distorted Stirner's ideas just as much as he did Proudhon's or Bakunin's).

Anarchism developed in the context of the French workers' movement and so embodied the legacies of the French Revolution (and its "Anarchists") as well as the critique of liberalism and capitalism current within French radical circles. Proudhon's seminal *What is Property?* was not written in a social vacuum nor did his ideas develop without a social and intellectual context. Anarchism, then, was born in the context of the rising labour movement. It flows from the associationist ideas raised by French workers faced with industrialisation — that is, proletarianisation. They rejected the inequalities and hierarchies associated with the rise of capitalism as sought to apply democratic ideas within the workplace and so abolish wage-labour by association.

This reflected workers during the Great French Revolution about whom one building employer moaned, "by an absurd parody of the government, regard their work as their property, the building site as a Republic of which they are jointly citizens, and believe in consequence that it belongs to them to name their own bosses, their inspectors and arbitrarily to share out the work amongst themselves."[7] Proudhon echoed this position repeatedly throughout his works:

> "Workers' Associations are the locus of a new principle and model of production that must replace present-day corporations [...] The principle that prevailed there, in place of that of employers and employees [...] is participation [...] There is mutuality, in fact, when in an industry, all the workers, instead of working for an owner who pays them and keeps their product, work for one an-

[7] quoted by Roger Magraw, **A History of the French Working Class** (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) I: 24–25



# An Anarchist FAQ

**Version 15.4 (17-Mar-2020)**

The Anarchist FAQ Editorial Collective

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his sterling work making Proudhon accessible and, moreover, has translated Bakunin's *Collected Works* for PM Press. Nestor Makhno's writings and autobiographies are also available in English. To name just a few amongst a host of excellent histories of movements and individuals.

All this is very welcome but more is needed — thinkers like Luigi Fabbri need their works available in English and key source materials (such as James Guillaume's *L'internationale: documents et souvenirs*) are also in need of translation. Even for figures like Kropotkin, a whole wealth of material in French, Russian and English which remains inaccessible and/or untranslated in archives.[6] However, such research and translation is time and resource consuming and few anarchists have much of either (being working class people in the main, we need to both earn a living and have a social life). Yet compared to where the movement was when AFAQ was started, we have seen significant progress. I hope that my work has helped this in some way. One thing is sure, AFAQ does save a lot of time because it can be referenced when the all-too-often myths about anarchism are raised (yet again!) by Marxists, propertarians and others.

As with any project, once it was completed I realised how I should have started. What is clear now is that the usual account of anarchism which starts in the distant past before discussing William Godwin and Max Stirner is not right. Regardless of their merits, neither of these people influenced the rise of anarchism as a theory or a movement. Indeed, both were discovered by a fully developed anarchist movement in the 1890s and, ironically, the only impact Stirner had in his lifetime was on Marx and what became Marxism (needless to say, Marx

[6] See my *"Sages and movements: An incomplete Peter Kropotkin bibliography"*, **Anarchist Studies**, Vol. 22 No. 1 and *"Kropotkin, Woodcock and Les Temps Nouveaux"*, **Anarchist Studies**, Vol. 23. No. 1)

other (but not all) individualist anarchists, were very selective in what they took from him. Proudhon's critique of wage-labour and corresponding advocacy of self-management and socialisation were lost on Tucker.[5] Revolutionary anarchism is closer to Proudhon's ideas than those who claimed his mantle — but this championing of Proudhon by Tucker shaped how many viewed the Frenchman and yet another false image (albeit less false than the one Marx invented) was created.

Similarly with Kropotkin — while more of his writings were available in English, these were the more general introductions to anarchism and his "day-to-day" journalism in the anarchist press (particularly the French) was unknown. This gave a somewhat skewed impression of his ideas and helped those seeking to portray him as a utopian or reformist (whether Marxists or self-proclaimed anarchists). This was because while the key texts on *ends* were readily available, the texts on *means* were less so. This does not excuse those — like the reformist ("liberal") wing of British anarchism in the 1960s onwards (and who were readily echoed by Marxists) — who portrayed Kropotkin as anything other than the revolutionary, class struggle anarchist he was for even these general works included references to unions, strikes, insurrections and so forth. Moreover, Caroline Cahm's excellent book *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886* has shown this aspect of anarchism since 1989 — indeed, *Direct Struggle Against Capital* owes a great deal to her research in tracking down numerous key articles from Kropotkin's early journalism.

These two works also indicate another improvement over the past 20 years – the increase in good quality research on anarchism and anarchists. We have had Emma Goldman's papers published while AK Press has just started the publication of Errico Malatesta's *Collected Works*. Shawn Wilbur continues

[5] See my *"Proudhon, Property and Possession"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 66



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rate. Both confirm the analysis of AFAQ on the nature of anarchism (i.e., libertarian *socialism*) and its history. Both would have been helpful in days-past when debating propertarians (right-wing "libertarians") and Marxists.

Taking Proudhon, before *Property is Theft!* very little of his voluminous writings had been translated into English and much of his writings — particularly his journalism and polemics during the 1848 revolution — were unknown. We now have a better idea of his ideas and contribution to anarchism as well as allowing various false, but commonplace, assertions about his ideas to be refuted.[1] Marx's claim that he advocated "Labour Notes" (i.e., pricing and payment by hours worked) was simply a baseless assertion made in the face of clear evidence in *System of Economic Contradictions* to the opposite (he advocated generalising "bills of exchange" as many commentators correctly noted).[2] *The Poverty of Philosophy* is, as Proudhon noted at the time, "the libel of one doctor Marx" and should be dismissed as "a tissue of crudities, slanders, falsifications, and plagiarism."[3] Sadly, this deeply dishonest work has shaped our perception of Proudhon (even in the anarchist movement) but hopefully the real Proudhon — advocate of self-managed (market) socialism — will become better known.[4]

It also became clear that those who most loudly proclaimed their allegiance to Proudhon, namely Benjamin Tucker and

[1] See my *"Proudhon on Race and the Civil War: Neither Washington nor Richmond"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 60

[2] See my *"Proudhon's constituted value and the myth of labour notes"*, **Anarchist Studies**, forthcoming 2017. [now published: *"Proudhon's Constituted Value and the Myth of Labour Notes"*, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 25, No. 1]

[3] **Correspondance** (Paris: Lacroix, 1875) II: 267–8

[4] See my *"Laying the Foundations: Proudhon's Contribution to Anarchist Economics"*, **Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics** (Oakland/Edinburgh/Baltimore: AK Press, 2012), Anthony J. Nocella, Deric Shannon and John Asimakopoulos (Editors), 64–78

# An Anarchist FAQ after 20 years

It is now 20 years since *An Anarchist FAQ* (AFAQ) was officially launched and six years since the core of it was completed (version 14.0). It has been published by AK Press as well as translated into numerous languages. It has been quoted and referenced by other works. So it has been a success — although when it was started I had no idea what it would end up like.

I am particularly happy that AK Press took the time and invested the resources to turn it into a book. Volume 1 of AFAQ (sections A to F plus the appendix on "The Symbols of Anarchy") was published in 2008 followed by volume 2 (sections H to J, slightly abridged) in 2012. Both volumes are impressive in both size and presentation — they look lovely.

Since then, though, there has been little done — a revision of an appendix about a laughingly bad Marxist anti-anarchist diatribe (more or less a copy of Hal Draper's equally bad *Two Souls of Socialism*). The unfinished appendix on the Russian Revolution remains so and the other appendices need to be revised. I hope to correct this by the 30th anniversary of AFAQ but no promises!

In my defence, I have been busy. Numerous other articles and reviews have been produced thanks to the work embodied into AFAQ and it has produced two other books: anthologies of Proudhon's and Kropotkin's works (*Property is Theft!* and *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, respectively). Both came about due to the research AFAQ needed — it showed that the picture we had of both key thinkers was not completely accu-



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In 2017 it is clear we Anarchists have much to do. Time will tell if we are up to the challenge — but one thing is sure, as Kropotkin said only those who do nothing make no mistakes.

Iain McKay
**An Anarchist FAQ**
www.anarchistfaq.org

> cialism a gross error of judgement [...] To tell the workers that they will be able to introduce the socialist system *while retaining the machine of the State* and only changing the men in power; to prevent, instead of aiding, the mind of the workers progressing towards *the search for new forms of life* that would be *their* own — that is in our eyes a historic mistake which borders on the criminal." (Kropotkin, Op. Cit., pp. 124–5)

The lesson of both the rise of social democracy at the end of the nineteenth and Bolshevik success in 1917 is that Anarchists need to organise to influence the class struggle, to present a real alternative both in terms of visions of tomorrow *and* how to win improvements today. The latter is more important in many ways for without that we will never be in a position to create the former: we will be an isolated sect complaining from the side-lines rather a key factor in moving society towards freedom. As 1917 shows, without an effective organised anarchist movement then others will take advantage of the situation — by using ideas and actions previously raised by Anarchists — for non-Anarchist ends.

The key, then, is to find positive areas to apply anarchist ideas, to encourage those subject to hierarchies to assert themselves and change themselves while changing their conditions. Only the struggle for freedom can make us able to live as free and equal individuals: that means we need be part of social struggle and self-organisation, in other words we need "Anarchy in Action" (see section J). Without that, Anarchy remains a dream — and the powers of State and Capital will continue to crush what little freedom we have. Resistance is fertile — and why direct action is always opposed by the authorities and their ideological shrills.



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Needless to say, the much more extensive welfare State for the rich should be targeted for reduction and eventual elimination long before anything else is even considered for reform.

Such popular struggles against privatisation or austerity — against the decisions and actions of the State against its subjects, never forget – will build the confidence and organisations needed to *really* change things, to *really* reduce the authority of the State and win improvements in the here-and-now. Indeed, the UK anti-union laws show that our masters know this, know where *our* real power lies: not in Parliament but in our workplaces and streets. This — direct action and solidarity — is what creates the possibility for revolution.

Neo-liberalism has singularly failed in terms of the promises it made ("trickle down," its anti-union arguments, productivity growth has trended down since the 1980s, the private profiteering associated with previously nationalised industries, etc., etc., etc.) — however, it did make the rich richer, its usually unstated goal, and all that can be forgiven and forgotten. However, its limitations are being felt — it is in danger of so hollowing out society that capitalism itself is threatened. This is being reflected in the ballot box. As discussed in section D.1, we may be at one of those points where, thanks to popular discontent and the pressing need to maintain the system, the State is used more to repair the damage that an inherently unstable capitalism inflicts on society than it is used to bolster the property and power of the few.

Yet we must never forget the nature of the State as an instrument of minority classes and that there are vested interests at work (see section B.2). This means that leaving change to politicians will result in little improvement. We need an anti-parliamentary movement:

> "We see in the incapacity of the statist socialist to understand the true historical problem of so-

> "Political economy — that is, proprietary despotism — can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat." (*Property is Theft!*, p. 187)

The crisis produced popular resistance, although obviously not enough. Anarchists took part in these struggles against austerity. This caused some commentators problems — why were Anarchists protesting against governments seeking to reduce the State? Yet Anarchism has never been just anti-State (surely "property is theft" shows that?). We are against the State because it defends that property and theft, so using economic crisis to impose austerity is State activity simply as a weapon for the few against the many.

Anarchists do not side with the State against its subjects. Rather we fight with our fellow workers against attempts by governments to save capitalism by pushing the costs of so doing onto the general population. This does not mean we favour State welfare any more than any other State activity. Welfare, like the State itself, must be abolished *from below* by the many, not from above by the few seeking to increase their wealth and power (see section J.5.15). Similarly, the alternative to nationalisation (or bailouts) is not privatisation but rather *socialisation* — workers' control. As Kropotkin suggested, echoing Proudhon (*General Idea of the Revolution*, p. 151), there is a lack of imagination and class analysis in State socialism:

> "Well, it is to increase the capital owned by the modern bourgeois States that the radicals and socialists are working today. They did not even bother to discuss — like English co-operators asked me one day — if there were no way to hand over the railways *directly* to the railway-workers' trade-unions, to free the enterprise from the yoke of the capitalist, instead of creating a new capitalist, even more dangerous than the bourgeois companies, the State." (Op. Cit., p. 325)



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collapsed and the "great moderation" was proclaimed. Yet the triumphalism could not hide the problems facing society — not least, the ever-increasing inequality as well as ecological crisis. Come the financial crisis of 2007–8 – caused, in part, because the neo-liberal assault on the working class had been *too* successful — the critique of capitalism and various economic theories developed to defend it AFAQ had summarised proved its usefulness (see section C)

After a rush to State-intervention — blowing the dust of Keynes and, for a few, even Marx — to stabilise the situation (at least for the few), the rush to austerity (at least for the many) began. AFAQ had summarised (in section C.9.1) why cutting wages would be counter-productive — and so it was. Austerity was proven to be counter-productive, making the situation worse as predicted by anyone who did not worship the holy textbooks of neo-classical or "Austrian" economics — even the most neo-classical Keynesian economist grasped the situation. Yet class interests and its ideologues proved — as would be expected — more significant.

In the UK, the Tories rushed to inflict austerity onto society and blamed a crisis caused by the elite on welfare provision for the many. Unlike in Greece and elsewhere in Europe, austerity was not imposed upon the government by the heavy hand of the EU but was embraced willingly – so killing off a recovery and stalling the economy for two years. When growth finally returned, austerity was proclaimed vindicated in spite of the critics being proven correct. Worse, it returned to trend growth without the higher growth usually associated with an exit from recession. Still, the utter failure of austerity did not stop Tory politicians in the UK proclaiming its necessity years later — while holding up austerity-struck Greece to warn against the horrors of not imposing austerity. Logic and reality will always come a distant last when defending the powers and the profits of the few. Little has changed since 1846 when Proudhon sarcastically noted:

tainment needs." (Kropotkin, *La Science moderne et l'anarchie*, pp. 92–3)

So Kropotkin is very clear that the link between now and the future is forged in the struggle and so — see section I.2.3 — we build the framework of Anarchism by our struggles against Capital, State and other forms of hierarchy (such as patriarchy, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.). Also of note is his comment that the revolution would not take months, but years. This shows that notions of "overnight" revolution habitually flung at anarchists by Marxists — see section I.2.2 — are nonsense. As such, we must remember that Anarchism is something for the here-and-now and that we must think in terms of a long-term strategy.

All of which points to Kropotkin as a realistic revolutionary and advocate of class struggle as the means of creating a better world rather than some sort of "gentle sage" with utopian visions, as some seem to think (see my

Anarcho-Syndicalist Review No. 64/5 for a summary). Yet this does not mean we have an "unknown" Kropotkin for his revolutionary class struggle politics were there to be found even in his well-known "general" works if you were prepared to look: sadly, neither the British reformist Anarchists of the post-war period nor the Marxists were going to do that!

So 21 years on, we have a better notion of the Anarchist tradition than ever before and I hope AFAQ played its part in that. Simplistic accounts – which seem to be based on little more than looking up "Anarchism" in the dictionary — should be harder to produce. It will take a particularly studious ignorance to proclaim Anarchism is just "anti-State" given its actual history as a theory and a movement. Still, we can sadly expect the right and left — for their own reasons — to continue to ignore Anarchism's socialist core. At least we have resources like AFAQ to show the accuracy of such claims.

When AFAQ was started, in the early 1990s, neo-liberalism appeared to be triumphant, "socialism" (i.e., Stalinism) had just



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> "Workers, no longer count on anyone but yourselves [...] Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of funds for resistance, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of Chambers of Labour [...] the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society [...] Anarchy, that it to say the true, the open popular revolution [...] organisation, from top to bottom and from the circumference to the centre" ("Letter to Albert Richard", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 62, p. 18)

Kropotkin also pointed to the neighbourhood assemblies, or sections, of the Great French Revolution as a form of popular self-organisation which anarchists today could learn from (see chapters XXIV and XXV of *The Great French Revolution*, both included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*). In this way would develop "independent Communes for the *territorial* groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings *by social functions* — the two interwoven and providing support to each to meet the needs of society". Added to these are the "groupings *by personal affinities* — groupings without number, infinitely varied, long-lasting or fleeting, emerging according to the needs of the moment for all possible purposes". These "three kinds of groupings" would ensure "the satisfaction of all social needs: consumption, production and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence; the satisfaction, finally, of scientific, artistic, literacy, enter-

few days, the strike was absolutely general [...] It was a whole people going on strike [...]

"A new force was thus established by the strike: the force of the workers asserting themselves for the first time and setting in motion this lever of any revolution — *direct action*. [...] It is equally obvious, furthermore, that the revolution will not be the work of a few months, but of several years. At the very least, what has been accomplished so far proves that this revolution will be of a social nature [...] bourgeois elements have already faded behind the two great forces of the peasants and the workers, and the two great means of action have been the general strike and direct action.

"There is every reason to believe that the workers of the cities will understand the strength conferred by direct action added to the general strike and, imitating in this the peasant rebels, they will likely be led to get their hands on all that is necessary to live and produce. Then they can lay in the cities the initial foundations of the communist commune." ("L'Action directe et la Grève générale en Russie," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 December 1905)

This, obviously, is echoed in *La Science moderne et l'anarchie* but it has its origins in the Bakunin and the Federalist wing of the First International, as reflected Kropotkin's writings on the labour movement from the 1870s onwards (see *Direct Struggle Against Capital* for a representative selection across the decades) and ably explored by Robert Graham in *'We Do Not Fear Anarchy – We Invoke It': The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015). As Bakunin put it:



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not think unions *by themselves* would *inevitably* be revolutionary and so also saw the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle (see section J.3).

Likewise, we should not become fixated on unions for in 1905 — twelve years before Lenin — Kropotkin saw the possibility of the soviets as a means of fighting capitalism and statism and explicitly linked them to the Paris Commune:

> "the workers' Council [...] had been appointed by the workers themselves – just like the insurrectional Commune of August 10, 1792 — [...] This very much reminds us of the Central Committee which preceded the Paris Commune of 1871, and it is certain that workers across the country should organise on this model [...] these councils represent the revolutionary strength of the working class. [...]
>
> "This is direct action at work [...] Let it not then be said that the workers of the Latin nations, by preaching the general strike and direct action, have taken the wrong path. The Russian working people, by applying these for themselves, have proven that their brothers in the West were perfectly right. [...] it is certain that the workers who succeeded in forcing the autocracy to capitulate will also force capitalism to do so. They will do more. They will be able to find forms of communal industrial organisation. But first they must first send packing the hypnotisers [*endormeurs*] who tell them: 'Just make the political revolution; it is too early for the social revolution.' [...] and while the socialist theoreticians strove to prove the impossibility of any general strike, they, the workers, began to go through the workshops, putting a stop to work everywhere. [...] After a

nition that it exists to impose minority class rule and has developed specific features to do so. This means that utilising the bourgeois State — or a State, like the Bolsheviks, marked by centralisation and unitarian structures — will not create socialism. This is because the modern State is first and foremost a *bourgeois* structure:

> "the State, with its hierarchy of functionaries and the weight of its historical traditions, could only delay the dawning of a new society freed from monopolies and exploitation [...] what means can the State provide to abolish this monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? [...] what advantages could the State provide for abolishing these same privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in *their* unions, *their* federations, completely outside the State?" (Kropotkin, Op. Cit., pp. 91–2)

This shows the alternative to social democracy, namely militant labour struggle: what became known as syndicalism — although, as *Direct Struggle Against Capital* shows, Kropotkin had advocated it in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The notion that there is a fundamental difference between anarchism and syndicalism cannot be supported (see section H.2.8). True, anarchism was initially reformist (Proudhon was opposed to strikes) but modern, revolutionary, anarchism was born in the First International and took a syndicalist position from the start. Kropotkin, like other revolutionary anarchists, took this "Bakuninist" position — although, like Bakunin, he did



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Déjacque had argued for in 1857 against Proudhon's market socialism (distribution according to the products of labour). Nor should we forget the desire for genuine freedom, for the free association of equals rather than that of master-servants driven by economic necessity, which inspired the coining of the term "libertarian" in 1857 and its subsequent embrace by Anarchists world-wide. Hopefully recounting the origins of the word, showing how and why the propertarians stole it, will make more people refuse to let the right use it — we can only hope that by 40th anniversary of AFAQ they will be called propertarians by all…

Finally, it is also 175 years from Kropotkin's birth. I'm glad to note that the all-too-common notion of Kropotkin as "the gentle sage" is being replaced by a more accurate account of his politics. Rather than being one of the best served Anarchist thinkers in terms of their works, only a fraction of his writings is available in English. His articles for French, British and Russian anarchist papers are still mostly unknown and even his final book, the last book published in his lifetime, 1913's *La Science moderne et l'anarchie* has never been translated in full (although I have been working to remedy that and next year, 2018, will see AK Press finally publish *Modern Science and Anarchy* in English translation).

So our understanding of Kropotkin's works is to some degree incomplete. Many accounts of his ideas are based on his most general works, which cannot help but skew our understanding of his ideas. In short, his works most focused on the labour movement have not generally been published as pamphlets and when they have (such as the English-language work "Politics and Socialism") they have rarely been reprinted. These articles help flesh out why Anarchists are against the State, against using it to abolish capitalism, and what our alternative to electioneering is (see section J).

Rather than oppose the State for idealistic reasons, Anarchist anti-Statism is based on a class analysis of it — the recog-

less he acknowledge himself the inferior, the subject of some Sir — servitude, submission, lack of freedom, the practice of the whip are *imposed* by the very form of society. By contrast, in a communist society which recognises the right of everyone, on an egalitarian basis, to all the instruments of labour and to all the means of existence that society possesses, the only men on their knees in front of others are those who are by their nature voluntary serfs. Each being equal to everyone else as far as the right to well-being is concerned, he does not have to kneel before the will and arrogance of others and so secures equality in all personal relationships with his co-members.

"[...] We finally realise now that without communism man will never be able to reach that full development of individuality which is, perhaps, the most powerful desire of every thinking being. It is highly probably that this essential point would have been recognised for some time if we had not always confused *individuation* — that is to say, the complete development of individuality — with *individualism*. Now, individualism – it is high time to understand this — is nothing but the *Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost* of the bourgeoisie, who believed to find in it the means of freeing himself from society by imposing on workers economic serfdom under the protection of the State" (Op. Cit., pp. 163–5)

Of course, thanks to Bolshevism, "communism" is usually viewed to mean central-planning (or what Anarchists more accurately call State-capitalism — see section H.3.13) but we should not forget that Kropotkin simply meant distribution according to *need* rather than *deed*: which was what Joseph



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> they are subjected to under the supervision of the State, the masses cannot remain under the domination of the forms which prevent the blossoming of popular initiative. These were developed by governments to perpetuate the servitude of the people, to *prevent it from letting its creative force blossom* and to develop institutions of egalitarian mutual aid. New forms must be found to serve the opposite goal." (*La Science moderne et l'anarchie* [Paris: Stock, 1913], p. 323)

This means that the Russian experience has confirmed that socialism has to be free — libertarian — or not at all. Sadly, unlike when AFAQ was started 21 years ago, "libertarian" has become increasingly associated with the right in Britain as it has in the United States. This is of obvious concern for all genuine libertarians. I have addressed the history of libertarian in *AFAQ* and its blog, which — like the revision of non-published appendices — has been somewhat quiet of late. An obvious exception was the posting of *160 years of Libertarian* this year to mark the coining of *libertaire* by Joseph Déjacque. As well as including a new and complete translation of Déjacque's 1857 "Open Letter" to Proudhon, it covers anarchist use of the term and the right's attempt to steal the word.

Suffice to say, the mess which is Wikipedia's entry on "libertarian" shows how distinct Anarchism is from Liberalism — unsurprisingly, given that Proudhon's seminal *What is Property?* and other works are obviously an extended critique of (classical) liberalism. For the right, "liberty" means little more than those with private power being able to restrict the freedom of the rest. What is annoying is that they use the good word "libertarian" to describe this regime of private power. Kropotkin's words from 1913 are still as relevant now as then:

> "In today's society, where no one is allowed to use the field, the factory, the instruments of labour, un-

nised this and said so, repeatedly. This should not stop us recognising that he built upon an analysis started by others (not least, Proudhon) and that his arguments for practical activity were deeply flawed. Bakunin, not Marx, was right about the fate of "political action" (in reformism) and the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (in tyranny).

So on the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, we can but hope that socialists will reflect on the ideological roots for the failure rather than seek solace in the post-hoc rationalisations began by Trotsky. After all, the Bolsheviks remained true to the vision of a centralised economic system based on nationalisation. As with Marx, workers' self-management of production did not figure highly (if at all) in Bolshevik visions of "socialism" — unlike anarchists from Proudhon onwards. Similarly, they remained true to the vision of centralised, hierarchical and unitarian political structure even if it were based, nominally, on working class organisations, the soviets (workers councils), rather than the orthodox Marxist position of capturing and transforming the current State (see section H.3.10). As Kropotkin put it:

> "It is therefore essential that to free themselves the masses who produce everything without being allowed to control the consumption of what they produce, find the means which enable them to display their creative forces and to develop themselves new, egalitarian, forms of consumption and of production.
>
> "The State and national representation cannot find these forms. It is the very *life* of the consumer and of the producer, his intellect, his organising spirit which must find them and improve them by applying them to the daily needs of life.
>
> "It is the same for forms of political organisation. In order to free themselves from the exploitation



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political events had not made responding difficult, he surely would have thought no one who has read his book would take it seriously. He was right — except that the two volumes of *System of Economic Contradictions* are not an easy book and few readers of Marx bother to compare him to what Proudhon actually wrote. All in all, the words of scientist (and, obviously, non-anarchist) Richard Dawkins against one of his critics are applicable here:

> "we are in danger of assuming that nobody would dare to be so rude without taking the elementary precaution of being right". ("In Defence of Selfish Genes," pp. 556–573, *Philosophy*, Vol. 56, No. 218, p. 556)

Given that many Marxists regurgitate previous attacks on anarchism when putting pen to paper, it is not academic or obscure to discuss things like this. The echoes of Marx's 1847 book are still being heard today and it aids our current activity and theory to understand what was wrong with that critique and subsequent ones. To not know our own history, to not know our own theorists, means being at a disadvantage against those who pretend to do.

Beyond the dishonesty, Marx's work is of note for the alternative he sketched to Proudhon's market socialism — and "sketched" is being generous. It amounts to a few sentences and is rooted in generalising from an example of two workers and two products to an economy of millions of workers and products. Given this, perhaps it is not surprising that the Bolshevik experiment failed so spectacularly — Marx clearly had no notion of the need for gathering, processing and implementing the information required for central planning. He and Engels always presented this process as simple rather than the bureaucratic nightmare it would be.

It should be said that Marx did make contributions to socialism and the understanding of capitalism. Even Bakunin recog-

once ridiculed (see my "The Poverty of (Marx's) Philosophy", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, No. 70). Ironically, if you ignore the facts and accept *The Poverty of Philosophy* as a valid critique of Proudhon then you also have to admit it is also a valid critique of *Capital*, which is *not* the book he criticised Proudhon for not writing in 1847.

In many ways, *The Poverty of Philosophy* is the template of subsequent Marxist polemics on Anarchism (see section H.2 for a critique of the most common claims). It is full of so many distortions that it is nearly impossible to answer them all, not to mention the postulating of some notion — in this case, amongst many others, labour notes and idealism — that are just inventions. Take the latter. As one ex-Marxist academic noted:

> "Despite Marx's scornful criticism, it is not the case that Proudhon regarded actual social conditions and economic forces as the embodiment of abstract philosophical categories antecedent to social reality. On the contrary, he is at pains to state that the intellectual organisation of social reality in abstract categories is secondary to that reality." (Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978], vol. 1, p. 205)

Which raises the obvious question: why did Marx suggest Proudhon was an idealist given that he obviously was not? Then again, this is hardly an isolated case and most Marxists have tended to follow this example when trying to critique anarchism. As informed readers of Marxist polemics against Anarchism will know, the notion of post-truth has existed far longer than most acknowledge.

Given the level of nonsense in it, it is perhaps understandable why Proudhon did not bother replying — if personal and



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(see my "Victor Serge: The Worst of the Anarchists," *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, No. 61).

We need to learn the lessons of history rather than seek post-hoc rationalisations which will inevitably lead to a similar outcome in the unlikely event of a Bolshevik-style party gaining popular support as in 1917. I must stress unlikely, for as well as Leninists having little grasp on the actual course of the revolution after October, as discussed in section H.5.12 they also fail to understand that the Bolshevik party in 1917 did not act like modern-day vanguardists think it did. For if it had, as in 1905, then it would have been as counter-productive — when not irrelevant — as modern-day Leninist sects are. This does not mean there was no party bureaucracy – there was, with an obvious negative impact before *and* after it seized power — but that it was usually ignored by the rank-and-file while being fought by Lenin: it was revolutionary during 1917 in spite of itself, its structures and its perspectives.

Anarchists, of course, did not need to come up with post-hoc explanations for the failure of the Revolution. Our predictions and warnings were confirmed — the State is not simply an instrument of economic class but has its own interests, nationalisation does not end capitalism but just replaces the boss by the bureaucrat, the State is centralised to ensure minority rule and cannot be used to abolish it, and so on. If Marxism paid anything other than lip-service to the idea of "scientific socialism" then all socialists would be anarchists.

Talking of Marxism, the first volume of *Capital* was published 150 years ago, in 1867, twenty years after Marx's disgraceful diatribe against Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Looking at both works is interesting, not least because Marx singularly failed in 1867 to apply the methodology he denounced Proudhon for not following in 1847. Instead, he uses the very one he mocked the Frenchman for utilising – namely building an abstract model of capitalism — while also taking up Proudhon's theory of exploitation he had likewise

*Ideological*, for the politics of the Bolsheviks played a key role. For example: their vision of socialism was impoverished, their analysis of the State was flawed and their vanguardist perspective inherently hierarchical (see section H.5). Some of these ideological positions were unique to the Bolsheviks, many were simply Marxism (or at least social-democratic) as we show (not least, the prejudices in favour of centralisation and economic central-planning).

*Structural*, for the prejudices of Bolshevik ideology played their part in the organisations and solutions they favoured. A perspective which assumes centralisation is "proletarian" and inherently "efficient" builds certain types of organisation. These structures, in turn, produce certain forms of social relationships — namely, a division between rulers and ruled. Centralised bodies also produce a bureaucracy around them in order to make decisions and implement them.

So the interaction of ideology and structure played its part and the "objective circumstances" pushed the embryonic bureaucratic class system in certain ways but they did not create it. In other words, while some kind of new class system was inevitable, the horrors of Stalinism can be said to be the product of the specific factors facing the Russian Revolution. A shorter civil war, for example, may have resulted in a less brutal regime in the 1930s. Note, *less* brutal — for Lenin's regime *was* a bureaucratic State-capitalist party dictatorship and had been within six months of the October Revolution.

Hopefully, AFAQ has shown that the real turning point of the revolution was not Kronstadt in 1921 but the spring of 1918 when the Bolsheviks made explicit what had always been implicit: that party power was more important than soviet democracy. It also shows that recent research confirms that Berkman and Goldman were right (see my "From Russia with Critique," *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, No. 69) and are far better guides to understanding what went wrong than turn-coats like Serge



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well as the reports of the delegates from syndicalist unions sent to the Second Congress of the *Communist International* and that of the newly formed *Red International of Labour Unions*. However, what Berkman termed *The Bolshevik Myth* held sway in the non-Anarchist left in spite of these facts becoming available. While this myth was slowly eroded as the evils of the regime became harder and harder to ignore, the damage had been done: the liberatory promise of revolution and of socialism became associated with its opposite.

Anarchists were not surprised that State socialism became a new class system — we had, after all, predicted this from Proudhon and Bakunin onwards. However, this did not stop many on the left believing *The Bolshevik Myth* and today there are still many grouplets on the left (with impressive names which reflect aspirations rather than reality) which denounce Stalinism while seeking the "genuine" socialism of the Bolsheviks. As part of its goal to be a resource for Anarchists, AFAQ sought to show the links between the regime of Lenin and Trotsky and that of Stalin. It sought to show the ideological roots of the degeneration of the Revolution and to show that the post-hoc explanations first postulated by Trotsky and regurgitated by Leninists to this day were inadequate.

This was part of the aim of section H (on Marxism) and I think it was successful. Originally, it was going to be much bigger, too big as it turned out. So sections on the Russian Revolution which were originally planned to be in section H (including ones on Kronstadt and the Makhnovists) were moved to an appendix. This appendix, as noted in the 20th anniversary blog, is still incomplete but its most important points have been placed in section H, particularly in section H.6 which summarises *why* the Russian Revolution failed and, just as importantly, that anarchist warnings were proven correct. It shows how that favourite post-hoc excuse of Marxists – "objective circumstances" — does not explain what happened and how ideological and structural factors are much more significant.

# *An Anarchist FAQ* after 21 years

For reasons too unimportant to discuss here, the 20th anniversary blog for *An Anarchist FAQ* (AFAQ) ended up on my personal blog rather than AFAQ's "official" one. Now I correct this by reposting it here as well as taking the opportunity to preface it with a few comments to mark 21 years since AFAQ was officially launched.

This year, 2017, marks numerous anarchist related anniversaries besides AFAQ's — most obviously, 100 years since the Russian Revolution (see section A.5.4). Given subsequent events, it is easy to forget that the overthrow of the Tsar was initially — and rightly — viewed as great event by all on the left. As information of the increasing *social* nature of the revolt — what Voline termed *The Unknown Revolution* — became better known, the far-left was increasingly enthused by the revolution: workers had formed soviets and were starting to organise unions and factory committees, peasants were taking back the land, and so on. The revolution — as Anarchists alone had argued during the failed revolution of 1905 — was going beyond political reform into a social revolution. Reports of the new, radical and functionally based democracy were avidly read across the Left and especially by Anarchists – it appeared that our vision of social revolution was coming true.

By the early 1920s, Anarchists had broken with the new regime. Accounts of the dictatorial nature of the Bolsheviks could no longer be ignored – particularly when coming from eye-witnesses like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman as



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

For most socialists, *"the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145] For this reason Proudhon, for example, supported workers' co-operatives, where *"every individual employed in the association … has an undivided share in the property of the company"* because by *"participation in losses and gains … the collective force [i.e. surplus] ceases to be a source of profits for a small number of managers: it becomes the property of all workers."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 222 and p. 223] Thus, in addition to desiring the end of exploitation of labour by capital, true socialists also desire a society within which the producers own and control the means of production (including, it should be stressed, those workplaces which supply services). The means by which the producers will do this is a moot point in anarchist and other socialist circles, but the desire remains a common one. Anarchists favour direct workers' control and either ownership by



> other and thereby contribute to a common product from which they share the profit."[8]

Workers' self-management of production by means of associations has been a part of anarchism *from the start* (from *What is Property?*: "leaders […] must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves"[9]) and any form of "anarchism" which rejects this in favour of factory fascism (wage-labour) is hardly libertarian.

This means that the all-too-common notion of anarchism being a fusion (confusion!) of "socialism" (presumably Marxism) and liberalism is simply wrong. Anarchism is a school of socialism ("the no-government system of socialism", to quote Kropotkin[10]) and cut its teeth critiquing liberalism and the class-ridden, unequal and unfree society it was creating. It was then members of this well-defined movement who could look back at the likes of Godwin and popular movements note similarities between their ideas on the state, property, etc. and those which had arisen later and, crucially, independently of them. These pre-1840 thinkers and movements can be better described as anarchistic rather than anarchist as such.

This analysis of where anarchism comes from is relevant to current events. Take inequality, or more correctly the recognition within mainstream politics and journalism that massive inequality exists and is rising. When AFAQ was started, this was generally denied but now the recognition of reality is at least acknowledged and, often, deplored, by some of the elite (usually politicians seeking votes). The denials of reality could be surreal — I remember reading an edition of the *Economist* at the turn of the millennium which had editorialised that the 20th century had shown Marx's predictions of a tiny minority of wealthy capitalists surrounded by a sea of impoverished pro-

[8] **Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology**, 616
[9] Proudhon, **Op Cit.,** 119
[10] **Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings**, 46

letarians to be false while, a few pages elsewhere, had a report on how inequality in America and elsewhere in the West had exploded so resulting in a few very wealthy people and the rest stagnating. The contradiction between ideology (faith) and reality (facts) could not have been more obvious — at least if you weren't the editors or a true believer in capitalism.

Perhaps needless to say, the reasons why this has happened have been much discussed but as it has been within a neoclassical framework it has not gotten very far. This is understandable as that ideology was developed precisely to rationalise and justify the inequalities of capitalism and not to explain them (see section C). Taking an anarchist analysis (as first expounded by Proudhon before being taken up by Marx) it is easy to understand why inequality has expounded. As section C.2 indicates, labour is exploited by capital and the former has been weakened over the last four decades by neo-liberalism (not least by increased state regulation of unions) and so workers cannot retain more of the value we produce as the product is monopolised by the owning class and senior management.

This means, for example, that the exploding wages of CEOs is *not* an example of "market failure" as some claim but rather an expression of how the capitalist market *is meant to work*.[11] Which all flows back to where anarchism came from, namely the (French) workers' movement, and what it was born fighting, namely a rising capitalism and its ideological expression of (classical) liberalism.

Thus we find John Locke's *just-so* story justifying property results "by a tacit and voluntary consent" to "a disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth"[12] Yet any agreement between the owners and proletariat would favour the former and once the worker has consented to being under the author-

[11] See my *"Pay Inequality: Where it comes from and what to do about it"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 58

[12] John Locke, **Two Treatises of Government** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 302



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

## A.1.4 Are anarchists socialists?

Yes. All branches of anarchism are opposed to capitalism. This is because capitalism is based upon oppression and exploitation (see sections B and C). Anarchists reject the *"notion that men cannot work together unless they have a driving-master to take a percentage of their product"* and think that in an anarchist society *"the real workmen will make their own regulations, decide when and where and how things shall be done."* By so doing workers would free themselves *"from the terrible bondage of capitalism."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"Anarchism"*, **Exquisite Rebel**, p. 75 and p. 79]

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

York between 1858 and 1861 while the use of the term *"libertarian communism"* dates from November, 1880 when a French anarchist congress adopted it. [Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 75 and p. 145] The use of the term "Libertarian" by anarchists became more popular from the 1890s onward after it was used in France in an attempt to get round anti-anarchist laws and to avoid the negative associations of the word "anarchy" in the popular mind (Sebastien Faure and Louise Michel published the paper **Le Libertaire — The Libertarian** — in France in 1895, for example). Since then, particularly outside America, it has **always** been associated with anarchist ideas and movements. Taking a more recent example, in the USA, anarchists organised ***"The Libertarian League"*** in July 1954, which had staunch anarcho-syndicalist principles and lasted until 1965. The US-based "Libertarian" Party, on the other hand has only existed since the early 1970's, well over 100 years after anarchists first used the term to describe their political ideas (and 90 years after the expression "libertarian communism" was first adopted). It is that party, not the anarchists, who have "stolen" the word. Later, in Section B, we will discuss why the idea of a "libertarian" capitalism (as desired by the Libertarian Party) is a contradiction in terms.

As we will also explain in Section I, only a libertarian-socialist system of ownership can maximise individual freedom. Needless to say, state ownership — what is commonly **called** "socialism" — is, for anarchists, not socialism at all. In fact, as we will elaborate in Section H, state "socialism" is just a form of capitalism, with no socialist content whatever. As Rudolf Rocker noted, for anarchists, socialism is *"not a simple question of a full belly, but a question of culture that would have to enlist the sense of personality and the free initiative of the individual; without freedom it would lead only to a dismal state capitalism which would sacrifice all individual thought and feeling to a fictitious collective interest."* [quoted by Colin Ward, *"Introduction"*, Rudolf Rocker, **The London Years**, p. 1]



ity of the wealthy then her labour and its product is no longer hers: "Thus the grass my horse has bit;

the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg'd… become my *Property*." The workers' labour "hath fixed my [the employer's] property" in both the product and common resources worked upon.[13] Locke's defence of property as resting on labour becomes the means to derive the worker of the full product of her labour[14] — as intended.

Compare this with anarchism. Proudhon's analysis brings him into conflict with Locke and the liberal tradition. Rejecting the notion that master-servant contracts were valid, he dismisses its basis of property in the person in a few words: "To tell a poor man that he has property because he has arms and legs, — that the hunger from which he suffers, and his power to sleep in the open air are his property, — is to play with words, and add insult to injury." Property, then, is solely material things — land, workplaces, etc. — and their monopolisation results in authoritarian relationships. To "recognise the right of territorial property is to give up labour, since it is to relinquish the means of labour", which results in the worker having "sold and surrendered his liberty" to the proprietor. This alienation of liberty is the means by which exploitation happens. Whoever "labours becomes a proprietor" of his product but by that Proudhon did "not mean simply (as do our hypocritical economists)" — and Locke — the "proprietor of his allowance, his salary, his wages" but "proprietor of the value which he creates, and by which the master alone profits." Locke is also clearly the target for Proudhon's comment that "the horse […] and ox […] produce with us, but are not associated with us; we take their product, but do not share it with them. The animals and workers whom we employ hold the same relation to us."[15]

[13] Locke, 289

[14] C. B Macpherson, **The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 214–5

[15] **Property is Theft!**, 95, 106, 117, 114, 129

As noted, the rise in inequality is even acknowledged by those who helped create it. Thus we find the *Economist*[16] admitting that "Liberalism depends on a belief in progress but, for many voters, progress is what happens to other people. While American GDP per person grew by 14% in 2001–15, median wages grew by only 2%." The journal also states that "liberals also need to restore social mobility and ensure that economic growth translates into rising wages" yet social mobility falling while inequality rises should be unsurprising (it is easier to climb a hill than a mountain) as is the awkward fact that the least "liberal" nations (continental Europe) have higher social mobility than the USA or UK ("liberal" nations). As for increasing wages, the neo-liberal agenda has been to regulate workers and our unions by anti-union laws to stop just that happening which makes a mockery of the claim that "[i]n the 1970s liberals concluded that the embrace of the state had become smothering and oppressive."[17] It is not hard to conclude that for "liberals" state intervention against workers is just normal — just like defence of capitalist property-rights is not oppressive. Rest assured, their solution to the problems caused by neo-liberalism is yet more neo-liberalism: "a relentless focus on dismantling privilege by battling special interests, exposing incumbent companies to competition and breaking down restrictive practices." Which was, as discussed in section J.4.2, the rhetoric used to increase state regulation of unions which, in turn, produced all the evils the journal is bemoaning now and which are the opposite outcome to those promised to justify this onslaught on working people and our organisations.

We should not be surprised. Let us not forget that belief is defined as "an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof" (such as Locke's stories which underlie liberalism in all its forms, particularly propertarian-

[16] *"The politics of anger"*, **The Economist**, July 2016

[17] See my *"Poor Adam Smith"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 66



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

Just taking those two first definitions and fusing them yields:

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

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

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

Nothing could be further from the truth. Anarchists have been using the term "libertarian" to describe themselves and their ideas since the 1850's. According to anarchist historian Max Nettlau, the revolutionary anarchist Joseph Dejacque published **Le Libertaire, Journal du Mouvement Social** in New

their rights, take action to defend their freedom, practice solidarity and co-operation, fight against oppression, organise themselves without leaders and bosses, the spirit of anarchism lives. Anarchists simply seek to strengthen these libertarian tendencies and bring them to their full fruition. As we discuss in section J, anarchists apply their ideas in many ways within capitalism in order to change it for the better until such time as we get rid of it completely. Section I discusses what we aim to replace it with, i.e. what anarchism aims for.

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

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

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

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



ism). Anarchists, however, prefer to study the facts and draw conclusions based on them. The facts of the last few decades clearly support Proudhon's analysis — rising productivity and level wages show that workers are exploited in production and allows the few to monopolise the gains derived from productivity increases. He also indicated in *System of Economic Contradictions* how the favoured "solution" of liberalism — more competition — resulted in monopolies (i.e., big companies) which meant that the amount of investment needed to enter the market was an objective barrier which, as well as reducing competition, turned the bulk of the population into wage-workers who have "sold their arms and parted with their liberty" to the few.[18]

Thus the social question remains fundamentally the same as when Proudhon took pen to paper. As is its answer: to end these social problems means ending master-servant relations within the workplace by means of association and abolishing the state that protects them by means of federalism. An account of anarchism which ignores all this would be a travesty and produce false picture of what anarchism is and *what counts as anarchist*.[19] Sadly, this false picture still exists in academic and other works — based on little more than if someone calls themselves an anarchist then they are. Few (bar the propertarians who fail to recognise the oxymoronic nature of "anarcho"-capitalism) would tolerate adding Nazism to accounts of socialism based on them having "socialist" in their party name — but even this low bar seems to be considered too high for some when it comes to discussing anarchism!

AFAQ was started in the early 1990s, just after the collapse of Stalinism ("socialism" or "communism") and the corresponding triumphalism of neo-liberals. Japanese-style corporate cap-

[18] **Property is Theft!**, 212

[19] See my *"Anarchism in the 21st Century"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 67

italism was in its "lost decade" and neo-liberalism was being accepted as "common-sense" within the leadership of the "official" opposition (the British Labour Party and its equivalents elsewhere). Yet within ten years, we had the bursting of the dot com bubble and a deep crisis in East-Asia. The latter saw economies previously praised by advocates of capitalism as being a heaven of "free-market" policies become, overnight, statist nightmares. Such is the power of ideology.

Then came the crisis of 2007–8, a crisis caused by neo-liberal policies which — incredible as it may seem — became the means of imposing more of said policies in the name of "Austerity". The Tories in the UK were particularly good (if that is the right word!) at turning a crisis caused by the 1% and their favoured policies into one apparently caused by New Labour not letting single mothers starve. While the narrative of the crisis turned the facts on their head, they could not stop the policies being implemented dragging out the crisis and turning it into the slowest recovery on record. So the financial crisis showed the bankruptcy of neo-classical economics in two senses. First, mainstream economists did not predict it (while post-Keynesian economists did). Second, the notion of "expansionary austerity" was tried and proven to be as nonsensical as even the mainstream ("bastard") Keynesians predicted. This resulted in a downward spiral whenever it was tried – whether Greece or the UK (so confirming section C.9 of AFAQ). However, the critics being proven correct was not considered good enough and so when growth — finally! — returned to the UK, the architects of this harmful policy were proclaimed by the much of mainstream press (including the *Financial Times*) to have been vindicated! Why? Simply because, as with Milton Friedman (see section C.8), the Tories



> *"Ultimately, only struggle determines outcome, and progress towards a more meaningful community must begin with the will to resist every form of injustice. In general terms, this means challenging all exploitation and defying the legitimacy of all coercive authority. If anarchists have one article of unshakeable faith, it is that, once the habit of deferring to politicians or ideologues is lost, and that of resistance to domination and exploitation acquired, then ordinary people have a capacity to organise every aspect of their lives in their own interests, anywhere and at any time, both freely and fairly.*
>
> *"Anarchists do not stand aside from popular struggle, nor do they attempt to dominate it. They seek to contribute practically whatever they can, and also to assist within it the highest possible levels of both individual self-development and of group solidarity. It is possible to recognise anarchist ideas concerning voluntary relationships, egalitarian participation in decision-making processes, mutual aid and a related critique of all forms of domination in philosophical, social and revolutionary movements in all times and places."* [**My Granny made me an Anarchist**, pp. 162–3]

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

It is no abstract philosophy. Anarchist ideas are put into practice everyday. Wherever oppressed people stand up for

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

> *"Anarchism is a movement for human freedom. It is concrete, democratic and egalitarian … Anarchism began — and remains — a direct challenge by the underprivileged to their oppression and exploitation. It opposes both the insidious growth of state power and the pernicious ethos of possessive individualism, which, together or separately, ultimately serve only the interests of the few at the expense of the rest.*
>
> *"Anarchism is both a theory and practice of life. Philosophically, it aims for the maximum accord between the individual, society and nature. Practically, it aims for us to organise and live our lives in such a way as to make politicians, governments, states and their officials superfluous. In an anarchist society, mutually respectful sovereign individuals would be organised in non-coercive relationships within naturally defined communities in which the means of production and distribution are held in common.*
>
> *"Anarchists are not dreamers obsessed with abstract principles and theoretical constructs … Anarchists are well aware that a perfect society cannot be won tomorrow. Indeed, the struggle lasts forever! However, it is the vision that provides the spur to struggle against things as they are, and for things that might be …*



made the rich richer and skewed state intervention even further towards the few.[20]

The global economic crisis rolls on — a classic example, as per section C.7, of a crisis caused by labour being too weak. We have seen the "traditional" left ride the wave of protest in many countries and divert it into parliamentarian avenues — were it quickly died. The example of Greece is the classic example with a left-wing anti-austerity party (Syriza) elected only for it to end up imposing even more stringent austerity measures than before. This confirmed our analysis in section J.2 of AFAQ on why anarchists reject electioneering and support direct action. The pressures on left-wing governments from big business and capital, the willingness the state bureaucracy (the civil service, etc.) to frustrate the policies and decisions of popularly elected governments, all played their role even without the years of campaigning for votes which have traditionally watered-down radical parties long before they achieve office (but not *real* power). Still, we are sure the true-believers will proclaim that *next* time they will not make the same mistakes as the Social Democrats, the Greens, and now Syriza. And state socialists call anarchists utopians…

So while proclaiming itself "Scientific Socialism" (an expression, like so much of Marxism, appropriated from Proudhon), it adherents seem wonderfully immune from learning from experience. Marxism continues, albeit in smaller numbers, to put countless numbers off socialism by presenting the cure (socialism) as being worse than the disease (capitalism). This may explain why Marxists so regularly distort anarchist ideas — if Marxism were so robust they would have no need to invent nonsense about anarchism. Yet they do — and section H.2 continues to be of use in replying to them. It may also explain why some Marxists prefer to invoke the Spanish

[20] See my *"Boomtime in Poundland: Has Austerity Worked?"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review,** No. 63

Revolution than the Russian (understandably given how bad Lenin's regime was!) or seek to associate their ideology with far more appealing forms of socialism (such as syndicalism[21]). Again, AFAQ is there to show the flaws in such attempts — and to show that much of what passes for "Marxism" was first expounded by anarchists[22] but without the authoritarian and metaphysical baggage.

Anarchists have long critiqued state socialism but on the assumption (sometimes unstated or mentioned in passing) that we were the genuine socialists. The logic is simple enough — the state is a hierarchical body and so based on inequality and so state socialism violated socialist principles (namely, equality) and could not, therefore, produce a socialist society. This was based on empirical evidence which shows that states developed to impose minority rule and the conclusion that, as a result, it cannot be used to end it. As Proudhon argued:

> "And who benefits from this regime of unity? The people? No, the upper classes […] Unity, today and since 1815, is quite simply a form of bourgeois exploitation under the protection of bayonets. Yes, political unity, in the great States, is bourgeois: the positions which it creates, the intrigues which it causes, the influences which it cherishes, all that is bourgeois and goes to the bourgeois."[23]

Even if we smash the existing state and replace it with a new one (marked, like all states, by centralisation and hierarchy, even an elected one) then it will just reproduce a new class system (this is a major theme of section H). The centralised, hierarchical, state is "the cornerstone of bourgeois despotism and

[21] See my *"Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism"*, **Anarchist Studies**, Vol. 20 No. 1 for one example.

[22] For a summary, see my *"Anarchist Theory: Use it or Lose it"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 57

[23] **La fédération et l'unité en Italie** (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 27–8



> *must surrender a tithe of his [or her] product, which will guarantee his liberty of access to the sources and means of production… Out of the blindly submissive, it makes the discontented; out of the unconsciously dissatisfied, it makes the consciously dissatisfied … Anarchism seeks to arouse the consciousness of oppression, the desire for a better society, and a sense of the necessity for unceasing warfare against capitalism and the State."* [**Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, pp. 23–4]

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

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

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

*out freedom is slavery and brutality."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 269]

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

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

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

> *"Anarchism ... teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all ... [It] teaches that the present unjust organisation of the production and distribution of wealth must finally be completely destroyed, and replaced by a system which will insure to each the liberty to work, without first seeking a master to whom he [or she]*



exploitation"[24] and "nothing resembles a monarchy more than a unitarian republic [*république unitaire*]."[25] It would be wishful thinking to conclude that an institutional structure so well suited to minority rule could produce a classless society and, as the Bolshevik regime showed (section H.6), we anarchists were proven correct.

Yet with Leninism and Social-Democracy becoming so dominant, anarchists often stopped calling themselves socialists or communists in order to distance themselves (understandably!) from both. If most people understood "communism" to be the Soviet Union then talking about a libertarian, or free, communism may be confusing. Similarly, if "socialism" meant centralisation and nationalisation (rather than federalism and workers' self-management) or slowly making capitalism slightly better (rather than replacing it with something better) then it is understandable that some anarchists would drop the term. Simply put the anarchist vision of socialism was at odds with what most people considered it to mean:

> "socialism is... the extinction of poverty, the elimination of capitalism and of wage labour, the transformation of property, the decentralisation of government, the organisation of universal suffrage, the effective and direct sovereignty of the workers, the balance of economic forces, the substitution of the contractual regime for the legal regime, etc., etc."[26]

Sadly, some took anti-statism as the defining characteristic of anarchism and forgot the underlying assumption of socialism. AFAQ showed that this was not the case. It also

[24] Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, 33

[25] Proudhon, **Du principe fédératif** (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 140

[26] Proudhon, *"Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire"*, **Oeuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon** 9: 306

debunked the nonsense of "anarcho"-capitalism (in section F) and subsequent research has shown that the notion of a non-socialist "anarchism" is at odds with the history of anarchism as both a theory and a movement. Even the individualist anarchists — who were the closest to classical liberalism — rejected capitalist property-rights and recognised that capitalism exploited the worker (see section G). Ignoring this Proudhon-influenced analysis and the rough equality its advocate's expected it to produce results in something very much at odds with their aspirations. However, "anarcho"-capitalists are, as when AFAQ was started, just an annoyance for a few zealots on the internet and some academics funded by propertarian "think-tanks" or wealthy backers does not equate to a movement — particularly given the obvious theoretical contradiction between claiming to be "libertarian" while supporting *authoritarian* social relationships (namely, private hierarchies — section B.1). As Kropotkin summarised:

> "They understand that, as they live amidst *sociable* creatures, such as men are, they never would free themselves if they tried to free *themselves alone*, individually, without taking the others into account. To have the individual free, they must strive to constitute *a society of equals*, wherein *every one* would be possessed of *equal rights* to the treasuries of knowledge and to the immense wealth accumulated by mankind and its civilisation, *wherein nobody should be compelled to sell his labour* (and consequently, to a certain degree, his personality) to those who intend to exploit him.
>
> "This is why Anarchy necessarily is *Communist*, why it was born amidst the international Socialist movement, and why an individualist, if he intends to remain Individualist, cannot be an Anarchist.



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

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

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

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

> "*We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism with-*

meant *"that man [or woman] must sell his [or her] labour"* and, therefore, *"that his [or her] inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 50] Forty years earlier Bakunin made the same point when he argued that under the current system *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"* to the capitalist in exchange for a wage. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 187]

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

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

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



> "He who intends to retain *for himself* the monopoly of any piece of land or property, or any other portion of the social wealth, *will be bound to look for some authority* which could guarantee to him possession of this piece of land, or this portion of the modern machinery — so as to enable him to compel others to work for him.
>
> "Either the individual will join a society of which all the members own, all together, such a territory, such machinery, such roads, and so on, and utilise them for the life of all — *and then he will be a Communist*; or he will apply to some sort of authority, placed above society, and obtain from it the right of taking, for his *own exclusive and permanent use*, such a portion of the territory or the social wealth. *And then he will NOT be an Anarchist: he will be an authoritarian.*"[27]

Hopefully academics will do their research and start to exclude "anarcho"-capitalism from accounts of anarchism and start to note how right-wing "libertarians" have twisted the meaning of the word in order to defend various *private* authoritarian social relationships (not least those associated with property). Sadly, given the quality of most works on anarchism, this hope may be unfilled — but at least AFAQ exists to show those interested what anarchism really stands for.

Still, there seems to be an improvement within academic circles – perhaps because there has been an increase in anarchist academics? This can be seen by many important works which have increased our understanding of both anarchist thinkers and movements and which have been published, often by AK

[27] *"A Few Thoughts on the Essence of Anarchism"*, **Direct Action Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology**, 202–3

Press, in cheaper editions. So in terms of serious research, anarchism is being better served than was often the case in the past — myths are being debunked and I hope AFAQ has played its part in that.

Yet theory without practice is of little use and producing accurate accounts of past anarchists and movements, while important, does not bring anarchy closer. Twenty years is a long time and there is still no sign of the social revolution — although social revolts continue aplenty! Does this mean AFAQ was a waste of time? Far from it! To think that misunderstands what anarchism is — it is not a vision of a "perfect" society but rather a movement aiming to change the world for the better. Sometimes our resistance — like the class struggle it is part of — is small-scale, invisible, securing minor victories or just slowing down the decisions of the powerful (whether the state or the boss). Sometimes our resistance explodes into the public and the revolt becomes newsworthy. Regardless of the size of activity, anarchists work today to make the world a bit more libertarian. As Kropotkin put it:

> "Anarchists are thus forced to work without respite and without delay [...]
>
> "They must reaffirm the main philosophical cornerstones of Anarchy. They must incorporate scientific methods, for these will help to reshape ideas: the myths of history will be debunked, along with those of social economy and philosophy [...]
>
> "They must participate in the daily struggle against oppression and prejudice in order to maintain a spirit of revolt everywhere people feel oppressed and possess the courage to rise up.
>
> "They must thwart the clever machinations of all those parties who were once allies but who now are hostile, who seek now to divert onto author-



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

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

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

We stress that this opposition to hierarchy is, for anarchists, not limited to just the state or government. It includes all authoritarian economic and social relationships as well as political ones, particularly those associated with capitalist property and wage labour. This can be seen from Proudhon's argument that *"**Capital** ... in the political field is analogous to **government** ... The economic idea of capitalism, the politics of government or of authority, and the theological idea of the Church are three identical ideas, linked in various ways. To attack one of them is equivalent to attacking all of them ... What capital does to labour, and the State to liberty, the Church does to the spirit. This trinity of absolutism is as baneful in practice as it is in philosophy. The most effective means for oppressing the people would be simultaneously to enslave its body, its will and its reason."* [quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 43–44] Thus we find Emma Goldman opposing capitalism as it

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

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

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

Reference to "hierarchy" in this context is a fairly recent development — the "classical" anarchists such as Proudhon,



> itarian paths those movements which were originally spawned in revolt against the oppression of Capital and State.
>
> "And finally […] they have to find, within the practice of life itself and indeed working through their own experiences, new ways in which social formations can be organised, be they centred on work, community or region, and how these might emerge in a liberated society, freed from the authority of governments and those who would subject us to poverty and hunger."[28]

If AFAQ has helped some people to join the struggle, to defend and extend what freedoms we have, to combat inequality in wealth and power, then it has been a worthwhile project even if an anarchist society remains an inspiration rather than a reality. It has brought that society a bit closer by showing the world what anarchism actually is, by debunking myths, by showing that there is an alternative and how the struggles of today create it to some degree.

For never forget that we create the new world when we resist the old. Even today we have the choice of acting in a libertarian manner or in an authoritarian one: we can organise with our fellow workers to resist the oppression and exploitation of our bosses — or be servile, know our place and grumble over low wages; we can resist the decisions of politicians by organising our communities — or wait quietly for four years to vote for the lesser evil; we can take to the streets in protest at the murderous results of racism — or just turn the channel and hope you will remain unaffected; we can struggle against patriarchy — or remain quiet; we can fight to ensure everyone can be themselves — or acquiesce to "popular" prejudices; we can encourage co-operative alternatives to wage-labour, land-

[28] *"The Anarchist Principle"*, **Op Cit.**, 200

lordism and officialdom — or quietly consume while muttering about being ripped off.

Choose!

Iain McKay



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

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

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

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

to imply disorder and confusion. Those with a vested interest in preserving the status quo will obviously wish to imply that opposition to the current system cannot work in practice, and that a new form of society will only lead to chaos. Or, as Errico Malatesta expresses it:

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

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

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

This FAQ is part of the process of changing the commonly-held ideas regarding anarchism and the meaning of anarchy. But that is not all. As well as combating the distortions produced by the "common-sense" idea of "anarchy", we also have to combat the distortions that anarchism and anarchists have been subjected to over the years by our political and social enemies. For, as Bartolomeo Vanzetti put it, anarchists are *"the radical of the radical — the black cats, the terrors of many, of all the bigots, exploiters, charlatans, fakers and oppressors. Consequently we are also the more slandered, misrepresented, misunderstood and persecuted of all."* [Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, **The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti**, p. 274]



# An Anarchist FAQ after ten years

It is now ten years since "An Anarchist FAQ" (AFAQ) was officially released. A lot has happened over that time, unfortunately finishing it has not been one of them!

Over that decade, AFAQ has changed considerably. It was initially conceived as a energy-saving device to stop anarchists having to continually make the same points against claims that "anarcho"-capitalism was a form of anarchism. As would be expected, the quality of the initial versions and sections were pretty mixed. Most of it was extremely good (even if we do say so ourselves!) and has required little change over the decade (mostly we have built upon and expanded the original material). A few bits were less good and have been researched more and rewritten. We have also, of course, made mistakes and corrected them when we have been informed about them or have discovered them ourselves. In general, though, our initial work has stood up well and while we were occasionally wrong on a few details, the general thrust of even these areas has been proven correct. Overall, our aim to produce an FAQ which reflected the majority of anarchist thought, both currently and historically from an international perspective, has been a success as shown by the number of mirrors, links and translations AFAQ has seen (being published by AK Press confirms this).

Since the official release, AFAQ has changed. When we released it back in 1996, we had already decided to make it a FAQ about anarchism rather than an FAQ on why anarchism is anti-capitalist. However, the first versions still bore the marks of its

origins. We realised that this limited it somewhat and we have slowly revised the AFAQ so that it has become a resource about anarchism (indeed, if it were to be started again the section on "anarcho"-capitalism would be placed into an appendix, where it belongs). This means that the aim of AFAQ has changed. I would say that it has two related goals:

1. To present the case for anarchism, to convince people they should become anarchists.
2. To be a resource for existing anarchists, to use to bolster their activism and activities by presenting facts and arguments to allow them to defend anarchism against those opposed to it (Marxists, capitalists, etc.).

Te second goal explains why, for example, we spend a lot of time refuting capitalist economics and Marxism/Leninism (partly, because many of the facts and arguments are in academic books which are unavailable to the general public). We hope that AFAQ has proved useful to our comrades as much as we hope we have convinced non-anarchists, at best, to become anarchists, or, at worse, to take our ideas seriously. Hopefully, the two aims are mutually complementary.

Not only has AFAQ changed over the last ten years, so has the anarchist and general political landscape on the internet. When AFAQ was being initially created, the number of anarchists on-line was small. There were not that many anarchist webpages and, relatively speaking, right-wing "libertarians" were un-opposed in arguing that "anarcho"-capitalism was a form of anarchism (the only FAQ was Caplan's biased and inaccurate "Anarchist Theory FAQ"). As a non-American, I was surprised that this oxymoron even existed (I still am, as are all the anarchists I mention it to). Anarchism has always been a **socialist** theory and the concept of an "anarchism" which supported the economic system anarchism was born opposing



# A.1 What is anarchism?

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

In the words of anarchist L. Susan Brown:

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

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

This process of misrepresentation is not without historical parallel. For example, in countries which have considered government by one person (monarchy) necessary, the words "republic" or "democracy" have been used precisely like "anarchy,"

present, even if they may disagree with our application of them here and there.



is nonsense. Arguing with its supporters and reading up on it convinced me that the only real link it has with anarchism is simply its attempted appropriation of the name.[1] Hence the pressing need for a **real** anarchist FAQ, a need AFAQ successfully met.

Luckily, over the 1990s things changed. More anarchists went online, anarchist organisations created a web presence and the balance of forces changed to reflect reality (i.e. there are far more anarchists than "anarcho"-capitalists). The anti-capitalist movement helped, putting anarchists back in the news (the BBC even linked to AFAQ for those interested in finding out what anarchists wanted!) Even in the USA, things got better and after Seattle genuine anarchism could no longer be ignored. This produced some articles by "anarcho"-capitalists, explaining how there are two forms of anarchism and that the two have nothing or little in common (if that is the case, why call your ideology anarchism?). Anarchist organisations and activism increased and the awareness that anarchism was anti-hierarchy, anti-state **and** anti-capitalist increased. As an added bonus, some genuine individualist anarchists appeared, refuting the claim that "anarcho"-capitalism was merely a form of "updated" individualist anarchism. All these developments were welcomed, as were the words of praise and encouragement we received for our work on AFAQ from many anarchists (including, it must be stressed, individualist ones). Today, genuine anarchism in all its forms has a much greater profile, as is anarchist opposition to "anarcho"-capitalism and its claims. We hope AFAQ played a role, however small, in that process.

[1] While "anarcho"-capitalism has some overlap with individualist anarchism, it lacks the radical and socialist sensibility and aims of the likes of Tucker which makes the latter anarchist, albeit a flawed and inconsistent form. Unlike the former, individualist anarchism **can** become consistent anarchism by simply applying its own principles in a logical manner.

Of course, the battle is not over. On Wikipedia, for example, right-"libertarians" are busy trying to rewrite the history of anarchism. Some anarchists have tried to counteract this attempt, and have meant with differing degrees of success. We urge you to get involved, if you have the time and energy as numbers, sadly, do seem to count. This is because we anarchists are up against people who, apparently, do not have a life and so can wage a war of attrition against those who try and include relevant facts to the entries (such as the obvious anti-capitalism of "traditional" anarchism, that anarchism is **not** compatible with government or hierarchy — hence an-**archy**! — or that calling yourself an anarchist does not necessarily make it so). It is a shame that such a promising project has been derailed by ideologues whose ignorance of the subject matter is matched only by their hatred of AFAQ which they deny is a "credible" or valid reference on anarchism.

I am not surprised that AFAQ is hated by the "libertarian" right (nor will I be surprised if it is equally hated by the authoritarian left). After all, it presents the case for genuine anarchism, exposes the claims of a capitalist "anarchism" for the nonsense they are and shows how deeply authoritarian right-wing "libertarianism" actually is. That the FAQ can be called "biased" by these people goes without saying (it is, after all, a FAQ about anarchism written by anarchists). What seems funny is that they just do not comprehend that anarchists take offence to their pretensions of labelling their ideology "anarchism," that we would seek to refute such claims and that their notion that "anarcho"-capitalism is anarchist is far more biased. Let us hope that more academics will pay attention to this and the obvious fact that there is a very long list of anarchists, famous and not-so-famous, who consider the whole concept an oxymoron.

Equally unsurprising is the attempt to deny that AFAQ is a valid reference on Wikipedia. This boils down to the claim that the authors are "nobodies." Given that Kropotkin always stressed that anarchism was born from the people, I take that



consequently of freedom, providing a book of rules and "answers" which relieve us of the "burden" of thinking for ourselves.

In producing this FAQ on anarchism it is not our intention to give you the "correct" answers or a new rule book. We will explain a bit about what anarchism has been in the past, but we will focus more on its modern forms and why **we** are anarchists today. The FAQ is an attempt to provoke thought and analysis on your part. If you are looking for a new ideology, then sorry, anarchism is not for you.

While anarchists try to be realistic and practical, we are not "reasonable" people. "Reasonable" people uncritically accept what the "experts" and "authorities" tell them is true, and so they will always remain slaves! Anarchists know that, as Bakunin wrote:

> *"[a] person is strong only when he stands upon his own truth, when he speaks and acts from his deepest convictions. Then, whatever the situation he may be in, he always knows what he must say and do. He may fall, but he cannot bring shame upon himself or his causes."* [quoted in Albert Meltzer, **I couldn't Paint Golden Angels**, p. 2]

What Bakunin describes is the power of independent thought, which is the power of freedom. We encourage you not to be "reasonable," not to accept what others tell you, but to think and act for yourself!

One last point: to state the obvious, this is **not** the final word on anarchism. Many anarchists will disagree with much that is written here, but this is to be expected when people think for themselves. All we wish to do is indicate the **basic** ideas of anarchism and give our analysis of certain topics based on how we understand and apply these ideas. We are sure, however, that all anarchists will agree with the core ideas we

*of a free humanity.*" [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 9]

As we'll see, all such institutions are hierarchies, and their repressive nature stems directly from their hierarchical form.

Anarchism is a socio-economic and political theory, but not an ideology. The difference is **very** important. Basically, theory means you have ideas; an ideology means ideas have you. Anarchism is a body of ideas, but they are flexible, in a constant state of evolution and flux, and open to modification in light of new data. As society changes and develops, so does anarchism. An ideology, in contrast, is a set of "fixed" ideas which people believe dogmatically, usually ignoring reality or "changing" it so as to fit with the ideology, which is (by definition) correct. All such "fixed" ideas are the source of tyranny and contradiction, leading to attempts to make everyone fit onto a Procrustean Bed. This will be true regardless of the ideology in question — Leninism, Objectivism, "Libertarianism," or whatever — all will all have the same effect: the destruction of real individuals in the name of a doctrine, a doctrine that usually serves the interest of some ruling elite. Or, as Michael Bakunin puts it:

> *"Until now all human history has been only a perpetual and bloody immolation of millions of poor human beings in honour of some pitiless abstraction — God, country, power of state, national honour, historical rights, judicial rights, political liberty, public welfare."* [**God and the State**, p. 59]

Dogmas are static and deathlike in their rigidity, often the work of some dead "prophet," religious or secular, whose followers erect his or her ideas into an idol, immutable as stone. Anarchists want the living to bury the dead so that the living can get on with their lives. The living should rule the dead, not vice versa. Ideologies are the nemesis of critical thinking and



intended insult as a badge of pride. I have always taken the position that it is not who says something that counts, but what they say. In other words, I would far sooner quote a "nobody" who knows what they are talking about than a "somebody" who does not. As AFAQ indicates with its many refutations of straw man arguments against anarchism, there are plenty of the latter. Ultimately, the logical conclusion of such an argument is that anarchists are not qualified to discuss anarchism, an inherently silly position but useful if you are seeking to turn anarchism into something it is not.

Given that even such an usually reliable expert as the late, great, Paul Avrich made mistakes, this position is by far the most sensible. Between what a suitably qualified "expert" writes and what actual anarchists say and do, I always go for the latter. Any serious scientist would do so, but sadly many do not — instead, we get ideology. A classic example is Eric Hobsbawm's thesis on **"Primitive Rebels"** which he decided to illustrate, in part, with the example of Spanish anarchism. As we recount as part of our appendix on "Marxism and Spanish Anarchism" while being undoubtedly a "somebody" and immensely qualified to write on the subject, his account was utter nonsense. This was proven beyond doubt when an anthologist interviewed the survivors of the Casas Viejas massacre. Their account of the event had only appeared previously in anarchist papers at the time and both, needless to say, refuted Hobsbawm.

So, to be called a "nobody" is quite a complement, given how many of the "somebodies" have not stopped being ignorant of anarchism from putting pen to paper and exposing that ignorance to the world (the worse recent example of this, outside of Marxism, must be George Monbiot's terrible comments in his **"Age of Consent"**). So, when it comes to saying what anarchism is, I turn to anarchists. This is what the "experts" should be doing anyway if they were doing their job.

Are we "qualified" to write about anarchism? Well, the the collective has always been made up of anarchists, so we have an anarchist FAQ written by anarchists. It has always been a popular site, given the number of mirrors, translations and links it has been given (one mirror called it "world famous"). It is being published by AK Press, one of the leading anarchist publishers in the world.

I am the main editor and contributor to AFAQ. While one contributor to Wikipedia claimed I as an American academic, this is not the case. I have a "real" job and work on AFAQ in my spare time (I do despair when people, particularly leftists, assume that wage slaves are incapable of producing works like AFAQ). I have been always been an anarchist since becoming politically aware which means I have been an anarchist activist for approximately 20 years (time flies when you are having fun!). I have been a member of numerous anarchist groups and have contributed to many anarchist publications and websites. As can be seen from my personal webpage,[2] I regularly contribute articles to **Freedom** (the leading English-language anarchist newspaper). Rarely does an issue come out without something by me it in. Moreover, some of the longer articles have appeared in **Black Flag** (before and after I joined its editorial committee). My works have also been published in **Scottish Anarchist**, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review** and **Free Voices** and some have been translated into other languages. I am also an invited columnist for the www.infoshop.org and www.anarkismo.net webpages (neither of which I am otherwise involved with). In addition, I have been invited to speak at anarchist conferences in Scotland and Ireland, as well as by Marxist parties to debate the merits of anarchism. Due to family commitments, my specifically anarchist activities are pretty

[2] Under my pseudonym "Anarcho" (given what's on it, I'm surprised I bother using "Anarcho" these days as it is obvious who writes the articles). It is available here: `http://anarchism.ws/writers/anarcho.html`



It should not be thought, however, that anarchism is just a critique of modern civilisation, just "negative" or "destructive." Because it is much more than that. For one thing, it is also a proposal for a free society. Emma Goldman expressed what might be called the "anarchist question" as follows: *"The problem that confronts us today... is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 158–159] In other words, how can we create a society in which the potential for each individual is realised but not at the expense of others? In order to achieve this, anarchists envision a society in which, instead of being controlled ***"from the top down"*** through hierarchical structures of centralised power, the affairs of humanity will, to quote Benjamin Tucker, *"be managed by individuals or voluntary associations."* [**Anarchist Reader**, p. 149] While later sections of the FAQ (**sections I and J**) will describe anarchism's positive proposals for organising society in this way, "from the bottom up," some of the constructive core of anarchism will be seen even in the earlier sections. The positive core of anarchism can even be seen in the anarchist critique of such flawed solutions to the social question as Marxism and right-wing "libertarianism" (**sections F and H**, respectively).

As Clifford Harper elegantly puts it, *"[l]ike all great ideas, anarchism is pretty simple when you get down to it — human beings are at their best when they are living free of authority, deciding things among themselves rather than being ordered about."* [**Anarchy: A Graphic Guide**, p. vii] Due to their desire to maximise individual and therefore social freedom, anarchists wish to dismantle all institutions that repress people:

> *"Common to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development*

Modern civilisation faces three potentially catastrophic crises: (1) social breakdown, a shorthand term for rising rates of poverty, homelessness, crime, violence, alienation, drug and alcohol abuse, social isolation, political apathy, dehumanisation, the deterioration of community structures of self-help and mutual aid, etc.; (2) destruction of the planet's delicate ecosystems on which all complex forms of life depend; and (3) the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

Orthodox opinion, including that of Establishment "experts," mainstream media, and politicians, generally regards these crises as separable, each having its own causes and therefore capable of being dealt with on a piecemeal basis, in isolation from the other two. Obviously, however, this "orthodox" approach isn't working, since the problems in question are getting worse. Unless some better approach is taken soon, we are clearly headed for disaster, either from catastrophic war, ecological Armageddon, or a descent into urban savagery — or all of the above.

Anarchism offers a unified and coherent way of making sense of these crises, by tracing them to a common source. This source is the principle of **hierarchical authority**, which underlies the major institutions of all "civilised" societies, whether capitalist or "communist." Anarchist analysis therefore starts from the fact that all of our major institutions are in the form of hierarchies, i.e. organisations that concentrate power at the top of a pyramidal structure, such as corporations, government bureaucracies, armies, political parties, religious organisations, universities, etc. It then goes on to show how the authoritarian relations inherent in such hierarchies negatively affect individuals, their society, and culture. In the first part of this FAQ (**sections A to E**) we will present the anarchist analysis of hierarchical authority and its negative effects in greater detail.



much limited to writing these days, but I remain a reasonably active trade unionist.

I will leave it up to the reader to decide whether we are "qualified" to write about anarchism or not!

But as I said, I always consider what is said more important than who says it. The fact that AFAQ is so popular with anarchists is what counts and I hope that we continue to be. We are always looking for help and suggestions, so if you want to get involved or want something added or changed, please contact us — we consider AFAQ as a resource for anarchists and we want it to reflect what anarchists think and do.[3] However, if you do want something changed or added be prepared to do some or all of the work yourself as we have our own plans on future developments and may not be able to provide the time or energy for other changes. Also, if you spot a mistake or a typo, please inform us as no matter how often we check errors do creep in. We take our task seriously and correct all errors when informed of them (differences in interpretation or terminology are not, of course, errors).[4]

Speaking personally, I have enjoyed being part of this project. I have learned a lot and have gained a better understanding of many anarchist thinkers and historical events. For example, I can now understand why Daniel Guerin was so

[3] Apologies for those who sent emails over the years and never received a reply — some were lost and, given how much busy we are, emails are always the first to suffer.

[4] For a discussion of one early incident, mentioned in the Wikipedia entry on AFAQ, see my article (*"An Anarchist FAQ, David Friedman and Medieval Iceland"* on my webpage). Suffice to say, once we became aware of his new criticism this year (Friedman did not bother to inform us directly), we sped up our planned revision and expansion of that section and corrected the few mistakes that had remained. In summary, it can be said our original critique remained valid in spite of some serious errors in details caused by a failure to check sources in a rush to officially release it. We learned our lesson and try not to make the same mistake again (and have not, as far as I am aware).

interested in Proudhon and why it has been a crying shame that Voltairine de Cleyre's works have been unavailable for 8 decades. As such, my understanding and appreciation of anarchism has been enriched by working on AFAQ and I hope that others have had a similar experience reading it. On the negative side, I've had to read some terrible books and articles but very few, if any, of those were anarchist. But this is minor. The work has been worth it and while it has taken longer than any of us had imagined at the start, I'm glad that we are still working on it ten years later as AFAQ is much improved for all that time and energy. If nothing else, this work has reinforced my belief in the positive ideas and ideals of anarchism and confirmed why I became an anarchist so long ago. And, let me be honest, I would not do it unless I enjoyed it!

What of the future? Obviously, we know that AFAQ is not the final word on anarchism (we have always stressed that this is **An** Anarchist FAQ and not "The Anarchist FAQ," although some do call it that). The immediate aim is to revise the existing main sections of AFAQ for publication, which we are slowly doing. In the process some previous work is being added to and, in some cases, totally revised. After ten years, our knowledge of many subjects has expanded considerably. We have also asked a couple of individualist anarchist comrades to have a look over section G and hopefully their input will flesh out that section when it comes to be revised (for all its flaws, individualist anarchism deserves far more than to be appropriated by the right and social anarchists should be helping its modern supporters attempts to reclaim their radical tradition).[5] Once the revision of the main body of AFAQ is complete, the appendix on the

[5] A few people have said that AFAQ does not give equal billing to individualist anarchism. However, in terms of numbers and influence it has always been very much a minority trend in anarchism outside of America. By the 1880s, this was probably the case in America as well and by the turn of the 20th century it was definitely the case (as noted by, among others, Paul Avrich). As such, it is hardly a flaw that AFAQ has presented the majority



# Section A — What is Anarchism?

"No, I don't think bowling leagues are the anarchist utopia, but they, like much of our lives outside of the workplace, are organised without hierarchy and oppression; the most meaningful, truly human parts of our lives already work best when organised on anarchist principles. Yet I also believe that in its function as critique and as a vision of the future — perhaps the only one that doesn't end in our extinction as a species, or, as Orwell put it, as a jackboot smashing a human face, forever — anarchism is not only desirable but possible and necessary."

Mark Leier: **The Case for Anarchy**



Russian Revolution will be finished and then all the appendices will be revised.

After that, AFAQ will be added to once new information becomes available and new anarchist social movements and ideas develop. We have not covered everything nor does AFAQ discussed all developments within anarchism in all countries. If you think we have missed something, then contact us and we can arrange to include the subject and issues missing. As noted above, though, do **not** expect us to do all the work for you. This is a resource for the movement and, as such, we expect fellow anarchists to help out beyond merely suggesting things they expect **others** to do!

Hopefully, after summarising 19th and 20th century anarchism, the anarchists of the 21st century will use that to build and develop new ideas and movements and create both viable anarchist alternatives under statism and capitalism and, eventually, a free society. Whether we do so or not is, ultimately, up to us. Let us hope we can rise to the challenge! I do hope that anarchists can rise above the often silly arguments that we often inflict on each other and concentrate on the 90%+ that unites us rather than the often insignificant differences some consider so important. One thing is sure, if we do not then the worse will happen.

Finally, another personal note. On the way to work, I go past a little park. This little oasis of green in the city is a joy to behold, more so since someone has added this piece of graffiti to one of its walls:

*"Resistance is **never** futile! Have a nice day, y'all. Love Friday, XXX"*

With that in mind, we dedicate the ten year anniversary release of "An Anarchist FAQ" to all those "nobodies," all those anarchists who are not famous or have the appropriate "qualifi-

position on anarchism (social anarchism), particularly as this is the position of the people involved.

cations", but whose activity, thoughts, ideas, ideals, dreams and hopes give the "somebodies" something to write about (even if they fail to get some, or even all of it, right).

Iain McKay



# A Summation

"No question, the word anarchy freaks people. Yet anarchy — rule by no one — has always struck me as the same as democracy carried to its logical and reasonable conclusions. Of course those who rule — bosses and politicians, capital and the state — cannot imagine that people could rule themselves, for to admit that people can live without authority and rulers pulls out the whole underpinnings of their ideology. Once you admit that people can — and do, today, in many spheres of their lives — run things easier, better and more fairly than the corporation and the government can, there's no justification for the boss and the premier. I think most of us realise and understand that, in our guts, but schools, culture, the police, all the authoritarian apparatuses, tell us we need bosses, we need to be controlled 'for our own good.' It's not for our own good — it's for the good of the boss, plain and simple."

"Anarchism is a demand for real freedom and real autonomy"

"But I also remain convinced that something like an anarchist future, a world of no bosses or politicians, one in which people, all people, can live full and meaningful lives, is possible and desirable. We see glimpses of it all around us in our day-to-day lives, as people organise much of their lives without depending on someone to tell them what to do. We see it in that spirit of revolt — a spirit that is often twisted by anger and despair, but nonetheless shows us that people have not given up. We see it in the political activism, the social lives, the demands for decency and respect and autonomy people put forward, the desire to be individuals while still being part of a community.

turn of the century Argentinean revolt against neo-liberalism is not discussed in section A.5 (this is a wonderful example of anarchist ideas being spontaneously applied in practice during a mass revolt). Suffice to say, anarchistic tendencies, ideas and practices develop all the time and anarchism is growing in influence but if we continually added to AFAQ to reflect this then it would never have become ready for publication! As it is, we have excluded most of the appendices from the book version (these remain available on the website along with a lengthy links page).

I would like to thank everybody who has helped and contributed (directly and indirectly, knowingly and unknowingly) to AFAQ. As for authorship, AFAQ started as a collective effort and remained so for many years. I have been the only person involved from the start and have done the bulk of the work on it. Moreover, the task of getting it ready and revised for publication has fallen to me. I have enjoyed it, in the main. This explains why the book has my name on it rather than a collective. I feel I have earned that right. As such, I claim responsibility for any typos and examples of bad grammar that remain. I have substantially revised AFAQ for publication and while I have tried to find them all, I am sure I have failed (particularly in sections that were effectively rewritten). I hope these do not detract from the book too much.

Finally, on a personal note I would like to dedicate this book to my partner and two lovely children. They are a constant source of inspiration, love, support and hope (not to mention patience!). If this work makes the world we live in better for them then it has been more than worthwhile. For, when it comes down to it, anarchism is simply about making the world a freer and better place. If we forget that, then we forget what makes us anarchists in the first place.

Iain McKay
An Anarchist FAQ



# Introduction

*"Proletarians of the world, look into the depths of your own beings, seek out the truth and realise it yourselves: you will find it nowhere else"*
—Peter Arshinov
**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**



limiting, their freedom and individuality. This means that a consistent anarchism is rooted in free association within a context of self-management, decentralisation and "bottom-up" decision-making (i.e., it is rooted in political, economic and social equality). While it is possible to be an anarchist while opposing exploitation but not all forms of hierarchical social relationships, it is hardly logical nor a convincing position.

AFAQ also seeks to go into subjects anarchists have, traditionally, been weak on, such as economics (which is ironic, as Proudhon made his name by his economic critiques). In this sense, it is a resource for anarchists both in terms of our own history and ideas but also on subjects which we inevitably come across in our struggles (hopefully, the critiques we provide of capitalism, neo-liberalism and so forth will also be useful to other radicals). We have tried to indicate the quoted source is an anarchist or libertarian. If in doubt, please look at the bibliography on the webpage. This breaks references down into libertarian (anarchist and non-anarchist) thinkers (or sympathetic accounts of anarchism) and non-libertarians (which, needless to say, includes right-"libertarians"). It should go without saying that quoting an expert on one subject does not mean anarchists subscribe to their opinions on other matters. Thus if we quote, say, a Keynesian or post-Keynesian economist on how capitalism works it does not imply we support their specific political recommendations.

Some have criticised AFAQ for not including some of the more recent developments within anarchism, which is fair enough. I have asked on numerous occasions for such critics to contribute a section on these and, of course, for referenced corrections for any mistakes others think we have done. Nothing has been forthcoming and we have usually discovered mistakes ourselves and corrected them (although a steady flow of emails pointing out typos has come our way). We have always been a small collective and we cannot do everything. This also explains why important social events like, say, the

(or private-state) capitalism. Such is the power having ideas that bolster the wealthy! The change in "libertarian" is such that some people talk about "libertarian anarchism" — as if you can have an "authoritarian anarchism"! That these people include "anarcho"-capitalists simply shows how ignorant of anarchism they actually are and how alien the ideology is to our movement (I've seen quite a few of them proclaim anarchism is simply a "new" form of Marxism, which shows their grasp of the subject). Equally bizarrely, these self-proclaimed "libertarian anarchists" are also those who most fervently defend the **authoritarian** social relationships inherent within capitalism! In other words, if "authoritarian anarchists" ***could*** exist then the "libertarian anarchists" would be them!

As AFAQ explains, being opposed to the state is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for being an anarchist. Not only is this clear from the works of anarchist thinkers and anarchism as a social movement, but also from the nature of the idea itself. To be an anarchist you must also be a socialist (i.e. opposed to capitalist property and the exploitation of labour). It is no coincidence that Godwin and Proudhon independently analysed private property from a libertarian perspective and drew similar conclusions or that Kropotkin and Tucker considered themselves socialists. To deny this critique is to deny anarchism as a movement and as a socio-political theory never mind its history and the aims of anarchists across the years.

Furthermore, as AFAQ stresses, to be a ***consistent*** anarchist you must recognise that freedom is more than simply the ability to change masters. Anarchism means "no authority" (an-archy) and to support social relationships marked by authority (hier-***archy***) produces a self-contradictory mess (such as supporting forms of domination, such as wage labour, which are essentially identical to those produced by the state — and, sometimes, admitted as such!). Anarchism is, fundamentally, a theory of organisation based on individuals associating together without restricting, and so denying and



# Welcome to our FAQ on anarchism

This FAQ was written by anarchists across the world in an attempt to present anarchist ideas and theory to those interested in it. It is a co-operative effort, produced by a (virtual) working group and it exists to present a useful organising tool for anarchists on-line and, hopefully, in the real world. It desires to present arguments on why you should be an anarchist as well as refuting common arguments against anarchism and other proposed solutions to the social problems we face.

As anarchist ideas seem so at odds with "common-sense" (such as "of course we need a state and capitalism") we need to indicate **why** anarchists think like we do. Unlike many political theories, anarchism rejects flip answers and instead bases its ideas and ideals in an in-depth analysis of society and humanity. In order to do both anarchism and the reader justice we have summarised our arguments as much as possible without making them simplistic. We know that it is a lengthy document and may put off the casual observer but its length is unavoidable.

Readers may consider our use of extensive quoting as being an example of a *"quotation [being] a handy thing to have about, saving one the trouble of thinking for oneself."* (A.A. Milne) This is not the case of course. We have included extensive quotations by many anarchist figures for three reasons. Firstly, to indicate that we are **not** making up our claims of what certain anarchists thought or argued for. Secondly, and most importantly, it allows us to link the past voices of anarchism with

its present adherents. And lastly, the quotes are used for their ability to convey ideas succinctly rather than as an appeal to "authority."

In addition, many quotes are used in order to allow readers to investigate the ideas of those quoted and to summarise facts and so save space. For example, a quote by Noam Chomsky on the development of capitalism by state protection ensures that we base our arguments on facts without having to present all the evidence and references Chomsky uses. Similarly, we quote experts on certain subjects (such as economics, for example) to support and bolster our analysis and claims.

We should also indicate the history of this FAQ. It was started in 1995 when a group of anarchists got together in order to write an FAQ refuting the claims of certain "libertarian" capitalists to being anarchists. Those who were involved in this project had spent many an hour on-line refuting claims by these people that capitalism and anarchism could go together. Finally, a group of net-activists decided the best thing was to produce an FAQ explaining why anarchism hates capitalism and why "anarcho" capitalists are not anarchists. However, after the suggestion of Mike Huben (who maintains the ***"Critiques of Libertarianism"*** web-page) it was decided that a pro-Anarchist FAQ would be a better idea than an anti-"anarcho"-capitalist one. So the Anarchist FAQ was born. It still bears some of the signs of its past-history. For example it gives the likes of Ayn Rand, Murray Rothbard, and so on, far too much space outside of Section F — they really are not that important. However, as they present extreme examples of everyday capitalist ideology and assumptions, they do have their uses — they state clearly the authoritarian implications of capitalist ideology which its more moderate supporters try to hide or minimise.

We think that we have produced a useful on-line resource for anarchists and other anti-capitalists to use. Perhaps, in light of this, we should dedicate this anarchist FAQ to the many on-



nor considered their governments democratic. Anarchism seems to be excluded from such common-sense and so we find academics discussing "anarcho"-capitalists along side anarchism simply, I suspect, because they ***call*** themselves "anarchists." That almost all anarchists reject their claims to being anarchists does not seem to be a sufficient warning about taking such statements at face value! For obvious reasons, we have not wasted space in explaining why another US based ideology, "National Anarchism", is not anarchism. While some individual anarchists were racist, the notion that anarchism has anything in common with those who aim for racially pure nationalist communities is ridiculous. Even academics have not fallen for ***that***, although for almost all genuine anarchists "anarcho"-capitalism makes as little sense as "anarcho"-nationalism.

Then there is the history of AFAQ. As indicated in the original introduction, AFAQ was prompted by battles with "anarcho"-capitalists on-line in the early 1990s. However, while AFAQ may have started as a reply to the "anarcho"-capitalists it is no longer that. It would be a mistake to think that they are more significant than they actually are or that many anarchists bother with them (most, I am sure, have never heard of it). I did consider whether it was wiser to simply exclude section F from the book but, in the end, I decided it should remain. Partly, for the reasons above and partly because it does serve another, more useful, purpose. Neo-liberalism is based, in many ways, on right-"libertarian" dogmas so critiquing those helps our struggle against "actually existing" capitalism and the current attacks by the ruling class.

I do not wish anarchism to go the same way that "libertarian" has gone in the US (and, to a lesser extent, in the UK). Between the 1890s and 1970s, libertarian was simply a pseudonym for anarchist or similar socialist theories. However, the American free-market right appropriated the label in the 1970s and now it means supporters of minimal state

number of times I've tracked down references only to discover they did not say what was suggested is, sadly, quite numerous).

Moreover, refuting distortions and inventions about anarchism can be lengthy simply because of the necessity of providing supporting evidence. Time and again, the same mistakes and straw man arguments are regurgitated by those unwilling or unable to look at the source material (Marxists are particularly bad at this, simply repeating *ad nauseum* the assertions of Marx and Engels as if they were accurate). Assumptions are piled onto assumptions, assertions repeated as if they were factual. AFAQ seeks to address these and present evidence to refute them once and for all. Simply saying that some statement is false may be correct, but hardly convincing unless you already know a lot about the subject. So I hope that readers will understand and find even the longest answers interesting and informative (one of the advantages of a FAQ format is that people can simply go to the sections they are interested in and skip others).

This volume covers what anarchism is, where it comes from, what it has done, what it is against (and why) as well as what anarchism is not (i.e., showing why "anarcho"-capitalism is not a form of anarchism).

The latter may come as a surprise to most. Few anarchists, never mind the general population, have heard of that specific ideology (it is US based, in the main) and those who have heard of it may wonder why we bothered given its obvious non-anarchist nature. Sadly, we need to cover this ground simply because some academics insist in listing it alongside genuine forms of anarchism and that needs to be exposed for the nonsense it is. Few serious thinkers would list fascism along side socialism, regardless of whether its supporters call their ideology "National Socialism" or "National Syndicalism" (unsurprisingly, right-"libertarians" do precisely that). No one took the Soviet bloc states seriously when they described themselves as "peoples' democracies"



line "libertarian" capitalists who, because of their inane arguments, prompted us to start this work. Then again, that would give them too much credit. Outside the net they are irrelevant and on the net they are just annoying. As you may guess, sections F and G contain the bulk of this early anti-Libertarian FAQ and are included purely to refute the claim that an anarchist can be a supporter of capitalism that is relatively common on the net (in the real world this would not be required as almost all anarchists think that "anarcho"-capitalism is an oxymoron and that its supporters are not part of the anarchist movement).

So, while coming from a very specific reason, the FAQ has expanded into more than we originally imagined. It has become a general introduction about anarchism, its ideas and history. Because anarchism recognises that there are no easy answers and that freedom must be based on individual responsibility the FAQ is quite in-depth. As it also challenges a lot of assumptions, we have had to cover a lot of ground. We also admit that some of the "frequently asked questions" we have included are more frequently asked than others. This is due to the need to include relevant arguments and facts which otherwise may not have been included.

We are sure that many anarchists will not agree 100% with what we have written in the FAQ. That is to be expected in a movement based upon individual freedom and critical thought. However, we are sure that most anarchists will agree with most of what we present and respect those parts with which they do disagree with as genuine expressions of anarchist ideas and ideals. The anarchist movement is marked by wide-spread disagreement and argument about various aspects of anarchist ideas and how to apply them (but also, we must add, a widespread tolerance of differing viewpoints and a willingness to work together in spite of minor disagreements). We have attempted to reflect this in the FAQ and hope we have done a

good job in presenting the ideas of all the anarchist tendencies we discuss.

We have no desire to write in stone what anarchism is and is not. Instead the FAQ is a starting point for people to read and learn for themselves about anarchism and translate that learning into direct action and self-activity. By so doing, we make anarchism a living theory, a product of individual and social self-activity. Only by applying our ideas in practice can we find their strengths and limitations and so develop anarchist theory in new directions and in light of new experiences. We hope that the FAQ both reflects and aids this process of self-activity and self-education.

We are sure that there are many issues that the FAQ does not address. If you think of anything we could add or feel you have a question and answer which should be included, get in contact with us. The FAQ is not our "property" but belongs to the whole anarchist movement and so aims to be an organic, living creation. We desire to see it grow and expand with new ideas and inputs from as many people as possible. If you want to get involved with the FAQ then contact us. Similarly, if others (particularly anarchists) want to distribute all or part of it then feel free. It is a resource for the movement. For this reason we have "copylefted" An Anarchist FAQ (see `http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/copyleft.html` for details). By so doing we ensure that the FAQ remains a free product, available for use by all.

One last point. Language has changed a lot over the years and this applies to anarchist thinkers too. The use of the term "man" to refer to humanity is one such change. Needless to say, in today's world such usage is inappropriate as it effectively ignores half the human race. For this reason the FAQ has tried to be gender neutral. However, this awareness is relatively recent and many anarchists (even the female ones like Emma Goldman) used the term "man" to refer to humanity as a whole. When we are quoting past comrades who use "man"



economic nature of a free society or our attitude to a currently non-existing syndicalist union!). So we have discussed the differences between anarchist schools of thought as well as within them, but we have tried to build bridges by stressing where they agree rather than create walls.

Needless to say, not all anarchists will agree with what is in AFAQ (it is, after all, as we have always stressed "An Anarchist FAQ", not "The Anarchist FAQ" as some comrades flatteringly call it). From my experience, most anarchists agree with most of it even if they have quibbles about certain aspects of it. I know that comrades do point others to it (I once saw a Marxist complain that anarchists always suggested he read AFAQ, so I explained to him that this was what having a "Frequency Asked Questions" was all about). So AFAQ is only a guide, you need to discover anarchism for yourself and develop and apply it in your own way. Hopefully AFAQ will help that process by presenting an overview of anarchism and indicating what it is, what it is not and where to find out more.

Some may object to the length of many of the answers and that is a valid point. However, some questions and issues cannot be dealt with quickly and be considered as remotely convincing. For example, simply stating that anarchists think that capitalism is exploitative and that claims otherwise are wrong may be both correct and short but it hardly a convincing reply to someone aware of the various defences of profit, interest and rent invented by capitalist economists. Similarly, stating that Marxist ideology helped destroy the Russian Revolution is, again, both correct and short but it would never convince a Leninist who stresses the impact of civil war on Bolshevik practice. Then there is the issue of sources. We have tried to let anarchists speak for themselves on most issues and that can take space. Some of the evidence we use is from books and articles the general reader may not have easy access so we have tried to present full quotes to show that our use is correct (the

As many anarchists have noted, our ideal must be one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented political theories on the planet. "An Anarchist FAQ" (AFAQ) aims to change this by presenting the basics of anarchist theory and history, refuting the most common distortions and nonsense about it and providing anarchists with a resource they can use to aid their arguments and struggles for freedom. This is important, as much of the ground covered in AFAQ was provoked by having to critique other theories and refute attacks on anarchism.

Anarchism has changed over the years and will continue to evolve and change as circumstances do likewise and new struggles are fought and (hopefully) won. It is not some fixed ideology, but rather a means of understanding an evolving world and to change it in libertarian directions. As such, AFAQ seeks to place specific aspects of anarchism into their historical context. For example, certain aspects of Proudhon's ideas can only be understood by remembering that he lived at a time when the vast majority of working people were peasants and artisans. Many commentators (particularly Marxist ones) seem to forget this (and that he supported co-operatives for large-scale industry). Much the same can be said of Bakunin, Tucker and so on. I hope AFAQ will help anarchism continue to develop to meet new circumstances by summarising what has gone before so that we can build on it.

We also seek to draw out what anarchists have in common while not denying their differences. After all, individualist-anarchist Benjamin Tucker would have agreed with communist-anarchist Peter Kropotkin when he stated that anarchism was the *"no government form of socialism."* While some anarchists seem to take more time in critiquing and attacking their comrades over (ultimately) usually minor differences than fighting oppression, I personally think that this activity while, at times, essential is hardly the most fruitful use of our limited resources — particularly when it is about possible future developments (whether it is on the



in this way, it obviously means humanity as a whole rather than the male sex. Where possible, we add "woman", "women", "her" and so on but if this would result in making the quote unreadable, we have left it as it stands. We hope this makes our position clear.

So we hope that this FAQ entertains you and makes you think. Hopefully it will produce a few more anarchists and speed up the creation of an anarchist society. If all else fails, we have enjoyed ourselves creating the FAQ and have shown anarchism to be a viable, coherent political idea.

We dedicate this work to the millions of anarchists, living and dead, who tried and are trying to create a better world. An Anarchist FAQ was officially released on July 19th, 1996 for that reason — to celebrate the Spanish Revolution of 1936 and the heroism of the Spanish anarchist movement. We hope that our work here helps make the world a freer place.

The following self-proclaimed anarchists are (mostly) responsible for this FAQ:

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# An Anarchist FAQ: Introduction to Volume 1

The workings of such a confederation are outlined in section A.2.9 ( What sort of society do anarchists want?) and discussed in greater detail in section I (What would an anarchist society look like?).

This system of direct democracy fits nicely into anarchist theory. Malatesta speaks for all anarchists when he argued that *"anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern human society in general."* As can be seen, the majority has no right to enforce itself on a minority — the minority can leave the association at any time and so, to use Malatesta's words, do not have to *"submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what these might be."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 100 and p. 101] Hence, direct democracy within voluntary association does not create "majority rule" nor assume that the minority must submit to the majority no matter what. In effect, anarchist supporters of direct democracy argue that it fits Malatesta's argument that:

> *"Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many ... But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must be on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm..."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

As the minority has the right to secede from the association as well as having extensive rights of action, protest and appeal, majority rule is not imposed as a principle. Rather, it



workers' associations or by the commune (see section A.3 on the different types of anarchists).

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

Therefore **all** anarchists are anti-capitalist (*"If labour owned the wealth it produced, there would be no capitalism"* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 44]). Benjamin Tucker, for example — the anarchist most influenced by liberalism (as we will discuss later) — called his ideas *"Anarchistic-Socialism"* and denounced capitalism as a system based upon *"the usurer, the receiver of interest, rent and profit."* Tucker held that in an anarchist, non-capitalist, free-market society, capitalists will become redundant and exploitation of labour by capital would cease, since *"labour... will... secure its natural wage, its entire product."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 82 and p. 85] Such

an economy will be based on mutual banking and the free exchange of products between co-operatives, artisans and peasants. For Tucker, and other Individualist anarchists, capitalism is not a true free market, being marked by various laws and monopolies which ensure that capitalists have the advantage over working people, so ensuring the latter's exploitation via profit, interest and rent (see section G for a fuller discussion). Even Max Stirner, the arch-egoist, had nothing but scorn for capitalist society and its various "spooks," which for him meant ideas that are treated as sacred or religious, such as private property, competition, division of labour, and so forth.

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

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

Labadie stated on many occasions that *"all anarchists are socialists, but not all socialists are anarchists."* Therefore, Daniel Guerin's comment that *"Anarchism is really a synonym for socialism. The anarchist is primarily a socialist whose aim is to abolish the exploitation of man by man"* is echoed throughout the history of the anarchist movement, be it the social or individualist wings. [**Anarchism**, p. 12] Indeed, the Haymarket Martyr Adolph Fischer used almost exactly the same words as Labadie to express the same fact — *"every anarchist is a socialist, but*



empower themselves at the expense of those subject to their decisions.

Anarchists recognise that majorities can and do make mistakes and that is why our theories on association place great importance on minority rights. This can be seen from our theory of self-assumed obligation, which bases itself on the right of minorities to protest against majority decisions and makes dissent a key factor in decision making. Thus Carole Pateman:

> *"If the majority have acted in bad faith... [then the] minority will have to take political action, including politically disobedient action if appropriate, to defend their citizenship and independence, and the political association itself... Political disobedience is merely one possible expression of the active citizenship on which a self-managing democracy is based ... The social practice of promising involves the right to refuse or change commitments; similarly, the practice of self-assumed political obligation is meaningless without the practical recognition of the right of minorities to refuse or withdraw consent, or where necessary, to disobey."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 162]

Moving beyond relationships within associations, we must highlight how different associations work together. As would be imagined, the links between associations follow the same outlines as for the associations themselves. Instead of individuals joining an association, we have associations joining confederations. The links between associations in the confederation are of the same horizontal and voluntary nature as within associations, with the same rights of "voice and exit" for members and the same rights for minorities. In this way society becomes an association of associations, a community of communities, a commune of communes, based upon maximising individual freedom by maximising participation and self-management.

By means of a federalism based on mandates and elections, anarchists ensure that decisions flow from the bottom-up. By making our own decisions, by looking after our joint interests ourselves, we exclude others ruling over us. Self-management, for anarchists, is essential to ensure freedom within the organisations so needed for any decent human existence.

Of course it could be argued that if you are in a minority, you are governed by others (*"Democratic rule is still rule"* [L. Susan Brown, **The Politics of Individualism**, p. 53]). Now, the concept of direct democracy as we have described it is not necessarily tied to the concept of majority rule. If someone finds themselves in a minority on a particular vote, he or she is confronted with the choice of either consenting or refusing to recognise it as binding. To deny the minority the opportunity to exercise its judgement and choice is to infringe its autonomy and to impose obligation upon it which it has not freely accepted. The coercive imposition of the majority will is contrary to the ideal of self-assumed obligation, and so is contrary to direct democracy and free association. Therefore, far from being a denial of freedom, direct democracy within the context of free association and self-assumed obligation is the only means by which liberty can be nurtured (*"Individual autonomy limited by the obligation to hold given promises."* [Malatesta, quoted by quoted by Max Nettlau, **Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist**]). Needless to say, a minority, if it remains in the association, can argue its case and try to convince the majority of the error of its ways.

And we must point out here that anarchist support for direct democracy does not suggest we think that the majority is always right. Far from it! The case for democratic participation is not that the majority is always right, but that no minority can be trusted not to prefer its own advantage to the good of the whole. History proves what common-sense predicts, namely that anyone with dictatorial powers (by they a head of state, a boss, a husband, whatever) will use their power to enrich and



*every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist"* — while acknowledging that the movement was *"divided into two factions; the communistic anarchists and the Proudhon or middle-class anarchists."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 81]

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

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

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

Anarchism developed in constant opposition to the ideas of Marxism, social democracy and Leninism. Long before Lenin rose to power, Mikhail Bakunin warned the followers of Marx against the *"Red bureaucracy"* that would institute *"the worst*

*of all despotic governments"* if Marx's state-socialist ideas were ever implemented. Indeed, the works of Stirner, Proudhon and especially Bakunin all predict the horror of state Socialism with great accuracy. In addition, the anarchists were among the first and most vocal critics and opposition to the Bolshevik regime in Russia.

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

Therefore anarchism is basically a form of socialism, one that stands in direct opposition to what is usually defined as "socialism" (i.e. state ownership and control). Instead of "central planning," which many people associate with the word "socialism," anarchists advocate free association and co-operation between individuals, workplaces and communities and so oppose "state" socialism as a form of state capitalism in which *"[e]very man [and woman] will be a wage-receiver, and the State the only wage payer."* [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 81] Thus anarchists reject Marxism (what most people think of as "socialism") as just *"[t]he*



*such cannot write a letter or add up a list of figures or do hundreds of chores which only an individual can perform."* Thus the need *"to **organise the administration.**"* Supposing an association is *"organised without any directive council or any hierarchical offices"* which *"meets in general assembly once a week or more often, when it settles all matters needful for its progress"* it still *"nominates a commission with **strictly administrative functions.**"* However, the assembly *"prescribes a definite line of conduct for this commission or gives it an **imperative mandate**"* and so *"would be **perfectly anarchist.**"* As it *"follows that **delegating** these tasks to qualified individuals, who are **instructed in advance how to proceed,** ... does not mean an abdication of that collectivity's own liberty."* [Jose Llunas Pujols, quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 187] This, it should be noted, follows Proudhon's ideas that within the workers' associations *"all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222]

Instead of capitalist or statist hierarchy, self-management (i.e. direct democracy) would be the guiding principle of the freely joined associations that make up a free society. This would apply to the federations of associations an anarchist society would need to function. *"All the commissions or delegations nominated in an anarchist society,"* correctly argued Jose Llunas Pujols, *"must be subject to replacement and recall at any time by the permanent suffrage of the section or sections that elected them."* Combined with the *"imperative mandate"* and *"purely administrative functions,"* this *"make[s] it thereby impossible for anyone to arrogate to himself [or herself] a scintilla of authority."* [quoted by Max Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 188–9] Again, Pujols follows Proudhon who demanded twenty years previously the *"implementation of the binding mandate"* to ensure the people do not *"adjure their sovereignty."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63]

bers (in the case of large workplaces and towns, this may be a functional sub-group such as a specific office or neighbourhood). In this assembly, in concert with others, the contents of his or her political obligations are defined. In acting within the association, people must exercise critical judgement and choice, i.e. manage their own activity. Rather than promising to obey (as in hierarchical organisations like the state or capitalist firm), individuals participate in making their own collective decisions, their own commitments to their fellows. This means that political obligation is not owed to a separate entity above the group or society, such as the state or company, but to one's fellow "citizens."

Although the assembled people collectively legislate the rules governing their association, and are bound by them as individuals, they are also superior to them in the sense that these rules can always be modified or repealed. Collectively, the associated "citizens" constitute a political "authority", but as this "authority" is based on horizontal relationships between themselves rather than vertical ones between themselves and an elite, the "authority" is non-hierarchical ("rational" or "natural," see section B.1 — "Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?" — for more on this). Thus Proudhon:

> *"In place of laws, we will put contracts [i.e. free agreement]. — No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each town, each industrial union, makes its own laws."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 245–6]

Such a system does not mean, of course, that everyone participates in every decision needed, no matter how trivial. While any decision can be put to the assembly (if the assembly so decides, perhaps prompted by some of its members), in practice certain activities (and so purely functional decisions) will be handled by the association's elected administration. This is because, to quote a Spanish anarchist activist, *"a collectivity as*



*idea of the State as Capitalist, to which the Social-Democratic fraction of the great Socialist Party is now trying to reduce Socialism."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 31] The anarchist objection to the identification of Marxism, "central planning" and State Socialism/Capitalism with socialism will be discussed in section H.

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

## A.1.5 Where does anarchism come from?

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

> *"The class struggle created by the enslavement of workers and their aspirations to liberty gave birth, in the oppression, to the idea of anarchism: the idea of the total negation of a social system based on the principles of classes and the State, and its replacement by a free non-statist society of workers under self-management.*
>
> *"So anarchism does not derive from the abstract reflections of an intellectual or a philosopher, but*

> *from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality, aspirations which become particularly alive in the best heroic period of the life and struggle of the working masses.*
>
> *"The outstanding anarchist thinkers, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others, did not invent the idea of anarchism, but, having discovered it in the masses, simply helped by the strength of their thought and knowledge to specify and spread it."* [pp. 15–16]

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

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



free agreement (this is also known as ***"self-management"***). The reason is that *"many forms of domination can be carried out in a 'free.' non-coercive, contractual manner... and it is naive... to think that mere opposition to political control will in itself lead to an end of oppression."* [John P. Clark, **Max Stirner's Egoism**, p. 93] Thus the relationships we create **within** an organisation is as important in determining its libertarian nature as its voluntary nature (see section A.2.14 for more discussion).

It is obvious that individuals must work together in order to lead a fully human life. And so, *"[h]aving to join with others humans"* the individual has three options: *"he [or she] must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 85]

Anarchists obviously pick the last option, association, as the only means by which individuals can work together as free and equal human beings, respecting the uniqueness and liberty of one another. Only within direct democracy can individuals express themselves, practice critical thought and self-government, so developing their intellectual and ethical capacities to the full. In terms of increasing an individual's freedom and their intellectual, ethical and social faculties, it is far better to be sometimes in a minority than be subject to the will of a boss all the time. So what is the theory behind anarchist direct democracy?

As Bertrand Russell noted, the anarchist *"does not wish to abolish government in the sense of collective decisions: what he does wish to abolish is the system by which a decision is enforced upon those who oppose it."* [**Roads to Freedom**, p. 85] Anarchists see self-management as the means to achieve this. Once an individual joins a community or workplace, he or she becomes a "citizen" (for want of a better word) of that association. The association is organised around an assembly of all its mem-

*homelessness and nonpossession."* [Max Baginski, *"Without Government,"* **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 11] Thus anarchism promises *"both requisites of happiness — liberty and wealth."* In anarchy, *"mankind will live in freedom and in comfort."* [Benjamin Tucker, **Why I am an Anarchist**, p. 135 and p. 136]

Only self-determination and free agreement on every level of society can develop the responsibility, initiative, intellect and solidarity of individuals and society as a whole. Only anarchist organisation allows the vast talent which exists within humanity to be accessed and used, enriching society by the very process of enriching and developing the individual. Only by involving everyone in the process of thinking, planning, coordinating and implementing the decisions that affect them can freedom blossom and individuality be fully developed and protected. Anarchy will release the creativity and talent of the mass of people enslaved by hierarchy.

Anarchy will even be of benefit for those who are said to benefit from capitalism and its authority relations. Anarchists *"maintain that **both** rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority; **both** exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 83] This is because *"[i]n any hierarchical relationship the dominator as well as the submissive pays his dues. The price paid for the 'glory of command' is indeed heavy. Every tyrant resents his duties. He is relegated to drag the dead weight of the dormant creative potential of the submissive all along the road of his hierarchical excursion."* [For Ourselves, **The Right to Be Greedy**, Thesis 95]

## A.2.11 Why are most anarchists in favour of direct democracy?

For most anarchists, direct democratic voting on policy decisions within free associations is the political counterpart of



*cause of the example of the silk workers of Lyon. The socialist ideal that he championed was already being realised, to a certain extent, by such workers."* [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 164]

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

> *"There were never theoreticians of Anarchism as such, though it produced a number of theoreticians who discussed aspects of its philosophy. Anarchism has remained a creed that has been worked out in action rather than as the putting into practice of an intellectual idea. Very often, a bourgeois writer comes along and writes down what has already been worked out in practice by workers and peasants; he [or she] is attributed by bourgeois historians as being a leader, and by successive bourgeois writers (citing the bourgeois historians) as being one more case that proves the working class relies on bourgeois leadership."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 18]

In Kropotkin's eyes, *"Anarchism had its origins in the same creative, constructive activity of the masses which has worked out in times past all the social institutions of mankind — and in the revolts ... against the representatives of force, external to these social institutions, who had laid their hands on these institutions and used them for their own advantage."* More recently,

*"Anarchy was brought forth by the same critical and revolutionary protest which gave birth to Socialism in general."* Anarchism, unlike other forms of socialism, *"lifted its sacrilegious arm, not only against Capitalism, but also against these pillars of Capitalism: Law, Authority, and the State."* All anarchist writers did was to *"work out a general expression of [anarchism's] principles, and the theoretical and scientific basis of its teachings"* derived from the experiences of working class people in struggle as well as analysing the evolutionary tendencies of society in general. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 19 and p. 57]

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

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



*account is taken of him at all."* [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 33]

The effects of hierarchy can be seen all around us. It does not work. Hierarchy and authority exist everywhere, in the workplace, at home, in the street. As Bob Black puts it, *"[i]f you spend most of your waking life taking orders or kissing ass, if you get habituated to hierarchy, you will become passive-aggressive, sado-masochistic, servile and stupefied, and you will carry that load into every aspect of the balance of your life."* [*"The Libertarian as Conservative,"* **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, pp. 147–8]

This means that the end of hierarchy will mean a **massive** transformation in everyday life. It will involve the creation of individual-centred organisations within which all can exercise, and so develop, their abilities to the fullest. By involving themselves and participating in the decisions that affect them, their workplace, their community and society, they can ensure the full development of their individual capacities.

With the free participation of all in social life, we would quickly see the end of inequality and injustice. Rather than people existing to make ends meet and being used to increase the wealth and power of the few as under capitalism, the end of hierarchy would see (to quote Kropotkin) *"the well-being of all"* and it is *"high time for the worker to assert his [or her] right to the common inheritance, and to enter into possession of it."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 35 and p. 44] For only taking possession of the means of life (workplaces, housing, the land, etc.) can ensure *"liberty and justice, for liberty and justice are not decreed but are the result of economic independence. They spring from the fact that the individual is able to live without depending on a master, and to enjoy ... the product of his [or her] toil."* [Ricardo Flores Magon, **Land and Liberty**, p. 62] Therefore liberty requires the abolition of capitalist private property rights in favour of ***"use rights."*** (see section B.3 for more details). Ironically, the *"abolition of property will free the people from*

## A.2.10 What will abolishing hierarchy mean and achieve?

The creation of a new society based upon libertarian organisations will have an incalculable effect on everyday life. The empowerment of millions of people will transform society in ways we can only guess at now.

However, many consider these forms of organisation as impractical and doomed to failure. To those who say that such confederal, non-authoritarian organisations would produce confusion and disunity, anarchists maintain that the statist, centralised and hierarchical form of organisation produces indifference instead of involvement, heartlessness instead of solidarity, uniformity instead of unity, and privileged elites instead of equality. More importantly, such organisations destroy individual initiative and crush independent action and critical thinking. (For more on hierarchy, see section B.1 — "Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?").

That libertarian organisation can work and is based upon (and promotes) liberty was demonstrated in the Spanish Anarchist movement. Fenner Brockway, Secretary of the British Independent Labour Party, when visiting Barcelona during the 1936 revolution, noted that *"the great solidarity that existed among the Anarchists was due to each individual relying on his [sic] own strength and not depending upon leadership... . The organisations must, to be successful, be combined with free-thinking people; not a mass, but free individuals"* [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 67f]

As sufficiently indicated already, hierarchical, centralised structures restrict freedom. As Proudhon noted: *"the centralist system is all very well as regards size, simplicity and construction: it lacks but one thing — the individual no longer belongs to himself in such a system, he cannot feel his worth, his life, and no*



*endeavoured to establish their personal authority."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 158–9]

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

Thus, while anarchism as a political theory is an expression of working class struggle and self-activity against capitalism and the modern state, the ideas of anarchism have continually expressed themselves in action throughout human existence. Many indigenous peoples in North America and elsewhere, for example, practised anarchism for thousands of years before anarchism as a specific political theory existed. Similarly, anarchistic tendencies and organisations have existed in every major revolution — the New England Town Meetings during the American Revolution, the Parisian 'Sections' during the French Revolution, the workers' councils and factory committees during the Russian Revolution to name just a few examples (see Murray Bookchin's **The Third Revolution** for details). This is to be expected if anarchism is, as we argue, a product of resistance to authority then any society with authorities will provoke resistance to them and generate anarchistic tendencies (and, of course, any societies without authorities cannot help but being anarchistic).

In other words, anarchism is an expression of the struggle against oppression and exploitation, a generalisation of working people's experiences and analyses of what is wrong with the current system and an expression of our hopes and dreams

for a better future. This struggle existed before it was called anarchism, but the historic anarchist movement (i.e. groups of people calling their ideas anarchism and aiming for an anarchist society) is essentially a product of working class struggle against capitalism and the state, against oppression and exploitation, and **for** a free society of free and equal individuals.



*individuals into structures which they could understand and control.*" [quoted by Cornelius Castoriadis, **Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 97] For individual initiatives, the individual involved would manage them.

As can be seen, anarchists wish to create a society based upon structures that ensure that no individual or group is able to wield power over others. Free agreement, confederation and the power of recall, fixed mandates and limited tenure are mechanisms by which power is removed from the hands of governments and placed in the hands of those directly affected by the decisions.

For a fuller discussion on what an anarchist society would look like see section I. Anarchy, however, is not some distant goal but rather an aspect of current struggles against oppression and exploitation. Means and ends are linked, with direct action generating mass participatory organisations and preparing people to directly manage their own personal and collective interests. This is because anarchists, as we discuss in section I.2.3, see the framework of a free society being based on the organisations created by the oppressed in their struggle against capitalism in the here and now. In this sense, collective struggle creates the organisations as well as the individual attitudes anarchism needs to work. The struggle against oppression is the school of anarchy. It teaches us not only how to be anarchists but also gives us a glimpse of what an anarchist society would be like, what its initial organisational framework could be and the experience of managing our own activities which is required for such a society to work. As such, anarchists try to create the kind of world we want in our current struggles and do not think our ideas are only applicable "after the revolution." Indeed, by applying our principles today we bring anarchy that much nearer.

mouthpiece for the association that elected (or otherwise selected) them in the first place. All delegates and action committees would be mandated and subject to instant recall to ensure they express the wishes of the assemblies they came from rather than their own. In this way government is replaced by anarchy, a network of free associations and communities cooperating as equals based on a system of mandated delegates, instant recall, free agreement and free federation from the bottom up.

Only this system would ensure the *"free organisation of the people, an organisation from below upwards."* This *"free federation from below upward"* would start with the basic *"association"* and their federation *"first into a commune, then a federation of communes into regions, of regions into nations, and of nations into an international fraternal association."* [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 298] This network of anarchist communities would work on three levels. There would be *"independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions [i.e. workplace associations] for the organisation of men [and women] in accordance with their different functions... [and] free combines and societies ... for the satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs, economic, sanitary, and educational; for mutual protection, for the propaganda of ideas, for arts, for amusement, and so on."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 79] All would be based on self-management, free association, free federation and self-organisation from the bottom up.

By organising in this manner, hierarchy is abolished in all aspects of life, because the people at the base of the organisation are in control, **not** their delegates. Only this form of organisation can replace government (the initiative and empowerment of the few) with anarchy (the initiative and empowerment of all). This form of organisation would exist in all activities which required group work and the co-ordination of many people. It would be, as Bakunin said, the means *"to integrate*



# A.2 What does anarchism stand for?

These words by Percy Bysshe Shelley gives an idea of what anarchism stands for in practice and what ideals drive it:

***The man***
***Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys:***
***Power, like a desolating pestilence,***
***Pollutes whate'er it touches, and obedience,***
***Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,***
***Makes slaves of men, and, of the human frame,***
***A mechanised automaton.***

As Shelley's lines suggest, anarchists place a high priority on liberty, desiring it both for themselves and others. They also consider individuality — that which makes one a unique person — to be a most important aspect of humanity. They recognise, however, that individuality does not exist in a vacuum but is a **social** phenomenon. Outside of society, individuality is impossible, since one needs other people in order to develop, expand, and grow.

Moreover, between individual and social development there is a reciprocal effect: individuals grow within and are shaped by a particular society, while at the same time they help shape and change aspects of that society (as well as themselves and other individuals) by their actions and thoughts. A society not based on free individuals, their hopes, dreams and ideas would be hollow and dead. Thus, *"the making of a human being... is a collective process, a process in which both community and the individual **participate**."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Modern Cri-**

**sis**, p. 79] Consequently, any political theory which bases itself purely on the social or the individual is false.

In order for individuality to develop to the fullest possible extent, anarchists consider it essential to create a society based on three principles: **liberty**, **equality** and **solidarity**. These principles are shared by all anarchists. Thus we find, the communist-anarchist Peter Kropotkin talking about a revolution inspired by *"the beautiful words, Liberty, Equality and Solidarity."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 128] Individualist-anarchist Benjamin Tucker wrote of a similar vision, arguing that anarchism *"insists on Socialism ... on true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalance on earth of Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 363] All three principles are interdependent.

Liberty is essential for the full flowering of human intelligence, creativity, and dignity. To be dominated by another is to be denied the chance to think and act for oneself, which is the only way to grow and develop one's individuality. Domination also stifles innovation and personal responsibility, leading to conformity and mediocrity. Thus the society that maximises the growth of individuality will necessarily be based on voluntary association, not coercion and authority. To quote Proudhon, *"All associated and all free."* Or, as Luigi Galleani puts it, anarchism is *"the autonomy of the individual within the freedom of association"* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 35] (See further section A.2.2 — Why do anarchists emphasise liberty?).

If liberty is essential for the fullest development of individuality, then equality is essential for genuine liberty to exist. There can be no real freedom in a class-stratified, hierarchical society riddled with gross inequalities of power, wealth, and privilege. For in such a society only a few — those at the top of the hierarchy — are relatively free, while the rest are semi-slaves. Hence without equality, liberty becomes a mockery — at best the "freedom" to choose one's master (boss), as under capitalism. Moreover, even the elite under such conditions are



draw from any confederation. Any compromises that are made by a delegate during negotiations have to go back to a general assembly for ratification. Without that ratification any compromises that are made by a delegate are not binding on the community that has delegated a particular task to a particular individual or committee. In addition, they can call confederal conferences to discuss new developments and to inform action committees about changing wishes and to instruct them on what to do about any developments and ideas.

In other words, any delegates required within an anarchist organisation or society are **not** representatives (as they are in a democratic government). Kropotkin makes the difference clear:

> *"The question of true delegation versus representation can be better understood if one imagines a hundred or two hundred men [and women], who meet each day in their work and share common concerns ... who have discussed every aspect of the question that concerns them and have reached a decision. They then choose someone and send him [or her] to reach an agreement with other delegates of the same kind... The delegate is not authorised to do more than explain to other delegates the considerations that have led his [or her] colleagues to their conclusion. Not being able to impose anything, he [or she] will seek an understanding and will return with a simple proposition which his mandatories can accept or refuse. This is what happens when true delegation comes into being."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 132]

Unlike in a representative system, **power** is not delegated into the hands of the few. Rather, any delegate is simply a

is a clear distinction between policy making (which lies with everyone who is affected) and the co-ordination and administration of any adopted policy (which is the job for delegates).

These egalitarian communities, founded by free agreement, also freely associate together in confederations. Such a free confederation would be run from the bottom up, with decisions following from the elemental assemblies upwards. The confederations would be run in the same manner as the collectives. There would be regular local regional, "national" and international conferences in which all important issues and problems affecting the collectives involved would be discussed. In addition, the fundamental, guiding principles and ideas of society would be debated and policy decisions made, put into practice, reviewed, and co-ordinated. The delegates would simply *"take their given mandates to the relative meetings and try to harmonise their various needs and desires. The deliberations would always be subject to the control and approval of those who delegated them"* and so *"there would be no danger than the interest of the people [would] be forgotten."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36]

Action committees would be formed, if required, to co-ordinate and administer the decisions of the assemblies and their congresses, under strict control from below as discussed above. Delegates to such bodies would have a limited tenure and, like the delegates to the congresses, have a fixed mandate — they are not able to make decisions on behalf of the people they are delegates for. In addition, like the delegates to conferences and congresses, they would be subject to instant recall by the assemblies and congresses from which they emerged in the first place. In this way any committees required to co-ordinate join activities would be, to quote Malatesta's words, *"always under the direct control of the population"* and so express the *"decisions taken at popular assemblies."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 175 and p. 129]

Most importantly, the basic community assemblies can overturn any decisions reached by the conferences and with-



not really free, because they must live in a stunted society made ugly and barren by the tyranny and alienation of the majority. And since individuality develops to the fullest only with the widest contact with other free individuals, members of the elite are restricted in the possibilities for their own development by the scarcity of free individuals with whom to interact. (See also section A.2.5 — Why are anarchists in favour of equality?)

Finally, solidarity means mutual aid: working voluntarily and co-operatively with others who share the same goals and interests. But without liberty and equality, society becomes a pyramid of competing classes based on the domination of the lower by the higher strata. In such a society, as we know from our own, it's "dominate or be dominated," "dog eat dog," and "everyone for themselves." Thus "rugged individualism" is promoted at the expense of community feeling, with those on the bottom resenting those above them and those on the top fearing those below them. Under such conditions, there can be no society-wide solidarity, but only a partial form of solidarity within classes whose interests are opposed, which weakens society as a whole. (See also section A.2.6 — Why is solidarity important to anarchists?)

It should be noted that solidarity does not imply self-sacrifice or self-negation. As Errico Malatesta makes clear:

> *"we are all egoists, we all seek our own satisfaction. But the anarchist finds his greatest satisfaction in struggling for the good of all, for the achievement of a society in which he [sic] can be a brother among brothers, and among healthy, intelligent, educated, and happy people. But he who is adaptable, who is satisfied to live among slaves and draw profit from the labour of slaves, is not, and cannot be, an anarchist."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 23]

For anarchists, **real** wealth is other people and the planet on which we live. Or, in the words of Emma Goldman, it *"consists in things of utility and beauty, in things which help to create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in ... [Our] goal is the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual . .. Such free display of human energy being possible only under complete individual and social freedom,"* in other words *"social equality."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 67–8]

Also, honouring individuality does not mean that anarchists are idealists, thinking that people or ideas develop outside of society. Individuality and ideas grow and develop within society, in response to material and intellectual interactions and experiences, which people actively analyse and interpret. Anarchism, therefore, is a **materialist** theory, recognising that ideas develop and grow from social interaction and individuals' mental activity (see Michael Bakunin's **God and the State** for the classic discussion of materialism versus idealism).

This means that an anarchist society will be the creation of human beings, not some deity or other transcendental principle, since *"[n]othing ever arranges itself, least of all in human relations. It is men [sic] who do the arranging, and they do it according to their attitudes and understanding of things."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 185]

Therefore, anarchism bases itself upon the power of ideas and the ability of people to act and transform their lives based on what they consider to be right. In other words, liberty.

## A.2.1 What is the essence of anarchism?

As we have seen, *"an-archy"* implies *"without rulers"* or *"without (hierarchical) authority."* Anarchists are not against "authorities" in the sense of experts who are particularly knowledgeable, skilful, or wise, though they believe that such author-



committees. These committees would be made up of mandated, recallable and temporary delegates who carry out their tasks under the watchful eyes of the assembly which elected them. Thus in an anarchist society, *"we'll look after our affairs ourselves and decide what to do about them. And when, to put our ideas into action, there is a need to put someone in charge of a project, we'll tell them to do [it] in such and such a way and no other ... nothing would be done without our decision. So our delegates, instead of people being individuals whom we've given the right to order us about, would be people ... [with] no authority, only the duty to carry out what everyone involved wanted."* [Errico Malatesta, **Fra Contadini**, p. 34] If the delegates act against their mandate or try to extend their influence or work beyond that already decided by the assembly (i.e. if they start to make policy decisions), they can be instantly recalled and their decisions abolished. In this way, the organisation remains in the hands of the union of individuals who created it.

This self-management by the members of a group at the base and the power of recall are essential tenets of any anarchist organisation. The **key** difference between a statist or hierarchical system and an anarchist community is who wields power. In a parliamentary system, for example, people give power to a group of representatives to make decisions for them for a fixed period of time. Whether they carry out their promises is irrelevant as people cannot recall them till the next election. Power lies at the top and those at the base are expected to obey. Similarly, in the capitalist workplace, power is held by an unelected minority of bosses and managers at the top and the workers are expected to obey.

In an anarchist society this relationship is reversed. No one individual or group (elected or unelected) holds power in an anarchist community. Instead decisions are made using direct democratic principles and, when required, the community can elect or appoint delegates to carry out these decisions. There

otherwise it will be a sham (as in capitalism), as only equality provides the necessary social context for freedom to grow and development. Therefore anarchists support directly democratic collectives, based on "one person one vote" (for the rationale of direct democracy as the political counterpart of free agreement, see section A.2.11 — Why do most anarchists support direct democracy?).

We should point out here that an anarchist society does not imply some sort of idyllic state of harmony within which everyone agrees. Far from it! As Luigi Galleani points out, *"[d]isagreements and friction will always exist. In fact they are an essential condition of unlimited progress. But once the bloody area of sheer animal competition — the struggle for food — has been eliminated, problems of disagreement could be solved without the slightest threat to the social order and individual liberty."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 28] Anarchism aims to *"rouse the spirit of initiative in individuals and in groups."* These will *"create in their mutual relations a movement and a life based on the principles of free understanding"* and recognise that ***"variety, conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death."*** [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 143]

Therefore, an anarchist society will be based upon co-operative conflict as *"[c]onflict, per se, is not harmful... disagreements exist [and should not be hidden] ... What makes disagreement destructive is not the fact of conflict itself but the addition of competition."* Indeed, *"a rigid demand for agreement means that people will effectively be prevented from contributing their wisdom to a group effort."* [Alfie Kohn, **No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, p. 156] It is for this reason that most anarchists reject consensus decision making in large groups (see section A.2.12).

So, in an anarchist society associations would be run by mass assemblies of all involved, based upon extensive discussion, debate and co-operative conflict between equals, with purely administrative tasks being handled by elected



ities should have no power to force others to follow their recommendations (see section B.1 for more on this distinction). In a nutshell, then, anarchism is anti-authoritarianism.

Anarchists are anti-authoritarians because they believe that no human being should dominate another. Anarchists, in L. Susan Brown's words, *"believe in the inherent dignity and worth of the human individual."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 107] Domination is inherently degrading and demeaning, since it submerges the will and judgement of the dominated to the will and judgement of the dominators, thus destroying the dignity and self-respect that comes only from personal autonomy. Moreover, domination makes possible and generally leads to exploitation, which is the root of inequality, poverty, and social breakdown.

In other words, then, the essence of anarchism (to express it positively) is free co-operation between equals to maximise their liberty and individuality.

Co-operation between equals is the key to anti-authoritarianism. By co-operation we can develop and protect our own intrinsic value as unique individuals as well as enriching our lives and liberty for *"[n]o individual can recognise his own humanity, and consequently realise it in his lifetime, if not by recognising it in others and co-operating in its realisation for others ... My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men [and women] who are my equals."* [Michael Bakunin, quoted by Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 30]

While being anti-authoritarians, anarchists recognise that human beings have a social nature and that they mutually influence each other. We cannot escape the "authority" of this mutual influence, because, as Bakunin reminds us:

> *"The abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we advocate the freedom of the*

> *masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them. What we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal, official."* [quoted by Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 51]

In other words, those influences which stem from hierarchical authority.

This is because hierarchical systems like capitalism deny liberty and, as a result, people's *"mental, moral, intellectual and physical qualities are dwarfed, stunted and crushed"* (see section B.1 for more details). Thus one of *"the grand truths of Anarchism"* is that *"to be really free is to allow each one to live their lives in their own way as long as each allows all to do the same."* This is why anarchists fight for a better society, for a society which respects individuals and their freedom. Under capitalism, *"[e]verything is upon the market for sale: all is merchandise and commerce"* but there are *"certain things that are priceless. Among these are life, liberty and happiness, and these are things which the society of the future, the free society, will guarantee to all."* Anarchists, as a result, seek to make people aware of their dignity, individuality and liberty and to encourage the spirit of revolt, resistance and solidarity in those subject to authority. This gets us denounced by the powerful as being breakers of the peace, but anarchists consider the struggle for freedom as infinitely better than the peace of slavery. Anarchists, as a result of our ideals, *"believe in peace at any price — except at the price of liberty. But this precious gift the wealth-producers already seem to have lost. Life … they have; but what is life worth when it lacks those elements which make for enjoyment?"* [Lucy Parsons, **Liberty, Equality & Solidarity**, p. 103, p. 131, p. 103 and p. 134]

So, in a nutshell, Anarchists seek a society in which people interact in ways which enhance the liberty of all rather than



Anarchists argue that organisations do not need to be hierarchical, they can be based upon co-operation between equals who manage their own affairs directly. In this way we can do without hierarchical structures (i.e. the delegation of power in the hands of a few). Only when an association is self-managed by its members can it be considered truly anarchistic.

We are sorry to belabour this point, but some capitalist apologists, apparently wanting to appropriate the "anarchist" name because of its association with freedom, have recently claimed that one can be both a capitalist and an anarchist at the same time (as in so-called "anarcho" capitalism). It should now be clear that since capitalism is based on hierarchy (not to mention statism and exploitation), "anarcho"-capitalism is a contradiction in terms. (For more on this, see Section F)

## A.2.9 What sort of society do anarchists want?

Anarchists desire a decentralised society, based on free association. We consider this form of society the best one for maximising the values we have outlined above — liberty, equality and solidarity. Only by a rational decentralisation of power, both structurally and territorially, can individual liberty be fostered and encouraged. The delegation of power into the hands of a minority is an obvious denial of individual liberty and dignity. Rather than taking the management of their own affairs away from people and putting it in the hands of others, anarchists favour organisations which minimise authority, keeping power at the base, in the hands of those who are affected by any decisions reached.

Free association is the cornerstone of an anarchist society. Individuals must be free to join together as they see fit, for this is the basis of freedom and human dignity. However, any such free agreement must be based on decentralisation of power;

*their labour to the capitalist at a price which does not reflect its real value.*" Therefore:

> *"To portray the parties to an employment contract, for example, as free and equal to each other is to ignore the serious inequality of bargaining power which exists between the worker and the employer. To then go on to portray the relationship of subordination and exploitation which naturally results as the epitome of freedom is to make a mockery of both individual liberty and social justice."* [Robert Graham, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70]

It is for this reason that anarchists support collective action and organisation: it increases the bargaining power of working people and allows them to assert their autonomy (see section J).

Secondly, if we take the key element as being whether an association is voluntary or not we would have to argue that the current state system must be considered as "anarchy." In a modern democracy no one forces an individual to live in a specific state. We are free to leave and go somewhere else. By ignoring the hierarchical nature of an association, you can end up supporting organisations based upon the denial of freedom (including capitalist companies, the armed forces, states even) all because they are "voluntary." As Bob Black argues, *"[t]o demonise state authoritarianism while ignoring identical albeit contract-consecrated subservient arrangements in the large-scale corporations which control the world economy is fetishism at its worst."* [*The Libertarian as Conservative,* **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 142] Anarchy is more than being free to pick a master.

Therefore opposition to hierarchy is a key anarchist position, otherwise you just become a "voluntary archist" — which is hardly anarchistic. For more on this see section A.2.14 ( Why is voluntarism not enough?).



crush the liberty (and so potential) of the many for the benefit of a few. Anarchists do not want to give others power over themselves, the power to tell them what to do under the threat of punishment if they do not obey. Perhaps non-anarchists, rather than be puzzled why anarchists are anarchists, would be better off asking what it says about themselves that they feel this attitude needs any sort of explanation.

## A.2.2 Why do anarchists emphasise liberty?

An anarchist can be regarded, in Bakunin's words, as a *"fanatic lover of freedom, considering it as the unique environment within which the intelligence, dignity and happiness of mankind can develop and increase."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 196] Because human beings are thinking creatures, to deny them liberty is to deny them the opportunity to think for themselves, which is to deny their very existence as humans. For anarchists, freedom is a product of our humanity, because:

> *"The very fact... that a person has a consciousness of self, of being different from others, creates a desire to act freely. The craving for liberty and self-expression is a very fundamental and dominant trait."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 439]

For this reason, anarchism *"proposes to rescue the self-respect and independence of the individual from all restraint and invasion by authority. Only in freedom can man [sic!] grow to his full stature. Only in freedom will he learn to think and move, and give the very best of himself. Only in freedom will he realise the true force of the social bonds which tie men together, and which are the true foundations of a normal social life."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 72–3]

Thus, for anarchists, freedom is basically individuals pursuing their own good in their own way. Doing so calls forth the activity and power of individuals as they make decisions for and about themselves and their lives. Only liberty can ensure individual development and diversity. This is because when individuals govern themselves and make their own decisions they have to exercise their minds and this can have no other effect than expanding and stimulating the individuals involved. As Malatesta put it, *"[f]or people to become educated to freedom and the management of their own interests, they must be left to act for themselves, to feel responsibility for their own actions in the good or bad that comes from them. They'd make mistakes, but they'd understand from the consequences where they'd gone wrong and try out new ways."* [**Fra Contadini**, p. 26]

So, liberty is the precondition for the maximum development of one's individual potential, which is also a social product and can be achieved only in and through community. A healthy, free community will produce free individuals, who in turn will shape the community and enrich the social relationships between the people of whom it is composed. Liberties, being socially produced, *"do not exist because they have been legally set down on a piece of paper, but only when they have become the ingrown habit of a people, and when any attempt to impair them will meet with the violent resistance of the populace ... One compels respect from others when one knows how to defend one's dignity as a human being. This is not only true in private life; it has always been the same in political life as well."* In fact, we *"owe all the political rights and privileges which we enjoy today in greater or lesser measures, not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 75]

It is for this reason anarchists support the tactic of ***"Direct Action"*** (see section J.2) for, as Emma Goldman argued, we have *"as much liberty as [we are] willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resis-*



> *— it can use ID cards and armed security police, along with closed-circuit TVs to watch us; it can punish dissenters with 'disciplinary layoffs' (as GM calls them), or it can fire us. We are forced, by circumstances, to accept much of this, or join the millions of unemployed... In almost every job, we have only the 'right' to quit. Major decisions are made at the top and we are expected to obey, whether we work in an ivory tower or a mine shaft."* [*"For Democracy Where We Work: A rationale for social self-management"*, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), pp. 193–4]

Thus the consistent anarchist must oppose hierarchy in all its forms, including the capitalist firm. Not to do so is to support ***archy*** — which an anarchist, by definition, cannot do. In other words, for anarchists, *"[p]romises to obey, contracts of (wage) slavery, agreements requiring the acceptance of a subordinate status, are all illegitimate because they do restrict and restrain individual autonomy."* [Robert Graham, *"The Anarchist Contract*, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 77] Hierarchy, therefore, is against the basic principles which drive anarchism. It denies what makes us human and *"divest[s] the personality of its most integral traits; it denies the very notion that the individual is **competent** to deal not only with the management of his or her personal life but with its most important context: the **social** context."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 202]

Some argue that as long as an association is voluntary, whether it has a hierarchical structure is irrelevant. Anarchists disagree. This is for two reasons. Firstly, under capitalism workers are driven by economic necessity to sell their labour (and so liberty) to those who own the means of life. This process re-enforces the economic conditions workers face by creating *"massive disparities in wealth ... [as] workers... sell*

chy, centralism and authoritarianism is state-like, or "statist." And as anarchists oppose both the state and authoritarian relations, anyone who does not seek to dismantle **all** forms of hierarchy cannot be called an anarchist. This applies to capitalist firms. As Noam Chomsky points out, the structure of the capitalist firm is extremely hierarchical, indeed fascist, in nature:

> "a fascist system… [is] absolutist — power goes from top down … the ideal state is top down control with the public essentially following orders.
>
> "Let's take a look at a corporation… [I]f you look at what they are, power goes strictly top down, from the board of directors to managers to lower managers to ultimately the people on the shop floor, typing messages, and so on. There's no flow of power or planning from the bottom up. People can disrupt and make suggestions, but the same is true of a slave society. The structure of power is linear, from the top down." [**Keeping the Rabble in Line**, p. 237]

David Deleon indicates these similarities between the company and the state well when he writes:

> *"Most factories are like military dictatorships. Those at the bottom are privates, the supervisors are sergeants, and on up through the hierarchy. The organisation can dictate everything from our clothing and hair style to how we spend a large portion of our lives, during work. It can compel overtime; it can require us to see a company doctor if we have a medical complaint; it can forbid us free time to engage in political activity; it can suppress freedom of speech, press and assembly*



*tance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social, and moral."* It requires *"integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free, independent spirits"* and *"only persistent resistance"* can *"finally set [us] free. Direct action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 76–7]

Direct action is, in other words, the application of liberty, used to resist oppression in the here and now as well as the means of creating a free society. It creates the necessary individual mentality and social conditions in which liberty flourishes. Both are essential as liberty develops only within society, not in opposition to it. Thus Murray Bookchin writes:

> *"What freedom, independence, and autonomy people have in a given historical period is the product of long social traditions and … a **collective** development — which is not to deny that individuals play an important role in that development, indeed are ultimately obliged to do so if they wish to be free."* [**Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism**, p. 15]

But freedom requires the right **kind** of social environment in which to grow and develop. Such an environment **must** be decentralised and based on the direct management of work by those who do it. For centralisation means coercive authority (hierarchy), whereas self-management is the essence of freedom. Self-management ensures that the individuals involved use (and so develop) all their abilities — particularly their mental ones. Hierarchy, in contrast, substitutes the activities and thoughts of a few for the activities and thoughts of all the individuals involved. Thus, rather than developing their abilities to the full, hierarchy marginalises the many and ensures that their development is blunted (see also section B.1).

It is for this reason that anarchists oppose both capitalism and statism. As the French anarchist Sebastien Faure noted, authority *"dresses itself in two principal forms: the political form, that is the State; and the economic form, that is private property."* [cited by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 43] Capitalism, like the state, is based on centralised authority (i.e. of the boss over the worker), the very purpose of which is to keep the management of work out of the hands of those who do it. This means *"that the serious, final, complete liberation of the workers is possible only upon one condition: that of the appropriation of capital, that is, of raw material and all the tools of labour, including land, by the whole body of the workers."* [Michael Bakunin, quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

Hence, as Noam Chomsky argues, a *"consistent anarchist must oppose private ownership of the means of production and the wage slavery which is a component of this system, as incompatible with the principle that labour must be freely undertaken and under the control of the producer."* [*"Notes on Anarchism"*, **For Reasons of State**, p. 158]

Thus, liberty for anarchists means a non-authoritarian society in which individuals and groups practice self-management, i.e. they govern themselves. The implications of this are important. First, it implies that an anarchist society will be non-coercive, that is, one in which violence or the threat of violence will not be used to "convince" individuals to do anything. Second, it implies that anarchists are firm supporters of individual sovereignty, and that, because of this support, they also oppose institutions based on coercive authority, i.e. hierarchy. And finally, it implies that anarchists' opposition to "government" means only that they oppose centralised, hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations or government. They do not oppose self-government through confederations of decentralised, grassroots organisations, so long as these are based on direct democracy rather than the delegation of power to "representatives" (see section A.2.9 for more on anarchist organisation).



> *group of decision-makers at the top and a broad base of people whose decisions are **made for them** at the bottom. Anarchism does not demand the changing of labels on the layers, it doesn't want different people on top, it wants **us** to clamber out from underneath."* [Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 22]

Hierarchies *"share a common feature: they are organised systems of command and obedience"* and so anarchists seek *"to eliminate hierarchy per se, not simply replace one form of hierarchy with another."* [Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 27] A hierarchy is a pyramidally-structured organisation composed of a series of grades, ranks, or offices of increasing power, prestige, and (usually) remuneration. Scholars who have investigated the hierarchical form have found that the two primary principles it embodies are domination and exploitation. For example, in his classic article *"What Do Bosses Do?"* (**Review of Radical Political Economy**, Vol. 6, No. 2), a study of the modern factory, Steven Marglin found that the main function of the corporate hierarchy is not greater productive efficiency (as capitalists claim), but greater control over workers, the purpose of such control being more effective exploitation.

Control in a hierarchy is maintained by coercion, that is, by the threat of negative sanctions of one kind or another: physical, economic, psychological, social, etc. Such control, including the repression of dissent and rebellion, therefore necessitates centralisation: a set of power relations in which the greatest control is exercised by the few at the top (particularly the head of the organisation), while those in the middle ranks have much less control and the many at the bottom have virtually none.

Since domination, coercion, and centralisation are essential features of authoritarianism, and as those features are embodied in hierarchies, all hierarchical institutions are authoritarian. Moreover, for anarchists, any organisation marked by hierar-

as one of the *"three fundamental principles [which] constitute the essential conditions of all human development, collective or individual, in history."* [**God and the State**, p. 12] This is simply because individuals and groups cannot be freed by others, only by themselves. Such rebellion (self-liberation) is the **only** means by which existing society becomes more libertarian and an anarchist society a possibility.

## A.2.8 Is it possible to be an anarchist without opposing hierarchy?

No. We have seen that anarchists abhor authoritarianism. But if one is an anti-authoritarian, one must oppose all hierarchical institutions, since they embody the principle of authority. For, as Emma Goldman argued, *"it is not only government in the sense of the state which is destructive of every individual value and quality. It is the whole complex authority and institutional domination which strangles life. It is the superstition, myth, pretence, evasions, and subservience which support authority and institutional domination."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 435] This means that *"there is and will always be a need to discover and overcome structures of hierarchy, authority and domination and constraints on freedom: slavery, wage-slavery [i.e. capitalism], racism, sexism, authoritarian schools, etc."* [Noam Chomsky, **Language and Politics**, p. 364]

Thus the consistent anarchist must oppose hierarchical relationships as well as the state. Whether economic, social or political, to be an anarchist means to oppose hierarchy. The argument for this (if anybody needs one) is as follows:

> *"All authoritarian institutions are organised as pyramids: the state, the private or public corporation, the army, the police, the church, the university, the hospital: they are all pyramidal structures with a small*



For authority is the opposite of liberty, and hence any form of organisation based on the delegation of power is a threat to the liberty and dignity of the people subjected to that power.

Anarchists consider freedom to be the only social environment within which human dignity and diversity can flower. Under capitalism and statism, however, there is no freedom for the majority, as private property and hierarchy ensure that the inclination and judgement of most individuals will be subordinated to the will of a master, severely restricting their liberty and making impossible the *"full development of all the material, intellectual and moral capacities that are latent in every one of us."* [Michael Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 261] That is why anarchists seek to ensure *"that real justice and real liberty might come on earth"* for it is *"all false, all unnecessary, this wild waste of human life, of bone and sinew and brain and heart, this turning of people into human rags, ghosts, piteous caricatures of the creatures they had it in them to be, on the day they were born; that what is called 'economy', the massing up of things, is in reality the most frightful spending — the sacrifice of the maker to the made — the lose of all the finer and nobler instincts in the gain of one revolting attribute, the power to count and calculate."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, **The First Mayday: The Haymarket Speeches 1895–1910**, pp, 17–18]

(See section B for further discussion of the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of capitalism and statism).

## A.2.3 Are anarchists in favour of organisation?

Yes. Without association, a truly human life is impossible. Liberty **cannot** exist without society and organisation. As George Barrett pointed out:

> "To get the full meaning out of life we must co-operate, and to co-operate we must make agreements with our fellow-men. But to suppose that such agreements mean a limitation of freedom is surely an absurdity; on the contrary, they are the exercise of our freedom.
>
> "If we are going to invent a dogma that to make agreements is to damage freedom, then at once freedom becomes tyrannical, for it forbids men to take the most ordinary everyday pleasures. For example, I cannot go for a walk with my friend because it is against the principle of Liberty that I should agree to be at a certain place at a certain time to meet him. I cannot in the least extend my own power beyond myself, because to do so I must co-operate with someone else, and co-operation implies an agreement, and that is against Liberty. It will be seen at once that this argument is absurd. I do not limit my liberty, but simply exercise it, when I agree with my friend to go for a walk.
>
> "If, on the other hand, I decide from my superior knowledge that it is good for my friend to take exercise, and therefore I attempt to compel him to go for a walk, then I begin to limit freedom. This is the difference between free agreement and government." [**Objections to Anarchism**, pp. 348–9]

As far as organisation goes, anarchists think that *"far from creating authority, [it] is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders."* [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 86] Thus anarchists are well aware of the need to organise in a structured and open manner. As Car-



through struggle against oppression is the only way this can be done. Thus anarchists encourage (to use Kropotkin's term) ***"the spirit of revolt."***

Self-liberation is a product of struggle, of self-organisation, solidarity and direct action. Direct action is the means of creating anarchists, free people, and so *"Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, — the State."* This is because *"[s]uch a struggle ... better than any indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his [or her] thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the state,"* that is, see the possibility of a free society. Kropotkin, like many anarchists, pointed to the Syndicalist and Trade Union movements as a means of developing libertarian ideas within existing society (although he, like most anarchists, did not limit anarchist activity exclusively to them). Indeed, any movement which *"permit[s] the working men [and women] to realise their solidarity and to feel the community of their interests ... prepare[s] the way for these conceptions"* of communist-anarchism, i.e. the overcoming the spiritual domination of existing society within the minds of the oppressed. [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 83 and p. 85]

For anarchists, in the words of a Scottish Anarchist militant, the *"history of human progress [is] seen as the history of rebellion and disobedience, with the individual debased by subservience to authority in its many forms and able to retain his/her dignity only through rebellion and disobedience."* [Robert Lynn, **Not a Life Story, Just a Leaf from It**, p. 77] This is why anarchists stress self-liberation (and self-organisation, self-management and self-activity). Little wonder Bakunin considered *"rebellion"*

upon the patient work of many years of organisation and education by people with "utopian" ideas. The process of "creating the new world in the shell of the old" (to use another **I.W.W.** expression), by building alternative institutions and relationships, is but one component of what must be a long tradition of revolutionary commitment and militancy.

As Malatesta made clear, *"to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme... anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves... , we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Unless a process of self-emancipation occurs, a free society is impossible. Only when individuals free themselves, both materially (by abolishing the state and capitalism) and intellectually (by freeing themselves of submissive attitudes towards authority), can a free society be possible. We should not forget that capitalist and state power, to a great extent, is power over the minds of those subject to them (backed up, of course, with sizeable force if the mental domination fails and people start rebelling and resisting). In effect, a spiritual power as the ideas of the ruling class dominate society and permeate the minds of the oppressed. As long as this holds, the working class will acquiesce to authority, oppression and exploitation as the normal condition of life. Minds submissive to the doctrines and positions of their masters cannot hope to win freedom, to revolt and fight. Thus the oppressed must overcome the mental domination of the existing system before they can throw off its yoke (and, anarchists argue, direct action is the means of doing both — see sections J.2 and J.4). Capitalism and statism must be beaten spiritually and theoretically before it is beaten materially (many anarchists call this mental liberation ***"class consciousness"*** — see section B.7.4). And self-liberation



ole Ehrlich points out, while anarchists *"aren't opposed to structure"* and simply *"want to abolish **hierarchical** structure"* they are *"almost always stereotyped as wanting no structure at all."* This is not the case, for *"organisations that would build in accountability, diffusion of power among the maximum number of persons, task rotation, skill-sharing, and the spread of information and resources"* are based on *"good social anarchist principles of organisation!"* [*"Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism"*, **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 47 and p. 46]

The fact that anarchists are in favour of organisation may seem strange at first, but it is understandable. *"For those with experience only of authoritarian organisation,"* argue two British anarchists, *"it appears that organisation can only be totalitarian or democratic, and that those who disbelieve in government must by that token disbelieve in organisation at all. That is not so."* [Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer, **The Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 122] In other words, because we live in a society in which virtually all forms of organisation are authoritarian, this makes them appear to be the only kind possible. What is usually not recognised is that this mode of organisation is historically conditioned, arising within a specific kind of society — one whose motive principles are domination and exploitation. According to archaeologists and anthropologists, this kind of society has only existed for about 5,000 years, having appeared with the first primitive states based on conquest and slavery, in which the labour of slaves created a surplus which supported a ruling class.

Prior to that time, for hundreds of thousands of years, human and proto-human societies were what Murray Bookchin calls *"organic,"* that is, based on co-operative forms of economic activity involving mutual aid, free access to productive resources, and a sharing of the products of communal labour according to need. Although such societies probably had status rankings based on age, there were no hierarchies in the sense of institutionalised dominance-subordination

relations enforced by coercive sanctions and resulting in class-stratification involving the economic exploitation of one class by another (see Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**).

It must be emphasised, however, that anarchists do **not** advocate going "back to the Stone Age." We merely note that since the hierarchical-authoritarian mode of organisation is a relatively recent development in the course of human social evolution, there is no reason to suppose that it is somehow "fated" to be permanent. We do not think that human beings are genetically "programmed" for authoritarian, competitive, and aggressive behaviour, as there is no credible evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, such behaviour is socially conditioned, or **learned**, and as such, can be **unlearned** (see Ashley Montagu, **The Nature of Human Aggression**). We are not fatalists or genetic determinists, but believe in free will, which means that people can change the way they do things, including the way they organise society.

And there is no doubt that society needs to be better organised, because presently most of its wealth — which is produced by the majority — and power gets distributed to a small, elite minority at the top of the social pyramid, causing deprivation and suffering for the rest, particularly for those at the bottom. Yet because this elite controls the means of coercion through its control of the state (see section B.2.3), it is able to suppress the majority and ignore its suffering — a phenomenon that occurs on a smaller scale within all hierarchies. Little wonder, then, that people within authoritarian and centralised structures come to hate them as a denial of their freedom. As Alexander Berkman puts it:

> *"Any one who tells you that Anarchists don't believe in organisation is talking nonsense. Organisation is everything, and everything is organisation. The whole of life is organisation, conscious or uncon-*



*of the future itself."* We can do so by creating alternative social relationships and organisations, acting as free people in a non-free society. Only by our actions in the here and now can we lay the foundation for a free society. Moreover, this process of self-liberation goes on all the time:

> *"Subordinates of all kinds exercise their capacity for critical self-reflection every day — that is why masters are thwarted, frustrated and, sometimes, overthrown. But unless masters are overthrown, unless subordinates engage in political activity, no amount of critical reflection will end their subjection and bring them freedom."* [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, p. 205]

Anarchists aim to encourage these tendencies in everyday life to reject, resist and thwart authority and bring them to their logical conclusion — a society of free individuals, co-operating as equals in free, self-managed associations. Without this process of critical self-reflection, resistance and self-liberation a free society is impossible. Thus, for anarchists, anarchism comes from the natural resistance of subordinated people striving to act as free individuals within a hierarchical world. This process of resistance is called by many anarchists the ***"class struggle"*** (as it is working class people who are generally the most subordinated group within society) or, more generally, ***"social struggle."*** It is this everyday resistance to authority (in all its forms) and the desire for freedom which is the key to the anarchist revolution. It is for this reason that *"anarchists emphasise over and over that the class struggle provides the only means for the workers [and other oppressed groups] to achieve control over their destiny."* [Marie-Louise Berneri, **Neither East Nor West**, p. 32]

Revolution is a process, not an event, and every *"spontaneous revolutionary action"* usually results from and is based

> … to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them … we must push the people to want always more and to increase its pressures [on the ruling elite], until it has achieved complete emancipation." [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 188–9]

Society, while shaping all individuals, is also created by them, through their actions, thoughts, and ideals. Challenging institutions that limit one's freedom is mentally liberating, as it sets in motion the process of questioning authoritarian relationships in general. This process gives us insight into how society works, changing our ideas and creating new ideals. To quote Emma Goldman again: *"True emancipation begins… in woman's soul."* And in a man's too, we might add. It is only here that we can *"begin [our] inner regeneration, [cutting] loose from the weight of prejudices, traditions and customs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 167] But this process must be self-directed, for as Max Stirner notes, *"the man who is set free is nothing but a freed man… a dog dragging a piece of chain with him."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 168] By changing the world, even in a small way, we change ourselves.

In an interview during the Spanish Revolution, the Spanish anarchist militant Durutti said, *"we have a new world in our hearts."* Only self-activity and self-liberation allows us to create such a vision and gives us the confidence to try to actualise it in the real world.

Anarchists, however, do not think that self-liberation must wait for the future, after the "glorious revolution." The personal is political, and given the nature of society, how we act in the here and now will influence the future of our society and our lives. Therefore, even in pre-anarchist society anarchists try to create, as Bakunin puts it, *"not only the ideas but also the facts*



> *scious … But there is organisation and organisation. Capitalist society is so badly organised that its various members suffer: just as when you have a pain in some part of you, your whole body aches and you are ill… , not a single member of the organisation or union may with impunity be discriminated against, suppressed or ignored. To do so would be the same as to ignore an aching tooth: you would be sick all over."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 198]

Yet this is precisely what happens in capitalist society, with the result that it is, indeed, *"sick all over."*

For these reasons, anarchists reject authoritarian forms of organisation and instead support associations based on free agreement. Free agreement is important because, in Berkman's words, *"[o]nly when each is a free and independent unit, co-operating with others from his own choice because of mutual interests, can the world work successfully and become powerful."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 199] As we discuss in section A.2.14, anarchists stress that free agreement has to be complemented by direct democracy (or, as it is usually called by anarchists, self-management) within the association itself otherwise "freedom" become little more than picking masters.

Anarchist organisation is based on a massive decentralisation of power back into the hands of the people, i.e. those who are directly affected by the decisions being made. To quote Proudhon:

> *"Unless democracy is a fraud and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his [or her] industry, each municipal, district or provincial council within its own territory … should act directly and by itself in administering the interests which it includes, and should exercise full sovereignty in relation to them."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 276]

It also implies a need for federalism to co-ordinate joint interests. For anarchism, federalism is the natural complement to self-management. With the abolition of the State, society *"can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion, but not from top to bottom ... The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal. Then alone will be realised the true and life-giving order of freedom and the common good, that order which, far from denying, on the contrary affirms and brings into harmony the interests of individuals and of society."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 205–6] Because a *"truly popular organisation begins ... from below"* and so *"federalism becomes a political institution of Socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life."* Thus libertarian socialism *"is federalistic in character."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 273–4 and p. 272]

Therefore, anarchist organisation is based on direct democracy (or self-management) and federalism (or confederation). These are the expression and environment of liberty. Direct (or participatory) democracy is essential because liberty and equality imply the need for forums within which people can discuss and debate as equals and which allow for the free exercise of what Murray Bookchin calls *"the creative role of dissent."* Federalism is necessary to ensure that common interests are discussed and joint activity organised in a way which reflects the wishes of all those affected by them. To ensure that decisions flow from the bottom up rather than being imposed from the top down by a few rulers.

Anarchist ideas on libertarian organisation and the need for direct democracy and confederation will be discussed further in sections A.2.9 and A.2.11.



chists suggest to aid this process will be discussed in section J ("What Do Anarchists Do?") and will not be discussed here. However, these methods all involve people organising themselves, setting their own agendas, and acting in ways that empower them and eliminate their dependence on leaders to do things for them. Anarchism is based on people *"acting for themselves"* (performing what anarchists call ***"direct action"*** — see section J.2 for details).

Direct action has an empowering and liberating effect on those involved in it. Self-activity is the means by which the creativity, initiative, imagination and critical thought of those subjected to authority can be developed. It is the means by which society can be changed. As Errico Malatesta pointed out:

> "Between man and his social environment there is a reciprocal action. Men make society what it is and society makes men what they are, and the result is therefore a kind of vicious circle. To transform society men [and women] must be changed, and to transform men, society must be changed ... Fortunately existing society has not been created by the inspired will of a dominating class, which has succeeded in reducing all its subjects to passive and unconscious instruments of its interests. It is the result of a thousand internecine struggles, of a thousand human and natural factors ...
>
> "From this the possibility of progress ... We must take advantage of all the means, all the possibilities and the opportunities that the present environment allows us to act on our fellow men [and women] and to develop their consciences and their demands ... to claim and to impose those major social transformations which are possible and which effectively serve to open the way to further advances later ... We must seek to get all the people

by hierarchical society, in which people are conditioned to blindly obey leaders.

## A.2.7 Why do anarchists argue for self-liberation?

Liberty, by its very nature, cannot be given. An individual cannot be freed by another, but must break his or her own chains through their own effort. Of course, self-effort can also be part of collective action, and in many cases it has to be in order to attain its ends. As Emma Goldman points out:

> *"History tells us that every oppressed class [or group or individual] gained true liberation from its masters by its own efforts."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 167]

This is because anarchists recognise that hierarchical systems, like any social relationship, shapes those subject to them. As Bookchin argued, "*class societies organise our psychic structures for command or obedience.*" This means that people ***internalise*** the values of hierarchical and class society and, as such, *"the State is not merely a constellation of bureaucratic and coercive instituions. It is also a state of mind, an instilled mentality for ordering reality ... Its capacity to rule by brute force has always been limited ... Without a high degree of co-operation from even the most victimised classes of society such as chattel slaves and serfs, its authority would eventually dissipate. Awe and apathy in the face of State power are products of social conditioning that renders this very power possible."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 159 and pp. 164–5] Self-liberation is the means by which we break down both internal ***and*** external chains, freeing ourselves mentally as well as physically.

Anarchists have long argued that people can only free themselves by their own actions. The various methods anar-



## A.2.4 Are anarchists in favour of "absolute" liberty?

No. Anarchists do not believe that everyone should be able to *"do whatever they like,"* because some actions invariably involve the denial of the liberty of others.

For example, anarchists do not support the "freedom" to rape, to exploit, or to coerce others. Neither do we tolerate authority. On the contrary, since authority is a threat to liberty, equality, and solidarity (not to mention human dignity), anarchists recognise the need to resist and overthrow it.

The exercise of authority is not freedom. No one has a "right" to rule others. As Malatesta points out, anarchism supports *"freedom for everybody ... with the only limit of the equal freedom for others; which does **not** mean ... that we recognise, and wish to respect, the 'freedom' to exploit, to oppress, to command, which is oppression and certainly not freedom."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 53]

In a capitalist society, resistance to all forms of hierarchical authority is the mark of a free person — be it private (the boss) or public (the state). As Henry David Thoreau pointed out in his essay on **"Civil Disobedience"** (1847)

> *"Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves."*

## A.2.5 Why are anarchists in favour of equality?

As mentioned in above, anarchists are dedicated to social equality because it is the only context in which individual liberty can flourish. However, there has been much nonsense written about "equality," and much of what is commonly believed about it is very strange indeed. Before discussing

what anarchist **do** mean by equality, we have to indicate what we **do not** mean by it.

Anarchists do **not** believe in *"equality of endowment,"* which is not only non-existent but would be **very** undesirable if it could be brought about. Everyone is unique. Biologically determined human differences not only exist but are *"a cause for joy, not fear or regret."* Why? Because *"life among clones would not be worth living, and a sane person will only rejoice that others have abilities that they do not share."* [Noam Chomsky, **Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 782]

That some people **seriously** suggest that anarchists means by "equality" that everyone should be **identical** is a sad reflection on the state of present-day intellectual culture and the corruption of words — a corruption used to divert attention from an unjust and authoritarian system and side-track people into discussions of biology. *"The uniqueness of the self in no way contradicts the principle of equality,"* noted Erich Fromm, *"The thesis that men are born equal implies that they all share the same fundamental human qualities, that they share the same basic fate of human beings, that they all have the same inalienable claim on freedom and happiness. It furthermore means that their relationship is one of solidarity, not one of domination-submission. What the concept of equality does not mean is that all men are alike."* [**The Fear of Freedom**, p. 228] Thus it would be fairer to say that anarchists seek equality **because** we recognise that everyone is different and, consequently, seek the full affirmation and development of that uniqueness.

Nor are anarchists in favour of so-called *"equality of outcome."* We have **no** desire to live in a society were everyone gets the same goods, lives in the same kind of house, wears the same uniform, etc. Part of the reason for the anarchist revolt against capitalism and statism is that they standardise so much of life (see George Reitzer's **The McDonaldisation of**



start to manage our own collective affairs together and so replace the boss once and for all. *"**Unions** will... multiply the individual's means and secure his assailed property."* [Max Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 258] By acting in solidarity, we can also replace the current system with one more to our liking: *"in union there is strength."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 74]

Solidarity is thus the means by which we can obtain and ensure our own freedom. We agree to work together so that we will not have to work for **another**. By agreeing to share with each other we increase our options so that we may enjoy **more**, not less. Mutual aid is in my self-interest — that is, I see that it is to my advantage to reach agreements with others based on mutual respect and social equality; for if I dominate someone, this means that the conditions exist which allow domination, and so in all probability I too will be dominated in turn.

As Max Stirner saw, solidarity is the means by which we ensure that our liberty is strengthened and defended from those in power who want to rule us: *"Do you yourself count for nothing then?"*, he asks. *"Are you bound to let anyone do anything he wants to you? Defend yourself and no one will touch you. If millions of people are behind you, supporting you, then you are a formidable force and you will win without difficulty."* [quoted in Luigi Galleani's **The End of Anarchism?**, p. 79 — different translation in **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 197]

Solidarity, therefore, is important to anarchists because it is the means by which liberty can be created and defended against power. Solidarity is strength and a product of our nature as social beings. However, solidarity should not be confused with "herdism," which implies passively following a leader. In order to be effective, solidarity must be created by free people, co-operating together as **equals**. The "big WE" is **not** solidarity, although the desire for "herdism" is a product of our need for solidarity and union. It is a "solidarity" corrupted

protect individuality and liberty and so is an expression of self-interest. As Alfie Kohn points out:

> *"when we think about co-operation… we tend to associate the concept with fuzzy-minded idealism… This may result from confusing co-operation with altruism… Structural co-operation defies the usual egoism/altruism dichotomy. It sets things up so that by helping you I am helping myself at the same time. Even if my motive initially may have been selfish, our fates now are linked. We sink or swim together. Co-operation is a shrewd and highly successful strategy — a pragmatic choice that gets things done at work and at school even more effectively than competition does… There is also good evidence that co-operation is more conductive to psychological health and to liking one another."* [**No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, p. 7]

And, within a hierarchical society, solidarity is important not only because of the satisfaction it gives us, but also because it is necessary to resist those in power. Malatesta's words are relevant here:

> *"the oppressed masses who have never completely resigned themselves to oppress and poverty, and who … show themselves thirsting for justice, freedom and wellbeing, are beginning to understand that they will not be able to achieve their emancipation except by union and solidarity with all the oppressed, with the exploited everywhere in the world."* [**Anarchy**, p. 33]

By standing together, we can increase our strength and get what we want. Eventually, by organising into groups, we can



**Society** on why capitalism is driven towards standardisation and conformity). In the words of Alexander Berkman:

> *"The spirit of authority, law, written and unwritten, tradition and custom force us into a common grove and make a man [or woman] a will-less automation without independence or individuality… All of us are its victims, and only the exceptionally strong succeed in breaking its chains, and that only partly."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 165]

Anarchists, therefore, have little to desire to make this *"common grove"* even deeper. Rather, we desire to destroy it and every social relationship and institution that creates it in the first place.

*"Equality of outcome"* can only be introduced and maintained by force, which would **not** be equality anyway, as some would have more power than others! *"Equality of outcome"* is particularly hated by anarchists, as we recognise that every individual has different needs, abilities, desires and interests. To make all consume the same would be tyranny. Obviously, if one person needs medical treatment and another does not, they do not receive an "equal" amount of medical care. The same is true of other human needs. As Alexander Berkman put it:

> "equality does not mean an equal amount but equal **opportunity**… Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse in fact."

> "Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is **equal opportunity to satisfy** them that constitutes true equality.
>
> "Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse ... Free opportunity of expressing and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 164–5]

For anarchists, the "concepts" of "equality" as "equality of outcome" or "equality of endowment" are meaningless. However, in a hierarchical society, "equality of opportunity" and "equality of outcome" **are** related. Under capitalism, for example, the opportunities each generation face are dependent on the outcomes of the previous ones. This means that under capitalism "equality of opportunity" without a rough "equality of outcome" (in the sense of income and resources) becomes meaningless, as there is no real equality of opportunity for the off-spring of a millionaire and that of a road sweeper. Those who argue for "equality of opportunity" while ignoring the barriers created by previous outcomes indicate that they do not know what they are talking about — opportunity in a hierarchical society depends not only on an open road but also upon an equal start. From this obvious fact springs the misconception that anarchists desire "equality of outcome" — but this applies to a hierarchical system, in a free society this would not the case (as we will see).

Equality, in anarchist theory, does not mean denying individual diversity or uniqueness. As Bakunin observes:

> *"once equality has triumphed and is well established, will various individuals' abilities and their levels of energy cease to differ? Some will exist, perhaps not*



noting *"what wonderful results this unique force of man's individuality has achieved when strengthened by co-operation with other individualities . .. co-operation — as opposed to internecine strife and struggle — has worked for the survival and evolution of the species... . only mutual aid and voluntary co-operation ... can create the basis for a free individual and associational life."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 118]

Solidarity means associating together as equals in order to satisfy our common interests and needs. Forms of association not based on solidarity (i.e. those based on inequality) will crush the individuality of those subjected to them. As Ret Marut points out, liberty needs solidarity, the recognition of common interests:

> *"The most noble, pure and true love of mankind is the love of oneself. **I** want to be free! **I** hope to be happy! **I** want to appreciate all the beauties of the world. But my freedom is secured **only** when all other people around me are free. I can only be happy when all other people around me are happy. I can only be joyful when all the people I see and meet look at the world with joy-filled eyes. And **only** then can I eat my fill with pure enjoyment when I have the secure knowledge that other people, too, can eat their fill as I do. And for that reason it is a question of **my own contentment**, only of **my own self**, when I rebel against every danger which threatens my freedom and my happiness..."* [Ret Marut (a.k.a. B. Traven), **The BrickBurner** magazine quoted by Karl S. Guthke, **B. Traven: The life behind the legends**, pp. 133–4]

To practice solidarity means that we recognise, as in the slogan of **Industrial Workers of the World**, that *"an injury to one is an injury to all."* Solidarity, therefore, is the means to

## A.2.6 Why is solidarity important to anarchists?

Solidarity, or mutual aid, is a key idea of anarchism. It is the link between the individual and society, the means by which individuals can work together to meet their common interests in an environment that supports and nurtures both liberty and equality. For anarchists, mutual aid is a fundamental feature of human life, a source of both strength and happiness and a fundamental requirement for a fully human existence.

Erich Fromm, noted psychologist and socialist humanist, points out that the *"human desire to experience union with others is rooted in the specific conditions of existence that characterise the human species and is one of the strongest motivations of human behaviour."* [**To Be or To Have**, p.107]

Therefore anarchists consider the desire to form "unions" (to use Max Stirner's term) with other people to be a natural need. These unions, or associations, must be based on equality and individuality in order to be fully satisfying to those who join them — i.e. they must be organised in an anarchist manner, i.e. voluntary, decentralised, and non-hierarchical.

Solidarity — co-operation between individuals — is necessary for life and is far from a denial of liberty. Solidarity, observed Errico Malatesta, *"is the only environment in which Man can express his personality and achieve his optimum development and enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing."* This *"coming together of individuals for the wellbeing of all, and of all for the wellbeing of each,"* results in *"the freedom of each not being limited by, but complemented — indeed finding the necessary* ***raison d'etre*** *in — the freedom of others."* [**Anarchy**, p. 29] In other words, solidarity and co-operation means treating each other as equals, refusing to treat others as means to an end and creating relationships which support freedom for all rather than a few dominating the many. Emma Goldman reiterated this theme,



> *so many as now, but certainly some will always exist. It is proverbial that the same tree never bears two identical leaves, and this will probably be always be true. And it is even more truer with regard to human beings, who are much more complex than leaves. But this diversity is hardly an evil. On the contrary... it is a resource of the human race. Thanks to this diversity, humanity is a collective whole in which the one individual complements all the others and needs them. As a result, this infinite diversity of human individuals is the fundamental cause and the very basis of their solidarity. It is all-powerful argument for equality."* [*"All-Round Education"*, **The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 117–8]

Equality for anarchists means **social** equality, or, to use Murray Bookchin's term, the ***"equality of unequals"*** (some like Malatesta used the term ***"equality of conditions"*** to express the same idea). By this he means that an anarchist society recognises the differences in ability and need of individuals but does not allow these differences to be turned into power. Individual differences, in other words, *"would be of no consequence, because inequality in fact is lost in the collectivity when it cannot cling to some legal fiction or institution."* [Michael Bakunin, **God and the State**, p. 53]

If hierarchical social relationships, and the forces that create them, are abolished in favour of ones that encourage participation and are based on the principle of "one person, one vote" then natural differences would not be able to be turned into hierarchical power. For example, without capitalist property rights there would not be means by which a minority could monopolise the means of life (machinery and land) and enrich themselves by the work of others via the wages system and usury (profits, rent and interest). Similarly, if workers manage

their own work, there is no class of capitalists to grow rich off their labour. Thus Proudhon:

> "Now, what can be the origin of this inequality?
>
> "As we see it, ... that origin is the realisation within society of this triple abstraction: capital, labour and talent.
>
> "It is because society has divided itself into three categories of citizen corresponding to the three terms of the formula... that caste distinctions have always been arrived at, and one half of the human race enslaved to the other... socialism thus consists of reducing the aristocratic formula of capital-labour-talent into the simpler formula of labour!... in order to make every citizen simultaneously, equally and to the same extent capitalist, labourer and expert or artist." [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 57–8]

Like all anarchists, Proudhon saw this integration of functions as the key to equality and freedom and proposed self-management as the means to achieve it. Thus self-management is the key to social equality. Social equality in the workplace, for example, means that everyone has an equal say in the policy decisions on how the workplace develops and changes. Anarchists are strong believers in the maxim "that which touches all, is decided by all."

This does not mean, of course, that expertise will be ignored or that everyone will decide everything. As far as expertise goes, different people have different interests, talents, and abilities, so obviously they will want to study different things and do different kinds of work. It is also obvious that when people are ill they consult a doctor — an expert — who manages his or her own work rather than being directed by a committee. We are sorry to have to bring these points up, but once the topics of



social equality and workers' self-management come up, some people start to talk nonsense. It is common sense that a hospital managed in a socially equal way will **not** involve non-medical staff voting on how doctors should perform an operation!

In fact, social equality and individual liberty are inseparable. Without the collective self-management of decisions that affect a group (equality) to complement the individual self-management of decisions that affect the individual (liberty), a free society is impossible. For without both, some will have power over others, making decisions **for** them (i.e. governing them), and thus some will be more free than others. Which implies, just to state the obvious, anarchists seek equality in **all** aspects of life, not just in terms of wealth. Anarchists *"demand for every person not just his [or her] entire measure of the wealth of society but also his [or her] portion of social power."* [Malatesta and Hamon, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 20] Thus self-management is needed to ensure both liberty **and** equality.

Social equality is required for individuals to both govern and express themselves, for the self-management it implies means *"people working in face-to-face relations with their fellows in order to bring the uniqueness of their own perspective to the business of solving common problems and achieving common goals."* [George Benello, **From the Ground Up**, p. 160] Thus equality allows the expression of individuality and so is a necessary base for individual liberty.

Section F.3 ("Why do 'anarcho'-capitalists place little or no value on equality?") discusses anarchist ideas on equality further. Noam Chomsky's essay *"Equality"* (contained in **The Chomsky Reader**) is a good summary of libertarian ideas on the subject.

*ernment ready to protect the title at all hazards."* [Lucy Parsons, **Freedom, Equality & Solidarity**, p. 33

However, within this use-rights framework, the two schools of anarchism propose different systems. The social anarchist generally argues for communal (or social) ownership and use. This would involve social ownership of the means of production and distribution, with personal possessions remaining for things you use, but not what was used to create them. Thus *"your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people." "Actual use,"* continues Berkman, *"will be considered the only title — not to ownership but to possession. The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency ... Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 217]

This system would be based on workers' self-management of their work and (for most social anarchists) the free sharing of the product of that labour (i.e. an economic system without money). This is because *"in the present state of industry, when everything is interdependent, when each branch of production is knit up with all the rest, the attempt to claim an individualist origin for the products of industry is untenable."* Given this, it is impossible to *"estimate the share of each in the riches which **all** contribute to amass"* and, moreover, the *"common possession of the instruments of labour must necessarily bring with it the enjoyment in common of the fruits of common labour."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 45 and p. 46] By this social anarchists simply mean that the social product which is produced by all would be available to all and each individual who has contributed productively to society can take what they need (how quickly we can reach such an ideal is a moot point, as we discuss in section I.2.2). Some social anarchists, like mutualists for example, are against such a system of libertarian (or free) communism, but, in general, the vast majority of social anarchists



is purely a decision making tool which allows minority dissent and opinion to be expressed (and acted upon) while ensuring that no minority forces its will on the majority. In other words, majority decisions are not binding on the minority. After all, as Malatesta argued:

> *"one cannot expect, or even wish, that someone who is firmly convinced that the course taken by the majority leads to disaster, should sacrifice his [or her] own convictions and passively look on, or even worse, should support a policy he [or she] considers wrong."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 132]

Even the Individual Anarchist Lysander Spooner acknowledged that direct democracy has its uses when he noted that *"[a]ll, or nearly all, voluntary associations give a majority, or some other portion of the members less than the whole, the right to use some **limited** discretion as to the **means** to be used to accomplish the ends in view."* However, only the unanimous decision of a jury (which would *"judge the law, and the justice of the law"*) could determine individual rights as this *"tribunal fairly represent[s] the whole people"* as *"no law can rightfully be enforced by the association in its corporate capacity, against the goods, rights, or person of any individual, except it be such as **all** members of the association agree that it may enforce"* (his support of juries results from Spooner acknowledging that it *"would be impossible in practice"* for **all** members of an association to agree) [**Trial by Jury**, p. 130-1f, p. 134, p. 214, p. 152 and p. 132]

Thus direct democracy and individual/minority rights need not clash. In practice, we can imagine direct democracy would be used to make most decisions within most associations (perhaps with super-majorities required for fundamental decisions) plus some combination of a jury system and minority protest/direct action and evaluate/protect minority claims/rights in an

anarchist society. The actual forms of freedom can only be created through practical experience by the people directly involved.

Lastly, we must stress that anarchist support for direct democracy does not mean that this solution is to be favoured in all circumstances. For example, many small associations may favour consensus decision making (see the next section on consensus and why most anarchists do not think that it is a viable alternative to direct democracy). However, most anarchists think that direct democracy within free association is the best (and most realistic) form of organisation which is consistent with anarchist principles of individual freedom, dignity and equality.

## A.2.12 Is consensus an alternative to direct democracy?

The few anarchists who reject direct democracy within free associations generally support consensus in decision making. Consensus is based upon everyone on a group agreeing to a decision before it can be put into action. Thus, it is argued, consensus stops the majority ruling the minority and is more consistent with anarchist principles.

Consensus, although the "best" option in decision making, as all agree, has its problems. As Murray Bookchin points out in describing his experience of consensus, it can have authoritarian implications:

> *"In order... to create full consensus on a decision, minority dissenters were often subtly urged or psychologically coerced to decline to vote on a troubling issue, inasmuch as their dissent would essentially amount to a one-person veto. This practice, called 'standing aside' in American consensus processes, all*



Most social anarchists recognise the need for education and to create alternatives (such as libertarian unions), but most disagree that this is enough in itself. They do not think capitalism can be reformed piece by piece into anarchy, although they do not ignore the importance of reforms by social struggle that increase libertarian tendencies within capitalism. Nor do they think revolution is in contradiction with anarchist principles as it is not authoritarian to destroy authority (be it state or capitalist). Thus the expropriation of the capitalist class and the destruction of the state by social revolution is a libertarian, not authoritarian, act by its very nature as it is directed against those who govern and exploit the vast majority. In short, social anarchists are usually evolutionists **and** revolutionists, trying to strengthen libertarian tendencies within capitalism while trying to abolish that system by social revolution. However, as some social anarchists are purely evolutionists too, this difference is not the most important one dividing social anarchists from individualists.

The second major difference concerns the form of anarchist economy proposed. Individualists prefer a market-based system of distribution to the social anarchists need-based system. Both agree that the current system of capitalist property rights must be abolished and that use rights must replace property rights in the means of life (i.e. the abolition of rent, interest and profits — *"usury,"* to use the individualist anarchists' preferred term for this unholy trinity). In effect, both schools follow Proudhon's classic work **What is Property?** and argue that possession must replace property in a free society (see section B.3 for a discussion of anarchist viewpoints on property). Thus property *"will lose a certain attribute which sanctifies it now. The absolute ownership of it — 'the right to use or abuse' — will be abolished, and possession, use, will be the only title. It will be seen how impossible it would be for one person to 'own' a million acres of land, without a title deed, backed by a gov-*

associated with individualist anarchism, only that we think social anarchism is more appropriate for modern society, that it creates a stronger base for individual freedom, and that it more closely reflects the sort of society we would like to live in.

## A.3.1 What are the differences between individualist and social anarchists?

While there is a tendency for individuals in both camps to claim that the proposals of the other camp would lead to the creation of some kind of state, the differences between individualists and social anarchists are not very great. Both are anti-state, anti-authority and anti-capitalist. The major differences are twofold.

The first is in regard to the means of action in the here and now (and so the manner in which anarchy will come about). Individualists generally prefer education and the creation of alternative institutions, such as mutual banks, unions, communes, etc. They usually support strikes and other non-violent forms of social protest (such as rent strikes, the non-payment of taxes and so on). Such activity, they argue, will ensure that present society will gradually develop out of government into an anarchist one. They are primarily evolutionists, not revolutionists, and dislike social anarchists' use of direct action to create revolutionary situations. They consider revolution as being in contradiction to anarchist principles as it involves the expropriation of capitalist property and, therefore, authoritarian means. Rather they seek to return to society the wealth taken out of society by property by means of an new, alternative, system of economics (based around mutual banks and co-operatives). In this way a general "social liquidation" would be rendered easy, with anarchism coming about by reform and not by expropriation.



> *too often involved intimidation of the dissenters, to the point that they completely withdrew from the decision-making process, rather than make an honourable and continuing expression of their dissent by voting, even as a minority, in accordance with their views. Having withdrawn, they ceased to be political beings–so that a 'decision' could be made... . 'consensus' was ultimately achieved only after dissenting members nullified themselves as participants in the process.*
>
> *"On a more theoretical level, consensus silenced that most vital aspect of all dialogue,* ***dissensus****. The ongoing dissent, the passionate dialogue that still persists even after a minority accedes temporarily to a majority decision,... [can be] replaced... .by dull monologues — and the uncontroverted and deadening tone of consensus. In majority decision-making, the defeated minority can resolve to overturn a decision on which they have been defeated — they are free to openly and persistently articulate reasoned and potentially persuasive disagreements. Consensus, for its part, honours no minorities, but mutes them in favour of the metaphysical 'one' of the 'consensus' group."* [*"Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism"*, **Democracy and Nature**, no. 8, p. 8]

Bookchin does not *"deny that consensus may be an appropriate form of decision-making in small groups of people who are thoroughly familiar with one another."* But he notes that, in practical terms, his own experience has shown him that *"when larger groups try to make decisions by consensus, it usually obliges them to arrive at the lowest common intellectual denominator in their decision-making: the least controversial or even the most mediocre decision that a sizeable assembly of*

*people can attain is adopted—precisely because everyone must agree with it or else withdraw from voting on that issue"* [**Op. Cit.**, p.7]

Therefore, due to its potentially authoritarian nature, most anarchists disagree that consensus is the political aspect of free association. While it is advantageous to try to reach consensus, it is usually impractical to do so — especially in large groups — regardless of its other, negative effects. Often it demeans a free society or association by tending to subvert individuality in the name of community and dissent in the name of solidarity. Neither true community nor solidarity are fostered when the individual's development and self-expression are aborted by public disapproval and pressure. Since individuals are all unique, they will have unique viewpoints which they should be encouraged to express, as society evolves and is enriched by the actions and ideas of individuals.

In other words, anarchist supporters of direct democracy stress the *"**creative** role of dissent"* which, they fear, *"tends to fade away in the grey uniformity required by consensus."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 8]

We must stress that anarchists are **not** in favour of a mechanical decision making process in which the majority just vote the minority away and ignore them. Far from it! Anarchists who support direct democracy see it as a dynamic debating process in which majority and minority listen to and respect each other as far possible and create a decision which all can live with (if possible). They see the process of participation within directly democratic associations as the means of creating common interests, as a process which will encourage diversity, individual and minority expression and reduce any tendency for majorities to marginalise or oppress minorities by ensuring discussion and debate occurs on important issues.



> *ican workingman [and woman] to grasp at the idea of solidarity, and, secondly, to the expulsion of active communist propagandists from Europe."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 110]

Thus rather than the numerous types of anarchism being an expression of some sort of "incoherence" within anarchism, it simply shows a movement which has its roots in real life rather than the books of long dead thinkers. It also shows a healthy recognition that people are different and that one person's dream may be another's nightmare and that different tactics and organisations may be required at different social periods and struggles. So while anarchists have their preferences on how they think a free society will, in general, be like and be created they are aware that other forms of anarchism and libertarian tactics may be more suitable for other people and social circumstances. However, just because someone calls themselves or their theory anarchism does not make it so. Any genuine type of anarchism must share the fundamental perspectives of the movement, in other words be anti-state and anti-capitalist.

Moreover, claims of anarchist "incoherence" by its critics are usually overblown. After all, being followers of Marx and/or Lenin has not stopped Marxists from splitting into numerous parties, groups and sects. Nor has it stopped sectarian conflict between them based on whose interpretation of the holy writings are the "correct" ones or who has used the "correct" quotes to bolster attempts to adjust their ideas and practice to a world significantly different from Europe in the 1850s or Russia in the 1900s. At least anarchists are honest about their differences!

Lastly, to put our cards on the table, the writers of this FAQ place themselves firmly in the "social" strand of anarchism. This does not mean that we ignore the many important ideas

*distinguish themselves by what they do, and how they organise themselves to go about doing it."* [David Graeber, **Fragments of An Anarchist Anthropology**, p. 5] This does not mean that anarchism does not have individuals who have contributed significantly to anarchist theory. Far from it, as can be seen in section A.4 there are many such people. Anarchists simply recognise that to call your theory after an individual is a kind of idolatry. Anarchists know that even the greatest thinker is only human and, consequently, can make mistakes, fail to live up to their ideals or have a partial understanding of certain issues (see section H.2 for more discussion on this). Moreover, we see that the world changes and, obviously, what was a suitable practice or programme in, say, industrialising France of the 1840s may have its limitations in 21st century France!

Consequently, it is to be expected that a social theory like anarchism would have numerous schools of thought and practice associated with it. Anarchism, as we noted in section A.5, has its roots in the struggles of working class people against oppression. Anarchist ideas have developed in many different social situations and, consequently, have reflected those circumstances. Most obviously, individualist anarchism initially developed in pre-industrial America and as a result has a different perspective on many issues than social anarchism. As America changed, going from a predominantly pre-capitalist rural society to an industrialised capitalist one, American anarchism changed:

> *"Originally the American movement, the native creation which arose with Josiah Warren in 1829, was purely individualistic; the student of economy will easily understand the material and historical causes for such development. But within the last twenty years the communist idea has made great progress, owning primarily to that concentration in capitalist production which has driven the Amer-*



## A.2.13 Are anarchists individualists or collectivists?

The short answer is: neither. This can be seen from the fact that liberal scholars denounce anarchists like Bakunin for being "collectivists" while Marxists attack Bakunin and anarchists in general for being "individualists."

This is hardly surprising, as anarchists reject both ideologies as nonsense. Whether they like it or not, non-anarchist individualists and collectivists are two sides of the same capitalist coin. This can best shown be by considering modern capitalism, in which "individualist" and "collectivist" tendencies continually interact, often with the political and economic structure swinging from one pole to the other. Capitalist collectivism and individualism are both one-sided aspects of human existence, and like all manifestations of imbalance, deeply flawed.

For anarchists, the idea that individuals should sacrifice themselves for the "group" or "greater good" is nonsensical. Groups are made up of individuals, and if people think only of what's best for the group, the group will be a lifeless shell. It is only the dynamics of human interaction within groups which give them life. "Groups" cannot think, only individuals can. This fact, ironically, leads authoritarian "collectivists" to a most particular kind of "individualism," namely the *"cult of the personality"* and leader worship. This is to be expected, since such collectivism lumps individuals into abstract groups, denies their individuality, and ends up with the need for someone with enough individuality to make decisions — a problem that is "solved" by the leader principle. Stalinism and Nazism are excellent examples of this phenomenon.

Therefore, anarchists recognise that individuals are the basic unit of society and that only individuals have interests and feelings. This means they oppose "collectivism" and the glorification of the group. In anarchist theory the group exists only to

aid and develop the individuals involved in them. This is why we place so much stress on groups structured in a libertarian manner — only a libertarian organisation allows the individuals within a group to fully express themselves, manage their own interests directly and to create social relationships which encourage individuality and individual freedom. So while society and the groups they join shapes the individual, the individual is the true basis of society. Hence Malatesta:

> *"Much has been said about the respective roles of individual initiative and social action in the life and progress of human societies ... [E]verything is maintained and kept going in the human world thanks to individual initiative ... The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity — and the* ***State*** *or government which claims to represent it — if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals. And it is in the organism of every individual that all thoughts and human actions inevitably have their origin, and from being individual they become collective thoughts and acts when they are or become accepted by many individuals. Social action, therefore, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiatives, but is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society ... [T]he question is not really changing the relationship between society and the individual ... [I]t is a question of preventing some individuals from oppressing others; of giving all individuals the same rights and the same means of action; and of replacing the initiative to the few [which Malatesta defines as a key aspect of government/hierarchy], which inevitably results in the oppression of everyone else ... "* [**Anarchy**, pp. 38–38]



> *by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 62–3]

It is within this general context that anarchists disagree. The main differences are between ***"individualist"*** and ***"social"*** anarchists, although the economic arrangements each desire are not mutually exclusive. Of the two, social anarchists (communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and so on) have always been the vast majority, with individualist anarchism being restricted mostly to the United States. In this section we indicate the differences between these main trends within the anarchist movement. As will soon become clear, while social and individualist anarchists both oppose the state and capitalism, they disagree on the nature of a free society (and how to get there). In a nutshell, social anarchists prefer communal solutions to social problems and a communal vision of the good society (i.e. a society that protects and encourages individual freedom). Individualist anarchists, as their name suggests, prefer individual solutions and have a more individualistic vision of the good society. However, we must not let these difference cloud what both schools have in common, namely a desire to maximise individual freedom and end state and capitalist domination and exploitation.

In addition to this major disagreement, anarchists also disagree over such issues as syndicalism, pacifism, "lifestylism," animal rights and a whole host of other ideas, but these, while important, are only different aspects of anarchism. Beyond a few key ideas, the anarchist movement (like life itself) is in a constant state of change, discussion and thought — as would be expected in a movement that values freedom so highly.

The most obvious thing to note about the different types of anarchism is that *"[n]one are named after some Great Thinker; instead, they are invariably named either after some kind of practice, or, most often, organisational principle ... Anarchists like to*

# A.3 What types of anarchism are there?

One thing that soon becomes clear to any one interested in anarchism is that there is not one single form of anarchism. Rather, there are different schools of anarchist thought, different types of anarchism which have many disagreements with each other on numerous issues. These types are usually distinguished by tactics and/or goals, with the latter (the vision of a free society) being the major division.

This means that anarchists, while all sharing a few key ideas, can be grouped into broad categories, depending on the economic arrangements that they consider to be most suitable to human freedom. However, all types of anarchists share a basic approach. To quote Rudolf Rocker:

> *"In common with the founders of Socialism, Anarchists demand the abolition of all economic monopolies and the common ownership of the soil and all other means of production, the use of which must be available to all without distinction; for personal and social freedom is conceivable only on the basis of equal economic advantages for everybody. Within the Socialist movement itself the Anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation of man*



These considerations do not mean that "individualism" finds favour with anarchists. As Emma Goldman pointed out, *"'rugged individualism'... is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his individuality. So-called Individualism is the social and economic* ***laissez-faire****: the exploitation of the masses by the [ruling] classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit ... That corrupt and perverse 'individualism' is the straitjacket of individuality .. [It] has inevitably resulted in the greatest modern slavery, the crassest class distinctions driving millions to the breadline. 'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking 'supermen.'"* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112]

While groups cannot think, individuals cannot live or discuss by themselves. Groups and associations are an essential aspect of individual life. Indeed, as groups generate social relationships by their very nature, they help **shape** individuals. In other words, groups structured in an authoritarian way will have a negative impact on the freedom and individuality of those within them. However, due to the abstract nature of their "individualism," capitalist individualists fail to see any difference between groups structured in a libertarian manner rather than in an authoritarian one — they are both "groups". Because of their one-sided perspective on this issue, "individualists" ironically end up supporting some of the most "collectivist" institutions in existence — capitalist companies — and, moreover, always find a need for the state despite their frequent denunciations of it. These contradictions stem from capitalist individualism's dependence on individual contracts in an unequal society, i.e. **abstract** individualism.

In contrast, anarchists stress **social** "individualism" (another, perhaps better, term for this concept could be ***"communal individuality"***). Anarchism *"insists that the centre of gravity in society is the individual — that he [sic] must*

*think for himself, act freely, and live fully... . If he is to develop freely and fully, he must be relieved from the interference and oppression of others... . [T]his has nothing in common with... 'rugged individualism.' Such predatory individualism is really flabby, not rugged. At the least danger to its safety, it runs to cover of the state and wails for protection... .Their 'rugged individualism' is simply one of the many pretences the ruling class makes to mask unbridled business and political extortion."* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 442–3]

Anarchism rejects the **abstract** individualism of capitalism, with its ideas of "absolute" freedom of the individual which is constrained by others. This theory ignores the social context in which freedom exists and grows. *"The freedom we want,"* Malatesta argued, *"for ourselves and for others, is not an absolute metaphysical, abstract freedom which in practice is inevitably translated into the oppression of the weak; but it is a real freedom, possible freedom, which is the conscious community of interests, voluntary solidarity."* [**Anarchy**, p. 43]

A society based on abstract individualism results in an inequality of power between the contracting individuals and so entails the need for an authority based on laws above them and organised coercion to enforce the contracts between them. This consequence is evident from capitalism and, most notably, in the "social contract" theory of how the state developed. In this theory it is assumed that individuals are "free" when they are isolated from each other, as they allegedly were originally in the "state of nature." Once they join society, they supposedly create a "contract" and a state to administer it. However, besides being a fantasy with no basis in reality (human beings have **always** been social animals), this "theory" is actually a justification for the state's having extensive powers over society; and this in turn is a justification of the capitalist system, which requires a strong state. It also mimics the results of the capitalist economic relations upon which this theory is built. Within capitalism, individuals "freely" contract together, but



libertarian ideas with a devote Christian belief. His ideas, along with Proudhon's, influences the Catholic Worker organisation, founded by anarchists Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933 and still active today. The anarchist activist Starhawk, active in the current anti-globalisation movement, has no problems also being a leading Pagan. However, for most anarchists, their ideas lead them logically to atheism for, as Emma Goldman put it, *"in its negation of gods is at the same time the strongest affirmation of man, and through man, the eternal yea to life, purpose, and beauty."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 248]

Nor does the anarchist case against religion imply that religious people do not take part in social struggles to improve society. Far from it. Religious people, including members of the church hierarchy, played a key role in the US civil rights movement of the 1960s. The religious belief within Zapata's army of peasants during the Mexican revolution did not stop anarchists taking part in it (indeed, it had already been heavily influenced by the ideas of anarchist militant Ricardo Flores Magon). It is the dual-nature of religion which explains why many popular movements and revolts (particularly by peasants) have used the rhetoric of religion, seeking to keep the good aspects of their faith will fighting the earthly injustice its official representatives sanctify. For anarchists, it is the willingness to fight against injustice which counts, not whether someone believes in god or not. We just think that the social role of religion is to dampen down revolt, not encourage it. The tiny number of radical priests compared to those in the mainstream or on the right suggests the validity of our analysis.

It should be stressed that anarchists, while overwhelmingly hostile to the idea of the Church and an established religion, do not object to people practising religious belief on their own or in groups, so long as that practice doesn't impinge on the liberties of others. For example, a cult that required human sacrifice or slavery would be antithetical to anarchist ideas, and would be opposed. But peaceful systems of belief could exist in harmony within in anarchist society. The anarchist view is that religion is a personal matter, above all else — if people want to believe in something, that's their business, and nobody else's as long as they do not impose those ideas on others. All we can do is discuss their ideas and try and convince them of their errors.

To end, it should noted that we are not suggesting that atheism is somehow mandatory for an anarchist. Far from it. As we discuss in section A.3.7, there are anarchists who do believe in god or some form of religion. For example, Tolstoy combined



in practice the owner rules the worker for as long as the contract is in place. (See sections A.2.14 and B.4 for further details).

Thus anarchists reject capitalist "individualism" as being, to quote Kropotkin, *"a narrow and selfish individualism"* which, moreover, is *"a foolish egoism which belittles the individual"* and is *"not individualism at all. It will not lead to what was established as a goal; that is the complete broad and most perfectly attainable development of individuality."* The hierarchy of capitalism results in *"the impoverishment of individuality"* rather than its development. To this anarchists contrast *"the individuality which attains the greatest individual development possible through the highest communist sociability in what concerns both its primordial needs and its relationships with others in general."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 295, p. 296 and p. 297] For anarchists, our freedom is enriched by those around us when we work with them as equals and not as master and servant.

In practice, both individualism and collectivism lead to a denial of both individual liberty and group autonomy and dynamics. In addition, each implies the other, with collectivism leading to a particular form of individualism and individualism leading to a particular form of collectivism.

Collectivism, with its implicit suppression of the individual, ultimately impoverishes the community, as groups are only given life by the individuals who comprise them. Individualism, with its explicit suppression of community (i.e. the people with whom you live), ultimately impoverishes the individual, since individuals do not exist apart from society but can only exist within it. In addition, individualism ends up denying the "select few" the insights and abilities of the individuals who make up the rest of society, and so is a source of self-denial. This is Individualism's fatal flaw (and contradiction), namely *"the impossibility for the individual to attain a really full development in the conditions of oppression of the mass by the 'beautiful aris-*

*tocracies'. His [or her] development would remain uni-lateral."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 293]

True liberty and community exist elsewhere.

## A.2.14 Why is voluntarism not enough?

Voluntarism means that association should be voluntary in order maximise liberty. Anarchists are, obviously, voluntarists, thinking that only in free association, created by free agreement, can individuals develop, grow, and express their liberty. However, it is evident that under capitalism voluntarism is not enough in itself to maximise liberty.

Voluntarism implies promising (i.e. the freedom to make agreements), and promising implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation. In addition, it presupposes that they can evaluate and change their actions and relationships. Contracts under capitalism, however, contradict these implications of voluntarism. For, while technically "voluntary" (though as we show in section B.4, this is not really the case), capitalist contracts result in a denial of liberty. This is because the social relationship of wage-labour involves promising to obey in return for payment. And as Carole Pateman points out, *"to promise to obey is to deny or to limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities [of independent judgement and rational deliberation]. To promise to obey is to state, that in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 19] This results in those obeying no longer making their own decisions. Thus the rational for voluntarism (i.e. that individuals are capable of thinking for themselves and must be allowed to express their individuality and make their own decisions) is violated in a



So, given the fruits of the Church, anarchists argue that it is time to uproot it and plant new trees, the trees of reason and liberty.

That said, anarchists do not deny that religions contain important ethical ideas or truths. Moreover, religions can be the base for strong and loving communities and groups. They can offer a sanctuary from the alienation and oppression of everyday life and offer a guide to action in a world where everything is for sale. Many aspects of, say, Jesus' or Buddha's life and teachings are inspiring and worth following. If this were not the case, if religions were simply a tool of the powerful, they would have long ago been rejected. Rather, they have a dual-nature in that contain both ideas necessary to live a good life as well as apologetics for power. If they did not, the oppressed would not believe and the powerful would suppress them as dangerous heresies.

And, indeed, repression has been the fate of any group that has preached a radical message. In the middle ages numerous revolutionary Christian movements and sects were crushed by the earthly powers that be with the firm support of the mainstream church. During the Spanish Civil War the Catholic church supported Franco's fascists, denouncing the killing of pro-Franco priests by supporters of the republic while remaining silent about Franco's murder of Basque priests who had supported the democratically elected government (Pope John Paul II is seeking to turn the dead pro-Franco priests into saints while the pro-Republican priests remain unmentioned). The Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, started out as a conservative but after seeing the way in which the political and economic powers were exploiting the people became their outspoken champion. He was assassinated by right-wing paramilitaries in 1980 because of this, a fate which has befallen many other supporters of liberation theology, a radical interpretation of the Gospels which tries to reconcile socialist ideas and Christian social thinking.

That religion is used to further the interests of the powerful can quickly be seen from most of history. It conditions the oppressed to humbly accept their place in life by urging the oppressed to be meek and await their reward in heaven. As Emma Goldman argued, Christianity (like religion in general) *"contains nothing dangerous to the regime of authority and wealth; it stands for self-denial and self-abnegation, for penance and regret, and is absolutely inert in the face of every [in]dignity, every outrage imposed upon mankind."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 234]

Thirdly, religion has always been a conservative force in society. This is unsurprising, as it bases itself not on investigation and analysis of the real world but rather in repeating the truths handed down from above and contained in a few holy books. Theism is then *"the theory of speculation"* while atheism is *"the science of demonstration."* The *"one hangs in the metaphysical clouds of the Beyond, while the other has its roots firmly in the soil. It is the earth, not heaven, which man must rescue if he is truly to be saved."* Atheism, then, *"expresses the expansion and growth of the human mind"* while theism *"is static and fixed."* It is *"the absolutism of theism, its pernicious influence upon humanity, its paralysing effect upon thought and action, which Atheism is fighting with all its power."* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 243, p. 245 and pp. 246–7]

As the Bible says, *"By their fruits shall ye know them."* We anarchists agree but unlike the church we apply this truth to religion as well. That is why we are, in the main, atheists. We recognise the destructive role played by the Church, and the harmful effects of organised monotheism, particularly Christianity, on people. As Goldman summaries, religion *"is the conspiracy of ignorance against reason, of darkness against light, of submission and slavery against independence and freedom; of the denial of strength and beauty, against the affirmation of the joy and glory of life."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]



hierarchical relationship as some are in charge and the many obey (see also section A.2.8). Thus any voluntarism which generates relationships of subordination is, by its very nature, incomplete and violates its own justification.

This can be seen from capitalist society, in which workers sell their freedom to a boss in order to live. In effect, under capitalism you are only free to the extent that you can choose whom you will obey! Freedom, however, must mean more than the right to change masters. Voluntary servitude is still servitude. For if, as Rousseau put it, sovereignty, *"for the same reason as makes it inalienable, cannot be represented"* neither can it be sold nor temporarily nullified by a hiring contract. Rousseau famously argued that the *"people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing."* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 266] Anarchists expand on this analysis. To paraphrase Rousseau:

> Under capitalism the worker regards herself as free; but she is grossly mistaken; she is free only when she signs her contract with her boss. As soon as it is signed, slavery overtakes her and she is nothing but an order taker.

To see why, to see the injustice, we need only quote Rousseau:

> *"That a rich and powerful man, having acquired immense possessions in land, should impose laws on those who want to establish themselves there, and that he should only allow them to do so on condition that they accept his supreme authority and obey all his wishes; that, I can still conceive … Would not this tyrannical act contain a double usurpation: that on*

*the ownership of the land and that on the liberty of the inhabitants?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 316]

Hence Proudhon's comment that *"Man may be made by property a slave or a despot by turns."* [**What is Property?**, p. 371] Little wonder we discover Bakunin rejecting *"any contract with another individual on any footing but the utmost equality and reciprocity"* as this would *"alienate his [or her] freedom"* and so would be a *"a relationship of voluntary servitude with another individual."* Anyone making such a contract in a free society (i.e. anarchist society) would be *"devoid of any sense of personal dignity."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 68–9] Only self-managed associations can create relationships of equality rather than of subordination between its members.

Therefore anarchists stress the need for direct democracy in voluntary associations in order to ensure that the concept of "freedom" is not a sham and a justification for domination, as it is under capitalism. Only self-managed associations can create relationships of equality rather than of subordination between its members.

It is for this reason that anarchists have opposed capitalism and urged *"workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* [Proudhon, **The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 277] For similar reasons, anarchists (with the notable exception of Proudhon) opposed marriage as it turned women into *"a bonded slave, who takes her master's name, her master's bread, her master's commands, and serves her master's passions ... who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"Sex Slavery"*, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 94] While marriage, due to feminist agitation, in many countries has been reformed towards the anarchist ideal of a free union of equals, it still is based on the patriarchal principles anarchists like Goldman and de Cleyre iden-



given the chance it has ruled as cruelly as any monarch or dictator. This is unsurprising:

> *"God being everything, the real world and man are nothing. God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty, power and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave. Incapable of finding justice, truth, and eternal life by his own effort, he can attain them only through a divine revelation. But whoever says revelation, says revealers, messiahs, prophets, priests, and legislators inspired by God himself; and these, as the holy instructors of humanity, chosen by God himself to direct it in the path of salvation, necessarily exercise absolute power. All men owe them passive and unlimited obedience; for against the divine reason there is no human reason, and against the justice of God no terrestrial justice holds."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

Christianity has only turned tolerant and peace-loving when it is powerless and even then it has continued its role as apologist for the powerful. This is the second reason why anarchists oppose the church for when not being the source of oppression, the church has justified it and ensured its continuation. It has kept the working class in bondage for generations by sanctioning the rule of earthly authorities and teaching working people that it is wrong to fight against those same authorities. Earthly rulers received their legitimisation from the heavenly lord, whether political (claiming that rulers are in power due to god's will) or economic (the rich having been rewarded by god). The bible praises obedience, raising it to a great virtue. More recent innovations like the Protestant work ethic also contribute to the subjugation of working people.

> *"Unless, then, we desire the enslavement and degradation of mankind .. . we may not, must not make the slightest concession either to the God of theology or to the God of metaphysics. He who, in this mystical alphabet, begins with A will inevitably end with Z; he who desires to worship God must harbour no childish illusions about the matter, but bravely renounce his liberty and humanity.*
>
> *"If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist."* [**God and the State**, p. 25]

For most anarchists, then, atheism is required due to the nature of religion. *"To proclaim as divine all that is grand, just, noble, and beautiful in humanity,"* Bakunin argued, *"is to tacitly admit that humanity of itself would have been unable to produce it — that is, that, abandoned to itself, its own nature is miserable, iniquitous, base, and ugly. Thus we come back to the essence of all religion — in other words, to the disparagement of humanity for the greater glory of divinity."* As such, to do justice to our humanity and the potential it has, anarchists argue that we must do without the harmful myth of god and all it entails and so on behalf of *"human liberty, dignity, and prosperity, we believe it our duty to recover from heaven the goods which it has stolen and return them to earth."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37 and p. 36]

As well as the theoretical degrading of humanity and its liberty, religion has other, more practical, problems with it from an anarchist point of view. Firstly, religions have been a source of inequality and oppression. Christianity (like Islam), for example, has always been a force for repression whenever it holds any political or social sway (believing you have a direct line to god is a sure way of creating an authoritarian society). The Church has been a force of social repression, genocide, and the justification for every tyrant for nearly two millennia. When



tified and condemned (see section A.3.5 for more on feminism and anarchism).

Clearly, voluntary entry is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to defend an individual's liberty. This is to be expected as it ignores (or takes for granted) the social conditions in which agreements are made and, moreover, ignores the social relationships created by them (*"For the worker who **must sell** his labour, it is impossible to remain **free.**"* [Kropotkin, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 305]). Any social relationships based on abstract individualism are likely to be based upon force, power, and authority, **not** liberty. This of course assumes a definition of liberty according to which individuals exercise their capacities and decide their own actions. Therefore, voluntarism is **not** enough to create a society that maximises liberty. This is why anarchists think that voluntary association **must** be complemented by self-management (direct democracy) **within** these associations. For anarchists, the assumptions of voluntarism imply self-management. Or, to use Proudhon's words, *"as individualism is the primordial fact of humanity, so association is its complementary term."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 430]

To answer the second objection first, in a society based on private property (and so statism), those with property have more power, which they can use to perpetuate their authority. *"Wealth is power, poverty is weakness,"* in the words of Albert Parsons. This means that under capitalism the much praised "freedom to choose" is extremely limited. It becomes, for the vast majority, the freedom to pick a master (under slavery, quipped Parsons, the master *"selected ... his own slaves. Under the wage slavery system the wage slave selects his master."*). Under capitalism, Parsons stressed, *"those disinherited of their natural rights must hire out and serve and obey the oppressing class or starve. There is no other alternative. Some things are priceless, chief among which are life and liberty. A freeman*

*[or woman] is not for sale or hire."* [**Anarchism**, p. 99 and p. 98] And why should we excuse servitude or tolerate those who desire to restrict the liberty of others? The "liberty" to command is the liberty to enslave, and so is actually a denial of liberty.

Regarding the first objection, anarchists plead guilty. We **are** prejudiced against the reduction of human beings to the status of robots. We are prejudiced in favour of human dignity and freedom. We are prejudiced, in fact, in favour of humanity and individuality.

( Section A.2.11 discusses why direct democracy is the necessary social counterpart to voluntarism (i.e. free agreement). Section B.4 discusses why capitalism cannot be based on equal bargaining power between property owners and the propertyless).

## A.2.15 What about "human nature"?

Anarchists, far from ignoring "human nature," have the only political theory that gives this concept deep thought and reflection. Too often, "human nature" is flung up as the last line of defence in an argument against anarchism, because it is thought to be beyond reply. This is not the case, however. First of all, human nature is a complex thing. If, by human nature, it is meant "what humans do," it is obvious that human nature is contradictory — love and hate, compassion and heartlessness, peace and violence, and so on, have all been expressed by people and so are all products of "human nature." Of course, what is considered "human nature" can change with changing social circumstances. For example, slavery was considered part of "human nature" and "normal" for thousands of years. Homosexuality was considered perfectly normal by the ancient Greeks yet thousands of years later the Christian



## A.2.20 Why are most anarchists atheists?

It is a fact that most anarchists are atheists. They reject the idea of god and oppose all forms of religion, particularly organised religion. Today, in secularised western European countries, religion has lost its once dominant place in society. This often makes the militant atheism of anarchism seem strange. However, once the negative role of religion is understood the importance of libertarian atheism becomes obvious. It is because of the role of religion and its institutions that anarchists have spent some time refuting the idea of religion as well as propagandising against it.

So why do so many anarchists embrace atheism? The simplest answer is that most anarchists are atheists because it is a logical extension of anarchist ideas. If anarchism is the rejection of illegitimate authorities, then it follows that it is the rejection of the so-called Ultimate Authority, God. Anarchism is grounded in reason, logic, and scientific thinking, not religious thinking. Anarchists tend to be sceptics, and not believers. Most anarchists consider the Church to be steeped in hypocrisy and the Bible a work of fiction, riddled with contradictions, absurdities and horrors. It is notorious in its debasement of women and its sexism is infamous. Yet men are treated little better. Nowhere in the bible is there an acknowledgement that human beings have inherent rights to life, liberty, happiness, dignity, fairness, or self-government. In the bible, humans are sinners, worms, and slaves (figuratively and literally, as it condones slavery). God has all the rights, humanity is nothing.

This is unsurprisingly, given the nature of religion. Bakunin put it best:

> *"The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and in practice.*

*tality, and joy."* [*"The Philosophy of Anarchism,"* **Anarchy and Order**, p. 37]

This defence of individuality is learned from nature. In an ecosystem, diversity is strength and so biodiversity becomes a source of basic ethical insight. In its most basic form, it provides a guide to *"help us distinguish which of our actions serve the thrust of natural evolution and which of them impede them."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 442]

So, the ethical concept *"lies in the feeling of sociality, inherent in the entire animal world and in the conceptions of equity, which constitutes one of the fundamental primary judgements of human reason."* Therefore anarchists embrace *"the permanent presence of a* ***double tendency*** *— towards greater development on the one side, of* ***sociality****, and, on the other side, of a consequent increase of the intensity of life which results in an increase of happiness for the* ***individuals****, and in progress — physical, intellectual, and moral."* [Kropotkin, **Ethics**, pp. 311–2 and pp. 19–20]

Anarchist attitudes to authority, the state, capitalism, private property and so on all come from our ethical belief that the liberty of individuals is of prime concern and that our ability to empathise with others, to see ourselves in others (our basic equality and common individuality, in other words).

Thus anarchism combines the subjective evaluation by individuals of a given set of circumstances and actions with the drawing of objective interpersonal conclusions of these evaluations based upon empathic bounds and discussion between equals. Anarchism is based on a humanistic approach to ethical ideas, one that evolves along with society and individual development. Hence an **ethical** society is one in which *"[d]ifference among people will be respected, indeed fostered, as elements that enrich the unity of experience and phenomenon ... [the different] will be conceived of as individual parts of a whole all the richer because of its complexity."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 82]



church denounced it as unnatural. War only become part of "human nature" once states developed. Hence Chomsky:

> "Individuals are certainly capable of evil ... But individuals are capable of all sorts of things. Human nature has lots of ways of realising itself, humans have lots of capacities and options. Which ones reveal themselves depends to a large extent on the institutional structures. If we had institutions which permitted pathological killers free rein, they'd be running the place. The only way to survive would be to let those elements of your nature manifest themselves.
>
> "If we have institutions which make greed the sole property of human beings and encourage pure greed at the expense of other human emotions and commitments, we're going to have a society based on greed, with all that follows. A different society might be organised in such a way that human feelings and emotions of other sorts, say, solidarity, support, sympathy become dominant. Then you'll have different aspects of human nature and personality revealing themselves." [**Chronicles of Dissent**, pp. 158]

Therefore, environment plays an important part in defining what "human nature" is, how it develops and what aspects of it are expressed. Indeed, one of the greatest myths about anarchism is the idea that we think human nature is inherently good (rather, we think it is inherently sociable). How it develops and expresses itself is dependent on the kind of society we live in and create. A hierarchical society will shape people in certain (negative) ways and produce a "human nature" radically different from a libertarian one. So *"when we hear men [and women] saying that Anarchists imagine men [and women]*

*much better than they really are, we merely wonder how intelligent people can repeat that nonsense. Do we not say continually that the only means of rendering men [and women] less rapacious and egotistic, less ambitious and less slavish at the same time, is to eliminate those conditions which favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness and ambition?"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 83]

As such, the use of "human nature" as an argument against anarchism is simply superficial and, ultimately, an evasion. It is an excuse not to think. *"Every fool,"* as Emma Goldman put it, *"from king to policemen, from the flatheaded parson to the visionless dabbler in science, presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature. The greater the mental charlatan, the more definite his insistence on the wickedness and weakness of human nature. Yet how can any one speak of it to-day, with every soul in prison, with every heart fettered, wounded, and maimed?"* Change society, create a better social environment and then we can judge what is a product of our natures and what is the product of an authoritarian system. For this reason, anarchism *"stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government."* For *"[f]reedom, expansion, opportunity, and above all, peace and repose, alone can teach us the real dominant factors of human nature and all its wonderful possibilities."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 73]

This does not mean that human beings are infinitely plastic, with each individual born a **tabula rasa** (blank slate) waiting to be formed by "society" (which in practice means those who run it). As Noam Chomsky argues, *"I don't think its possible to give a rational account of the concept of alienated labour on that assumption [that human nature is nothing but a historical product], nor is it possible to produce something like a moral justification for the commitment to some kind of social change, except on the basis of assumptions about human nature and how modi-*



which, according to Kropotkin, can be summarised as *"[i]s it useful to society? Then it is good. Is it hurtful? Then it is bad."* Which acts human beings think of as right or wrong is not, however, unchanging and the *"estimate of what is useful or harmful ... changes, but the foundation remains the same."* [*"Anarchist Morality"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91 and p. 92]

This sense of empathy, based upon a critical mind, is the fundamental basis of social ethics — the 'what-should-be' can be seen as an ethical criterion for the truth or validity of an objective 'what-is.' So, while recognising the root of ethics in nature, anarchists consider ethics as fundamentally a **human** idea — the product of life, thought and evolution created by individuals and generalised by social living and community.

So what, for anarchists, is unethical behaviour? Essentially anything that denies the most precious achievement of history: the liberty, uniqueness and dignity of the individual.

Individuals can see what actions are unethical because, due to empathy, they can place themselves into the position of those suffering the behaviour. Acts which restrict individuality can be considered unethical for two (interrelated) reasons.

Firstly, the protection and development of individuality in all enriches the life of every individual and it gives pleasure to individuals because of the diversity it produces. This egoist basis of ethics reinforces the second (social) reason, namely that individuality is good for society for it enriches the community and social life, strengthening it and allowing it to grow and evolve. As Bakunin constantly argued, progress is marked by a movement from *"the simple to the complex"* or, in the words of Herbert Read, it *"is measured by the degree of differentiation within a society. If the individual is a unit in a corporate mass, his [or her] life will be limited, dull, and mechanical. If the individual is a unit on his [or her] own, with space and potentiality for separate action ...he can develop — develop in the only real meaning of the word — develop in consciousness of strength, vi-*

sion of what gives us pleasure as a whole individual (both rational and emotional, reason and empathy). This leads all anarchists to reject the false division between egoism and altruism and recognise that what many people (for example, capitalists) call "egoism" results in individual self-negation and a reduction of individual self-interest. As Kropotkin argues:

> *"What was it that morality, evolving in animal and human societies, was striving for, if not for the opposition to the promptings of narrow egoism, and bringing up humanity in the spirit of the development of altruism? The very expressions 'egoism' and 'altruism' are incorrect, because there can be no pure altruism without an admixture of personal pleasure — and consequently, without egoism. It would therefore be more nearly correct to say that ethics aims at* ***the development of social habits and the weakening of the narrowly personal habits.*** *These last make the individual lose sight of society through his regard for his own person, and therefore they even fail to attain their object, i.e. the welfare of the individual, whereas the development of habits of work in common, and of mutual aid in general, leads to a series of beneficial consequences in the family as well as society."* [**Ethics**, pp. 307–8]

Therefore anarchism is based upon the rejection of moral absolutism (i.e. *"God's Law," "Natural Law," "Man's Nature," "A is A"*) and the narrow egotism which moral relativism so easily lends itself to. Instead, anarchists recognise that there exists concepts of right and wrong which exist outside of an individual's evaluation of their own acts.

This is because of the social nature of humanity. The interactions between individuals do develop into a social maxim



*fications in the structure of society will be better able to conform to some of the fundamental needs that are part of our essential nature."* [**Language and Politics**, p. 215] We do not wish to enter the debate about what human characteristics are and are not "innate." All we will say is that human beings have an innate ability to think and learn — that much is obvious, we feel — and that humans are sociable creatures, needing the company of others to feel complete and to prosper. Moreover, they have the ability to recognise and oppose injustice and oppression (Bakunin rightly considered *"**the power to think** and **the desire to rebel**"* as *"precious faculties."* [**God and the State**, p. 9]).

These three features, we think, suggest the viability of an anarchist society. The innate ability to think for oneself automatically makes all forms of hierarchy illegitimate, and our need for social relationships implies that we can organise without the state. The deep unhappiness and alienation afflicting modern society reveals that the centralisation and authoritarianism of capitalism and the state are denying some innate needs within us. In fact, as mentioned earlier, for the great majority of its existence the human race **has** lived in anarchic communities, with little or no hierarchy. That modern society calls such people "savages" or "primitive" is pure arrogance. So who can tell whether anarchism is against "human nature"? Anarchists have accumulated much evidence to suggest that it may not be.

As for the charge the anarchists demand too much of "human nature," it is often **non** anarchists who make the greatest claims on it. For *"while our opponents seem to admit there is a kind of salt of the earth — the rulers, the employers, the leaders — who, happily enough, prevent those bad men — the ruled, the exploited, the led — from becoming still worse than they are"* we anarchists *"maintain that **both** rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority"* and *"**both** exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation."* So *"there is [a] difference, and a very important one. **We** admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no ex-*

*ception for the rulers. **They** make it, although sometimes unconsciously, and because we make no such exception, they say that we are dreamers."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83] If human nature is so bad, then giving some people power over others and hoping this will lead to justice and freedom is hopelessly utopian.

Moreover, as noted, Anarchists argue that hierarchical organisations bring out the worse in human nature. Both the oppressor and the oppressed are negatively affected by the authoritarian relationships so produced. *"It is a characteristic of privilege and of every kind of privilege,"* argued Bakunin, *"to kill the mind and heart of man ... That is a social law which admits no exceptions ... It is the law of equality and humanity."* [**God and the State**, p. 31] And while the privileged become corrupted by power, the powerless (in general) become servile in heart and mind (luckily the human spirit is such that there will always be rebels no matter the oppression for where there is oppression, there is resistance and, consequently, hope). As such, it seems strange for anarchists to hear non-anarchists justify hierarchy in terms of the (distorted) "human nature" it produces.

Sadly, too many have done precisely this. It continues to this day. For example, with the rise of "sociobiology," some claim (with very little **real** evidence) that capitalism is a product of our "nature," which is determined by our genes. These claims are simply a new variation of the "human nature" argument and have, unsurprisingly, been leapt upon by the powers that be. Considering the dearth of evidence, their support for this "new" doctrine must be purely the result of its utility to those in power — i.e. the fact that it is useful to have an "objective" and "scientific" basis to rationalise inequalities in wealth and power (for a discussion of this process see **Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature** by Steven Rose, R.C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin).

This is not to say that it does not hold a grain of truth. As scientist Stephen Jay Gould notes, *"the range of our potential*



*their **equals** can obey the rule: 'Do not do to others what you do not wish them to do to you.' A serf-owner and a slave merchant can evidently not recognise ... the 'categorial imperative' [of treating people as ends in themselves and not as means] as regards serfs [or slaves] because they do not look upon them as equals."* Hence the *"greatest obstacle to the maintenance of a certain moral level in our present societies lies in the absence of social equality. Without **real** equality, the sense of justice can never be universally developed, because **Justice implies the recognition of Equality.**"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 88 and p. 79]

Capitalism, like any society, gets the ethical behaviour it deserves..

In a society which moves between moral relativism and absolutism it is little wonder that egoism becomes confused with egotism. By disempowering individuals from developing their own ethical ideas and instead encouraging blind obedience to external authority (and so moral relativism once individuals think that they are without that authority's power), capitalist society ensures an impoverishment of individuality and ego. As Erich Fromm puts it:

> *"The failure of modern culture lies not in its principle of individualism, not in the idea that moral virtue is the same as the pursuit of self-interest, but in the deterioration of the meaning of self-interest; not in the fact that people are **too much concerned with their self-interest,** but that they are **not concerned enough with the interest of their real self; not in the fact that they are too selfish, but that they do not love themselves.**"* [**Man for Himself**, p. 139]

Therefore, strictly speaking, anarchism is based upon an egoistic frame of reference — ethical ideas must be an expres-

3) The feeling of empathy — *"the true origin of the moral sentiment .. . [is] simply in the feeling of sympathy."* [*"Anarchist Morality"*, **Anarchism**, p. 94] In other words, an individual's ability to feel and share experiences and concepts with others.

This last factor is very important for the development of a sense of ethics. As Kropotkin argued, *"[t]he more powerful your imagination, the better you can picture to yourself what any being feels when it is made to suffer, and the more intense and delicate will your moral sense be.. . And the more you are accustomed by circumstances, by those surrounding you, or by the intensity of your own thought and your imagination, to **act** as your own thought and imagination urge, the more will the moral sentiment grow in you, the more will it became habitual."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 95]

So, anarchism is based (essentially) upon the ethical maxim *"treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances."* Anarchists are neither egoists nor altruists when it come to moral stands, they are simply **human.**

As Kropotkin noted, *"egoism"* and *"altruism"* both have their roots in the same motive — *"however great the difference between the two actions in their result of humanity, the motive is the same. It is the quest for pleasure."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

For anarchists, a person's sense of ethics must be developed by themselves and requires the full use of an individual's mental abilities as part of a social grouping, as part of a community. As capitalism and other forms of authority weaken the individual's imagination and reduce the number of outlets for them to exercise their reason under the dead weight of hierarchy as well as disrupting community, little wonder that life under capitalism is marked by a stark disregard for others and lack of ethical behaviour.

Combined with these factors is the role played by inequality within society. Without equality, there can be no real ethics for *"Justice implies Equality... only those who consider **others** as*



*behaviour is circumscribed by our biology"* and if this is what sociobiology means *"by genetic control, then we can scarcely disagree."* However, this is not what is meant. Rather, it is a form of *"biological determinism"* that sociobiology argues for. Saying that there are specific genes for specific human traits says little for while *"[v]iolence, sexism, and general nastiness **are** biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviours"* so are *"peacefulness, equality, and kindness."* And so *"we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish."* That this may be the case can be seen from the works of sociobiologists themselves, who *"acknowledge diversity"* in human cultures while *"often dismiss[ing] the uncomfortable 'exceptions' as temporary and unimportant aberrations."* This is surprising, for if you believe that *"repeated, often genocidal warfare has shaped our genetic destiny, the existence of nonaggressive peoples is embarrassing."* [**Ever Since Darwin**, p. 252, p. 257 and p. 254]

Like the social Darwinism that preceded it, sociobiology proceeds by first projecting the dominant ideas of current society onto nature (often unconsciously, so that scientists mistakenly consider the ideas in question as both "normal" and "natural"). Bookchin refers to this as *"the subtle projection of historically conditioned human values"* onto nature rather than *"scientific objectivity."* Then the theories of nature produced in this manner are transferred **back** onto society and history, being used to "prove" that the principles of capitalism (hierarchy, authority, competition, etc.) are eternal **laws,** which are then appealed to as a justification for the status quo! *"What this procedure does accomplish,"* notes Bookchin, *"is reinforce human social hierarchies by justifying the command of men and women as innate features of the 'natural order.' Human domination is thereby transcribed into the genetic code as biologically immutable."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 95 and p. 92] Amazingly, there are many supposedly intelligent people who take this sleight-of-hand seriously.

This can be seen when "hierarchies" in nature are used to explain, and so justify, hierarchies in human societies. Such analogies are misleading for they forget the institutional nature of human life. As Murray Bookchin notes in his critique of sociobiology, a *"weak, enfeebled, unnerved, and sick ape is hardly likely to become an 'alpha' male, much less retain this highly ephemeral 'status.' By contrast, the most physically and mentally pathological human rulers have exercised authority with devastating effect in the course of history."* This *"expresses a power of hierarchical* ***institutions*** *over persons that is completely reversed in so-called 'animal hierarchies' where the absence of institutions is precisely the only intelligible way of talking about 'alpha males' or 'queen bees.'"* [*"Sociobiology or Social Ecology"*, **Which way for the Ecology Movement?**, p. 58] Thus what makes human society unique is conveniently ignored and the real sources of power in society are hidden under a genetic screen.

The sort of apologetics associated with appeals to "human nature" (or sociobiology at its worse) are natural, of course, because every ruling class needs to justify their right to rule. Hence they support doctrines that defined the latter in ways appearing to justify elite power — be it sociobiology, divine right, original sin, etc. Obviously, such doctrines have always been wrong ... until now, of course, as it is obvious our current society truly conforms to "human nature" and it has been scientifically proven by our current scientific priesthood!

The arrogance of this claim is truly amazing. History hasn't stopped. One thousand years from now, society will be completely different from what it is presently or from what anyone has imagined. No government in place at the moment will still be around, and the current economic system will not exist. The only thing that may remain the same is that people will still be claiming that their new society is the "One True System" that completely conforms to human nature, even though all past systems did not.



Therefore Anarchists take, essentially, a scientific approach to problems. Anarchists arrive at ethical judgements without relying on the mythology of spiritual aid, but on the merits of their own minds. This is done through logic and reason, and is a far better route to resolving moral questions than obsolete, authoritarian systems like orthodox religion and certainly better than the "there is no wrong or right" of moral relativism.

So, what are the source of ethical concepts? For Kropotkin, *"nature has thus to be recognised as the* ***first ethical teacher of man.*** *The social instinct, innate in men as well as in all the social animals, — this is the origin of all ethical conceptions and all subsequent development of morality."* [**Ethics**, p. 45]

Life, in other words, is the basis of anarchist ethics. This means that, essentially (according to anarchists), an individual's ethical viewpoints are derived from three basic sources:

1) from the society an individual lives in. As Kropotkin pointed out, *"Man's conceptions of morality are completely dependent upon the form that their social life assumed at a given time in a given locality ... this [social life] is reflected in the moral conceptions of men and in the moral teachings of the given epoch."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 315] In other words, experience of life and of living.

2) A critical evaluation by individuals of their society's ethical norms, as indicated above. This is the core of Erich Fromm's argument that *"Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only using his own powers can he give meaning to his life ...****there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productively.****"* [**Man for Himself**, p. 45] In other words, individual thought and development.

> *"All progress begins by abolishing something; every reform rests upon denunciation of some abuse; each new idea is based upon the proved insufficiency of the old idea."*

Most anarchists take the viewpoint that ethical standards, like life itself, are in a constant process of evolution. This leads them to reject the various notions of *"God's Law," "Natural Law,"* and so on in favour of a theory of ethical development based upon the idea that individuals are entirely empowered to question and assess the world around them — in fact, they require it in order to be truly free. You cannot be an anarchist and blindly accept **anything**! Michael Bakunin, one of the founding anarchist thinkers, expressed this radical scepticism as so:

> *"No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world. I cleave to no system. I am a true seeker."*

Any system of ethics which is not based on individual questioning can only be authoritarian. Erich Fromm explains why:

> *"Formally, authoritarian ethics denies man's capacity to know what is good or bad; the norm giver is always an authority transcending the individual. Such a system is based not on reason and knowledge but on awe of the authority and on the subject's feeling of weakness and dependence; the surrender of decision making to the authority results from the latter's magic power; its decisions can not and must not be questioned. **Materially**, or according to content, authoritarian ethics answers the question of what is good or bad primarily in terms of the interests of the authority, not the interests of the subject; it is exploitative, although the subject may derive considerable benefits, psychic or material, from it."* [**Man For Himself**, p. 10]



Of course, it does not cross the minds of supporters of capitalism that people from different cultures may draw different conclusions from the same facts — conclusions that may be **more** valid. Nor does it occur to capitalist apologists that the theories of the "objective" scientists may be framed in the context of the dominant ideas of the society they live in. It comes as no surprise to anarchists, however, that scientists working in Tsarist Russia developed a theory of evolution based on **co-operation** within species, quite unlike their counterparts in capitalist Britain, who developed a theory based on **competitive struggle** within and between species. That the latter theory reflected the dominant political and economic theories of British society (notably competitive individualism) is pure coincidence, of course.

Kropotkin's classic work **Mutual Aid**, for example, was written in response to the obvious inaccuracies that British representatives of Darwinism had projected onto nature and human life. Building upon the mainstream Russian criticism of the British Darwinism of the time, Kropotkin showed (with substantial empirical evidence) that "mutual aid" within a group or species played as important a role as "mutual struggle" between individuals within those groups or species (see Stephan Jay Gould's essay *"Kropotkin was no Crackpot"* in his book **Bully for Brontosaurus** for details and an evaluation). It was, he stressed, a *"factor"* in evolution along with competition, a factor which, in most circumstances, was far more important to survival. Thus co-operation is just as "natural" as competition so proving that "human nature" was not a barrier to anarchism as co-operation between members of a species can be the best pathway to advantage individuals.

To conclude. Anarchists argue that anarchy is not against "human nature" for two main reasons. Firstly, what is considered as being "human nature" is shaped by the society we live in and the relationships we create. This means a hierarchical society will encourage certain personality traits to dominate

while an anarchist one would encourage others. As such, anarchists *"do not so much rely on the fact that human nature will change as they do upon the theory that the same nature will act differently under different circumstances."* Secondly, change *"seems to be one of the fundamental laws of existence"* so *"who can say that man [sic!] has reached the limits of his possibilities."* [George Barrett, **Objections to Anarchism**, pp. 360–1 and p. 360]

For useful discussions on anarchist ideas on human nature, both of which refute the idea that anarchists think human beings are naturally good, see Peter Marshall's *"Human nature and anarchism"* [David Goodway (ed.), **For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice**, pp. 127–149] and David Hartley's *"Communitarian Anarchism and Human Nature"*. [**Anarchist Studies**, vol. 3, no. 2, Autumn 1995, pp. 145–164]

## A.2.16 Does anarchism require "perfect" people to work?

No. Anarchy is not a utopia, a "perfect" society. It will be a ***human*** society, with all the problems, hopes, and fears associated with human beings. Anarchists do not think that human beings need to be "perfect" for anarchy to work. They only need to be free. Thus Christie and Meltzer:

> *"[A] common fallacy [is] that revolutionary socialism [i.e. anarchism] is an 'idealisation' of the workers and [so] the mere recital of their present faults is a refutation of the class struggle ... it seems morally unreasonable that a free society ... could exist without moral or ethical perfection. But so far as the overthrow of [existing] society is concerned, we may ignore the fact of people's shortcomings and prejudices, so long as they do not become*



free themselves from the confines of existing morality and question that morality — *"I decide whether it is the **right thing** for me; there is no right **outside** me."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 189]

Few anarchists, however, would go so far as Stirner and reject **any** concept of social ethics at all (saying that, Stirner does value some universal concepts although they are egoistic ones). Such extreme moral relativism is almost as bad as moral absolutism for most anarchists (moral relativism is the view that there is no right or wrong beyond what suits an individual while moral absolutism is that view that what is right and wrong is independent of what individuals think).

It is often claimed that modern society is breaking up because of excessive "egoism" or moral relativism. This is false. As far as moral relativism goes, this is a step forward from the moral absolutism urged upon society by various Moralists and true-believers because it bases itself, however slimly, upon the idea of individual reason. However, as it denies the existence (or desirability) of ethics it is but the mirror image of what it is rebelling against. Neither option empowers the individual or is liberating.

Consequently, both of these attitudes hold enormous attraction to authoritarians, as a populace that is either unable to form an opinion about things (and will tolerate anything) or who blindly follow the commands of the ruling elite are of great value to those in power. Both are rejected by most anarchists in favour of an evolutionary approach to ethics based upon human reason to develop the ethical concepts and interpersonal empathy to generalise these concepts into ethical attitudes within society as well as within individuals. An anarchistic approach to ethics therefore shares the critical individual investigation implied in moral relativism but grounds itself into common feelings of right and wrong. As Proudhon argued:

Terrorism has been used by many other political, social and religious groups and parties. For example, Christians, Marxists, Hindus, Nationalists, Republicans, Moslems, Sikhs, Fascists, Jews and Patriots have all committed acts of terrorism. Few of these movements or ideas have been labelled as "terrorist by nature" or continually associated with violence — which shows anarchism's threat to the status quo. There is nothing more likely to discredit and marginalise an idea than for malicious and/or ill-informed persons to portray those who believe and practice it as "mad bombers" with no opinions or ideals at all, just an insane urge to destroy.

Of course, the vast majority of Christians and so on have opposed terrorism as morally repugnant and counter-productive. As have the vast majority of anarchists, at all times and places. However, it seems that in our case it is necessary to state our opposition to terrorism time and time again.

So, to summarise — only a small minority of terrorists have ever been anarchists, and only a small minority of anarchists have ever been terrorists. The anarchist movement as a whole has always recognised that social relationships cannot be assassinated or bombed out of existence. Compared to the violence of the state and capitalism, anarchist violence is a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately most people remember the acts of the few anarchists who have committed violence rather than the acts of violence and repression by the state and capital that prompted those acts.

## A.2.19 What ethical views do anarchists hold?

Anarchist viewpoints on ethics vary considerably, although all share a common belief in the need for an individual to develop within themselves their own sense of ethics. All anarchists agree with Max Stirner that an individual must



> *institutionalised. One may view without concern the fact … that the workers might achieve control of their places of work long before they had acquired the social graces of the 'intellectual' or shed all the prejudices of the present society from family discipline to xenophobia. What does it matter, so long as they can run industry without masters? Prejudices wither in freedom and only flourish while the social climate is favourable to them … What we say is … that once life can continue without imposed authority from above, and imposed authority cannot survive the withdrawal of labour from its service, the prejudices of authoritarianism will disappear. There is no cure for them other than the free process of education.*" [**The Floodgates of Anarchy**, pp. 36–7]

Obviously, though, we think that a free society will produce people who are more in tune with both their own and others individuality and needs, thus reducing individual conflict. Remaining disputes would be solved by reasonable methods, for example, the use of juries, mutual third parties, or community and workplace assemblies (see section I.5.8 for a discussion of how could be done for anti-social activities as well as disputes).

Like the "anarchism-is-against-human-nature" argument (see section A.2.15), opponents of anarchism usually assume "perfect" people — people who are not corrupted by power when placed in positions of authority, people who are strangely unaffected by the distorting effects of hierarchy, privilege, and so forth. However, anarchists make no such claims about human perfection. We simply recognise that vesting power in the hands of one person or an elite is never a good idea, as people are not perfect.

It should be noted that the idea that anarchism requires a "new" (perfect) man or woman is often raised by the opponents

of anarchism to discredit it (and, usually, to justify the retention of hierarchical authority, particularly capitalist relations of production). After all, people are not perfect and are unlikely ever to be. As such, they pounce on every example of a government falling and the resulting chaos to dismiss anarchism as unrealistic. The media loves to proclaim a country to be falling into "anarchy" whenever there is a disruption in "law and order" and looting takes place.

Anarchists are not impressed by this argument. A moment's reflection shows why, for the detractors make the basic mistake of assuming an anarchist society without anarchists! (A variation of such claims is raised by the right-wing "anarcho"-capitalists to discredit real anarchism. However, their "objection" discredits their own claim to be anarchists for they implicitly assume an anarchist society without anarchists!). Needless to say, an "anarchy" made up of people who still saw the need for authority, property and statism would soon become authoritarian (i.e. non-anarchist) again. This is because even if the government disappeared tomorrow, the same system would soon grow up again, because *"the strength of the government rests not with itself, but with the people. A great tyrant may be a fool, and not a superman. His strength lies not in himself, but in the superstition of the people who think that it is right to obey him. So long as that superstition exists it is useless for some liberator to cut off the head of tyranny; the people will create another, for they have grown accustomed to rely on something outside themselves."* [George Barrett, **Objections to Anarchism**, p. 355]

Hence Alexander Berkman:

> *"Our social institutions are founded on certain ideas; as long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built on them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism*



innocent people" then the state is the greatest terrorist of them all (as well as having the biggest bombs and other weapons of destruction available on the planet). If the people committing "acts of terror" are really anarchists, they would do everything possible to avoid harming innocent people and never use the statist line that "collateral damage" is regrettable but inevitable. This is why the vast majority of "propaganda by the deed" acts were directed towards individuals of the ruling class, such as Presidents and Royalty, and were the result of previous acts of state and capitalist violence.

So "terrorist" acts have been committed by anarchists. This is a fact. However, it has nothing to do with anarchism as a socio-political theory. As Emma Goldman argued, it was *"not Anarchism, as such, but the brutal slaughter of the eleven steel workers [that] was the urge for Alexander Berkman's act."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 268] Equally, members of **other** political and religious groups have also committed such acts. As the Freedom Group of London argued:

> *"There is a truism that the man [or woman] in the street seems always to forget, when he is abusing the Anarchists, or whatever party happens to be his* ***bete noire*** *for the moment, as the cause of some outrage just perpetrated. This indisputable fact is that homicidal outrages have, from time immemorial, been the reply of goaded and desperate classes, and goaded and desperate individuals, to wrongs from their fellowmen [and women], which they felt to be intolerable. Such acts are the violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive … their cause lies not in any special conviction, but in the depths of .. . human nature itself. The whole course of history, political and social, is strewn with evidence of this."* [quoted by Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 259]

> *"to bring about a revolution, and specially the Anarchist revolution[, it] is necessary that the people be conscious of their rights and their strength; it is necessary that they be ready to fight and ready to take the conduct of their affairs into their own hands. It must be the constant preoccupation of the revolutionists, the point towards which all their activity must aim, to bring about this state of mind among the masses ... Who expects the emancipation of mankind to come, not from the persistent and harmonious co-operation of all men [and women] of progress, but from the accidental or providential happening of some acts of heroism, is not better advised that one who expected it from the intervention of an ingenious legislator or of a victorious general ... our ideas oblige us to put all our hopes in the masses, because we do not believe in the possibility of imposing good by force and we do not want to be commanded ... Today, that which ... was the logical outcome of our ideas, the condition which our conception of the revolution and reorganisation of society imposes on us ... [is] to live among the people and to win them over to our ideas by actively taking part in their struggles and sufferings."* [Errico Malatesta, *"The Duties of the Present Hour"*, pp. 181–3, **Anarchism**, Robert Graham (ed.), pp. 180–1]

Despite most anarchists' tactical disagreement with propaganda by deed, few would consider it to be terrorism or rule out assassination under all circumstances. Bombing a village during a war because there **might** be an enemy in it is terrorism, whereas assassinating a murdering dictator or head of a repressive state is defence at best and revenge at worst. As anarchists have long pointed out, if by terrorism it is meant "killing



> *will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. xii]

In other words, anarchy needs ***anarchists*** in order to be created and survive. But these anarchists need not be perfect, just people who have freed themselves, by their own efforts, of the superstition that command-and-obedience relations and capitalist property rights are necessary. The implicit assumption in the idea that anarchy needs "perfect" people is that freedom will be given, not taken; hence the obvious conclusion follows that an anarchy requiring "perfect" people will fail. But this argument ignores the need for self-activity and self-liberation in order to create a free society. For anarchists, *"history is nothing but a struggle between the rulers and the ruled, the oppressors and the oppressed."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 85] Ideas change through struggle and, consequently, in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, we not only change the world, we change ourselves at the same time. So it is the struggle for freedom which creates people capable of taking the responsibility for their own lives, communities and planet. People capable of living as equals in a free society, so making anarchy possible.

As such, the chaos which often results when a government disappears is not anarchy nor, in fact, a case against anarchism. It simple means that the necessary preconditions for creating an anarchist society do not exist. Anarchy would be the product of collective struggle at the heart of society, not the product of external shocks. Nor, we should note, do anarchists think that such a society will appear "overnight." Rather, we see the creation of an anarchist system as a process, not an event. The ins-and-outs of how it would function will evolve over time in

the light of experience and objective circumstances, not appear in a perfect form immediately (see section H.2.5 for a discussion of Marxist claims otherwise).

Therefore, anarchists do not conclude that "perfect" people are necessary anarchism to work because the anarchist is *"no liberator with a divine mission to free humanity, but he is a part of that humanity struggling onwards towards liberty."* As such, *"[i]f, then, by some external means an Anarchist Revolution could be, so to speak, supplied ready-made and thrust upon the people, it is true that they would reject it and rebuild the old society. If, on the other hand, the people develop their ideas of freedom, and they themselves get rid of the last stronghold of tyranny — the government — then indeed the revolution will be permanently accomplished."* [George Barrett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 355]

This is not to suggest that an anarchist society must wait until ***everyone*** is an anarchist. Far from it. It is highly unlikely, for example, that the rich and powerful will suddenly see the errors of their ways and voluntarily renounce their privileges. Faced with a large and growing anarchist movement, the ruling elite has always used repression to defend its position in society. The use of fascism in Spain (see section A.5.6) and Italy (see section A.5.5) show the depths the capitalist class can sink to. Anarchism will be created in the face of opposition by the ruling minorities and, consequently, will need to defend itself against attempts to recreate authority (see section H.2.1 for a refutation of Marxist claims anarchists reject the need to defend an anarchist society against counter-revolution).

Instead anarchists argue that we should focus our activity on convincing those subject to oppression and exploitation that they have the power to resist both and, ultimately, can end both by destroying the social institutions that cause them. As Malatesta argued, *"we need the support of the masses to build a force of sufficient strength to achieve our specific task of radical change in the social organism by the direct action of the masses, we must get closer to them, accept them as they are, and*



*diminished as a result of the preoccupation with"* propaganda by deed. He *"saw the best possibility for popular revolution in the ... development of the new militancy in the labour movement. From now on he focussed his attention increasingly on the importance of revolutionary minorities working among the masses to develop the spirit of revolt."* However, even during the early 1880s when his support for individual acts of revolt (if not for propaganda by the deed) was highest, he saw the need for collective class struggle and, therefore, *"Kropotkin always insisted on the importance of the labour movement in the struggles leading up to the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 205–6, p. 208 and p. 280]

Kropotkin was not alone. More and more anarchists came to see "propaganda by the deed" as giving the state an excuse to clamp down on both the anarchist and labour movements. Moreover, it gave the media (and opponents of anarchism) a chance to associate anarchism with mindless violence, thus alienating much of the population from the movement. This false association is renewed at every opportunity, regardless of the facts (for example, even though Individualist Anarchists rejected "propaganda by the deed" totally, they were also smeared by the press as "violent" and "terrorists").

In addition, as Kropotkin pointed out, the assumption behind propaganda by the deed, i.e. that everyone was waiting for a chance to rebel, was false. In fact, people are products of the system in which they live; hence they accepted most of the myths used to keep that system going. With the failure of propaganda by deed, anarchists turned back to what most of the movement had been doing anyway: encouraging the class struggle and the process of self-liberation. This turn back to the roots of anarchism can be seen from the rise in anarcho-syndicalist unions after 1890 (see section A.5.3). This position flows naturally from anarchist theory, unlike the idea of individual acts of violence:

Needless to say, the state and media painted all anarchists with the same brush. They still do, usually inaccurately (such as blaming Bakunin for such acts even though he had been dead years before the tactic was even discussed in anarchist circles or by labelling non-anarchist groups anarchists!).

All in all, the "propaganda by the deed" phase of anarchism was a failure, as the vast majority of anarchists soon came to see. Kropotkin can be considered typical. He *"never liked the slogan **propaganda by deed**, and did not use it to describe his own ideas of revolutionary action."* However, in 1879 while still *"urg[ing] the importance of collective action"* he started *"expressing considerable sympathy and interest in **attentats**"* (these *"collective forms of action"* were seen as acting *"at the trade union and communal level"*). In 1880 he *"became less preoccupied with collective action and this enthusiasm for acts of revolt by individuals and small groups increased."* This did not last and Kropotkin soon attached *"progressively less importance to isolated acts of revolt"* particularly once *"he saw greater opportunities for developing collective action in the new militant trade unionism."* [Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 92, p. 115, p. 129, pp. 129–30, p. 205] By the late 1880s and early 1890s he came to disapprove of such acts of violence. This was partly due to simple revulsion at the worse of the acts (such as the Barcelona Theatre bombing in response to the state murder of anarchists involved in the Jerez uprising of 1892 and Emile Henry's bombing of a cafe in response to state repression) and partly due to the awareness that it was hindering the anarchist cause.

Kropotkin recognised that the *"spate of terrorist acts"* of the 1880s had caused *"the authorities into taking repressive action against the movement"* and were *"not in his view consistent with the anarchist ideal and did little or nothing to promote popular revolt."* In addition, he was *"anxious about the isolation of the movement from the masses"* which *"had increased rather than*



*from within their ranks seek to 'push' them forward as much as possible."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 155–6] This would create the conditions that make possible a rapid evolution towards anarchism as what was initially accepted by a minority *"but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people"* and *"the minority will become the People, the great mass, and that mass rising up against property and the State, will march forward towards anarchist communism."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 75] Hence the importance anarchists attach to spreading our ideas and arguing the case for anarchism. This creates conscious anarchists from those questioning the injustices of capitalism and the state.

This process is helped by the nature of hierarchical society and the resistance it naturally developed in those subject to it. Anarchist ideas develop spontaneously through struggle. As we discuss in section I.2.3, anarchistic organisations are often created as part of the resistance against oppression and exploitation which marks every hierarchical system and can., potentially, be the framework of a few society. As such, the creation of libertarian institutions is, therefore, always a possibility in any situation. A peoples' experiences may push them towards anarchist conclusions, namely the awareness that the state exists to protect the wealthy and powerful few and to disempower the many. That while it is needed to maintain class and hierarchical society, it is not needed to organise society nor can it do so in a just and fair way for all. This is possible. However, without a conscious anarchist presence any libertarian tendencies are likely to be used, abused and finally destroyed by parties or religious groups seeking political power over the masses (the Russian Revolution is the most famous example of this process). It is for that reason anarchists organise to influence the struggle and spread our ideas (see section J.3 for details). For it is the case that only when anarchist ideas *"acquire a predominating influence"* and are *"accepted by a sufficiently*

*large section of the population"* will we *"have achieved anarchy, or taken a step towards anarchy."* For anarchy *"cannot be imposed against the wishes of the people."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 159 and p. 163]

So, to conclude, the creation of an anarchist society is not dependent on people being perfect but it is dependent on a large majority being anarchists and wanting to reorganise society in a libertarian manner. This will not eliminate conflict between individuals nor create a fully formed anarchist humanity overnight but it will lay the ground for the gradual elimination of whatever prejudices and anti-social behaviour that remain after the struggle to change society has revolutionised those doing it.

## A.2.17 Aren't most people too stupid for a free society to work?

We are sorry to have to include this question in an anarchist FAQ, but we know that many political ideologies explicitly assume that ordinary people are too stupid to be able to manage their own lives and run society. All aspects of the capitalist political agenda, from Left to Right, contain people who make this claim. Be it Leninists, fascists, Fabians or Objectivists, it is assumed that only a select few are creative and intelligent and that these people should govern others. Usually, this elitism is masked by fine, flowing rhetoric about "freedom," "democracy" and other platitudes with which the ideologues attempt to dull people's critical thought by telling them want they want to hear.

It is, of course, also no surprise that those who believe in "natural" elites always class themselves at the top. We have yet to discover an "objectivist", for example, who considers themselves part of the great mass of "second-handers" (it is always amusing to hear people who simply parrot the ideas of



Anarchists point to the hypocrisy of the accusation that anarchists are "violent" given that such claims come from either supporters of government or the actual governments themselves, governments *"which came into being through violence, which maintain themselves in power through violence, and which use violence constantly to keep down rebellion and to bully other nations."* [Howard Zinn, **The Zinn Reader**, p. 652]

We can get a feel of the hypocrisy surrounding condemnation of anarchist violence by non-anarchists by considering their response to state violence. For example, many capitalist papers and individuals in the 1920s and 1930s celebrated Fascism as well as Mussolini and Hitler. Anarchists, in contrast, fought Fascism to the death and tried to assassinate both Mussolini and Hitler. Obviously supporting murderous dictatorships is not "violence" and "terrorism" but resisting such regimes is! Similarly, non-anarchists can support repressive and authoritarian states, war and the suppression of strikes and unrest by violence ("restoring law and order") and not be considered "violent." Anarchists, in contrast, are condemned as "violent" and "terrorist" because a few of them tried to revenge such acts of oppression and state/capitalist violence! Similarly, it seems the height of hypocrisy for someone to denounce the anarchist "violence" which produces a few broken windows in, say, Seattle while supporting the actual violence of the police in imposing the state's rule or, even worse, supporting the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. If anyone should be considered violent it is the supporter of state and its actions yet people do not see the obvious and *"deplore the type of violence that the state deplores, and applaud the violence that the state practises."* [Christie and Meltzer, **The Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 132]

It must be noted that the majority of anarchists did not support this tactic. Of those who committed "propaganda by the deed" (sometimes called *"attentats"*), as Murray Bookchin points out, only a *"few ... were members of Anarchist groups. The majority ... were soloists."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 102]

of terrorism with anarchism is because of the ***"propaganda by the deed"*** period in the anarchist movement.

This period — roughly from 1880 to 1900 — was marked by a small number of anarchists assassinating members of the ruling class (royalty, politicians and so forth). At its worse, this period saw theatres and shops frequented by members of the bourgeoisie targeted. These acts were termed *"propaganda by the deed."* Anarchist support for the tactic was galvanised by the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by Russian Populists (this event prompted Johann Most's famous editorial in **Freiheit**, entitled *"At Last!"*, celebrating regicide and the assassination of tyrants). However, there were deeper reasons for anarchist support of this tactic: firstly, in revenge for acts of repression directed towards working class people; and secondly, as a means to encourage people to revolt by showing that their oppressors could be defeated.

Considering these reasons it is no coincidence that propaganda by the deed began in France after the 20 000-plus deaths due to the French state's brutal suppression of the Paris Commune, in which many anarchists were killed. It is interesting to note that while the anarchist violence in revenge for the Commune is relatively well known, the state's mass murder of the Communards is relatively unknown. Similarly, it may be known that the Italian Anarchist Gaetano Bresci assassinated King Umberto of Italy in 1900 or that Alexander Berkman tried to kill Carnegie Steel Corporation manager Henry Clay Frick in 1892. What is often unknown is that Umberto's troops had fired upon and killed protesting peasants or that Frick's Pinkertons had also murdered locked-out workers at Homestead.

Such downplaying of statist and capitalist violence is hardly surprising. *"The State's behaviour is violence,"* points out Max Stirner, *"and it calls its violence 'law'; that of the individual, 'crime.'"* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 197] Little wonder, then, that anarchist violence is condemned but the repression (and often worse violence) that provoked it ignored and forgotten.



Ayn Rand dismissing other people so!) or who will be a toilet cleaner in the unknown "ideal" of "real" capitalism. Everybody reading an elitist text will consider him or herself to be part of the "select few." It's "natural" in an elitist society to consider elites to be natural and yourself a potential member of one!

Examination of history shows that there is a basic elitist ideology which has been the essential rationalisation of all states and ruling classes since their emergence at the beginning of the Bronze Age (*"if the legacy of domination had had any broader purpose than the support of hierarchical and class interests, it has been the attemp to exorcise the belief in public competence from social discourse itself."* [Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 206]). This ideology merely changes its outer garments, not its basic inner content over time.

During the Dark Ages, for example, it was coloured by Christianity, being adapted to the needs of the Church hierarchy. The most useful "divinely revealed" dogma to the priestly elite was "original sin": the notion that human beings are basically depraved and incompetent creatures who need "direction from above," with priests as the conveniently necessary mediators between ordinary humans and "God." The idea that average people are basically stupid and thus incapable of governing themselves is a carry over from this doctrine, a relic of the Dark Ages.

In reply to all those who claim that most people are "second-handers" or cannot develop anything more than "trade union consciousness," all we can say is that it is an absurdity that cannot withstand even a superficial look at history, particularly the labour movement. The creative powers of those struggling for freedom is often truly amazing, and if this intellectual power and inspiration is not seen in "normal" society, this is the clearest indictment possible of the deadening effects of hierarchy and the conformity produced by authority. (See also section B.1 for more on the effects of hierarchy). As Bob Black points outs:

> *"You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you'll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinisation all around us than even such significant moronising mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home in the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families* ***they*** *start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it."* [**The Abolition of Work and other essays**, pp. 21–2]

When elitists try to conceive of liberation, they can only think of it being **given** to the oppressed by kind (for Leninists) or stupid (for Objectivists) elites. It is hardly surprising, then, that it fails. Only self-liberation can produce a free society. The crushing and distorting effects of authority can only be overcome by self-activity. The few examples of such self-liberation prove that most people, once considered incapable of freedom by others, are more than up for the task.

Those who proclaim their "superiority" often do so out of fear that their authority and power will be destroyed once people free themselves from the debilitating hands of authority and come to realise that, in the words of Max Stirner, *"the great are great only because we are on our knees. Let us rise"*



*litical campaign of state terrorism. The campaign included disinformation, the use of infiltrators and provocateurs, collusion with avowed Fascist groups ... , the deliberate targeting of non-violent groups for tear gas and beating, endemic police brutality, the torture of prisoners, the political persecution of organisers ... They did all those openly, in a way that indicates they had no fear of repercussions and expected political protection from the highest sources."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 128–9] This was, unsurprisingly, not reported by the media.

Subsequent protests have seen the media indulge in yet more anti-anarchist hype, inventing stories to present anarchists are hate-filled individuals planning mass violence. For example, in Ireland in 2004 the media reported that anarchists were planning to use poison gas during EU related celebrations in Dublin. Of course, evidence of such a plan was not forthcoming and no such action happened. Neither did the riot the media said anarchists were organising. A similar process of misinformation accompanied the anti-capitalist May Day demonstrations in London and the protests against the Republican National Congress in New York. In spite of being constantly proved wrong after the event, the media always prints the scare stories of anarchist violence (even inventing events at, say Seattle, to justify their articles and to demonise anarchism further). Thus the myth that anarchism equals violence is perpetrated. Needless to say, the same papers that hyped the (non-existent) threat of anarchist violence remained silent on the actual violence of, and repression by, the police against demonstrators which occurred at these events. Neither did they run apologies after their (evidence-less) stories of doom were exposed as the nonsense they were by subsequent events.

This does not mean that Anarchists have not committed acts of violence. They have (as have members of other political and religious movements). The main reason for the association

***blow up a social relationship"*** (to quote the title of an anarchist pamphlet which presents the anarchist case against terrorism).

How is it, then, that anarchism is associated with violence? Partly this is because the state and media insist on referring to terrorists who are **not** anarchists as anarchists. For example, the German Baader-Meinhoff gang were often called "anarchists" despite their self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninism. Smears, unfortunately, work. Similarly, as Emma Goldman pointed out, *"it is a known fact known to almost everyone familiar with the Anarchist movement that a great number of [violent] acts, for which Anarchists had to suffer, either originated with the capitalist press or were instigated, if not directly perpetrated, by the police."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 262]

An example of this process at work can be seen from the current anti-globalisation movement. In Seattle, for example, the media reported "violence" by protestors (particularly anarchist ones) yet this amounted to a few broken windows. The much greater **actual** violence of the police against protestors (which, incidentally, started **before** the breaking of a single window) was not considered worthy of comment. Subsequent media coverage of anti-globalisation demonstrations followed this pattern, firmly connecting anarchism with violence in spite of that the protesters have been the ones to suffer the greatest violence at the hands of the state. As anarchist activist Starhawk notes, *"if breaking windows and fighting back when the cops attack is 'violence,' then give me a new word, a word a thousand times stronger, to use when the cops are beating non-resisting people into comas."* [**Staying on the Streets**, p. 130]

Similarly, at the Genoa protests in 2001 the mainstream media presented the protestors as violent even though it was the state who killed one of them and hospitalised many thousands more. The presence of police agent provocateurs in creating the violence was unmentioned by the media. As Starhawk noted afterwards, in Genoa *"we encountered a carefully orchestrated po-*



As Emma Goldman remarks about women's equality, *"[t]he extraordinary achievements of women in every walk of life have silenced forever the loose talk of women's inferiority. Those who still cling to this fetish do so because they hate nothing so much as to see their authority challenged. This is the characteristic of all authority, whether the master over his economic slaves or man over women. However, everywhere woman is escaping her cage, everywhere she is going ahead with free, large strides."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 256] The same comments are applicable, for example, to the very successful experiments in workers' self-management during the Spanish Revolution.

Then, of course, the notion that people are too stupid for anarchism to work also backfires on those who argue it. Take, for example, those who use this argument to advocate democratic government rather than anarchy. Democracy, as Luigi Galleani noted, means *"acknowledging the right and the competence of the people to select their rulers."* However, *"whoever has the political competence to choose his [or her] own rulers is, by implication, also competent to do without them, especially when the causes of economic enmity are uprooted."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 37] Thus the argument for democracy against anarchism undermines itself, for *"if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing the election of a genius from the votes of a mass of fools?"* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 53–4]

As for those who consider dictatorship as the solution to human stupidity, the question arises why are these dictators immune to this apparently universal human trait? And, as Malatesta noted, *"who are the best? And who will recognise these qualities in them?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53] If they impose themselves on the "stupid" masses, why assume they will not exploit and oppress the many for their own benefit? Or, for that matter, that they are any more intelligent than the masses? The history of dic-

tatorial and monarchical government suggests a clear answer to those questions. A similar argument applies for other non-democratic systems, such as those based on limited suffrage. For example, the Lockean (i.e. classical liberal or right-wing libertarian) ideal of a state based on the rule of property owners is doomed to be little more than a regime which oppresses the majority to maintain the power and privilege of the wealthy few. Equally, the idea of near universal stupidity bar an elite of capitalists (the "objectivist" vision) implies a system somewhat less ideal than the perfect system presented in the literature. This is because most people would tolerate oppressive bosses who treat them as means to an end rather than an end in themselves. For how can you expect people to recognise and pursue their own self-interest if you consider them fundamentally as the *"uncivilised hordes"*? You cannot have it both ways and the *"unknown ideal"* of pure capitalism would be as grubby, oppressive and alienating as "actually existing" capitalism.

As such, anarchists are firmly convinced that arguments against anarchy based on the lack of ability of the mass of people are inherently self-contradictory (when not blatantly self-servicing). If people are too stupid for anarchism then they are too stupid for any system you care to mention. Ultimately, anarchists argue that such a perspective simply reflects the servile mentality produced by a hierarchical society rather than a genuine analysis of humanity and our history as a species. To quote Rousseau:

> *"when I see multitudes of entirely naked savages scorn European voluptuousness and endure hunger, fire, the sword, and death to preserve only their independence, I feel that it does not behove slaves to reason about freedom."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 780]



## A.2.18 Do anarchists support terrorism?

No. This is for three reasons.

Terrorism means either targeting or not worrying about killing innocent people. For anarchy to exist, it must be created by the mass of people. One does not convince people of one's ideas by blowing them up. Secondly, anarchism is about self-liberation. One cannot blow up a social relationship. Freedom cannot be created by the actions of an elite few destroying rulers **on behalf of** the majority. Simply put, a *"structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Martin A. Millar, **Kropotkin**, p. 174] For so long as people feel the need for rulers, hierarchy will exist (see section A.2.16 for more on this). As we have stressed earlier, freedom cannot be given, only taken. Lastly, anarchism aims for freedom. Hence Bakunin's comment that *"when one is carrying out a revolution for the liberation of humanity, one should respect the life and liberty of men [and women]."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, p. 125] For anarchists, means determine the ends and terrorism by its very nature violates life and liberty of individuals and so cannot be used to create an anarchist society. The history of, say, the Russian Revolution, confirmed Kropotkin's insight that *"[v]ery sad would be the future revolution if it could only triumph by terror."* [quoted by Millar, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

Moreover anarchists are **not** against individuals but the institutions and social relationships that cause certain individuals to have power over others and abuse (i.e. use) that power. Therefore the anarchist revolution is about destroying structures, not people. As Bakunin pointed out, *"we wish not to kill persons, but to abolish status and its perquisites"* and anarchism *"does not mean the death of the individuals who make up the bourgeoisie, but the death of the bourgeoisie as a political and social entity economically distinct from the working class."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 71 and p. 70] In other words, ***"You can't***

*… And, unless one thinks through these things, it's not really serious."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 226]

Somewhat ironically, many proponents of primitivsm agree with its critics that the earth would be unable to support six billion living as a hunter-gatherers. This, critics argue, gives primitivism a key problem in that population levels will take time to fall and so any "primitivist" rebellion faces two options. Either it comes about via some kind of collapse of "civilisation" or it involves a lengthy transition period during which "civilisation" and its industrial legacies are decommissioned safely, population levels drop naturally to an appropriate level and people gain the necessary skills required for their new existence.

The problems with the first option should be obvious but, sadly, it is implied by many primitivist writers. Moore, for example, talks about *"when civilisation collapses"* (*"through its own volition, through our efforts, or a combination of the two"*). This implies an extremely speedy process which is confirmed when he talks about the need for *"positive alternatives"* to be built now as *"the social disruption caused by collapse could easily create the psychological insecurity and social vacuum in which fascism and other totalitarian dictatorships could flourish."* [**Op. Cit.**] Social change based on *"collapse," "insecurity"* and *"social disruption"* does not sound like a recipe for a successful revolution.

Then there are the anti-organisation dogmas expounded by primitivism. Moore is typical, asserting that *"[o]rganisations, for anarcho-primitivists, are just rackets, gangs for putting a particular ideology in power"* and reiterates the point by saying primitivists stand for *"the abolition of all power relations, including the State . .. and any kind of party or organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**] Yet without organisation, no modern society could function. There would be a total and instant collapse which would see not only mass starvation but also ecological destruction as nuclear power stations meltdown, industrial waste seeps into the surrounding environment, cities and towns decay and



look forward to the end of money and, therefore, of buying and selling. All agree, however, that anarchy will see *"Capitalistic and proprietary exploitation stopped everywhere"* and *"the wage system abolished"* whether by *"equal and just exchange"* (like Proudhon) or by the free sharing (like Kropotkin). [Proudhon, **The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 281]

In contrast, the individualist anarchist (like the mutualist) denies that this system of use-rights should include the product of the workers labour. Instead of social ownership, individualist anarchists propose a more market based system in which workers would possess their own means of production and exchange the product of their labour freely with other workers. They argue that capitalism is not, in fact, a truly free market. Rather, by means of the state, capitalists have placed fetters on the market to create and protect their economic and social power (market discipline for the working class, state aid for the ruling class in other words). These state created monopolies (of money, land, tariffs and patents) and state enforcement of capitalist property rights are the source of economic inequality and exploitation. With the abolition of government, **real** free competition would result and ensure the end of capitalism and capitalist exploitation (see Benjamin Tucker's essay **State Socialism and Anarchism** for an excellent summary of this argument).

The Individualist anarchists argue that the means of production (bar land) are the product of individual labour and so they accept that people should be able to sell the means of production they use, if they so desire. However, they reject capitalist property rights and instead favour an *"occupancy and use"* system. If the means of production, say land, is not in use, it reverts back to common ownership and is available to others for use. They think this system, called mutualism, will result in workers control of production and the end of capitalist exploitation and usury. This is because, logically and practically, a regime of "occupancy and use" cannot be squared with wage labour. If

a workplace needs a group to operate it then it must be owned by the group who use it. If one individual claims to own it and it is, in fact, used by more than that person then, obviously, "occupancy and use" is violated. Equally, if an owner employs others to use the workplace then the boss can appropriate the product of the workers' labour, so violating the maxim that labour should receive its full product. Thus the principles of individualist anarchism point to anti-capitalist conclusions (see section G.3).

This second difference is the most important. The individualist fears being forced to join a community and thus losing his or her freedom (including the freedom to exchange freely with others). Max Stirner puts this position well when he argues that *"Communism, by the abolition of all personal property, only presses me back still more into dependence on another, to wit, on the generality or collectivity ... [which is] a condition hindering my free movement, a sovereign power over me. Communism rightly revolts against the pressure that I experience from individual proprietors; but still more horrible is the might that it puts in the hands of the collectivity."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 257] Proudhon also argued against communism, stating that the community becomes the proprietor under communism and so capitalism and communism are based on property and so authority (see the section *"Characteristics of communism and of property"* in **What is Property?**). Thus the Individualist anarchist argues that social ownership places the individual's freedom in danger as any form of communism subjects the individual to society or the commune. They fear that as well as dictating individual morality, socialisation would effectively eliminate workers' control as "society" would tell workers what to produce and take the product of their labour. In effect, they argue that communism (or social ownership in general) would be similar to capitalism, with the exploitation and authority of the boss replaced with that of "society."



So, as can be seen, primitivism has little or no bearing to the traditional anarchist movement and its ideas. The visions of both are simply incompatible, with the ideas of the latter dismissed as authoritarian by the former and anarchists questioning whether primitivism is practical in the short term or even desirable in the long. While supporters of primitivism like to portray it as the most advanced and radical form of anarchism, others are less convinced. They consider it as a confused ideology which draws its followers into absurd positions and, moreover, is utterly impractical. They would agree with Ken Knabb that primitivism is rooted in *"fantasies [which] contain so many obvious self-contradictions that it is hardly necessary to criticise them in any detail. They have questionable relevance to actual past societies and virtually no relevance to present possibilities. Even supposing that life was better in one or another previous era,* ***we have to begin from where we are now.*** *Modern technology is so interwoven with all aspects of our life that it could not be abruptly discontinued without causing a global chaos that would wipe out billions of people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

The reason for this is simply that we live in a highly industrialised and interconnected system in which most people do not have the skills required to live in a hunter-gatherer or even agricultural society. Moreover, it is extremely doubtful that six billion people **could** survive as hunter-gatherers even if they had the necessary skills. As Brian Morris notes, *"[t]he future we are told is 'primitive.' How this is to be achieved in a world that presently sustains almost six billion people (for evidence suggests that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle is only able to support 1 or 2 people per sq. mile)"* primitivists like Zerzan do not tell us. [*"Anthropology and Anarchism,"* pp. 35–41, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p. 38] Most anarchists, therefore, agree with Chomsky's summation that *"I do not think that they are realising that what they are calling for is the mass genocide of millions of people because of the way society is now structured and organised ... If you eliminate these structures everybody dies*

While such tribal communities, which lived in harmony with nature and had little or no hierarchies, are seen as inspirational, primitivists look (to use the title of a John Zerzan book) forward to seeing the *"Future Primitive."* As John Moore puts it, *"the future envisioned by anarcho-primitivism ... is without precedent. Although primitive cultures provide intimations of the future, and that future may well incorporate elements derived from those cultures, an anarcho-primitivist world would likely be quite different from previous forms of anarchy."* [**Op. Cit.**]

For the primitivist, other forms of anarchism are simply self-managed alienation within essentially the same basic system we now endure. Hence Moore's comment that *"classical anarchism"* wants *"to take over civilisation, rework its structures to some degree, and remove its worst abuses and oppressions. However, 99% of life in civilisation remains unchanged in their future scenarios, precisely because the aspects of civilisation they question are minimal ... overall life patterns wouldn't change too much."* Thus *"[f]rom the perspective of anarcho-primitivism, all other forms of radicalism appear as reformist, whether or not they regard themselves as revolutionary."* [**Op. Cit.**]

In reply, "classical anarchists" point out three things. Firstly, to claim that the *"worst abuses and oppressions"* account for 1% of capitalist society is simply nonsense and, moreover, something an apologist of that system would happily agree with. Secondly, it is obvious from reading any "classical" anarchist text that Moore's assertions are nonsense. "Classical" anarchism aims to transform society radically from top to bottom, not tinker with minor aspects of it. Do primitivists really think that people who went to the effort to abolish capitalism would simply continue doing 99% of the same things they did before hand? Of course not. In other words, it is not enough to get rid of the boss, although this is a necessary first step! Thirdly, and most importantly, Moore's argument ensures that his new society would be impossible to reach.



Needless to say, social anarchists disagree. They argue that Stirner's and Proudhon's comments are totally correct — but only about authoritarian communism. As Kropotkin argued, *"before and in 1848, the theory [of communism] was put forward in such a shape as to fully account for Proudhon's distrust as to its effect upon liberty. The old idea of Communism was the idea of monastic communities under the severe rule of elders or of men of science for directing priests. The last vestiges of liberty and of individual energy would be destroyed, if humanity ever had to go through such a communism."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 98] Kropotkin always argued that communist-anarchism was a **new** development and given that it dates from the 1870s, Proudhon's and Stirner's remarks cannot be considered as being directed against it as they could not be familiar with it.

Rather than subject the individual to the community, social anarchists argue that communal ownership would provide the necessary framework to protect individual liberty in all aspects of life by abolishing the power of the property owner, in whatever form it takes. In addition, rather than abolish **all** individual "property," communist anarchism acknowledges the importance of individual possessions and individual space. Thus we find Kropotkin arguing against forms of communism that *"desire to manage the community after the model of a family ... [to live] all in the same house and ... thus forced to continuously meet the same 'brethren and sisters' ... [it is] a fundamental error to impose on all the 'great family' instead of trying, on the contrary, to guarantee as much freedom and home life to each individual."* [**Small Communal Experiments and Why They Fail**, pp. 8–9] The aim of anarchist-communism is, to again quote Kropotkin, to place *"the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7] This ensures individual expression of tastes and desires and so individuality —

both in consumption **and** in production, as social anarchists are firm supporters of workers' self-management.

Thus, for social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchist opposition to communism is only valid for state or authoritarian communism and ignores the fundamental nature of communist-anarchism. Communist anarchists do not replace individuality with community but rather use community to defend individuality. Rather than have "society" control the individual, as the Individualist Anarchist fears, social anarchism is based on importance of individuality and individual expression:

> *"Anarchist Communism maintains that most valuable of all conquests — individual liberty — and moreover extends it and gives it a solid basis — economic liberty — without which political liberty is delusive; it does not ask the individual who has rejected god, the universal tyrant, god the king, and god the parliament, to give unto himself a god more terrible than any of the proceeding — god the Community, or to abdicate upon its altar his [or her] independence, his [or her] will, his [or her] tastes, and to renew the vow of asceticism which he formally made before the crucified god. It says to him, on the contrary, 'No society is free so long as the individual is not so! ...'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 14–15]

In addition, social anarchists have always recognised the need for voluntary collectivisation. If people desire to work by themselves, this is not seen as a problem (see Kropotkin's **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61 and **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 104–5 as well as Malatesta's **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 99 and p. 103). This, social anarchists, stress does not in any way contradict their principles or the communist nature of their desired society as such exceptions are rooted in



quently, aim for *"the destruction of civilisation"*. How far back they wish to go is a moot point. Some see the technological level that existed before the Industrial Revolution as acceptable, many go further and reject agriculture and all forms of technology beyond the most basic. For them, a return to the wild, to a hunter-gatherer mode of life, is the only way for anarchy is exist and dismiss out of hand the idea that appropriate technology can be used to create an anarchist society based on industrial production which minimises its impact on ecosystems.

Thus we find the primitivist magazine **"Green Anarchy"** arguing that those, like themselves, *"who prioritise the values of personal autonomy or wild existence have reason to oppose and reject all large-scale organisations and societies on the grounds that they necessitate imperialism, slavery and hierarchy, regardless of the purposes they may be designed for."* They oppose capitalism as it is *"civilisation's current dominant manifestation."* However, they stress that it is *"Civilisation, not capitalism per se, was the genesis of systemic authoritarianism, compulsory servitude and social isolation. Hence, an attack upon capitalism that fails to target civilisation can never abolish the institutionalised coercion that fuels society. To attempt to collectivise industry for the purpose of democratising it is to fail to recognise that all large-scale organisations adopt a direction and form that is independent of its members' intentions."* Thus, they argue, genuine anarchists must oppose industry and technology for *"[h]ierarchical institutions, territorial expansion, and the mechanisation of life are all required for the administration and process of mass production to occur."* For primitivists, *"[o]nly small communities of self-sufficient individuals can coexist with other beings, human or not, without imposing their authority upon them."* Such communities would share essential features with tribal societies, *"[f]or over 99% of human history, humans lived within small and egalitarian extended family arrangements, while drawing their subsistence directly from the land."* [**Against Mass Society**]

## A.3.9 What is anarcho-primitivism?

As discussed in section A.3.3, most anarchists would agree with Situationist Ken Knabb in arguing that *"in a liberated world computers and other modern technologies could be used to eliminate dangerous or boring tasks, freeing everyone to concentrate on more interesting activities."* Obviously *"[c]ertain technologies — nuclear power is the most obvious example — are indeed so insanely dangerous that they will no doubt be brought to a prompt halt. Many other industries which produce absurd, obsolete or superfluous commodities will, of course, cease automatically with the disappearance of their commercial rationales. But many technologies ..., however they may presently be misused, have few if any **inherent** drawbacks. It's simply a matter of using them more sensibly, bringing them under popular control, introducing a few ecological improvements, and redesigning them for human rather than capitalistic ends."* [**Public Secrets**, p. 79 and p. 80] Thus most eco-anarchists see the use of appropriate technology as the means of creating a society which lives in balance with nature.

However, a small but vocal minority of self-proclaimed Green anarchists disagree. Writers such as John Zerzan, John Moore and David Watson have expounded a vision of anarchism which, they claim, aims to critique every form of power and oppression. This is often called *"anarcho-primitivism,"* which according to Moore, is simply *"a shorthand term for a radical current that critiques the totality of civilisation from an anarchist perspective, and seeks to initiate a comprehensive transformation of human life."* [**Primitivist Primer**]

How this current expresses itself is diverse, with the most extreme elements seeking the end of all forms of technology, division of labour, domestication, "Progress", industrialism, what they call *"mass society"* and, for some, even symbolic culture (i.e. numbers, language, time and art). They tend to call any system which includes these features *"civilisation"* and, conse-



the "use rights" system both are based in (see section I.6.2 for a full discussion). In addition, for social anarchists an association exists solely for the benefit of the individuals that compose it; it is the means by which people co-operate to meet their common needs. Therefore, **all** anarchists emphasise the importance of free agreement as the basis of an anarchist society. Thus all anarchists agree with Bakunin:

> *"Collectivism could only imposed only on slaves, and this kind of collectivism would then be the negation of humanity. In a free community, collectivism can only come about through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 200]

If individualists desire to work for themselves and exchange goods with others, social anarchists have no objection. Hence our comments that the two forms of anarchism are not mutually exclusive. Social anarchists support the right of individuals **not** to join a commune while Individualist Anarchists support the rights of individuals to pool their possessions as they see fit, including communistic associations. However, if, in the name of freedom, an individual wished to claim property rights so as to exploit the labour of others, social anarchists would quickly resist this attempt to recreate statism in the name of "liberty." Anarchists do not respect the "freedom" to be a ruler! In the words of Luigi Galleani:

> *"No less sophistical is the tendency of those who, under the comfortable cloak of anarchist individualism, would welcome the idea of domination ... But the heralds of domination presume to practice individualism in the name of their ego, over the obedient, resigned, or inert ego of others."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 40]

Moreover, for social anarchists, the idea that the means of production can be sold implies that private property could be reintroduced in an anarchist society. In a free market, some succeed and others fail. As Proudhon argued, in competition victory goes to the strongest. When one's bargaining power is weaker than another then any "free exchange" will benefit the stronger party. Thus the market, even a non-capitalist one, will tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than equalising them. Under capitalism this is more obvious as those with only their labour power to sell are in a weaker position than those with capital but individualist anarchism would also be affected.

Thus, social anarchists argue, much against its will an individualist anarchist society would evolve away from fair exchanges back into capitalism. If, as seems likely, the "unsuccessful" competitors are forced into unemployment they may have to sell their labour to the "successful" in order to survive. This would create authoritarian social relationships and the domination of the few over the many via "free contracts." The enforcement of such contracts (and others like them), in all likelihood, *"opens ... the way for reconstituting under the heading of 'defence' all the functions of the State."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 297]

Benjamin Tucker, the anarchist most influenced by liberalism and free market ideas, also faced the problems associated with all schools of abstract individualism — in particular, the acceptance of authoritarian social relations as an expression of "liberty." This is due to the similarity of property to the state. Tucker argued that the state was marked by two things, aggression and *"the assumption of authority over a given area and all within it, exercised generally for the double purpose of more complete oppression of its subjects and extension of its boundaries."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 22] However, the boss and landlord also has authority over a given area (the property in question) and all within it (workers and tenants). The former control the



about getting rid of the state, economics is of secondary importance. However, such a use of *"anarchism without adjectives"* is bogus as it was commonly agreed at the time that the types of economics that were being discussed were **anti-capitalist** (i.e. socialistic). For Malatesta, for example, there were *"anarchists who foresee and propose other solution, other future forms of social organisation"* than communist anarchism, but they *"desire, just as we do, to destroy political power and private property." "Let us do away,"* he argued, *"with all exclusivism of schools of thinking"* and let us *"come to an understanding on ways and means, and go forwards."* [quoted by Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175] In other words, it was agreed that capitalism had to be abolished along with the state and once this was the case free experimentation would develop. Thus the struggle against the state was just one part of a wider struggle to end oppression and exploitation and could not be isolated from these wider aims. As "anarcho"-capitalists do not seek the abolition of capitalism along with the state they are not anarchists and so "anarchism without adjectives" does not apply to the so-called "anarchist" capitalists (see section F on why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist).

This is not to say that after a revolution "anarcho"-capitalist communities would not exist. Far from it. If a group of people wanted to form such a system then they could, just as we would expect a community which supported state socialism or theocracy to live under that regime. Such enclaves of hierarchy would exist simply because it is unlikely that everyone on the planet, or even in a given geographical area, will become anarchists all at the same time. The key thing to remember is that no such system would be anarchist and, consequently, is not *"anarchism without adjectives."*

*the absence of government many different experiments would probably be tried in various localities in order to determine the most appropriate form.*" [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 393] In her own words, a whole range of economic systems would be *"advantageously tried in different localities. I would see the instincts and habits of the people express themselves in a free choice in every community; and I am sure that distinct environments would call out distinct adaptations.*" [*"Anarchism"*, **Exquisite Rebel**, p. 79] Consequently, individualist and communist anarchist *"forms of society, as well as many intermediations, would, in the absence of government, be tried in various localities, according to the instincts and material condition of the people ... Liberty and experiment alone can determine the best forms of society. Therefore I no longer label myself otherwise than 'Anarchist' simply.*" [*"The Making of An Anarchist"*, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, pp. 107–8]

These debates had a lasting impact on the anarchist movement, with such noted anarchists as de Cleyre, Malatesta, Nettlau and Reclus adopting the tolerant perspective embodied in the expression "anarchism without adjectives" (see Nettlau's **A Short History of Anarchism**, pages 195 to 201 for an excellent summary of this). It is also, we add, the dominant position within the anarchist movement today with most anarchists recognising the right of other tendencies to the name "anarchist" while, obviously, having their own preferences for specific types of anarchist theory and their own arguments why other types are flawed. However, we must stress that the different forms of anarchism (communism, syndicalism, religious etc) are not mutually exclusive and you do not have to support one and hate the others. This tolerance is reflected in the expression "anarchism without adjectives."

One last point, some "anarcho"-capitalists have attempted to use the tolerance associated with "anarchism without adjectives" to argue that their ideology should be accepted as part of the anarchist movement. After all, they argue, anarchism is just



actions of the latter just as the state rules the citizen or subject. In other words, individual ownership produces the same social relationships as that created by the state, as it comes from the same source (monopoly of power over a given area and those who use it).

Social anarchists argue that the Individualist Anarchists acceptance of individual ownership and their individualistic conception of individual freedom can lead to the denial of individual freedom by the creation of social relationships which are essentially authoritarian/statist in nature. *"The individualists,"* argued Malatesta, *"give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail to take into account, or dwell on the fact that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of solidarity and voluntary co-operation.*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 16] Thus wage labour, for example, places the worker in the same relationship to the boss as citizenship places the citizen to the state, namely of one of domination and subjection. Similarly with the tenant and the landlord.

Such a social relationship cannot help but produce the other aspects of the state. As Albert Meltzer points out, this can have nothing but statist implications, because *"the school of Benjamin Tucker — by virtue of their individualism — accepted the need for police to break strikes so as to guarantee the employer's 'freedom.' All this school of so-called Individualists accept ... the necessity of the police force, hence for government, and the prime definition of anarchism is* ***no government.***" [**Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, p. 8] It is partly for this reason social anarchists support social ownership as the best means of protecting individual liberty.

Accepting individual ownership this problem can only be "got round" by accepting, along with Proudhon (the source of many of Tucker's economic ideas), the need for co-operatives to run workplaces that require more than one worker. This naturally complements their support for "occupancy and use" for land, which would effectively abolish landlords. Without co-

operatives, workers will be exploited for *"it is well enough to talk of [the worker] buying hand tools, or small machinery which can be moved about; but what about the gigantic machinery necessary to the operation of a mine, or a mill? It requires many to work it. If one owns it, will he not make the others pay tribute for using it?"* This is because *"no man would employ another to work for him unless he could get more for his product than he had to pay for it, and that being the case, the inevitable course of exchange and re-exchange would be that the man* ***having received less than the full amount.****"* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"Why I am an Anarchist"*, **Exquisite Rebel**, p. 61 and p. 60] Only when the people who use a resource own it can individual ownership not result in hierarchical authority or exploitation (i.e. statism/capitalism). Only when an industry is co-operatively owned, can the workers ensure that they govern themselves during work and can get the full value of the goods they make once they are sold.

This solution is the one Individualist Anarchists ***do*** seem to accept and the only one consistent with all their declared principles (as well as anarchism). This can be seen when French individualist E. Armand argued that the key difference between his school of anarchism and communist-anarchism is that as well as seeing *"ownership of the consumer goods representing an extension of [the worker's] personality"* it also *"regards ownership of the means of production and free disposal of his produce as the quintessential guarantee of the autonomy of the individual. The understanding is that such ownership boils down to the chance to deploy (as individuals, couples, family groups, etc.) the requisite plot of soil or machinery of production to meet the requirements of the social unit, provided that the proprietor does not transfer it to someone else or reply upon the services of someone else in operating it."* Thus the individualist anarchist could *"defend himself against … the exploitation of anyone by one of his neighbours who will set him to work in his employ and for his benefit"* and *"greed, which is to say the opportunity for an*



that their ideas did not reach the working class while most Collectivist-Anarchists stressed their commitment to communist ideals and their arrival sooner, rather than later, after a revolution. Thus both groups of anarchists could work together as there was *"no reason for splitting up into small schools, in our eagerness to overemphasise certain features, subject to variation in time and place, of the society of the future, which is too remote from us to permit us to envision all its adjustments and possible combinations."* Moreover, in a free society *"the methods and the individual forms of association and agreements, or the organisation of labour and of social life, will not be uniform and we cannot, at this moment, make and forecasts or determinations concerning them."* [Malatesta, quoted by Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, p. 173]

Thus, Malatesta continued, *"[e]ven the question as between anarchist-collectivism and anarchist-communism is a matter of qualification, of method and agreement"* as the key is that, no matter the system, *"a new moral conscience will come into being, which will make the wage system repugnant to men [and women] just as legal slavery and compulsion are now repugnant to them."* If this happens then, *"whatever the specific forms of society may turn out to be, the basis of social organisation will be communist."* As long as we *"hold to fundamental principles and … do our utmost to instil them in the masses"* we need not *"quarrel over mere words or trifles but give post-revolutionary society a direction towards justice, equality and liberty."* [quoted by Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, p. 173 and p. 174]

Similarly, in the United States there was also an intense debate at the same time between Individualist and Communist anarchists. There Benjamin Tucker was arguing that Communist-Anarchists were not anarchists while John Most was saying similar things about Tucker's ideas. Just as people like Mella and Tarrida put forward the idea of tolerance between anarchist groups, so anarchists like Voltairine de Cleyre *"came to label herself simply 'Anarchist,' and called like Malatesta for an 'Anarchism without Adjectives,' since in*

not entirely dissimilar to Collectivist Anarchism (as can be seen from James Guillaume's famous work *"On Building the New Social Order"* within **Bakunin on Anarchism**, the collectivists did see their economic system evolving into free communism), Communist Anarchists developed, deepened and enriched Bakunin's work just as Bakunin had developed, deepened and enriched Proudhon's. Communist Anarchism was associated with such anarchists as Elisee Reclus, Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta and (most famously) Peter Kropotkin.

Quickly Communist-Anarchist ideas replaced Collectivist Anarchism as the main anarchist tendency in Europe, except in Spain. Here the major issue was not the question of communism (although for Ricardo Mella this played a part) but a question of the modification of strategy and tactics implied by Communist Anarchism. At this time (the 1880s), the Communist Anarchists stressed local (pure) cells of anarchist militants, generally opposed trade unionism (although Kropotkin was not one of these as he saw the importance of militant workers organisations) as well as being somewhat anti-organisation as well. Unsurprisingly, such a change in strategy and tactics came in for a lot of discussion from the Spanish Collectivists who strongly supported working class organisation and struggle.

This conflict soon spread outside of Spain and the discussion found its way into the pages of **La Revolte** in Paris. This provoked many anarchists to agree with Malatesta's argument that *"[i]t is not right for us, to say the least, to fall into strife over mere hypotheses."* [quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 198–9] Over time, most anarchists agreed (to use Nettlau's words) that *"we cannot foresee the economic development of the future"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 201] and so started to stress what they had in common (opposition to capitalism and the state) rather than the different visions of how a free society would operate. As time progressed, most Communist-Anarchists saw that ignoring the labour movement ensured



*individual, couple or family group to own more than strictly required for their normal upkeep."* [*"Mini-Manual of the Anarchist Individualist"*, pp. 145–9, **Anarchism**, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 147 and pp. 147–8]

The ideas of the American individualist anarchists logically flow to the same conclusions. "Occupancy and Use" automatically excludes wage labour and so exploitation and oppression. As Wm. Gary Kline correctly points out, the US Individualist anarchists *"expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 104] It is this vision of a self-employed society that logically flows from their principles which ensures that their ideas are truly anarchist. As it is, their belief that their system would ensure the elimination of profit, rent and interest place them squarely in the anti-capitalist camp alongside social anarchists.

Needless to say, social anarchists disagree with individualist anarchism, arguing that there are undesirable features of even non-capitalist markets which would undermine freedom and equality. Moreover, the development of industry has resulted in **natural** barriers of entry into markets and this not only makes it almost impossible to abolish capitalism by competing against it, it also makes the possibility of recreating usury in new forms likely. Combine this with the difficulty in determining the exact contribution of each worker to a product in a modern economy and you see why social anarchists argue that the only real solution to capitalism is to ensure community ownership and management of the economy. It is this recognition of the developments within the capitalist economy which make social anarchists reject individualist anarchism in favour of communalising, and so decentralising, production by freely associated and co-operative labour on a large-scale rather than just in the workplace.

For more discussion on the ideas of the Individualist anarchists, and why social anarchists reject them, see section G — "Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?"

## A.3.2 Are there different types of social anarchism?

Yes. Social anarchism has four major trends — mutualism, collectivism, communism and syndicalism. The differences are not great and simply involve differences in strategy. The one major difference that does exist is between mutualism and the other kinds of social anarchism. Mutualism is based around a form of market socialism — workers' co-operatives exchanging the product of their labour via a system of community banks. This mutual bank network would be *"formed by the whole community, not for the especial advantage of any individual or class, but for the benefit of all ... [with] no interest ... exacted on loans, except enough to cover risks and expenses."* Such a system would end capitalist exploitation and oppression for by *"introducing mutualism into exchange and credit we introduce it everywhere, and labour will assume a new aspect and become truly democratic."* [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his *"Bank of the People"***, pp. 44–45 and p. 45]

The social anarchist version of mutualism differs from the individualist form by having the mutual banks owned by the local community (or commune) instead of being independent co-operatives. This would ensure that they provided investment funds to co-operatives rather than to capitalistic enterprises. Another difference is that some social anarchist mutualists support the creation of what Proudhon termed an ***"agro-industrial federation"*** to complement the federation of libertarian communities (called communes by Proudhon). This is a *"confederation ... intended to provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry"* and large scale developments such



formation of values as a key aspect of creating an anarchist society and on the importance of non-violence as a general tactic (although, we must stress, that few anarchists totally reject the use of violence in self-defence, when no other option is available).

## A.3.8 What is *"anarchism without adjectives"*?

In the words of historian George Richard Esenwein, *"anarchism without adjectives"* in its broadest sense *"referred to an unhyphenated form of anarchism, that is, a doctrine without any qualifying labels such as communist, collectivist, mutualist, or individualist. For others, ... [it] was simply understood as an attitude that tolerated the coexistence of different anarchist schools."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898**, p. 135]

The originator of the expression was Cuban born Fernando Tarrida del Marmol who used it in November, 1889, in Barcelona. He directed his comments towards the communist and collectivist anarchists in Spain who at the time were having an intense debate over the merits of their two theories. "Anarchism without adjectives" was an attempt to show greater tolerance between anarchist tendencies and to be clear that anarchists should not impose a preconceived economic plan on anyone — even in theory. Thus the economic preferences of anarchists should be of *"secondary importance"* to abolishing capitalism and the state, with free experimentation the one rule of a free society.

Thus the theoretical perspective known as *"anarquismo sin adjetives"* ("anarchism without adjectives") was one of the by-products of a intense debate within the movement itself. The roots of the argument can be found in the development of Communist Anarchism after Bakunin's death in 1876. While

*bands.*" (Colossians 3:18) They are also ordered to *"keep silence in the churches."* (I Corinthians 14:34–35). Male rule is explicitly stated: *"I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."* (I Corinthians 11:3)

Clearly, a Christian anarchist would have to be as highly selective as non-anarchist believers when it comes to applying the teachings of the Bible. The rich rarely proclaim the need for poverty (at least for themselves) and seem happy to forgot (like the churches) the difficulty a rich man apparently has entering heaven, for example. They seem happy to ignore Jesus' admonition that *"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."* (Matthew 19:21). The followers of the Christian right do not apply this to their political leaders, or, for that matter, their spiritual ones. Few apply the maxim to *"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."* (Luke 6:30, repeated in Matthew 5:42) Nor do they hold *"all things common"* as practised by the first Christian believers. (Acts 4:32) So if non-anarchist believers are to be considered as ignoring the teachings of the Bible by anarchist ones, the same can be said of them by those they attack.

Moreover idea that Christianity is basically anarchism is hard to reconcile with its history. The Bible has been used to defend injustice far more than it has been to combat it. In countries where Churches hold **de facto** political power, such as in Ireland, in parts of South America, in nineteenth and early twentieth century Spain and so forth, typically anarchists are strongly anti-religious because the Church has the power to suppress dissent and class struggle. Thus the actual role of the Church belies the claim that the Bible is an anarchist text.

In addition, most social anarchists consider Tolstoyian pacifism as dogmatic and extreme, seeing the need (sometimes) for violence to resist greater evils. However, most anarchists would agree with Tolstoyians on the need for individual trans-



as roads, railways and so on. The purpose of *"specific federal arrangements is to protect the citizens of the federated states [sic!] from capitalist and financial feudalism, both within them and from the outside."* This is because *"political right requires to be buttressed by economic right."* Thus the agro-industrial federation would be required to ensure the anarchist nature of society from the destabilising effects of market exchanges (which can generate increasing inequalities in wealth and so power). Such a system would be a practical example of solidarity, as *"industries are sisters; they are parts of the same body; one cannot suffer without the others sharing in its suffering. They should therefore federate, not to be absorbed and confused together, but in order to guarantee mutually the conditions of common prosperity ... Making such an agreement will not detract from their liberty; it will simply give their liberty more security and force."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 70, p. 67 and p. 72]

The other forms of social anarchism do not share the mutualists support for markets, even non-capitalist ones. Instead they think that freedom is best served by communalising production and sharing information and products freely between co-operatives. In other words, the other forms of social anarchism are based upon common (or social) ownership by federations of producers' associations and communes rather than mutualism's system of individual co-operatives. In Bakunin's words, the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal"* and *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 174] Only by extending the principle of co-operation beyond individual workplaces can indi-

vidual liberty be maximised and protected (see section I.1.3 for why most anarchists are opposed to markets). In this they share some ground with Proudhon, as can be seen. The industrial confederations would *"guarantee the mutual use of the tools of production which are the property of each of these groups and which will by a reciprocal contract become the collective property of the whole ... federation. In this way, the federation of groups will be able to ... regulate the rate of production to meet the fluctuating needs of society."* [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 376]

These anarchists share the mutualists support for workers' self-management of production within co-operatives but see confederations of these associations as being the focal point for expressing mutual aid, not a market. Workplace autonomy and self-management would be the basis of any federation, for *"the workers in the various factories have not the slightest intention of handing over their hard-won control of the tools of production to a superior power calling itself the 'corporation.'"* [Guillaume, **Op. Cit.**, p. 364] In addition to this industry-wide federation, there would also be cross-industry and community confederations to look after tasks which are not within the exclusive jurisdiction or capacity of any particular industrial federation or are of a social nature. Again, this has similarities to Proudhon's mutualist ideas.

Social anarchists share a firm commitment to common ownership of the means of production (excluding those used purely by individuals) and reject the individualist idea that these can be "sold off" by those who use them. The reason, as noted earlier, is because if this could be done, capitalism and statism could regain a foothold in the free society. In addition, other social anarchists do not agree with the mutualist idea that capitalism can be reformed into libertarian socialism by introducing mutual banking. For them capitalism can only be replaced by a free society by social revolution.



*themselves, hierarchy will have made its first triumph over freedom.'"* [Brian Morris, **Ecology and Anarchism**, p. 137] This means that most anarchists agree with Bakunin that if God existed it would be necessary, for human freedom and dignity, to abolish it. Given what the Bible says, few anarchists think it can be used to justify libertarian ideas rather than support authoritarian ones and are not surprised that the hierarchical side of Christianity has predominated in its long (and generally oppressive) history.

Atheist anarchists point to the fact that the Bible is notorious for advocating all kinds of abuses. How does the Christian anarchist reconcile this? Are they a Christian first, or an anarchist? Equality, or adherence to the Scripture? For a believer, it seems no choice at all. If the Bible is the word of God, how can an anarchist support the more extreme positions it takes while claiming to believe in God, his authority and his laws?

For example, no capitalist nation would implement the no working on the Sabbath law which the Bible expounds. Most Christian bosses have been happy to force their fellow believers to work on the seventh day in spite of the Biblical penalty of being stoned to death (*"Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death."* Exodus 35:2). Would a Christian anarchist advocate such a punishment for breaking God's law? Equally, a nation which allowed a woman to be stoned to death for not being a virgin on her wedding night would, rightly, be considered utterly evil. Yet this is the fate specified in the "good book" (Deuteronomy 22:13–21). Would premarital sex by women be considered a capital crime by a Christian anarchist? Or, for that matter, should *"a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother"* also suffer the fate of having *"all the men of his city ... stone him with stones, that he die"*? (Deuteronomy 21:18–21) Or what of the Bible's treatment of women: *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own hus-*

***sistance through disobedience, the passive force."*** [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251] In his ideas of a free society, Tolstoy was clearly influenced by rural Russian life and aimed for a society based on peasant farming of communal land, artisans and small-scale co-operatives. He rejected industrialisation as the product of state violence, arguing that *"such division of labour as now exists will ... be impossible in a free society."* [Tolstoy, **Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

Tolstoy's ideas had a strong influence on Gandhi, who inspired his fellow country people to use non-violent resistance to kick Britain out of India. Moreover, Gandhi's vision of a free India as a federation of peasant communes is similar to Tolstoy's anarchist vision of a free society (although we must stress that Gandhi was not an anarchist). The **Catholic Worker Group** in the United States was also heavily influenced by Tolstoy (and Proudhon), as was Dorothy Day a staunch Christian pacifist and anarchist who founded it in 1933. The influence of Tolstoy and religious anarchism in general can also be found in **Liberation Theology** movements in Latin and South America who combine Christian ideas with social activism amongst the working class and peasantry (although we should note that Liberation Theology is more generally inspired by state socialist ideas rather than anarchist ones).

So there is a minority tradition within anarchism which draws anarchist conclusions from religion. However, as we noted in section A.2.20, most anarchists disagree, arguing that anarchism implies atheism and it is no coincidence that the biblical thought has, historically, been associated with hierarchy and defence of earthly rulers. Thus the vast majority of anarchists have been and are atheists, for *"to worship or revere any being, natural or supernatural, will always be a form of self-subjugation and servitude that will give rise to social domination. As [Bookchin] writes: 'The moment that human beings fall on their knees before anything that is 'higher' than*



The major difference between collectivists and communists is over the question of "money" after a revolution. Anarcho-communists consider the abolition of money to be essential, while anarcho-collectivists consider the end of private ownership of the means of production to be the key. As Kropotkin noted, collectivist anarchism *"express[es] a state of things in which all necessaries for production are owned in common by the labour groups and the free communes, while the ways of retribution [i.e. distribution] of labour, communist or otherwise, would be settled by each group for itself."* [**Anarchism**, p. 295] Thus, while communism and collectivism both organise production in common via producers' associations, they differ in how the goods produced will be distributed. Communism is based on free consumption of all while collectivism is more likely to be based on the distribution of goods according to the labour contributed. However, most anarcho-collectivists think that, over time, as productivity increases and the sense of community becomes stronger, money will disappear. Both agree that, in the end, society would be run along the lines suggested by the communist maxim: ***"From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs."*** They just disagree on how quickly this will come about (see section I.2.2).

For anarcho-communists, they think that *"communism — at least partial — has more chances of being established than collectivism"* after a revolution. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 298] They think that moves towards communism are essential as collectivism *"begins by abolishing private ownership of the means of production and immediately reverses itself by returning to the system of remuneration according to work performed which means the reintroduction of inequality."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 230] The quicker the move to communism, the less chances of new inequalities developing. Needless to say, these positions are **not** that different and, in practice, the necessities of a social revolution and the level of political awareness

of those introducing anarchism will determine which system will be applied in each area.

Syndicalism is the other major form of social anarchism. Anarcho-syndicalists, like other syndicalists, want to create an industrial union movement based on anarchist ideas. Therefore they advocate decentralised, federated unions that use direct action to get reforms under capitalism until they are strong enough to overthrow it. In many ways anarcho-syndicalism can be considered as a new version of collectivist-anarchism, which also stressed the importance of anarchists working within the labour movement and creating unions which prefigure the future free society.

Thus, even under capitalism, anarcho-syndicalists seek to create *"free associations of free producers."* They think that these associations would serve as *"a practical school of anarchism"* and they take very seriously Bakunin's remark that the workers' organisations must create *"not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself"* in the pre-revolutionary period.

Anarcho-syndicalists, like all social anarchists, *"are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain in each special branch of production; that is, through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products in the interest of the community on the basis of free mutual agreements."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 55]

Again, like all social anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists see the collective struggle and organisation implied in unions as the school for anarchism. As Eugene Varlin (an anarchist active in the First International who was murdered at the end of the Paris Commune) put it, unions have *"the enormous advan-*



*squeezed out of the workers, and whose whole occupation is based on forced, unnatural labour"* and therefore, *"he must first give up ruining human lives for his own profit."* [**The Kingdom Of God is Within You**, p. 338 and p. 339] Unsurprisingly, Tolstoy argued that co-operatives were the *"only social activity which a moral, self-respecting person who doesn't want to be a party of violence can take part in."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 378]

So, for Tolstoy, *"taxes, or land-owning or property in articles of use or in the means of production"* produces *"the slavery of our times."* However, he rejected the state socialist solution to the social problem as political power would create a new form of slavery on the ruins of the old. This was because *"the fundamental cause of slavery is legislation: the fact that there are people who have the power to make laws."* This requires *"organised violence used by people who have power, in order to compel others to obey the laws they (the powerful) have made — in other words, to do their will."* Handing over economic life to the state would simply mean *"there will be people to whom power will be given to regulate all these matters. Some people will decide these questions, and others will obey them."* [Tolstoy, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40, p. 41, p. 43 and p. 25] He correctly prophetised that *"the only thing that will happen"* with the victory of Marxism would be *"that despotism will be passed on. Now the capitalists are ruling, but then the directors of the working class will rule."* [quoted by Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 379]

From his opposition to violence, Tolstoy rejects both state and private property and urged pacifist tactics to end violence within society and create a just society. For Tolstoy, government could only be destroyed by a mass refusal to obey, by non-participation in govermmental violence and by exposing fraud of statism to the world. He rejected the idea that force should be used to resist or end the force of the state. In Nettlau's words, he *"asserted ... **resistance to evil**; and to one of the ways of resistance — by active force — he added another way: **re-***

*the advantage.*" Thus Tolstoy recognised that property rights in anything beyond use require state violence to protect them as possession is *"always protected by custom, public opinion, by feelings of justice and reciprocity, and they do not need to be protected by violence."* [**The Slavery of Our Times**, p. 47] Indeed, he argues that:

> *"Tens of thousands of acres of forest lands belonging to one proprietor — while thousands of people close by have no fuel — need protection by violence. So, too, do factories and works where several generations of workmen have been defrauded and are still being defrauded. Yet more do the hundreds of thousands of bushels of grain, belonging to one owner, who has held them back to sell at triple price in time of famine."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 47–8]

As with other anarchists, Tolstoy recognised that under capitalism, economic conditions *"compel [the worker] to go into temporary or perpetual slavery to a capitalist"* and so is *"obliged to sell his liberty."* This applied to both rural and urban workers, for the *"slaves of our times are not only all those factory and workshop hands, who must sell themselves completely into the power of the factory and foundry owners in order to exist; but nearly all the agricultural labourers are slaves, working as they do unceasingly to grow another's corn on another's field."* Such a system could only be maintained by violence, for *"first, the fruit of their toil is unjustly and violently taken form the workers, and then the law steps in, and these very articles which have been taken from the workmen — unjustly and by violence — are declared to be the absolute property of those who have stolen them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34, p. 31 and p. 38]

Tolstoy argued that capitalism morally and physically ruined individuals and that capitalists were *"slave-drivers."* He considered it impossible for a true Christian to be a capitalist, for a *"manufacturer is a man whose income consists of value*



*tage of making people accustomed to group life and thus preparing them for a more extended social organisation. They accustom people not only to get along with one another and to understand one another, but also to organise themselves, to discuss, and to reason from a collective perspective."* Moreover, as well as mitigating capitalist exploitation and oppression in the here and now, the unions also *"form the natural elements of the social edifice of the future; it is they who can be easily transformed into producers associations; it is they who can make the social ingredients and the organisation of production work."* [quoted by Julian P. W. Archer, **The First International in France, 1864–1872**, p. 196]

The difference between syndicalists and other revolutionary social anarchists is slight and purely revolves around the question of anarcho-syndicalist unions. Collectivist anarchists agree that building libertarian unions is important and that work within the labour movement is essential in order to ensure *"the development and organisation ... of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 197] Communist anarchists usually also acknowledge the importance of working in the labour movement but they generally think that syndicalistic organisations will be created by workers in struggle, and so consider encouraging the ***"spirit of revolt"*** as more important than creating syndicalist unions and hoping workers will join them (of course, anarcho-syndicalists support such autonomous struggle and organisation, so the differences are not great). Communist-anarchists also do not place as great an emphasis on the workplace, considering struggles within it to be equal in importance to other struggles against hierarchy and domination outside the workplace (most anarcho-syndicalists would agree with this, however, and often it is just a question of emphasis). A few communist-anarchists reject the labour movement as

hopelessly reformist in nature and so refuse to work within it, but these are a small minority.

Both communist and collectivist anarchists recognise the need for anarchists to unite together in purely anarchist organisations. They think it is essential that anarchists work together as anarchists to clarify and spread their ideas to others. Syndicalists often deny the importance of anarchist groups and federations, arguing that revolutionary industrial and community unions are enough in themselves. Syndicalists think that the anarchist and union movements can be fused into one, but most other anarchists disagree. Non-syndicalists point out the reformist nature of unionism and urge that to keep syndicalist unions revolutionary, anarchists must work within them as part of an anarchist group or federation. Most non-syndicalists consider the fusion of anarchism and unionism a source of potential **confusion** that would result in the two movements failing to do their respective work correctly. For more details on anarcho-syndicalism see section J.3.8 (and section J.3.9 on why many anarchists reject aspects of it). It should be stressed that non-syndicalist anarchists do **not** reject the need for collective struggle and organisation by workers (see section H.2.8 on that particular Marxist myth).

In practice, few anarcho-syndicalists totally reject the need for an anarchist federation, while few anarchists are totally anti-syndicalist. For example, Bakunin inspired both anarcho-communist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and anarcho-communists like Kropotkin, Malatesta, Berkman and Goldman were all sympathetic to anarcho-syndicalist movements and ideas.

For further reading on the various types of social anarchism, we would recommend the following: mutualism is usually associated with the works of Proudhon, collectivism with Bakunin's, communism with Kropotkin's, Malatesta's, Goldman's and Berkman's. Syndicalism is somewhat different, as it was far more the product of workers' in struggle than



Thus a true Christian must refrain from governing others. From this anti-statist position he naturally argued in favour of a society self-organised from below:

> *"Why think that non-official people could not arrange their life for themselves, as well as Government people can arrange it nor for themselves but for others?"* [**The Slavery of Our Times**, p. 46]

This meant that *"people can only be freed from slavery by the abolition of Governments."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 49] Tolstoy urged non-violent action against oppression, seeing a spiritual transformation of individuals as the key to creating an anarchist society. As Max Nettlau argues, the *"great truth stressed by Tolstoy is that the recognition of the power of the good, of goodness, of solidarity — and of all that is called love — lies within **ourselves**, and that it can and must be awakened, developed and exercised **in our own behaviour.**"* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 251–2] Unsurprisngly, Tolstoy thought the *"anarchists are right in everything ... They are mistaken only in thinking that anarchy can be instituted by a revolution."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 375]

Like all anarchists, Tolstoy was critical of private property and capitalism. He greatly admired and was heavily influenced by Proudhon, considering the latter's *"property is theft"* as *"an absolute truth"* which would *"survive as long as humanity."* [quoted by Jack Hayward, **After the French Revolution**, p. 213] Like Henry George (whose ideas, like those of Proudhon, had a strong impact on him) he opposed private property in land, arguing that *"were it not for the defence of landed property, and its consequent rise in price, people would not be crowded into such narrow spaces, but would scatter over the free land of which there is still so much in the world."* Moreover, *"in this struggle [for landed property] it is not those who work in the land, but always those who take part in government violence, who have*

contributions to *"the legacy of freedom," "[b]y spawning nonconformity, heretical conventicles, and issues of authority over person and belief, Christianity created not merely a centralised authoritarian Papacy, but also its very antithesis: a quasi-religious anarchism."* Thus *"Christianity's mixed message can be grouped into two broad and highly conflicting systems of belief. On one side there was a radical, activistic, communistic, and libertarian vision of the Christian life"* and *"on the other side there was a conservative, quietistic, materially unwordly, and hierarchical vision."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 266 and pp. 274–5]

Thus clergyman's John Ball's egalitarian comments (as quoted by Peter Marshall [**Op. Cit.**, p. 89]) during the Peasant Revolt in 1381 in England:

*"When Adam delved and Eve span,*
*Who was then a gentleman?"* The history of Christian anarchism includes the ***Heresy of the Free Spirit*** in the Middle Ages, numerous Peasant revolts and the ***Anabaptists*** in the 16th century. The libertarian tradition within Christianity surfaced again in the 18th century in the writings of William Blake and the American Adam Ballou reached anarchist conclusions in his **Practical Christian Socialism** in 1854. However, Christian anarchism became a clearly defined thread of the anarchist movement with the work of the famous Russian author Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy took the message of the Bible seriously and came to consider that a true Christian must oppose the state. From his reading of the Bible, Tolstoy drew anarchist conclusions:

> *"ruling means using force, and using force means doing to him whom force is used, what he does not like and what he who uses force would certainly not like done to himself. Consequently ruling means doing to others what we would not they should do unto us, that is, doing wrong."* [**The Kingdom of God is Within You**, p. 242]



the work of a "famous" name (although this does not stop academics calling George Sorel the father of syndicalism, even though he wrote about a syndicalist movement that already existed. The idea that working class people can develop their own ideas, by themselves, is usually lost on them). However, Rudolf Rocker is often considered a leading anarcho-syndicalist theorist and the works of Fernand Pelloutier and Emile Pouget are essential reading to understand anarcho-syndicalism. For an overview of the development of social anarchism and key works by its leading lights, Daniel Guerin's excellent anthology **No Gods No Masters** cannot be bettered.

## A.3.3 What kinds of green anarchism are there?

An emphasis on anarchist ideas as a solution to the ecological crisis is a common thread in most forms of anarchism today. The trend goes back to the late nineteenth century and the works of Peter Kropotkin and Elisee Reclus. The latter, for example, argued that a *"secret harmony exists between the earth and the people whom it nourishes, and when imprudent societies let themselves violate this harmony, they always end up regretting it."* Similarly, no contemporary ecologist would disagree with his comments that the *"truly civilised man [and women] understands that his [or her] nature is bound up with the interest of all and with that of nature. He [or she] repairs the damage caused by his predecessors and works to improve his domain."* [quoted by George Woodcock, *"Introduction"*, Marie Fleming, **The Geography of Freedom**, p. 15]

With regards Kropotkin, he argued that an anarchist society would be based on a confederation of communities that would integrate manual and brain work as well as decentralising and integrating industry and agriculture (see

his classic work **Fields, Factories, and Workshops**). This idea of an economy in which *"small is beautiful"* (to use the title of E.F. Schumacher's Green classic) was proposed nearly 70 years before it was taken up by what was to become the green movement. In addition, in **Mutual Aid** Kropotkin documented how co-operation within species and between them and their environment is usually of more benefit to them than competition. Kropotkin's work, combined with that of William Morris, the Reclus brothers (both of whom, like Kropotkin, were world-renowned geographers), and many others laid the foundations for the current anarchist interest in ecological issues.

However, while there are many themes of an ecological nature within classical anarchism, it is only relatively recently that the similarities between ecological thought and anarchism has come to the fore (essentially from the publication of Murray Bookchin's classic essay *"Ecology and Revolutionary Thought"* in 1965). Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to state that it is the ideas and work of Murray Bookchin that has placed ecology and ecological issues at the heart of anarchism and anarchist ideals and analysis into many aspects of the green movement.

Before discussing the types of green anarchism (also called eco-anarchism) it would be worthwhile to explain exactly **what** anarchism and ecology have in common. To quote Murray Bookchin, *"both the ecologist and the anarchist place a strong emphasis on spontaneity"* and *"to both the ecologist and the anarchist, an ever-increasing unity is achieved by growing differentiation. **An expanding whole is created by the diversification and enrichment of its parts.**"* Moreover, *"[j]ust as the ecologist seeks to expand the range of an eco-system and promote free interplay between species, so the anarchist seeks to expand the range of social experiments and remove all fetters to its development."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 36]



*particularly in its Zen form, ... has ... a strong libertarian spirit."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53 and p. 65] Some, like the anti-globalisation activist Starhawk, combine their anarchist ideas with Pagan and Spiritualist influences. However, religious anarchism usually takes the form of Christian Anarchism, which we will concentrate on here.

Christian Anarchists take seriously Jesus' words to his followers that *"kings and governors have domination over men; let there be none like that among you."* Similarly, Paul's dictum that there *"is no authority except God"* is taken to its obvious conclusion with the denial of state authority within society. Thus, for a true Christian, the state is usurping God's authority and it is up to each individual to govern themselves and discover that (to use the title of Tolstoy's famous book) **The Kingdom of God is within you**.

Similarly, the voluntary poverty of Jesus, his comments on the corrupting effects of wealth and the Biblical claim that the world was created for humanity to be enjoyed in common have all been taken as the basis of a socialistic critique of private property and capitalism. Indeed, the early Christian church (which could be considered as a liberation movement of slaves, although one that was later co-opted into a state religion) was based upon communistic sharing of material goods, a theme which has continually appeared within radical Christian movements inspired, no doubt, by such comments as *"all that believed were together, and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them all, according as every man has need"* and *"the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, not one of them said that all of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common."* (Acts, 2:44,45; 4:32)

Unsurprisingly, the Bible would have been used to express radical libertarian aspirations of the oppressed, which, in later times, would have taken the form of anarchist or Marxist terminology). As Bookchin notes in his discussion of Christianity's

for authoritarian civilisation?), J.6 (What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?), and J.5.13 (What are Modern Schools?)

Cultural anarchist ideas are shared by almost all schools of anarchist thought and consciousness-raising is considered an essential part of any anarchist movement. For anarchists, its important to *"build the new world in the shell of the old"* in all aspects of our lives and creating an anarchist culture is part of that activity. Few anarchists, however, consider consciousness-raising as enough in itself and so combine cultural anarchist activities with organising, using direct action and building libertarian alternatives in capitalist society. The anarchist movement is one that combines practical self-activity with cultural work, with both activities feeding into and supporting the other.

## A.3.7 Are there religious anarchists?

Yes, there are. While most anarchists have opposed religion and the idea of God as deeply anti-human and a justification for earthly authority and slavery, a few believers in religion have taken their ideas to anarchist conclusions. Like all anarchists, these religious anarchists have combined an opposition to the state with a critical position with regards to private property and inequality. In other words, anarchism is not necessarily atheistic. Indeed, according to Jacques Ellul, *"biblical thought leads directly to anarchism, and that this is the only 'political anti-political' position in accord with Christian thinkers."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 75]

There are many different types of anarchism inspired by religious ideas. As Peter Marshall notes, the *"first clear expression of an anarchist sensibility may be traced back to the Taoists in ancient China from about the sixth century BC"* and *"Buddhism,*



Thus the anarchist concern with free development, decentralisation, diversity and spontaneity is reflected in ecological ideas and concerns. Hierarchy, centralisation, the state and concentrations of wealth reduce diversity and the free development of individuals and their communities by their very nature, and so weakens the social eco-system as well as the actual eco-systems human societies are part of. As Bookchin argues, *"the reconstructive message of ecology... [is that] we must conserve and promote variety"* but within modern capitalist society *"[a]ll that is spontaneous, creative and individuated is circumscribed by the standardised, the regulated and the massified."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35 and p. 26] So, in many ways, anarchism can be considered the application of ecological ideas to society, as anarchism aims to empower individuals and communities, decentralise political, social and economic power so ensuring that individuals and social life develops freely and so becomes increasingly diverse in nature. It is for this reason Brian Morris argues that *"the only political tradition that complements and, as it were, integrally connects with ecology — in a genuine and authentic way — is that of anarchism."* [**Ecology and Anarchism**, p. 132]

So what kinds of green anarchism are there? While almost all forms of modern anarchism consider themselves to have an ecological dimension, the specifically eco-anarchist thread within anarchism has two main focal points, ***Social Ecology*** and ***"primitivist"***. In addition, some anarchists are influenced by ***Deep Ecology***, although not many. Undoubtedly Social Ecology is the most influential and numerous current. Social Ecology is associated with the ideas and works of Murray Bookchin, who has been writing on ecological matters since the 1950's and, from the 1960s, has combined these issues with revolutionary social anarchism. His works include **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, **Toward an Ecological Society**, **The Ecology of Freedom** and a host of others.

Social Ecology locates the roots of the ecological crisis firmly in relations of domination between people. The domination of nature is seen as a product of domination within society, but this domination only reaches crisis proportions under capitalism. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

> *"The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man... But it was not until organic community relations... dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly ... The plundering of the human spirit by the market place is paralleled by the plundering of the earth by capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 24–5]

*"Only insofar,"* Bookchin stresses, *"as the ecology **consciously** cultivates an anti-hierarchical and a non-domineering sensibility, structure, and strategy for social change can it retain its very **identity** as the voice for a new balance between humanity and nature and its **goal** for a truly ecological society."* Social ecologists contrast this to what Bookchin labels *"environmentalism"* for while social ecology *"seeks to eliminate the concept of the domination of nature by humanity by eliminating domination of human by human, environmentalism reflects an 'instrumentalist' or technical sensibility in which nature is viewed merely as a passive habit, an agglomeration of external objects and forces, that must be made more 'serviceable' for*



domination with many aspects besides the political and economic. Hence those values cannot be eradicated even by a combined economic and political revolution if there it is not also accompanied by profound psychological changes in the majority of the population. For mass acquiescence in the current system is rooted in the psychic structure of human beings (their *"character structure,"* to use Wilhelm Reich's expression), which is produced by many forms of conditioning and socialisation that have developed with patriarchal-authoritarian civilisation during the past five or six thousand years.

In other words, even if capitalism and the state were overthrown tomorrow, people would soon create new forms of authority in their place. For authority — a strong leader, a chain of command, someone to give orders and relieve one of the responsibility of thinking for oneself — are what the submissive/authoritarian personality feels most comfortable with. Unfortunately, the majority of human beings fear real freedom, and indeed, do not know what to do with it — as is shown by a long string of failed revolutions and freedom movements in which the revolutionary ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality were betrayed and a new hierarchy and ruling class were quickly created. These failures are generally attributed to the machinations of reactionary politicians and capitalists, and to the perfidy of revolutionary leaders; but reactionary politicians only attract followers because they find a favourable soil for the growth of their authoritarian ideals in the character structure of ordinary people.

Hence the prerequisite of an anarchist revolution is a period of consciousness-raising in which people gradually become aware of submissive/authoritarian traits within themselves, see how those traits are reproduced by conditioning, and understand how they can be mitigated or eliminated through new forms of culture, particularly new child-rearing and educational methods. We will explore this issue more fully in section B.1.5 (What is the mass-psychological basis

of society traditionally regarded as belonging to the sphere of "culture" rather than "economics" or "politics" — for example, through art, music, drama, literature, education, child-rearing practices, sexual morality, technology, and so forth.

Cultural expressions are anarchistic to the extent that they deliberately attack, weaken, or subvert the tendency of most traditional cultural forms to promote authoritarian values and attitudes, particularly domination and exploitation. Thus a novel that portrays the evils of militarism can be considered as cultural anarchism if it goes beyond the simple "war-is-hell" model and allows the reader to see how militarism is connected with authoritarian institutions (e.g. capitalism and statism) or methods of authoritarian conditioning (e.g. upbringing in the traditional patriarchal family). Or, as John Clark expresses it, cultural anarchism implies *"the development of arts, media, and other symbolic forms that expose various aspects of the system of domination and contrast them with a system of values based on freedom and community."* This *"**cultural** struggle"* would be part of a general struggle *"to combat the material and ideological power of all dominating classes, whether economic, political, racial, religious, or sexual, with a multi-dimensional practice of liberation."* In other words, an *"expanded conception of class analysis"* and *"an amplified practice of class struggle"* which includes, but is not limited to, *"**economic** actions like strikes, boycotts, job actions, occupation, organisations of direct action groups and federations of libertarian workers' groups and development of workers' assemblies, collectives and co-operatives"* and *"**political** activity"* like the *"active interference with implementation of repressive governmental policies,"* the *"non-compliance and resistance against regimentation and bureaucratisation of society"* and *"participation in movements for increasing direct participation in decision-making and local control."* [**The Anarchist Moment**, p. 31]

Cultural anarchism is important — indeed essential — because authoritarian values are embedded in a total system of



*human use, irrespective of what these uses may be. Environmentalism .. . does not bring into question the underlying notions of the present society, notably that man must dominate nature. On the contrary, it seeks to facilitate that domination by developing techniques for diminishing the hazards caused by domination."* [Murray Bookchin, **Towards an Ecological Society**, p. 77]

Social ecology offers the vision of a society in harmony with nature, one which *"involves a fundamental reversal of all the trends that mark the historic development of capitalist technology and bourgeois society — the minute specialisation of machines and labour, the concentration of resources and people in gigantic industrial enterprises and urban entities, the stratification and bureaucratisation of nature and human beings."* Such an ecotopia *"establish entirely new eco-communities that are artistically moulded to the eco-systems in which they are located."* Echoing Kropotkin, Bookchin argues that *"[s]uch an eco-community ... would heal the split between town and country, between mind and body by fusing intellectual with physical work, industry with agricultural in a rotation or diversification of vocational tasks."* This society would be based on the use of appropriate and green technology, a *"new kind of technology — or eco-technology — one composed of flexible, versatile machinery whose productive applications would emphasise durability and quality, not built in obsolescence, and insensate quantitative output of shoddy goods, and a rapid circulation of expendable commodities ... Such an eco-technology would use the inexhaustible energy capacities of nature — the sun and wind, the tides and waterways, the temperature differentials of the earth and the abundance of hydrogen around us as fuels — to provide the eco-community with non-polluting materials or wastes that could be recycled."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 68–9]

However, this is not all. As Bookchin stresses an ecological society *"is more than a society that tries to check the mounting disequilibrium that exists between humanity and the natural world. Reduced to simple technical or political issues, this*

*anaemic view of such a society's function degrades the issues raised by an ecological critique and leads them to purely technical and instrumental approaches to ecological problems. Social ecology is, first of all, a* ***sensibility*** *that includes not only a critique of hierarchy and domination but a reconstructive outlook ... guided by an ethics that emphasises variety without structuring differences into a hierarchical order ... the precepts for such an ethics ... [are] participation and differentiation."* [**The Modern Crisis**, pp. 24–5]

Therefore social ecologists consider it essential to attack hierarchy and capitalism, not civilisation as such as the root cause of ecological problems. This is one of the key areas in which they disagree with "Primitivist" Anarchist ideas, who tend to be far more critical of **all** aspects of modern life, with some going so far as calling for *"the end of civilisation"* including, apparently, all forms of technology and large scale organisation. We discuss these ideas in section A.3.9.

We must note here that other anarchists, while generally agreeing with its analysis and suggestions, are deeply critical of Social Ecology's support for running candidates in municipal elections. While Social Ecologists see this as a means of creating popular self-managing assemblies and creating a counter power to the state, few anarchists agree. Rather they see it as inherently reformist as well as being hopelessly naive about the possibilities of using elections to bring about social change (see section J.5.14 for a fuller discussion of this). Instead they propose direct action as the means to forward anarchist and ecological ideas, rejecting electioneering as a dead-end which ends up watering down radical ideas and corrupting the people involved (see section J.2 — What is Direct Action?).

Lastly, there is "deep ecology," which, because of its biocentric nature, many anarchists reject as anti-human. There are few anarchists who think that **people,** as people, are the cause of the ecological crisis, which many deep ecologists seem to suggest. Murray Bookchin, for example, has been particularly



*otherwise, we could go ahead and pass motions until the world ends and gain nothing."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] If women waited for others to act for them their social position would never have changed. This includes getting the vote in the first place. Faced with the militant suffrage movement for women's votes, British anarchist Rose Witcop recognised that it was *"true that this movement shows us that women who so far have been so submissive to their masters, the men, are beginning to wake up at last to the fact they are not inferior to those masters."* Yet she argued that women would not be freed by votes but *"by their own strength."* [quoted by Sheila Rowbotham, **Hidden from History**, pp. 100–1 and p. 101] The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s showed the truth of that analysis. In spite of equal voting rights, women's social place had remained unchanged since the 1920s.

Ultimately, as Anarchist Lily Gair Wilkinson stressed, the *"call for 'votes' can never be a call to freedom. For what is it to vote? To vote is to register assent to being ruled by one legislator or another?"* [quoted by Sheila Rowbotham, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] It does not get to the heart of the problem, namely hierarchy and the authoritarian social relationships it creates of which patriarchy is only a subset of. Only by getting rid of all bosses, political, economic, social and sexual can **genuine** freedom for women be achieved and *"make it possible for women to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery."* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

## A.3.6 What is Cultural Anarchism?

For our purposes, we will define cultural anarchism as the promotion of anti-authoritarian values through those aspects

*ter before he is put down and she exalted to — Equality. This acknowledgement is,* ***the freedom to control her own person****. "* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"The Gates of Freedom"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 242] Neither men nor state nor church should say what a woman does with her body. A logical extension of this is that women must have control over their own reproductive organs. Thus anarcha-feminists, like anarchists in general, are pro-choice and pro-reproductive rights (i.e. the right of a woman to control her own reproductive decisions). This is a long standing position. Emma Goldman was persecuted and incarcerated because of her public advocacy of birth control methods and the extremist notion that women should decide when they become pregnant (as feminist writer Margaret Anderson put it, *"In 1916, Emma Goldman was sent to prison for advocating that 'women need not always keep their mouth shut and their wombs open.'"*).

Anarcha-feminism does not stop there. Like anarchism in general, it aims at changing **all** aspects of society not just what happens in the home. For, as Goldman asked, *"how much independence is gained if the narrowness and lack of freedom of the home is exchanged for the narrowness and lack of freedom of the factory, sweat-shop, department store, or office?"* Thus women's equality and freedom had to be fought everywhere and defended against all forms of hierarchy. Nor can they be achieved by voting. Real liberation, argue anarcha-feminists, is only possible by direct action and anarcha-feminism is based on women's self-activity and self-liberation for while the *"right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands ... true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in the courts. It begins in woman's soul ... her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve freedom reaches."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 216 and p. 224]

The history of the women's movement proves this. Every gain has come from below, by the action of women themselves. As Louise Michel put it, *"[w]e women are not bad revolutionaries. Without begging anyone, we are taking our place in the struggles;*



outspoken in his criticism of deep ecology and the anti-human ideas that are often associated with it (see **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, for example). David Watson has also argued against Deep Ecology (see his **How Deep is Deep Ecology?** written under the name George Bradford). Most anarchists would argue that it is not people but the current system which is the problem, and that only people can change it. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

> *"[Deep Ecology's problems] stem from an authoritarian streak in a crude biologism that uses 'natural law' to conceal an ever-diminishing sense of humanity and papers over a profound ignorance of social reality by ignoring the fact it is* ***capitalism*** *we are talking about, not an abstraction called 'Humanity' and 'Society.'"* [**The Philosophy of Social Ecology**, p. 160]

Thus, as Morris stresses, *"by focusing entirely on the category of 'humanity' the Deep Ecologists ignore or completely obscure the social origins of ecological problems, or alternatively, biologise what are essentially social problems."* To submerge ecological critique and analysis into a simplistic protest against the human race ignores the real causes and dynamics of ecological destruction and, therefore, ensures an end to this destruction cannot be found. Simply put, it is hardly "people" who are to blame when the vast majority have no real say in the decisions that affect their lives, communities, industries and eco-systems. Rather, it is an economic and social system that places profits and power above people and planet. By focusing on "Humanity" (and so failing to distinguish between rich and poor, men and women, whites and people of colour, exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed) the system we live under is effectively ignored, and so are the institutional causes of ecological problems. This can be *"both reactionary and authoritarian in its implications, and substitutes a naive understanding*

*of 'nature' for a critical study of real social issues and concerns."* [Morris, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135]

Faced with a constant anarchist critique of certain of their spokes-persons ideas, many Deep Ecologists have turned away from the anti-human ideas associated with their movement. Deep ecology, particularly the organisation ***Earth First!*** (EF!), has changed considerably over time, and EF! now has a close working relationship with the ***Industrial Workers of the World*** (IWW), a syndicalist union. While deep ecology is not a thread of eco-anarchism, it shares many ideas and is becoming more accepted by anarchists as EF! rejects its few misanthropic ideas and starts to see that hierarchy, not the human race, is the problem (for a discussion between Murray Bookchin and leading Earth Firster! Dave Foreman see the book **Defending the Earth**).

## A.3.4 Is anarchism pacifistic?

A pacifist strand has long existed in anarchism, with Leo Tolstoy being one of its major figures. This strand is usually called ***"anarcho-pacifism"*** (the term ***"non-violent anarchist"*** is sometimes used, but this term is unfortunate because it implies the rest of the movement are "violent," which is not the case!). The union of anarchism and pacifism is not surprising given the fundamental ideals and arguments of anarchism. After all, violence, or the threat of violence or harm, is a key means by which individual freedom is destroyed. As Peter Marshall points out, *"[g]iven the anarchist's respect for the sovereignty of the individual, in the long run it is non-violence and not violence which is implied by anarchist values."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p.637] Malatesta is even more explicit when he wrote that the *"main plank of anarchism is the removal of violence from human relations"* and



argued before the rise of feminism, a diversion from the "real" struggle against capitalism which would somehow be automatically solved after the revolution. It is an essential part of the struggle:

> *"We do not need any of your titles ... We want none of them. What we do want is knowledge and education and liberty. We know what our rights are and we demand them. Are we not standing next to you fighting the supreme fight? Are you not strong enough, men, to make part of that supreme fight a struggle for the rights of women? And then men and women together will gain the rights of all humanity."* [Louise Michel, **Op. Cit.**, p. 142]

A key part of this revolutionising modern society is the transformation of the current relationship between the sexes. Marriage is a particular evil for *"the old form of marriage, based on the Bible, 'till death doth part,' ... [is] an institution that stands for the sovereignty of the man over the women, of her complete submission to his whims and commands."* Women are reduced *"to the function of man's servant and bearer of his children."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 220–1] Instead of this, anarchists proposed ***"free love,"*** that is couples and families based on free agreement between equals than one partner being in authority and the other simply obeying. Such unions would be without sanction of church or state for *"two beings who love each other do not need permission from a third to go to bed."* [Mozzoni, quoted by Moya, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200]

Equality and freedom apply to more than just relationships. For *"if social progress consists in a constant tendency towards the equalisation of the liberties of social units, then the demands of progress are not satisfied so long as half society, Women, is in subjection... . Woman ... is beginning to feel her servitude; that there is a requisite acknowledgement to be won from her mas-*

*And we shall use propaganda by speech, deed, and most of all life — **being** what we teach."* Thus anarcha-feminists, like all anarchists, see the struggle against patriarchy as being a struggle of the oppressed for their own self-liberation, for *"**as a class** I have nothing to hope from men . .. No tyrant ever renounced his tyranny until he had to. If history ever teaches us anything it teaches this. Therefore my hope lies in creating rebellion in the breasts of women."* [*"The Gates of Freedom"*, pp. 235–250, Eugenia C. Delamotte, **Gates of Freedom**, p. 249 and p. 239] This was sadly as applicable within the anarchist movement as it was outside it in patriarchal society.

Faced with the sexism of male anarchists who spoke of sexual equality, women anarchists in Spain organised themselves into the **Mujeres Libres** organisation to combat it. They did not believe in leaving their liberation to some day after the revolution. Their liberation was a integral part of that revolution and had to be started today. In this they repeated the conclusions of anarchist women in Illinois Coal towns who grew tried of hearing their male comrades *"shout in favour"* of sexual equality *"in the future society"* while doing nothing about it in the here and now. They used a particularly insulting analogy, comparing their male comrades to priests who *"make false promises to the starving masses ... [that] there will be rewards in paradise."* The argued that mothers should make their daughters *"understand that the difference in sex does not imply inequality in rights"* and that as well as being *"rebels against the social system of today,"* they *"should fight especially against the oppression of men who would like to retain women as their moral and material inferior."* [Ersilia Grandi, quoted by Caroline Waldron Merithew, **Anarchist Motherhood**, p. 227] They formed the ***"Luisa Michel"*** group to fight against capitalism and patriarchy in the upper Illinois valley coal towns over three decades before their Spanish comrades organised themselves.

For anarcha-feminists, combating sexism is a key aspect of the struggle for freedom. It is not, as many Marxist socialists



that anarchists *"are opposed to violence."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 53]

However, although many anarchists reject violence and proclaim pacifism, the movement, in general, is not essentially pacifistic (in the sense of opposed all forms of violence at all times). Rather, it is anti-militarist, being against the organised violence of the state but recognising that there are important differences between the violence of the oppressor and the violence of the oppressed. This explains why the anarchist movement has always placed a lot of time and energy in opposing the military machine and capitalist wars while, at the same time, supporting and organising armed resistance against oppression (as in the case of the Makhnovist army during the Russian Revolution which resisted both Red and White armies and the militias the anarchists organised to resist the fascists during the Spanish Revolution — see sections A.5.4 and A.5.6, respectively).

On the question of non-violence, as a rough rule of thumb, the movement divides along Individualist and Social lines. Most Individualist anarchists support purely non-violent tactics of social change, as do the Mutualists. However, Individualist anarchism is not pacifist as such, as many support the idea of violence in self-defence against aggression. Most social anarchists, on the other hand, do support the use of revolutionary violence, holding that physical force will be required to overthrow entrenched power and to resist state and capitalist aggression (although it was an anarcho-syndicalist, Bart de Ligt, who wrote the pacifist classic, **The Conquest of Violence**). As Malatesta put it, violence, while being *"in itself an evil,"* is *"justifiable only when it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence"* and that a *"slave is always in a state of legitimate defence and consequently, his violence against the boss, against the oppressor, is always morally justifiable."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 55 and pp. 53–54] Moreover, they stress that, to use the words of Bakunin, since social oppression *"stems*

*far less from individuals than from the organisation of things and from social positions"* anarchists aim to *"ruthlessly destroy positions and things"* rather than people, since the aim of an anarchist revolution is to see the end of privileged classes *"not as individuals, but as classes."* [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin** p. 121, p. 124 and p. 122]

Indeed, the question of violence is relatively unimportant to most anarchists, as they do not glorify it and think that it should be kept to a minimum during any social struggle or revolution. All anarchists would agree with the Dutch pacifist anarcho-syndicalist Bart de Ligt when he argued that *"the violence and warfare which are characteristic conditions of the capitalist world do not go with the liberation of the individual, which is the historic mission of the exploited classes. The greater the violence, the weaker the revolution, even where violence has deliberately been put at the service of the revolution."* [**The Conquest of Violence**, p. 75]

Similarly, all anarchists would agree with de Ligt on, to use the name of one of his book's chapters, *"the absurdity of bourgeois pacifism."* For de Ligt, and all anarchists, violence is inherent in the capitalist system and any attempt to make capitalism pacifistic is doomed to failure. This is because, on the one hand, war is often just economic competition carried out by other means. Nations often go to war when they face an economic crisis, what they cannot gain in economic struggle they attempt to get by conflict. On the other hand, *"violence is indispensable in modern society... [because] without it the ruling class would be completely unable to maintain its privileged position with regard to the exploited masses in each country. The army is used first and foremost to hold down the workers... when they become discontented."* [Bart de Ligt, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] As long as the state and capitalism exist, violence is inevitable and so, for anarcho-pacifists, the consistent pacifist must be an anarchist just as the consistent anarchist must be a pacifist.



> *dination, argues for non-instrumental economic forms that preserve individual existential freedom, for both men and women."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 144]

Anarcha-feminists have much to contribute to our understanding of the origins of the ecological crisis in the authoritarian values of hierarchical civilisation. For example, a number of feminist scholars have argued that the domination of nature has paralleled the domination of women, who have been identified with nature throughout history (See, for example, Caroline Merchant, **The Death of Nature**, 1980). Both women and nature are victims of the obsession with control that characterises the authoritarian personality. For this reason, a growing number of both radical ecologists and feminists are recognising that hierarchies must be dismantled in order to achieve their respective goals.

In addition, anarcha-feminism reminds us of the importance of treating women equally with men while, at the same time, respecting women's differences from men. In other words, that recognising and respecting diversity includes women as well as men. Too often many male anarchists assume that, because they are (in theory) opposed to sexism, they are not sexist in practice. Such an assumption is false. Anarcha-feminism brings the question of consistency between theory and practice to the front of social activism and reminds us all that we must fight not only external constraints but also internal ones.

This means that anarcha-feminism urges us to practice what we preach. As Voltairine de Cleyre argued, *"I never expect men to **give** us liberty. No, Women, we are not **worth** it, until we **take** it."* This involves *"insisting on a new code of ethics founded on the law of equal freedom: a code recognising the complete individuality of woman. By making rebels wherever we can. By ourselves **living our beliefs** . ... We are revolutionists.*

that feminism is in conflict with its own ideals if it desires simply to allow women to have the same chance of being a boss as a man does. They simply state the obvious, namely that they *"do not believe that power in the hands of women could possibly lead to a non-coercive society"* nor do they *"believe that anything good can come out of a mass movement with a leadership elite."* The *"central issues are always power and social hierarchy"* and so people *"are free only when they have power over their own lives."* [Carole Ehrlich, *"Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism"*, **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 44] For if, as Louise Michel put it, *"a proletarian is a slave; the wife of a proletarian is even more a slave"* ensuring that the wife experiences an equal level of oppression as the husband misses the point. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141]

Anarcha-feminists, therefore, like all anarchists oppose capitalism as a denial of liberty. Their critique of hierarchy in the society does not start and end with patriarchy. It is a case of wanting freedom everywhere, of wanting to *"[b]reak up ... every home that rests in slavery! Every marriage that represents the sale and transfer of the individuality of one of its parties to the other! Every institution, social or civil, that stands between man and his right; every tie that renders one a master, another a serf."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"The Economic Tendency of Freethought"*, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 72] The ideal that an "equal opportunity" capitalism would free women ignores the fact that any such system would still see working class women oppressed by bosses (be they male or female). For anarcha-feminists, the struggle for women's liberation cannot be separated from the struggle against hierarchy **as such.** As L. Susan Brown puts it:

> *"Anarchist-feminism, as an expression of the anarchist sensibility applied to feminist concerns, takes the individual as its starting point and, in opposition to relations of domination and subor-*



For those anarchists who are non-pacifists, violence is seen as an unavoidable and unfortunate result of oppression and exploitation as well as the only means by which the privileged classes will renounce their power and wealth. Those in authority rarely give up their power and so must be forced. Hence the need for *"transitional"* violence *"to put an end to the far greater, and permanent, violence which keeps the majority of mankind in servitude."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55] To concentrate on the issue of violence versus non-violence is to ignore the real issue, namely how do we change society for the better. As Alexander Berkman pointed out, those anarchists who are pacifists confuse the issue, like those who think *"it's the same as if rolling up your sleeves for work should be considered the work itself."* To the contrary, *"[t]he fighting part of revolution is merely rolling up your sleeves. The real, actual task is ahead."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 183] And, indeed, most social struggle and revolutions start relatively peaceful (via strikes, occupations and so on) and only degenerate into violence when those in power try to maintain their position (a classic example of this is in Italy, in 1920, when the occupation of factories by their workers was followed by fascist terror — see section A.5.5).

As noted above, all anarchists are anti-militarists and oppose both the military machine (and so the "defence" industry) as well as statist/capitalist wars (although a few anarchists, like Rudolf Rocker and Sam Dolgoff, supported the anti-fascist capitalist side during the second world war as the lesser evil). The anti-war machine message of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists was propagated long before the start of the first world war, with syndicalists and anarchists in Britain and North America reprinting a French CGT leaflet urging soldiers not to follow orders and repress their striking fellow workers. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were both arrested and deported from America for organising a ***"No-Conscription League"*** in 1917 while many anarchists in Europe were jailed for refusing to join the armed forces in

the first and second world wars. The anarcho-syndicalist influenced IWW was crushed by a ruthless wave of government repression due to the threat its organising and anti-war message presented to the powerful elites who favoured war. More recently, anarchists, (including people like Noam Chomsky and Paul Goodman) have been active in the peace movement as well as contributing to the resistance to conscription where it still exists. Anarchists took an active part in opposing such wars as the Vietnam War, the Falklands war as well as the Gulf wars of 1991 and 2003 (including, in Italy and Spain, helping to organise strikes in protest against it). And it was during the 1991 Gulf War when many anarchists raised the slogan ***"No war but the class war"*** which nicely sums up the anarchist opposition to war — namely an evil consequence of any class system, in which the oppressed classes of different countries kill each other for the power and profits of their rulers. Rather than take part in this organised slaughter, anarchists urge working people to fight for their own interests, not those of their masters:

> *"More than ever we must avoid compromise; deepen the chasm between capitalists and wage slaves, between rulers and ruled; preach expropriation of private property and the destruction of states such as the only means of guaranteeing fraternity between peoples and Justice and Liberty for all; and we must prepare to accomplish these things."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 251]

We must note here that Malatesta's words were written in part against Peter Kropotkin who, for reasons best known to himself, rejected everything he had argued for decades and supported the allies in the First World War as a lesser evil against German authoritarianism and Imperialism. Of course, as Malatesta pointed out, *"all Governments and all capitalist classes"* do



women's freedom did not mean an equal chance to become a boss or a wage slave, a voter or a politician, but rather to be a free and equal individual co-operating as equals in free associations. *"Feminism,"* stressed Peggy Kornegger, *"doesn't mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means no corporate power and no Presidents. The Equal Rights Amendment will not transform society; it only gives women the 'right' to plug into a hierarchical economy. Challenging sexism means challenging all hierarchy — economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarcha-feminist revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 27]

Anarchism, as can be seen, included a class and economic analysis which is missing from mainstream feminism while, at the same time, showing an awareness to domestic and sex-based power relations which eluded the mainstream socialist movement. This flows from our hatred of hierarchy. As Mozzoni put it, *"Anarchy defends the cause of all the oppressed, and because of this, and in a special way, it defends your [women's] cause, oh! women, doubly oppressed by present society in both the social and private spheres."* [quoted by Moya, **Op. Cit.**, p. 203] This means that, to quote a Chinese anarchist, what anarchists *"mean by equality between the sexes is not just that the men will no longer oppress women. We also want men to no longer to be oppressed by other men, and women no longer to be oppressed by other women."* Thus women should *"completely overthrow rulership, force men to abandon all their special privileges and become equal to women, and make a world with neither the oppression of women nor the oppression of men."* [He Zhen, quoted by Peter Zarrow, **Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture**, p. 147]

So, in the historic anarchist movement, as Martha Ackelsberg notes, liberal/mainstream feminism was considered as being *"too narrowly focused as a strategy for women's emancipation; sexual struggle could not be separated from class struggle or from the anarchist project as a whole."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 119] Anarcha-feminism continues this tradition by arguing that all forms of hierarchy are wrong, not just patriarchy, and

*life in all its complexities; by freeing herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation."* [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 211]

Anarcha-feminism tries to keep feminism from becoming influenced and dominated by authoritarian ideologies of either the right or left. It proposes direct action and self-help instead of the mass reformist campaigns favoured by the "official" feminist movement, with its creation of hierarchical and centralist organisations and its illusion that having more women bosses, politicians, and soldiers is a move towards "equality." Anarcha-feminists would point out that the so-called "management science" which women have to learn in order to become mangers in capitalist companies is essentially a set of techniques for controlling and exploiting wage workers in corporate hierarchies, whereas "feminising" society requires the elimination of capitalist wage-slavery and managerial domination altogether. Anarcha-feminists realise that learning how to become an effective exploiter or oppressor is not the path to equality (as one member of the Mujeres Libres put it, *"[w]e did not want to substitute a feminist hierarchy for a masculine one"* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 22–3] — also see section B.1.4 for a further discussion on patriarchy and hierarchy).

Hence anarchism's traditional hostility to liberal (or mainstream) feminism, while supporting women's liberation and equality. Federica Montseny (a leading figure in the Spanish Anarchist movement) argued that such feminism advocated equality for women, but did not challenge existing institutions. She argued that (mainstream) feminism's only ambition is to give to women of a particular class the opportunity to participate more fully in the existing system of privilege and if these institutions *"are unjust when men take advantage of them, they will still be unjust if women take advantage of them."* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 119] Thus, for anarchists,



*"misdeeds ... against the workers and rebels of their own countries."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 246] He, along with Berkman, Goldman and a host of other anarchists, put their name to International Anarchist Manifesto against the First World War. It expressed the opinion of the bulk of the anarchist movement (at the time and consequently) on war and how to stop it. It is worth quoting from:

> "The truth is that the cause of wars ... rests solely in the existence of the State, which is the form of privilege ... Whatever the form it may assume, the State is nothing but organised oppression for the advantage of a privileged minority ...
>
> "The misfortune of the peoples, who were deeply attached to peace, is that, in order to avoid war, they placed their confidence in the State with its intriguing diplomatists, in democracy, and in political parties ... This confidence has been deliberately betrayed, and continues to be so, when governments, with the aid of the whole of the press, persuade their respective people that this war is a war of liberation.
>
> "We are resolutely against all wars between peoples, and ... have been, are, and ever will be most energetically opposed to war.
>
> "The role of the Anarchists ... is to continue to proclaim that there is only one war of liberation: that which in all countries is waged by the oppressed against the oppressors, by the exploited against the exploiters. Our part is to summon the slaves to revolt against their masters.
>
> "Anarchist action and propaganda should assiduously and perseveringly aim at weakening and dissolving the various States, at cultivating the spirit

of revolt, and arousing discontent in peoples and armies…

"We must take advantage of all the movements of revolt, of all the discontent, in order to foment insurrection, and to organise the revolution which we look to put end to all social wrongs… Social justice realised through the free organisation of producers: war and militarism done away with forever; and complete freedom won, by the abolition of the State and its organs of destruction." [*"International Anarchist Manifesto on the War,"* **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, pp. 386–8]

Thus, the attraction of pacifism to anarchists is clear. Violence **is** authoritarian and coercive, and so its use does contradict anarchist principles. That is why anarchists would agree with Malatesta when he argues that *"[w]e are on principle opposed to violence and for this reason wish that the social struggle should be conducted as humanely as possible."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57] Most, if not all, anarchists who are not strict pacifists agree with pacifist-anarchists when they argue that violence can often be counterproductive, alienating people and giving the state an excuse to repress both the anarchist movement and popular movements for social change. All anarchists support non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, which often provide better roads to radical change.

So, to sum up, anarchists who are pure pacifists are rare. Most accept the use of violence as a necessary evil and advocate minimising its use. All agree that a revolution which **institutionalises** violence will just recreate the state in a new form. They argue, however, that it is not authoritarian to destroy authority or to use violence to resist violence. Therefore, although most anarchists are not pacifists, most reject violence except in self-defence and even then kept to the minimum.



lowing these conquests, however, such values came to be regarded as "inferior," especially for a man, since men were in charge of domination and exploitation under patriarchy. (See e.g. Riane Eisler, **The Chalice and the Blade**; Elise Boulding, **The Underside of History**). Hence anarcha-feminists have referred to the creation of a non-authoritarian, anarchist society based on co-operation, sharing, mutual aid, etc. as the "feminisation of society."

Anarcha-feminists have noted that "feminising" society cannot be achieved without both self-management and decentralisation. This is because the patriarchal-authoritarian values and traditions they wish to overthrow are embodied and reproduced in hierarchies. Thus feminism implies decentralisation, which in turn implies self-management. Many feminists have recognised this, as reflected in their experiments with collective forms of feminist organisations that eliminate hierarchical structure and competitive forms of decision making. Some feminists have even argued that directly democratic organisations are specifically female political forms. [see e.g. Nancy Hartsock *"Feminist Theory and the Development of Revolutionary Strategy,"* in Zeila Eisenstein, ed., **Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism**, pp. 56–77] Like all anarchists, anarcha-feminists recognise that self-liberation is the key to women's equality and thus, freedom. Thus Emma Goldman:

*"Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself. First, by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right of anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children, unless she wants them, by refusing to be a servant to God, the State, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of*

## A.3.5 What is Anarcha-Feminism?

Although opposition to the state and all forms of authority had a strong voice among the early feminists of the 19th century, the more recent feminist movement which began in the 1960's was founded upon anarchist practice. This is where the term anarcha-feminism came from, referring to women anarchists who act within the larger feminist and anarchist movements to remind them of their principles.

The modern anarcha-feminists built upon the feminist ideas of previous anarchists, both male and female. Indeed, anarchism and feminism have always been closely linked. Many outstanding feminists have also been anarchists, including the pioneering Mary Wollstonecraft (author of **A Vindication of the Rights of Woman**), the Communard Louise Michel, and the American anarchists (and tireless champions of women's freedom) Voltairine de Cleyre and Emma Goldman (for the former, see her essays *"Sex Slavery"*, *"Gates of Freedom"*, *"The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy"*, *"Those Who Marry Do Ill"*; for the latter see *"The Traffic in Women"*, *"Woman Suffrage"*, *"The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation"*, *"Marriage and Love"* and *"Victims of Morality"*, for example). **Freedom**, the world's oldest anarchist newspaper, was founded by Charlotte Wilson in 1886. Anarchist women like Virgilia D'Andrea and Rose Pesota played important roles in both the libertarian and labour movements. The ***"Mujeres Libres"*** (*"Free Women"*) movement in Spain during the Spanish revolution is a classic example of women anarchists organising themselves to defend their basic freedoms and create a society based on women's freedom and equality (see **Free Women of Spain** by Martha Ackelsberg for more details on this important organisation). In addition, all the male major anarchist thinkers (bar Proudhon) were firm supporters of women's equality. For example, Bakunin opposed patriarchy and how the law *"subjects [women] to the absolute domination of the man."* He argued that *"[e]qual*



how the *"major locus of criticism of authoritarian, hierarchical, undemocratic forms of organisation for the last twenty years has been the women's movement ... After Marx defeated Bakunin in the First International, the prevailing form of organisation in the labour movement, the nationalised industries and in the left sects has mimicked the hierarchy of the state ... The women's movement has rescued and put into practice the long-submerged idea [of anarchists like Bakunin] that movements for, and experiments in, social change must 'prefigure' the future form of social organisation."* [**The Disorder of Women**, p. 201]

Peggy Kornegger has drawn attention to these strong connections between feminism and anarchism, both in theory and practice. *"The radical feminist perspective is almost pure anarchism,"* she writes. *"The basic theory postulates the nuclear family as the basis of all authoritarian systems. The lesson the child learns, from father to teacher to boss to god, is to* ***obey*** *the great anonymous voice of Authority. To graduate from childhood to adulthood is to become a full-fledged automaton, incapable of questioning or even of thinking clearly."* [*"Anarchism: The Feminist Connection,"* **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 26] Similarly, the Zero Collective argues that Anarcha-feminism *"consists in recognising the anarchism of feminism and consciously developing it."* [*"Anarchism/Feminism,"* pp. 3–7, **The Raven**, no. 21, p. 6]

Anarcha-feminists point out that authoritarian traits and values, for example, domination, exploitation, aggressiveness, competitiveness, desensitisation etc., are highly valued in hierarchical civilisations and are traditionally referred to as "masculine." In contrast, non-authoritarian traits and values such as co-operation, sharing, compassion, sensitivity, warmth, etc., are traditionally regarded as "feminine" and are devalued. Feminist scholars have traced this phenomenon back to the growth of patriarchal societies during the early Bronze Age and their conquest of co-operatively based "organic" societies in which "feminine" traits and values were prevalent and respected. Fol-

*rights must belong to men and women"* so that women can *"become independent and be free to forge their own way of life."* He looked forward to the end of *"the authoritarian juridical family"* and *"the full sexual freedom of women."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 396 and p. 397]

Thus anarchism has since the 1860s combined a radical critique of capitalism and the state with an equally powerful critique of patriarchy (rule by men). Anarchists, particularly female ones, recognised that modern society was dominated by men. As Ana Maria Mozzoni (an Italian anarchist immigrant in Buenos Aires) put it, women *"will find that the priest who damns you is a man; that the legislator who oppresses you is a man, that the husband who reduces you to an **object** is a man; that the libertine who harasses you is a man; that the capitalist who enriches himself with your ill-paid work and the speculator who calmly pockets the price of your body, are men."* Little has changed since then. Patriarchy still exists and, to quote the anarchist paper **La Questione Sociale**, it is still usually the case that women *"are slaves both in social and private life. If you are a proletarian, you have two tyrants: the man and the boss. If bourgeois, the only sovereignty left to you is that of frivolity and coquetry."* [quoted by Jose Moya, **Italians in Buenos Aires's Anarchist Movement**, pp. 197–8 and p. 200]

Anarchism, therefore, is based on an awareness that fighting patriarchy is as important as fighting against the state or capitalism. For *"[y]ou can have no free, or just, or equal society, nor anything approaching it, so long as womanhood is bought, sold, housed, clothed, fed, and **protected**, as a chattel."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"The Gates of Freedom"*, pp. 235–250, Eugenia C. Delamotte, **Gates of Freedom**, p. 242] To quote Louise Michel:

> *"The first thing that must change is the relationship between the sexes. Humanity has two parts, men and women, and we ought to be walking hand in hand; instead there is antagonism, and it will last as long as the 'stronger' half controls, or think its controls, the 'weaker' half."* [**The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, p. 139]



Thus anarchism, like feminism, fights patriarchy and for women's equality. Both share much common history and a concern about individual freedom, equality and dignity for members of the female sex (although, as we will explain in more depth below, anarchists have always been very critical of mainstream/liberal feminism as not going far enough). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the new wave of feminism of the sixties expressed itself in an anarchistic manner and drew much inspiration from anarchist figures such as Emma Goldman. Cathy Levine points out that, during this time, *"independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders, and other factotums of the male left, creating, independently and simultaneously, organisations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and regions. No accident, either."* [*"The Tyranny of Tyranny,"* **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 66] It is no accident because, as feminist scholars have noted, women were among the first victims of hierarchical society, which is thought to have begun with the rise of patriarchy and ideologies of domination during the late Neolithic era. Marilyn French argues (in **Beyond Power**) that the first major social stratification of the human race occurred when men began dominating women, with women becoming in effect a "lower" and "inferior" social class.

The links between anarchism and modern feminism exist in both ideas and action. Leading feminist thinker Carole Pateman notes that her *"discussion [on contract theory and its authoritarian and patriarchal basis] owes something to"* libertarian ideas, that is the *"anarchist wing of the socialist movement."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 14] Moreover, she noted in the 1980s

The history of Mayday is closely linked with the anarchist movement and the struggles of working people for a better world. Indeed, it originated with the execution of four anarchists in Chicago in 1886 for organising workers in the fight for the eight-hour day. Thus May Day is a product of ***"anarchy in action"*** — of the struggle of working people using direct action in labour unions to change the world.

It began in the 1880s in the USA. In 1884, the **Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada** (created in 1881, it changed its name in 1886 to the **American Federation of Labor**) passed a resolution which asserted that *"eight hours shall constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886, and that we recommend to labour organisations throughout this district that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution."* A call for strikes on May 1st, 1886 was made in support of this demand.

In Chicago the anarchists were the main force in the union movement, and partially as a result of their presence, the unions translated this call into strikes on May 1st. The anarchists thought that the eight hour day could only be won through direct action and solidarity. They considered that struggles for reforms, like the eight hour day, were not enough in themselves. They viewed them as only one battle in an ongoing class war that would only end by social revolution and the creation of a free society. It was with these ideas that they organised and fought.

In Chicago alone, 400 000 workers went out and the threat of strike action ensured that more than 45 000 were granted a shorter working day without striking. On May 3, 1886, police fired into a crowd of pickets at the McCormick Harvester Machine Company, killing at least one striker, seriously wounding five or six others, and injuring an undetermined number. Anarchists called for a mass meeting the next day in Haymarket Square to protest the brutality. According to the Mayor, *"nothing had occurred yet, or looked likely to occur to require*



hordes of starving people fighting over what vegetables, fruits and animals they could find in the countryside. Clearly an anti-organisation dogma can only be reconciled with the idea of a near overnight *"collapse"* of civilisation, not with a steady progress towards a long term goal. Equally, how many *"positive alternatives"* could exist without organisation?

Moore dismissed any critique that points out that a collapse would cause mass destruction as *"just smear tactics," "weird fantasies spread by some commentators hostile to anarcho-primitivism who suggest that the population levels envisaged by anarcho-primitivists would have to be achieved by mass die-offs or nazi-style death camps."* The *"commitment of anarcho-primitivists to the abolition of all power relations ... means that such orchestrated slaughter remains an impossibility as well as just plain horrendous."* [**Op. Cit.**] Yet no critic is suggesting that primitivists desire such a die-off or seek to organise it. They simply point out that the collapse of civilisation would result in a mass die-off due to the fact that most people do not have the skills necessary to survive it nor could the Earth provide enough food for six billion people trying to live in a primitivist manner. Other primitivists have asserted that it can, stating *"[i]t is not possible for all six billion of the planet's current inhabitants to survive as hunter-gatherers, but it is possible for those who can't to grow their own food in significantly smaller spaces ... as has been demonstrated by permaculture, organic gardening, and indigenous horticulture techniques."* [**Against Mass Society**] Unfortunately no evidence was provided to show the truth of this assertion nor that people could develop the necessary skills in time even if it were. It seems a slim hope to place the fate of billions on, so that humanity can be "wild" and free from such tyrannies as hospitals, books and electricity.

Faced with the horrors that such a *"collapse"* would entail, those primitivists who have thought the issue through end up accepting the need for a transition period. John Zerzan, for ex-

ample, argues that it *"seems evident that industrialisation and the factories could not be gotten rid of instantly, but equally clear that their liquidation must be pursued with all the vigour behind the rush of break-out."* Even the existence of cities is accepted, for *"[c]ultivation within the cities is another aspect of practical transition."* [**On the Transition: Postscript to Future Primitive**]

However, to accept the necessity of a transition period does little more than expose the contradictions within primitivism. Zerzan notes that *"the means of reproducing the prevailing Death Ship (e.g. its technology) cannot be used to fashion a liberated world."* He ponders: *"What would we keep? 'Labour-saving devices?' Unless they involve no division of labour (e.g. a lever or incline), this concept is a fiction; behind the 'saving' is hidden the congealed drudgery of many and the despoliation of the natural world."* How this is compatible with maintaining *"industrialisation and the factories"* for a (non-specified) period is unclear. Similarly, he argues that *"[i]nstead of the coercion of work — and how much of the present could continue without precisely that coercion? — an existence without constraints is an immediate, central objective."* [**Op. Cit.**] How that is compatible with the arguing that industry would be maintained for a time is left unasked, never mind unanswered. And if "work" continues, how is this compatible with the typical primitivist dismissal of "traditional" anarchism, namely that self-management is managing your own alienation and that no one will want to work in a factory or in a mine and, therefore, coercion will have to be used to make them do so? Does working in a self-managed workplace somehow become less alienating and authoritarian during a primitivist transition?

It is an obvious fact that the human population size cannot be reduced significantly by voluntary means in a short period of time. For primitivism to be viable, world population levels need to drop by something like 90%. This implies a drastic reduction of population will take decades, if not centuries,



murdered after they had surrendered, and their bodies dumped in mass graves. As a final insult, **Sacré Coeur** was built by the bourgeoisie on the birth place of the Commune, the Butte of Montmartre, to atone for the radical and atheist revolt which had so terrified them.

For anarchists, the lessons of the Paris Commune were threefold. Firstly, a decentralised confederation of communities is the necessary political form of a free society (*"**This was the form that the social revolution must take** — the independent commune."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 163]). Secondly, *"there is no more reason for a government inside a Commune than for government above the Commune."* This means that an anarchist community will be based on a confederation of neighbourhood and workplace assemblies freely co-operating together. Thirdly, it is critically important to unify political and economic revolutions into a **social** revolution. *"They tried to consolidate the Commune first and put off the social revolution until later, whereas the only way to proceed was **to consolidate the Commune by means of the social revolution!**"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel** , p. 97]

For more anarchist perspectives on the Paris Commune see Kropotkin's essay *"The Paris Commune"* in **Words of a Rebel** (and **The Anarchist Reader**) and Bakunin's *"The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State"* in **Bakunin on Anarchism**.

## A.5.2 The Haymarket Martyrs

May 1st is a day of special significance for the labour movement. While it has been hijacked in the past by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, the labour movement festival of May Day is a day of world-wide solidarity. A time to remember past struggles and demonstrate our hope for a better future. A day to remember that an injury to one is an injury to all.

*triumph of a popular Commune was materially impossible without a parallel triumph of the people in the economic field."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

Anarchists drew the obvious conclusions, arguing that *"if no central government was needed to rule the independent Communes, if the national Government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central* ***municipal*** *Government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the Commune."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 75] Instead of abolishing the state within the commune by organising federations of directly democratic mass assemblies, like the Parisian "sections" of the revolution of 1789–93 (see Kropotkin's **Great French Revolution** for more on these), the Paris Commune kept representative government and suffered for it. *"Instead of acting for themselves ... the people, confiding in their governors, entrusted them the charge of taking the initiative. This was the first consequence of the inevitable result of elections."* The council soon became *"the greatest obstacle to the revolution"* thus proving the *"political axiom that a government cannot be revolutionary."* [**Anarchism**, p. 240, p. 241 and p. 249]

The council become more and more isolated from the people who elected it, and thus more and more irrelevant. And as its irrelevance grew, so did its authoritarian tendencies, with the Jacobin majority creating a *"Committee of Public Safety"* to *"defend"* (by terror) the "revolution." The Committee was opposed by the libertarian socialist minority and was, fortunately, ignored in practice by the people of Paris as they defended their freedom against the French army, which was attacking them in the name of capitalist civilisation and "liberty." On May 21st, government troops entered the city, followed by seven days of bitter street fighting. Squads of soldiers and armed members of the bourgeoisie roamed the streets, killing and maiming at will. Over 25,000 people were killed in the street fighting, many



to achieve voluntarily. Given that it is unlikely that (almost) everyone on the planet will decide not to have children, this time scale will almost certainly be centuries and so agriculture and most industries will have to continue (and an exodus from the cities would be impossible immediately). Likewise, reliable contraceptives are a product of modern technology and, consequently, the means of producing them would have to maintained over that time — unless primitivists argue that along with refusing to have children, people will also refuse to have sex.

Then there is the legacy of industrial society, which simply cannot be left to decay on its own. To take just one obvious example, leaving nuclear power plants to melt down would hardly be eco-friendly. Moreover, it is doubtful that the ruling elite will just surrender its power without resistance and, consequently, any social revolution would need to defend itself against attempts to reintroduce hierarchy. Needless to say, a revolution which shunned all organisation and industry as inherently authoritarian would not be able to do this (it would have been impossible to produce the necessary military supplies to fight Franco's fascist forces during the Spanish Revolution if the workers had not converted and used their workplaces to do so, to note another obvious example).

Then there is another, key, contradiction. For if you accept that there is a need for a transition from 'here' to 'there' then primitivism automatically excludes itself from the anarchist tradition. The reason is simple. Moore asserts that *"mass society"* involves *"people working, living in artificial, technologised environments, and [being] subject to forms of coercion and control."* [**Op. Cit.**] So if what primitivists argue about technology, industry and mass society are all true, then any primitivist transition would, by definition, not be libertarian. This is because *"mass society"* will have to remain for some time (at the very least decades, more likely centuries) after a successful revolution and, consequently from a primitivist perspective,

be based on *"forms of coercion and control."* There is an ideology which proclaims the need for a transitional system which will be based on coercion, control and hierarchy which will, in time, disappear into a stateless society. It also, like primitivism, stresses that industry and large scale organisation is impossible without hierarchy and authority. That ideology is Marxism. Thus it seems ironic to "classical" anarchists to hear self-proclaimed anarchists repeating Engels arguments against Bakunin as arguments for "anarchy" (see section H.4 for a discussion of Engels claims that industry excludes autonomy).

So if, as seems likely, any transition will take centuries to achieve then the primivitist critique of "traditional" anarchism becomes little more than a joke — and a hindrance to meaningful anarchist practice and social change. It shows the contradiction at the heart of primitivism. While its advocates attack other anarchists for supporting technology, organisation, self-management of work, industrialisation and so on, they are themselves are dependent on the things they oppose as part of any humane transition to a primitivist society. And given the passion with which they attack other anarchists on these matters, unsurprisingly the whole notion of a primitivist transition period seems impossible to other anarchists. To denounce technology and industrialism as inherently authoritarian and then turn round and advocate their use after a revolution simply does not make sense from a logical or libertarian perspective.

Thus the key problem with primitivism can be seen. It offers no practical means of achieving its goals in a libertarian manner. As Knabb summarises, *"[w]hat begins as a valid questioning of excessive faith in science and technology ends up as a desperate and even less justified faith in the return of a primeval paradise, accompanied by a failure to engage the present system in any but an abstract, apocalyptical way."* To avoid this, it is necessary to take into account where we are now and, consequently, we will have to *"seriously consider how we will deal with all the practical problems that will be posed in the interim."*



selves *"in a Jacobin manner"* (to use Bakunin's cutting term). As Peter Kropotkin pointed out, while *"proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle ... they stopped mid-course"* and gave *"themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils."* Thus the Paris Commune did not *"break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the Communes."* This lead to disaster as the Commune council became *"immobilised ... by red tape"* and lost *"the sensitivity that comes from continued contact with the masses ... Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre — the people — they themselves paralysed the popular initiative."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 97, p. 93 and p. 97]

In addition, its attempts at economic reform did not go far enough, making no attempt to turn all workplaces into co-operatives (i.e. to expropriate capital) and forming associations of these co-operatives to co-ordinate and support each other's economic activities. Paris, stressed Voltairine de Cleyre, *"failed to strike at economic tyranny, and so came of what it could have achieved"* which was a *"free community whose economic affairs shall be arranged by the groups of actual producers and distributors, eliminating the useless and harmful element now in possession of the world's capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] As the city was under constant siege by the French army, it is understandable that the Communards had other things on their minds. However, for Kropotkin such a position was a disaster:

> *"They treated the economic question as a secondary one, which would be attended to later on, **after** the triumph of the Commune ... But the crushing defeat which soon followed, and the blood-thirsty revenge taken by the middle class, proved once more that the*

218] The new society envisioned by the communards was one based on the *"absolute autonomy of the Commune ... assuring to each its integral rights and to each Frenchman the full exercise of his aptitudes, as a man, a citizen and a labourer. The autonomy of the Commune will have for its limits only the equal autonomy of all other communes adhering to the contract; their association must ensure the liberty of France."* [*"Declaration to the French People"*, quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, pp. 276–7] With its vision of a confederation of communes, Bakunin was correct to assert that the Paris Commune was *"a bold, clearly formulated negation of the State."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 264]

Moreover, the Commune's ideas on federation obviously reflected the influence of Proudhon on French radical ideas. Indeed, the Commune's vision of a communal France based on a federation of delegates bound by imperative mandates issued by their electors and subject to recall at any moment echoes Proudhon's ideas (Proudhon had argued in favour of the *"implementation of the binding mandate"* in 1848 [**No Gods, No Masters**, p. 63] and for federation of communes in his work **The Principle of Federation**).

Thus both economically and politically the Paris Commune was heavily influenced by anarchist ideas. Economically, the theory of associated production expounded by Proudhon and Bakunin became consciously revolutionary practice. Politically, in the Commune's call for federalism and autonomy, anarchists see their *"future social organisation... [being] carried out from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with associations, then going into the communes, the regions, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 270]

However, for anarchists the Commune did not go far enough. It did not abolish the state within the Commune, as it had abolished it beyond it. The Communards organised them-



[**Op. Cit.**, p. 80 and p. 79] Sadly, primitivist ideology excludes this possibility by dismissing the starting point any real revolution would begin from as being inherently authoritarian. Moreover, they are blocking genuine social change by ensuring that no mass movement would ever be revolutionary enough to satisfy their criteria:

> *"Those who proudly proclaim their 'total opposition' to all compromise, all authority, all organisation, all theory, all technology, etc., usually turn out to have no **revolutionary** perspective whatsoever — no practical conception of how the present system might be overthrown or how a post-revolutionary society might work. Some even attempt to justify this lack by declaring that a mere revolution could never be radical enough to satisfy their eternal ontological rebelliousness. Such all-or-nothing bombast may temporarily impress a few spectators, but its ultimate effect is simply to make people blasé."* [Knabb, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 31–32]

Then there is the question of the means suggested for achieving primitivism. Moore argues that the *"kind of world envisaged by anarcho-primitivism is one unprecedented in human experience in terms of the degree and types of freedom anticipated ... so there can't be any limits on the forms of resistance and insurgency that might develop."* [**Op. Cit.**] Non-primitivists reply by saying that this implies primitivists don't know what they want nor how to get there. Equally, they stress that there **must be** limits on what are considered acceptable forms of resistance. This is because means shape the ends created and so authoritarian means will result in authoritarian ends. Tactics are not neutral and support for certain tactics betray an authoritarian perspective.

This can be seen from the UK magazine **"Green Anarchist,"** part of the extreme end of "Primitivism." Due to its

inherent unattractiveness for most people, it could never come about by libertarian means (i.e. by the free choice of individuals who create it by their own acts) and so cannot be anarchist as very few people would actually voluntarily embrace such a situation. This led to **"Green Anarchist"** developing a form of eco-vanguardism in order, to use Rousseau's expression, to "force people to be free." This was expressed when the magazine supported the actions and ideas of the (non-anarchist) Unabomber and published an article (*"The Irrationalists"*) by one its editors stating that *"the Oklahoma bombers had the right idea. The pity was that they did not blast any more government offices ... The Tokyo sarin cult had the right idea. The pity was that in testing the gas a year prior to the attack they gave themselves away."* [**Green Anarchist**, no. 51, p. 11] A defence of these remarks was published in the next issue and a subsequent exchange of letters in the US-based **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** magazine (numbers 48 to 52) saw the other editor justify this sick, authoritarian nonsense as simply examples of *"unmediated resistance"* conducted *"under conditions of extreme repression."* Whatever happened to the anarchist principle that means shape the ends? This means there **are** *"limits"* on tactics, as some tactics are not and can never be libertarian.

However, few primitivists take such an extreme position. Most "primitivist" anarchists rather than being anti-technology and anti-civilisation as such instead (to use David Watson's expression) believe it is a case of the *"affirmation of aboriginal lifeways"* and of taking a far more critical approach to issues such as technology, rationality and progress than that associated with Social Ecology. These eco-anarchists reject *"a dogmatic primitivism which claims we can return in some linear way to our primordial roots"* just as much as the idea of "progress," *"**superseding** both Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment"* ideas and traditions. For them, Primitivism *"reflects not only a glimpse at life before the rise of*



> *"The abolition of the exploitation of man by man, the last vestige of slavery;*
>
> *"The organisation of labour in mutual associations and inalienable capital."*

In this way, they hoped to ensure that *"equality must not be an empty word"* in the Commune. [**The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left**, Eugene Schulkind (ed.), p. 164] The Engineers Union voted at a meeting on 23rd of April that since the aim of the Commune should be *"economic emancipation"* it should *"organise labour through associations in which there would be joint responsibility"* in order *"to suppress the exploitation of man by man."* [quoted by Stewart Edwards, **The Paris Commune 1871**, pp. 263–4]

As well as self-managed workers' associations, the Communards practised direct democracy in a network popular clubs, popular organisations similar to the directly democratic neighbourhood assemblies (*"sections"*) of the French Revolution. *"People, govern yourselves through your public meetings, through your press"* proclaimed the newspaper of one Club. The commune was seen as an expression of the assembled people, for (to quote another Club) *"Communal power resides in each arrondissement [neighbourhood] wherever men are assembled who have a horror of the yoke and of servitude."* Little wonder that Gustave Courbet, artist friend and follower of Proudhon, proclaimed Paris as *"a true paradise ... all social groups have established themselves as federations and are masters of their own fate."* [quoted by Martin Phillip Johnson, **The Paradise of Association**, p. 5 and p. 6]

In addition the Commune's *"Declaration to the French People"* which echoed many key anarchist ideas. It saw the *"political unity"* of society as being based on *"the voluntary association of all local initiatives, the free and spontaneous concourse of all individual energies for the common aim, the well-being, the liberty and the security of all."* [quoted by Edwards, **Op. Cit.**, p.

and desired to recreate France as a confederation of communes (i.e. communities). Within the Commune, the elected council people were recallable and paid an average wage. In addition, they had to report back to the people who had elected them and were subject to recall by electors if they did not carry out their mandates.

Why this development caught the imagination of anarchists is clear — it has strong similarities with anarchist ideas. In fact, the example of the Paris Commune was in many ways similar to how Bakunin had predicted that a revolution would have to occur — a major city declaring itself autonomous, organising itself, leading by example, and urging the rest of the planet to follow it. (See *"Letter to Albert Richards"* in **Bakunin on Anarchism**). The Paris Commune began the process of creating a new society, one organised from the bottom up. It was *"a blow for the decentralisation of political power."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"The Paris Commune,"* **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 67]

Many anarchists played a role within the Commune — for example Louise Michel, the Reclus brothers, and Eugene Varlin (the latter murdered in the repression afterwards). As for the reforms initiated by the Commune, such as the re-opening of workplaces as co-operatives, anarchists can see their ideas of associated labour beginning to be realised. By May, 43 workplaces were co-operatively run and the Louvre Museum was a munitions factory run by a workers' council. Echoing Proudhon, a meeting of the Mechanics Union and the Association of Metal Workers argued that *"our economic emancipation … can only be obtained through the formation of workers' associations, which alone can transform our position from that of wage earners to that of associates."* They instructed their delegates to the Commune's Commission on Labour Organisation to support the following objectives:



*the state, but also a legitimate response to real conditions of life under civilisation"* and so we should respect and learn from *"palaeolithic and neolithic wisdom traditions"* (such as those associated with Native American tribes and other aboriginal peoples). While we *"cannot, and would not want to abandon secular modes of thinking and experiencing the world… we cannot reduce the experience of life, and the fundamental, inescapable questions **why** we live, and **how** we live, to secular terms… Moreover, the boundary between the spiritual and the secular is not so clear. A dialectical understanding that we are our history would affirm an inspirited reason that honours not only atheistic Spanish revolutionaries who died for **el ideal,** but also religious pacifist prisoners of conscience, Lakota ghost dancers, taoist hermits and executed sufi mystics."* [David Watson, **Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a future social ecology**, p. 240, p. 103, p. 240 and pp. 66–67]

Such "primitivist" anarchism is associated with a range of magazines, mostly US-based, like **Fifth Estate**. For example, on the question of technology, they argue that *"[w]hile market capitalism was a spark that set the fire, and remains at the centre of the complex, it is only part of something larger: the forced adaptation of organic human societies to an economic-instrumental civilisation and its mass technics, which are not only hierarchical and external but increasingly 'cellular' and internal. It makes no sense to layer the various elements of this process in a mechanistic hierarchy of first cause and secondary effects."* [Watson, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 127–8] For this reason primitivists are more critical of all aspects of technology, including calls by social ecologists for the use of **appropriate** technology essential in order to liberate humanity and the planet:

> *"To speak of technological society is in fact to refer to **the technics generated within capitalism,** which in turn generate new forms of capital. The notion of a distinct realm of social relations that de-*

> *termine this technology is not only ahistorical and undialectical, it reflects a kind of simplistic base/superstructure schema."* [Watson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 124]

Thus it is not a case of who **uses** technology which determines its effects, rather the effects of technology are determined to a large degree by the society that creates it. In other words, technology is selected which tends to re-enforce hierarchical power as it is those in power who generally select which technology is introduced within society (saying that, oppressed people have this excellent habit of turning technology against the powerful and technological change and social struggle are inter-related — see section D.10). Thus even the use of appropriate technology involves more than selecting from the range of available technology at hand, as these technologies have certain effects regardless of who uses them. Rather it is a question of critically evaluating all aspects of technology and modifying and rejecting it as required to maximise individual freedom, empowerment and happiness. Few Social Ecologists would disagree with this approach, though, and differences are usually a question of emphasis rather than a deep political point.

However, few anarchists are convinced by an ideology which, as Brian Morris notes, dismisses the *"last eight thousand years or so of human history"* as little more than a source *"of tyranny, hierarchical control, mechanised routine devoid of any spontaneity. All those products of the human creative imagination — farming, art, philosophy, technology, science, urban living, symbolic culture — are viewed negatively by Zerzan — in a monolithic sense."* While there is no reason to worship progress, there is just as little need to dismiss all change and development out of hand as oppressive. Nor are they convinced by Zerzan's *"selective culling of the anthropological literature."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 38] Most anarchists would concurr with Murray Bookchin:



## A.5.1 The Paris Commune

The Paris Commune of 1871 played an important role in the development of both anarchist ideas and the movement. As Bakunin commented at the time,

> *"revolutionary socialism [i.e. anarchism] has just attempted its first striking and practical demonstration in the Paris Commune ... [It] show[ed] to all enslaved peoples (and are there any masses that are not slaves?) the only road to emancipation and health; Paris inflict[ed] a mortal blow upon the political traditions of bourgeois radicalism and [gave] a real basis to revolutionary socialism."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 263–4]

The Paris Commune was created after France was defeated by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian war. The French government tried to send in troops to regain the Parisian National Guard's cannon to prevent it from falling into the hands of the population. *"Learning that the Versailles soldiers were trying to seize the cannon,"* recounted participant Louise Michel, *"men and women of Montmartre swarmed up the Butte in surprise manoeuvre. Those people who were climbing up the Butte believed they would die, but they were prepared to pay the price."* The soldiers refused to fire on the jeering crowd and turned their weapons on their officers. This was March 18th; the Commune had begun and *"the people wakened ... The eighteenth of March could have belonged to the allies of kings, or to foreigners, or to the people. It was the people's."* [**Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, p. 64]

In the free elections called by the Parisian National Guard, the citizens of Paris elected a council made up of a majority of Jacobins and Republicans and a minority of socialists (mostly Blanquists — authoritarian socialists — and followers of the anarchist Proudhon). This council proclaimed Paris autonomous

nificant growth. As this growth accelerates, many more examples of anarchy in action will be created and more and more people will take part in anarchist organisations and activities, making this part of the FAQ less and less important.

However, it is essential to highlight mass examples of anarchism working on a large scale in order to avoid the specious accusation of "utopianism." As history is written by the winners, these examples of anarchy in action are often hidden from view in obscure books. Rarely are they mentioned in the schools and universities (or if mentioned, they are distorted). Needless to say, the few examples we give are just that, a few.

Anarchism has a long history in many countries, and we cannot attempt to document every example, just those we consider to be important. We are also sorry if the examples seem Eurocentric. We have, due to space and time considerations, had to ignore the syndicalist revolt (1910 to 1914) and the shop steward movement (1917–21) in Britain, Germany (1919–21), Portugal (1974), the Mexican revolution, anarchists in the Cuban revolution, the struggle in Korea against Japanese (then US and Russian) imperialism during and after the Second World War, Hungary (1956), the "the refusal of work" revolt in the late 1960's (particularly in "the hot Autumn" in Italy, 1969), the UK miner's strike (1984–85), the struggle against the Poll Tax in Britain (1988–92), the strikes in France in 1986 and 1995, the Italian COBAS movement in the 80's and 90's, the popular assemblies and self-managed occupied workplaces during the Argentine revolt at the start of the 21st century and numerous other major struggles that have involved anarchist ideas of self-management (ideas that usually develop from the movement themselves, without anarchists necessarily playing a major, or "leading", role).

For anarchists, revolutions and mass struggles are ***"festivals of the oppressed,"*** when ordinary people start to act for themselves and change both themselves and the world.



> *"The ecology movement will never gain any real influence or have any significant impact on society if it advances a message of despair rather than hope, of a regressive and impossible return to primordial human cultures, rather than a commitment to human progress and to a unique **human** empathy for life as a whole ... We must recover the utopian impulses, the hopefulness, the appreciation of what is good, what is worth rescuing in yumn civilisation, as well as what must be rejected, if the ecology movement is to play a transformative and creative role in human affairs. For without changing society, we will not change the diastrous ecological direction in which capitalism is moving."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 63]

In addition, a position of "turning back the clock" is deeply flawed, for while some aboriginal societies are very anarchistic, not all are. As anarchist anthropologist David Graeber points out, *"we know almost nothing about like in Palaeolithic, other than the sort of thing that can be gleaned from studying very old skulls ... But what we see in the more recent ethnographic records is endless variety. There were hunter-gatherer societies with nobles and slaves, there are agrarian societies that are fiercely egalitarian. Even in ... Amazonia, one finds some groups who can justly be described as anarchists, like the Piaroa, living alongside others (say, the warlike Sherentre, who are clearly anything but."* [**Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology**, pp. 53–4] Even if we speculate, like Zerzan, that if we go back far enough we would find all of humanity in anarchistic tribes, the fact remains that certain of these societies did develop into statist, propertarian ones implying that a future anarchist society that is predominantly inspired by and seek to reproduce key elements of prehistoric forms of anarchy is not the answer

as "civilisation" may develop again due to the same social or environmental factors.

Primitivism confuses two radically different positions, namely support for a literal return to primitive lifeways and the use of examples from primitive life as a tool for social critique. Few anarchists would disagree with the second position as they recognise that current does not equal better and, consequently, past cultures and societies can have positive (as well as negative) aspects to them which can shed light on what a genuinely human society can be like. Similarly if "primitivism" simply involved questioning technology along with authority, few would disagree. However, this sensible position is, in the main, subsumed within the first one, the idea that an anarchist society would be a literal return to hunter-gatherer society. That this is the case can be seen from primitivist writings (some primitivists say that they are not suggesting the Stone Age as a model for their desired society nor a return to gathering and hunting, yet they seem to exclude any other options by their critique).

So to suggest that primitivism is simply a critique or some sort of *"anarchist speculation"* (to use John Moore's term) seems incredulous. If you demonise technology, organisation, "mass society" and "civilisation" as inherently authoritarian, you cannot turn round and advocate their use in a transition period or even in a free society. As such, the critique points to a mode of action and a vision of a free society and to suggest otherwise is simply incredulous. Equally, if you praise foraging bands and shifting horticultural communities of past and present as examples of anarchy then critics are entitled to conclude that primitivists desire a similar system for the future. This is reinforced by the critiques of industry, technology, "mass society" and agriculture.

Until such time as "primitivists" clearly state which of the two forms of primitivism they subscribe to, other anarchists will not take their ideas that seriously. Given that they fail to



these movements were prevented from recovering by the capitalist West on one hand and the Leninist East on the other. Over the same period of time, anarchism had been repressed in the US, Latin America, China, Korea (where a social revolution with anarchist content was put down before the Korean War), and Japan. Even in the one or two countries that escaped the worst of the repression, the combination of the Cold War and international isolation saw libertarian unions like the Swedish SAC become reformist.

But the 60's were a decade of new struggle, and all over the world the 'New Left' looked to anarchism as well as elsewhere for its ideas. Many of the prominent figures of the massive explosion of May 1968 in France considered themselves anarchists. Although these movements themselves degenerated, those coming out of them kept the idea alive and began to construct new movements. The death of Franco in 1975 saw a massive rebirth of anarchism in Spain, with up to 500,000 people attending the CNT's first post-Franco rally. The return to a limited democracy in some South American countries in the late 70's and 80's saw a growth in anarchism there. Finally, in the late 80's it was anarchists who struck the first blows against the Leninist USSR, with the first protest march since 1928 being held in Moscow by anarchists in 1987.

Today the anarchist movement, although still weak, organises tens of thousands of revolutionaries in many countries. Spain, Sweden and Italy all have libertarian union movements organising some 250,000 between them. Most other European countries have several thousand active anarchists. Anarchist groups have appeared for the first time in other countries, including Nigeria and Turkey. In South America the movement has recovered massively. A contact sheet circulated by the Venezuelan anarchist group **Corrio A** lists over 100 organisations in just about every country.

Perhaps the recovery is slowest in North America, but there, too, all the libertarian organisations seem to be undergoing sig-

account of the Russian revolution he was an active participant of. He used it to refer to the rarely acknowledged independent, creative actions of the people themselves. As Voline put it, *"it is not known how to study a revolution"* and most historians *"mistrust and ignore those developments which occur silently in the depths of the revolution ... at best, they accord them a few words in passing ... [Yet] it is precisely these hidden facts which are important, and which throw a true light on the events under consideration and on the period."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 19] Anarchism, based as it is on revolution from below, has contributed considerably to both the ***"underground history"*** and the ***"unknown revolution"*** of the past few centuries and this section of the FAQ will shed some light on its achievements.

It is important to point out that these examples are of wide-scale social experiments and do not imply that we ignore the undercurrent of anarchist practice which exists in everyday life, even under capitalism. Both Peter Kropotkin (in **Mutual Aid**) and Colin Ward (in **Anarchy in Action**) have documented the many ways in which ordinary people, usually unaware of anarchism, have worked together as equals to meet their common interests. As Colin Ward argues, *"an anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 14]

Anarchism is not only about a future society, it is also about the social struggle happening today. It is not a condition but a process, which we create by our self-activity and self-liberation.

By the 1960's, however, many commentators were writing off the anarchist movement as a thing of the past. Not only had fascism finished off European anarchist movements in the years before and during the war, but in the post-war period



answer such basic questions of how they plan to deactivate industry safely and avoid mass starvation without the workers' control, international links and federal organisation they habitually dismiss out of hand as new forms of "governance," other anarchists do not hold much hope that it will happen soon. Ultimately, we are faced with the fact that a revolution will start in society as it is. Anarchism recognises this and suggests a means of transforming it. Primitivism shies away from such minor problems and, consequently, has little to recommend it in most anarchists' eyes.

This is not to suggest, of course, that non-primitivist anarchists think that everyone in a free society must have the same level of technology. Far from it. An anarchist society would be based on free experimentation. Different individuals and groups will pick the way of life that best suits them. Those who seek less technological ways of living will be free to do so as will those who want to apply the benefits of (appropriate) technologies. Similarly, all anarchists support the struggles of those in the developing world against the onslaught of (capitalist) civilisation and the demands of (capitalist) progress.

For more on "primitivist" anarchism see John Zerzan's **Future Primitive** as well as David Watson's **Beyond Bookchin** and **Against the Mega-Machine**. Ken Knabb's essay **The Poverty of Primitivism** is an excellent critique of primitivism as is Brian Oliver Sheppard's **Anarchism vs. Primitivism**.

# A.4 Who are the major anarchist thinkers?

Although Gerard Winstanley (**The New Law of Righteousness**, 1649) and William Godwin (**Enquiry Concerning Political Justice**, 1793) had begun to unfold the philosophy of anarchism in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that anarchism emerged as a coherent theory with a systematic, developed programme. This work was mainly started by four people — a German, ***Max Stirner*** (1806–1856), a Frenchman, ***Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*** (1809–1865), and two Russians, ***Michael Bakunin*** (1814–1876) and ***Peter Kropotkin*** (1842–1921). They took the ideas in common circulation within sections of the working population and expressed them in written form.

Born in the atmosphere of German romantic philosophy, Stirner's anarchism (set forth in **The Ego and Its Own**) was an extreme form of individualism, or **egoism**, which placed the unique individual above all else — state, property, law or duty. His ideas remain a cornerstone of anarchism. Stirner attacked both capitalism and state socialism, laying the foundations of both social and individualist anarchism by his egoist critique of capitalism and the state that supports it. In place of the state and capitalism, Max Stirner urges the *"union of egoists,"* free associations of unique individuals who co-operate as equals in order to maximise their freedom and satisfy their desires (including emotional ones for solidarity, or "intercourse" as Stirner called it). Such a union would be non-hierarchical, for, as Stirner wonders, *"is an association, wherein most mem-*



of popular self-activity and self-liberation (as Proudhon put it in 1848, *"the proletariat must emancipate itself"*). [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, p. 143 and p. 125] All anarchists echo Proudhon's idea of revolutionary change from below, the creation of a new society by the actions of the oppressed themselves. Bakunin, for example, argued that anarchists are *"foes ... of all State organisations as such, and believe that the people can only be happy and free, when, organised from below by means of its own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of any guardians, it will create its own life."* [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 63] In section J.7 we discuss what anarchists think a social revolution is and what it involves.

Many of these revolutions and revolutionary movements are relatively unknown to non-anarchists. Most people will have heard of the Russian revolution but few will know of the popular movements which were its life-blood before the Bolsheviks seized power or the role that the anarchists played in it. Few will have heard of the Paris Commune, the Italian factory occupations or the Spanish collectives. This is unsurprising for, as Hebert Read notes, history *"is of two kinds — a record of events that take place publicly, that make the headlines in the newspapers and get embodied in official records — we might call this overground history"* but *"taking place at the same time, preparing for these public events, anticipating them, is another kind of history, that is not embodied in official records, an invisible underground history."* [quoted by William R. McKercher, **Freedom and Authority**, p. 155] Almost by definition, popular movements and revolts are part of *"underground history"*, the social history which gets ignored in favour of elite history, the accounts of the kings, queens, politicians and wealthy whose fame is the product of the crushing of the many.

This means our examples of "anarchy in action" are part of what the Russian anarchist Voline called *"The Unknown Revolution."* Voline used that expression as the title of his classic

# A.5 What are some examples of "Anarchy in Action"?

Anarchism, more than anything else, is about the efforts of millions of revolutionaries changing the world in the last two centuries. Here we will discuss some of the high points of this movement, all of them of a profoundly anti-capitalist nature.

Anarchism **is** about radically changing the world, not just making the present system less inhuman by encouraging the anarchistic tendencies within it to grow and develop. While no purely anarchist revolution has taken place yet, there have been numerous ones with a highly anarchist character and level of participation. And while these have **all** been destroyed, in each case it has been at the hands of outside force brought against them (backed either by Communists or Capitalists), not because of any internal problems in anarchism itself. These revolutions, despite their failure to survive in the face of overwhelming force, have been both an inspiration for anarchists and proof that anarchism is a viable social theory and can be practised on a large scale.

What these revolutions share is the fact they are, to use Proudhon's term, a ***"revolution from below"*** — they were examples of *"collective activity, of popular spontaneity."* It is only a transformation of society from the bottom up by the action of the oppressed themselves that can create a free society. As Proudhon asked, *"[w]hat serious and lasting Revolution was not made **from below,** by the people?"* For this reason an anarchist is a *"revolutionary **from below.**"* Thus the social revolutions and mass movements we discuss in this section are examples



*bers allow themselves to be lulled as regards their most natural and most obvious interests, actually an Egoist's association? Can they really be 'Egoists' who have banded together when one is a slave or a serf of the other?"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 24]

Individualism by definition includes no concrete programme for changing social conditions. This was attempted by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first to describe himself openly as an anarchist. His theories of **mutualism**, **federalism** and workers' **self-management** and **association** had a profound effect on the growth of anarchism as a mass movement and spelled out clearly how an anarchist world could function and be co-ordinated. It would be no exaggeration to state that Proudhon's work defined the fundamental nature of anarchism as both an anti-state and anti-capitalist movement and set of ideas. Bakunin, Kropotkin and Tucker all claimed inspiration from his ideas and they are the immediate source for both social and individualist anarchism, with each thread emphasising different aspects of mutualism (for example, social anarchists stress the associational aspect of them while individualist anarchists the non-capitalist market side). Proudhon's major works include **What is Property**, **System of Economical Contradictions**, **The Principle of Federation** and, and **The Political Capacity of the Working Classes**. His most detailed discussion of what mutualism would look like can be found in his **The General Idea of the Revolution**. His ideas heavily influenced both the French Labour movement and the Paris Commune of 1871.

Proudhon's ideas were built upon by Michael Bakunin, who humbly suggested that his own ideas were simply Proudhon's *"widely developed and pushed right to ... [their] final consequences."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 198] However, he is doing a disservice to his own role in developing anarchism. For Bakunin is the central figure in the development of modern anarchist activism and

ideas. He emphasised the importance of **collectivism,** mass insurrection, **revolution** and involvement in the militant **labour movement** as the means of creating a free, classless society. Moreover, he repudiated Proudhon's sexism and added patriarchy to the list of social evils anarchism opposes. Bakunin also emphasised the social nature of humanity and individuality, rejecting the abstract individualism of liberalism as a denial of freedom. His ideas become dominant in the 20th century among large sections of the radical labour movement. Indeed, many of his ideas are almost identical to what would later be called syndicalism or anarcho-syndicalism. Bakunin influenced many union movements — especially in Spain, where a major anarchist social revolution took place in 1936. His works include **Anarchy and Statism** (his only book), **God and the State**, **The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State**, and many others. **Bakunin on Anarchism**, edited by Sam Dolgoff is an excellent collection of his major writings. Brian Morris' **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom** is an excellent introduction to Bakunin's life and ideas.

Peter Kropotkin, a scientist by training, fashioned a sophisticated and detailed anarchist analysis of modern conditions linked to a thorough-going prescription for a future society — **communist-anarchism** — which continues to be the most widely-held theory among anarchists. He identified **mutual aid** as the best means by which individuals can develop and grow, pointing out that competition **within** humanity (and other species) was often not in the best interests of those involved. Like Bakunin, he stressed the importance of direct, economic, class struggle and anarchist participation in any popular movement, particularly in labour unions. Taking Proudhon's and Bakunin's idea of the **commune,** he generalised their insights into a vision of how the social, economic and personal life of a free society would function. He aimed to base anarchism *"on a scientific basis by the study of the tendencies that are apparent now in society and may*



structure an interest in actively supporting the authoritarian order.

While his uni-dimensional focus on sex is misplaced, his analysis of how we internalise our oppression in order to survive under hierarchy is important for understanding why so many of the most oppressed people seem to love their social position and those who rule over them. By understanding this collective character structure and how it forms also provides humanity with new means of transcending such obstacles to social change. Only an awareness of how people's character structure prevents them from becoming aware of their real interests can it be combated and social self-emancipation assured.

Maurice Brinton's **The Irrational in Politics** is an excellent short introduction to Reich's ideas which links their insights to libertarian socialism.

*Proudhon and others.*" [**The Sane Society**, p. 265, p. 267 and p. 259] Fromm's Marxism, therefore, was fundamentally of a libertarian and humanist type and his insights of profound importance for anyone interested in changing society for the better.

Wilheim Reich, like Fromm, set out to elaborate a social psychology based on both Marxism and psychoanalysis. For Reich, sexual repression led to people amenable to authoritarianism and happy to subject themselves to authoritarian regimes. While he famously analysed Nazism in this way (in **The Mass Psychology of Fascism**, his insights also apply to other societies and movements (it is no co-incidence, for example, that the religious right in America oppose pre-martial sex and use scare tactics to get teenagers to associate it with disease, dirt and guilt).

His argument is that due to sexual repression we develop what he called *"character armour"* which internalises our oppressions and ensures that we can function in a hierarchical society. This social conditioning is produced by the patriarchal family and its net results is a powerful reinforcement and perpetuation of the dominant ideology and the mass production of individuals with obedience built into them, individuals ready to accept the authority of teacher, priest, employer and politician as well as to endorse the prevailing social structure. This explains how individuals and groups can support movements and institutions which exploit or oppress them. In other words, act think, feel and act against themselves and, moreover, can internalise their own oppression to such a degree that they may even seek to defend their subordinate position.

Thus, for Reich, sexual repression produces an individual who is adjusted to the authoritarian order and who will submit to it in spite of all misery and degradation it causes them. The net result is fear of freedom, and a conservative, reactionary mentality. Sexual repression aids political power, not only through the process which makes the mass individual passive and unpolitical, but also by creating in their character



*indicate its further evolution"* towards anarchy while, at the same time, urging anarchists to *"promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those union to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation."* [**Anarchism**, p. 298 and p. 287] Like Bakunin, he was a revolutionary and, like Bakunin, his ideas inspired those struggle for freedom across the globe. His major works included **Mutual Aid**, **The Conquest of Bread**, **Field, Factories, and Workshops**, **Modern Science and Anarchism**, **Act for Yourselves**, **The State: Its Historic Role**, **Words of a Rebel**, and many others. A collection of his revolutionary pamphlets is available under the title **Anarchism** and is essential reading for anyone interested in his ideas. In Addition, Graham Purchase's **Evolution and Revolution** and **Kropotkin: The Politics of Community** by Brain Morris are both excellent evaluations of his ideas and how they are still relevant today.

The various theories proposed by these "founding anarchists" are not, however, mutually exclusive: they are interconnected in many ways, and to some extent refer to different levels of social life. Individualism relates closely to the conduct of our private lives: only by recognising the uniqueness and freedom of others and forming unions with them can we protect and maximise our own uniqueness and liberty; mutualism relates to our general relations with others: by mutually working together and co-operating we ensure that we do not work for others. Production under anarchism would be collectivist, with people working together for their own, and the common, good, and in the wider political and social world decisions would be reached communally.

It should also be stressed that anarchist schools of thought are **not** named after individual anarchists. Thus anarchists are **not** *"Bakuninists"*, *"Proudhonists"* or *"Kropotkinists"* (to name three possibilities). Anarchists, to quote Malatesta, *"follow ideas and not men, and rebel against this habit of embodying*

*a principle in a man.*" This did not stop him calling Bakunin *"our great master and inspiration."* [**Errico Malatesta: Life and Ideas**, p. 199 and p. 209] Equally, not everything written by a famous anarchist thinker is automatically libertarian. Bakunin, for example, only became an anarchist in the last ten years of his life (this does not stop Marxists using his pre-anarchist days to attack anarchism!). Proudhon turned away from anarchism in the 1850s before returning to a more anarchistic (if not strictly anarchist) position just before his death in 1865. Similarly, Kropotkin's or Tucker's arguments in favour of supporting the Allies during the First World War had nothing to do with anarchism. Thus to say, for example, that anarchism is flawed because Proudhon was a sexist pig simply does not convince anarchists. No one would dismiss democracy, for example, because Rousseau opinions on women were just as sexist as Proudhon's. As with anything, modern anarchists analyse the writings of previous anarchists to draw inspiration, but a dogma. Consequently, we reject the non-libertarian ideas of "famous" anarchists while keeping their positive contributions to the development of anarchist theory. We are sorry to belabour the point, but much of Marxist "criticism" of anarchism basically involves pointing out the negative aspects of dead anarchist thinkers and it is best simply to state clearly the obvious stupidity of such an approach.

Anarchist ideas of course did not stop developing when Kropotkin died. Neither are they the products of just four men. Anarchism is by its very nature an evolving theory, with many different thinkers and activists. When Bakunin and Kropotkin were alive, for example, they drew aspects of their ideas from other libertarian activists. Bakunin, for example, built upon the practical activity of the followers of Proudhon in the French labour movement in the 1860s. Kropotkin, while the most associated with developing the theory communist-anarchism, was simply the most famous expounder of the ideas that had develethics, the authoritarian personality (what causes it and how to change it), alienation, freedom, individualism and what a good society would be like.

Fromm's analysis of capitalism and the *"having"* mode of life are incredibly insightful, especially in context with today's consumerism. For Fromm, the way we live, work and organise together influence how we develop, our health (mental and physical), our happiness more than we suspect. He questions the sanity of a society which covets property over humanity and adheres to theories of submission and domination rather than self-determination and self-actualisation. His scathing indictment of modern capitalism shows that it is the main source of the isolation and alienation prevalent in today. Alienation, for Fromm, is at the heart of the system (whether private or state capitalism). We are happy to the extent that we realise ourselves and for this to occur our society must value the human over the inanimate (property).

Fromm rooted his ideas in a humanistic interpretation of Marx, rejecting Leninism and Stalinism as an authoritarian corruption of his ideas (*"the destruction of socialism ... began with Lenin."*). Moreover, he stressed the need for a decentralised and libertarian form of socialism, arguing that the anarchists had been right to question Marx's preferences for states and centralisation. As he put it, the *"errors of Marx and Engels ... [and] their centralistic orientation, were due to the fact they were much more rooted in the middle-class tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both psychologically and intellectually, than men like Fourier, Owen, Proudhon and Kropotkin."* As the *"contradiction"* in Marx between *"the principles of centralisation and decentralisation,"* for Fromm *"Marx and Engels were much more 'bourgeois' thinkers than were men like Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Landauer. Paradoxical as it sounds, the Leninist development of Socialism represented a regression to the bourgeois concepts of the state and of political power, rather than the new socialist concept as it was expressed so much clearer by Owen,*

slowdowns, strikes and sabotage, so too do the non-waged resist the reduction of their lives to work. For Autonomists, the creation of communism is not something that comes later but is something which is repeatedly created by current developments of new forms of working class self-activity.

The similarities with social anarchism are obvious. Which probably explains why Autonomists spend so much time analysing and quoting Marx to justify their ideas for otherwise other Marxists will follow Lenin's lead on the council communists and label them anarchists and ignore them! For anarchists, all this Marx quoting seems amusing. Ultimately, if Marx really was an Autonomist Marxist then why do Autonomists have to spend so much time re-constructing what Marx "really" meant? Why did he not just say it clearly to begin with? Similarly, why root out (sometimes obscure) quotes and (sometimes passing) comments from Marx to justify your insights? Does something stop being true if Marx did not mention it first? Whatever the insights of Autonomism its Marxism will drag it backwards by rooting its politics in the texts of two long dead Germans. Like the surreal debate between Trotsky and Stalin in the 1920s over *"Socialism in One Country"* conducted by means of Lenin quotes, all that will be proved is not whether a given idea is right but simply that the mutually agreed authority figure (Lenin or Marx) may have held it. Thus anarchists suggest that Autonomists practice some autonomy when it comes to Marx and Engels.

Other libertarian Marxists close to anarchism include Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich. Both tried to combine Marx with Freud to produce a radical analysis of capitalism and the personality disorders it causes. Erich Fromm, in such books as **The Fear of Freedom**, **Man for Himself**, **The Sane Society** and **To Have or To Be?** developed a powerful and insightful analysis of capitalism which discussed how it shaped the individual and built psychological barriers to freedom and authentic living. His works discuss many important topics, including



oped after Bakunin's death in the libertarian wing of the First International and before he became an anarchist. Thus anarchism is the product of tens of thousands of thinkers and activists across the globe, each shaping and developing anarchist theory to meet their needs as part of the general movement for social change. Of the many other anarchists who could be mentioned here, we can mention but a few.

Stirner is not the only famous anarchist to come from Germany. It also produced a number of original anarchist thinkers. Gustav Landauer was expelled from the Marxist Social-Democratic Party for his radical views and soon after identified himself as an anarchist. For him, anarchy was *"the expression of the liberation of man from the idols of state, the church and capital"* and he fought *"**State** socialism, levelling from above, bureaucracy"* in favour of *"free association and union, the absence of authority."* His ideas were a combination of Proudhon's and Kropotkin's and he saw the development of self-managed communities and co-operatives as the means of changing society. He is most famous for his insight that the *"state is a condition, a certain relationship among human beings, a mode of behaviour between them; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently towards one another."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 410 and p. 411] He took a leading part in the Munich revolution of 1919 and was murdered during its crushing by the German state. His book **For Socialism** is an excellent summary of his main ideas.

Other notable German anarchists include Johann Most, originally a Marxist and an elected member of the Reichstag, he saw the futility of voting and became an anarchist after being exiled for writing against the Kaiser and clergy. He played an important role in the American anarchist movement, working for a time with Emma Goldman. More a propagandist than a great thinker, his revolutionary message inspired numerous people to become anarchists. Then there is Rudolf

Rocker, a bookbinder by trade who played an important role in the Jewish labour movement in the East End of London (see his autobiography, **The London Years**, for details). He also produced the definite introduction to **Anarcho-syndicalism** as well as analysing the Russian Revolution in articles like **Anarchism and Sovietism** and defending the Spanish revolution in pamphlets like **The Tragedy of Spain**. His **Nationalism and Culture** is a searching analysis of human culture through the ages, with an analysis of both political thinkers and power politics. He dissects nationalism and explains how the nation is not the cause but the result of the state as well as repudiating race science for the nonsense it is.

In the United States Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were two of the leading anarchist thinkers and activists. Goldman united Stirner's egoism with Kropotkin's communism into a passionate and powerful theory which combined the best of both. She also placed anarchism at the centre of feminist theory and activism as well as being an advocate of syndicalism (see her book **Anarchism and Other Essays** and the collection of essays, articles and talks entitled **Red Emma Speaks**). Alexander Berkman, Emma's lifelong companion, produced a classic introduction to anarchist ideas called **What is Anarchism?** (also known as **What is Communist Anarchism?** and the **ABC of Anarchism**). Like Goldman, he supported anarchist involvement in the labour movement was a prolific writer and speaker (the book **Life of An Anarchist** gives an excellent selection of his best articles, books and pamphlets). Both were involved in editing anarchist journals, with Goldman most associated with **Mother Earth** (see **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth** edited by Peter Glassgold) and Berkman **The Blast** (reprinted in full in 2005). Both journals were closed down when the two anarchists were arrested in 1917 for their anti-war activism.



ing for any budding Situationists, as is Knabb's own **Public Secrets**.

Lastly there is Autonomist Marxism. Drawing on the works of the council communism, Castoriadis, situationism and others, it places the class struggle at the heart of its analysis of capitalism. It initially developed in Italy during the 1960s and has many currents, some closer to anarchism than others. While the most famous thinker in the Autonomist tradition is probably Antonio Negri (who coined the wonderful phrase *"money has only one face, that of the boss"* in **Marx Beyond Marx**) his ideas are more within traditional Marxist. For an Autonomist whose ideas are closer to anarchism, we need to turn to the US thinker and activist who has written the one of the best summaries of Kropotkin's ideas in which he usefully indicates the similarities between anarcho-communism and Autonomist Marxism (*"Kropotkin, Self-valorisation and the Crisis of Marxism,"* **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 2, no. 3). His book **Reading Capital Politically** is an essential text for understanding Autonomism and its history.

For Cleaver, *"autonomist Marxism"* as generic name for a variety of movements, politics and thinkers who have emphasised the autonomous power of workers — autonomous from capital, obviously, but also from their official organisations (e.g. the trade unions, the political parties) and, moreover, the power of particular groups of working class people to act autonomously from other groups (e.g. women from men). By *"autonomy"* it is meant the ability of working class people to define their own interests and to struggle for them and, critically, to go beyond mere reaction to exploitation and to take the offensive in ways that shape the class struggle and define the future. Thus they place working class power at the centre of their thinking about capitalism, how it develops and its dynamics as well as in the class conflicts within it. This is not limited to just the workplace and just as workers resist the imposition of work inside the factory or office, via

Building upon the ideas of council communism, the Situationists developed their ideas in important new directions. Working in the late 1950s and 1960s, they combined council communist ideas with surrealism and other forms of radical art to produce an impressive critique of post-war capitalism. Unlike Castoriadis, whose ideas influenced them, the Situationists continued to view themselves as Marxists, developing Marx's critique of capitalist economy into a critique of capitalist society as alienation had shifted from being located in capitalist production into everyday life. They coined the expression ***"The Spectacle"*** to describe a social system in which people become alienated from their own lives and played the role of an audience, of spectators. Thus capitalism had turned being into having and now, with the spectacle, it turned having into appearing. They argued that we could not wait for a distant revolution, but rather should liberate ourselves in the here and now, creating events (*"situations"*) which would disrupt the ordinary and normal to jolt people out of their allotted roles within society. A social revolution based on sovereign rank and file assemblies and self-managed councils would be the ultimate "situation" and the aim of all Situationists.

While critical of anarchism, the differences between the two theories are relatively minor and the impact of the Situationists on anarchism cannot be underestimated. Many anarchists embraced their critique of modern capitalist society, their subversion of modern art and culture for revolutionary purposes and call for revolutionising everyday life. Ironically, while Situationism viewed itself as an attempt to transcend tradition forms of Marxism and anarchism, it essentially became subsumed by anarchism. The classic works of situationism are Guy Debord's **Society of the Spectacle** and Raoul Veneigem's **The Revolution of Everyday Life**. The **Situationist International Anthology** (edited by Ken Knabb) is essential read-



In December 1919, both he and Goldman were expelled by the US government to Russia after the 1917 revolution had radicalised significant parts of the American population. There as they were considered too dangerous to be allowed to remain in the land of the free. Exactly two years later, their passports arrived to allow them to leave Russia. The Bolshevik slaughter of the Kronstadt revolt in March 1921 after the civil war ended had finally convinced them that the Bolshevik dictatorship meant the death of the revolution there. The Bolshevik rulers were more than happy to see the back of two genuine revolutionaries who stayed true to their principles. Once outside Russia, Berkman wrote numerous articles on the fate of the revolution (including **The Russian Tragedy** and **The Kronstadt Rebellion**) as well as publishing his diary in book from as **The Bolshevik Myth**. Goldman produced her classic work **My Disillusionment in Russia** as well as publishing her famous autobiography **Living My Life**. She also found time to refute Trotsky's lies about the Kronstadt rebellion in **Trotsky Protests Too Much**.

As well as Berkman and Goldman, the United States also produced other notable activists and thinkers. Voltairine de Cleyre played an important role in the US anarchist movement, enriching both US and international anarchist theory with her articles, poems and speeches. Her work includes such classics as **Anarchism and American Traditions**, **Direct Action**, **Sex Slavery** and **The Dominant Idea**. These are included, along with other articles and some of her famous poems, in **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**. These and other important essays are included in **Exquisite Rebel**, another anthology of her writings, while Eugenia C. Delamotte's **Gates of Freedom** provides an excellent overview of her life and ideas as well as selections from her works. In addition, the book **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth** contains a good selection of her writings as well as other anarchists active at the time. Also of interest

is the collection of the speeches she made to mark the state murder of the Chicago Martyrs in 1886 (see **the First Mayday: The Haymarket Speeches 1895–1910**). Every November the 11th, except when illness made it impossible, she spoke in their memory. For those interested in the ideas of that previous generation of anarchists which the Chicago Martyrs represented, Albert Parsons' **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis** is essential reading. His wife, Lucy Parsons, was also an outstanding anarchist activist from the 1870s until her death in 1942 and selections of her writings and speeches can be found in the book **Freedom, Equality & Solidarity** (edited by Gale Ahrens).

Elsewhere in the Americas, Ricardo Flores Magon helped lay the ground for the Mexican revolution of 1910 by founding the (strangely named) **Mexican Liberal Party** in 1905 which organised two unsuccessful uprising against the Diaz dictatorship in 1906 and 1908. Through his paper **Tierra y Libertad** (*"Land and Liberty"*) he influenced the developing labour movement as well as Zapata's peasant army. He continually stressed the need to turn the revolution into a **social** revolution which will *"give the lands to the people"* as well as *"possession of the factories, mines, etc."* Only this would ensure that the people *"will not be deceived."* Talking of the Agrarians (the Zapatista army), Ricardo's brother Enrique he notes that they *"are more or less inclined towards anarchism"* and they can work together because both are *"direct actionists"* and *"they act perfectly revolutionary. They go after the rich, the authorities and the priestcraft"* and have *"burnt to ashes private property deeds as well as all official records"* as well as having *"thrown down the fences that marked private properties."* Thus the anarchists *"propagate our principles"* while the Zapatista's *"put them into practice."* [quoted by David Poole, **Land and Liberty**, p. 17 and p. 25] Ricardo died as a political prisoner in an American jail and is, ironically, considered a hero of the revolution by the Mexican state. A substantial collection of his writings are available in the book



1921, the council communists broke with the Bolshevism that had already effectively expelled them from both the national Communist Parties and the Communist International.

Like the anarchists, they argued that Russia was a state-capitalist party dictatorship and had nothing to be with socialism. And, again like anarchists, the council communists argue that the process of building a new society, like the revolution itself, is either the work of the people themselves or doomed from the start. As with the anarchists, they too saw the Bolshevik take-over of the soviets (like that of the trade unions) as subverting the revolution and beginning the restoration of oppression and exploitation.

To discover more about council communism, the works of Paul Mattick are essential reading. While best known as a writer on Marxist economic theory in such works as **Marx and Keynes**, **Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory** and **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, Mattick had been a council communist since the German revolution of 1919/1920. His books **Anti-Bolshevik Communism** and **Marxism: The Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?** are excellent introductions to his political ideas. Also essential reading is Anton Pannekeok's works. His classic **Workers' Councils** explains council communism from first principles while his **Lenin as Philosopher** dissects Lenin's claims to being a Marxist (Serge Bricianer, **Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils** is the best study of the development of Panekoek's ideas). In the UK, the militant suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst became a council communist under the impact of the Russian Revolution and, along with anarchists like Guy Aldred, led the opposition to the importation of Leninism into the communist movement there (see Mark Shipway's **Anti-Parliamentary Communism: The Movement for Workers Councils in Britain, 1917–45** for more details of libertarian communism in the UK). Otto Ruhle and Karl Korsch are also important thinkers in this tradition.

critiques of capitalism and presented a vision of socialism rooted in co-operatively organised workplaces. While retaining an element of government and state in their political ideas, these socialists have placed economic self-management at the heart of their economic vision and, consequently, are closer to anarchism than most socialists.

## A.4.4 Are there any Marxist thinkers close to anarchism?

None of the libertarian socialists we highlighted in the last section were Marxists. This is unsurprising as most forms of Marxism are authoritarian. However, this is not the case for all schools of Marxism. There are important sub-branches of Marxism which shares the anarchist vision of a self-managed society. These include Council Communism, Situationism and Autonomism. Perhaps significantly, these few Marxist tendencies which are closest to anarchism are, like the branches of anarchism itself, not named after individuals. We will discuss each in turn.

Council Communism was born in the German Revolution of 1919 when Marxists inspired by the example of the Russian soviets and disgusted by the centralism, opportunism and betrayal of the mainstream Marxist social-democrats, drew similar anti-parliamentarian, direct actionist and decentralised conclusions to those held by anarchists since Bakunin. Like Marx's libertarian opponent in the First International, they argued that a federation of workers' councils would form the basis of a socialist society and, consequently, saw the need to build militant workplace organisations to promote their formation. Lenin attacked these movements and their advocates in his diatribe **Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, which council communist Herman Gorter demolished in his **An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin**. By



**Dreams of Freedom** (which includes an impressive biographical essay which discusses his influence as well as placing his work in historical context).

Italy, with its strong and dynamic anarchist movement, has produced some of the best anarchist writers. Errico Malatesta spent over 50 years fighting for anarchism across the world and his writings are amongst the best in anarchist theory. For those interested in his practical and inspiring ideas then his short pamphlet **Anarchy** cannot be beaten. Collections of his articles can be found in **The Anarchist Revolution** and **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, both edited by Vernon Richards. A favourite writing technique was the use of dialogues, such as **At the Cafe: Conversations on Anarchism**. These, using the conversations he had with non-anarchists as their basis, explained anarchist ideas in a clear and down to Earth manner. Another dialogue, **Fra Contadini: A Dialogue on Anarchy**, was translated into many languages, with 100,000 copies printed in Italy in 1920 when the revolution Malatesta had fought for all his life looked likely. At this time Malatesta edited **Umanita Nova** (the first Italian daily anarchist paper, it soon gained a circulation of 50 000) as well as writing the programme for the **Unione Anarchica Italiana**, a national anarchist organisation of some 20 000. For his activities during the factory occupations he was arrested at the age of 67 along with 80 other anarchists activists. Other Italian anarchists of note include Malatesta's friend Luigi Fabbri (sadly little of his work has been translated into English bar **Bourgeois Influences on Anarchism** and **Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism**) Luigi Galleani produced a very powerful anti-organisational anarchist-communism which proclaimed (in **The End of Anarchism?**) that *"Communism is simply the economic foundation by which the individual has the opportunity to regulate himself and carry out his functions."* Camillo Berneri, before being murdered by the Communists during the Spanish Revolution, continued the fine tradition of

critical, practical anarchism associated with Italian anarchism. His study of Kropotkin's federalist ideas is a classic (**Peter Kropotkin: His Federalist Ideas**). His daughter Marie-Louise Berneri, before her tragic early death, contributed to the British anarchist press (see her **Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939–48** and **Journey Through Utopia**).

In Japan, Hatta Shuzo developed Kropotkin's communist-anarchism in new directions between the world wars. Called "true anarchism," he created an anarchism which was a concrete alternative to the mainly peasant country he and thousands of his comrades were active in. While rejecting certain aspects of syndicalism, they organised workers into unions as well as working with the peasantry for the *"foundation stones on which to build the new society that we long for are none other than the awakening of the tenant farmers"* who *"account for a majority of the population."* Their new society was based on decentralised communes which combined industry and agriculture for, as one of Hatta's comrade's put it, *"the village will cease to be a mere communist agricultural village and become a co-operative society which is a fusion of agriculture and industry."* Hatta rejected the idea that they sought to go back to an ideal past, stating that the anarchists were *"completely opposite to the medievalists. We seek to use machines as means of production and, indeed, hope for the invention of yet more ingenious machines."* [quoted by John Crump, **Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, p. 122–3, and p. 144]

As far as individualist anarchism goes, the undoubted "pope" was Benjamin Tucker. Tucker, in his **Instead of Book**, used his intellect and wit to attack all who he considered enemies of freedom (mostly capitalists, but also a few social anarchists as well! For example, Tucker excommunicated Kropotkin and the other communist-anarchists from anarchism. Kropotkin did not return the favour). Tucker built on the such notable thinkers as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, Stephen Pearl Andrews and William B. Greene, adapting



space for a revolutionary libertarian socialism, opposed to the bureaucratic reformism of Labour as well as the police-state "socialism" of Stalinism and the authoritarianism of the Leninism which produced it. He produced numerous key pamphlets which shaped the thinking of a generation of anarchists and other libertarian socialists. These included **Paris: May 1968**, his brilliant eyewitness account of the near-revolution in France, the essential **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** in which he exposed Lenin's hostility to workers' self-management, and **The Irrational in Politics**, a restatement and development of the early work of Wilhelm Reich. These and many more articles have been collected in the book **For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton**, edited by David Goodway.

The American radical historian Howard Zinn has sometimes called himself an anarchist and is well informed about the anarchist tradition (he wrote an excellent introductory essay on *"Anarchism"* for a US edition of a Herbert Read book) . As well as his classic **A People's History of the United States**, his writings of civil disobedience and non-violent direct action are essential. An excellent collection of essays by this libertarian socialist scholar has been produced under the title **The Zinn Reader**. Another notable libertarian socialists close to anarchism are Edward Carpenter (see, for example, Sheila Rowbotham's **Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life**) and Simone Weil (**Oppression and Liberty**)

It would also be worthwhile to mention those market socialists who, like anarchists, base their socialism on workers' self-management. Rejecting central planning, they have turned back to the ideas of industrial democracy and market socialism advocated by the likes of Proudhon (although, coming from a Marxist background, they generally fail to mention the link which their central-planning foes stress). Allan Engler (in **Apostles of Greed**) and David Schweickart (in **Against Capitalism** and **After Capitalism**) have provided useful

communists (Morris said he was a communist and saw no need to append "anarchist" to it as, for him, communism was democratic and liberatory). A prominent member of the "Arts and Crafts" movement, Morris argued for humanising work and it was, to quoted the title of one of his most famous essays, as case of **Useful Work vrs Useless Toil**. His utopia novel **News from Nowhere** paints a compelling vision of a libertarian communist society where industrialisation has been replaced with a communal craft-based economy. It is a utopia which has long appealed to most social anarchists. For a discussion of Morris' ideas, placed in the context of his famous utopia, see **William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time** (Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan (eds.))

Also of note is the Greek thinker Cornelius Castoriadis. Originally a Trotskyist, Castoriadis evaluation of Trotsky's deeply flawed analysis of Stalinist Russia as a degenerated workers' state lead him to reject first Leninism and then Marxism itself. This led him to libertarian conclusions, seeing the key issue not who owns the means of production but rather hierarchy. Thus the class struggle was between those with power and those subject to it. This led him to reject Marxist economics as its value analysis abstracted from (i.e. ignored!) the class struggle at the heart of production (Autonomist Marxism rejects this interpretation of Marx, but they are the only Marxists who do). Castoriadis, like social anarchists, saw the future society as one based on radical autonomy, generalised self-management and workers' councils organised from the bottom up. His three volume collected works (**Political and Social Writings**) are essential reading for anyone interested in libertarian socialist politics and a radical critique of Marxism.

Special mention should also be made of Maurice Brinton, who, as well as translating many works by Castoriadis, was a significant libertarian socialist thinker and activist as well. An ex-Trotskyist like Castoriadis, Brinton carved out a political



Proudhon's mutualism to the conditions of pre-capitalist America (see Rudolf Rocker's **Pioneers of American Freedom** for details). Defending the worker, artisan and small-scale farmer from a state intent on building capitalism by means of state intervention, Tucker argued that capitalist exploitation would be abolished by creating a totally free non-capitalist market in which the four state monopolies used to create capitalism would be struck down by means of mutual banking and *"occupancy and use"* land and resource rights. Placing himself firmly in the socialist camp, he recognised (like Proudhon) that all non-labour income was theft and so opposed profit, rent and interest. he translated Proudhon's **What is Property** and **System of Economical Contradictions** as well as Bakunin's **God and the State**. Tucker's compatriot, Joseph Labadie was an active trade unionist as well as contributor to Tucker's paper **Liberty**. His son, Lawrence Labadie carried the individualist-anarchist torch after Tucker's death, believing that *"that freedom in every walk of life is the greatest possible means of elevating the human race to happier conditions."*

Undoubtedly the Russian Leo Tolstoy is the most famous writer associated with religious anarchism and has had the greatest impact in spreading the spiritual and pacifistic ideas associated with that tendency. Influencing such notable people as Gandhi and the ***Catholic Worker Group*** around Dorothy Day, Tolstoy presented a radical interpretation of Christianity which stressed individual responsibility and freedom above the mindless authoritarianism and hierarchy which marks so much of mainstream Christianity. Tolstoy's works, like those of that other radical libertarian Christian William Blake, have inspired many Christians towards a libertarian vision of Jesus' message which has been hidden by the mainstream churches. Thus Christian Anarchism maintains, along with Tolstoy, that *"Christianity in its true sense puts an end to government"* (see,

for example, Tolstoy's **The Kingdom of God is within you** and Peter Marshall's **William Blake: Visionary Anarchist**).

More recently, Noam Chomsky (in such works as **Deterring Democracy**, **Necessary Illusions**, **World Orders, Old and New**, **Rogue States**, **Hegemony or Survival** and many others) and Murray Bookchin (**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, **The Ecology of Freedom**, **Towards an Ecological Society**, and **Remaking Society**, among others) have kept the social anarchist movement at the front of political theory and analysis. Bookchin's work has placed anarchism at the centre of green thought and has been a constant threat to those wishing to mystify or corrupt the movement to create an ecological society. **The Murray Bookchin Reader** contains a representative selection of his writings. Sadly, a few years before his death Bookchin distanced himself from the anarchism he spent nearly four decades advocating (although he remained a libertarian socialist to the end). Chomsky's well documented critiques of U.S. imperialism and how the media operates are his most famous works, but he has also written extensively about the anarchist tradition and its ideas, most famously in his essays *"Notes on Anarchism"* (in **For Reasons of State**) and his defence of the anarchist social revolution against bourgeois historians in *"Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship"* (in **American Power and the New Mandarins**). These and others of his more explicitly anarchist essays and interviews can be found in the collection **Chomsky on Anarchism**. Other good sources for his anarchist ideas are **Radical Priorities**, **Language and Politics** and the pamphlet **Government in the Future**. Both **Understanding Power** and **The Chomsky Reader** are excellent introductions to his thought.

Britain has also seen an important series of anarchist thinkers. Hebert Read (probably the only anarchist to ever accept a knighthood!) wrote several works on anarchist philosophy and theory (see his **Anarchy and Order** compilation of essays). His anarchism flowered directly from his



the 1910s and 1920s who advocated a decentralised communal system with workers' control of industry. G.D.H. Cole's **Guild Socialism Restated** is the most famous work of this school, which also included author's S.G. Hobson and A.R. Orage (Geoffrey Osteregaard's **The Tradition of Workers' Control** provides an good summary of the ideas of Guild Socialism). Bertrand Russell, another supporter of Guild Socialism, was attracted to anarchist ideas and wrote an extremely informed and thoughtful discussion of anarchism, syndicalism and Marxism in his classic book **Roads to Freedom**.

While Russell was pessimistic about the possibility of anarchism in the near future, he felt it was *"the ultimate idea to which society should approximate."* As a Guild Socialist, he took it for granted that there could *"be no real freedom or democracy until the men who do the work in a business also control its management."* His vision of a good society is one any anarchist would support: *"a world in which the creative spirit is alive, in which life is an adventure full of joy and hope, based upon the impulse to construct than upon the desire to retain what we possess or to seize what is possessed by others. It must be a world in which affection has free play, in which love is purged of the instinct for domination, in which cruelty and envy have been dispelled by happiness and the unfettered development of all the instincts that build up life and fill it with mental delights."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Problems of Knowledge and Freedom**, pp. 59–60, p. 61 and p. x] An informed and interesting writer on many subjects, his thought and social activism has influenced many other thinkers, including Noam Chomsky (whose **Problems of Knowledge and Freedom** is a wide ranging discussion on some of the topics Russell addressed).

Another important British libertarian socialist thinker and activist was William Morris. Morris, a friend of Kropotkin, was active in the **Socialist League** and led its anti-parliamentarian wing. While stressing he was not an anarchist, there is little real difference between the ideas of Morris and most anarcho-

*dictation of another if he does not want to starve."*
[**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 10]

## A.4.3 Are there any socialist thinkers close to anarchism?

Anarchism developed in response to the development of capitalism and it is in the non-anarchist socialist tradition which anarchism finds most fellow travellers.

The earliest British socialists (the so-called Ricardian Socialists) following in the wake of Robert Owen held ideas which were similar to those of anarchists. For example, Thomas Hodgskin expounded ideas similar to Proudhon's mutualism while William Thompson developed a non-state, communal form of socialism based on *"communities of mutual co-operative"* which had similarities to anarcho-communism (Thompson had been a mutualist before becoming a communist in light of the problems even a non-capitalist market would have). John Francis Bray is also of interest, as is the radical agrarianist Thomas Spence who developed a communal form of land-based socialism which expounded many ideas usually associated with anarchism (see *"The Agrarian Socialism of Thomas Spence"* by Brian Morris in his book **Ecology and Anarchism**). Moreover, the early British trade union movement *"developed, stage by stage, a theory of syndicalism"* 40 years before Bakunin and the libertarian wing of the First International did. [E.P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 912] Noel Thompson's **The Real Rights of Man** is a good summary of all these thinkers and movements, as is E.P. Thompson's classic social history of working class life (and politics) of this period, **The Making of the English Working Class**.

Libertarian ideas did not die out in Britain in the 1840s. There was also the quasi-syndicalists of the Guild Socialists of



aesthetic concerns and he was a committed pacifist. As well as giving fresh insight and expression to the tradition themes of anarchism, he contributed regularly to the anarchist press (see the collection of articles **A One-Man Manifesto and other writings from Freedom Press**). Another pacifist anarchist was Alex Comfort. As well as writing the **Joy of Sex**, Comfort was an active pacifist and anarchist. He wrote particularly on pacifism, psychiatry and sexual politics from a libertarian perspective. His most famous anarchist book was **Authority and Delinquency** and a collection of his anarchist pamphlets and articles was published under the title **Writings against Power and Death**.

However, the most famous and influential British anarchist must be Colin Ward. He became an anarchist when stationed in Glasgow during the Second World War and came across the local anarchist group there. Once an anarchist, he has contributed to the anarchist press extensively. As well as being an editor of **Freedom**, he also edited the influential monthly magazine **Anarchy** during the 1960s (a selection of articles picked by Ward can be found in the book **A Decade of Anarchy**). However, his most famous single book is **Anarchy in Action** where he has updated Kropotkin's **Mutual Aid** by uncovering and documenting the anarchistic nature of everyday life even within capitalism. His extensive writing on housing has emphasised the importance of collective self-help and social management of housing against the twin evils of privatisation and nationalisation (see, for example, his books **Talking Houses** and **Housing: An Anarchist Approach**). He has cast an anarchist eye on numerous other issues, including water use (Reflected in Water: A Crisis of Social Responsibility), transport (**Freedom to go: after the motor age**) and the welfare state (**Social Policy: an anarchist response**). His **Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction** is a good starting point for discovering anarchism and his particular perspective on it while **Talking Anarchy** provides an excellent overview of both his ideas

and life. Lastly we must mention both Albert Meltzer and Nicolas Walter, both of whom contributed extensively to the anarchist press as well as writing two well known short introductions to anarchism (**Anarchism: Arguments for and against** and **About Anarchism**, respectively).

We could go on; there are many more writers we could mention. But besides these, there are the thousands of "ordinary" anarchist militants who have never written books but whose common sense and activism have encouraged the spirit of revolt within society and helped build the new world in the shell of the old. As Kropotkin put it, *"anarchism was born **among the people**; and it will continue to be full of life and creative power only as long as it remains a thing of the people."* [**Anarchism**, p. 146]

So we hope that this concentration on anarchist thinkers should not be taken to mean that there is some sort of division between activists and intellectuals in the movement. Far from it. Few anarchists are purely thinkers or activists. They are usually both. Kropotkin, for example, was jailed for his activism, as was Malatesta and Goldman. Makhno, most famous as an active participate in the Russian Revolution, also contributed theoretical articles to the anarchist press during and after it. The same can be said of Louise Michel, whose militant activities during the Paris Commune and in building the anarchist movement in France after it did not preclude her writing articles for the libertarian press. We are simply indicating key anarchists thinkers so that those interested can read about their ideas directly.

## A.4.1 Are there any thinkers close to anarchism?

Yes. There are numerous thinkers who are close to anarchism. They come from both the liberal and socialist traditions.



pre-capitalist classical liberal thought *"is opposed to state intervention in social life, as a consequence of deeper assumptions about the human need for liberty, diversity, and free association. On the same assumptions, capitalist relations of production, wage labour, competitiveness, the ideology of 'possessive individualism' — all must be regarded as fundamentally antihuman. Libertarian socialism is properly to be regarded as the inheritor of the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment."* [*"Notes on Anarchism"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

Thus anarchism shares commonality with pre-capitalist and democratic liberal forms. The hopes of these liberals were shattered with the development of capitalism. To quote Rudolf Rocker's analysis:

> *"Liberalism and Democracy were pre-eminently political concepts, and since the great majority of the original adherents of both maintained the right of ownership in the old sense, these had to renounce them both when economic development took a course which could not be practically reconciled with the original principles of Democracy, and still less with those of Liberalism. Democracy, with its motto of 'all citizens equal before the law,' and Liberalism with its 'right of man over his own person,' both shipwrecked on the realities of the capitalist economic form. So long as millions of human beings in every country had to sell their labour-power to a small minority of owners, and to sink into the most wretched misery if they could find no buyers, the so-called 'equality before the law' remains merely a pious fraud, since the laws are made by those who find themselves in possession of the social wealth. But in the same way there can also be no talk of a 'right over one's own person,' for that right ends when one is compelled to submit to the economic*

*"sympathy in equality … living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other."* Rejecting the idea that there had to be *"an absolute master"* in any association, he pointed out that in *"partnership in business … it is not found or thought necessary to enact that in every partnership, one partner shall have entire control over the concern, and the others shall be bound to obey his rule."* [*"The Subjection of Women,"* quoted by Susan L. Brown, **The Politics of Individualism**, pp. 45–6]

Yet his own example showed the flaw in liberal support for capitalism, for the employee ***is*** subject to a relationship in which power accrues to one party and obedience to another. Unsurprisingly, therefore, he argued that the *"form of association … which is mankind continue to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital … and working under managers elected and removable by themselves."* [**The Principles of Political Economy**, p. 147] Autocratic management during working hours is hardly compatible with Mill's maxim that *"[o]ver himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."* Mill's opposition to centralised government and wage slavery brought his ideas closer to anarchism than most liberals, as did his comment that the *"social principle of the future"* was *"how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership in the raw materials of the globe, and equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 164] His defence of individuality, **On Liberty**, is a classic, if flawed, work and his analysis of socialist tendencies (*"Chapters on Socialism"*) is worth reading for its evaluation of their pros and cons from a (democratic) liberal perspective.

Like Proudhon, Mill was a forerunner of modern-day market socialism and a firm supporter of decentralisation and social participation. This, argues Chomsky, is unsurprising for



While this may be considered surprising, it is not. Anarchism has links with both ideologies. Obviously the individualist anarchists are closest to the liberal tradition while social anarchists are closest to the socialist.

Indeed, as Nicholas Walter put it, *"Anarchism can be seen as a development from either liberalism or socialism, or from both liberalism and socialism. Like liberals, anarchists want freedom; like socialists, anarchists want equality."* However, *"anarchism is not just a mixture of liberalism and socialism … we differ fundamentally from them."* [**About Anarchism**, p. 29 and p. 31] In this he echoes Rocker's comments in **Anarcho-Syndicalism**. And this can be a useful tool for seeing the links between anarchism and other theories however it must be stressed that anarchism offers an ***anarchist*** critique of both liberalism and socialism and we should not submerge the uniqueness of anarchism into other philosophies.

Section A.4.2 discusses liberal thinkers who are close to anarchism, while section A.4.3 highlights those socialists who are close to anarchism. There are even Marxists who inject libertarian ideas into their politics and these are discussed in section A.4.4. And, of course, there are thinkers who cannot be so easily categorised and will be discussed here.

Economist David Ellerman has produced an impressive body of work arguing for workplace democracy. Explicitly linking his ideas the early British Ricardian socialists and Proudhon, in such works as **The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm** and **Property and Contract in Economics** he has presented both a rights based and labour-property based defence of self-management against capitalism. He argues that *"[t]oday's economic democrats are the **new abolitionists** trying to abolish the whole institution of renting people in favour of democratic self-management in the workplace"* for his *"critique is not new; it was developed in the Enlightenment doctrine of inalienable rights. It was applied by abolitionists against the voluntary self-enslavement contract and by political democrats*

*against the voluntary contraction defence of non-democratic government.*" [**The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 210] Anyone, like anarchists, interested in producer co-operatives as alternatives to wage slavery will find his work of immense interest.

Ellerman is not the only person to stress the benefits of co-operation. Alfie Kohn's important work on the benefits of co-operation builds upon Kropotkin's studies of mutual aid and is, consequently, of interest to social anarchists. In **No Contest: the case against competition** and **Punished by Rewards**, Kohn discusses (with extensive empirical evidence) the failings and negative impact of competition on those subject to it. He addresses both economic and social issues in his works and shows that competition is not what it is cracked up to be.

Within feminist theory, Carole Pateman is the most obvious libertarian influenced thinker. Independently of Ellerman, Pateman has produced a powerful argument for self-managed association in both the workplace and society as a whole. Building upon a libertarian analysis of Rousseau's arguments, her analysis of contract theory is ground breaking. If a theme has to be ascribed to Pateman's work it could be freedom and what it means to be free. For her, freedom can only be viewed as self-determination and, consequently, the absence of subordination. Consequently, she has advocated a participatory form of democracy from her first major work, **Participation and Democratic Theory** onwards. In that book, a pioneering study of in participatory democracy, she exposed the limitations of liberal democratic theory, analysed the works of Rousseau, Mill and Cole and presented empirical evidence on the benefits of participation on the individuals involved.

In the **Problem of Political Obligation**, Pateman discusses the "liberal" arguments on freedom and finds them wanting. For the liberal, a person must consent to be ruled by another but this opens up the "problem" that they might not consent and, indeed, may never have consented. Thus



*from them into the hands of the higher classes.*" The democrats "*identify with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the honest & safe ... depository of the public interest,*" if not always "*the most wise.*" [quoted by Chomsky, **Powers and Prospects**, p. 88] As Chomsky notes, the "*aristocrats*" were "*the advocates of the rising capitalist state, which Jefferson regarded with dismay, recognising the obvious contradiction between democracy and the capitalism.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88] Claudio J. Katz's essay on "*Thomas Jefferson's Liberal Anticapitalism*" usefully explores these issues. [**American Journal of Political Science**, vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan, 2003), pp. 1–17]

Jefferson even went so far as to argue that "*a little rebellion now and then is a good thing ... It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government ... The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.*" [quoted by Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 94] However, his libertarian credentials are damaged by him being both a President of the United States and a slave owner but compared to the other "founding fathers" of the American state, his liberalism is of a democratic form. As Chomsky reminds us, "*all the Founding Fathers hated democracy — Thomas Jefferson was a partial exception, but only partial.*" The American state, as a classical liberal state, was designed (to quote James Madison) "*to protect the minority of the opulent from the majority.*" Or, to repeat John Jay's principle, the "*people who own the country ought to govern it.*" [**Understanding Power**, p. 315] If American is a (formally) democracy rather than an oligarchy, it is in spite of rather than because of classical liberalism.

Then there is John Stuart Mill who recognised the fundamental contradiction in classical liberalism. How can an ideology which proclaims itself for individual liberty support institutions which systematically nullify that liberty in practice? For this reason Mill attacked patriarchal marriage, arguing that marriage must be a voluntary association between equals, with

over, he was against state intervention because whenever *"a legislature attempts to regulate differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters. When regulation, therefore, is in favour of the workmen, it is always just and equitable; but it is otherwise when in favour of the masters."* He notes how *"the law"* would *"punish"* workers' combinations *"very severely"* while ignoring the masters' combinations (*"if it dealt impartially, it would treat the masters in the same manner"*). [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 88 and p. 129] Thus state intervention was to be opposed in general because the state was run by the few for the few, which would make state intervention benefit the few, not the many. It is doubtful Smith would have left his ideas on laissez-faire unchanged if he had lived to see the development of corporate capitalism. It is this critical edge of Smith's work are conveniently ignored by those claiming him for the classical liberal tradition.

Smith, argues Chomsky, was *"a pre-capitalist and anti-capitalist person with roots in the Enlightenment."* Yes, he argues, *"the classical liberals, the [Thomas] Jeffersons and the Smiths, were opposing the concentrations of power that they saw around them ... They didn't see other forms of concentration of power which only developed later. When they did see them, they didn't like them. Jefferson was a good example. He was strongly opposed to the concentrations of power that he saw developing, and warned that the banking institutions and the industrial corporations which were barely coming into existence in his day would destroy the achievements of the Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 125]

As Murray Bookchin notes, Jefferson *"is most clearly identified in the early history of the United States with the political demands and interests of the independent farmer-proprietor."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 188–9] In other words, with pre-capitalist economic forms. We also find Jefferson contrasting the *"aristocrats"* and the *"democrats."* The former are *"those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers*



the liberal state would lack a justification. She deepens her analysis to question why freedom should be equated to consenting to be ruled and proposed a participatory democratic theory in which people collectively make their own decisions (a self-assumed obligation to your fellow citizens rather to a state). In discussing Kropotkin, she showed her awareness of the social anarchist tradition to which her own theory is obviously related.

Pateman builds on this analysis in her **The Sexual Contract**, where she dissects the sexism of classical liberal and democratic theory. She analyses the weakness of what calls 'contractarian' theory (classical liberalism and right-wing "libertarianism") and shows how it leads not to free associations of self-governing individuals but rather social relationships based on authority, hierarchy and power in which a few rule the many. Her analysis of the state, marriage and wage labour are profoundly libertarian, showing that freedom must mean more than consenting to be ruled. This is the paradox of capitalist liberal, for a person is assumed to be free in order to consent to a contract but once within it they face the reality subordination to another's decisions (see section A.4.2 for further discussion).

Her ideas challenge some of Western culture's core beliefs about individual freedom and her critiques of the major Enlightenment political philosophers are powerful and convincing. Implicit is a critique not just of the conservative and liberal tradition, but of the patriarchy and hierarchy contained within the Left as well. As well as these works, a collection of her essays is available called **The Disorder of Women**.

Within the so-called "anti-globalisation" movement Naomi Klein shows an awareness of libertarian ideas and her own work has a libertarian thrust to it (we call it "so-called" as its members are internationalists, seeking a globalisation from below not one imposed from above by and for a few). She first came to attention as the author of **No Logo**, which charts the growth of consumer capitalism, exposing the dark reality be-

hind the glossy brands of capitalism and, more importantly, highlighting the resistance to it. No distant academic, she is an active participant in the movement she reports on in **Fences and Windows**, a collection of essays on globalisation, its consequences and the wave of protests against it.

Klein's articles are well written and engaging, covering the reality of modern capitalism, the gap, as she puts it, *"between rich and power but also between rhetoric and reality, between what is said and what is done. Between the promise of globalisation and its real effects."* She shows how we live in a world where the market (i.e. capital) is made "freer" while people suffer increased state power and repression. How an unelected Argentine President labels that country's popular assemblies *"antidemocratic."* How rhetoric about liberty is used as a tool to defend and increase private power (as she reminds us, *"always missing from [the globalisation] discussion is the issue of power. So many of the debates that we have about globalisation theory are actually about power: who holds it, who is exercising it and who is disguising it, pretending it no longer matters"*). [**Fences and Windows**, pp 83–4 and p. 83]

And how people across the world are resisting. As she puts it, *"many [in the movement] are tired of being spoken for and about. They are demanding a more direct form of political participation."* She reports on a movement which she is part of, one which aims for a globalisation from below, one *"founded on principles of transparency, accountability and self-determination, one that frees people instead of liberating capital."* This means being against a *"corporate-driven globalisation . .. that is centralising power and wealth into fewer and fewer hands"* while presenting an alternative which is about *"decentralising power and building community-based decision-making potential — whether through unions, neighbourhoods, farms, villages, anarchist collectives or aboriginal self-government."* All strong anarchist principles and, like anarchists, she wants people to manage their own affairs and chronicles attempts around the world to do just that



> *Its ideas must be attenuated beyond recognition to be transmuted into an ideology of industrial capitalism."* [*"Notes on Anarchism"*, **For Reasons of State**, p. 156]

Chomsky discusses this in more detail in his essay *"Language and Freedom"* (contained in both **Reason of State** and **The Chomsky Reader**). As well as Humbolt and Mill, such "pre-capitalist" liberals would include such radicals as Thomas Paine, who envisioned a society based on artisan and small farmers (i.e. a pre-capitalist economy) with a rough level of social equality and, of course, a minimal government. His ideas inspired working class radicals across the world and, as E.P. Thompson reminds us, Paine's **Rights of Man** was *"a foundation-text of the English [and Scottish] working-class movement."* While his ideas on government are *"close to a theory of anarchism,"* his reform proposals *"set a source towards the social legislation of the twentieth century."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 99, p. 101 and p. 102] His combination of concern for liberty and social justice places him close to anarchism.

Then there is Adam Smith. While the right (particularly elements of the "libertarian" right) claim him as a classic liberal, his ideas are more complex than that. For example, as Noam Chomsky points out, Smith advocated the free market because *"it would lead to perfect equality, equality of condition, not just equality of opportunity."* [**Class Warfare**, p. 124] As Smith himself put it, *"in a society where things were left to follow their natural course, where there is perfect liberty"* it would mean that *"advantages would soon return to the level of other employments"* and so *"the different employments of labour and stock must … be either perfectly equal or continually tending to equality."* Nor did he oppose state intervention or state aid for the working classes. For example, he advocated public education to counter the negative effects of the division of labour. More-

notes, *"the 'libertarian' doctrines that are fashionable in the US and UK particularly … seem to me to reduce to advocacy of one or another form of illegitimate authority, quite often real tyranny."* [**Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 777] Moreover, as Benjamin Tucker noted with regards their predecessors, while they are happy to attack any state regulation which benefits the many or limits their power, they are silent on the laws (and regulations and "rights") which benefit the few.

However there is another liberal tradition, one which is essentially pre-capitalist which has more in common with the aspirations of anarchism. As Chomsky put it:

> *"These ideas [of anarchism] grow out the Enlightenment; their roots are in Rousseau's* ***Discourse on Inequality****, Humbolt's* ***The Limits of State Action****, Kant's insistence, in his defence of the French Revolution, that freedom is the precondition for acquiring the maturity for freedom, not a gift to be granted when such maturity is achieved .. . With the development of industrial capitalism, a new and unanticipated system of injustice, it is libertarian socialism that has preserved and extended the radical humanist message of the Enlightenment and the classical liberal ideals that were perverted into an ideology to sustain the emerging social order. In fact, on the very same assumptions that led classical liberalism to oppose the intervention of the state in social life, capitalist social relations are also intolerable. This is clear, for example, from the classic work of [Wilhelm von] Humboldt,* ***The Limits of State Action****, which anticipated and perhaps inspired [John Stuart] Mill … This classic of liberal thought, completed in 1792, is in its essence profoundly, though prematurely, anticapitalist.*



(many of which, as Klein notes, are anarchists or influenced by anarchist ideas, sometimes knowing, sometimes not). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 77, p. 79 and p. 16]

While not an anarchist, she is aware that real change comes from below, by the self-activity of working class people fighting for a better world. Decentralisation of power is a key idea in the book. As she puts it, the *"goal"* of the social movements she describes is *"not to take power for themselves but to challenge power centralisation on principle"* and so creating *"a new culture of vibrant direct democracy … one that is fuelled and strengthened by direct participation."* She does not urge the movement to invest itself with new leaders and neither does she (like the Left) think that electing a few leaders to make decisions for us equals "democracy" (*"the goal is not better faraway rules and rulers but close-up democracy on the ground"*). Klein, therefore, gets to the heart of the matter. Real social change is based on empowering the grassroots, *"the desire for self-determination, economic sustainability and participatory democracy."* Given this, Klein has presented libertarian ideas to a wide audience. [**Op. Cit.**, p. xxvi, p. xxvi-xxvii, p. 245 and p. 233]

Other notable libertarian thinkers include Henry D. Thoreau, Albert Camus, Aldous Huxley, Lewis Mumford, Lewis Mumford and Oscar Wilde. Thus there are numerous thinkers who approach anarchist conclusions and who discuss subjects of interest to libertarians. As Kropotkin noted a hundred years ago, these kinds of writers *"are full of ideas which show how closely anarchism is interwoven with the work that is going on in modern thought in the same direction of enfranchisement of man from the bonds of the state as well as from those of capitalism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 300] The only change since then is that more names can be added to the list.

Peter Marshall discusses the ideas of most, but not all, of the non-anarchist libertarians we mention in this and subsequent sections in his book history of anarchism, **Demanding the**

**Impossible**. Clifford Harper's **Anarchy: A Graphic Guide** is also a useful guide for finding out more.

## A.4.2 Are there any liberal thinkers close to anarchism?

As noted in the last section, there are thinkers in both the liberal and socialist traditions who approach anarchist theory and ideals. This understandable as anarchism shares certain ideas and ideals with both.

However, as will become clear in sections A.4.3 and A.4.4, anarchism shares most common ground with the socialist tradition it is a part of. This is because classical liberalism is a profoundly elitist tradition. The works of Locke and the tradition he inspired aimed to justify hierarchy, state and private property. As Carole Pateman notes, *"Locke's state of nature, with its father-rulers and capitalist economy, would certainly not find favour with anarchists"* any more than his vision of the social contract and the liberal state it creates. A state, which as Pateman recounts, in which *"only males who own substantial amounts of material property are [the] politically relevant members of society"* and exists *"precisely to preserve the property relationships of the developing capitalist market economy, not to disturb them."* For the majority, the non-propertied, they expressed *"tacit consent"* to be ruled by the few by *"choosing to remain within the one's country of birth when reaching adulthood."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 141, p. 71, p. 78 and p. 73]

Thus anarchism is at odds with what can be called the pro-capitalist liberal tradition which, flowing from Locke, builds upon his rationales for hierarchy. As David Ellerman notes, *"there is a whole liberal tradition of apologising for non-democratic government based on consent — on a voluntary social contract alienating governing rights to a sovereign."* In



economics, this is reflected in their support for wage labour and the capitalist autocracy it creates for the *"employment contract is the modern limited workplace version"* of such contracts. [**The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 210] This pro-capitalist liberalism essentially boils down to the liberty to pick a master or, if you are among the lucky few, to become a master yourself. The idea that freedom means self-determination for all at all times is alien to it. Rather it is based on the idea of "self-ownership," that you "own" yourself and your rights. Consequently, you can sell (alienate) your rights and liberty on the market. As we discuss in section B.4, in practice this means that most people are subject to autocratic rule for most of their waking hours (whether in work or in marriage).

The modern equivalent of classical liberalism is the right-wing "libertarian" tradition associated with Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick, von Hayek and so forth. As they aim to reduce the state to simply the defender to private property and enforcer of the hierarchies that social institution creates, they can by no stretch of the imagination be considered near anarchism. What is called "liberalism" in, say, the United States is a more democratic liberal tradition and has, like anarchism, little in common with the shrill pro-capitalist defenders of the minimum state. While they may (sometimes) be happy to denounce the state's attacks on individual liberty, they are more than happy to defend the "freedom" of the property owner to impose exactly the same restrictions on those who use their land or capital.

Given that feudalism combined ownership and rulership, that the governance of people living on land was an attribute of the ownership of that land, it would be no exaggeration to say that the right-wing "libertarian" tradition is simply its modern (voluntary) form. It is no more libertarian than the feudal lords who combated the powers of the King in order to protect their power over their own land and serfs. As Chomsky

The anti-authoritarian left, though very active, was too weak among striking workers, and so the idea of self-managed organisations and workers self-management was not widespread. However, the May-June revolt shows that events can change very rapidly. *"Under the influence of the students,"* noted libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton, *"thousands began to query the whole principle of hierarchy ... Within a matter of days the tremendous creative potentialities of the people suddenly erupted. The boldest and realistic ideas — and they are usually the same — were advocated, argued, applied. Language, rendered stale by decades of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo, eviscerated by those who manipulate it for advertising purposes, reappeared as something new and fresh. People re-appropriated it in all its fullness. Magnificently apposite and poetic slogans emerged from the anonymous crowd."* [*"Paris: May 1968"*, **For Workers' Power**, p. 253] The working class, fused by the energy and bravado of the students, raised demands that could not be catered for within the confines of the existing system. The General Strike displays with beautiful clarity the potential power that lies in the hands of the working class. The mass assemblies and occupations give an excellent, if short-lived, example of anarchy in action and how anarchist ideas can quickly spread and be applied in practice.

For more details of these events, see participants Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit's **Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative** or Maurice Brinton's eye-witness account *"Paris: may 1968"* (in his **For Workers' Power**). **Beneath the Paving Stones** by edited Dark Star is a good anthology of situationist works relating to Paris 68 (it also contains Brinton's essay).



*interference."* However, as the meeting was breaking up a column of 180 police arrived and ordered the meeting to end. At this moment a bomb was thrown into the police ranks, who opened fire on the crowd. How many civilians were wounded or killed by the police was never exactly ascertained, but 7 policemen eventually died (ironically, only one was the victim of the bomb, the rest were a result of the bullets fired by the police [Paul Avrich, **The Haymarket Tragedy**, p. 208]).

A *"reign of terror"* swept over Chicago, and the *"organised banditti and conscienceless brigands of capital suspended the only papers which would give the side of those whom they crammed into prison cells. They have invaded the homes of everyone who has ever known to have raised a voice or sympathised with those who have aught to say against the present system of robbery and oppression ... they have invaded their homes and subjected them and their families to indignities that must be seen to be believed."* [Lucy Parsons, **Liberty, Equality & Solidarity**, p. 53] Meeting halls, union offices, printing shops and private homes were raided (usually without warrants). Such raids into working-class areas allowed the police to round up all known anarchists and other socialists. Many suspects were beaten up and some bribed. *"Make the raids first and look up the law afterwards"* was the public statement of J. Grinnell, the States Attorney, when a question was raised about search warrants. [*"Editor's Introduction"*, **The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 7]

Eight anarchists were put on trial for accessory to murder. No pretence was made that any of the accused had carried out or even planned the bomb. The judge ruled that it was not necessary for the state to identify the actual perpetrator or prove that he had acted under the influence of the accused. The state did not try to establish that the defendants had in any way approved or abetted the act. In fact, only three were present at the meeting when the bomb exploded and one of those, Albert Par-

sons, was accompanied by his wife and fellow anarchist Lucy and their two small children to the event.

The reason why these eight were picked was because of their anarchism and union organising, as made clear by that State's Attorney when he told the jury that *"Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the Grand Jury, and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them. Gentlemen of the jury; convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and you save our institutions, our society."* The jury was selected by a special bailiff, nominated by the State's Attorney and was explicitly chosen to compose of businessmen and a relative of one of the cops killed. The defence was not allowed to present evidence that the special bailiff had publicly claimed *"I am managing this case and I know what I am about. These fellows are going to be hanged as certain as death."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 8] Not surprisingly, the accused were convicted. Seven were sentenced to death, one to 15 years' imprisonment.

An international campaign resulted in two of the death sentences being commuted to life, but the world wide protest did not stop the US state. Of the remaining five, one (Louis Lingg) cheated the executioner and killed himself on the eve of the execution. The remaining four (Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel and Adolph Fischer) were hanged on November 11th 1887. They are known in Labour history as the Haymarket Martyrs. Between 150,000 and 500,000 lined the route taken by the funeral cortege and between 10,000 to 25,000 were estimated to have watched the burial.

In 1889, the American delegation attending the International Socialist congress in Paris proposed that May 1st be adopted as a workers' holiday. This was to commemorate working class struggle and the *"Martyrdom of the Chicago Eight"*. Since then Mayday has became a day for international solidarity. In 1893, the new Governor of Illinois made official what the working class in Chicago and across the world knew



had guaranteed an increase of 35% in the industrial minimum wage and an all round-wage increase of 10%. The leaders of the CGT organised a march of 500,000 workers through the streets of Paris two days later. Paris was covered in posters calling for a *"Government of the People."* Unfortunately the majority still thought in terms of changing their rulers rather than taking control for themselves.

By June 5th most of the strikes were over and an air of what passes for normality within capitalism had rolled back over France. Any strikes which continued after this date were crushed in a military-style operation using armoured vehicles and guns. On June 7th, they made an assault on the Flins steelworks which started a four-day running battle which left one worker dead. Three days later, Renault strikers were gunned down by police, killing two. In isolation, those pockets of militancy stood no chance. On June 12th, demonstrations were banned, radical groups outlawed, and their members arrested. Under attack from all sides, with escalating state violence and trade union sell-outs, the General Strike and occupations crumbled.

So why did this revolt fail? Certainly not because "vanguard" Bolshevik parties were missing. It was infested with them. Fortunately, the traditional authoritarian left sects were isolated and outraged. Those involved in the revolt did not require a vanguard to tell them what to do, and the "workers' vanguards" frantically ran after the movement trying to catch up with it and control it.

No, it was the lack of independent, self-managed confederal organisations to co-ordinate struggle which resulted in occupations being isolated from each other. So divided, they fell. In addition, Murray Bookchin argues that *"an awareness among the workers that the factories had to be **worked**, not merely occupied or struck,"* was missing. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 182]

This awareness would have been encouraged by the existence of a strong anarchist movement before the revolt.

They united with the government and bosses to craft a series of reforms, but once they turned to the factories they were jeered out of them by the workers.

The struggle itself and the activity to spread it was organised by self-governing mass assemblies and co-ordinated by action committees. The strikes were often run by assemblies as well. As Murray Bookchin argues, the *"hope [of the revolt] lay in the extension of self-management in all its forms — the general assemblies and their administrative forms, the action committees, the factory strike committees — to all areas of the economy, indeed to all areas of life itself."* Within the assemblies, *"a fever of life gripped millions, a rewaking of senses that people never thought they possessed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 168 and p. 167] It was not a workers' strike or a student strike. It was a **peoples'** strike that cut across almost all class lines.

On May 24th, anarchists organised a demonstration. Thirty thousand marched towards the Palace de la Bastille. The police had the Ministries protected, using the usual devices of tear gas and batons, but the Bourse (Stock Exchange) was left unprotected and a number of demonstrators set fire to it.

It was at this stage that some left-wing groups lost their nerve. The Trotskyist JCR turned people back into the Latin Quarter. Other groups such as UNEF and Parti Socialiste Unife (United Socialist Party) blocked the taking of the Ministries of Finance and Justice. Cohn-Bendit said of this incident *"As for us, we failed to realise how easy it would have been to sweep all these nobodies away... .It is now clear that if, on 25 May, Paris had woken to find the most important Ministries occupied, Gaullism would have caved in at once... . "* Cohn-Bendit was forced into exile later that very night.

As the street demonstrations grew and occupations continued, the state prepared to use overwhelming means to stop the revolt. Secretly, top generals readied 20,000 loyal troops for use on Paris. Police occupied communications centres like TV stations and Post Offices. By Monday, May 27th, the Government



all along and pardoned the Martyrs because of their obvious innocence and because *"the trial was not fair."* To this day, no one knows who threw the bomb — the only definite fact is that it was not any of those who were tried for the act: *"Our comrades were not murdered by the state because they had any connection with the bomb-throwing, but because they had been active in organising the wage-slaves of America."* [Lucy Parsons, **Op. Cit.**, p. 142]

The authorities had believed at the time of the trial that such persecution would break the back of the labour movement. As Lucy Parsons, a participant of the events, noted 20 years later, the Haymarket trial *"was a class trial — relentless, vindictive, savage and bloody. By that prosecution the capitalists sought to break the great strike for the eight-hour day which as being successfully inaugurated in Chicago, this city being the stormcentre of that great movement; and they also intended, by the savage manner in which they conducted the trial of these men, to frighten the working class back to their long hours of toil and low wages from which they were attempting to emerge. The capitalistic class imagined they could carry out their hellish plot by putting to an ignominious death the most progressive leaders among the working class of that day. In executing their bloody deed of judicial murder they succeeded, but in arresting the mighty onward movement of the class struggle they utterly failed."* [Lucy Parsons, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128] In the words of August Spies when he addressed the court after he had been sentenced to die:

> *"If you think that by hanging us you can stamp out the labour movement ... the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil in misery and want, expect salvation — if this is your opinion, then hang us! Here you will tread on a spark, but there and there, behind you — and in front of you, and everywhere, flames blaze up. It is a subter-*

*ranean fire. You cannot put it out."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 287]

At the time and in the years to come, this defiance of the state and capitalism was to win thousands to anarchism, particularly in the US itself. Since the Haymarket event, anarchists have celebrated May Day (on the 1st of May — the reformist unions and labour parties moved its marches to the first Sunday of the month). We do so to show our solidarity with other working class people across the world, to celebrate past and present struggles, to show our power and remind the ruling class of their vulnerability. As Nestor Makhno put it:

> *"That day those American workers attempted, by organising themselves, to give expression to their protest against the iniquitous order of the State and Capital of the propertied ...*
>
> "The workers of Chicago ... had gathered to resolve, in common, the problems of their lives and their struggles...
>
> "Today too ... the toilers ... regard the first of May as the occasion of a get-together when they will concern themselves with their own affairs and consider the matter of their emancipation." [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, pp. 59–60]

Anarchists stay true to the origins of May Day and celebrate its birth in the direct action of the oppressed. It is a classic example of anarchist principles of direct action and solidarity, *"an historic event of great importance, inasmuch as it was, in the first place, the first time that workers themselves had attempted to get a shorter work day by united, simultaneous action ... this strike was the first in the nature of Direct Action on a large scale, the*



*ended up with the very opposite of what it was originally looking for."* [quoted by Clifford Harper, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149] These councils would be self-managed and not be the means by which a "revolutionary" party would take power. Like the anarchists of **Noire et Rouge** and the libertarian socialists of **Socialisme ou Barbarie**, their support for a self-managed revolution from below had a massive influence in the May events and the ideas that inspired it.

On May 14th, the Sud-Aviation workers locked the management in its offices and occupied their factory. They were followed by the Cleon-Renault, Lockhead-Beauvais and Mucel-Orleans factories the next day. That night the National Theatre in Paris was seized to become a permanent assembly for mass debate. Next, France's largest factory, Renault-Billancourt, was occupied. Often the decision to go on indefinite strike was taken by the workers without consulting union officials. By May 17th, a hundred Paris Factories were in the hands of their workers. The weekend of the 19th of May saw 122 factories occupied. By May 20th, the strike and occupations were general and involved six million people. Print workers said they did not wish to leave a monopoly of media coverage to TV and radio, and agreed to print newspapers as long as the press *"carries out with objectivity the role of providing information which is its duty."* In some cases print-workers insisted on changes in headlines or articles before they would print the paper. This happened mostly with the right-wing papers such as ***'Le Figaro'*** or ***'La Nation'***.

With the Renault occupation, the Sorbonne occupiers immediately prepared to join the Renault strikers, and led by anarchist black and red banners, 4,000 students headed for the occupied factory. The state, bosses, unions and Communist Party were now faced with their greatest nightmare — a worker-student alliance. Ten thousand police reservists were called up and frantic union officials locked the factory gates. The Communist Party urged their members to crush the revolt.

propaganda, leaflets, proclamations, telegrams, and posters. Slogans such as "***Everything is Possible," "Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible," "Life without Dead Times,"*** and ***"It is Forbidden to Forbid"*** plastered the walls. ***"All Power to the Imagination"*** was on everyone's lips. As Murray Bookchin pointed out, *"the motive forces of revolution today... are not simply scarcity and material need, but also* ***quality of everyday life ... the attempt to gain control of one's own destiny****."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 166]

Many of the most famous slogans of those days originated from the Situationists. The **Situationist International** had been formed in 1957 by a small group of dissident radicals and artists. They had developed a highly sophisticated (if jargon riddled) and coherent analysis of modern capitalist society and how to supersede it with a new, freer one. Modern life, they argued, was mere survival rather than living, dominated by the economy of consumption in which everyone, everything, every emotion and relationship becomes a commodity. People were no longer simply alienated producers, they were also alienated consumers. They defined this kind of society as the ***"Spectacle."*** Life itself had been stolen and so revolution meant recreating life. The area of revolutionary change was no longer just the workplace, but in everyday existence:

> *"People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth."* [quoted by Clifford Harper, **Anarchy: A Graphic Guide**, p. 153]

Like many other groups whose politics influenced the Paris events, the situationists argued that *"the workers' councils are the only answer. Every other form of revolutionary struggle has*



*first in America."* [Lucy Parsons, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 139–40] Oppression and exploitation breed resistance and, for anarchists, May Day is an international symbol of that resistance and power — a power expressed in the last words of August Spies, chiselled in stone on the monument to the Haymarket martyrs in Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago:

> *"The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today."*

To understand why the state and business class were so determined to hang the Chicago Anarchists, it is necessary to realise they were considered the leaders of a massive radical union movement. In 1884, the Chicago Anarchists produced the world's first daily anarchist newspaper, the **Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeiting**. This was written, read, owned and published by the German immigrant working class movement. The combined circulation of this daily plus a weekly (**Vorbote**) and a Sunday edition (**Fackel**) more than doubled, from 13,000 per issues in 1880 to 26,980 in 1886. Anarchist weekly papers existed for other ethnic groups as well (one English, one Bohemian and one Scandinavian).

Anarchists were very active in the Central Labour Union (which included the eleven largest unions in the city) and aimed to make it, in the words of Albert Parsons (one of the Martyrs), *"the embryonic group of the future 'free society.'"* The anarchists were also part of the **International Working People's Association** (also called the ***"Black International"***) which had representatives from 26 cities at its founding convention. The I.W.P.A. soon *"made headway among trade unions, especially in the mid-west"* and its ideas of *"direct action of the rank and file"* and of trade unions *"serv[ing] as the instrument of the working class for the complete destruction of capitalism and the nucleus for the formation of a new society"* became known as the ***"Chicago Idea"*** (an idea which later

inspired the **Industrial Workers of the World** which was founded in Chicago in 1905). [*"Editor's Introduction,"* **The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 4]

This idea was expressed in the manifesto issued at the I.W.P.A.'s Pittsburgh Congress of 1883:

> *"First — Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e. by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.*
>
> *"Second — Establishment of a free society based upon co-operative organisation of production.*
>
> *"Third — Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organisations without commerce and profit-mongery.*
>
> *"Fourth — Organisation of education on a secular, scientific and equal basis for both sexes.*
>
> *"Fifth — Equal rights for all without distinction to sex or race.*
>
> *"Sixth — Regulation of all public affairs by free contracts between autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42]

In addition to their union organising, the Chicago anarchist movement also organised social societies, picnics, lectures, dances, libraries and a host of other activities. These all helped to forge a distinctly working-class revolutionary culture in the heart of the *"American Dream."* The threat to the ruling class and their system was too great to allow it to continue (particularly with memories of the vast uprising of labour in 1877 still fresh. As in 1886, that revolt was also meet by state violence — see **Strike!** by J. Brecher for details of this strike movement as well as the Haymarket events). Hence the



authorities of Nanterre in Paris for anti-Vietnam War activity, a group of anarchists (including Daniel Cohn-Bendit) promptly called a protest demonstration. The arrival of 80 police enraged many students, who quit their studies to join the battle and drive the police from the university.

Inspired by this support, the anarchists seized the administration building and held a mass debate. The occupation spread, Nanterre was surrounded by police, and the authorities closed the university down. The next day, the Nanterre students gathered at the Sorbonne University in the centre of Paris. Continual police pressure and the arrest of over 500 people caused anger to erupt into five hours of street fighting. The police even attacked passers-by with clubs and tear gas.

A total ban on demonstrations and the closure of the Sorbonne brought thousands of students out onto the streets. Increasing police violence provoked the building of the first barricades. Jean Jacques Lebel, a reporter, wrote that by 1 a.m., *"[l]iterally thousands helped build barricades... women, workers, bystanders, people in pyjamas, human chains to carry rocks, wood, iron."* An entire night of fighting left 350 police injured. On May 7th, a 50,000-strong protest march against the police was transformed into a day-long battle through the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter. Police tear gas was answered by molotov cocktails and the chant *"Long Live the Paris Commune!"*

By May 10th, continuing massive demonstrations forced the Education Minister to start negotiations. But in the streets, 60 barricades had appeared and young workers were joining the students. The trade unions condemned the police violence. Huge demonstrations throughout France culminated on May 13th with one million people on the streets of Paris.

Faced with this massive protest, the police left the Latin Quarter. Students seized the Sorbonne and created a mass assembly to spread the struggle. Occupations soon spread to every French University. From the Sorbonne came a flood of

*with equality. In every country in the world a huge tribe of party-hacks and sleek little professors are busy 'proving' that Socialism means no more than a planned state-capitalism with the grab-motive left intact. But fortunately there also exists a vision of Socialism quite different from this. The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the 'mystique' of Socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all ... In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me..."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 83–84]

For more information on the Spanish Revolution, the following books are recommended: **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** by Vernon Richards; **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** and **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution** by Jose Peirats; **Free Women of Spain** by Martha A. Ackelsberg; **The Anarchist Collectives** edited by Sam Dolgoff; *"Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship"* by Noam Chomsky (in **The Chomsky Reader**); **The Anarchists of Casas Viejas** by Jerome R. Mintz; and **Homage to Catalonia** by George Orwell.

## A.5.7 The May-June Revolt in France, 1968

The May-June events in France placed anarchism back on the radical landscape after a period in which many people had written the movement off as dead. This revolt of ten million people grew from humble beginnings. Expelled by the university



repression, kangaroo court, and the state murder of those the state and capitalist class considered "leaders" of the movement.

For more on the Haymarket Martyrs, their lives and their ideas, **The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs** is essential reading. Albert Parsons, the only American born Martyr, produced a book which explained what they stood for called **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**. Historian Paul Avrich's **The Haymarket Tragedy** is a useful in depth account of the events.

## A.5.3 Building the Syndicalist Unions

Just before the turn of the century in Europe, the anarchist movement began to create one of the most successful attempts to apply anarchist organisational ideas in everyday life. This was the building of mass revolutionary unions (also known as syndicalism or anarcho-syndicalism). The syndicalist movement, in the words of a leading French syndicalist militant, was *"a practical schooling in anarchism"* for it was *"a laboratory of economic struggles"* and organised *"along anarchic lines."* By organising workers into *"libertarian organisations,"* the syndicalist unions were creating the *"free associations of free producers"* within capitalism to combat it and, ultimately, replace it. [Fernand Pelloutier, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 57, p. 55 and p. 56]

While the details of syndicalist organisation varied from country to country, the main lines were the same. Workers should form themselves into unions (or ***syndicates***, the French for union). While organisation by industry was generally the preferred form, craft and trade organisations were also used. These unions were directly controlled by their members and would federate together on an industrial and geographical basis. Thus a given union would be federated with all the local unions in a given town, region and country as well as with all

the unions within its industry into a national union (of, say, miners or metal workers). Each union was autonomous and all officials were part-time (and paid their normal wages if they missed work on union business). The tactics of syndicalism were direct action and solidarity and its aim was to replace capitalism by the unions providing the basic framework of the new, free, society.

Thus, for anarcho-syndicalism, *"the trade union is by no means a mere transitory phenomenon bound up with the duration of capitalist society, it is the germ of the Socialist economy of the future, the elementary school of Socialism in general."* The *"economic fighting organisation of the workers"* gives their members *"every opportunity for direct action in their struggles for daily bread, it also provides them with the necessary preliminaries for carrying through the reorganisation of social life on a [libertarian] Socialist plan by them own strength."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 59 and p. 62] Anarcho-syndicalism, to use the expression of the I.W.W., aims to build the new world in the shell of the old.

In the period from the 1890's to the outbreak of World War I, anarchists built revolutionary unions in most European countries (particularly in Spain, Italy and France). In addition, anarchists in South and North America were also successful in organising syndicalist unions (particularly Cuba, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil). Almost all industrialised countries had some syndicalist movement, although Europe and South America had the biggest and strongest ones. These unions were organised in a confederal manner, from the bottom up, along anarchist lines. They fought with capitalists on a day-to-day basis around the issue of better wages and working conditions and the state for social reforms, but they also sought to overthrow capitalism through the revolutionary general strike.

Thus hundreds of thousands of workers around the world were applying anarchist ideas in everyday life, proving that



the anarchists placed anti-fascist unity before the revolution, thus helping their enemies to defeat both them and the revolution. Whether they were forced by circumstances into this position or could have avoided it is still being debated (see section I.8.10 for a discussion of why the CNT-FAI collaborated and section I.8.11 on why this decision was **not** a product of anarchist theory).

Orwell's account of his experiences in the militia's indicates why the Spanish Revolution is so important to anarchists:

> *"I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragon one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilised life — snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc. — had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class- division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master... One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word 'comrade' stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality. I am well aware that it is now the fashion to deny that Socialism has anything to do*

the outbreak of the war; for example, the unions often funded rational schools, workers centres, and so on.

The voluntary militias that went to free the rest of Spain from Franco were organised on anarchist principles and included both men and women. There was no rank, no saluting and no officer class. Everybody was equal. George Orwell, a member of the POUM militia (the POUM was a dissident Marxist party, influenced by Leninism but not, as the Communists asserted, Trotskyist) makes this clear:

> *"The essential point of the [militia] system was the social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality. If you wanted to slap the general commanding the division on the back and ask him for a cigarette, you could do so, and no one thought it curious. In theory at any rate each militia was a democracy and not a hierarchy. It was understood that orders had to be obeyed, but it was also understood that when you gave an order you gave it as comrade to comrade and not as superior to inferior. There were officers and N.C.O.s, but there was no military rank in the ordinary sense; no titles, no badges, no heel-clicking and saluting. They had attempted to produce within the militias a sort of temporary working model of the classless society. Of course there was not perfect equality, but there was a nearer approach to it than I had ever seen or that I would have though conceivable in time of war... "*
> [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

In Spain, however, as elsewhere, the anarchist movement was smashed between Stalinism (the Communist Party) on the one hand and Capitalism (Franco) on the other. Unfortunately,



anarchy was no utopian dream but a practical method of organising on a wide scale. That anarchist organisational techniques encouraged member participation, empowerment and militancy, and that they also successfully fought for reforms and promoted class consciousness, can be seen in the growth of anarcho-syndicalist unions and their impact on the labour movement. The Industrial Workers of the World, for example, still inspires union activists and has, throughout its long history, provided many union songs and slogans.

However, as a mass movement, syndicalism effectively ended by the 1930s. This was due to two factors. Firstly, most of the syndicalist unions were severely repressed just after World War I. In the immediate post-war years they reached their height. This wave of militancy was known as the "red years" in Italy, where it attained its high point with factory occupations (see section A.5.5). But these years also saw the destruction of these unions in country after county. In the USA, for example, the I.W.W. was crushed by a wave of repression backed whole-heartedly by the media, the state, and the capitalist class. Europe saw capitalism go on the offensive with a new weapon — fascism. Fascism arose (first in Italy and, most infamously, in Germany) as an attempt by capitalism to physically smash the organisations the working class had built. This was due to radicalism that had spread across Europe in the wake of the war ending, inspired by the example of Russia. Numerous near revolutions had terrified the bourgeoisie, who turned to fascism to save their system.

In country after country, anarchists were forced to flee into exile, vanish from sight, or became victims of assassins or concentration camps after their (often heroic) attempts at fighting fascism failed. In Portugal, for example, the 100,000 strong anarcho-syndicalist CGT union launched numerous revolts in the late 1920s and early 1930s against fascism. In January 1934, the CGT called for a revolutionary general strike which developed into a five day insurrection. A state of siege was declared

by the state, which used extensive force to crush the rebellion. The CGT, whose militants had played a prominent and courageous role in the insurrection, was completely smashed and Portugal remained a fascist state for the next 40 years. [Phil Mailer, **Portugal: The Impossible Revolution**, pp. 72–3] In Spain, the CNT (the most famous anarcho-syndicalist union) fought a similar battle. By 1936, it claimed one and a half million members. As in Italy and Portugal, the capitalist class embraced fascism to save their power from the dispossessed, who were becoming confident of their power and their right to manage their own lives (see section A.5.6).

As well as fascism, syndicalism also faced the negative influence of Leninism. The apparent success of the Russian revolution led many activists to turn to authoritarian politics, particularly in English speaking countries and, to a lesser extent, France. Such notable syndicalist activists as Tom Mann in England, William Gallacher in Scotland and William Foster in the USA became Communists (the last two, it should be noted, became Stalinist). Moreover, Communist parties deliberately undermined the libertarian unions, encouraging fights and splits (as, for example, in the I.W.W.). After the end of the Second World War, the Stalinists finished off what fascism had started in Eastern Europe and destroyed the anarchist and syndicalist movements in such places as Bulgaria and Poland. In Cuba, Castro also followed Lenin's example and did what the Batista and Machado dictatorship's could not, namely smash the influential anarchist and syndicalist movements (see Frank Fernandez's **Cuban Anarchism** for a history of this movement from its origins in the 1860s to the 21st century).

So by the start of the second world war, the large and powerful anarchist movements of Italy, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and Portugal had been crushed by fascism (but not, we must stress, without a fight). When necessary, the capitalists supported authoritarian states in order to crush the labour movement and make their countries safe for capitalism. Only Sweden escaped



various divisions. The control over the rail lines, according to Gaston Leval, *"did not operate from above downwards, as in a statist and centralised system. The Revolutionary Committee had no such powers... The members of the... committee being content to supervise the general activity and to co-ordinate that of the different routes that made up the network."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 255]

On the land, tens of thousands of peasants and rural day workers created voluntary, self-managed collectives. The quality of life improved as co-operation allowed the introduction of health care, education, machinery and investment in the social infrastructure. As well as increasing production, the collectives increased freedom. As one member puts it, *"it was marvellous ... to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 360]

We discuss the revolution in more detail in section I.8. For example, sections I.8.3 and I.8.4 discuss in more depth how the industrial collectives. The rural collectives are discussed in sections I.8.5 and I.8.6. We must stress that these sections are summaries of a vast social movement, and more information can be gathered from such works as Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, Sam Dolfgoff's **The Anarchist Collectives**, Jose Peirats' **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution** and a host of other anarchist accounts of the revolution.

On the social front, anarchist organisations created rational schools, a libertarian health service, social centres, and so on. The ***Mujeres Libres*** (free women) combated the traditional role of women in Spanish society, empowering thousands both inside and outside the anarchist movement (see **The Free Women of Spain** by Martha A. Ackelsberg for more information on this very important organisation). This activity on the social front only built on the work started long before

> *having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine."* [**Homage to Catalonia**, pp. 2–3]

The full extent of this historic revolution cannot be covered here. It will be discussed in more detail in Section I.8 of the FAQ. All that can be done is to highlight a few points of special interest in the hope that these will give some indication of the importance of these events and encourage people to find out more about it.

All industry in Catalonia was placed either under workers' self-management **or** workers' control (that is, either totally taking over **all** aspects of management, in the first case, or, in the second, controlling the old management). In some cases, whole town and regional economies were transformed into federations of collectives. The example of the Railway Federation (which was set up to manage the railway lines in Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia) can be given as a typical example. The base of the federation was the local assemblies:

> *"All the workers of each locality would meet twice a week to examine all that pertained to the work to be done... The local general assembly named a committee to manage the general activity in each station and its annexes. At [these] meetings, the decisions (direccion) of this committee, whose members continued to work [at their previous jobs], would be subjected to the approval or disapproval of the workers, after giving reports and answering questions."*

The delegates on the committee could be removed by an assembly at any time and the highest co-ordinating body of the Railway Federation was the ***"Revolutionary Committee,"*** whose members were elected by union assemblies in the



this trend, where the syndicalist union the SAC is still organising workers. It is, in fact, like many other syndicalist unions active today, growing as workers turn away from bureaucratic unions whose leaders seem more interested in protecting their privileges and cutting deals with management than defending their members. In France, Spain and Italy and elsewhere, syndicalist unions are again on the rise, showing that anarchist ideas are applicable in everyday life.

Finally, it must be stressed that syndicalism has its roots in the ideas of the earliest anarchists and, consequently, was not invented in the 1890s. It is true that development of syndicalism came about, in part, as a reaction to the disastrous "propaganda by deed" period, in which individual anarchists assassinated government leaders in attempts to provoke a popular uprising and in revenge for the mass murders of the Communards and other rebels (see section A.2.18 for details). But in response to this failed and counterproductive campaign, anarchists went back to their roots and to the ideas of Bakunin. Thus, as recognised by the likes of Kropotkin and Malatesta, syndicalism was simply a return to the ideas current in the libertarian wing of the First International.

Thus we find Bakunin arguing that *"it is necessary to organise the power of the proletariat. But this organisation must be the work of the proletariat itself ... Organise, constantly organise the international militant solidarity of the workers, in every trade and country, and remember that however weak you are as isolated individuals or districts, you will constitute a tremendous, invincible power by means of universal co-operation."* As one American activist commented, this is *"the same militant spirit that breathes now in the best expressions of the Syndicalist and I.W.W. movements"* both of which express *"a strong world wide revival of the ideas for which Bakunin laboured throughout his life."* [Max Baginski, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 71] As with the syndicalists, Bakunin stressed the *"organisation of trade sections, their fed-*

*eration ... bear in themselves the living germs of* ***the new social order,*** *which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

Such ideas were repeated by other libertarians. Eugene Varlin, whose role in the Paris Commune ensured his death, advocated a socialism of associations, arguing in 1870 that syndicates were the *"natural elements"* for the rebuilding of society: *"it is they that can easily be transformed into producer associations; it is they that can put into practice the retooling of society and the organisation of production."* [quoted by Martin Phillip Johnson, **The Paradise of Association**, p. 139] As we discussed in section A.5.2, the Chicago Anarchists held similar views, seeing the labour movement as both the means of achieving anarchy and the framework of the free society. As Lucy Parsons (the wife of Albert) put it *"we hold that the granges, trade-unions, Knights of Labour assemblies, etc., are the embryonic groups of the ideal anarchistic society ..."* [contained in Albert R. Parsons, **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 110] These ideas fed into the revolutionary unionism of the I.W.W. As one historian notes, the *"proceedings of the I.W.W.'s inaugural convention indicate that the participants were not only aware of the 'Chicago Idea' but were conscious of a continuity between their efforts and the struggles of the Chicago anarchists to initiate industrial unionism."* The Chicago idea represented *"the earliest American expression of syndicalism."* [Salvatore Salerno, **Red November, Black November**, p. 71]

Thus, syndicalism and anarchism are not differing theories but, rather, different interpretations of the same ideas (see for a fuller discussion section H.2.8). While not all syndicalists are anarchists (some Marxists have proclaimed support for syndicalism) and not all anarchists are syndicalists (see section J.3.9 for a discussion why), all social anarchists see the need for taking part in the labour and other popular movements



Franco. In every possible way the working class of Spain were creating by their own actions a new world based on their own ideas of social justice and freedom — ideas inspired, of course, by anarchism and anarchosyndicalism.

George Orwell's eye-witness account of revolutionary Barcelona in late December, 1936, gives a vivid picture of the social transformation that had begun:

> *"The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workman. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivised; even the bootblacks had been collectivised and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Señor' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' or 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'... Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of*

*that involved both industry and agriculture over substantial areas ... And that again was, by both human measures and indeed anyone's economic measures, quite successful. That is, production continued effectively; workers in farms and factories proved quite capable of managing their affairs without coercion from above, contrary to what lots of socialists, communists, liberals and other wanted to believe."* The revolution of 1936 was *"based on three generations of experiment and thought and work which extended anarchist ideas to very large parts of the population."* [**Radical Priorities**, p. 212]

Due to this anarchist organising and agitation, Spain in the 1930's had the largest anarchist movement in the world. At the start of the Spanish "Civil" war, over one and one half million workers and peasants were members of the CNT (the ***National Confederation of Labour***), an anarcho-syndicalist union federation, and 30,000 were members of the FAI (the ***Anarchist Federation of Iberia***). The total population of Spain at this time was 24 million.

The social revolution which met the Fascist coup on July 18th, 1936, is the greatest experiment in libertarian socialism to date. Here the last mass syndicalist union, the CNT, not only held off the fascist rising but encouraged the widespread takeover of land and factories. Over seven million people, including about two million CNT members, put self-management into practise in the most difficult of circumstances and actually improved both working conditions and output.

In the heady days after the 19th of July, the initiative and power truly rested in the hands of the rank-and-file members of the CNT and FAI. It was ordinary people, undoubtedly under the influence of Faistas (members of the FAI) and CNT militants, who, after defeating the fascist uprising, got production, distribution and consumption started again (under more egalitarian arrangements, of course), as well as organising and volunteering (in their tens of thousands) to join the militias, which were to be sent to free those parts of Spain that were under



and encouraging libertarian forms of organisation and struggle within them. By doing this, inside and outside of syndicalist unions, anarchists are showing the validity of our ideas. For, as Kropotkin stressed, the *"next revolution must from its inception bring about the seizure of the entire social wealth by the workers in order to transform it into common property. This revolution can succeed only through the workers, only if the urban and rural workers everywhere carry out this objective themselves. To that end, they must initiate their own action in the period* ***before the revolution****; this can happen only if there is a strong* ***workers' organisation.****"* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 20] Such popular self-managed organisations cannot be anything but ***"anarchy in action."***

## A.5.4 Anarchists in the Russian Revolution

The Russian revolution of 1917 saw a huge growth in anarchism in that country and many experiments in anarchist ideas. However, in popular culture the Russian Revolution is seen not as a mass movement by ordinary people struggling towards freedom but as the means by which Lenin imposed his dictatorship on Russia. The truth is radically different. The Russian Revolution was a mass movement from below in which many different currents of ideas existed and in which millions of working people (workers in the cities and towns as well as peasants) tried to transform their world into a better place. Sadly, those hopes and dreams were crushed under the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party — first under Lenin, later under Stalin.

The Russian Revolution, like most history, is a good example of the maxim "history is written by those who win." Most capitalist histories of the period between 1917 and 1921 ignore what the anarchist Voline called ***"the unknown revolution"*** — the revolution called forth from below by the actions of ordi-

nary people. Leninist accounts, at best, praise this autonomous activity of workers so long as it coincides with their own party line but radically condemn it (and attribute it with the basest motives) as soon as it strays from that line. Thus Leninist accounts will praise the workers when they move ahead of the Bolsheviks (as in the spring and summer of 1917) but will condemn them when they oppose Bolshevik policy once the Bolsheviks are in power. At worse, Leninist accounts portray the movement and struggles of the masses as little more than a backdrop to the activities of the vanguard party.

For anarchists, however, the Russian Revolution is seen as a classic example of a social revolution in which the self-activity of working people played a key role. In their soviets, factory committees and other class organisations, the Russian masses were trying to transform society from a class-ridden, hierarchical statist regime into one based on liberty, equality and solidarity. As such, the initial months of the Revolution seemed to confirm Bakunin's prediction that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free associations or federations of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206] The soviets and factory committees expressed concretely Bakunin's ideas and Anarchists played an important role in the struggle.

The initial overthrow of the Tsar came from the direct action of the masses. In February 1917, the women of Petrograd erupted in bread riots. On February 18th, the workers of the Putilov Works in Petrograd went on strike. By February 22nd, the strike had spread to other factories. Two days later, 200 000 workers were on strike and by February 25th the strike was virtually general. The same day also saw the first bloody clashes between protestors and the army. The turning point came on the 27th, when some troops went over to the revolutionary masses, sweeping along other units. This left the gov-



*tionalist movement .. . which bore similarities to the populist and republican rhetoric of the southern syndicalist intellectuals."* He argues that there *"has been far too much emphasis on syndicalist intellectuals and national organisers"* and that syndicalism *"relied little on its national leadership for its long-term vitality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 77, p. 53 and p. 51] If we do look at the membership of the USI, rather than finding a group which *"mostly went over to fascism,"* we discover a group of people who fought fascism tooth and nail and were subject to extensive fascist violence.

To summarise, Italian Fascism had nothing to do with syndicalism and, as seen above, the USI fought the Fascists and was destroyed by them along with the UAI, Socialist Party and other radicals. That a handful of pre-war Marxist-syndicalists later became Fascists and called for a "National-Syndicalism" does not mean that syndicalism and fascism are related (any more than some anarchists later becoming Marxists makes anarchism "a vehicle" for Marxism!).

It is hardly surprising that anarchists were the most consistent and successful opponents of Fascism. The two movements could not be further apart, one standing for total statism in the service of capitalism while the other for a free, non-capitalist society. Neither is it surprising that when their privileges and power were in danger, the capitalists and the landowners turned to fascism to save them. This process is a common feature in history (to list just four examples, Italy, Germany, Spain and Chile).

## A.5.6 Anarchism and the Spanish Revolution

As Noam Chomsky notes, *"a good example of a really large-scale anarchist revolution — in fact the best example to my knowledge — is the Spanish revolution in 1936, in which over most of Republican Spain there was a quite inspiring anarchist revolution*

that the *"leading syndicalists came out for intervention quickly and almost unanimously"* [Roberts, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106] after the First World War started. Many of these pro-war "leading syndicalists" did become fascists. However, to concentrate on a handful of "leaders" (which the majority did not even follow!) and state that this shows that the *"Italian syndicalists mostly went over to Fascism"* staggers belief. What is even worse, as seen above, the Italian anarchists and syndicalists were the most dedicated and successful fighters against fascism. In effect, Black and Sabatini have slandered a whole movement.

What is also interesting is that these "leading syndicalists" were not anarchists and so not anarcho-syndicalists. As Roberts notes *"[i]n Italy, the syndicalist doctrine was more clearly the product of a group of intellectuals, operating within the Socialist party and seeking an alternative to reformism."* They *"explicitly denounced anarchism"* and *"insisted on a variety of Marxist orthodoxy."* The *"syndicalists genuinely desired — and tried — to work within the Marxist tradition."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 66, p. 72, p. 57 and p. 79] According to Carl Levy, in his account of Italian anarchism, *"[u]nlike other syndicalist movements, the Italian variation coalesced inside a Second International party. Supporter were partially drawn from socialist intransigents ... the southern syndicalist intellectuals pronounced republicanism ... Another component ... was the remnant of the Partito Operaio."* [*"Italian Anarchism: 1870–1926"* in **For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice**, David Goodway (Ed.), p. 51]

In other words, the Italian syndicalists who turned to fascism were, firstly, a small minority of intellectuals who could not convince the majority within the syndicalist union to follow them, and, secondly, Marxists and republicans rather than anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists or even revolutionary syndicalists.

According to Carl Levy, Roberts' book *"concentrates on the syndicalist intelligentsia"* and that *"some syndicalist intellectuals ... helped generate, or sympathetically endorsed, the new Na-*



ernment without its means of coercion, the Tsar abdicated and a provisional government was formed.

So spontaneous was this movement that all the political parties were left behind. This included the Bolsheviks, with the *"Petrograd organisation of the Bolsheviks oppos[ing] the calling of strikes precisely on the eve of the revolution destined to overthrow the Tsar. Fortunately, the workers ignored the Bolshevik 'directives' and went on strike anyway ... Had the workers followed its guidance, it is doubtful that the revolution would have occurred when it did."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 123]

The revolution carried on in this vein of direct action from below until the new, "socialist" state was powerful enough to stop it.

For the Left, the end of Tsarism was the culmination of years of effort by socialists and anarchists everywhere. It represented the progressive wing of human thought overcoming traditional oppression, and as such was duly praised by leftists around the world. However, **in** Russia things were progressing. In the workplaces and streets and on the land, more and more people became convinced that abolishing feudalism politically was **not** enough. The overthrow of the Tsar made little real difference if feudal exploitation still existed in the economy, so workers started to seize their workplaces and peasants, the land. All across Russia, ordinary people started to build their own organisations, unions, co-operatives, factory committees and councils (or "soviets" in Russian). These organisations were initially organised in anarchist fashion, with recallable delegates and being federated with each other.

Needless to say, all the political parties and organisations played a role in this process. The two wings of the Marxist social-democrats were active (the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks), as were the Social Revolutionaries (a populist peasant based party) and the anarchists. The anarchists participated in this movement, encouraging all tendencies to

self-management and urging the overthrow of the provisional government. They argued that it was necessary to transform the revolution from a purely political one into an economic/social one. Until the return of Lenin from exile, they were the only political tendency who thought along those lines.

Lenin convinced his party to adopt the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* and push the revolution forward. This meant a sharp break with previous Marxist positions, leading one ex-Bolshevik turned Menshevik to comment that Lenin had *"made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years — the throne of Bakunin!"* [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, **Prelude to Revolution**, p. 40] The Bolsheviks now turned to winning mass support, championing direct action and supporting the radical actions of the masses, policies in the past associated with anarchism (*"the Bolsheviks launched ... slogans which until then had been particularly and insistently been voiced by the Anarchists."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 210]). Soon they were winning more and more votes in the soviet and factory committee elections. As Alexander Berkman argues, the *"Anarchist mottoes proclaimed by the Bolsheviks did not fail to bring results. The masses relied to their flag."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 120]

The anarchists were also influential at this time. Anarchists were particularly active in the movement for workers self-management of production which existed around the factory committees (see M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** for details). They were arguing for workers and peasants to expropriate the owning class, abolish all forms of government and re-organise society from the bottom up using their own class organisations — the soviets, the factory committees, co-operatives and so on. They could also influence the direction of struggle. As Alexander Rabinowitch (in his study of the July uprising of 1917) notes:



was the fact that the anti-fascist movement was dominated by anti-capitalist elements that led the USA and the UK to place known fascists in governmental positions in the places they "liberated" (often where the town had already been taken by the Partisans, resulting in the Allied troops "liberating" the town from its own inhabitants!).

Given this history of resisting fascism in Italy, it is surprising that some claim Italian fascism was a product or form of syndicalism. This is even claimed by some anarchists. According to Bob Black the *"Italian syndicalists mostly went over to Fascism"* and references David D. Roberts 1979 study **The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism** to support his claim. [**Anarchy after Leftism**, p. 64] Peter Sabatini in a review in **Social Anarchism** makes a similar statement, saying that syndicalism's *"ultimate failure"* was *"its transformation into a vehicle of fascism."* [**Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 99] What is the truth behind these claims?

Looking at Black's reference we discover that, in fact, most of the Italian syndicalists did not go over to fascism, if by syndicalists we mean members of the USI (the Italian Syndicalist Union). Roberts states that:

> *"The vast majority of the organised workers failed to respond to the syndicalists' appeals and continued to oppose [Italian] intervention [in the First World War], shunning what seemed to be a futile capitalist war. The syndicalists failed to convince even a majority within the USI ... the majority opted for the neutralism of Armando Borghi, leader of the anarchists within the USI. Schism followed as De Ambris led the interventionist minority out of the confederation."* [**The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism**, p. 113]

However, if we take "syndicalist" to mean some of the intellectuals and "leaders" of the pre-war movement, it was a case

*examples of the correctness of the policies which the anarchists urged in action and propaganda.*" [**Red Years, Black Years**, p. 3 and p. 2] Historian Tobias Abse confirms this analysis, arguing that *"[w]hat happened in Parma in August 1922 ... could have happened elsewhere, if only the leadership of the Socialist and Communist parties thrown their weight behind the call of the anarchist Malatesta for a united revolutionary front against Fascism.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 56]

In the end, fascist violence was successful and capitalist power maintained:

> *"The anarchists' will and courage were not enough to counter the fascist gangs, powerfully aided with material and arms, backed by the repressive organs of the state. Anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists were decisive in some areas and in some industries, but only a similar choice of direct action on the parts of the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labour [the reformist trade union] could have halted fascism.*" [**Red Years, Black Years**, pp. 1–2]

After helping to defeat the revolution, the Marxists helped ensure the victory of fascism.

Even after the fascist state was created, anarchists resisted both inside and outside Italy. In America, for example, Italian anarchists played a major role in fighting fascist influence in their communities, none more so that Carlo Tresca, most famous for his role in the 1912 IWW Lawrence strike, who *"in the 1920s had no peer among anti-Fascist leaders, a distinction recognised by Mussolini's political police in Rome.*" [Nunzio Pernicone, **Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel**, p. 4] Many Italians, both anarchist and non-anarchist, travelled to Spain to resist Franco in 1936 (see Umberto Marzochhi's **Remembering Spain: Italian Anarchist Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War** for details). During the Second World War, anarchists played a major part in the Italian Partisan movement. It



> *"At the rank-and-file level, particularly within the [Petrograd] garrison and at the Kronstadt naval base, there was in fact very little to distinguish Bolshevik from Anarchist... The Anarchist-Communists and the Bolsheviks competed for the support of the same uneducated, depressed, and dissatisfied elements of the population, and the fact is that in the summer of 1917, the Anarchist-Communists, with the support they enjoyed in a few important factories and regiments, possessed an undeniable capacity to influence the course of events. Indeed, the Anarchist appeal was great enough in some factories and military units to influence the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

Indeed, one leading Bolshevik stated in June, 1917 (in response to a rise in anarchist influence), *"[b]y fencing ourselves off from the Anarchists, we may fence ourselves off from the masses.*" [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

The anarchists operated with the Bolsheviks during the October Revolution which overthrew the provisional government. But things changed once the authoritarian socialists of the Bolshevik party had seized power. While both anarchists and Bolsheviks used many of the same slogans, there were important differences between the two. As Voline argued, *"[f]rom the lips and pens of the Anarchists, those slogans were sincere and concrete, for they corresponded to their principles and called for action entirely in conformity with such principles. But with the Bolsheviks, the same slogans meant practical solutions totally different from those of the libertarians and did not tally with the ideas which the slogans appeared to express.*" [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 210]

Take, for example, the slogan *"All power to the Soviets."* For anarchists it meant exactly that — organs for the working class to run society directly, based on mandated, recallable delegates.

For the Bolsheviks, that slogan was simply the means for a Bolshevik government to be formed over and above the soviets. The difference is important, *"for the Anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 213] Reducing the soviets to simply executing the decrees of the central (Bolshevik) government and having their All-Russian Congress be able to recall the government (i.e. those with **real** power) does not equal "all power," quite the reverse.

Similarly with the term *"workers' control of production."* Before the October Revolution Lenin saw *"workers' control"* purely in terms of the *"universal, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 52] He did not see it in terms of workers' management of production itself (i.e. the abolition of wage labour) via federations of factory committees. Anarchists and the workers' factory committees did. As S.A. Smith correctly notes, Lenin used *"the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees."* In fact Lenin's *"proposals ... [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous."* [**Red Petrograd**, p. 154] For anarchists, *"if the workers' organisations were capable of exercising effective control [over their bosses], then they also were capable of guaranteeing all production. In such an event, private industry could be eliminated quickly but progressively, and replaced by collective industry. Consequently, the Anarchists rejected the vague nebulous slogan of 'control of production.' They advocated* ***expropriation — progressive, but immediate — of private industry by the organisations of collective production.***" [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 221]

Once in power, the Bolsheviks systematically undermined the popular meaning of workers' control and replaced it with



*self-identification ... This dynamic was re-enforced by an important socialist and anarchist presence"* there. The failure of the Communist leadership to support the movement shows the bankruptcy of Bolshevik organisational forms which were unresponsive to the needs of the popular movement. Indeed, these events show the *"libertarian custom of autonomy from, and resistance to, authority was also operated against the leaders of the workers' movement, particularly when they were held to have misunderstood the situation at grass roots level."* [Sonnessa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200, p. 198 and p. 193]

Thus the Communist Party failed to support the popular resistance to fascism. The Communist leader Antonio Gramsci explained why, arguing that *"the party leadership's attitude on the question of the Arditi del Popolo ... corresponded to a need to prevent the party members from being controlled by a leadership that was not the party's leadership."* Gramsci added that this policy *"served to disqualify a mass movement which had started from below and which could instead have been exploited by us politically."* [**Selections from Political Writings (1921–1926)**, p. 333] While being less sectarian towards the Arditi del Popolo than other Communist leaders, *"[i]n common with all communist leaders, Gramsci awaited the formation of the PCd'I-led military squads."* [Sonnessa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196] In other words, the struggle against fascism was seen by the Communist leadership as a means of gaining more members and, when the opposite was a possibility, they preferred defeat and fascism rather than risk their followers becoming influenced by anarchism.

As Abse notes, *"it was the withdrawal of support by the Socialist and Communist parties at the national level that crippled"* the Arditi. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74] Thus *"social reformist defeatism and communist sectarianism made impossible an armed opposition that was widespread and therefore effective; and the isolated instances of popular resistance were unable to unite in a successful strategy."* And fascism could have been defeated: *"Insurrections at Sarzanna, in July 1921, and at Parma, in August 1922, are*

*and large numbers of artisans and craftsmen."* [Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 75] Unsurprisingly, the **Arditi del Popolo** *"appear to have been strongest and most successful in areas where traditional working-class political culture was less exclusively socialist and had strong anarchist or syndicalist traditions, for example, Bari, Livorno, Parma and Rome."* [Antonio Sonnessa, *"Working Class Defence Organisation, Anti-Fascist Resistance and the **Arditi del Popolo** in Turin, 1919–22,"* pp. 183–218, **European History Quarterly**, vol. 33, no. 2, p. 184]

However, both the socialist and communist parties withdrew from the organisation. The socialists signed a "Pact of Pacification" with the Fascists in August 1921. The communists *"preferred to withdraw their members from the Arditi del Popolo rather than let them work with the anarchists."* [**Red Years, Black Years**, p. 17] Indeed, *"[o]n the same day as the Pact was signed, **Ordine Nuovo** published a PCd'I [Communist Party of Italy] communication warning communists against involvement"* in the Arditi del Popolo. Four days later, the Communist leadership *"officially abandoned the movement. Severe disciplinary measures were threatened against those communists who continued to participate in, or liase with,"* the organisation. Thus by *"the end of the first week of August 1921 the PSI, CGL and the PCd'I had officially denounced"* the organisation. *"Only the anarchist leaders, if not always sympathetic to the programme of the [Arditi del Popolo], did not abandon the movement."* Indeed, **Umanita Nova** *"strongly supported"* it *"on the grounds it represented a popular expression of anti-fascist resistance and in defence of freedom to organise."* [Antonio Sonnessa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 195 and p. 194]

However, in spite of the decisions by their leaders, many rank and file socialists and communists took part in the movement. The latter took part in open *"defiance of the PCd'I leadership's growing abandonment"* of it. In Turin, for example, communists who took part in the **Arditi del Polopo** did so *"less as communists and more as part of a wider, working-class*



their own, statist conception. *"On three occasions,"* one historian notes, *"in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38] This process ultimately resulted in Lenin arguing for, and introducing, *"one-man management"* armed with *"dictatorial"* power (with the manager appointed from above by the state) in April 1918. This process is documented in Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, which also indicates the clear links between Bolshevik practice and Bolshevik ideology as well as how both differed from popular activity and ideas.

Hence the comments by Russian Anarchist Peter Arshinov:

> *"Another no less important peculiarity is that [the] October [revolution of 1917] has two meanings — that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party [the Marxist-Communists] that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses."* [**The Two Octobers**]

Initially, anarchists had supported the Bolsheviks, since the Bolshevik leaders had hidden their state-building ideology behind support for the soviets (as socialist historian Samuel Farber notes, the anarchists *"had actually been an unnamed coalition partner of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 126]). However, this support quickly "withered away" as the Bolsheviks showed that they were, in fact, not seeking true socialism but were instead securing power for themselves and pushing not for collective ownership of land and productive resources but for government ownership. The Bolsheviks, as noted, systematically undermined the workers' control/self-management movement in favour of capitalist-like forms of workplace management based around *"one-man management"* armed with *"dictatorial powers."*

As regards the soviets, the Bolsheviks systematically undermining what limited independence and democracy they had. In response to the *"great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections"* during the spring and summer of 1918 *"Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections."* Also, the *"government continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918. Apparently, the government feared that the opposition parties would show gains."* [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24 and p. 22] In the Petrograd elections, the Bolsheviks *"lost the absolute majority in the soviet they had previously enjoyed"* but remained the largest party. However, the results of the Petrograd soviet elections were irrelevant as a *"Bolshevik victory was assured by the numerically quite significant representation now given to trade unions, district soviets, factory-shop committees, district workers conferences, and Red Army and naval units, in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, *"The Evolution of Local Soviets in Petrograd"*, pp. 20–37, **Slavic Review**, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 36f] In other words, the Bolsheviks had undermined the democratic nature of the



> *ple: to break the power of the organised workers and peasants as completely as possible, to wipe out, with the bullet and the club, not only the gains of the **biennio rosso**, but everything that the lower classes had gained ... between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54]

The fascist squads attacked and destroyed anarchist and socialist meeting places, social centres, radical presses and Camera del Lavoro (local trade union councils). However, even in the dark days of fascist terror, the anarchists resisted the forces of totalitarianism. *"It is no coincidence that the strongest working-class resistance to Fascism was in ... towns or cities in which there was quite a strong anarchist, syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist tradition."* [Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56]

The anarchists participated in, and often organised sections of, the **Arditi del Popolo**, a working-class organisation devoted to the self-defence of workers' interests. The Arditi del Popolo organised and encouraged working-class resistance to fascist squads, often defeating larger fascist forces (for example, *"the total humiliation of thousands of Italo Balbo's squadristi by a couple of hundred Arditi del Popolo backed by the inhabitants of the working class districts"* in the anarchist stronghold of Parma in August 1922 [Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56]).

The Arditi del Popolo was the closest Italy got to the idea of a united, revolutionary working-class front against fascism, as had been suggested by Malatesta and the UAI. This movement *"developed along anti-bourgeois and anti-fascist lines, and was marked by the independence of its local sections."* [**Red Years, Black Years: Anarchist Resistance to Fascism in Italy**, p. 2] Rather than being just an "anti-fascist" organisation, the Arditi *"were not a movement in defence of 'democracy' in the abstract, but an essentially working-class organisation devoted to the defence of the interests of industrial workers, the dockers*

have been as successful and widespread as it was. Lastly, that socialist organisations, structured in a hierarchical fashion, do not produce a revolutionary membership. By continually looking to leaders, the movement was crippled and could not develop to its full potential.

This period of Italian history explains the growth of Fascism in Italy. As Tobias Abse points out, *"the rise of fascism in Italy cannot be detached from the events of the **biennio rosso**, the two red years of 1919 and 1920, that preceded it. Fascism was a preventive counter-revolution ... launched as a result of the failed revolution"* [*"The Rise of Fascism in an Industrial City"*, pp. 52–81, **Rethinking Italian Fascism**, David Forgacs (ed.), p. 54] The term *"preventive counter-revolution"* was originally coined by the leading anarchist Luigi Fabbri, who correctly described fascism as *"the organisation and agent of the violent armed defence of the ruling class against the proletariat, which, to their mind, has become unduly demanding, united and intrusive."* [*"Fascism: The Preventive Counter-Revolution"*, pp. 408–416, **Anarchism**, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 410 and p. 409]

The rise of fascism confirmed Malatesta's warning at the time of the factory occupations: *"If we do not carry on to the end, we will pay with tears of blood for the fear we now instil in the bourgeoisie."* [quoted by Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66] The capitalists and rich landowners backed the fascists in order to teach the working class their place, aided by the state. They ensured *"that it was given every assistance in terms of funding and arms, turning a blind eye to its breaches of the law and, where necessary, covering its back through intervention by armed forces which, on the pretext of restoring order, would rush to the aid of the fascists wherever the latter were beginning to take a beating instead of doling one out."* [Fabbri, **Op. Cit.**, p. 411] To quote Tobias Abse:

> *"The aims of the Fascists and their backers amongst the industrialists and agrarians in 1921–22 were sim-*



soviet by swamping it by their own delegates. Faced with rejection in the soviets, the Bolsheviks showed that for them "soviet power" equalled party power. To stay in power, the Bolsheviks had to destroy the soviets, which they did. The soviet system remained "soviet" in name only. Indeed, from 1919 onwards Lenin, Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks were admitting that they had created a party dictatorship and, moreover, that such a dictatorship was essential for any revolution (Trotsky supported party dictatorship even after the rise of Stalinism).

The Red Army, moreover, no longer was a democratic organisation. In March of 1918 Trotsky had abolished the election of officers and soldier committees:

> *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* [**Work, Discipline, Order**]

As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

> *"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [*"The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control"*, **For Workers' Power**, pp. 336–7]

Unsurprisingly, Samuel Farber notes that *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin*

*declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921.*" [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44]

Thus after the October Revolution, anarchists started to denounce the Bolshevik regime and call for a ***"Third Revolution"*** which would finally free the masses from all bosses (capitalist or socialist). They exposed the fundamental difference between the rhetoric of Bolshevism (as expressed, for example, in Lenin's **State and Revolution**) with its reality. Bolshevism in power had proved Bakunin's prediction that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would become the *"dictatorship **over** the proletariat"* by the leaders of the Communist Party.

The influence of the anarchists started to grow. As Jacques Sadoul (a French officer) noted in early 1918:

> *"The anarchist party is the most active, the most militant of the opposition groups and probably the most popular ... The Bolsheviks are anxious."* [quoted by Daniel Guerin, **Anarchism**, pp. 95–6]

By April 1918, the Bolsheviks began the physical suppression of their anarchist rivals. On April 12th, 1918, the Cheka (the secret police formed by Lenin in December, 1917) attacked anarchist centres in Moscow. Those in other cities were attacked soon after. As well as repressing their most vocal opponents on the left, the Bolsheviks were restricting the freedom of the masses they claimed to be protecting. Democratic soviets, free speech, opposition political parties and groups, self-management in the workplace and on the land — all were destroyed in the name of "socialism." All this happened, we must stress, **before** the start of the Civil War in late May, 1918, which most supporters of Leninism blame for the Bolsheviks' authoritarianism. During the civil war, this process accelerated, with the Bolsheviks' systematically repressing opposition from all quarters — including the strikes and protests of the very class who they claimed was exercising its "dictatorship" while they were in power!



> *the control of factories is a mockery ... because it tends to harmonise your interests and those of the bourgeois which is like harmonising the interests of the wolf and the sheep. Don't believe those of your leaders who make fools of you by adjourning the revolution from day to day. You yourselves must make the revolution when an occasion will offer itself, without waiting for orders which never come, or which come only to enjoin you to abandon action. Have confidence in yourselves, have faith in your future and you will win."* [quoted by Max Nettlau, **Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist**]

Malatesta was proven correct. With the end of the occupations, the only victors were the bourgeoisie and the government. Soon the workers would face Fascism, but first, in October 1920, *"after the factories were evacuated,"* the government (obviously knowing who the real threat was) *"arrested the entire leadership of the USI and UAI. The socialists did not respond"* and *"more-or-less ignored the persecution of the libertarians until the spring of 1921 when the aged Malatesta and other imprisoned anarchists mounted a hunger strike from their cells in Milan."* [Carl Levy, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 221–2] They were acquitted after a four day trial.

The events of 1920 show four things. Firstly, that workers can manage their own workplaces successfully by themselves, without bosses. Secondly, on the need for anarchists to be involved in the labour movement. Without the support of the USI, the Turin movement would have been even more isolated than it was. Thirdly, anarchists need to be organised to influence the class struggle. The growth of the UAI and USI in terms of both influence and size indicates the importance of this. Without the anarchists and syndicalists raising the idea of factory occupations and supporting the movement, it is doubtful that it would

**Cit.**, p. 136] The local syndicalist union confederations could not provide the necessary framework for a fully co-ordinated occupation movement as the reformist unions refused to work with them; and although the anarchists were a large minority, they were still a minority:

> *"At the 'interproletarian' convention held on 12 September (in which the Unione Anarchia, the railwaymen's and maritime workers union participated) the syndicalist union decided that 'we cannot do it ourselves' without the socialist party and the CGL, protested against the 'counter-revolutionary vote' of Milan, declared it minoritarian, arbitrary and null, and ended by launching new, vague, but ardent calls to action."* [Paolo Spriano, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94]

Malatesta addressed the workers of one of the factories at Milan. He argued that *"[t]hose who celebrate the agreement signed at Rome [between the Confederazione and the capitalists] as a great victory of yours are deceiving you. The victory in reality belongs to Giolitti, to the government and the bourgeoisie who are saved from the precipice over which they were hanging."* During the occupation the *"bourgeoisie trembled, the government was powerless to face the situation."* Therefore:

> *"To speak of victory when the Roman agreement throws you back under bourgeois exploitation which you could have got rid of is a lie. If you give up the factories, do this with the conviction [of] hav[ing] lost a great battle and with the firm intention to resume the struggle on the first occasion and to carry it on in a thorough way... Nothing is lost if you have no illusion [about] the deceiving character of the victory. The famous decree on*



It is important to stress that this process had started well **before** the start of the civil war, confirming anarchist theory that a "workers' state" is a contraction in terms. For anarchists, the Bolshevik substitution of party power for workers power (and the conflict between the two) did not come as a surprise. The state is the delegation of **power** — as such, it means that the idea of a "workers' state" expressing "workers' power" is a logical impossibility. If workers **are** running society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, **not** in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design. For this reason anarchists have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the agent of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished.

As we discuss in section H, the degeneration of the Bolsheviks from a popular working class party into dictators over the working class did not occur by accident. A combination of political ideas and the realities of state power (and the social relationships it generates) could not help but result in such a degeneration. The political ideas of Bolshevism, with its vanguardism, fear of spontaneity and identification of party power with working class power inevitably meant that the party would clash with those whom it claimed to represent. After all, if the party is the vanguard then, automatically, everyone else is a "backward" element. This meant that if the working class resisted Bolshevik policies or rejected them in soviet elections, then the working class was "wavering" and being influenced by "petty-bourgeois" and "backward" elements. Vanguardism breeds elitism and, when combined with state power, dictatorship.

State power, as anarchists have always stressed, means the delegation of power into the hands of a few. This automatically produces a class division in society — those with power

and those without. As such, once in power the Bolsheviks were isolated from the working class. The Russian Revolution confirmed Malatesta's argument that a *"government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [**Anarchy**, p. 34] A highly centralised state such as the Bolsheviks built would reduce accountability to a minimum while at the same time accelerating the isolation of the rulers from the ruled. The masses were no longer a source of inspiration and power, but rather an alien group whose lack of "discipline" (i.e. ability to follow orders) placed the revolution in danger. As one Russian Anarchist argued:

> *"The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators — a new class born mainly form the womb of the so-called intelligentsia ... We do not mean to say ... that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from centralisation. It cannot be otherwise."* [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 123–4]

For this reason anarchists, while agreeing that there is an uneven development of political ideas within the working class,



movement spread throughout Italy, not only in the industrial heartland around Milan, Turin and Genoa, but also in Rome, Florence, Naples and Palermo. The *"militants of the USI were certainly in the forefront of the movement,"* while **Umanita Nova** argued that *"the movement is very serious and we must do everything we can to channel it towards a massive extension."* The persistent call of the USI was for *"an extension of the movement to the whole of industry to institute their 'expropriating general strike.'"* [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 236 and pp. 243–4] Railway workers, influenced by the libertarians, refused to transport troops, workers went on strike against the orders of the reformist unions and peasants occupied the land. The anarchists whole-heartedly supported the movement, unsurprisingly as the *"occupation of the factories and the land suited perfectly our programme of action."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] Luigi Fabbri described the occupations as having *"revealed a power in the proletariat of which it had been unaware hitherto."* [quoted by Paolo Sprinao, **The Occupation of the Factories**, p. 134]

However, after four weeks of occupation, the workers decided to leave the factories. This was because of the actions of the socialist party and the reformist trade unions. They opposed the movement and negotiated with the state for a return to "normality" in exchange for a promise to extend workers' control legally, in association with the bosses. The question of revolution was decided by a vote of the CGL national council in Milan on April 10–11$^{th}$, without consulting the syndicalist unions, after the Socialist Party leadership refused to decide one way or the other.

Needless to say, this promise of "workers' control" was not kept. The lack of independent inter-factory organisation made workers dependent on trade union bureaucrats for information on what was going on in other cities, and they used that power to isolate factories, cities, and factories from each other. This lead to a return to work, *"in spite of the opposition of individual anarchists dispersed among the factories."* [Malatesta, **Op.**

ducing for themselves. Errico Malatesta, who took part in these events, writes:

> *"The metal workers started the movement over wage rates. It was a strike of a new kind. Instead of abandoning the factories, the idea was to remain inside without working ... Throughout Italy there was a revolutionary fervour among the workers and soon the demands changed their characters. Workers thought that the moment was ripe to take possession once [and] for all the means of production. They armed for defence ... and began to organise production on their own ... It was the right of property abolished in fact ...; it was a new regime, a new form of social life that was being ushered in. And the government stood by because it felt impotent to offer opposition."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 134]

Daniel Guerin provides a good summary of the extent of the movement:

> *"The management of the factories ... [was] conducted by technical and administrative workers' committees. Self-management went quite a long way: in the early period assistance was obtained from the banks, but when it was withdrawn the self-management system issued its own money to pay the workers' wages. Very strict self-discipline was required, the use of alcoholic beverages forbidden, and armed patrols were organised for self-defence. Very close solidarity was established between the factories under self-management. Ores and coal were put into a common pool, and shared out equitably."* [**Anarchism**, p. 109]

Italy was *"paralysed, with half a million workers occupying their factories and raising red and black flags over them."* The



reject the idea that "revolutionaries" should take power on behalf of working people. Only when working people actually run society themselves will a revolution be successful. For anarchists, this meant that *"[e]ffective emancipation can be achieved only by the* ***direct, widespread, and independent action ... of the workers themselves,*** *grouped ... in their own class organisations ... on the basis of concrete action and self-government,* ***helped but not governed,*** *by revolutionaries working in the very midst of, and not above the mass and the professional, technical, defence and other branches."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 197] By substituting party power for workers power, the Russian Revolution had made its first fatal step. Little wonder that the following prediction (from November 1917) made by anarchists in Russia came true:

> *"Once their power is consolidated and 'legalised', the Bolsheviks who are ... men of centralist and authoritarian action will begin to rearrange the life of the country and of the people by governmental and dictatorial methods, imposed by the centre. The[y] ... will dictate the will of the party to all Russia, and command the whole nation.* ***Your Soviets and your other local organisations will become little by little, simply executive organs of the will of the central government.*** *In the place of healthy, constructive work by the labouring masses, in place of free unification from the bottom, we will see the installation of an authoritarian and statist apparatus which would act from above and set about wiping out everything that stood in its way with an iron hand."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235]

The so-called "workers' state" could not be participatory or empowering for working class people (as the Marxists claimed) simply because state structures are not designed for

that. Created as instruments of minority rule, they cannot be transformed into (nor "new" ones created which are) a means of liberation for the working classes. As Kropotkin put it, Anarchists *"maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."* [**Anarchism**, p. 170] In the words of an anarchist pamphlet written in 1918:

> *"Bolshevism, day by day and step by step, proves that state power possesses inalienable characteristics; it can change its label, its 'theory', and its servitors, but in essence it merely remains power and despotism in new forms."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, *"The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution,"* pp. 341–350, **Russian Review**, vol. 26, issue no. 4, p. 347]

For insiders, the Revolution had died a few months after the Bolsheviks took over. To the outside world, the Bolsheviks and the USSR came to represent "socialism" even as they systematically destroyed the basis of real socialism. By transforming the soviets into state bodies, substituting party power for soviet power, undermining the factory committees, eliminating democracy in the armed forces and workplaces, repressing the political opposition and workers' protests, the Bolsheviks effectively marginalised the working class from its own revolution. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the degeneration of the revolution and the ultimate rise of Stalinism.

As anarchists had predicted for decades previously, in the space of a few months, and before the start of the Civil War, the Bolshevik's "workers' state" had become, like any state, an alien power **over** the working class and an instrument of minority rule (in this case, the rule of the party). The Civil War



presence, they would yet see a resurgence of their position during the September factory occupations.

The anarchists *"accused the socialists of betrayal. They criticised what they believed was a false sense of discipline that had bound socialists to their own cowardly leadership. They contrasted the discipline that placed every movement under the 'calculations, fears, mistakes and possible betrayals of the leaders' to the other discipline of the workers of Sestri Ponente who struck in solidarity with Turin, the discipline of the railway workers who refused to transport security forces to Turin and the anarchists and members of the Unione Sindacale who forgot considerations of party and sect to put themselves at the disposition of the Torinesi."* [Carl Levy, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161] Sadly, this top-down "discipline" of the socialists and their unions would be repeated during the factory occupations, with terrible results.

In September, 1920, there were large-scale stay-in strikes in Italy in response to an owner wage cut and lockout. *"Central to the climate of the crisis was the rise of the syndicalists."* In mid-August, the USI metal-workers *"called for both unions to occupy the factories"* and called for *"a preventive occupation"* against lock-outs. The USI saw this as the *"expropriation of the factories by the metal-workers"* (which must *"be defended by all necessary measures"*) and saw the need *"to call the workers of other industries into battle."* [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 236, pp. 238–9] Indeed, *"[i]f the FIOM had not embraced the syndicalist idea of an occupation of factories to counter an employer's lockout, the USI may well have won significant support from the politically active working class of Turin."* [Carl Levy, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] These strikes began in the engineering factories and soon spread to railways, road transport, and other industries, with peasants seizing land. The strikers, however, did more than just occupy their workplaces, they placed them under workers' self-management. Soon over 500 000 "strikers" were at work, pro-

response the employers declared a general lockout. The government supported the lockout with a mass show of force and troops occupied the factories and mounted machine guns posts at them. When the shop stewards movement decided to surrender on the immediate issues in dispute after two weeks on strike, the employers responded with demands that the shop stewards councils be limited to non-working hours, in accordance with the FIOM national contract, and that managerial control be re-imposed.

These demands were aimed at the heart of the factory council system and Turin labour movement responded with a massive general strike in defence of it. In Turin, the strike was total and it soon spread throughout the region of Piedmont and involved 500 000 workers at its height. The Turin strikers called for the strike to be extended nationally and, being mostly led by socialists, they turned to the CGL trade union and Socialist Party leaders, who rejected their call.

The only support for the Turin general strike came from unions that were mainly under anarcho-syndicalist influence, such as the independent railway and the maritime workers unions (*"The syndicalists were the only ones to move."*). The railway workers in Pisa and Florence refused to transport troops who were being sent to Turin. There were strikes all around Genoa, among dock workers and in workplaces where the USI was a major influence. So in spite of being *"betrayed and abandoned by the whole socialist movement,"* the April movement *"still found popular support"* with *"actions ... either directly led or indirectly inspired by anarcho-syndicalists."* In Turin itself, the anarchists and syndicalists were *"threatening to cut the council movement out from under"* Gramsci and the **Ordine Nuovo** group. [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 207, p. 193 and p. 194]

Eventually the CGL leadership settled the strike on terms that accepted the employers' main demand for limiting the shop stewards' councils to non-working hours. Though the councils were now much reduced in activity and shop floor



accelerated this process and soon party dictatorship was introduced (indeed, leading Bolsheviks began arguing that it was essential in any revolution). The Bolsheviks put down the libertarian socialist elements within their country, with the crushing of the uprising at Kronstadt and the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine being the final nails in the coffin of socialism and the subjugation of the soviets.

The Kronstadt uprising of February, 1921, was, for anarchists, of immense importance (see the appendix "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" for a full discussion of this uprising). The uprising started when the sailors of Kronstadt supported the striking workers of Petrograd in February, 1921. They raised a 15 point resolution, the first point of which was a call for soviet democracy. The Bolsheviks slandered the Kronstadt rebels as counter-revolutionaries and crushed the revolt. For anarchists, this was significant as the repression could not be justified in terms of the Civil War (which had ended months before) and because it was a major uprising of ordinary people for ***real*** socialism. As Voline puts it:

> *"Kronstadt was the first entirely independent attempt of the people to liberate themselves of all yokes and carry out the Social Revolution: this attempt was made directly ... by the working masses themselves, without political shepherds, without leaders or tutors. It was the first step towards the third and social revolution."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 537–8]

In the Ukraine, anarchist ideas were most successfully applied. In areas under the protection of the Makhnovist movement, working class people organised their own lives directly, based on their own ideas and needs — true social self-determination. Under the leadership of Nestor Makhno, a self-educated peasant, the movement not only fought

against both Red and White dictatorships but also resisted the Ukrainian nationalists. In opposition to the call for "national self-determination," i.e. a new Ukrainian state, Makhno called instead for working class self-determination in the Ukraine and across the world. Makhno inspired his fellow peasants and workers to fight for real freedom:

> *"Conquer or die — such is the dilemma that faces the Ukrainian peasants and workers at this historic moment … But we will not conquer in order to repeat the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters; we will conquer in order to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of the truth."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 58]

To ensure this end, the Makhnovists refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated the city the Makhnovists *"immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference … it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations … The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm … Railroad workers took the first step … They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region … From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began to turn systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 149]



ing *"a strong syndicalist campaign to establish councils in Mila, Armando Borghi [anarchist secretary of the USI] called for mass factory occupations. In Turin, the re-election of workshop commissars was just ending in a two-week orgy of passionate discussion and workers caught the fever. [Factory Council] Commissars began to call for occupations."* Indeed, *"the council movement outside Turin was essentially anarcho-syndicalist."* Unsurprisingly, the secretary of the syndicalist metal-workers *"urged support for the Turin councils because they represented anti-bureaucratic direct action, aimed at control of the factory and could be the first cells of syndicalist industrial unions … The syndicalist congress voted to support the councils… . Malatesta … supported them as a form of direct action guaranteed to generate rebelliousness … **Umanita Nova** and **Guerra di Classe** [paper of the USI] became almost as committed to the councils as **L'Ordine Nuovo** and the Turin edition of **Avanti.**"* [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200, p. 193 and p. 196]

The upsurge in militancy soon provoked an employer counter-offensive. The bosses organisation denounced the factory councils and called for a mobilisation against them. Workers were rebelling and refusing to follow the bosses orders — "indiscipline" was rising in the factories. They won state support for the enforcement of the existing industrial regulations. The national contract won by the FIOM in 1919 had provided that the internal commissions were banned from the shop floor and restricted to non-working hours. This meant that the activities of the shop stewards' movement in Turin — such as stopping work to hold shop steward elections — were in violation of the contract. The movement was essentially being maintained through mass insubordination. The bosses used this infringement of the agreed contract as the means combating the factory councils in Turin.

The showdown with the employers arrived in April, when a general assembly of shop stewards at Fiat called for sit-in strikes to protest the dismissal of several shop stewards. In

*regard the factory councils as 'organs suited to future communist management of both the individual factory and the whole society.'"* [**Anarchism**, p. 109]

The developments in Turin should not be taken in isolation. All across Italy, workers and peasants were taking action. In late February 1920, a rash of factory occupations broke out in Liguria, Piedmont and Naples. In Liguria, the workers occupied the metal and shipbuilding plants in Sestri Ponente, Cornigliano and Campi after a breakdown of pay talks. For up to four days, under syndicalist leadership, they ran the plants through factory councils.

During this period the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI) grew in size to around 800 000 members and the influence of the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI) with its 20 000 members and daily paper (**Umanita Nova**) grew correspondingly. As the Welsh Marxist historian Gwyn A. Williams points out *"Anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists were the most consistently and totally revolutionary group on the left ... the most obvious feature of the history of syndicalism and anarchism in 1919–20: rapid and virtually continuous growth ... The syndicalists above all captured militant working-class opinion which the socialist movement was utterly failing to capture."* [**Proletarian Order**, pp. 194–195] In Turin, libertarians *"worked within FIOM"* and had been *"heavily involved in the **Ordine Nuovo** campaign from the beginning."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195] Unsurprisingly, **Ordone Nuovo** was denounced as "syndicalist" by other socialists.

It was the anarchists and syndicalists who first raised the idea of occupying workplaces. Malatesta was discussing this idea in **Umanita Nova** in March, 1920. In his words, *"General strikes of protest no longer upset anyone ... One must seek something else. We put forward an idea: take-over of factories... the method certainly has a future, because it corresponds to the ultimate ends of the workers' movement and constitutes an exercise preparing one for the ultimate act of expropriation."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 134] In the same month, dur-



The Makhnovists argued that the *"freedom of the workers and peasants is their own, and not subject to any restriction. It is up to the workers and peasants themselves to act, to organise themselves, to agree among themselves in all aspects of their lives, as they see fit and desire .. . The Makhnovists can do no more than give aid and counsel ... In no circumstances can they, nor do they wish to, govern."* [Peter Arshinov, quoted by Guerin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] In Alexandrovsk, the Bolsheviks proposed to the Makhnovists spheres of action — their Revkom (Revolutionary Committee) would handle political affairs and the Makhnovists military ones. Makhno advised them *"to go and take up some honest trade instead of seeking to impose their will on the workers."* [Peter Arshinov in **The Anarchist Reader**, p. 141]

They also organised free agricultural communes which *"[a]dmittedly .. . were not numerous, and included only a minority of the population .. . But what was most precious was that these communes were formed by the poor peasants themselves. The Makhnovists never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes."* [Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 87] Makhno played an important role in abolishing the holdings of the landed gentry. The local soviet and their district and regional congresses equalised the use of the land between all sections of the peasant community. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 53–4]

Moreover, the Makhnovists took the time and energy to involve the whole population in discussing the development of the revolution, the activities of the army and social policy. They organised numerous conferences of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates to discuss political and social issues as well as free soviets, unions and communes. They organised a regional congress of peasants and workers when they had liberated Aleksandrovsk. When the Makhnovists tried to convene the third regional congress of peasants, workers and insurgents in April 1919 and an extraordinary congress of several regions in June 1919 the Bolsheviks viewed them as counter-

revolutionary, tried to ban them and declared their organisers and delegates outside the law.

The Makhnovists replied by holding the conferences anyway and asking *"[c]an there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves?"* and *"[w]hose interests should the revolution defend: those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* Makhno himself stated that he *"consider[ed] it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call conferences on their own account, to discuss their affairs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 103 and p. 129]

In addition, the Makhnovists *"fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power."* Indeed, the *"only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153 and p. 154]

The Makhnovists rejected the Bolshevik corruption of the soviets and instead proposed *"the free and completely independent soviet system of working people without authorities and their arbitrary laws."* Their proclamations stated that the *"working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves, that is to say. ADMINISTRATIVE, not ruling soviets."* Economically, capitalism would be abolished along with the state — the land and workshops *"must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271 and p. 273]



In Turin, a new rank-and-file movement was developing. This movement was based around the *"internal commissions"* (elected ad hoc grievance committees). These new organisations were based directly on the group of people who worked together in a particular work shop, with a mandated and recallable shop steward elected for each group of 15 to 20 or so workers. The assembly of all the shop stewards in a given plant then elected the "internal commission" for that facility, which was directly and constantly responsible to the body of shop stewards, which was called the *"factory council."*

Between November 1918 and March 1919, the internal commissions had become a national issue within the trade union movement. On February 20, 1919, the Italian Federation of Metal Workers (FIOM) won a contract providing for the election of "internal commissions" in the factories. The workers subsequently tried to transform these organs of workers' representation into factory councils with a managerial function. By May Day 1919, the internal commissions *"were becoming the dominant force within the metalworking industry and the unions were in danger of becoming marginal administrative units. Behind these alarming developments, in the eyes of reformists, lay the libertarians."* [Carl Levy, **Gramsci and the Anarchists**, p. 135] By November 1919 the internal commissions of Turin were transformed into factory councils.

The movement in Turin is usually associated with the weekly **L'Ordine Nuovo** (The New Order), which first appeared on May 1, 1919. As Daniel Guerin summarises, it was *"edited by a left socialist, Antonio Gramsci, assisted by a professor of philosophy at Turin University with anarchist ideas, writing under the pseudonym of Carlo Petri, and also of a whole nucleus of Turin libertarians. In the factories, the Ordine Nuovo group was supported by a number of people, especially the anarcho-syndicalist militants of the metal trades, Pietro Ferrero and Maurizio Garino. The manifesto of* ***Ordine Nuovo*** *was signed by socialists and libertarians together, agreeing to*

Many of these books were written by anarchists active during the revolution, many imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and deported to the West due to international pressure exerted by anarcho-syndicalist delegates to Moscow who the Bolsheviks were trying to win over to Leninism. The majority of such delegates stayed true to their libertarian politics and convinced their unions to reject Bolshevism and break with Moscow. By the early 1920's all the anarcho-syndicalist union confederations had joined with the anarchists in rejecting the "socialism" in Russia as state capitalism and party dictatorship.

## A.5.5 Anarchists in the Italian Factory Occupations

After the end of the First World War there was a massive radicalisation across Europe and the world. Union membership exploded, with strikes, demonstrations and agitation reaching massive levels. This was partly due to the war, partly to the apparent success of the Russian Revolution. This enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution even reached Individualist Anarchists like Joseph Labadie, who like many other anti-capitalists, saw *"the red in the east [giving] hope of a brighter day"* and the Bolsheviks as making *"laudable efforts to at least try some way out of the hell of industrial slavery."* [quoted by Carlotta R. Anderson, **All-American Anarchist** p. 225 and p. 241]

Across Europe, anarchist ideas became more popular and anarcho-syndicalist unions grew in size. For example, in Britain, the ferment produced the shop stewards' movement and the strikes on Clydeside; Germany saw the rise of IWW inspired industrial unionism and a libertarian form of Marxism called "Council Communism"; Spain saw a massive growth in the anarcho-syndicalist CNT. In addition, it also, unfortunately, saw the rise and growth of both social democratic and communist parties. Italy was no exception.



The army itself, in stark contrast to the Red Army, was fundamentally democratic (although, of course, the horrific nature of the civil war did result in a few deviations from the ideal — however, compared to the regime imposed on the Red Army by Trotsky, the Makhnovists were much more democratic movement).

The anarchist experiment of self-management in the Ukraine came to a bloody end when the Bolsheviks turned on the Makhnovists (their former allies against the "Whites," or pro-Tsarists) when they were no longer needed. This important movement is fully discussed in the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?" of our FAQ. However, we must stress here the one obvious lesson of the Makhnovist movement, namely that the dictatorial policies pursued by the Bolsheviks were not imposed on them by objective circumstances. Rather, the political ideas of Bolshevism had a clear influence in the decisions they made. After all, the Makhnovists were active in the same Civil War and yet did not pursue the same policies of party power as the Bolsheviks did. Rather, they successfully encouraged working class freedom, democracy and power in extremely difficult circumstances (and in the face of strong Bolshevik opposition to those policies). The received wisdom on the left is that there was no alternative open to the Bolsheviks. The experience of the Makhnovists disproves this. What the masses of people, as well as those in power, do and think politically is as much part of the process determining the outcome of history as are the objective obstacles that limit the choices available. Clearly, ideas do matter and, as such, the Makhnovists show that there was (and is) a practical alternative to Bolshevism — anarchism.

The last anarchist march in Moscow until 1987 took place at the funeral of Kropotkin in 1921, when over 10,000 marched behind his coffin. They carried black banners declaring *"Where there is authority, there is no freedom"* and *"The Liberation of the*

*working class is the task of the workers themselves."* As the procession passed the Butyrki prison, the inmates sang anarchist songs and shook the bars of their cells.

Anarchist opposition within Russia to the Bolshevik regime started in 1918. They were the first left-wing group to be repressed by the new "revolutionary" regime. Outside of Russia, anarchists continued to support the Bolsheviks until news came from anarchist sources about the repressive nature of the Bolshevik regime (until then, many had discounted negative reports as being from pro-capitalist sources). Once these reliable reports came in, anarchists across the globe rejected Bolshevism and its system of party power and repression. The experience of Bolshevism confirmed Bakunin's prediction that Marxism meant *"the highly despotic government of the masses by a new and very small aristocracy of real or pretended scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be liberated from the cares of government and included in entirety in the governed herd."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 178–9]

From about 1921 on, anarchists outside of Russia started describing the USSR as *"state-capitalist"* to indicate that although individual bosses might have been eliminated, the Soviet state bureaucracy played the same role as individual bosses do in the West (anarchists **within** Russia had been calling it that since 1918). For anarchists, *"the Russian revolution ... is trying to reach ... economic equality ... this effort has been made in Russia under a strongly centralised party dictatorship ... this effort to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralised state communism under the iron law of a party dictatorship is bound to end in failure. We are learning to know in Russia how **not** to introduce communism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 254]

This meant exposing that Berkman called **"The Bolshevik Myth,"** the idea that the Russian Revolution was a success and should be copied by revolutionaries in other countries: *"It is imperative to unmask the great delusion, which otherwise might lead the Western workers to the same abyss as their brothers*



*[and sisters] in Russia. It is incumbent upon those who have seen through the myth to expose its true nature."* [*"The Anti-Climax'"*, **The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 342] Moreover, anarchists felt that it was their revolutionary duty not only present and learn from the facts of the revolution but also show solidarity with those subject to Bolshevik dictatorship. As Emma Goldman argued, she had not *"come to Russia expecting to find Anarchism realised."* Such idealism was alien to her (although that has not stopped Leninists saying the opposite). Rather, she expected to see *"the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought."* She was aware that revolutions were difficult, involving *"destruction"* and *"violence."* That Russia was not perfect was not the source of her vocal opposition to Bolshevism. Rather, it was the fact that *"the Russian people have been **locked out**"* of their own revolution by the Bolshevik state which used *"the sword and the gun to keep the people out."* As a revolutionary she refused *"to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlvii and p. xliv]

For more information on the Russian Revolution and the role played by anarchists, see the appendix on "The Russian Revolution" of the FAQ. As well as covering the Kronstadt uprising and the Makhnovists, it discusses why the revolution failed, the role of Bolshevik ideology played in that failure and whether there were any alternatives to Bolshevism.

The following books are also recommended: **The Unknown Revolution** by Voline; **The Guillotine at Work** by G.P. Maximov; **The Bolshevik Myth** and **The Russian Tragedy**, both by Alexander Berkman; **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** by M. Brinton; **The Kronstadt Uprising** by Ida Mett; **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** by Peter Arshinov; **My Disillusionment in Russia** and **Living My Life** by Emma Goldman; **Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack: The struggle for free soviets in the Ukraine 1917–1921** by Alexandre Skirda.

we must fight against own our prejudices while supporting those in struggle against our common enemies, no matter their sex, skin colour or sexuality. Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin words on fighting racism are applicable to all forms of oppression:

> *"Racism must be fought vigorously wherever it is found, even if in our own ranks, and even in ones own breast. Accordingly, we must end the system of white skin privilege which the bosses use to split the class, and subject racially oppressed workers to super-exploitation. White workers, especially those in the Western world, must resist the attempt to use one section of the working class to help them advance, while holding back the gains of another segment based on race or nationality. This kind of class opportunism and capitulationism on the part of white labour must be directly challenged and defeated. There can be no workers unity until the system of super-exploitation and world White Supremacy is brought to an end."* [**Anarchism and the Black Revolution**, p. 128]

Progress towards equality can and has been made. While it is still true that (in the words of Emma Goldman) *"[n]owhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex"* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 177] and that education is still patriarchal, with young women still often steered away from traditionally "male" courses of study and work (which teaches children that men and women are assigned different roles in society and sets them up to accept these limitations as they grow up) it is also true that the position of women, like that of blacks and gays, **has** improved. This is due to the various self-organised, self-liberation movements that have continually developed throughout history and these are **the** key to fighting oppression in the short term (and creating the potential for the long term solution of dismantling capitalism and the state).



# Section B — Why do anarchists oppose the current system?

This section of the FAQ presents an analysis of the basic social relationships of modern society and the structures which create them, particularly those aspects of society that anarchists want to change.

Anarchism is, essentially, a revolt against capitalism. As a political theory it was born at the same time as capitalism and in opposition to it. As a social movement it grew in strength and influence as capitalism colonised more and more parts of society. Rather than simply express opposition to the state, as some so-called experts assert, anarchism has always been opposed to other forms of authority and the oppression they create, in particular capitalism and its particular form of private property. It is no coincidence that Proudhon, the first person to declare themselves an anarchist, did so in a book entitled **What is Property?** (and gave the answer ***"It is theft!"***). From Proudhon onwards, anarchism has opposed both the state and capitalism (indeed, it is the one thing such diverse thinkers as Benjamin Tucker and Peter Kropotkin both agreed on). Needless to say, since Proudhon anarchism has extended its critique of authority beyond these two social evils. Other forms of social hierarchy, such as sexism, racism and homophobia, have been rejected as limitations of freedom and equality. So this section of the FAQ summarises the key ideas behind anarchism's rejection of the current system we live under.

This, of course, does not mean that anarchistic ideas have not existed within society before the dawn of capitalism. Far from it. Thinkers whose ideas can be classified as anarchist go back thousands of years and are found many diverse cultures and places. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that anarchism was born the moment the state and private property were created. However, as Kropotkin noted, while *"from all times there have been Anarchists and Statists"* in our times *"Anarchy was brought forth by the same critical and revolutionary protest that gave rise to Socialism in general."* However, unlike other socialists, anarchists have not stopped at the *"negation*



community we argue for popular assemblies (see section J.5.1) as a means of not only combating the power of the state but also replaced it with by free, self-managed, communities (see section I.5).

Thus the current struggle itself creates the bridge between what is and what could be:

> *"Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must* ***be*** *the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distant panaceas. They must be created as* ***modes of struggle*** *against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 104]

This is not all. As well as fighting the state and capitalism, we also need fight all other forms of oppression. This means that anarchists argue that we need to combat social hierarchies like racism and sexism as well as workplace hierarchy and economic class, that we need to oppose homophobia and religious hatred as well as the political state. Such oppressions and struggles are not diversions from the struggle against class oppression or capitalism but part and parcel of the struggle for human freedom and cannot be ignored without fatally harming it.

As part of that process, anarchists encourage and support all sections of the population to stand up for their humanity and individuality by resisting racist, sexist and anti-gay activity and challenging such views in their everyday lives, everywhere (as Carole Pateman points out, *"sexual domination structures the workplace as well as the conjugal home"* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 142]). It means a struggle of all working class people against the internal and external tyrannies we face —

hierarchy is natural or by rewarding subservient behaviour). Unsurprisingly, this never completely succeeds and so capitalism is marked by constant struggles between the oppressed and oppressor. Some of these struggles succeed, some do not. Some are defensive, some are not. Some, like strikes, are visible, other less so (such a working slowly and less efficiently than management desires). And these struggles are waged by both sides of the hierarchical divide. Those subject to hierarchy fight to limit it and increase their autonomy and those who exercise authority fight to increase their power over others. Who wins varies. The 1960s and 1970s saw a marked increase in victories for the oppressed all throughout capitalism but, unfortunately, since the 1980s, as we discuss in section C.8.3, there has been a relentless class war conducted by the powerful which has succeeded in inflicting a series of defeats on working class people. Unsurprisingly, the rich have got richer and more powerful since.

So anarchists take part in the on-going social struggle in society in an attempt to end it in the only way possible, the victory of the oppressed. A key part of this is to fight for partial freedoms, for minor or major reforms, as this strengthens the spirit of revolt and starts the process towards the final end of hierarchy. In such struggles we stress the autonomy of those involved and see them not only as the means of getting more justice and freedom in the current unfree system but also as a means of ending the hierarchies they are fighting once and for all. Thus, for example, in the class struggle we argue for *"[o]rganisation from the bottom up, beginning with the shop and factory, on the foundation of the joint interests of the workers everywhere, irrespective of trade, race, or country."* [Alexander Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 207] Such an organisation, as we discuss in section J.5.2, would be run via workplace assemblies and would be the ideal means of replacing capitalist hierarchy in industry by genuine economic freedom, i.e. worker's self-management of production (see section I.3). Similarly, in the



*of Capitalism and of society based on the subjection of labour to capital"* and went further to *"declare themselves against what constitutes the real strength of Capitalism: the State and its principle supports — centralisation of authority, law, always made by a minority for its own profit, and a form of justice whose chief aim is to protect Authority and Capitalism."* So anarchism was *"not only against Capitalism, but also against these pillars of Capitalism: Law, Authority, and the State."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 16 and p. 19]

In other words, anarchism as it exists today, as a social movement with a long history of struggle and with a political theory and set of ideas, is the product of the transformation of society which accompanied the creation of the modern (nation-) state and capital and (far more importantly) the reaction, resistance and opposition of those subject to these new social relationships and institutions. As such, the analysis and critique presented in this section of the FAQ will concentrate on modern, capitalist, society.

Anarchists realise that the power of governments and other forms of hierarchy depends upon the agreement of the governed. Fear is not the whole answer, it is far more *"because they [the oppressed] subscribe to the same values as their governors. Rulers and ruled alike believe in the principle of authority, of hierarchy, of power."* [Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 15] With this in mind, we present in this section of the FAQ our arguments to challenge this "consensus," to present the case why we should become anarchists, why authoritarian social relationships and organisations are not in our interests.

Needless to say, this task is not easy. No ruling class could survive unless the institutions which empower it are generally accepted by those subject to them. This is achieved by various means — by propaganda, the so-called education system, by tradition, by the media, by the general cultural assumptions of a society. In this way the dominant ideas in society are those

of the dominant elite. This means that any social movement needs to combat these ideas before trying to end them:

> *"People often do not even recognise the existence of systems of oppression and domination. They have to try to struggle to gain their rights within the systems in which they live before they even perceive that there is repression. Take a look at the women's movement. One of the first steps in the development of the women's movement was so-called 'consciousness raising efforts.' Try to get women to perceive that it is not the natural state of the world for them to be dominated and controlled. My grandmother couldn't join the women's movement, since she didn't feel any oppression, in some sense. That's just the way life was, like the sun rises in the morning. Until people can realise that it is not like the sun rising, that it can be changed, that you don't have to follow orders, that you don't have to be beaten, until people can perceive that there is something wrong with that, until that is overcome, you can't go on. And one of the ways to do that is to try to press reforms within the existing systems of repression, and sooner or later you find that you will have to change them."* [Noam Chomsky, **Anarchism Interview**]

This means, as Malatesta stressed, that anarchists *"first task therefore must be to persuade people."* This means that we *"must make people aware of the misfortunes they suffer and of their chances to destroy them ... To those who are cold and hungry we will demonstrate how possible and easy it would be to assure everybody their material needs. To those who are oppressed and despised we shall show how it is possible to live happily in a world of people who are free and equal .. . And when we will have succeeded in arousing the sentiment of rebellion in the minds of men*



*"serve as a training camp to develop"* a person's *"understanding of [their] proper role in life, to cultivate [their] self-reliance and independence, teach him [or her] mutual help and co-operation, and make him [or her] conscious of [their] responsibility. [They] will learn to decide and act on [their] own behalf, not leaving it to leaders or politicians to attend to [their] affairs and look out for [their] welfare. It will be [them] who will determine, together with [their] fellows ... , what they want and what methods will best serve their aims."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206]

In other words, struggle encourages all the traits hierarchy erodes and, consequently, develop the abilities not only to question and resist authority but, ultimately, end it once and for all. This means that any struggle **changes** those who take part in it, politicising them and transforming their personalities by shaking off the servile traits produced and required by hierarchy. As an example, after the sit-down strikes in Flint, Michigan, in 1937 one eye-witness saw how *"the auto worker became a different human being. The women that had participated actively became a different type of women ... They carried themselves with a different walk, their heads were high, and they had confidence in themselves."* [Genora (Johnson) Dollinger, contained in **Voices of a People's History of the United States**, Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove (eds.), p. 349] Such changes happen in all struggles (also see section J.4.2). Anarchists are not surprised for, as discussed in section J.1 and J.2.1, we have long recognised the liberating aspects of social struggle and the key role it plays in creating free people and the other preconditions for needed for an anarchist society (like the initial social structure — see section I.2.3).

Needless to say, a hierarchical system like capitalism cannot survive with a non-submissive working class and the bosses spend a considerable amount of time, energy and resources trying to break the spirits of the working class so they will submit to authority (either unwillingly, by fear of being fired, or willingly, by fooling them into believing that

cially) excluded from decision making, who are reduced to carrying out (executing) the decisions made by the few. As a result, most people suffer feelings of alienation and unhappiness. However, in practice, people try and overcome this position of powerlessness and so hierarchy produces a struggle against itself by those subjected to it. This process goes on all the time, to a greater or lesser degree, and is an essential aspect in creating the possibility of political consciousness, social change and revolution. People refuse to be treated like objects (as required by hierarchical society) and by so doing hierarchy creates the possibility for its own destruction.

For the inequality in wealth and power produced by hierarchies, between the powerful and the powerless, between the rich and the poor, has not been ordained by god, nature or some other superhuman force. It has been created by a specific social system, its institutions and workings — a system based upon authoritarian social relationships which effect us both physically and mentally. So there is hope. Just as authoritarian traits are learned, so can they be **unlearned.** As Carole Pateman summarises, the evidence supports the argument *"that we do learn to participate by participating"* and that a participatory environment *"might also be effective in diminishing tendencies toward non-democratic attitudes in the individual."* [**Participaton and Democratic Theory**, p. 105] So oppression reproduces resistance and the seeds of its own destruction.

It is for this reason anarchists stress the importance of self-liberation (see section A.2.7) and *"support all struggles for partial freedom, because we are convinced that one learns through struggle, and that once one begins to enjoy a little freedom one ends by wanting it all."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 195] By means of direct action (see section J.2), people exert themselves and stand up for themselves. This breaks the conditioning of hierarchy, breaks the submissiveness which hierarchical social relationships both need and produce. Thus the daily struggles against oppression



*[and women] against the avoidable and unjust evils from which we suffer in society today, and in getting them to understand how they are caused and how it depends on human will to rid ourselves of them"* then we will be able to unite and change them for the better. [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 185–6]

So we must explain **why** we want to change the system. From this discussion, it will become apparent why anarchists are dissatisfied with the very limited amount of freedom in modern society and why they want to create a truly free society. In the words of Noam Chomsky, the anarchist critique of modern society means:

> *"to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom. That includes political power, ownership and management, relations among men and women, parents and children, our control over the fate of future generations (the basic moral imperative behind the environmental movement…), and much else. Naturally this means a challenge to the huge institutions of coercion and control: the state, the unaccountable private tyrannies that control most of the domestic and international economy [i.e. capitalist corporations and companies], and so on. But not only these."* [**Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 775]

This task is made easier by the fact that the *"dominating class"* has **not** *"succeeded in reducing all its subjects to passive and unconscious instruments of its interests."* This means that where there is oppression and exploitation there is also resistance — and hope. Even when those oppressed by hierarchical

social relations generally accept it, those institutions cannot put out the spark of freedom totally. Indeed, they help produce the spirit of revolt by their very operation as people finally say enough is enough and stand up for their rights. Thus hierarchical societies *"contain organic contradictions and [these] are like the germs of death"* from which *"the possibility of progress"* springs. [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 186–7]

Anarchists, therefore, combine their critique of existing society with active participation in the on-going struggles which exist in any hierarchical struggle. As we discuss in section J, we urge people to take ***direct action*** to fight oppression. Such struggles change those who take part in them, breaking the social conditioning which keeps hierarchical society going and making people aware of other possibilities, aware that other worlds are possible and that we do not have to live like this. Thus struggle is the practical school of anarchism, the means by which the preconditions of an anarchist society are created. Anarchists seek to learn from such struggles while, at the same time, propagating our ideas within them and encouraging them to develop into a general struggle for social liberation and change.

Thus the natural resistance of the oppressed to their oppression encourages this process of justification Chomsky (and anarchism) calls for, this critical evaluation of authority and domination, this undermining of what previously was considered "natural" or "common-sense" **until we started to question it.** As noted above, an essential part of this process is to encourage direct action by the oppressed against their oppressors as well as encouraging the anarchistic tendencies and awareness that exist (to a greater or lesser degree) in any hierarchical society. The task of anarchists is to encourage such struggles and the questioning their produce of society and the way it works. We aim to encourage people to look at the root causes of the social problems they are fighting, to seek to change the underlying social institutions and relationships which produce them.



gles and the anarchistic elements they produce which make the end of all forms of hierarchy not only desirable, but possible.

So while the negative impact of hierarchy is not surprising, neither is the resistance to it. This is because the individual *"is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text; he [or she] is an entity charged with energy and structured in specific ways, which, while adapting itself, reacts in specific and ascertainable ways to external conditions."* In this *"process of adaptation,"* people develop *"definite mental and emotional reactions which follow from specific properties"* of our nature. [Eric Fromm, **Man for Himself**, p. 23 and p. 22] For example:

> *"Man can adapt himself to slavery, but he reacts to it by lowering his intellectual and moral qualities … Man can adapt himself to cultural conditions which demand the repression of sexual strivings, but in achieving this adaptation he develops … neurotic symptoms. He can adapt to almost any culture pattern, but in so far as these are contradictory to his nature he develops mental and emotional disturbances which force him eventually change these conditions since he cannot change his nature… . If … man could adapt himself to all conditions without fighting those which are against his nature, he would have no history. Human evolution is rooted in man's adaptability and in certain indestructible qualities of his nature which compel him to search for conditions better adjusted to his intrinsic needs."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 22–23]

So as well as adaptation to hierarchy, there is resistance. This means that modern society (capitalism), like any hierarchical society, faces a direct contradiction. On the one hand, such systems divide society into a narrow stratum of order givers and the vast majority of the population who are (offi-

ically excludes the creation of people able to free themselves from it?

Anarchists disagree. Hierarchy can be ended, both in specific forms and in general. A quick look at the history of the human species shows that this is the case. People who have been subject to monarchy have ended it, creating republics where before absolutism reigned. Slavery and serfdom have been abolished. Alexander Berkman simply stated the obvious when he pointed out that *"many ideas, once held to be true, have come to be regarded as wrong and evil. Thus the ideas of divine right of kings, of slavery and serfdom. There was a time when the whole world believed those institutions to be right, just, and unchangeable."* However, they became *"discredited and lost their hold upon the people, and finally the institutions that incorporated those ideas were abolished"* as *"they were useful only to the master class"* and *"were done away with by popular uprisings and revolutions."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 178] It is unlikely, therefore, that current forms of hierarchy are exceptions to this process.

Today, we can see that this is the case. Malatesta's comments of over one hundred years ago are still valid: *"the oppressed masses ... have never completely resigned themselves to oppression and poverty ... [and] show themselves thirsting for justice, freedom and wellbeing."* [**Anarchy**, p. 33] Those at the bottom are constantly resisting both hierarchy and its the negative effects and, equally important, creating non-hierarchical ways of living and fighting. This constant process of self-activity and self-liberation can be seen from the labour, women's and other movements — in which, to some degree, people create their own alternatives based upon their own dreams and hopes. Anarchism is based upon, and grew out of, this process of resistance, hope and direct action. In other words, the libertarian elements that the oppressed continually produce in their struggles within and against hierarchical systems are extrapolated and generalised into what is called anarchism. It is these struggles within and against an unjust system creates the seeds of the society that will replace it. In other words, we seek to encourage hope and a positive vision of a better world.



However, this section of the FAQ is concerned directly with the critical or "negative" aspect of anarchism, the exposing of the evil inherent in all authority, be it from state, property or whatever and why, consequently, anarchists seek *"the destruction of power, property, hierarchy and exploitation."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 11] Later sections will indicate how, after analysing the world, anarchists plan to change it constructively, but some of the constructive core of anarchism will be seen even in this section. After this broad critique of the current system, we move onto more specific areas. Section C explains the anarchist critique of the economics of capitalism. Section D discusses how the social relationships and institutions described in this section impact on society as a whole. Section E discusses the causes (and some suggested solutions) to the ecological problems we face.

# B.1 Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?

First, it is necessary to indicate what kind of authority anarchism challenges. While it is customary for some opponents of anarchism to assert that anarchists oppose all kinds of authority, the reality of the situation is more complex. While anarchists have, on occasion, stated their opposition to "all authority" a closer reading quickly shows that anarchists reject only one specific form of authority, what we tend to call hierarchy (see section H.4 for more details). This can be seen when Bakunin stated that *"the principle of **authority**"* was the *"eminently theological, metaphysical and political idea that the masses, **always** incapable of governing themselves, must submit at all times to the benevolent yoke of a wisdom and a justice, which in one way or another, is imposed from above."* [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 33]

Other forms of authority are more acceptable to anarchists, it depends whether the authority in question becomes a source of **power** over others or not. That is the key to understanding the anarchist position on authority — if it is ***hierarchical*** authority, then anarchists are against it.. The reason is simple:

> *"[n]o one should be entrusted with power, inasmuch as anyone invested with authority must ... became an oppressor and exploiter of society."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 249]



summarises, *"at the same time that they learn to deflect their repressed rage against those they perceive as weak, they also learn to submit to autocratic or 'strong-man' rule. Moreover, having been severely punished for any hint of rebellion (even 'talking back' about being treated unfairly), they gradually also learn to deny to themselves that there was anything wrong with what was done to them as children — and to do it in turn to their own children."* [**The Authoritarian Personality**, p. 187]

These are just some of the mechanisms that perpetuate the status quo by creating the kinds of personalities who worship authority and fear freedom. Consequently, anarchists are generally opposed to traditional child-rearing practices, the patriarchal-authoritarian family (and its "values"), the suppression of adolescent sexuality, and the pleasure-denying, pain-affirming attitudes taught by the Church and in most schools. In place of these, anarchists favour non-authoritarian, non-repressive child-rearing practices and educational methods (see sections J.6 and secJ.5.13, respectively) whose purpose is to prevent, or at least minimise, the psychological crippling of individuals, allowing them instead to develop natural self-regulation and self-motivated learning. This, we believe, is the only way to for people to grow up into happy, creative, and truly freedom-loving individuals who will provide the psychological ground where anarchist economic and political institutions can flourish.

## B.1.6 Can hierarchy be ended?

Faced with the fact that hierarchy, in its many distinctive forms, has been with us such a long time and so negatively shapes those subject to it, some may conclude that the anarchist hope of ending it, or even reducing it, is little more than a utopian dream. Surely, it will be argued, as anarchists acknowledge that those subject to a hierarchy adapt to it this automat-

bitions, besides sexual ones, that are imposed on children and adolescents. Rianne Eisler, for example, in her book **Sacred Pleasure**, stresses that it is not just a sex-negative attitude but a **pleasure**-negative attitude that creates the kinds of personalities in question. Denial of the value of pleasurable sensations permeates our unconscious, as reflected, for example, in the common idea that to enjoy the pleasures of the body is the "animalistic" (and hence "bad") side of human nature, as contrasted with the "higher" pleasures of the mind and "spirit." By such dualism, which denies a spiritual aspect to the body, people are made to feel guilty about enjoying any pleasurable sensations — a conditioning that does, however, prepare them for lives based on the sacrifice of pleasure (or indeed, even of life itself) under capitalism and statism, with their requirements of mass submission to alienated labour, exploitation, military service to protect ruling-class interests, and so on. And at the same time, authoritarian ideology emphasises the value of suffering, as for example through the glorification of the tough, insensitive warrior hero, who suffers (and inflicts "necessary" suffering on others ) for the sake of some pitiless ideal.

Eisler also points out that there is *"ample evidence that people who grow up in families where rigid hierarchies and painful punishments are the norm learn to suppress anger toward their parents. There is also ample evidence that this anger is then often deflected against traditionally disempowered groups (such as minorities, children, and women)."* [**Sacred Pleasure**, p. 187] This repressed anger then becomes fertile ground for reactionary politicians, whose mass appeal usually rests in part on scapegoating minorities for society's problems.

As the psychologist Else Frenkel-Brunswick documents in **The Authoritarian Personality**, people who have been conditioned through childhood abuse to surrender their will to the requirements of feared authoritarian parents, also tend to be very susceptible as adults to surrender their will and minds to authoritarian leaders. *"In other words,"* Frenkel-Brunswick



This distinction between forms of authority is important. As Erich Fromm pointed out, *"authority"* is *"a broad term with two entirely different meanings: it can be either 'rational' or 'irrational' authority. Rational authority is based on competence, and it helps the person who leans on it to grow. Irrational authority is based on power and serves to exploit the person subjected to it."* [**To Have or To Be**, pp. 44–45] The same point was made by Bakunin over 100 years earlier when he indicated the difference between authority and *"natural influence."* For Bakunin, individual freedom *"results from th[e] great number of material, intellectual, and moral influences which every individual around him [or her] and which society … continually exercise … To abolish this mutual influence would be to die."* Consequently, *"when we reclaim the freedom of the masses, we hardly wish to abolish the effect of any individual's or any group of individual's natural influence upon the masses. What we wish is to abolish artificial, privileged, legal, and official influences."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140 and p. 141]

It is, in other words, the difference between taking part in a decision and listening to alternative viewpoints and experts (*"natural influence"*) before making your mind up and having a decision **made for you** by a separate group of individuals (who may or may not be elected) because that is their role in an organisation or society. In the former, the individual exercises their judgement and freedom (i.e. is based on rational authority). In the latter, they are subjected to the wills of others, to hierarchical authority (i.e. is based on irrational authority). This is because rational authority *"not only permits but requires constant scrutiny and criticism … it is always temporary, its acceptance depending on its performance."* The source of irrational authority, on the other hand, *"is always power over people … Power on the one side, fear on the other, are always the buttresses on which irrational authority is built."* Thus former is based upon *"equality"* while the latter *"is by its very nature based upon inequality."* [Erich Fromm, **Man for Himself**, pp. 9–10]

This crucial point is expressed in the difference between **having** authority and **being** an authority. Being an authority just means that a given person is generally recognised as competent for a given task, based on his or her individual skills and knowledge. Put differently, it is socially acknowledged expertise. In contrast, having authority is a social relationship based on status and power derived from a hierarchical position, not on individual ability. Obviously this does not mean that competence is not an element for obtaining a hierarchical position; it just means that the real or alleged initial competence is transferred to the title or position of the authority and so becomes independent of individuals, i.e. institutionalised (or what Bakunin termed *"official"*).

This difference is important because the way people behave is more a product of the institutions in which we are raised than of any inherent nature. In other words, social relationships **shape** the individuals involved. This means that the various groups individuals create have traits, behaviours and outcomes that cannot be understood by reducing them to the individuals within them. That is, groups consist not only of individuals, but also relationships between individuals and these relationships will affect those subject to them. For example, obviously *"the exercise of power by some disempowers others"* and so through a *"combination of physical intimidation, economic domination and dependency, and psychological limitations, social institutions and practices affect the way everyone sees the world and her or his place in it."* This, as we discuss in the next section, impacts on those involved in such authoritarian social relationships as *"the exercise of power in any institutionalised form — whether economic, political or sexual — brutalises both the wielder of power and the one over whom it is exercised."* [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 41]

Authoritarian social relationships means dividing society into (the few) order givers and (the many) order takers, impoverishing the individuals involved (mentally, emotionally



render to the flow of energy discharged during orgasm. Hence there is an incomplete release of sexual tension, which results in a state of chronic bioenergetic stasis. Such a condition, Reich found, is the breeding ground for neuroses and reactionary attitudes. (For further details see the section J.6).

In this connection it is interesting to note that "primitive" societies, such as the Trobriand Islanders, prior to their developing patriarchal-authoritarian institutions, provided special community houses where teenagers could go with their partners to enjoy undisturbed sexual relationships — and this with society's full approval. Such an institution would be taken for granted in an anarchist society, as it is implied by the concept of freedom. (For more on adolescent sexual liberation, see section J.6.8.)

Nationalistic feelings can also be traced to the authoritarian family. A child's attachment to its mother is, of course, natural and is the basis of all family ties. Subjectively, the emotional core of the concepts of homeland and nation are mother and family, since the mother is the homeland of the child, just as the family is the "nation in miniature." According to Reich, who carefully studied the mass appeal of Hitler's "National Socialism," nationalistic sentiments are a direct continuation of the family tie and are rooted in a **fixated** tie to the mother. As Reich points out, although infantile attachment to the mother is natural, **fixated** attachment is not, but is a social product. In puberty, the tie to the mother would make room for other attachments, i.e., natural sexual relations, **if** the unnatural sexual restrictions imposed on adolescents did not cause it to be eternalised. It is in the form of this socially conditioned externalisation that fixation on the mother becomes the basis of nationalist feelings in the adult; and it is only at this stage that it becomes a reactionary social force.

Later writers who have followed Reich in analysing the process of creating reactionary character structures have broadened the scope of his analysis to include other important inhi-

The family is the most essential institution for this purpose because children are most vulnerable to psychological maiming in their first few years, from the time of birth to about six years of age, during which time they are mostly in the charge of their parents. The schools and churches then continue the process of conditioning once the children are old enough to be away from their parents, but they are generally unsuccessful if the proper foundation has not been laid very early in life by the parents. Thus A.S. Neill observes that *"the nursery training is very like the kennel training. The whipped child, like the whipped puppy, grows into an obedient, inferior adult. And as we train our dogs to suit our own purposes, so we train our children. In that kennel, the nursery, the human dogs must be clean; they must feed when we think it convenient for them to feed. I saw a hundred thousand obedient, fawning dogs wag their tails in the Templehof, Berlin, when in 1935, the great trainer Hitler whistled his commands."* [**Summerhill: a Radical Approach to Child Rearing**, p. 100]

The family is also the main agency of repression during adolescence, when sexual energy reaches its peak. This is because the vast majority of parents provide no private space for adolescents to pursue undisturbed sexual relationships with their partners, but in fact actively discourage such behaviour, often (as in fundamentalist Christian families) demanding complete abstinence — at the very time when abstinence is most impossible! Moreover, since teenagers are economically dependent on their parents under capitalism, with no societal provision of housing or dormitories allowing for sexual freedom, young people have no alternative but to submit to irrational parental demands for abstention from premarital sex. This in turn forces them to engage in furtive sex in the back seats of cars or other out-of-the-way places where they cannot relax or obtain full sexual satisfaction. As Reich found, when sexuality is repressed and laden with anxiety, the result is always some degree of what he terms *"orgastic impotence"*: the inability to fully sur-



and physically) and society as a whole. Human relationships, in all parts of life, are stamped by authority, not liberty. And as freedom can only be created by freedom, authoritarian social relationships (and the obedience they require) do not and cannot educate a person in freedom — only participation (self-management) in all areas of life can do that. *"In a society based on exploitation and servitude,"* in Kropotkin's words, *"human nature itself is degraded"* and it is only *"as servitude disappears"* shall we *"regain our rights."* [**Anarchism**, p. 104]

Of course, it will be pointed out that in any collective undertaking there is a need for co-operation and co-ordination and this need to "subordinate" the individual to group activities is a form of authority. Therefore, it is claimed, a democratically managed group is just as "authoritarian" as one based on hierarchical authority. Anarchists are not impressed by such arguments. Yes, we reply, of course in any group undertaking there is a need make and stick by agreements but anarchists argue that to use the word "authority" to describe two fundamentally different ways of making decisions is playing with words. It obscures the fundamental difference between free association and hierarchical imposition and confuses co-operation with command (as we note in section H.4, Marxists are particularly fond of this fallacy). Simply put, there are two different ways of co-ordinating individual activity within groups — either by authoritarian means or by libertarian means. Proudhon, in relation to workplaces, makes the difference clear:

> *"either the workman... will be simply the employee of the proprietor-capitalist-promoter; or he will participate... [and] have a voice in the council, in a word he will become an associate.*
>
> *"In the first case the workman is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience... In the second case he resumes his dignity as a man and citizen... he forms part of the producing*

> *organisation, of which he was before but the slave; as, in the town, he forms part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject ... we need not hesitate, for we have no choice... it is necessary to form an ASSOCIATION among workers ... because without that, they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two ... castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 215–216]

In other words, associations can be based upon a form of **rational** authority, based upon **natural influence** and so reflect freedom, the ability of individuals to think, act and feel and manage their own time and activity. Otherwise, we include elements of slavery into our relationships with others, elements that poison the whole and shape us in negative ways (see section B.1.1). Only the reorganisation of society in a libertarian way (and, we may add, the mental transformation such a change requires and would create) will allow the individual to *"achieve more or less complete blossoming, whilst continuing to develop"* and banish *"that spirit of submission that has been artificially thrust upon him [or her]"* [Nestor Makhno, **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 62]

So, anarchists *"ask nothing better than to see [others]... exercise over us a natural and legitimate influence, freely accepted, and never imposed ... We accept all natural authorities and all influences of fact, but none of right."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 255] Anarchist support for free association within directly democratic groups is based upon such organisational forms increasing influence and reducing irrational authority in our lives. Members of such organisations can create and present their own ideas and suggestions, critically evaluate the proposals and suggestions from their fellows, accept those that they agree with or become convinced



> *with severe fear; and since sex is a forbidden subject, thought in general and man's critical faculty also become inhibited. In short, morality's aim is to produce acquiescent subjects who, despite distress and humiliation, are adjusted to the authoritarian order. Thus, the family is the authoritarian state in miniature, to which the child must learn to adapt himself as a preparation for the general social adjustment required of him later. Man's authoritarian structure — this must be clearly established — is basically produced by the embedding of sexual inhibitions and fear."* [Reich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

In this way, by damaging the individual's power to rebel and think for him/herself, the inhibition of childhood sexuality — and indeed other forms of free, natural expression of bioenergy (e.g. shouting, crying, running, jumping, etc.) — becomes the most important weapon in creating reactionary personalities. This is why every reactionary politician puts such an emphasis on "strengthening the family" and promoting "family values" (i.e. patriarchy, compulsive monogamy, premarital chastity, corporal punishment, etc.). In the words of Reich:

> *"Since authoritarian society reproduces itself in the individual structures of the masses with the help of the authoritarian family, it follows that political reaction has to regard and defend the authoritarian family as **the** basis of the 'state, culture, and civilisation... .' [It is] **political reaction's germ cell**, the most important centre for the production of reactionary men and women. Originating and developing from definite social processes, it becomes the most essential institution for the preservation of the authoritarian system that shapes it."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 104–105]

The suppression of natural sexuality involved in this transformation from matricentric to patriarchal society created various anti-social drives (sadism, destructive impulses, rape fantasies, etc.), which then also had to be suppressed through the imposition of a compulsive morality, which took the place the natural self-regulation that one finds in pre-patriarchal societies. In this way, sex began to be regarded as "dirty," "diabolical," "wicked," etc. — which it had indeed become through the creation of secondary drives. Thus:

> *"The patriarchal-authoritarian sexual order that resulted from the revolutionary processes of latter-day [matricentrism] (economic independence of the chief's family from the maternal gens, a growing exchange of goods between the tribes, development of the means of production, etc.) becomes the primary basis of authoritarian ideology by depriving the women, children, and adolescents of their sexual freedom, making a commodity of sex and placing sexual interests in the service of economic subjugation. From now on, sexuality is indeed distorted; it becomes diabolical and demonic and has to be curbed."* [Reich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88]

Once the beginnings of patriarchy are in place, the creation of a fully authoritarian society based on the psychological crippling of its members through sexual suppression follows:

> *"The moral inhibition of the child's natural sexuality, the last stage of which is the severe impairment of the child's **genital** sexuality, makes the child afraid, shy, fearful of authority, obedient, 'good,' and 'docile' in the authoritarian sense of the words. It has a crippling effect on man's rebellious forces because every vital life-impulse is now burdened*



by and have the option of leaving the association if they are unhappy with its direction. Hence the influence of individuals and their free interaction determine the nature of the decisions reached, and no one has the right to impose their ideas on another. As Bakunin argued, in such organisations *"no function remains fixed and it will not remain permanently and irrevocably attached to one person. Hierarchical order and promotion do not exist... In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 415]

Therefore, anarchists are opposed to **irrational** (e.g., illegitimate) authority, in other words, hierarchy — hierarchy being the institutionalisation of authority within a society. Hierarchical social institutions include the state (see section B.2), private property and the class systems it produces (see section B.3) and, therefore, capitalism (see section B.4). Due to their hierarchical nature, anarchists oppose these with passion. *"Every institution, social or civil,"* argued Voltairine de Cleyre, *"that stands between man [or woman] and his [or her] right; every tie that renders one a master, another a serf; every law, every statue, every be-it-enacted that represents tyranny"* anarchists seek to destroy. However, hierarchy exists beyond these institutions. For example, hierarchical social relationships include sexism, racism and homophobia (see section B.1.4), and anarchists oppose, and fight, them all. Thus, as well as fighting capitalism as being hierarchical (for workers *"slave in a factory,"* albeit *"the slavery ends with the working hours"*) de Cleyre also opposed patriarchal social relationships which produce a *"home that rests on slavery"* because of a *"marriage that represents the sale and transfer of the individuality of one of its parties to the other!"* [**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 72, p. 17 and p. 72]

Needless to say, while we discuss different forms of hierarchy in different sections this does not imply that anarchists

think they, and their negative effects, are somehow independent or can be easily compartmentalised. For example, the modern state and capitalism are intimately interrelated and cannot be considered as independent of each other. Similarly, social hierarchies like sexism and racism are used by other hierarchies to maintain themselves (for example, bosses will use racism to divide and so rule their workers). From this it follows that abolishing one or some of these hierarchies, while desirable, would not be sufficient. Abolishing capitalism while maintaining the state would not lead to a free society (and vice versa) — if it were possible. As Murray Bookchin notes:

> *"there can be a decidedly classless, even a non-exploitative society in the **economic** sense that still preserves hierarchical rule and domination in the **social** sense — whether they take the form of the patriarchal family, domination by age and ethnic groups, bureaucratic institutions, ideological manipulation or a pyramidal division of labour … classless or not, society would be riddles by domination and, with domination, a general condition of command and obedience, of unfreedom and humiliation, and perhaps most decisively, an abortion of each individual's potentiality for consciousness, reason, selfhood, creativity, and the right to assert full control over her or his daily live."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, pp. 14–5]

This clearly implies that anarchists *"challenge not only class formations but hierarchies, not only material exploitation but domination in every form."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15] Hence the anarchist stress on opposing hierarchy rather than just, say, the state (as some falsely assert) or simply economic class and exploitation (as, say, many Marxists do). As noted earlier (in section A.2.8), anarchists consider all hierarchies to be not only



economic equality, and sexual freedom, and on the other, patriarchal society, a private-property economy, economic class stratification, and sexual repression. As Reich puts it:

> "Every tribe that developed from a [matricentric] to a patriarchal organisation had to change the sexual structure of its members to produce a sexuality in keeping with its new form of life. This was a necessary change because the shifting of power and of wealth from the democratic gens [maternal clans] to the authoritarian family of the chief was mainly implemented with the help of the suppression of the sexual strivings of the people. It was in this way that sexual suppression became an essential factor in the division of society into classes.
>
> "Marriage, and the lawful dowry it entailed, became the axis of the transformation of the one organisation into the other. In view of the fact that the marriage tribute of the wife's gens to the man's family strengthened the male's, especially the chief's, position of power, the male members of the higher ranking gens and families developed a keen interest in making the nuptial ties permanent. At this stage, in other words, only the man had an interest in marriage. In this way natural work-democracy's simple alliance, which could be easily dissolved at any time, was transformed into the permanent and monogamous marital relationship of patriarchy. The permanent monogamous marriage became the basic institution of patriarchal society — which it still is today. To safeguard these marriages, however, it was necessary to impose greater and greater restrictions upon and to depreciate natural genital strivings." [**The Mass Psychology of Fascism**, p. 90]

from memory does not weaken its force in the unconscious, but actually intensifies it and enables it to manifest itself in various pathological disturbances and anti-social drives; and (5) that, far from being of divine origin, human moral codes are derived from the educational measures used by the parents and parental surrogates in earliest childhood, the most effective of these being the ones opposed to childhood sexuality.

By studying Bronislaw Malinowsli's research on the Trobriand Islanders, a woman-centred (matricentric) society in which children's sexual behaviour was not repressed and in which neuroses and perversions as well as authoritarian institutions and values were almost non-existent, Reich came to the conclusion that patriarchy and authoritarianism originally developed when tribal chieftains began to get economic advantages from a certain type of marriage ("cross-cousin marriages") entered into by their sons. In such marriages, the brothers of the son's wife were obliged to pay a dowry to her in the form of continuous tribute, thus enriching her husband's clan (i.e. the chief's). By arranging many such marriages for his sons (which were usually numerous due to the chief's privilege of polygamy), the chief's clan could accumulate wealth. Thus society began to be stratified into ruling and subordinate clans based on wealth.

To secure the permanence of these "good" marriages, strict monogamy was required. However, it was found that monogamy was impossible to maintain without the repression of childhood sexuality, since, as statistics show, children who are allowed free expression of sexuality often do not adapt successfully to life-long monogamy. Therefore, along with class stratification and private property, authoritarian child-rearing methods were developed to inculcate the repressive sexual morality on which the new patriarchal system depended for its reproduction. Thus there is a historical correlation between, on the one hand, pre-patriarchal society, primitive libertarian communism (or *"work democracy,"* to use Reich's expression),



harmful but unnecessary, and think that there are alternative, more egalitarian ways to organise social life. In fact, we argue that hierarchical authority creates the conditions it is presumably designed to combat, and thus tends to be self-perpetuating. Thus hierarchical organisations erode the ability of those at the bottom to manage their own affairs directly so requiring hierarchy and some people in positions to give orders and the rest to follow them. Rather than prevent disorder, governments are among its primary causes while its bureaucracies ostensibly set up to fight poverty wind up perpetuating it, because without poverty, the high-salaried top administrators would be out of work. The same applies to agencies intended to eliminate drug abuse, fight crime, etc. In other words, the power and privileges deriving from top hierarchical positions constitute a strong incentive for those who hold them **not** to solve the problems they are supposed to solve. (For further discussion see Marilyn French, **Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals**, Summit Books, 1985).

## B.1.1 What are the effects of authoritarian social relationships?

Hierarchical authority is inextricably connected with the marginalisation and disempowerment of those without authority. This has negative effects on those over whom authority is exercised, since *"[t]hose who have these symbols of authority and those who benefit from them must dull their subject people's realistic, i.e. critical, thinking and make them believe the fiction [that irrational authority is rational and necessary], ... [so] the mind is lulled into submission by cliches ... [and] people are made dumb because they become dependent and lose their capacity to trust their eyes and judgement."* [Erich Fromm, **To Have or To Be?**, p. 47]

Or, in the words of Bakunin, *"the principle of authority, applied to men who have surpassed or attained their majority, becomes a monstrosity, a source of slavery and intellectual and moral depravity."* [**God and the State**, p. 41]

This is echoed by the syndicalist miners who wrote the classic **The Miners' Next Step** when they indicate the nature of authoritarian organisations and their effect on those involved. Leadership (i.e. hierarchical authority) *"implies power held by the leader. Without power the leader is inept. The possession of power inevitably leads to corruption... in spite of... good intentions ... [Leadership means] power of initiative, this sense of responsibility, the self-respect which comes from expressed manhood [sic!], is taken from the men, and consolidated in the leader. The sum of their initiative, their responsibility, their self-respect becomes his ... [and the] order and system he maintains is based upon the suppression of the men, from being independent thinkers into being 'the men' ... In a word, he is compelled to become an autocrat and a foe to democracy."* Indeed, for the *"leader,"* such marginalisation can be beneficial, for a leader *"sees no need for any high level of intelligence in the rank and file, except to applaud his actions. Indeed such intelligence from his point of view, by breeding criticism and opposition, is an obstacle and causes confusion."* [**The Miners' Next Step**, pp. 16–17 and p. 15]

Anarchists argue that hierarchical social relationships will have a negative effect on those subject to them, who can no longer exercise their critical, creative and mental abilities **freely**. As Colin Ward argues, people *"do go from womb to tomb without realising their human potential, precisely because the power to initiate, to participate in innovating, choosing, judging, and deciding is reserved for the top men"* (and it usually **is** men!) [**Anarchy in Action**, p, 42]. Anarchism is based on the insight that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals. Following orders all day hardly builds an independent, empowered, creative person-



## B.1.5 How is the mass-psychological basis for authoritarian civilisation created?

We noted in section A.3.6 that hierarchical, authoritarian institutions tend to be self-perpetuating, because growing up under their influence creates submissive/authoritarian personalities — people who both "respect" authority (based on fear of punishment) and desire to exercise it themselves on subordinates. Individuals with such a character structure do not really want to dismantle hierarchies, because they are afraid of the responsibility entailed by genuine freedom. It seems "natural" and "right" to them that society's institutions, from the authoritarian factory to the patriarchal family, should be pyramidal, with an elite at the top giving orders while those below them merely obey. Thus we have the spectacle of so-called "Libertarians" and "anarcho" capitalists bleating about "liberty" while at the same time advocating factory fascism and privatised states. In short, authoritarian civilisation reproduces itself with each generation because, through an intricate system of conditioning that permeates every aspect of society, it creates masses of people who support the status quo.

Wilhelm Reich has given one of the most thorough analyses of the psychological processes involved in the reproduction of authoritarian civilisation. Reich based his analysis on four of Freud's most solidly grounded discoveries, namely, (1) that there exists an unconscious part of the mind which has a powerful though irrational influence on behaviour; (2) that even the small child develops a lively "genital" sexuality, i.e. a desire for sexual pleasure which has nothing to do with procreation; (3) that childhood sexuality along with the Oedipal conflicts that arise in parent-child relations under monogamy and patriarchy are usually repressed through fear of punishment or disapproval for sexual acts and thoughts; (4) that this blocking of the child's natural sexual activity and extinguishing it

ity is too useful a tool for elites to discard. By using the results of racism (e.g. poverty) as a justification for racist ideology, criticism of the status quo can, yet again, be replaced by nonsense about "nature" and "biology." Similarly with sexism or discrimination against gays.

The long-term solution is obvious: dismantle capitalism and the hierarchical, economically class-stratified society with which it is bound up. By getting rid of capitalist oppression and exploitation and its consequent imperialism and poverty, we will also eliminate the need for ideologies of racial or sexual superiority used to justify the oppression of one group by another or to divide and weaken the working class. However, struggles against bigotry cannot be left until after a revolution. If they were two things are likely: one, such a revolution would be unlikely to happen and, two, if it were then these problems would more than likely remain in the new society created by it. Therefore the negative impacts of inequality can and must be fought in the here and now, like any form of hierarchy. Indeed, as we discuss in more detail section B.1.6 by doing so we make life a bit better in the here and now as well as bringing the time when such inequalities are finally ended nearer. Only this can ensure that we can all live as free and equal individuals in a world without the blights of sexism, racism, homophobia or religious hatred.

Needless to say, anarchists totally reject the kind of "equality" that accepts other kinds of hierarchy, that accepts the dominant priorities of capitalism and the state and accedes to the devaluation of relationships and individuality in name of power and wealth. There is a kind of "equality" in having "equal opportunities," in having black, gay or women bosses and politicians, but one that misses the point. Saying "Me too!" instead of "What a mess!" does not suggest real liberation, just different bosses and new forms of oppression. We need to look at the way society is organised, not at the sex, colour, nationality or sexuality of who is giving the orders!



ality (*"authority and servility walk ever hand in hand."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 81]). As Emma Goldman made clear, if a person's *"inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master"* (such as a boss, as most people have to sell their labour under capitalism) then little wonder such an authoritarian relationship *"condemns millions of people to be mere nonentities."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 50]

As the human brain is a bodily organ, it needs to be used regularly in order to be at its fittest. Authority concentrates decision-making in the hands of those at the top, meaning that most people are turned into executants, following the orders of others. If muscle is not used, it turns to fat; if the brain is not used, creativity, critical thought and mental abilities become blunted and side-tracked onto marginal issues, like sports and fashion. This can only have a negative impact:

> *"Hierarchical institutions foster alienated and exploitative relationships among those who participate in them, disempowering people and distancing them from their own reality. Hierarchies make some people dependent on others, blame the dependent for their dependency, and then use that dependency as a justification for further exercise of authority... . Those in positions of relative dominance tend to define the very characteristics of those subordinate to them ... Anarchists argue that to be always in a position of being acted upon and never to be allowed to act is to be doomed to a state of dependence and resignation. Those who are constantly ordered about and prevented from thinking for themselves soon come to doubt their own capacities ... [and have] difficulty acting on [their] sense of self in opposition to societal norms, standards and expectations."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 40–1]

And so, in the words of Colin Ward, the *"system makes its morons, then despises them for their ineptitude, and rewards its 'gifted few' for their rarity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

This negative impact of hierarchy is, of course, not limited to those subject to it. Those in power are affected by it, but in different ways. As we noted in section A.2.15, power corrupts those who have it as well as those subjected to it. The Spanish Libertarian Youth put it this way in the 1930s:

> *"Against the principle of authority because this implies erosion of the human personality when some men submit to the will of others, arousing in these instincts which predispose them to cruelty and indifference in the face of the suffering of their fellows."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 76]

Hierarchy impoverishes the human spirit. *"A hierarchical mentality,"* notes Bookchin, *"fosters the renunciation of the pleasures of life. It justifies toil, guilt, and sacrifice by the 'inferiors,' and pleasure and the indulgent gratification of virtually every caprice by their 'superiors.' The objective history of the social structure becomes internalised as a subjective history of the psychic structure."* In other words, being subject to hierarchy fosters the internalisation of oppression — and the denial of individuality necessary to accept it. *"Hierarchy, class, and ultimately the State,"* he stresses, *"penetrate the very integument of the human psyche and establish within it unreflective internal powers of coercion and constraint ... By using guilt and self-blame, the inner State can control behaviour long before fear of the coercive powers of the State have to be invoked."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 72 and p. 189]

In a nutshell, *"[h]ierarchies, classes, and states warp the creative powers of humanity."* However, that is not all. Hierarchy, anarchists argue, also twists our relationships with the environment. Indeed, *"all our notions of dominating nature stem from*



> *"As long as discrimination exists and racial or ethnic minorities are oppressed, the entire working class is weakened. This is so because the Capitalist class is able to use racism to drive down the wages of individual segments of the working class by inciting racial antagonism and forcing a fight for jobs and services. This division is a development that ultimately undercuts the living standards of all workers. Moreover, by pitting Whites against Blacks and other oppressed nationalities, the Capitalist class is able to prevent workers from uniting against their common enemy. As long as workers are fighting each other, the Capitalist class is secure."* [Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 12–3]

In addition, a wealth of alternative viewpoints, insights, experiences, cultures, thoughts and so on are denied the racist, sexist or homophobe. Their minds are trapped in a cage, stagnating within a mono-culture — and stagnation is death for the personality. Such forms of oppression are dehumanising for those who practice them, for the oppressor lives as a **role**, not as a person, and so are restricted by it and cannot express their individuality **freely** (and so do so in very limited ways). This warps the personality of the oppressor and impoverishes their own life and personality. Homophobia and sexism also limits the flexibility of all people, gay or straight, to choose the sexual expressions and relationships that are right for them. The sexual repression of the sexist and homophobe will hardly be good for their mental health, their relationships or general development.

From the anarchist standpoint, oppression based on race, sex or sexuality will remain forever intractable under capitalism or, indeed, under any economic or political system based on domination and exploitation. While individual members of "minorities" may prosper, racism as a justification for inequal-

tive American, Asian and Hispanic) workers in United States and found several key things:

(1) The narrower the gap between white and black wages in an American state, the higher white earnings were relative to white earnings elsewhere. This means that *"whites do not benefit economically by economic discrimination. White workers especially appear to benefit economically from the absence of economic discrimination… both in the absolute level of their earnings and in relative equality among whites."* [p. 413] In other words, the less wage discrimination there was against black workers, the better were the wages that white workers received.
(2) The more "non-white" people in the population of a given American State, the more inequality there was between whites. In other words, the existence of a poor, oppressed group of workers reduced the wages of white workers, although it did not affect the earnings of non-working class whites very much (*"the greater the discrimination against [non-white] people, the greater the inequality among whites"* [p. 410]). So white workers clearly lost economically from this discrimination.
(3) He also found that *"the more intense racial discrimination is, the lower are the white earnings because of … [its effect on] working-class solidarity."* [p. 412] In other words, racism economically disadvantages white workers because it undermines the solidarity between black and white workers and weakens trade union organisation.

So overall, these white workers receive some apparent privileges from racism, but are in fact screwed by it. Thus racism and other forms of hierarchy actually works against the interests of those working class people who practice it — and, by weakening workplace and social unity, benefits the ruling class:



*the very real domination of human by human … And it is not until we eliminate domination in all its forms … that we will really create a rational, ecological society."* For *"the conflicts within a divided humanity, structured around domination, inevitably leads to conflicts with nature. The ecological crisis with its embattled division between humanity and nature stems, above all, from divisions between human and human."* While the *"rise of capitalism, with a law of life based on competition, capital accumulation, and limitless growth, brought these problems — ecological and social — to an acute point,"* anarchists *"emphasise that major ecological problems have their roots in social problems — problems that go back to the very beginnings of patricentric culture itself."* [Murray Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, p. 72, p. 44, p. 72 and pp. 154–5]

Thus, anarchists argue, hierarchy impacts not only on us but also our surroundings. The environmental crisis we face is a result of the hierarchical power structures at the heart of our society, structures which damage the planet's ecology at least as much as they damage humans. The problems within society, the economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face. The way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis. Ultimately, ecological destruction is rooted in the organisation of our society for a degraded humanity can only yield a degraded nature (as capitalism and our hierarchical history have sadly shown).

This is unsurprising as we, as a species, shape our environment and, consequently, whatever shapes us will impact how we do so. This means that the individuals produced by the hierarchy (and the authoritarian mentality it produces) will shape the planet in specific, harmful, ways. This is to be expected as humans act upon their environment deliberately, creating what is most suitable for their mode of existence. If that mode of living is riddled with hierarchies, classes, states and the op-

pression, exploitation and domination they create then our relations with the natural world will hardly be any better. In other words, social hierarchy and class legitimises our domination of the environment, planting the seeds for the believe that nature exists, like other people, to be dominated and used as required.

Which brings us to another key reason why anarchists reject hierarchy. In addition to these negative psychological effects from the denial of liberty, authoritarian social relationships also produce social inequality. This is because an individual subject to the authority of another has to obey the orders of those above them in the social hierarchy. In capitalism this means that workers have to follow the orders of their boss (see next section), orders that are designed to make the boss richer. And richer they have become, with the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of big firms earning 212 times what the average US worker did in 1995 (up from a mere 44 times 30 years earlier). Indeed, from 1994 to 1995 alone, CEO compensation in the USA rose 16 percent, compared to 2.8 percent for workers, which did not even keep pace with inflation, and whose stagnating wages cannot be blamed on corporate profits, which rose a healthy 14.8 percent for that year.

Needless to say, inequality in terms of power will translate itself into inequality in terms of wealth (and vice versa). The effects of such social inequality are wide-reaching. For example, health is affected significantly by inequality. Poor people are more likely to be sick and die at an earlier age, compared to rich people. Simply put, *"the lower the class, the worse the health. Going beyond such static measures, even interruptions in income of the sort caused by unemployment have adverse health effects."* Indeed, the sustained economic hardship associated with a low place in the social hierarchy leads to poorer physical, psychological and cognitive functioning (*"with consequences that last a decade or more"*). *"Low incomes, unpleasant occupations and sustained discrimination,"* notes Doug Henwood, *"may result in*



wants to reinforce "family values" (i.e. submission to authority, "tradition", "morality" and so on). The introduction of Clause 28 in Britain is a good example of this, with the government making it illegal for public bodies to promote gay sexuality (i.e. to present it as anything other than a perversion). In American, the right is also seeking to demonise homosexuality as part of their campaign to reinforce the values of the patriarchal family unit and submission to "traditional" authority. Therefore, the oppression of people based on their sexuality is unlikely to end until sexism is eliminated.

This is not all. As well as adversely affecting those subject to them, sexism, racism and homophobia are harmful to those who practice them (and in some way benefit from them) within the working class itself. Why this should be the case is obvious, once you think about it. All three divide the working class, which means that whites, males and heterosexuals hurt themselves by maintaining a pool of low-paid competing labour, ensuring low wages for their own wives, daughters, mothers, relatives and friends. Such divisions create inferior conditions and wages for all as capitalists gain a competitive advantage using this pool of cheap labour, forcing all capitalists to cut conditions and wages to survive in the market (in addition, such social hierarchies, by undermining solidarity against the employer on the job and the state possibly create a group of excluded workers who could become scabs during strikes). Also, "privileged" sections of the working class lose out because their wages and conditions are less than those which unity could have won them. Only the boss really wins.

This can be seen from research into this subject. The researcher Al Szymanski sought to systematically and scientifically test the proposition that white workers gain from racism [*"Racial Discrimination and White Gain"*, in **American Sociological Review**, vol. 41, no. 3, June 1976, pp. 403–414]. He compared the situation of "white" and "non-white" (i.e. black, Na-

women do at home without pay. In general, female dominated industries pay less. In 1998, occupations that were over 90% male had a median wage almost 10% above average while those over 90% female, almost 25% below. One study found that a 30% increase in women in an occupation translated into a 10% decline in average pay. Needless to say, having children is bad economic news for most women (women with children earn 10 to 15% less than women without children while for men the opposite is the case). Having maternity level, incidentally, have a far smaller motherhood penalty. [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 95–7]

The oppression of lesbians, gays and bisexuals is inextricably linked with sexism. A patriarchal, capitalist society cannot see homosexual practices as the normal human variations they are because they blur that society's rigid gender roles and sexist stereotypes. Most young gay people keep their sexuality to themselves for fear of being kicked out of home and all gays have the fear that some "straights" will try to kick their sexuality out of them if they express their sexuality freely. As with those subject to other forms of bigotry, gays are also discriminated against economically (gay men earning about 4–7% less than the average straight man [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]). Thus the social oppression which result in having an alternative sexuality are experienced on many different levels, from extreme violence to less pay for doing the same work.

Gays are not oppressed on a whim but because of the specific need of capitalism for the nuclear family. The nuclear family, as the primary — and inexpensive — creator of submissive people (growing up within the authoritarian family gets children used to, and "respectful" of, hierarchy and subordination — see section B.1.5) as well as provider and carer for the workforce fulfils an important need for capitalism. Alternative sexualities represent a threat to the family model because they provide a different role model for people. This means that gays are going to be in the front line of attack whenever capitalism



*apparently physical symptoms that confuse even sophisticated biomedical scientists ... Higher incomes are also associated with lower frequency of psychiatric disorders, as are higher levels of asset ownership."* [**After the New Economy**, pp. 81–2]

Moreover, the ***degree*** of inequality is important (i.e. the size of the gap between rich and poor). According to an editorial in the **British Medical Journal** *"what matters in determining mortality and health in a society is less the overall wealth of that society and more how evenly wealth is distributed. The more equally wealth is distributed the better the health of that society."* [vol. 312, April 20, 1996, p. 985]

Research in the USA found overwhelming evidence of this. George Kaplan and his colleagues measured inequality in the 50 US states and compared it to the age-adjusted death rate for all causes of death, and a pattern emerged: the more unequal the distribution of income, the greater the death rate. In other words, it is the gap between rich and poor, and not the average income in each state, that best predicts the death rate in each state. [*"Inequality in income and mortality in the United States: analysis of mortality and potential pathways,"* **British Medical Journal**, vol. 312, April 20, 1996, pp. 999–1003]

This measure of income inequality was also tested against other social conditions besides health. States with greater inequality in the distribution of income also had higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of incarceration, a higher percentage of people receiving income assistance and food stamps, a greater percentage of people without medical insurance, greater proportion of babies born with low birth weight, higher murder rates, higher rates of violent crime, higher costs per-person for medical care, and higher costs per person for police protection. Moreover states with greater inequality of income distribution also spent less per person on education, had fewer books per person in the schools, and had poorer educational performance, including worse reading

skills, worse mathematics skills, and lower rates of completion of high school.

As the gap grows between rich and poor (indicating an increase in social hierarchy within and outwith of workplaces) the health of a people deteriorates and the social fabric unravels. The psychological hardship of being low down on the social ladder has detrimental effects on people, beyond whatever effects are produced by the substandard housing, nutrition, air quality, recreational opportunities, and medical care enjoyed by the poor (see George Davey Smith, *"Income inequality and mortality: why are they related?"* **British Medical Journal**, Vol. 312, April 20, 1996, pp. 987–988).

So wealth does not determine health. What does is the gap between the rich and the poor. The larger the gap, the sicker the society. Countries with a greater degree of socioeconomic inequality show greater inequality in health status; also, that middle-income groups in relatively unequal societies have worse health than comparable, or even poorer, groups in more equal societies. Unsurprisingly, this is also reflected over time. The widening income differentials in both the USA and the UK since 1980 have coincided with a slowing down of improvements in life-expectancy, for example.

Inequality, in short, is bad for our health: the health of a population depends not just on the size of the economic pie, but on how the pie is shared.

This is not all. As well as inequalities in wealth, inequalities in freedom also play a large role in overall human well-being. According to Michael Marmot's **The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity**, as you move up any kind of hierarchy your health status improves. Autonomy and position in a hierarchy are related (i.e. the higher you are in a hierarchy, the more autonomy you have). Thus the implication of this empirical work is that autonomy is a source of good health, that the more control you have over your work environment and your life in general, the less likely you are to



pay) for capitalist owners to exploit. Moreover, women's subordination gives working-class men someone to look down upon and, sometimes, a convenient target on whom they can take out their frustrations (instead of stirring up trouble at work). As Lucy Parsons pointed out, a working class woman is *"a slave to a slave."*

Sexism, like all forms of bigotry, is reflected in relative incomes and wealth levels. In the US women, on average, were being paid 57% the amount men were in 2001 (an improvement than the 39% 20 years earlier). Part of this is due to fewer women working than men, but for those who do work outside the home their incomes were 66% than of men's (up from 47% in 1980 and 38% in 1970). Those who work full time, their incomes 76% of men's, up from the 60% average through most of the 1970s. However, as with the black-white gap, this is due in part to the stagnant income of male workers (in 1998 men's real incomes were just 1% above 1989 levels while women's were 14% above). So rather than the increase in income being purely the result of women entering high-paying and largely male occupations and them closing the gender gap, it has also been the result of the intense attacks on the working class since the 1980s which has de-unionised and de-industrialised America. This has resulted in a lot of high-paying male jobs have been lost and more and more women have entered the job market to make sure their families make ends. [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91–2]

Turning away from averages, we discover that sexism results in women being paid about 12% less than men during the same job, with the same relative variables (like work experience, education and so forth). Needless to say, as with racism, such "relevant variables" are themselves shaped by discrimination. Women, like blacks, are less likely to get job interviews and jobs. Sexism even affects types of jobs, for example, "caring" professions pay less than non-caring ones because they are seen as feminine and involve the kinds of tasks which

The nature of sexual oppression can be seen from marriage. Emma Goldman pointed out that marriage *"stands for the sovereignty of the man over the women,"* with her *"complete submission"* to the husbands *"whims and commands."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 164] As Carole Pateman notes, until *"the late nineteenth century the legal and civil position of a wife resembled that of a slave… A slave had no independent legal existence apart from his master, and husband and wife became 'one person,' the person of the husband."* Indeed, the law *"was based on the assumption that a wife was (like) property"* and only the marriage contract *"includes the explicit commitment to obey."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 119, p. 122 and p. 181]

However, when women started to question the assumptions of male domination, numerous theories were developed to explain why women's oppression and domination by men was "natural." Because men enforced their rule over women by force, men's "superiority" was argued to be a "natural" product of their gender, which is associated with greater physical strength (on the premise that "might makes right"). In the 17th century, it was argued that women were more like animals than men, thus "proving" that women had as much right to equality with men as sheep did. More recently, elites have embraced socio-biology in response to the growing women's movement. By "explaining" women's oppression on biological grounds, a social system run by men and for men could be ignored.

Women's subservient role also has economic value for capitalism (we should note that Goldman considered capitalism to be another *"paternal arrangement"* like marriage, both of which robbed people of their *"birthright," "stunts"* their growth, *"poisons"* their bodies and keeps people in *"ignorance, in poverty and dependence."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]). Women often provide necessary (and unpaid) labour which keeps the (usually) male worker in good condition; and it is primarily women who raise the next generation of wage-slaves (again without



suffer the classic stress-related illnesses, such as heart disease. As public-Health scholars Jeffrey Johnson and Ellen Hall have noted, the *"potential to control one's own environment is differentially distributed along class lines."* [quoted by Robert Kuttner, **Everything for Sale**, p. 153]

As would be expected from the very nature of hierarchy, to *"be in a life situation where one experiences relentless demands by others, over which one has relatively little control, is to be at risk of poor health, physically as well as mentally."* Looking at heart disease, the people with greatest risk *"tended to be in occupations with high demands, low control, and low social support. People in demanding positions but with great autonomy were at lower risk."* Under capitalism, *"a relatively small elite demands and gets empowerment, self-actualisation, autonomy, and other work satisfaction that partially compensate for long hours"* while *"epidemiological data confirm that lower-paid, lower-status workers are more likely to experience the most clinically damaging forms of stress, in part because they have less control over their work."* [Kuttner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 153 and p. 154]

In other words, the inequality of autonomy and social participation produced by hierarchy is itself a cause of poor health. There would be positive feedback on the total amount of health — and thus of social welfare — if social inequality was reduced, not only in terms of wealth but also, crucially, in power. This is strong evidence in support of anarchist visions of egalitarianism. Some social structures give more people more autonomy than others and acting to promote social justice along these lines is a key step toward improving our health. This means that promoting libertarian, i.e. self-managed, social organisations would increase not only liberty but also people's health and well-being, both physical and mental. Which is, as we argued above, to be expected as hierarchy, by its very nature, impacts negatively on those subject to it.

This dovetails into anarchist support for workers' control. Industrial psychologists have found that satisfaction in work

depends on the "span of autonomy" works have. Unsurprisingly, those workers who are continually making decisions for themselves are happier and live longer. It is the power to control all aspects of your life — work particularly — that wealth and status tend to confer that is the key determinant of health. Men who have low job control face a 50% higher risk of new illness: heart attacks, stroke, diabetes or merely ordinary infections. Women are at slightly lower risk but low job control was still a factor in whether they fell ill or not.

So it is the fact that the boss is a boss that makes the employment relationship so troublesome for health issues (and genuine libertarians). The more bossy the boss, the worse, as a rule is the job. So part of autonomy is not being bossed around, but that is only part of the story. And, of course, hierarchy (inequality of power) and exploitation (the source of material inequality) are related. As we indicate in the next section, capitalism is based on wage labour. The worker sell their liberty to the boss for a given period of time, i.e. they loose their autonomy. This allows the possibility of exploitation, as the worker can produce more wealth than they receive back in wages. As the boss pockets the difference, lack of autonomy produces increases in social inequality which, in turn, impacts negatively on your well-being.

Then there is the waste associated with hierarchy. While the proponents of authority like to stress its "efficiency," the reality is different. As Colin Ward points out, being in authority *"derives from your rank in some chain of command ... But knowledge and wisdom are not distributed in order of rank, and they are no one person's monopoly in any undertaking. The fantastic inefficiency of any hierarchical organisation — any factory, office, university, warehouse or hospital — is the outcome of two almost invariable characteristics. One is that the knowledge and wisdom of the people at the bottom of the pyramid finds no place in the decision-making leadership hierarchy of the institution. Frequently it is devoted to making the institution work in*



unemployment and setting workers against each other. Such factors ensure that capitalism will never "compete" discrimination way as some free-market capitalist economists argue.

In other words, capitalism has benefited and will continue to benefit from its racist heritage. Racism has provided pools of cheap labour for capitalists to draw upon and permitted a section of the population to be subjected to worse treatment, so increasing profits by reducing working conditions and other non-pay related costs. In America, blacks still get paid less than whites for the same work (around 10% less than white workers with the same education, work experience, occupation and other relevent demographic variables). This is transferred into wealth inequalities. In 1998, black incomes were 54% of white incomes while black net worth (including residential) was 12% and nonresidential net worth just 3% of white. For Hispanics, the picture was similar with incomes just 62% of whites, net worth, 4% and nonresidential net worth 0%. While just under 15% of white households had zero or negative net worth, 27% of black households and 36% Hispanic were in the same situation. Even at similar levels of income, black households were significantly less wealthy than white ones. [Doug Henwood, **After the New Economy**, p. 99 and pp. 125–6]

All this means that racial minorities are *"subjected to oppression and exploitation on the dual grounds of race and class, and thus have to fight the extra battles against racism and discrimination."* [Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, **Anarchism and the Black Revolution**, p. 126]

Sexism only required a "justification" once women started to act for themselves and demand equal rights. Before that point, sexual oppression did not need to be "justified" — it was "natural" (saying that, of course, equality between the sexes was stronger before the rise of Christianity as a state religion and capitalism so the "place" of women in society has fallen over the last few hundred years before rising again thanks to the women's movement).

**of Capitalist Development**, p. 311] Indeed, employers have often deliberately fostered divisions among workers on racial lines as part of a strategy of "divide and rule" (in other contexts, like Northern Ireland or Scotland, the employers have used religion in the same way instead).

Employers and politicians have often deliberately fostered divisions among workers on racial lines as part of a strategy of "divide and rule." In other contexts, like Tzarist Russia, Northern Ireland or Scotland, the employers have used religion in the same way. In others, immigrants and native born is the dividing line. The net effect is the same, social oppressions which range from the extreme violence anarchists like Emma Goldman denounced in the American South (*"the atrocities rampant in the South, of negroes lynched, tortured and burned by infuriated crowds without a hand being raised or a word said for their protection"* [**Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 1, p. 386]) or the pogroms against Jews in Tsarist Russia to discrimination in where people can live, what jobs people can get, less pay and so on.

For those in power, this makes perfect sense as racism (like other forms of bigotry) can be used to split and divide the working class by getting people to blame others of their class for the conditions they all suffer. In this way, the anger people feel about the problems they face are turned away from their real causes onto scapegoats. Thus white workers are subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) encouraged, for example, to blame unemployment, poverty and crime on blacks or Hispanics instead of capitalism and the (white, male) elites who run it and who directly benefit from low wages and high profits. Discrimination against racial minorities and women makes sense for capitalism, for in this way profits are enlarged directly and indirectly. As jobs and investment opportunities are denied to the disadvantaged groups, their wages can be depressed below prevailing levels and profits, correspondingly, increased. Indirectly, discrimination adds capitalist profits and power by increasing



*spite of the formal leadership structure, or alternatively to sabotaging the ostensible function of the institution, because it is none of their choosing. The other is that they would rather not be there anyway: they are there through economic necessity rather than through identification with a common task which throws up its own shifting and functional leadership."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 41]

Hierarchy, in other words, blocks the flow of information and knowledge. Rulers, as Malatesta argued, *"can only make use of the forces that exist in society — except for those great forces"* their action *"paralyses and destroys, and those rebel forces, and all that is wasted through conflicts; inevitable tremendous losses in such an artificial system."* And so as well as individuals being prevented from developing to their fullest, wasting their unfulfilled potentialities, hierarchy also harms society as a whole by reducing efficiency and creativity. This is because input into decisions are limited *"only to those individuals who form the government [of a hierarchical organisation] or who by reason of their position can influence the[ir] policy."* Obviously this means *"that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society,"* hierarchy *"greatly reduce[s] them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing."* [**Anarchy**, p. 38 and p. 39]

Large scale hierarchical organisations, like the state, are also marked by bureaucracy. This becomes a necessity in order to gather the necessary information it needs to make decisions (and, obviously, to control those under it). However, soon this bureaucracy becomes the real source of power due to its permanence and control of information and resources. Thus hierarchy cannot *"survive without creating around itself a new privileged class"* as well as being a *"privileged class and cut off from the people"* itself. [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37 and p. 36] This means that those at the top of an institution rarely know the facts on the ground, making decisions in relative ignorance of their impact or the actual needs of the situation or

people involved. As economist Joseph Stiglitz concluded from his own experiences in the World Bank, *"immense time and effort are required to effect change even from the inside, in an international bureaucracy. Such organisations are opaque rather than transparent, and not only does far too little information radiate from inside to the outside world, perhaps even less information from outside is able to penetrate the organisation. The opaqueness also means that it is hard for information from the bottom of the organisation to percolate to the top."* [**Globalisation and its Discontents**, p. 33] The same can be said of any hierarchical organisation, whether a nation state or capitalist business.

Moreover, as Ward and Malatesta indicate, hierarchy provokes a struggle between those at the bottom and at the top. This struggle is also a source of waste as it diverts resources and energy from more fruitful activity into fighting it. Ironically, as we discuss in section H.4.4, one weapon forged in that struggle is the ***"work to rule,"*** namely workers bringing their workplace to a grinding halt by following the dictates of the boss to the letter. This is clear evidence that a workplace only operates because workers exercise their autonomy during working hours, an autonomy which authoritarian structures stifle and waste. A participatory workplace, therefore, would be more efficient and less wasteful than the hierarchical one associated with capitalism. As we discuss in section J.5.12, hierarchy and the struggle it creates always acts as a barrier stopping the increased efficiency associated with workers' participation undermining the autocratic workplace of capitalism.

All this is not to suggest that those at the bottom of hierarchies are victims nor that those at the top of hierarchies only gain benefits — far from it. As Ward and Malatesta indicated, hierarchy by its very nature creates resistance to it from those subjected to it and, in the process, the potential for ending it (see section B.1.6 for more discussion). Conversely, at the summit of the pyramid, we also see the evils of hierarchy.



right of the aristocracy to rule over France. He argued that the French aristocracy was originally of Germanic origin while the "masses" were Gallic or Celtic, and that since the Germanic race was "superior", the aristocracy had a natural right to rule. Although the French "masses" didn't find this theory particularly persuasive, it was later taken up by proponents of German expansion and became the origin of German racial ideology, used to justify Nazi oppression of Jews and other "non-Aryan" types. Notions of the "white man's burden" and "Manifest Destiny" developed at about the same time in England and to a lesser extent in America, and were used to rationalise Anglo-Saxon conquest and world domination on a "humanitarian" basis.

Racism and authoritarianism at home and abroad has gone hand in hand. As Rudolf Rocker argued, *"[a]ll advocates of the race doctrine have been and are the associates and defenders of every political and social reaction, advocates of the power principle in its most brutal form ... He who thinks that he sees in all political and social antagonisms merely blood-determined manifestations of race, denies all conciliatory influence of ideas, all community of ethical feeling, and must at every crisis take refuge in brute force. In fact, race theory is only the cult of power."* Racism aids the consolidation of elite power for by attacking *"all the achievements ... in the direction of personal freedom"* and the idea of equality *"[n]o better moral justification could be produced for the industrial bondage which our holders of industrial power keep before them as a picture of the future."* [**Nationalism and Culture**, pp. 337–8]

The idea of racial superiority was also found to have great domestic utility. As Paul Sweezy points out, *"[t]he intensification of social conflict within the advanced capitalist countries... has to be directed as far as possible into innocuous channels — innocuous, that is to say, from the standpoint of capitalist class rule. The stirring up of antagonisms along racial lines is a convenient method of directing attention away from class struggle,"* which of course is dangerous to ruling-class interests. [**Theory**

## B.1.4 Why do racism, sexism and homophobia exist?

Since racism, sexism and homophobia (hatred/fear of homosexuals) are institutionalised throughout society, sexual, racial and gay oppression are commonplace. The primary cause of these three evil attitudes is the need for ideologies that justify domination and exploitation, which are inherent in hierarchy — in other words, "theories" that "justify" and "explain" oppression and injustice. As Tacitus said, *"We hate those whom we injure."* Those who oppress others always find reasons to regard their victims as "inferior" and hence deserving of their fate. Elites need some way to justify their superior social and economic positions. Since the social system is obviously unfair and elitist, attention must be distracted to other, less inconvenient, "facts," such as alleged superiority based on biology or "nature." Therefore, doctrines of sexual, racial, and ethnic superiority are inevitable in hierarchical, class-stratified societies.

We will take each form of bigotry in turn.

From an economic standpoint, racism is associated with the exploitation of cheap labour at home and imperialism abroad. Indeed, early capitalist development in both America and Europe was strengthened by the bondage of people, particularly those of African descent. In the Americas, Australia and other parts of the world the slaughter of the original inhabitants and the expropriation of their land was also a key aspect in the growth of capitalism. As the subordination of foreign nations proceeds by force, it appears to the dominant nation that it owes its mastery to its special natural qualities, in other words to its "racial" characteristics. Thus imperialists have frequently appealed to the Darwinian doctrine of "Survival of the Fittest" to give their racism a basis in "nature."

In Europe, one of the first theories of racial superiority was proposed by Gobineau in the 1850s to establish the natural



If we look at those at the top of the system, yes, indeed they often do **very** well in terms of material goods and access to education, leisure, health and so on but they lose their humanity and individuality. As Bakunin pointed out, *"power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 249] Power operates destructively, even on those who have it, reducing their individuality as it *"renders them stupid and brutal, even when they were originally endowed with the best of talents. One who is constantly striving to force everything into a mechanical order at last becomes a machine himself and loses all human feeling."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 17–8]

When it boils down to it, hierarchy is self-defeating, for if *"wealth is other people,"* then by treating others as less than yourself, restricting their growth, you lose all the potential insights and abilities these individuals have, so impoverishing your own life and **restricting your own growth.** Unfortunately in these days material wealth (a particularly narrow form of "self-interest") has replaced concern for developing the whole person and leading a fulfilling and creative life (a broad self-interest, which places the individual **within** society, one that recognises that relationships with others shape and develop all individuals). In a hierarchical, class based society everyone loses to some degree, even those at the "top."

Looking at the environment, the self-defeating nature of hierarchy also becomes clear. The destiny of human life goes hand-in-hand with the destiny of the non-human world. While being rich and powerful may mitigate the impact of the ecological destruction produced by hierarchies and capitalism, it will not stop them and will, eventually, impact on the elite as well as the many.

Little wonder, then, that *"anarchism ... works to destroy authority in all its aspects ... [and] refuses all hierarchical organisation."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 137]

## B.1.2 Is capitalism hierarchical?

Yes. Under capitalism workers do not exchange the products of their labour they exchange the labour itself for money. They sell themselves for a given period of time, and in return for wages, promise to obey their paymasters. Those who pay and give the orders — owners and managers — are at the top of the hierarchy, those who obey at the bottom. This means that capitalism, by its very nature, is hierarchical.

As Carole Pateman argues:

> *"Capacities or labour power cannot be used without the worker using his will, his understanding and experience, to put them into effect. The use of labour power requires the presence of its 'owner,' and it remains mere potential until he acts in the manner necessary to put it into use, or agrees or is compelled so to act; that is, the worker must labour. To contract for the use of labour power is a waste of resources unless it can be used in the way in which the new owner requires. The fiction 'labour power' cannot be used; what is required is that the worker labours as demanded. The employment contract must, therefore, create a relationship of command and obedience between employer and worker ... In short, the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself. To obtain the right to use another is to be a (civil) master."* [**The Sexual Contract**, pp. 150–1]

You need only compare this to Proudhon's comments quoted in section B.1 to see that anarchists have long recognised that capitalism is, by its very nature, hierarchical.



comes to regard oneself and others in that way also. Thus all social relationships — and so, ultimately, **all** individuals — are commodified. In capitalism, literally nothing is sacred — "everything has its price" — be it dignity, self-worth, pride, honour — all become commodities up for grabs. Such debasement produces a number of social pathologies. "Consumerism" is one example which can be traced directly to the commodification of the individual under capitalism. To quote Fromm again, *"**Things** have no self, and men who have become things [i.e. commodities on the labour market] can have no self."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 143]

However, people still feel the **need** for selfhood, and so try to fill the emptiness by consuming. The illusion of happiness, that one's life will be complete if one gets a new commodity, drives people to consume. Unfortunately, since commodities are yet more things, they provide no substitute for selfhood, and so the consuming must begin anew. This process is, of course, encouraged by the advertising industry, which tries to convince us to buy what we don't need because it will make us popular/sexy/happy/free/etc. (delete as appropriate!). But consuming cannot really satisfy the needs that the commodities are bought to satisfy. Those needs can only be satisfied by social interaction based on truly human values and by creative, self-directed work.

This does not mean, of course, that anarchists are against higher living standards or material goods. To the contrary, they recognise that liberty and a good life are only possible when one does not have to worry about having enough food, decent housing, and so forth. Freedom and 16 hours of work a day do not go together, nor do equality and poverty or solidarity and hunger. However, anarchists consider consumerism to be a distortion of consumption caused by the alienating and inhuman "account book" ethics of capitalism, which crushes the individual and his or her sense of identity, dignity and selfhood.

> *most hallowed moral and spiritual expressions. We now 'invest' in our children, marriages, and personal relationships, a term that is equated with words like 'love' and 'care.' We live in a world of 'trade-offs' and we ask for the 'bottom line' of any emotional 'transaction.' We use the terminology of contracts rather than that of loyalties and spiritual affinities."* [**The Modern Crisis**, p. 79]

With human values replaced by the ethics of calculation, and with only the laws of market and state "binding" people together, social breakdown is inevitable. Little wonder modern capitalism has seen a massive increase in crime and dehumanisation under the freer markets established by "conservative" governments, such as those of Thatcher and Reagan and their transnational corporate masters. We now live in a society where people live in self-constructed fortresses, "free" behind their walls and defences (both emotional and physical).

Of course, some people **like** the "ethics" of mathematics. But this is mostly because — like all gods — it gives the worshipper an easy rule book to follow. "Five is greater than four, therefore five is better" is pretty simple to understand. John Steinbeck noticed this when he wrote:

> *"Some of them [the owners] hated the mathematics that drove them [to kick the farmers off their land], and some were afraid, and some worshipped the mathematics because it provided a refuge from thought and from feeling."* [**The Grapes of Wrath**, p. 34]

The debasement of the individual in the workplace, where so much time is spent, necessarily affects a person's self-image, which in turn carries over into the way he or she acts in other areas of life. If one is regarded as a commodity at work, one



The worker is subjected to the authority of the boss during working hours (sometimes outside work too). As Noam Chomsky summarises, *"a corporation, factory of business is the economic equivalent of fascism: decisions and control are strictly top-down."* [**Letters from Lexington**, p. 127] The worker's choices are extremely limited, for most people it amount to renting themselves out to a series of different masters (for a lucky few, the option of being a master is available). And master is the right word for, as David Ellerman reminds us, *"[s]ociety seems to have 'covered up' in the popular consciousness the fact that the traditional name [for employer and employee] is '**master and servant.**'"* [**Property and Contract in Economics**, p. 103]

This hierarchical control of wage labour has the effect of alienating workers from their own work, and so from themselves. Workers no longer govern themselves during work hours and so are no longer free. And so, due to capitalism, there is *"an oppression in the land,"* a *"form of slavery"* rooted in current *"property institutions"* which produces *"a social war, inevitable so long as present legal-social conditions endure."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 54–5]

Some defenders of capitalism are aware of the contradiction between the rhetoric of the system and its reality for those subject to it. Most utilise the argument that workers consent to this form of hierarchy. Ignoring the economic conditions which force people to sell their liberty on the labour market (see section B.4.3), the issue instantly arises of whether consent is enough in itself to justify the alienation/selling of a person's liberty. For example, there have been arguments for slavery and monarchy (i.e. dictatorship) rooted in consent. Do we really want to say that the only thing wrong with fascism or slavery is that people do not consent to it? Sadly, some right-wing "libertarians" come to that conclusion (see section B.4).

Some try to redefine the reality of the command-and-obey of wage labour. *"To speak of managing, directing, or*

*assigning workers to various tasks is a deceptive way of noting that the employer continually is involved in re-negotiation of contracts on terms that must be acceptable to both parties,"* argue two right-wing economists. [Arman Alchian and Harold Demsetz, quoted by Ellerman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 170] So the employer-employee (or, to use the old, more correct, terminology, master-servant) contract is thus a series of unspoken contracts.

However, if an oral contract is not worth the paper it is written on, how valuable is an unspoken one? And what does this *"re-negotiation of contracts"* amount to? The employee decides whether to obey the command or leave and the boss decides whether the employee is obedient and productive enough to remain in under his or her control. Hardly a relationship based on freedom between equal partners! As such, this capitalist defence of wage labour *"is a deceptive way of noting"* that the employee is paid to obey. The contract between them is simply that of obedience on one side and power on the other. That both sides may break the contract does not alter this fact. Thus the capitalist workplace *"is not democratic in spite of the 'consent of the governed' to the employment contract ... In the employment contract, the workers alienate and transfer their legal rights to the employer to govern their activities 'within the scope of the employment' to the employer."* [David Ellerman, **The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 50]

Ultimately, there is ***one*** right that cannot be ceded or abandoned, namely the right to personality. If a person gave up their personality they would cease to be a person yet this is what the employment contract imposes. To maintain and develop their personality is a basic right of humanity and it cannot be transferred to another, permanently or temporarily. To argue otherwise would be to admit that under certain circumstances and for certain periods of time a person is not a person but rather a thing to be used by others. Yet this is precisely what capitalism does due to its hierarchical nature.



one that places humanity below property. As Erich Fromm argues:

> *"The use [i.e. exploitation] of man by man is expressive of the* ***system of values*** *underlying the capitalistic system.* ***Capital, the dead past, employs labour — the living vitality and power of the present.*** *In the capitalistic hierarchy of values, capital stands higher than labour, amassed things higher than the manifestations of life. Capital employs labour, and not labour capital. The person who owns capital commands the person who 'only' owns his life, human skill, vitality and creative productivity. 'Things' are higher than man. The conflict between capital and labour is much more than the conflict between two classes, more than their fight for a greater share of the social product. It is the conflict between two principles of value:* ***that between the world of things, and their amassment, and the world of life and its productivity****."* [**The Sane Society**, pp. 94–95]

Capitalism only values a person as representing a certain amount of the commodity called "labour power," in other words, as a **thing**. Instead of being valued as an individual — a unique human being with intrinsic moral and spiritual worth — only one's price tag counts. This replacement of human relationships by economic ones soon results in the replacement of human values by economic ones, giving us an "ethics" of the account book, in which people are valued by how much they earn. It also leads, as Murray Bookchin argues, to a debasement of human values:

> *"So deeply rooted is the market economy in our minds that its grubby language has replaced our*

*invest in"* such countries. [Joel Bakan, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89 and p. 185] Perhaps unsurprisingly, as such regimes are best able to enforce the necessary conditions to commodify labour fully.

## B.1.3 What kind of hierarchy of values does capitalism create?

Anarchists argue that capitalism can only have a negative impact on ethical behaviour. This flows from its hierarchical nature. We think that hierarchy must, by its very nature, always impact negatively on morality.

As we argued in section A.2.19, ethics is dependent on both individual liberty and equality between individuals. Hierarchy violates both and so the *"great sources of moral depravity"* are *"capitalism, religion, justice, government."* In *"the domain of economy, coercion has lead us to industrial servitude; in the domain of politics to the State ... [where] the nation ... becomes nothing but a mass of obedient* ***subjects*** *to a central authority."* This has *"contributed and powerfully aided to create all the present economic, political, and social evils"* and *"has given proof of its absolute impotence to raise the moral level of societies; it has not even been able to maintain it at the level it had already reached."* This is unsurprising, as society developed *"authoritarian prejudices"* and *"men become more and more divided into governors and governed, exploiters and exploited, the moral level fell ... and the spirit of the age declined."* By violating equality, by rejecting social co-operation between equals in favour of top-down, authoritarian, social relationships which turn some into the tools of others, capitalism, like the state, could not help but erode ethical standards as the *"moral level"* of society is *"debased by the practice of authority."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, pp. 137–8, p. 106 and p. 139]

However, as we as promoting general unethical behaviour, capitalism produces a specific perverted hierarchy of values —



This is not all. Capitalism, by treating labour as analogous to all other commodities denies the key distinction between labour and other "resources" — that is to say its inseparability from its bearer — labour, unlike other "property," is endowed with will and agency. Thus when one speaks of selling labour there is a necessary subjugation of will (hierarchy). As Karl Polanyi writes:

> *"Labour is only another name for human activity which goes with life itself, which is in turn not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life itself, be stored or mobilised ... To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment ... would result in the demolition of society. For the alleged commodity 'labour power' cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In disposing of a man's labour power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity 'man' attached to that tag."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 72]

In other words, labour is much more than the commodity to which capitalism tries to reduce it. Creative, self-managed work is a source of pride and joy and part of what it means to be fully human. Wrenching control of work from the hands of the worker profoundly harms his or her mental and physical health. Indeed, Proudhon went so far as to argue that capitalist companies *"plunder the bodies and souls of the wage-workers"* and were an *"outrage upon human dignity and personality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 219] This is because wage labour turns productive activity and the person who does it into a commodity. People *"are*

*not human **beings** so much as human **resources**. To the morally blind corporation, they are tool to generate as much profit as possible. And 'the tool can be treated just like a piece of metal — you use it if you want, you throw it away if you don't want it,' says Noam Chomsky. 'If you can get human beings to become tool like that, it's more efficient by some measure of efficiency ... a measure which is based on dehumanisation. You have to dehumanise it. That's part of the system.'"* [Joel Bakan, **The Corporation**, p. 69]

Separating labour from other activities of life and subjecting it to the laws of the market means to annihilate its natural, organic form of existence — a form that evolved with the human race through tens of thousands of years of co-operative economic activity based on sharing and mutual aid — and replacing it with an atomistic and individualistic one based on contract and competition. Unsurprisingly, this relationship is a very recent development and, moreover, the product of substantial state action and coercion (see section F.8 for some discussion of this). Simply put, *"the early labourer ... abhorred the factory, where he [or she] felt degraded and tortured."* While the state ensured a steady pool of landless workers by enforcing private property rights, the early manufacturers also utilised the state to ensure low wages, primarily for social reasons — only an overworked and downtrodden labourer with no other options would agree to do whatever their master required of them. *"Legal compulsion and parish serfdom as in England,"* noted Polanyi, *"the rigors of an absolutist labour police as on the Continent, indented labour as in the early Americas were the prerequisites of the 'willing worker.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 164–5]

Ignoring its origins in state action, the social relationship of wage labour is then claimed by capitalists to be a source of "freedom," whereas in fact it is a form of (in)voluntary servitude (see sections B.4 and A.2.14 for more discussion). Therefore a libertarian who did not support economic liberty (i.e. self-



government in industry, libertarian socialism) would be no libertarian at all, and no believer in liberty. Capitalism is based upon hierarchy and the denial of liberty. To present it otherwise denies the nature of wage labour. However, supporters of capitalism try to but — as Karl Polanyi points out — the idea that wage labour is based upon some kind of "natural" liberty is false:

> *"To represent this principle [wage labour] as one of non-interference [with freedom], as economic liberals were wont to do, was merely the expression of an ingrained prejudice in favour of a definite kind of interference, namely, such as would destroy non-contractual relations between individuals and prevent their spontaneous re-formation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.163]

As noted above, capitalism itself was created by state violence and the destruction of traditional ways of life and social interaction was part of that task. From the start, bosses spent considerable time and energy combating attempts of working people to join together to resist the hierarchy they were subjected to and reassert human values. Such forms of free association between equals (such as trade unions) were combated, just as attempts to regulate the worse excesses of the system by democratic governments. Indeed, capitalists prefer centralised, elitist and/or authoritarian regimes precisely because they are sure to be outside of popular control (see section B.2.5). They are the only way that contractual relations based on market power could be enforced on an unwilling population. Capitalism was born under such states and as well as backing fascist movements, they made high profits in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Today many corporations *"regularly do business with totalitarian and authoritarian regimes — again, because it is profitable to do so."* Indeed, there is a *"trend by US corporations to*

**Political Philosophy of Michael Bakunin**, p. 208]

This is unsurprising. For anarchists, *"the State organisation ... [is] the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses."* It does not imply that these minorities need to be the economically dominant class in a society. The state is *"a superstructure built to the advantage of Landlordism, Capitalism, and Officialism."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 82 and p. 105] Consequently, we cannot assume that abolishing one or even two of this unholy trinity will result in freedom nor that all three share exactly the same interests or power in relation to the others. Thus, in some situations, the landlord class can promote its interests over those of the capitalist class (and vice versa) while the state bureaucracy can grow at the expense of both.

As such, it is important to stress that the minority whose interests the state defends need not be an economically dominant one (although it usually is). Under some circumstances a priesthood can be a ruling class, as can a military group or a bureaucracy. This means that the state can also effectively **replace** the economically dominant elite as the exploiting class. This is because anarchists view the state as having (class) interests of its own.

As we discuss in more detail in section H.3.9, the state cannot be considered as merely an instrument of (economic) class rule. History has shown numerous societies were the state **itself** was the ruling class and where no other dominant economic class existed. The experience of Soviet Russia indicates the validity of this analysis. The reality of the Russian Revolution contrasted starkly with the Marxist claim that a state was simply an instrument of class rule and, consequently, the working class needed to build its own state within which to rule society. Rather than being an instrument by which working class people could run and transform society in their own interests,



Emma Goldman argued that emancipation begins *"in [a] woman's soul."* Only by a process of internal emancipation, in which the oppressed get to know their own value, respect themselves and their culture, can they be in a position to effectively combat (and overcome) external oppression and attitudes. Only when you respect yourself can you be in a position to get others to respect you. Those men, whites and heterosexuals who are opposed to bigotry, inequality and injustice, must support oppressed groups and refuse to condone racist, sexist or homophobic attitudes and actions by others or themselves. For anarchists, *"not a single member of the Labour movement may with impunity be discriminated against, suppressed or ignored... Labour [and other] organisations must be built on the principle of equal liberty of all its members. This equality means that only if each worker is a free and independent unit, co-operating with the others from his or her mutual interests, can the whole labour organisation work successfully and become powerful."* [Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 127–8]

We must all treat people as equals, while at the same time respecting their differences. Diversity is a strength and a source of joy, and anarchists reject the idea that equality means conformity. By these methods, of internal self-liberation and solidarity against external oppression, we can fight against bigotry. Racism, sexism and homophobia can be reduced, perhaps almost eliminated, before a social revolution has occurred by those subject to them organising themselves, fighting back **autonomously** and refusing to be subjected to racial, sexual or anti-gay abuse or to allowing others to get away with it (which plays an essential role in making others aware of their own attitudes and actions, attitudes they may even be blind to!).

The example of the ***Mujeres Libres*** (Free Women) in Spain during the 1930s shows what is possible. Women anarchists involved in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. organised themselves autonomously to raise the issue of sexism in the wider libertarian

movement, to increase women's involvement in libertarian organisations and help the process of women's self-liberation against male oppression. Along the way they also had to combat the (all too common) sexist attitudes of their "revolutionary" male fellow anarchists. Martha A. Ackelsberg's book **Free Women of Spain** is an excellent account of this movement and the issues it raises for all people concerned about freedom. Decades latter, the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s did much the same thing, aiming to challenge the traditional sexism and patriarchy of capitalist society. They, too, formed their own organisations to fight for their own needs as a group. Individuals worked together and drew strength for their own personal battles in the home and in wider society.

Another essential part of this process is for such autonomous groups to actively support others in struggle (including members of the dominant race/sex/sexuality). Such practical solidarity and communication can, when combined with the radicalising effects of the struggle itself on those involved, help break down prejudice and bigotry, undermining the social hierarchies that oppress us all. For example, gay and lesbian groups supporting the 1984/5 UK miners' strike resulted in such groups being given pride of place in many miners' marches. Another example is the great strike by Jewish immigrant workers in 1912 in London which occurred at the same time as a big London Dock Strike. *"The common struggle brought Jewish and non-Jewish workers together. Joint strike meetings were held, and the same speakers spoke at huge joint demonstrations."* The Jewish strike was a success, dealing a *"death-blow to the sweatshop system. The English workers looked at the Jewish workers with quite different eyes after this victory."* Yet the London dock strike continued and many dockers' families were suffering real wants. The successful Jewish strikers started a campaign *"to take some of the dockers' children into their homes."* This practical support *"did a great*



Therefore the state machine (and structure), while its modern form is intrinsically linked to capitalism, cannot be seen as being a tool usable by the majority. This is because the *"State, any State — even when it dresses-up in the most liberal and democratic form — is essentially based on domination, and upon violence, that is upon despotism — a concealed but no less dangerous despotism."* The State *"denotes power, authority, domination; it presupposes inequality in fact."* [**The Political Philosophy of Michael Bakunin**, p. 211 and p. 240] The state, therefore, has its own specific logic, its own priorities and its own momentum. It constitutes its own locus of power which is not merely a derivative of economic class power. Consequently, the state can be beyond the control of the economically dominant class and it need not reflect economic relations.

This is due to its hierarchical and centralised nature, which empowers the few who control the state machine — *"[e]very state power, every government, by its nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organisation and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people."* If *"the whole proletariat ... [are] members of the government ... there will be no government, no state, but, if there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those who are slaves."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 328 and p. 330]

In other words, the state bureaucracy is itself directly an oppressor and can exist independently of an economically dominant class. In Bakunin's prophetic words:

> *"What have we seen throughout history? The State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: the sacerdotal class, the nobility, the bourgeoisie — and finally, when all other classes have exhausted themselves, the class of the bureaucracy enters the stage and then the State falls, or rises, if you please, to the position of a machine."* [**The**

a society anarchists also argue that the state has, due to its hierarchical nature, interests of its own. Thus it cannot be considered as simply the tool of the economically dominant class in society. States have their own dynamics, due to their structure, which generate their own classes and class interests and privileges (and which allows them to escape from the control of the economic ruling class and pursue their own interests, to a greater or lesser degree). As Malatesta put it *"the government, though springing from the bourgeoisie and its servant and protector, tends, as with every servant and every protector, to achieve its own emancipation and to dominate whoever it protects."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

Thus, even in a class system like capitalism, the state can act independently of the ruling elite and, potentially, act against their interests. As part of its role is to mediate between individual capitalists/corporations, it needs sufficient power to tame them and this requires the state to have some independence from the class whose interests it, in general, defends. And such independence can be used to further its own interests, even to the detriment of the capitalist class, if the circumstances allow. If the capitalist class is weak or divided then the state can be in a position to exercise its autonomy vis-à-vis the economically dominant elite, using against the capitalists as a whole the tools it usually applies to them individually to further its own interests and powers.

This means that the state it not just *"the guardian of capital"* for it *"has a vitality of its own and constitutes ... a veritable social class apart from other classes ... ; and this class has its own particular parasitical and usurious interests, in conflict with those of the rest of the collectivity which the State itself claims to represent ... The State, being the depository of society's greatest physical and material force, has too much power in its hands to resign itself to being no more than the capitalists' guard dog."* [Luigi Fabbri, quoted by David Berry, **A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945**, p. 39]



*deal to strengthen the friendship between Jewish and non-Jewish workers."* [Rudolf Rocker, **London Years**, p. 129 and p. 131] This solidarity was repaid in October 1936, when the dockers were at the forefront in stopping Mosley's fascist blackshirts marching through Jewish areas (the famous battle of Cable street).

For whites, males and heterosexuals, the only anarchistic approach is to support others in struggle, refuse to tolerate bigotry in others and to root out their own fears and prejudices (while refusing to be uncritical of self-liberation struggles — solidarity does not imply switching your brain off!). This obviously involves taking the issue of social oppression into all working class organisations and activity, ensuring that no oppressed group is marginalised within them.

Only in this way can the hold of these social diseases be weakened and a better, non-hierarchical system be created. An injury to one is an injury to all.

# B.2 Why are anarchists against the state?

As previously noted (see section B.1), anarchists oppose all forms of hierarchical authority. Historically, however, they have spent most of their time and energy opposing two main forms in particular. One is capitalism, the other, the state. These two forms of authority have a symbiotic relationship and cannot be easily separated:

> "[T]he State ... and Capitalism are facts and conceptions which we cannot separate from each other. In the course of history these institutions have developed, supporting and reinforcing each other.
>
> "They are connected with each other — not as mere accidental co-incidences. They are linked together by the links of cause and effect." [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 94]

In this section, in consequence, as well as explaining why anarchists oppose the state, we will necessarily have to analyse the relationship between it and capitalism.

So what is the state? As Malatesta put it, anarchists *"have used the word State, and still do, to mean the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs, the control over their personal behaviour, the responsibility for their personal safety, are taken away from the people and entrusted to others*



an expression of its role as an instrument of capital in general. Moreover, without the tax money from successful businesses the state would be weakened and so the state is in competition with capitalists for the surplus value produced by the working class. Hence the anti-state rhetoric of big business which can fool those unaware of the hand-in-glove nature of modern capitalism to the state.

As Chomsky notes:

> *"There has always been a kind of love-hate relationship between business interests and the capitalist state. On the one hand, business wants a powerful state to regulate disorderly markets, provide services and subsidies to business, enhance and protect access to foreign markets and resources, and so on. On the other hand, business does not want a powerful competitor, in particular, one that might respond to different interests, popular interests, and conduct policies with a redistributive effect, with regard to income or power."* [**Turning the Tide**, p. 211]

As such, the state is often in conflict with sections of the capitalist class, just as sections of that class use the state to advance their own interests within the general framework of protecting the capitalist system (i.e. the interests of the ruling class **as a class**). The state's role is to resolve such disputes within that class peacefully. Under modern capitalism, this is usually done via the *"democratic"* process (within which we get the chance of picking the representatives of the elite who will oppress us least).

Such conflicts sometimes give the impression of the state being a "neutral" body, but this is an illusion — it exists to defend class power and privilege — but exactly which class it defends can change. While recognising that the state protects the power and position of the economically dominant class within

## B.2.6 Can the state be an independent power within society?

Yes it can. Given the power of the state machine, it would be hard to believe that it could always be simply a tool for the economically dominant minority in a society. Given its structure and powers, it can use them to further its own interests. Indeed, in some circumstances it can be the ruling class itself.

However, in normal times the state is, as we discussed in section B.2.1, a tool of the capitalist class. This, it must be stressed, does not mean that they always see *"eye to eye."* Top politicians, for example, are part of the ruling elite, but they are in competition with other parts of it. In addition, different sectors of the capitalist class are competing against each other for profits, political influence, privileges, etc. The bourgeoisie, argued Malatesta, *"are always at war among themselves ... Thus the games of the swings, the manoeuvres, the concessions and withdrawals, the attempts to find allies among the people against the conservatives, and among the conservatives against the people."* [**Anarchy**, p. 25] This means that different sections of the ruling class will cluster around different parties, depending on their interests, and these parties will seek to gain power to further those interests. This may bring them into conflict with other sections of the capitalist class. The state is the means by which these conflicts can be resolved.

Given that the role of the state is to ensure the best conditions for capital **as a whole,** this means that, when necessary, it can and does work against the interests of certain parts of the capitalist class. To carry out this function the state needs to be above individual capitalists or companies. This is what can give the state the appearance of being a neutral social institution and can fool people into thinking that it represents the interests of society as a whole. Yet this sometime neutrality with regards to individual capitalist companies exists only as



*who, by usurpation or delegation, are vested with the power to make laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force."* [**Anarchy**, p. 17]

He continues:

> *"For us, government [or the state] is made up of all the governors; and the governors ... are those who have the power to make **laws** regulating inter-human relations and to see that they are carried out . .. [and] who have the power, to a greater or lesser degree, to make use of the social power, that is of the physical, intellectual and economic power of the whole community, in order to oblige everybody to carry out their wishes. And this power, in our opinion, constitutes the principle of government, of authority."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

Kropotkin presented a similar analysis, arguing that the state *"not only includes the existence of a power situated above society, but also of a **territorial concentration** as well as the concentration **in the hands of a few of many functions in the life of societies** ... A whole mechanism of legislation and of policing has to be developed in order to subject some classes to the domination of others."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 10] For Bakunin, all states *"are in essence only machines governing the masses from above, through ... a privileged minority, allegedly knowing the genuine interests of the people better than the people themselves."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 211] On this subject Murray Bookchin writes:

> *"Minimally, the State is a professional system of social coercion — not merely a system of social administration as it is still naively regarded by the public and by many political theorists. The word 'professional' should be emphasised as much as the word*

> *'coercion.' .. . It is only when coercion is institutionalised into a professional, systematic and organised form of social control — that is, when people are plucked out of their everyday lives in a community and expected not only to 'administer' it but to do so with the backing of a monopoly of violence — that we can properly speak of a State."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 66]

As Bookchin indicates, anarchists reject the idea that the state is the same as society or that **any** grouping of human beings living and organised together is a state. This confusion, as Kropotkin notes, explains why *"anarchists are generally upbraided for wanting to 'destroy society' and of advocating a return to 'the permanent war of each against all.'"* Such a position *"overlook[s] the fact that Man lived in Societies for thousands of years before the State had been heard of"* and that, consequently, the State *"is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 10]

The state, therefore, is not just federations of individuals or peoples and so, as Malatesta stressed, cannot be used to describe a *"human collectively gathered together in a particular territory and making up what is called a social unit irrespective of the way the way said collectivity are grouped or the state of relations between them."* It cannot be *"used simply as a synonym for society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 17] The state is a particular form of social organisation based on certain key attributes and so, we argue, *"the word 'State' ... should be reserved for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Ethics**, p. 317f] As such, the state *"is a historic, transitory institution, a temporary form of society"* and one whose *"utter extinction"* is possible as the *"State is not society."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 151]

In summary, the state is a specific way in which human affairs are organised in a given area, a way marked by certain in-



In reality, what capitalists object to about "big government" is its spending on social programs designed to benefit the poor and working class, an "illegitimate" function which "wastes" part of the surplus that might go to capital (and also makes people less desperate and so less willing to work cheaply). Hence the constant push to reduce the state to its "classical" role as protector of private property and the system, and little else. Other than their specious quarrel with the welfare state, capitalists are the staunchest supports of government (and the "correct" form of state intervention, such as defence spending), as evidenced by the fact that funds can always be found to build more prisons and send troops abroad to advance ruling-class interests, even as politicians are crying that there is "no money" in the treasury for scholarships, national health care, or welfare for the poor.

State centralisation ensures that *"as much as the equalitarian principles have been embodied in its political constitutions, it is the bourgeoisie that governs, and it is the people, the workers, peasants included, who obey the laws made by the bourgeoisie"* who *"has in fact if not by right the exclusive privilege of governing."* This means that *"political equality ... is only a puerile fiction, an utter lie."* It takes a great deal of faith to assume that the rich, *"being so far removed from the people by the conditions of its economic and social existence"* can *"give expression in the government and in the laws, to the feelings, the ideas, and the will of the people."* Unsurprisingly, we find that *"in legislation as well as in carrying on the government, the bourgeoisie is guided by its own interests and its own instincts without concerning itself much with the interests of the people."* So while *"on election days even the proudest bourgeois who have any political ambitions are forced to court ... The Sovereign People."* But on the *"day after the elections every one goes back to their daily business"* and the politicians are given carte blanche to rule in the name of the people they claim to represent." [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 218 and p. 219]

states to follow suit and rationalise their markets across *"nations"* by creating multi-state agreements and unions.

As Noam Chomsky notes, G7, the IMF, the World Bank and so forth are a *"de facto world government,"* and *"the institutions of the transnational state largely serve other masters [than the people], as state power typically does; in this case the rising transnational corporations in the domains of finance and other services, manufacturing, media and communications."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 179]

As multi-nationals grow and develop, breaking through national boundaries, a corresponding growth in statism is required. Moreover, a *"particularly valuable feature of the rising de facto governing institutions is their immunity from popular influence, even awareness. They operate in secret, creating a world subordinated to the needs of investors, with the public 'put in its place', the threat of democracy reduced"* [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178].

This does not mean that capitalists desire state centralisation for everything. Often, particularly for social issues, relative decentralisation is often preferred (i.e. power is given to local bureaucrats) in order to increase business control over them. By devolving control to local areas, the power which large corporations, investment firms and the like have over the local government increases proportionally. In addition, even middle-sized enterprise can join in and influence, constrain or directly control local policies and set one workforce against another. Private power can ensure that *"freedom"* is safe, **their** freedom.

No matter which set of bureaucrats are selected, the need to centralise social power, thus marginalising the population, is of prime importance to the business class. It is also important to remember that capitalist opposition to *"big government"* is often financial, as the state feeds off the available social surplus, so reducing the amount left for the market to distribute to the various capitals in competition.



stitutions which, in turn, have certain characteristics. This does not imply, however, that the state is a monolithic entity that has been the same from its birth to the present day. States vary in many ways, especially in their degree of authoritarianism, in the size and power of their bureaucracy and how they organise themselves. Thus we have monarchies, oligarchies, theocracies, party dictatorships and (more or less) democratic states. We have ancient states, with minimal bureaucracy, and modern ones, with enormous bureaucracy.

Moreover, anarchists argue that *"the **political** regime ... is always an expression of the **economic** regime which exists at the heart of society."* This means that regardless of how the state changes, it *"continues to be shaped by the economic system, of which it is always the expression and, at the same time, the consecration and the sustaining force."* Needless to say, there is not always an exact match and sometimes *"the political regime of a country finds itself lagging behind the economic changes that are taking place, and in that case it will abruptly be set aside and remodelled in a way appropriate to the economic regime that has been established."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 118]

At other times, the state can change its form to protect the economic system it is an expression of. Thus we see democracies turn to dictatorships in the face of popular revolts and movements. The most obvious examples of Pinochet's Chile, Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany are all striking confirmations of Bakunin's comment that while *"[n]o government could serve the economic interests of the bourgeoisie better than a republic,"* that class would *"prefer ... military dictatorship"* if needed to crush *"the revolts of the proletariat."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 417]

However, as much as the state may change its form it still has certain characteristics which identify a social institution as a state. As such, we can say that, for anarchists, the state is marked by three things:

1. A **"monopoly of violence"** in a given territorial area;

2. This violence having a *"professional,"* institutional nature; and

3. A hierarchical nature, centralisation of power and initiative into the hands of a few.

Of these three aspects, the last one (its centralised, hierarchical nature) is the most important simply because the concentration of power into the hands of the few ensures a division of society into government and governed (which necessitates the creation of a professional body to enforce that division). Hence we find Bakunin arguing that *"[w]ith the State there must go also ... all organisation of social life from the top downward, via legislation and government."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 242] In other words, *"the people was not governing itself."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 120]

This aspect implies the rest. In a state, all the people residing in an area are subject to the state, submitting themselves to the individuals who make up the institution of authority ruling that territory. To enforce the will of this few, they must have a monopoly of force within the territory. As the members of the state collectively monopolise political decision making power, they are a privileged body separated by its position and status from the rest of the population as a whole which means they cannot rely on them to enforce its will. This necessities a professional body of some kind to enforce their decisions, a separate police force or army rather than the people armed.

Given this, the division of society into rulers and ruled is the key to what constitutes a state. Without such a division, we would not need a monopoly of violence and so would simply have an association of equals, unmarked by power and hierarchy (such as exists in many stateless "primitive" tribes and will exist in a future anarchist society). And, it must be stressed, such a division exists even in democratic states as *"with the*



"big government" created an environment in which big business could grow (often encouraged by the state by subsidies and protectionism — as would be expected when the state is run by the wealthy) as well as further removing state power from influence by the masses and placing it more firmly in the hands of the wealthy. It is little wonder we see such developments, for *"[s]tructures of governance tend to coalesce around domestic power, in the last few centuries, economic power."* [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 178]

State centralisation makes it easier for business to control government, ensuring that it remains their puppet and to influence the political process. For example, the European Round Table (ERT) *"an elite lobby group of ... chairmen or chief executives of large multi-nationals based mainly in the EU ... [with] 11 of the 20 largest European companies [with] combined sales [in 1991] ... exceeding $500 billion, ... approximately 60 per cent of EU industrial production,"* makes much use of the EU. As two researchers who have studied this body note, the ERT *"is adept at lobbying ... so that many ERT proposals and 'visions' are mysteriously regurgitated in Commission summit documents."* The ERT *"claims that the labour market should be more 'flexible,' arguing for more flexible hours, seasonal contracts, job sharing and part time work. In December 1993, seven years after the ERT made its suggestions [and after most states had agreed to the Maastricht Treaty and its "social chapter"], the European Commission published a white paper ... [proposing] making labour markets in Europe more flexible."* [Doherty and Hoedeman, *"Knights of the Road,"* **New Statesman**, 4/11/94, p. 27]

The current talk of globalisation, NAFTA, and the Single European Market indicates an underlying transformation in which state growth follows the path cut by economic growth. Simply put, with the growth of transnational corporations and global finance markets, the bounds of the nation-state have been made economically redundant. As companies have expanded into multi-nationals, so the pressure has mounted for

> *come simply to ratify those forms of inequality that the market system had produced.'"* [Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 234]

The US state was created on elitist liberal doctrine and actively aimed to reduce democratic tendencies (in the name of "individual liberty"). What happened in practice (unsurprisingly enough) was that the wealthy elite used the state to undermine popular culture and common right in favour of protecting and extending their own interests and power. In the process, US society was reformed in their own image:

> *"By the middle of the nineteenth century the legal system had been reshaped to the advantage of men of commerce and industry at the expense of farmers, workers, consumers, and other less powerful groups in society... it actively promoted a legal distribution of wealth against the weakest groups in society."* [Morton Horwitz, quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235]

In more modern times, state centralisation and expansion has gone hand in glove with rapid industrialisation and the growth of business. As Edward Herman points out, *"[t]o a great extent, it was the growth in business size and power that elicited the countervailing emergence of unions and the growth of government. Bigness **beyond** business was to a large extent a response to bigness **in** business."* [**Corporate Control, Corporate Power**, p. 188 — see also, Stephen Skowronek, **Building A New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920**] State centralisation was required to produce bigger, well-defined markets and was supported by business when it acted in their interests (i.e. as markets expanded, so did the state in order to standardise and enforce property laws and so on). On the other hand, this development towards



*state there is always a hierarchical and status difference between rulers and ruled. Even if it is a democracy, where we suppose those who rule today are not rulers tomorrow, there are still differences in status. In a democratic system, only a tiny minority will ever have the opportunity to rule and these are invariably drawn from the elite."* [Harold Barclay, **The State**, pp. 23–4]

Thus, the *"essence of government"* is that *"it is a thing apart, developing its own interests"* and so is *"an institution existing for its own sake, preying upon the people, and teaching them whatever will tend to keep it secure in its seat."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 27 and p. 26] And so *"despotism resides not so much in the **form** of the State or power as in the very **principle** of the State and political power."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 211]

As the state is the delegation of power into the hands of the few, it is obviously based on hierarchy. This delegation of power results in the elected people becoming isolated from the mass of people who elected them and outside of their control (see section B.2.4). In addition, as those elected are given power over a host of different issues and told to decide upon them, a bureaucracy soon develops around them to aid in their decision-making and enforce those decisions once they have been reached. However, this bureaucracy, due to its control of information and its permanency, soon has more power than the elected officials. Therefore *"a highly complex state machine ... leads to the formation of a class especially concerned with state management, which, using its acquired experience, begins to deceive the rest for its personal advantage."* [Kropotkin, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 61] This means that those who serve the people's (so-called) servant have more power than those they serve, just as the politician has more power than those who elected him. All forms of state-like (i.e. hierarchical) organisations inevitably spawn a bureaucracy about them. This bureaucracy soon becomes the de facto

focal point of power in the structure, regardless of the official rules.

This marginalisation and disempowerment of ordinary people (and so the empowerment of a bureaucracy) is the key reason for anarchist opposition to the state. Such an arrangement ensures that the individual is disempowered, subject to bureaucratic, authoritarian rule which reduces the person to an object or a number, **not** a unique individual with hopes, dreams, thoughts and feelings. As Proudhon forcefully argued:

> *"To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so ... To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorised, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolised, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown it all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonoured. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 294]

Such is the nature of the state that **any** act, no matter how evil, becomes good if it helps forward the interests of the state and the minorities it protects. As Bakunin put it:



*est in establishing a strong federal government."* Needless to say, while the rich elite were well represented in formulating the principles of the new order, four groups were not: *"slaves, indentured servants, women, men without property."* Needless to say, the new state and its constitution did not reflect their interests. Given that these were the vast majority, *"there was not only a positive need for strong central government to protect the large economic interests, but also immediate fear of rebellion by discontented farmers."* [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 90] The chief event was Shay's Rebellion in western Massachusetts. There the new Constitution had raised property qualifications for voting and, therefore, no one could hold state office without being wealthy. The new state was formed to combat such rebellions, to protect the wealthy few against the many.

Moreover, state centralisation, the exclusion of popular participation, was essential to mould US society into one dominated by capitalism:

> *"In the thirty years leading up to the Civil War, the law was increasingly interpreted in the courts to suit capitalist development. Studying this, Morton Horwitz (**The Transformation of American Law**) points out that the English common-law was no longer holy when it stood in the way of business growth ... Judgements for damages against businessmen were taken out of the hands of juries, which were unpredictable, and given to judges ... The ancient idea of a fair price for goods gave way in the courts to the idea of caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) ... contract law was intended to discriminate against working people and for business ... The pretence of the law was that a worker and a railroad made a contract with equal bargaining power ... 'The circle was completed; the law had*

For example, the founding fathers of the American State were quite explicit on the need for centralisation for precisely this reason. For James Madison the key worry was when the *"majority"* gained control of *"popular government"* and was in a position to *"sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens."* Thus the *"public good"* escaped the *"majority"* nor was it, as you would think, what the public thought of as good (for some reason left unexplained, Madison considered the majority able to pick those who **could** identify the public good). To safeguard against this, he advocated a republic rather than a democracy in which the citizens *"assemble and administer the government in person ... have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property."* He, of course, took it for granted that *"[t]hose who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society."* His schema was to ensure that private property was defended and, as a consequence, the interests of those who held protected. Hence the need for *"the delegation of the government ... to a small number of citizens elected by the rest."* This centralisation of power into a few hands locally was matched by a territorial centralisation for the same reason. Madison favoured *"a large over a small republic"* as a *"rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union than a particular member of it."* [contained in **Voices of a People's History of the United States**, Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove (eds.), pp. 109–113] This desire to have a formal democracy, where the masses are mere spectators of events rather than participants, is a recurring theme in capitalism (see the chapter *"Force and Opinion"* in Noam Chomsky's **Deterring Democracy** for a good overview).

On the federal and state levels in the US after the Revolution, centralisation of power was encouraged, since *"most of the makers of the Constitution had some direct economic inter-*



***"The State ... is the most flagrant, the most cynical, and the most complete negation of humanity.*** *It shatters the universal solidarity of all men [and women] on the earth, and brings some of them into association only for the purpose of destroying, conquering, and enslaving all the rest ...*

*"This flagrant negation of humanity which constitutes the very essence of the State is, from the standpoint of the State, its supreme duty and its greatest virtue ... Thus, to offend, to oppress, to despoil, to plunder, to assassinate or enslave one's fellowman [or woman] is ordinarily regarded as a crime. In public life, on the other hand, from the standpoint of patriotism, when these things are done for the greater glory of the State, for the preservation or the extension of its power, it is all transformed into duty and virtue. And this virtue, this duty, are obligatory for each patriotic citizen; everyone if supposed to exercise them not against foreigners only but against one's own fellow citizens ... whenever the welfare of the State demands it.*

*"This explains why, since the birth of the State, the world of politics has always been and continues to be the stage for unlimited rascality and brigandage ... This explains why the entire history of ancient and modern states is merely a series of revolting crimes; why kings and ministers, past and present, of all times and all countries — statesmen, diplomats, bureaucrats, and warriors — if judged from the standpoint of simply morality and human justice, have a hundred, a thousand times over earned their sentence to hard labour or to the gallows. There is no horror, no cruelty, sacrilege, or perjury, no imposture, no infamous transaction, no cynical robbery,*

> *no bold plunder or shabby betrayal that has not been or is not daily being perpetrated by the representatives of the states, under no other pretext than those elastic words, so convenient and yet so terrible: '**for reasons of state.**'"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 133–4]

Governments habitually lie to the people they claim to represent in order to justify wars, reductions (if not the destruction) of civil liberties and human rights, policies which benefit the few over the many, and other crimes. And if its subjects protest, the state will happily use whatever force deemed necessary to bring the rebels back in line (labelling such repression "law and order"). Such repression includes the use of death squads, the institutionalisation of torture, collective punishments, indefinite imprisonment, and other horrors at the worse extremes.

Little wonder the state usually spends so much time ensuring the (mis)education of its population — only by obscuring (when not hiding) its actual practises can it ensure the allegiance of those subject to it. The history of the state could be viewed as nothing more than the attempts of its subjects to control it and bind it to the standards people apply to themselves.

Such behaviour is not surprising, given that Anarchists see the state, with its vast scope and control of deadly force, as the "ultimate" hierarchical structure, suffering from all the negative characteristics associated with authority described in the last section. *"Any loical and straightforward theory of the State,"* argued Bakunin, *"is essentially founded upon the principle of **authority**, that is the eminently theological, metaphysical, and political idea that the masses, **always** incapable of governing themselves, must at all times submit to the beneficent yoke of a wisdom and a justice imposed upon them, in some way or other, from above."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 142] Such a system of authority cannot help being centralised, hierarchical and bu-



> *"[Thus] the middle classes surrounded themselves with every precaution in order to keep the municipal power in the hands of the well-to-do members of the community."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 179–186]

Thus centralisation aimed to take power away from the mass of the people and give it to the wealthy. The power of the people rested in popular assemblies, such as the *"Sections"* and *"Districts"* of Paris (expressing, in Kropotkin's words, *"the principles of anarchism"* and *"practising ... Direct Self-Government"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 204 and p. 203]) and village assemblies. However, the National Assembly *"tried all it could to lessen the power of the districts ... [and] put an end to those hotbeds of Revolution ... [by allowing] **active** citizens only ... to take part in the electoral and administrative assemblies."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 211] Thus the *"central government was steadily endeavouring to subject the sections to its authority"* with the state *"seeking to centralise everything in its own hands ... [I]ts depriving the popular organisations ... all ... administrative functions ... and its subjecting them to its bureaucracy in police matters, meant the death of the sections."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 549 and p. 552]

As can be seen, both the French and American revolutions saw a similar process by which the wealthy centralised power into their own hands (volume one of Murray Bookchin's **The Third Revolution** discusses the French and American revolutions in some detail). This ensured that working class people (i.e. the majority) were excluded from the decision making process and subject to the laws and power of a few. Which, of course, benefits the minority class whose representatives have that power. This was the rationale for the centralisation of power in every revolution. Whether it was the American, French or Russian, the centralisation of power was the means to exclude the many from participating in the decisions that affected them and their communities.

*to divide the French into two classes, of which one only, the **active** citizens, should take part in the government, whilst the other, comprising the great mass of the people under the name of **passive** citizens, should be deprived of all political rights … [T]he [National] Assembly divided France into departments … always maintaining the principle of excluding the poorer classes from the Government … [T]hey excluded from the primary assemblies the mass of the people … who could no longer take part in the primary assemblies, and accordingly had no right to nominate the electors [who chose representatives to the National Assembly], or the municipality, or any of the local authorities …*

*"And finally, the **permanence** of the electoral assemblies was interdicted. Once the middle-class governors were appointed, these assemblies were not to meet again. Once the middle-class governors were appointed, they must not be controlled too strictly. Soon the right even of petitioning and of passing resolutions was taken away — 'Vote and hold your tongue!'*

*"As to the villages … the general assembly of the inhabitants … [to which] belonged the administration of the affairs of the commune .. . were forbidden by the … law. Henceforth only the well-to-do peasants, the **active** citizens, had the right to meet, **once a year**, to nominate the mayor and the municipality, composed of three or four middle-class men of the village.*

*"A similar municipal organisation was given to the towns…*



reaucratic in nature. And because of its centralised, hierarchical, and bureaucratic nature, the state becomes a great weight over society, restricting its growth and development and making popular control impossible. As Bakunin put it:

> *"the so-called general interests of society supposedly represented by the State … [are] in reality … the general and permanent negation of the positive interests of the regions, communes, and associations, and a vast number of individuals subordinated to the State … [in which] all the best aspirations, all the living forces of a country, are sanctimoniously immolated and interred."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 207]

That is by no means the end of it. As well as its obvious hierarchical form, anarchists object to the state for another, equally important, reason. This is its role as a defender of the economically dominant class in society against the rest of it (i.e. from the working class). This means, under the current system, the capitalists *"need the state to legalise their methods of robbery, to protect the capitalist system."* [Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 16] The state, as we discuss in section B.2.1, is the defender of private property (see section B.3 for a discussion of what anarchists mean by that term and how it differs from individual possessions).

This means that in capitalist states the mechanisms of state domination are controlled by and for a corporate elite (and hence the large corporations are often considered to belong to a wider *"state-complex"*). Indeed, as we discuss in more depth in section F.8, the *"State has been, and still is, the main pillar and the creator, direct and indirect, of Capitalism and its powers over the masses."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 97] Section B.2.3 indicates how this is domination is achieved in a representative democracy.

However this does not mean anarchists think that the state is purely an instrument of economic class rule. As Malatesta argued, while *"a special class (government) which, provided with the necessary means of repression, exists to legalise and protect the owning class from the demands of the workers ... it uses the powers at its disposal to create privileges for itself and to subject, if it can, the owning class itself as well."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 183] Thus the state has interests of its own, distinct from and sometimes in opposition to the economic ruling elite. This means that both state **and** capitalism needs to be abolished, for the former is as much a distinct (and oppressive and exploitative) class as the former. This aspects of the state is discussed in section B.2.6.

As part of its role as defender of capitalism, the state is involved in not only in political domination but also in economic domination. This domination can take different forms, varying from simply maintaining capitalist property rights to actually owning workplaces and exploiting labour directly. Thus every state intervenes in the economy in some manner. While this is usually to favour the economically dominant, it can also occur try and mitigate the anti-social nature of the capitalist market and regulate its worse abuses. We discuss this aspect of the state in section B.2.2.

Needless to say, the characteristics which mark a state did not develop by chance. As we discuss in section H.3.7, anarchists have an evolutionary perspective on the state. This means that it has a hierarchical nature in order to facilitate the execution of its role, its function. As sections B.2.4 and B.2.5 indicate, the centralisation that marks a state is required to secure elite rule and was deliberately and actively created to do so. This means that states, by their very nature, are top-down institutions which centralise power into a few hands and, as a consequence, a state *"with its traditions, its hierarchy, and its narrow nationalism"* can *"not be utilised as an instrument of emancipation."* [Kropotkon, **Evolution and Environment**,



*with town meeting government ... Attempts by conservative elements were made to establish a 'corporate form (of municipal government) whereby the towns would be governed by mayors and councils' elected from urban wards ... [T]he merchants 'backed incorporation consistently in their efforts to escape town meetings.'"* [Murray Bookchin, **Towards an Ecological Society**, p. 182]

Here we see local policy making being taken out of the hands of the many and centralised in the hands of the few (who are always the wealthy). France provides another example:

> *"The Government found...the folkmotes [of all households] 'too noisy', too disobedient, and in 1787, elected councils, composed of a mayor and three to six syndics, chosen among the wealthier peasants, were introduced instead."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Mutual Aid**, pp. 185–186]

This was part of a general movement to disempower the working class by centralising decision making power into the hands of the few (as in the American revolution). Kropotkin indicates the process at work:

> *"[T]he middle classes, who had until then had sought the support of the people, in order to obtain constitutional laws and to dominate the higher nobility, were going, now that they had seen and felt the strength of the people, to do all they could to dominate the people, to disarm them and to drive them back into subjection.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *"[T]hey made haste to legislate in such a way that the political power which was slipping out of the hand of the Court should not fall into the hands of the people. Thus ... [it was] proposed ...*

local authoritarian institutions (say capitalist firms and feudal landlords) would not ensure freedom. Equally, the abolition of local authorities may simply result in the strengthening of central power and a corresponding weakening of freedom.

## B.2.5 Who benefits from centralisation?

No social system would exist unless it benefited someone or some group. Centralisation, be it in the state or the company, is no different. In all cases, centralisation directly benefits those at the top, because it shelters them from those who are below, allowing the latter to be controlled and governed more effectively. Therefore, it is in the direct interests of bureaucrats and politicians to support centralism.

Under capitalism, however, various sections of the business class also support state centralism. This is the symbiotic relationship between capital and the state. As will be discussed later (in section F.8), the state played an important role in "nationalising" the market, i.e. forcing the "free market" onto society. By centralising power in the hands of representatives and so creating a state bureaucracy, ordinary people were disempowered and thus became less likely to interfere with the interests of the wealthy. *"In a republic,"* writes Bakunin, *"the so-called people, the legal people, allegedly represented by the State, stifle and will keep on stifling the actual and living people"* by *"the bureaucratic world"* for *"the greater benefit of the privileged propertied classes as well as for its own benefit."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 211]

Examples of increased political centralisation being promoted by wealthy business interests by can be seen throughout the history of capitalism. *"In revolutionary America, 'the nature of city government came in for heated discussion,' observes Merril Jensen ... Town meetings ... 'had been a focal point of revolutionary activity'. The anti-democratic reaction that set in after the American revolution was marked by efforts to do away*



p. 78] It is for this reason that anarchists aim to create a new form of social organisation and life, a decentralised one based on decision making from the bottom-up and the elimination of hierarchy.

Finally, we must point out that anarchists, while stressing what states have in common, do recognise that some forms of the state are better than others. Democracies, for example, tend to be less oppressive than dictatorships or monarchies. As such it would be false to conclude that anarchists, *"in criticising the democratic government we thereby show our preference for the monarchy. We are firmly convinced that the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 144] However, this does not change the nature or role of the state. Indeed, what liberties we have are **not** dependent on the goodwill of the state but rather the result of people standing against it and exercising their autonomy. Left to itself, the state would soon turn the liberties and rights it says it defends into dead-laws — things that look good in print but not practised in real life.

So in the rest of this section we will discuss the state, its role, its impact on a society's freedom and who benefits from its existence. Kropotkin's classic essay, **The State: It's Historic Role** is recommended for further reading on this subject. Harold Barclay's **The State** is a good overview of the origins of the state, how it has changed over the millenniums and the nature of the modern state.

## B.2.1 What is main function of the state?

The main function of the state is to guarantee the existing social relationships and their sources within a given society through centralised power and a monopoly of violence. To use Malatesta's words, the state is basically *"the property owners' **gendarme.**"* This is because there are *"two ways of oppressing*

*men [and women]: either directly by brute force, by physical violence; or indirectly by denying them the means of life and thus reducing them to a state of surrender."* The owning class, *"gradually concentrating in their hands the means of production, the real sources of life, agriculture, industry, barter, etc., end up establishing their own power which, by reason of the superiority of its means ... always ends by more or less openly subjecting the political power, which is the government, and making it into its own* ***gendarme.****"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 23, p. 21 and p. 22]

The state, therefore, is *"the political expression of the economic structure"* of society and, therefore, *"the representative of the people who own or control the wealth of the community and the oppressor of the people who do the work which creates the wealth."* [Nicholas Walter, **About Anarchism**, p. 37] It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the state is the extractive apparatus of society's parasites.

The state ensures the exploitative privileges of its ruling elite by protecting certain economic monopolies from which its members derive their wealth. The nature of these economic privileges varies over time. Under the current system, this means defending capitalist property rights (see section B.3.2). This service is referred to as "protecting private property" and is said to be one of the two main functions of the state, the other being to ensure that individuals are "secure in their persons." However, although this second aim is professed, in reality most state laws and institutions are concerned with the protection of property (for the anarchist definition of "property" see section B.3.1).

From this we may infer that references to the "security of persons," "crime prevention," etc., are mostly rationalisations of the state's existence and smokescreens for its perpetuation of elite power and privileges. This does not mean that the state does not address these issues. Of course it does, but, to quote Kropotkin, any *"laws developed from the nucleus of customs useful to human communities ... have been turned to account by*



*by the power the policeman has over us on the street or that of the local judge behind him; by the authority of our employers; ... by the welfare bureaucrats if we are poor; ... by landlords if we are tenants."* Thus freedom and justice *"are determined by power and money"* rather than laws. This points to the importance of popular participation, of social movements, for what those do are *"to create a countervailing power to the policeman with a club and a gun. That's essentially what movements do: They create countervailing powers to counter the power which is much more important than what is written down in the Constitution or the laws."* [Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 84–5, pp. 54–5 and p. 79]

It is precisely this kind of mass participation that centralisation kills. Under centralism, social concern and power are taken away from ordinary citizens and centralised in the hands of the few. This results in any formally guaranteed liberties being effectively ignored when people want to use them, if the powers at be so decide. Ultimately, isolated individuals facing the might of a centralised state machine are in a weak position. Which is way the state does what it can to undermine such popular movements and organisations (going so far as to violate its own laws to do so).

As should be obvious, by centralisation anarchists do not mean simply a territorial centralisation of power in a specific central location (such as in a nation state where power rests in a central government located in a specific place). We also mean the centralisation of **power** into a few hands. Thus we can have a system like feudalism which is territorially decentralised (i.e. made up on numerous feudal lords without a strong central state) while having power centralised in a few hands locally (i.e. power rests in the hands of the feudal lords, not in the general population). Or, to use another example, we can have a laissez-faire capitalist system which has a weak central authority but is made up of a multitude of autocratic workplaces. As such, getting rid of the central power (say the central state in capitalism or the monarch in absolutism) while retaining the

This means that state centralism can become a serious source of danger to the liberty and well-being of most of the people under it. *"The bourgeois republicans,"* argued Bakunin, *"do not yet grasp this simple truth, demonstrated by the experience of all times and in all lands, that every organised power standing above and over the people necessarily excludes the freedom of peoples. The political state has no other purpose than to protect and perpetuate the exploitation of the labour of the proletariat by the economically dominant classes, and in so doing the state places itself against the freedom of the people."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 416]

Unsurprisingly, therefore, *"whatever progress that has been made ... on various issues, whatever things have been done for people, whatever human rights have been gained, have not been gained through the calm deliberations of Congress or the wisdom of presidents or the ingenious decisions of the Supreme Court. Whatever progress has been made ... has come because of the actions of ordinary people, of citizens, of social movements. Not from the Constitution."* That document has been happily ignored by the official of the state when it suits them. An obvious example is the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution, which *"didn't have any meaning until black people rose up in the 1950s and 1960s in the South in mass movements ... They made whatever words there were in the Constitution and the 14th Amendment have some meaning for the first time."* [Howard Zinn, **Failure to Quit**, p. 69 and p. 73]

This is because the *"fact that you have got a constitutional right doesn't mean you're going to get that right. Who has the power on the spot? The policeman on the street. The principal in the school. The employer on job. The Constitution does not cover private employment. In other words, the Constitution does not cover most of reality."* Thus our liberty is not determined by the laws of the state. Rather *"the source and solution of our civil liberties problems are in the situations of every day ... Our actual freedom is determined not by the Constitution or the Court, but*



*rulers to sanctify their own domination." of the people, and maintained only by the fear of punishment."* [**Anarchism**, p. 215]

Simply put, if the state *"presented nothing but a collection of prescriptions serviceable to rulers, it would find some difficulty in insuring acceptance and obedience"* and so the law reflects customs "essential to the very being of society" but these are *"cleverly intermingled with usages imposed by the ruling caste and both claim equal respect from the crowd."* Thus the state's laws have a *"two-fold character."* While its *"origin is the desire of the ruling class to give permanence to customs imposed by themselves for their own advantage"* it also passes into law *"customs useful to society, customs which have no need of law to insure respect"* — unlike those *"other customs useful only to rulers, injurious to the mass of the people, and maintained only by the fear of punishment."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 205–6] To use an obvious example, we find the state using the defence of an individual's possessions as the rationale for imposing capitalist private property rights upon the general public and, consequently, defending the elite and the source of its wealth and power against those subject to it.

Moreover, even though the state does take a secondary interest in protecting the security of persons (particularly elite persons), the vast majority of crimes against persons are motivated by poverty and alienation due to state-supported exploitation and also by the desensitisation to violence created by the state's own violent methods of protecting private property. In other words, the state rationalises its existence by pointing to the social evils it itself helps to create (either directly or indirectly). Hence, anarchists maintain that without the state and the crime-engendering conditions to which it gives rise, it would be possible for decentralised, voluntary community associations to deal compassionately (not punitively) with the few incorrigibly violent people who might remain (see section I.5.8).

Anarchists think it is pretty clear what the real role of the modern state is. It represents the essential coercive mechanisms by which capitalism and the authority relations associated with private property are sustained. The protection of property is fundamentally the means of assuring the social domination of owners over non-owners, both in society as a whole and in the particular case of a specific boss over a specific group of workers. Class domination is the authority of property owners over those who use that property and it is the primary function of the state to uphold that domination (and the social relationships that generate it). In Kropotkin's words, *"the rich perfectly well know that if the machinery of the State ceased to protect them, their power over the labouring classes would be gone immediately."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 98] Protecting private property and upholding class domination are the same thing.

The historian Charles Beard makes a similar point:

> *"Inasmuch as the primary object of a government, beyond mere repression of physical violence, is the making of the rules which determine the property relations of members of society, the dominant classes whose rights are thus to be protected must perforce obtain from the government such rules as are consonant with the larger interests necessary to the continuance of their economic processes, or they must themselves control the organs of government."* ["An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution," quoted by Howard Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89]

This role of the state — to protect capitalism and the property, power and authority of the property owner — was also noticed by Adam Smith:

> *"[T]he inequality of fortune ... introduces among men a degree of authority and subordination which*



ering the European Community (EC), for example, we find that the *"mechanism for decision-making between EC states leaves power in the hands of officials (from Interior ministries, police, immigration, customs and security services) through a myriad of working groups. Senior officials ... play a critical role in ensuring agreements between the different state officials. The EC Summit meetings, comprising the 12 Prime Ministers, simply rubberstamp the conclusions agreed by the Interior and Justice Ministers. It is only then, in this intergovernmental process, that parliaments and people are informed (and them only with the barest details)."* [Tony Bunyon, **Statewatching the New Europe**, p. 39]

As well as economic pressures from elites, governments also face pressures within the state itself due to the bureaucracy that comes with centralism. There is a difference between the state and government. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The government is made up of various politicians. It's the institutions that have power in the state due to their permanence, not the representatives who come and go. As Clive Ponting (an ex-civil servant himself) indicates, *"the function of a political system in any country ... is to regulate, but not to alter radically, the existing economic structure and its linked power relationships. The great illusion of politics is that politicians have the ability to make whatever changes they like."* [quoted in **Alternatives**, no.5, p. 19]

Therefore, as well as marginalising the people, the state also ends up marginalising "our" representatives. As power rests not in the elected bodies, but in a bureaucracy, popular control becomes increasingly meaningless. As Bakunin pointed out, *"liberty can be valid only when . .. [popular] control [of the state] is valid. On the contrary, where such control is fictitious, this freedom of the people likewise becomes a mere fiction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212] State centralisation ensures that popular control is meaningless.

cide among themselves the issues they consider important. Elections are not based on natural, decentralised groupings and thus cease to be relevant. The individual is just another "voter" in the mass, a political "constituent" and nothing more. The amorphous basis of modern, statist elections *"aims at nothing less than to abolish political life in towns, communes and departments, and through this destruction of all municipal and regional autonomy to arrest the development of universal suffrage."* [Proudhon, quoted by Martin Buber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29]

Thus people are disempowered by the very structures that claim to allow them to express themselves. To quote Proudhon again, in the centralised state *"the citizen divests himself of sovereignty, the town and the Department and province above it, absorbed by central authority, are no longer anything but agencies under direct ministerial control."* He continues:

> *"The Consequences soon make themselves felt: the citizen and the town are deprived of all dignity, the state's depredations multiply, and the burden on the taxpayer increases in proportion. It is no longer the government that is made for the people; it is the people who are made for the government. Power invades everything, dominates everything, absorbs everything."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 59]

As intended, as isolated people are no threat to the powers that be. This process of marginalisation can be seen from American history, for example, when town meetings were replaced by elected bodies, with the citizens being placed in passive, spectator roles as mere "voters" (see next section). Being an atomised voter is hardly an ideal notion of "freedom," despite the rhetoric of politicians about the virtues of a "free society" and "The Free World" — as if voting once every four or five years could ever be classed as "liberty" or even "democracy."

Marginalisation of the people is the key control mechanism in the state and authoritarian organisations in general. Consid-



> *could not possibly exist before. It thereby introduces some degree of that civil government which is indispensably necessary for its own preservation … [and] to maintain and secure that authority and subordination. The rich, in particular, are necessarily interested to support that order of things which can alone secure them in the possession of their own advantages. Men of inferior wealth combine to defend those of superior wealth in the possession of their property, in order that men of superior wealth may combine to defend them in the possession of theirs … [T]he maintenance of their lesser authority depends upon that of his greater authority, and that upon their subordination to him depends his power of keeping their inferiors in subordination to them. They constitute a sort of little nobility, who feel themselves interested to defend the property and to support the authority of their own little sovereign in order that he may be able to defend their property and to support their authority. Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, book 5, pp. 412–3]

This is reflected in both the theory and history of the modern state. Theorists of the liberal state like John Locke had no qualms about developing a theory of the state which placed the defence of private property at its heart. This perspective was reflected in the American Revolution. For example, there is the words of John Jay (the first chief justice of the Supreme Court), namely that *"the people who own the country ought to govern it."* [quoted by Noam Chomksy, **Understanding**

**Power**, p. 315] This was the maxim of the Founding Fathers of American *"democracy"* and it has continued ever since.

So, in a nutshell, the state is the means by which the ruling class rules. Hence Bakunin:

> *"The State is authority, domination, and force, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses .. . the State's domination ... [ensures] that of the privileged classes who it solely represents."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140]

Under the current system, this means that the state *"constitutes the chief bulwark of capital"* because of its *"centralisation, law (always written by a minority in the interest of that minority), and courts of justice (established mainly for the defence of authority and capital)."* Thus it is *"the mission of all governments ... is to protect and maintain by force the ... privileges of the possessing classes."* Consequently, while *"[i]n the struggle between the individual and the State, anarchism ... takes the side of the individual as against the State, of society against the authority which oppresses it,"* anarchists are well aware that the state does not exist above society, independent of the classes which make it up. [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, pp. 149–50, p. 214 and pp. 192–3]

Consequently anarchists reject the idea that the role of the state is simply to represent the interests of the people or "the nation." For *"democracy is an empty pretence to the extent that production, finance and commerce — and along with them, the political processes of the society as well — are under control of 'concentrations of private power.' The 'national interest' as articulated by those who dominate the ... societies will be their special interests. Under these circumstances, talk of 'national interest' can only contribute to mystification and oppression."* [Noam Chomsky, **Radical Priorities**, p. 52] As we discuss in section D.6, nationalism always reflects the interests of the elite, not those



> *they have no guarantee that it will be carried out as they desired. They are abdicating to these persons, granting them the right to impose their own wills by the threat of force. Electing individuals to public office is like being given a limited choice of your oppressors ... Parliamentary democracies are essentially oligarchies in which the populace is led to believe that it delegates all its authority to members of parliament to do as they think best."* [Harold Barclay, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 46–7]

The nature of centralisation places power into the hands of the few. Representative democracy is based on this delegation of power, with voters electing others to govern them. This cannot help but create a situation in which freedom is endangered — universal suffrage *"does not prevent the formation of a body of politicians, privileged in fact though not in law, who, devoting themselves exclusively to the administration of the nation's public affairs, end by becoming a sort of political aristocracy or oligarchy."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 240]

This should not come as a surprise, for to *"create a state is to institutionalise power in a form of machine that exists **apart** from the people. It is to professionalise rule and policy making, to create a distinct interest (be it of bureaucrats, deputies, commissars, legislators, the military, the police, ad nauseam) that, however weak or however well-intentioned it may be at first, eventually takes on a corruptive power of its own."* [Murray Bookchin, *"The Ecological Crisis, Socialism, and the need to remake society,"* pp. 1–10, **Society and Nature**, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 7]

Centralism makes democracy meaningless, as political decision-making is given over to professional politicians in remote capitals. Lacking local autonomy, people are isolated from each other (atomised) by having no political forum where they can come together to discuss, debate, and de-

nore the opinions of the majority while, at the same time, verbally praising the "democracy" it is abusing (New Labour in the UK during the run up to the invasion of Iraq was a classic example of this). Given that politicians can do what they like for four or five years once elected, it is clear that popular control via the ballot box is hardly effective or even meaningful.

Indeed, such "democracy" almost always means electing politicians who say one thing in opposition and do the opposite once in office. Politicians who, at best, ignore their election manifesto when it suits them or, at worse, introduce the exact opposite. It is the kind of "democracy" in which people can protest in their hundreds of thousands against a policy only to see their "representative" government simply ignore them (while, at the same time, seeing their representatives bend over backward ensuring corporate profits and power while speaking platitudes to the electorate and their need to tighten their belts). At best it can be said that democratic governments tend to be less oppressive than others but it does not follow that this equates to liberty.

State centralisation is the means to ensure this situation and the debasement of freedom it implies.

All forms of hierarchy, even those in which the top officers are elected are marked by authoritarianism and centralism. Power is concentrated in the centre (or at the top), which means that society becomes *"a heap of dust animated from without by a subordinating, centralist idea."* [P. J. Proudhon, quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 29] For, once elected, top officers can do as they please, and, as in all bureaucracies, many important decisions are made by non-elected staff. This means that the democratic state is a contradiction in terms:

> *"In the democratic state the election of rulers by alleged majority vote is a subterfuge which helps individuals to believe that they control the situation. They are selecting persons to do a task for them and*



who make up a nation and, consequently, anarchists reject the notion as nothing more than a con (i.e. the use of affection of where you live to further ruling class aims and power).

Indeed, part of the state's role as defender of the ruling elite is to do so internationally, defending "national" (i.e. elite) interests against the elites of other nations. Thus we find that at the IMF and World Bank, nations are represented by ministers who are *"closely aligned with particular constituents **within** their countries. The trade ministers reflect the concerns of the business community"* while the *"finance ministers and central bank governors are closely tied to financial community; they come from financial firms, and after their period in service, that is where they return ... These individuals see the world through the eyes of the financial community."* Unsurprisingly, the *"decisions of any institution naturally reflect the perspectives and interests of those who make the decisions"* and so the *"policies of the international economic institutions are all too often closely aligned with the commercial and financial interests of those in the advanced industrial countries."* [Joseph Stiglitz, **Globalisation and its Discontents**, pp. 19–20]

This, it must be stressed, does not change in the so-called democratic state. Here, however, the primary function of the state is disguised by the "democratic" facade of the representative electoral system, through which it is made to appear that the people rule themselves. Thus Bakunin writes that the modern state *"unites in itself the two conditions necessary for the prosperity of the capitalistic economy: State centralisation and the actual subjection of ... the people ... to the minority allegedly representing it but actually governing it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210] How this is achieved is discussed in section B.2.3.

## B.2.2 Does the state have subsidiary functions?

Yes, it does. While, as discussed in the last section, the state is an instrument to maintain class rule this does not mean that it is limited to just defending the social relationships in a society and the economic and political sources of those relationships. No state has ever left its activities at that bare minimum. As well as defending the rich, their property and the specific forms of property rights they favoured, the state has numerous other subsidiary functions.

What these are has varied considerably over time and space and, consequently, it would be impossible to list them all. However, **why** it does is more straight forward. We can generalise two main forms of subsidiary functions of the state. The first one is to boost the interests of the ruling elite either nationally or internationally beyond just defending their property. The second is to protect society against the negative effects of the capitalist market. We will discuss each in turn and, for simplicity and relevance, we will concentrate on capitalism (see also section D.1).

The first main subsidiary function of the state is when it intervenes in society to help the capitalist class in some way. This can take obvious forms of intervention, such as subsidies, tax breaks, non-bid government contracts, protective tariffs to old, inefficient, industries, giving actual monopolies to certain firms or individuals, bailouts of corporations judged by state bureaucrats as too important to let fail, and so on. However, the state intervenes far more than that and in more subtle ways. Usually it does so to solve problems that arise in the course of capitalist development and which cannot, in general, be left to the market (at least initially). These are designed to benefit the capitalist class as a whole rather than just specific individuals, companies or sectors.



## B.2.4 How does state centralisation affect freedom?

It is a common idea that voting every four or so years to elect the public face of a highly centralised and bureaucratic machine means that ordinary people control the state and, as a consequence, free. In reality, this is a false idea. In any system of centralised power the general population have little say in what affects them and, as a result, their freedom is extremely limited.

Obviously, to say that this idea is false does not imply that there is no difference between a liberal republic and a fascistic or monarchical state. Far from it. The vote is an important victory wrested from the powers that be. That, of course, is not to suggest that anarchists think that libertarian socialism is only possible after universal suffrage has been won or that it is achievable via it. Far from it. It is simply to point out that being able to pick your ruler is a step forward from having one imposed upon you. Moreover, those considered able to pick their ruler is, logically, also able to do without one.

However, while the people are proclaimed to be sovereign in a democratic state, in reality they alienate their power and hand over control of their affairs to a small minority. Liberty, in other words, is reduced to merely the possibility *"to pick rulers"* every four or five years and whose mandate (sic!) is *"to legislate on any subject, and his decision will become law."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 122 and p. 123]

In other words, representative democracy is not "liberty" nor "self-government." It is about alienating power to a few people who then (mis)rule in your name. To imply it is anything else is nonsense. So while we get to pick a politician to govern in our name it does not follow that they represent those who voted for them in any meaningful sense. As shown time and time again, "representative" governments can happily ig-

cal process — and hence the state — through the *"power of the purse."* In summary:

> *"No democracy has freed itself from the rule by the well-to-do anymore than it has freed itself from the division between the ruler and the ruled ... at the very least, no democracy has jeopardised the role of business enterprise. Only the wealthy and well off can afford to launch viable campaigns for public office and to assume such positions. Change in government in a democracy is a circulation from one elite group to another."* [Harold Barclay, **Op. Cit.**, p. 47]

In other words, elite control of politics through huge wealth disparities insures the continuation of such disparities and thus the continuation of elite control. In this way the crucial political decisions of those at the top are insulated from significant influence by those at the bottom. Finally, it should be noted that these barriers do not arise accidentally. They flow from the way the state is structured. By effectively disempowering the masses and centralising power into the hands of the few which make up the government, the very nature of the state ensures that it remains under elite control. This is why, from the start, the capitalist class has favoured centralisation. We discuss this in the next two sections.

(For more on the ruling elite and its relation to the state, see C. Wright Mills, **The Power Elite** [Oxford, 1956]; cf. Ralph Miliband, **The State in Capitalist Society** [Basic Books, 1969] and **Divided Societies** [Oxford, 1989]; G. William Domhoff, **Who Rules America?** [Prentice Hall, 1967]; and **Who Rules America Now? A View for the '80s** [Touchstone, 1983]).<.p>



These interventions have taken different forms in different times and include state funding for industry (e.g. military spending); the creation of social infrastructure too expensive for private capital to provide (railways, motorways); the funding of research that companies cannot afford to undertake; protective tariffs to protect developing industries from more efficient international competition (the key to successful industrialisation as it allows capitalists to rip-off consumers, making them rich and increasing funds available for investment); giving capitalists preferential access to land and other natural resources; providing education to the general public that ensures they have the skills and attitude required by capitalists and the state (it is no accident that a key thing learned in school is how to survive boredom, being in a hierarchy and to do what it orders); imperialist ventures to create colonies or client states (or protect citizen's capital invested abroad) in order to create markets or get access to raw materials and cheap labour; government spending to stimulate consumer demand in the face of recession and stagnation; maintaining a "natural" level of unemployment that can be used to discipline the working class, so ensuring they produce more, for less; manipulating the interest rate in order to try and reduce the effects of the business cycle and undermine workers' gains in the class struggle.

These actions, and others like it, ensures that a key role of the state within capitalism *"is essentially to socialise risk and cost, and to privatise power and profit."* Unsurprisingly, *"with all the talk about minimising the state, in the OECD countries the state continues to grow relative to GNP."* [Noam Chomsky, **Rogue States**, p. 189] Hence David Deleon:

> *"Above all, the state remains an institution for the continuance of dominant socioeconomic relations, whether through such agencies as the military, the courts, politics or the police ... Contemporary states have acquired ... less primitive means to reinforce*

> *their property systems [than state violence — which is always the means of last, often first, resort]. States can regulate, moderate or resolve tensions in the economy by preventing the bankruptcies of key corporations, manipulating the economy through interest rates, supporting hierarchical ideology through tax benefits for churches and schools, and other tactics. In essence, it is not a neutral institution; it is powerfully for the status quo. The capitalist state, for example, is virtually a gyroscope centred in capital, balancing the system. If one sector of the economy earns a level of profit, let us say, that harms the rest of the system — such as oil producers' causing public resentment and increased manufacturing costs — the state may redistribute some of that profit through taxation, or offer encouragement to competitors."* [*"Anarchism on the origins and functions of the state: some basic notes"*, **Reinventing Anarchy**, pp. 71–72]

In other words, the state acts to protect the long-term interests of the capitalist class as a whole (and ensure its own survival) by protecting the system. This role can and does clash with the interests of particular capitalists or even whole sections of the ruling class (see section B.2.6). But this conflict does not change the role of the state as the property owners' policeman. Indeed, the state can be considered as a means for settling (in a peaceful and apparently independent manner) upper-class disputes over what to do to keep the system going.

This subsidiary role, it must be stressed, is no accident, It is part and parcel capitalism. Indeed, *"successful industrial societies have consistently relied on departures from market orthodoxies, while condemning their victims [at home and abroad] to market discipline."* [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 113] While such state intervention grew greatly after



> *"Even with universal suffrage — we could well say even more so with universal suffrage — the government remained the bourgeoisie's servant and **gendarme.** For were it to be otherwise with the government hinting that it might take up a hostile attitude, or that democracy could ever be anything but a pretence to deceive the people, the bourgeoisie, feeling its interests threatened, would by quick to react, and would use all the influence and force at its disposal, by reason of its wealth, to recall the government to its proper place as the bourgeoisie's **gendarme.**"* [**Anarchy**, p. 23]

It is due to these barriers that the state remains an instrument of the capitalist class while being, in theory, a democracy. Thus the state machine remains a tool by which the few can enrich themselves at the expense of the many. This does not mean, of course, that the state is immune to popular pressure. Far from it. As indicated in the last section, direct action by the oppressed can and has forced the state to implement significant reforms. Similarly, the need to defend society against the negative effects of unregulated capitalism can also force through populist measures (particularly when the alternative may be worse than the allowing the reforms, i.e. revolution). The key is that such changes are **not** the natural function of the state.

So due to their economic assets, the elites whose incomes are derived from them — namely, finance capitalists, industrial capitalists, and landlords — are able to accumulate vast wealth from those whom they exploit. This stratifies society into a hierarchy of economic classes, with a huge disparity of wealth between the small property-owning elite at the top and the non-property-owning majority at the bottom. Then, because it takes enormous wealth to win elections and lobby or bribe legislators, the propertied elite are able to control the politi-

the power of the richest 1–5% of a countries population (and their finance experts), power derived from their control over investment and production. Given that the bottom 90% of the US population has a smaller share (23%) of all kinds of investable capital that the richest 1/2% (who own 29%), with stock ownership being even more concentrated (the top 5% holding 95% of all shares), its obvious why Doug Henwood argues that stock markets are *"a way for the very rich as a class to own an economy's productive capital stock as a whole,"* are a source of *"political power"* and a way to have influence over government policy. [**Wall Street: Class Racket**]

The mechanism is simple enough. The ability of capital to disinvest (capital flight) and otherwise adversely impact the economy is a powerful weapon to keep the state as its servant. The companies and the elite can invest at home or abroad, speculate in currency markets and so forth. If a significant number of investors or corporations lose confidence in a government they will simply stop investing at home and move their funds abroad. At home, the general population feel the results as demand drops, layoffs increase and recession kicks in. As Noam Chomsky notes:

> *"In capitalist democracy, the interests that must be satisfied are those of capitalists; otherwise, there is no investment, no production, no work, no resources to be devoted, however marginally, to the needs of the general population."* [**Turning the Tide**, p. 233]

This ensures the elite control of government as government policies which private power finds unwelcome will quickly be reversed. The power which "business confidence" has over the political system ensures that democracy is subservient to big business. As summarised by Malatesta:



the Second World War, the role of the state as active promoter of the capitalist class rather than just its passive defender as implied in capitalist ideology (i.e. as defender of property) has always been a feature of the system. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"every State reduces the peasants and the industrial workers to a life of misery, by means of taxes, and through the monopolies it creates in favour of the landlords, the cotton lords, the railway magnates, the publicans, and the like ... we need only to look round, to see how everywhere in Europe and America the States are constituting monopolies in favour of capitalists at home, and still more in conquered lands [which are part of their empires]."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 97]

By *"monopolies,"* it should be noted, Kropotkin meant general privileges and benefits rather than giving a certain firm total control over a market. This continues to this day by such means as, for example, privatising industries but providing them with state subsidies or by (mis-labelled) "free trade" agreements which impose protectionist measures such as intellectual property rights on the world market.

All this means that capitalism has rarely relied on purely economic power to keep the capitalists in their social position of dominance (either nationally, vis-à-vis the working class, or internationally, vis-à-vis competing foreign elites). While a "free market" capitalist regime in which the state reduces its intervention to simply protecting capitalist property rights has been approximated on a few occasions, this is not the standard state of the system — direct force, i.e. state action, almost always supplements it.

This is most obviously the case during the birth of capitalist production. Then the bourgeoisie wants and uses the power of the state to "regulate" wages (i.e. to keep them down to such

levels as to maximise profits and force people attend work regularly), to lengthen the working day and to keep the labourer dependent on wage labour as their own means of income (by such means as enclosing land, enforcing property rights on unoccupied land, and so forth). As capitalism is not and has never been a "natural" development in society, it is not surprising that more and more state intervention is required to keep it going (and if even this was not the case, if force was essential to creating the system in the first place, the fact that it latter can survive without further direct intervention does not make the system any less statist). As such, "regulation" and other forms of state intervention continue to be used in order to skew the market in favour of the rich and so force working people to sell their labour on the bosses terms.

This form of state intervention is designed to prevent those greater evils which might threaten the efficiency of a capitalist economy or the social and economic position of the bosses. It is designed not to provide positive benefits for those subject to the elite (although this may be a side-effect). Which brings us to the other kind of state intervention, the attempts by society, by means of the state, to protect itself against the eroding effects of the capitalist market system.

Capitalism is an inherently anti-social system. By trying to treat labour (people) and land (the environment) as commodities, it has to break down communities and weaken ecosystems. This cannot but harm those subject to it and, as a consequence, this leads to pressure on government to intervene to mitigate the most damaging effects of unrestrained capitalism. Therefore, on one side there is the historical movement of the market, a movement that has not inherent limit and that therefore threatens society's very existence. On the other there is society's natural propensity to defend itself, and therefore to create institutions for its protection. Combine this with a desire for justice on behalf of the oppressed along with opposition to the worse inequalities and abuses of power and wealth and we



mation and pushing its own agenda onto the politicians who are in theory their bosses but in reality dependent on the bureaucracy. And, needless to say, if all else fails the state bureaucracy can play its final hand: the military coup.

This threat has been applied in many countries, most obviously in the developing world (with the aid of Western, usually US, imperialism). The coups in Iran (1953) and Chile (1973) are just two examples of this process. Yet the so-called developed world is not immune to it. The rise of fascism in Italy, Germany, Portugal and Spain can be considered as variations of a military coup (particularly the last one where fascism was imposed by the military). Wealthy business men funded para-military forces to break the back of the labour movement, forces formed by ex-military people. Even the New Deal in America was threatened by such a coup. [Joel Bakan, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 86–95] While such regimes do protect the interests of capital and are, consequently, backed by it, they do hold problems for capitalism. This is because, as with the Absolutism which fostered capitalism in the first place, this kind of government can get ideas above its station This means that a military coup will only be used when the last barrier, the capital barrier, is used and fails.

The capital barrier is obviously related to the wealth barrier insofar as it relates to the power that great wealth produces. However, it is different in how it is applied. The wealth barrier restricts who gets into office, the capital barrier controls whoever does so. The capital barrier, in other words, are the economic forces that can be brought to bear on any government which is acting in ways disliked of by the capitalist class.

We see their power implied when the news report that changes in government, policies and law have been *"welcomed by the markets."* As the richest 1% of households in America (about 2 million adults) owned 35% of the stock owned by individuals in 1992 — with the top 10% owning over 81% — we can see that the *"opinion"* of the markets actually means

> *"The business class dominates government through its ability to fund political campaigns, purchase high priced lobbyists and reward former officials with lucrative jobs ... [Politicians] have become wholly dependent upon the same corporate dollars to pay for a new professional class of PR consultants, marketeers and social scientists who manage and promote causes and candidates in essentially the same manner that advertising campaigns sell cars, fashions, drugs and other wares."* [John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, **Toxic Sludge is Good for You**, p. 78]

That is the first barrier, the direct and indirect impact of wealth. This, in itself, is a powerful barrier to deter democracy and, as a consequence, it is usually sufficient in itself. Yet sometimes people see through the media distortions and vote for reformist, even radical, candidates. As we discuss in section J.2.6, anarchists argue that the net effect of running for office is a general **de**-radicalising of the party involved. Revolutionary parties become reformist, reformist parties end up maintaining capitalism and introducing polities the opposite of which they had promised. So while it is unlikely that a radical party could get elected and remain radical in the process, it is possible. If such a party did get into office, the remaining two barriers kicks in: the bureaucracy barrier and the capital barrier.

The existence of a state bureaucracy is a key feature in ensuring that the state remains the ruling class's *"policeman"* and will be discussed in greater detail in section J.2.2 (Why do anarchists reject voting as a means for change?). Suffice to say, the politicians who are elected to office are at a disadvantage as regards the state bureaucracy. The latter is a permanent concentration of power while the former come and go. Consequently, they are in a position to tame any rebel government by means of bureaucratic inertia, distorting and hiding necessary infor-



have the potential for the state to act to combat the worse excesses of the system in order to keep the system as a whole going. After all, the government *"cannot want society to break up, for it would mean that it and the dominant class would be deprived of the sources of exploitation."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

Needless to say, the thrust for any system of social protection usually comes from below, from the people most directly affected by the negative effects of capitalism. In the face of mass protests the state may be used to grant concessions to the working class in cases where not doing so would threaten the integrity of the system as a whole. Thus, social struggle is the dynamic for understanding many, if not all, of the subsidiary functions acquired by the state over the years (this applies to pro-capitalist functions as these are usually driven by the need to bolster the profits and power of capitalists at the expense of the working class).

State legislation to set the length of the working day is an obvious example this. In the early period of capitalist development, the economic position of the capitalists was secure and, consequently, the state happily ignored the lengthening working day, thus allowing capitalists to appropriate more surplus value from workers and increase the rate of profit without interference. Whatever protests erupted were handled by troops. Later, however, after workers began to organise on a wider and wider scale, reducing the length of the working day became a key demand around which revolutionary socialist fervour was developing. In order to defuse this threat (and socialist revolution is the worst-case scenario for the capitalist), the state passed legislation to reduce the length of the working day.

Initially, the state was functioning purely as the protector of the capitalist class, using its powers simply to defend the property of the few against the many who used it (i.e. repressing the labour movement to allow the capitalists to do as they liked). In the second period, the state was granting concessions

to the working class to eliminate a threat to the integrity of the system as a whole. Needless to say, once workers' struggle calmed down and their bargaining position reduced by the normal workings of market (see section B.4.3), the legislation restricting the working day was happily ignored and became "dead laws."

This suggests that there is a continuing tension and conflict between the efforts to establish, maintain, and spread the "free market" and the efforts to protect people and society from the consequences of its workings. Who wins this conflict depends on the relative strength of those involved (as does the actual reforms agreed to). Ultimately, what the state concedes, it can also take back. Thus the rise and fall of the welfare state — granted to stop more revolutionary change (see section D.1.3), it did not fundamentally challenge the existence of wage labour and was useful as a means of regulating capitalism but was "reformed" (i.e. made worse, rather than better) when it conflicted with the needs of the capitalist economy and the ruling elite felt strong enough to do so.

Of course, this form of state intervention does not change the nature nor role of the state as an instrument of minority power. Indeed, that nature cannot help but shape how the state tries to implement social protection and so if the state assumes functions it does so as much in the immediate interest of the capitalist class as in the interest of society in general. Even where it takes action under pressure from the general population or to try and mend the harm done by the capitalist market, its class and hierarchical character twists the results in ways useful primarily to the capitalist class or itself. This can be seen from how labour legislation is applied, for example. Thus even the "good" functions of the state are penetrated with and dominated by the state's hierarchical nature. As Malatesta forcefully put it:



That is not all. The wealth barrier operates indirectly to. This takes many forms. The most obvious is in the ability of corporations and the elite to lobby politicians. In the US, there is the pervasive power of Washington's army of 24,000 registered lobbyists — and the influence of the corporate interests they represent. These lobbyists, whose job it is to convince politicians to vote in certain ways to further the interests of their corporate clients help shape the political agenda even further toward business interests than it already is. This Lobby industry is immense — and exclusively for big business and the elite. Wealth ensures that the equal opportunity to garner resources to share a perspective and influence the political progress is monopolised by the few: *"where are the desperately needed countervailing lobbies to represent the interests of average citizens? Where are the millions of dollars acting in **their** interests? Alas, they are notably absent."* [Joel Bakan, **The Corporation**, p. 107]

However, it cannot be denied that it is up to the general population to vote for politicians. This is when the indirect impact of wealth kicks in, namely the role of the media and the Public Relations (PR) industry. As we discuss in section D.3, the modern media is dominated by big business and, unsurprisingly, reflects their interests. This means that the media has an important impact on how voters see parties and specific politicians and candidates. A radical party will, at best, be ignored by the capitalist press or, at worse, subject to smears and attacks. This will have a corresponding negative impact on their election prospects and will involve the affected party having to invest substantially more time, energy and resources in countering the negative media coverage. The PR industry has a similar effect, although that has the advantage of not having to bother with appearing to look factual or unbiased. Add to this the impact of elite and corporation funded *"think tanks"* and the political system is fatally skewed in favour of the capitalist class (also see section D.2).

In a nutshell:

are paid more than twice the national average) and politicians can be among the richest 1% of the population. Thus not only do we have a sharing of common interests the elite, the politicians are part of it. As such, they can hardly be said to be representative of the general public and are in a position of having a vested interest in legislation on property being voted on.

Some defend these second jobs and outside investments by saying that it keeps them in touch with the outside world and, consequently, makes them better politicians. That such an argument is spurious can be seen from the fact that such outside interests never involve working in McDonald's flipping burgers or working on an assembly line. For some reason, no politician seeks to get a feeling for what life is like for the average person. Yet, in a sense, this argument **does** have a point. Such jobs and income do keep politicians in touch with the world of the elite rather than that of the masses and, as the task of the state is to protect elite interests, it cannot be denied that this sharing of interests and income with the elite can only aid that task!

Then there is the sad process by which politicians, once they leave politics, get jobs in the corporate hierarchy (particularly with the very companies they had previously claimed to regulate on behalf of the public). This was termed "the revolving door." Incredibly, this has changed for the worse. Now the highest of government officials arrive directly from the executive offices of powerful corporations. Lobbyists are appointed to the jobs whose occupants they once vied to influence. Those who regulate and those supposed to be regulated have become almost indistinguishable.

Thus politicians and capitalists go hand in hand. Wealth selects them, funds them and gives them jobs and income when in office. Finally, once they finally leave politics, they are often given directorships and other jobs in the business world. Little wonder, then, that the capitalist class maintains control of the state.



> *"The basic function of government ... is always that of oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters ... It is true that to these basic functions ... other functions have been added in the course of history ... hardly ever has a government existed ... which did not combine with its oppressive and plundering activities others which were useful ... to social life. But this does not detract from the fact that government is by nature oppressive ... and that it is in origin and by its attitude, inevitably inclined to defend and strengthen the dominant class; indeed it confirms and aggravates the position ... [I]t is enough to understand how and why it carries out these functions to find the practical evidence that whatever governments do is always motivated by the desire to dominate, and is always geared to defending, extending and perpetuating its privileges and those of the class of which it is both the representative and defender."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 23–4]

This does not mean that these reforms should be abolished (the alternative is often worse, as neo-liberalism shows), it simply recognises that the state is not a neutral body and cannot be expected to act as if it were. Which, ironically, indicates another aspect of social protection reforms within capitalism: they make for good PR. By appearing to care for the interests of those harmed by capitalism, the state can obscure it real nature:

> *"A government cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness; it cannot impose respect for the lives of the privileged if it does not appear to demand respect for all human life; it cannot impose acceptance*

> *of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

Obviously, being an instrument of the ruling elite, the state can hardly be relied upon to control the system which that elite run. As we discuss in the next section, even in a democracy the state is run and controlled by the wealthy making it unlikely that pro-people legislation will be introduced or enforced without substantial popular pressure. That is why anarchists favour direct action and extra-parliamentary organising (see sections J.2 and J.5 for details). Ultimately, even basic civil liberties and rights are the product of direct action, of *"mass movements among the people"* to *"wrest these rights from the ruling classes, who would never have consented to them voluntarily."* [Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 75]

Equally obviously, the ruling elite and its defenders hate any legislation it does not favour — while, of course, remaining silent on its own use of the state. As Benjamin Tucker pointed out about the "free market" capitalist Herbert Spencer, *"amid his multitudinous illustrations ... of the evils of legislation, he in every instance cites some law passed ostensibly at least to protect labour, alleviating suffering, or promote the people's welfare... But never once does he call attention to the far more deadly and deep-seated evils growing out of the innumerable laws creating privilege and sustaining monopoly."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 45] Such hypocrisy is staggering, but all too common in the ranks of supporters of "free market" capitalism.

Finally, it must be stressed that none of these subsidiary functions implies that capitalism can be changed through a series of piecemeal reforms into a benevolent system that primarily serves working class interests. To the contrary, these functions grow out of, and supplement, the basic role of the state as the protector of capitalist property and the social relations they generate — i.e. the foundation of the capitalist's ability to



noose on bankrupt people in 2005. By funding Bush, these corporations ensured that the government furthered their interests rather than the people who voted in the election.

This means that as a *"consequence of the distribution of resources and decision-making power in the society at large ... the political class and the cultural managers typically associate themselves with the sectors that dominate the private economy; they are either drawn directly from those sectors or expect to join them."* [Chomsky, **Necessary Illusions**, p. 23] This can be seen from George W. Bush's quip at an elite fund-raising gala during the 2000 Presidential election: *"This is an impressive crowd — the haves and the have-mores. Some people call you the elites; I call you my base."* Unsurprisingly:

> *"In the real world, state policy is largely determined by those groups that command resources, ultimately by virtue of their ownership and management of the private economy or their status as wealthy professionals. The major decision-making positions in the Executive branch of the government are typically filled by representatives of major corporations, banks and investment firms, a few law firms that cater primarily to corporate interests and thus represent the broad interests of owners and managers rather than some parochial interest .. . The Legislative branch is more varied, but overwhelmingly, it is drawn from the business and professional classes."* [Chomsky, **On Power and Ideology**, pp. 116–7]

That is not the only tie between politics and business. Many politicians also have directorships in companies, interests in companies, shares, land and other forms of property income and so forth. Thus they are less like the majority of constituents they claim to represent and more like the wealthy few. Combine these outside earnings with a high salary (in the UK, MP's

exploit. Therefore reforms may modify the functioning of capitalism but they can never threaten its basis.

In summary, while the level and nature of statist intervention on behalf of the employing classes may vary, it is always there. No matter what activity it conducts beyond its primary function of protecting private property, what subsidiary functions it takes on, the state always operates as an instrument of the ruling class. This applies even to those subsidiary functions which have been imposed on the state by the general public — even the most popular reform will be twisted to benefit the state or capital, if at all possible. This is not to dismiss all attempts at reform as irrelevant, it simply means recognising that we, the oppressed, need to rely on our own strength and organisations to improve our circumstances.

## B.2.3 How does the ruling class maintain control of the state?

In some systems, it is obvious how economic dominant minorities control the state. In feudalism, for example, the land was owned by the feudal lords who exploited the peasantry directly. Economic and political power were merged into the same set of hands, the landlords. Absolutism saw the monarch bring the feudal lords under his power and the relative decentralised nature of feudalism was replaced by a centralised state.

It was this centralised state system which the raising bourgeoisie took as the model for their state. The King was replaced by a Parliament, which was initially elected on a limited suffrage. In this initial form of capitalist state, it is (again) obvious how the elite maintain control of the state machine. As the vote was based on having a minimum amount of property, the poor were effectively barred from having any (official) say in what the government did. This exclusion was theorised by philosophers like John Locke — the working masses were considered



similarly prohibitive amounts were spent. In the 2001 general election the Labour Party spent a total of £10,945,119, the Tories £12,751,813 and the Liberal Democrats (who came a distant third) just £1,361,377.

To get this sort of money, wealthy contributors need to be found and wooed, in other words promised that that their interests will be actively looked after. While, in theory, it is possible to raise large sums from small contributions in practice this is difficult. To raise $1 million you need to either convince 50 millionaires to give you $20,000 or 20,000 people to fork out $50. Given that for the elite $20,000 is pocket money, it is hardly surprising that politicians aim for winning over the few, not the many. Similarly with corporations and big business. It is far easier and more efficient in time and energy to concentrate on the wealthy few (whether individuals or companies).

It is obvious: whoever pays the piper calls the tune. And in capitalism, this means the wealthy and business. In the US corporate campaign donations and policy paybacks have reached unprecedented proportions. The vast majority of large campaign donations are, not surprisingly, from corporations. Most of the wealthy individuals who give large donations to the candidates are CEOs and corporate board members. And, just to be sure, many companies give to more than one party.

Unsurprisingly, corporations and the rich expect their investments to get a return. This can be seen from George W. Bush's administration. His election campaigns were beholden to the energy industry (which has backed him since the beginning of his career as Governor of Texas). The disgraced corporation Enron (and its CEO Kenneth Lay) were among Bush's largest contributors in 2000. Once in power, Bush backed numerous policies favourable to that industry (such as rolling back environmental regulation on a national level as he had done in Texas). His supporters in Wall Street were not surprised that Bush tried to privatise Social Security. Nor were the credit card companies when the Republicans tighten the

to be an object of state policy rather than part of the body of people (property owners) who nominated the government. In this perspective the state was like a joint-stock company. The owning class were the share-holders who nominated the broad of directors and the mass of the population were the workers who had no say in determining the management personnel and were expected to follow orders.

As would be expected, this system was mightily disliked by the majority who were subjected to it. Such a "classical liberal" regime was rule by an alien, despotic power, lacking popular legitimacy, and utterly unaccountable to the general population. It is quite evident that a government elected on a limited franchise could not be trusted to treat those who owned no real property with equal consideration. It was predictable that the ruling elite would use the state they controlled to further their own interests and to weaken potential resistance to their social, economic and political power. Which is precisely what they did do, while masking their power under the guise of "good governance" and "liberty." Moreover, limited suffrage, like absolutism, was considered an affront to liberty and individual dignity by many of those subject to it.

Hence the call for universal suffrage and opposition to property qualifications for the franchise. For many radicals (including Marx and Engels) such a system would mean that the working classes would hold *"political power"* and, consequently, be in a position to end the class system once and for all. Anarchists were not convinced, arguing that *"universal suffrage, considered in itself and applied in a society based on economic and social inequality, will be nothing but a swindle and snare for the people"* and *"the surest way to consolidate under the mantle of liberalism and justice the permanent domination of the people by the owning classes, to the detriment of popular liberty."* Consequently, anarchists denied that it *"could be used by the people for the conquest of economic and social equality. It must always and necessarily be an instrument hostile to the people, one which*



*supports the **de facto** dictatorship of the bourgeoisie."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 224]

Due to popular mass movements form below, the vote was won by the male working classes and, at a later stage, women. While the elite fought long and hard to retain their privileged position they were defeated. Sadly, the history of universal suffrage proven the anarchists right. Even allegedly *"democratic"* capitalist states are in effect dictatorships of the propertariat. The political history of modern times can be summarised by the rise of capitalist power, the rise, due to popular movements, of (representative) democracy and the continued success of the former to undermine and control the latter.

This is achieved by three main processes which combine to effectively deter democracy. These are the wealth barrier, the bureaucracy barrier and, lastly, the capital barrier. Each will be discussed in turn and all ensure that *"representative democracy"* remains an *"organ of capitalist domination."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 127]

The wealth barrier is the most obvious. It takes money to run for office. In 1976, the total spent on the US Presidential election was $66.9 million. In 1984, it was $103.6 million and in 1996 it was $239.9 million. At the dawn of the 21st century, these figures had increased yet again. 2000 saw $343.1 spent and 2004, $717.9 million. Most of this money was spent by the two main candidates. In 2000, Republican George Bush spent a massive $185,921,855 while his Democratic rival Al Gore spent only $120,031,205. Four years later, Bush spent $345,259,155 while John Kerry managed a mere $310,033,347.

Other election campaigns are also enormously expensive. In 2000, the average winning candidate for a seat in the US House of Representatives spent $816,000 while the average willing senator spent $7 million. Even local races require significant amounts of fundraising. One candidate for the Illinois House raised over $650,000 while another candidate for the Illinois Supreme Court raised $737,000. In the UK,

it!" and does not address the issue at hand. The vast majority of the population cannot avoid wage labour and remain wage workers for most of their adult lives. It is virtually impossible to distinguish being able to sell your liberty/labour piecemeal over a lifetime from alienating your whole lifetime's labour at one go. Changing who you alienate your labour/liberty to does not change the act and experience of alienation.

Thus the paradox of self-ownership. It presupposes autonomy only in order to deny it. In order to enter a contract, the worker exercises autonomy in deciding whether it is advantageous to rent or sell his or her property (their labour power) for use by another (and given that the alternative is, at best, poverty unsurprisingly people do consider it "advantageous" to "consent" to the contract). Yet what is rented or sold is **not** a piece of property but rather a self-governing individual. Once the contract is made and the property rights are transferred, they no longer have autonomy and are treated like any other factor of production or commodity.

In the "self-ownership" thesis this is acceptable due to its assumption that people and their labour power are property. Yet the worker cannot send along their labour by itself to an employer. By its very nature, the worker has to be present in the workplace if this "property" is to be put to use by the person who has bought it. The consequence of contracting out your labour (your property in the person) is that your autonomy (liberty) is restricted, if not destroyed, depending on the circumstances of the particular contract signed. This is because employers hire people, not a piece of property.

So far from being based on the "right to self-ownership," then, capitalism effectively denies it, alienating the individual from such basic rights as free speech, independent thought, and self-management of one's own activity, which individuals have to **give up** when they are employed. But since these rights, according to Rothbard, are the products of humans **as** humans, wage labour alienates them from themselves, exactly as it does



the new state created by the Russian Revolution soon became a power over the class it claimed to represent (see section H.6 for more on this). The working class was exploited and dominated by the new state and its bureaucracy rather than by the capitalist class as previously. This did not happen by chance. As we discuss in section H.3.7, the state has evolved certain characteristics (such as centralisation, delegated power and so on) which ensure its task as enforcer of minority rule is achieved. Keeping those characteristics will inevitably mean keeping the task they were created to serve.

Thus, to summarise, the state's role is to repress the individual and the working class as a whole in the interests of economically dominant minorities/classes and in its own interests. It is *"a society for mutual insurance between the landlord, the military commander, the judge, the priest, and later on the capitalist, in order to support such other's authority over the people, and for exploiting the poverty of the masses and getting rich themselves."* Such was the *"origin of the State; such was its history; and such is its present essence."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 94]

So while the state is an instrument of class rule it does **not** automatically mean that it does not clash with sections of the class it represents nor that it has to be the tool of an economically dominant class. One thing is sure, however. The state is not a suitable tool for securing the emancipation of the oppressed.

# B.3 Why are anarchists against private property?

Private property is one of the three things all anarchists oppose, along side hierarchical authority and the state. Today, the dominant system of private property is capitalist in nature and, as such, anarchists tend to concentrate on this system and its property rights regime. We will be reflecting this here but do not, because of this, assume that anarchists consider other forms of private property regime (such as, say, feudalism) as acceptable. This is not the case — anarchists are against every form of property rights regime which results in the many working for the few.

Anarchist opposition to private property rests on two, related, arguments. These were summed up by Proudhon's maxims (from What is Property? that *"property is theft"* and *"property is despotism."* In his words, *"Property ... violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism ... [and has] perfect identity with robbery."* [Proudhon, What is Property, p. 251] Anarchists, therefore, oppose private property (i.e. capitalism) because it is a source of coercive, hierarchical authority as well as exploitation and, consequently, elite privilege and inequality. It is based on and produces inequality, in terms of both wealth and power.

We will summarise each argument in turn.

The statement *"property is theft"* is one of anarchism's most famous sayings. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that anyone who rejects this statement is not an anarchist. This maxim works in two related ways. Firstly, it recognises the fact that



> *of a man's labour as he can perform in a day, or any other stipulated time. Being equally, however, the owner of the labour, so purchased, as the owner of the slave is of that of the slave, the produce, which is the result of this labour, combined with his capital, is all equally his own. In the state of society, in which we at present exist, it is in these circumstances that almost all production is effected: the capitalist is the owner of both instruments of production: and the whole of the produce is his."* [*"Elements of Political Economy"* quoted by David Ellerman, **Property and Contract in Economics**, pp. 53–4

Thus the only *"difference"* between slavery and capitalist labour is the *"mode of purchasing."* The labour itself and its product in both cases is owned by the *"great capitalist."* Clearly this is a case of, to use Rothbard's words, during working hours the worker *"has little or no right to self-ownership; his person and his produce are systematically expropriated by his master."* Little wonder anarchists have tended to call wage labour by the more accurate term ***"wage slavery."*** For the duration of the working day the boss owns the labour power of the worker. As this cannot be alienated from its "owner" this means that the boss effectively owns the worker — and keeps the product of their labour for the privilege of so doing!

There are key differences of course. At the time, slavery was not a voluntary decision and the slaves could not change their master (although in some cultures, such as Ancient Rome, people over the could sell themselves in slavery while *"**voluntary** slavery is sanctioned in the Bible."* [Ellerman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 115 and p. 114]). Yet the fact that under wage slavery people are not forced to take a specific job and can change masters does not change the relations of authority created between the two parties. As we note in the next section, the objection that people can leave their jobs just amounts to saying "love it or leave

flows from this principle). Instead they stress that we "own" our labour and we contract them to others to use. Yet, unlike other forms of property, labour cannot be alienated. Therefore when you sell your labour you sell yourself, your liberty, for the time in question. By alienating your labour power, you alienate the substance of your being, your personality, for the time in question.

As such, "self-ownership" ironically becomes the means of justifying authoritarian social relationships which deny the autonomy it claims to defend. Indeed, these relationships have similarities with slavery, the very thing which its advocates like to contrast "self-ownership" to. While modern defenders of capitalism deny this, classical economist James Mill let the cat out of the bag by directly comparing the two. It is worthwhile to quote him at length:

> *"The great capitalist, the owner of a manufactory, if he operated with slaves instead of free labourers, like the West India planter, would be regarded as owner both of the capital, and of the labour. He would be owner, in short, of both instruments of production: and the whole of the produce, without participation, would be his own.*
>
> *"What is the difference, in the case of the man, who operates by means of labourers receiving wages? The labourer, who receives wages, sells his labour for a day, a week, a month, or a year, as the case may be. The manufacturer, who pays these wages, buys the labour, for the day, the year, or whatever period it may be. He is equally therefore the owner of the labour, with the manufacturer who operates with slaves. The only difference is, in the mode of purchasing. The owner of the slave purchases, at once, the whole of the labour, which the man can ever perform: he, who pays wages, purchases only so much*



the earth and its resources, the common inheritance of all, have been monopolised by a few. Secondly, it argues that, as a consequence of this, those who own property exploit those who do not. This is because those who do not own have to pay or sell their labour to those who do own in order to get access to the resources they need to live and work (such as workplaces, machinery, land, credit, housing, products under patents, and such like — see section B.3.2 for more discussion).

As we discuss in section B.3.3, this exploitation (theft) flows from the fact that workers do not own or control the means of production they use and, as a consequence, are controlled by those who do during work hours. This alienation of control over labour to the boss places the employer in a position to exploit that labour — to get the worker to produce more than they get paid in wages. That is precisely **why** the boss employs the worker. Combine this with rent, interest and intellectual property rights and we find the secret to maintaining the capitalist system as all allow enormous inequalities of wealth to continue and keep the resources of the world in the hands of a few.

Yet labour cannot be alienated. Therefore when you sell your labour you sell yourself, your liberty, for the time in question. This brings us to the second reason why anarchists oppose private property, the fact it produces authoritarian social relationships. For all true anarchists, property is opposed as a source of authority, indeed despotism. To quote Proudhon on this subject:

> *"The proprietor, the robber, the hero, the sovereign — for all these titles are synonymous — imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control; that is, he pretends to be the legislative and the executive power at once ... [and so] property engenders despotism ... That is so clearly the essence of property that, to be convinced of it, one need but remember what it is, and observe what happens around*

> *him. Property is the right to **use** and **abuse** ... if goods are property, why should not the proprietors be kings, and despotic kings — kings in proportion to their **facultes bonitaires**? And if each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property, absolute king throughout his own domain, how could a government of proprietors be any thing but chaos and confusion?"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 266–7]

In other words, private property is the state writ small, with the property owner acting as the *"sovereign lord"* over their property, and so the absolute king of those who use it. As in any monarchy, the worker is the subject of the capitalist, having to follow their orders, laws and decisions while on their property. This, obviously, is the total denial of liberty (and dignity, we may note, as it is degrading to have to follow orders). And so private property (capitalism) necessarily excludes participation, influence, and control by those who use, but do not own, the means of life.

It is, of course, true that private property provides a sphere of decision-making free from outside interference — but only for the property's owners. But for those who are not property owners the situation if radically different. In a system of exclusively private property does not guarantee them any such sphere of freedom. They have only the freedom to sell their liberty to those who **do** own private property. If I am evicted from one piece of private property, where can I go? Nowhere, unless another owner agrees to allow me access to their piece of private property. This means that everywhere I can stand is a place where I have no right to stand without permission and, as a consequence, I exist only by the sufferance of the property owning elite. Hence Proudhon:

> *"Just as the commoner once held his land by the munificence and condescension of the lord, so to-day*



> *but rather the business that employs him. Your foreman or supervisor gives you more or-else orders in a week than the police do in a decade."* [*"The Libertarian as Conservative"*, **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 145]

In developing nations, this control can easily been seen to be an utter affront to human dignity and liberty. There a workplace is often *"surrounded by barbed wire. Behind its locked doors ... workers are supervised by guards who beat and humiliate them on the slightest pretext ... Each worker repeats the same action — sewing on a belt loop, stitching a sleeve — maybe two thousand times a day. They work under painfully bright lights, for twelve- to fourteen-hour shifts, in overheated factories, with too few bathroom breaks, and restricted access to water (to reduce the need for more bathroom breaks), which is often foul and unfit for human consumption in any event."* The purpose is *"to maximise the amount of profit that could be wrung out"* of the workers, with the *"time allocated to each task"* being calculated in *"units of ten thousands of a second."* [Joel Bakan, **The Corporation**, pp. 66–7] While in the developed world the forms of control are, in general, nowhere as extreme (in thanks due to hard won labour organising and struggle) the basic principle is the same. Only a sophist would argue that the workers "owned" themselves and abilities for the period in question — yet this is what the advocates of "self-ownership" do argue.

So if by the term "self-ownership" it is meant "individual autonomy" then, no, capitalism is not based on it. Ironically, the theory of "self-ownership" is used to undercut and destroy genuine self-ownership during working hours (and, potentially, elsewhere). The logic is simple. As I own myself I am, therefore, able to sell myself as well, although few advocates of "self-ownership" are as blunt as this (as we discuss in section F.2.2 right-libertarian Robert Nozick accepts that voluntary slavery

ties in the interests of company profits. Otherwise, workers can rest assured that any efforts to engage in such *"vital activities"* on company time **will** be *"hampered"* by *"coercive molestation."* Therefore wage labour (the basis of capitalism) in practice **denies** the rights associated with "self-ownership," thus alienating the individual from his or her basic rights. Or as Michael Bakunin expressed it, *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"* under capitalism. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 187]

In a society of relative equals, "property" would not be a source of power as use would co-incidence with occupancy (i.e. private property would be replaced by possession). For example, you would still be able to fling a drunk out of your home. But in a system based on wage labour (i.e. capitalism), property is a different thing altogether, becoming a source of **institutionalised** power and coercive authority through hierarchy. As Noam Chomsky writes, capitalism is based on *"a **particular form** of authoritarian control. Namely, the kind that comes through private ownership and control, which is an **extremely** rigid system of domination."* When "property" is purely what you, as an individual, use (i.e. **possession**) it is not a source of power. In capitalism, however, "property" rights no longer coincide with **use** rights, and so they become a **denial** of freedom and a source of authority and power over the individual.

As we've seen in the discussion of hierarchy (sections A.2.8 and B.1), all forms of authoritarian control depend on *"coercive molestation"* — i.e. the use or threat of sanctions. This is definitely the case in company hierarchies under capitalism. Bob Black describes the authoritarian nature of capitalism as follows:

> *"[T]he place where [adults] pass the most time and submit to the closest control is at work. Thus ... it's apparent that the source of the greatest direct duress experienced by the ordinary adult is **not** the state*



> *the working-man holds his labour by the condescension and necessities of the master and proprietor."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128]

This means that far from providing a sphere of independence, a society in which all property is private thus renders the property-less completely dependent on those who own property. This ensures that the exploitation of another's labour occurs and that some are subjected to the will of others, in direct contradiction to what the defenders of property promise. This is unsurprising given the nature of the property they are defending:

> *"Our opponents ... are in the habit of justifying the right to private property by stating that property is the condition and guarantee of liberty.*
>
> *"And we agree with them. Do we not say repeatedly that poverty is slavery?*
>
> *"But then why do we oppose them?*
>
> *"The reason is clear: in reality the property that they defend is capitalist property, namely property that allows its owners to live from the work of others and which therefore depends on the existence of a class of the disinherited and dispossessed, forced to sell their labour to the property owners for a wage below its real value ... This means that workers are subjected to a kind of slavery, which, though it may vary in degree of harshness, always means social inferiority, material penury and moral degradation, and is the primary cause of all the ills that beset today's social order."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 113]

It will, of course, be objected that no one forces a worker to work for a given boss. However, as we discuss in section B.4.3,

this assertion (while true) misses the point. While workers are not forced to work for a **specific** boss, they inevitably have to work for a boss. This is because there is literally no other way to survive — all other economic options have been taken from them by state coercion. The net effect is that the working class has little choice but to hire themselves out to those with property and, as a consequence, the labourer *"has sold and surrendered his liberty"* to the boss. [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130]

Private property, therefore, produces a very specific form of authority structure within society, a structure in which a few govern the many during working hours. These relations of production are inherently authoritarian and embody and perpetuate the capitalist class system. The moment you enter the factory gate or the office door, you lose all your basic rights as a human being. You have no freedom of speech nor association and no right of assembly. If you were asked to ignore your values, your priorities, your judgement, and your dignity, and leave them at the door when you enter your home, you would rightly consider that tyranny yet that is exactly what you do during working hours if you are a worker. You have no say in what goes on. You may as well be a horse (to use John Locke's analogy — see section B.4.2) or a piece of machinery.

Little wonder, then, that anarchists oppose private property as Anarchy is *"the absence of a master, of a sovereign"* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 264] and call capitalism for what it is, namely **wage slavery**!

For these reasons, anarchists agree with Rousseau when he stated:

> *"The first man who, having fenced off a plot of land, thought of saying, 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him was the real founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors might the human race had been spared by the one who, upon pulling*



justify. Rather, it aims to justify the denial of liberty, not its exercise. It aims to portray social relationships, primarily wage labour, in which one person commands another as examples of liberty rather than what they are, examples of domination and oppression. In other words, "self-ownership" becomes the means by which the autonomy of individuals is limited, if not destroyed, in the name of freedom and liberty.

This is exposed in the right-libertarian slogan *"human rights are property rights."* Assuming this is true, it means that you can alienate your rights, rent them or sell them like any other kind of property. Moreover, if you have no property, you have no human rights as you have no place to exercise them. As Ayn Rand, another ideologue for "free market" capitalism stated, *"there can be no such thing as the right to unrestricted freedom of speech (or of action) on someone else's property."* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 258] If you are in someone else's property (say at work) you have no basic rights at all, beyond the right not to be harmed (a right bosses habitually violate anyway by ignoring health and safety issues).

Self-ownership justifies this. You have rented out the property in your person (labour services) and, consequently, another person can tell you what to do, when to do and how to do it. Thus property comes into conflict with liberty. If you argue that *"human rights are property rights"* you automatically ensure that human rights are continually violated in practice simply because there is a conflict between property and liberty. This is not surprising, as the "property rights" theory of liberty was created to justify the denial of other people's liberty and the appropriation of their labour.

Clearly, then, we reach a problem with "self-ownership" (or property in the person) once we take into account private property and its distribution. In a nutshell, capitalists don't pay their employees to perform the other *"vital activities"* listed by Rothbard (learning, valuing, choosing ends and means) — unless, of course, the firm requires that workers undertake such activi-

*ence. Since each individual must think, learn, value, and choose his or her ends and means in order to survive and flourish, the right to self-ownership gives man [sic] the right to perform these vital activities without being hampered by coercive molestation."* [**For a New Liberty**, pp. 26–27]

At first sight, this appears to sound reasonable. That we "own" ourselves and, consequently, we decide what we do with ourselves has an intuitive appeal. Surely this is liberty? Thus, in this perspective, liberty *"is a condition in which a person's ownership rights in his own body and his legitimate material property are **not** invaded, are not aggressed against."* It also lends itself to contrasts with slavery, where one individual owns another and *"the slave has little or no right to self-ownership; his person and his produce are systematically expropriated by his master by the use of violence."* [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, p. 41] This means that "self-ownership" can be portrayed as the opposite of slavery: we have the dominion over ourselves that a slaveholder has over their slave. This means that slavery is wrong because the slave owner has stolen the rightful property of the slave, namely their body (and its related abilities). This concept is sometimes expressed as people having a "natural" or "inalienable" right to own their own body and the product of their own labour.

Anarchists, while understanding the appeal of the idea, are not convinced. That "self-ownership," like slavery, places issues of freedom and individuality within the context of private property — as such it shares the most important claim of slavery, namely that people can be objects of the rules of private property. It suggests an alienated perspective and, moreover, a fatal flaw in the dogma. This can be seen from how the axiom is used in practice. In as much as the term "self-ownership" is used simply as an synonym for "individual autonomy" anarchists do not have an issue with it. However, the "basic axiom" is not used in this way by the theorists of capitalism. Liberty in the sense of individual autonomy is not what "self-ownership" aims to



> *up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had shouted to his fellow men: 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are lost if you forget the fruits of the earth belong to all and that the earth belongs to no one.'"* [*"Discourse on Inequality,"* **The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 84]

This explains anarchist opposition to capitalism. It is marked by two main features, *"private property"* (or in some cases, state-owned property — see section B.3.5) and, consequently, wage labour and exploitation and authority. Moreover, such a system requires a state to maintain itself for as *"long as within society a possessing and non-possessing group of human beings face one another in enmity, the state will be indispensable to the possessing minority for the protection for its privileges."* [Rudolf Rocker, Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 11] Thus private ownership of the means of production is only possible if there is a state, meaning mechanisms of organised coercion at the disposal of the propertied class (see section B.2).

Also, it ought to be easy to see that capitalism, by giving rise to an ideologically inalienable *"right"* to private property, will also quickly give rise to inequalities in the distribution of external resources, and that this inequality in resource distribution will give rise to a further inequality in the relative bargaining positions of the propertied and the property less. While apologists for capitalism usually attempt to justify private property by claiming that "self-ownership" is a "universal right" (see section B.4.2 — *"Is capitalism based on self-ownership?"*), it is clear that capitalism actually makes universal autonomy implied by the flawed concept of self-ownership (for the appeal of the notion of self-ownership rests on the ideal that people are not used as a means but only as an end in themselves). The capitalist system, however, has undermined autonomy and individual freedom, and ironically, has used the term *"self-ownership"* as the basis for doing so. Under capitalism, as will be seen in sec-

tion B.4, most people are usually left in a situation where their best option is to allow themselves to be used in just those ways that are logically incompatible with genuine self-ownership, i.e. the autonomy which makes it initially an appealing concept.

Only libertarian socialism can continue to affirm the meaningful autonomy and individual freedom which self-ownership promises whilst building the conditions that guarantee it. Only by abolishing private property can there be access to the means of life for all, so making the autonomy which self-ownership promises but cannot deliver a reality by universalising self-management in all aspects of life.

Before discussing the anti-libertarian aspects of capitalism, it will be necessary to define *"private property"* as distinct from *"personal possessions"* and show in more detail why the former requires state protection and is exploitative.

## B.3.1 What is the difference between private property and possession?

Anarchists define *"private property"* (or just *"property,"* for short) as state-protected monopolies of certain objects or privileges which are used to control and exploit others. *"Possession,"* on the other hand, is ownership of things that are not used to exploit others (e.g. a car, a refrigerator, a toothbrush, etc.). Thus many things can be considered as either property or possessions depending on how they are used.

To summarise, anarchists are in favour of the kind of property which *"cannot be used to exploit another — those kinds of personal possessions which we accumulate from childhood and which become part of our lives."* We are opposed to the kind of property *"which can be used only to exploit people — land and buildings, instruments of production and distribution, raw materials and manufactured articles, money and capital."* [Nicholas Walter, **About Anarchism**, p. 40] As a rule of thumb, anar-



> *to accept the job, and especially when she agrees to* ***keep*** *the job. The office is, after all, private property. The secretary does not have to remain if the 'coercion' is objectionable."* [quoted by Engler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

The primary goal of the Fraser Institute is to convince people that all other rights must be subordinated to the right to enjoy wealth. In this case, Block makes clear that under private property, only bosses have "freedom to," and most also desire to ensure they have "freedom from" interference with this right.

So, when capitalists gush about the "liberty" available under capitalism, what they are really thinking of is their state-protected freedom to exploit and oppress workers through the ownership of property, a freedom that allows them to continue amassing huge disparities of wealth, which in turn insures their continued power and privileges. That the capitalist class in liberal-democratic states **gives** workers the right to change masters (though this is not true under state capitalism) is far from showing that capitalism is based on freedom, For as Peter Kropotkin rightly points out, *"freedoms are not given, they are taken."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 43] In capitalism, you are "free" to do anything you are permitted to do by your masters, which amounts to "freedom" with a collar and leash.

## B.4.2 Is capitalism based on self-ownership?

Murray Rothbard, a leading "libertarian" capitalist, claims that capitalism is based on the *"basic axiom"* of *"the right to self-ownership."* This *"axiom"* is defined as *"the absolute right of each man [sic] ... to control [his or her] body free of coercive interfer-*

employees can never be equal, because private ownership of the means of production gives rise to social hierarchy and relations of coercive authority and subordination, as was recognised even by Adam Smith (see below).

The picture painted by Walter Reuther (one time head of the US autoworkers' union) of working life in America before the Wagner act is a commentary on class inequality : *"Injustice was as common as streetcars. When men walked into their jobs, they left their dignity, their citizenship and their humanity outside. They were required to report for duty whether there was work or not. While they waited on the convenience of supervisors and foremen they were unpaid. They could be fired without a pretext. They were subjected to arbitrary, senseless rules ... Men were tortured by regulations that made difficult even going to the toilet. Despite grandiloquent statements from the presidents of huge corporations that their door was open to any worker with a complaint, there was no one and no agency to which a worker could appeal if he were wronged. The very idea that a worker could be wronged seemed absurd to the employer."* Much of this indignity remains, and with the globalisation of capital, the bargaining position of workers is further deteriorating, so that the gains of a century of class struggle are in danger of being lost.

A quick look at the enormous disparity of power and wealth between the capitalist class and the working class shows that the benefits of the "agreements" entered into between the two sides are far from equal. Walter Block, a leading ideologue of the Canadian right-libertarian "think-tank" the Fraser Institute, makes clear the differences in power and benefits when discussing sexual harassment in the workplace:

> *"Consider the sexual harassment which continually occurs between a secretary and a boss ... while objectionable to many women, [it] is not a coercive action. It is rather part of a package deal in which the secretary agrees to **all** aspects of the job when she agrees*



chists oppose those forms of property which are owned by a few people but which are used by others. This leads to the former controlling the latter and using them to produce a surplus for them (either directly, as in the case of a employee, or indirectly, in the case of a tenant).

The key is that *"possession"* is rooted in the concept of *"use rights"* or *"usufruct"* while *"private property"* is rooted in a divorce between the users and ownership. For example, a house that one lives in is a possession, whereas if one rents it to someone else at a profit it becomes property. Similarly, if one uses a saw to make a living as a self-employed carpenter, the saw is a possession; whereas if one employs others at wages to use the saw for one's own profit, it is property. Needless to say, a capitalist workplace, where the workers are ordered about by a boss, is an example of *"property"* while a co-operative, where the workers manage their own work, is an example of *"possession."* To quote Proudhon:

> *"The proprietor is a man who, having absolute control of an instrument of production, claims the right to enjoy the product of the instrument without using it himself. To this end he lends it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 293]

While it may initially be confusing to make this distinction, it is very useful to understand the nature of capitalist society. Capitalists tend to use the word *"property"* to mean anything from a toothbrush to a transnational corporation — two very different things, with very different impacts upon society. Hence Proudhon:

> *"Originally the word **property** was synonymous with **proper** or **individual possession.** It designated each individual's special right to the use of a thing. But when this right of use ... became active and paramount — that is, when the usufructuary*

> *converted his right to personally use the thing into the right to use it by his neighbour's labour — then property changed its nature and this idea became complex."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 395–6]

Proudhon graphically illustrated the distinction by comparing a lover as a possessor, and a husband as a proprietor! As he stressed, the *"double definition of property — domain and possession — is of highest importance; and must be clearly understood, in order to comprehend"* what anarchism is really about. So while some may question why we make this distinction, the reason is clear. As Proudhon argued, *"it is proper to call different things by different names, if we keep the name 'property' for the former [possession], we must call the latter [the domain of property] robbery, repine, brigandage. If, on the contrary, we reserve the name 'property' for the latter, we must designate the former by the term* ***possession*** *or some other equivalent; otherwise we should be troubled with an unpleasant synonym."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 65 and p. 373]

The difference between property and possession can be seen from the types of authority relations each generates. Taking the example of a capitalist workplace, its clear that those who own the workplace determine how it is used, not those who do the actual work. This leads to an almost totalitarian system. As Noam Chomsky points out, *"the term 'totalitarian' is quite accurate. There is no human institution that approaches totalitarianism as closely as a business corporation. I mean, power is completely top-down. You can be inside it somewhere and you take orders from above and hand 'em down. Ultimately, it's in the hands of owners and investors."* Thus the actual producer does not control their own activity, the product of their labour nor the means of production they use. In modern class societies, the producer is in a position of subordination to those who actually do own or manage the productive process.



the worker had the choice of working for themselves — under capitalism this is not the case. For capitalist economists like Friedman, workers choose whether to work or not. The bosses must pay a wage to cover the "disutility" of labour. In reality, of course, most workers face the choice of working or starvation/poverty. Capitalism is based upon the existence of a labour force without access to capital or land, and therefore without a choice as to whether to put its labour in the market or not. Friedman would, hopefully, agree that where there is no choice there is coercion. His attempted demonstration that capitalism co-ordinates without coercion therefore fails.

Capitalist apologists are able to convince some people that capitalism is "based on freedom" only because the system has certain superficial **appearances** of freedom. On closer analysis these appearances turn out to be deceptions. For example, it is claimed that the employees of capitalist firms have freedom because they can always quit. To requote Bob Black:

> *"Some people giving orders and others obeying them: this is the essence of servitude. Of course, as [right-Libertarians] smugly [observe], 'one can at least change jobs,' but you can't avoid having a job — just as under statism one can at least change nationalities but you can't avoid subjection to one nation-state or another. But freedom means more than the right to change masters."* [*"The Libertarian as Conservative"*, **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 147]

Under capitalism, workers have only the Hobson's choice of being governed/exploited or living on the street.

Anarchists point out that for choice to be real, free agreements and associations must be based on the social equality of those who enter into them, and both sides must receive roughly equivalent benefit. But social relations between capitalists and

*transaction is strictly voluntary... The employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, pp. 14–15]

Friedman, to prove the free nature of capitalism, compares capitalism with a simple exchange economy based upon independent producers. He states that in such a simple economy each household *"has the alternative of producing directly for itself, [and so] it need not enter into any exchange unless it benefits from it. Hence no exchange will take place unless both parties do benefit from it. Co-operation is thereby achieved without coercion."* Under capitalism (or the *"complex"* economy) Friedman states that *"individuals are effectively free to enter or not to enter into any particular exchange, so that every transaction is strictly voluntary."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 13 and p. 14]

A moments thought, however, shows that capitalism is not based on *"strictly voluntary"* transactions as Friedman claims. This is because the proviso that is required to make every transaction *"strictly voluntary"* is **not** freedom not to enter any **particular** exchange, but freedom not to enter into any exchange **at all.**

This, and only this, was the proviso that proved the simple model Friedman presents (the one based upon artisan production) to be voluntary and non-coercive; and nothing less than this would prove the complex model (i.e. capitalism) is voluntary and non-coercive. But Friedman is clearly claiming above that freedom not to enter into any **particular** exchange is enough and so, **only by changing his own requirements**, can he claim that capitalism is based upon freedom.

It is easy to see what Friedman has done, but it is less easy to excuse it (particularly as it is so commonplace in capitalist apologetics). He moved from the simple economy of exchange between independent producers to the capitalist economy without mentioning the most important thing that distinguishes them — namely the separation of labour from the means of production. In the society of independent producers,



In an anarchist society, as noted, actual use is considered the only title. This means that a workplace is organised and run by those who work within it, thus reducing hierarchy and increasing freedom and equality within society. Hence anarchist opposition to private property and capitalism flows naturally from anarchism's basic principles and ideas. Hence all anarchists agree with Proudhon:

> *"Possession is a right; property is against right. Suppress property while maintaining possession."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271]

As Alexander Berkman frames this distinction, anarchism *"abolishes private ownership of the means of production and distribution, and with it goes capitalistic business. Personal possession remains only in the things you use. Thus, your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people. Land, machinery, and all other public utilities will be collective property, neither to be bought nor sold. Actual use will be considered the only title — not to ownership but to possession."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 217]

This analysis of different forms of property is at the heart of both social and individualist anarchism. This means that all anarchists seek to change people's opinions on what is to be considered as valid forms of property, aiming to see that *"the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becomes the prevailing view"* and so ensure that *"individuals should no longer be protected by their fellows in anything but personal occupation and cultivation [i.e. use] of land."* [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 159 and p. 85] The key differences, as we noted in section A.3.1, is how they apply this principle.

This anarchist support for possession does not imply the break up of large scale organisations such as factories or other workplaces which require large numbers of people to operate.

Far from it. Anarchists argue for association as the complement of possession. This means applying *"occupancy and use"* to property which is worked by more than one person results in associated labour, i.e. those who collectively work together (i.e. use a given property) manage it and their own labour as a self-governing, directly democratic, association of equals (usually called *"self-management"* for short).

This logically flows from the theory of possession, of *"occupancy and use."* For if production is carried on in groups who is the legal occupier of the land? The employer or their manager? Obviously not, as they are by definition occupying more than they can use by themselves. Clearly, the association of those engaged in the work can be the only rational answer. Hence Proudhon's comment that *"all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor." "In order to destroy despotism and inequality of conditions, men must ... become associates"* and this implies workers' self-management — *"leaders, instructors, superintendents ... must be chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130, p. 372 and p. 137]

In this way, anarchists seek, in Proudhon's words, *"abolition of the proletariat"* and consider a key idea of our ideas that *"Industrial Democracy must... succeed Industrial Feudalism."* [Proudhon, **Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 179 and p. 167] Thus an anarchist society would be based on possession, with workers' self-management being practised at all levels from the smallest one person workplace or farm to large scale industry (see section I.3 for more discussion).

Clearly, then, all anarchists seek to transform and limit property rights. Capitalist property rights would be ended and a new system introduced rooted in the concept of possession and use. While the exact nature of that new system differs between schools of anarchist thought, the basic principles are the same as they flow from the same anarchist theory of property to be found in Proudhon's, What is Property?.



Or, as Chomsky puts it, supporters of capitalism do not understand *"the **fundamental** doctrine, that you should be free from domination and control, including the control of the manager and the owner"* [Feb. 14th, 1992 appearance on **Pozner/Donahue**].

Under corporate authoritarianism, the psychological traits deemed most desirable for average citizens to possess are efficiency, conformity, emotional detachment, insensitivity, and unquestioning obedience to authority — traits that allow people to survive and even prosper as employees in the company hierarchy. And of course, for "non-average" citizens, i.e., bosses, managers, administrators, etc., **authoritarian** traits are needed, the most important being the ability and willingness to dominate others.

But all such master/slave traits are inimical to the functioning of real (i.e. participatory/libertarian) democracy, which requires that citizens have qualities like flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, understanding, emotional honesty, directness, warmth, realism, and the ability to mediate, communicate, negotiate, integrate and co-operate. Therefore, capitalism is not only **un**democratic, it is **anti**-democratic, because it promotes the development of traits that make real democracy (and so a libertarian society) impossible.

Many capitalist apologists have attempted to show that capitalist authority structures are "voluntary" and are, therefore, somehow not a denial of individual and social freedom. Milton Friedman (a leading free market capitalist economist) has attempted to do just this. Like most apologists for capitalism he ignores the authoritarian relations explicit within wage labour (within the workplace, "co-ordination" is based upon top-down command, **not** horizontal co-operation). Instead he concentrates on the decision of a worker to sell their labour to a **specific** boss and so ignores the lack of freedom within such contracts. He argues that *"individuals are effectively free to enter or not enter into any particular exchange, so every*

Thus freedom for anarchists requires participatory democracy, which means face-to-face discussion and voting on issues by the people affected by them.

Are these conditions of freedom met in the capitalist system? Obviously not. Despite all their rhetoric about "democracy," most of the "advanced" capitalist states remain only superficially democratic — and this because the majority of their citizens are employees who spend about half their waking hours under the thumb of capitalist dictators (bosses) who allow them no voice in the crucial economic decisions that affect their lives most profoundly and require them to work under conditions inimical to independent thinking. If the most basic freedom, namely freedom to think for oneself, is denied, then freedom itself is denied.

The capitalist workplace is profoundly undemocratic. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky points out, the oppressive authority relations in the typical corporate hierarchy would be called fascist or totalitarian if we were referring to a political system. In his words :

> *"There's nothing individualistic about corporations. These are big conglomerate institutions, essentially totalitarian in character, but hardly individualistic. There are few institutions in human society that have such strict hierarchy and top-down control as a business organisation. Nothing there about 'don't tread on me'. You're being tread on all the time."* [**Keeping the Rabble in Line**, p. 280]

Far from being "based on freedom," then, capitalism actually destroys freedom. In this regard, Robert E. Wood, the chief executive officer of Sears, spoke plainly when he said *"[w]e stress the advantages of the free enterprise system, we complain about the totalitarian state, but… we have created more or less of a totalitarian system in industry, particularly in large industry."* [quoted by Allan Engler, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 68]



Significantly, William Godwin in his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice makes the same point concerning the difference between property and possession (although not in the same language) fifty years before Proudhon, which indicates its central place in anarchist thought. For Godwin, there were different kinds of property. One kind was *"the empire to which every [person] is entitled over the produce of his [or her] own industry."* However, another kind was *"a system, in whatever manner established, by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry."* This *"species of property is in direct contradiction"* to the former kind (he similarities with subsequent anarchist ideas is striking). For Godwin, inequality produces a *"servile"* spirit in the poor and, moreover, a person who *"is born to poverty, may be said, under a another name, to be born a slave."* [**The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin**, p. 133, p. 134, p. 125 and p. 126]

Needless to say, anarchists have not be totally consistent in using this terminology. Some, for example, have referred to the capitalist and landlord classes as being the *"possessing classes."* Others prefer to use the term *"personal property"* rather than *"possession"* or *"capital"* rather than *"private property."* Some, like many individualist anarchists, use the term *"property"* in a general sense and qualify it with *"occupancy and use"* in the case of land, housing and workplaces. However, no matter the specific words used, the key idea is the same.

## B.3.2 What kinds of property does the state protect?

Kropotkin argued that the state was *"the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities."* [**Anarchism**, p. 286] In every system of class exploitation, a ruling class controls access to the means of production in order to extract tribute from labour. Capitalism is no

exception. In this system the state maintains various kinds of *"class monopolies"* (to use Tucker's phrase) to ensure that workers do not receive their *"natural wage,"* the full product of their labour. While some of these monopolies are obvious (such as tariffs, state granted market monopolies and so on), most are *"behind the scenes"* and work to ensure that capitalist domination does not need extensive force to maintain.

Under capitalism, there are four major kinds of property, or exploitative monopolies, that the state protects:

By enforcing these forms of property, the state ensures that the objective conditions within the economy favour the capitalist, with the worker free only to accept oppressive and exploitative contracts within which they forfeit their autonomy and promise obedience or face misery and poverty. Due to these *"initiations of force"* conducted **previously** to any specific contract being signed, capitalists enrich themselves at our expense because we *"are compelled to pay a heavy tribute to property holders for the right of cultivating land or putting machinery into action."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 103] These conditions obviously also make a mockery of free agreement (see section B.4).

These various forms of state intervention are considered so normal many people do not even think of them as such. Thus we find defenders of "free market" capitalism thundering against forms of "state intervention" which are designed to aid the poor while seeing nothing wrong in defending intellectual property rights, corporations, absentee landlords and the other multitude of laws and taxes capitalists and their politicians have placed and kept upon the statute-books to skew the labour market in favour of themselves (see section F.8 on the state's role in developing capitalism in the first place).

Needless to say, despite the supposedly subtle role of such *"objective"* pressures in controlling the working class, working class resistance has been such that capital has never been able to dispense with the powers of the state, both direct and indi-



depend on the state. This is because *"[classical] Liberalism, is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore is simply a lie, for freedom is not possible without equality…The criticism liberals direct at government consists only of wanting to deprive it some of its functions and to call upon the capitalists to fight it out amongst themselves, but it cannot attack the repressive functions which are of its essence: for without the* ***gendarme*** *the property owner could not exist."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 47]

We have discussed the state and how the ruling elite control in section B.2 and will not do so here. Nor we will discuss the ways in which the elite use that state to enforce private property (see section B.3) or use the state to intervene in society (see section D.1). Rather, the rest of this section will discuss how capitalism impacts on freedom and autonomy and why the standard apologetics by defenders of capitalism fail.

## B.4.1 Is capitalism based on freedom?

For anarchists, freedom means both *"freedom from"* and *"freedom to."* "Freedom from" signifies not being subject to domination, exploitation, coercive authority, repression, or other forms of degradation and humiliation. "Freedom to" means being able to develop and express one's abilities, talents, and potentials to the fullest possible extent compatible with the maximum freedom of others. Both kinds of freedom imply the need for self-management, responsibility, and independence, which basically means that people have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. And since individuals do not exist in a social vacuum, it also means that freedom **must** take on a collective aspect, with the associations that individuals form with each other (e.g. communities, work groups, social groups) being run in a manner which allows the individual to participate in the decisions that the group makes.

*ertarian as Conservative*, **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 147] That supporters of capitalism often claim that this "right" to change masters **is** the essence of "freedom" is a telling indictment of the capitalist notion of "liberty."

Needless to say, the authoritarianism of capitalism is not limited to the workplace. Capitalists seek to bolster their power within society as a whole, via the state. Capitalists call upon and support the state when it acts in **their** interests and when it supports **their** authority and power. Any apparent "conflict" between state and capital is like two gangsters fighting over the proceeds of a robbery: they will squabble over the loot and who has more power in the gang, but they need each other to appropriate the goods and defend their "property" against those from whom they stole it.

Unlike a company, however, the democratic state can be influenced by its citizens, who are able to act in ways that limit (to some extent) the power of the ruling elite to be "left alone" to enjoy their power. As a result, the wealthy hate the democratic aspects of the state, and its ordinary citizens, as potential threats to their power. This "problem" was noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in early 19th-century America:

> *"It is easy to perceive that the wealthy members of the community entertain a hearty distaste to the democratic institutions of their country. The populace is at once the object of their scorn and their fears."*

These fears have not changed, nor has the contempt for democratic ideas. To quote one US Corporate Executive, *"one man, one vote will result in the eventual failure of democracy as we know it."* [L. Silk and D. Vogel, **Ethics and Profits: The Crisis of Confidence in American Business**, pp. 189f]

This contempt for democracy does not mean that capitalists are **anti**-state. Far from it. As previously noted, capitalists



rect. When *"objective"* means of control fail, the capitalists will always turn to the use of state repression to restore the *"natural"* order. Then the *"invisible"* hand of the market is replaced by the visible fist of the state and the indirect means of securing ruling class profits and power are supplemented by more direct forms by the state. As we indicate in section D.1, state intervention beyond enforcing these forms of private property is the norm of capitalism, not the exception, and is done so to secure the power and profits of the capitalist class.

To indicate the importance of these state backed monopolies, we shall sketch their impact.

The credit monopoly, by which the state controls who can and cannot issue or loan money, reduces the ability of working class people to create their own alternatives to capitalism. By charging high amounts of interest on loans (which is only possible because competition is restricted) few people can afford to create co-operatives or one-person firms. In addition, having to repay loans at high interest to capitalist banks ensures that co-operatives often have to undermine their own principles by having to employ wage labour to make ends meet (see section J.5.11). It is unsurprising, therefore, that the very successful Mondragon co-operatives in the Basque Country created their own credit union which is largely responsible for the experiment's success.

Just as increasing wages is an important struggle within capitalism, so is the question of credit. Proudhon and his followers supported the idea of a **People's Bank.** If the working class could take over and control increasing amounts of money it could undercut capitalist power while building its own alternative social order (for money is ultimately the means of buying labour power, and so authority over the labourer — which is the key to surplus value production). Proudhon hoped that by credit being reduced to cost (namely administration charges) workers would be able to buy the means of production they needed. While most anarchists would argue that increased

working class access to credit would no more bring down capitalism than increased wages, all anarchists recognise how more cheap credit, like more wages, can make life easier for working people and how the struggle for such credit, like the struggle for wages, might play a useful role in the development of the power of the working class within capitalism. Obvious cases that spring to mind are those where money has been used by workers to finance their struggles against capital, from strike funds and weapons to the periodical avoidance of work made possible by sufficiently high money income. Increased access to cheap credit would give working class people slightly more options than selling their liberty or facing misery (just as increased wages and unemployment benefit also gives us more options).

Therefore, the credit monopoly reduces competition to capitalism from co-operatives (which are generally more productive than capitalist firms) while at the same time forcing down wages for all workers as the demand for labour is lower than it would otherwise be. This, in turn, allows capitalists to use the fear of the sack to extract higher levels of surplus value from employees, so consolidating capitalist power (within and outwith the workplace) and expansion (increasing set-up costs and so creating oligarchic markets dominated by a few firms). In addition, high interest rates transfer income directly from producers to banks. Credit and money are both used as weapons in the class struggle. This is why, again and again, we see the ruling class call for centralised banking and use state action (from the direct regulation of money itself, to the attempted management of its flows by the manipulation of the interest) in the face of repeated threats to the nature (and role) of money within capitalism.

The credit monopoly has other advantages for the elite. The 1980s were marked by a rising debt burden on households as well as the increased concentration of wealth in the US. The two are linked. Due to *"the decline in real hourly wages, and the*



the strikers: *"By the end of the strike, most of the dead and injured were miners and their families."* The strike soon took on the features of a war, with battles between strikers and their supporters and the company thugs. Ironically, when the National Guard was sent in to "restore order" the *"miners, having faced in the first five weeks of the strike what they considered a reign of terror at the hands of the private guards, ... looked forward"* to their arrival. They *"did not know that the governor was sending these troops under pressure from the mine operators."* Indeed, the banks and corporations lent the state funds to pay for the militia. It was these company thugs, dressed in the uniform of the state militia, who murdered woman and children in the infamous Ludlow Massacre of April 20th, 1914. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22, p. 25, p. 35]

Without irony the **New York Times** editorialised that the *"militia was as impersonal and impartial as the law."* The corporation itself hired Ivy Lee (*"the father of public relations in the United States"*) to change public opinion after the slaughter. Significantly, Lee produced a series of tracts labelled *"Facts Concerning the Struggle in Colorado for Industrial Freedom."* The head of the corporation (Rockefeller) portrayed his repression of the strikers as blow for workers' freedom, to *"defend the workers' right to work."* [quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44, p. 51 and p. 50] So much for the capitalism being the embodiment of liberty.

Of course, it can be claimed that "market forces" will result in the most liberal owners being the most successful, but a nice master is still a master (and, of course, capitalism then was more "free market" than today, suggesting that this is simply wishful thinking). To paraphrase Tolstoy, *"the liberal capitalist is like a kind donkey owner. He will do everything for the donkey — care for it, feed it, wash it. Everything except get off its back!"* And as Bob Black notes, *"Some people giving orders and others obeying them: this is the essence of servitude... . But freedom means more than the right to change masters."* [*The Lib-*

> *"[I]f one starts a private town, on land whose acquisition did not and does not violate the Lockean proviso [of non-aggression], persons who chose to move there or later remain there would have no **right** to a say in how the town was run, unless it was granted to them by the decision procedures for the town which the owner had established."* [Robert Nozick, **Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. 270]

This is voluntary feudalism, nothing more. And, indeed, it was. Such private towns have existed, most notably the infamous company towns of US history. Howard Zinn summarises the conditions of such "private towns" in the Colorado mine fields:

> *"Each mining camp was a feudal dominion, with the company acting as lord and master. Every camp had a marshal, a law enforcement officer paid by the company. The 'laws' were the company's rules. Curfews were imposed, 'suspicious' strangers were not allowed to visit the homes, the company store had a monopoly on goods sold in the camp. The doctor was a company doctor, the schoolteachers hired by the company ... Political power in Colorado rested in the hands of those who held economic power. This meant that the authority of Colorado Fuel & Iron and other mine operators was virtually supreme ... Company officials were appointed as election judges. Company-dominated coroners and judges prevented injured employees from collecting damages."* [**The Colorado Coal Strike, 1913–14**, pp. 9–11]

Unsurprisingly, when the workers rebelled against this tyranny, they were evicted from their homes and the private law enforcement agents were extremely efficient in repressing



*stagnation in household incomes, the middle and lower classes have borrowed more to stay in place"* and they have *"borrowed from the very rich who have [become] richer."* By 1997, US households spent $1 trillion (or 17% of the after-tax incomes) on debt service. *"This represents a massive upward redistribution of income."* And why did they borrow? The bottom 40% of the income distribution *"borrowed to compensate for stagnant or falling incomes"* while the upper 20% borrowed *"mainly to invest."* Thus *"consumer credit can be thought of as a way to sustain mass consumption in the face of stagnant or falling wages. But there's an additional social and political bonus, from the point of view of the creditor class: it reduces pressure for higher wages by allowing people to buy goods they couldn't otherwise afford. It helps to nourish both the appearance and reality of a middle-class standard of living in a time of polarisation. And debt can be a great conservatising force; with a large monthly mortgage and/or MasterCard bill, strikes and other forms of troublemaking look less appealing than they would other wise."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 64–6]

Thus credit *"is an important form of social coercion; mortgaged workers are more pliable."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 232] Money is power and any means which lessens that power by increasing the options of workers is considered a threat by the capitalist class — whether it is tight labour markets, state provided unemployment benefit, or cheap, self-organised, credit — will be resisted. The credit monopoly can, therefore, only be fought as part of a broader attack on all forms of capitalist social power.

In summary, the credit monopoly, by artificially restricting the option to work for ourselves, ensures we work for a boss while also enriching the few at the expense of the many.

The land monopoly consists of enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and use. It also includes making the squatting of abandoned housing and other forms of property illegal. This leads to ground-

rent, by which landlords get payment for letting others use the land they own but do not actually cultivate or use. It also allows the ownership and control of natural resources like oil, gas, coal and timber. This monopoly is particularly exploitative as the owner cannot claim to have created the land or its resources. It was available to all until the landlord claimed it by fencing it off and barring others from using it.

Until the nineteenth century, the control of land was probably the single most important form of privilege by which working people were forced to accept less than its product as a wage. While this monopoly is less important in a modern capitalist society (as few people know how to farm), it still plays a role (particularly in terms of ownership of natural resources). At a minimum, every home and workplace needs land on which to be built. Thus while cultivation of land has become less important, the use of land remains crucial. The land monopoly, therefore, ensures that working people find no land to cultivate, no space to set up shop and no place to sleep without first having to pay a landlord a sum for the privilege of setting foot on the land they own but neither created nor use. At best, the worker has mortgaged their life for decades to get their wee bit of soil or, at worse, paid their rent and remained as property-less as before. Either way, the landlords are richer for the exchange.

Moreover, the land monopoly did play an important role in **creating** capitalism (also see section F.8.3). This took two main forms. Firstly, the state enforced the ownership of large estates in the hands of a single family. Taking the best land by force, these landlords turned vast tracks of land into parks and hunting grounds so forcing the peasants little option but to huddle together on what remained. Access to superior land was therefore only possible by paying a rent for the privilege, if at all. Thus an elite claimed ownership of vacant lands, and by controlling access to it (without themselves ever directly occupying or working it) they controlled the labouring classes of the time. Secondly, the ruling elite also simply stole land which had



system of dictatorial states on an island. Each regime is a monarchy (i.e. a dictatorship). The King of each land decrees what his subjects do, who they associate with and, moreover, appropriates the fruit of their labour in exchange for food, clothing and shelter for however many hours a day he wants (the King is generous and allows his subjects some time to themselves in the evening and weekends). Some of the Kings even decree what their subjects will wear and how they will greet their fellow subjects. Few people would say that those subject to such arrangements are free.

Now, if we add the condition that any subject is free to leave a Kingdom but only if another King will let them join his regime, does that make it any more freer? Slightly, but not by much. The subjects how have a limited choice in who can govern them but the **nature** of the regime they are subjected to does not change. What we would expect to see happen is that those subjects whose skills are in demand will get better, more liberal, conditions than the others (as long as they are in demand). For the majority the conditions they are forced to accept will be as bad as before as they are easily replaceable. Both sets of subjects, however, are still under the autocratic rule of the monarchs. Neither are free but the members of one set have a more liberal regime than the others, dependent on the whims of the autocrats and their need for labour.

That this thought experiment reflects the way capitalism operates is clear. Little wonder anarchists have echoed Proudhon's complaint that *"our large capitalist associations [are] organised in the spirit of commercial and industrial feudalism."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 72] Ironically, rather than deny the anarchist claim, defenders of capitalism have tried to convince us that such a regime is liberty incarnate. Yet the statist nature of private property can be seen in (right-wing) "Libertarian" (i.e. "classical" liberal) works representing the extremes of laissez-faire capitalism:

> *women and the vast majority of men for decades, for most of their lifespans. For certain purposes it's not too misleading to call our system democracy or capitalism or — better still — industrialism, but its real names are factory fascism and office oligarchy. Anybody who says these people are 'free' is lying or stupid."* [**The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 21]

In response to this, defenders of capitalism usually say something along the lines of *"It's a free market and if you don't like it, find another job."* Of course, there are a number of problems with this response. Most obviously is the fact that capitalism is not and has never been a "free market." As we noted in section B.2, a key role of the state has been to protect the interests of the capitalist class and, as a consequence of this, it has intervened time and time again to skew the market in favour of the bosses. As such, to inform us that capitalism is something it has never been in order to defend it from criticism is hardly convincing.

However, there is another more fundamental issue with the response, namely the assumption that tyranny is an acceptable form of human interaction. To say that your option is either tolerate this boss or seek out another (hopefully more liberal) one suggests an utter lack of understanding what freedom is. Freedom is not the opportunity to pick a master, it is to be have autonomy over yourself. What capitalist ideology has achieved is to confuse having the ability to pick a master with freedom, that consent equates to liberty — regardless of the objective circumstances shaping the choices being made or the nature of the social relationships such choices produce.

While we return to this argument in section B.4.3, a few words seem appropriate now. To see why the capitalist response misses the point, we need only transfer the argument from the economic regime to the political. Let us assume a



traditionally been owned by the community. This was called enclosure, the process by which common land was turned into private property. Economist William Lazonick summaries this process:

> *"The reorganisation of agricultural land [the enclosure movement] ... inevitably undermined the viability of traditional peasant agriculture . .. [it] created a sizeable labour force of disinherited peasants with only tenuous attachments to the land. To earn a living, many of these peasants turned to 'domestic industry' — the production of goods in their cottages ... It was the eighteenth century expansion of domestic industry ... that laid the basis for the British Industrial Revolution. The emergence of labour-saving machine technology transformed ... textile manufacture ... and the factory replaced the family home as the predominant site of production."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, pp. 3–4]

By being able to *"legally"* bar people from *"their"* property, the landlord class used the land monopoly to ensure the creation of a class of people with nothing to sell but their labour (i.e. liberty). Land was taken from those who traditionally used it, violating common rights, and it was used by the landlord to produce for their own profit (more recently, a similar process has been going on in the Third World as well). Personal occupancy was replaced by landlordism and agricultural wage slavery, and so *"the Enclosure Acts ... reduced the agricultural population to misery, placed them at the mercy of the landowners, and forced a great number of them to migrate to the towns where, as proletarians, they were delivered to the mercy of the middle-class manufacturers."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 117–8]

A variation of this process took place in countries like America, where the state took over ownership of vast tracks of land and then sold it to farmers. As Howard Zinn notes, the Homestead Act *"gave 160 acres of western land, unoccupied and publicly owned, to anyone who would cultivate it for fives years. Anyone willing to pay $1.25 an acre could buy a homestead. Few ordinary people had the $200 necessary to do this; speculators moved in and bought up much of the land."* [**A People's History of the United States**, p. 233] Those farmers who did pay the money often had to go into debt to do so, placing an extra burden on their labour. Vast tracks of land were also given to railroad and other companies either directly (by gift or by selling cheap) or by lease (in the form of privileged access to state owned land for the purpose of extracting raw materials like lumber and oil). Either way, access to land was restricted and those who actually did work it ended up paying a tribute to the landlord in one form or another (either directly in rent or indirectly by repaying a loan).

This was the land monopoly in action (also see sections F.8.3, F.8.4 and F.8.5 for more details) and from it sprang the tools and equipment monopoly as domestic industry could not survive in the face of industrial capitalism. Confronted with competition from industrial production growing rich on the profits produced from cheap labour, the ability of workers to own their own means of production decreased over time. From a situation where most workers owned their own tools and, consequently, worked for themselves, we now face an economic regime were the tools and equipment needed for work are owned by a capitalists and, consequently, workers now work for a boss.

The tools and equipment monopoly is similar to the land monopoly as it is based upon the capitalist denying workers access to their capital unless the worker pays tribute to the owner for using it. While capital is *"simply stored-up labour which has already received its pay in full"* and so *"the lender*



# B.4 How does capitalism affect liberty?

Private property is in many ways like a private form of state. The owner determines what goes on within the area he or she "owns," and therefore exercises a monopoly of power over it. When power is exercised over one's self, it is a source of freedom, but under capitalism it is a source of coercive authority. As Bob Black points out in **The Abolition of Work**:

> *"The liberals and conservatives and Libertarians who lament totalitarianism are phoneys and hypocrites... You find the same sort of hierarchy and discipline in an office or factory as you do in a prison or a monastery... A worker is a part-time slave. The boss says when to show up, when to leave, and what to do in the meantime. He tells you how much work to do and how fast. He is free to carry his control to humiliating extremes, regulating, if he feels like it, the clothes you wear or how often you go to the bathroom. With a few exceptions he can fire you for any reason, or no reason. He has you spied on by snitches and supervisors, he amasses a dossier on every employee. Talking back is called 'insubordination,' just as if a worker is a naughty child, and it not only gets you fired, it disqualifies you for unemployment compensation...The demeaning system of domination I've described rules over half the waking hours of a majority of*

the means of production, whether or not this is formally and legally recognised.

This explains why libertarian socialists have consistently stressed workers' self-management of production as the basis of any real form of socialism. To concentrate on ownership, as both Leninism and social democracy have done, misses the point. Needless to say, those regimes which have replaced capitalist ownership with state property have shown the validity the anarchist analysis in these matters (*"all-powerful, centralised Government with State Capitalism as its economic expression,"* to quote Emma Goldman's summation of Lenin's Russia [**Op. Cit.**, p. 388]). State property is in no way fundamentally different from private property — all that changes is who exploits and oppresses the workers.

For more discussion see section H.3.13 — *"Why is state socialism just state capitalism?"*



*of capital is entitled to its return intact, and nothing more"* (to use Tucker's words), due to legal privilege the capitalist is in a position to charge a *"fee"* for its use. This is because, with the working class legally barred from both the land and available capital (the means of life), members of that class have little option but to agree to wage contracts which let capitalists extract a *"fee"* for the use of their equipment (see section B.3.3).

Thus the capital-monopoly is, like the land monopoly, enforced by the state and its laws. This is most clearly seen if you look at the main form in which such capital is held today, the corporation. This is nothing more than a legal construct. *"Over the last 150 years,"* notes Joel Bakan, *"the corporation has risen from relative obscurity to becomes the world's dominant economic institution."* The law has been changed to give corporations *"limited liability"* and other perks in order *"to attract valuable incorporation business ... by jettisoning unpopular [to capitalists] restrictions from ... corporate laws."* Finally, the courts *"fully transformed the corporation onto a 'person,' with its own identity ... and empowered, like a real person, to conduct business in its own name, acquire assets, employ workers, pay taxes, and go to court to assert its rights and defend its actions."* In America, this was achieved using the 14th Amendment (which was passed to protect freed slaves!). In summary, the corporation *"is not an independent 'person' with its own rights, needs, and desires ... It is a state-created tool for advancing social and economic policy."* [**The Corporation**, p. 5, p. 13, p. 16 and p. 158]

Nor can it be said that this monopoly is the product of hard work and saving. The capital-monopoly is a recent development and how this situation developed is usually ignored. If not glossed over as irrelevant, some fairy tale is spun in which a few bright people saved and worked hard to accumulate capital and the lazy majority flocked to be employed by these (almost superhuman) geniuses. In reality, the initial capital for investing in industry came from wealth plundered from overseas or from the proceeds of feudal and landlord exploitation. In addi-

tion, as we discuss in section F.8, extensive state intervention was required to create a class of wage workers and ensure that capital was in the best position to exploit them. This explicit state intervention was scaled down once the capital-monopoly found its own feet.

Once this was achieved, state action became less explicit and becomes focused around defending the capitalists' property rights. This is because the *"fee"* charged to workers was partly reinvested into capital, which reduced the prices of goods, ruining domestic industry and so narrowing the options available to workers in the economy. In addition, investment also increased the set-up costs of potential competitors, which continued the dispossession of the working class from the means of production as these *"natural"* barriers to entry into markets ensured few members of that class had the necessary funds to create co-operative workplaces of appropriate size. So while the land monopoly was essential to create capitalism, the *"tools and equipment"* monopoly that sprang from it soon became the mainspring of the system.

In this way usury became self-perpetuating, with apparently *"free exchanges"* being the means by which capitalist domination survives. In other words, "past initiations of force" combined with the current state protection of property ensure that capitalist domination of society continues with only the use of *"defensive"* force (i.e. violence used to protect the power of property owners against unions, strikes, occupations, etc.). The *"fees"* extracted from previous generations of workers has ensured that the current one is in no position to re-unite itself with the means of life by *"free competition"* (in other words, the paying of usury ensures that usury continues). Needless to say, the surplus produced by this generation will be used to increase the capital stock and so ensure the dispossession of future generations and so usury becomes self-perpetuating. And, of course, state protection of *"property"* against *"theft"*



*tribution"* which *"belong[s] to the people, to be settled and used by individuals or groups according to their needs"* based on *"free access"*). [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 406–7]

Thus, by Schweickart's own definition, a system based on state ownership **is** capitalist as the workers clearly do not own the own means of production they use, the state does. Neither do they own the goods or services they produce, the state which supplies the workers with the means of production does. The difference is that rather than being a number of different capitalists there is only one, the state. It is, as Kropotkin warned, the *"mere substitution … of the State as the universal capitalist for the present capitalists."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 106] This is why anarchists have tended to call such regimes *"state capitalist"* as the state basically replaces the capitalist as boss.

While this is most clear for regimes like China's which are dictatorships, the logic also applies to democratic states. No matter if a state is democratic, state ownership is a form of exclusive property ownership which implies a social relationship which is totally different from genuine forms of socialism. Common ownership and use rights produce social relationships based on liberty and equality. State ownership, however, presupposes the existence of a government machine, a centralised bureaucracy, which stands above the members of society, both as individuals and as a group, and has the power to coerce and dominate them. In other words, when a state owns the means of life, the members of society remain proletarians, non-owners, excluded from control. Both legally and in reality, the means of life belong not to them, but to the state. As the state is not an abstraction floating above society but rather a social institution made up of a specific group of human beings, this means that this group controls and so effectively owns the property in question, not society as a whole nor those who actually use it. Just as the owning class excludes the majority, so does the state bureaucracy which means it owns

cussed in section B.2, is marked by power being concentrated in a few hands. As the general populate is, by design, excluded from decision making within it this means that the state apparatus has control over the property in question. As the general public and those who use a piece of property are excluded from controlling it, state property is identical to private property. Instead of capitalists owning it, the state bureaucracy does.

This can easily be seen from the example of such so-called *"socialist"* states as the Soviet Union or China. To show why, we need only quote a market socialist who claims that China is not capitalist. According to David Schweickart a society is capitalist if, *"[i]n order to gain access to means of production (without which no one can work), most people must contract with people who own (or represent the owners of) such means. In exchange for a wage of a salary, they agree to supply the owners with a certain quantity and quality of labour.* ***It is a crucial characteristic of the institution of wage labour that the goods or services produced do not belong to the workers who produce them but to those who supply the workers with the means of production.*** *"* Anarchists agree with Schweickart's definition of capitalism. As such, he is right to argue that a *"society of small farmers and artisans .. . is not a capitalist society, since wage labour is largely absent."* He is, however, wrong to assert that a *"society in which most of [the] means of production are owned by the central government or by local communities — contemporary China, for example — is not a capitalist society, since private ownership of the means of production is not dominant."* [**After Capitalism**, p. 23]

The reason is apparent. As Emma Goldman said (pointing out the obvious), if property is nationalised *"it belongs to the state; this is, the government has control of it and can dispose of it according to its wishes and views ... Such a condition of affairs may be called state capitalism, but it would be fantastic to consider it in any sense Communistic"* (as that needs the *"socialisation of the land and of the machinery of production and dis-*



by working people ensures that property remains theft and the **real** thieves keep their plunder.

As far as the *"ideas"* monopoly is concerned, this has been used to enrich capitalist corporations at the expense of the general public and the inventor. Patents make an astronomical price difference. Until the early 1970s, for example, Italy did not recognise drug patents. As a result, Roche Products charged the British National Health Service over 40 times more for patented components of Librium and Valium than charged by competitors in Italy. As Tucker argued, the patent monopoly *"consists in protecting investors and authors against competition for a period long enough to enable them to extort from the people a reward enormously in excess of the labour measure of their services, — in other words, in giving certain people a right of property for a term of years and facts of nature, and the power to extract tribute from others for the use of this natural wealth which should be open to all."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 86]

The net effect of this can be terrible. The Uruguay Round of global trade negotiations *"strengthen intellectual property rights. American and other Western drug companies could now stop drug companies in India and Brazil from 'stealing' their intellectual property. But these drug companies in the developing world were making these life-saving drugs available to their citizens at a fraction of the price at which the drugs were sold by the Western drug companies ... Profits of the Western drug companies would go up ... but the increases profits from sales in the developing world were small, since few could afford the drugs ... [and so] thousands were effectively condemned to death, becomes governments and individuals in developing countries could no longer pay the high prices demanded."* [Joseph Stiglitz, **Globalisation and its discontents**, pp. 7–8] While international outrage over AIDS drugs eventually forced the drug companies to sell the drugs at cost price in late 2001, the underlying intellectual property rights regime was still in place.

The irony that this regime was created in a process allegedly about trade liberalisation should not go unnoticed. *"Intellectual property rights,"* as Noam Chomsky correctly points out, *"are a protectionist measure, they have nothing to do with free trade — in fact, they're the exact **opposite** of free trade."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 282] The fundamental injustice of the *"ideas monopoly"* is exacerbated by the fact that many of these patented products are the result of government funding of research and development, with private industry simply reaping monopoly profits from technology it did not spend a penny to develop. In fact, extending government aid for research and development is considered an important and acceptable area of state intervention by governments and companies verbally committed to the neo-liberal agenda.

The *"ideas monopoly"* actually works against its own rationale. Patents suppress innovation as much as they encourage it. The research scientists who actually do the work of inventing are required to sign over patent rights as a condition of employment, while patents and industrial security programs used to bolster competitive advantage on the market actually prevent the sharing of information, so reducing innovation (this evil is being particularly felt in universities as the new *"intellectual property rights"* regime is spreading there). Further research stalls as the incremental innovation based on others' patents is hindered while the patent holder can rest on their laurels as they have no fear of a competitor improving the invention. They also hamper technical progress because, by their very nature, preclude the possibility of independent discovery. Also, of course, some companies own a patent explicitly not to use it but simply to prevent someone else from so doing.

As Noam Chomsky notes, today trade agreements like GATT and NAFTA *"impose a mixture of liberalisation and protection, going far beyond trade, designed to keep wealth and power firmly in the hands of the masters."* Thus *"investor rights are to be protected and enhanced"* and a key demand *"is in-*



then justifying the initial creation of private property becomes much more difficult, if not impossible.

And if each owner's title to their property includes the historical shadow of the Lockean Proviso on appropriation, then such titles are invalid. Any title people have over unequal resources will be qualified by the facts that *"property is theft"* and that *"property is despotism."* The claim that private property is economic liberty is obviously untrue, as is the claim that private property can be justified in terms of anything except *"might is right."*

In summary, *"[i]f the right of life is equal, the right of labour is equal, and so is the right of occupancy."* This means that *"those who do not possess today are proprietors by the same title as those who do possess; but instead of inferring therefrom that property should be shared by all, I demand, in the name of general security, its entire abolition."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77 and p. 66] Simply put, if it is right for the initial appropriation of resources to be made then, by that very same reason, it is right for others in the same and subsequent generations to abolish private property in favour of a system which respects the liberty of all rather than a few.

For more anarchist analysis on private property and why it cannot be justified (be it by occupancy, labour, natural right, or whatever) consult Proudhon's classic work What is Property?. For further discussion on capitalist property rights see section F.4.

## B.3.5 Is state owned property different from private property?

No, far from it.

State ownership should not be confused with the common or public ownership implied by the concept of *"use rights."* The state is a hierarchical instrument of coercion and, as we dis-

physical and mental being. Concern for self-determination (i.e. meaningful self-ownership) leads us to common property plus workers' control of production and so some form of libertarian socialism — **not** private property and capitalism.

And, of course, the appropriation of the land requires a state to defend it against the dispossessed as well as continuous interference in people's lives. Left to their own devices, people would freely use the resources around them which they considered unjustly appropriated by others and it is only continuous state intervention that prevents then from violating Nozick's principles of justice (to use Nozick's own terminology, the *"Lockean Proviso"* is a patterned theory, his claims otherwise not withstanding).

In addition, we should note that private ownership by one person presupposes non-ownership by others (*"we who belong to the proletaire class, property excommunicates us!"* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105]) and so the *"free market"* restricts as well as creates liberties just as any other economic system. Hence the claim that capitalism constitutes *"economic liberty"* is obviously false. In fact, it is **based** upon denying liberty for the vast majority during work hours (as well as having serious impacts on liberty outwith work hours due to the effects of concentrations of wealth upon society).

Perhaps Nozick can claim that the increased material benefits of private property makes the acquisition justified. However, it seems strange that a theory supporting "liberty" should consider well off slaves to be better than poor free men and women. As Nozick claims that the wage slaves consent is not required for the initial acquisition, so perhaps he can claim that the gain in material welfare outweighs the loss of autonomy and so allows the initial act as an act of paternalism. But as Nozick opposes paternalism when it restricts private property rights he can hardly invoke it when it is required to generate these rights. And if we exclude paternalism and emphasise autonomy (as Nozick claims he does elsewhere in his theory),



*creased protection for 'intellectual property,' including software and patents, with patent rights extending to process as well as product"* in order to *"ensure that US-based corporations control the technology of the future"* and so *"locking the poor majority into dependence on high-priced products of Western agribusiness, biotechnology, the pharmaceutical industry and so on."* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 183, p. 181 and pp. 182–3] This means that if a company discovers a new, more efficient, way of producing a drug then the *"ideas monopoly"* will stop them and so *"these are not only highly protectionist measures ... they're a blow **against** economic efficiency and technological process — that just shows you how much 'free trade' really is involved in all of this."* [Chomsky, **Understanding Power**, p. 282]

All of which means that the corporations (and their governments) in the developed world are trying to prevent emergence of competition by controlling the flow of technology to others. The "free trade" agreements are being used to create monopolies for their products and this will either block or slow down the rise of competition. While corporate propagandists piously denounce "anti-globalisation" activists as enemies of the developing world, seeking to use trade barriers to maintain their (Western) lifestyles at the expense of the poor nations, the reality is different. The *"ideas monopoly"* is being aggressively used to either suppress or control the developing world's economic activity in order to keep the South as, effectively, one big sweatshop. As well as reaping monopoly profits directly, the threat of "low-wage" competition from the developing world can be used to keep the wage slaves of the developed world in check and so maintain profit levels at home.

This is not all. Like other forms of private property, the usury produced by it helps ensure it becomes self-perpetuating. By creating "legal" absolute monopolies and reaping the excess profits these create, capitalists not only enrich themselves at the expense of others, they also ensure their dominance in the

market. Some of the excess profits reaped due to patents and copyrights are invested back into the company, securing advantages by creating various "natural" barriers to entry for potential competitors. Thus patents impact on business structure, encouraging the formation and dominance of big business.

Looking at the end of the nineteenth century, the ideas monopoly played a key role in promoting cartels and, as a result, laid the foundation for what was to become corporate capitalism in the twentieth century. Patents were used on a massive scale to promote concentration of capital, erect barriers to entry, and maintain a monopoly of advanced technology in the hands of western corporations. The exchange or pooling of patents between competitors, historically, has been a key method for the creation of cartels in industry. This was true especially of the electrical appliance, communications, and chemical industries. For example, by the 1890s, two large companies, General Electric and Westinghouse, *"monopolised a substantial part of the American electrical manufacturing industry, and their success had been in large measure the result of patent control."* The two competitors simply pooled their patents and *"yet another means of patent and market control had developed: corporate patent-pooling agreements. Designed to minimise the expense and uncertainties of conflict between the giants, they greatly reinforced the position of each vis-à-vis lesser competitors and new entrants into the field."* [David Noble, **American By Design**, p. 10]

While the patent system is, in theory, promoted to defend the small scale inventor, in reality it is corporate interests that benefit. As David Noble points out, the *"inventor, the original focus of the patent system, tended to increasingly to 'abandon' his patent in exchange for corporate security; he either sold or licensed his patent rights to industrial corporations or assigned them to the company of which he became an employee, bartering his genius for a salary. In addition, by means of patent control gained through purchase, consolidation, patent pools, and cross-*



(the majority) who can only gain access to the means of life on terms acceptable to the former. How can the majority really be said to own themselves if they may do nothing without the permission of others (the owning minority).

Under capitalism people are claimed to own themselves, but this is purely formal as most people do not have independent access to resources. And as they have to use other peoples' resources, they become under the control of those who own the resources. In other words, private property reduces the autonomy of the majority of the population and creates a regime of authority which has many similarities to enslavement. As John Stuart Mill put it:

> *"No longer enslaved or made dependent by force of law, the great majority are so by force of property; they are still chained to a place, to an occupation, and to conformity with the will of an employer, and debarred by the accident of birth to both the enjoyments, and from the mental and moral advantages, which others inherit without exertion and independently of desert. That this is an evil equal to almost any of those against which mankind have hitherto struggles, the poor are not wrong in believing."* [*"Chapters on Socialism"*, **Principles of Political Economy**, pp. 377–8]

Capitalism, even though claiming formal self-ownership, in fact not only restricts the self-determination of working class people, it also makes them a resource for others. Those who enter the market after others have appropriated all the available property are limited to charity or working for others. The latter, as we discuss in section C, results in exploitation as the worker's labour is used to enrich others. Working people are compelled to co-operate with the current scheme of property and are forced to benefit others. This means that self-determination requires resources as well as rights over one's

property, all managed their own work, had self-government in all aspects of their lives. After the appropriation, the new wage slave has no such liberty and indeed must accept the conditions of employment within which they relinquish control over how they spend much of their time. That this is issue is irrelevant for the Lockean Proviso shows how concerned about liberty capitalism actually is.

Considering Nozick's many claims in favour of self-ownership and why it is important, you would think that the autonomy of the newly dispossessed wage slaves would be important to him. However, no such concern is to be found — the autonomy of wage slaves is treated as if it were irrelevant. Nozick claims that a concern for people's freedom to lead their own lives underlies his theory of unrestricted property-rights, but, this apparently does not apply to wage slaves. His justification for the creation of private property treats only the autonomy of the land owner as relevant. However, as Proudhon rightly argues:

> *"if the liberty of man is sacred, it is equally sacred in all individuals; that, if it needs property for its objective action, that is, for its life, the appropriation of material is equally necessary for all ... Does it not follow that if one individual cannot prevent another ... from appropriating an amount of material equal to his own, no more can he prevent individuals to come."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 84–85]

The implications of Nozick's argument become clear once we move beyond the initial acts of appropriation to the situation of a developed capitalist economy. In such a situation, **all** of the available useful land has been appropriated. There is massive differences in who owns what and these differences are passed on to the next generation. Thus we have a (minority) class of people who own the world and a class of people



*licensing agreements, as well as by regulated patent production through systematic industrial research, the corporations steadily expanded their 'monopoly of monopolies.'"* As well as this, corporations used *"patents to circumvent anti-trust laws."* This reaping of monopoly profits at the expense of the customer made such *"tremendous strides"* between 1900 and 1929 and *"were of such proportions as to render subsequent judicial and legislative effects to check corporate monopoly through patent control too little too late."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87, p. 84 and p. 88]

Things have changed little since Edwin Prindle, a corporate patent lawyer, wrote in 1906 that:

> *"Patents are the best and most effective means of controlling competition. They occasionally give absolute command of the market, enabling their owner to name the price without regard to the cost of production... Patents are the only legal form of absolute monopoly .. . The power which a patentee has to dictate the conditions under which his monopoly may be exercised had been used to form trade agreements throughout practically entire industries."* [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89]

Thus, the ruling class, by means of the state, is continually trying to develop new forms of private property by creating artificial scarcities and monopolies, e.g. by requiring expensive licenses to engage in particular types of activities, such as broadcasting or producing certain kinds of medicines or products. In the *"Information Age,"* usury (use fees) from intellectual property are becoming a much more important source of income for elites, as reflected in the attention paid to strengthening mechanisms for enforcing copyright and patents in the recent GATT agreements, or in US pressure on foreign countries (like China) to respect such laws.

This allows corporations to destroy potential competitors and ensure that their prices can be set as high as possible (and monopoly profits maintained indefinitely). It also allows them to enclose ever more of the common inheritance of humanity, place it under private ownership and charge the previous users money to gain access to it. As Chomsky notes, *"U.S. corporations must control seeds, plant varieties, drugs, and the means of life generally."* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 183] This has been termed *"bio-piracy"* (a better term may be the new enclosures) and it is a process by which *"international companies [are] patenting traditional medicines or foods."* They *"seek to make money from 'resources' and knowledge that rightfully belongs to the developing countries"* and *"in so doing, they squelch domestic firms that have long provided the products. While it is not clear whether these patents would hold up in court if they were effectively challenged, it is clear that the less developed countries many not have the legal and financial resources required to challenge the patent."* [Joseph Stiglitz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 246] They may also not withstand the economic pressures they may experience if the international markets conclude that such acts indicate a regime that is less that business friendly. That the people who were dependent on the generic drugs or plants can no longer afford them is as irrelevant as the impediments to scientific and technological advance they create.

In other words, capitalists desire to skew the *"free market"* in their favour by ensuring that the law reflects and protects their interests, namely their *"property rights."* By this process they ensure that co-operative tendencies within society are crushed by state-supported "market forces." As Noam Chomsky puts it, modern capitalism is *"state protection and public subsidy for the rich, market discipline for the poor."* [*"Rollback, Part I"*, **Z Magazine**] Self-proclaimed defenders of "free market" capitalism are usually nothing of the kind, while the few who actually support it only object to the *"public*



according to Nozick, the initial appropriation was just and so are all subsequent market exchanges. In this way, the unowned world becomes owned and a market system based on capitalist property rights in productive resources (the land) and labour develop.

Interestingly, for a ideology that calls itself "libertarian" Nozick's theory defines *"worse off"* in terms purely of material welfare, compared to the conditions that existed within the society based upon common use. However, the fact is if one person appropriated the land that the other cannot live off the remaining land then we have a problem. The other person has no choice but to agree to become employed by the landowner. The fact that the new land owner offers the other a wage to work their land that exceeds what the new wage slave originally produced may meet the *"Lockean Proviso"* misses the point. The important issue is that the new wage slave has no option but to work for another and, as a consequence, becomes subject to that person's authority. In other words, being *"worse off"* in terms of liberty (i.e. autonomy or self-government) is irrelevant for Nozick, a **very** telling position to take.

Nozick claims to place emphasis on self-ownership in his ideology because we are separate individuals, each with our own life to lead. It is strange, therefore, to see that Nozick does not emphasise people's ability to act on their own conception of themselves in his account of appropriation. Indeed, there is no objection to an appropriation that puts someone in an unnecessary and undesirable position of subordination and dependence on the will of others.

Notice that the fact that individuals are now subject to the decisions of other individuals is not considered by Nozick in assessing the fairness of the appropriation. The fact that the creation of private property results in the denial of important freedoms for wage slaves (namely, the wage slave has no say over the status of the land they had been utilising and no say over how their labour is used). Before the creation of private

dates back to Locke's work in the seventh century (itself an attempt to defend the encroachment of capitalist norms of ownership over previous common law ones). Nozick's theory only appears valid because we live in a society where the dominant form of property rights are capitalist. As such, Nozick is begging the question — he is assuming the thing he is trying to prove.

Ignoring these obvious issues, what of Nozick's actual argument?

The first thing to note is that it is a fairy tale, it is a myth. The current property system and its distribution of resources and ownership rights is a product of thousands of years of conflict, coercion and violence. As such, given Nozick's arguments, it is illegitimate and the current owners have no right to deprive others of access to them or to object to taxation or expropriation. However, it is precisely this conclusion which Nozick seeks to eliminate by means of his story. By presenting an ahistoric thought experiment, he hopes to convince the reader to ignore the actual history of property in order to defend the current owners of property from redistribution. Nozick's theory is only taken seriously because, firstly, it assumes the very thing it is trying to justify (i.e. capitalist property rights) and, as such, has a superficial coherence as a result and, secondly, it has obvious political utility for the rich.

The second thing to note is that the argument itself is deeply flawed. To see why, take (as an example) two individuals who share land in common. Nozick allows for one individual to claim the land as their own as long as the *"process normally giving rise to a permanent bequeathable property right in a previously unowned thing will not do so if the position of others no longer at liberty to use the thing is therefore worsened."* [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. 178] Given this, one of our two land sharers can appropriate the land as long as they can provide the other with a wage greater than what they were originally producing. If this situation is achieved then,



*subsidy"* aspect of modern capitalism and happily support state protection for property rights.

All these monopolies seek to enrich the capitalist (and increase their capital stock) at the expense of working people, to restrict their ability to undermine the ruling elites power and wealth. All aim to ensure that any option we have to work for ourselves (either individually or collectively) is restricted by tilting the playing field against us, making sure that we have little option but to sell our labour on the *"free market"* and be exploited. In other words, the various monopolies make sure that "natural" barriers to entry (see section C.4) are created, leaving the heights of the economy in the control of big business while alternatives to capitalism are marginalised at its fringes.

So it is these kinds of property and the authoritarian social relationships that they create which the state exists to protect. It should be noted that converting private to state ownership (i.e. nationalisation) does not fundamentally change the nature of property relationships; it just removes private capitalists and replaces them with bureaucrats (as we discuss in section B.3.5).

## B.3.3 Why is property exploitative?

To answer this question, consider the monopoly of productive *"tools and equipment."* This monopoly, obtained by the class of industrial capitalists, allows this class in effect to charge workers a *"fee"* for the privilege of using the monopolised tools and equipment.

This occurs because property, in Proudhon words, *"excommunicates"* the working class. This means that private property creates a class of people who have no choice but to work for a boss in order to pay the landlord rent or buy the goods they, as a class, produce but do not own. The state enforces property rights in land, workplaces and so on, meaning that the owner can bar others from using them and enforce **their** rules

on those they do let use *"their"* property. So the boss *"gives you a job; that is, permission to work in the factory or mill which was not built by him but by other workers like yourself. And for that permission you help to support him for ... as long as you work for him."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 14] This is called wage labour and is, for anarchists, the defining characteristic of capitalism.

This class of people who are dependent on wages to survive was sometimes called the *"proletariat"* by nineteenth century anarchists. Today most anarchists usually call it the *"working class"* as most workers in modern capitalist nations are wage workers rather than peasants or artisans (i.e. self-employed workers who are also exploited by the private property system, but in different ways). It should also be noted that property used in this way (i.e. to employ and exploit other people's labour) is also called ***"capital"*** by anarchists and other socialists. Thus, for anarchists, private property generates a class system, a regime in which the few, due to their ownership of wealth and the means of producing it, rule over the many who own very little (see section B.7 for more discussion of classes).

This ensures that the few can profit from the work of others:

> *"In the capitalist system the working man cannot [in general] work for himself ... So ... you must find an employer. You work for him ... In the capitalist system the whole working class sells its labour power to the employing class. The workers build factories, make machinery and tools, and produce goods. The employers keep the factories, the machinery, the tools and the goods for themselves as* ***their profit.*** *The workers only get their wages ... Though the workers, as a class, have built the factories, a slice of their daily labour is taken from them for the privilege of* ***using*** *those factories ... Though the workers have made the tools and the*



> *laborer. Now, the law bases property upon immemorial, unquestionable possession; that is, prescription. Labour is only the sensible sign, the physical act, by which occupation is manifested. If, then, the cultivator remains proprietor after he has ceased to labor and produce; if his possession, first conceded, then tolerated, finally becomes inalienable, — it happens by permission of the civil law, and by virtue of the principle of occupancy. So true is this, that there is not a bill of sale, not a farm lease, not an annuity, but implies it .. .*
>
> *"Man has created every thing — every thing save the material itself. Now, I maintain that this material he can only possess and use, on condition of permanent labor, — granting, for the time being, his right of property in things which he has produced.*
>
> *"This, then, is the first point settled: property in product, if we grant so much, does not carry with it property in the means of production; that seems to me to need no further demonstration. There is no difference between the soldier who possesses his arms, the mason who possesses the materials committed to his care, the fisherman who possesses the water, the hunter who possesses the fields and forests, and the cultivator who possesses the lands: all, if you say so, are proprietors of their products — not one is proprietor of the means of production. The right to product is exclusive –****jus in re****; the right to means is common —****jus ad rem****."* [**What is Property?**, pp. 120–1]

Proudhon's argument has far more historical validity than Nozick's. Common ownership of land combined with personal use has been the dominant form of property rights for tens of thousands of years while Nozick's *"natural law"* theory

erty? Surely it would be as likely to simply mean that you have lost the labour you have expended (for example, few would argue that you owned a river simply because you swam or fished in it). Even if we assume the validity of the argument and acknowledge that by working on a piece of land creates ownership, why assume that this ownership must be based on **capitalist** property rights? Many cultures have recognised no such *"absolute"* forms of property, admitted the right of property in what is produced but not the land itself.

As such, the assumption that expending labour turns the soil into private property does not automatically hold. You could equally argue the opposite, namely that labour, while producing ownership of the goods created, does not produce property in land, only possession. In the words of Proudhon:

> *"I maintain that the possessor is paid for his trouble and industry .. . but that he acquires no right to the land. 'Let the labourer have the fruits of his labour.' Very good; but I do not understand that property in products carries with it property in raw material. Does the skill of the fisherman, who on the same coast can catch more fish than his fellows, make him proprietor of the fishing-grounds? Can the expertness of a hunter ever be regarded as a property-title to a game-forest? The analogy is perfect, — the industrious cultivator finds the reward of his industry in the abundancy and superiority of his crop. If he has made improvements in the soil, he has the possessor's right of preference. Never, under any circumstances, can he be allowed to claim a property-title to the soil which he cultivates, on the ground of his skill as a cultivator.*
>
> *"To change possession into property, something is needed besides labour, without which a man would cease to be proprietor as soon as he ceased to be a*



> *machinery, another slice of their daily labour is taken from them for the privilege of* ***using*** *those tools and machinery ...*
>
> *"Can you guess now why the wisdom of Proudhon said that* ***the possessions of the rich are stolen property****? Stolen from the producer, the worker."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 7–8]

Thus the daily theft/exploitation associated with capitalism is dependent on the distribution of wealth and private property (i.e. the initial theft of the means of life, the land, workplaces and housing by the owning class). Due to the dispossession of the vast majority of the population from the means of life, capitalists are in an ideal position to charge a *"use-fee"* for the capital they own, but neither produced nor use. Having little option, workers agree to contracts within which they forfeit their autonomy during work and the product of that work. This results in capitalists having access to a *"commodity"* (labour) that can potentially produce more value than it gets paid for in wages.

For this situation to arise, for wage labour to exist, workers must not own or control the means of production they use. As a consequence, are controlled by those who do own the means of production they use during work hours. As their labour is owned by their boss and as labour cannot be separated from the person who does it, the boss effectively owns the worker for the duration of the working day and, as a consequence, exploitation becomes possible. This is because during working hours, the owner can dictate (within certain limits determined by worker resistance and solidarity as well as objective conditions, such as the level of unemployment within an industry or country) the organisation, level, duration, conditions, pace and intensity of work, and so the amount of output (which the owner has sole rights over even though they did not produce it).

Thus the *"fee"* (or *"surplus value"*) is created by owners paying workers less than the full value added by their labour to the products or services they create for the firm. The capitalist's profit is thus the difference between this *"surplus value,"* created by and appropriated from labour, minus the firm's overhead and cost of raw materials (See also section C.2 — *"Where do profits come from?"*).

So property is exploitative because it allows a surplus to be monopolised by the owners. Property creates hierarchical relationships within the workplace (the *"tools and equipment monopoly"* might better be called the *"power monopoly"*) and as in any hierarchical system, those with the power use it to protect and further their own interests at the expense of others. Within the workplace there is resistance by workers to this oppression and exploitation, which the *"hierarchical . .. relations of the capitalist enterprise are designed to resolve this conflict in favour of the representatives of capital."* [William Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184]

Needless to say, the state is always on hand to protect the rights of property and management against the actions of the dispossessed. When it boils down to it, it is the existence of the state as protector of the *"power monopoly"* that allows it to exist at all.

So, capitalists are able to appropriate this surplus value from workers solely because they own the means of production, not because they earn it by doing productive work themselves. Of course some capitalists **may** also contribute to production, in which case they are in fairness entitled to the amount of value added to the firm's output by their own labour; but owners typically pay themselves much more than this, and are able to do so because the state guarantees them that right as property owners (which is unsurprising, as they alone have knowledge of the firms inputs and outputs and, like all people in unaccountable positions, abuse that power — which is partly why anarchists support direct democracy



as the essential counterpart of free agreement, for no one in power can be trusted not to prefer their own interests over those subject to their decisions). And of course many capitalists hire managers to run their businesses for them, thus collecting income for doing nothing except owning.

Capitalists' profits, then, are a form of state-supported exploitation. This is equally true of the interest collected by bankers and rents collected by landlords. Without some form of state, these forms of exploitation would be impossible, as the monopolies on which they depend could not be maintained. For instance, in the absence of state troops and police, workers would simply take over and operate factories for themselves, thus preventing capitalists from appropriating an unjust share of the surplus they create.

## B.3.4 Can private property be justified?

No. Even though a few supporters of capitalism recognise that private property, particularly in land, was created by the use of force, most maintain that private property is just. One common defence of private property is found in the work of Robert Nozick (a supporter of *"free market"* capitalism). For Nozick, the use of force makes acquisition illegitimate and so any current title to the property is illegitimate (in other words, theft and trading in stolen goods does not make ownership of these goods legal). So, if the initial acquisition of land was illegitimate then all current titles are also illegitimate. And since private ownership of land is the basis of capitalism, capitalism itself would be rendered illegal.

To get round this problem, Nozick utilises the work of Locke (*"The Lockean Proviso"*) which can be summarised as:

However, there are numerous flaws in this theory. Most obvious is why does the mixing of something you own (labour) with something owned by all (or unowned) turn it in your prop-

Within capitalism, economics plays an important ideological role. Economics has been used to construct a theory from which exploitation and oppression are excluded, by definition. We will attempt here to explain why capitalism is deeply exploitative. Elsewhere, in section B, we have indicated why capitalism is oppressive and will not repeat ourselves here.

In many ways economics plays the role within capitalism that religion played in the Middle Ages, namely to provide justification for the dominant social system and hierarchies. *"The priest keeps you docile and subjected,"* argued Malatesta, *"telling you everything is God's will; the economist say it's the law of nature."* They *"end up saying that no one is responsible for poverty, so there's no point rebelling against it."* [**Fra Contadini**, p. 21] Even worse, they usually argue that collective action by working class people is counterproductive and, like the priest, urge us to tolerate current oppression and exploitation with promises of a better future (in heaven for the priest, for the economist it is an unspecified "long run"). It would be no generalisation to state that if you want to find someone to rationalise and justify an obvious injustice or form of oppression then you should turn to an economist (preferably a "free market" one).

That is not the only similarity between the "science" of economics and religion. Like religion, its basis in science is usually lacking and its theories more based upon "leaps of faith" than empirical fact. Indeed, it is hard to find a "science" more unconcerned about empirical evidence or building realistic models than economics. Just looking at the assumptions made in "perfect competition" shows that (see section C.1 for details). This means that economics is immune to such trivialities as evidence and fact, although that does not stop economics being used to rationalise and justify certain of these facts (such as exploitation and inequality). A classic example is the various ways economists have sought to explain what anarchists and other socialists have tended to call ***"surplus value"*** (i.e.



the individual's labour power and creativity. For you do not sell your skills, as these skills are **part** of you. Instead, what you have to sell is your **time**, your labour power, and so **yourself.** Thus under wage labour, rights of "self-ownership" are always placed below property rights, the only "right" being left to you is that of finding another job (although even this right is denied in some countries if the employee owes the company money).

It should be stressed that this is **not** a strange paradox of the "self-ownership" axiom. Far from it. The doctrine was most famously expounded by John Locke, who argued that *"every Man has a **Property** in his own **Person.** This no Body has any Right to but himself."* However, a person can sell, *"for a certain time, the Service he undertakes to do, in exchange for Wages he is to receive."* The buyer of the labour then owns both it and its product. *"Thus the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg'd in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, becomes my **Property,** without the assignation or consent of any body. The **labour** that was mine ... hath **fixed** my **Property** in them."* [**Second Treatise on Government**, Section 27, Section 85 and Section 28]

Thus a person (the servant) becomes the equivalent of an animal (the horse) once they have sold their labour to the boss. Wage labour denies the basic humanity and autonomy of the worker. Rather than being equals, private property produces relations of domination and alienation. Proudhon compared this to an association in which, *"while the partnership lasts, the profits and losses are divided between them; since each produces, not for himself, but for the society; when the time of distribution arrives it is not the producer who is considered, but the associated. That is why the slave, to whom the planter gives straw and rice; and the civilised labour, to whom the capitalist pays a salary which is always too small, — not being associated with their employers, although producing with them, — are disregarded when the product is divided. Thus the horse who draws our coaches ... produce with us, but are not associated with us; we take their*

*product but do not share it with them. The animals and labourers whom we employ hold the same relation to us."* [**What is Property?**, p. 226]

So while the capitalist Locke sees nothing wrong in comparing a person to an animal, the anarchist Proudhon objects to the fundamental injustice of a system which turns a person into a resource for another to use. And we do mean resource, as the self-ownership thesis is also the means by which the poor become little more than spare parts for the wealthy. After all, the poor own their bodies and, consequently, can sell all or part of it to a willing party. This means that someone in dire economic necessity can sell parts of their body to the rich. Ultimately, *"[t]o tell a poor man that he **has** property because he **has** arms and legs — that the hunger from which he suffers, and his power to sleep in the open air are his property, — is to play upon words, and to add insult to injury."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 80]

Obviously the ability to labour is **not** the property of a person — it is their possession. Use and ownership are fused and cannot be separated out. As such, anarchists argue that the history of capitalism shows that there is a considerable difference whether one said (like the defenders of capitalism) that slavery is wrong because every person has a natural right to the property of their own body, or because every person has a natural right freely to determine their own destiny (like the anarchists). The first kind of right is alienable and in the context of a capitalist regime ensures that the many labour for those who own the means of life. The second kind of right is inalienable as long as a person remained a person and, therefore, liberty or self-determination is not a claim to ownership which might be both acquired and surrendered, but an inextricable aspect of the activity of being human.

The anarchist position on the inalienable nature of human liberty also forms the basis for the excluded to demand access to the means necessary to labour. *"From the distinction between*



# Section C — What are the myths of capitalist economics?

*"the all-important **economic power**"* of the working class. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87, p. 86 and p. 88]

This potential power of the oppressed, anarchist argue, shows that not only are classes wasteful and harmful, but that they can be ended once those at the bottom seek to do so and reorganise society appropriately. This means that we have the power to transform the economic system into a non-exploitative and classless one as *"only a productive class may be libertarian in nature, because it does not need to exploit."* [Albert Meltzer, **Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, p. 23]

Finally, it is important to stress that anarchists think that class consciousness **must** also mean to be aware of **all** forms of hierarchical power, not just economic oppression. As such, class consciousness and class conflict is not simply about inequalities of wealth or income but rather questioning all forms of domination, oppression and exploitation.

For anarchists, *"[t]he class struggle does not centre around material exploitation alone but also around spiritual exploitation, ... [as well as] psychological and environmental oppression."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 151] This means that we do not consider economic oppression to be the only important thing, ignoring struggles and forms of oppression outside the workplace. To the contrary, workers are human beings, not the economically driven robots of capitalist and Leninist mythology. They are concerned about everything that affects them — their parents, their children, their friends, their neighbours, their planet and, very often, total strangers.



*possession and property,"* argued Proudhon, *"arise two sorts of rights: the **jus in re**, the right **in** a thing, the right by which I may reclaim the property which I have acquired, in whatever hands I find it; and **jus ad rem**, the right **to** a thing, which gives me a claim to become a proprietor ... In the first, possession and property are united; the second includes only naked property. With me who, as a labourer, have a right to the possession of the products of Nature and my own industry — and who, as a proletaire, enjoy none of them — it is by virtue of the **jus de rem** that I demand admittance to the **jus in re**."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 65] Thus to make the self-ownership of labour and its products a reality for those who do the actual work in society rather than a farce, property must be abolished — both in terms of the means of life and also in defining liberty and what it means to be free.

So, contrary to Rothbard's claim, capitalism in practice uses the rhetoric of self-ownership to alienate the right to genuine self-ownership because of the authoritarian structure of the workplace, which derives from private property. If we desire real self-ownership, we cannot renounce it for most of our adult lives by becoming wage slaves. Only workers' self-management of production, not capitalism, can make self-ownership a reality:

> *"They speak of 'inherent rights', 'inalienable rights', 'natural rights,' etc ... Unless the material conditions for equality exist, it is worse than mockery to pronounce men equal. And unless there is equality (and by equality I mean equal chances for every one to make the most of himself [or herself]) unless, I say, these equal changes exist, freedom, either of though, speech, or action, is equally a mockery ... As long as the working-people ... tramp the streets, whose stones they lay, whose filth they clean, whose sewers they dig, yet upon which they must not stand too long lest the policeman bid them 'move on'; as long*

*as they go from factory to factory, begging for the opportunity to be a slave, receiving the insults of bosses and foreman, getting the old 'no,' the old shake of the head, in these factories they built, whose machines they wrought; so long as they consent to be herd like cattle, in the cities, driven year after year, more and more, off the mortgaged land, the land they cleared, fertilised, cultivated, rendered of value . .. so long as they continue to do these things vaguely relying upon some power outside themselves, be it god, or priest, or politician, or employer, or charitable society, to remedy matters, so long deliverance will be delayed. When they conceive the possibility of a complete international federation of labour, whose constituent groups shall take possession of land, mines, factories, all the instruments of production ... , in short, conduct their own industry without regulative interference from law-makers or employers, then we may hope for the only help which counts for aught — Self-Help; the only condition which can guarantee free speech [along with their other rights] (and no paper guarantee needed).*" [Voltairine de Cleyre, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, pp. 4–6]

To conclude, the idea that capitalism is based on self-ownership is radically at odds with reality if, by self-ownership, it is meant self-determination or individual autonomy. However, this is not surprising given that the rationale behind the self-ownership thesis is precisely to justify capitalist hierarchy and its resulting restrictions on liberty. Rather than being a defence of liberty, self-ownership is designed to facilitate its erosion. In order to make the promise of autonomy implied by the concept of "self-ownership" a reality, private property will need to be abolished.



*pate itself from bondage ... It is only be growing to a true realisation of their present position, by visualising their possibilities and powers, by learning unity and co-operation, and practising them, that the masses can attain freedom.*" [Alexander Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 187–8]

We recognise, therefore, that only those at the bottom of society have a **self**-interest in freeing themselves from the burden of those at the top, and so we see the importance of class consciousness in the struggle of oppressed people for self-liberation. Thus, *"[f]ar from believing in the messianic role of the working class, the anarchists' aim is to **abolish** the working class in so far as this term refers to the underprivileged majority in all existing societies... What we do say is that no revolution can succeed without the active participation of the working, producing, section of the population... The power of the State, the values of authoritarian society can only be challenged and destroyed by a greater power and new values."* [Vernon Richards, **The Raven**, no. 14, pp. 183–4] Anarchists also argue that one of the effects of direct action to resist oppression and exploitation of working class people would be the **creation** of such a power and new values, values based on respect for individual freedom and solidarity (see sections J.2 and J.4 on direct action and its liberating potential).

As such, class consciousness also means recognising that working class people not only have an interest in ending its oppression but that we also have the power to do so. *"This power, the people's power,"* notes Berkman, *"is **actual**: it cannot be taken away, as the power of the ruler, of the politician, or of the capitalist can be. It cannot be taken away because it does not consist of possessions but in ability. It is the ability to create, to produce; the power that feeds and clothes the world, that gives us life, health and comfort, joy and pleasure."* The power of government and capital *"disappear when the people refuse to acknowledge them as masters, refuse to let them lord it over them."* This is

which comes out during social struggle. And such struggle is part of the process by which more and more oppressed people subjectivity recognise the objective facts. And by more and more people recognising the facts of capitalist reality, more and more people will want to change them.

Currently there are working class people who want an anarchist society and there are others who just want to climb up the hierarchy to get to a position where they can impose their will to others. But that does not change the fact that their current position is that they are subjected to the authority of hierarchy and so can come into conflict with it. And by so doing, they must practise self-activity and this struggle can change their minds, what they think, and so they become radicalised. This, the radicalising effects of self-activity and social struggle, is a key factor in why anarchists are involved in it. It is an important means of creating more anarchists and getting more and more people aware of anarchism as a viable alternative to capitalism.

Ultimately, it does not matter what class you are, it's what you **believe in** that matters. And what you **do.** Hence we see anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin, former members of the Russian ruling class, or like Malatesta, born into an Italian middle class family, rejecting their backgrounds and its privileges and becoming supporters of working class self-liberation. But anarchists base their activity primarily on the working class (including peasants, self-employed artisans and so on) because the working class is subject to hierarchy and so have a real need to resist to exist. This process of resisting the powers that be can and does have a radicalising effect on those involved and so what they believe in and what they do **changes.** Being subject to hierarchy, oppression and exploitation means that it is in the working class people's *"own interest to abolish them. It has been truly said that 'the emancipation of the workers must be accomplished by the workers themselves,' for no social class will do it for them ... It is ...* ***the interest*** *of the proletariat to emanci-*



For more discussion of the limitations, contradictions and fallacies of defining liberty in terms of self-ownership and property rights, see section F.2.

## B.4.3 But no one forces you to work for them!

Of course it is claimed that entering wage labour is a "voluntary" undertaking, from which both sides allegedly benefit. However, due to **past** initiations of force (e.g. the seizure of land by conquest), the control of the state by the capitalist class plus the tendency for capital to concentrate, a relative handful of people now control vast wealth, depriving all others access to the means of life. Thus denial of free access to the means of life is based ultimately on the principle of "might makes right." And as Murray Bookchin so rightly points out, *"the means of life must be taken for what they literally are: the means without which life is impossible. To deny them to people is more than 'theft' ... it is outright homicide."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 187]

David Ellerman has also noted that the past use of force has resulted in the majority being limited to those options allowed to them by the powers that be:

> *"It is a veritable mainstay of capitalist thought ... that the moral flaws of chattel slavery have not survived in capitalism since the workers, unlike the slaves, are free people making voluntary wage contracts. But it is only that, in the case of capitalism, the denial of natural rights is less complete so that the worker has a residual legal personality as a free 'commodity owner.' He is thus allowed to voluntarily put his own working life to traffic. When a robber denies another person's right to make an infinite number of other choices besides losing his*

*money or his life and the denial is backed up by a gun, then this is clearly robbery even though it might be said that the victim making a 'voluntary choice' between his remaining options. When the legal system itself denies the natural rights of working people in the name of the prerogatives of capital, and this denial is sanctioned by the legal violence of the state, then the theorists of 'libertarian' capitalism do not proclaim institutional robbery, but rather they celebrate the 'natural liberty' of working people to choose between the remaining options of selling their labour as a commodity and being unemployed."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **The Chomsky Reader**, p. 186]

Therefore the existence of the labour market depends on the worker being separated from the means of production. The natural basis of capitalism is wage labour, wherein the majority have little option but to sell their skills, labour and time to those who **do** own the means of production. In advanced capitalist countries, less than 10% of the working population are self-employed (in 1990, 7.6% in the UK, 8% in the USA and Canada — however, this figure includes **employers** as well, meaning that the number of self-employed **workers** is even smaller!). Hence for the vast majority, the labour market is their only option.

Michael Bakunin notes that these facts put the worker in the position of a serf with regard to the capitalist, even though the worker is formally "free" and "equal" under the law:

*"Juridically they are both equal; but economically the worker is the serf of the capitalist ... thereby the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time. The worker is in the position of a serf because this terrible threat of starvation which daily hangs over his head and over his family, will force him*



nise what the bosses already know: the importance of solidarity with others in the same class position as oneself and of acting together as equals to attain common goals. The difference is that the ruling class wants to keep the class system going while anarchists seek to end it once and for all.

It could therefore be argued that anarchists actually want an ***"anti-class"*** consciousness to develop — that is, for people to recognise that classes exist, to understand **why** they exist, and act to abolish the root causes for their continued existence (*"class consciousness,"* argues Vernon Richards, *"but not in the sense of wanting to perpetuate classes, but the consciousness of their existence, an understanding of why they exist, and a determination, informed by knowledge and militancy, to abolish them."* [**The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 133]). In short, anarchists want to eliminate classes, not universalise the class of "wage worker" (which would presuppose the continued existence of capitalism).

More importantly, class consciousness does not involve "worker worship." To the contrary, as Murray Bookchin points out, *"[t]he worker begins to become a revolutionary when he undoes his [or her] 'workerness', when he [or she] comes to detest his class status here and now, when he begins to shed... his work ethic, his character-structure derived from industrial discipline, his respect for hierarchy, his obedience to leaders, his consumerism, his vestiges of puritanism."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 119] For, in the end, anarchists *"cannot build until the working class gets rid of its illusions, its acceptance of bosses and faith in leaders."* [Marie-Louise Berneri, **Neither East Nor West**, p. 19]

It may be objected that there are only individuals and anarchists are trying to throw a lot of people in a box and put a label like "working class" on them. In reply, anarchists agree, yes, there are "only" individuals but some of them are bosses, most of them are working class. This is an objective division within society which the ruling class does its best to hide but

> *country and they will not 'disturb industry' and the 'orderly life of the community' by strikes and stoppage of work. If you listen to your exploiters and their mouthpieces you will be 'good' and consider only the interests of your masters, of your city and country — but no one cares about **your** interests and those of your family, the interests of your union and of your fellow workers of the labouring class. 'Don't be selfish,' they admonish you, while the boss is getting rich by your being good and unselfish. And they laugh in their sleeves and thank the Lord that you are such an idiot."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 74–5]

So, in a nutshell, class consciousness is to look after your own interest as a member of the working class. To be aware that there is inequality in society and that you cannot expect the wealthy and powerful to be concerned about anyone's interest except their own. That only by struggle can you gain respect and an increased slice of the wealth you produce but do not own. And that there is *"an irreconcilable antagonism"* between the ruling class and working class *"which results inevitably from their respective stations in life."* The riches of the former are *"based on the exploitation and subjugation of the latter's labour"* which means *"war between"* the two *"is unavoidable."* For the working class desires *"only equality"* while the ruling elite *"exist[s] only through inequality."* For the latter, *"as a separate class, equality is death"* while for the former *"the least inequality is slavery."* [Bakunin, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 97 and pp. 91–2]

Although class analysis may at first appear to be a novel idea, the conflicting interests of the classes is **well** recognised on the other side of the class divide. For example, James Madison in the **Federalist Paper** #10 states that *"those who hold and those who are without have ever formed distinct interests in society."* For anarchists, class consciousness means to recog-



> *to accept any conditions imposed by the gainful calculations of the capitalist, the industrialist, the employer... .The worker always has the **right** to leave his employer, but has he the means to do so? No, he does it in order to sell himself to another employer. He is driven to it by the same hunger which forces him to sell himself to the first employer. Thus the worker's liberty ... is only a theoretical freedom, lacking any means for its possible realisation, and consequently it is only a fictitious liberty, an utter falsehood. The truth is that the whole life of the worker is simply a continuous and dismaying succession of terms of serfdom — voluntary from the juridical point of view but compulsory from an economic sense — broken up by momentarily brief interludes of freedom accompanied by starvation; in other words, it is real slavery."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 187–8]

Obviously, a company cannot **force** you to work for them but, in general, you have to work for **someone**. How this situation developed is, of course, usually ignored. If not glossed over as irrelevant, some fairy tale is spun in which a few bright people saved and worked hard to accumulate capital and the lazy majority flocked to be employed by these (almost superhuman) geniuses. In the words of one right-wing economist (talking specifically of the industrial revolution but whose argument is utilised today):

> *"The factory owners did not have the power to compel anybody to take a factory job. They could only hire people who were ready to work for the wages offered to them. Low as these wage rates were, they were nonetheless much more than these paupers could earn in any other field open to them."* [Ludwig von Mises, **Human Action**, pp. 619–20]

Notice the assumptions. The workers just happen have such a terrible set of options — the employing classes have absolutely nothing to do with it. And these owners just happen to have all these means of production on their hands while the working class just happen to be without property and, as a consequence, forced to sell their labour on the owners' terms. That the state enforces capitalist property rights and acts to defend the power of the owning class is just another co-incidence among many. The possibility that the employing classes might be directly implicated in state policies that reduced the available options of workers is too ludicrous even to mention.

Yet in the real world, the power of coincidence to explain all is less compelling. Here things are more grim as the owning class clearly benefited from numerous acts of state violence and a general legal framework which restricted the options available for the workers. Apparently we are meant to believe that it is purely by strange co-incidence the state was run by the wealthy and owning classes, not the working class, and that a whole host of anti-labour laws and practices were implemented by random chance.

It should be stressed that this nonsense, with its underlying assumptions and inventions, is still being peddled today. It is being repeated to combat the protests that "multinational corporations exploit people in poor countries." Yes, it will be readily admitted, multinationals **do** pay lower wages in developing countries than in rich ones: that is why they go there. However, it is argued, this represents economic advancement compares to what the other options available are. As the corporations do not force them to work for them and they would have stayed with what they were doing previously the charge of exploitation is wrong. Would you, it is stressed, leave your job for one with less pay and worse conditions? In fact, the bosses are doing them a favour in paying such low wages for the products the companies charge such high prices in the developed world for.



*Capitalist industry is the process of continuing to appropriate the products of labour for the benefit of the master class ... It is clear that your interests as a worker are* ***different*** *from the interests of your capitalistic masters. More than different: they are entirely opposite; in fact, contrary, antagonistic to each other. The better wages the boss pays you, the less profit he makes out of you. It does not require great philosophy to understand that.*" [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 75–6]

That classes are in conflict can be seen from the post-war period in most developed countries. Taking the example of the USA, the immediate post-war period (the 1950s to the 1970s) were marked by social conflict, strikes and so forth. From the 1980s onwards, there was a period of relative social peace because the bosses managed to inflict a series of defeats on the working class. Workers became less militant, the trade unions went into a period of decline and the success of capitalism proclaimed. If the interests of both classes were the same we would expect that all sections of society would have benefited more in the 1980s onwards than between the 1950s to 1970s. This is **not** the case. While income grew steadily across the board between 1950 and 1980s, since then wealth has flooded up to the top while those at the bottom found it harder to make ends meet.

A similar process occurred in the 1920s when Alexander Berkman stated the obvious:

> *"The masters have found a very effective way to paralyse the strength of organised labour. They have persuaded the workers that they have the same interests as the employers ... that what is good for the employer is good for his employees ... [that] the workers will not think of fighting their masters for better conditions, but they will be patient and wait till the employer can 'share his prosperity' with them. They will also consider the interests of 'their'*

Because in union there is power — power which can destroy the class system as well as the state and create a new world.

That's why the very existence of class is denied by the elite. It's part of their strategy for winning the battle of ideas and ensuring that people remain as atomised individuals. By *"manufacturing consent"* (to use Walter Lipman's expression for the function of the media), force need not be used. By limiting the public's sources of information to propaganda organs controlled by state and corporate elites, all debate can be confined within a narrow conceptual framework of capitalist terminology and assumptions, and anything premised on a different conceptual framework can be marginalised. Thus the average person is brought to accept current society as "fair" and "just," or at least as "the best available," because no alternatives are ever allowed to be discussed.

## B.7.4 What do anarchists mean by *"class consciousness"*?

Given that the existence of classes is often ignored or considered unimportant ("boss and worker have common interests") in mainstream culture, its important to continually point out the facts of the situation: that a wealthy elite run the world and the vast majority are subjected to hierarchy and work to enrich this elite. To be class conscious means that we are aware of the objective facts and act appropriately to change them.

This is why anarchists stress the need for ***"class consciousness,"*** for recognising that classes exist and that their interests are in **conflict.** The reason why this is the case is obvious enough. As Alexander Berkman argues, *"the interests of capital and labour are not the same. No greater lie was ever invented than the so-called 'identity of interests' [between capital and labour] ... labour produces all the wealth of the world ... [and] capital is owned by the masters is stolen property, stolen products of labour.*



And so, by the same strange co-incidence that marked the industrial revolution, capitalists today (in the form of multinational corporations) gravitate toward states with terrible human rights records. States where, at worse, death squads torture and "disappear" union and peasant co-operative organisers or where, at best, attempts to organise a union can get you arrested or fired and blacklisted. States were peasants are being forced of their land as a result of government policies which favour the big landlords. By an equally strange coincidence, the foreign policy of the American and European governments is devoted to making sure such anti-labour regimes stay in power. It is a co-incidence, of course, that such regimes are favoured by the multinationals and that these states spend so much effort in providing a "market friendly" climate to tempt the corporations to set up their sweatshops there. It is also, apparently, just a co-incidence that these states are controlled by the local wealthy owning classes and subject to economic pressure by the transnationals which invest and wish to invest there.

It is clear that when a person who is mugged hands over their money to the mugger they do so because they prefer it to the "next best alternative." As such, it is correct that people agree to sell their liberty to a boss because their "next best alternative" is worse (utter poverty or starvation are not found that appealing for some reason). But so what? As anarchists have been pointing out over a century, the capitalists have systematically used the state to create a limit options for the many, to create buyers' market for labour by skewing the conditions under which workers can sell their labour in the bosses favour. To then merrily answer all criticisms of this set-up with the response that the workers "voluntarily agreed" to work on those terms is just hypocrisy. Does it really change things if the mugger (the state) is only the agent (hired thug) of another criminal (the owning class)?

As such, hymns to the "free market" seem somewhat false when the reality of the situation is such that workers do not

need to be forced at gun point to enter a specific workplace because of **past** (and more often than not, current) "initiation of force" by the capitalist class and the state which have created the objective conditions within which we make our employment decisions. Before any **specific** labour market contract occurs, the separation of workers from the means of production is an established fact (and the resulting "labour" market usually gives the advantage to the capitalists as a class). So while we can usually pick which capitalist to work for, we, in general, cannot choose to work for ourselves (the self-employed sector of the economy is tiny, which indicates well how spurious capitalist liberty actually is). Of course, the ability to leave employment and seek it elsewhere is an important freedom. However, this freedom, like most freedoms under capitalism, is of limited use and hides a deeper anti-individual reality.

As Karl Polanyi puts it:

> *"In human terms such a postulate [of a labour market] implied for the worker extreme instability of earnings, utter absence of professional standards, abject readiness to be shoved and pushed about indiscriminately, complete dependence on the whims of the market. [Ludwig Von] Mises justly argued that if workers 'did not act as trade unionists, but reduced their demands and changed their locations and occupations according to the labour market, they would eventually find work.' This sums up the position under a system based on the postulate of the commodity character of labour. It is not for the commodity to decide where it should be offered for sale, to what purpose it should be used, at what price it should be allowed to change hands, and in what manner it should be consumed or destroyed."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 176]



of a "pluralist" and "democratic" society — a Never-Never Land where all laws and public policies supposedly get determined only by the amount of "public support" they have — certainly not by any small faction wielding power in disproportion to its size.

To deny the existence of class is a powerful tool in the hands of the powerful. As Alexander Berkman points out, *"[o]ur social institutions are founded on certain ideas; so long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built on them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."* [*"Author's Foreword,"* **What is Anarchism?**, p. xii]

Unsurprisingly, to deny the existence of classes is an important means of bolstering capitalism, to undercut social criticism of inequality and oppression. It presents a picture of a system in which only individuals exist, ignoring the differences between one set of people (the ruling class) and the others (the working class) in terms of social position, power and interests. This obviously helps those in power maintain it by focusing analysis away from that power and its sources (wealth, hierarchy, etc.).

It also helps maintain the class system by undermining collective struggle. To admit class exists means to admit that working people share common interests due to their common position in the social hierarchy. And common interests can lead to common action to change that position. Isolated consumers, however, are in no position to act for themselves. One individual standing alone is easily defeated, whereas a ***union*** of individuals supporting each other is not. Throughout the history of capitalism there have been attempts by the ruling class — often successful — to destroy working class organisations. Why?

*origins"* [in *"Lies My Teacher Told Me"* citing William Miller, *"American Historians and the Business Elite,"* in **Men in Business**, pp. 326–28; cf. David Montgomery, **Beyond Equality**, pg. 15] And this was at the height of USA "free market" capitalism. According to a survey done by C. Wright Mills and reported in his book **The Power Elite**, about 65% of the highest-earning CEOs in American corporations come from wealthy families. Meritocracy, after all, does not imply a "classless" society, only that some mobility exists between classes. Yet we continually hear that class is an outmoded concept; that classes don't exist any more, just atomised individuals who all enjoy "equal opportunity," "equality before the law," and so forth. So what's going on?

The fact that the capitalist media are the biggest promoters of the "end-of-class" idea should make us wonder exactly **why** they do it. Whose interest is being served by denying the existence of classes? Clearly it is those who run the class system, who gain the most from it, who want everyone to think we are all "equal." Those who control the major media don't want the idea of class to spread because they themselves are members of the ruling class, with all the privileges that implies. Hence they use the media as propaganda organs to mould public opinion and distract the middle and working classes from the crucial issue, i.e., their own subordinate status. This is why the mainstream news sources give us nothing but superficial analyses, biased and selective reporting, outright lies, and an endless barrage of yellow journalism, titillation, and "entertainment," rather than talking about the class nature of capitalist society (see section D.3 — "How does wealth influence the mass media?")

The universities, think tanks, and private research foundations are also important propaganda tools of the ruling class. This is why it is virtually taboo in mainstream academic circles to suggest that anything like a ruling class even exists in the United States. Students are instead indoctrinated with the myth



(Although we should point out that von Mises argument that workers will "eventually" find work as well as being nice and vague — how long is "eventually"?, for example — is contradicted by actual experience. As the Keynesian economist Michael Stewart notes, in the nineteenth century workers *"who lost their jobs had to redeploy fast or starve (and even this feature of the ninetheenth century economy... did not prevent prolonged recessions)"* [**Keynes in the 1990s**, p. 31] Workers "reducing their demands" may actually worsen an economic slump, causing more unemployment in the short run and lengthening the length of the crisis. We address the issue of unemployment and workers "reducing their demands" in more detail in section C.9).

It is sometimes argued that capital needs labour, so both have an equal say in the terms offered, and hence the labour market is based on "liberty." But for capitalism to be based on real freedom or on true free agreement, both sides of the capital/labour divide must be equal in bargaining power, otherwise any agreement would favour the most powerful at the expense of the other party. However, due to the existence of private property and the states needed to protect it, this equality is de facto impossible, regardless of the theory. This is because. in general, capitalists have three advantages on the "free" labour market– the law and state placing the rights of property above those of labour, the existence of unemployment over most of the business cycle and capitalists having more resources to fall back on. We will discuss each in turn.

The first advantage, namely property owners having the backing of the law and state, ensures that when workers go on strike or use other forms of direct action (or even when they try to form a union) the capitalist has the full backing of the state to employ scabs, break picket lines or fire "the ringleaders." This obviously gives employers greater power in their bargaining position, placing workers in a weak position (a po-

sition that may make them, the workers, think twice before standing up for their rights).

The existence of unemployment over most of the business cycle ensures that *"employers have a structural advantage in the labour market, because there are typically more candidates... than jobs for them to fill."* This means that *"[c]ompetition in labour markets us typically skewed in favour of employers: it is a buyers market. And in a buyer's market, it is the sellers who compromise. Competition for labour is not strong enough to ensure that workers' desires are always satisified."* [Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 71, p. 129] If the labour market generally favours the employer, then this obviously places working people at a disadvantage as the threat of unemployment and the hardships associated with it encourages workers to take any job and submit to their bosses demands and power while employed. Unemployment, in other words, serves to discipline labour. The higher the prevailing unemployment rate, the harder it is to find a new job, which raises the cost of job loss and makes it less likely for workers to strike, join unions, or to resist employer demands, and so on.

As Bakunin argued, *"the property owners... are **likewise** forced to seek out and purchase labour... **but not in the same measure** ... [there is no] equality between those who offer their labour and those who purchase it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 183] This ensures that any "free agreements" made benefit the capitalists more than the workers (see the next section on periods of full employment, when conditions tilt in favour of working people).

Lastly, there is the issue of inequalities in wealth and so resources. The capitalist generally has more resources to fall back on during strikes and while waiting to find employees (for example, large companies with many factories can swap production to their other factories if one goes on strike). And by having more resources to fall back on, the capitalist can hold out longer than the worker, so placing the employer in a stronger



inequality of incomes and wealth, the lower the equality of opportunity and, consequently, the lower the social mobility.

Finally, we should point out even if income mobility was higher it does not cancel out the fact that a class system is marked by differences in **power** which accompany the differences in income. In other words, because it is possible (in theory) for everyone to become a boss this does not make the power and authority that bosses have over their workers (or the impact of their wealth on society) any more legitimate (just because everyone — in theory — can become a member of the government does not make government any less authoritarian). Because the membership of the boss class can change does not negate the fact that such a class exists.

Ultimately, using (usually highly inflated) notions of social mobility to defend a class system is unconvincing. After all, in most slave societies slaves could buy their freedom and free people could sell themselves into slavery (to pay off debts). If someone tried to defend slavery with the reference to this fact of social mobility they would be dismissed as mad. The evil of slavery is not mitigated by the fact that a few slaves could stop being slaves if they worked hard enough.

## B.7.3 Why is the existence of classes denied?

It is clear, then, that classes do exist, and equally clear that individuals can rise and fall within the class structure — though, of course, it's easier to become rich if you're born in a rich family than a poor one. Thus James W. Loewen reports that *"ninety-five percent of the executives and financiers in America around the turn of the century came from upper-class or upper-middle-class backgrounds. Fewer than 3 percent started as poor immigrants or farm children. Throughout the nineteenth century, just 2 percent of American industrialists came from working-class*

groups of children, one set born in the 1950s and the other in the 1970s. In the UK, while 17 per cent of the former made it from the bottom quarter income group to the top, only 11 per cent of the latter did so. Mobility in the Nordic countries was twice that of the UK. While only the US did worse than the UK in social mobility

The puzzle of why, given that there is no evidence of American exceptionalism or higher social mobility, the myth persists has an easy solution. It has utility for the ruling class in maintaining the system. By promoting the myth that people can find the path to the top easy then the institutions of power will not be questioned, just the moral character of the many who do not.

Needless to say, income mobility does not tell the whole story. Increases in income do not automatically reflect changes in class, far from it. A better paid worker is still working class and, consequently, still subject to oppression and exploitation during working hours. As such, income mobility, while important, does not address inequalities in power. Similarly, income mobility does not make up for a class system and its resulting authoritarian social relationships and inequalities in terms of liberty, health and social influence. And the facts suggest that the capitalist dogma of "meritocracy" that attempts to justify this system has little basis in reality. Capitalism is a class ridden system and while there is some changes in the make-up of each class they are remarkably fixed, particularly once you get to the top 5–10% of the population (i.e. the ruling class).

Logically, this is not surprising. There is no reason to think that more unequal societies should be more mobile. The greater the inequality, the more economic power those at the top will have and, consequently, the harder it will be those at the bottom to climb upwards. To suggest otherwise is to argue that it is easier to climb a mountain than a hill! Unsurprisingly the facts support the common sense analysis that the higher the



bargaining position and so ensuring labour contracts favour them. This was recognised by Adam Smith:

> *"It is not difficult to foresee which of the two parties [workers and capitalists] must, upon all ordinary occasions… force the other into a compliance with their terms… In all such disputes the masters can hold out much longer… though they did not employ a single workman [the masters] could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scare any a year without employment. In the long-run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate… [I]n disputes with their workmen, masters must generally have the advantage."* [**Wealth of Nations**, pp. 59–60]

How little things have changed.

So, while it is definitely the case that no one forces you to work for them, the capitalist system is such that you have little choice but to sell your liberty and labour on the "free market." Not only this, but the labour market (which is what makes capitalism capitalism) is (usually) skewed in favour of the employer, so ensuring that any "free agreements" made on it favour the boss and result in the workers submitting to domination and exploitation. This is why anarchists support collective organisation (such as unions) and resistance (such as strikes), direct action and solidarity to make us as, if not more, powerful than our exploiters and win important reforms and improvements (and, ultimately, change society), even when faced with the disadvantages on the labour market we have indicated. The despotism associated with property (to use Proudhon's expression) is resisted by those subject to it and, needless to say, the boss does not always win.

## B.4.4 But what about periods of high demand for labour?

Of course there are periods when the demand for labour exceeds supply, but these periods hold the seeds of depression for capitalism, as workers are in an excellent position to challenge, both individually and collectively, their allotted role as commodities. This point is discussed in more detail in section C.7 (What causes the capitalist business cycle? ) and so we will not do so here. For now it's enough to point out that during normal times (i.e. over most of the business cycle), capitalists often enjoy extensive authority over workers, an authority deriving from the unequal bargaining power between capital and labour, as noted by Adam Smith and many others.

However, this changes during times of high demand for labour. To illustrate, let us assume that supply and demand approximate each other. It is clear that such a situation is only good for the worker. Bosses cannot easily fire a worker as there is no one to replace them and the workers, either collectively by solidarity or individually by "exit" (i.e. quitting and moving to a new job), can ensure a boss respects their interests and, indeed, can push these interests to the full. The boss finds it hard to keep their authority intact or from stopping wages rising and causing a profits squeeze. In other words, as unemployment drops, workers power increases.

Looking at it another way, giving someone the right to hire and fire an input into a production process vests that individual with considerable power over that input unless it is costless for that input to move; that is unless the input is perfectly mobile. This is only approximated in real life for labour during periods of full employment, and so perfect mobility of **labour** costs problems for a capitalist firm because under such conditions workers are not dependent on a particular capitalist and so the level of worker effort is determined far more by the decisions of



*far from the income class they are born into, and there is little difference between US and European mobility patterns. In fact, the United States has the largest share of what the OECD called 'low-wage' workers, and the poorest performance on the emergence from the wage cellar of any country it studied."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 130]

Indeed, *"both the US and British poor were more likely to stay poor for a long period of time: almost half of all people who were poor for one year stayed poor for five or more years, compared with 30% in Canada and 36% in Germany. And, despite claims of great upward mobility in the US, 45% of the poor rose out of poverty in a given year, compared with 45% in the UK, 53% in Germany, and 56% in Canada. And of those who did exit poverty, 15% of Americans were likely to make a round trip back under the poverty line, compared with 16% in Germany, 10% in the UK, and 7% in Canada."* [Doug Henwood, **After the New Economy**, pp. 136–7]

A 2005 study of income mobility by researchers at the London School of Economics (on behalf of the educational charity the Sutton Trust) confirms that the more free market a country, the worse is its levels of social mobility. [Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg and Stephen Machin, **Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America**, April, 2005] They found that Britain has one of the worst records for social mobility in the developed world, beaten only by the USA out of eight European and North American countries. Norway was the best followed by Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Canada.

This means that children born to poor families in Britain and the USA are less likely to fulfil their full potential than in other countries and are less likely to break free of their backgrounds than in the past. In other words, we find it harder to earn more money and get better jobs than our parents. Moreover, not only is social mobility in Britain much lower than in other advanced countries, it is actually declining and has fallen markedly over time. The findings were based on studies of two

survey of today's adult men *"finds that this number has dropped to only 10 percent. That is, over the past generation upward mobility has fallen drastically. Very few children of the lower class are making their way to even moderate affluence. This goes along with other studies indicating that rags-to-riches stories have become vanishingly rare, and that the correlation between fathers' and sons' incomes has risen in recent decades. In modern America, it seems, you're quite likely to stay in the social and economic class into which you were born."* [Paul Krugman, *"The Death of Horatio Alger"*, **The Nation**, January 5, 2004]

British Keynesian economist Will Hutton quotes US data from 2000–1 which *"compare[s] the mobility of workers in America with the four biggest European economies and three Nordic economies."* The US *"has the lowest share of workers moving from the bottom fifth of workers into the second fifth, the lowest share moving into the top 60 per cent and the highest share unable to sustain full-time employment."* He cites an OECD study which *"confirms the poor rates of relative upward mobility for very low-paid American workers; it also found that full-time workers in Britain, Italy and Germany enjoy much more rapid growth in their earnings than those in the US ... However, downward mobility was more marked in the US; American workers are more likely to suffer a reduction in their real earnings than workers in Europe."* Thus even the OECD (the *"high priest of deregulation"*) was *"forced to conclude that countries with more deregulated labour and product markets (pre-eminently the US) do not appear to have higher relative mobility, nor do low-paid workers in these economies experience more upward mobility. The OECD is pulling its punches. The US experience is worse than Europe's."* Numerous studies have shown that *"either there is no difference"* in income mobility between the USA and Europe *"or that there is less mobility in the US."* [**The World We're In**, pp. 166–7]

Little wonder, then, that Doug Henwood argues that *"the final appeal of apologists of the American way is an appeal to our legendary mobility"* fails. In fact, *"people generally don't move*



workers (either collectively or individually) than by managerial authority. The threat of firing cannot be used as a threat to increase effort, and hence production, and so full employment increases workers power.

With the capitalist firm being a fixed commitment of resources, this situation is intolerable. Such times are bad for business and so occur rarely with free market capitalism (we must point out that in neo-classical economics, it is assumed that all inputs — including capital — are perfectly mobile and so the theory ignores reality and assumes away **capitalist production** itself!).

During the last period of capitalist boom, the post-war period, we can see the breakdown of capitalist authority and the fear this held for the ruling elite. The Trilateral Commission's 1975 report, which attempted to "understand" the growing discontent among the general population, makes our point well. In periods of full employment, according to the report, there is *"an excess of democracy."* In other words, due to the increased bargaining power workers gained during a period of high demand for labour, people started thinking about and acting upon their needs as **humans,** not as commodities embodying labour power. This naturally had devastating effects on capitalist and statist authority: *"People no longer felt the same compulsion to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talent"*.

This loosening of the bonds of compulsion and obedience led to *"previously passive or unorganised groups in the population, blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women... embark[ing] on concerted efforts to establish their claims to opportunities, rewards, and privileges, which they had not considered themselves entitled to before."*

Such an *"excess"* of participation in politics of course posed a serious threat to the status quo, since for the elites who authored the report, it was considered axiomatic that *"the effec-*

*tive operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and non-involvement on the part of some individuals and groups… . In itself, this marginality on the part of some groups is inherently undemocratic, but it is also one of the factors which has enabled democracy to function effectively."* Such a statement reveals the hollowness of the establishment's concept of 'democracy,' which in order to function effectively (i.e. to serve elite interests) must be *"inherently undemocratic."*

Any period where people feel empowered allows them to communicate with their fellows, identify their needs and desires, and resist those forces that deny their freedom to manage their own lives. Such resistance strikes a deadly blow at the capitalist need to treat people as commodities, since (to re-quote Polanyi) people no longer feel that it *"is not for the commodity to decide where it should be offered for sale, to what purpose it should be used, at what price it should be allowed to change hands, and in what manner it should be consumed or destroyed."* Instead, as thinking and feeling people, they act to reclaim their freedom and humanity.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the economic effects of such periods of empowerment and revolt are discussed in section C.7. We will end by quoting the Polish economist Michal Kalecki, who noted that a continuous capitalist boom would **not** be in the interests of the ruling class. In 1943, in response to the more optimistic Keynesians, he noted that *"to maintain the high level of employment… in the subsequent boom, a strong opposition of 'business leaders' is likely to be encountered… lasting full employment is not at all to their liking. The workers would 'get out of hand' and the 'captains of industry' would be anxious 'to teach them a lesson'"* because *"under a regime of permanent full employment, 'the sack' would cease to play its role as a disciplinary measure. The social position of the boss would be undermined and the self assurance and class consciousness of the working class would grow. Strikes for wage increases and improvements in conditions of work would create po-*



ing to one study by Greg Duncan of the University of Michigan, the middle class shrank during the 1980s, with fewer poor families moving up or rich families moving down. Duncan compared two periods. During the first period (1975 to 1980) incomes were more equal than they are today. In the second (1981 to 1985) income inequality began soaring. In this period there was a reduction in income mobility upward from low to medium incomes of over 10%.

Here are the exact figures [cited by Paul Krugman, *"The Rich, the Right, and the Facts,"* **The American Prospect** no. 11, Fall 1992, pp. 19–31]:

**Percentages of families making transitions to and from middle class (5-year period before and after 1980)**

| Transition | Before 1980 | After 1980 |
|---|---|---|
| Middle income to low income | 8.5 | 9.8 |
| Middle income to high income | 5.8 | 6.8 |
| Low income to middle income | 35.1 | 24.6 |
| High income to middle income | 30.8 | 27.6 |

Writing in 2004, Krugman returned to this subject. The intervening twelve years had made things worse. America, he notes, is *"more of a caste society than we like to think. And the caste lines have lately become a lot more rigid."* Before the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, America had more intergenerational mobility. *"A classic 1978 survey found that among adult men whose fathers were in the bottom 25 percent of the population as ranked by social and economic status, 23 percent had made it into the top 25 percent. In other words, during the first thirty years or so after World War II, the American dream of upward mobility was a real experience for many people."* However, a new

*of opportunity; the other of a status society. The confusion behind these two kinds of inequality is particularly important, precisely because competitive free-enterprise capitalism tends to substitute the one for the other."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 171]

As with so many things, Friedman is wrong in his assertion (and that is all it is, no evidence is provided). The more free market capitalist regimes have **less** social mobility than those, like Western Europe, which have extensive social intervention in the economy. As an added irony, the facts suggest that implementing Friedman's suggested policies in favour of his beloved "competitive free-enterprise capitalism" has made social mobility less, not greater. In effect, as with so many things, Friedman ensured the refutation of his own dogmas.

Taking the USA as an example (usually considered one of the most capitalist countries in the world) there is income mobility, but not enough to make income inequality irrelevant. Census data show that 81.6 percent of those families who were in the bottom quintile of the income distribution in 1985 were still there in the next year; for the top quintile, it was 76.3 percent.

Over longer time periods, there is more mixing but still not that much and those who do slip into different quintiles are typically at the borders of their category (e.g. those dropping out of the top quintile are typically at the bottom of that group). Only around 5% of families rise from bottom to top, or fall from top to bottom. In other words, the class structure of a modern capitalist society is pretty solid and *"much of the movement up and down represents fluctuations around a fairly fixed long term distribution."* [Paul Krugman, **Peddling Prosperity**, p. 143]

Perhaps under a "pure" capitalist system things would be different? Ronald Reagan helped make capitalism more "free market" in the 1980s, but there is no indication that income mobility increased significantly during that time. In fact, accord-



*litical tension… 'discipline in the factories' and 'political stability' are more appreciated by business leaders than profits. Their class interest tells them that lasting full employment is unsound from their point of view and that unemployment is an integral part of the normal capitalist system."* [quoted by Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 139 and p. 138]

Therefore, periods when the demand for labour outstrips supply are not healthy for capitalism, as they allow people to assert their freedom and humanity — both fatal to the system. This is why news of large numbers of new jobs sends the stock market plunging and why capitalists are so keen these days to maintain a "natural" rate of unemployment (that it has to be maintained indicates that it is **not** "natural"). Kalecki, we must point out, also correctly predicted the rise of *"a powerful bloc"* between *"big business and the rentier interests"* against full employment and that *"they would probably find more than one economist to declare that the situation was manifestly unsound."* The resulting *"pressure of all these forces, and in particular big business"* would *"induce the Government to return to… orthodox policy."* [Kalecki, quoted by Sawyer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140] This is exactly what happened in the 1970s, with the monetarists and other sections of the "free market" right providing the ideological support for the business lead class war, and whose "theories" (when applied) promptly generated massive unemployment, thus teaching the working class the required lesson.

So, although detrimental to profit-making, periods of recession and high unemployment are not only unavoidable but are necessary to capitalism in order to *"discipline"* workers and *"teach them a lesson."* And in all, it is little wonder that capitalism rarely produces periods approximating full employment — they are **not** in its interests (see also section C.9). The dynamics of capitalism makes recession and unemployment inevitable, just as it makes class struggle (which creates these dynamics) inevitable.

## B.4.5 But I want to be "left alone"!

It is ironic that supporters of laissez-faire capitalism, such as "Libertarians" and "anarcho"-capitalists, should claim that they want to be "left alone," since capitalism **never** allows this. As Max Stirner expressed it:

> *"Restless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm **enjoyment**. We do not get the comfort of our possessions..."* [Max Stirner **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 268]

Capitalism cannot let us *"take breath"* simply because it needs to grow or die, which puts constant pressure on both workers and capitalists (see section D.4.1). Workers can never relax or be free of anxiety about losing their jobs, because if they do not work, they do not eat, nor can they ensure that their children will get a better life. Within the workplace, they are not "left alone" by their bosses in order to manage their own activities. Instead, they are told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Indeed, the history of experiments in workers' control and self-management within capitalist companies confirms our claims that, for the worker, capitalism is incompatible with the desire to be "left alone." As an illustration we will use the

**"Pilot Program"** conducted by General Electric between 1968 and 1972.

General Electric proposed the "Pilot Program" as a means of overcoming the problems they faced with introducing Numeric Control (N/C) machinery into its plant at Lynn River Works, Massachusetts. Faced with rising tensions on the shop floor, bottle-necks in production and low-quality products, GE management tried a scheme of *"job enrichment"* based on workers' control of production in one area of the plant. By June 1970 the workers' involved were *"on their own"* (as one manager put it)



Little wonder Proudhon argued that the law of supply and demand was a *"deceitful law ... suitable only for assuring the victory of the strong over the weak, of those who own property over those who own nothing."* [quoted by Alan Ritter, **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 121]

## B.7.2 Does social mobility make up for class inequality?

Faced with the massive differences between classes under capitalism we highlighted in the last section, many supporters of capitalism still deny the obvious. They do so by confusing a **caste** system with a **class** system. In a caste system, those born into it stay in it all their lives. In a class system, the membership of classes can and does change over time.

Therefore, it is claimed, what is important is not the existence of classes but of social mobility (usually reflected in income mobility). According to this argument, if there is a high level of social/income mobility then the degree of inequality in any given year is unimportant. This is because the redistribution of income over a person's life time would be very even. Thus the inequalities of income and wealth of capitalism does not matter as capitalism has high social mobility.

Milton Friedman puts the argument in this way:

> *"Consider two societies that have the same distribution of annual income. In one there is a great mobility and change so that the position of particular families in the income hierarchy varies widely from year to year. In the other, there is great rigidity so that each family stays in the same position. Clearly, in any meaningful sense, the second would be the more unequal society. The one kind of inequality is a sign of dynamic change, social mobility, equality*

society is more polarised. Moreover, over the last 20–30 years those inequalities have increased spectacularly. The ruling elite have become richer and wealth has flooded upwards rather than trickled down.

The cause of the increase in wealth and income polarisation is not hard to find. It is due to the increased economic and political power of the capitalist class and the weakened position of working class people. As anarchists have long argued, any "free contract" between the powerful and the powerless will benefit the former far more than the latter. This means that if the working class's economic and social power is weakened then we will be in a bad position to retain a given share of the wealth we produce but is owned by our bosses and accumulates in the hands of the few.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, there has been an increase in the share of total income going to capital (i.e., interest, dividends, and rent) and a decrease in the amount going to labour (wages, salaries, and benefits). Moreover, an increasing part of the share to labour is accruing to high-level management (in electronics, for example, top executives used to paid themselves 42 times the average worker in 1991, a mere 5 years later it was 220 times as much).

Since the start of the 1980s, unemployment and globalisation has weakened the economic and social power of the working class. Due to the decline in the unions and general labour militancy, wages at the bottom have stagnated (real pay for most US workers is lower in 2005 than it was in 1973!). This, combined with "trickle-down" economic policies of tax cuts for the wealthy, tax raises for the working classes, the maintaining of a "natural" law of unemployment (which weakens unions and workers power) and cutbacks in social programs, has seriously eroded living standards for all but the upper strata — a process that is clearly leading toward social breakdown, with effects that will be discussed later (see section D.9).



and *"[i]n terms of group job enlargement this was when the Pilot Project really began, with immediate results in increased output and machine utilisation, and a reduction on manufacturing losses. As one union official remarked two years later, 'The fact that we broke down a traditional policy of GE [that the union could never have a hand in managing the business] was in itself satisfying, especially when we could throw success up to them to boot.'"* [David Noble, **Forces of Production**, p. 295]

The project, after some initial scepticism, proved to be a great success with the workers involved. Indeed, other workers in the factory desired to be included and the union soon tried to get it spread throughout the plant and into other GE locations. The success of the scheme was that it was based on workers' managing their own affairs rather than being told what to do by their bosses — *"We are human beings,"* said one worker, *"and want to be treated as such."* [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 292] To be fully human means to be free to govern oneself in all aspects of life, including production.

However, just after a year of the workers being given control over their working lives, management stopped the project. Why? *"In the eyes of some management supporters of the 'experiment,' the Pilot Program was terminated because management as a whole refused to give up any of its traditional authority ... [t]he Pilot Program foundered on the basic contradiction of capitalist production: Who's running the shop?"* [Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 318]

Noble goes on to argue that to GE's top management, *"the union's desire to extend the program appeared as a step toward greater workers control over production and, as such, a threat to the traditional authority rooted in private ownership of the means of production. Thus the decision to terminate represented a defence not only of the prerogatives of production supervisors and plant managers but also of the power vested in property ownership."* He notes that this result was not an isolated case and that the *"demise of the GE Pilot Program followed the typical pattern for such 'job enrichment experiments'"*

[**Op. Cit.**, p. 318 and p. 320] Even though *"[s]everal dozen well-documented experiments show that productivity increases and social problems decrease when workers participate in the work decisions affecting their lives"* [Department of Health, Education and Welfare study quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 322] such schemes are ended by bosses seeking to preserve their own power, the power that flows from private property.

As one worker in the GE Pilot Program stated, *"[w]e just want to be left alone."* They were not — capitalist social relations prohibit such a possibility (as Noble correctly notes, *"the 'way of life' for the management meant controlling the lives of others"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 294 and p. 300]). In spite of improved productivity, projects in workers' control are scrapped because they undermined both the power of the capitalists — and by undermining their power, you potentially undermine their profits too (*"If we're all one, for manufacturing reasons, we must share in the fruits equitably, just like a co-op business."* [GE Pilot Program worker, quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 295]).

As we argue in more detail in section J.5.12, profit maximisation can work against efficiency, meaning that capitalism can harm the overall economy by promoting less efficient production techniques (i.e. hierarchical ones against egalitarian ones) because it is in the interests of capitalists to do so and the capitalist market rewards that behaviour. This is because, ultimately, profits are unpaid labour. If you empower labour, give workers' control over their work then they will increase efficiency and productivity (they know how to do their job the best) but you also erode authority structures within the workplace. Workers' will seek more and more control (freedom naturally tries to grow) and this, as the Pilot Program worker clearly saw, implies a co-operative workplace in which workers', **not** managers, decide what to do with the surplus produced. By threatening power, you threaten profits (or, more correctly, who controls the profit and where it goes). With the control over production **and** who gets to control any surplus in danger,



and so is useful to analyse in order to refute the claims that the free-market promotes general well-being (i.e. a larger "middle class"). That the most free-market nation has the worse poverty rates **and** the smallest "middle class" indicates well the anarchist claim that capitalism, left to its own devices, will benefit the strong (the ruling class) over the weak (the working class) via "free exchanges" on the "free" market (as we argue in section C.7, only during periods of full employment — and/or wide scale working class solidarity and militancy — does the balance of forces change in favour of working class people. Little wonder, then, that periods of full employment also see falling inequality — see James K. Galbraith's **Created Unequal** for more details on the correlation of unemployment and inequality).

Of course, it could be objected that this relative measure of poverty and income ignores the fact that US incomes are among the highest in the world, meaning that the US poor may be pretty well off by foreign standards. Henwood refutes this claim, noting that *"even on absolute measures, the US performance is embarrassing. LIS researcher Lane Kenworthy estimated poverty rates for fifteen countries using the US poverty line as the benchmark... Though the United States has the highest average income, it's far from having the lowest poverty rate."* Only Italy, Britain and Australia had higher levels of absolute poverty (and Australia exceeded the US value by 0.2%, 11.9% compared to 11.7%). Thus, in both absolute **and** relative terms, the USA compares badly with European countries. [Doug Henwood, *"Booming, Borrowing, and Consuming: The US Economy in 1999"*, pp.120–33, **Monthly Review**, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 129–31]

In summary, therefore, taking the USA as being the most capitalist nation in the developed world, we discover a class system in which a very small minority own the bulk of the means of life and get most of the income. Compared to other Western countries, the class inequalities are greater and the

shorter working weeks and longer holidays than Americans. They may have a lower average income than the United States but they do not have the same inequalities. This means that the median European family has a standard of living roughly comparable with that of the median U.S. family — wages may even be higher.

As Doug Henwood notes, *"[i]nternational measures put the United States in a disgraceful light… The soundbite version of the LIS [Luxembourg Income Study] data is this: for a country th[at] rich, [it] ha[s] a lot of poor people."* Henwood looked at both relative and absolute measures of income and poverty using the cross-border comparisons of income distribution provided by the LIS and discovered that *"[f]or a country that thinks itself universally middle class [i.e. middle income], the United States has the second-smallest middle class of the nineteen countries for which good LIS data exists."* Only Russia, a country in near-total collapse was worse (40.9% of the population were middle income compared to 46.2% in the USA. Households were classed as poor if their incomes were under 50 percent of the national medium; near-poor, between 50 and 62.5 percent; middle, between 62.5 and 150 percent; and well-to-do, over 150 percent. The USA rates for poor (19.1%), near-poor (8.1%) and middle (46.2%) were worse than European countries like Germany (11.1%, 6.5% and 64%), France (13%, 7.2% and 60.4%) and Belgium (5.5%, 8.0% and 72.4%) as well as Canada (11.6%, 8.2% and 60%) and Australia (14.8%, 10% and 52.5%).

The reasons for this? Henwood states that the *"reasons are clear — weak unions and a weak welfare state. The social-democratic states — the ones that interfere most with market incomes — have the largest [middles classes]. The US poverty rate is nearly twice the average of the other eighteen."* Needless to say, "middle class" as defined by income is a very blunt term (as Henwood states). It says nothing about property ownership or social power, for example, but income is often taken in the capitalist press as the defining aspect of "class"



it is unsurprising that companies soon abandon such schemes and return to the old, less efficient, hierarchical schemes based on *"Do what you are told, for as long as you are told."* Such a regime is hardly fit for free people and, as Noble notes, the regime that replaced the GE Pilot Program was *"designed to 'break' the pilots of their new found 'habits' of self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-respect."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 307]

Thus the experience of workers' control project within capitalist firms indicates well that capitalism cannot *"leave you alone"* if you are a wage slave.

Moreover, capitalists themselves cannot relax because they must ensure their workers' productivity rises faster than their workers' wages, otherwise their business will fail (see sections C.2 and C.3). This means that every company has to innovate or be left behind, to be put out of business or work. Hence the boss is not "left alone" — their decisions are made under the duress of market forces, of the necessities imposed by competition on individual capitalists. Restless acquisition — in this context, the necessity to accumulate capital in order to survive in the market — always haunts the capitalist. And since unpaid labour is the key to capitalist expansion, work must continue to exist and grow — necessitating the boss to control the working hours of the worker to ensure that they produce more goods than they receive in wages. The boss is not "left alone" nor do they leave the worker alone.

These facts, based upon the authority relations associated with private property and relentless competition, ensure that the desire to be "left alone" cannot be satisfied under capitalism.

As Murray Bookchin observes:

> *"Despite their assertions of autonomy and distrust of state authority . .. classical liberal thinkers did not in the last instance hold to the notion that the individual is completely free from lawful guidance. Indeed, their interpretation of autonomy actually pre-*

*supposed quite definite arrangements beyond the individual — notably, the laws of the marketplace. Individual autonomy to the contrary, these laws constitute a social organising system in which all 'collections of individuals' are held under the sway of the famous 'invisible hand' of competition. Paradoxically, the laws of the marketplace override the exercise of 'free will' by the same sovereign individuals who otherwise constitute the "collection of individuals."* [*"Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism"*, pp. 1–17, **Democracy and Nature** no. 8, p. 4]

Human interaction is an essential part of life. Anarchism proposes to eliminate only undesired social interactions and authoritarian impositions, which are inherent in capitalism and indeed in any hierarchical form of socio-economic organisation (e.g. state socialism). Hermits soon become less than human, as social interaction enriches and develops individuality. Capitalism may attempt to reduce us to hermits, only "connected" by the market, but such a denial of our humanity and individuality inevitably feeds the spirit of revolt. In practice the "laws" of the market and the hierarchy of capital will never "leave one alone," but instead, crush one's individuality and freedom. Yet this aspect of capitalism conflicts with the human "instinct for freedom," as Noam Chomsky describes it, and hence there arises a counter-tendency toward radicalisation and rebellion among any oppressed people (see section J).

One last point. The desire to "be left alone" often expresses two drastically different ideas — the wish to be your own master and manage your own affairs and the desire by bosses and landlords to have more power over their property. However, the authority exercised by such owners over their property is also exercised over **those who use that property.** Therefore, the notion of "being left alone" contains two contradictory as-



expressed in 1998 dollars (i.e., adjusted for inflation) went from $32,522 in 1970 to $35,864 in 1999. That is a mere 10 percent increase over nearly 30 years. Over the same period, however, according to Fortune magazine, the average real annual compensation of the top 100 C.E.O.'s went from $1.3 million — 39 times the pay of an average worker — to $37.5 million, more than 1,000 times the pay of ordinary workers.

Yet even here, we are likely to miss the real picture. The average salary is misleading as this does not reflect the distribution of wealth. For example, in the UK in the early 1990s, two-thirds of workers earned the average wage or below and only a third above. To talk about the "average" income, therefore, is to disguise remarkable variation. In the US, adjusting for inflation, average family income — total income divided by the number of families — grew 28% between 1979 and 1997. The median family income — the income of a family in the middle (i.e. the income where half of families earn more and half less) grew by only 10%. The median is a better indicator of how typical American families are doing as the distribution of income is so top heavy in the USA (i.e. the average income is considerably higher than the median). It should also be noted that the incomes of the bottom fifth of families actually fell slightly. In other words, the benefits of economic growth over nearly two decades have **not** trickled down to ordinary families. Median family income has risen only about 0.5% per year. Even worse, *"just about all of that increase was due to wives working longer hours, with little or no gain in real wages."* [Paul Krugman, *"For Richer"*, **Op. Cit.**]

So if America does have higher average or per capita income than other advanced countries, it is simply because the rich are richer. This means that a high average income level can be misleading if a large amount of national income is concentrated in relatively few hands. This means that large numbers of Americans are worse off economically than their counterparts in other advanced countries. Thus Europeans have, in general,

7.3
12.9
+5.6

By far the biggest gainers from the wealth concentration since the 1980s have been the super-rich. The closer you get to the top, the bigger the gains. In other words, it is not simply that the top 20 percent of families have had bigger percentage gains than the rest. Rather, the top 5 percent have done better than the next 15, the top 1 percent better than the next 4 per cent, and so on.

As such, if someone argues that while the share of national income going to the top 10 percent of earners has increased that it does not matter because anyone with an income over $81,000 is in that top 10 percent they are missing the point. The lower end of the top ten per cent were not the big winners over the last 30 years. Most of the gains in the share in that top ten percent went to the top 1 percent (who earn at least $230,000). Of these gains, 60 percent went to the top 0.1 percent (who earn more than $790,000). And of these gains, almost half went to the top 0.01 percent (a mere 13,000 people who had an income of at least $3.6 million and an average income of $17 million). [Paul Krugman, *"For Richer"*, **New York Times**, 20/10/02]

All this proves that classes do in fact exist, with wealth and power concentrating at the top of society, in the hands of the few.

To put this inequality of income into some perspective, the average full-time Wal-Mart employee was paid only about $17,000 a year in 2004. Benefits are few, with less than half the company's workers covered by its health care plan. In the same year Wal-Mart's chief executive, Scott Lee Jr., was paid $17.5 million. In other words, every two weeks he was paid about as much as his average employee would earn after a lifetime working for him.

Since the 1970s, most Americans have had only modest salary increases (if that). The average annual salary in America,



pects within a class ridden and hierarchical society. Obviously anarchists are sympathetic to the first, inherently libertarian, aspect — the desire to manage your own life, in your own way — but we reject the second aspect and any implication that it is in the interests of the governed to leave those in power alone. Rather, it is in the interest of the governed to subject those with authority over them to as much control as possible — for obvious reasons.

Therefore, working people are more or less free to the extent that they **restrict** the ability of their bosses to be "left alone." One of the aims of anarchists within a capitalist society is **ensure** that those in power are **not** "left alone" to exercise their authority over those subject to it. We see solidarity, direct action and workplace and community organisation as a means of interfering with the authority of the state, capitalists and property owners until such time as we can destroy such authoritarian social relationships once and for all.

Hence anarchist dislike of the term "laissez-faire" — within a class society it can only mean protecting the powerful against the working class (under the banner of "neutrally" enforcing property rights and so **the power derived from them**). However, we are well aware of the other, libertarian, vision expressed in the desire to be "left alone." That is the reason we have discussed why capitalist society can never actually achieve that desire — it is handicapped by its hierarchical and competitive nature — and how such a desire can be twisted into a means of enhancing the power of the few over the many.

# B.5 Is capitalism empowering and based on human action?

A key element of the social vision propounded by capitalism, particularly "libertarian" capitalism, is that of "voting" by the "customer," which is compared to political voting by the "citizen." According to Milton Friedman, *"when you vote in the supermarket, you get precisely what you voted for and so does everyone else."* Such "voting" with one's pocket is then claimed to be an example of the wonderful "freedom" people enjoy under capitalism (as opposed to "socialism," always equated by right-wingers with **state** socialism, which will be discussed in section H). However, in evaluating this claim, the difference between customers and citizens is critical.

The customer chooses between products on the shelf that have been designed and built by others for the purpose of profit. The consumer is the end-user, essentially a spectator rather than an actor, merely choosing between options created elsewhere by others. Market decision making is therefore fundamentally **passive** and **reactionary,** i.e. based on reacting to developments initiated by others. In contrast, the "citizen" is actively involved, at least ideally, in all stages of the decision making process, either directly or through elected delegates. Therefore, given decentralised and participatory-democratic organisations, decision making by citizens can be **pro-active,** based on human **action** in which one takes the initiative and sets the agenda oneself. Indeed, most supporters of the "citizen" model support it precisely **because** it actively involves individuals in participating in social decision making, so creating an educa-



Doug Henwood provides some more details on income [**Op. Cit.**, p. 90]:

**Changes in income, 1977–1999** real income growth 1977–99

Share of total income
1977
1999
Change
poorest 20%
-9%
5.7%
4.2%
-1.5%
second 20%
+1
11.5
9.7
-1.8
middle 20%
+8
16.4
14.7
-1.7
fourth 20%
+14
22.8
21.3
-1.5
top 20%
+43
44.2
50.4
+6.2
top 1%
+115

*richest 1% of households ... owned 42% of the stock owned by individuals, and 56% of the bonds ... the top 10% together owned nearly 90% of both."* Given that around 50% of all corporate stock is owned by households, this means that 1% of the population *"owns a quarter of the productive capital and future profits of corporate America; the top 10% nearly half."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 66–7] Unsurprisingly, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that more than half of corporate profits ultimately accrue to the wealthiest 1 percent of taxpayers, while only about 8 percent go to the bottom 60 percent.

Henwood summarises the situation by noting that *"the richest tenth of the population has a bit over three-quarters of all the wealth in this society, and the bottom half has almost none — but it has lots of debt."* Most middle-income people have most of their (limited) wealth in their homes and if we look at non-residential wealth we find a *"very, very concentrated"* situation. The *"bottom half of the population claimed about 20% of all income in 2001 — but only 2% of non-residential wealth. The richest 5% of the population claimed about 23% of income, a bit more than the entire bottom half. But it owned almost two-thirds — 65% — of the wealth."* [**After the New Economy**, p. 122]

In terms of income, the period since 1970 has also been marked by increasing inequalities and concentration:

> *"According to estimates by the economists Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez — confirmed by data from the Congressional Budget Office — between 1973 and 2000 the average real income of the bottom 90 percent of American taxpayers actually fell by 7 percent. Meanwhile, the income of the top 1 percent rose by 148 percent, the income of the top 0.1 percent rose by 343 percent and the income of the top 0.01 percent rose 599 percent."* [Paul Krugman, *"The Death of Horatio Alger"*, **The Nation**, January 5, 2004]



tional aspect to the process and developing the abilities and powers of those involved.

In addition, the power of the consumer is not evenly distributed across society. Thus the expression "voting" when used in a market context expresses a radically different idea than the one usually associated with it. In political voting everyone gets one vote, in the market it is one vote per dollar. What sort of "democracy" is it that gives one person more votes than tens of thousands of others combined?

Therefore the "consumer" idea fails to take into account the differences in power that exist on the market as well as assigning an essentially passive role to the individual. At best they can act on the market as isolated individuals through their purchasing power. However, such a position is part of the problem for, as E.F. Schumacher argues, the *"buyer is essentially a bargain hunter; he is not concerned with the origin of the goods or the conditions under which they have been produced. His sole concern is to obtain the best value for money."* He goes on to note that the market *"therefore respects only the surface of society and its significance relates to the momentary situation as it exists there and then. There is no probing into the depths of things, into the natural or social facts that lie behind them."* [**Small is Beautiful**, p. 29]

Indeed, the "customer" model actually works **against** any attempt to "probe" the facts of things. Firstly, consumers rarely know the significance or implications of the goods they are offered because the price mechanism withholds such information from them. Secondly, because the atomistic nature of the market makes discussion about the "why" and "how" of production difficult — we get to choose between various "whats". Instead of critically evaluating the pros and cons of certain economic practices, all we are offered is the option of choosing between things already produced. We can only **re**-act when the damage is already done by picking the option which does least damage (often we do not have even that choice). And to dis-

cover a given products social and ecological impact we have to take a pro-active role by joining groups which provide this sort of information (information which, while essential for a rational decision, the market does not and cannot provide).

Moreover, the "consumer" model fails to recognise that the decisions we make on the market to satisfy our "wants" are determined by social and market forces. What we are capable of wanting is relative to the forms of social organisation we live in. For example, people choose to buy cars because General Motors bought up and destroyed the tram network in the 1930s and people buy "fast food" because they have no time to cook because of increasing working hours. This means that our decisions within the market are often restricted by economic pressures. For example, the market forces firms, on pain of bankruptcy, to do whatever possible to be cost-effective. Firms that pollute, have bad working conditions and so on often gain competitive advantage in so doing and other firms either have to follow suit or go out of business. A "race to the bottom" ensures, with individuals making "decisions of desperation" just to survive. Individual commitments to certain values, in other words, may become irrelevant simply because the countervailing economic pressures are simply too intense (little wonder Robert Owen argued that the profit motive was *"a principle entirely unfavourable to individual and public happiness"*).

And, of course, the market also does not, and cannot, come up with goods that we do not want in our capacity as consumers but desire to protect for future generations or because of ecological reasons. By making the protection of the planet, eco-systems and other such "goods" dependent on the market, capitalism ensures that unless we put our money where our mouth is we can have no say in the protection of such goods as eco-systems, historical sites, and so on. The need to protect such "resources" in the long term is ignored in favour of short-termism — indeed, if we do not "consume" such products today they will not be there tomorrow. Placed within a society that



of resources like companies, land and patents. Unsurprisingly, wealth insulates its holders from personal economic crises, like unemployment and sickness, as well as gives its holders social and political power. It, and its perks, can also be passed down the generations. Equally unsurprisingly, the distribution of wealth is much more unequal than the distribution of income.

At the start of the 1990s, the share of total US income was as follows: one third went to the top 10% of the population, the next 30% gets another third and the bottom 60% gets the last third. Dividing the wealth into thirds, we find that the top 1% owns a third, the next 9% owns a third, and bottom 90% owns the rest. [David Schweickart, **After Capitalism**, p. 92] Over the 1990s, the inequalities in US society have continued to increase. In 1980, the richest fifth of Americans had incomes about ten times those of the poorest fifth. A decade later, they has twelve times. By 2001, they had incomes over fourteen times greater. [Doug Henwood, **After the New Economy**, p. 79] Looking at the figures for private family wealth, we find that in 1976 the wealthiest one percent of Americans owned 19% of it, the next 9% owned 30% and the bottom 90% of the population owned 51%. By 1995 the top 1% owned 40%, more than owned by the bottom 92% of the US population combined — the next 9% had 31% while the bottom 90% had only 29% of total (see Edward N. Wolff, **Top Heavy: A Study of Increasing Inequality in America** for details).

So in terms of wealth ownership, we see a system in which a very small minority own the means of life. In 1992 the richest 1% of households — about 2 million adults — owned 39% of the stock owned by individuals. The top 10%, owned over 81%. In other words, the bottom 90% of the population had a smaller share (23%) of investable capital of all kinds than the richest 1/2% (29%). Stock ownership was even more densely concentrated, with the richest 5% holding 95% of all shares. [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street: Class racket**] Three years later, *"the*

and experience the benefits and pleasure of co-operation. Anarchists, by their ideas and action try to change this situation and encourage solidarity within the working class in order to resist, and ultimately get rid of, capitalism. However, their activity is helped by the fact that those in struggle often realise that *"solidarity is strength"* and so start to work together and unite their struggles against their common enemy. Indeed, history is full of such developments.

## B.7.1 But do classes actually exist?

So do classes actually exist, or are anarchists making them up? The fact that we even need to consider this question points to the pervasive propaganda efforts by the ruling class to suppress class consciousness, which will be discussed further on. First, however, let's examine some statistics, taking the USA as an example. We have done so because the state has the reputation of being a land of opportunity and capitalism. Moreover, class is seldom talked about there (although its business class is **very** class conscious). Moreover, when countries have followed the US model of freer capitalism (for example, the UK), a similar explosion of inequality develops along side increased poverty rates and concentration of wealth into fewer and fewer hands.

There are two ways of looking into class, by income and by wealth. Of the two, the distribution of wealth is the most important to understanding the class structure as this represents your assets, what you own rather than what you earn in a year. Given that wealth is the source of income, this represents the impact and power of private property and the class system it represents. After all, while all employed workers have an income (i.e. a wage), their actual wealth usually amounts to their personal items and their house (if they are lucky). As such, their wealth generates little or no income, unlike the owners



the vast majority of people often face difficulties making ends meet, this means that capitalism can never provide us with goods which we would like to see available as **people** (either for others or for future generations or just to protect the planet) but cannot afford or desire as **consumers.**

It is clearly a sign of the increasing dominance of capitalist ideology that the "customer" model is being transferred to the political arena. This reflects the fact that the increasing scale of political institutions has reinforced the tendency noted earlier for voters to become passive spectators, placing their "support" behind one or another "product" (i.e. party or leader). As Murray Bookchin comments, *"educated, knowledgeable citizens become reduced to mere taxpayers who exchange money for 'services.'"* [**Remaking Society**, p. 71] In practice, due to state centralism, this turns the political process into an extension of the market, with "citizens" being reduced to "consumers." Or, in Erich Fromm's apt analysis, *"The functioning of the political machinery in a democratic country is not essentially different from the procedure on the commodity market. The political parties are not too different from big commercial enterprises, and the professional politicians try to sell their wares to the public."* [**The Sane Society**, pp. 186–187]

But does it matter? Friedman suggests that being a customer is **better** than being a citizen as you get "precisely" what you, and everyone else, wants.

The key questions here are whether people always get what they want when they shop. Do consumers who buy bleached newsprint and toilet paper **really** want tons of dioxins and other organochlorides in rivers, lakes and coastal waters? Do customers who buy cars **really** want traffic jams, air pollution, motorways carving up the landscape and the greenhouse effect? And what of those who do not buy these things? They are also affected by the decisions of others. The notion that only the consumer is affected by his or her decision is nonsense — as is

the childish desire to get "precisely" what you want, regardless of the social impact.

Perhaps Friedman could claim that when we consume we also approve of its impact. But when we "vote" on the market we cannot say that we approved of the resulting pollution (or distribution of income or power) because that was not a choice on offer. Such changes are **pre-defined** or an aggregate outcome and can only be chosen by a collective decision. In this way we can modify outcomes we could bring about individually but which harm us collectively. And unlike the market, in politics we can **change our minds** and revert back to a former state, undoing the mistakes made. No such option is available on the market.

So Friedman's claims that in elections *"you end up with something different from what you voted for"* is equally applicable to the market place.

These considerations indicate that the "consumer" model of human action is somewhat limited (to say the least!). Instead we need to recognise the importance of the "citizen" model, which we should point out includes the "consumer" model within it. Taking part as an active member of the community does not imply that we stop making individual consumption choices between those available, all it does is potentially enrich our available options by removing lousy choices (such as ecology or profit, cheap goods or labour rights, family or career).

In addition we must stress its role in developing those who practice the "citizen" model and how it can enrich our social and personal life. Being active within participatory institutions fosters and develops an active, "public-spirited" type of character. Citizens, because they are making **collective** decisions have to weight other interests **as well as** their own and so consider the impact on themselves, others, society and the environment of possible decisions. It is, by its very nature, an educative process by which all benefit by developing their critical



class (we should point out here that what is usually called "middle class" in the USA and elsewhere is nothing of the kind, and usually refers to working class people with decent jobs, homes, etc. As class is considered a rude word in polite society in the USA, such mystification is to be expected).

So, there will be exceptions to this classification scheme. However, most of society share common interests, as they face the economic uncertainties and hierarchical nature of capitalism.

We do not aim to fit all of reality into this class scheme, but only to develop it as reality indicates, based on our own experiences of the changing patterns of modern society. Nor is this scheme intended to suggest that all members of a class have identical interests or that competition does not exist between members of the same class, as it does between the classes. Capitalism, by its very nature, is a competitive system. As Malatesta pointed out, *"one must bear in mind that on the one hand the bourgeoisie (the property owners) are always at war amongst themselves... and that on the other hand the government, though springing from the bourgeoisie and its servant and protector, tends, as every servant and every protector, to achieve its own emancipation and to dominate whoever it protects. Thus the game of the swings, the manoeuvres, the concessions and the withdrawals, the attempts to find allies among the people and against the conservatives, and among conservatives against the people, which is the science of the governors, and which blinds the ingenuous and phlegmatic who always wait for salvation to come down to them from above."* [**Anarchy**, p. 25]

However, no matter how much inter-elite rivalry goes on, at the slightest threat to the system from which they benefit, the ruling class will unite to defend their common interests. Once the threat passes, they will return to competing among themselves for power, market share and wealth. Unfortunately, the working class rarely unites as a class, mainly due to its chronic economic and social position. At best, certain sections unite

in terms of hire/fire and investment decisions, is the important thing. Ownership of capital as a means of determining a person's class, while still important, does not tell the whole story. An obvious example is that of the higher layers of management within corporations. They have massive power within the company, basically taking over the role held by the actual capitalist in smaller firms. While they may technically be "salary slaves" their power and position in the social hierarchy indicate that they are members of the ruling class in practice (and, consequently, their income is best thought of as a share of profits rather than a wage). Much the same can be said of politicians and state bureaucrats whose power and influence does not derive from the ownership of the means of production but rather then control over the means of coercion. Moreover, many large companies are owned by other large companies, through pension funds, multinationals, etc. (in 1945, 93% of shares were owned by individuals; by 1997, this had fallen to 43%). Needless to say, if working-class people own shares that does not make them capitalists as the dividends are **not** enough to live on nor do they give them any say in how a company is run).

For most anarchists, there are two main classes:

Obviously there are "grey" areas in any society, individuals and groups who do not fit exactly into either the working or ruling class. Such people include those who work but have some control over other people, e.g. power of hire/fire. These are the people who make the minor, day-to-day decisions concerning the running of capital or state. This area includes lower to middle management, professionals, and small capitalists.

There is some argument within the anarchist movement whether this "grey" area constitutes another ("middle") class or not. Most anarchists say no, most of this "grey" area are working class, others (such as the British **Class War Federation**) argue it is a different class. One thing is sure, all anarchists agree that most people in this "grey" area have an interest in getting rid of the current system just as much as the working



abilities and expanding their definition of self-interest to take into account themselves as part of a society and eco-system **as well as** as an individual. The "consumer" model, with its passive and exclusively private/money orientation develops few of people's faculties and narrows their self-interest to such a degree that their "rational" actions can actually (indirectly) harm them.

As Noam Chomsky argues, it is *"now widely realised that the economists 'externalities' can no longer be consigned to footnotes. No one who gives a moment's thought to the problems of contemporary society can fail to be aware of the social costs of consumption and production, the progressive destruction of the environment, the utter irrationality of the utilisation of contemporary technology, the inability of a system based on profit or growth maximisation to deal with needs that can only be expressed collectively, and the enormous bias this system imposes towards maximisation of commodities for personal use in place of the general improvement of the quality of life."* [**Radical Priorities**, pp. 190–1]

The "citizen" model takes on board the fact that the sum of rational individual decisions may not yield a rational collective outcome (which, we must add, harms the individuals involved and so works against their self-interest). Social standards, created and enriched by a process of discussion and dialogue can be effective in realms where the atomised "consumer" model is essentially powerless to achieve constructive social change, never mind protect the individual from "agreeing" to "decisions of desperation" that leave them and society as a whole worse off (see also sections E.3 and E.5).

This is **not** to suggest that anarchists desire to eliminate individual decision making, far from it. An anarchist society will be based upon individuals making decisions on what they want to consume, where they want to work, what kind of work they want to do and so on. So the aim of the "citizen" model is not to "replace" the "consumer" model, but only to improve the social

environment within which we make our individual consumption decisions. What the "citizen" model of human action desires is to place such decisions within a social framework, one that allows each individual to take an active part in improving the quality of life for us all by removing "Hobson choices" as far as possible.



# B.7 What classes exist within modern society?

For anarchists, class analysis is an important means of understanding the world and what is going on in it. While recognition of the fact that classes actually exist is less prevalent now than it once was, this does not mean that classes have ceased to exist. Quite the contrary. As we'll see, it means only that the ruling class has been more successful than before in obscuring the existence of class.

Class can be objectively defined: the relationship between an individual and the sources of power within society determines his or her class. We live in a class society in which a few people possess far more political and economic power than the majority, who usually work for the minority that controls them and the decisions that affect them. This means that class is based both on exploitation **and** oppression, with some controlling the labour of others for their own gain. The means of oppression have been indicated in earlier parts of section B, while section C (What are the myths of capitalist economics?) indicates exactly how exploitation occurs within a society apparently based on free and equal exchange. In addition, it also highlights the effects on the economic system itself of this exploitation. The social and political impact of the system and the classes and hierarchies it creates is discussed in depth in section D (How do statism and capitalism affect society?).

We must emphasise at the outset that the idea of the "working class" as composed of nothing but industrial workers is simply false. It is **not** applicable today, if it ever was. Power,

communities ensures that power lies in the hands of local people.

This process in no way implies that "society" decides what an individual is to consume. That, like all decisions affecting the individual only, is left entirely up to the person involved. Communal decision-making is for decisions that impact both the individual and society, allowing those affected by it to discuss it among themselves as equals, thus creating a rich social context within which individuals can act. This is an obvious improvement over the current system, where decisions that often profoundly alter people's lives are left to the discretion of an elite class of managers and owners, who are supposed to "know best."

There is, of course, the danger of "tyranny of the majority" in any democratic system, but in a direct libertarian democracy, this danger would be greatly reduced, for reasons discussed in section I.5.6 ( Won't there be a danger of a "tyranny of the majority" under libertarian socialism?).



# B.6 But won't decisions made by individuals with their own money be the best?

This question refers to an argument commonly used by capitalists to justify the fact that investment decisions are removed from public control under capitalism, with private investors making all the decisions. Clearly the assumption behind this argument is that individuals suddenly lose their intelligence when they get together and discuss their common interests. But surely, through debate, we can enrich our ideas by social interaction. In the marketplace we do not discuss but instead act as atomised individuals.

This issue involves the *"Isolation Paradox,"* according to which the very logic of individual decision-making is different from that of collective decision-making. An example is the *"tyranny of small decisions."* Let us assume that in the soft drink industry some companies start to produce (cheaper) non-returnable bottles. The end result of this is that most, if not all, the companies making returnable bottles lose business and switch to non-returnables. Result? Increased waste and environmental destruction.

This is because market price fails to take into account social costs and benefits, indeed it **mis**-estimates them for both buyer/seller and to others not involved in the transaction. This is because, as Schumacher points out, the *"strength of the idea of private enterprise lies in its terrifying simplicity. It suggests that the totality of life can be reduced to one aspect — profits..."*

[**Small is Beautiful**, p. 215] But life cannot be reduced to one aspect without impoverishing it and so capitalism *"knows the price of everything but the value of nothing."*

Therefore the market promotes "the tyranny of small decisions" and this can have negative outcomes for those involved. The capitalist "solution" to this problem is no solution, namely to act after the event. Only after the decisions have been made and their effects felt can action be taken. But by then the damage has been done. Can suing a company **really** replace a fragile eco-system? In addition, the economic context has been significantly altered, because investment decisions are often difficult to unmake.

In other words, the operations of the market provide an unending source of examples for the argument that the aggregate results of the pursuit of private interest may well be collectively damaging. And as collectives are made up of individuals, that means damaging to the individuals involved. The remarkable ideological success of "free market" capitalism is to identify the anti-social choice with self-interest, so that any choice in the favour of the interests which we share collectively is treated as a piece of self-sacrifice. However, by atomising decision making, the market often actively works against the self-interest of the individuals that make it up.

Game theory is aware that the sum of rational choices do not automatically yield a rational group outcome. Indeed, it terms such situations as "collective action" problems. By not agreeing common standards, a "race to the bottom" can ensue in which a given society reaps choices that we as individuals really don't want. The rational pursuit of individual self-interest leaves the group, and so most individuals, worse off. The problem is not bad individual judgement (far from it, the individual is the only person able to know what is best for them in a given situation). It is the absence of social discussion and remedies that compels people to make unbearable choices because the available menu presents no good options.



By **not** discussing the impact of their decisions with everyone who will be affected, the individuals in question have not made a better decision. Of course, under our present highly centralised statist and capitalist system, such a discussion would be impossible to implement, and its closest approximation — the election process — is too vast, bureaucratic and dominated by wealth to do much beyond passing a few toothless laws which are generally ignored when they hinder profits.

However, let's consider what the situation would be like under libertarian socialism, where the local community assemblies discuss the question of returnable bottles along with the workforce. Here the function of specific interest groups (such as consumer co-operatives, ecology groups, workplace Research and Development action committees and so on) would play a critical role in producing information. Knowledge, as Bakunin, Kropotkin, etc. knew, is widely dispersed throughout society and the role of interested parties is essential in making it available to others. Based upon this information and the debate it provokes, the collective decision reached would most probably favour returnables over waste. This would be a better decision from a social and ecological point of view, and one that would benefit the individuals who discussed and agreed upon its effects on themselves and their society.

In other words, anarchists think we have to take an active part in creating the menu as well as picking options from it which reflect our individual tastes and interests.

It needs to be emphasised that such a system does not involve discussing and voting on everything under the sun, which would paralyse all activity. To the contrary, most decisions would be left to those interested (e.g. workers decide on administration and day-to-day decisions within the factory), the community decides upon policy (e.g. returnables over waste). Neither is it a case of electing people to decide for us, as the decentralised nature of the confederation of

*don ... If we aggregate over several individuals, such a model is unjustified."* [Alan Kirman, *"The Intrinsic Limits of Modern Economy Theory"*, pp. 126–139, The Economic Journal, Vol. 99, No. 395, p. 138, p. 136 and p. 138]

So why all the bother? Why spend over 100 years driving economics into a dead-end? Simply because of political reasons. The advantage of the neoclassical approach was that it abstracted away from production (where power relations are clear) and concentrated on exchange (where power works indirectly). As libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick notes, the *"problems of bourgeois economics seemed to disappear as soon as one ignored production and attended only to the market ... Viewed apart from production, the price problem can be dealt with purely in terms of the market."* [**Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 9] By ignoring production, the obvious inequalities of power produced by the dominant social relations within capitalism could be ignored in favour of looking at abstract individuals as buyers and sellers. That this meant ignoring such key concepts as time by forcing economics into a static, freeze frame, model of the economy was a price worth paying as it allowed capitalism to be justified as the best of all possible worlds:

> *"On the one hand, it was thought essential to represent the winning of profit, interest, and rent as participation in the creation of wealth. On the other, it was thought desirable to found the authority of economics on the procedures of natural science. This second desire prompted a search for general economic laws independent of time and circumstances. If such laws could be proven, the existing society would thereby be legitimated and every idea of changing it refuted. Subjective value theory promised to accomplish both tasks at once. Disregarding the exchange relationship peculiar to capitalism — that between the sellers and buyers of*



profits, interest and rent). Rather than seek to explain its origin by an empirical study of the society it exists in (capitalism), economists have preferred to invent "just-so" stories, little a-historic parables about a past which never existed is used to illustrate (and so defend) a present class system and its inequalities and injustices. The lessons of a fairy tale about a society that has never existed are used as a guide for one which does and, by some strange co-incidence, they happen to justify the existing class system and its distribution of income. Hence the love of Robinson Crusoe in economics.

Ironically, this favouring of theory (ideology would be a better term) is selective as their exposure as fundamentally flawed does not stop them being repeated. As we discuss in section C.2, the neoclassical theory of capital was proven to be incorrect by left-wing economists. This was admitted by their opponents: *"The question that confronts us is not whether the Cambridge Criticism is theoretically valid. It is. Rather the question is an empirical or econometric one: is there sufficient substitutability within the system to establish neo-classical results?"* Yet this did not stop this theory being taught to this day and the successful critique forgotten. Nor has econometrics successfully refuted the analysis, as capital specified in terms of money cannot reflect a theoretical substance (neo-classical "capital") which could not exist in reality. However, that is unimportant for *"[u]ntil the econometricians have the answer for us, placing reliance upon neo-classical economic theory is a matter of faith,"* which, of course, he had [C. E. Ferguson, **The Neo-classical Theory of Production and Distribution**, p. 266 and p. xvii]

Little wonder that Joan Robinson, one of the left-wing economists who helped expose the bankruptcy of the neo-classical theory of capital, stated that economics was *"back where it was, a branch of theology."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, Vol. 4, p. 127] It remains there more than thirty years later:

> *"Economics is not a science. Many economists — particularly those who believe that decisions on whether to get married can be reduced to an equation — see the world as a complex organism that can be understood using the right differential calculus. Yet everything we know about economics suggests that it is a branch and not a particularly advanced one, of witchcraft."* [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 226]

The weakness of economics is even acknowledged by some within the profession itself. According to Paul Ormerod, *"orthodox economics is in many ways an empty box. Its understanding of the world is similar to that of the physical sciences in the Middle Ages. A few insights have been obtained which stand the test of time, but they are very few indeed, and the whole basis of conventional economics is deeply flawed."* Moreover, he notes the *"overwhelming empirical evidence against the validity of its theories."* It is rare to see an economist be so honest. The majority of economists seem happy to go on with their theories, trying to squeeze life into the Procrustean bed of their models. And, like the priests of old, make it hard for non-academics to question their dogmas as *"economics is often intimidating. Its practitioners ... have erected around the discipline a barrier of jargon and mathematics which makes the subject difficult to penetrate for the non-initiated."* [**The Death of Economics**, p. ix, p. 67 and p. ix]

So in this section of our FAQ, we will try to get to the heart of modern capitalism, cutting through the ideological myths that supporters of the system have created around it. This will be a difficult task, as the divergence of the reality of capitalism and the economics that is used to explain (justify, more correctly) it is large. For example, the preferred model used in neo-classical economics is that of "perfect competition" which is based on a multitude of small firms producing homogenous



There is a certain irony about the change from cardinal to ordinal utility and finally the rise of the impossible nonsense which are "indifference curves." While these changes were driven by the need to deny the advocates of redistributive taxation policies the mantel of economic science to justify their schemes, the fact is by rejecting cardinal utility, it becomes impossible to say whether state action like taxes decreases utility at all. With ordinal utility and its related concepts, you cannot actually show that government intervention actually harms "social utility." All you can say is that they are indeterminate. While the rich may lose income and the poor gain, it is impossible to say anything about social utility without making an interpersonal (cardinal) utility comparison. Thus, ironically, ordinal utility based economics provides a much weaker defence of free market capitalism by removing the economist of the ability to call any act of government "inefficient" and they would have to be evaluated in, horror of horrors, non-economic terms. As Keen notes, it is *"ironic that this ancient defence of inequality ultimately backfires on economics, by making its impossible to construct a market demand curve which is independent on the distribution of income ... economics cannot defend any one distribution of income over any other. A redistribution of income that favours the poor over the rich cannot be formally opposed by economic theory."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51]

Neoclassical economics has also confirmed that the classical perspective of analysing society in terms of classes is also more valid than the individualistic approach it values. As one leading neo-classical economist has noted, if economics is *"to progress further we may well be forced to theorise in terms of groups who have collectively coherent behaviour."* Moreover, the classical economists would not be surprised by the admission that *"the addition of production **can** help"* economic analysis nor the conclusion that the *"idea that we should start at the level of the isolated individual is one which we may well have to aban-*

finance markets show endogenous instability, result in bad investment as well as reducing the overall level of investment as investors will not fund investments which are not predicted to have a sufficiently high rate of return. All of which has a large and negative impact on the real economy. Instead, the economic profession embraced a highly unreal economic theory which has encouraged the world to indulge in stock market speculation as it argues that they do not have bubbles, booms or bursts (that the 1990s stock market bubble finally burst like many previous ones is unlikely to stop this). Perhaps this has to do the implications for economic theory for this farcical analysis of the stock market? As two mainstream economists put it:

> *"To reject the Efficient Market Hypothesis for the whole stock market . .. implies broadly that production decisions based on stock prices will lead to inefficient capital allocations. More generally, if the application of rational expectations theory to the virtually 'idea' conditions provided by the stock market fails, then what confidence can economists have in its application to other areas of economics ... ?"* [Marsh and Merton, quoted by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 161]

Ultimately, neoclassical economics, by means of the concept of "representative" agent, has proved that subjective evaluations could not be aggregated and, as a result, a market supply and demand curves cannot be produced. In other words, neoclassical economics has shown that if society were comprised of one individual, buying one good produced by one factory then it could accurately reflect what happened in it. *"It is stating the obvious,"* states Keen, *"to call the representative agent an 'ad hoc' assumption, made simply so that economists can pretend to have a sound basis for their analysis, when in reality they have no grounding whatsoever."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 188]



products in a market which none of them are big enough to influence (i.e. have no market power). This theory was developed in the late 19th century when the real economy was marked by the rise of big business, a dominance which continues to this day. Nor can it be said that even small firms produce identical products — product differentiation and brand loyalty are key factors for any business. In other words, the model reflected (and still reflects) the exact opposite of reality.

In spite of the theoretical models of economics having little or no relation to reality, they are used to both explain and justify the current system. As for the former, the truly staggering aspect of economics for those who value the scientific method is the immunity of its doctrines to empirical refutation (and, in some cases, theoretical refutation). The latter is the key to not only understanding why economics is in such a bad state but also why it stays like that. While economists like to portray themselves as objective scientists, merely analysing the system, the development of their "science" has always been marked with apologetics, with rationalising the injustices of the existing system. This can be seen best in attempts by economists to show that Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of firms, capitalists and landlords all deserve their riches while workers should be grateful for what they get. As such, economics has never been value free simply because what it says affects people and society. This produces a market for economic ideology in which those economists who supply the demand will prosper. Thus we find many *"fields of economics and economic policy where the responses of important economic professionals and the publicity given economic findings are correlated with the increased market demand for specific conclusions and a particular ideology."* [Edward S. Herman, *"The Selling of Market Economics,"* pp. 173–199, **New Ways of Knowing**, Marcus G. Raskin and Herbert J. Bernstein (eds.), p.192]

Even if we assume the impossible, namely that economists and their ideology can truly be objective in the face of market

demand for their services, there is a root problem with capitalist economics. This is that it the specific social relations and classes produced by capitalism have become embedded into the theory. Thus, as an example, the concepts of the marginal productivity of land and capital are assumed to universal in spite the fact that neither makes any sense outside an economy where one class of people owns the means of life while another sells their labour to them. Thus in an artisan/peasant society or one based around co-operatives, there would be no need for such concepts for in such societies, the distinction between wages and profits has no meaning and, as a result, there is no income to the owners of machinery and land and no need to explain it in terms of the "marginal productivity" of either. Thus mainstream economics takes the class structure of capitalism as a natural, eternal, fact and builds up from there. Anarchists, like other socialists, stress the opposite, namely that capitalism is a specific historical phase and, consequently, there are no universal economic laws and if you change the system the laws of economics change. Unless you are a capitalist economist, of course, when the same laws apply no matter what.

In our discussion, it is important to remember that capitalist economics is **not** the same as the capitalist economy. The latter exists quite independently of the former (and, ironically, usually flourishes best when the policy makers ignore it). Dissident economist Steve Keen provides a telling analogy between economics and meteorology. Just as *"the climate would exist even if there were no intellectual discipline of meteorology, the economy itself would exist whether or not the intellectual pursuit of economics existed."* Both share *"a fundamental raison d'etre,"* namely *"that of attempting to understand a complex system."* However, there are differences. Like weather forecasters, *"economists frequently get their forecasts of the economic future wrong. But in fact, though weather forecasts are sometimes incorrect, overall meteorologists have an enviable record of accurate prediction — whereas the economic record is tragically bad."* This



the same information. Yet if everyone held identical opinions then there would be no trading of shares as trading obviously implies **different** opinions on how a stock will perform. Similarly, in reality investors are credit rationed, the rate of borrowing tends to rise as the amount borrowed increases and the borrowing rate normally exceeds the leading rate. The developer of the theory was honest enough to state that the *"consequence of accommodating such aspects of reality are likely to be disastrous in terms of the usefulness of the resulting theory ... The theory is in a shambles."* [W.F Sharpe, quoted by Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 233]

Thus the world was turned into a single person simply to provide a theory which showed that stock markets were "efficient" (i.e. accurately reflect unknown future earnings). In spite of these slight problems, the theory was accepted in the mainstream as an accurate reflection of finance markets. Why? Well, the implications of this theory are deeply political as it suggests that finance markets will never experience bubbles and deep slumps. That this contradicts the well-known history of the stock market was considered unimportant. Unsurprisingly, *"as time went on, more and more data turned up which was not consistent with"* the theory. This is because the model's world *"is clearly not our world."* The theory *"cannot apply in a world in which investors differ in their expectations, in which the future is uncertain, and in which borrowing is rationed."* It *"should never have been given any credibility — yet instead it became an article of faith for academics in finance, and a common belief in the commercial world of finance."* [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 246 and p. 234]

This theory is at the root of the argument that finance markets should be deregulated and as many funds as possible invested in them. While the theory may benefit the minority of share holders who own the bulk of shares and help them pressurise government policy, it is hard to see how it benefits the rest of society. Alternative, more realistic theories, argue that

*if the concept of a social indifference curve itself is invalid, then so too are many of the most treasured notions of economics."* [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50] This means much of economic theory is invalidated and with it the policy recommendations based on it.

This elimination of individual differences in favour of a society of clones by marginalism is not restricted to demand. Take the concept of the *"representative firm"* used to explain supply. Rather than a theoretical device to deal with variety, it ignores diversity. It is a heuristic concept which deals with a varied collection of firms by identifying a single set of distinct characteristics which are deemed to represent the essential qualities of the industry as a whole. It is **not** a single firm or even a typical or average firm. It is an imaginary firm which exhibits the "representative" features of the entire industry, i.e. it treats an industry as if it were just one firm. Moreover, it should be stressed that this concept is driven by the needs to prove the model, not by any concern over reality. The *"real weakness"* of the *"representative firm"* in neo-classical economics is that it is *"no more than a firm which answers the requirements expected from it by the supply curve"* and because it is *"nothing more than a small-scale replica of the industry's supply curve that it is unsuitable for the purpose it has been called into being."* [Kaldor, **The Essential Kaldor**, p. 50]

Then there is neoclassical analysis of the finance market. According to the Efficient Market Hypothesis, information is disseminated equally among all market participants, they all hold similar interpretations of that information and all can get access to all the credit they need at any time at the same rate. In other words, everyone is considered to be identical in terms of what they know, what they can get and what they do with that knowledge and cash. This results in a theory which argues that stock markets accurately price stocks on the basis of their unknown future earnings, i.e. that these identical expectations by identical investors are correct. In other words, investors are able to correctly predict the future and act in the same way to



means it is impossible to ignore economics (*"to treat it and its practitioners as we these days treat astrologers"*) as it is a social discipline and so what we *"believe about economics therefore has an impact upon human society and the way we relate to one another."* Despite *"the abysmal predictive record of their discipline,"* economists *"are forever recommending ways in which the institutional environment should be altered to make the economy work better."* By that they mean make the real economy more like their models, as *"the hypothetical pure market performs better than the mixed economy in which we live."* [**Debunking Economics**, pp. 6–8] Whether this actually makes the world a better place is irrelevant (indeed, economics has been so developed as to make such questions irrelevant as what happens on the market is, by definition, for the best).

Here we expose the apologetics for what they are, expose the ideological role of economics as a means to justify, indeed ignore, exploitation and oppression. In the process of our discussion we will often expose the ideological apologetics that capitalist economics create to defend the status quo and the system of oppression and exploitation it produces. We will also attempt to show the deep flaws in the internal inconsistencies of mainstream economics. In addition, we will show how important reality is when evaluating the claims of economics.

That this needs to be done can be seen by comparing the promise of economics with its actual results when applied in reality. Mainstream economics argues that it is based on the idea of "utility" in consumption, i.e. the subjective pleasure of individuals. Thus production is, it is claimed, aimed at meeting the demands of consumers. Yet for a system supposedly based on maximising individual happiness ("utility"), capitalism produces a hell of a lot of unhappy people. Some radical economists have tried to indicate this and have created an all-embracing measure of well-being called the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). Their conclusions, as summarised by Elliot and Atkinson, are significant:

> *"In the 1950s and 1960s the ISEW rose in tandem with per capita GDP. It was a time not just of rising incomes, but of greater social equity, low crime, full employment and expanding welfare states. But from the mid-1970s onwards the two measures started to move apart. GDP per head continued its inexorable rise, but the ISEW started to decline as a result of lengthening dole queues, social exclusion, the explosion in crime, habitat loss, environmental degradation and the growth of environment- and stress-related illness. By the start of the 1990s, the ISEW was almost back to the levels at which it started in the early 1950s."* [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

So while capitalism continues to produce more and more goods and, presumably, maximises more and more individual utility, actual real people are being "irrational" and not realising they are, in fact, better off and happier. Ironically, when such unhappiness is pointed out most defenders of capitalism dismiss people's expressed woe's as irrelevant. Apparently **some** subjective evaluations are considered more important than others!

Given that the mid-1970s marked the start of neo-liberalism, the promotion of the market and the reduction of government interference in the economy, this is surely significant. After all, the *"global economy of the early 21st century looks a lot more like the economic textbook ideal that did the world of the 1950s ... All these changes have followed the advance of economists that the unfettered market is the best way to allocate resources, and that well-intentioned interventions which oppose market forces will actually do more harm than good."* As such, *"[w]ith the market so much more in control of the global economy now than fifty years ago, then if economists are right, the world **should be** a manifestly better place: it should be growing faster, with more*



> *academic economists are aware of this problem, but they pretend that the failure can be managed with a couple of assumptions. Yet the assumptions themselves are so absurd that only someone with a grossly distorted sense of logic could accept them. That grossly distorted sense of logic is acquired in the course of a standard education in economics."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 25–7]

Rather than produce a *"social indifference map which had the same properties as the individual indifference maps"* by adding up all the individual maps, economics *"proved that this consistent summation from individual to society could **not** be achieved."* Any sane person would have rejected the theory at this stage, but not economists. Keen states the obvious: *"That economists, in general, failed to draw this inference speaks volumes for the unscientific nature of economic theory."* They simply invented *"some fudge to disguise the gapping hole they have uncovered in the theory."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 40 and p. 48] Ironically, it took over one hundred years and advanced mathematical logic to reach the same conclusion that the classical economists took for granted, namely that individual utility could not be measured and compared. However, instead of seeking exchange value (price) in the process of production, neoclassical economists simply that made a few absurd assumptions and continued on its way as if nothing was wrong.

This is important because *"economists are trying to prove that a market economy necessarily maximises social welfare. If they can't prove that the market demand curve falls smoothly as price rises, they can't prove that the market maximises social welfare."* In addition, *"the concept of a social indifference curve is crucial to many of the key notions of economics: the argument that free trade is necessarily superior to regulated trade, for example, is first constructed using a social indifference curve. Therefore,*

> *"Though mainstream economics began by assuming that this hedonistic, individualist approach to analysing consumer demand was intellectually sound,* ***it ended up proving that it was not.*** *The critics were right: society is more than the sum of its individual members."* [Steve Keen, **Debunking Economics**, p. 23]

As noted above, to fight the conclusion that redistributing wealth would result in a different level of social well-being, economists had to show that *"altering the distribution of income did not alter social welfare. They worked out that two conditions were necessary for this to be true: (a) that all people have the same tastes; (b) that each person's tastes remain the same as her income changes, so that every additional dollar of income was spent exactly the same way as all previous dollars."* The former assumption *"in fact amounts to assuming that there is only one person in society"* or that *"society consists of a multitude of identical drones"* or clones. The latter assumption *"amounts to assuming that there is only one commodity — since otherwise spending patterns would necessary change as income rose."* [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24] This is the real meaning of the assumption that all goods and consumers can be considered *"representative."* Sadly, such individuals and goods do not exist. Thus:

> *"Economics can prove that 'the demand curve slows downward in price' for a single individual and a single commodity. But in a society consisting of many different individuals with many different commodities, the 'market demand curve' is more probably jagged, and slopes every which way. One essential building block of the economic analysis of markets, the demand curve, therefore does not have the characteristics needed for economic theory to be internally consistent . .. most mainstream*



*stability, and income should go to those who deserve it."* However, *"[u]nfortunately, the world refuses to dance the expected tune. In particularly, the final ten years of the 20th century were marked, not by tranquil growth, but by crises."* [Steve Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 2]

These problems and the general unhappiness with the way society is going is related to various factors, most of which are impossible to reflect in mainstream economic analysis. They flow from the fact that capitalism is a system marked by inequalities of wealth and power and so how it develops is based on them, not the subjective evaluations of atomised individuals that economics starts with. This in itself is enough to suggest that capitalist economics is deeply flawed and presents a distinctly flawed picture of capitalism and how it actually works.

Anarchists argue that this is unsurprising as economics, rather than being a science is, in fact, little more than an ideology whose main aim is to justify and rationalise the existing system. We agree with libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick's summation that economics is *"actually no more than a sophisticated apology for the social and economic* ***status quo***" and hence the *"growing discrepancy between [its] theories and reality."* [**Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. vii] Anarchists, unsurprisingly, see capitalism as a fundamentally exploitative system rooted in inequalities of power and wealth dominated by hierarchical structures (capitalist firms). In the sections that follow, the exploitative nature of capitalism is explained in greater detail. We would like to point out that for anarchists, exploitation is not more important than domination. Anarchists are opposed to both equally and consider them to be two sides of the same coin. You cannot have domination without exploitation nor exploitation without domination. As Emma Goldman pointed out, under capitalism:

> *"wealth means power; the power to subdue, to crush, to exploit, the power to enslave, to outrage, to degrade ... Nor is this the only crime ... Still more fatal is the crime of turning the producer into a mere particle of a machine, with less will and decision than his master of steel and iron. Man is being robbed not merely of the products of his labour, but of the power of free initiative, of originality, and the interest in, or desire for, the things he is making."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 66–7]

Needless to say, it would be impossible to discuss or refute **every** issue covered in a standard economics book or every school of economics. As economist Nicholas Kaldor notes, *"[e]ach year new fashions sweep the 'politico-economic complex' only to disappear again with equal suddenness ... These sudden bursts of fashion are a sure sign of the 'pre-scientific' stage [economics is in], where any crazy idea can get a hearing simply because nothing is known with sufficient confidence to rule it out."* [**The Essential Kaldor**, p. 377] We will have to concentrate on key issues like the flaws in mainstream economics, why capitalism is exploitative, the existence and role of economic power, the business cycle, unemployment and inequality.

Nor do we wish to suggest that all forms of economics are useless or equally bad. Our critique of capitalist economics does not suggest that no economist has contributed worthwhile and important work to social knowledge or our understanding of the economy. Far from it. As Bakunin put it, property *"is a god"* and has *"its metaphysics. It is the science of the bourgeois economists. Like any metaphysics it is a sort of twilight, a compromise between truth and falsehood, with the latter benefiting from it. It seeks to give falsehood the appearance of truth and leads truth to falsehood."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 179] How far this is true varies form school to school, economist to economist. Some have



While you may think that income redistribution was a good idea, it was now proven by "science" that this little more than a belief as all interpersonal comparisons were now impossible. That this was music to the ears of the wealthy was, of course, just one of those strange co-incidences which always seems to plague economic "science."

The next stage of the process was to abandon then ordinal utility in favour of "indifference curves" (the continued discussion of "utility" in economics textbooks is primarily heuristic). In this theory consumers are supposed to maximise their utility by working out which bundle of goods gives them the highest level of satisfaction based on the twin constraints of income and given prices (let us forget, for the moment, that marginal utility was meant to determines prices in the first place). To do this, it is assumed that incomes and tastes are independent and that consumers have pre-existing preferences for all possible bundles.

This produces a graph that shows different quantities of two different goods, with the "indifference curves" showing the combinations of goods which give the consumer the same level of satisfaction (hence the name, as the consumer is "indifferent" to any combination along the curve). There is also a straight line representing relative prices and the consumer's income and this budget line shows the uppermost curve the consumer can afford to reach. That these indifference curves could not be observed was not an issue although leading neo-classical economist Paul Samuelson provided an apparent means see these curves by his concept of *"revealed preference"* (a basic tautology). There is a reason why "indifference curves" cannot be observed. They are literally impossible for human beings to calculate once you move beyond a trivially small set of alternatives and it is impossible for actual people to act as economists argue they do. Ignoring this slight problem, the "indifference curve" approach to demand can be faulted for another, even more basic, reason. It does not prove what it seeks to show:

explain those prices, the failure of the theory could not be more striking.

However, this is the least of its problems. At first, the neoclassical economists used cardinal utility as their analysis tool. Cardinal utility meant that it was measurable between individuals, i.e. that the utility of a given good was the same for all. While this allowed prices to be determined, it caused obvious political problems as it obviously justified the taxation of the wealthy. As cardinal utility implied that the "utility" of an extra dollar to a poor person was clearly greater than the loss of one dollar to a rich man, it was appropriated by reformists precisely to justify social reforms and taxation.

Capitalist economists had, yet again, created a theory that could be used to attack capitalism and the income and wealth hierarchy it produces. As with classical economics, socialists and other social reformists used the new theories to do precisely that, appropriating it to justify the redistribution of income and wealth downward (i.e. back into the hands of the class who had created it in the first place). Combine this with the high levels of class conflict at the time and it should come as no surprise that the "science" of economics was suitably revised.

There was, of course, a suitable "scientific" rationale for this revision. It was noted that as individual evaluations are inherently subjective, it is obvious that cardinal utility was impossible in practice. Of course, cardinality was not totally rejected. Neoclassical economics retained the idea that capitalists maximise profits, which is a cardinal quantity. However for demand utility became "ordinal," that is utility was considered an individual thing and so could not be measured. This resulted in the conclusion that there was no way of making interpersonal comparisons between individuals and, consequently, no basis for saying a pound in the hands of a poor person had more utility than if it had remained in the pocket of a billionaire. The economic case for taxation was now, apparently, closed.



a better understanding of certain aspects of capitalism than others. Some are more prone to apologetics than others. Some are aware of the problems of modern economics and *"some of the most committed economists have concluded that, if economics is to become less of a religion and more of a science, then the foundations of economics should be torn down and replaced"* (although, *"left to [their] own devices"*, economists *"would continue to build an apparently grand edifice upon rotten foundations."*). [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

As a rule of thumb, the more free market a particular economist or school of economics is, the more likely they will be prone to apologetics and unrealistic assumptions and models. Nor are we suggesting that if someone has made a positive contribution in one or more areas of economic analysis that their opinions on other subjects are correct or compatible with anarchist ideas. It is possible to present a correct analysis of capitalism or capitalist economics while, at the same time, being blind to the problems of Keynesian economics or the horrors of Stalinism. As such, our quoting of certain critical economists does not imply agreement with their political opinions or policy suggestions.

Then there is the issue of what do we mean by the term "capitalist economics"? Basically, any form of economic theory which seeks to rationalise and defend capitalism. This can go from the extreme of free market capitalist economics (such as the so-called "Austrian" school and Monetarists) to those who advocate state intervention to keep capitalism going (Keynesian economists). We will not be discussing those economists who advocate state capitalism. As a default, we will take "capitalist economics" to refer to the mainstream "neoclassical" school as this is the dominant form of the ideology and many of its key features are accepted by the others. This seems applicable, given that the current version of capitalism being promoted is neo-liberalism where state

intervention is minimised and, when it does happen, directed towards benefiting the ruling elite.

Lastly, one of the constant refrains of economists is the notion that the public is ignorant of economics. The implicit assumption behind this bemoaning of ignorance by economists is that the world should be run either by economists or on their recommendations. In section C.11 we present a case study of a nation, Chile, unlucky enough to have that fate subjected upon it. Unsurprisingly, this rule by economists could only be imposed as a result of a military coup and subsequent dictatorship. As would be expected, given the biases of economics, the wealthy did very well, workers less so (to put it mildly), in this experiment. Equally unsurprising, the system was proclaimed an economic miracle — before it promptly collapsed.

So this section of the FAQ is our modest contribution to making economists happier by making working class people less ignorant of their subject. As Joan Robinson put it:

> *"In short, no economic theory gives us ready-made answers. Any theory that we follow blindly will lead us astray. To make good use of an economic theory, we must first sort out the relations of the propagandist and the scientific elements in it, then by checking with experience, see how far the scientific element appears convincing, and finally recombine it with our own political views. The purpose of studying economics is not to acquire a set of ready-made answers to economic questions, but to learn how to avoid being deceived by economists."* [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 75]



## C.1.3 Can you have an economics based on individualism?

In a word, no. No economic system is simply the sum of its parts. The idea that capitalism is based on the subjective evaluations of individuals for goods flies in the face of both logic and the way capitalism works. In other words, modern economists is based on a fallacy. While it would be expected for critics of capitalism to conclude this, the ironic thing is that economists themselves have proven this to be the case.

Neoclassical theory argues that marginal utility determines demand and price, i.e. the price of a good is dependent on the intensity of demand for the marginal unit consumed. This was in contrast to classic economics, which argued that price (exchange value) was regulated by the cost of production, ultimately the amount of labour used to create it. While realistic, this had the political drawback of implying that profit, rent and interest were the product of unpaid labour and so capitalism was exploitative. This conclusion was quickly seized upon by numerous critics of capitalism, including Proudhon and Marx. The rise of marginal utility theory meant that such critiques could be ignored.

However, this change was not unproblematic. The most obvious problem with it is that it leads to circular reasoning. Prices are supposed to measure the "marginal utility" of the commodity, yet consumers need to know the price **first** in order to evaluate how best to maximise their satisfaction. Hence it *"obviously rest[s] on circular reasoning. Although it tries to explain prices, prices [are] necessary to explain marginal utility."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p.58] In the end, as Jevons (one of the founders of the new economics) acknowledged, the price of a commodity is the only test we have of the utility of the commodity to the producer. Given that marginality utility was meant to

an example, Keen points to the theory of perfect competition which assumes that while the demand curve for the market as a whole is downward sloping, an individual firm in perfect competition is so small that it cannot affect the market price and, consequently, faces a horizontal demand curve. Which is utterly impossible. In other words, economics breaks the laws of mathematics.

These are just two examples, there are many, many more. However, these two are pretty fundamental to the whole edifice of modern economic theory. Much, if not most, of mainstream economics is based upon theories which have little or no relation to reality. Kropotkin's dismissal of *"the metaphysical definitions of the academical economists"* is as applicable today. [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 92] Little wonder dissident economist Nicholas Kaldor argued that:

> *"The Walrasian [i.e. general] equilibrium theory is a highly developed intellectual system, much refined and elaborated by mathematical economists since World War II — an intellectual experiment ... But it does not constitute a scientific hypothesis, like Einstein's theory of relativity or Newton's law of gravitation, in that its basic assumptions are axiomatic and not empirical, and no specific methods have been put forward by which the validity or relevance of its results could be tested. The assumptions make assertions about reality in their implications, but these are not founded on direct observation, and, in the opinion of practitioners of the theory at any rate, they cannot be contradicted by observation or experiment."* [**The Essential Kaldor**, p. 416]



# C.1 What is wrong with economics?

In a nutshell, a lot. While economists like to portray their discipline as "scientific" and "value free", the reality is very different. It is, in fact, very far from a science and hardly "value free." Instead it is, to a large degree, deeply ideological and its conclusions almost always (by a strange co-incidence) what the wealthy, landlords, bosses and managers of capital want to hear. The words of Kropotkin still ring true today:

> *"Political Economy has always confined itself to stating facts occurring in society, and justifying them in the interest of the dominant class ... Having found [something] profitable to capitalists, it has set it up as a* ***principle.****"* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 181]

This is at its best, of course. At its worse economics does not even bother with the facts and simply makes the most appropriate assumptions necessary to justify the particular beliefs of the economists and, usually, the interests of the ruling class. This is the key problem with economics: it is **not** a science. It is **not** independent of the class nature of society, either in the theoretical models it builds or in the questions it raises and tries to answer. This is due, in part, to the pressures of the market, in part due to the assumptions and methodology of the dominant forms of economics. It is a mishmash of ideology and genuine science, with the former (unfortunately) being the bulk of it.

The argument that economics, in the main, is not a science it not one restricted to anarchists or other critics of capital-

ism. Some economists are well aware of the limitations of their profession. For example, Steve Keen lists many of the flaws of mainstream (neoclassical) economics in his excellent book **Debunking Economics**, noting that (for example) it is based on a *"dynamically irrelevant and factually incorrect instantaneous static snap-shot"* of the real capitalist economy. [**Debunking Economics**, p. 197] The late Joan Robinson argued forcefully that the neoclassical economist *"sets up a 'model' on arbitrarily constructed assumptions, and then applies 'results' from it to current affairs, without even trying to pretend that the assumptions conform to reality."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 4, p. 25] More recently, economist Mark Blaug has summarised many of the problems he sees with the current state of economics:

> *"Economics has increasing become an intellectual games played for its own sake and not for its practical consequences. Economists have gradually converted the subject into a sort of social mathematics in which analytical rigor as understood in math departments is everything and empirical relevance (as understood in physics departments) is nothing … general equilibrium theory … using economic terms like 'prices', 'quantities', 'factors of production,' and so on, but that nevertheless is clearly and even scandalously unrepresentative of any recognisable economic system…*
>
> *"Perfect competition never did exist and never could exist because, even when firms are small, they do not just take the price but strive to make the price. All the current textbooks say as much, but then immediately go on to say that the 'cloud-cuckoo' fantasy-land of perfect competition is the benchmark against which we may say something significant about real-world competition … But how can an idealised state of perfection be a benchmark when we are never told*



Another key problem in economics is that of time. This has been known, and admitted, by economists for some time. Marshall, for example, stated that *"the element of **time**"* was *"the source of many of the greatest difficulties of economics."* [**Principles of Economics**, p. 109] The founder of general equilibrium theory, Walras, recognised that the passage of time wrecked his whole model and stated that we *"shall resolve the … difficulty purely and simply by ignoring the time element at this point."* This was due, in part, because production *"requires a certain lapse of time."* [**Elements of Pure Economics**, p. 242] This was generalised by Gerard Debreu (in his Nobel Prize for economics winning **Theory of Value** ) who postulated that everyone makes their sales and purchases for all time in one instant.

Thus the cutting edge of neo-classical economics, general equilibrium ignores both time **and** production. It is based on making time stop, looking at finished goods, getting individuals to bid for them and, once all goods are at equilibrium, allowing the transactions to take place. For Walras, this was for a certain moment of time and was repeated, for his followers it happened once for all eternity. This is obviously not the way markets work in the real world and, consequently, the dominant branch of economics is hardly scientific. Sadly, the notion of individuals having full knowledge of both now and the future crops up with alarming regularly in the "science" of economics.

Even if we ignore such minor issues as empirical evidence and time, economics has problems even with its favoured tool, mathematics. As Steve Keen has indicated, economists have *"obscured reality using mathematics because they have practised mathematics badly, and because they have not realised the limits of mathematics."* indeed, there are *"numerous theorems in economics that reply upon mathematically fallacious propositions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258 and p. 259] For a theory born from the desire to apply calculus to economics, this is deeply ironic. As

> *"If in fact the output to employment relationship is relatively constant, then the neo-classical explanation for employment and output determination collapses. With a flat production function, the marginal product of labour will be constant, and it will **never** intersect the real wage. The output of the form then can't be explained by the cost of employing labour... [This means that] neo-classical economics simply cannot explain anything: neither the level of employment, nor output, nor, ultimately, what determines the real wage ...the entire edifice of economics collapses."* [**Debunking Economics**, pp. 76–7]

It should be noted that the empirical research simply confirmed an earlier critique of neo-classical economics presented by Piero Sraffa in 1926. He argued that while the neo-classical model of production works in theory only if we accept its assumptions. If those assumptions do not apply in practice, then it is irrelevant. He therefore *"focussed upon the economic assumptions that there were 'factors of production' which were fixed in the short run, and that supply and demand were independent of each other. He argued that these two assumptions could be fulfilled simultaneously. In circumstances where it was valid to say some factor of production was fixed in the short term, supply and demand could not independent, so that every point on the supply curve would be associated with a different demand curve. On the other hand, in circumstances where supply and demand could justifiably be treated as independent, then it would be impossible for any factor of production to be fixed. Hence the marginal costs of production would be constant."* He stressed firms would have to be irrational to act otherwise, foregoing the chance to make profits simply to allow economists to build their models of how they should act. [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 66–72]



> *how to measure the gap between it and real-world competition? It is implied that all real-world competition is 'approximately' like perfect competition, but the degree of the approximation is never specified, even vaguely ...*
>
> *"Think of the following typical assumptions: perfectly infallible, utterly omniscient, infinitely long-lived identical consumers; zero transaction costs; complete markets for all time-stated claims for all conceivable events, no trading of any kind at disequilibrium prices; infinitely rapid velocities of prices and quantities; no radical, incalculable uncertainty in real time but only probabilistically calculable risk in logical time; only linearly homogeneous production functions; no technical progress requiring embodied capital investment, and so on, and so on — all these are not just unrealistic but also unrobust assumptions. And yet they figure critically in leading economic theories."* [*"Disturbing Currents in Modern Economics"*, **Challenge!**, Vol. 41, No. 3, May-June, 1998]

So neoclassical ideology is based upon special, virtually ad hoc, assumptions. Many of the assumptions are impossible, such as the popular assertion that individuals can accurately predict the future (as required by "rational expectations" and general equilibrium theory), that there are a infinite number of small firms in every market or that time is an unimportant concept which can be abstracted from. Even when we ignore those assumptions which are obviously nonsense, the remaining ones are hardly much better. Here we have a collection of apparently valid positions which, in fact, rarely have any basis in reality. As we discuss in section C.1.2, an essential one, without which neoclassical economics simply disintegrates, has very little basis in the real world (in fact, it was invented

simply to ensure the theory worked as desired). Similarly, markets often adjust in terms of quantities rather than price, a fact overlooked in general equilibrium theory. Some of the assumptions are mutually exclusive. For example, the neo-classical theory of the supply curve is based on the assumption that some factor of production cannot be changed in the short run. This is essential to get the concept of diminishing marginal productivity which, in turn, generates a rising marginal cost and so a rising supply curve. This means that firms **within** an industry cannot change their capital equipment. However, the theory of perfect competition requires that in the short period there are no barriers to entry, i.e. that anyone **outside** the industry can create capital equipment and move into the market. These two positions are logically inconsistent.

In other words, although the symbols used in mainstream may have economic sounding names, the theory has no point of contact with empirical reality (or, at times, basic logic):

> *"Nothing in these abstract economic models actually **works** in the real world. It doesn't matter how many footnotes they put in, or how many ways they tinker around the edges. The whole enterprise is totally rotten at the core: it has no relation to reality."* [Noam Chomsky, **Understanding Power**, pp. 254–5]

As we will indicate, while its theoretical underpinnings are claimed to be universal, they are specific to capitalism and, ironically, they fail to even provide an accurate model of that system as it ignores most of the real features of an actual capitalist economy. So if an economist does not say that mainstream economics has no bearing to reality, you can be sure that what he or she tells you will be more likely ideology than anything else. "Economic reality" is not about facts; it's about faith in capitalism. Even worse, it is about blind faith in what the economic ideologues say about capitalism. The key to understanding economists is that they believe that if it is in an economic



against reality. No other science would then simply ignore the facts which utterly contradicted the theory and continue to teach that theory as if it were a valid generalisation of the facts. But, then, economics is not a science.

This strange perspective makes sense once it is realised how key the notion of diminishing costs is to economics. In fact, if the assumption of increasing marginal costs is abandoned then so is perfect competition and *"the basis of which economic laws can be constructed … is shorn away,"* causing the *"wreckage of the greater part of general equilibrium theory."* This will have *"a very destructive consequence for economic theory,"* in the words of one leading neo-classical economist. [John Hicks, **Value and Capital**, pp. 83–4] As Steve Keen notes, this is extremely significant:

> *"Strange as it may seem … this is a very big deal. If marginal returns are constant rather than falling, then the neo-classical explanation of everything collapses. Not only can economic theory no longer explain how much a firm produces, it can explain nothing else.*
>
> *"Take, for example, the economic theory of employment and wage determination … The theory asserts that the real wage is equivalent to the marginal product of labour … An employer will employ an additional worker if the amount the worker adds to output — the worker's marginal product — exceeds the real wage … [This] explains the economic predilection for blaming everything on wages being too high — neo-classical economics can be summed up, as [John Kenneth] Galbraith once remarked, in the twin propositions that the poor don't work hard enough because they're paid too much, and the rich don't work hard enough because they're not paid enough …*

*mand."* [A.S. Blinder, E. Cabetti, D. Lebow and J. Rudd, **Asking About Prices**, p. 102 and p. 101]

Thus empirical research has concluded that actual price setting has nothing to do with clearing the market by equating market supply to market demand (i.e. what economic theory sees as the role of prices). Rather, prices are set to enable the firm to continue as a going concern and equating supply and demand in any arbitrary period of time is irrelevant to a firm which hopes to exist for the indefinite future. As Lee put it, basing himself on extensive use of empirical research, *"market prices are not market-clearing or profit-maximising prices, but rather are enterprise-, and hence transaction-reproducing prices."* Rather than a non-existent equilibrium or profit maximisation at a given moment determining prices, the market price is *"set and the market managed for the purpose of ensuring continual transactions for those enterprises in the market, that is for the benefit of the business leaders and their enterprises."* A significant proportion of goods have prices based on mark-up, normal cost and target rate of return pricing procedures and are relatively stable over time. Thus *"the existence of stable, administered market prices implies that the markets in which they exist are not organised like auction markets or like the early retail markets and oriental bazaars"* as imagined in mainstream economic ideology. [Frederic S. Lee, **Post Keynesian Price Theory**, p. 228 and p. 212]

Unsurprisingly, most of these researchers were highly critical the conventional economic theory of markets and price setting. One viewed the economists' concepts of perfect competition and monopoly as virtual nonsense and *"the product of the itching imaginations of uninformed and inexperienced armchair theorisers."* [Tucker, quoted by Lee, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73f] Which **was** exactly how it was produced.

No other science would think it appropriate to develop theory utterly independently of phenomenon under analysis. No other science would wait decades before testing a theory



textbook, then it must be true — particularly if it confirms any initial prejudices. The opposite is usually the case.

The obvious fact that the real world is not like that described by economic text books can have some funny results, particularly when events in the real world contradict the textbooks. For most economists, or those who consider themselves as such, the textbook is usually preferred. As such, much of capitalist apologetics is faith-driven. Reality has to be adjusted accordingly.

A classic example was the changing positions of pundits and "experts" on the East Asian economic miracle. As these economies grew spectacularly during the 1970s and 1980s, the experts universally applauded them as examples of the power of free markets. In 1995, for example, the right-wing Heritage Foundation's index of economic freedom had four Asian countries in its top seven countries. The **Economist** explained at the start of 1990s that Taiwan and South Korea had among the least price-distorting regimes in the world. Both the Word Bank and IMF agreed, downplaying the presence of industrial policy in the region. This was unsurprising. After all, their ideology said that free markets would produce high growth and stability and so, logically, the presence of both in East Asia must be driven by the free market. This meant that, for the true believers, these nations were paradigms of the free market, reality not withstanding. The markets agreed, putting billions into Asian equity markets while foreign banks loaned similar vast amounts.

In 1997, however, all this changed when all the Asian countries previously qualified as "free" saw their economies collapse. Overnight the same experts who had praised these economies as paradigms of the free market found the cause of the problem — extensive state intervention. The free market paradise had become transformed into a state regulated hell! Why? Because of ideology — the free market is stable and produces high growth and, consequently, it was impossible

for any economy facing crisis to be a free market one! Hence the need to disown what was previously praised, without (of course) mentioning the very obvious contradiction.

In reality, these economies had always been far from the free market. The role of the state in these "free market" miracles was extensive and well documented. So while East Asia *"had not only grown faster and done better at reducing poverty than any other region of the world … it had also been more stable,"* these countries *"had been successful not only in spite of the fact that they had not followed most of the dictates of the Washington Consensus [i.e. neo-liberalism], but* ***because*** *they had not."* The government had played *"important roles … far from the minimalist [ones] beloved"* of neo-liberalism. During the 1990s, things had changed as the IMF had urged a *"excessively rapid financial and capital market liberalisation"* for these countries as sound economic policies. This *"was probably the single most important cause of the [1997] crisis"* which saw these economies suffer meltdown, *"the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression"* (a meltdown worsened by IMF aid and its underlying dogmas). Even worse for the believers in market fundamentalism, those nations (like Malaysia) that refused IMF suggestions and used state intervention has a *"shorter and shallower"* downturn than those who did not. [Joseph Stiglitz, **Globalisation and its Discontents**, p. 89, p. 90, p. 91 and p. 93] Even worse, the obvious conclusion from these events is more than just the ideological perspective of economists, it is that "the market" is not all-knowing as investors (like the experts) failed to see the statist policies so bemoaned by the ideologues of capitalism **after** 1997.

This is not to say that the models produced by neoclassical economists are not wonders of mathematics or logic. Few people would deny that a lot of very intelligent people have spent a lot of time producing some quite impressive mathematical models in economics. It is a shame that they are utterly irrelevant to reality. Ironically, for a theory claims to be



underlying reality that per-unit costs fell as output levels rose, resulted in far more stable prices than were predicted by traditional economic theory. One researcher concluded that administered prices *"differ so sharply from the behaviour to be expected from"* the theory *"as to challenge the basic conclusions"* of it. He warned that until such time as *"economic theory can explain and take into account the implications"* of this empirical data, *"it provides a poor basis for public policy."* Needless to say, this did not disturb neo-classical economists or stop them providing public policy recommendations. [Gardiner C. Means, *"The Administered-Price Thesis Reconfirmed",* **The American Economic Review**, pp. 292–306, Vol. 62, No. 3, p. 304]

One study in 1952 showed firms a range of hypothetical cost curves, and asked firms which ones most closely approximated their own costs. Over 90% of firms chose a graph with a declining average cost rather than one showing the conventional economic theory of rising marginal costs. These firms faced declining average cost, and their marginal revenues were much greater than marginal cost at all levels of output. Unsurprisingly, the study's authors concluded if this sample was typical then it was *"obvious that short-run marginal price theory should be revised in the light of reality."* We are still waiting. [Eiteman and Guthrie, *"The Shape of the Average Cost Curve",* **The American Economic Review**, pp. 832–8, Vol. 42, No. 5, p. 838]

A more recent study of the empirical data came to the same conclusions, arguing that it is *"overwhelming bad news … for economic theory."* While economists treat rising marginal cost as the rule, 89% of firms in the study reported marginal costs which were either constant or declined with output. As for price elasticity, it is not a vital operational concept for corporations. In other words, the *"firms that sell 40 percent of GDP believe their demand is totally insensitive to price"* while *"only about one-sixth of GDP is sold under conditions of elastic de-*

neither here nor there. It did not happen in theory and, consequently, that was the important thing and so *"when the great concentrations of power in the multinational corporations are bringing the age of national employment policy to an end, the text books are still illustrated by U-shaped curves showing the limitation on the size of firms in a perfectly competitive market."* [Joan Robinson, **Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 5]

To be good, a theory must have two attributes: They accurately describe the phenomena in question and they make accurate predictions. Neither holds for Pigou's invention: reality keeps getting in the way. Not only did the rise of a few large firms dominating markets indirectly show that the theory was nonsense, when empirical testing was finally done decades after the theory was proposed it showed that in most cases the opposite is the case: that there were constant or even falling costs in production. Just as the theories of marginality and diminishing marginal returns taking over economics, the real world was showing how wrong it was with the rise of corporations across the world.

So the reason why the market become dominated by a few firms should be obvious enough: actual corporate price is utterly different from the economic theory. This was discovered when researchers did what the original theorists did not think was relevant: they actually asked firms what they did and the researchers consistently found that, for the vast majority of manufacturing firms their average costs of production declined as output rose, their marginal costs were always well below their average costs, and substantially smaller than 'marginal revenue', and the concept of a 'demand curve' (and therefore its derivative 'marginal revenue') was simply irrelevant.

Unsurprisingly, real firms set their prices prior to sales, based on a mark-up on costs at a target rate of output. In other words, they did not passively react to the market. These prices are an essential feature of capitalism as prices are set to maintain the long-term viability of the firm. This, and the



so concerned about allocating scarce resources efficiently, economics has used a lot of time and energy refining the analyses of economies which have not, do not, and will not ever exist. In other words, scare resources have been inefficiently allocated to produce waste.

Why? Perhaps because there is a demand for such nonsense? Some economists are extremely keen to apply their methodology in all sorts of areas outside the economy. No matter how inappropriate, they seek to colonise every aspect of life. One area, however, seems immune to such analysis. This is the market for economic theory. If, as economists stress, every human activity can be analysed by economics then why not the demand and supply of economics itself? Perhaps because if that was done some uncomfortable truths would be discovered?

Basic supply and demand theory would indicate that those economic theories which have utility to others would be provided by economists. In a system with inequalities of wealth, effective demand is skewed in favour of the wealthy. Given these basic assumptions, we would predict that only these forms of economists which favour the requirements of the wealthy would gain dominance as these meet the (effective) demand. By a strange co-incidence, this is **precisely** what has happened. This did and does not stop economists complaining that dissidents and radicals were and are biased. As Edward Herman points out:

> *"Back in 1849, the British economist Nassau Senior chided those defending trade unions and minimum wage regulations for expounding an 'economics of the poor.' The idea that he and his establishment confreres were putting forth an 'economics of the rich' never occurred to him; he thought of himself as a scientist and spokesperson of true principles. This self-deception pervaded mainstream economics up to the*

*time of the Keynesian Revolution of the 1930s. Keynesian economics, though quickly tamed into an instrument of service to the capitalist state, was disturbing in its stress on the inherent instability of capitalism, the tendency toward chronic unemployment, and the need for substantial government intervention to maintain viability. With the resurgent capitalism of the past 50 years, Keynesian ideas, and their implicit call for intervention, have been under incessant attack, and, in the intellectual counterrevolution led by the Chicago School, the traditional laissez-faire ('let-the-fur-fly') economics of the rich has been re-established as the core of mainstream economics."* [**The Economics of the Rich** ]

Herman goes on to ask *"[w]hy do the economists serve the rich?"* and argues that *"[f]or one thing, the leading economists are among the rich, and others seek advancement to similar heights. Chicago School economist Gary Becker was on to something when he argued that economic motives explain a lot of actions frequently attributed to other forces. He of course never applied this idea to economics as a profession .. ."* There are a great many well paying think tanks, research posts, consultancies and so on that create an *"'effective demand' that should elicit an appropriate supply resource."*

Elsewhere, Herman notes the *"class links of these professionals to the business community were strong and the ideological element was realised in the neoclassical competitive model ... Spin-off negative effects on the lower classes were part of the 'price of progress.' It was the elite orientation of these questions [asked by economics], premises, and the central paradigm [of economic theory] that caused matters like unemployment, mass poverty, and work hazards to escape the net of mainstream economist interest until well into the twentieth century."* Moreover, *"the economics profession in the years 1880–1930 was by and large strongly con-*



who do the actual production form between themselves — and the conflicts that ensure.

The theory does have a few key assumptions associated with it, however. First, there are diminishing returns. This plays a central role. In mainstream diminishing returns are required to produce a downward sloping demand curve for a given factor. Second, there is a rising supply curve based on rising marginal costs produced by diminishing returns. The average variable cost curve for a firm is assumed to be U-shaped, the result of first increasing and then diminishing returns. These are logically necessary for the neo-classical theory to work.

Non-economists would, of course, think that these assumptions are generalisations based on empirical evidence. However, they are not. Take the U-shaped average cost curve. This was simply invented by A. C. Pigou, *"a loyal disciple of [leading neo-classical Alfred] Marshall and quite innocent of any knowledge of industry. He therefore constructed a U-shaped average cost curve for a firm, showing economies of scale up to a certain size and rising costs beyond it."* [Joan Robinson, **Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 5, p. 11] The invention was driven by need of the theory, not the facts. With increasing returns to scale, then large firms would have cost advantages against small ones and would drive them out of business in competition. This would destroy the concept of perfect competition. However, the invention of the average cost curve allowed the theory to work as "proved" that a competitive market could **not** become dominated by a few large firms, as feared.

The model, in other words, was adjusted to ensure that it produced the desired result rather than reflect reality. The theory was required to prove that markets remained competitive and the existence of diminishing marginal returns to scale of production **did** tend by itself to limit the size of individual firms. That markets did become dominated by a few large firms was

results in policy recommendations which consistently and systematically favour the ruling class.

## C.1.2 Is economics a science?

In a word, no. If by "scientific" it is meant in the usual sense of being based on empirical observation and on developing an analysis that was consistent with and made sense of the data, then most forms of economics are not a science.

Rather than base itself on a study of reality and the generalisation of theory based on the data gathered, economics has almost always been based on generating theories rooted on whatever assumptions were required to make the theory work. Empirical confirmation, if it happens at all, is usually done decades later and if the facts contradict the economics, so much the worse for the facts.

A classic example of this is the neo-classical theory of production. As noted previously, neoclassical economics is focused on individual evaluations of existing products and, unsurprisingly, economics is indelibly marked by *"the dominance of a theoretical vision that treats the inner workings of the production process as a 'black box.'"* This means that the *"neoclassical theory of the 'capitalist' economy makes no qualitative distinction between the corporate enterprise that employs tens of thousands of people and the small family undertaking that does no employ any wage labour at all. As far as theory is concerned, it is technology and market forces, not structures of social power, that govern the activities of corporate capitalists and petty proprietors alike."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 34 and pp. 33–4] Production in this schema just happens — inputs go in, outputs go out — and what happens inside is considered irrelevant, a technical issue independent of the social relationships those



*servative, reflecting in its core paradigm its class links and sympathy with the dominant business community, fundamentally anti-union and suspicious of government, and tending to view competition as the true and durable state of nature."* [Edward S. Herman, *"The Selling of Market Economics,"* pp. 173–199, **New Ways of Knowing**, Marcus G. Raskin and Herbert J. Bernstein (eds.),p. 179–80 and p. 180]

Rather than scientific analysis, economics has always been driven by the demands of the wealthy (*"How did [economics] get instituted? As a weapon of class warfare."* [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252]). This works on numerous levels. The most obvious is that most economists take the current class system and wealth/income distribution as granted and generate general *"laws"* of economics from a specific historical society. As we discuss in the next section, this inevitably skews the "science" into ideology and apologetics. The analysis is also (almost inevitably) based on individualistic assumptions, ignoring or downplaying the key issues of groups, organisations, class and the economic and social power they generate. Then there are the assumptions used and questions raised. As Herman argues, this has hardly been a neutral process:

> *"the theorists explicating these systems, such as Carl Menger, Leon Walras, and Alfred Marshall, were knowingly assuming away formulations that raised disturbing questions (income distribution, class and market power, instability, and unemployment) and creating theoretical models compatible with their own policy biases of status quo or modest reformism ... Given the choice of 'problem,' ideology and other sources of bias may still enter economic analysis if the answer is predetermined by the structure of the theory or premises, or if the facts are selected or bent to prove the desired answer."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 176]

Needless to say, economics is a "science" with deep ramifications within society. As a result, it comes under pressure from outside influences and vested interests far more than, say, anthropology or physics. This has meant that the wealthy have always taken a keen interest that the "science" teaches the appropriate lessons. This has resulted in a demand for a "science" which reflects the interests of the few, not the many. Is it **really** just a co-incidence that the lessons of economics are just what the bosses and the wealthy would like to hear? As non-neoclassical economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted in 1972:

> *"Economic instruction in the United States is about a hundred years old. In its first half century economists were subject to censorship by outsiders. Businessmen and their political and ideological acolytes kept watch on departments of economics and reacted promptly to heresy, the latter being anything that seemed to threaten the sanctity of property, profits, a proper tariff policy and a balanced budget, or that suggested sympathy for unions, public ownership, public regulation or, in any organised way, for the poor."* [**The Essential Galbraith**, p. 135]

It is **really** surprising that having the wealthy fund (and so control) the development of a "science" has produced a body of theory which so benefits their interests? Or that they would be keen to educate the masses in the lessons of said "science", lessons which happen to conclude that the best thing workers should do is obey the dictates of the bosses, sorry, the market? It is really just a co-incidence that the repeated use of economics is to spread the message that strikes, unions, resistance and so forth are counter-productive and that the best thing worker can do is simply wait patiently for wealth to trickle down?



> *"This is no surprise, really. Mainstream economics is built entirely on a notion of self-interested individuals, rational self-maximisers who can order their wants and spend accordingly. There's little room for sentiment, uncertainty, selflessness, and social institutions. Whether this is an accurate picture of the average human is open to question, but there's no question that capitalism as a system and economics as a discipline both reward people who conform to the model."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p, 143]

So is economics "value free"? Far from it. Given its social role, it would be surprising that it were. That it tends to produce policy recommendations that benefit the capitalist class is not an accident. It is rooted in the fibre of the "science" as it reflects the assumptions of capitalist society and its class structure. Not only does it take the power and class structures of capitalism for granted, it also makes them the ideal for any and every economy. Given this, it should come as no surprise that economists will tend to support policies which will make the real world conform more closely to the standard (usually neoclassical) economic model. Thus the models of economics become more than a set of abstract assumptions, used simply as a tool in theoretical analysis of the casual relations of facts. Rather they become political goals, an ideal towards which reality should be forced to travel.

This means that economics has a dual character. On the one hand, it attempts to prove that certain things (for example, that free market capitalism produces an optimum allocation of resources or that, given free competition, price formation will ensure that each person's income corresponds to their productive contribution). On the other, economists stress that economic "science" has nothing to do with the question of the justice of existing institutions, class structures or the current economic system. And some people seem surprised that this

them, structure their jobs or how they are paid — or, of course, change the system.

Of course, the economist who says that they are conducting "value free" analysis are indifferent to the kinds of relationships within society is being less than honest. Capitalist economic theory is rooted in very specific assumptions and concepts such as "economic man" and "perfect competition." It claims to be "value-free" yet its preferred terminology is riddled with value connotations. For example, the behaviour of "economic man" (i.e., people who are self-interested utility maximisation machines) is described as *"rational."* By implication, then, the behaviour of real people is *"irrational"* whenever they depart from this severely truncated account of human nature and society. Our lives consist of much more than buying and selling. We have goals and concerns which cannot be bought or sold in markets. In other words, humanity and liberty transcend the limits of property and, as a result, economics. This, unsurprisingly, affects those who study the "science" as well:

> *"Studying economics also seems to make you a nastier person. Psychological studies have shown that economics graduate students are more likely to 'free ride' — shirk contributions to an experimental 'public goods' account in the pursuit of higher private returns — than the general public. Economists also are less generous that other academics in charitable giving. Undergraduate economics majors are more likely to defect in the classic prisoner's dilemma game that are other majors. And on other tests, students grow less honest — expressing less of a tendency, for example, to return found money — after studying economics, but not studying a control subject like astronomy.*



This co-incidence has been a feature of the "science" from the start. The French Second Empire in the 1850s and 60s saw *"numerous private individuals and organisation, municipalities, and the central government encouraged and founded institutions to instruct workers in economic principles."* The aim was to *"impress upon [workers] the salutary lessons of economics."* Significantly, the *"weightiest motive"* for so doing *"was fear that the influence of socialist ideas upon the working class threatened the social order."* The revolution of 1848 *"convinced many of the upper classes that the must prove to workers that attacks upon the economic order were both unjustified and futile."* Another reason was the recognition of the right to strike in 1864 and so workers *"had to be warned against abuse of the new weapon."* The instruction *"was always with the aim of refuting socialist doctrines and exposing popular misconceptions. As one economist stated, it was not the purpose of a certain course to initiate workers into the complexities of economic science, but to define principles useful for 'our conduct in the social order.'"* The interest in such classes was related to the level of *"worker discontent and agitation."* The impact was less than desired: *"The future Communard Lefrancais referred mockingly to the economists ... and the 'banality' and 'platitudes' of the doctrine they taught. A newspaper account of the reception given to the economist Joseph Garnier states that Garnier was greeted with shouts of: 'He is an economist' ... It took courage, said the article, to admit that one was an economist before a public meeting."* [David I. Kulstein, *"Economics Instruction for Workers during the Second Empire,"* pp. 225–234, **French Historical Studies**, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 233]

This process is still at work, with corporations and the wealthy funding university departments and posts as well as their own *"think tanks"* and paid PR economists. The control of funds for research and teaching plays it part in keeping economics the *"economics of the rich."* Analysing the situation in the 1970s, Herman notes that the *"enlarged*

*private demand for the services of economists by the business community … met a warm supply response.*" He stressed that *"if the demand in the market is for specific policy conclusions and particular viewpoints that will serve such conclusions, the market will accommodate this demand."* Hence *"blatantly ideological models … are being spewed forth on a large scale, approved and often funded by large vested interests"* which helps *"shift the balance between ideology and science even more firmly toward the former."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 184, p. 185 and p. 179] The idea that "experts" funded and approved by the wealthy would be objective scientists is hardly worth considering. Unfortunately, many people fail to exercise sufficient scepticism about economists and the economics they support. As with most experts, there are two obvious questions with which any analysis of economics should begin: *"Who is funding it?"* and *"Who benefits from it?"*

However, there are other factors as well, namely the hierarchical organisation of the university system. The heads of economics departments have the power to ensure the continuation of their ideological position due to the position as hirer and promoter of staff. As economics *"has mixed its ideology into the subject so well that the ideologically unconventional usually appear to appointment committees to be scientifically incompetent."* [Benjamin Ward, **What's Wrong with Economics?**, p. 250] Galbraith termed this *"a new despotism,"* which consisted of *"defining scientific excellence in economics not as what is true but as whatever is closest to belief and method to the scholarly tendency of the people who already have tenure in the subject. This is a pervasive test, not the less oppress for being, in the frequent case, both self-righteous and unconscious. It helps ensure, needless to say, the perpetuation of the neoclassical orthodoxy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 135] This plays a key role in keeping economics an ideology rather than a science:



to what workers should do, the "laws" of economics suddenly switch. The economist will now deny that competition is a good idea and instead urge that the workers co-operate (i.e. obey) their boss rather than compete (i.e. struggle over the division of output and authority in the workplace). They will argue that there is *"harmony of interests"* between worker and boss, that it is in the **self**-interest of workers **not** to be selfish but rather to do whatever the boss asks to further **the bosses** interests (i.e. profits).

That this perspective implicitly recognises the **dependent** position of workers, goes without saying. So while the sale of labour is portrayed as a market exchange between equals, it is in fact an authority relation between servant and master. The conclusions of economics is simply implicitly acknowledging that authoritarian relationship by identifying with the authority figure in the relationship and urging obedience to them. It simply suggests workers make the best of it by refusing to be independent individuals who need freedom to flourish (at least during working hours, outside they can express their individuality by shopping).

This should come as no surprise, for, as Chomsky notes, economics is rooted in the notion that *"you only harm the poor by making them believe that they have rights other than what they can win on the market, like a basic right to live, because that kind of right interferes with the market, and with efficiency, and with growth and so on — so ultimately people will just be worse off if you try to recognise them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251] Economics teaches that you must accept change without regard to whether it is appropriate it not. It teaches that you must not struggle, you must not fight. You must simply accept whatever change happens. Worse, it teaches that resisting and fighting back are utterly counter-productive. In other words, it teaches a servile mentality to those subject to authority. For business, economics is ideal for getting their employees to change their attitudes rather than collectively change how their bosses treat

Neoclassical economics, in effect, took the "political" out of "political economy" by taking capitalist society for granted along with its class system, its hierarchies and its inequalities. This is reflected in the terminology used. These days even the term capitalism has gone out of fashion, replaced with the approved terms *"market system,"* the *"free market"* or *"free enterprise."* Yet, as Chomsky noted, terms such as *"free enterprise"* are used *"to designate a system of autocratic governance of the economy in which neither the community nor the workforce has any role (a system we would call 'fascist' if translated to the political sphere)."* [**Language and Politics**, p. 175] As such, it seems hardly "value-free" to proclaim a system free when, in reality, most people are distinctly not free for most of their waking hours and whose choices outside production are influenced by the inequality of wealth and power which that system of production create.

This shift in terminology reflects a political necessity. It effectively removes the role of wealth (capital) from the economy. Instead of the owners and manager of capital being in control or, at the very least, having significant impact on social events, we have the impersonal activity of *"the markets"* or *"market forces."* That such a change in terminology is the interest of those whose money accords them power and influence goes without saying. By focusing on the market, economics helps hide the real sources of power in an economy and attention is drawn away from such a key questions of how money (wealth) produces power and how it skews the "free market" in its favour. All in all, as dissident economist John Kenneth Galbraith once put it, *"[w]hat economists believe and teach is rarely hostile to the institutions that reflect the dominant economic power. Not to notice this takes effort, although many succeed."* [**The Essential Galbraith**, p. 180]

This becomes obvious when we look at how the advice economics gives to working class people. In theory, economics is based on individualism and competition yet when it comes



> *"The power inherent in this system of quality control within the economics profession is obviously very great. The discipline's censors occupy leading posts in economics departments at the major institutions ... Any economist with serious hopes of obtaining a tenured position in one of these departments will soon be made aware of the criteria by which he is to be judged ... the entire academic program ... consists of indoctrination in the ideas and techniques of the science."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 29–30]

All this has meant that the "science" of economics has hardly changed in its basics in over one hundred years. Even notions which have been debunked (and have been acknowledged as such) continue to be taught:

> *"The so-called mainline teaching of economic theory has a curious self-sealing capacity. Every breach that is made in it by criticism is somehow filled up by admitting the point but refusing to draw any consequence from it, so that the old doctrines can be repeated as before. Thus the Keynesian revolution was absorbed into the doctrine that, 'in the long run,' there is a natural tendency for a market economy to achieve full employment of available labour and full utilisation of equipment; that the rate of accumulation is determined by household saving; and that the rate of interest is identical with the rate of profit on capital. Similarly, Piero Sraffa's demolition of the neoclassical production function in labour and 'capital' was admitted to be unanswerable, but it has not been allowed to affect the propagation of the 'marginal productivity' theory of wages and profits.*
>
> *"The most sophisticated practitioners of orthodoxy maintain that the whole structure is an exercise in*

> *pure logic which has no application to real life at all. All the same they give their pupils the impression that they are being provided with an instrument which is valuable, indeed necessary, for the analysis of actual problems."* [Joan Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 5, p. 222]

The social role of economics explains this process, for *"orthodox traditional economics ... was a plan for explaining to the privileged class that their position was morally right and was necessary for the welfare of society. Even the poor were better off under the existing system that they would be under any other ... the doctrine [argued] that increased wealth of the propertied class brings about an automatic increase of income to the poor, so that, if the rich were made poorer, the poor would necessarily become poorer too."* [Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 4, p. 242]

In such a situation, debunked theories would continue to be taught simply because what they say has a utility to certain sections of society:

> *"Few issues provide better examples of the negative impact of economic theory on society than the distribution of income. Economists are forever opposing 'market interventions' which might raise the wages of the poor, while defending astronomical salary levels for top executives on the basis that if the market is willing to pay them so much, they must be worth it. In fact, the inequality which is so much a characteristic of modern society reflects power rather than justice. This is one of the many instances where unsound economic theory makes economists the champions of policies which, is anything, undermine the economic foundations of modern society."* [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 126]



*we are passing ... is distinguished by a special characteristic — WAGES."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 199]). Such a perspective cannot help being ideological rather than scientific. By trying to create a theory applicable for all time (and so, apparently, value free) they just hide the fact their theory assumes and justifies the inequalities of capitalism (for example, the assumption of given needs and distribution of wealth and income secretly introduces the social relations of the current society back into the model, something which the model had supposedly abstracted from). By stressing individualism, scarcity and competition, in reality economic analysis reflects nothing more than the dominant ideological conceptions found in capitalist society. Every few economic systems or societies in the history of humanity have actually reflected these aspects of capitalism (indeed, a lot of state violence has been used to create these conditions by breaking up traditional forms of society, property rights and customs in favour of those desired by the current ruling elite).

The very general nature of the various theories of profit, interest and rent should send alarm bells ringing. Their authors construct these theories based on the deductive method and stress how they are applicable in **every** social and economic system. In other words, the theories are just that, theories derived independently of the facts of the society they are in. It seems somewhat strange, to say the least, to develop a theory of, say, interest independently of the class system within which it is charged but this is precisely what these "scientists" do. It is understandable why. By ignoring the current system and its classes and hierarchies, the economic aspects of this system can be justified in terms of appeals to universal human existence. This will raise less objections than saying, for example, that interest exists because the rich will only part with their money if they get more in return and the poor will pay for this because they have little choice due to their socio-economic situation. Far better to talk about "time preference" rather than the reality of class society (see section C.2.6).

possible to say which part of it is attributable to labour, land or machinery and, consequently, if these factors are being efficiently used. This means that the "science" of economics is bound up with the current system and its specific class structure and, therefore, as a *"ruling class paradigm, the competitive model"* has the *"substantial"* merit that *"it can be used to rule off the agenda any proposals for substantial reform or intervention detrimental to large economic interests ... as the model allows (on its assumptions) a formal demonstration that these would reduce efficiency."* [Edward S. Herman, *"The Selling of Market Economics,"* pp. 173–199, **New Ways of Knowing**, Marcus G. Raskin and Herbert J. Bernstein (eds.), p. 178]

Then there are the methodological assumptions based on individualism. By concentrating on individual choices, economics abstracts from the social system within which such choices are made and what influences them. Thus, for example, the analysis of the causes of poverty is turned towards the failings of individuals rather than the system as a whole (to be poor becomes a personal stigma). That the reality on the ground bears little resemblance to the myth matters little — when people with two jobs still fail to earn enough to feed their families, it seems ridiculous to call them lazy or selfish. It suggests a failure in the system, not in the poor themselves. An individualistic analysis is guaranteed to exclude, by definition, the impact of class, inequality, social hierarchies and economic/social power and any analysis of any inherent biases in a given economic system, its distribution of wealth and, consequently, its distribution of income between classes.

This abstracting of individuals from their social surroundings results in the generating economic "laws" which are applicable for all individuals, in all societies, for all times. This results in all concrete instances, no matter how historically different, being treated as expressions of the same universal concept. In this way the uniqueness of contemporary society, namely its basis in wage labour, is ignored (*"The period through which*



This argument is based on the notion that wages equal the marginal productivity of labour. This is supposed to mean that as the output of workers increase, their wages rise. However, as we note in section C.1.5, this law of economics has been violated for the last thirty-odd years in the US. Has this resulted in a change in the theory? Of course not. Not that the theory is actually correct. As we discuss in section C.2.5, marginal productivity theory has been exposed as nonsense (and acknowledged as flawed by leading neo-classical economists) since the early 1960s. However, its utility in defending inequality is such that its continued use does not really come as a surprise.

This is not to suggest that mainstream economics is monolithic. Far from it. It is riddled with argument and competing policy recommendations. Some theories rise to prominence, simply to disappear again (*"See, the 'science' happens to be a very flexible one: you can change it to do whatever you feel like, it's that kind of 'science.'"* [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 253]). Given our analysis that economics is a commodity and subject to demand, this comes as no surprise. Given that the capitalist class is always in competition within itself and different sections have different needs at different times, we would expect a diversity of economics beliefs within the "science" which rise and fall depending on the needs and relative strengths of different sections of capital. While, overall, the "science" will support basic things (such as profits, interest and rent are **not** the result of exploitation) but the actual policy recommendations will vary. This is not to say that certain individuals or schools will not have their own particular dogmas or that individuals rise above such influences and act as real scientists, of course, just that (in general) supply is not independent of demand or class influence.

Nor should we dismiss the role of popular dissent in shaping the "science." The class struggle has resulted in a few changes to economics, if only in terms of the apologetics used to justify non-labour income. Popular struggles and organi-

sation play their role as the success of, say, union organising to reduce the working day obviously refutes the claims made against such movements by economists. Similarly, the need for economics to justify reforms can become a pressing issue when the alternative (revolution) is a possibility. As Chomsky notes, during the 19th century (as today) popular struggle played as much of a role as the needs of the ruling class in the development of the "science":

> *"[Economics] changed for a number of reasons. For one thing, these guys had won, so they didn't need it so much as an ideological weapon anymore. For another, they recognised that they themselves needed a powerful interventionist state to defend industry form the hardships of competition in the open market — as they had always **had** in fact. And beyond that, eliminating people's 'right to live' was starting to have some negative side-effects. First of all, it was causing riots all over the place ... Then something even worse happened — the population started to organise: you got the beginning of an organised labour movement ... then a socialist movement developed. And at that point, the elites ... recognised that the game had to be called off, else they **really** would be in trouble ... it wasn't until recent years that laissez-faire ideology was revived again — and again, it was a weapon of class warfare ... And it doesn't have any more validity than it had in the early nineteenth century — in fact it has even **less.** At least in the early nineteenth century ... [the] assumptions had **some** relation to reality. Today those assumptions have **not** relation to reality."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 253–4]

Whether the *"economics of the rich"* or the *"economics of the poor"* win out in academia is driven far more by the state of the



we discuss in section C.9, the neoclassical model of the labour market is seriously flawed).

Which brings us to another key problem with the claim that economics is "value free," namely the fact that it takes the current class system of capitalism and its distribution of wealth as not only a fact but as an ideal. This is because economics is based on the need to be able to differentiate between each factor of production in order to determine if it is being used optimally. In other words, the given class structure of capitalism is required to show that an economy uses the available resources efficiently or not. It claims to be "value free" simply because it embeds the economic relationships of capitalist society into its assumptions about nature.

Yet it is impossible to define profit, rent and interest independently of the class structure of any given society. Therefore, this *"type of distribution is the peculiarity of capitalism. Under feudalism the surplus was extracted as land rent. In an artisan economy each commodity is produced by a men with his own tools; the distinction between wages and profits has no meaning there."* This means that *"the very essence of the theory is bound up with a particular institution — wage labour. The central doctrine is that 'wages tend to equal marginal product of labour.' Obviously this has no meaning for a peasant household where all share the work and the income of their holding according to the rules of family life; nor does it apply in a [co-operative] where, the workers' council has to decide what part of net proceeds to allot to investment, what part to a welfare found and what part to distribute as wage."* [Joan Robinson, **Collected Economic Papers**, p. 26 and p. 130]

This means that the "universal" principles of economics end up by making any economy which does **not** share the core social relations of capitalism inherently "inefficient." If, for example, workers own all three "factors of production" (labour, land and capital) then the "value-free" laws of economics concludes that this will be inefficient. As there is only "income", it is im-

rations, unions are considered monopolistic. Thus we see the strange situation of economists (or economics influenced ideologies like right-wing "libertarians") enthusiastically defending companies that raise their prices in the wake of, say, a natural disaster and making windfall profits while, at the same time, attacking workers who decide to raise their wages by striking for being selfish. It is, of course, unlikely that they would let similar charges against bosses pass without comment. But what can you expect from an ideology which presents unemployment as a good thing (namely, increased leisure — see section C.1.5) and being rich as, essentially, a **disutility** (the pain of abstaining from present consumption falls heaviest on those with wealth — see section C.2.7).

Ultimately, only economists would argue, with a straight face, that the billionaire owner of a transnational corporation is exploited when the workers in his sweatshops successfully form a union (usually in the face of the economic and political power wielded by their boss). Yet that is what many economists argue: the transnational corporation is not a monopoly but the union is and monopolies exploit others! Of course, they rarely state it as bluntly as that. Instead they suggest that unions get higher wages for their members be forcing other workers to take less pay (i.e. by exploiting them). So when bosses break unions they are doing this **not** to defend their profits and power but really to raise the standard of other, less fortunate, workers? Hardly. In reality, of course, the reason why unions are so disliked by economics is that bosses, in general, hate them. Under capitalism, labour is a cost and higher wages means less profits (all things being equal). Hence the need to demonise unions, for one of the less understood facts is that while unions increase wages for members, they also increase wages for non-union workers. This should not be surprising as non-union companies have to raise wages stop their workers unionising and to compete for the best workers who will be drawn to the better pay and conditions of union shops (as



class war than by abstract debating about unreal models. Thus the rise of monetarism came about due to its utility to the dominant sections of the ruling class rather than it winning any intellectual battles (it was decisively refuted by leading Keynesians like Nicholas Kaldor who saw their predicted fears become true when it was applied — see section C.8). Hopefully by analysing the myths of capitalist economics we will aid those fighting for a better world by giving them the means of counteracting those who claim the mantle of "science" to foster the *"economics of the rich"* onto society.

To conclude, neo-classical economics shows the viability of an unreal system and this is translated into assertions about the world that we live in. Rather than analyse reality, economics evades it and asserts that the economy works *"as if"* it matched the unreal assumptions of neoclassical economics. No other science would take such an approach seriously. In biology, for example, the notion that the world can be analysed *"as if"* God created it is called Creationism and rightly dismissed. In economics, such people are generally awarded professorships or even the (so-called) Nobel prize in economics (Keen critiques the *"as if"* methodology of economics in chapter 7 of his **Debunking Economics** ). Moreover, and even worse, policy decisions will be enacted based on a model which has no bearing in reality — with disastrous results (for example, the rise and fall of Monetarism).

Its net effect to justify the current class system and diverts serious attention from critical questions facing working class people (for example, inequality and market power, what goes on in production, how authority relations impact on society and in the workplace). Rather than looking to how things are produced, the conflicts generated in the production process and the generation as well as division of products/surplus, economics takes what was produced as given, as well as the capitalist workplace, the division of labour and authority relations and so on. The individualistic neoclassical analysis by defini-

tion ignores such key issues as economic power, the possibility of a structural imbalance in the way economic growth is distributed, organisation structure, and so on.

Given its social role, it comes as no surprise that economics is not a genuine science. For most economists, the *"scientific method (the inductive method of natural sciences) [is] utterly unknown to them."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 179] The argument that most economics is not a science is not limited to just anarchists or other critics of capitalism. Many dissident economics recognise this fact as well, arguing that the profession needs to get its act together if it is to be taken seriously. Whether it could retain its position as defender of capitalism if this happens is a moot point as many of the theorems developed were done so explicitly as part of this role (particularly to defend non-labour income — see section C.2). That economics can become much broader and more relevant is always a possibility, but to do so would mean to take into account an unpleasant reality marked by class, hierarchy and inequality rather than logic deductions derived from Robinson Crusoe. While the latter can produce mathematical models to reach the conclusions that the market is already doing a good job (or, at best, there are some imperfections which can be counterbalanced by the state), the former cannot.

Anarchists, unsurprisingly, take a different approach to economics. As Kropotkin put it, *"we think that to become a science, Political Economy has to be built up in a different way. It must be treated as a natural science, and use the methods used in all exact, empirical sciences."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 93] This means that we must start with the world as it is, not as economics would like it to be. It must be placed in historical context and key facts of capitalism, like wage labour, not taken for granted. It must not abstract from such key facts of life as economic and social power. In a word, economics must reject those features which turn it into a sophisticated defence of the status quo. Given its social role within capitalism (and the his-



the present and the future (Jefferson: *"Can one generation bind another and all others in succession forever? I think not. The Creator has made the earth for the living, not for the dead. Rights and powers can only belong to persons, not to things, not to mere matter unendowed with will"*). For, as Malatesta argued, people should *"not have the right ... to subject people to their rule and even less of bequeathing to the countless successions of their descendants the right to dominate and exploit future generations."* [**At the Cafe**, p. 48]

Then there is the strange co-incidence that "value free" economics generally ends up blaming all the problems of capitalism on workers. Unemployment? Recession? Low growth? Wages are too high! Proudhon summed up capitalist economic theory well when he stated that *"Political economy — that is, proprietary despotism — can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 187] And little has changed since 1846 (or 1776!) when it comes to economics "explaining" capitalism's problems (such as the business cycle or unemployment).

As such, it is hard to consider economics as "value free" when economists regularly attack unions while being silent or supportive of big business. According to neo-classical economic theory, both are meant to be equally bad for the economy but you would be hard pressed to find many economists who would urge the breaking up of corporations into a multitude of small firms as their theory demands, the number who will thunder against "monopolistic" labour is substantially higher (ironically, as we note in section C.1.4, their own theory shows that they must urge the break up of corporations or support unions for, otherwise, unorganised labour **is** exploited). Apparently arguing that high wages are always bad but high profits are always good is value free.

So while big business is generally ignored (in favour of arguments that the economy works *"as if"* it did not exist), unions are rarely given such favours. Unlike, say, transnational corpo-

the current owners holdings of wealth and the income that generates. In other words, heads I win, tails you loose.

Needless to say, this (selective) myopia is not restricted to just history. It is applied to current situations as well. Thus we find economists defending current economic systems as "free market" regimes in spite of obvious forms of state intervention. As Chomsky notes:

> *"when people talk about ... free-market 'trade forces' inevitably kicking all these people out of work and driving the whole world towards a kind of a Third World-type polarisation of wealth ... that's true if you take a narrow enough perspective on it. But if you look into the factors that **made** things the way they are, it doesn't even come **close** to being true, it's not remotely in touch with reality. But when you're studying economics in the ideological institutions, that's all irrelevant and you're not supposed to ask questions like these."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 260]

To ignore all that and simply take the current distribution of wealth and income as given and then argue that the "free market" produces the best allocation of resources is staggering. Particularly as the claim of *"efficient allocation"* does not address the obvious question: "efficient" for whose benefit? For the idealisation of freedom in and through the market ignores the fact that this freedom is very limited in scope to great numbers of people as well as the consequences to the individuals concerned by the distribution of purchasing power amongst them that the market throws up (rooted, of course in the original endowments). Which, of course, explains why, even **if** these parables of economics were true, anarchists would still oppose capitalism. We extend Thomas Jefferson's comment that the *"earth belongs always to the living generation"* to economic institutions as well as political — the past should not dominate



tory and evolution of economic thought), it is doubtful it will ever become a real science simply because it if did it would hardly be used to defend that system.

## C.1.1 Is economics really value free?

Modern economists try and portray economics as a "value-free science." Of course, it rarely dawns on them that they are usually just taking existing social structures for granted and building economic dogmas around them, so justifying them. At best, as Kropotkin pointed out:

> *"[A]ll the so-called laws and theories of political economy are in reality no more than statements of the following nature: 'Granting that there are always in a country a considerable number of people who cannot subsist a month, or even a fortnight, without earning a salary and accepting for that purpose the conditions of work imposed upon them by the State, or offered to them by those whom the State recognises as owners of land, factories, railways, etc., then the results will be so and so.'*
>
> *"So far academic political economy has been only an enumeration of what happens under these conditions — without distinctly stating the conditions themselves. And then, having described **the facts** which arise in our society under these conditions, they represent to us these **facts** as rigid, **inevitable economic laws.**"* [**Anarchism**, p. 179]

In other words, economists usually take the political and economic aspects of capitalist society (such as property rights, inequality and so on) as given and construct their theories around it. At best. At worse, economics is simply speculation

based on the necessary assumptions required to prove the desired end. By some strange coincidence these ends usually bolster the power and profits of the few and show that the free market is the best of all possible worlds. Alfred Marshall, one of the founders of neoclassical economics, once noted the usefulness of economics to the elite:

> *"From Metaphysics I went to Ethics, and found that the justification of the existing conditions of society was not easy. A friend, who had read a great deal of what are called the Moral Sciences, constantly said: 'Ah! if you understood Political Economy you would not say that'"* [quoted by Joan Robinson, **Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 4, p. 129]

Joan Robinson added that *"[n]owadays, of course, no one would put it so crudely. Nowadays, the hidden persuaders are concealed behind scientific objectivity, carefully avoiding value judgements; they are persuading all the better so."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 129] The way which economic theory systematically says what bosses and the wealthy want to hear is just one of those strange co-incidences of life, one which seems to befall economics with alarming regularity.

How does economics achieve this strange co-incidence, how does the "value free" "science" end up being wedded to producing apologetics for the current system? A key reason is the lack of concern about history, about how the current distribution of income and wealth was created. Instead, the current distribution of wealth and income is taken for granted.

This flows, in part, from the static nature of neoclassical economics. If your economic analysis starts and ends with a snapshot of time, with a given set of commodities, then how those commodities get into a specific set of hands can be considered irrelevant — particularly when you modify your theory to exclude the possibility of proving income redistribution will



ries of profit and interest (see section C.2.7) requires such a fiction to be remotely convincing. It needs to assume a community marked by basic equality of wealth and income yet divided into two groups of people, one of which was industrious and farsighted who abstained from directly consuming the products created by their **own** labour while the other was lazy and consumed their income without thought of the future. Over time, the descendants of the diligent came to own the means of life while the descendants of the lazy and the prodigal have, to quote Marx, *"nothing to sell but themselves."* In that way, modern day profits and interest can be justified by appealing to such *"insipid childishness."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 873] The real history of the rise of capitalism is, as we discuss in section F.8, grim.

Of course, it may be argued that this is just a model and an abstraction and, consequently, valid to illustrate a point. Anarchists disagree. Yes, there is often the need for abstraction in studying an economy or any other complex system, but this is not an abstraction, it is propaganda and a historical invention used not to illustrate an abstract point but rather a specific system of power and class. That these little parables and stories have all the necessary assumptions and abstractions required to reach the desired conclusions is just one of those co-incidences which seem to regularly befall economics.

The strange thing about these fictional stories is that they are given much more credence than real history within economics. Almost always, fictional "history" will always top actual history in economics. If the actual history of capitalism is mentioned, then the defenders of capitalism will simply say that we should not penalise current holders of capital for actions in the dim and distant past (that current and future generations of workers are penalised goes unmentioned). However, the fictional "history" of capitalism suffers from no such dismissal, for invented actions in the dim and distant past justify

*"mentioned, they were forgotten immediately, to be spoken of no more."* Thus reality is mentioned, but any impact this may have on the distribution of income is forgotten for otherwise you would have to conclude, with the anarchists, that the *"appropriation of the produce of human labour by the owners of capital [and land] exists only because millions of men [and women] have literally nothing to live upon, unless they sell their labour force and their intelligence at a price that will make the net profit of the capitalist and 'surplus value' possible."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 92 and p. 106]

This is important, for respecting property rights is easy to talk about but it only faintly holds some water if the existing property ownership distribution is legitimate. If it is illegitimate, if the current property titles were the result of theft, corruption, colonial conquest, state intervention, and other forms of coercion then things are obviously different. That is why economics rarely, if ever, discusses this. This does not, of course, stop economists arguing against current interventions in the market (particularly those associated with the welfare state). In effect, they are arguing that it is okay to reap the benefits of past initiations of force but it is wrong to try and rectify them. It is as if someone walks into a room of people, robs them at gun point and then asks that they should respect each others property rights from now on and only engage in voluntary exchanges with what they had left. Any attempt to establish a moral case for the "free market" in such circumstances would be unlikely to succeed. This is free market capitalist economics in a nutshell: never mind past injustices, let us all do the best we can given the current allocations of resources.

Many economists go one better. Not content in ignoring history, they create little fictional stories in order to justify their theories or the current distribution of wealth and income. Usually, they start from isolated individual or a community of approximately equal individuals (a community usually without any communal institutions). For example, the "waiting" theo-



increase overall utility (see section C.1.3). It also flows from the social role of economics as defender of capitalism. By taking the current distribution of income and wealth as given, then many awkward questions can be automatically excluded from the "science."

This can be seen from the rise of neoclassical economics in the 1870s and 1880s. The break between classical political economy and economics was marked by a change in the kind of questions being asked. In the former, the central focus was on distribution, growth, production and the relations between social classes. The exact determination of individual prices was of little concern, particularly in the short run. For the new economics, the focus became developing a rigorous theory of price determination. This meant abstracting from production and looking at the amount of goods available at any given moment of time. Thus economics avoided questions about class relations by asking questions about individual utility, so narrowing the field of analysis by asking politically harmless questions based on unrealistic models (for all its talk of rigour, the new economics did not provide an answer to how real prices were determined any more than classical economics had simply because its abstract models had no relation to reality).

It did, however, provide a naturalistic justification for capitalist social relations by arguing that profit, interest and rent are the result of individual decisions rather than the product of a specific social system. In other words, economics took the classes of capitalism, internalised them within itself, gave them universal application and, by taking for granted the existing distribution of wealth, justified the class structure and differences in market power this produces. It does not ask (or investigate) **why** some people own all the land and capital while the vast majority have to sell their labour on the market to survive. As such, it internalises the class structure of capitalism. Taking this class structure as a given, economics simply asks the

question how much does each "factor" (labour, land, capital) contribute to the production of goods.

Alfred Marshall justified this perspective as follows:

> *"In the long run the earnings of each agent (of production) are, as a rule, sufficient only to recompense the sum total of the efforts and sacrifices required to produce them ... with a partial exception in the case of land ... especially much land in old countries, if we could trace its record back to their earliest origins. But the attempt would raise controversial questions in history and ethics as well as in economics; and the aims of our present inquiry are prospective rather than retrospective."* [**Principles of Economics**, p. 832]

Which is wonderfully handy for those who benefited from the theft of the common heritage of humanity. Particularly as Marshall himself notes the dire consequences for those without access to the means of life on the market:

> *"When a workman is in fear of hunger, his need of money is very great; and, if at starting he gets the worst of the bargaining, it remains great ... That is all the more probably because, while the advantage in bargaining is likely to be pretty well distributed between the two sides of a market for commodities, it is more often on the side of the buyers than on that of the sellers in a market for labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 335–6]

Given that market exchanges will benefit the stronger of the parties involved, this means that inequalities become stronger and more secure over time. Taking the current distribution of property as a given (and, moreover, something that must not



be changed) then the market does not correct this sort of injustice. In fact, it perpetuates it and, moreover, it has no way of compensating the victims as there is no mechanism for ensuring reparations. So the impact of previous acts of aggression has an impact on how a specific society developed and the current state of the world. To dismiss *"retrospective"* analysis as it raises *"controversial questions"* and *"ethics"* is not value-free or objective science, it is pure ideology and skews any *"prospective"* enquiry into apologetics.

This can be seen when Marshall noted that labour *"is often sold under special disadvantages, arising from the closely connected group of facts that labour power is 'perishable,' that the sellers of it are commonly poor and have no reserve fund, and that they cannot easily withhold it from the market."* Moreover, the *"disadvantage, wherever it exists, is likely to be cumulative in its effects."* Yet, for some reason, he still maintains that *"wages of every class of labour tend to be equal to the net product due to the additional labourer of this class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 567, p. 569 and p. 518] Why should it, given the noted fact that workers are at a disadvantage in the market place? Hence Malatesta:

> *"Landlords, capitalists have robbed the people, with violence and dishonesty, of the land and all the means of production, and in consequence of this initial theft can each day take away from workers the product of their labour."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 168]

As such, how could it possibly be considered "scientific" or "value-free" to ignore history? It is hardly *"retrospective"* to analyse the roots of the current disadvantage working class people have in the current and *"prospective"* labour market, particularly given that Marshall himself notes their results. This is a striking example of what Kropotkin deplored in economics, namely that in the rare situations when social conditions were

value of their labour, since the surplus appropriated by owners for investment, etc. represents value added to commodities by workers — value for which they are not paid nor control.

The size of this surplus, the amount of unpaid labour, can be changed by changing the duration and intensity of work (i.e. by making workers labour longer and harder). If the duration of work is increased, the amount of surplus value is increased absolutely. If the intensity is increased, e.g. by innovation in the production process, then the amount of surplus value increases relatively (i.e. workers produce the equivalent of their wage sooner during their working day resulting in more unpaid labour for their boss). Introducing new machinery, for example, increases surplus-value by reducing the amount of work required per unit of output. In the words of economist William Lazonick:

> *"As a general rule, all market prices, including wages, are given to the particular capitalist. Moreover, in a competitive world a particular capitalist cannot retain privileged access to process or product innovations for any appreciable period of time. But the capitalist does have privileged access to, and control over, the workers that he employs. Precisely because the work is not perfectly mobile but is dependent on the capitalist to gain a living, the capitalist is not subject to the dictates of market forces in dealing with the worker in the production process. The more dependent the worker is on his or her particular employer, the more power the capitalist has to demand longer and harder work in return for a day's pay. The resultant unremunerated increase in the productivity of the worker per unit of time is the source of surplus-value.*
>
> *"The measure of surplus-value is the difference between the value-added by and the value paid to labour power — it could explain the division of the social product, under whatever forms, as resulting from the needs of the exchangers themselves."* [Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 11]



The attempt to ignore production implied in capitalist economics comes from a desire to hide the exploitative and class nature of capitalism. By concentrating upon the "subjective" evaluations of individuals, those individuals are abstracted away from real economic activity (i.e. production) so the source of profits and power in the economy can be ignored (section C.2 indicates why exploitation of labour in production is the source of profit, interest and rent and **not** exchanges in the market).

Hence the flight from classical economics to the static, timeless world of individuals exchanging pre-existing goods on the market. The evolution of capitalist economics has always been towards removing any theory which could be used to attack capitalism. Thus classical economics was rejected in favour of utility theory once socialists and anarchists used it to show that capitalism was exploitative. Then this utility theory was modified over time in order to purge it of undesirable political consequences. In so doing, they ended up not only proving that an economics based on individualism was impossible but also that it cannot be used to oppose redistribution policies after all.

## C.1.4 What is wrong with equilibrium analysis?

The dominant form of economic analysis since the 1880s has been equilibrium analysis. While equilibrium had been used by classical economics to explain what regulated market prices, it did not consider it as reflecting any real economy. This was because classical economics analysed capitalism as

a mode of production rather than as a mode of exchange, as a mode of circulation, as neo-classical economics does. It looked at the process of creating products while neo-classical economics looked at the price ratios between already existing goods (this explains why neo-classical economists have such a hard time understanding classical or Marxist economics, the schools are talking about different things and why they tend to call any market system "capitalism" regardless of whether wage labour predominates of not). The classical school is based on an analysis of markets based on production of commodities through time. The neo-classical school is based on an analysis of markets based on the exchange of the goods which exist at any moment of time.

This indicates what is wrong with equilibrium analysis, it is essentially a static tool used to analyse a dynamic system. It assumes stability where none exists. Capitalism is always unstable, always out of equilibrium, since *"growing out of capitalist competition, to heighten exploitation, ... the relations of production ... [are] in a state of perpetual transformation, which manifests itself in changing relative prices of goods on the market. Therefore the market is continuously in disequilibrium, although with different degrees of severity, thus giving rise, by its occasional approach to an equilibrium state, to the illusion of a tendency toward equilibrium."* [Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 51] Given this obvious fact of the real economy, it comes as no surprise that dissident economists consider equilibrium analysis as *"a major obstacle to the development of economics as a* ***science*** *— meaning by the term 'science' a body of theorems based on assumptions that are* ***empirically*** *derived (from observations) and which embody hypotheses that are capable of verification both in regard to the assumptions and the predictions."* [Kaldor, **The Essential Kaldor**, p. 373]

Thus the whole concept is an unreal rather than valid abstraction of reality. Sadly, the notions of "perfect competition" and (Walrasian) "general equilibrium" are part and parcel of



the activity and output of the worker (i.e. owns them during working hours as activity cannot be separated from the body and *"[t]here is an integral relationship between the body and self. The body and self are not identical, but selves are inseparable from bodies."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206]).

Considered purely in terms of output, this results in, as Proudhon noted, workers working *"for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products."* [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 29] The ability of capitalists to maintain this kind of monopolisation of another's time and output is enshrined in *"property rights"* enforced by either public or private states. In short, therefore, property *"is the right to enjoy and dispose at will of another's goods — the fruit of an other's industry and labour."* [P-J Proudhon, **What is Property**, p. 171] And because of this "right," a worker's wage will always be less than the wealth that he or she produces.

The surplus value produced by labour is divided between profits, interest and rent (or, more correctly, between the owners of the various factors of production other than labour). In practice, this surplus is used by the owners of capital for: (a) investment (b) to pay themselves dividends on their stock, if any; (c) to pay for rent and interest payments; and (d) to pay their executives and managers (who are sometimes identical with the owners themselves) much higher salaries than workers. As the surplus is being divided between different groups of capitalists, this means that there can be clashes of interest between (say) industrial capitalists and finance capitalists. For example, a rise in interest rates can squeeze industrial capitalists by directing more of the surplus from them into the hands of rentiers. Such a rise could cause business failures and so a slump (indeed, rising interest rates is a key way of regulating working class power by generating unemployment to discipline workers by fear of the sack). The surplus, like the labour used to reproduce existing capital, is embodied in the finished commodity and is realised once it is sold. This means that workers do not receive the full

*between employer and worker."* So, *"the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself... The characteristics of this condition are captured in the term* ***wage slave.*** *"* [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, pp. 150–1]

Or, to use Bakunin's words, *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"* and so *"concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his employer, this contract constitutes a sort of* ***voluntary*** *and* ***transitory*** *serfdom."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 187] This domination is the source of the surplus, for *"wage slavery is not a consequence of exploitation — exploitation is a consequence of the fact that the sale of labour power entails the worker's subordination. The employment contract creates the capitalist as master; he has the political right to determine how the labour of the worker will be used, and — consequently — can engage in exploitation."* [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

So profits exist because the worker sells themselves to the capitalist, who then owns their activity and, therefore, controls them (or, more accurately, **tries** to control them) like a machine. Benjamin Tucker's comments with regard to the claim that capital is entitled to a reward are of use here. He notes that some *"combat... the doctrine that surplus value — oftener called profits — belong to the labourer because he creates it, by arguing that the horse... is rightly entitled to the surplus value which he creates for his owner. So he will be when he has the sense to claim and the power to take it... Th[is] argument .. is based upon the assumption that certain men are born owned by other men, just as horses are. Thus its* ***reductio ad absurdum*** *turns upon itself."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 495–6] In other words, to argue that capital should be rewarded is to implicitly assume that workers are just like machinery, another "factor of production" rather than human beings and the creator of things of value. So profits exists because during the working day the capitalist controls



neoclassical economics. It attempts to show, in the words of Paul Ormerod, *"that under certain assumptions the free market system would lead to an allocation of a given set of resources which was in a very particular and restricted sense optimal from the point of view of every individual and company in the economy."* [**The Death of Economics**, p. 45] This was what Walrasian general equilibrium proved. However, the assumptions required prove to be somewhat unrealistic (to understate the point). As Ormerod points out:

> *"[i]t cannot be emphasised too strongly that ... the competitive model is far removed from being a reasonable representation of Western economies in practice... [It is] a travesty of reality. The world does not consist, for example, of an enormous number of small firms, none of which has any degree of control over the market ... The theory introduced by the marginal revolution was based upon a series of postulates about human behaviour and the workings of the economy. It was very much an experiment in pure thought, with little empirical rationalisation of the assumptions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48]

Indeed, *"the weight of evidence"* is *"against the validity of the model of competitive general equilibrium as a plausible representation of reality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62] For example, to this day, economists still start with the assumption of a multitude of firms, even worse, a "continuum" of them exist in **every** market. How many markets are there in which there is an infinite number of traders? This means that from the start the issues and problems associated with oligopoly and imperfect competition have been abstracted from. This means the theory does not allow one to answer interesting questions which turn on the asymmetry of information and bargaining power among

economic agents, whether due to size, or organisation, or social stigmas, or whatever else. In the real world, oligopoly is common place and asymmetry of information and bargaining power the norm. To abstract from these means to present an economic vision at odds with the reality people face and, therefore, can only propose solutions which harm those with weaker bargaining positions and without information.

General equilibrium is an entirely static concept, a market marked by perfect knowledge and so inhabited by people who are under no inducement or need to act. It is also timeless, a world without a future and so with no uncertainty (any attempt to include time, and so uncertainty, ensures that the model ceases to be of value). At best, economists include "time" by means of comparing one static state to another, i.e. *"the features of one non-existent equilibrium were compared with those of a later non-existent equilibrium."* [Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22] How the economy actually changed from one stable state to another is left to the imagination. Indeed, the idea of any long-run equilibrium is rendered irrelevant by the movement towards it as the equilibrium also moves. Unsurprisingly, therefore, to construct an equilibrium path through time requires all prices for all periods to be determined at the start and that everyone foresees future prices correctly for eternity — including for goods not invented yet. Thus the model cannot easily or usefully account for the reality that economic agents do not actually know such things as future prices, future availability of goods, changes in production techniques or in markets to occur in the future, etc. Instead, to achieve its results — proofs about equilibrium conditions — the model assumes that actors have perfect knowledge at least of the probabilities of all possible outcomes for the economy. The opposite is obviously the case in reality:

> *"Yet the main lessons of these increasingly abstract and unreal theoretical constructions are also in-*



*his implement, and receiving products in exchange for nothing, is either a parasite or a thief."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170]

It is this appropriation of wealth from the worker by the owner which differentiates capitalism from the simple commodity production of artisan and peasant economies. All anarchists agree with Bakunin when he stated that:

> *"**what is property, what is capital in their present form?** For the capitalist and the property owner they mean the power and the right, guaranteed by the State, to live without working ... [and so] the power and right to live by exploiting the work of someone else ... those ... [who are] forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 180]

It is the nature of capitalism for the monopolisation of the worker's product by others to exist. This is because of private property in the means of production and so in *"consequence of [which] ... [the] worker, when he is able to work, finds no acre to till, no machine to set in motion, unless he agrees to sell his labour for a sum inferior to its real value."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 55]

Therefore workers have to sell their labour on the market. However, as this "commodity" *"cannot be separated from the person of the worker like pieces of property. The worker's capacities are developed over time and they form an integral part of his self and self-identity; capacities are internally not externally related to the person. Moreover, capacities or labour power cannot be used without the worker using his will, his understanding and experience, to put them into effect. The use of labour power requires the presence of its 'owner'... To contract for the use of labour power is a waste of resources unless it can be used in the way in which the new owner requires ... The employment contract must, therefore, create a relationship of command and obedience*

> *Once engaged, it cannot be **disengaged** without difficulty; and the sole resource of its owner will be exploitation. Exploitation alone is capable of maintaining engaged capital at its nominal value."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 291]

Under capitalism, workers not only create sufficient value (i.e. produced commodities) to maintain existing capital and their own existence, they also produce a surplus. This surplus expresses itself as a surplus of goods and services, i.e. an excess of commodities compared to the number a workers' wages could buy back. The wealth of the capitalists, in other words, is due to them *"accumulating the product of the labour of others."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 3] Thus Proudhon:

> *"The working man cannot ... repurchase that which he has produced for his master. It is thus with all trades whatsoever... since, producing for a master who in one form or another makes a profit, they are obliged to pay more for their own labour than they get for it."* [**What is Property**, p. 189]

In other words, the price of all produced goods is greater than the money value represented by the workers' wages (plus raw materials and overheads such as wear and tear on machinery) when those goods were produced. The labour contained in these "surplus-products" is the source of profit, which has to be realised on the market (in practice, of course, the value represented by these surplus-products is distributed throughout all the commodities produced in the form of profit — the difference between the cost price and the market price). In summary, surplus value is unpaid labour and hence capitalism is based on exploitation. As Proudhon noted, *"**Products,** say economists, **are only bought by products**. This maxim is property's condemnation. The proprietor producing neither by his own labour nor by*



> *creasingly taken on trust ... It is generally taken for granted by the great majority of academic economists that the economy always approaches, or is near to, a state of 'equilibrium' ... all propositions which the **pure** mathematical economist has shown to be valid only on assumptions that are manifestly unreal — that is to say, directly contrary to experience and not just 'abstract.' In fact, equilibrium theory has reached the stage where the pure theorist has successfully (though perhaps inadvertently) demonstrated that the main implications of this theory cannot possibly hold in reality, but has not yet managed to pass his message down the line to the textbook writer and to the classroom."* [Kaldor, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 376–7]

In this timeless, perfect world, "free market" capitalism will prove itself an efficient method of allocating resources and all markets will clear. In part at least, General Equilibrium Theory is an abstract answer to an abstract and important question: Can an economy relying only on price signals for market information be orderly? The answer of general equilibrium is clear and definitive — one can describe such an economy with these properties. However, no actual economy has been described and, given the assumptions involved, none could ever exist. A theoretical question has been answered involving some amount of intellectual achievement, but it is a answer which has no bearing to reality. And this is often termed the "high theory" of equilibrium. Obviously most economists must treat the real world as a special case.

Little wonder, then, that Kaldor argued that his *"basic objection to the theory of general equilibrium is not that it is abstract — all theory is abstract and must necessarily be so since there can be no analysis without abstraction — but that it starts from the wrong kind of abstraction, and therefore gives a misleading*

*'paradigm' ... of the world as it is; it gives a misleading impression of the nature and the manner of operation of economic forces."* Moreover, belief that equilibrium theory is the only starting point for economic analysis has survived *"despite the increasing (**not** diminishing) arbitrariness of its based assumptions — which was forced upon its practitioners by the ever more precise cognition of the needs of logical consistency. In terms of gradually converting an 'intellectual experiment' ... into a scientific theory — in other words, a set of theorems directly related to observable phenomena — the development of theoretical economics was one of continual **de**gress, not **pro**gress ... The process ... of **relaxing** the unreal basis assumptions .. . has not yet started. Indeed, [they get] ... thicker and more impenetrable with every successive reformation of the theory."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 399 and pp. 375–6]

Thus General Equilibrium theory analyses an economic state which there is no reason to suppose will ever, or has ever, come about. It is, therefore, an abstraction which has no discernible applicability or relevance to the world as it is. To argue that it can give insights into the real world is ridiculous. While it is true that there are certain imaginary intellectual problems for which the general equilibrium model is well designed to provide precise answers (if anything really could), in practice this means the same as saying that if one insists on analysing a problem which has no real world equivalent or solution, it may be appropriate to use a model which has no real-world application. Models derived to provide answers to imaginary problems will be unsuitable for resolving practical, real-world economic problems or even providing a useful insight into how capitalism works and develops.

This can have devastating real world impact, as can be seen from the results of neoclassical advice to Eastern Europe and other countries in their transition from state capitalism (Stalinism) to private capitalism. As Joseph Stiglitz documents it was a disaster for all but the elite due to the *"market fundamentalism preached"* by economists It resulted in *"a marked deterioration"*



Almost all anarchists seek to change this, combat oppression and alienation as well as exploitation (some individualist anarchists are the exception on this issue). Needless to say, the idea that we could be subject to oppression during working hours and ***not*** be exploited is one most anarchists would dismiss as a bad joke and, as a result, follow Proudhon and demand the abolition of wage labour (most take it further and advocate the abolition of the wages system as well, i.e. support libertarian communism).

## C.2.2 How does exploitation happen?

In order to make more money, money must be transformed into capital, i.e., workplaces, machinery and other *"capital goods."* By itself, however, capital (like money) produces nothing. While a few even talk about *"making money work for you"* (as if pieces of paper can actually do any form of work!) obviously this is not the case — human beings have to do the actual work. As Kropotkin put it, *"if [the capitalist] locks [his money] up, it will not increase, because [it] does not grow like seed, and after a lapse of a twelve month he will not find £110 in his drawer if he only put £100 into it.* [**The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution**, p. 4] Capital only becomes productive in the labour process when workers use it:

> *"Values created by net product are classed as savings and capitalised in the most highly exchangeable form, the form which is freest and least susceptible of depreciation, — in a word, the form of specie, the only constituted value. Now, if capital leaves this state of freedom and **engages itself**, — that is, takes the form of machines, buildings, etc., — it will still be susceptible of exchange, but much more exposed than before to the oscillations of supply and demand.*

**Economy**, pp. 39–40] In other words, rising exploitation **can** go hand in hand with rising wages.

Finally, we must stress that we are critiquing economics mostly in its own terms. On average workers sell their labour-power at a "fair" market price and still exploitation occurs. As sellers of a commodity (labour-power) they do not receive its full worth (i.e. what they actually produce). Even if they did, almost all anarchists would still be against the system as it is based on the worker becoming a wage-slave and subject to hierarchy. In other words, they are not free during production and, consequently, they would still being robbed, although this time it is as human beings rather than a factor of production (i.e. they are oppressed rather than exploited). As Bookchin put it:

> *"To the modern mind, labour is viewed as a rarefied, abstract activity, a process extrinsic to human notions of genuine self-actualisation. One usually 'goes to work' the way a condemned person 'goes' to a place of confinement: the workplace is little more than a penal institution in which mere existence must a penalty in the form of mindless labour ... We 'measure' labour in hours, products, and efficiency, but rarely do we understand it as a concrete human activity. Aside from the earnings it generates, labour is normally alien to human fulfilment ... [as] the rewards one acquires by submitting to a work discipline. By definition, these rewards are viewed as incentives for submission, rather than for the freedom that should accompany creativity and self-fulfilment. We commonly are 'paid' for supinely working on our knees, not for heroically standing in our feet."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 308]



in most peoples *"basic standard of living, reflected in a host of social indicators"* and well as large drops in GDP. [**Globalisation and its discontents**, p. 138 and p. 152] Thus real people can be harmed by unreal theory. That the advice of neoclassical economists has made millions of people look back at Stalinism as "the good old days" should be enough to show its intellectual and moral bankruptcy.

What can you expect? Mainstream economic theory begins with axioms and assumptions and uses a deductive methodology to arrive at conclusions, its usefulness in discovering how the world works is limited. The deductive method is **pre-scientific** in nature. The axioms and assumptions can be considered fictitious (as they have negligible empirical relevance) and the conclusions of deductive models can only really have relevance to the structure of those models as the models themselves bear no relation to economic reality:

> *"Some theorists, even among those who reject general equilibrium as useless, praise its logical elegance and completeness ... But if any proposition drawn from it is applied to an economy inhabited by human beings, it immediately becomes self-contradictory. Human life does not exist outside history and no one had correct foresight of his own future behaviour, let alone of the behaviour of all the other individuals which will impinge upon his. I do not think that it is right to praise the logical elegance of a system which becomes self-contradictory when it is applied to the question that it was designed to answer."* [Joan Robinson, **Contributions to Modern Economics**, pp. 127–8]

Not that this deductive model is internally sound. For example, the assumptions required for perfect competition are mu-

tually exclusive. In order for the market reach equilibrium, economic actors need to able to affect it. So, for example, if there is an excess supply some companies must lower their prices. However, such acts contradict the basic assumption of "perfect competition," namely that the number of buyers and sellers is so huge that no one individual actor (a firm or a consumer) can determine the market price by their actions. In other words, economists assume that the impact of each firm is zero but yet when these zeroes are summed up over the whole market the total is greater than zero. This is impossible. Moreover, the *"requirements of equilibrium are carefully examined in the Walrasian argument but there is no way of demonstrating that a market which starts in an out-of-equilibrium position will tend to get into equilibrium, except by putting further very severe restrictions on the already highly abstract argument."* [Joan Robinson, **Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 5, p. 154] Nor does the stable unique equilibrium actually exist for, ironically, *"mathematicians have shown that, under fairly general conditions, general equilibrium is unstable."* [Keen, **Debunking Economics**, p. 173]

Another major problem with equilibrium theory is the fact that it does not, in fact, describe a capitalist economy. It should go without saying that models which focus purely on exchange cannot, by definition, offer a realistic analysis, never mind description, of the capitalism or the generation of income in an industrialised economy. As Joan Robinson summarises:

> *"The neo-classical theory ... pretends to derive a system of prices from the relative scarcity of commodities in relation to the demand for them. I say **pretend** because this system cannot be applied to capitalist production.*
>
> *"The Walrasian conception of equilibrium arrived at by higgling and haggling in a market illuminates*



chists in the nineteenth century did argue that capitalism was marked by falling real wages, this was more a product of the time they were living through rather than an universal law. Most anarchists today argue that whether wages rise or fall depends on the social and economic power of working people and the historic context of a given society. This means, in other words, that labour is exploited not because workers have a low standard of living (although it can) but because labour produces the whole of the value created in any process of production or creation of a service but gets only part of it back.

As such, it does not matter **if** real wages do go up or not. Due to the accumulation of capital, the social and economic power of the capitalists and their ability to extract surplus-value can go up at a higher rate than real wages. The key issue is one of freedom rather than the possibility of consuming more. Bosses are in a position, due to the hierarchical nature of the capitalist workplace, to make workers produce more than they pay them in wages. The absolute level of those wages is irrelevant to the creation and appropriation of value and surplus-value as this happens at all times within capitalism.

As an example, since the 1970s American workers have seen their wages stagnate and have placed themselves into more and more debt to maintain an expected standard of living. During this time, productivity has increased and so they have been increasingly exploited. However, between 1950s and 1970s wages did increase along with productivity. Strong unions and a willingness to strike mitigated exploitation and increased living standards but exploitation continued. As Doug Henwood notes, while *"average incomes have risen considerably"* since 1945, *"the amount of work necessary to earn those incomes has risen with equal relentlessness ... So, despite the fact that productivity overall is up more than threefold"* over this time *"the average worker would have to toil six months longer to make the average family income."* [**After the New**

organised to yield outputs, the whole emphasis is on exchanges of ready made goods).

Nor is this distribution somehow fixed. As we discuss in section C.3, how the amount of value produced by workers is divided between wages and surplus value is source of much conflict and struggle, the outcome of which depends on the balance of power between and within classes. The same can be said of surplus value. This is divided between profits, interest and rent — capitalists, financiers and landlords. This does not imply that these sections of the exploiting class see eye to eye or that there is not competition between them. Struggle goes on within classes and well as between classes and this applies at the top of the economic hierarchy as at the bottom. The different sections of the ruling elite fight over their share of surplus value. This can involve fighting over control of the state to ensure that their interests are favoured over others. For example, the Keynesian post-war period can be considered a period when industrial capitalists shaped state policy while the period after 1973 represents a shift in power towards finance capital.

We must stress, therefore, that the exploitation of workers is not defined as payment less than competitive ("free market") for their labour. Rather, exploitation occurs even if they are paid the market wage. This is because workers are paid for their ability to labour (their *"labour-power,"* to use Marx's term) rather the labour itself. This means that for a given hour's work (labour), the capitalist expects the worker to produce more than their wage (labour power). How much more is dependent on the class struggle and the objective circumstances each side faces. Indeed, a rebellious workforce willing to take direct action in defence of their interests will not allow subjection or its resulting exploitation.

Similarly, it would be wrong to confuse exploitation with low wages. Yes, exploitation is often associated with paying low wages but it is more than possible for real wages to go up while the rate of exploitation falls or rises. While some anar-



> *the account of prisoners of war swapping the contents of their Red Cross parcels.*
>
> *"It makes sense also, with some modifications, in an economy of artisans and small traders ...*
>
> *"Two essential characteristics of industrial capitalism are absent in these economic systems — the distinction between income from work and income from property and the nature of investments made in the light of uncertain expectations about a long future."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 5, p. 34]

p> Even such basic things as profits and money have a hard time fitting into general equilibrium theory. In a perfectly competitive equilibrium, super-normal profit is zero so profit fails to appear. Normal profit is assumed to be the contribution capital makes to output and is treated as a cost of production and notionally set as the zero mark. A capitalism without profit? Or growth, *"since there is no profit or any other sort of surplus in the neoclassical equilibrium, there can be no expanded reproduction of the system."* [Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22] It also treats capitalism as little more than a barter economy. The concept of general equilibrium is incompatible with the actual role of money in a capitalist economy. The assumption of *"perfect knowledge"* makes the keeping of cash reserves as a precaution against unexpected developments would not be necessary as the future is already known. In a world where there was absolute certainty about the present and future there would be no need for a medium of exchange like money at all. In the real world, money has a real effect on production an economic stability. It is, in other words, not neutral (although, conveniently, in a fictional world with neutral money *"crises **do not occur**"* and it *"assumed away the very matter under investigation,"* namely depressions. [Keynes, quoted by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 199]).

Given that general equilibrium theory does not satisfactorily encompass such things as profit, money, growth, instability or even firms, how it can be considered as even an adequate representation of any real capitalist economy is hard to understand. Yet, sadly, this perspective has dominated economics for over 100 years. There is almost no discussion of how scarce means are organised to yield outputs, the whole emphasis is on exchanges of ready made goods. This is unsurprising, as this allows economics to abstract from such key concepts as power, class and hierarchy. It shows the *"the bankruptcy of academic economic teaching. The structure of thought which it expounds was long ago proven to be hollow. It consisted of a set of propositions which bore hardly any relation to the structure and evolution of the economy that they were supposed to depict."* [Joan Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Ultimately, equilibrium analysis simply presents an unreal picture of the real world. Economics treat a dynamic system as a static one, building models rooted in the concept of equilibrium when a non-equilibrium analysis makes obvious sense. As Steven Keen notes, it is not only the real world that has suffered, so has economics:

> *"This obsession with equilibrium has imposed enormous costs on economics ... unreal assumptions are needed to maintain conditions under which there will be a unique, 'optimal' equilibrium ... If you believe you can use unreality to model reality, then eventually your grip on reality itself can become tenuous."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 177]

Ironically, given economists usual role in society as defenders of big business and the elite in general, there is one conclusion of general equilibrium theory which does have some relevance to the real world. In 1956, two economists *"demonstrated that serious problems exist for the model of competitive equilibrium if any of its assumptions are breached."* They were *"not*



stand how a surplus is created we need to look at the process of value creation. For this, it is necessary to look at production to see if there is something which produces more than it gets paid for. Anarchists, like other socialists, argue that this is labour and, consequently, that capitalism is an exploitative system. We discuss why in the next section.

Obviously, pro-capitalist economics argues against this theory of how a surplus arises and the conclusion that capitalism is exploitative. We will discuss the more common arguments below. However, one example will suffice here to see why labour is the source of a surplus, rather than (say) "waiting", risk or the productivity of capital (to list some of the more common explanations for capitalist appropriation of surplus value). This is a card game. A good poker-player uses equipment (capital), takes risks, delays gratification, engages in strategic behaviour, tries new tricks (innovates), not to mention cheats, and can make large winnings. However, no surplus product results from such behaviour; the gambler's winnings are simply redistributions from others with no new production occurring. For one to win, the rest must lose. Thus risk-taking, abstinence, entrepreneurship, and so on might be necessary for an individual to receive profits but they are far from sufficient for them not to be the result a pure redistribution from others.

In short, our discussion of exploitation under capitalism is first and foremost an economy-wide one. We are concentrating on how value (goods and services) and surplus value (profits, rent and interest) are produced rather than how they are distributed. The distribution of goods between people and the division of income into wages and surplus value between classes is a secondary concern as this can only occur under capitalism if workers produce goods and services to sell (this is the direct opposite of mainstream economics which assumes a static economy with almost no discussion of how scarce means are

vast sums. They are paid that well currently because they monopolise power in the company and can, consequently, get away with deciding that they, unsurprisingly, contribute most to the production of useful goods rather than those who do the actual work.

Nor are we talking, as such, of profits generated by buying cheap and selling dear. We are discussing the situation at the level of the economy as a whole, **not** individual transactions. The reason is obvious. If profits could just explained in terms of buying cheap in order to sell dear then, over all, such transactions would cancel each other out when we look at the market as a whole as any profit will cancel any loss. For example, if someone buys a product at, say, £20 and sells it at £25 then there would be no surplus overall as someone else will have to pay £20 for something which cost £25. In other words, what one person gains as a seller, someone else will lose as a buyer and no net surplus has been created. Capitalists, in other words, do not simply profit at each other's expense. There is a creation of surplus rather than mere redistribution of a given product. This means that we are explaining why production results in a aggregate surplus and why it gets distributed between social classes under capitalism.

This means that capitalism is based on the creation of surplus rather than mere redistribution of a given sum of products. If this were not the case then the amount of goods in the economy would not increase, growth would not exist and all that would happen is that the distribution of goods would change, depending on the transactions made. Such a world would be one without production and, consequently, not realistic. Unsurprisingly, as we noted in section C.1, this is the world of neoclassical economics. This shows the weakness of attempts to explain the source of profits in terms of the market rather than production. While the market can explain how, perhaps, a specific set of goods and surplus is distributed, it cannot explain how a surplus is generated in the first place. To under-



*dealing with the fundamental problem of whether a competitive equilibrium exists,"* rather they wanted to know what happens if the assumptions of the model were violated. Assuming that two violations existed, they worked out what would happen if only one of them were removed. The answer was a shock for economists — *"If just one of many, or even just one of two [violations] is removed, it is not possible to prejudge the outcome. The economy as a whole can theoretically be worse off it just one violation exists than it is when two such violations exist."* In other words, any single move towards the economists' ideal market may make the world worse off. [Ormerod, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 82–4]

What Kelvin Lancaster and Richard Lipsey had shown in their paper *"The General Theory of the Second Best"* [**Review of Economic Studies**, December 1956] has one obvious implication, namely that neoclassical economics itself has shown that trade unions were essential to stop workers being exploited under capitalism. This is because the neoclassical model requires there to be a multitude of small firms and no unions. In the real world, most markets are dominated by a few big firms. Getting rid of unions in such a less than competitive market would result in the wage being less than the price for which the marginal worker's output can be sold, i.e. workers are exploited by capital. In other words, economics has **itself** disproved the neoclassical case against trade unions. Not that you would know that from neoclassical economists, of course. In spite of knowing that, in their own terms, breaking union power while retaining big business would result, in the exploitation of labour, neoclassical economists lead the attack on "union power" in the 1970s and 1980s. The subsequent explosion in inequality as wealth flooded upwards provided empirical confirmation of this analysis.

Strangely, though, most neoclassical economists are still as anti-union as ever — in spite of both their own ideology and the empirical evidence. That the anti-union message is just what the bosses want to hear can just be marked up as yet another

one of those strange co-incidences which the value-free science of economics is so prone to. Suffice to say, if the economics profession ever questions general equilibrium theory it will be due to conclusions like this becoming better known in the general population.

## C.1.5 Does economics really reflect the reality of capitalism?

As we discussed in section C.1.2, mainstream economics is rooted in capitalism and capitalist social relations. It takes the current division of society into classes as both given **as well as** producing the highest form of efficiency. In other words, mainstream economics is rooted in capitalist assumptions and, unsurprisingly, its conclusions are, almost always, beneficial to capitalists, managers, landlords, lenders and the rich rather than workers, tenants, borrowers and the poor.

However, on another level mainstream capitalist economics simply does **not** reflect capitalism at all. While this may seem paradoxical, it is not. Neoclassical economics has always been marked by apologetics. Consequently, it must abstract or ignore from the more unpleasant and awkward aspects of capitalism in order to present it in the best possible light.

Take, for example, the labour market. Anarchists, like other socialists, have always stressed that under capitalism workers have the choice between selling their liberty/labour to a boss or starving to death (or extreme poverty, assuming some kind of welfare state). This is because they do not have access to the means of life (land and workplaces) unless they sell their labour to those who own them. In such circumstances, it makes little sense to talk of liberty as the only real liberty working people have is, if they are lucky, agreeing to be exploited by one boss rather than another. How much an person works, like their



of the higher levels of management is a share of profits **not** a labour income based on their contribution to production but rather due to their position in the economic hierarchy and the power that gives them.

So management is paid well because they monopolise power in the company and can get away with it. As Bakunin argued, within the capitalist workplace *"administrative work ... [is] monopolised ... if I concentrate in my hands the administrative power, it is not because the interests of production demand it, but in order to serve my own ends, the ends of exploitation. As absolute boss of my establishment I get for my labours [many] ... times more than my workers get for theirs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 186] Given this, it is irrelevant whether those in the hierarchy simply control (in the case of managers) or actually own the means of production. What counts is that those who do the actual work are excluded from the decision making process.

This is not to say that 100 percent of what managers do is exploitative. The case is complicated by the fact that there is a legitimate need for co-ordination between various aspects of complex production processes — a need that would remain under libertarian socialism and would be filled by elected and recallable (and in some cases rotating) managers (see section I.3). But under capitalism, managers become parasitic in proportion to their proximity to the top of the pyramid. In fact, the further the distance from the production process, the higher the salary; whereas the closer the distance, the more likely that a "manager" is a worker with a little more power than average. In capitalist organisations, the less you do, the more you get. In practice, executives typically call upon subordinates to perform managerial (i.e. co-ordinating) functions and restrict themselves to broader policy-making decisions. As their decision-making power comes from the hierarchical nature of the firm, they could be easily replaced if policy making was in the hands of those who are affected by it. As such, their role as managers do not require them to make

*poses a class of … people, obliged to sell their labour power to the property-owners for less than its value."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 102]

Another complication arises due to the fact that the owners of private property sometimes do work on them (i.e. be a boss) or hire others to do boss-like work on their behalf (i.e. executives and other managerial staff). It could be argued that bosses and executives are also *"workers"* and so contribute to the value of the commodities produced. However, this is not the case. Exploitation does not just happen, it needs to be organised and managed. In other words, exploitation requires labour (*"There is work and there is work,"* as Bakunin noted, *"There is productive labour and there is the labour of exploitation."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 180]). The key is that while a workplace would grind to a halt without workers, the workers could happily do without a boss by organising themselves into an association to manage their own work. As such, while bosses may work, they are not taking part in productive activity but rather exploitative activity.

Much the same can be said of executives and managers. Though they may not own the instruments of production, they are certainly buyers and controllers of labour power, and under their auspices production is still **capitalist** production. The creation of a "salary-slave" strata of managers does not alter the capitalist relations of production. In effect, the management strata are **de facto** capitalists and they are like "working capitalist" and, consequently, their "wages" come from the surplus value appropriated from workers and realised on the market. Thus the exploitative role of managers, even if they can be fired, is no different from capitalists. Moreover, *"shareholders and managers/technocrats share common motives: to make profits and to reproduce hierarchy relations that exclude most of the employees from effective decision making"* [Takis Fotopoulos, *"The Economic Foundations of an Ecological Society"*, pp. 1–40, **Society and Nature**, No.3, p. 16] In other words, the high pay



wages, will be based on the relative balance of power between the working and capitalist classes in a given situation.

Unsurprisingly, neoclassical economics does not portray the choice facing working class people in such a realistic light. Rather, it argues that the amount of hours an individual works is based on their preference for income and leisure time. Thus the standard model of the labour market is somewhat paradoxical in that there is no actual labour in it. There is only income, leisure and the preference of the individual for more of one or the other. It is leisure that is assumed to be a "normal good" and labour is just what is left over after the individual "consumes" all the leisure they want. This means that working resolves itself into the vacuous double negative of not-not-working and the notion that all unemployment is voluntary.

That this is nonsense should be obvious. How much "leisure" can someone indulge in without an income? How can an economic theory be considered remotely valid when it presents unemployment (i.e. no income) as the ultimate utility in an economy where everything is (or should be) subject to a price? Income, then, has an overwhelming impact upon the marginal utility of leisure time. Equally, this perspective cannot explain why the prospect of job loss is seen with such fear by most workers. If the neoclassical (non-)analysis of the labour market were true, workers would be happy to be made unemployed. In reality, fear of the sack is a major disciplining tool within capitalism. That free market capitalist economists have succeeded in making unemployment appear as a desirable situation suggests that its grip on the reality of capitalism is slim to say the least (here, as in many other areas, Keynes is more realistic although most of his followers have capitulated faced with neoclassical criticism that standard Keynesian theory had bad micro-economic foundations rather than admit that later was nonsense and the former *"an*

*emasculated version of Keynes"* inflicted on the world by J.R. Hicks. [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 211]).

However, this picture of the "labour" market does hide the reality of working class dependency and, consequently, the power of the capitalist class. To admit that workers do not exercise any free choice over whether they work or not and, once in work, have to accept the work hours set by their employers makes capitalism seem less wonderful than its supporters claim. Ultimately, this fiction of the labour market being driven by the workers' desire for "leisure" and that all unemployment is "voluntary" is rooted in the need to obscure the fact that unemployment is an essential feature of capitalism and, consequently, is endemic to it. This is because it is the fundamental disciplinary mechanism of the system (*"it is a whip in [the bosses'] hands, constantly held over you, so you will slave hard for him and 'behave' yourself,"* to quote Alexander Berkman). As we argued in section B.4.3, capitalism **must** have unemployment in order to ensure that workers will obey their bosses and not demand better pay and conditions (or, even worse, question why they have bosses in the first place). It is, in other words, *"inherent in the wage system"* and *"the fundamental condition of successful capitalist production."* While it is *"dangerous and degrading"* to the worker, it is *"very advantageous to the boss"* and so capitalism *"can't exist without it."* [Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 26] The experience of state managed full employment between (approximately) 1950 and 1970 confirms this analysis, as does the subsequent period (see section C.7.1).

For the choice of leisure and labour to be a reality, then workers need an independent source of income. The model, in other words, assumes that workers need to be enticed by the given wage and this is only the case when workers have the option of working for themselves, i.e. that they own their own means of production. If this were the case, then it would not be capitalism. In other words, the vision of the labour market



peared. Profit is a somewhat more complex economic category although, ultimately, is still a payment for using someone else's property.

The term "profit" is often used simply, but incorrectly, to mean an excess over costs. However, this ignores the key issue, namely how a workplace is organised. In a co-operative, for example, while there is a surplus over costs, *"there is no profit, only income to be divided among members. Without employees the labour-managed firm does not have a wage bill, and labour costs are not counted among the expenses to be extracted from profit, as they are in the capitalist firm."* This means that the ***"economic category of profit does not exist in the labour-managed firm,*** *as it does in the capitalist firm where wages are a cost to be subtracted from gross income before a residual profit is determined ... Income shared among all producers is net income generated by the firm: the total of value added by human labour applied to the means of production, less payment of all costs of production and any reserves for depreciation of plant and equipment."* [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, p. 41 and p. 45] Gunn, it should be noted, follows both Proudhon and Marx in his analysis (*"Let us suppose the workers are themselves in possession of their respective means of production and exchange their commodities with one another. These commodities would not be products of capital."* [Marx, **Capital**, vol. 3, p. 276]).

In other words, by profits we mean income that flows to the owner of a workplace or land who hires others to do the work. As such returns to capital are as unique to capitalism as unemployment is. This means that a farmer who works their own land receives a labour income when they sell the crop while one who hires labourers to work the land will receives a non-labour income, profit. Hence the difference between ***possession*** and ***private property*** (or ***capital***) and anarchist opposition to *"capitalist property, that is, property which allows some to live by the work of others and which therefore presup-*

## C.2.1 What is *"surplus value"*?

Before discussing how surplus-value exists and the flaws in capitalist defences of it, we need to be specific about what we mean by the term

**"surplus value."** To do this we must revisit the difference between possession and private property we discussed in section B.3. For anarchists, private property (or capital) is *"the power to produce without labour."* [Proudhon, **What is Property?**, p. 161] As such, surplus value is created when the owners of property let others use them and receive an income from so doing. Therefore something only becomes capital, producing surplus value, under specific social relationships.

Surplus value is *"the difference between the value produced by the workers and the wages they receive"* and is *"appropriated by the landlord and capitalist class ... absorbed by the non-producing classes as profits, interest, rent, etc."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, pp. 46–7] It basically refers to any non-labour income (some anarchists, particularly individualist anarchists, have tended to call *"surplus value"* usury). As Proudhon noted, it *"receives different names according to the thing by which it is yielded: if by land, **ground-rent**; if by houses and furniture, **rent**; if by life-investments, **revenue**; if by money, **interest**; if by exchange, **advantage**, **gain**, **profit** (three things which must not be confounded with the wages of legitimate price of labour)."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 159]

For simplicity, we will consider *"surplus value"* to have three component parts: profits, interest and rent. All are based on payment for letting someone else use your property. Rent is what we pay to be allowed to exist on part of the earth (or some other piece of property). Interest is what we pay for the use of money. Profit is what we pay to be allowed to work a farm or use piece of machinery. Rent and interest are easy to define, they are obviously the payment for using someone else's property and have existed long before capitalism ap-



in capitalist economics assumes a non-capitalist economy of artisans and peasant farmers — precisely the kind of economy capitalism destroyed (with the help of the state). An additional irony of this neoclassical analysis is that those who subscribe to it most are also those who attack the notion of a generous welfare state (or oppose the idea of welfare state in all forms). Their compliant is that with a welfare state, the labour market becomes "inefficient" as people can claim benefits and so need not seek work. Yet, logically, they should support a generous welfare state as it gives working people a genuine choice between labour and leisure. That bosses find it hard to hire people should be seen as a good thing as work is obviously being evaluated as a "disutility" rather than as a necessity. As an added irony, as we discuss in section C.9, the capitalist analysis of the labour market is **not** based on any firm empirical evidence nor does it have any real logical basis (it is just an assumption). In fact, the evidence we do have points against it and in favour of the socialist analysis of unemployment and the labour market.

One of the reasons why neoclassical economics is so blasé about unemployment is because it argues that it should never happen. That capitalism has always been marked by unemployment and that this rises and falls as part of the business cycle is a inconvenient fact which neoclassical economics avoided seriously analysing until the 1930s. This flows from Say's law, the argument that supply creates its own demand. This theory, and its more formally put Walras' Law, is the basis on which the idea that capitalism could never face a general economic crisis is rooted in. That capitalism has **always** been marked by boom and bust has never put Say's Law into question except during the 1930s and even then it was quickly put back into the centre of economic ideology.

For Say, *"every producer asks for money in exchange for his products only for the purpose of employing that money again immediately in the purchase of another product."* However, this is not the case in a capitalist economy as capitalists seek to

accumulate wealth and this involves creating a difference between the value of commodities someone desired to sell and buy on the market. While Say asserts that people simply want to consume commodities, capitalism is marked by the desire (the need) to accumulate. The ultimate aim is **not** consumption, as Say asserted (and today's economists repeat), but rather to make as much profit as possible. To ignore this is to ignore the essence of capitalism and while it may allow the economist to reason away the contradictions of that system, the reality of the business cycle cannot be ignored.

Say's law, in other words, assumes a world without **capital**:

> *"what is a given stock of capital? In this context, clearly, it is the actual equipment and stocks of commodities that happen to be in existence today, the result of recent or remote past history, together with the know-how, skill of labour, etc., that makes up the state of technology. Equipment ... is designed for a particular range of uses, to be operated by a particular labour force. There is not a great deal of play in it. The description of the stock of equipment in existence at any moment as 'scare means with alternative uses' is rather exaggerated. The uses in fact are fairly specific, though they may be changed over time. But they **can** be utilised, at any moment, by offering less or more employment to labour. This is a characteristic of the wage economy. In an artisan economy, where each producer owns his own equipment, each produces what he can and sells it for what it will fetch. Say's law, that goods are the demand for goods, was ceasing to be true at the time he formulated it."* [Joan Robinson, **Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 4, p. 133]

As Keen notes, Say's law *"evisage[s] an exchange-only economy: an economy in which goods exist at the outset, but*



are parables about what should be rather than what is. We argue that any scientific analysis of the source of *"surplus value"* cannot help conclude that it is due, primarily, to inequalities of wealth and, consequently, inequalities of power on the market. In other words, that Rousseau was right:

> *"The terms of social compact between these two estates of men may be summed up in a few words: 'You have need of me, because I am rich and you are poor. We will therefore come to an agreement. I will permit you to have the honour of serving me, on condition that you bestow on me that little you have left, in return for the pains I shall take to command you.'"* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 162]

This is the analysis of exploitation we present in more detail in section C.2.2. To summarise it, labour faces social inequality when it passes from the market to production. In the workplace, capitalists exercise social power over how labour is used and this allows them to produce more value from the productive efforts of workers than they pay for in wages. This social power is rooted in social dependence, namely the fact that workers have little choice but to sell their liberty to those who own the means of life. To ensure the creation and appropriation of surplus-value, capitalists must not only own the production process and the product of the workers' labour, they must own the labour of the workers itself. In other words, they must control the workers. Hence capitalist production must be, to use Proudhon's term, *"despotism."* How much surplus-value can be produced depends on the relative economic power between bosses and workers as this determines the duration of work and the intensity of labour, however its roots are the same — the hierarchical and class nature of capitalist society.

This rationale for profits is called the "abstinence" or "waiting" theory. Clark, like Mill, expressed a defence of non-labour income in the face of socialist and anarchist criticism, namely the idea of marginal productivity to explain and justify non-labour income. Other theories have been developed as the weaknesses of previous ones have been exposed and we will discuss some of them in subsequent sections.

The ironic thing is that, well over 200 years after it came of age with Adam Smith's **Wealth of Nations**, economics has no agreed explanation for the source of surplus value. As dissident economists Michele I. Naples and Nahid Aslanbeigui show, introductory economics texts provide *"no consistent, widely accepted theory"* on the profit rate. Looking at the top three introductions to economics, they discovered that there was a *"strange amalgam"* of theories which is *"often confusing, incomplete and inconsistent."* Given that internal consistency is usually heralded as one of the hallmarks of neoclassical theory, *"the theory must be questioned."* This *"failure ... to provide a coherent theory of the rate of profit in the short run or long run"* is damning, as the *"absence of a coherent explanation for the profit rate represents a fundamental failure for the neoclassical model."* [*"What **does** determine the profit rate? The neoclassical theories present in introductory textbooks,"* pp. 53–71, **Cambridge Journal of Economics**, vol. 20, p. 53, p. 54, p. 69 and p. 70]

As will become clear, anarchists consider defences of *"surplus value"* to be essentially ideological and without an empirical base. As we will attempt to indicate, capitalists are not justified in appropriating surplus value from workers for no matter how this appropriation is explained by capitalist economics, we find that inequality in wealth and power are the real reasons for this appropriation rather than some actual productive act on the part of capitalists, investors or landlords. Mainstream economic theories generally seek to justify the distribution of income and wealth rather than to understand it. They



*where no production takes place. The market simply enables the exchange of pre-existing goods."* However, once we had capital to the economy, things change as capitalists wish *"to supply more than they demand, and to accumulate the difference as profit which adds to their wealth."* This results in an excess demand and, consequently, the possibility of a crisis. Thus mainstream capitalist economics *"is best suited to the economic irrelevance of an exchange-only economy, or a production economy in which growth does not occur. If production and growth do occur, then they take place outside the market, when ironically the market is the main intellectual focus of neoclassical economics. Conventional economics is this a theory which suits a static economy ... when what is needed are theories to analyse dynamic economies."* [**Debunking Economics**, p. 194, p. 195 and p. 197]

Ultimately, capital assets are not produced for their own stake but in expectation of profits. This obvious fact is ignored by Say's law, but was recognised by Marx (and subsequently acknowledged by Keynes as being correct). As Keen notes, unlike Say and his followers, *"Marx's perspective thus integrates production, exchange and credit as holistic aspects of a capitalist economy, and therefore as essential elements of any theory of capitalism. Conventional economics, in contrast, can only analyse an exchange economy in which money is simply a means to make barter easier."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 195–6]

Rejecting Say's Law as being applicable to capitalism means recognising that the capitalist economy is not stable, that it can experience booms and slumps. That this reflects the reality of that economy should go without saying. It also involves recognising that it can take time for unemployed workers to find new employment, that unemployment can by involuntary and that bosses can gain advantages from the fear of unemployment by workers.

That last fact, the fear of unemployment is used by bosses to get workers to accept reductions in wages, hours and bene-

fits, is key factor facing workers in any real economy. Yet, according to the economic textbooks, workers should have been falling over themselves to maximise the utility of leisure and minimise the disutility of work. Similarly, workers should not fear being made unemployed by globalisation as the export of any jobs would simply have generated more economic activity and so the displaced workers would immediately be re-employed (albeit at a lower wage, perhaps). Again, according to the economic textbooks, these lower wages would generate even more economic activity and thus lead, in the long run, to higher wages. If only workers had only listened to the economists then they would realise that that not only did they actually gain (in the long run) by their wages, hours and benefits being cut, many of them also gained (in the short term) increased utility by not having to go to work. That is, assuming the economists know what they are talking about.

Then there is the question of income. For most capitalist economics, a given wage is supposed to be equal to the *"marginal contribution"* that an individual makes to a given company. Are we **really** expected to believe this? Common sense (and empirical evidence) suggests otherwise. Consider Mr. Rand Araskog, the CEO of ITT in 1990, who in that year was paid a salary of $7 million. Is it conceivable that an ITT accountant calculated that, all else being the same, the company's $20.4 billion in revenues that year would have been $7 million less without Mr. Araskog — hence determining his marginal contribution to be $7 million? This seems highly unlikely.

Which feeds into the question of exploding CEO pay. While this has affected most countries, the US has seen the largest increases (followed by the UK). In 1979 the CEO of a UK company earned slightly less than 10 times as much as the average worker on the shop floor. By 2002 a boss of a FTSE 100 company could expect to make 54 times as much as the typical worker. This means that while the wages for those on the shopfloor went up a little, once inflation is taken into account, the bosses



> *"When a workman leaves the mill, carrying his pay in his pocket, the civil law guarantees to him what he thus takes away; but before he leaves the mill he is the rightful owner of a part of the wealth that the day's industry has brought forth. Does the economic law which, in some way that he does not understand, determines what his pay shall be, make it to correspond with the amount of his portion of the day's product, or does it force him to leave some of his rightful share behind him? A plan of living that should force men to leave in their employer's hands anything that by right of creation is theirs, would be an institutional robbery — a legally established violation of the principle on which property is supposed to rest."* [**The Distribution of Wealth**, pp. 8–9]

Why should the owners of land, money and machinery get an income in the first place? Capitalist economics argues that everything involves a cost and, as such, people should be rewarded for the sacrifices they suffer when they contribute to production. Labour, in this schema, is considered a cost to those who labour and, consequently, they should be rewarded for it. Labour is thought of a disutility, i.e. something people do not want, rather than something with utility, i.e. something people do want. Under capitalism (like any class system), this perspective makes some sense as workers are bossed about and often subject to long and difficult labour. Most people will happily agree that labour is an obvious cost and should be rewarded.

Economists, unsurprisingly, have tended to justify surplus value by arguing that it involves as much cost and sacrifice as labour. For Mill, labour *"cannot be carried on without materials and machinery ... All these things are the fruits of previous production. If the labourers possessed of them, they would not need to divide the produce with any one; but while they have them not, an equivalent must be given to those who have."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

this should be most justly realised, they all agree that labour should control **all** that it produces (either individually or collectively) and, consequently, non-labour income is exploitation (it should be stressed that as both schemes are voluntary, there is no real contradiction between them). Anarchists tend to call non-labour income "surplus-value" or "usury" and these terms are used to group together profits, rent and interest (see section C.2.1 for details).

That this critique is a problem for capitalism can be seen from the many varied and wonderful defences created by economists to justify non-labour income. Economists, at least in the past, saw the problem clear enough. John Stuart Mill, the final great economist of the classical school, presented the typical moral justification of capitalism, along with the problems it causes. As he explains in his classic introduction to economics, the *"institution of property, when limited to its essential elements, consists in the recognition, in each person, of a right to the exclusive disposal of what he or she have produced by their own exertions ... The foundation of the whole is, the right of producers to what they themselves have produced."* He then notes the obvious contradiction — workers do **not** receive what they have produced. Thus it *"may be objected"* that capitalist society *"recognises rights of property in individuals over which they have not produced,"* for example *"the operatives in a manufactory create, by their labour and skill, the whole produce; yet, instead of it belonging to them, the law gives them only their stipulated hire [wages], and transfers the produce to someone who has merely supplied the funds, without perhaps contributing to the work itself."* [**Principles of Political Economy**, p. 25] With the rise of neoclassical economics, the problem remained and so did need to justify capitalism continued to drive economics. J. B. Clark, for example, knew what was at stake and, like Mill, expressed it:



wages arose from £200,000 per year to around £1.4m a year. In America, the increase was even worse. In 1980, the ratio of CEO to worker pay 50 to 1. Twenty years later it was 525 to 1, before falling back to 281 to 1 in 2002 following the collapse of the share price bubble. [Larry Elliott, *"Nice work if you can get it: chief executives quietly enrich themselves for mediocrity,"* **The Guardian**, 23 January, 2006]

The notion of marginal productivity is used to justify many things on the market. For example, the widening gap between high-paid and low-paid Americans (it is argued) simply reflects a labour market efficiently rewarding more productive people. Thus the compensation for corporate chief executives climbs so sharply because it reflects their marginal productivity. The strange thing about this kind of argument is that, as we indicate in section C.2.5, the problem of defining and measuring capital wrecked the entire neoclassical theory of marginal factor productivity and with it the associated marginal productivity theory of income back in the 1960s — and was admitted as the leading neo-classical economists of the time. That marginal productivity theory is still invoked to justify capitalist inequalities shows not only how economics ignores the reality of capitalism but also the intellectual bankruptcy of the "science" and whose interests it, ultimately, serves.

In spite of this awkward little fact, what of the claims made based on it? Is this pay **really** the result of any increased productivity on the part of CEOs? The evidence points the other way. This can be seen from the performance of the economies and companies in question. In Britain trend growth was a bit more than 2% in 1980 and is still a bit more than 2% a quarter of a century later. A study of corporate performance in Britain and the United States looked at the companies that make up the FTSE 100 index in Britain and the S&P 500 in the US and found that executive income is rarely justified by improved performance. [Julie Froud, Sukhdev Johal, Adam Leaver and Karel Williams, **Financialisation and Strategy: Narrative**

**and Number** ] Rising stock prices in the 1990s, for example, were the product of one of the financial market's irrational bubbles over which the CEO's had no control or role in creating.

During the same period as soaring CEO pay, workers' real wages remained flat. Are we to believe that since the 1980s, the marginal contribution of CEOs has increased massively whereas workers' marginal contributions remained stagnant? According to economists, in a free market wages should increase until they reach their marginal productivity. In the US, however, during the 1960s *"pay and productivity grew in tandem, but they separated in the 1970s. In the 1990s boom, pay growth lagged behind productivity by almost 30%."* Looking purely at direct pay, *"overall productivity rose four times as fast as the average real hourly wage — and twenty times as fast in manufacturing."* Pay did catch up a bit in the late 1990s, but after 2000 *"pay returned to its lagging position."* [Doug Henwood, **After the New Economy**, pp. 45–6] In other words, over two decades of free market reforms has produced a situation which has refuted the idea that a workers wage equals their marginal productivity.

The standard response by economists would be to state that the US economy is not a free market. Yet the 1970s, after all, saw the start of reforms based on the recommendations of free market capitalist economists. The 1980s and 1990s saw even more. Regulation was reduced, if not effectively eliminated, the welfare state rolled back and unions marginalised. So it staggers belief to state that the US was **more** free market in the 1950s and 1960s than in the 1980s and 1990s but, logically, this is what economists suggest. Moreover, this explanation sits ill at ease with the multitude of economists who justified growing inequality and skyrocketing CEO pay and company profits during this period in terms of free market economics. What is it to be? If the US is not a free market, then the incomes of companies and the wealth are **not** the result of their marginal contribution but rather are gained at the expense of the work-



*being founded on private property, in fact denies the natural basis for private property appropriation."* [**The Democratic worker-owned firm**, p. 59] This was expressed by Proudhon in the following way:

> *"Whoever labours becomes a proprietor — this is an inevitable deduction from the principles of political economy and jurisprudence. And when I say proprietor, I do not mean simply (as do our hypocritical economists) proprietor of his allowance, his salary, his wages, — I mean proprietor of the value his creates, and by which the master alone profits ...* ***The labourer retains, even after he has received his wages, a natural right in the thing he was produced."*** [**What is Property?**, pp. 123–4]

In other words, taking the moral justification for capitalism, anarchists argue that it fails to meet its own criteria (*"With me who, as a labourer, have a right to the possession of the products of Nature and my own industry — and who, as a proletaire [wage labourer], enjoy none of them."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65]). Whether this principle should be applied in a free society is a moot point within anarchism. Individualist and mutualist anarchists argue it should be and, therefore, say that individual workers should receive the product of their toil (and so argue for distribution according to deed). Communist-anarchists argue that *"social ownership and sharing according to need ... would be the best and most just economic arrangement."* This is for two reasons. Firstly, because *"in modern industry"* there is *"no such thing"* as an individual product as *"all labour and the products of labour are social."* [Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, pp. 169–70] Secondly, in terms of simple justice need is not related to the ability to work and, of course, it would be wrong to penalise those who cannot work (i.e. the sick, the young and the old). Yet, while anarchists disagree over exactly how

# C.2 Why is capitalism exploitative?

For anarchists, capitalism is marked by the exploitation of labour by capital. While this is most famously expressed by Proudhon's ***"property is theft,"*** this perspective can be found in all forms of anarchism. For Bakunin, capitalism was marked by an *"economic relationship between the exploiter and exploited"* as it meant the few have *"the power and right to live by exploiting the labour of someone else, the right to exploit the labour of those who possess neither property nor capital and who thus are forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 183] This means that when a worker *"sells his labour to an employee ... some part of the value of his produce will be unjustly taken by the employer."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism and Anarchist-Communism**, p. 52]

At the root this criticism is based, ironically enough, on the **capitalist** defence of private property as the product of labour. As noted in section B.4.2, Locke defended private property in terms of labour yet allowed that labour to be sold to others. This allowed the buyers of labour (capitalists and landlords) to appropriate the product of other people's labour (wage workers and tenants) and so, in the words of dissident economist David Ellerman, *"capitalist production, i.e. production based on the employment contract denies workers the right to the (positive and negative) fruit of their labour. Yet people's right to the fruits of their labour has always been the natural basis for private property appropriation. Thus capitalist production, far from*



ing class. If the US is a free market, then the rich are justified (in terms of economic theory) in their income but workers' wages do not equal their marginal productivity. Unsurprisingly, most economists do not raise the question, never mind answer it.

So what is the reason for this extreme wage difference? Simply put, it's due to the totalitarian nature of capitalist firms (see section B.4). Those at the bottom of the company have no say in what happens within it; so as long as the share-owners are happy, wage differentials will rise and rise (particularly when top management own large amounts of shares!). It is capitalist property relations that allow this monopolisation of wealth by the few who own (or boss) but do not produce. The workers do not get the full value of what they produce, nor do they have a say in how the surplus value produced by their labour gets used (e.g. investment decisions). Others have monopolised both the wealth produced by workers and the decision-making power within the company (see section C.2 for more discussion). This is a private form of taxation without representation, just as the company is a private form of statism. Unlike the typical economist, most people would not consider it too strange a coincidence that the people with power in a company, when working out who contributes most to a product, decide it's themselves!

Whether workers will tolerate stagnating wages depends, of course, on the general economic climate. High unemployment and job insecurity help make workers obedient and grateful for any job and this has been the case for most of the 1980s and 1990s in both America and the UK. So a key reason for the exploding pay is to be found in the successful class struggle the ruling class has been waging since the 1970s. There has *"been a real shift in focus, so that the beneficiaries of corporate success (such as it is) are no longer the workers and the general public as a whole but shareholders. And given that there is evidence that only households in the top half of the income distribution in the UK and the US hold shares, this represents a significant redistri-*

*bution of money and power.*" [Larry Elliott, **Op. Cit.**] That economics ignores the social context of rising CEO pay says a lot about the limitations of modern economics and how it can be used to justify the current system.

Then there is the trivial little thing of production. Economics used to be called "political economy" and was production orientated. This was replaced by an economics based on marginalism and subjective evaluations of a given supply of goods is fixed. For classical economics, to focus on an instant of time was meaningless as time does not stop. To exclude production meant to exclude time, which as we noted in section C.1.2 this is precisely and knowingly what marginalist economics did do. This means modern economics simply ignores production as well as time and given that profit making is a key concern for any firm in the real world, such a position shows how irrelevant neoclassical economics really is.

Indeed, the neo-classical theory falls flat on its face. Basing itself, in effect, on a snapshot of time its principles for the rational firm are, likewise, based on time standing still. It argues that profit is maximised where marginal cost equals marginal revenue yet this is only applicable when you hold time constant. However, a real firm will not maximise profit with respect to quantity but also in respect to time. The neoclassical rule about how to maximise profit *"is therefore correct if the quantity produced never changes"* and *"by ignoring time in its analysis of the firm, economic theory ignores some of the most important issues facing a firm."* Neo-classical economics exposes its essentially static nature again. It *"ignores time, and is therefore only relevant in a world in which time does no matter."* [Keen, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 80–1]

Then there is the issue of consumption. While capitalist apologists go on about *"consumer sovereignty"* and the market as a *"consumers democracy,"* the reality is somewhat different. Firstly, and most obviously, big business spends a lot of money



*for believers in the primacy of the market over all other forms of social organisation."* [Keen, **Debunking Economics**, p. 304]

Those who seek freedom for all and want to base themselves on more than faith in an economic system marked by hierarchy, inequality and oppression would be better seeking a more realistic and less apologetic economic theory.

as much, if not more, necessary information than it provides). As such, his defence of capitalism can be turned against it and the centralised, autocratic structures it is based on.

To conclude, while its open and extreme support for free market capitalism and its inequalities is, to say the least, refreshing, it is not remotely convincing or scientific. In fact, it amounts to little more than a vigorous defence of business power hidden behind a thin rhetoric of "free markets." As it preaches the infallibility of capitalism, this requires a nearly unyielding defence of corporations, economic and social power and workplace hierarchy. It must dismiss the obvious fact that allowing big business to flourish into oligopoly and monopoly (as it does, see section C.4) reduces the possibility of competition solving the problem of unethical business practices and worker exploitation, as they claim. This is unsurprising, as the Austrian school (like economics in general) identifies "freedom" with the "freedom" of private enterprise, i.e. the lack of accountability of the economically privileged and powerful. This simply becomes a defence of the economically powerful to do what they want (within the laws specified by their peers in government).

Ironically, the Austrian defence of capitalism is dependent on the belief that it will remain close to equilibrium. However, as seems likely, capitalism is endogenously unstable, then any real "pure" capitalism will be distant from equilibrium and, as a result, marked by unemployment and, of course, booms and slumps. So it is possible to have a capitalist economics based on non-equilibrium, but it is unlikely to convince anyone that does not already believe that capitalism is the best system ever unless they are unconcerned about unemployment (and so worker exploitation) and instability. As Steve Keen notes, it is *"an alternative way to ideologically support a capitalist economy … If neoclassical economics becomes untenable for any reason, the Austrians are well placed to provide an alternative religion*



trying to shape and influence demand by means of advertising. Not for them the neoclassical assumption of "given" needs, determined outside the system. So the reality of capitalism is one where the "sovereign" is manipulated by others. Secondly, there is the distribution of resources within society.

Market demand is usually discussed in terms of tastes, not in the distribution of purchasing power required to satisfy those tastes. Income distribution is taken as given, which is very handy for those with the most wealth. Needless to say, those who have a lot of money will be able to maximise their satisfactions far easier than those who have little. Also, of course, they can out-bid those with less money. If capitalism is a "consumers" democracy then it is a strange one, based on *"one dollar, one vote."* It should be obvious whose values are going to be reflected most strongly in the market. If we start with the orthodox economics (convenient) assumption of a *"given distribution of income"* then any attempt to determine the best allocation of resources is flawed to start with as money replaces utility from the start. To claim after that the market based distribution is the best one is question begging in the extreme.

In other words, under capitalism, it is not individual need or "utility" as such that is maximised, rather it is ***effective*** utility (usually called "effective demand") — namely utility that is backed up with money. This is the reality behind all the appeals to the marvels of the market. As right-wing guru von Hayek put, the *"[s]pontaneous order produced by the market does not ensure that what general opinion regards as more important needs are always met before the less important ones."* [*"Competition as a discovery process"*, **The Essence of Hayek**, p. 258] Which is just a polite way of referring to the process by which millionaires build a new mansion while thousands are homeless or live in slums or feed luxury food to their pets while humans go hungry. It is, in effect, to dismiss the needs of, for example, the 37 million Americans who lived below the poverty line in

2005 (12.7% of the population, the highest percentage in the developed world and is based on the American state's absolute definition of poverty, looking at relative levels, the figures are worse). Similarly, the 46 million Americans without health insurance may, of course, think that their need to live should be considered as *"more important"* than, say, allowing Paris Hilton to buy a new designer outfit. Or, at the most extreme, when agribusiness grow cash crops for foreign markets while the landless starve to death. As E.P. Thompson argues, Hayek's answer:

> *"promote[s] the notion that high prices were a (painful) remedy for dearth, in drawing supplies to the afflicted region of scarcity. But what draws supply are not high prices but sufficient money in their purses to pay high prices. A characteristic phenomenon in times of dearth is that it generates unemployment and empty pursues; in purchasing necessities at inflated prices people cease to be able to buy inessentials [causing unemployment] ... Hence the number of those able to pay the inflated prices declines in the afflicted regions, and food may be exported to neighbouring, less afflicted, regions where employment is holding up and consumers still have money with which to pay. In this sequence, high prices can actually withdraw supply from the most afflicted area."* [**Customs in Common**, pp. 283–4]

Therefore *"the law of supply and demand"* may not be the "most efficient" means of distribution in a society based on inequality. This is clearly reflected in the "rationing" by purse which this system is based on. While in the economics books, price is the means by which scare resources are "rationed" in reality this creates many errors. As Thompson notes,



Similarly, it goes without saying Hayek's thesis was extremely selectively applied. It is strange to see, for example, Conservative politicians clutching Hayek's **Road to Serfdom** with one hand and using it to defend cutting the welfare state while, with the other, implementing policies which give billions to the Military Industrial Complex. Apparently "planning" is only dangerous to liberty when it is in the interests of the many. Luckily, defence spending (for example) has no such problems. As Chomsky stresses, *"the 'free market' ideology is very **useful** — it's a weapon against the general population ... because it's an argument against social spending, and it's a weapon against poor people abroad ... But nobody [in the ruling class] really pays attention to this stuff when it comes to actual planning — and no one ever has."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 256] That is why anarchists stress the importance of reforms from **below** rather than from above — as long as we have a state, any reforms should be directed first and foremost to the (much more generous) welfare state for the rich rather than the general population (the experience of the 1980s onwards shows what happens when reforms are left to the capitalist class).

This is not to say that Hayek's attack upon those who refer to totalitarian serfdom as a "new freedom" was not fully justified. Nor is his critique of central planning and state "socialism" without merit. Far from it. Anarchists would agree that any valid economic system must be based on freedom and decentralisation in order to be dynamic and meet needs, they simply apply such a critique to capitalism **as well as** state socialism. The ironic thing about Hayek's argument is that he did not see how his theory of tacit knowledge, used to such good effect against state socialist ideas of central planning, were just as applicable to critiquing the highly centralised and top-down capitalist company and economy. Nor, ironically enough, that it was just as applicable to the price mechanism he defended so vigorously (as we note in section I.1.2, the price system hides

who tried to save capitalism from itself. For the Austrian school, there is only capitalism or "socialism" (i.e. state intervention) and they cannot be combined. Any attempt to do so would, as Hayek put it in his book **The Road to Serfdom**, inevitably lead to totalitarianism. Hence the Austrians are at the forefront in attacking the welfare state as not only counterproductive but inherently leading to fascism or, even worse, some form of state socialism. Needless to say, the state's role in creating capitalism in the first place is skilfully ignored in favour of endless praise for the "natural" system of capitalism. Nor do they realise that the victory of state intervention they so bemoan is, in part, necessary to keep capitalism going and, in part, a consequence of attempts to approximate their utopia (see section D.1 for a discussion).

Not that Hayek's thesis has any empirical grounding. No state has ever become fascist due to intervening in the economy (unless a right-wing coup happens, as in Chile, but that was not his argument). Rather, dictatorial states have implemented planning rather than democratic states becoming dictatorial after intervening in the economy. Moreover, looking at the Western welfare states, the key compliant by the capitalist class in the 1960s and 1970s was not a lack of general freedom but rather too much. Workers and other previously oppressed but obedient sections of society were standing up for themselves and fighting the traditional hierarchies within society. This hardly fits in with serfdom, although the industrial relations which emerged in Pinochet's Chile, Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's America does. The call was for the state to defend the *"management's right to manage"* against rebellious wage slaves by breaking their spirit and organisation while, at the same time, intervening to bolster capitalist authority in the workplace. That this required an increase in state power and centralisation would only come as a surprise to those who confuse the rhetoric of capitalism with its reality.



*"[h]owever persuasive the metaphor, there is an elision of the real Relationships assigned by price, which suggests ... ideological sleight-of-mind. Rationing by price does not allocate resources equally among those in need; it reserves the supply to those who can pay the price and excludes those who can't ... The raising of prices during dearth could 'ration' them [the poor] out of the market altogether."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 285] Which is precisely what does happen. As economist (and famine expert) Amartya Sen notes:

> *"Take a theory of entitlements based on a set of rights of 'ownership, transfer and rectification.' In this system a set of holdings of different people are judged to be just (or unjust) by looking at past history, and not by checking the consequences of that set of holdings. But what if the consequences are recognisably terrible? .. .[R]efer[ing] to some empirical findings in a work on famines ... evidence [is presented] to indicate that in many large famines in the recent past, in which millions of people have died, there was no over-all decline in food availability at all, and the famines occurred precisely because of shifts in entitlement resulting from exercises of rights that are perfectly legitimate... . [Can] famines ... occur with a system of rights of the kind morally defended in various ethical theories, including Nozick's. I believe the answer is straightforwardly yes, since for many people the only resource that they legitimately possess, viz. their labour-power, may well turn out to be unsaleable in the market, giving the person no command over food ... [i]f results such as starvations and famines were to occur, would the distribution of holdings still be morally acceptable despite their disastrous consequences? There is*

> *something deeply implausible in the affirmative answer.*" [**Resources, Values and Development**, pp. 311–2]

Recurring famines were a constant problem during the lassiez-faire period of the British Empire. While the Irish Potato famine is probably the best known, the fact is that millions died due to starvation mostly due to a firm believe in the power of the market. In British India, according to the most reliable estimates, the deaths from the 1876–1878 famine were in the range of 6–8 million and between 1896 and 1900, were between 17 to 20 million. According to a British statistician who analysed Indian food security measures in the two millennia prior to 1800, there was one major famine a century in India. Under British rule there was one every four years. Over all, the late 1870s and the late 1890s saw somewhere between 30 to 60 million people die in famines in India, China and Brazil (not including the many more who died elsewhere). While bad weather started the problem by placing the price of food above the reach of the poorest, the market and political decisions based on profound belief in it made the famine worse. Simply put, had the authorities distributed what food existed, most of the victims would have survived yet they did not as this would have, they argued, broke the laws of the market and produced a culture of dependency. [Mike Davis, **Late Victorian Holocausts** ] This pattern, incidentally, has been repeated in third world countries to this day with famine countries exporting food as the there is no "demand" for it at home.

All of which puts Hayek's glib comments about *"spontaneous order"* into a more realistic context. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"The very essence of the present economic system is that the worker can never enjoy the well-being he*



talk of "freedom", when push came to shove, they end up defending authoritarian regimes in order to save capitalism when the working classes rebel against the "natural" order. Thus we find von Mises, for example, arguing in the 1920s that it *"cannot be denied that Fascism and similar movements aiming at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has, for the moment, saved European civilisation. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live eternally in history."* [**Liberalism**, p. 51] Faced with the Nazis in the 1930s, von Mises changed his tune somewhat as, being Jewish, he faced the same state repression he was happy to see inflicted upon rebellious workers the previous decade. Unsurprisingly, he started to stress that Nazi was short for "National Socialism" and so the horrors of fascism could be blamed on "socialism" rather than the capitalists who funded the fascist parties and made extensive profits under them once the labour, anarchist and socialist movements had been crushed.

Similarly, when right-wing governments influenced by the Austrian school were elected in various countries in the 1980s, those countries saw an increase in state authoritarianism and centralisation. In the UK, for example, Thatcher's government strengthened the state and used it to break the labour movement (in order to ensure management authority over their workers). In other words, instead of regulating capital and the people, the state just regulates the people. The general public will have the freedom of doing what the market dictates and if they object to the market's "invisible hand", then the very visible fist of the state (or private defence companies) will ensure they do. We can be sure if a large anarchist movement developed the Austrian economists will, like von Mises in the 1920s, back whatever state violence was required to defend "civilisation" against it. All in the name of "freedom," of course.

Then there is the idea that anything else that "pure" capitalism would be worse. Given their ideological embrace of the free market, the Austrians attack those economists (like Keynes)

available to us). The worker who agrees to work in a sweatshop does "maximise" her "utility" by so doing — after all, this option is better than starving to death — but only an ideologue blinded by capitalist economics will think that she is free or that her decision is not made under (economic) compulsion.

The Austrian school is so in love with markets they even see them where they do not exist, namely inside capitalist firms. There, hierarchy reigns and so for all their talk of "liberty" the Austrian school at best ignores, at worse exalts, factory fascism (see section F.2.1) For them, management is there to manage and workers are there to obey. Ironically, the Austrian (like the neo-liberal) ethic of "freedom" is based on an utterly credulous faith in authority in the workplace. Thus we have the defenders of "freedom" defending the hierarchical and autocratic capitalist managerial structure, i.e. "free" workers subject to a relationship distinctly **lacking** freedom. If your personal life were as closely monitored and regulated as your work life, you would rightly consider it oppression.

In other words, this idealisation of freedom through the market completely ignores the fact that this freedom can be, to a large number of people, very limited in scope. Moreover, the freedom associated with capitalism, as far as the labour market goes, becomes little more than the freedom to pick your master. All in all, this defence of capitalism ignores the existence of economic inequality (and so power) which infringes the freedom and opportunities of others. Social inequalities can ensure that people end up *"wanting what they get"* rather than *"getting what they want"* simply because they have to adjust their expectations and behaviour to fit into the patterns determined by concentrations of economic power. This is particularly the case within the labour market, where sellers of labour power are usually at a disadvantage when compared to buyers due to the existence of unemployment as we have discussed.

As such, their claims to be defenders of "liberty" ring hollow in anarchist ears. This can be seen from the 1920s. For all their



> *[or she] has produced ... Inevitably, industry is directed ... not towards what is needed to satisfy the needs of all, but towards that which, at a given moment, brings in the greatest profit for a few. Of necessity, the abundance of some will be based on the poverty of others, and the straitened circumstances of the greater number will have to be maintained at all costs, that there may be hands to sell themselves for a part only of what which they are capable of producing; without which private accumulation of capital is impossible."* [**Anarchism**, p. 128]

In other words, the market cannot be isolated and abstracted from the network of political, social and legal relations within which it is situated. This means that all that "supply and demand" tells us is that those with money can demand more, and be supplied with more, than those without. Whether this is the "most efficient" result for society cannot be determined (unless, of course, you assume that rich people are more valuable than working class ones **because** they are rich). This has an obvious effect on production, with "effective demand" twisting economic activity and so, under capitalism, meeting needs is secondary as the *"only aim is to increase the profits of the capitalist."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]). George Barrett brings home of evil effects of such a system:

> *"To-day the scramble is to compete for the greatest profits. If there is more profit to be made in satisfying my lady's passing whim than there is in feeding hungry children, then competition brings us in feverish haste to supply the former, whilst cold charity or the poor law can supply the latter, or leave it unsupplied, just as it feels disposed. That is how it works out."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, p. 347]

Therefore, as far as consumption is concerned, anarchists are well aware of the need to create and distribute necessary goods to those who require them. This, however, cannot be achieved under capitalism and for all its talk of "utility," "demand", "consumer sovereignty" and so forth the real facts are those with most money determine what is an "efficient" allocation of resources. This is directly, in terms of their control over the means of life as well as indirectly, by means of skewing market demand. For if financial profit is the sole consideration for resource allocation, then the wealthy can outbid the poor and ensure the highest returns. The less wealthy can do without.

All in all, the world assumed by neo-classical economics is not the one we actually live in, and so applying that theory is both misleading and (usually) disastrous (at least to the "have-nots"). While this may seen surprisingly, it is not once we take into account its role as apologist and defender of capitalism. Once that is recognised, any apparent contradiction falls away.

## C.1.6 Is it possible to a non-equilibrium based capitalist economics?

Yes, it is but it would be unlikely to be free-market based as the reality of capitalism would get the better of its apologetics. This can be seen from the two current schools of economics which, rightly, reject the notion of equilibrium — the post-Keynesian school and the so-called Austrian school.

The former has few illusions in the nature of capitalism. At its best, this school combines the valid insights of classical economics, Marx and Keynes to produce a robust radical (even socialist) critique of both capitalism and capitalist economics. At its worse, it argues for state intervention to save capitalism from itself and, politically, aligns itself with social democratic (*"liberal",* in the USA) movements and parties. If economics



economics as the defender of "pure" (and, illogically, not so pure) capitalism that conclusion is not hard to deny.

Rejecting equilibrium is not as straightforward as the Austrians hope, both in terms of logic and in justifying capitalism. Equilibrium plays a role in neo-classical economics for a reason. A disequilibrium trade means that people on the winning side of the bargain will gain real income at the expense of the losers. In other words, Austrian economics is rooted (in most markets, at least) in the idea that trading benefits one side more than the other which flies in the face of the repeated dogma that trade benefits both parties. Moreover, rejecting the idea of equilibrium means rejecting any attempt to claim that workers' wages equal their just contribution to production and so to society. If equilibrium does not exist or is never actually reached then the various economic laws which "prove" that workers are not exploited under capitalism do not apply. This also applies to accepting that any real market is unlike the ideal market of perfect competition. In other words, by recognising and taking into account reality capitalist economics cannot show that capitalism is stable, non-exploitative or that it meets the needs of all.

Given that they reject the notion of equilibrium as well as the concept of empirical testing of their theories and the economy, their defence of capitalism rests on two things: "freedom" and anything else would be worse. Neither are particularly convincing.

Taking the first option, this superficially appears appealing, particularly to anarchists. However this stress on "freedom" — the freedom of individuals to make their own decisions — flounders on the rocks of capitalist reality. Who can deny that individuals, when free to choose, will pick the option they consider best for themselves? However, what this praise for individual freedom ignores is that capitalism often reduces choice to picking the lesser of two (or more) evils due to the inequalities it creates (hence our reference to the **quality** of the decisions

> *pre-supposed by the theory was not present, or else there is some error in our observation. The disagreement between the theory and the facts of experience frequently forces us to think through the problems of the theory again.* ***But so long as a rethinking of the theory uncovers no errors in our thinking, we are not entitled to doubt its truth****"* [emphasis added, quoted by Homa Katouzian, **Ideology and Method in Economics**, pp. 39–40]

In other words, if reality is in conflict with your ideas, do not adjust your views because reality must be at fault! The scientific method would be to revise the theory in light of the facts. It is not scientific to reject the facts in light of the theory! Without experience, any theory is just a flight of fantasy. For the higher a deductive edifice is built, the more likely it is that errors will creep in and these can only be corrected by checking the analysis against reality. Starting assumptions and trains of logic may contain inaccuracies so small as to be undetectable, yet will yield entirely false conclusions. Similarly, trains of logic may miss things which are only brought to light by actual experiences or be correct, but incomplete or concentrate on or stress inappropriate factors. To ignore actual experience is to loose that input when evaluating a theory.

Ignoring the obvious problems of the empirical record, as any consistent Austrian would, the question does arise why does the Austrian school make exceptions to its disequilibrium analysis for these two markets. Perhaps this is a case of political expediency, allowing the ideological supporters of free market capitalism to attack the notion of equilibrium when it clearly clashes with reality but being able to return to it when attacking, say, trade unions, welfare programmes and other schemes which aim to aid working class people against the ravages of the capitalist market? Given the self-appointed role of Austrian



does become a science, then this school of economics will play a key role in its development. Economists of this school include Joan Robinson, Nicholas Kaldor, John Kenneth Galbraith, Paul Davidson and Steven Keen. Due to its non-apologetic nature, we will not discuss it here.

The Austrian school has a radically different perspective. This school, so named because its founders were Austrian, is passionately pro-capitalist and argues against **any** form of state intervention (bar, of course, the definition and defence of capitalist property rights and the power that these create). Economists of this school include Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Ludwig von Mises, Murray Rothbard, Israel Kirzner and Frederick von Hayek (the latter is often attacked by other Austrian economists as not being sufficiently robust in his opposition to state intervention). It is very much a minority school.

As it shares many of the same founding fathers as neoclassical economics and is rooted in marginalism, the Austrian school is close to neoclassical economics in many ways. The key difference is that it rejects the notion that the economy is in equilibrium and embraces a more dynamic model of capitalism. It is rooted in the notion of entrepreneurial activity, the idea that entrepreneurs act on information and disequilibrium to make super profits and bring the system closer to equilibrium. Thus, to use their expression, their focus is on the market process rather than a non-existent end state. As such, it defends capitalism in terms of how it reacts of **dis**-equilibrium and presents a theory of the market process that brings the economy closer to equilibrium. And fails.

The claim that markets tend continually towards equilibrium, as the consequence of entrepreneurial actions, is hard to justify in terms of its own assumptions. While the adjustments of a firm may bring the specific market it operates in more towards equilibrium, their ramifications may take other markets away from it and so any action will have stabilising

and destabilising aspects to it. It strains belief to assume that entrepreneurial activity will only push an economy more towards equilibrium as any change in the supply and demand for any specific good leads to changes in the markets for other goods (including money). That these adjustments will all (mostly) tend towards equilibrium is little more than wishful thinking.

While being more realistic than mainstream neo-classical theory, this method abandons the possibility of demonstrating that the market outcome is in any sense a realisation of the individual preferences of whose interaction it is an expression. It has no way of establishing the supposedly stabilising character of entrepreneurial activity or its alleged socially beneficial character as the dynamic process could lead to a divergence rather than a convergence of behaviour. A dynamic system need not be self-correcting, particularly in the labour market, nor show any sign of self-equilibrium (i.e. it will be subject to the business cycle).

Given that the Austrian theory is, in part, based on Say's Law the critique we presented in the last section also applies here. However, there is another reason to think the Austrian self-adjusting perspective on capitalism is flawed and this is rooted in their own analysis. Ironically enough, economists of this school often maintain that while equilibrium does not exist their analysis is rooted on two key markets being in such a state: the labour market and the market for credit. The reason for these strange exceptions to their general assumption is, fundamentally, political. The former is required to deflect claims that "pure" capitalism would result in the exploitation of the working class, the latter is required to show that such a system would be stable.

Looking at the labour market, the Austrians argue that free market capitalism would experience full employment. That this condition is one of equilibrium does not seem to cause them much concern. Thus we find von Hayek, for example, arguing



where the last third of the 19th century (often considered as a heyday of private enterprise) was a period of profound instability and anxiety. Between 1867 and 1900 there were 8 complete business cycles. Over these 396 months, the economy expanded during 199 months and contracted during 197. Hardly a sign of great stability (since the end of world war II, only about a fifth of the time has spent in periods of recession or depression, by way of comparison). Overall, the economy went into a slump, panic or crisis in 1807, 1817, 1828, 1834, 1837, 1854, 1857, 1873, 1882, and 1893 (in addition, 1903 and 1907 were also crisis years). Full employment, needless to say, was not the normal situation (during the 1890s, for example, the unemployment rate exceeded 10% for 6 consecutive years, reaching a peak of 18.4% in 1894, and was under 4% for just one, 1892). So much for temporary and mild slumps, prices adjusting fast and markets clearing quickly in pre-Keynesian economies!

Luckily, though, the Austrian school's methodology allows it to ignore such irritating constrictions as facts, statistics, data, history or experimental confirmation. While neoclassical economics at least **pretends** to be scientific, the Austrian school displays its deductive (i.e. pre-scientific) methodology as a badge of pride along side its fanatical love of free market capitalism. For the Austrians, in the words of von Mises, economic theory *"is not derived from experience; it is prior to experience"* and *"no kind of experience can ever force us to discard or modify* ***a priori*** *theorems; they are logically prior to it and cannot be either proved by corroborative experience or disproved by experience to the contrary."* And if this does not do justice to a full exposition of the phantasmagoria of von Mises' **a priorism**, the reader may take some joy (or horror) from the following statement:

> *"If a contradiction appears between a theory and experience,* ***we must always assume*** *that a condition*

dition it argues is the standard situation in all other markets. In effect, they think that the money supply and interest rates are determined exogenously (i.e. outside the economy) by the state. However, this is unlikely as the evidence points the other way, i.e. to the endogenous nature of the money supply itself. This account of money (proposed strongly by, among others, the post-Keynesian school) argues that the money supply is a function of the demand for credit, which itself is a function of the level of economic activity. In other words, the banking system creates as much money as people need and any attempt to control that creation will cause economic problems and, perhaps, crisis. Money, in other words, emerges from **within** the system and so the Austrian attempt to *"blame the state"* is simply wrong. As we discuss in section C.8, attempts by the state to control the money during the Monetarist disasters of the early 1980s failed and it is unlikely that this would change in a *"pure"* capitalism marked by a totally privatised banking system.

It should also be noted that in the 1930s, the Austrian theory of the business cycle lost the theoretical battle with the Keynesian one (not to be confused with the neoclassical-Keynesian synthesis of the post-war years). This was for three reasons. Firstly, it was irrelevant (its conclusion was do nothing). Secondly, it was arrogant (it essentially argued that the slump would not have happened if people had listened to them and the pain of depression was fully deserved for not doing so). Thirdly, and most importantly, the leading Austrian theorist on the business cycle was completely refuted by Piero Sraffa and Nicholas Kaldor (Hayek's own follower who turned Keynesian) both of whom exposed the internal contradictions of his analysis.

The empirical record backs our critique of the Austrian claims on the stability of capitalism and unemployment. Throughout the nineteenth century there were a continual economic booms and slumps. This was the case in the USA, often pointed to as an approximately lassiez-faire economy,



that the *"cause of unemployment ... is a deviation of prices and wages from their equilibrium position which would establish itself with a free market and stable money. But we can never know at what system of relative prices and wages such an equilibrium would establish itself."* Therefore, *"the deviation of existing prices from that equilibrium position ... is the cause of the impossibility of selling part of the labour supply."* [**New Studies**, p. 201] Therefore, we see the usual embrace of equilibrium theory to defend capitalism against the evils it creates even by those who claim to know better.

Of course, the need to argue that there would be full employment under "pure" capitalism is required to maintain the fiction that everyone will be better off under it. It is hard to say that working class people will benefit if they are subject to high levels of unemployment and the resulting fear and insecurity that produces. As would be expected, the Austrian school shares the same perspective on unemployment as the neoclassical school, arguing that it is *"voluntary"* and the result of the price of labour being too high (who knew that depressions were so beneficial to workers, what with some having more leisure to enjoy and the others having higher than normal wages?). The reality of capitalism is very different than this abstract model.

Anarchists have long realised that the capitalist market is based upon inequalities and changes in power. Proudhon argued that *"[t]he manufacturer says to the labourer, 'You are as free to go elsewhere with your services as I am to receive them. I offer you so much.' The merchant says to the customer, 'Take it or leave it; you are master of your money, as I am of my goods. I want so much.' Who will yield? The weaker."* He, like all anarchists, saw that domination, oppression and exploitation flow from inequalities of market/economic power and that the *"power of invasion lies in superior strength."* [**What is Property?**, p. 216 and p. 215] This is particularly the case in the labour market, as we argued in section B.4.3.

As such, it is unlikely that "pure" capitalism would experience full employment for under such conditions the employers loose the upper hand. To permanently experience a condition which, as we indicate in section C.7, causes "actually existing" capitalism so many problems seems more like wishful thinking than a serious analysis. If unemployment is included in the Austrian model (as it should) then the bargaining position of labour is obviously weakened and, as a consequence, capital will take advantage and gather profits at the expense of labour. Conversely, if labour is empowered by full employment then they can use their position to erode the profits and managerial powers of their bosses. Logically, therefore, we would expect less than full unemployment and job insecurity to be the normal state of the economy with short periods of full unemployment before a slump. Given this, we would expect "pure" capitalism to be unstable, just as the approximations to it in history have always been. Austrian economics gives no reason to believe that would change in the slightest. Indeed, given their obvious hatred of trade unions and the welfare state, the bargaining power of labour would be weakened further during most of the business cycle and, contra Hayek, unemployment would remain and its level would fluctuate significantly throughout the business cycle.

Which brings us to the next atypical market in Austrian theory, namely the credit market. According to the Austrian school, "pure" capitalism would not suffer from a business cycle (or, at worse, a very mild one). This is due to the lack of equilibrium in the credit market due to state intervention (or, more correctly, state non-intervention). Austrian economist W. Duncan Reekie provides a summary:

> *"The business cycle is generated by monetary expansion and contraction ... When new money is printed it appears as if the supply of savings has increased. Interest rates fall and businessmen are misled into borrowing additional founds to finance extra investment activity ... This would be of no consequence if it had been the outcome of [genuine saving] ... — but the change was government induced. The new money reaches factor owners in the form of wages, rent and interest ... the factor owners will then spend the higher money incomes in their existing consumption:investment proportions ... Capital goods industries will find their expansion has been in error and malinvestments have been incurred."* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, pp. 68–9]

This analysis is based on their notion that the interest rate reflects the "time preference" of individuals between present and future goods (see section C.2.6 for more details). The argument is that banks or governments manipulate the money supply or interest rates, making the actual interest rate different from the "real" interest rate which equates savings and loans. Of course, that analysis is dependent on the interest rate equating savings and loans which is, of course, an equilibrium position. If we assume that the market for credit shows the same disequilibrium tendencies as other markets, then the possibility for malinvestment is extremely likely as banks and other businesses extend credit based on inaccurate assumptions about present conditions and uncertain future developments in order to secure greater profits. Unsurprisingly, the Austrians (like most economists) expect the working class to bear the price for any recession in terms of real wage cuts in spite of their theory indicating that its roots lie in capitalists and bankers seeking more profits and, consequently, the former demanding and the latter supplying more credit than the "natural" interest rate would supply.

Ironically, therefore, the Austrian business cycle is rooted in the concept of **dis**-equilibrium in the credit market, the con-

entrepreneurs discover, for example, a use of resources, they bring these resources into a new (economic) existence. Accordingly, they have created something **ex nihilo** (out of nothing) and therefore are entitled to the associated profit on generally accepted moral principle of *"finders keepers."*

Anarchists, needless to say, have some issues with such an analysis. The most obvious objection is that while *"finders keepers"* may be an acceptable ethical position on the playground, it is hardly a firm basis to justify an economic system marked by inequalities of liberty and wealth. Moreover, discovering something does **not** entitle you to an income from it. Take, for example, someone who discovers a flower in a wood. That, in itself, will generate no income of any kind. Unless the flower is picked and taken to a market, the discoverer cannot "profit" from discovering it. If the flower is left untouched then it is available for others to appropriate unless some means are used to stop them (such as guarding the flower). This means, of course, limiting the discovery potential of others, like the state enforcing copyright stops the independent discovery of the same idea, process or product.

As such, "discovery" is not sufficient to justify non-labour income as an idea remains an idea unless someone applies it. To generate an income (profit) from a discovery you need to somehow take it to the market and, under capitalism, this means getting funds to invest in machinery and workplaces. However, these in themselves do nothing and, consequently, workers need to be employed to produce the goods in question. If the costs of producing these goods is less than the market price, then a profit is made. Does this profit represent the initial "discovery"? Hardly for without funds the idea would have remained just that. Does the profit represent the contribution of "capital"? Hardly, for without the labour of the workers the workplace would have remained still and the product would have remained an idea.



> *the worker. As owner of the means of production, the industrial capitalist has a legal right to keep the surplus-value for himself."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 54]

Such surplus indicates that labour, like any other commodity, has a use value and an exchange value. Labour's exchange value is a worker's wages, its use value their ability to work, to do what the capitalist who buys it wants. Thus the existence of "surplus products" indicates that there is a difference between the exchange value of labour and its use value, that labour can **potentially** create **more** value than it receives back in wages. We stress potentially, because the extraction of use value from labour is not a simple operation like the extraction of so many joules of energy from a ton of coal. Labour power cannot be used without subjecting the labourer to the will of the capitalist — unlike other commodities, labour power remains inseparably embodied in human beings. Both the extraction of use value and the determination of exchange value for labour depends upon — and are profoundly modified by — the actions of workers. Neither the effort provided during an hours work, nor the time spent in work, nor the wage received in exchange for it, can be determined without taking into account the worker's resistance to being turned into a commodity, into an order taker. In other words, the amount of "surplus products" extracted from a worker is dependent upon the resistance to dehumanisation within the workplace, to the attempts by workers to resist the destruction of liberty during work hours.

Thus unpaid labour, the consequence of the authority relations explicit in private property, is the source of profits. Part of this surplus is used to enrich capitalists and another to increase capital, which in turn is used to increase profits, in an endless cycle (a cycle, however, which is not a steady increase but is subject to periodic disruption by recessions or depres-

sions — "The business cycle." The basic causes for such crises will be discussed later, in sections C.7 and C.8).

It should be noted that few economists deny that the "value added" by workers in production must exceed the wages paid. It has to, if a profit is to be made. As Adam Smith put it:

> *"As soon as stock has accumulated in the hands of particular persons, some of them will naturally employ it in setting to work industrious people, whom they will supply with materials and subsistence, in order to make a profit by the sale of their work, or by what their labour adds to the value of the materials … The value which the workmen add to the materials, therefore, resolves itself in this case into two parts, of which one pays their wages, the other the profits of their employer upon the whole stock of materials and wages which he advanced. He could have no interest to employ them, unless he expected from the sale of their work something more than what was sufficient to replace his stock to him."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 42]

That surplus value consists of unpaid labour is a simple fact. The difference is that non-socialist economists refuse to explain this in terms of exploitation. Like Smith, David Ricardo argued in a similar manner and justified surplus value appropriation in spite of this analysis. Faced with the obvious interpretation of non-labour income as exploitation which could easily be derived from classical economics, subsequent economists have sought to obscure this fact and have produced a series of rationales to justify the appropriation of workers labour by capitalists. In other words, to explain and justify the fact that capitalism is not based on its own principle that labour creates and justifies property. These rationales have developed over time, usually in response to socialist and anarchist criticism of



fact of "waiting" which causes profits but rather the monopoly of the means of life by the capitalist class which is the basis of *"economic dependence."* Any economic theory which fails to acknowledge and analyse this social inequality is doomed to failure from the start.

To conclude, the arguments that "waiting" or "time preference" explain or justify surplus value are deeply flawed simply because they ignore the reality of class society. By focusing on individual subjective evaluations, they ignore the social context in which these decisions are made and, as a result, fail to take into account the class character of interest and profit. In effect, they argue that the wealthy deserve a reward for being wealthy. Whether it is to justify profits or interest, the arguments used simply show that we have an economic system that works only by bribing the rich!

## C.2.8 Are profits the result of entrepreneurial activity and innovation?

One of the more common arguments in favour of profits is the notion that they are the result of innovation or entrepreneurial activity, that the creative spirit of the capitalist innovates profits into existence. This perspective is usually associated with the so-called "Austrian" school of capitalist economics but has become more common in the mainstream of economics, particularly since the 1970s.

There are two related themes in this defence of profits — innovation and entrepreneurial activity. While related, they differ in one key way. The former (associated with Joseph Schumpeter) is rooted in production while the former seeks to be of more general application. Both are based on the idea of "discovery", the subjective process by which people use their knowledge to identify gaps in the market, new products or services or new means of producing existing goods. When

*of sacrificing present goods and waiting for future goods."* [**Man, Economy, and State**, pp. 294–95]

This meant that without risk, *"[e]ven if financial returns and consumer demand are certain,* ***the capitalists are still providing present goods to the owners of labour and land*** *and thus relieving them of the burden of waiting until the future goods are produced and finally transformed into consumers' goods."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 298] Capitalists pay out, say, £100,000 this year in wages and reap £200,000 next year not because of exploitation but because both parties prefer this amount of money this year rather than next year. Capitalists, in other words, pay out wages in advance and then wait for a sale. They will only do so if compensated by profit.

Rothbard's argument simply assumes a **class** system in which there is a minority of rich and a majority of propertyless workers. The reason why workers cannot "wait" is because if they did they would starve to death. Unsurprisingly, then, they prefer their wages now rather than next year. Similarly, the reason why they do not save and form their own co-operatives is that they simply cannot "wait" until their workplace is ready and their products are sold before eating and paying rent. In other words, their decisions are rooted in their class position while the capitalists (the rich) have shouldered the "burden" of abstinence so that they can be rewarded with even more money in the future. Clearly, the time preference position and the "waiting" or "abstinence" perspective are basically the same (Rothbard even echoes Senior's lament about the improvident working class, arguing that *"the major problem with the lower-class poor is irresponsible present-mindedness."* [**For a New Liberty**, p. 154]). As such, it is subject to the same critique (as can be found in, say, the works of a certain Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk).

In other words, profit has a **social** basis, rooted in the different economic situation of classes within capitalism. It is not the



capitalism and its economics (starting in response to the so-called Ricardian Socialists who predated Proudhon and Marx and who first made such an analysis commonplace). These have been based on many factors, such as the abstinence or waiting by the capitalist, the productivity of capital, "time-preference," entrepreneurialism and so forth. We discuss most rationales and indicate their weaknesses in subsequent sections.

## C.2.3 Is owning capital sufficient reason to justify profits?

No, it does not. To understand why, we must first explain the logic behind this claim. It is rooted in what is termed "marginal productivity" theory. In the words of one of its developers:

> *"If each productive function is paid for according to the amount of its product, then each man get what he himself produces. If he works, he gets what he creates by working; if he provides capital, he gets what his capital produces; and if, further, he renders service by co-ordinating labour and capital, he gets the product that can be separately traced to that function. Only in one of these ways can a man produce anything. If he receives all that he brings into existence through any one of these three functions, he receives all that he creates at all."* [John Bates Clark, **The Distribution of Wealth**, p.7]

Needless to say, this analysis was based on the need to justify the existing system, for it was *"the purpose of this work to show that the distribution of income to society is controlled by a natural law, and that this law, if it worked without friction, would give to every agent of production the amount of wealth which that agent creates."* In other words, *"what a social class*

*gets is, under natural law, what it contributes to the general output of industry."* [Clark, **Op. Cit.**, p. v and p. 313] And only mad people can reject a *"natural law"* like gravity — or capitalism!

Most schools of capitalist economics, when they bother to try and justify non-labour income, hold to this theory of productivity. Unsurprisingly, as it proves what right-wing economist Milton Friedman called the *"capitalist ethic"*: *"To each according to what he and the instruments he owns produces."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, pp. 161–162] As such, this is one of the key defences of capitalism, based as it is on the productive contribution of each factor (labour, land and capital). Anarchists as unconvinced.

Unsurprisingly, this theory took some time to develop given the theoretical difficulties involved. After all, you need all three factors to produce a commodity, say a bushel of wheat. How can we determine that percentage of the price is due to the land, what percentage to labour and what percentage to capital? You cannot simply say that the "contribution" of each factor just happens to be identical to its cost (i.e. the contribution of land is what the market rent is) as this is circular reasoning. So how is it possible to specify contribution of each factor of production independently of the market mechanism in such a way as to show, firstly, that the contributions add up to 100 percent and, secondly, that the free market will in fact return to each factor its respective contribution?

This is where marginal productivity theory comes in. In neo-classical theory, the contribution of a specific factor is defined as the marginal product of that factor when the other factors are left constant. Take, as an example, a hundred bushels of wheat produced by X acres of land being worked by Y workers using £Z worth of capital. The contribution of land can then be defined as the increase in wheat that an extra acre of land would produce (X+1) if the same number of workers employed the same capital worked it. Similarly, the contribution of a worker would be the increase that would



derestimates" the value of future goods but because she lacks the means of obtaining any sort of goods at all except by the selling of her labour power. There is no real choice between producing for herself or working for a boss — she has no real opportunity of doing the former at all and so **has** to do the latter. This means that workers sells their labour (future goods) "voluntarily" for an amount less than its value (present goods) because their class position ensures that they cannot "wait." So, if profit is the price of time, then it is a monopoly price produced by the class monopoly of wealth ownership under capitalism. Needless to say, as capital is accumulated from surplus value, the dependence of the working class on the capitalists will tend to grow over time as the "waiting" required to go into business will tend to increase also.

An additional irony of Böhm-Bawerk's argument is that is very similar to the "abstinence" theory he so rightly mocked and which he admitted the socialists were right to reject. This can be seen from one of his followers, right-"libertarian" Murray Rothbard:

> *"What has been the contribution of these product-owners, or 'capitalists', to the production process? It is this: the saving and restriction of consumption, instead of being done by the owners of land and labour, has been done by the **capitalists.** The capitalists originally saved, say, 95 ounces of gold which they could have then spent on consumers' goods. They refrained from doing so, however, and, instead, **advanced** the money to the original owners of the factors. They **paid** the latter for their services while they were working, thus advancing them money before the product was actually produced and sold to the consumers. The capitalists, therefore, made an essential contribution to production. They relieved the owners of the original factors from the necessity*

*by working on their own account, and are accordingly, as a body, inclined and ready to sell the future product of their labour for a considerably less amount of present goods."* So, being poor, meant that they lacked the resources to "wait" for "future" goods and so became dependent (as a class) on those who do. This was, in his opinion the *"sole ground of that much-talked-of and much-deplored dependence of labourer on capitalist."* It is *"only because the labourers cannot wait till the roundabout process ... delivers up its products ready for consumption, that they become economically dependent on the capitalists who already hold in their possession what we have called 'intermediate products.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 330 and p. 83]

Böhm-Bawerk, ironically, simply repeats (although in different words) **and agrees** with the socialist critique of capitalism which, as we discussed in section C.2.2, is also rooted in the class dependence of workers to capitalists (Bakunin, for example, argued that the capitalists were *"profiting by the economic dependence of the worker"* in order to exploit them by *"turn[ing] the worker into a subordinate."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 188]). The difference is that Böhm-Bawerk thinks that the capitalists deserve their income from wealth while anarchists, like other socialists, argue they do not as they simply are being rewarded for being wealthy. Böhm-Bawerk simply cannot bring himself to acknowledge that an individual's psychology, their subjective evaluations, are conditioned by their social circumstances and so cannot comprehend the **class** character of capitalism and profit. After all, a landless worker will, of course, estimate the "sacrifice" or "disutility" of selling their labour to a master as much less than the peasant farmer or artisan who possesses their own land or tools. The same can be said of workers organised into a union.

As such, Böhm-Bawerk ignores the obvious, that the source of non-labour income is not in individual subjective evaluations but rather the **social** system within which people live. The worker does not sell her labour power because she "un-



result if an addition worker was hired (Y + 1) to work the same land (X) with the same capital (£Z). The contribution of capital, obviously, would be the increase in wheat produced by the same number of workers (X) working the same amount of land (Y) using one more unit of capital (£Z+1). Then mathematics kicks in. If enough assumptions are made in terms of the substitutability of factors, diminishing returns, and so forth, then a mathematical theorem (Euler's Theorem) can be used to show that the sum of these marginal contributions would be a hundred bushels. Applying yet more assumptions to ensure "perfect competition" it can be mathematically proven that the rent per acre set by this perfect market will be precisely the contribution of the land, that the market wage will be the contribution of the worker, and the market interest rate will be the contribution of capital. In addition, it can be shown that any monopoly power will enable a factor owner to receive more than it contributes, so exploiting the others.

While this is impressive, the problems are obvious. As we discuss in section C.2.5, this model does not (indeed, cannot) describe any actual real economy. However, there is a more fundamental issue than mere practicality or realism, namely that it confuses a **moral** principle (that factors should receive in accordance with their productive contributions) with an ownership issue. This is because even if we want to say that land and capital "contribute" to the final product, we cannot say the same for the landowner or the capitalist. Using our example above, it should be noted that neither the capitalist nor the landowner actually engages in anything that might be called a productive activity. Their roles are purely passive, they simply allow what they own to be used by the people who do the actual work, the labourers.

Marginal productivity theory shows that with declining marginal productivity, the contribution of labour is less than the total product. The difference is claimed to be precisely the contribution of capital and land. But what is this "contribution"

of capital and land? Without any labourers there would be no output. In addition, in physical terms, the marginal product of, say, capital is simply the amount by which production would decline is one piece of capital were taken out of production. It does not reflect any productive activity whatsoever on the part of the owner of said capital. **It does not, therefore, measure his or her productive contribution.** In other words, capitalist economics tries to confuse the owners of capital with the machinery they own. Unlike labour, whose "ownership" cannot be separated from the productive activities being done, capital and land can be rewarded without their owners actually doing anything productive at all.

For all its amazing mathematics, the neo-classical solution fails simply because it is not only irrelevant to reality, it is not relevant ethically.

To see why, let us consider the case of land and labour (capital is more complex and will be discussed in the next two sections). Marginal productivity theory can show, given enough assumptions, that five acres of land can produce 100 bushels of wheat with the labour of ten men and that the contribution of land and labour are, respectively, 40 and 60 bushels each. In other words, that each worker receives a wage representing 6 bushels of wheat while the landlord receives an income of 40 bushels. As socialist David Schweickart notes, *"we have derived both the contribution of labour and the contribution of land from purely technical considerations. We have made no assumptions about ownership, competition, or any other social or political relationship. No covert assumptions about capitalism have been smuggled into the analysis."* [**After Capitalism**, p. 29]

Surely this means that economics has produced a defence of non-labour income? Not so, as it ignores the key issue of what represents a valid contribution. The conclusion that the landlord (or capitalist) is entitled to their income *"in no way follows from the technical premises of the argument. Suppose our ten workers had cultivated the five acres* ***as a worker collective.***



their labour creates in terms of **future** goods, not **current** goods. This difference between the high value of current goods and low value of future goods is the source of surplus value:

> *"This, and nothing else, is the foundation of the so-called 'cheap' buying of production instruments, and especially of labour, which the Socialists rightly explain as the source of profit on capital, but wrongly interpret … as the result of a robbery or exploitation of the working classes by the propertied classes."* [**The Positive Theory of Capital**, p. 301]

The capitalists are justified in keeping this surplus value because they provided the time required for the production process to occur. Thus surplus value is the product of an exchange, the exchange of present goods for future ones. The capitalist bought labour at its full present value (i.e. the value of its future product) and so there is no exploitation as the future goods are slowly maturing during the process of production and can then be sold at its full value as a present commodity. Profit, like interest, is seen as resulting from varying estimates of the present and future needs.

As should be obvious, our criticisms of the "waiting" theory of interest apply to this justification of profits. Money in itself does not produce profit any more than interest. It can only do that when invested in **actual** means of production which are put to work by actual people. As such, "time preference" only makes sense in an economy where there is a class of propertyless people who are unable to "wait" for future goods as they would have died of starvation long before they arrived.

So it is the **class** position of workers which explains their time preferences, as Böhm-Bawerk **himself** acknowledged. Thus capitalism was marked by an *"enormous number of wage-earners who cannot employ their labour remuneratively*

fearing unemployment (sorry, maximising "leisure") or not having to worry about saving (as your income just covers your out-goings) it is clear which are the greatest sacrifices and which are rewarded accordingly under capitalism.

Much the same argument can be applied to "time-preference" theories of profit. These argue that profits are the result of individuals preferring present goods to future ones. Capitalists pay workers wages, allowing them to consumer now rather than later. This is the providing of time and this is rewarded by profits. This principle was first stated clearly by Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk and has been taken as the basis of the "Austrian" school of capitalist economics (see section C.1.6). After rejecting past theories of interest (including, as noted above, "abstinence" theories, which he concluded the socialists were right to mock), Böhm-Bawerk argued that profits could only by explained by means of time preference:

> *"**The loan is a real exchange of present goods against future goods** ... present goods invariably possess a greater value than future goods of the same number and kind, and therefore a definite sum of present goods can, as a rule, only be purchased by a larger sum of future goods. Present goods possess an agio in future goods. **This agio is interest.** It is not a separate equivalent for a separate and durable use of the loaned goods, for that is inconceivable; it is a part equivalent of the loaned sum, kept separate for practical reasons. The replacement of the capital + the interest constitutes the full equivalent."* [**Capital and Interest**, p. 259]

For him, time preference alone is the reason for profit/interest due to the relative low value of future goods, compared to present goods. Capital goods, although already present in their physical state, are really **future** goods in their *"economic nature"* as is labour. This means that workers are paid the amount



*In this, they would receive the entire product, all one hundred bushels, instead of sixty. Is this unfair? To whom should the other forty bushels go? To the land, for its 'contribution'? Should the collective perhaps burn forty bushels as an offering to the Land-God? (Is the Land-Lord the representative on Earth of this Land-God?)."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] It should be noted that Schweickart is echoing the words of Proudhon:

> *"How much does the proprietor increase the utility of his tenant's products? Has he ploughed, sowed, reaped, mowed, winnowed, weeded? ... I admit that the land is an implement; but who made it? Did the proprietor? Did he — by the efficacious virtue of the right of property, by this **moral quality** infused into the soil — endow it with vigour and fertility? Exactly there lies the monopoly of the proprietor, though he did not make the implement, he asks pay for its use. When the Creator shall present himself and claim farm-rent, we will consider the matter with him; or even when the proprietor — his pretended representative — shall exhibit his power of attorney."* [**What is Property?**, pp. 166–7]

In other words, granting permission cannot be considered as a "contribution" or a "productive" act:

> *"We can see that a moral sleight-of-hand has been performed. A technical demonstration has passed itself off as a moral argument by its choice of terminology, namely, by calling a marginal product a 'contribution.' The 'contribution = ethical entitlement' of the landowner has been identified with the 'contribution = marginal product' of the land ... What is the nature of the landowner's 'contribution' here? We can say that the landlord*

> ***contributed the land*** *to the workers, but notice the qualitative difference between his 'contribution' and the contribution of his workforce. He 'contributes' his land — but the land remains intact and remains his at the end of the harvest, whereas the labour contributed by each labourer is gone. If the labourers do not expend* ***more*** *labour next harvest, they will get nothing more, whereas the landowner can continue to 'contribute' year after year (lifting not a finger), and be rewarded year after year for doing so."* [Schweickart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

As the examples of the capitalist and co-operative farms shows, the "contribution" of land and capital can be rewarded without their owners doing anything at all. So what does it mean, "capital's share"? After all, no one has ever given money to a machine or land. That money goes to the owner, not the technology or resource used. When "land" gets its "reward" it involves money going to the landowner **not** fertiliser being spread on the land. Equally, if the land and the capital were owned by the labourers then "capital" and "land" would receive nothing despite both being used in the productive process and, consequently, having "aided" production. Which shows the fallacy of the idea that profits, interest and rent represent a form of "contribution" to the productive process by land and capital which needs rewarded. They only get a "reward" when they hire labour to work them, i.e. they give permission for others to use the property in question in return for telling them what to do and keeping the product of their labour.

As Proudhon put it, *"[w]ho is entitled to the rent of the land? The producer of the land, without doubt. Who made the land? God. Then, proprietor, retire!"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 104] Much the same can be said of "capital" (workplaces, machinery, etc.) as well. The capitalist, argued Berkman, *"gives you a job; that is permission to work in the factory or mill which was not built by him but by*



> *vidual concerned..."* [**The Accumulation of Capital**, p. 395]

So, interest has little to do with "waiting" and a lot more to do with the inequalities associated with the capitalist system. In effect, the "waiting" theory assumes what it is trying to prove. Interest is positive simply because capitalists can appropriate surplus value from workers and so current money is more valuable than future money because of this fact. Ironically, therefore, the pro-capitalist theories of who abstains are wrong, *"since saving is mainly out of profits, and real wages tend to be lower the higher the rate of profit, the abstinence associated with saving is mainly done by the workers, who do not receive any share in the 'reward.'"* [Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 393]

In other words, "waiting" does not produce a surplus, labour does. As such, to *"say that those who hold financial instruments can lay claim to a portion of the social product by abstaining or waiting provides no explanation of what makes the production process profitable, and hence to what extent interest claims or dividends can be paid. Reliance on a waiting theory of the return to capital represented nothing less than a reluctance of economists to confront the sources of value creation and analyse the process of economic development."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 267] This would involve having to analyse the social relations between workers and managers/bosses on the shop floor, which would be to bring into question the whole nature of capitalism and any claims it was based upon freedom.

To summarise, the idea that interest is the "reward" for waiting simply ignores the reality of class society and, in effect, rewards the wealthy for being wealthy. Neo-classical economics implies that being rich is the ultimate disutility. The hardships ("sacrifices") of having to decide to consume or invest their riches weighs as heavily on the elite as they do on the scales of utility. Compared to, say, working in a sweatshop,

inequality and interest expresses the fact that workers have to sell their labour to others in order to survive:

> *"The notion that human beings discount the future certainly seems to correspond to everyone's subjective experience, but the conclusion drawn from it is a* ***non sequitor****, for most people have enough sense to want to be able to exercise consuming power as long as fate permits, and many people are in the situation of having a higher income in the present than they expect in the future (salary earners will have to retire, business may be better now than it seems likely to be later, etc.) and many look beyond their own lifetime and wish to leave consuming power to their heirs. Thus a great many ... are eagerly looking for a reliable vehicle to carry purchasing power into the future ... It is impossible to say what price would rule if there were a market for present* ***versus*** *future purchasing power, unaffected by any other influence except the desires of individuals about the time-pattern of their consumption. It might will be such a market would normally yield a negative rate of discount ...*
>
> *"The rate of interest is normally positive for a quite different reason. Present purchasing power is valuable partly because, under the capitalist rules of the game, it permits its owner ... to employ labour and undertake production which will yield a surplus of receipts over costs. In an economy in which the rate of profit is expected to be positive, the rate of interest is positive ... [and so] the present value of purchasing power exceeds its future value to the corresponding extent... This is nothing whatever to do with the subjective* ***rate of discount of the future*** *of the indi-*



> *other workers like yourself. And for that permission you help to support him for the rest of your life or as long as you work for him."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 14]

So non-labour income exists **not** because of the owners of capital and land "contribute" to production but because they, as a class, **own** the means of life and workers have to sell their labour and liberty to them to gain access:

> *"We cry shame on the feudal baron who forbade the peasant to turn a clod of earth unless he surrendered to his lord a fourth of his crop. We called those the barbarous times, But if the forms have changed, the relations have remained the same, and the worker is forced, under the name of free contract, to accept feudal obligations."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 31–2]

It is capitalist property relations that allow this monopolisation of wealth by those who own (or boss) but do not produce. The workers do not get the full value of what they produce, nor do they have a say in how the surplus value produced by their labour gets used (e.g. investment decisions). Others have monopolised both the wealth produced by workers and the decision-making power within the company. This is a private form of taxation without representation, just as the company is a private form of statism.

Therefore, providing capital is **not** a productive act, and keeping the profits that are produced by those who actually do use capital is an act of theft. This does not mean, of course, that creating capital goods is not creative nor that it does not aid production. Far from it! But owning the outcome of such activity and renting it does not justify capitalism or profits. In other words, while we need machinery, workplaces, houses and raw materials to produce goods we do **not** need landlords and capitalists.

The problem with the capitalists' "contribution to production" argument is that one must either assume (a) a strict definition of who is the producer of something, in which case one must credit only the worker(s), or (b) a looser definition based on which individuals have contributed to the circumstances that made the productive work possible. Since the worker's productivity was made possible in part by the use of property supplied by the capitalist, one can thus credit the capitalist with "contributing to production" and so claim that he or she is entitled to a reward, i.e. profit.

However, if one assumes (b), one must then explain why the chain of credit should stop with the capitalist. Since all human activity takes place within a complex social network, many factors might be cited as contributing to the circumstances that allowed workers to produce — e.g. their upbringing and education, the contribution of other workers in providing essential products, services and infrastructure that permits their place of employment to operate, and so on (even the government, which funds infrastructure and education). Certainly the property of the capitalist contributed in this sense. But his contribution was less important than the work of, say, the worker's mother. Yet no capitalist, so far as we know, has proposed compensating workers' mothers with any share of the firm's revenues, and particularly not with a **greater** share than that received by capitalists! Plainly, however, if they followed their own logic consistently, capitalists would have to agree that such compensation would be fair.

In summary, while some may consider that profit is the capitalist's "contribution" to the value of a commodity, the reality is that it is nothing more than the reward for owning capital and giving permission for **others** to produce using it. As David Schweickart puts it, *"'providing capital' means nothing more than 'allowing it to be used.' But an act of granting permission, in and of itself, is not a productive activity. If labourers cease to labour, production ceases in any society. But if owners cease to* **Cit.**, p. 1] Little wonder we argued in section C.2.3 that simply owning property does not justify non-labour income.

In other words, due to **one** decision not to do anything (i.e. **not** to consume), a person (and his or her heirs) may receive **forever** a reward that is not tied to any productive activity. Unlike the people actually doing the work (who only get a reward every time they "contribute" to creating a commodity), the capitalist will get rewarded for just **one** act of abstention. This is hardly a just arrangement. As David Schweickart has pointed out, *"Capitalism does reward some individuals perpetually. This, if it is to be justified by the canon of contribution, one must defend the claim that some contributions are indeed eternal."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 17] As we noted in section C.1.1, current and future generations should not be dominated by the actions of the long dead.

The "waiting" theory, of course, simply seeks to justify interest rather than explain its origin. If the capitalist really **did** deserve an income as a reward for their abstinence, where does it come from? It cannot be created passively, merely by the decision to save, so interest exists because the exploitation of labour exists. As Joan Robinson summarised:

> *"Obviously, the reward of saving is owning some more wealth. One of the advantages, though by no means the only one, of owning wealth is the possibility of getting interest on it.*
>
> *"But why is it possible to get interest? Because businesses make profits and are willing to borrow."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 5, p. 36]

This is the key. If ones ability and willingness to "wait" is dependent on social facts (such as available resources, ones class, etc.), then interest cannot be based upon subjective evaluations, as these are not the independent factor. In other words, saving does not express "waiting", it simply expresses the extent of

the *"greatest accumulators of wealth are very rich persons, some [!] of whom live in luxury, and certainly do not practise abstinence in that sense of the term in which it is convertible with abstemiousness."* So he opted for the term "waiting" because there was *"advantage"* in its use to describe *"the accumulation of wealth"* as the *"result of a postponement of enjoyment."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 232–3] This is particularly the case as socialists had long been pointing out the obvious fact that capitalists do not *"abstain"* from anything.

The lesson is obvious, in mainstream economics if reality conflicts with your theory, do not reconsider the theory, change its name!

The problems of "waiting" and "abstinence" as the source of interest becomes even clearer when we look at inherited wealth. Talking about "abstinence" or "waiting" when discussing a capitalist inheriting a company worth millions is silly. Senior recognised this, arguing that income in this case is not profit, but rather *"has all the attributes of rent."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 129] That such a huge portion of capitalist revenue would not be considered profit shows the bankruptcy of any theory which see profit as the reward for "waiting." However, Senior's argument does show that interest payments need not reflect any positive contribution to production by those who receive it. Like the landlord receiving payment for owning a gift of nature, the capitalist receives income for simply monopolising the work of previous generations and, as Smith put it, the *"rent of land, considered as the price paid for the use of land, is naturally a monopoly price."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 131]

Even capitalist economists, while seeking to justify interest, admit that it *"arises independently of any personal act of the capitalist. It accrues to him even though he has not moved any finger in creating it . .. And it flows without ever exhausting that capital from which it arises, and therefore without any necessary limit to its continuance. It is, if one may use such an expression in mundane matters, capable of everlasting life."* [Böhm-Bawerk, **Op.**



*grant permission, production is affected only if their **authority** over the means of production is respected."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 11]

This authority, as discussed earlier, derives from the coercive mechanisms of the state, whose primary purpose is to ensure that capitalists have this ability to grant or deny workers access to the means of production. Therefore, not only is "providing capital" not a productive activity, it depends on a system of organised coercion which requires the appropriation of a considerable portion of the value produced by labour, through taxes, and hence is actually parasitic. Needless to say, rent can also be considered as "profit", being based purely on "granting permission" and so not a productive activity. The same can be said of interest, although the arguments are somewhat different (see section C.2.6).

So, even if we assume that capital and land **are** productive, it does not follow that owning those resources entitles the owner to an income. However, this analysis is giving too much credit to capitalist ideology. The simple fact is that capital is **not** productive at all. Rather, *"capital"* only contributes to production when used by labour (land does produce use values, of course, but these only become available once labour is used to pick the fruit, reap the corn or dig the coal). As such, profit is not the reward for the productivity of capital. Rather **labour** produces the marginal productivity of capital. This is discussed in the next section.

## C.2.4 Is profit the reward for the productivity of capital?

In a word, no. As Proudhon pointed out, *"Capital, tools, and machinery are likewise unproductive... The proprietor who asks to be rewarded for the use of a tool or for the productive power of his land, takes for granted, then, that which is radically false;*

*namely, that capital produces by its own effort — and, in taking pay for this imaginary product, he literally receives something for nothing."* [**What is Property?**, p. 169] In other words, only labour is productive and profit is not the reward for the productivity of capital.

Needless to say, capitalist economists disagree. *"Here again the philosophy of the economists is wanting. To defend usury they have pretended that capital was productive, and they have changed a metaphor into a reality,"* argued Proudhon. The socialists had *"no difficulty in overturning their sophistry; and through this controversy the theory of capital has fallen into such disfavour that today, in the minds of the people,* ***capitalist*** *and* ***idler*** *are synonymous terms."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 290]

Sadly, since Proudhon's time, the metaphor has become regained its hold, thanks in part to neo-classical economics and the "marginal productivity" theory. We explained this theory in the last section as part of our discussion on why, even if we assume that land and capital **are** productive this does not, in itself, justify capitalist profit. Rather, profits accrue to the capitalist simply because he or she gave their permission for others to use their property. However, the notion that profits represent that "productivity" of capital is deeply flawed for other reasons. The key one is that, by themselves, capital and land produce nothing. As Bakunin put it, *"neither property nor capital produces anything when not fertilised by labour."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 183]

In other words, capital is "productive" simply because people use it. This is hardly a surprising conclusion. Mainstream economics recognises it in its own way (the standard economic terminology for this is that *"factors usually do not work alone"*). Needless to say, the conclusions anarchists and defenders of capitalism draw from this obvious fact are radically different.

The standard defence of class inequalities under capitalism is that people get rich by producing what other people want.



> *saved sovereign which the domestic servant puts in the savings bank bears, absolutely and relatively, less interest than the lightly spared thousands which the millionaire puts to fructify in debenture and mortgage funds. These phenomena fit badly into a theory which explains interest quite universally as a 'wage of abstinence.'"* [Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, **Capital and Interest**, p. 277]

All in all, as Joan Robinson pointed out, *"that the rate of interest is the 'reward for waiting' but 'waiting' only means owning wealth ... In short, a man who refrains from blowing his capital in orgies and feasts can continue to get interest on it. This seems perfectly correct, but as a theory of distribution it is only a circular argument."* [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 11] Interest is not the reward for "waiting," rather it is one of the (many) rewards for being rich. This was admitted as much by Marshall himself, who noted that the *"power to save depends on an excess of income over necessary expenditure; and this is greatest among the wealthy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 229]

Little wonder, then, that neo-classical economists introduced the term **waiting** as an "explanation" for returns to capital (such as interest). Before this change in the jargon of economics, mainstream economists used the notion of "abstinence" (the term used by Nassau Senior) to account for (and so justify) interest. Just as Senior's "theory" was seized upon to defend returns to capital, so was the term "waiting" after it was introduced in the 1880s. Interestingly, while describing **exactly** the same thing, "waiting" became the preferred term simply because it had a less apologetic ring to it. Both describe the *"sacrifice of present pleasure for the sake of future"* yet, according to Marshall, the term *"abstinence"* was *"liable to be misunderstood"* because there were just too many wealthy people around who received interest and dividends without ever having abstained from anything. As he admitted,

Given how much income this "abstinence" or "waiting" results in, we can only conclude that it is the most painful of decisions possible for a multi-millionaire to decide **not** to buy that fifth house and instead save the money. The effort to restrain themselves from squandering their entire fortunes all at once must be staggering. In the capitalist's world, an industrialist who decides not to consume a part of their riches "suffers" a cost equivalent to that of someone who postpones consumption of their meagre income to save enough to get something they need. Similarly, if the industrialist "earns" hundred times more in interest than the wage of the worker who toils in their workplace, the industrialist "suffers" hundred times more discomfort living in his palace than, say, the coal miner does working at the coal face in dangerous conditions or the worker stuck in a boring McJob they hate. The "disutility" of postponing consumption while living in luxury is obviously 100 times greater than the "disutility" of, say, working for a living and so should be rewarded appropriately.

As there is no direct relationship between interest received and the "sacrifice" involved (if anything, it is an **inverse** relationship), the idea that interest is the reward for waiting is simply nonsense. You need be no anarchist to come to this obvious conclusion. It was admitted as much by a leading capitalist economist and his argument simply echoes Proudhon's earlier critique:

> *"the existence and height of interest by no means invariably correspond with the existence and the height of a 'sacrifice of abstinence.' Interest, in exceptional cases, is received where there has been no individual sacrifice of abstinence. High interest is often got where the sacrifice of the abstinence is very trifling — as in the case of [a] millionaire — and 'low interest' is often got where the sacrifice entailed by the abstinence is very great. The hardly*



That, however, is hardly ever true. Under capitalism, people get rich by hiring other people to produce what other people want or by providing land, money or machinery to those who do the hiring. The number of people who have became rich purely by their own labour, without employing others, is tiny. When pressed, defenders of capitalism will admit the basic point and argue that, in a free market, everyone gets in income what their contribution in producing these goods indicates. Each factor of production (land, capital and labour) is treated in the same way and their marginal productivity indicates what their contribution to a finished product is and so their income. Thus wages represent the marginal productivity of labour, profit the marginal productivity of capital and rent the marginal productivity of land. As we have used land and labour in the previous section, we will concentrate on land and "capital" here. We must note, however, that marginal productivity theory has immense difficulties with capital and has been proven to be internally incoherent on this matter (see next section). However, as mainstream economics ignores this, so will we for the time being.

So what of the argument that profits represent the contribution of capital? The reason why anarchists are not impressed becomes clear when we consider ten men digging a hole with spades. Holding labour constant means that we add spades to the mix. Each new spade increases productivity by the same amount (because we assume that labour is homogenous) until we reach the eleventh spade. At that point, the extra spade lies unused and so the marginal contribution of the spade ("capital") is zero. This suggests that the socialists are correct, capital **is** unproductive and, consequently, does not deserve any reward for its use.

Of course, it will be pointed out that the eleventh spade cost money and, as a result, the capitalist would have stopped at ten spades and the marginal contribution of capital equals the amount the tenth spade added. Yet the only reason that

spade added anything to production was because there was a worker to use it. In other words, as economist David Ellerman stresses, the *"point is that capital itself does not 'produce' at all; capital is used by Labour to produce the outputs ... Labour produces the marginal product **of capital.**"* [**Property and Contract in Economics**, p. 204] As such, to talk of the "marginal product" of capital is meaningless as holding labour constant is meaningless:

> *"Consider, for example, the 'marginal product of a shovel' in a simple production process wherein three workers use two shovels and a wheelbarrow to dig out a cellar. Two of the workers use two shovels to fill the wheelbarrow which the third worker pushes a certain distance to dump the dirt. The marginal productivity of a shovel is defined as the extra product produced when an extra shovel is added and the other factors, such as labour, are held constant. The labour is the human activity of carrying out this production process. If labour was held 'constant' is the sense of carrying out the same human activity, then any third shovel would just lie unused and the extra product would be identically zero.*
>
> *"'Holding labour constant' really means reorganising the human activity in a more capital intensive way so that the extra shovel will be optimally utilised. For instance, all three workers could use the three shovels to fill the wheelbarrow and then they could take turns emptying the wheelbarrow. In this manner, the workers would use the extra shovel and by so doing they would produce some extra product (additional earth moved during the same time period). This extra product would be called the 'marginal product of the shovel, but in fact it is produced by the workers who are also using the*



able to buy things you need", and is thus skewing the obvious difference in costs of such postponement of consumption!

Thus Proudhon's comments that the loaning of capital *"does not involve an actual sacrifice on the part of the capitalist"* and so *"does not deprive himself... of the capital which be lends. He lends it, on the contrary, precisely because the loan is not a deprivation to him; he lends it because he has no use for it himself, being sufficiently provided with capital without it; be lends it, finally, because he neither intends nor is able to make it valuable to him personally, — because, if he should keep it in his own hands, this capital, sterile by nature, would remain sterile, whereas, by its loan and the resulting interest, it yields a profit which enables the capitalist to live without working. Now, to live without working is, in political as well as moral economy, a contradictory proposition, an impossible thing."* [**Interest and Principal: A Loan is a Service**]

In other words, contra Marshall, saving is **not** a sacrifice for the wealthy and, as such, not deserving a reward. Proudhon goes on:

> *"The proprietor who possesses two estates, one at Tours, and the other at Orleans, and who is obliged to fix his residence on the one which he uses, and consequently to abandon his residence on the other, can this proprietor claim that he deprives himself of anything, because he is not, like God, ubiquitous in action and presence? As well say that we who live in Paris are deprived of a residence in New York! Confess, then, that the privation of the capitalist is akin to that of the master who has lost his slave, to that of the prince expelled by his subjects, to that of the robber who, wishing to break into a house, finds the dogs on the watch and the inmates at the windows."*

it is the capitalist class, the rich, who refrain from expending their income on immediate consumption and *"abstain."* Astonishingly, working class people show no such desire to abstain from spending their wages on immediate consumption. It does not take a genius to work out why, although many economists have followed Senior in placing the blame on working class lack of abstinence on poor education rather than, say, the class system they live in (for Senior, *"the worse educated"* classes *"are always the most improvident, and consequently the least abstinent."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60]).

Therefore, the plausibility of interest as payment for the pain of deferring consumption rests on the premise that the typical saving unit is a small or medium-income household. But in contemporary capitalist societies, this is not the case. Such households are not the source of most savings; the bulk of interest payments do not go to them. As such, interest is the dependent factor and so "waiting" cannot explain interest. Rather, interest is product of social inequality and the social relationships produced by an economy. Lenders lend because they have the funds to do so while borrowers borrow because without money now they may not be around later. As those with funds are hardly going without by lending, it does not make much sense to argue that they would spend even more today without the temptation of more income later.

To put this point differently, the capitalist proponents of interest only consider "postponing consumption" as an abstraction, without making it concrete. For example, a capitalist may "postpone consumption" of his 10th Rolls Royce because he needs the money to upgrade some machinery in his factory; whereas a single mother may have to "postpone consumption" of food or adequate housing in order to attempt to better take care of her children. The two situations are vastly different, yet the capitalist equates them. This equation implies that "not being able to buy anything you want" is the same as "not being



> *additional shovel … [Capital] does not 'produce' its marginal product. Capital does not 'produce' at all. Capital is used by Labour to produce the output. When capital is increased, Labour produces extra output by using up the extra capital . .. In short,* ***Labour produced the marginal product of capital*** *(and used up the extra capital services)."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 207–9]

Therefore, the idea that profits equals the marginal productivity of capital is hard to believe. Capital, in this perspective, is not only a tree which bears fruit even if its owner leaves it uncultivated, it is a tree which also picks its own fruit, prepares it and serves it for dinner! Little wonder the classical economists (Smith, Ricardo, John Stuart Mill) considered capital to be unproductive and explained profits and interest in other, less obviously false, means.

Perhaps the "marginal productivity" of capital is simply what is left over once workers have been paid their "share" of production, i.e. once the marginal productivity of labour has been rewarded. Obviously the marginal product of labour and capital are related. In a production process, the contribution of capital will (by definition) be equal to total price minus the contribution of labour. You define the marginal product of labour, it is necessary to keep something else constant. This means either the physical inputs other than labour are kept constant, or the rate of profit on capital is kept constant. As economist Joan Robinson noted:

> *"I found this satisfactory, for it destroys the doctrine that wages are regulated by marginal productivity. In a short-period case, where equipment is given, at full-capacity operation the marginal physical product of labour is indeterminate. When nine men with nine spades are digging a hole, to add a tenth man*

> *could increase output only to the extent that nine dig better if they have a rest from time to time. On the other hand, to subtract the ninth man would reduce output by more or less the average amount. The wage must lie somewhere between the average value of output per head and zero, so that marginal product is greater or much less than the wage according as equipment is being worked below or above its designed capacity.*" [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 104]

If wages are not regulated by marginal productivity theory, then neither is capital (or land). Subtracting labour while keeping capital constant simply results in unused equipment and unused equipment, by definition, produces nothing. What the "contribution" of capital is dependent, therefore, on the economic power the owning class has in a given market situation (as we discuss in section C.3). As William Lazonick notes, the neo-classical theory of marginal productivity has two key problems which flow from its flawed metaphor that capital is "productive":

> *"The first flaw is the assumption that, at any point in time, the productivity of a technology is given to the firm, irrespective of the social context in which the firm attempts to utilise the technology .. . this assumption, typically implicit in mainstream economic analysis and [is] derived from an ignorance of the nature of the production process as much as everything else ..."*
>
> *"The second flaw in the neo-classical theoretical structure is the assumption that factor prices are independent of factor productivities. On the basis of this assumption, factor productivities arising from different combinations of capital and labour can*



interest rate stems from the fact that people prefer present spending over future spending. If someone borrows £200 for one year at 5%, this is basically the same as saying that there would rather have £200 now than £210 a year from now. Thus interest is the cost of providing a service, namely time. People are able to acquire today what they would otherwise not have until sometime in the future. With a loan, interest is the price of the advantage obtained from having money immediately rather than having to wait for.

This, on first appears, seems plausible. If you accept the logic of capitalist economics and look purely at individuals and their preferences independently of their social circumstances then it can make sense. However, once you look wider you start to see this argument start to fall apart. Why is it that the wealthy are willing to save and provide funds while it is the working class who do not save and get into debt? Surely a person's "time preference" is dependent on their socio-economic position? As we argued in the last section, this means that any subjective evaluation of the present and future is dependent on, not independent of, the structure of market prices and income distribution. It varies with the income of individual and their class position, since the latter will condition the degree or urgency of present wants and needs.

So this theory appears ludicrous to a critic of capitalism — simply put, does the mine owner really sacrifice more than a miner, a rich stockholder more than an autoworker working in their car plant, a millionaire investor more than a call centre worker? As such, the notion that "waiting" explains interest is question begging in the extreme as it utterly ignores inequality within a society. After all, it is far easier for a rich person to "defer consumption" than for someone on an average income. This is borne out by statistics, for as Simon Kuznets has noted, *"only the upper income groups save; the total savings of groups below the top decile are fairly close to zero."* [**Economic Growth and Structure**, p. 263] Obviously, therefore, in modern society

[**An Outline of the Science of Political Economy**, p. 60 and p. 91]

Today, the idea that interest is the reward for "abstinence" on the part of savers is still a common one in capitalist economics. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Senior's argument had become known as the "waiting" theory while still playing the same role in justifying non-labour income. One of the leading neo-classical economists of his day, Alfred Marshall, argued that *"[i]f we admit [a commodity] is the product of labour alone, and not of labour and waiting, we can no doubt be compelled by an inexorable logic to admit that there is no justification of interest, the reward for waiting."* [**Principles of Economics**, p. 587] While implicitly recognising that labour is the source of all value in capitalism (and that abstinence is not the **source** of profits), it is claimed that interest is a justifiable claim on the surplus value produced by a worker.

Why is this the case? Capitalist economics claims that by "deferring consumption," the capitalist allows new means of production to be developed and so should be rewarded for this sacrifice. In other words, in order to have capital available as an input — i.e. to bear costs now for returns in the future — someone has to be willing to postpone his or her consumption. That is a real cost, and one that people will pay only if rewarded for it:

> *"human nature being what it is, we are justified in speaking of the interest on capital as the reward of the sacrifice involved in waiting for the enjoyment of material resources, because few people would save much without reward; just as we speak of wages as the reward of labour, because few people would work hard without reward."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 232]

The interest rate is, in neo-classical economic theory, set when the demand for loans meets the supply of savings. The



> *be taken as given to the firm; hence the choice of technique depends only on variations in relative factor prices. It is, however, increasingly recognised by economists who speak of 'efficiency wages' that factor prices and factor productivities may be linked, particularly for labour inputs ... the productivity of a technology depends on the amount of effort that workers choose to supply."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 130 and pp. 133–4]

In other words, neo-classical economics forgets that technology has to be used by workers and so its "productivity" depends on how it is applied. If profit did flow as a result of some property of machinery then bosses could do without autocratic workplace management to ensure profits. They would have no need to supervise workers to ensure that adequate amounts of work are done in excess of what they pay in wages. This means the idea (so beloved by pro-capitalist economics) that a worker's wage **is** the equivalent of what she produces is one violated everyday within reality:

> *"Managers of a capitalist enterprise are not content simply to respond to the dictates of the market by equating the wage to the value of the marginal product of labour. Once the worker has entered the production process, the forces of the market have, for a time at least, been superseded. The effort-pay relation will depend not only on market relations of exchange but also... on the hierarchical relations of production — on the relative power of managers and workers within the enterprise."* [William Lazonick, **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, pp. 184–5]

But, then again, capitalist economics is more concerned with justifying the status quo than being in touch with the real world. To claim that a workers wage represents her contribution and profit capital's is simply false. Capital cannot produce anything (never mind a surplus) unless used by labour and so profits do not represent the productivity of capital. In and of themselves, fixed costs do not create value. Whether value is created depends on how investments are developed and used once in place. Which brings us back to labour (and the social relationships which exist within an economy) as the fundamental source of surplus value.

Then there is the concept of profit sharing, whereby workers are get a share of the profits made by the company. Yet profits are the return to capital. This shatters the notion that profits represent the contribution of capital. **If** profits were the contribution of the productivity of equipment, then sharing profits would mean that capital was not receiving its full *"contribution"* to production (and so was being exploited by labour!). It is unlikely that bosses would implement such a scheme unless they knew they would get more profits out of it. As such, profit sharing is usually used as a technique to **increase** productivity and profits. Yet in neo-classical economics, it seems strange that such a technique would be required if profits, in fact, **did** represent capital's "contribution." After all, the machinery which the workers are using is the same as before profit sharing was introduced — how could this unchanged capital stock produce an increased "contribution"? It could only do so if, in fact, capital was unproductive and it was the unpaid efforts, skills and energy of workers' that actually was the source of profits. Thus the claim that profit equals capital's "contribution" has little basis in fact.

As capital is not autonomously productive and goods are the product of human (mental and physical) labour, Proudhon was right to argue that *"Capital, tools, and machinery are likewise unproductive ... The proprietor who asks to be rewarded for*



of abstract individuals whose decisions are made without any social influence. Rather, the interest rate depends on the conditions and institutions within the economy as a whole. The rate of interest is positive under capitalism because it is a class society, marked by inequality and power, **not** because of the "time preference" of abstract individuals.

In summary, providing capital and charging interest are not productive acts. As Proudhon argued, *"all rent received (nominally as damages, but really as payment for a loan) is an act of property — of robbery."* [**What is Property**, p. 171]

## C.2.7 Are interest and profit not the reward for waiting?

Another defence of surplus value by capitalist economics is also based on time. This argument is related to the "time preference" one we have discussed in the last section and is, likewise, rooted in the idea that money now is different than money later and, as a consequence, surplus value represents (in effect) an exchange of present goods for future ones. This argument has two main forms, depending on whether it is interest or profits which are being defended, but both are based on this perspective. We will discuss each in turn.

One of the oldest defences of interest is the "abstinence" theory first postulated by Nassau Senior in 1836. For Senior, abstinence is a sacrifice of present enjoyment for the purpose achieving some distant result. This demands the same heavy sacrifice as does labour, for to *"abstain from the enjoyment which is in our power, or to seek distant rather than immediate results, are among the most painful exertions of the human will."* Thus wages and interest/profit *"are to be considered as the rewards of peculiar sacrifices, the former the remuneration for labour, and the latter for abstinence from immediate enjoyment."*

these could ensure a positive cycle of investment, growth and savings (Keynes, it should be noted, praised Proudhon's follower Silvio Gesell in **The General Theory**. For a useful discussion see Dudley Dillard's essay *"Keynes and Proudhon"* [**The Journal of Economic History**, vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 63–76]).

Thus the key flaw in the theory is that of capitalist economics in general. By concentrating on the decisions of individuals, it ignores the social conditions in which these decisions are made. By taking the social inequalities and insecurities of capitalism as a given, the theory ignores the obvious fact that an individual's "time preference" will be highly shaped by their circumstances. Change those circumstances and their "time preference" will also change. In other words, working people have a different "time preference" to the rich because they are poorer. Similarly, by focusing on individuals, the "time preference" theory fails to take into account the institutions of a given society. If working class people have access to credit in other forms than those supplied by capitalists then their "time preference" will differ radically. As an example, we need only look at credit unions. In communities with credit unions the poor are less likely to agree to get into an agreement from a loan shark. It seems unlikely, to say the least, that the "time preference" of those involved have changed. They are subject to the same income inequalities and pressures as before, but by uniting with their fellows they give themselves better alternatives.

As such, "time preference" is clearly not an independent factor. This means that it cannot be used to justify capitalism or the charging of interest. It simply says, in effect, that in a society marked by inequality the rich will charge the poor as much interest as they can get away with. This is hardly a sound basis to argue that charging interest is a just or a universal fact. It reflects social inequality, the way a given society is organised and the institutions it creates. Put another way, there is no "natural" rate of interest which reflects the subjective "time preferences"



*the use of a tool or for the productive power of his land, takes for granted, then, that which is radically false; namely, that capital produces by its own effort — and, in taking pay for this imaginary product, he literally receives something for nothing.*" [**What is Property?**, p. 169]

It will be objected that while capital is not productive in itself, its use does make labour more productive. As such, surely its owner is entitled to some share of the larger output produced by its aid. Surely this means that the owners of capital deserve a reward? Is this difference not the "contribution" of capital? Anarchists are not convinced. Ultimately, this argument boils down to the notion that giving permission to use something is a productive act, a perspective we rejected in the last section. In addition, providing capital is unlike normal commodity production. This is because capitalists, unlike workers, get paid multiple times for one piece of work (which, in all likelihood, they paid others to do) and **keep** the result of that labour. As Proudhon argued:

> *"He [the worker] who manufactures or repairs the farmer's tools receives the price **once**, either at the time of delivery, or in several payments; and when this price is once paid to the manufacturer, the tools which he has delivered belong to him no more. Never can he claim double payment for the same tool, or the same job of repairs. If he annually shares in the products of the farmer, it is owing to the fact that he annually does something for the farmer.*
>
> *"The proprietor, on the contrary, does not yield his implement; eternally he is paid for it, eternally he keeps it."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 169–170]

While the capitalist, in general, gets their investment back plus something extra, the workers can never get their time back. That time has gone, forever, in return for a wage which

allows them to survive in order to sell their time and labour (i.e. liberty) again. Meanwhile, the masters have accumulated more capital and their the social and economic power and, consequently, their ability to extract surplus value goes up at a higher rate than the wages they have to pay (as we discuss in section C.7, this process is not without problems and regularly causes economic crisis to break out).

Without labour nothing would have been produced and so, in terms of justice, **at best** it could be claimed that the owners of capital deserve to be paid only for what has been used of their capital (i.e. wear and tear and damages). While it is true that the value invested in fixed capital is in the course of time transferred to the commodities produced by it and through their sale transformed into money, this does not represent any actual labour by the owners of capital. Anarchists reject the ideological sleight-of-hand that suggests otherwise and recognise that (mental and physical) labour is the **only** form of contribution that can be made by humans to a productive process. Without labour, nothing can be produced nor the value contained in fixed capital transferred to goods. As Charles A. Dana pointed out in his popular introduction to Proudhon's ideas, *"[t]he labourer without capital would soon supply his wants by its production ... but capital with no labourers to consume it can only lie useless and rot."* [**Proudhon and his "Bank of the People"**, p. 31] If workers do not control the full value of their contributions to the output they produce then they are exploited and so, as indicated, capitalism is based upon exploitation.

Of course, as long as "capital" **is** owned by a different class than as those who use it, this is extremely unlikely that the owners of capital will simply accept a "reward" of damages. This is due to the hierarchical organisation of production of capitalism. In the words of the early English socialist Thomas Hodgskin *"capital does not derive its utility from previous, but present labour; and does not bring its owner a profit because it has been stored up, but because it is a means of obtaining a com-*



> *over to the discretion of the adversary. Hence direct usury, of which the poor borrower is only too often the victim; and hence the low wages forcibly exploited from the workers...*
>
> *"It is not my business to put excesses like these, where there actually is exploitation, under the aegis of that favourable opinion I pronounced above as to the essence of interest. But, on the other hand, I must say with all emphasis, that what we might stigmatise as 'usury' does not consist in the obtaining of a gain out of a loan, or out of the buying of labour, but in the immoderate extent of that gain ... Some gain or profit on capital there would be if there were no compulsion on the poor, and no monopolising of property; and some gain there must be. It is only the height of this gain where, in particular cases, it reaches an excess, that is open to criticism, and, of course, the very unequal conditions of wealth in our modern communities bring us unpleasantly near the danger of exploitation and of usurious rates of interest."* [**The Positive Theory of Capital**, p. 361]

Little wonder, then, that Proudhon continually stressed the need for working people to organise themselves and credit (which, of course, they would have done naturally, if it were not for the state intervening to protect the interests, income and power of the ruling class, i.e. of itself and the economically dominant class). If, as Böhm-Bawerk admitted, interest rates could be high due to institutional factors then, surely, they do not reflect the "time preferences" of individuals. This means that they could be lower (effectively zero) if society organised itself in the appropriate manner. The need for savings could be replaced by, for example, co-operation and credit (as already exists, in part, in any developed economy). Organising

its, interest is payment for permission to use something and, therefore, not a productive act which should be rewarded. It is **not** the same as other forms of exchange. Proudhon pointed out the difference:

> *"Comparing a loan to a **sale**, you say: Your argument is as valid against the latter as against the former, for the hatter who sells hats does not **deprive** himself.*
>
> *"No, for he receives for his hats — at least he is reputed to receive for them — their exact value immediately, neither **more** nor **less**. But the capitalist lender not only is not deprived, since he recovers his capital intact, but he receives more than his capital, more than he contributes to the exchange; he receives in addition to his capital an interest which represents no positive product on his part. Now, a service which costs no labour to him who renders it is a service which may become gratuitous."* [**Interest and Principal: The Circulation of Capital, Not Capital Itself, Gives Birth to Progress**]

The reason why interest rates do not fall to zero is due to the class nature of capitalism, **not** "time preference." That it is ultimately rooted in social institutions can be seen from Böhm-Bawerk's acknowledgement that monopoly can result in exploitation by increasing the rate of interest above the rate specified by "time preference" (i.e. the market):

> *"Now, of course, the circumstances unfavourable to buyers may be corrected by active competition among sellers … But, every now and then, something will suspend the capitalists' competition, and then those unfortunates, whom fate has thrown on a local market ruled by monopoly, are delivered*



> *mand over labour."* [**Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital**] It is more than a strange coincidence that the people with power in a company, when working out who contributes most to a product, decide it is themselves!

This means that the notion that labour gets its "share" of the products created is radically false for, as *"a description of **property rights**, the distributive shares picture is quite misleading and false. The simple fact is that one legal party owns all the product. For example, General Motors doesn't just own 'Capital's share' of the GM cars produced; it owns all of them."* [Ellerman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27] Or as Proudhon put it, *"Property is the right to enjoy and dispose of another's goods, — the fruit of another's industry and labour."* The only way to finally abolish exploitation is for workers to manage their own work and the machinery and tools they use. This is implied, of course, in the argument that labour is the source of property for *"if labour is the sole basis of property, I cease to be a proprietor of my field as soon as I receive rent for it from another … It is the same with all capital."* Thus, *"all production being necessarily collective"* and *"all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor."* [**What is Property?**, p. 171, p. 133 and p. 130]

The reason why capital gets a "reward" is simply due to the current system which gives capitalist class an advantage which allows them to refuse access to their property except under the condition that they command the workers to make more than they have to pay in wages and keep their capital at the end of the production process to be used afresh the next. So while capital is not productive and owning capital is not a productive act, under capitalism it is an enriching one and will continue to be so until such time as that system is abolished. In other words, profits, interest and rent are not founded upon any permanent principle of economic or social life but arise from a specific social system which produce specific social relationships. Abolish wage labour by co-operatives, for example, and the issue of the "productivity" of "capital" disappears as "capital" no longer

exists (a machine is a machine, it only becomes capital when it is used by wage labour).

So rather that the demand for labour being determined by the technical considerations of production, it is determined by the need of the capitalist to make a profit. This is something the neo-classical theory implicitly admits, as the marginal productivity of labour is just a roundabout way of saying that labour-power will be bought as long as the wage is not higher than the profits that the workers produce. In other words, wages do not rise above the level at which the capitalist will be able to produce and realise surplus-value. To state that workers will be hired as long as the marginal productivity of their labour exceeds the wage is another way of saying that workers are exploited by their boss. So even if we do ignore reality for the moment, this defence of profits does **not** prove what it seeks to — it shows that labour **is** exploited under capitalism.

However, as we discuss in the next section, this whole discussion is somewhat beside the point. This is because marginal productivity theory has been conclusively proven to be flawed by dissident economics and has been acknowledged as such by leading neo-classical economists.

## C.2.5 Do profits represent the contribution of capital to production?

In a word, no. While we have assumed the validity of "marginal productivity" theory in relation to capital in the previous two sections, the fact is that the theory is deeply flawed. This is on two levels. Firstly, it does not reflect reality in any way. Secondly, it is logically flawed and, even worse, this has been known to economists for decades. While the first objection will hardly bother most neo-classical economists (what part of that dogma **does** reflect reality?), the second should as intellectual coherence is what replaces reality in



in which 'waiting' is a condition for capital **increase**, though not for capital per se. Any society which wishes to increase its stock of capital goods may have to postpone some gratification. Workplaces and resources turned over to producing capital goods cannot be used to produce consumer items, after all. How that is organised differs from society to society. So, like most capitalist economics there is a grain of truth in it but this grain of truth is used to grow a forest of half-truths and confusion.

As such, this notion of "waiting" only makes sense in a 'Robinson Crusoe" style situation, **not** in any form of real economy. In a real economy, we do not need to "wait" for our consumption goods until investment is complete since the division of labour/work has replaced the succession in time by a succession in place. We are dealing with an already well developed system of **social** production and an economy based on a social distribution of labour in which there are available all the various stages of the production process. As such, the notion that "waiting" is required makes little sense. This can be seen from the fact that it is not the capitalist who grants an advance to the worker. In almost all cases the worker is paid by their boss **after** they have completed their work. That is, it is the worker who makes an advance of their labour power to the capitalist. This waiting is only possible because *"no species of labourer depends on any previously prepared stock, for in fact no such stock exists; but every species of labourer does constantly, and at all times, depend for his supplies on the co-existing labour of some other labourers."* [Thomas Hodgskin, **Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital**] This means that the workers, as a class, creates the fund of goods out of which the capitalists pay them.

Ultimately, selling the use of money (paid for by interest) is not the same as selling a commodity. The seller of the commodity does not receive the commodity back as well as its price, unlike the typical lender of money. In effect, as with rent and prof-

Which raises the question of whether someone who saves deserve a reward for so doing? Simply put, no. Why? Because the act of saving is no more an act of production than is purchasing a commodity (most investment comes from retained profits and so the analogy is valid). Clearly the reward for purchasing a commodity is that commodity. By analogy, the reward for saving should be not interest but one's savings — the ability to consume at a later stage. Particularly as the effects of interest rates and savings can have such negative impacts on the rest of the economy. It seems strange, to say the least, to reward people for helping do so. Why should someone be rewarded for a decision which may cause companies to go bust, so **reducing** the available means of production as reduced demand results in job loses and idle factories? Moreover, this problem *"becomes ever more acute the richer or more inegalitarian the society becomes, since wealthy people tend to save more than poor people."* [Schweickart, **After Capitalism**, p. 43]

Supporters of capitalists assume that people will not save unless promised the ability to consume **more** at a later stage, yet close examination of this argument reveals its absurdity. People in many different economic systems save in order to consume later, but only in capitalism is it assumed that they need a reward for it beyond the reward of having those savings available for consumption later. The peasant farmer "defers consumption" in order to have grain to plant next year, even the squirrel "defers consumption" of nuts in order to have a stock through winter. Neither expects to see their stores increase in size over time. Therefore, saving is rewarded by saving, as consuming is rewarded by consuming. In fact, the capitalist "explanation" for interest has all the hallmarks of apologetics. It is merely an attempt to justify an activity without careful analysing it.

To be sure, there is an economic truth underlying this argument for justifying interest, but the formulation by supporters of capitalism is inaccurate and unfortunate. There is a sense



economics. However, in spite of "marginal productivity" theory being proven to be nonsense and admitted as such by leading neo-classical economists, it is still taught in economic classes and discussed in text books as if it were valid.

We will discuss each issue in turn.

The theory is based on a high level of abstraction and the assumptions used to allow the mathematics to work are so extreme that no real world example could possibly meet them. The first problem is determining the level at which the theory should be applied. Does it apply to individuals, groups, industries or the whole economy? For depending on the level at which it is applied, there are different problems associated with it and different conclusions to be drawn from it. Similarly, the time period over which it is to be applied has an impact. As such, the theory is so vague that it would be impossible to test as its supporters would simply deny the results as being inapplicable to **their** particular version of the model.

Then there are problems with the model itself. While it has to assume that factors are identical in order to invoke the necessary mathematical theory, none of the factors used are homogenous in the real world. Similarly, for Euler's theory to be applied, there must be constant returns to scale and this does not apply either (it would be fair to say that the assumption of constant returns to scale was postulated to allow the theorem to be invoked in the first place rather than as a result of a scientific analysis of real industrial conditions). Also, the model assumes an ideal market which cannot be realised and any real world imperfections make it redundant. In the model, such features of the real world as oligopolistic markets (i.e. markets dominated by a few firms), disequilibrium states, market power, informational imperfections of markets, and so forth do not exist. Including any of these real features invalidates the model and no "factor" gets its just rewards.

Moreover, like neo-classical economics in general, this theory just assumes the original distribution of ownership. As

such, it is a boon for those who have benefited from previous acts of coercion — their ill-gotten gains can now be used to generate income for them!

Finally, "marginal productivity" theory ignores the fact that most production is collective in nature and, as a consequence, the idea of subtracting a single worker makes little or no sense. As soon as there is *"a division of labour and an interdependence of different jobs, as is the case generally in modern industry,"* its *"absurdity can immediately be shown."* For example, *"[i]f, in a coal-fired locomotive, the train's engineer is eliminated, one does not 'reduce a little' of the product (transportation), one eliminates it completely; and the same is true if one eliminates the fireman. The 'product' of this indivisible team of engineer and fireman obeys a law of all or nothing, and there is no 'marginal product' of the one that can be separated from the other. The same thing goes on the shop floor, and ultimately for the modern factory as a whole, where jobs are closely interdependent."* [Cornelius Castoriadis, **Political and Social Writings**, vol. 3, p. 213] Kropotkin made the same point, arguing it *"is utterly impossible to draw a distinction between the work"* of the individuals collectively producing a product as all *"contribute ... in proportion to their strength, their energy, their knowledge, their intelligence, and their skill."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 170 and p. 169]

This suggests another explanation for the existence of profits than the "marginal productivity" of capital. Let us assume, as argued in marginal productivity theory, that a worker receives exactly what she has produced because if she ceases to work, the total product will decline by precisely the value of her wage. However, this argument has a flaw in it. This is because the total product will decline by more than that value if two or more workers leave. This is because the wage each worker receives under conditions of perfect competition is assumed to be the product of the **last** labourer in neo-classical theory. The neoclassical argument presumes a "declining marginal productivity," i.e. the marginal product of the last worker is assumed to



sions affect everyone. In a nutshell, the standard model fails to take into account changes of income that result from decisions to invest and save (see Michael Stewart's **Keynes and After** for a good, if basic, introduction). This meant that if some people do not consume now, demand falls for certain goods, production is turned away from consumption goods, and this has an effect on all. Some firms will find their sales failing and may go under, causing rising unemployment. Or, to put it slightly differently, aggregate demand — and so aggregate supply — is changed when some people postpone consumption, and this affects others. The decrease in the demand for consumer goods affects the producers of these goods. With less income, the producers would reduce their expenditure and this would have repercussions on other people's incomes. In such circumstances, it is unlikely that capitalists would be seeking to invest and so rising savings would result in falling investment in spite of falling interest rates. In an uncertain world, investment will only be done if capitalists think that they will end up with more money than they started with and this is unlikely to happen when faced with falling demand.

Whether rising interest rates do cause a crisis is dependent on the strength of the economy. During a strong expansion, a modest rise in interest rates may be outweighed by rising wages and profits. During a crisis, falling rates will not counteract the general economic despair. Keynes aimed to save capitalism from itself and urged state intervention to counteract the problems associated with free market capitalism. As we discuss in section C.8.1, this ultimately failed partly due to the mainstream economics gutting Keynes' work of key concepts which were incompatible with it, partly due to Keynes' own incomplete escape from neoclassical economics, partly due the unwillingness of rentiers to agree to their own euthanasia but mostly because capitalism is inherently unstable due to the hierarchical (and so oppressive and exploitative) organisation of production.

*He has more than you have now, and he will get back more than he gives.*" [Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, p. 23]

While the theory is less than ideal, the practice is little better. Interest rates have numerous perverse influences in any real economy. In neo-classical and related economics, saving does not have a negative impact on the economy as it is argued that non-consumed income must be invested. While this could be the case when capitalism was young, when the owners of firms ploughed their profits back into them, as financial institutions grew this became less so. Saving and investment became different activities, governed by the rate of interest. If the supply of savings increased, the interest rate would drop and capitalists would invest more. If the demand for loans increased, then the interest rate would rise, causing more savings to occur.

While the model is simple and elegant, it does have its flaws. These are first analysed by Keynes during the Great Depression of the 1930s, a depression which the neo-classical model said was impossible.

For example, rather than bring investment into line with savings, a higher interest can cause savings to fall as *"[h]ousehold saving, of course, is mainly saving up to spend later, and ... it is likely to respond the wrong way. A higher rate of return means that 'less' saving is necessary to get a given pension or whatever.*" [Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 11] Similarly, higher interest rates need not lead to higher investment as higher interest payments can dampen profits as both consumers and industrial capitalists have to divert more of their finances away from real spending and towards debt services. The former causes a drop in demand for products while the latter leaves less for investing.

As argued by Keynes, the impact of saving is not as positive as some like to claim. Any economy is a network, where deci-



be less than the second last and so on. In other words, in neo-classical economics, all workers bar the mythical "last worker" do not receive the full product of their labour. They only receive what the **last** worker is claimed to produce and so everyone **bar** the last worker does not receive exactly what he or she produces. In other words, all the workers are exploited bar the last one.

However, this argument forgets that co-operation leads to increased productivity which the capitalists appropriate for themselves. This is because, as Proudhon argued, *"the capitalist has paid as many times one day's wages"* rather than the workers collectively and, as such, *"he has paid nothing for that immense power which results from the union and harmony of labourers, and the convergence and simultaneousness of their efforts. Two hundred grenadiers stood the obelisk of Luxor upon its base in a few hours; do you suppose that one man could have accomplished the same task in two hundred days? Nevertheless, on the books of the capitalist, the amount of wages would have been the same.*" Therefore, the capitalist has *"paid all the individual forces"* but *"the collective force still remains to be paid. Consequently, there remains a right of collective property"* which the capitalist *"enjoy[s] unjustly."* [**What is Property?**, p. 127 and p. 130]

As usual, therefore, we must distinguish between the ideology and reality of capitalism. As we indicated in section C.1, the model of perfect competition has no relationship with the real world. Unsurprisingly, marginal productivity theory is likewise unrelated to reality. This means that the assumptions required to make "marginal productivity" theory work are so unreal that these, in themselves, should have made any genuine scientist reject the idea out of hand. Note, we are **not** opposing abstract theory, **every** theory abstracts from reality is some way. We are arguing that, to be valid, a theory has to reflect the real situation it is seeking to explain in some meaningful way. Any abstractions or assumptions

used must be relatively trivial and, when relaxed, not result in the theory collapsing. This is not the case with marginal productivity theory. It is important to recognise that there are degrees of abstraction. There are *"negligibility assumptions"* which state that some aspect of reality has little or no effect on what is being analysed. Sadly for marginal productivity theory, its assumptions are not of this kind. Rather, they are *"domain assumptions"* which specify *"the conditions under which a particular theory will apply. If those conditions do not apply, then neither does the theory."* [Steve Keen, **Debunking Economics**, p. 151] This is the case here.

However, most economists will happily ignore this critique for, as noted repeatedly, basing economic theory on reality or realistic models is not considered a major concern by neoclassical economists. However, "marginal productivity" theory applied to capital is riddled with logical inconsistencies which show that it is simply wrong. In the words of the noted left-wing economist Joan Robinson:

> *"The neo-classicals evidently had not been told that the neo-classical theory did not contain a solution of the problems of profits or of the value of capital. They have erected a towering structure of mathematical theorems on a foundation that does not exist. Recently [in the 1960s, leading neo-classical economist] Paul Samuelson was sufficiently candid to admit that the basis of his system does not hold, but the theorems go on pouring out just the same."* [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 186]

If profits **are** the result of private property and the inequality it produces, then it is unsurprising that neoclassical theory would be as foundationless as Robinson argues. After all, this is a **political** question and neo-classical economics was developed to ignore such questions. Marginal productivity theory



**Street**, p. 65] Again, "time preference" does not come into it as economic necessity forces the borrowers to consume more now in order to be around in the future.

Therefore, money lending is, for the poor person, not a choice between more consumption now/less later and less consumption now/more later. If there is no consumption now, there will not be any later. So not everybody saves money because they want to be able to spend more at a future date. As for borrowing, the real reason for it is necessity produced by the circumstances people find themselves in. As for the lender, their role is based on generating a current and future income stream, like any business. So if "time preference" seems unlikely for the lender, it seems even more unlikely for the borrower or saver. Thus, while there is an element of time involved in decisions to save, lend and borrow, it would be wrong to see interest as the consequence of "time preference." Most people do not think in terms of it and, therefore, predicting their behaviour using it would be silly.

At the root of the matter is that for the vast majority of cases in a capitalist economy, an individual's "time preference" is determined by their social circumstances, the institutions which exist, uncertainty and a host of other factors. As inequality drives "time preference," there is no reason to explain interest rates by the latter rather than the former. Unless, of course, you are seeking to rationalise and justify the rich getting richer. Ultimately, interest is an expression of inequality, **not** exchange:

> *"If there is chicanery afoot in calling 'money now' a different good than 'money later,' it is by no means harmless, for the intended effect is to subsume money lending under the normative rubric of exchange … [but] there are obvious differences … [for in normal commodity exchange] both parties have something [while in loaning] he has something you don't … [so] inequality dominates the relationship.*

set even further from any abstract "time preference" that exists. Therefore, the structure of that market will have a significant effect on the interest rate. Someone in the same circumstances with the same "time preference" will get radically different interest rates depending on the "degree of monopoly" of the banking sector (see section C.5 for "degree of monopoly"). An economy with a multitude of small banks, implying low barriers of entry, will have different interest rates than one with a few big firms implying high barriers (if banks are forced to have 100% gold reserves, as desired by many "free market" capitalists, then these barriers may be even higher). As such, it is highly unlikely that "time preference" rather than market power is a more significant factor in determining interest rates in any **real** economy. Unless, of course, the rather implausible claim is made that the interest rate would be the same no matter how competitive the banking market was — which, of course, is what the "time preference" argument does imply.

Nor is "time preference" that useful when we look at the saver. People save money for a variety of motives, few (if any) of which have anything to do with "time preference." A common motive is, unsurprisingly, uncertainty about the future. Thus people put money into savings accounts to cover possible mishaps and unexpected developments (as in *"saving for a rainy day"*). Indeed, in an uncertain world future money may be its own reward for immediate consumption is often a risky thing to do as it reduces the ability to consumer in the future (for example, workers facing unemployment in the future could value the same amount of money more then than now). Given that the future is uncertain, many save precisely for precautionary reasons and increasing current consumption is viewed as a disutility as it is risky behaviour. Another common reason would be to save because they do not have enough money to buy what they want now. This is particularly the case with working class families who face stagnating or falling income or face financial difficulties.[Henwood, **Wall**



has been subject to intense controversy, precisely because it claims to show that labour is not exploited under capitalism (i.e. that each factor gets what it contributes to production). We will now summarise this successful criticism.

The first major theoretical problem is obvious: how do you measure capital? In neoclassical economics, capital is referred to as machinery of all sorts as well as the workplaces that house them. Each of these items is, in turn, made up of a multitude of other commodities and many of these are assemblies of other commodities. So what does it mean to say, as in marginal productivity theory, that "capital" is varied by one unit? The only thing these products have in common is a price and that is precisely what economists **do** use to aggregate capital. Sadly, though, shows *"that there is no meaning to be given to a 'quantity of capital' apart from the rate of profit, so that the contention that the 'marginal product of capital' determines the rate of profit is meaningless."* [Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103] This is because argument is based on circular reasoning:

> *"For long-period problems we have to consider the meaning of the rate of profit on capital ... the value of capital equipment, reckoned as its future earnings discounted at a rate of interest equal to the rate of profit, is equal to its initial cost, which involves prices including profit at the same rate on the value of the capital involved in producing it, allowing for depreciation at the appropriate rate over its life up to date.*
>
> *"The value of a stock of capital equipment, therefore, involves the rate of profit. There is no meaning in a 'quantity of capital' apart from the rate of profit."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 4, p. 125]

Looking at it another way, neo-classical economics seeks to simultaneously solve the problems of production and income

distribution. It attempts to show how the level of employment of capital and labour is determined as well as how national income is divided between the two. The latter is done by multiplying the quantities of labour and capital by the equilibrium wage and interest rate, respectively. In the long term, equilibrium conditions are governed by the net marginal productivity of each factor, with each supplied until its net marginal revenue is zero. This is why the market rate of interest is used as capital is assumed to have marginal productivity and the existing market interest reflects that.

Yet in what sense can we say that capital has marginal productivity? How is the stock of capital to be measured? One measure is to take the present value of the income stream expected to accrue to capital owners. However, where does this discount rate and net income stream come from? To find a value for these, it is necessary to estimate a national income and the division of income between labour and capital but that is what the analysis was meant to produce. In other words, the neo-classical theory requires assumptions which are, in fact, the solution. This means that value of capital is dependent on the distribution of income. As there is no rationale offered for choosing one income distribution over another, the neo-classical theory does not solve the problem it set out to investigate but rather simply assumes it away. It is a tautology. It asks how the rate of profit is determined and answers by referencing the quantity of capital and its marginal revenue product. When asked how these are determined, the reply is based on assuming a division of future income and the discounting of the returns of capital with the market rate of interest. That is, it simply says that the market rate of interest is a function of the market rate of interest (and an assumed distribution of income).

In other words, according to neoclassical theory, the rate of profit and interest depends on the amount of capital, and the amount of capital depends on the rate of profit and interest.



than now? Hardly, their motivation is far more complicated than that. It is doubtful that many people actually sit down and work out how much their money is going to be "worth" to them a year or more from now. Even if they did, the fact is that they really have no idea how much it will be worth. The future is unknown and uncertain and, consequently, it is implausible that "time preference" plays the determining role in the decision making process.

In most economies, particularly capitalism, the saver and lender are rarely the same person. People save and the banks use it to loan it to others. The banks do not do this because they have a low "time preference" but because they want to make profits. They are a business and make their money by charging more interest on loans than they give on savings. Time preference does not enter into it, particularly as, to maximise profits, banks loan out more (on credit) than they have in savings and, consequently, make the actual interest rate totally independent of the rate "time preference" would (in theory) produce.

Given that it would be extremely difficult, indeed impossible, to stop banks acting in this way, we can conclude that even if "time preference" were true, it would be of little use in the real world. This, ironically, is recognised by the same free market capitalist economists who advocate a "time preference" perspective on interest. Usually associated with the "Austrian" school, they argue that banks should have 100% reserves (i.e. they loan out only what they have in savings, backed by gold). This implicitly admits that the interest rate does not reflect "time preference" but rather the activities (such as credit creation) of banks (not to mention other companies who extend business credit to consumers). As we discuss in section C.8, this is not due to state meddling with the money supply or the rate of interest but rather the way capitalism works.

Moreover, as the banking industry is marked, like any industry, by oligopolistic competition, the big banks will be able to add a mark up on services, so distorting any interest rates

It is only because money provides the authority to allocate resources and exploit wage labour that money now is more valuable (*"we know that mere saving itself brings in nothing, so long as the pence saved are not used to exploit."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 59]). The capitalist does not supply "time" (as the "time value" theory argues), the loan provides authority/power and so the interest rate does not reflect "time preference" but rather the utility of the loan to capitalists, i.e. whether it can be used to successfully exploit labour. If the expectations of profits by capitalists are low (as in, say, during a depression), loans would not be desired no matter how low the interest rate became. As such, the interest rate is shaped by the general profit level and so be independent of the "time preference" of individuals.

Then there is the problem of circularity. In any real economy, interest rates obviously shape people's saving decisions. This means that an individual's "time preference" is shaped by the thing it is meant to explain:

> *"But there may be some savers who have the psychology required by the text books and weigh a preference for present spending against an increment of income (interest, dividends and capital gains) to be had from an increment of wealth. But what then? Each individual goes on saving or dis-saving till the point where his individual subjective rate of discount is equal to the market rate of interest. There has to be a market rate of interest for him to compare his rate of discount to."* [Joan Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 11–12]

Looking at the individuals whose subjective evaluations allegedly determine the interest rate, there is the critical question of motivation. Looking at lenders, do they **really** charge interest because they would rather spend more money later



One has to assume a rate of profit in order to demonstrate the equilibrium rate of return is determined. This issue is avoided in neo-classical economics simply by ignoring it (it must be noted that the same can be said of the "Austrian" concept of *"roundaboutness"* as *"it is impossible to define one way of producing a commodity as 'more roundabout' than another independently of the rate of profit … Therefore the Austrian notion of roundaboutness is as internally inconsistent as the neoclassical concept of the marginal productivity of capital."* [Steve Keen, **Debunking Economics**, p. 302]).

The next problem with the theory is that "capital" is treated as something utterly unreal. Take, for example, leading neoclassical Dennis Robertson's 1931 attempt to explain the marginal productivity of labour when holding "capital" constant:

> *"If ten men are to be set out to dig a hole instead of nine, they will be furnished with ten cheaper spades instead of nine more expensive ones; or perhaps if there is no room for him to dig comfortably, the tenth man will be furnished with a bucket and sent to fetch beer for the other nine."* [*"Wage-grumbles"*, **Economic Fragments**, p. 226]

So to work out the marginal productivity of the factors involved, *"ten cheaper spades"* somehow equals nine more expensive spades? How is this keeping capital constant? And how does this reflect reality? Surely, any real world example would involve sending the tenth digger to get another spade? And how do nine expensive spades become nine cheaper ones? In the real world, this is impossible but in neoclassical economics this is not only possible but required for the theory to work. As Robinson argued, in neo-classical theory the *"concept of capital all the man-made factors are boiled into one, which we may call **leets** … [which], though all made up of one physical substance, is endowed with the capacity to embody various techniques of*

*production ... and a change of technique can be made simply by squeezing up or spreading out leets, instantaneously and without cost.*" [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 106]

This allows economics to avoid the obvious aggregation problems with "capital", make sense of the concept of adding an extra unit of capital to discover its "marginal productivity" and allows capital to be held "constant" so that the "marginal productivity" of labour can be found. For when *"the stock of means of production in existence can be represented as a quantity of ectoplasm, we can say, appealing to Euler's theorem, that the rent per unit of ectoplasm is equal to the marginal product of the given quantity of ectoplasm when it is fully utilised. This does seem to add anything of interest to the argument."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99] This ensures reality has to be ignored and so economic theory need not discuss any practical questions:

> *"When equipment is made of leets, there is no distinction between long and short-period problems ... Nine spades are lumps of leets; when the tenth man turns up it is squeezed out to provide him with a share of equipment nine-tenths of what each man had before ... There is no room for imperfect competition. There is no possibility of disappointed expectations ... There is no problem of unemployment ... Unemployed workers would bid down wages and the pre-existing quantity of leets would be spread out to accommodate them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 107]

The concept that capital goods are made of ectoplasm and can be remoulded into the profit maximising form from day to day was invented in order to prove that labour and capital both receive their contribution to society, to show that labour is not exploited. It is not meant to be taken literally, it is only a parable, but without it the whole argument (and defence of capitalism) collapses. Once capital equipment is admitted to being



money for current needs, one can more easily "discount" the future (for example, workers will value the future product of their labour less than their current wages simply because without those wages there will be no future). We will discuss this issue in more detail later and will not do so here (see section C.2.7).

The second thing to ask is why should the supply price of waiting be assumed to be positive? If the interest rate simply reflects the subjective evaluations of individuals then, surely, it could be negative or zero. Deferred gratification is as plausible a psychological phenomenon as the overvaluation of present satisfactions, while uncertainty is as likely to produce immediate consumption as it is to produce provision for the future (saving). Thus Joan Robinson:

> *"The rate of interest (excess of repayment over original loan) would settle at the level which equated supply and demand for loans. Whether it was positive or negative would depend upon whether spendthrifts or prudent family men happened to predominate in the community. There is no* ***a priori*** *presumption in favour of a positive rate. Thus, the rate of interest cannot be account for as the 'cost of waiting.'*
>
> *"The reason why there is always a demand for loans at a positive rate of interest, in an economy where there is property in the means of production and means of production are scarce, is that finance expended now can be used to employ labour in productive processes which will yield a surplus in the future over costs of production. Interest is positive because profits are positive (though at the same time the cost and difficulty of obtaining finance play a part in keeping productive equipment scarce, and so contribute to maintaining the level of profits)."* [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 83]

als have different "time preferences." Some economic schools, like the Austrian school, argue that the actions by banks and states to artificially lower interest rates (by, for example, creating credit or printing money) create the business cycle as this distorts the information about people's willingness to consume now rather than later leading to over investment and so to a slump.

That the idea of doing nothing (i.e. not consuming) can be considered as productive says a lot about capitalist theory. However, this is beside the point as the argument is riddled with assumptions and, moreover, ignores key problems with the notion that savings always lead to investment.

The fundamental weakness of the theory of time preference must be that it is simply an unrealistic theory and does not reflect where the supply of capital does come from. It **may** be appropriate to the decisions of households between saving and consumption, but the main source of new capital is previous profit under capitalism. The motivation of making profits is not the provision of future means of consumption, it is profits for their own sake. The nature of capitalism requires profits to be accumulated into capital for if capitalists **did** only consume the system would break down. While from the point of view of the mainstream economics such profit-making for its own sake is irrational in reality it is imposed on the capitalist by capitalist competition. It is only by constantly investing, by introducing new technology, work practices and products, can the capitalists keep their capital (and income) intact. Thus the motivation of capitalists to invest is imposed on them by the capitalist system, not by subjective evaluations between consuming more later rather than now.

Ignoring this issue and looking at the household savings, the theory still raises questions. The most obvious problem is that an individual's psychology is conditioned by the social situation they find themselves in. Ones "time preference" is determined by ones social position. If one has more than enough



actual, specific objects that cannot be squeezed, without cost, into new objects to accommodate more or less workers, such comforting notions that profits equal the (marginal) contribution of "capital" or that unemployment is caused by wages being too high have to be discarded for the wishful thinking they most surely are.

The last problem arises when ignore these issues and assume that marginal productivity theory is correct. Consider the notion of the short run, where at least one factor of production cannot be varied. To determine its marginal productivity then capital has to be the factor which is varied. However, common sense suggests that capital is the least flexible factor and if that can be varied then every other one can be as well? As dissident economist Piero Sraffa argued, when a market is defined broadly enough, then the key neoclassical assumption that the demand and supply of a commodity are independent breaks down. This was applied by another economist, Amit Bhaduri, to the "capital market" (which is, by nature, a broadly defined industry). Steve Keen usually summarises these arguments, noting that *"at the aggregate level [of the economy as a whole], the desired relationship — the rate of profit equals the marginal productivity of capital — will not hold true"* as it only applies *"when the capital to labour ratio is the same in all industries — which is effectively the same as saying there is only one industry."* This *"proves Sraffa's assertion that, when a broadly defined industry is considered, changes in its conditions of supply and demand will affect the distribution of income."* This means that a *"change in the capital input will change output, but it also changes the wage, and the rate of profit … As a result, the distribution of income is neither meritocratic nor determined by the market. The distribution of income is to some significant degree determined independently of marginal productivity and the impartial blades of supply and demand … To be able to work out prices, it is first necessary to know the distribution of income … There is therefore nothing sacrosanct about the prices that apply*

*in the economy, and equally nothing sacrosanct about the distribution of income. It reflects the relative power of different groups in society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 135]

It should be noted that this critique bases itself on the neoclassical assumption that it is possible to define a factor of production called capital. In other words, even if we assume that neo-classical economics theory of capital is not circular reasoning, it's theory of distribution is still logically wrong.

So mainstream economics is based on a theory of distribution which is utterly irrelevant to the real world and is incoherent when applied to capital. This would not be important except that it is used to justify the distribution of income in the real world. For example, the widening gap between rich and poor (it is argued) simply reflects a market efficiently rewarding more productive people. Thus the compensation for corporate chief executives climbs so sharply because it reflects their marginal productivity. Except, of course, the theory supports no such thing — except in a make believe world which cannot exist (lassiez fairy land, anyone?).

It must be noted that this successful critique of neoclassical economics by dissident economists was first raised by Joan Robinson in the 1950s (it usually called the Cambridge Capital Controversy). It is rarely mentioned these days. While most economic textbooks simply repeat the standard theory, the fact is that this theory has been successfully debunked by dissident economists over four decades go. As Steve Keen notes, while leading neoclassical economists admitted that the critique was correct in the 1960s, today *"economic theory continues to use exactly the same concepts which Sraffa's critique showed to be completely invalid"* in spite the *"definitive capitulation by as significant an economist as Paul Samuelson."* As he concludes: *"There is no better sign of the intellectual bankruptcy of economics than this."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 146, p. 129 and p. 147]

Why? Simply because the Cambridge Capital Controversy would expose the student of economics to some serious problems with neo-classical economics and they may start questioning the internal consistency of its claims. They would also be exposed to alternative economic theories and start to question whether profits **are** the result of exploitation. As this would put into jeopardy the role of economists as, to quote Marx, the *"hired prize-fighters"* for capital who replace *"genuine scientific research"* with *"the bad conscience and evil intent of apologetics."* Unsurprisingly, he characterised this as *"vulgar economics."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 97]



## C.2.6 Does interest represent the "time value" of money?

One defence of interest is the notion of the "time value" of money, that individuals have different "time preferences." Most individuals prefer, it is claimed, to consume now rather than later while a few prefer to save now on the condition that they can consume more later. Interest, therefore, is the payment that encourages people to defer consumption and so is dependent upon the subjective evaluations of individuals. It is, in effect, an exchange over time and so surplus value is generated by the exchange of present goods for future goods.

Based on this argument, many supporters of capitalism claim that it is legitimate for the person who provided the capital to get back **more** than they put in, because of the "time value of money." This is because investment requires savings and the person who provides those had to postpone a certain amount of current consumption and only agree to do this only if they get an increased amount later (i.e. a portion, over time, of the increased output that their saving makes possible). This plays a key role in the economy as it provide the funds from which investment can take place and the economy grow.

In this theory, interest rates are based upon this "time value" of money and the argument is rooted in the idea that individu-

of free and equal exchanges, capitalism is marked by hierarchy, inequality and power. This reality explains what regulates market prices and the impact of big business. In the long term, market price cannot be viewed independently of production. As David Ricardo put it:

> *"It is the cost of production which must ultimately regulate the price of commodities, and not, as has been often said, the proportion between the supply and demand: the proportion between supply and demand may, indeed, for a time, affect the market value of a commodity, until it is supplied in greater or less abundance, according as the demand may have increased or diminished; but this effect will be only of temporary duration."* [**The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation**, p. 260]

Market prices, in this (classical) analysis, are the prices that prevail at any given time on the market (and change due to transient and random variations). Natural prices are the cost of production and act as centres of gravitational attraction for market prices. Over time, market prices are tend towards natural prices but are considered unlikely to exactly meet them. Natural prices can only change due to changes in the productive process (for example, by introducing new, more productive, machinery and/or by decreasing the wages of the workforce relative to its output). Surplus value (the difference between market and natural prices) are the key to understanding how supply changes to meet demand. This produces the dynamic of market forces:

> *"Let us suppose that all commodities are at their natural price, and consequently that the profits of capital in all employments are exactly at the same rate … Suppose now that a change of fashion should in-*



Which brings us to the next obvious problem, namely that "entrepreneurial" activity becomes meaningless when divorced from owning capital. This is because any action which is taken to benefit an individual and involves "discovery" is considered entrepreneurial. Successfully looking for a better job? Your new wages are entrepreneurial profit. Indeed, successfully finding **any** job makes the wages entrepreneurial profit. Workers successfully organising and striking to improve their pay and conditions? An entrepreneurial act whose higher wages are, in fact, entrepreneurial profit. Selling your shares in one company and buying others? Any higher dividends are entrepreneurial profit. Not selling your shares? Likewise. What income flow could **not** be explained by "entrepreneurial" activity if we try hard enough?

In other words, the term becomes meaningless unless it is linked to owning capital and so any non-trivial notion of entrepreneurial activity requires private property, i.e. property which functions as capital. This can be seen from an analysis of whether entrepreneurship which is **not** linked to owning capital or land creates surplus value (profits) or not. It is possible, for example, that an entrepreneur can make a profit by buying cheap in one market and selling dear in another. However, this simply redistributes existing products and surplus value, it does not **create** them. This means that the entrepreneur does not create something from nothing, he takes something created by others and sells it at a higher price and so gains a slice of the surplus value created by others. If buying high and selling low **was** the cause of surplus value, then profits overall would be null as any gainer would be matched by a loser. Ironically, for all its talk of being concerned about process, this defence of entrepreneurial profits rests on the same a **static** vision of capitalism as does neo-classical economics.

Thus entrepreneurship is inherently related to inequalities in economic power, with those at the top of the market hierarchy having more ability to gain benefits of it than those at the

bottom. Entrepreneurship, in other words, rather than an independent factor is rooted in social inequality. The larger one's property, the more able they are to gather and act on information advantages, i.e. act in as an entrepreneur. Moreover the ability to exercise the entrepreneurial spirit or innovate is restricted by the class system of capitalism. To implement a new idea, you need money. As it is extremely difficult for entrepreneurs to act on the opportunities they have observed without the ownership of property, so profits due to innovation simply becomes yet another reward for already being wealthy or, at best, being able to convince the wealthy to loan you money in the expectation of a return. Given that credit is unlikely to be forthcoming to those without collateral (and most working class people are asset-poor), entrepreneurs are almost always capitalists because of social inequality. Entrepreneurial opportunities are, therefore, not available to everyone and so it is inherently linked to private property (i.e. capital).

So while entrepreneurship in the abstract may help explain the distribution of income, it neither explains why surplus value exists in the first place nor does it justify the entrepreneur's appropriation of part of that surplus. To explain why surplus value exists and why capitalists may be justified in keeping it, we need to look at the other aspect of entrepreneurship, innovation as this is rooted in the actual production process.

Innovation occurs in order to expand profits and so survive competition from other companies. While profits can be redistributed in circulation (for example by oligopolistic competition or inflation) this can only occur at the expense of other people or capitals (see sections C.5 and C.7). Innovation, however, allows the generation of profits directly from the new or increased productivity (i.e. exploitation) of labour it allows. This is because it is in production that commodities, and so profits, are created and innovation results in new products and/or new production methods. New products mean



# C.5 Why does Big Business get a bigger slice of profits?

As described in the last section, due to the nature of the capitalist market, large firms soon come to dominate. Once a few large companies dominate a particular market, they form an oligopoly from which a large number of competitors have effectively been excluded, thus reducing competitive pressures. In this situation there is a tendency for prices to rise above what would be the "market" level, as the oligopolistic producers do not face the potential of new capital entering "their" market (due to the relatively high capital costs and other entry/movement barriers).

The domination of a market by a few big firms results in exploitation, but of a different kind than that rooted in production. Capitalism is based on the extraction of surplus value of workers in the production process. When a market is marked by oligopoly, this exploitation is supplemented by the exploitation of **consumers** who are charged higher prices than would be the case in a more competitive market. This form of competition results in Big Business having an "unfair" slice of available profits as oligopolistic profits are *"created at the expense of individual capitals still caught up in competition."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics, and the Age of Inflation**, p. 38]

To understand why big business gets a bigger slice of the economic pie, we need to look at what neo-classical economics tries to avoid, namely production and market power. Mainstream economics views capitalism as a mode of distribution (the market), not a mode of production. Rather than a world

of capitalism, we imagine that markets associated with new technologies will go the same way (and the evidence seems to support this).

The reality of capitalist development is that even **if** workers invested in new markets, one that require low set-up costs, the dynamic of the system is such that over time these markets will also become dominated by a few big firms. Moreover, to survive in an oligopolised economy small cooperatives will be under pressure to hire wage labour and otherwise act as capitalist concerns. Therefore, even if we ignore the massive state intervention which created capitalism in the first place (see section F.8), the dynamics of the system are such that relations of domination and oppression will always be associated with it — they cannot be "competed" away as the actions of competition creates and re-enforces them (also see sections J.5.11 and J.5.12 on the barriers capitalism places on co-operatives and self-management even though they are more efficient).

So the effects of the concentration of capital on the options open to us are great and very important. The existence of Big Business has a direct impact on the "voluntary" nature of wage labour as it produces very effective "barriers of entry" for alternative modes of production. The resultant pressures big business place on small firms also reduces the viability of co-operatives and self-employment to survive **as** co-operatives and non-employers of wage labour, effectively marginalising them as true alternatives. Moreover, even in new markets the dynamics of capitalism are such that **new** barriers are created all the time, again reducing our options.

Overall, the **reality** of capitalism is such that the equality of opportunity implied in models of "perfect competition" is lacking. And without such equality, wage labour cannot be said to be a "voluntary" choice between available options — the options available have been skewed so far in one direction that the other alternatives have been marginalised.



that the company can reap excess profits until competitors enter the new market and force the market price down by competition. New production methods allow the intensity of labour to be increased, meaning that workers do more work relative to their wages (in other words, the cost of production falls relative to the market price, meaning extra profits).

So while competition ensures that capitalist firms innovate, innovation is the means by which companies can get an edge in the market. This is because innovation means that *"capitalist excess profits come from the production process… when there is an above-average rise in labour productivity; the reduced costs then enable firms to earn higher than average profits in their products. But this form of excess profits is only temporary and disappears again when improved production methods become more general."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 38] Capitalists, of course, use a number of techniques to stop the spread of new products or production methods in order to maintain their position, such as state enforced intellectual property rights.

Innovation as the source of profits is usually associated with economist Joseph Schumpeter who described and praised capitalism's genius for *"creative destruction"* caused by capitalists who innovate, i.e. introduce new goods and means of production. Schumpeter's analysis of capitalism is more realistic than the standard neo-classical perspective. He recognised that capitalism was marked by a business cycle which he argued flowed from cycles of innovation conducted by capitalists. He also rejected the neo-classical assumption of perfect competition, arguing that the *"introduction of new methods of production and new commodities is hardly compatible with perfect and perfectly prompt competition from the start … As a matter of fact, perfect competition has always been temporarily stemmed whenever anything new is being introduced."* [**Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy**, p. 104]

This analysis presents a picture of capitalism more like it actually is rather than what economics would like it to be. However, this does not mean that its justification for profits is correct, far from it. Anarchists do agree that it is true that individuals do see new potential and act in innovative ways to create new products or processes. However, this is not the source of surplus value. This is because an innovation only becomes a source of profits once it actually produced, i.e. once workers have toiled to create it (in the case of new goods) or used it (in the case of new production techniques). An idea in and of itself produces nothing unless it is applied. The reason why profits result from innovation is due to the way the capitalist firm is organised rather than any inherent aspect of innovation.

Ultimately, entrepreneurialism is just a fancy name for decision making and, as such, it is a **labour** income (labour refers to physical **and** mental activities). However, as noted above, there are two types of labour under capitalism, the labour of production and the labour of exploitation. Looking at entrepreneurialism in a workplace situation, it is obvious that it is **not** independent of owning or managing capital and so it is impossible to distinguish profits produced by "entrepreneurial" activity and profits resulting from a return on property (and so the labour of others). In other words, it is the labour of exploitation and any income from it is simply monopoly profit. This is because the capitalist or manager has a monopoly of power within the workplace and, consequently, can reap the benefits this privileged position ensures. The workers have their opportunities for entrepreneurialism restricted and monopolised by the few in power who, when deciding who contributes most to production, strangely enough decide it is themselves.

This can be seen from the fact that innovation in terms of new technology is used to help win the class war at the point of production for the capitalists. As the aim of capitalist production is to maximise the profits available for capitalists and management to control, it follows that capitalism will intro-



stricting the options available on the "free market" for working people. Chomsky states the obvious:

> *"If you had equality of power, you could talk about freedom, but when all the power is concentrated in one place, then freedom's a joke. People talk about a 'free market.' Sure. You and I are perfectly free to set up an automobile company and compete with General Motors. Nobody's stopping us. That freedom is meaningless ... It's just that power happens to be organised so that only certain options are available. Within that limited range of options, those who have the power say, 'Let's have freedom.' That's a very skewed form of freedom. The principle is right. How freedom works depends on what the social structures are. If the freedoms are such that the only choices you have objectively are to conform to one or another system of power, there's no freedom."* [**Language and Politics**, pp. 641–2]

As we noted in section C.4, those with little capital are reduced to markets with low set-up costs and low concentration. Thus, claim the supporters of capitalism, workers still have a choice. However, this choice is (as we have indicated) somewhat limited by the existence of oligopolistic markets — so limited, in fact, that less than 10% of the working population are self-employed workers. Moreover, it is claimed, technological forces may work to increase the number of markets that require low set-up costs (the computing market is often pointed to as an example). However, similar predictions were made over 100 years ago when the electric motor began to replace the steam engine in factories. *"The new technologies [of the 1870s] may have been compatible with small production units and decentralised operations... That... expectation was not fulfilled."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] From the history

This means that economics is based on a model which assumes that firms have no impact on the markets they operate it. This assumption is violated in most real markets and so the neo-classical conclusions regarding the outcomes of competition cannot be supported. That the assumptions of economic ideology so contradicts reality also has important considerations on the "voluntary" nature of wage labour. If the competitive model assumed by neo-classical economics held we would see a wide range of ownership types (including co-operatives, extensive self-employment and workers hiring capital) as there would be no "barriers of entry" associated with firm control. This is not the case — workers hiring capital is non-existent and self-employment and co-operatives are marginal. The dominant control form is capital hiring labour (wage slavery).

With a model based upon "perfect competition," supporters of capitalism could build a case that wage labour is a voluntary choice — after all, workers (in such a market) could hire capital or form co-operatives relatively easily. But the **reality** of the "free" market is such that this model does not exist — and as an assumption, it is seriously misleading. If we take into account the actuality of the capitalist economy, we soon have to realise that oligopoly is the dominant form of market and that the capitalist economy, by its very nature, restricts the options available to workers — which makes the notion that wage labour is a "voluntary" choice untenable.

If the economy is so structured as to make entry into markets difficult and survival dependent on accumulating capital, then these barriers are just as effective as government decrees. If small businesses are squeezed by oligopolies then chances of failure are increased (and so off-putting to workers with few resources) and if income inequality is large, then workers will find it very hard to find the collateral required to borrow capital and start their own co-operatives. Thus, looking at the **reality** of capitalism (as opposed to the textbooks) it is clear that the existence of oligopoly helps to maintain wage labour by re-



duce technology that will allow more surplus value to be extracted from workers. As Cornelius Castoriadis argues, capitalism *"does not utilise a socially neutral technology for capitalist ends. Capitalism has created capitalist technology, which is by no means neutral. The real essence of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: It is to subordinate and dominate the producers."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 104] Therefore, "innovation" (technological improvement) can be used to increase the power of capital over the workforce, to ensure that workers will do as they are told. In this way innovation can maximise surplus value production by trying to increase domination during working hours as well as by increasing productivity by new processes.

These attempts to increase profits by using innovation is the key to capitalist expansion and accumulation. As such innovation plays a key role within the capitalist system. However, the source of profits does not change and remains in the labour, skills and creativity of workers in the workplace. As such, innovation results in profits because labour is exploited in the production process, **not** due to some magical property of innovation.

The question now arises whether profits are justified as a reward for those who made the decision to innovate in the first place. This, however, fails for the obvious reason that capitalism is marked by a hierarchical organisation of production. It is designed so that a few make all the decisions while the majority are excluded from power. As such, to say that capitalists or managers deserve their profits due to innovation is begging the question. Profits which are claimed to flow from innovation are, in fact, the reward for having a monopoly, namely the monopoly of decision making within the workplace, rather than some actual contribution to production. The only thing management does is decide which innovations to pursue and to reap the benefits they create. In other words, they gain a reward simply due to their monopoly of decision making power

within a firm. Yet this hierarchy only exists because of capitalism and so can hardly be used to defend that system and the appropriation of surplus value by capitalists.

Thus, if entrepreneurial spirit is the source of profit then we can reply that under capitalism the means of exercising that spirit is monopolised by certain classes and structures. The monopoly of decision making power in the hands of managers and bosses in a capitalist firm ensure that they also monopolise the rewards of the entrepreneurialism their workforce produce. This, in turn, reduces the scope for innovation as this division of society into people who do mental and physical labour *"destroy[s] the love of work and the capacity for invention"* and under such a system, the worker *"lose[s] his intelligence and his spirit of invention."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 183 and p. 181]

These issues should be a key concern **if** entrepreneurialism **really** were considered as the unique source of profit. However, such issues as management power is rarely, if ever, discussed by the Austrian school. While they thunder against state restrictions on entrepreneurial activity, boss and management restrictions are always defended (if mentioned at all). Similarly, they argue that state intervention (say, anti-monopoly laws) can only harm consumers as it tends to discourage entrepreneurial activity yet ignore the restrictions to entrepreneurship imposed by inequality, the hierarchical structure of the capitalist workplace and negative effects both have on individuals and their development (as discussed in section B.1.1).

This, we must stress, is the key problem with the idea that innovation is the root of surplus value. It focuses attention to the top of the capitalist hierarchy, to business leaders. This implies that they, the bosses, create "wealth" and without them nothing would be done. For example, leading "Austrian" economist Israel Kirzner talks of *"the necessarily indivisible entrepreneur"* who *"is responsible for the entire*



models is usually, by way of co-incidence, that an oligopolistic market acts "as if" it were a perfectly competitive one and so we need not be concerned by rising market dominance by a few firms. Much work by the ideological supporters of "free market" capitalism is based on this premise, namely that reality works "as if" it reflected the model (rather than vice versa, in a real science) and, consequently, market power is nothing to be concerned about (that many of these "think tanks" and university places happen to be funded by the super-profits generated by big business is, of course, purely a co-incidence as these "scientists" act "as if" they were neutrally funded). In Herman's words: *"Despite their inadequacies, the new apologetic theories have profoundly affected policy, because they provide an intellectual rationale for the agenda of the powerful."* [**Op. Cit.**]

It may be argued (and it has) that the lack of interest in analysing a real economy by economists is because oligopolistic competition is hard to model mathematically. Perhaps, but this simply shows the limitations of neo-classical economics and if the tool used for a task are unsuitable, surely you should change the tool rather than (effectively) ignore the work that needs to be done. Sadly, most economists have favoured producing mathematical models which can say a lot about theory but very little about reality. That economics can become much broader and more relevant is always a possibility, but to do so would mean to take into account an unpleasant reality marked by market power, class, hierarchy and inequality rather than logical deductions derived from Robinson Crusoe. While the latter can produce mathematical models to reach the conclusions that the market is already doing a good job (or, at best, there are some imperfections which can be fixed by minor state interventions), the former cannot. Which, of course, is makes it hardly a surprise that neo-classical economists favour it so (particularly given the origins, history and role of that particular branch of economics).

and the apparent benefits of competition in the model are derived from *"a mathematical error of confusing a very small quantity with zero."* While *"there are plenty of good reasons to be wary of monopolies … economic theory does not provide any of them."* [**Debunking Economics**, p. 108, p. 101, p. 99, p. 98 and p. 107]

This is not to say that economists have ignored oligopoly. Some have busied themselves providing rationales by which to defend it, rooted in the assumption that *"the market can do it all, and that regulation and antitrust actions are misconceived. First, theorists showed that efficiency gains from mergers might reduce prices even more than monopoly power would cause them to rise. Economists also stressed 'entry,' claiming that if mergers did not improve efficiency any price increases would be wiped out eventually by new companies entering the industry. Entry is also the heart of the theory of 'contestable markets,' developed by economic consultants to AT&T, who argued that the ease of entry in cases where resources (trucks, aircraft) can be shifted quickly at low cost, makes for effective competition."* By pure co-incidence, AT&T had hired economic consultants as part of their hundreds of millions of dollars antitrust defences, in fact some 30 economists from five leading economics departments during the 1970s and early 1980s. [Edward S. Herman, *"The Threat From Mergers: Can Antitrust Make a Difference?"*, **Dollars and Sense**, no. 217, May/June 1998]

Needless to say, these new "theories" are rooted in the same assumptions of neo-classical economists and, as such, are based on notions we have already debunked. As Herman notes, they *"suffer from over-simplification, a strong infusion of ideology, and lack of empirical support."* He notes that mergers *"often are motivated by factors other than enhancing efficiency — such as the desire for monopoly power, empire building, cutting taxes, improving stock values, and even as a cover for poor management (such as when the badly-run U.S. Steel bought control of Marathon Oil)."* The conclusion of these



*product, The contributions of the factor inputs, being without an entrepreneurial component, are irrelevant for the ethical position being taken."* [*"Producer, Entrepreneur, and the Right to Property,"* pp. 185–199, **Perception, Opportunity, and Profit**, p. 195] The workforce is part of the *"factor inputs"* who are considered *"irrelevant."* He quotes economist Frank Knight to bolster this analysis that the entrepreneur solely creates wealth and, consequently, deserves his profits:

> *"Under the enterprise system, a special social class, the businessman, direct economic activity:* ***they are in the strict sense the producers, while the great mass of the population merely furnishes them with productive services, placing their persons and their property at the disposal of this class."*** [quoted by Kirzner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189]

If, as Chomsky stresses, the capitalist firm is organised in a fascist way, the "entrepreneurial" defence of profits is its ideology, its **"Führerprinzip"** (the German for *"leader principle"*). This ideology sees each organisation as a hierarchy of leaders, where every leader (Führer, in German) has absolute responsibility in his own area, demands absolute obedience from those below him and answers only to his superiors. This ideology was most infamously applied by fascism but its roots lie in military organisations which continue to use a similar authority structure today.

Usually defenders of capitalism contrast the joys of "individualism" with the evils of "collectivism" in which the individual is sub-merged into the group or collective and is made to work for the benefit of the group. Yet when it comes to capitalist industry, they stress the abilities of the people at the top of the company, the owner, the entrepreneur, and treat as unpeople those who do the actual work (and ignore the very real subordination of those lower down the hierarchy). The entrepreneur

is considered the driving force of the market process and the organisations and people they govern are ignored, leading to the impression that the accomplishments of a firm are the personal triumphs of the capitalists, as though their subordinates are merely tools not unlike the machines on which they labour.

The ironic thing about this argument is that if it were true, then the economy would grind to a halt (we discuss this more fully in our critique of Engels's diatribe against anarchism *"On Authority"* in section H.4.4). It exposes a distinct contradiction within capitalism. While the advocates of entrepreneurialism assert that the entrepreneur is the only real producer of wealth in society, the fact is that the entrepreneurialism of the workforce industry is required to implement the decisions made by the bosses. Without this unacknowledged input, the entrepreneur would be impotent. Kropotkin recognised this fact when he talked of the workers *"who have added to the original invention"* little additions and contributions *"without which the most fertile idea would remain fruitless."* Nor does the idea itself develop out of nothing as *"every invention is a synthesis, the resultant of innumerable inventions which have preceded it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

> *"The capitalist organisation of production is profoundly contradictory ... It claims to reduce the worker to a limited and determined set of tasks, but it is obliged at the same time to rely upon the universal capacities he develops both as a function of and in opposition to the situation in which he is placed ... Production can be carried out only insofar as the worker himself organises his work and goes beyond his theoretical role of pure and simply executant,"* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 181]

Moreover, such a hierarchical organisation cannot help but generate wasted potential. Most innovation is the cumulative



ture of the "science" (see section C.1 for more discussion of the non-scientific nature of mainstream economics).

This does not mean that reality has been totally forgotten. Some work was conducted on "imperfect competition" in the 1930s independently by two economists (Edward Chamberlin and Joan Robinson) but these were exceptions to the rule and even these models were very much in the traditional analytical framework, i.e. were still rooted in the assumptions and static world of neo-classical economics. These models assume that there are many producers and many consumers in a given market and that there are no barriers to entry and exit, that is, the characteristics of a monopolistically competitive market are almost exactly the same as in perfect competition, with the exception of heterogeneous products. This meant that monopolistic competition involves a great deal of non-price competition. This caused Robinson to later distance herself from her own work and look for more accurate (non-neoclassical) ways to analyse an economy.

As noted, neo-classical economics **does** have a theory on "monopoly," a situation (like perfect competition) which rarely exists. Ignoring that minor point, it is as deeply flawed as the rest of that ideology. It argues that "monopoly" is bad because it produces a lower output for a higher price. Unlike perfect competition, a monopolist can set a price above marginal cost and so exploit consumers by over pricing. In contrast, perfectly competitive markets force their members to set price to be equal to marginal cost. As it is rooted in the assumptions we exposed as nonsense as section C.1, this neo-classical theory on free competition and monopoly is similarly invalid. As Steve Keen notes, there is *"no substance"* to the neo-classical *"critique of monopolies"* as it *"erroneously assumes that the perfectly competitive firm faces a horizontal demand curve,"* which is impossible given a downward sloping market demand curve. This means that *"the individual firm and the market level aspects of perfect competition are inconsistent"*

could still note in 1984 that *"traditional economy theory ... offers very little indeed by way of explanation of oligopolistic behaviour"* in spite (or, perhaps, **because**) it was *"the most important market situation today"* (as *"instances of monopoly"* are *"as difficult to find as perfect competition."*). In other words, capitalist economics does *"not know how to explain the most important part of a modern industrial economy."* [Peter Donaldson, **Economics of the Real World** p. 141, p. 140 and p. 142]

Over two decades later, the situation had not changed. For example, one leading introduction to economics notes *"the prevalence of oligopoly"* and admits it *"is far more common than either perfect competition or monopoly."* However, *"the analysis of oligopoly turns out to present some puzzles for which they is no easy solution"* as *"the analysis of oligopoly is far more difficult and messy than that of perfect competition."* Why? *"When we try to analyse oligopoly, the economists usual way of thinking — asking how self-interested individuals would behave, then analysing their interaction — does not work as well as we might hope."* Rest assured, though, there is not need to reconsider the *"usual way"* of economic analysis to allow it to analyse something as marginal as the most common market form for, by luck, *"the industry behaves 'almost' as if it were perfectly competitive."* [Paul Krugman and Robin Wells, **Economics**, p. 383, p. 365 and p. 383] Which is handy, to say the least.

Given that oligopoly has marked capitalist economics since, at least, the 1880s it shows how little concerned with reality mainstream economics is. In other words, neoclassicalism was redundant when it was first formulated (if four or five large firms are responsible for most of the output of an industry, avoidance of price competition becomes almost automatic and the notion that all firms are price takers is an obvious falsehood). That mainstream economists were not interested in including such facts into their models shows the ideological na-



effect of lots of incremental process improvements and the people most qualified to identify opportunities for such improvements are, obviously, those involved in the process. In the hierarchical capitalist firm, those most aware of what would improve efficiency have the least power to do anything about it. They also have the least incentive as well as any productivity increases resulting from their improvements will almost always enrich their bosses and investors, not them. Indeed, any gains may be translated into layoffs, soaring stock prices, and senior management awarding itself a huge bonus for "cutting costs." What worker in his right mind would do something to help their worst enemy? As such, capitalism hinders innovation:

> *"capitalism divides society into a narrow stratum of directors (whose function is to decide and organise everything) and the vast majority of the population, who are reduced to carrying out (executing) the decisions made by these directors. As a result of this very fact, most people experience their own lives as something alien to them ... It is nonsensical to seek to organise people ... as if they were mere objects ... In real life, capitalism is obliged to base itself on people's capacity for self-organisation, on the individual and collective creativity of the producers. Without making use of these abilities the system would not survive a day. But the whole 'official' organisation of modern society both ignores and seeks to suppress these abilities to the utmost. The result is not only an enormous waste due to untapped capacity. The system does more: It* ***necessarily*** *engenders opposition, a struggle against it by those upon whom it seeks to impose itself ... The net result is not only waste but perpetual conflict."* [Castoriadis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 93]

While workers make the product and make entrepreneurial decisions every day, in the face of opposition of the company hierarchy, the benefits of those decisions are monopolised by the few who take all the glory for themselves. The question now becomes, why should capitalists and managers have a monopoly of power and profits when, in practice, they do not and cannot have a monopoly of entrepreneurialism within a workplace? If the output of a workplace is the result of the combined mental and physical activity (entrepreneurialism) of all workers, there is no justification either for the product or "innovation" (i.e. decision making power) to be monopolised by the few.

We must also stress that innovation itself is a form of labour — mental labour. Indeed, many companies have Research and Development groups in which workers are paid to generate new and innovative ideas for their employers. This means that innovation is not related to property ownership at all. In most modern industries, as Schumpeter himself acknowledged, innovation and technical progress is conducted by *"teams of trained specialists, who turn out what is required and make it work in predictable ways"* and so *"[b]ureau and committee work tends to replace individual action."* This meant that *"the leading man ... is becoming just another office worker — and one who is not always difficult to replace."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133] And we must also point out that many new innovations come from individuals who combine mental and physical labour outside of capitalist companies. Given this, it is difficult to argue that profits are the result of innovation of a few exceptional people rather than by workers when the innovations, as well as being worked or produced by workers are themselves are created by teams of workers.

As such, "innovation" and "entrepreneurialism" is not limited to a few great people but rather exists in all of us. While the few may currently monopolise "entrepreneurialism" for their own benefit, an economy does not need to work this way. De-



capitalism's tendency to result in big business. The impact of the wealth of the few on the lives of the many is indicated in section D of the FAQ. As shown there, in addition to involving direct authority over employees, capitalism also involves indirect control over communities through the power that stems from wealth.

Thus capitalism is not the free market described by such people as Adam Smith — the level of capital concentration has made a mockery of the ideas of free competition.

## C.4.3 What does the existence of Big Business mean for economic theory and wage labour?

Here we indicate the impact of Big Business on economic theory itself and wage labour. In the words of Michal Kalecki, perfect competition is "a most unrealistic assumption" and *"when its actual status of a handy model is forgotten becomes a dangerous myth."* [quoted by Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 8] Unfortunately mainstream capitalist economics is **built** on this myth. Ironically, it was against a *"background [of rising Big Business in the 1890s] that the grip of marginal economics, an imaginary world of many small firms. .. was consolidated in the economics profession."* Thus, *"[a]lmost from its conception, the theoretical postulates of marginal economics concerning the nature of companies [and of markets, we must add] have been a travesty of reality."* [Paul Ormerod, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 55–56]

This can be seen from the fact that mainstream economics has, for most of its history, effectively ignored the fact of oligopoly for most of its history. Instead, economics has refined the model of "perfect competition" (which cannot exist and is rarely, if ever, approximated) and developed an analysis of monopoly (which is also rare). Significantly, an economist

*when market power so reduces competitive pressures that administrative reforms can be dispensed with. One notorious case was … U.S. Steel [formed in 1901]. Nevertheless, the company was hardly a commercial failure, effective market control endured for decades, and above normal returns were made on the watered stock … Another such case was Ford. The company survived the 1930s only because of cash reserves stocked away in its glory days. 'Ford provides an excellent illustration of the fact that a really large business organisation can withstand a surprising amount of mismanagement.'"* [**Accumulation and Power**, p. 174]

This means that the market power which bigness generates can counteract the costs of size, in terms of the bureaucratic administration it generates and the usual wastes associated with centralised, top-down hierarchical organisation. The local and practical knowledge so necessary to make sensible decision cannot be captured by capitalist hierarchies and, as a result, as bigness increases, so does the inefficiencies in terms of human activity, resource use and information. However, this waste that workplace bureaucracy creates can be hidden in the super-profits which big business generates which means, by confusing profits with efficiency, capitalism helps misallocate resources. This means, as price-setters rather than price-takers, big business can make high profits even when they are inefficient. Profits, in other words, do not reflect "efficiency" but rather how effectively they have secured market power. In other words, the capitalist economy is dominated by a few big firms and so profits, far from being a signal about the appropriate uses of resources, simply indicate the degree of economic power a company has in its industry or market.

Thus Big Business reduces efficiency within an economy on many levels as well as having significant and lasting impact on society's social, economic and political structure.

The effects of the concentration of capital and wealth on society are very important, which is why we are discussing



cision making need **not** be centralised in a few hands. Ordinary workers can manage their own productive activity, innovate and make decisions to meet social and individual needs (i.e. practice "entrepreneurialism"). This can be seen from various experiments in workers' control where increased equality within the workplace actually increases productivity and innovation. As these experiments show workers, when given the chance, can develop numerous "good ideas" **and**, equally as important, produce them. A capitalist with a "good idea," on the other hand, would be powerless to produce it without workers and it is this fact that shows that innovation, in and of itself, is not the source of surplus value.

So, contrary to much capitalist apologetics, innovation is not the monopoly of an elite class of humans. It is part of all of us, although the necessary social environment needed to nurture and develop it in all is crushed by the authoritarian workplaces of capitalism and the effects of inequalities of wealth and power within society as a whole. If workers were truly incapable of innovation, any shift toward greater control of production by workers should result in decreased productivity. What one actually finds, however, is just the opposite: productivity increased dramatically as ordinary people were given the chance, usually denied them, to apply their skills and talents. They show the kind of ingenuity and creativity people naturally bring to a challenging situation — if they are allowed to, if they are participants rather than servants or subordinates.

In fact, there is *"a growing body of empirical literature that is generally supportive of claims for the economic efficiency of the labour-managed firm. Much of this literature focuses on productivity, frequently finding it to be positively correlated with increasing levels of participation … Studies that encompass a range of issues broader than the purely economic also tend to support claims for the efficiency of labour managed and worker-controlled firms … In addition, studies that compare the economic preference of groups of traditionally and worker-controlled forms*

*point to the stronger performance of the latter."* [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, pp. 42–3] This is confirmed by David Noble, who points out that *"the self-serving claim"* that *"centralised management authority is the key to productivity"* is *"belied by nearly every sociological study of work."* [**Progress without People**, p. 65]

During the Spanish Revolution of 1936–39, workers self-managed many factories following the principles of participatory democracy. Productivity and innovation in the Spanish collectives was exceptionally high (particularly given the difficult economic and political situation they faced). As Jose Peirats notes, industry was *"transformed from top to bottom ... there were achieved feats pregnant with significance for people who had always striven to deny the reality of the wealth of popular initiatives unveiled by revolutions."* Workers made suggestions and presented new inventions, *"offering the product of their discoveries, genius or imaginings."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 86]

The metal-working industry is a good example. As Augustine Souchy observes, at the outbreak of the Civil War, the metal industry in Catalonia was *"very poorly developed."* Yet within months, the Catalonian metal workers had rebuilt the industry from scratch, converting factories to the production of war materials for the anti-fascist troops. A few days after the July 19th revolution, the Hispano-Suiza Automobile Company was already converted to the manufacture of armoured cars, ambulances, weapons, and munitions for the fighting front. *"Experts were truly astounded,"* Souchy writes, *"at the expertise of the workers in building new machinery for the manufacture of arms and munitions. Very few machines were imported. In a short time, two hundred different hydraulic presses of up to 250 tons pressure, one hundred seventy-eight revolving lathes, and hundreds of milling machines and boring machines were built."* [**The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management**



evidence presented by Keith Cowling *"points to the conclusion that a redistribution from wages to profits will have a depressive impact on consumption"* which may cause depression. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51] High profits also means that more can be retained by the firm to fund investment (or pay high level managers more salaries or increase dividends, of course). When capital expands faster than labour income over-investment is an increasing problem and aggregate demand cannot keep up to counteract falling profit shares (see section C.7 on more about the business cycle). Moreover, as the capital stock is larger, oligopoly will also have a tendency to deepen the eventual slump, making it last long and harder to recover from.

Looking at oligopoly from an efficiency angle, the existence of super profits from oligopolies means that the higher price within a market allows inefficient firms to continue production. Smaller firms can make average (non-oligopolistic) profits **in spite** of having higher costs, sub-optimal plant and so on. This results in inefficient use of resources as market forces cannot work to eliminate firms which have higher costs than average (one of the key features of capitalism according to its supporters). And, of course, oligopolistic profits skew allocative efficiency as a handful of firms can out-bid all the rest, meaning that resources do not go where they are most needed but where the largest effective demand lies. This impacts on incomes as well, for market power can be used to bolster CEO salaries and perks and so drive up elite income and so skew resources to meeting their demand for luxuries rather than the needs of the general population. Equally, they also allow income to become unrelated to actual work, as can be seen from the sight of CEO's getting massive wages while their corporation's performance falls.

Such large resources available to oligopolistic companies also allows inefficient firms to survive on the market even in the face of competition from other oligopolistic firms. As Richard B. Du Boff points out, efficiency can also be *"impaired*

"levelness" of the "playing field" we face in the market and the ideas dominant in society (see section D.3).

So, with increasing size, comes the increasing power, the power of oligopolies to *"influence the terms under which they choose to operate. Not only do they **react** to the level of wages and the pace of work, they also **act** to determine them... The credible threat of the shift of production and investment will serve to hold down wages and raise the level of effort [required from workers] ... [and] may also be able to gain the co-operation of the state in securing the appropriate environment ... [for] a redistribution towards profits"* in value/added and national income. [Keith Cowling and Roger Sugden, **Transnational Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 99]

Since the market price of commodities produced by oligopolies is determined by a mark-up over costs, this means that they contribute to inflation as they adapt to increasing costs or falls in their rate of profit by increasing prices. However, this does not mean that oligopolistic capitalism is not subject to slumps. Far from it. Class struggle will influence the share of wages (and so profit share) as wage increases will not be fully offset by price increases — higher prices mean lower demand and there is always the threat of competition from other oligopolies. In addition, class struggle will also have an impact on productivity and the amount of surplus value in the economy as a whole, which places major limitations on the stability of the system. Thus oligopolistic capitalism still has to contend with the effects of social resistance to hierarchy, exploitation and oppression that afflicted the more competitive capitalism of the past.

The distributive effects of oligopoly skews income, thus the degree of monopoly has a major impact on the degree of inequality in household distribution. The flow of wealth to the top helps to skew production away from working class needs (by outbidding others for resources and having firms produce goods for elite markets while others go without). The empirical



**in the Spanish Revolution, 1936–1939**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), p. 96]

Similarly, there was virtually no optical industry in Spain before the July revolution, only some scattered workshops. After the revolution, the small workshops were voluntarily converted into a production collective. *"The greatest innovation,"* according to Souchy, *"was the construction of a new factory for optical apparatuses and instruments. The whole operation was financed by the voluntary contributions of the workers. In a short time the factory turned out opera glasses, telemeters, binoculars, surveying instruments, industrial glassware in different colours, and certain scientific instruments. It also manufactured and repaired optical equipment for the fighting fronts .. . What private capitalists failed to do was accomplished by the creative capacity of the members of the Optical Workers' Union of the CNT."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 98–99]

More recently, the positive impact of workers' control has been strikingly confirmed in studies of the Mondragon co-operatives in Spain, where workers are democratically involved in production decisions and encouraged to innovate. As George Bennello notes, *"Mondragon productivity is very high — higher than in its capitalist counterparts. Efficiency, measured as the ratio of utilised resources — capital and labour — to output, is far higher than in comparable capitalist factories."* [*"The Challenge of Mondragon"*, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, p. 216]

The example of Lucas Aerospace, during the 1970s indicates well the creative potential waiting to be utilised and wasted due to capitalism. Faced with massive job cuts and restructuring, the workers and their Shop Stewards SSCC in 1976 proposed an alternative Corporate Plan to Lucas's management. This was the product of two years planning and debate among Lucas workers. Everyone from unionised engineers, to technicians to production workers and secretaries was involved in drawing it up. It was based on detailed information on the ma-

chinery and equipment that all Lucas sites had, as well as the type of skills that were in the company. The workers designed the products themselves, using their own experiences of work and life. While its central aim was to head off Lucas's planned job cuts, it presented a vision of a better world by arguing that the concentration on military goods and markets was neither the best use of resources nor in itself desirable. It argued that if Lucas was to look away from military production it could expand into markets for socially useful goods (such as medical equipment) where it already had some expertise and sales. The management were not interested, it was their to "manage" Lucas and to decide where its resources would be used, including the 18,000 people working there. Management were more than happy to exclude the workforce from any say in such fundamental matter as implementing the workers' ideas would have shown how unnecessary they, the bosses, actually were.

Another example of wasted worker innovation is provided by the US car industry. In the 1960s, Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) had proposed to the Johnson Whitehouse that the government help the US car companies to produce small cars, competing with Volkswagen which had enjoyed phenomenal success in the U.S. market. The project, unsurprisingly, fell through as the executives of the car companies were uninterested. In the 1970s, higher petrol prices saw US buyers opt for smaller cars and the big US manufacturers were caught unprepared. This allowed Toyota, Honda and other Asian car companies to gain a crucial foothold in the American market. Unsurprisingly, resistance by the union and workforce were blamed for the industry's problems when, in fact, it was the bosses, not the unions, who were blind to a potential market niche and the industry's competitive challenges.

Therefore, far from being a threat to innovation, workers' self-management would increase it and, more importantly, direct it towards improving the quality of life for all as opposed to



Moreover, the *"level of aggregate concentration helps to indicate the degree of centralisation of decision-making in the economy and the economic power of large firms."* [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 261] Thus oligopoly increases and centralises economic power over investment decisions and location decisions which can be used to play one region/country and/or workforce against another to lower wages and conditions for all (or, equally likely, investment will be moved away from countries with rebellious work forces or radical governments, the resulting slump teaching them a lesson on whose interests count). As the size of business increases, the power of capital over labour and society also increases with the threat of relocation being enough to make workforces accept pay cuts, worsening conditions, "down-sizing" and so on and communities increased pollution, the passing of pro-capital laws with respect to strikes, union rights, etc. (and increased corporate control over politics due to the mobility of capital).

Also, of course, oligopoly results in political power as their economic importance and resources gives them the ability to influence government to introduce favourable policies — either directly, by funding political parties or lobbying politicians, or indirectly by investment decisions (i.e. by pressuring governments by means of capital flight — see section D.2). Thus concentrated economic power is in an ideal position to influence (if not control) political power and ensure state aid (both direct and indirect) to bolster the position of the corporation and allow it to expand further and faster than otherwise. More money can also be plowed into influencing the media and funding political think-tanks to skew the political climate in their favour. Economic power also extends into the labour market, where restricted labour opportunities as well as negative effects on the work process itself may result. All of which shapes the society we live in; the laws we are subject to; the "evenness" and

oligopolistic market will respond "as if" it were made up of thousands and thousands of firms with little market power. An assumption belied by the reality of capitalism since its birth.

Moreover, the "free market" response to the reality of oligopoly ignores the fact that we are more than just consumers and that economic activity and the results of market events impact on many different aspects of life. Thus our argument is not focused on the fact we pay more for some products than we would in a more competitive market — it is the **wider** results of oligopoly we should be concerned with, not just higher prices, lower "efficiency" and other economic criteria. If a few companies receive excess profits just because their size limits competition the effects of this will be felt **everywhere.**

For a start, these "excessive" profits will tend to end up in few hands, so skewing the income distribution (and so power and influence) within society. The available evidence suggests that *"more concentrated industries generate a lower wage share for workers"* in a firm's value-added. [Keith Cowling, **Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 106] The largest firms retain only 52% of their profits, the rest is paid out as dividends, compared to 79% for the smallest ones and *"what might be called rentiers share of the corporate surplus — dividends plus interest as a percentage of pretax profits and interest — has risen sharply, from 20–30% in the 1950s to 60–70% in the early 1990s."* The top 10% of the US population own well over 80% of stock and bonds owned by individuals while the top 5% of stockowners own 94.5% of all stock held by individuals. Little wonder wealth has become so concentrated since the 1970s [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 75, p. 73 and pp. 66–67]. At its most basic, this skewing of income provides the capitalist class with more resources to fight the class war but its impact goes much wider than this.



increasing the profits of the few (this aspect an anarchist society will be discussed in more detail in section I). This should be unsurprising, as vesting a minority with managerial authority and deciding that the others should be cogs results in a massive loss of social initiative and drive. In addition, see sections J.5.10, J.5.11 and J.5.12 for more on why anarchists support self-management and why, in spite of its higher efficiency and productivity, the capitalist market will select against it.

To conclude, capitalist workplace hierarchy actually hinders innovation and efficiency rather than fosters it. To defend profits by appealing to innovation is, in such circumstances, deeply ironic. Not only does it end up simply justifying profits in terms of monopoly power (i.e. hierarchical decision making rewarding itself), that power also wastes a huge amount of potential innovation in society — namely the ideas and experience of the workforce excluded from the decision making process. Given that power produces resistance, capitalism ensures that the *"creative faculties [the workers] are not allowed to exercise **on behalf** of a social order that rejects them (and which they reject) are now utilised **against** that social order"* and so *"work under capitalism"* is *"a perpetual waste of creative capacity, and a constant struggle between the worker and his own activity."* [Castoriadis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 93 and p. 94]

Therefore, rather than being a defence of capitalist profit taking (and the inequality it generates) innovation backfires against capitalism. Innovation flourishes best under freedom and this points towards libertarian socialism and workers' self-management. Given the chance, workers can manage their own work and this results in increased innovation and productivity, so showing that capitalist monopoly of decision making power hinders both. This is unsurprising, for only equality can maximise liberty and so workers' control (rather than capitalist power) is the key to innovation. Only those who confuse freedom with the oppression of wage labour would be surprised by this.

## C.2.9 Do profits reflect a reward for risk?

Another common justification of surplus value is that of "risk taking", namely the notion that non-labour income is justified because its owners took a risk in providing money and deserve a reward for so doing.

Before discussing why anarchists reject this argument, it must be noted that in the mainstream neo-classical model, risk and uncertainty plays no role in generating profits. According to general equilibrium theory, there is no uncertainty (the present and future are known) and so there is no role for risk. As such, the concept of profits being related to risk is more realistic than the standard model. However, as we will argue, such an argument is unrealistic in many other ways, particularly in relation to modern-day corporate capitalism.

It is fair to say that the appeal of risk to explain and justify profits lies almost entirely in the example of the small investor who gambles their savings (for example, by opening a bar) and face a major risk if the investment does not succeed. However, in spite of the emotional appeal of such examples, anarchists argue that they are hardly typical of investment decisions and rewards within capitalism. In fact, such examples are used precisely to draw attention away from the way the system works rather than provide an insight into it. That is, the higher apparent realism of the argument hides an equally unreal model of capitalism as the more obviously unrealistic theories which seek to rationalise non-labour income.

So does "risk" explain or justify non-labour income? No, anarchists argue. This is for five reasons. Firstly, the returns on property income are utterly independent on the amount of risk involved. Secondly, all human acts involve risk of some kind and so why should property owners gain exclusively from it? Thirdly, risk as such it not rewarded, only **successful** risks are and what constitutes success is dependent on production, i.e. exploiting labour. Fourthly, most "risk" related non-labour in-



competitors being created, which results in more and more markets being dominated by a few big firms. This oligopolisation process becomes self-supporting as oligopolies (due to their size) have access to more resources than smaller firms. Thus the dynamic of competitive capitalism is to negate itself in the form of oligopoly.

## C.4.2 What are the effects of Big Business on society?

Unsurprisingly many pro-capitalist economists and supporters of capitalism try to downplay the extensive evidence on the size and dominance of Big Business in capitalism.

Some deny that Big Business is a problem — if the market results in a few companies dominating it, then so be it (the "Chicago" and "Austrian" schools are at the forefront of this kind of position — although it does seem somewhat ironic that "market advocates" should be, at best, indifferent, at worse, celebrate the suppression of market co-ordination by **planned** co-ordination within the economy that the increased size of Big Business marks). According to this perspective, oligopolies and cartels usually do not survive very long, unless they are doing a good job of serving the customer.

We agree — it is oligopolistic **competition** we are discussing here. Big Business has to be responsive to demand (when not manipulating/creating it by advertising, of course), otherwise they lose market share to their rivals (usually other dominant firms in the same market, or big firms from other countries). However, the response to demand can be skewed by economic power and, while responsive to some degree, an economy dominated by big business can see super-profits being generated by externalising costs onto suppliers and consumers (in terms of higher prices). As such, the idea that the market will solve all problems is simply assuming that an

So, looking at the **Fortune** 500, even the 500th firm is massive (with sales of around $3 billion). The top 100 firms usually have sales significantly larger than bottom 400 put together. Thus the capitalist economy is marked by a small number of extremely large firms, which are large in both absolute terms and in terms of the firms immediately below them. This pattern repeats itself for the next group and so on, until we reach the very small firms (where the majority of firms are).

The other effect of Big Business is that large companies tend to become more diversified as the concentration levels in individual industries increase. This is because as a given market becomes dominated by larger companies, these companies expand into other markets (using their larger resources to do so) in order to strengthen their position in the economy and reduce risks. This can be seen in the rise of "subsidiaries" of parent companies in many different markets, with some products apparently competing against each other actually owned by the same company!

Tobacco companies are masters of this diversification strategy; most people support their toxic industry without even knowing it! Don't believe it? Well, if are an American and you ate any Jell-O products, drank Kool-Aid, used Log Cabin syrup, munched Minute Rice, quaffed Miller beer, gobbled Oreos, smeared Velveeta on Ritz crackers, and washed it all down with Maxwell House coffee, you supported the tobacco industry, all without taking a puff on a cigarette! Similarly, in other countries. Simply put, most people have no idea which products and companies are owned by which corporations, which goods apparently in competition with others in fact bolster the profits of the same transnational company.

Ironically, the reason why the economy becomes dominated by Big Business has to do with the nature of competition itself. In order to survive (by maximising profits) in a competitive market, firms have to invest in capital, advertising, and so on. This survival process results in barriers to potential



come today plays **no** part in aiding production and, indeed, is simply not that risky due to state intervention. Fifthly, risk in this context is not independent of owning capital and, consequently, the arguments against "waiting" and innovation apply equally to this rationale. In other words, "risk" is simply yet another excuse to reward the rich for being wealthy.

The first objection is the most obvious. It is a joke to suggest that capitalism rewards in proportion to risk. There is little or no relationship between income and the risk that person faces. Indeed, it would be fairer to say that return is **inversely** proportional to the amount of risk a person faces. The most obvious example is that of a worker who wants to be their own boss and sets up their own business. That is a genuine risk, as they are risking their savings and are willing to go into debt. Compare this to a billionaire investor with millions of shares in hundreds of companies. While the former struggles to make a living, the latter gets a large regular flow of income without raising a finger. In terms of risk, the investor is wealthy enough to have spread their money so far that, in practical terms, there is none. Who has the larger income?

As such, the risk people face is dependent on their existing wealth and so it is impossible to determine any relationship between it and the income it is claimed to generate. Given that risk is inherently subjective, there is no way of discovering its laws of operation except by begging the question and using the actual rate of profits to measure the cost of risk-bearing.

The second objection is equally as obvious. The suggestion that risk taking is the source and justification for profits ignores the fact that virtually all human activity involves risk. To claim that capitalists should be paid for the risks associated with investment is to implicitly state that money is more valuable that human life. After all, workers risk their health and often their lives in work and often the most dangerous workplaces are those associated with the lowest pay. Moreover, providing safe working conditions can eat into profits and by cut-

ting health and safety costs, profits can rise. This means that to reward capitalist "risk", the risk workers face may actually increase. In the inverted world of capitalist ethics, it is usually cheaper (or more "efficient") to replace an individual worker than a capital investment. Unlike investors, bosses and the corporate elite, workers **do** face risk to life or limb daily as part of their work. Life is risky and no life is more risky that that of a worker who may be ruined by the "risky" decisions of management, capitalists and investors seeking to make their next million. While it is possible to diversify the risk in holding a stock portfolio that is not possible with a job. A job cannot be spread across a wide array of companies diversifying risk.

In other words, workers face much greater risks than their employers and, moreover, they have no say in what risks will be taken with their lives and livelihoods. It is workers who pay the lion's share of the costs of failure, not management and stockholders. When firms are in difficulty, it is the workers who are asked to pay for the failures of management though pay cuts and the elimination of health and other benefits. Management rarely get pay cuts, indeed they often get bonuses and "incentive" schemes to get them to do the work they were (over) paid to do in the first. When a corporate manager makes a mistake and their business actually fails, his workers will suffer far more serious consequences than him. In most cases, the manager will still live comfortably (indeed, many will receive extremely generous severance packages) while workers will face the fear, insecurity and hardship of having to find a new job. Indeed, as we argued in section C.2.1, it is the risk of unemployment that is a key factor in ensuring the exploitation of labour in the first place.

As production is inherently collective under capitalism, so must be the risk. As Proudhon put it, it may be argued that the capitalist *"alone runs the risk of the enterprise"* but this ignores the fact that capitalist cannot *"alone work a mine or run a railroad"* nor *"alone carry on a factory, sail a ship, play a tragedy,*



*"The latest data available show that in the manufacturing sector the four largest companies in a given industry controlled an average of 40 percent of the industry's output in 1992, and the top eight had 52 percent. These shares were practically unchanged from 1972, but they are two percentage points higher than in 1982. Retail trade (department stores, food stores, apparel, furniture, building materials and home supplies, eating and drinking places, and other retail industries) also showed a jump in market concentration since the early 1980s. The top four firms accounted for an average of 16 percent of the retail industry's sales in 1982 and 20 percent in 1992; for the eight largest, the average industry share rose from 22 to 28 percent. Some figures now available for 1997 suggest that concentration continued to increase during the 1990s; of total sales receipts in the overall economy, companies with 2,500 employees or more took in 47 percent in 1997, compared with 42 percent in 1992.*

*"In the financial sector, the number of commercial banks fell 30 percent between 1990 and 1999, while the ten largest were increasing their share of loans and other industry assets from 26 to 45 percent. It is well established that other sectors, including agriculture and telecommunications, have also become more concentrated in the 1980s and 1990s. The overall rise in concentration has not been great-although the new wave may yet make a major mark-but the upward drift has taken place from a starting point of highly concentrated economic power across the economy."* [Richard B. Du Boff and Edward S. Herman, *"Mergers, Concentration, and the Erosion of Democracy"*, **Monthly Review**, May 2001]

Schweppes dominate soft drinks while Budweiser, Miller, and Coors share the beer market. Nabisco, Keebler and Pepperidge Farms dominate the cookie industry. Expansions and mergers play their role in securing economic power and dominance. In 1996 the number three company in the US cookie industry was acquired by Keebler, which (in turn) was acquired by Kellogg in 2000. Nabisco is a division of Kraft/Philip Morris and Pepperidge Farm is owned by relatively minor player Campbell. Looking at the US airline industry, considered the great hope for deregulation in 1978, it has seen the six largest companies control of the market rise from 73% in 1978 to 85% in 1987 (and increasing fares across the board). [*"Unexpected Result of Airline Decontrol is Return to Monopolies,"* **Wall Street Journal**, 20/07/1987] By 1998, the top six's share had increased by 1% but control was effectively higher with three code-sharing alliances now linking all six in pairs.[Amy Taub, *"Oligopoly!"* **Multinational Monitor**, November 1998, p. 9]

This process of concentration is happening in industries historically considered arenas of small companies. In the UK, a few big supermarkets are driving out small corner shops (the four-firm concentration ratio of the supermarket industry is over 70%) while the British brewing industry has a staggering 85% ratio. In American, the book industry is being dominated by a few big companies, both in production and distribution. A few large conglomerates publish most leading titles while a few big chains (Barnes & Nobles and Borders) have the majority of retail sales. On the internet, Amazon dominates the field in competition with the online versions of the larger bookshops. This process occurs in market after market. As such, it should be stressed that increasing concentration afflicts most, if not all sectors of the economy. There are exceptions, of course, and small businesses never disappear totally but even in many relatively de-centralised and apparently small-scale businesses, the trend to consolidation has unmistakable:



*build the Pantheon."* He asked: *"Can anybody do such things as these, even if he has all the capital necessary?"* And so *"association"* becomes *"absolutely necessary and right"* as the *"work to be accomplished"* is *"the common and undivided property of all those who take part therein."* If not, shareholders would *"plunder the bodies and souls of the wage-workers"* and it would be *"an outrage upon human dignity and personality."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 219] In other words, as production is collective, so is the risk faced and, consequently, risk cannot be used to justify excluding people from controlling their own working lives or the fruit of their labour.

This brings us to the third reason, namely how "risk" contributes to production. The idea that "risk" is a contribution to production is equally flawed. Obviously, no one argues that **failed** investments should result in investors being rewarded for the risks they took. This means that **successful** risks are what counts and this means that the company has produced a desired good or service. In other words, the argument for risk is dependent on the investor providing capital which the workers of the company used productivity to create a commodity. However, as we discussed in section C.2.4 capital is **not** productive and, as a result, an investor may expect the return of their initial investment but no more. At best, the investor has allowed others to use their money but, as section C.2.3 indicated, giving permission to use something is not a productive act.

However, there is another sense in which risk does not, in general, contribute to production within capitalism, namely finance markets. This bring us to our fourth objection, namely that most kinds of "risks" within capitalism do **not** contribute to production and, thanks to state aid, not that risky.

Looking at the typical "risk" associated with capitalism, namely putting money into the stock market and buying shares, the idea that "risk" contributes to production is seriously flawed. As David Schweickart points out, *"[i]n the vast majority of cases, when you buy stock, you give your money not*

*to the company but to another private individual. You buy your share of stock from someone who is cashing in his share. Not a nickel of your money goes to the company itself. The company's profits would have been exactly the same, with or without your stock purchase."* [**After Capitalism**, p. 37] In fact between 1952 and 1997, about 92% of investment was paid for by firms' own internal funds and so *"the stock market contributes virtually nothing to the financing of outside investment."* Even new stock offerings only accounted for 4% of non-financial corporations capital expenditures. [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 72] *"In spite of the stock market's large symbolic value, it is notorious that it has relatively little to do with the production of goods and services,"* notes David Ellerman, *"The overwhelming bulk of stock transactions are in second-hand shares so the capital paid for shares usually goes to other stock traders, not to productive enterprises issuing new shares."* [**The Democratic worker-owned firm**, p. 199]

In other words, most investment is simply the "risk" associated with buying a potential income stream in an uncertain world. The buyer's action has not contributed to producing that income stream in any way whatsoever yet it results in a claim on the labour of others. At best, it could be said that a previous owner of the shares at some time in the past has *"contributed"* to production by providing money but this does not justify non-labour income. As such, investing in shares may rearrange existing wealth (often to the great advantage of the rearrangers) but it does produce anything. New wealth flows from production, the use of labour on existing wealth to create new wealth.

Ironically, the stock market (and the risk it is based on) harms this process. The notion that dividends represent the return for "risk" may be faulted by looking at how the markets operate in reality, rather than in theory. Stock markets react to recent movements in the price of stock markets, causing price movements to build upon price movements. According to academic finance economist Bob Haugen, this results in finance



in agriculture, 29,000 large farms (only 1.3% of all farms) accounted for one-third of total farm sales and 46% of farm profits. In 1987, the top 50 firms accounted for 54.4% of the total sales of the **Fortune** 500 largest industrial companies. [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 171] Between 1982 and 1992, the top two hundred corporations increased their share of global Gross Domestic Product from 24.2% to 26.8%, *"with the leading ten taking almost half the profits of the top two hundred."* This underestimates economic concentration as it *"does not take account of privately owned giants."* [Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 181]

The process of market domination is reflected by the increasing market share of the big companies. In Britain, the top 100 manufacturing companies saw their market share rise from 16% in 1909, to 27% in 1949, to 32% in 1958 and to 42% by 1975. In terms of net assets, the top 100 industrial and commercial companies saw their share of net assets rise from 47% in 1948 to 64% in 1968 to 80% in 1976 [R.C.O. Matthews (ed.), **Economy and Democracy**, p. 239]. Looking wider afield, we find that in 1995 about 50 firms produce about 15 percent of the manufactured goods in the industrialised world. There are about 150 firms in the world-wide motor vehicle industry. But the two largest firms, General Motors and Ford, together produce almost one-third of all vehicles. The five largest firms produce half of all output and the ten largest firms produce three-quarters. Four appliance firms manufacture 98 percent of the washing machines made in the United States. In the U. S. meat-packing industry, four firms account for over 85 percent of the output of beef, while the other 1,245 firms have less than 15 percent of the market.

While the concentration of economic power is most apparent in the manufacturing sector, it is not limited to that sector. We are seeing increasing concentration in the service sector — airlines, fast-food chains ,and the entertainment industry are just a few examples. In America Coke, Pepsi, and Cadbury-

survive on the market, so *"[t]ransnationals arise because they are a means of consolidating or increasing profits in an oligopoly world."* [Keith Cowling and Roger Sugden, **Transnational Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 20] So while a strictly national picture will show a market dominated by, say, four firms, a global view shows us twelve firms instead and market power looks much less worrisome. But just as the national market saw a increased concentration of firms over time, so will global markets. Over time a well-evolved structure of global oligopoly will appear, with a handful of firms dominating most global markets (with turnovers larger than most countries GDP — which is the case even now. For example, in 1993 Shell had assets of US$ 100.8 billion, which is more than double the GDP of New Zealand and three times that of Nigeria, and total sales of US$ 95.2 billion).

Thus the very dynamic of capitalism, the requirements for survival on the market, results in the market becoming dominated by Big Business (*"the more competition develops, the more it tends to reduce the number of competitors."* [P-J Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 243]). The irony that competition results in its destruction and the replacement of market co-ordination with planned allocation of resources is one usually lost on supporters of capitalism.

## C.4.1 How extensive is Big Business?

The effects of Big Business on assets, sales and profit distribution are clear. In the USA, in 1985, there were 14,600 commercial banks. The 50 largest owned 45.7 of all assets, the 100 largest held 57.4%. In 1984 there were 272,037 active corporations in the manufacturing sector, 710 of them (one-fourth of 1 percent) held 80.2 percent of total assets. In the service sector (usually held to be the home of small business), 95 firms of the total of 899,369 owned 28 percent of the sector's assets. In 1986



markets having endogenous instability, with such price-driven volatility accounting for over three-quarters of all volatility in finance markets. This leads to the market directing investments very badly as some investment is wasted in over-valued companies and under-valued firms cannot get finance to produce useful goods. The market's endogenous volatility reduces the overall level of investment as investors will only fund projects which return a sufficiently high level of return. This results in a serious drag on economic growth. As such, "risk" has a large and negative impact on the real economy and it seems ironic to reward such behaviour. Particularly as the high rate of return is meant to compensate for the risk of investing in the stock market, but in fact most of this risk results from the endogenous stability of the market itself. [Steve Keen, **Debunking Economics**, pp. 249–50]

Appeals to "risk" to justify capitalism are somewhat ironic, given the dominant organisational form within capitalism — the corporation. These firms are based on *"limited liability"* which was designed explicitly to reduce the risk faced by investors. As Joel Bakan notes, before this "no matter how much, or how little, a person had invested in a company, he or she was **personally** liable, without limit, for the company's debts. Investors' homes, savings, and other personal assess would be exposed to claims by creditors if a company failed, meaning that a person risked finance ruin simply by owning shares in a company. Stockholding could not becomes a truly attractive option ... until that risk was removed, which it soon was. By the middle of the nineteenth century, business leaders and politicians broadly advocated changing the law to limit the liability of shareholders to the amounts they had invested in a company. If a person bought $100 worth of shares, they reasoned, he or she should be immune to liability for anything beyond that, regardless of what happened to the company." Limited liability's *"sole purpose ... is to shield them from legal responsibility for corporations' actions"* as well as

reducing the risks of investing (unlike for small businesses). [**The Corporation**, p. 11 and p. 79]

This means that stock holders (investors) in a corporation hold no liability for the corporation's debts and obligations. As a result of this state granted privilege, potential losses cannot exceed the amount which they paid for their shares. The rationale used to justify this is the argument that without limited liability, a creditor would not likely allow any share to be sold to a buyer of at least equivalent creditworthiness as the seller. This means that limited liability allows corporations to raise funds for riskier enterprises by reducing risks and costs from the owners and shifting them onto other members of society (i.e. an externality). It is, in effect, a state granted privilege to trade with a limited chance of loss but with an unlimited chance of gain.

This is an interesting double-standard. It suggests that corporations are not, in fact, owned by shareholders at all since they take on none of the responsibility of ownership, especially the responsibility to pay back debts. Why should they have the privilege of getting profit during good times when they take none of the responsibility during bad times? Corporations are creatures of government, created with the social privileges of limited financial liability of shareholders. Since their debts are ultimately public, why should their profits be private?

Needless to say, this reducing of risk is not limited to within a state, it is applied internationally as well. Big banks and corporations lend money to developing nations but *"the people who borrowed the money [i.e. the local elite] aren't held responsible for it. It's the people . .. who have to pay [the debts] off ... The lenders are protected from risk. That's one of the main functions of the IMF, to provide risk free insurance to people who lend and invest in risky loans. They earn high yields because there's a lot of risk, but they don't have to take the risk, because it's socialised. It's transferred in various ways to Northern taxpayers through the IMP and other devices ... The whole system is one in*



or firms can also rely on its established relationships with customers or suppliers to limit the activities of smaller firms which are trying to expand (for example, using their clout to stop their contacts purchasing the smaller firms products).

Little wonder Proudhon argued that *"[i]n competition... victory is assured to the heaviest battalions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 260]

As a result of these entry/movement barriers, we see the market being divided into two main sectors — an oligopolistic sector and a more competitive one. These sectors work on two levels — within markets (with a few firms in a given market having very large market shares, power and excess profits) and within the economy itself (some markets being highly concentrated and dominated by a few firms, other markets being more competitive). This results in smaller firms in oligopolistic markets being squeezed by big business along side firms in more competitive markets. Being protected from competitive forces means that the market price of oligopolistic markets is **not** forced down to the average production price by the market, but instead it tends to stabilise around the production price of the smaller firms in the industry (which do not have access to the benefits associated with dominant position in a market). This means that the dominant firms get super-profits while new capital is not tempted into the market as returns would not make the move worthwhile for any but the biggest companies, who usually get comparable returns in their own oligopolised markets (and due to the existence of market power in a few hands, entry can potentially be disastrous for small firms if the dominant firms perceive expansion as a threat).

Thus whatever super-profits Big Business reap are maintained due to the advantages it has in terms of concentration, market power and size which reduce competition (see section C.5 for details).

And, we must note, that the processes that saw the rise of national Big Business is also at work on the global market. Just as Big Business arose from a desire to maximise profits and

These barriers work on two levels — **absolute** (entry) barriers and **relative** (movement) barriers. As business grows in size, the amount of capital required to invest in order to start a business also increases. This restricts entry of new capital into the market (and limits it to firms with substantial financial and/or political backing behind them):

> *"Once dominant organisations have come to characterise the structure of an industry, immense barriers to entry face potential competitors. Huge investments in plant, equipment, and personnel are needed ... [T]he development and utilisation of productive resources **within** the organisation takes considerable time, particularly in the face of formidable incumbents ... It is therefore one thing for a few business organisations to emerge in an industry that has been characterised by . .. highly competitive conditions. It is quite another to break into an industry... [marked by] oligopolistic market power."* [William Lazonick, **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, pp. 86–87]

Moreover, **within** the oligopolistic industry, the large size and market power of the dominant firms mean that smaller firms face expansion disadvantages which reduce competition. The dominant firms have many advantages over their smaller rivals — significant purchasing power (which gains better service and lower prices from suppliers as well as better access to resources), privileged access to financial resources, larger amounts of retained earnings to fund investment, economies of scale both within and **between** workplaces, the undercutting of prices to "uneconomical" levels and so on (and, of course, they can **buy** the smaller company — IBM paid $3.5 billion for Lotus in 1995. That is about equal to the entire annual output of Nepal, which has a population of 20 million). The large firm



*which the borrowers are released from the responsibility. That's transferred to the impoverished mass of the population in their own countries. And the lenders are protected from risk."* [Noam Chomsky, **Propaganda and the Public Mind**, p. 125]

Capitalism, ironically enough, has developed precisely by externalising risk and placing the burden onto other parties — suppliers, creditors, workers and, ultimately, society as a whole. *"Costs and risks are socialised,"* in other words, *"and the profit is privatised."* [Noam Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 185] To then turn round and justify corporate profits in terms of risk seems to be hypocritical in the extreme, particularly by appealing to examples of small business people whom usually face the burdens caused by corporate externalising of risk! Doug Henwood states the obvious when he writes shareholder *"liabilities are limited by definition to what they paid for the shares"* and *"they can always sell their shares in a troubled firm, and if they have diversified portfolios, they can handle an occasional wipe-out with hardly a stumble. Employees, and often customers and suppliers, are rarely so well-insulated."* Given that the *"signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock market itself counts for little or nothing as a source of finance"* and the argument for risk as a defence of profits is extremely weak. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 293 and p. 292]

Lastly, the risk theory of profit fails to take into account the different risk-taking abilities of that derive from the unequal distribution of society's wealth. As James Meade puts it, while *"property owners can spread their risks by putting small bits of their property into a large number of concerns, a worker cannot easily put small bits of his effort into a large number of different jobs. This presumably is the main reason we find risk-bearing capital hiring labour"* and not vice versa. [quoted by David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, pp. 129–130]

It should be noted that until the early nineteenth century, self-employment was the normal state of affairs and it has declined steadily to reach, at best, around 10% of the working

population in Western countries today. It would be inaccurate, to say the least, to explain this decline in terms of increased unwillingness to face potential risks on the part of working people. Rather, it is a product of increased costs to set up and run businesses which acts as a very effect **natural** barrier to competition (see section C.4). With limited resources available, most working people simply **cannot** face the risk as they do not have sufficient funds in the first place and, moreover, if such funds are found the market is hardly a level playing field.

This means that going into business for yourself is always a possibility, but that option is very difficult without sufficient assets. Moreover, even if sufficient funds are found (either by savings or a loan), the risk is extremely high due to the inability to diversify investments and the constant possibility that larger firms will set-up shop in your area (for example, Wal-Mart driving out small businesses or chain pubs, cafes and bars destroying local family businesses). So it is true that there is a small flow of workers into self-employment (sometimes called the petit bourgeoisie) and that, of these, a small amount become full-scale capitalists. However, these are the exceptions that prove the rule — there is a greater return into wage slavery as enterprises fail.

Simply put, the distribution of wealth (and so ability to take risks) is so skewed that such possibilities are small and, in spite being highly risky, do not provide sufficient returns to make most of them a success. That many people **do** risk their savings and put themselves through stress, insecurity and hardship in this way is, ironically, hardly a defence of capitalism as it suggests that wage labour is so bad that many people will chance everything to escape it. Sadly, this natural desire to be your own boss generally becomes, if successful, being someone else's boss! Which means, in almost all cases, it shows that to become rich you need to exploit other people's labour.

So, as with "waiting" (see section C.2.7), taking a risk is much easier if you are wealthy and so risk is simply another



*the industry"* [Sawyer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108]). J. S. Bain (in **Barriers in New Competition**) identified three main sources of entry barrier: economies of scale (i.e. increased capital costs and their more productive nature); product differentiation (i.e. advertising); and a more general category he called *"absolute cost advantage."*

This last barrier means that larger companies are able to outbid smaller companies for resources, ideas, etc. and put more money into Research and Development and buying patents. Therefore they can have a technological and material advantage over the small company. They can charge "uneconomic" prices for a time (and still survive due to their resources) — an activity called *"predatory pricing"* — and/or mount lavish promotional campaigns to gain larger market share or drive competitors out of the market. In addition, it is easier for large companies to raise external capital, and risk is generally less.

In addition, large firms can have a major impact on innovation and the development of technology — they can simply absorb newer, smaller, enterprises by way of their economic power, buying out (and thus controlling) new ideas, much the way oil companies hold patents on a variety of alternative energy source technologies, which they then fail to develop in order to reduce competition for their product (of course, at some future date they may develop them when it becomes profitable for them to do so). Also, when control of a market is secure, oligopolies will usually delay innovation to maximise their use of existing plant and equipment or introduce spurious innovations to maximise product differentiation. If their control of a market is challenged (usually by other big firms, such as the increased competition Western oligopolies faced from Japanese ones in the 1970s and 1980s), they can speed up the introduction of more advanced technology and usually remain competitive (due, mainly, to the size of the resources they have available).

the steel industry as an illustration: in 1869 the average cost of steel works in the USA was $156,000, but by 1899 it was $967,000 — a 520% increase. From 1901 to 1950, gross fixed assets increased from $740,201 to $2,829,186 in the steel industry as a whole, with the assets of Bethlehem Steel increasing by 4,386.5% from 1905 ($29,294) to 1950 ($1,314,267). These increasing assets are reflected both in the size of workplaces and in the administration levels in the company as a whole (i.e. **between** individual workplaces).

The reason for the rise in capital investment is rooted in the need for capitalist firms to gain a competitive edge on their rivals. As noted in section C.2, the source of profit is the unpaid labour of workers and this can be increased by one of two means. The first is by making workers work longer for less on the same machinery (the generation of absolute surplus value, to use Marx's term). The second is to make labour more productive by investing in new machinery (the generation of relative surplus value, again using Marx's terminology). The use of technology drives up the output per worker relative to their wages and so the workforce is exploited at a higher rate (how long before workers force their bosses to raise their wages depends on the balance of class forces as we noted in the last section). This means that capitalists are driven by the market to accumulate capital. The first firm to introduce new techniques reduces their costs relative to the market price, so allowing them to gain a surplus profit by having a competitive advantage (this addition profit disappears as the new techniques are generalised and competition invests in them).

As well as increasing the rate of exploitation, this process has an impact on the structure of the economy. With the increasing ratio of capital to worker, the cost of starting a rival firm in a given, well-developed, market prohibits all but other large firms from doing so (and here we ignore advertising and other distribution expenses, which increase start-up costs even more — *"advertising raises the capital requirements for entry into*



means for rewarding the wealthy for being wealthy. In other words, risk aversion is the dependent, not the independent, factor. The distribution of wealth determines the risks people willing to face and so cannot explain or justify that wealth. Rather than individual evaluations determining "risk", these evaluations will be dependent on the class position of the individuals involved. As Schweickart notes, *"large numbers of people simply do not have any discretionary funds to invest. They can't play at all ... among those who can play, some are better situated than others. Wealth gives access to information, expert advice, and opportunities for diversification that the small investor often lacks."* [**After Capitalism**, p. 34] As such, profits do not reflect the real cost of risk but rather the scarcity of people with anything to risk (i.e. inequality of wealth).

Similarly, given that the capitalists (or their hired managers) have a monopoly of decision making power within a firm, any risks made by a company reflects that hierarchy. As such, risk and the ability to take risks are monopolised in a few hands. If profit **is** the product of risk then, ultimately, it is the product of a hierarchical company structure and, consequently, capitalists are simply rewarding themselves because they have power within the workplace. As with "innovation" and "entrepreneurialism" (see section C.2.8), this rationale for surplus value depends on ignoring how the workplace is structured. In other words, because managers monopolise decision making ("risk") they also monopolise the surplus value produced by workers. However, the former in no way justifies this appropriation nor does it create it.

As risk is not an independent factor and so cannot be the source of profit. Indeed other activities can involve far more risk and be rewarded less. Needless to say, the most serious consequences of "risk" are usually suffered by working people who can lose their jobs, health and even lives all depending on how the risks of the wealthy turn out in an uncertain world. As such, it is one thing to gamble your own income on a risky de-

cision but quite another when that decision can ruin the lives of others. If quoting Keynes is not too out of place: *"Speculators may do no harm as bubbles on a steady stream of enterprise. But the position is serious when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation. When the capital development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done."* [**The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money**, p. 159]

Appeals of risk to justify capitalism simply exposes that system as little more than a massive casino. In order for such a system to be fair, the participants must have approximately equal chances of winning. However, with massive inequality the wealthy face little chance of loosing. For example, if a millionaire and a pauper both repeatedly bet a pound on the outcome of a coin toss, the millionaire will always win as the pauper has so little reserve money that even a minor run of bad luck will bankrupt him.

Ultimately, *"the capitalist investment game (as a whole and usually in its various parts) is positive sum. In most years more money is made in the financial markets than is lost. How is this possible? It is possible only because those who engage in real productive activity receive less than that to which they would be entitled were they fully compensated for what they produce. The reward, allegedly for risk, derives from this discrepancy."* [David Schweickart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 38] In other words, people would not risk their money unless they could make a profit and the willingness to risk is dependent on current and expected profit levels and so cannot explain them. To focus on risk simply obscures the influence that property has upon the ability to enter a given industry (i.e. to take a risk in the first place) and so distracts attention away from the essential aspects of how profits are actually generated (i.e. away from production and its hierarchical organisation under capitalism).

So risk does not explain how surplus value is generated nor is its origin. Moreover, as the risk people face and the return



section for details and evidence). This occurs because only established firms can afford the large capital investments needed to compete, thus reducing the number of competitors who can enter or survive in a given the market. Thus, in Proudhon's words, *"competition kills competition."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 242] In other words, capitalist markets evolve toward oligopolistic concentration.

This *"does not mean that new, powerful brands have not emerged [after the rise of Big Business in the USA after the 1880s]; they have, but in such markets... which were either small or non-existent in the early years of this century."* The dynamic of capitalism is such that the *"competitive advantage [associated with the size and market power of Big Business], once created, prove[s] to be enduring."* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 55]

For people with little or no capital, entering competition is limited to new markets with low start-up costs (*"In general, the industries which are generally associated with small scale production... have low levels of concentration"* [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Industries and Firms**, p. 35]). Sadly, however, due to the dynamics of competition, these markets usually in turn become dominated by a few big firms, as weaker firms fail, successful ones grow and capital costs increase (*"Each time capital completes its cycle, the individual grows smaller in proportion to it."* [Josephine Guerts, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** no. 41, p. 48]).

For example, between 1869 and 1955 *"there was a marked growth in capital per person and per number of the labour force. Net capital per head rose... to about four times its initial level ... at a rate of about 17% per decade."* The annual rate of gross capital formation rose *"from $3.5 billion in 1869–1888 to $19 billion in 1929–1955, and to $30 billion in 1946–1955. This long term rise over some three quarters of a century was thus about nine times the original level"* (in constant, 1929, dollars). [Simon Kuznets, **Capital in the American Economy**, p. 33 and p. 394] To take

they get is dependent on the wealth they have, it cannot be used to justify this distribution. Quite the opposite, as return and risk are usually inversely related. If risk was the source of surplus value or justified it, the riskiest investment and poorest investor would receive the highest returns and this is not the case. In summary, the "risk" defence of capitalism does not convince.



# C.4 Why does the market become dominated by Big Business?

As noted in section C.1.4, the standard capitalist economic model assumes an economy made up of a large number of small firms, none of which can have any impact on the market. Such a model has no bearing to reality:

> *"The facts show ... that capitalist economies tend over time and with some interruptions to become more and more heavily concentrated."* [M.A. Utton, **The Political Economy of Big Business**, p. 186]

As Bakunin argued, capitalist production *"must ceaselessly expand at the expense of the smaller speculative and productive enterprises devouring them."* Thus *"[c]ompetition in the economic field destroys and swallows up the small and even medium-sized enterprises, factories, land estates, and commercial houses for the benefit of huge capital holdings."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 182] The history of capitalism has proven him right. while the small and medium firm has not disappeared, economic life under capitalism is dominated by a few big firms.

This growth of business is rooted in the capitalist system itself. The dynamic of the "free" market is that it tends to becomes dominated by a few firms (on a national, and increasingly, international, level), resulting in oligopolistic competition and higher profits for the companies in question (see next

# C.3 What determines the distribution between labour and capital?

In short, class struggle determines the distribution of income between classes (As Proudhon put it, the expression *"the relations of profits to wages"* means *"the war between labour and capital."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 130]). This, in turn, is dependent on the balance of power within any given economy at any given time.

Given our analysis of the source of surplus value in section C.2.2, this should come as no surprise. Given the central role of labour in creating both goods (things with value) and surplus value, production prices determine market prices. This means that market prices are governed, however indirectly, by what goes on in production. In any company, wages determine a large percentage of the production costs. Looking at other costs (such as raw materials), again wages play a large role in determining their price. Obviously the division of a commodity's price into costs and profits is not a fixed ratio, which mean that prices are the result of complex interactions of wage levels and productivity. Within the limits of a given situation, the class struggle between employers and employees over wages, working conditions and benefits determines the degree of exploitation within a society and so the distribution of income, i.e. the relative amount of money which goes to labour (i.e. wages) and capital (surplus value).

To quote libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis:



ket, the more likely it is to obtain a larger share of the available surplus, for reasons discussed later (see section C.5). While this represents a distribution of surplus value **between** capitalists based on market power, the important thing to note here is that while companies compete on the market to realise their share of the total surplus (unpaid labour) the **source** of these profits does not lie in the market, but in production. One cannot buy what does not exist and if one gains, another loses.

Market power also plays a key role in producing inflation, which has its roots in the ability of firms to pass cost increases to consumers in the form of higher prices. This represents a distribution of income from lenders to borrowers, i.e. from finance capital to industrial capital and labour to capital (as capital "borrows" labour, i.e. the workers are paid **after** they have produced goods for their bosses). How able capitalists are to pass on costs to the general population depends on how able they are to withstand competition from other companies, i.e. how much they dominate their market and can act as a price setter. Of course, inflation is not the only possible outcome of rising costs (such as wage rises). It is always possible to reduce profits or increase the productivity of labour (i.e. increase the rate of exploitation). The former is rarely raised as a possibility, as the underlying assumption seems to be that profits are sacrosanct, and the latter is dependent, of course, on the balance of forces within the economy.

In the next section, we discuss why capitalism is marked by big business and what this concentrated market power means to the capitalist economy.

the **total** payroll which includes managers and so on). In the US construction industry, wages were 35.4% of value added in 1992 (with total payroll, 50.18%). Therefore the argument that because a large percentage of income goes to "labour" capitalism is fine hides the realities of that system and the exploitation its hierarchical nature creates.

Overall, since the 1970s working class America has seen stagnating income, rising working hours and falling social (i.e. income-class) mobility while, at the same time, productivity has been rising and inequality soaring. While this may come as a surprise (or be considered a paradox by capitalist economics, a paradox usually to be justified and rationalised id acknowledged at all) anarchists consider this to be a striking confirmation of their analysis. Unsurprisingly, in a hierarchical system those at the top do better than those at the bottom. The system is set up so that the majority enrich the minority. That is way anarchists argue that workplace organisation and resistance is essential to maintain — and even increase — labour's income. For if the share of income between labour and capital depends on their relative power — and it does — then only the actions of workers themselves can improve their situation and determine the distribution of the value they create.

This analysis obviously applied **within** classes as well. At any time, there is a given amount of unpaid labour in circulation in the form of goods or services representing more added value than workers were paid for. This given sum of unpaid labour (surplus value) represents a total over which the different capitalists, landlords and bankers fight over. Each company tries to maximise its share of that total, and if a company does realise an above-average share, it means that some other companies receive less than average.

The key to distribution within the capitalist class is, as between that class and the working class, power. Looking at what is normally, although somewhat inaccurately, called monopoly this is obvious. The larger the company with respect to its mar-



*"Far from being completely dominated by the will of the capitalist and forced to increase indefinitely the yield of labour, production is determined just as much by the workers' individual and collective resistance to such increases. The extraction of 'use value form labour power' is not a technical operation; it is a process of bitter struggle in which half the time, so to speak, the capitalists turn out to be losers.*

*"The same thing holds true for living standards, i.e., real wage levels. From its beginnings, the working class has fought to reduce the length of the workday and to raise wage levels. It is this struggle that has determined how these levels have risen and fallen over the years .. .*

*"Neither the actual labour rendered during an hour of labour time nor the wage received in exchange for this work can be determined by any kind of 'objective' law, norm, or calculation ... What we are saying does not mean that specifically economic or even 'objective' factors play no real in determining wage levels. Quite the contrary. At any given instant, the class struggle comes into play only within a given economic — and, more generally, objective — framework, and it acts not only directly but also through the intermediary of a series of partial 'economic mechanisms.' To give only one example among thousands, an economic victory for workers in one sector has a ripple effect on overall wage levels, not only because it can encourage other workers to be more combative, but also because sectors with lower wage levels will experience greater difficulties recruiting manpower. None of these mechanisms, however, can effectively act on its own and have its own significance if*

*taken separately from the class struggle. And the economic context itself is always gradually affected one way or another by this struggle."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 248]

The essential point is that the extraction of surplus value from workers is not a simple technical operation, as implied by the neo-classical perspective (and, ironically, classical Marxism as Castoriadis explains in his classic work *"Modern Capitalism and Revolution"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 226–343]). As noted previously, unlike the extraction of so many joules from a ton of coal, extracting surplus value ("use value") from labour power involves conflict between people, between classes. Labour power is unlike all other commodities — it is and remains inseparably embodied in human beings. This means that the division of profits and wages in a company and in the economy as a whole is dependent upon and modified by the actions of workers (and capitalists), both as individuals and as a class. It is this struggle which, ultimately, drives the capitalist economy, it is this conflict between the human and commodity aspects of labour power that ultimately brings capitalism into repeated crisis (see section C.7).

From this perspective, the neo-classical argument that a factor in production (labour, capital or land) receives an income share that indicates its productive power "at the margin" is false. Rather, it is a question of power — and the willingness to use it. As Christopher Eaton Gunn points out, the neo-classical argument *"take[s] no account of power — of politics, conflict, and bargaining — as more likely indicators of relative shares of income in the real world."* [**Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, p. 185] Ultimately, working class struggle is an *"indispensable means of raising their standard of living or defending their attained advantages against the concerted measures of the employers."* It is *"not only a means for the defence of immediate economic interests, it is also a continuous schooling for their*



by 2.9%). This wedge is the source of rising inequality, with the upper classes claiming most of the income growth. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46]

All of which refutes those apologists for capitalism who cite the empirical fact that, in a modern capitalist economy, a large majority of all income goes to "labour," with profit, interest and rent adding up to something under twenty percent of the total. Of course, even if surplus value were less than 20% of a workers' output, this does not change its exploitative nature (just as, for the capitalist apologist, taxation does not stop being "theft" just because it is around 10% of all income). However, this value for profit, interest and rent is based on a statistical sleight-of-hand, as "worker" is defined as including everyone who has a salary in a company, including managers and CEOs. The large incomes which many managers and all CEOs receive would, of course, ensure that a large majority of all income does go to "labour." Thus this "fact" ignores the role of most managers as de facto capitalists and their income represents a slice of surplus value rather than wages. This sleight-of-hand also obscures the results of this distribution for while the 70% of "labour" income goes into many hands, the 20% representing surplus value goes into the hands of a few. So even if we ignore the issue of CEO "wages", the fact is that a substantial amount of money is going into the hands of a small minority which will, obviously, skew income, wealth and economic power away from the vast majority.

To get a better picture of the nature of exploitation within modern capitalism we have to compare workers wages to their productivity. According to the World Bank, in 1966, US manufacturing wages were equal to 46% of the value-added in production (value-added is the difference between selling price and the costs of raw materials and other inputs to the production process). In 1990, that figure had fallen to 36% and by 1993, to 35%. Figures from the 1992 Economic Census of the US Census Bureau indicate it had reached 19.76% (39.24% if we take

*top of the wage scale, particularly corporate chief executive officers [CEO], and other wage earners."* Between 1979 and 1995, wages *"were stagnant or fell for the bottom 60% of wage earners"* and grew by 5% for the 80th percentile. Between 1992 and 2005, saw median CEO pay rise by 186.2% while the media worker saw only a 7.2% rise in their wages. Wealth inequality was even worse, with the wealth share of the bottom 80% shrinking by 3.8 percentage points (which was gained by the top 5% of households). Using the official standard of poverty, 11.3% of Americans were in poverty in 2000, rising to 12.7% in 2004 (*"This is the first time that poverty rose through each of the first three years of a recovery"*). However, the official poverty line is hopelessly out of date (for a family of four it was 48% of median family income in 1960, in 2006 it is 29%). Using a threshold of twice the official value sees an increase in poverty from 29.3% to 31.2% [**Op. Cit.**, p. 4, p. 5, p. 7, p. 9 and p. 11]

Of course, it will be argued that only in a perfectly competitive market (or, more realistically, a truly "free" one) will wages increase in-line with productivity. However, you would expect that a regime of **freer** markets would make things better, not worse. This has not happened. The neo-classical argument that unions, struggling over wages and working conditions will harm workers in the "long run" has been dramatically refuted since the 1970s — the decline of the labour movement in the USA has been marked by falling wages, not rising ones, for example. Despite of rising productivity, wealth has **not** "trickled down" — rather it has flooded up (a situation only surprising to those who believe economic textbooks or what politicians say). In fact, between 1947 and 1973, the median family income rose by 103.9% while productivity rose by 103.7% and so wages and productivity went hand-in-hand. Since the mid-1970s this close mapping broke down. From 1973 to 2005, productivity rose by 75.5% while income increased by a mere 21.8%, less than one-third the rate of productivity (from 2000 to 2004, productivity rose by 14% while family income fell



*powers of resistance, showing them every day that every last right has to be won by unceasing struggle against the existing system."* [Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 78]

If the power of labour is increasing, its share in income will tend to increase and, obviously, if the power of labour decreased it would fall. And the history of the post-war economy supports such an analysis, with labour in the advanced countries share of income falling from 68% in the 1970s to 65.1% in 1995 (in the EU, it fell from 69.2% to 62%). In the USA, labour's share of income in the manufacturing sector fell from 74.8% to 70.6% over the 1979–89 period, reversing the rise in labour's share that occurred over the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The reversal in labour's share occurred at the same time as labour's power was undercut by right-wing governments who have pursued business friendly "free market" policies to combat "inflation" (an euphemism for working class militancy and resistance) by undermining working class power and organisation by generating high unemployment.

Thus, for many anarchists, the relative power between labour and capital determines the distribution of income between them. In periods of full employment or growing workplace organisation and solidarity, workers wages will tend to rise faster. In periods where there is high unemployment and weaker unions and less direct action, labour's share will fall. From this analysis anarchists support collective organisation and action in order to increase the power of labour and ensure we receive more of the value we produce.

The neo-classical notion that rising productivity allows for increasing wages is one that has suffered numerous shocks since the early 1970s. Usually wage increases lag behind productivity. For example, during Thatcher's reign of freer markets, productivity rose by 4.2%, 1.4% higher than the increase in real earnings between 1980–88. Under Reagan, productivity increased by 3.3%, accompanied by a fall of 0.8% in real earnings. Remember, though, these are averages and hide the actual in-

creases in pay differentials between workers and managers. To take one example, the real wages for employed single men between 1978 and 1984 in the UK rose by 1.8% for the bottom 10% of that group, for the highest 10%, it was a massive 18.4%. The average rise (10.1%) hides the vast differences between top and bottom. In addition, these figures ignore the starting point of these rises — the often massive differences in wages between employees (compare the earnings of the CEO of McDonalds and one of its cleaners). In other words, 2.8% of nearly nothing is still nearly nothing!

Looking at the USA again, we find that workers who are paid by the hour (the majority of employees) saw their average pay peak in 1973. Since then, it had declined substantially and stood at its mid-1960s level in 1992. For over 80 per cent of the US workforce (production and non-supervisory workers), real wages have fallen by 19.2 per cent for weekly earnings and 13.4 per cent for hourly earnings between 1973 and 1994. Productivity had risen by 23.2 per cent. Combined with this drop in real wages in the USA, we have seen an increase in hours worked. In order to maintain their current standard of living, working class people have turned to both debt and longer working hours. Since 1979, the annual hours worked by middle-income families rose from 3 020 to 3 206 in 1989, 3 287 in 1996 and 3 335 in 1997. In Mexico we find a similar process. Between 1980 and 1992, productivity rose by 48 per cent while salaries (adjusted for inflation) fell by 21 per cent.

Between 1989 to 1997, productivity increased by 9.7% in the USA while median compensation decreased by 4.2%. In addition, median family working hours grew by 4% (or three weeks of full-time work) while its income increased by only 0.6 % (in other words, increases in working hours helped to create this slight growth). If the wages of workers were related to their productivity, as argued by neo-classical economics, you would expect wages to increase as productivity rose, rather than fall. However, if wages are related to economic power, then this fall



is to be expected. This explains the desire for "flexible" labour markets, where workers' bargaining power is eroded and so more income can go to profits rather than wages.

It is amazing how far the US in 2005, the paradigm for neoliberalism, is from the predictions of neo-classical economic textbooks. Since the 1970s, there has only been one period of sustained good times for working people, the late 1990s. Before and after this period, there has been wage stagnation (between 2000 and 2004, for example, the real median family income **fell** by 3%). While the real income of households in the lowest fifth grew by 6.1% between 1979 and 2000, the top fifth saw an increase of 70% and the average income of the top 1% grew by 184%. This rising inequality was fuelled by the expansion of income from capital and an increased concentration of capital income in the top 1% (who received 57.5% of all capital income in 2003, compared to 37.8% in 1979). This reflected the increased share of income flowing to corporate profits (profits rates in 2005 were the highest in 36 years). If the pre-tax return to capital had remained at its 1979 level, then hourly compensation would have been 5% higher. In 2005 dollars, this represents an annual transfer of $235 billion from labour to capital. [Lawrence Mishel, Jered Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto, **The State of Working America 2006/7**, pp. 2–3]

Labour's share of income in the corporate sector fell from 82.1% in 179 to 81.1% in 1989, and then to 79.1% in 2005. However, this fall is even worse for labour as labour income *"includes the pay of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), thereby overstating the income share going to 'workers' and understating 'profits,' since the bonuses and stock options given CEOs are more akin to profits than wages"* and so *"some of the profits are showing up in CEO paychecks and are counted as worker pay."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83 and p. 84]

Unsurprisingly, there has been a *"stunning disconnect between the rapid productivity growth and pay growth,"* along with a *"tremendous widening of the wage gap between those at the*

*rance of economics?"*, pp. 467–87, **Critical Review**, vol. 3, no. 3–4, p. 468]

In other words, the notion that if the actual interest rate somehow equalled the *"natural"* one is not only rooted in equilibrium but also the neo-classical notion of perfect knowledge of current and future events — all of which "Austrian" economists are meant to reject. This can be seen when Murray Rothbard states that entrepreneurs *"are trained to forecast the market correctly; they only make mass errors when governmental or bank intervention distorts the 'signals' of the market."* He even attacks Joseph Schumpeter's crisis theory because, in effect, Schumpeter does not show how entrepreneurs cannot predict the future (*"There is no explanation offered on the lack of accurate forecasting ... why were not the difficulties expected and discounted?"*). [**America's Great Depression**, p. 48 and p. 70] Rothbard does not ponder why bankers, who are surely entrepreneurs as well, make **their** errors nor why the foresight of business people in an uncertain and complex economy seems to fail them in the face of repeated actions of banks (which they could, surely, have *"expected and discounted"*). This means that the argument concerning distortions of the interest rate does not, as such, explain the occurrence of over-investment (and so the business cycle). Therefore, it cannot be claimed that removing state interference in the market for money will also remove the business-cycle.

However, these arguments do have an element of truth in them. Expansion of credit above the *"natural"* level which equates it with savings can and does allow capital to expand further than it otherwise would and so **encourages** over-investment (i.e. it builds upon trends already present rather than **creating** them). While we have ignored the role of credit expansion in our comments above to stress that credit is not fundamental to the business cycle, it is useful to discuss this as it is an essential factor in real capitalist economies. Indeed, without it capitalist economies would not have grown as fast



> *crease the demand for silks, and lessen that for woollens; their natural price, the quantity of labour necessary to their production, would continue unaltered, but the market price of silks would rise, and that of woollens would fall; and consequently the profits of the silk manufacturer would be above, whilst those of the woollen manufacturer would be below, the general and adjusted rate of profits ... This increased demand for silks would however soon be supplied, by the transference of capital and labour from the woollen to the silk manufacture; when the market prices of silks and woollens would again approach their natural prices, and then the usual profits would be obtained by the respective manufacturers of those commodities. It is then the desire, which every capitalist has, of diverting his funds from a less to a more profitable employment, that prevents the market price of commodities from continuing for any length of time either much above, or much below their natural price."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

This means that *"capital moves from relatively stagnating into rapidly developing industries ... The extra profit, in excess of the average profit, won at a given price level disappears again, however, with the influx of capital from profit-poor into profit-rich industries,"* so increasing supply and reducing prices, and thus profits. In other words, *"market relations are governed by the production relations."* [Paul Mattick, **Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 49 and p. 51]

In a developed capitalist economy it is not as simple as this — there are various "average" profits depending on what Michal Kalecki termed the ***"degree of monopoly"*** within a market. This theory *"indicates that profits arise from monopoly power, and hence profits accrue to firms with more monopoly power ... A rise in the degree of monopoly caused by the growth*

*of large firms would result in the shift of profits from small business to big business."* [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 36] This means that a market with a high "degree of monopoly" will have a few firms in it with higher than average profit levels (or rate of return) compared to the smaller firms in the sector or to those in more competitive markets.

The "degree of monopoly" reflects such factors as level of market concentration and power, market share, extent of advertising, barriers to entry/movement, collusion and so on. The higher these factors, the higher the degree of monopoly and the higher the mark-up of prices over costs (and so the share of profits in value added). Our approach to this issue is similar to Kalecki's in many ways although we stress that the degree of monopoly affects how profits are distributed **between** firms, **not** how they are created in the first place (which come, as argued in section C.2, from the *"unpaid labour of the poor"* — to use Kropotkin's words).

There is substantial evidence to support such a theory. J.S Bain in **Barriers in New Competition** noted that in industries where the level of seller concentration was very high and where entry barriers were also substantial, profit rates were higher than average. Research has tended to confirm Bain's findings. Keith Cowling summarises this later evidence:

> *"[A]s far as the USA is concerned... there are grounds for believing that a significant, but not very strong, relationship exists between profitability and concentration... [along with] a significant relationship between advertising and profitability [an important factor in a market's "degree of monopoly"]... [Moreover w]here the estimation is restricted to an appropriate cross-section [of industry] ... both concentration and advertising appeared significant [for the UK]. By focusing on the impact of changes in concen-*



*the different production cycles of different industries."* This will produce differing needs for credit (in both terms of amount and of intensity). *"Assuming uneven changes in the demand for credit"* between industries reflecting uneven changes in their requirements it is quite possible for over-investment (and so over-production) to occur *"even if the credit system is working 'satisfactorily'"* (i.e., as it should in theory. The credit system, therefore, *"does not communicate the relevant information"* and for this reason *"it is not the case that we must look to a departure from an ideal credit system to explain the business cycle."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 135–6]

Another underlying assumption in this argument is that the economy is close to equilibrium (a concept which "Austrian" economists claim to reject). After all, rising interest rates will cause debt-servicing to become harder even if it reflects the *"natural"* rate. Equally, it also suggests that both banks and firms are capable of seeing into the future. For even **if** the credit market is working as postulated in the theory it does not mean that firms and banks do not make mistakes nor experience unexpected market situations. In such circumstances, firms may find it impossible to repay loans, credit chains may start to break as more and more firms find themselves in economic difficulties. Just because actual interest rates somehow equal the natural rate does not make the future any more certain nor does it ensure that credit is invested wisely. Crucially, it does not ensure that credit is not used to inflate a bubble or add to over-investment in a specific sector of the economy. To assume otherwise suggests the firms and banks rarely make mistakes and that the accumulative impact of all decisions move an economy always towards, and never away from, equilibrium. As Post-Keynesian Paul Davidson dryly noted, *"Austrian subjectivists cannot have it both ways — they cannot argue for the importance of time, uncertainty, and money, and simultaneously presume that plan or pattern co-ordination must exist and is waiting to be discovered."* [*"The economics of ignorance or the igno-*

*increased demand for credit, and hence a rise in interest rates."* [**The Market**, p. 135]

For example, if the price of tin rises, this will lead to an expansion in investment in the tin industry to reap the higher profits this implies. This would lead to a rise in interest rates as more credit is demanded. This rise in interest rates lowers anticipated profits and dampens the expansion. The expansion of credit stops this process by distorting the interest rate and so stops it performing its economic function. This results in overproduction as interest rates do not reflect **real** savings and so capitalists over-invest in new capital, capital which appears profitable only because the interest rate is artificially low. When the rate inevitably adjusts upwards towards its "natural" value, the invested capital becomes unprofitable and so over-investment appears. Hence, according to the argument, by eliminating state control of money these negative effects of capitalism would disappear as the credit system, if working correctly, will communicate all the relevant information required by capitalists.

*"However,"* argues O'Neil, *"this argument is flawed. It is not clear that the relevant information is communicated by changes in interest rates."* This is because interest rates reflect the general aggregate demand for credit in an economy. However, the information which a **specific** company requires *"if the over-expansion in the production of some good is to be avoided is not the general level of demand for credit, but the level of demand amongst competitors."* It does not provide the relative demands in different industries (the parallels with Sraffa's critique should be obvious). *"An increase in the planned production of some good by a group of competitors will be reflected in a proportional change in interest rates only if it is assumed that the change in demand for credit by that group is identical with that found in the economy as a whole, i.e. if rates of change in the demand for credit are even throughout an economy. However, there is no reason to suppose such an assumption is true, given*



> *tration overtime ... [we are] able to circumvent the major problems posed by the lack of appropriate estimates of price elasticities of demand ... [to find] a significant and positive concentration effect... It seems reasonable to conclude on the basis of evidence for both the USA and UK that there is a significant relationship between concentration and price-cost margins."* [**Monopoly Capitalism**, pp. 109–110]

We must note that the price-cost margin variable typically used in these studies subtracts the wage and **salary** bill from the value added in production. This would have a tendency to reduce the margin as it does not take into account that most management salaries (particularly those at the top of the hierarchy) are more akin to profits than costs (and so should **not** be subtracted from value added). Also, as many markets are regionalised (particularly in the USA) nation-wide analysis may downplay the level of concentration existing in a given market.

The argument is not that big business charges "high prices" in respect to smaller competitors but rather they charge high prices in comparison to their costs. This means that a corporation can sell at the standard market price (or even undercut the prices of small business) and still make higher profits than average. In other words, market power ensures that prices do not fall to cost. Moreover, market power ensures that "costs" are often inflicted on others as big business uses its economic clout to externalise costs onto suppliers and its workers. For example, this means that farmers and other small producers will agree to lower prices for goods when supplying large supermarkets while the employees have to put up with lower wages and benefits (which extend through the market, creating lower wages and fewer jobs for retail workers in the surrounding area). Possibly, lower prices can be attributed to lower quality products (which workers are forced to buy in order to make their lower wages go further).

This means that large firms can maintain their prices and profits above "normal" (competitive) levels without the assistance of government simply due to their size and market power (and let us not forget the important fact that Big Business rose during the period in which capitalism was closest to "laissez faire" and the size and activity of the state was small). As much of mainstream economics is based on the idea of "perfect competition" (and the related concept that the free market is an efficient allocater of resources when it approximates this condition) it is clear that such a finding cuts to the heart of claims that capitalism is a system based upon equal opportunity, freedom and justice. The existence of Big Business and the impact it has on the rest of the economy and society at large exposes capitalist economics as a house built on sand.

Another side effect of oligopoly is that the number of mergers will tend to increase in the run up to a slump. Just as credit is expanded in an attempt to hold off the crisis (see section C.8), so firms will merge in an attempt to increase their market power and so improve their profit margins by increasing their mark-up over costs. As the rate of profit levels off and falls, mergers are an attempt to raise profits by increasing the degree of monopoly in the market/economy. However, this is a short term solution and can only postpone, but stop, the crisis as its roots lie in production, **not** the market (see section C.7) — there is only so much surplus value around and the capital stock cannot be wished away. Once the slump occurs, a period of cut-throat competition will start and then, slowly, the process of concentration will start again (as weak firms go under, successful firms increase their market share and capital stock and so on).

The development of oligopolies within capitalism thus causes a redistribution of profits away from small capitalists to Big Business (i.e. small businesses are squeezed by big ones due to the latter's market power and size). Moreover, the existence of oligopoly can and does result in increased costs



*error and malinvestments have been incurred"* and so there has been *"wasteful mis-investment due to government interference with the market."* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, pp. 68–9]

Yet the government does **not** force banks to make excessive loans and this is the first, and most obvious, fallacy of argument. After all, what Reekie is actually complaining about when he argues that *"state action"* creates the business cycle by creating excess money is that the state **allows** bankers to meet the demand for credit by creating it. This makes sense, for how could the state force bankers to expand credit by loaning more money than they have savings? This is implicitly admitted when Reekie argues that *"[o]nce fractional reserve banking is introduced, however, the supply of money substitutes will include fiduciary media. The ingenuity of bankers, other financial intermediaries and the endorsement and* ***guaranteeing of their activities by governments and central banks*** *has ensured that the quantity of fiat money is immense."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] As we will discuss in detail below what is termed *"credit money"* (created by banks) is an essential part of capitalism and would exist without a system of central banks. This is because money is created from within the system, in response to the needs of capitalists. In a word, the money supply is endogenous.

The second fallacy of this theory of the business cycle lies with the assumption that the information provided by the interest rate itself is sufficient in itself to ensure rational investment decisions, it that provides companies and individuals with accurate information about how price changes will affect future trends in production. Specifically, the claim is that changes in interest rates (i.e. changes in the demand and supply of credit) indirectly inform companies of the responses of their competitors. As John O'Neill argues, the argument assumes *"that information about the panned responses of producers in competition is indirectly distributed by changes in interest rates: the planned increase in production by separate producers is reflected in an*

be used for investing. After all, which company would start increasing its capital stock facing a fall in demand and which capitalist would venture to create a new company during a depression? Unsurprisingly, few economists thought that advocating a deflationary policy in the midst of the most severe economic crisis in history made much sense. It may have been economic orthodoxy but making the depression worse in order to make things better would have ensured either the victory of fascism or some-sort of socialist revolution.

Given these practical considerations and the devastating critiques inflicted upon it, Keynesian theory became the dominant theme in economics (particularly once it had been lobotomised of any ideas which threatened neo-classical supremacy — see section C.8.1). This has not, as noted, stopped Hayek's followers repeating his theory to this day (nor has its roots in equilibrium theory bothered them — see section C.1.6). Bearing this in mind, it is useful to discuss this theory because it reflects the pre-Keynesian orthodoxy although we must stress that our discussion of "Austrian" economics here should not be taken as suggesting that they are a significant school of thought or that their influence is large. Far from it — they still remain on the sidelines of economics where they were pushed after von Hayek's defeat in the 1930s. We use them simply because they are the only school of thought which still subscribes fully to the pre-Keynesian position. Most modern neo-classical economists pay at least lip-service to Keynes.

Take, for example, "Austrian" economist W. Duncan Reekie's argument that the business cycle *"is generated by monetary expansion and contraction ... When new money is printed it appears as if the supply of savings has increased. Interest rates fall and businessmen are misled into borrowing additional funds to finance extra investment activity."* This would be of *"no consequence"* if it had been the outcome of genuine saving *"but the change was government induced ... Capital goods industries will find their expansion has been in*



faced by Big Business being passed on in the form of price increases, which can force other companies, in unrelated markets, to raise **their** prices in order to realise sufficient profits. Therefore, oligopoly has a tendency to create price increases across the market as a whole and can thus be inflationary.

For these (and other) reasons many small businessmen and members of the middle-class wind up hating Big Business (while trying to replace them!) and embracing ideologies which promise to wipe them out. Hence we see that both ideologies of the "radical" middle-class — Libertarianism and fascism — attack Big Business, either as "the socialism of Big Business" targeted by Libertarianism or the "International Plutocracy" by Fascism. As Peter Sabatini notes:

> *"At the turn of the century, local entrepreneurial (proprietorship/partnership) business [in the USA] was overshadowed in short order by transnational corporate capitalism... . The various strata comprising the capitalist class responded differentially to these transpiring events as a function of their respective position of benefit. Small business that remained as such came to greatly resent the economic advantage corporate capitalism secured to itself, and the sweeping changes the latter imposed on the presumed ground rules of bourgeois competition. Nevertheless, because capitalism is liberalism's raison d'etre, small business operators had little choice but to blame the state for their financial woes, otherwise they moved themselves to another ideological camp (anti-capitalism). Hence, the enlarged state was imputed as the primary cause for capitalism's 'aberration' into its monopoly form, and thus it became the scapegoat for small business complaint."* [**Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**]

However, despite the complaints of small capitalists, the tendency of markets to become dominated by a few big firms is an obvious side-effect of capitalism itself. *"If the home of 'Big Business' was once the public utilities and manufacturing it now seems to be equally comfortable in any environment."* [M.A. Utton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29] This is because in their drive to expand (which they must do in order to survive), capitalists invest in new machinery and plants in order to reduce production costs and so increase profits. Hence a successful capitalist firm will grow in size over time in order to squeeze out competitors and, in so doing, it naturally creates formidable natural barriers to competition — excluding all but other large firms from undermining its market position.

## C.5.1 Aren't the super-profits of Big Business due to its higher efficiency?

Obviously the analysis of Big Business profitability presented in section C.5 is denied by supporters of capitalism. H. Demsetz of the pro-"free" market "Chicago School" of economists (which echoes the "Austrian" school's position that whatever happens on a free market is for the best) argues that **efficiency** (not degree of monopoly) is the cause of the super-profits for Big Business. His argument is that if oligopolistic profits are due to high levels of concentration, then the big firms in an industry will not be able to stop smaller ones reaping the benefits of this in the form of higher profits. So if concentration leads to high profits (due, mostly, to collusion between the dominant firms) then smaller firms in the same industry should benefit too.

However, his argument is flawed as it is not the case that oligopolies practice overt collusion. The barriers to entry/mobility are such that the dominant firms in a oligopolistic market do not have to compete by price and their market power



*and Capital,"* pp. 42–53, **The Economic Journal**, vol. 42, no. 165, p. 42, pp. 43–4 and p. 49] Hayek admitted that this was a possibility, to which Sraffa replied:

> *"only under conditions of equilibrium would there be a single rate, and that when saving was in progress there would be at any one moment be many 'natural' rates, possibly as many as there are commodities; so that it would be not merely difficult in practice, but altogether inconceivable, that the money rate would be equal to 'the' natural rate ... Dr. Hayek now acknowledges the multiplicity of the 'natural' rates, but he has nothing more to say on this specific point than that they 'all would be equilibrium rates.' The only meaning (if it be a meaning) I can attach to this is that his maxim of policy now requires that the money rate should be equal to all these divergent natural rates."* [*"A Rejoinder,"* pp. 249–251, **Op. Cit.** Vol. 42, No. 166, p. 251]

Then there was the practical suggestions that flowed from the analysis, namely do nothing. It also implied that the best thing to do in a recession or depression is not to spend, but rather to save as this will bring the savings and loans back into the equilibrium position. Economist R. F. Kahn recounted when Hayek presented his theory at a seminar in Cambridge University. His presentation was followed by silence. Then Kahn asked the obvious question: *"Is it your view that if I went out tomorrow and bought a new overcoat, that would increase unemployment?"* All that Hayek could offer in reply was the unconvincing claim that to show why would require a complicated mathematical argument. The notion that reducing consumption in a depression was the best thing to do convinced few people and the impact of such saving should be obvious, namely a collapse in demand for goods and services. Any savings would, in the circumstances of a recession, be unlikely to

arguments of his mentor Ludwig von Mises and has been repeated by their followers ever since. Yet, for some strange reason, they almost always fail to mention that Hayek was roundly defeated in the theoretical battles of the time by Keynesians. In fact, his former students (including John Hicks and Nicholas Kaldor) showed how Hayek's theory was flawed and he gave up business cycle research in the early 1940s for other work. Kaldor's first critique (*"Capital Intensity and the Trade Cycle"*), for example, resulted in Hayek completed rewriting his theory while Kaldor's second article (*"Professor Hayek and the Concertina-effect"*) showed that Hayek's Ricardo Effect was only possible under some very special circumstances and so highly unlikely. [Kaldor, **Essays on Economic Stability and Growth**, pp. 120–147 and pp. 148–176]

Kaldor's critique was combined with an earlier critique by Piero Sraffa who noted that Hayek's desire for *"neutral"* money was simply impossible in any real capitalist economy for *"a state of things in which money is 'neutral' is identical with a state in which there is no money at all."* Hayek *"completely ignored"* the fact that *"money is not only the medium of exchange, but also a store of value"* which *"amounts to assuming away the very object of the inquiry."* Sraffa also noted that the starting point of Hayek's theory was flawed: *"An essential confusion ... is the belief that the divergence of rates is a characteristic of a money economy ... If money did not exist, and loans were made in terms of all sorts of commodities, there would be a single rate which satisfies the conditions of equilibrium, but there might be at any moment as many 'natural' rates of interest as there are commodities, though they would not be 'equilibrium' rates. The 'arbitrary' action of the banks is by no means a necessary condition for the divergence; if loans were made in wheat and farmers (or for that matter the weather) 'arbitrarily changed' the quantity of wheat produced, the actual rate of interes on loans in terms of wheat would diverge from the rate on other commodities and there would be no single equilibrium rate."* [*"Dr. Hayek on Money*



allows a mark-up over costs which market forces cannot undermine. As their only possible competitors are similarly large firms, collusion is not required as these firms have no interest in reducing the mark-up they share and so they "compete" over market share by non-price methods such as advertising (advertising, as well as being a barrier to entry, reduces price competition and increases mark-up).

In his study, Demsetz notes that while there is a positive correlation between profit rate and market concentration, smaller firms in the oligarchic market are **not** more profitable than their counterparts in other markets. [M.A. Utton, **The Political Economy of Big Business**, p. 98] From this Demsetz concludes that oligopoly is irrelevant and that the efficiency of increased size is the source of excess profits. But this misses the point — smaller firms in concentrated industries will have a similar profitability to firms of similar size in less concentrated markets, **not** higher profitability. The existence of super profits across **all** the firms in a given industry would attract firms to that market, so reducing profits. However, because profitability is associated with the large firms in the market the barriers of entry/movement associated with Big Business stops this process happening. **If** small firms were as profitable, then entry would be easier and so the "degree of monopoly" would be low and we would see an influx of smaller firms.

While it is true that bigger firms may gain advantages associated with economies of scale the question surely is, what stops the smaller firms investing and increasing the size of their companies in order to reap economies of scale within and between workplaces? What is stopping market forces eroding super-profits by capital moving into the industry and increasing the number of firms, and so increasing supply? If barriers exist to stop this process occurring, then concentration, market power and other barriers to entry/movement (not efficiency) is the issue. Competition is a **process,** not a state, and this indicates that "efficiency" is not the source of oligopolistic profits

(indeed, what creates the apparent "efficiency" of big firms is likely to be the barriers to market forces which add to the mark-up!).

It is important to recognise what is "small" and "big" is dependent on the industry in question and so size advantages obviously differ from industry to industry. The optimum size of plant may be large in some sectors but relatively small in others (some workplaces have to be of a certain size in order to be technically efficient in a given market). However, this relates to technical efficiency, rather than overall "efficiency" associated with a firm. This means that technological issues cannot, by themselves, explain the size of modern corporations. Technology may, at best, explain the increase in size of the factory, but it does not explain why the modern large firm comprises multiple factories. In other words, the company, the **administrative** unit, is usually much larger than the workplace, the **production** unit. The reasons for this lie in the way in which production technologies interacted with economic institutions and market power.

It seems likely that large firms gather "economies of scale" due to the size of the firm, not plant, as well as from the level of concentration within an industry: *"Considerable evidence indicates that economies of scale [at plant level] ... do not account for the high concentration levels in U.S. industry"* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 174] Further, *"the explanation for the enormous growth in aggregate concentration must be found in factors other than economies of scale at plant level."* [M.A. Utton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44] Co-ordination of individual plants by the visible hand of management seems to play a key role in creating and maintaining dominant positions within a market. And, of course, these structures are costly to create and maintain as well as taking time to build up. Thus the size of the firm, with the economies of scale **beyond** the workplace associated with the economic power this produces within the marke creates formidable barriers to entry/movement.



In pre-Keynesian bourgeois economics, the reason why Say's Law is applicable in a money economy is the interest rate. As we discussed in section C.2.6, this is claimed to reflect the *"time preference"* of individuals. While it is possible for sales not to be turned into purchases in the market, the money involved is not withdrawn from the economy. Rather, it is saved and made available to investors. The interest rate is the means by which savings and investment come into line. This means that Say's Law is maintained as savings are used to purchase capital goods and so demand and supply match. As long as interest rates are working as they should, the possibility of a general crisis is impossible. The problem is that the credit system does not work exactly as it claimed and this lies with the banks who introduce fractional reserve banking. This allows them to loan out more money than they have in savings in order to increase their profits. This lowers the rate of interest below its *"natural"* (or equilibrium) rate and thus firms get price signals which do not reflect the wishes of consumers for future goods rather than current ones. This causes over-investment and, ultimately, a crisis. This is because, eventually, interest rates must rise and projects which were profitable at the lower rate of interest will no longer be so. The moral of the theory is that if the actual rate of interest equalled the *"natural"* rate then a situation of *"neutral"* money would be achieved and so misdirections of production would be avoided, so ending the business cycle.

As far as capitalist economics had a theory of the business cycle, this was it and it was the dominant ideological position within the profession until publication of Keynes' **The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money** in 1936. Politically, it was very useful as it recommended that the state should do nothing during the crisis and this was the preferred position of right-wing governments in America and Britain. It was forcefully argued by "Austrian" economist Frederick von Hayek during the early 1930s, who was repeating the earlier

# C.8 Is state control of money the cause of the business cycle?

As explained in the last section, capitalism will suffer from a boom-and-bust cycle due to objective pressures on profit production even if we ignore the subjective revolt against authority by working class people. It is this two-way pressure on profit rates, the subjective and objective, which causes the business cycle and such economic problems as *"stagflation."* However, for supporters of the free market, this conclusion is unacceptable and so they usually try to explain the business cycle in terms of **external** influences rather than those generated by the way capitalism works. Most pro-"free market" capitalists blame government intervention in the market, particularly state control over money, as the source of the business cycle. This analysis is defective, as will be shown below.

First it should be noted that many supporters of capitalism ignore the "subjective" pressures on capitalism that we discussed in section C.7.1. In addition, the problems associated with rising capital investment (as highlighted in section C.7.3) are also usually ignored, because they usually consider capital to be "productive" and so cannot see how its use could result in crises. This leaves them with the problems associated with the price mechanism, as discussed in section C.7.2. It is here, in the market for credit and money, that the role of the state comes into play, distorting the natural workings of the market and causing the ups and downs of business.



So an important factor influencing the profitability of Big Business is the clout that market power provides. This comes in two main forms — horizontal and vertical controls:

> *"Horizontal controls allow oligopolies to control necessary steps in an economic process from material supplies to processing, manufacturing, transportation and distribution. Oligopolies... [control] more of the highest quality and most accessible supplies than they intend to market immediately... competitors are left with lower quality or more expensive supplies... [It is also] based on exclusive possession of technologies, patents and franchises as well as on excess productive capacity ...*
>
> *"Vertical controls substitute administrative command for exchange between steps of economic processes. The largest oligopolies procure materials from their own subsidiaries, process and manufacture these in their own refineries, mills and factories, transport their own goods and then market these through their own distribution and sales network."* [Allan Engler, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 51]

Moreover, large firms reduce their costs due to their privileged access to credit and resources. Both credit and advertising show economies of scale, meaning that as the size of loans and advertising increase, costs go down. In the case of finance, interest rates are usually cheaper for big firms than small ones and while *"firms of all sizes find most [about 70% between 1970 and 1984] of their investments without having to resort to [financial] markets or banks"* size does have an impact on the *"importance of banks as a source of finance"*: *"Firms with assets under $100 million relied on banks for around 70% of their long-term debt... those with assets from $250 million to $1 billion, 41%; and those with over $1 billion in assets, 15%."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall**

**Street**, p. 75] Also dominant firms can get better deals with independent suppliers and distributors due to their market clout and their large demand for goods/inputs, also reducing their costs.

This means that oligopolies are more "efficient" (i.e. have higher profits) than smaller firms due to the benefits associated with their market power rather than vice versa. Concentration (and firm size) leads to "economies of scale" which smaller firms in the same market cannot gain access to. Hence the claim that any positive association between concentration and profit rates is simply recording the fact that the largest firms tend to be most efficient, and hence more profitable, is wrong. In addition, *"Demsetz's findings have been questioned by non-Chicago [school] critics"* due to the inappropriateness of the evidence used as well as some of his analysis techniques. Overall, *"the empirical work gives limited support"* to this "free-market" explanation of oligopolistic profits and instead suggest market power plays the key role. [William L. Baldwin, **Market Power, Competition and Anti-Trust Policy**, p. 310, p. 315]

Unsurprisingly we find that the *"bigger the corporation in size of assets or the larger its market share, the higher its rate of profit: these findings confirm the advantages of market power... Furthermore, 'large firms in concentrated industries earn systematically higher profits than do all other firms, about 30 percent more... on average,' and there is less variation in profit rates too."* Thus, concentration, not efficiency, is the key to profitability, with those factors what create "efficiency" themselves being very effective barriers to entry which helps maintain the "degree of monopoly" (and so mark-up and profits for the dominant firms) in a market. Oligopolies have varying degrees of administrative efficiency and market power, all of which consolidate its position. Thus the *"barriers to entry posed by decreasing unit costs of production and distribution and by national organisations of managers, buyers, salesmen, and service personnel made oligopoly advantages cumulative — and were as global in*



to neo-classical economic theory, the events of the 1920s indicate that even if the capitalist assumption that labour is a commodity like all others **is** approximated in real life, capitalism is still subject to crisis (ironically, a militant union movement in the 1920s would have postponed crisis by shifting income from capital to labour, increasing aggregate demand, reducing investment and supporting the more competitive sectors of the economy!). Therefore, any neo-classical "blame labour" arguments for crisis (which were so popular in the 1930s and 1970s) only tells half the story (if that). Even if workers **do** act in a servile way to capitalist authority, capitalism will still be marked by boom and bust (as shown by the 1920s and 1980/90s).

To conclude, capitalism will suffer from a boom-and-bust cycle due to the above-mentioned objective pressures on profit production, even if we ignore the subjective revolt against authority by workers, explained earlier. In other words, even if the capitalist assumption that workers are not human beings but only "variable capital" **were** true, it would not mean that capitalism would be a crisis free system. However, for most anarchists, such a discussion is somewhat academic for human beings are not commodities, the labour "market" is not like the iron market, and the subjective revolt against capitalist domination will exist as long as capitalism does.

workers' consumption but rising profit rates. This is possible as long as aggregate demand remains sufficient, which it can as long as high profit rates stimulate investment (i.e., money is not saved or sufficient credit is generated to ensure that investment spending does not lag consumption). Investment creates new capacity and that implies the need for further increases in investment, capitalist luxury consumption, and credit-based consumption to maintain aggregate demand. This profit-led growth is hard to sustain as high profits rates are difficult to maintain due to low working class income as both investment and capitalist luxury consumption are more unstable. Investment is more volatile than consumption, so the average degree of instability increases which, in turn, means that the probability of a slump rises. Further, this type of growth creates imbalances between sectors of the economy as firms rush to invest in profitable sections leading to relative over-production and over-investment in those areas (see last section). With the rise in unstable forms of demand, an economy becomes increasingly fragile and so increasingly vulnerable to "shocks." The stock market crash of 1929 was such a shock and the resulting panic and reduced demand for luxury goods and investment that it produced exposed the underlying weakness of the economy. After the Crash, restrictive fiscal and monetary policies and falling demand interacted to break this unstable prosperity and to accelerate the slump. This was reinforced by wage-cut induced under-consumption as well as debt deflation making over-investment worse in relation to over demand within the economy. So US prosperity was fragile long before late 1929, due to the process of over-investment relative to demand which lead the economy to be reliant on unstable forms of demand such as luxury consumption and investment.

The crash of 1929 indicates the "objective" limits of capitalism. Even with a very weak position of labour crisis still occurred and prosperity turned to "hard times." In contradiction



*their implications as they were national.*" [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 175 and p. 150]

This explains why capitalists always seek to acquire monopoly power, to destroy the assumptions of neo-classical economics, so they can influence the price, quantity and quality of the product. It also ensures that in the real world there are, unlike the models of mainstream economics, entrenched economic forces and why there is little equal opportunity. Why, in other words, the market in most sectors is an oligopoly.

This recent research confirms Kropotkin's analysis of capitalism found in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops**. Kropotkin, after extensive investigation of the actual situation within the economy, argued that *"it is not the superiority of the **technical** organisation of the trade in a factory, nor the economies realised on the prime-mover, which militate against the small industry ... but the more advantageous conditions for **selling** the produce and for **buying** the raw produce which are at the disposal of big concerns."* Since the *"manufacture being a strictly private enterprise, its owners find it advantageous to have all the branches of a given industry under their own management: they thus cumulate the profits of the successful transformations of the raw material... [and soon] the owner finds his advantage in being able to hold the command of the market. But from a **technical** point of view the advantages of such an accumulation are trifling and often doubtful."* He sums up by stating that *"[t]his is why the 'concentration' so much spoken of is often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of **dominating the market,** not for cheapening the technical process."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 147, p. 153 and p. 154]

It should be stressed that Kropotkin, like other anarchists, recognised that technical efficiencies differed from industry to industry and so the optimum size of plant may be large in some sectors but relatively small in others. As such, he did

not fetishise "smallness" as some Marxists assert (see section H.2.3). Rather, Kropotkin was keenly aware that capitalism operated on principles which submerged technical efficiency by the price mechanism which, in turn, was submerged by economic power. While not denying that "economies of scale" existed, Kropotkin recognised that what counts as "efficient" under capitalism is specific to that system. Thus whatever increases profits is "efficient" under capitalism, whether it is using market power to drive down costs (credit, raw materials or labour) or internalising profits by building suppliers. Under capitalism profit is used as a (misleading) alternative for efficiency (influenced, as it is, by market power) and this distorts the size of firms/workplaces. In a sane society, one based on economic freedom, workplaces would be re-organised to take into account technical efficiency and the needs of the people who used them rather than what maximises the profits and power of the few.

All this means is that the "degree of monopoly" within an industry helps determine the distribution of profits within an economy, with some of the surplus value "created" by other companies being realised by Big Business. Hence, the oligopolies reduce the pool of profits available to other companies in more competitive markets by charging consumers higher prices than a more competitive market would. As high capital costs reduce mobility within and exclude most competitors from entering the oligopolistic market, it means that only if the oligopolies raise their prices **too** high can real competition become possible (i.e. profitable) again and so *"it should not be concluded that oligopolies can set prices as high as they like. If prices are set too high, dominant firms from other industries would be tempted to move in and gain a share of the exceptional returns. Small producers — using more expensive materials or out-dated technologies — would be able to increase their share of the market and make the competitive rate of profit or better."* [Allan Engler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 53]



The key to understanding what happened lies in the contradictory nature of capitalist production. The "boom" conditions were the result of capital investment, which increased productivity thereby reducing costs and increasing profits. The large and increasing investment in capital goods was the principal device by which profits were spent. In addition, those sectors of the economy marked by big business (i.e. oligopoly, a market dominated by a few firms) placed pressures upon the more competitive ones. As big business, as usual, received a higher share of profits due to their market position (see section C.5), this lead to many firms in the more competitive sectors of the economy facing a profitability crisis during the 1920s.

The increase in investment, while directly squeezing profits in the more competitive sectors of the economy, also eventually caused the rate of profit to stagnate, and then fall, over the economy as a whole. While the mass of available profits in the economy grew, it eventually became too small compared to the total capital invested. Moreover, with the fall in the share of income going to labour and the rise of inequality, aggregate demand for goods could not keep up with production leading to unsold goods (which is another way of expressing the process of over-investment leading to over-production, as over-production implies under-consumption and vice versa). As expected returns (profitability) on investments hesitated, a decline in investment demand occurred and so a slump began (rising predominantly from the capital stock rising faster than profits). Investment flattened out in 1928 and turned down in 1929. With the stagnation in investment, a great speculative orgy occurred in 1928 and 1929 in an attempt to enhance profitability. This unsurprisingly failed and in October 1929 the stock market crashed, paving the way for the Great Depression of the 1930s.

This process of over-investment relative to consumption is based on rising labour productivity combined with stagnant wages or relative slow wage growth. This implies inadequate

1929, employment of production workers fell by 1% and non-production employment fell by about 6% (during the 1923 to 29 boom, production employment only increased by 2%, and non-production employment remained constant). This was due to the introduction of labour saving machinery and the rise in the capital stock. In addition, the numbers seeking work were boosted by new immigrants and the unwillingness of existing ones to return home due to difficulties returning to America. Lastly, the greatest source of industrial labour supply came from the American farm — there was a flood of rural workers into the urban labour market over the 1920s. [Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 252–5] It is interesting to note that even **with** a labour market favourable to employers for over 5 years, unemployment was still high. This suggests that the neo-classical "argument" (assertion would be more correct) that unemployment within capitalism is caused by strong unions or high real wages is somewhat flawed to say the least (see section C.9).

Facing high unemployment, workers' quit rates fell due to fear of loosing jobs (particularly those workers with relatively higher wages). This, combined with the steady decline of the unions and the very low number of strikes, indicates that labour was weak. This is reflected in the share of total manufacturing income going to wages fell from 57.5% in 1923–24 to 52.6% in 1928/29 (between 1920 and 1929, it fell by 5.7%). Productivity increased from an annual rate of 1.2% between 1909 and 1919 to 5.6% between 1919 and 1929. This increase in productivity was reflected in the fact that over the post-1922 boom, the share of manufacturing income paid in salaries rose from 17% to 18.3% and the share to capital rose from 25.5% to 29.1%. Managerial salaries rose by 21.9% and firm surplus by 62.6% between 1920 and 1929. [Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 241–2] Any notion that the 1929 crash was the result of a rebellious working class is not applicable.



Big Business, therefore, receives a larger share of the available surplus value in the economy, due to its size advantage and market power, not due to "higher efficiency".

# C.6 Can market dominance by Big Business change?

Capital concentration, of course, does not mean that in a given market, dominance will continue forever by the same firms, no matter what. However, the fact that the companies that dominate a market can change over time is no great cause for joy (no matter what supporters of free market capitalism claim). This is because when market dominance changes between companies all it means is that **old** Big Business is replaced by **new** Big Business:

> *"Once oligopoly emerges in an industry, one should not assume that sustained competitive advantage will be maintained forever... once achieved in any given product market, oligopoly creates barriers to entry that can be overcome only by the development of even more powerful forms of business organisation that can plan and co-ordinate even more complex specialised divisions of labour."* [William Lazonick, **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 173]

The assumption that the "degree of monopoly" will rise over time is an obvious one to make and, in general, the history of capitalism has tended to support doing so. While periods of rising concentration will be interspersed with periods of constant or falling levels, the general trend will be upwards (we would expect the degree of monopoly to remain the same or fall during booms and rise to new levels in slumps). Yet even



profits squeeze but this was not the case. This slump was **not** the result of working class resistance, indeed the 1920s were marked by a labour market which was continuously favourable to employers. This was for two reasons. Firstly, the "Palmer Raids" at the end of the 1910s saw the state root out radicals in the US labour movement and wider society. Secondly, the deep depression of 1920–21 (during which national unemployment rates averaged over 9%, the highest level over any two-year period since the 1890s) changed the labour market from a seller's to a buyer's market. This allowed the bosses to apply what became to be known as *"the American Plan,"* namely firing workers who belonged to a union and forcing them to sign *"yellow-dog"* contracts (promises not to join a union) to gain or keep their jobs. Reinforcing this was the use of legal injunctions by employers against work protests and the use of industrial spies to identify and sack union members. This class war from above made labour weak, which is reflected in the influence and size of unions falling across the country. As union membership declined, the number of strilkes reached their lowest level since the early 1880s, falling to just over 700 per year between 1927 to 1930 (compared to 3,500 per year between 1916 and 1921). [Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 249–251] The key thing to remember is that the impact of unemployment is not limited to the current year's figures. High unemployment rates have a sustained impact on the organisations, morale, and bargaining power of workers even if unemployment rates fall afterwards. This was the situation in the 1920s, with workers remembering the two years of record unemployment rates of 1921 and 1922 (in fact, the unemployment rate for manufacturing workers was close to the overall rate in 1933).

During the post-1922 boom, this position did not change. The national 3.3% unemployment rate hid the fact that non-farm unemployment averaged 5.5% between 1923 and 1929. Across all industries, the growth of manufacturing output did not increase the demand for labour. Between 1919 and

can increase consumption and so lessen the dangers of overproduction. However, these have (objective and subjective) limits and can never succeed in stopping depressions from occurring as they ultimately flow from capitalist production and the need to make profits.

A classic example of these "objective" pressures on capitalism is the "Roaring Twenties" that preceded the Great Depression of the 1930s. After the 1921 slump, there was a rapid rise in investment in the USA with investment nearly doubling between 1919 and 1927. Because of this investment in capital equipment, manufacturing production grew by 8.0% per annum between 1919 and 1929 and labour productivity grew by an annual rate of 5.6% (this is including the slump of 1921–22). With costs falling and prices comparatively stable, profits increased which in turn lead to high levels of capital investment (the production of capital goods increased at an average annual rate of 6.4%). [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 241] The optimism felt by business as a result of higher profits was reflected in the wealthy sections of America. In the 1920s prosperity was concentrated at the top. One-tenth of the top 1% of families received as much income as the bottom 42% and only 2.3% of the population enjoyed incomes over $100,00 (60% of families made less than $2,000 a year, 42% less than $1,000). While the richest 1% owned 40% of the nation's wealth by 1929 (and the number of people claiming half-million dollar incomes rose from 156 in 1920 to 1,489 in 1929) the bottom 93% of the population experienced a 4% drop in real disposable per-capita income between 1923 and 1929. However, in spite (or, perhaps, because) of this, US capitalism was booming and belief in capitalism was at its peak.

But by 1929 all this had changed with the stock market crash — followed by a deep depression. What was its cause? Given our analysis presented in section C.7.1, it may have been expected to have been caused by the "boom" decreasing unemployment, so increased working class power and leading to a



if the "degree of monopoly" falls or new competitors replace old ones, it is hardly a great improvement as changing the company hardly changes the impact of capital concentration or Big Business on the economy. While the faces may change, the system itself remains the same. As such, it makes little real difference if, for a time, a market is dominated by 6 large firms rather than, say, 4. While the **relative** level of barriers may fall, the **absolute** level may increase and so restrict competition to established big business (either national or foreign) and it is the absolute level which maintains the class monopoly of capital over labour.

Nor should we expect the "degree of monopoly" to constantly increase, there will be cycles of expansion and contraction in line with the age of the market and the business cycle. It is obvious that at the start of a specific market, there will be a relative high "degree of monopoly" as a few pioneering create a new industry. Then the level of concentration will fall as competitors entry the market. Over time, the numbers of firms will drop due to failure and mergers. This process is accelerated during booms and slumps. In the boom, more companies feel able to try setting up or expanding in a specific market, so driving the "degree of monopoly" down. However, in the slump the level of concentration will rise as more and more firms go to the wall or try and merge to survive (for example, there were 100 car producers in the USA in 1929, ten years later there were only three). So our basic point is **not** dependent on any specific tendency of the degree of monopoly. It can fall somewhat as, say, five large firms come to dominate a market rather than, say, three over a period of a few years. The fact remains that barriers to competition remain strong and deny any claims that any real economy reflects the "perfect competition" of the textbooks.

So even in a in a well-developed market, one with a high degree of monopoly (i.e. high market concentration and capital costs that create barriers to entry into it), there can be decreases

as well as increases in the level of concentration. However, how this happens is significant. New companies can usually only enter under four conditions:

Usually some or all of these processes are at work at once and some can have contradictory results. Take, for example, the rise of "globalisation" and its impact on the "degree of monopoly" in a given national market. On the national level, "degree of monopoly" may fall as foreign companies invade a given market, particularly one where the national producers are in decline (which has happened to a small degree in UK manufacturing in the 1990s, for example). However, on the international level the degree of concentration may well have risen as only a few companies can actually compete on a global level. Similarly, while the "degree of monopoly" within a specific national market may fall, the balance of (economic) power within the economy may shift towards capital and so place labour in a weaker position to advance its claims (this has, undoubtedly, been the case with "globalisation" — see section D.5.3).

Let us consider the US steel industry as an example. The 1980s saw the rise of the so-called "mini-mills" with lower capital costs. The mini-mills, a new industry segment, developed only after the US steel industry had gone into decline due to Japanese competition. The creation of Nippon Steel, matching the size of US steel companies, was a key factor in the rise of the Japanese steel industry, which invested heavily in modern technology to increase steel output by 2,216% in 30 years (5.3 million tons in 1950 to 122.8 million by 1980). By the mid 1980s, the mini-mills and imports each had a quarter of the US market, with many previously steel-based companies diversifying into new markets.

Only by investing $9 billion to increase technological competitiveness, cutting workers wages to increase labour productivity, getting relief from stringent pollution control laws and (very importantly) the US government restricting imports to



> *live upon their work."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 127–128]

In other words, over-production and under-consumption reciprocally imply each other. There is no over production except in regard to a given level of solvent demand. There is no deficiency in demand except in relation to a given level of production. The goods "over-produced" may be required by consumers, but the market price is too low to generate a profit and so existing goods must be destroyed and production must be reduced in order to artificially increase it. So, for example, the sight of food and other products being destroyed while people are in need of them is a common one in depression years.

So, while the crisis appears on the market as a *"commodity glut"* (i.e. as a reduction in effective demand) and is propagated through the economy by the price mechanism, its roots lie in production. Until such time as profit levels stabilise at an acceptable level, thus allowing renewed capital expansion, the slump will continue. The social costs of the wage cutting this requires is yet another "externality," to be bothered with only if they threaten capitalist power and wealth.

There are means, of course, by which capitalism can postpone (but not stop) a general crisis developing. The extension of credit by banks to both investors and consumers is the traditional, and most common, way. Imperialism, by which markets are increased and profits are extracted from less developed countries and used to boost the imperialist countries profits, is another method (*"The workman being unable to purchase with their wages the riches they are producing, industry must search for markets elsewhere."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]). Another is state intervention in the economy (such as minimum wages, the incorporation of trades unions into the system, arms production, manipulating interest rates to maintain a *"natural"* rate of unemployment to keep workers on their toes, etc.). Another is state spending to increase aggregate demand, which

over-produces, it cuts back production, introduces cost-cutting measures, fires workers and so on in order to try and realise more profits. These may spread if the overall economic is fragile as the reduced demand for industries that supplied the affected industry impacts on the **general** demand (via a fall in inputs as well as rising unemployment). The related industries now face over-production themselves and the natural response to the information supplied by the market is for individual companies to reduce production, fire workers, etc., which again leads to declining demand. This makes it even harder to realise profit on the market and leads to more cost cutting, deepening the crisis. While individually this is rational, collectively it is not and so soon all industries face the same problem. A local slump is propagated through the economy.

Cycles of prosperity, followed by over-production and then depression are the natural result of capitalism. Over-production is the result of over-accumulation, and over-accumulation occurs because of the need to maximise short-term profits in order to stay in business. So while the crisis appears as a glut of commodities on the market, as there are more commodities in circulation that can be purchased by the aggregate demand (*"Property sells products to the labourer for more than it pays him for them,"* to use Proudhon's words), its roots are deeper. It lies in the nature of capitalist production itself.

"Over-production," we should point out, exists only from the viewpoint of capital, **not** of the working class:

> *"What economists call over-production is but a production that is above the purchasing power of the worker... this sort of over-production remains fatally characteristic of the present capitalist production, because workers cannot buy with their salaries what they have produced and at the same time copiously nourish the swarm of idlers who*



a quarter of the total home market could the US steel industry survive. The fall in the value of the dollar also helped by making imports more expensive. In addition, US steel firms became increasingly linked with their Japanese "rivals," resulting in increased centralisation (and so concentration) of capital.

Therefore, only because competition from foreign capital created space in a previously dominated market, driving established capital out, combined with state intervention to protect and aid home producers, was a new segment of the industry able to get a foothold in the local market. With many established companies closing down and moving to other markets, and once the value of the dollar fell which forced import prices up and state intervention reduced foreign competition, the mini-mills were in an excellent position to increase US market share. It should also be noted that this period in the US steel industry was marked by increased "co-operation" between US and Japanese companies, with larger companies the outcome. This meant, in the case of the mini-mills, that the cycle of capital formation and concentration would start again, with bigger companies driving out the smaller ones through competition.

Nor should we assume that an oligopolistic markets mean the end of all small businesses. Far from it. Not only do small firms continue to exist, big business itself may generate same scale industry around it (in the form of suppliers or as providers of services to its workers). We are not arguing that small businesses do not exist, but rather than their impact is limited compared to the giants of the business world. In fact, within an oligopolistic market, existing small firms always present a problem as some might try to grow beyond their established niches. However, the dominant firms will often simply purchase the smaller one firm, use its established relationships with customers or suppliers to limit its activities or stand temporary losses and so cut its prices below the cost of production until it runs competitors out of business or establishes its price leadership, before raising prices again.

As such, our basic point is **not** dependent on any specific tendency of the degree of monopoly. It can fall somewhat as, say, six large firms come to dominate a market rather than, say, four. The fact remains that barriers to competition remain strong and deny any claims that any real economy reflects the "perfect competition" of the textbooks. So, while the actual companies involved may change over time, the economy as a whole will always be marked by Big Business due to the nature of capitalism. That's the way capitalism works — profits for the few at the expense of the many.



short term, its overall effect means that it is **not** profitable for all in the long run. As Kalecki put it, the *"tragedy of investment is that it causes crisis because it is useful. Doubtless many people will consider this theory paradoxical. But it is not the theory which is paradoxical, but its subject — the capitalist economy."* [quoted by Sawyer **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] This paradox applies to the issue of wages as well:

> *"What a system is that which leads a business man to think with delight that society will soon be able to dispense with men!* ***Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour****! ... Fool! though the workmen cost you something, they are your customers: what will you do with your products, when, driven away by you, they shall consume them no longer? Thus machinery, after crushing the workmen, is not slow in dealing employers a counter-blow; for, if production excludes consumption, it is soon obliged to stop itself.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *"These failures were caused by over-production, — that is, by an inadequate market, or the distress of the people. What a pity that machinery cannot also deliver capital from the oppression of consumers! What a misfortune that machines do not buy the fabrics which they weave! The ideal society will be reached when commerce, agriculture, and manufactures can proceed without a man upon earth!"* [Proudhon, **System of Economical Contradictions**, pp. 189–90]

So, if the profit rate falls to a level that does not allow capital formation to continue, a slump sets in. This general slump means that the rate of profit over the whole economy falls due to excessive investment. When one industry over-invests and

capitalists and investors are a key issue and these are shaped by the general state of the economy.

It could be argued that such an analysis is flawed as no company would invest in machinery if it would reduce its rate of profit. But such an objection is flawed, simply because (as we noted) such investment is perfectly sensible (indeed, a necessity) for a specific firm. By investing they gain (potentially) an edge in the market and so increased profits for a period. This forces their competitors to act likewise and **they** invest in new technology. Unfortunately, while this is individually sensible, collectively it is not as the net result of these individual acts is over-investment in the economy as a whole. Moreover, unlike the model of perfect competition, in a real economy capitalists have no way of knowing the future, and so the results of their own actions never mind the actions of their competitors. Thus over-accumulation of capital is the natural result of competition simply because even if we assume that the bosses of the firms are individually rational they are driven to make decisions which are collectively irrational to remain in business. The future is unknowable and so the capitalist has no idea what the net result of their decisions will be nor the state of the economy when their investment decisions are finally active. Both of these factors ensure that firms act as they do, investing in machinery which, in the end, will result in a crisis of over-accumulation.

The logic is simple and is rooted in the concept of *"the fallacy of composition."* To use an analogy, if you attend a rock concert and take a box to stand on then you will get a better view. If others do the same, you will be in exactly the same position as before. Worse, even, as it may be easier to loose your balance and come crashing down in a heap (and, perhaps, bringing others with you). This analogy shows why introducing new machinery, which is profitable for an individual company, has such a potentially negative effect on the economy as a whole. While it is profitable for an individual company in the



# C.7 What causes the capitalist business cycle?

The business cycle is the term used to describe the boom and slump nature of capitalism. Sometimes there is full employment, with workplaces producing more and more goods and services, the economy grows and along with it wages. However, as Proudhon argued, this happy situation does not last:

> *"But industry, under the influence of property, does not proceed with such regularity... As soon as a demand begins to be felt, the factories fill up, and everybody goes to work. Then business is lively. .. Under the rule of property, the flowers of industry are woven into none but funeral wreaths. The labourer digs his own grave... [the capitalist] tries... to continue production by lessening expenses. Then comes the lowering of wages; the introduction of machinery; the employment of women and children ... the decreased cost creates a larger market... [but] the productive power tends to more than ever outstrip consumption... To-day the factory is closed. Tomorrow the people starve in the streets... In consequence of the cessation of business and the extreme cheapness of merchandise... frightened creditors hasten to withdraw their funds [and] Production is suspended, and labour comes to a standstill."* [**What is Property**, pp. 191–192]

Why does this happen? For anarchists, as Proudhon noted, it's to do with the nature of capitalist production and the social relationships it creates (*"the rule of property"*). The key to understanding the business cycle is to understand that, to use Proudhon's words, *"Property sells products to the labourer for more than it pays him for them; therefore it is impossible."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 194] In other words, the need for the capitalist to make a profit from the workers they employ is the underlying cause of the business cycle. If the capitalist class cannot make enough surplus value (profit, interest, rent) then it will stop production, sack people, ruin lives and communities until such time as enough can once again be extracted from working class people. As Proudhon put it (using the term *"interest"* to cover all forms of surplus value):

> *"The primary cause of commercial and industrial stagnations is, then, interest on capital, — that interest which the ancients with one accord branded with the name of usury, whenever it was paid for the use of money, but which they did not dare to condemn in the forms of house-rent, farm-rent, or profit: as if the nature of the thing lent could ever warrant a charge for the lending; that is, robbery."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 193]

So what influences the level of surplus value? There are two main classes of pressure on surplus value production, what we will call the ***"subjective"*** and ***"objective"*** (we will use the term profits to cover surplus value from now on as this is less cumbersome and other forms of surplus value depend on the amount extracted from workers on the shopfloor). The "subjective" pressures are to do with the nature of the social relationships created by capitalism, the relations of domination and subjection which are the root of exploitation and the resistance to them. In other words the subjective pressures are the result of the fact that *"property is despotism"* (to use Proudhon's



to remain in business). As investment increases, the surplus value workers have to produce must increase faster. As long as the rate of exploitation produced by the new investments is high enough to counteract the increase in constant capital and keep the profit rate from falling, then the boom will continue. If, however, the mass of possible profits in the economy is too small compared to the total capital invested (both in means of production, fixed, and labour, variable) then the possibility exists for a general fall in the rate of profit (the ratio of profit to investment in capital and labour). Unless exploitation increases sufficiently, already produced surplus value earmarked for the expansion of capital may not be realised on the market (i.e. goods may not be sold). If this happens, then the surplus value will remain in its money form, thus failing to act as capital. In other words, accumulation will grind to a halt and a slump will start.

When this happens, over-investment has occurred. No new investments are made, goods cannot be sold resulting in a general reduction of production and so increased unemployment as companies fire workers or go out of business. This removes more and more constant capital from the economy, increasing unemployment which forces those with jobs to work harder, for longer so allowing the mass of profits produced to be increased, resulting (eventually) in an increase in the rate of profit. Once profit rates are high enough, capitalists have the incentive to make new investments and slump turns to boom. As we discuss in section C.8, the notion that investment will be helped by lowing interest rates in a slump fails to understand that *"the rate of investment decisions is an increasing function of the difference between the prospective rate of profit and the rate of interest."* [Michal Kalecki, quoted by Malcolm Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 98] If profit rates are depressed due to over-investment then even the lowest interest rates will have little effect. In other words, expectations of

## C.7.3 What role does investment play in the business cycle?

Other problems for capitalism arise due to the increases in productivity which occur as a result of capital investment or new working practices which aim to increase short term profits for the company. The need to maximise profits results in more and more investment in order to improve the productivity of the workforce (i.e. to increase the amount of surplus value produced). A rise in productivity, however, means that whatever profit is produced is spread over an increasing number of commodities. This profit still needs to be realised on the market but this may prove difficult as capitalists produce not for existing markets but for expected ones. As individual firms cannot predict what their competitors will do, it is rational for them to try to maximise their market share by increasing production (by increasing investment). As the market does not provide the necessary information to co-ordinate their actions, this leads to supply exceeding demand and difficulties realising sufficient profits. In other words, a period of over-production occurs due to the over-accumulation of capital.

Due to the increased investment in the means of production, variable capital (labour) uses a larger and larger constant capital (the means of production). As labour is the source of surplus value, this means that in the short term profits may be increased by the new investment, i.e. workers must produce more, in relative terms, than before so reducing a firms production costs for the commodities or services it produces. This allows increased profits to be realised at the current market price (which reflects the old costs of production). Exploitation of labour must increase in order for the return on total (i.e. constant **and** variable) capital to increase or, at worse, remain constant. However, while this is rational for one company, it is not rational when all firms do it (which they must in order



expression) and are a product of the class struggle. This will be discussed in section C.7.1. The objective pressures are related to how capitalism works and fall into two processes. The first is the way in which markets do not provide enough information to producers avoid disproportionalities within the market. In other words, that the market regularly produces situations where there is too much produced for specific markets leading to slumps The second objective factor is related to the process by which *"productive power tends more and more to outstrip consumption"* (to use Proudhon's words), i.e. over-investment or over-accumulation. These are discussed in sections C.7.2 and C.7.3, respectively.

Before continuing, we would like to stress here that all three factors operate together in a real economy and we have divided them purely to help explain the issues involved in each one. The class struggle, market "communication" creating disproportionalities and over-investment all interact. Due to the needs of the internal (class struggle) and external (inter-company) competition, capitalists have to invest in new means of production. As workers' power increases during a boom, capitalists innovate and invest in order to try and counter it. Similarly, to get market advantage (and so increased profits) over their competitors, a company invests in new machinery. While this helps increase profits for individual companies in the short term, it leads to collective over-investment and falling profits in the long term. Moreover, due to lack of effective communication within the market caused by the price mechanism firms rush to produce more goods and services in specific boom markets, so leading to over-production and the resulting gluts result in slumps. This process is accelerated by the incomplete information provided by the interest rate, which results in investment becoming concentrated in certain parts of the economy. Relative over-investment can occur, increasing and compounding any existing tendencies for over-production and so creating the possibility of crisis. In

addition, the boom encourages new companies and foreign competitors to try and get market share, so decreasing the *"degree of monopoly"* in an industry, and so reducing the mark-up and profits of big business (which, in turn, can cause an increase in mergers and take-overs towards the end of the boom).

Meanwhile, as unemployment falls workers' power, confidence and willingness to stand up for their rights increases, causing profit margins to be eroded at the point of production. This has the impact of reducing tendencies to over-invest as workers resist the introduction of new technology and techniques. The higher wages also maintain and even increase demand for the finished goods and services produced, allowing firms to realise the potential profits their workers have created. Rising wages, therefore, harms the potential for **producing** profits by increasing costs yet it increases the possibility for **realising** profits on the market as firms cannot make profits if there is no demand for their goods and their inventories of unsold goods pile up. In other words, wages are costs for any specific firm but the wages other companies pay are a key factor in the demand for what it produces. This contradictory effect of class struggle matches the contradictory effect of investment. Just as investment causes crisis because it is useful, the class struggle both hinders over-accumulation of capital and maintains aggregate demand (so postponing the crisis) while at the same time eroding capitalist power and so profit margins at the point of production (so accelerating it).

And we should note that these factors work in reverse during a slump, creating the potential for a new boom. In terms of workers, rising unemployment empower the capitalists who take advantage of the weakened position of their employees to drive through wage cuts or increase productivity in order to improve the profitability of their companies (i.e. increase surplus value). Labour will, usually, accept the increased rate of exploitation this implies to remain in work. This results in wages



However, it should be stressed that disproportionalities of production between industries and the separation of production and sale do not **per se** result in a general crisis. If that were the case the capitalism would be in a constant state of crisis as markets are rarely in a state of equilibrium and sales do not instantly result in purchases. This means that market dislocations need not automatically produce a general crisis in the economy as the problems associated with localised slumps can be handled when the overall conditions within an economy are good. It simply provides the **potential** for crisis and a means of transmitting and generalising local slumps when the overall economic situation is weak. In other words, it is an accumulative process in which small changes can build up on each other until the pressures they exert become unstoppable. The key thing to remember is that capitalism is an inherently dynamic system which consists of different aspects which develop unevenly (i.e., disproportionately). Production, credit, finance markets, circulation of money and goods, investment, wages, profits as well as specific markets get out of step. An economic crisis occurs when this process gets too far out of line.

This process also applies to investment as well. So far, we have assumed that firms adjust to price changes without seeking new investment. This is, of course, unlikely to always be the case. As we discuss in section C.8, this analysis of the market providing incomplete information also applies to the market for credit and other forms of external financing. This results in a situation where the problems associated with over-production can be amplified by over-investment. This means that the problems associated with markets creating disproportionalities are combined with the problems resulting from increased productivity and capital investment which are discussed in the next section.

cess and *"the possibility of hoarding."* Time *"because a good is usually sold some time after it is made, running the risk that its sale price could fall below the cost of production, wiping out the capitalist's expected profit."* Hoarding *"because income need not be spent but may merely be kept idle."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 232]

This means that over-production becomes possible and bankruptcies and unemployment can become widespread and so a slump can start. *"As any Marxian or Keynesian crisis theorist can tell you,"* Henwood summarises, *"the separation of purchase and sale is one of the great flashpoints of capitalism; an expected sale that goes unmade can drive a capitalist under, and can unravel a chain of financial commitments. Multiply that by a thousand or two and you have great potential mischief."* Thus *"the presence of money as a store of value, the possibility of keeping wealth in financial form rather than spending it promptly on commodities, always introduces the possibility of crisis."* That is, the possibility *"of an excess of capital lacking a profitable investment outlet, and an excess of goods that couldn't be sold profitably on the open market."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 93–4 and p. 94]

So when the market prices of goods fall far below their cost prices then production and investment stagnate. This is because profits can only be transformed into capital at a loss and so it lies idle in banks. Thus unemployed labour is associated with unemployed capital, i.e. excess money. This desire for capitalists to increase their demand for storing their wealth in money rather than investing it is driven by the rate of profit in the economy. Bad times result in increased hoarding and so a general fall in aggregate demand. Lowering interest rates will not provoke a demand for such money hoards, as claimed in "free market" capitalist theory, as few capitalists will seek to invest in a recession as expected profits will be lower than the interest rate.



falling and so, potentially, allows profit margins to rise. However, wage cuts result in falling demand for goods and services and so, overall, the net effect of cutting wages may be an overall **drop** in demand which would make the slump worse. There is a contradictory aspect to the objective pressures as well during a slump. The price mechanism hinders the spread of knowledge required for production and investment decisions to be made. While collectively it makes sense for firms to start producing and investing more, individual firms are isolated from each other. Their expectations are negative, they expect the slump to continue and so will be unwilling to start investing again. In the slump, many firms go out of business so reducing the amount of fixed capital in the economy and so over-investment is reduced. As overall investment falls, so the average rate of profit in the economy can increase. Yet falling investment means that firms in that sector of the economy will face stagnant demand and in the face of an uncertain future will be a drag on other sectors. In addition, as firms go under the *"degree of monopoly"* of each industry increases which increases the mark-up and profits of big business yet the overall market situation is such that their goods cannot be sold.

Eventually, however, the slump will end (few anarchists accept the notion that capitalism will self-destruct due to internal economic processes). The increased surplus value production made possible by high unemployment is enough relative to the (reduced) fixed capital stock to increase the rate of profit. This encourages capitalists to start investing again and a boom begins (a boom which contains the seeds of its own end). How long this process takes cannot be predicted in advance (which is why Keynes stressed that in the long run we are all dead). It depends on objective circumstances, how excessive the preceding boom was, government policy and how willing working class people are to pay the costs for the capitalist crisis.

Thus subjective and objective factors interact and counteract with each other, but in the end a crisis will result simply be-

cause the system is based upon wage labour and the producers are not producing for themselves. Ultimately, a crisis is caused because capitalism is production for profit and when the capitalist class does not (collectively) get a sufficient rate of profit for whatever reason then a slump is the result. If workers produced for themselves, this decisive factor would not be an issue as no capitalist class would exist. Until that happens the business cycle will continue, driven by "subjective" and "objective" pressures — pressures that are related directly to the nature of capitalist production and the wage labour on which it is based. Which pressure will predominate in any given period will be dependent on the relative power of classes. One way to look at it is that slumps can be caused when working class people are "too strong" or "too weak." The former means that we are able to reduce the rate of exploitation, squeezing the profit rate by keeping an increased share of the surplus value we produce. The later means we are too weak to stop income distribution being shifted in favour of the capitalist class, which results in over-accumulation and rendering the economy prone to a failure in aggregate demand. The 1960s and 1970s are the classic example of what happens when "subjective" pressures predominate while the 1920s and 1930s show the "objective" ones at work.

Finally, it must be stressed that this analysis does **not** imply that anarchists think that capitalism will self-destruct. In spite of crises being inevitable and occurring frequently, revolution is not. Capitalism will only be eliminated by working class revolution, when people see the need for social transformation and not imposed on people as the by-product of an economic collapse.



the future profitability of their production decisions (social usefulness is, of course, of no concern).

It is this irrationality and lack of information which feed into the business cycle. *"These local booms and slumps in production ... are then amplified into general crises precisely through the interconnections in the market that Hayek highlights in his example of the production and consumption of tin."* [O'Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136] The negative effects of over-production in one market will be passed on to those which supply it with goods in the shape of decreased demand. These firms will now experience relative over-production which, in turn, will affect their suppliers. Whatever benefits may accrue to consumers of these goods in the shape of lower prices will be reduced as demand for their products drops as more and more workers are made unemployed or their wages are cut (which means that **real** wages remain constant as prices are falling alongside money wages — see section C.9.1 for details). Firms will also seek to hoard money, leading to yet more falling demand for goods and so unemployed labour is joined by under-utilisation of capacity.

Which brings us to the issue of money and its role in the business cycle. "Free market" capitalist economics is based on Say's Law. This is the notion that supply creates its own demand and so general gluts of goods and mass unemployment are impossible. As we noted in section C.1.5, this vision of economic activity is only suited to precapitalist economies or ones without money for money is considered as nothing more than an aid to barter, a medium of exchange only. It ignores the fact that money is a store of value and, as such, can be held onto precisely for that reason. This means that Say's Law is invalid as its unity between sale and purchase can be disturbed so causing the chain of contractual relationships to be broken. Simply put, someone who sells a product need not spend their income on another product at the same time. Unlike barter, the sale of one commodity is an act distinct from the purchase of another. Money, in other words, *"brings in time"* into the market pro-

This, it should be noted, is not a problem of people making a series of unrelated mistakes. *"Rather, it is that the market imparts the same information to affected agents, and this information is such that the rational strategy for all agents is to expand production or contract consumption, while it is not rational for all agents to act in this manner collectively."* In other words, the information the market provides is not sufficient for rational decision making and naturally results in disproportionalities in the market. Thus the price mechanism actively encourages *"the suppression of the mutual exchange of information concerning planned responses"* to current prices and this *"leads to over production."* So it is **not** a question of inaccurate prediction (although given that the future is unknowable and unpredictable this is a factor). Instead, it is *"one of individually rational responses to the same signal resulting in collectively irrational responses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 135 and p. 197]

This means that prices in themselves do not provide adequate knowledge for rational decision making as they are not at their long-run equilibrium levels. This causes a problem for Hayek's account of the market process as he stresses that actual prices never are at this (purely theoretical) price. As we discuss in section C.8, Hayek's own theory of the business cycle shows the negative impact which the 'misinformation' conveyed by disequilibrium prices can cause on the economy. In that analysis, the disequilibrium price that leads to very substantial macroeconomic distortions is the rate of interest but, obviously, the same argument applies for commodity prices as well. This means that the market process, based on the reactions of profit-maximising firms to the same (unsustainable) prices for a commodity can generating mal-investment and subsequent market distributions on a wide level. Simply put, the price mechanism may carry information regarding the terms on which various commodities may currently be exchanged but it does not follow that a knowledge of these exchange ratios enable agents to calculate



## C.7.1 What role does class struggle play in the business cycle?

At its most basic, the class struggle (the resistance to hierarchy in all its forms) is the main cause of the business cycle. As we argued in sections B.1.2 and C.2, capitalists in order to exploit a worker must first oppress them. But where there is oppression, there is resistance; where there is authority, there is the will to freedom. Hence capitalism is marked by a continuous struggle between worker and boss at the point of production as well as struggle outside of the workplace against other forms of hierarchy.

This class struggle reflects a conflict between workers attempts at liberation and self-empowerment and capital's attempts to turn the individual worker into a small cog in a big machine. It reflects the attempts of the oppressed to try to live a fully human life, when the *"worker claims his share in the riches he produces; he claims his share in the management of production; and he claims not only some additional well-being, but also his full rights in the higher enjoyment of science and art."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, pp. 48–49] As Errico Malatesta argued:

> *"If [workers] succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs ... [T]here exists no natural law (law of wages) which determines what part of a worker's labour should go to him [or her] ... Wages, hours and other conditions of employment are the result of the struggle between bosses and workers. The former try and give the workers as little as possible; the latter try, or should try to work as little, and earn as much, as pos-*

*sible. Where workers accept any conditions, or even being discontented, do not know how to put up effective resistance to the bosses demands, they are soon reduced to bestial conditions of life. Where, instead, they have ideas of how human beings should live and know how to join forces, and through refusal to work or the latent and open threat of rebellion, to win bosses respect, in such cases, they are treated in a relatively decent way ... Through struggle, by resistance against the bosses, therefore, workers can, up to a certain point, prevent a worsening of their conditions as well as obtaining real improvement."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 191–2]

It is this struggle that determines wages and indirect income such as welfare, education grants and so forth. This struggle also influences the concentration of capital, as capital attempts to use technology to get an advantage against their competitors by driving down prices by increasing the productivity of labour (i.e., to extract the maximum surplus value possible from employees). And, as will be discussed in section D.10, increased capital investment also reflects an attempt to increase the control of the worker by capital (or to replace them with machinery that cannot say "no") **plus** the transformation of the individual into "the mass worker" who can be fired and replaced with little or no hassle. For example, Proudhon quotes an *"English Manufacturer"* who states that he invested in machinery precisely to replace humans by machines because machines are easier to control:

*"The insubordination of our workforce has given us the idea of dispensing with them. We have made and stimulated every imaginable effort of the mind to replace the service of men by tools more docile, and*



*present moment ... but with respect to expected demand at some future moment ... when their products reach the market."* The price mechanism provides information that indicates the relationship between supply and demand **now** and while this information **is** relevant to producers plans, it is not **all** the information that is relevant or is required by those involved. It cannot provide information which will allow producers to predict demand later. *"A major component of the information required for such a prediction is that of the plans of other producers which respond to that demand. This is information that the market, as a competitive system, fails to distribute."* It is this *"informational restriction"* which is one of the sources of why there is a business cycle. This is because each producer *"responds to the same signal the change in price. However, each agent acts independently of the response of other producers and consumers."* The result is *"an overproduction of goods in relation to effective demand for them. Goods cannot be sold. There is a realisation crisis: producers cannot realise the value of their products. Given this overproduction, demand falls against supply. There is a slump. This eventually leads to a rise in demand against supply, production expends leading to another boom, and so on."* [**The Market**, pp. 134–5]

This information cannot be supplied due to competition. Simply put, if A and B are in competition, if A informs B of her activities and B does not reciprocate, then B is in a position to compete more effectively than A. Hence communication within the market is discouraged and each production unit is isolated from the rest. In other words, each person or company responds to the same signal (the change in price) but each acts independently of the response of other producers and consumers. The result is often a slump in the market, causing unemployment and economic disruption. Thus the market *"blocks the communication of information and fails to co-ordinate plans for economic action."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137]

The key problem with Hayek's account is that he does not discuss the **collective** results of the individual decisions he highlights. It is true that faced with a rise in the price of tin, individual firms will cut back on its use. Yet there is no reason to suppose that the net result of these actions will bring the demand and supply of tin back to equilibrium. In fact, it is just as likely that the reduction in demand for tin is such that its producers face falling sales and so cut back production even more. Similarly, a rising demand for tin could easily result in all tin producers increasing supply so much as to produce a glut on the market. Proudhon described this process well in the 1840s:

> *"A peasant who has harvested twenty sacks of wheat, which he with his family proposes to consume, deems himself twice as rich as if he had harvested only ten; likewise a housewife who has spun fifty yards of linen believes that she is twice as rich as if she had spun but twenty-five. Relatively to the household, both are right; looked at in their external relations, they may be utterly mistaken. If the crop of wheat is double throughout the whole country, twenty sacks will sell for less than ten would have sold for if it had been but half as great; so, under similar circumstances, fifty yards of linen will be worth less than twenty-five: so that value decreases as the production of utility increases, and a producer may arrive at poverty by continually enriching himself."* [**The System of Economical Contradictions**, pp. 77–78]

He argued that this occurred due to the *"contradiction"* of *"the double character of value"* (i.e. between value in use and value in exchange). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

As John O'Neill argues (basing himself on Marx rather than Proudhon), when producers *"make plans concerning future production, they are planning not with respect of demand at the*



> *we have achieved our object. Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour."* [quoted by Proudhon, **System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 189]

(To which Proudhon replied *"[w]hat a misfortunate that machinery cannot also deliver capital from the oppression of consumers!"* The over-production and reductions in demand caused by machinery replacing people soon destroys these illusions of automatic production by a slump — see section C.7.3).

Therefore, class struggle influences both wages and capital investment, and so the prices of commodities in the market. It also, more importantly, determines profit levels and it is the rise and fall of profit levels that are the ultimate cause of the business cycle. This is because, under capitalism, production's *"only aim is to increase the profits of the capitalist. And we have, therefore, — the continuous fluctuations of industry, the crisis coming periodically."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

A common capitalist myth, derived from neo-classical (and related) ideology, is that free-market capitalism will result in a continuous boom. Since the cause of slumps is allegedly state interference in the market (particularly in credit and money), eliminating such meddling will obviously bring reality into line with the textbooks and, consequently, eliminate such negative features of "actually existing" capitalism as the business cycle. Let us assume, for a moment, that this is the case (as will be discussed in section C.8, this is **not** the case). In the "boom economy" of capitalist dreams there will be full employment yet while this helps *"increase total demand, its fatal characteristic from the business view is that it keeps the reserve army of the unemployed low, thereby protecting wage levels and strengthening labour's bargaining power."* [Edward S. Herman, **Beyond Hypocrisy**, p. 93] This leads to the undermining of full employment as profit margins are placed under pressure (which

explains why bosses have lead the fight against government full employment policies).

The process should be obvious enough. Full employment results in a situation where workers are in a very strong position, a strength which can undermine the system. This is because capitalism always proceeds along a tightrope. If a boom is to continue smoothly, real wages must develop within a certain band. If their growth is too low then capitalists will find it difficult to sell the products their workers have produced and so, because of this, face what is often called a *"realisation crisis"* (i.e. the fact that capitalists cannot make a profit if they cannot sell their products). If real wage growth is too high then the conditions for producing profits are undermined as labour gets more of the value it produces. This means that in periods of boom, when unemployment is falling, the conditions for realisation improve as demand for consumer goods increase, thus expanding markets and encouraging capitalists to invest. However, such an increase in investment (and so employment) has an adverse effect on the conditions for **producing** surplus value as labour can assert itself at the point of production, increase its resistance to the demands of management and, far more importantly, make its own.

If an industry or country experiences high unemployment, workers will put up with longer hours, stagnating wages, worse conditions and new technology in order to remain in work. This allows capital to extract a higher level of profit from those workers, which in turn signals other capitalists to invest in that area. As investment increases, unemployment falls. As the pool of available labour runs dry, then wages will rise as employers bid for scare resources and workers feel their power. As workers are in a better position they can go from resisting capital's agenda to proposing their own (e.g. demands for higher wages, better working conditions and even for workers' control). As workers' power increases, the share of income going to capital falls, as do profit rates,



demand or supply changes. *"Assume,"* he argues, *"that somewhere in the world a new opportunity for the use of some raw material, say tin, has arisen, or that one of the sources of supply of tin has been eliminated. It does not matter for our purpose and it is very significant that it does not matter which of these two causes has made tin more scarce. All that the users of tin need to know is that some of the tin they used to consume is now more profitably employed elsewhere, and that in consequence they must economise tin. There is no need for the great majority of them even to know where the more urgent need has arisen, or in favour of what other uses they ought to husband the supply."* The subsequent rise in its price will result in reduced consumption as many users will economise on its use and so the information that tin has become (relatively) scarcer spreads throughout the economy and influences not only tin users, but also its substitutes and the substitutes of these substitutes and so on. This will move the economy towards equilibrium without the people informed knowing anything about the original causes for these changes. *"The whole acts as one market, not because any of its members survey the whole field, but because their limited individual fields of vision sufficiently overlap so that through many intermediaries the relevant information is communicated to all."* (*"The use of knowledge in society,"* pp. 519–30, **American Economic Review**, Vol. 35, No. 4, , p. 526)

While it can be granted that this account of the market is not without foundation, it is also clear that the price mechanism does not communicate all the relevant information needed by companies or individuals. This means that capitalism does not work in the way suggested in the economic textbooks. It is the workings of the price mechanism itself which leads to booms and slumps in economic activity and the resulting human and social costs they entail. This can be seen if we investigate the actual processes hidden behind the workings of the price mechanism.

from the individuals who sell it, capitalism would still be faced with the fact that only surplus labour (unemployment) ensures the creation of adequate amounts of surplus value.

Moreover, even assuming that individuals can be totally happy in a capitalist economy, willing to sell their freedom and creativity for a little more money, putting up, unquestioningly, with every demand and whim of their bosses (and so negating their own personality and individuality in the process), capitalism does have "objective" pressures limiting its development. So while social struggle, as argued above, can have a decisive effect on the health of the capitalist economy, it is not the only problem the system faces. This is because there are objective pressures within the system beyond and above the authoritarian social relations it produces and the resistance to them. These pressures are discussed next, in sections C.7.2 and C.7.3.

## C.7.2 What role does the market play in the business cycle?

A major problem with capitalism is the working of the capitalist market itself. For the supporters of "free market" capitalism, the market provides all the necessary information required to make investment and production decisions. This means that a rise or fall in the price of a commodity acts as a signal to everyone in the market, who then respond to that signal. These responses will be co-ordinated by the market, resulting in a healthy economy.

This perspective is expressed well by right-liberal, Frederick von Hayek in his *"The Uses of Knowledge in Society"* (reprinted in **Individualism and Economic Order**). Using the example of the tin market, he defends capitalism against central planning on its ability to handle the division of knowledge within society and its dynamic use of this dispersed knowledge when



and capital experiences a profits squeeze and so cuts down on investment and employment and/or wages. The cut in investment increases unemployment in the capital goods sector of the economy, which in turn reduces demand for consumption goods as jobless workers can no longer afford to buy as much as before. This process accelerates as bosses fire workers or cut their wages and the slump deepens and so unemployment increases, which begins the cycle again. This can be called "subjective" pressure on profit rates.

This interplay of profits and wages can be seen in most business cycles. As an example, let us consider the crisis which ended post-war Keynesianism in the early 1970's and paved the way for the neo-liberal reforms of Thatcher and Reagan. This crisis, which started in 1973, had its roots in the 1960s boom and the profits squeeze it produced. If we look at the USA we find that it experienced continuous growth between 1961 and 1969 (the longest in its history until then). From 1961 onwards, unemployment steadily fell, effectively creating full employment. From 1963, the number of strikes and total working time lost steadily increased (the number of strikes doubled from 1963 to 1970, with the number of wildcat strike rising from 22% of all strikes in 1960 to 36.5% in 1966). By 1965 both the business profit shares and business profit rates peaked. The fall in profit share and rate of profit continued until 1970 (when unemployment started to increase), where it rose slightly until the 1973 slump occurred. In addition, after 1965, inflation started to accelerate as capitalist firms tried to maintain their profit margins by passing cost increases to consumers (as we discuss section C.8.2, inflation has far more to do with capitalist profits than it has with money supply or wages). This helped to reduce real wage gains and maintain profitability over the 1968 to 1973 period above what it otherwise would have been, which helped postpone, but not stop, a slump.

Looking at the wider picture, we find that for the advanced capital countries as a whole, the product wage rose steadily be-

tween 1962 and 1971 while productivity fell. The growth of the product wage (the real cost to the employer of hiring workers) exceeded that of productivity growth in the late 1960s, slightly after the year in which profit share in national income and the rate of profit peaked. From then on, productivity continued to fall while the product wage continued to rise. This process, the result of falling unemployment and rising workers' power (expressed, in part, by an explosion in the number of strikes across Europe and elsewhere), helped to ensure that workers keep an increasing share of the value they produced. The actual post-tax real wages and productivity in the advanced capitalist countries increased at about the same rate from 1960 to 1968 but between 1968 and 1973 the former increased at a larger rate than the latter (hence the profits squeeze). Moreover, increased international competition meant that many domestic companies where limited in their responses to the profits squeeze as well as facing a global decrease in demand for their products. This resulted in profit shares and rates declining to around 80% of their previous peak levels across the advanced capitalist nations. [Philip Armstrong, Andrew Glyn and John Harrison, **Capitalism Since 1945**, pp. 178–80, pp. 182–4 and pp. 192–3]

It must be stressed that social struggle was not limited to the workplace. In the 1960s a *"series of strong liberation movements emerged among women, students and ethnic minorities. A crisis of social institutions was in progress, and large social groups were questioning the very foundations of the modern, hierarchical society: the patriarchal family, the authoritarian school and university, the hierarchical workplace or office, the bureaucratic trade union or party."* [Takis Fotopoulos, *"The Nation-state and the Market,"* pp. 37–80, **Society and Nature**, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 58] In stark contrast to the predictions of the right, state intervention within capitalism to maintain full employment and provide social services like health care had **not** resulted in a *"Road to Serfdom."* The opposite occurred, with previously marginalised sectors of the population resisting their oppression and exploita-



class struggle as can be seen, for example, from 1930s America.

This means that our analysis shows the limitations and contradictions of the system as well as its need for workers to be in a weak bargaining position in order for it to "work" (which explodes the myth that capitalism is a free society). Moreover, rather than portray working people as victims of the system (as is the case in many Marxist analyses of capitalism) our analysis recognises that we, both individually and collectively, have the power to influence and **change** that system by our activity. We should be proud of the fact that working people refuse to negate themselves or submit their interests to that of others or play the role of order-takers required by the system. Such expressions of the human spirit, of the struggle of freedom against authority, should not be ignored or down-played, rather they should be celebrated. That the struggle against authority causes the system so much trouble is not an argument against social struggle, it is an argument against a system based on hierarchy, oppression, exploitation and the denial of freedom.

To sum up, in many ways, social struggle is the inner dynamic of the system, and its most basic contradiction: while capitalism tries to turn the majority of people into commodities (namely, bearers of labour power), it also has to deal with the human responses to this process of objectification (namely, the class struggle). However, it does not follow that cutting wages will solve a crisis — far from it, for, as we argue in section C.9.1, cutting wages will deepen any crisis, making things worse before they get better. Nor does it follow that, if social struggle were eliminated, capitalism would work fine. After all, if we assume that labour power is a commodity like any other, its price will rise as demand increases relative to supply (which will either produce inflation or a profits squeeze, probably both). Therefore, even without the social struggle which accompanies the fact that labour power cannot be separated

*They complain only of those of other people."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, pp. 87–88]

As an aside, we must note that these days we would have to add economists to Smith's *"merchants and master manufacturers."* Not that this is surprising, given that economic theory has progressed (or degenerated) from Smith's disinterested analysis into apologetics for any action of the boss (a classic example, we must add, of supply and demand, with the marketplace of ideas responding to a demand for such work from *"our merchants and master manufacturers"*). Any "theory" which blames capitalism's problems on "greedy" workers will always be favoured over one that correctly places them in the contradictions created by wage slavery. Ultimately, capitalist economics blame every problem of capitalism on the working class refusing to kow-tow to the bosses (for example, unemployment is caused by wages being too high rather than bosses needing unemployment to maintain their power and profits — see section C.9.2 on empirical evidence that indicates that the first explanation is wrong).

Before concluding, one last point. While it may appear that our analysis of the "subjective" pressures on capitalism is similar to that of mainstream economics, this is not the case. This s because our analysis recognises that such pressures are inherent in the system, have contradictory effects (and so cannot be easily solved without making things worse before they get better) and hold the potential for creating a free society. Our analysis recognises that workers' power and resistance **is** bad for capitalism (as for any hierarchical system), but it also indicates that there is nothing capitalism can do about it without creating authoritarian regimes (such as Nazi Germany) or by generating massive amounts of unemployment (as was the case in the early 1980s in both the USA and the UK, when right-wing governments mismanaged the economy into deep recessions) and even this is no guarantee of eliminating working



tion by questioning authority in more and more areas of life — including, it must be stressed, within our own organisations as well (for example, the rank and file of trade unions had to rebel just as much against their own officials as they had against the bureaucracy of the capitalist firm).

These social struggles resulted in an economic crisis as capital could no longer oppress and exploit working class people sufficiently in order to maintain a suitable profit rate. This crisis was then used to discipline the working class and restore capitalist authority within and outside the workplace (see section C.8.2). We should also note that this process of social revolt in spite, or perhaps because of, the increase of material wealth was predicted by Malatesta. In 1922 he argued that:

> *"The fundamental error of the reformists is that of dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and servants, between proprietors and workers ...*
>
> *"Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the ferule of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and the sentiment of human dignity ... can also imagine and aspire to a technical organisation of production which assures abundance for all and at the same time materially advantageous both to bosses and the workers. But in reality 'social peace' based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is employers and employees. And there will be neither peace nor abundance.*
>
> *"The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers for the better exploitation [sic!] of the forces of nature in the interests of mankind,*

> *because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want more!"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 78–79]

The experience of the post-war compromise and social democratic reform shows that, ultimately, the social question is not poverty but rather freedom. However, to return to the impact of class struggle on capitalism.

It is the awareness that full employment is bad for business which is the basis of the so-called *"Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment"* (NAIRU). As we will discuss in more detail in section C.9, the NAIRU is the rate of unemployment for an economy under which inflation, it is claimed, starts to accelerate. While the basis of this "theory" is slim (the NAIRU is an invisible, mobile rate and so the "theory" can explain every historical event simply because you can prove anything when your datum cannot be seen by mere mortals) it is very useful for justifying policies which aim at attacking working people, their organisations and their activities. The NAIRU is concerned with a *"wage-price"* spiral caused by falling unemployment and rising workers' rights and power. Of course, you never hear of an *"interest-price"* spiral or a *"rent-price"* spiral or a *"profits-price"* spiral even though these are also part of any price. It is always a *"wage-price"* spiral, simply because interest, rent and profits are income to capital and so, by definition, above reproach. By accepting the logic of NAIRU, the capitalist system implicitly acknowledges that it and full employment are incompatible and so with it any claim that it allocates resources efficiently or labour contracts benefit both parties equally.

For these reasons, anarchists argue that a continual "boom" economy is an impossibility simply because capitalism is driven by profit considerations, which, combined with the



subjective pressure on profits due to the class struggle between workers and capitalists, **necessarily** produces a continuous boom-and-bust cycle. When it boils down to it, this is unsurprising, as *"industry is directed, and will have to be directed, not towards what is needed to satisfy the needs of all, but towards that which, at a given moment, brings in the greatest temporary profit to a few. Of necessity, the abundance of some will be based upon the poverty of others, and the straitened circumstances of the greater number will have to be maintained at all costs, that there may be hands to sell themselves for a part only of that which they are capable of producing, without which private accumulation of capital is impossible!"* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128]

Of course, when such "subjective" pressures are felt on the system, when private accumulation of capital is threatened by improved circumstances for the many, the ruling class denounces working class "greed" and "selfishness." When this occurs we should remember what Adam Smith had to say on this subject:

> *"In reality high profits tend much more to raise the price of work than high wages ... That part of the price of the commodity that resolved itself into wages would ... rise only in arithmetical proportion to the rise in wages. But if profits of all the different employers of those working people should be raised five per cent., that price of the commodity which resolved itself into profit would ... rise in geometrical proportion to this rise in profit ... Our merchants and master manufacturers complain of the bad effects of high wages in raising the price and thereby lessening the sale of their goods at home and abroad. They say nothing concerning the bad effects of high profits. They are silent with regard to the pernicious effects of their own gains.*

## C.9.1 Would cutting wages reduce unemployment?

The "free market" capitalist (i.e., neo-classical, neo-liberal or "Austrian") argument is that unemployment is caused by the real wage of labour being higher than the market clearing level. The basic argument is that the market for labour is like any other market and as the price of a commodity increases, the demand for it falls. In terms of labour, high prices (wages) causes lower demand (unemployment). Workers, it is claimed, are more interested in money wages than real wages (which is the amount of goods they can buy with their money wages). This leads them to resist wage cuts even when prices are falling, leading to a rise in their real wages and so they price themselves out of work without realising it. From this analysis comes the argument that if workers were allowed to compete 'freely' among themselves for jobs, real wages would decrease and so unemployment would fall. State intervention (e.g. unemployment benefit, social welfare programmes, legal rights to organise, minimum wage laws, etc.) and labour union activity are, according to this theory, the cause of unemployment, as such intervention and activity forces wages above their market level and so force employers to "let people go." The key to ending unemployment is simple: cut wages.

This position was brazenly put by "Austrian" economist Murray Rothbard. He opposed any suggestion that wages should **not** be cut as the notion that *"the first shock of the depression must fall on profits and not on wages."* This was *"precisely the reverse of sound policy since profits provide the motive power for business activity."* [**America's Great Depression**, p. 188] Rothbard's analysis of the Great Depression is so extreme it almost reads like a satirical attack on the laissez-faire position as his hysterical anti-unionism makes him blame unions for the depression for, apparently, merely existing



as they have. Credit is fundamental to capitalism and this is the last fallacy in the pre-Keynesian argument. In a real economy, it is the most important. Even assuming that the actual rate of interest **could** always equal the equilibrium rate and that it reflected the natural rate of all commodities and all industries, it would not matter as banks would always seek to make profits by extending credit and so artificially lower the actual interest rate during booms. To understand why, we need to explain the flaws in the main laissez-faire approaches to money.

There are three main approaches to the question of eliminating state control of money in "free market" capitalist economics — Monetarism, the 100% gold reserve limit for banks and what is often called "free banking." All three are associated with the right and all three are wrong. The first two are easy to dismiss. Monetarism has been tried and has failed spectacularly in the early 1980s. As it was a key aspect of the neo-liberal war on working class people at this time we will discuss its limitations as part of our account of this period in section C.8.3.

The second option, namely imposing a 100% gold reserve limit for banks is highly interventionist and so not remotely laissez-faire (why should the banking industry be subject to state regulation unlike the rest?). Its logic is simple, namely to ensure that banks do not make loans unless they have sufficient savings to cover them all. In other words, it seeks to abolish the credit cycle by abolishing credit by making banks keep 100% gold reserves against notes. This, in effect, abolishes banking as an industry. Simply put (and it seems strange to have to point this out to supporters of capitalism) banks seek to make a profit and do so by providing credit. This means that any capitalist system will be, fundamentally, one with credit money as banks will always seek to make a profit on the spread between loan and deposit rates. It is a necessity for the banking system and so non-fractional banking is simply not possible. The requirement that banks have enough cash on hand to meet

all depositors demand amounts to the assertion that banks do not lend any money. A 100% reserve system is not a reformed or true banking system. It is the abolition of the banking system. Without fractional reserves, banks cannot make any loans of any kind as they would not be in a position to give their clients their savings if they have made loans. Only someone completely ignorant of a real capitalist economy could make such a suggestion and, unsurprisingly, this position is held by members of the "Austrian" school (particularly its minimum state wing).

This leaves "free banking." This school of thought is, again, associated with the "Austrian" school of economics and right-wing "libertarians" in general. It is advocated by those who seek to eliminate fractional reserve banking but balk by the regulations required by a 100% gold standard (Rothbard gets round this by arguing this standard *"would be part and parcel of the general libertarian legal prohibition against fraud."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32]). It is based on totally privatising the banking system and creating a system in which banks and other private companies compete on the market to get their coins and notes accepted by the general population. This position, it must be stressed, is not the same as anarchist mutual banking as it is seen not as a way of reducing usury to zero but rather as a means of ensuring that interest rates work as they are claimed to do in capitalist theory.

The "free banking" school argues that under competitive pressures, banks would maintain a 100% ratio between the credit they provide and the money they issue with the reserves they actually have. They argue that under the present system, banks can create more credit than they have funds/reserves available as the state exists as lender of last resort and so banks will count on it to bail them out in bad times. Market forces would ensure the end of fractional reserve banking and stop them pushing the rate of interest below its "natural rate." So if banks were subject to market forces, it is argued, then they



that the *"performance of the world economy since capital was liberalised has been worse than when it was tightly controlled"* and that *"[t]hus far, [the] actual performance [of liberalised capitalism] has not lived up to the propaganda."* [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 274 and p. 223] In fact, as Palley notes, *"wage and income growth that would have been deemed totally unsatisfactory a decade ago are now embraced as outstanding economic performance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 202]

Lastly, it is apparent merely from a glance at the history of capitalism during its laissez-faire heyday in the 19th century that "free" competition among workers for jobs does not lead to full employment. Between 1870 and 1913, unemployment was at an average of 5.7% in the 16 more advanced capitalist countries. This compares to an average of 7.3% in 1913–50 and 3.1% in 1950–70. [Takis Fotopoulos, *"The Nation-State and the Market"*, pp. 37–80, **Society and Nature**, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 61] If laissez-faire did lead to full employment, these figures would, surely, be reversed.

As discussed above, full employment **cannot** be a fixed feature of capitalism due to its authoritarian nature and the requirements of production for profit. To summarise, unemployment has more to do with private property than the wages of our fellow workers or any social safety nets working class movements have managed to pressure the ruling class to accept. However, it is worthwhile to discuss why the "free market" capitalist is wrong to claim that unemployment within their system will not exist for long periods of time. In addition, to do so will also indicate the poverty of their theory of, and "solution" to, unemployment and the human misery they would cause. We do this in the next section.

as unemployment is rising, it can only mean that the real wage is not falling fast enough — empirical evidence is never enough to falsify logical deductions from assumptions!

(As an aside, it is one of amazing aspects of the "science" of economics that empirical evidence is never enough to refute its claims. As the Post-Keynesian economist Nicholas Kaldor once pointed out, *"[b]ut unlike any scientific theory, where the basic assumptions are chosen on the basis of direct observation of the phenomena the behaviour of which forms the subject-matter of the theory, the basic assumptions of economic theory are either of a kind that are unverifiable… or of a kind which are directly contradicted by observation."* [**Further Essays on Applied Economics**, pp. 177–8])

Of course, reality often has the last laugh on any ideology. For example, since the late 1970s and early 1980s right-wing capitalist parties have taken power in many countries across the world. These regimes made many pro-free market reforms, arguing that a dose of market forces would lower unemployment, increase growth and so on. The reality proved somewhat different. For example, in the UK, by the time the Labour Party under Tony Blair come back to office in 1997, unemployment (while falling) was still higher than it had been when the last Labour government left office in 1979 (this in spite of repeated redefinitions of unemployment by the Tories in the 1980s to artifically reduce the figures). 18 years of labour market reform had **not** reduced unemployment even under the new definitions. This outcome was identical to New Zealand's neo-liberal experiment, were its overall effect was unimpressive, to say the least: lower growth, lower productivity and feeble real wage increases combined with rising inequality and unemployment. Like the UK, unemployment was still higher in 1997 than it had been in 1979. Over a decade of "flexible" labour markets had increased unemployment (more than doubling it, in fact, at one point as in the UK under Thatcher). It is no understatement to argue, in the words of two critics of neo-liberalism,



would not generate credit money, interest rates would reflect the real rate and so over-investment, and so crisis, would be a thing of the past. Knowing that the state would not step in to save them will also force banks to be prudent in their activities.

This analysis, however, is flawed. We have noted one flaw above, namely the problem that interest rates do not provide sufficient or correct information for investment decisions. Thus relative over-investment could still occur. Another problem is the endogenous nature of money and credit and the pressures this puts on banks. As Steve Keen notes, Austrian economists think that *"the current system of State money means that the money supply is entirely exogenous and under the control of the State authorities. They then attribute much of the cyclical behaviour of the economy to government meddling with the money supply and the rate of interest."* In contrast, Post-Keynesian economists argue that *"though it may appear that the State controls the money supply, the complex chain of causation in the finance sector actually works backwards"* with *"private banks and other credit-generating institutions largely forc[ing] the State's hand. Thus the money supply is largely endogenously determined by the market economy, rather than imposed upon it exogenously by the State."* He notes that the *"empirical record certainly supports Post-Keynesians rather than Austrians on this point. Statistical evidence about the leads and lags between the State-determined component of money supply and broad credit show that the latter 'leads' the former."* [**Debunking Economics**, p. 303] Moreover, as our discussion of the failure of Monetarism will show, central banks could **not** control the money supply when they tried.

To understand why, we need to turn to the ideas of the noted Post-Keynesian economist Hyman Minsky. He created an analysis of the finance and credit markets which gives an insight into why it is doubtful that even a "free banking" system would resist the temptation to create credit money (i.e. loan-

ing more money than available savings). This model is usually called *"The Financial Instability Hypothesis."*

Let us assume that the economy is going into the recovery period after a crash. Initially firms would be conservative in their investment while banks would lend within their savings limit and to low-risk investments. In this way the banks do ensure that the interest rate reflects the "natural" rate. However, this combination of a growing economy and conservatively financed investment means that most projects succeed and this gradually becomes clear to managers/capitalists and bankers. As a result, both managers and bankers come to regard the present risk premium as excessive. New investment projects are evaluated using less conservative estimates of future cash flows. This is the foundation of the new boom and its eventual bust. In Minsky's words, *"stability is destabilising."*

As the economy starts to grow, companies increasingly turn to external finance and these funds are forthcoming because the banking sector shares the increased optimism of investors. Let us not forget that banks are private companies too and so seek profits as well. As Minsky argues, *"bankers live in the same expectational climate as businessmen"* and so *"profit-seeking bankers will find ways of accommodating their customers ... Banks and bankers are not passive managers of money to lend or to invest; they are in business to maximise profits."* [quoted by L. Randall Wray, **Money and Credit in Capitalist Economies**, p. 85] Providing credit is the key way of doing this and so credit expansion occurs. If they did not, the boom would soon turn into slump as investors would have no funds available for them and interest rates would increase, thus forcing firms to pay more in debt repayment, an increase which many firms may not be able to do or find difficult. This in turn would suppress investment and so production, generating unemployment (as companies cannot "fire" investments as easily as they can fire workers), so reducing consumption



*some helps perpetuate the forced overwork of others."* [**The Overworked American**, p. 71, p. 75, p. 129, pp. 75–76 and p. 76]

So, full employment under capitalism is unlikely to last long (nor would full employment booms fill a major part of the business cycle). In addition, it should be stressed that the notion that capitalism naturally stays at equilibrium or that unemployment is temporary adjustments is false, even given the logic of capitalist economics. As Proudhon argued:

> *"The economists admit it [that machinery causes unemployment]: but here they repeat their eternal refrain that, after a lapse of time, the demand for the product having increased in proportion to the reduction in price [caused by the investment], labour in turn will come finally to be in greater demand than ever. Undoubtedly,* ***with time,*** *the equilibrium will be restored; but I must add again, the equilibrium will be no sooner restored at this point than it will be disturbed at another, because the spirit of invention never stops."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, pp. 200–1]

That capitalism creates permanent unemployment and, indeed, needs it to function is a conclusion that few, if any, pro-"free market" capitalists subscribe to. Faced with the empirical evidence that full employment is rare in capitalism, they argue that reality is not close enough to their theories and must be changed (usually by weakening the power of labour by welfare "reform" and reducing "union power"). Thus reality is at fault, not the theory (to re-quote Proudhon, *"Political economy — that is, proprietary despotism — can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 187]) So if unemployment exists, then its because real wages are too high, not because capitalists need unemployment to discipline labour (see section C.9.2 for evidence that this argument is false). Or if real wages are falling

the threat of unemployment decreases the bargaining power of workers. This means that unemployment is not only a natural product of capitalism, it is an essential part of it.

So cycles of short periods approaching full employment and followed by longer periods of high unemployment are actually a more likely outcome of pure capitalism than continued full employment. As we argued in sections C.1.5 and C.7.1 capitalism needs unemployment to function successfully and so "free market" capitalism will experience periods of boom and slump, with unemployment increasing and decreasing over time (as can be seen from 19th century capitalism). So as Juliet Schor, a labour economist, put it, usually *"employers have a structural advantage in the labour market, because there are typically more candidates ready and willing to endure this work marathon [of long hours] than jobs for them to fill."* Under conditions of full-employment *"employers are in danger of losing the upper hand"* and hiring new workers *"suddenly becomes much more difficult. They are harder to find, cost more, and are less experienced."* These considerations *"help explain why full employment has been rare."* Thus competition in the labour market is *"typically skewed in favour of employers: it is a buyers market. And in a buyer's market, it is the sellers who compromise."* In the end, workers adapt to this inequality of power and instead of getting what they want, they want what they get (to use Schor's expression). Under full employment this changes. In such a situation it is the bosses who have to start compromising. And they do not like it. As Schor notes, America *"has never experienced a sustained period of full employment. The closest we have gotten is the late 1960s, when the overall unemployment rate was under 4 percent for four years. But that experience does more to prove the point than any other example. The trauma caused to business by those years of a tight labour market was considerable. Since then, there has been a powerful consensus that the nation cannot withstand such a low rate of unemployment."* Hence the support for the NAIRU to ensure that *"forced idleness of*



demand along with investment demand, so deepening the slump.

To avoid this and to take advantage of the rising economy, bankers accommodate their customers and generate credit rather than rise interest rates. In this way they accept liability structures both for themselves and for their customers *"that, in a more sober expectational climate, they would have rejected."* [Minsky, **Inflation, Recession and Economic Policy**, p. 123] The banks innovate their financial products, in other words, in line with demand. Firms increase their indebtedness and banks are more than willing to allow this due to the few signs of financial strain in the economy. The individual firms and banks increase their financial liability, and so the whole economy moves up the liability structure. Like other businesses, banks operate in an uncertain environment and have no way of knowing whether their actions will increase the fragility within the economy or push it into crisis.

The central banks, meanwhile, accommodate the banks activity. They do not and cannot force them to create credit. Alan Holmes, a senior vice president at the New York Federal Reserve, put the process this way:

> *"In the real world, banks extend credit, creating deposits in the process, and look for the reserves later. The question then becomes one of whether and how the Federal Reserve will accommodate the demand for reserves. In the very short run, the Federal Reserve has little or no choice about accommodating that demand, over time, its influence can obviously be felt."* [quoted by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 220]

As long as profits exceed debt servicing requirements, the system will continue to work. Eventually, though, interest rates rise as the existing extension of credit appears too high

to the banks or the central bank. This affects all firms, from the most conservatively financed to the most speculative, and "pushes" them up even higher up the liability structure. Refinancing existing debts is made at the higher rate of interest, increasing cash outflows and reducing demand for investment as the debt burden increases. Conservatively financed firms can no longer can repay their debts easily, less conservative ones fail to pay them and so on. The margin of error narrows and firms and banks become more vulnerable to unexpected developments, such a new competitors, strikes, investments which do not generate the expected rate of return, credit becoming hard to get, interest rates increase and so on. In the end, the boom turns to slump and firms and banks fail. The state then intervenes to try and stop the slump getting worse (with varying degrees of success and failure).

Thus the generation of credit is a spontaneous process rooted in the nature of capitalism and is fundamentally endogenous in nature. This means that the business cycle is an inherent part of capitalism even if we assume that it is caused purely by disequilibrium in the credit market. In other words, it is more than likely that the credit market will be in disequilibrium like every other market in any real capitalist economy — and for the same reasons. As such, the natural rate of interest relies on concepts of equilibrium that are not only inconsistent with reality but also with the broader principles of "Austrian" economic ideology.

The "free banking" school reject this claim and argue that private banks in competition would **not** do this as this would make them appear less competitive on the market and so customers would frequent other banks (this is the same process by which inflation would be solved). However, it is **because** the banks are competing that they innovate — if they do not, another bank or company would in order to get more profits. Keynesian economist Charles P. Kindleburger comments:



state intervention on behalf of the capitalist class, preferring to attack trade unions, minimum wages, welfare and numerous other "imperfections" of the labour market which, strangely, are designed (at least in rhetoric) to benefit working class people. Ignoring that issue, however, the question now arises, would a "purer" capitalism create full employment?

First, we should point out that some supporters of "free market" capitalism (most notably, the "Austrian" school) claim that real markets are not in equilibrium at all, i.e. that the nature state of the economy is one of disequilibrium. As we noted in section C.1.6, this means full employment is impossible as this is an equilibrium position but few explicitly state this obvious conclusion of their own theories and claim against logic that full employment can occur (full employment, it should be stressed, has never meant 100% employment as they will always be some people looking for a job and so by that term we mean close to 100% employment). Anarchists agree: full employment can occur in "free market" capitalism but not for ever nor even for long periods. As the Polish socialist economist Michal Kalecki pointed out in regards to pre-Keynesian capitalism, *"[n]ot only is there mass unemployment in the slump, but average employment throughout the cycle is considerably below the peak reached in the boom. The reserve of capital equipment and the reserve army of unemployed are typical features of capitalist economy at least throughout a considerable part of the [business] cycle."* [quoted by Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, pp. 115–6]

It is doubtful that "pure" capitalism will be any different. This is due to the nature of the system. What is missing from the orthodox analysis is an explicit discussion of class and class struggle (implicitly, they are there and almost always favour the bosses). Once this is included, the functional reason for unemployment becomes clear. It serves to discipline the workforce, who will tolerate being bossed about much more with the fear that unemployment brings. This holds down wages as

If this is the case, and it is, then any attempts to maintain the "natural" rate are also meaningless as the only way to discover it is to watch **actual** inflation levels and raising interest rates appropriately. Which means that people are being made unemployed on the off-chance that the unemployment level will drop below the (invisible and mobile) "natural" rate and harm the interests of the ruling class (high inflation rates harms interest incomes and full employment squeezes profits by increasing workers' power). This does not seem to bother most economists, for whom empirical evidence at the best of times is of little consequence. This is doubly true with the NAIRU, for with an invisible, mobile value, the theory is always true after the fact — if inflation rises as unemployment rises, then the natural rate has increased; if inflation falls as unemployment rises, it has fallen! As post-Keynesian economist James K. Galbraith noted in his useful critique of the NAIRU, *"as the real unemployment rate moves, the apparent NAIRU moves in its shadow"* and its *"estimates and re-estimates seem largely a response to predictive failure. We still have no theory, and no external evidence, governing the fall of the estimated NAIRU. The literature simply observes that inflation hasn't occurred and so the previous estimate must have been too high."* He stresses, economists have held *"to a concept in the face of twenty years of unexplained variation, predictive failure, and failure of the profession to coalesce on procedural issues."* [**Created Unequal**, p. 180] Given that most mainstream economists subscribe to this fallacy, it just shows how the "science" accommodates itself to the needs of the powerful and how the powerful will turn to any old nonsense if it suits their purpose. A better example of supply and demand for ideology could not be found.

So, supporters of "free market" capitalism do have a point, "actually existing capitalism" has created high levels of unemployment. What **is** significant is that most supporters of capitalism consider that this is a laissez-faire policy! Sadly, the ideological supporters of pure capitalism rarely mention this



> *"As a historical generalisation, it can be said that every time the authorities stabilise or control some quantity of money… in moments of euphoria more will be produced. Or if the definition of money is fixed in terms of particular assets, and the euphoria happens to 'monetise' credit in new ways that are excluded from the definition, the amount of money defined in the old way will not grow, but its velocity will increase … fix any [definition of money] and the market will create new forms of money in periods of boom to get round the limit."* [**Manias, Panics and Crashes**, p. 48]

This can be seen from the fact that *"[b]ank notes … and bills of exchange … were initially developed because of an inelastic supply of coin."* Thus monetary expansion *"is systematic and endogenous rather than random and exogenous."* [Kindleburger, **Op. Cit.**, p. 51 and p. 150] This means that *"any shortage of commonly-used types [of money] is bound to lead to the emergence of new types; indeed, this is how, historically, first bank notes and the chequing account emerged."* If the state tries to regulate one form of money, *"lending and borrowing is diverted to other sources."* [Nicholas Kaldor, *"The New Monetarism"*, **The Essential Kaldor**, p. 481 and p. 482] This means that the notion that abolishing central banking will result in the use of gold and 100% reverses and so eliminate the business cycle is misplaced:

> *"This view overlooks the fact that the **emergence** of money-substitutes — whether in the form of bank notes, bank accounts, or credit cards — was a spontaneous process, not planned or regulated 'from above' by some central authority, and for that reason alone it is impossible to treat some arbitrary definition of money (which included specific forms*

> *of such money-substitutes in the definition of money) as an exogenous variable. The emergence of surrogate money was a spontaneous process resulting from the development of the banking system; this development brought a steady increase in the ratio of money substitutes of 'real' money."* [Nicholas Kaldor, **The Scourge of Monetarism**, p. 44f]

This process can be seen at work in Adam Smith's time. Then Scotland was based on a competitive banking system in which baking firms issued their own money and maintained their own reverse of gold. Yet, as Smith notes, they issued more money than was available in the banks coffers:

> *"Though some of those notes [the banks issued] are continually coming back for payment, part of them continue to circulate for months and years together. Though he [the banker] has generally in circulation, therefore, notes to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds, twenty thousand pounds in gold and silver may frequently be a sufficient provision for answering occasional demands."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, pp. 257–8]

In other words, the competitive banking system did not, in fact, eliminate fractional reserve banking. Ironically enough, Smith noted that *"the Bank of England paid very dearly, not only for its own imprudence, but for the much greater imprudence of almost all of the Scotch [sic!] banks."* Thus the central bank was more conservative in its money and credit generation than the banks under competitive pressures! Indeed, Smith argues that the banking companies did not, in fact, act in line with their interests as assumed by the "free banking" school for *"had every particular banking company always understood and attended to*



to private serfdom has been cleared of any barriers imposed on it by the rise of the working class movement and the policies of social democracy implemented after the Second World War to stop social revolution. This is the agenda pursued so strongly in America and Britain, imposed on the developing nations and urged upon Continental Europe.

Although the aims and results of the NAIRU should be enough to condemn it out of hand, it can be dismissed for other reasons. First and foremost, this "natural" rate is both invisible and can move. This means trying to find it is impossible (although it does not stop economists trying, and then trying again when rate inflation and unemployment rates refute the first attempt, and then trying again and again). In addition, it is a fundamentally a meaningless concept — you can prove anything with an invisible, mobile value — it is an non-refutable concept and so, fundamentally, non-scientific. Close inspection reveals natural rate theory to be akin to a religious doctrine. This is because it is not possible to conceive of a test that could possibly falsify the theory. When predictions of the natural rate turn out wrong (as they repeatedly have), proponents can simply assert that the natural rate has changed. That has led to the most recent incarnation of the theory in which the natural rate is basically the trend rate of unemployment. Whatever trend is observed is natural — case closed.

Since natural rate theory cannot be tested, a sensible thing would be to examine its assumptions for plausibility and reasonableness. However, Milton Friedman's early work on economic methodology blocks this route as he asserted that realism and plausibility of assumptions have no place in economics. With most economists blindly accepting this position, the result is a church in which entry is conditional on accepting particular assumptions about the working of markets. The net effect is to produce an ideology, an ideology which survives due to its utility to certain sections of society.

Balogh put it, full employment *"generally removes the need for servility, and thus alters the way of life, the relationship between classes ... weakening the dominance of men over men, dissolving the master-servant relation. It is the greatest engine for the attainment by all of human dignity and greater equality."* [**The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics**, p. 47]

Which explains, in part, why the 1960s and 1970s were marked by mass social protest against authority rather than von Hayek's *"Road to Serfdom."* It also explains why the NAIRU was so enthusiastically embraced and applied by the ruling class. When times are hard, workers with jobs think twice before standing up to their bosses and so work harder, for longer and in worse conditions. This ensures that surplus value is increased relative to wages (indeed, in the USA, real wages have stagnated since 1973 while profits have grown massively). In addition, such a policy ensures that political discussion about investment, profits, power and so on (*"the other institutional factors"*) are reduced and diverted because working class people are too busy trying to make ends meet. Thus the state intervenes in the economy to **stop** full employment developing to combat inflation and instability on behalf of the capitalist class.

That this state manipulation is considered consistent with the "free market" says a lot about the bankruptcy of the capitalist system and its defenders. But, then, for most defenders of the system state intervention on behalf of capital is part of the natural order, unlike state intervention (at least in rhetoric) on behalf of the working class (and shows that Kropotkin was right to stress that the state **never** practices "laissez-faire" with regard to the working class — see section D.1). Thus neo-liberal capitalism is based on monetary policy that explicitly tries to weaken working class resistance by means of unemployment. If "inflation" (i.e. labour income) starts to increase, interest rates are raised so causing unemployment and, it is hoped, putting the plebes back in their place. In other words, the road



*its own particular interest, the circulation never could have been overstocked with paper money. But every particular baking company has not always understood and attended to its own particular interest, and the circulation has frequently been overstocked with paper money."* Thus we have reserve banking plus bankers acting in ways opposed to their *"particular interest"* (i.e. what economists consider to be their actual self-interest rather than what the bankers actually thought was their self-interest!) in a system of competitive banking. Why could this be the case? Smith mentions, in passing, a possible reason. He notes that *"the high profits of trade afforded a great temptation to overtrading"* and that while a *"multiplication of banking companies ... increases the security of the public"* by forcing them *"to be more circumspect in their conduct"* it also *"obliges all bankers to be more liberal in their dealings with their customers, lest their rivals should carry them away."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 269, p. 267, p. 274 and p. 294]

Thus the banks were pulled in two directions at once, to accommodate their loan customers and make more profits while being circumspect in their activities to maintain sufficient reserves for the demands of their savers. Which factor prevails would depend on the state of the economy, with up-swings provoking liberal lending (as described by Minsky). Moreover, given that credit generation is meant to produce the business cycle, it is clear from the case of Scotland that competitive banking would not, in fact, stop either. This also was the case with 19$^{th}$ century America, which did not have a central bank for most of that period and that *"left the volatile US financial system without any kind of lender of last resort, but in booms all kinds of funny money passed."* This lead to *"thousands of decentralised banks ... hoarding reserves"* and so *"starving the system of liquidity precisely at the moment it was most badly needed"* while *"the up cycles were also extraordinary, powered by loose credit and kinky currencies (like privately issued banknotes)."* [Doug Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 93 and p. 94]

As Nicholas Kaldor argued, *"the essential function of banks in the creation of 'finance' (or credit) was well understood by Adam Smith, who ... regarded branch-banking as a most important invention for the enrichment of society. He described how, as a result of the finance banks were able to place at the disposal of producers, the real income of Scotland doubled or trebled in a remarkably short time. Expressed in Keynesian terms, the 'finance' provided by banks made it possible to increase investments ahead of income or savings, and to provide the savings counterpart of the investment out of the additional income generated through a multiplier process by the additional spending."* This process, however, was unstable which naturally lead to the rise of central banks. *"Since the notes issued by some banks were found more acceptable than those of others, giving rise to periodic payments crises and uncertainty, it was sooner or later everywhere found necessary to concentrate the right of issuing bank notes in the hands of a single institution."* [*"How Monetarism Failed,"* **Further Essays on Economic Theory and Policy**, p. 181] In addition, from an anarchist perspective, no ruling class wants economic instability to undermine its wealth and income generating ability (Doug Henwood provides a useful summary of this process, and the arguments used to justify it within the American ruling class, for the creation of the US Federal Reserve at the start of the 20th century. [**Wall Street**, pp. 92–5]). Nor would any ruling class want too easy credit undermining its power over the working class by holding down unemployment too long (or allowing working class people to create their own financial institutions).

Thus the over supply of credit, rather than being the **cause** of the crisis is actually a symptom. Competitive investment drives the business cycle expansion, which is allowed and encouraged by the competition among banks in supplying credit. Such expansion complements — and thus amplifies — other objective tendencies towards crisis, such as over-investment and disportionalities. In other words, a pure "free market" capital-



*thereby lowering demand and raising unemployment."* In effect, the Federal Reserve *"has been using monetary policy as a form of surrogate incomes policy, and this surrogate policy has been tilted against wages in favour of profits"* and so is regulating the economy *"in a manner favourable to business."* [Thomas I. Palley, **Plenty of Nothing**, p. 77, p. 111 and pp. 112–3] That this is done under the name of fighting inflation should not fool us:

> *"Mild inflation is often an indication that workers have some bargaining strength and may even have the upper hand. Yet, it is at exactly this stage that the Fed now intervenes owning to its anti-inflation commitment, and this intervention raises interest rates and unemployment. Thus, far from being neutral, the Fed's anti-inflation policy implies siding with business in the ever-present conflict between labour and capital over distribution of the fruits of economic activity ... natural-rate theory serves as the perfect cloak for a pro-business policy stance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110]

In a sense, it is understandable that the ruling class within capitalism desires to manipulate unemployment in this way and deflect questions about their profit, property and power onto the state of the labour market. High prices can, therefore, be blamed on high wages rather than high profits, rents and interest while, at the same time, workers will put up with lower hours and work harder and be too busy surviving to find the time or the energy to question the boss's authority either in theory or in practice. So managing the economy by manipulating interest rates to increase unemployment levels when required allows greater profits to be extracted from workers as management hierarchy is more secure. People will put up with a lot in the face of job insecurity. As left-wing economist Thomas

*were pulling workers from other companies with offers of higher wages and better benefits. Some Beige Books reported that firms had to offer such non-wage benefits as flexible work hours, child care, or training in order to retain workers. The Beige Books give accounts of firms having to send buses into inner cities to bring workers out to the suburbs to work in hotels and restaurants. It even reported that some employers were forced to hire workers with handicaps in order to meet their needs for labour.*

*"From the standpoint of employers, life is much easier when the workers are lined up at the door clamouring for jobs than when workers have the option to shop around for better opportunities. Employers can count on a sympathetic ear from the Fed. When the Fed perceives too much upward wage pressure, it slams on the brakes and brings the party to an end. The Fed justifies limiting job growth and raising the unemployment rate because of its concern that inflation may get out of control, but this does not change the fact that it is preventing workers, and specifically less-skilled workers, from getting jobs, and clamping down on their wage growth."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 32–3]

This has not happened by accident. Lobbying by business, as another left-wing economist stresses, *"is directed toward increasing their economic power"* and business *"has been a supporter of macroeconomic policies that have operated the economy with higher rates of unemployment. The stated justification is that this lowers inflation, but it also weakens workers' bargaining power."* Unsurprisingly, *"the economic consequence of the shift in the balance of power in favour of business ... has served to redistribute income towards profits at the expense of wages,*



ism would still have a business cycle as this cycle is caused by the nature of capitalism, not by state intervention. In reality (i.e. in "actually existing" capitalism), state manipulation of money (via interest rates) is essential for the capitalist class as it allows indirect profit-generating activity, such as ensuring a "natural" level of unemployment to keep profits up, an acceptable level of inflation to ensure increased profits, and so forth, as well as providing a means of tempering the business cycle, organising bailouts and injecting money into the economy during panics. Ultimately, if state manipulation of money caused the problems of capitalism, we would not have seen the economic successes of the post-war Keynesian experiment or the business cycle in pre-Keynesian days and in countries which had a more free banking system (for example, nearly half of the late 19$^{th}$ century in the US was spent in periods of recession and depression, compared to a fifth since the end of World War II).

It is true that all crises have been preceded by a speculatively-enhanced expansion of production and credit. This does not mean, however, that crisis **results** from speculation and the expansion of credit. The connection is not causal in free market capitalism. The expansion and contraction of credit is a mere symptom of the periodic changes in the business cycle, as the decline of profitability contracts credit just as an increase enlarges it. So while there are some similarities in the pre-Keynesian/"Austrian" theory and the radical one outlined here, the key differences are two-fold. Firstly, the pro-capitalist theory argues that it is possible for capitalist banks **not** to act, well, like capitalists if subject to competition (or regulated enough). This seems highly unlikely and fits as badly into their general theories as the notion that disequilibrium in the credit market is the root of the business cycle. Secondly, the radical position stresses that the role of credit reflect deeper causes. Paul Mattick gives the correct analysis:

> *"[M]oney and credit policies can themselves change nothing with regard to profitability or insufficient profits. Profits come only from production, from the surplus value produced by workers … The expansion of credit has always been taken as a sign of a coming crisis, in the sense that it reflected the attempt of individual capital entities to expand despite sharpening competition, and hence survive the crisis… Although the expansion of credit has staved off crisis for a short time, it has never prevented it, since ultimately it is the real relationship between total profits and the needs of social capital to expand in value which is the decisive factor, and that cannot be altered by credit."* [**Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, pp. 17–18]

In short, the apologists of capitalism confuse the symptoms for the disease.

The cyclical movements on the real side of the economy will be enhanced (both upwards and downwards) by events in its financial side and this may result in greater amplitudes in the cycle but the latter does not create the former. Where there *"is no profit to be had, credit will not be sought."* While extension of the credit system *"can be a factor deferring crisis, the actual outbreak of crisis makes it into an aggravating factor because of the larger amount of capital that must be devalued."* [Paul Mattick, **Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 138] But this is also a problem facing competing private companies using the gold standard. The money supply reflects the economic activity within a country and if that supply cannot adjust, interest rates rise and provoke a crisis. Thus the need for a flexible money supply (as desired, for example, by Mutualists and the US Individualist Anarchists).

It must always be remembered that a loan is not like other commodities. Its exchange value is set by its use value. As its



*Fed!"*), the Federal Reverse (like all Central Banks since the 1980s) *"worries that if too many people have jobs, or if it is too easy for workers to find jobs, there will be upward pressure on wages. More rapid wage growth can get translated into more rapidly rising prices — in other words, inflation. So the Fed often decides to raise interest rates to slow the economy and keep people out of work in order to keep inflation from increasing and eventually getting out of control."* However, *"[m]ost people probably do not realise that the Federal Reserve Board, an agency of the government, intervenes in the economy to prevent it from creating too many jobs. But there is even more to the story. When the Fed hits the brakes to slow job growth, it is not doctors, lawyers, and CEOs who end up without jobs. The people who lose are those in the middle and the bottom — sales clerks, factory workers, custodians, and dishwashers. These are the workers who don't get hired or get laid off when the economy slows or goes into a recession."* [**The Conservative Nanny State**, p. 31] Thus the state pushes up unemployment rates to slow wage growth, and thereby relieve inflationary pressure. The reason should be obvious:

> *"In periods of low unemployment, workers don't only gain from higher wages. Employers must make efforts to accommodate workers' various needs, such as child care or flexible work schedules, because they know that workers have other employment options. The Fed is well aware of the difficulties that employers face in periods of low unemployment. It compiles a regular survey, called the 'Beige Book,' of attitudes from around the country about the state of the economy. Most of the people interviewed for the Beige Book are employers.*
>
> *"From 1997 to 2000, when the unemployment rate was at its lowest levels in 30 years, the Beige Book was filled with complaints that some companies*

the expense of labour (see section C.3 for details). The use of Phelps' theory by capital in the class war is equally obvious — as was so blatantly stated by **The Economist** and the head of the American Federal Reserve during this period:

> *"there's supporting testimony from Alan Greenspan. Several times during the late 1990s, Greenspan worried publicly that, as unemployment drifted steadily lower the 'pool of available workers' was running dry. The dryer it ran, the greater risk of 'wage inflation,' meaning anything more than minimal increases. Productivity gains took some of the edge of this potentially dire threat, said Greenspan, and so did 'residual fear of job skill obsolescence, which has induced a preference for job security over wage gains' ... Workers were nervous and acting as if the unemployment rate were higher than the 4% it reached in the boom. Still, Greenspan was a bit worried, because ... if the pool stayed dry, 'Significant increases in wages, in excess of productivity growth, [would] inevitably emerge, absent the unlikely repeal of the law of supply and demand.' Which is why Greenspan & Co. raised short-term interest rates by about two points during 1999 and the first half of 2000. There was no threat of inflation ... nor were there any signs of rising worker militancy. But wages were creeping higher, and the threat of the sack was losing some of its bite."* [Doug Henwood, **After the New Economy**, pp. 206–7]

Which is quite ironic, given that Greenspan's role in the economy was, precisely, to *"repeal"* the *"law of supply and demand."* As one left-wing economist puts it (in a chapter correctly entitled *"The Workers Are Getting Uppity: Call In the*



use value lies in investing and so generating a stream of income, the market rate of interest is governed by the average expectations of profits for the capitalist class. Thus credit is driven by its **perceived** use-value rather than its cost of production or the amount of money a bank has. Its possible use value reflects the prospective exchange-values (prices and profits) it can help produce. This means that uncertainty and expectations play a key role in the credit and financial markets and these impact on the real economy. This means that money can **never** be neutral and so capitalism will be subject to the business cycle and so unemployment will remain a constant threat over the heads of working class people. In such circumstances, the notion that capitalism results in a level playing field for classes is simply not possible and so, except in boom times, working class will be at a disadvantage on the labour market.

To sum up, *"[i]t is not credit but only the increase in production made possible by it that increases surplus value. It is then the rate of exploitation which determines credit expansion."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 18] Hence credit money would increase and decrease in line with capitalist profitability, as predicted in capitalist economic theory. But this could not affect the business cycle, which has its roots in production for capital (i.e. profit) and capitalist authority relations, to which the credit supply would obviously reflect, and not vice versa.

## C.8.1 Does this mean that Keynesianism works?

If state interference in credit generation does not cause the business cycle, does that mean Keynesianism capitalism can work? Keynesian economics, as opposed to free market capitalism, maintains that the state can and should intervene in the economy in order to stop economic crises from occurring.

Can it work? To begin to answer that question, we must first quickly define what is meant by Keynesianism as there are different kinds of Keynesianist policies and economics.

As far as economics goes, Keynes' co-worker Joan Robinson coined the phrase *"Bastard Keynesianism"* to describe the vulgarisation of his economics and its stripping of all aspects which were incompatible with the assumptions of neo-classical economics. Thus the key notion of uncertainty was eliminated and his analysis of the labour market reduced to the position he explicitly rejected, namely that unemployment was caused by price rigidities. This process was aided by the fact that Keynes retained significant parts of the neo-classical position in his analysis and argued that the role of the state was limited to creating the overall conditions necessary to allow the neo-classical system to come *"into its own again"* and allow capitalism *"to realise the full potentialities of production."* [**The General Theory**, pp. 378–9] Unlike many of his more radical followers, Keynes was blind to real nature of capitalism as a class based system and so failed to understand the functional role that unemployment plays within it (see section C.1.5).

However, the context in which Keynes worked explains much. Faced with the dire situation capitalism faced during the 1930s, he presented a new theoretical analysis of capitalism that both explained the crisis and suggested policies that would, without interfering with its general principles, end it. Keynes' work was aided both by the practical failure of traditional solutions and growing fear of revolution and so even the most died-in-the-wool neo-classical economists could not keep his theory from being tried. When it appeared to work that, on one level, ended the argument. However, at a deeper level, at the level of theory, the struggle was just beginning. As the neo-classical (and Austrian) tradition is axiom-led rather than empirically-led (otherwise their axioms would have been abandoned long ago), the mere fact



> *more labour, and therefore makes the supply of labour to a certain extent independent of the supply of labourers. The movement of the law of supply and demand of labour on this basis completes the despotism of capital. Thus as soon as the workers learn the secret of why it happens that the more they work, the more alien wealth they produce … as soon as, by setting up trade unions, etc., they try to organise a planned co-operation between employed and unemployed in order to obviate or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalistic production on their class, so soon capital and its sycophant, political economy, cry out at the infringement of the 'eternal' and so to speak 'sacred' law of supply and demand. Every combination of employed and unemployed disturbs the 'pure' action of this law. But on the other hand, as soon as … adverse circumstances prevent the creation of an industrial reserve army and, with it, the absolute dependence of the working-class upon the capitalist class, capital, along with its platitudinous Sancho Panza, rebels against the 'sacred' law of supply and demand, and tries to check its inadequacies by forcible means."* [**Capital**, Vol. 1, pp. 793–4]

That the **Economist** and Phelps are simply echoing, and confirming, Marx is obvious. Modern economics, while disparaging Marx, has integrated this idea into its macro-economic policy recommendations by urging the state to manipulate the economy to ensure that "inflation" (i.e. wage rises) are under control. Economics has played its role of platitudinous sycophant well while Phelps' theory has informed state interference (*"forcible means"*) in the economy since the 1980s, with the expected result that wages have failed to keep up with rising productivity and so capital as enriched itself at

**Economist**) do treat the market like a god (a theodicy is a specific branch of theology and philosophy that attempts to reconcile the existence of evil in the world with the assumption of a benevolent God). And, as with all gods, sacrifices are required and Phelps' theory is the means by which this is achieved. As the magazine noted: *"in much of his work he contends that unemployment is necessary to cow workers, ensuring their loyalty to the company and their diligence on the job, at a wage the company can afford to pay"* (i.e., one which would ensure a profit).

It is this theory which has governed state policy since the 1980s. In other words, government's around the world have been trying to *"cow workers"* in order to ensure their obedience (*"loyalty to the company"*). Unsurprisingly, attempts to lower the *"natural rate"* have all involved using the state to break the economic power of working class people (attacking unions, increasing interest rates to increase unemployment in order to temporarily *"cow"* workers and so on). All so that profits can be keep high in the face of the rising wages caused by the natural actions of the market!

Yet it must be stressed that Friedman's and Phelps' conclusions are hardly new. Anarchists and other socialists had been arguing since the 1840s that capitalism had no tendency to full employment either in theory or in practice. They have also noted how periods of full employment bolstered working class power and harmed profits. It is, as we stressed in section C.1.5, the fundamental disciplinary mechanism of the system. Somewhat ironically, then, Phelps got bourgeois economics highest prize for restating, in neo-classical jargon, the model of the labour market expounded by, say, Marx:

> *"If [capital's] accumulation on the one hand increases the demand for labour, it increases on the other the supply of workers by 'setting them free', while at the same time the pressure of the unemployed compels those that are employed to furnish*



that capitalism was in crisis and that Keynes had presented a theory more in line with the reality was not enough to change mainstream economics. From the start, neo-classical economists began their counter-attack. Led by Paul Samuelson in the US and John Hicks in the UK, they set about making Keynes' theories safe for neo-classical economics. They did this by using mathematics on a part of his theory, leaving out all those bits that were inconsistent with neo-classical axioms. This bowdlerised version of Keynes soon became the standard in undergraduate courses.

The fate of Keynes reinforces the comment of French revolutionary Louis de Saint-Just that *"those who make revolution half way only dig their own graves."* Keynes ideas were only a partial break with the neo-classical orthodoxy and, as such, allowed the basis for the neo-classical-Keynesian synthesis which dominated post-war economics until the mid-1970s as well as giving the Monetarist counter-revolution space to grow. Perhaps this partial break is understandable, given the dominance of neo-classical ideas in the economics profession it may have been too much to expect them to renounce all their dogmas yet it ensured that any developments towards an economics based on science rather than ideology would be resigned to the sidelines.

It is important to stress that Keynes was, first and foremost, a supporter of capitalism. He aimed to save it, not to end it. As he put it the *"**class war** will find me on the side of the educated bourgeoisie."* [quoted by Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 212] That he presented a more accurate picture of capitalism and exposed some of the contradictions within neo-classical economics is part of the reason he was and is so hated by many on the right, although his argument that the state should limit some of the power of individual firms and capitalists and redistribute some income and wealth was a far more important source of that hatred. That he helped save capitalism from itself (and secure their fortunes) did not seem to concern his wealthy detractors.

They failed to understand Keynes often sounded more radical than he actually was. Doug Henwood gives a good overview of Keynes' ideas (and limitations) in chapter 5 of his book **Wall Street**.

What of Keynesian policies? The *"Bastard Keynesianism"* of the post-war period (for all its limitations) did seem to have some impact on capitalism. This can be seen from comparing Keynesianism with what came before. The more laissez-faire period was nowhere near as stable as modern day supporters of free(r) market capitalists like to suggest. There were continual economic booms and slumps. The last third of the 19th century (often considered as the heyday of private enterprise) was a period of profound instability and anxiety as it *"was characterised by violent booms and busts, in nearly equal measure, since almost half the period was one of panic and depression."* American spent nearly half of the late 19th century in periods of recession and depression. By way of comparison, since the end of world war II, only about a fifth of the time has been. [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 94 and p. 54] Between 1867 and 1900 there were 8 complete business cycles. Over these 396 months, the economy expanded during 199 months and contracted during 197. Hardly a sign of great stability. Overall, the economy went into a slump, panic or crisis in 1807, 1817, 1828, 1834, 1837, 1854, 1857, 1873, 1882, and 1893 (in addition, 1903 and 1907 were also crisis years).

Then there is what is often called the *"Golden Age of Capitalism,"* the boom years of (approximately) 1945 to 1975. This post-war boom presents compelling evidence that Keynesianism can effect the business cycle for the better by reducing its tendency to develop into a full depression. By intervening in the economy, the state would reduce uncertainty for capitalists by maintaining overall demand which will, in turn, ensure conditions where they will invest their money rather than holding onto it (what Keynes termed *"liquidity-preference"*). In other words, to create conditions where capitalists will desire to in-



This can be seen when the other (independent) inventor of the "natural" rate theory won the so-called Nobel prize in 2006. Unsurprisingly, the **Economist** magazine was cock-a-hoop. [*"A natural choice: Edmund Phelps earns the economics profession's highest accolade"*, Oct 12th 2006] The reasons why became clear. According to the magazine, *"Phelps won his laurels in part for kicking the feet from under his intellectual forerunners"* by presenting a (neo-classical) explanation for the breakdown of the so-called *"Phillips curve."* This presented a statistical trade-off between inflation and unemployment (*"unemployment was low in Britain when wage inflation was high, and high when inflation was low"*). The problem was that economists *"were quick — too quick — to conclude that policymakers therefore faced a grand, macroeconomic trade-off"* in which, due to *"such a tight labour market, companies appease workers by offering higher wages. They then pass on the cost in the form of dearer prices, cheating workers of a higher real wage. Thus policy makers can engineer lower unemployment only through deception."* Phelps innovation was to argue that *"[e]ventually workers will cotton on, demanding still higher wages to offset the rising cost of living. They can be duped for as long as inflation stays one step ahead of their rising expectations of what it will be."* The similarities with Friedman's idea are obvious. This meant that the *"stable trade-off depicted by the Phillips curve is thus a dangerous mirage"* which broke down in the 1970s with the rise of stagflation.

Phelps argued that there was a *"natural"* rate of unemployment, where *"workers' expectations are fulfilled, prices turn out as anticipated, and they no longer sell their labour under false pretences."* This *"equilibrium does not, sadly, imply full employment"* and so capitalism required *"leaving some workers mouldering on the shelf. Given economists' almost theological commitment to the notion that markets clear, the presence of unemployment in the world requires a theodicy to explain it."* The religious metaphor does seem appropriate as most economists (and **The**

analysis, obviously, did not fit in well with the panglossian assumptions of neo-classical economics. Yet basing an analysis on individual expectations does not answer the question whether these expectations are meet. With strong organisation and a willingness to act, workers can increase their wages to counteract inflation. This means that there are two main options within capitalism. The first option is to use price controls to stop capitalists increasing their prices. However, this contradicts the scared laws of supply and demand and violates private property. Which brings us to the second option, namely to break unions and raise unemployment to such levels that workers think twice about standing up for themselves. In this case, workers cannot increase their money wages and so their real wages drop.

Guess which option the capitalist state went for? As Friedman made clear when he introduced the concept there was really nothing *"natural"* about the natural rate theory as it was determined by state policy:

> *"I do not mean to suggest that it is immutable and unchangeable. On the contrary, many of the market characteristics that determine its level are man-made and policy-made. In the United States, for example, legal minimum wage rates ... and the strength of labour unions all make the natural rate of unemployment higher than it would otherwise be."* [*"The Role of Monetary Policy,"* pp. 1–17, **American Economic Review**, Vol. 68, No. 1, p. 9]

Thus the "natural" rate is really a social and political phenomenon which, in effect, measures the bargaining strength of working people. This suggests that inflation will fall when working class people are in no position to recoup rising prices in the form of rising wages. The "Natural Rate" is, in other words, about class conflict.



vest and ensure the willingness on the part of capitalists to act as capitalists.

This period of social Keynesianism after the war was marked by reduced inequality, increased rights for working class people, less unemployment, a welfare state you could actually use and so on. Compared to present-day capitalism, it had much going for it. However, Keynesian capitalism is still capitalism and so is still based upon oppression and exploitation. It was, in fact, a more refined form of capitalism, within which the state intervention was used to protect capitalism from itself while trying to ensure that working class struggle against it was directed, via productivity deals, into keeping the system going. For the population at large, the general idea was that the welfare state (especially in Europe) was a way for society to get a grip on capitalism by putting some humanity into it. In a confused way, the welfare state was promoted as an attempt to create a society in which the economy existed for people, not people for the economy.

While the state has always had a share in the total surplus value produced by the working class, only under Keynesianism is this share increased and used actively to manage the economy. Traditionally, placing checks on state appropriation of surplus value had been one of the aims of classical capitalist thought (simply put, cheap government means more surplus value available for capitalists to compete for). But as capital has accumulated, so has the state increased and its share in social surplus (for control over the domestic enemy has to be expanded and society protected from the destruction caused by free market capitalism). It must be stressed that state intervention was not **totally** new for *"[f]rom its origins, the United States had relied heavily on state intervention and protection for the development of industry and agriculture, from the textile industry in the early nineteenth century, through the steel industry at the end of the century, to computers, electronics, and biotechnology today. Furthermore, the same has been true of every other*

*successful industrial society."* [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 101] The difference was that such state action was directed to social goals as well as bolstering capitalist profits (much to the hatred of the right).

The roots of the new policy of higher levels and different forms of state intervention lie in two related factors. The Great Depression of the 1930s had lead to the realisation that attempts to enforce widespread reductions in money wages and costs (the traditional means to overcome depression) simply did not work. As Keynes stressed, cutting wages reduced prices and so left real wages unaffected. Worse, it reduced aggregate demand and lead to a deepening of the slump (see section C.9.1 for details). This meant that leaving the market to solve its own problems would make things a lot worse before they became better. Such a policy would, moreover, be impossible because the social and economic costs would have been too expensive. Working class people simply would not tolerate more austerity imposed on them and increasingly took direct action to solve their problems. For example, America saw a militant strike wave involving a half million workers in 1934, with factory occupations and other forms of militant direct action commonplace. It was only a matter of time before capitalism was either ended by revolution or saved by fascism, with neither prospect appealing to large sections of the ruling class.

So instead of attempting the usual class war (which may have had revolutionary results), sections of the capitalist class thought a new approach was required. This involved using the state to manipulate demand in order to increase the funds available for capital. By means of demand bolstered by state borrowing and investment, aggregate demand could be increased and the slump ended. In effect, the state acts to encourage capitalists to act like capitalists by creating an environment when they think it is wise to invest again. As Paul Mattick points out, the *"additional production made possible by deficit financ-*



Friedman raised his notion of a *"Natural Rate of Unemployment"* in 1968. He rooted it in the neo-classical perspective of individual expectations rather than, say, the more realistic notion of class conflict. His argument was simple. There exists in the economy some *"natural"* rate associated with the real wage an ideal economy would produce (this is *"the level that would be ground out by the Walrasian system of general equilibrium equations,"* to quote him). Attempts by the government to reduce actual unemployment below this level would result in rising inflation. This is because there would be divergence between the actual rate of inflation and its expected rate. By lowering unemployment, bosses have to raise wages and this draws unemployed people into work (note the assumption that unemployment is voluntary). However, rising wages were passed on by bosses in rising prices and so the **real** wage remains the same. This eventually leads to people leaving the workforce as the real wage has fallen back to the previous, undesired, levels. However, while the unemployment level rises back to its *"natural"* level, inflation does not. This is because workers are interested in real wages and, so if inflation is at, say, 2% then they will demand wage increases that take this into account. If they expect inflation to increase again then workers will demand **more** wages to make up for it, which in turn will cause prices to rise (although Friedman downplayed that this was because **bosses** were increasing their prices to maintain profit levels). This will lead to rising inflation **and** rising unemployment. Thus the expectations of individuals are the key.

For many economists, this process predicted the rise of stagflation in the 1970s and gave Friedman's Monetarist dogmas credence. However, this was because the *"Bastard Keynesianism"* of the post-war period was rooted in the same neo-classical assumptions used by Friedman. Moreover, they had forgotten the warnings of left-wing Keynesians in the 1940s that full unemployment would cause inflation as bosses would pass on wage rises onto consumers. This class based

*'leisure' over the real wage available at going (or still lower) wage rates ...*

*"Apart from the grossness of this kind of metaphysical legerdemain, the very concept of a natural rate of unemployment has a huge built-in bias. It takes as granted all the other institutional factors that influence the price level-unemployment trade-off (market structures and independent pricing power, business investment policies at home and abroad, the distribution of income, the fiscal and monetary mix, etc.) and focuses solely on the tightness of the labour market as the controllable variable. Inflation is the main threat, the labour market (i.e. wage rates and unemployment levels) is the locus of the solution to the problem."* [**Beyond Hypocrisy**, p. 94]

Unsurprisingly, Herman defines this "natural" rate as *"the rate of unemployment preferred by the propertied classes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 156] The theory behind this is usually called the ***"Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment"*** (or NAIRU). Like many of the worse aspects of modern economics, the concept was raised Milton Friedman in the late 1960s. At around the same time, Edmund Phelps independently developed the theory (and gained the so-called "Nobel Prize" in economics for so doing in 2006). Both are similar and both simply repeat, in neo-classical jargon, the insight which critics of capitalism had argued for over a century: unemployment is a necessary aspect of capitalism for it is essential to maintaining the power of the boss over the worker. Ironically, therefore, modern neo-classical economics is based on a notion which it denied for over a century (this change may be, in part, because the ruling elite thinks it has won the class war and has, currently, no major political and social movements it has to refute by presenting a rosy picture of the system).



*ing does appear as additional demand, but as demand unaccompanied by a corresponding increase in total profits... [this] functions immediately as an increase in demand that stimulates the economy as a whole and can become the point for a new prosperity"* if objective conditions allow it. [**Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 143]

State intervention can, in the short term, postpone crises by stimulating production. This can be seen from the in 1930s New Deal period under Roosevelt when the economy grew five years out of seven compared to it shrinking every year under the pro-laissez-faire Republican President Herbert Hoover (under Hoover, the GNP shrank an average of -8.4 percent a year, under Roosevelt it grew by 6.4 percent). The 1938 slump after 3 years of growth under Roosevelt was due to a decrease in state intervention:

*"The forces of recovery operating within the depression, as well as the decrease in unemployment via public expenditures, increased production up to the output level of 1929. This was sufficient for the Roosevelt administration to drastically reduce public works ... in a new effort to balance the budget in response to the demands of the business world. .. The recovery proved to be short-lived. At the end of 1937 the Business Index fell from 110 to 85, bringing the economy back to the state in which it had found itself in 1935 ... Millions of workers lost their jobs once again."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 138]

The rush to war made Keynesian policies permanent. With the success of state intervention during the second world war, Keynesianism was seen as a way of ensuring capitalist survival. The resulting boom is well known, with state intervention being seen as the way of ensuring prosperity for all sections of society. It had not fully recovered from the Great Depression and

the boom economy during the war had obviously contrasted deeply with the stagnation of the 1930s. Plus, of course, a militant working class, which had put up with years of denial in the struggle against fascist-capitalism would not have taken lightly to a return to mass unemployment and poverty. Capitalism had to turn to continued state intervention as it is not a viable system. So, politically and economically a change was required. This change was provided by the ideas of Keynes, a change which occurred under working class pressure but in the interests of the ruling class.

So there is no denying that for a considerable time, capitalism has been able to prevent the rise of depressions which so plagued the pre-war world and that this was accomplished by government interventions. This is because Keynesianism can serve to initiate a new prosperity and postpone crisis by state intervention to bolster demand and encourage profit investment. This can mitigate the conditions of crisis, since one of its short-term effects is that it offers private capital a wider range of action and an improved basis for its own efforts to escape the shortage of profits for accumulation. In addition, Keynesianism can fund Research and Development in new technologies and working methods (such as automation) which can increase profits, guarantee markets for goods as well as transferring wealth from the working class to capital via indirect taxation and inflation. In the long run, however, Keynesian *"management of the economy by means of monetary and credit policies and by means of state-induced production must eventually find its end in the contradictions of the accumulation process."* [Paul Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18] This is because it cannot stop the tendency to (relative) over-investment, disproportionalities and profits squeeze we outlined in section C.7. In fact, due to its maintenance of full employment it increases the possibility of a crisis arising due to increased workers' power at the point of production.



# C.9 Would laissez-faire capitalism reduce unemployment?

In order to answer this question, we must first have to point out that "actually existing capitalism" tries to manage unemployment to ensure a compliant and servile working class. This is done under the name of fighting "inflation" but, in reality, it about controlling wages and maintaining high profit rates for the capitalist class. Market discipline for the working class, state protection for the ruling class, in other words. As Edward Herman points out:

> *"Conservative economists have even developed a concept of a 'natural rate of unemployment,' a metaphysical notion and throwback to an eighteenth century vision of a 'natural order,' but with a modern apologetic twist. The natural rate is defined as the minimum unemployment level consistent with price level stability, but, as it is based on a highly abstract model that is not directly testable, the natural rate can only be inferred from the price level itself. That is, if prices are going up, unemployment is below the 'natural rate' and too low, whether the actual rate is 4, 8, or 10 percent. In this world of conservative economics, anybody is 'voluntarily' unemployed. Unemployment is a matter of rational choice: some people prefer*

*what is profitable promotes growth; what is most profitable is best. But people have began to notice that the growth of statistical GNP is not the same thing as an increase in welfare."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 4, p. 128] Yet even here, the post-1970s experience is not great. A quarter century of top heavy growth in which the vast majority of economic gains have gone to the richest 10% of the population has not produced the rate of GDP growth promised for it. In fact, the key stimulus for growth in the 1990s and 2000s was bubbles, first in the stock market and then in the housing market. Moreover, rising personal debt has bolstered the economy in a manner which are as unsustainable as the stock and housing bubbles which, in part, supported it. How long the system will stagger on depends, ultimately, on how long working class people will put up with it and having to pay the costs inflicted onto society and the environment in the pursuit of increasing the wealth of the few.

While working class resistance continues, it is largely defensive, but, as in the past, this can and will change. Even the darkest night ends with the dawn and the lights of working class resistance can be seen across the globe. For example, the anti-Poll Tax struggle in Britain against the Thatcher Government was successful as have been many anti-cuts struggles across the USA and Western Europe, the Zapatista uprising in Mexico was inspiring as was the Argentine revolt against neo-liberalism and its wave of popular assemblies and occupied workplaces. In France, the anti-CPE protests showed a new generation of working class people know not only how to protest but also nonsense when they hear it. In general, there has been continual strikes and protests across the world. Even in the face of state repression and managed economic recession, working class people are still fighting back. The job for anarchists to is encourage these sparks of liberty and help them win.



So, these interventions did not actually set aside the underlying causes of economic and social crisis. The modifications of the capitalist system could not totally countermand the subjective and objective limitations of a system based upon wage slavery and social hierarchy. This can be seen when the rosy picture of post-war prosperity changed drastically in the 1970s when economic crisis returned with a vengeance, with high unemployment occurring along with high inflation. This soon lead to a return to a more "free market" capitalism with, in Chomsky's words, *"state protection and public subsidy for the rich, market discipline for the poor."* This process and its aftermath are discussed in the next section.

## C.8.2 What happened to Keynesianism in the 1970s?

Basically, the subjective and objective limitations to Keynesianism we highlighted in the last section were finally reached in the early 1970s. It, in effect, came into conflict with the reality of capitalism as a class and hierarchical system. It faced either revolution to increase popular participation in social, political and economic life (and so eliminate capitalist power), an increase in social democratic tendencies (and so become some kind of democratic state capitalist regime) or a return to free(r) market capitalist principles by increasing unemployment and so placing a rebellious people in its place. Under the name of fighting inflation, the ruling class unsurprisingly picked the latter option.

The 1970s are a key time in modern capitalism. In comparison to the two previous decades, it suffered from high unemployment and high inflation rates (the term stagflation is usually used to describe this). This crisis was reflected in mass strikes and protests across the world. Economic crisis returned, with the state interventions that for so long kept capitalism

healthy either being ineffective or making the crisis worse. In other words, a combination of social struggle and a lack of surplus value available to capital resulted in the breakdown of the successful post-war consensus. Both subjected the *"Bastard Keynesianism"* of the post-war period to serious political and ideological challenges. This lead to a rise in neo-classical economic ideology and the advocating of free(r) market capitalism as the solution to capitalism's problems. This challenge took, in the main, the form of Milton Friedman's Monetarism.

The roots and legacy of this breakdown in Keynesianism are informative and worth analysing. The post-war period marked a distinct change for capitalism, with new, higher levels of state intervention. The mix of intervention obviously differed from country to country, based upon the needs and ideologies of the ruling parties and social elites as well as the impact of social movements and protests. In Europe, nationalisation was widespread as inefficient capital was taken over by the state and reinvigorated by state funding while social spending was more important as Social Democratic parties attempted to introduce reforms. Chomsky describes the process in the USA:

> *"Business leaders recognised that social spending could stimulate the economy, but much preferred the military Keynesian alternative — for reasons having to do with privilege and power, not 'economic rationality.' This approach was adopted at once, the Cold War serving as the justification... . The Pentagon system was considered ideal for these purposes. It extends well beyond the military establishment, incorporating also the Department of Energy... and the space agency NASA, converted by the Kennedy administration to a significant component of the state-directed public subsidy to advanced industry. These arrangements impose on the public a large burden of the costs of industry*



This is a mix of free(r) markets (for the many) and varying degrees of state intervention (for the select few), while the state has become stronger and more centralised (*"prisons also offer a Keynesian stimulus to the economy, both to the construction business and white collar employment; the fastest growing profession is reported to be security personnel."* [Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 110]). In other words, pretty much the same situation that has existed since the dawn of capitalism (see section D.1) — free(r) markets supported by ready use of state power as and when required.

The continued role of the state means that it is unlikely that a repeat of the Great Depression is possible. The large size of state consumption means that it stabilises aggregate demand to a degree unknown in 1929 or in the 19th century period of free(r) market capitalism. This is **not** to suggest that deep recessions will not happen (they have and will). It is simply to suggest that they will **not** turn into a deep depression. Unless, of course, ideologues who believe the "just-so" stories of economic textbooks and the gurus of capitalism gain political office and start to dismantle too much of the modern state. As Thatcher showed in 1979, it is possible to deepen recessions considerably if you subscribe to flawed economic theory (ideology would be a better word) and do not care about the impact it is having on the general public — and, more importantly, if the general public cannot stop you).

However, as we discuss in section C.10 the net effect of this one-sided class war has not been as good as has been suggested by the ideologues of capitalism and the media. Faced with the re-imposition of hierarchy, the quality of life for the majority has fallen (consumption, i.e. the quantity of life, may not but that is due to a combination of debt, increased hours at work and more family members taking jobs to make ends meet). This, in turn, has lead to a fetish over economic growth. As Joan Robinson put it in the 1970s when this process started the *"economists have relapsed into the slogans of laisser faire —*

cles. For example, Michael Borrus, co-director of the Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy (a corporate-funded trade and technology research institute), cites a 1988 Department of Commerce study that states that *"five of the top six fastest growing U.S. industries from 1972 to 1988 were sponsored or sustained, directly or indirectly, by federal investment."* He goes on to state that the *"winners [in earlier years were] computers, biotechnology, jet engines, and airframes"* all *"the by-product of public spending."* [quoted by Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 109] As James Midgley points out, *"the aggregate size of the public sector did not decrease during the 1980s and instead, budgetary policy resulted in a significant shift in existing allocations from social to military and law enforcement."* [*"The radical right, politics and society"*, **The Radical Right and the Welfare State**, Howard Glennerster and James Midgley (eds.), p. 11] Indeed, the US state funds one third of all civil R&D projects, and the UK state provides a similar subsidy. [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] And, of course, the state remains waiting to save the elite from their own market follies (for example, after the widespread collapse of Savings and Loans Associations in deregulated corruption and speculation, the 1980s pro-"free market" Republican administration happily bailed them out, showing that market forces were only for one class).

The corporate owned media attacks social Keynesianism, while remaining silent or justifying pro-business state intervention. Combined with extensive corporate funding of right-wing "think-tanks" which explain why (the wrong sort of) social programmes are counter-productive, the corporate state system tries to fool the population into thinking that there is no alternative to the rule by the market while the elite enrich themselves at the public's expense. This means that state intervention has not ended as such. We are still in the age of Keynes, but social Keynesianism has been replaced by military Keynesianism cloaked beneath the rhetoric of "free market" dogma.



> *(research and development, R&D) and provide a guaranteed market for excess production, a useful cushion for management decisions. Furthermore, this form of industrial policy does not have the undesirable side-effects of social spending directed to human needs. Apart from unwelcome redistributive effects, the latter policies tend to interfere with managerial prerogatives; useful production may undercut private gain, while state-subsidised waste production... is a gift to the owner and manager, to whom any marketable spin-offs will be promptly delivered. Social spending may also arouse public interest and participation, thus enhancing the threat of democracy... The defects of social spending do not taint the military Keynesian alternative. For such reasons, **Business Week** explained, 'there's a tremendous social and economic difference between welfare pump-priming and military pump-priming,' the latter being far preferable."* [**World Orders, Old and New**, pp. 100–1]

Over time, social Keynesianism took increasing hold even in the USA, partly in response to working class struggle, partly due to the need for popular support at elections and partly due to *"[p]opular opposition to the Vietnam war [which] prevented Washington from carrying out a national mobilisation ... which might have made it possible to complete the conquest without harm to the domestic economy. Washington was forced to fight a 'guns-and-butter' war to placate the population, at considerable economic cost."* [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 157–8]

Social Keynesianism directs part of the total surplus value to workers and unemployed while military Keynesianism transfers surplus value from the general population to capital and from capital to capital. This allows R&D and capital to be publicly subsidised, as well as essential but unprofitable

capital to survive. As long as real wages did not exceed a rise in productivity, Keynesianism would continue. However, both functions have objective limits as the transfer of profits from successful capital to essential, but less successful, or long term investment can cause a crisis is there is not enough profit available to the system as a whole. The surplus value producing capital, in this case, would be handicapped due to the transfers and cannot respond to economic problems as freely as before. This was compounded by the world becoming economically "tripolar," with a revitalised Europe and a Japan-based Asian region emerging as major economic forces. This placed the USA under increased pressure, as did the Vietnam War. Increased international competition meant the firms were limited in how they could adjust to the increased pressures they faced in the class struggle.

This factor, class struggle, cannot be underestimated. In fact, the main reason for the 1970s breakdown was social struggle by working people. The only limit to the rate of growth required by Keynesianism to function is the degree to which final output consists of consumption goods for the presently employed population instead of investment. As long as wages rise in line with productivity, capitalism does well and firms invest (indeed, investment is the most basic means by which work, i.e. capitalist domination, is imposed). However, faced with a workforce which is able to increase its wages and resist the introduction of new technologies then capitalism will face a crisis. The net effect of full employment was the increased rebellious of the working class (both inside and outside the workplace). This struggle was directed against hierarchy in general, with workers, students, women, ethnic groups, anti-war protesters and the unemployed all organising successful struggles against authority. This struggle attacked the hierarchical core of capitalism as well as increasing the amount of income going to labour, resulting in a profit squeeze (see section C.7). By the 1970s, cap-



ously reaped the benefits it was intended to for capital. Income going to capital has increased and that going to labour has declined and the "labour market" has been disciplined to a large degree (but not totally we must add). Working people have been turned, to a large degree, from participants into spectators, as required for any hierarchical system. The human impact of these policies cannot be calculated. Little wonder, then, the utility of neo-classical dogma to the elite — it could be used by rich, powerful people to justify the fact that they are pursuing social policies that create poverty and force children to die. As Chomsky argues, *"one aspect of the internationalisation of the economy is the extension of the two-tiered Third World mode to the core countries. Market doctrine thus becomes an essential ideological weapon at home as well, its highly selective application safely obscured by the doctrinal system. Wealth and power are increasingly concentrated. Service for the general public — education, health, transportation, libraries, etc. — become as superfluous as those they serve, and can therefore be limited or dispensed with entirely."* [**Year 501**, p. 109]

The state managed recession has had its successes. Company profits are up as the *"competitive cost"* of workers is reduced due to fear of job losses. The Wall Street Journal's review of economic performance for the last quarter of 1995 is headlined *"Companies' Profits Surged 61% on Higher Prices, Cost Cuts."* After-tax profits rose 62% from 1993, up from 34% for the third quarter. While working America faces stagnant wages, Corporate America posted record profits in 1994. **Business Week** estimated 1994 profits to be up *"an enormous 41% over [1993],"* despite a bare 9% increase in sales, a *"colossal success,"* resulting in large part from a *"sharp"* drop in the *"share going to labour,"* though *"economists say labour will benefit — eventually."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, *"Rollback III"*, **Z Magazine**, April 1995] Labour was still waiting over a decade later.

Moreover, for capital, Keynesianism is still goes on as before, combined (as usual) with praises to market mira-

the recent gain in per capita income in the Reagan-Bush years went to the top 1% of income earners (while the bottom lost absolutely). Income inequality increased, with the income of the bottom fifth of the US population falling by 18% while that of the richest fifth rose by 8%. [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 141] Combined with bubbles in stocks and housing, the illusion of a good economy is maintained while only those at the top are doing well (see section B.7 on rising inequality). This disciplining of the working class has been successful, resulting in the benefits of rising productivity and growth going to the elite. Unemployment and underemployment are still widespread, with most newly created jobs being part-time and insecure.

Indirect means of increasing capital's share in the social income were also used, such as reducing environment regulations, so externalising pollution costs onto current and future generations. In Britain, state owned monopolies were privatised at knock-down prices allowing private capital to increase its resources at a fraction of the real cost. Indeed, some nationalised industries were privatised **as monopolies** for a period allowing monopoly profits to be extracted from consumers before the state allowed competition in those markets. Indirect taxation also increased, reducing working class consumption by getting us to foot the bill for capitalist restructuring as well as military-style Keynesianism. Internationally, the exploitation of under-developed nations increased with $418 billion being transferred to the developed world between 1982 and 1990 [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] Capital also became increasingly international in scope, as it used advances in technology to move capital to third world countries where state repression ensured a less militant working class. This transfer had the advantage of increasing unemployment in the developed world, so placing more pressures upon working class resistance.

This policy of capital-led class war, a response to the successful working class struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, obvi-



italism and the state could no longer ensure that working class struggles could be contained within the system.

This profits squeeze reflected the rise in inflation. While it has become commonplace to argue that Keynesianism did not predict the possibility of exploding inflation, this is not entirely true. While Keynes and the mainstream Keynesians failed to take into account the impact of full employment on class relations and power, his left-wing followers did not. Influenced by Michal Kalecki, the argued that full employment would impact on power at the point of production and, consequently, prices. To quote Joan Robinson from 1943:

> *"The first function of unemployment (which has always existed in open or disguised forms) is that it maintains the authority of master over man. The master has normally been in a position to say: 'If you don't want the job, there are plenty of others who do.' When the man can say: 'If you don't want to employ me, there are plenty of others who will', the situation is radically altered. One effect of such a change might be to remove a number of abuses to which the workers have been compelled to submit in the past ... [Another is that] the absence of fear of unemployment might go further and have a disruptive effect upon factory discipline ... [He may] us[e] his newly-found freedom from fear to snatch every advantage that he can ...*
>
> *"The change in the workers' bargaining position which would follow from the abolition of unemployment would show itself in another and more subtle way. Unemployment ... has not only the function of preserving discipline in industry, but also indirectly the function of preserving the value of money ... there would be a constant upward pressure upon money wage-rates ... the vicious spiral of wages and*

*prices might become chronic ... if it moved too fast, it might precipitate a violent inflation.*" [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 1, pp. 84–5]

Thus left-wing Keynesians (who later founded the Post-Keynesian school of economics) recognised that capitalists *"could recoup themselves for rising costs by raising prices."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85] This perspective was reflected in a watered-down fashion in mainstream economics by means of the Philips Curve. When first suggested in the 1958, this was taken to indicate a stable relationship between unemployment and inflation. As unemployment fell, inflation rose. This relationship fell apart in the 1970s, as inflation rose as unemployment rose.

Neo-classical (and other pro-"free market" capitalist) economics usually argues that inflation is purely a monetary phenomenon, the result of there being more money in circulation than is needed for the sale of the various commodities on the market. This was the position of Milton Friedman and his Monetarist school during the 1960s and 1970s. However, this is not true. In general, there is no relationship between the money supply and inflation. The amount of money can increase while the rate of inflation falls, for example (as we will discuss in the next section, Monetarism itself ironically proved there is no relationship). Inflation has other roots, namely it is *"an expression of inadequate profits that must be offset by price and money policies ... Under any circumstances, inflation spells the need for higher profits."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 19] Inflation leads to higher profits by making labour cheaper. That is, it reduces *"the real wages of workers... [which] directly benefits employers... [as] prices rise faster than wages, income that would have gone to workers goes to business instead."* [J. Brecher and T. Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, p. 120]

Inflation, in other words, is a symptom of an on-going struggle over income distribution between classes. It is caused



*of the new Monetarism"* and *"How Monetarism Failed"* in **Further Essays on Economic Theory and Policy**, *"The New Monetarism"* in **The Essential Kaldor** and **The Scourge of Monetarism**).

So under the rhetoric of "free market" capitalism, Keynesianism was used to manage the crisis as it had previously managed the prosperity. "Supply Side" economics (combined with neo-classical dogma) was used to undercut working class power and consumption and so allow capital to reap more profits off working class people by a combination of reduced regulation for the capitalist class and state intervention to control the working class. Unemployment was used to discipline a militant workforce and as a means of getting workers to struggle **for** work instead of **against** wage labour. With the fear of job loss hanging over their heads, workers put up with speedups, longer hours, worse conditions and lower wages and this increased the profits that could be extracted directly from workers as well as reducing business costs by allowing employers to reduce on-job safety and protection and so on. The labour "market" was fragmented to a large degree into powerless, atomised units with unions fighting a losing battle in the face of a recession made much worse by government policy (and justified by economic ideology). In this way capitalism could successfully change the composition of demand from the working class to capital.

Needless to say, we still living under the legacy of this process. As we indicated in section C.3, there has been a significant shift in income from labour to capital in the USA. The same holds true in the UK, as does rising inequality and higher rates of poverty. While the economy is doing well for the few, the many are finding it harder to make ends meet and, as a result, are working harder for longer and getting into debt to maintain their income levels (in a sense, it could be argued that aggregate demand management has been partially privatised as so many working class people are in debt). Unsurprisingly 70% of

intervention. In his view, the US monetary authorities followed highly deflationary policies and so the money supply fell because they forced or permitted a sharp reduction in the monetary base. In other words, because they failed to exercise the responsibilities assigned to them. This is the core of his argument. Yet it is important to stress that by this he did not, in fact, mean that it happened because the government had intervened in the market. Ironically, Friedman argued it happened because the government did **not** intervene fast or far enough thus making a bad situation much worse. In other words, it was not interventionist enough!

This self-contradictory argument arises because Friedman was an ideologue for capitalism and so sought to show that it was a stable system, to exempt capitalism from any systemic responsibility for recessions. That he ended up arguing that the state caused the Great Depression by doing nothing (which, ironically, was what Friedman usually argued it should do) just shows the power of ideology over logic or facts. Its fleeting popularity was due to its utility in the class war for the ruling class at that time. Given the absolute failure of Monetarism, in both theory and practice, it is little talked about now. That in the 1970s it was the leading economic dogma of the right explains why this is the case. Given that the right usually likes to portray itself as being strong on the economy it is useful to indicate that this is **not** the case — unless you think causing the deepest recessions since the 1930s in order to create conditions where working class people are put in their place so the rich get richer is your definition of sound economic policy. As Doug Henwood summarises, there *"can be no doubt that monetarism … throughout the world from the Chilean coup onward, has been an important part of a conscious policy to crush labour and redistribute income and power toward capital."* [**Wall Street**, pp. 201–2]

For more on Monetarism, the work of its greatest critic, Nicholas Kaldor, is essential reading (see for example, *"Origins*



when capitalist profit margins are reduced (for whatever reason, subjective or objective) and the bosses try to maintain them by increasing prices, i.e. by passing costs onto consumers. This means that it would be wrong to conclude that wage increases "cause" inflation as such. To do so ignores the fact that workers do not set prices, capitalists do. Any increase in costs could, after all, be absorbed by lowering profits. Instead working class people get denounced for being "greedy" and are subjected to calls for "restraint" — in order for their bosses to make sufficient profits! As Joan Robinson put it, while capitalist economies denies it (unlike, significantly, Adam Smith) there is an *"inflationary pressure that arises from an increase in the share of gross profits in gross income. How are workers to be asked to accept 'wage restraint' unless there is a restraint on profits? … unemployment is the problem. If it could be relived by tax cuts, generating purchasing power, would not a general cut in profit margins be still more effective? These are the questions that all the rigmarole about marginal productivity is designed to prevent us from discussing."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 4, p. 134]

Inflation and the response by the capitalist class to it, in their own ways, shows the hypocrisy of capitalism. After all, wages are increasing due to "natural" market forces of supply and demand. It is the **capitalists** who are trying to buck the market by refusing to accept lower profits caused by conditions on it. Obviously, to use Benjamin Tucker's expression, under capitalism market forces are good for the goose (labour) but bad for the gander (capital). The so-called "wages explosion" of the late 1960s was a symptom of this shift in class power away from capital and to labour which full employment had created. The growing expectations and aspirations of working class people led them not only to demand more of the goods they produced, it had start many questioning why social hierarchies were needed in the first place. Rather than accept this as a natural outcome of the eternal laws of supply and demand,

the boss class used the state to create a more favourable labour market environment (as, it should be stressed, it has always done).

This does not mean that inflation suits all capitalists equally (nor, obviously, does it suit those social layers who live on fixed incomes and who thus suffer when prices increase but such people are irrelevant in the eyes of capital). Far from it — during periods of inflation, lenders tend to lose and borrowers tend to gain. The opposition to high levels of inflation by many supporters of capitalism is based upon this fact and the division within the capitalist class it indicates. There are two main groups of capitalists, finance capitalists and industrial capitalists. The latter can and do benefit from inflation (as indicated above) but the former sees high inflation as a threat. When inflation is accelerating it can push the real interest rate into negative territory and this is a horrifying prospect to those for whom interest income is fundamental (i.e. finance capital). In addition, high levels of inflation can also fuel social struggle, as workers and other sections of society try to keep their income at a steady level. As social struggle has a politicising effect on those involved, a condition of high inflation could have serious impacts on the political stability of capitalism and so cause problems for the ruling class.

How inflation is viewed in the media and by governments is an expression of the relative strengths of the two sections of the capitalist class and of the level of class struggle within society. For example, in the 1970s, with the increased international mobility of capital, the balance of power came to rest with finance capital and inflation became the source of all evil. This shift of influence to finance capital can be seen from the rise of rentier income. The distribution of US manufacturing profits indicate this process — comparing the periods 1965–73 to 1990–96, we find that interest payments rose from 11% to 24%, dividend payments rose from 26% to 36% while retained earnings fell from 65% to 40%. Given that retained earnings are



higher prices on the same wages). Which is what happened in the 1980s.

It is also of interest to note that even in Friedman's own test case of his basic contention, the Great Depression of 1929–33, he got it wrong. For Friedman, the *"fact is that the Great Depression, like most other periods of severe unemployment, was produced by government mismanagement rather than by any inherent instability of the private economy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54] Kaldor pointed out that *"[a]ccording to Friedman's own figures, the amount of 'high-powered money'... in the US increased, not decreased, throughout the Great Contraction: in July 1932, it was more than 10 per cent higher than in July, 1929 ... The Great Contraction of the money supply ... occurred **despite** this increase in the monetary base."* [*"The New Monetarism"*, **The Essential Kaldor**, pp. 487–8] Other economists also investigated Friedman's claims, with similar result. Peter Temin, for example, critiqued them from a Keynesian point of view, asking whether the decline in spending resulted from a decline in the money supply or the other way round. He noted that while the Monetarist *"narrative is long and complex"* it *"offers far less support for [its] assertions than appears at first. In fact, it assumes the conclusion and describes the Depression in terms of it; it does not test or prove it at all."* He examined the changes in the real money balances and found that they increased between 1929 and 1931 from between 1 and 18% (depending on choice of money aggregate used and how it was deflated). Overall, the money supply not only did not decline but actually increased 5% between August 1929 and August 1931. Temin concluded that there is no evidence that money caused the depression after the stock market crash. [**Did Monetary Forces Cause the Great Depression?**, pp. 15–6 and p. 141]

There is, of course, a slight irony about Friedman's account of the Great Depression. Friedman suggested that the Federal Reserve actually caused the Great Depression, that it was in some sense a demonstration of the evils of government

deepest recession since the 1930s. [quoted by Michael Stewart, **Keynes and After**, p. 179] As Michael Stewart dryly notes, it *"would be difficult to find an economic prediction that that proved more comprehensively inaccurate."* Unemployment rose from around 5% in 1979 to 13% in the middle of 1985 (and would have been even higher but for a change in the method used for measuring it, a change implemented to knock numbers off of this disgraceful figure). In 1984 manufacturing output was still 10% lower than it had been in 1979. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 180] Little wonder Kaldor stated that Monetarism was *"a terrible curse, a visitation of evil spirits, with particularly unfortunate, one could almost say devastating, effects on"* Britain. [*"The Origins of the New Monetarism,"* pp. 160–177, **Further Essays on Economic Theory and Policy**, p. 160]

Eventually, inflation did fall. From an anarchist perspective, however, this fall in inflation was the result of the high unemployment of this period as it weakened labour, so allowing profits to be made in production rather than in circulation (see last section for this aspect of inflation). With no need for capitalists to maintain their profits via price increases, inflation would naturally decrease as labour's bargaining position was weakened by the fear mass unemployment produced in the workforce. Rather than being a purely monetary phenomena as Friedman claimed, inflation was a product of the profit needs of capital and the state of the class struggle. The net effect of the deep recession of the early 1980s and mass unemployment during the 1980s (and 1990s) was to control working class people by putting the fear of being fired back. The money supply had nothing to do with it and attempts to control it would, of necessity, fail and the only tool available to governments would be raising interest rates. This would reduce inflation only by depressing investment, generating unemployment, and so (eventually) slowing the growth in wages as workers bear the brunt of the recessions by lowering their real income (i.e., paying



the most important source of investment funds, the rise of finance capital helps explain why, in contradiction to the claims of the right-wing, economic growth has become steadily worse as markets have been liberalised — funds that could have been resulted in real investment have ended up in the finance machine. In addition, the waves of strikes and protests that inflation produced had worrying implications for the ruling class as they showed a working class able and willing to contest their power and, perhaps, start questioning **why** economic and social decisions were being made by a few rather than by those affected by them. However, as the underlying reasons for inflation remained (namely to increase profits) inflation itself was only reduced to acceptable levels, levels that ensured a positive real interest rate and acceptable profits.

Thus, Keynesianism sowed the seeds of its own destruction. Full employment had altered the balance of power in the workplace and economy from capital to labour. The prediction of socialist economist Michal Kalecki that full employment would erode social discipline had become true (see section B.4.4). Faced with rising direct and indirect costs due to this, firms passed them on to consumers. Yet consumers are also, usually, working class and this provoked more direct action to increase real wages in the face of inflation. Within the capitalist class, finance capital was increasing in strength at the expense of industrial capital. Facing the erosion of their loan income, states were subject to economic pressures to place fighting inflation above maintaining full employment. While Keynes had hoped that *"the rentier aspect of capitalism [was] a transitional phase"* and his ideas would lead to *"the euthanasia of the rentier,"* finance capital was not so willing to see this happen. [**The General Theory**, p. 376] The 1970s saw the influence of an increasingly assertive finance capital rise at a time when significant numbers within ranks of industrial capitalists were sick of full employment and wanted compliant workers again. The resulting recessions may have

harmed individual capitalists (particularly smaller ones) but the capitalist class as a whole did very well of them (and, as we noted in section B.2, one of the roles of the state is to manage the system in the interests of the capitalist class **as a whole** and this can lead it into conflict with **some** members of that class). Thus the maintenance of sufficiently high unemployment under the mantra of fighting inflation as the de facto state policy from the 1980s onwards (see section C.9). While industrial capital might want a slightly stronger economy and a slightly lower rate of unemployment than finance capital, the differences are not significant enough to inspire major conflict. After all, bosses in any industry *"like slack in the labour market"* as it *"makes for a pliant workforce"* and, of course, *"many non-financial corporations have heavy financial interests."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 123–4 and p. 135]

It was these processes and pressures which came to a head in the 1970s. In other words, post-war Keynesianism failed simply because it could not, in the long term, stop the subjective and objective pressures which capitalism always faces. In the 1970s, it was the subjective pressure which played the key role, namely social struggle was the fundamental factor in economic developments. The system could not handle the struggle of human beings against the oppression, exploitation, hierarchy and alienation they are subject to under capitalism.

## C.8.3 How did capitalism adjust to the crisis in Keynesianism?

Basically by using, and then managing, the 1970s crisis to discipline the working class in order to reap increased profits and secure and extend the ruling classes' power. It did this using a combination of crisis, free(r) markets and adjusted Keynesianism as part of a ruling elite lead class war against labour.



Friedman's argument on what caused inflation was also wrong. According to his theory, inflation was caused by the money supply increasing faster than the economy, yet inflation **fell** as the money supply increased. Between 1979 and 1981–2, its growth rose and was still higher in 1982–3 than it had been in 1978–9 yet inflation was down to 4.6% in 1983. As the moderate conservative MP Ian Gilmore pointed out, *"[h]ad Friedmanite monetarism... been right, inflation would have been about 16 per cent in 1982–3, 11 per cent in 1983–4, and 8 per cent in 1984–5. In fact ... in the relevant years it never approached the levels infallibly predicted by monetarist doctrine."* [Ian Gilmore, **Dancing With Dogma**, p. 57 and pp. 62–3] So, as Henwood summarises, *"even the periods of recession and recovery disprove monetarist dogma."* [**Wall Street**, p. 202]

However, the failed attempt to control the money supply had other, more important effects, namely exploding interest and unemployment rates. Being unable to control the supply of money, the government did the next best thing: it tried to control the demand for money by rising interest rates. Unfortunately for the Tories their preferred measure for the money supply included interest-bearing bank deposits. This meant, as the government raised interest rates in its attempts to control the money supply, it was profitable for people to put more money on deposit. Thus the rise in interest rates promoted people to put money in the bank, so increasing the particular measure of the money supply the government sought to control which, in turn, lead them to increase interest rates. [Michael Stewart, **Keynes in the 1990s**, p. 50]

The exploding interest rates used in a vain attempt to control the money supply was the last thing Britain needed in the early 1980s. The economy was already sliding into recession and government attempts to control the money supply deepened it. While Milton Friedman predicted *"only a modest reduction in output and employment"* as a *"side effect of reducing inflation to single figures by 1982,"* in fact Britain experienced its

*man's assertions lack[ed] any factual foundation whatsoever."* He stressed, *"They ha[d] no basis in fact, and he seems to me have invented them on the spur of the moment."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26] There was no relationship between the money supply and inflation.

Even more unfortunately for both the theory and (far more importantly) vast numbers of working class people, it was proven wrong not only theoretically but also empirically. Monetarism was imposed on both the USA and the UK in the early 1980s, with disastrous results. As the Thatcher government in 1979 applied Monetarist dogma the most whole-heartedly we will concentrate on that regime (the same basic things occurred under Reagan as well but he embraced military Keynesianism sooner and so mitigated its worse effects. [Michael Stewart, **Keynes and After**, p. 181] This did not stop the right proclaiming the Reagan boom as validation of "free market" economics!).

Firstly, the attempt to control the money supply failed, as predicted by Nicholas Kaldor (see his 1970 essay *"The New Monetarism"*). This is because the money supply, rather than being set by the central bank or the state (as Friedman claimed), is a function of the demand for credit, which is itself a function of economic activity. To use economic terminology, Friedman had assumed that the money supply was "exogenous" and so determined outside the economy by the state when, in fact, it is "endogenous" in nature (i.e. comes from **within** the economy). [**The Essential Kaldor**, p. 483] This means that any attempt by the central bank to control the money supply, as desired by Friedman, will fail.

The experience of the Thatcher and Reagan regimes indicates this well. The Thatcher government could not meet the money controls it set. It took until 1986 before the Tory government stopped announcing monetary targets, persuaded no doubt by the embarrassment caused by its inability to hit them. In addition, the variations in the money supply showed that



In the face of crisis in the 1970s, Keynesianist redirection of profits between capitals and classes had become a burden to capital as a whole and had increased the expectations and militancy of working people to dangerous levels. The crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s helped control working class power and unemployment was utilised as a means of saving capitalism and imposing the costs of free(r) markets onto society as whole. The policies implemented were ostensibly to combat high inflation. However, as left-wing economist Nicholas Kaldor summarised, inflation may have dropped but this lay *"in their success in transforming the labour market from a twentieth-century sellers' market to a nineteenth-century buyers' market, with wholesome effects on factory discipline, wage claims, and proneness to strike."* [**The Scourge of Monetarism**, p. xxiii] Another British economist described this policy memorably as *"deliberately setting out to base the viability of the capitalist system on the maintenance of a large 'industrial reserve army' [of the unemployed] ... [it is] the incomes policy of Karl Marx."* [Thomas Balogh, **The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics**, pp. 177–8] The aim, in summary, was to swing the balance of social, economic and political power back to capital and ensure the road to (private) serfdom was followed. The rationale was fighting inflation.

Initially the crisis was used to justify attacks on working class people in the name of the free market. And, indeed, capitalism was made more market based, although with a "safety net" and "welfare state" for the wealthy. We have seen a partial return to *"what economists have called freedom of industry and commerce, but which really meant the relieving of industry from the harassing and repressive supervision of the State, and the giving to it full liberty to exploit the worker, whom was still to be deprived of his freedom."* The *"crisis of democracy"* which so haunted the ruling class in the 1960s and 1970s was overcome and replaced with, to use Kropotkin's words, the *"liberty to ex-*

*ploit human labour without any safeguard for the victims of such exploitation and the political power organised as to assure freedom of exploitation to the middle-class."* [Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol.1, p. 28 and p. 30]

Fighting inflation, in other words, was simply code used by the ruling class for fighting the class war and putting the working class back in its place in the social hierarchy. *"Behind the economic concept of inflation was a fear among elites that they were losing control"* as the *"sting of unemployment was lessened and workers became progressively less docile."* [Doug Henwood, **After the New Economy**, p. 204] Milton Friedman's Monetarism was the means by which this was achieved. While (deservedly) mostly forgotten now, Monetarism was very popular in the 1970s and was the economic ideology of choice of both Reagan and Thatcher. This was the economic justification for the restructuring of capitalism and the end of social Keynesianism. Its legacy remains to some degree in the overriding concern over inflation which haunts the world's central banks and other financial institutions, but its specific policy recommendations have been dropped in practice after failing spectacularly when applied (a fact which, strangely, was not mentioned in the eulogies from the right that marked Friedman's death).

According to Monetarism, the problem with capitalism was money related, namely that the state and its central bank printed too much money and, therefore, its issue should be controlled. Friedman stressed, like most capitalist economists, that monetary factors are **the** most important feature in explaining such problems of capitalism as the business cycle, inflation and so on. This is unsurprising, as it has the useful ideological effect of acquitting the inner-workings of capitalism of any involvement in such developments. Slumps, for example, may occur, but they are the fault of the state interfering in the economy. Inflation was a purely monetary phenomenon caused by the state printing more money than required by the growth of economic activity (for example, if



the economy grew by 2% but the money supply increased by 5%, inflation would rise by 3%). This analysis of inflation is deeply flawed, as we will see. This was how Friedman explained the Great Depression of the 1930s in the USA, for example (see, for example, his *"The Role of Monetary Policy"* [**American Economic Review**, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 1–17]).

Thus Monetarists argued for controlling the money supply, of placing the state under a *"monetary constitution"* which ensured that the central banks be required by law to increase the quantity of money at a constant rate of 3–5% a year. This would ensure that inflation would be banished, the economy would adjust to its natural equilibrium, the business cycle would become mild (if not disappear) and capitalism would finally work as predicted in the economics textbooks. With the *"monetary constitution"* money would become *"depoliticised"* and state influence and control over money would be eliminated. Money would go back to being what it is in neo-classical theory, essentially neutral, a link between production and consumption and capable of no mischief on its own. Hence the need for a *"legislated rule"* which would control *"the behaviour of the stock of money"* by *"instructing the monetary authority to achieve a specified rate of growth in the stock of money."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 54]

Unfortunately for Monetarism, its analysis was simply wrong. It cannot be stressed enough how deeply flawed and ideological Friedman's arguments were. As one critique noted, his assumptions have *"been shown to be fallacious and the empirical evidence questionable if not totally misinterpreted."* Moreover, *"none of the assumptions which Friedman made to reach his extraordinary conclusions bears any relation to reality. They were chosen precisely because they led to the desired conclusion, that inflation is a purely monetary phenomenon, originating solely in excess monetary demand."* [Thomas Balogh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 165 and p. 167] For Kaldor, Friedman's claims that empirical evidence supported his ideology were false. *"Fried-*

is substantial evidence to suggest that the standard defences of "free market" capitalism are not up to much. Let us be clear and state there is generally a positive correlation between economic growth and the income of the poor. We are not attacking economic growth as such but rather asking whether neoliberalism's own defence actually stands up.

Looking at the historical picture, then, yes, capitalism does produce much more economic growth than previous social systems such as slavery and feudalism. However, defending capitalism on the basis that it better than a slave based economy is hardly a strong foundation (particularly when capitalists are happy to locate to dictatorships which have slave-like labour conditions). The more substantive argument is based on the assumption that "free market" capitalism produces faster economic growth than other forms of that system and that growth of the economic pie is more important than how it is distributed. In other words, the same (or even smaller) share of a bigger pie in the future is better than a bigger share of the existing pie. This means we need to look at the economic performance of capitalist economies, comparing the neo-liberal ones to regulated social democratic ones. We would expect the former to be performing significantly better than the latter in addition to being more dynamic **after** reforms than before. The reality hardly matches the claims.

The attempt to compare and contrast economies can be found in, say, the works of Milton Friedman to show the superiority of his beloved "free market" capitalism. However, as economist Thomas Balogh notes, to prove that *"socialistic policies"* had crippled Britain's economic growth since 1945 Friedman began *"by misrepresenting the size of the public sector … he chooses a ratio which, though irrelevant, gives spurious support to his thesis."* Equally, Friedman compares post-war Britain to post-war Japan and West Germany, conveniently failing to note that both hardly had minimal states (for example, West Germany had approximately the same level of



(even in an extremely weakened state) for their influence was such as to lead economists and the President to recommend to numerous leading corporate business men **not** to cut wages to end the depression (wages were cut, but not sufficiently as prices also dropped as we will discuss in the next section). It should be noted that Rothbard takes his position on wage cutting despite of an account of the business cycle rooted in bankers lowering interest rates and bosses over-investing as a result (see section C.8). So despite not setting interest rates nor making investment decisions, he expected working class people to pay for the actions of bankers and capitalists by accepting lower wages! Thus working class people must pay the price of the profit seeking activities of their economic masters who not only profited in good times, but can expect others to pay the price in bad ones. Clearly, Rothbard took the first rule of economics to heart: the boss is always right.

The chain of logic in this explanation for unemployment is rooted in many of the key assumptions of neo-classical and other marginalist economics. A firm's demand for labour (in this schema) is the marginal physical product of labour multiplied by the price of the output and so it is dependent on marginal productivity theory. It is assumed that there are diminishing returns and marginal productivity as only this produces a downward-sloping labour demand curve. For labour, it is assumed that its supply curve is upwards slopping. So it must be stressed that marginal productivity theory lies at the core of "free market" capitalist theories of output and distribution and so unemployment as the marginal product of labour is interpreted as the labour demand curve. This enforces the viewpoint that unemployment is caused by wages being too high as firms adjust production to bring the marginal cost of their products (the cost of producing one more item) into equality with the product's market-determined price. So a drop in labour costs theoretically leads to an expansion in production, producing jobs for the "temporarily" unemployed and moving

the economy toward full-employment. So, in this theory, unemployment can only be reduced by lowering the real wages of workers currently employed. Thus the unfettered free market would ensure that all those who want to work at the equilibrium real wage will do so. By definition, any people who were idle in such a pure capitalism would be voluntarily enjoying leisure and **not** unemployed. At worse, mass unemployment would be a transitory disturbance which will quickly disappear if the market is flexible enough and there are no imperfections in it (such as trade unions, workers' rights, minimum wages, and so on).

Sadly for these arguments, the assumptions required to reach it are absurd as the conclusions (namely, that there is no involuntary unemployment as markets are fully efficient). More perniciously, when confronted with the reality of unemployment, most supporters of this view argue that it arises only because of government-imposed rigidities and trade unions. In their "ideal" world without either, there would, they claim, be no unemployment. Of course, it is much easier to demand that nothing should be done to alleviate unemployment and that workers' real wages be reduced when you are sitting in a tenured post in academia save from the labour market forces you wish others to be subjected to (in their own interests).

This perspective suffered during the Great Depression and the threat of revolution produced by persistent mass unemployment meant that dissident economists had space to question the orthodoxy. At the head of this re-evaluation was Keynes who presented an alternative analysis and solution to the problem of unemployment in his 1936 book **The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money** (it should be noted that the Polish socialist economist Michal Kalecki independently developed a similar theory a few years before Keynes but without the neo-classical baggage Keynes brought into his work).



that the empirical track-record of "actually existing" capitalism should be ignored in favour of economic ideology as reality is simply not pure enough. That, again, would be unconvincing for the obvious reason that we would be being asked to have faith in the validity of economics (as we have noted before, this would not be wise given its surreal assumptions and non-scientific nature). This would have one positive side-effect, as doing this would mean that that "market advocates" would have to stop claiming that all the good things we have are due to something (capitalism) that does not exist. So that option is unlikely to have many supporters or convince many. Finally, it could be argued that contrary to appearances capitalism really **does** benefit everyone. While this option is not compatible with intellectual honesty, it is by the far the most popular within the ranks of "market advocates." This is undoubtedly because the wealth and corporations are always willing to pay well for people happy to defend their power and profits against the reality they produce.

So what of the claim that capitalism is the best way to help them poor, that capitalism will especially benefit working class people? To make sense (i.e. to be more than simply a rhetoric assertion), it must rest on two basic notions. Firstly, that "free market" capitalism will have a higher growth rate than alternative forms of that system (such state capitalism or regulated capitalism). Secondly, that inequality will be less and share of wages in the national income more in "free market" than in other systems (this must be the case, otherwise "free market" reforms do not **especially** help working class people). We will discuss the first claim here, before discussing the track record of neo-liberalism in the next section followed a discussion of the history of capitalism and free trade in section C.10.2. We then analysis the failings of the equality defence in section C.10.3 before ending with a discussion on the limitations of looking at income and growth in evaluating how capitalism benefits the working class (section C.10.4). As we show, there

However, this appeal to reality will not convince many supporters of capitalism. For the true believer in the capitalist market, this kind of evidence does not create doubt in their ideas, only the conviction that the experiments did not go far enough. Thus, for the ideologue, freer market capitalism handily tell us nothing about free market capitalism — unless, of course, they can be portrayed as an "economic miracle" (regardless of the facts). For "advocates of the market," the sanctity of private property and private contracts is held as an inalienable natural right. To refute charges that this Will simply benefit the already wealthy they spend much time arguing that unfettered capitalism is also the only economic system which will produce the greatest benefit for the greatest number. In other words, that absolute capitalist markets and private property rights coincides **exactly** with personal interest. A clearer example of wishful thinking could hardly be asked for. Yet it is not hard to see what function this plays. Few people will be persuaded by their assumptions on property and markets, given the common sense objection that free exchange between the weak and the strong will, obviously, benefit the latter more. Yet more people may be convinced to go along with "free market" proposals by considerations of economic efficiency and the hope that the poor will see their living standards improve over time (particularly if "experts" with economics degrees are involved as people often assume they know what they are talking about).

Now, the empirical track-record of what is called capitalism is decidedly mixed. There are three courses of action open to the market advocate. The first is to embrace the property-rights argument wholeheartedly, and say that we should adopt pure capitalism even if it hurts a large percentage of the population because it is the right thing to do. This would be unconvincing for most people as economic austerity and serf-like working conditions in return for protecting the power and property rights of the few who actually own the wealth would find few (sane or disinterested) supporters. Then it could be argues



Somewhat ironically, given the abuse he has suffered at the hands of the right (and some of his self-proclaimed followers), Keynes took the assumptions of neo-classical economics on the labour market as the starting point of his analysis. As such, critics of Keynes's analysis generally misrepresent it. For example, right-liberal von Hayek asserted that Keynes *"started from the correct insight that the regular cause of extensive unemployment is real wages that are too high. The next step consisted in the proposition that a direct lowering of money wages could be brought about only by a struggle so painful and prolonged that it could not be contemplated. Hence he concluded that real wages must be lowered by the process of lowering the value of money,"* i.e. by inflation. Thus *"the supply of money must be so increased as to raise prices to a level where the real value of the prevailing money wage is no longer greater than the productivity of the workers seeking employment."* [**The Constitution of Liberty**, p. 280] This is echoed by libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick who presented an identical argument, stressing that for Keynes *"wages were less flexible than had been generally assumed"* and lowering real wages by inflation *"allowed for more subtle ways of wage-cutting than those traditionally employed."* [**Marx and Keynes**, p. 7]

Both are wrong. These arguments are a serious distortion of Keynes's argument. While he did start by assuming the neo-classical position that unemployment was caused by wages being too high, he was at pains to stress that even with ideally flexible labour markets cutting real wages would **not** reduce unemployment. As such, Keynes argued that unemployment was **not** caused by labour resisting wage cuts or by "sticky" wages. Indeed, any "Keynesian" economist who does argue that "sticky" wages are responsible for unemployment shows that he or she has not read Keynes — Chapter two of the **General Theory** critiques precisely this argument. Taking neo-classical economists at its word, Keynes analyses what would happen **if** the labour market were perfect and so

he assumes the same model as his neo-classical opponents, namely that unemployment is caused by wages being too high and there is flexibility in both commodity and labour markets. As he stressed, his *"criticism of the accepted [neo-]classical theory of economics has consisted not so much in finding logical flaws in its analysis as in pointing out that its tacit assumptions are seldom or never satisfied, with the result that it cannot solve the economic problems of the actual world."* [**The General Theory**, p. 378]

What Keynes did was to consider the **overall** effect of cutting wages on the economy as a whole. Given that wages make up a significant part of the costs of a commodity, *"if money-wages change, one would have expected the [neo-]classical school to argue that prices would change in almost the same proportion, leaving the real wage and the level of unemployment practically the same as before."* However, this was not the case, causing Keynes to point out that they *"do not seem to have realised that ... their supply curve for labour will shift bodily with every movement of prices."* This was because labour cannot determine its own real wage as prices are controlled by bosses. Once this is recognised, it becomes obvious that workers do not control the cost of living (i.e., the real wage). Therefore trade unions *"do not raise the obstacle to any increase in aggregate employment which is attributed to them by the [neo-]classical school."* So while workers could, in theory, control their wages by asking for less pay (or, more realistically, accepting any wage cuts imposed by their bosses as the alternative is unemployment) they do not have any control over the prices of the goods they produce. This means that they have **no** control over their real wages and so **cannot** reduce unemployment by pricing themselves into work by accepting lower wages. Given these obvious facts, Keynes concluded that there was *"no ground for the belief that a flexible wage policy is capable of continuous full employment ... The economic system cannot be made self-adjusting*



coin a well-worn phrase) "trickle down" from the wealthy to the many.

What to make of this claim? Again, it does contain an element of truth. As capitalism is a "grow or die" economy (see section D.4), obviously the amount of wealth available to society increases for **all** as the economy expands. So the poor will, in general, be better off **absolutely** in any growing economy (at least in economic terms). This was the case under Soviet state capitalism as well: the poorest worker in the 1980s was obviously far better off economically than one in the 1920s. As such, what counts is **relative** differences between classes and periods within a growth economy. Given the thesis that free-market capitalism will benefit the poor **especially,** we have to ask: is this actually true and, of so, can the other classes benefit equally well? This means we need to ask whether the assumption to concentrate on **absolute** poverty or inequality rather that **relative** values makes more sense. Similarly, we need to question the assumption that "free market" capitalism is the growth machine its supporters assert and whether the benefits of the growth it produces does, in fact, "trickle down." Questioning these assumptions is essential.

The key problem with evaluating such claims is, of course, the fact that an economy, like a society, is a very complex system which evolves through time. There are few opportunities for "controlled experiments" with which to test differing analyses and theories. This means that any attempt to analysis these claims must be based on looking at different countries and time periods in order to contrast them. Thus we will look at the same countries at different periods (the more social democratic post-war period to the more neo-liberal post-1980s and more neo-liberal countries with those in which free-market "reforms" have not been pushed as far). As we will show, the track record of "free(r) market" capitalism has been, at best, distinctly unimpressive and, at worse, significantly poorer.

# C.10 Is "free market" capitalism the best way to reduce poverty?

It is far to say that supporters of "free-market" capitalism make the claim that their system not only benefits everyone, but especially working class people (indeed, the very poorest sectors of society). This was the position during the so-called "anti-globalisation" protests at the turn of the 21st century, when the issue of global inequality and poverty was forced to the front of politics (for a time). In response, the likes of the Economist portraying itself and the big businesses seeking lower costs and higher profits as the real champions of the poor (particularly in the third world).

In this perspective growth is the key to reducing (absolute) poverty rather than, say, redistribution, struggle for reforms by means of direct action and popular self-organisation or (heaven forbid!) social revolution. The logic is simple. Economic growth of 1% per year will double an economy in 70 years, while 3% does so in just over 23 years and 5% growth takes a mere 15 years. Thus the standard right-wing argument is that we should promote "free market" capitalism as this is a growth machine par excellence. In fact, any form of redistribution or social struggle is considered counter-productive in this viewpoint as it is harms overall growth by either scaring away capital from a country or blunts the incentives of the elite to strive to "produce" more wealth. Over time, wealth will (to



*along these lines.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 12, pp. 8–9, p. 15 and p. 267] As he summarised:

> *"the contention that the unemployment which characterises a depression is due to a refusal by labour to accept a reduction of money-wages is not clearly supported by the facts. It is not very plausible to assert that unemployment in the United States in 1932 was due either to labour obstinately refusing to accept a reduction of money-wages or to its demanding a real wage beyond what the productivity of the economic machine was capable of furnishing ... Labour is not more truculent in the depression than in the boom — far from it. Nor is its physical productivity less. These facts from experience are a* ***prima facie*** *ground for questioning the adequacy of the [neo-]classical analysis."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 9]

This means that the standard neo-classical argument was flawed. While cutting wages may make sense for one firm, it would not have this effect throughout the economy as is required to reduce unemployment as a whole. This is another example of the fallacy of composition. What may work with an individual worker or firm will not have the same effect on the economy as a whole for cutting wages for all workers would have a massive effect on the aggregate demand for their firms products.

For Keynes and Kalecki, there were two possibilities if wages were cut. One possibility, which Keynes considered the most likely, would be that a cut in money wages across the whole economy would see a similar cut in prices. The net effect of this would be to leave real wages unchanged. The other assumes that as wages are cut, prices remain prices remained unchanged or only fell by a small amount (i.e. if wealth was redistributed from workers to their employers).

This is the underlying assumption of "free market" argument that cutting wages would end the slump. In this theory, cutting real wages would increase profits and investment and this would make up for any decline in working class consumption and so its supporters reject the claim that cutting real wages would merely decrease the demand for consumer goods without automatically increasing investment sufficiently to compensate for this.

However, in order make this claim, the theory depends on three critical assumptions, namely that firms can expand production, that they will expand production, and that, if they do, they can sell their expanded production. This theory and its assumptions can be questioned. To do so we will draw upon David Schweickart's excellent summary. [**Against Capitalism**, pp. 105–7]

The first assumption states that it is always possible for a company to take on new workers. Yet increasing production requires more than just labour. Tools, raw materials and work space are all required in addition to new workers. If production goods and facilities are not available, employment will not be increased. Therefore the assumption that labour can always be added to the existing stock to increase output is plainly unrealistic, particularly if we assume with neo-classical economics that all resources are fully utilised (for an economy operating at less than full capacity, the assumption is somewhat less inappropriate).

Next, will firms expand production when labour costs decline? Hardly. Increasing production will increase supply and eat into the excess profits resulting from the fall in wages (assuming, of course, that demand holds up in the face of falling wages). If unemployment did result in a lowering of the general market wage, companies might use the opportunity to replace their current workers or force them to take a pay cut. If this happened, neither production nor employment would increase. However, it could be argued that the excess profits would in-



> *ject readiness to be shoved and pushed about indiscriminately, complete dependence on the whims of the market. [Ludwig Von] Mises justly argued that if workers 'did not act as trade unionists, but reduced their demands and changed their locations and occupations according to the labour market, they would eventually find work.' This sums up the position under a system based on the postulate of the commodity character of labour. It is not for the commodity to decide where it should be offered for sale, to what purpose it should be used, at what price it should be allowed to change hands, and in what manner it should be consumed or destroyed."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 176]

However, people are **not** commodities but living, thinking, feeling individuals. The "labour market" is more a social institution than an economic one and people and work more than mere commodities. If we reject the neo-liberals' assumptions for the nonsense they are, their case fails. Capitalism, ultimately, cannot provide full employment simply because labour is **not** a commodity (and as we discussed in section C.7, this revolt against commodification is a key part of understanding the business cycle and so unemployment).

malnutrition, racial tensions and a host of other, negative, impacts. Given all this, given the dire impact of joblessness, it strains belief that people would **choose** to put themselves through it. The human costs of unemployment are well documented. There is a stable correlation between rates of unemployment and the rates of mental-hospital admissions. There is a connection between unemployment and juvenile and young-adult crime. The effects on an individual's self-respect and the wider implications for their community and society are massive. As David Schweickart concludes the *"costs of unemployment, whether measured in terms of the cold cash of lost production and lost taxes or in the hotter units of alienation, violence, and despair, are likely to be large under Laissez Faire."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

Of course, it could be argued that the unemployed should look for work and leave their families, home towns, and communities in order to find it. However, this argument merely states that people should change their whole lives as required by "market forces" (and the wishes — *"animal spirits,"* to use Keynes' term — of those who own capital). In other words, it just acknowledges that capitalism results in people losing their ability to plan ahead and organise their lives (and that, in addition, it can deprive them of their sense of identity, dignity and self-respect as well), portraying this as somehow a requirement of life (or even, in some cases, noble).

It seems that capitalism is logically committed to viciously contravening the very values upon which it claims it be built, namely the respect for the innate worth and separateness of individuals. This is hardly surprising, as capitalism is based on reducing individuals to the level of another commodity (called "labour"). To requote Karl Polanyi:

> *"In human terms such a postulate [of a labour market] implied for the worker extreme instability of earnings, utter absence of professional standards, ab-*



crease capital investment in the economy (a key assumption of neo-liberalism). The reply is obvious: perhaps, perhaps not. A slumping economy might well induce financial caution and so capitalists could stall investment until they are convinced of the sustained higher profitability will last.

This feeds directly into the last assumption, namely that the produced goods will be sold. Assuming that money wages are cut, but prices remain the same then this would be a cut in real wages. But when wages decline, so does worker purchasing power, and if this is not offset by an increase in spending elsewhere, then total demand will decline. However, it can be argued that not everyone's real income would fall: incomes from profits would increase. But redistributing income from workers to capitalists, a group who tend to spend a smaller portion of their income on consumption than do workers, could reduce effective demand and increase unemployment. Moreover, business does not (cannot) instantaneously make use of the enlarged funds resulting from the shift of wages to profit for investment (either because of financial caution or lack of existing facilities). In addition, which sane company would increase investment in the face of falling demand for its products? So when wages decline, so does workers' purchasing power and this is unlikely to be offset by an increase in spending elsewhere. This will lead to a reduction in aggregate demand as profits are accumulated but unused, so leading to stocks of unsold goods and renewed price reductions. This means that the cut in real wages will be cancelled out by price cuts to sell unsold stock and unemployment remains. In other words, contrary to neo-classical economics, a fall in wages may result in the same or even more unemployment as aggregate demand drops and companies cannot find a market for their goods. And so, *"[i]f prices do not fall, it is still worse, for then real wages are reduced and unemployment is increased directly by the fall in the purchase of consumption goods."* [Joan Robinson, **Further Contributions to Economics**, p. 34]

The "Pigou" (or *"real balance"*) effect is another neo-classical argument that aims to prove that (in the end) capitalism will pass from slump to boom quickly. This theory argues that when unemployment is sufficiently high, it will lead to the price level falling which would lead to a rise in the real value of the money supply and so increase the real value of savings. People with such assets will have become richer and this increase in wealth will enable people to buy more goods and so investment will begin again. In this way, slump passes to boom naturally.

However, this argument is flawed in many ways. In reply, Michal Kalecki argued that, firstly, Pigou had *"assumed that the banking system would maintain the stock of money constant in the face of declining incomes, although there was no particular reason why they should."* If the money stock changes, the value of money will also change. Secondly, that *"the gain in money holders when prices fall is exactly offset by the loss to money providers. Thus, whilst the real value of a deposit in bank account rises for the depositor when prices fell, the liability represented by that deposit for the bank also rises in size."* And, thirdly, *"that falling prices and wages would mean that the real value of outstanding debts would be increased, which borrowers would find it increasingly difficult to repay as their real income fails to keep pace with the rising real value of debt. Indeed, when the falling prices and wages are generated by low levels of demand, the aggregate real income will be low. Bankruptcies follow, debts cannot be repaid, and a confidence crisis was likely to follow."* In other words, debtors may cut back on spending more than creditors would increase it and so the depression would continue as demand did not rise. [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 90]

So, the traditional neo-classical reply that investment spending will increase because lower costs will mean greater profits, leading to greater savings, and ultimately, to greater investment is weak. Lower costs will mean greater profits only



If we look at the relative size of a nation's social security transfers as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product and its relative poverty rate we find a correlation. Those nations with a high level of spending have lower rates of poverty. In addition, there is a correlation between the spending level and the number of persistent poor. Those nations with high spending levels have more of their citizens escape poverty. For example, Sweden has a single-year poverty rate of 3% and a poverty escape rate of 45% and Germany has figures of 8% and 24% (and a persistent poverty rate of 2%). In contrast, the USA has figures of 20% and 15% (and a persistent poverty rate of 42%).

Given that a strong welfare state acts as a kind of floor under the wage and working conditions of labour, it is easy to see why capitalists and the supporters of "free market" capitalism seek to undermine it. By undermining the welfare state, by making labour "flexible," profits and power can be protected from working people standing up for their rights and interests. Little wonder the claimed benefits of "flexibility" have proved to be so elusive for the vast majority while inequality has exploded. The welfare state, in other words, reduces the attempts of the capitalist system to commodify labour and increases the options available to working class people. While it did not reduce the need to get a job, the welfare state did undermine dependence on any particular employee and so increased workers' independence and power. It is no coincidence that the attacks on unions and the welfare state was and is framed in the rhetoric of protecting the *"right of management to manage"* and of driving people back into wage slavery. In other words, an attempt to increase the commodification of labour by making work so insecure that workers will not stand up for their rights.

Unemployment has tremendous social costs, with the unemployed facing financial insecurity and the possibility of indebtedness and poverty. Many studies have found that unemployment results in family distribution, ill health (both physical and mental), suicide, drug addition, homelessness,

UK during the same period, to quote the ex-Thatcherite John Gray, there *"was the growth of an underclass. The percentage of British (non-pensioner) households that are wholly workless — that is, none of whose members is active in the productive economy — increased from 6.5 per cent in 1975 to 16.4 per cent in 1985 and 19.1 per cent in 1994... Between 1992 and 1997 there was a 15 per cent increase in unemployed lone parents... This dramatic growth of an underclass occurred as a direct consequence of neo-liberal welfare reforms, particularly as they affected housing."* [**False Dawn**, p. 30] This is the opposite of the predictions of right-wing theories and rhetoric.

As Gray correctly argues, the *"message of the American [and other] New Right has always been that poverty and the under class are products of the disincentive effects of welfare, not the free market."* He goes on to note that it *"has never squared with the experience of the countries of continental Europe where levels of welfare provision are far more comprehensive than those of the United States have long co-existed with the absence of anything resembling an American-style underclass. It does not touch at virtually any point the experience of other Anglo-Saxon countries."* He points to the example of New Zealand where *"the theories of the American New Right achieved a rare and curious feat — self-refutation by their practical application. Contrary to the New Right's claims, the abolition of nearly all universal social services and the stratification of income groups for the purpose of targeting welfare benefits selectively created a neo-liberal poverty trap."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42]

So while the level of unemployment benefits and the welfare state may have little impact on the level of unemployment (which is to be expected if the nature of unemployment is essentially involuntary), it **does** have an effect on the nature, length and persistency of poverty. Cutting the welfare state increases poverty and the time spent in poverty (and by cutting redistribution, it also increases inequality).



if the products are sold, which they might not be if demand is adversely affected. In other words, a higher profit margins do not result in higher profits due to fall in consumption caused by the reduction of workers purchasing power. And, as Michal Kalecki argued, wage cuts in combating a slump may be ineffective because gains in profits are not applied immediately to increase investment and the reduced purchasing power caused by the wage cuts causes a fall in sales, meaning that higher profit margins do not result in higher profits. Moreover, as Keynes pointed out long ago, the forces and motivations governing saving are quite distinct from those governing investment. Hence there is no necessity for the two quantities always to coincide. So firms that have reduced wages may not be able to sell as much as before, let alone more. In that case they will cut production, add to unemployment and further reduce demand. This can set off a vicious downward spiral of falling demand and plummeting production leading to depression, a process described by Kropotkin (nearly 40 years before Keynes made the same point in **The General Theory**):

> *"Profits being the basis of capitalist industry, low profits explain all ulterior consequences.*
>
> *"Low profits induce the employers to reduce the wages, or the number of workers, or the number of days of employment during the week... As Adam Smith said, low profits ultimately mean a reduction of wages, and low wages mean a reduced consumption by the worker. Low profits mean also a somewhat reduced consumption by the employer; and both together mean lower profits and reduced consumption with that immense class of middlemen which has grown up in manufacturing countries, and that, again, means a further reduction of profits for the employers."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 33]

So, as is often the case, Keynes was simply including into mainstream economics perspectives which had long been held by critics of capitalism and dismissed by the orthodoxy. Keynes' critique of Say's Law essentially repeated Marx's while Proudhon pointed out in 1846 that *"if the producer earns less, he will buy less"* and this will *"engender .. . over-production and destitution."* This was because *"though the workmen cost [the capitalist] something, they are [his] customers: what will you do with your products, when driven away by [him], they shall consume no longer?"* This means that cutting wages and employment would not work for they are *"not slow in dealing employers a counter-blow; for if production excludes consumption, it is soon obliged to stop itself."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 204 and p. 190] Significantly, Keynes praised Proudhon's follower Silvio Gesell for getting part of the answer and for producing *"an anti-Marxian socialism"* which the *"future will learn more from"* than Marx. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 355]

So far our critique of the "free market" position has, like Keynes's, been within the assumptions of that theory itself. More has to be said, though, as its assumptions are deeply flawed and unrealistic. It should be stressed that while Keynes's acceptance of much of the orthodoxy ensured that at least some of his ideas become part of the mainstream, Post-Keynesians like Joan Robinson would latter bemoan the fact that he sought a compromise rather than clean break with the orthodoxy. This lead to the rise of the post-war neo-classical synthesis, the so-called "Keynesian" argument that unemployment was caused by wages being "sticky" and the means by which the right could undermine social Keynesianism and ensure a return to neo-classical orthodoxy.

Given the absurd assumptions underlying the "free market" argument, a wider critique is possible as it reflects reality no more than any other part of the pro-capitalist ideology which passes for mainstream economics.



In addition, it is worthwhile to note that the right-wing assumption that higher unemployment benefits and a healthy welfare state promote unemployment is not supported by the evidence. As a moderate member of the British Conservative Party notes, the *"OECD studied seventeen industrial countries and found no connect between a country's unemployment rate and the level of its social-security payments."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, p. 118] Moreover, the economists David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald *"Wage Curve"* for many different countries is approximately the same for each of the fifteen countries they looked at. This also suggests that labour market unemployment is independent of social-security conditions as their "wage curve" can be considered as a measure of wage flexibility. Both of these facts suggest that unemployment is involuntary in nature and cutting social-security will **not** affect unemployment.

Another factor in considering the nature of unemployment is the effect of decades of "reform" of the welfare state conducted in both the USA and UK since 1980. During the 1960s the welfare state was far more generous than it was in the 1990s and unemployment was lower. If unemployment was "voluntary" and due to social-security being high, we would expect a decrease in unemployment as welfare was cut (this was, after all, the rationale for cutting it in the first place). In fact, the reverse occurred, with unemployment rising as the welfare state was cut. Lower social-security payments did not lead to lower unemployment, quite the reverse in fact.

Faced with these facts, some may conclude that as unemployment is independent of social security payments then the welfare state can be cut. However, this is not the case as the size of the welfare state does affect the poverty rates and how long people remain in poverty. In the USA, the poverty rate was 11.7% in 1979 and rose to 13% in 1988, and continued to rise to 15.1% in 1993. The net effect of cutting the welfare state was to help **increase** poverty. Similarly, in the

about the state of modern capitalist economic theory, but as it is popular in many right-wing circles, we should discuss it.

David Schweickart notes, these kinds of arguments ignore *"two well-established facts: First, when unemployment rises, it is layoffs, not [voluntary] quits, that are rising. Second, unemployed workers normally accept their first job offer. Neither of these facts fits well with the hypothesis that most unemployment is a free choice of leisure."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 108] When a company fires a number of its workers, it can hardly be said that the sacked workers have calculated that their time is better spent looking for a new job. They have no option. Of course, there are numerous jobs advertised in the media. Does this not prove that capitalism always provides jobs for those who want them? Hardly, as the number of jobs advertised must have some correspondence to the number of unemployed and the required skills and those available. If 100 jobs are advertised in an areas reporting 1,000 unemployed, it can scarcely be claimed that capitalism tends to full employment. This hardly gives much support to the right-wing claim that unemployment is "voluntary" and gives an obvious answer to right-wing economist Robert Lucas's quest *"to explain why people allocate time to ... unemployment, we need to know why they prefer it to all other activities."* [quoted by Schweickart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] A puzzle indeed! Perhaps this unworldly perspective explains why there has been no real effort to verify the assertion that unemployment is "voluntary leisure."

Somewhat ironically, given the desire for many on the right to deny the possibility of involuntary unemployment this perspective became increasingly influential at precisely the same time as the various theories of the so-called "natural rate" of unemployment did (see section C.9). Thus, at the same time as unemployment was proclaimed as being a "voluntary" choice economics was also implicitly arguing that this was nonsense, that unemployment **is** an essential disciplinary tool within capitalism to keep workers in their place (sorry, to fight inflation).



As noted above, the argument that unemployment is caused by wages being too high is part of the wider marginalist perspective. Flaws in that will mean that its explanation of unemployment is equally flawed. So it must be stressed that the marginalist theory of distribution lies at the core of its theories of both output and unemployment. In that theory, the marginal product of labour is interpreted as the labour demand curve as the firm's demand for labour is the marginal physical product of labour multiplied by the price of the output and this produces the viewpoint that unemployment is caused by wages being too high. So given the central role which marginal productivity theory plays in the mainstream argument, it is useful to start our deeper critique by re-iterating that, as indicated in section C.2, Joan Robinson and Piero Sraffa had successfully debunked this theory in the 1950s. *"Yet for psychological and political reasons,"* notes James K. Galbraith, *"rather than for logical and mathematical ones, the capital critique has not penetrated mainstream economics. It likely never will. Today only a handful of economists seem aware of it."* [*"The distribution of income"*, pp. 32–41, Richard P. F. Holt and Steven Pressman (eds.), **A New Guide to Post Keynesian Economics**, p. 34] Given that this underlies the argument that high wages cause high unemployment, it means that the mainstream argument for cutting wages has no firm theoretical basis.

It should also be noted that the assumption that adding more labour to capital is always possible flows from the assumption of marginal productivity theory which treats "capital" like an ectoplasm and can be moulded into whatever form is required by the labour available (see section C.2.5 for more discussion). Hence Joan Robinson's dismissal of this assumption, for *"the difference between the future and the past is eliminated by making capital 'malleable' so that mistakes can always be undone and equilibrium is always guaranteed. .. with 'malleable' capital the demand for labour depends on the level of wages."* [**Contributions to Modern Economics**,

p. 6] Moreover, *"labour and capital are not often as smoothly substitutable for each other as the [neo-classical] model requires ... You can't use one without the other. You can't measure the marginal productivity of one without the other."* Demand for capital and labour is, sometimes, a **joint** demand and so it is often to adjust wages to a worker's marginal productivity independent of the cost of capital. [Hugh Stretton, **Economics: A New Introduction**, p. 401]

Then there is the role of diminishing returns. The assumption that the demand curve for labour is always downward sloping with respect to aggregate employment is rooted in the notion that industry operates, at least in the short run, under conditions of diminishing returns. However, diminishing returns are **not** a feature of industries in the real world. Thus the assumption that the downward slopping marginal product of labour curve is identical to the aggregate demand curve for labour is not true as it is inconsistent with empirical evidence. *"In a system at increasing returns,"* noted one economist, *"the direct relation between real wages and employment tends to render the ordinary mechanism of wage adjustment ineffective and unstable."* [Ferdinando Targetti, **Nicholas Kaldor**, p. 344] In fact, as discussed in section C.1.2, without this assumption mainstream economics cannot show that unemployment is, in fact, caused by real wages being too high (along with many other things).

Thus, if we accept reality, we must end up *"denying the inevitability of a negative relationship between real wages and employment."* Post-Keynesian economists have not found any empirical links between the growth of unemployment since the early in 1970s and changes in the relationship between productivity and wages and so there is *"no theoretical reason to expect a negative relationship between employment and the real wage, even at the level of the individual firm."* Even the beloved marginal analysis cannot be used in the labour market, as *"[m]ost jobs are offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Workers*



Finally, we must clarify the anarchist position on state welfare (we support working class organisations, although we are critical of unions with bureaucratic and top-down structures). As far as state welfare goes, anarchists do not place it high on the list of things we are struggling against (once the welfare state for the rich has been abolished, then, perhaps, we will reconsider that). As we will discuss in section D.1.5, anarchists are well aware that the current neo-liberal rhetoric of "minimising" the state is self-serving and hides an attack on the living standards of working class people. As such, we do not join in such attacks regardless of how critical we may be of aspects of the welfare state for we seek genuine reform from below by those who use it rather than "reform" from above by politicians and bureaucrats in the interests of state and capital. We also seek to promote alternative social institutions which, unlike the welfare state, are under working class control and so cannot be cut by decree from above. For further discussion, see sections J.5.15 and J.5.16.

## C.9.4 Is unemployment voluntary?

Here we point out another aspect of the free market capitalist "blame the workers" argument, of which the diatribes against unions and workers' rights highlighted above is only a part. This is the assumption that unemployment is not involuntary but is freely chosen by workers. As Nicholas Kaldor put it, for "free market" economists involuntary employment *"cannot exist because it is excluded by the assumptions."* [**Further Essays on Applied Economics**, p. x] Many neo-classical economists claim that unemployed workers calculate that their time is better spent searching for more highly paid employment (or living on welfare than working) and so desire to be jobless. That this argument is taken seriously says a lot

ment and finding willing workers is hard to do. This seems, to say the least, an unlikely situation. If bosses were convinced that, for example, raising the minimum wage would increase unemployment rather than their wages bill they would be supporting it wholeheartedly as it would allow them to pressurise their workers into labouring longer and harder to remain in employment. Suffice to say, bosses are in no hurry to see their pool of wage slaves drained and so their opposition to trade unions and minimum wages are the product of need for profits rather than some concern for the unemployed.

This applies to family issues as well. In its support for "free markets" you can get a taste of the schizophrenic nature of the conservative right's approach to family values. On the one hand, they complain that families do not spend enough time together as they are under financial pressure and this results both parents going out to work and working longer hours. Families will also suffer because businesses do not have to offer paid maternity leave, paid time off, flexitime, paid holidays, or other things that benefit them. However, the right cannot bring themselves to advocate unions and strike action by workers (or state intervention) to achieve this. Ironically, their support for "free market" capitalism and "individualism" undermines their support for "family values." Ultimately, that is because profits will always come before parents.

All this is unsurprising as, ultimately, the only real solution to unemployment and overwork is to end wage labour and the liberation of humanity from the needs of capital. Anarchists argue that an economy should exist to serve people rather than people existing to serve the economy as under capitalism. This explains why capitalism has always been marked by a focus on "what the economy wants" or "what is best for the economy" as having a capitalist economy always results in profit being placed over people. Thus we have the paradoxical situation, as under neo-liberalism, where an economy is doing well while the bulk of the population are not.



*have little or no scope to vary hours of work, thereby making marginal trade-offs between income and leisure. There is thus no worker sovereignty corresponding to the (very controversial) notion of consumer sovereignty."* Over all, *"if a relationship exists between aggregate employment and the real wage, it is employment that determines wages. Employment and unemployment are product market variables, not labour market variables. Thus attempts to restore full employment by cutting wages are fundamentally misguided."* [John E. King, *"Labor and Unemployment,"* pp. 65–78, Holt and Pressman (eds.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 68, pp. 67–8, p. 72, p. 68 and p. 72] In addition:

> *"Neo-classical theorists themselves have conceded that a negative relationship between the real wage and the level of employment can be established only in a one-commodity model; in a multi-commodity framework no such generalisation is possible. This confines neo-classical theory to an economy without money and makes it inapplicable to a capitalist or entrepreneurial economy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

And, of course, the whole analysis is rooted in the notion of perfect competition. As Nicholas Kaldor mildly put it:

> *"If economics had been a 'science' in the strict sense of the word, the empirical observation that most firms operate in imperfect markets would have forced economists to scrap their existing theories and to start thinking on entirely new lines ... unfortunately economists do not feel under the same compulsion to maintain a close correspondence between theoretical hypotheses and the facts of experience."* [**Further Essays on Economic Theory ad Policy**, p. 19]

Any real economy is significantly different from the impossible notion of perfect competition and *"if there exists*

*even one monopoly anywhere in the system … it follows that others must be averaging less than the marginal value of their output. So to concede the existence of monopoly requires that one either drop the competitive model entirely or construct an elaborate new theory … that divides the world into monopolistic, competitive, and subcompetitive ('exploited') sectors."* [James K. Galbraith, **Created Unequal**, p. 52] As noted in section C.4.3, mainstream economists have admitted that monopolistic competition (i.e., oligopoly) is the dominant market form but they cannot model it due to the limitations of the individualistic assumptions of bourgeois economics. Meanwhile, while thundering against unions the mainstream economics profession remains strangely silent on the impact of big business and pro-capitalist monopolies like patents and copyrights on distribution and so the impact of real wages on unemployment.

All this means that *"neither the demand for labour nor the supply of labour depends on the real wage. It follows from this that the labour market is not a true market, for the price associated with it, the wage rate, is incapable of performing any market-clearing function, and thus variations in the wage rate cannot eliminate unemployment."* [King, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] As such, the *"conventional economic analysis of markets … is unlikely to apply"* to the labour market and as a result *"wages are highly unlikely to reflect workers' contributions to production."* This is because economists treat labour as no different from other commodities yet *"economic theory supports no such conclusion."* At its most basic, labour is **not** produced for profit and the *"supply curve for labour can 'slope backward' — so that a fall in wages can cause an increase in the supply of workers."* In fact, the idea of a backward sloping supply curve for labour is just as easy to derive from the assumptions used by economists to derive their standard one. This is because workers may prefer to work less as the wage rate rises as they will be better off even if they do not work more. Conversely, very low wage rates are likely to



*strike leaders… In Colombia, the government used anti-terrorist legislation in 1993 to try 15 trade union leaders opposing the privatisation of the state telecommunications company. In the most extreme example, Peru's Alberto Fujimori dealt with a troublesome Congress by simply dissolving it … and seizing emergency powers."* [Duncan Green, **The Silent Revolution**, p. 157]

This is unsurprising. People, when left alone, will create communities, organise together to collectively pursue their own happiness, protect their communities and environment. In other words, they will form groups, associations and unions to control and influence the decisions that affect them. In order to create a "fully competitive" labour market, individuals must be atomised and unions, communities and associations weakened, if not destroyed, in order to fully privatise life. State power must be used to disempower the mass of the population, restrict their liberty, control popular organisations and social protest and so ensure that the free market can function without opposition to the human suffering, misery and pain it would cause. People, to use Rousseau's evil term, *"must be forced to be free."* And, unfortunately for neo-liberalism, the countries that tried to reform their labour market still suffered from high unemployment, plus increased social inequality and poverty and where still subject to the booms and slumps of the business cycle.

Of course, bosses and the elite are hardly going to present their desire for higher profits and more power in those terms. Hence the need to appear concerned about the fate of the unemployed. As such, it is significant, of course, that right-wing economists only seem to become concerned over unemployment when trade unions are organising or politicians are thinking of introducing or raising the minimum wage. Then they will talk about how these will raise unemployment and harm workers, particularly those from ethnic minorities. Given that bosses always oppose such policies, we must conclude that they are, in fact, seeking a situation where there is full employ-

liberal age *"is an economic environment that pits citizen against citizen for the benefit of those who own and manage"* a country. [**Op. Cit**, p. 203]

And we must add that whenever governments have attempted to make the labour market *"fully competitive"* it has either been the product of dictatorship (e.g. Chile under Pinochet) or occurred at the same time as increased centralisation of state power and increased powers for the police and employers (e.g. Britain under Thatcher, Reagan in the USA). This is the agenda which is proscribed for Western Europe. In 2006, when successful street protests stopped a proposed labour market reform in France (the CPE), one American journalist, Elaine Sciolino, complained that *"the government seems to fear its people; the people seem to fear change."* [**New York Times**, March 17 2006] Such are the contradictions of neo-liberalism. While proclaiming the need to reduce state intervention, it requires increased state power to impose its agenda. It needs to make people fear their government and fear for their jobs. Once that has been achieved, then people who accept "change" (i.e. the decisions of their economic, social and political bosses) without question. That the French people do not want a British or American style labour market, full of low-wage toilers who serve at the boss's pleasure should not come as a surprise. Nor should the notion that elected officials in a supposed democracy are meant to reflect the feelings of the sovereign people be considered as unusual or irrational.

The anti-democratic nature of capitalist "flexiblity" applies across the world. Latin American Presidents trying to introduce neo-liberalism into their countries have had to follow suit and *"ride roughshod over democratic institutions, using the tradition Latin American technique of governing by decree in order to bypass congressional opposition... Civil rights have also taken a battering. In Bolivia, the government attempted to defuse union opposition ... by declaring a state of siege and imprisoning 143*



produce a very high supply of labour as workers need to work more to meet their basic needs. In addition, as noted at the end of section C.1.4, economic theory itself shows that workers will not get a fair wage when they face very powerful employers unless they organise unions. [Steve Keen, **Debunking Economics**, pp. 111–2 and pp. 119–23]

Strong evidence that this model of the labour market can be found from the history of capitalism. Continually we see capitalists turn to the state to ensure low wages in order to ensure a steady supply of labour (this was a key aim of state intervention during the rise of capitalism, incidentally). For example, in central and southern Africa mining companies tried to get locals to labour. They had little need for money, so they worked a day or two then disappeared for the rest of the week. To avoid simply introducing slavery, some colonial administrators introduced and enforced a poll-tax. To earn enough to pay it, workers had to work a full week. [Hugh Stretton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 403] Much the same was imposed on British workers at the dawn of capitalism. As Stephen Marglin points out, the *"indiscipline of the labouring classes, or more bluntly, their laziness, was widely noted by eighteenth century observers."* By laziness or indiscipline, these members of the ruling class meant the situation where *"as wages rose, workers chose to work less."* In economic terms, *"a backward bending labour supply curve is a most natural phenomenon as long as the individual worker controls the supply of labour."* However, *"the fact that higher wages led workers to choose more leisure ... was disastrous"* for the capitalists. Unsurprisingly, the bosses did not meekly accept the workings of the invisible hand. Their *"first recourse was to the law"* and they *"utilised the legislative, police and judicial powers of the state"* to ensure that working class people had to supply as many hours as the bosses demanded. [*"What do Bosses do?"*, pp. 60–112, **Review of Radical Political Economy**, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 91–4]

This means that the market supply curve *"could have any shape at all"* and so economic theory *"fails to prove that employment is determined by supply and demand, and reinforces the real world observation that involuntary unemployment can exist"* as reducing the wage need not bring the demand and supply of labour into alignment. While the possibility of backward-bending labour supply curves is sometimes pointed out in textbooks, the assumption of an upward sloping supply curve is taken as the normal situation but *"there is no theoretical — or empirical — justification for this."* Sadly for the world, this assumption is used to draw very strong conclusions by economists. The standard arguments against minimum wage legislation, trade unions and demand management by government are all based on it. Yet, as Keen notes, such important policy positions *"should be based upon robust intellectual or empirical foundations, rather than the flimsy substrate of mere fancy. Economists are quite prone to dismiss alternative perspectives on labour market policy on this very basis — that they lack any theoretical or empirical foundations. Yet their own policy positions are based as much on wishful thinking as on wisdom."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 121–2 and p. 123]

Within a capitalist economy the opposite assumption to that taken by economics is far more likely, namely that there **is** a backward sloping labour supply curve. This is because the decision to work is **not** one based on the choice between wages and leisure made by the individual worker. Most workers do **not** choose whether they work or not, and the hours spent working, by comparing their (given) preferences and the level of real wages. They do **not** practice voluntary leisure waiting for the real wage to exceed their so-called *"reservation"* wage (i.e. the wage which will tempt them to forsake a life of leisure for the disutility of work). Rather, most workers have to take a job because they do not have a choice as the alternative is poverty (at best) or starvation and homelessness (at worse). The



this simply does not reflect the real world. Any real economy is marked by the economic power of big business (in itself, according to neo-classical economics, a distortion of the market). Unless workers organise then they are in a weak position and will be even more exploited by their economic masters. Left-wing economist Thomas I. Palley presents the correct analysis of working class organisation when he wrote:

> *"The reality is that unions are a correction of market failure, namely the massive imbalance of power that exists between individual workers and corporate capital. The importance of labour market bargaining power for the distribution of income, means that unions are a fundamental prop for widespread prosperity. Weakening unions does not create a 'natural' market: it just creates a market in which business has the power to dominate labour.*
>
> *"The notion of perfect natural markets is built on the assumption that market participants have no power. In reality, the process of labour exchange is characterised not only by the presence of power, but also by gross inequality of power. An individual worker is at a great disadvantage in dealing with large corporations that have access to massive pools of capital and can organise in a fashion that renders every individual dispensible ... Unions help rectify the imbalance of power in labour markets, and they therefore correct market failure rather than causing it."* {**Op. Cit.**, pp. 36–7]

The welfare state also increases the bargaining power of workers against their firms and limits the ability of firms to replace striking workers with scabs. Given this, it is understandable why bosses hate unions and any state aid which undermines their economic power. Thus the *"hallmark"* of the neo-

their time making ends meet and blaming everyone and everything but their ruling class for their situation (*"US families must work even more hours to achieve the standard of living their predecessors achieved 30 years ago."* [David R. Howell, *"Conclusion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 338]).

All this is unsurprising for anarchists as we recognise that "flexibility" just means weakening the bargaining power of labour in order to increase the power and profits of the rich (hence the expression ***"flexploitation"***!). Increased "flexibility" has been associated with **higher,** not lower unemployment. This, again, is unsurprising, as a "flexible" labour market basically means one in which workers are glad to have any job and face increased insecurity at work (actually, ***"insecurity"*** would be a more honest word to use to describe the ideal of a competitive labour market rather than *"flexibility"* but such honesty would let the cat out of the bag). In such an environment, workers' power is reduced meaning that capital gets a larger share of the national income than labour and workers are less inclined to stand up for their rights. This contributes to a fall in aggregate demand, so increasing unemployment. In addition, we should note that "flexibility" may have little effect on unemployment (although not on profits) as a reduction of labour's bargaining power may result in **more** rather than less unemployment. This is because firms can fire "excess" workers at will, increase the hours of those who remain and stagnating or falling wages reduces aggregate demand. Thus the paradox of increased "flexibility" resulting in higher unemployment is only a paradox in the neo-classical framework. From an anarchist perspective, it is just the way the system works as is the paradox of overwork and unemployment occurring at the same time.

So while "free market" economics protrays unions as a form of market failure, an interference with the natural workings of the market system and recommend that the state should eliminate them or ensure that they are basically powerless to act,



real wage influences the decision on how much labour to supply rather than the decision to work or not. This is because as workers and their families have a certain basic living standard to maintain and essential bills which need to be paid. As earnings increase, basic costs are covered and so people are more able to work less and so the supply of labour tends to fall. Conversely, if real earnings fall because the real wage is less then the supply of labour may **increase** as people work more hours and/or more family members start working to make enough to cover the bills (this is because, once in work, most people are obliged to accept the hours set by their bosses). This is the opposite of what happens in "normal" markets, where lower prices are meant to produce a **decrease** in the amount of the commodity supplied. In other words, the labour market is not a market, i.e. it reacts in different ways than other markets (Stretton provides a good summary of this argument [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 403–4 and p. 491]).

So, as radical economists have correctly observe, such considerations undercut the "free market" capitalist contention that labour unions and state intervention are responsible for unemployment (or that depressions will easily or naturally end by the workings of the market). To the contrary, insofar as labour unions and various welfare provisions prevent demand from falling as low as it might otherwise go during a slump, they apply a brake to the downward spiral. Far from being responsible for unemployment, they actually mitigate it. For example, unions, by putting purchasing power in the hands of workers, stimulates demand and keeps employment higher than the level it would have been. Moreover, wages are generally spent immediately and completely whilst profits are not. A shift from profits to wages may stimulate the economy since more money is spent but there will be a delayed cut in consumption out of profits. [Malcolm Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 118] All this should be obvious, as wages (and benefits) may be costs for some

firms but they are revenue for even more and labour is not like other commodities and reacts in changes in price in different ways.

Given the dynamics of the labour "market" (if such a term makes much sense given its atypical nature), any policies based on applying "economics 101" to it will be doomed to failure. As such, any book entitled **Economics in One Lesson** must be viewed with suspicion unless it admits that what it expounds has little or no bearing to reality and urges the reader to take at least the second lesson. Of course, a few people actually do accept the simplistic arguments that reside in such basic economics texts and think that they explain the world (these people usually become right-"libertarians" and spend the rest of their lives ignoring their own experience and reality in favour of a few simple axioms). The wage-cutting argument (like most of economics) asserts that any problems are due to people not listening to economists and that there is no economic power, there are no "special interests" — it is just that people are stupid. Of course, it is irrelevant that it is much easier to demand that workers' real wages be reduced when you are sitting in a tenured post in academia. True to their ideals and "science", it is refreshing to see how many of these "free market" economists renounce tenure so that their wages can adjust automatically as the market demand for their ideologically charged comments changes.

So when economic theories extol suffering for future benefits, it is always worth asking who suffers, and who benefits. Needless to say, the labour market flexibility agenda is anti-union, anti-minimum wage, and anti-worker protection. This agenda emerges from theoretical claims that price flexibility can restore full employment, and it rests dubious logic, absurd assumptions and on a false analogy comparing the labour market with the market for peanuts. Which, ironically, is appropriate as the logic of the model is that workers will end up working for peanuts! As such, the "labour market" model has



> *'flexibility' is being interpreted once again from an unbalanced and one-sided perspective. It is, rather, a high degree of labour market* ***discipline*** *that seems to be the operative force. US workers remain insecure despite a relatively low unemployment rate, and hence compensation gains ... were muted. This implies a consequent redistribution of income from labour to capital ... Greenspan's story is more about* ***fear*** *than it is about flexibility — and hence this famous testimony has come to be known as Greenspan's 'fear factor' hypothesis, in which he concisely described the importance of labour market discipline for his conduct of monetary policy."* [Jim Stanford, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140]

So while this attack on the wages, working conditions and social welfare is conducted under the pre-Keynesian notion of wages being *"sticky"* downwards, the underlying desire is to impose a "flexibility" which ensures that wages are *"sticky"* **upwards.** This suggests a certain one-sidedness to the "flexibility" of modern labour markets: employers enjoy the ability to practice flexpoilation but the flexibility of workers to resist is reduced.

Rather than lack of "flexibility," the key factor in explaining high unemployment in Europe is the anti-inflationary policies of its central banks, which pursue high interest rates in order to "control" inflation (i.e. wages). In contrast, America has more flexibility simply due to the state of the working class there. With labour so effectively crushed in America, with so many workers feeling they cannot change things or buying into the individualistic premises of capitalism thanks to constant propaganda by business funded think-tanks, the US central bank can rely on job insecurity and ideology to keep workers in their place in spite of relatively lower official unemployment. Meanwhile, as the rich get richer many working class people spend

> *continued reluctance of workers to leave their jobs to seek other employment as the labour market has tightened provides further evidence of such concern, as does the tendency toward longer labour union contracts ... The low level of work stoppages of recent years also attests to concern about job security ... The continued decline in the share of the private workforce in labour unions has likely made wages more responsive to market forces ... Owing in part to the subdued behaviour of wages, profits and rates of return on capital have risen to high levels."* [quoted by Jim Stanford, *"Testing the Flexibility Paradigm: Canadian Labor Market Performance in International Context,"* pp. 119–155, **Fighting Unemployment**, David R. Howell (ed.), pp. 139–40]

Under such circumstances, it is obvious why unemployment could drop and inflation remain steady. Yet there is a massive contradiction in Greenspan's account. As well as showing how keen the Federal Reserve investigates the state of the class struggle, ready to intervene when the workers may be winning, it also suggests that flexibility works just one way:

> *"Some of the features highlighted by Greenspan reflect precisely a **lack** of flexibility in the labour market: a lack of response of compensation to tight labour markets, a reluctance of workers to leave their jobs, and the prevalence of long-term contracts that lock employment arrangements for six or more years at a time. And so Greenspan's portrayal of the unique features of the US model suggests that something more than flexibility is the key ingredient at work — or at least that*



a certain utility as it removes the problem of institutions and, above all, power from the perspective of the economist. In fact, institutions such as unions can only be considered as a problem in this model rather than a natural response to the unique nature of the labour "market" which, despite the obvious differences, most economists treat like any other.

To conclude, a cut in wages may deepen any slump, making it deeper and longer than it otherwise would be. Rather than being the solution to unemployment, cutting wages will make it worse (we will address the question of whether wages being too high actually causes unemployment in the first place, in the next section). Given that, as we argued in section C.8.2, inflation is caused by insufficient profits for capitalists (they try to maintain their profit margins by price increases) this spiralling effect of cutting wages helps to explain what economists term *"stagflation"* — rising unemployment combined with rising inflation (as seen in the 1970s). As workers are made unemployed, aggregate demand falls, cutting profit margins even more and in response capitalists raise prices in an attempt to recoup their losses. Only a very deep recession can break this cycle (along with labour militancy and more than a few workers and their families).

Thus the capitalist solution to crisis is based on working class people paying for capitalism's contradictions. For, according to the mainstream theory, when the production capacity of a good exceeds any reasonable demand for it, the workers must be laid off and/or have their wages cut to make the company profitable again. Meanwhile the company executives — the people responsible for the bad decisions to build lots of factories — continue to collect their fat salaries, bonuses and pensions, and get to stay on to help manage the company through its problems. For, after all, who better, to return a company to profitability than those who in their wisdom ran it into bankruptcy? Strange, though, no matter how

high their salaries and bonuses get, managers and executives **never** price **themselves** out of work.

All this means that working class people have two options in a slump — accept a deeper depression in order to start the boom-bust cycle again or get rid of capitalism and with it the contradictory nature of capitalist production which produces the business cycle in the first place (not to mention other blights such as hierarchy and inequality). In the end, the only solution to unemployment is to get rid of the system which created it by workers seizing their means of production and abolishing the state. When this happens, then production for the profit of the few will be ended and so, too, the contradictions this generates.

## C.9.2 Is unemployment caused by wages being too high?

As we noted in the last section, most capitalist economic theories argue that unemployment is caused by wages being too high. Any economics student will tell you that labour is like any other commodity and so if its price is too high then there will be less demand for it, so producing an excess supply of it on the market. Thus high wages will reduce the quantity of labour demanded and so create unemployment — a simple case of "supply and demand."

From this theory we would expect that areas and periods with high wages will also have high levels of unemployment. Unfortunately for the theory, this does not seem to be the case. Even worse for it, high wages are generally associated with booms rather than slumps and this has been known to mainstream economics since at least 1939 when in March of that year **The Economic Journal** printed an article by Keynes about the movement of real wages during a boom in which he evaluated the empirical analysis of two labour economists



ployment in Europe has a lot less to do with "rigid" structures and "pampered" citizens than it does with the fiscal and monetary austerity produced by the excessively tight monetary policies of the European Central Bank plus the requirements of the Maastricht Treaty and the *"Growth and Stability pact"* which aims to reduce demand expansion (i.e. wage rises) under the name of price stability (i.e., the usual mantra of fighting inflation by lowering wage increases). So, *"[i]n the face of tight monetary policy imposed first by the [German] Bundesbank and then by the European Central Bank ... it has been essential to keep wages moderate and budget deficits limited. With domestic demand severely constrained, many European countries experiences particularly poor employment growth in the mid-1990s."* [David R. Howell, *"Conclusion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 337] This has been essentially imposed by the EU bureaucrats onto the European population and as these policies, like the EU itself, has the support of most of Europe's ruling class such an explanation is off the political agenda.

So if "flexibility" does not result in lower unemployment, just what is it good for? The net results of American labour market "flexibility" were summarised by head the US Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan in 1997. He was discussing the late 1990s boom (which was, in fact, the product of the dot.com bubble rather than the dawn of a new era so many claimed at the time). He explained why unemployment managed to fall below the standard NAIRU rate without inflation increasing. In his words:

> *"Increases in hourly compensation ... have continued to fall far short of what they would have been had historical relationships between compensation gains and the degree of labour market tightness held ... As I see it, heightened job insecurity explains a significant part of the restraint on compensation and the consequent muted price inflation . .. The*

US (and much higher than in the UK where low wages and long hours boost the figure). And it should be remembered that rising productivity in the US has not been reflecting in rising wages since 1980. The gains of productivity, in other words, have been accumulated by the boss class and not by the hard working American people (whose working week has steadily increased during that period). Moreover, France created more private sector jobs (+10% between 1996 and 2002, according to the OECD) than the UK (+6%) or the US (+5%). Ironically, given the praise it receives for being a neo-liberal model, the UK economy barely created any net employment in the private sector between 2002 and 2007 (unemployment **had** dropped, but that was due to increased state spending which led to a large rise in public sector jobs).

Then there is the fact that some European countries **have** listened to the neo-liberal orthodoxy and reformed their markets but to little success. So it should be noted that *"there has in fact already been a very considerable liberalisation and reform in Europe,"* both in product and labour markets. In fact, during the 1990s Germany and Italy reformed their labour markets *"roughly ten times"* as much as the USA. The *"point is that reforms should have boosted productivity growth in Europe,"* but they did not. If regulation *"was the fundamental problem, some positive impact on labour productivity growth should have come already from the very substantial deregulation already undertaken. Deregulation should have contributed to an acceleration in productivity growth in Europe whereas actually productivity growth declines. It is hard to see how regulation, which was declining, could be the source of Europe's slowdown."* [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 144]

So, perhaps, "flexibility" is not the solution to unemployment some claim it is (after all, the lack of a welfare state in the 19th century did not stop mass unemployment nor long depressions occurring). Indeed, a strong case can be made (and has been by left-wing economists) that the higher open unem-



(entitled *"Relative Movements of Real Wages and Output"* this is contained as an Appendix of most modern editions of **The General Theory**).

These studies showed that *"when money wages are rising, real wages have usually risen too; whilst, when money wages are falling, real wages are no more likely to rise than to fall."* Keynes admitted that in **The General Theory** he was *"accepting, without taking care to check the facts"*, a *"widely held"* belief. He discussed where this belief came from, namely leading 19th century British economist Alfred Marshall who had produced a *"generalisation"* from a six year period between 1880–86 which was not true for the subsequent business cycles of 1886 to 1914. He also quotes another leading economist, Arthur Pigou, from 1927 on how *"the upper halves of trade cycles have, on the whole, been associated with higher rates of real wages than the lower halves"* and indicates that he provided evidence on this from 1850 to 1910 (although this did not stop Pigou reverting to the *"Marshallian tradition"* during the Great Depression and blaming high unemployment on high wages). [**The General Theory**, p. 394, p. 398 and p. 399] Keynes conceded the point, arguing that he had tried to minimise differences between his analysis and the standard perspective. He stressed that while he assumed countercyclical real wages his argument did not depend on it and given the empirical evidence provided by labour economists he accepted that real wages were pro-cyclical in nature.

The reason why this is the case is obvious given the analysis in the last section. Labour does not control prices and so cannot control its own real wage. Looking at the Great Depression, it seems difficult to blame it on workers refusing to take pay cuts when by 1933 *"wages and salaries in U.S. manufacturing were less than half their 1929 levels and, in automobiles and steel, were under 40 percent of the 1929 levels."* In Detroit, there had been 475,000 auto-workers. By 1931 *"almost half has been laid off."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Ad-**

**vantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 271] The notion of all powerful unions or workers' resistance to wage cuts causing high unemployment hardly fits these facts. Peter Temin provides information on real wages in manufacturing during the depression years. Using 1929 as the base year, weekly average real wages (i.e., earnings divided by the consumer price index) fell each year to reach a low of 85.5% by 1932. Hourly real wages remained approximately constant (rising to 100.1% in 1930 and then 102.6% in 1931 before falling to 99% in 1932). The larger fall in weekly wages was due to workers having a shorter working week. The *"effect of shorter hours and lower wages was to decrease the income of employed workers."* Thus the notion that lowering wages will increase employment seems as hard to support as the notion that wages being too high caused the depression in the first place. Temin argues, *"no part of the [neo-]classical story is accurate."* [**Did Monetary Forces Cause the Great Depression?**, pp. 139–40] It should be noted that the consensus of economists is that during this period the evidence seems to suggest that real wages **did** rise overall. This was because the prices of commodities fell faster than did the wages paid to workers. Which confirms Keynes, as he had argued that workers cannot price themselves into work as they have no control over prices. However, there is no reason to think that high real wages caused the high unemployment as the slump itself forced producers to cut prices (not to mention wages). Rather, the slump caused the increase in real wages.

Since then, economists have generally confirmed that real wage are procyclical. In fact, *"a great deal of empirical research has been conducted in this area — research which mostly contradicts the neo-classical assumption of an inverse relation between real wages and employment."* [Ferdinando Targetti, **Nicholas Kaldor**, p. 50] Nicholas Kaldor, one of the first Keynesians, also stressed that the notion that there is an inverse relationship between real wages and employment is *"contradicted by numerous empirical studies which show that, in the short pe-*



for example, most of GDP growth since the 1980s has been captured by the top 5% of the population while median wages have been (at best) flat. Ignoring the enrichment of the elite in the USA and UK would mean that GDP growth would be, at least for the bulk of the population, better in Europe. This means that while Europe may have grown more slowly, it benefits more than just the ruling class. Then there are such factors as poverty and social mobility. Rates of poverty are much worse in the neo-liberal countries, while social mobility has fallen in the US and UK since the 1980s. There are less poor people in Europe and they stay in poverty for shorter periods of time compared to America and Britain.

Moreover, comparing Europe's income or GDP per person to the U.S. fails to take into account the fact that Europeans work far less than Americans or British people. So while France may have lagged America in per capita income in 2007 ($30,693 to $43,144), it cannot be said that working class people are automatically worse off as French workers have a significantly shorter working week and substantially more holidays. Less hours at work and longer holidays may impact negatively on GDP but only an idiot would say that this means the economy is worse, never mind the quality of life. Economists, it should be remembered, cannot say that one person is worse off than another if she has less income due to working fewer hours. So GDP per capita may be higher in the US, but only because American workers work more hours and **not** because they are more productive. Like other Europeans, the French have decided to work less and enjoy it more. So it is important to remember that GDP is not synonymous with well-being and that inequality can produce misleading per capita income comparisons.

A far better indicator of economic welfare is productivity. It is understandable that this is not used as a measure when comparing America to Europe as it is as high, or higher, in France and other Western European countries as it is in the

awareness during the French anti-CPE protests in 2006. In fact, the percentage of prime-age workers (25–54) in employment is pretty similar in "regulated" France, Germany and Sweden as in "flexible" America and Britain (it is much higher for women in Sweden). However, there are significant differences in youth employment rates and this suggests where the apparent unemployment problem lies in Europe. This problem is due to the statistical method used to determine the unemployment figures. The standard measure of unemployment divides the number unemployed by the numbers unemployed plus employed. The flaw in this should be obvious. For example, assume that 90% of French youths are in education and of the remaining 10%, 5% are in work and 5% are unemployed. This last 10% are the "labour force" and so we would get a massive 50% unemployment rate but this is due to the low (5%) employment rate. Looking at the youth population as a whole, only 5% are actually unemployed. [David R. Howell, *"Introduction"*, pp. 3–34, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 13–14] By the standard measure, French males age 15–24 had an unemployment rate of 20.8% in 2007, as compared to 11.8% in America. Yet this difference is mainly because, in France (as in the rest of Europe), there are many more young males not in the labour force (more are in school and fewer work part time while studying). As those who are not in the labour market are not counted in the standard measure, this gives an inflated value for youth unemployment. A far better comparison would be to compare the number of unemployed divided by the population of those in the same age group. This results in the USA having a rate of 8.3% and France 8.6%.

Another source of the "decline" of Europe is usually linked to lower GDP growth over the past few years compared to countries like Britain and the USA. Yet this perspective fails to take into account internal income distribution. Both the USA and UK are marked by large (and increasing) inequality and that GDP growth is just as unequally distributed. In America,



*riod, changes in real wages are positively correlated with changes in employment and not negatively."* [**Further Essays on Economic Theory and Policy**, p. 114fn] As Hugh Stretton summarises in his excellent introductory text on economics:

> *"In defiance of market theory, the demand for labour tends strongly to vary **with** its price, not inversely to it. Wages are high when there is full employment. Wages — especially for the least-skilled and lowest paid — are lowest when there is least employment. The causes chiefly run from the employment to the wages, rather than the other way. Unemployment weakens the bargaining power, worsens the job security and working conditions, and lowers the pay of those still in jobs.*
>
> *"The lower wages do not induce employers to create more jobs … most business firms have no reason to take on more hands if wages decline. Only empty warehouses, or the prospect of more sales can get them to do that, and these conditions rarely coincide with falling employment and wages. The causes tend to work the other way: unemployment lowers wages, and the lower wages do not restore the lost employment."* [**Economics: A New Introduction**, pp. 401–2]

Will Hutton, the British neo-Keynesian economist, summarises research by two other economists that suggests high wages do not cause unemployment:

> *"the British economists David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald [examined] … the data in twelve countries about the actual relation between wages and unemployment — and what they have discovered is another major challenge to the free market account*

*of the labour market. Free market theory would predict that low wages would be correlated with low local unemployment; and high wages with high local unemployment.*

*"Blanchflower and Oswald have found precisely the opposite relationship. The higher the wages, the lower the local unemployment — and the lower the wages, the higher the local unemployment. As they say, this is not a conclusion that can be squared with free market text-book theories of how a competitive labour market should work."* [**The State We're In**, p. 102]

Unemployment was highest where real wages were lowest and nowhere had falling wages being followed by rising employment or falling unemployment. Blanchflower and Oswald stated that their conclusion is that employees *"who work in areas of high unemployment earn less, other things constant, than those who are surrounded by low unemployment."* [**The Wage Curve**, p. 360] This relationship, the exact opposite of that predicted by "free market" capitalist economics, was found in many different countries and time periods, with the curve being similar for different countries. Thus, the evidence suggests that high unemployment is associated with low earnings, not high, and vice versa.

Looking at less extensive evidence, if minimum wages and unions cause unemployment, why did the South-eastern states of the USA (with a **lower** minimum wage and weaker unions) have a **higher** unemployment rate than North-western states during the 1960s and 1970s? Or why, when the (relative) minimum wage declined under Reagan and Bush in the 1980s, did chronic unemployment accompany it? [Allan Engler, **The Apostles of Greed**, p. 107] Or the **Low Pay Network** report *"Priced Into Poverty"* which discovered that in the 18 months before they were abolished, the British Wages Councils (which



Switzerland 1.7%). Britain, which probably had the most flexible labour market had an average unemployment rate higher than half of Europe. And the unemployment rate of Germany is heavily influenced by areas which were formally in East Germany. Looking at the former West German regions only, unemployment between 1983 and 1995 was 6.3%, compared to 6.6% in the USA (and 9.8% in the UK). This did not change subsequently. There are many regulated European countries with lower unemployment than the USA (in 2002, 10 of 18 European countries had lower unemployment rates). Thus:

*"Often overlooked in the 1990s in the rush to embrace market fundamentalism and to applaud the American model was the fact that several European countries with strong welfare states consistently reported unemployment rates well below that of the United States ... At the same time, other European welfare sates, characterised by some of the lowest levels of wage inequality and the highest levels of social protection in the developed world, experienced substantial declines in unemployment over the 1990s, reaching levels that are now below that of the United States."* [David R. Howell, *"Conclusion"*, pp. 310–43, **Op. Cit.**, p. 310]

As such, it is important to remember that *"the empirical basis"* of the neo-liberal OECD-IMF orthodoxy is *"limited."* [Howell, **Op. Cit.**, p. 337] In fact, the whole "Europe is in a state of decline" narrative which is used to justify the imposition of neo-liberal reforms there is better understood as the corporate media's clever ploy to push Europe into the hands of the self-destructing neo-liberalism that is slowly taking its toll on Britain and America rather than a serious analysis of the real situation there.

Take, for example, the issue of high youth unemployment in many European countries which reached international

Eighteen years of high unemployment and a massive explosion in those on incapacity benefits is hardly an advert for the benefits of "flexible" labour market. However, a very deep recession, double-figure unemployment for most of the decade, defeats for key strikes and unions plus continued high unemployment for nearly two decades had an impact on the labour movement. It made people willing to put up with anything in order to remain in work. Hence Thatcher's "economic miracle" — the working class finally knew its place in the social hierarchy.

Thus, if a politician is elected who is hailed by the right as a "new Thatcher", i.e., seeking to "reform" the economy (which is "economically correct" speak for using the state to break working class militancy) then there are some preconditions required before they force their populations down the road to (private) serfdom. They will have to triple unemployment in under three years and have such record levels last over a decade, provoke the deepest recession since the 1930s, oversee the destruction of the manufacturing sector and use the powers of the state to break the mass protests and strikes their policies will provoke. Whether they are successful depends on the willingness of working class people to stand up for their liberties and rights and so impose, from the streets, the changes that really needed — changes that politicians will not, indeed cannot, achieve.

Nor should it be forgotten that here are many European countries with around the same, or lower, official unemployment rates as the UK with much less "flexible" labour markets. Taking the period 1983 to 1995, we find that around 30 per cent of the population of OECD Europe lived in countries with average unemployment rates lower than the USA and around 70 per cent in countries with lower unemployment than Canada (whose wages are only slightly less flexible than the USA). Furthermore, the European countries with the lowest unemployment rates were not noted for their labour market flexibility (Austria 3.7%, Norway 4.1%, Portugal 6.4%, Sweden 3.9% and



set minimum wages for various industries) saw a rise of 18,200 in full-time equivalent jobs compared to a net loss of 39,300 full-time equivalent jobs in the 18 months afterwards. Given that nearly half the vacancies in former Wages Council sectors paid less than the rate which it is estimated Wages Councils would now pay, and nearly 15% paid less than the rate at abolition, there should (by the "free market" argument) have been rises in employment in these sectors as pay fell. The opposite happened. This research shows that the falls in pay associated with Wages Council abolition had not created more employment. Indeed, employment growth was more buoyant prior to abolition than subsequently. So whilst Wages Council abolition did not result in more employment, the erosion of pay rates caused by their abolition resulted in more families having to endure poverty pay. Significantly, the introduction of a national minimum wage by the first New Labour government did not have the dire impact "free market" capitalist economists and politicians predicted.

It should also be noted that an extensive analysis of the impact of minimum wage increases at the state level in America by economists David Card and Alan Kreuger found the facts contradicted the standard theory, with rises in the minimum wage having a small positive impact on both employment and wages for all workers. [**Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage**] While their work was attacked by business leaders and economists from think-tanks funded by them, Card and Kreuger's findings that raising the lowest wages had no effect on unemployment or decreased it proved to be robust. In particular, when replying to criticism of their work by other economists who based their work, in part, on data supplied by a business funded think-tank Card and Krueger discovered that not only was that work consistent with their original findings but that the *"only data set that indicates a significant decline in employment"* was by some amazing coincidence *"the small set of restaurants collected by"* the think

tank. [*"Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania: Reply"*, pp. 1397–1420, **The American Economic Review**, Vol. 90, No. 5, p. 1419] For a good overview of *"how the fast food industry and its conservative allies sought to discredit two distinguished economists, and how the attack backfired"* when *"the two experts used by the fast food industry to impeach Card and Krueger, effectively ratified them"* see John Schmitt's *"Behind the Numbers: Cooked to Order."* [**The American Prospect**, May-June 1996, pp. 82–85]

(This does not mean that anarchists support the imposition of a legal minimum wage. Most anarchists do not because it takes the responsibility for wages from unions and other working class organisations, where it belongs, and places it in the hands of the state. We mention these examples in order to highlight that the "free market" capitalist argument has serious flaws with it.)

Empirical evidence does not support the argument the "free market" capitalist argument that unemployment is caused by real wages being too high. The phenomenon that real wages tend to increase during the upward swing of the business cycle (as unemployment falls) and fall during recessions (when unemployment increases) renders the standard interpretation that real wages govern employment difficult to maintain (real wages are *"pro-cyclical,"* to use economic terminology). This evidence makes it harder for economists to justify policies based on a direct attack on real wages as the means to cure unemployment.

While this evidence may come as a shock to those who subscribe to the arguments put forward by those who think capitalist economics reflect the reality of that system, it fits well with the anarchist and other socialist analysis. For anarchists, unemployment is a means of disciplining labour and maintaining a suitable rate of profit (i.e. unemployment is a key means of ensuring that workers are exploited). As full employment is



work on the labour market and, consequently, reduce the unemployment statistics.

While the UK is praised for its "flexible" labour market in the 2000s, many forget the price which was paid to achieve it and even more fail to realise that the figures hide a somewhat different reality. It is therefore essential to remember Britain's actual economic performance during Thatcher's rule rather than the "economically correct" narrative we have inherited from the media and economic "experts." When Thatcher came to office in 1979 she did so promising to end the mass unemployment experienced under Labour (which had doubled between 1974 and 1979). Unemployment then tripled in her first term, rising to over 3 million in 1982 (for the first time since the 1930s, representing 1 in 8 people). This was due in large part to the application of Monetarist dogma making the recession far worse than it had to be. Unemployment remained at record levels throughout the 1980s, only dropping to below its 1979 level in 1997 when New Labour took office. It gets worse. Faced with unemployment rising to well over 10%, Thatcher's regime did what any respectable government would — it cooked the books. It changed how unemployment was recorded in order to artificially lower the official unemployment records. It also should be stressed that the UK unemployment figures do not take into account the Thatcherite policy of shunting as many people as possible off the unemployment roles and onto sickness and incapacity benefits during the 1980s and 1990s (*"In some countries, like the UK and the Netherlands, many [of the unemployed] found their way onto sickness benefit … Across the UK, for example, there was a strong positive correlation between numbers on sickness benefits and the local unemployment rate."* [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107]). Once these "hidden" people are included the unemployment figures of Britain are similar to those countries, such as France and Germany, who are more honest in recording who is and is not unemployed.

Also when evaluating the unemployment records of a country, other factors than the "official" rate given by the government must taken into account. Firstly, different governments have different definitions of what counts as unemployment. As an example, the USA has a more restrictive definition of who is unemployed than Germany. For example, in 2005 Germany's unemployment rate was officially 11.2%. However, using the US definition it was only around 9% (7% in what was formerly West Germany). The offical figure was higher as it included people, such as those involuntarily working part-time, as being unemployed who are counted as being employed in the USA. America, in the same year, had an unemployment rate of around 5%. So comparing unadjusted unemployment figures will give a radically different picture of the problem than using standardised ones. Sadly far too often business reporting in newspapers fail to do this.

In addition, all estimates of America's unemployment record must take into account its incarceration rates. The prison population is not counted as part of the labour force and so is excluded when calculating unemployment figures. This is particularly significant as those in prison are disproportionately from demographic groups with very high unemployment rates and so it is likely that a substantial portion of these people would be unemployed if they were not in jail. If America and the UK did not have the huge surge in prison population since the 1980s neo-liberal reforms, the unemployment rate in both countries would be significantly higher. In the late 1990s, for example, more than a million extra people would be seeking work if the US penal policies resembled those of any other Western nation. [John Gray, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113] England and Wales, unsurprisingly, tops the prison league table for Western Europe. In 2005, 145 per 100,000 of their population was incarcerated. In comparison, France had a rate of 88 while Germany had one of 97. This would, obviously, reduce the numbers of those seeking



approached, labour's power increases, so reducing the rate of exploitation and so increasing labour's share of the value it produces (and so higher wages). Thus, from an anarchist point of view, the fact that wages are higher in areas of low unemployment is not a surprise, nor is the phenomenon of pro-cyclical real wages. After all, as we noted in section C.3, the ratio between wages and profits are, to a large degree, a product of bargaining power and so we would expect real wages to grow in the upswing of the business cycle, fall in the slump and be high in areas of low unemployment.

The evidence therefore suggests that the "free market" capitalist claim that unemployment is caused by unions, "too high" wages, and so on, is false. Indeed, by stopping capitalists appropriating more of the income created by workers, high wages maintain aggregate demand and contribute to higher employment (although, of course, high employment cannot be maintained indefinitely under wage slavery due to the rise in workers' power this implies). Rather, unemployment is a key aspect of the capitalist system and cannot be got rid off within it. The "free market" capitalist "blame the workers" approach fails to understand the nature and dynamic of the system (given its ideological role, this is unsurprising). So high real wages for workers increases aggregate demand and reduces unemployment from the level it would be if the wage rate was cut. This is supported by most of the research into wage dynamics during the business cycle and by the *"wage curve"* of numerous countries. This suggests that the demand for labour is independent of the real wages and so the price of labour (wages) is incapable of performing any market clearing function. The supply and demand for labour are determined by two different sets of factors. The relationship between wages and unemployment flows from the latter to the former rather than the reverse: the wage is influenced by the level of unemployment. Thus wages are not the product of a labour market which does not really exist but rather is the product of *"institutions, customs, privi-*

*lege, social relations, history, law, and above all power, with an admixture of ingenuity and luck. But of course power, and particularly market or monopoly power, changes with the general of demand, the rate of growth, and the rate of unemployment. In periods of high employment, the weak gain on the strong; in periods of high unemployment, the strong gain on the weak."* [Galbraith, **Created Unequal**, p. 266]

This should be obvious enough. It is difficult for workers to resist wage cuts and speeds-up when faced with the fear of mass unemployment. As such, higher rates of unemployment *"reduce labour's bargaining power vis-a-vis business, and this helps explain why wages have declined and workers have not received their share of productivity growth"* (between 1970 and 1993, only the top 20% of the US population increased its share of national income). [Thomas I. Palley, **Plenty of Nothing**, p. 55 and p. 58] Strangely, though, this obvious fact seems lost on most economists. In fact, if you took their arguments seriously then you would have to conclude that depressions and recessions are the periods during which working class people do the best! This is on two levels. First, in neo-classical economics work is considered a disutility and workers decide not to work at the market-clearing real wage because they prefer leisure to working. Leisure is assumed to be intrinsically good and the wage the means by which workers are encouraged to sacrifice it. Thus high unemployment must be a good thing as it gives many more people leisure time. Second, for those in work their real wages are higher than before, so their income has risen. Alfred Marshall, for example, argued that in depressions money wages fell but not as fast as prices. A *"powerful friction"* stopped this, which *"establish[ed] a higher standard of living among the working classes"* and a *"diminish[ing of] the inequalities of wealth."* When asked whether during a period of depression the employed working classes got more than they did before, he replied *"[m]ore than they did before, on the average."* [quoted by Keynes, **Op. Cit.**, p. 396]



> *of unemployment remain so persistently high in a country, Britain, where active measures have been taken to create flexibility?"* [Keith Cowling and Roger Sugden, **Beyond Capitalism**, p. 9]

If we look at the fraction of the labour force without a job in America, we find that in 1969 it was 3.4% (7.3% including the underemployed) and **rose** to 6.1% in 1987 (16.8% including the underemployed). Using more recent data, we find that, on average, the unemployment rate was 6.2% in 1990–97 compared to 5.0% in the period 1950–65. In other words, labour market "flexibility" has not reduced unemployment levels, in fact "flexible" labour markets have been associated with higher levels of unemployment. Of course, we are comparing different time periods. A lot changed between the 1960s and the 1990s and so comparing these periods cannot be the whole answer. However, it does seem strange that the period with stronger unions, higher minimum wages and more generous welfare state should be associated with **lower** unemployment than the subsequent "flexible" period. It is possible that the rise in flexibility and the increase in unemployment may be unrelated. If we look at different countries over the same time period we can see if "flexibility" actually reduces unemployment. As one British economist notes, this may not be the case:

> *"Open unemployment is, of course, lower in the US. But once we allow for all forms of non-employment [such as underemployment, jobless workers who are not officially registered as such and so on], there is little difference between Europe and the US: between 1988 and 1994, 11 per cent of men aged 25–55 were not in work in France, compared with 13 per cent in the UK, 14 per cent in the US and 15 per cent in Germany."* [Richard Layard, quoted by John Gray, **False Dawn**, p. 113]

far as welfare goes, the relationship between unemployment and benefits is, if anything, in the 'wrong' direction (higher benefits do along with lower unemployment). Of course there are a host of other influences on unemployment but *"if benefits were very important we might expect **some** degree of correlation in the 'right' (positive) direction ... such a lack of simple relation with unemployment applies to other likely suspects such as employment protection and union membership."* [**Capitalism Unleashed**, p. 48, p. 121, p. 48 and p. 47]

Nor is it mentioned that the history of labour market flexibility is somewhat at odds with the theory. It is useful to remember that American unemployment was far worse than Europe's during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. In fact, it did not get better than the European average until the second half of the 1980s. [David R. Howell, *"Introduction"*, pp. 3–34, **Fighting Unemployment**, David R. Howell (ed.), pp. 10–11] To summarise:

> *"it appears to be only relatively recently that the maintained greater flexibility of US labour markets has apparently led to a superior performance in terms of lower unemployment, despite the fact this flexibility is no new phenomenon. Comparing, for example, the United States with the United Kingdom, in the 1960s the United States averaged 4.8 per cent, with the United Kingdom at 1.9 per cent; in the 1970s the United States rate rose to 6.1 per cent, with the United Kingdom rising to 4.3 per cent, and it was only in the 1980s that the ranking was reversed with the United States at 7.2 per cent and the United Kingdom at 10 per cent... Notice that this reversal of rankings in the 1980s took place despite all the best efforts of Mrs Thatcher to create labour market flexibility... [I]f labour market flexibility is important in explaining the level of unemployment... why does the level*



Thus, apparently, working class people do worse in booms than in slumps and, moreover, they can resist wage cuts more in the face of mass unemployment than in periods approaching full employment. That the theory which produced these conclusions could be taken remotely seriously shows the dangers of deducing an economic ideology from a few simple axioms rather than trusting in empirical evidence and common sense derived from experience. Nor should it come as too great a surprise, as "free market" capitalist economics tends to ignore (or dismiss) the importance of economic power and the social context within which individuals make their choices. As Bob Black acidly put it with regards to the 1980s, it *"wasn't the **workers** who took these gains [of increased productivity], not in higher wages, not in safer working conditions, and not in shorter hours — hours of work have **increased** ... It must be, then, that in the 80s and after workers have 'chosen' lower wages, longer hours **and** greater danger on the job. Yeah, sure."* [*"Smokestack Lightning,"* pp. 43–62, **Friendly Fire**, p. 61]

In the real world, workers have little choice but to accept a job as they have no independent means to exist in a pure capitalist system and so no wages means no money for buying such trivialities as food and shelter. The decision to take a job is, for most workers, a non-decision — paid work is undertaken out of economic necessity and so we are not in a position to refuse work because real wages are too low to be worth the effort (the welfare state reduces this pressure, which is why the right and bosses are trying to destroy it). With high unemployment, pay and conditions will worsen while hours and intensity of labour will increase as the fear of the sack will result in increased job insecurity and so workers will be more willing to placate their bosses by obeying and not complaining. Needless to say, empirical evidence shows that *"when unemployment is high, inequality rises. And when unemployment is low, inequality tends to fall."* [James K. Galbraith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 148] This is unsurprising as the *"wage curve"* suggests that it is unemploy-

ment which drives wage levels, not the other way round. This is important as higher unemployment would therefore create higher inequality as workers are in no position to claim back productivity increases and so wealth would flood upwards.

Then there is the issue of the backward-bending supply curve of labour we discussed at the end of the last section. As the "labour market" is not really a market, cutting real wages will have the opposite effect on the supply of labour than its supporters claim. It is commonly found that as real wages fall, hours at work become longer and the number of workers in a family increases. This is because the labour supply curve is negatively slopped as families need to work more (i.e., provide more labour) to make ends meet. This means that a fall in real wages may **increase** the supply of labour as workers are forced to work longer hours or take second jobs simply to survive. The net effect of increasing supply would be to **decrease** real wages even more and so, potentially, start a vicious circle and make the recession deeper. Looking at the US, we find evidence that supports this analysis. As the wages for the bottom 80% of the population fell in real terms under Reagan and Bush in the 1980s, the number of people with multiple jobs increased as did the number of mothers who entered the labour market. In fact, *"the only reason that family income was maintained is the massive increase in labour force participation of married women ... Put simply, jobs paying family wages have been disappearing, and sustaining a family now requires that both adults work ... The result has been a squeeze on the amount of time that people have for themselves ... there is a loss of life quality associated with the decline in time for family ... they have also been forced to work longer ... Americans are working longer just to maintain their current position, and the quality of family life is likely declining. A time squeeze has therefore accompanied the wage squeeze."* [Palley, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 63–4] That is, the supply of labour **increased** as its price fell (Reagan's turn to military Keynesianism and



oligopoly reigns). Most who favour labour market "flexibility" are also those most against the breaking up of big business and oligopolistic markets or are against attempts to stop mergers between dominant companies in and across markets. Yet the model requires **both** sides to be made up of numerous small firms without market influence or power. So why expect making one side more "flexible" will have a positive effect on the whole?

There is no logical reason for this to be the case and as we noted in section C.1.4, neo-classical economics agrees — in an economy with both unions and big business, removing the former while retaining the latter will **not** bring it closer to the ideal of perfect competition. With the resulting shift in power on the labour market things will get worse as income is distributed from labour to capital. Which is, we must stress, precisely what **has** happened since the 1980s and the much lauded "reforms" of the labour market. It is a bit like expecting peace to occur between two warring factions by disarming one side and arguing that because the number of guns have been halved peacefulness has doubled! Of course, the only "peace" that would result would be the peace of the graveyard or a conquered people — subservience can pass for peace, if you do not look too close. In the end, calls for the "flexibility" of labour indicate the truism that, under capitalism, labour exists to meet the requirements of capital (or living labour exists to meet the needs of dead labour, a truly insane way to organise a society).

Then there is the key question of comparing reality with the rhetoric. As economist Andrew Glyn points out, the neoliberal orthodoxy on this issue *"has been strenuously promoted despite weak evidence for the magnitude of its benefits and in almost total neglect of its costs."* In fact, *"there is no evidence that the countries which carried out more reforms secured significant falls in unemployment."* This is perhaps unsurprising as *"there is plenty of support for such deregulation from business even without strong evidence that unemployment would be reduced."* As

incomplete nature of the "reforms" ensured that a deep spiral was avoided).

To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to think about how the impact of eliminating the minimum wage and trade unions would actually have. First, of course, there would be a drop in the wages of the poorest workers as the assertion is that the minimum wage increases unemployment by forcing wages up. The assertion is that the bosses would then employ more workers as a result. However, this assumes that extra workers could easily be added to the existing capital stock which may not be the case. Assuming this is the case (and it **is** a big assumption), what happens to the workers who have had their pay cut? Obviously, they still need to pay their bills which means they either cut back on consumption and/or seek more work (assuming that prices have not fallen, as this would leave the real wage unchanged). If the former happens, then firms may find that they face reduced demand for their products and, consequently, have no need for the extra employees predicted by the theory. If the latter happens, then the ranks of those seeking work will increase as people look for extra jobs or people outside the labour market (like mothers and children) are forced into the job market. As the supply of workers increase, wages **must** drop according to the logic of the "free market" position. This does not mean that a recovery is impossible, just that in the short and medium terms cutting wages will make a recession worse and be unlikely to **reduce** unemployment for some time.

This suggests that a "free market" capitalism, marked by a fully competitive labour market, no welfare programmes nor unemployment benefits, and extensive business power to break unions and strikes would see aggregate demand constantly rise and fall, in line with the business cycle, and unemployment and inequality would follow suit. Moreover, unemployment would be higher over most of the business cycle (and particularly at the bottom of the slump) than under a capitalism with



are paid too little, while the poor do not work because they are paid too much.

We should first point out that attacks on social welfare have a long pedigree and have been conducted with much the same rationale — it made people lazy and gave them flexibility when seeking work. For example, the British **Poor Law Report** of the 1830s *"built its case against relief on the damage done by poor relief to personal morality and labour discipline (much the same thing in the eyes of the commissioners)."* [David McNally, **Against the Market**, p. 101] The report itself stated that *"the greatest evil"* of the system was *"the spirit of laziness and insubordination that it creates."* [quoted by McNally, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

While the rhetoric used to justify attacks on welfare has changed somewhat since then, the logic and rationale have not. They have as their root the need to eliminate anything which provided working class people any means for independence from the labour market. It has always aimed to ensure that the fear of the sack remains a powerful tool in the bosses arsenal and to ensure that their authority is not undermined. Ironically, therefore, its underlying aims are to **decrease** the options available to working class people, i.e. to reduce **our** flexibility within the labour market by limiting our options to finding a job fast or face dire poverty (or worse).

Secondly, there is a unspoken paradox to this whole process. If we look at the stated, public, rationale behind "flexibility" we find a strange fact. While the labour market is to be made more "flexible" and in line with ideal of "perfect competition", on the capitalist side no attempt is being made to bring **it** into line with that model. Let us not forget that perfect competition (the theoretical condition in which all resources, including labour, will be efficiently utilised) states that there must be a large number of buyers and sellers. This is the case on the sellers side of the "flexible" labour market, but this is **not** the case on the buyers (where, as indicated in section C.4,

social programmes, militant unions and legal rights to organise because the real wage would not be able to stay at levels that could support aggregate demand nor could the unemployed use their benefits to stimulate the production of consumer goods. This suggests that a fully competitive labour market, as in the 19th century, would increase the instability of the system — an analysis which was confirmed in during the 1980s (*"the relationship between measured inequality and economic stability ... was weak but if anything it suggests that the more egalitarian countries showed a more stable pattern of growth after 1979."* [Dan Corry and Andrew Glyn, *"The Macroeconomics of equality, stability and growth"*, **Paying for Inequality**, Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (eds.) pp. 212–213]).

So, in summary, the available evidence suggests that **high** wages are associated with **low** levels of unemployment. While this should be the expected result from any realistic analysis of the economic power which marks capitalist economies, it does not provide much support for claims that only by cutting real wages can unemployment be reduced. The "free market" capitalist position and one based on reality have radically different conclusions as well as political implications. Ultimately, most laissez-faire economic analysis is unpersuasive both in terms of the facts and their logic. While economics may be marked by axiomatic reasoning which renders everything the markets does as optimal, the problem is precisely that it is pure axiomatic reasoning with little or no regard for the real world. Moreover, by some strange coincidence, they usually involve policy implications which generally make the rich richer by weakening the working class. Unsurprisingly, decades of empirical evidence have not shifted the faith of those who think that the simple axioms of economics take precedence over the real world nor has this faith lost its utility to the economically powerful.



## C.9.3 Are "flexible" labour markets the answer to unemployment?

The usual "free market" capitalist (or neo-liberal) argument is that labour markets must become more "flexible" to solve the problem of unemployment. This is done by weakening unions, reducing (or abolishing) the welfare state, and so on. In defence of these policies, their proponents point to the low unemployment rates of the USA and UK and contrast them to the claimed economic woes of Europe (particularly France and Germany). As we will indicate in this section, this stance has more to do a touching faith that deregulating the labour market brings the economy as a whole closer to the ideal of "perfect competition" than a balanced analysis and assessment of the available evidence. Moreover, it is always important to remember, as tenured economists (talking of protective labour market institutions!) seem to forget, that deregulation can and does have high economic (and not to mention individual and social) costs too.

The underlying argument for flexible labour markets is the notion that unemployment is cased by wages being too high and due to market imperfections wages are sticky downwards. While both claims, as we have seen above, are dubious both factually and logically this has not stopped this position becoming the reigning orthodoxy in elite circles. By market imperfections it is meant trade unions, laws which protect labour, unemployment benefit and other forms of social welfare provision (and definitely **not** big business, patent and copyright laws, or any other pro-business state interventions). All these ensure that wages for those employed are inflexible downwards and the living standards of those unemployed are too high to induce them to seek work. This means that orthodox economics is based on (to use John Kenneth Galbraith's justly famous quip) the assumption that the rich do not work because they

its interests in the forestry processing plants in the country the government followed the privatisation of other areas of the economy and they *"were sold at a discount, according to one estimate, at least 20 per cent below their value."* Thus *"the privatisations were bargain sell-offs of public assets,"* which amounted to a *"subsidy from the national treasury to the buyers of 27 to 69 percent"* and so *"[c]ontrol of the common wealth of the entire nation passed to a handful of national and foreign interests that captured most of the subsidy implicit in the rock bottom prices."* [Joseph Collins and John Lear, **Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look**, p. 206, p. 54 and p. 59]

By 1978, the Chicago Boys *"were pressing for new laws that would bring labour relations in line with the neoliberal economic model in which the market, not the state, would regulate factors of production."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 31] According to Pinochet's Minister of Labour (1978–81), the Labour relations had been *"modernised"* and that *"politicised"* labour leaders and their *"privileged fiefdoms"* had been eliminated, with workers no longer having *"monopolies"* on job positions. Rather than government intervention, negotiation between capital and labour was now left to *"individual responsibility and the discipline of the market."* The stated aim was to *"introduce democracy into the world of Chilean unions and resolve problems that for decades had been obstacles for the progress of workers."* [quoted by Joseph Collins and John Lear, *"Working in Chile's Free Market"*, pp. 10–29, **Latin American Perspectives**, vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 10–11 and p. 16] The hypocrisy of a technocratic bureaucrat appointed by a military dictatorship talking about introducing democracy into unions is obvious. The price of labour, it was claimed, now found its correct level as set by the "free" market.

All of which explains Friedman's 1991 comment that the *"real miracle of Chile"* was that Pinochet *"support[ed] a free market regime designed by principled believers in a free*



state spending as the UK and Japan had the social planning of its Ministry of Industry and Trade). As Balogh notes, the *"consequences of socialism are then illustrated by reference to the weak economic performance of Britain in comparison with Japan and Germany since 1945. This is an odd comparison to choose when judging the impact of 'socialism' on Britain. Surely what we need is to compare the British performance during a period of sustained boom under 'Friedmanism', e.g. in the period 1900–13, with the record under 'socialism,' say 1945–75."* However, to do that would mean noting that the average annual rate of growth per head of GNP between 1900 and 1913 was a mere 0.2%, compared to 2.2% between 1948 and 1975. Even taking other starting dates (such as the slump year 1893) produces a smaller rate of growth that the post-war period. [**The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics**, p. 181]

Nor do things get better when we look at the Friedman influenced Thatcher government which turned the UK into a poster-child for neo-liberalism. Here, yet again, the facts do not really support the claims in favour of "free(r) markets". As Ian Gilmore, a moderate conservative MP at the time, points out *"[d]uring the Thatcher years growth was lower than in any period of similar length since the war."* He notes *"the vast discrepancy between what the Thatcherites claimed for their policies and what actually happened."* Unsurprisingly, there was an *"unparalleled rise in poverty,"* as *"relative poverty grew significantly during the 1980s,"* from a nearly a tenth in 1979 to nearly a fifth in 1987. In 1979, the poorest fifth had just under 10% of post-tax income and the richest fifth had 37%. Ten years later, this had fallen to 7% and risen to 43% (*"The rich got rich, and the poor got poorer"*). *"Not only did the poor not share in the limited growth that took place between 1979 and 1990, the poor were relatively poorer than they had been on 1979."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, pp. 83–4, p. 87, p. 142, p. 138 and p. 172] we will return to this issue in section C.10.3.

Things did not get any better in the 1990s. Growth in GDP per capita was steadily decreased in the UK, from 2.3% per annum between 1950 and 1970, to 2.1% between 1970 and 1979 and to 1.9% between 1979 and 1997. For the US, a similar process was at work (from 2.0%, to 2.3% to 1.5%). At best, it can be said that the growth rates of Germany and France between 1979 and 1997 were worse (at 1.7% and 1.4%, respectively). However, before 1979 their growth was much higher (at 5.1%/4.5% between 1950 and 1970 and 2.8%/3.3% between 1970 and 1979, respectively). Growth in labour productivity per hour worked is hardly impressive, being 2.3% between 1979 and 1997 compared to 0.8% for the US, 2.4% for France and 2.2% for Germany. This is well below the 1950–1970 figure of 3.0% and only slightly better than 2.1% during the strike bound 1970s. In 1979, the UK was 9th of 15 EU members in OECD measures of prosperity. By 1995, it was 11th before rising back to 10th in 1999. In summary, *"the idea that Britain has a clearly superior economy to the continent is a delusion."* [Adair Turner, **Just Capital: The Liberal Economy**, p. 200, pp. 199–200 and p. 196]

The best that can be said of Thatcherism is that during the 1980s, *"Britain put an end to three decades of relative decline and caught up some lost ground versus continental leaders … But Britain's absolute productivity and prosperity performance is still below the European average and its pace of catch-up has been slow."* Combine this with longer working hours compared to the rest of Europe, we have a situation in the UK where *"too many companies relying on low wages and a flexible labour market to remain competitive, rather than on investment in capital equipment and technique."* Looking at the historical picture, it should be stressed that the UK has been in decline since the 1880s, when it remained the only developed nation to embrace free trade and that between the 1950s and 1970s, the *"absolute growth rates per capita .. . compared well with the inter-war years and with the period of British leadership in the nineteenth century."* This lack of success for neo-liberal reforms can also



treatment deepened. This is dishonest as it fails to take into account not only the impact of neo-liberal policies but also that a deep recession often produces a vigorous upsurge:

> *"By taking 1975, a recession year in which the Chilean economy declined by 13 percent, as the starting point of their analysis, the Chicago Boys obscured the fact that their 'boom' was more a recovery from the deep recession than a new economic expansion. From 1974 to 1981, the Chilean economy grew at a modest 1.4 percent a year on average. Even at the height of the 'boom' in 1980, effective unemployment was so high — 17 percent — that 5 percent of the workforce were in government make-work programs, a confession of failure for neoliberals who believe in the market as self-correcting and who abhor government welfare programs. Nor did the Chicago Boys call attention to the extreme concentration of capital, precipitous fall in real wages and negative redistribution of income that their policies promoted, or their disincentives to productive investment."* [Peter Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 28–9]

Between 1975 and 1982, the regime implemented numerous economic reforms based on the suggestions of the Chicago Boys and their intellectual gurus Friedman and von Hayek. They privatised numerous state owned industries and resources and, as would be expected, the privatisations were carried out in such a way as to profit the wealthy. *"The denationalisation process,"* notes Rayack, *"was carried out under conditions that were extremely advantageous for the new owners … the enterprises were sold at sharply undervalues prices."* Only large conglomerates could afford them, so capital became even more concentrated. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] When it privatised

This plan also had the backing of certain business interests. Unsurprisingly, immediately after the coup, many of its authors entered key Economic Ministries as advisers. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] It is also interesting to note that *"[a]ccording to the report of the United States Senate on covert actions in Chile, the activities of these economists were financed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)."* [Borzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89] Obviously some forms of state intervention were more acceptable than others.

April 1975 saw the Chicago Boys assume *"what was in effect dictatorial control over economic policy ... The monetarists were now in a commanding position to put in place Friedman's recommendations, and they didn't hesitate."* The actual results of the free market policies introduced by the dictatorship were far less than the "miracle" claimed by Friedman and a host of other right-wingers. The initial effects of introducing free market policies was a shock-induced depression which resulted in GDP dropping by 12.9% year "shock treatment" was imposed saw the GDP fall by 12.9% (Latin America saw a 3.8% rise), real wages fell to 64.9% of their 1970 level and unemployment rising to 20 percent. Even Pinochet *"had to concede that the social cost of the shock treatment was greater than he expected."* [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56, p. 41 and p. 57] For Friedman, his *"only concern"* with the plan was *"whether it would be pushed long enough and hard enough."* [quoted by Joseph Collins and John Lear, **Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look**, p. 29] Unsurprisingly, the *"rigorous imposition of the neoliberal economic model after 1975 soon threatened [workers] job security too"* and they *"bore the brunt"* of the changes in terms of *"lost jobs and raised work norms."* [Winn, *"No Miracle for Us,"* Peter Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 131]

After the depression of 1975, the economic started to grow again. This is the source of claim of an "economic miracle." Friedman, for example, used 1976 as his base-line, so excluding the depression year of 1975 which his recommended shock



be seen in New Zealand. The economic results of its liberalisation project were just as poor. Between 1984–98 per capita income grew only about 5.4%, or 0.4% per annum, well below the EU average and one of the lowest rates of increase among the OECD countries. [Turner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196, p. 212, p. 199 and p. 240fn] Needless to say, be cause the rich got richer and rebellious workers controlled, both the UK and New Zealand were proclaimed "economic miracles."

This lack of dynamism is not limited just to the UK or New Zealand. As left-wing economist Andrew Glyn notes, the *"fact that there was no general improvement in growth in the 1980s could be explained away by the fact that the ... policies ... were only picking up steam. But the real puzzle is the 15 years since 1990. Why [have these free market policies] ... failed to bring an increase in the growth rate."* In fact, growth per year has steadily fallen since 1973 with 1990–2004 the lowest rate yet for the USA, Europe and Japan. This applies to other economic indicators as well. *"The fact that output per head has been growing more slowly since 1990 than it did in the turbulent period 1973–9, never mind the Golden Age, must be a severe disappointment to those who believed that unleashing the free market would restore rapid growth."* He summarises the evidence by pointing out that *"economic performance overall has been unspectacular."* [**Capitalism Unleashed**, pp. 130–1 and p. 151]

As Chomsky summarises, *"neoliberal-style programs began to take shape in the 1970s"* and since then real wages *"for the majority have largely stagnated or declined ... the relatively weak benefits system has declines as well. Incomes are maintained only be extending working hours well beyond those in similar societies, while inequality has soared"* (as has personal debt). Moreover, *"this is a vast change from the preceding quarter century, when economic growth was the highest on record for a protracted period and also egalitarian. Social indicators, which closely tracked economic growth until the mid-1970s, then diverged, declining to the level of 1960 by the year 200O."* [**Failed States**, p. 211]

The assumption is that producing free(r) markets and a pure(r) capitalism will result in higher growth and so rising living standards. *"So far,"* note two experts, *"the promises have not been realised. As trade and financial markets have been flung open, incomes have risen not faster, but slower. Equality among nations has not improved, with many of the poorest nations suffering an absolute decline in incomes. Within nations, inequality seems to have worsened ... the trend to towards more inequality."* In the two decades after 1980, *"overall income growth slowed dramatically."* For example, the rich countries saw annual per capita income growth fall from 4.8% (1965–80) to 1.4% (1980–95). Medium countries saw a fall from 3.8% to 3.1% (excluding China, this was 3.2% to 0.6% as China rose from 4.1% to 8.6%). For the poorest nations, there was a rise from 1.4% to 2.0% but this becomes 1.2% to 0.1% when India is excluded (India saw a rise from 1.5% to 3.2%). In fact, income dropped by -0.4% a year between 1980 and 1995 for the least developed countries (it had risen 0.4% a year between 1965 and 1980). *"In more advanced countries ... income growth was lower in the 1990s than in the 1980s. Over the entire post-1980 period, it was substantially below that of the 1960s and 1970s."* In America, for example, annual growth of per capita income has dropped from 2.3% between 1960–79, to 1.5% between 1979 and 1989 and 1.0% between 1989 and 1996 (per capita income growth up to 1998 was 1.4% per year, still less than the 1.6% per cent between 1973 and 1980 and 1980s and about half the growth over the 1960 to 1973 period). Given that income equality improved during the 1960s and 1970s, before worsening after 1980 for most countries, particularly the USA, this means that even these most increases flowed overwhelming to those at the top of the income hierarchy. In America, the working hours for a middle-class family has increased by 10.4% between 1979 and 1997. In other words, working class people are working more for less. In most advanced nations, there has *"not been a sizeable increase in poverty,"* the *"exceptions [being] the USA*



placed Pinochet and the real relationship between economic and political liberty.

Faced with an economic crisis, in 1975 Pinochet turned to the ideas of Milton Friedman and a group of Chilean economics who had been taught by him at the University in Chicago. A short meeting between Friedman and Pinochet convinced the dictator to hand economic policy making to Friedman's acolytes (who became known as "the Chicago Boys" for obvious reasons). These were free-market economists, working on a belief in the efficiency and fairness of the free market and who desired to put the laws of supply and demand back to work. They set out to reduce the role of the state in terms of regulation and social welfare as these, they argued, had restricted Chile's growth by reducing competition, lowering growth, artificially increasing wages, and leading to inflation. The ultimate goal, Pinochet once said, was to make Chile *"not a nation of proletarians, but a nation of entrepreneurs."* [quoted by Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, **Modern Latin America**, p. 137]

The role of the Chicago Boys cannot be understated. They had a close relationship with the military from 1972, and according to one expert had a key role in the coup:

> *"In August of 1972 a group of ten economists under the leadership of de Castro began to work on the formulation of an economic programme that would replace [Allende's one]... In fact, the existence of the plan was essential to any attempt on the part of the armed forces to overthrow Allende as the Chilean armed forces did not have any economic plan of their own."* [Silvia Borzutzky, *"The Chicago Boys, social security and welfare in Chile"*, **The Radical Right and the Welfare State**, Howard Glennerster and James Midgley (eds.), p. 88]

the military and increased training Chilean military personnel in the United States and Panama. In other words, the coup was helped by US state and various US corporations both directly and indirectly, by undermining the Chilean economy.

Thousands of people were murdered by the forces of "law and order" and Pinochet's forces *"are conservatively estimated to have killed over 11,000 people in his first year in power."* [P. Gunson, A. Thompson, G. Chamberlain, **The Dictionary of Contemporary Politics of South America**, p. 228] Military units embarked on an operation called the Caravan of Death to hunt down those they considered subversives (i.e. anyone suspected or accused of holding left-wing views or sympathies). Torture and rape were used extensively and when people did not just disappear, their mutilated bodies were jumped in plain view as a warning to others. While the Chilean government's official truth and reconciliation committee places the number of disappeared at roughly 3,000, church and human rights groups estimate the number is far higher, at over 10,000. Hundreds of thousands fled into exile. Thus ended Allende's "democratic road to Socialism." The terror did not end after the coup and dictatorship's record on human rights was rightly denounced as barbaric.

Friedman, of course, stressed his *"disagreement with the authoritarian political system of Chile."* [quoted by Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] For the time being we will ignore the obvious contradiction in this "economic miracle", i.e. why it almost always takes authoritarian/fascistic states to introduce "economic liberty." Rather we will take the right at its word and concentrate on the economic facts of the free-market capitalism imposed on the Chilean people. They claim it was a free market and given that, for example, Friedman was leading ideologue for capitalism we can assume that the regime approximated the workings of such a system. We will discuss the illogical nature and utter hypocrisy of the right's position in section D.11, where we also discuss the limited nature of the democratic regime which re-



*and the United Kingdom, where poverty grew, respectively, by 2.4 and 5.4 percentage points between 1979 and 1991."* [Jeff Faux and Larry Mishel, *"Inequality and the Global Economy"*, pp. 93–111, Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens (eds.), **On The Edge**, pp. 93–4, p. 96, p. 97, p. 98, p. 101, p. 102 and p. 100]

This lack of rise in growth is a definite feature of neo-liberalism. The promises of the "free market" capitalism have not borne fruit:

> *"Growth did not accelerate. It slowed down. During the 1960s, the average rate of growth of world GDP per capita was 3.5% per annum ... The average rate of growth of world GDP per capital was 2.1% per annum during the 1970s, 1.3% per annum during the 1980s and 1% per annum during the 1990s. This growth was more volatile compared with the past, particularly in the developing world. the growth was also unevenly distributed across countries ...*
>
> *"Economic inequalities have increased in the late twentieth century as the income gap between rich and poor countries, between rich and the poor in the world's population, as also between rich and poor people within countries, has widen. The ratio of GDP per capital in the richest country to GDP per capita in the poorest country of the world rose from 35:1 in 1950 to 42:1 in 1970 and 62:1 in 1990. The ratio of GDP per capita in the 20 richest countries to GDP per capita in the poorest 20 countries of the world rose from 54:1 during 1960–62 to 121:1 during 2000–20002. The income gap between people has also widened over time. The ratio of the average GNP per capita in the richest quintile of the world's population to the poorest quintile in the world's population rose from 31:1 in 1965 to 60:1 in 1990 and 74:1 in 1997 ... Income distribution within countries*

*also worsened ... Between 1975 and 2000, the share of the richest 1% in gross income rose from 8% to 17% in the US, from 8.8% to 13.3% in Canada and from 6.1% to 13% in the UK.*" [Deepak Nayyar, *"Globalisation, history and development: a tale of two centuries,"* pp. 137–159, **Cambridge Journal of Economics**, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 153–4 and p. 154]

In fact, between 1950 and 1973 there was a vastly superior economic performance compared to what came before and what came after. If laissez-faire capitalism would benefit "everyone" more than "really existing capitalism," the growth rate would be **higher** during the later period, which more closely approximated laissez faire. It is not. As such, we should always remember that if anything is proclaimed an "economic miracle" it is unlikely to actually be so, at least for the working class. Looking at the American triumphantism of the late 1990s, it was easy to forget that in the 1980s and early 1990s, despair at the US economy was commonplace. Then people looked to Japan, just as they had looked to Europe in the 1960s.

We must also note that there is a standard response by believers on "laissez-faire" capitalism when inconvenient facts are presented to them, namely to stress that we have not reached the market utopia yet and more reforms are required (*"a feature of hard-line free-market analysis [is] that when liberalisation does not work the reason is always timidity and the solution is obvious. Complete the job."* [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 143]). Another possible defence would be to stress that the results would have been worse if the reforms had not been implemented. These are, of course, possibilities but given the rhetoric used by the defenders of capitalism on the wonders and efficiency of free markets, it seems strange that making them freer would have such negative effects.



*ask: a miracle for **whom** — and at what cost?"* [*"Introduction"*, Peter Winn (ed.), **Victims of the Chilean Miracle**, p. 12] As we will prove, Chile's "economic miracle" is **very** class dependent. For its working class, the neo-liberal reforms of the Pinochet regime have resulted in a worsening of their lives; if you are a capitalist then it has been a miracle. That the likes of Friedman claim the experiment as a "miracle" shows where their sympathies lie — and how firm a grasp they have of reality.

The reason why the Chilean people become the first test case for neo-liberalism is significant. They did not have a choice. General Pinochet was the figure-head of a military coup in 1973 against the democratically elected left-wing government led by President Allende. This coup was the culmination of years of US interference by the US in Chilean politics and was desired by the US **before** Allende took office in November 1970 (*"It is the firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup,"* as one CIA memo put it in October of that year [quoted by Gregory Palast, *"A Marxist threat to cola sales? Pepsi demands a US coup. Goodbye Allende. Hello Pinochet"*, **The Observer**, 8/11/1998]). Then American president Richard Nixon imposed an embargo on Chile and began a covert plan to overturn the Allende government. In the words of the US ambassador to Chile, the Americas *"will do all in our power to condemn Chileans to utmost poverty."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Deterring Democracy**, p. 395]

According to notes taken by CIA director Richard Helms at a 1970 meeting in the Oval Office, his orders were to *"make the economy scream."* This was called Project FUBELT and its aims were clear: *"The Director [of the CIA] told the group that President Nixon had decided that an Allende regime in Chile was not acceptable to the United States. The President asked the Agency to prevent Allende from coming to power or to unseat him."* [*"Genesis of Project FUBELT"* document dated September 16, 1970] Not all aid was cut. During 1972 and 1973 the US increased aid to

# C.11 Doesn't neo-liberalism in Chile prove that the free market benefits everyone?

Chile is considered by some to be one of the economic success stories of the modern world. It can be considered as the first laboratory for neo-liberal economic dogma, first under Pinochet's dictatorship and later when his regime had been replaced by a more democratic one. It can be considered as the template for the economic vision later applied by Reagan and Thatcher in the West. What happened in Chile was repeated (to some degree) wherever neo-liberal policies were implemented. As such, it makes a good case study to evaluate the benefits of free(r) market capitalism and the claims of capitalist economics.

For the right, Chile was pointed to as a casebook in sound economics and is held up as an example of the benefits of capitalism. Milton Friedman, for example, stated in 1982 that Military Junta *"has supported a fully free-market economy as a matter of principle. Chile is an economic miracle."* [quoted by Elton Rayack, **Not so Free to Choose**, p. 37] Then US President George Bush praised the Chilean economic record in December 1990 when he visited that country, stating Chile deserved its *"reputation as an economic model"* for others to follow.

However, the reality of the situation is radically different. As Chilean expert Peter Winn argues, *"[w]e question whether Chile's neoliberal boom ... should be regarded as a miracle. When confronted by such a claim, scholars and students should always*



Looking at the history of capitalism, it appears that social-democratic capitalism, with strong unions and a welfare state, produces not only more growth but also more equitable growth (as one expert notes, *"[i]f the 'welfare state' were abolished and taxes reduced accordingly, society would become a great deal more unequal."* [John Hills, **Inequality and the State**, p. 195]). Movements to more laissez-faire capitalism has resulted not only in lower growth but also growth which accumulates in fewer hands (which makes sense considering the basic anarchist insight that a free exchange benefits the stronger of the two parties). As such, based on its own criteria (namely economic growth), then neo-liberalism has to be judged a failure. Do not get us wrong. It is possible to still advocate laissez-faire capitalism on ethical grounds (if that is the right word). It is simply doubtful that it will produce the boost in economic growth (or employment) that its advocates suggest. It may do, of course, as "actually existing" capitalism is still far from the pure system of the textbooks but it is significant that movements towards the ideal have produced **less** growth along with greater inequality and relative poverty.

This is **not** to suggest that anarchists support social-democratic capitalism rather than more laissez-faire forms. Far from it — we seek to end all forms of that system. However, it is significant that the more equal forms of capitalism based on strong and militant unions produced better results than "free(r) market" forms. This suggests that the standard right-wing argument that collective organising and fighting to keep an increased share of the wealth we produce harms the overall economy and so harmful in the long run are deeply flawed. Instead, it is the **lack** of any struggle for equality and freedom that is correlated with bad overall economic performance. Of course, such struggles are a pain for the capitalist class. Rather than produce a *"road to serfdom,"* social-democracy created the full employment environment which produced a rebellious population. The move towards "free(r) markets"

was a response to this social struggle, an attempt to enserf the population which has proven to be somewhat successful. As such, Kalecki's 1940s prediction we quoted in section B.4.4 has been proven correct: the ruling class would prefer social peace (i.e. obedience) rather than higher growth (particularly if they get to monopolise most of the gains of that lower growth).

Finally, we should note that there is a slight irony to see right-wingers saying that "pure(r)" capitalism would benefit the poor especially. This is because they usually reject the idea that aggregate economic statistics are a meaningful concept or that the government should collate such data (this is a particular feature of the "Austrian" school of economics). As such, it would be near impossible to determine if living standards had improved any faster than under the current system. Given the history of "actually existing" capitalism, it is probably wise that many "market advocates" do so. Moreover, any subjective evaluation, such as asking people, which resulted in a negative response would be dismissed out of hand as "envy." Ironically, for an ideology which says it bases itself on "subjective" evaluations, economists are always ready to ignore any which conflict with their ideas. Needless to say, even if it could be proven beyond doubt that "pure(r)" capitalism did **not** help the poor but rather enriched the wealthy then almost all "free market" capitalists would **not** change their ideas. This is because, for them, the outcomes of the market are hallowed and if they result in increased poverty then so be it. It just shows that the poor are lazy and not worth higher incomes. That they sometimes utilise the rhetoric of social concern simply shows that most people still have concern and solidarity for their fellows, a concern which capitalism has not managed to totally remove (much to the chagrin of the likes of von Hayek — see chapter 11 of Alan Haworth's **Anti-Libertarianism** for a short but relevant discussion of this).



The history of capitalism shows that economic growth is quite compatible with stagnating wages, increasing poverty and insecurity for workers and their families, rising inequality and wealth accumulating in fewer and fewer hands (the example of the USA and Chile from the 1970s to 1990s and Chile spring to mind). And, of course, even **if** workers kow-tow to bosses, the bosses may just move production elsewhere anyway (as tens of thousands of "down-sized" workers across the West can testify). For more details of this process in the USA see Edward S. Herman's article *"Immiserating Growth: The First World"* in Z Magazine, July 1994.

For anarchists it seems strange to wait for a bigger cake when we can have the whole bakery. If control of investment was in the hands of those it directly effects (working people) then it could be directed into socially and ecologically constructive projects rather than being used as a tool in the class war and to make the rich richer. The arguments against "rocking the boat" are self-serving (it is obviously in the interests the rich and powerful to defend a given income and property distribution) and, ultimately, self-defeating for those working people who accept them. In the end, even the most self-negating working class will suffer from the negative effects of treating society as a resource for the economy, the higher mobility of capital that accompanies growth and effects of periodic economic and long term ecological crisis. When it boils down to it, we all have two options — you can do what is right or you can do what you are told. "Free market" capitalist economics opts for the latter.

ity and dignity. Luckily there are economists around to explain, on their behalf, that these workers cannot afford such luxuries.

Looking beyond the empirical investigation, we should point out the slave mentality behind these arguments. After all, what does this argument actually imply? Simply that economic growth is the only way for working people to get ahead. If working people put up with exploitative working environments, in the long run capitalists will invest some of their profits and so increase the economic cake for all. So, like religion, "free market" economics argue that we must sacrifice in the short term so that (perhaps) in the future our living standards will increase (*"you'll get pie in the sky when you die"* as Joe Hill said about religion). Moreover, any attempt to change the "laws of the market" (i.e. the decisions of the rich) by collective action will only harm the working class. If the defenders of capitalism were genuinely interested in individual freedom they would be urging the oppressed masses to revolt rather than defending the investing of capital in oppressive regimes in terms of the freedom they are so willing to sacrifice when it comes to workers. But, of course, these defenders of "freedom" will be the first to point out that such revolts make for a bad investment climate — capital will be frightened away to countries with a more "realistic" and "flexible" workforce (usually made so by state repression).

In other words, capitalist economics praises servitude over independence, kow-towing over defiance and altruism over egoism. The "rational" person of neo-classical economics does not confront authority, rather he accommodates himself to it. For, in the long run, such self-negation will pay off with a bigger cake with (it is claimed) correspondingly bigger crumbs "trickling" downwards. In other words, in the short-term, the gains may flow to the elite but in the future we will all gain as some of it will trickle (back) down to the working people who created them in the first place. But, unfortunately, in the real world uncertainty is the rule and the future is unknown.



## C.10.1 Hasn't neo-liberalism benefited the world's poor?

Until the wave of so-called "anti-globalisation" protests (a more accurate term would be "global justice" protests) erupted in the late 1990s, there was no real need for the neo-liberal agenda to justify its performance. When opposition could not be ignored, then it had to be undermined. This lead to a host of articles and books justifying neo-liberalism in terms of it helping the world's poorest peoples. This has meant denying the reality of 30 years of neo-liberal reforms in favour of concentrating on absolute poverty figures.

This is understandable. As we discuss in the section C.10.4, absolute inequality and poverty is a good means of making discussion of the real issues meaningless. Moreover, as noted above, as capitalism must grow to survive wealth will tend to increase for all members of society over time. The real question is whether "free(r) markets increase or reduce growth rates and how they impact on relative levels of poverty and inequality. Given that the last few decades indicate how free(r) markets result in increased inequality, it is obvious why defenders of capitalism would seek to focus attention on absolute income. While denied by some, inequality has risen under globalisation. Those who deny it usually do so because the doctrines of the powerful are at stake. Some, in spite of the evidence, are that world-wide economic inequality has fallen thanks to global capitalism.

At the forefront of such claims is **the Economist** magazine, which played its usual role of ideological cheerleader for the ruling class. Discussing *"Global economic inequality"*, the magazine argued that the claim that inequality has risen is false. Ironically, their own article refutes its own conclusions as it presented a graph which showed an upward relationship between economic growth from 1980 to 2000 and original income

level for a large group of countries. This means that global economic inequality **has** increased — as they admit, this means *"that the poor are falling behind, and that cross-country inequality is getting worse."* [*"More or less equal?"*, **The Economist**, 11th March, 2004]

However, this conclusion is ideologically incorrect and so something must be done to achieve the correct position in order to defend capitalism against the anti-capitalist bias of reality. They did this by adding another chart which weights each point by population. This showed that two of the largest countries of their group, China and India, grew among the fastest. Using this data they make the claim that inequality has, in fact, fallen under neo-liberalism. Once you look at individuals rather than countries then the claim can be made that worldwide inequality has been falling under "free(r) market" capitalism. While an impressive piece of ideological obfuscation, the argument ignores changes **within** countries. The article states that *"average incomes in India and China are going up extremely rapidly"* but not every person receives the average. The average hides a lot. For example, 9 homeless people have an average income of £0 but add a multi-millionaire and the average income of the ten people is in the millions. On average, at the end of a game of poker everyone has the same amount of money they started with. As such, to ignore the fact that inequality increased dramatically both countries during the 1990s is disgraceful when trying to evaluate whether poverty has actually decreased or not. And it should be obvious that if inequality is increasing **within** a country then it must also be increasing internationally as well.

Significantly, *"where governments adopted the [neo-liberal] Washington Consensus, the poor have benefited less from growth."* [Joseph E. Stiglitz, **Globalization and its Discontents**, p. 79] The mantra that economic growth is so wonderful is hard to justify when the benefits of that growth are being enjoyed by a small proportion of the people and the burdens of growth (such



*fer this work — it is beneficial to him, but not to us."* Another states the obvious: *"But we are landless, so we have no choice but to work in the economic zone even though it is very hard and the situation is unfair."* [quoted by Klein, **No Logo**, p. 220 and p. 221] It should noted that the boss has, of course, the backing of a great many economists (including many moderately left-wing ones) who argue that sweatshops are better than no jobs and that these countries cannot afford basic workers' rights (as these are class societies, it means that their ruling class cannot afford to give their workers the beneficial aspects of a free market, namely the right to organise and associate freely). It is amazing how quickly an economist or right-liberal will proclaim that a society cannot expect the luxury of a free market, at least for the working class, and how these "individualists" will proclaim that the little people must suffer in order for the greater good to be achieved.

As for the regimes within these factories, Klein notes that they are extremely authoritarian. The largest free-trade zone in the Philippines is *"a miniature military state inside a democracy"* and the *"management is military-style, the supervisors often abusive."* As would be expected, *"no questioning of authority is expected or permitted"* and in some *"strikes are officially illegal"* (rather than unofficially banned). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 204, p. 205 and p. 214] As with the original industrial revolution, capitalism takes advantages of other forms of social hierarchy in developing countries. As Stephen A. Marglin noted, the women and children, *"who by all accounts constituted the overwhelming majority of factory workers in the early days, were there not because they choose to be but because their husbands and fathers told them to be. The application of revealed preference to their presence in the factory requires a rather elastic view of the concept of individual choice."* [*"What do Bosses do?"*, pp. 60–112, **The Review of Radical Political Economics**, vol. 6, No. 2, p. 98] In other words, while the workers **may** be better off in terms of wages they are not better off in terms of liberty, equal-

sidered expendable are always members of the working class). So the notion of absolute poverty has always been associated with defending inequalities of wealth and power as well as providing justification in terms of long term benefit for the violation of the "freedom" and "individual rights" they claim to defend. Significantly, the contemporary representatives of the landlords who imposed enclosures framed their arguments precisely in terms of restricting the independence (i.e. freedom) of the working population. As Marxist David McNally summarises after providing extensive quotes, it was *"precisely these elements of material and spiritual independence that many of the most outspoken advocates of enclosure sought to destroy."* They *"were remarkably forthright in this respect. Common rights and access to common lands, they argued, allowed a degree of social and economic independence, and thereby produced a lazy, dissolute mass of rural poor ... Denying such people common lands and common rights would force them to conform to the harsh discipline imposed by the market in labour."* [**Against the Market**, p. 19] This would only be considered paradoxical if you equate freedom with capitalism.

The underlying assumption under all this is that liberty (at least for working class people) is less important than material wealth, a vision rightly attacked when Stalinism seemed to be out-performing the West in terms of growth before the 1970s. Yet the question, surely, is would individuals freely agree to be subjected to the dictates of a boss for 10–12 hours a day if other alternatives had not closed off by state intervention? As we discuss in section F.8, the answer has always been no. This is the case today. For example, Naomi Klein interviews one boss of a third-world sweatshop who explained that *"for the lowly province worker, working inside an enclosed factory is better than being outside."* One of his workers rebutted this, stating *"Our rights are being trampled"* and the he said that *"because he has not experienced working in a factory and the conditions inside."* Another noted that *"of course he would say that we pre-*



as rising job insecurity, loss of benefits, wage stagnation and decline for the majority of workers, declining public services, loss of local communities and so forth) are being borne by so many. Which does seem to be the case under neo-liberalism (which, undoubtedly, explains why it is portrayed so positively in the business press).

To be fair, the article does note the slow and declining incomes in the past 20 years in sub-Saharan Africa but rest assured, the magazine stresses, this area *"suffers not from globalisation, but from lack of it."* This means that this area can be ignored when evaluating the results of neo-liberalism. Yet this is unconvincing as these nations are hardly isolated from the rest of the world. As they are suffering from debt and western imposed structural adjustment programs it seems illogical to ignore them — unless it is a way to improve neo-liberalism's outcomes by evading its greatest failures.

Then there is the comparison being made. The Economist looks solely at the years 1980–2000 yet surely the right comparison would be between this period and the twenty years before 1980? Once that is done, it becomes clear why the magazine failed to do so for *"economic growth and almost all of the other indicators, the last 20 years have shown a very clear decline in progress as compared with the previous two decades."* While it is *"commonly believed that the shift towards globalisation has been a success, at least regarding growth,"* in fact *"the progress achieved in the two decades of globalisation has been considerably less than the progress in the period from 1960 to 1980."* For low and middle-income countries, performance is *"much worse ... than the period from 1960 to 1980." "Summing up the evidence on per capita income growth, countries at every level of per capita GDP performed worse on average in the period of globalisation than in the period from 1960 to 1980."* [Mark Weisbrot, Dean Baker, Egor Kraev and Judy Chen, **The Scorecard on Globalization 1980–2000: Twenty Years of Diminished Progress**] In fact:

> *"The poorest group went from a per capita GDP growth rate of 1.9 percent annually in 1960–80, to a decline of 0.5 percent per year (1980–2000). For the middle group (which includes mostly poor countries), there was a sharp decline from an annual per capita growth rate of 3.6 percent to just less than 1 percent. Over a 20-year period, this represents the difference between doubling income per person, versus increasing it by just 21 percent."* [**Op. Cit.**]

Nor should we forget that there is a *"gallery of nations whose economies soured shortly after their leaders were lauded by the global policy elite for pursuing sound economic fundamentals."* [Jeff Faux and Larry Mishel, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94] This process of proclaiming the success of neo-liberalism before it implodes started with the original neo-liberal experiment, namely Pinochet's Chile whose economy imploded just after Milton Friedman proclaimed it an "economic miracle" (see section C.11).

Latin America has suffered the most attention from neo-liberalism and its institutions so it would be useful to look there for evaluating the claims of its supporters (*"the IMF talks with pride about the progress that Latin America made in market reforms"* [Stiglitz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]). Rather than success story, there has been *"a long period of economic failure: for the prior 20 years, 1980–1999, the region grew by only 11 percent (in per capita terms) over the whole period. This is the worst 20-year growth performance for more than a century, even including the years of the Great Depression."* By comparison, *"for the two decades from 1960–1979, Latin America experienced per capita GDP growth of 80 percent."* In fact, *"using the 1960–1979 period as a baseline, the quarter century for 1980–2004 is dismal. Annual growth in GDP per capita registers a mere 0.5 percent, as opposed to 3.0 percent over the previous period. Countries that are now considered relatively successful are not doing very well compared*



inequality we indicated in section B.1, this position is perfectly justified.

The notion of absolute poverty being the key dates back to at least Locke who argued in his **Second Treatise** on government that in America *"a King of a large and fruitful Territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England."* (section 41) Ignoring the dubious anthropological assertions, his claim was made as part of a general defence of enclosing common land and turning independent workers into dependent wage slaves. The key to his argument is that the accumulation of property and land beyond that useable by an individual along with the elimination of customary rights for poor individuals was justified because owners of the enclosed land would hire workers and increase the overall wealth available. This meant that the dispossessed workers (and particularly their descendants) would be better off materially (see C.B MacPherson's **The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke** for an excellent discussion of this). The links with the current debate on globalisation are clear, with so-called "market advocates" and "individualists" providing extensive apologetics for capital moving to authoritarian regimes which systematically violate individual rights and the principles of the "free" market precisely in terms of the increased material wealth this (eventually) produces. But then it is easy for bosses, tenured professors and well paid think-tank experts to pontificate that such sacrifices (for others, of course) are worth it in the long run.

This apparently strange transformation of "individualists" into "collectivists" (justifying the violation of individual rights in terms of the greater good) has a long precedent. Indeed, it can only be considered strange if you are ignorant of the nature and history of capitalism as well as the contortions its defenders have inflicted on themselves (and by yet another of these strange co-incidences that so regularly afflicts capitalism and its supporters, the individuals whose liberty and rights are con-

notion that capitalism resulted in **absolute** impoverishment. As he put it in volume 1 of **Capital**, *"the number and extent of [the worker's] so-called necessary requirements, as also the manner and extent they are satisfied, are themselves products of history, and depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilisation attained by a country ... In contrast, therefore, with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labour-power contains a historical and moral element."* [p. 275]

It is ironic that those today who most aggressively identify themselves as disciples of Smith are also the people who are most opposed to definitions of poverty that are consistent with this definition of "necessaries" (this is unsurprising, as those who invoke his name most usually do so in pursuit of ideas alien to his work). This is done for the usual self-interested motives. For example, Thatcher's government originally had little problem with the concept of relative poverty and *"[o]nly when its policies had led to a conspicuous growth of relative poverty was the idea denounced, and the decision taken by the government ... that absolute poverty (undefined and unqualified) was the only reality."* [Ian Gilmore, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136] Smith's perspective, significantly, is that followed by most poverty researchers, who use a relative measure in evaluating poverty rates. The reason is unsurprising as poor is relative to the living standards and customs of a time and place. Some sceptic might regurgitate the unoriginal response that the poor in the West are rich compared to people in developing countries, but they do not live in those countries. True, living standards have improved considerably over time but comparing the poor of today with those of centuries past is also meaningless. The poor today are poor relative to what it takes to live and develop their individual potentials in their own societies, not in (for example) 18th century Scotland or half-way across the globe (even Milton Friedman had to grudging admit that *"poverty is in part a relative matter."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191]). Considering the harmful effects of relative



*to past performance. For example, Mexico registers 0.8 percent annual per capita growth for 1980–2004, as compared with 3.3 percent for 1960–79. For Brazil, which one had one of the fastest growing economies in the world, per capita growth is only 0.8 percent annually for 1980–2004, as compared with 4.9 percent for 1960–79."* For Latin America as a whole, real per-capita growth was 3.0% in the 1960s, 2.9% in the 1970s, -0.3% in the 1980s and 1.4% in the 1990s. This means that for 1980–1999, *"the region's per capita GDP grew at an annual rate of only 0.5 percent, a cumulative total of 11 percent for the two decades."* By comparison, *"from 1960–1979, per capita growth was 3.0 percent, or 80 percent for these two decades."* [Mark Weisbrot and David Rosnick, **Another Lost Decade?: Latin America's Growth Failure Continues into the 21st Century**] Looking at Mexico, for example, since NAFTA per capita GDP growth in Mexico has averaged less than 1.0% annually. This is an extremely poor growth record for a developing country. Successful developing countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan have managed to sustain per capita GDP growth rates that have averaged more than 4.0% since the sixties. In fact, Mexico managed to sustain a per capita GDP growth rate of more than 4.0% in the period from 1960 to 1980, when it was following a path of import substitution. But, then, neither South Korea nor Taiwan followed the dictates of neo-liberalism.

Over all it is important to stress that neo-liberalism has failed its own test:

> *"Economic growth over the last twenty years, the period during which [neo-liberalism] policies ... have been put into place, has been dramatically reduced ... to assume that the World Bank and the IMF have brought 'growth-enhancing policies' to their client countries goes against the overwhelming weight of the evidence over the last two decades ... In short, there is no region of the world that the Bank*

> *or Fund can point to as having succeeded through adopting the policies that they promote — or in many cases, impose — upon borrowing countries."* [Mark Weisbrot, Dean Baker, Robert Naiman, and Gila Neta, **Growth May Be Good for the Poor — But are IMF and World Bank Policies Good for Growth?**]

As Chomsky summarises, the periods of fastest and prolonged growth have not coincide with phases of extensive liberalisation. In fact, neoliberal reforms have *"been accompanied by much slower rates of growth and reduced progress on social indicators … There are exceptions to the general tendency: high growth rates were recorded among those who ignored the rules (and with tremendous inequality and other severe side effects in China and India)."* Growth rates have, in fact, fell by *"over half"* compared to the preceding period of statist policies (particularly when measured per capita). [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 216–7] For most countries, growth was higher in the 1950s, 1960s and even the 1970s. This suggests that neo-liberalism fails even its own tests as noted by one economist who compared the reality of successful development to the neo-liberal myth:

> *"the poor growth records of developing countries over the last two decades suggest this line of defence [i.e. it brings higher growth] is simply untenable … The plain fact is that the Neo-Liberal 'policy reforms' have not been able to deliver their central promise — namely, economic growth."* [Ha-Joon Chang, **Kicking Away the Ladder**, p. 128]

Then there is the issue of what the magazine fails to mention. For a start, it excludes the ex-Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. This is understandable for obvious reasons. If these nations were included, then their rising inequality and



praiseworthy, by the absolute standard as even slavery would have absolutely better living standards than, say, the earliest humans.

In this respect, the words of Adam Smith are as relevant as ever. In **The Wealth of Nations** Smith states the following:

> *"By necessaries I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct … Under necessaries, therefore, I comprehend not only those things which nature, but those things which the established rules of decency have rendered necessary to the lowest rank of people."* (Book Five, Chapter II, Article IV)

As usual, Adam Smith is right while his erstwhile ideological followers are wrong. They may object, noting that strictly speaking Smith was talking of *"necessaries"* rather than poverty. However, his concept of necessaries implies a definition of poverty and this is obviously based not on some unchanging biological concept of subsistence but on whatever *"the custom of the country"* or *"the established rules of decency"* consider necessary Marx made the same point his later works, when he distanced himself from his earlier

way (Europe generates about half the CO2 emissions for the same level of GDP) compared to the US or the UK.

A definite case of what is good for the economy (profits) is bad for people. To state the obvious, an economy and the people in that economy are not identical. The former can be doing well, but not the latter — particularly if inequality is skewing distribution of any rising incomes. So while the economy may be doing well, its (median) participant (and below) may see very little of it.

Of course, defenders of laissez-faire capitalism will point out that the United States, like the UK and any other real country, is far from being laissez-faire. This is true, yet it seems strange that the further an economy moves from that "ideal" the better conditions get for those who, it is claimed, will especially benefit from it. As such, non-believers in pure capitalism have cause for dissent although for the typical "market advocate" such comparisons tell us littler — unless they happen to bolster their case then "actually existing" capitalism can be used as an example.

Ultimately, the real issue is to do with quality of life and relative changes. Yet the argument that capitalism helps the poorest most via high economic growth is rooted in comparing "free market" capitalism with historical example, i.e. in the notion of **absolute** inequality rather than **relative** inequality and poverty. Thus poverty (economic, cultural and social) in, say, America can be dismissed simply on the grounds that poor people in 2005 have more and better goods than those in 1905. The logic of an absolute position (as intended, undoubtedly) is such as to make even discussing poverty and inequality pointless as it is easy to say that there are **no** poor people in the West as no one lives in a cave. But, then again, using absolute values it is easy to prove that there were no poor people in Medieval Europe, either, as they did not live in caves and, compared to hunter gatherers or the slaves of antiquity, they had much better living standards. As such, any regime would be



poverty since they became part of the global market would have to be mentioned and this would make its defence of neo-liberalism much harder (as would the fact life expectancies fell to Third World levels). As economist Joseph Stiglitz points out, the neo-liberal reforms brought the ex-Stalinist countries *"unprecedented poverty."* In 1989, only 2% of Russians lived in poverty, by the late 1998 that number had soared to 23.8%, using the $2 a day standard. More than 40% had less that $4 a day. Other post-Stalinist countries *"have seen comparable, if not worse, increases in poverty."* Overall, these reform package has *"entailed one of the largest increases in poverty in history."* [**Globalization and its Discontents**, p. 6, p. 153 and p. 182]

The GDP in the former Stalinist states fell between 20% and 40% in the decade after 1989, an economic contraction which can only be compared to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Of the 19 ex-Stalinist economies, only Poland's GDP exceeded that of 1989, the year transition began. In only 5 was GDP per capita more than 80% of the 1989 level. [Chang, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] Only a small minority saw their real wages rise; the vast majority experienced a spectacular fall in living standards. It took the Czech Republic, for example eight years until average real wages reached their 1989 level. Unemployment became widespread. In 2005, Slovakia had 27% of its under-25s are unemployed while in Poland 39% of under-25s were without a job (the highest figure in Europe) and 17% of the population were below the poverty line.

Overall, between 1985 and 2000, growth in GDP per capita was negative in 17 transition countries while the *"incidence of poverty increased in most countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s and the 1990s. Much of Eastern Europe and Central Asia experiences a sharp rise in poverty during the 1990s."* East, Southwest and South Asia did experience a steady decline in the incidence of poverty, but *"most of this improvement is accounted for by changes in just two countries, with large populations, China and*

*India."* [Deepak Nayyar, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154, pp. 154–5 and p. 155] Hardly an inspiring result.

And what of the actual economic regimes in China and India? One left-wing economist notes that *"in the early stages of China's high growth period there was an expansion of state employment, including in the dynamic and crucial manufacturing sector ... in its most recent phase, private capital accumulation dominates the growth process in China, although the state still strongly influences the pattern of investment through its control of the credit system and its policy of creating 'national champions' in sectors such as cars and steel."* Not to mention, of course, its role in the labour market. There is no freedom to organise — the country is, in effect, one big workplace and the state bosses do not tolerate freedom of association, assembly and speech any more than any other company. Unsurprisingly, labour discipline *"is very harsh"* and workers may find it difficult to change jobs and migrate to urban areas. [Andrew Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87 and p. 94]

As one expert notes, in the case of both India and China *"the main trade reforms took place **after** the onset of high growth. Moreover, these countries' trade restrictions remain among the highest in the world."* In India, its *"trend growth rate increased substantially in the early 1980s"* while *"serious trade reform did not start until 1991–93 ... tariffs were actually higher in the rising growth period of the 1980s than in the low-growth 1970s."* Thus claims of *"the beneficial effects of trade liberalisation on poverty have to be seen as statements based on faith rather than evidence."* [Dani Rodrik, **Comments on 'Trade, Growth, and Poverty by D. Dollar and A. Kraay**] As Chomsky notes, there is a deliberate policy which *"muddles export orientation with neo-liberalism, so that if a billion Chinese experience high growth under export-orientated policies that radically violate neo-liberal principles, the increase in average global growth rates can be hailed as a triumph of the principles that are violated."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 217] It should also be mentioned that both these



trial nations for pollutant emissions into the air.
highest murder rates.
worse ranking for life expectancy and infant morality.

It seems strange that the more laissez-faire system has the worse job security, least leisure time, highest poverty and inequality if laissez-faire will **especially** benefit the poor or working people. In fact, we find the more free market the regime, the worse it is for the workers. Americans have longer hours and shorter holidays than Western Europeans and more people live in poverty. 22% of American children grow up in poverty, which means that it ranks 22$^{nd}$ out of the 23 industrialised nations, ahead of only Mexico and behind all 15 of the pre-2004 EU countries.

According to a 2007 United Nation report, the worse places to be a child are in neo-liberal societies such as the UK and USA (the UK was bottom, at number 21 one below the US). The UNICEF report dealt with the condition of children in advanced capitalist countries and found that both the UK and US are way down the list on education, health, poverty, and well-being. While UNICEF preferred to state that this is because of a "dog eat dog society", it is hardly a coincidence that these two societies have most embraced the principles of neo-liberalism and have repeatedly attacked the labour movement, civil society in general as well as the welfare state in the interests of capital. In contrast, the social democratic northern European countries which have best results. One could also point out, for example, that Europeans enjoy more leisure time, better health, less poverty, less inequality and thus more economic security, greater intergenerational economic mobility, better access to high-quality social services like health care and education, and manage to do it all in a far more environmentally sustainable

selves to the authority of bosses do to economic pressures and the threat of unemployment.

So it can be said that laissez-faire capitalism will benefit all, **especially** the poor, only in the sense that all can potentially benefit as an economy increases in size. Of course, the mantra that economic growth is so wonderful is hard to justify when the benefits of that growth are being enjoyed by a small proportion of the people and the burdens of growth (such as rising job insecurity, loss of benefits, wage stagnation and decline for the majority of workers, declining public services, loss of local communities and so forth) are being borne by so many (as is the case with the more to freer markets from the 1980s). If we look at actually existing capitalism, we can start to draw some conclusions about whether a pure laissez-faire capitalism will actually benefit working people. The United States has a small public sector by international standards and in many ways it is the closest large industrial nation to the unknown ideal of pure capitalism. It is also interesting to note that it is also number one, or close to it, in the following areas [Richard Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, pp. 183–4]:

> lowest level of job security for workers, with greatest chance of being dismissed without notice or reason.
> greatest chance for a worker to become unemployed without adequate unemployment and medical insurance.
> less leisure time for workers, such as holiday time.
> one of the most lopsided income distribution profiles.
> lowest ratio of female to male earnings, in 1987 64% of the male wage.
> highest incidence of poverty in the industrial world.
> among the worse rankings of all advanced indus-



states avoided the 1980s debt crisis by avoiding Western banks in the 1970s. They also maintain capital controls, so that hot money cannot flow freely in and out, and have large state sectors.

At least the **Economist** itself notes that *"[n]either country is an exemplar of free market capitalism — far from it."* That says it all about the defenders of free market capitalism; they defend their ideas by pointing to countries which do not apply them!

It should be stressed that this praise for the "free market" using regimes which hardly meet the criteria has a long history. This has included both Japan and the East Asian Tigers in the 1970s and 1980s as *"the spectacular growth of these countries … is fundamentally due to activist industrial, trade and technology policies (ITT) by the state."* [Chang, **Op. Cit.**, p. 49] As an expert on these economies notes, *"the legend is not fully consistent with the way the governments have in practice behaved,"* namely adopting *"over a long period of time a much more aggressive, dirigistic set of industrial policies than free-trading principles would justify."* In fact, their *"governments were deeply committed to increasing and sustaining high levels of investment and to steering its composition."* He bemoans the *"assumption that only those features of economic policy consistent with neoclassical principles could have contributed to good economic performance"* and so explanations for such *"accordingly ignore non-neoclassical features."* [Robert Wade, *"What can Economics Learn from East Asian Success?"*, pp. 68–79, **Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science**, vol. 505, pp. 70–1, p. 72 and p. 68]

This analysis was proved right when, ironically, the praise turned to attack when the 1997 crisis erupted and all the features previously ignored or denied where brought onto the central stage to explain the slump (*"When their bubbles imploded, the same countries were denounced by the policy elites for something called 'crony capitalism' — a year earlier, the term had been 'business-friendly environment.'"* [Jeff Faux and Larry Mishel,

**Op. Cit.**, p. 94]). As Robert Wade noted, *"the perception shifted from 'miracle Asia' to 'Asian crony state capitalism' almost over night,"* a term used *"to convey a told-you-so moral about the dangers of government intervention."* [*"From 'miracle' to 'cronyism': explaining the Great Asian Slump"*, pp. 673–706, **Cambridge Journal of Economics**, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 699 and p. 700] Ironically, Japan's 1990s woes and the 1997 crisis both occurred **after** those states liberalised their economies (as recommended by, of course, economists and the IMF). Unsurprisingly, we discover Milton Friedman pointing (in 2002!) to the *"dramatic success of the market-orientated policies of the East Asian tigers"* as if they gave support to his ideological position of laissez-faire capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. ix]

Then there is the issue of "economic liberty" as such. Milton Friedman stated in 2002 that the *"limited increase in economic freedom has changed the face of China, strikingly confirming our faith in the power of free markets."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. viii-ix] Faith is the right word, as only the faithful could fair to note that there is no free market in China as it does not have basic freedoms for labour. How much "economic freedom" is there for workers under a brutal dictatorship? How can it be claimed, with a straight face, that there is an *"increase in economic freedom"* in such regimes? It seems, therefore, that for right-wing economists that their *"faith"* in "free markets" is *"confirmed"* by an authoritarian system that obviously and constantly violates the freedom of labour. But then again, workers have never been considered highly by the profession. What has always counted is the freedom of the boss and, consequently, a regime that secures that is always praised (and we discuss in section C.11, Friedman has a track record in this).

The selectively of the supporters of "free market" capitalists is truly staggering. Take, as an example, globalisation and anti-globalisation protests. Supports of the trade deals accused critics as being against "free trade" and, by implication, against freedom. Yet the deals they supported were based on accepting



As such, the notion of growth **as such** is good should be rejected in favour of a critical approach to the issue which asks growth for what and for whom. As Chomsky puts it, *"[m]any indigenous people apparently do not see any reason why their lives, societies, and cultures should be disrupted or destroyed so that New Yorkers can sit in SUVs in traffic gridlock."* [**Failed States**, p. 259] Under capitalism, much "productivity" is accounted for by economic activity that is best described as wasteful: military spending; expanding police and prison bureaucracies; the spiralling cost of (privatised) healthcare; suburban sprawl; the fast-food industry and its inevitable ill effects on health; cleaning up pollution; specifying and defending intellectual and other property rights; treating the illnesses caused by over-work, insecurity and stress; and so on. As Alexander Berkman once noted, capitalism spawns many forms of "work" and "productive" activity which only make sense within that system and could *"be automatically done away with"* in a sane society. [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 223–5] Equally, "productivity" and living standards can stand at odds with each other. For example, if a country has a lower working week and take longer holidays, these would clearly depress GDP. This is the case with America and France, with approximately equal productivity the later spends less time in work and more time off. Yet it takes a capitalist ideologue to say that such a country is worse off as a nation for all that time people spend enjoying themselves.

These issues are important to remember when listening to "free market" gurus discussing economic growth from their "gated communities," insulated from the surrounding deterioration of society and nature caused by the workings of capitalism. In other words, quality is often more important than quantity. This leads to the important idea that some (even many) of the requirements for a truly human life cannot be found on any market, no matter how "free" it may be. Equally, a "free" market can lead to unfree people as they driven to submit them-

data showing that *"the per capita income of the poor falling from 1979–84, and 1989–94, while per capita income rose."* Overall, the US has seen its median wage and real wages for the bottom 20th of its populations fall between 1973 and 1997 while *"per capita income in the US has risen by 70 percent. For the median wage and bottom-quintile wage to actually **fall** during this same period is an economic change of momentous proportions, from the point of view of the majority of Americans."* [Mark Weisbrot, Dean Baker, Robert Naiman, and Gila Neta, **Growth May Be Good for the Poor — But are IMF and World Bank Policies Good for Growth?**] This is a classic example of society with substantial inequality seeing the benefits of growth accrue to the already rich. To state the obvious, **how** the benefits of growth are distributed cannot be ignored.

In addition, consumerism may not lead to the happiness or the "better society" which many economists imply to be its results. If consumerism is an attempt to fill an empty life, it is clearly doomed to failure. If capitalism results in an alienated, isolated existence, consuming more will hardly change that. The problem lies within the individual and the society within which they live. Hence, quantitative increases in goods and services may not lead to anyone "benefiting" in any meaningful way. Similarly, there is the issue of the quality of the production and consumption produced by economic growth. Values like GDP do not tell us much in terms of what was produced and its social and environmental impact. Thus high growth rates could be achieved by the state expanding its armed forces and weaponry (i.e. throwing money to arms corporations) while letting society go to rot (as under Reagan). Then there is awkward fact that negative social developments, such as pollution and rising crime, can contribute to a rising value for GDP). This happens because the costs of cleaning up, say, an oil spill involves market transactions and so gets added to the GDP for an economy.



the current labour standards across the world. This means accepting the labour conditions of states, usually dictatorships, which habitually deny a free market (even a capitalist one) to its workers — all in the name of the free market! Which makes the "free market" supporters of neo-liberalism utter hypocrites. They are happy to accept a "free market" in which the denial of freedom of workers to form unions is an intrinsic part. It also suggests that the much attacked critics of "trade" deals who demand that basic standards of freedom for workers be incorporated into them are those who truly support "free trade" and the "free market." Those who advocate unrestricted trade with dictatorial regimes (where workers are thrown in prison, at best, or assassinated, at worse, if they organise or talk about unions and protests) are engaging in the worse form of doublethink when they appropriate the term "freedom" for their position.

It is easy to understand why supporters of capitalism do so. In such regimes, capital is free and the many abuses of freedom are directed towards the working class. These suppress wages and the resulting competition can be used to undermine workers wages, conditions and freedoms back home. This is why neo-liberals and such like agree to a range of global policies that give substantial freedoms to capitalists to operate unhindered around the world while, at the same time, fiercely resistant to any demands that the freedom of workers be given equal concern (this why Chomsky talks about the *"international global justice movement, ludicrously called 'anti-globalisation' because they favour globalisation that privileges the interests of people, not investors and financial institutions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259]). In other words, free markets are fine for capitalists, but not for workers. And if anyone disagrees, they turn round and accuse their critics of being opposed to "freedom"! As such, anti-globalisation protesters are right. People in such regimes are not free and it is meaningless to talk of the benefits of "free markets" when a free market in

labour does not exist. It does, of course, show how genuine the defenders of capitalism are about freedom.

So has global poverty fallen since the rise of neo-liberalism in 1970s? Perhaps it has, but only if you apply the World Bank measure (i.e. a living standard of less than a dollar a day). If that is done then the number of individuals in dire poverty is (probably) falling (although Joseph Stiglitz states that *"the actual number of people living in poverty ... actually increased by almost 100 million"* in the 1990s and he argues that globalisation as practised *"has not succeeded in reducing poverty."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 5 and p. 6]). However, the vast bulk of those who have risen out of dire poverty are in China and India, that is in the two countries which do not follow the neo-liberal dogma. In those that did follow the recommendations of neo-liberalism, in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, poverty and growth rates are much worse. Chang states the obvious:

> *"So we have an apparent 'paradox' here — at least if you are a Neo-Liberal economist. All countries, but especially developing countries, grew much faster when they used 'bad' policies during the 1960–1980 period than when they used 'good' ones during the following two decades ... Now, the interesting thing is that these 'bad; policies are basically those that the NDCs [Now Developed Countries] had pursued when they were developing countries themselves. Given this, we can only conclude that, in recommending the allegedly 'good' policies, the NDCs are in effect 'kicking away the ladder' by which they have climbed to the top."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

Hardly a glowing recommendation for the prescriptions favoured by the Economist and other supporters of free market capitalism. Nor very convincing support for solving the problems of neo-liberalism with yet more globalisation (of



know whether they had a home to come back to. This is because every price would have to be subject to constant change in order to adjust to equilibrium. Insecurity, in other words, is at the heart of the economy and this is hardly productive of community or "family" values (and other expressions used in the rhetoric of the right while they promote an economic system which, in practice, undermines them in the name of profit). In other words, while a society may become materially better off over time, it becomes worse off in terms of **real** wealth, that is those things which make life worth living. Thus capitalism has a corrosive effect on human relationships, the pleasure of productive activity (work), genuine freedom for the many, how we treat each other and so on. The corrosive effects of economics are not limited simply to the workplace but seep into all other aspects of your life.

Even assuming that free market capitalism could generate high growth rates (and that assumption is not borne out in the real world), this is not the end of the matter. How the growth is distributed is also important. The benefits of growth may accumulate to the few rather than the many. Per capita and average increases may hide a less pleasant reality for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. An obvious example would be a society in which there is massive inequality, where a few are extremely rich and the vast majority are struggling to make ends meet. Such a society could have decent growth rates and per capita and average income may grow. However, if such growth is concentrated at the top, in the hands of the already wealthy, the reality is that economic growth does not benefit the many as the statistics suggest. As such, it is important to stress that average growth may not result in a bettering for all sections of a society. In fact, *"there are plenty of instances in which the poor, and the majority of the population. have been left behind in the era of globalisation — even where per capita income has grown."* This is not limited to just developing countries. Two episodes like this occurred in the United States, with

Thompson was specifically referring to the experience of the British industrial revolution on the working class but his analysis is of general note (its relevance goes far beyond evaluating past or current industrialisation processes). This means that concentrating on, say, absolute poverty or income growth (as defenders of neo-liberalism do) means to ignore the quality of life which this increased income is associated with. For example, a peasant farmer who has to leave his farm for employment in a factory may consider having bosses dictating his every move, an increased working day and intensity of work more significant than, say, a net increase in his income. That this farmer may have been driven off his farm as a result of neo-liberal or other "reforms" is another factor which has to be taken into account. If, to suggest another possibility, Health and Safety regulations reduce work speeds, then national output will be reduced just as unions will stop firms making their workers labour more intensely for longer. However, increased output at the expense of those who do the work is not unproblematic (i.e. real wages may increase but at the cost of longer hours, less safety and greater intensity of labour). Another obvious example would be the family where the husband gets "downsized" from a good manufacturing job. He may get a lower paying service industry job, which forces his wife (and perhaps children) to get a job in order to make ends meet. Family income may increase slightly as a result, but at a heavy cost to the family and their way of life. Therefore the standard of living in the abstract may have increased, but, for the people in question, they would feel that it had deteriorated considerably. As such, economic growth need not imply rising standards of living in terms if the **quality** of life decreases as incomes rise.

This is, in part, because if the economy worked as neoclassical theory demanded, then people would go to work not knowing how much they would be paid, how long they would be employed for or, indeed, whether they had a job at all when they got there. If they rented their home, they would not even



the same, neo-liberal, kind). One thing is true, though. The accepted wisdom of the age if that the road to prosperity and international acceptance is "economic liberalisation" or some of euphemism for opening economies to foreign investment. What this really means is that authoritarian regimes that allow their subjects to be exploited by international capital rather than state bureaucracies will find apologists among those who profit from such transactions or get paid by them. That this involves violation of the freedom of working class people and the labour "market" does not seem to bother them for, they stress, in long term material benefits this will create outweigh such restrictions on the eternal and sacred laws of economics. That "freedom" is used to justify this just shows how debased that concept has become under capitalism and within capitalist ideology.

## C.10.2 Does "free trade" benefit everyone?

As we discussed in the last section, the post-1980 era of neoliberal globalisation and "free(r) markets" has not been as beneficial to the developing world as the defenders of neo-liberalism suggest. In fact, these economies have done worse under neoliberalism than they did under state-aided forms of development between 1950 and 1980. The only exceptions post-1980 have been those states which have rejected the dogmas of neoliberalism and used the state to foster economic development rather than rely on "free trade."

It would, of course, be churlish to note that this is a common feature of capitalist development. Industrialisation has always been associated with violations of the sacred laws of economics and freedom for workers. In fact, the central conceit of neo-liberalism is that it ignores the evidence of history but this is unsurprising (as noted in section C.1.2, economics has a distinct bias against empirical evidence). This applies to the

notion of free trade as well as industrialisation, both of which show the economists lack of concern with reality.

Most economists are firm supporters of free trade, arguing that it benefits all countries who apply it. The reason why was first explained by David Ricardo, one of the founding fathers of the discipline. Using the example of England and Portugal and wine and cloth, he argued that international trade would benefit both countries even if one country (Portugal) produced both goods more cheaply than the other because it was relative costs which counted. This theory, called comparative advantage, meant that it would be mutually beneficial for both countries to specialise in the goods they had a relative advantage in and trade. So while it is cheaper to produce cloth in Portugal than England, it is cheaper still for Portugal to produce excess wine, and trade that for English cloth. Conversely, England benefits from this trade because its cost for producing cloth has not changed but it can now get wine at closer to the cost of cloth. By each country specialising in producing one good, the sum total of goods internationally increases and, consequently, everyone is better off when these goods are traded. [**The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation**, pp. 81–3]

This argument is still considered as the bed-rock of the economics of international trade and is used to refute arguments in favour of policies like protectionism. Strangely, though, economists have rarely compared the outcome of these policies. Perhaps because as Chomsky notes, *"if you want to know how well those theorems actually work, just compare Portugal and England after a hundred years of development."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 254] One economist who did was the German Friedrich List who, in 1837, urged people *"to turn his attention to Portugal and to England and to compare the economies of these two countries. I am sure that he can have no doubts as to which country is prosperous and which has lost its economic independence, is dead from an intellectual, commercial*



occurred, such as in Asia, the countries have **not** embraced the neo-liberal model.

However, there is a deeper critique to be made of the notion that capitalism benefits everyone, especially the poor. This relates to the **quality** of life, rather than the quantity of money available. This is an extremely important aspect to the question of whether "free market" capitalism will result in everyone being "better off." The typical capitalist tendency is to consider quantitative values as being the most important consideration. Hence the concern over economic growth, profit levels, and so on, which dominate discussions on modern life. However, as E.P. Thompson makes clear, this ignores important aspects of human life:

> *"simple points must be made. It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A per capita increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships, and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time ... [For example] real wages [may have] advanced ... but at the cost of longer hours and greater intensity of labour ... In statistical terms, this reveals an upward curve. To the families concerned it might feel like immiseration.*
>
> *"Thus it is perfectly possible ... [to have an] improvement in average material standards ... [at the same time as] intensified exploitation, greater insecurity, and increasing human misery ... most people [can be] 'better off' than their forerunners had been fifty years before, but they had suffered and continued to suffer this ... improvement as a catastrophic experience."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 231]

with ideology is that capitalism is not "pure" enough. That, of course, is a valid argument (as Friedman notes, Thatcher and Reagan *"were able to curb leviathan, through not to cut it down."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. vii]). State intervention has hardly disappeared since 1980 but given the lush praise given to the "magic" of the market you would expect **some** improvement. When Friedman died in 2006, the praise from the right-wing and business press was extensive, listing him as one of the most, if not **the** most, influential economist of the late 20th century. It seems strange, then, to suggest that the market is now **less** free than at the height of the post-war Keynesian period. To do so would suggest that Reagan, Thatcher and Pinochet had little or no impact on the economy (or that they made it worse in terms of state intervention). In other words, that Friedman was, in fact, the **least** influential economist of the late 20th century (as opposed to one of the worse, if we compare his assertions to reality before and after the policies they inspired were implemented). However, he helped make the rich richer, so the actual impact of what he actually suggested for the bulk of the population can be cheerfully ignored.

## C.10.4 Does growth automatically mean people are better off?

In the above sections we have discussed the effects of neoliberal reforms purely in terms of economic statistics such as growth rates and so on. This means we have critiqued capitalism in its own terms, in terms of its supporters own arguments in its favour. As shown, in terms of equality, social mobility and growth the rise of "free(r) market" capitalism has not been all its supporters have asserted. Rather than produce more equality, less poverty and increased growth, the opposite has occurred. Where some progress on these areas have



*and industrial point of view, and is decadent, poverty stricken and weak."* [**The Natural System of Political Economy**, pp. 169–70] Unsurprisingly, List used this example to bolster his case for protectionism. Little has changed. Allan Engler notes that *"[a]fter nearly 200 years, comparative advantage had given Portugal no noticeable advantage."* While the UK became the leading industrial power, Portugal remained a poor agricultural economy: *"Britain's manufacturing industries were the most efficient in the world, Portugal had little choice but to be an exporter of agricultural products and raw materials."* In 1988, Portugal's per capita GDP was less than one third that of the UK. When "Purchasing power parity" is factored in, Portugal's per capita GDP was barely more than half of the UK. [**Apostles of Greed**, p. 132]

Nor should we forget that free trade takes the economic agent as the country. Unlike an individual, a nation is divided by classes and marked by inequalities of wealth, power and influence. Thus while free trade may increase the sum-total of wealth in a specific country, it does not guarantee that its benefits or losses will be distributed equally between social classes, never mind individuals. Thus capitalists may favour free trade at specific times because it weakens the bargaining power of labour, so allowing them to reap more income at the workers' expense (as producers and consumers). Taking the example of the so-called "free trade" agreements of the 1990s, there was no reason to believe that benefits of such trade may accrue to all within a given state nor that the costs will be afflicted on all classes. Subsequent developments confirmed such a perspective, with the working class suffering the costs of corporate-led "globalisation" while the ruling class gained the benefits. Not that such developments bothered most economists too much, of course. Equally, while the total amount of goods may be increased by countries pursuing their comparative advantage it does not automatically follow that trade between them will distribute the benefits equally either between the countries or

within them. As with exchange between classes, trade between countries is subject to economic power and so free trade can easily lead to the enrichment of one at the expense of the other. This means that the economically powerful will tend to support free trade as they will reap more from it.

Therefore the argument for free trade cannot be abstracted from its impact or the interests it serves, as Joan Robinson pointed out:

> *"When Ricardo set out the case against protection he was supporting British economic interests. Free trade ruined Portuguese industry. Free trade for* ***others*** *is in the interests of the strongest competitor in world markets, and a sufficiently strong competitor has no need for protection at home. Free trade doctrine, in practice, is a more subtle form of Mercantilism. When Britain was the workshop of the world, universal free trade suited her interests. When (with the aid of protection) rival industries developed in Germany and the United States, she was still able to preserve free trade for her own exports in the Empire."* [**Collected Economic Papers**, vol. 5, p. 28]

This echoes the analysis of List who that the British advocacy of free trade was primarily political in nature and not to mention hypocritical. Its political aim was to destroy potential competitors by flooding their markets with goods, so ruining their industrial base and making them exporters of raw materials for British industry rather than producers of finished goods. He argued that a *"study of the true consequences"* of free trade *"provide the key to England's commercial policy from that day to this. The English have always been cosmopolitans and philanthropists in theory but always monopolists in practice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 167] Moreover, such a position was hypocritical because Britain industrialised by means of state intervention and now sought to deny that option to other nations.



*importance of property incomes."*, with the ratio of property income to labour income rising from 15% in the USA in 1979 to 18% in 2002. In France it went from 7% to 12% and is around 8% in Norway and Finland. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 167, p. 168, p. 169, p. 171, p. 169, p. 173, p. 174 and p. 170]

Needless to say, given the lack of evidence presented when Friedman first published his book in 1962, the 40th anniversary edition was equally fact free. Given that 40 years is more than enough time to evaluate his claims particularly given that approximately half-way through this period, Friedman's ideas became increasingly influential and applied, in varying degrees in many countries (particularly in the UK under Thatcher and the US under Reagan). Friedman does not mention the developments in equality, mobility or labour share in 2002, simply making the general statement that he was *"enormously gratified by how well the book has withstood time."* Except, of course, where reality utterly contradicted it! This applies not only to his claims on equality, income shares and poverty, but also the fundamental basis of his Monetarist dogma, namely the aim to control the *"behaviour of the stock of money"* by means of *"a legislated rule instructing the monetary authority to achieve a specified rates of growth in the stock of money."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. ix and p. 54] As we indicated in section C.8, the devastating results of applying this centre-piece of his ideology means that it hardly *"withstood time"* by any stretch of the imagination! In other words, we have a case of self-refutation that has few equals.

To conclude, as defences of capitalism based on equality are unlikely to survive contact with reality, the notion that this system is really the best friend of the working person and the poor needs to be defended by other means. This is where the growth argument we debunked in the last two sections comes in. Neither has much basis in reality.

Of course, the usual excuse should be noted. It could be argued that the reason for this lack of correlation of reality

*than in Europe"* and have grown faster. Real wages for the top 10% grew by 27.2% between 1979 and 2003, compared to 10.2% in the middle (real wages for the bottom 10% did not grow). In Europe, *"real wages grew at the bottom at a similar rate to the average."* The top 1% of wage-earners in the USA doubled their total wage share between 1979 and 1998 from 6.2% to 10.9%, whilst the top 0.1% nearly tripled their share to 4.1%. Almost all of the increase in the top 10% went to the top 5%, and about two-thirds to the top 1%. In France, the share of the top 1% remained the same. Overall, *"labour's position tended to be more eroded in the more free market economies like the USA and UK than in European economies where social protection [including trade unionism] was already stronger."* [Andrew Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 6 p. 116, p. 117, p. 118 and p. 127]

Looking at inequality and poverty, the conclusion is that liberalisation of markets *"tend to bring greater inequality."* In fact, the rise in the UK was strongest in the 1980s, the Thatcher period while New Zealand *"saw as big an increase in inequality as the UK."* The USA *"maintained its position as the most unequal country with inequality increasing in both decades."* In summary, *"the increase in inequality has been noticeably greater in the inegalitarian liberal economies than in Northern Europe."* Moreover, *"liberal countries have larger proportions of their populations in poverty"* than European ones. Unsurprisingly, New Zealand and the UK (both poster-childs for neo-liberalism) *"had the biggest increases in numbers in poverty between the mid-1980s and 2000."* In the mid-1990s, 20–25% of workers in the UK, Canada and USA were earning less than 65% of median earnings, compared to 5–8% in Scandinavia and Belgium. This rise income inequality *"tend to reproduce themselves through the generations."* There *"is far **less** social mobility in the USA"* than in Scandinavia, Germany and Canada and there has been a *"severe decline in social mobility"* in the UK after the Friedman-inspired Thatcherism of the 1980s and 1990s. Unsurprisingly, there has been *"a rise in the*



List advocated that the state should protect infant industries until such time as they could survive international competition. Once industrialised, the state could then withdraw. He did not deny that free trade may benefit agricultural exporters, but only at the expense of industrial development and spillover benefits it generates for the economy as a whole. In other words, free trade harmed the less-developed nation in terms of its economic prosperity and independence in the long run. Protectionism allowed the development of local industrial capitalism while free trade bolstered the fortunes of foreign capitalist nations (a Hobson's choice, really, from an anarchist perspective). This was the situation with British capitalism, as *"Britain had very high tariffs on manufacturing products as late as the 1820s, some two generations after the start of its Industrial Revolution ... Measures other than tariff protection were also deployed"* (such as banning imports from competitors). [Chang, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22] Needless to say, trade unions were illegal during this period of industrialisation and troops were regularly deployed to crush strikes, riots and rebellions. Economist Thomas Balogh confirms this analysis:

> *"The fact is that Britain's economic growth forged ahead of its European competitors while it was exploiting an effective monopoly of the steam engine, from 1780 to 1840. Through most of that period the nation had a high and complicated tariff ..., massive public investment and spending ... and an extensive public welfare system with wage supplements and welfare allowances indexed to basic costs of living ...*
>
> *"There followed a long period, from about 1840 to 1931, when Britain did indeed have the freest trade and relatively speaking the cheapest government and (until 1914) the smallest public sector among the industrially developing nations, Yet, for competitiveness, that century saw the relative decline of the*

*country. Numerous competing countries, led by the US and Germany, emerged and overtook and passed Britain in output and income per head. Every one of them had protective tariffs, and a bigger (relative) public sector than the British."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 180]

Significantly, and highly embarrassingly for neo-classical economists, the one nation which embraced free trade ideology most, namely the UK in the latter half of the 19th century, suffered economic decline in comparison to its competitors who embraced protectionist and other statist economic policies. It would be churlish to note that this is the exact opposite of what the theory predicts.

In historical terms, List has been proven correct numerous times. If the arguments for free trade were correct, then the United States and Germany (plus Japan, South Korea, etc., more recently), would be economic backwaters while Portugal would have flourished. The opposite happened. By the 1900s, Britain was overtaken economically by America and Germany, both of whom industrialised by means of protectionism and other forms of state intervention. As such, we should not forget that Adam Smith confidently predicted that protectionism in America would *"would retard instead of accelerating the further increase in the value of their annual progress, and would obstruct instead of promoting the progress of their country towards real wealth and greatness."* He considered it best that capital be *"employed in agriculture"* rather than manufacturing. [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 328 and p. 327]). The historical record hardly supports Smith's predictions as *"throughout the nineteenth century and up to the 1920s, the USA was the fastest growing economy in the world, despite being the most protectionist during almost all of this period … Most interestingly, the two best 20-year GDP per capita growth performances during the 1830–1910 period were 1870–1890 (2.1 per cent) and 1890–1910 (two per cent) — both period of*



roughly 10%, before falling to 6% in 1977. It then *"the rose sharply"* and peaked at 21% in 1991/92 before stabilising at 18–19%. After housing costs, this meant a rise from 7% to 25% below half the average income, falling to 23%. It should be noted that the pre-Thatcher period gives *"the lie to the notion that 'relative' poverty can never be reduced."* In summary, by the early 1990s *"relative poverty was twice the level it had been in the 1960s, and three times what it had been in the late 1970s."* It seems needless to add that social mobility fell. [John Hills, **Op. Cit.**, p. 48, p. 263 and pp. 120–1]

The same can be said of Eastern Europe. This is particularly significant, for if Friedman's assertions were right then we would expect that the end of Stalinism in Eastern Europe would have seen a decrease in inequality. As in Chile, Britain, New Zealand and America, the opposite occurred — inequality exploded. By the start of the 21st century Eastern Europe was challenging neo-liberal Britain at the top of the European income inequality tables.

The historical record does not give much support to claims that free(r) market capitalism is best for working class people. Real wage growth rose to around 5% per year in the early 1970s, before falling substantially to under 2% from the 1980s onwards for 13 OECD countries. In fact, *"real wage have growth very slowly in OECD countries since 1979, an extraordinary turnround from the 3–5% growth rates of the 1960s."* In the US, the median wage was actually less in 2003 than in 1979. Average wages actually declined until 1995, then they increased somewhat so that the average growth rate for the 1990s was less than 0.5% a year. Europe and Japan have done only a little better, with growth of around 1% per year. This is unsurprising, given the rise in returns to capital after 1979 for *"real wages do not automatically grow as fast as labour productivity. The general increase in the share of profits .. pulls real wage growth behind productivity growth."* Within the labour force, inequality has risen. Wage differentials *"are considerably higher in the UK/US group*

the rich. Before that, the income of all sections of society grew at roughly the same level between 1961 and 1979. Most of the increase was near the mean, the one exception was the lowest tenth whose incomes rose significantly higher than the rest). This meant that *"over the 1960s and 1970s as a whole all income groups benefited from rising incomes, the lowest rising fastest."* After 1978 *"the pattern broke down"* and incomes for the highest tenth rose by 60–68 percent while at the medium it grew by about 30% between 1979 and 1994/5. The lower down the income distribution, the lower the growth (in fact, after housing costs the income of bottom 10% was 8% lower in 1994/5 than in 1979). As in America during the same period a fence turned into stairs as the nearer to the bottom the slower income grew, the nearer the top the faster income grew (i.e. roughly equal growth turned into growth which increased as income increased — see section B.7.1). Between 1979 and 1990/91, the bottom 70% saw their income share fall. During the Major years, from 1992 to 1997, inequality stopped growing simply because hardly anyone's income grew. Over all, between 1979 and 2002/3, the share of all incomes received by the bottom half fell from 22% to 37%. This is more than the whole of the bottom half combined. The bottom 10% saw their share of income fall from 4.3% to 3% (after housing costs, this was 4.0% to 2.0%). Only the top tenth saw their income increase (from 20.6% to 28%). About 40% of the total increase in real net incomes went to the top tenth between 1979 and 2002–3. 17% of the increase in after-tax incomes went to the top 1%, about 13% went to the top 0.5% (*"Wealth is much more unequally distributed than incomes."*). [John Hills, **Op. Cit.**, p. 20, p. 21, p. 23 and p. 37]

Unsurprisingly, income inequality widened considerably (which more than reversed all the moves towards equality of income that had taken place since 1945) and Britain went from being one of the more equal countries in the industrialised countries to being one of the most unequal. The numbers below half the median income rose. In the 1960s, this was



*particularly high protectionism. It is hard to believe that this association between the degree of protectionism and overall growth is purely coincidental."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

As with the UK, America *"remained the most ardent practitioner of infant industry protection until the First World War, and even until the Second."* Like UK, the state played its role in repressing labour, for while unions were usually not technically illegal, they were subject to anti-trust laws (at state and then federal level) as well as force during strikes from troops and private police forces. It was *"only after the Second World War that the USA — with its industrial supremacy unchallenged — finally liberalised it trade and started championing the cause of free trade."* [Chang, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28 and p. 29] Unsurprisingly, faced with growing international competition it practised protectionism and state aid while keeping the rhetoric of free trade to ensure that any potential competitor has its industries ruined by being forced to follow policies the US never applied in the same situation. Chomsky summarises:

> *"So take a look at one of the things you don't say if you're an economist within one of the ideological institutions, although surely every economist has to know it. Take the fact that there is not a single case on record in history of any country that has developed successfully through adherence to 'free market' principles: none."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 255]

Not that this has disabused most economists from repeating Ricardo's theory as if it told the full story of international trade or has been empirically verified. As Chang puts it, his approach of studying the actual history of specific countries and generalising conclusions *"is concrete and inductive"* and *"contrasts strongly with the currently dominant Neoclassical approach based on abstract and deductive methods."* This has meant that *"contemporary discussion on economic development*

*policy-making has been peculiarly ahistoric.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 6] This is unsurprising, as there is a distinct tendency within mainstream economics not to check to see if whether the theory conforms to reality. It is as if we **know** that capitalist economics is true, so why bother to consider the evidence. So no matter how implausible a given theory is, capitalist economics simply asks us to take them on trust. Perhaps this is because they are nothing more than logical deductions from various assumptions and comparing them to reality would expose not only the bankruptcy of the theory but also the bogus claims that economics relates to reality or is a science?

That these theories survive at all is due to their utility to vested interests and, of course, their slightly complicated logical beauty. It should be noted, in passing, that the free trade argument is based on **reducing** international competition. It recommends that different countries specialise in different industries. That this would make sense for, say, a country with industry (marked by increasing returns to scale and significant spill-over effects into other areas of the economy) rather than one based on agriculture (marked by decreasing returns to scale) goes without saying. That the policy would turn the world into a provider of raw materials and markets rather than a source of competitors for the most advanced nation is just one of these co-incidences capitalist economics suffers from.

As such, it is not a coincidence that both the classic "free trade" and current neo-liberal position does allow a nation to secure its dominance in the market by forcing the ruling elites in **other** nations to subscribe to rules which hinder their freedom to develop in their own way. As we discuss in section D.5, the rise of neo-liberalism can be viewed as the latest in a long series of imperialist agendas designed to secure benefits of trade to the West as well as reducing the number of rivals on the international market. As Chang notes, Britain's move to free trade after 1846 *"was based on its then unchallenged economic superiority and was intricately linked with its imperial pol-*



the population are managers and assuming another 70/30 split between management and worker income this means that management gets £2100 in total (an average of £210) while workers get £4900 (an average of £57.65). This means that the owners of capital get 6 times the national average income, managers just over twice that amount and workers just over half the average. In other words, a national statistic of 70% labour income hides the reality that workers, who make up 85% of the population, actually get less than half the income (49%). Capital income, although less, is distributed to fewer people and so causes massive inequality (15% of the population get an average income of £340, nearly 6 times more than the average for the remaining 85% while the upper 5% get over 10 times). If the share of management in labour income rises to 35%, then workers wages fall and inequality rises while labour income remains constant at 70% (management's average income rises to £363.33 while workers' falls to £53.53). It should be stressed this example **underestimates** inequality in capitalist economies, particularly ones which had the misfortunate to apply Friedman's ideas.

Looking further a field, this pattern has been repeated everywhere "free(r) market" capitalism has been imposed. In Chile equality and labour's share increased during the 1960s and early 1970s, only for both to plummet under Pinochet's Friedman-inspired neo-liberal regime (see section C.11 for the grim details of *"economic liberty"* there). In Thatcher's Britain, inequality rose while labour share and social mobility fell. Between 1978 and 1990, the share of wages and salaries in household income in the UK fell from 65.8% to 57.4%. The share for capital income (rent, interest and dividends) more than doubled (from 4.9% to 10.0%).Unsurprisingly, this rise *"directly contributed to the increase in overall inequality"* (48% of all investment income went to the richest tenth of households). [John Hill, **Inequality and the State**, p. 88]

Looking at how increases in income and wealth were distributed, we find that gains since 1979 went predominantly to

it used to. Between 1945 and 1980, worker wages did, indeed, track productivity increases. This was also the high period of union density in America. After 1980, that link was broken. By a strange co-incidence, this was the Friedman-inspired Reagan effectively legalised and encouraged union busting. Since then, productivity increases are going almost entirely to the top tenth of the population, while median incomes have stagnated. Without unions and robust worker bargaining power, productivity increases have not been doing much for workers. Not that people like Friedman actually mentioned that rather significant fact.

Then there is the issue of *"human services"* itself. This is **not** the same as labour income at all as it includes, for example, management pay. As we indicated in section C.3, this "labour" income is better thought of as **capital** income as that specific labour is rooted in the control of capital. That this is the case can be seen by the numerous defences of exploding CEO pay by right-wing think tanks, journals and economists as well as the lack of concern about the inflationary nature of such massive "pay" rises (particularly when contrasted to the response over very slight increases in workers' pay). This means that "labour" income could remain constant while CEO salaries explode and worker wages stagnant or even fall, as is the case in both the US (and UK) since 1980. In such circumstances, looking at "human services" becomes misleading as returns to capital are listed as "labour" simply because they are in the form of bosses pay. Equally, CEO perks and bonuses would be included as "labour" non-wage compensation.

To see what this means we must use an example. Take a country with 100 people with a combined income of £10,000. The average income would be £100 each. Taking a labour/capital split of 70/30, we get an income of labour of £7000 and an income to capital of £3000. Assuming that 5% of the population own the capital stock, that is an average income of £600 each while labour gets an average of £73.68. However, 10% of



*icy."* The stated aim was to halt the move to industrialisation in Europe by promoting agricultural markets. Outside of the West, *"most of the rest of the world was forced to practice free trade through colonialism and ... unequal treaties."* These days, this policy is implemented via international organisations which impose Western-dominated rules. As Chang notes, the *"developed countries did not get where they are now through policies and the institutions that they recommend to developing countries today. Most of them actively used 'bad' trade and industrial policies ... practices that these days are frowned upon, if not actively banned, by the WTO."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 16, p. 23, p. 16 and p. 2]

In other words, the developed countries are making it difficult for the developing countries to use policies and institutions which they themselves so successfully used previously. This, as with the "free trade" arguments of the 19th century, is simply a means of controlling economic development in other countries to reduce the number of potential competitors and to secure markets in other countries. In addition, we must also stress that the threat of capital flight within western countries also raises competitive pressures for labour and so has the added benefit of helping tame rebellious workers in the imperialist nations themselves. These factors help explain the continued support for free trade theory in economic circles in spite of the lack of empirical evidence in its favour. But then again, given that most economists cannot understand how one class exploits another by means of exchange within a national market due to its economic power, it would be surprising if they could see it within international markets.

To generalise, it appears that under capitalism there are two main options for a country. Either it submits itself to the dictates of global finance, embracing neo-liberal reforms and seeing its growth fall and inequality rise or (like every other successful industrialiser) it violates the eternal laws of economics by using the state to protect and govern its home market and see growth rise along with inequality. As Chang notes, looking

at the historical record a *"consistent pattern emerges, in which all the catching-up economies use activist industrial, trade and technology (ITT) policies ... to promote economic development."* He stresses *"it was the UK and the USA, the supposed homes of free trade policy, which used tariff protection most aggressively."* The former *"implemented the kinds of ITT policies that became famous for their use in ... Japan, Korea and Taiwan."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 125–6, p. 59 and pp. 60–1] In addition, another aspect of this process involves repressing the working class so that **we** pay the costs for industrialising. Unions were illegal when Britain used its ITT policies while the *"labour market in Taiwan and Korea, for example, has been about as close to a free market as it is possible to get, due in part to government repression of unions."* [*"What can Economics Learn from East Asian Success?"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] Given that unions are anathema to neo-classical and Austrian economics, it is understandable why their repression should be considered relatively unproblematic (in fact, according to economic ideology repressing unions can be considered to be in the interests of the working class as, it is claimed, unions harm non-unionised workers — who knew that bosses and their states were such philanthropists?).

Neither option has much to recommend it from an anarchist perspective. As such, our stating of facts associated with the history of "actually existing" capitalism should not be construed to imply that anarchists support state-run development. Far from it. We are simply noting that the conclusion of history seems to be that countries industrialise and grow faster when the state governs the market in significant ways while, at the same time, repressing the labour movement. This is unsurprising, for as we discuss in section D.1, this process of state intervention is part and parcel of capitalism and, as noted in section F.8, has always been a feature of its rise in the first place (to use Marx's expression, a process of *"primitive accumulation"* has always been required to create capitalism). This does not mean, just to state the obvious, that anarchists support protec-



1950 and 2000 (although this, too, peaked in the 1970s before falling [Krueger, **Op. Cit.**]). However, this "labour" income can be problematic. For example, employer provided health care is considered as non-wage compensation so it is possible for rising health care costs to be reflected in rising labour compensation yet this hardly amounts to a rising labour share as the net gain would be zero. Then there is the question of government employees and welfare benefits which, of course, are considered labour income. Unfortunately, Friedman provides no clue as to which statistics he is referring to, so we do not know whether to include total compensation or not in evaluating his claims.

One group of economists have taken the issue of government transfers into account. Since 1979, there has been an *"increased share of capital income (such as rent, dividends, interest payments, and capital gains) and a corresponding smaller share earned as wages and salaries."* Most families receive little or no capital income, but it is *"a very important source of income to the top 1% and especially the top 0.1% (who receive more than a third of all capital income)."* In 1959, total labour income was 73.5% while capital income was 13.3% of market-based income (personal income less government transfers). By 1979, these were 75.8% and 15.1%, respectively. The increases for both are due to a fall in "proprietor's income" from 13.3% to 9.1%. By 2000, capital income had risen to 19.1% while labour's share had fallen to 71.8% (proprietor's income remained the same). This *"shift away from labour income and toward capital income is unique in the post-war period and is partly responsible for the ongoing growth of inequality since 1979."* [Lawrence Mishel, Jered Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto, **The State of Working America 2006/7**, p. 76 and p. 79]

It should be noted that Friedman repeated the standard economist (and right-wing) argument that a better way to increase wages than unions or struggle is to make workers more productive. That lifts everyone's standard of living. At least

As we showed in section B.7, inequality rose **and** social mobility fell since 1980 in the USA and the UK (social democratic nations have a better record on both). As far as the share of income goes, that too has failed to support his assertions. Even in 1962, the facts did not support his assertion as regards the USA. According to figures from the U.S. Department of Commerce the share of labour in 1929 was 58.2% and this rose to 69.5% by 1959. Even looking at just private employees, this was a rise from 52.5% to 58% (income for government employees, including the military went from 5.7% to 12.2%). In addition, "proprietor's income" (which represents income to the owner of a business which combines work effort and ownership, for example a farmer or some other self-employed worker) fell, with farm income going from 6.8% to 3.0%, while other such income dropped from 10.1% to 8.7%. [Walter S. Measday, *"Labor's Share in the National Income,"* **The Quarterly Review of Economics & Business**, Vol. 2, No. 3, August 1962] Unless Friedman would argue that 1929 America was more statist than 1959, it seems that his assertion was false even when it was first made. How did his comment fare after he made it? Looking at the period after 1959 there was continuing increase in labour share in the national income, peaking in the 1970s before steadily dropping over the following decades (it dropped to below 1948 levels in 1983 and stayed there). [Alan B. Krueger, *"Measuring Labor's Share"*, **The American Economic Review**, vol. 89, No.2, May 1999] Since then the downward trend has continued.

It would be churlish to note that the 1970s saw the rise of influence of Friedman's ideas in both countries and that they were applied in the early 1980s.

There are problems with using labour share. For example it moves with the business cycle (rising in recessions and falling in booms). In addition, there can be other forms of labour compensation as well as wages. Looking at total compensation to labour, this amounts to around 70% of total US income between



tionism against "free trade." In a class system, the former will tend to benefit local capitalists while the latter will benefit foreign ones. Then there is the social context. In a predominantly rural economy, protectionism is a key way to create capitalism. For example, this was the case in 19th century America and it should be noted that the Southern slave states were opposed to protectionism, as where the individualist anarchists. In other words, protectionism was a capitalist measure which pre-capitalists and anti-capitalists opposed as against their interests. Conversely, in a developed capitalist economy "free trade" (usually very selectively applied) can be a useful way to undermine workers wages and working conditions as well as foreign capitalist competitors (it may also change agriculture itself in developing countries, displacing small peasant farmers from the land and promoting capitalist agriculture, i.e. one based on large estates and wage labour).

For the anarchist, while it is true that in the long run option two does raise the standard of living faster than option one, it should always be remembered that we are talking about a **class** system and so the costs and benefits will be determined by those in power, not the general population. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that people in developing countries actually want a Western lifestyle (although the elites who run those countries certainly do, as can be seen from the policies they are imposing). As Bookchin once noted, *"[a]s Westerners, 'we' tend to assume out of hand that 'they' want or need the same kind of technologies and commodities that capitalism produced in America and Europe ... With the removal of imperialism's mailed fist, a new perspective could open for the Third World."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 156–7]

Suffice to say, there are other means to achieve development (assuming that is desired) based on working class control of industry. Given this, the only genuine solution for developing countries would be to get rid of their class systems and create a society where working people take control of their

own fates, i.e. anarchism. Hence we find Proudhon, for example, stating he *"oppose[d] the free traders because they favour interest, while they demand the abolition of tariffs."* He advocated the opposite, supporting free trade *"as a consequence of the abolition of interest"* (i.e. capitalism). Thus the issue of free trade cannot be separated from the kind of society practising it nor from the creation of a free society. Abolishing capitalism in one country, he argued, would lead to other nations reforming themselves, which would *"emancipate their lower classes; in a word, to bring about revolution. Free trade would then become equal exchange."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 235–8] Unless that happens, then no matter whether protectionism or free trade is applied, working class people will suffer its costs and will have to fight for any benefits it may bring.

## C.10.3 Does "free market" capitalism benefit everyone, *especially* working class people?

One defence of capitalism is that, appearances and popular opinion to the contrary, it is benefits working class people **more** than the ruling class.

This argument can be found in right-liberal economist Milton Friedman's defence of capitalism in which he addresses the claim that *"the extension and development of capitalism has meant increased inequality."* Not so, he states. *"Among the Western countries alone,"* he argues, *"inequality appears to be less, in any meaningful sense, the more highly capitalist the country is ... With respect to changes over time, the economic progress achieved in the capitalist countries has been accompanied by a drastic diminution in inequality."* In fact, *"a free society [i.e. capitalism] in fact tends towards greater material equality than any other yet tried."* Thus, according to Friedman, a *"striking fact, contrary to popular conception, is that capitalism leads to less inequality than alternative systems of organisation and that the development of capitalism has greatly lessened the extent of inequality. Comparisons over space and time alike confirm this."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 168, pp. 169–70, p. 195 and p. 169]



Friedman makes other claims to the superiority of capitalism. Thus he states that not only do non-capitalist societies *"tend to have wider inequality than capitalist, even as measured by annual income"* in such systems inequality *"tends to be permanent, whereas capitalism undermines status and introduces social mobility."* Like most right-wingers, he stresses the importance of social mobility and argues that a society with little change in position *"would be the more unequal society."* Finally, he states that *"[o]ne of the most striking facts which run counter to people's expectations has to do with the source of income. The more capitalistic a country is, the smaller the fraction of income for the use of what is generally regarded as capital, and the larger the fraction paid for human services."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–2, p. 171 and pp. 168–9]

Friedman, as he regularly did, failed to present any evidence to support his claims or any of his *"striking fact[s]"* so it is hard to evaluate the truthfulness of any of this specific assertions. One possible way of doing so would be to consider the actual performance of specific countries before and after 1980. That year is significant as this marked the assumption of office of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US, both of whom were heavily influenced by Friedman and other supporters of "free market" capitalism. If his claims were true, then we would expect **decreases** in equality, social mobility and the share of *"human services"* before 1980 (the period of social Keynesian policies) and **increases** in all three after. Sadly for Friedman (and us!), the facts are counter to his assertions — equality, mobility and share of income for *"human services"* all decreased post-1980.

> *employed … At the very least, he need not be so desperate to find another job as his counterpart in the 1930's. He can afford to be choosy and to wait until he is either recalled or a more attractive job turns up."* [quoted by Elton Rayack, **Not so Free to Choose**, p. 130]

Which, ironically, contradicts Friedman's own claims as regards the welfare state. In an attempt to show that being unemployed is not as bad as people believe Friedman *"glaringly contradicts two of his main theses, (1) that the worker is free to choose and (2) that no government social programs have achieved the results promised by its proponents."* As Rayack notes, by *"admitting the existence of involuntary unemployment, Friedman is, in essence, denying that … the market protects the worker's freedom to choose… In addition, since those social programs have made it possible for the worker to be 'choosy; in seeking employment, to that extent the welfare state has increased his freedom."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 130] But, of course, the likes of von Mises will dismiss Friedman as a "socialist" and no further thought is required.

That governments started to pay out unemployment benefit is not surprising, given that mass unemployment can produce mass discontent. This caused the state to start paying out a dole in order eliminate the possibility of crime as well as working class self-help, which could conceivably have undermined the status quo. The elite was well aware of the danger in workers organising for their own benefit and tried to counter-act it. What the likes of von Mises forget is that the state has to consider the long term viability of the system rather than the ideologically correct position produced by logically deducting abstract principles.

Sadly, in pursuing of ideologically correct answers, capitalist apologists often ignore common sense. If one believes people exist for the economy and not the economy for people, one



*market."* [**Economic Freedom, Human Freedom, Political Freedom**] As to be expected with Friedman, the actual experience of implementing his dogmas refuted both them and his assertions on capitalism. Moreover, working class paid the price.

The advent of the "free market" led to reduced barriers to imports *"on the ground the quotas and tariffs protected inefficient industries and kept prices artificially high. The result was that many local firms lost out to multinational corporations. The Chilean business community, which strongly supported the coup in 1973, was badly affected."* [Skidmore and Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 138] The decline of domestic industry cost thousands of better-paying jobs. Looking at the textile sector, firms survived because of *"lowered labour costs and increased productivity."* The sector has *"low real wages, which dramatically altered"* its international competitiveness. In other words, the Chilean textile industry *"had restructured itself on the back of its workers."* [Peter Winn, *"No Miracle for Us"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] The mines were *"enormously profitable after 1973 because of increased labour discipline, the reduction in costs due to the contraction of real wages, and an increase in production based on expansion programs initiated during the late 1960s."* [Thomas Miller Klubock, *"Class, Community, and Neoliberalism in Chile"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 241] This was the **real** basis of the 1976 to 1981 "economic miracle" Friedman praised in 1982.

As with most neo-liberal experiments, the post-1975 "miracle" was built on sand. It was *"a speculative bubble that was hailed as an 'economic miracle' until it burst in the 1981–82 bank crash that brought the deregulated Chilean economy down in its wake."* It was *"largely short-term speculative capital … producing a bubble in stock market and real estate values"* and *"by 1982 the economy was in shambles and Chile in the throes of its worse economic crisis since the depression of the 1930s. A year later, massive social protests defied Pinochet's security forces."* [Winn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 38] Thus *"the bottom fell out of the economy"* and

Chile's GDP fell 14% in one year. In the textile industry alone, an estimated 35 to 45% of companies failed. [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]

So after 7 years of free(r) market capitalism, Chile faced yet another economic crisis which, in terms of unemployment and falling GDP was even greater than that experienced during the terrible shock treatment of 1975. Real wages dropped sharply, falling in 1983 to 14% below what they had been in 1970. Bankruptcies skyrocketed, as did foreign debt and unemployment. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69] Chile's GNP *"fell by more than 15 percent, while its real disposable GNP declined by 19 percent. The industrial sector contracted by more than 21 percent and construction by more than 23 percent. Bankruptcies tripled ... It was a crisis comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which affected Chile more severely than any other country in the world."* The same can be said of this crisis, for while GNP in Chile feel 14% during 1982–3, the rest of Latin America experienced 3.5% drop as whole. [Winn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 41 and p. 66] By 1983, the Chilean economy was devastated and it was only by the end of 1986 that Gross Domestic Product per capita (barely) equalled that of 1970. Unemployment (including those on government make-work programmes) had risen to a third of the labour force by mid-1983. By 1986, per capita consumption was actually 11% lower than the 1970 level. [Skidmore and Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 138]

Faced with this massive economic collapse (a collapse that somehow slipped Friedman's mind when he was evaluating the Chilean experiment in 1991), the regime organised a massive bailout. The "Chicago Boys" resisted this measure, arguing with dogmatic arrogance that there was no need for government intervention or policy changes because they believed in the self-correcting mechanisms of the market would resolve any economic problem. However, they were applying a simplistic textbook version of the economy to a complex reality which was spectacularly different from their assumptions. When that



*nomic liberalism, in the sense of free trade, a competitive labour market and the Gold Standard, did not last more than 40 years, and by the 1870s and 1880s, protectionist legislation was back ... It was also significant... [that all major capitalist powers] passed through a period of free trade and laissez-faire, followed by a period of anti-liberal legislation."* [*"The Nation-state and the Market"*, pp. 37–80, **Society and Nature**, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 48]

For example, the reason for the return of protectionist legislation was the Depression of 1873–86, which marked the end of the first experiment with pure economic liberalism. Paradoxically, then, the attempt to liberalise the markets led to more regulation. In light of our previous analysis, this is not surprising. Neither the owners of the country nor the politicians desired to see society destroyed, the result to which unhindered laissez-faire leads. Apologists of capitalism overlook the fact that *"[a]t the beginning of the Depression, Europe had been in the heyday of free trade."* [Polanyi, **Op. Cit.**, p. 216] State intervention came about in response to the social disruptions resulting from laissez-faire. It did not cause them.

Similarly, it is a fallacy to state, as Ludwig von Mises did, that *"as long as unemployment benefit is paid, unemployment must exist."* [quoted by Polanyi, **Op. Cit.**, p. 283] This statement is not only ahistoric but ignores the existence of the **involuntary** unemployment (the purer capitalism of the nineteenth century regularly experienced periods of economic crisis and mass unemployment). Even such a die-hard exponent of the minimal state as Milton Friedman recognised involuntary unemployment existed:

> *"The growth of government transfer payments in the form of unemployment insurance, food stamps, welfare, social security, and so on, has reduced drastically the suffering associated with involuntary unemployment... most laid-off workers ... may enjoy nearly as high an income when unemployed as when*

> *ment further weakens the market. This does not alter the fact that powerful underlying forces — not power hungry bureaucrats or frustrated intellectuals — are determining the main drift."* [Edward Herman, **Corporate Control, Corporate Power**, pp. 300–1]

In other words, state intervention is the result of the problems caused by capitalism rather than their cause. To say otherwise is like arguing that murder is the result of passing laws against it.

As Polanyi explains, the neo-liberal premise is false, because state intervention always *"dealt with some problem arising out of modern industrial conditions or, at any rate, in the market method of dealing with them."* In fact, most of these "collectivist" measures were carried out by *"convinced supporters of laissez-faire ... [and who] were as a rule uncompromising opponents of [state] socialism or any other form of collectivism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 146] Sometimes such measures were introduced to undermine support for socialist ideas caused by the excesses of "free market" capitalism but usually there were introduced due to a pressing social need or problem which capitalism created but could not meet or solve. This means that key to understanding state intervention, therefore, is to recognise that politics is a **not** matter of free will on behalf of politicians or the electorate. Rather they are the outcome of the development of capitalism itself and result from social, economic or environmental pressures which the state has to acknowledge and act upon as they were harming the viability of the system as a whole.

Thus state intervention did not spring out of thin air, but occurred in response to pressing social and economic needs. This can be observed in the mid 19th century, which saw the closest approximation to laissez-faire in the history of capitalism. As Takis Fotopoulos argues, *"the attempt to establish pure eco-*



reality refused to respond in the way predicted by their ideological musing, the state stepped in simply because the situation had become so critical it could not avoid it.

The regime did do some things to help the unemployed, with 14% of the labour force enrolled in two government make-work programs that paid less than the minimum wage by October 1983. However, aid for the capitalist class was far more substantial. The IMF offered loans to Chile to help it out of mess its economic policies had helped create, but under strict conditions (such as making the Chilean public responsible for paying the billions in foreign loans contracted by **private** banks and firms). The total bailout cost 3% of Chile's GNP for three years, a cost which was passed on to the population (this *"socialisation of private debts were both striking and unequal"*). This follows the usual pattern of "free market" capitalism — market discipline for the working class, state aid for the elite. During the "miracle," the economic gains had been privatised; during the crash the burden for repayment was socialised. In fact, the regime's intervention into the economy was so extensive that, *"[w]ith understandable irony, critics lampooned the 'Chicago road to socialism.'"* [Winn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66 and p. 40]

Significantly, of the 19 banks that the government had privatised, all but five failed. These along with the other bankrupt firms fell back into government hands, a fact the regime sought to downplay by failing to classify them as public companies. Once the debts had been *"assumed by the public,"* their *"assets were sold to private interests."* Significantly, the *"one bank that had not been privatised and the other publicly owned companies survived the crisis in relatively good shape"* and almost all of them were *"turning a profit, generating for the government in profits and taxes 25 percent of its total revenues ... Thus the public companies that had escaped the Chicago Boy's privatisations ... enabled a financially strapped government to resuscitate the*

*failed private banks and companies."* [Collins and Lear, **Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look**, pp. 51–2]

Needless to say, the recovery (like the illusionary boom) was paid for by the working class. The 1982 crash meant that *"something had to give, and the Chicago Boys decided that it would be wages. Wages, they explained, should be allowed to find their natural level."* An 1982 decree *"transferred much of the burden of recovery and profitability to workers and became central to Chile's economic recovery throughout the rest of the decade."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 19] For the miners, between late 1973 and May 1983, real average wages dropped by 32.6% and workers' benefits were reduced (for example, the free medical attention and health care that had been won in the 1920s were dropped). [Thomas Miller Klubock, *"Class, Community, and Neoliberalism in Chile,"* Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 217] As Peter Winn summarises:

> *"Chile's workers, who had paid the social costs of the illusory neoliberal 'miracle,' now paid as well the highest price for the errors of their nation's military rulers and Chicago Boy technocrats and the imprudence of their country's capitalists. Plant closing and layoffs drove the effective unemployment rate above 30 percent, while real wages for those lucky enough to retain their jobs fell by nearly 11 percent in 1979–82 and by some 20 percent during the 1980s. In addition, inflation jumped to over 20 percent in both 1982 and 1983, and the budget surplus gave way to a deficit equal to 3 percent of the GNP by 1983. By then, Chile's foreign debt was 13 percent higher than its GNP ... Chile's economy contracted 400 percent more in 1982–83 than the rest of Latin America."* [*"The Pinochet Era"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, pp. 41–2]

Unsurprisingly, for the capitalist class things were somewhat different. Private banks *"were bailed out by the govern-*



yond that required to defend private property, but these unsurprisingly have little influence beyond appropriation of some rhetoric and arguments by those seeking to bolster the ruling elite). So most of the right attack the social or regulatory activities of the government, but fail to attack those bureaucratic activities (like defence, protection of property) which they agree with. As such, their arguments are so selective as to be little more than self-serving special pleading. Secondly, it does appear that their concern for social problems is limited simply to their utility for attacking those aspects of state intervention which claim to help those most harmed by the current system. They usually show greater compassion for the welfare of the elite and industry than for the working class. For former, they are in favour of state aid, for the latter the benefits of economic growth is all that counts.

So what to make of claims that it is precisely the state's interference with the market which causes the problems that society blames on the market? For anarchists, such a position is illogical, for *"whoever says regulation says limitation: now, how conceive of limiting privilege before it existed?"* It *"would be an effect without a cause"* and so *"regulation was a corrective to privilege"* and not vice versa. *"In logic as well as in history, everything is appropriated and monopolised when laws and regulations arrive."* [Proudhon, **System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 371] As economist Edward Herman notes:

> *"The growth of government has closely followed perceived failings of the private market system, especially in terms of market instability, income insecurity, and the proliferation of negative externalities. Some of these deficiencies of the market can be attributed to its very success, which have generated more threatening externalities and created demands for things the market is not well suited to provide. It may also be true that the growth of the govern-*

to create and protect capitalism and industry in the first place (see section F.8 for details).

In short, although laissez-faire may be the ideological basis of capitalism — the religion that justifies the system — it has rarely if ever been actually practised. So, while the ideologues are praising "free enterprise" as the fountainhead of modern prosperity, the corporations and companies are gorging at the table of the State. As such, it would be wrong to suggest that anarchists are somehow "in favour" of state intervention. This is not true. We are "in favour" of reality, not ideology. The reality of capitalism is that it needs state intervention to be created and needs state intervention to continue (both to secure the exploitation of labour and to protect society from the effects of the market system). That we have no truck with the myths of "free market" economics does not mean we "support" state intervention beyond recognising it as a fact of a system we want to end and that some forms of state intervention are better than others.

## D.1.1 Does state intervention cause the problems to begin with?

It depends. In the case of state intervention on behalf of the ruling class, the answer is always yes! However, in terms of social intervention the answer is usually no.

However, for classical liberals (or, as we would call them today, neo-liberals, right-wing "libertarians" or "conservatives"), state intervention is the root of all evil. It is difficult for anarchists to take such argument that seriously. Firstly, it is easily concluded from their arguments that they are only opposed to state intervention on behalf of the working class (i.e. the welfare state or legal support for trade unionism). They either ignore or downplay state intervention on behalf of the ruling class (a few **do** consistently oppose all state intervention be-



*ment, which spent $6 billion in subsidies during 1983–85 (equal to 30 percent of the GNP!) but were made subject to strict government regulation designed to assure their solvency. Controls were also placed on flows of foreign capital."* [Winn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] The government also raised tariffs from 10% to between 20 and 35% and the peso was drastically devalued. [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15] Pinochet's state took a more active role in promoting economic activity. For example, it developed new export industries which *"benefited from a series of subsidies, privatisations, and deregulations that allowed for unrestricted exploitation of natural resources of limited renewability. Equally important were low wages, great flexibility of employers vis-à-vis workers, and high levels of unemployment."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 20] The forestry sector was marked by government hand-outs to the already rich. Joseph Collins and John Lear argue that the neoliberals' *"stated goals were to curtail sharply the direct role of government in forestry and to let market mechanisms determine the prices and direct the use of resources. Yet government intervention and subsidies were in fact central to reorienting the benefits of forestry production away from the rural population towards a handful of national and foreign companies."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 205]

By 1986, the economy had stabilised and the crisis was over. However, the recovery was paid for by the working class as *"wages stayed low"* even as the economy began to recover. Low wages were key to the celebrated 'miracle' recovery. From 1984 to 1989 the gross national product grew an average of 6 percent annually. By 1987 Chile had recovered the production levels of 1981, and by 1989 production levels exceeded 1981 levels by 10 percent. The average wage, by contrast, was 5 percent lower at the end of the decade than it had been in 1981 — almost 10 percent lower than the average 1970 wage. The drop in the minimum wage *"was even more drastic."* Public unrest during the economic crisis made it politically difficult to eliminate, so it *"was allowed to erode steadily in the face of inflation.*

*By 1988, it was 40 percent lower in real terms than it had been in 1981 ... In that year 32 percent of the workers in Santiago earned the minimum wage or less."* Thus, *"recovery and expansion after 1985 depended on two ingredients that are unsustainable over the long term and in a democratic society,"* namely *"an intensified exploitation of the labour force"* and *"the unregulated exploitation of nonrenewable natural resources such as native forests and fishing areas, which amounted to a one-time subsidy to domestic conglomerates and multinationals."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83, p. 84 and p. 35]

In summary, *"the experiment has been an economic disaster."* [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 72]

## C.11.1 Who benefited from Chile's "economic miracle"?

Given that Chile was hardly an "economic miracle," the question arises why it was termed so by people like Friedman. To answer that question, we need to ask who actually benefited from the neo-liberalism Pinochet imposed. To do this we need to recognise that capitalism is a class system and these classes have different interests. We would expect any policies which benefit the ruling elite to be classed as an "economic miracle" regardless of how adversely they affect the general population (and vice versa). In the case of Chile, this is precisely what happened.

Rather than benefit everyone, neo-liberalism harmed the majority. Overall, by far the hardest group hit was the working class, particularly the urban working class. By 1976, the third year of Junta rule, real wages had fallen to 35% below their 1970 level. It was only by 1981 that they has risen to 97.3% of the 1970 level, only to fall again to 86.7% by 1983. Unemployment, excluding those on state make-work programmes, was 14.8% in 1976, falling to 11.8% by 1980 (this is still double the



As such, Marx was wrong to state it was *"otherwise during the historical genesis of capitalist production."* It is not only the *"rising bourgeoisie"* which *"needs the power of the state"* nor is it just *"an essential aspect of so-called primitive accumulation."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, pp. 899–900]

The enthusiasm for the "free market" since the 1970s is in fact the product of the extended boom, which in turn was a product of a state co-ordinated war economy and highly interventionist Keynesian economics (a boom that the apologists of capitalism use, ironically, as "evidence" that "capitalism" works) plus an unhealthy dose of nostalgia for a past that never existed. It's strange how a system that has never existed has produced so much! When the Keynesian system went into crisis, the ideologues of "free market" capitalism seized their chance and found many in the ruling class willing to utilise their rhetoric to reduce or end those aspects of state intervention which benefited the many or inconvenienced themselves. However, state intervention, while reduced, did not end. It simply became more focused in the interests of the elite (i.e. the natural order). As Chomsky stresses, the "minimal state" rhetoric of the capitalists is a lie, for they will *"never get rid of the state because they need it for their own purposes, but they love to use this as an ideological weapon against everyone else."* They are *"not going to survive without a massive state subsidy, so they want a powerful state."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 215]

And neither should it be forgotten that state intervention was required to create the "free" market in the first place. To quote Polanyi again, *"[f]or as long as [the market] system is not established, economic liberals must and will unhesitatingly call for the intervention of the state in order to establish it, and once established, in order to maintain it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 149] Protectionism and subsidy (mercantilism) — along with the liberal use of state violence against the working class — was required

deed, as Noam Chomsky argues, *"[w]hat is called 'capitalism' is basically a system of corporate mercantilism, with huge and largely unaccountable private tyrannies exercising vast control over the economy, political systems, and social and cultural life, operating in close co-operation with powerful states that intervene massively in the domestic economy and international society. That is dramatically true of the United States, contrary to much illusion. The rich and privileged are no more willing to face market discipline than they have been in the past, though they consider it just fine for the general population."* [**Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 784] As Kropotkin put it:

> *"What, then is the use of taking, with Marx, about the 'primitive accumulation' — as if this 'push' given to capitalists were a thing of the past? ... In short, nowhere has the system of 'non-intervention of the State' ever existed ... Nowhere, since States have grown up, have the masses had the freedom of resisting the oppression by capitalists. The few rights they have now they have gained only by determination and endless sacrifice.*
>
> *"To speak therefore of 'non-intervention of the State' may be all right for middle-class economists, who try to persuade the workers that their misery is 'a law of Nature.' But — how can Socialists use such language?"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 97–8]

In other words, while Marx was right to note that the *"silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker"* he was wrong to state that *"[d]irect extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases."* The ruling class rarely lives up to its own rhetoric and while *"rely[ing] on his [the workers'] dependence on capital"* it always supplements that with state intervention.



average 1960s level) only to rise to 20.3% by 1982. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] Between 1980 and 1988, the real value of wages grew only 1.2 percent while the real value of the minimum wage declined by 28.5 percent. During this period, urban unemployment averaged 15.3 percent per year. [Silvia Borzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 96] Even by 1989 the unemployment rate was still at 10% (the rate in 1970 was 5.7%) and the real wage was still 8% lower than in 1970. Between 1975 and 1989, unemployment averaged 16.7%. In other words, after nearly 15 years of free market capitalism, real wages had still not exceeded their 1970 levels and unemployment was still higher. As would be expected in such circumstances the share of wages in national income fell from 42.7% in 1970 to 33.9% in 1993. Given that high unemployment is often attributed by the right to strong unions and other labour market "imperfections," these figures are doubly significant as the Chilean regime, as noted above, reformed the labour market to improve its "competitiveness."

After 1982, *"stagnant wages and the unequal distribution of income severely curtailed buying power for most Chileans, who would not recover 1970 consumption levels until 1989."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25] By 1988, *"the average real wage had returned to 1980 levels, but it was still well below 1970 levels. Moreover, in 1986, some 37 percent of the labour force worked in the informal sector, where wages were lower and benefits often nonexistent. Many worked for minimum wage which in 1988 provided only half of what an average family required to live decently — and a fifth of the workers didn't even earn that. A survey . .. concluded that nearly half of Chileans lived in poverty."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 48] This was far more in absolute and relative terms than at any time in the in the preceding three decades. [Collins and Lear, *"Working in Chile's Free Market"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

Per capita consumption fell by 23% from 1972–87. The proportion of the population below the poverty line (the minimum income required for basic food and housing) increased from

20% to 44.4% between 1970 and 1987. Per capita health care spending was more than halved from 1973 to 1985, setting off explosive growth in poverty-related diseases such as typhoid, diabetes and viral hepatitis. On the other hand, while consumption for the poorest 20% of the population of Santiago dropped by 30%, it rose by 15% for the richest 20%. [Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, pp. 190–191] The percentage of Chileans without adequate housing increased from 27 to 40 percent between 1972 and 1988, despite the claims of the government that it would solve homelessness via market friendly policies.

So after two decades of neoliberalism, the Chilean worker can look forward to *"a job that offers little stability and low wages, usually a temporary one or one in the informal economy ... Much of the growth in jobs after the 1982–1983 crash came in economic sectors characterised by seasonal employment ... [and are] notorious for their low pay, long hours, and high turnover."* In 1989, over 30% of jobs were in the formal sector in the Santiago metropolitan area with incomes less than half the average of those in the formal sector. For those with jobs, *"the work pace intensified and the work day lengthened ... Many Chileans worked far longer than the legal maximum work week of 48 hours without being paid for the extra hours. Even free-market celebrants ... admit that extra unpaid hours remain a serious problem"* in 1989. In fact, it is *"commonly assumed that employees work overtime without pay or else"* and, unsurprisingly, the *"pattern resembles the European production systems of the mid-19$^{th}$ century."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22 pp. 22–3, p. 23, p. 24 and p. 25] Unsurprisingly, as in neo-liberal America, wages have become divorced from productivity growth. Even in the 1990s, *"there is evidence that productivity growth outpaced real wage growth by as much as a ratio 3:1 in 1993 and 5:1 in 1997."* [Volker Frank, *"Politics without Policy"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73]

Similar comments are possible in regards to the privatised pension system, regarded by many right-wingers as a success and a model for other countries. However, on closer inspection



the class interests of the ruling elite; and (5) the need to impose its authoritarian social relationships upon an unwilling population in the first place. Thus the contradictions of capitalism necessitate government intervention. The more the economy grows, the greater become the contradictions and the greater the contradictions, the greater the need for state intervention. The development of capitalism as a system provides amble empirical support for this theoretical assessment.

Part of the problem is that the assumption that "pure" capitalism does not need the state is shared by both Marxists and supporters of capitalism. *"So long as capital is still weak,"* Marx wrote, "it supports itself by leaning on the crutches of past, or disappearing, modes of production. As soon as it begins to feel itself strong, it throws away these crutches and moves about in accordance with its own laws of motion. But as soon as it begins to feel itself as a hindrance to further development and is recognised as such, it adapts forms of behaviour through the harnessing of competition which seemingly indicate its absolute rule but actually point to its decay and dissolution." [quoted by Paul Mattick, **Marx and Keynes**, p. 96] Council Communist Paul Mattick comments that a *"healthy"* capitalism *"is a strictly competitive capitalism, and the imperfections of competition in the early and late stages of its development must be regarded as the ailments of an infantile and of a senile capitalism. For a capitalism which restricts competition cannot find its indirect 'regulation' in the price and market movements which derive from the value relations in the production process."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 97]

However, this gives capitalism far too much credit — as well as ignoring how far the reality of that system is from the theory. State intervention has always been a constant aspect of economic life under capitalism. Its limited attempts at laissez-faire have always been failures, resulting in a return to its statist roots. The process of selective laissez-faire and collectivism has been as much a feature of capitalism in the past as it is now. In-

*constructing a legal basis for private corporate power, and in numerous other ways providing an escape from the stranglehold of comparative advantage."* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 114] State intervention is as natural to capitalism as wage labour.

In the case of Britain and a host of other countries (and more recently in the cases of Japan and the Newly Industrialising Countries of the Far East, like Korea) state intervention was the key to development and success in the "free market." (see, for example, Robert Wade's **Governing the Market**). In other "developing" countries which have had the misfortune to be subjected to "free-market reforms" (e.g. neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programs) rather than following the interventionist Japanese and Korean models, the results have been devastating for the vast majority, with drastic increases in poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, etc. (for the elite, the results are somewhat different of course). In the nineteenth century, states only turned to laissez-faire once they could benefit from it and had a strong enough economy to survive it: *"Only in the mid-nineteenth century, when it had become powerful enough to overcome any competition, did England [sic!] embrace free trade."* [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Before this, protectionism and other methods were used to nurture economic development. And once laissez-faire started to undermine a country's economy, it was quickly revoked. For example, protectionism is often used to protect a fragile economy and militarism has always been a favourite way for the ruling elite to help the economy, as is still the case, for example, in the "Pentagon System" in the USA (see section D.8).

Therefore, contrary to conventional wisdom, state intervention will always be associated with capitalism due to: (1) its authoritarian nature; (2) its inability to prevent the anti-social results of the competitive market; (3) its fallacious assumption that society should be *"an accessory to the economic system"*; (4)



this system shows its weaknesses — indeed, it can be argued that the system is only a success for those companies making extensive profits from it (administration costs of the Chilean system are almost 30% of revenues, compared to 1% for the U.S. Social Security system [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 305]). For working people, it is a disaster. According to SAFP, the government agency which regulates the system, 96% of the known workforce were enrolled in February 1995, but 43.4% of these were not adding to their funds. Perhaps as many as 60% do not contribute regularly (given the nature of the labour market, this is unsurprising). Unfortunately, regular contributions are required to receive full benefits. Critics argue that only 20% of contributors will actually receive good pensions.

Workers need to find money for health care as their *"remuneration has been reduced to the wage, ending most benefits that workers had gained over the years [before the coup]. Moreover, the privatisation of such social services as health care and retirement security ... [has meant] the costs were now taken entirely from employee earnings."* Unsurprisingly, *"[l]onger work days and a stepped-up pace of work increased the likelihood of accidents and illness. From 1982 to 1985 the number of reported workplace accident almost doubled. Public health experts estimate, however, that over three-quarters of workplace accidents went unreported, in part because over half of the workforce is without any kind of accident insurance."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 25]

It is interesting to note that when this programme was introduced, the armed forces and police were allowed to keep their own generous public plans. If the plans **were** are as good as their supporters claim, you would think that those introducing them would have joined them. Obviously what was good enough for the masses were not suitable for the rulers and the holders of the guns they depended upon. Given the subsequent fate of that scheme, it is understandable that the ruling elite and its minions did not want middle-men to make money off

their savings and did not trust their pensions to the fluctuations of the stock market. Their subjects, however, were less lucky. All in all, Chile's privatised social security system *"transferred worker savings in the form of social security contributions from the public to the private sector, making them available to the country's economic groups for investment. Given the oligopic concentration of wealth and corporate control under Pinochet, this meant handing the forced savings of workers over to Chile's most powerful capitalists."* That is, *"to shore up capital markets through its transfer of worker savings to Chile's business elites."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 64 and p. 31]

The same applies to the health system, with the armed forces and national police and their dependants having their own public health care system. This means that they avoid the privatised health system which the wealthy use and the run-down public system which the majority have access to. The market ensures that for most people, *"the actual determining factor is not 'choice,' but one's ability to pay."* By 1990, only 15% of Chileans were in the private system (of these, nearly 75% are form the top 30% of the population by income). This means that there are three medical systems in Chile. The well-funded public one for armed forces and police, a good to excellent private system for the elite few and a *"grossly under-funded, rundown, over-burdened"* one *"for some 70% of Chileans."* Most *"pay more and receive less."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99 and p. 246]

The impact on individuals extended beyond purely financial considerations, with the Chilean labour force *"once accustomed to secure, unionised jobs [before Pinochet] ... [being turned] into a nation of anxious individualists ... [with] over half of all visits to Chile's public health system involv[ing] psychological ailments, mainly depression. 'The repression isn't physical any more, it's economic — feeding your family, educating your child,' says Maria Pena, who works in a fishmeal factory in Concepcion. 'I feel real anxiety about the future', she adds, 'They can chuck us*



Therefore state intervention occurs as a form of protection against the workings of the market. As capitalism is based on atomising society in the name of "freedom" on the competitive market, it is hardly surprising that defence against the anti-social workings of the market should take statist forms — there being few other structures capable of providing such defence (as such social institutions have been undermined, if not crushed, by the rise of capitalism in the first place). Thus, ironically, "individualism" produces a "collectivist" tendency within society as capitalism destroys communal forms of social organisation in favour of ones based on abstract individualism, authority, and hierarchy — all qualities embodied in the state, the sole remaining agent of collective action in the capitalist worldview. Strangely, conservatives and other right-wingers fail to see this, instead spouting on about "traditional values" while, at the same time, glorifying the "free market." This is one of the (many) ironic aspects of free market dogma, namely that it is often supported by people who are at the forefront of attacking the **effects** of it. Thus we see conservatives bemoaning the breakdown of traditional values while, at the same time, advocating the economic system whose operation weakens family life, breaks up communities, undermines social bonds and places individual gain above all else, particularly "traditional values" and "community." They seem blissfully unaware that capitalism destroys the traditions they claim to support and recognises only monetary values.

In addition to social protection, state intervention is required to protect a country's economy (and so the economic interests of the ruling class). As Noam Chomsky points out, even the USA, home of "free enterprise," was marked by *"large-scale intervention in the economy after independence, and conquest of resources and markets... [while] a centralised developmental state [was constructed] committed to [the] creation and entrenchment of domestic manufacture and commerce, subsidising local production and barring cheaper British imports,*

*countries at a definite stage of their industrial development, pointing to the depth and independence of the underlying causes of the process."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 71, pp. 41–42 and pp. 149–150]

To expect that a community would remain indifferent to the scourge of unemployment, dangerous working conditions, 16-hour working days, the shifting of industries and occupations, and the moral and psychological disruption accompanying them — merely because economic effects, in the long run, might be better — is an absurdity. Similarly, for workers to remain indifferent to, for example, poor working conditions, peacefully waiting for a new boss to offer them better conditions, or for citizens to wait passively for capitalists to start voluntarily acting responsibly toward the environment, is to assume a servile and apathetic role for humanity. Luckily, labour refuses to be a commodity and citizens refuse to stand idly by while the planet's ecosystems are destroyed.

In other words, the state and many of its various policies are not imposed from outside of the capitalist system. It is not some alien body but rather has evolved in response to clear failings within capitalism itself (either from the perspective of the ruling elite or from the general population). It contrast, as the likes of von Hayek did, to the "spontaneous" order of the market versus a "designed" order associated with state fails to understand that the latter can come about in response to the former. In other words, as Polanyi noted, state intervention can be a *"spontaneous reaction"* and so be a product of social evolution itself. While the notion of a spontaneous order may be useful to attack undesired forms of state intervention (usually social welfare, in the case of von Hayek), it fails to note this process at work nor the fact that the state itself played a key role in the creation of capitalism in the first place as well as specifying the rules for the operation and so evolution of the market itself.



*out at any time. You can't think five years ahead. If you've got money you can get an education and health care; money is everything here now.'"* Little wonder, then, that *"adjustment has created an atomised society, where increased stress and individualism have damaged its traditionally strong and caring community life… suicides have increased threefold between 1970 and 1991 and the number of alcoholics has quadrupled in the last 30 years … [and] family breakdowns are increasing, while opinion polls show the current crime wave to be the most widely condemned aspect of life in the new Chile. 'Relationships are changing,' says Betty Bizamar, a 26-year-old trade union leader. 'People use each other, spend less time with their family. All they talk about is money, things. True friendship is difficult now.'"* [Duncan Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 96 and p. 166]

The experiment with free market capitalism also had serious impacts for Chile's environment. The capital city of Santiago became one of the most polluted cities in the world due the free reign of market forces. With no environmental regulation there is general environmental ruin and water supplies have severe pollution problems. [Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 190] With the bulk of the country's experts being based on the extraction and low processing of natural resources, eco-systems and the environment have been plundered in the name of profit and property. The depletion of natural resources, particularly in forestry and fishing, is accelerating due to the self-interested behaviour of a few large firms looking for short term profit.

So, in summary, Chile's workers *"were central target's of [Pinochet's] political repression and suffered greatly from his state terror. They also paid a disproportionate share of the costs of his regime's regressive social policies. Workers and their organisations were also the primary targets of Pinochet's labour laws and among the biggest losers from his policies of privatisation and deindustrialisation."* [Winn, *"Introduction"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10]

Given that the majority of Chile's people where harmed by the economic policies of the regime, how can it be termed a "miracle"? The answer can be found in another consequence of Pinochet's neo-classical monetarist policies, namely *"a contraction of demand, since workers and their families could afford to purchase fewer goods. The reduction in the market further threatened the business community, which started producing more goods for export and less for local consumption. This posed yet another obstacle to economic growth and led to increased concentration of income and wealth in the hands of a small elite."* [Skidmore and Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 138]

It is the increased wealth of the elite that we see the true "miracle" of Chile. When the leader of the Christian Democratic Party returned from exile in 1989 he said that economic growth that benefited the top 10% of the population had been achieved (Pinochet's official institutions agreed). [Noam Chomsky, **Deterring Democracy**, p. 231] This is more than confirmed by other sources. According to one expert in the Latin American neo-liberal revolutions, the elite *"had become massively wealthy under Pinochet."* [Duncan Green, **The Silent Revolution**, p. 216] In 1980, the richest 10% of the population took 36.5% of the national income. By 1989, this had risen to 46.8%. By contrast, the bottom 50% of income earners saw their share fall from 20.4% to 16.8% over the same period. Household consumption followed the same pattern. In 1970, the top 20% of households had 44.5% of consumption. This rose to 51% in 1980 and to 54.6% in 1989. Between 1970 and 1989, the share going to the other 80% fell. The poorest 20% of households saw their share fall from 7.6% in 1970 to 4.4% in 1989. The next 20% saw their share fall from 11.8% to 8.2%, and middle 20% share fell from 15.6% to 12.7%. The next 20% saw their share of consumption fall from 20.5% to 20.1%. In other words, *"at least 60 percent of the population was relatively, if not absolutely, worse off."* [James Petras and Fernando Ignacio Leiva, **Democracy and Poverty in Chile**, p. 39 and p. 34]



So while many ideologues of capitalism thunder against state intervention (for the benefit of the masses), the fact is that capitalism itself produces the need for such intervention. The abstractly individualistic theory on which capitalism is based ("everyone for themselves") results in a high degree of statism since the economic system itself contains no means to combat its own socially destructive workings. The state must also intervene in the economy, not only to protect the interests of the ruling class but also to protect society from the atomising and destructive impact of capitalism. Moreover, capitalism has an inherent tendency toward periodic recessions or depressions, and the attempt to prevent them has become part of the state's function. However, since preventing them is impossible (they are built into the system — see section C.7), in practice the state can only try to postpone them and ameliorate their severity. Let's begin with the need for social intervention.

Capitalism is based on turning both labour and land into commodities. As socialist Karl Polanyi points out, however, *"labour and land are no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists; to include labour and land in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market."* And this means that *"human society has become an accessory to the economic system,"* with humanity placing itself fully in the hands of supply and demand. But such a situation *"could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness."* This, inevitably, provokes a reaction in order to defend the basis of society and the environment that capitalism needs, but ruthlessly exploits. As Polanyi summarises, *"the countermove against economic liberalism and laissez-faire possessed all the unmistakable characteristics of a spontaneous reaction ... [A] closely similar change from laissez-faire to 'collectivism' took place in various*

sections of the ruling class may seek advantages over others by control of the state is, likewise, a truism.

All in all, the idea that capitalism is a system without state intervention is a myth. The rich use the state to bolster their wealth and power, as would be expected. Yet even if such a thing as a truly "laissez-faire" capitalist state were possible, it would still be protecting capitalist property rights and the hierarchical social relations these produce against those subject to them. This means, as Kropotkin stressed, it *"has never practised"* the idea of laissez faire. In fact, *"while all Governments have given the capitalists and monopolists full liberty to enrich themselves with the underpaid labour of working men [and women] ... they have **never**, **nowhere** given the working [people] the liberty of opposing that exploitation. Never has any Government applied the 'leave things alone' principle to the exploited masses. It reserved it for the exploiters only."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96] As such, under pure "free market" capitalism state intervention would still exist but it would be limited to repressing the working class (see section D.1.4 for more discussion).

Then there is the last reason, namely counteracting the destructive effects of capitalism itself. As Chomsky puts it, *"in a predatory capitalist economy, state intervention would be an absolute necessity to preserve human existence and to prevent the destruction of the physical environment — I speak optimistically ... social protection ... [is] therefore a minimal necessity to constrain the irrational and destructive workings of the classical free market."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 111] This kind of intervention is required simply because *"government cannot want society to break up, for it would mean that it and the dominant class would be deprived of sources of exploitation; nor can it leave society to maintain itself without official intervention, for then people would soon realise that government serves only to defend property owners ... and they would hasten to rid themselves of both."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 25]



In summary, *"the distribution of income in Chile in 1988, after a decade of free-market policies, was markedly regressive. Between 1978 and 1988 the richest 10 percent of Chileans increased their share of national income from 37 to 47 percent, while the next 30 percent saw their share shrink from 23 to 18%. The income share of the poorest fifth of the population dropped from 5 to 4 percent."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 26] In the last years of Pinochet's dictatorship, the richest 10% of the rural population saw their income rise by 90% between 1987 and 1990. The share of the poorest 25% fell from 11% to 7%. The legacy of Pinochet's social inequality could still be found in 1993, with a two-tier health care system within which infant mortality is 7 per 1000 births for the richest fifth of the population and 40 per 1000 for the poorest fifth. [Duncan Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108 and p. 101] Between 1970 and 1989, labour's share of the national income fell from 52.3% to 30.7% (it was 62.8% in 1972). Real wages in 1987 were still 81.2% of their 1980–1 level. [Petras and Leiva, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34, p. 25 and p. 170]

Thus Chile has been a "miracle" for the capitalist class, with its successes being *"enjoyed primarily (and in many areas, exclusively) by the economic and political elites. In any society shot through with enormous inequalities in wealth and income, the market ... works to concentrate wealth and income."* There has been *"a clear trend toward more concentrated control over economic resources ... Economic concentration is now greater than at any other time in Chile's history"* with multinational corporations reaping *"rich rewards from Chile's free-market policies"* (*"not surprisingly, they enthusiastically applaud the model and push to implant it everywhere"*). Ultimately, it is *"unconscionable to consider any economic and social project successful when the percentage of those impoverished ... more than doubled."* [Collins and Lear, **Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look**, p. 252 and p. 253]

Thus the wealth created by the Chilean economy in during the Pinochet years did **not** "trickle down" to the working class

(as claimed would happen by "free market" capitalist dogma) but instead accumulated in the hands of the rich. As in the UK and the USA, with the application of "trickle down economics" there was a vast skewing of income distribution in favour of the already-rich. That is, there has been a 'trickle-up' (or rather, a **flood** upwards). Which is hardly surprising, as exchanges between the strong and weak will favour the former (which is why anarchists support working class organisation and collective action to make us stronger than the capitalists and why Pinochet repressed them).

Overall, *"in 1972, Chile was the second most equal country in Latin America; by 2002 it was the second most **un**equal country in the region."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56] Significantly, this refutes Friedman's 1962 assertion that *"capitalism leads to less inequality ... inequality appears to be less ... the more highly capitalist the country is."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 169] As with other countries which applied Friedman's ideas (such as the UK and US), inequality soared in Chile. Ironically, in this as in so many cases, implementing his ideas refuted his own assertions.

There are two conclusions which can be drawn. Firstly, that Chile is now **less** capitalist after applying Friedman's dogmas. Secondly, that Friedman did not know what he was talking about. The second option Seems the most likely, although for some defenders of the faith Chile's neo-liberal experiment may not have been "pure" enough. However, this kind of assertion will only convince the true believer.

## C.11.2 What about Chile's economic growth and low inflation?

Given the actual results of the experiment, there are only two areas left to claim an "economic miracle." These are com-



*intervention of the State' ever existed. Everywhere the State has been, and still is, the main pillar and the creator, direct and indirect, of Capitalism and its powers over the masses. Nowhere, since States have grown up, have the masses had the freedom of resisting the oppression by capitalists... The state has **always** interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has always granted him protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. **And it could not be otherwise.** To do so was one of the functions — the chief mission — of the State."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 97–8]

In addition to this role, the state has also regulated certain industries and, at times, directly involved itself in employing wage labour to product goods and services. The classic example of the latter is the construction and maintenance of a transport network in order to facilitate the physical circulation of goods. As Colin Ward noted, transport *"is an activity heavily regulated by government. This regulation was introduced, not in the interests of the commercial transport operators, but in the face of their intense opposition, as well as that of the ideologists of 'free' enterprise."* He gives the example of the railways, which were *"built at a time when it was believed that market forces would reward the good and useful and eliminate the bad or socially useless."* However, *"it was found necessary as early as 1840 for the government's Board of Trade to regulate and supervise them, simply for the protection of the public."* [**Freedom to Go**, p. 7 and pp. 7–8]

This sort of intervention was to ensure that no one capitalist or group of capitalists had a virtual monopoly over the others which would allow them to charge excessive prices. Thus the need to bolster capital as a whole may involve regulating or expropriating certain capitalists and sections of that class. Also, state ownership was and is a key means of rationalising production methods, either directly by state ownership or indirectly by paying for Research and Development. That certain

# D.1 Why does state intervention occur?

The most obvious interaction between statism and capitalism is when the state intervenes in the economy. Indeed, the full range of capitalist politics is expressed in how much someone thinks this should happen. At one extreme, there are the right-wing liberals (sometimes mistakenly called "libertarians") who seek to reduce the state to a defender of private property rights. At the other, there are those who seek the state to assume full ownership and control of the economy (i.e. state capitalists who are usually mistakenly called "socialists"). In practice, the level of state intervention lies between these two extremes, moving back and forth along the spectrum as necessity requires.

For anarchists, capitalism as an economy requires state intervention. There is, and cannot be, a capitalist economy which does not exhibit some form of state action within it. The state is forced to intervene in society for three reasons:

From our discussion of the state and its role in section B.2, the first two reasons are unexpected and straight forward. The state is an instrument of class rule and, as such, acts to favour the continuation of the system as a whole. The state, therefore, has always intervened in the capitalist economy, usually to distort the market in favour of the capitalist class within its borders as against the working class and foreign competitors. This is done by means of taxes, tariffs, subsidies and so forth.

State intervention has been a feature of capitalism from the start. As Kropotkin argued, *"nowhere has the system of 'non-*



bating inflation and increasing economic growth. Neither can be said to be "miraculous."

As far as inflation goes, the Pinochet regime **did** reduce it, eventually. At the time of the time of the CIA-backed coup it was around 500% (given that the US undermined the Chilean economy — *"make the economy scream"*, Richard Helms, the director of the CIA — high inflation would be expected). By 1982 it was 10% and between 1983 to 1987, it fluctuated between 20 and 31%. It took eight years for the Chicago Boys to control inflation and, significantly, this involved *"the failure of several stabilisation programmes at an elevated social cost ... In other words, the stabilisation programs they prescribed not only were not miraculous — they were not successful."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 63] In reality, inflation was not controlled by means of Friedman's Monetarism but rather by state repression as left-wing Keynesian Nicholas Kaldor points out:

> *"The rate of growth of the money supply was reduced from 570 per cent in 1973 ... to 130 per cent in 1977. But this did not succeed in moderating the growth of the money GNP or of the rise in prices, because — lo and behold! — no sooner did they succeed in moderating the growth of the money supply down, than the velocity of circulation shot up, and inflation was greater with a lower rate of growth of the money supply . .. they have managed to bring down the rate of growth of prices ... And how? By the method well tried by Fascist dictatorships. It is a kind of incomes policy. It is a prohibition of wage increases with concentration camps for those who disobey and, of course, the prohibition of trade union activity and so on. And so it was not monetarism that brought the Chilean inflation down ... [It was based on] methods which by-passed the price mechanism."* [**The Economic Consequences of Mrs Thatcher**, p. 45]

Inflation was controlled by means of state repression and high unemployment, a combination of the incomes policy of Hitler and Mussolini and Karl Marx (i.e., Friedman's "natural rate of unemployment" we debunked in section C.9). In other words, Monetarism and "free market" capitalism did not reduce inflation (as was the case with Thatcher and Reagan was well).

Which leaves growth, the only line of defence possible for the claim of a Chilean "Miracle." As we discussed in section C.10, the right argue that relative shares of wealth are not important, it is the absolute level which counts. While the share of the economic pie may have dropped for most Chileans, the right argue that the high economic growth of the economy meant that they were receiving a smaller share of a bigger pie. We will ignore the well documented facts that the **level** of inequality, rather than absolute levels of standards of living, has most effect on the health of a population and that ill-health is inversely correlated with income (i.e. the poor have worse health that the rich). We will also ignore other issues related to the distribution of wealth, and so power, in a society (such as the free market re-enforcing and increasing inequalities via "free exchange" between strong and weak parties, as the terms of any exchange will be skewed in favour of the stronger party, an analysis which the Chilean experience provides extensive evidence for with its "competitive" and "flexible" labour market). In other words, growth without equality can have damaging effects which are not, and cannot be, indicated in growth figures.

So we will consider the claim that the Pinochet regime's record on growth makes it a "miracle" (as nothing else could). However, when we look at the regime's growth record we find that it is hardly a "miracle" at all — the celebrated economic growth of the 1980s must be viewed in the light of the two catastrophic recessions which Chile suffered in 1975 and 1982. As Edward Herman points out, this growth was *"regularly ex-*



nomic and social power and inequality and its impact on society and the political structure.

In some ways, this section discusses class struggle **from above**, i.e. the attacks on the working class conducted by the ruling class by means of its state. While it appears that every generation has someone insisting that the "class war" is dead and/or obsolete (Tony Blair did just that in the late 1990s), what they mean is that class struggle **from below** is dead (or, at least, they wish it so). What is ignored is that the class struggle from above continues even if class struggle from the below appears to have disappeared (until it reappears in yet another form). This should be unsurprising as any ruling class will be seeking to extend its profits, powers and privileges, a task aided immensely by the reduced pressure from below associated with periods of apparent social calm (Blair's activities in office being a striking confirmation of this). Ultimately, while you may seek to ignore capitalism and the state, neither will ignore you. That this produces resistance should be obvious, as is the fact that demise of struggle from below have always been proven wrong.

By necessity, this section will not (indeed, cannot) cover all aspects of how statism and capitalism interact to shape both the society we live in and ourselves as individuals. We will simply sketch the forces at work in certain important aspects of the current system and how anarchists view them. Thus our discussion of imperialism, for example, will not get into the details of specific wars and interventions but rather give a broad picture of why they happen and why they have changed over the years. However, we hope to present enough detail for further investigation as well as an understanding of how anarchists analyse the current system based on our anti-authoritarian principles and how the political and economic aspects of capitalism interact.

case, as the state *"is a hybridisation of political and social institutions, of coercive with distributive functions, of highly punitive with regulatory procedures, and finally of class with administrative needs — this melding process has produced very real ideological and practical paradoxes that persist as major issues today."* [Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 196] These paradoxes can only be solved, anarchists argue, by abolishing the state and the social hierarchies it either creates (the state bureaucracy) or defends (the economically dominant class). Until then, reforms of the system will be incomplete, be subject to reversals and have unintended consequences.

These links and interaction between statism and capitalism are to be expected due to their similar nature. As anarchists have long argued, at root they are based on the same hierarchical principle. Proudhon, for example, regarded *"the capitalist principle"* and *"the governmental principle"* as *"one and the same principle ... abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the abolition of the government of man by man, are one and the same formula."* [quoted by Wayne Thorpe, **"The Workers Themselves"**, p. 279] This means that anarchists reject the notion that political reforms are enough in themselves and instead stress that they must be linked to (or, at least, take into account) economic change. This means, for example, while we oppose specific imperialist wars and occupation, we recognise that they will reoccur until such time as the economic forces which generate them are abolished. Similarly, we do not automatically think all attempts to reduce state intervention should be supported simply because they appear to reduce the state. Instead, we consider who is introducing the reforms, why they are doing so and what the results will be. If the "reforms" are simply a case of politicians redirecting state intervention away from the welfare state to bolster capitalist power and profits, we would not support the change. Anarchist opposition to neoliberalism flows from our awareness of the existence of eco-



*aggerated by measurements from inappropriate bases (like the 1982 trough)."* [**The Economics of the Rich**]

This point is essential to understand the actual nature of Chile's "miracle" growth. For example, supporters of the "miracle" pointed to the period 1978 to 1981 (when the economy grew at 6.6 percent a year) or the post 1982–84 recession upswing. However, this is a case of "lies, damn lies, and statistics" as it does not take into account the catching up an economy goes through as it leaves a recession. During a recovery, laid-off workers go back to work and the economy experiences an increase in growth due to this. This means that the deeper the recession, the higher the subsequent growth in the up-turn. So to see if Chile's economic growth was a miracle and worth the decrease in income for the many, we need to look at whole business cycle, rather than for the upturn. If we do this we find that Chile had the second worse rate of growth in Latin America between 1975 and 1980. The average growth in GDP was 1.5% per year between 1974 and 1982, which was lower than the average Latin American growth rate of 4.3% and lower than the 4.5% of Chile in the 1960's. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

This meant that, in per capita terms, Chile's GDP only increased by 1.5% per year between 1974–80. This was considerably less than the 2.3% achieved in the 1960's. The average growth in GDP was 1.5% per year between 1974 and 1982, which was lower than the average Latin American growth rate of 4.3% and lower than the 4.5% of Chile in the 1960s. Between 1970 and 1980, per capita GDP grew by only 8%, while for Latin America as a whole, it increased by 40%. Between the years 1980 and 1982 during which all of Latin America was adversely affected by depression conditions, per capita GDP fell by 12.9 percent, compared to a fall of 4.3 percent for Latin America as a whole. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57 and p. 64]

Thus, between 1970 and 1989, Chile's GDP *"grew at a slow pace (relative to the 1960s and to other Latin American countries over the same period) with an average rate of 1.8–2.0 per cent. On*

*a per capita basis ... GDP [grew] at a rate (0.1–0.2 per cent) well below the Latin American average ... [B]y 1989 the GDP was still 6.1 per cent below the 1981 level, not having recovered the level reached in 1970. For the entire period of military rule (1974–1989) only five Latin American countries had a worse record. Some miracle!"* [Petras and Leiva, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

Thus the growth "miracles" refer to recoveries from depression-like collapses, collapses that can be attributed in large part to the free-market policies imposed on Chile! Overall, the growth "miracle" under Pinochet turns out to be non-existent. The full time frame illustrates Chile's lack of significant economic and social process between 1975 and 1989. Indeed, the economy was characterised by instability rather than real growth. The high levels of growth during the boom periods (pointed to by the right as evidence of the "miracle") barely made up for the losses during the bust periods.

All in all, the experience of Chile under Pinochet and its "economic miracle" indicates that the costs involved in creating a free market capitalist regime are heavy, at least for the majority. Rather than being transitional, these problems have proven to be structural and enduring in nature, as the social, environmental, economic and political costs become embedded into society. The murky side of the Chilean "miracle" is simply not reflected in the impressive macroeconomic indictors used to market "free market" capitalism, indicators themselves subject to manipulation as we have seen.

## C.11.3 Did neo-liberal Chile confirm capitalist economics?

No. Despite claims by the likes of Friedman, Chile's neo-liberal experiment was no "economic miracle" and, in fact, refuted many of the key dogmas of capitalist economics. We can



*occasions when some problem is noticed, attribut[e] them to any cause **other** than the system that consistently brings them about."* [**Deterring Democracy**, p. 232] Thus we have people, say, attacking imperialist adventures while, at the same time, supporting the capitalist system which drives it. Or opposing state intervention in the name of "freedom" while supporting an economic system which by its working forces the state to intervene simply to keep it going and society together. The contradictions multiple, simply because the symptoms are addressed, never the roots of the problems.

That the system and its effects are interwoven can best be seen from the fact that while right-wing parties have been elected to office promising to reduce the role of the state in society, the actual size and activity of the state has not been reduced, indeed it has usually increased in scope (both in size and in terms of power and centralisation). This is unsurprising, as "free market" implies strong (and centralised) state — the "freedom" of management to manage means that the freedom of workers to resist authoritarian management structures must be weakened by state action. Thus, ironically, state intervention within society will continue to be needed in order to ensure that society survives the rigours of market forces and that elite power and privilege are protected from the masses.

The thing to remember is that the political and economic spheres are not independent. They interact in many ways, with economic forces prompting political reactions and changes, and vice versa. Overall, as Kropotkin stressed, there are *"intimate links ... between the political regime and the economic regime."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 118] These means that it is impossible to talk of, say, capitalism as if it could exist without shaping and being shaped by the state and society. Equally, to think that the state could intervene as it pleased in the economy fails to take into account the influence economic institutions and forces have on it. This has always been the

This section of the FAQ indicates how both statism and capitalism affect the society they exist in. It is a continuation of sections B (Why do anarchists oppose the current system?) and C (What are the myths of capitalist economics?) and it discusses the impact of the underlying social and power relationships within the current system on society.

This section is important because the institutions and social relationships capitalism and statism spawn do not exist in a social vacuum, they have deep impacts on our everyday lives. These effects go beyond us as individuals (for example, the negative effects of hierarchy on our individuality) and have an effect on how the political institutions in our society work, how technology develops, how the media operates and so on. As such, it is worthwhile to point out how (and why) statism and capitalism affect society as a whole outwith the narrow bounds of politics and economics.

So here we sketch some of the impact concentrations of political and economic power have upon society. While many people attack the *results* of these processes (like specific forms of state intervention, ecological destruction, imperialism, etc.) they usually ignore their *causes*. This means that the struggle against social evils will be never-ending, like a doctor fighting the symptoms of a disease without treating the disease itself or the conditions which create it in the first place. We have indicated the roots of the problems we face in earlier sections; now we discuss how these impact on other aspects of our society. This section of the FAQ explores the interactions of the causes and results and draws out how the authoritarian and exploitative nature of capitalism and the state affects the world we live in.

It is important to remember that most supporters of capitalism refuse to do this. Yes, some of them point out **some** flaws and problems within society but they never relate them to the system as such. As Noam Chomsky points out, they *"ignor[e] the catastrophes of capitalism or, on the rare*



show this by comparing the actual performance of "economic liberty" with Friedman's predictions about it.

The first thing to note is that neo-liberal Chile hardly supports the claim that the free market is stable. In fact, it was marked by deep recessions followed by periods of high growth as the economic recovered. This resulted in overall (at best) mediocre growth rates (see last section).

Then there is the fact that the Chilean experiment refutes key neo-classical dogmas about the labour market. In **Capitalist and Freedom**, Friedman was at pains to attack trade unions and the idea that they defended the worker from coercion by the boss. Nonsense, he asserted, the *"employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work."* [pp. 14–5] Thus collective action in the form of, say, unions is both unnecessary and, in fact, harmful. The ability of workers to change jobs is sufficient and the desire of capitalist economists is always to make the real labour market become more like the ideal market of perfect competition — lots of atomised individuals who are price takers, not price setters. While big business gets ignored, unions are demonised.

The problem is that such "perfect" labour markets are hard to create outside of dictatorships. Pinochet's reign of terror created such a market. Faced with the possibility of death and torture if they stood up for their rights, the only **real** alternative most workers had was that of finding a new job. So while the labour market was far from being an expression of "economic liberty," Chile's dictatorship **did** produce a labour market which almost perfectly reflected the neo-classical (and Austrian) ideal. Workers become atomised individuals as state terror forced them to eschew acting as trade unionists and seeking collective solutions to their (individual and collective) problems. Workers had no choice **but** to seek a new employer if they felt they were being mistreated or under-valued. Terror created the preconditions for the workings of an ideal capitalist labour market. Friedman's talk of "economic liberty" in Chile

suggests that Friedman thought that a "free market" in labour would work "as if" it were subject to death squads. In other words, that capitalism needs an atomised workforce which is too scared to stand up for themselves. Undoubtedly, he would prefer such fear to be imposed by purely "economic" means (unemployment playing its usual role) but as his work on the "natural rate of unemployment" suggests, he is not above appealing to the state to maintain it.

Unfortunately for capitalist ideology, Chile refuted that notion, with its workers subject to the autocratic power of the boss and having to give concession after concession simply to remain in work. Thus the *"total overhaul of the labour law system [which] took place between 1979 and 1981 ... aimed at creating a perfect labour market, eliminating collective bargaining, allowing massive dismissal of workers, increasing the daily working hours up to twelve hours and eliminating the labour courts."* [Silvia Borzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91] In reality, the Labour code simply reflected the power property owners have over their wage slaves and *"was solidly probusiness. It was intended to maximise the flexibility of management's use of labour and to keep any eventual elected government from intervening on behalf of labour in negotiations between employers and workers."* This was hidden, of course, by *"populist rhetoric."* [Collins and Lear, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16] In fact, the Plan Laboral *"was intended to definitely shift the balance of power in labour relations in favour of business and to weaken the workers and unions that formed the central political base of the Left."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 31]

Unsurprisingly, *"workers ... have not received a fair share of the benefits from the economic growth and productivity increases that their labour has produced and that they have had to bear a disproportionate share of the costs of this restructuring in their wages, working conditions, job quality, and labour relations."* [Winn, *"Introduction"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10]



# Section D — How do statism and capitalism affect society?

in subsidised housing. Then there are the facts of almost free medical treatment at government clinics and hospitals and an education system almost entirely funded by the government. These are all massive interventions in the marketplace, interventions Friedman spent many decades fighting in the USA. He did, however, contribute to the myth that the British were benign imperialists and the "free market" they introduced into Hong Kong was in the interests of all rather than for those who exercised the dictatorship.



Chile, yet again, refuted another of Friedman's assertions about capitalism. In 1975, he wrongly predicted that the unemployed caused by the Monetarist recession would quickly find work, telling a Santiago audience that they would *"be surprised how fast people would be absorbed by a growing private-sector economy."* [quoted by Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57] Unemployment reached record levels for decades, as the free market regime *"has been slow to create jobs. During the 1960s unemployment hovered around 6 percent; by contrast, the unemployment level for the years 1974 to 1987 averaged 20 percent of the workforce. Even in the best years of the boom (1980–1981) it stayed as high as 18 percent. In the years immediately following the 1982 crash, unemployment — including government emergency work programs — peaked at 35 percent of the workforce."* Unsurprisingly, the *"most important rationalisation"* made by Chilean industry *"was the lowering of labour costs. This was accomplished through massive layoffs, intensifying the work of remaining workers, and pushing wage levels well below historic levels."* This was aided by unemployment levels which *"officially averaged 20 percent from 1974 to 1987. Chronic high levels of unemployment afforded employers considerable leverage in setting working conditions and wage levels ... Not surprisingly, workers who managed to hold onto their jobs were willing to make repeated concessions to employers, and in order to get jobs employees often submitted to onerous terms."* Between 1979 and 1982, more than a fifth of manufacturing companies failed and employment in the sector fell by over a quarter. In the decade before 1981, out of every 26 workers, 13 became unemployed, 5 joined the urban informal sector and 8 were on a government emergency employment program. It should be stressed that official statistics *"underestimate the real level of unemployment"* as they exclude people who worked just one day in the previous week. A respected church-sponsored institute on employment found that in 1988, unemployment in Santiago was

as high as 21%. [Lear and Collins, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22, p. 15, p. 16, p. 15 and p. 22]

The standard free-market argument is that unemployment is solved by subjecting the wage level to the rigours of the market. While wages will be lower, more people will be employed. As we discussed in section C.9, the logic and evidence for such claims is spurious. Needless to say, Friedman never revised his claims in the light of the empirical evidence produced by the application of his ideas.

Given the fact that "labour" (i.e., an individual) is not produced for the market in the first place, you can expect it to react differently from other "commodities." For example, a cut in its price will generally increase supply, not decrease it, simply because people have to eat, pay the rent and so forth. Cutting wages will see partners and children sent to work, plus the acceptance of longer hours by those who remain in work. As such, the idea that unemployment is caused by wages being too high has always been a specious and self-serving argument, one refuted not only by logic but that bane of economics, empirical evidence. This was the case with Chile's "economic miracle," where declining wages forced families to seek multiple incomes in order to survive: *"The single salary that could support a family was beyond the reach of most workers; the norm, in fact, was for spouses and children to take on temporary and informal jobs ... Even with multiple incomes, many families were hard-pressed to survive."* [Lear and Collins, **Op. Cit.**, p. 23] Which, of course, refutes "free market" capitalist claim that the labour market is like any other market. In reality, it is not and so it is hardly surprising that a drop in the price of labour **increased** supply nor that the demand for labour did not increase to in response to the drop in its real wage.

Lastly, there is the notion that collective action in the market by the state or trade unions harms the general population, particularly the poor. For neo-classical and Austrian economists, labour is the source of all of capitalism's problems



*companies"*). Unsurprisingly, the first Beijing-appointed executive was made up of successful business men and one of its first acts was to suspend pro-labour laws passed by the out-going legislature. [Bell, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17, p. 18 and pp. 19–20] The Chinese government opposed attempts to extend democracy, imposing a complex electoral system which, in the words of the **Asian Wall Street Journal**, was a *"means of reducing public participation in the political process while stacking the next legislature with people who depend on favours from the regime in Hong Kong or Beijing and answer to narrow special interests, particularly the business elite."* [quoted by Bell, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 18–9]

This reflects the fact that business tycoons are worried that democracy would led to increased welfare spending with one, for example, predicting that the *"under-educated, and those who did not pay tax would elect candidates who stood for more social spending, which would turn Hong Kong into a 'welfare state' ... If we had a 100-per-cent directly elected LegCo, only social welfare-oriented candidates will be elected. Hong Kong is a business city and we [sic!] do not want to end up being a social welfare state."* [*"Tycoon warns on protests,"* **The Standard**, 29 April 2004] Such a government can ignore public opinion and the electorate more than in an independent democracy and, of course, can be more influenced by business (as the history of Hong Kong testifies).

Overall, it is fair to say that Friedman only saw what he wanted to see and contrasted his idealised vision with Britain and explained the divergent economic performances of both countries to a conflict between "socialism" and "capitalism." How he failed to notice that the reality of Hong Kong was one marked by collusion between big business and the state and that in key areas the regime was much more "socialist" than its British counterpart is difficult to understand given his willingness to use it as an example. It seems intellectually dishonest to fail to mention that the state owned all the land and was the biggest landlord with at least 50% of the population living

ernment works closely with the local business elite? Having a political regime in which the wealthy can influence the government without the need for elections may be considered too a high price to pay just to get subsidised housing, health care and education. Given a choice between freedom and a high rate of growth, how many would pick the latter over the former?

It is no coincidence that like most examples of the wonders of the free market, Hong Kong was not a democracy. It was a relatively liberal colonial dictatorship run. But political liberty does not rate highly with many supporters of laissez-faire capitalism (such as right-"libertarians", for example). However, the two are linked. Which explains why we have spent so much time debunking the "free market" capitalism claims over Hong Kong. It is more than simply a concern over basic facts and correcting inaccurate assertions. Rather it is a concern over the meaning of freedom and the dubious assumption that freedom can be compartmentalised. While Hong Kong may be a more appealing example that Pinochet's Chile, it still rests on the assumption that the masses should be excluded from having a say over their communities (in their own interests, of course, and **never,** of course, in the interests of those who do the excluding) and that freedom is simply the ability to change bosses (or become one yourself). Ultimately, there is a big difference between "free" and "business-friendly." Hong Kong is the latter simply because it is not the former. Its success is testament that dictatorships can be more reliable defenders of class privilege than democracies.

This can be seen from the attitude of Hong Kong's business elite to the democratic reforms introduced in the 1990s and integration with China. Significantly, *"the nominally socialist Chinese government consistently opposed the introduction of further social welfare programs in Hong Kong."* This is because *"it has chosen to enter into a strategic alliance with Hong Kong's business class"* (*"To earn support of corporate bosses, the Chinese government organised timely interventions on behalf of Hong Kong*



(and any government silly enough to pander to the economically illiterate masses). Pinochet's regime allowed them to prove this was the case. Again Chile refuted them.

The "Chicago Boys" had no illusions that fascism was required to create free market capitalism. According to Sergio de Castro, the architect of the economic programme Pinochet imposed, fascism was required to introduce "economic liberty" because *"it provided a lasting regime; it gave the authorities a degree of efficiency that it was not possible to obtain in a democratic regime; and it made possible the application of a model developed by experts and that did not depend upon the social reactions produced by its implementation."* [quoted by Silvia Borzutzky, *"The Chicago Boys, social security and welfare in Chile"*, **The Radical Right and the Welfare State**, Howard Glennerster and James Midgley (eds.), p. 90] They affirmed that *"in a democracy we could not have done one-fifth of what we did."* [quoted by Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 28]

Given the individualistic assumptions of neo-classical and Austrian economics, it is not hard to conclude that creating a police state in order to control industrial disputes, social protest, unions, political associations, and so on, is what is required to introduce the ground rules the capitalist market requires for its operation. As socialist Brian Barry argues in relation to the Thatcher regime in Britain which was also heavily influenced by the ideas of "free market" capitalists like Milton Friedman and Frederick von Hayek:

> *"Some observers claim to have found something paradoxical in the fact that the Thatcher regime combines liberal individualist rhetoric with authoritarian action. But there is no paradox at all. Even under the most repressive conditions ... people seek to act collectively in order to improve things for themselves, and it requires an enormous exercise of brutal power to fragment these efforts*

> *at organisation and to force people to pursue their interests individually… left to themselves, people will inevitably tend to pursue their interests through collective action — in trade unions, tenants' associations, community organisations and local government. Only the pretty ruthless exercise of central power can defeat these tendencies: hence the common association between individualism and authoritarianism, well exemplified in the fact that the countries held up as models by the free-marketers are, without exception, authoritarian regimes."* [*"The Continuing Relevance of Socialism"*, Robert Skidelsky (ed.), **Thatcherism**, p. 146]

Little wonder, then, that Pinochet's regime was marked by authoritarianism, terror and rule by savants. Indeed, *"[t]he Chicago-trained economists emphasised the scientific nature of their programme and the need to replace politics by economics and the politicians by economists. Thus, the decisions made were not the result of the will of the authority, but they were determined by their scientific knowledge. The use of the scientific knowledge, in turn, would reduce the power of government since decisions will be made by technocrats and by the individuals in the private sector."* [Silvia Borzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90] However, as Winn points out:

> *"Although the Chicago Boys justified their policies with a discourse of liberty, they were not troubled by the contradiction of basing the economic freedom they promoted on the most dictatorial regime in Chilean history — or in denying workers the freedom to strike or bargain collectively. At bottom, the only freedom that they cared about was the economic liberty of those Chileans and foreigners with capital to invest and consume, and*



*working in low-paying service jobs without much hope of upward mobility."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 21–2]

As other experts note, while Hong Kong may have a GDP-per-capita of a developed nation, its distribution of household income was similar to that of Guatemala. Looking at the 1960s onwards, income distribution only improved between 1966 and 1971, after this period the share of the bottom 30% of the population went down continuously while the top 20% saw an increase in their share of total income. In fact, from the 1980s, *"the top 20% of households managed to account for over 50 per cent of the total income."* In fact, the bottom 60% of the population saw a decline in their share of income between 1971 and 1996. Overall, *"high-income households increased their wealth progressively faster than low-income households."* This polarisation, they argue, will continue as the economy de-industrialises: *"in the absence of proper social policies, it will generate a small, extremely wealthy class of the 'new rich' and simultaneously a large population of the 'working poor.'"* [Simon X. B. Zhao and L. Zhand, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85, p. 80, p. 82, p. 84 and p. 102]

Given that everywhere cannot be such a service provider, it does not provide much of an indication of how "free market" capitalism would work in, say, the United States. And as there is in fact extensive (if informal) economic management and that the state owns all the land and subsidies rent and health care, how can it be even considered an example of "free market" capitalism in action? Unless, of course, you consider that "economic freedom" best flourishes under a dictatorship which owns all the land, which has close links to business interests, provides a comprehensive, if basic, welfare state and is dependent on another country to provide its defence needs and the head of its executive. While most American's would be envious of Hong Kong's welfare state, it is doubtful that many would consider its other features as desirable. How many would be happy with being under a *"benevolent dictator"* (perhaps being turned into a colony of Britain again?) whose appointed gov-

Hong Kong participation and 4,000,000 workers (nine times larger than the territory's own manufacturing workforce) are now directly or indirectly employed by Hong Kong companies. In the late 1980's Hong Kong trading and manufacturing companies began to expand further a field than just southern China. By the mid 1990's they were operating across Asia, in Eastern Europe and Central America. This shift, incidentally, has resulted in deindustrialisation and a *"decrease in real income among manual workers"* as they moved to the lower end service sector. [Simon X. B. Zhao and l. Zhand, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88]

Then there is the criteria Friedman uses, namely per-capita GDP. As we have repeated stressed, averages hide a lot of important and relevant information when evaluating a society. So it must be stressed that Friedman's criteria of per capita income is an average and, as such, hides the effect of inequality. This means that a society with huge numbers of poor people and a handful of ultra-rich individuals may have a higher average income than a more equal society. This is the case of, say, America compared to Sweden. Unsurprisingly, Hong Kong is a very unequal society and this inequality is growing (so his claim that Hong Kong is capitalist refutes his 1962 assertion that the more capitalist economies are more equal). *"Behind the impressive GDP figures,"* indicates Chan, *"is a widening income gap between the super-rich and the grassroots, with 650,000 people reportedly living below the poverty line."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 576] As Bell points out, 13% lived below the poverty line in 1999, compared to 8% in 1971. This is partly explained by *"the rising proportion of elderly people and single-parent families."* However, economic integration with China has played a role as Hong Kong's manufacturing sector *"has been almost entirely transferred to the southern province of Guangdong (where labour is cheaper and workers' rights are practically non-existent), with the consequence that Hong Kong's industrial workers now find it much harder to find decent jobs in Hong Kong. Most end up*



> *that 'freedom,' de Castro believed, was best assured by an authoritarian government and a passive labour force. In short, their notions of freedom were both selective and self-serving."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 28]

Of course, turning authority over to technocrats and private power does not change its nature — only who has it. Pinochet's regime saw a marked shift of governmental power away from protection of individual rights to a protection of capital and property rather than an abolition of that power altogether. As would be expected, only the wealthy benefited. The working class were subjected to attempts to create a "perfect labour market" — and only terror can turn people into the atomised commodities such a market requires. Perhaps when looking over the nightmare of Pinochet's regime we should ponder these words of Bakunin in which he indicates the negative effects of running society by means of science books and "experts":

> *"human science is always and necessarily imperfect... were we to force the practical life of men — collective as well as individual — into rigorous and exclusive conformity with the latest data of science, we would thus condemn society as well as individuals to suffer martyrdom on a Procrustean bed, which would soon dislocate and stifle them, since life is always an infinitely greater thing than science."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 79]

The Chilean experience of rule by free market ideologues prove Bakunin's points beyond doubt. Chilean society was forced onto the Procrustean bed by the use of terror and life was forced to conform to the assumptions found in economics textbooks. And as we proved above, only those with power or wealth did well out of the experiment. From an anarchist

perspective, the results were all too sadly predictable. The only surprising thing is that the right point to the experiment as a success story.

Since Chile has become (mostly) a democracy (with the armed forces still holding considerable influence) the post-Pinochet governments have made minor reforms. For example, *"tax increases targeted for social spending for the poor"* allowed them to *"halve the 1988 45 percent poverty rate bequeathed by Pinochet."* In fact, the *"bulk of this spending"* was aimed at *"the poorest of the poor, the 25 percent of the population classified as destitute in 1988."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era,"* **Op. Cit.**, p. 50, p. 52 and p. 55]

However, while this *"curtailed absolute poverty, they did not reduce inequality ... From 1990 to 1996 the share of the national income of the poorest 20 percent of the population stagnated beneath 4 percent, while that of the richest 20 percent inched up from 56 percent to 57 percent ... the distribution of income was one of the most unequal in the world. In Latin America, only Brazil was worse."* [Paul W Drake, *"Foreword"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. xi] The new government raised the minimum wage in 1990 by 17% in real terms, with another rise of approximately 15% two years later. This had a significant on income as *"a substantial number of the Chilean labour force receives wages and salaries that are only slightly above the minimum wage."* [Volker Frank, *"Politics without Policy"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 73 and p. 76] In stark contrast to the claims of neo-classical economics, the rise in the minimum wage did not increase unemployment. In fact, it **dropped** to 4.4%, in 1992, the lowest since the early 1970s.

Overall, increased social spending on health, education and poverty relief has occurred since the end of the dictatorship and has lifted over a million Chileans out of poverty between 1987 and 1992 (the poverty rate has dropped from 44.6% in 1987 to 23.2% in 1996, although this is still higher than in 1970). However, inequality is still a major problem as are other legacies from the Pinochet era, such as the nature of the labour market,



the world's ten richest men in 1998. *"Meanwhile, potential new entrants to the market are restricted by the huge cost of paying land-conversion premiums that are the bedrock of government revenues."* This is a *"cosy arrangement between the government and major developers."* [Daniel A. Bell, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16]

The role as headquarters for companies and as a financial centre also plays a part. It means an essential part of its success is that it gets surplus value produced elsewhere in the world. Handling other people's money is a sure-fire way of getting rich and this will have a nice impact on per-capita income figures (as will selling goods produced in sweat-shops in dictatorships like China). There has been a gradual shift in economic direction to a more service-oriented economy which has stamped Hong Kong as one of the world's foremost financial centres. This highly developed sector is served by some 565 banks and deposit-taking companies from over 40 countries, including 85 of the world's top 100 in terms of assets. In addition, it is the 8$^{th}$ largest stock market in the world (in terms of capitalisation) and the 2$^{nd}$ largest in Asia. By 1995, Hong Kong was the world's 10$^{th}$ largest exporter of services with the industry embracing everything from accounting and legal services, insurance and maritime to telecommunications and media. The contribution of the services sectors as a whole to GDP increased from 60 per cent in 1970 to 83 per cent in 1994.

Meanwhile, manufacturing industry has moved to low wage countries such as southern China (by the end of the 1970's, Hong Kong's manufacturing base was less competitive, facing increasing costs in land and labour — in other words, workers were starting to benefit from economic growth and so capital moved elsewhere). The economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in southern China in 1978 where important, as this allowed capital access to labour living under a dictatorship (just as American capitalists invested heavily in Nazi Germany — labour rights were null, profits were high). It is estimated about 42,000 enterprises in the province have

market" capitalism. Wade indicates that we can consider Hong Kong as a *"special case or as a less successful variant of the authoritarian-capitalist state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 333]

There are other explanations for Hong Kong's high growth rates than simply "capitalism." Firstly, Hong Kong is a city state and cities have a higher economic growth rate than regions (which are held back by large rural areas). This is because the agricultural sector rarely achieves high economic growth rates and so in its absence a high growth rate is easier to achieve. Secondly, there is Hong Kong's location and its corresponding role as an entrepôt economy. Wade notes that *"its economic growth is a function of its service role in a wider regional economy, as entrepôt trader, regional headquarters for multinational companies, and refuge for nervous money."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 331] Being between China and the rest of the world means its traders could act as a middleman, earning income from the mark-up they could impose on good going through the territory. This is why Hong Kong is often referred to as an entrepôt economy, a place that imports, stores, and re-exports goods. In other words, Hong Kong made a lot of its money because many Chinese exports and imports went through it and its traders marked-up the prices. It should be obvious if most of Western Europe's goods went through, say, Liverpool, that city would have a very good economic performance regardless of other factors. This option is hardly available to most cities, never mind countries.

Then there is the issue of state ownership of land. As Mae Kam Ng reports, monopoly ownership of all land by the state sets the context for super-profits by government and finance capital generally. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 13] Unsurprisingly, most government land *"is sold to just three real-estate developers"* who *"sit on huge tracts of land, drop-feeding apartments onto the market so as to maintain high property prices."* Between 1992 and 1996, for example, prices increased fourfold and profits doubled. The heads of two of the property firms were on the list of



income insecurity, family separations, alcoholism, and so on. Yet while *"both unemployment and poverty decreased, in part because of programs targeted at the poorest sectors of the population by centre-left governments with greater social concern than the Pinochet dictatorship,"* many problems remain such as *"a work week that was among the longest in the world."* [Winn, *"Introduction"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 4]

Chile has moved away from Pinochet's "free-market" model in other ways to. In 1991, Chile introduced a range of controls over capital, including a provision for 30% of all non-equity capital entering Chile to be deposited without interest at the central bank for one year. This reserve requirement — known locally as the encaje — amounts to a tax on capital flows that is higher the shorter the term of the loan. As William Greider points out, Chile *"has managed in the last decade to achieve rapid economic growth by abandoning the pure free-market theory taught by American economists and emulating major elements of the Asian strategy, including forced savings and the purposeful control of capital. The Chilean government tells foreign investors where they may invest, keeps them out of certain financial assets and prohibits them from withdrawing their capital rapidly."* [**One World, Ready or Not**, p. 280]

Needless to say, while state aid to the working class has increased somewhat, state welfare for business is still the norm. After the 1982 crash, the Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO) reverted to its old role in developing Chilean industry (after the coup, it did little more than just selling off state property at discount prices to the wealthy). In other words, the post-recession "miracle" of the 1980s was due, in part, to a state organisation whose remit was promoting economic development, supporting business with new technology as well as technical and financial assistance. It, in effect, promoted joint public-private sectors initiatives. One key example was its role in funding and development of

new resource-sector firms, such as the forestry sector ad the fishing industry. While free-marketeers have portrayed the boom natural-resource extraction as the result of the "free market," in reality private capital lacked the initiative and foresight to develop these industries and CORFO provided aid as well as credits and subsidies to encourage it. [James M. Cypher, *"Is Chile a Neoliberal Success?"*, **Dollars & Sense**, September/October 2004] Then there is the role of Fundación Chile, a public-private agency designed to develop firms in new areas where private capital will not invest. This pays for research and development before selling its stake to the private sector once a project becomes commercially viable. [Jon Jeter, *"A Smoother Road To Free Markets,"* **Washington Post**, 21/01/2004] In other words, a similar system of state intervention promoted by the East-Asian Tigers (and in a similar fashion, ignored by the ideologues of "free market" capitalism — but, then, state action for capitalists never seems to count as interfering in the market).

Thus the Chilean state has violated its "free market" credentials, in many ways, very successfully too. While it started in the 1980s, post-Pinochet has extended this to include aid to the working class. Thus the claims of free-market advocates that Chile's rapid growth in the 1990s is evidence for their model are false (just as their claims concerning South-East Asia also proved false, claims conveniently forgotten when those economies went into crisis). Needless to say, Chile is under pressure to change its ways and conform to the dictates of global finance. In 1998, Chile eased its controls, following heavy speculative pressure on its currency, the peso. That year economic growth halved and contracted 1.1% in 1999.

So even the neo-liberal jaguar has had to move away from a purely free market approach on social issues and the Chilean government has had to intervene into the economy in order to start putting back together the society ripped apart by market forces and authoritarian government. However, fear of the



*nomic interests."* [Mae Kam Ng, **Op. Cit.**, p. 11, p. 39, p. 37 and p. 13] As Chan stresses, *"the colonial government has continuously played a direct and crucial role as a very significant economic participant. Besides its control of valuable resources, the regime's command of the relevant legal, political and social institutions and processes also indirectly shapes economic behaviour and societal development."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 574]

Overall, as Bell notes, *"one cannot help but notice the large gap between this reality and the myth of an open and competitive market where only talent and luck determine the economic winners."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 16] As an expert in the Asian Tiger economies summarises:

> *"to conclude ... that Hong Kong is close to a free market economy is misleading ... Not only is the economy managed from outside the formal institutions of government by the informal coalition of peak private economic organisations, but government itself also has available some unusual instruments for influencing industrial activity. It owns all the land... It controls rents in part of the public housing market and supplies subsidised public housing to roughly half the population, thereby helping to keep down the cost of labour. And its ability to increase or decrease the flow of immigrants from China also gives it a way of affecting labour costs."* [Robert Wade, **Governing the Market**, p. 332]

This means that the Hong Kong system of "laissez-faire" is marked by the state having close ties with the major banks and trading companies, which, in turn, are closely linked to the life-time expatriates who largely run the government. This provides a *"point of concentration"* to conduct negotiations in line with an implicit development strategy. Therefore it is pretty clear that Hong Kong does not really show the benefits of "free

military has ensured that reforms have been minor and, consequently, Chile cannot be considered a genuine democracy. In other words, "economic liberty" has not produced genuine "political liberty" as Friedman (and others) claim (see section D.11). Ultimately, for all but the tiny elite at the top, the Pinochet regime of "economic liberty" was a nightmare. Economic "liberty" only seemed to benefit one group in society, an obvious "miracle." For the vast majority, the "miracle" of economic "liberty" resulted, as it usually does, in increased inequality, exploitation, poverty, pollution, crime and social alienation. The irony is that many right-wing free-marketers point to it as a model of the benefits of capitalism.



*which is actively involved, fully engaged and often interventionist, whether by design or necessity."* He notes that *"the most damaging legacy [of colonial rule] was the blatantly pro-business bias in the government's decision-making."* There has been *"collusion between the colonial officialdom and the British economic elites."* Indeed, *"the colonial regime has been at fault for its subservience to business interests as manifested in its unwillingness until very recently, not because of laissez-faire but from its pro-business bias, to legislate against cartels and monopolies and to regulate economic activities in the interests of labour, consumers and the environment ... In other words, free trade and free enterprise with an open market ... did not always mean fair trade and equal opportunity: the regime intervened to favour British and big business interests at the expense of both fair play and of a level playing field for all economic players regardless of class or race."* [Ming K Chan, *"The Legacy of the British Administration of Hong Kong: A View from Hong Kong,"* pp. 567–582, **The China Quarterly**, no. 151, p. 577, p. 576, p. 575 and pp. 575–6] Bell notes that a British corporation *"held the local telephone monopoly until 1995"* while another *"holds all the landing rights at Hong Kong airport."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21]

Unsurprisingly, as it owns all the land, the government has *"a strong position in commanding resources to direct spatial development in the territory."* There is a *"three-tiered system of land-use plans."* The top-level, for example, *"maps out the overall land development strategy to meet the long-term socio-economic needs of Hong Kong"* and it is *"prepared and reviewed by the administration and there is no public input to it."* This planning system is, as noted, heavily influenced by the business sector and its *"committees operate largely behind closed doors and policy formulation could be likened to a black-box operation." "Traditionally,"* Ng notes, *"the closed door and Hong Kong centred urban planning system had served to maintain economic dynamism in the colony. With democratisation introduced in the 1980s, the planning system is forced to be more open and to serve not just eco-*

# C.12 Doesn't Hong Kong show the potentials of "free market" capitalism?

Given the general lack of laissez-faire capitalism in the world, examples to show its benefits are few and far between. Rather than admit that the ideal is simply impossible, conservative and right-"libertarian" ideologues scour the world and history for examples. Rarely do they let facts get in the way of their searching — until the example expresses some negative features such as economic crisis (repression of working class people or rising inequality and poverty are of little consequence). Once that happens, then all the statist features of those economies previously ignored or downplayed will be stressed in order to protect the ideal from reality.

One such example is Hong Kong, which is often pointed to by right-wingers as an example of the power of capitalism and how a "pure" capitalism will benefit all. It has regularly been ranked as first in the *"Index of Economic Freedom"* produced by the Heritage Foundation, a US-based conservative think tank ("economic freedom" reflecting what you expect a right-winger would consider important). Milton Friedman played a leading role in this idealisation of the former UK colony. In his words:

> *"Take the fifty-year experiment in economic policy provided by Hong Kong between the end of World War II and ... when Hong Kong reverted to China.*



run. Overall, since the 1960s *"the Hong Kong government's involvement in everyday life has increases steadily and now reaches into many vital areas of socio-economic development."* [Ming K Chan, *"The Legacy of the British Administration of Hong Kong: A View from Hong Kong,"* pp. 567–582, **The China Quarterly**, no. 151, p. 575 and p. 574] It also intervened massively in the stock market during the 1997 Asian crisis. Strangely, Friedman failed to note any of these developments nor point to the lack of competition in many areas of the domestic economy and the high returns given to competition-free utility companies.

The state did not agree to these welfare measures by choice, as they were originally forced upon it by fears of social unrest, first by waves of migrants fleeing from China and then by the need to portray itself as something more than an uncaring colonial regime. However, the other form of intervention it pursued **was** by choice, namely the collusion between the state and business elites. As one expert notes, the *"executive-led 'administrative non-party' state was heavily influenced by the business community"* with *"the composition of various government advisory boards, committees and the three councils"* reflecting this as *"business interests had an overwhelming voice in the consultation machinery (about 70% of the total membership)."* This is accurately described as a *"bureaucratic-cum-corporatist state"* with *"the interests of government and the private sector dominating those of the community."* Overall, *"the government and private sector share common interests and have close links."* [Mae Kam Ng, *"Political Economy and Urban Planning,"* **Progress in Planning**, P. Diamond and B. H. Massan (eds.), vol. 51, Part 1, p. 11 and p. 84] Sizeable fortunes will be made when there are interlocking arrangements between the local oligarchies and the state.

Another commentator notes that the myth of Hong Kong's laissez-faire regime *"has been disproved in academic debates more than a decade ago"* and points to *"the hypocrisy of laissez-faire colonialism"* which is marked by *"a government*

> *"In this experiment, Hong Kong represents the experimental treatment . .. I take Britain as one control because Britain, a benevolent dictator, imposed different policies on Hong Kong from the ones it pursued at home ...*
>
> *"Nonetheless, there are some statistics, and in 1960, the earliest date for which I have been able to get them, the average per capita income in Hong Kong was 28 percent of that in Great Britain; by 1996, it had risen to 137 percent of that in Britain. In short, from 1960 to 1996, Hong Kong's per capita income rose from about one-quarter of Britain's to more than a third larger than Britain's ... I believe that the only plausible explanation for the different rates of growth is socialism in Britain, free enterprise and free markets in Hong Kong. Has anybody got a better explanation? I'd be grateful for any suggestions."* [**The Hong Kong Experiment**]

It should be stressed that by "socialism" Friedman meant state spending, particularly that associated with welfare (*"Direct government spending is less than 15 percent of national income in Hong Kong, more than 40 percent in the United States."* [**Op. Cit.**]). What to make of his claims?

It is undeniable that the figures for Hong Kong's economy are impressive. Per-capita GDP by end 1996 should reach US$ 25,300, one of the highest in Asia and higher than many western nations. Enviable tax rates — 16.5% corporate profits tax, 15% salaries tax. In the first 5 years of the 1990's Hong Kong's economy grew at a tremendous rate — nominal per capita income and GDP levels (where inflation is not factored in) almost doubled. Even accounting for inflation, growth was brisk. The average annual growth rate in real terms of total GDP in the 10 years to 1995 was six per cent, growing by 4.6 per cent in 1995. However, looking more closely, we find a somewhat



youthful population compared with western countries which meant it had less need for spending on pensions and help for the aged (this advantage is declining as the population ages). In addition, the *"large majority of primary schools and secondary schools are either free of heavily subsidised, and the territory's tertiary institutions all receive most of their funds from the public coffers."* [Bell, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 16–7 and p. 17] We can be sure that when conservatives and right-"libertarians" use Hong Kong as a model, they are **not** referring to these aspects of the regime.

Given this, Hong Kong has *"deviated from the myth of a laissez-faire economy with the government limiting itself to the role of the 'night watchman'"* as it *"is a welfare state."* In 1995–6, it spent 47 percent of its public expenditure on social services (*"only slightly less than the United Kingdom"*). Between 1992 and 1998, welfare spending increased at a real rate of at least 10 percent annually. [Bell, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16] *"Without doubt,"* two experts note, *"the development of public housing in Hong Kong has contributed greatly to the social well-being of the Territory."* Overall, social welfare *"is the third largest [state] expenditure ... after education and health."* [Simon X. B. Zhao and l. Zhand, *"Economic Growth and Income Inequality in Hong Kong: Trends and Explanations,"* pp. 74–103, **China: An International Journal**, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 95 and p. 97] Hong Kong spent 11.6% of its GDP on welfare spending in 2004, for example.

Moreover, this state intervention is not limited to just social welfare provision. Hong Kong has an affordable public transport system in which the government has substantial equity in most transport systems and grants franchises and monopolised routes. So as well as being the monopoly owner of land and the largest landlord, the state imposes rent controls, operates three railways and regulates transport services and public utilities as monopoly franchises. It subsidises education, health care, welfare and charity. It has also took over the ownership and management of several banks in the 1980s to prevent a general bank

different picture than that painted by those claim Hong Kong as an example of the wonders of free market capitalism. Once these basic (and well known) facts are known, it is hard to take Friedman's claims seriously. Of course, there are aspects of laissez-faire to the system (it does not subsidise sunset industries, for example) however, there is much more to Hong Kong that these features. Ultimately, laissez-faire capitalism is more than just low taxes.

The most obvious starting place is the fact that the government owns all the land. To state the obvious, land nationalisation is hardly capitalistic. It is one of the reasons why its direct taxation levels are so low. As one resident points out:

> *"The main explanation for low tax rates ... is not low social spending. One important factor is that Hong Kong does not have to support a defence industry ... The most crucial explanation ... lies in the fact that less than half of the government's revenues comes from direct taxation.*
>
> *"The Hong Kong government actually derives much of its revenue from land transactions. The territory's land is technically owned by the government, and the government fills its coffers by selling fifty-year leases to developers (the fact that there are no absolute private property rights to land will come as another surprise t boosters of 'Hong Kong-style' libertarianism) ... The government has an interest in maintaining high property values ... if it is to maintain its policy of low taxation. It does this by carefully controlling the amount of land that is released for sale ... It is, of course, those buying new homes and renting from the private sector who pay the price for this policy. Many Hong Kongers live in third world conditions, and the need to pay astronomical residential property prices is widely viewed as an indirect form of taxation."* [Daniel A. Bell, *"Hong Kong's Transition to Capitalism"*, pp. 15–23, **Dissent**, Winter 1998, pp. 15–6]



The ownership of land and the state's role as landlord partly explains the low apparent ratio of state spending to GDP. If the cost of the subsidised housing land were accounted for at market prices in the government budget, the ratio would be significantly higher. As noted, Hong Kong had no need to pay for defence as this cost was borne by the UK taxpayer. Include these government-provided services at their market prices and the famously low share of government spending in GDP climbs sharply.

Luckily for many inhabitants of Hong Kong, the state provides a range of social welfare services in housing, education, health care and social security. The government has a very basic, but comprehensive social welfare system. This started in the 1950s, when the government launched one of the largest public housing schemes in history to house the influx of about 2 million people fleeing Communist China. Hong Kong's social welfare system really started in 1973, when the newly appointed governor *"announced that public housing, education, medical, and social welfare services would be treated as the four pillars of a fair and caring society."* He launched a public housing program and by 1998, 52 percent of the population *"live in subsidised housing, most of whom rent flats from the Housing Authority with rents set at one-fifth the market level (the rest have bought subsidised flats under various home-ownership schemes, with prices discounted 50 percent from those in the private sector)."* Beyond public housing, Hong Kong *"also has most of the standard features of welfare states in Western Europe. There is an excellent public health care system: private hospitals are actually going out of business because clean and efficient public hospitals are well subsidised (the government pays 97 percent of the costs)."* Fortunately for the state, the territory initially had a relatively

islatures and (perhaps) in the courts. Advertisers are very concerned to avoid offending constituencies who might produce flak, and their demands for inoffensive programming exerts pressure on the media to avoid certain kinds of facts, positions, or programs that are likely to call forth flak. This can have a strong deterrence factor, with media organisations avoiding certain subjects and sources simply to avoid having to deal with the inevitable flak they will receive from the usual sources. The ability to produce flak *"is related to power,"* as it is expensive to generate on scale which is actually effective. [p. 26] Unsurprisingly, this means that the most effective flak comes from business and government who have the funds to produce it on a large scale.

The government itself is *"a major producer of flak, regularly assailing, threatening, and 'correcting' the media, trying to contain any deviations from the established line in foreign or domestic policy."* However, the right-wing plays a major role in deliberately creating flak. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, the corporate community sponsored the creation of such institutions as the American Legal Foundation, the Capital Legal Foundation, the Media Institute, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, and Accuracy in Media (AIM), which may be regarded as organisations designed for the specific purpose of producing flak. Freedom House is an older US organisation which had a broader design but whose flak-producing activities became a model for the more recent organisations. The Media Institute, for instance, was set up in 1972 and is funded by wealthy corporate patrons, sponsoring media monitoring projects, conferences, and studies of the media. The main focus of its studies and conferences has been the alleged failure of the media to portray business accurately and to give adequate weight to the business point of view, but it also sponsors works which "expose" alleged left-wing bias in the mass media. [p. 28 and pp. 27–8]



becomes willing to sacrifice people and their society today for the supposed economic benefit of future generations (in reality, current profits). If one accepts the ethics of mathematics, a future increase in the size of the economy is more important than current social disruption. Thus Polanyi again: *"a social calamity is primarily a cultural not an economic phenomenon that can be measured by income figures."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 157] And it is the nature of capitalism to ignore or despise what cannot be measured.

This does not mean that state intervention cannot have bad effects on the economy or society. Given the state's centralised, bureaucratic nature, it would be impossible for it **not** to have some bad effects. State intervention can and does make bad situations worse in some cases. It also has a tendency for self-perpetuation. As Elisee Reclus put it:

> *"As soon as an institution is established, even if it should be only to combat flagrant abuses, it creates them anew through its very existence. It has to adapt to its bad environment, and in order to function, it must do so in a pathological way. Whereas the creators of the institution follow only noble ideals, the employees that they appoint must consider above all their remuneration and the continuation of their employment."* [*"The Modern State"*, pp. 201–15, John P Clark and Camille Martin (eds.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 207]

As such, welfare within a bureaucratic system will have problems but getting rid of it will hardly **reduce** inequality (as proven by the onslaught on it by Thatcher and Reagan). This is unsurprising, for while the state bureaucracy can never eliminate poverty, it can and does reduce it — if only to keep the bureaucrats secure in employment by showing some results.

Moreover, as Malatesta notes, *"the practical evidence [is] that whatever governments do is always motivated by the desire*

*to dominate, and is always geared to defending, extending and perpetuating its privileges and those of the class of which it is both the representative and defender."* [**Anarchy**, p. 24] In such circumstances, it would be amazing that state intervention did not have negative effects. However, to criticise those negative effects while ignoring or downplaying the far worse social problems which produced the intervention in the first place is both staggeringly illogical and deeply hypocritical. As we discuss later, in section D.1.5, the anarchist approach to reforms and state intervention is based on this awareness.

## D.1.2 Is state intervention the result of democracy?

No. Social and economic intervention by the modern state began long before universal suffrage became widespread. While this intervention was usually in the interests of the capitalist class, it was sometimes done explicitly in the name of the general welfare and the public interest. Needless to say, while the former usually goes unmentioned by defenders of capitalism, the latter is denounced and attacked as violations of the natural order (often in terms of the sinister sounding "collectivist" measures).

That democracy is not the root cause for the state's interference in the market is easily seen from the fact that non-democratic capitalist states presided over by defenders of "free market" capitalism have done so. For example, in Britain, acts of state intervention were introduced when property and sexual restrictions on voting rights still existed. More recently, taking Pinochet's neo-liberal dictatorship in Chile, we find that the state, as would be expected, *"often intervened on behalf of private and foreign business interests."* Given the history of capitalism, this is to be expected. However, the state also practised social intervention at times, partly to



essential to elite interests. "Experts" on TV panel discussions and news programs are often drawn from such organisations, whose funding comes primarily from the corporate sector and wealthy families — a fact that is, of course, never mentioned on the programs where they appear. This allows business, for example, to sell its interests as objective and academic while, in fact, they provide a thin veneer to mask partisan work which draws the proper conclusions desired by their pay masters.

This process of creating a mass of experts readily available to the media *"has been carried out on a deliberate and a massive scale."* These ensure that *"the corporate viewpoint"* is effectively spread as the experts work is *"funded and their outputs ... disseminated to the media by a sophisticated propaganda effort. The corporate funding and clear ideological purpose in the overall effort had no discernible effect on the credibility of the intellectuals so mobilised; on the contrary, the funding and pushing of their ideas catapulted them into the press."* [p. 23 and p. 24]

## D.3.4 How is "flak" used as a means of disciplining the media?

*"Flak"* is a term used by Herman and Chomsky to refer *"to negative responses to a media statement or program."* Such responses may be expressed as phone calls, letters, telegrams, e-mail messages, petitions, lawsuits, speeches, bills before Congress, or *"other modes of complaint, threat, or punishment."* Flak may be generated centrally, by organisations, or it may come from the independent actions of individuals (sometimes encouraged to act by media hacks such as right-wing talk show hosts or newspapers). *"If flak is produced on a large-scale, or by individuals or groups with substantial resources, it can be both uncomfortable and costly to the media."* [p. 26]

This is for many reasons. Positions need to be defended within and outwith an organisation, sometimes in front of leg-

ences and photo-opportunity sessions. This means that, in effect, *"the large bureaucracies of the powerful **subsidise** the mass media, and gain special access by their contribution to reducing the media's costs of acquiring the raw materials of, and producing, news."* [p. 22]

This economic dependency also allows corporations and the state to influence the media. The most obvious way is by using their *"personal relationships, threats, and rewards to further influence and coerce the media. The media may feel obligated to carry extremely dubious stories and mute criticism in order not to offend sources and disturb a close relationship. It is very difficult to call authorities on whom one depends for daily news liars, even if they tell whoppers."* Critical sources may be avoided not only due to the higher costs in finding them and establishing their credibility, but because the established *"primary sources may be offended and may even threaten the media with using them."* [p. 22] As well as refusing to co-operate on shows or reports which include critics, corporations and governments may threaten the media with loss of access if they ask too many critical questions or delve into inappropriate areas.

In addition, *"more important, powerful sources regularly take advantage of media routines and dependency to 'manage' the media, to manipulate them into following a special agenda and framework ... Part of this management process consists of inundating the media with stories, which serve sometimes to foist a particular line and frame on the media ... and at other times to chase unwanted stories off the front page or out of the media altogether."* [p. 23]

The dominance of official sources would, of course, be weakened by the existence of highly respectable unofficial sources that gave dissident views with great authority. To alleviate this problem, the power elite uses the strategy of *"co-opting the experts"* — that is, putting them on the payroll as consultants, funding their research, and organising think tanks that will hire them directly and help disseminate the messages deemed



diffuse popular disaffection with the economic realities the system generated (disaffection that state oppression could not control) and partly to counter-act the negative effects of its own dogmas. As such, *"[f]ree-market ideologues are reluctant to acknowledge that even the Pinochet government intervened in many cases in the market-place in last-minute attempts to offset the havoc wrecked by its free-market policies (low-income housing, air quality, public health, etc.)"* [Joseph Collins and John Lear, **Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look**, p. 254]

The notion that it is "democracy" which causes politicians to promise the electorate state action in return for office is based on a naive viewpoint of representative democracy. The centralist and hierarchical nature of "representative" democracy means that the population at large has little real control over politicians, who are far more influenced by big business, business lobby groups, and the state bureaucracy. This means that truly popular and democratic pressures are limited within the capitalist state and the interests of elites are far more decisive in explaining state actions.

Obviously anarchists are well aware that the state does say it intervenes to protect the interests of the general public, not the elite. While much of this is often rhetoric to hide policies which (in reality) benefit corporate interests far more than the general public, it cannot be denied that such intervention does exist, to some degree. However, even here the evidence supports the anarchist claim that the state is an instrument of class rule, not a representative of the general interest. This is because such reforms have, in general, been few and far between compared to those laws which benefit the few.

Moreover, historically when politicians have made legal changes favouring the general public rather than the elite they have done so only after intense social pressure from below. For examples, the state only passed pro-union laws only when the alternative was disruptive industrial conflict. In the US,

the federal government, at best, ignored or, at worse, actively suppressed labour unions during the 19th century. It was only when mineworkers were able to shut down the anthracite coal fields for months in 1902, threatening disruption of heating supplies around the country, that Teddy Roosevelt supported union demands for binding arbitration to raise wages. He was the first President in American history to intervene in a strike in a positive manner on behalf of workers.

This can be seen from the "New Deal" and related measures of limited state intervention to stimulate economic recovery during the Great Depression. These were motivated by more material reasons than democracy. Thus Takis Fotopoulos argues that *"[t]he fact ...that 'business confidence' was at its lowest could go a long way in explaining the much more tolerant attitude of those controlling production towards measures encroaching on their economic power and profits. In fact, it was only when — and as long as — state interventionism had the approval of those actually controlling production that it was successful."* [*"The Nation-state and the Market"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55] As anarchist Sam Dolgoff notes, the New Deal in America (and similar policies elsewhere) was introduced, in part, because the *"whole system of human exploitation was threatened. The political state saved itself, and all that was essential to capitalism, doing what 'private enterprise' could not do. Concessions were made to the workers, the farmers, the middle-class, while the private capitalists were deprived of some of their power."* [**The American Labor Movement**, pp. 25–6] Much the same can be said of the post-war Keynesianism consensus, which combined state aid to the capitalist class with social reforms. These reforms were rarely the result of generous politicians but rather the product of social pressures from below and the needs of the system as a whole. For example, the extensive reforms made by the 1945 Labour Government in the UK was the direct result of ruling class fear, not socialism. As Quentin Hogg, a Conservative M.P., put it in the House of Parliament in 1943: *"If you do not*



Department, in Washington, D.C., are centres of such activity on a national scale, while city hall and police departments are their local equivalents. In addition, trade groups, businesses and corporations also provide regular stories that are deemed as newsworthy and from credible sources.

In other words, government and corporate sources have the great merit of being recognisable and credible by their status and prestige; moreover, they have the most money available to produce a flow of news that the media can use. For example, the Pentagon has a public-information service employing many thousands of people, spending hundreds of millions of dollars every year, and far outspending not only the public-information resources of any dissenting individual or group but the **aggregate** of such groups. Only the corporate sector has the resources to produce public information and propaganda on the scale of the Pentagon and other government bodies. The Chamber of Commerce, a business collective, had a 1983 budget for research, communications, and political activities of $65 million. Besides the US Chamber of Commerce, there are thousands of state and local chambers of commerce and trade associations also engaged in public relations and lobbying activities. As we noted in section D.2, the corporate funding of PR is massive. Thus *"business corporations and trade groups are also regular purveyors of stories deemed newsworthy. These bureaucracies turn out a large volume of material that meets the demands of news organisations for reliable, scheduled flows."* [p. 19]

To maintain their pre-eminent position as sources, government and business-news agencies expend much effort to make things easy for news organisations. They provide the media organisations with facilities in which to gather, give journalists advance copies of speeches and upcoming reports; schedule press conferences at hours convenient for those needing to meet news deadlines; write press releases in language that can be used with little editing; and carefully organise press confer-

*by income."* This has had the effect of placing working class and radical papers at a serious disadvantage. Without access to advertising revenue, even the most popular paper will fold or price itself out of the market. Chomsky and Herman cite the British pro-labour and pro-union **Daily Herald** as an example of this process. At its peak, the **Daily Herald** had almost double the readership of **The Times**, the **Financial Times** and **The Guardian** combined, yet even with 8.1% of the national circulation it got 3.5% of net advertising revenue and so could not survive on the "free market." As Herman and Chomsky note, a *"mass movement without any major media support, and subject to a great deal of active press hostility, suffers a serious disability, and struggles against grave odds."* With the folding of the **Daily Herald**, the labour movement lost its voice in the mainstream media. [pp. 17–8 and pp. 15–16]

Thus advertising is an effective filter for news choice (and, indeed, survival in the market).

## D.3.3 Why do the media rely on government and business "experts" for information?

As Herman and Chomsky stress, basic economics explains why the mass media *"are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information"* as well as *"reciprocity of interest."* The media need *"a steady, reliable flow of raw material of news. They have daily news demands and imperative news schedules that they must meet."* They cannot afford to have reporters and cameras at all locations and so economics *"dictates that they concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs."* [p. 18] This means that bottom-line considerations dictate that the media concentrate their resources where news, rumours and leaks are plentiful, and where regular press conferences are held. The White House, Pentagon, and the State



*give the people social reforms, they are going to give you revolution."* Memories of the near revolutions across Europe after the First World War were obviously in many minds, on both sides.

Needless to say, when the ruling class considered a specific reform to be against its interests, it will be abolished or restricted. An example of this can be seen in the 1934 Wagner Act in the USA, which gave US labour its first and last political victory. The Act was passed due to the upsurge in wildcat strikes, factory occupations and successful union organising drives which were spreading throughout the country. Its purpose was specifically to calm this struggle in order to preserve "labour peace." The act made it legal for unions to organise, but this placed labour struggles within the boundaries of legal procedures and so meant that they could be more easily controlled. In addition, this concession was a form of appeasement whose effect was to make those involved in union actions less likely to start questioning the fundamental bases of the capitalist system. Once the fear of a militant labour movement had passed, the Wagner Act was undermined and made powerless by new laws, laws which made illegal the tactics which forced the politicians to pass the law in the first place and increased the powers of bosses over workers. The same can be said of other countries.

The pattern is clear. It is always the case that things need to change on the ground first and then the law acknowledges the changes. Any state intervention on behalf of the general public or workers have all followed people and workers organising and fighting for their rights. If labour or social "peace" exists because of too little organising and protesting or because of lack of strength in the workplace by unions, politicians will feel no real pressure to change the law and, consequently, refuse to. As Malatesta put it, the *"only limit to the oppression of government is that power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it ... When the people meekly submit to the law, or their protests are feeble and confined to words, the government studies*

*its own interests and ignores the needs of the people; when the protests are lively, insistent, threatening, the government ... gives way or resorts to repression."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 196]

Needless to say, the implication of classical liberal ideology that popular democracy is a threat to capitalism is the root of the fallacy that democracy leads to state intervention. The notion that by limiting the franchise the rich will make laws which benefit all says more about the classical liberals' touching faith in the altruism of the rich than it does about their understanding of human nature, the realities of both state and capitalism and their grasp of history. The fact that they can join with John Locke and claim with a straight face that all must abide by the rules that only the elite make says a lot about their concept of "freedom."

Some of the more modern classical liberals (for example, many right-wing "libertarians") advocate a "democratic" state which cannot intervene in economic matters. This is no solution, however, as it only gets rid of the statist response to real and pressing social problems caused by capitalism without supplying anything better in its place. This is a form of paternalism, as the elite determines what is, and is not, intervention and what the masses should, and should not, be able to do (in their interests, of course). Then there is the obvious conclusion that any such regime would have to exclude change. After all, if people can change the regime they are under they may change it in ways that the right does not support. The provision for ending economic and other reforms would effectively ban most opposition parties as, by definition, they could do nothing once in power. How this differs from a dictatorship would be hard to say — after all, most dictatorships have parliamentary bodies which have no power but which can talk a lot.

Needless to say, the right often justify this position by appealing to the likes of Adam Smith but this, needless to say,



## D.3.2 What is the effect of advertising on the mass media?

The main business of the media is to sell audiences to advertisers. Advertisers thus acquire a kind of de facto licensing authority, since without their support the media would cease to be economically viable. And it is **affluent** audiences that get advertisers interested. As Chomsky and Herman put it, the *"idea that the drive for large audiences makes the mass media 'democratic' thus suffers from the initial weakness that its political analogue is a voting system weighted by income!"* [p.16]

As regards TV, in addition to *"discrimination against unfriendly media institutions, advertisers also choose selectively among programs on the basis of their own principles. With rare exceptions these are culturally and politically conservative. Large corporate advertisers on television will rarely sponsor programs that engage in serious criticisms of corporate activities."* Accordingly, large corporate advertisers almost never sponsor programs that contain serious criticisms of corporate activities, such as negative ecological impacts, the workings of the military-industrial complex, or corporate support of and benefits from Third World dictatorships. This means that TV companies *"learn over time that such programs will not sell and would have to be carried at a financial sacrifice, and that, in addition, they may offend powerful advertisers."* More generally, advertisers will want *"to avoid programs with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the 'buying mood.'"* [p. 17]

Political discrimination is therefore structured into advertising allocations by wealthy companies with an emphasis on people with money to buy. In addition, *"many companies will always refuse to do business with ideological enemies and those whom they perceive as damaging their interests."* Thus overt discrimination adds to the force of the *"voting system weighted*

Because they are large corporations with international investment interests, the major media tend to have a right-wing political bias. In addition, members of the business class own most of the mass media, the bulk of which depends for their existence on advertising revenue (which in turn comes from private business). Business also provides a substantial share of "experts" for news programmes and generates massive "flak." Claims that the media are "left-leaning" are sheer disinformation manufactured by the "flak" organisations described below (in section D.3.4

). Thus Herman and Chomsky:

> *"the dominant media forms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with other major corporations, banks, and government. This is the first powerful filter that effects news choices."* [p. 14]

Needless to say, reporters and editors will be selected based upon how well their work reflects the interests and needs of their employers. Thus a radical reporter and a more mainstream one both of the same skills and abilities would have very different careers within the industry. Unless the radical reporter toned down their copy, they are unlikely to see it printed unedited or unchanged. Thus the structure within the media firm will tend to penalise radical viewpoints, encouraging an acceptance of the status quo in order to further a career. This selection process ensures that owners do not need to order editors or reporters what to do — to be successful they will have to internalise the values of their employers.



fails to appreciate the changing political and economic situation since those days. As market socialist Allan Engler argues:

> *"In Smith's day government was openly and unashamedly an instrument of wealth owners. Less than 10 per cent of British men — and no women at all — had the right to vote. When Smith opposed government interference in the economy, he was opposing the imposition of wealth owners' interests on everybody else. Today, when neoconservatives oppose state interference, their aim to the opposite: to stop the representatives of the people from interfering with the interests of wealth owners."* [**Apostles of Greed**, p. 104]

As well as the changing political situation, Smith's society was without the concentrations of economic power that marks capitalism as a developed system. Whether Smith would have been happy to see his name appropriated to defend corporate power is, obviously, a moot point. However, he had no illusions that the state of his time interfered to bolster the elite, not the many (for example: *"Whenever the law has attempted to regulate the wages of workmen, it has always been rather to lower them than to raise them."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 119]). As such, it is doubtful he would have agreed with those who involve his name to defend corporate power and trusts while advocating the restriction of trade unions as is the case with modern day neo-liberalism:

> *"Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always masters. When the regulation, therefore, is in favour of the workmen, it is always just and equitable ... When masters combine together in order to reduce the wages of their workmen, they commonly enter into a private bond or*

> *agreement ... Were the workmen to enter into a contrary combination of the same kind. not to accept of a certain wage under a certain penalty, the law would punish them very severely; and if dealt impartially, it would treat the masters in the same way."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

The interest of merchants and master manufacturers, Smith stressed, *"is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public ... The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never to be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention. It comes from an order of men whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 231–2] These days Smith would have likely argued that this position applies equally to attempts by big business to **revoke** laws and regulations!

To view the state intervention as simply implementing the wishes of the majority is to assume that classes and other social hierarchies do not exist, that one class does not oppress and exploit another and that they share common interests. It means ignoring the realities of the current political system as well as economic, for political parties will need to seek funds to campaign and that means private cash. Unsurprisingly, they will do what their backers demands and this dependence the wealthy changes the laws all obey. This means that any government will tend to favour business and the wealthy as the parties are funded by them and so they get some say over what is done. Only those parties which internalise the values and interests of their donors will prosper and so the wealthy acquire an unspoken veto power over government policy. In



and 24 systems — along with the government and wire services, *"defines the news agenda and supplies much of the national and international news to the lower tiers of the media, and thus for the general public."* [p. 5] Since then, media concentration has increased, both nationally and on a global level. Bagdikian's 2004 book, **The New Media Monopoly**, showed that since 1983 the number of corporations controlling most newspapers, magazines, book publishers, movie studios, and electronic media have shrunk from 50 to five global-dimension firms, operating with many of the characteristics of a cartel — Time-Warner, Disney, News Corporation, Viacom and Germany-based Bertelsmann.

These *"top-tier companies are large, profit-seeking corporations, owned and controlled by very wealthy people ... Many of these companies are fully integrated into the financial market"* which means that *"the pressures of stockholders, directors and bankers to focus on the bottom line are powerful."* [p. 5] These pressures have intensified in recent years as media stocks have become market favourites and as deregulation has increased profitability and so the threat of take-overs. These ensure that these *"control groups obviously have a special take on the status quo by virtue of their wealth and their strategic position in one of the great institutions of society. And they exercise the power of this strategic position, if only by establishing the general aims of the company and choosing its top management."* [p. 8]

The media giants have also diversified into other fields. For example GE, and Westinghouse, both owners of major television networks, are huge, diversified multinational companies heavily involved in the controversial areas of weapons production and nuclear power. GE and Westinghouse depend on the government to subsidise their nuclear power and military research and development, and to create a favourable climate for their overseas sales and investments. Similar dependence on the government affect other media.

*whether or not 'the economy' is good is never explained."* Barring a few exceptions, the media did not *"reflect the concerns of average salaried workers at least as much as those of the investor class."* Needless to say, which capitalist economists were allowed space to discuss their ideas, progressive economists did not. [*"Good News! The Rich Get Richer: Lack of applause for falling wages is media mystery,"* **Extra!**, March/April 2006] Given the nature and role of the media, this reporting comes as no surprise.

We stress again, before continuing, that this is a **summary** of Herman's and Chomsky's thesis and we cannot hope to present the wealth of evidence and argument available in either **Manufacturing Consent** or **Necessary Illusions**. We recommend either of these books for more information on and evidence to support the "propaganda model" of the media. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes in this section of the FAQ are from Herman and Chomsky's **Manufacturing Consent**.

## D.3.1 How does the structure of the media affect its content?

Even a century ago, the number of media with any substantial outreach was limited by the large size of the necessary investment, and this limitation has become increasingly effective over time. As in any well developed market, this means that there are very effective **natural** barriers to entry into the media industry. Due to this process of concentration, the ownership of the major media has become increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. As Ben Bagdikian's stresses in his 1987 book **Media Monopoly**, the 29 largest media systems account for over half of the output of all newspapers, and most of the sales and audiences in magazines, broadcasting, books, and movies. The *"top tier"* of these — somewhere between 10



other words, parties need to beg the rich for election funds. Some parties do, of course, have trade union funding, but this is easily counteracted by pressure from big business (i.e., that useful euphemism, *"the markets"*) and the state bureaucracy. This explains why the unions in, say, Britain spend a large part of their time under Labour governments trying to influence it by means of strikes and lobbying.

The defenders of "free market" capitalism appear oblivious as to the reasons **why** the state has approved regulations and nationalisations as well as **why** trade unions, (libertarian and statist) socialist and populist movements came about in the first place. Writing all these off as the products of ideology and/or economic ignorance is far too facile an explanation, as is the idea of power hungry bureaucrats seeking to extend their reach. The truth is much more simple and lies at the heart of the current system. The reasons why various "anti-capitalist" social movements and state interventions arise with such regular periodicity is because of the effects of an economic system which is inherently unstable and exploitative. For example, social movements arose in the 19th century because workers, artisans and farmers were suffering the effects of a state busy creating the necessary conditions for capitalism. They were losing their independence and had become, or were being turned, into wage slaves and, naturally, hated it. They saw the negative effects of capitalism on their lives and communities and tried to stop it.

In terms of social regulation, the fact is that they were often the result of pressing needs. Epidemics, for example, do not respect property rights and the periodic deep recessions that marked 19th century capitalism made the desire to avoid them an understandable one on the part of the ruling elite. Unlike their ideological followers in the latter part of the century and onwards, the political economists of the first half of the nineteenth century were too intelligent and too well informed to advocate out-and-out laissez-faire. They grasped the realities

of the economic system in which they worked and thought and, as a result, were aware of clash between the logic of pure abstract theory and the demands of social life and morality. While they stressed the pure theory, the usually did so in order to justify the need for state intervention in some particular aspect of social or economic life. John Stuart Mill's famous chapter on *"the grounds and limits of the laissez-faire and non-interference principle"* in his **Principles of Political Economy** is, perhaps, the most obvious example of this dichotomy (unsurprisingly, von Mises dismissed Mill as a "socialist" — recognising the problems which capitalism itself generates will make you ideologically suspect to the true believer).

To abolish these reforms without first abolishing capitalism is to return to the social conditions which produced the social movements in the first place. In other words, to return to the horrors of the 19th century. We can see this in the USA today, where this process of turning back the clock is most advanced: mass criminality, lower life expectancy, gated communities, increased work hours, and a fortune spent on security. However, this should not blind us to the limitations of these movements and reforms which, while coming about as a means to overcome the negative effects of corporate capitalism upon the population, **preserved** that system. In terms of successful popular reform movements, the policies they lead to were (usually) the minimum standard agreed upon by the capitalists themselves to offset social unrest.

Unsurprisingly, most opponents of state intervention are equally opposed to popular movements and the pressures they subject the state to. However trying to weaken (or even get rid of) the social movements which have helped reform capitalism ironically helps bolster the power and centralisation of the state. This is because to get rid of working class organisations means eliminating a key counter-balance to the might of the state. Atomised individuals not only cannot fight capitalist exploitation and oppression, they also cannot fight and



simply foisted them onto the general population. Genuine criticism only starts to appear when the costs of a conflict become so high that elements of the ruling class start to question tactics and strategy. Until that happens, any criticism is minor (and within a generally pro-war perspective) and the media acts essentially as the fourth branch of the government rather than a Fourth Estate. The Iraq war, it should be noted, was an excellent example of this process at work. Initially, the media simply amplified elite needs, uncritically reporting the Bush Administration's pathetic "evidence" of Iraqi WMD (which quickly became exposed as the nonsense it was). Only when the war became too much of a burden did critical views start being heard and then only in a context of being supportive of the goals of the operation.

This analysis applies as much to domestic issues. For example, Janine Jackson reported how most of the media fell in step with the Bush Administration's attempts in 2006 to trumpet a "booming" U.S. economy in the face of public disbelief. As she notes, there were *"obvious reasons [for] the majority of Americans dissent ... Most American households are not, in fact, seeing their economic fortunes improve. GDP is up, but virtually all the growth has gone into corporate profits and the incomes of the highest economic brackets. Wages and incomes for average workers, adjusted for inflation, are down in recent years; the median income for non-elderly households is down 4.8 percent since 2000 ...The poverty rate is rising, as is the number of people in debt."* Yet *"rather than confront these realities, and explore the implications of the White House's efforts to deny them, most mainstream media instead assisted the Bush team's PR by themselves feigning confusion over the gap between the official view and the public mood."* They did so by presenting *"the majority of Americans' understanding of their own economic situation .. . as somehow disconnected from reality, ascribed to 'pessimism,' ignorance or irrationality ... But why these ordinary workers, representing the majority of households, should not be considered the arbiters of*

**MediaLens** (neither, it should be pointed out, are anarchist organisations).

Before discussing the "propaganda model", we will present a few examples by FAIR to show how the media reflects the interests of the ruling class. War usually provides the most obvious evidence for the biases in the media. For example, Steve Rendall and Tara Broughel analysed the US news media during the first stage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and found that official voices dominated it *"while opponents of the war have been notably underrepresented,"* Nearly two-thirds of all sources were pro-war, rising to 71% of US guests. Anti-war voices were a mere 10% of all sources, but just 6% of non-Iraqi sources and 3% of US sources. *"Thus viewers were more than six times as likely to see a pro-war source as one who was anti-war; with U.S. guests alone, the ratio increases to 25 to 1."* Unsurprisingly, official voices, *"including current and former government employees, whether civilian or military, dominated network newscasts"* (63% of overall sources). Some analysts did criticise certain aspects of the military planning, but such *"the rare criticisms were clearly motivated by a desire to see U.S. military efforts succeed."* While dissent was quite visible in America, *"the networks largely ignored anti-war opinion."* FAIR found that just 3% of US sources represented or expressed opposition to the war in spite of the fact more than one in four Americans opposed it. In summary, *"none of the networks offered anything resembling proportionate coverage of anti-war voices"*. [*"Amplifying Officials, Squelching Dissent"*, **Extra!** May/June 2003]

This perspective is common during war time, with the media's rule of thumb being, essentially, that to support the war is to be objective, while to be anti-war is to carry a bias. The media repeats the sanitised language of the state, relying on official sources to inform the public. Truth-seeking independence was far from the media agenda and so they made it easier for governments to do what they always do, that is lie. Rather than challenge the agenda of the state, the media



restrict the might of the state nor attempt to influence it even a fraction of what the wealthy elite can via the stock market and management investment decisions. As such, von Hayek's assertion that *"it is inexcusable to pretend that ... the pressure which can be brought by the large firms or corporation is comparable to that of the organisation of labour"* is right, but in the exact opposite way he intended. [**Law, Legislation and Liberty**, vol. III, p. 89] Outside the imagination of conservatives and right-wing liberals, big business has much greater influence than trade unions on government policy (see section D.2 for some details). While trade union and other forms of popular action are more visible than elite pressures, it does not mean that the form does not exist or less influential. Quite the reverse. The latter may be more noticeable, true, but is only because it has to be in order to be effective and because the former is so prevalent.

The reality of the situation can be seen from looking at the US, a political system where union influence is minimal while business influence and lobbying is large scale (and has been since the 1980s). A poll of popular attitudes about the 2005 US budget *"revealed that popular attitudes are virtually the inverse of policy."* In general, there is a *"dramatic divide between public opinion and public policy,"* but public opinion has little impact on state officials. Unsurprisingly, the general population *"do not feel that the government is responsive to the public will."* The key to evaluating whether a state is a functioning democracy is dependent on *"what public opinion is on major issues"* and *"how it relates to public policy."* In the case of the US, business interests are supreme and, as such, *"[n]ot only does the US government stand apart from the rest of the world on many crucial issues, but even from its own population."* The state *"pursues the strategic and economic interests of dominant sectors of the domestic population,"* unless forced otherwise by the people (for *"rights are not likely to be granted by benevolent authorities"* but rather by *"education and organising"*). In summary,

governments implement policies which benefit *"the short-term interests of narrow sectors of power and wealth ... It takes wilful blindness not to see how these commitments guide ... policy."* [Chomsky, **Failed States**, p. 234, p. 235, p. 228, p. 229, p. 262, p. 263 and p. 211] A clearer example of how capitalist "democracy" works can hardly be found.

Von Hayek showed his grasp of reality by stating that the real problem is *"not the selfish action of individual firms but the selfishness of organised groups"* and so *"the real exploiters in our present society are not egotistic capitalists ... but organisations which derive their power from the moral support of collective action and the feeling of group loyalty."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96] So (autocratic) firms and (state privileged) corporations are part of the natural order, but (self-organised and, at worse, relatively democratic) unions are not. Ignoring the factual issues of the power and influence of wealth and business, the logical problem with this opinion is clear. Companies are, of course, *"organised groups"* and based around *"collective action"*. The difference is that the actions and groups are dictated by the few individuals at the top. As would be expected, the application of his ideas by the Thatcher government not only bolstered capitalist power and resulted in increased inequality and exploitation (see section J.4.2) but also a strengthening and centralisation of state power. One aspect of this the introduction of government regulation of unions as well as new legislation which increase police powers to restrict the right to strike and protest (both of which were, in part, due opposition to free market policies by the population).

Anarchists may agree that the state, due to its centralisation and bureaucracy, crushes the spontaneous nature of society and is a handicap to social progress and evolution. However, leaving the market alone to work its course fallaciously assumes that people will happily sit back and let market forces rip apart their communities and environment. Getting rid of state intervention without getting rid of capitalism and cre-



**essary Illusions** for a further discussion of this model of the media.

Chomsky and Herman's "propaganda model" of the media postulates a set of five *"filters"* that act to screen the news and other material disseminated by the media. These *"filters"* result in a media that reflects elite viewpoints and interests and mobilises *"support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity."* [**Manufacturing Consent**, p. xi] These *"filters"* are: (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) *"flak"* (negative responses to a media report) as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) *"anticommunism"* as a national religion and control mechanism. It is these filters which ensure that genuine objectivity is usually lacking in the media (needless to say, some media, such as Fox news and the right-wing newspapers like the UK's Sun, Telegraph and Daily Mail, do not even try to present an objective perspective).

*"The raw material of news must pass through successive filters leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print,"* Chomsky and Herman maintain. The filters *"fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place, and they explain the basis and operations of what amount to propaganda campaigns."* [p. 2] We will briefly consider the nature of these five filters below before refuting two common objections to the model. As with Chomsky and Herman, examples are mostly from the US media. For more extensive analysis, we would recommend two organisations which study and critique the performance of the media from a perspective informed by the "propaganda model." These are the American **Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting** (FAIR) and the UK based

# D.3 How does wealth influence the mass media?

In a word, massively. This, in turn, influences the way people see the world and, as a result, the media is a key means by which the general population come to accept, and support, *"the arrangements of the social, economic, and political order."* The media, in other words *"are vigilant guardians protecting privilege from the threat of public understanding and participation."* This process ensures that state violence is not necessary to maintain the system as *"more subtle means are required: the manufacture of consent, [and] deceiving the masses with 'necessary illusions."* [Noam Chomsky, **Necessary Illusions**, pp. 13–4 and p. 19] The media, in other words, are a key means of ensuring that the dominant ideas within society are those of the dominant class.

Noam Chomsky has helped develop a detailed and sophisticated analyse of how the wealthy and powerful use the media to propagandise in their own interests behind a mask of objective news reporting. Along with Edward Herman, he has developed the ***"Propaganda Model"*** of the media works. Herman and Chomsky expound this analysis in their book **Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media**, whose main theses we will summarise in this section (unless otherwise indicated all quotes are from this work). We do not suggest that we can present anything other than a summary here and, as such, we urge readers to consult **Manufacturing Consent** itself for a full description and extensive supporting evidence. We would also recommend Chomsky's **Nec-**



ating a free society would mean that the need for social self-protection would still exist but that there would be even less means of achieving it than now. The results of such a policy, as history shows, would be a catastrophe for the working class (and the environment, we must add) and beneficial only for the elite (as intended, of course).

Ultimately, the implication of the false premise that democracy leads to state intervention is that the state exists for the benefit of the majority, which uses the state to exploit the elite! Amazingly, many capitalist apologists accept this as a valid inference from their premise, even though it's obviously a **reductio ad absurdum** of that premise as well as going against the facts of history. That the ruling elite is sometimes forced to accept state intervention outside its preferred area of aid for itself simply means that, firstly, capitalism is an unstable system which undermines its own social and ecological basis and, secondly, that they recognise that reform is preferable to revolution (unlike their cheerleaders).

## D.1.3 Is state intervention socialistic?

No. Libertarian socialism is about self-liberation and self-management of one's activities. Getting the state to act for us is the opposite of these ideals. In addition, the question implies that socialism is connected with its nemesis, statism, and that socialism means even more bureaucratic control and centralisation (*"socialism is the contrary of governmentalism."* [Proudhon, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63]). As Kropotkin stressed: *"State bureaucracy and centralisation are as irreconcilable with socialism as was autocracy with capitalist rule."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 185] The history of both social democracy and state socialism proved this, with the former merely reforming some aspects of capitalism while keeping the system intact while the latter created an even worse form of class system.

The identification of socialism with the state is something that social democrats, Stalinists and capitalist apologists **all** agree upon. However, as we'll see in section H.3.13, "state socialism" is in reality just state capitalism — the turning of the world into "one office and one factory" (to use Lenin's expression). Little wonder that most sane people join with anarchists in rejecting it. Who wants to work under a system in which, if one does not like the boss (i.e. the state), one cannot even quit?

The theory that state intervention is "creeping socialism" takes the laissez-faire ideology of capitalism at its face value, not realising that it is ideology rather than reality. Capitalism is a dynamic system and evolves over time, but this does not mean that by moving away from its theoretical starting point it is negating its essential nature and becoming socialistic. Capitalism was born from state intervention, and except for a very short period of laissez-faire which ended in depression has always depended on state intervention for its existence. As such, while there *"may be a residual sense to the notion that the state serves as an equaliser, in that without its intervention the destructive powers of capitalism would demolish social existence and the physical environment, a fact that has been well understood by the masters of the private economy who have regularly called upon the state to restrain and organise these forces. But the common idea that the government acts as a social equaliser can hardly be put forth as a general principle."* [Noam Chomsky, **The Chomsky Reader**, p. 185]

The list of state aid to business is lengthy and can hardly be considered as socialistic or egalitarian is aim (regardless of its supporters saying it is about creating "jobs" rather than securing profits, the reality of the situation). Government subsidies to arms companies and agribusiness, its subsidy of research and development work undertaken by government-supported universities, its spending to ensure a favourable international climate for business operations, its defence of intellectual property rights, its tort reform (i.e. the business agenda of limiting



combat the direct experience of stagnating wages, autocratic bosses, environmental degradation, economic insecurity and wealth polarisation indefinitely. The actual objective reality of neo-liberal capitalism will always come into glaring contrast with the propaganda used to justify and extend it. Hence the rising budgets for these activities cannot counteract the rising unease the American people feel about the direction their country is taking. The task of anarchists is to help the struggle, in America and across the globe, by which they can take their country and lives back from the elite.

actual amount is unknown, as PR industry (and their clients, of course) *"carefully conceals most of its activities from public view. This invisibility is part of a deliberate strategy for manipulating public opinion and government policy."* The net effect is that the wealth of *"large corporations, business associations and governments"* is used to *"out-manoeuvre, overpower and outlast true citizen reformers."* In other words: *"Making the World Safe from Democracy."* [John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, **Toxic Sludge is Good for You!**, p. 13, p. 14 and p. 13] The public relations industry, as Chomsky notes, is a means by which *"the oppressors … instil their assumptions as the perspective from which you [should] look at the world"* and is *"done extremely consciously."* [**Propaganda and the Public Mind**, p. 166]

The effects of this business propaganda are felt in all other aspects of life, ensuring that while the US business class is extremely class conscious, the rest of the American population considers "class" a swear word! It does have an impact. The rise of, say, "supply-side" economics in the late 1970s can be attributed to the sheer power of its backers rather than its intellectual or scientific merit (which, even in terms of mainstream economics, were slim). Much the same can be said for Monetarism and other discredited free-market dogmas. Hence the usual targets for these campaigns: taxes, regulation of business, welfare (for the poor, not for business), union corruption (when facing organising drives), and so on. All, of course, wrapped up in populist rhetoric which hides the real beneficiaries of the policies (for example, tax cut campaigns which strangely fail to mention that the elite will benefit most, or entirely, from the proposed legislation).

Ironically, the apparent success of this propaganda machine shows the inherent contradiction in the process. Spin and propaganda, while influential, cannot stop people experiencing the grim consequences when the business agenda is applied. While corporate propaganda has shaped the American political scene significantly to the right since the 1970s, it cannot



citizen power to sue corporations), its manipulation of unemployment rates, and so forth, are all examples of state intervention which can, by no stretch of the imagination be considered as "socialistic." As left-liberal economist Dean Baker notes:

> *"The key flaw in the stance that most progressives have taken on economic issues is that they have accepted a framing whereby conservatives are assumed to support market outcomes, while progressives want to rely on the government … The reality is that conservatives have been quite actively using the power of the government to shape market outcomes in ways that redistribute income upward. However, conservatives have been clever enough to not own up to their role in this process, pretending all along that everything is just the natural working of the market. And, progressives have been foolish enough to go along with this view."* [**The Conservative Nanny State: How the Wealthy Use the Government to Stay Rich and Get Richer**, p. v]

He stresses, that *"both conservatives and liberals want government intervention. The difference between them is the goal of government intervention, and the fact that conservatives are smart enough to conceal their dependence on the government."* They *"want to use the government to distribute income upward to higher paid workers, business owners, and investors. They support the establishment of rules and structures that have this effect."* Dean discusses numerous examples of right-wing forms of state action, and notes that *"[i]n these areas of public policy … conservatives are enthusiastic promoters of big government. They are happy to have the government intervene into the inner workings of the economy to make sure that money flows in the direction they like — upward. It is accurate to say that conservatives*

*don't like big government social programs, but not because they don't like big government. The problem with big government social programs is that they tend to distribute money downward, or provide benefits to large numbers of people."* It seems redundant to note that *"conservatives don't own up to the fact that the policies they favour are forms of government intervention. Conservatives do their best to portray the forms of government intervention that they favour, for example, patent and copyright protection, as simply part of the natural order of things."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 1 and p. 2]

This, it should be stressed, is unexpected. As we explained in section B.2, the state is an instrument of minority rule. As such, it strains belief that state intervention would be socialist in nature. After all, if the state is an agent of a self-interesting ruling class, then its laws are inevitably biased in its favour. The ultimate purpose of the state and its laws are the protection of private property and so the form of law is a class weapon while its content is the protection of class interests. They are inseparable.

So the state and its institutions can *"challenge the use of authority by other institutions, such as cruel parents, greedy landlords, brutal bosses, violent criminals"* as well as *"promot[ing] desirable social activities, such as public works, disaster relief, communications and transport systems, poor relief, education and broadcasting."* Anarchists argue, though, the state remains *"primarily ... oppressive"* and its *"main function is in fact to hold down the people, to limit freedom"* and that *"all the benevolent functions of the state can be exercised and often have been exercised by voluntary associations."* Moreover, *"the essential function of the state is to maintain the existing inequality"* and so *"cannot redistribute wealth fairly because it is the main agency of the unfair distribution."* This is because it is *"the political expression of the economic structure, that it is the representative of the people who own or control the wealth of the community and*



critical light to their students. Funding for this propaganda machine comes from the American Bankers Association, AT&T, the Sears Roebuck Foundation and the Ford Foundation. As Domhoff points out, *"[a]lthough it [and other bodies like it] has not been able to bring about active acceptance of all power elite policies and perspectives, on economic or other domestic issues, it has been able to ensure that opposing opinions have remained isolated, suspect and only partially developed."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 103–4]

In other words, "unacceptable" ideas are marginalised, the limits of expression defined, and all within a society apparently based on "the free marketplace of ideas."

This process has been going on for some time. For example *"[i]n April 1947, the Advertising Council announced a $100 million campaign to use all media to 'sell' the American economic system — as they conceived it — to the American people; the program was officially described as a 'major project of educating the American people about the economic facts of life.' Corporations 'started extensive programs to indoctrinate employees,' the leading business journal* ***Fortune*** *reported, subjected their captive audiences to 'Courses in Economic Education' and testing them for commitment to the 'free enterprise system — that is, Americanism.' A survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) found that many corporate leaders regarded 'propaganda' and 'economic education' as synonymous, holding that 'we want our people to think right'... [and that] 'some employers view... [it] as a sort of 'battle of loyalties' with the unions' — a rather unequal battle, given the resources available."* These huge PR campaigns *"employed the media, cinema, and other devices to identify 'free enterprise' — meaning state-subsidised private power with no infringement on managerial prerogatives — as 'the American way,' threatened by dangerous subversives."* [Noam Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 89–90 and p. 89]

By 1995, $10 billion was considered a *"conservative estimate"* on how much money was spent on public relations. The

are reduced. These include funding private foundations and institutes ("think-tanks") which can study, promote and protect ways to advance the interests of the few. It can also include the private funding of university chairs as well as the employment of PR companies to attack opponents and sell to the public the benefits not only of specific companies their activities but also the whole socio-economic system. In the words of Australian Social Scientist Alex Carey the *"twentieth century has been characterised by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 89]

By 1978, American business was spending $1 billion a year on grassroots propaganda. [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 93] This is known as *"Astroturf"* by PR insiders, to reflect the appearance of popular support, without the substance, and *"grasstops"* whereby influential citizens are hired to serve as spokespersons for business interests. In 1983, there existed 26 general purpose foundations for this purpose with endowments of $100 million or more, as well as dozens of corporate foundations. One extremely wealth conservative, Richard Mellon Scaife, was giving $10 million a year through four foundations and trusts. [G. William Domhoff, **Who Rules America Now?**, p. 92 and p. 94] These, along with media power, ensure that force — always an inefficient means of control — is replaced by (to use a term associated with Noam Chomsky) the *"manufacture of consent"*: the process whereby the limits of acceptable expression are defined by the wealthy.

Various institutions are used to get Big Business's message across, for example, the Joint Council on Economic Education, ostensibly a charitable organisation, funds economic education for teachers and provides books, pamphlets and films as teaching aids. In 1974, 20,000 teachers participated in its workshops. The aim is to induce teachers to present corporations in an un-



*the oppressor of the people who do the work which creates wealth."* [Walters, **About Anarchism**, p. 36 and p. 37]

The claim that state intervention is "socialist" also ignores the realities of power concentration under capitalism. Real socialism equalises power by redistributing it to the people, but, as Noam Chomsky points out, *"[i]n a highly inegalitarian society, it is most unlikely that government programs will be equalisers. Rather, it is to be expected that they will be designed and manipulated by private power for their own benefits; and to a significant degree the expectation is fulfilled. It is not very likely that matters could be otherwise in the absence of mass popular organisations that are prepared to struggle for their rights and interests."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 184] The notion that "welfare equals socialism" is nonsense, although it can reduce poverty and economic inequality somewhat. As Colin Ward notes, *"when socialists have achieved power"* they have produced nothing more than *"[m]onopoly capitalism with a veneer of social welfare as a substitute for social justice."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 18]

This analysis applies to state ownership and control of industry. Britain, for example, saw the nationalisation of roughly 20% of the economy by the 1945 Labour Government. These were the most unprofitable sections of the economy but, at the time, essential for the economy as a whole. By taking it into state ownership, these sections could be rationalised and developed at public expense. Rather than nationalisation being feared as "socialism," the capitalist class had no real issue with it. As anarchists at the time noted, *"the real opinions of capitalists can be seen from Stock Exchange conditions and statements of industrialists [rather] than the Tory Front bench ... [and from these we] see that the owning class is not at all displeased with the record and tendency of the Labour Party."* [Vernon Richards (ed.), **Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation — Selections from Freedom 1945–1950**, p. 9]

Moreover, the example of nationalised industries is a good indicator of the non-socialist nature of state intervention. Na-

tionalisation meant replacing the capitalist bureaucrat with a state one, with little real improvement for those subjected to the "new" regime. At the height of the British Labour Party's post-war nationalisations, anarchists were pointing out its anti-socialist nature. Nationalisation was *"really consolidating the old individual capitalist class into a new and efficient class of managers to run ... state capitalism"* by *"installing the really creative industrialists in dictatorial managerial positions."* [Vernon Richards (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 10] Thus, in practice, the real examples of nationalisation confirmed Kropotkin's prediction that it would be *"an exchange of present capitalism for state-capitalism"* and simply be *"nothing but a new, perhaps improved, but still undesirable form of the wage system."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 193 and p. 171] The nationalised industries were expected, of course, to make a profit, partly for *"repaying the generous compensation plus interest to the former owners of the mainly bankrupt industries that the Labour government had taken over."* [Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 7]

Ultimately, state ownership at local or national level is hardly socialistic in principle or in practice. As Kropotkin stressed, *"no reasonable man [or woman] will expect that Municipal Socialism, any more than Co-operation, could solve to any extent the Social problem."* This was because it was *"self-evident that [the capitalists] will not let themselves be expropriated without opposing resistance. They may favour municipal [or state] enterprise for a time; but the moment they see that it really begins to reduce the number of paupers ... or gives them regular employment, and consequently threatens to reduce the profits of the exploiters, they will soon put an end to it."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 94 and p. 95] The rise of Monetarism in the 1970s and the subsequent enthronement of the "Natural Rate" of unemployment thesis proves this argument.

While state intervention is hardly socialistic, what can be said is that *"the positive feature of welfare legislation is that, contrary to the capitalist ethic, it is a testament to human solidarity.*



*and opinion, because you cannot control people by force anymore and therefore you have to modify their consciousness so that they don't perceive that they are living under conditions of alienation, oppression, subordination and so on. In fact, that's what probably a couple trillion dollars are spent on each year in the US, very self-consciously, from the framing of television advertisements for two-year olds to what you are taught in graduate school economics programs. It's designed to create a consciousness of subordination and it's also intended specifically and pretty consciously to suppress normal human emotions."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 223]

This process became apparent in the 1960s. In the words of Edward Herman:

> *"The business community of the United States was deeply concerned over the excesses of democracy in the United States in the 1960s, and it has tried hard to rectify this problem by means of investments in both politicians and informing public opinion. The latter effort has included massive institutional advertising and other direct and indirect propaganda campaigns, but it has extended to attempts to influence the content of academic ideas ... [With] a significant portion of academic research coming from foundations based on business fortunes ... [and money] intended to allow people with preferred viewpoints to be aided financially in obtaining academic status and influence and in producing and disseminating books."* [*"The Selling of Market Economics,"* pp. 173–199, **New Ways of Knowing**, Marcus G. Raskin and Herbert J. Bernstein (eds.), p. 182]

Wealth, in other words, is employed to shape the public mind and ensure that challenges to that wealth (and its source)

Of course, exceptions can occur, with popular governments implementing significant reforms when economic and political circumstances are favourable. However, these generally need popular movements at the same time to be really effective and these, at some stage, come into conflict with the reformist politicians who hold them back. Given the need for such extra-parliamentary movements to ensure reforms anarchists consider their time better spent building these than encouraging illusions about voting for radical politicians to act for us (see section J.2 for details).

## D.2.2 How extensive is business propaganda?

Business spends a lot of money to ensure that people accept the status quo. Referring again to the US as an example (where such techniques are common), various means are used to get people to identify "free enterprise" (meaning state-subsidised private power with no infringement of managerial prerogatives) as "the American way." The success of these campaigns is clear, since many American working people (for example) now object to unions ing too much power or irrationally rejecting all radical ideas as "Communism" (i.e. Stalinism) regardless of their content. By the 1990s, it had even made "liberal" (i.e. mildly reformist centre-left policies) into a swear word in some parts of the country.

This is unsurprising and its roots can be found in the success of sort of popular movements business propaganda was created to combat. As Chomsky argues, due to popular struggles, *"the state has limited capacity to coerce"* in the advanced capitalist countries (although it is always there, to be used when required). This meant that *"elite groups — the business world, state managers and so on — recognised early on that they are going to have to develop massive methods of control of attitude*



*The negative feature is precisely that it is an arm of the state."* [Colin Ward, **Talking Anarchy**, p. 79] For anarchists, while *"we are certainly in full sympathy with all that is being done to widen the attributes of city life and to introduce communistic conceptions into it. But it is only through a Social Revolution, made by the workers themselves, that the present exploitation of Labour by Capital can be altered."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 95–6] As British anarchists stressed during the first post-war Labour Government:

> *"The fact that the alternative, under capitalism, is destitution and the sharper anomalies of poverty, does not make the Liberal-Socialistic alternative a sound proposition."*
>
> *"The only rational insurance against the evils of poverty and industrialism and old age under the wages system is the abolition of poverty and the wages system, and the transformation of industrialism to serve human ends instead of grinding up human beings."* [Vernon Richards (ed.), **World War — Cold War**, p. 347]

In reality, rather than genuine socialism we had reformists *"operating capitalism while trying to give it a socialist gloss."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 353] The fact is that the ruling class oppose those forms of state intervention which aim, at least in rhetoric, to help working class people. This does not make such reforms socialistic. The much more substantial state intervention for the elite and business are simply part of the natural order and go unmentioned. That this amounts to a welfare state for the wealthy or socialism for the rich is, of course, one of the great unspeakable truths of capitalism.

## D.1.4 Is laissez-faire capitalism actually without state intervention?

The underlying assumption in the neo-liberal and conservative attacks against state intervention is the assumption that their minimal state is without it. The reality of the situation is, of course, different. Even the minimal state of the ideologues dreams intervenes on behalf of the ruling class in order to defend capitalist power and the property and property rights this flows from.

This means that the laissez-faire position is a form of state intervention as well. State "neutrality" considered as simply enforcing property rights (the "minimal state") instantly raises the question of **whose** conception of property rights, popular ones or capitalist ones? Unsurprisingly, the capitalist state enforces capitalist notions of property. In other words, it sanctions and supports economic inequality and the privileges and power of those who own property and, of course, the social relationships such a system generates. Yet by defending capitalist property, the state can hardly remain "neutral" with regards to ownership and the power it generates. In other words, the "neutral" state **has** to intervene to defend the authority of the boss or landlord over the workers they exploit and oppress. It is not a "public body" defending some mythical "public interest" but rather a defender of class society and the socio-economic relationships such a system creates. Political power, therefore, reflects and defends economic and social power.

As Kropotkin argued, the *"major portion"* of laws have *"but one object — to protect private property, i.e. wealth acquired by the exploitation of man by man. Their aim is to open to capital fresh fields for exploitation, and to sanction the new forms which that exploitation continually assumes, as capital swallows up another branch of human activity ... They exist to keep up the machinery of government which serves to secure to capital*



unions by law and made the welfare state difficult to live on. It reversed many of the partial gains from previous struggles and ended a situation where people had enough dignity not to accept any job offered or put up with an employer's authoritarian practices. These factors created "inflexibility" in the labour market, so that the working class had to be taught a lesson in "good" economics (in part, ironically, by mismanaging the economy by applying neoclassical dogmas in their Monetarist form!).

Needless to say, the situation in the 21st century has become worse. There has been a *"huge rise in international borrowing ... in international capital markets since the liberalisation moves of the 1970s, and [a] significant increase in foreign penetration of national central government bond markets."* This means that it is *"obvious that no central government today may follow economic policies that are disapproved of by the capital markets, which have the power to create an intolerable economic pressure on the respective country's borrowing ability, currency value and investment flows."* [Takis Fotopoulos, **Toward an Inclusive Democracy**, p. 42] We discuss globalisation in more detail in section D.5.

Unsurprisingly, when left-wing governments have been elected into office after the 1980s, they have spent a lot of time during the election showing how moderate they are to the capitalist class ("the markets"). This moderation continued once in office and any reforms implemented have been of a minor nature and placed within a general neo-liberal context. This was the fate of the British Labour government of Tony Blair, while in Brazil the government of Lula (a former lathe operator, labour union leader and Brazil's first working-class president) was termed "Tropical Blairism" by left-wing critics. Rather than use popular mandate to pursue social justice, they have governed for the rich. Given the role of the state and the pressures governments experience from capital, anarchists were not surprised.

and 1982 the Tories abolished them and ended restrictions on lending for banks and building societies:

> *"The result of the abolition of exchange controls was visible almost immediately: capital hitherto invested in the U.K. began going abroad. In the* ***Guardian*** *of 21 September, 1981, Victor Keegan noted that 'Figures published last week by the Bank of England show that pension funds are now investing 25% of their money abroad (compared with almost nothing a few years ago) and there has been no investment at all (net) by unit trusts in the UK since exchange controls were abolished.'"* [Robin Ramsay, *"Mrs Thatcher, North Sea and the Hegemony of the City"*, pp. 2–9, **Lobster**, no. 27, p. 3]

This contributed to the general mismanagement of the economy by Thatcher's Monetarist government. While Milton Friedman had predicted *"only a modest reduction in output and employment will be a side effect of reducing inflation to single figures by 1982,"* the actual results of applying his ideas were drastically different. [quoted by Michael Stewart, **Keynes and After**, p. 179] Britain experienced its deepest recession since the 1930s, with unemployment nearly tripling between 1979 and 1985 (officially, from around 5% to 13% but the real figure was even higher as the government changed the method of measuring it to reduce the figures!). Total output fell by 2.5% in 1980 and another 1.5% in 1981. By 1984 manufacturing investment was still 30% lower in 1979. [Steward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 180] Poverty and inequality soared as unemployment and state repression broke the back of the labour movement and working class resistance.

Eventually, capital returned to the UK as Thatcher's government had subdued a militant working class, shackled the trade



*the exploitation and monopoly of wealth produced."* This means that all modern states *"all serve one God — capital; all have but one object — to facilitate the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist."* [**Anarchism**, p. 210]

Given that the capitalist market is marked by inequalities of power, any legal framework will defend that power. The state simply allows the interaction between parties to determine the norms of conduct in any contract. This ensures that the more powerful party to impose its desires on the weaker one as the market, by definition, does not and cannot have any protections against the imposition of private power. The state (or legal code) by enforcing the norms agreed to by the exchange is just as much a form of state intervention as more obvious forms of state action. In other words, the state's monopoly of power and coercion is used to enforce the contracts reached between the powerful and powerless. As such contracts will hardly be neutral, the state cannot be a neutral arbiter when presiding over capitalism. The net result is simply that the state allows the more powerful party to an exchange to have authority over the weaker party — all under the fiction of equality and freedom. And, as Malatesta stressed, state power and centralisation will have to increase:

> *"liberalism, is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore is simply a lie, for freedom is not possible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism. The criticism liberals direct at government consists of wanting to deprive it of some of its functions and to call upon the capitalists to fight it out among themselves, but it cannot attack the repressive functions which are of its essence: for with the* ***gendarme*** *the property owner could not exist, indeed the government's powers of repression must perforce increase*

*as free competition results in more discord and inequality."* [**Anarchy**, p. 46]

His comments were more than confirmed by the rise of neoliberalism nearly a century later which combined the "free(r) market" with a strong state marked by more extensive centralisation and police powers.

This is unsurprising, as laissez-faire capitalism being *"unable to solve its celebrated problem of the harmony of interests, [is forced] to impose laws, if only provisional ones, and abdicates in its turn before this new authority that is incompatible with the practice of liberty."* [Proudhon, quoted by Alan Ritter, **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 122] Thus capitalism always has to rely on the state, on political coercion, if only the minimal state, to assure its survival. The capitalist market has to, in other words, resort to the coercion it claims to avoid once people start to question its shortcomings. Of course, this coercion need not be monopolised in the form of state police and armed forces. It has been enforced successfully by private police forces and security guards, but it does not change the fact that force is required to maintain capitalist property, power and property rights.

In summary, **all** forms of capitalism rest on the superior force of economic elites who have the backing of the state to defend the sources of that power as well as any contracts it has agreed to. In other words, "laissez-faire" capitalism does not end state intervention, it simply creates a situation where the state leaves the market process to the domination of those who occupy superior market positions. As Kropotkin put it, capitalism *"is called the freedom of transactions but it is more truly called the freedom of exploitation."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 119]

Given this, it may be objected that in this case there is no reason for the ruling class to interfere with the economy. If economic coercion is sufficient, then the elite has no need to turn to the state for aid. This objection, however, fails to ap-



*million a day buying back its own money on the markets to support the pound."* [**The Times**, 10/6/76]

**The Times** [27/5/76] noted that *"the further decline in the value of the pound has occurred despite the high level of interest rates... . [D]ealers said that selling pressure against the pound was not heavy or persistent, but there was an almost total lack of interest amongst buyers. The drop in the pound is extremely surprising in view of the unanimous opinion of bankers, politicians and officials that the currency is undervalued."* While there was much talk of private armies and military intervention, this was not needed. As anarchist John Casey argues, the ruling class *"chose to play the economic card ... They decided to subdue the rogue Labour administration by pulling the financial plugs out of the economy ... This resulted in the stock market and the pound plummeting ... This was a much neater solution than bullets and forced the Wilson government to clean up the mess by screwing the working class with public spending cuts and a freeze on wage claims ... The whole process of economic sabotage was neatly engineering through third parties like dealers in the currency markets."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 23]

The Labour government, faced with the power of international capital, ended up having to receive a temporary "bailing out" by the IMF, which imposed a package of cuts and controls, to which Labour's response was, in effect, *"We'll do anything you say,"* as one economist described it. The social costs of these policies were disastrous, with unemployment rising to the then unheard-of-height of one million. And let's not forget that they *"cut expenditure by twice the amount the IMF were promised"* in an attempt to appear business-friendly. [Peter Donaldson, **A Question of Economics**, p. 89] By capital flight, a slightly radical Labour government was brought to heel.

Capital will not invest in a country that does not meet its approval. In 1977, the Bank of England failed to get the Labour government to abolish its exchange controls. Between 1979

*pistol-point to cut back on expenditure"* by the Governor of the Bank of England, the stock exchange's major mouthpiece. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34] One attempt to pressurise Wilson resulted in him later reflecting:

> *"Not for the first time, I said that we had now reached the situation where a newly elected government with a mandate from the people was being told, not so much by the Governor of the Bank of England but by international speculators, that the policies on which we had fought the election could not be implemented; that the government was to be forced into the adoption of Tory policies to which it was fundamentally opposed. The Governor confirmed that that was, in fact, the case."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37]

Only the bluff of threatening to call another general election allowed Wilson to win that particular battle but his government was constrained. It implemented only some of the reforms it had won the election on while implementing many more policies which reflected the wishes of the capitalist class (for example, attempts to shackle the rank and file of the unions).

A similar process was at work against the 1974 to 1979 Labour government. In January, 1974, the FT Index for the London Stock Exchange stood at 500 points. In February, the Miner's went on strike, forcing Heath (the Tory Prime Minister) to hold (and lose) a general election. The new Labour government (which included some left-wingers in its cabinet) talked about nationalising the banks and much heavy industry. In August, 1974, Tony Benn announced plans to nationalise the ship building industry. By December, the FT index had fallen to 150 points. [John Casey, *"The Seventies"*, **The Heavy Stuff**, no. 3, p. 21] By 1976 the Treasury was *"spending $100*



preciate that the state **has** to interfere to counteract the negative impacts of capitalism. Moreover, as we discussed in section C.7, economic coercion becomes less pressing during periods of low unemployment and these tend to provoke a slump. It is in the interests of the ruling elite to use state action to reduce the power of the working classes in society. Thus we find the Federal Reserve in the USA studying economic statistics to see if workers are increasing their bargaining power on the labour market (i.e. are in a position to demand more wages or better conditions). If so, then interest rates are increased and the resulting unemployment and job insecurity make workers more likely to put up with low pay and do what their bosses demand. As Doug Henwood notes, *"policy makers are exceedingly obsessed with wage increases and the state of labour militancy. They're not only concerned with the state of the macroeconomy, conventionally defined, they're also concerned with the state of the class struggle, to use the old-fashioned language."* [**Wall Street**, p. 219] Little wonder the ruling class and its high priests within the "science" of economics have embraced the concept of a "natural rate" of unemployment (see section C.9 on this and as we indicated in section C.6, this has been **very** enriching for the ruling class since 1980).

Ultimately, the business class wants the state to intervene in the economy beyond the minimum desired by a few ideologues of capitalism simply to ensure it gets even more wealth and power — and to ensure that the system does not implode. Ironically, to get capitalism to work as some of its defenders want it to would require a revolution in itself — against the capitalists! Yet if we go to the trouble of fighting public tyranny (the state), why should we stop there? Why should private tyranny (capitalism, its autocratic structures and hierarchical social relationships) remain untouched? Particularly, as Chomsky notes, under capitalism *"minimising the state means strengthening the private sectors. It narrows the domain within which public influence can be expressed. That's not an anarchist goal ... It's min-*

*imising the state and increasing an even worse power,"* namely capitalist firms and corporations which are *"private totalitarian organisations."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 214 and p. 213] In other words, if a government "privatises" some government function, it is not substituting a market for a bureaucracy. It is substituting a private bureaucracy for a public one, usually at rock-bottom prices, so that some more capitalists can make a profit. All the economic mumbo-jumbo is just a smokescreen for this fact.

## D.1.5 Do anarchists support state intervention?

So where do anarchists stand on state intervention? This question does not present a short answer simply because it is a complex issue. On the one hand, as Proudhon stressed, the state exists to *"maintain **order** in society, by consecrating and sanctifying obedience of the citizens to the State, subordination of the poor to the rich, of the common people to the upper class, of the worker to the idler."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 243] In such circumstances, appealing to the state makes little sense. On the other hand, the modern state does do some good things (to varying degrees). As a result of past popular struggles, there is a basic welfare system in some countries which does help the poorest sections of society. That aspect of state intervention is what is under attack by the right under the slogan of "minimising the state."

In the long term, of course, the real solution is to abolish capitalism *"and both citizens and communities will have no need of the intervention of the State."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 268] In a free society, social self-defence would not be statist but would be similar in nature to trade unionism, co-operatives and pressure groups — individuals working together in voluntary associations to ensure a free and just society — within the context



back into its place. Therefore we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react in different ways to the same institutional influences and interests. It's no coincidence that the Australian Labour Party and the Spanish Socialist Party introduced "Thatcherite" policies at the same time as the "Iron Lady" implemented them in Britain. The New Zealand Labour government is a case in point, where *"within a few months of re-election [in 1984], finance minister Roger Douglas set out a programme of economic 'reforms' that made Thatcher and Reagan look like wimps... .[A]lmost everything was privatised and the consequences explained away in marketspeak. Division of wealth that had been unknown in New Zealand suddenly appeared, along with unemployment, poverty and crime."* [John Pilger, *"Breaking the one party state,"* **New Statesman**, 16/12/94]

An extreme example of capital flight being used to "discipline" a naughty administration can be seen from Labour governments in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s. Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister between 1964 and 1970, recorded the pressures his government was under from "the markets":

> *"We were soon to learn that decisions on pensions and taxation were no longer to be regarded, as in the past, as decisions for parliament alone. The combination of tax increases with increased social security benefits provoked the first of a series of attacks on sterling, by speculators and others, which beset almost every section of the government for the next five years."* [**The Labour Government 1964–1970**, p. 31]

He also had to *"listen night after night to demands that there should be cuts in government expenditure, and particularly in those parts of government expenditure which related to social services. It was not long before we were being asked, almost at*

*refuse to roll over old debts or to extend new financing on any but the most punishing terms (if at all). The explosion of [US] federal debt in the 1980s vastly increased the power of creditors to demand austere fiscal and monetary policies to dampen the US economy as it recovered … from the 1989–92 slowdown."* [**Wall Street**, pp. 23–24] And, we must note, Wall street made a fortune on the debt, directly and indirectly.

This analysis applies within countries as well. Commenting on Clinton's plans for the devolution of welfare programmes from Federal to State government in America, Noam Chomsky makes the important point that *"under conditions of relative equality, this could be a move towards democracy. Under existing circumstances, devolution is intended as a further blow to the eroding democratic processes. Major corporations, investment firms, and the like, can constrain or directly control the acts of national governments and can set one national workforce against another. But the game is much easier when the only competing player that might remotely be influenced by the 'great beast' is a state government, and even middle-sized enterprise can join in. The shadow cast by business [over society and politics] can thus be darker, and private power can move on to greater victories in the name of freedom."* [Noam Chomsky, *"Rollback III"*, **Z Magazine**, March, 1995]

Economic blackmail is a very useful weapon in deterring freedom. Little wonder Proudhon argued that the *"Revolutionary principle … is Liberty. In other words, no more government of man by man through the accumulation of capital."* [quoted by Jack Hayward, **After the French Revolution**, p. 177]

## D.2.1 Is capital flight really that powerful?

Yes. By capital flight, business can ensure that any government which becomes too independent and starts to consider the interests of those who elected it will be put



of an egalitarian, decentralised and participatory system which eliminates or reduces the problems in the first place (see section I).

However, that does not answer the question of what we do in the here and now when faced with demands that the welfare state (for the working class, **not** corporate welfare) and other reforms be rolled back. This attack has been on going since the 1970s, accelerating since 1980. We should be clear that claims to be minimising the state should be taken with a massive pitch of salt as the likes of Reagan were *"elected to office promising to downsize government and to 'get the government off the people's back,' even though what he meant was to deregulate big business, and make them free to exploit the workers and make larger profits."* [Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, **Anarchism and the Black Revolution**, p. 100] As such, it would be a big mistake to confuse anarchist hostility to the state with the rhetoric of right-wing politicians seeking to reduce social spending (Brian Oliver Sheppard discusses this issue well in his article *"Anarchism vs. Right-Wing 'Anti-Statism'"* [**Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, no. 31, Spring 2001]). Chomsky puts it well:

> *"State authority is now under severe attack in the more democratic societies, but not because it conflicts with the libertarian vision. Rather the opposite: because it offers (weak) protection to some aspects of that vision. Governments have a fatal flaw: unlike the private tyrannies, the institutions of state power and authority offer to the despised public an opportunity to play some role, however limited, in managing their own affairs. That defect is intolerable to the masters . .. the goals of a committed anarchist should be to defend some state institutions from the attack against them, while trying at the same time to pry them open to more meaningful public participation — and, ultimately, to dismantle them in a much*

*more free society, of the appropriate circumstances can be achieved.*" [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 193 and p. 194]

There is, of course, a tension in this position. The state may be influenced by popular struggle but it remains an instrument of **capitalist** rule. It may intervene in society as a result of people power and by the necessity to keep the system as a whole going, but it is bureaucratic and influenced by the wealthy and big business. Indeed, the onslaught on the welfare state by both Thatcher and Reagan was conducted under a "democratic" mandate although, in fact, these governments took advantage of the lack of real accountability between elections. They took advantage of an aspect of the state which anarchists had been warning of for decades, being *"well aware that [the politician] can now commit crimes with immunity, [and so] the elected official finds himself immediately exposed to all sorts of seductions on behalf of the ruling classes"* and so implemented policies *"solicited by big industry, high officials, and above all, by international finance."* [Elisee Reclus, **The Modern State**, p. 208 and pp. 208–9]

As such, while anarchists are against the state, our position on state intervention depends on the specific issue at hand. Most of us think state health care services and unemployment benefits (for example) are more socially useful than arms production, and in lieu of more anarchistic solutions, better than the alternative of "free market" capitalism. This does not mean we are happy with state intervention, which in practice undermines working class self-help, mutual aid and autonomy. Also, state intervention of the "social" nature is often paternalistic, run by and for the "middle classes" (i.e. professional/managerial types and other self-proclaimed "experts"). However, until such time as a viable anarchist counterculture is created, we have little option but to "support" the lesser evil (and make no mistake, it **is** an evil).



David Noble provides a good summary of the effects of such indirect pressures when he writes firms *"have the ability to transfer production from one country to another, to close a plant in one and reopen it elsewhere, to direct and redirect investment wherever the 'climate' is most favourable [to business]... . [I]t has enabled the corporation to play one workforce off against another in the pursuit of the cheapest and most compliant labour (which gives the misleading appearance of greater efficiency)... [I]t has compelled regions and nations to compete with one another to try and attract investment by offering tax incentives, labour discipline, relaxed environmental and other regulations and publicly subsidised infrastructure... Thus has emerged the great paradox of our age, according to which those nations that prosper most (attract corporate investment) by most readily lowering their standard of living (wages, benefits, quality of life, political freedom). The net result of this system of extortion is a universal lowering of conditions and expectations in the name of competitiveness and prosperity."* [**Progress Without People**, pp. 91–92]

And, we must note, even when a country **does** lower its standard of living to attract investment or encourage its own business class to invest (as the USA and UK did by means of recession to discipline the workforce by high unemployment) it is no guarantee that capital will stay. US workers have seen their companies' profits rise while their wages have stagnated and (in reward) hundreds of thousands have been "down-sized" or seen their jobs moved to Mexico or South East Asia sweatshops. In the far east, Japanese, Hong Kong, and South Korean workers have also seen their manufacturing jobs move to low wage (and more repressive/authoritarian) countries such as China and Indonesia.

As well as the mobility of capital, there is also the threat posed by public debt. As Doug Henwood notes, *"[p]ublic debt is a powerful way of assuring that the state remains safely in capital's hands. The higher a government's debt, the more it must please its bankers. Should bankers grow displeased, they will*

harmless to the interests of the ruling class. We discuss this in section J.2.2 and will not do so here.

To this it must be added that wealth has a massive **indirect** influence over politics (and so over society and the law). We have noted above that wealth controls the media and its content. However, beyond this there is what can be called "Investor Confidence," which is another important source of influence. This is *"the key to capitalist stability,"* notes market socialist David Schweickart. *"If a government initiates policies that capitalists perceive to be opposed to their interests, they may, with neither organisation nor even spitefulness, become reluctant to invest [or actually dis-invest] in the offending country (or region or community), not if 'the climate for business is bad.' The outcome of such isolated acts is an economic downturn, and hence political instability. So a government ... has no real choice but to regard the interests of business as privileged. In a very real sense, what is good for business really is good for the country. If business suffers, so will everyone else."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 214–5]

Hence Chomsky's comment that when *"popular reform candidates ... get elected ... you get [a] capital strike — investment capital flows out of the country, there's a lowering of investment, and the economy grinds to a halt ... The reason is quite simple. In our society, real power does not happen to lie in the political system, it lies in the private economy; that's were the decisions are made about what's produced, how much is produced, what's consumed, where investment takes place, who has jobs, who controls the resources, and so on and so forth. And as long as that remains the case, changes inside the political system can make* ***some*** *difference — I don't want to say it's zero — but the differences are going to be very slight."* This means that government policy is forced to make *"the rich folk happy"* otherwise *"everything's going to grind to a halt."* [**Understanding Power**, pp. 62–3] As we discuss in the next section, this is precisely what **has** happened.



Taking the issue of privatisation of state owned and run industry, the anarchist position is opposition to both. As we noted in section D.1.3, the anarchist prediction that if you substitute government ownership for private ownership, *"nothing is changed but the stockholders and the management; beyond that, there is not the least difference in the position of the workers."* [Proudhon, quoted by Ritter, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 167–8] However, privatisation is a rip-off of the general public for the benefit of the wealthy:

> *"Privatisation of public services — whether it is through the direct sale of utilities or through indirect methods such as PFI and PPP — involves a massive transfer of wealth from taxpayers to the pockets of private business interests. It negates the concept of there being such a thing as 'public service' and subjects everything to the bottom line of profit. In other words it seeks to maximise the profits of a few at the expense of wages and social obligations. Furthermore, privatisation inevitably leads to an attack on wages and working conditions — conditions which have been fought for through years of trade union agitation are done away with at the scratch of a pen."* [Gregor Kerr, *"Privatisation: the rip-off of public resources"*, pp. 14–18, **Black and Red Revolution**, no. 11, p. 16]

In response to such "reforms", anarchists propose an alternatives to both options. Anarchists aim not at state ownership but to *"transfer all that is needed for production ... from the hands of the individual capitalists into those of the communities of producers and consumers."* [Kropotkin, **Environment and Evolution**, pp. 169–70] In other words, while *"[i]n today's world 'public sector' has come to mean 'government.' It is only if 'public sector' can be made to mean 'people's ownership' in a real sense that*

*the call for public ownership can be a truly radical one."* [Kerr, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18] This is based on a common-sense conclusion from the analysis of the state as an instrument of the ruling class:

> *"While anarchists oppose the privatisation of state assets and services for the reasons discussed above, we do not call — as some on the left do — for the 'nationalisation' of services as a solution to problems . .. We'd be expecting the same politicians who are busily implementing the neo-liberal agenda to now take on the role of workers' protectors . .. it is important to point out that the 'nationalise it' or 'take it into public ownership' slogan is far too often spun out by people on the left without their taking into account that there is a massive difference between state control/ownership and workers' control/ownership ... we all know that even if the revenues ... were still in state ownership, spending it on housing the homeless or reducing hospital waiting lists would not top the agenda of the government.*
>
> *"Put simply, state ownership does not equal workers' ownership ... we are sold the lie that the resource ... is 'public property.' The reality however is that far from being in the ownership of 'the public,' ordinary people have no direct say in the allocation of these resources. Just as working class people are consistently alienated from the product of their labour, this selling of the idea of 'public ownership' over which the public have no real say leads to an increase in apathy and a sense of helplessness among ordinary people. It is much more likely that the political establishment who control the purse strings supposedly 'in the public interest' will actually spend revenues generated from these 'public assets' on measures that will have*



Therefore, logically, politics will be dominated by the rich and powerful — in fact if not in theory — since, in general, only the rich can afford to run and only parties supported by the wealthy will gain enough funds and favourable press coverage to have a chance (see section D.3 for the wealthy's control of the mass media). Of course, there are many countries which do have labour-based parties, often allied with union movements, as is the case in Western Europe, for example. Yet even here, the funds available for labour parties are always less than those of capitalist supported parties, meaning that the ability of the former to compete in "fair" elections is hindered. In addition, the political agenda is dominated by the media and as the media are owned by and dependent upon advertising from business, it is hardly surprising that independent labour-based political agendas are difficult to follow or be taken seriously. Unsurprisingly, many of these so-called labour or social-democratic parties have moved to the right (particularly since the 1980s). In Britain, for example, the New Labour government which was elected in 1997 simply, in the main, followed the policies of the previous Conservative Governments and saw its main funding switch from unions to wealthy business men (sometimes in the form of "loans" which could be hidden from the accounts). Significantly, New Labour's success was in part dependent on support from the right-wing media empire of Rupert Murdoch (Blair even consulted with him on policy, indicating his hold over the government).

Then there are the barriers involved once a party has gained office. Just because a party has become the government, it does not mean that they can simply implement their election promises. There are also significant pressures on politicians from the state bureaucracy itself. The state structure is designed to ensure that real power lies not in the hands of elected representatives but rather in the hands of officials, of the state bureaucracy which ensures that any pro-labour political agenda will be watered down and made

*the long-term effect of re-enforcing rather than alleviating social division. Public policy consistently results in an increase in the gap between the well-off and the poor.*" [Kerr, Opt. Cit., pp. 16–7 and p. 17]

Thus an anarchist approach to this issue would be to reject both privatisation **and** nationalisation in favour of socialisation, i.e. placing nationalised firms under workers' self-management. In the terms of public utilities, such as water and power suppliers, they could be self-managed by their workers in association with municipal co-operatives — based on one member, one vote — which would be a much better alternative than privatising what is obviously a natural monopoly (which, as experience shows, simply facilitates the fleecing of the public for massive private profit). Christie and Meltzer state the obvious:

> *"It is true that government takes over the control of certain necessary social functions. It does not follow that **only** the state could assume such control. The postmen are 'civil servants' only because the State makes them such. The railways were not always run by the state, They belonged to the capitalists [and do once more, at least in the UK], and could as easily have been run by the railway workers.*
>
> *"The opponents of anarchism assure us that if we put government under a ban, there would be no education, for the state controls the schools. There would be no hospitals — where would the money come from? Nobody would work — who would pay their wages? ... But in reality, not ... the state, but the people provide what the people have. If the people do not provide for themselves, the state cannot help them. It only appears to do so because it is in control. Those who have power may apportion work or regulate the*



# D.2 What influence does wealth have over politics?

The short answer is: a great deal of influence, directly and indirectly. We have already touched on this in section B.2.3. Here we will expand on those remarks.

State policy in a capitalist democracy is usually well-insulated from popular influence but very open to elite influence and money interests. Let's consider the possibility of direct influence first. It's obvious that elections cost money and that only the rich and corporations can realistically afford to take part in a major way. Even union donations to political parties cannot effectively compete with those from the business classes. For example, in the 1972 US presidential elections, of the $500 million spent, only about $13 million came from trade unions. The vast majority of the rest undoubtedly came from Big Business and wealthy individuals. For the 1956 elections, the last year for which direct union-business comparisons are possible, the contributions of 742 businessmen matched those of unions representing 17 million workers. This, it should be stressed was at a time when unions had large memberships and before the decline of organised labour in America. Thus the evidence shows that it is *"irrefutable"* that *"businessmen contribute vastly greater sums of money to political campaigns than do other groups [in society]. Moreover, they have special ease of access to government officials, and they are disproportionately represented at all upper levels of government."* [David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, pp. 210–1]

*standard of living, but this is part of the attack upon the people, not something undertaken on their behalf.*" [**The Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 148–149]

Much the same can be said of other aspects of state intervention. For example, if we look at state education or welfare an anarchist solution could be to press for *"workers' control by all the people involved"* in an institution, in other words *"the extension of the principle of freedom from the economic to the political side of the health [and education] system[s]."* [Nicholas Walters, **About Anarchism**, p. 76] The aim is to create *"new forms of organisation for the social functions that the state fulfils through the bureaucracy."* [Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 19] This means that anarchists, as part of the wider socialist, labour and social movements seek *"to counterbalance as much as we [can] the centralistic, bureaucratic ambitions of Social Democracy."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 120] This applies both to the organisation and tactics of popular movements as well as the proposed reforms and how they are implemented.

In terms of social reforms, anarchists stress that it cannot be left in the hands of politicians (i.e. the agents of the ruling class). It should be obvious that if you let the ruling class decide (on the basis of their own needs and priorities) which reforms to introduce you can guess which ones will be implemented. If the state establishes what is and is not a "reform", then it will implement those which it favours in a manner which benefits itself and the capitalist class. Such top-down "liberalisation" will only increase the power and freedom of the capitalist class and make capitalist and statist exploitation more efficient. It will not undermine the restrictions on liberty for the many which ensure the profits, property and power of the few in the first place. That is, there will be minor changes around the edges of the state system in order to give more "freedom" to landlords and employers to lord it over their tenants and workers. This



politician leaves office those forces will go away or stop trying to influence the political decision making process.

The task of anarchists therefore is not to abstractly oppose state intervention but rather contribute to popular self-organisation and struggle, creating pressures from the streets and workplaces that governments cannot ignore or defy. This means supporting direct action rather than electioneering (see section J.2) for the *"make-up of the government, the names, persons and political tendencies which rubbed shoulders in it, were incapable of effecting the slightest amendment to the enduring quintessence of the state organism . .. And the price of entering the of strengthening the state is always unfailingly paid in the currency of a weakening of the forces offering it their assistance. For every reinforcement of state power there is always ... a corresponding debilitation of grassroots elements. Men may come and go, but the state remains."* [Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 150]

*been convinced that such a belief is a dangerous illusion … There is a pitch of material and spiritual degradation from which a man can no longer rise. Those who have been born into misery and never knew a better state are rarely able to resist and revolt … Certainly the old slogan, 'The worse the better', was based on an erroneous assumption. Like that other slogan, 'All or nothing', which made many radical oppose any improvement in the lot of the workers, even when the workers demanded it, on the ground that it would distract the mind of the proletariat, and turn it away from the road which leads to social emancipation. It is contrary to all the experience of history and of psychology; people who are not prepared to fight for the betterment of their living conditions are not likely to fight for social emancipation. Slogans of this kind are like a cancer in the revolutionary movement."* [Rudolf Rocker, **London Years**, pp. 25–6]

The anarchist position is, therefore, a practical one based on the specific situation rather than a simplistic application of what is ideologically correct. Rolling back the state in the abstract is not without problems in a class and hierarchy ridden system where opportunities in life are immensely unequal. As such, any *"effort to develop and implement government programs that really were equalisers would lead to a form of class war, and in the present state of popular organisations and distribution of effective power, there can hardly be much doubt as to who would win."* [Chomsky, **The Chomsky Reader**, p. 184] Anarchists seek to build the grassroots resistance for politicians like Reagan, Bush Snr and Jnr, Thatcher and so on do not get elected without some serious institutional forces at work. It would be insane to think that once a particularly right-wing



can be seen from the experience of neo-liberalism across the world.

This means that the decision of what aspects of statism to dismantle first should **never** be handed over to politicians and bureaucrats who are inevitably agents of the capitalist class. It should be decided from below and guided by an overall strategy of dismantling capitalism **as a system.** That means that any reforms should be aimed at those forms of state intervention which bolster the profits and power of the ruling class and long before addressing those laws which are aimed at making exploitation and oppression tolerable for the working class. If this is not done, then any "reforms" will be directed by the representatives of the business class and, consequently, aim to cut social programmes people actually need while leaving welfare for the rich in place. As such, anarchists argue that pressure from below is required to prioritise reforms based on genuine need rather than the interests of capital. For example, in the UK this would involve, say, urging the privatisation of the Royal Family before even thinking about "reforming" the National Health Service or fighting for the state to "get off the backs" of the unions trying to deregulate business. The key is that people reject a *"naive appeal to the legislators and high officials, waiting for salvation through their deliberations and decrees."* In reality *"freedom does not come begging, but rather must be conquered."* [Reclus, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210] This is not done, then the results will simply confirm Voltairine de Cleyre's insight:

> *"Nearly all laws which were originally framed with the intention of benefiting workers, have either turned into weapons in their enemies' hands, or become dead letters unless the workers through their organisations have directly enforced their observance. So that in the end, it is direct action that has to be relied on anyway."* [**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 59]

A classic example of the former are the anti-trust laws in America, originally aimed at breaking the power of capitalist monopoly but were soon turned against labour unions and strikers. De Cleyre's second point is a truism and, obviously, means that anarchists aim to strengthen popular organisations and create mass movements which use direct action to defend their rights. Just because there are laws protecting workers, for example, there is no guarantee that they will be enforced — unless workers themselves are strong enough to make sure the bosses comply with the law.

Anarchists are in favour of self-directed activity and direct action to get improvements and defend reforms in the here and now. By organising strikes and protests ourselves, we can improve our lives. This does not mean that using direct action to get favourable laws passed or less-favourable ones revoked is a waste of time. Far from it. However, unless ordinary people use their own strength and grassroots organisations to enforce the law, the state and employers will honour any disliked law purely in the breach. By trusting the state, social self-protection against the market and power concentrations becomes hollow. In the end, what the state gives (or, more correctly, is pressurised into giving), it can take away but what we create and run ourselves is always responsive to **our** desires and interests. We have seen how vulnerable state welfare is to pressures from the capitalist class to see that this is a truism.

This is not to deny that in many ways such state "support" can be used as a means of regaining some of the power and labour stolen from us by capitalists in the first place. State intervention **can** give working people more options than they otherwise would have. If state action could not be used in this way, it is doubtful that capitalists and their hired "experts" would spend so much time trying to undermine and limit it. As the capitalist class happily uses the state to enforce its power and property rights, working people making whatever use they can of it is to be expected. Be that as it may, this does not blind anarchists to the negative aspects of the welfare state and other forms of state intervention (see section J.5.15 for anarchist perspectives on the welfare state).



One problem with state intervention, as Kropotkin saw, is that the state's absorption of social functions *"necessarily favoured the development of an unbridled, narrow-minded individualism. In proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers, the citizens were evidently relieved from their obligations towards each other."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 183] In the case of state "social functions," such as the British National Health Service, although they were created as a **result** of the social atomisation caused by capitalism, they have tended to **reinforce** the individualism and lack of personal and social responsibility that produced the need for such action in the first place. The pressing need, therefore, is for working class people need *"independent control ... of their own welfare programs. Mutual aid and welfare arrangements are necessary."* [Sam Dolgoff, **The American Labour Movement**, p. 26] Specific forms of community and social self-help and their historical precedents are discussed in section J.5.16.

This means that the anarchist task is building popular resistance to the state and capitalism and that may, at time, involves resisting attempts to impose "reforms" which harm the working class and enrich and empower the ruling class. As such, few anarchists subscribe to the notion that we should support capitalism inspired "minimising" of the state in the believe that this will increase poverty and inequality and so speed up the arrival of a social revolution. However, such a position fails to appreciate that social change is only possible when the hope for a better future has not been completely destroyed:

> *"Like many others I have believed in my youth that as social conditions became worse, those who suffered so much would come to realise the deeper causes of their poverty and suffering. I have since*

"patriotic" propaganda. Needless to say, those workers made redundant by these cheap imports may not consider this as a benefit and, by increasing the pool of unemployment and the threat of companies outsourcing work and moving plants to other countries, help hold or drive down wages for most of the working population (as has happened in various degrees in Western countries since the 1970s).

However, as soon as international rivalry between imperialist powers becomes too intense, capitalists will attempt to maintain their profit rates by depressing wages and laying people off in their own country. Workers' real wages will also suffer if military spending goes beyond a certain point. Moreover, if militarism leads to actual war, the working class has much more to lose than to gain as they will be fighting it and making the necessary sacrifices on the "home front" in order to win it. In addition, while imperialism can improve living conditions (for a time), it cannot remove the hierarchical nature of capitalism and therefore cannot stop the class struggle, the spirit of revolt and the instinct for freedom. So, while workers in the developed nations may sometimes benefit from imperialism, such periods cannot last long and cannot end the class struggle.

Rudolf Rocker was correct to stress the contradictory (and self-defeating) nature of working class support for imperialism:

> *"No doubt some small comforts may sometimes fall to the share of the workers when the bourgeoisie of their country attain some advantage over that of another country; but this always happens at the cost of their own freedom and the economic oppression of other peoples. The worker .. . participates to some extent in the profits which, without effort on their part, fall into the laps of the bourgeoisie of his country from the unrestrained exploitation of colonial peoples; but sooner or later there comes the time when*



And, it should be noted, while the flak machines *"steadily attack the media, the media treats them well. They receive respectful attention, and their propagandistic role and links to a large corporate program are rarely mentioned or analysed."* [p. 28] Indeed, such attacks *"are often not unwelcome, first because response is simple or superfluous; and second, because debate over this issue helps entrench the belief that the media are ... independent and objective, with high standards of professional integrity and openness to all reasonable views"* which is *"quite acceptable to established power and privilege — even to the media elites themselves, who are not averse to the charge that they may have gone to far in pursuing their cantankerous and obstreperous ways in defiance of orthodoxy and power."* Ultimately, such flak *"can only be understood as a demand that the media should not even reflect the range of debate over tactical questions among the dominant elites, but should serve only those segments that happen to manage the state at a particular moment, and should do so with proper enthusiasm and optimism about the causes — noble by definition — in which state power is engaged."* [Chomsky, **Necessary Illusions**, p. 13 and p. 11]

## D.3.5 Why is "anticommunism" used as control mechanism?

The final filter which Herman and Chomsky discuss is the ideology of anticommunism. "Communism" is of course regarded as the ultimate evil by the corporate rich, since the ideas of collective ownership of productive assets *"threatens the very root of their class position and superior status."* As the concept is *"fuzzy,"* it can be widely applied and *"can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests."* [p. 29] Hence the attacks on third-world nationalists as "socialists" and the steady expansion of "communism" to apply to any form of socialism, social democracy, reformism,

trade unionism or even "liberalism" (i.e. any movement which aims to give workers more bargaining power or allow ordinary citizens more voice in public policy decisions).

Hence the ideology of anticommunism has been very useful, because it can be used to discredit anybody advocating policies regarded as harmful to corporate interests. It also helps to divide the Left and labour movements, justifies support for pro-US fascist regimes abroad as "lesser evils" than communism, and discourages liberals from opposing such regimes for fear of being branded as heretics from the national religion. This process has been aided immensely by the obvious fact that the "communist" regimes (i.e. Stalinist dictatorships) have been so terrible.

Since the collapse of the USSR and related states in 1989, the utility of anticommunism has lost some of its power. Of course, there are still a few official communist enemy states, like North Korea, Cuba, and China, but these are not quite the threat the USSR was. North Korea and Cuba are too impoverished to threaten the world's only super-power (that so many Americans think that Cuba was ever a threat says a lot about the power of propaganda). China is problematic, as Western corporations now have access to, and can exploit, its resources, markets and cheap labour. As such, criticism of China will be mooted, unless it starts to hinder US corporations or become too much of an economic rival.

So we can still expect, to some degree, abuses or human rights violations in these countries are systematically played up by the media while similar abuses in client states are downplayed or ignored. Chomsky and Herman refer to the victims of abuses in enemy states as **worthy victims,** while victims who suffer at the hands of US clients or friends are **unworthy victims.** Stories about worthy victims are often made the subject of sustained propaganda campaigns, to score political points against enemies. For example:



[Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 211] So the local ruling class, while benefiting from imperialism, may dislike its dependent position and, if it feels strong enough, may contest their position and gain more independence for themselves.

Many of the post-war imperialist conflicts were of this nature, with local elites trying to disentangle themselves from an imperialist power. Similarly, many conflicts (either fought directly by imperialist powers or funded indirectly by them) were the direct result of ensuring that a nation trying to free itself from imperialist domination did not serve as a positive example for other satellite nations. Which means that local ruling classes can come into conflict with imperialist ones. These can express themselves as wars of national liberation, for example, or just as normal conflicts (such as the first Gulf War). As competition is at the heart of capitalism, we should not be surprised that sections of the international ruling class disagree and fight each other.

The relationship between the working class and imperialism is more complex. In traditional imperialism, foreign trade and the export of capital often make it possible to import cheap goods from abroad and increase profits for the capitalist class, and in this sense, workers can gain because they can improve their standard of living without necessarily coming into system threatening conflict with their employers (i.e. struggle can win reforms which otherwise would be strongly resisted by the capitalist class). Thus living standard may be improved by low wage imports while rising profits may mean rising wages for some key workers (CEOs giving themselves higher wages because they control their own pay rises does not, of course, count!). Therefore, in imperialistic nations during economic boom times, one finds a tendency among the working class (particularly the unorganised sector) to support foreign military adventurism and an aggressive foreign policy. This is part of what is often called the "embourgeoisement" of the proletariat, or the co-optation of labour by capitalist ideology and

pand (as we discussed in section D.5). Consequently, it needs to conquer foreign markets and gain access to cheap raw materials and labour. As such, a nation with a powerful capitalist economy will need an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy, which it achieves by buying politicians, initiating media propaganda campaigns, funding right-wing think tanks, and so on, as previously described.

Thus the ruling class benefits from, and so usually supports, imperialism — only, we stress, when the costs out-weight the benefits will we see members of the elite oppose it. Which, of course, explains the elites support for what is termed "globalisation." Needless to say, the ruling class has done **very** well over the last few decades. For example, in the US, the gaps between rich and poor **and** between the rich and middle income reaching their widest point on record in 1997 (from the **Congressional Budget Office** study on Historic Effective Tax Rates 1979–1997). The top 1% saw their after-tax incomes rise by $414,200 between 1979–97, the middle fifth by $3,400 and the bottom fifth fell by -$100. The benefits of globalisation are concentrated at the top, as is to be expected (indeed, almost all of the income gains from economic growth between 1989 and 1998 accrued to the top 5% of American families).

Needless to say, the local ruling classes of the dominated nations may not see it that way. While, of course, local ruling classes do extremely well from imperialism, they need not **like** the position of dependence and subordination they are placed in. Moreover, the steady stream of profits leaving the country for foreign corporations cannot be used to enrich local elites even more. Just as the capitalist dislikes the state or a union limiting their power or taxing/reducing their profits, so the dominated nation's ruling class dislikes imperialist domination and will seek to ignore or escape it whenever possible. This is because *"every State, in so far as it wants to live not only on paper and not merely by sufferance of its neighbours, but to enjoy real independence — inevitably must become a conquering State."*



> *"If the government of corporate community and the media feel that a story is useful as well as dramatic, they focus on it intensively and use it to enlighten the public. This was true, for example, of the shooting down by the Soviets of the Korean airliner KAL 007 in early September 1983, which permitted an extended campaign of denigration of an official enemy and greatly advanced Reagan administration arms plans."*
>
> *"In sharp contrast, the shooting down by Israel of a Libyan civilian airliner in February 1973 led to no outcry in the West, no denunciations for 'cold-blooded murder,' and no boycott. This difference in treatment was explained by the* ***New York Times*** *precisely on the grounds of utility: 'No useful purpose is served by an acrimonious debate over the assignment of blame for the downing of a Libyan airliner in the Sinai peninsula last week.' There* ***was*** *a very 'useful purpose' served by focusing on the Soviet act, and a massive propaganda campaign ensued."* [p. 32]

As noted, since the end of the Cold War, anti-communism has not been used as extensively as it once was to mobilise support for elite crusades. Other enemies have to be found and so the "Drug War" or "anti-terrorism" now often provide the public with "official enemies" to hate and fear. Thus the Drug War was the excuse for the Bush administration's invasion of Panama, and "fighting narco-terrorists" has more recently been the official reason for shipping military hardware and surveillance equipment to Mexico (where it's actually being used against the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, whose uprising is threatening to destabilise the country and endanger US investments). After 9/11, terrorism became the key means of forcing support for policies. The mantra *"you are either with us*

*or with the terrorists"* was used to bolster support and reduce criticism for both imperial adventures as well as a whole range of regressive domestic policies.

Whether any of these new enemies will prove to be as useful as anticommunism remains to be seen. It is likely, particularly given how "communism" has become so vague as to include liberal and social democratic ideas, that it will remain the bogey man of choice — particularly as many within the population both at home and abroad continue to support left-wing ideas and organisations. Given the track record of neo-liberalism across the globe, being able to tar its opponents as "communists" will remain a useful tool.

## D.3.6 Isn't the "propaganda model" a conspiracy theory?

No, far from it. Chomsky and Herman explicitly address this charge in **Manufacturing Consent** and explain why it is a false one:

> *"Institutional critiques such as we present in this book are commonly dismissed by establishment commentators as 'conspiracy theories,' but this is merely an evasion. We do not use any kind of 'conspiracy' hypothesis to explain mass-media performance. In fact, our treatment is much closer to a 'free market' analysis, with the results largely an outcome of the workings of market forces."* [p. xii]

They go on to suggest what some of these "market forces" are. One of the most important is the weeding-out process that determines who gets the journalistic jobs in the major media: *"Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of*



interests of private capital still need to be defended against the dispossessed. All that changes is that the governments of the imperialistic nations become even more accountable to capital and even less to their populations.

## D.5.4 What is the relationship between imperialism and the social classes within capitalism?

The two main classes within capitalist society are, as we indicated in section B.7, the ruling class and the working class. The grey area between these two classes is sometimes called the middle class. As would be expected, different classes have different positions in society and, therefore, different relationships with imperialism. Moreover, we have to also take into account the differences resulting from the relative positions of the nations in question in the world economic and political systems. The ruling class in imperialist nations will not have identical interests as those in the dominated ones, for example. As such, our discussion will have indicate these differences as well.

The relationship between the ruling class and imperialism is quite simple: It is in favour of it when it supports its interests and when the benefits outweigh the costs. Therefore, for imperialist countries, the ruling class will always be in favour of expanding their influence and power as long as it pays. If the costs outweigh the benefits, of course, sections of the ruling class will argue against imperialist adventures and wars (as, for example, elements of the US elite did when it was clear that they would lose both the Vietnam war and, perhaps, the class war at home by continuing it).

There are strong economic forces at work as well. Due to capital's need to grow in order to survive and compete on the market, find new markets and raw materials, it needs to ex-

unlike multinationals. NAFTA was designed to reduce this influence even more. Changes in government policy reflect the changing needs of business, modified, of course, by fear of the working population and its strength. Which explains globalisation — the need for capital to strengthen its position vis-à-vis labour by pitting one labour force against — and our next step, namely to strengthen and globalise working class resistance. Only when it is clear that the costs of globalisation — in terms of strikes, protests, boycotts, occupations, economic instability and so on — is higher than potential profits will business turn away from it. Only international working class direct action and solidarity will get results. Until that happens, we will see governments co-operating in the process of globalisation.

So, for better or for worse, globalisation has become the latest buzz word to describe the current stage of capitalism and so we shall use it here. It use does have two positive side effects though. Firstly, it draws attention to the increased size and power of transnational corporations and their impact on global structures of governance **and** the nation state. Secondly, it allows anarchists and other protesters to raise the issue of international solidarity and a globalisation from below which respects diversity and is based on people's needs, not profit.

After all, as Rebecca DeWitt stresses, anarchism and the WTO *"are well suited opponents and anarchism is benefiting from this fight. The WTO is practically the epitome of an authoritarian structure of power to be fought against. People came to Seattle because they knew that it was wrong to let a secret body of officials make policies unaccountable to anyone except themselves. A non-elected body, the WTO is attempting to become more powerful than any national government ... For anarchism, the focus of global capitalism couldn't be more ideal."* [*"An Anarchist Response to Seattle,"* pp. 5–12, **Social Anarchism**, no. 29, p. 6]

To sum up, globalisation will see imperialism change as capitalism itself changes. The need for imperialism remains, as the



*right-thinking people, internalised preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organisation, market, and political power."* This is the key, as the model *"helps us to understand how media personnel adapt, and are adapted, to systemic demands. Given the imperatives of corporate organisation and the workings of the various filters, conformity to the needs and interests of privileged sectors is essential to success."* This means that those who do not display the requisite values and perspectives will be regarded as irresponsible and/or ideological and, consequently, will not succeed (barring a few exceptions). In other words, those who *"adapt, perhaps quite honestly, will then be able to assert, accurately, that they perceive no pressures to conform. The media are indeed free ... for those who have internalised the required values and perspectives."* [p. xii and p. 304]

In other words, important media employees learn to internalise the values of their bosses: *"Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organisational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organisations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalised, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centres of power."* But, it may be asked, isn't it still a conspiracy theory to suggest that media leaders all have similar values? Not at all. Such leaders *"do similar things because they see the world through the same lenses, are subject to similar constraints and incentives, and thus feature stories or maintain silence together in tacit collective action and leader-follower behaviour."* [p. xii]

The fact that media leaders share the same fundamental values does not mean, however, that the media are a solid monolith on all issues. The powerful often disagree on the tactics needed *"to attain generally shared aims, [and this gets] reflected in media debate. But views that challenge fundamental premises or suggest that the observed modes of exercise of state power are*

*based on systemic factors will be excluded from the mass media even when elite controversy over tactics rages fiercely.*" [p. xii] This means that viewpoints which question the legitimacy of elite aims or suggest that state power is being exercised in elite interests rather than the "national" interest will be excluded from the mass media. As such, we would expect the media to encourage debate within accepted bounds simply because the ruling class is not monolithic and while they agree on keeping the system going, they disagree on the best way to do so.

Therefore the "propaganda model" has as little in common with a "conspiracy theory" as saying that the management of General Motors acts to maintain and increase its profits. As Chomsky notes, *"[t]o confront power is costly and difficult; high standards of evidence and argument are imposed, and critical analysis is naturally not welcomed by those who are in a position to react vigorously and to determine the array of rewards and punishments. Conformity to a 'patriotic agenda,' in contrast, imposes no such costs."* This means that *"conformity is the easy way, and the path to privilege and prestige ... It is a natural expectation, on uncontroversial assumptions, that the major media and other ideological institutions will generally reflect the perspectives and interests of established power."* [**Necessary Illusions**, pp. 8–9 and p. 10]

## D.3.7 Isn't the model contradicted by the media reporting government and business failures?

As noted above, the claim that the media are "adversarial" or (more implausibly) that they have a "left-wing bias" is due to right-wing PR organisations. This means that some "inconvenient facts" are occasionally allowed to pass through the filters in order to give the **appearance** of "objectivity" — precisely so the media can deny charges of engaging in propa-



disobey and do problematic things like demand higher wages, better working conditions, go on strike and so on (indeed, this fact has seen companies based in "developing" nations move to less "developed" to find more compliant labour).

This, of course, necessitates a strengthening of the state in its role as protector of property and as a defence against any unrest provoked by the inequalities, impoverishment and despair caused by globalisation (and, of course, the hope, solidarity and direct action generated by that unrest within the working class). Hence the rise of the neo-liberal consensus in both Britain and the USA saw an increase in state centralisation as well as the number of police, police powers and in laws directed against the labour and radical movements.

As such, it would be a mistake (as many in the anti-globalisation movement do) to contrast the market to the state. State and capital are not opposed to each other — in fact, the opposite is the case. The modern state exists to protect capitalist rule, just as every state exists to defend minority rule, and it is essential for nation states to attract and retain capital within their borders to ensure their revenue by having a suitably strong economy to tax. Globalisation is a state-led initiative whose primary aim is to keep the economically dominant happy. The states which are being "undermined" by globalisation are not horrified by this process as certain protestors are, which should give pause for thought. States are complicit in the process of globalisation — unsurprisingly, as they represent the ruling elites who favour and benefit from globalisation. Moreover, with the advent of a "global market" under GATT, corporations still need politicians to act for them in creating a "free" market which best suits their interests. Therefore, by backing powerful states, corporate elites can increase their bargaining powers and help shape the "New World Order" in their own image.

Governments may be, as Malatesta put it, the property owners **gendarme**, but they can be influenced by their subjects,

*government to insure that target countries are 'safe for investment' (no movements for freedom and democracy), that loans will be repaid, contracts kept, and international law respected (but only when it is useful to do so).*" [Henry Rosemont, Jr., **Op. Cit.**, p. 18] For the foreseeable future, America seems to be the global rent-a-cop of choice — particularly as many of the largest corporations are based there.

It makes sense for corporations to pick and choose between states for the best protection, blackmailing their citizens to pay for the armed forces via taxes. It is, in other words, similar to the process at work within the US when companies moved to states which promised the most favourable laws. For example, New Jersey repealed its anti-trust law in 1891–2 and amended its corporation law in 1896 to allow companies to be as large as they liked, to operate anywhere and to own other corporations. This drew corporations to it until Delaware offered even more freedoms to corporate power until other states offered similar laws. In other words, competed for revenue by writing laws to sell to corporations and the mobility of corporations meant that they bargained from a superior position. Globalisation is simply this process on a larger scale, as capital will move to countries whose governments supply what it demands (and punish those which do not). Therefore, far from ending imperialism, globalisation will see it continue, but with one major difference: the citizens in the imperialist countries will see even fewer benefits from imperialism than before, while, as ever, still having to carry the costs.

So, in spite of claims that governments are powerless in the face of global capital, we should never forget that state power has increased drastically in one area — in state repression against its own citizens. No matter how mobile capital is, it still needs to take concrete form to generate surplus value. Without wage salves, capital would not survive. As such, it can never permanently escape from its own contradictions — wherever it goes, it has to create workers who have a tendency to



ganda. As Chomsky and Herman put it: *"the 'naturalness' of these processes, with inconvenient facts allowed sparingly and within the proper framework of assumptions, and fundamental dissent virtually excluded from the mass media (but permitted in a marginalised press), makes for a propaganda system that is far more credible and effective in putting over a patriotic agenda than one with official censorship."* [p. xiv]

To support their case against the "adversarial" nature of the media, Herman and Chomsky look into the claims of such right-wing media PR machines as Freedom House. However, it is soon discovered that *"the very examples offered in praise of the media for their independence, or criticism of their excessive zeal, illustrate exactly the opposite."* Such flak, while being worthless as serious analysis, does help to reinforce the myth of an "adversarial media" and so is taken seriously by the media. By saying that both right and left attack them, the media presents themselves as neutral, balanced and objective — a position which is valid only if both criticisms are valid and of equal worth. This is not the case, as Herman and Chomsky prove, both in terms of evidence and underlying aims and principles. Ultimately, the attacks by the right on the media are based on the concern *"to protect state authority from an intrusive public"* and so *"condemn the media for lack of sufficient enthusiasm in supporting official crusades."* In other words, that the *"existing level of subordination to state authority is often deemed unsatisfactory."* [p. xiv and p. 301] The right-wing notion that the media are "liberal" or "left-wing" says far more about the authoritarian vision and aims of the right than the reality of the media.

Therefore the "adversarial" nature of the media is a myth, but this is not to imply that the media does not present critical analysis. Herman and Chomsky in fact argue that the *"mass media are not a solid monolith on all issues."* and do not deny that it does present facts (which they do sometimes themselves cite). This *"affords the opportunity for a classic* ***non sequitur****, in*

*which the citations of facts from the mainstream press by a critic of the press is offered as a triumphant 'proof' that the criticism is self-refuting, and that media coverage of disputed issues is indeed adequate."* But, as they argue, *"[t]hat the media provide some facts about an issue ... proves absolutely nothing about the adequacy or accuracy of that coverage. The mass media do, in fact, literally suppress a great deal ... But even more important in this context is the question given to a fact — its placement, tone, and repetitions, the framework within which it is presented, and the related facts that accompany it and give it meaning (or provide understanding) . .. there is no merit to the pretence that because certain facts may be found by a diligent and sceptical researcher, the absence of radical bias and de facto suppression is thereby demonstrated."* [p. xii and pp xiv-xv]

As they stress, the media in a democratic system is different from one in a dictatorship and so they *"do not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a totalitarian state. Rather, they permit — indeed, encourage — spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus, a system so powerful as to be internalised largely without awareness."* Within this context, *"facts that tend to undermine the government line, if they are properly understood, can be found."* Indeed, it is *"possible that the volume of inconvenient facts can expand, as it did during the Vietnam War, in response to the growth of a critical constituency (which included elite elements from 1968). Even in this exceptional case, however, it was very rare for news and commentary to find their way into the mass media if they failed to conform to the framework of established dogma (postulating benevolent U.S aims, the United States responding to aggression and terror, etc.)"* While during the war and after, *"apologists for state policy commonly pointed to the inconvenient facts, the periodic 'pessimism' of media pundits, and the debates over tactics as showing that the media were 'adversarial' and even 'lost' the war,"* in fact these *"allegations are ludi-*



increase in corporate power and ensure that states can only intervene when it suits corporations, not the general public.

The ability of corporations to sue governments was enshrined in chapter 11 of NAFTA. In a small town in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosi, a California firm — Metalclad — a commercial purveyor of hazardous wastes, bought an abandoned dump site nearby. It proposed to expand on the dumpsite and use it to dump toxic waste material. The people in the neighbourhood of the dump site protested. The municipality, using powers delegated to it by the state, rezoned the site and forbid Metalclad to extend its land holdings. Metalclad, under Chapter 11 of NAFTA, then sued the Mexican government for damage to its profit margins and balance sheet as a result of being treated unequally by the people of San Luis Potosi. A trade panel, convened in Washington, agreed with the company. [Naomi Klein, **Fences and Windows**, pp. 56–59] In Canada, the Ethyl corporation sued when the government banned its gasoline additive as a health hazard. The government settled "out of court" to prevent a public spectacle of a corporation overruling the nation's Parliament.

NAFTA and other Free Trade agreements are designed for corporations and corporate rule. Chapter 11 was not enshrined in the NAFTA in order to make a better world for the people of Canada, any more than for the people of San Luis Potosi but, instead, for the capitalist elite. This is an inherently imperialist situation, which will "justify" further intervention in the "developing" nations by the US and other imperialist nations, either through indirect military aid to client regimes or through outright invasion, depending on the nature of the *"crisis of democracy"* (a term used by the Trilateral Commission to characterise popular uprisings and a politicising of the general public).

However, force is always required to protect private capital. Even a globalised capitalist company still requires a defender. After all, *"[a]t the international level, U.S. corporations need the*

*Germany"* (as the **Financial Times** put it) at 40% of the wage and with few benefits. [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 160]

This mobility is a useful tool in the class war. There has been *"a significant impact of NAFTA on strikebreaking. About half of union organising efforts are disrupted by employer threats to transfer production abroad, for example … The threats are not idle. When such organising drives succeed, employers close the plant in whole or in part at triple the pre-NAFTA rate (about 15 percent of the time). Plant-closing threats are almost twice as high in more mobile industries (e.g. manufacturing vs. construction)."* [**Rogue States**, pp. 139–40] This process is hardly unique to America, and takes place all across the world (including in the "developing" world itself). This process has increased the bargaining power of employers and has helped to hold wages down (while productivity has increased). In the US, the share of national income going to corporate profits increased by 3.2 percentage points between 1989 and 1998. This represents a significant redistribution of the economic pie. [Mark Weisbrot, **Op. Cit.**] Hence the need for **international** workers' organisation and solidarity (as anarchists have been arguing since Bakunin [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 305–8]).

This means that such agreements such as NAFTA and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (shelved due to popular protest and outrage but definitely not forgotten) considerably weaken the governments of nation-states — but only in one area, the regulation of business. Such agreements restrict the ability of governments to check capital flight, restrict currency trading, eliminate environment and labour protection laws, ease the repatriation of profits and anything else that might impede the flow of profits or reduce business power. Indeed, under NAFTA, corporations can sue governments if they think the government is hindering its freedom on the market. Disagreements are settled by unelected panels outside the control of democratic governments. Such agreements represent an



*crous."* [p. 302 and p. xiv] A similar process, it should be noted, occurred during the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

To summarise, as Chomsky notes *"what is essential is the power to set the agenda."* This means that debate *"cannot be stilled, and indeed, in a properly functioning system of propaganda, it should not be, because it has a system-reinforcing character if constrained within proper bounds. What is essential is to set the bounds firmly. Controversy may rage as long as it adheres to the presuppositions that define the consensus of elites, and it should furthermore be encourages within these bounds, this helping to establish these doctrines as the very condition of thinkable thought while reinforcing the belief that freedom reigns."* [**Necessary Illusions**, p. 48]

# D.4 What is the relationship between capitalism and the ecological crisis?

Environmental damage has reached alarming proportions. Almost daily there are new upwardly revised estimates of the severity of global warming, ozone destruction, topsoil loss, oxygen depletion from the clearing of rain forests, acid rain, toxic wastes and pesticide residues in food and water, the accelerating extinction rate of natural species, etc., etc. Almost all scientists now recognise that global warming may soon become irreversible, with devastating results for humanity. Those few who reject this consensus are usually paid by corporations with a vested interest in denying the reality of what their companies are doing to the planet (such as oil companies). That sections of the ruling class have become aware of the damage inflicted on the planet's eco-systems suggests that we have only a few decades before they irreparably damaged.

Most anarchists see the ecological crisis as rooted in the psychology of domination, which emerged with the rise of hierarchy (including patriarchy, classes, and the first primitive states) during the Late Neolithic. Murray Bookchin, one of the pioneers of eco-anarchism, points out that *"[t]he hierarchies, classes, propertied forms, and statist institutions that emerged with social domination were carried over conceptually into humanity's relationship with nature. Nature too became increasingly regarded as a mere resource, an object, a raw material to be exploited as ruthlessly as slaves on a latifundium."* [**Toward**



*like labour rights, or educational programmes, or health, or efforts to stimulate the economy, or, in fact, anything that might help people and not profits (and therefore irrational in the technical sense)."* [**Rogue States**, pp. 212–3]

This means that under globalisation, states will compete with each other to offer the best deals to investors and transnational companies — such as tax breaks, union busting, no pollution controls, and so forth. The effects on the countries' ordinary people will be ignored in the name of future benefits (not so much pie in the sky when you die, more like pie in the future, maybe, if you are nice and do what you are told). For example, such an "acceptable" business climate was created in Britain, where *"market forces have deprived workers of rights in the name of competition."* [**Scotland on Sunday**, 9/1/95] Unsurprisingly. number of people with less than half the average income rose from 9% of the population in 1979 to 25% in 1993. The share of national wealth held by the poorer half of the population has fallen from one third to one quarter. However, as would be expected, the number of millionaires has increased, as has the welfare state for the rich, with the public's tax money being used to enrich the few via military Keynesianism, privatisation and funding for Research and Development. Like any religion, the free-market ideology is marked by the hypocrisy of those at the top and the sacrifices required from the majority at the bottom.

In addition, the globalisation of capital allows it to play one work force against another. For example, General Motors plans to close two dozen plants in the United States and Canada, but it has become the largest employer in Mexico. Why? Because an *"economic miracle"* has driven wages down. Labour's share of personal income in Mexico has *"declined from 36 percent in the mid-1970's to 23 percent by 1992."* Elsewhere, General Motors opened a $690 million assembly plant in the former East Germany. Why? Because there workers are willing to *"work longer hours than their pampered colleagues in western*

*growth, but when it has, it has not brought benefits to all; the net effect of the policies set by the Washington Consensus had all too often been to benefit the few at the expense of the many, the well-off at the expense of the poor.*" [**Globalisation and Its Discontents**, p. 17, p. 20, p. 13, p. 36 and p. 20]

While transnational companies are, perhaps, the most well-known representatives of this process of globalisation, the power and mobility of modern capitalism can be seen from the following figures. From 1986 to 1990, foreign exchange transactions rose from under $300 billion to $700 billion daily and were expected to exceed $1.3 trillion in 1994. The World Bank estimates that the total resources of international financial institutions at about $14 trillion. To put some kind of perspective on these figures, the Balse-based Bank for International Settlement estimated that the aggregate daily turnover in the foreign exchange markets at nearly $900 billion in April 1992, equal to 13 times the Gross Domestic Product of the OECD group of countries on an annualised basis [**Financial Times**, 23/9/93]. In Britain, some $200–300 billion a day flows through London's foreign exchange markets. This is the equivalent of the UK's annual Gross National Product in two or three days. Needless to say, since the early 1990s, these amounts have grown to even higher levels (daily currency transactions have risen from a mere $80 billion in 1980 to $1.26 billion in 1995. In proportion to world trade, this trading in foreign exchange rose from a ration of 10:1 to nearly 70:1 [Mark Weisbrot, **Globalisation for Whom?**]).

Little wonder that a **Financial Times** special supplement on the IMF stated that *"Wise governments realise that the only intelligent response to the challenge of globalisation is to make their economies more acceptable."* [**Op. Cit.**] More acceptable to business, that is, not their populations. As Chomsky put it, *"free capital flow creates what's sometimes called a 'virtual parliament' of global capital, which can exercise veto power over government policies that it considers irrational. That means things*



**an Ecological Society** p. 41] In his view, without uprooting the psychology of domination, all attempts to stave off ecological catastrophe are likely to be mere palliatives and so doomed to failure.

Bookchin argues that *"the conflict between humanity and nature is an extension of the conflict between human and human. Unless the ecology movement encompasses the problem of domination in all its aspects, it will contribute* ***nothing*** *toward eliminating the root causes of the ecological crisis of our time. If the ecology movement stops at mere reformism in pollution and conservation control — at mere 'environmentalism' — without dealing radically with the need for an expanded concept of revolution, it will merely serve as a safety value for the existing system of natural and human exploitation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 43] Since capitalism is the vehicle through which the psychology of domination finds its most ecologically destructive outlet, most eco-anarchists give the highest priority to dismantling it:

> *"Literally, the system in its endless devouring of nature will reduce the entire biosphere to the fragile simplicity of our desert and arctic biomes. We will be reversing the process of organic evolution which has differentiated flora and fauna into increasingly complex forms and relationships, thereby creating a simpler and less stable world of life. The consequences of this appalling regression are predictable enough in the long run — the biosphere will become so fragile that it will eventually collapse from the standpoint human survival needs and remove the organic preconditions for human life. That this will eventuate from a society based on production for the sake of production is … merely a matter of time, although when it will occur is impossible to predict."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68]

This is not to say that ecological destruction did not exist before the rise of capitalism. This is not the case. Social problems, and the environmental destruction they create, *"lie not only in the conflict between wage labour and capital"* they also *"lie in the conflicts between age-groups and sexes within the family, hierarchical modes of instruction in the schools, the bureaucratic usurpation of power within the city, and ethnic divisions within society. Ultimately, they stem from a hierarchical sensibility of command and obedience that begins with the family and merely reaches its most visible social form in the factory, bureaucracy and military. I cannot emphasise too strongly that these problems emerged long before capitalism."* However, capitalism is the dominant economic form today and so the *"modern urban crisis largely reflects the divisions that capitalism has produced between society and nature."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 29 and p. 28]

Capitalism, unlike previous class and hierarchical systems, has an expansionist nature which makes it incompatible with the planet's ecology. So it is important to stress that capitalism must be **eliminated** because it **cannot** reform itself so as to become "environment friendly," contrary to the claims of so-called "green" capitalists. This is because *"[c]apitalism not only validates precapitalist notions of the domination of nature, ... it turns the plunder of nature into society's law of life. To quibble with this kind of system about its values, to try to frighten it with visions about the consequences of growth is to quarrel with its very metabolism. One might more easily persuade a green plant to desist from photosynthesis than to ask the bourgeois economy to desist from capital accumulation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 66]

Thus capitalism causes ecological destruction because it is based upon domination (of human over human and so humanity over nature) and continual, endless growth (for without growth, capitalism would die). This can be seen from the fact that industrial production has increased fifty fold between 1950 and the 1990s. Obviously such expansion in a finite environment cannot go on indefinitely without



WB loans. Private banks and lending agencies would also pull out, as they lent under the cover of the IMF — the only body with the power to both underpin loans and squeeze repayment from debtors. These policies meant introducing austerity programmes which, in turn, meant cutting public spending, freezing wages, restricting credit, allowing foreign multinational companies to cherry pick assets at bargain prices, and passing laws to liberalise the flow of capital into and out of the country. Not surprisingly, the result was disastrous for the working population, but the debts were repaid and both local and international elites did very well out of it. So while workers in the West suffered repression and hardship, the fate of the working class in the "developing" world was considerably worse.

Leading economist Joseph Stiglitz worked in the World Bank and described some of dire consequences of these policies. He notes how the neo-liberalism the IMF and WB imposed has, *"too often, not been followed by the promised growth, but by increased misery"* and workers *"lost their jobs [being] forced into poverty"* or *"been hit by a heightened sense of insecurity"* if they remained in work. For many *"it seems closer to an unmitigated disaster."* He argues that part of the problem is that the IMF and WB have been taken over by true believers in capitalism and apply market fundamentalism in all cases. Thus, they *"became the new missionary institutions"* of *"free market ideology"* through which *"these ideas were pushed on reluctant poor countries."* Their policies were *"based on an ideology — market fundamentalism — that required little, if any, consideration of a country's particular circumstances and immediate problems. IMF economists could ignore the short-term effects their policies might have on [a] country, content in the belief* ***in the long run*** *the country would be better off"* — a position which many working class people there rejected by rioting and protest. In summary, globalisation *"as it has been practised has not lived up to what its advocates promised it would accomplish ... In some cases it has not even resulted in*

recessions of the early 1980s which broke the back of working class resistance in the U.K. and U.S.A. High unemployment helped to discipline a rebellious working class and the new mobility of capital meant a virtual "investment strike" against nations which had a "poor industrial record" (i.e. workers who were not obedient wage slaves). Moreover, as in any economic crisis, the "degree of monopoly" (i.e. the dominance of large firms) in the market increased as weaker firms went under and others merged to survive. This enhancing the tendencies toward concentration and centralisation which always exist in capitalism, so ensuring an extra thrust towards global operations as the size and position of the surviving firms required wider and larger markets to operate in.

Internationally, another crisis played its role in promoting globalisation. This was the Debit Crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Debt plays a central role for the western powers in dictating how their economies should be organised. The debt crisis proved an ideal leverage for the western powers to force "free trade" on the "third world." This occurred when third world countries faced with falling incomes and rising interest rates defaulted on their loans (loans that were mainly given as a bribe to the ruling elites of those countries and used as a means to suppress the working people of those countries — who now, sickenly, are expected to repay them!).

Before this, as noted in section D.5.1, many countries had followed a policy of "import substitution." This tended to create new competitors who could deny transnational corporations both markets and cheap raw materials. With the debt crisis, the imperialist powers could end this policy but instead of military force, the governments of the west sent in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). The loans required by "developing" nations in the face of recession and rising debt repayments meant that they had little choice but to agree to an IMF-designed economic reform programme. If they refused, not only were they denied IMF funds, but also



disastrous consequences. Yet it is impossible **in principle** for capitalism to kick its addiction to growth. It is important to understand why.

Capitalism is based on production for profit. In order to stay profitable, a firm needs to make a profit. In other words, money must become more money. This can be done in two ways. Firstly, a firm can produce new goods, either in response to an existing need or (by means of advertising) by creating a new one. Secondly, by producing a new good more cheaply than other firms in the same industry in order to successfully compete. If one firm increases its productivity (as all firms must try to do), it will be able to produce more cheaply, thus undercutting its competition and capturing more market share (until eventually it forces less profitable firms into bankruptcy). Hence, constantly increasing productivity is essential for survival.

There are two ways to increase productivity, either by passing on costs to third parties (externalities) or by investing in new means of production. The former involves, for example, polluting the surrounding environment or increasing the exploitation of workers (e.g. longer hours and/or more intense work for the same amount of pay). The latter involves introducing new technologies that reduce the amount of labour necessary to produce the same product or service. Due to the struggle of workers to prevent increases in the level of their exploitation and by citizens to stop pollution, new technologies are usually the main way that productivity is increased under capitalism (though of course capitalists are always looking for ways to avoid regulations and to increase the exploitation of workers on a given technology by other means as well).

But new technologies are expensive, which means that in order to pay for continuous upgrades, a firm must continually sell **more** of what it produces, and so must keep expanding its capital. To stay in the same place under capitalism is to tempt crisis — thus a firm must always strive for more profits and thus

must always expand and invest. In order to survive, a firm must constantly expand and upgrade its capital and production levels so it can sell enough to **keep** expanding and upgrading its capital — i.e. "grow or die," or *"production for the sake of production"* (to user Marx's term). This means that the accumulation of capital is at the heart of the system and so it is impossible in principle for capitalism to solve the ecological crisis, because "grow or die" is inherent in its nature:

> *"To speak of 'limits to growth' under a capitalistic market economy is as meaningless as to speak of limits of warfare under a warrior society. The moral pieties, that are voiced today by many well-meaning environmentalists, are as naive as the moral pieties of multinationals are manipulative. Capitalism can no more be 'persuaded' to limit growth than a human being can be 'persuaded' to stop breathing. Attempts to 'green' capitalism, to make it 'ecological', are doomed by the very nature of the system as a system of endless growth."* [Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, pp. 93–94]

As long as capitalism exists, it will **necessarily** continue its *"endless devouring of nature,"* until it removes the *"organic preconditions for human life."* For this reason there can be no compromise with capitalism: We must destroy it before it destroys us. And time is running out.

Capitalists, of course, do not accept this conclusion. Many simply ignore the evidence or view the situation through rose-coloured spectacles, maintaining that ecological problems are not as serious as they seem or that science will find a way to solve them before it's too late. Some are aware of the problem, but they fail to understand its roots and, as such, advocate reforms which are based on either regulation or (more usually in these neo-liberal days) on "market" based solutions. In section



objective economic forces and the class struggle. Moreover, like the forms that came before, it is rooted in the economic power of corporations based in a few developed nations and political power of the states that are the home base of these corporations. These powers influence international institutions and individual countries to pursue neo-liberal policies, the so-called "Washington Consensus" of free market reforms, associated with globalisation.

Globalisation cannot be understood unless its history is known. The current process of increasing international trade, investment and finance markets started in the late 60s and early 1970s. Increased competition from a re-built Europe and Japan challenged US domination combined with working class struggle across the globe to leave the capitalist world feeling the strain. Dissatisfaction with factory and office life combined with other social movements (such as the women's movement, anti-racist struggles, anti-war movements and so on) which demanded more than capitalism could provide. The near revolution in France, 1968, is the most famous of these struggles but it occurred all across the globe.

For the ruling class, the squeeze on profits and authority from ever-increasing wage demands, strikes, stoppages, boycotts, squatting, protests and other struggles meant that a solution had to be found and the working class disciplined (and profits regained). One part of the solution was to "run away" and so capital flooded into certain areas of the "developing" world. This increased the trends towards globalisation. Another solution was the embrace of Monetarism and tight money (i.e. credit) policies. It is a moot point whether those who applied Monetarism actually knew it was nonsense and, consequently, sought an economic crisis or whether they were simply incompetent ideologues who knew little about economics and mismanaged the economy by imposing its recommendations, the outcome was the same. It resulted in increases in the interest rate, which helped deepen the

lar pressure from the streets and economic stagnation flowing from its state-run capitalism. Being unable to continue as before and unwilling, for obvious reasons, to encourage economic and political participation, it opted for the top-down transformation of state to private capitalism. Representative democracy was implemented and state assets were privatised into the hands of a new class of capitalists (often made up of the old bureaucrats) rather than the workers themselves. In other words, the post-Stalinist regimes are still class systems and now subject to a different form of imperialism — namely, globalisation.

## D.5.3 Does globalisation mean the end of imperialism?

No. While it is true that the size of multinational companies has increased along with the mobility of capital, the need for nation-states to serve corporate interests still exists. With the increased mobility of capital, i.e. its ability to move from one country and invest in another easily, and with the growth in international money markets, we have seen what can be called a "free market" in states developing. Corporations can ensure that governments do as they are told simply by threatening to move elsewhere (which they will do anyway, if it results in more profits).

Therefore, as Howard Zinn stresses, *"it's very important to point out that globalisation is in fact imperialism and that there is a disadvantage to simply using the term 'globalisation' in a way that plays into the thinking of people at the World Bank and journalists .. . who are agog at globalisation. They just can't contain their joy at the spread of American economic and corporate power all over the world. .. it would be very good to puncture that balloon and say 'This is imperialism.'"* [**Bush Drives us into Bakunin's Arms**] Globalisation is, like the forms of imperialism that preceded it, a response to both



E we will show why these arguments are unsound and why libertarian socialism is our best hope for preventing ecological catastrophe.

# D.5 What causes imperialism?

In a word: power. Imperialism is the process by which one country dominates another directly, by political means, or indirectly, by economic means, in order to steal its wealth (either natural or produced). This, by necessity, means the exploitation of working people in the dominated nation. Moreover, it can also aid the exploitation of working people in the imperialist nation itself. As such, imperialism cannot be considered in isolation from the dominant economic and social system. Fundamentally the cause is the same inequality of power, which is used in the service of exploitation.

While the rhetoric used for imperial adventures may be about self-defence, defending/exporting "democracy" and/or "humanitarian" interests, the reality is much more basic and grim. As Chomsky stresses, *"deeds consistently accord with interests, and conflict with words — discoveries that must not, however, weaken our faith in the sincerity of the declarations of our leaders."* This is unsurprising as states are always *"pursuing the strategic and economic interests of dominant sectors to the accompaniment of rhetorical flourishes about its exceptional dedication to the highest values"* and so *"the evidence for ... the proclaimed messianic missions reduces to routine pronouncements"* (faithfully repeated by the media) while *"counter-evidence is mountainous."* [**Failed States**, p. 171 and pp. 203–4]

We must stress that we are concentrating on the roots of imperialism here. We do not, and cannot, provide a detailed



*propriation, of power passing out of their hands, whoever seizes it from them. They will defend their property against any class or clique. The fact that they are indignant [about Soviet imperialism] proves their fear — it tells us nothing at all about the agents inspiring that fear."* [J.H., *"The Fourth International"*, pp. 37–43, Vernon Richards (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, pp. 41–2] This elimination of tradition forms of class rule and their replacement with new forms is required as these are the only economic forms compatible with the needs of the state capitalist regimes to exploit these countries on a regular basis.

The second myth is the notion that opposition to state-capitalist imperialism by its subject peoples meant support for Western capitalism. In fact, the revolts and revolutions which repeatedly flared up under Stalinism almost always raised genuine socialist demands. For example, the 1956 Hungarian revolution *"was a social revolution in the fullest sense of the term. Its object was a fundamental change in the relations of production, and in the relations between ruler and ruled in factories, pits and on the land."* Given this, unsurprisingly Western political commentary *"was centred upon the nationalistic aspects of the Revolution, no matter how trivial."* This was unsurprising, as the West was *"opposed both to its methods and to its aims ... What capitalist government could genuinely support a people demanding 'workers' management of industry' and already beginning to implement this on an increasing scale?"* The revolution *"showed every sign of making both them and their bureaucratic counterparts in the East redundant."* The revolt itself was rooted *"[n]ew organs of struggle,"* workers' councils *"which embodied, in embryo, the new society they were seeking to achieve."* [Anderson, **Op. Cit.**, p.6, p. 106 and p. 107]

The ending of state capitalism in Eastern Europe in 1989 has ended its imperialist domination of those countries. However, it has simply opened the door for private-capitalist imperialism as the revolts themselves remained fundamentally at the political level. The ruling bureaucracy was faced with both popu-

*"Neither East nor West."* We *"cannot alter our views about Russia [or any other state capitalist regime] simply because, for imperialist reasons, American and British spokesmen now denounce Russia totalitarianism. We know that their indignation is hypocritical and that they may become friendly to Russia again if it suits their interests."* [Marie-Louise Berneri, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] In the clash of imperialism, anarchists support neither side as both are rooted in the exploitation and oppression of the working class.

Finally, it is worthwhile to refute two common myths about state capitalist imperialism. The first myth is that state-capitalist imperialism results in a non-capitalist regimes and that is why it is so opposed to by Western interests. From this position, held by many Trotskyists, it is argued that we should support such regimes against the West (for example, that socialists should have supported the Russian invasion of Afghanistan). This position is based on a fallacy rooted in the false Trotskyist notion that state ownership of the means of production is inherently socialist.

Just as capitalist domination saw the transformation of the satellite's countries social relations from pre-capitalist forms in favour of capitalist ones, the domination of "socialist" nations meant the elimination of traditional bourgeois social relations in favour of state capitalist ones. As such, the nature and form of imperialism was fundamentally identical and served the interests of the appropriate ruling class in each case. This transformation of one kind of class system into another explains the root of the West's very public attacks on Soviet imperialism. It had nothing to do with the USSR being considered a "workers' state" as Trotsky, for example, argued. *"Expropriation of the capitalist class,"* argued one anarchist in 1940, *"is naturally terrifying"* to the capitalist class *"but that does not prove anything about a workers' state ... In Stalinist Russia expropriation is carried out ... by, and ultimately for the benefit of, the bureaucracy, not by the workers at all. The bourgeoisie are afraid of ex-*



history of the horrors associated with it. For US imperialism, the works of Noam Chomsky are recommended. His books **Turning the Tide** and **The Culture of Terrorism** expose the evils of US intervention in Central America, for example, while **Deterring Democracy**, **Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs** and **Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy** present a wider perspective. **Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II** and **Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower** by William Blum are also worth reading. For post-1945 British imperialism, Mark Curtis's **Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World** and **Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses** are recommended.

As we will discuss in the following sections, imperialism has changed over time, particularly during the last two hundred years (where its forms and methods have evolved with the changing needs of capitalism). But even in the pre-capitalist days of empire building, imperialism was driven by economic forces and needs. In order to make one's state secure, in order to increase the wealth available to the state, its ruling bureaucracy and its associated ruling class, it had to be based on a strong economy and have a sufficient resource base for the state and ruling elite to exploit (both in terms of human and natural resources). By increasing the area controlled by the state, one increased the wealth available.

States by their nature, like capital, are expansionist bodies, with those who run them always wanting to increase the range of their power and influence (this can be seen from the massive number of wars that have occurred in Europe over the last 500 years). This process was began as nation-states were created by Kings declaring lands to be their private property, regardless of the wishes of those who actually lived there. Moreover, this conflict did not end when monarchies were replaced by more democratic forms of government. As Bakunin argued:

> *"we find wars of extermination, wars among races and nations; wars of conquest, wars to maintain equilibrium, political and religious wars, wars waged in the name of 'great ideas' ... , patriotic wars for greater national unity ... And what do we find beneath all that, beneath all the hypocritical phrases used in order to give these wars the appearance of humanity and right? Always the same economic phenomenon:* ***the tendency on the part of some to live and prosper at the expense of others.*** *All the rest is mere humbug. The ignorant and naive, and the fools are entrapped by it, but the strong men who direct the destinies of the State know only too well that underlying all those wars there is only one motive: pillage, the seizing of someone else's wealth and the enslavement of someone else's labour."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 170]

However, while the economic motive for expansion is generally the same, the economic system which a nation is based on has a definite impact on what drives that motive as well as the specific nature of that imperialism. Thus the empire building of ancient Rome or Feudal England has a different economic base (and so driving need) than, say, the imperialism of nineteenth century Germany and Britain or twentieth and twenty-first century United States. Here we will focus mainly on modern capitalist imperialism as it is the most relevant one in the modern world.

Capitalism, by its very nature, is growth-based and so is characterised by the accumulation and concentration of capital. Companies **must** expand in order to survive competition in the marketplace. This, inevitably, sees a rise in international activity and organisation as a result of competition over markets and resources within a given country. By expanding into



the benefit of both the local and Russian rulers. In a similar way, and for identical needs, the Western Imperialist powers supported murderous local capitalist and feudal elites in their struggle against their own working classes, arguing that it was supporting "freedom" and "democracy" against Soviet aggression.

The turning of Communist Parties into conduits of Soviet elite interests became obvious under Stalin, when the twists and turns of the party line were staggering. However, it actually started under Lenin and Trotsky and *"almost from the beginning"* the Communist International (Comintern) *"served primarily not as an instrument for World Revolution, but as an instrument of Russian Foreign Policy."* This explains *"the most bewildering changes of policy and political somersaults"* it imposed on its member parties. Ultimately, *"the allegedly revolutionary aims of the Comintern stood in contrast to the diplomatic relations of the Soviet Union with other countries."* [Marie-Louise Berneri, **Neither East Nor West**, p. 64 and p. 63] As early as 1920, the Dutch Council Communist Anton Pannekoek was arguing that the Comintern opposition to anti-parliamentarianism was rooted *"in the needs of the Soviet Republic"* for *"peaceful trade with the rest of the world."* This meant that the Comintern's policies were driven *"by the political needs of Soviet Russia."* [**"Afterword to World Revolution and Communist Tactics,"** D.A. Smart (ed.), **Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism**, p. 143 and p. 144] This is to be expected, as the regime had always been state capitalist and so the policies of the Comintern were based on the interests of a (state) capitalist regime.

Therefore, imperialism is not limited to states based on private capitalism — the state capitalist regimes have also been guilty of it. This is to be expected, as both are based on minority rule, the exploitation and oppression of labour and the need to expand the resources available to it. This means that anarchists oppose all forms of capitalist imperialism and raise the slogan

ing standards to accelerate industrialisation in conformity with the requirements of the Russian ruling class. This was because these regimes served not as outlets for excess Soviet products but rather as a means of *"plugging holes in the Russian economy, which [was] in a chronic state of underproduction in comparison to its needs."* As such, the *"form and content"* of this regimes' *"domination over its satellite countries are determined fundamentally by its own economic structure"* and so it would be *"completely incorrect to consider these relations identical to the relations of classical colonialism."* [Castoriadis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] So part of the difference between private and state capitalist was drive by the need to plunder these countries of commodities to make up for shortages caused by central planning (in contrast, capitalist imperialism tended to export goods). As would be expected, within this overall imperialist agenda the local bureaucrats and elites feathered their own nests, as with any form of imperialism.

As well as physical expansionism, the state-capitalist elites also aided "anti-imperialist" movements when it served their interests. The aim of this was to placed such movements and any regimes they created within the Soviet or Chinese sphere of influence. Ironically, this process was aided by imperialist rivalries with US imperialism as American pressure often closed off other options in an attempt to demonise such movements and states as "communist" in order to justify supporting their repression or for intervening itself. This is **not** to suggest that Soviet regime was encouraging "world revolution" by this support. Far from it, given the Stalinist betrayals and attacks on genuine revolutionary movements and struggles (the example of the Spanish Revolution is the obvious one to mention here). Soviet aid was limited to those parties which were willing to subjugate themselves and any popular movements they influenced to the needs of the Russian ruling class. Once the Stalinist parties had replaced the local ruling class, trade relations were formalised between the so-called "socialist" nations for



new markets in new countries, a company can gain an advantage over its competitors as well as overcome limited markets and resources in the home nation. In Bakunin's words:

> *"just as capitalist production and banking speculation, which in the long run swallows up that production, must, under the threat of bankruptcy, ceaselessly expand at the expense of the small financial and productive enterprises which they absorb, must become universal, monopolistic enterprises extending all over the world — so this modern and necessarily military State is driven on by an irrepressible urge to become a universal State... . Hegemony is only a modest manifestation possible under the circumstances, of this unrealisable urge inherent in every State. And the first condition of this hegemony is the relative impotence and subjection of all the neighbouring States."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

Therefore, economically and politically, the imperialistic activities of **both** capitalist and state-capitalist (i.e. the Soviet Union and other "socialist" nations) comes as no surprise. Capitalism is inevitably imperialistic and so *"[w]ar, capitalism and imperialism form a veritable trinity,"* to quote Dutch pacifist-syndicalist Bart de Ligt [**The Conquest of Violence**, p. 64] The growth of big business is such that it can no longer function purely within the national market and so they have to expand internationally to gain advantage in and survive. This, in turn, requires the home state of the corporations also to have global reach in order to defend them and to promote their interests. Hence the economic basis for modern imperialism, with *"the capitalistic interests of the various countries fight[ing] for the foreign markets and compete with each other there"* and when they *"get into trouble about concessions and sources of profit,"* they *"call upon their respective governments to defend their interests*

*… to protect the privileges and dividends of some … capitalist in a foreign country."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 31] Thus a capitalist class needs the power of nation states not only to create internal markets and infrastructure but also to secure and protect international markets and opportunities in a world of rivals and **their** states.

As power depends on profits within capitalism, this means that modern imperialism is caused more by economic factors than purely political considerations (although, obviously, this factor does play a role). Imperialism serves capital by increasing the pool of profits available for the imperialistic country in the world market as well as reducing the number of potential competitors. As Kropotkin stressed, *"capital knows no fatherland; and if high profits can be derived from the work of Indian coolies whose wages are only one-half of those of English workmen [or women], or even less, capital will migrate to India, as it has gone to Russian, although its migration may mean starvation for Lancashire."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops**, p. 57]

Therefore, capital will travel to where it can maximise its profits — regardless of the human or environmental costs at home or abroad. This is the economic base for modern imperialism, to ensure that any trade conducted benefits the stronger party more than the weaker one. Whether this trade is between nations or between classes is irrelevant, the aim of imperialism is to give business an advantage on the market. By travelling to where labour is cheap and the labour movement weak (usually thanks to dictatorial regimes), environmental laws few or non-existent, and little stands in the way of corporate power, capital can maximise its profits. Moreover, the export of capital allows a reduction in the competitive pressures faced by companies in the home markets (at least for short periods).

This has two effects. Firstly, the industrially developed nation (or, more correctly corporation based in that nation) can exploit less developed nations. In this way, the dominant power can maximise for itself the benefits created by international



*hind the Iron Curtain are better regarded as what they really [were] — satellite states of Russia."* [*"Russia's Grip Tightens"*, pp. 283–5, Vernon Richards (ed.), **World War — Cold War**, p. 285 and p. 284] Of course, the creation of these satellite states was based on the inter-imperialist agreements reached at the Yalta conference of February 1945.

As can be seen by Russia's ruthless policy towards her satellite regimes, Soviet imperialism was more inclined to the defence of what she already had and the creation of a buffer zone between herself and the West. This is not to deny that the ruling elite of the Soviet Union did not try to exploit the countries under its influence. For example, in the years after the end of the Second World War, the Eastern Block countries paid the USSR millions of dollars in reparations. As in private capitalism, the *"satellite states were regarded as a source of raw materials and of cheap manufactured goods. Russia secured the satellites exports at below world prices. And it exported to them at above world prices."* Thus trade *"was based on the old imperialist principle of buying cheap and selling dear — very, very dear!"* [Andy Anderson, **Hungary '56**, pp. 25–6 and p. 25] However, the nature of the imperialist regime was such that it discouraged too much expansionism as *"Russian imperialism [had] to rely on armies of occupation, utterly subservient quisling governments, or a highly organised and loyal political police (or all three). In such circumstances considerable dilution of Russian power occur[red] with each acquisition of territory."* [*"Russian Imperialism"*, pp. 270–1, Vernon Richards (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 270]

Needless to say, the form and content of the state capitalist domination of its satellite countries was dependent on its own economic and political structure and needs, just as traditional capitalist imperialism reflected its needs and structures. While direct exploitation declined over time, the satellite states were still expected to develop their economies in accordance with the needs of the Soviet Bloc as a whole (i.e., in the interests of the Russian elite). This meant the forcing down of liv-

*the result of the differences separating bureaucratic capitalism from monopoly capitalism, but at bottom this changes nothing.*

*"We must strongly emphasise that the imperialistic features of capital are not tied to 'private' or 'State' ownership of the means of production … the same process takes place if, instead of monopolies, there is an exploiting bureaucracy; in other words, this bureaucracy also can **exploit**, but only on the condition that it **dominates.**"* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 1, p. 159]

Given this, it comes as no surprise that the state-capitalist countries also participated in imperialist activities, adventures and wars, although on a lesser scale and for slightly different reasons than those associated with private capitalism. However, regardless of the exact cause the USSR *"has always pursued an imperialist foreign policy, that it is the state and not the workers which owns and controls the whole life of the country."* Given this, it is unsurprising that *"world revolution was abandoned in favour of alliances with capitalist countries. Like the bourgeois states the USSR took part in the manoeuvrings to establish a balance of power in Europe."* This has its roots in its internal class structure, as *"it is obvious that a state which pursues an imperialist foreign policy cannot itself by revolutionary"* and this is shown in *"the internal life of the USSR"* where *"the means of wealth production"* are *"owned by the state which represents, as always, a privileged class — the bureaucracy."* [*"USSR — Anarchist Position,"* pp. 21–24, Vernon Richards (ed.), **The Left and World War II**, p. 22 and p. 23]

This process became obvious after the defeat of Nazi Germany and the creation of Stalinist states in Eastern Europe. As anarchists at the time noted, this was *"the consolidation of Russian imperialist power"* and their *"incorporation … within the structure of the Soviet Union."* As such, *"all these countries be-*



trade. If, as some claim, trade always benefits each party, then imperialism allows the benefits of international trade to accrue more to one side than the other. Secondly, it gives big business more weapons to use to weaken the position of labour in the imperialist nation. This, again, allows the benefits of trade (this time the trade of workers liberty for wages) to accrue to more to business rather than to labour.

How this is done and in what manner varies and changes, but the aim is always the same — exploitation.

This can be achieved in many ways. For example, allowing the import of cheaper raw materials and goods; the export of goods to markets sheltered from foreign competitors; the export of capital from capital-rich areas to capital-poor areas as the investing of capital in less industrially developed countries allows the capitalists in question to benefit from lower wages; relocating factories to countries with fewer (or no) social and environmental laws, controls or regulations. All these allow profits to be gathered at the expense of the working people of the oppressed nation (the rulers of these nations generally do well out of imperialism, as would be expected). The initial source of exported capital is, of course, the exploitation of labour at home but it is exported to less developed countries where capital is scarcer and the price of land, labour and raw materials cheaper. These factors all contribute to enlarging profit margins:

*"The relationship of these global corporations with the poorer countries had long been an exploiting one … Whereas U.S. corporations in Europe between 1950 and 1965 invested $8.1 billion and made $5.5 billion in profits, in Latin America they invested $3.8 billion and made $11.2 billion in profits, and in Africa they invested $5.2 billion and made $14.3 bullion in profits."* [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 556]

Betsy Hartman, looking at the 1980s, concurs. *"Despite the popular Western image of the Third World as a bottomless begging bowl,"* she observes, *"it today gives more to the industrialised world than it takes. Inflows of official 'aid' and private loans and investments are exceeded by outflows in the form of repatriated profits, interest payments, and private capital sent abroad by Third World Elites."* [quoted by George Bradford, **Woman's Freedom: Key to the Population Question**, p. 77]

In addition, imperialism allows big business to increase its strength with respect to its workforce in the imperialist nation by the threat of switching production to other countries or by using foreign investments to ride out strikes. This is required because, while the "home" working class are still exploited and oppressed, their continual attempts at organising and resisting their exploiters proved more and more successful. As such, *"the opposition of the white working classes to the ... capitalist class continually gain[ed] strength, and the workers ... [won] increased wages, shorter hours, insurances, pensions, etc., the white exploiters found it profitable to obtain their labour from men [,women and children] of so-called inferior race ... Capitalists can therefore make infinitely more out there than at home."* [Bart de Ligt, **Op. Cit.**, p. 49]

As such, imperialism (like capitalism) is not only driven by the need to increase profits (important as this is, of course), it is also driven by the class struggle — the need for capital to escape from the strength of the working class in a particular country. From this perspective, the export of capital can be seen in two ways. Firstly, as a means of disciplining rebellious workers at home by an "investment strike" (capital, in effect, runs away, so causing unemployment which disciplines the rebels). Secondly, as a way to increase the 'reserve army' of the unemployed facing working people in the imperialist nations by creating new competitors for their jobs (i.e. dividing, and so ruling, workers by playing one set of workers against another). Both are re-



government which aims to codify the domination of corporations over governments. This process is often called "globalisation" and we discuss it in section D.5.3. First, however, we need to discuss non-private capitalist forms of imperialism associated with the Stalinist regimes and we do that in the next section.

## D.5.2 Is imperialism just a product of private capitalism?

While we are predominantly interested in **capitalist** imperialism, we cannot avoid discussing the activities of the so-called "socialist" nations (such as the Soviet Union, China, etc.). Given that modern imperialism has an economic base caused in developed capitalism by, in part, the rise of big business organised on a wider and wider scale, we should not be surprised that the state capitalist ("socialist") nations are/were also imperialistic. As the state-capitalist system expresses the logical end point of capital concentration (the one big firm) the same imperialistic pressures that apply to big business and its state will also apply to the state capitalist nation.

In the words of libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis:

> *"But if imperialist expansion is the necessary expression of an economy in which the process of capital concentration has arrived at the stage of monopoly domination, this is true a fortiori for an economy in which this process of concentration has arrived at its natural limit ... In other words, imperialist expansion is even more necessary for a totally concentrated economy ... That they are realised through different modes (for example, capital exportation play a much more restricted role and acts in a different way than is the case with monopoly domination) is*

*sources' — in their countries!"* [**How Deep is Deep Ecology?**, p. 62]

This is to be expected, as imperialism is the only means of defending the foreign investments of a nation's capitalist class, and by allowing the extraction of profits and the creation of markets, it also safeguards the future of private capital.

This process has not come to an end and imperialism is continuing to evolve based on changing political and economic developments. The most obvious political change is the end of the USSR. During the cold war, the competition between the USA and the USSR had an obvious impact on how imperialism worked. On the one hand, acts of imperial power could be justified in fighting "Communism" (for the USA) or "US imperialism" (for the USSR). On the other, fear of provoking a nuclear war or driving developing nations into the hands of the other side allowed more leeway for developing nations to pursue policies like import substitution. With the end of the cold-war, these options have decreased considerably for developing nations as US imperialism how has, effectively, no constraints beyond international public opinion and pressure from below. As the invasion of Iraq in 2003 shows, this power is still weak but sufficient to limit some of the excesses of imperial power (for example, the US could not carpet bomb Iraq as it had Vietnam).

The most obvious economic change is the increased global nature of capitalism. Capital investments in developing nations have increased steadily over the years, with profits from the exploitation of cheap labour flowing back into the pockets of the corporate elite in the imperialist nation, not to its citizens as a whole (though there are sometimes temporary benefits to other classes, as discussed in section D.5.4). With the increasing globalisation of big business and markets, capitalism (and so imperialism) is on the threshold of a new transformation. Just as direct imperialism transformed into in-direct imperialism, so in-direct imperialism is transforming into a global system of



lated, of course, and both seek to weaken working class power by the fear of unemployment. This process played a key role in the rise of globalisation — see section D.5.3 for details.

Thus imperialism, which is rooted in the search from surplus profits for big business, is also a response to working class power at home. The export of capital is done by emerging and established transnational companies to overcome a militant and class consciousness working class which is often too advanced for heavy exploitation, and finance capital can make easier and bigger profits by investing productive capital elsewhere. It aids the bargaining position of business by pitting the workers in one country against another, so while they are being exploited by the same set of bosses, those bosses can use this fictional "competition" of foreign workers to squeeze concessions from workers at home.

Imperialism has another function, namely to hinder or control the industrialisation of other countries. Such industrialisation will, of course, mean the emergence of new capitalists, who will compete with the existing ones both in the "less developed" countries and in the world market as a whole. Imperialism, therefore, attempts to reduce competition on the world market. As we discuss in the next section, the nineteenth century saw the industrialisation of many European nations as well as America, Japan and Russia by means of state intervention. However, this state-led industrialisation had a drawback, namely that it created more and more competitors on the world market. Moreover, as Kropotkin noted, they has the advantage that the *"new manufacturers ... begin where"* the old have *"arrived after a century of experiments and groupings"* and so they *"are built according to the newest and best models which have been worked out elsewhere."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32 and p. 49] Hence the need to stop new competitors and secure raw materials and markets, which was achieved by colonialism:

*"Industries of all kinds decentralise and are scattered all over the globe; and everywhere a variety, an integrated variety, of trades grows, instead of specialisation ... each nation becomes in its turn a manufacturing nation ... For each new-comer the first steps only are difficult ... The fact is so well felt, if not understood, that the race for colonies has become the distinctive feature of the last twenty years [Kropotkin is writing in 1912]. Each nation will have her own colonies. But colonies will not help."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 75]

Imperialism hinders industrialisation in two ways. The first way was direct colonisation, a system which has effectively ended. The second is by indirect means — namely the extraction of profits by international big business. A directly dominated country can be stopped from developing industry and be forced to specialise as a provider of raw materials. This was the aim of "classic" imperialism, with its empires and colonial wars. By means of colonisation, the imperialist powers ensure that the less-developed nation stays that way — so ensuring one less competitor as well as favourable access to raw materials and cheap labour. French anarchist Elisee Reclus rightly called this a process of creating *"colonies of exploitation."* [quoted by John P Clark and Camille Martin (eds.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 92]

This approach has been superseded by indirect means (see next section). Globalisation can be seen as an intensification of this process. By codifying into international agreements the ability of corporations to sue nation states for violating "free trade," the possibility of new competitor nations developing is weakened. Industrialisation will be dependent on transnational corporations and so development will be hindered and directed to ensure corporate profits and power. Unsurprisingly, those nations which **have** industrialised over the last few decades



period has been marked by imperialist conflict. These include old-fashioned direct war by the imperialist nation (such as the Vietnam and Iraq wars) as well as new-style imperialistic wars by proxy (such as US support for the Contras in Nicaragua or support for military coups against reformist or nationalist governments). As such, if a regime becomes too independent, military force always remains an option. This can be seen from the 1990 Gulf War, when Saddam invaded Kuwait (and all his past crimes, conducted with the support of the West, were dragged from the Memory Hole to justify war).

Least it be considered that we are being excessive in our analysis, let us not forget that the US *"has intervened well over a hundred times in the internal affairs of other nations since 1945. The rhetoric has been that we have done so largely to preserve or restore freedom and democracy, or on behalf of human rights. The reality has been that [they] ... have been consistently designed and implemented to further the interests of US (now largely transnational) corporations, and the elites both at home and abroad who profit from their depredations."* [Henry Rosemont, Jr., *"U.S. Foreign Policy: the Execution of Human Rights"*, pp. 13–25, **Social Anarchism**, no. 29 p. 13] This has involved the overthrow of democratically elected governments (such as in Iran, 1953; Guatemala, 1954; Chile, 1973) and their replacement by reactionary right-wing dictatorships (usually involving the military). As George Bradford argues, *"[i]n light of [the economic] looting [by corporations under imperialism], it should become clearer ... why nationalist regimes that cease to serve as simple conduits for massive U.S. corporate exploitation come under such powerful attack — Guatemala in 1954, Chile in 1973 ... Nicaragua [in the 1980s] ... [U.S.] State Department philosophy since the 1950s has been to rely on various police states and to hold back 'nationalistic regimes' that might be more responsive to 'increasing popular demand for immediate improvements in the low living standards of the masses,' in order to 'protect our re-*

aged" to buy imperialist countries' goods (often in exchange for "aid", typically military "aid") and open their markets to the dominant power's companies and their products.

Thus, the Third World sags beneath the weight of well-funded oppression, while its countries are sucked dry of their native wealth, in the name of "development" and in the spirit of "democracy" and "freedom". The United States leads the West in its global responsibility (another favourite buzzword) to ensure that this peculiar kind of "freedom" remains unchallenged by any indigenous movements. The actual form of the regime supported is irrelevant, although fascist states are often favoured due to their stability (i.e. lack of popular opposition movements). As long as the fascist regimes remain compliant and obedient to the West and capitalism thrives unchallenged then they can commit any crime against their own people while being praised for making progress towards "democracy." However, the moment they step out of line and act in ways which clash with the interests of the imperialist powers then their short-comings will used to justify intervention (the example of Saddam Hussein is the most obvious one to raise here). As for "democracy," this can be tolerated by imperialism as long as its in *"the traditional sense of 'top-down' rule by elites linked to US power, with democratic forms of little substance — unless they are compelled to do so, by their own populations in particular."* This applies *"internally"* as well as abroad, for *"democracy is fine as long as it ... does not risk popular interference with primary interests of power and wealth."* Thus the aim is to ensure *"an obedient client state is firmly in place, the general perferene of conquerors, leaving just military bases for future contingencies."* [**Failed States**, p. 171, p. 204 and p. 148]

In these ways, markets are kept open for corporations based in the advanced nations all without the apparent use of force or the need for colonies. However, this does not mean that war is not an option and, unsurprisingly, the post-1945



(such as the East Asian Tiger economies) have done so by using the state to protect industry and control international finance.

The new attack of the capitalist class ("globalisation") is a means of plundering local capitalists and diminish their power and area of control. The steady weakening and ultimate collapse of the Eastern Block (in terms of economic/political performance and ideological appeal) also played a role in this process. The end of the Cold War meant a reduction in the space available for local elites to manoeuvre. Before this local ruling classes could, if they were lucky, use the struggle between US and USSR imperialism to give them a breathing space in which they could exploit to pursue their own agenda (within limits, of course, and with the blessing of the imperialist power in whose orbit they were in). The Eastern Tiger economies were an example of this process at work. The West could use them to provide cheap imports for the home market as well as in the ideological conflict of the Cold War as an example of the benefits of the "free market" (not that they were) and the ruling elites, while maintaining a pro-west and pro-business environment (by force directed against their own populations, of course), could pursue their own economic strategies. With the end of the Cold War, this factor is no longer in play and the newly industrialised nations are now an obvious economic competitor. The local elites are now "encouraged" (by economic blackmail via the World Bank and the IMF) to embrace US economic ideology. Just as neo-liberalism attacks the welfare state in the Imperialist nations, so it results in a lower tolerance of local capital in "less developed" nations.

However, while imperialism is driven by the needs of capitalism it cannot end the contradictions inherent in that system. As Reclus put it in the late nineteenth century, *"the theatre expands, since it now embraces the whole of the land and seas. But the forces that struggled against one another in each particularly state are precisely those that fight across the earth. In each country, capital seeks to subdue the workers. Similarly, on the level of*

*the broadest world market, capital, which had grown enormously, disregards all the old borders and seeks to put the entire mass of producers to work on behalf of its profits, and to secure all the consumers in the world."* [Reclus, quoted by Clark and Martin (eds.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 97]

This struggle for markets and resources does, by necessity, lead to conflict. This may be the wars of conquest required to initially dominate an economically "backward" nation (such as the US invasion of the Philippines, the conquest of Africa by West European states, and so on) or maintain that dominance once it has been achieved (such as the Vietnam War, the Algerian War, the Gulf War and so on). Or it may be the wars between major imperialist powers once the competition for markets and colonies reaches a point when they cannot be settled peacefully (as in the First and Second World Wars). As Kropotkin argued:

> *"men no longer fight for the pleasure of kings, they fight for the integrity of revenues and for the growing wealth ... [for the] benefit of the barons of high finance and industry ... [P]olitical preponderance ... is quite simply a matter of economic preponderance in international markets. What Germany, France, Russia, England, and Austria are all trying to win ... is not military preponderance: it is economic domination. It is the right to impose their goods and their customs tariffs on their neighbours; the right to exploit industrially backward peoples; the privilege of building railroads ... to appropriate from a neighbour either a port which will activate commerce, or a province where surplus merchandise can be unloaded ... When we fight today, it is to guarantee our great industrialists a profit of 30%, to assure the financial barons their domination at the Bourse [stock-exchange], and to provide*



it is code for imperialist aims for Western governments, particularly the U.S. and its junior partner, the U.K. As discussed in section D.2.1, economic power can be quite effective in pressuring governments to do what the capitalist class desire even in advanced industrial countries. This applies even more so to so-called developing nations.

In addition to the stick of economic and political pressure, the imperialist countries also use the carrot of foreign aid and investment to ensure their aims. This can best be seen when Western governments provide lavish funds to "developing" states, particularly petty right-wing despots, under the pseudonym "foreign aid." Hence the all to common sight of US Presidents supporting authoritarian (indeed, dictatorial) regimes while at the same time mouthing nice platitudes about "liberty" and "progress." The purpose of this foreign aid, noble-sounding rhetoric about freedom and democracy aside, is to ensure that the existing world order remains intact and that US corporations have access to the raw materials and markets they need. Stability has become the watchword of modern imperialists, who see **any** indigenous popular movements as a threat to the existing world order. The U.S. and other Western powers provide much-needed war material and training for the military of these governments, so that they may continue to keep the business climate friendly to foreign investors (that means tacitly and overtly supporting fascism around the globe).

Foreign aid also channels public funds to home based transnational companies via the ruling classes in Third World countries. It is, in other words, is a process where the poor people of rich countries give their money to the rich people of poor countries to ensure that the investments of the rich people of rich countries is safe from the poor people of poor countries! Needless to say, the owners of the companies providing this "aid" also do very well out of it. This has the advantage of securing markets as other countries are "encour-

and economic pressure, to open their borders to foreign capital. If a state takes up a position which the imperial powers consider "bad for business," action will be taken, from sanctions to outright invasion. Keeping the world open and "free" for capitalist exploitation has been America's general policy since 1945. It springs directly from the expansion requirements of private capital and so cannot be fundamentally changed. However, it was also influenced by the shifting needs resulting from the new political and economic order and the rivalries existing between imperialist nations (particularly those of the Cold War). As such, which method of intervention and the shift from direct colonialism to neo-colonialism (and any "anomalies") can be explained by these conflicts.

Within this basic framework of indirect imperialism, many "developing" nations did manage to start the process of industrialising. Partly in response to the Great Depression, some former colonies started to apply the policies used so successfully by imperialist nations like Germany and America in the previous century. They followed a policy of "import substitution" which meant that they tried to manufacture goods like, for instance, cars that they had previously imported. Without suggesting this sort of policy offered a positive alternative (it was, after all, just local capitalism) it did have one big disadvantage for the imperialist powers: it tended to deny them both markets and cheap raw materials (the current turn towards globalisation was used to break these policies). As such, whether a nation pursued such policies was dependent on the costs involved to the imperialist power involved.

So instead of direct rule over less developed nations (which generally proved to be too costly, both economically and politically), indirect forms of domination were now preferred. These are rooted in economic and political pressure rather than the automatic use of violence, although force is always an option and is resorted to if "business interests" are threatened. This is the reality of the expression "the international community" —



*the shareholders of mines and railways with their incomes."* [**Words of a Rebel**, pp. 65–6]

In summary, current imperialism is caused by, and always serves, the needs and interests of Capital. If it did not, if imperialism were bad for business, the business class would oppose it. This partly explains why the colonialism of the 19th century is no more (the other reasons being social resistance to foreign domination, which obviously helped to make imperialism bad for business as well, and the need for US imperialism to gain access to these markets after the second world war). There are now more cost-effective means than direct colonialism to ensure that "underdeveloped" countries remain open to exploitation by foreign capital. Once the costs exceeded the benefits, colonialist imperialism changed into the neo-colonialism of multinationals, political influence, and the threat of force. Moreover, we must not forget that any change in imperialism relates to changes in the underlying economic system and so the changing nature of modern imperialism can be roughly linked to developments within the capitalist economy.

Imperialism, then, is basically the ability of countries to globally and locally dictate trade relations and investments with other countries in such a way as to gain an advantage over the other countries. When capital is invested in foreign nations, the surplus value extracted from the workers in those nations are not re-invested in those nations. Rather a sizeable part of it returns to the base nation of the corporation (in the form of profits for that company). Indeed, that is to be expected as the whole reason for the investment of capital in the first place was to get more out of the country than the corporation put into it. Instead of this surplus value being re-invested into industry in the less-developed nation (as would be the case with home-grown exploiters, who are dependent on local markets and labour) it ends up in the hands of foreign

exploiters who take them out of the dominated country. This means that industrial development as less resources to draw on, making the local ruling class dependent on foreign capital and its whims.

This can be done directly (by means of invasion and colonies) or indirectly (by means of economic and political power). Which method is used depends on the specific circumstances facing the countries in question. Moreover, it depends on the balance of class forces within each country as well (for example, a nation with a militant working class would be less likely to pursue a war policy due to the social costs involved). However, the aim of imperialism is always to enrich and empower the capitalist and bureaucratic classes.

## D.5.1 How has imperialism changed over time?

The development of Imperialism cannot be isolated from the general dynamics and tendencies of the capitalist economy. Imperialist capitalism, therefore, is not identical to pre-capitalist forms of imperialism, although there can, of course, be similarities. As such, it must be viewed as an advanced stage of capitalism and not as some kind of deviation of it. This kind of imperialism was attained by some nations, mostly Western European, in the late 19th and early 20th-century. Since then it has changed and developed as economic and political developments occurred, but it is based on the same basic principles. As such, it is useful to describe the history of capitalism in order to fully understand the place imperialism holds within it, how it has changed, what functions it provides and, consequently, how it may change in the future.

Imperialism has important economic advantages for those who run the economy. As the needs of the business class



> *"the present struggle is one between rival Imperialisms and for the protection of vested interests. The workers in every country, belonging to the oppressed class, have nothing in common with these interests and the political aspirations of the ruling class. Their immediate struggle is their* ***emancipation. Their*** *front line is the workshop and factory, not the Maginot Line where they will just rot and die, whilst their masters at home pile up their ill-gotten gains."* [*"War Commentary"*, quoted Mark Shipway, **Anti-Parliamentary Communism**, p. 170]

After the Second World War, the European countries yielded to pressure from the USA and national liberation movements and grated many former countries "independence" (often after intense conflict). As Kropotkin predicted, such social movements were to be expected for with the growth of capitalism *"the number of people with an interest in the capitulation of the capitalist state system also increases."* [*"Anarchism and Syndicalism"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 26] Unfortunately these "liberation" movements transformed mass struggle from a potential struggle against capitalism into movements aiming for independent capitalist nation states (see section D.7). Not, we must stress, that the USA was being altruistic in its actions, independence for colonies weakened its rivals as well as allowing US capital access to those markets.

This process reflected capital expanding even more **beyond** the nation-state into multinational corporations. The nature of imperialism and imperialistic wars changed accordingly. In addition, the various successful struggles for National Liberation ensured that imperialism had to change itself in face of popular resistance. These two factors ensured that the old form of imperialism was replaced by a new system of "neo-colonialism" in which newly "independent" colonies are forced, via political

change, the forms taken by imperialism also change. We can identify three main phases: classic imperialism (i.e. conquest), indirect (economic) imperialism, and globalisation. We will consider the first two in this section and globalisation in section D.5.3. However, for all the talk of globalisation in recent years, it is important to remember that capitalism has always been an international system, that the changing forms of imperialism reflect this international nature and that the changes within imperialism are in response to developments within capitalism itself.

Capitalism has always been expansive. Under mercantilism, for example, the "free" market was nationalised **within** the nation state while state aid was used to skew international trade on behalf of the home elite and favour the development of capitalist industry. This meant using the centralised state (and its armed might) to break down "internal" barriers and customs which hindered the free flow of goods, capital and, ultimately, labour. We should stress this as the state has always played a key role in the development and protection of capitalism. The use of the state to, firstly, protect infant capitalist manufacturing and, secondly, to create a "free" market (i.e. free from the customs and interference of society) should not be forgotten, particularly as this second ("internal") role is repeated "externally" through imperialism. Needless to say, this process of "internal" imperialism within the country by the ruling class by means of the state was accompanied by extensive violence against the working class (also see section F.8).

So, state intervention was used to create and ensure capital's dominant position at home by protecting it against foreign competition and the recently dispossessed working class. This transition from feudal to capitalist economy enjoyed the active promotion of the state authorities, whose increasing centralisation ran parallel with the growing strength and size of merchant capital. It also needed a powerful state to protect its international trade, to conquer colonies and to fight for control



nationalised market created by the state within its own borders. Imperialism was then used to expand the area that could be colonised by the capital associated with a given nation-state. This stage ended, however, once the dominant powers had carved up the planet into different spheres of influence and there was nowhere left to expand into. In the competition for access to cheap raw materials and foreign markets, nation-states came into conflict with each other. As it was obvious that a conflict was brewing, the major European countries tried to organise a "balance of power." This meant that armies were built and navies created to frighten other countries and so deter war. Unfortunately, these measures were not enough to countermand the economic and power processes at play (*"Armies equipped to the teeth with weapons, with highly developed instruments of murder and backed by military interests, have their own dynamic interests,"* as Goldman put it [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 353]). War did break out, a war over empires and influence, a war, it was claimed, that would end all wars. As we now know, of course, it did not because it did not fight the root cause of modern wars, capitalism.

After the First World War, the identification of nation-state with national capital became even more obvious, and can be seen in the rise of extensive state intervention to keep capitalism going — for example, the rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany and the efforts of "national" governments in Britain and the USA to "solve" the economic crisis of the Great Depression. However, these attempts to solve the problems of capital did not work. The economic imperatives at work before the first world war had not gone away. Big business still needed markets and raw materials and the statification of industry under fascism only aided to the problems associated with imperialism. Another war was only a matter of time and when it came most anarchists, as they had during the first world war, opposed both sides and called for revolution:

over the world market. The absolutist state was used to actively implant, help and develop capitalist trade and industry.

The first industrial nation was Britain. After building up its industrial base under mercantilism and crushing its rivals in various wars, it was in an ideal position to dominate the international market. It embraced free trade as its unique place as the only capitalist/industrialised nation in the world market meant that it did not have to worry about competition from other nations. Any free exchange between unequal traders will benefit the stronger party. Thus Britain, could achieve domination in the world market by means of free trade. This meant that goods were exported rather than capital.

Faced with the influx of cheap, mass produced goods, existing industry in Europe and the Americas faced ruin. As economist Nicholas Kaldor notes, *"the arrival of cheap factory-made English goods **did** cause a loss of employment and output of small-scale industry (the artisanate) both in European countries (where it was later offset by large-scale industrialisation brought about by protection) and even more in India and China, where it was no so offset."* [**Further Essays on Applied Economics**, p. 238] The existing industrial base was crushed, industrialisation was aborted and unemployment rose. These countries faced two possibilities: turn themselves into providers of raw materials for Britain or violate the principles of the market and industrialise by protectionism.

In many nations of Western Europe (soon to be followed by the USA and Japan), the decision was simple. Faced with this competition, these countries utilised the means by which Britain had industrialised — state protection. Tariff barriers were raised, state aid was provided and industry revived sufficiently to turn these nations into successful competitors of Britain. This process was termed by Kropotkin as *"the consecutive development of nations"* (although he underestimated the importance of state aid in this process). No nation, he argued, would let itself become specialised as the provider



*it an emerging capitalist economy and wage system, destroyed the tradition economies in most countries. By substituting cash crops and monoculture for forms of sustainable agriculture, it destroyed the basic land skills of the people whom it reduced to plantation workers."* [**How Deep is Deep Ecology**, p. 40] Indeed, this process was in many ways similar to the development of capitalism in the "developed" nations, with the creation of a class of landless workers who forms the nucleus of the first generation of people given up to the mercy of the manufacturers.

However, this process had objective limitations. Firstly, the expansion of empires had the limitation that there were only so many potential colonies out there. This meant that conflicts over markets and colonies was inevitable (as the states involved knew, and so they embarked on a policy of building larger and larger armed forces). As Kropotkin argued before the First World War, the real cause of war at the time was *"the competition for markets and the right to exploit nations backward in industry."* [quoted by Martin Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 225] Secondly, the creation of trusts, the export of goods and the import of cheap raw materials cannot stop the business cycle nor "buy-off" the working class indefinitely (i.e. the excess profits of imperialism will never be enough to grant more and more reforms and improvements to the working class in the industrialised world). Thus the need to overcome economic slumps propelled business to find new ways of dominating the market, up to and including the use of war to grab new markets and destroy rivals. Moreover, war was a good way of side tracking class conflict at home — which, let us not forget, had been reaching increasingly larger, more militant and more radical levels in all the imperialist nations (see John Zerzan's *"Origins and Meaning of WWI"* in his **Elements of Refusal**).

Thus this first phase of imperialism began as the growing capitalist economy started to reach the boundaries of the

industrially developed countries is exported back to the home country, profit levels can be protected both from working-class demands and from any relative decline in surplus-value production caused by increased capital investment (see section C.2 for more on surplus value). In fact, the working class of the imperialist country could receive improved wages and living conditions as the looted wealth was imported into the country and that meant that the workers could fight for, and win, improvements that otherwise would have provoked intense class conflict. And as the sons and daughters of the poor emigrated to the colonies to make a living for themselves on stolen land, the wealth extracted from those colonies helped to overcome the reduction in the supply of labour at home which would increase its market price. This loot also helps reduce competitive pressures on the nation's economy. Of course, these advantages of conquest cannot totally **stop** the business cycle nor eliminate competition, as the imperialistic nations soon discovered.

Therefore, the "classic" form of imperialism based on direct conquest and the creation of colonies had numerous advantages for the imperialist nations and the big business which their states represented.

These dominated nations were, in the main, pre-capitalist societies. The domination of imperialist powers meant the importation of capitalist social relationships and institutions into them, so provoking extensive cultural and physical resistance to these attempts of foreign capitalists to promote the growth of the free market. However, peasants', artisans' and tribal people's desires to be "left alone" was never respected, and "civilisation" was forced upon them "for their own good." As Kropotkin realised, *"force is necessary to continually bring new 'uncivilised nations' under the same conditions [of wage labour]."* [**Anarchism and Anarchist Communism**, p. 53] Anarchist George Bradford also stresses this, arguing that we *"should remember that, historically, colonialism, bringing with*



of raw materials or the manufacturer of a few commodities but would diversify into many different lines of production. Obviously no national ruling class would want to see itself be dependent on another and so industrial development was essential (regardless of the wishes of the general population). Thus a nation in such a situation *"tries to emancipate herself from her dependency ... and rapidly begins to manufacture all those goods she used to import."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops**, p. 49 and p. 32]

Protectionism may have violated the laws of neo-classical economics, but it proved essential for industrialisation. While, as Kropotkin argued, protectionism ensured *"the high profits of those manufacturers who do not improve their factories and chiefly rely upon cheap labour and long hours,"* it also meant that these profits would be used to finance industry and develop an industrial base. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 41] Without this state aid, it is doubtful that these countries would have industrialised (as Kaldor notes, *"all the present 'developed' or 'industrialised' countries established their industries through 'import substitution' by means of protective tariffs and/or differential subsidies."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 127]).

Within the industrialising country, the usual process of competition driving out competitors continued. More and more markets became dominated by big business (although, as Kropotkin stressed, without totally eliminating smaller workshops within an industry and even creating more around them). Indeed, as Russian anarchist G. P. Maximoff stressed, the *"specific character of Imperialism is ... the concentration and centralisation of capital in syndicates, trusts and cartels, which ... have a decisive voice, not only in the economic and political life of their countries, but also in the life of the nations of the worlds a whole."* [**Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 10] The modern multi-national and transnational corporations are the latest expression of this process.

Simply put, the size of big business was such that it had to expand internationally as their original national markets were not sufficient and to gain further advantages over their competitors. Faced with high tariff barriers and rising international competition, industry responded by exporting capital as well as finished goods. This export of capital was an essential way of beating protectionism (and even reap benefits from it) and gain a foothold in foreign markets (*"protective duties have no doubt contributed ... towards attracting German and English manufacturers to Poland and Russia"* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 41]). In addition, it allowed access to cheap labour and raw materials by placing capital in foreign lands As part of this process colonies were seized to increase the size of "friendly" markets and, of course, allow the easy export of capital into areas with cheap labour and raw materials. The increased concentration of capital this implies was essential to gain an advantage against foreign competitors and dominate the international market as well as the national one.

This form of imperialism, which arose in the late nineteenth century, was based on the creation of larger and larger businesses and the creation of colonies across the globe by the industrialised nations. Direct conquest had the advantage of opening up more of the planet for the capitalist market, thus leading to more trade and exploitation of raw materials and labour. This gave a massive boost to both the state and the industries of the invading country in terms of new profits, so allowing an increase in the number of capitalists and other social parasites that could exist in the developed nation. As Kropotkin noted at the time, *"British, French, Belgian and other capitalists, by means of the ease with which they exploit countries which themselves have no developed industry, today control the labour of hundreds of millions of those people in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. The result is that the number of those people in the leading industrialised countries of Europe who live off the work of others doesn't gradually decrease at all. Far from it."* [*"Anarchism and Syndicalism"*, **Black Flag**, no. 210, p. 26]



As well as gaining access to raw materials, imperialism allows the dominating nation to gain access to markets for its goods. By having an empire, products produced at home can be easily dumped into foreign markets with less developed industry, undercutting locally produced goods and consequently destroying the local economy (and so potential competitors) along with the society and culture based on it. Empire building is a good way of creating privileged markets for one's goods. By eliminating foreign competition, the imperialist nation's capitalists can charge monopoly prices in the dominated country, so ensuring high profit margins for capitalist business. This adds with the problems associated with the over-production of goods:

> *"The workman being unable to purchase with their wages the riches they are producing, industry must search for new markets elsewhere, amidst the middle classes of other nations. It must find markets, in the East, in Africa, anywhere; it must increase, by trade, the number of its serfs in Egypt, in India, on the Congo. But everywhere it finds competitors in other nations which rapidly enter into the same line of industrial development. And wars, continuous wars, must be fought for the supremacy in the world-market — wars for the possession of the East, wars for getting possession of the seas, wars for the right of imposing heavy duties on foreign merchandise."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, pp. 55–6]

This process of expansion into non-capitalist areas also helps Capital to weather both the subjective and objective economic pressures upon it which cause the business cycle (see section C.7 for more details). As wealth looted from less

and skilled workers have more power over their working conditions and work due to the difficulty in replacing them. Unskilled labour makes it easier to "rationalise" the production process with methods like Taylorism, a system of strict production schedules and activities based on the amount of time (as determined by management) that workers "need" to perform various operations in the workplace, thus requiring simple, easily analysed and timed movements. As companies are in competition, each has to copy the most "efficient" (i.e. profit maximising) production techniques introduced by the others in order to remain profitable, no matter how dehumanising this may be for workers. Thus the evil effects of the division of labour and deskilling becoming widespread. Instead of managing their own work, workers are turned into human machines in a labour process they do not control, instead being controlled by those who own the machines they use (see also Harry Braverman, **Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century**).

As Max Stirner noted (echoing Adam Smith), this process of deskilling and controlling work means that *"[w]hen everyone is to cultivate himself into man, condemning a man to **machine-like labour** amounts to the same thing as slavery... . Every labour is to have the intent that the man be satisfied. Therefore he must become a **master** in it too, be able to perform it as a totality. He who in a pin-factory only puts on heads, only draws the wire, works, as it were mechanically, like a machine; he remains half-trained, does not become a master: his labour cannot **satisfy** him, it can only **fatigue** him. His labour is nothing by itself, has no object **in itself,** is nothing complete in itself; he labours only into another's hands, and is **used** (exploited) by this other."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 121] Kropotkin makes a similar argument against the division of labour (*"machine-like labour"*) in **The Conquest of Bread** (see chapter XV — *"The Division of Labour"*) as did Proudhon (see chapters III and IV of **System of Economical Contradictions**).



> *these people too, wake up, and he has to pay all the more dearly for the small advantages he has enjoyed... . Small gains arising from increased opportunity of employment and higher wages may accrue to the workers in a successful state from the carving out of new markets at the cost of others; but at the same time their brothers on the other side of the border have to pay for them by unemployment and the lowering of the standards of labour. The result is an ever widening rift in the international labour movement ... By this rift the liberation of the workers from the yoke of wage-slavery is pushed further and further into the distance. As long as the worker ties up his interests with those of the bourgeoisie of his country instead of with his class, he must logically also take in his stride all the results of that relationship. He must stand ready to fight the wars of the possessing classes for the retention and extension of their markets, and to defend any injustice they may perpetrate on other people ... Only when the workers in every country shall come to understand clearly that their interests are everywhere the same, and out of this understanding learn to act together, will the effective basis be laid for the international liberation of the working class."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 71]

Ultimately, any *"collaboration of workers and employers ... can only result in the workers being condemned to ... eat the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 70–1] This applies to both the imperialist and the satellite state, of course. Moreover, as imperialism needs to have a strong military force available for it and as a consequence it required militarism at home. This has an impact at home in that resources which could be used to improve the quality of life for all are

funnelled towards producing weapons (and profits for corporations). Moreover, militarism is directed not only at external enemies, but also against those who threaten elite role at home. We discuss militarism in more detail in section D.8.

However, under globalisation things are somewhat different. With the increase in world trade and the signing of "free trade" agreements like NAFTA, the position of workers in the imperialist nations need not improve. For example, since the 1970s, the wages — adjusted for inflation — of the typical American employee have actually fallen, even as the economy has grown. In other words, the majority of Americans are no longer sharing in the gains from economic growth. This is very different from the previous era, for example 1946–73, when the real wages of the typical worker rose by about 80 percent. Not that this globalisation has aided the working class in the "developing" nations. In Latin America, for example, GDP per capita grew by 75 percent from 1960–1980, whereas between 1981 and 1998 it has only risen 6 percent. [Mark Weisbrot, Dean Baker, Robert Naiman, and Gila Neta, **Growth May Be Good for the Poor—But are IMF and World Bank Policies Good for Growth?**]

As Chomsky noted, *"[t]o the credit of the **Wall Street Journal**, it points out that there's a 'but.' Mexico has 'a stellar reputation,' and it's an economic miracle, but the population is being devastated. There's been a 40 percent drop in purchasing power since 1994. The poverty rate is going up and is in fact rising fast. The economic miracle wiped out, they say, a generation of progress; most Mexicans are poorer than their parents. Other sources reveal that agriculture is being wiped out by US-subsidised agricultural imports, manufacturing wages have declines about 20 percent, general wages even more. In fact, NAFTA is a remarkable success: it's the first trade agreement in history that's succeeded in harming the populations of all three countries involved. That's quite an achievement."* In the U.S., *"the medium income (half above, half below) for families has*



capitalist industry, where technology has been implemented specifically to deskill the worker, so replacing the skilled, valued craftsperson with the easily trained and replaced "mass worker." By making trying to make any individual worker dispensable, the capitalist hopes to deprive workers of a means of controlling the relation between their effort on the job and the pay they receive. In Proudhon's words, the *"machine, or the workshop, after having degraded the labourer by giving him a master, completes his degeneracy by reducing him from the rank of artisan to that of common workman."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 202]

So, unsurprisingly, technology within a hierarchical society will tend to re-enforce hierarchy and domination. Managers/capitalists will select technology that will protect and extend their power (and profits), not weaken it. Thus, while it is often claimed that technology is "neutral" this is not (and can never be) the case. Simply put, "progress" within a hierarchical system will reflect the power structures of that system.

As sociologist George Reitzer notes, technological innovation under a hierarchical system soon results in *"increased control and the replacement of human with non-human technology. In fact, the replacement of human with non-human technology is very often motivated by a desire for greater control, which of course is motivated by the need for profit-maximisation. The great sources of uncertainty and unpredictability in any rationalising system are people ... McDonaldisation involves the search for the means to exert increasing control over both employees and customers."* [**The McDonaldisation of Society**, p. 100] For Reitzer, capitalism is marked by the *"irrationality of rationality,"* in which this process of control results in a system based on crushing the individuality and humanity of those who live within it.

In this process of controlling employees for the purpose of maximising profit, deskilling comes about because skilled labour is more expensive than unskilled or semi-skilled

# D.10 How does capitalism affect technology?

Technology has an obvious effect on individual freedom, in some ways increasing it, in others restricting it. However, since capitalism is a social system based on inequalities of power, it is a truism that technology will reflect those inequalities as it does not develop in a social vacuum. As Bookchin puts it:

> *"Along side its positive aspects, technological advance has a distinctly negative, socially regressive side. If it is true that technological progress enlarges the historical potentiality for freedom, it is also true that the bourgeois control of technology reinforces the established organisation of society and everyday life. Technology and the resources of abundance furnish capitalism with the means for assimilating large sections of society to the established system of hierarchy and authority ... By their centralistic and bureaucratic tendencies, the resource of abundance reinforce the monopolistic, centralistic and bureaucratic tendencies in the political apparatus .. . [Technology can be used] for perpetuating hierarchy, exploitation and unfreedom."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 3]

No technology evolves and spreads unless there are people who benefit from it and have sufficient means to disseminate it. In a capitalist society, technologies useful to the rich and powerful are generally the ones that spread. This can be seen from



*gotten back now to what it was in 1989, which is below what it was in the 1970s."* [**Rogue States**, pp. 98–9 and p. 213]

An achievement which was predicted. But, of course, while occasionally admitting that globalisation may harm the wages of workers in developed countries, it is argued that it will benefit those in the "developing" world. It is amazing how open to socialist arguments capitalists and their supporters are, as long as its not their income being redistributed! As can be seen from NAFTA, this did not happen. Faced with cheap imports, agriculture and local industry would be undermined, increasing the number of workers seeking work, so forcing down wages as the bargaining power of labour is decreased. Combine this with governments which act in the interests of capital (as always) and force the poor to accept the costs of economic austerity and back business attempts to break unions and workers resistance then we have a situation where productivity can increase dramatically while wages fall behind (either relatively or absolutely). As has been the case in both the USA and Mexico, for example.

This reversal has had much to do with changes in the global "rules of the game," which have greatly favoured corporations and weakened labour. Unsurprisingly, the North American union movement has opposed NAFTA and other treaties which empower business over labour. Therefore, the position of labour within both imperialist and dominated nations can be harmed under globalisation, so ensuring international solidarity and organisation have a stronger reason to be embraced by both sides. This should not come as a surprise, however, as the process towards globalisation was accelerated by intensive class struggle across the world and was used as a tool against the working class (see last section).

It is difficult to generalise about the effects of imperialism on the "middle class" (i.e. professionals, self-employed, small business people, peasants and so on — **not** middle income groups, who are usually working class). Some groups within

this strata stand to gain, others to lose (in particular, peasants who are impoverished by cheap imports of food). This lack of common interests and a common organisational base makes the middle class unstable and susceptible to patriotic sloganeering, vague theories of national or racial superiority, or fascist scapegoating of minorities for society's problems. For this reason, the ruling class finds it relatively easy to recruit large sectors of the middle class to an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy, through media propaganda campaigns. Since many in organised labour tends to perceive imperialism as being against its overall best interests, and thus usually opposes it, the ruling class is able to intensify the hostility of the middle class to the organised working class by portraying the latter as "unpatriotic" and "unwilling to sacrifice" for the "national interest." Sadly, the trade union bureaucracy usually accepts the "patriotic" message, particularly at times of war, and often collaborates with the state to further imperialistic interests. This eventually brings them into conflict with the rank-and-file, whose interests are ignored even more than usual when this occurs.

To summarise, the ruling class is usually pro-imperialism — as long as it is in their interests (i.e. the benefits outweigh the costs). The working class, regardless of any short term benefit its members may gain, end up paying the costs of imperialism by having to fight its wars and pay for the militarism it produces. So, under imperialism, like any form of capitalism, the working class will pay the bill required to maintain it. This means that we have a real interest in ending it — particularly as under globalisation the few benefits that used to accrue to us are much less.



blamed blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews for "unfairly" taking their jobs. Thus the neo-Nazi skinheads, for example, have been mostly recruited from disgruntled working-class whites below the age of 30. This has provided leaders of right-wing extremist groups with a growing base of potential storm troopers.

Therefore, laissez-faire ideology helps create a social environment in which racist tendencies can increase. Firstly, it does so by increasing poverty, job insecurity, inequality and so on which right-wing groups can use to gather support by creating scapegoats in our own class to blame (for example, by blaming poverty on blacks "taking our jobs" rather than capitalists moving their capital to other, more profitable, countries or them cutting wages and conditions for **all** workers — and as we point out in section B.1.4, racism, by dividing the working class, makes poverty and inequality **worse** and so is self-defeating). Secondly, it abets racists by legitimising the notions that inequalities in pay and wealth are due to racial differences rather than a hierarchical system which harms **all** working class people (and uses racism to divide, and so weaken, the oppressed). By pointing to individuals rather than to institutions, organisations, customs, history and above all power — the relative power between workers and capitalists, citizens and the state, the market power of big business, etc. — laissez-faire ideology points analysis into a dead-end as well as apologetics for the wealthy, apologetics which can be, and are, utilised by racists to justify their evil politics.

economic institutions and social attitudes have on inequality. In the words of left-liberal economist James K. Galbraith:

> *"What the economists did, in effect, was to reason backward, from the troublesome effect to a cause that would rationalise and justify it .. . [I]t is the work of the efficient market [they argued], and the fundamental legitimacy of the outcome is not supposed to be questioned.*
>
> *"The **apologia** is a dreadful thing. It has distorted our understanding, twisted our perspective, and crabbed our politics. On the right, as one might expect, the winners on the expanded scale of wealth and incomes are given a reason for self-satisfaction and an excuse for gloating. Their gains are due to personal merit, the application of high intelligence, and the smiles of fortune. Those on the loosing side are guilty of sloth, self-indulgence, and whining. Perhaps they have bad culture. Or perhaps they have bad genes. While no serious economist would make that last leap into racist fantasy, the underlying structure of the economists' argument has undoubtedly helped to legitimise, before a larger public, those who promote such ideas."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 264]

The logical corollary of this social Darwinism is that whites who are "less fit" (i.e., poor) also deserve their poverty. But philosophies of racial hatred are not necessarily consistent. Thus the ranks of white supremacist organisations have been swollen in recent years by undereducated and underemployed white youths frustrated by a declining industrial labour market and a noticeably eroding social status. [Ridgeway, **Op. Cit.**, p.186] Rather than drawing the logical Social-Darwinian conclusion — that they, too, are "inferior" — they have instead



# D.6 Are anarchists against Nationalism?

Yes, anarchists are opposed to nationalism in all its forms. British anarchists Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer simply point out the obvious: *"As a nation implies a state, it is not possible to be a nationalist and an anarchist."* [**The Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 59fn]

To understand this position, we must first define what anarchists mean by nationalism. For many people, it is just the natural attachment to home, the place one grew up. Nationality, as Bakunin noted, is a *"natural and social fact,"* as *"every people and the smallest folk-unit has its own character, its own specific mode of existence, its own way of speaking, feeling, thinking, and acting; and it is this idiosyncrasy that constitutes the essence of nationality."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 325] These feelings, however, obviously do not exist in a social vacuum. They cannot be discussed without also discussing the nature of these groups and what classes and other social hierarchies they contain. Once we do this, the anarchist opposition to nationalism becomes clear.

This means that anarchists distinguish between **nationality** (that is, cultural affinity) and **nationalism** (confined to the state and government itself). This allows us to define what we support and oppose — nationalism, at root, is destructive and reactionary, whereas cultural difference and affinity is a source of community, social diversity and vitality.

Such diversity is to be celebrated and allowed to express it itself on its own terms. Or, as Murray Bookchin puts it, *"[t]hat*

*specific peoples should be free to fully develop their own cultural capacities is not merely a right but a desideratum. The world would be a drab place indeed if a magnificent mosaic of different cultures does not replace the largely decultured and homogenised world created by modern capitalism."* [*"Nationalism and the 'National Question'"*, pp. 8–36. **Society and Nature**, No. 5, pp. 28–29] But, as he also warns, such cultural freedom and variety should **not** be confused with nationalism. The latter is far more (and ethically, a lot less) than simple recognition of cultural uniqueness and love of home. Nationalism is the love of, or the desire to create, a nation-state and for this reason anarchists are opposed to it, in all its forms.

This means that nationalism cannot and must not be confused with nationality. The later is a product of social processes while the former to a product of state action and elite rule. Social evolution cannot be squeezed into the narrow, restricting borders of the nation state without harming the individuals whose lives **make** that social development happen in the first place.

The state, as we have seen, is a centralised body invested with power and a social monopoly of force. As such it preempts the autonomy of localities and peoples, and in the name of the "nation" crushes the living, breathing reality of "nations" (i.e. peoples and their cultures) with one law, one culture and one "official" history. Unlike most nationalists, anarchists recognise that almost all "nations" are in fact not homogeneous, and so consider nationality to be far wider in application than just lines on maps, created by conquest. Hence we think that recreating the centralised state in a slightly smaller area, as nationalist movements generally advocate, cannot solve what is called the "national question."

Ultimately, as Rudolf Rocker argued, the ***"nation is not the cause, but the result of the state. It is the state that creates the nation, not the nation the state."*** Every state *"is an artificial mechanism imposed upon [people] from above by some ruler,*



conservatism, whose hallmark was the reinstatement, to some degree, of laissez-faire economic policies (and, to an even larger degree, of laissez-faire rhetoric). A "free market," Reagan's economic "experts" argued, necessarily produced inequality; but by allowing unhindered market forces to select the economically fittest and to weed out the unfit, the economy would become healthy again. The wealth of those who survived and prospered in the harsh new climate would ultimately benefit the less fortunate, through a "trickle-down" effect which was supposed to create millions of new high-paying jobs.

All this would be accomplished by deregulating business, reducing taxes on the wealthy, and dismantling or drastically cutting back federal programmes designed to promote social equality, fairness, and compassion. The aptly named Laffer Curve (although invented without the burden of any empirical research or evidence) alleged to illustrate how cutting taxes actually **raises** government revenue. When this program of pro-business policies was applied the results were, unsurprisingly, the opposite of that proclaimed, with wealth flooding upwards and the creation of low-paying, dead-end jobs (the biggest "Laffers" in this scenario were the ruling class, who saw unprecedented gains in wealth at the expense of the rest of us).

The Reaganites' doctrine of inequality gave the official seal of approval to ideas of racial superiority that right-wing extremists had used for years to rationalise the exploitation of minorities. If, on average, blacks and Hispanics earn only about half as much as whites; if more than a third of all blacks and a quarter of all Hispanics lived below the poverty line; if the economic gap between whites and non-whites was growing — well, that just proved that there was a racial component in the Social-Darwinian selection process, showing that minorities "deserved" their poverty and lower social status because they were "less fit." By focusing on individuals, laissez-faire economics hides the social roots of inequality and the effect that

What easier way is there to divert people's anger than onto scapegoats? Anger about bad housing, no housing, boring work, no work, bad wages and conditions, job insecurity, no future, and so on. Instead of attacking the real causes of these (and other) problems, people are encouraged to direct their anger against people who face the same problems just because they have a different skin colour or come from a different part of the world! Little wonder politicians and their rich backers like to play the racist card — it diverts attention away from them and the system they run (i.e. the **real** causes of our problems).

Racism, in other words, tries to turn **class** issues into "race" issues. Little wonder that sections of the ruling elite will turn to it, as and when required. Their class interests (and, often, their personal bigotry) requires them to do so — a divided working class will never challenge their position in society. This means that justifications for racism appear for two reasons. Firstly, to try and justify the existing inequalities within society (for example, the infamous — and highly inaccurate — *"Bell Curve"* and related works). Secondly, to divide the working class and divert anger about living conditions and social problems away from the ruling elite and their system onto scapegoats in our own class. After all, *"for the past fifty years American business has been organising a major class war, and they needed troops — there **are** votes after all, and you can't just come before the electorate and say, 'Vote for me, I'm trying to screw you.' So what they've had to do is appeal to the population on some other grounds. Well, there aren't a lot of other grounds, and everybody picks the same ones ... — jingoism, racism, fear, religious fundamentalism: These are ways of appealing to people if you're trying to organise a mass base of support for policies that are really intended to crush them."* [Chomsky, **Understanding Power**, pp. 294–5]

Part of the right-wing resurgence in the US and elsewhere has been the institutionalisation of the Reagan-Bush brand of



*and it never pursues any other ends but to defend and make secure the interests of privileged minorities within society."* Nationalism *"has never been anything but the political religion of the modern state."* [**Nationalism and Culture**, p. 200 and p. 201] It was created to reinforce the state by providing it with the loyalty of a people of shared linguistic, ethnic, and cultural affinities. And if these shared affinities do not exist, the state will create them by centralising education in its own hands, imposing an "official" language and attempting to crush cultural differences from the peoples within its borders.

This is because it treats groups of people not as unique individuals but rather *"as if they were individuals with definite traits of character and peculiar psychic properties or intellectual qualities"* which *"must irrevocably lead to the most monstrously deceptive conclusions."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 437] This creates the theoretical justification for authoritarianism, as it allows the stamping out of all forms of individuality and local customs and cultures which do not concur with the abstract standard. In addition, nationalism hides class differences within the "nation" by arguing that all people must unite around their supposedly common interests (as members of the same "nation"), when in fact they have nothing in common due to the existence of hierarchies and classes.

Malatesta recognised this when he noted that you cannot talk about states like they were *"homogeneous ethnographic units, each having its proper interests, aspirations, and mission, in opposition to the interests, aspirations, and mission of rival units. This may be true relatively, as long as the oppressed, and chiefly the workers, have no self-consciousness, fail to recognise the injustice of their inferior position, and make themselves the docile tools of the oppressors."* In that case, it is *"the dominating class only that counts"* and this *"owning to its desire to conserve and to enlarge its power ... may excite racial ambitions and hatred, and send its nation, its flock, against 'foreign' countries, with a view to releasing them from their present oppressors, and*

*submitting them to its own political and economical domination."* Thus anarchists have *"always fought against patriotism, which is a survival of the past, and serves well the interests of the oppressors."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 244]

Thus nationalism is a key means of obscuring class differences and getting those subject to hierarchies to accept them as "natural." As such, it plays an important role in keeping the current class system going (unsurprisingly, the nation-state and its nationalism arose at the same time as capitalism). As well dividing the working class internationally, it is also used within a nation state to turn working class people born in a specific nation against immigrants. By getting native-born workers to blame newcomers, the capitalist class weakens the resistance to their power as well as turning economic issues into racial/nationalist ones. In practice, however, nationalism is a *"state ideology"* which boils down to saying it is *"'our country' as opposed to **theirs**, meaning **we** were the serfs of the government first."* [Christie and Meltzer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] It tries to confuse love of where you grow up or live with *"love of the State"* and so nationalism is *"not the faithful expression"* of this natural feeling but rather *"an expression distorted by means of a false abstraction, always for the benefit of an exploiting minority."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 324]

Needless to say, the nationalism of the bourgeoisie often comes into direct conflict with the people who make up the nation it claims to love. Bakunin simply stated a truism when he noted that the capitalist class *"would rather submit"* to a *"foreign yoke than renounce its social privileges and accept economic equality."* This does not mean that the *"bourgeoisie is unpatriotic; on the contrary patriotism, in the narrowest sense, is its essential virtue. But the bourgeoisie love their country only because, for them, the country, represented by the State, safeguards their economic, political, and social privileges. Any nation withdrawing their protection would be disowned by them, Therefore, for the bourgeoisie, the country **is** the State. Patriots of the State,*



*mixture of crude racism and smoother racism in the modern democratic state.*

> *"So in addition to the Nazis and the Klan, there are other Right-Wing forces that have been on the rise … They include ultra-conservative rightist politicians and Christian fundamentalist preachers, along with the extreme right section of the Capitalist ruling class itself, small business owners, talk show hosts … along with the professors, economists, philosophers and others in academia who are providing the ideological weapons for the Capitalist offensive against the workers and oppresses people. So not all racists wear sheets. These are the 'respectable' racists, the New Right conservatives … The Capitalist class has already shown their willingness to use this conservative movement as a smoke screen for an attack on the Labor movement, Black struggle, and the entire working class."* [**Anarchism and the Black Revolution**, p. 18]

The expanding popularity of such racist groups in the US is matched by a similar phenomenon in Europe, where xenophobia and a weak economy have propelled extreme right-wing politicians into the limelight on promises to deport foreigners. This poisons the whole mainstream political spectrum, with centre and centre-left politicians pandering to racism and introducing aspects of the right's agenda under the rhetoric of "addressing concerns" and raising the prospect that by not doing what the right wants, the right will expand in influence. How legitimising the right by implementing its ideas is meant to undercut their support is never explained, but the "greater evil" argument does have its utility for every opportunistic politician (particularly one under pressure from the right-wing media whipping up scare stories about immigration and such like to advance the interests of their wealthy backers).

economic positions is, as one would expect, causing racially based theories of privilege to become more popular.

That racist feelings are gaining strength in America is evidenced by the increasing political influence of the right, whose thinly disguised racism reflects the darkening vision of a growing segment of the conservative community. Further evidence can be seen in the growth of ultraconservative extremist groups preaching avowedly racist philosophies, such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nations, the White Aryan Resistance, and others (see James Ridgeway's **Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and the Rise of a New White Culture**). Much the same can be said of Europe, with the growth of parties like the BNP in Britain, the FN in France and similar organisations elsewhere.

Most conservative politicians have taken pains to distance themselves officially from the extreme right. Yet they are dependent on getting votes of those influenced by the right-wing media personalities and the extreme right. This means that this racism cannot help seep into their election campaigns and, unsurprisingly, mainstream conservative politicians have used, and continue to use, code words and innuendo ("welfare queens," "quotas," etc.) to convey a thinly veiled racist message. This allows mainstream right-wingers to exploit the budding racism of lower- and middle-class white youths, who must compete for increasingly scarce jobs with desperate minorities who are willing to work at very low wages. As Lorenzo Lom'boa Ervin notes:

> *"Basing themselves on alienated white social forces, the Nazis and Klan are trying to build a mass movement which can hire itself out to the Capitalists at the proper moment and assume state power ... Fascism is the ultimate authoritarian society when in power, even though it has changed its face to a*



*they become furious enemies of the masses if the people, tried of sacrificing themselves, of being used as a passive footstool by the government, revolt against it. If the bourgeoisie had to choose between the masses who rebel against the State"* and a foreign invader, *"they would surely choose the latter."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 185–6] Given this, Bakunin would have not been surprised by either the rise of Fascism in Italy nor when the Allies in post-fascist Italy *"crush[ed] revolutionary movements"* and gave *"their support to fascists who made good by becoming Allied Quislings."* [Marie-Louise Berneri, **Neither East Nor West**, p. 97]

In addition, nationalism is often used to justify the most horrific crimes, with the Nation effectively replacing God in terms of justifying injustice and oppression and allowing individuals to wash their hands of their own actions. For *"under cover of the nation everything can be hid"* argues Rocker (echoing Bakunin, we must note). *"The national flag covers every injustice, every inhumanity, every lie, every outrage, every crime. The collective responsibility of the nation kills the sense of justice of the individual and brings man to the point where he overlooks injustice done; where, indeed, it may appear to him a meritorious act if committed in the interests of the nation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 252] So when discussing nationalism:

> *"we must not forget that we are always dealing with the organised selfishness of privileged minorities which hide behind the skirts of the nation, hide behind the credulity of the masses. We speak of national interests, national capital, national spheres of interest, national honour, and national spirit; but we forget that behind all this there are hidden merely the selfish interests of power-loving politicians and money-loving business men for whom the nation is a convenient cover to hide their personal*

*greed and their schemes for political power from the eyes of the world."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 252–3]

Hence we see the all too familiar sight of successful "national liberation" movements replacing foreign oppression with a home-based one. Nationalist governments introduce *"the worse features of the very empires from which oppressed peoples have tried to shake loose. Not only do they typically reproduce state machines that are as oppressive as the ones that colonial powers imposed on them, but they reinforce those machines with cultural, religious, ethnic, and xenophobic traits that are often used to foster regional and even domestic hatreds and sub-imperialisms."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30] This is unsurprising as nationalism delivers power to local ruling classes as it relies on taking state power. As a result, nationalism can never deliver freedom to the working class (the vast majority of a given "nation") as its function is to build a mass support base for local elites angry with imperialism for blocking their ambitions to rule and exploit "their" nation and fellow country people.

In fact, nationalism is no threat to capitalism or even to imperialism. It replaces imperialist domination with local elite and foreign oppression and exploitation with native versions. That sometimes the local elites, like imperial ones, introduce reforms which benefit the majority does not change the nature of the new regimes although this does potentially bring them into conflict with imperialist powers. As Chomsky notes, for imperialism the *"threat is not nationalism, but independent nationalism, which focuses on the needs of the population, not merely the wealthy sectors and the foreign investors to whom they are linked. Subservient nationalism that does not succumb to these heresies is quite welcome"* and it is *"quite willing to deal with them if they are willing to sell the country to the foreign master, as Third World elites (including now those in much of Eastern Europe) are often quite willing to do, since they may greatly benefit even as*



given the history of the secret state the new measures were turned against the Left, as COINTELPRO and similar laws were in the past.

If, as the Bush Administration continually asserted, the terrorists hate the west for our freedoms (rather than their self-proclaimed hatred of US foreign policy) then that government is the greatest appeaser the world has ever seen (not to mention the greatest recruiting agent they ever had). It has done more to undermine freedom and increase state power (along with the threat of terrorism) that the terrorists ever dreamed. However, it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion that it is simply incompetence, arrogance and ignorance which was at work (tempting as that may be). Rather, there are institutional factors at work as well (a fact that becomes obvious when looking at the history of the secret state and its activities). The fact that such draconian measures were even considered says volumes about the direction in which the US — and by implication the other "advanced" capitalist states — are headed.

## D.9.3 What causes justifications for racism to appear?

The tendency toward social breakdown which is inherent in the growth of wealth polarisation, as discussed above, is also producing a growth in racism in the countries affected. As we have seen, social breakdown leads to the increasingly authoritarian government prompted by the need of the ruling class to contain protest and civil unrest among those at the bottom of the wealth pyramid. In the US those in the lowest economic strata belong mostly to racial minorities, while in several European countries there are growing populations of impoverished minorities from the Third World, often from former colonies. The desire of the more affluent strata to justify their superior

1976. Congressional sources show that in 1985 alone the FBI conducted 96 investigations of groups and individuals opposed to the Reagan Administration's Central American policies, including religious organisations who expressed solidarity with Central American refugees.

Since the 1980s, the state has used the threat of "terrorism" (both domestic and international) to bolster its means of repression. The aim has been to allow the President, on his own initiative and by his own definition, to declare any person or organisation "terrorist" and so eliminate any rights they may, in theory, have. The 911 attacks were used to pass in effect a "wish-list" (in the form of the PATRIOT act) of measures long sought by both the secret state and the right but which they had difficulty in passing previously due to public scrutiny. Post-911, as after the Oklahoma bombing, much opposition was muted while those that did raise their voices were dismissed as, at best, naive or, at worse, pro-terrorist.

Post-911, presidential rulings are considered as conclusive while the Attorney General was handed new enforcement powers, e.g. suspects would be considered guilty unless proven innocent, and the source or nature of the evidence brought against suspects would not have to be revealed if the Justice Department claimed a *"national security"* interest in suppressing such facts, as of course it would. Security agencies were given massive new powers to gather information on and act against suspected "terrorists" (i.e., any enemy of the state, dissident or critic of capitalism). As intended, the ability to abuse these powers is staggering. They greatly increased the size and funding of the FBI and gave it the power to engage in "anti-terrorist" activities all over the country, without judicial oversight. Unsurprisingly, during the run-up to the Iraq invasion of 2003, the anti-war movement was targeted with these new powers of surveillance. That the secret state, for example, seriously argued that potential "terrorists" could exist within Quaker peace groups says it all. Unsurprisingly,



*their countries are destroyed."* [*"Nationalism and the New World Order"* pp. 1–7, **Society and Nature**, No. 5, pp. 4–5] However, independent nationalism is like social democracy in imperialist countries in that it may, at best, reduce the evils of the class system and social hierarchies but it never gets rid of them (at worse, it creates new classes and hierarchies clustered around the state bureaucracy).

Anarchists oppose nationalism in all its forms as harmful to the interests of those who make up a given nation and their cultural identities. As Rocker put it, peoples and groups of peoples have *"existed long before the state put in its appearance"* and *"develop without the assistance of the state. They are only hindered in their natural development when some external power interferes by violence with their life and forces it into patterns which it has not known before."* A nation, in contrast, *"encompasses a whole array of different peoples and groups of peoples who have by more or less violent means been pressed together into the frame of a common state."* In other words, the *"nation is, then, unthinkable without the state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 201]

Given this, we do support nationality and cultural difference, diversity and self-determination as a natural expression of our love of freedom and support for decentralisation. This should not, however, be confused with supporting nationalism. In addition, it goes without saying that a nationality that take on notions of racial, cultural or ethnic "superiority" or "purity" or believe that cultural differences are somehow rooted in biology get no support from anarchists. Equally unsurprisingly, anarchists have been the most consistent foes of that particularly extreme form of nationalism, fascism (*"a politico-economic state where the ruling class of each country behaves towards its own people as ... it has behaved to the colonial peoples under its heel."* [Bart de Ligt, **The Conquest of Violence**, p. 74]). Moreover, we do not support those aspects of specific cultures which reflect social hierarchies (for example, many traditional cultures have sexist and homophobic tendencies). By supporting nation-

ality, we do not advocate tolerating these. Nor do the negative aspects of specific cultures justify another state imposing its will on it in the name of "civilising" it. As history shows, such "humanitarian" intervention is just a mask for justifying imperialist conquest and exploitation and it rarely works as cultural change has to flow from below, by the actions of the oppressed themselves, in order to be successful.

In opposition to nationalism, Anarchists are *"proud of being internationalists."* We seek *"the end of all oppression and of all exploitation,"* and so aim *"to awaken a consciousness of the antagonism of interests between dominators and dominated, between exploiters and workers, and to develop the class struggle inside each country, and the solidarity among all workers across the frontiers, as against any prejudice and any passion of either race or nationality."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 244]

We must stress that anarchists, being opposed to all forms of exploitation and oppression, are against a situation of external domination where the one country dominates the people and territory of another country (i.e., imperialism — see section D.5). This flows from our basic principles as *"[t]rue internationalism will never be attained except by the independence of each nationality, little or large, compact or disunited — just as anarchy is in the independence of each individual. If we say no government of man over man, how can [we] permit the government of conquered nationalities by the conquering nationalities?"* [Kropotkin, quoted by Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 231] As we discuss in the next section, while rejecting Nationalism anarchists do not necessarily oppose national liberation struggles against foreign domination.



These activities finally came to public attention because of the Watergate investigations, congressional hearings, and information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). In response to the revelations of FBI abuse, Attorney General Edward Levi in 1976 set forth a set of public guidelines governing the initiation and scope of the bureau's domestic security investigations, severely restricting its ability to investigate political dissidents.

The Levi guidelines, however, proved to be only a temporary reversal of the trend. Although throughout his presidency Ronald Reagan professed to be against the increase of state power in regard to domestic policy, he in fact expanded the power of the national bureaucracy for "national security" purposes in systematic and unprecedented ways. One of the most significant of these was his immediate elimination of the safeguards against FBI abuse that the Levi guidelines had been designed to prevent. This was accomplished through two interrelated executive branch initiatives: Executive Order 12333, issued in 1981, and Attorney General William French Smith's guidelines, which replaced Levi's in 1983. The Smith guidelines permitted the FBI to launch domestic security investigations if the facts *"reasonably indicated"* that groups or individuals were involved in criminal activity. More importantly, however, the new guidelines also authorised the FBI to *"anticipate or prevent crime."* As a result, the FBI could now investigate groups or individuals whose statements *"advocated"* criminal activity or indicated an **apparent intent** to engage in crime, particularly crimes of violence.

As Curry notes, the language of the Smith guidelines provided FBI officials with sufficient interpretative latitude to investigate virtually any group or individual it chose to target, including political activists who opposed the administration's foreign policy. Not surprisingly, under the new guidelines the Bureau immediately began investigating a wide variety of political dissidents, quickly making up for the time it had lost since

and ultimately destroy the New Left and Black radical movements of the sixties and early seventies, i.e. to silence the major sources of political dissent and opposition. It's aim was to *"disrupt"* a wide range of popular movements *"by instigating violence in the ghetto, direct participation in police assassination of a Black Panther organiser, burglaries and harassment of the Socialist Workers Party over many years, and other methods of defamation and disruption."* [**Necessary Illusions**, p. 189]

The FBI fomented violence through the use of agents provocateurs and destroyed the credibility of movement leaders by framing them, bringing false charges against them, distributing offensive materials published in their name, spreading false rumours, sabotaging equipment, stealing money, and other dirty tricks. By such means the Bureau exacerbated internal frictions within movements, turning members against each other as well as other groups. For example, during the civil rights movement, while the government was making concessions and verbally supporting the movement, the FBI was harassing and breaking up black groups. Between 1956 and 1971, the FBI took 295 actions against black groups as part of COLINTELPRO. [Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 455]

Government documents show the FBI and police involved in creating acrimonious disputes which ultimately led to the break-up of such groups as Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panther Party, and the Liberation News Service. The Bureau also played a part in the failure of such groups to form alliances across racial, class, and regional lines. The FBI is implicated in the assassination of Malcolm X, who was killed in a "factional dispute" that the Bureau bragged of having "developed" in the Nation of Islam. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the target of an elaborate FBI plot to drive him to suicide before he was conveniently killed by a lone sniper. Other radicals were portrayed as "Communists", criminals, adulterers, or government agents, while still others were murdered in phoney "shoot-outs" where the only shooting was done by the police.



# D.7 Are anarchists opposed to National Liberation struggles?

Obviously, given the anarchist analysis of imperialism discussed in section D.5, anarchists are opposed to imperialism and wars it inevitably causes. Likewise, as noted in the last section, we are against any form of nationalism. Anarchists oppose nationalism just as much as they oppose imperialism — neither offer a way to a free society. While we oppose imperialism and foreign domination and support decentralisation, it does not mean that anarchists blindly support national liberation movements. In this section we explain the anarchist position on such movements.

Anarchists, it should be stressed, are not against globalisation or international links and ties as such. Far from it, we have always been internationalists and are in favour of ***"globalisation from below,"*** one that respects and encourages diversity and difference while sharing the world. However, we have no desire to live in a world turned bland by corporate power and economic imperialism. As such, we are opposed to capitalist trends which commodify culture as it commodifies social relationships. We want to make the world an interesting place to live in and that means opposing both actual (i.e. physical, political and economic) imperialism as well as the cultural and social forms of it.

However, this does not mean that anarchists are indifferent to the national oppression inherent within imperialism. Far

from it. Being opposed to all forms of hierarchy, anarchists cannot be in favour of a system in which a country dominates another. The Cuban anarchists spoke for all of us when they stated that they were *"against all forms of imperialism and colonialism; against the economic domination of peoples ... against military pressure to impose upon peoples political and economic system foreign to their national cultures, customs and social systems ... We believe that among the nations of the world, the small are as worthy as the big. Just as we remain enemies of national states because each of them hold its own people in subjection; so also are we opposed to the super-states that utilise their political, economic and military power to impose their rapacious systems of exploitation on weaker countries. As against all forms of imperialism, we declare for revolutionary internationalism; for the creation of great confederations of free peoples for their mutual interests; for solidarity and mutual aid."* [quoted by Sam Dolgoff, **The Cuban Revolution: A Critical Perspective**, p. 138]

It is impossible to be free while dependent on the power of another. If the capital one uses is owned by another country, one is in no position to resist the demands of that country. If you are dependent on foreign corporations and international finance to invest in your nation, then you have to do what they want (and so the ruling class will suppress political and social opposition to please their backers as well as maintain themselves in power). To be self-governing under capitalism, a community or nation must be economically independent. The centralisation of capital implied by imperialism means that power rests in the hands of a few others, not with those directly affected by the decisions made by that power. This power allows them to define and impose the rules and guidelines of the global market, forcing the many to follow the laws the few make. Thus capitalism soon makes a decentralised economy, and so a free society, impossible. As such, anarchists stress decentralisation of industry and its integration with agriculture (see section I.3.8) within the context of socialisation of prop-



quiries into a very broad category of potential "subversives"; and by repeatedly misinforming a succession of careless or indifferent presidents and attorneys general about the precise scope of Roosevelt's directives, Hoover managed for more than 30 years to elicit tacit executive approval for continuous FBI investigations into an ever-expanding class of political dissidents. [Geoffrey R. Stone, *"The Reagan Administration, the First Amendment, and FBI Domestic Security Investigations,"* Curry (ed.), **Op. Cit.**]

The advent of the Cold War, ongoing conflicts with the Soviet Union, and fears of the "international Communist conspiracy" provided justification not only for covert CIA operations and American military intervention in countries all over the globe, but also contributed to the FBI's rationale for expanding its domestic surveillance activities. Thus in 1957, without authorisation from Congress or any president, Hoover launched a highly secret operation called COINTELPRO:

> *"From 1957 to 1974, the bureau opened investigative files on more than half a million 'subversive' Americans. In the course of these investigations, the bureau, in the name of 'national security,' engaged in widespread wire-tapping, bugging, mail-openings, and break-ins. Even more insidious was the bureau's extensive use of informers and undercover operative to infiltrate and report on the activities and membership of 'subversive' political associations ranging from the Socialist Workers Party to the NAACP to the Medical Committee for Human Rights to a Milwaukee Boy Scout troop."* [Stone, **Op. Cit.**, p. 274]

But COINTELPRO involved much more than just investigation and surveillance. As Chomsky notes, it was *"one of its major programs of repression"* and was used to discredit, weaken,

policies is not limited to just possibilities and so in this section we will examine the operations of the secret police in the USA since the 1950s. First, however, we must stress that these tendencies are hardly US specific. For example, the secret services in the UK have regularly spied on left-wing groups as well as being heavily involved in undermining the 1984–5 Miners strike. [S. Milne, **The Enemy Within**]

The creation of an elaborate US "national security" apparatus has come about gradually since 1945 through congressional enactments, numerous executive orders and national security directives, and a series of Supreme Court decisions that have eroded First Amendment rights. The policies of the Reagan administration, however, reflected radical departures from the past, as revealed not only by their comprehensive scope but by their institutionalisation of secrecy, censorship, and repression in ways that will be difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. As Richard Curry points out, the Reagan administration's success stems *"from major structural and technological changes that have occurred in American society during the twentieth century — especially the emergence of the modern bureaucratic State and the invention of sophisticated electronic devices that make surveillance possible in new and insidious ways."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 4]

The FBI has used *"countersubversive"* surveillance techniques and kept lists of people and groups judged to be potential national security threats since the days of the Red Scare in the 1920s. Such activities were expanded in the late 1930s when Franklin Roosevelt instructed the FBI to gather information about Fascist and Communist activities in the US and to conduct investigations into possible espionage and sabotage (although for most of the 1920s and 1930s, fascists and fascist sympathisers were, at best, ignored and, at worse, publicly praised while anti-fascists like anarchist Carol Tresca were spied on and harassed by the authorities. [Nunzio Pernicone, **Carlo Tresca**]). FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover interpreted these directives as authorising open-ended in-



erty and workers' self-management of production. Only this can ensure that production meets the needs of all rather than the profits of a few.

Moreover, anarchists also recognise that economic imperialism is the parent of cultural and social imperialism. As Takis Fotopoulos argues, *"the marketisation of culture and the recent liberalisation and deregulation of markets have contributed significantly to the present cultural homogenisation, with traditional communities and their cultures disappearing all over the world and people converted to consumers of a mass culture produced in the advanced capitalist countries and particularly the USA."* [**Towards an Inclusive Democracy**, p. 40] Equally, we are aware, to quote Chomsky, that racism *"is inherent in imperial rule"* and that it is *"inherent in the relation of domination"* that imperialism is based on. [**Imperial Ambitions**, p. 48]

It is this context which explains the anarchist position on national liberation struggles. While we are internationalists, we are against all forms of domination and oppression — including national ones. This means that we are not indifferent to national liberation struggles. Quite the opposite. In the words of Bakunin:

> *"Fatherland and nationality are, like individuality, each a natural and social fact, physiological and historical at the same time; neither of them is a principle. Only that can be called a human principle which is universal and common to all men; and nationality separates men … What is a principle is the respect which everyone should have for natural facts, real or social. Nationality, like individuality, is one of those facts … To violate it is to commit a crime … And that is why I feel myself always the patriot of all oppressed fatherlands."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 324]

This is because nationality *"is a historic, local fact which, like all real and harmless facts, has the right to claim general acceptance."* This means that *"[e]very people, like every person, is involuntarily that which it is and therefore has a right to be itself. Therein lies the so-called national rights."* Nationality, Bakunin stressed, *"is not a principle; it is a legitimate fact, just as individuality is. Every nationality, great or small, has the incontestable right to be itself, to live according to its own nature. This right is simply the corollary of the general principal of freedom."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 325]

More recently Murray Bookchin has expressed similar sentiments. *"No left libertarian,"* he argued, *"can oppose the **right** of a subjugated people to establish itself as an autonomous entity — be it in a [libertarian] confederation ... or as a nation-state based in hierarchical and class inequities."* Even so, anarchists do not elevate the idea of national liberation *"into a mindless article of faith,"* as much of the Leninist-influenced left has done. We do not call for support for the oppressed nation without first inquiring into *"**what kind of society** a given 'national liberation' movement would likely produce."* To do so, as Bookchin points out, would be to *"support national liberation struggles for instrumental purposes, merely as a means of 'weakening' imperialism,"* which leads to *"a condition of moral bankruptcy"* as socialist ideas become associated with the authoritarian and statist goals of the "anti-imperialist" dictatorships in "liberated" nations. *"But to oppose an oppressor is not equivalent to calling for **support** for everything formerly colonised nation-states do."* [*"Nationalism and the 'National Question'"*, pp. 8–36, **Society and Nature**, No. 5, p. 31, p. 25, p. 29 and p. 31]

This means that anarchists oppose foreign oppression and are usually sympathetic to attempts by those who suffer it to end it. This does not mean that we necessarily support national liberation movements as such (after all, they usually desire to create a new state) but we cannot sit back and watch one nation oppress another and so act to stop that oppression (by,



state *"imping[ing] continually on the country's political rights"* or *"suppress[ing] them with a strike of the pen."* The state must always *"find itself faced by a mass of people ready to rebel."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 129 and p. 124]

## D.9.2 Why is government surveillance of citizens on the increase?

Authoritarian governments are characterised by fully developed secret police forces, extensive government surveillance of civilians, a high level of official secrecy and censorship, and an elaborate system of state coercion to intimidate and silence dissenters. All of these phenomena have existed in the US since suppression of the anarchist inspired No-Conscription League and the IWW for its unionising and anti-war activity. The post-World War I Red Scare and Palmer raids continued this process of wartime jailings and intimidation, combined with the deportation of aliens (the arrest, trial and subsequent deportation of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman is but one example of this war on radicals). [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of America**, pp. 363–7]

However, since World War II these systems have taken more extreme forms, especially during the 1980s and 2000s. Indeed, one of the most disturbing revelations to emerge from the Iran-Contra affair was the Reagan administration's contingency plan for imposing martial law. Alfonso Chardy, a reporter for the Miami Herald, revealed in July 1987 that Lt. Col. Oliver North, while serving on the National Security Council's staff, had worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency on a plan to suspend the Bill of Rights by imposing martial law in the event of *"national opposition to a US military invasion abroad."* [Richard O. Curry (ed.), **Freedom at Risk: Secrecy, Censorship, and Repression in the 1980s**] However, this rise in authoritarian-style government

and civil liberties we have. While anarchists have no illusions about the nature of even so-called democratic states, we are not indifferent to the form of state we have to endure and how it changes. As Malatesta put it:

> *"there is no doubt that the worst of democracies is always preferable, if only from an educational point of view, than the best of dictatorships. Of course democracy, so-called government of the people, is a lie; but the lie always slightly binds the liar and limits the extent of his arbitrary power ... Democracy is a lie, it is oppression and is in reality, oligarchy; that is, government by the few to the advantage of a privileged class. But we can still fight it in the name of freedom and equality, unlike those who have replaced it or want to replace it with something worse."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 77]

We must stress that as long as governments exist, then this struggle against authoritarianism will continue. As Kropotkin argued, these tendencies *"do not depend on individuals; they are inherent in the institution."* We must always remember that *"[o]f its own accord, representative government does not offer real liberties, and it can accommodate itself remarkably well to despotism. Freedoms have to be seized from it, as much as they do from absolute kings; and once they have been gained they must be defended against parliament as much as they were against a king."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 137 and p. 123]

So we cannot assume that legal rights against and restrictions on state or economic power are enough in themselves. Liberty needs to be continually defended by the mass of the population who cannot leave it to others to act for them. *"If we want ... to leave the gates wide open to reaction,"* Kropotkin put it, *"we have only to confide our affairs to a representative government."* Only *"extra-parliamentary agitation"* will stop the



for example, protesting against the oppressing nation and trying to get them to change their policies and withdraw from the oppressed nations affairs). Nor does it mean we are uncritical of specific expressions of nationality and popular cultures. Just as we are against sexist, racist and homophobic individuals and seek to help them change their attitudes, we are also opposed to such traits within peoples and cultures and urge those who are subject to such popular prejudices to change them by their own efforts with the practical and moral solidarity of others (any attempt to use state force to end such discrimination rarely works and is often counter-productive as it entrenches such opinions). Needless to say, justifying foreign intervention or occupation by appeals to end such backward cultural traits is usually hypocritical in the extreme and masks more basic interests. An obvious example is the Christian and Republican right and its use of the position of women in Afghanistan to bolster support for the invasion of 2001 (the sight of the American Taliban discovering the importance of feminism — in other countries, of course — was surreal but not unexpected given the needs of the moment and their basis in *"reasons of state"*).

The reason for this critical attitude to national liberation struggles is that they usually counterpoise the common interests of "the nation" to those of a (foreign) oppressor and assume that **class** and social hierarchies (i.e. internal oppression) are irrelevant. Although nationalist movements often cut across classes, they in practice seek to increase autonomy for certain parts of society (namely the local elites) while ignoring that of other parts (namely the working class who are expected to continue being subject to class and state oppression). For anarchists, a new national state would not bring any fundamental change in the lives of most people, who would still be powerless both economically and socially. Looking around the world at all the many nation-states in existence, we see the same gross disparities in power, influence and wealth restricting self-determination for working-class people, even if they are free

"nationally." It seems hypocritical for nationalist leaders to talk of liberating their own nation from imperialism while advocating the creation of a capitalist nation-state, which will be oppressive to its own population (and, perhaps, eventually become imperialistic itself as it develops to a certain point and has to seek foreign outlets for its products and capital). The fate of all former colonies provides ample support for this conclusion.

As Bakunin stressed, nationalists do not understand that *"the spontaneous and free union of the living forces of a nation has nothing in common with their artificial concentration at once mechanistic and forced in the political centralisation of the unitary state; and because [they] confused and identified these two very opposing things [they have] not only been the promoter of the independence of [their] country [they have] become at the same time ... the promoter of its present slavery."* [quoted by Jean Caroline Cahm, *"Bakunin"*, pp. 22–49, Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fisera (eds), **Socialism and Nationalism**, vol. 1, p. 36]

In response to national liberation struggles, anarchists stress the self-liberation of the working class, which can be only achieved by its members' own efforts, creating and using their own organisations. In this process there can be no separation of political, social and economic goals. The struggle against imperialism cannot be separated from the struggle against capitalism. This has been the approach of most, if not all, anarchist movements in the face of foreign domination — the combination of the struggle against foreign domination with the class struggle against native oppressors. In many different countries (including Bulgaria, Mexico, Cuba and Korea) anarchists have tried, by their *"propaganda, and above all **action**, [to] encourage the masses to turn the struggle for political independence into the struggle for the Social Revolution."* [Sam Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 41] In other words, a people will free only *"by the general uprising of the labouring masses."* [Bakunin, quoted by Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36]



the US and UK should show that such concerns are extremely valid.

In response to social breakdown or "terrorism," voters may turn to martial-style leaders (aided by the media). Once elected, and with the support of willing legislatures and courts, administrations could easily create much more extensive mechanisms of authoritarian government than already exist, giving the executive branch virtually dictatorial powers. Such administrations could escalate foreign militarism, further expand the funding and scope of the police, national guard units, secret police and foreign intelligence agencies, and authorise more widespread surveillance of citizens as well as the infiltration of dissident political groups (all of which happened in post-911 America). There would be a corresponding rise of government secrecy (as *"popular understanding of the workings of government is not conducive to instilling proper reverence for powerful leaders and their nobility."* [Chomsky, **Failed States**, p.238]). These developments would not occur all at once, but so gradually, imperceptibly, and logically — given the need to maintain "law and order" — that most people would not even be aware that an authoritarian take-over was underway. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that this is already underway in the US (see **Friendly Fascism** by Bertram Gross for details).

We will examine some of the symptoms of growing authoritarianism listed above, again referring primarily to the example of the United States. The general trend has been a hollowing out of even the limited democratic structures associated with representative states in favour of a purely formal appearance of elections which are used to justify ignoring the popular will, authoritarianism and "top-down" rule by the executive. While these have always been a feature of the state (and must be, if it is to do its function as we discussed in section B.2) the tendencies are increasing and should be of concern for all those who seek to protect, never mind, expand what human rights

*equality, so grows their power. And so also diminish the voices of solidarity and mutual reinforcement, the voices of civil society, the voices of a democratic and egalitarian middle class."* [**Created Unequal: The Crisis in American Pay**, p. 265]

If this is true, then along with increasing wealth polarisation in the US we should expect to see signs of growing authoritarianism. This hypothesis is confirmed by numerous facts, including the following: continuing growth of an *"imperial presidency"* (concentration of political power); extralegal operations by the executive branch (e.g. the Iran-Contra scandal, the Grenada and Panama invasions); skyrocketing incarceration rates; more official secrecy and censorship; the rise of the Far Right; more police and prisons; FBI requests for massive wiretapping capability; and so on. Public support for draconian measures to deal with crime reflect the increasingly authoritarian mood of citizens beginning to panic in the face of an ongoing social breakdown, which has been brought about, quite simply, by ruling-class greed that has gotten out of hand — a fact that is carefully obscured by the media. The 911 attacks have been used to bolster these authoritarian trends, as would be expected.

One might think that representative democracy and constitutionally guaranteed freedoms would make an authoritarian government impossible in the United States and other liberal democratic nations with similar constitutional "protections" for civil rights. In reality, however, the declaration of a "national emergency" would allow the central government to ignore constitutional guarantees with impunity and set up what Hannah Arendt calls *"invisible government"* — mechanisms allowing an administration to circumvent constitutional structures while leaving them nominally in place. The erosion of civil liberties and increase in state powers post-911 in both



History has shown the validity of this argument, as well as the fears of Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon that it is *"the duty of all the poor to work and to struggle to break the chains that enslave us. To leave the solution of our problems to the educated and the rich classes is to voluntarily put ourselves in the grasp of their claws."* For *"a simple change of rulers is not a fount of liberty"* and *"any revolutionary program that doesn't contain a clause concerning the taking of the lands [and workplaces] by the people is a program of the ruling classes, who will never struggle against their own interests."* [**Dreams of Freedom**, p. 142 and p. 293] As Kropotkin stressed, the *"failure of all nationalist movements ... lies in this curse ... that the economic question ... remains on the side ... In a word, it seems to me that in each national movement we have a major task: to set forth the question [of nationalism] on an economic basis and carry out agitation against serfdom [and other forms of exploitation] at one with the struggle against [oppression by] foreign nationality."* [quoted by Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 230]

Moreover, we should point out that Anarchists in imperialist countries have also opposed national oppression by both words and deeds. For example, the prominent Japanese Anarchist Kotoku Shusi was framed and executed in 1910 after campaigning against Japanese expansionism. In Italy, the anarchist movement opposed Italian expansionism into Eritrea and Ethiopia in the 1880s and 1890s, and organised a massive anti-war movement against the 1911 invasion of Libya. In 1909, the Spanish Anarchists organised a mass strike against intervention in Morocco. More recently, anarchists in France struggled against two colonial wars (in Indochina and Algeria) in the late 50's and early 60's, anarchists world-wide opposed US aggression in Latin America and Vietnam (without, we must note, supporting the Cuban and Vietnamese Stalinist regimes), opposed the Gulf War (during which most anarchists raised the call of *"No war but the class war"*) as well as opposing Soviet imperialism.

In practice national liberation movements are full of contradictions between the way the rank and file sees progress being made (and their hopes and dreams) and the wishes of their ruling class members/leaders. The leadership will always resolve this conflict in favour of the future ruling class, at best paying lip-service to social issues by always stressing that addressing them must be postponed to **after** the foreign power has left the country. That makes it possible for individual members of these struggles to realise the limited nature of nationalism and break from these politics towards anarchism. At times of major struggle and conflict this contradiction will become very apparent and at this stage it is possible that large numbers may break from nationalism in practice, if not in theory, by pushing the revolt into social struggles and changes. In such circumstances, theory may catch up with practice and nationalist ideology rejected in favour of a wider concept of freedom, particularly **if** an alternative that addresses these concerns exists. Providing that anarchists do not compromise our ideals such movements against foreign domination can be wonderful opportunities to spread our politics, ideals and ideas — and to show up the limitations and dangers of nationalism itself and present a viable alternative.

For anarchists, the key question is whether freedom is for abstract concepts like "the nation" or for the individuals who make up the nationality and give it life. Oppression must be fought on all fronts, within nations and internationally, in order for working-class people to gain the fruits of freedom. Any national liberation struggle which bases itself on nationalism is doomed to failure as a movement for extending human freedom. Thus anarchists *"refuse to participate in national liberation fronts; they participate in class fronts which may or may not be involved in national liberation struggles. The struggle must spread to establish economic, political and social structures in the liberated territories, based on federalist and libertarian organisa-*



## D.9.1 What is the relationship between wealth polarisation and authoritarian government?

We have previously noted the recent increase in the rate of wealth polarisation, with its erosion of working-class living standards (see section B.7). This process has been referred to by Noam Chomsky as "Third-Worldisation." It is appearing in a particularly acute form in the US — the "richest" industrialised nation which also has the highest level of poverty, since it is the most polarised — but the process can be seen in other "advanced" industrial nations as well, particularly in the UK. As neo-liberalism has spread, so has inequality soared.

Third World governments are typically authoritarian, since harsh measures are required to suppress rebellions among their impoverished and discontented masses. Hence "Third-Worldisation" implies not only economic polarisation but also increasingly authoritarian governments. As Philip Slater puts it, a large, educated, and alert "middle class" (i.e. average income earners) has always been the backbone of democracy, and anything that concentrates wealth tends to weaken democratic institutions. [**A Dream Deferred**, p. 68] This analysis is echoed by left-liberal economist James K. Galbraith:

> *"As polarisation of wages, incomes and wealth develops, the common interests and common social programs of society fall into decline. We have seen this too, in this country over thirty years, beginning with the erosion of public services and public investments, particularly in the cities, with the assault on the poor and on immigrants and the disabled that led to the welfare bill of 1996, and continuing now manufactured crises of Medicare and the social security system. The haves are on the march. With growing in-*

**Societies**, p. 166 and p. 204] As such, this reduction in genuine liberty, democracy and growth in executive power does not flow simply from the intentions of a few bad apples. Rather, they reflect economic developments, the needs of the system as a whole plus the pressures associated with the way specific institutions are structured and operate as well as the need to exclude, control and marginalise the general population. Thus while we can struggle and resist specific manifestations of this process, we need to fight and eliminate their root causes within capitalism and statism themselves if we want to turn them back and, eventually, end them.

This increase in centralised and authoritarian rule may not result in obvious elimination of such basic rights as freedom of speech. However, this is due to the success of the project to reduce genuine freedom and democracy rather than its failure. If the general population are successfully marginalised and excluded from the public sphere (i.e. turned into Locke's system of being within but not part of a society) then a legal framework which recognises civil liberties would still be maintained. That most basic liberties would remain relatively intact and that most radicals will remain unmolested would be a testimony to the lack of power possessed by the public at large in the existing system. That is, countercultural movements need not be a concern to the government until they become broader-based and capable of challenging the existing socio-economic order — only then is it "necessary" for the repressive, authoritarian forces to work on undermining the movement. So long as there is no effective organising and no threat to the interests of the ruling elite, people are permitted to say whatever they want. This creates the illusion that the system is open to all ideas, when, in fact, it is not. But, as the decimation of the Wobblies and anarchist movement after the First World War first illustrated, the government will seek to eradicate any movement that poses a significant threat.



*tions."* [Alfredo M. Bonanno, **Anarchism and the National Liberation Struggle**, p. 12]

The Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine expressed this perspective well when it was fighting for freedom during the Russian Revolution and Civil War. The Ukraine at the time was a very diverse country, with many distinct national and ethnic groups living within it which made this issue particularly complex:

> *"Clearly, each national group has a natural and indisputable entitlement to speak its language, live in accordance with its customs, retain its beliefs and rituals ... in short, to maintain and develop its national culture in every sphere. It is obvious that this clear and specific stance has absolutely nothing to do with narrow nationalism of the 'separatist' variety which pits nation against nation and substitutes an artificial and harmful separation for the struggle to achieve a natural social union of toilers in one shared social communion.*
>
> *"In our view, national aspirations of a natural, wholesome character (language, customs, culture, etc.) can achieve full and fruitful satisfaction only in the union of nationalities rather than in their antagonism ...*
>
> *"The speedy construction of a new life on [libertarian] socialist foundations will ineluctably lead to development of the culture peculiar to each nationality. Whenever we Makhnovist insurgents speak of independence of the Ukraine, we ground it in the social and economic plane of the toilers. We proclaim the right of the Ukrainian people (and every other nation) to self-determination, not in the narrow, nationalist sense ... but in the sense of*

> *the toilers' right to self-determination. We declare that the toiling folk of the Ukraine's towns and countryside have shown everyone through their heroic fight that they do not wish any longer to suffer political power and have no use for it, and that they consciously aspire to a libertarian society. We thus declare that all political power ... is to be regarded ... as an enemy and counter-revolutionary. To the very last drop of their blood they will wage a ferocious struggle against it, in defence of their entitlement to self-organisation."* [quoted by Alexandre Skirda, **Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack**, pp. 377–8]

So while anarchists unmask nationalism for what it is, we do not disdain the basic struggle for identity and self-management which nationalism diverts. We encourage direct action and the spirit of revolt against all forms of oppression — social, economic, political, racial, sexual, religious and national. By this method, we aim to turn national liberation struggles into ***human*** liberation struggles. And while fighting against oppression, we struggle for anarchy, a free confederation of communes based on workplace and community assemblies. A confederation which will place the nation-state, all nation-states, into the dust-bin of history where it belongs. This struggle for popular self-determination is, as such, considered to be part of a wider, international movement for *"a social revolution cannot be confined to a single isolated country, it is by its very nature international in scope"* and so popular movements must *"link their aspirations and forces with the aspirations and forces of all other countries"* and so the *"only way of arriving at emancipation lies in the fraternity of oppressed peoples in an international alliance of all countries."* [Bakunin, quoted by Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40 and p. 36]



likely that the trade union bureaucracy will reconsider their funding in spite of the fact New Labour simply ignored them when not actually attacking them!). The absence of a true opposition party, which itself is a main characteristic of authoritarian regimes, is thus an accomplished fact already, and has been so for many years.

Besides the reasons noted above, another cause of increasing political centralisation under capitalism is that industrialisation forces masses of people into alienated wage slavery, breaking their bonds to other people, to the land, and to tradition, which in turn encourages strong central governments to assume the role of surrogate parent and to provide direction for their citizens in political, intellectual, moral, and even spiritual matters. (see Hannah Arendt, **The Origins of Totalitarianism**). And as Marilyn French emphasises in **Beyond Power**, the growing concentration of political power in the capitalist state can also be attributed to the form of the corporation, which is a microcosm of the authoritarian state, since it is based on centralised authority, bureaucratic hierarchy, antidemocratic controls, and lack of individual initiative and autonomy. Thus the millions of people who work for large corporations tend automatically to develop the psychological traits needed to survive and "succeed" under authoritarian rule: notably, obedience, conformity, efficiency, subservience, and fear of responsibility. The political system naturally tends to reflect the psychological conditions created at the workplace, where most people spend about half their time.

Reviewing such trends, Marxist Ralph Miliband concludes that *"it points in the direction of a regime in which democratic forms have ceased to provide effective constraints upon state power."* The *"distribution of power"* will become *"more unequal"* and so *"[h]owever strident the rhetoric of democracy and popular sovereignty may be, and despite the 'populist' overtones which politics must now incorporate, the trend is toward the ever-greater appropriation of power at the top."* [**Divided**

of the state machine and its bureaucracy, nor will the workings and needs of the capitalist economy.

This helps explains why the distinctions between the two major parties in the US have been, to a large extent, virtually obliterated. Each is controlled by the corporate elite, albeit by different factions within it. Despite many tactical and verbal disagreements, virtually all members of this elite share a basic set of principles, attitudes, ideals, and values. Whether Democrat or Republican, most of them have graduated from the same Ivy League schools, belong to the same exclusive social clubs, serve on the same interlocking boards of directors of the same major corporations, and send their children to the same private boarding schools (see G. William Domhoff, **Who Rules America Now?** and C. Wright Mills, **The Power Elite**). Perhaps most importantly, they share the same psychology, which means that they have the same priorities and interests: namely, those of corporate America. That the Democrats are somewhat more dependent and responsive to progressive working class people while the Republicans are beholden to the rich and sections of the religious right come election time should not make us confuse rhetoric with the reality of policies pursued and underlying common assumptions and interests.

This means that in the USA there is really only one party — the Business Party — which wears two different masks to hide its real face from the public. Similar remarks apply to the liberal democratic regimes in the rest of the advanced capitalist states. In the UK, Blair's "New Labour" has taken over the mantle of Thatcherism and have implemented policies based on its assumptions. Unsurprisingly, it received the backing of numerous right-wing newspapers as well as funding from wealthy individuals. In other words, the UK system has mutated into a more US style one of two Business parties one of which gets more trade union support than the other (needless to say, it is unlikely that Labour will be changing its name to "Capital" unless forced to by the trading standards office nor does it look



And as far as "national" identity within an anarchist society is concerned, our position is clear and simple. As Bakunin noted with respect to the Polish struggle for national liberation during the last century, anarchists, as *"adversaries of every State, ... reject the rights and frontiers called historic. For us Poland only begins, only truly exists there where the labouring masses are and want to be Polish, it ends where, renouncing all particular links with Poland, the masses wish to establish other national links."* [quoted by Jean Caroline Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

# D.8 What causes militarism and what are its effects?

There are three main causes of capitalist militarism.

Firstly, there is the need to contain the domestic enemy — the oppressed and exploited sections of the population. As Emma Goldman argued, the military machine *"is not directed only against the external enemy; it aims much more at the internal enemy. It concerns that element of labour which has learned not to hope for anything from our institutions, that awakened part of the working people which has realised that the war of classes underlies all wars among nations, and that if war is justified at all it is the war against economic dependence and political slavery, the two dominant issues involved in the struggle of the classes."* In other words, the nation *"which is to be protected by a huge military force is not"* that *"of the people, but that of the privileged class; the class which robs and exploits the masses, and controls their lives from the cradle to the grave."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 352 and p. 348]

The second, as noted in the section on imperialism, is that a strong military is necessary in order for a ruling class to pursue an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy in order to defend its interests globally. For most developed capitalist nations, this kind of foreign policy becomes more and more important because of economic forces, i.e. in order to provide outlets for its goods and capital to prevent the system from collapsing by expanding the market continually outward. This outward expansion of, and so competition between, capital needs military force to protect its interests (particularly those



*"ever more centralised"* and local government was *"fragmenting and weakening."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, p. 261, p. 262 and p. 269]

This reversal of what, traditionally, conservatives and even liberals had argued had its roots in the "free market" capitalist ideology. For *"[n]othing is to stand in the way of the free market, and no such fripperies as democratic votes are to be allowed to upset it. The unadulterated free market is unalterable, and those who dislike it or suffer from it must learn to put up with it. In Rousseau's language, they must be forced to be free."* as such there was *"no paradox"* to the *"Thatcherite devotion to both the free market and a strong state"* as the *"establishment of individualism and a free-market state is an unbending if not dictatorial venture which demands the prevention of collective action and the submission of dissenting institutions and individuals."* Thus rhetoric about "liberty" and rolling back the state can easily be *"combined in practice with centralisation and the expansion of the state's frontiers."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 273–4 and p. 273] A similar process occurred under Reagan in America.

As Chomsky stresses, the *"antidemocratic thrust has precedents, of course, but is reaching new heights"* under the current set of *"reactionary statists"* who *"are dedicated warriors. With consistency and passion that approach caricature, their policies serve the serve the substantial people — in fact, an unusually narrow sector of them — and disregard or harm the underlying population and future generations. They are also seeking to use their current opportunities to institutionalise these arrangements, so that it will be no small task to reconstruct a more humane and democratic society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 238 and p. 236] As we noted in section D.1, the likes of Reagan, Thatcher and Bush do not appear by accident. They and the policies they implement reflect the interests of significant sectors of the ruling elite and their desires. These will not disappear if different, more progressive sounding, politicians are elected. Nor will the nature

market forms, the ability to buy and sell, within the rules designed by and for the property owners. Centralised state power within an overall authoritarian social culture is the best way to achieve this aim.

It should be stressed that the rise of inequality and centralised state power has came about by design, not by accident. Both trends delight the rich and the right, whose aim has always been to exclude the general population from the public sphere, eliminate taxation on wealth and income derived from owning it and roll back the limited reforms the general population have won over the years. In his book **Post-Conservative America** Kevin Phillips, one of the most knowledgeable and serious conservative ideologues, discusses the possibility of fundamental alterations that he regards as desirable in the US government. His proposals leave no doubt about the direction in which the Right wishes to proceed. *"Governmental power is too diffused to make difficult and necessary economic and technical decisions,"* Phillips maintains. *"[A]ccordingly, the nature of that power must be re-thought. Power at the federal level must be augmented, and lodged for the most part in the executive branch."* [p. 218] He assures us that all the changes he envisions can be accomplished without altering the Constitution.

As one moderate British Conservative MP has documented, the "free-market" Conservative Thatcher government of the 1980s increased centralisation of power and led a sustained *"assault on local government."* One key reason was *"dislike of opposition"* which applied to *"intermediate institutions"* between the individual and the state. These *"were despised and disliked because they got in the way of 'free-market forces' ... and were liable to disagree with Thatcherite policies."* Indeed, they simply abolished elected local governments (like the Greater London Council) which were opposed to the policies of the central government. They controlled the rest by removing their power to raise their own funds, which destroyed their local autonomy. The net effect of neo-liberal reforms was that Britain became



invested in other countries) and give it added clout in the economic jungle of the world market. This need has resulted in, for example, *"hundreds of US bases [being] placed all over the world to ensure global domination."* [Chomsky, **Failed States**, p. 11]

The third major reason for militarism is to bolster a state's economy. Capitalist militarism promotes the development of a specially favoured group of companies which includes *"all those engaged in the manufacture and sale of munitions and in military equipment for personal gain and profit."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 354] These armaments companies ("defence" contractors) have a direct interest in the maximum expansion of military production. Since this group is particularly wealthy, it exerts great pressure on government to pursue the type of state intervention and, often, the aggressive foreign policies it wants. As Chomsky noted with respect to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq:

> *"Empires are costly. Running Iraq is not cheap. Somebody's paying. Somebody's paying the corporations that destroyed Iraq and the corporations that are rebuilding it. in both cases, they're getting paid by the U.S. taxpayer. Those are gifts from U.S. taxpayers to U.S. Corporations ... The same tax-payers fund the military-corporate system of weapons manufacturers and technology companies that bombed Iraq ... It's a transfer of wealth from the general population to narrow sectors of the population."* [**Imperial Ambitions**, pp. 56–7]

This "special relationship" between state and Big Business also has the advantage that it allows the ordinary citizen to pay for industrial Research and Development. As Noam Chomsky points out in many of his works, the *"Pentagon System,"* in which the public is forced to subsidise research and develop-

ment of high tech industry through subsidies to defence contractors, is a covert substitute in the US for the overt industrial planning policies of other "advanced" capitalist nations, like Germany and Japan. Government subsidies provide an important way for companies to fund their research and development at taxpayer expense, which often yields "spin-offs" with great commercial potential as consumer products (e.g. computers). Needless to say, all the profits go to the defence contractors and to the commercial companies who buy licences to patented technologies from them, rather than being shared with the public which funded the R&D that made the profits possible. Thus militarism is a key means of securing technological advances within capitalism.

It is necessary to provide some details to indicate the size and impact of military spending on the US economy:

> *"Since 1945... there have been new industries sparking investment and employment .. In most of them, basic research and technological progress were closely linked to the expanding military sector. The major innovation in the 1950s was electronics ... [which] increased its output 15 percent per year. It was of critical importance in workplace automation, with the federal government providing the bulk of the research and development (R&D) dollars for military-orientated purposes. Infrared instrumentation, pressure and temperature measuring equipment, medical electronics, and thermoelectric energy conversion all benefited from military R&D. By the 1960s indirect and direct military demand accounted for as much as 70 percent of the total output of the electronics industry. Feedbacks also developed between electronics and aircraft, the second growth industry of the 1950s. By 1960 ... [i]ts annual investment outlays were 5.3 times larger*



in well with the neo-liberal agenda (and, indeed, this agenda dependent on it). As Chomsky notes, *"democracy reduces to empty form"* when the votes of the general public votes no impact or role in determining economic and social development. In other words, *"neoliberal reforms are antithetical to promotion of democracy. They are not designed to shrink the state, as often asserted, but to strengthen state institutions to serve even more than before the needs of the substantial people."* This has seen *"extensive gerrymandering to prevent competition for seats in the House, the most democratic of government institutions and therefore the most worrisome,"* while congress has been *"geared to implementing the pro-business policies"* and the White House has been reconstructed into top-down systems, in a similar way to that of a corporation (*"In structure, the political counterpart to a corporation is a totalitarian state."*) [**Op. Cit.**, p. 218, p. 237 and p. 238]

The aim is to exclude the general politic from civil society, creating Locke's system of rule by property owners only. As one expert (and critic) on Locke argues in his scheme, the *"labouring class, being without estate, are subject to, but not full members of civil society"* and the *"right to rule (more accurately, the right to control any government) is given to men of estate only."* The working class will be in but not part of civil society in the same way that they are in but not part of a company. The labouring class may do the actual work in a capitalist firm, but they *"cannot take part in the operation of the company at the same level as the owners."* Thus the ideal (classical) "liberal" state is a *"joint-stock company of owners whose majority decision binds not only themselves but also their employees."* [C. B. MacPherson, **The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism**, p. 248, p. 249 and p. 251] The aim of significant sections of the right and the ruling class is to achieve this goal within the context of a nominally democratic state which, on paper, allows significant civil liberties but which, in practice, operates like a corporation. Liberty for the many will be reduced to

Anglo-American jurisprudence: elimination of presumption of innocence, keeping suspects in indefinite imprisonment, ending trial by impartial jury, restricting access to lawyers and knowledge of evidence and charges against the accused. He has regularly stated when signing legislation that he will assert the right to ignore those parts of laws with which he disagrees. His administration has adopted policies which have ignored the Geneva Convention (labelled as *"quaint"*) and publicly tolerated torture of suspects and prisoners of war. That this underlying authoritarianism of politicians is often belied by their words should go without saying (an obvious fact, somehow missed by the mainstream media, which made satire redundant in the case the second Bush).

Not that this centralisation of powers has bothered the representatives whom are being disempowered by it. Quite the reverse. This is unsurprising, for under a leader which *"guarantees 'order' — that is to say internal exploitation and external expansion — than the parliament submits to all his caprices and arms him with ever new powers ... That is understandable: all government has tendency to become personal since that is its origin and its essence ... it will always search for the man on whom it can unload the cares of government and to whom in turn it will submit. As long as we confide to a small group all the economic, political, military, financial and industrial prerogatives with which we arm them today, this small group will necessarily be inclined ... to submit to a single chief."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128] As such, there are institutional forces at work within the government organisational structure which encourage these tendencies and as long as they find favour with business interests they will not be challenged.

This is a key factor, of course. If increased authoritarianism and concentration of decision making were actually harming the interests of the economically dominant elite then more concern would be expressed about them in what passes for public discourse. However, the reduction of democratic processes fits



> *than their 1947–49 level, and over 90 percent of its output went to the military. Synthetics (plastics and fibres) was another growth industry owning much of its development to military-related projects. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, military-related R&D, including space, accounted for 40 to 50 percent of total public and private R&D spending and at least 85% of federal government share."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, pp. 103–4]

As another economist notes, it is *"important to recognise that the role of the US federal government in industrial development has been substantial even in the post-war period, thanks to the large amount of defence-related procurements and R&D spending, which have had enormous spillover effects. The share of the US federal government in total R&D speanding, which was only 16 per cent in 1930, remained between one-half and two-thirds during the postwar years. Industries such as computers, aerospace and the internet, where the USA still maintains an international edge despite the decline in its overall technological leadership, would not have existed without defence-related R&D funding by the country's federal government."* Moreover, the state also plays a *"crucial role"* in supporting R&D in the pharmaceutical industry. [Ha-Joon Chang, **Kicking Away the Ladder**, p. 31]

Not only this, government spending on road building (initially justified using defence concerns) also gave a massive boost to private capital (and, in the process, totally transformed America into a land fit for car and oil corporations). The cumulative impact of the 1944, 1956 and 1968 Federal Highway Acts *"allowed $70 billion to be spent on the interstates without [the money] passing through the congressional appropriations board."* The 1956 Act *"[i]n effect wrote into law the 1932 National Highway Users Conference strategy of G[eneral] M[otors] chairman Alfred P. Sloan to channel gasoline and other*

*motor vehicle-related excise taxes into highway construction."* GM also bought-up and effectively destroyed public transit companies across America, so reducing competition against private car ownership. The net effect of this state intervention was that by 1963–66 *"one in every six business enterprise was directly dependent on the manufacture, distribution, servicing, and the use of motor vehicles."* The impact of this process is still evident today — both in terms of ecological destruction and in the fact that automobile and oil companies are still dominate the top twenty of the Fortune 500. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

This system, which can be called military Keynesianism, has three advantages over socially-based state intervention. Firstly, unlike social programmes, military intervention does not improve the situation (and thus, hopes) of the majority, who can continue to be marginalised by the system, suffer the discipline of the labour market and feel the threat of unemployment. Secondly, it acts likes welfare for the rich, ensuring that while the many are subject to market forces, the few can escape that fate — while singing the praises of the "free market". And, thirdly, it does not compete with private capital — in fact, it supplements it.

Because of the connection between militarism and imperialism, it was natural after World War II that America should become the world's leading military state at the same time that it was becoming the world's leading economic power, and that strong ties developed between government, business, and the armed forces. American "military capitalism" is described in detail below, but the remarks also apply to a number of other "advanced" capitalist states.

In his farewell address, President Eisenhower warned of the danger posed to individual liberties and democratic processes by the *"military-industrial complex,"* which might, he cautioned, seek to keep the economy in a state of continual war-readiness simply because it is good business. This echoed the warning which had been made earlier by sociologist C. Wright



episode the National Security Council, an arm of the executive branch, secretly funded the Contras, a mercenary counter-revolutionary force in Central America, in direct violation of the Boland Amendment which Congress had passed for the specific purpose of prohibiting such funding. Then there is the weakening of government agencies to the point where they can no longer effectively carry out their mandate. Reagan's tenure in the White House again provides a number of examples. The Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, was for all practical purposes neutralised when employees dedicated to genuine environmental protection were removed and replaced with people loyal to corporate polluters. Such detours around the law are deliberate policy tools that allow presidents to exercise much more actual power than they appear to have on paper. Finally, the President's authority to determine foreign and domestic policy through National Security Directives that are kept secret from Congress and the American people. Such NSDs cover a virtually unlimited field of actions, shaping policy that may be radically different from what is stated publicly by the White House and involving such matters as interference with First Amendment rights, initiation of activities that could lead to war, escalation of military conflicts, and even the commitment of billions of dollars in loan guarantees — all without congressional approval or even knowledge.

President Clinton's use of an Executive Order to bail out Mexico from its debt crisis after Congress failed to appropriate the money falls right into the authoritarian tradition of running the country by fiat, a process which accelerated with his successor George Bush (in keeping with the general tendencies of Republican administrations in particular). The second Bush took this disdain for democracy and the law even further. His administration has tried to roll back numerous basic liberties and rights as well. He has sought to strip people accused of crimes of rights that date as far back as the Magna Carta in

was made the primary instrument of US intervention in the internal affairs of other nations for national security reasons. This process of executive control over war reached a peak post-911, with Bush's nonsense of a *"pre-emptive"* war and public acknowledgement of a long standing US policy that the Commander-in-Chief was authorised to take "defensive" war measures without congressional approval or UN authorisation.

And as they have continued to commit troops to war without congressional authorisation or genuine public debate, the President's unilateral policy-making has spilled over into domestic affairs as well. Most obviously, thanks to Bush I and Clinton, important economic treaties (like GATT and NAFTA) can be rammed through Congress as *"fast-track"* legislation, which limits the time allowed for debate and forbids amendments. Thanks to Jimmy Carter, who reformed the Senior Executive Service to give the White House more control over career bureaucrats, and Ronald Reagan, who politicised the upper levels of the executive branch to an unprecedented degree, presidents can now pack government with their spoilsmen and reward partisan bureaucrats (the lack of response by FEMA during the Katrina hurricane is an example of this). Thanks to the first Bush, presidents now have a powerful new technique to enhance presidential prerogatives and erode the intent of Congress even further — namely, signing laws while announcing that they will not obey them. Fifth, thanks also to Bush, yet another new instrument of arbitrary presidential power has been created: the "tsar," a presidential appointee with vague, sweeping charges that overlap with or supersede the powers of department heads. [Michael Lind, *"The Case for Congressional Power: the Out-of-Control Presidency,"* **The New Republic**, Aug. 14, 1995]

Thus we find administrations bypassing or weakening official government agencies or institutions to implement policies that are not officially permitted. In the US, the Reagan Administration's Iran-Contra affair is an example. During that



Mills (in **The Power Elite**), who pointed out that since the end of World War II the military had become enlarged and decisive to the shape of the entire American economy, and that US capitalism had in fact become a military capitalism. This situation has not substantially changed since Mills wrote, for it is still the case that all US military officers have grown up in the atmosphere of the post-war military-industrial alliance and have been explicitly educated and trained to carry it on. Moreover, many powerful corporations have a vested interest in maintaining this system and will be funding and lobbying politicians and their parties to ensure its continuance.

That this interrelationship between corporate power and the state expressed by militarism is a key aspect of capitalism can be seen from the way it survived the end of the Cold War, the expressed rationale for this system:

> *"With the Cold war no longer available, it was necessary to reframe pretexts not only for [foreign] intervention but also for militarised state capitalism at home. The Pentagon budget presented to Congress a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall remained largely unchanged, but was packaged in a new rhetorical framework, presented in the National Security Strategy of March 1990. Once priority was to support advanced industry in traditional ways, in sharp violation of the free market doctrines proclaimed and imposed on others. The National Security Strategy called for strengthening 'the defence industrial base' (essentially, high-tech industry) with incentives 'to invest in new facilities and equipment as well as in research and development.' As in the past, the costs and risks of the coming phases of the industrial economy were to be socialised, with eventual profits privatised, a form of state socialism for the rich on which much of the advanced US econ-*

*omy relies, particularly since World War II."* [**Failed States**, p. 126]

This means that US defence businesses, which are among the biggest lobbyists, cannot afford to lose this "corporate welfare." Unsurprisingly, they did not. So while many politicians asserted a "peace dividend" was at hand when the Soviet Bloc collapsed, this has not came to pass. Although it is true that some fat was trimmed from the defence budget in the early 1990s, both economic and political pressures have tended to keep the basic military-industrial complex intact, insuring a state of global war-readiness and continuing production of ever more advanced weapons systems into the foreseeable future. Various excuses were used to justify continued militarism, none of them particularly convincing due to the nature of the threat.

The first Gulf War was useful, but the quick defeat of Saddam showed how little a threat he actually was. The Iraq invasion of 2003 proved that his regime, while temporarily helpful to the Pentagon, was not enough of a menace to warrant the robust defence budgets of yore now given that his military machine had been smashed. This did not, of course, stop the Bush Administration spinning the threat and lying to the world about (non-existent) Iraqi "Weapons of Mass Destruction" (this is unsurprising, though, given how the Soviet military machine had also been hyped and its threat exaggerated to justify military spending). Other "threats" to the world's sole super-power such as Cuba, Iran, Libya and North Korea are equally unconvincing to any one with a firm grasp of reality. Luckily for the US state, a new enemy appeared in the shape of Islamic Terrorism.

The terrorist atrocity of 9/11 was quickly used to justify expanding US militarism (and expanding the power of the state and reducing civil liberties). In its wake, various government bureaucracies and corporations could present their wish-lists



controlled authority in the form of an empowered executive against which, ironically, it had fought against at its birth.

This process can be seen clearly in the history of the United States. Since World War II, power has become centralised in the hands of the president to such an extent that some scholars now refer to an *"imperial presidency,"* following Arthur Schlesinger's 1973 book of that title. In the UK, Prime Minister Tony Blair has been repeatedly criticised for his *"presidential"* form of government, while Parliament has been repeatedly side-tracked. This builds on tendencies which flow back to, at least, the Thatcher government which started the neo-liberal transformation of the UK with its associated rise in inequality, social polarisation and increases in state centralisation and authority.

Contemporary US presidents' appropriation of congressional authority, especially in matters relating to national security, has paralleled the rise of the United States as the world's strongest and most imperialistic military power. In the increasingly dangerous and interdependent world of the 20th century, the perceived need for a leader who can act quickly and decisively, without possibly disastrous obstruction by Congress, has provided an impetus for ever greater concentration of power in the White House. This concentration has taken place in both foreign and domestic policy, but it has been catalysed above all by a series of foreign policy decisions in which modern US presidents have seized the most vital of all government powers, the power to make war. For example, President Truman decided to commit troops in Korea without prior congressional approval while the Eisenhower Administration established a system of pacts and treaties with nations all over the globe, making it difficult for Congress to limit the President's deployment of troops according to the requirements of treaty obligations and national security, both of which were left to presidential judgement. The CIA, a secretive agency accountable to Congress only after the fact,

to the politicians and expect them to be passed without real comment all under the guise of "the war on terror." As this threat is so vague and so widespread, it is ideal to justify continuing militarism as well as imperial adventures across the global (any state can be attacked simply be declaring it is harbouring terrorists). It can also be used to justify attacks on existing enemies, such as Iraq and the other countries in the so-called "axis of evil" and related states. As such, it was not surprising to hear about the possible Iranian nuclear threat and about the dangers of Iranian influence even while the US military was bogged down in the quagmire of Iraq.

While the Bush Administration's doctrine of *"pre-emptive war"* (i.e. aggression) may have, as Chomsky noted, *"broken little new ground"* and have been standard (but unspoken) US policy from its birth, its does show how militarism will be justified for some time to come. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85] It (and the threat of terrorism which is used to justify it) provides the Pentagon with more arguments for continued high levels of defence spending and military intervention. In a nutshell, then, the trend toward increasing militarism is not likely to be checked as the Pentagon has found a sufficiently dangerous and demonic enemy to justify continued military spending in the style to which it's accustomed.

Thus the demands of US military capitalism still take priority over the needs of the people. For example, Holly Sklar points out that Washington, Detroit, and Philadelphia have higher infant death rates than Jamaica or Costa Rica and that Black America as a whole has a higher infant mortality rate than Nigeria; yet the US still spends less public funds on education than on the military, and more on military bands than on the National Endowment for the Arts. [*"Brave New World Order,"* Cynthia Peters (ed.), **Collateral Damage**, pp. 3–46] But of course, politicians continue to maintain that education and social services must be cut back even further



# D.9 Why does political power become concentrated under capitalism?

Under capitalism, political power tends to become concentrated in the executive branch of government, along with a corresponding decline in the effectiveness of parliamentary institutions. As Kropotkin discussed in his account of *"Representative Government,"* parliaments grew out of the struggle of capitalists against the power of centralised monarchies during the early modern period. This meant that the function of parliaments was to check and control the exercise of executive power when it was controlled by another class (namely the aristocracy and landlords). The role of Parliaments flourished and reached the peak of their prestige in the struggle against the monarchy and immediately afterwards.

With the end of absolute monarchy, legislatures become battlegrounds of contending parties, divided by divergent class and group interests. This reduces their capacity for positive action, particularly when struggle outside parliament is pressurising representatives to take some interest in public concerns. The ruling class also needs a strong centralised state that can protect its interests internally and externally and which can ignore both popular demands and the vested interests of specific sections of the dominant economic and social elites in order to pursue policies required to keep the system as a whole going. This means that there will be a tendency for Parliaments to give up its prerogatives, building up a centralised and un-

because there is "no money" to fund them. As Chomsky so rightly says:

> *"It is sometimes argued that concealing development of high-tech industry under the cover of 'defence' has been a valuable contribution to society. Those who do not share that contempt for democracy might ask what decisions the population would have made if they had been informed of the real options and allowed to choose among them. Perhaps they might have preferred more social spending for health, education, decent housing, a sustainable environment for future generations, and support for the United Nations, international law, and diplomacy, as polls regularly show. We can only guess, since fear of democracy barred the option of allowing the public into the political arena, or even informing them about what was being done in their name."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 127]

Finally, as well as skewing resource allocation and wealth away from the general public, militarism also harms freedom and increases the threat of war. The later is obvious, as militarism cannot help but feed an arms race as countries hurry to increase their military might in response to the developments of others. While this may be good for profits for the few, the general population have to hope that the outcome of such rivalries do not lead to war. As Goldman noted about the First World War, can be, in part, *"traced to the cut-throat competition for military equipment ... Armies equipped to the teeth with weapons, with highly developed instruments of murder backed by their military interests, have their own dynamic functions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 353]

As to freedom, as an institution the military is based on the *"unquestioning obedience and loyalty to the government."* (to



quote, as Goldman did, one US General). The ideal soldier, as Goldman puts it, is *"a cold-blooded, mechanical, obedient tool of his military superiors"* and this position cannot be harmonised with individual liberty. Indeed, *"[c]an there be anything more destructive of the true genius of liberty than ... the spirit of unquestioning obedience?"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 52–4] As militarism becomes bigger, this spirit of obedience widens and becomes more dominant in the community. It comes to the fore during periods of war or in the run up to war, when protest and dissent are equated to treason by those in power and their supporters. The war hysteria and corresponding repression and authoritarianism which repeatedly sweeps so-called "free" nations shows that militarism has a wider impact than just economic development and wasted resources. As Bakunin noted, *"where military force prevails, there freedom has to take its leave — especially the freedom and well-being of the working people."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 221–2]

*such social responsibility, would supplant anyone so misguided as to be concerned with something other than private benefit."* This explains why real capitalist systems have always *"been required to safeguard social existence in the face of the destructive forces of private capitalism"* by means of *"substantial state control."* However, the *"central questions ... are not addressed, but rather begged"* when discussing corporate social responsibility. [**Language and Politics**, p. 275]

Ultimately, the key problem with liberal environmentalism (as with liberalism in general) is that it tends, by definition, to ignore class and hierarchy. The "we are all in this together" kind of message ignores that most of decisions that got us into our current ecological and social mess were made by the rich as they have control over resources and power structures (both private and public). It also suggests that getting us out of the mess must involve taking power and wealth back from the elite — if for no other reason because working class people do not, by themselves, have the resources to solve the problem.

Moreover, the fact is the ruling class do **not** inhabit quite the same polluted planet as everyone else. Their wealth protects them, to a large degree, to the problems that they themselves have created and which, in fact, they owe so much of that wealth to (little wonder, then, they deny there is a serious problem). They have access to a better quality of life, food and local environment (no toxic dumps and motorways are near their homes or holiday retreats). Of course, this is a short term protection but the fate of the planet is a long-term abstraction when compared to the immediate returns on one's investments. So it is not true to say that **all** parts of the ruling class are in denial about the ecological problems. A few are aware but many more show utter hatred towards those who think the planet is more important than profits.

This means that such key environmentalist activities such as education and lobbying are unlikely to have much effect. While these may produce **some** improvements in terms of our



Modern industry is set up to ensure that workers do not become "masters" of their work but instead follow the orders of management. The evolution of technology lies in the relations of power within a society. This is because *"the viability of a design is not simply a technical or even economic evaluation but rather a political one. A technology is deemed viable if it conforms to the existing relations of power."* [David Noble, **Progress without People**, p. 63]

This process of controlling, restricting, and de-individualising labour is a key feature of capitalism. Work that is skilled and controlled by workers is empowering to them in two ways. Firstly it gives them pride in their work and themselves. Secondly, it makes it harder to replace them or suck profits out of them. Therefore, in order to remove the "subjective" factor (i.e. individuality and worker control) from the work process, capital needs methods of controlling the workforce to prevent workers from asserting their individuality, thus preventing them from arranging their own lives and work and resisting the authority of the bosses. This need to control workers can be seen from the type of machinery introduced during the Industrial Revolution. According to Andrew Ure (author of **Philosophy of Manufactures**), a consultant for the factory owners at the time:

> *"In the factories for spinning coarse yarn ... the mule-spinners [skilled workers] have abused their powers beyond endurance, domineering in the most arrogant manner ... over their masters. High wages, instead of leading to thankfulness of temper and improvement of mind, have, in too many cases, cherished pride and supplied funds for supporting refractory spirits in strikes ... During a disastrous turmoil of [this] kind ... several of the capitalists ... had recourse to the celebrated machinists ... of Manchester ... [to construct] a self-acting mule ...*

> *This invention confirms the great doctrine already propounded, that when capital enlists science in her service, the refractory hand of labour will always be taught docility.*" [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 125]

Proudhon quotes an English Manufacturer who argues the same point:

> *"The insubordination of our workmen has given us the idea of dispensing with them. We have made and stimulated every imaginable effort to replace the service of men by tools more docile, and we have achieved our object. Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 189]

It is important to stress that technological innovation was not driven by reasons of economic efficiency as such but rather to break the power of workers at the point of production. Once that was done, initially uneconomic investments could become economically viable. As David Noble summarises, during the Industrial Revolution *"Capital invested in machines that would reinforce the system of domination [in the workplace], and this decision to invest, which might in the long run render the chosen technique economical, was not itself an economical decision but a political one, with cultural sanction.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 6]

Needless to say, this use of technology within the class war continued. A similar process was at work in the US, where the rise in trade unionism resulted in *"industrial managers bec[oming] even more insistent that skill and initiative not be left on the shop floor, and that, by the same token, shop floor workers not have control over the reproduction of relevant skills through craft-regulated apprenticeship training. Fearful that skilled shop-floor workers would use their scare resources to*



*'resources' for human production and consumption.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 15–6]

This is the key. As environmentalism does not bring into question the underlying notion of the present society that man must dominate nature it cannot present anything other than short-term solutions for the various symptoms of the underlying problem. Moreover, as it does not question hierarchy, it simply adjusts itself to the status quo. Thus liberal environmentalism is so *"hopelessly ineffectual"* because *"it takes the present social order for granted"* and is mired in *"the paralysing belief that a market society, privately owned property, and the present-day bureaucratic nation-state cannot be changed in any basic sense. Thus, it is the prevailing order that sets the terms of any 'compromise' or 'trade-off'"* and so *"the natural world, including oppressed people, always loses something piece by piece, until everything is lost in the end. As long as liberal environmentalism is structured around the social status quo, property rights always prevail over public rights and power always prevails over powerlessness. Be it a forest, wetlands, or good agricultural soil, a 'developer' who owns any of these 'resources' usually sets the terms on which every negotiation occurs and ultimately succeeds in achieving the triumph of wealth over ecological considerations.*" [Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, p. 15]

This means that a truly ecological perspective seeks to end the situation where a few govern the many, not to make the few nicer. As Chomsky once noted on the issue of *"corporate social responsibility"*, he could not discuss the issue as such because he did *"not accept some of its presuppositions, specifically with regard to the legitimacy of corporate power"* as he did not see any *"justification for concentration of private power"* than *"in the political domain."* Both would *"act in a socially responsible way — as benevolent despots — when social strife, disorder, protest, etc., induce them to do so for their own benefit."* He stressed that in a capitalist society *"socially responsible behaviour would be penalised quickly in that competitors, lacking*

> *… Within this context, very little of a social nature is spared from the environmentalist's vocabulary: cities become 'urban resources' and their inhabitants 'human resources' … Environmentalism … tends to view the ecological project for attaining a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature as a truce rather than a lasting equilibrium. The 'harmony' of the environmentalist centres around the development of new techniques for plundering the natural world with minimal disruption of the human 'habitat.' Environmentalism does not question the most basic premise of the present society, notably, that humanity must dominant nature; rather, it seeks to* ***facilitate*** *than notion by developing techniques for diminishing the hazards caused by the reckless despoliation of the environment."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 86]

So eco-anarchists call the position of those who seek to reform capitalism and make it more green "environmentalism" rather than ecology. The reasons are obvious, as environmentalists *"focus on specific issues like air and water pollution"* while ignoring the social roots of the problems they are trying to solve. In other words, their outlook *"rest[s] on an instrumental, almost engineering approach to solving ecological dislocations. To all appearances, they wanted to adapt the natural world to the needs of the existing society and its exploitative, capitalist imperatives by way of reforms that minimise harm to human health and well-being. The much-needed goals of formulating a project for radical social change and for cultivating a new sensibility toward the natural world tended to fall outside the orbit of their practical concerns."* Eco-anarchists, while supporting such partial structures, stress that *"these problems originate in a hierarchical, class, and today, competitive capitalist system that nourishes a view of the natural world as a mere agglomeration of*



*reduce their effort and increase their pay, management deemed that knowledge of the shop-floor process must reside with the managerial structure."* [William Lazonick, **Organisation and Technology in Capitalist Development**, p. 273]

American managers happily embraced Taylorism (aka "scientific management"), according to which the task of the manager was to gather into his possession all available knowledge about the work he oversaw and reorganise it. Taylor himself considered the task for workers was *"to do what they are told to do promptly and without asking questions or making suggestions."* [quoted by David Noble, **American By Design**, p. 268] Taylor also relied exclusively upon incentive-pay schemes which mechanically linked pay to productivity and had no appreciation of the subtleties of psychology or sociology (which would have told him that enjoyment of work and creativity is more important for people than just higher pay). Unsurprisingly, workers responded to his schemes by insubordination, sabotage and strikes and it was *"discovered … that the 'time and motion' experts frequently knew very little about the proper work activities under their supervision, that often they simply guessed at the optimum rates for given operations … it meant that the arbitrary authority of management has simply been reintroduced in a less apparent form."* [David Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 272] Although, now, the power of management could hide begin the "objectivity" of "science."

Katherine Stone also argues that the *"transfer of skill [from the worker to management] was not a response to the necessities of production, but was, rather, a strategy to rob workers of their power"* by *"tak[ing] knowledge and authority from the skilled workers and creating a management cadre able to direct production."* Stone highlights that this deskilling process was combined by a *"divide and rule"* policy by management based on wage incentives and new promotion policies. This created a reward system in which workers who played by the rules would receive concrete gains in terms of income and status. Over time,

such a structure would become to be seen as *"the natural way to organise work and one which offered them personal advancement"* even though, *"when the system was set up, it was neither obvious nor rational. The job ladders were created just when the skill requirements for jobs in the industry were diminishing as a result of the new technology, and jobs were becoming more and more equal as to the learning time and responsibility involved."* The modern structure of the capitalist workplace was created to break workers resistance to capitalist authority and was deliberately *"aimed at altering workers' ways of thinking and feeling — which they did by making workers' individual 'objective' self-interests congruent with that of the employers and in conflict with workers' collective self-interest."* It was a means of *"labour discipline"* and of *"motivating workers to work for the employers' gain and preventing workers from uniting to take back control of production."* Stone notes that the *"development of the new labour system in the steel industry was repeated throughout the economy in different industries. As in the steel industry, the core of these new labour systems were the creation of artificial job hierarchies and the transfer of skills from workers to the managers."* [*"The Origins of Job Structure in the Steel Industry,"* pp. 123–157, Root & Branch (ed.), **Root and Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements**, p. 155, p. 153, p. 152 and pp. 153–4]

This process of deskilling workers was complemented by other factors — state protected markets (in the form of tariffs and government orders — the *"lead in technological innovation came in armaments where assured government orders justified high fixed-cost investments"*); the use of *"both political and economic power [by American Capitalists] to eradicate and diffuse workers' attempts to assert shop-floor control"*; and *"repression, instigated and financed both privately and publicly, to eliminate radical elements [and often not-so-radical elements as well, we must note] in the American labour movement."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 218 and p. 303] Thus state action played a key role in destroying craft con-



> *and the like could be directed to the construction of small-scale solar and wind energy devices, efficient means of transportation, and energy-saving shelters."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83]

We must understand that *"the very **idea** of dominating first nature has its origins in the domination of human by human"* otherwise *"we will lose what little understanding we have of the social origin of our most serious ecological problems."* It this happens then we cannot solve these problems, as it *"will grossly distort humanity's potentialities to play a creative role in non-human as well as human development."* For *"the human capacity to reason conceptually, to fashion tools and devise extraordinary technologies"* can all *"be used for the good of the biosphere, not simply for harming it. What is of **pivotal** importance in determining whether human beings will creatively foster the evolution of first nature or whether they will be highly destructive to non-human and human beings alike is precisely the kind of **society** we establish, not only the kind of sensibility we develop."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34]

## E.1.2 What is the difference between environmentalism and ecology?

As we noted in section A.3.3, eco-anarchists contrast ecology with environmentalism. The difference is important as it suggests both a different analysis of where our ecological problems come from and the best way to solve them. As Bookchin put it:

> *"By 'environmentalism' I propose to designate a mechanistic, instrumental outlook that sees nature as a passive habitat composed of 'objects' such as animals, plants, minerals, and the like that must merely be rendered more serviceable for human use*

*gant sneer on the faces of the elites who administer it ... Unfortunately, a preoccupation with technical size, scale, and even artistry deflects our attention away from the most significant problems of technics — notably, its ties with the ideals and social structures of freedom."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 325–6]

In other words, "small-scale" technology will not transform an authoritarian society into an ecological one. Nor will applying ecologically friendly technology to capitalism reduce its drive to grow at the expense of the planet and the people who inhabit it. This means that technology is an aspect of a wider society rather than a socially neutral instrument which will **always** have the same (usually negative) results. As Bookchin stressed, a *"liberatory technology presupposes liberatory institutions; a liberatory sensibility requires a liberatory society. By the same token, artistic crafts are difficult to conceive without an artistically crafted society, and the 'inversion of tools' is impossible with a radical inversion of all social and productive relationships."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 328–9]

Finally, it should be stressed that attempts to blame technology or industry for our ecological problems have another negative effect than just obscuring the real causes of those problems and turning attention away from the elites who implement specific forms of technology to further their aims. It also means denying that technology can be transformed and new forms created which can help produce an ecologically balanced society:

*"The knowledge and physical instruments for promoting a harmonisation of humanity with nature and of human with human are largely at hand or could easily be devised. Many of the physical principles used to construct such patently harmful facilities as conventional power plants, energy-consuming vehicles, surface-mining equipment*



trol within industry, along with the large financial resources of capitalists compared to workers. Bringing this sorry story up to date, we find *"many, if not most, American managers are reluctant to develop skills [and initiative] on the shop floor for the fear of losing control of the flow of work."* [William Lazonick, **Organisation and Technology in Capitalist Development**, pp. 279–280] Nor should we forget that many technologies are the product of state aid. For example, in the case of automation *"the state, especially the military, has played a central role. Not only has it subsidised extravagant developments that the market could not or refused to bear but it absorbed excessive costs and thereby kept afloat those competitors who would otherwise have sunk."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83]

Given that there is a division of knowledge in society (and, obviously, in the workplace as well) this means that capitalism has selected to introduce a management and technology mix which leads to inefficiency and waste of valuable knowledge, experience and skills. Thus the capitalist workplace is both produced by and is a weapon in the class struggle and reflects the shifting power relations between workers and employers. The creation of artificial job hierarchies, the transfer of skills away from workers to managers and technological development are all products of class struggle. Thus technological progress and workplace organisation within capitalism have little to do with "efficiency" and far more to do with profits and power. *"Capitalism does not utilise a socially nature technology for capitalist ends,"* Cornelius Castoriadis correctly argued. It has *"created a capitalist technology, which is by no means neutral. The real intention of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: It is to subordinate and dominate the producers"* and *"to eliminate the human element in productive labour."* This means that capitalist technologies will evolve, that there is *"a process of 'natural selection,' affecting technical inventions as they are applied to industry. Some are preferred to others"* and will be *"the ones that fit in with capitalism's basic need*

*to deal with labour power as a measurable, supervisable, and interchangeable commodity.*" Thus technology will be selected "*within the framework of its own class rationality.*" [**Social and Political Writings**, vol. 2, p. 104]

This means that while self-management has consistently proven to be more efficient (and empowering) than hierarchical management structures, capitalism actively selects **against** it. This is because capitalism is motivated purely by increasing the power and profits for the bosses, and both are best done by disempowering workers and empowering bosses (i.e. the maximisation of power) — even though this concentration of power harms efficiency by distorting and restricting information flow and the gathering and use of widely distributed knowledge within the firm (as in any command economy) as well as having a serious impact on the wider economy and social efficiency. Thus the last refuge of the capitalist or technophile (namely that the productivity gains of technology outweigh the human costs or the means used to achieve them) is doubly flawed. Firstly, disempowering technology may maximise profits, but it need not increase efficient utilisation of resources or workers' time, skills or potential. Secondly, "*when investment does in fact generate innovation, does such innovation yield greater productivity? ... After conducting a poll of industry executives on trends in automation,* ***Business Week*** *concluded in 1982 that 'there is a heavy backing for capital investment in a variety of labour-saving technologies that are designed to fatten profits without necessary adding to productive output.'*" David Noble concludes that "*whenever managers are able to use automation to 'fatten profits' and enhance their authority (by eliminating jobs and extorting concessions and obedience from the workers who remain) without at the same time increasing social product, they appear more than ready to do.*" [David Noble, **Progress Without People**, pp. 86–87 and p. 89] As we argue in greater detail later, in section J.5.12, efficiency and profit maximisation are two different things, with such deskilling and management control



and regulations plus the lack of opposition. It can also be seen from the gutting of environmental laws and regulation in the west in order to gain competitive advantages. Unsurprisingly, laws to restrict protest have been increasingly passed in many countries as they have embraced the neo-liberal agenda with the Thatcher regime in the UK and its successors trail-blazing this process. The centralisation of power which accompanies such neo-liberal experiments reduces social pressures on the state and ensures that business interests take precedence.

As we argued in section D.10, the way that technology is used and evolves will reflect the power relations within society. Given a hierarchical society, we would expect a given technology to be used in repressive ways regardless of the nature of that technology itself. Bookchin points to the difference between the Iroquois and the Inca. Both societies used the same forms of technology, but the former was a fairly democratic and egalitarian federation while the latter was a highly despotic empire. As such, technology "*does not fully or even adequately account for the institutional differences*" between societies. [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 331] This means that technology does not explain the causes for ecological harm and it is possible to have an anti-ecological system based on small-scale technologies:

> "*Some of the most dehumanising and centralised social systems were fashioned out of very 'small' technologies; but bureaucracies, monarchies, and military forces turned these systems into brutalising cudgels to subdue humankind and, later, to try to subdue nature. To be sure, a large-scale technics will foster the development of an oppressively large-scale society; but every warped society follows the dialectic of its own pathology of domination, irrespective of the scale of its technics. It can organise the 'small' into the repellent as surely as it can imprint an arro-*

(the environment) as they had for "second nature" (humanity) and dominated, oppressed and exploited both (just as private capitalism does).

As Bookchin emphasised the ecological crisis stems not only from private property but from the principle of domination itself — a principle embodied in institutional hierarchies and relations of command and obedience which pervade society at many different levels. Thus, *"[w]ithout changing the most molecular relationships in society — notably, those between men and women, adults and children, whites and other ethnic groups, heterosexuals and gays (the list, in fact, is considerable) — society will be riddled by domination even in a socialistic 'classless' and 'non-exploitative' form. It would be infused by hierarchy even as it celebrated the dubious virtues of 'people's democracies,' 'socialism' and the 'public ownership' of 'natural resources,' And as long as hierarchy persists, as long as domination organises humanity around a system of elites, the project of dominating nature will continue to exist and inevitably lead our planet to ecological extinction."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 76]

Given this, the real reasons for why the environmental record of Stalinist regimes were worse that private capitalism can easily be found. Firstly, any opposition was more easily silenced by the police state and so the ruling bureaucrats had far more lee-way to pollute than in most western countries. In other words, a sound environment requires freedom, the freedom of people to participate and protest. Secondly, such dictatorships can implement centralised, top-down planning which renders their ecological impact more systematic and widespread (James C. Scott explores this at great length in his excellent book **Seeing like a State**).

Fundamentally, though, there is no real difference between private and state capitalism. That this is the case can be seen from the willingness of capitalist firms to invest in, say, China in order to take advantage of their weaker environmental laws



actually **reducing** efficiency — compared to workers' control — but as it allows managers to maximise profits the capitalist market selects it.

Of course the claim is that higher wages follow increased investment and technological innovation ("in the long run" — although usually "the long run" has to be helped to arrive by workers' struggle and protest!). Passing aside the question of whether slightly increased consumption really makes up for dehumanising and uncreative work, we must note that it is usually the capitalist who **really** benefits from technological change in money terms. For example, between 1920 and 1927 (a period when unemployment caused by technology became commonplace) the automobile industry (which was at the forefront of technological change) saw wages rise by 23.7%. Thus, claim supporters of capitalism, technology is in all our interests. However, capital surpluses rose by 192.9% during the same period — 8 times faster! Little wonder wages rose! Similarly, over the last 20 years the USA and many other countries have seen companies "down-sizing" and "right-sizing" their workforce and introducing new technologies. The result? Simply put, the 1970s saw the start of *"no-wage growth expansions."* Before the early 1970s, *"real wage growth tracked the growth of productivity and production in the economy overall. After …, they ceased to do so… Real wage growth fell sharply below measured productivity growth."* [James K. Galbraith, **Created Unequal**, p. 79] So while real wages have stagnated, profits have been increasing as productivity rises and the rich have been getting richer — technology yet again showing whose side it is on.

Overall, as David Noble notes (with regards to manufacturing in the early 1990s):

> *"U.S. Manufacturing industry over the last thirty years … [has seen] the value of capital stock (machinery) relative to labour double, reflecting the trend towards mechanisation and automation. As*

> *a consequence … the absolute output person hour increased 115%, more than double. But during this same period, real earnings for hourly workers … rose only 84%, less than double. Thus, after three decades of automation-based progress, workers are now earning less relative to their output than before. That is, they are producing more for less; working more for their boss and less for themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 92–3]

Noble continues:

> *"For if the impact of automation on workers has not been ambiguous, neither has the impact on management and those it serves — labour's loss has been their gain. During the same first thirty years of our age of automation, corporate after tax profits have increased 450%, more than five times the increase in real earnings for workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 95]

But why? Because labour has the ability to produce a flexible amount of output (use value) for a given wage. Unlike coal or steel, a worker can be made to work more intensely during a given working period and so technology can be utilised to maximise that effort as well as increasing the pool of potential replacements for an employee by deskilling their work (so reducing workers' power to get higher wages for their work). Thus technology is a key way of increasing the power of the boss, which in turn can increase output per worker while ensuring that the workers' receive relatively less of that output back in terms of wages — *"Machines,"* argued Proudhon, *"promised us an increase of wealth they have kept their word, but at the same time endowing us with an increase of poverty. They promised us liberty … [but] have brought us slavery."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 199]

But do not get us wrong, technological progress does not imply that we are victims. Far from it, much innovation is the



Claiming that "industrialism" rather than "capitalism" is the cause of our ecological problems allowed greens to point to both the west and the so-called "socialist" countries and draw out what was common to both (i.e. terrible environmental records and a growth mentality). In addition, it allowed green parties and thinkers to portray themselves as being "above" the "old" conflicts between socialism and capitalism (hence the slogan *"Neither Right nor Left, but in front"*). Yet this position rarely convinced anyone as any serious green thinker soon notes that the social roots of our environmental problems need to be addressed and that brings green ideas into conflict with the status quo (it is no coincidence that many on the right dismiss green issues as nothing more than a form of socialism or, in America, "liberalism"). However, by refusing to clearly indicate opposition to capitalism this position allowed many reactionary ideas (and people!) to be smuggled into the green movement (the population myth being a prime example). As for "industrialism" exposing the similarities between capitalism and Stalinism, it would have been far better to do as anarchists had done since 1918 and call the USSR and related regimes what they actually were, namely "state capitalism."

Some greens (like many defenders of capitalism) point to the terrible ecological legacy of the Stalinist countries of Eastern Europe and elsewhere. For supporters of capitalism, this was due to the lack of private property in these systems while, for greens, it showed that environmental concerns where above both capitalism and "socialism." Needless to say, by "capitalism" anarchists mean both private and state forms of that system. As we argued in section B.3.5, under Stalinism the state bureaucracy controlled and so effectively owned the means of production. As under private capitalism, an elite monopolised decision making and aimed to maximise their income by oppressing and exploiting the working class. Unsurprisingly, they had as little consideration "first nature"

In summary, the root cause of our ecological problems likes in hierarchy within humanity, particularly in the form of the state and capitalism. Capitalism is a "grow-or-die" system which cannot help destroy the environment while the state is a centralised system which destroys the freedom and participation required to interact with eco-systems. Based on this analysis, anarchists reject the notion that all we need do is get the state to regulate the economy as the state is part of the problem as well as being an instrument of minority rule. Instead, we aim to create an ecological society and end capitalism, the state and other forms of hierarchy. This is done by encouraging social movements which fight for improvements in the short term by means direct action, solidarity and the creation of popular libertarian organisations.

## E.1.1 Is industry the cause of environmental problems?

Some environmentalists argue that the root cause of our ecological crisis lies in industry and technology. This leads them to stress that "industrialism" is the problem and that needs to be eliminated. An extreme example of this is primitivism (see section A.3.9), although it does appear in the works of "deep ecologists" and liberal greens. However, most anarchists are unconvinced and agree with Bookchin when he noted that "cries against 'technology' and 'industrial society' [are] two very safe, socially natural targets against which even the bourgeoisie can inveigh in Earth Day celebrations, as long as minimal attention is paid to the social relations in which the mechanisation of society is rooted." Instead, ecology needs *"a confrontational stance toward capitalism and hierarchical society"* in order to be effective and fix the root causes of our problems. [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 54]



direct result of our resistance to hierarchy and its tools. For example, capitalists turned to Taylorism and "scientific management" in response to the power of skilled craft workers to control their work and working environment (the famous 1892 Homestead strike, for example, was a direct product of the desire of the company to end the skilled workers' control and power on the shop-floor). Such management schemes never last in the long run nor totally work in the short run either — which explains why hierarchical management continues, as does technological deskilling. Workers always find ways of using new technology to increase their power within the workplace, undermining management decisions to their own advantage). As left-wing economist William Lazonick puts it:

> *"Because it is the workers, not managers, who are actually doing the work, access to information on the effort-saving potential of a machine will be asymmetric, giving workers a distinct advantage in determining the pace of work. In addition, workers through their unions will attempt to exert industry-wide control over the relation between effort and pay on newly diffused technology. The resultant relation between effort and earnings will depend on the exercise of social power, not on abstract 'laws' of proportional change."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, pp. 66–7]

This means that the *"economic effectiveness of the factory as a mode of work organisation did not occur within a social vacuum but depend[s] on the historical evolution of conditions that determined the relative power of capitalists and workers to structure the relation between effort and pay."* As such, it is important not to overemphasise the *"independent influence of technology as opposed to the relations of production in the determination of work organisation. Because machinery does change the skill content of work, it can potentially serve as an instrument of social*

*power. How and to what extent it does so, however, depends not only on the nature of the technology but also on the nature of the social environment into which it is introduced."* Thus the introduction of machinery into the capitalist labour process *"is only a necessary, not sufficient, condition for the displacement of worker control over the relation between effort and pay."* [Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52 and p. 63] Needless to say, capitalists have always appealed to the state to help create a suitable social environment.

This analysis applies to both the formal and informal organisation of workers in workplace. Just as the informal structures and practices of working people evolve over time in response to new technology and practices, so does union organisation. In response to Taylorism, factory and other workers created a whole new structure of working class power — a new kind of unionism based on the industrial level. For example, the IWW was formed specifically to create industrial unions arguing that *"[l]abourers are no longer classified by difference in trade skill, but the employer assigns them according to the machine which they are attached. These divisions, far from representing differences in skill or interests among the labourers, are imposed by the employers that workers may be pitted against one another and spurred to greater exertion in the shop, and that all resistance to capitalist tyranny may be weakened by artificial distinctions."* [quoted by Stone, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

For this reason, anarchists and syndicalists argued for, and built, industrial unions — one union per workplace and industry — in order to combat these divisions and effectively resist capitalist tyranny. This can be seen in many different countries. In Spain, the C.N.T. (an anarcho-syndicalist union) adopted the **sindicato unico** (one union) in 1918 which united all workers of the same workplace in the same union (by uniting skilled and unskilled in a single organisation, the union increased their fighting power). In the UK, the shop stewards movement arose during the first world war based on



fight hard for even the most basic and common-sense changes while constantly having to stop capitalists ignoring or undermining any reforms actually passed which threaten their profits and the accumulation of capital as a whole. This means that counterforces are always set into motion by ruling class and even sensible reforms (such as anti-pollution laws) will be overturned in the name of "deregulation" and profits.

Unsurprisingly, eco-anarchists, like all anarchists, reject appeals to state power as this *"invariably legitimates and strengthens the State, with the result that it disempowers the people."* They note that ecology movements *"that enter into parliamentary activities not only legitimate State power at the expense of popular power,"* they also are *"obligated to function **within** the State"* and *"must 'play the game,' which means that they must shape their priorities according to predetermined rules over which they have no control."* This results in *"an ongoing **process** of degeneration, a steady devolution of ideals, practices, and party structures"* in order to achieve *"very little"* in *"arrest[ing] environmental decay."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 161, p. 162 and p. 163] The fate of numerous green parties across the world supports that analysis.

That is why anarchists stress the importance of creating social movements based on direct action and solidarity as the means of enacting reforms under a hierarchical society. Only when we take a keen interest and act to create and enforce reforms will they stand any chance of being applied successfully. If such social pressure does not exist, then any reform will remain a dead-letter and ignored by those seeking to maximise their profits at the expense of both people and planet. As we discuss in section J, this involves creating alternative forms of organisation like federations of community assemblies (see section J.5.1) and industrial unions (see section J.5.2). Given the nature of both a capitalist economy and the state, this makes perfect sense.

*jects can be treated as standardised units, the power of resolution in the planning exercise is enhanced … The same logic applies to the transformation of the natural world.*" [**Seeing like a State**, pp. 22–3 and p. 346]

A central power reduces the participation and diversity required to create an ecological society and tailor humanity's interaction with the environment in a way which respects local conditions and eco-systems. In fact, it helps creates ecological problems by centralising power at the top of society, limiting and repressing the freedom of individuals communities and peoples as well as standardising and so degrading complex societies and eco-systems. As such, the state is just as anti-ecological as capitalism is as it shares many of the same features. As Scott stresses, capitalism *"is just as much an agency of homogenisation, uniformity, grids, and heroic simplification as the state is, with the difference being that, for capitalists, simplification must pay. A market necessarily reduces quality to quantity via the price mechanism and promotes standardisation; in markets, money talks, not people … the conclusions that can be drawn from the failures of modern projects of social engineering are as applicable to market-driven standardisation as they are to bureaucratic homogeneity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 8]

In the short term, the state may be able to restrict some of the worse excesses of capitalism (this can be seen from the desire of capitalists to fund parties which promise to deregulate an economy, regardless of the social and environmental impact of so doing). However, the interactions between these two anti-ecological institutions are unlikely to produce long term environmental solutions. This is because while state intervention can result in beneficial constraints on the anti-ecological and anti-social dynamics of capitalism, it is always limited by the nature of the state itself. As we noted in section B.2.1, the state is an instrument of class rule and, consequently, extremely unlikely to impose changes that may harm or destroy the system itself. This means that any reform movement will have to



workplace organisation (a movement inspired by the pre-war syndicalist revolt and which included many syndicalist activists). This movement was partly in response to the reformist TUC unions working with the state during the war to suppress class struggle. In Germany, the 1919 near revolution saw the creation of revolutionary workplace unions and councils (and a large increase in the size of the anarcho-syndicalist union FAU which was organised by industry).

This process was not limited to just libertarian unions. In the USA, the 1930s saw a massive and militant union organising drive by the C.I.O. based on industrial unionism and collective bargaining (inspired, in part, by the example of the I.W.W. and its broad organisation of unskilled workers). More recently, workers in the 1960s and 70s responded to the increasing reformism and bureaucratic nature of such unions as the CIO and TUC by organising themselves directly on the shop floor to control their work and working conditions. This informal movement expressed itself in wildcat strikes against both unions and management, sabotage and unofficial workers' control of production (see John Zerzan's essay *"Organised Labour and the Revolt Against Work"* in **Elements of Refusal**). In the UK, the shop stewards' movement revived itself, organising much of the unofficial strikes and protests which occurred in the 1960s and 70s. A similar tendency was seen in many countries during this period.

So in response to a new developments in technology and workplace organisation, workers' developed new forms of resistance which in turn provokes a response by management. Thus technology and its (ab)uses are very much a product of the class struggle, of the struggle for freedom in the workplace. With a given technology, workers and radicals soon learn to resist it and, sometimes, use it in ways never dreamed of to resist their bosses and the state (which necessitates a transformation of within technology again to try and give the bosses an upper hand!). The use of the Internet, for example, to organise, spread

and co-ordinate information, resistance and struggles is a classic example of this process (see Jason Wehling, *"'Netwars' and Activists Power on the Internet"*, **Scottish Anarchist** no. 2 for details). There is always a "guerrilla war" associated with technology, with workers and radicals developing their own tactics to gain counter control for themselves. Thus much technological change reflects **our** power and activity to change our own lives and working conditions. We must never forget that.

While some may dismiss our analysis as "Luddite," to do so is make "technology" an idol to be worshipped rather than something to be critically analysed. Indeed, it would be temping to argue that worshippers of technological progress are, in effect, urging us **not** to think and to sacrifice ourselves to a new abstraction like the state or capital. Moreover, such attacks misrepresent the ideas of the Luddites themselves — they never actually opposed **all** technology or machinery. Rather, they opposed *"all Machinery hurtful to Commonality"* (as a March 1812 letter to a hated Manufacturer put it). Rather than worship technological progress (or view it uncritically), the Luddites subjected technology to critical analysis and evaluation. They opposed those forms of machinery that harmed themselves or society. Unlike those who smear others as "Luddites," the labourers who broke machines were not intimidated by the modern notion of progress. As John Clark notes, they *"chose to smash the dehumanising machinery being imposed on them, rather than submit to domination and degradation in the name of technical progress."* [**The Anarchist Moment**, p. 102] Their sense of right and wrong was not clouded by the notion that technology was somehow inevitable, neutral or to be worshipped without question.

The Luddites did not think that **human** values (or their own interests) were irrelevant in evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of a given technology and its effects on workers and society as a whole. Nor did they consider their skills and livelihood as less important than the profits and power of the capitalists.



*ies."* This flows from its nature for one of its ***"essential functions is to confine, restrict, and essentially suppress local democratic institutions and initiatives."*** It has been organised to reduce public participation and control, even scrutiny. [*"The Ecological Crisis, Socialism, and the need to remake society,"* pp. 1–10, **Society and Nature**, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 8 and p. 9] If the creation of an ecological society requires individual freedom and social participation (and it does) then the state by its very nature and function excludes both.

The state's centralised nature is such that it cannot handle the complexities and diversity of life. *"No administrative system is capable of representing"* a community or, for that matter, an eco-system argues James C. Scott *"except through a heroic and greatly schematised process of abstraction and simplification. It is not simply a question of capacity ... It is also a question of purpose. State agents have no interest — nor should they — in describing an entire social reality . .. Their abstractions and simplifications are disciplined by a small number of objectives."* This means that the state is unable to effectively handle the needs of ecological systems, including human ones. Scott analyses various large-scale state schemes aiming at social improvement and indicates their utter failure. This failure was rooted in the nature of centralised systems. He urges us *"to consider the kind of human subject for whom all these benefits were being provided. This subject was singularly abstract."* The state was planning *"for generic subjects who needed so many square feet of housing space, acres of farmland, litres of clean water, and units of transportation and so much food, fresh air, and recreational space. Standardised citizens were uniform in their needs and even interchangeable. What is striking, of course, is that such subjects ... have, for purposes of the planning exercise, no gender; no tastes; no history; no values; no opinions or original ideas, no traditions, and no distinctive personalities to contribute to the enterprise ... The lack of context and particularity is not an oversight; it is the necessary first premise of any large-scale planning exercise. To the degree that the sub-*

presses the kind of information required to make ecologically informed decisions.

As Bookchin summarises, capitalism *"has made social evolution hopelessly incompatible with ecological evolution."* [**Ecology of Freedom**, p. 14] It lacks a sustainable relation to nature not due to chance, ignorance or bad intentions but due to its very nature and workings.

Fortunately, as we discussed in section D.1, capitalism has rarely been allowed to operate for long entirely on its own logic. When it does, counter-tendencies develop to stop society being destroyed by market forces and the need to accumulate money. Opposition forces always emerge, whether these are in the form of state intervention or in social movements aiming for reforms or more radical social change (the former tends to be the result of the latter, but not always). Both force capitalism to moderate its worst tendencies.

However, state intervention is, at best, a short-term. This is because the state is just as much a system of social domination, oppression and exploitation as capitalism. Which brings us to the next key institution which anarchists argue needs to be eliminated in order to create an ecological society: the state. If, as anarchists argue, the oppression of people is the fundamental reason for our ecological problems then it logically follows that the state **cannot** be used to either create and manage an ecological society. It is a hierarchical, centralised, top-down organisation based on the use of coercion to maintain elite rule. It is, as we stressed in section B.2, premised on the monopolisation of power in the hands of a few. In other words, it is the opposite of commonly agreed ecological principles such as freedom to develop, decentralisation and diversity.

As Bookchin put it, the *"notion that human freedom can be achieved, much less perpetuated, through a state of **any** kind is monstrously oxymoronic — a contradiction in terms."* This is because *"statist forms"* are based on *"centralisation, bureaucratisation, and the professionalisation of power in the hands of elite bod-*



In other words, they would have agreed with Proudhon's later comment that machinery *"plays the leading role in industry, man is secondary"* **and** they acted to change this relationship. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 204] The Luddites were an example of working people deciding what their interests were and acting to defend them by their own direct action — in this case opposing technology which benefited the ruling class by giving them an edge in the class struggle. Anarchists follow this critical approach to technology, recognising that it is not neutral nor above criticism. That this is simply sensible can be seen from the world around us, where capitalism has, to quote Rocker, made work *"soulless and has lost for the individual the quality of creative joy. By becoming a dreary end-in-itself it has degraded man into an eternal galley slave and robbed him of that which is most precious, the inner joy of accomplished work, the creative urge of the personality. The individual feels himself to be only an insignificant element of a gigantic mechanism in whose dull monotone every personal note dies out."* He has *"became the slave of the tool he created."* There has been a *"growth of technology at the expense of human personality."* [**Nationalism and Culture**, p. 253 and p. 254]

For capital, the source of problems in industry is people. Unlike machines, people can think, feel, dream, hope and act. The "evolution" of technology must, therefore, reflect the class struggle within society and the struggle for liberty against the forces of authority. Technology, far from being neutral, reflects the interests of those with power. Technology will only be truly our friend once we control it ourselves and **modify** to reflect **human** values (this may mean that some forms of technology will have to be written off and replaces by new forms in a free society). Until that happens, most technological processes — regardless of the other advantages they may have — will be used to exploit and control people. Thus Proudhon's comments that *"in the present condition of society, the workshop with its hierarchical organisation, and machinery"* could only serve *"exclu-*

*sively the interests of the least numerous, the least industrious, and the wealthiest class"* rather than *"be employed for the benefit of all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 205]

While resisting technological "progress" which is considered harmful to people or the planet (by means up to and including machine breaking) is essential in the here and now, the issue of technology can only be truly solved when those who use a given technology control its development, introduction and use. (*"The worker will only respect machinery **on the day** when it becomes his friend, shortening his work, rather than as **today**, his enemy, taking away jobs, killing workers,"* in the words of French syndicalist Emile Pouget [quoted by David Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]). Little wonder, therefore, that anarchists consider workers' self-management as a key means of solving the problems created by technology. Proudhon, for example, argued that the solution to the problems created by the division of labour and technology could only be solved by *"association"*, and *"by a broad education, by the obligation of apprenticeship, and by the co-operation of all who take part in the collective work."* This would ensure that *"the division of labour can no longer be a cause of degradation for the workman [or workwoman]."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 223]

While as far as technology goes, it may not be enough to get rid of the boss this is a necessary first step. Unless this is done, it will be impossible to transform existing technologies or create new ones which enhance freedom rather than controlling and shaping the worker (or user in general) and enhancing the power and profits of the capitalist. This means that in an anarchist society, technology would have to be transformed and/or developed which empowered those who used it, so reducing any oppressive aspects of it. In the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, the *"conscious transformation of technology will therefore be a central task of a society of free workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 104] As German anarchist Gustav Landauer stressed, most are *"completely unaware of how fundamentally the technology*



So, in a large part, environmental problems derive from the fact that capitalism is a competitive economy, guided by the maxim "grow or die." This is its very law of life for unless a firm expands, it will be driven out of business or taken over by a competitor. Hence the capitalist economy is based on a process of growth and production for their own sake. *"No amount of moralising or pietising,"* stresses Bookchin, *"can alter the fact that rivalry at the most molecular base of society is a bourgeois law of life ... Accumulation to undermine, buy out, or otherwise absorb or outwit a competitor **is a condition for existence in a capitalist economic order.**"* This means *"a capitalistic society based on competition and growth for its own sake must ultimately devour the natural world, just like an untreated cancer must ultimately devour its host. Personal intentions, be they good or bad, have little to do with this unrelenting process. An economy that is structured around the maxim, 'Grow or Die,' must **necessarily** pit itself against the natural world and leave ecological ruin in its wake as its works it way through the biosphere."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 93 and p. 15]

This means that good intentions and ideals have no bearing on the survival of a capitalist enterprise. There is a very simple way to be "moral" in the capitalist economy: namely, to commit economic suicide. This helps explain another key anti-ecological tendency within capitalism, namely the drive to externalise costs of production (i.e., pass them on to the community at large) in order to minimise private costs and so maximise profits and so growth. As we will discuss in more detail in section E.3, capitalism has an in-built tendency to externalise costs in the form of pollution as it rewards the kind of short-term perspective that pollutes the planet in order to maximise the profits of the capitalist. This is also driven by the fact that capitalism's need to expand also reduces decision making from the quantitative to the qualitative. In other words, whether something produces a short-term profit is the guiding maxim of decision making and the price mechanism itself sup-

*to our times"* but previous environmental destruction *"pales before the massive destruction of the environment that has occurred since the days of the Industrial Revolution, and especially since the end of the Second World War. The damage inflicted on the environment by contemporary society encompasses the entire world ... The exploitation and pollution of the earth has damaged not only the integrity of the atmosphere, climate, water resources, soil, flora and fauna of specific regions, but also the basic natural cycles on which all living things depend."* [Bookchin, **Ecology of Freedom**, p. 411 and p. 83]

This has its roots in the "grow-or-die" nature of capitalism we discussed in section D.4. An ever-expanding capitalism must inevitably come into collision with a finite planet and its fragile ecology. Firms whose aim is to maximise their profits in order to grow will happily exploit whoever and whatever they can to do so. As capitalism is based on exploiting people, can we doubt that it will also exploit nature? It is unsurprising, therefore, that this system results in the exploitation of the real sources of wealth, namely nature and people. It is as much about robbing nature as it is about robbing the worker. To quote Murray Bookchin:

> *"Any attempt to solve the ecological crisis within a bourgeois framework must be dismissed as chimerical. Capitalism is inherently anti-ecological. Competition and accumulation constitute its very law of life, a law ... summarised in the phrase, 'production for the sake of production.' Anything, however hallowed or rare, 'has its price' and is fair game for the marketplace. In a society of this kind, nature is necessarily treated as a mere resource to be plundered and exploited. The destruction of the natural world, far being the result of mere hubristic blunders, follows inexorably from the very logic of capitalist production."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. viii-ix]



*of the socialists differs from capitalist technology ... Technology will, in a cultured people, have to be directed to the psychology of free people who want to use it."* This will happen when *"the workers themselves determine under what conditions they want to work,"* step out of *"capitalism mentally and physically"*, and *"cease playing a role in it and begin to be men [and women]."* [*"For Socialism,"* pp. 184–6, **Anarchism**, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 285 and p. 286]

Thus most anarchists would agree with Bookchin's comment that technology *"is necessarily liberatory or consistently beneficial to man's development"* but we *"do not believe that man is destined to be enslaved by technology and technological modes of thought."* A free society *"will not want to negate technology precisely because it is liberated and can strike a balance"* and create a *"technology for life,"* a liberatory technology based on human and ecological needs. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 43 and p. 80] See section I.4.9 for more discussion on technology within an anarchist society.

# D.11 Can politics and economics be separated from each other?

A key aspect of anarchism is the idea that the political and economic aspects of society cannot be separated. Section D has been an attempt to show how these two aspects of society interact and influence each other. This means that economic liberty cannot be separated from political liberty and vice versa. If working class people are subject to authoritarian political organisations then their economic liberty will likewise be restricted and, conversely, if their economic freedoms are limited then so, too, will their political freedoms. As Proudhon put it, *"industrial liberty is inseparable from political liberty."* [quoted by Alan Ritter, **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 188]

Some disagree, arguing that economic liberty is of primary importance. When Milton Friedman died in 2006, for example, many of his supporters parroted his defence of working with the Pinochet regime and noted that Chile had (eventually) become a democracy. For Friedman, this justified his praise for the "economic liberty" the regime had introduced and rationalised the advice he gave it. For him, Chile provided his earlier assertion that *"economic freedom is an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom."* For while Friedman stated that there was *"an intimate connection between economics and politics,"* he meant simply that capitalism was required to produce democracy (to use his words, *"capitalism is a necessary*



*in a practice that could yield effective social change."* It *"easily plays into the hands of a privileged stratum who are only too eager to blame all the human victims of an exploitative society for the social and ecological ills of our time."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 33]

Thus, for eco-anarchists, hierarchy is the fundamental root cause of our ecological problems. Hierarchy, notes Bookchin includes economic class *"and even gives rise to class society historically"* but it *"goes beyond this limited meaning imputed to a largely economic form of stratification."* It refers to a system of *"command and obedience in which elites enjoy varying degrees of control over their subordinates without necessarily exploiting them."* [**Ecology of Freedom**, p. 68] Anarchism, he stressed, *"anchored ecological problems for the first time in hierarchy, not simply in economic classes."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 155]

Needless to say, the forms of hierarchy have changed and evolved over the years. The anarchist analysis of hierarchies goes *"well beyond economic forms of exploitation into cultural forms of domination that exist in the family, between generations and sexes, among ethnic groups, in institutions of political, economic, and social management, and very significantly, in the way we experience reality as a whole, including nature and non-human life-forms."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46] This means that anarchists recognise that ecological destruction has existed in most human societies and is not limited just to capitalism. It existed, to some degree, in all hierarchical pre-capitalist societies and, of course, in any hierarchical post-capitalist ones as well. However, as most of us live under capitalism today, anarchists concentrate our analysis to that system and seek to change it. Anarchists stress the need to end capitalism simply because of its inherently anti-ecological nature (*"The history of 'civilisation' has been a steady process of estrangement from nature that has increasingly developed into outright antagonism."*). Our society faces *"a breakdown not only of its values and institutions, but also of its natural environment. This problem is not unique*

vironment it inhabits in a decent, sane and respective way. A society marked by inequality, hierarchies and exploitation will trend its environment as its members treat each other. Thus *"all our notions of dominating nature stem from the very real domination of human by human."* The *"domination of human by human* ***preceded*** *the notion of dominating nature. Indeed, human domination of human gave rise to the very* ***idea*** *of dominating nature."* This means, obviously, that *"it is not until we eliminate domination in all its forms ... that we will really create a rational, ecological society."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 44]

By degrading ourselves, we create the potential for degrading our environment. This means that anarchists *"emphasise that ecological degradation is, in great part, a product of the degradation of human beings by hunger, material insecurity, class rule, hierarchical domination, patriarchy, ethnic discrimination, and competition."* [Bookchin, *"The Future of the Ecology Movement,"* pp. 1–20, **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, p. 17] This is unsurprising, for *"nature, as every materialist knows, is not something merely external to humanity. We are a part of nature. Consequently, in dominating nature we not only dominate an 'external world' — we also dominate ourselves."* [John Clark, **The Anarchist Moment**, p. 114]

We cannot stress how important this analysis is. We cannot ignore *"the deep-seated division in society that came into existence with hierarchies and classes."* To do so means placing *"young people and old, women and men, poor and rich, exploited and exploiters, people of colour and whites* ***all*** *on a par that stands completely at odds with social reality. Everyone, in turn, despite the different burdens he or she is obliged to bear, is given the same responsibility for the ills of our planet. Be they starving Ethiopian children or corporate barons, all people are held to be equally culpable in producing present ecological problems."* These become *"****de-socialised****"* and so this perspective *"side-step[s] the profoundly social roots of present-day ecological dislocations"* and *"****deflects*** *innumerable people from engaging*



*condition for political freedom"*). [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 8 and p. 10]

So it should first be stressed that by "economic liberty" Friedman meant capitalism and by "political liberty" he meant representative government and a democratic state. Anarchists would disagree that either of those institutions have much to do with genuine liberty. However, we will ignore this for the moment and take his general point. Sadly, such a position makes little sense. In fact, Friedman's separation of "economic" and "political" liberties is simply wrong as well as having authoritarian implications and lacking empirical basis.

The easiest way of showing that statism and capitalism cannot be separated is to look at a country where "economic liberty" (i.e. free market capitalism) existed but "political liberty" (i.e. a democratic government with basic human rights) did not. The most obvious example is Pinochet's Chile, an experiment which Friedman praised as an "economic miracle" shortly before it collapsed. In section C.11 we discussed the Chilean "economic miracle" at face value, refusing to discuss the issue of whether describing the regime as one of "economic liberty" could be justified. Rather, we exposed the results of applying what leading ideologues of capitalism have called "free market" policies on the country. As would be expected, the results were hardly an "economic miracle" if you were working class. Which shows how little our lives are valued by the elite and their "experts."

As to be expected with Friedman, the actual experience of implementing his economic dogmas in Chile refuted them. Much the same can be said of his distinction of "economic" and "political" liberty. Friedman discussed the Chilean regime in 1991, arguing that *"Pinochet and the military in Chile were led to adopt free market principles after they took over only because they did not have any other choice."* [**Economic Freedom, Human Freedom, Political Freedom**] This is an interesting definition of *"free market principles."* It seems to be compatible

with a regime in which the secret police can seize uppity workers, torture them and dump their bodies in a ditch as a warning to others.

For Friedman, the economic and political regimes could be separated. As he put it, *"I have nothing good to say about the political regime that Pinochet imposed. It was a terrible political regime. The real miracle of Chile is not how well it has done economically; the real miracle of Chile is that a military junta was willing to go against its principles and support a free market regime designed by principled believers in a free market."* [**Op. Cit.**] How, exactly, could the political regime **not** impact on the economic one? How is a "free market" possible if people who make up the labour market are repressed and in fear of their lives? True, the Chilean workers could, as workers in Tsarist Russia, *"change their jobs without getting permission from political authorities"* (as Friedman put it [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 10]), however this is only a small part of what anarchists consider to be genuine economic liberty.

To see why, it is useful to show a snapshot of what life was like under Friedman's "economic liberty" for working class people. Once this is done, it is easy to see how incredulous Friedman was being. Peter Winn gives a good description of what Chile's "economic liberty" was based on:

> *"In the wake of the coup, most of the 'revolutionary' leaders of the textile workers disappeared, some to unmarked graves, jails, or concentration camps, others to exile or the underground resistance. Moreover, when the textile factories resumed production, it was under military administration and with soldiers patrolling the plants. Authoritarian management and industrial discipline were reimposed at the point of a bayonet, and few workers dared to protest. Some feared for their lives or liberty; many more feared for their jobs. Military intelligence officers*



# E.1 What are the root causes of our ecological problems?

The dangers associated with environmental damage have become better known over the last few decades. In fact, awareness of the crisis we face has entered into the mainstream of politics. Those who assert that environmental problems are minor or non-existent have, thankfully, become marginalised (effectively, a few cranks and so-called "scientists" funded by corporations and right-wing think tanks). Both politicians and corporations have been keen to announce their "green" credentials. Which is ironic, as anarchists would argue that both the state and capitalism are key causes for the environmental problems we are facing.

In other words, anarchists argue that pollution and the other environmental problems we face are symptoms. The disease itself is deeply imbedded in the system we live under and need to be addressed alongside treating the more obvious results of that deeper cause. Otherwise, to try and eliminate the symptoms **by themselves** can be little more than a minor palliative and, fundamentally, pointless as they will simply keep reappearing until their root causes are eliminated.

For anarchists, as we noted in section A.3.3, the root causes for our ecological problems lie in social problems. Bookchin uses the terms *"first nature"* and *"second nature"* to express this idea. First nature is the environment while second nature is humanity. The latter can shape and influence the former, for the worse or for the better. How it does so depends on how it treats itself. A decent, sane and egalitarian society will treat the en-

and a capitalist economy, ecological disruption will continue and grow, putting our Earth in increasing danger. We need to resist the system and create new values based on quality, not quantity. We must return the human factor to our alienated society before we alienate ourselves completely off the planet.

Peter Marshall's **Nature's Web** presents a good overview of all aspects of green thought over human history from a libertarian perspective, including excellent summaries of such anarchists as Proudhon, Kropotkin and Bookchin (as well as libertarian socialist William Morris and his ecologically balanced utopia **News from Nowhere**).



> *interrogated the workers one by one, pressing them to inform on each other and then firing those considered to be leftist activists. The dismissals often continued after the mills were returned to their former owners, at first for political reasons or for personal revenge, but, with the recession of 1975, for economic motives as well. The unions, decimated by their leadership losses, intimidated by the repression, and proscribed by military decree from collective bargaining, strikes, or other militant actions, were incapable of defending their members' jobs, wages, or working conditions. With wages frozen and prices rising rapidly, living standards fell precipitously, even for those fortunate enough to keep their jobs."* [*"No Miracle for Us"*, Peter Winn (ed.), **Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973–2002**, p. 131]

In the copper mines, *"[h]undreds of leftist activists were fired, and many were arrested and tortured ... the military exercised a firm control over union leaders and activity within the unions remained dormant until the 1980s."* The *"decade following the military coup was defined by intense repression and a generalised climate of terror and fear."* Workers recalled that people who spoke at union meetings were detained and until 1980 police permission was required to hold a meeting, which was held under police supervision. At work, *"supervisors and foremen ruled with an authoritarian discipline"* while miners *"reported that spies denounced workers who talked politics or spoke at union meetings to the company administration and police."* [Thomas Miller Klubock, *"Class, Community, and Neoliberalism in Chile"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 214 p. 216 and p. 217]

Over all, Workers *"bore the brunt of the repression during the military take-over and throughout the Pinochet regime. The*

*armed forces viewed workers — and the level of organisation they had achieved under previous governments — as the greatest threat to traditional power structure in Chile ... Armed troops went after workers in general and union members and leaders in particular with a virulence that contradicted their claim to be stamping out 'class hatred.'"* As for the relationship between "economic" and "political" liberty, the latter was dependent on the end of the former: *"Fear of repression was clearly essential to the implementation of free-market labour policies, but far more pervasive was the fear of unemployment"* generated by the so-called "economic miracle." [John Lear and Joseph Collins, *"Working in Chile's Free Market"*, pp. 10–29, **Latin American Perspectives**, vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 12–3 and p. 14]

Thus the ready police repression made strikes and other forms of protest both impractical and dangerous. When working class people did take to the streets after the economic crash of 1982, they were subject to intense state repression as Pinochet *"cracked down, sending in army troops to curb the demonstrators."* According to a report by the Roman Catholic Church 113 protesters had been killed during social protest, with several thousand detained for political activity and protests between May 1983 and mid-1984. Thousands of strikers were also fired and union leaders jailed. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] In fact, the *"brutal government repression put even the militant copper miners on the defensive."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 43] Workers were aware that the regime *"was likely to use the full rigour of the law against workers who acted in defence of their interests. Moreover, even though the arbitrary actions of the secret police diminished in the last years of the dictatorship, they did not disappear, nor did their internalised legacy. Fear of becoming a target of repression still exercised a chilling effect on both workers and their leaders."* [Winn, *"No Miracle for Us"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 133]



project. Similarly, eco-anarchists recognise that domination of nature and male domination of women have historically gone hand in hand, so that eco-feminism is yet another aspect of eco-anarchism. Since feminism, ecology, and peace are key issues of the Green movement, anarchists believe that many Greens are implicitly committed to anarchism, whether they realise it or not, and hence that they should adopt anarchist principles of direct action rather than getting bogged down in trying to elect people to state offices.

Here we discuss some of the main themes of eco-anarchism and consider a few suggestions by non-anarchists about how to protect the environment. In section E.1, we summarise why anarchists consider why a green society cannot be a capitalist one (and vice versa). Section E.2 presents a short overview of what an ecological society would be like. Section E.3 refutes the false capitalist claim that the answer to the ecological crisis is to privatise everything while section E.4 discusses why capitalism is anti-ecological and its defenders, invariably, anti-green. Then we indicate why green consumerism is doomed to failure in section E.5 before, in section E.6, refuting the myth that population growth is a **cause** of ecological problems rather than the **effect** of deeper issues.

Obviously, these are hardly the end of the matter. Some tactics popular in the green movement are shared by others and we discuss these elsewhere. For example, the issue of electing Green Parties to power will be addressed in section J.2.4 ("Surely voting for radical parties will be effective?") and so will be ignored here. The question of "single-issue" campaigns (like C.N.D. and Friends of the Earth) will be discussed in section J.1.4. Remember that eco-anarchists, like all anarchists, take a keen interest in many other issues and struggles and just because we do not discuss something here does not mean we are indifferent to it.

For anarchists, unless we resolve the underlying contradictions within society, which stem from domination, hierarchy

freedom, humanity, and nature for the power and profits of the few.

Understanding the social roots of the problems we face is the key. Many greens attack what they consider the "wrong ideas" of modern society, its "materialistic values" and counterpose **new** ideas, more in tune with a green society. This approach, however, misses the point. Ideas and values do not "just happen", but are the **product** of a given set of social relationships and the struggles they produce. This means that it is not just a matter of changing our values in a way that places humanity in harmony with nature (important though that is), but also of understanding the **social** and **structural** origins of the ecological crisis. Ideas and values **do** need to be challenged, but unless the authoritarian social relationships, hierarchy and inequalities in power (i.e. what produces these values and ideas) are also challenged and, more importantly, **changed** an ecological society is impossible. So unless other Greens recognise that this crisis did not develop in a social vacuum and is not the "fault" of people as **people** (as opposed to people in a hierarchical society), little can be done root out the systemic causes of the problems that we and the planet face.

Besides its alliance with the ecology movement, eco-anarchism also finds allies in the feminist and peace movements, which it regards, like the ecology movement, as implying the need for anarchist principles. Thus eco-anarchists think that global competition between nation-states is responsible not only for the devouring of nature but is also the primary cause of international military tensions, as nations seek to dominate each other by military force or the threat thereof. As international competition becomes more intense and weapons of mass destruction spread, the seeds are being sown for catastrophic global warfare involving nuclear, chemical, and/or biological weapons. Because such warfare would be the ultimate ecological disaster, eco-anarchism and the peace movement are but two aspects of the same basic



All of which puts into stark light Friedman's 1982 comment that *"Chile is an even more amazing political miracle. A military regime has supported reforms that sharply reduce the role of the state and replace control from the top with control from the bottom."* [quoted by Rayack, **Not so Free to Choose**, p. 37] Clearly Friedman had no idea what he was talking about. While the *"role of the state"* **was** reduced in terms of welfare for the masses, it was obviously massively **increased** in terms of warfare against them (we will address the *"control from the bottom"* nonsense shortly).

For anarchists, it is simply common-sense that "economic liberty" cannot exist within an authoritarian state for the mass of the population. In reality, the economic and political regime cannot be so easily compartmentalised. As Malatesta noted, *"every economic question of some importance automatically becomes a political question ... Workers' organisations must therefore, of necessity, adopt a line of action in face of present as well as possible future government action."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 130–1] Such common-sense is sadly lacking with Friedman who seriously seems to believe that "economic liberty" could exist without the freedom of workers to take collective action if they so desired. In other words, the "economic miracle" Friedman praises was built on the corpses, fears and backs of working class people. Unlike Friedman, Chile's workers and bosses know that *"employers could count on the backing of the military in any conflict with workers."* [Lear and Collins, **Op. Cit.**, p. 13] As can be seen, Malatesta had a much firmer grasp of the question of liberty that Friedman, as expected as the latter equals it with capitalism and its hierarchies while the former spent much of his live in prison and exile trying to increase the freedom of working class people by fighting the former and the state which maintains them.

As we argued in section D.1.4, laissez-faire capitalism does not end statism. Rather it focuses it on purely defending eco-

nomic power (i.e. "economic liberty" for the capitalist class). The example of Chile's "economic liberty" proves this beyond doubt and shows that the separation of economic and political freedom is impossible and, consequently, both capitalism **and** the state need to be fought and, ultimately, abolished.

## D.11.1 What does Chile tell us about the right and its vision of liberty?

The key to understanding how Friedman managed to ignore the obvious lack of "economic liberty" for the bulk of the population under Pinochet lies in remembering that he is a supporter of capitalism. As capitalism is a hierarchical system in which workers sell their liberty to a boss, it comes as no real surprise that Friedman's concern for liberty is selective.

Pinochet did introduce free-market capitalism, but this meant real liberty only for the rich. For the working class, "economic liberty" did not exist, as they did not manage their own work nor control their workplaces and lived under a fascist state. The liberty to take economic (never mind political) action in the forms of forming unions, going on strike, organising go-slows and so on was severely curtailed by the very likely threat of repression. Of course, the supporters of the Chilean "Miracle" and its "economic liberty" did not bother to question how the suppression of political liberty effected the economy or how people acted within it. They maintained that the repression of labour, the death squads, the fear installed in rebel workers could be ignored when looking at the economy. But in the real world, people will put up with a lot more if they face the barrel of a gun than if they do not. So the claim that "economic liberty" existed in Chile makes sense only if we take into account that there was only **real** liberty for one class. The bosses may have been "left alone" but the workers were not, unless they submitted to authority



As we discuss in the next section, for anarchists the root cause of our ecological problems is hierarchy in society compounded by a capitalist economy. For anarchists, the notion of an ecological capitalism is, literally, impossible. Libertarian socialist Takis Fotopoulous has argued that the main reason why the project of "greening" capitalism is just a utopian dream *"lies in a fundamental contradiction that exists between the logic and dynamic of the growth economy, on the one hand, and the attempt to condition this dynamic with qualitative interests"* on the other. [*"Development or Democracy?"*, pp. 57–92, **Society and Nature**, No. 7, p. 82] Green issues, like social ones, are inherently qualitative in nature and, as such, it is unsurprising that a system based on profit would ignore them.

Under capitalism, ethics, nature and humanity all have a price tag. And that price tag is god. This is understandable as every hierarchical social system requires a belief-system. Under feudalism, the belief-system came from the Church, whereas under capitalism, it pretends to come from science, whose biased practitioners (usually funded by the state and capital) are the new priesthood. Like the old priesthoods, only those members who produce "objective research" become famous and influential — "objective research" being that which accepts the status quo as "natural" and produces what the elite want to hear (i.e. apologetics for capitalism and elite rule will always be praised as "objective" and "scientific" regardless of its actual scientific and factual content, the infamous "bell curve" and Malthus's "Law of Population" being classic examples). More importantly, capitalism needs science to be able to measure and quantify everything in order to sell it. This mathematical faith is reflected in its politics and economics, where quantity is more important than quality, where 5 votes are better than 2 votes, where $5 is better than $2. And like all religions, capitalism needs sacrifice. In the name of "free enterprise," "economic efficiency," "stability" and "growth" it sacrifices individuality,

proposing "ecological" solutions based on expanding private property rights. Similarly, we find the notion of green consumerism raised as viable means of greening the planet (rather than as an addition to social struggle) or a focus on symptoms (such as population growth) rather than root causes. This section refutes many such flawed suggestions.

A key concept to remember in our discussion is that between environmentalism and ecology. Following Bookchin, eco-anarchists contrast their ideas with those who seek to reform capitalism and make it more green (a position they term *"environmentalism"* rather than ecology). The latter *"focus on specific issues like air and water pollution"* while ignoring the social roots of the problems they are trying to solve. In other words, their outlook *"rest[s] on an instrumental, almost engineering approach to solving ecological dislocations. To all appearances, they wanted to adapt the natural world to the needs of the existing society and its exploitative, capitalist imperatives by way of reforms that minimise harm to human health and well-being. The much-needed goals of formulating a project for radical social change and for cultivating a new sensibility toward the natural world tended to fall outside the orbit of their practical concerns."* Eco-anarchists, while supporting such partial struggles, stress that *"these problems originate in a hierarchical, class, and today, competitive capitalist system that nourishes a view of the natural world as a mere agglomeration of 'resources' for human production and consumption."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, pp. 15–6] This means that while some kind of environmentalism may be possible under capitalism or some other authoritarian system, an ecological approach is impossible. Simply put, the concerns of ecology cannot be squeezed into a hierarchical perspective or private property. Just as an eco-system cannot be commanded, divided and enclosed, nor can a truly ecological vision. Attempts to do so will impoverish both.



(capitalist or state). Hardly what most people would term as "liberty".

Beyond the ideologues of capitalism who term themselves "economists," it is generally admitted that the "labour market," if it exists, is a somewhat unique market. As "labour" cannot be separated from its owner, it means that when you "buy" labour you "buy" the time, and so liberty, of the individual involved. Rather than be bought on the market all at once, as with a slave, the wage slave's life is bought piecemeal. This is the key to understanding Friedman's nonsensical claims for never forget that by "economic freedom" he means capitalism. To understand the difference we need only compare two of Friedman's arguments to the reality of capitalism. Once we do that then his blindness to Chile's neo-liberal dictatorship's impact on genuine economic liberty becomes clear.

The most obvious fallacy within his argument is this assertion:

> *"A characteristic feature of a free private market is that all parties to a transaction believe that they are going to be better off by that transaction. It is not a zero sum game in which some can benefit only at the expense of others. It is a situation in which everybody thinks he is going to be better off."* [**Economic Freedom, Human Freedom, Political Freedom**]

Who can deny that the worker who sells her liberty to the autocrat of a capitalist firm is *"going to be better off"* than one starving to death? As we noted in section B.4.1, Friedman avoids the obvious fact that a capitalist economy is dependent on there being a class of people who have no means of supporting themselves **except** by selling their labour (i.e. liberty). While full employment will mitigate this dependency (and, as a result, bring the system to crisis), it never goes

away. And given that Pinochet's *"free market regime designed by principled believers in a free market"* had substantial unemployment, it is unsurprising that the capitalist was *"better off"* than the worker as a result. As the experience of the *"free private market"* in Chile suggests, workers need to be free to organise without the fear of death squads otherwise they will be oppressed and exploited by their bosses. By denying that freedom, Pinochet's regime could only be considered "free" by the ideologues and savants of capitalism. The only positive thing that can be said is that it provided empirical evidence that the ideal neo-classical labour market would increase inequality and exploitation (see section C.11.3).

The problem with Friedman's argument is that he fails to recognise the hierarchical nature of capitalism and the limited liberty it produces. This can be seen from Friedman's comparison of military dictatorships to capitalism:

> *"Almost all military juntas are adverse to economic freedom for obvious reasons. The military is organised from the top down: the general tells the colonel, the colonel tells the captain, the captain tells the lieutenant, and so on. A market economy is organised from the bottom up: the consumer tells the retailer, the retailer tells the wholesaler, the wholesaler tells the producer, and the producer delivers. The principles underlying a military organisation are precisely the reverse of those underlying a market organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**]

Obviously geometry was not Friedman's strong point. A "market economy" is characterised by **horizontal** links between workplaces and consumers, not vertical ones. However, the key issue is that the dominant *"market organisation"* under capitalism ***is*** marked by the *"principles underlying a military organisation."* To present a more accurate picture than



> *they always end up regretting it."* [quoted by Clark and Martin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 125–6]

*"Man,"* Reclus says, can find beauty in *"the intimate and deeply seated harmony of his work with that of nature."* Like the eco-anarchists a century later, he stressed the social roots of our environmental problems arguing that a *"complete union of Man with Nature can only be effected by the destruction of the frontiers between castes as well as between peoples."* He also indicated that the exploitation of nature is part and parcel of capitalism, for *"it matters little to the industrialist ... whether he blackens the atmosphere with fumes ... or contaminates it with foul-smelling vapours." "Since nature is so often desecrated by speculators precisely because of its beauty,"* Reclus argued, *"it is not surprising that farmers and industrialists, in their own exploitative endeavours, fail to consider whether they contribute to defacing the land."* The capitalist is *"concerned not with making his work harmonious with the landscape."* [quoted by Clark and Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28, p. 30, p. 124 and p. 125] Few modern day eco-anarchists would disagree.

So, while a specifically ecological anarchism did not develop until the revolutionary work done by Murray Bookchin from the 1950's onwards, anarchist theory has had a significant "proto-green" content since at least the 1860s. What Bookchin and writers like him did was to make anarchism's implicit ecological aspects explicit, a work which has immensely enriched anarchist theory and practice.

In addition to pointing out the key role ecology plays within anarchism, this section is required to refute some commonly proposed solutions to the ecological problems we face. While it is wonderful that green ideas have becoming increasingly commonplace, the sad fact is that many people have jumped on the green bandwagon whose basic assumptions and practices are deeply anti-ecological. Thus we find fascists expounding on their environmental vision or defenders of capitalism

ensures that Kropotkin is *"a great inspiration to the modern ecological movement."* [Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 311 and p. 312]

As well as Kropotkin's work, special note must be made of French anarchist Elisee Reclus. As Clark and Martin note, Reclus introduced *"a strongly ecological dimension into the tradition of anarchist and libertarian social theory"*. He made *"a powerful contribution to introducing this more ecological perspective into anarchist thought,"* of *"looking beyond the project of planetary domination and attempting to restore humanity to its rightful place within, rather than above, nature."* Reclus, *"much more than Kropotkin, introduced into anarchist theory themes that were later developed in social ecology and eco-anarchism."* [John P. Clark and Camille Martin (ed.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 19] For example, in 1866 Reclus argued as follows:

> *"Wild nature is so beautiful. Is it really necessary for man, in seizing it, to proceed with mathematical precision in exploiting each new conquered domain and then mark his possession with vulgar constructions and perfectly straight boundaries? If this continues to occur, the harmonious contrasts that are one of the beauties of the earth will soon give way to depressing uniformity ...*
>
> *"The question of knowing which of the works of man serves to beautify and which contributes to the degradation of external nature can seem pointless to so-called practical minds; nevertheless, it is a matter of the greatest importance. Humanity's development is most intimately connected with the nature that surrounds it. A secret harmony exists between the earth and the peoples whom it nourishes, and when reckless societies allow themselves to meddle with that which creates the beauty of their domain,*



Friedman, in the *"market organisation"* of a capitalist firm the boss tells the worker what to do. It is *"organised from the top down"* just as a military junta is. That Friedman ignores the organisational structure which 90% of the population have to operate within for most of their waking hours is significant. It shows how little he understands of capitalism and "economic freedom."

In Pinochet's Chile, the workplace **did** become more like *"a military organisation."* Without effective unions and basic human rights, the bosses acted like the autocrats they are. Discussing the textile industry, Peter Winn notes that *"most mill owners took full advantage of the regime's probusiness Labour Code ... At many mills, sweatshop conditions prevailed, wages were low, and management was authoritarian, even tyrannical ... Workers might resent these conditions, but they often felt powerless to oppose them. Informers and the threat of dismissal kept even alienated and discontented workers in line."* [*"No Miracle for Us"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 132 and pp. 132–3] John Lear and Joseph Collins generalise the picture, noting that *"[i]n wake of the coup, factory owners suddenly had absolute control over their workers and could fire any worker without case. From 1973 through 1978, practically every labour right for organised and unorganised workers was suspended. All tools of collective bargaining, including of course the right to strike, were outlawed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 13] The Junta themselves had no illusions about the military-like regime they desired within the workplace, stating in 1974 its intention of *"imposing authority and discipline in production and labour relations."* [quoted by Joseph Collins and John Lear, **Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look**, p. 27]

The reality of life under Pinochet for working class people should make anyone with sense wary of praising the regime in any way, but Friedman argued that the *"results were spectacular. Inflation came down sharply. After a transitory period of recession and low output that is unavoidable in the course of revers-*

*ing a strong inflation, output started to expand, and ever since, the Chilean economy has performed better than any other South American economy."* [**Op. Cit.**] Of course, by downplaying the deep recession caused by applying his recommended *"shock-treatment"* policies, Friedman can confuse the high growth resulting from coming out of the boom combined with ready repression on labour with sound economic policies. Strangely he failed to mention the *"spectacular"* recession of 1982 which wiped out the gains of 1976 to 1981. As indicated in section C.11, looking over the whole of the Pinochet period the results were hardly *"spectacular"* (unless you were rich) and the moderate gains were paid for by the working class in terms of longer hours, lower pay and political and economic oppression.

In other words, Friedman and the 'Chicago boys' provided an appearance of technical respectability to the dreams, greed and power of the landlords and capitalists who made up the Chilean oligarchy. The military simply applied the brutal force required to achieve those goals. As such, there is only an apparent contradiction between political tyranny and "economic liberty," not a real one. Repression for the working class and "economic liberty" for the elite are two sides of the same coin.

This should be common-sense and, as such, it is nonsensical for the likes of Friedman to support an economic policy while pretending to reject the system of terror it required to implement. After all, economic policies do not occur in a social and political vacuum. They are conditioned by, and at the same time modify, the social and political situation where they are put into practice. Thus there cannot be "economic liberty" for workers if they expect a visit from the secret police if they talk back to their boss. Yet for Friedman and those like him, there seems to be a lack of awareness of such basic and obvious facts. There is a necessary connection between economic policy (and its outcome) and the socio-political setting in which it is implemented.



*for his doctrine of federalism and for his insight that liberty is the mother and not the daughter of order."* [**Nature's Web**, p. 307 and p. 308] For Proudhon, a key problem was that people viewed the land as *"something which enables them to levy a certain revenue each year. Gone is the deep feeling for nature."* People *"no longer love the soil. Landowners sell it, lease it, divide it into shares, prostitute it, bargain with it and treat it as an object of speculation. Farmers torture it, violate it, exhaust it and sacrifice it to their impatient desire for gain. They never become one with it."* We *"have lost our feeling for nature."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 261]

Other precursors of eco-anarchism can be found in Peter Kropotkin's writings. For example, in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops**, Kropotkin argued the case for *"small is beautiful"* 70 years before E. F. Schumacher coined the phase, advocating *"a harmonious balance between agriculture and industry. Instead of the concentration of large factories in cities, he called for economic as well as social decentralisation, believing that diversity is the best way to organise production by mutual co-operation. He favoured the scattering of industry throughout the country and the integration of industry and agriculture at the local level."* His vision of a decentralised commonwealth based on an integration of agriculture and industry as well as manual and intellectual work has obvious parallels with much modern green thought, as does his stress on the need for **appropriate** levels of technology and his recognition that the capitalist market distorts the development, size and operation of technology and industry. Through his investigations in geography and biology, Kropotkin discovered species to be interconnected with each other and with their environment. **Mutual Aid** is the classic source book on the survival value of co-operation within species which Kropotkin regarded as an important factor of evolution, arguing that those who claim competition within and between species is the chief or only factor have distorted Darwin's work. All this

This section of the FAQ expands upon section D.4 ("What is the relationship between capitalism and the ecological crisis?") in which we indicated that since capitalism is based upon the principle of "grow or die," a "green" capitalism is impossible. By its very nature capitalism must expand, creating new markets, increasing production and consumption, and so invading more ecosystems, using more resources, and upsetting the interrelations and delicate balances that exist with ecosystems. We have decided to include a separate section on this to stress how important green issues are to anarchism and what a central place ecology has in modern anarchism.

Anarchists have been at the forefront of ecological thinking and the green movement for decades. This is unsurprisingly, as many key concepts of anarchism are also key concepts in ecological thought. In addition, the ecological implications of many anarchist ideas (such as decentralisation, integration of industry and agriculture, and so forth) has meant that anarchists have quickly recognised the importance of ecological movements and ideas.

Murray Bookchin in particular has placed anarchist ideas at the centre of green debate as well as bringing out the links anarchism has with ecological thinking. His eco-anarchism (which he called **social ecology**) was based on emphasising the **social** nature of the ecological problems we face. In such classic works as **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, **Toward an Ecological Society** and **The Ecology of Freedom** he has consistently argued that humanity's domination of nature is the result of domination **within** humanity itself.

However, anarchism has always had an ecological dimension. As Peter Marshall notes in his extensive overview of ecological thought, ecologists *"find in Proudhon two of their most cherished social principles: federalism and decentralisation."* He *"stands as an important forerunner of the modern ecological movement for his stress on the close communion between humanity and nature, for his belief in natural justice,*



Friedman exposes the utter hypocrisy of the supporters of capitalism. His myopia about the reality of the regime was expressed in articles which amount to little more than apologetics for the dictatorship. For example, in 1982 he noted in response to the economic problems of the previous year *"the opposition to the free-market policies that had been largely silence by success is being given full voice."* [quoted by Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. p. 63] No mention that the real cause of the *"silence"* of the opposition was not the *"success"* of policies which had impoverished the working class and enriched the elite but, rather, the expectation of a visit by the secret police. Given that Pinochet had sent murder squads to kill prominent dissidents abroad, Friedman's comments are incredulous — particularly as Allende's former foreign minister, Orlando Letelier, was assassinated in Washington in 1976 by a car bomb.

The state terror, the violation of human rights and drastic control and suppression of every form of meaningful dissent is discussed (and often condemned) as something only indirectly linked, or indeed entirely unrelated, to the economic policies that the military imposed. To publicly praise and support the economic policies adopted by the dictatorship while regretting its political regime is simply illogical hypocrisy. However, it does expose the limited nature of the right's concept of liberty as well as its priorities and values.

## D.11.2 But surely Chile proves that "economic freedom" creates political freedom?

As noted above, Friedman defended his praise for the Pinochet regime by arguing that its "economic liberty" helped produce the end of the dictatorship. In the words of Friedman:

> *"The economic development and the recovery produced by economic freedom in turn promoted the public's desire for a greater degree of political freedom ... In Chile, the drive for political freedom, that was generated by economic freedom and the resulting economic success, ultimately resulted in a referendum that introduced political democracy. Now, at long last, Chile has all three things: political freedom, human freedom and economic freedom. Chile will continue to be an interesting experiment to watch to see whether it can keep all three or whether, now that it has political freedom, that political freedom will tend to be used to destroy or reduce economic freedom."* [**Op. Cit.**]

It is hard to find an account so skewed by ideological blindness as this. The notion that Chile's "free market" capitalism provided the base for eliminating Pinochet's dictatorship is hard to defend. If it were true then we would expect Pinochet's rule to be substantially shorter than other military dictatorships in the region. However, this is **not** the case. For example, Argentina's Military Junta lasted from 1976 to 1983, 7 years; Peru's 12 years (1968 to 1980); Uruguay's 12 years (1973 to 1985); Bolivia's 18 years (1964 to 1982). Pinochet's lasted 17 years, exceeded by Brazil's 21 years (1964 to 1985). If Friedman's argument were valid then Pinochet would have fallen long before the rest. In fact, Chile was one of the last Latin American countries to return to democracy.

Nor can it be said that ending of the Pinochet regime was an automatic outcome of economic forces. Rather, it was a product of struggle by ordinary people who took to the streets in the early 1980s to protest in the face of state repression. The regime was subject to popular pressures from below and these, not capitalism, were the key factor. After all, it was not "economic liberty" which produced the desire



# Section E — What do anarchists think causes ecological problems?

the state in the near past resulted in a fascist dictatorship murdering thousands of people as well as repeated and persistent violations of human rights by the junta, not to mention the existence of "anti-Marxist" death squads — for example in 1986 *"Amnesty International accused the Chilean government of employing death squads."* [P. Gunson, A. Thompson, G. Chamberlain, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] According to one Human Rights group, the Pinochet regime was responsible for 11,536 human rights violations between 1984 and 1988 alone. [Calculation of *"Comite Nacional de Defensa do los Derechos del Pueblo,"* reported in **Fortin**, September 23, 1988]

These facts that would have a strongly deterrent effect on people contemplating the use of political liberty to actually **change** the status quo in ways that the military and economic elites did not approve of. This does not mean, of course, that the Chilean people are not resisting oppression and exploitation and rebuilding their organisations, simply that using free speech, striking and other forms of social action is more difficult. That is protects and increases the power, wealth and authority of the employer and state over their wage slaves goes without sating — it was what was intended. As Kropotkin pointed out years ago, *"freedom of press ... and all the rest, are only respected if the people do not make use of them against the privileged classes. But the day the people begin to take advantage of them to undermine those privileges, then the so-called liberties will be cast overboard."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42] Chile is a classic example of this, a bloody example which helps deter genuine democracy in that country decades later.



for "political freedom." Working class people could remember what political freedom was before it was destroyed in order to create Friedman's "economic liberty" and tried to recreate it.

In the face of state terror, political activists and trade unionists fought the regime. The 1988 referendum Friedman alludes to was the product of this heroic activity, not some abstract economic force. As Cathy Schneider points out, the 1983–86 *"cycle of protests had set the stage for a negotiated transition to democracy in 1990."* These protests, it should be noted, were subject to extreme state repression (one demonstration saw Pinochet send 18,000 troops onto the streets, who shot 129 people, 29 fatally, and tortured some of the 1,000 arrested). [**Shantytown protest in Pinochet's Chile**, p. 194 and p. 165] Peter Winn, for example, notes *"the resistance of workers to both the dictatorship and its neoliberal policies, often against great odds and at great risks."* In fact, *"during the Pinochet era, with its repression and restrictions on union activism, Chile's workers displayed great creativity in devising new ways to resist ... Nor was this resistance confined to the workplace or workers' issues ... it was Chile's workers who first raised the flag of political resistance against the dictatorship in the 1970s and sustained it during the years when political parties were banned. And it was the copper miners who mobilised the social protests and political opposition to the military regime in the 1980s to demand an end to Pinochet's dictatorship and the restoration of democracy and civil liberties."* [*"Introduction"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 11] This is confirmed by John Lear and Joseph Collins, who note that *"[d]uring the mid-1980s, unions were fundamental to organising the national protests that led eventually to the negotiations of the 1988 plebiscite."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20]

This, it should be noted, has always been the case. Political freedoms have **never** been given by the powers that be but rather won by long struggles by working class people. This has always been the case, as Kropotkin stressed basic political liberties were *"extorted from parliament by force, by agitations*

*that threatened to become rebellions. It was by establishing trade unions and practising strike action despite the edicts of Parliament and the hangings"* that workers *"won the right to associate and strike"* in Britain for example. [**Words of a Rebel**, pp. 123–4] To ignore that often heroic struggle shows an ignorance about history which only matches an ignorance about liberty. The history of capitalism is important in this regard. It first developed under Absolutist states which used its power to bolster the position of their capitalist class within both national (against the working class) and international markets (against foreign competitors). As we discuss in section F.8, they actively intervened to create the pre-conditions for generalised wage slavery before becoming a handicap to the rising bourgeoisie. These regimes were generally replaced by liberal states with limited voting rights which generally lifted the burden of state regulation from the capitalist class. The working class had to fight long and hard to win basic civil liberties and the vote. As Chomsky notes, such progress *"didn't just happen; it happened through the struggles of the labour movement, and the Civil Rights Movement, and the women's movement, and everything else. It's the popular movements which expanded the domain of freedom of speech [and other liberties] until it began to be meaningful."* [**Understanding Power**, pp. 268–9]

Once these rights were won, the ruling elite has always turned to fascism to control them once they started to threaten their power and wealth. This obviously applies to Chile. Until the coup of 11 September 1973, Chile had been seen increasing participation of the working class in economic and social decision making. The coup was, simply, a massive class revenge of the wealthy against a working class which had dared to imagine that another world was possible. Unsurprisingly, given the key role of working class people in the struggle for freedom, *"Worker leaders and activists ... were central targets of the military regime's state terror, whose goal was to intimidate them into passivity, in large part so that neoliberal policies could be*



All of which explains why subsequent governments have only tinkered with the free-market policies introduced by Pinochet. They have dared not reverse them not due to their popular nature but to the obvious fact that recent Chilean history shows that progressive politicians and their supporters have something to fear besides losing an election. Unsurprisingly, workers *"socio-economic aspirations were postponed in the interest of not jeopardising the transition and their expectations of labour law reform were sacrificed on the same alter."* [Winn, *"Introduction"*, Winn (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, p. 10] While 2002 saw the election of the first socialist president since Allende, it is unlikely that Chile will experience anything beyond minor reforms — the legacy of fear and political restrictions will ensure that the ruling class will have little to fear from "political liberty" being used by politicians to curb their power and wealth.

Then there is the social legacy of 17 years of dictatorship. As one expert on Latin America, Cathy Scheider, noted in 1993, *"the transformation of the economic and political system"* under Pinochet *"has had a profound impact on the world view of the typical Chilean,"* with most having *"little contact with other workers or with their neighbours, and only limited time with their family. Their exposure to political or labour organisations is minimal... they lack either the political resources or the disposition to confront the state. The fragmentation of opposition communities has accomplished what brute military repression could not. It has transformed Chile, both culturally and politically, from a country of active participatory grassroots communities, to a land of disconnected, apolitical individuals. The cumulative impact of this change is such that we are unlikely to see any concerted challenge to the current ideology in the near future."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 184]

In such circumstances, political liberty can be reintroduced, as no one is in a position to effectively use it. In addition, Chileans live with the memory that challenging

of right-"libertarian" Friedrich von Hayek and, unsurprisingly aimed to insulate "economic liberty" from popular pressures, i.e. to limit and reduce democracy to secure the freedom of capitalism (and, of course, the capitalist class).

In addition, the threat of military intervention is always at the forefront of political discussions. For example, on 11 September 1990, Pinochet *"warned that he would lead another coup is conditions warranted it. In 1993, when investigations into an arms procurement scandal implicated his son, Pinochet ordered combat-ready troops and tanks onto the streets for an 'exercise' … Throughout the Aylwin presidency, Pinochet maintained an army 'shadow cabinet' that acted as a political pressure group."* Unsurprisingly, the first post-Pinochet government *"often backed down in practice for the sake of social peace — or out of fear of endangering the transition to democracy. As a result, Aylwin was unable to fulfil his promises of constitutional and institutional reforms that would reverse Pinochet's authoritarian legacy."* This was because the new government thought that the coup and dictatorship *"reflected the decision of business elites to call in the military, because they could not protect their core interests under Chile's radicalised democracy. The lesson that … [they] drew … was that to avoid its repetition in the 1990s it was necessary to reassure business that its interests would be protected."* [Winn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50 and p. 53]

The limited nature of Chile's democracy was seen in 1998, when Pinochet was arrested in Britain in regard of a warrant issued by a Spanish Judge for the murders of Spanish citizens during his regime. Commentators, particularly those on the right, stressed that Pinochet's arrest could undermine Chile's "fragile democracy" by provoking the military. In other words, Chile is only a democracy in-so-far as the military let it be. Of course, few commentators acknowledged the fact that this meant that Chile was not, in fact, a democracy after all.



*imposed."* [Peter Winn, *"Introduction"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 12] Equally unsurprising, those who had taken to the streets aimed for political freedom in order to **end** the "economic liberty" imposed by the regime.

This means that Friedman's maxim that economic liberty is required to produce political liberty is a deeply flawed position to take. Not only does it ignore the popular struggles which have always had to be fought to end minority government, it also allows its advocates to justify and work with authoritarian regimes. At best, this position ensures that you will be indifferent to the destruction of political freedom as long as "economic liberty" (i.e. capitalism) was secured. At worse, it ensures that you would actively support such a destruction as you can justify it in terms of a return to "democracy" in the long run. Friedman and the "Chicago Boys" express both ends of that spectrum. That he can comment on *"the paradox that economic freedom produces political freedom but political freedom may destroy economic freedom"* in the context of Chile is staggering, as it was the destruction of "political freedom" that allowed "economic freedom" (for the rich) to be imposed. [**Op. Cit.**] In reality, Chile provides evidence to support the alternative argument that the introduction of free market capitalism requires the elimination or, at best, the reduction of "political liberty."

In other words, fascism was an ideal political environment to introduce "economic liberty" **because** it had destroyed political liberty. Perhaps we should conclude that the denial of political liberty is both necessary and sufficient in order to create (and preserve) "free market" capitalism? After all, the history of capitalism has been marked by the ruling class overthrowing "political liberty" when their power was threatened by popular movements. In other words, that Malatesta was right to argue that the *"capitalists can maintain the struggle in the economic field so long as workers demand small … improvements; but as soon as they see their profits seriously diminished and the very ex-*

*istence of their privileges threatened, they appeal to government and if it is not sufficiently understanding and not strong enough to defend them … they use their own wealth to finance new repressive forces and to set up a new government which will serve them better."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 131]

Friedman's argument implies that "economic liberty" is more important than "political liberty," so making people less concerned about dictatorships as long as they support the interests of the capitalist class. While the long list of capitalists, conservatives and right-wing ("classical") liberals who supported fascism or fascist-like regimes shows that giving them an ideological prop to justify it is unnecessary, it is hardly wise.

Then there is the question of whether Chile does, in fact, have genuine political liberty (i.e. a democratic government). The answer is, not quite. Chile's democracy is a "managed" one, constrained both by the political legacy of Pinochet's constitution and the threat of military intervention. Significantly, Friedman seems unconcerned about the quality of the post-Pinochet democracy Chile experiences. Simply put, the existence of an electoral regime cannot be confused with democracy or "political liberty."

It is clear that Pinochet went into the 1988 plebiscite expecting to win (particularly as he tried to rig it like the 1980 one). According to many reports from members of his cabinet and staff, he was absolutely furious and wanted to annul the results. The popular backlash this would have created ensured he abided by the result. Instead, he ensured that the new governments had to accept his authoritarian constitution and decree-laws. In other words, knowing he would be replaced he immediately took steps to limit the subsequent democratically elected governments as well as remaining as the head of the armed forces (as we discuss below, this obviously ensures the threat of a coup hung over the new governments).



This means that post-Pinochet Chile is not your typical "democracy." Pinochet became an unelected senator for life after his retirement as armed forces commander in March 1998 and 28% of the Senate is *"designated,"* including four retired military officers named by the National Security Council. Pinochet also imposed a *"unique binomial electoral law, [in] which to elect two deputies or senators from the same district, a party or electoral alliance needed to double its opponent's vote — a difficult feat — or else the opponent received an equal number of seats in congress."* This ensured rightist control of the Senate despite a decade of majority victories by the centre-left in elections and so *"Pinochet's 'designated senators' and undemocratic electoral law continued to frustrate the popular will and limit Chile's restored democracy."* The majority could not *"pass laws without the consent of its rightist opponents."* Pinochet used *"final months as president to decree laws that would hamstring his opponents, even if a majority of the electorate supported them."* In addition, any new government was *"confronted by a judiciary and government bureaucracy packed by Pinochet with his own adherents. Moreover, the Right enjoyed a near monopoly of the press and media that grew as the decade advanced."* [Winn, *"The Pinochet Era"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 64 and p. 49]

Thus Chile is lumbered with Pinochet's legacy, *"the authoritarian constitution of 1980, which sought to create a 'protected democracy' under military tutelage. It was written so as to be difficult to amend and designed to handcuff a future opposition government and frustrate popular will."* It *"removed the military from civilian control, while submitting future elected governments to a military-dominated National Security Council with a vague but broad purview."* It also *"banned measures against private property."* With some *"relative minor modifications of some of its most egregious features during the transition to democracy"* it remained *"in effect for the rest of the century"* and in 2004 was *"still Chile's fundamental charter."* [Winn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30] This constitution built upon the work

Under capitalism, we may be free to choose, but the options are usually lousy choices, and not the only ones potentially available in theory (this is a key problem with green consumerism — see section E.5).

The short-termism of capitalism has produced, in effect, a system which is *"a massive pyramid scheme that will collapse somewhere down the line when all the major players have already retired from the game. Of course when the last of these hustlers cash in their chips, there won't be any place left to retire to."* [David Watson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57]



environmental impact, it cannot stop the long-term destruction of our planet as the ecological crisis is *"**systemic** — and not a matter of misinformation, spiritual insensitivity, or lack of moral integrity. The present social illness lies not only in the outlook that pervades the present society; it lies above all in the very **structure** and **law of life** in the system itself, in its imperative, which no entrepreneur or corporation can ignore without facing destruction: growth, more growth, and still more growth."* [Murray Bookchin, *"The Ecological Crisis, Socialism, and the need to remake society,"* pp. 1–10, **Society and Nature**, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 2–3] This can only be ended by ending capitalism, not by appeals to consumers to buy eco-friendly products or to capitalists to provide them:

> *"Accumulation is determined not by the good or bad intentions of the individual bourgeois, but by the commodity relationship itself ... It is not the perversity of the bourgeois that creates production for the sake of production, but the very market nexus over which he presides and to which he succumbs... . It requires a grotesque self-deception, or worse, an act of ideological social deception, to foster the belief that this society can undo its very law of life in response to ethical arguments or intellectual persuasion."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 66]

Sadly, much of what passes for the green movement is based on this kind of perspective. At worse, many environmentalists place their hopes on green consumerism and education. At best, they seek to create green parties to work within the state to pass appropriate regulations and laws. Neither option gets to the core of the problem, namely a system in which there are *"oppressive human beings who literally own society and others who are owned by it. Until society can be reclaimed by an undivided humanity that will use its collective wisdom, cultural achieve-*

*ments, technological innovations, scientific knowledge, and innate creativity for its own benefit and for that of the natural world, all ecological problems will have their roots in social problems.*" [Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, p. 39]



the ecologically damaging products will have the advantage. In other words, capitalism has a built-in bias toward short-term gain, and this bias — along with its inherent need for growth — means the planet will continue its free-fall toward ecological disaster so long as capitalism exists.

This suggests that attempts to address ecological problems like pollution and depletion of resources by calling for public education are unlikely to work. While it is true that this will raise people's awareness to the point of creating enough demand for environment-friendly technologies and products that they will be profitable to produce, it does not solve the problem that the costs involved in doing such research now cannot be met by a possible future demand. Moreover, the costs of such technology can initially be quite high and so the effective demand for such products may not be sufficient. For example, energy-saving light bulbs have been around for some time but have been far more expensive that traditional ones. This means that for those on lower-incomes who would, in theory, benefit most from lower-energy bills cannot afford them. Thus their short-term income constrains undermine long-term benefits.

Even if the research is completed, the market itself can stop products being used. For example, the ability to produce reasonably inexpensive solar photovoltaic power cells has existed for some time. The problem is that they are currently very expensive and so there is a limited demand for them. This means that no capitalist wants to risk investing in factory large enough to take advantage of the economies of scale possible. The net effect is that short-term considerations ensure that a viable eco-technology has been margainalised.

This means that no amount of education can countermand the effects of market forces and the short-term perspective they inflict on us all. If faced with a tight budget and relatively expensive "ecological" products and technology, consumers and companies may be forced to choose the cheaper, ecologically unfriendly product to make ends meet or survive in the market.

after 300 years. So if it costs $1 today to prevent ecological damage worth $2 million in the 24th century then economic theory argues that our descendants would be better off with us putting that $1 in the bank. This would suggest that basing our responsibility to future generations on economics may not be the wisest course.

The supporter of capitalism may respond by arguing that business leaders are as able to see long-term negative environmental effects as the rest of us. But this is to misunderstand the nature of the objection. It is not that business leaders **as individuals** are any less able to see what's happening to the environment. It is that if they want to keep their jobs they have to do what the system requires, which is to concentrate on what is most profitable in the short term. Thus if the president of company X has a mystical experience of oneness with nature and starts diverting profits into pollution control while the presidents of Y and Z continue with business as usual, the stockholders of company X will get a new president who is willing to focus on short-term profits like Y and Z. As Joel Bakan stresses, managers of corporations *"have a legal duty to put shareholders' interests above all others ... Corporate social responsibility is thus illegal — at least when it is genuine."* Ones which *"choose social and environmental goals over profits — who try and act morally — are, in fact, immoral"* as their role in both the economy and economic ideology is to *"make much as much money as possible for shareholders."* [**The Corporation**, pp. 36–7 and p. 34]

In general, then, if one company tries to devote resources to develop products or processes that are ecologically responsible, they will simply be undercut by other companies which are not doing so (assuming such products or processes are more expensive, as they generally are as the costs are not inflicted on other people and the planet). While some products may survive in small niche markets which reflect the fact that many people are willing and able to pay more to protect their world, in general they will not be competitive in the market and so



# E.2 What do eco-anarchists propose instead of capitalism?

Given what eco-anarchists consider to be the root cause of our ecological problems (as discussed in the last section), it should come as no surprise that they think that the current ecological crisis can only be really solved by eliminating those root causes, namely by ending domination within humanity and creating an anarchist society. So here we will summarise the vision of the free society eco-anarchists advocate before discussing the limitations of various non-anarchist proposals to solve environmental problems in subsequent sections.

However, before so doing it is important to stress that eco-anarchists consider it important to fight against ecological and social problems today. Like all anarchists, they argue for direct action and solidarity to struggle for improvements and reforms under the current system. This means that eco-anarchism *"supports every effort to conserve the environment"* in the here and now. The key difference between them and environmentalists is that eco-anarchists place such partial struggles within a larger context of changing society as a whole. The former is part of *"waging a delaying action against the rampant destruction of the environment"* the other is *"a create movement to totally revolutionise the social relations of humans to each other and of humanity to nature."* [Murray Bookchin, **Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 43] This is one of the key differences between an ecological perspective

and an environmental one (a difference discussed in section E.1.2). Finding ways to resist capitalism's reduction of the living world to resources and commodities and its plunder of the planet, our resistance to specific aspects of an eco-cidal system, are merely a starting point in the critique of the whole system and of a wider struggle for a better society. As such, our outline of an ecological society (or ecotopia) is not meant to suggest an indifference to partial struggles and reforms within capitalism. It is simply to indicate why anarchists are confident that ending capitalism and the state will create the necessary preconditions for a free and ecologically viable society.

This perspective flows from the basic insight of eco-anarchism, namely that ecological problems are not separate from social ones. As we are part of nature, it means that how we interact and shape with it will be influenced by how we interact and shape ourselves. As Reclus put it *"every people gives, so to speak, new clothing to the surrounding nature. By means of its fields and roads, by its dwelling and every manner of construction, by the way it arranges the trees and the landscape in general, the populace expresses the character of its own ideals. If it really has a feeling for beauty, it will make nature more beautiful. If, on the other hand, the great mass of humanity should remain as it is today, crude, egoistic and inauthentic, it will continue to mark the face of the earth with its wretched traces. Thus will the poet's cry of desperation become a reality: 'Where can I flee? Nature itself has become hideous.'"* In order to transform how we interact with nature, we need to transform how we interact with each other. *"Fortunately,"* Reclus notes, *"a complete alliance of the beautiful and the useful is possible."* [quoted by Clark and Martin (eds.) , **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 125 and p. 28]

Over a century later, Murray Bookchin echoed this insight:



agribusiness as small farmers are being driven out of business. Short-termism means that progress in agriculture is whatever increases the current yield of a crop even if means destroying the sources of fertility in the long run in order to maintain current fertility by adding more and more chemicals (which run off into rivers, seep into the water table and end up in the food itself.

This kind of irrational short-term behaviour also afflicts capital markets as well. The process works in the same way Chomsky highlights. Suppose there are 3 companies, X, Y, and Z and suppose that company X invests in the project of developing a non-polluting technology within ten years. At the same time its competitors, Y and Z, will be putting their resources into increasing profits and market share in the coming days and months and over the next year. During that period, company X will be unable to attract enough capital from investors to carry out its plans, since investors will flock to the companies that are most immediately profitable. This means that the default position under capitalism is that the company (or country) with the lowest standards enjoys a competitive advantage, and drags down the standards of other companies (or countries). Sometimes, though, capital markets experience irrational bubbles. During the dot.com boom of the 1990s, investors did plough money into internet start-ups and losses were tolerated for a few years in the expectation of high profits in the near future. When that did not happen, the stock market crashed and investors turned away from that market in droves. If something similar happened to eco-technologies, the subsequent aftermath may mean that funding essential for redressing our interaction with the environment would not be forthcoming until the memories of the crash had disappeared in the next bubble frenzy.

Besides, thanks to compound interest benefits far in the future have a very small present value. If $1 were left in a bank at 5% annual interest, it would be worth more than $2 million

markets for such products until such time as markets have appeared for them in the commercial sector. Thus capitalism, by itself, will tend to under-invest in long term projects:

> *"in a competitive system you do **short-term planning only** ... Let's take corporate managers, where there's no real confusion about what they're doing. They are maximising profit and market share in the short term. In fact, if they were not to do that, they would no longer exist. Let's be concrete. Suppose that some automobile company, say General Motors, decides to devote their resources to planning for something that will be profitable ten years from now. Suppose that's where they divert their resources: they want to think in some long-term conception of market dominance. Their rivals are going to maximising profit and power in the short term, and they're going to take over the market, and General Motors won't be in business. That's true for the owners and also for the managers. The managers want to stay managers. They can fight off hostile take-over bids, they can keep from being replaced, as long as they contribute to short-term profitability. As a result, long-term considerations are rarely considered in competitive systems."* [Noam Chomsky, **Language and Politics**, p. 598]

This does not mean that firms will not look into future products nor do research and development. Many do (particularly if helped by the state). Nor does it imply that some industries do not have a longer-term perspective. It simply shows that such activity is not the normal state of affairs. Moreover, any such "long-term" perspective is rarely more than a decade while an ecological perspective demands much more than this. This also applies to agriculture, which is increasingly being turned into



> *"The views advanced by anarchists were deliberately called **social** ecology to emphasise that major ecological problems have their roots in social problems — problems that go back to the very beginnings of patricentric culture itself. The rise of capitalism, with a law of life based on competition, capital accumulation, and limitless growth, brought these problems — ecological and social — to an acute point; indeed, one that was unprecedented in any prior epoch of human development. Capitalist society, by recycling the organise world into an increasingly inanimate, inorganic assemblage of commodities, was destined to simplify the biosphere, thereby cutting across the grain of natural evolution with its ages-long thrust towards differentiation and diversity.*
>
> *"To reverse this trend, capitalism had to be replaced by an ecological society based on non-hierarchical relationships, decentralised communities, eco-technologies like solar power, organic agriculture, and humanly scaled industries — in short, by face-to-face democratic forms of settlement economically and structurally tailored to the ecosystems in which they were located."* [**Remaking Society**, pp. 154–5]

The vision of an ecological society rests on the obvious fact that people can have both positive and negative impacts on the environment. In current society, there are vast differences and antagonisms between privileged whites and people of colour, men and women, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed. Remove those differences and antagonisms and our interactions with ourselves and nature change radically. In other words, there is a vast difference between free, non-hierarchical, class, and stateless societies on the one hand, and hierarchical, class-

ridden, statist, and authoritarian ones and how they interact with the environment.

Given the nature of ecology, it should come as no surprise that social anarchists have been at the forefront of eco-anarchist theory and activism. It would be fair to say that most eco-anarchists, like most anarchists in general, envision an ecotopia based on communist-anarchist principles. This does not mean that individualist anarchists are indifferent to environmental issues, simply that most anarchists are unconvinced that such solutions will actually end the ecological crisis we face. Certain of the proposals in this section are applicable to individualist anarchism (for example, the arguments that co-operatives will produce less growth and be less likely to pollute). However, others are not. Most obviously, arguments in favour of common ownership and against the price mechanism are not applicable to the market based solutions of individualist anarchism. It should also be pointed out, that much of the eco-anarchist critique of capitalist approaches to ecological problems are also applicable to individualist and mutualist anarchism as well (particularly the former, as the latter does recognise the need to regulate the market). While certain aspects of capitalism would be removed in an individualist anarchism (such as massive inequalities of wealth, capitalist property rights as well as direct and indirect subsidies to big business), it is still has the informational problems associated with markets as well as a growth orientation.

Here we discuss the typical eco-anarchist view of a free ecological society, namely one rooted in social anarchist principles. Eco-anarchists, like all consistent anarchists advocate workers' self-management of the economy as a necessary component of an ecologically sustainable society. This usually means society-wide ownership of the means of production and all productive enterprises self-managed by their workers (as described further in section I.3). This is a key aspect of making a truly ecologate. Due to the nature of the market, firms are forced to focus on short-term profitability rather than long-term survival. This makes sense. If a company does not make money now, it will not be around later.

This, obviously, drives the creation of "externalities" discussed in previous sections. Harmful environmental effects such as pollution, global warming, ozone depletion, and destruction of wildlife habitat are not counted as "costs of production" in standard methods of accounting because they are borne by everyone in the society. This gives companies a strong incentive to ignore such costs as competition forces firms to cut as many costs as possible in order to boost short-term profits.

To give an obvious example, if a firm has to decide between installing a piece of costly equipment which reduces its pollution and continuing as it currently is, then it is more likely to do the latter. If the firm **does** invest then its costs are increased and it will lose its competitive edge compared to its rivals who do not make a similar investment. The "rational" decision is, therefore, not to invest, particularly if by externalising costs it can increase its profits or market share by cutting prices. In other words, the market rewards the polluters and this is a powerful incentive to maximise such activities. The market, in other words, provides incentives to firms to produce externalities as part their drive for short-term profitability. While this is rational from the firm's position, it is collectively irrational as the planet's ecology is harmed.

The short-term perspective can also be seen by the tendency of firms to under-invest in developing risky new technologies. This is because basic research which may take years, if not decades, to develop and most companies are unwilling to take on that burden. Unsurprisingly, most advanced capitalist countries see such work funded by the state (as we noted in section D.8, over 50% of total R&D funding has been provided by the federal state in the USA). Moreover, the state has provided

alternative schools (organised by libertarian unions and other associations) which used libertarian education to produce anarchists would hardly be favoured by companies and so be effectively black-listed — a real deterrent to their spreading through society. Why would a capitalist company employ a graduate of a school who would make trouble for them once employed as their wage slave?

Finally, needless to say, the combined wealth of corporations and the rich outweighs that of even the best funded environmental group or organisation (or even all of them put together). This means that the idea of such groups buying, say, rainforest is unlikely to succeed as they simply do not have the resources needed — they will be outbid by those who wish to develop wilderness regions. This is particularly the case once we accept the framework of economic self-interest assumed by market theory. This implies that organisations aiming to increase the income of individual's will be better funded than those whose aim is to preserve the environment for future generations. As recent developments show, companies can and do use that superior resources to wage a war for hearts and minds in all aspects of society, staring in the schoolroom. Luckily no amount of spin can nullify reality or the spirit of freedom and so this propaganda war will continue as long as capitalism does.

In summary, market solutions to environmental problems under capitalism will always suffer from the fact that real markets are marked by economic inequalities and power.

## E.3.3 Can capitalism's focus on short-term profitability deal with the ecological crisis?

No a word, no. This is another key problem associated with capitalism's ability to deal with the ecological crisis it helps cre-



ical society. Most greens, even if they are not anarchists, recognise the pernicious ecological effects of the capitalist "grow or die" principle; but unless they are also anarchists, they usually fail to make the connection between that principle and the **hierarchical form** of the typical capitalist corporation. The capitalist firm, like the state, is centralised, top-down and autocratic. These are the opposite of what an ecological ethos would suggest. In contrast, eco-anarchists emphasise the need for socially owned and worker self-managed firms.

This vision of co-operative rather than hierarchical production is a common position for almost all anarchists. Communist and non-communist social anarchists, like mutualists and collectivists, propose co-operative workplaces but differ in how best to distribute the products produced. The former urge the abolition of money and sharing according to need while the latter see income related to work and surpluses are shared equally among all members. Both of these systems would produce workplaces which would be under far less pressure toward rapid expansion than the traditional capitalist firm (as individualist anarchism aims for the abolition of rent, profit and interest it, too, will have less expansive workplaces).

The slower growth rate of co-operatives has been documented in a number of studies, which show that in the traditional capitalist firm, owners' and executives' percentage share of profits greatly increases as more employees are added to the payroll. This is because the corporate hierarchy is designed to facilitate exploitation by funnelling a disproportionate share of the surplus value produced by workers to those at the top of the pyramid (see section C.2) Such a design gives ownership and management a very strong incentive to expand, since, other things being equal, their income rises with every new employee hired. [David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, pp. 153–4] Hence the hierarchical form of the capitalist corporation is one of the main causes of runaway

growth as well as social inequality and the rise of big business and oligopoly in the so-called "free" market.

By contrast, in an equal-share worker co-operative, the addition of more members simply means more people with whom the available pie will have to be equally divided — a situation that immensely reduces the incentive to expand. Thus a libertarian-socialist economy will not be under the same pressure to grow. Moreover, when introducing technological innovations or facing declining decline for goods, a self-managed workplace would be more likely to increase leisure time among producers rather than increase workloads or reduce numbers of staff.

This means that rather than produce a few big firms, a worker-controlled economy would tend to create an economy with more small and medium sized workplaces. This would make integrating them into local communities and eco-systems far easier as well as making them more easily dependent on green sources of energy. Then there are the other ecological advantages to workers' self-management beyond the relative lack of expansion of specific workplaces and the decentralisation this implies. These are explained well by market socialist David Schweickart:

> *"To the extent that emissions affect the workers directly on the job (as they often do), we can expect a self-managed firm to pollute less. Workers will control the technology; it will not be imposed on them from without.*
>
> *"To the extent that emissions affect the local community, they are likely to be less severe, for two reasons. Firstly, workers (unlike capitalist owners) will necessarily live nearby, and so the decision-makers will bear more of the environmental costs directly. Second ... a self-managed firm will not be able to avoid local regulation by running away (or threat-*



Moreover, it takes up the valuable time of those experts who have to debunk the claims rather than do the research needed to understand the ecological problems we face and propose possible solutions.

As well as spin and propaganda aimed at adults, companies are increasingly funding children's education. This development implies obvious limitations on the power of education to solve ecological problems. Companies will hardly provide teaching materials or fund schools which educate their pupils on the **real** causes of ecological problems. Unsurprisingly, a 1998 study in the US by the Consumers Union found that 80% of teaching material provided by companies was biased and provided students with incomplete or slanted information that favoured its sponsor's products and views [Schlosser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55] The more dependent a school is on corporate funds, the less likely it will be to teach its students the necessity to question the motivations and activities of business. That business will not fund education which it perceives as anti-business should go without saying. As Sharon Beder summarises, *"the infiltration of school curricula through banning some texts and offering corporate-based curriculum material and lesson plans in their place can conflict with educational objectives, and also with the attainment of an undistorted understanding of environmental problems."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 172–3]

This indicates the real problem of purely "educational" approaches to solving the ecological crisis, namely that the ruling elite controls education (either directly or indirectly). This is to be expected, as any capitalist elite must control education because it is an essential indoctrination tool needed to promote capitalist values and to train a large population of future wage-slaves in the proper habits of obedience to authority. Thus capitalists cannot afford to lose control of the educational system. And this means that such schools will not teach students what is really necessary to avoid ecological disaster: namely the dismantling of capitalism itself. And we may add,

multi-billion pound industry has poisoned public debate on such a key issue for the future of humanity by propaganda and dis-information.

Having substantial resources available means that the media can be used to further an anti-green agenda and dominate the debate (at least for a while). Take, as an example, **The Skeptical Environmentalist**, a book by Bjørn Lomborg (a political scientist and professor of statistics at the University of Aarhus in Denmark). When it was published in 2001, it caused a sensation with its claims that scientists and environmental organisations were making, at best, exaggerated and, at worse, false claims about the world's environmental problems. His conclusion was panglossian in nature, namely that there was not that much to worry about and we can continue as we are. That, of course, was music to the ears of those actively destroying the environment as it reduces the likelihood that any attempt will be made to stop them.

Unsurprisingly, the book was heavily promoted by the usual suspects and, as a result received significant attention from the media. However, the **extremely** critical reviews and critiques it subsequently produced from expert scientists on the issues Lomborg discussed were less prominently reviewed in the media, if at all. That critics of the book argued that it was hardly an example of good science based on objectivity, understanding of the underlying concepts, appropriate statistical methods and careful peer review goes without saying. Sadly, the fact that numerous experts in the fields Lomborg discussed showed that his book was seriously flawed, misused data and statistics and marred by flawed logic and hidden value judgements was not given anything like the same coverage even though this information is far more important in terms of shaping public perception. Such works and their orchestrated media blitz provides those with a vested interest in the status quo with arguments that they should be allowed to continue their anti-environmental activities and agenda.



> *ening to do so). The great stick that a capitalist firm holds over the head of a local community will be absent. Hence absent will be the macrophenomenon of various regions of the country trying to compete for firms by offering a 'better business climate' (i.e. fewer environmental restrictions).*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 145]

For an ecological society to work, it requires the active participation of those doing productive activity. They are often the first to be affected by industrial pollution and have the best knowledge of how to stop it happening. As such, workplace self-management is an essential requirement for a society which aims to life in harmony with its surrounds (and with itself, as a key aspect of social unfreedom would be eliminated in the form of wage slavery).

For these reasons, libertarian socialism based on producer co-operatives is essential for the type of economy necessary to solve the ecological crisis. These all feed directly into the green vision as *"ecology points to the necessity of decentralisation, diversity in natural and social systems, human-scale technology, and an end to the exploitation of nature."* [John Clark, **The Anarchist Moment**, p. 115] This can only be achieved on a society which bases itself on workers' self-management as this would facilitate the decentralisation of industries in ways which are harmonious with nature.

So far, all forms of social anarchism are in agreement. However, eco-anarchists tend to be communist-anarchists and oppose both mutualism and collectivism. This is because workers' ownership and self-management places the workers of an enterprise in a position where they can become a particularistic interest within their community. This may lead to these firms acting purely in their own narrow interests and against the local community. They would be, in other words, outside of community input and be solely accountable to themselves. This

could lead to a situation where they become "collective capitalists" with a common interest in expanding their enterprises, increasing their "profits" and even subjecting themselves to irrational practices to survive in the market (i.e., harming their own wider and long-term interests as market pressures have a distinct tendency to produce a race to the bottom — see section I.1.3 for more discussion). This leads most eco-anarchists to call for a confederal economy and society in which communities will be decentralised and freely give of their resources without the use of money.

As a natural compliment to workplace self-management, eco-anarchists propose communal self-management. So, although it may have appeared that we focus our attention on the economic aspects of the ecological crisis and its solution, this is not the case. It should always be kept in mind that all anarchists see that a complete solution to our many ecological and social problems must be multi-dimensional, addressing all aspects of the total system of hierarchy and domination. This means that only anarchism, with its emphasis on the elimination of authority in **all** areas of life, goes to the fundamental root of the ecological crisis.

The eco-anarchist argument for direct (participatory) democracy is that effective protection of the planet's ecosystems requires that all people are able to take part at the grassroots level in decision-making that affects their environment, since they are more aware of their immediate eco-systems and more likely to favour stringent environmental safeguards than politicians, state bureaucrats and the large, polluting special interests that now dominate the "representative" system of government. Moreover, real change must come from below, not from above as this is the very source of the social and ecological problems that we face as it divests individuals, communities and society as a whole of their power, indeed right, to shape their own destinies as well



perfectly logical but, in fact, totally insane (this helps explain why making people "think like an economist" takes so many years of indoctrination within university walls and why so few achieve it).

Economic power works in other ways as well. A classic example of this at work can be seen from the systematic destruction of public transport systems in America from the 1930s onwards (see David St. Clair's **The Motorization of American Cities** for a well-researched account of this). These systems were deliberately bought by automotive (General Motors), oil, and tire corporations in order to eliminate a less costly (both economically **and** ecologically) competitor to the automobile. This was done purely to maximise sales and profits for the companies involved yet it transformed the way of life in scores of cities across America. It is doubtful that if environmental concerns had been considered important at the time that they would have stopped this from happening. This means that individual consumption decisions will be made within an market whose options can be limited simply by a large company buying out and destroying alternatives.

Then there is the issue of economic power in the media. This is well understood by corporations, who fund PR, think-tanks and "experts" to counteract environmental activism and deny, for example, that humans are contributing to global warming. Thus we have the strange position that only Americans think that there is a debate on the causes of global warming rather than a scientific consensus. The actions of corporate funded "experts" and PR have ensured **that** particular outcome. As Sharon Beder recounts in her book **Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism**, a large amount of money is being spent on number sophisticated techniques to change the way people think about the environment, what causes the problems we face and what we can and should do about it. Compared to the resources of environmental and green organisations, it is unsurprising that this elaborate

*and mortality"* and so *"pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages."* Secondly, *"that under-populated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City."* Thirdly, the *"demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity."* Concern over pollution related illness would be higher in a country where more children survive to get them. *"Also, much of the concern over industrial atmosphere discharge is about visibility impairing particulates ... Clearly trade in goods that embody aesthetic pollution concerns could be welfare enhancing. While production is mobile the consumption of pretty air is a non-tradable."* The memo notes *"the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that"* and ends by stating that the *"problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution"* in the third world *"could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every Bank proposal for liberalisation."* [**The Economist**, 08/02/1992]

While Summers accepted the criticism for the memo, it was actually written by Lant Pritchett, a prominent economist at the Bank. Summers claimed he was being ironic and provocative. **The Economist**, unsurprisingly, stated *"his economics was hard to answer"* while criticising the language used. This was because clean growth may slower than allowing pollution to occur and this would stop *"helping millions of people in the third world to escape their poverty."* [15/02/1992] So not only is poisoning the poor with pollution is economically correct, it is in fact required by morality. Ignoring the false assumption that growth, any kind of growth, always benefits the poor and the utter contempt shown for both those poor themselves and our environment what we have here is the cold logic that drives economic power to move location to maintain its right to pollute our common environment. Economically, it is



as draining them of their material and "spiritual" resources (i.e., the thoughts, hopes and dreams of people).

Simply put, it should be hardly necessary to explore in any great depth the sound ecological and social reasons for decentralising decision making power to the grassroots of society, i.e. to the people who have to live with the decisions being reached. The decentralised nature of anarchism would mean that any new investments and proposed solutions to existing problems would be tailored to local conditions. Due to the mobility of capital, laws passed under capitalism to protect the environment have to be created and implemented by the central government to be effective. Yet the state, as discussed in section E.1, is a centralised structure unsuited to the task of collecting and processing the information and knowledge required to customise decisions to local ecological and social circumstances. This means that legislation, precisely due to its scope, cannot be finely tuned to local conditions (and so can generate local opposition, particularly if whipped up by corporate front organisations). In an eco-anarchist society, decentralisation would not have the threat of economic power hanging over it and so decisions would be reached which reflected the actual local needs of the population. As they would be unlikely to want to pollute themselves or their neighbours, eco-anarchists are confident that such local empowerment will produce a society which lives with, rather than upon, the environment.

Thus eco-communities (or eco-communes) are a key aspect of an ecotopia. Eco-communes, Bookchin argued, will be *"networked confederally through ecosystems, bioregions, and biomes"* and be *"artistically tailored to their naturally surrounding. We can envision that their squares will be interlaced by streams, their places of assembly surrounded by groves, their physical contours respected and tastefully landscaped, their soils nurtured caringly to foster plant variety for ourselves, our domestic animals, and wherever possible the wildlife they may support on their fringes."* They would be decentralised

and *"scaled to human dimensions,"* using recycling as well as integrating *"solar, wind, hydraulic, and methane-producing installations into a highly variegated pattern for producing power. Agriculture, aquaculture, stockraising, and hunting would be regarded as crafts — an orientation that we hope would be extended as much as possible to the fabrication of use-values of nearly all kinds. The need to mass-produce goods in highly mechanised installations would be vastly diminished by the communities' overwhelming emphasis on quality and permanence."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 444]

This means that local communities will generate social and economic policies tailored to their own unique ecological circumstances, in co-operation with others (it is important stress that eco-communes do not imply supporting local self-sufficiency and economic autarchy as values in themselves). Decisions that have regional impact are worked out by confederations of local assemblies, so that everybody affected by a decision can participate in making it. Such a system would be self-sufficient as workplace and community participation would foster creativity, spontaneity, responsibility, independence, and respect for individuality — the qualities needed for a self-management to function effectively. Just as hierarchy shapes those subject to it in negative ways, participation would shape us in positive ways which would strengthen our individuality and enrich our freedom and interaction with others and nature.

That is not all. The communal framework would also impact on how industry would develop. It would allow eco-technologies to be prioritised in terms of R&D and subsidised in terms of consumption. No more would green alternatives and eco-technologies be left unused simply because most people cannot afford to buy them nor would their development be under-funded simply because a capitalist sees little profit form it or a politician cannot see any benefit from it. It also means that the broad outlines of production are



*medicines and other products banned in the developed world. Labour is cheap, there are few if any safety standards, and costs are cut. But the formula of cost-benefit still stands: the costs are simply borne by others, by the victims of Union Carbide, Dow, and Standard Oil."* [David Watson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44] This, it should be noted, makes perfect economic sense. If an accident happened and the poor actually manage to successfully sue the company, any payments will reflect their lost of earnings (i.e., not very much).

As such, there are other strong economic reasons for doing this kind of pollution exporting. You can estimate the value of production lost because of ecological damage and the value of earnings lost through its related health problems as well as health care costs. This makes it more likely that polluting industries will move to low-income areas or countries where the costs of pollution are correspondingly less (particularly compared to the profits made in selling the products in high-income areas). Rising incomes makes such goods as safety, health and the environment more valuable as the value of life is, for working people, based on their wages. Therefore, we would expect pollution to be valued less when working class people are affected by it. In other words, toxic dumps will tend to cluster around poorer areas as the costs of paying for the harm done will be much less. The same logic underlies the arguments of those who suggest that Third World countries should be dumping grounds for toxic industrial wastes since life is cheap there

This was seen in early 1992 when a memo that went out under the name of the then chief economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers, was leaked to the press. Discussing the issue of *"dirty"* Industries, the memo argued that the World Bank should *"be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries"* to Less Developed Countries and provided three reasons. Firstly, the *"measurements of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity*

consequences of their decisions. The "free market" capitalist argument would be, again, that those affected by the pollution would sue the company. We will assume that concentrations of wealth have little or no effect on the social system (which is a **highly** unlikely assumption, but never mind). Surely, if local people did successfully sue, the company would be harmed economically — directly, in terms of the cost of the judgement, indirectly in terms of having to implement new, eco-friendly processes. Hence the company would be handicapped in competition, and this would have obvious consequences for the local (and wider) economy.

This gives the company an incentive to simply move to an area that would tolerate the pollution if it were sued or even threatened with a lawsuit. Not only would existing capital move, but fresh capital would not invest in an area where people stand up for their rights. This — the natural result of economic power — would be a "big stick" over the heads of the local community. And when combined with the costs and difficulties in taking a large company to court, it would make suing an unlikely option for most people. That such a result would occur can be inferred from history, where we see that multinational firms have moved production to countries with little or no pollution laws and that court cases take years, if not decades, to process.

This is the current situation on the international market, where there is competition in terms of environment laws. Unsurprisingly, industry tends to move to countries which tolerate high levels of pollution (usually because of authoritarian governments which, like the capitalists themselves, simply ignore the wishes of the general population). Thus we have a market in pollution laws which, unsurprisingly, supplies the ability to pollute to meet the demand for it. This means that developing countries *"are nothing but a dumping ground and pool of cheap labour for capitalist corporations. Obsolete technology is shipped there along with the production of chemicals,*



established at the community assembly level while they are implemented in practice by smaller collective bodies which also operate on an egalitarian, participatory, and democratic basis. Co-operative workplaces form an integral part of this process, having control over the production process and the best way to implement any general outlines.

It is for these reasons that anarchists argue that common ownership combined with a use-rights based system of possession is better for the environment as it allows everyone the right to take action to stop pollution, not simply those who are directly affected by it. As a framework for ecological ethics, the communal system envisioned by social anarchists would be far better than private property and markets in protecting the environment. This is because the pressures that markets exert on their members would not exist, as would the perverse incentives which reward anti-social and anti-ecological practices. Equally, the anti-ecological centralisation and hierarchy of the state would be ended and replaced with a participatory system which can take into account the needs of the local environment and utilise the local knowledge and information that both the state and capitalism suppresses.

Thus a genuine solution to the ecological crisis presupposes communes, i.e. participatory democracy in the social sphere. This is a transformation that would amount to a political revolution. However, as Bakunin continually emphasised, a political revolution of this nature cannot be envisioned without a **socio-economic** revolution based on workers' self-management. This is because the daily experience of participatory decision-making, non-authoritarian modes of organisation, and personalistic human relationships would not survive if those values were denied during working hours. Moreover, as mentioned above, participatory communities would be hard pressed to survive the pressure that big business would subject them to.

Needless to say, the economic and social aspects of life cannot be considered in isolation. For example, the negative results of workplace hierarchy and its master-servant dynamic will hardly remain there. Given the amount of time that most people spend working, the political importance of turning it into a training ground for the development of libertarian values can scarcely be overstated. As history has demonstrated, political revolutions that are not based upon social changes and mass psychological transformation — that is, by a deconditioning from the master/slave attitudes absorbed from the current system — result only in the substitution of new ruling elites for the old ones (e.g. Lenin becoming the new "Tsar" and Communist Party aparatchiks becoming the new "aristocracy"). Therefore, besides having a slower growth rate, worker co-operatives with democratic self-management would lay the psychological foundations for the kind of directly democratic political system necessary to protect the biosphere. Thus "green" libertarian socialism is the only proposal radical enough to solve the ecological crisis.

Ecological crises become possible only within the context of social relations which weaken people's capacities to fight an organised defence of the planet's ecology and their own environment. This means that the restriction of participation in decision-making processes within hierarchical organisations such as the state and capitalism firms help create environmental along with social problems by denying those most affected by a problem the means of fixing it. Needless to say, hierarchy within the workplace is a prerequisite to accumulation and so growth while hierarchy within a community is a prerequisite to defend economic and social inequality as well as minority rule as the disempowered become indifferent to community and social issues they have little or no say in. Both combine to create the basis of our current ecological crisis and both need to be ended.



meatpacking industry advocated yet more technology to "solve" the problems caused by the existing technology. Rather than focusing on the primary causes of meat contamination, they proposed irradiating food. Of course the firms involved want to replace the word *"irradiation"* with the phrase *"cold pasteurisation"* due to the public being unhappy with the idea of their food being subject to radiation.

All this is achievable due to the economic power of fewer and fewer firms imposing costs onto their workers, their customers and, ultimately, the planet.

The next obvious factor associated with economic power are the pressures associated with capital markets and mobility. Investors and capitalists are always seeking the maximum return and given a choice between lower profits due to greater environmental regulation and higher profits due to no such laws, the preferred option will hardly need explaining. After all, the investor is usually concerned with the returns they get in their investment, **not** in its physical condition nor in the overall environmental state of the planet (which is someone else's concern). This means that investors and companies interest is in moving their capital to areas which return most money, not which have the best environmental impact and legacy. Thus the mobility of capital has to be taken into account. This is an important weapon in ensuring that the agenda of business is untroubled by social concerns and environmental issues. After all, if the owners and managers of capital consider that a state's environmental laws too restrictive then it can simply shift investments to states with a more favourable business climate. This creates significant pressures on communities to minimise environmental protection both in order to retain existing business and attract new ones.

Let us assume that a company is polluting a local area. It is usually the case that capitalist owners rarely live near the workplaces they own, unlike workers and their families. This means that the decision makers do not have to live with the

*… into the most dangerous job in the United States … And the same meat industry practices that endanger these workers have facilitated the introduction of deadly pathogens … into America's hamburger meat.*" [Eric Schlosser, **Fast Food Nation**, p. 5 and pp. 8–9]

Award winning journalist Eric Schlosser has presented an excellent insight in this centralised and concentrated food-industrial complex in his book **Fast Food Nation**. Schlosser, of course, is not alone in documenting the fundamentally anti-ecological nature of the capitalism and how an alienated society has created an alienated means of feeding itself. As a non-anarchist, he does fail to drawn the obvious conclusion (namely abolish capitalism) but his book does present a good overview of the nature of the processed at work and what drives them. Capitalism has created a world where even the smell and taste of food is mass produced as the industrialisation of agriculture and food processing has lead to the product (it is hard to call it food) becoming bland and tasteless and so chemicals are used to counteract the effects of producing it on such a scale. It is standardised food for a standardised society. As he memorably notes: *"Millions of … people at that very moment were standing at the same counter, ordering the same food from the same menu, food that tasted everywhere the same."* The Orwellian world of modern corporate capitalism is seen in all its glory. A world in which the industry group formed to combat Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulation is called *"Alliance for Workplace Safety"* and where the processed food's taste has to have the correct *"mouthfeel."* Unsurprisingly, the executives of these companies talk about *"the very essence of freedom"* and yet their corporation's *"first commandant is that only production counts … The employee's duty is to follow orders. Period."* In this irrational world, technology will solve all our problems, even the ones it generates itself. For example, faced with the serious health problems generated by the industrialisation of meat processing, the



Ultimately, a free nature can only begin to emerge when we live in a fully participatory society which itself is free of oppression, domination and exploitation. Only then will we be able to rid ourselves of the idea of dominating nature and fulfil our potential as individuals and be a creative force in natural as well social evolution. That means replacing the current system with one based on freedom, equality and solidarity. Once this is achieved, *"social life will yield a sensitive development of human and natural diversity, falling together into a well balanced harmonious whole. Ranging from community through region to entire continents, we will see a colourful differentiation of human groups and ecosystems, each developing its unique potentialities and exposing members of the community to a wide spectrum of economic, cultural and behavioural stimuli. Falling within our purview will be an exciting, often dramatic, variety of communal forms — here marked by architectural and industrial adaptations to semi-arid ecosystems, there to grasslands, elsewhere by adaptation to forested areas. We will witness a creative interplay between individual and group, community and environment, humanity and nature."* [Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 39]

So, to conclude, in place of capitalism eco-anarchists favour ecologically responsible forms of libertarian socialism, with an economy based on the principles of complementarily with nature; decentralisation (where possible and desirable) of large-scale industries, reskilling of workers, and a return to more artisan-like modes of production; the use of eco-technologies and ecologically friendly energy sources to create green products; the use of recycled and recyclable raw materials and renewable resources; the integration of town and country, industry and agriculture; the creation of self-managed eco-communities which exist in harmony with their surroundings; and self-managed workplaces responsive to the wishes of local community assemblies and labour councils in which decisions are made by direct democracy

and co-ordinated (where appropriate and applicable) from the bottom-up in a free federation. Such a society would aim to develop the individuality and freedom of all its members in order to ensure that we end the domination of nature by humanity by ending domination within humanity itself.

This is the vision of a green society put forth by Murray Bookchin. To quote him:

> *"We must create an ecological society — not merely because such a society is desirable but because it is direly necessary. We must begin to live in order to survive. Such a society involves a fundamental reversal of all the trends that mark the historic development of capitalist technology and bourgeois society — the minute specialisation or machines and labour, the concentration of resources and people in gigantic industrial enterprises and urban entities, the stratification and bureaucratisation of life, the divorce of town from country, the objectification of nature and human beings. In my view, this sweeping reversal means that we must begin to decentralise our cities and establish entirely new eco-communities that are artistically moulded to the ecosystems in which they are located ...*
>
> *"Such an eco-community ... would heal the split between town and country, indeed, between mind and body by fusing intellectual with physical work, industry with agriculture in a rotation or diversification of vocational tasks. An eco-community would be supported by a new kind of technology — or eco-technology — one composed of flexible, versatile machinery whose productive applications would emphasise durability and quality ..."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, pp. 68–9]



ist market is dominated by a small group of big companies who make increased profits at the expense of their smaller rivals. This is achieved, in part, because their size gives such firms significant influence in the market, forcing smaller companies out of business or into making concessions to get and maintain contracts.

The negative environmental impact of such a process should be obvious. For example, economic power places immense pressures towards monoculture in agriculture. In the UK the market is dominated by a few big supermarkets. Their suppliers are expected to produce fruits and vegetables which meet the requirements of the supermarkets in terms of standardised products which are easy to transport and store. The large-scale nature of the operations ensure that farmers across Britain (indeed, the world) have to turn their farms into suppliers of these standardised goods and so the natural diversity of nature is systematically replaced by a few strains of specific fruits and vegetables over which the consumer can pick. Monopolisation of markets results in the monoculture of nature.

This process is at work in all capitalist nations. In American, for example, the *"centralised purchasing decisions of the large restaurant chains and their demand for standardised products have given a handful of corporations an unprecedented degree of power over the nation's food supply ... obliterating regional differences, and spreading identical stores throughout the country ... The key to a successful franchise . .. can be expressed in one world: 'uniformity.'"* This has resulted in the industrialisation of food production, with the *"fast food chains now stand[ing] atop a huge food-industrial complex that has gained control of American agriculture ... large multinationals ... dominate one commodity market after another ... The fast food chain's vast purchasing power and their demand for a uniform product have encouraged fundamental changes in how cattle are raised, slaughter, and processed into ground beef. These changes have made meatpacking*

fused to be intimidated and called McDonald's bluff. Representing themselves in court, the two unemployed activists started the longest trial in UK history. After three years and a cost of around £10 million, the trial judge found that some of the claims were untrue (significantly, McDonald's had successfully petitioned the judge not to have a jury for the case, arguing that the issues were too complex for the public to understand). While the case was a public relations disaster for the company, McDonald's keeps going as before using the working practices exposed in the trial and remains one of the world's largest corporations confident that few people would have the time and resources to fight SLAPPs (although the corporation may now think twice before suing anarchists!).

Furthermore, companies are known to gather lists of known "trouble-makers" These "black lists" of people who could cause companies "trouble" (i.e., by union organising or suing employers over "property rights" issues) would often ensure employee "loyalty," particularly if new jobs need references. Under wage labour, causing one's employer "problems" can make one's current and future position difficult. Being black-listed would mean no job, no wages, and little chance of being re-employed. This would be the result of continually suing in defence of one's property rights — assuming, of course, that one had the time and money necessary to sue in the first place. Hence working-class people are a weak position to defend their rights under capitalism due to the power of employers both within and without the workplace. All these are strong incentives **not** to rock the boat, particularly if employees have signed a contract ensuring that they will be fired if they discuss company business with others (lawyers, unions, media, etc.).

Economic power producing terrible contracts does not affect just labour, it also effects smaller capitalists as well. As we discussed in section C.4, rather than operating "efficiently" to allocate resources within perfect competition any real capital-



Lastly, we need to quickly sketch out how anarchists see the change to an ecological society happening as there is little point having an aim if you have no idea how to achieve it.

As noted above, eco-anarchists (like all anarchists) do not counterpoise an ideal utopia to existing society but rather participate in current ecological struggles. Moreover, we see that struggle itself as the link between what is and what could be. This implies, at minimum, a two pronged strategy of neighbourhood movements and workplace organising as a means of both fighting and abolishing capitalism. These would work together, with the former targeting, say, the disposal of toxic wastes and the latter stopping the production of toxins in the first place. Only when workers are in a position to refuse to engage in destructive practices or produce destructive goods can lasting ecological change emerge. Unsurprisingly, modern anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists have been keen to stress the need for a green syndicalism which addresses ecological as well as economical exploitation. The ideas of community and industrial unionism are discussed in more detail in section J.5 along with other anarchist tactics for social change. Needless to say, such organisations would use direct action as their means of achieving their goals (see section J.2). It should be noted that some of Bookchin's social ecologist followers advocate, like him, greens standing in local elections as a means to create a counter-power to the state. As we discuss in section J.5.14, this strategy (called Libertarian Municipalism) finds few supporters in the wider anarchist movement.

This strategy flows, of course, into the structures of an ecological society. As we discuss in section I.2.3, anarchists argue that the framework of a free society will be created in the process of fighting the existing one. Thus the structures of an eco-anarchist society (i.e. eco-communes and self-managed workplaces) will be created by fighting the ecocidal tendencies of the current system. In other words, like all anarchists eco-anarchists seek to create the new world while fighting the old

one. This means what we do now is, however imperfect, an example of what we propose instead of capitalism. That means we act in an ecological fashion today in order to ensure that we can create an ecological society tomorrow.

For more discussion of how an anarchist society would work, see section I. We will discuss the limitations of various proposed solutions to the environmental crisis in the following sections.



*dividual citizens and groups for circulating petitions, writing to public officials, speaking at, or even just attending, public meetings, organising a boycott and engaging in peaceful demonstrations."* This trend has spread to other countries and the intent is the same: to silence opposition and undermine campaigns. This tactic is called a SLAPP (for ***"Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation"***) and is a civil court action which does not seek to win compensation but rather aims *"to harass, intimidate and distract their opponents ... They win the political battle, even when they lose the court case, if their victims and those associated with them stop speaking out against them."* This is an example of economic power at work, for the cost to a firm is just part of doing business but could bankrupt an individual or environmental organisation. In this way *"the legal system best serves those who have large financial resources at their disposal"* as such cases take *"an average of three years to be settled, and even if the person sued wins, can cost tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. Emotional stress, disillusionment, diversion of time and energy, and even divisions within families, communities and groups can also result."* [**Global Spin**, pp. 63–7]

A SLAPP usually deters those already involved from continuing to freely participate in debate and protest as well as deterring others from joining in. The threat of a court case in the face of economic power usually ensures that SLAPPS do not go to trial and so its objective of scaring off potential opponents usually works quickly. The reason can be seen from the one case in which a SLAPP backfired, namely the McLibel trial. After successfully forcing apologies from major UK media outlets like the BBC, Channel 4 and the Guardian by threatening legal action for critical reporting of the company, McDonald's turned its attention to the small eco-anarchist group London Greenpeace (which is not affiliated with Greenpeace International). This group had produced a leaflet called *"What's Wrong with McDonald's"* and the company sent spies to its meetings to identify people to sue. Two of the anarchists re-

*tal conflicts are often about who has rights to environment goods, and hence who is to bear the costs and who is to bear the benefits ... Hence, environmental policy and resource decision-making cannot avoid making normative choices which include questions of resource distribution and the relationships between conflicting rights claims ... The monetary value of a 'negative externality' depends on social institutions and distributional conflicts — willing to pay measures, actual or hypothetical, consider preferences of the higher income groups [as] more important than those of lower ones. If the people damaged are poor, the monetary measure of the cost of damage will be lower — 'the poor sell cheap.'"* [**Markets, Deliberation and Environment**, pp. 58–9]

Economic power also impacts on the types of contracts people make. It does not take too much imagination to envision the possibility that companies may make signing waivers that release it from liability a condition for working there. This could mean, for example, a firm would invest (or threaten to move production) only on condition that the local community and its workers sign a form waiving the firm of any responsibility for damages that may result from working there or from its production process. In the face of economic necessity, the workers may be desperate enough to take the jobs and sign the waivers. The same would be the case for local communities, who tolerate the environmental destruction they are subjected to simply to ensure that their economy remains viable. This already happens, with some companies including a clause in their contracts which states the employee cannot join a union.

Then there is the threat of legal action by companies. *"Every year,"* records green Sharon Beder, *"thousands of Americans are sued for speaking out against governments and corporations. Multi-million dollar law suits are being filed against in-*



# E.3 Can private property rights protect the environment?

Environmental issues have become increasingly important over the decades. When Murray Bookchin wrote his first works on our ecological problems in the 1950s, he was only one of a small band. Today, even right-wing politicians have to give at least some lip-service to environmental concerns while corporations are keen to present their green credentials to the general public (even if they do not, in fact, have any).

As such, there has been a significant change. This is better late than never, considering that the warnings made by the likes of Bookchin in the 1950s and 1960s have come true to a threateningly worrying degree. Sadly, eco-anarchist solutions are still ignored but that is unsurprising as they go to the heart of the ecological problem, namely domination within humanity as the precondition for the domination of nature and the workings of the capitalist economy. It is hardly likely that those who practice and benefit from that oppression and exploitation will admit that they are causing the problems! Hence the need to appear green in order to keep a fundamentally anti-green system going.

Of course, some right-wingers are totally opposed to ecological issues. They seriously seem to forget without a viable ecology, there would be no capitalism. Ayn Rand, for example, dismissed environmental concerns as being anti-human and had little problem with factory chimneys belching smoke

into the atmosphere (her fondness for chimneys and skyscrapers would have have made Freud reach for his notepad). As Bob Black once noted, *"Rand remarked that she **worshipped** smokestacks. For her … they not only stood for, they **were** the epitome of human accomplishment. She must have meant it since she was something of a human smokestack herself; she was a chain smoker, as were the other rationals in her entourage. In the end she abolished her own breathing: she died of lung cancer."* [*"Smokestack Lightning,"* **Friendly Fire**, p. 62] The fate of this guru of capitalism is a forewarning for our collective one if we ignore the environment and our impact on it.

The key to understanding why so many on the right are dismissive of ecological concerns is simply that ecology cannot be squeezed into their narrow individualistic property based politics. Ecology is about interconnectiveness, about change and interaction, about the sources of life and how we interact with them and they with us. Moreover, ecology is rooted in the **quality** of life and goes not automatically view quantity as the key factor. As such, the notion that more is better does not strike the ecologist as, in itself, a good thing. The idea that growth is good as such is the principle associated with cancer. Ecology also destroys the individualistic premise of capitalist economics. It exposes the myth that the market ensures everyone gets exactly what they want — for if you consume eco-friendly products but others do not then you are affected by their decisions as the environmental impact affects all. Equally, the notion that the solution to GM crops should letting "the market" decide fails to take into account that such crops spread into local eco-systems and contaminate whole areas (not to mention the issue of corporate power enclosing another part of the commons). The market "solution" in this case would result in everyone, to some degree, consuming GM crops eventually. None of this can be fitted into the capitalist ideology.

However, while vocal irrational anti-green perspectives lingers on in some sections of the right (particularly those



for some money is more tempting when you are struggling to make ends meet.

Then there is the issue of effective demand. Simply put, allocation of resources on the market is based on money and not need. If more money can be made in, say, meeting the consumption demands of the west rather than the needs of local people then the market will "efficiently" allocate resources away from the latter to the former regardless of the social and ecological impact. Take the example of Biofuels which have been presented by some as a means of fuelling cars in a less environmentally destructive way. Yet this brings people and cars into direct competition over the most "efficient" (i.e. most profitable) use of land. Unfortunately, effective demand is on the side of cars as their owners usually live in the developed countries. This leads to a situation where land is turned from producing food to producing biofuels, the net effect of which is to reduce supply of food, increase its price and so produce an increased likelihood of starvation. It also gives more economic incentive to destroy rainforests and other fragile eco-systems in order to produce more biofuel for the market.

Green socialist John O'Neill simply states the obvious:

> *"[The] treatment of efficiency as if it were logically independent of distribution is at best misleading, for the determination of efficiency already presupposes a given distribution of rights … [A specific outcome] is always relative to an initial starting point … If property rights are changed so also is what is efficient. Hence, the opposition between distributional and efficiency criteria is misleading. Existing costs and benefits themselves are the product of a given distribution of property rights. Since costs are not independent of rights they cannot guide the allocation of rights. Different initial distributions entail differences in whose preferences are to count. Environmen-*

"consent" to hierarchy within the workplace in return for access to the means of life, so to would they "consent" to pollution. In other words, the notion that pollution can be stopped by means of private property and lawsuits ignores the issue of class and economic inequality. Once these are factored in, it soon becomes clear that people may put up with externalities imposed upon them simply because of economic necessity and the pressure big business can inflict.

The first area to discuss is inequalities in wealth and income. Not all economic actors have equal resources. Corporations and the wealthy have far greater resources at their disposal and can spend millions of pounds in producing PR and advertising (propaganda), fighting court cases, influencing the political process, funding "experts" and think-tanks, and, if need be, fighting strikes and protests. Companies can use *"a mix of cover-up, publicity campaigns and legal manoeuvres to continue operations unimpeded."* They can go to court to try an *"block more stringent pollution controls."* [David Watson, **Against the Megamachine**, p. 56] Also while, in principle, the legal system offers equal protection to all in reality, wealthy firms and individuals have more resources than members of the general public. This means that they can employ large numbers of lawyers and draw out litigation procedures for years, if not decades.

This can be seen around us today. Unsurprisingly, the groups which bear a disproportionate share of environmental burdens are the poorest ones. Those at the bottom of the social hierarchy have less resources available to fight for their rights. They may not be aware of their rights in specific situations and not organised enough to resist. This, of course, explains why companies spend so much time attacking unions and other forms of collective organisation which change that situation. Moreover as well as being less willing to sue, those on lower income may be more willing to be bought-off due to their economic situation. After all, tolerating pollution in return



funded by the heaviest polluters), other supporters of capitalism have considered the problems of ecological destruction in some degree. Some of this is, of course, simply greenwashing (i.e., using PR and advertising to present a green image while conducting business as usual). Some of it is funding think tanks which use green-sounding names, imagery and rhetoric to help pursue a decidedly anti-ecological practice and agenda. Some of is, to some degree, genuine. Al Gore's campaign to make the world aware of the dangers of climate change is obviously sincere and important work (although it is fair to point out the lack of green policies being raised during his 2000 Presidential election campaign and the poverty of his proposed solutions and means of change). Nicholas Stern's 2006 report on climate change produced for the UK government is another example and it gives an insight into the mentality of such environmentalists. The report did produce quite an impact (plus its dismissal by the usual suspects). The key reason for that was, undoubtedly, due to it placing a money sum on the dangers of environmental disruption. Such is capitalism — people and planet can go to the dogs, but any threat to profits must be acted upon. As the British PM at the time put it, any Climate Change Bill must be *"fully compatible with the interests of businesses and consumers as well."* Which is ironic, as it is the power of money which is causing the bulk of the problems we face.

Which is what we will discuss here, namely whether private property can be used to solve our environmental problems. Liberal environmentalists base their case on capitalist markets aided with some form of state intervention. Neoliberal and right-"libertarian" environmentalists base their case purely on capitalist markets and reject any role for the state bar that of defining and enforcing private property rights. Both, however, assume that capitalism will remain and tailor their policies around it. Anarchists question that particularly assumption particularly given, as we discussed in section E.1,

the fundamental reason why capitalism cannot be green is its irrational "grow-or-die" dynamic. However, there are other aspects of the system which contribute to capitalism bringing ecological crisis sooner rather than later. These flow from the nature of private property and the market competition it produces (this discussion, we should stress, ignores such factors as economic power which will be addressed in section E.3.2).

The market itself causes ecological problems for two related reasons: externalities and the price mechanism. It is difficult making informed consumption decisions under capitalism because rather than provide enough information to make informed decisions, the market hinders the flow of relevant information and suppresses essential knowledge. This is particularly the case with environmental information and knowledge. Simply put, we have no way of knowing from a given price the ecological impact of the products we buy. One such area of suppressed information is that involving externalities. This is a commonly understood problem. The market actively rewards those companies which inflict externalities on society. This is the *"routine and regular harms caused to* ***others*** *— workers, consumers, communities, the environment."* These are termed *"externalities"* in *"the coolly technical jargon of economics"* and the capitalist company is an *"externalising machine"* and it is *"no exaggeration to say that the corporation's built in compulsion to externalise its costs is at the root of many of the world's social and environmental ills."* [Joel Bakan, **The Corporation**, p. 60 and p. 61]

The logic is simple, by externalising (imposing) costs on others (be it workers, customers or the planet) a firm can reduce its costs and make higher profits. Thus firms have a vested interest in producing externalities. To put it crudely, pollution pays while ecology costs. Every pound a business spends on environmental protections is one less in profits. As such, it makes economic sense to treat the environment like a dump



area. Moreover, capitalism is as unlikely to produce their fair distribution of environmental goods any more than any other good or resource due to differences in income and so demand (particularly as it takes the existing distribution of wealth as the starting point). The reality of our environmental problems provides ample evidence for this analysis.

During this discussion we have touched upon another key issue, namely how wealth can affect how environmental and other externalities are produced and dealt with in a capitalist system. Here we extend our critique by addressed an issue we have deliberately ignored until now, namely the distribution and wealth and its resulting economic power. The importance of this factor cannot be stressed too much, as "market advocates" at best downplay it or, at worse, ignore it or deny it exists. However, it plays the same role in environmental matters as it does in, say, evaluating individual freedom within capitalism. Once we factor in economic power the obvious conclusion is the market based solutions to the environment will result in, as with freedom, people selling it simply to survive under capitalism (as we discussed in section B.4, for example).

It could be argued that strictly enforcing property rights so that polluters can be sued for any damages made will solve the problem of externalities. If someone suffered pollution damage on their property which they had not consented to then they could issue a lawsuit in order to get the polluter to pay compensation for the damage they have done. This could force polluters to internalise the costs of pollution and so the threat of lawsuits can be used as an incentive to avoid polluting others.

While this approach could be considered as **part** of any solution to environmental problems under capitalism, the sad fact is it ignores the realities of the capitalist economy. The key phrase here is "not consented to" as it means that pollution would be fine if the others agree to it (in return, say, for money). This has obvious implications for the ability of capitalism to reduce pollution. For just as working class people

But why should we be surprised? After all, private property bases itself on the notion that we must buy access to land and other resources required for a fully human life. Why should a clean environment and a healthy body be any different? Yet again, we see the derived rights (namely private property) trumping the fundamental base right (namely the right of self-ownership which should automatically exclude harm by pollution). That this happens so consistently should not come as too great a surprise, given that the theory was invented to justify the appropriation of the fruits of the worker's labour by the property owner (see section B.4.2). Why should we be surprised that this is now being used to appropriate the rights of individuals to a clean environment and turn it into yet another means of expropriating them from their birthrights?

## E.3.2 How does economic power contribute to the ecological crisis?

So far in this section we have discussed why markets fail to allocate environmental resources. This is due to information blocks and costs, lack of fully internalised prices (externalities) and the existence of public goods. Individual choices are shaped by the information available to them about the consequences of their actions, and the price mechanism blocks essential aspects of this and so information is usually partial at best within the market. Worse, it is usually distorted by advertising and the media as well as corporate and government spin and PR. Local knowledge is undermined by market power, leading to unsustainable practices to reap maximum short term profits. Profits as the only decision making criteria also leads to environmental destruction as something which may be ecologically essential may not be economically viable. All this means that the price of a good cannot indicate its environmental impact and so that market failure is pervasive in the environmental



and externalise costs by pumping raw industrial effluent into the atmosphere, rivers, and oceans. The social cost of so doing weighs little against the personal profits that result from inflicting diffuse losses onto the general public. Nor should we discount the pressure of market forces in this process. In order to survive on the market, firms may have to act in ways which, while profitable in the short-run, are harmful in the long term. For example, a family-owned farm may be forced to increase production using environmentally unsound means simply in order to avoid bankruptcy.

As well as economic incentives, the creation of externalities flows from the price mechanism itself. The first key issue, as green economist E. F. Schumacher stressed, is that the market is based on *"total quantification at the expense of qualitative differences; for private enterprise is not concerned with what it produces but only what it gains from production."* This means that the *"judgement of economics ... is an extremely **fragmentary** judgement; out of the large number of aspects which in real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken, economics supplies only one — whether a thing yields a profit **to those who undertake it** or not."* [**Small is Beautiful**, p. 215 and p. 28] This leads to a simplistic decision making perspective:

> *"Everything becomes crystal clear after you have reduced reality to one — one only — of its thousand aspects. You know what to do — whatever produces profits; you know what to avoid — whatever reduces them or makes a loss. And there is at the same time a perfect measuring rod for the degree of success or failure. Let no-one befog the issue by asking whether a particular action is conducive to the wealth and well-being of society, whether it leads to moral, aesthetic, or cultural enrichment. Simply find out whether it pays."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 215]

This means that key factors in decision making are, at best, undermined by the pressing need to make profits or, at worse, simply ignored as a handicap. So *"in the market place, for practical reasons, innumerable qualitative distinctions which are of vital importance for man and society are suppressed; they are not allowed to surface. Thus the reign of quantity celebrates its greatest triumphs in 'The Market.'"* This feeds the drive to externalise costs, as it is *"based on a definition of cost which excludes all 'free goods,' that is to say, the entire God-given environment, except for those parts of it that have been privately appropriated. This means that an activity can be economic although it plays hell with the environment, and that a competing activity, if at some cost it protects and conserves the environment, will be uneconomic."* To summarise: *"it is inherent in the methodology of economics to* ***ignore man's dependence on the natural world.***" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30 and p. 29]

Ultimately, should our decision-making be limited to a single criteria, namely whether it makes someone a profit? Should our environment be handed over to a system which bases itself on confusing efficient resource allocation with maximising profits in an economy marked by inequalities of wealth and, consequently, on unequal willingness and ability to pay? In other words, biodiversity, eco-system stability, clean water and air, and so forth only become legitimate social goals when the market places a price on them sufficient for a capitalist to make money from them. Such a system can only fail to achieve a green society simply because ecological concerns cannot be reduced to one criteria (*"The discipline of economics achieves its formidable resolving power by transforming what might otherwise be considered qualitative matters into quantitative issues with a single metric and, as it were, a bottom line: profit or loss."* [James C. Scott, **Seeing like a State**, p. 346]). This is particularly the case when even economists admit that the market under-supplies public goods, of which a clean and aesthetically pleasing environment is the classic



secondary functions have been under attack by corporations and the wealthy (a task which their well-funded think-tanls provide the rationales for). If all this is the case (and it is), then why expect cutting out the middle-person by privatising nature to improve matters? By its own logic, therefore, privatising nature is hardly going to produce a better environment as it is unlikely that corporations would fund policies which would result in more costs for themselves and less access to valuable natural resources. As free market environmentalism is premised on economic solutions to ecological problems and assumes that economic agents will act in ways which maximise their own benefit, such an obvious conclusion should come naturally to its advocates. For some reason, it does not.

Ultimately, privatising nature rests on the ridiculous notion that a clean environment is a privilege which we must buy rather than a right. Under "free market environmentalism" private property is assumed to be the fundamental right while there is no right to a clean and sustainable environment. In other words, the interests of property owners are considered the most important factor and the rest of us are left with the possibility of asking them for certain environmental goods which they may supply if they make a profit from so doing. This prioritisation and categorisation is by no means obvious and uncontroversial. Surely the right to a clean and liveable environment is more fundamental than those associated with property? If we assume this then the reduction of pollution, soil erosion, and so forth are not goods for which we must pay but rather rights to which we are entitled. In other words, protecting species and ecosystem as well as preventing avoidable deaths and illnesses are fundamental issues which simply transcend the market. Being asked to put a price on nature and people is, at best, meaningless, or, at worse, degrading. It suggests that the person simply does not understand why these things are important.

mental policies. The state is far more likely to be "captured" by capitalist interests than by environmental groups or even the general community. Moreover, its bureaucrats have all too often tended to weight the costs and benefits of specific projects in such a way as to ensure that any really desired ones will go ahead, regardless of what local people want or what the environmental impact will really be. Such projects, needless to say, will almost always have powerful economic interests behind them and will seek to ensure that "development" which fosters economic growth is pursued. This should be unsurprising. If we assume, as "market advocates" do, that state officials seek to further their own interests then classes with the most economic wealth are most likely to be able to do that the best. That the state will reflect the interests of those with most private property and marginalise the property-less should, therefore, come as no surprise.

Yet the state is not immune to social pressure from the general public or the reality of environmental degradation. This is proved, in its own way, by the rise of corporate PR, lobbying and think-tanks into multi-million pound industries. So while the supporters of the market stress its ability to change in the face of consumer demand, their view of the alternatives is extremely static and narrow. They fail, unsurprisingly, to consider the possibility of alternative forms of social organisation. Moreover, they also fail to mention that popular struggles can influence the state by means of direct action. For them, state officials will always pursue their own private interests, irrespective of popular pressures and social struggles (or, for that matter, the impact of corporate lobbying). While it is possible that the state will favour specific interests and policies, it does not mean that it cannot be forced to consider wider ones by the general public (until such time as it can be abolished, of course).

As we discussed in section D.1.5, the fact the state can be pressured by the general public is precisely why certain of its



example. Markets may reflect, to some degree, individual consumer preferences distorted by income distribution but they are simply incapable of reflecting collective values (a clean environment and spectacular views are inherently collective goods and cannot be enclosed). As a result, capitalists will be unlikely to invest in such projects as they cannot make everyone who uses them pay for the privilege.

Then there is the tendency for the market to undermine and destroy practical and local knowledge on which truly ecological decisions need to be based. Indigenous groups, for example, have accumulated an enormous body of knowledge about local ecological conditions and species which are ignored in economic terms or eliminated by competition with those with economic power. Under markets, in other words, unarticulated knowledge of soil conditions and bio-diversity which have considerable value for long-term sustainability is usually lost when it meets agribusiness.

Practical knowledge, i.e. local and tacit knowledge which James C. Scott terms metis, is being destroyed and replaced *"by standardised formulas legible from the centre"* and this *"is virtually inscribed in the activities of both the state and large-scale bureaucratic capitalism."* The *"logic animating the project ... is one of control and appropriation. Local knowledge, because it is dispersed and relatively autonomous, is all but unappropriable. The reduction or, more utopian still, the elimination of metis and the local control its entails are preconditions, in the case of the state, of administrative order and fiscal appropriation and, in the case of the large capitalism firm, of worker discipline and profit."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 335–6] Green socialist John O'Neill provides a similar analysis:

> *"far from fostering the existence of practical and local knowledge, the spread of markets often appears to do the opposite: the growth of global markets is associated with the disappearance of knowledge*

*that is local and practical, and the growth of abstract codifiable information … the market as a mode of co-ordination appears to foster forms of abstract codifiable knowledge … The knowledge of weak and marginal actors in markets, such as peasant and marginalised indigenous communities, tends to be lost to those who hold market power. The epistemic value of knowledge claims bear no direct relation to their market value. Local and often unarticulated knowledge of soil conditions and crop varieties that have considerable value for long-term sustainability of agriculture has no value in markets and hence is always liable to loss when it comes into contact with oil-based agricultural technologies of those who do have market power. The undermining of local practical knowledge in market economies has also been exacerbated by the global nature of both markets and large corporate actors who require knowledge that is transferable across different cultures and contexts and hence abstract and codifiable … Finally, the demand for commensurability and calculability runs against the defence of local and practical knowledge. This is not just a theoretical problem but one with real institutional embodiments. The market encourages a spirit of calculability … That spirit is the starting point for the algorithmic account of practical reason which requires explicit common measures for rational choice and fails to acknowledge the existence of choice founded upon practical judgement. More generally it is not amicable to forms of knowledge that are practical, local and uncodifiable."* [**Markets, Deliberation and Environment**, pp. 192–3]



*up the mess they make. It involves a judgement that costs to the company are somehow synonymous with costs to the community and therefore can be weighed against benefits to the community."* Such measures *"grant the highest decision-making power over environmental quality to those who currently make production decisions. A market system gives power to those most able to pay. Corporations and firms, rather than citizens or environmentalists, will have the choice about whether to pollute (and pay the charges or buy credits to do so)."* [Sharon Beder, **Global Spin**, p. 104]

The surreal notion of "too much" clean environment does indicate another key problem with this approach, namely its confusion of need and demand with **effective** demand. The fact is that people may desire a clean environment, but they may not be able to afford to pay for it on the market. In a similar way, there can be "too much" food while people are starving to death simply because people cannot afford to pay for it (there is no effective demand for food, but an obvious pressing need). Much the same can be said of environment goods. A lack of demand for a resource today does **not** mean it is not valued by individuals nor does it mean that it will not be valued in the future. However, in the short-term focus produced by the market such goods will be long-gone, replaced by more profitable investments.

The underlying assumption is that a clean environment is a luxury which we must purchase from property owners rather than a right we have as human beings. Even if we assume the flawed concept of self-ownership, the principle upon which defenders of capitalism tend to justify their system, the principle should be that our ownership rights in our bodies excludes it being harmed by the actions of others. In other words, a clean environment should be a basic right for all. Privatising the environment goes directly against this basic ecological insight.

The state's environmental record **has** often been terrible, particularly as its bureaucrats have been influenced by private interest groups when formulating and implementing environ-

more than they did about company profits — eventually forced them to.

So given all this, it is clear that privatising nature is no guarantee that environmental problems will be reduced. In fact, it is more likely to have the opposite effect. Even its own advocates suggest that their solution may produce **more** pollution than the current system of state regulation. Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal put it this way:

> *"If markets produce 'too little' clean water because dischargers do not have to pay for its use, then political solutions are equally likely to produce 'too much' clean water because those who enjoy the benefits do not pay the cost … Just as pollution externalities can generate too much dirty air, political externalities can generate too much water storage, clear-cutting, wilderness, or water quality … Free market environmentalism emphasises the importance of market process in determining optimal amounts of resource use."* [**Free Market Environmentalism**, p. 23]

What kind of environmentalism considers the possibility of "too much" clean air and water? This means, ironically, that from the perspective of free-market "environmentalism" that certain ecological features may be over-protected as a result of the influence of non-economic goals and priorities. Given that this model is proposed by many corporate funded think tanks, it is more than likely that their sponsors think there is "too much" clean air and water, "too much" wilderness and "too much" environmental goods. In other words, the "optimal" level of pollution is currently too low as it doubtful that corporations are seeking to increase their costs of production by internalising even more externalities.

Equally, we can be sure that "too much" pollution *"is where the company polluting the water has to pay too much to clean*



Thus the market tends to replace traditional forms of agriculture and working practices (and the complex knowledge and expertises associated with both) with standardised techniques which aim to extract as much profit in the short-term as possible by concentrating power into the hands of management and their appointed experts. That they cannot even begin to comprehend the local conditions and practical knowledge and skills required to effectively use the resources available in a sustainable manner should go without saying. Unfortunately, the economic clout of big business is such that it can defeat traditional forms of knowledge in the short-term (the long-term effect of such exploitation is usually considered someone else's problem).

So, given this analysis, it comes as no surprise to anarchists that private property has not protected the environment. In fact, it is one of the root causes of our ecological problems. Markets hide the ecological and health information necessary for environmentally sound decisions. Ultimately, environmental issues almost always involve value judgements and the market stops the possibility of producing a public dialogue in which these values can be discussed and enriched. Instead, it replaces this process by an aggregation of existing preferences (shaped by economic pressures and necessity) skewed in favour of this generation's property owners. An individual's interest, like that of the public as a whole, is not something which exists independently of the decision-making processes used but rather is something which is shaped by them. Atomistic processes focused on a simplistic criteria will produce simplistic decisions which have collectively irrational results. Collective decision making based on equal participation of all will produce decisions which reflect **all** the concerns of **all** affected in a process which will help produce empowered and educated individuals along with informed decisions.

Some disagree. For these the reason why there is environmental damage is not due to too much private property but

because there is too little. This perspective derives from neo-classical and related economic theory and it argues that ecological harm occurs because environmental goods and bads are unpriced. They come free, in other words. This suggests that the best way to protect the environment is to privatise everything and to create markets in all areas of life. This perspective, needless to say, is entirely the opposite of the standard eco-anarchist one which argues that our environmental problems have their root in market mechanisms, private property and the behaviour they generate. As such, applying market norms even more rigorously and into areas of life that were previously protected from markets will tend to make ecological problems worse, not better.

As would be expected, the pro-property perspective is part of the wider turn to free(r) market capitalism since the 1970s. With the apparent success of Thatcherism and Reaganism (at least for the people who count under capitalism, i.e. the wealthy) and the fall of Stalinism in the Eastern Block, the 1980s and 1990s saw a period of capitalist triumphantism. This lead to an increase in market based solutions to every conceivable social problem, regardless of how inappropriate and/or insane the suggestions were. This applies to ecological issues as well. The publication of **Free Market Environmentalism** by Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal in 1991 saw ideas previously associated with the right-"libertarian" fringe become more mainstream and, significantly, supported by corporate interests and the think-tanks and politicians they fund.

Some see it as a deliberate plan to counteract a growing ecological movement which aims to change social, political and economic structures in order to get at the root cases of our environmental problems. Activist Sara Diamond suggested that *"[s]ome farsighted corporations are finding that the best 'bulwark' against 'anti-corporation' environmentalism is the creation and promotion of an alternative model called 'free*



money received can hardly replace an individual or species or eco-system. At best, it could be argued that the threat of being sued will stop environmentally damaging activities but there is little evidence that this works. If a company concludes that the damages incurred by court action is less than the potential profits to be made, then they will tolerate the possibility of court action (particularly if they feel that potential victims do not have the time or resources available to sue). This kind of decision was most infamously done by General Motors when it designed its Malibu car. The company estimated that the cost of court awarded damages per car was less than ensuring that the car did not explode during certain kinds of collusion and so allowed people to die in fuel-fed fires rather than alter the design. Unfortunately for GM, the jury was horrified (on appeal, the damages were substantially reduced). [Joel Bakan, **The Corporation**, pp. 61–5]

So this means that companies seeking to maximise profits have an incentive to cut safety costs on the assumption that the risk of so doing will be sufficiently low to make it worthwhile and that any profits generated will more than cover the costs of any trial and damages imposed. As eco-anarchist David Watson noted in regards to the Prudhoe Bay disaster, it *"should go without saying that Exxon and its allies don't try their best to protect the environment or human health. Capitalist institutions produce to accumulate power and wealth, not for any social good. Predictably, in order to cut costs, Exxon steadily dismantled what emergency safeguards it had throughout the 1980s, pointing to environmental studies showing a major spill as so unlikely that preparation was unnecessary. So when the inevitable came crashing down, the response was complete impotence and negligence."* [**Against the Megamachine**, p. 57] As such, it cannot be stressed too much that the only reason companies act any different (if and when they do) is because outside agitators — people who understand and cared about the planet and people

possessed of any say over their environment beyond what their money can buy. Transforming ecological concerns into money ensures a monopoly by the wealthy few:

> *"In other words, the environment is assumed to be something that can be 'valued,' in a similar way that everything else is assigned a value within the market economy.*
>
> *"However, apart from the fact that there is no way to put an 'objective' value on most of the elements that constitute the environment (since they affect a subjective par excellence factor, i.e. the quality of life), the solution suggested ... implies the extension of the marketisation process to the environment itself. In other words, it implies the assignment of a market value to the environment ... so that the effects of growth onto it are 'internalised' ... The outcome of such a process is easily predictable: the environment will either be put under the control of the economic elites that control the market economy (in case an actual market value be assigned to it) or the state (in case an imputed value is only possible). In either case, not only the arrest of the ecological damage is — at least — doubtful, but the control over Nature by elites who aim to dominate it — using 'green' prescriptions this time — is perpetuated."* [Takis Fotopoulous, *"Development or Democracy?"*, pp. 57–92, **Society and Nature**, No. 7, pp. 79–80]

Another key problem with using private property in regard to environmental issues is that they are almost always reactive, almost never proactive. Thus the pollution needs to have occurred before court actions are taken as strict liability generally provides after-the-fact compensation for injuries received. If someone does successfully sue for damages, the



*market environmentalism.'"* [*"Free Market Environmentalism,"* **Z Magazine**, December 1991] Whatever the case, the net effect of this reliance on markets is to depoliticise environmental debates, to transform issues which involve values and affect many people into ones in which the property owner is given priority and where the criteria for decision making becomes one of profit and loss. It means, effectively, ending debates over **why** ecological destruction happens and what we should do about it and accepting the assumptions, institutions and social relationships of capitalism as a given as well as privatising yet more of the world and handing it over to capitalists. Little wonder it is being proposed as an alternative by corporations concerned about their green image. At the very least, it is fair to say that the corporations who punt free market environmentalism as an alternative paradigm for environmental policy making are not expecting to pay more by internalising their costs by so doing.

As with market fundamentalism in general, private property based environmentalism appears to offer solutions simply because it fails to take into account the reality of any actual capitalist system. The notion that all we have to do is let markets work ignores the fact that any theoretical claim for the welfare superiority of free-market outcomes falls when we look at any real capitalist market. Once we introduce, say, economic power, imperfect competition, public goods, externalities or asymmetric information then the market quickly becomes a god with feet of clay. This is what we will explore in the rest of this section while the next section will discuss a specific example of how laissez-faire capitalism cannot be ecological as proved by one of its most fervent ideologues. Overall, anarchists feel we have a good case on why is unlikely that private property can protect the environment.

## E.3.1 Will privatising nature save it?

No, it will not. To see why, it is only necessary to look at the arguments and assumptions of those who advocate such solutions to our ecological problems.

The logic behind the notion of privatising the planet is simple. Many of our environmental problems stem, as noted in the last section, from externalities. According to the "market advocates" this is due to there being unowned resources for if someone owned them, they would sue whoever or whatever was polluting them. By means of private property and the courts, pollution would end. Similarly, if an endangered species or ecosystem were privatised then the new owners would have an interest in protecting them if tourists, say, were willing to pay to see them. Thus the solution to environmental problems is simple. Privatise everything and allow people's natural incentive to care for their own property take over.

Even on this basic level, there are obvious problems. Why assume that **capitalist** property rights are the only ones, for example? However, the crux of the problem is clear enough. This solution only works if we assume that the "resources" in question make their owners a profit or if they are willing and able to track down the polluters. Neither assumption is robust enough to carry the weight that capitalism places on our planet's environment. There is no automatic mechanism by which capitalism will ensure that environmentally sound practices will predominate. In fact, the opposite is far more likely.

At its most basic, the underlying rationale is flawed. It argues that it is only by giving the environment a price can we compare its use for different purposes. This allows the benefits from preserving a forest to be compared to the benefits of cutting it down and building a shopping centre over it. Yet by "benefits" it simply means economic benefits, i.e. whether it is profitable for property owners to do so, rather than ecologically sensible. This is an important difference. If more money



sources in the first place? What courts must be set up to assess and try crimes and define damages? Then there are the costs of defining and enforcing private rights by means of the courts. This would mean individual case-by-case adjudications which increase transaction costs. Needless to say, such cases will be influenced by the resources available to both sides. Moreover, the judiciary is almost always the least accountable and representative branch of the state and so turning environmental policy decisions over to them will hardly ensure that public concerns are at the foremost of any decision (such a move would also help undermine trial by jury as juries often tend to reward sizeable damages against corporations in such cases, a factor corporations are all too aware of).

This brings us to the problem of actually proving that the particles of a specific firm has inflicted a specific harm on a particular person and their property. Usually, there are multiple firms engaging in polluting the atmosphere and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to legally establish the liability of any particular firm. How to identify which particular polluter caused the smog which damaged your lungs and garden? Is it an individual company? A set of companies? All companies? Or is it transportation? In which case, is it the specific car which finally caused your cancer or a specific set of car uses? Or all car users? Or is it the manufacturers for producing such dangerous products in the first place?

Needless to say, even this possibility is limited to the current generation. Pollution afflicts future generations as well and it is impossible for their interests to be reflected in court for "future harm" is not the question, only present harm counts. Nor can non-human species or eco-systems sue for damage, only their owners can and, as noted above, they may find it more profitable to tolerate (or even encourage) pollution than sue. Given that non-owners cannot sue as they are not directly harmed, the fate of the planet will rest in the hands of the property-owning class and so the majority are effectively dis-

ness exists and is protected but who will never visit either? Nor are future generations taken into account by a value that reflects current willingness to pay and might not be consistent with long-term welfare or even survival. And how do you factor in the impact a cleaner environment has on protecting or extending human lives? Surely a healthy environment is worth much more than simply lost earnings and the medical bills and clean-up activities saved? At best, you could factor this in by assuming that the wage premium of workers in dangerous occupations reflects it but a human life is, surely, worth more than the wages required to attract workers into dangerous working conditions. Wages are **not** an objective measure of the level of environmental risks workers are willing to tolerate as they are influenced by the overall state of the economy, the balance of class power and a whole host of other factors. Simply put, fear of unemployment and economic security will ensure that workers tolerate jobs that expose them and their communities to high levels of environmental dangers.

Economic necessity drives decisions in the so-called "free" market (given a choice between clean air and water and having a job, many people would choose the latter simply because they have to in order to survive). These factors can only be ignored which means that environmental values **cannot** be treated like commodities and market prices **cannot** accurately reflect environmental values. The key thing to remember is that the market does not meet demand, it meets **effective** demand (i.e. demands backed up with money). Yet people want endangered species and eco-systems protected even if there is no effective demand for them on the market (nor could be). We will return to this critical subject in the next section.

Then there are the practicalities of privatising nature. How, for example, do we "privatise" the oceans? How do we "privatise" whales and sharks in order to conserve them? How do we know if a whaling ship kills "your" whale? And what if "your" shark feeds on "my" fish? From whom do we buy these re-



can be made in turning a lake into a toxic waste dump then, logically, its owners will do so. Similarly, if timber prices are not rising at the prevailing profit or interest rate, then a self-interested firm will seek to increase its profits and cut-down its trees as fast as possible, investing the returns elsewhere. They may even sell such cleared land to other companies to develop. This undermines any claim that private property rights and environmental protection go hand-in-hand.

As Glenn Albrecht argues, such a capitalist "solution" to environmental problems is only *"likely to be effective in protecting species [or ecosystems] which are commercially important only if the commercial value of that species [or ecosystem] exceeds that of other potential sources of income that could be generated from the same 'natural capital' that the species inhabits If, for example, the conservation of species for ecotourism generates income which is greater than that which could be gained by using their habit for the growing of cash crops, then the private property rights of the owners of the habitat will effectively protect those species ... However, this model becomes progressively less plausible when we are confronted with rare but commercially unimportant species [or ecosystems] versus very large development proposals that are inconsistent with their continual existence. The less charismatic the species, the more 'unattractive' the ecosystem, the more likely it will be that the development proposal will proceed. The 'rights' of developers will eventually win out over species and ecosystems since ... bio-diversity itself has no right to exist and even if it did, the clash of rights between an endangered species and multi-national capital would be a very uneven contest."* [*"Ethics, Anarchy and Sustainable Development"*, pp. 95–118, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 104–5]

So the conservation of endangered species or eco-systems is not automatically achieved using the market. This is especially the case when there is little, or no, economic value in the species or eco-system in question. The most obvious example is when there is only a limited profit to be made from a piece

of land by maintaining it as the habitat of a rare species. If any alternative economic uses for that land yields a greater profit then that land will be developed. Moreover, if a species looses its economic value as a commodity then the property owners will become indifferent to its survival. Prices change and so an investment which made sense today may not look so good tomorrow. So if the market price of a resource decreases then it becomes unlikely that its ecological benefits will outweigh its economic ones. Overall, regardless of the wider ecological importance of a specific eco-system or species it is likely that their owner will prioritise short-term profits over environmental concerns. It should go without saying that threatened or endangered eco-systems and species will be lost under a privatised regime as it relies on the willingness of profit-orientated companies and individuals to take a loss in order to protect the environment.

Overall, advocates of market based environmentalism need to present a case that **all** plants, animals and eco-systems are valuable commodities in the same way as, say, fish are. While a case for market-based environmentalism can be made by arguing that fish have a market price and, as such, owners of lakes, rivers and oceans would have an incentive to keep their waters clean in order to sell fish on the market, the same cannot be said of all species and habitats. Simply put, not all creatures, plants and eco-systems with an ecological value will have an economic one as well.

Moreover, markets can send mixed messages about the environmental policies which should be pursued. This may lead to over investment in some areas and then a slump. For example, rising demand for recycled goods may inspire an investment boom which, in turn, may lead to over-supply and then a crash, with plants closing as the price falls due to increased supply. Recycling may then become economically unviable, even though it remains ecologically essential. In addition, market prices hardly provide an accurate signal regarding the "correct"



level of ecological demands in a society as they are constrained by income levels and reflect the economic pressures people are under. Financial security and income level play a key role, for in the market not all votes are equal. A market based allocation of environmental goods and bads does not reflect the obvious fact the poor may appear to value environmental issues less than the wealthy in this scheme simply because their preferences (as expressed in the market) are limited by lower budgets.

Ultimately, market demand can change without the underlying demand for a specific good changing. For example, since the 1970s the real wages of most Americans have stagnated while inequality has soared. As a result, fewer households can afford to go on holidays to wilderness areas or buy more expensive ecologically friendly products. Does that imply that the people involved now value the environment less simply because they now find it harder to make ends meet? Equally, if falling living standards force people to take jobs with dangerous environmental consequences does than really provide an accurate picture of people's desires? It takes a giant leap of faith (in the market) to assume that falling demand for a specific environmental good implies that reducing environmental damage has become less valuable to people. Economic necessity may compel people to act against their best impulses, even strongly felt natural values (an obvious example is that during recessions people may be more willing to tolerate greenhouse gas emissions simply because they need the work).

Nor can it be claimed that all the relevant factors in ecological decision making can take the commodity form, i.e. be given a price. This means that market prices do not, in fact, actually reflect people's environmental values. Many aspects of our environment simply cannot be given a market price (how can you charge people to look at beautiful scenery?). Then there is the issue of how to charge a price which reflects the demand of people who wish to know that, say, the rainforest or wilder-

which is often claimed, usually by "anarcho"-capitalists, as being a forefather of the ideology).

We are covering this topic in an anarchist FAQ for three reasons. Firstly, the number of "libertarian" and "anarcho"-capitalists on the net means that those seeking to find out about anarchism may conclude that they are "anarchists" as well. Secondly, unfortunately, some academics and writers have taken their claims of being anarchists at face value and have included their ideology in general accounts of anarchism (the better academic accounts do note that anarchists generally reject the claim). These two reasons are obviously related and hence the need to show the facts of the matter. The last reason is to provide other anarchists with arguments and evidence to use against "anarcho"-capitalism and its claims of being a new form of "anarchism."

So this section of the FAQ does not, as we noted above, represent some kind of "debate" within anarchism. It reflects the attempt by anarchists to reclaim the history and meaning of anarchism from those who are attempting to steal its name. However, our discussion also serves two other purposes. Firstly, critiquing right "libertarian" theories allows us to explain anarchist ones at the same time and indicate why they are better. Secondly, and more importantly, it shares many of the same assumptions and aims of neo-liberalism. This was noted by Bob Black in the early 1980s, when a *"wing of the Reaganist Right ... obviously appropriated, with suspect selectivity, such libertarian themes as deregulation and voluntarism. Ideologues indignate that Reagan has travestied their principles. Tough shit! I notice that it's* ***their*** *principles, not mine, that he found suitable to travesty."* [*"The Libertarian As Conservative"*, pp. 141–8, **The Abolition of Work and Other Essays**, pp. 141–2] This was echoed by Noam Chomsky two decades later when he stated that *"nobody takes [right-wing libertarianism] seriously"* (as *"everybody knows that a society that worked by ... [its] principles would self-destruct in three seconds"*). The *"only reason"* why some people



# E.4 Can laissez-faire capitalism protect the environment?

In a word, no. Here we explain why using as our example the arguments of a leading right-"libertarian."

As discussed in the last section, there is plenty of reason to doubt the claim that private property is the best means available to protect the environment. Even in its own terms, it does not do so and this is compounded once we factor in aspects of any real capitalist system which are habitually ignored by supporters of that system (most obviously, economic power derived from inequalities of wealth and income). Rather than the problem being too little private property, our environmental problems have their source not in a failure to apply market principles rigorously enough, but in their very spread into more and more aspects of our lives and across the world.

That capitalism simply cannot have an ecological nature can be seen from the work of right-"libertarian" Murray Rothbard, an advocate of extreme laissez-faire capitalism. His position is similar to that of other free market environmentalists. As pollution can be considered as an infringement of the property rights of the person being polluted then the solution is obvious. Enforce "absolute" property rights and end pollution by suing anyone imposing externalities on others. According to this perspective, only absolute private property (i.e. a system of laissez-faire capitalism) can protect the environment.

This viewpoint is pretty much confined to the right-"libertarian" defenders of capitalism and those influenced by them. However, given the tendency of capitalists to appropriate right-"libertarian" ideas to bolster their power much of Rothbard's assumptions and arguments have a wider impact and, as such, it is useful to discuss them and their limitations. The latter is made extremely easy as Rothbard himself has indicated why capitalism and the environment simply do not go together. While paying lip-service to environmental notions, his ideas (both in theory and in practice) are inherently anti-green and his solutions, as he admitted himself, unlikely to achieve their (limited) goals.

Rothbard's argument seems straight forward enough and, in theory, promises the end of pollution. Given the problems of externalities, of companies polluting our air and water resources, he argued that their root lie not in capitalist greed, private property or the market rewarding anti-social behaviour but by the government refusing to protect the rights of private property. The remedy is simple: privatise everything and so owners of private property would issue injunctions and pollution would automatically stop. For example, if there were "absolute" private property rights in rivers and seas their owners would not permit their pollution:

> *"if private firms were able to own the rivers and lakes ... then anyone dumping garbage ... would promptly be sued in the courts for their aggression against private property and would be forced by the courts to pay damages and to cease and desist from any further aggression. Thus, only private property rights will insure an end to pollution-invasion of resources. Only because rivers are unowned is there no owner to rise up and defend his precious resource from attack."* [**For a New Liberty**, p. 255]

The same applies to air pollution:



the word anarchism in an unusual way (i.e. in opposition to what has always been meant by the term), they also use the word capitalism in a like manner (i.e., to refer to something that has never existed). It should go without saying that using words like "capitalism" and "anarchism" in ways radically different to traditional uses cannot help but provoke confusion. Yet is it a case that "anarcho"-capitalists have simply picked a bad name for their ideology? Hardly, as its advocates will quickly rush to defend exploitation (non-labour income) and capitalist property rights as well as the authoritarian social structures produced with them. Moreover, as good capitalist economists the notion of an economy without interest, rent and profit is considered highly inefficient and so unlikely to develop. As such, their ideology is rooted in a perspective and an economy marked by wage labour, landlords, banking and stock markets and so hierarchy, oppression and exploitation, i.e. a capitalist one.

So they have chosen their name well as it shows in clear light how far they are from the anarchist tradition. As such, almost all anarchists would agree with long-time anarchist activist Donald Rooum's comment that *"self-styled 'anarcho-capitalists' (not to be confused with anarchists of any persuasion) [simply] want the state abolished as a regulator of capitalism, and government handed over to capitalists."* They are *"wrongly self-styled 'anarchists'"* because they *"do not oppose capitalist oppression"* while genuine anarchists are *"extreme libertarian socialists."* [**What Is Anarchism?**, p. 7, pp. 12–13 and p. 10] As we stress in section F.1, "anarcho"-capitalists do not oppose the hierarchies and exploitation associated with capitalism (wage labour and landlordism) and, consequently, have no claim to the term "anarchist." Just because someone uses a label it does not mean that they support the ideas associated with that label and this is the case with "anarcho"-capitalism — its ideas are at odds with the key ideas associated with all forms of traditional anarchism (even individualist anarchism

syndicalist ideas of decentralised, "from the bottom up" unions and the abolition of the state and capitalism.

It could be argued (and it has) that the previous use of a word does not preclude new uses. Language changes and, as such, it is possible for a **new** kind of "anarchism" to develop which has little, or no, similarities with what was previously known as anarchism. Equally, it could be said that new developments of anarchism have occurred in the past which were significantly different from old versions (for example, the rise of communist forms of anarchism in opposition to Proudhon's anti-communist mutualism). Both arguments are unconvincing. The first just makes a mockery of the concept of language and breeds confusion. If people start calling black white, it does not make it so. Equally, to call an ideology with little in common with a known and long established socio-political theory and movement the same name simply results in confusion. No one takes, say, fascists seriously when they call their parties "democratic" nor would we take Trotskyists seriously if they started to call themselves "libertarians" (as some have started to do). The second argument fails to note that developments within anarchism built upon what came before and did not change its fundamental (socialistic) basis. Thus communist and collectivist anarchism are valid forms of anarchism because they built upon the key insights of mutualism rather than denying them.

A related defence of "anarcho"-capitalism as a form of anarchism is the suggestion that the problem is one of terminology. This argument is based on noting that "anarcho"-capitalists are against "actually existing" capitalism and so *"we must distinguish between 'free-market capitalism' ... and 'state capitalism' ... The two are as different as day and night."* [Rothbard, **The Logic of Action II**, p. 185] It would be churlish indeed to point out that the **real** difference is that one exists while the other has existed only in Rothbard's head. Yet point it out we must, for the simple fact is that not only do "anarcho"-capitalists use



> *"The remedy against air pollution is therefore crystal clear ... The remedy is simply for the courts to return to their function of defending person and property rights against invasion, and therefore to enjoin anyone from injecting pollutants into the air ... The argument against such an injunctive prohibition against pollution that it would add to the costs of industrial production is as reprehensible as the pre-Civil War argument that the abolition of slavery would add to the costs of growing cotton, and therefore abolition, however morally correct, was 'impractical.' For this means that the polluters are able to impose all of the high costs of pollution upon those whose lungs and property rights they have been allowed to invade with impunity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259]

This is a valid point. Regulating or creating markets for emissions means that governments tolerate pollution and so allows capitalists to impose its often high costs onto others. The problem is that Rothbard's solution cannot achieve this goal as it ignores economic power. Moreover, this argument implies that the consistent and intellectually honest right-"libertarian" would support a zero-emissions environmental policy. However, as we discuss in the next section, Rothbard (like most right-"libertarians") turned to various legalisms like "provable harm" and ideological constructs to ensure that this policy would not be implemented. In fact, he argued extensively on how polluters **could** impose costs on other people under his system. First, however, we need to discuss the limitations of his position before discussing how he later reprehensibly refuted his own arguments. Then in section E.4.2 we will indicate how his own theory cannot support the privatisation of water or the air nor the preservation of wilderness areas. Needless to say, much of the critique

presented in section E.3 is also applicable here and so we will summarise the key issues in order to reduce repetition.

As regards the issue of privatising natural resources like rivers, the most obvious issue is that Rothbard ignores one major point: why **would** the private owner be interested in keeping it clean? What if the rubbish dumper is the corporation that owns the property? Why not just assume that the company can make more money turning the lakes and rivers into dumping sites, or trees into junk mail? This scenario is no less plausible. In fact, it is more likely to happen in many cases as there is a demand for such dumps by wealthy corporations who would be willing to pay for the privilege.

So to claim that capitalism will protect the environment is just another example of free market capitalists trying to give the reader what he or she wants to hear. In practice, the idea that extending property rights to rivers, lakes and so forth (if possible) will stop ecological destruction all depends on the assumptions used. Thus, for example, if it is assumed that ecotourism will produce more income from a wetland than draining it for cash crops, then, obviously, the wetlands are saved. If the opposite assumption is made, the wetlands are destroyed.

But, of course, the supporter of capitalism will jump in and say that if dumping were allowed, this would cause pollution, which would affect others who would then sue the owner in question. "Maybe" is the answer to this claim, for there are many circumstances where a lawsuit would be unlikely to happen. For example, what if the locals are slum dwellers and cannot afford to sue? What if they are afraid that their landlords will evict them if they sue (particularly if the landlords also own the polluting property in question)? What if many members of the affected community work for the polluting company and stand to lose their jobs if they sue? All in all, this argument ignores the obvious fact that resources are required to fight a court case and to make and contest appeals. In the case of a large corporation and a small group of even average



> *viewed as contentious. Here, his Anarcho-Capitalism is treated as marginal, since, while there are linkages with the tradition of individualist anarchism, there is a dislocation between the mutualism and communitarianism of that tradition and the free market theory, deriving from Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, that underpins Rothbard's political philosophy, and places him in the modern Libertarian tradition.*" [**Anarchist Thinkers and Thought**, p. 133]

This is important, for while Rothbard (like other "anarcho"-capitalists) appropriates **some** aspects of individualist anarchism he does so in a highly selective manner and places what he does take into an utterly different social environment and political tradition. So while there are similarities between both systems, there are important differences as we will discuss in detail in section G along with the anti-capitalist nature of individualist anarchism (i.e. those essential bits which Rothbard and his followers ignore or dismiss). Needless to say, Nursey-Bray does not include "anarcho"-capitalism in his discussion of anarchist schools of thought in the bibliography's introduction.

Of course, we cannot stop the "anarcho"-capitalists using the words "anarcho", "anarchism" and "anarchy" to describe their ideas. The democracies of the west could not stop the Chinese Stalinist state calling itself the People's Republic of China. Nor could the social democrats stop the fascists in Germany calling themselves "National Socialists". Nor could the Italian anarcho-syndicalists stop the fascists using the expression "National Syndicalism". This does not mean their names reflected their content — China is a dictatorship, not a democracy; the Nazi's were not socialists (capitalists made fortunes in Nazi Germany because it crushed the labour movement); and the Italian fascist state had nothing in common with anarcho-

held divergent views, it has never been limited to simply opposition to the state (i.e. the dictionary definition).

The "anarcho"-capitalist argument that it is a form of anarchism hinges on using the dictionary definition of "anarchism" and/or "anarchy." They try to define anarchism as being "opposition to government," and nothing else. Of course, many (if not most) dictionaries "define" anarchy as "chaos" or "disorder" but we never see "anarcho"-capitalists use those particular definitions! Moreover, and this should go without saying, dictionaries are hardly politically sophisticated and their definitions rarely reflect the wide range of ideas associated with political theories and their history. Thus the dictionary "definition" of anarchism will tend to ignore its consistent views on authority, exploitation, property and capitalism (ideas easily discovered if actual anarchist texts are read). And for this strategy to work, a lot of "inconvenient" history and ideas from all branches of anarchism must be ignored. From individualists like Tucker to communists like Kropotkin and considered anarchism as part of the wider socialist movement. Therefore "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists in the same sense that rain is not dry.

Significantly, the inventor of the term "anarcho"-capitalism, Murray Rothbard had no impact on the anarchist movement even in North America. His influence, unsurprisingly, was limited to the right, particularly in so-called "libertarian" circles. The same can be said of "anarcho"-capitalism in general. This can be seen from the way Rothbard is mentioned in Paul Nursey-Bray's bibliography on anarchist thinkers. This is an academic book, a reference for libraries. Rothbard is featured, but the context is very suggestive. The book includes Rothbard in a section titled *"On the Margins of Anarchist Theory."* His introduction to the Rothbard section is worth quoting:

> *"Either the inclusion or the omission of Rothbard as an anarchist is likely, in one quarter or another, to be*



income families, the former will have much more time and resources to spend in fighting any lawsuit. This is the case today and it seems unlikely that it will change in any society marked by inequalities of wealth and power. In other words, Rothbard ignores the key issue of economic power:

> *"Rothbard appears to assume that the courts will be as accessible to the victims of pollution as to the owner of the factory. Yet it is not unlikely that the owner's resources will far exceed those of his victims. Given this disparity, it is not at all clear that persons who suffer the costs of pollution will be able to bear the price of relief.*
>
> *"Rothbard's proposal ignores a critical variable: power. This is not surprising. Libertarians [sic!] are inclined to view 'power' and 'market' as antithetical terms … In Rothbard's discussion, the factor owner has no power over those who live near the factory. If we define power as comparative advantage under restricted circumstances, however, we can see that he may. He can exercise that power by stretching out the litigation until his opponent's financial resources are exhausted. In what is perhaps a worst case example, though by no means an unrealistic scenario, the owner of an industry on which an entire community depends for its livelihood may threaten to relocate unless local residents agree to accept high levels of pollution. In this instance, the 'threat' is merely an announcement by the owner that he will move his property, as is his right, unless the people of the community 'freely' assent to his conditions … There is no reason to believe that all such persons would seek injunctive relief … Some might be willing to tolerate the pollution if the factory owner would provide compensation. In*

> *short, the owner could pay to pollute. This solution … ignores the presence of power in the market. It is unlikely that the 'buyers' and 'sellers' of pollution will be on an equal footing."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at wits' end**, pp. 121–2]

There is strong reason to believe that some people may tolerate pollution in return for compensation (as, for example, a poor person may agree to let someone smoke in their home in return for $100 or accept a job in a smoke filled pub or bar in order to survive in the short term regardless of the long-term danger of lung cancer). As such, it is always possible that, due to economic necessity in an unequal society, that a company may pay to be able to pollute. As we discussed in section E.3.2, the demand for the ability to pollute freely has seen a shift in industries from the west to developing nations due to economic pressures and market logic:

> *"Questions of intergenerational equity and/or justice also arise in the context of industrial activity which is clearly life threatening or seriously diminishes the quality of life. Pollution of the air, water, soil and food in a way that threatens human health is obviously not sustainable, yet it is characteristic of much industrial action. The greatest burden of the life and health threatening by-products of industrial processes falls on those least able to exercise options that provide respite. The poor have risks to health* ***imposed*** *on them while the wealthy can afford to purchase a healthy lifestyle. In newly industrialising countries the poorest people are often faced with no choice in living close to plants which present a significant threat to the local population … With the international trend toward moving manufacturing industry to the cheapest sources*



and "anarcho"-capitalists have fundamentally ***different*** analyses and goals it is hardly "sectarian" to point this out (being "sectarian" in politics means prioritising differences and rivalries with politically close groups).

Some scholars do note the difference. For example, Jeremy Jennings, in his excellent overview of anarchist theory and history, argues that it is *"hard not to conclude that these ideas ["anarcho"-capitalism] — with roots deep in classical liberalism — are described as anarchist only on the basis of a misunderstanding of what anarchism is."* [*"Anarchism"*, **Contemporary Political Ideologies**, Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (eds.), p. 142] Barbara Goodwin reaches a similar conclusion, noting that the "anarcho"-capitalists' *"true place is in the group of right-wing libertarians"* not in anarchism for *"[w]hile condemning absolutely state coercion, they tacitly condone the economic and interpersonal coercion which would prevail in a totally* ***laissez-faire*** *society. Most anarchists share the egalitarian ideal with socialists: anarcho-capitalists abhor equality and socialism equally."* [**Using Political Ideas**, p. 138]

Sadly, these seem to be the minority in academic circles as most are happy to discuss right-"libertarian" ideology as a subclass of anarchism in spite of there being so little in common between the two. Their inclusion does really seem to derive from the fact that "anarcho"-capitalists **call** themselves anarchists and the academics take this at face value. Yet, as one anarchist notes, having a *"completely fluid definition of anarchism, allows for anyone and anything to be described as such, no matter how authoritarian and anti-social."* [Benjamin Franks, *"Mortal Combat"*, pp. 4–6, **A Touch of Class**, no. 1, p. 5] Also, given that many academics approach anarchism from what could be termed the "dictionary definition" methodology rather than as a political movement approach there is a tendency for "anarcho"-capitalist claims to be taken at face value. As such, it is useful to stress that anarchism is a social movement with a long history and while its adherents have

*losophy ... and [its advocates] adoption of the words 'libertarian' and 'libertarianism.' It has therefore now become necessary to distinguish between their right libertarianism and the left libertarianism of the anarchist tradition."* [**Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow**, p. 4] This appropriation of the term "libertarian" by the right not only has bred confusion, but also protest as anarchists have tried to point out the obvious, namely that capitalism is marked by **authoritarian** social relationships and so there are good reasons for anarchism being a fundamentally anti-capitalist socio-political theory and movement. That a minority of the right "libertarians" have also tried to appropriate "anarchist" to describe their authoritarian politics is something almost all anarchists reject and oppose.

That the vast majority of anarchists reject the notion of "anarcho"-capitalism as a form of anarchism is an inconvenient fact for its supporters. Rather than address this, they generally point to the fact that some academics state that "anarcho"-capitalism is a form of anarchism and include it in their accounts of our movement and ideas. That some academics do this is true, but irrelevant. What counts is what anarchists think anarchism is. To place the opinions of academics above that of anarchists implies that anarchists know nothing about anarchism, that we do not really understand the ideas we advocate but academics do! Yet this is the implication. As such the near universal rejection of "anarcho"-capitalism as a form of anarchism within anarchist circles is significant. However, it could be argued that as a few anarchists (usually individualist ones, but not always) **do** admit "anarcho"-capitalism into our movement that this (very small) minority shows that the majority are "sectarian." Again, this is not convincing as some individuals in any movement will hold positions which the majority reject and which are, sometimes, incompatible with the basic principles of the movement (Proudhon's sexism and racism are obvious examples). Equally, given that anarchists



> *of labour, there is an increasing likelihood that standards in occupational health and safety will decline and damage to human and environmental health will increase."* [Glenn Albrecht, *"Ethics, Anarchy and Sustainable Development"*, pp. 95–118, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 107–8]

The tragedy at Bhopal in India is testimony to this process. This should be unsurprising, as there is a demand for the ability to pollute from wealthy corporations and this has resulted in many countries supplying it. This reflects the history of capitalism within the so-called developed countries as well. As Rothbard laments:

> *"[F]actory smoke and many of its bad effects have been known ever since the Industrial Revolution, known to the extent that the American courts, during the late — and as far back as the early — 19th century made the deliberate decision to allow property rights to be violated by industrial smoke. To do so, the courts had to — and did — systematically change and weaken the defences of property rights embedded in Anglo-Saxon common law ... the courts systematically altered the law of negligence and the law of nuisance to **permit** any air pollution which was not unusually greater than any similar manufacturing firm, one that was not more extensive than the customary practice of polluters."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 257]

Left-wing critic of right-"libertarianism" Alan Haworth points out the obvious by stating that *"[i]n this remarkably — wonderfully — self-contradictory passage, we are invited to draw the conclusion that private property **must** provide the solution to the pollution problem from an account of how*

*it clearly did **not.**"* In other words 19th-century America — which for many right-"libertarians" is a kind of "golden era" of free-market capitalism — saw a move *"from an initial situation of well-defended property rights to a later situation where greater pollution was tolerated."* This means that private property cannot provide a solution the pollution problem. [**Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 113]

It is likely, as Haworth points out, that Rothbard and other free marketeers will claim that the 19th-century capitalist system was not pure enough, that the courts were motivated to act under pressure from the state (which in turn was pressured by powerful industrialists). But can it be purified by just removing the government and privatising the courts, relying on a so-called "free market for justice"? The pressure from the industrialists remains, if not increases, on the privately owned courts trying to make a living on the market. Indeed, the whole concept of private courts competing in a "free market for justice" becomes absurd once it is recognised that those with the most money will be able to buy the most "justice" (as is largely the case now). Also, this faith in the courts ignores the fact suing would only occur **after** the damage has already been done. It's not easy to replace ecosystems and extinct species. And if the threat of court action had a "deterrent" effect, then pollution, murder, stealing and a host of other crimes would long ago have disappeared.

To paraphrase Haworth, the characteristically "free market" capitalist argument that if X were privately owned, Y would almost certainly occur, is just wishful thinking.

Equally, it would be churlish to note that this change in the law (like so many others) was an essential part of the creation of capitalism in the first place. As we discuss in section F.8, capitalism has always been born of state intervention and the toleration of pollution was one of many means by which costs associated with creating a capitalist system were imposed on the general public. This is still the case today, with (for example)



Anyone who has followed political discussion on the net has probably come across people calling themselves "libertarians" but arguing from a right-wing, pro-capitalist perspective. For most people outside of North America, this is weird as the term *"libertarian"* is almost always used in conjunction with *"socialist"* or *"communist"* (particularly in Europe and, it should be stressed, historically in America). In the US, though, the Right has partially succeeded in appropriating the term "libertarian" for itself. Even stranger is that a few of these right-wingers have started calling themselves "anarchists" in what must be one of the finest examples of an oxymoron in the English language: "Anarcho-capitalist"‼!

Arguing with fools is seldom rewarded, but to let their foolishness to go unchallenged risks allowing them to deceive those who are new to anarchism. This is what this section of the FAQ is for, to show why the claims of these "anarchist" capitalists are false. Anarchism has always been anti-capitalist and any "anarchism" that claims otherwise cannot be part of the anarchist tradition. It is important to stress that anarchist opposition to the so-called capitalist "anarchists" do **not** reflect some kind of debate within anarchism, as many of these types like to pretend, but a debate between anarchism and its old enemy, capitalism. In many ways this debate mirrors the one between Peter Kropotkin and Herbert Spencer (an English capitalist minimal statist) at the turn the 19th century and, as such, it is hardly new.

At that time, people like Spencer tended to call themselves "liberals" while, as Bookchin noted, *"libertarian"* was *"a term created by nineteenth-century European anarchists, not by contemporary American right-wing proprietarians."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 57] David Goodway concurs, stating that *"libertarian"* has been *"frequently employed by anarchists"* as an alternative name for our politics for over a century. However, the *"situation has been vastly complicated in recent decades with the rise of ... extreme right-wing laissez-faire phi-*

# Section F — Is "anarcho"-capitalism a type of anarchism?

the **Economist** magazine happily arguing that the migration of dirty industries to the third world is *"desirable"* as there is a *"trade-off between growth and pollution control."* Inflicting pollution on the poorest sections of humanity is, of course, in their own best interests. As the magazine put it, *"[i]f clean growth means slower growth, as it sometimes will, its human cost will be lives blighted by a poverty that would otherwise have been mitigated. That is why it is wrong for the World Bank or anybody else to insist upon rich-country standards of environmental practices in developing countries ... when a trade off between cleaner air and less poverty has to be faced, most poor countries will rightly want to tolerate more pollution than rich countries do in return for more growth."* [*"Pollution and the Poor"*, **The Economist**, 15/02/1992] That "poor countries" are just as state, class and hierarchy afflicted as "rich-country" ones and so it is **not** the poor who will be deciding to *"tolerate"* pollution in return for higher profits (to use the correct word rather than the economically correct euphemism). Rather, it will be inflicted upon them by the ruling class which runs their country. That members of the elite are willing to inflict the costs of industrialisation on the working class in the form of pollution is unsurprising to anyone with a grasp of reality and how capitalism develops and works (it should be noted that the magazine expounded this particular argument to defend the infamous Lawrence Summers memo discussed in section E.3.2).

Finally, let us consider what would happen is Rothbard's schema could actually be applied. It would mean that almost every modern industry would be faced with law suits over pollution. This would mean that the costs of product would soar, assuming production continued at all. It is likely that faced with demands that industry stop polluting, most firms would simply go out of business (either due to the costs involved in damages or simply because no suitable non-polluting replacement technology exists) As Rothbard here considers **all** forms of pollution as an affront to property rights, this also applies

to transport. In other words, "pure" capitalism would necessitate the end of industrial society. While such a prospect may be welcomed by some deep ecologists and primitivists, few others would support such a solution to the problems of pollution.

Within a decade of his zero-emissions argument, however, Rothbard had changed his position and presented a right-"libertarian" argument which essentially allowed the polluters to continue business as usual, arguing for a system which, he admitted, would make it nearly impossible for individuals to sue over pollution damage. As usual, given a choice between individual freedom and capitalism Rothbard choose the latter. As such, as Rothbard himself proves beyond reasonable doubt, the extension of private property rights will be unable to protect the environment. We discuss this in the next section.

## E.4.1 Will laissez-faire capitalism actually end pollution?

No, it will not. In order to show why, we need only quote Murray Rothbard's own arguments. It is worth going through his arguments to see exactly why "pure" capitalism simply cannot solve the ecological crisis.

As noted in the last section, Rothbard initially presented an argument that free market capitalism would have a zero-emissions policy. Within a decade, he had substantially changed his tune in an article for the right-"libertarian" think-tank the **Cato Institute**. Perhaps this change of heart is understandable once you realise that most free market capitalist propagandists are simply priests of a religion convenient to the interests of the people who own the marketplace. Rothbard founded the think-tank which published this article along with industrialist Charles Koch in 1977. Koch companies are involved in the petroleum, chemicals, energy, minerals, fertilisers industries as well as many others. To advocate



*cial compulsion."* [*"The Population Myth"*, pp. 30–48, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34] A sane society would not be driven by growth for the sake of growth and would aim to reduce production by reducing the average working week to ensure both an acceptable standard of living **plus** time to enjoy it. So it is not a case that the current industrial system is something we need to keep. Few anarchists consider a social revolution as simply expropriating current industry and running it more or less as it is now. While expropriating the means of life is a necessary first step, it is only the start of a process in which we transform the way we interact with nature (which, of course, includes people).

To conclude, as Bradford summarises the *"salvation of the marvellous green planet, our Mother Earth, depends on the liberation of women — and children, and men — from social domination, exploitation and hierarchy. They must go together."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68] By focusing attention away from the root causes of ecological and social disruption — i.e. capitalism and hierarchy — and onto their victims, the advocates of the "population myth" do a great favour to the system that creates mindless growth. Hence the population myth will obviously find favour with ruling elites, and this — as opposed to any basis for the myth in scientific fact — will ensure its continual reappearance in the media and education.

> *breakdown. If 'people' as a **species** are responsible for environmental dislocations, these dislocations cease to be the result of **social** dislocations. A mythic 'Humanity' is created — irrespective of whether we are talking about oppressed minorities, women, Third World people, or people in the First World — in which everyone is brought into complicity with powerful corporate elites in producing environmental dislocations. In this way, the social roots of ecological problems are shrewdly obscured ... [W]e can dismiss or explain away hunger, misery, or illness as 'natural checks' that are imposed on human beings to retain the 'balance of nature.' We can comfortably forget that much of the poverty and hunger that afflicts the world has its origins in the corporate exploitation of human beings and nature — in agribusiness and social oppression."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 9–10]

Looking at population numbers simply misses the point. As Murray Bookchin argues, this *"arithmetic mentality which disregards the social context of demographics is incredibly shortsighted. Once we accept without any reflection or criticism that we live in a 'grow-or-die' capitalistic society in which accumulation is literally a law of economic survival and competition is the motor of 'progress,' anything we have to say about population is basically meaningless. The biosphere will eventually be destroyed whether five billion or fifty million live on the planet. Competing firms in a 'dog-eat-dog' market must outproduce each other if they are to remain in existence. They must plunder the soil, remove the earth's forests, kill off its wildlife, pollute its air and waterways not because their intentions are necessarily bad, although they usually are ... but because they must simply survive. Only a radical restructuring of society as a whole, including its anti-ecological sensibilities, can remove this all commanding so-*



a zero-pollution policy would hardly be in the Institute's enlightened self-interest as its backers would soon be out of business (along with industrial capitalism as a whole).

Rothbard's defence of the right to pollute is as ingenious as it is contradictory to his original position. As will be discussed in section F.4, Rothbard subscribes to a *"homesteading"* theory of property and he utilises this not only to steal the actual physical planet (the land) from this and future generations but also our (and their) right to a clean environment. He points to *"more sophisticated and modern forms of homesteading"* which can be used to *"homestead"* pollution rights. If, for example, a firm is surrounded by unowned land then it can pollute to its hearts content. If anyone moves to the area then the firm only becomes liable for any excess pollution over this amount. Thus firms *"can be said to have **homesteaded a pollution easement** of a certain degree and type."* He points to an *"exemplary"* court case which rejected the argument of someone who moved to an industrial area and then sued to end pollution. As the plaintiff had voluntarily moved to the area, she had no cause for complaint. In other words, polluters can simply continue to pollute under free market capitalism. This is particularly the case as clean air acts would not exist in libertarian legal theory, such an act being *"illegitimate and itself invasive and a criminal interference with the property rights of noncriminals."* [*"Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution,"* pp. 55–99, **Cato Journal**, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 77, p. 79 and p. 89]

In the last section, we showed how Rothbard had earlier argued that the solution to pollution was to privatise everything. Given that rivers, lakes and seas are currently **unowned** this implies that the current levels of pollution would be the initial "homesteaded" level and so privatisation will not, in fact, reduce pollution at all. At best, it may stop pollution getting worse but even this runs into the problem that pollution usually increases slowly over time and would be hard to notice and

much harder to prove which incremental change produced the actual quantitative change.

Which leads to the next, obvious, problem. According to Rothbard you can sue provided that *"the polluter has not previously established a homestead easement," "prove strict causality from the actions of the defendant... beyond a reasonable doubt"* and identify *"**those who actually** commit the deed"* (i.e. the employees involved, **not** the company). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87] Of course, how do you know and prove that a specific polluter is responsible for a specific environmental or physical harm? It would be near impossible to identify which company contributed which particles to the smog which caused pollution related illnesses. Polluters, needless to say, have the right to buy-off a suit which would be a handy tool for wealthy corporations in an unequal society to continue polluting as economic necessity may induce people to accept payment in return for tolerating it.

Turning to the pollution caused by actual products, such as cars, Rothbard argues that *"libertarian [sic!] principle"* requires a return to **privity,** a situation where the manufacturers of a product are not responsible for any negative side-effects when it is used. In terms of transport pollution, the *"guilty polluter should be each individual car owner and not the automobile manufacturer, who is not responsible for the actual tort and the actual emission."* This is because the manufacturer does not know how the car will be used (Rothbard gives an example that it may not be driven but was bought *"mainly for aesthetic contemplation by the car owner"*!). He admits that *"the situation for plaintiffs against auto emissions might seem hopeless under libertarian law."* Rest assured, though, as *"the roads would be privately owned"* then the owner of the road could be sued for the emissions going *"into the lungs or airspace of other citizens"* and so *"would be liable for pollution damage."* This would be *"much more feasible than suing each individual car owner for the*



logical crisis cannot be solved without the complete overthrow of capitalism, pretending instead that the system can become "green" through various band-aid reforms. "Controlling population growth" is always a key item on such liberals' agendas, taking the place of "eliminating capitalism," which should be the centrepiece. *"Population control is substituted for social justice, and the problem is actually aggravated by the Malthusian 'cure',"* points out feminist Betsy Hartmann. [quoted by Bradford, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77]

After all, there **is** enough food to feed the world's population but its distribution reflects inequalities in wealth, power and effective demand (this is most obviously seen when food is exported from famine areas as there is no effective demand for it there, a sadly regular occurrence). The *"myth that population increases in places like the Sudan, for example, result in famine"* can only survive if we ignore *"the notorious fact that the Sudanese could easily feed themselves if they were not forced by the American-controlled World Bank and International Monetary Fund to grow cotton instead of grains."* [Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, p. 11] Hence the importance of class analysis and an awareness of hierarchy. We can hardly talk of "our" resources when those resources are owned by a handful of giant corporations. Equally, we cannot talk about "our" industrial impact on the planet when the decisions of industry are made by a bosses and most of us are deliberately excluded from the decision making process. While it makes sense for the ruling elite to ignore such key issues, it counter-productive for radicals to do so and blame "people" or their numbers for social and environmental problems:

> *"The most striking feature of such way of thinking is not only that it closely parallels the way of thinking that is found in the corporate world. What is more serious is that it serves to deflect our attention from the role society plays in producing ecological*

ter all, the US consumes 40% of the world's resources to support only 5% of its population). For the rest of the world to enjoy that kind of standard of living we would require the resources of multiple Earths! Ultimately, anything which is not renewable is exhaustible. The real question is when will it be exhausted? How? Why? And by whom? As such, it is important to remember that this "standard of living" is a product of an hierarchical system which produces an alienated society in which consumption for the sake of consumption is the new god. In a grow-or-die economy, production and consumption must keep increasing to prevent economic collapse. This need for growth leads to massive advertising campaigns to indoctrinate people with the capitalist theology that more and more must be consumed to find "happiness" (salvation), producing consumerist attitudes that feed into an already-present tendency to consume in order to compensate for doing boring, pointless work in a hierarchical workplace. Unless a transformation of values occurs that recognises the importance of **living** as opposed to **consuming,** the ecological crisis **will** get worse. It is impossible to imagine such a radical transformation occurring under capitalism and so a key aim of eco-anarchists is to encourage people to consider what they need to live enriched, empowering and happy lives rather than participate in the rat race capitalism produces (even if you do win, you remain a rat).

Nor it cannot be denied that developments like better health care, nutrition, and longer lifespans contribute to overpopulation and are made possible by "industry." But to see such developments as primary causes of population growth is to ignore the central role played by poverty, the disruption of cultural patterns, and the need for cheap labour due to capitalism. There are always elevated birth rates associated with poverty, whether or not medical science improves significantly (for example, during the early days of capitalism). "Industrialism" is in fact a term used by liberal Greens (even when they call themselves "deep") who do not want to admit that the eco-



*minute amount of pollutants he might be responsible for."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 90 and p. 91]

The problems with this argument should be obvious. Firstly, roads are currently "unowned" under the right-"libertarian" perspective (they are owned by the state which has no right to own anything). This means, as Rothbard has already suggested, any new road owners would have already created a "homesteading" right to pollute (after all, who would buy a road if they expected to be sued by so doing?). Secondly, it would be extremely difficult to say that specific emissions from a specific road caused the problems and Rothbard stresses that there must be *"proof beyond reasonable doubt."* Road-owners as well as capitalist firms which pollute will, like the tobacco industry, be heartened to read that *"statistical correlation ... cannot establish causation, certainly not for a rigorous legal proof of guilt or harm."* After all, *"many smokers never get lung cancer"* and *"many lung cancer sufferers have never smoked."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 92 and p. 73] So if illnesses cluster around, say, roads or certain industries then this cannot be considered as evidence of harm caused by the pollution they produce.

Then there is the question of who is responsible for the damage inflicted. Here Rothbard runs up against the contradictions within wage labour. Capitalism is based on the notion that a person's liberty/labour can be sold/alienated to another who can then use it as they see fit. This means that, for the capitalist, the worker has no claim on the products and services that labour has produced. Strangely, according to Rothbard, this alienation of responsibility suddenly is rescinded when that sold labour commits an action which has negative consequences for the employer. Then it suddenly becomes nothing to do with the employer and the labourer becomes responsible for their labour again.

Rothbard is quite clear that he considers that the owners of businesses are **not** responsible for their employee's action. He gives the example of an employer who hires an incompe-

tent worker and suffers the lost of his wages as a result. However, *"there appears to be no legitimate reason for forcing the employer to bear the **additional** cost of his employee's tortious behaviour."* For a corporation *"does not act; only individuals act, and each must be responsible for his own actions and those alone."* He notes that employers are sued because they *"generally have more money than employees, so that it becomes more convenient … to stick the wealthier class with the liability."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 76 and p. 75]

This ignores the fact that externalities are imposed on others in order to maximise the profits of the corporation. The stockholders directly benefit from the "tortious behaviour" of their wage slaves. For example, if a manager decides to save £1,000,000 by letting toxic waste damage to occur to then the owners benefit by a higher return on their investment. To state that is the manager who must pay for any damage means that the owners of a corporation or business are absolved for any responsibility for the actions of those hired to make money for them. In other words, they accumulate the benefits in the form of more income but not the risks or costs associated with, say, imposing externalities onto others. That the *"wealthier class"* would be happy to see such a legal system should go without saying.

The notion that as long as *"the tort is committed by the employee in the course of furthering, even only in part, his employer's business, then the employer is also liable"* is dismissed as *"a legal concept so at war with libertarianism, individualism, and capitalism, and suited only to a precapitalist society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74 and p. 75] If this principle is against "individualism" then it is simply because capitalism violates individualism. What Rothbard fails to appreciate is that the whole basis of capitalism is that it is based on the worker selling his time/liberty to the boss. As Mark Leier puts it in his excellent biography of Bakunin:



by social institutions and pressures and, as such, part of a wider social struggle for change.

In other words, we must question the underlying assumption of the neo-Malthusians that society and technology are static and that the circumstances that produced historic growth and consumption rates will remain unchanged. This is obviously false, since humanity is not static. To quote Bookchin again:

> *"by reducing us to studies of line graphs, bar graphs, and statistical tables, the neo-Malthusians literally freeze reality as it is. Their numerical extrapolations do not construct any reality that is new; they mere extend, statistic by statistic, what is basically old and given .. . We are taught to accept society, behaviour, and values as they **are**, not as they should be or even **could** be. This procedure places us under the tyranny of the status quo and divests us of any ability to think about radically changing the world. I have encountered very few books or articles written by neo-Malthusians that question whether we should live under any kind of money economy at all, any statist system of society, or be guided by profit oriented behaviour. There are books and articles aplenty that explain 'how to' become a 'morally responsible' banker, entrepreneur, landowner, 'developer,' or, for all I know, arms merchant. But whether the whole system called capitalism (forgive me!), be it corporate in the west or bureaucratic in the east, must be abandoned if we are to achieve an ecological society is rarely discussed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33]

It is probably true that an "American" living standard is not possible for the population of the world at its present level (af-

results in a few people using many resources. To talk about consumption and not to wonder how many Rolls Royces and mansions the "average" person uses means producing skewed arguments. Equally, it is possible to have more just societies with approximately the same living standards with significantly **less** consumption of resources and **less** pollution and waste produced. We need only compare America with Europe to see this. One could point out, for example, that Europeans enjoy more leisure time, better health, less poverty, less inequality and thus more economic security, greater intergenerational economic mobility, better access to high-quality social services like health care and education, and manage to do it all in a far more environmentally sustainable way (Europe generates about half the CO2 emissions for the same level of GDP) compared to the US.

In fact, even relatively minor changes in how we work can have significant impact. For example, two economists at the Center for Economic and Policy Research produced a paper comparing U.S. and European energy consumption and related it to hours worked. They concluded that if Americans chose to take advantage of their high level of productivity by simply shortening the workweek or taking longer holidays rather than producing more, there would follow a number of benefits. Specifically, if the U.S. followed Western Europe in terms of work hours then not only would workers find themselves with seven additional weeks of time off, the US would consume some 20% less energy and if this saving was directly translated into lower carbon emissions then it would have emitted 3% less carbon dioxide in 2002 than in 1990 (this level of emissions is only 4% above the negotiated target of the Kyoto Protocol). If Europe following IMF orthodoxy and increased working hours, this would have a corresponding negative impact on energy use and emissions (not to mention quality of life). [David Rosnick and Mark Weisbrot, **Are Shorter Work Hours Good for the Environment?**] Of course, any such choice is influenced



> *"The primary element of capitalism is wage labour It is this that makes capitalism what it is ... The employer owns and controls the coffee shop or factory where production takes place and determines who will be hired and fired and how things will be produced; that's what it means to be a 'boss.' Workers produce goods or services for their employer. Everything they produce on the job belongs to the capitalist: workers have no more right to the coffee or cars they produce than someone off the street. Their employer, protected by law and by the apparatus of the state, owns all they produce. The employer then sells the goods that have been produced and gives the workers a portion of the value they have created. Capitalists and workers fight over the precise amounts of this portion, but the capitalist system is based on the notion that the capitalist owns everything that is produced and controls how everything is produced."* [**Bakunin: The Creative Passion**, p. 26]

This is clearly the case when a worker acts in a way which increases profits without externalities. The most obvious case is when workers' produce more goods than they receive back in wages (i.e. the exploitation at the heart of capitalism — see section C.2). Why should that change when the action has an externality? While it may benefit the boss to argue that he should gain the profits of the worker's actions but not the costs it hardly makes much logical sense. The labour sold becomes the property of the buyer who is then entitled to appropriate the produce of that labour. There is no reason for this to suddenly change when the product is a negative rather than a positive. It suggests that the worker has sold both her labour and its product to the employer unless it happens to put her employer in court, then it suddenly becomes her's again!

And we must note that it is Rothbard's arguments own arguments which are *"suited only to a precapitalist society."* As David Ellerman notes, the slave was considered a piece of property under the law **unless** he or she committed a crime. Once that had occurred, the slave became an autonomous individual in the eyes of the law and, as a result, could be prosecuted as an individual rather than his owner. This exposed a fundamental inconsistency *"in a legal system that treats the same individual as a thing in normal work and legally as a person when committing a crime."* Much the same applies to wage labour as well. When an employee commits a negligent tort then *"the tortious servant emerges from the cocoon of non-responsibility metamorphosed into a responsible human agent."* In other words, *"the employee is said to have stepped outside the employee's role."* [**Property and Contract in Economics**, p. 125, p. 128 and p. 133] Rothbard's argument is essentially the same as that of the slave-owner, with the boss enjoying the positive fruits of their wage slaves activities but not being responsible for any negative results.

So, to summarise, we have a system which will allow pollution to continue as this right has been "homesteaded" while, at the same, making it near impossible to sue individual firms for their contribution to the destruction of the earth. Moreover, it rewards the owners of companies for any externalities inflicted while absolving them of any responsibility for the actions which enriched them. And Rothbard asserts that *"private ownership"* can solve *"many 'externality' problems"*! The key problem is, of course, that for Rothbard the *"overriding factor in air pollution law, as in other parts of the law, should be libertarian and property rights principles"* rather than, say, stopping the destruction of our planet or even defending the right of individual's not to die of pollution related diseases. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91 and p. 99] Rothbard shows that for the defender of capitalism, given a choice between property and planet/people the former will always win.



of population numbers get it backward. Poverty causes high birth rates as people gamble on having large families so that some children will survive in order to look after the parents in their old age. Eliminate economic insecurity and poverty, then people have less children.

Some Greens argue that it is impossible for **everyone** to have a high standard of living, as this would deplete available resources and place too much pressure on the environment. However, their use of statistics hides a sleight of hand which invalidates their argument. As Bookchin correctly argues:

> *"Consider the issue of population and food supply in terms of mere numbers and we step on a wild merry-go-round that does not support neo-Malthusian predictions of a decade ago, much less a generation ago. Such typically neo-Malthusian stunts as determining the 'per capita consumption' of steel, oil, paper, chemicals, and the like of a nation by dividing the total tonnage of the latter by the national population, such that every man, women, and child is said to 'consume' a resultant quantity, gives us a picture that is blatantly false and functions as a sheer apologia for the upper classes. The steel that goes into a battleship, the oil that is used to fuel a tank, and the paper that is covered by ads hardly depicts the human consumption of materials. Rather, it is stuff consumed by all the Pentagons of the world that help keep a 'grow-or-die economy in operation — goods, I may add, whose function is to destroy and whose destiny is to be destroyed."* [*"The Population Myth"*, pp. 30–48, **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, pp. 34–5]

Focusing on averages, in other words, misses out the obvious fact we live in a highly unequal societies which

Other anarchists have echoed this analysis. George Bradford, for example, correctly notes that *"the way out of the [ecological] crisis lies in the practical opening toward freedom of self-expression and selfhood for women that is the key to the destruction of hierarchy."* In other words, women's *"freedom and well-being are at the centre of the resolution to the population problem, and that can only be faced within the larger social context."* That means *"real participation in social decision-making, real health concerns, access to land, and the overthrow of patriarchal domination."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68 and p. 82] Bookchin makes the same point, noting that population growth rates have fallen in developed countries because *"of the **freedom** that women have acquired over recent decades to transcend the role that patriarchy assigned to them as mere reproductive factories."* [*"The Future of the Ecology Movement,"* pp. 1–20, **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, p. 19]

This means that an **increase** of freedom will solve the population question. Sadly, many advocates of neo-Malthusianism extend control over people from women to all. The advocates of the "population myth," as well as getting the problem wrong, also (usually) suggest very authoritarian "solutions" — for example, urging an increase in state power with a "Bureau of Population Control" to "police" society and ensure that the state enters the bedroom and our most personal relationships. Luckily for humanity and individual freedom, since they misconceive the problem, such "Big Brother" solutions are not required.

So, it must be stressed the "population explosion" is not a neutral theory, and its invention reflected class interests at the time and continual use since then is due to its utility to vested interests. We should not be fooled into thinking that overpopulation is the main cause of the ecological crisis, as this is a strategy for distracting people from the root-cause of both ecological destruction and population growth today: namely, the capitalist economy and the inequalities and hierarchical social relationships it produces. As such, those who stress the issue



To conclude, Rothbard provides more than enough evidence to disprove his own arguments. This is not a unique occurrence. As discussed in the next section he does the same as regards owning water and air resources.

## E.4.2 Can wilderness survive under laissez-faire capitalism?

No. This conclusion comes naturally from the laissez-faire capitalist defence of private property as expounded by Murray Rothbard. Moreover, ironically, he also destroys his own arguments for ending pollution by privatising water and air.

For Rothbard, labour is the key to turning unowned natural resources into private property. As he put it, *"before the homesteader, no one really used and controlled — and hence owned — the land. The pioneer, or homesteader, is the man who first brings the valueless unused natural objects into production and use."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 49]

Starting with the question of wilderness (a topic close to many eco-anarchists' and other ecologists' hearts) we run into the usual problems and self-contradictions which befalls right-"libertarian" ideology. Rothbard states clearly that *"libertarian theory must invalidate [any] claim to ownership"* of land that has *"never been transformed from its natural state"* (he presents an example of an owner who has left a piece of his *"legally owned"* land untouched). If another person appears who **does** transform the land, it becomes *"justly owned by another"* and the original owner cannot stop her (and should the original owner *"use violence to prevent another settler from entering this never-used land and transforming it into use"* they also become a *"criminal aggressor"*). Rothbard also stresses that he is **not** saying that land must continually be in use to be valid property. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 63–64] This is unsurprising, as that would justify landless workers seizing the land from landowners during a

depression and working it themselves and we cannot have that now, can we?

Now, where does that leave wilderness? In response to ecologists who oppose the destruction of the rainforest, many supporters of capitalism suggest that they put their money where their mouth is and **buy** rainforest land. In this way, it is claimed, rainforest will be protected (see section B.5 for why such arguments are nonsense). As ecologists desire the rainforest **because it is wilderness** they are unlikely to "transform" it by human labour (its precisely that they want to stop). From Rothbard's arguments it is fair to ask whether logging companies have a right to "transform" the virgin wilderness owned by ecologists, after all it meets Rothbard's criteria (it is still wilderness). Perhaps it will be claimed that fencing off land "transforms" it (hardly what you imagine "mixing labour" with to mean, but never mind) — but that allows large companies and rich individuals to hire workers to fence in vast tracks of land (and recreate the land monopoly by a "libertarian" route). But as discussed in section F.4.1, fencing off land does not seem to imply that it becomes property in Rothbard's theory. And, of course, fencing in areas of rainforest disrupts the local eco-system — animals cannot freely travel, for example — which, again, is what ecologists desire to stop. Would Rothbard have accepted a piece of paper as "transforming" land? We doubt it (after all, in his example the wilderness owner **did** legally own it) — and so most ecologists will have a hard time in pure capitalism (wilderness is just not an option).

Moreover, Rothbard's "homesteading" theory actually violates his support for unrestricted property rights. What if a property owner **wants** part of her land to remain wilderness? Their desires are violated by the "homesteading" theory (unless, of course, fencing things off equals "transforming" them, which it apparently does not). How can companies provide wilderness holidays to people if they have no right to stop settlers



*of an excessive race, but because the earth is monopolised in the hands of the few to the exclusion of the many.*" She noted that the promotion of large families had vested interests behind it, although working class people *"have learned to see in large families a millstone around their necks, deliberately imposed upon them by the reactionary forces in society because a large family paralyses the brain and benumbs the muscles of the masses ... [The worker] continues in the rut, compromises and cringes before his master, just to earn barely enough to feed the many little mouths. He dare not join a revolutionary organisation; he dare not go on strike; he dare not express an opinion."* [*"The Social Aspects of Birth Control"*, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 135 and pp. 136–7] This support for birth control, it should be stressed, resulted in Goldman being arrested. Malthus, like many of his followers *"opposed contraception as immoral, preferring to let the poor starve as a 'natural' method of keeping numbers down. For him, only misery, poverty, famine, disease, and war would keep population from expanding beyond the carrying capacity of the land."* [Bradford, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69]

Unsurprisingly, Goldman linked the issue of birth control to that of women's liberation arguing that *"I never will acquiesce or submit to authority, nor will I make peace with a system which degrades woman to a mere incubator and which fattens on her innocent victims. I now and here declare war upon this system."* The key problem was that woman *"has been on her knees before the altar of duty imposed by God, by Capitalism, by the State, and by Morality"* for ages. Once that changed, the issue of population would solve itself for *"[a]fter all it is woman whom is risking her health and sacrificing her youth in the reproduction of the race. Surely she ought to be in a position to decide how many children she should bring into world, whether they should be brought into the world by the man she loves and because she wants the child, or should be born in hatred and loathing."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140 and p. 136]

traception is less available. Having children then becomes virtually the only survival means, with people resting their hopes for a better future in their offspring. Therefore social conditions have a major impact on population growth. In countries with higher economic and cultural levels, population growth soon starts to fall off. Today, for example, much of Europe has seen birth rates fall beyond the national replacement rate. This is the case even in Catholic countries, which one would imagine would have religious factors encouraging large families.

To be clear, we are **not** saying that overpopulation is not a very serious problem. Obviously, population growth **cannot** be ignored or solutions put off until capitalism is eliminated. We need to immediately provide better education and access to contraceptives across the planet as well as raising cultural levels and increasing women's rights in order to combat overpopulation **in addition to** fighting for land reform, union organising and so on. Overpopulation only benefits the elite by keeping the cost of labour low. This was the position of the likes of Emma Goldman and other radicals of her time:

> *"Many working-class radicals accepted the logic that excessive numbers were what kept the poor in their misery. During the nineteenth century there were courageous attempts to disseminate birth-control information both to promote lower population and to make it possible for women to control their own reproductivity and escape male domination. Birth control was the province of feminism, radical socialism and anarchism."* [Bradford, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69]

Unlike many neo-Malthusians Goldman was well aware that **social** reasons explained why so many people went hungry. As she put it, *"if the masses of people continue to be poor and the rich grow ever richer, it is not because the earth is lacking in fertility and richness to supply the need*



(including large companies) "homesteading" that wilderness? Then there is the question of wild animals. Obviously, they can only become owned by either killing them or by domesticating them (the only possible means of "mixing your labour" with them). Does it mean that someone only values, say, a polar bear when they kill it or capture it for a zoo?

At best, it could be argued that wilderness would be allowed **if** the land was transformed first then allowed to return to the wild. This flows from Rothbard's argument that there is no requirement that land continue to be used in order for it to continue to be a person's property. As he stresses, *"our libertarian [sic!] theory holds that land needs only be transformed **once** to pass into private ownership."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 65] This means that land could be used and then allowed to fall into disuse for the important thing is that once labour is mixed with the natural resources, it remains owned in perpetuity. However, destroying wilderness in order to recreate it is simply an insane position to take as many eco-systems are extremely fragile and will not return to their previous state. Moreover, this process takes a long time during which access to the land will be restricted to all but those the owner consents to.

And, of course, where does Rothbard's theory leave hunter-gatherer or nomad societies. They **use** the resources of the wilderness, but they do not "transform" them (in this case you cannot easily tell if virgin land is empty or being used). If a group of nomads find its traditionally used, but natural, oasis appropriated by a homesteader what are they to do? If they ignore the homesteaders claims he can call upon the police (public or private) to stop them — and then, in true Rothbardian fashion, the homesteader can refuse to supply water to them unless they pay for the privilege. And if the history of the United States and other colonies are anything to go by, such people will become "criminal aggressors" and removed from the picture.

As such, it is important to stress the social context of Rothbard's Lockean principles. As John O'Neill notes, Locke's labour theory of property was used not only to support enclosing common land in England but also as a justification for stealing the land of indigenous population's across the world. For example, the *"appropriation of America is justified by its being brought into the world of commence and hence cultivation … The Lockean account of the 'vast wilderness' of America as land uncultivated and unshaped by the pastoral activities of the indigenous population formed part of the justification of the appropriation of native land."* [**Markets, Deliberation and Environment**, p. 119] That the native population was **using** the land was irrelevant as Rothbard himself noted. As he put it, the Indians *"laid claim to vast reaches of land which they hunted but which they did not transform by cultivation."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 1, p. 187]. This meant that *"the bulk of Indian-claimed land was not settled and transformed by the Indians"* and so settlers were *"at least justified in ignoring vague, abstract claims."* The Indian hunting based claims were *"dubious."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 54 and p. 59] The net outcome, of course, was that the *"vague, abstract"* Indian claims to hunting lands were meet with the concrete use of force to defend the newly appropriated (i.e. stolen) land (force which quickly reached the level of genocide).

So unless people bestowed some form of transforming labour over the wilderness areas then any claims of ownership are unsubstantiated. At most, tribal people and nomads could claim the wild animals they killed and the trails that they cleared. This is because a person would *"have to use the land, to 'cultivate' it in some way, before he could be asserted to own it."* This cultivation is not limited to *"tilling the soil"* but also includes clearing it for a house or pasture or caring for some plots of timber. [**Man, Economy, and State, with Power and Market**, p. 170] Thus game preserves or wilderness areas could **not** exist in a pure capitalist society. This has



enjoy their blood-money without remorse. It is unwise for greens to repeat such arguments:

> *"It's a betrayal of the entire message of social ecology to ask the world's poor to deny themselves access to the necessities of life on grounds that involve long-range problems of ecological dislocation, the shortcomings of 'high' technology, and very specious claims of natural shortages in materials, while saying nothing at all about the artificial scarcity engineered by corporate capitalism."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 350]

In a country that is being introduced to the joys of capitalism by state intervention (the usual means by which traditional cultures and habits are destroyed to create a "natural system of liberty"), population soon explodes as a result of the poor social and economic conditions in which people find themselves. In the inner-city ghettos of the First World, social and economic conditions similar to those of the Third World give rise to similarly elevated birth rates. When ghetto populations are composed mostly of minorities, as in countries like the US, higher birth rates among the minority poor provides a convenient extra excuse for racism, "proving" that the affected minorities are "inferior" because they "lack self-control," are "mere animals obsessed with procreation," etc. Much the same was said of Irish Catholics in the past and, needless to say, such an argument ignores the fact that slum dwellers in, for example, Britain during the Industrial Revolution were virtually all white but still had high birth rates.

Population growth, far from being the cause of poverty, is in fact a result of it. There is an inverse relationship between per capita income and the fertility rate — as poverty decreases, so do the population rates. When people are ground into the dirt by poverty, education falls, women's rights decrease, and con-

*consider the questions of land ownership, the history of colonialism, and where social power lies. So when the poor demand their rights, the Malthusians see 'political instability' growing from population pressure."* [**Woman's Freedom: Key to the Population Question**, p. 77] Bookchin makes a similar critique:

> *"the most sinister feature about neo-Malthusianism is the extent to which it actively deflects us from dealing with the social origins of our ecological problems — indeed, the extent to which it places the blame for them on the victims of hunger rather than those who victimise them. Presumably, if there is a 'population problem' and famine in Africa, it is the ordinary people who are to blame for having too many children or insisting on living too long — an argument advanced by Malthus nearly two centuries ago with respect to England's poor. The viewpoint not only justifies privilege; it fosters brutalisation and degrades the neo-Malthusians even more than it degrades the victims of privilege."* [*"The Population Myth"*, pp. 30–48, **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, p. 34]

Increased population is not the cause of landlessness, it is the result of it. If a traditional culture, its values, and its sense of identity are destroyed, population growth rates increase dramatically. As in 17th- and 18th-century Britain, peasants in the Third World are kicked off their land by the local ruling elite, who then use the land to produce cash crops for export while their fellow country people starve. Like Ireland during the Potato Famine, the Third World nations most affected by famine have also been exporters of food to the developed nations. Malthusianism is handy for the wealthy, giving them a "scientific" excuse for the misery they cause so they can



deep ecological implications as it automatically means the replacement of wild, old-growth forests with, at best, managed ones. These are **not** an equivalent in ecological terms even if they have approximately the same number of trees. As James C. Scott stresses:

> *"Old-growth forests, polycropping, and agriculture with open-pollinated landraces **may** not be as productive, in the short run, as single-species forests and fields or identical hybrids. But they are demonstrably more stable, more self-sufficient, and less vulnerable to epidemics and environmental stress … Every time we replace 'natural capital' (such as wild fish stocks or old-growth forests) with what might be termed 'cultivated natural capital' (such as fish farms or tree plantations), we gain ease of appropriation and in immediate productivity, but at the cost of more maintenance expenses and less 'redundancy, resiliency, and stability' … Other things being equal . .. the less diverse the cultivated natural capital, the more vulnerable and nonsustainable it becomes. The problem is that in most economic systems, the external costs (in water or air pollution, for example, or the exhaustion of non-renewable resources, including a reduction in biodiversity) accumulate long before the activity becomes unprofitable in a narrow profit-and-loss sense."* [**Seeing like a State**, p. 353]

Forests which are planned as a resource are made ecologically simplistic in order to make them economically viable (i.e., to reduce the costs involved in harvesting the crop). They tend to be monocultures of one type of tree and conservationists note that placing all eggs in one basket could prompt an ecological disaster. A palm oil monoculture which replaces rainforest to produce biofuel, for example, would be unable to support

the rich diversity of wildlife as well as leaving the environment vulnerable to catastrophic disease. Meanwhile, local people dependent on the crop could be left high and dry if it fell out of favour on the global market.

To summarise, capitalism simply cannot protect wilderness and, by extension, the planet's ecology. Moreover, it is no friend to the indigenous population who use but do not "transform" their local environment.

It should also be noted that underlying assumption behind this and similar arguments is that other cultures and ways of life, like many eco-systems and species, are simply not worth keeping. While lip-service is made to the notion of cultural diversity, the overwhelming emphasis is on universalising the capitalist model of economic activity, property rights and way of life (and a corresponding ignoring of the role state power played in creating these as well as destroying traditional customs and ways of life). Such a model for development means the replacement of indigenous customs and communitarian-based ethics by a commercial system based on an abstract individualism with a very narrow vision of what constitutes self-interest. These new converts to the international order would be forced, like all others, to survive on the capitalist market. With vast differences in wealth and power such markets have, it is likely that the net result would simply be that new markets would be created out of the natural 'capital' in the developing world and these would soon be exploited.

As an aside, we must note that Rothbard fails to realise — and this comes from his worship of capitalism and his "Austrian economics" — is that people value many things which do not, indeed cannot, appear on the market. He claims that wilderness is *"valueless unused natural objects"* for it people valued them, they would use — i.e. transform — them. But unused things may be of **considerable** value to people, wilderness being a classic example. And if something **cannot** be transformed into private property, does that mean people do not value it?



In fact, Malthus even went so far as to argue for the poor to be employed in building roads and public works! No mention of "excess" population there, which indicates well the ideological nature of his over-population theory. As McNally shows, it was the utility of Malthus's practical conclusions in his "Essay on the Principles of Population" for fighting the poor law and the right to subsistence (i.e. welfare provisions) which explained his popularity: *"he made classical economics an open enemy of the working class."* [*"The Malthusian Moment: Political Economy versus Popular Radicalism"*, pp. 62–103, **Against the Market**, p. 85 and p. 91]

So it is easy to explain the support Malthus and his assertions got in spite of the lack of empirical evidence and the self-contradictory utterances of its inventor. Its support rests simply in its utility as a justification for the inhuman miseries inflicted upon the British people by "its" ruling class of aristocrats and industrialists was the only reason why it was given the time of day. Similarly today, its utility to the ruling class ensures that it keeps surfacing every so often, until forced to disappear again once the actual facts of the case are raised. That the population myth, like "genetic" justifications for race-, class- and gender-based oppression, keeps appearing over and over again, even after extensive evidence has disproved it, indicates its usefulness to the ideological guardians of the establishment.

Neo-Malthusianism basically blames the victims of capitalism for their victimisation, criticising ordinary people for "breeding" or living too long, thus ignoring (at best) or justifying (usually) **privilege** — the social root of hunger. To put it simply, the hungry are hungry because they are excluded from the land or cannot earn enough to survive. In Latin America, for example, 11% of the population was landless in 1961, by 1975 it was 40%. Approximately 80% of all Third World agricultural land is owned by 3% of landowners. As anarchist George Bradford stresses, Malthusians *"do not*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the form of Social Darwinism this was also used against working class people and social reform).

As Kropotkin summarised, Malthus work was *"pernicious"* in its influence. It *"summed up ideas already current in the minds of the wealth-possessing minority"* and arose to combat the *"ideas of equality and liberty"* awakened by the French and American revolutions. Malthus asserted against Godwin *"that no equality is possible; that the poverty of the many is not due to institutions, but is a natural* ***law.****"* This meant he *"thus gave the rich a kind of scientific argument against the ideas of equality."* However, it was simply *"a pseudo-scientific"* assertion which reflected *"the secret desires of the wealth-possessing classes"* and not a scientific hypothesis. This is obvious as technology has ensured that Malthus's fears are *"groundless"* while they are continually repeated. [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 77, p. 78 and p. 79]

That the theory was fundamentally ideological in nature can be seen from Malthus himself. It is interesting to note that in contrast, and in direct contradiction to his population "theory," as an economist Malthus was worried about the danger of **over-production** within a capitalist economy. He was keen to defend the landlords from attacks by Ricardo and had to find a reason for their existence. To do this, he attacked Say's Law (the notion that over-production was impossible in a free market economy). Utilising the notion of effective demand, he argued that capitalist saving caused the threat of over-production and it was the landlords luxury consumption which made up the deficit in demand this caused and ensured a stable economy. As Marxist David McNally points out, the *"whole of this argument is completely at odds with the economic analysis"* of his essay on population. According to that, the *"chronic ... danger which confronts society is* ***underproduction*** *of food relative to people."* In his economics book, the world *"is threatened by* ***overproduction.*** *Rather than there being too little supply relative to demand, there is now too little demand relative to supply."*



For example, people value community, stress-free working environments, meaningful work — if the market cannot provide these, does that mean they do not value them? Of course not (see Juliet Schor's **The Overworked American** on how working people's desire for shorter working hours was not transformed into options on the market).

So it should be remembered that in valuing impacts on nature, there is a difference between use values (i.e. income from commodities produced by a resource) and non-use values (i.e., the value placed on the existence of a species or wilderness). The former are usually well-defined, but often small while the latter are often large, but poorly defined. For example, the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska resulted in losses to people who worked and lived in the affected area of an estimated $300 million. However, the existence value of the area to the American population was $9 billion. In other words, the amount that American households were reportedly willing to pay to prevent a similar oil spill in a similar area was 30 times larger. Yet this non-use value cannot be taken into account in Rothbard's schema as nature is not considered a value in itself but merely a resource to be exploited.

Which brings us to another key problem with Rothbard's argument: he simply cannot justify the appropriation of water and atmosphere by means of his own principles. To show why, we need simply consult Rothbard's own writings on the subject.

Rothbard has a serious problem here. As noted above, he subscribed to a Lockean vision of property. In this schema, property is generated by mixing labour with unowned resources. Yet you simply cannot mix your labour with water or air. In other words, he is left with a system of property rights which cannot, by their very nature, be extended to common goods like water and air. Let us quote Rothbard on this subject:

> *"it is true that the high seas, in relation to shipping lanes, are probably inappropriable, because of their abundance in relation to shipping routes. This is **not** true, however, of **fishing** rights. Fish are definitely not available in unlimited quantities, relatively to human wants. Therefore, they are appropriable ... In a free [sic!] society, fishing rights to the appropriate areas of oceans would be owned by the first users of these areas and then useable or saleable to other individuals. Ownership of areas of water that contain fish is directly analogous to private ownership of areas of land or forests that contain animals to be hunted ... water can definitely be marked off in terms of latitudes and longitudes. These boundaries, then would circumscribe the area owned by individuals, in the full knowledge that fish and water can move from one person's property to another."* [**Man, Economy, and State, with Power and Market**, pp. 173–4]

In a footnote to this surreal passage, he added that it *"is rapidly becoming evident that air lanes for planes are becoming scare and, in a free [sic!] society, would be owned by first users."*

So, travellers crossing the sea gain no property rights by doing so but those travelling through the air do. Why this should be the case is hard to explain as, logically, both acts "transform" the commons by "labour" in exactly the same manner (i.e. not at all). Why **should** fishing result in absolute property rights in oceans, seas, lakes and rivers? Does picking a fruit give you property rights in the tree or the forest it stands in? Surely, at best, it gives you a property right in the fish and fruit? And what happens if area of water is so polluted that there are no fish? Does that mean that this body of water is impossible to appropriate? How does it become owned? Surely it cannot and so it will always remain a dumping ground for waste?



# E.6 What is the population myth?

The idea that population growth is the **key** cause of ecological problems is extremely commonplace. Even individuals associated with such radical green groups as **Earth First!** have promoted it. It is, however, a gross distortion of the truth. **Capitalism** is the main cause of both overpopulation **and** the ecological crisis.

Firstly, we should point out that all the "doomsday" prophets of the "population bomb" have been proved wrong time and time again. The dire predictions of Thomas Malthus, the originator of the population myth, have not come true, yet neo-Malthusians continue to mouth his reactionary ideas. In fact Malthus wrote his infamous *"Essay on the Principles of Population"* which inflicted his *"law of population"* onto the world in response to the anarchist William Godwin and other social reformers. In other words, it was explicitly conceived as an attempt to "prove" that social stratification, and so the status quo, was a "law of nature" and that poverty was the fault of the poor themselves, not the fault of an unjust and authoritarian socio-economic system. As such, the "theory" was created with political goals in mind and as a weapon in the class struggle (as an aside, it should be noted that Darwin argued his theory of natural selection was *"the doctrine of Malthus applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdom."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Nature's Web**, p. 320] In other words, anarchism, indirectly, inspired the theory of evolution.

*take public activities to stop ecological degradation. Each surely does his or her part. But it will require a much greater effort — and organised, clearly conscious, and forward-looking political* ***movement*** *— to meet the basic challenges posed by our aggressively* ***anti****-ecological society.*

*"Yes, we as individuals should change our lifestyles as much as possible, but it is the utmost shortsightedness to believe that that is all or even primarily what we have to do. We need to restructure the entire society, even as we engage in lifestyle changes and single-issue struggles against pollution, nuclear power plants, the excessive use of fossil fuels, the destruction of soil, and so forth. We must have a coherent analysis of the deep-seated hierarchical relationships and systems of domination, as well as class relationships and economic exploitation, that degrade people as well as the environment."* [*"The Ecological Crisis, Socialism, and the need to remake society,"* pp. 1–10, **Society and Nature**, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 4]

Using the capitalist market to combat the effects produced by that same market is no alternative. Until capitalism and the state are dismantled, solutions like ethical consumerism will be about as effective as fighting a forest fire with a water pistol. Such solutions are doomed to failure because they promote individual responses to social problems, problems that by their very nature require collective action, and deal only with the symptoms, rather than focusing on the cause of the problem in the first place. Real change comes from collective struggle, not individual decisions within the market place which cannot combat the cancerous growth principle of the capitalist economy. As such, ethical consumerism does not break from the logic of capitalism and so is doomed to failure.



Looking at the issue of land and water, Rothbard asserts that owning water is *"directly analogous"* to owning land for hunting purposes. Does this mean that the landowner who hunts cannot bar travellers from their land? Or does it mean that the sea-owner can bar travellers from crossing their property? Ironically, as shown above, Rothbard later explicitly rejected the claims of Native Americans to own their land because they hunted animals on it. The same, logically, applies to his arguments that bodies of water can be appropriated.

Given that Rothbard is keen to stress that labour is required to transform land into private property, his arguments are self-contradictory and highly illogical. It should also be stressed that here Rothbard nullifies his criteria for appropriating private property. Originally, only labour being used on the resource can turn it into private property. Now, however, the only criteria is that it is scare. This is understandable, as fishing and travelling through the air cannot remotely be considered "mixing labour" with the resource.

It is easy to see why Rothbard produced such self-contradictory arguments over the years as each one was aimed at justifying and extending the reach of capitalist property rights. Thus the Indians' hunting claims could be rejected as these allowed the privatising of the land while the logically identical fishing claims could be used to allow the privatisation of bodies of water. Logic need not bother the ideologue when he seeking ways to justify the supremacy of the ideal (capitalist private property, in this case).

Finally, since Rothbard (falsely) claims to be an anarchist, it is useful to compare his arguments to that of Proudhon's. Significantly, in the founding work of anarchism Proudhon presented an analysis of this issue directly opposite to Rothbard's. Let us quote the founding father of anarchism on this important matter:

> *"A man who should be prohibited from walking in the highways, from resting in the fields, from taking shelter in caves, from lighting fires, from picking berries, from gathering herbs and boiling them in a bit of baked clay, — such a man could not live. Consequently the earth — like water, air, and light — is a primary object of necessity which each has a right to use freely, without infringing another's right. Why, then, is the earth appropriated? … [An economist] assures us that it is because it is not INFINITE. The land is limited in amount. Then … it ought to be appropriated. It would seem, on the contrary, that he ought to say, Then it ought not to be appropriated. Because, no matter how large a quantity of air or light any one appropriates, no one is damaged thereby; there always remains enough for all. With the soil, it is very different. Lay hold who will, or who can, of the sun's rays, the passing breeze, or the sea's billows; he has my consent, and my pardon for his bad intentions. But let any living man dare to change his right of territorial possession into the right of property, and I will declare war upon him, and wage it to the death!"* [**What is Property?**, p. 106]

Unlike Locke who at least paid lip-service to the notion that the commons can be enclosed when there is enough and as good left for others to use, Rothbard turn this onto its head. In his "Lockean" schema, a resource can be appropriated only when it is scare (i.e. there is **not** enough and as good left for others). Perhaps it comes as no surprise that Rothbard rejects the ***"Lockean proviso"*** (and essentially argues that Locke was not a consistent Lockean as his work is *"riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies"* and have been *"expanded and purified"* by his followers. [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 22]).



*ities, to politicians and bureaucrats who live in a nexus of obedience and command in which they are normally expected to play subordinate roles.* ***Yet this is precisely the immediate cause of the ecological crisis of our time*** *— a cause that has its historic roots in the market society that engulfs us."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 81] This means that fighting ecological destruction today must be a **social** movement rather than one of individual consumption decisions or personalistic transformation. These can go on without questioning the ecocidal drive of capitalism which *"will insidiously simplify the biosphere (making due allowances for 'wilderness' reserves and theme parks), steadily reduce the organic to the inorganic and the complex to the simple, and convert soil into sand — all at the expense of the biosphere's integrity and viability. The state will still be an ever-present means for keeping oppressed people at bay and will 'manage' whatever crises emerge as best it can. Ultimately, society will tend to become more and more authoritarian, public life will atrophy."* [Bookchin, *"The Future of the Ecology Movement,"* pp. 1–20, **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, p. 14]

All this is not to suggest that individual decisions on what to consume are irrelevant, far from it. Nor are consumer boycotts a waste of time. If organised into mass movements and linked to workplace struggle they can be very effective. It is simply to point out that individual actions, important as they are, are no solution to **social** problems. Thus Bookchin:

> *"The fact is that we are confronted by a thoroughly irrational social system, not simply by predatory individuals who can be won over to ecological ideas by moral arguments, psychotherapy, or even the challenges of a troubled public to their products and behaviour … One can only commend the individuals who by virtue of their consumption habits, recycling activities. and appeals for a new sensibility under-*

In addition, since capitalism is a world system, companies can produce and sell their non-green and dangerous goods elsewhere. Many of the products and practices banned or boycotted in developed countries are sold and used in developing ones. For example, Agent Orange (used as to defoliate forests during the Vietnam War by the US) is used as an herbicide in the Third World, as is DDT. Agent Orange contains one of the most toxic compounds known to humanity and was responsible for thousands of deformed children in Vietnam. Ciba-Geigy continued to sell Enterovioform (a drug which caused blindness and paralysis in at least 10,000 Japanese users of it) in those countries that permitted it to do so. Many companies have moved to developing countries to escape the stricter pollution and labour laws in the developed countries.

Neither does green consumerism question why it should be the ruling elites within capitalism that decide what to produce and how to produce it. Since these elites are driven by profit considerations, if it is profitable to pollute, pollution will occur. Moreover, green consumerism does not challenge the (essential) capitalist principle of consumption for the sake of consumption, nor can it come to terms with the fact that "demand" is created, to a large degree, by "suppliers," specifically by advertising agencies that use a host of techniques to manipulate public tastes, as well as using their financial clout to ensure that "negative" (i.e. truthful) stories about companies' environmental records do not surface in the mainstream media.

Because ethical consumerism is based **wholly** on market solutions to the ecological crisis, it is incapable even of recognising a key **root** cause of that crisis, namely the atomising nature of capitalism and the social relationships it creates. Atomised individuals ("soloists") cannot change the world, and "voting" on the market hardly reduces their atomisation. As Murray Bookchin argues, *"[t]ragically, these millions [of "soloists"] have surrendered their social power, indeed, their very personal-*



Rothbard is aware of what is involved in accepting the Lockean Proviso — namely the existence of private property (*"Locke's proviso may lead to the outlawry of **all** private property of land, since one can always say that the reduction of available land leaves everyone else .. . worse off"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]). The Proviso **does** imply the end of capitalist property rights which is why Rothbard, and other right-"libertarians", reject it while failing to note that Locke himself simply assumed that the invention of money transcended this limitation. [C.B. MacPherson, **The Political Theory of Individualism**, pp. 203–20] As we discussed in section B.3.4, it should be stressed that this limitation is considered to be transcended purely in terms of material wealth rather than its impact on individual liberty or dignity which, surely, should be of prime concern for someone claiming to favour "liberty." What Rothbard failed to understand that Locke's Proviso of apparently limiting appropriation of land as long as there was enough and as good for others was a ploy to make the destruction of the commons palatable to those with a conscience or some awareness of what liberty involves. This can be seen from the fact this limitation could be transcended at all (in the same way, Locke justified the exploitation of labour by arguing that it was the property of the worker who sold it to their boss — see section B.4.2 for details). By getting rid of the Proviso, Rothbard simply exposes this theft of our common birthright in all its unjust glory.

It is simple. Either you reject the Proviso and embrace capitalist property rights (and so allow one class of people to be dispossessed and another empowered at their expense) or you take it seriously and reject private property in favour of possession and liberty. Anarchists, obviously, favour the latter option. Thus Proudhon:

> *"Water, air, and light are **common** things, not because they are **inexhaustible**, but because they are*

> ***indispensable**; and so indispensable that for that very reason Nature has created them in quantities almost infinite, in order that their plentifulness might prevent their appropriation. Likewise the land is indispensable to our existence, — consequently a common thing, consequently unsusceptible of appropriation; but land is much scarcer than the other elements, therefore its use must be regulated, not for the profit of a few, but in the interest and for the security of all.*
>
> *"In a word, equality of rights is proved by equality of needs. Now, equality of rights, in the case of a commodity which is limited in amount, can be realised only by equality of possession ... From whatever point we view this question of property — provided we go to the bottom of it — we reach equality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 107]

To conclude, it would be unfair to simply quote Keynes evaluation of one work by von Hayek, another leading "Austrian Economist," namely that it *"is an extraordinary example of how, starting with a mistake, a remorseless logician can end up in bedlam."* This is only partly true as Rothbard's account of property rights in water and air is hardly logical (although it is remorseless once we consider its impact when applied in an unequal and hierarchical society). That this nonsense is in direct opposition to the anarchist perspective on this issue should not come as a surprise any more than its incoherence. As we discuss in section F, Rothbard's claims to being an "anarchist" are as baseless as his claim that capitalism will protect the environment.



> *"green consumerism, which is largely a cynical attempt to maintain profit margins, does not challenge capital's eco-cidal accumulation, but actually facilitates it by opening a new market. All products, no matter how 'green', cause some pollution, use some resources and energy, and cause some ecological disturbance. This would not matter in a society in which production was rationally planned, but in an exponentially expanding economy, production, however 'green', would eventually destroy the Earth's environment. Ozone-friendly aerosols, for example, still use other harmful chemicals; create pollution in their manufacture, use and disposal; and use large amounts of resources and energy. Of course, up to now, the green pretensions of most companies have been exposed largely as presenting an acceptably green image, with little or no substance. The market is presented as the saviour of the environment. Environmental concern is commodified and transformed into ideological support for capitalism. Instead of raising awareness of the causes of the ecological crisis, green consumerism mystifies them. The solution is presented as an individual act rather than as the collective action of individuals struggling for social change. The corporations laugh all the way to the bank."* [**From Green to Red**, pp. 9–10]

"Ethical" consumerism, like "ethical" investment, is still based on profit making, the extraction of surplus value from others. This is hardly "ethical," as it cannot challenge the inequality in exchange and power that lies at the heart of capitalism nor the authoritarian social relationships it creates. Therefore it cannot really undermine the ecologically destructive nature of capitalism.

# E.5 Can ethical consumerism stop the ecological crisis?

No. At best, it can have a limited impact in reducing environmental degradation and so postpone the ecological crisis. At worse, it could accelerate that crisis by creating new markets and thus increasing growth.

Before discussing why and just so there is no misunderstanding, we must stress that anarchists fully recognise that using recycled or renewable raw materials, reducing consumption and buying "ecologically friendly" products and technologies **are** very important. As such, we would be the last to denounce such a thing. But such measures are of very limited use as solutions to the ecological problems we face. At best they can only delay, not prevent, capitalism's ultimate destruction of the planet's ecological base.

Green consumerism is often the only thing capitalism has to offer in the face of mounting ecological destruction. Usually it boils down to nothing more than slick advertising campaigns by big corporate polluters to hype band-aid measures such as using a few recycled materials or contributing money to a wildlife fund, which are showcased as "concern for the environment" while off camera the pollution and devouring of non-renewable resources goes on. They also engage in "greenwashing", in which companies lavishly fund PR campaigns to paint themselves "green" without altering their current polluting practices!

This means that apparently "green" companies and products actually are not. Many firms hire expensive Public



capitalism ("green" firms need to make profits, accumulate capital and grow bigger), nor do they address the pernicious role of advertising or the lack of public control over production and investment under capitalism. Hence it is a totally inadequate solution.

As green Sharon Beder notes, green marketing aims at *"increasing consumption, not reducing it. Many firms [seek] to capitalise on new markets created by rising environmental consciousness"* with such trends prompting *"a surge of advertisements and labels claiming environmental benefits. Green imagery was used to sell products, and caring for the environment became a marketing strategy"* and was a *"way of redirecting a willingness to spend less into a willingness to buy green products."* This means that firms can *"expand their market share to include consumers that want green products. Since manufacturers still make environmentally damaging products and retailers still sell non-green products on shelves next to green ones, it is evident that green marketing is merely a way of expanding sales. If they were genuinely concerned to protect the environment they would replace the unsound products with sound ones, not just augment their existing lines."* Moreover, green marketing *"does not necessarily mean green products, but false and misleading claims can be hard for consumers to detect"* while the *"most cynical marketers simply use environmental imagery to conjure up the impression that a product is good for the environment without making any real claims at all."* Ultimately, green consumerism *"reduces people to consumers. Their power to influence society is reduced to their purchasing power."* It *"does not deal with issues such as economic growth on a finite planet, the power of transnational corporations, and the way power is structured in our society."* [**Global Spin**, pp. 176–80]

Andrew Watson sums up green consumerism very eloquently as follows:

Relations firms and produce advertisements to paint a false image of themselves as being ecologically friendly (i.e. perform "greenwashing"). This indicates a weakness of market economies — they hinder (even distort) the flow of information required for consumers to make informed decisions. The market does not provide enough information for consumers to determine whether a product **is** actually green or not — it just gives them a price supplemented by (often deliberately misleading) advertising designed to manipulate the consumer and present an appropriate corporate image. Consumers have to rely on other sources, many of which are minority journals and organisations and so difficult to find, to provide them with the accurate information required to countermand the power and persuasion of advertising and the work of PR experts. This helps explain why, for example, *"large agribusiness firms are now attempting, like Soviet commissars, to stifle criticism of their policies"* by means of *"veggie libel laws."* These laws, which in 2001 had been passed in 13 American states (*"backed by agribusiness"*) *"make it illegal to criticise agricultural commodities in a manner inconsistent with 'reasonable' scientific evidence. The whole concept of 'veggie libel' laws is probably unconstitutional; nevertheless, these laws remain on the books."* [Eric Schlosser, **Fast Food Nation**, p. 266]

We should not discount the impact of PR experts in shaping the way people see the world or decide to consume. A lot of resources are poured into corporate Public Relations in order to present a green image. *"In the perverse world of corporate public relations,"* note critics John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, *"propagandising and lobbying **against** environmental protection is called 'environmental' or 'green' PR. 'Greenwashing' is a more accurate pejorative now commonly used to describe the ways that polluters employ deceptive PR to falsely paint themselves an environmentally responsible public image ... Today a virulent, pro-industry, **anti**-environmentalism is on the rise ... PR experts ... are waging and winning a war against environmentalists on be-*



due to economic necessity or ignorance. Money (quantity) counts in the market, not values (quality).

Then there is the matter of sourcing of secondary products. After all, most products we consume are made up of a multitude of other goods and it is difficult, if not impossible, to know where these component parts come from. Thus we have no real way of knowing whether your latest computer has parts produced in sweatshops in third-world countries nor would a decision not to buy it be communicated that far back down the market chain (in fact, the company would not even know that you were even **thinking** about buying a product unless you used non-market means to inform them and then they may simply dismiss an individual as a crank).

So the notion that consumerism can be turned to pressurising companies is deeply flawed. This is **not** to suggest that we become unconcerned about how we spend our money. Far from it. Buying greener products rather than the standard one does have an impact. It just means being aware of the limitations of green consumerism, particularly as a means of changing the world. Rather, we must look to changing how goods are produced. This applies, of course, to shareholder democracy as well. Buying shares in a firm rarely results in an majority at the annual meetings nor, even if it did, does it allow an effective say in the day-to-day decisions management makes.

Thus green consumerism is hindered by the nature of the market — how the market reduces everything to price and so hides the information required to make truly informed decisions on what to consume. Moreover, it is capable of being used to further ecological damage by the use of PR to paint a false picture of the companies and their environmental activities. In this way, the general public think things are improving while the underlying problems remain (and, perhaps, get worse). Even assuming companies are honest and do minimise their environmental damage they cannot face the fundamental cause of the ecological crisis in the "grow-or-die" principle of

This works the other way too. Simply put, a company has no idea whether you not buying a product is based on ethical consumption decisions or whether it is due to simple dislike of the product. Unless there is an organised consumer boycott, i.e. a collective campaign, then the company really has no idea that it is being penalised for its anti-ecological and/or anti-social actions. Equally, corporations are so interlinked that it can make boycotts ineffective. For example, unless you happened to read the business section on the day McDonalds bought a sizeable share in Pret-a-Manger you would have no idea that going there instead of McDonalds would be swelling the formers profits.

Ultimately, the price mechanism does not provide enough information for the customer to make an informed decision about the impact of their purchase and, by reducing prices, actively rewards the behaviour Schlosser condemns. After all, what is now "organic" production was just the normal means of doing it. The pressures of the market, the price mechanism so often suggested as a tool for change, ensured the industrialisation of farming which so many now rightly condemn. By reducing costs, market demand increased for the cheaper products and these drove the other, more ecologically and socially sound, practices out of business.

Which feeds into the issue of effective demand and income limitations. The most obvious problem is that the market is **not** a consumer democracy as some people have more votes than others (in fact, the world's richest people have more "votes" than the poorest billions, combined!). Those with the most "votes" (i.e. money) will hardly be interested in changing the economic system which placed them in that position. Similarly, those with the least "votes" will be more willing to buy ecologically destructive products simply to make ends meet rather than any real desire to do so. In addition, one individual's decision **not** to buy something will easily be swamped by others seeking the best deal, i.e. the lowest prices,



*half of corporate clients in the chemical, energy, food, automobile, forestry and mining industries.*" A significant amount of cash is spent (an estimated $1 billion a year by the mid-1990s) *"on the services of anti-environmental PR professionals and on 'greenwashing' their corporate image."* [**Toxic Sludge is Good for You!**, p. 125] See the chapter called *"Silencing Spring"* in Stauber's and Rampton's book **Toxic Sludge is Good for You!** for a good summary of this use of PR firms.

Even apparently ecologically friendly firms like "The Body Shop" can present a false image of what they do. For example, journalist Jon Entine investigated that company in 1994 and discovered that only a minuscule fraction of its ingredients came from **Trade Not Aid** (a program claimed to aid developing countries). Entine also discovered that the company also used many outdated, off-the-shelf product formulas filled with non-renewable petrochemicals as well as animal tested ingredients. When Entine contacted the company he received libel threats and it hired a PR company to combat his story. [Stauber and Rampton, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 74–5] This highlights the dangers of looking to consumerism to solve ecological problems. As Entine argued:

> *"The Body Shop is a corporation with the privileges and power in society as all others. Like other corporations it makes products that are unsustainable, encourages consumerism, uses non-renewable materials, hires giant PR and law firms, and exaggerates its environment policies. If we are to become a sustainable society, it is crucial that we have institutions … that are truly sustainable. The Body Shop has deceived the public by trying to make us think that they are a lot further down the road to sustainability than they really are. We should … no longer … lionise the Body Shop and others who claim to be*

*something they are not.*" [quoted by Stauber and Rampton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 76]

Even ignoring the distorting influence of advertising and corporate-paid PR, the fundamental issue remains of whether consumerism can actually fundamentally influence how business works. One environmental journalist puts the arguments well in his excellent book on "Fast Food" (from the industrialisation of farming, to the monopolisation of food processing, to the standardisation of food consumption it). As he puts corporations will *"sell free-range, organic, grass-fed hamburgers if you demand it. They will sell whatever sells at a profit."* [Eric Schlosser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 269] He complements this position by suggesting various regulations and some role for trade unions.

Which, of course, is true. It is equally true that we are not forced to buy any specific product, which is why companies spend so much in convincing us to buy their products. Yet even ignoring the influence of advertising, it is unlikely that using the market will make capitalism nicer. Sadly, the market rewards the anti-social activities that Schlosser and other environmentalists chronicle. As he himself notes, the *"low price of a fast food hamburger does not reflect its real cost ... The profits of the fast food chains have been made possible by the losses imposed on the rest of society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 261] This means that the idea that by using the market we can "reform" capitalism is flawed simply because even "good" companies have to make a profit and so will be tempted to cut costs, inflict them on third parties (such as workers, consumers and the planet). The most obvious form of such externalities is pollution. Such anti-social and anti-ecological behaviour makes perfect business sense as prices fall when costs are passed on to others in the form of externalities. Thus firms which employ debt-slaves in sweatshops while polluting the atmosphere in a third-world dictatorship will have lower costs and so prices than those employing unionised workers under eco-friendly regulations.



The amazing thing is that being concerned about such issues is considered as a flaw in economics. In fact, seeking the lowest price and ignoring the social and ecological impact of a product is *"considered virtuousness"* by the market and by economists for, as green economist E. F. Schumacher, pointed out *"[i]f a buyer refused a good bargain because he suspected that the cheapness of the goods in question stemmed from exploitation or other despicable practices (except theft), he would be open to criticism of behaving 'uneconomically' which is viewed as nothing less than a fall from grace. Economists and others are wont to treat such eccentric behaviour with derision if not indignation. The religion of economics has its own code of ethics, and the First Commandment is to behave 'economically.'"* [**Small is Beautiful**, p. 30] And, of course, such a consumer would face numerous competitors who will happily take advantage of such activities.

Then there is the issue of how the market system hides much more information than it gives (a factor we will return to in section I.1.2). Under the price system, customers have no way of knowing the ecological (or social) impact of the products they buy. All they have is a price and that simply does not indicate how the product was produced and what costs were internalised in the final price and which were externalised. Such information, unsurprisingly, is usually supplied **outside** the market by ecological activists, unions, customer groups and so on. Then there is the misinformation provided by the companies themselves in their adverts and PR campaigns. The skilfully created media images of advertising can easily swamp the efforts of these voluntary groups to inform the public of the facts of the social and environmental costs of certain products. Besides, any company has the threat of court action to silence their critics as the cost in money, resources, energy and time to fight for free speech in court is an effective means to keep the public ignorant about the dark side of capitalism.

a contract that creates equal partners is impossible — the pact will establish an association of masters and servants. Needless to say, the strong will present the contract as being to the advantage of both: the strong no longer have to labour (and become rich, i.e. even stronger) and the weak receive an income and so do not starve. [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, p. 61] So if freedom is considered as a function of ownership then it is very clear that individuals lacking property (outside their own body, of course) lose effective control over their own person and labour (which was, least we forget, the basis of their equal natural rights). When ones bargaining power is weak (which is typically the case in the labour market) exchanges tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than working towards an equalisation.

In other words, "contract" need not replace power if the bargaining position and wealth of the would-be contractors are not equal (for, if the bargainers had equal power it is doubtful they would agree to sell control of their liberty/labour to another). This means that "power" and "market" are not antithetical terms. While, in an abstract sense, all market relations are voluntary in practice this is not the case within a capitalist market. A large company has a comparative advantage over smaller ones, communities and individual workers which will definitely shape the outcome of any contract. For example, a large company or rich person will have access to more funds and so stretch out litigations and strikes until their opponents resources are exhausted. Or, if a company is polluting the environment, the local community may put up with the damage caused out of fear that the industry (which it depends upon) would relocate to another area. If members of the community **did** sue, then the company would be merely exercising its property rights when it threatened to move to another location. In such circumstances, the community would "freely" consent to its conditions or face massive economic and social disruption. And, similarly, *"the landlords' agents who threatened to*



in the ruling elite *"pretend to take it seriously is because you can use it as a weapon"* in the class struggle [**Understanding Power**, p. 200] As neo-liberalism is being used as the ideological basis of the current attack on the working class, critiquing "anarcho"-capitalism also allows us to build theoretical weapons to use to resist this attack and aid our side in the class war.

The results of the onslaught of free(r) market capitalism along with anarchist criticism of "anarcho"-capitalism has resulted in some "anarcho"-capitalists trying to re-brand their ideology as "market anarchism." This, from their perspective, has two advantages. Firstly, it allows them to co-opt the likes of Tucker and Spooner (and, sometimes, even Proudhon!) into their family tree as all these supported markets (while systematically attacking capitalism). Secondly, it allows them to distance their ideology from the grim reality of neo-liberalism and the results of making capitalism more "free market." Simply put, going on about the benefits of "free market" capitalism while freer market capitalism is enriching the already wealthy and oppressing and impoverishing the many is hard going. Using the term "market anarchism" to avoid both the reality of anarchism's anti-capitalist core and the reality of the freer market capitalism they have helped produce makes sense in the marketplace of ideas (the term "blackwashing" seems appropriate here). The fact is that however laudable its stated aims, "anarcho"-capitalism is deeply flawed due to its simplistic nature and is easy to abuse on behalf of the economic oligarchy that lurks behind the rhetoric of economic textbooks in that "special case" so ignored by economists, namely reality.

Anarchism has always been aware of the existence of "free market" capitalism, particularly its extreme (minimal state) wing, and has always rejected it. As we discuss in section F.7, anarchists from Proudhon onwards have rejected it (and, significantly, vice versa). As academic Alan Carter notes, anarchist concern for equality as a necessary precondition for

genuine freedom *"is one very good reason for not confusing anarchists with liberals or economic 'libertarians' — in other words, for not lumping together everyone who is in some way or another critical of the state. It is why calling the likes of Nozick 'anarchists' is highly misleading."* [*"Some notes on 'Anarchism'"*, pp. 141–5, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 143] So anarchists have evaluated "free market" capitalism and rejected it as non-anarchist since the birth of anarchism and so attempts by "anarcho"-capitalism to say that their system is "anarchist" flies in the face of this long history of anarchist analysis. That some academics fall for their attempts to appropriate the anarchist label for their ideology is down to a false premise: it *"is judged to be anarchism largely because some anarcho-capitalists* ***say*** *they are 'anarchists' and because they criticise the State."* [Peter Sabatini, **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 100]

More generally, we must stress that most (if not all) anarchists do not want to live in a society **just like this one** but without state coercion and (the initiation of) force. Anarchists do not confuse "freedom" with the "right" to govern and exploit others nor with being able to change masters. It is not enough to say we can start our own (co-operative) business in such a society. We want the abolition of the capitalist system of authoritarian relationships, not just a change of bosses or the possibility of little islands of liberty within a sea of capitalism (islands which are always in danger of being flooded and our freedom destroyed). Thus, in this section of the FAQ, we analysis many "anarcho"-capitalist claims on their own terms (for example, the importance of equality in the market or why replacing the state with private defence firms is simply changing the name of the state rather than abolishing it) but that does not mean we desire a society nearly identical to the current one. Far from it, we want to transform this society into one more suited for developing and enriching individuality and freedom.



> *ing competition (for this would need to exercise authority over the competitors and it is an* ***anarcho****-capitalist society) competition would not be carried to the point where anybody actually suffered from it. While proclaiming their system to be a competitive one, in which private interest rules unchecked, they show it operating as a co-operative one, in which no person or group profits at the cost of another."* [**On the Capitalist Anarchists**]

This assumption of (relative) equality comes to the fore in Murray Rothbard's "Homesteading" concept of property (discussed in section F.4.1). "Homesteading" paints a picture of individuals and families going into the wilderness to make a home for themselves, fighting against the elements and so forth. It does **not** invoke the idea of transnational corporations employing tens of thousands of people or a population without land, resources and selling their labour to others. Rothbard as noted argued that economic power does not exist (at least under capitalism, as we saw in section F.1 he does make — highly illogical — exceptions). Similarly, David Friedman's example of a pro-death penalty and anti-death penalty "defence" firm coming to an agreement (see section F.6.3) implicitly assumes that the firms have equal bargaining powers and resources — if not, then the bargaining process would be very one-sided and the smaller company would think twice before taking on the larger one in battle (the likely outcome if they cannot come to an agreement on this issue) and so compromise.

However, the right-"libertarian" denial of market power is unsurprising. The *"necessity, not the redundancy, of the assumption about natural equality* is required *"if the inherent problems of contract theory are not to become too obvious."* If some individuals **are** assumed to have significantly more power are more capable than others, and if they are always self-interested, then

46] George Walford also makes this point in his comments on David Friedman's **The Machinery of Freedom**:

> *"The private ownership envisaged by the anarcho-capitalists would be very different from that which we know. It is hardly going too far to say that while the one is nasty, the other would be nice. In anarcho-capitalism there would be no National Insurance, no Social Security, no National Health Service and not even anything corresponding to the Poor Laws; there would be no public safety-nets at all. It would be a rigorously competitive society: work, beg or die. But as one reads on, learning that each individual would have to buy, personally, all goods and services needed, not only food, clothing and shelter but also education, medicine, sanitation, justice, police, all forms of security and insurance, even permission to use the streets (for these also would be privately owned), as one reads about all this a curious feature emerges: everybody always has enough money to buy all these things.*
>
> *"There are no public casualty wards or hospitals or hospices, but neither is there anybody dying in the streets. There is no public educational system but no uneducated children, no public police service but nobody unable to buy the services of an efficient security firm, no public law but nobody unable to buy the use of a private legal system. Neither is there anybody able to buy much more than anybody else; no person or group possesses economic power over others.*
>
> *"No explanation is offered. The anarcho-capitalists simply take it for granted that in their favoured society, although it possesses no machinery for restrain-*



Finally, we dedicate this section of the FAQ to those who have seen the real face of "free market" capitalism at work: the working men and women (anarchist or not) murdered in the jails and concentration camps or on the streets by the hired assassins of capitalism.

For more discussion on this issue, see the appendix "Anarchism and 'Anarcho'-capitalism"

# F.1 Are "anarcho"-capitalists really anarchists?

In a word, no. While "anarcho"-capitalists obviously try to associate themselves with the anarchist tradition by using the word "anarcho" or by calling themselves "anarchists" their ideas are distinctly at odds with those associated with anarchism. As a result, any claims that their ideas are anarchist or that they are part of the anarchist tradition or movement are false.

"Anarcho"-capitalists claim to be anarchists because they say that they oppose government. As noted in the last section, they use a dictionary definition of anarchism. However, this fails to appreciate that anarchism is a **political theory**. As dictionaries are rarely politically sophisticated things, this means that they fail to recognise that anarchism is more than just opposition to government, it is also marked a opposition to capitalism (i.e. exploitation and private property). Thus, opposition to government is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being an anarchist — you also need to be opposed to exploitation and capitalist private property. As "anarcho"-capitalists do not consider interest, rent and profits (i.e. capitalism) to be exploitative nor oppose capitalist property rights, they are not anarchists.

Part of the problem is that Marxists, like many academics, also tend to assert that anarchists are simply against the state. It is significant that both Marxists and "anarcho"-capitalists tend to define anarchism as purely opposition to government. This is no co-incidence, as both seek to exclude anarchism from its



nology corporations are working on this, too!), human society **can** be changed, by the individuals who comprise it, to reflect the basic features we all share in common — our humanity, our ability to think and feel, and our need for freedom.

## F.3.1 Why is this disregard for equality important?

Simply because a disregard for equality soon ends with liberty for the majority being negated in many important ways. Most "anarcho"-capitalists and right-Libertarians deny (or at best ignore) market power. Rothbard, for example, claims that economic power does not exist under capitalism; what people call *"economic power"* is *"simply the right under freedom to refuse to make an exchange"* and so the concept is meaningless. [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 222]

However, the fact is that there are substantial power centres in society (and so are the source of hierarchical power and authoritarian social relations) which are **not the state.** As Elisee Reclus put it, the *"power of kings and emperors has limits, but that of wealth has none at all. The dollar is the master of masters."* Thus wealth is a source of power as *"the essential thing"* under capitalism *"is to train oneself to pursue monetary gain, with the goal of commanding others by means of the omnipotence of money. One's power increases in direct proportion to one's economic resources."* [quoted by John P. Clark and Camille Martin (eds.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 95 and pp. 96–7] Thus the central fallacy of "anarcho"-capitalism is the (unstated) assumption that the various actors within an economy have relatively equal power. This assumption has been noted by many readers of their works. For example, Peter Marshall notes that *"'anarcho-capitalists' like Murray Rothbard assume individuals would have equal bargaining power in a [capitalist] market-based society."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p.

p. 74 and p. 76]). Without social equality, individual freedom is so restricted that it becomes a mockery (essentially limiting freedom of the majority to choosing **which** master will govern them rather than being free).

Of course, by defining "equality" in such a restrictive manner, Rothbard's own ideology is proved to be nonsense. As L.A. Rollins notes, *"Libertarianism, the advocacy of 'free society' in which people enjoy 'equal freedom' and 'equal rights,' is actually a specific form of egalitarianism. As such, Libertarianism itself is a revolt against nature. If people, by their very biological nature, are unequal in all the attributes necessary to achieving, and preserving 'freedom' and 'rights' ... then there is no way that people can enjoy 'equal freedom' or 'equal rights'. If a free society is conceived as a society of 'equal freedom,' then there ain't no such thing as 'a free society'."* [**The Myth of Natural Law**, p. 36] Under capitalism, freedom is a commodity like everything else. The more money you have, the greater your freedom. "Equal" freedom, in the Newspeak-Rothbardian sense, **cannot** exist! As for "equality before the law", its clear that such a hope is always dashed against the rocks of wealth and market power. As far as rights go, of course, both the rich and the poor have an "equal right" to sleep under a bridge (assuming the bridge's owner agrees of course!); but the owner of the bridge and the homeless have **different** rights, and so they cannot be said to have "equal rights" in the Newspeak-Rothbardian sense either. Needless to say, poor and rich will not "equally" use the "right" to sleep under a bridge, either.

As Bob Black observed: *"The time of your life is the one commodity you can sell but never buy back. Murray Rothbard thinks egalitarianism is a revolt against nature, but his day is 24 hours long, just like everybody else's."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 147]

By twisting the language of political debate, the vast differences in power in capitalist society can be "blamed" not on an unjust and authoritarian system but on "biology" (we are all unique individuals, after all). Unlike genes (although biotech-



place in the wider socialist movement. This makes perfect sense from the Marxist perspective as it allows them to present their ideology as the only serious anti-capitalist one around (not to mention associating anarchism with "anarcho"-capitalism is an excellent way of discrediting our ideas in the wider radical movement). It should go without saying that this is an obvious and serious misrepresentation of the anarchist position as even a superficial glance at anarchist theory and history shows that no anarchist limited their critique of society simply at the state. So while academics and Marxists seem aware of the anarchist opposition to the state, they usually fail to grasp the anarchist critique applies to all other authoritarian social institutions and how it fits into the overall anarchist analysis and struggle. They seem to think the anarchist condemnation of capitalist private property, patriarchy and so forth are somehow superfluous additions rather than a logical position which reflects the core of anarchism:

> *"Critics have sometimes contended that anarchist thought, and classical anarchist theory in particular, has emphasised opposition to the state to the point of neglecting the real hegemony of economic power. This interpretation arises, perhaps, from a simplistic and overdrawn distinction between the anarchist focus on political domination and the Marxist focus on economic exploitation ... there is abundant evidence against such a thesis throughout the history of anarchist thought."* [John P. Clark and Camille Martin, **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 95]

So Reclus simply stated the obvious when he wrote that *"the anti-authoritarian critique to which the state is subjected applies equally to all social institutions."* [quoted by Clark and Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140] Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and

so on would all agree with that. While they all stressed that anarchism was against the state they quickly moved on to present a critique of private property and other forms of hierarchical authority. So while anarchism obviously opposes the state, *"sophisticated and developed anarchist theory proceeds further. It does not stop with a criticism of political organisation, but goes on to investigate the authoritarian nature of economic inequality and private property, hierarchical economic structures, traditional education, the patriarchal family, class and racial discrimination, and rigid sex- and age-roles, to mention just a few of the more important topics."* For the *"essence of anarchism is, after all, not the theoretical opposition to the state, but the practical and theoretical struggle against domination."* [John Clark, **The Anarchist Moment**, p. 128 and p. 70]

This is also the case with individualist anarchists whose defence of certain forms of property did stop them criticising key aspects of **capitalist** property rights. As Jeremy Jennings notes, the *"point to stress is that all anarchists, and not only those wedded to the predominant twentieth-century strain of anarchist communism have been critical of private property to the extent that it was a source of hierarchy and privilege."* He goes on to state that anarchists like Tucker and Spooner *"agreed with the proposition that property was legitimate only insofar as it embraced no more than the total product of individual labour."* [*"Anarchism"*, **Contemporary Political Ideologies**, Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (eds.), p. 132] This is acknowledged by the likes of Rothbard who had to explicitly point how that his position on such subjects was fundamentally different (i.e., at odds) with individualist anarchism.

As such, it would be fair to say that most "anarcho"-capitalists are capitalists first and foremost. If aspects of anarchism do not fit with some element of capitalism, they will reject that element of anarchism rather than question capitalism (Rothbard's selective appropriation of the individualist



*vision and association of labour. I receive and I give — such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination."* [**God and the State**, p. 33]

Such an environment can only exist within self-managed associations, for capitalism (i.e. wage labour) creates very specific relations and institutions of authority. It is for this reason anarchists are socialists. In other words, anarchists support equality precisely **because** we recognise that everyone is unique. If we are serious about "equality of rights" or "equal freedom" then conditions must be such that people can enjoy these rights and liberties. If we assume the right to develop one's capacities to the fullest, for example, then inequality of resources and so power within society destroys that right simply because most people do not have the means to freely exercise their capacities (they are subject to the authority of the boss, for example, during work hours).

So, in direct contrast to anarchism, right-"libertarianism" is unconcerned about any form of equality except "equality of rights". This blinds them to the realities of life; in particular, the impact of economic and social power on individuals within society and the social relationships of domination they create. Individuals may be "equal" before the law and in rights, but they may not be free due to the influence of social inequality, the relationships it creates and how it affects the law and the ability of the oppressed to use it. Because of this, all anarchists insist that equality is essential for freedom, including those in the Individualist Anarchist tradition the "anarcho"-capitalist tries to co-opt (*"Spooner and Godwin insist that inequality corrupts freedom. Their anarchism is directed as much against inequality as against tyranny"* and so *"[w]hile sympathetic to Spooner's individualist anarchism, they [Rothbard and David Friedman] fail to notice or conveniently overlook its egalitarian implications."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**,

time in a workplace rather than in a tenured academic post he may have realised that bosses are rarely the natural elite he thought they were. Like the factory owner Engels, he was blissfully unaware that it is the self-activity of the non-"elite" on the shop floor (the product of which the boss monopolises) that keeps the whole hierarchical structure going (as we discuss in section H.4.4, the work to rule — were workers do **exactly** what the boss orders them to do — is a devastating weapon in the class struggle). It does seem somewhat ironic that the anti-Marxist Rothbard should has recourse to the same argument as Engels in order to refute the anarchist case for freedom within association! It should also be mentioned that Black has also recognised this, noting that right-"libertarianism" and mainstream Marxism *"are as different as Coke and Pepsi when it comes to consecrating class society and the source of its power, work. Only upon the firm foundation of factory fascism and office oligarchy do libertarians and Leninists dare to debate the trivial issues dividing them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 146]

So, as Rothbard admits, inequality produces a **class** system and authoritarian social relationships which are rooted in ownership and control of private property. These produce specific areas of conflict over liberty, a fact of life which Rothbard (like other "anarcho"-capitalists) is keen to deny as we discuss in section F.3.2. Thus, for anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist opposition to equality misses the point and is extremely question begging. Anarchists do not desire to make people "identical" (which would be impossible and a total denial of liberty **and** equality) but to make the social relationships between individuals equal in **power.** In other words, they desire a situation where people interact together without institutionalised power or hierarchy and are influenced by each other "naturally," in proportion to how the (individual) **differences** between (social) **equals** are applicable in a given context. To quote Michael Bakunin, *"[t]he greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results ... the necessity of the di-*



anarchist tradition is the most obvious example of this). This means that right-"libertarians" attach the "anarcho" prefix to their ideology because they believe that being against government intervention is equivalent to being an anarchist (which flows into their use of the dictionary definition of anarchism). That they ignore the bulk of the anarchist tradition should prove that there is hardly anything anarchistic about them at all. They are not against authority, hierarchy or the state — they simply want to privatise them.

Ironically, this limited definition of "anarchism" ensures that "anarcho"-capitalism is inherently self-refuting. This can be seen from leading "anarcho"-capitalist Murray Rothbard. He thundered against the evil of the state, arguing that it *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given territorial area."* In and of itself, this definition is unremarkable. That a few people (an elite of rulers) claim the right to rule others must be **part** of any sensible definition of the state or government. However, the problems begin for Rothbard when he notes that *"[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170 and p. 173] The logical contradiction in this position should be obvious, but not to Rothbard. It shows the power of ideology, the ability of mere words (the expression *"private property"*) to turn the bad (*"ultimate decision-making power over a given area"*) into the good (*"ultimate decision-making power over a given area"*).

Now, this contradiction can be solved in only **one** way — the users of the *"given area"* are also its owners. In other words, a system of possession (or "occupancy and use") as favoured by anarchists. However, Rothbard is a capitalist and supports private property, non-labour income, wage labour, capitalists and landlords. This means that he supports a divergence between ownership and use and this means that this *"ultimate decision-making power"* extends to those who **use,** but do not own, such

property (i.e. tenants and workers). The statist nature of private property is clearly indicated by Rothbard's words — the property owner in an "anarcho"-capitalist society possesses the *"ultimate decision-making power"* over a given area, which is also what the state has currently. Rothbard has, ironically, proved by his own definition that "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist.

Of course, it would be churlish to point out that the usual name for a political system in which the owner of a territory is also its ruler is, in fact, monarchy. Which suggests that while "anarcho"-capitalism may be called "anarcho-statism" a far better term could be "anarcho-monarchism." In fact, some "anarcho"-capitalists have made explicit this obvious implication of Rothbard's argument. Hans-Hermann Hoppe is one.

Hoppe prefers monarchy to democracy, considering it the superior system. He argues that the monarch is the **private** owner of the government — all the land and other resources are **owned** by him. Basing himself on Austrian economics (what else?) and its notion of time preference, he concludes that the monarch will, therefore, work to maximise both current income and the total capital value of his estate. Assuming self-interest, his planning horizon will be farsighted and exploitation be far more limited. Democracy, in contrast, is a publicly-owned government and the elected rulers have use of resources for a short period only and **not** their capital value. In other words, they do not own the country and so will seek to maximise their short-term interests (and the interests of those they think will elect them into office). In contrast, Bakunin stressed that if anarchism rejects democracy it was *"hardly in order to reverse it but rather to advance it,"* in particular to extend it via *"the great economic revolution without which every right is but an empty phrase and a trick."* He rejected wholeheartedly *"the camp of aristocratic ... reaction."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 87]



So in response to the claim that equality could only be maintained by continuously interfering with people's lives, anarchists would say that the inequalities produced by capitalist property rights also involve extensive and continuous interference with people's lives. After all, as Bob Black notes *"it is apparent that the source of greatest direct duress experienced by the ordinary adult is **not** the state but rather the business that employs him [or her]. Your foreman or supervisor gives you more or-else orders in a week than the police do in a decade."* [*"The Libertarian As Conservative"*, **The Abolition of Work and Other Essays**, p. 145] For example, a worker employed by a capitalist cannot freely exchange the machines or raw materials they have been provided with to use but Nozick does not class this distribution of "restricted" property rights as infringing liberty (nor does he argue that wage slavery itself restricts freedom, of course). Thus claims that equality involves infringing liberty ignores the fact that inequality also infringes liberty (never mind the significant negative effects of inequality, both of wealth and power, we discussed in section B.1). A reorganisation of society could effectively minimise inequalities by eliminating the major source of such inequalities (wage labour) by self-management. We have no desire to restrict free exchanges (after all, most anarchists desire to see the "gift economy" become a reality sooner or later) but we argue that free exchanges need not involve the unrestricted capitalist property rights Nozick assumes (see section I.5.12 for a discussion of "capitalistic acts" within an anarchist society).

Rothbard, ironically, is aware of the fact that inequality restricts freedom for the many. As he put it *"inequality of control"* is an *"inevitable corollary of freedom"* for in any organisation *"there will always be a minority of people who will rise to the position of leaders and others who will remain as followers in the rank and file."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] To requote Bob Black: *"Some people giving orders and others obeying them: this is the essence of servitude."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 147] Perhaps if Rothbard had spent some

Another reason for "anarcho"-capitalist lack of concern for equality is that they think that (to use Robert Nozick's expression) *"liberty upsets patterns"*. It is argued that equality (or any *"end-state principle of justice"*) cannot be *"continuously realised without continuous interference with people's lives,"* i.e. can only be maintained by restricting individual freedom to make exchanges or by taxation of income. [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, pp. 160–3] However, what this argument fails to acknowledge is that inequality also restricts individual freedom and that the capitalist property rights framework is not the only one possible. After all, money is power and inequalities in terms of power easily result in restrictions of liberty and the transformation of the majority into order takers rather than free producers. In other words, once a certain level of inequality is reached property does not promote, but actually conflicts with, the ends which render private property legitimate. As we argue in the next section, inequality can easily led to the situation where self-ownership is used to justify its own negation and so unrestricted property rights will undermine the meaningful self-determination which many people intuitively understand by the term "self-ownership" (i.e., what anarchists would usually call "freedom" rather than self-ownership). Thus private property itself leads to continuous interference with people's lives, as does the enforcement of Nozick's "just" distribution of property and the power that flows from such inequality. Moreover, as many critics have noted Nozick's argument assumes what it sets out to proves. As one put it, while Nozick may *"wish to defend capitalist private property rights by insisting that these are founded in basic liberties,"* in fact he *"has produced … an argument for unrestricted private property using unrestricted private property, and thus he begs the question he tries to answer."* [Andrew Kerhohan, *"Capitalism and Self-Ownership"*, pp. 60–76, **Capitalism**, Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miler, Jr, Jeffrey Paul and John Ahrens (eds.), p. 71]



However, Hoppe is not a traditional monarchist. His ideal system is one of **competing** monarchies, a society which is led by a *"voluntarily acknowledged 'natural' elite — a **nobilitas naturalis**"* comprised of *"families with long-established records of superior achievement, farsightedness, and exemplary personal conduct."* This is because *"a few individuals quickly acquire the status of an elite"* and their inherent qualities will *"more likely than not [be] passed on within a few — noble — families."* The sole "problem" with traditional monarchies was *"with **monopoly**, not with elites or nobility,"* in other words the King monopolised the role of judge and their subjects could not turn to other members of the noble class for services. [*"The Political Economy of Monarchy and Democracy and the Idea of a Natural Order,"* pp. 94–121, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 11, no. 2, p. 118 and p. 119]

Which simply confirms the anarchist critique of "anarcho"-capitalism, namely that it is **not** anarchist. This becomes even more obvious when Hoppe helpfully expands on the reality of "anarcho"-capitalism:

> *"In a covenant concluded among proprietor and community tenants for the purpose of protecting their private property, no such thing as a right to free (unlimited) speech exists, not even to unlimited speech on one's own tenant-property. One may say innumerable things and promote almost any idea under the sun, but naturally no one is permitted to advocate ideas contrary to the very purpose of the covenant of preserving private property, such as democracy and communism. There can be no tolerance towards democrats and communists in a libertarian social order. They will have to be physically separated and expelled from society. Likewise in a covenant founded for the purpose of protecting family and kin, there can be no tolerance toward*

> *those habitually promoting lifestyles incompatible with this goal. They — the advocates of alternative, non-family and kin-centred lifestyles such as, for instance, individual hedonism, parasitism, nature-environment worship, homosexuality, or communism — will have to be physically removed from society, too, if one is to maintain a libertarian order."* [**Democracy: the God that Failed**, p. 218]

Thus the proprietor has power/authority over his tenants and can decree what they can and cannot do, excluding anyone whom they consider as being subversive (in the tenants' own interests, of course). In other words, the autocratic powers of the boss are extended into **all** aspects of society — all under the mask of advocating liberty. Sadly, the preservation of property rights destroys liberty for the many (Hoppe states clearly that for the "anarcho"-capitalist the *"natural outcome of the voluntary transactions between various private property owners is decidedly non-egalitarian, hierarchical and elitist."* [*"The Political Economy of Monarchy and Democracy and the Idea of a Natural Order,"* **Op. Cit.**, p. 118]). Unsurprisingly, Chomsky argued that right-wing "libertarianism" has *"no objection to tyranny as long as it is private tyranny."* In fact it (like other contemporary ideologies) *"reduce[s] to advocacy of one or another form of illegitimate authority, quite often real tyranny."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 235 and p. 181] As such, it is hard not to conclude that "anarcho"-capitalism is little more than a play with words. It is not anarchism but a cleverly designed and worded surrogate for elitist, autocratic conservatism. Nor is too difficult to conclude that genuine anarchists and libertarians (of all types) would not be tolerated in this so-called *"libertarian social order."*

Some "anarcho"-capitalists do seem dimly aware of this glaringly obvious contradiction. Rothbard, for example, does



that "natural" differences generate social inequalities is question begging in the extreme — it takes the rights framework of capitalism as a given and ignores the initial source of inequality in property and power. Indeed, inequality of outcome or reward is more likely to be influenced by social conditions rather than individual differences (as would be expected in a society based on wage labour or other forms of exploitation).

Rothbard is at pains to portray egalitarians as driven by envy of the rich. It is hard to credit "envy" as the driving force of the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin who left the life of wealthy aristocrats to become anarchists, who suffered imprisonment in their struggles for liberty for all rather than an elite. When this is pointed out, the typical right-wing response is to say that this shows that **real** working class people are not socialists. In other words if you are a working class anarchist then you are driven by envy and if not, if you reject your class background, then you show that socialism is not a working class movement! So driven by this assumption and hatred for socialism Rothbard went so far as to distort Karl Marx's words to fit it into his own ideological position. He stated that *"Marx concedes the truth of the charge of anti-communists then and now"* that communism was the expression of envy and a desire to reduce all to a common level. Except, of course, Marx did nothing of the kind. In the passages Rothbard presented as evidence for his claims, Marx is critiquing what he termed "crude" communism (the *"this type of communism"* in the passage Rothbard quoted but clearly did not understand) and it is, therefore, not surprising Marx *"clearly did not stress this dark side of communist revolution in the his later writings"* as he explicitly **rejected** this type of communism! For Rothbard, all types of socialism seem to be identical and identified with central planning — hence his bizarre comment that *"Stalin established socialism in the Soviet Union."* [**The Logic of Action II**, pp. 394–5 and p. 200]

This can be seen from existing society: we see that in workplaces and across industries many, if not most, unique individuals receive identical wages for identical work (although this often is not the case for women and blacks, who receive less wages than male, white workers for identical labour). Similarly, capitalists have deliberately introduced wage inequalities and hierarchies for no other reason that to divide and so rule the workforce (see section D.10). Thus, if we assume egalitarianism **is** a revolt against nature, then much of capitalist economic life is in such a revolt and when it is not, the "natural" inequalities have usually been imposed artificially by those in power either within the workplace or in society as a whole by means of state intervention, property laws and authoritarian social structures. Moreover, as we indicated in section C.2.5, anarchists have been aware of the ***collective*** nature of production within capitalism since Proudhon wrote **What is Property?** in 1840. Rothbard ignores both the anarchist tradition and reality when he stresses that individual differences produce inequalities of outcome. As an economist with a firmer grasp of the real world put it, the *"notion that wages depend on personal skill, as expressed in the value of output, makes no sense in any organisation where production is interdependent and joint — which is to say it makes no sense in virtually any organisation."* [James K. Galbraith, **Created Unequal**, p. 263]

Thus "natural" differences do not necessarily result in inequality as such nor do such differences have much meaning in an economy marked by joint production. Given a different social system, "natural" differences would be encouraged and celebrated far wider than they are under capitalism (where hierarchy ensures the crushing of individuality rather than its encouragement) without any reduction in social equality. At its most basic, the elimination of hierarchy within the workplace would not only increase freedom but also reduce inequality as the few would not be able to monopolise the decision making process and the fruit of joint productive activity. So the claim



present an argument which could be used to solve it, but he utterly fails. He simply ignores the crux of the matter, that capitalism is based on hierarchy and, therefore, cannot be anarchist. He does this by arguing that the hierarchy associated with capitalism is fine as long as the private property that produced it was acquired in a "just" manner. Yet in so doing he yet again draws attention to the identical authority structures and social relationships of the state and property. As he puts it:

> *"**If** the State may be said to properly **own** its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there **is** no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. **So long** as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170]

Obviously Rothbard argues that the state does not "justly" own its territory. He asserts that *"our homesteading theory"* of the creation of private property *"suffices to demolish any such pretensions by the State apparatus"* and so the problem with the state is that it *"claims and exercises a compulsory monopoly of defence and ultimate decision-making over an area larger than an individual's justly-acquired property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 171 and p. 173] There are four fundamental problems with his argument.

First, it assumes his "homesteading theory" is a robust and libertarian theory, but neither is the case (see section F.4.1). Second, it ignores the history of capitalism. Given that the current distribution of property is just as much the result of violence and coercion as the state, his argument is seriously flawed. It amounts to little more than an ***"immaculate conception of***

***property"*** unrelated to reality. Third, even if we ignore these issues and assume that private property could be and was legitimately produced by the means Rothbard assumes, it does not justify the hierarchy associated with it as current and future generations of humanity have, effectively, been excommunicated from liberty by previous ones. If, as Rothbard argues, property is a natural right and the basis of liberty then why should the many be excluded from their birthright by a minority? In other words, Rothbard denies that liberty should be universal. He chooses property over liberty while anarchists choose liberty over property. Fourthly, it implies that the fundamental problem with the state is **not**, as anarchists have continually stressed, its hierarchical and authoritarian nature but rather the fact that it does not justly own the territory it claims to rule.

Even worse, the possibility that private property can result in **more** violations of individual freedom (at least for non-proprietors ) than the state of its citizens was implicitly acknowledged by Rothbard. He uses as a hypothetical example a country whose King is threatened by a rising "libertarian" movement. The King responses by *"employ[ing] a cunning stratagem,"* namely he *"proclaims his government to be dissolved, but just before doing so he arbitrarily parcels out the entire land area of his kingdom to the 'ownership' of himself and his relatives."* Rather than taxes, his subjects now pay rent and he can *"regulate the lives of all the people who presume to live on"* his property as he sees fit. Rothbard then asks:

> *"Now what should be the reply of the libertarian rebels to this pert challenge? If they are consistent utilitarians, they must bow to this subterfuge, and resign themselves to living under a regime no less despotic than the one they had been battling for so long. Perhaps, indeed,* ***more*** *despotic, for now the king and his relatives can claim for themselves the*



> *we can hardly claim much insight into just what the relevant combination of attributes may be ... One might suppose that some mixture of avarice, selfishness, lack of concern for others, aggressiveness, and similar characteristics play a part in getting ahead and 'making it' in a competitive society based on capitalist principles. ... Whatever the correct collection of attributes may be, we may ask what follows from the fact, if it is a fact, that some partially inherited combination of attributes tends to material success? All that follows ... is a comment on our particular social and economic arrangements ... The egalitarian might respond, in all such cases, that the social order should be changed so that the collection of attributes that tends to bring success no longer do so. He might even argue that in a more decent society, the attributes that now lead to success would be recognised as pathological, and that gentle persuasion might be a proper means to help people to overcome their unfortunate malady."* [**The Chomsky Reader**, p. 190]

So if we change society then the social inequalities we see today would disappear. It is more than probable that natural difference has been long ago been replaced with **social** inequalities, especially inequalities of property. And as we argue in section F.8 these inequalities of property were initially the result of force, **not** differences in ability. Thus to claim that social inequality flows from natural differences is false as most social inequality has flown from violence and force. This initial inequality has been magnified by the framework of capitalist property rights and so the inequality within capitalism is far more dependent upon, say, the existence of wage labour rather than "natural" differences between individuals.

*to their power or wealth: a question fit perhaps to be discussed by slaves in the hearing of their masters, but highly unbecoming to reasonable and free men in search of the truth."* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 49] This seems applicable when you see Rothbard proclaim that inequality of individuals will lead to inequalities of income as *"each man will tend to earn an income equal to his 'marginal productivity.'"* This is because *"some men"* (and it is always men!) are *"more intelligent, others more alert and farsighted, than the remainder of the population"* and capitalism will *"allow the rise of these natural aristocracies."* In fact, for Rothbard, all government, in its essence, is a conspiracy against the superior man. [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 29 and p. 34] But a few more points should be raised.

The uniqueness of individuals has always existed but for the vast majority of human history we have lived in very egalitarian societies. If social inequality did, indeed, flow from natural inequalities then **all** societies would be marked by it. This is not the case. Indeed, taking a relatively recent example, many visitors to the early United States noted its egalitarian nature, something that soon changed with the rise of capitalism (a rise dependent upon state action, we must add). This implies that the society we live in (its rights framework, the social relationships it generates and so forth) has far more of a decisive impact on inequality than individual differences. Thus certain rights frameworks will tend to magnify "natural" inequalities (assuming that is the source of the initial inequality, rather than, say, violence and force). As Noam Chomsky argues:

> *"Presumably it is the case that in our 'real world' some combination of attributes is conducive to success in responding to 'the demands of the economic system.' Let us agree, for the sake of discussion, that this combination of attributes is in part a matter of native endowment. Why does this (alleged) fact pose an 'intellectual dilemma' to egalitarians? Note that*



> *libertarians' very principle of the absolute right of private property, an absoluteness which they might not have dared to claim before."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54]

It should go without saying that Rothbard argues that we should reject this *"cunning stratagem"* as a con as the new distribution of property would not be the result of "just" means. However, he failed to note how his argument undermines his own claims that capitalism can be libertarian. As he himself argues, not only does the property owner have the same monopoly of power over a given area as the state, it is **more** despotic as it is based on the *"absolute right of private property"*! And remember, Rothbard is arguing **in favour** of "anarcho"-capitalism (*"if you have unbridled capitalism, you will have all kinds of authority: you will have **extreme** authority."* [Chomsky, **Understanding Power**, p. 200]). The fundamental problem is that Rothbard's ideology blinds him to the obvious, namely that the state and private property produce identical social relationships (ironically, he opines the theory that the state owns its territory *"makes the State, as well as the King in the Middle Ages, a feudal overlord, who at least theoretically **owned** all the land in his domain"* without noticing that this makes the capitalist or landlord a King and a feudal overlord within "anarcho"-capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 171]).

One group of Chinese anarchists pointed out the obvious in 1914. As anarchism *"takes opposition to authority as its essential principle,"* anarchists aim to *"sweep away all the evil systems of present society which have an authoritarian nature"* and so *"our ideal society"* would be *"without landlords, capitalists, leaders, officials, representatives or heads of families."* [quoted by Arif Dirlik, **Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution**, p. 131] Only this, the elimination of all forms of hierarchy (political, economic and social) would achieve genuine anarchism, a society without authority (an-archy). In practice, private property is a

major source of oppression and authoritarianism within society — there is little or no freedom subject to a landlord or within capitalist production (as Bakunin noted, *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"*). In stark contrast to anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists have no problem with landlords and factory fascism (i.e. wage labour), a position which seems highly illogical for a theory calling itself libertarian. If it were truly libertarian, it would oppose all forms of domination, not just statism (*"Those who reject authoritarianism will require nobody' permission to breathe. The libertarian ... is not grateful to get permission to reside anywhere on his own planet and denies the right of any one to screen off bits of it for their own use or rule."* [Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer, **Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 31]). This illogical and self-contradictory position flows from the "anarcho"-capitalist definition of freedom as the absence of coercion and will be discussed in section F.2 in more detail. The ironic thing is that "anarcho"-capitalists implicitly prove the anarchist critique of their own ideology.

Of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist has another means to avoid the obvious, namely the assertion that the market will limit the abuses of the property owners. If workers do not like their ruler then they can seek another. Thus capitalist hierarchy is fine as workers and tenants "consent" to it. While the logic is obviously the same, it is doubtful that an "anarcho"-capitalist would support the state just because its subjects can leave and join another one. As such, this does not address the core issue — the authoritarian nature of capitalist property (see section A.2.14). Moreover, this argument completely ignores the reality of economic and social power. Thus the "consent" argument fails because it ignores the social circumstances of capitalism which limit the choice of the many.

Anarchists have long argued that, as a class, workers have little choice but to "consent" to capitalist hierarchy. The alternative is either dire poverty or starvation. "Anarcho"-capitalists dismiss such claims by denying that there is such a thing as



> *the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse, in fact. Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is* ***equal*** *opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse, and only the repression of this free diversity results in levelling, in uniformity and sameness. Free opportunity and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations... . Life in freedom, in anarchy will do more than liberate man merely from his present political and economic bondage. That will be only the first step, the preliminary to a truly human existence."* [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 164–5]

So it is precisely the diversity of individuals (their uniqueness) which drives the anarchist support for equality, not its denial. Thus anarchists reject the Rothbardian-Newspeak definition of equality as meaningless. No two people are identical and so imposing "identical" equality between them would mean treating them as **unequals**, i.e. not having equal worth or giving them equal respect as befits them as human beings and fellow unique individuals.

So what should we make of Rothbard's claim? It is tempting just to quote Rousseau when he argued *"it is ... useless to inquire whether there is any essential connection between the two inequalities [social and natural]; for this would be only asking, in other words, whether those who command are necessarily better than those who obey, and if strength of body or of mind, wisdom, or virtue are always found in particular individuals, in proportion*

under. Inequality of endowment, in this perspective, implies inequality of outcome and so social inequality. As individual differences are a fact of nature, attempts to create a society based on "equality" (i.e. making everyone identical in terms of possessions and so forth) is impossible and "unnatural." That this would be music to the ears of the wealthy should go without saying.

Before continuing, we must note that Rothbard is destroying language to make his point and that he is not the first to abuse language in this particular way. In George Orwell's **1984**, the expression *"all men are created equal"* could be translated into Newspeak *"but only in the same sense in which **All men are redhaired** is a possible Oldspeak sentence. It did not contain a grammatical error, but it expressed a palpable untruth — i.e. that all men are of equal size, weight, or strength."* [*"Appendix: The Principles of Newspeak"*, **1984**, p. 246] It is nice to know that "Mr. Libertarian" is stealing ideas from Big Brother, and for the same reason: to make critical thought impossible by restricting the meaning of words.

"Equality," in the context of political discussion, does not mean "identical," it means equality of rights, respect, worth, power and so forth. It does not imply treating everyone identically (for example, expecting an eighty year old man to do identical work as an eighteen violates treating both equally with respect as unique individuals). Needless to say, no anarchist has ever advocated such a notion of equality as being identical. As discussed in section A.2.5, anarchists have always based our arguments on the need for social equality on the fact that, while people are different, we all have the same right to be free and that inequality in wealth produces inequalities of liberty. For anarchists:

> *"equality does not mean an equal amount but equal **opportunity** ... Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of*



economic power. Rather, it is simply freedom of contract. Anarchists consider such claims as a joke. To show why, we need only quote (yet again) Rothbard on the abolition of slavery and serfdom in the 19th century. He argued, correctly, that the *"**bodies** of the oppressed were freed, but the property which they had worked and eminently deserved to own, remained in the hands of their former oppressors. With economic power thus remaining in their hands, the former lords soon found themselves virtual masters once more of what were now free tenants or farm labourers. The serfs and slaves had tasted freedom, but had been cruelly derived of its fruits."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

To say the least, anarchists fail to see the logic in this position. Contrast this with the standard "anarcho"-capitalist claim that if market forces ("voluntary exchanges") result in the creation of *"tenants or farm labourers"* then they are free. Yet labourers dispossessed by market forces are in exactly the same social and economic situation as the ex-serfs and ex-slaves. If the latter do not have the fruits of freedom, neither do the former. Rothbard sees the obvious *"economic power"* in the latter case, but denies it in the former (ironically, Rothbard dismissed economic power under capitalism in the same work. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 221–2]). It is only Rothbard's ideology that stops him from drawing the obvious conclusion — identical economic conditions produce identical social relationships and so capitalism is marked by *"economic power"* and *"virtual masters."* The only solution is for "anarcho"-capitalist to simply say that the ex-serfs and ex-slaves were actually free to choose and, consequently, Rothbard was wrong. It might be inhuman, but at least it would be consistent!

Rothbard's perspective is alien to anarchism. For example, as individualist anarchist William Bailie noted, under capitalism there is a class system marked by *"a dependent industrial class of wage-workers"* and *"a privileged class of wealth-monopolisers, each becoming more and more distinct from the other as capitalism advances."* This has turned property

into *"a social power, an economic force destructive of rights, a fertile source of injustice, a means of enslaving the dispossessed."* He concluded: *"Under this system equal liberty cannot obtain."* Bailie notes that the modern *"industrial world under capitalistic conditions"* have *"arisen under the **regime** of status"* (and so *"law-made privileges"*) however, it seems unlikely that he would have concluded that such a class system would be fine if it had developed naturally or the current state was abolished while leaving that class structure intact. [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 121] As we discuss in section G.4, Individualist Anarchists like Tucker and Yarrows ended up recognising that even the freest competition had become powerless against the enormous concentrations of wealth associated with corporate capitalism.

Therefore anarchists recognise that "free exchange" or "consent" in unequal circumstances will reduce freedom as well as increasing inequality between individuals and classes. As we discuss in section F.3, inequality will produce social relationships which are based on hierarchy and domination, **not** freedom. As Noam Chomsky put it:

> *"Anarcho-capitalism, in my opinion, is a doctrinal system which, if ever implemented, would lead to forms of tyranny and oppression that have few counterparts in human history. There isn't the slightest possibility that its (in my view, horrendous) ideas would be implemented, because they would quickly destroy any society that made this colossal error. The idea of 'free contract' between the potentate and his starving subject is a sick joke, perhaps worth some moments in an academic seminar exploring the consequences of (in my view, absurd) ideas, but nowhere else."* [**Noam Chomsky on Anarchism**, interview with Tom Lane, December 23, 1996]



# F.3 Why do anarcho"-capitalists place little or no value on equality?

Murray Rothbard argued that *"the 'rightist' libertarian is not opposed to inequality."* [**For a New Liberty**, p. 47] In contrast, genuine libertarians oppose inequality because it has harmful effects on individual liberty. Part of the reason "anarcho"-capitalism places little or no value on "equality" derives from their definition of that term. *"A and B are 'equal,'"* Rothbard argued, *"if they are identical to each other with respect to a given attribute ... There is one and only one way, then, in which any two people can really be 'equal' in the fullest sense: they must be identical in **all** their attributes."* He then pointed out the obvious fact that *"men are not uniform ... the species, mankind, is uniquely characterised by a high degree of variety, diversity, differentiation: in short, inequality."* [**Egalitarianism as a Revolt against Nature and Other Essays**, p. 4 and p.5]

In others words, every individual is unique — something no egalitarian has ever denied. On the basis of this amazing insight, he concludes that equality is impossible (except "equality of rights") and that the attempt to achieve "equality" is a *"revolt against nature."* The utility of Rothbard's sophistry to the rich and powerful should be obvious as it moves analysis away from the social system we live in and onto biological differences. This means that because we are all unique, the outcome of our actions will not be identical and so social inequality flows from natural differences and not due to the economic system we live

The employment contract (i.e. wage slavery) abrogates liberty. It is based upon inequality of power and *"exploitation is a consequence of the fact that the sale of labour power entails the worker's subordination."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149] Hence Proudhon's support for self-management and opposition to capitalism — any relationship that resembles slavery is illegitimate and no contract that creates a relationship of subordination is valid. Thus in a truly anarchistic society, slave contracts would be unenforceable — people in a truly free (i.e. non-capitalist) society would **never** tolerate such a horrible institution or consider it a valid agreement. If someone was silly enough to sign such a contract, they would simply have to say they now rejected it in order to be free — such contracts are made to be broken and without the force of a law system (and private defence firms) to back it up, such contracts will stay broken.

The right-"libertarian" support for slave contracts (and wage slavery) indicates that their ideology has little to do with liberty and far more to do with justifying property and the oppression and exploitation it produces. Their theoretical support for permanent and temporary voluntary slavery and autocracy indicates a deeper authoritarianism which negates their claims to be libertarians.



Clearly, then, by its own arguments "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist. This should come as no surprise to anarchists. Anarchism, as a political theory, was born when Proudhon wrote **What is Property?** specifically to refute the notion that workers are free when capitalist property forces them to seek employment by landlords and capitalists. He was well aware that in such circumstances property *"violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism … [and has] perfect identity with robbery."* He, unsurprisingly, talks of the *"proprietor, to whom [the worker] has sold and surrendered his liberty."* For Proudhon, anarchy was *"the absence of a master, of a sovereign"* while *"proprietor"* was *"synonymous"* with *"sovereign"* for he *"imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control."* This meant that *"property engenders despotism,"* as *"each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property."* [**What is Property**, p. 251, p. 130, p. 264 and pp. 266–7] It must also be stressed that Proudhon's classic work is a lengthy critique of the kind of apologetics for private property Rothbard espouses to salvage his ideology from its obvious contradictions.

So, ironically, Rothbard repeats the same analysis as Proudhon but draws the **opposite** conclusions and expects to be considered an anarchist! Moreover, it seems equally ironic that "anarcho"-capitalism calls itself "anarchist" while basing itself on the arguments that anarchism was created in opposition to. As shown, "anarcho"-capitalism makes as much sense as "anarcho-statism" — an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. The idea that "anarcho"-capitalism warrants the name "anarchist" is simply false. Only someone ignorant of anarchism could maintain such a thing. While you expect anarchist theory to show this to be the case, the wonderful thing is that "anarcho"-capitalism itself does the same.

Little wonder Bob Black argues that *"[t]o demonise state authoritarianism while ignoring identical albeit contract-consecrated subservient arrangements in the large-scale*

*corporations which control the world economy is fetishism at its worst."* [*"The Libertarian As Conservative"*, **The Abolition of Work and Other Essays**, pp. 142] Left-liberal Stephen L. Newman makes the same point:

> *"The emphasis [right-wing] libertarians place on the opposition of liberty and political power tends to obscure the role of authority in their worldview … the authority exercised in private relationships, however — in the relationship between employer and employee, for instance — meets with no objection… . [This] reveals a curious insensitivity to the use of private authority as a means of social control. Comparing public and private authority, we might well ask of the [right-wing] libertarians: When the price of exercising one's freedom is terribly high, what practical difference is there between the commands of the state and those issued by one's employer? … Though admittedly the circumstances are not identical, telling disgruntled empowers that they are always free to leave their jobs seems no different in principle from telling political dissidents that they are free to emigrate."* [**Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 45–46]

As Bob Black pointed out, right libertarians argue that *"'one can at least change jobs.' But you can't avoid having a job — just as under statism one can at least change nationalities but you can't avoid subjection to one nation-state or another. But freedom means more than the right to change masters."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 147] The similarities between capitalism and statism are clear — and so why "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be anarchist. To reject the authority (the *"ultimate decision-making power"*) of the state and embrace that of the property owner indicates not only a highly illogical stance but one at odds with



a qualitative change in their relationship to others — freedom is turned into mastery and subordination. For the anarchist, slavery is thus the paradigm of what freedom is **not**, instead of an exemplification of what it is (as right-"libertarians" state). As Proudhon argued:

> *"If I were asked to answer the following question: What is slavery? and I should answer in one word, It is murder, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him."* [**What is Property?**, p. 37]

In contrast, the right-"libertarian" effectively argues that "I support slavery because I believe in liberty." It is a sad reflection of the ethical and intellectual bankruptcy of our society that such an "argument" is actually proposed by some people under the name of liberty. The concept of "slavery as freedom" is far too Orwellian to warrant a critique — we will leave it up to right-"libertarians" to corrupt our language and ethical standards with an attempt to prove it.

From the basic insight that slavery is the opposite of freedom, the anarchist rejection of authoritarian social relations quickly follows:

> *"Liberty is inviolable. I can neither sell nor alienate my liberty; every contract, every condition of a contract, which has in view the alienation or suspension of liberty, is null: the slave, when he plants his foot upon the soil of liberty, at that moment becomes a free man .. . Liberty is the original condition of man; to renounce liberty is to renounce the nature of man: after that, how could we perform the acts of man?"* [P.J. Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 67]

*non-democratic government would carry over to the employment contract — which is the voluntary contractual basis for the free-market free-enterprise system. Such a critique would thus be a* ***reductio ad absurdum****."* As *"contractual slavery"* is an *"extension of the employer-employee contract,"* he shows that the difference between wage labour and slavery is the time scale rather than the principle or social relationships involved. [**Op. Cit.**] This explains why the early workers' movement called capitalism ***"wage slavery"*** and why anarchists still do. It exposes the unfree nature of capitalism and the poverty of its vision of freedom. While it is possible to present wage labour as "freedom" due to its "consensual" nature, it becomes much harder to do so when talking about slavery or dictatorship (and let us not forget that Nozick also had no problem with autocracy — see section B.4). Then the contradictions are exposed for all to see and be horrified by.

All this does not mean that we must reject free agreement. Far from it! Free agreement is **essential** for a society based upon individual dignity and liberty. There are a variety of forms of free agreement and anarchists support those based upon co-operation and self-management (i.e. individuals working together as equals). Anarchists desire to create relationships which reflect (and so express) the liberty that is the basis of free agreement. Capitalism creates relationships that deny liberty. The opposition between autonomy and subjection can only be maintained by modifying or rejecting contract theory, something that capitalism cannot do and so the right-wing "libertarian" rejects autonomy in favour of subjection (and so rejects socialism in favour of capitalism).

So the real contrast between genuine libertarians and right-"libertarians" is best expressed in their respective opinions on slavery. Anarchism is based upon the individual whose individuality depends upon the maintenance of free relationships with other individuals. If individuals deny their capacities for self-government through a contract the individuals bring about



the basic principles of anarchism. This whole-hearted support for wage labour and capitalist property rights indicates that "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists because they do not reject all forms of **archy.** They obviously support the hierarchy between boss and worker (wage labour) and landlord and tenant. Anarchism, by definition, is against all forms of archy, including the hierarchy generated by capitalist property. To ignore the obvious archy associated with capitalist property is highly illogical and trying to dismiss one form of domination as flowing from "just" property while attacking the other because it flows from "unjust" property is not seeing the wood for the trees.

In addition, we must note that such inequalities in power and wealth will need "defending" from those subject to them ("anarcho"-capitalists recognise the need for private police and courts to defend property from theft — and, anarchists add, to defend the theft and despotism associated with property!). Due to its support of private property (and thus authority), "anarcho"-capitalism ends up retaining a state in its "anarchy": namely a **private** state whose existence its proponents attempt to deny simply by refusing to call it a state, like an ostrich hiding its head in the sand. As one anarchist so rightly put it, "anarcho"-capitalists *"simply replaced the state with private security firms, and can hardly be described as anarchists as the term is normally understood."* [Brian Morris, *"Global Anti-Capitalism"*, pp. 170–6, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 175] As we discuss more fully in section F.6 this is why "anarcho"-capitalism is better described as "private state" capitalism as there would be a functional equivalent of the state and it would be just as skewed in favour of the propertied elite as the existing one (if not more so). As Albert Meltzer put it:

> *"Commonsense shows that any capitalist society might dispense with a 'State' ... but it could not*

*dispense with organised government, or a privatised form of it, if there were people amassing money and others working to amass it for them. The philosophy of 'anarcho-capitalism' dreamed up by the 'libertarian' New Right, has nothing to do with Anarchism as known by the Anarchist movement proper. It is a lie ... Patently unbridled capitalism ... needs some force at its disposal to maintain class privileges, either from the State itself or from private armies. What they believe in is in fact a limited State — that is, one in which the State has one function, to protect the ruling class, does not interfere with exploitation, and comes as cheap as possible for the ruling class. The idea also serves another purpose ... a moral justification for bourgeois consciences in avoiding taxes without feeling guilty about it."* [**Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, p. 50]

For anarchists, this need of capitalism for some kind of state is unsurprising. For *"Anarchy without socialism seems equally as impossible to us [as socialism without anarchy], for in such a case it could not be other than the domination of the strongest, and would therefore set in motion right away the organisation and consolidation of this domination; that is to the constitution of government."* [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 148] Because of this, the "anarcho"-capitalist rejection of the anarchist critique of capitalism and our arguments on the need for equality, they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition. To anarchists it seems bizarre that "anarcho"-capitalists want to get rid of the state but maintain the system it helped create and its function as a defender of the capitalist class's property and property rights. In other words, to reduce the state purely to its function as (to



**ical Forum**, xiv, 1982). This classic rebuttal takes the form of "proof by contradiction" (or **reductio ad absurdum**) whereby he takes the arguments of right-libertarianism to their logical end and shows how they reach the memorably conclusion that the *"time has come for liberal economic and political thinkers to stop dodging this issue and to critically re-examine their shared prejudices about certain voluntary social institutions ... this critical process will inexorably drive liberalism to its only logical conclusion: libertarianism that finally lays the true moral foundation for economic and political slavery."* Ellerman shows how, from a right-"libertarian" perspective there is a *"fundamental contradiction"* in a modern liberal society for the state to prohibit slave contracts. He notes that there *"seems to be a basic shared prejudice of liberalism that slavery is inherently involuntary, so the issue of genuinely voluntary slavery has received little scrutiny. The perfectly valid liberal argument that involuntary slavery is inherently unjust is thus taken to include voluntary slavery (in which case, the argument, by definition, does not apply). This has resulted in an abridgement of the freedom of contract in modern liberal society."* Thus it is possible to argue for a *"civilised form of contractual slavery."* ["J. Philmore,", **Op. Cit.**]

So accurate and logical was Ellerman's article that many of its readers were convinced it **was** written by a right-"libertarian" (including, we have to say, us!). One such writer was Carole Pateman, who correctly noted that *"[t]here is a nice historical irony here. In the American South, slaves were emancipated and turned into wage labourers, and now American contractarians argue that all workers should have the opportunity to turn themselves into civil slaves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]).

The aim of Ellerman's article was to show the problems that employment (wage labour) presents for the concept of self-government and how contract need not result in social relationships based on freedom. As "Philmore" put it, *"[a]ny thorough and decisive critique of voluntary slavery or constitutional*

derlying the agreement and makes itself null and void. In other words, voluntary government is still government and a defining characteristic of an anarchy must be, surely, "no government" and "no rulers."

This is most easily seen in the extreme case of the slave contract. John Stuart Mill stated that such a contract would be "null and void." He argued that an individual may voluntarily choose to enter such a contract but in so doing *"he abdicates his liberty; he foregoes any future use of it beyond that single act. He therefore defeats, in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself…The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free. It is not freedom, to be allowed to alienate his freedom."* He adds that *"these reasons, the force of which is so conspicuous in this particular case, are evidently of far wider application."* [quoted by Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–2]

And it is such an application that defenders of capitalism fear (Mill did in fact apply these reasons wider and unsurprisingly became a supporter of a market syndicalist form of socialism). If we reject slave contracts as illegitimate then, logically, we must also reject **all** contracts that express qualities similar to slavery (i.e. deny freedom) including wage slavery. Given that, as David Ellerman points out, *"the voluntary slave … and the employee cannot in fact take their will out of their intentional actions so that they could be 'employed' by the master or employer"* we are left with *"the rather implausible assertion that a person can vacate his or her will for eight or so hours a day for weeks, months, or years on end but cannot do so for a working lifetime."* [**Property and Contract in Economics**, p. 58] This is Rothbard's position.

The implications of supporting voluntary slavery is quite devastating for all forms of right-wing "libertarianism." This was proven by Ellerman when he wrote an extremely robust defence of it under the pseudonym "J. Philmore" called **The Libertarian Case for Slavery** (first published in **The Philosoph-**



use Malatesta's apt word) the gendarme of the capitalist class is ***not*** an anarchist goal.

Thus anarchism is far more than the common dictionary definition of "no government" — it also entails being against all forms of **archy**, including those generated by capitalist property. This is clear from the roots of the word "anarchy." As we noted in section A.1, the word anarchy means "no rulers" or "contrary to authority." As Rothbard himself acknowledges, the property owner is the ruler of their property and, therefore, those who use it. For this reason "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be considered as a form of anarchism — a real anarchist must logically oppose the authority of the property owner along with that of the state. As "anarcho"-capitalism does not explicitly (or implicitly, for that matter) call for economic arrangements that will end wage labour and usury it cannot be considered anarchist or part of the anarchist tradition. While anarchists have always opposed capitalism, "anarcho"-capitalists have embraced it and due to this embrace their "anarchy" will be marked by relationships based upon subordination and hierarchy (such as wage labour), **not** freedom (little wonder that Proudhon argued that *"property is despotism"* — it creates authoritarian and hierarchical relationships between people in a similar way to statism). Their support for "free market" capitalism ignores the impact of wealth and power on the nature and outcome of individual decisions within the market (see sections F.2 and F.3 for further discussion). Furthermore, any such system of (economic and social) power will require extensive force to maintain it and the "anarcho"-capitalist system of competing "defence firms" will simply be a new state, enforcing capitalist power, property rights and law.

Thus the "anarcho"-capitalist and the anarchist have different starting positions and opposite ends in mind. Their claims to being anarchists are bogus simply because they reject so much of the anarchist tradition as to make what little they do pay lip-service to non-anarchist in theory and practice. Lit-

tle wonder Peter Marshall said that *"few anarchists would accept the 'anarcho-capitalists' into the anarchist camp since they do not share a concern for economic equality and social justice."* As such, "anarcho"-capitalists, *"even if they do reject the State, might therefore best be called right-wing libertarians rather than anarchists."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 565]



dividuals from contracting out their "labour services" to whom and however long they "desire". You cannot have it both ways.

So, ironically, an ideology proclaiming itself to support "liberty" ends up justifying and defending slavery. Indeed, for the right-"libertarian" the slave contract is an exemplification, not the denial, of the individual's liberty! How is this possible? How can slavery be supported as an expression of liberty? Simple, right-"libertarian" support for slavery is a symptom of a **deeper** authoritarianism, namely their uncritical acceptance of contract theory. The central claim of contract theory is that contract is the means to secure and enhance individual freedom. Slavery is the antithesis to freedom and so, in theory, contract and slavery must be mutually exclusive. However, as indicated above, some contract theorists (past and present) have included slave contracts among legitimate contracts. This suggests that contract theory cannot provide the theoretical support needed to secure and enhance individual freedom.

As Carole Pateman argues, *"contract theory is primarily about a way of creating social relations constituted by subordination, not about exchange."* Rather than undermining subordination, contract theorists justify modern subjection — *"contract doctrine has proclaimed that subjection to a master — a boss, a husband — is freedom."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 40 and p. 146] The question central to contract theory (and so right-Libertarianism) is not "are people free" (as one would expect) but "are people free to subordinate themselves in any manner they please." A radically different question and one only fitting to someone who does not know what liberty means.

Anarchists argue that not all contracts are legitimate and no free individual can make a contract that denies his or her own freedom. If an individual is able to express themselves by making free agreements then those free agreements must also be based upon freedom internally as well. Any agreement that creates domination or hierarchy negates the assumptions un-

pay such damages (either as a lump sum or over a period of time) could turn the worker into the most common type of modern slave, the debt-slave.

And it is interesting to note that even Murray Rothbard is not against the selling of humans. He argued that children are the property of their parents who can (bar actually murdering them by violence) do whatever they please with them, even sell them on a *"flourishing free child market."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 102] Combined with a whole hearted support for child labour (after all, the child can leave its parents if it objects to working for them) such a "free child market" could easily become a "child slave market" — with entrepreneurs making a healthy profit selling infants and children or their labour to capitalists (as did occur in 19th century Britain). Unsurprisingly, Rothbard ignores the possible nasty aspects of such a market in human flesh (such as children being sold to work in factories, homes and brothels). But this is besides the point.

Of course, this theoretical justification for slavery at the heart of an ideology calling itself "libertarianism" is hard for many right-"libertarians" to accept and so they argue that such contracts would be very hard to enforce. This attempt to get out of the contradiction fails simply because it ignores the nature of the capitalist market. If there is a demand for slave contracts to be enforced, then companies will develop to provide that "service" (and it would be interesting to see how two "protection" firms, one defending slave contracts and another not, could compromise and reach a peaceful agreement over whether slave contracts were valid). Thus we could see a so-called "free" society producing companies whose specific purpose was to hunt down escaped slaves (i.e. individuals in slave contracts who have not paid damages to their owners for freedom). Of course, perhaps Rothbard would claim that such slave contracts would be "outlawed" under his *"general libertarian law code"* but this is a denial of market "freedom". If slave contracts **are** "banned" then surely this is paternalism, stopping in-



# F.2 What do "anarcho"-capitalists mean by freedom?

For "anarcho"-capitalists, the concept of freedom is limited to the idea of *"freedom from."* For them, freedom means simply freedom from the *"initiation of force,"* or the *"non-aggression against anyone's person and property."* [Murray Rothbard, **For a New Liberty**, p. 23] The notion that real freedom must combine both freedom *"to"* **and** freedom *"from"* is missing in their ideology, as is the social context of the so-called freedom they defend.

Before continuing, it is useful to quote Alan Haworth when he notes that *"[i]n fact, it is surprising how **little** close attention the concept of freedom receives from libertarian writers. Once again **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** is a case in point. The word 'freedom' doesn't even appear in the index. The word 'liberty' appears, but only to refer the reader to the 'Wilt Chamberlain' passage. In a supposedly 'libertarian' work, this is more than surprising. It is truly remarkable."* [**Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 95] Why this is the case can be seen from how the right-"libertarian" defines freedom.

In right-"libertarian" and "anarcho"-capitalist ideology, freedom is considered to be a product of property. As Murray Rothbard puts it, *"the libertarian defines the concept of 'freedom' or 'liberty'…[as a] condition in which a person's ownership rights in his body and his legitimate material property rights are not*

*invaded, are not aggressed against… . Freedom and unrestricted property rights go hand in hand."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.41]

This definition has some problems, however. In such a society, one cannot (legitimately) do anything with or on another's property if the owner prohibits it. This means that an individual's only **guaranteed** freedom is determined by the amount of property that he or she owns. This has the consequence that someone with no property has no guaranteed freedom at all (beyond, of course, the freedom not to be murdered or otherwise harmed by the deliberate acts of others). In other words, a distribution of property is a distribution of freedom, as the right-"libertarians" themselves define it. It strikes anarchists as strange that an ideology that claims to be committed to promoting freedom entails the conclusion that some people should be more free than others. Yet this is the logical implication of their view, which raises a serious doubt as to whether "anarcho"-capitalists are actually interested in freedom at all.

Looking at Rothbard's definition of "liberty" quoted above, we can see that freedom is actually no longer considered to be a fundamental, independent concept. Instead, freedom is a derivative of something more fundamental, namely the *"legitimate rights"* of an individual, which are identified as property rights. In other words, given that "anarcho"-capitalists and right-"libertarians" in general consider the right to property as "absolute," it follows that freedom and property become one and the same. This suggests an alternative name for the right Libertarian, namely ***"Propertarian."*** And, needless to say, if we do not accept the right-libertarians' view of what constitutes "legitimate rights," then their claim to be defenders of liberty is weak.

Another important implication of this "liberty as property" concept is that it produces a strangely alienated concept of freedom. Liberty, as we noted, is no longer considered absolute, but a derivative of property — which has the important consequence that you can "sell" your liberty and still be considered



*surrendered in advance"* and that if a *"labourer remains totally subservient to his master's will voluntarily, he is not yet a slave since his submission is voluntary."* However, as we noted in section F.2, Rothbard emphasis on quitting fails to recognise the actual denial of will and control over ones own body that is explicit in wage labour. It is this failure that pro-slave contract "libertarians" stress — they consider the slave contract as an extended wage contract. Moreover, a modern slave contract would likely take the form of a *"performance bond,"* on which Rothbard laments about its *"unfortunate suppression"* by the state. In such a system, the slave could agree to perform X years labour or pay their master substantial damages if they fail to do so. It is the threat of damages that enforces the contract and such a "contract" Rothbard does agree is enforceable. Another means of creating slave contracts would be *"conditional exchange"* which Rothbard also supports. As for debt bondage, that too, seems acceptable. He surreally notes that paying damages and debts in such contracts is fine as *"money, of course, **is** alienable"* and so forgets that it needs to be earned by labour which, he asserts, is **not** alienable! [**The Ethics of Liberty,** pp. 134–135, p. 40, pp. 136–9, p. 141 and p. 138]

It should be noted that the slavery contract cannot be null and void because it is unenforceable, as Rothbard suggests. This is because the doctrine of specific performance applies to all contracts, not just to labour contracts. This is because **all** contracts specify some future performance. In the case of the lifetime labour contract, then it can be broken as long as the slave pays any appropriate damages. As Rothbard puts it elsewhere, *"if A has agreed to work for life for B in exchange for 10,000 grams of gold, he will have to return the proportionate amount of property if he terminates the arrangement and ceases to work."* [**Man, Economy, and State**, vol. I , p. 441] This is understandable, as the law generally allows material damages for breached contracts, as does Rothbard in his support for the *"performance bond"* and *"conditional exchange."* Needless to say, having to

an individual would "agree" to sell their lifetime's labour to another (as when a starving worker would "agree" to become a slave in return for food). In addition, the contract would be able to be broken under certain conditions (perhaps in return for breaking the contract, the former slave would have pay damages to his or her master for the labour their master would lose — a sizeable amount no doubt and such a payment could result in debt slavery, which is the most common form of "civilised" slavery. Such damages may be agreed in the contract as a "performance bond" or "conditional exchange."

In summary, right-"libertarians" are talking about "civilised" slavery (or, in other words, civil slavery) and not forced slavery. While some may have reservations about calling it slavery, they agree with the basic concept that since people own themselves they can sell themselves, that is sell their labour for a lifetime rather than piecemeal.

We must stress that this is no academic debate. "Voluntary" slavery has been a problem in many societies and still exists in many countries today (particularly third world ones where bonded labour — i.e. where debt is used to enslave people — is the most common form). With the rise of sweat shops and child labour in many "developed" countries such as the USA, "voluntary" slavery (perhaps via debt and bonded labour) may become common in all parts of the world — an ironic (if not surprising) result of "freeing" the market and being indifferent to the actual freedom of those within it.

Some right-"libertarians" are obviously uneasy with the logical conclusion of their definition of freedom. Murray Rothbard, for example, stressed the *"unenforceability, in libertarian theory, of voluntary slave contracts."* Of course, **other** "libertarian" theorists claim the exact opposite, so *"libertarian theory"* makes no such claim, but never mind! Essentially, his objection revolves around the assertion that a person *"cannot, in nature, sell himself into slavery and have this sale enforced — for this would mean that his future will over his own body was being*



free by the ideology. This concept of liberty is usually termed "self-ownership." But, to state the obvious, I do not "own" myself, as if were an object somehow separable from my subjectivity — I **am** myself (see section B.4.2). However, the concept of "self-ownership" is handy for justifying various forms of domination and oppression — for by agreeing (usually under the force of circumstances, we must note) to certain contracts, an individual can "sell" (or rent out) themselves to others (for example, when workers sell their labour power to capitalists on the "free market"). In effect, "self-ownership" becomes the means of justifying treating people as objects — ironically, the very thing the concept was created to stop! As anarchist L. Susan Brown notes, *"[a]t the moment an individual 'sells' labour power to another, he/she loses self-determination and instead is treated as a subjectless instrument for the fulfilment of another's will."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 4]

Given that workers are paid to obey, you really have to wonder which planet Murray Rothbard was on when he argued that a person's *"labour service is alienable, but his **will** is not"* and that he *"cannot alienate his **will**, more particularly his control over his own mind and body."* He contrasts private property and self-ownership by arguing that *"[a]ll physical property owned by a person is alienable ... I can give away or sell to another person my shoes, my house, my car, my money, etc. But there are certain vital things which, in natural fact and in the nature of man, are **in**alienable ... [his] will and control over his own person are inalienable."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 40, p. 135 and pp. 134–5] Yet *"labour services"* are unlike the private possessions Rothbard lists as being alienable. As we argued in section B.1 a person's *"labour services"* and *"will"* cannot be divided — if you sell your labour services, you also have to give control of your body and mind to another person. If a worker does not obey the commands of her employer, she is fired. That Rothbard denied this indicates a total lack of common-sense. Perhaps Rothbard would have argued that as the worker can quit

at any time she does not really alienate their will (this seems to be his case against slave contracts — see section F.2.2). But this ignores the fact that between the signing and breaking of the contract and during work hours (and perhaps outside work hours, if the boss has mandatory drug testing or will fire workers who attend union or anarchist meetings or those who have an "unnatural" sexuality and so on) the worker **does** alienate his will and body. In the words of Rudolf Rocker, *"under the realities of the capitalist economic form ... there can ... be no talk of a 'right over one's own person,' for that ends when one is compelled to submit to the economic dictation of another if he does not want to starve."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 10]

Ironically, the rights of property (which are said to flow from an individual's self-ownership of themselves) becomes the means, under capitalism, by which self-ownership of non-property owners is denied. The foundational right (self-ownership) becomes denied by the derivative right (ownership of things). *"To treat others and oneself as property,"* argues L. Susan Brown, *"objectifies the human individual, denies the unity of subject and object and is a negation of individual will ... [and] destroys the very freedom one sought in the first place. The liberal belief in property, both real and in the person, leads not to freedom but to relationships of domination and subordination."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 3] Under capitalism, a lack of property can be just as oppressive as a lack of legal rights because of the relationships of domination and subjection this situation creates. That people "consent" to this hierarchy misses the point. As Alexander Berkman put it:

> *"The law says your employer does not steal anything from you, because it is done with your consent. You have agreed to work for your boss for certain pay, he to have all that you produce ...*
>
> *"But did you really consent?*



them, *"an agreement for a limited power on the one side, and obedience on the other ... slavery ceases."* As long as the master could not kill the slave, then it was *"drudgery."* Like Nozick, he acknowledges that *"men did sell themselves; but, it is plain, this was only to drudgery, not to slavery: for, it is evident, the person sold was not under an absolute, arbitrary, despotical power: for the master could not have power to kill him, at any time, whom, at a certain time, he was obliged to let go free out of his service."* [Locke, **Second Treatise of Government**, Section 24] In other words, voluntary slavery was fine but just call it something else.

Not that Locke was bothered by **involuntary** slavery. He was heavily involved in the slave trade. He owned shares in the **"Royal Africa Company"** which carried on the slave trade for England, making a profit when he sold them. He also held a significant share in another slave company, the **"Bahama Adventurers."** In the *"Second Treatise"*, Locke justified slavery in terms of *"Captives taken in a just war,"* a war waged against aggressors. [Section 85] That, of course, had nothing to do with the **actual** slavery Locke profited from (slave raids were common, for example). Nor did his "liberal" principles stop him suggesting a constitution that would ensure that *"every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his Negro slaves."* The constitution itself was typically autocratic and hierarchical, designed explicitly to *"avoid erecting a numerous democracy."* [**The Works of John Locke**, vol. X, p. 196]

So the notion of contractual slavery has a long history within right-wing liberalism, although most refuse to call it by that name. It is of course simply embarrassment that stops many right-"libertarians" calling a spade a spade. They incorrectly assume that slavery has to be involuntary. In fact, historically, voluntary slave contracts have been common (David Ellerman's **Property and Contract in Economics** has an excellent overview). Any new form of voluntary slavery would be a "civilised" form of slavery and could occur when

with Nozick, there is no logical basis in their ideology for such disagreement.

This can be seen from "anarcho"-capitalist Walter Block, who, like Nozick, supports voluntary slavery. As he puts it, *"if I own something, I can sell it (and should be allowed by law to do so). If I can't sell, then, and to that extent, I really don't own it."* Thus agreeing to sell yourself for a lifetime *"is a bona fide contract"* which, if *"abrogated, theft occurs."* He critiques those other right-wing "libertarians" (like Murray Rothbard) who oppose voluntary slavery as being inconsistent to their principles. Block, in his words, seeks to make *"a tiny adjustment"* which *"strengthens libertarianism by making it more internally consistent."* He argues that his position shows *"that contract, predicated on private property [can] reach to the furthest realms of human interaction, even to voluntary slave contracts."* [*"Towards a Libertarian Theory of Inalienability: A Critique of Rothbard, Barnett, Smith, Kinsella, Gordon, and Epstein,"* pp. 39–85, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 44, p. 48, p. 82 and p. 46]

So the logic is simple, you cannot really own something unless you can sell it. Self-ownership is one of the cornerstones of laissez-faire capitalist ideology. Therefore, since you own yourself you can sell yourself.

This defence of slavery should not come as a surprise to any one familiar with classical liberalism. An elitist ideology, its main rationale is to defend the liberty and power of property owners and justify unfree social relationships (such as government and wage labour) in terms of "consent." Nozick and Block just takes it to its logical conclusion. This is because his position is not new but, as with so many other right-"libertarian" ones, can be found in John Locke's work. The key difference is that Locke refused the term *"slavery"* and favoured *"drudgery"* as, for him, slavery mean a relationship *"between a lawful conqueror and a captive"* where the former has the power of life and death over the latter. Once a *"compact"* is agreed between



> *"When the highway man holds his gun to your head, you turn your valuables over to him. You 'consent' all right, but you do so because you cannot help yourself, because you are* ***compelled*** *by his gun.*
>
> *"Are you not* ***compelled*** *to work for an employer? Your need compels you just as the highwayman's gun. You must live ... You can't work for yourself ... The factories, machinery, and tools belong to the employing class, so you* ***must*** *hire yourself out to that class in order to work and live. Whatever you work at, whoever your employer may be, it always comes to the same: you must work* ***for him****. You can't help yourself. You are* ***compelled****."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 11]

Due to this class monopoly over the means of life, workers (usually) are at a disadvantage in terms of bargaining power — there are more workers than jobs (see section C.9). Within capitalism there is no equality between owners and the dispossessed, and so property is a source of **power.** To claim that this power should be "left alone" or is "fair" is *"to the anarchists... preposterous. Once a State has been established, and most of the country's capital privatised, the threat of physical force is no longer necessary to coerce workers into accepting jobs, even with low pay and poor conditions. To use [right-"libertarian"] Ayn Rand's term, 'initial force' has* ***already taken place,*** *by those who now have capital against those who do not... . In other words, if a thief died and willed his 'ill-gotten gain' to his children, would the children have a right to the stolen property? Not legally. So if 'property is theft,' to borrow Proudhon's quip, and the fruit of exploited labour is simply legal theft, then the only factor giving the children of a deceased capitalist a right to inherit the 'booty' is the law, the State. As Bakunin wrote, 'Ghosts should not rule and oppress this world, which belongs only to the*

*living.'"* [Jeff Draughn, **Between Anarchism and Libertarianism**]

Or, in other words, right-Libertarianism fails to *"meet the charge that normal operations of the market systematically places an entire class of persons (wage earners) in circumstances that compel them to accept the terms and conditions of labour dictated by those who offer work. While it is true that individuals are formally free to seek better jobs or withhold their labour in the hope of receiving higher wages, in the end their position in the market works against them; they cannot live if they do not find employment. When circumstances regularly bestow a relative disadvantage on one class of persons in their dealings with another class, members of the advantaged class have little need of coercive measures to get what they want."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 130] Eliminating taxation does not end oppression, in other words. As Tolstoy put it:

> *"in Russia serfdom was only abolished when all the land had been appropriated. When land was granted to the peasants, it was burdened with payments which took the place of the land slavery. In Europe, taxes that kept the people in bondage began to be abolished only when the people had lost their land, were unaccustomed to agricultural work, and ... quite dependent on the capitalists ... [They] abolish the taxes that fall on the workers ... only because the majority of the people are already in the hands of the capitalists. One form of slavery is not abolished until another has already replaced it."* [**The Slavery of Our Times**, p. 32]

So Rothbard's argument (as well as being contradictory) misses the point (and the reality of capitalism). Yes, **if** we define freedom as *"the absence of coercion"* then the idea that wage



To defend the "freedom" of property owners is to defend authority and privilege — in other words, statism. So, in considering the concept of liberty as "freedom from," it is clear that by defending private property (as opposed to possession) the "anarcho"-capitalist is defending the power and authority of property owners to govern those who use "their" property. And also, we must note, defending all the petty tyrannies that make the work lives of so many people frustrating, stressful and unrewarding.

Anarchism, by definition, is in favour of organisations and social relationships which are non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian. Otherwise, some people are more free than others. Failing to attack hierarchy leads to massive contradiction. For example, since the British Army is a volunteer one, it is an "anarchist" organisation! Ironically, it can also allow a state to appear "libertarian" as that, too, can be considered voluntary arrangement as long as it allows its subjects to emigrate freely. So equating freedom with (capitalist) property rights does not protect freedom, in fact it actively denies it. This lack of freedom is only inevitable as long as we accept capitalist private property rights. If we reject them, we can try and create a world based on freedom in all aspects of life, rather than just in a few.

## F.2.2 Do "libertarian"-capitalists support slavery?

Yes. It may come as a surprise to many people, but right-"Libertarianism" is one of the few political theories that justifies slavery. For example, Robert Nozick asks whether *"a free system would allow [the individual] to sell himself into slavery"* and he answers *"I believe that it would."* [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. 371] While some right-"libertarians" do not agree

their bosses property rights and they would be repressed for trying).

So the right-wing "libertarian" right is interested only in a narrow concept of freedom (rather than in freedom or liberty as such). This can be seen in the argument of Ayn Rand that *"**Freedom**, in a political context, means freedom from government coercion. It does **not** mean freedom from the landlord, or freedom from the employer, or freedom from the laws of nature which do not provide men with automatic prosperity. It means freedom from the coercive power of the state — and nothing else!"* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 192] By arguing in this way, right-"libertarians" ignore the vast number of authoritarian social relationships that exist in capitalist society and, as Rand does here, imply that these social relationships are like *"the laws of nature."* However, if one looks at the world without prejudice but with an eye to maximising freedom, the major coercive institutions are the state **and** capitalist social relationships (and the latter relies on the former). It should also be noted that, unlike gravity, the power of the landlord and boss depends on the use of force — gravity does not need policemen to make things fall!

The right "libertarian," then, far from being a defender of freedom, is in fact a keen defender of certain forms of authority. As Kropotkin argued against a forerunner of right-"libertarianism":

> *"The modern Individualism initiated by Herbert Spencer is, like the critical theory of Proudhon, a powerful indictment against the dangers and wrongs of government, but its practical solution of the social problem is miserable — so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of 'No force' be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 98]



labour does not restrict liberty is unavoidable, but such a definition is useless. This is because it hides structures of power and relations of domination and subordination. As Carole Pateman argues, *"the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself ... To sell command over the use of oneself for a specified period ... is to be an unfree labourer. The characteristics of this condition are captured in the term **wage slave**."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 151]

In other words, contracts about property in the person inevitably create subordination. "Anarcho"-capitalism defines this source of unfreedom away, but it still exists and has a major impact on people's liberty. For anarchists freedom is better described as "self-government" or "self-management" — to be able to govern ones own actions (if alone) or to participate in the determination of join activity (if part of a group). Freedom, to put it another way, is not an abstract legal concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all their powers, capacities, and talents which nature has endowed them. A key aspect of this is to govern one own actions when within associations (self-management). If we look at freedom this way, we see that coercion is condemned but so is hierarchy (and so is capitalism for during working hours people are not free to make their own plans and have a say in what affects them. They are order takers, **not** free individuals).

It is because anarchists have recognised the authoritarian nature of capitalist firms that they have opposed wage labour and capitalist property rights along with the state. They have desired to replace institutions structured by subordination with institutions constituted by free relationships (based, in other words, on self-management) in **all** areas of life, including economic organisations. Hence Proudhon's argument that the *"workmen's associations ... are full of hope both as a protest*

*against the wage system, and as an affirmation of **reciprocity**"* and that their importance lies *"in their denial of the rule of capitalists, money lenders and governments."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 98–99]

Unlike anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist account of freedom allows an individual's freedom to be rented out to another while maintaining that the person is still free. It may seem strange that an ideology proclaiming its support for liberty sees nothing wrong with the alienation and denial of liberty but, in actual fact, it is unsurprising. After all, contract theory is a *"theoretical strategy that justifies subjection by presenting it as freedom"* and has *"turned a subversive proposition [that we are born free and equal] into a defence of civil subjection."* Little wonder, then, that contract *"creates a relation of subordination"* and not of freedom [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39 and p. 59] Little wonder, then, that Colin Ward argued that, as an anarchist, he is *"by definition, a socialist"* and that *"[w]orkers' control of industrial production"* is *"the only approach compatible with anarchism."* [**Talking Anarchy**, p. 25 and p. 26]

Ultimately, any attempt to build an ethical framework starting from the abstract individual (as Rothbard does with his *"legitimate rights"* method) will result in domination and oppression between people, **not** freedom. Indeed, Rothbard provides an example of the dangers of idealist philosophy that Bakunin warned about when he argued that while *"[m]aterialism denies free will and ends in the establishment of liberty; idealism, in the name of human dignity, proclaims free will, and on the ruins of every liberty founds authority."* [**God and the State**, p. 48] That this is the case with "anarcho"-capitalism can be seen from Rothbard's wholehearted support for wage labour, landlordism and the rules imposed by property owners on those who use, but do not own, their property. Rothbard, basing himself on abstract individualism, cannot help but justify authority over liberty. This, undoubtedly, flows from the right-liberal and conservative roots of his



Perhaps Reekie (like most right-"libertarians") will maintain that workers voluntarily agree ("consent") to be subject to the bosses dictatorship (he writes that *"each will only enter into the contractual agreement known as a firm if each believes he will be better off thereby. The firm is simply another example of mutually beneficial exchange."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137]). However, this does not stop the relationship being authoritarian or dictatorial (and so exploitative as it is **highly** unlikely that those at the top will not abuse their power). Representing employment relations as voluntary agreement simply mystifies the existence and exercise of power within the organisation so created.

As we argue further in the section F.3, in a capitalist society workers have the option of finding a job or facing abject poverty and/or starvation. Little wonder, then, that people "voluntarily" sell their labour and "consent" to authoritarian structures! They have little option to do otherwise. So, **within** the labour market workers **can** and **do** seek out the best working conditions possible, but that does not mean that the final contract agreed is "freely" accepted and not due to the force of circumstances, that both parties have equal bargaining power when drawing up the contract or that the freedom of both parties is ensured.

Which means to argue (as right-"libertarians" do) that freedom cannot be restricted by wage labour because people enter into relationships they consider will lead to improvements over their initial situation totally misses the point. As the initial situation is not considered relevant, their argument fails. After all, agreeing to work in a sweatshop 14 hours a day **is** an improvement over starving to death — but it does not mean that those who so agree are free when working there or actually **want** to be there. They are not and it is the circumstances, created and enforced by the law (i.e., the state), that have ensured that they "consent" to such a regime (given the chance, they would desire to **change** that regime but cannot as this would violate

subordinated employees. Again, we find the right-"libertarian" acknowledging that the capitalist managerial structure is a hierarchy and workers are subordinated while denying it is autocratic to the workers! Thus we have "free" workers within a relationship distinctly **lacking** freedom — a strange paradox. Indeed, if your personal life were as closely monitored and regulated as the work life of millions of people across the world, you would rightly consider it the worse form of oppression and tyranny.

Somewhat ironically, right-wing liberal and "free market" economist Milton Friedman contrasted *"central planning involving the use of coercion — the technique of the army or the modern totalitarian state"* with *"voluntary co-operation between individuals — the technique of the marketplace"* as two distinct ways of co-ordinating the economic activity of large groups (*"millions"*) of people. [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 13] However, this misses the key issue of the internal nature of the company. As right-"libertarians" themselves note, the internal structure of a capitalist company is hierarchical. Indeed, the capitalist company **is** a form of central planning and so shares the same "technique" as the army. As Peter Drucker noted in his history of General Motors, *"[t]here is a remarkably close parallel between General Motors' scheme of organisation and those of the two institutions most renowned for administrative efficiency: that of the Catholic Church and that of the modern army."* [quoted by David Engler, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 66] Thus capitalism is marked by a series of totalitarian organisations. Dictatorship does not change much — nor does it become less fascistic — when discussing economic structures rather than political ones. To state the obvious, *"the employment contract (like the marriage contract) is not an exchange; both contracts create social relations that endure over time — social relations of subordination."* [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, p. 148]



ideology. Individualist anarchist Shawn Wilbar once defined Wikipedia as *"the most successful modern experiment in promoting obedience to authority as freedom."* However, Wikipedia pales into insignificance compared to the success of liberalism (in its many forms) in doing precisely that. Whether politically or economically, liberalism has always rushed to justify and rationalise the individual subjecting themselves to some form of hierarchy. That "anarcho"-capitalism does this under the name "anarchism" is deeply insulting to anarchists.

Overall, we can see that the logic of the right-"libertarian" definition of "freedom" ends up negating itself because it results in the creation and encouragement of **authority,** which is an **opposite** of freedom. For example, as Ayn Rand pointed out, *"man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave."* [**The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z**, pp. 388–9] But, as was shown in section C.2, capitalism is based on, as Proudhon put it, workers working *"for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products,"* and so is a form of **theft.** Thus, by "libertarian" capitalism's **own** logic, capitalism is based not on freedom, but on (wage) slavery; for interest, profit and rent are derived from a worker's **unpaid** labour, i.e. *"others dispose of his [sic] product."*

Thus it is debatable that a right-"libertarian" or "anarcho" capitalist society would have less unfreedom or authoritarianism in it than "actually existing" capitalism. In contrast to anarchism, "anarcho"-capitalism, with its narrow definitions, restricts freedom to only a few areas of social life and ignores domination and authority beyond those aspects. As Peter Marshall points out, their *"definition of freedom is entirely negative. It calls for the absence of coercion but cannot guarantee the positive freedom of individual autonomy and independence."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 564] By confining freedom to such a narrow range of human action, "anarcho"-capitalism

is clearly **not** a form of anarchism. Real anarchists support freedom in every aspect of an individual's life.

In short, as French anarchist Elisee Reclus put it there is *"an abyss between two kinds of society,"* one of which is *"constituted freely by men of good will, based on a consideration of their common interests"* and another which *"accepts the existence of either temporary or permanent masters to whom [its members] owe obedience."* [quoted by Clark and Martin, **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 62] In other words, when choosing between anarchism and capitalism, "anarcho"-capitalists pick the latter and call it the former.

## F.2.1 How does private property affect freedom?

The right-"libertarian" either does not acknowledge or dismisses as irrelevant the fact that the (absolute) right of private property may lead to extensive control by property owners over those who use, but do not own, property (such as workers and tenants). Thus a free-market capitalist system leads to a very selective and class-based protection of "rights" and "freedoms." For example, under capitalism, the "freedom" of employers inevitably conflicts with the "freedom" of employees. When stockholders or their managers exercise their "freedom of enterprise" to decide how their company will operate, they violate their employee's right to decide how their labouring capacities will be utilised and so under capitalism the "property rights" of employers will conflict with and restrict the "human right" of employees to manage themselves. Capitalism allows the right of self-management only to the few, not to all. Or, alternatively, capitalism does not recognise certain human rights as **universal** which anarchism does.

This can be seen from Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie's defence of wage labour. While referring to *"intra-firm labour markets"* as *"hierarchies"*, Reekie (in his best ***ex cathedra*** tone) states that *"[t]here is nothing authoritarian, dictatorial or exploitative in the relationship. Employees order employers to pay them amounts specified in the hiring contract just as much as employers order employees to abide by the terms of the contract."* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 136 and p. 137]. Given that *"the terms of contract"* involve the worker agreeing to obey the employers orders and that they will be fired if they do not, its pretty clear that the ordering that goes on in the *"intra-firm labour market"* is decidedly **one way**. Bosses have the power, workers are paid to obey. And this begs the question: **if** the employment contract creates a free worker, why must she abandon her liberty during work hours?

Reekie actually recognises this lack of freedom in a "round about" way when he notes that *"employees in a firm at any level in the hierarchy can exercise an entrepreneurial role. The area within which that role can be carried out increases the more authority the employee has."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 142] Which means workers **are** subject to control from above which restricts the activities they are allowed to do and so they are **not** free to act, make decisions, participate in the plans of the organisation, to create the future and so forth within working hours. And it is strange that while recognising the firm as a hierarchy, Reekie tries to deny that it is authoritarian or dictatorial — as if you could have a hierarchy without authoritarian structures or an unelected person in authority who is not a dictator. His confusion is shared by Austrian guru Ludwig von Mises, who asserted that the *"entrepreneur and capitalist are not irresponsible autocrats"* because they are *"unconditionally subject to the sovereignty of the consumer"* while, **on the next page**, admitting there was a *"managerial hierarchy"* which contains *"the average subordinate employee."* [**Human Action**, p. 809 and p. 810] It does not enter his mind that the capitalist may be subject to some consumer control while being an autocrat to their

transnational corporation will have far more resources available to him to pay for **his** laws to be enforced than one of his employees on the assembly line. Moreover, as we noted in section F.3.1, the labour market is usually skewed in favour of capitalists. This means that workers have to compromise to get work and such compromises may involve agreeing to join a specific "defence" firm or not join one at all (just as workers are often forced to sign non-union contracts today in order to get work). In other words, a privatised law system is very likely to skew the enforcement of laws in line with the skewing of income and wealth in society. At the very least, unlike every other market, the customer is **not** guaranteed to get exactly what they demand simply because the product they "consume" is dependent on others within the same market to ensure its supply. The unique workings of the law/defence market are such as to deny customer choice (we will discuss other aspects of this unique market shortly). Wieck summed by pointing out the obvious:

> *"any judicial system is going to exist in the context of economic institutions. If there are gross inequalities of power in the economic and social domains, one has to imagine society as strangely compartmentalised in order to believe that those inequalities will fail to reflect themselves in the judicial and legal domain, and that the economically powerful will be unable to manipulate the legal and judicial system to their advantage. To abstract from such influences of context, and then consider the merits of an abstract judicial system.. . is to follow a method that is not likely to take us far. This, by the way, is a criticism that applies...to any theory that relies on a rule of law to override the tendencies inherent in a given social and economic system"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 225]



*discharge agricultural workers and tenants who failed to vote the reactionary ticket"* in the 1936 Spanish election were just exercising their legitimate property rights when they threatened working people and their families with economic uncertainty and distress. [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 260]

If we take the labour market, it is clear that the "buyers" and "sellers" of labour power are rarely on an equal footing (if they were, then capitalism would soon go into crisis — see section C.7). As we stressed in section C.9, under capitalism competition in labour markets is typically skewed in favour of employers. Thus the ability to refuse an exchange weighs most heavily on one class than another and so ensures that "free exchange" works to ensure the domination (and so exploitation) of one by the other. Inequality in the market ensures that the decisions of the majority of people within it are shaped in accordance with that needs of the powerful, not the needs of all. It was for this reason, for example, that the Individual Anarchist J.K. Ingalls opposed Henry George's proposal of nationalising the land. Ingalls was well aware that the rich could outbid the poor for leases on land and so the dispossession of the working class would continue.

The market, therefore, does not end power or unfreedom — they are still there, but in different forms. And for an exchange to be truly voluntary, both parties must have equal power to accept, reject, or influence its terms. Unfortunately, these conditions are rarely meet on the labour market or within the capitalist market in general. Thus Rothbard's argument that economic power does not exist fails to acknowledge that the rich can outbid the poor for resources and that a corporation generally has greater ability to refuse a contract (with an individual, union or community) than vice versa (and that the impact of such a refusal is such that it will encourage the others involved to compromise far sooner). In such circumstances, formally free individuals will have to "consent" to be unfree in order to sur-

vive. Looking at the tread-mill of modern capitalism, at what we end up tolerating for the sake of earning enough money to survive it comes as no surprise that anarchists have asked whether the market is serving us or are we serving it (and, of course, those who have positions of power within it).

So inequality cannot be easily dismissed. As Max Stirner pointed out, free competition *"is not 'free,' because I lack the **things** for competition."* Due to this basic inequality of wealth (of "things") we find that *"[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors … of the capitalists, therefore. The labourer cannot **realise** on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the customer … The capitalist has the greatest profit from it."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 262 and p. 115] It is interesting to note that even Stirner recognised that capitalism results in exploitation and that its roots lie in inequalities in property and so power. And we may add that value the labourer does not *"realise"* goes into the hands of the capitalists, who invest it in more "things" and which consolidates and increases their advantage in "free" competition. To quote Stephan L. Newman:

> *"Another disquieting aspect of the libertarians' refusal to acknowledge power in the market is their failure to confront the tension between freedom and autonomy… Wage labour under capitalism is, of course, formally free labour. No one is forced to work at gun point. Economic circumstance, however, often has the effect of force; it compels the relatively poor to accept work under conditions dictated by owners and managers. The individual worker retains freedom [i.e. negative liberty] but loses autonomy [positive liberty]."* [**Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 122–123]

If we consider "equality before the law" it is obvious that this also has limitations in an (materially) unequal society.



ent law codes could be resolved by a bargaining process (the law in question is the death penalty). This process would involve one defence firm giving a sum of money to the other for them accepting the appropriate (anti/pro capital punishment) court. Friedman claims that *"[a]s in any good trade, everyone gains"* but this is obviously not true. Assuming the anti-capital punishment defence firm pays the pro one to accept an anti-capital punishment court, then, yes, both defence firms have made money and so are happy, so are the anti-capital punishment consumers but the pro-death penalty customers have only (perhaps) received a cut in their bills. Their desire to see criminals hanged (for whatever reason) has been ignored (if they were not in favour of the death penalty, they would not have subscribed to that company). Friedman claims that the deal, by allowing the anti-death penalty firm to cut its costs, will ensure that it *"keep its customers and even get more"* but this is just an assumption. It is just as likely to loose customers to a defence firm that refuses to compromise (and has the resources to back it up). Friedman's assumption that lower costs will automatically win over people's passions is unfounded as is the assumption that both firms have equal resources and bargaining power. If the pro-capital punishment firm demands more than the anti can provide and has larger weaponry and troops, then the anti defence firm may have to agree to let the pro one have its way. So, all in all, it is **not** clear that *"everyone gains"* — there may be a sizeable percentage of those involved who do not "gain" as their desire for capital punishment is traded away by those who claimed they would enforce it. This may, in turn, produce a demand for defence firms which do **not** compromise with obvious implications for public peace.

In other words, a system of competing law codes and privatised rights does not ensure that **all** individual interests are meet. Given unequal resources within society, it is clear that the "effective demand" of the parties involved to see their law codes enforced is drastically different. The wealthy head of a

As well as the obvious influence of economic interests and differences in wealth, another problem faces the "free market" justice of "anarcho"-capitalism. This is the *"general libertarian law code"* itself. Even if we assume that the system actually works like it should in theory, the simple fact remains that these "defence companies" are enforcing laws which explicitly defend capitalist property (and so social relations). Capitalists own the means of production upon which they hire wage-labourers to work and this is an inequality established **prior** to any specific transaction in the labour market. This inequality reflects itself in terms of differences in power within (and outside) the company and in the "law code" of "anarcho"-capitalism which protects that power against the dispossessed.

In other words, the law code within which the defence companies work assumes that capitalist property is legitimate and that force can legitimately be used to defend it. This means that, in effect, "anarcho"-capitalism is based on a monopoly of law, a monopoly which explicitly exists to defend the power and capital of the wealthy. The major difference is that the agencies used to protect that wealth will be in a weaker position to act independently of their pay-masters. Unlike the state, the "defence" firm is not remotely accountable to the general population and cannot be used to equalise even slightly the power relationships between worker and capitalist (as the state has, on occasion done, due to public pressure and to preserve the system as a whole). And, needless to say, it is very likely that the private police forces **will** give preferential treatment to their wealthier customers (which business does not?) and that the law code will reflect the interests of the wealthier sectors of society (particularly if prosperous judges administer that code) in reality, even if not in theory. Since, in capitalist practice, "the customer is always right," the best-paying customers will get their way in "anarcho"-capitalist society.

For example, in chapter 29 of **The Machinery of Freedom**, David Friedman presents an example of how a clash of differ-



Brian Morris notes that for Ayn Rand, *"[u]nder capitalism ... politics (state) and economics (capitalism) are separated ... This, of course, is pure ideology, for Rand's justification of the state is that it 'protects' private property, that is, it supports and upholds the economic power of capitalists by coercive means."* [**Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 189] The same can be said of "anarcho"-capitalism and its "protection agencies" and *"general libertarian law code."* If within a society a few own all the resources and the majority are dispossessed, then any law code which protects private property **automatically** empowers the owning class. Workers will **always** be initiating force if they rebel against their bosses or act against the code and so equality before the law" reflects and reinforces inequality of power and wealth. This means that a system of property rights protects the liberties of some people in a way which gives them an unacceptable degree of power over others. And this critique cannot be met merely by reaffirming the rights in question, we have to assess the relative importance of the various kinds of liberty and other values we hold dear.

Therefore right-"libertarian" disregard for equality is important because it allows "anarcho"-capitalism to ignore many important restrictions of freedom in society. In addition, it allows them to brush over the negative effects of their system by painting an unreal picture of a capitalist society without vast extremes of wealth and power (indeed, they often construe capitalist society in terms of an ideal — namely artisan production — that is **pre**-capitalist and whose social basis has been eroded by capitalist development). Inequality shapes the decisions we have available and what ones we make:

> *"An 'incentive' is always available in conditions of substantial social inequality that ensure that the 'weak' enter into a contract. When social inequality prevails, questions arise about what counts as voluntary entry into a contract. This is*

> *why socialists and feminists have focused on the conditions of entry into the employment contract and the marriage contract. Men and women … are now juridically free and equal citizens, but, in unequal social conditions, the possibility cannot be ruled out that some or many contracts create relationships that bear uncomfortable resemblances to a slave contract."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62]

This ideological confusion of right-libertarianism can also be seen from their opposition to taxation. On the one hand, they argue that taxation is wrong because it takes money from those who "earn" it and gives it to the poor. On the other hand, "free market" capitalism is assumed to be a more equal society! If taxation takes from the rich and gives to the poor, how will "anarcho"-capitalism be more egalitarian? That equalisation mechanism would be gone (of course, it could be claimed that all great riches are purely the result of state intervention skewing the "free market" but that places all their "rags to riches" stories in a strange position). Thus we have a problem: either we have relative equality or we do not. Either we have riches, and so market power, or we do not. And its clear from the likes of Rothbard, "anarcho"-capitalism will not be without its millionaires (there is, according to him, apparently nothing un-libertarian about *"hierarchy, wage-work, granting of funds by libertarian millionaires, and a libertarian party"* [quoted by Black, **Op. Cit.**, p. 142]). And so we are left with market power and so extensive unfreedom.

Thus, for a ideology that denounces egalitarianism as a *"revolt against nature"* it is pretty funny that they paint a picture of "anarcho"-capitalism as a society of (relative) equals. In other words, their propaganda is based on something that has never existed, and never will: an egalitarian capitalist society. Without the implicit assumption of equality which underlies their



*is self-interest is hardly an innocuous social force controllable by the possibility of forming or affiliating with competing 'companies.'"* [Wieck, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225] This is particularly true if these companies are themselves Big Business and so have a large impact on the laws they are enforcing. If the law code recognises and protects capitalist power, property and wealth as fundamental **any** attempt to change this is "initiation of force" and so the power of the rich is written into the system from the start!

(And, we must add, if there is a general libertarian law code to which all must subscribe, where does that put customer demand? If people demand a non-libertarian law code, will defence firms refuse to supply it? If so, will not new firms, looking for profit, spring up that will supply what is being demanded? And will that not put them in direct conflict with the existing, pro-general law code ones? And will a market in law codes not just reflect economic power and wealth? David Friedman, who is for a market in law codes, argues that *"[i]f almost everyone believes strongly that heroin addiction is so horrible that it should not be permitted anywhere under any circumstances anarcho-capitalist institutions will produce laws against heroin. Laws are being produced on the market, and that is what the market wants."* And he adds that *"market demands are in dollars, not votes. The legality of heroin will be determined, not by how many are for or against but how high a cost each side is willing to bear in order to get its way."* [**The Machinery of Freedom**, p. 127] And, as the market is less than equal in terms of income and wealth, such a position will mean that the capitalist class will have a higher effective demand than the working class and more resources to pay for any conflicts that arise. Thus any law codes that develop will tend to reflect the interests of the wealthy.)

Which brings us nicely on to the next problem regarding market forces.

> *money was property protected by the process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment ... The justices of the Supreme Court were not simply interpreters of the Constitution. They were men of certain backgrounds, of certain [class] interests."* [**A People's History of the United States**, p. 255]

Of course it will be argued that the Supreme Court is chosen by the government and is a state enforced monopoly and so our analysis is flawed. Yet this is not the case. As Rothbard made clear, the *"general libertarian law code"* would be created by lawyers and jurists and everyone would be expected to obey it. Why expect **these** lawyers and jurists to be any less class conscious then those in the 19th century? If the Supreme Court *"was doing its bit for the ruling elite"* then why would those creating the law system be any different? *"How could it be neutral between rich and poor,"* argues Zinn, *"when its members were often former wealthy lawyers, and almost always came from the upper class?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 254] Moreover, the corporate laws came about because there was a demand for them. That demand would still have existed in "anarcho"-capitalism. Now, while there may nor be a Supreme Court, Rothbard does maintain that *"the basic Law Code ... would have to be agreed upon by all the judicial agencies"* but he maintains that this *"would imply no unified legal system"*! Even though *"[a]ny agencies that transgressed the basic libertarian law code would be open outlaws"* and soon crushed this is **not**, apparently, a monopoly. [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 234] So, you either agree to the law code or you go out of business. And that is **not** a monopoly! Therefore, we think, our comments on the Supreme Court are valid (see also section F.7.2).

If all the available defence firms enforce the same laws, then it can hardly be called "competitive"! And if this is the case (and it is) *"when private wealth is uncontrolled, then a police-judicial complex enjoying a clientele of wealthy corporations whose motto*



rhetoric then the obvious limitations of their vision of "liberty" become too obvious. Any real laissez-faire capitalism would be unequal and *"those who have wealth and power would only increase their privileges, while the weak and poor would go to the wall ... Right-wing libertarians merely want freedom for themselves to protect their privileges and to exploit others."* [Peter Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 653]

## F.3.2 Can there be harmony of interests in an unequal society?

Like the right-liberalism it is derived from, "anarcho"-capitalism is based on the concept of *"harmony of interests"* which was advanced by the likes of Frédéric Bastiat in the 19th century and Rothbard's mentor Ludwig von Mises in the 20th. For Rothbard, *"all classes live in harmony through the voluntary exchange of goods and services that mutually benefits them all."* This meant that capitalists and workers have no antagonistic class interests [**Classical Economics: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought**, Vol. 2, p. 380 and p. 382]

For Rothbard, class interest and conflict does not exist within capitalism, except when it is supported by state power. It was, he asserted, *"fallacious to employ such terms as 'class interests' or 'class conflict' in discussing the market economy."* This was because of two things: *"harmony of interests of different groups"* **and** *"lack of homogeneity among the interests of any one social class."* It is only in *"relation to **state** action that the interests of different men become welded into 'classes'."* This means that the *"homogeneity **emerges from** the interventions of the government into society."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 1, p. 261] So, in other words, class conflict is impossible under capitalism because of the wonderful coincidence that there are,

simultaneously, both common interests between individuals and classes and lack of any!

You do not need to be an anarchist or other socialist to see that this argument is nonsense. Adam Smith, for example, simply recorded reality when he noted that workers and bosses have *"interests [which] are by no means the same. The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible. The former are disposed to combine in order to raise, the latter to lower the wages of labour."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 58] The state, Smith recognised, was a key means by which the property owning class maintained their position in society. As such, it **reflects** economic class conflict and interests and does not **create** it (this is **not** to suggest that economic class is the only form of social hierarchy of course, just an extremely important one). American workers, unlike Rothbard, were all too aware of the truth in Smith's analysis. For example, one group argued in 1840 that the bosses *"hold us then at their mercy, and make us work solely for their profit ... The capitalist has no other interest in us, than to get as much labour out of us as possible. We are hired men, and hired men, like hired horses, have no souls."* Thus *"their interests as capitalist, and ours as labourers, are directly opposite"* and *"in the nature of things, hostile, and irreconcilable."* [quoted by Christopher L. Tomlins, **Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic**, p. 10] Then there is Alexander Berkman's analysis:

> *"It is easy to understand why the masters don't want you to be organised, why they are afraid of a real labour union. They know very well that a strong, fighting union can compel higher wages and better conditions, which means less profit for the plutocrats. That is why they do everything in their power to stop labour from organising ...*
>
> *"The masters have found a very effective way to paralyse the strength of organised labour. They*



*agencies would merely serve the interests of their paymasters."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 653] With the increase of private "defence associations" under "really existing capitalism" today (associations that many "anarcho"-capitalists point to as examples of their ideas), we see a vindication of Marshall's claim. There have been many documented experiences of protesters being badly beaten by private security guards. As far as market theory goes, the companies are only supplying what the buyer is demanding. The rights of others are **not a factor** (yet more "externalities," obviously). Even if the victims successfully sue the company, the message is clear — social activism can seriously damage your health. With a reversion to *"a general libertarian law code"* enforced by private companies, this form of "defence" of "absolute" property rights can only increase, perhaps to the levels previously attained in the heyday of US capitalism, as described above by Wieck.

## F.6.3 But surely market forces will stop abuses by the rich?

Unlikely. The rise of corporations within America indicates exactly how a *"general libertarian law code"* would reflect the interests of the rich and powerful. The laws recognising corporations as "legal persons" were **not** primarily a product of "the state" but of private lawyers hired by the rich. As Howard Zinn notes:

> *"the American Bar Association, organised by lawyers accustomed to serving the wealthy, began a national campaign of education to reverse the [Supreme] Court decision [that companies could not be considered as a person]... . By 1886, they succeeded ... the Supreme Court had accepted the argument that corporations were 'persons' and their*

class to a serf-like existence, capitalist production undermined independent producers (much to the annoyance of individualist anarchists at the time), and the result was the emergence of the corporate America that "anarcho"-capitalists (sometimes) say they oppose.

Are we to expect that "anarcho"-capitalism will be different? That, unlike before, "defence" firms will intervene on behalf of strikers? Given that the *"general libertarian law code"* will be enforcing capitalist property rights, workers will be in exactly the same situation as they were then. Support of strikers violating property rights would be a violation of the law and be costly for profit making firms to do (if not dangerous as they could be "outlawed" by the rest). This suggests that "anarcho"-capitalism will extend extensive rights and powers to bosses, but few if any rights to rebellious workers. And this difference in power is enshrined within the fundamental institutions of the system. This can easily be seen from Rothbard's numerous anti-union tirades and his obvious hatred of them, strikes and pickets (which he habitually labelled as violent). As such it is not surprising to discover that Rothbard complained in the 1960s that, because of the Wagner Act, the American police *"commonly remain 'neutral' when strike-breakers are molested or else blame the strike-breakers for 'provoking' the attacks on them … When unions are permitted to resort to violence, the state or other enforcing agency has implicitly delegated this power to the unions. The unions, then, have become 'private states.'"* [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 41] The role of the police was to back the property owner against their rebel workers, in other words, and the state was failing to provide the appropriate service (of course, that bosses exercising power over workers provoked the strike is irrelevant, while private police attacking picket lines is purely a form of "defensive" violence and is, likewise, of no concern).

In evaluating "anarcho"-capitalism's claim to be a form of anarchism, Peter Marshall notes that *"private protection*



> *have persuaded the workers that they have the same interests as the employers … and what is good for the employer is also good for his employees … If your interests are the same as those of your boss, then why should you fight him? That is what they tell you … It is good for the industrial magnates to have their workers believe [this] … [as they] will not think of fighting their masters for better conditions, but they will be patient and wait till the employer can 'share his prosperity' with them … If you listen to your exploiters and their mouthpieces you will be 'good' and consider only the interests of your masters … but no one cares about* ***your*** *interests … 'Don't be selfish,' they admonish you, while the boss is getting rich by your being good and unselfish. And they laugh in their sleeves and thank the Lord that you are such an idiot.*
>
> *"But … the interests of capital and labour are not the same. No greater lie was ever invented than the so-called 'identity of interests' … It is clear that … they are entirely opposite, in fact antagonistic to each other."* [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 74–5]

That Rothbard denies this says a lot about the power of ideology.

Rothbard was clear what unions do, namely limit the authority of the boss and ensure that workers keep more of the surplus value they produce. As he put it, unions *"attempt to persuade workers that they can better their lot at the expense of the employer. Consequently, they invariably attempt as much as possible to establish work rules that hinder management's directives … In other words, instead of agreeing to submit to the work orders of management in exchange for his pay, the worker now set up not only minimum wages, but also work rules without which they refuse to work."* This will *"lower output."* [**The Logic of Action**

**II**, p. 40 and p. 41] Notice the assumption, that the income of and authority of the boss are sacrosanct.

For Rothbard, unions lower productivity and harm profits because they contest the authority of the boss to do what they like on their property (apparently, laissez-faire was not applicable for working class people during working hours). Yet this implicitly acknowledges that there **are** conflicts of interests between workers and bosses. It does not take too much thought to discover possible conflicts of interests which could arise between workers who seek to maximise their wages and minimise their labour and bosses who seek to minimise their wage costs and maximise the output their workers produce. It could be argued that if workers do win this conflict of interests then their bosses will go out of business and so they harm themselves by not obeying their industrial masters. The rational worker, in this perspective, would be the one who best understood that his or her interests have become the same as the interests of the boss because his or her prosperity will depend on how well their firm is doing. In such cases, they will put the interest of the firm before their own and not hinder the boss by questioning their authority. If that is the case, then "harmony of interests" simply translates as "bosses know best" and "do what you are told" — and such obedience is a fine "harmony" for the order giver we are sure!

So the interesting thing is that Rothbard's perspective produces a distinctly servile conclusion. If workers do not have a conflict of interests with their bosses then, obviously, the logical thing for the employee is to do whatever their boss orders them to do. By serving their master, they automatically benefit themselves. In contrast, anarchists have rejected such a position. For example, William Godwin rejected capitalist private property precisely because of the *"spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud"* it produced. [**An Enquiry into Political Justice**, p. 732]



> *complexes were a law unto themselves, powerful enough to ignore, when they did not purchase, the governments of various jurisdictions of the American federal system. This industrial system was, at the time, often characterised as feudalism."* [**Anarchist Justice**, pp. 223–224]

For a description of the weaponry and activities of these private armies, the Marxist economic historian Maurice Dobb presents an excellent summary in **Studies in Capitalist Development**. [pp. 353–357] According to a report on *"Private Police Systems"* quoted by Dobb, in a town dominated by Republican Steel the *"civil liberties and the rights of labour were suppressed by company police. Union organisers were driven out of town."* Company towns had their own (company-run) money, stores, houses and jails and many corporations had machine-guns and tear-gas along with the usual shot-guns, rifles and revolvers. The *"usurpation of police powers by privately paid 'guards and 'deputies', often hired from detective agencies, many with criminal records"* was *"a general practice in many parts of the country."*

The local (state-run) law enforcement agencies turned a blind-eye to what was going on (after all, the workers **had** broken their contracts and so were "criminal aggressors" against the companies) even when union members and strikers were beaten and killed. The workers own defence organisations (unions) were the only ones willing to help them, and if the workers seemed to be winning then troops were called in to "restore the peace" (as happened in the Ludlow strike, when strikers originally cheered the troops as they thought they would defend them; needless to say, they were wrong).

Here we have a society which is claimed by many "anarcho"-capitalists as one of the closest examples to their "ideal," with limited state intervention, free reign for property owners, etc. What happened? The rich reduced the working

such a system would not be the corruption of "private" courts and police forces (although, as suggested above, this could indeed be a problem):

> *"There is something more serious than the 'Mafia danger', and this other problem concerns the role of such 'defence' institutions in a given social and economic context.*
>
> *"[The] context ... is one of a free-market economy with no restraints upon accumulation of property. Now, we had an American experience, roughly from the end of the Civil War to the 1930's, in what were in effect private courts, private police, indeed private governments. We had the experience of the (private) Pinkerton police which, by its spies, by its* ***agents provocateurs,*** *and by methods that included violence and kidnapping, was one of the most powerful tools of large corporations and an instrument of oppression of working people. We had the experience as well of the police forces established to the same end, within corporations, by numerous companies ... (The automobile companies drew upon additional covert instruments of a private nature, usually termed vigilante, such as the Black Legion). These were, in effect, private armies, and were sometimes described as such. The territories owned by coal companies, which frequently included entire towns and their environs, the stores the miners were obliged by economic coercion to patronise, the houses they lived in, were commonly policed by the private police of the United States Steel Corporation or whatever company owned the properties. The chief practical function of these police was, of course, to prevent labour organisation and preserve a certain balance of 'bargaining.' ... These*



Moreover, we should note that Rothbard's diatribe against unions also implicitly acknowledges the socialist critique of capitalism which stresses that it is being subject to the authority of boss during work hours which makes exploitation possible (see section C.2). If wages represented the workers' "marginal" contribution to production, bosses would not need to ensure their orders were followed. So any real boss fights unions precisely because they limit their ability to extract as much product as possible from the worker for the agreed wage. As such, the hierarchical social relations within the workplace ensure that there are no *"harmony of interests"* as the key to a successful capitalist firm is to minimise wage costs in order to maximise profits. It should also be noted that Rothbard has recourse to another concept "Austrian" economists claims to reject during his anti-union comments. Somewhat ironically, he appeals to equilibrium analysis as, apparently, *"wage rates on the non-union labour market will always tend toward equilibrium in a smooth and harmonious manner"* (in another essay, he opines that *"in the Austrian tradition ... the entrepreneur harmoniously adjusts the economy in the direction of equilibrium"*). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 41 and p. 234] True, he does not say that the wages will reach equilibrium (and what stops them, unless, in part, it is the actions of entrepreneurs disrupting the economy?) however, it is strange that the labour market can approximate a situation which Austrian economists claim does not exist! However, as noted in section C.1.6 this fiction is required to hide the obvious economic power of the boss class under capitalism.

Somewhat ironically, given his claims of *"harmony of interests,"* Rothbard was well aware that landlords and capitalists have always used the state to further their interests. However, he preferred to call this *"mercentilism"* rather than capitalism. As such, it is amusing to read his short article *"Mercentilism: A Lesson for Our Times?"* as it closely parallels Marx's classic account of *"Primitive Accumulation"* contained in volume 1 of

**Capital**. [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 43–55] The key difference is that Rothbard simply refused to see this state action as creating the necessary preconditions for his beloved capitalism nor does it seem to impact on his mantra of *"harmony of interests"* between classes. In spite of documenting exactly how the capitalist and landlord class used the state to enrich themselves at the expense of the working class, he refuses to consider how this refutes any claim of *"harmony of interests"* between exploiter and exploited.

Rothbard rightly notes that mercantilism involved the *"use of the state to cripple or prohibit one's competition."* This applies to both foreign capitalists and to the working class who are, of course, competitors in terms of how income is divided. Unlike Marx, he simply failed to see how mercantilist policies were instrumental for building an industrial economy and creating a proletariat. Thus he thunders against mercantilism for *"lowering interest rates artificially"* and promoting inflation which *"did not benefit the poor"* as *"wages habitually lagged behind the rise in prices."* He describes the *"desperate attempts by the ruling classes to coerce wages below their market rates."* Somewhat ironically, given the "anarcho"-capitalist opposition to legal holidays, he noted the mercantilists *"dislike of holidays, by which the 'nation' was deprived of certain amounts of labour; the desire of the individual worker for leisure was never considered worthy of note."* So why were such "bad" economic laws imposed? Simply because the landlords and capitalists were in charge of the state. As Rothbard notes, *"this was clearly legislation for the benefit of the feudal landlords and to the detriment of the workers"* while Parliament *"was heavily landlord-dominated."* In Massachusetts the upper house consisted *"of the wealthiest merchants and landowners."* The mercantilists, he notes but does not ponder, *"were frankly interested in exploiting [the workers'] labour to the utmost."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 44, p. 46, p. 47, p. 51, p. 48, p. 51, p. 47, p. 54 and p. 47] Yet these policies made perfect sense from their class perspective, they were essential



relations impact on society and the individuals who make it up. This would be reflected in any genuinely libertarian society, something right-"libertarians" are aware of. They, therefore, seek to freeze the rights framework and legal system to protect institutions, like property, no matter how they evolve and come to replace whatever freedom enhancing features they had with oppression. Hence we find Rothbard's mentor, Ludwig von Mises asserting that *"[t]here may possibly be a difference of opinion about whether a particular institution is socially beneficial or harmful. But once it has been judged [by whom?] beneficial, one can no longer contend that, for some inexplicable reason, it must be condemned as immoral."* [**Liberalism**, p. 34] Rothbard's system is designed to ensure that the general population cannot judge whether a particular institution has changed is social impact. Thus a system of "defence" on the capitalist market will continue to reflect the influence and power of property owners and wealth and not be subject to popular control beyond choosing between companies to enforce the capitalist laws.

Ultimately, such an "anarcho"-capitalist system would be based on simple absolute principles decided in advance by a small group of ideological leaders. We are then expected to live with the consequences as best we can. If people end up in a worse condition than before then that is irrelevant as that we have enforced the eternal principles they have proclaimed as being in our best interests.

## F.6.2 What are the social consequences of such a system?

The "anarcho" capitalist imagines that there will be police agencies, "defence associations," courts, and appeals courts all organised on a free-market basis and available for hire. As David Wieck points out, however, the major problem with

*prosecute, local juries would not convict, local jailers would not imprison."* [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, pp. 385–6] It is precisely this outcome which causes Rothbard to reject that system.

Thus Rothbard postulated a **judge** directed system of laws in stark contrast to individualist anarchism's **jury** directed system. It is understandable that Rothbard would seek to replace juries with judges, it is the only way he can exclude the general population from having a say in the laws they are subjected to. Juries allow the general public to judge the law as well as any crime and so this would allow those aspects "corrected" by right-"libertarians" to seep back into the "common law" and so make private property and power accountable to the general public rather than vice versa. Moreover, concepts of right and wrong evolve over time and in line with changes in socio-economic conditions. To have a "common law" which is unchanging means that social evolution is considered to have stopped when Murray Rothbard decided to call his ideology "anarcho"-capitalism.

In a genuinely libertarian system, social customs (common law) would evolve based on what the general population thought was right and wrong based on changing social institutions and relationships between individuals. That is why ruling classes have always sought to replace it with state determined and enforced laws. Changing social norms and institutions can be seen from property. As Proudhon noted, property *"changed its nature"* over time. Originally, *"the word **property** was synonymous with ... **individual possession**"* but it became more *"complex"* and turned into **private property** — *"the right to use it by his neighbour's labour."* [**What is Property?**, p. 395] The changing nature of property created relations of domination and exploitation between people absent before. For the capitalist, however, both the tools of the self-employed artisan and the capital of a transnational corporation are both forms of "property" and so basically identical. Changing social



for maximising a surplus (profits) which was subsequently invested in developing industry. As such, they were very successful and laid the foundation for the industrial capitalism of the 19th century. The key change between mercantilism and capitalism proper is that economic power is greater as the working class has been successfully dispossessed from the means of life and, as such, political power need not be appealed to as often and can appear, in rhetoric at least, defensive.

Discussing attempts by employers in Massachusetts in 1670 and 1672 to get the state to enforce a maximum wage Rothbard opined that there *"seemed to be no understanding of how wages are set in an unhampered market."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 2, p. 18] On the contrary, dear professor, the employers were perfectly aware of how wages were set in a market where workers have the upper hand and, consequently, sought to use the state to hamper the market. As they have constantly done since the dawn of capitalism as, unlike certain economists, they are fully aware of the truth of *"harmony of interests"* and acted accordingly. As we document in section F.8, the history of capitalism is filled with the capitalist class using the state to enforce the kind of *"harmony of interests"* which masters have always sought — obedience. This statist intervention has continued to this day as, in practice, the capitalist class has never totally relied on economic power to enforce its rule due to the instability of the capitalist market — see section C.7 — as well as the destructive effects of market forces on society and the desire to bolster its position in the economy at the expense of the working class — see section D.1. That the history and current practice of capitalism was not sufficient to dispel Rothbard of his *"harmony of interests"* position is significant. But, as Rothbard was always at pains to stress as a good "Austrian" economist, empirical testing does not prove or disprove a theory and so the history and practice of capitalism matters little when evaluating the pros and cons of that system (unless its

history confirms Rothbard's ideology then he does make numerous empirical statements).

For Rothbard, the obvious **class** based need for such policies is missing. Instead, we get the pathetic comment that only *"certain"* merchants and manufacturers *"benefited from these mercantilist laws."* [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 44] He applied this same myopic perspective to "actually existing" capitalism as well, of course, lamenting the use of the state by certain capitalists as the product of economic ignorance and/or special interests specific to the capitalists in question. He simply could not see the forest for the trees. This is hardly a myopia limited to Rothbard. Bastiat formulated his *"harmony of interests"* theory precisely when the class struggle between workers and capitalists had become a threat to the social order, when socialist ideas of all kinds (including anarchism, which Bastiat explicitly opposed) were spreading and the labour movement was organising illegally due to state bans in most countries. As such, he was propagating the notion that workers and bosses had interests in common when, in practice, it was most obviously the case they had not. What "harmony" that did exist was due to state repression of the labour movement, itself a strange necessity if labour and capital **did** share interests.

The history of capitalism causes problems within "anarcho"-capitalism as it claims that everyone benefits from market exchanges and that this, not coercion, produces faster economic growth. If this **is** the case, then why did some individuals reject the market in order to enrich themselves by political means and, logically, impoverish themselves in the long run (and it has been an **extremely** long run)? And why have the economically dominant class generally also been the ones to control the state? After all, if there are no class interests or conflict then why has the property owning classes always sought state aid to skew the economy in its interests? If the classes **did** have harmonious interests then they would have no need to bolster their position nor would they seek to. Yet state policy has al-



acknowledges that this process is likely (and uses the example of standard paper sizes to illustrate it). Which suggests that competition would be meaningless as **all** firms would be enforcing the same (capitalist) law.

In any event, the laws would not be decided on the basis of "one person, one vote"; hence, as market forces worked their magic, the "general" law code would reflect vested interests and so be very hard to change. As rights and laws would be a commodity like everything else in capitalism, they would soon reflect the interests of the rich — particularly if those interpreting the law are wealthy professionals and companies with vested interests of their own. Little wonder that the individualist anarchists proposed "trial by jury" as the only basis for real justice in a free society. For, unlike professional "arbitrators," juries are ad hoc, made up of ordinary people and do not reflect power, authority, or the influence of wealth. And by being able to judge the law as well as a conflict, they can ensure a populist revision of laws as society progresses.

Rothbard, unsurprisingly, is at pains to dismiss the individualist anarchist idea of juries judging the law as well as the facts, stating it would give each free-market jury *"totally free rein over judicial decisions"* and this *"could not be expected to arrive at just or even libertarian decisions."* [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, **Op. Cit.**, p.7] However, the opposite is the case as juries made up of ordinary people will be more likely to reach just decisions which place genuinely libertarian positions above a law dedicated to maintaining capitalist property and power. History is full of examples of juries acquitting people for so-called crimes against property which are the result of dire need or simply reflect class injustice. For example, during the Great Depression unemployed miners in Pennsylvania *"dug small mines on company property, mined coal, trucked it to cities and sold it below the commercial rate. By 1934, 5 million tons of this 'bootleg' coal were produced by twenty thousand men using four thousand vehicles. When attempts were made to*

ally existing capitalism" were hard fought for, often resulting in strikes which quickly became mini-wars as the capitalists used the full might associated with their wealth to stop them getting a foothold or to destroy them if they had. In America the bosses usually had recourse to private defence firms like the Pinkertons to break unions and strikes. Since 1935 in America, union rights have been protected by the state in direct opposition to capitalist "freedom of contract." Before the law was changed (under pressure from below, in the face of business opposition and violence), unions were usually crushed by force — the companies were better armed, had more resources and had the law on their side (Rothbard showed his grasp of American labour history by asserting that union *"restrictions and strikes"* were the *"result of government privilege, notably in the Wagner Act of 1935."* [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 194]). Since the 1980s and the advent of the free(r) market, we can see what happens to "peaceful negotiation" and "co-operation" between unions and companies when it is no longer required and when the resources of both sides are unequal. The market power of companies far exceeds those of the unions and the law, by definition, favours the companies. As an example of how competing "protection agencies" will work in an "anarcho"-capitalist society, it is far more insightful than originally intended!

Now let us consider Rothbard's *"basic law code"* itself. For Rothbard, the laws in the *"general libertarian law code"* would be unchangeable, selected by those considered as "the voice of nature" (with obvious authoritarian implications). David Friedman, in contrast, argues that as well as a market in defence companies, there will also be a market in laws and rights. However, there will be extensive market pressure to unify these differing law codes into one standard one (imagine what would happen if ever CD manufacturer created a unique CD player, or every computer manufacturer different sized floppy-disk drivers — little wonder, then, that over time companies standardise their products). Friedman himself



ways reflected the needs of the property-owning elite — subject to pressures from below, of course (as Rothbard rather lamely notes, without pondering the obvious implications, the *"peasantry and the urban labourers and artisans were never able to control the state apparatus and were therefore at the bottom of the state-organised pyramid and exploited by the ruling groups."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 1, p. 260]). It is no coincidence that the working classes have not been able to control the state nor that legislation is *"grossly the favourer of the rich against the poor."* [William Godwin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 93] They **are** the ones passing the laws, after all. This long and continuing anti-labour intervention in the market does, though, place Rothbard's opinion that government is a conspiracy against the superior man in a new light!

So when right-"libertarians" assert that there are *"harmony of interests"* between classes in an unhampered market, anarchists simply reply by pointing out that the very fact we have a "hampered" market shows that no such thing exists within capitalism. It will be argued, of course, that the right-"libertarian" is against state intervention for the capitalists (beyond defending their property which is a significant use of state power in and of itself) and that their political ideas aim to stop it. Which is true (and why a revolution would be needed to implement it!). However, the very fact that the capitalist class has habitually turned to the state to bolster its economic power is precisely the issue as it shows that the right-"libertarian" harmony of interests (on which they place so much stress as the foundation of their new order) simply does not exist. If it did, then the property owning class would never have turned to the state in the first place nor would it have tolerated "certain" of its members doing so.

If there were harmony of interests between classes, then the bosses would not turn to death squads to kill rebel workers as they have habitually done (and it should be stressed that libertarian union organisers have been assassinated by bosses

and their vigilantes, including the lynching of IWW members and business organised death squads against CNT members in Barcelona). This use of private and public violence should not be surprising, for, at the very least, as Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon noted, there can be no real fraternity between classes *"because the possessing class is always disposed to perpetuate the economic, political, and social system that guarantees it the tranquil enjoyment of its plunders, while the working class makes efforts to destroy this iniquitous system."* [**Dreams of Freedom**, p. 139]

Rothbard's obvious hatred of unions and strikes can be explained by his ideological commitment to the *"harmony of interests."* This is because strikes and the need of working class people to organise gives the lie to the doctrine of *"harmony of interests"* between masters and workers that apologists for capitalism like Rothbard suggested underlay industrial relations. Worse, they give credibility to the notion that there exists opposed interests between classes. Strangely, Rothbard himself provides more than enough evidence to refute his own dogmas when he investigates state intervention on the market.

Every ruling class seeks to deny that it has interests separate from the people under it. Significantly those who deny class struggle the most are usually those who practice it the most (for example, Mussolini, Pinochet and Thatcher all proclaimed the end of class struggle while, in America, the Republican-right denounces anyone who points out the results of **their** class war on the working class as advocating "class war"). The elite has long been aware, as Black Nationalist Steve Biko put it, that the *"most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."* Defenders of slavery and serfdom presented it as god's will and that the master's duty was to treat the slave well just as the slave's duty was to obey (while, of course, blaming the slave if the master did not hold up his side of the covenant). So every hierarchical system has its own version of the *"harmony of interests"*



of the same size, with the same resources behind it and in real life this would clearly **not** the case). Moreover, it seems likely that a Legal-Industrial complex would develop, with other companies buying shares in "defence" firms as well as companies which provide lawyers and judges (and vice versa). We would also expect mergers to develop as well as cross-ownership between companies, not to mention individual judges and security company owners and managers having shares in other capitalist firms. Even if the possibility that the companies providing security and "justice" have links with other capitalism firms is discounted then the fact remains that these firms would hardly be sympathetic to organisations and individuals seeking to change the system which makes them rich or, as property owners and bosses, seeking to challenge the powers associated with both particularly if the law is designed from a propertarian perspective.

Fourthly, it is **very** likely that many companies would make subscription to a specific "defence" firm or court a requirement of employment and residence. Just as today many (most?) workers have to sign no-union contracts (and face being fired if they change their minds), it does not take much imagination to see that the same could apply to "defence" firms and courts. This was/is the case in company towns (indeed, you can consider unions as a form of "defence" firm and these companies refused to recognise them). As the labour market is almost always a buyer's market, it is not enough to argue that workers can find a new job without this condition. They may not and so have to put up with this situation. And if (as seems likely) the laws and rules of the property-owner will take precedence in any conflict, then workers and tenants will be at a disadvantage no matter how "impartial" the judges.

Ironically, some "anarcho"-capitalists (like David Friedman) have pointed to company/union negotiations as an example of how different defence firms would work out their differences peacefully. Sadly for this argument, union rights under "actu-

defence associations and "people's arbitrators" would develop on the market for the working class. In this way impartiality will be ensured. This argument overlooks a few key points.

Firstly, the general "libertarian" law code would be applicable to **all** associations, so they would have to operate within a system determined by the power of money and of capital. The law code would reflect, therefore, property **not** labour and so "socialistic" law codes would be classed as "outlaw" ones. The options then facing working people is to select a firm which best enforced the **capitalist** law in their favour. And as noted above, the impartial enforcement of a biased law code will hardly ensure freedom or justice for all. This means that saying the possibility of competition from another judge would keep them honest becomes meaningless when they are all implementing the **same** capitalist law!

Secondly, in a race between a Jaguar and a Volkswagen Beetle, who is more likely to win? The rich would have "the best justice money can buy," even more than they do now. Members of the capitalist class would be able to select the firms with the best lawyers, best private cops and most resources. Those without the financial clout to purchase quality "justice" would simply be out of luck — such is the "magic" of the marketplace.

Thirdly, because of the tendency toward concentration, centralisation, and oligopoly under capitalism (due to increasing capital costs for new firms entering the market, as discussed in section C.4), a few companies would soon dominate the market — with obvious implications for "justice." Different firms will have different resources and in a conflict between a small firm and a larger one, the smaller one is at a disadvantage. They may not be in a position to fight the larger company if it rejects arbitration and so may give in simply because, as the "anarcho"-capitalists so rightly point out, conflict and violence will push up a company's costs and so they would have to be avoided by smaller ones (it is ironic that the "anarcho"-capitalist implicitly assumes that every "defence company" is approximately



position and each hierarchical society which replaces the last mocks the previous incarnations of it while, at the same time, solemnly announcing that **this** society truly does have harmony of interests as its founding principle. Capitalism is no exception, with many economists repeating the mantra that every boss has proclaimed from the dawn of time, namely that workers and their masters have common interests. As usual, it is worthwhile to quote Rothbard on this matter. He (rightly) takes to task a defender of the slave master's version of *"harmony of interests"* and, in so doing, exposes the role of economics under capitalism. To quote Rothbard:

> *"The increasing alienation of the slaves and the servants led ... the oligarchy to try to win their allegiance by rationalising their ordeal as somehow natural, righteous, and divine. So have tyrants always tried to dupe their subjects into approving — or at least remaining resigned to — their fate ... Servants, according to the emphatically non-servant [Reverend Samuel] Willard, were duty-bound to revere and obey their masters, to serve them diligently and cheerfully, and to be patient and submissive even to the cruellest master. A convenient ideology indeed for the masters! ... All the subjects must do, in short, was to surrender their natural born gift of freedom and independence, to subject themselves completely to the whims and commands of others, who could then be blindly trusted to 'take care' of them permanently ...*
>
> *"Despite the myths of ideology and the threats of the whip, servants and slaves found many ways of protest and rebellion. Masters were continually denouncing servants for being disobedient, sullen, and lazy."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 2, pp. 18–19]

Change Reverend Samuel Willard to the emphatically non-worker Professor Murray Rothbard and we have a very succinct definition of the role his economics plays within capitalism. There are differences. The key one was that while Willard wanted permanent servitude, Rothbard sought a temporary form and allowed the worker to change masters. While Willard turned to the whip and the state, Rothbard turned to absolute private property and the capitalist market to ensure that workers had to sell their liberty to the boss class (unsurprisingly, as Willard lived in an economy whose workers had access to land and tools while in Rothbard's time the class monopolisation of the means of life was complete and workers have little alternative but to sell their liberty to the owning class).

Rothbard did not seek to ban unions and strikes. He argued that his system of absolute property rights would simply make it nearly impossible for unions to organise or for any form of collective action to succeed. Even basic picketing would be impossible for, as Rothbard noted many a time, the pavement outside the workplace would be owned by the boss who would be as unlikely to allow picketing as he would allow a union. Thus we would have private property and economic power making collective struggle **de facto** illegal rather than the **de jure** illegality which the state has so enacted on behalf of the capitalists. As he put it, while unions were *"theoretically compatible with the existence of a purely free market"* he doubted that it would be possible as unions relied on the state to be "neutral" and tolerate their activities as they *"acquire almost all their power through the wielding of force, specifically force against strikebeakers and against the property of employers."* [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 41] Thus we find right-"libertarians" in favour of "defensive" violence (i.e., that limited to defending the property and power of the capitalists and landlords) while denouncing as violence any action of those subjected to it.



"voluntary" interpretations yet it hardly taxes the imagination to see how economic inequality would shape any "bargains" made on it. So we have a legal system created and run by judges and jurists within which specific interpretations would be reached by "bargains" conducted between the rich and the poor. A fine liberation indeed!

So although only *"finding"* the law, the arbitrators and judges still exert an influence in the "justice" process, an influence not impartial or neutral. As the arbitrators themselves would be part of a profession, with specific companies developing within the market, it does not take a genius to realise that when *"interpreting"* the *"basic law code,"* such companies would hardly act against their own interests as companies. As we noted in section F.3.2, the basic class interest of keeping the current property rights system going will still remain — a situation which wealthy judges would be, to say the least, happy to see continue. In addition, if the "justice" system was based on "one dollar, one vote," the "law" would best defend those with the most "votes" (the question of market forces will be discussed in section F.6.3). Moreover, even if "market forces" would ensure that "impartial" judges were dominant, all judges would be enforcing a **very** partial law code (namely one that defended **capitalist** property rights). Impartiality when enforcing partial laws hardly makes judgements less unfair.

Thus, due to these three pressures — the interests of arbitrators/judges, the influence of money and the nature of the law — the terms of "free agreements" under such a law system would be tilted in favour of lenders over debtors, landlords over tenants, employers over employees, and in general, the rich over the poor just as we have today. This is what one would expect in a system based on "unrestricted" property rights and a (capitalist) free market.

Some "anarcho"-capitalists, however, claim that just as cheaper cars were developed to meet demand, so cheaper

Given these obvious points, it should come as no surprise that Rothbard solves this problem by explicitly excluding the general population from deciding which laws they will be subject to. As he put it, *"it would not be a very difficult task for Libertarian lawyers and jurists to arrive at a rational and objective code of libertarian legal principles and procedures … This code would then be followed and applied to specific cases by privately-competitive and free-market courts and judges, all of whom would be pledged to abide by the code."* [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, pp. 5–15, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 7] By jurist Rothbard means a professional or an expert who studies, develops, applies or otherwise deals with the law, i.e. a lawyer or a judge. That is, law-making by privately-competitive judges and lawyers. And not only would the law be designed by experts, so would its interpretation:

> *"If legislation is replaced by such judge-made law fixity and certainty … will replace the capriciously changing edicts of statutory legislation. The body of judge-made law changes very slowly … decisions properly apply only to the particular case, judge-made law — in contrast to legislation — permits a vast body of voluntary, freely-adapted rules, bargains, and arbitrations to proliferate as needed in society. The twin of the free market economy, then, is … a proliferation of voluntary rules interpreted and applied by experts in the law."* [*"On Freedom and the Law"*, **Op. Cit.** p. 38]

In other words, as well as privatising the commons in land he also seeks to privatise "common law." This will be expropriated from the general population and turned over to wealthy judges and libertarian scholars to "correct" as they see fit. Within this mandatory legal regime, there would be



Rothbard, of course, allowed workers to leave their employment in order to seek another job if they felt exploited. Yet for all his obvious hatred of unions and strikes, Rothbard does not ask the most basic question — if there is not clash of interests between labour and capital then why do unions even exist and why do bosses always resist them (often brutally)? And why has capital always turned to the state to bolster its position in the labour market? If there were really harmony of interests between classes then capital would not have turned repeatedly to the state to crush the labour movement. For anarchists, the reasons are obvious as is why the bosses always deny any clash of interests for *"it is to the interests of capital to keep the workers from understanding that they are wage slaves. The 'identity of interest'; swindle is one of the means of doing it … All those who profit from wage slavery are interested in keeping up the system, and all of them naturally try to prevent the workers from understanding the situation."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77]

Rothbard's vociferous anti-unionism and his obvious desire to make any form of collective action by workers impossible in practice if not in law shows how economics has replaced religion as a control mechanism. In any hierarchical system it makes sense for the masters to indoctrinate the servant class with such self-serving nonsense but only capitalists have the advantage that it is proclaimed a "science" rather than, say, a religion. Yet even here, the parallels are close. As Colin Ward noted in passing, the *"so-called Libertarianism of the political Right"* is simply *"the worship of the market economy."* [**Talking Anarchy**, p. 76] So while Willard appealed to god as the basis of his natural order, Rothbard appeal to "science" was nothing of the kind given the ideological apriorism of "Austrian" economics. As a particularly scathing reviewer of one of his economics books rightly put it, the *"main point of the book is to show that the never-never land of the perfectly free market economy represents the best of all conceivable worlds giving maximum satisfaction to all participants. Whatever is, is right in the*

*free market ... It would appear that Professor Rothbard's book is more akin to systematic theology than economics ... its real interest belongs to the student of the sociology of religion."* [D.N. Winch, **The Economic Journal**, vol. 74, No. 294, pp. 481–2]

To conclude, it is best to quote Emma Goldman's biting dismissal of the right-liberal individualism that Rothbard's ideology is just another form of. She rightly attacked that *"'rugged individualism' which is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his individuality. So-called Individualism is the social and economic* ***laissez-faire****: the exploitation of the masses by classes by means of trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit ... That corrupt and perverse 'individualism' is the strait-jacket of individuality ... This 'rugged individualism' has inevitably resulted in the greatest modern slavery, the crassest class distinctions ... 'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking 'supermen' ... [and] in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom and social opportunity to live is denounced as ... evil in the name of that same individualism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112]

So, to conclude. Both the history and current practice of capitalism shows that there can be no harmony of interests in an unequal society. Anyone who claims otherwise has not been paying attention.



*finding it on the basis of agreed-upon principles derived either from custom or reason."* [**Society without a State**, p. 206] However, this begs the question: **whose** reason? **whose** customs? Do individuals in different classes share the same customs? The same ideas of right and wrong? Would rich and poor desire the same from a *"basic law code"*? Obviously not. The rich would only support a code which defended their power over the poor.

Rothbard does not address this issue. He stated that "anarcho"-capitalism would involve *"taking the largely libertarian common law, and correcting it by the use of man's reason, before enshrining it as a permanently fixed libertarian law code."* [*"On Freedom and the Law"*, **New Individualist Review**, Winter 1962, p. 40] Needless to say, *"man"* does not exist — it is an abstraction (and a distinctly collectivist one, we should note). There are only individual men and women and so individuals and **their** reason. By *"man's reason"* Rothbard meant, at best, the prejudices of those individuals with whom he agreed with or, at worse, his own value judgements. Needless to say, what is considered acceptable will vary from individual to individual and reflect their social position. Similarly, as Kropotkin stressed, "common law" does not develop in isolation of class struggles and so is a mishmash of customs genuinely required by social life and influences imposed by elites by means of state action. [**Anarchism**, pp. 204–6] This implies what should be *"corrected"* from the "common law" will also differ based on their class position and their general concepts of what is right and wrong. History is full of examples of lawyers, jurists and judges (not to mention states) *"correcting"* common law and social custom in favour of a propertarian perspective which, by strange co-incidence, favoured the capitalists and landlords, i.e. those of the same class as the politicians, lawyers, jurists and judges (see section F.8 for more details). We can imagine the results of similar "correcting" of common law by those deemed worthy by Rothbard and his followers of representing both "man" and "natural law."

are free to select any other judge. Of course, the competing judges would **also** be striving for profits and wealth — which means the choice of character may be somewhat limited! — and the laws which they were using to guide their judgements would be enforcing capitalist rights.

Whether or not this system would work as desired is discussed in the following sections. We think that it will not. Moreover, we will argue that "anarcho"-capitalist "defence companies" meet not only the criteria of statehood we outlined in section B.2, but also Rothbard's own criteria for the state. As regards the anarchist criterion, it is clear that "defence companies" exist to defend private property; that they are hierarchical (in that they are capitalist companies which defend the power of those who employ them); that they are professional coercive bodies; and that they exercise a monopoly of force over a given area (the area, initially, being the property of the person or company who is employing the company). Not only that, as we discuss in section F.6.4 these "defence companies" also matches the right-libertarian and "anarcho"-capitalist definition of the state. For this (and other reasons), we should call the "anarcho"-capitalist defence firms "private states" — that is what they are — and "anarcho"-capitalism "private state" capitalism.

## F.6.1 What's wrong with this "free market" justice?

It does not take much imagination to figure out whose interests prosperous arbitrators, judges and defence companies would defend: their own as well as those who pay their wages — which is to say, other members of the rich elite. As the law exists to defend property, then it (by definition) exists to defend the power of capitalists against their workers. Rothbard argued that the *"judges"* would *"not [be] making the law but*



# F.4 What is the right-"libertarian" position on private property?

Right-"libertarians" are not interested in eliminating capitalist private property and thus the authority, oppression and exploitation which goes with it. They make an idol of private property and claim to defend "absolute" and "unrestricted" property rights. In particular, taxation and theft are among the greatest evils possible as they involve coercion against "justly held" property. It is true that they call for an end to the state, but this is not because they are concerned about the restrictions of liberty experienced by wage slaves and tenants but because they wish capitalists and landlords not to be bothered by legal restrictions on what they can and cannot do on their property. Anarchists stress that the right-"libertarians" are not opposed to workers being exploited or oppressed (in fact, they deny that is possible under capitalism) but because they do not want the state to impede capitalist "freedom" to exploit and oppress workers even more than is the case now! Thus they *"are against the State simply because they are capitalists first and foremost."* [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 564]

It should be obvious **why** someone is against the state matters when evaluating claims of a thinker to be included within the anarchist tradition. For example, socialist opposition to wage labour was shared by the pro-slavery advocates in the Southern States of America. The latter opposed wage

labour as being worse than its chattel form because, it was argued, the owner had an incentive to look after his property during both good and bad times while the wage worker was left to starve during the latter. This argument does not place them in the socialist camp any more than socialist opposition to wage labour made them supporters of slavery. As such, "anarcho"-capitalist and right-"libertarian" opposition to the state should not be confused with anarchist and left-libertarian opposition. The former opposes it because it restricts capitalist power, profits and property while the latter opposes it because it is a bulwark of all three.

Moreover, in the capitalist celebration of property as the source of liberty they deny or ignore the fact that private property is a source of "tyranny" in itself (as we have indicated in sections B.3 and B.4, for example). As we saw in section F.1, this leads to quite explicit (if unaware) self-contradiction by leading "anarcho"-capitalist ideologues. As Tolstoy stressed, the *"retention of the laws concerning land and property keeps the workers in slavery to the landowners and the capitalists, even though the workers are freed from taxes."* [**The Slavery of Our Times**, pp. 39–40] Hence Malatesta:

> *"One of the basic tenets of anarchism is the abolition of [class] monopoly, whether of the land, raw materials or the means of production, and consequently the abolition of exploitation of the labour of others by those who possess the means of production. The appropriation of the labour of others is from the anarchist and socialist point of view, theft."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 167–8]

As much anarchists may disagree about other matters, they are united in condemning capitalist property. Thus Proudhon argued that property was *"theft"* and *"despotism"* while Stirner indicated the religious and statist nature of private property and its impact on individual liberty when he wrote:



*abide by the basic law code,"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206] Thus a *"general libertarian law code"* would govern the actions of these companies. This "law code" would prohibit coercive aggression at the very least, although to do so it would have to specify what counted as legitimate property, how said can be owned and what actually constitutes aggression. Thus the law code would be quite extensive.

How is this law code to be actually specified? Would these laws be democratically decided? Would they reflect common usage (i.e. custom)? "Supply and demand"? "Natural law"? Given the strong dislike of democracy shown by "anarcho"-capitalists, we think we can safely say that some combination of the last two options would be used. Murray Rothbard argued for "Natural Law" and so the judges in his system would *"not [be] making the law but finding it on the basis of agreed-upon principles derived either from custom or reason."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206] David Friedman, on the other hand, argues that different defence firms would sell their own laws. [**The Machinery of Freedom**, p. 116] It is sometimes acknowledged that non-"libertarian" laws may be demanded (and supplied) in such a market although the obvious fact that the rich can afford to pay for more laws (either in quantity or in terms of being more expensive to enforce) is downplayed.

Around this system of "defence companies" is a free market in "arbitrators" and "appeal judges" to administer justice and the *"basic law code."* Rothbard believes that such a system would see *"arbitrators with the best reputation for efficiency and probity"* being *"chosen by the various parties in the market"* and *"will come to be given an increasing amount of business."* Judges *"will prosper on the market in proportion to their reputation for efficiency and impartiality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 199 and p. 204] Therefore, like any other company, arbitrators would strive for profits with the most successful ones would *"prosper"*, i.e. become wealthy. Such wealth would, of course, have no impact on the decisions of the judges, and if it did, the population (in theory)

*"Property in the civic sense means **sacred** property, such that I must **respect** your property. 'Respect for property!' ... The position of affairs is different in the egoistic sense. I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as **my** property, in which I respect nothing. Pray do the like with what you call my property!*

*"With this view we shall most easily come to an understanding with each other.*

*"The political liberals are anxious that ... every one be free lord on his ground, even if this ground has only so much area as can have its requirements adequately filled by the manure of one person ... Be it ever so little, if one only has somewhat of his own — to wit, a **respected** property: The more such owners ... the more 'free people and good patriots' has the State.*

*"Political liberalism, like everything religious, counts on **respect,** humaneness, the virtues of love. Therefore does it live in incessant vexation. For in practice people respect nothing, and everyday the small possessions are bought up again by greater proprietors, and the 'free people' change into day labourers.*

*"If, on the contrary, the 'small proprietors' had reflected that the great property was also theirs, they would not have respectively shut themselves out from it, and would not have been shut out ... Instead of owning the world, as he might, he does not even own even the paltry point on which he turns around."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, pp. 248–9]

While different anarchists have different perspectives on what comes next, we are all critical of the current capitalist property rights system. Thus "anarcho"-capitalists reject



# F.6 Is "anarcho"-capitalism against the state?

No. Due to its basis in private property, "anarcho"-capitalism implies a class division of society into bosses and workers. Any such division will require a state to maintain it. However, it need not be the same state as exists now. Regarding this point, "anarcho"-capitalism plainly advocates "defence associations" to protect property. For the "anarcho"-capitalist these private companies are not states. For anarchists, they most definitely. As Bakunin put it, the state *"is authority, domination, and force, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140] It goes without saying that "anarcho"-capitalism has a state in the anarchist sense.

According to Murray Rothbard [**Society Without A State**, p. 192], a state must have one or both of the following characteristics:

He makes the same point elsewhere. [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 171] Significantly, he stresses that *"our definition of anarchism"* is a system which *"provides no legal sanction"* for aggression against person and property rather than, say, being against government or authority. [**Society without a State**, p. 206]

Instead of this, the "anarcho"-capitalist thinks that people should be able to select their own "defence companies" (which would provide the needed police) and courts from a free market in "defence" which would spring up after the state monopoly has been eliminated. These companies *"all ... would have to*

totally one of the common (and so defining) features of all anarchist traditions — the opposition to capitalist property. From Individualist Anarchists like Tucker to Communist-Anarchists like Bookchin, anarchists have been opposed to what William Godwin termed *"accumulated property."* This was because it was in *"direct contradiction"* to property in the form of *"the produce of his [the worker's] own industry"* and so it allows *"one man... [to] dispos[e] of the produce of another man's industry."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 129–131]

For anarchists, capitalist property is a source exploitation and domination, **not** freedom (it undermines the freedom associated with possession by creating relations of domination between owner and employee). Hardly surprising, then, that, according to Murray Bookchin, Murray Rothbard *"attacked me as an anarchist with vigour because, as he put it, I am opposed to private property."* Bookchin, correctly, dismisses "anarcho-capitalists as *"proprietarians"* [*"A Meditation on Anarchist Ethics"*, pp. 328–346, **The Raven**, no. 28, p. 343]

We will discuss Rothbard's "homesteading" justification of private property in the next section. However, we will note here one aspect of right-"libertarian" absolute and unrestricted property rights, namely that it easily generates evil side effects such as hierarchy and starvation. As economist and famine expert Amartya Sen notes:

> *"Take a theory of entitlements based on a set of rights of 'ownership, transfer and rectification.' In this system a set of holdings of different people are judged to be just (or unjust) by looking at past history, and not by checking the consequences of that set of holdings. But what if the consequences are recognisably terrible? .. .[R]efer[ing] to some empirical findings in a work on famines ... evidence [is presented] to indicate that in many large famines in the recent past, in which millions of*



*free thought, rigidify speech in the form of a final and irrevocable vow, and even dictate that the worker fold his arms and die of hunger at the owners' command."* [Elisee Reclus, quoted by John P. Clark and Camille Martin (eds.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 159] As Peter Marshall notes, *"[i]n the name of freedom, the anarcho-capitalists would like to turn public spaces into private property, but freedom does not flourish behind high fences protected by private companies but expands in the open air when it is enjoyed by all."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 564]

Little wonder Proudhon argued that *"if the public highway is nothing but an accessory of private property; if the communal lands are converted into private property; if the public domain, in short, is guarded, exploited, leased, and sold like private property — what remains for the proletaire? Of what advantage is it to him that society has left the state of war to enter the regime of police?"* [**System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 371]

Of course, Rothbard (and other right-"libertarians") are aware that privatisation will not remove restrictions on freedom of speech, association and so on (while, at the same time, trying to portray themselves as supporters of such liberties!). However, for them such restrictions are of no consequence. As Rothbard argues, any *"prohibitions would not be state imposed, but would simply be requirements for residence or for use of some person's or community's land area."* [**Nations by Consent**, p. 85] Thus we yet again see the blindness of right-"libertarians" to the commonality between private property and the state we first noted in section F.1. The state also maintains that submitting to its authority is the requirement for taking up residence in its territory. As Tucker noted, the state can be defined as (in part) *"the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 24] If the property owners can determine "prohibitions" (i.e. laws and rules) for those who use the property then they are the *"sole authority over a given area and all within it,"* i.e. a state. Thus privatising "the commons" means subjecting the non-property owners to the rules and laws of the property owners — in effect, privatising the state and turning the world into a series of monarchies and oligarchies without the pretence of democracy and democratic rights.

These examples can hardly be said to be increasing liberty for society as a whole, although "anarcho"-capitalists seem to think they would. So far from **increasing** liberty for all, then, privatising the commons would only increase it for the ruling elite, by giving them yet another monopoly from which to collect income and exercise their power over. It would **reduce** freedom for everyone else. Ironically, therefore, Rothbard ideology provides more than enough evidence to confirm the anarchist argument that private property and liberty are fundamentally in conflict. *"It goes without saying that th[e] absolute freedom of thought, speech, and action"* anarchists support *"is incompatible with the maintenance of institutions that restrict*



> *people have died, there was no over-all decline in food availability at all, and the famines occurred precisely because of shifts in entitlement resulting from exercises of rights that are perfectly legitimate... . [Can] famines ... occur with a system of rights of the kind morally defended in various ethical theories, including Nozick's[?] I believe the answer is straightforwardly yes, since for many people the only resource that they legitimately possess, viz. their labour-power, may well turn out to be unsaleable in the market, giving the person no command over food ... [i]f results such as starvations and famines were to occur, would the distribution of holdings still be morally acceptable despite their disastrous consequences? There is something deeply implausible in the affirmative answer."* [**Resources, Values and Development**, pp. 311–2]

Thus "unrestricted" property rights can have seriously bad consequences and so the existence of "justly held" property need not imply a just or free society — far from it. The inequalities property can generate can have a serious on individual freedom (see section F.3). Indeed, Murray Rothbard argued that the state was evil not because it restricted individual freedom but because the resources it claimed to own were not "justly" acquired. If they were, then the state could deny freedom within its boundaries just as any other property owner could. Thus right-"libertarian" theory judges property **not** on its impact on current freedom but by looking at past history. This has the interesting side effect, as we noted in section F.1, of allowing its supporters to look at capitalist and statist hierarchies, acknowledge their similar negative effects on the liberty of those subjected to them but argue that one is legitimate and the other is not simply because of their history. As if this changed the

domination and unfreedom that both inflict on people living today!

This flows from the way "anarcho"-capitalists define "freedom," namely so that only **deliberate** acts which violate your (right-"libertarian" defined) rights by other humans beings that cause unfreedom (*"we define freedom ... as the **absence of invasion** by another man of an man's person or property."* [Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 41]). This means that if no-one deliberately coerces you then you are free. In this way the workings of the capitalist private property can be placed alongside the "facts of nature" and ignored as a source of unfreedom. However, a moments thought shows that this is not the case. Both deliberate and non-deliberate acts can leave individuals lacking freedom. A simply analogy will show why.

Let us assume (in an example paraphrased from Alan Haworth's excellent book **Anti-Libertarianism** [p. 49]) that someone kidnaps you and places you down a deep (naturally formed) pit, miles from anyway, which is impossible to climb up. No one would deny that you are unfree. Let us further assume that another person walks by and accidentally falls into the pit with you. According to right-"libertarianism", while you are unfree (i.e. subject to deliberate coercion) your fellow pit-dweller is perfectly free for they have subject to the "facts of nature" and not human action (deliberate or otherwise). Or, perhaps, they "voluntarily choose" to stay in the pit, after all, it is "only" the "facts of nature" limiting their actions. But, obviously, both of you are in **exactly the same position,** have **exactly the same choices** and so are **equally** unfree! Thus a definition of "liberty" that maintains that only deliberate acts of others — for example, coercion — reduces freedom misses the point totally. In other words, freedom is path independent and the *"forces of the market cannot provide genuine conditions for freedom any more than the powers of the State. The victims of both are equally enslaved, alienated and*



security even today. Think about how much worse it would become under "anarcho"-capitalism when the whole world becomes a series of malls — it would be impossible to hold a picket when the owner of the pavement objects (as Rothbard himself gleefully argued. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 132]). If the owner of the pavement also happens to be the boss being picketed, which Rothbard himself considered most likely, then workers' rights would be zero. Perhaps we could also see capitalists suing working class organisations for littering their property if they do hand out leaflets (so placing even greater stress on limited resources).

The I.W.W. went down in history for its rigorous defence of freedom of speech because of its rightly famous "free speech" fights in numerous American cities and towns. The city bosses worried by the wobblies' open air public meetings simply made them illegal. The I.W.W. used direct action and carried on holding them. Violence was inflicted upon wobblies who joined the struggle by "private citizens," but in the end the I.W.W. won (for Emma Goldman's account of the San Diego struggle and the terrible repression inflicted on the libertarians by the "patriotic" vigilantes see **Living My Life** [vol. 1, pp. 494–503]). Consider the case under "anarcho"-capitalism. The wobblies would have been "criminal aggressors" as the owners of the streets have refused to allow "subversives" to use them to argue their case. If they refused to acknowledge the decree of the property owners, private cops would have taken them away. Given that those who controlled city government in the historical example were the wealthiest citizens in town, its likely that the same people would have been involved in the fictional ("anarcho"-capitalist) account. Is it a good thing that in the real account the wobblies are hailed as heroes of freedom but in the fictional one they are "criminal aggressors"? Does converting public spaces into private property **really** stop restrictions on free speech being a bad thing?

way "anarcho"-capitalists propose to protect the environment — see section E.4). It is unlikely that those wishing to bring suit could find, never mind sue, the millions of individual car owners who could have potentially caused their illness. Hence the road-owners would be sued for letting polluting (or unsafe) cars onto "their" roads. The road-owners would therefore desire to restrict pollution levels by restricting the right to use their property, and so would resist the "right of passage" as an "attack" on their "absolute" property rights. If the road-owners got their way (which would be highly likely given the need for "absolute" property rights and is suggested by the variable pricing way to avoid traffic jams mentioned above) and were able to control who used their property, freedom to travel would be **very** restricted and limited to those whom the owner considered "desirable." Indeed, Murray Rothbard supports such a regime (*"In the free [sic!] society, they [travellers] would, in the first instance, have the right to travel only on those streets whose owners agree to have them there."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 119]). The threat to liberty in such a system is obvious — to all but Rothbard and other right-"libertarians", of course.

To take another example, let us consider the privatisation of parks, streets and other public areas. Currently, individuals can use these areas to hold political demonstrations, hand out leaflets, picket and so on. However, under "anarcho"-capitalism the owners of such property can restrict such liberties if they desire, calling such activities "initiation of force" (although they cannot explain how speaking your mind is an example of "force"). Therefore, freedom of speech, assembly and a host of other liberties we take for granted would be eliminated under a right-"libertarian" regime. Or, taking the case of pickets and other forms of social struggle, its clear that privatising "the commons" would only benefit the bosses. Strikers or political activists picketing or handing out leaflets in shopping centres are quickly ejected by private



*oppressed."* [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 565]

It is worth quoting Noam Chomsky at length on this subject:

> *"Consider, for example, the [right-'libertarian'] 'entitlement theory of justice' ... [a]ccording to this theory, a person has a right to whatever he has acquired by means that are just. If, by luck or labour or ingenuity, a person acquires such and such, then he is entitled to keep it and dispose of it as he wills, and a just society will not infringe on this right.*
>
> *"One can easily determine where such a principle might lead. It is entirely possible that by legitimate means — say, luck supplemented by contractual arrangements 'freely undertaken' under pressure of need — one person might gain control of the necessities of life. Others are then free to sell themselves to this person as slaves, if he is willing to accept them. Otherwise, they are free to perish. Without extra question-begging conditions, the society is just.*
>
> *"The argument has all the merits of a proof that 2 + 2 = 5 ... Suppose that some concept of a 'just society' is advanced that fails to characterise the situation just described as unjust... Then one of two conclusions is in order. We may conclude that the concept is simply unimportant and of no interest as a guide to thought or action, since it fails to apply properly even in such an elementary case as this. Or we may conclude that the concept advanced is to be dismissed in that it fails to correspond to the pretheorectical notion that it intends to capture in clear cases. If our intuitive concept of justice is clear enough to rule social arrangements of the sort described as grossly*

> *unjust, then the sole interest of a demonstration that this outcome might be 'just' under a given 'theory of justice' lies in the inference by* ***reductio ad absurdum*** *to the conclusion that the theory is hopelessly inadequate. While it may capture some partial intuition regarding justice, it evidently neglects others.*
>
> *"The real question to be raised about theories that fail so completely to capture the concept of justice in its significant and intuitive sense is why they arouse such interest. Why are they not simply dismissed out of hand on the grounds of this failure, which is striking in clear cases? Perhaps the answer is, in part, the one given by Edward Greenberg in a discussion of some recent work on the entitlement theory of justice. After reviewing empirical and conceptual shortcomings, he observes that such work 'plays an important function in the process of . .. 'blaming the victim,' and of protecting property against egalitarian onslaughts by various non-propertied groups.' An ideological defence of privileges, exploitation, and private power will be welcomed, regardless of its merits.*
>
> "These matters are of no small importance to poor and oppressed people here and elsewhere." [**The Chomsky Reader**, pp. 187–188]

The glorification of property rights has always been most strongly advocated by those who hold the bulk of property in a society. This is understandable as they have the most to gain from this. Those seeking to increase freedom in society would be wise to understand why this is the case and reject it.

The defence of capitalist property does have one interesting side effect, namely the need arises to defend inequality and the authoritarian relationships inequality creates. Due to (capitalist) private property, wage labour would still exist under "anarcho"-capitalism (it is capitalism after all). This means



*allowed to rent, or purchase, property."* What happens to those who cannot **afford** to pay for access or travel (i.e., exit) is not addressed (perhaps, being unable to exit a given capitalist's land they will become bonded labourers? Or be imprisoned and used to undercut workers' wages via prison labour? Perhaps they will just be shot as trespassers? Who can tell?). Nor is it addressed how this situation actually **increases** freedom. For Rothbard, a *"totally privatised country would be as closed as the particular inhabitants and property owners [**not** the same thing, we must point out] desire. It seems clear, then, that the regime of open borders that exists* ***de facto*** *in the US really amounts to a compulsory opening by the central state... and does not genuinely reflect the wishes of the proprietors."* [**Nations by Consent**, p. 84 and p. 85] Of course, the wishes of **non**-proprietors (the vast majority) do not matter in the slightest. Thus, it is clear, that with the privatisation of "the commons" the right to roam, to travel, would become a privilege, subject to the laws and rules of the property owners. This can hardly be said to **increase** freedom for anyone bar the capitalist class.

Rothbard acknowledges that *"in a fully privatised world, access rights would obviously be a crucial part of land ownership."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86] Given that there is no free lunch, we can imagine we would have to pay for such "rights." The implications of this are obviously unappealing and an obvious danger to individual freedom. The problem of access associated with the idea of privatising the roads can only be avoided by having a "right of passage" encoded into the "general libertarian law code." This would mean that road owners would be required, by law, to let anyone use them. But where are "absolute" property rights in this case? Are the owners of roads not to have the same rights as other owners? And if "right of passage" is enforced, what would this mean for road owners when people sue them for car-pollution related illnesses? (The right of those injured by pollution to sue polluters is the main

investments in charging monopoly prices to other capitalists explains why states have also often regulated transport).

Some may object that this picture of extensive surveillance of individuals would not occur or be impossible. However, Murray Rothbard (in a slightly different context) argued that technology would be available to collate information about individuals. He argued that *"[i]t should be pointed out that modern technology makes even more feasible the collection and dissemination of information about people's credit ratings and records of keeping or violating their contracts or arbitration agreements. Presumably, an anarchist [sic!] society would see the expansion of this sort of dissemination of data."* [**Society Without A State"**, p. 199] So with the total privatisation of society we could also see the rise of private Big Brothers, collecting information about individuals for use by property owners. The example of the **Economic League** (a British company which provided the "service" of tracking the political affiliations and activities of workers for employers) springs to mind.

And, of course, these privatisation suggestions ignore differences in income and market power. If, for example, variable pricing is used to discourage road use at times of peak demand (to eliminate traffic jams at rush-hour) as is suggested both by Murray Rothbard and David Friedman, then the rich will have far more "freedom" to travel than the rest of the population. And we may even see people having to go into debt just to get to work or move to look for work.

Which raises another problem with notion of total privatisation, the problem that it implies the end of freedom of travel. Unless you get permission or (and this seems more likely) pay for access, you will not be able to travel **anywhere.** As Rothbard **himself** makes clear, "anarcho"-capitalism means the end of the right to roam. He states that *"it became clear to me that a totally privatised country would not have open borders at all. If every piece of land in a country were owned .. . no immigrant could enter there unless invited to enter and*



that "defensive" force, a state, is required to "defend" exploitation, oppression, hierarchy and authority from those who suffer them. Inequality makes a mockery of free agreement and "consent" as we have continually stressed. As Peter Kropotkin pointed out long ago:

> *"When a workman sells his labour to an employer ... it is a mockery to call that a free contract. Modern economists may call it free, but the father of political economy — Adam Smith — was never guilty of such a misrepresentation. As long as three-quarters of humanity are compelled to enter into agreements of that description, force is, of course, necessary, both to enforce the supposed agreements and to maintain such a state of things. Force — and a good deal of force — is necessary to prevent the labourers from taking possession of what they consider unjustly appropriated by the few... . The Spencerian party [proto-right-'libertarians'] perfectly well understand that; and while they advocate no force for changing the existing conditions, they advocate still more force than is now used for maintaining them. As to Anarchy, it is obviously as incompatible with plutocracy as with any other kind of -cracy."* [**Anarchism and Anarchist Communism**, pp. 52–53]

Because of this need to defend privilege and power, "anarcho"-capitalism is best called "private-state" capitalism. As anarchists Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer argue, the *"American oil baron, who sneers at any form of State intervention in his manner of conducting business — that is to say, of exploiting man and nature — is also able to 'abolish the State' to a certain extent. But he has to build up a repressive machine of his own (an army of sheriffs to guard his interests) and*

*takes over as far as he can, those functions normally exercised by the government, excluding any tendency of the latter that might be an obstacle to his pursuit of wealth.*" [**Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 12] Unsurprising "anarcho"-capitalists propose private security forces rather than state security forces (police and military) — a proposal that is equivalent to bringing back the state under another name. This will be discussed in more detail in section F.6.

By advocating private property, right-"libertarians" contradict many of their other claims. For example, they tend to oppose censorship and attempts to limit freedom of association within society when the state is involved yet they will wholeheartedly support the right of the boss or landlord when they ban unions or people talking about unions on their property. They will oppose closed shops when they are worker created but have no problems when bosses make joining the company union a mandatory requirement for taking a position. Then they say that they support the right of individuals to travel where they like. They make this claim because they assume that only the state limits free travel but this is a false assumption. Owners must agree to let you on their land or property (*"people only have the right to move to those properties and lands where the owners desire to rent or sell to them."* [Murray Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 119]. There is no "freedom of travel" onto private property (including private roads). Therefore immigration may be just as hard under "anarcho"-capitalism as it is under statism (after all, the state, like the property owner, only lets people in whom it wants to let in). Private property, as can be seen from these simple examples, is the state writ small. Saying it is different when the boss does it is not convincing to any genuine libertarian.

Then there is the possibility of alternative means of living. Right-"libertarians" generally argue that people can be as communistic as they want on their own property. They fail to note that all groups would have no choice about living under laws



introduced). In London, the local government has introduced a scheme which allowed people to pay for public transport by electronic card. It also allowed the government to keep a detailed record of where and when people travelled, with obvious civil liberty implications.

If we extrapolate from these to a system of **fully** privatised "commons," it would clearly require all individuals to have tracking devices on them so they could be properly billed for use of roads, pavements, etc. Obviously being tracked by private firms would be a serious threat to individual liberty. Another, less costly, option would be for private guards to randomly stop and question car-owners and individuals to make sure they had paid for the use of the road or pavement in question. "Parasites" would be arrested and fined or locked up. Again, however, being stopped and questioned by uniformed individuals has more in common with police states than liberty. Toll-boothing **every** street would be highly unfeasible due to the costs involved and difficulties for use that it implies. Thus the idea of privatising roads and charging drivers to gain access seems impractical at best and distinctly freedom endangering at worse. Would giving companies that information for all travellers, including pedestrians, **really** eliminate all civil liberty concerns?

Of course, the option of owners letting users have free access to the roads and pavements they construct and run would be difficult for a profit-based company. No one could make a profit in that case. If companies paid to construct roads for their customers/employees to use, they would be financially hindered in competition with other companies that did not, and thus would be unlikely to do so. If they restricted use purely to their own customers, the tracking problem appears again. So the costs in creating a transport network and then running it explains why capitalism has always turned to state aid to provide infrastructure (the potential power of the owners of such

based on the most rigid and extreme interpretation of property rights invented and surviving within the economic pressures such a regime would generate. If a community cannot survive in the capitalist market then, in their perspective, it deserves its fate. Yet this Social-Darwinist approach to social organisation is based on numerous fallacies. It confuses the market price of something with how important it is; it confuses capitalism with productive activity in general; and it confuses profits with an activities contribution to social and individual well being; it confuses freedom with the ability to pick a master rather than as an absence of a master. Needless to say, as they consider capitalism as the most efficient economy ever the underlying assumption is that capitalist systems will win out in competition with all others. This will obviously be aided immensely under a law code which is capitalist in nature.

## F.4.1 What is wrong with a "homesteading" theory of property?

So how do "anarcho"-capitalists justify property? Looking at Murray Rothbard, we find that he proposes a *"homesteading theory of property"*. In this theory it is argued that property comes from occupancy and mixing labour with natural resources (which are assumed to be unowned). Thus the world is transformed into private property, for *"title to an unowned resource (such as land) comes properly only from the expenditure of labour to transform that resource into use."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 63]

His theory, it should be stressed, has its roots in the same Lockean tradition as Robert Nozick's (which we critiqued in section B.3.4). Like Locke, Rothbard paints a conceptual history of individuals and families forging a home in the wilderness by the sweat of their labour (it is tempting to rename his theory the ***"immaculate conception of property"*** as his conceptual



# F.5 Will privatising "the commons" increase liberty?

"Anarcho"-capitalists aim for a situation in which *"no land areas, no square footage in the world shall remain 'public,'"* in other words **everything** will be *"privatised."* [Murray Rothbard, **Nations by Consent**, p. 84] They claim that privatising "the commons" (e.g. roads, parks, etc.) which are now freely available to all will increase liberty. Is this true? Here we will concern ourselves with private ownership of commonly used "property" which we all take for granted (and often pay for with taxes).

Its clear from even a brief consideration of a hypothetical society based on "privatised" roads (as suggested by Murray Rothbard [**For a New Liberty**, pp. 202–203] and David Friedman [**The Machinery of Freedom**, pp. 98–101]) that the only increase of liberty will be for the ruling elite. As "anarcho"-capitalism is based on paying for what one uses, privatisation of roads would require some method of tracking individuals to ensure that they pay for the roads they use. In the UK, for example, during the 1980s the British Tory government looked into the idea of toll-based motorways. Obviously having toll-booths on motorways would hinder their use and restrict "freedom," and so they came up with the idea of tracking cars by satellite. Every vehicle would have a tracking device installed in it and a satellite would record where people went and which roads they used. They would then be sent a bill or have their bank balances debited based on this information (in the fascist city-state/company town of Singapore such a scheme **has** been

theory is so at odds with actual historical fact). His one innovation (if it can be called that) was to deny even the rhetorical importance of what is often termed the Lockean Proviso, namely the notion that common resources can be appropriated only if there is enough for others to do likewise. As we noted in section E.4.2 this was because it could lead (horror of horrors!) to the outlawry of all private property.

Sadly for Rothbard, his "homesteading" theory of property was refuted by Proudhon in **What is Property?** in 1840 (along with many other justifications of property). Proudhon rightly argued that *"if the liberty of man is sacred, it is equally sacred in all individuals; that, if it needs property for its objective action, that is, for its life, the appropriation of material is equally necessary for all ... Does it not follow that if one individual cannot prevent another ... from appropriating an amount of material equal to his own, no more can he prevent individuals to come."* And if all the available resources are appropriated, and the owner *"draws boundaries, fences himself in ... Here, then, is a piece of land upon which, henceforth, no one has a right to step, save the proprietor and his friends ... Let [this]... multiply, and soon the people ... will have nowhere to rest, no place to shelter, no ground to till. They will die at the proprietor's door, on the edge of that property which was their birthright."* [**What is Property?**, pp. 84–85 and p. 118]

Proudhon's genius lay in turning apologies for private property against it by treating them as absolute and universal as its apologists treated property itself. To claims like Rothbard's that property was a natural right, he explained that the essence of such rights was their universality and that private property ensured that this right could not be extended to all. To claims that labour created property, he simply noted that private property ensured that most people have no property to labour on and so the outcome of that labour was owned by those who did. As for occupancy, he simply noted that most owners do not occupancy all the property they own while those who do use it



started as the *"urban commercial elites adamantly resisted [all] peaceful petitions"* while the *"state legislators also turned a deaf ear"* as they were heavily influenced by these same elites. This rebellion was an important factor in the centralisation of state power in America to ensure that popular input and control over government were marginalised and that the wealthy elite and their property rights were protected against the many (*"Elite and well-to-do sectors of the population mobilised in great force to support an instrument that clearly benefited them at the expense of the backcountry agrarians and urban poor."*) [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 234, p. 235 and p. 243]). Thus the homestead system was, ironically, undermined and destroyed by the rise of capitalism (aided, as usual, by a state run by and for the rich).

So while Rothbard's theory as a certain appeal (reinforced by watching too many Westerns, we imagine) it fails to justify the "unrestricted" property rights theory (and the theory of freedom Rothbard derives from it). All it does is to end up justifying capitalist and landlord domination (which is what it was intended to do).

do not own it. In such circumstances, how can occupancy justify property when property excludes occupancy? Proudhon showed that the defenders of property had to choose between self-interest and principle, between hypocrisy and logic.

Rothbard picks the former over the latter and his theory is simply a rationale for a specific class based property rights system (*"[w]e who belong to the proletaire class, property excommunicates us!"* [P-J Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105]). As Rothbard **himself** admitted in respect to the aftermath of slavery and serfdom, not having access to the means of life places one the position of unjust dependency on those who do and so private property creates economic power as much under his beloved capitalism as it did in post-serfdom (see section F.1). Thus, Rothbard's account, for all its intuitive appeal, ends up justifying capitalist and landlord domination and ensures that the vast majority of the population experience property as theft and despotism rather than as a source of liberty and empowerment (which possession gives).

It also seems strange that while (correctly) attacking social contract theories of the state as invalid (because *"no past generation can bind later generations"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 145]) he fails to see he is doing **exactly that** with his support of private property (similarly, Ayn Rand argued that *"[a]ny alleged 'right' of one man, which necessitates the violation of the right of another, is not and cannot be a right"* but, obviously, appropriating land does violate the rights of others to walk, use or appropriate that land [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 325]). Due to his support for appropriation and inheritance, Rothbard is clearly ensuring that future generations are **not** born as free as the first settlers were (after all, they cannot appropriate any land, it is all taken!). If future generations cannot be bound by past ones, this applies equally to resources and property rights. Something anarchists have long realised — there is no defensible reason why those who first acquired property should control its use and exclude future generations.



*wholly self-sufficient and required little, if any, currency."* The economy was rooted in barter, with farmers trading surpluses with nearby artisans. This pre-capitalist economy meant people enjoyed *"freedom from servitude to others"* and *"fostered"* a *"sturdy willingness to defend [their] independence from outside commercial interlopers. This condition of near-autarchy, however, was not individualistic; rather it made for strong community interdependence ... In fact, the independence that the New England yeomanry enjoyed was itself a function of the co-operative social base from which it emerged. To barter home-grown goods and objects, to share tools and implements, to engage in common labour during harvesting time in a system of mutual aid, indeed, to help new-comers in barn-raising, corn-husking, log-rolling, and the like, was the indispensable cement that bound scattered farmsteads into a united community."* Bookchin quotes David P. Szatmary (author of a book on Shay' Rebellion) stating that it was a society based upon *"co-operative, community orientated interchanges"* and not a *"basically competitive society."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 233]

Into this non-capitalist society came capitalist elements. Market forces and economic power soon resulted in the transformation of this society. Merchants asked for payment in specie (gold or silver coin), which the farmers did not have. In addition, money was required to pay taxes (taxation has always been a key way in which the state encouraged a transformation towards capitalism as money could only be made by hiring oneself to those who had it). The farmers *"were now cajoled by local shopkeepers"* to *"make all their payments and meet all their debts in money rather than barter. Since the farmers lacked money, the shopkeepers granted them short-term credit for their purchases. In time, many farmers became significantly indebted and could not pay off what they owed, least of all in specie."* The creditors turned to the courts and many the homesteaders were dispossessed of their land and goods to pay their debts. In response Shay's rebellion

Even if we take Rothbard's theory at face value we find numerous problems with it. If title to unowned resources comes via the *"expenditure of labour"* on it, how can rivers, lakes and the oceans be appropriated? The banks of the rivers can be transformed, but can the river itself? How can you mix your labour with water? "Anarcho"-capitalists usually blame pollution on the fact that rivers, oceans, and so forth are unowned but as we discussed in section E.4, Rothbard provided no coherent argument for resolving this problem nor the issue of environmental externalities like pollution it was meant to solve (in fact, he ended up providing polluters with sufficient apologetics to allow them to continue destroying the planet).

Then there is the question of what equates to "mixing" labour. Does fencing in land mean you have "mixed labour" with it? Rothbard argues that this is not the case (he expresses opposition to *"arbitrary claims"*). He notes that it is **not** the case that *"the first discoverer ... could properly lay claim to"* a piece of land by *"laying out a boundary for the area."* He thinks that *"their claim would still be no more than the boundary **itself**, and not to any of the land within, for only the boundary will have been transformed and used by men"* However, if the boundary **is** private property and the owner refuses others permission to cross it, then the enclosed land is inaccessible to others! If an "enterprising" right-"libertarian" builds a fence around the only oasis in a desert and refuses permission to cross it to travellers unless they pay his price (which is everything they own) then the person **has** appropriated the oasis without "transforming" it by his labour. The travellers have the choice of paying the price or dying (and any oasis owner is well within his rights letting them die). Given Rothbard's comments, it is probable that he could claim that such a boundary is null and void as it allows "arbitrary" claims — although this position is not at all clear. After all, the fence builder **has** transformed the boundary and "unrestricted" property rights is what the right-"libertarian" is all about.



One thing is true, if the oasis became private property by some means then refusing water to travellers would be fine as *"the owner is scarcely being 'coercive'; in fact he is supplying a vital service, and should have the right to refuse a sale or charge whatever the customers will pay. The situation may be unfortunate for the customers, as are many situations in life."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50f and p. 221] That the owner is providing *"a vital service"* only because he has expropriated the common heritage of humanity is as lost on Rothbard as is the obvious economic power that this situation creates.

And, of course, Rothbard ignores the fact of economic power — a transnational corporation can "transform" far more virgin resources in a day by hiring workers than a family could in a year. A transnational "mixing" the labour it has bought from its wage slaves with the land does not spring into mind reading Rothbard's account of property but in the real world that is what happens. This is, perhaps, unsurprising as the whole point of Locke's theory was to justify the appropriation of the product of other people's labour by their employer.

Which is another problem with Rothbard's account. It is completely ahistoric (and so, as we noted above, is more like an *"immaculate conception of property"*). He has transported "capitalist man" into the dawn of time and constructed a history of property based upon what he is trying to justify. He ignores the awkward historic fact that land was held in common for millennium and that the notion of "mixing" labour to enclose it was basically invented to justify the expropriation of land from the general population (and from native populations) by the rich. What **is** interesting to note, though, is that the **actual** experience of life on the US frontier (the historic example Rothbard seems to want to claim) was far from the individualistic framework he builds upon it and (ironically enough) it was destroyed by the development of capitalism.

As Murray Bookchin notes, in rural areas there *"developed a modest subsistence agriculture that allowed them to be almost*

as beneficial to their class as a whole. And as development economist Lance Taylor argues:

> *"In the long run, there are no laissez-faire transitions to modern economic growth. The state has always intervened to create a capitalist class, and then it has to regulate the capitalist class, and then the state has to worry about being taken over by the capitalist class, but the state has always been there."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 104]

In order to attack mercantilism, the early capitalists had to ignore the successful impact of its policies in developing industry and a "store of wealth" for future economic activity. As William Lazonick points out, *"the political purpose of [Adam Smith's] the* ***Wealth of Nations*** *was to attack the mercantilist institutions that the British economy had built up over the previous two hundred years. Yet in proposing institutional change, Smith lacked a dynamic historical analysis. In his attack on these institutions, Smith might have asked why the extent of the world market available to Britain in the late eighteenth century was* ***so uniquely under British control.*** *If Smith had asked this 'big question,' he might have been forced to grant credit for Britain's extent of the world market to the very mercantilist institutions he was attacking."* Moreover, he *"might have recognised the integral relation between economic and political power in the rise of Britain to international dominance."* Overall, *"[w]hat the British advocates of laissez-faire neglected to talk about was the role that a system of national power had played in creating conditions for Britain to embark on its dynamic development path ... They did not bother to ask how Britain had attained th[e] position [of 'workshop of the world'], while they conveniently ignored the on going system of national power — the British Empire — that ... continued to support Britain's position."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 2, p. 3 and p.5]



There is another reason why "market forces" will not stop abuse by the rich, or indeed stop the system from turning from private to public statism. This is due to the nature of the "defence" market (for a similar analysis of the "defence" market see right-"libertarian" economist Tyler Cowen's *"Law as a Public Good: The Economics of Anarchy"* [**Economics and Philosophy**, no. 8 (1992), pp. 249–267] and *"Rejoinder to David Friedman on the Economics of Anarchy"* [**Economics and Philosophy**, no. 10 (1994), pp. 329–332]). In "anarcho"-capitalist theory it is assumed that the competing "defence companies" have a vested interest in peacefully settling differences between themselves by means of arbitration. In order to be competitive on the market, companies will have to co-operate via contractual relations otherwise the higher price associated with conflict will make the company uncompetitive and it will go under. Those companies that ignore decisions made in arbitration would be outlawed by others, ostracised and their rulings ignored. By this process, it is argued, a system of competing "defence" companies will be stable and not turn into a civil war between agencies with each enforcing the interests of their clients against others by force.

However, there is a catch. Unlike every other market, the businesses in competition in the "defence" industry **must** co-operate with its fellows in order to provide its services for its customers. They need to be able to agree to courts and judges, agree to abide by decisions and law codes and so forth. In economics there are other, more accurate, terms to describe co-operative activity between companies: collusion and cartels. These are when companies in a specific market agree to work together (co-operate) to restrict competition and reap the benefits of monopoly power by working to achieve the same ends in partnership with each other. By stressing the co-operative nature of the "defence" market, "anarcho"-capitalists are implicitly acknowledging that collusion is built into the system. The necessary contractual relations between agencies in the

"protection" market require that firms co-operate and, by so doing, to behave (effectively) as one large firm (and so resemble a normal state even more than they already do). Quoting Adam Smith seems appropriate here: *"People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 117] Having a market based on people of the same trade co-operating seems, therefore, an unwise move.

For example, when buying food it does not matter whether the supermarkets visited have good relations with each other. The goods bought are independent of the relationships that exist between competing companies. However, in the case of private states this is **not** the case. If a specific "defence" company has bad relationships with other companies in the market then it is against a customer's self-interest to subscribe to it. Why subscribe to a private state if its judgements are ignored by the others and it has to resort to violence to be heard? This, as well as being potentially dangerous, will also push up the prices that have to be paid. Arbitration is one of the most important services a defence firm can offer its customers and its market share is based upon being able to settle interagency disputes without risk of war or uncertainty that the final outcome will not be accepted by all parties. Lose that and a company will lose market share.

Therefore, the market set-up within the "anarcho"-capitalist "defence" market is such that private states **have to co-operate** with the others (or go out of business fast) and this means collusion can take place. In other words, a system of private states will have to agree to work together in order to provide the service of "law enforcement" to their customers and the result of such co-operation is to create a cartel. However, unlike cartels in other industries, the "defence" cartel will be a stable body simply because its members **have** to work with their competitors in order to survive.



> *ing, at all times under its control and specifically organised to defend that class against any possible demands by the disinherited."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 22–3]

Malatesta here indicates the true meaning of *"leave us alone,"* or *"laissez-faire."* The **absolutist** state (not "the state" per se) began to interfere with capitalists' profit-making activities and authority, so they determined that it had to go — which the rising capitalist class did when they utilised such popular movements as the English, French and American revolutions. In such circumstances, when the state is not fully controlled by the capitalist class, then it makes perfect sense to oppose state intervention no matter how useful it may have been in the past — a state run by aristocratic and feudal landlords does not produce class legislation in quite the right form. That changes when members of the capitalist class hold state power and when the landlords start acting more like rural capitalists and, unsurprisingly, laissez-faire was quickly modified and then abandoned once capitalists could rely on a ***capitalist*** state to support and protect its economic power within society.

When capitalism had been rid of unwanted interference by the hostile use of state power by non-capitalist classes then laissez-faire had its utility (just as it has its utility today when attacking social welfare). Once this had been accomplished then state intervention in society was encouraged and applauded by capitalists. *"It is ironic that the main protagonists of the State, in its political and administrative authority, were the middle-class Utilitarians, on the other side of whose Statist banner were inscribed the doctrines of economic Laissez Faire."* [E.P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 90] Capitalists simply wanted **capitalist** states to replace monarchical states, so that heads of government would follow state economic policies regarded by capitalists

it in its early stages. Just as children eventually rebel against the protection and rules of their parents, so the capitalists rebelled against the over-bearing support of the absolutist state. Mercantilist policies favoured some industries and harmed the growth of others. The rules and regulations imposed upon those it did favour reduced the flexibility of capitalists to changing environments. As Rocker argues, *"no matter how the absolutist state strove, in its own interest, to meet the demands of commerce, it still put on industry countless fetters which became gradually more and more oppressive ... [it] became an unbearable burden ... which paralysed all economic and social life."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 119] All in all, mercantilism became more of a hindrance than a help and so had to be replaced. With the growth of economic and social power by the capitalist class, this replacement was made easier. As Errico Malatesta notes:

> *"The development of production, the vast expansion of commerce, the immeasurable power assumed by money ... have guaranteed this supremacy [of economic power over political power] to the capitalist class which, no longer content with enjoying the support of the government, demanded that government arise from its own ranks. A government which owed its origin to the right of conquest ... though subject by existing circumstances to the capitalist class, went on maintaining a proud and contemptuous attitude towards its now wealthy former slaves, and had pretensions to independence of domination. That government was indeed the defender, the property owners' gendarme, but the kind of gendarmes who think they are somebody, and behave in an arrogant manner towards the people they have to escort and defend, when they don't rob or kill them at the next street corner; and the capitalist class got rid of it . .. and replac[ed] it by a government of its own choos-*



Let us look at what would happen after such a cartel is formed in a specific area and a new "defence company" desired to enter the market. This new company will have to work with the members of the cartel in order to provide its services to its customers (note that "anarcho"-capitalists already assume that they *"will have to"* subscribe to the same law code). If the new defence firm tries to under-cut the cartel's monopoly prices, the other companies would refuse to work with it. Having to face constant conflict or the possibility of conflict, seeing its decisions being ignored by other agencies and being uncertain what the results of a dispute would be, few would patronise the new "defence company." The new company's prices would go up and it would soon face either folding or joining the cartel. Unlike every other market, if a "defence company" does not have friendly, co-operative relations with other firms in the same industry then it will go out of business.

This means that the firms that are co-operating have simply to agree not to deal with new firms which are attempting to undermine the cartel in order for them to fail. A "cartel busting" firm goes out of business in the same way an outlaw one does — the higher costs associated with having to solve all its conflicts by force, not arbitration, increases its production costs much higher than the competitors and the firm faces insurmountable difficulties selling its products at a profit (ignoring any drop of demand due to fears of conflict by actual and potential customers). Even if we assume that many people will happily join the new firm in spite of the dangers to protect themselves against the cartel and its taxation (i.e. monopoly profits), enough will remain members of the cartel so that co-operation will still be needed and conflict unprofitable and dangerous (and as the cartel will have more resources than the new firm, it could usually hold out longer than the new firm could). In effect, breaking the cartel may take the form of an armed revolution — as it would with any state.

The forces that break up cartels and monopolies in other industries (such as free entry — although, of course the "defence" market will be subject to oligopolistic tendencies as any other and this will create barriers to entry) do not work here and so new firms have to co-operate or loose market share and/or profits. This means that "defence companies" will reap monopoly profits and, more importantly, have a monopoly of force over a given area.

It is also likely that a multitude of cartels would develop, with a given cartel operating in a given locality. This is because law enforcement would be localised in given areas as most crime occurs where the criminal lives (few criminals would live in Glasgow and commit crimes in Paris). However, as defence companies have to co-operate to provide their services, so would the cartels. Few people live all their lives in one area and so firms from different cartels would come into contact, so forming a cartel of cartels. This cartel of cartels may (perhaps) be less powerful than a local cartel, but it would still be required and for exactly the same reasons a local one is. Therefore "anarcho"-capitalism would, like "actually existing capitalism," be marked by a series of public states covering given areas, coordinated by larger states at higher levels. Such a set up would parallel the United States in many ways except it would be run directly by wealthy shareholders without the sham of "democratic" elections. Moreover, as in the USA and other states there will still be a monopoly of rules and laws (the *"general libertarian law code"*).

Hence a monopoly of private states will develop in addition to the existing monopoly of law and this is a de facto monopoly of force over a given area (i.e. some kind of public state run by share holders). New companies attempting to enter the "defence" industry will have to work with the existing cartel in order to provide the services it offers to its customers. The cartel is in a dominant position and new entries into the market either become part of it or fail. This is exactly the position with



As we discussed in section C.10, some kind of mercantilism has always been required for a country to industrialise. Over all, as economist Paul Ormerod puts it, the *"advice to follow pure free-market polices seems ... to be contrary to the lessons of virtually the whole of economic history since the Industrial Revolution ... every country which has moved into ... strong sustained growth . .. has done so in outright violation of pure, free-market principles."* These interventions include the use of *"tariff barriers"* to protect infant industries, *"government subsidies"* and *"active state intervention in the economy."* He summarises: *"The model of entrepreneurial activity in the product market, with judicious state support plus repression in the labour market, seems to be a good model of economic development."* [**The Death of Economics**, p. 63]

Thus the social forces at work creating capitalism was a combination of capitalist activity and state action. But without the support of the state, it is doubtful that capitalist activity would have been enough to generate the initial accumulation required to start the economic ball rolling. Hence the necessity of Mercantilism in Europe and its modified cousin of state aid, tariffs and "homestead acts" in America.

## F.8.2 What was the social context of the statement "laissez-faire?"

The honeymoon of interests between the early capitalists and autocratic kings did not last long. *"This selfsame monarchy, which for weighty reasons sought to further the aims of commercial capital and was... itself aided in its development by capital, grew at last into a crippling obstacle to any further development of European industry."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Nationalism and Culture**, p. 117]

This is the social context of the expression *"laissez-faire"* — a system which has outgrown the supports that protected

allowed industrialists to reap excess profits which they could then use to increase their investments. In the words of Marxist economic historian Maurice Dobb:

> *"In short, the Mercantile System was a system of State-regulated exploitation through trade which played a highly important rule in the adolescence of capitalist industry: it was essentially the economic policy of an age of primitive accumulation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 209]

As Rocker summarises, *"when absolutism had victoriously overcome all opposition to national unification, by its furthering of mercantilism and economic monopoly it gave the whole social evolution a direction which could only lead to capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 116–7]

Mercantilist policies took many forms, including the state providing capital to new industries, exempting them from guild rules and taxes, establishing monopolies over local, foreign and colonial markets, and granting titles and pensions to successful capitalists. In terms of foreign trade, the state assisted home-grown capitalists by imposing tariffs, quotas, and prohibitions on imports. They also prohibited the export of tools and technology as well as the emigration of skilled workers to stop competition (this applied to any colonies a specific state may have had). Other policies were applied as required by the needs of specific states. For example, the English state imposed a series of Navigation Acts which forced traders to use English ships to visit its ports and colonies (this destroyed the commerce of Holland, its chief rival). Nor should the impact of war be minimised, with the demand for weapons and transportation (including ships) injecting government spending into the economy. Unsurprisingly, given this favouring of domestic industry at the expense of its rivals and the subject working class population the mercantilist period was one of generally rapid growth, particularly in England.



the state, with "private agencies" free to operate as long as they work to the state's guidelines. As with the monopolist *"general libertarian law code"*, if you do not toe the line, you go out of business fast.

"Anarcho"-capitalists claim that this will not occur, but that the co-operation needed to provide the service of law enforcement will somehow **not** turn into collusion between companies. However, they are quick to argue that renegade "agencies" (for example, the so-called "Mafia problem" or those who reject judgements) will go out of business because of the higher costs associated with conflict and not arbitration. Yet these higher costs are ensured because the firms in question do not co-operate with others. If other agencies boycott a firm but co-operate with all the others, then the boycotted firm will be at the same disadvantage — regardless of whether it is a cartel buster or a renegade. So the "anarcho"-capitalist is trying to have it both ways. If the punishment of non-conforming firms cannot occur, then "anarcho"-capitalism will turn into a war of all against all or, at the very least, the service of social peace and law enforcement cannot be provided. If firms cannot deter others from disrupting the social peace (one service the firm provides) then "anarcho"-capitalism is not stable and will not remain orderly as agencies develop which favour the interests of their own customers and enforce their own law codes at the expense of others. If collusion cannot occur (or is too costly) then neither can the punishment of non-conforming firms and "anarcho"-capitalism will prove to be unstable.

So, to sum up, the "defence" market of private states has powerful forces within it to turn it into a monopoly of force over a given area. From a privately chosen monopoly of force over a specific (privately owned) area, the market of private states will turn into a monopoly of force over a general area. This is due to the need for peaceful relations between companies, relations which are required for a firm to secure market share. The unique market forces that exist within this market

ensure collusion and the system of private states will become a cartel and so a public state — unaccountable to all but its shareholders, a state of the wealthy, by the wealthy, for the wealthy.

## F.6.4 Why are these "defence associations" states?

It is clear that "anarcho"-capitalist defence associations meet the criteria of statehood outlined in section B.2 ("Why are anarchists against the state"). They defend property and preserve authority relationships, they practice coercion, and are hierarchical institutions which govern those under them on behalf of a "ruling elite," i.e. those who employ both the governing forces and those they govern. Thus, from an anarchist perspective, these "defence associations" are most definitely states.

What is interesting, however, is that by their own definitions a very good case can be made that these "defence associations" are states in the "anarcho"-capitalist sense too. Capitalist apologists usually define a "government" (or state) as something which has a monopoly of force and coercion within a given area. Relative to the rest of the society, these defence associations would have a monopoly of force and coercion of a given piece of property: thus, by the "anarcho"-capitalists' **own definition** of statehood, these associations would qualify!

If we look at Rothbard's definition of statehood, which requires (a) the power to tax and/or (b) a *"coerced monopoly of the provision of defence over a given area"*, "anarcho"-capitalism runs into trouble.

In the first place, the costs of hiring defence associations will be deducted from the wealth created by those who use, but do not own, the property of capitalists and landlords. Let us not forget that a capitalist will only employ a worker or rent out land and housing if they make a profit from so doing. Without



which the "commons" — the free farmland shared communally by the peasants in most rural villages — was "enclosed" or incorporated into the estates of various landlords as private property (see section F.8.3). This ensured a pool of landless workers who had no option but to sell their labour to landlords and capitalists. Indeed, the widespread independence caused by the possession of the majority of households of land caused the rising class of capitalists to complain, as one put it, *"that men who should work as wage-labourers cling to the soil, and in the naughtiness of their hearts prefer independence as squatters to employment by a master."* [quoted by Allan Engler, **The Apostles of Greed**, p. 12] Once in service to a master, the state was always on hand to repress any signs of *"naughtiness"* and *"independence"* (such as strikes, riots, unions and the like). For example, Seventeenth century France saw a *"number of decrees ... which forbade workers to change their employment or which prohibited assemblies of workers or strikes on pain of corporal punishment or even death. (Even the Theological Faculty of the University of Paris saw fit to pronounce solemnly against the sin of workers' organisation)."* [Maurice Dobb, **Studies in Capitalism Development**, p. 160]

In addition, other forms of state aid ensured that capitalist firms got a head start, so ensuring their dominance over other forms of work (such as co-operatives). A major way of creating a pool of resources that could be used for investment was the use of mercantilist policies which used protectionist measures to enrich capitalists and landlords at the expense of consumers and their workers. For example, one of most common complaints of early capitalists was that workers could not turn up to work regularly. Once they had worked a few days, they disappeared as they had earned enough money to live on. With higher prices for food, caused by protectionist measures, workers had to work longer and harder and so became accustomed to factory labour. In addition, mercantilism allowed native industry to develop by barring foreign competition and so

its power and so opposes *"all coalitions and all private societies, whatever their aim."* [**The State: It's Historic role**, p. 53]

The rising economic power of the proto-capitalists conflicted with that of the feudal lords, which meant that the former required help to consolidate their position. That aid came in the form of the monarchical state which, in turn, needed support against the feudal lords. With the force of absolutism behind it, capital could start the process of increasing its power and influence by expanding the "market" through state action. This use of state coercion was required because, as Bookchin noted, *"[i]n every pre-capitalist society, countervailing forces ... existed to restrict the market economy. No less significantly, many pre-capitalist societies raised what they thought were insuperable obstacles to the penetration of the State into social life."* He noted the *"power of village communities to resist the invasion of trade and despotic political forms into society's abiding communal substrate."* State violence was required to break this resistance and, unsurprisingly the *"one class to benefit most from the rising nation-state was the European bourgeoisie ... This structure . .. provided the basis for the next great system of labour mobilisation: the factory."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, pp. 207–8 and p. 336] The absolutist state, noted Rocker, *"was dependent upon the help of these new economic forces, and vice versa* and so it *"at first furthered the plans of commercial capital"* as its coffers were filled by the expansion of commerce. Its armies and fleets *"contributed to the expansion of industrial production because they demanded a number of things for whose large-scale production the shops of small tradesmen were no longer adapted. Thus gradually arose the so-called manufactures, the forerunners of the later large industries."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 117–8] As such, it is impossible to underestimate the role of state power in creating the preconditions for both agricultural and industrial capitalism.

Some of the most important state actions from the standpoint of early industry were the so-called Enclosure Acts, by



the labour of the worker, there would be nothing to sell and no wages to pay for rent and so a company's or landlord's "defence" firm will be paid from the revenue gathered from the capitalists power to extract a tribute from those who use, but do not own, a property. In other words, workers would pay for the agencies that enforce their employers' authority over them via the wage system and rent — taxation in a more insidious form.

In the second, under capitalism most people spend a large part of their day on other people's property — that is, they work for capitalists and/or live in rented accommodation. Hence if property owners select a "defence association" to protect their factories, farms, rental housing, etc., their employees and tenants will view it as a *"coerced monopoly of the provision of defence over a given area."* For certainly the employees and tenants will not be able to hire their own defence companies to expropriate the capitalists and landlords. So, from the standpoint of the employees and tenants, the owners do have a monopoly of "defence" over the areas in question. Of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist will argue that the tenants and workers "consent" to **all** the rules and conditions of a contract when they sign it and so the property owner's monopoly is not "coerced." However, the "consent" argument is so weak in conditions of inequality as to be useless (see section F.3.1, for example) and, moreover, it can and has been used to justify the state. In other words, "consent" in and of itself does not ensure that a given regime is not statist. So an argument along these lines is deeply flawed and can be used to justify regimes which are little better than "industrial feudalism" (such as, as indicated in section B.4, company towns, for example — an institution which right-"libertarians" have no problem with). Even the *"general libertarian law code,"* could be considered a "monopoly of government over a particular area," particularly if ordinary people have no real means of affecting the law code, either because it is market-driven and

so is money-determined, or because it will be "natural" law and so unchangeable by mere mortals.

In other words, **if** the state *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area"* then its pretty clear that the property owner shares this power. As we indicated in section F.1, Rothbard agrees that the owner is, after all, the *"ultimate decision-making power"* in their workplace or on their land. If the boss takes a dislike to you (for example, you do not follow their orders) then you get fired. If you cannot get a job or rent the land without agreeing to certain conditions (such as not joining a union or subscribing to the "defence firm" approved by your employer) then you either sign the contract or look for something else. Rothbard fails to draw the obvious conclusion and instead refers to the state *"prohibiting the voluntary purchase and sale of defence and judicial services."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170 and p. 171] But just as surely as the law of contract allows the banning of unions from a property, it can just as surely ban the sale and purchase of defence and judicial services (it could be argued that market forces will stop this happening, but this is unlikely as bosses usually have the advantage on the labour market and workers have to compromise to get a job). After all, in the company towns, only company money was legal tender and company police the only law enforcers.

Therefore, it is obvious that the "anarcho"-capitalist system meets the Weberian criteria of a monopoly to enforce certain rules in a given area of land. The *"general libertarian law code"* is a monopoly and property owners determine the rules that apply on their property. Moreover, if the rules that property owners enforce are subject to rules contained in the monopolistic *"general libertarian law code"* (for example, that they cannot ban the sale and purchase of certain products — such as defence — on their own territory) then "anarcho"-capitalism **definitely** meets the Weberian definition of the state (as described by Ayn Rand as an institution *"that holds the exclusive*



Bookchin went on to note that capitalism existed *"with growing significance in the mixed economy of the West from the fourteenth century up to the seventeenth"* but that it *"literally exploded into being in Europe, particularly England, during the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181] The question arises, what lay behind this *"growing significance"*? Did capitalism *"explode"* due to its inherently more efficient nature or where there other, non-economic, forces at work? As we will show, it was most definitely the second — capitalism was born not from economic forces but from the political actions of the social elites which its usury enriched. Unlike artisan (simple commodity) production, wage labour generates inequalities and wealth for the few and so will be selected, protected and encouraged by those who control the state in their own economic and social interests.

The development of capitalism in Europe was favoured by two social elites, the rising capitalist class within the degenerating medieval cities and the absolutist state. The medieval city was *"thoroughly changed by the gradual increase in the power of commercial capital, due primarily to foreign trade ... By this the inner unity of the commune was loosened, giving place to a growing caste system and leading necessarily to a progressive inequality of social interests. The privileged minorities pressed ever more definitely towards a centralisation of the political forces of the community... Mercantilism in the perishing city republics led logically to a demand for larger economic units [i.e. to nationalise the market]; and by this the desire for stronger political forms was greatly strengthened ... Thus the city gradually became a small state, paving the way for the coming national state."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Nationalism and Culture**, p. 94] Kropotkin stressed that in this destruction of communal self-organisation the state not only served the interests of the rising capitalist class but also its own. Just as the landlord and capitalist seeks a workforce and labour market made up of atomised and isolated individuals, so does the state seek to eliminate all potential rivals to

create or impose capitalism onto an unwilling population. All we can do is provide a glimpse into the brutal history of capitalism and provide enough references for those interested to pursue the issue further. The first starting point should be Part VIII (*"So-Called Primitive Accumulation"*) of volume 1 of Marx's **Capital**. This classic account of the origins of capitalism should be supplemented by more recent accounts, but its basic analysis is correct. Marxist writers have expanded on Marx's analysis, with Maurice Dobb's **Studies in the Development of Capitalism** and David McNally's **Against the Market** are worth consulting, as is Michael Perelman's **The Invention of Capitalism**. Kropotkin's **Mutual Aid** has a short summary of state action in destroying communal institutions and common ownership of land, as does his **The State: It's Historic Role**. Rudolf Rocker's **Nationalism and Culture** is also essential reading. Individualist Anarchist Kevin Carson's **Studies in Mutualist Political Economy** provides an excellent summary (see part 2, *"Capitalism and the State: Past, Present and Future"*) as does his essay **The Iron Fist behind the Invisible Hand**.

## F.8.1 What social forces lay behind the rise of capitalism?

Capitalist society is a relatively recent development. For Marx, while markets have existed for millennium *"the capitalist era dates from the sixteenth century."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 876] As Murray Bookchin pointed out, for a *"long era, perhaps spanning more than five centuries,"* capitalism *"coexisted with feudal and simple commodity relationships"* in Europe. He argues that this period *"simply cannot be treated as 'transitional' without reading back the present into the past."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 179] In other words, capitalism was not a inevitable outcome of "history" or social evolution.



*power to **enforce** certain rules of conduct in a given geographical area"* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 239]) as its "law code" overrides the desires of property owners to do what they like on their own property.

Therefore, no matter how you look at it, "anarcho"-capitalism and its "defence" market promotes a *"monopoly of ultimate decision making power"* over a *"given territorial area"*. It is obvious that for anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist system is a state system. And, as we note, a reasonable case can be made for it also being a state in the "anarcho"-capitalist sense as well. So, in effect, "anarcho"-capitalism has a **different** sort of state, one in which bosses hire and fire the policeman. As anarchist Peter Sabatini notes:

> *"Within [right] Libertarianism, Rothbard represents a minority perspective that actually argues for the total elimination of the state. However Rothbard's claim as an anarchist is quickly voided when it is shown that he only wants an end to the public state. In its place he allows countless private states, with each person supplying their own police force, army, and law, or else purchasing these services from capitalist vendors ... Rothbard sees nothing at all wrong with the amassing of wealth, therefore those with more capital will inevitably have greater coercive force at their disposal, just as they do now."* [**Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**]

Far from wanting to abolish the state, then, "anarcho"-capitalists only desire to privatise it — to make it solely accountable to capitalist wealth. Their "companies" perform the same services as the state, for the same people, in the same manner. However, there is one slight difference. Property owners would be able to select between competing companies for their "services." Because such "companies" are employed

by the boss, they would be used to reinforce the totalitarian nature of capitalist firms by ensuring that the police and the law they enforce are not even slightly accountable to ordinary people. Looking beyond the "defence association" to the defence market itself (as we argued in the last section), this will become a cartel and so become some kind of public state. The very nature of the private state, its need to co-operate with others in the same industry, push it towards a monopoly network of firms and so a monopoly of force over a given area. Given the assumptions used to defend "anarcho"-capitalism, its system of private statism will develop into public statism — a state run by managers accountable only to the share-holding elite.

To quote Peter Marshall again, the "anarcho"-capitalists *"claim that all would benefit from a free exchange on the market, it is by no means certain; any unfettered market system would most likely sponsor a reversion to an unequal society with defence associations perpetuating exploitation and privilege."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 565] History, and current practice, prove this point.

In short, "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists at all, they are just capitalists who desire to see private states develop — states which are strictly accountable to their paymasters without even the sham of democracy we have today. Hence a far better name for "anarcho"-capitalism would be "private-state" capitalism. At least that way we get a fairer idea of what they are trying to sell us. Bob Black put it well: *"To my mind a right-wing anarchist is just a minarchist who'd abolish the state to his own satisfaction by calling it something else ... They don't denounce what the state does, they just object to who's doing it."* [*"The Libertarian As Conservative"*, **The Abolition of Work and Other Essays**, p. 144]



In summary, like other apologists for capitalism, right-wing "libertarians" advocate that system without acknowledging the means that were necessary to create it. They tend to equate it with any market system, failing to understand that it is a specific kind of market system where labour itself is a commodity. It is ironic, of course, that most defenders of capitalism stress the importance of markets (which have pre-dated capitalism) while downplaying the importance of wage labour (which defines it) along with the violence which created it. Yet as both anarchists and Marxists have stressed, money and commodities do not define capitalism any more than private ownership of the means of production. So it is important to remember that from a socialist perspective capitalism is **not** identical to the market. As we stressed in section C.2, both anarchists and Marxists argue that where people produce for themselves, is not capitalist production, i.e. when a worker sells commodities this is not capitalist production. Thus the supporters of capitalism fail to understand that a great deal of state coercion was required to transform pre-capitalist societies of artisans and peasant farmers selling the produce of their labour into a capitalist society of wage workers selling themselves to bosses, bankers and landlords.

Lastly, it should be stressed that this process of primitive accumulation is not limited to private capitalism. State capitalism has also had recourse to such techniques. Stalin's forced collectivisation of the peasantry and the brutal industrialisation involved in five-year plans in the 1930s are the most obvious example). What took centuries in Britain was condensed into decades in the Soviet Union and other state capitalist regimes, with a corresponding impact on its human toil. However, we will not discuss these acts of state coercion here as we are concerned primarily with the actions required to create the conditions required for private capitalism.

Needless to say, this section cannot hope to go into all the forms of state intervention across the globe which were used to

nomically correct way. As it was, the neo-classical economists who did oversee the transition ensured that ownership and control transferred directly to a new ruling class rather than waste time issuing "shares" which would eventually end up in a few hands due to market forces (the actual way it was done could be considered a modern form of "primitive accumulation" as it ensured that capital goods did not end up in the hands of the workers).

But this is beside the point. The fact remains that state action was required to create and maintain capitalism. Without state support it is doubtful that capitalism would have developed at all. So the only "capitalism" that has existed is a product of state support and intervention, and it has been characterised by markets that are considerably less than free. Thus, serious supporters of truly free markets (like the American Individualist Anarchists) have not been satisfied with "capitalism" — have, in fact, quite rightly and explicitly opposed it. Their vision of a free society has always been at odds with the standard capitalist one, a fact which "anarcho"-capitalists bemoan and dismiss as "mistakes" and/or the product of "bad economics." Apparently the net effect of all this state coercion has been, essentially, null. It has **not**, as the critics of capitalism have argued, fundamentally shaped the development of the economy as capitalism would have developed naturally by itself. Thus an economy marked by inequalities of wealth and power, where the bulk of the population are landless and resourceless and where interest, rent and profits are extracted from the labour of working people would have developed anyway regardless of the state coercion which marked the rise of capitalism and the need for a subservient and dependent working class by the landlords and capitalists which drove these policies simply accelerated the process towards "economic liberty." However, it is more than mere coincidence that capitalism and state coercion are so intertwined both in history and in current practice.



# F.7 How does the history of "anarcho"-capitalism show that it is not anarchist?

Of course, "anarcho"-capitalism does have historic precedents and "anarcho"-capitalists spend considerable time trying to co-opt various individuals into their self-proclaimed tradition of "anti-statist" liberalism. That, in itself, should be enough to show that anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism have little in common as anarchism developed in opposition to liberalism and its defence of capitalism. Unsurprisingly, these "anti-state" liberals tended to, at best, refuse to call themselves anarchists or, at worse, explicitly deny they were anarchists.

One "anarcho"-capitalist overview of their tradition is presented by David M. Hart. His perspective on anarchism is typical of the school, noting that in his essay anarchism or anarchist *"are used in the sense of a political theory which advocates the maximum amount of individual liberty, a necessary condition of which is the elimination of governmental or other organised force."* [*"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part I"*, pp. 263–290, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. V, no. 3, p. 284] Yet anarchism has **never** been solely concerned with abolishing the state. Rather, anarchists have always raised economic and social demands and goals along with their opposition to the state. As such, anti-statism may be a necessary condition to be an anarchist, but not a sufficient one to count a specific individual or theory as anarchist.

Specifically, anarchists have turned their analysis onto private property noting that the hierarchical social relationships created by inequality of wealth (for example, wage labour) restricts individual freedom. This means that if we do seek *"the maximum of individual liberty"* then our analysis cannot be limited to just the state or government. Thus a libertarian critique of private property is an essential aspect of anarchism. Consequently, to limit anarchism as Hart does requires substantial rewriting of history, as can be seen from his account of William Godwin.

Hart tries to co-opt of William Godwin into the ranks of "anti-state" liberalism, arguing that he *"defended individualism and the right to property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 265] He, of course, quotes from Godwin to support his claim yet strangely truncates Godwin's argument to exclude his conclusion that *"[w]hen the laws of morality shall be clearly understood, their excellence universally apprehended, and themselves seen to be coincident with each man's private advantage, the idea of property in this sense will remain, but no man will have the least desire, for purposes of ostentation or luxury, to possess more than his neighbours."* In other words, personal property (possession) would still exist but not private property in the sense of capital or inequality of wealth. For Godwin, *"it follows, upon the principles of equal and impartial justice, that the good things of the world are a common stock, upon which one man has a valid a title as another to draw for what he wants."* [**An Enquiry into Political Justice**, p. 199 and p. 703] Rather than being a liberal Godwin moved beyond that limited ideology to provide the first anarchist critique of private property and the authoritarian social relationships it created. His vision of a free society would, to use modern terminology, be voluntary (***libertarian***) communism.

This analysis is confirmed in book 8 of Godwin's classic work, entitled ***"On Property."*** Needless to say, Hart fails to mention this analysis, unsurprisingly as it was later reprinted



*In a deep sense, getting rid of the socialist state requires that state to perform one final, swift, glorious act of self-immolation, after which it vanishes from the scene."* (compare to Engels' comment that *"the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society"* is the state's *"last independent act as a state."* [**Selected Works**, p. 424]). He considered the *"capital goods built by the State"* as being *"philosophically unowned"* yet failed to note whose labour was exploited and taxed to build them in the first place (needless to say, he rejected the ideas of shares to all as this would be *"egalitarian handouts ... to undeserving citizens,"* presumably the ill, the unemployed, retirees, mothers, children, and future generations). [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 213, p. 212 and p. 209]

Industrial plants would be transferred to workers currently employed there, but not by their own direct action and direct expropriation. Rather, the state would do so. This is understandable as, left to themselves, the workers may not act quite as he desired. Thus we see him advocating the transfer of industry from the state bureaucracy to workers by means of *"private, negotiable shares"* as ownership was *"not to be granted to collectives or co-operatives or workers or peasants holistically, which would only bring back the ills of socialism in a decentralised and chaotic syndicalist form."* His "homesteading" was not to be done by the workers themselves rather it was a case of *"granting shares to workers"* by the state. He also notes that it should be a *"priority"* for the government *"to return all stolen, confiscated property to its original owners, or to their heirs."* This would involve *"finding original landowners"* — i.e., the landlord class whose wealth was based on exploiting the serfs and peasants. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210 and pp. 211–2] Thus expropriated peasants would have their land returned but not, apparently, any peasants working land which had been taken from their feudal and aristocratic overlords by the state. Thus those who had just been freed from Stalinist rule would have been subjected to "libertarian" rule to ensure that the transition was done in the eco-

*tees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 875] As for the other side of the class divide, they desired to be "left alone" to exercise their power over others as we will see. That modern "capitalism" is, in effect, a kind of "corporate mercantilism," with states providing the conditions that allow corporations to flourish (e.g. tax breaks, subsidies, bailouts, anti-labour laws, etc.) says more about the statist roots of capitalism than the ideologically correct definition of capitalism used by its supporters.

In fact, if we look at the role of the state in creating capitalism we could be tempted to rename "anarcho"-capitalism "marxian-capitalism". This is because, given the historical evidence, a political theory can be developed by which the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" is created and that this capitalist state "withers away" into "anarchy". That this means replacing the economic and social ideas of Marxism and their replacement by their direct opposite should not mean that we should reject the idea (after all, that is what "anarcho"-capitalism has done to Individualist Anarchism!). But we doubt that many "anarcho"-capitalists will accept such a name change (even though this would reflect their politics far better; after all they do not object to past initiations of force, just current ones and many do seem to think that the modern state **will** wither away due to market forces).

This is suggested by the fact that Rothbard did not advocate change from below as the means of creating "anarchy." He helped found the so-called Libertarian Party in 1971 which, like Marxists, stands for political office. With the fall of Stalinism in 1989, Rothbard faced whole economies which could be "homesteaded" and he argued that *"desocialisation"* (i.e., de-nationalisation as, like Leninists, he confused socialisation with nationalisation) *"necessarily involves the action of that government surrendering its property to its private subjects …*



as a socialist pamphlet. Godwin thought that the *"subject of property is the key-stone that completes the fabric of political justice."* Like Proudhon, he subjected property as well as the state to an anarchist analysis. For Godwin, there were *"three degrees"* of property. The first is possession of things you need to live. The second is *"the empire to which every man is entitled over the produce of his own industry."* The third is *"that which occupies the most vigilant attention in the civilised states of Europe. It is a system, in whatever manner established, by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry."* He notes that it is *"clear therefore that the third species of property is in direct contradiction to the second."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 701 and p. 710–2] The similarities with Proudhon's classic analysis of private property are obvious (and it should be stressed that the two founders of the anarchist tradition independently reached the same critique of private property).

Godwin, unlike classical liberals, saw the need to *"point out the evils of accumulated property,"* arguing that the *"spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud … are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement."* Thus private property harms the personality and development those subjected to the authoritarian social relationships it produces, for *"accumulation brings home a servile and truckling spirit"* and such accumulated property *"treads the powers of thought in the dust, extinguishes the sparks of genius, and reduces the great mass of mankind to be immersed in sordid cares."* This meant that the *"feudal spirit still survives that reduced the great mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle for the service of a few."* Like the socialist movement he inspired, Godwin argued that *"it is to be considered that this injustice, the unequal distribution of property, the grasping and selfish spirit of individuals, is to be regarded as one of the original sources of government, and, as it rises in its excesses, is continually demanding and necessitating new injustice, new penalties and new slavery."* He

stressed, *"let it never be forgotten that accumulated property is usurpation"* and considered the evils produced by monarchies, courts, priests, and criminal laws to be *"imbecile and impotent compared to the evils that arise out of the established administration of property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 732, p. 725, p. 730, p. 726, pp. 717–8, p. 718 and p. 725]

Unsurprisingly given this analysis, Godwin argued against the current system of property and in favour of *"the justice of an equal distribution of the good things of life."* This would be based on *"[e]quality of conditions, or, in other words, an equal admission to the means of improvement and pleasure"* as this *"is a law rigorously enjoined upon mankind by the voice of justice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 725 and p. 736] Thus his anarchist ideas were applied to private property, noting like subsequent anarchists that economic inequality resulted in the loss of liberty for the many and, consequently, an anarchist society would see a radical change in property and property rights. As Kropotkin noted, Godwin *"stated in 1793 in a quite definite form the political and economic principle of Anarchism."* Little wonder he, like so many others, argued that Godwin was *"the first theoriser of Socialism without government — that is to say, of Anarchism."* [**Environment and Evolution**, p. 62 and p. 26] For Kropotkin, anarchism was by definition not restricted to purely political issues but also attacked economic hierarchy, inequality and injustice. As Peter Marshall confirms, *"Godwin's economics, like his politics, are an extension of his ethics."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 210]

Godwin's theory of property is significant because it prefigured what was to become standard nineteenth century socialist thought on the matter. In Britain, his ideas influenced Robert Owen and, as a result, the early socialist movement in that country. His analysis of property, as noted, was identical to and predated Proudhon's classic anarchist analysis. As such, to state, as Hart did, that Godwin simply *"concluded that the state was an evil which had to be reduced in power if not elim-*



Needless to say, some governments interfere in the economy more than others. Corporations do not invest in or buy from suppliers based in authoritarian regimes by accident. They do not just happen to be here, passively benefiting from statism and authoritarianism. Rather they choose **between** states to locate in based precisely on the cheapness of the labour supply. In other words, they prefer to locate in dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in Central America and Southeast Asia **because** those regimes interfere in the labour market the most — while, of course, talking about the very "free market" and "economic liberty" those regimes deny to their subjects. For Rothbard, this seems to be just a coincidence or a correlation rather than systematic for the collusion between state and business is the fault, not of capitalism, but simply of particular capitalists. The system, in other words, is pure; only individuals are corrupt. But, for anarchists, the origins of the modern capitalist system lies not in the individual qualities of capitalists as such but in the dynamic and evolution of capitalism itself — a complex interaction of class interest, class struggle, social defence against the destructive actions of the market, individual qualities and so forth. In other words, Rothbard's claims are flawed — they fail to understand capitalism as a **system**, its dynamic nature and the authoritarian social relationships it produces and the need for state intervention these produce and require.

So, when the right suggests that "we" be "left alone," what they mean by "we" comes into clear focus when we consider how capitalism developed. Artisans and peasants were only "left alone" to starve (sometimes not even that, as the workhouse was invented to bring vagabonds to the joy of work), and the working classes of industrial capitalism were only "left alone" outside work and for only as long as they respected the rules of their "betters." As Marx memorably put it, the *"newly freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and all the guaran-*

elsewhere was based on the profits extracted from slave labour and *"much of the profits earned in the northern states were derived from the surplus originating on the southern plantations."* [Perelman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 246] In terms of the wage workers in the North, they have been indirectly exploited by the existence of slavery as the investment this allowed reduced their bargaining power on the market as it reduced their ability to set up business for themselves by increasing the fixed costs of so doing. And what of the investment generated by the exploitation of these wage workers? As Mark Leier points out, the capitalists and landlords *"may have purchased the land and machinery, but this money represented nothing more than the expropriated labour of others."* [**Bakunin**, p. 111] If the land should be returned to those who worked it as Rothbard suggests, why not the industrial empires that were created on the backs of the generations of slaves who worked it? And what of the profits made from the generations of wage slaves who worked on these investments? And what of the investments which these profits allowed? Surely if the land should be given to those who worked it then so must any investments it generated? And assuming that those currently employed can rightly seize their workplaces, what about those previously employed and **their** descendants? Why should they be excluded from the riches their ancestors helped create?

To talk in terms of individuals misses all this and the net result is to ensure that the results of centuries of coercion and theft are undisturbed. This is because it is the working class **as a whole** who have been expropriated and whose labour has been exploited. The actual individuals involved and their descendants would be impossible to identify nor would it be possible to track down how the stolen fruits of their labour were invested. In this way, the class theft of our planet and liberty as well as the products of generations of working class people will continue safely.



*inated completely"* while not noting his analysis of property gives a radically false presentation of his ideas. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 265] However, it does fit into his flawed assertion that anarchism is purely concerned with the state. Any evidence to the contrary is simply ignored.

## F.7.1 Are competing governments anarchism?

No, of course not. Yet according to "anarcho"-capitalism, it is. This can be seen from the ideas of Gustave de Molinari.

Hart is on firmer ground when he argues that the 19th century French economist Gustave de Molinari is the true founder of "anarcho"-capitalism. With Molinari, he argues, *"the two different currents of anarchist thought converged: he combined the political anarchism of Burke and Godwin with the nascent economic anarchism of Adam Smith and Say to create a new forms of anarchism"* that has been called *"anarcho-capitalism, or free market anarchism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Of course, Godwin (like other anarchists) did not limit his anarchism purely to "political" issues and so he discussed *"economic anarchism"* as well in his critique of private property (as Proudhon also did). As such, to artificially split anarchism into political and economic spheres is both historically and logically flawed. While some dictionaries limit "anarchism" to opposition to the state, anarchists did and do not.

The key problem for Hart is that Molinari refused to call himself an anarchist. He did not even oppose government, as Hart himself notes Molinari proposed a system of insurance companies to provide defence of property and *"called these insurance companies 'governments' even though they did not have a monopoly within a given geographical area."* As Hart notes, Molinari was the sole defender of such free-market justice at the time in France. [David M. Hart, *"Gustave de Molinari and the*

*Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part II*", pp. 399–434, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. V, no. 4, p. 415 and p. 411] Molinari was clear that he wanted *"a regime of free government,"* counterpoising *"monopolist or communist governments"* to *"free governments."* This would lead to *"freedom of government"* rather than its abolition (i.e., not freedom **from** government). For Molinari the future would not bring *"the suppression of the state which is the dream of the anarchists ... It will bring the diffusion of the state within society. That is ... 'a free state in a free society.'"* [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 429, p. 411 and p. 422] As such, Molinari can hardly be considered an anarchist, even if "anarchist" is limited to purely being against government.

Moreover, in another sense Molinari was in favour of the state. As we discuss in section F.6, these companies would have a monopoly within a given geographical area — they have to in order to enforce the property owner's power over those who use, but do not own, the property in question. The key contradiction can be seen in Molinari's advocating of company towns, privately owned communities (his term was a *"proprietary company"*). Instead of taxes, people would pay rent and the *"administration of the community would be either left in the hands of the company itself or handled special organisations set up for this purpose."* Within such a regime *"those with the most property had proportionally the greater say in matters which affected the community."* If the poor objected then they could simply leave. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 421–2 and p. 422]

Given this, the idea that Molinari was an anarchist in any form can be dismissed. His system was based on privatising government, not abolishing it (as he himself admitted). This would be different from the current system, of course, as landlords and capitalists would be hiring police directly to enforce their decisions rather than relying on a state which they control indirectly. This system would not be anarchist as can be seen from American history. There capitalists and landlords created their own private police forces and armies, which regu-



Rothbard, in other words, ignores class theft and the accumulative effect of stealing both productive property and the products of the workers who use it. He considered the *"moral indignation"* of socialism arose from the argument *"that the capitalists have stolen the rightful property of the workers, and therefore that existing titles to accumulated capital are unjust."* He argued that given *"this hypothesis, the remainder of the impetus for both Marxism and anarchosyndicalism follow quite logically."* However, Rothbard's "solution" to the problem of past force seems to be (essentially) a justification of existing property titles and not a serious attempt to understand or correct past initiations of force that have shaped society into a capitalist one and still shape it today. This is because he is simply concerned with returning property which has been obviously stolen and can be returned to those who have been directly dispossessed or their descendants (for example, giving land back to peasants or tenant farmers). If this cannot be done then the *"title to that property, belongs properly, justly and ethically to its current possessors."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 52 and p. 57] At best, he allows nationalised property and any corporation which has the bulk of its income coming from the state to be "homesteaded" by their workers (which, according to Rothbard's arguments for the end of Stalinism, means they will get shares in the company). The end result of his theory is to leave things pretty much as they are. This is because he could not understand that the exploitation of the working class was/is collective in nature and, as such, is simply impossible to redress it in his individualistic term of reference.

To take an obvious example, if the profits of slavery in the Southern states of America were used to invest in factories in the Northern states (as they were), does giving the land to the freed slaves in 1865 **really** signify the end of the injustice that situation produced? Surely the products of the slaves work were stolen property just as much as the land was and, as a result, so is any investment made from it? After all, investment

which flows from the collective and interconnected nature of production and investment in any real economy. State action supported by sectors of the capitalist class has, to use economic jargon, positive externalities for the rest. They, in general, benefit from it ***as a class*** just as working class people suffers from it collectively as it limits their available choices to those desired by their economic and political masters (usually the same people). As such, the right-"libertarian" fails to understand the **class** basis of state intervention.

For example, the owners of the American steel and other companies who grew rich and their companies big behind protectionist walls were obviously "bad" bourgeoisie. But were the bourgeoisie who supplied the steel companies with coal, machinery, food, "defence" and so on not also benefiting from state action? And the suppliers of the luxury goods to the wealthy steel company owners, did they not benefit from state action? Or the suppliers of commodities to the workers that laboured in the steel factories that the tariffs made possible, did they not benefit? And the suppliers to these suppliers? And the suppliers to these suppliers? Did not the users of technology first introduced into industry by companies protected by state orders also not benefit? Did not the capitalists who had a large pool of landless working class people to select from benefit from the "land monopoly" even though they may not have, unlike other capitalists, directly advocated it? It increased the pool of wage labour for **all** capitalists and increased their bargaining position/power in the labour market at the expense of the working class. In other words, such a policy helped maintain capitalist market power, irrespective of whether individual capitalists encouraged politicians to vote to create/maintain it. And, similarly, **all** American capitalists benefited from the changes in common law to recognise and protect capitalist private property and rights that the state enforced during the 19th century (see section B.2.5).



larly attacked and murdered union organisers and strikers. As an example, there is Henry Ford's Service Department (private police force):

> *"In 1932 a hunger march of the unemployed was planned to march up to the gates of the Ford plant at Dearborn… The machine guns of the Dearborn police and the Ford Motor Company's Service Department killed [four] and wounded over a score of others… Ford was fundamentally and entirely opposed to trade unions. The idea of working men questioning his prerogatives as an owner was outrageous … [T]he River Rouge plant… was dominated by the autocratic regime of Bennett's service men. Bennett .. organise[d] and train[ed] the three and a half thousand private policemen employed by Ford. His task was to maintain discipline amongst the work force, protect Ford's property [and power], and prevent unionisation… Frank Murphy, the mayor of Detroit, claimed that 'Henry Ford employs some of the worst gangsters in our city.' The claim was well based. Ford's Service Department policed the gates of his plants, infiltrated emergent groups of union activists, posed as workers to spy on men on the line… Under this tyranny the Ford worker had no security, no rights. So much so that any information about the state of things within the plant could only be freely obtained from ex-Ford workers."* [Huw Beynon, **Working for Ford**, pp. 29–30]

The private police attacked women workers handing out pro-union leaflets and gave them *"a severe beating."* At Kansas and Dallas *"similar beatings were handed out to the union men."* This use of private police to control the work force was not unique. General Motors *"spent one million dollars on espionage,*

*employing fourteen detective agencies and two hundred spies at one time [between 1933 and 1936]. The Pinkerton Detective Agency found anti-unionism its most lucrative activity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34 and p. 32] We must also note that the Pinkerton's had been selling their private police services for decades before the 1930s. For over 60 years the Pinkerton Detective Agency had *"specialised in providing spies, agent provocateurs, and private armed forces for employers combating labour organisations."* By 1892 it *"had provided its services for management in seventy major labour disputes, and its 2,000 active agents and 30,000 reserves totalled more than the standing army of the nation."* [Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 55] With this force available, little wonder unions found it so hard to survive in the USA.

Only an "anarcho"-capitalist would deny that this is a private government, employing private police to enforce private power. Given that unions could be considered as "defence" agencies for workers, this suggests a picture of how "anarcho"-capitalism may work in practice radically different from than that produced by its advocates. The reason is simple, it does not ignore inequality and subjects property to an anarchist analysis. Little wonder, then, that Proudhon stressed that it *"becomes necessary for the workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* Anarchism, in other words, would see *"[c]apitalistic and proprietary exploitation stopped everywhere, the wage system abolished"* and so *"the economic organisation [would] replac[e] the governmental and military system."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 227 and p. 281] Clearly, the idea that Proudhon shared the same political goal as Molinari is a joke. He would have dismissed such a system as little more than an updated form of feudalism in which the property owner is sovereign and the workers subjects (also see section B.4).



power of the bosses and should not even think about helping the working class (employed or unemployed). As such, while their advice and rhetoric may have changed, the social role of economists has not. State action was required to dispossess the direct producers from the means of life (particularly the land) and to reduce the real wage of workers so that they have to provide regular work in a obedient manner. In this, it and the capitalists received much advice from the earliest economists as Marxist economic historian Michael Perelman documents in great detail. As he summarises, *"classical political economy was concerned with promoting primitive accumulation in order to foster capitalist development, even though the logic of primitive accumulation was in direct conflict with the classical political economists' purported adherence to the values of laissez-faire."* [**The Invention of Capitalism**, p. 12] The turn to "laissez-faire" was possible because direct state power could be mostly replaced by economic power to ensure the dependency of the working class.

Needless to say, some right-"libertarians" recognise that the state played **some** role in economic life in the rise and development of capitalism. So they contrast "bad" business people (who took state aid) and "good" ones (who did not). Thus Rothbard's comment that Marxists have *"made no particular distinction between 'bourgeoisie' who made use of the state, and bourgeoisie who acted on the free market."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 72] But such an argument is nonsense as it ignores the fact that the "free market" is a network (and defined by the state by the property rights it enforces). This means that state intervention in one part of the economy will have ramifications in other parts, particularly if the state action in question is the expropriation and/or protection of productive resources (land and workplaces) or the skewing of the labour market in favour of the bosses. In other words, the individualistic perspective of "anarcho"-capitalism blinds its proponents to the obvious collective nature of working class exploitation and oppression

ernment has always been an instrument in creating and developing such a system. As one critic of right-"libertarian" ideas put it, Rothbard *"completely overlooks the role of the state in building and maintaining a capitalist economy in the West. Privileged to live in the twentieth century, long after the battles to establish capitalism have been fought and won, Rothbard sees the state solely as a burden on the market and a vehicle for imposing the still greater burden of socialism. He manifests a kind of historical nearsightedness that allows him to collapse many centuries of human experience into one long night of tyranny that ended only with the invention of the free market and its 'spontaneous' triumph over the past. It is pointless to argue, as Rothbard seems ready to do, that capitalism would have succeeded without the bourgeois state; the fact is that all capitalist nations have relied on the machinery of government to create and preserve the political and legal environments required by their economic system."* That, of course, has not stopped him *"critis[ing] others for being unhistorical."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 77–8 and p. 79]

Thus we have a key contradiction within "anarcho"-capitalism. While they bemoan state intervention in the market, their underlying assumption is that it had no real effect on how society has evolved over the centuries. By a remarkable coincidence, the net effect of all this state intervention was to produce a capitalist economy identical in all features as one which would have been produced if society had been left alone to evolve naturally. It does seem strange that state violence would happen to produce the same economic system as that produced by right-"libertarians" and Austrian economists logically deducing concepts from a few basic axioms and assumptions. Even more of a coincidence, these conclusions also happen to be almost exactly the same as what those who have benefited from previous state coercion want to hear — namely, the private property is good, trade unions and strikes are bad, that the state should not interfere with the



Unsurprisingly, Molinari (unlike the individualist anarchists) attacked the jury system, arguing that its obliged people to *"perform the duties of judges. This is pure communism."* People would *"judge according to the colour of their opinions, than according to justice."* [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 409] As the jury system used amateurs (i.e. ordinary people) rather than full-time professionals it could not be relied upon to defend the power and property rights of the rich. As we noted in section F.6.1, Rothbard criticised the individualist anarchists for supporting juries for essentially the same reasons.

But, as is clear from Hart's account, Molinari had little concern that working class people should have a say in their own lives beyond consuming goods and picking bosses. His perspective can be seen from his lament that in those *"colonies where slavery has been abolished without the compulsory labour being replaced with an equivalent quantity of free [sic!] labour [i.e., wage labour], there has occurred the opposite of what happens everyday before our eyes. Simple workers have been seen to exploit in their turn the industrial* ***entrepreneurs,*** *demanding from them wages which bear absolutely no relation to the legitimate share in the product which they ought to receive. The planters were unable to obtain for their sugar a sufficient price to cover the increase in wages, and were obliged to furnish the extra amount, at first out of their profits, and then out of their very capital. A considerable number of planters have been ruined as a result … It is doubtless better that these accumulations of capital should be destroyed than that generations of men should perish [Marx: 'how generous of M. Molinari'] but would it not be better if both survived?"* [quoted by Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 937f]

So workers exploiting capital is the *"opposite of what happens everyday before our eyes"*? In other words, it is normal that entrepreneurs *"exploit"* workers under capitalism? Similarly, what is a *"legitimate share"* which workers *"ought to receive"*? Surely that is determined by the eternal laws of supply and demand and not what the capitalists (or Molinari) thinks is

right? And those poor former slave drivers, they really do deserve our sympathy. What horrors they face from the impositions subjected upon them by their ex-chattels — they had to reduce their profits! How dare their ex-slaves refuse to obey them in return for what their ex-owners think was their *"legitimate share in the produce"*! How *"simple"* these workers were, not understanding the sacrifices their former masters suffer nor appreciating how much more difficult it is for their ex-masters to create *"the product"* without the whip and the branding iron to aid them! As Marx so rightly comments: *"And what, if you please, is this 'legitimate share', which, according to [Molinari's] own admission, the capitalist in Europe daily neglects to pay? Over yonder, in the colonies, where the workers are so 'simple' as to 'exploit' the capitalist, M. Molinari feels a powerful itch to use police methods to set on the right road that law of supply and demand which works automatically everywhere else."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 937f]

An added difficulty in arguing that Molinari was an anarchist is that he was a contemporary of Proudhon, the first self-declared anarchist, and lived in a country with a vigorous anarchist movement. Surely if he was really an anarchist, he would have proclaimed his kinship with Proudhon and joined in the wider movement. He did not, as Hart notes as regards Proudhon:

> *"their differences in economic theory were considerable, and it is probably for this reason that Molinari refused to call himself an anarchist in spite of their many similarities in political theory. Molinari refused to accept the socialist economic ideas of Proudhon .. . in Molinari's mind, the term 'anarchist' was intimately linked with socialist and statist economic views."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 415]

Yet Proudhon's economic views, like Godwin's, flowed from his anarchist analysis and principles. They cannot be



in the first place. It ignores the centuries of state violence required to produce the "free" worker who makes a "voluntary" agreement which is compelled by the social conditions that this created.

The history of state coercion and intervention is inseparable from the history of capitalism: it is contradictory to celebrate the latter while claiming to condemn the former. In practice capitalism has **always** meant intervention in markets to aid business and the rich. That is, what has been called by supporters of capitalism "laissez-faire" was nothing of the kind and represented the political-economic program of a specific fraction of the capitalist class rather than a set of principles of "hands off the market." As individualist anarchist Kevin Carson summaries, *"what is nostalgically called 'laissez-faire' was in fact a system of continuing state intervention to subsidise accumulation, guarantee privilege, and maintain work discipline."* [**The Iron Fist behind the Invisible Hand**] Moreover, there is the apparent unwillingness by such "free market" advocates (i.e. supporters of "free market" capitalism) to distinguish between historically and currently unfree capitalism and the other truly free market economy that they claim to desire. It is common to hear "anarcho"-capitalists point to the state-based capitalist system as vindication of their views (and even more surreal to see them point to **pre**-capitalist systems as examples of their ideology). It should be obvious that they cannot have it both ways.

In other words, Rothbard and other "anarcho"-capitalists treat capitalism as if it were the natural order of things rather than being the product of centuries of capitalist capture and use of state power to further their own interests. The fact that past uses of state power have allowed capitalist norms and assumptions to become the default system by their codification in property law and justified by bourgeois economic does not make it natural. The role of the state in the construction of a capitalist economy cannot be ignored or downplayed as gov-

*modern electronics?"* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 168] Such state interference in the economy is often denounced and dismissed by right-"libertarians" as mercantilism. However, to claim that "mercantilism" is not capitalism makes little sense. Without mercantilism, "proper" capitalism would never have developed, and any attempt to divorce a social system from its roots is ahistoric and makes a mockery of critical thought (particularly as "proper" capitalism turns to mercantilism regularly).

Similarly, it is somewhat ironic when "anarcho"-capitalists and other right "libertarians" claim that they support the freedom of individuals to choose how to live. After all, the working class was not given **that** particular choice when capitalism was developing. Instead, their right to choose their own way of life was constantly violated and denied — and justified by the leading capitalist economists of the time. To achieve this, state violence had one overall aim, to dispossess the labouring people from access to the means of life (particularly the land) and make them dependent on landlords and capitalists to earn a living. The state coercion *"which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production."* [Marx, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 874–5] So to claim that **now** (after capitalism has been created) we get the chance to try and live as we like is insulting in the extreme. The available options we have are not independent of the society we live in and are decisively shaped by the past. To claim we are "free" to live as we like (within the laws of capitalism, of course) is basically to argue that we are able (in theory) to "buy" the freedom that every individual is due from those who have stolen it from us



arbitrarily separated as Hart suggests. So while arguing that *"Molinari was just as much an anarchist as Proudhon,"* Hart forgets the key issue. Proudhon was aware that private property ensured that the proletarian did not exercise *"self-government"* during working hours, i.e. that he was ruled by another. As for Hart claiming that Proudhon had *"statist economic views"* it simply shows how far an "anarcho"-capitalist perspective is from genuine anarchism. Proudhon's economic analysis, his critique of private property and capitalism, flowed from his anarchism and was an integral aspect of it.

By restricting anarchism purely to opposition to the state, Hart is impoverishing anarchist theory and denying its history. Given that anarchism was born from a critique of private property as well as government, this shows the false nature of Hart's claim that *"Molinari was the first to develop a theory of free-market, proprietary anarchism that extended the laws of the market and a rigorous defence of property to its logical extreme."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 415 and p. 416] Hart shows how far from anarchism Molinari was as Proudhon had turned his anarchist analysis to property, showing that *"defence of property"* lead to the oppression of the many by the few in social relationships identical to those which mark the state. Moreover, Proudhon, argued the state would always be required to defend such social relations. Privatising it would hardly be a step forward.

Unsurprisingly, Proudhon dismissed the idea that the laissez faire capitalists shared his goals. *"The school of Say,"* Proudhon argued, was *"the chief focus of counter-revolution next to the Jesuits"* and *"has for ten years past seemed to exist only to protect and applaud the execrable work of the monopolists of money and necessities, deepening more and more the obscurity of a science [economics] naturally difficult and full of complications"* (much the same can be said of "anarcho"-capitalists, incidentally). For Proudhon, *"the disciples of Malthus and of Say, who oppose with all their might any intervention of the State in matters commercial or industrial, do not fail to avail themselves of this seemingly*

*liberal attitude, and to show themselves more revolutionary than the Revolution. More than one honest searcher has been deceived thereby."* However, this apparent "anti-statist" attitude of supporters of capitalism is false as pure free market capitalism cannot solve the social question, which arises because of capitalism itself. As such, it was impossible to abolish the state under capitalism. Thus *"this inaction of Power in economic matters was the foundation of government. What need should we have of a political organisation, if Power once permitted us to enjoy economic order?"* Instead of capitalism, Proudhon advocated the *"constitution of Value,"* the *"organisation of credit,"* the elimination of interest, the *"establishment of workingmen's associations"* and *"the use of a just price."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 225, p. 226 and p. 233]

Clearly, then, the claims that Molinari was an anarchist fail as he, unlike his followers, was aware of what anarchism actually stood for. Hart, in his own way, acknowledges this:

> *"In spite of his protestations to the contrary, Molinari should be considered an anarchist thinker. His attack on the state's monopoly of defence must surely warrant the description of anarchism. His reluctance to accept this label stemmed from the fact that the socialists had used it first to describe a form of non-statist society which Molinari definitely opposed. Like many original thinkers, Molinari had to use the concepts developed by others to describe his theories. In his case, he had come to the same political conclusions as the communist anarchists although he had been working within the liberal tradition, and it is therefore not surprising that the terms used by the two schools were not compatible. It would not be until the latter half of the twentieth century that radical, free-trade liberals would use*



fact *"utterly mistaken; it is a 'fairly tale,' or it is a class theory used to justify the privileges of the upper classes."* [**The State**, pp. 5–6] As Individualist anarchist Kevin Carson summarised as part of his excellent overview of this historic process:

> *"Capitalism has never been established by means of the free market. It has always been established by a revolution from above, imposed by a ruling class with its origins in the Old Regime … by a pre-capitalist ruling class that had been transformed in a capitalist manner. In England, it was the landed aristocracy; in France, Napoleon III's bureaucracy; in Germany, the Junkers; in Japan, the Meiji. In America, the closest approach to a 'natural' bourgeois evolution, industrialisation was carried out by a mercantilist aristocracy of Federalist shipping magnates and landlords."* [*"Primitive Accumulation and the Rise of Capitalism,"* **Studies in Mutualist Political Economy**]

This, the actual history of capitalism, will be discussed in the following sections. So it is ironic to hear right-"libertarians" sing the praises of a capitalism that never existed and urge its adoption by all nations, in spite of the historical evidence suggesting that only state intervention made capitalist economies viable — even in that Mecca of "free enterprise," the United States. As Noam Chomsky argues, *"who but a lunatic could have opposed the development of a textile industry in New England in the early nineteenth century, when British textile production was so much more efficient that half the New England industrial sector would have gone bankrupt without very high protective tariffs, thus terminating industrial development in the United States? Or the high tariffs that radically undermined economic efficiency to allow the United States to develop steel and other manufacturing capacities? Or the gross distortions of the market that created*

> *and serfdom, of modern fraud and exploitation. They have shown how it is nourished by the blood of the worker, and how little by little it has conquered the whole world … Law … has followed the same phases as capital … they have advanced hand in hand, sustaining one another with the suffering of mankind."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 207]

This process is what Karl Marx termed ***"primitive accumulation"*** and was marked by extensive state violence. Capitalism, as he memorably put it, *"comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt"* and the *"starting-point of the development that gave rise both to the wage-labourer and to the capitalist was the enslavement of the worker."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 926 and p. 875] Or, if Kropotkin and Marx seem too committed to be fair, we have John Stuart Mill's summary that the *"social arrangements of modern Europe commenced from a distribution of property which was the result, not of just partition, or acquisition by industry, but of conquest and violence."* [**Principles of Political Economy**, p. 15]

The same can be said of all countries. As such, when supporters of "libertarian" capitalism say they are against the "initiation of force," they mean only **new** initiations of force: for the system they support was born from numerous initiations of force in the past (moreover, it also requires state intervention to keep it going — section D.1 addresses this point in some detail). Indeed, many thinkers have argued that it was precisely this state support and coercion (particularly the separation of people from the land) that played the **key** role in allowing capitalism to develop rather than the theory that *"previous savings"* did so. As left-wing German thinker Franz Oppenheimer (whom Murray Rothbard selectively quoted) argued, *"the concept of a 'primitive accumulation,' or an original store of wealth, in land and in movable property, brought about by means of purely economic forces"* while *"seem[ing] quite plausible"* is in



> *the word 'anarchist' to describe their beliefs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 416]

It should be noted that Proudhon was **not** a communist-anarchist, but the point remains (as an aside, Rothbard also showed his grasp of anarchism by asserting that *"the demented Bakunin"* was a *"leading anarcho-communist,"* who *"emphasised [the lumpenproletariat] in the 1840s."* [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 388 and p. 381] Which would have been impressive as not only did Bakunin become an anarchist in the 1860s, anarcho-communism, as anyone with even a basic knowledge of anarchist history knows, developed after his death nor did Bakunin emphasise the lumpenproletariat as the agent of social change, Rothbardian and Marxian inventions not withstanding). The aims of anarchism were recognised by Molinari as being inconsistent with his ideology. Consequently, he (rightly) refused the label. If only his self-proclaimed followers in the *"latter half of the twentieth century"* did the same then anarchists would not have to bother with them!

It does seem ironic that the founder of "anarcho"-capitalism should have come to the same conclusion as modern day anarchists on the subject of whether his ideas are a form of anarchism or not!

## F.7.2 Is government compatible with anarchism?

Of course not, but ironically this is the conclusion arrived at by Hart's analyst of the British "voluntaryists," particularly Auberon Herbert. Voluntaryism was a fringe part of the right-wing individualist movement inspired by Herbert Spencer, a leading spokesman for free market capitalism in the later half of the nineteenth century. Like Hart, leading "anarcho"-capitalist Hans-Hermann Hoppe believes that Herbert

*"develop[ed] the Spencerian idea of equal freedom to its logically consistent anarcho-capitalist end."* [**Anarcho-Capitalism: An Annotated Bibliography**]

Yet, as with Molinari, there is a problem with presenting this ideology as anarchist, namely that its leading light, Herbert, explicitly rejected the label "anarchist" and called for both a government and a democratic state. Thus, apparently, both state and government are *"logically consistent"* with "anarcho"-capitalism and vice versa!

Herbert was clearly aware of individualist anarchism and distanced himself from it. He argued that such a system would be *"pandemonium."* He thought that we should *"not direct our attacks — as the anarchists do — **against all government** , against government in itself"* but *"only against the overgrown, the exaggerated, the insolent, unreasonable and indefensible forms of government, which are found everywhere today."* Government should be *"strictly limited to its legitimate duties in defence of self-ownership and individual rights."* He stressed that *"we are governmentalists ... formally constituted by the nation, employing in this matter of force the majority method."* Moreover, Herbert knew of, and rejected, individualist anarchism, considering it to be *"founded on a fatal mistake."* [**Essay X: The Principles Of Voluntaryism And Free Life**] He repeated this argument in other words, stating that anarchy was a *"contradiction,"* and that the Voluntaryists *"reject the anarchist creed."* He was clear that they *"believe in a national government, voluntary supported ... and only entrusted with force for protection of person and property."* He called his system of a national government funded by non-coerced contributions *"the Voluntary State."* [*"A Voluntaryist Appeal"*, **Herbert Spencer and the Limits of the State**, Michael W. Taylor (ed.), p. 239 and p. 228] As such, claims that Herbert was an anarchist cannot be justified.

Hart is aware of this slight problem, quoting Herbert's claim that he aimed for *"regularly constituted government,*



# F.8 What role did the state take in the creation of capitalism?

If the "anarcho"-capitalist is to claim with any plausibility that "real" capitalism is non-statist or that it can exist without a state, it must be shown that capitalism evolved naturally, in opposition to state intervention. In reality, the opposite is the case. Capitalism was born from state intervention. In the words of Kropotkin, *"the State .. . and capitalism ... developed side by side, mutually supporting and re-enforcing each other."* [**Anarchism**, p. 181]

Numerous writers have made this point. For example, in Karl Polanyi's flawed masterpiece **The Great Transformation** we read that *"the road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organised and controlled interventionism"* by the state. [p. 140] This intervention took many forms — for example, state support during "mercantilism," which allowed the "manufactures" (i.e. industry) to survive and develop, enclosures of common land, and so forth. In addition, the slave trade, the invasion and brutal conquest of the Americas and other "primitive" nations, and the looting of gold, slaves, and raw materials from abroad also enriched the European economy, giving the development of capitalism an added boost. Thus Kropotkin:

> *"The history of the genesis of capital has already been told by socialists many times. They have described how it was born of war and pillage, of slavery*

law, as written by *"Libertarian lawyers and jurists."* If they did not they would quickly be labelled "outlaw" agencies and crushed by the others. Ironically, Tucker would join Bakunin and Kropotkin in an "anarchist" court accused to violating "anarchist" law by practising and advocating "occupancy and use" rather than the approved Rothbardian property rights. Even if these democratic "defence" agencies could survive and not be driven out of the market by a combination of lack of investment and violence due to their "outlaw" status, there is another problem. As we discussed in section F.1, landlords and capitalists have a monopoly of decision making power over their property. As such, they can simply refuse to recognise any democratic agency as a legitimate defence association and use the same tactics perfected against unions to ensure that it does not gain a foothold in their domain.

Clearly, then, a "right-wing" anarchism is impossible as any system based on capitalist property rights will simply be an oligarchy run by and for the wealthy. As Rothbard notes, any defence agency based on democratic principles will not survive in the "market" for defence simply because it does not allow the wealthy to control it and its decisions. Little wonder Proudhon argued that laissez-faire capitalism meant *"the victory of the strong over the weak, of those who own property over those who own nothing."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 259]



*generally accepted by all citizens for the protection of the individual."* [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] Like Molinari, Herbert was aware that anarchism was a form of socialism and that the political aims could not be artificially separated from its economic and social aims. As such, he was right **not** to call his ideas anarchism as it would result in confusion (particularly as anarchism was a much larger movement than his). As Hart acknowledges, *"Herbert faced the same problems that Molinari had with labelling his philosophy. Like Molinari, he rejected the term 'anarchism,' which he associated with the socialism of Proudhon and .. . terrorism."* While *"quite tolerant"* of individualist anarchism, he thought they *"were mistaken in their rejections of 'government.'"* However, Hart knows better than Herbert about his own ideas, arguing that his ideology *"is in fact a new form of anarchism, since the most important aspect of the modern state, the monopoly of the use of force in a given area, is rejected in no uncertain terms by both men."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86] He does mention that Benjamin Tucker called Herbert a *"true anarchist in everything but name,"* but Tucker denied that Kropotkin was an anarchist suggesting that he was hardly a reliable guide. [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87] As it stands, it seems that Tucker (unlike other anarchists) was mistaken in his evaluation of Herbert's politics.

While there were similarities between Herbert's position and individualist anarchism, *"the gulf"* between them *"in other respects was unbridgeable"* notes historian Matthew Thomas. *"The primary concern of the individualists was with the preservation of existing property relations and the maintenance of some form of organisation to protect these relations... Such a vestigial government was obviously incompatible with the individualist anarchist desire to abolish the state. The anarchists also demanded sweeping changes in the structure of property relations through the destruction of the land and currency monopolies. This they argued, would create equal opportunities for all. The individualists however rejected this and sought to defend the*

*vested interests of the property-owning classes. The implications of such differences prevented any real alliance."* [**Anarchist Ideas and Counter-Cultures in Britain, 1880–1914**, p. 20] Anarchist William R. McKercher, in his analysis of the libertarian (socialist) movement of late 19th century Britain, concludes (rightly) that Herbert *"was often mistakenly taken as an anarchist"* but *"a reading of Herbert's work will show that he was not an anarchist."* [**Freedom and Authority**, p. 199fn and p. 73fn] The leading British social anarchist journal of the time noted that the *"Auberon Herbertites in England are sometimes called Anarchists by outsiders, but they are willing to compromise with the inequity of government to maintain private property."* [**Freedom**, Vol. II, No. 17, 1888]

Some non-anarchists **did** call Herbert an anarchist. For example, J. A. Hobson, a left-wing liberal, wrote a critique of Herbert's politics called *"A Rich Man's Anarchism."* Hobson argued that Herbert's support for exclusive private property would result in the poor being enslaved to the rich. Herbert, *"by allowing first comers to monopolise without restriction the best natural supplies"* would allow them *"to thwart and restrict the similar freedom of those who come after."* Hobson gave the *"extreme instance"* of an island *"the whole of which is annexed by a few individuals, who use the rights of exclusive property and transmission ... to establish primogeniture."* In such a situation, the bulk of the population would be denied the right to exercise their faculties or to enjoy the fruits of their labour, which Herbert claimed to be the inalienable rights of all. Hobson concluded: *"It is thus that the 'freedom' of a few (in Herbert's sense) involves the 'slavery' of the many."* [quoted by M. W. Taylor, **Men Versus the State**, pp. 248–9] M. W. Taylor notes that *"of all the points Hobson raised ... this argument was his most effective, and Herbert was unable to provide a satisfactory response."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 249]

The ironic thing is that Hobson's critique simply echoed the **anarchist** one and, moreover, simply repeated Proudhon's arguments in **What is Property?**. As such, from an anarchist



> *"There is a strong **a priori** reason for believing that corporations will be superior to co-operatives in any given situation. For if each owner receives only one vote regardless of how much money he has invested in a project (and earnings are divided in the same way), there is no incentive to invest more than the next man; in fact, every incentive is the other way. This hampering of investment militates strongly against the co-operative form."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 125]

So **if** the law is determined and interpreted by defence agencies and courts then it will be done so by those who have invested most in these companies. As it is unlikely that the rich will invest in defence firms which do not support their property rights, power, profits and definition of property, it is clear that agencies which favour the wealthy will survive on the market. The idea that market demand will counter this class rule seems unlikely, given Rothbard's own argument. In order to compete successfully you need more than demand, you need sources of investment. If co-operative defence agencies do form, they will be at a market disadvantage due to lack of investment. As argued in section J.5.12, even though co-operatives are more efficient than capitalist firms lack of investment (caused by the lack of control by capitalists Rothbard notes) stops them replacing wage slavery. Thus capitalist wealth and power inhibits the spread of freedom in production. If we apply Rothbard's argument to his own system, we suggest that the market in "defence" will also stop the spread of more libertarian associations thanks to capitalist power and wealth. In other words, like any market, Rothbard's "defence" market will simply reflect the interests of the elite, not the masses.

Moreover, we can expect any democratic defence agency (like a union) to support, say, striking workers or squatting tenants, to be crushed. This is because, as Rothbard stresses, **all** "defence" firms would be expected to apply the *"common"*

> *"It would, in fact, be competing at a severe disadvantage, having been established on the principle of 'democratic voting.' Looked at as a market phenomenon, 'democratic voting' (one vote per person) is simply the method of the consumer 'co-operative.' Empirically, it has been demonstrated time and again that co-operatives cannot compete successfully against stock-owned companies, especially when both are equal before the law. There is no reason to believe that co-operatives for defence would be any more efficient. Hence, we may expect the old co-operative government to 'wither away' through loss of customers on the market, while joint-stock (i.e., corporate) defence agencies would become the prevailing market form."* [**Power and Market**, p. 125]

Notice how he assumes that both a co-operative and corporation would be *"equal before the law."* But who determines that law? Obviously **not** a democratically elected government, as the idea of "one person, one vote" in determining the common law all are subject to is *"inefficient."* Nor does he think, like the individualist anarchists, that the law would be judged by juries along with the facts. As we note in section F.6.1, he rejected that in favour of it being determined by *"Libertarian lawyers and jurists."* Thus the law is unchangeable by ordinary people and enforced by private defence agencies hired to protect the liberty and property of the owning class. In the case of a capitalist economy, this means defending the power of landlords and capitalists against rebel tenants and workers.

This means that Rothbard's *"common Law Code"* will be determined, interpreted, enforced and amended by corporations based on the will of the majority of shareholders, i.e. the rich. That hardly seems likely to produce equality before the law. As he argues in a footnote:



perspective, Herbert's inability to give a reply was unsurprising given the power of Proudhon's libertarian critique of private property. In fact, Proudhon used a similar argument to Hobson's, presenting *"a colony ... in a wild district"* rather than an island. His argument and conclusions are the same, though, with a small minority becoming *"proprietors of the whole district"* and the rest *"dispossessed"* and *"compelled to sell their birthright."* He concluded by saying *"[i]n this century of bourgeois morality ... the moral sense is so debased that I should not be at all surprised if I were asked, by many a worthy proprietor, what I see in this that is unjust and illegitimate? Debased creature! galvanised corpse! how can I expect to convince you, if you cannot tell robbery when I show it to you?"* [**What is Property?**, pp. 125–7] Which shows how far Herbert's position was from genuine anarchism — and how far "anarcho"-capitalism is.

So, economically, Herbert was not an anarchist, arguing that the state should protect Lockean property rights. Of course, Hart may argue that these economic differences are not relevant to the issue of Herbert's anarchism but that is simply to repeat the claim that anarchism is solely concerned with government, a claim which is hard to support. This position cannot be maintained, particularly given that both Herbert and Molinari defended the right of capitalists and landlords to force their employees and tenants to follow their orders. Their "governments" existed to defend the capitalist from rebellious workers, to break unions, strikes and occupations. In other words, they were a monopoly of the use of force in a given area to enforce the monopoly of power in a given area (namely, the wishes of the property owner). While they may have argued that this was "defence of liberty," in reality it is defence of power and authority.

What about if we just look at the political aspects of his ideas? Did Herbert actually advocate anarchism? No, far from it. He clearly demanded a minimal state based on voluntary taxation. The state would not use force of any kind, *"except*

*for purposes of restraining force."* He argued that in his system, while *"the state should compel no services and exact no payments by force,"* it *"should be free to conduct many useful undertakings … in competition with all voluntary agencies … in dependence on voluntary payments."* [Herbert, **Essay X: The Principles Of Voluntaryism And Free Life**] As such, *"the state"* would remain and unless he is using the term "state" in some highly unusual way, it is clear that he means a system where individuals live under a single elected government as their common law maker, judge and defender within a given territory.

This becomes clearer once we look at how the state would be organised. In his essay **"A Politician in Sight of Haven,"** Herbert does discuss the franchise, stating it would be limited to those who paid a voluntary *"income tax"* and anyone *"paying it would have the right to vote; those who did not pay it would be — as is just — without the franchise. There would be no other tax."* The law would be strictly limited, of course, and the *"government … must confine itself simply to the defence of life and property, whether as regards internal or external defence."* In other words, Herbert was a minimal statist, with his government elected by a majority of those who choose to pay their income tax and funded by that (and by any other voluntary taxes they decided to pay). Whether individuals and companies could hire their own private police in such a regime is irrelevant in determining whether it is an anarchy.

This can be best seen by comparing Herbert with Ayn Rand. No one would ever claim Rand was an anarchist, yet her ideas were extremely similar to Herbert's. Like Herbert, Rand supported laissez-faire capitalism and was against the "initiation of force." Like Herbert, she extended this principle to favour a government funded by voluntary means [*"Government Financing in a Free Society,"* **The Virtue of Selfishness**, pp. 116–20] Moreover, like Herbert, she explicitly denied being an anarchist and, again like Herbert, thought the idea of competing defence agencies ("governments") would result in chaos. The



according to David Wieck, *"results in a conception that is entirely outside the mainstream of anarchist theoretical writings or social movements … this conjunction is a self-contradiction."* He stressed that *"the main traditions of anarchism are entirely different. These traditions, and theoretical writings associated with them, express the perspectives and the aspirations, and also, sometimes, the rage, of the oppressed people in human society: not only those economically oppressed, although the major anarchist movements have been mainly movements of workers and peasants, but also those oppressed by power in all those social dimensions … including of course that of political power expressed in the state."* In other words, anarchism represents *"a moral commitment"* which Rothbard's position is *"diametrically opposite"* to. [**Anarchist Justice**, p. 215, p. 229 and p. 234]

It is a shame that some academics consider only the word Rothbard uses as relevant rather than the content and its relation to anarchist theory and history. If they did, they would soon realise that the expressed opposition of so many anarchists to "anarcho"-capitalism is something which cannot be ignored or dismissed. In other words, a "right-wing" anarchist cannot and does not exist, no matter how often sections of the right try to use that word to describe their ideology.

The reason is simple. Anarchist economics and politics cannot be artificially separated. They are intrinsically linked. Godwin and Proudhon did not stop their analysis at the state. They extended it the social relationships produced by inequality of wealth, i.e. economic power as well as political power. To see why, we need only consult Rothbard's work. As noted in the last section, for Rothbard the key issue with the "voluntary taxationists" was not who determined the *"body of absolute law"* but rather who enforced it. In his discussion, he argued that a democratic "defence agency" is at a disadvantage in his "free market" system. As he put it:

notes that with Molinari's death in 1912, *"liberal anti-statism virtually disappeared until it was rediscovered by the economist Murray Rothbard in the late 1950's"* [*"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part III"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88] While this fringe is somewhat bigger than previously, the fact remains that the ideas expounded by Rothbard are just as alien to the anarchist tradition as Molinari's. It is a shame that Rothbard, like his predecessors, did not call his ideology something other than anarchism. Not only would it have been more accurate, it would also have lead to much less confusion and no need to write this section of the FAQ! It is a testament to their lack of common sense that Rothbard and other "anarcho"-capitalists failed to recognise that, given a long-existing socio-political theory and movement called anarchism, they could not possibly call themselves "anarchists" without conflating of their own views with those of the existing tradition. Yet rather than introducing a new term into political vocabulary (or using Molinari's terminology) they preferred to try fruitlessly to appropriate a term used by others. They seemed to have forgotten that political vocabulary and usage are path dependent. Hence we get subjected to articles which talk about the new "anarchism" while trying to disassociate "anarcho"-capitalism from the genuine anarchism found in media reports and history books. As it stands, the only reason why "anarcho"-capitalism is considered a form of "anarchism" by some is because one person (Rothbard) decided to steal the name of a well established and widespread political and social theory and movement in the 1950s and apply it to an ideology with little, if anything, in common with it.

As Hart inadvertently shows, it is not a firm base to build a claim. That anyone can consider "anarcho"-capitalism as anarchist simply flows from a lack of knowledge about anarchism — as numerous anarchists have argued. For example, *"Rothbard's conjunction of anarchism with capitalism,"*



similarities with Herbert are clear, yet no "anarcho"-capitalist would claim that Rand was an anarchist, yet some do claim that Herbert was.

This position is, of course, deeply illogical and flows from the non-anarchist nature of "anarcho"-capitalism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Rothbard discusses the ideas of the "voluntaryists" he fails to address the key issue of who determines the laws being enforced in society. For Rothbard, the key issue was **who** is enforcing the law, not where that law comes from (as long, of course, as it is a law code he approved of). The implications of this is significant, as it implies that "anarchism" need not be opposed to either the state nor government! This can be clearly seen from Rothbard's analysis of Herbert's voluntary taxation position.

Rothbard, correctly, notes that Herbert advocated voluntary taxation as the means of funding a state whose basic role was to enforce Lockean property rights. The key point of his critique was **not** who determines the law but who enforces it. For Rothbard, it should be privatised police and courts and he suggests that the *"voluntary taxationists have never attempted to answer this problem; they have rather stubbornly assumed that no one would set up a competing defence agency within a State's territorial limits."* If the state **did** bar such firms, then that system is not a genuine free market. However, *"if the government **did** permit free competition in defence service, there would soon no longer be a central government over the territory. Defence agencies, police and judicial, would compete with one another in the same uncoerced manner as the producers of any other service on the market."* [**Power and Market**, p. 122 and p. 123]

Obviously this misses the point totally. What Rothbard ignores is who determines the laws which these private "defence" agencies would enforce. If the laws are made by a central government then the fact that citizen's can hire private police and attend private courts does not stop the regime being statist. We can safely assume Rand, for example, would have had no

problem with companies providing private security guards or the hiring of private detectives within the context of her minimal state. Ironically, Rothbard stresses the need for such a monopoly legal system:

> *"While 'the government' would cease to exist, the same cannot be said for a constitution or a rule of law, which, in fact, would take on in the free society a far more important function than at present. For the freely competing judicial agencies would have to be guided by a body of absolute law to enable them to distinguish objectively between defence and invasion. This law, embodying elaborations upon the basic injunction to defend person and property from acts of invasion, would be codified in the basic legal code. Failure to establish such a code of law would tend to break down the free market, for then defence against invasion could not be adequately achieved."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123–4]

So if you violate the *"absolute law"* defending (absolute) property rights then you would be in trouble. The problem now lies in determining who sets that law. For Rothbard, as we noted in section F.6.1, his system of monopoly laws would be determined by judges, Libertarian lawyers and jurists. The "voluntaryists" proposed a different solution, namely a central government elected by the majority of those who voluntarily decided to pay an income tax. In the words of Herbert:

> *"We agree that there must be a central agency to deal with crime — an agency that defends the liberty of all men, and employs force against the uses of force; but my central agency rests upon voluntary support, whilst Mr. Levy's central agency rests on compulsory support."* [quoted by Carl Watner, *"The English*



Tucker called his ideas *"socialism"* and presented a left-wing critique of most aspects of liberalism, particularly its Lockean based private property rights. Tucker based much of his ideas on property on Proudhon, so if Hart dismisses the latter as a socialist then this must apply to Tucker as well. Given that he notes that there are *"two main kinds of anarchist thought,"* namely *"communist anarchism which denies the right of an individual to seek profit, charge rent or interest and to own property"* and a *"'right-wing' proprietary anarchism, which vigorously defends these rights"* then Tucker, like Godwin, would have to be placed in the *"left-wing"* camp. [*"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part II"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 427] Tucker, after all, argued that he aimed for the end of profit, interest and rent and attacked private property in land and housing beyond "occupancy and use." It is a shame that Hart was so ignorant of anarchism to ignore all the other forms of anarchism which, while anti-capitalist, were not communist.

As has been seen, Hart's account of the history of "anti-state" liberalism is flawed. Godwin is included only by ignoring his views on property, views which in many ways reflects the later "socialist" (i.e. anarchist) analysis of Proudhon. He then discusses a few individuals who were alone in their opinions even within the extreme free market right and all of whom knew of anarchism and explicitly rejected that name for their respective ideologies. In fact, they preferred the term *"government"* or *"state"* to describe their systems which, on the face of it, would be hard to reconcile with the usual "anarcho"-capitalist definition of anarchism as being "no government" or simply "anti-statism." Hart's discussion of individualist anarchism is equally flawed, failing to discuss their economic views (just as well, as its links to "left-wing" anarchism would be obvious).

However, the similarities of Molinari's views with what later became known as "anarcho"-capitalism are clear. Hart

*in Hobbes's more important sense of the latter term. One might better, and less confusingly, call this a libertarian state than an anarchy."* [**Anarchist Justice**, pp. 216–7]

The obvious recipients of the coercion of the new state would be those who rejected the authority of their bosses and landlords, those who reject the Lockean property rights Rothbard and Herbert hold dear. In such cases, the rebels and any "defence agency" (like, say, a union) which defended them would be driven out of business as it violated the law of the land. How this is different from a state banning competing agencies is hard to determine. This is a *"difficulty"* argues Wieck, which *"results from the attachment of a principle of private property, and of unrestricted accumulation of wealth, to the principle of individual liberty. This increases sharply the possibility that many reasonable people who respect their fellow men and women will find themselves outside the law because of dissent from a property interpretation of liberty."* Similarly, there are the economic results of capitalism. *"One can imagine,"* Wieck continues, *"that those who lose out badly in the free competition of Rothbard's economic system, perhaps a considerable number, might regard the legal authority as an alien power, a state for them, based on violence, and might be quite unmoved by the fact that, just as under nineteenth century capitalism, a principle of liberty was the justification for it all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 217 and pp. 217–8]

## F.7.3 Can there be a "right-wing" anarchism?

In a word, no. This can be seen from "anarcho"-capitalism itself as well as its attempts to co-opt the US individualist anarchists into its family tree.

Hart mentions the individualist anarchists, calling Tucker's ideas *"**laissez faire** liberalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87] However,



*Individualists As They Appear In Liberty,"* pp. 191–211, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, p. 194]

And all Rothbard is concerned over private cops would exist or not! This lack of concern over the existence of the state and government flows from the strange fact that "anarcho"-capitalists commonly use the term "anarchism" to refer to any philosophy that opposes all forms of initiatory coercion. Notice that government does not play a part in this definition, thus Rothbard can analyse Herbert's politics without commenting on who determines the law his private "defence" agencies enforce. For Rothbard, *"an anarchist society"* is defined *"as one where there is no legal possibility for coercive aggression against the person and property of any individual."* He then moved onto the state, defining that as an *"institution which possesses one or both (almost always both) of the following properties: (1) it acquires its income by the physical coercion known as 'taxation'; and (2) it acquires and usually obtains a coerced monopoly of the provision of defence service (police and courts) over a given territorial area."* [**Society without a State**, p. 192]

This is highly unusual definition of "anarchism," given that it utterly fails to mention or define government. This, perhaps, is understandable as any attempt to define it in terms of *"monopoly of decision-making power"* results in showing that capitalism is statist (see section F.1 for a summary). The key issue here is the term *"legal possibility."* That suggestions a system of laws which determine what is *"coercive aggression"* and what constitutes what is and what is not legitimate "property." Herbert is considered by some "anarcho"-capitalists as one of them. Which brings us to a strange conclusion that, for "anarcho"-capitalists you can have a system of "anarchism" in which there is a government and state — as long as the state does not impose taxation nor stop private police forces from operating!

As Rothbard argues *"if a government based on voluntary taxation permits free competition, the result will be the purely free-market system ... The previous government would now simply be one competing defence agency among many on the market."* [**Power and Market**, p. 124] That the government is specifying what is and is not legal does not seem to bother him or even cross his mind. Why should it, when the existence of government is irrelevant to his definition of anarchism and the state? That private police are enforcing a monopoly law determined by the government seems hardly a step in the right direction nor can it be considered as anarchism. Perhaps this is unsurprising, for under his system there would be *"a basic, common Law Code"* which *"all would have to abide by"* as well as *"some way of resolving disputes that will gain a majority consensus in society ... whose decision will be accepted by the great majority of the public."* [**"Society without a State,"**, p. 205]

That this is simply a state under a different name can be seen from looking at other right-wing liberals. Milton Friedman, for example, noted (correctly) that the *"consistent liberal is not an anarchist."* He stated that government *"is essential"* for providing a *"legal framework"* and provide *"the definition of property rights."* In other words, to *"determine, arbitrate and enforce the rules of the game."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 34, p. 15, p. 25, p. 26 and p. 27] For Ludwig von Mises *"liberalism is not anarchism, nor has it anything whatsoever to do with anarchism."* Liberalism *"restricts the activity of the state in the economic sphere exclusively to the protection of property."* [**Liberalism**, p. 37 and p. 38] The key difference between these liberals and Rothbard's brand of liberalism is that rather than an elected parliament making laws, "anarcho"-capitalism would have a general law code produced by "libertarian" lawyers, jurists and judges. Both would have laws interpreted by judges. Rothbard's system is also based on a legal framework which would both provide a definition of property rights and determine the rules of



the game. However, the means of enforcing and arbitrating those laws would be totally private. Yet even this is hardly a difference, as it is doubtful if Friedman or von Mises (like Rand or Herbert) would have barred private security firms or voluntary arbitration services as long as they followed the law of the land. The only major difference is that Rothbard's system explicitly excludes the general public from specifying or amending the laws they are subject to and allows (prosperous) judges to interpret and add to the (capitalist) law. Perhaps this dispossession of the general public is the only means by which the minimal state will remain minimal (as Rothbard claimed) and capitalist property, authority and property rights remain secure and sacrosanct, yet the situation where the general public has no say in the regime and the laws they are subjected to is usually called dictatorship, not "anarchy."

At least Herbert is clear that his politics was a governmental system, unlike Rothbard who assumes a monopoly law but seems to think that this is not a government or a state. As David Wieck argued, this is illogical for according to Rothbard *"all 'would have to' conform to the same legal code"* and this can only be achieved by means of *"the forceful action of adherents to the code against those who flout it"* and so *"in his system* ***there would stand over against every individual the legal authority of all the others.*** *An individual who did not recognise private property as legitimate would surely perceive this as a tyranny of law, a tyranny of the majority or of the most powerful — in short, a hydra-headed state. If the law code is itself unitary, then this multiple state might be said to have properly a single head — the law . .. But it looks as though one might still call this 'a state,' under Rothbard's definition, by satisfying* ***de facto*** *one of his pair of sufficient conditions: 'It asserts and usually obtains a coerced monopoly of provision of defence service (police and courts) over a given territorial area' ... Hobbes's individual sovereign would seem to have become many sovereigns — with but one law, however, and in truth, therefore, a single sovereign*

# Introduction to Volume 2

Similar comments are applicable to American supporters of laissez faire who fail to notice that the "traditional" American support for world-wide free trade is quite a recent phenomenon. It started only at the end of the Second World War (although, of course, **within** America military Keynesian policies were utilised). While American industry was developing, the state and capitalist class had no time for laissez-faire (see section F.8.5 for details). After it had grown strong, the United States began preaching laissez-faire to the rest of the world — and began to kid itself about its own history, believing its slogans about laissez-faire as the secret of its success. Yet like all other successful industrialisers, the state could aid capitalists directly and indirectly (via tariffs, land policy, repression of the labour movement, infrastructure subsidy and so on) and it would "leave them alone" to oppress and exploit workers, exploit consumers, build their industrial empires and so forth.

Takis Fotopoules indicates that the social forces at work in "freeing" the market did not represent a "natural" evolution towards freedom:

> *"Contrary to what liberals and Marxists assert, marketisation of the economy was not just an evolutionary process, following the expansion of trade under mercantilism ... modern [i.e. capitalist] markets did not evolve out of local markets and/or markets for foreign goods ... the nation-state, which was just emerging at the end of the Middle Ages, played a crucial role creating the conditions for the 'nationalisation' of the market ... and ... by freeing the market from effective social control."* [*"The Nation-state and the Market"*, pp. 37–80 **Society and Nature**, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 44–45]

The "freeing" of the market means freeing those who "own" most of the market (i.e. the wealthy elite) from *"effective social control,"* but the rest of society was not as lucky.

Kropotkin makes a similar point: *"While giving the capitalist any degree of free scope to amass his wealth at the expense of the helpless labourers, the government has **nowhere** and **never** ... afforded the labourers the opportunity 'to do as they pleased'."* [**Anarchism**, p. 182]

So, the expression "laissez-faire" dates from the period when capitalists were objecting to the restrictions that helped create them in the first place. It has little to do with freedom as such and far more to do with the needs of capitalist power and profits. It should also be remembered that at this time the state was run by the rich and for the rich. Elections, where they took place, involved the wealthiest of male property owners. This meant there were two aspects in the call for laissez-faire. On the one hand, by the elite to eliminate regulations and interventions they found burdensome and felt unnecessary as their social position was secure by their economic power (mercantilism evolved into capitalism proper when market power was usually sufficient to produce dependency and obedience as the working class had been successfully dispossessed from the land and the means of production). On the other, serious social reformers (like Adam Smith) who recognised that the costs of such elite inspired state regulations generally fell on working class people. The moral authority of the latter was used to bolster the desire of the former to maximise their wealth by imposing costs of others (workers, customers, society and the planet's eco-system) with the state waiting in the wings to support them as and when required.

Unsurprising, working class people recognised the hypocrisy of this arrangement (even if most modern-day right-"libertarians" do not and provide their services justifying the actions and desires of repressive and exploitative oligarchs seeking monopolistic positions). They turned to political and social activism seeking to change a system which saw economic and political power reinforce each other. Some (like the Chartists and Marxists) argued for political reforms to gen-



with a "circled-A" clearly on the back of his helmet. Other than this, there is little know about the "circled-A"s origin.

Today the circled-A is one of the most successful images in the whole field of political symbolising. Its *"incredible simplicity and directness led [it] to become the accepted symbol of the restrengthened anarchist movement after the revolt of 1968"* particularly as in many, if not most, of the world's languages the word for anarchy begins with the letter A. [Peter Peterson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 8]

red, social co-operation or solidarity. Thus the red-and-black flag more than any one symbol symbolises the aim of anarchism (*"Liberty of the individual and social co-operation of the whole community"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 102]) as well as its means (*"[t]o make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise themselves. Resistance and the strike are excellent means of organisation for doing this"* and *"the strike develops the sentiment of solidarity."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism: 1872–1186**, p. 255 and p. 256]).

## 3 Where does the circled-A come from?

The circled-A is, perhaps, even more famous than the Black and Red-and-Black flags as an anarchist symbol (probably because it lends itself so well to graffiti). According to Peter Marshall the *"circled-A"* represents Proudhon's maxim *"Anarchy is Order."* [**Demanding the Impossible** p. 558] Peter Peterson also adds that the circle is *"a symbol of unity and determination"* which *"lends support to the off-proclaimed idea of international anarchist solidarity."* [*"Flag, Torch, and Fist: The Symbols of Anarchism"*, **Freedom**, vol. 48, No. 11, pp. 8]

However, the origin of the "circled-A" as an anarchist symbol is less clear. Many think that it started in the 1970s punk movement, but it goes back to a much earlier period. According to Peter Marshall, *"[i]n 1964 a French group,* ***Jeunesse Libertaire****, gave new impetus to Proudhon's slogan 'Anarchy is Order' by creating the circled-A a symbol which quickly proliferated throughout the world."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 445] This is not the earliest sighting of this symbol. On November 25 1956, at its foundation in Brussels, the **Alliance Ouvriere Anarchiste** (AOA) adopted this symbol. Going even further, a BBC documentary on the Spanish Civil War shows an anarchist militia member



eralise democracy into genuine one person, one vote. In this way, political liberty would be used to end the worse excesses of so-called "economic liberty" (i.e., capitalist privilege and power). Others (like mutualists) aimed at economic reforms which ensure that the capitalist class would be abolished by means of genuine economic freedom. Finally, most other anarchists argued that revolutionary change was required as the state and capitalism were so intertwined that both had to be ended at the same time. However, the struggle against state power always came from the general population. As Murray Bookchin argued, it is an error to depict this *"revolutionary era and its democratic aspirations as 'bourgeois,' an imagery that makes capitalism a system more committed to freedom, or even ordinary civil liberties, than it was historically."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 180f] While the capitalist class may have benefited from such popular movements as the English, American and French revolutions but these revolutions were not led, never mind started or fought, by the bourgeoisie.

Not much as changed as capitalists are today seeking maximum freedom from the state to ensure maximum authority over their wage slaves and society. The one essential form of support the "Libertarian" right wants the state (or "defence" firms) to provide capitalism is the enforcement of property rights — the right of property owners to "do as they like" on their own property, which can have obvious and extensive social impacts. What "libertarian" capitalists object to is attempts by others — workers, society as a whole, the state, etc. — to interfere with the authority of bosses. That this is just the defence of privilege and power (and **not** freedom) has been discussed in section B and elsewhere in section F, so we will not repeat ourselves here. Samuel Johnson once observed that *"we hear the loudest* ***yelps*** *for liberty among the drivers of Negroes."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 141] Our modern "libertarian" capitalist drivers of wage-slaves are yelping for exactly the same kind of "liberty."

## F.8.3 What other forms did state intervention in creating capitalism take?

Beyond being a paymaster for new forms of production and social relations as well as defending the owners' power, the state intervened economically in other ways as well. As we noted in section B.2.5, the state played a key role in transforming the law codes of society in a capitalistic fashion, ignoring custom and common law when it was convenient to do so. Similarly, the use of tariffs and the granting of monopolies to companies played an important role in accumulating capital at the expense of working people, as did the breaking of unions and strikes by force.

However, one of the most blatant of these acts was the enclosure of common land. In Britain, by means of the Enclosure Acts, land that had been freely used by poor peasants was claimed by large landlords as private property. As socialist historian E.P. Thompson summarised, *"the social violence of enclosure consisted ... in the drastic, total imposition upon the village of capitalist property-definitions."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 237–8] Property rights, which favoured the rich, replaced the use rights and free agreement that had governed peasants use of the commons. Unlike use rights, which rest in the individual, property rights require state intervention to create and maintain. *"Parliament and law imposed capitalist definitions to exclusive property in land,"* Thompson notes. This process involved ignoring the wishes of those who used the commons and repressing those who objected. Parliament was, of course, run by and for the rich who then simply *"observed the rules which they themselves had made."* [**Customs in Common**, p. 163]

Unsurprisingly, many landowners would become rich through the enclosure of the commons, heaths and downland while many ordinary people had a centuries old right taken



ganising and strikes. Given the clear links and similarities between the collectivist anarchism of the First International (the most famous advocate of which was Bakunin) and anarcho-syndicalism, it is not surprising that they used similar symbols. As Kropotkin argued, *"Syndicalism is nothing other than the rebirth of the International — federalist, worker, Latin."* [quoted by Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 176] So a rebirth of symbols would not be a co-incidence.

Thus the red-and-black flag comes from the experience of anarchists in the labour movement and is particularly, but not exclusively, associated with anarcho-syndicalism. The black represents libertarian ideas and strikes (i.e. direct action), the red represents the labour movement. Over time association with anarcho-syndicalism has become less noted, with many non-syndicalist anarchists happy to use the red-and-black flag (many anarcho-communists use it, for example). It would be a good generalisation to state that social anarchists are more inclined to use the red-and-black flag than individualist anarchists just as social anarchists are usually more willing to align themselves with the wider socialist and labour movements than individualists (in modern times at least). However, both the red and black flags have their roots in the labour movement and working class struggle which suggests that the combination of both flags into one was a logical development. Given that the black **and** red flags were associated with the Lyon uprising of 1831, perhaps the development of the red-and-black flag is not too unusual. Similarly, given that the Black Flag was the *"flag of strikes"* (to quote Louise Michel — see above) its use with the red flag of the labour movement seems a natural development for a movement like anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism which bases itself on direct action and the importance of strikes in the class struggle.

So while associated with anarcho-syndicalism, the red-and-black flag has become a standard anarchist symbol as the years have gone by, with the black still representing anarchy and the

*"workers' flag symbolising their struggle for liberation."* (Hodges refers to Sandino's *"peculiar brand of anarcho-communism"* suggesting that his appropriation of the flag indicated a strong libertarian theme to his politics). [**Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution**, p. 49, p. 137 and p. 19]

This suggests that the red-and-black flag was rediscovered by the Spanish Anarchists in 1931 rather than being invented by them. However, the CNT-FAI seem to have been the first to bisect their flags diagonally black and red (but other divisions, such as horizontally, were also used). In the English speaking world, though, the use of the red-and-black flag by anarchists seems to spring from the world-wide publicity generated by the Spanish Revolution in 1936. With CNT-FAI related information spreading across the world, the use of the CNT inspired diagonally split red-and-black flag also spread until it became a common anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist symbol in all countries.

For some, the red-and-black flag is associated with anarcho-syndicalism more than anarchism. As Albert Meltzer put it, *"[t]he flag of the labour movement (not necessarily only of socialism) is red. The CNT of Spain originated the red-and-black of anarchosyndicalism (anarchism plus the labour movement)."* [**Anarcho-Quiz Book**, p. 50] Donald C. Hodges makes a similar point, when he states that *"[o]n the insignia of the Mexico's House of the World Worker [the Mexican anarcho-syndicalist union], the red band stood for the economic struggle of workers against the proprietary classes, and the black for their insurrectionary struggle."* [**Sandino's Communism**, p. 22]

This does not contradict its earliest uses in Italy and Mexico as those anarchists took it for granted that they should work within the labour movement to spread libertarian ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising we find movements in Mexico and Italy using the same flags. Both were involved in the First International and its anti-authoritarian off-spring. Both, like the Jura Federation in Switzerland, were heavily involved in union or-



away. Land enclosure was a gigantic swindle on the part of large landowners. In the words of one English folk poem written in 1764 as a protest against enclosure:

*They hang the man, and flog the woman,*
*That steals the goose from off the common;*
*But let the greater villain loose,*
*That steals the common from the goose.*

*It should be remembered that the process of enclosure was not limited to just the period of the industrial revolution. As Colin Ward notes,* "in Tudor times, a wave of enclosures by land-owners who sought to profit from the high price of wool had deprived the commoners of their livelihood and obliged them to seek work elsewhere or become vagrants or squatters on the wastes on the edges of villages." *[**Cotters and Squatters**, p. 30] This first wave increased the size of the rural proletariat who sold their labour to landlords. Nor should we forget that this imposition of capitalist property rights did not imply that it was illegal. As Michael Perelman notes, "[f]ormally, this dispossession was perfectly legal. After all, the peasants did not have property rights in the narrow sense. They only had traditional rights. As markets evolved, first land-hungry gentry and later the bourgeoisie used the state to create a legal structure to abrogate these traditional rights."* [**The Invention of Capitalism**, pp. 13–4]

While technically legal as the landlords made the law, the impact of this stealing of the land should not be under estimated. Without land, you cannot live and have to sell your liberty to others. This places those with capital at an advantage, which will tend to increase, rather than decrease, the inequalities in society (and so place the landless workers at an increasing disadvantage over time). This process can be seen from early stages of capitalism. With the enclosure of the land an agricultural workforce was created which had to travel where the work was. This influx of landless ex-peasants into the towns ensured that the traditional guild system

crumbled and was transformed into capitalistic industry with bosses and wage slaves rather than master craftsmen and their journeymen. Hence the enclosure of land played a key role, for *"it is clear that economic inequalities are unlikely to create a division of society into an employing master class and a subject wage-earning class, unless access to the means of production, including land, is by some means or another barred to a substantial section of the community."* [Maurice Dobb, **Studies in Capitalist Development**, p. 253]

The importance of access to land is summarised by this limerick by the followers of Henry George (a 19th century writer who argued for a *"single tax"* and the nationalisation of land). The Georgites got their basic argument on the importance of land down these few, excellent, lines:

*A college economist planned*
*To live without access to land*
*He would have succeeded*
*But found that he needed*
*Food, shelter and somewhere to stand.*

Thus anarchists concern over the *"land monopoly"* of which the Enclosure Acts were but one part. The land monopoly, to use Tucker's words, *"consists in the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150] So it should be remembered that common land did **not** include the large holdings of members of the feudal aristocracy and other landlords. This helped to artificially limit available land and produce a rural proletariat just as much as enclosures.

It is important to remember that wage labour first developed on the land and it was the protection of land titles of landlords and nobility, combined with enclosure, that meant people could not just work their own land. The pressing economic circumstances created by enclosing the land and enforcing property rights to large estates ensured that capitalists did not have to point a gun at people's heads to get them to work



that the insurgents in 1874 were *"decked out in the red and black emblem of the International"* while three years later they were *"prominently displaying the red and black anarchist flag."* [T. R. Ravindranathan, **Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 208 and p. 228] Thus the black-and-red flag, like the black flag, was a recognised symbol of the labour movement (in this case, the Italian section of the First International) before becoming linked to anarchism.

The red-and-black flag was used by anarchists a few years later in Mexico. At an anarchist protest meeting on December 14th, 1879, at Columbus Park in Mexico City *"[s]ome five thousand persons gathered replete with numerous red-and-black flags, some of which bore the inscription 'La Social, Liga International del Jura.' A large black banner bearing the inscription 'La Social, Gran Liga International' covered the front of the speaker's platform."* The links between the Mexican and European anarchist movements were strong, as the *"nineteenth-century Mexican urban labour-movement maintained direct contact with the Jura branch of the ... European-based First International Workingmen's Association and at one stage openly affiliated with it."* [John M. Hart, **Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931**, p. 58 and p. 17] One year after it was founded, the anarchist influenced **Casa del Obrero Mundial** organised Mexico's first May Day demonstration in 1913 and *"between twenty and twenty-five thousand workers gathered behind red and black flags"* in Mexico City. [John Lear, **Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens**, p. 236]

Augusto Sandino, the radical Nicaraguan national liberation fighter was so inspired by the example of the Mexican anarcho-syndicalists that he based his movement's flag on their red-and-black ones (the Sandinista's flag is divided horizontally, rather than diagonally). As historian Donald C. Hodges notes, Sandino's *"red and black flag had an anarcho-syndicalist origin, having been introduced into Mexico by Spanish immigrants."* Unsurprisingly, his flag was considered a

*flag symbolised an attempt to unite the spirit of later anarchism with the mass appeal of the International."* [**Anarchism**, p. 325fn]

According to Abel Paz, anarchist historian and CNT militant in the 1930s, the 1st of May, 1931, was *"the first time in history [that] the red and black flag flew over a CNT-FAI rally."* This was the outcome of an important meeting of CNT militants and anarchist groups to plan the May Day demonstrations in Barcelona. One of the issues to be resolved was *"under what flag to march."* One group was termed the *"Red Flag"* anarchists (who *"put greater emphasis on labour issues"*), the other *"Black Flag"* anarchists (who were *"more distant (at the time) from economic questions"*). However, with the newly proclaimed Republic there were *"tremendous opportunities for mass mobilisations"* which made disagreements on how much emphasis to place on labour issues *"meaningless."* This allowed an accord to be reached with its *"material expression"* being *"making the two flags into one: the black and red flag."* [**Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 206]

However, the red-and-black flag was used by anarchists long before 1931, indeed decades before the CNT was even formed. In fact, it, rather than the black flag, may well have been the first specifically anarchist flag.

The earliest recorded use of the red-and-black colours was during the attempted Bologna insurrection of August 1874 where participants were *"sporting the anarchists' red and black cockade."* [Nunzio Pernicone, **Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892**, p. 93] In April 1877, a similar attempt at provoking rebellion saw anarchists enter the small Italian town of Letino *"wearing red and black cockades"* and carrying a *"red and black banner."* These actions helped to *"captur[e] national attention"* and *"draw considerable notice to the International and its socialist programme."* [Nunzio Pernicone, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 124–5 and pp. 126–7] Significantly, another historian notes



long hours in authoritarian, dehumanising conditions. In such circumstances, when the majority are dispossessed and face the threat of starvation, poverty, homelessness and so on, "initiation of force" is **not required.** But guns **were** required to enforce the system of private property that created the labour market in the first place, to enclosure common land and protect the estates of the nobility and wealthy.

By decreasing the availability of land for rural people, the enclosures destroyed working-class independence. Through these Acts, innumerable peasants were excluded from access to their former means of livelihood, forcing them to seek work from landlords or to migrate to the cities to seek work in the newly emerging factories of the budding industrial capitalists who were thus provided with a ready source of cheap labour. The capitalists, of course, did not describe the results this way, but attempted to obfuscate the issue with their usual rhetoric about civilisation and progress. Thus John Bellers, a 17th-century supporter of enclosures, claimed that commons were *"a hindrance to Industry, and ... Nurseries of Idleness and Insolence."* The *"forests and great Commons make the Poor that are upon them too much like the **indians.**"* [quoted by Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 165] Elsewhere Thompson argues that the commons *"were now seen as a dangerous centre of indiscipline ... Ideology was added to self-interest. It became a matter of public-spirited policy for gentlemen to remove cottagers from the commons, reduce his labourers to dependence."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 242–3] David McNally confirms this, arguing *"it was precisely these elements of material and spiritual independence that many of the most outspoken advocates of enclosure sought to destroy."* Eighteenth-century proponents of enclosure *"were remarkably forthright in this respect. Common rights and access to common lands, they argued, allowed a degree of social and economic independence, and thereby produced a lazy, dissolute mass of rural poor who eschewed honest labour and church attendance ...*

*Denying such people common lands and common rights would force them to conform to the harsh discipline imposed by the market in labour.*" [**Against the Market**, p. 19]

The commons gave working-class people a degree of independence which allowed them to be "insolent" to their betters. This had to be stopped, as it undermined to the very roots of authority relationships within society. The commons **increased** freedom for ordinary people and made them less willing to follow orders and accept wage labour. The reference to "Indians" is important, as the independence and freedom of Native Americans is well documented. The common feature of both cultures was communal ownership of the means of production and free access to it (usufruct). This is discussed further in section I.7 (Won't Libertarian Socialism destroy individuality?). As Bookchin stressed, the factory *"was not born from a need to integrate labour with modern machinery,"* rather it was to regulate labour and make it regular. For the *"irregularity, or 'naturalness,' in the rhythm and intensity of traditional systems of work contributed more towards the bourgeoisie's craze for social control and its savagely anti-naturalistic outlook than did the prices or earnings demanded by its employees. More than any single technical factor, this irregularity led to the rationalisation of labour under a single ensemble of rule, to a discipline of work and regulation of time that yielded the modern factory ... the initial goal of the factory was to dominate labour and destroy the worker's independence from capital."* [**The Ecology of Freedom** p. 406]

Hence the pressing need to break the workers' ties with the land and so the *"loss of this independence included the loss of the worker's contact with food cultivation ... To live in a cottage ... often meant to cultivate a family garden, possibly to pasture a cow, to prepare one's own bread, and to have the skills for keeping a home in good repair. To utterly erase these skills and means of a livelihood from the worker's life became an industrial imperative."* Thus the worker's *"complete dependence on the factory*



while anarchism and the black flag had been linked, at the latest, from the early 1880s, it did not become the definitive anarchist symbol until the 1920s (Carlo Tresca in America was still talking of standing *"beneath the red flag that is the immaculate flag of the anarchist idea"* in 1925. [quoted by Nunzio Pernicone, **Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel**, p. 161]). Before then, anarchists used both it and the red flag as their symbols of choice. After the Russian Revolution, anarchists would still use red in their flags, but only when combined with black. In this way they would not associate themselves with the tyranny of the USSR or the reformism and statism of the mainstream socialist movement.

## 2 Why the red-and-black flag?

The red-and-black flag has been associated with anarchism for some time. Murray Bookchin placed the creation of this flag in Spain:

> *"The presence of black flags together with red ones became a feature of Anarchist demonstrations throughout Europe and the Americas. With the establishment of the CNT, a single flag on which black and red were separated diagonally, was adopted and used mainly in Spain."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 57]

George Woodcock also stressed the Spanish origin of the flag:

> *"The anarcho-syndicalist flag in Spain was black and red, divided diagonally. In the days of the [First] International the anarchists, like other socialist sects, carried the red flag, but later they tended to substitute for it the black flag. The black-and-red*

*Liberty.'"* [Ricardo Flores Magon, **Land and Liberty**, p. 98 and p. 100]

So for a considerable period of time anarchists used red as well as black flags as their symbol. The general drift away from the red flag towards the black must be placed in the historical context. During the 1880s the socialist movement was changing. Marxist social democracy was becoming the dominant socialist trend, with libertarian socialism going into relative decline in many areas. Thus the red flag was increasingly associated with the authoritarian and statist (and increasingly reformist) side of the socialist movement. In order to distinguish themselves from other socialists, the use of the black flag makes perfect sense as it was it an accepted symbol of working class revolt like the red flag.

After the Russian Revolution and its slide into dictatorship (first under Lenin, then Stalin) anarchist use of the red flag decreased as it no longer *"stood for liberty."* Instead, it had become associated, at worse, with the Communist Parties or, at best, bureaucratic, reformist and authoritarian social democracy. This change can be seen from the Japanese movement. As noted above, before the First World War anarchists there had happily raised the red flag but in the 1920s they unfurled the black flag. Organised in the **Kokushoku Seinen Renmei** (Black Youth League), they published **Kokushoku Seinen** (Black Youth). By 1930, the anarchist theoretical magazine **Kotushoku Sensen** (Black Battlefront) had been replaced by two journals called **Kurohata** (Black Flag) and **Kuhusen** (Black Struggle). [John Crump, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 69–71 and p. 88]

According to historian Candace Falk, *"[t]hough black has been associated with anarchism in France since 1883, the colour red was the predominant symbol of anarchism throughout this period; only after the First World War was the colour black widely adopted."* [**Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 1, p. 208fn] As this change did not occur overnight, it seems safe to conclude that



*and on an industrial labour market was a compelling precondition for the triumph of industrial society ... The need to destroy whatever independent means of life the worker could garner ... all involved the issue of reducing the proletariat to a condition of total powerlessness in the face of capital. And with that powerlessness came a supineness, a loss of character and community, and a decline in moral fibre."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.,**, pp. 406–7] Unsurprisingly, there was a positive association between enclosure and migration out of villages and a *"definite correlation ... between the extent of enclosure and reliance on poor rates ... parliamentary enclosure resulted in out-migration and a higher level of pauperisation."* Moreover, *"the standard of living was generally much higher in those areas where labourer managed to combine industrial work with farming ... Access to commons meant that labourers could graze animals, gather wood, stones and gravel, dig coal, hunt and fish. These rights often made the difference between subsistence and abject poverty."* [David McNally, **Op. Cit.**, p. 14 and p. 18] Game laws also ensured that the peasantry and servants could not legally hunt for food as from the time of Richard II (1389) to 1831, no person could kill game unless qualified by estate or social standing.

The enclosure of the commons (in whatever form it took — see section F.8.5 for the US equivalent) solved both problems — the high cost of labour, and the freedom and dignity of the worker. The enclosures perfectly illustrate the principle that capitalism requires a state to ensure that the majority of people do not have free access to any means of livelihood and so must sell themselves to capitalists in order to survive. There is no doubt that if the state had "left alone" the European peasantry, allowing them to continue their collective farming practices ("collective farming" because, as Kropotkin shows, the peasants not only shared the land but much of the farm labour as well), capitalism could not have taken hold (see **Mutual Aid** for more on the European enclosures [pp. 184–189]). As Kropotkin notes, *"[i]nstances of commoners themselves dividing*

*their lands were rare, everywhere the State coerced them to enforce the division, or simply favoured the private appropriation of their lands"* by the nobles and wealthy. Thus *"to speak of the natural death of the village community [or the commons] in virtue of economical law is as grim a joke as to speak of the natural death of soldiers slaughtered on a battlefield."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 188 and p. 189]

Once a labour market **was** created by means of enclosure and the land monopoly, the state did **not** passively let it work. When market conditions favoured the working class, the state took heed of the calls of landlords and capitalists and intervened to restore the "natural" order. The state actively used the law to lower wages and ban unions of workers for centuries. In Britain, for example, after the Black Death there was a "servant" shortage. Rather than allow the market to work its magic, the landlords turned to the state and the result was ***"the Statute of Labourers"*** of 1351:

> *"Whereas late against the malice of servants, which were idle, and not willing to serve after the pestilence, without taking excessive wages, it was ordained by our lord the king ... that such manner of servants ... should be bound to serve, receiving salary and wages, accustomed in places where they ought to serve in the twentieth year of the reign of the king that now is, or five or six years before; and that the same servants refusing to serve in such manner should be punished by imprisonment of their bodies ... now forasmuch as it is given the king to understand in this present parliament, by the petition of the commonalty, that the said servants having no regard to the said ordinance, .. to the great damage of the great men, and impoverishing of all the said commonalty, whereof the said commonalty prayeth remedy: wherefore in the said parliament,*



discussed the revival of the International Workers Association as a

*Strikers' International* for to *"be able to make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise themselves. Resistance and strikes are excellent methods of organisation for doing this."* He stressed that the *"strike develops the sentiment of solidarity"* and argued that the First International *"was born of strikes; it was fundamentally a strikers' organisation."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886**, p. 255 and p. 256]

A *"Strikers International"* would need the strikers flag and so, perhaps, the **Black International** got its name. This, of course, fits perfectly with the use of the Black Flag as a symbol of workers' resistance by anarchism, a political expression of that resistance.

However, the black flag did not instantly replace the red flag as the main anarchist symbol. The use of the red flag continued for some decades in anarchist circles. Thus we find Kropotkin writing in the early 1880s of *"anarchist groups ... rais[ing] the red flag of revolution."* As Woodcock noted, the *"black flag was not universally accepted by anarchists at this time. Many, like Kropotkin, still thought of themselves as socialists and of the red flag as theirs also."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 75 and p. 225] In addition, we find the Chicago anarchists using both black and red flags all through the 1880s. French Anarchists carried three red flags at the funeral of Louise Michel's mother in 1885 as well as at her own funeral in January 1905. [Louise Michel, **Op. Cit.**, p. 183 and p. 201] Anarchist in Japan, for example, demonstrated under red flags bearing the slogans *"Anarchy"* and *"Anarchist Communism"* in June, 1908. [John Crump, **Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, p. 25] Three years later, the Mexican anarchists declared that they had *"hoisted the Red Flag on Mexico's fields of action"* as part of their *"war against Authority, war against Capital, and war against the Church."* They were *"fighting under the Red Flag to the famous cry of 'Land and*

capitalism. This is unsurprising given the nature of anarchist politics. Just as anarchists base our ideas on actual working class practice, we would also base our symbols on those created by that self-activity. For example, Proudhon as well as taking the term *"mutualism"* from radical workers also argued that co-operative *"labour associations"* had *"spontaneously, without prompting and without capital been formed in Paris and in Lyon… the proof of it [mutualism, the organisation of credit and labour] … lies in current practice, revolutionary practice."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 59–60] He considered his ideas, in other words, to be an expression of working class self-activity. Indeed, according to K. Steven Vincent, there was *"close similarity between the associational ideal of Proudhon … and the program of the Lyon Mutualists"* and that there was *"a remarkable convergence [between the ideas], and it is likely that Proudhon was able to articulate his positive program more coherently because of the example of the silk workers of Lyon. The socialist ideal that he championed was already being realised, to a certain extent, by such workers."* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 164] Other anarchists have made similar arguments concerning anarchism being the expression of tendencies within working class struggle against oppression and exploitation and so the using of a traditional workers symbol would be a natural expression of this aspect of anarchism.

Similarly, perhaps it is Louise Michel's comment that the Black Flag was the *"flag of strikes"* which could explain the naming of the **Black International** founded in 1881 (and so the increasing use of the Black Flag in anarchist circles in the early 1880s). Around the time of its founding congress Kropotkin was formulating the idea that this organisation would be a *"Strikers' International"* (**Internationale Greviste**) — it would be *"an organisation of resistance, of strikes."* [quoted by Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 147] In December 1881 he



> *by the assent of the said prelates, earls, barons, and other great men, and of the same commonalty there assembled, to refrain the malice of the said servants, be ordained and established the things underwritten."*

Thus state action was required because labourers had increased bargaining power and commanded higher wages which, in turn, led to inflation throughout the economy. In other words, an early version of the NAIRU (see section C.9). In one form or another this statute remained in force right through to the 19th century (later versions made it illegal for employees to "conspire" to fix wages, i.e., to organise to demand wage increases). Such measures were particularly sought when the labour market occasionally favoured the working class. For example, *"[a]fter the Restoration [of the English Monarchy],"* noted Dobb, *"when labour-scarcity had again become a serious complaint and the propertied class had been soundly frightened by the insubordination of the Commonwealth years, the clamour for legislative interference to keep wages low, to drive the poor into employment and to extend the system of workhouses and 'houses of correction' and the farming out of paupers once more reached a crescendo."* The same occurred on Continental Europe. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 234]

So, time and again employers called on the state to provide force to suppress the working class, artificially lower wages and bolster their economic power and authority. While such legislation was often difficult to enforce and often ineffectual in that real wages did, over time, increase, the threat and use of state coercion would ensure that they did not increase as fast as they may otherwise have done. Similarly, the use of courts and troops to break unions and strikes helped the process of capital accumulation immensely. Then there were the various laws used to control the free movement of workers. *"For centuries,"* notes Colin Ward, *"the lives of the poor majority in rural*

*England were dominated by the Poor law and its ramifications, like the Settlement Act of 1697 which debarred strangers from entering a parish unless they had a Settlement Certificate in which their home parish agreed to take them back if they became in need of poor relief. Like the Workhouse, it was a hated institution that lasted into the 20th century."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 31]

As Kropotkin stressed, *"it was the State which undertook to settle .. . griefs"* between workers and bosses *"so as to guarantee a 'convenient' livelihood"* (convenient for the masters, of course). It also acted *"severely to prohibit all combinations ... under the menace of severe punishments ... Both in the town and in the village the State reigned over loose aggregations of individuals, and was ready to prevent by the most stringent measures the reconstitution of any sort of separate unions among them."* Workers who formed unions *"were prosecuted wholesale under the Master and Servant Act — workers being summarily arrested and condemned upon a mere complaint of misbehaviour lodged by the master. Strikes were suppressed in an autocratic way ... to say nothing of the military suppression of strike riots ... To practice mutual support under such circumstances was anything but an easy task ... After a long fight, which lasted over a hundred years, the right of combing together was conquered."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 210 and p. 211] It took until 1813 until the laws regulating wages were repealed while the laws against combinations remained until 1825 (although that did not stop the Tolpuddle Martyrs being convicted of "administering an illegal oath" and deported to Tasmania in 1834). Fifty years later, the provisions of the statues of labourers which made it a civil action if the boss broke his contract but a criminal action if the worker broke it were repealed. Trade unions were given legal recognition in 1871 while, at the same time, another law limited what the workers could do in a strike or lockout. The British ideals of free trade never included freedom to organise.

(Luckily, by then, economists were at hand to explain to the workers that organising to demand higher wages was



**Drapeau Noir**, no. 1, 12th August 1883] This was echoed by Louise Michel:

> *"How many wrathful people, young people, will be with us when the red and black banners wave in the wind of anger! What a tidal wave it will be when the red and black banners rise around the old wreck!*
>
> *"The red banner, which has always stood for liberty, frightens the executioners because it is so red with our blood. The black flag, with layers of blood upon it from those who wanted to live by working or die by fighting, frightens those who want to live off the work of others. Those red and black banners wave over us mourning our dead and wave over our hopes for the dawn that is breaking."* [**The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, pp. 193–4]

The mass slaughter of Communards by the French ruling class after the fall of the Paris Commune of 1871 could also explain the use of the Black Flag by anarchists at this time. Black *"is the colour of mourning [at least in Western cultures], it symbolises our mourning for dead comrades, those whose lives were taken by war, on the battlefield (between states) or in the streets and on the picket lines (between classes)."* [Chico, *"letters"*, **Freedom**, vol. 48, No. 12, p. 10] Given the 25 000 dead in the Commune, many of them anarchists and libertarian socialists, the use of the Black Flag by anarchists afterwards would make sense. Sandino, the Nicaraguan libertarian socialist (whose use of the red-and-black colours we discuss below) also said that black stood for mourning (*"Red for liberty; black for mourning; and the skull for a struggle to the death"* [Donald C. Hodges, **Sandino's Communism**, p. 24]).

Regardless of other meanings, it is clear that anarchists took up the black flag in the 1880s because it was, like the red flag, a recognised symbol of working class resistance to

> *flags, the colour of mourning and a reminder of their economic distress. Others pushed loaves of bread on the bayonets of their guns and held them aloft. The symbolic force of this action was reinforced by a repeatedly-shouted slogan: 'bread or lead!': in other words, if they were not given bread which they could afford, then they were prepared to face bullets. At some point during the rebellion, a more eloquent expression was devised: '**Vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant**!' — 'Live working or die by fighting!'. Some witnesses report seeing this painted on a black flag."* [Sharif Gemie, **French Revolutions, 1815–1914**, pp. 52–53]

Kropotkin himself states that its use continued in the French labour movement after this uprising. He notes that the Paris Workers *"raised in June [1848] their black flag of 'Bread or Labour'"* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 100] Black flags were also hung from windows in Paris on the 1st of March, 1871, in defiance of the Prussians marching through the city after their victory in the Franco-Prussian War. [Stewart Edwards, **The Communards of Paris, 1871**, p. 25]

The use of the black flag by anarchists, therefore, is an expression of their roots and activity in the labour movement in Europe, particularly in France. The anarchist adoption of the Black Flag by the movement in the 1880s reflects its use as *"the traditional symbol of hunger, poverty and despair"* and that it was *"raised during popular risings in Europe as a sign of no surrender and no quarter."* [Walter and Becker, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 128] This is confirmed by the first anarchist journal to be called **Black Flag**: *"On the heights of the city [of Lyon] in la Croix-Rousse and Vaise, workers, pushed by hunger, raised for the first time this sign of mourning and revenge [the black flag], and made therefore of it the emblem of workers' demands."* [**Le**



against their own self-interest. By a strange coincidence, all those laws against unions had actually **helped** the working class by enforcing the necessary conditions for perfect competition in labour market! What are the chances of that? Of course, while considered undesirable from the perspective of mainstream economists — and, by strange co-incidence, the bosses — unions are generally not banned these days but rather heavily regulated. The freedom loving, deregulating Thatcherites passed six Employment Acts between 1980 and 1993 restricting industrial action by requiring pre-strike ballots, outlawing secondary action, restricting picketing and giving employers the right to seek injunctions where there is doubt about the legality of action — in the workers' interest, of course as, for some reason, politicians, bosses and economists have always known what best for trade unionists rather than the trade unionists themselves. And if they objected, well, that was what the state was for.)

So to anyone remotely familiar with working class history the notion that there could be an economic theory which ignores power relations between bosses and workers is a particularly self-serving joke. Economic relations always have a power element, even if only to protect the property and power of the wealthy — the Invisible Hand always counts on a very visible Iron Fist when required. As Kropotkin memorably put it, the rise of capitalism has always seen the State *"tighten the screw for the worker"* and *"impos[ing] industrial serfdom."* So what the bourgeoisie *"swept away as harmful to industry"* was anything considered as *"useless and harmful"* but that class *"was at pains not to sweep away was the power of the State over industry, over the factory serf."* Nor should the role of public schooling be overlooked, within which *"the spirit of voluntary servitude was always cleverly cultivated in the minds of the young, and still is, in order to perpetuate the subjection of the individual to the State."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, pp. 52–3 and p. 55] Such education also ensured that children

become used to the obedience and boredom required for wage slavery.

Like the more recent case of fascist Chile, "free market" capitalism was imposed on the majority of society by an elite using the authoritarian state. This was recognised by Adam Smith when he opposed state intervention in **The Wealth of Nations**. In Smith's day, the government was openly and unashamedly an instrument of wealth owners. Less than 10 per cent of British men (and no women) had the right to vote. When Smith opposed state interference, he was opposing the imposition of wealth owners' interests on everybody else (and, of course, how "liberal", never mind "libertarian", is a political system in which the many follow the rules and laws set-down in the so-called interests of all by the few? As history shows, any minority given, or who take, such power **will** abuse it in their own interests). Today, the situation is reversed, with neo-liberals and right-"libertarians" opposing state interference in the economy (e.g. regulation of Big Business) so as to prevent the public from having even a minor impact on the power or interests of the elite. The fact that "free market" capitalism always requires introduction by an authoritarian state should make all honest "Libertarians" ask: How "free" is the "free market"?

## F.8.4 Aren't the enclosures a socialist myth?

The short answer is no, they are not. While a lot of historical analysis has been spent in trying to deny the extent and impact of the enclosures, the simple fact is (in the words of noted historian E.P. Thompson) enclosure *"was a plain enough case of class robbery, played according to the fair rules of property and law laid down by a parliament of property-owners and lawyers."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 237–8]



[**Beyond the Martyrs**, p. 141 and p. 150] While it *"was interpreted in anarchist circles as the symbol of death, hunger and misery"* it was *"also said to be the 'emblem of retribution'"* and in a labour procession in Cincinnati in January 1885, *"it was further acknowledged to be the banner of working-class intransigence, as demonstrated by the words 'No Quarter' inscribed on it."* [Donald C. Hodges, **Sandino's Communism**, p. 21] For Berkman, it was the *"symbol of starvation and desperate misery."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 341] Louise Michel stated that the *"black flag is the flag of strikes and the flag of those who are hungry."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 168]

Along these lines, Albert Meltzer maintains that the association between the black flag and working class revolt *"originated in Rheims [France] in 1831 ('Work or Death') in an unemployed demonstration."* [**The Anarcho-Quiz Book**, p. 49] He went on to assert that it was Michel's action in 1883 that solidified the association. The links from revolts in France to anarchism are even stronger. As Murray Bookchin records, in Lyon *"[i]n 1831, the silk-weaving artisans ... rose in armed conflict to gain a better* ***tarif****, or contract, from the merchants. For a brief period they actually took control of the city, under red and black flags — which made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of revolutionary symbols. Their use of the word* ***mutuelisme*** *to denote the associative disposition of society that they preferred made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of anarchist thought as well, since Proudhon appears to have picked up the word from them during his brief stay in the city in 1843–4."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 157] Sharif Gemie confirms this, noting that a police report sent to the Lyon prefect that said: *"The silk-weavers of the Croix-Rousse have decided that tomorrow they will go down to Lyon, carrying a black flag, calling for work or death."* The revolt saw the Black Flag raised:

> *"At eleven a.m. the silk-weavers' columns descended the slops of the Croix-Rousse. Some carried black*

after Kropotkin's funeral march, the Kronstadt rebellion broke out and anarchism was erased from Soviet Russia for good. With the end of Stalinism, anarchism with its Black Flag re-emerged all across Eastern Europe, including Russia.

While the events above are fairly well known, as has been related, the exact origin of the black flag is not. What is known is that a large number of Anarchist groups in the early 1880s adopted titles associated with black. In July of 1881, the Black International was founded in London. This was an attempt to reorganise the Anarchist wing of the recently dissolved First International. In October 1881, a meeting in Chicago lead to the **International Working People's Association** being formed in North America. This organisation, also known as the **Black International**, affiliated to the London organisation. [Woodcock, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212–4 and p. 393] These two conferences are immediately followed by Michel's demonstration (1883) and the black flags in Chicago (1884).

Thus it was around the early 1880s that anarchism and the Black Flag became inseparably linked. Avrich, for example, states that in 1884, the black flag *"was the new anarchist emblem."* [**The Haymarket Tragedy**, p. 144] In agreement, Murray Bookchin reports that *"in later years, the Anarchists were to adopt the black flag"* when speaking of the Spanish Anarchist movement in 1870. [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 57] Walter and Heiner also note that *"it was adopted by the anarchist movement during the 1880s."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 128]

Now the question becomes why, exactly, black was chosen. The Chicago *"Alarm"* stated that the black flag is *"the fearful symbol of hunger, misery and death."* [quoted by Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 144] Bookchin asserts that anarchists were *"to adopt the black flag as a symbol of the workers misery and as an expression of their anger and bitterness."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 57] Historian Bruce C. Nelson also notes that the Black Flag was considered *"the emblem of hunger"* when it was unfurled in Chicago in 1884.



The enclosures were one of the ways that the *"land monopoly"* was created. The land monopoly referred to feudal and capitalist property rights and ownership of land by (among others) the Individualist Anarchists. Instead of an *"occupancy and use"* regime advocated by anarchists, the land monopoly allowed a few to bar the many from the land — so creating a class of people with nothing to sell but their labour. While this monopoly is less important these days in developed nations (few people know how to farm) it was essential as a means of consolidating capitalism. Given the choice, most people preferred to become independent farmers rather than wage workers (see next section). As such, the *"land monopoly"* involves more than simply enclosing common land but also enforcing the claims of landlords to areas of land greater than they can work by their own labour.

Needless to say, the titles of landlords and the state are generally ignored by supporters of capitalism who tend to concentrate on the enclosure movement in order to downplay its importance. Little wonder, for it is something of an embarrassment for them to acknowledge that the creation of capitalism was somewhat less than "immaculate" — after all, capitalism is portrayed as an almost ideal society of freedom. To find out that an idol has feet of clay and that we are still living with the impact of its origins is something pro-capitalists must deny. So **are** the enclosures a socialist myth? Most claims that it is flow from the work of the historian J.D. Chambers' famous essay *"Enclosures and the Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution."* [**Economic History Review**, 2nd series, no. 5, August 1953] In this essay, Chambers attempts to refute Karl Marx's account of the enclosures and the role it played in what Marx called *"primitive accumulation."*

We cannot be expected to provide an extensive account of the debate that has raged over this issue (Colin Ward notes that *"a later series of scholars have provided locally detailed evidence that reinforces"* the traditional socialist analysis of enclosure

and its impact. [**Cotters and Squatters**, p. 143]). All we can do is provide a summary of the work of William Lazonick who presented an excellent reply to those who claim that the enclosures were an unimportant historical event (see his *"Karl Marx and Enclosures in England."* [**Review of Radical Political Economy**, no. 6, pp. 1–32]). Here, we draw upon his subsequent summarisation of his critique provided in his books **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor** and **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**.

There are three main claims against the socialist account of the enclosures. We will cover each in turn.

Firstly, it is often claimed that the enclosures drove the uprooted cottager and small peasant into industry. However, this was never claimed. As Lazonick stresses while some economic historians *"have attributed to Marx the notion that, in one fell swoop, the enclosure movement drove the peasants off the soil and into the factories. Marx did not put forth such a simplistic view of the rise of a wage-labour force ... Despite gaps and omission in Marx's historical analysis, his basic arguments concerning the creation of a landless proletariat are both important and valid. The transformations of social relations of production and the emergence of a wage-labour force in the agricultural sector were the critical preconditions for the Industrial Revolution."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, pp. 12–3]

It is correct, as the critics of Marx stress, that the agricultural revolution associated with the enclosures **increased** the demand for farm labour as claimed by Chambers and others. And this is the whole point — enclosures created a pool of dispossessed labourers who had to sell their time/liberty to survive and whether this was to a landlord or an industrialist is irrelevant (as Marx himself stressed). As such, the account by Chambers, ironically, *"confirms the broad outlines of Marx's arguments"* as it implicitly acknowledges that *"over the long run the massive reallocation of access to land that enclosures entailed resulted in the separation of the mass of agricultural producers*



*banners ... were the most dramatic form of advertisement"* for the revolutionary anarchist movement in America. April 1885 saw Lucy Parsons and Lizzie Holmes at the head of a protest march *"each bearing a flag, one black, the other red."* [**The Haymarket Tragedy**, p. 145, pp. 81–2 and p. 147] The Black Flag continued to be used by anarchists in America, with one being seized by police at an anarchist organised demonstration for the unemployed in 1893 at which Emma Goldman spoke. [**Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 1, p. 144] Twenty one years later, Alexander Berkman reported on another anarchist inspired unemployed march in New York which raised the black flag in *"menacing defiance in the face of parasitic contentment and self-righteous arrogance"* of the *"exploiters and well-fed idlers."* [*"The Movement of the Unemployed"*, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 341]

It seems that black flags did not appear in Russia until the founding of the **Chernoe Znamia** (***"black banner"***) movement in 1905. With the defeat of that year's revolution, anarchism went underground again. The Black Flag, like anarchism in general, re-emerged during the 1917 revolution. Anarchists in Petrograd took part in the February demonstrations which brought down Tsarism carrying black flags with *"Down with authority and capitalism!"* on them. As part of their activity, anarchists organised armed detachments in most towns and cities called *"Black Guards"* to defend themselves against counter-revolutionary attempts by the provisional government. As noted above, the Makhnovists fought Bolshevik and White dictatorship under Black Flags. On a more dreary note, February 1921 saw the end of black flags in Soviet Russia. That month saw Peter Kropotkin's funeral take place in Moscow. Twenty thousand people marched in his honour, carrying black banners that read: *"Where there is authority there is no freedom."* [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 44, p. 124, p. 183 and p. 227] Only two weeks

Today, if you go to any sizeable demonstration you will usually see the Black Flag raised by the anarchists present.

However, the anarchists' black flag originated much earlier than this. Louise Michel, famous participant in the Paris Commune of 1871, was instrumental in popularising the use of the Black Flag in anarchist circles. At a March 18th public meeting in 1882 to commemorate the Paris Commune she proclaimed that the *"red flag was no longer appropriate; [the anarchists] should raise the black flag of misery."* [Edith Thomas, **Louise Michel**, p. 191] The following year she put her words into action. According to anarchist historian George Woodcock, Michel flew the black flag on March 9, 1883, during demonstration of the unemployed in Paris, France. An open air meeting of the unemployed was broken up by the police and around 500 demonstrators, with Michel at the front carrying a black flag and shouting *"Bread, work, or lead!"* marched off towards the Boulevard Saint-Germain. The crowd pillaged three baker's shops before the police attacked. Michel was arrested and sentenced to six years solitary confinement. Public pressure soon forced the granting of an amnesty. [**Anarchism**, pp. 251–2] August the same year saw the publication of the anarchist paper **Le Drapeau Noir** (**The Black Flag**) in Lyon which suggests that it had become a popular symbol within anarchist circles. [*"Sur la Symbolique anarchiste"*, **Bulletin du CIRA**, no. 62, p. 2] However, anarchists had been using red-and-black flags a number of years previously (see next section) so Michel's use of the colour black was not totally without precedence.

Not long after, the black flag made its way to America. Paul Avrich reports that on November 27, 1884, it was displayed in Chicago at an anarchist demonstration. According to Avrich, August Spies, one of the Haymarket martyrs, *"noted that this was the first occasion on which [the black flag] had been unfurled on American soil."* By January the following year, *"[s]treet parades and mass outdoor demonstrations, with red and black*



*from the means of production."* So the *"critical transformation was not the level of agricultural employment before and after enclosure but the changes in employment relations caused by the reorganisation of landholdings and the reallocation of access to land."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 29, pp. 29–30 and p. 30] Thus the key feature of the enclosures was that it created a supply for farm labour, a supply that had no choice but to work for another. Once freed from the land, these workers could later move to the towns in search for better work:

> *"Critical to the Marxian thesis of the origins of the industrial labour force is the transformation of the social relations of agriculture and the creation, in the first instance, of an agricultural wage-labour force that might eventually, perhaps through market incentives, be drawn into the industrial labour force."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 273]

In summary, when the critics argue that enclosures increased the demand for farm labour they are not refuting Marx but confirming his analysis. This is because the enclosures had resulted in a transformation in employment relations in agriculture with the peasants and farmers turned into wage workers for landlords (i.e., rural capitalists). For if wage labour is the defining characteristic of capitalism then it matters little if the boss is a farmer or an industrialist. This means that the *"critics, it turns out, have not differed substantially with Marx on the facts of agricultural transformation. But by ignoring the historical and theoretical significance of the resultant changes in the social relations of* ***agricultural*** *production, the critics have missed Marx's main point."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 30]

Secondly, it is argued that the number of small farm owners increased, or at least did not greatly decline, and so the enclosure movement was unimportant. Again, this misses the point.

Small farm owners can still employ wage workers (i.e. become capitalist farmers as opposed to "yeomen" — an independent peasant proprietor). As Lazonick notes, *"[i]t is true that after 1750 some petty proprietors continued to occupy and work their own land. But in a world of capitalist agriculture, the yeomanry no longer played an important role in determining the course of capitalist agriculture. As a social class that could influence the evolution of British economy society, the yeomanry had disappeared."* Moreover, Chambers himself acknowledged that for the poor without legal rights in land, then enclosure injured them. For *"the majority of the agricultural population ... had only customary rights. To argue that these people were not treated unfairly because they did not possess legally enforceable property rights is irrelevant to the fact that they were dispossessed by enclosures. Again, Marx's critics have failed to address the issue of the transformation of access to the means of production as a precondition for the Industrial Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32 and p. 31]

Thirdly, it is often claimed that it was population growth, rather than enclosures, that caused the supply of wage workers. So was population growth more important than enclosures? Given that enclosure impacted on the individuals and social customs of the time, it is impossible to separate the growth in population from the social context in which it happened. As such, the population argument ignores the question of whether the changes in society caused by enclosures and the rise of capitalism have an impact on the observed trends towards earlier marriage and larger families after 1750. Lazonick argues that *"[t]here is reason to believe that they did."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] Overall, Lazonick notes that *"[i]t can even be argued that the changed social relations of agriculture altered the constraints on early marriage and incentives to childbearing that contributed to the growth in population. The key point is that transformations in social relations in production can influence, and have influenced, the quantity of wage labour supplied on both agricultural*



> *the sperm, the secret growth of the embryo in the womb all these the blackness surrounds and protects.*
>
> *"So black is negation, is anger, is outrage, is mourning, is beauty, is hope, is the fostering and sheltering of new forms of human life and relationship on and with this earth. The black flag means all these things. We are proud to carry it, sorry we have to, and look forward to the day when such a symbol will no longer be necessary."* [*"Why the Black Flag?"*, Howard Ehrlich (ed.), **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, pp. 31–2]

Here we discuss when and why anarchists first took up the black flag as our symbol.

There are ample accounts of the use of black flags by anarchists. Probably the most famous was Nestor Makhno's partisans during the Russia Revolution. Under the black banner, his army routed a dozen armies and kept a large portion of the Ukraine free from concentrated power for a good couple of years. On the black flag was embroidered *"Liberty or Death"* and *"The Land to the Peasant, The Factories to the Workers."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 607–10] In 1925, the Japanese anarchists formed the **Black Youth League** and, in 1945, when the anarchist federation reformed, their journal was named **Kurohata** (**Black Flag**). [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, pp. 525–6] In 1968, students carried black (and red) flags during the street fighting and General Strike in France, bringing the resurgence of anarchism in the 1960s into the view of the general public. The same year saw the Black Flag being raised at the American **Students for a Democratic Society** national convention. Two years later the British based magazine **Black Flag** was started and is still going strong. At the turn of the 21st century, the Black Flag was at the front of the so-called anti-globalisation protests.

## 1 What is the history of the Black Flag?

As is well known, the black flag is the symbol of anarchism. Howard Ehrlich has a great passage in his book **Reinventing Anarchy, Again** on why anarchists use it. It is worth quoting at length:

> *"Why is our flag black? Black is a shade of negation. The black flag is the negation of all flags. It is a negation of nationhood which puts the human race against itself and denies the unity of all humankind. Black is a mood of anger and outrage at all the hideous crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of allegiance to one state or another. It is anger and outrage at the insult to human intelligence implied in the pretences, hypocrisies, and cheap chicaneries of governments ... Black is also a colour of mourning; the black flag which cancels out the nation also mourns its victims the countless millions murdered in wars, external and internal, to the greater glory and stability of some bloody state. It mourns for those whose labour is robbed (taxed) to pay for the slaughter and oppression of other human beings. It mourns not only the death of the body but the crippling of the spirit under authoritarian and hierarchic systems; it mourns the millions of brain cells blacked out with never a chance to light up the world. It is a colour of inconsolable grief.*
>
> *"But black is also beautiful. It is a colour of determination, of resolve, of strength, a colour by which all others are clarified and defined. Black is the mysterious surrounding of germination, of fertility, the breeding ground of new life which always evolves, renews, refreshes, and reproduces itself in darkness. The seed hidden in the earth, the strange journey of*



> *and industrial labour markets. To argue that population growth created the industrial labour supply is to ignore these momentous social transformations"* associated with the rise of capitalism. [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 273]

In other words, there is good reason to think that the enclosures, far from being some kind of socialist myth, in fact played a key role in the development of capitalism. As Lazonick notes, *"Chambers misunderstood"* the *"argument concerning the 'institutional creation' of a proletarianised (i.e. landless) workforce. Indeed, Chamber's own evidence and logic tend to support the Marxian [and anarchist!] argument, when it is properly understood."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273]

Lastly, it must be stressed that this process of dispossession happened over hundreds of years. It was not a case of simply driving peasants off their land and into factories. In fact, the first acts of expropriation took place in agriculture and created a rural proletariat which had to sell their labour/liberty to landlords and it was the second wave of enclosures, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that was closely connected with the process of industrialisation. The enclosure movement, moreover, was imposed in an uneven way, affecting different areas at different times, depending on the power of peasant resistance and the nature of the crops being grown (and other objective conditions). Nor was it a case of an instant transformation — for a long period this rural proletariat was not totally dependent on wages, still having some access to the land and wastes for fuel and food. So while rural wage workers did exist throughout the period from 1350 to the 1600s, capitalism was not fully established in Britain yet as such people comprised only a small proportion of the labouring classes. The acts of enclosure were just one part of a long process by which a proletariat was created.

## F.8.5 What about the lack of enclosures in the Americas?

The enclosure movement was but one part of a wide-reaching process of state intervention in creating capitalism. Moreover, it is just one way of creating the *"land monopoly"* which ensured the creation of a working class. The circumstances facing the ruling class in the Americas were distinctly different than in the Old World and so the "land monopoly" took a different form there. In the Americas, enclosures were unimportant as customary land rights did not really exist (at least once the Native Americans were eliminated by violence). Here the problem was that (after the original users of the land were eliminated) there were vast tracts of land available for people to use. Other forms of state intervention were similar to that applied under mercantilism in Europe (such as tariffs, government spending, use of unfree labour and state repression of workers and their organisations and so on). All had one aim, to enrich and power the masters and dispossess the actual producers of the means of life (land and means of production).

Unsurprisingly, due to the abundance of land, there was a movement towards independent farming in the early years of the American colonies and subsequent Republic and this pushed up the price of remaining labour on the market by reducing the supply. Capitalists found it difficult to find workers willing to work for them at wages low enough to provide them with sufficient profits. It was due to the difficulty in finding cheap enough labour that capitalists in America turned to slavery. All things being equal, wage labour **is** more productive than slavery but in early America all things were **not** equal. Having access to cheap (indeed, free) land meant that working people had a choice, and few desired to become wage slaves



*class struggle."* [**The Anarchist Past and other essays**, pp. 60–1]

Unsurprisingly, the first anarchist symbols reflected the origins and ideas of this class struggle movement. Both the black and red-and-black flags were first used by revolutionary anarchists. The black flag was popularised in the 1880s by Louise Michel, a leading French communist-anarchist militant. From Europe it spread to America when the communist-anarchists of the **International Working People's Association** raised it in their struggle against capitalism before being taken up by other revolutionary class struggle anarchists across the globe. The red-and-black flag was first used by the Italian section of the First International and this had been the first to move from collectivist to communist-anarchism in October 1876. [Nunzio Pernicone, **Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892**, p. 111] From there, it spread to Mexico and was used by anarchist labour militants there before being re-invented by the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in the 1930s. Like anarchism itself, the anarchist flags are a product of the social struggle against capitalism and statism.

We would like to point out that this appendix is partly based on Jason Wehling's 1995 essay **Anarchism and the History of the Black Flag**. Needless to say, this appendix does not cover all anarchists symbols. For example, recently the red-and-black flag has become complemented by the green-and-black flag of eco-anarchism (the symbolism of the green should need no explanation). Other libertarian popular symbols include the IWW inspired ***"Wildcat"*** (representing, of course, the spontaneity, direct action, solidarity and militancy of a wildcat strike), the ***"Black Rose"*** (inspired, no doubt, by the demand of striking IWW women workers in Lawrence, 1912, for not only bread, but for roses too) and the ironic ***"little black bomb"*** (among others). Here we concentrate on the three most famous ones.

protest march in Berne which involved the anarchists *"carrying the red flag in honour of the Paris Commune"* for *"in Switzerland federal law prohibited public display of the red flag."* [Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 137] Anarchist historians Nicolas Walter and Heiner Becker note that *"Kropotkin always preferred the red flag."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 128] On Labour Day in 1899, Emma Goldman gave lectures to miners in Spring Valley, Illinois, which ended in a demonstration which she headed *"carrying a large red flag."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 245] According to historian Caroline Waldron Merithew, the 300 marchers *"defied police orders to haul down the 'red flag of anarchy.'"* [**Anarchist Motherhood**, p. 236]

This should be unsurprising as anarchism is a form of socialism and came out of the general socialist and labour movements. Common roots would imply common imagery. However, as mainstream socialism developed in the nineteenth century into either reformist social democracy or the state socialism of the revolutionary Marxists, anarchists developed their own images of revolt based upon those raised by working class people in struggle. As will be shown, they come from the revolutionary anarchism most directly associated with the wider labour and socialist movements, i.e., the dominant, mainstream social anarchist tradition. As Nicholas Walter put it:

> *"[The] serious study of anarchism should be based on fact rather than fantasy, and concentrate on people and movements that actually used the word. However old and wide the ideas of anarchism may be … no one called himself an anarchist before [Proudhon in] 1840, and no movement called itself anarchist before the 1870s … The actual anarchist movement was founded … by the anti-authoritarian sections of the First International … This was certainly the first anarchist movement, and this movement was certainly based on a libertarian version of the concept of the*



and so because of this, capitalists turned to slavery in the South and the "land monopoly" in the North.

This was because, in the words of Maurice Dobb, it *"became clear to those who wished to reproduce capitalist relations of production in the new country that the foundation-stone of their endeavour must be the restriction of land-ownership to a minority and the exclusion of the majority from any share in [productive] property."* [**Studies in Capitalist Development**, pp. 221–2] As one radical historian puts it, *"[w]hen land is 'free' or 'cheap'. as it was in different regions of the United States before the 1830s, there was no compulsion for farmers to introduce labour-saving technology. As a result, 'independent household production' … hindered the development of capitalism … [by] allowing large portions of the population to escape wage labour."* [Charlie Post, *"The 'Agricultural Revolution' in the United States"*, pp. 216–228, **Science and Society**, vol. 61, no. 2, p. 221]

It was precisely this option (i.e. of independent production) that had to be destroyed in order for capitalist industry to develop. The state had to violate the holy laws of "supply and demand" by controlling the access to land in order to ensure the normal workings of "supply and demand" in the labour market (i.e. that the bargaining position favoured employer over employee). Once this situation became the typical one (i.e., when the option of self-employment was effectively eliminated) a more (protectionist based) "laissez-faire" approach could be adopted, with state action used indirectly to favour the capitalists and landlords (and readily available to protect private property from the actions of the dispossessed).

So how was this transformation of land ownership achieved?

Instead of allowing settlers to appropriate their own farms as was often the case before the 1830s, the state stepped in once the army had cleared out (usually by genocide) the original users. Its first major role was to enforce legal rights of property on unused land. Land stolen from the Native Americans was

sold at auction to the highest bidders, namely speculators, who then sold it on to farmers. This process started right *"after the revolution, [when] huge sections of land were bought up by rich speculators"* and their claims supported by the law. [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 125] Thus land which should have been free was sold to land-hungry farmers and the few enriched themselves at the expense of the many. Not only did this increase inequality within society, it also encouraged the development of wage labour — having to pay for land would have ensured that many immigrants remained on the East Coast until they had enough money. Thus a pool of people with little option but to sell their labour was increased due to state protection of unoccupied land. That the land usually ended up in the hands of farmers did not (could not) countermand the shift in class forces that this policy created.

This was also the essential role of the various "Homesteading Acts" and, in general, the *"Federal land law in the 19th century provided for the sale of most of the public domain at public auction to the higher bidder ... Actual settlers were forced to buy land from speculators, at prices considerably above the federal minimal price."* (which few people could afford anyway). [Charlie Post, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222] This is confirmed by Howard Zinn who notes that 1862 Homestead Act *"gave 160 acres of western land, unoccupied and publicly owned, to anyone who would cultivate it for five years ... Few ordinary people had the $200 necessary to do this; speculators moved in and bought up much of the land. Homestead land added up to 50 million acres. But during the Civil War, over 100 million acres were given by Congress and the President to various railroads, free of charge."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 233] Little wonder the Individualist Anarchists supported an *"occupancy and use"* system of land ownership as a key way of stopping capitalist and landlord usury as well as the development of capitalism itself.



# Appendix — The Symbols of Anarchy

## Introduction

Anarchism has always stood deliberately for a broad, and at times vague, political platform. The reasoning is sound; blueprints create rigid dogma and stifle the creative spirit of revolt. Along the same lines and resulting in the same problems, Anarchists have rejected the "disciplined" leadership that is found in many other political groupings on the Left. The reasoning for this is also sound; leadership based on authority is inherently hierarchical.

It seems to follow logically that since Anarchists have shied away from anything static, that we would also shy away from the importance of symbols and icons. Yet the fact is Anarchists have used symbolism in our revolt against the State and Capital, the most famous of which are the circled-A, the black flag and the red-and-black flag. This appendix tries to show the history of these three iconic symbols and indicate why they were taken up by anarchists to represent our ideas and movement.

Ironically enough, one of the original anarchist symbols was the ***red*** flag. As anarchist Communard Louise Michel put it, *"Lyon, Marseille, Narbonne, all had their own Communes, and like ours [in Paris], theirs too were drowned in the blood of revolutionaries. That is why our flags are red. Why are our red banners so terribly frightening to those persons who have caused them to be stained that colour?"* [**The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, p. 65] March 18th, 1877, saw Kropotkin participate in a

vious any the latter has always opposed the former. It is why anarchists today still seek to encourage the desire and hope for political **and** economic freedom rather than the changing of masters we have under capitalism. Anarchism will continue as long as these feelings and hopes still exist and they will remain until such time as we organise and abolish capitalism and the state.



This change in the appropriation of land had significant effects on agriculture and the desirability of taking up farming for immigrants. As Post notes, *"[w]hen the social conditions for obtaining and maintaining possession of land change, as they did in the Midwest between 1830 and 1840, pursuing the goal of preserving [family ownership and control] .. . produced very different results. In order to pay growing mortgages, debts and taxes, family farmers were compelled to specialise production toward cash crops and to market more and more of their output."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 221–2]

So, in order to pay for land which was formerly free, farmers got themselves into debt and increasingly turned to the market to pay it off. Thus, the *"Federal land system, by transforming land into a commodity and stimulating land speculation, made the Midwestern farmers dependent upon markets for the continual possession of their farms."* Once on the market, farmers had to invest in new machinery and this also got them into debt. In the face of a bad harvest or market glut, they could not repay their loans and their farms had to be sold to so do so. By 1880, 25% of all farms were rented by tenants, and the numbers kept rising. In addition, the *"transformation of social property relations in northern agriculture set the stage for the 'agricultural revolution' of the 1840s and 1850s ... [R]ising debts and taxes forced Midwestern family farmers to compete as commodity producers in order to maintain their land-holding ... The transformation ... was the central precondition for the development of industrial capitalism in the United States."* [Charlie Post, **Op. Cit.**, p. 223 and p. 226]

It should be noted that feudal land owning was enforced in many areas of the colonies and the early Republic. Landlords had their holdings protected by the state and their demands for rent had the full backing of the state. This lead to numerous anti-rent conflicts. [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 84 and pp. 206–11] Such struggles helped end such arrangements, with landlords being "encouraged" to

allow the farmers to buy the land which was rightfully theirs. The wealth appropriated from the farmers in the form of rent and the price of the land could then be invested in industry so transforming feudal relations on the land into capitalist relations in industry (and, eventually, back on the land when the farmers succumbed to the pressures of the capitalist market and debt forced them to sell).

This means that Murray Rothbard's comment that *"once the land was purchased by the settler, the injustice disappeared"* is nonsense — the injustice was transmitted to other parts of society and this, the wider legacy of the original injustice, lived on and helped transform society towards capitalism. In addition, his comment about *"the establishment in North America of a truly libertarian land system"* would be one the Individualist Anarchists of the period would have seriously disagreed with! [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 73] Rothbard, at times, seems to be vaguely aware of the importance of land as the basis of freedom in early America. For example, he notes in passing that *"the abundance of fertile virgin land in a vast territory enabled individualism to come to full flower in many areas."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 2, p. 186] Yet he did not ponder the transformation in social relationships which would result when that land was gone. In fact, he was blasé about it. *"If latecomers are worse off,"* he opined, *"well then that is their proper assumption of risk in this free and uncertain world. There is no longer a vast frontier in the United States, and there is no point crying over the fact."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 240] Unsurprisingly we also find Murray Rothbard commenting that Native Americans *"lived under a collectivistic regime that, for land allocation, was scarcely more just than the English governmental land grab."* [**Conceived in Liberty**, vol. 1, p. 187] That such a regime made for **increased** individual liberty and that it was precisely the independence from the landlord and bosses this produced which made enclosure and state land grabs such appealing prospects for the ruling class was lost on him.



*moved the first rebels against the slavery inherent in the capitalist mode of production."* [Ostergaard, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27 and p. 90]

State action was required produce and protect the momentous changes in social relations which are central to the capitalist system. However, once capital **has** separated the working class from the means of life, then it no longer had to rely as much on state coercion. With the choice now between wage slavery or starving, then the appearance of voluntary choice could be maintained as economic power was/is usually effective enough to ensure that state violence could be used as a last resort. Coercive practices are still possible, of course, but market forces are usually sufficient as the market is usually skewed against the working class. However, the role of the state remains a key to understanding capitalism as a system rather than just specific periods of it. This is because, as we stressed in section D.1, state action is not associated only with the past, with the transformation from feudalism to capitalism. It happens today and it will continue to happen as long as capitalism continues.

Far from being a "natural" development, then, capitalism was imposed on a society by state action, by and on behalf of ruling elites. Those working class people alive at the time viewed it as *"unnatural relations"* and organised to overcome it. It is from such movements that all the many forms of socialism sprang, including anarchism. This is the case with the European anarchism associated with Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin as well as the American individualist anarchism of Warren and Tucker. The links between anarchism and working class rebellion against the autocracy of capital and the state is reflected not only in our theory and history, but also in our anarchist symbols. The Black Flag, for example, was first raised by rebel artisans in France and its association with labour insurrection was the reason why anarchists took it up as our symbol (see the appendix on "The Symbols of Anarchy"). So given both the history of capitalism and anarchism, it becomes ob-

**Rise of French Republican Socialism**, pp. 162–3] Similar movements and ideas developed elsewhere, as capitalism was imposed (subsequent developments were obviously influenced by the socialist ideas which had arisen earlier and so were more obviously shaped by anarchist and Marxist ideas).

This is unsurprising, the workers then, who had not been swallowed up whole by the industrial revolution, could make critical comparisons between the factory system and what preceded it. *"Today, we are so accustomed to this method of production [capitalism] and its concomitant, the wage system, that it requires quite an effort of imagination to appreciate the significance of the change in terms of the lives of ordinary workers ... the worker became **alienated** ... from the means of production and the products of his labour ... In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the new socialist theories proposed an alternative to the capitalist system which would avoid this alienation."* While wage slavery may seem "natural" today, the first generation of wage labourers saw the transformation of the social relationships they experienced in work, from a situation in which they controlled their own work (and so themselves) to one in which **others** controlled them, and they did not like it. However, while many modern workers instinctively hate wage labour and having bosses, without the awareness of some other method of working, many put up with it as "inevitable." The first generation of wage labourers had the awareness of something else (although a flawed and limited something else as it existed in a hierarchical and class system) and this gave then a deep insight into the nature of capitalism and produced a deeply radical response to it and its authoritarian structures. Anarchism (like other forms of socialism) was born of the demand for liberty and resistance to authority which capitalism had provoked in its wage slaves. With our support for workers' self-management of production, *"as in so many others, the anarchists remain guardians of the libertarian aspirations which*



Unlike capitalist economists, politicians and bosses at the time, Rothbard seemed unaware that this *"vast frontier"* (like the commons) was viewed as a major problem for maintaining labour discipline and appropriate state action was taken to reduce it by restricting free access to the land in order to ensure that workers were dependent on wage labour. Many early economists recognised this and advocated such action. Edward Wakefield was typical when he complained that *"where land is cheap and all are free, where every one who so pleases can easily obtain a piece of land for himself, not only is labour dear, as respects the labourer's share of the product, but the difficulty is to obtain combined labour at any price."* This resulted in a situation were few *"can accumulate great masses of wealth"* as workers *"cease ... to be labourers for hire; they ... become independent landowners, if not competitors with their former masters in the labour market."* Unsurprisingly, Wakefield urged state action to reduce this option and ensure that labour become cheap as workers had little choice but to seek a master. One key way was for the state to seize the land and then sell it to the population. This would ensure that *"no labourer would be able to procure land until he had worked for money"* and this *"would produce capital for the employment of more labourers."* [quoted by Marx, **Op. Cit.,** , p. 935, p. 936 and p. 939] Which is precisely what did occur.

At the same time that it excluded the working class from virgin land, the state granted large tracts of land to the privileged classes: to land speculators, logging and mining companies, planters, railroads, and so on. In addition to seizing the land and distributing it in such a way as to benefit capitalist industry, the *"government played its part in helping the bankers and hurting the farmers; it kept the amount of money — based in the gold supply — steady while the population rose, so there was less and less money in circulation. The farmer had to pay off his debts in dollars that were harder to get. The bankers, getting loans back, were getting dollars worth more than when they*

*loaned them out — a kind of interest on top of interest. That was why so much of the talk of farmers' movements in those days had to do with putting more money in circulation."* [Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 278] This was the case with the Individualist Anarchists at the same time, we must add.

Overall, therefore, state action ensured the transformation of America from a society of independent workers to a capitalist one. By creating and enforcing the "land monopoly" (of which state ownership of unoccupied land and its enforcement of landlord rights were the most important) the state ensured that the balance of class forces tipped in favour of the capitalist class. By removing the option of farming your own land, the US government created its own form of enclosure and the creation of a landless workforce with little option but to sell its liberty on the "free market". They was nothing "natural" about it. Little wonder the Individualist Anarchist J.K. Ingalls attacked the "land monopoly" with the following words:

> *"The earth, with its vast resources of mineral wealth, its spontaneous productions and its fertile soil, the free gift of God and the common patrimony of mankind, has for long centuries been held in the grasp of one set of oppressors by right of conquest or right of discovery; and it is now held by another, through the right of purchase from them. All of man's natural possessions ... have been claimed as property; nor has man himself escaped the insatiate jaws of greed. The invasion of his rights and possessions has resulted ... in clothing property with a power to accumulate an income."* [quoted by James Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 142]

Marx, correctly, argued that *"the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of that private property which rests on the labour of the individual himself;*



*of the community, those who resisted degradation were in the right."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 599]

Opposition to wage labour and factory fascism was/is widespread and seems to occur wherever it is encountered. *"Research has shown"*, summarises William Lazonick, *"that the 'free-born Englishman' of the eighteenth century — even those who, by force of circumstance, had to submit to agricultural wage labour — tenaciously resisted entry into the capitalist workshop."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 37] British workers shared the dislike of wage labour of their American cousins. A *"Member of the Builders' Union"* in the 1830s argued that the trade unions *"will not only strike for less work, and more wages, but will ultimately* ***abolish wages****, become their own masters and work for each other; labour and capital will no longer be separate but will be indissolubly joined together in the hands of workmen and work-women."* [quoted by E. P. Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 912] This perspective inspired the **Grand National Consolidated Trades Union** of 1834 which had the *"two-fold purpose of syndicalist unions — the protection of the workers under the existing system and the formation of the nuclei of the future society"* when the unions *"take over the whole industry of the country."* [Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 133] As Thompson noted, *"industrial syndicalism"* was a major theme of this time in the labour movement. *"When Marx was still in his teens,"* he noted, British trade unionists had *"developed, stage by stage, a theory of syndicalism"* in which the *"unions themselves could solve the problem of political power"* along with wage slavery. This vision was lost *"in the terrible defeats of 1834 and 1835."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 912 and p. 913] In France, the mutualists of Lyons had come to the same conclusions, seeking *"the formation of a series of co-operative associations"* which would *"return to the workers control of their industry."* Proudhon would take up this theme, as would the anarchist movement he helped create. [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Jospeh Proudhon and the**

*depart from it at pleasure . .. Thus all the philosophy of mind which enter vitally into government by the people ... is combined with a set of rule which the operatives have no voice in forming or administering, yet of a nature not merely perfectly just, but human, benevolent, patriarchal in a high degree."* Those actually subjected to this *"benevolent"* dictatorship had a somewhat different perspective. Workers, in contrast, were perfectly aware that wage labour was wage slavery — that they were decidedly **unfree** during working hours and subjected to the will of another. The workers therefore attacked capitalism precisely because it was despotism (*"monarchical principles on democratic soil"*) and thought they *"who work in the mills ought to own them."* Unsurprisingly, when workers did revolt against the benevolent despots, the workers noted how the bosses responded by marking *"every person with intelligence and independence ... He is a suspected individual and must be either got rid of or broken in. Hundreds of honest labourers have been dismissed from employment ... because they have been suspected of knowing their rights and daring to assert them."* [quoted by Ware, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78, p. 79 and p. 110]

While most working class people now are accustomed to wage labour (while often hating their job) the actual process of resistance to the development of capitalism indicates well its inherently authoritarian nature and that people were not inclined to accept it as "economic freedom." Only once other options were closed off and capitalists given an edge in the "free" market by state action did people accept and become accustomed to wage labour. As E. P. Thompson notes, for British workers at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, the *"gap in status between a 'servant,' a hired wage-labourer subject to the orders and discipline of the master, and an artisan, who might 'come and go' as he pleased, was wide enough for men to shed blood rather than allow themselves to be pushed from one side to the other. And, in the value system*



*in other words, the expropriation of the worker."* [**Capital**, Vol. 1, p. 940] He noted that to achieve this, the state is used:

> *"How then can the anti-capitalistic cancer of the colonies be healed? . .. Let the Government set an artificial price on the virgin soil, a price independent of the law of supply and demand, a price that compels the immigrant to work a long time for wages before he can earn enough money to buy land, and turn himself into an independent farmer."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 938]

Moreover, tariffs were introduced with *"the objective of manufacturing capitalists artificially"* for the *"system of protection was an artificial means of manufacturing manufacturers, or expropriating independent workers, of capitalising the national means of production and subsistence, and of forcibly cutting short the transition ... to the modern mode of production,"* to capitalism [**Op. Cit.**, p. 932 and pp. 921–2]

So mercantilism, state aid in capitalist development, was also seen in the United States of America. As Edward Herman points out, the *"level of government involvement in business in the United States from the late eighteenth century to the present has followed a U-shaped pattern: There was extensive government intervention in the pre-Civil War period (major subsidies, joint ventures with active government participation and direct government production), then a quasi-laissez faire period between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century [a period marked by "the aggressive use of tariff protection" and state supported railway construction, a key factor in capitalist expansion in the USA], followed by a gradual upswing of government intervention in the twentieth century, which accelerated after 1930."* [**Corporate Control, Corporate Power**, p. 162]

Such intervention ensured that income was transferred from workers to capitalists. Under state protection, America

industrialised by forcing the consumer to enrich the capitalists and increase their capital stock. *"According to one study, if the tariff had been removed in the 1830s 'about half the industrial sector of New England would have been bankrupted' ... the tariff became a near-permanent political institution representing government assistance to manufacturing. It kept price levels from being driven down by foreign competition and thereby shifted the distribution of income in favour of owners of industrial property to the disadvantage of workers and customers."* This protection was essential, for the *"end of the European wars in 1814 ... reopened the United States to a flood of British imports that drove many American competitors out of business. Large portions of the newly expanded manufacturing base were wiped out, bringing a decade of near-stagnation."* Unsurprisingly, the *"era of protectionism began in 1816, with northern agitation for higher tariffs."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 56, p. 14 and p. 55] Combined with ready repression of the labour movement and government "homesteading" acts (see section F.8.5), tariffs were the American equivalent of mercantilism (which, after all, was above all else a policy of protectionism, i.e. the use of government to stimulate the growth of native industry). Only once America was at the top of the economic pile did it renounce state intervention (just as Britain did, we must note).

This is **not** to suggest that government aid was limited to tariffs. The state played a key role in the development of industry and manufacturing. As John Zerzan notes, the *"role of the State is tellingly reflected by the fact that the 'armoury system' now rivals the older 'American system of manufactures' term as the more accurate to describe the new system of production methods"* developed in the early 1800s. [**Elements of Refusal**, p. 100] By the middle of the nineteenth century *"a distinctive 'American system of manufactures' had emerged . .. The lead in technological innovation [during the US Industrial Revolution] came in armaments where assured government*



*of the employing and the employed classes ... when labour determines to sell itself no longer to speculators, but to become its own employer, to own and enjoy itself and the fruit thereof, the necessity for scales of prices will have passed away and labour will be forever rescued from the control of the capitalist."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 27–28]

Little wonder, then, why wage labourers considered capitalism as a modified form of slavery and why the term *"wage slavery"* became so popular in the labour and anarchist movements. It was just reflecting the feelings of those who experienced the wages system at first hand and who created the labour and socialist movements in response. As labour historian Norman Ware notes, the *"term 'wage slave' had a much better standing in the forties [of the 19$^{th}$ century] than it has today. It was not then regarded as an empty shibboleth of the soap-box orator. This would suggest that it has suffered only the normal degradation of language, has become a **cliche**, not that it is a grossly misleading characterisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. xvf] It is no coincidence that, in America, the first manufacturing complex in Lowell was designed to symbolise its goals and its hierarchical structure nor that its design was emulated by many of the penitentiaries, insane asylums, orphanages and reformatories of the period. [Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 392]

These responses of workers to the experience of wage labour is important as they show that capitalism is by no means "natural." The fact is the first generation of workers tried to avoid wage labour is at all possible — they hated the restrictions of freedom it imposed upon them. Unlike the bourgeoisie, who positively eulogised the discipline they imposed on others. As one put it with respect to one corporation in Lowell, New England, the factories at Lowell were *"a new world, in its police it is **imperium in imperio**. It has been said that an absolute despotism, justly administered ... would be a perfect government ... For at the same time that it is an absolute despotism, it is a most perfect democracy. Any of its subjects can*

The courts, of course, did their part in ensuring that the law reflected and bolstered the power of the boss rather than the worker. *"Acting piecemeal,"* summarises Tomlins, *"the law courts and law writers of the early republic built their approach to the employment relationship on the back of English master/servant law. In the process, they vested in the generality of nineteenth-century employers a controlling authority over the employees founded upon the pre-industrial master's claim to property in his servant's personal services."* Courts were *"having recourse to master/servant's language of power and control"* as the *"preferred strategy for dealing with the employment relation"* and so advertised their conclusion that *"employment relations were properly to be conceived of as generically hierarchical."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 231 and p. 225] As we noted in last section the courts, judges and jurists acted to outlaw unions as conspiracies and force workers to work the full length of their contracts. In addition, they also reduced employer liability in industrial accidents (which, of course, helped lower the costs of investment as well as operating costs).

Artisans and farmers correctly saw this as a process of downward mobility toward wage labour and almost as soon as there were wage workers, there were strikes, machine breaking, riots, unions and many other forms of resistance. John Zerzan's argument that there was a *"relentless assault on the worker's historical rights to free time, self-education, craftsmanship, and play was at the heart of the rise of the factory system"* is extremely accurate. [**Elements of Refusal**, p. 105] And it was an assault that workers resisted with all their might. In response to being subjected to the wage labour, workers rebelled and tried to organise themselves to fight the powers that be and to replace the system with a co-operative one. As the printer's union argued, its members *"regard such an organisation [a union] not only as an agent of immediate relief, but also as an essential to the ultimate destruction of those unnatural relations at present subsisting between the interests*



*orders justified high fixed-cost investments in special-pursue machinery and managerial personnel. Indeed, some of the pioneering effects occurred in government-owned armouries."* Other forms of state aid were used, for example the textile industry *"still required tariffs to protect [it] from ... British competition."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 218 and p. 219] The government also *"actively furthered this process [of 'commercial revolution'] with public works in transportation and communication."* In addition to this "physical" aid, *"state government provided critical help, with devices like the chartered corporation"* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15] As we noted in section B.2.5, there were changes in the legal system which favoured capitalist interests over the rest of society.

Nineteenth-century America also went in heavily for industrial planning — occasionally under that name but more often in the name of national defence. The military was the excuse for what is today termed rebuilding infrastructure, picking winners, promoting research, and co-ordinating industrial growth (as it still is, we should add). As Richard B. Du Boff points out, the "anti-state" backlash of the 1840s onwards in America was highly selective, as the general opinion was that *"[h]enceforth, if governments wished to subsidise private business operations, there would be no objection. But if public power were to be used to control business actions or if the public sector were to undertake economic initiatives on its own, it would run up against the determined opposition of private capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

State intervention was not limited to simply reducing the amount of available land or enforcing a high tariff. *"Given the independent spirit of workers in the colonies, capital understood that great profits required the use of unfree labour."* [Michael Perelman, **The Invention of Capitalism**, p. 246] It was also applied in the labour market as well. Most obviously, it enforced the property rights of slave owners (until the civil war, produced when the pro-free trade policies of the South clashed

with the pro-tariff desires of the capitalist North). The evil and horrors of slavery are well documented, as is its key role in building capitalism in America and elsewhere so we will concentrate on other forms of obviously unfree labour. Convict labour in Australia, for example, played an important role in the early days of colonisation while in America indentured servants played a similar role.

Indentured service was a system whereby workers had to labour for a specific number of years usually in return for passage to America with the law requiring the return of runaway servants. In theory, of course, the person was only selling their labour. In practice, indentured servants were basically slaves and the courts enforced the laws that made it so. The treatment of servants was harsh and often as brutal as that inflicted on slaves. Half the servants died in the first two years and unsurprisingly, runaways were frequent. The courts realised this was a problem and started to demand that everyone have identification and travel papers.

It should also be noted that the practice of indentured servants also shows how state intervention in one country can impact on others. This is because people were willing to endure indentured service in the colonies because of how bad their situation was at home. Thus the effects of primitive accumulation in Britain impacted on the development of America as most indentured servants were recruited from the growing number of unemployed people in urban areas there. Dispossessed from their land and unable to find work in the cities, many became indentured servants in order to take passage to the Americas. In fact, between one half to two thirds of all immigrants to Colonial America arrived as indentured servants and, at times, three-quarters of the population of some colonies were under contracts of indenture. That this allowed the employing class to overcome their problems in hiring "help" should go without saying, as should its impact on American inequality and



deeply into mass consciousness during the days of the early economy. In 1854, for example, a group of skilled piano makers hoped that *"the day is far distant when they [wage earners] will so far forget what is due to manhood as to glory in a system forced upon them by their necessity and in opposition to their feelings of independence and self-respect. May the piano trade be spared such exhibitions of the degrading power of the day [wage] system."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, p. 26]

Clearly the working class did not consider working for a daily wage, in contrast to working for themselves and selling their own product, to be a step forward for liberty or individual dignity. The difference between selling the product of one's labour and selling one's labour (i.e. oneself) was seen and condemned (*"[w]hen the producer ... sold his product, he retained himself. But when he came to sell his labour, he sold himself ... the extension [of wage labour] to the skilled worker was regarded by him as a symbol of a deeper change."* [Norman Ware, **The Industrial Worker, 1840–1860**, p. xiv]). Indeed, one group of workers argued that they were *"slaves in the strictest sense of the word"* as they had *"to toil from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same for our masters — aye, masters, and for our daily bread."* [quoted by Ware, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] Another group argued that *"the factory system contains in itself the elements of slavery, we think no sound reasoning can deny, and everyday continues to add power to its incorporate sovereignty, while the sovereignty of the working people decreases in the same degree."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29] For working class people, free labour meant something radically different than that subscribed to by employers and economists. For workers, free labour meant economic independence through the ownership of productive equipment or land. For bosses, it meant workers being free of any alternative to consenting to authoritarian organisations within their workplaces — if that required state intervention (and it did), then so be it.

Early America was pervaded by artisan production — individual ownership of the means of production. Unlike capitalism, this system is **not** marked by the separation of the worker from the means of life. Most people did not have to work for another, and so did not. As Jeremy Brecher notes, in 1831 the *"great majority of Americans were farmers working their own land, primarily for their own needs. Most of the rest were self-employed artisans, merchants, traders, and professionals. Other classes — employees and industrialists in the North, slaves and planters in the South — were relatively small. The great majority of Americans were independent and free from anybody's command."* [**Strike!**, p. xxi] So the availability of land ensured that in America, slavery and indentured servants were the only means by which capitalists could get people to work for them. This was because slaves and servants were not able to leave their masters and become self-employed farmers or artisans. As noted in the last section this material base was, ironically, acknowledged by Rothbard but the implications for freedom when it disappeared was not. While he did not ponder what would happen when that supply of land ended and whether the libertarian aspects of early American society would survive, contemporary politicians, bosses, and economists did. Unsurprisingly, they turned to the state to ensure that capitalism grew on the grave of artisan and farmer property.

Toward the middle of the 19th century the economy began to change. Capitalism began to be imported into American society as the infrastructure was improved by state aid and tariff walls were constructed which allowed home-grown manufacturing companies to develop. Soon, due to (state-supported) capitalist competition, artisan production was replaced by wage labour. Thus "evolved" modern capitalism. Many workers understood, resented, and opposed their increasing subjugation to their employers, which could not be reconciled with the principles of freedom and economic independence that had marked American life and had sunk



the ability of capitalists and landlords to enrich themselves on their servants labour and to invest it profitably.

As well as allowing unfree labour, the American state intervened to ensure that the freedom of wage workers was limited in similar ways as we indicated in section F.8.3. *"The changes in social relations of production in artisan trades that took place in the thirty years after 1790,"* notes one historian, *"and the ... trade unionism to which ... it gave rise, both replicated in important respects the experience of workers in the artisan trades in Britain over a rather longer period ... The juridical responses they provoked likewise reproduced English practice. Beginning in 1806, American courts consciously seized upon English common law precedent to combat journeymen's associations."* Capitalists in this era tried to *"secure profit ... through the exercise of disciplinary power over their employees."* To achieve this *"employers made a bid for legal aid"* and it is here *"that the key to law's role in the process of creating an industrial economy in America lies."* As in the UK, the state invented laws and issues proclamations against workers' combinations, calling them conspiracies and prosecuting them as such. Trade unionists argued that laws which declared unions as illegal combinations should be repealed as against the Constitution of the USA while *"the specific cause of trademens protestations of their right to organise was, unsurprisingly, the willingness of local authorities to renew their resort to conspiracy indictments to countermand the growing power of the union movement."* Using criminal conspiracy to counter combinations among employees was commonplace, with the law viewing a *"collective quitting of employment [as] a criminal interference"* and combinations to raise the rate of labour *"indictable at common law."* [Christopher L. Tomlins, **Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic**, p. 113, p. 295, p. 159 and p. 213] By the end of the nineteenth century, state repression for conspiracy was replaced by state repression for acting like a trust while actual trusts were ignored and so laws, ostensibly passed (with the help of the

unions themselves) to limit the power of capital, were turned against labour (this should be unsurprising as it was a capitalist state which passed them). [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 254]

Another key means to limit the freedom of workers was denying departing workers their wages for the part of the contract they had completed. This *"underscored the judiciary's tendency to articulate their approval"* of the hierarchical master/servant relationship in terms of its *"social utility: It was a necessary and desirable feature of the social organisation of work ... that the employer's authority be reinforced in this way."* Appeals courts held that *"an employment contract was an entire contract, and therefore that no obligation to pay wages existed until the employee had completed the agreed term."* Law suits *"by employers seeking damages for an employee's departure prior to the expiry of an agreed term or for other forms of breach of contract constituted one form of legally sanctioned economic discipline of some importance in shaping the employment relations of the nineteenth century."* Thus the boss could fire the worker without paying their wages while if the worker left the boss he would expect a similar outcome. This was because the courts had decided that the *"employer was entitled not only to receipt of the services contracted for in their entirety prior to payment but also to the obedience of the employee in the process of rendering them."* [Tomlins, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 278–9, p. 274, p. 272 and pp. 279–80] The ability of workers to seek self-employment on the farm or workplace or even better conditions and wages were simply abolished by employers turning to the state.

So, in summary, the state could remedy the shortage of cheap wage labour by controlling access to the land, repressing trade unions as conspiracies or trusts and ensuring that workers had to obey their bosses for the full term of their contract (while the bosses could fire them at will). Combine this with the extensive use of tariffs, state funding of industry and infrastructure among many other forms of state aid to capitalists and we have a situation were capitalism was imposed on a pre-capitalist nation at the behest of the wealthy elite by the state, as was the case with all other countries.



## F.8.6 How did working people view the rise of capitalism?

The best example of how hated capitalism was can be seen by the rise and spread of the labour and socialist movements, in all their many forms, across the world. It is no coincidence that the development of capitalism also saw the rise of socialist theories. Nor was it a coincidence that the rising workers movement was subjected to extensive state repression, with unions, strikes and other protests being systematically repressed. Only once capital was firmly entrenched in its market position could economic power come to replace political force (although, of course, that always remained ready in the background to defend capitalist property and power).

The rise of unions, socialism and other reform movements and their repression was a feature of **all** capitalist countries. While America is sometime portrayed as an exception to this, in reality that country was also marked by numerous popular movements which challenged the rise of capitalism and the transformation of social relationships within the economy from artisanal self-management to capitalist wage slavery. As in other countries, the state was always quick to support the capitalist class against their rebellious wage slaves, using first conspiracy and then anti-trust laws against working class people and their organisations. So, in order to fully understand how different capitalism was from previous economic systems, we will consider early capitalism in the US, which for many right-"libertarians" is **the** example of the "capitalism-equals-freedom" argument.

allowing individuals to own and work their own land and tools if they so desire yet no one claims that they support "private property." Equally, that many of the Individualist Anarchists used the term "property" to describe a system of possession (or *"occupancy-and-use"*) should not blind us to the non-capitalist nature of that "property." Once we move beyond looking at the words they used to what they meant by those words we clearly see that their ideas are distinctly different from those of supporters of capitalism. In fact, they share a basic commonality with social anarchism (*"Property will lose a certain attribute which sanctifies it now. The absolute ownership of it — 'the right to use or abuse' will be abolished — and possession, use, will be the only title."* [Albert R. Parsons, **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 173]). This should be unsurprising given the influence of Proudhon on both wings of the movement.

As Malatesta noted, recognising the *"the right of workers to the products of their own labour,"* demanding *"the abolition of interest"* and *"the division of land and the instruments of labour among those who wish to use them"* would be *"a socialist school different from [communist-anarchism], but it is still socialism."* It would be a *"mutualist"* socialism. [**At the Café**, p. 54 and p. 56] In other words, property need not be incompatible with socialism. It all depends on the type of property being advocated.

## G.1.3 What about their support for wage labour?

As we have argued in section A.2.8 and elsewhere, a consistent anarchist must oppose wage labour as this is a form of hierarchical authority. While social anarchism has drawn this logical conclusion from anarchist principles, individualist anarchism has not. While many of its supporters have expressed opposition to wage labour along with other forms hierarchi-



> *"Conquer or die — such is the dilemma that faces the ... peasants and workers at this historic moment ... But we will not conquer in order to repeat the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters; we will conquer in order to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of the truth."*
>
> Nestor Makhno[1]

Welcome to volume 2 of **An Anarchist FAQ** (**AFAQ**)!

If the core of volume 1 was based on outlining anarchist ideas and history as well as presenting the anarchist critique of authority, capitalism and statism, then this volume is focused around two threads. The first is the critique of Marxism, historically anarchism's main alternative within the socialist movement. The second is what anarchists aim for and how we get there.

Needless to say, the second theme is by far the more important as anarchism is more than just analysing what is wrong with the world, it also aims to change it.

First, though, we start with an account of individualist anarchism (section G). It is fair to say that individualist anarchism has generally been on the margin of accounts of anarchism. This, undoubtedly, reflects the fact it has been predominantly a North American movement and was always a small minority within the global anarchist movement. Even in the USA, it was eclipsed by social anarchism.

As such, it has been somewhat overlooked in accounts of anarchism and **AFAQ** seeks to correct that. Unfortunately, it has also to address claims that "anarcho"-capitalism is a form of individualist anarchism and so it spends some time refuting

[1] quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 58

such assertions. We do so with a heavy heart, as this will tend to exaggerate the importance of that ideology and its influence but it needs to be done simply in order to counteract those ideologues and academics who seek to confuse the two either out of ignorance (for the latter) or self-interest (for the former). In addition, section G is shaped by the history of **AFAQ**, when it started as an anti-"anarcho"-capitalist FAQ rather than a pro-anarchist one. If it had been started as the pro-anarchist FAQ it has now become, that section would have been substantially different (most obviously, the material on "anarcho"-capitalism being placed in an appendix where it belongs).

This means that in some regards, section G can be considered as a continuation of section F (which is on why "anarcho"-capitalism is not a form of anarchism). Individualist anarchism ***is*** the form of anarchism closest to liberalism and, as a consequence, to "anarcho"-capitalism. However, similarities do not equate to the former being a (flawed, from an "anarcho"-capitalist perspective) forerunner of the latter. If this were the case then some would assert that social anarchism is a form of Marxism. There are overlaps, of course, but then again there are overlaps between individualist anarchism, Marxism and social anarchism. Yet, for all its differences with social anarchism, individualist anarchism shared a critique of capitalism and the state which has significant commonality.

Individualist anarchism is a unique political theory and it does it a disservice to reduce it to simply a flawed precursor of an ideology whose origins and aims are radically at odds with it. It is no coincidence that individualist anarchism found its home in the broader labour and socialist movements while propertarianism views these with disdain. Nor is it a coincidence that the main influences on individualist anarchism were labour, monetary and land reform movements plus the economics of Proudhon and other socialists while, for "anarcho"-capitalism, it is "Austrian" economics which developed, in part, precisely to combat such popular movements. This leads to fundamen-



a form of possession. Unfortunately, by generally using the term "property" to describe this new system of possession they generated exactly the confusion that Proudhon foretold. Sadly, right-"libertarians" use this confusion to promote the idea that the likes of Tucker supported capitalist property rights and so capitalism. As Tucker argued, *"[d]efining it with Proudhon as the sum total of legal privileges bestowed upon the holder wealth, [individualist anarchism] agrees with Proudhon that property is robbery. But using the word in the commoner acceptation, as denoting the labour's individual possession of his product or of his proportional share of the joint product of himself and others, [it] holds that property is liberty."* [**Liberty**, no. 122, p. 4]

If, as it is sometimes suggested, the difference between a right "libertarian" is that they despise the state because it hinders the freedom of property while left libertarians condemn it because it is a bastion of property, it is worthwhile to note two important facts. Firstly, that individualist anarchism condemns the state because it protects the land monopoly, i.e., capitalist property rights in land and what is on it, rather than a system of "occupancy and use." Secondly, that all schools of anarchist oppose capitalism because it is based on the exploitation of labour, an exploitation which the state protects. Hence de Cleyre: *"I wish a sharp distinction made between the legal institution of property, and property in the sense that what a man definitely produces by his own labour is his own."* The inequality and oppressions of capitalism are *"the inevitable result of the whole politico-economic lie that man can be free and the institution of property continue to exist."* [**Exquisite Rebel**, p. 297] Given this, given these bastions of property against which the both the individualist and social anarchists turn their fire, it is obvious that both schools are left libertarians.

For these reasons it is clear that just because the Individualist Anarchists supported (a form of) "property" does not mean they are capitalists. After all, as we note in the section G.2 communist-anarchists recognise the necessity of

In the case of land and housing, almost all Individualist Anarchists argued that the person who lives or works on it (even under lease) would be regarded *"as the occupant and user of the land on which the house stands, and as the owner of the house itself,"* that is they become *"the owner of both land and house as soon as he becomes the occupant."* [Tucker, **Occupancy and Use Versus the Single Tax**] For Tucker, occupancy and use was *"the Anarchistic solution of the land question"* as it allowed free access to land to all, to be *"enjoyed by the occupant without payment of tribute to a non-occupant."* This applied to what was on the land as well, for if A builds a house, and rents it to B, who lives or works in it under the lease then Tucker would *"regard B as the occupant and user of the land on which the house stands, and as* ***the owner of the house itself.****"* [**Liberty**, no. 308, p. 4]

Needless to say, the individualist anarchists were just as opposed to that mainstay of modern capitalism, the corporation. For Greene corporations *"disarrange our social organisation, and make the just distribution of the products of labour impossible."* [quoted by Wm. Gary Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism**, p. 94] While opposing state attempts to limit trusts (it did not get to the root of the problem which lay in class privilege), Tucker took it for granted that *"corporate privileges are in themselves a wrong."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 129] Given that "occupancy and use" applies to what is on the land, it logically follows that for those workplaces with absentee owners (i.e., owners who hire managers to run them) then these are abandoned by their owners. By the "occupancy and use" criteria, the land and what is on it reverts to those actually using them (i.e., the workers in question). Corporations and shareowners, in other words, are extremely unlikely to exist in individualist anarchism.

Hence to claim that the Individualist Anarchists supported capitalist property rights is false. As can be seen, they advocated a system which differed significantly to the current system, indeed they urged the restriction of property rights to



tally different analyses, strategies and aims that show beyond doubt that the two cannot be confused. The individualist anarchists cannot be considered as forerunners of propertarianism in any more than the most superficial terms. So it is a shame this needs to be discussed at all, but it has.

Ironically, a sadly unpublished article from the 1950s by the founder of that ideology, Murray Rothbard, has come to light which came to the same conclusion (inaccurately entitled, given the history of anarchist use of libertarian, **Are Libertarians 'Anarchists'?**). Ignoring the errors, distortions and inventions about anarchism Rothbard inflicts on the reader, this essay came to the following (correct!) conclusion: *"We must therefore conclude that we are* **not** *anarchists, and that those who call us anarchists are not on firm etymological ground, and are being completely unhistorical."* This was applicable to both the *"dominant anarchist doctrine ... of 'anarchist communism'"* (*"which has also been called 'collectivist anarchism,' 'anarcho-syndicalism,' and 'libertarian communism'*) as well as individualist anarchists, considered by Rothbard *"the best of them",* as **both** had *"socialistic elements in their doctrines."* He suggested that there were thinkers *"in that Golden Age of liberalism"* who had ideas *"similar"* to his ideology but these *"never referred to themselves as anarchists"* while *"all the anarchist groups ... possessed socialistic* **economic** *doctrines in common."* If only he had kept to that analysis and called his ideology something more accurate then this FAQ would have been much shorter!

Also significant is Rothbard's use of the term "libertarian communism" which indicates he was well aware of the traditional use of libertarian as an alternative to anarchist. Interestingly, while reminiscing about the origins of the so-called "libertarian" right in America Rothbard publicly acknowledged their stealing of the word libertarian from genuine anarchists:

> *"One gratifying aspect of our rise to some prominence is that, for the first time in my memory, we,*

> *'our side,' had captured a crucial word from the enemy ... 'Libertarians' ... had long been simply a polite word for left-wing [sic!] anarchists, that is for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken it over ..."*[2]

Today, of course, propertarians shrilly denounce anarchists using the term libertarian in its original and correct meaning as attempting to appropriate *their* name and associate it with socialism! Oh, the irony...

Unlike the propertarians who are so busy degrading the good name "libertarian" and the memories of individualist anarchism, adherents of both schools of anarchism considered themselves socialists. Of course there *are* real differences between individualist and social anarchism, and we explore these. We show that attempts by some members of each school to excommunicate the others are, ultimately, pointless (in general, the individualists seemed keener to do that than the social anarchists but both sides had their intolerant ones). There is significant overlap between both sections of the movement and so it is perfectly possible for each to coexist happily in a free society as well as, on certain issues and tactics, to work fruitfully together in resisting capitalism and the state.[3]

We then turn to discuss Marxism and its flaws (section H). To be honest, it is staggering that this section even needs to be written given that the anarchist critique of Marxism has been validated time and time again. It is like writing a book on evolution and spending a significant time refuting the claims of

[2] **The Betrayal of the American Right**, Ludwig von Mises Institute, p. 83

[3] I would also like to take the opportunity to thank individualist anarchist Shawn Wilbur for his valued input into section G and the suggestions he made after reading the first drafts sent to him. Without this help, and the numerous works of nineteenth century anarchism he has placed on-line, this section would not be as comprehensive as it has become.



*the use of all these things. They all agree that the present social system is one composed of a class of slaves and a class of masters, and that justice is impossible under such conditions."* [**What is Socialism?**]

Thus the Individualist Anarchists definition of "property" differed considerably from that of the capitalist definition. As they themselves acknowledge. Robinson argued that *"the only real remedy is a change of heart, through which land using will be recognised as proper and legitimate, but land holding will be regarded as robbery and piracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273] Tucker, likewise, indicated that his ideas on "property" were not the same as existing ones when he argued that *"the present system of land tenure should be changed to one of occupancy and use"* and that *"no advocate of occupancy-and-use tenure of land believes that it can be put in force, until as a theory it has been as generally ... seen and accepted as the prevailing theory of ordinary private property."* [**Occupancy and Use verses the Single Tax**] Thus, for Tucker, anarchism is dependent on *"the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becom[ing] the prevailing view."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 159]

Based on this theory of "property" Tucker opposed landlords and rent, arguing that anarchy *"means the freeing of all land not occupied **by the owner**"* that is, *"land ownership limited by occupancy and use."* He extended this principle to housing, arguing that *"Anarchic associations"* would *"not collect your rent, and might not even evict your tenant"* and *"tenants would not be forced to pay you rent, nor would you be allowed to seize their property. The Anarchic Associations would look upon your tenants very much as they would look upon your guests."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155 and p. 162] In fact, individualist anarchism would *"accord the actual occupant and user of land the right to that which is upon the land, who left it there when abandoning the land."* [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 350, p. 4]

Looking at Tucker's arguments, it is clear that the last thing Tucker supported was capitalist property rights. For example, he argued that *"property, in the sense of individual possession, is liberty"* and contrasted this with capitalist property. [**Instead of a Book**, p. 394] That his ideas on "property" were somewhat different than that associated with right-"libertarian" thinkers is most clearly seen with regards to land. Here we discover him advocating *"occupancy and use"* and rejecting the "right" of land owners to bar the landless from any land they owned but did not **personally** use. Rent was *"due to that denial of liberty which takes the shape of land monopoly, vesting titles to land in individuals and associations which do not use it, and thereby compelling the non-owning users to pay tribute to the non-using owners as a condition of admission to the competitive market."* Anarchist opposition of rent did *"not mean simply the freeing of unoccupied land. It means the freeing of all land not occupied **by the owner.** In other words, it means land ownership limited by occupancy and use."* [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 130 and p. 155] This would result in a *"system of occupying ownership ... accompanied by no legal power to collect rent."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 325]

A similar position was held by John Beverley Robinson. He argued that there *"are two kinds of land ownership, proprietorship or property, by which the owner is absolute lord of the land, to use it or to hold it out of use, as it may please him; and possession, by which he is secure in the tenure of land which he uses and occupies, but has no claim upon it at all if he ceases to use it."* Moreover, *"[a]ll that is necessary to do away with Rent is to away with absolute property in land."* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 272] Joseph Labadie, likewise, stated that *"the two great sub-divisions of Socialists"* (anarchists and State Socialists) both *"agree that the resources of nature — land, mines, and so forth — should not be held as private property and subject to being held by the individual for speculative purposes, that use of these things shall be the only valid title, and that each person has an equal right to*



Lamarckian theory. Sadly, though, many radicals seem unable to grasp the facts of history, namely that the predictions made by anarchism as regards Marxism have come to pass. Bakunin was right: social democracy did become reformist and the dictatorship of the proletariat became the dictatorship ***over*** the proletariat.

This critique is not to suggest that anarchists should reject everything Marx argued.[4] In terms of his critique of capitalism, there is much that libertarians can agree with (undoubtedly because much of it was built on Proudhon's analysis!). In part, it is this analysis which ensures that Marxism remains alive as a distinct ideology in the radical movement rather than Marx's positive contributions being integrated along with others (such as Proudhon and Bakunin) into libertarian socialism. It is a powerful and, in large parts, a correct analysis of that system but in terms of constructive ideas on what socialism would be and how to achieve it, Marxism comes up as deeply flawed. So, as with anarchist thinkers, we should recognise the important and valid parts of Marx's contribution to the socialist movement while rejecting its negative aspects — particularly as many so-called "Marxist" positions were first expounded by anarchists!

In part, because as well as his critique of capitalism the other main reason for Marxism's continued existence is, undoubtedly, its apparent success. Needless to say, most Marxists are keen to forget that the first apparently successful Marxist movement was social democracy. Engels lavish praise for it is rarely mentioned these days, given social democracy's quick descent into reformism and, worse, explicit counter-revolution during the German revolution. Rather, it is the apparent suc-

[4] Nor, for that matter, that there are no libertarian Marxists. There are, as we indicated insection A.4.4 of volume 1 of **AFAQ**. Why they continue to call themselves Marxists while rejecting Marx's ideas on numerous key issues (and implicitly agreeing with Bakunin in the process) is a mystery.

cess of Leninism[5] during the Russian Revolution that accounts for why so many radicals are attracted to it. As such, what Alexander Berkman termed **The Bolshevik Myth** is alive and well — and needs to be combated.

Suffice to say, the promises of Lenin's **State and Revolution** did not last the night and within six months there was a *de facto* party dictatorship presiding over a state capitalist economy (by early 1919, the need for party dictatorship in a revolution was considered a truism by all the leaders of the party). If that counts as a success, what would failure be? Luckily, unlike Berkman's generation, the numbers blinded by wishful thinking about "socialism" in Russia are fewer although we do have those who, while denouncing Stalin, seem incapable of seeing the obvious links with Lenin's regime and its ideological conceptions (most notably, but not limited to, its vanguardism). As we show in section H.6, the standard modern-day Leninist excuses for Bolshevik tyranny have nothing to recommend them — both in terms of theory and empirical evidence. So as well as presenting a theoretical critique of Marxism, we seek to root it in the experiences of Marxism in practice. This involves, in the main, focusing on the Social-Democratic movement, Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution.

We also spend some time refuting numerous Marxist distortions of anarchist ideas. I've lost count of the times I have seen blatantly false claims about anarchism raised by Marxists. I'm not that surprised, as few Marxists actually bother to read the likes of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. Instead, they simply repeat what other Marxists have claimed about anarchism (starting, of course, with Marx and Engels). This explains why section H.2 has so many quotes in it, simply to drive home what

[5] We are aware that many Marxists reject the suggestion that Leninism is actually Marxist — a position we show has some validity. We argue that it was not only anarchism which Lenin distorted in **State and Revolution** but also important aspects of the ideas of Marx and Engels on such key issues as the state (see section H.3.10, for example).



the worker owns and controls their own means of production. It is, in effect, a form of socialism (a *"petit bourgeois"* form of socialism, to use the typical insulting Marxist phrase). Thus support for "private property" need not mean support for capitalism (as shown, for example, by the Individualist Anarchists). To claim otherwise is to ignore the essential insight of socialism and totally distort the socialist case against capitalism.

To summarise, from an anarchist (and Marxist) perspective capitalism is **not** defined by "property" as such. Rather, it is defined by private property, property which is turned into a means of exploiting the labour of those who use it. For most anarchists, this is done by means of wage labour and abolished by means of workers' associations and self-management (see next section for a discussion of individualist anarchism and wage labour). To use Proudhon's terminology, there is a fundamental difference between property and possession.

Secondly, and more importantly, what the Individualist Anarchists meant by "private property" (or "property") was distinctly different than what is meant by supporters of capitalism. Basically, the "libertarian" right exploit, for their own ends, the confusion generated by the use of the word "property" by the likes of Tucker to describe a situation of "possession." Proudhon recognised this danger. He argued that *"it is proper to call different things by different names, if we keep the name 'property' for the former [individual possession], we must call the latter [the domain of property] robbery, repine, brigandage. If, on the contrary, we reserve the name 'property' for the latter, we must designate the former by the term* ***possession*** *or some other equivalent; otherwise we should be troubled with an unpleasant synonym."* [**What is Property?**, p. 373] Unfortunately Tucker, who translated this work, did not heed Proudhon's words of wisdom and called possession in an anarchist society by the word "property" (but then, neither did Proudhon in the latter part of his life!)

In pre-capitalist social environments, when property is directly owned by the producer, capitalist defences of private property can be used against it. Even John Locke's arguments in favour of private property could be used against capitalism. As Murray Bookchin makes clear regarding pre-capitalist society:

> *"Unknown in the 1640s, the non-bourgeois aspects of Locke's theories were very much in the air a century and a half later ... [In an artisan/peasant society] a Lockean argument could be used as effectively against the merchants ... to whom the farmers were indebted, as it could against the King [or the State]. Nor did the small proprietors of America ever quite lose sight of the view that attempts to seize their farmsteads and possessions for unpaid debts were a violation of their 'natural rights,' and from the 1770s until as late as the 1930s they took up arms to keep merchants and bankers from dispossessing them from land they or their ancestors had wrestled from 'nature' by virtue of their own labour. The notion that property was sacred was thus highly elastic: it could be used as effectively by pre-capitalist strata to hold on to their property as it could by capitalists strata to expand their holdings."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 187–8]

The individualist anarchists inherited this perspective on property and sought means of ending the transformation of American society from one where labour-property predominated into one where capitalist private property (and so exploitation) predominated. Thus their opposition to state interference in the economy as the capitalists were using the state to advance this process (see section F.8.5).

So artisan and co-operative property is not capitalist. It does not generate relationships of exploitation and domination as



would be obvious to anyone familiar with anarchist theory and practice. A few quotes could be dismissed as selective, a multitude cannot. I'm sorry that has to be done, but the regularity of abysmally bad Marxist diatribes against anarchism means that it had to be done in such detail. Sadly, I'm sure that refuting these habitual false assertions in **AFAQ** it will not stop Marxists repeating them.

Marxist myths on anarchism also feeds into section G, given that many Marxists have been at pains to portray anarchism as being simply "anti-state" (in this, they share common-ground with the propertarians). Yet even a cursory glance of anarchist theory and history shows that it has *never* limited itself to just a critique of the state. As long as anarchism has been a named socio-economic theory we have directed our fire at both state ***and*** property. *Property is Theft!*, my new anthology of Proudhon's writings, shows how interlinked the anarchist opposition to the state and capitalism has been from the start. Thus we find Proudhon arguing that *"the capitalist principle"* and the *"governmental principle are one and the same principle"* and so *"the abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the abolition of government of man by man are one and the same formula."* Moreover, it is *"to protect this exploitation of man by man that the State exists"* Unsurprisingly, then, anarchists are *"simultaneously striving for the abolition of capital and of the State"* and *"if you do away with the former, you still have to do away with the latter, and* ***vice versa****."*[6]

So the notion of an anarchism which is simply anti-state is completely alien to our tradition. However, falsely limiting anarchism to purely opposition to the state does allow Marxists to portray their tradition as the only form of socialism and so exclude anarchism, by definition, from anti-capitalism.

After Marxism, we move onto more constructive and fruitful subjects, namely anarchist ideas of what a free society could

[6] **Property is Theft!**, p. 496, p. 535, p. 503 and p. 506

be like (section I) and what we do in the here and now to bring it closer and to make our lives better (section J).

Section I is important, simply because it presents a rough outline of what anarchists have suggested would characterise a free society. So we discuss workers self-management, community self-government, economic and social federalism, anti-social behaviour in a free society, and a host of other issues. While many people, particularly Marxists, question the wisdom of discussing the future society (Marx's comment on "writing the cookbooks of the future" springs to mind[7]), anarchists have been more willing to sketch out a rough vision of what a free society could be like. This may come as a surprise for some (infatuated with Bakunin's pre-anarchist comment that *"the urge to destroy is a creative urge"*) but in reality anarchism has always been a constructive socio-economic theory and anarchist thinkers have always been more than willing to sketch what a free society *could* be.

And that is the key, this is what anarchy *could* be like. As we are at pains to stress, we are not presenting a blueprint: it is a series of suggestions based on our critique of capitalism, anarchist principles and the experiences of the struggle against oppression as well as social revolutions that have taken place. This is important, as anarchists have never abstractly postulated ideal social organisations to the oppression of hierarchy but, rather, developed our ideas of what a free society could look like by critically analysing the current exploitative and oppression one as well as the self-activity and self-organisation of those resisting it.

This anti-utopian perspective has been a significant aspect of anarchism since Proudhon who (especially his **System of Economic Contradictions**) attacked utopian socialists like Fourier and Saint-Simon for presenting fantastical visions

[7] If Marx had been a bit more forthcoming then the likes of Stalin would have found it harder to label their nightmare regimes "socialist."



*by means of such appropriation."* [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 412, p. 413, p. 414, p. 47 and p. 49]

We quote Marx and Engels simply because as authorities on socialism go, they are ones that right-"libertarians" (or Marxists, for that matter) cannot ignore or dismiss. Needless to say, they are presenting an identical analysis to that of Proudhon in **What is Property?** and, significantly, Godwin in his **Political Justice** (although, of course, the conclusions drawn from this common critique of capitalism were radically different in the case of Proudhon). This is, it must be stressed, simply Proudhon's distinction between property and possession (see section B.3.1). The former is theft and despotism, the latter is liberty. In other words, for genuine anarchists, "property" is a ***social relation*** and that a key element of anarchist thinking (both social and individualist) was the need to redefine that relation in accord with standards of liberty and justice.

So what right-"libertarians" do when they point out that the individualist anarchists supported property is to misunderstand the socialist critique of capitalism. They, to paraphrase Marx, confuse two very different kinds of "property," one of which rests on the labour of the producers themselves and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. They do not analyse the social relationships between people which the property in question generates and, instead, concentrate on **things** (i.e. property). Thus, rather than being interested in people and the relationships they create between themselves, the right-"libertarian" focuses on property (and, more often than not, just the word rather than what the word describes). This is a strange position for someone seeking liberty to take, as liberty is a product of social interaction (i.e. the relations we have and create with others) and not a product of things (property is not freedom as freedom is a relationship between people, not things). They confuse property with possession (and vice versa).

*has its practical manifestation here in the struggle between them.*" [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 931]

So, under capitalism, *"property turns out to be the right, on the part of the capitalist, to appropriate the unpaid labour of others, or its product, and the impossibility, on the part of the worker, of appropriating his own product."* In other words, property is not viewed as being identical with capitalism. *"The historical conditions of [Capital's] existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available on the market, as the seller of his own labour-power."* Thus wage-labour, for Marx, is the necessary pre-condition for capitalism, **not** "private property" as such as *"the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They only become capital under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 730, p. 264 and p. 938]

For Engels, *"[b]efore capitalistic production"* industry was *"based upon the private property of the labourers in their means of production"*, i.e., *"the agriculture of the small peasant"* and *"the handicrafts organised in guilds."* Capitalism, he argued, was based on capitalists owning *"**social** means of production only workable by a collectivity of men"* and so they *"appropriated ... the product of the **labour of others**."* Both, it should be noted, had also made this same distinction in the **Communist Manifesto**, stating that *"the distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property."* Artisan and peasant property is *"a form that preceded the bourgeois form"* which there *"is no need to abolish"* as *"the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it."* This means that communism *"derives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others*



(and appealing for rich benefactors!) rather than studying tendencies within capitalism which could transcend it (particularly working class self-activity). Thus social transformation *"must not emanate from the powers that be; it ought to be SPONTANEOUS."* It must come *"from below"* as only this ensured change *"by the concerted action of the citizens, by the experience of the workers, by the progress and diffusion of enlightenment, revolution by the means of liberty."*[8] Echoing Proudhon, Kropotkin argued that *"the method followed by the anarchist thinker"* is *"entirely different from that followed by the utopists ... He studies human society as it is now and was in the past ... tries to discover its tendencies, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes."*[9] A key aspect of this is looking at the self-organisation and struggles of working class people, these being the means by which anarchists link the current to the future.

So we discuss in **AFAQ** the perennial issues of both transition and how the new world gestates within the old. As section I.2.3 shows in detail, anarchists have always stressed that the new world is created in our struggles against the old. The fight for freedom transforms those who take part as well as creating the organisations (such as community assemblies, workers' councils, factory committees and their federations) which will be the framework of a free society. So the IWW slogan of *"building a new world in the shell of the old"* has been a key aspect of anarchism for some time, with Proudhon proclaiming during the 1848 Revolution that *"a new society be founded in the heart of the old society"* based on *"a body representative of the proletariat be[ing] formed ... in opposition to the bourgeoisie's representation."*[10]

[8] Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 325 and p. 398

[9] **Anarchism**, p. 47

[10] **Op. Cit.**, p. 321. Proudhon had made a similar call in 1846, arguing that *"an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of*

Which brings us nicely to the last section, on what do anarchists do? In section J we summarise how anarchists see social change happening, how we organise to influence the class struggle as well as the forms of organisations we create. There are substantial discussions on alternative forms of social organisation we advocate and how they are the embryonic forms of a free society we create while resisting the current oppressive one. Thus, for example, we discuss how the federations of workplace assemblies we urge to fight the bosses become the means by which co-operative production is organised in a free society while the neighbourhood assemblies created as a counter-power to the state become the means by which free individuals manage their communities.

We also outline why anarchists support direct action and reject voting ("political action") as the means of social change as well as the role of libertarians in social struggle and revolution as well as how we organise to influence both. As well as summarising our ideas on the important issues of how we organise and how we change the world, we take the time to refute some of the more common false claims against abstentionism and whether we are "a-political" or not. Suffice to say, the anarchist critique of electioneering has been validated (as can be seen by the numbers of ex-radical politicians and ex-socialist parties in the world). Our arguments on the transforming power of direct action, solidarity and working class self-organisation from below have, likewise, been vindicated time and time again.

It must also be noted that the sections within this volume have been slightly edited to ensure that it approximates volume 1 in size. This has involved trimming around a tenth of the material. I have tried to cut non-essential paragraphs and subsections to ensure that the core of the arguments remain intact.

*which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave"* as the state is *"inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat."* (pp. 225–6)



## G.1.2 What about their support of "private property"?

The notion that because the Individualist Anarchists supported "private property" they supported capitalism is distinctly wrong. This is for two reasons. Firstly, private property is not the distinctive aspect of capitalism — exploitation of wage labour is. Secondly, and more importantly, what the Individualist Anarchists meant by "private property" (or "property") was distinctly different than what is meant by theorists on the "libertarian"-right or what is commonly accepted as "private property" under capitalism. Thus support of private property does not indicate a support for capitalism.

On the first issue, it is important to note that there are many different kinds of private property. If quoting Karl Marx is not **too** out of place:

> *"Political economy confuses, on principle, two very different kinds of private property, one of which rests on the labour of the producer himself, and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. It forgets that the latter is not only the direct antithesis of the former, but grows on the former's tomb and nowhere else.*
>
> *"In Western Europe, the homeland of political economy, the process of primitive accumulation is more of less accomplished ...*
>
> *"It is otherwise in the colonies. There the capitalist regime constantly comes up against the obstacle presented by the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems*

In summary, the "free market" as sought by (say) Tucker would not be classed as a "free market" by right-wing "libertarians." So the term "free market" (and, of course, "socialism") can mean different things to different people. As such, it would be correct to state that **all** anarchists oppose the "free market" by definition as all anarchists oppose the **capitalist** "free market." And, just as correctly, "anarcho"-capitalists would oppose the individualist anarchist "free market," arguing that it would be no such thing as it would be restrictive of property rights (**capitalist** property rights of course). For example, the question of resource use in an individualist society is totally different than in a capitalist "free market" as landlordism would not exist. This is a restriction on capitalist property rights and a violation of a capitalist "free market." So an individualist "free market" would not be considered so by right-wing "libertarians" due to the substantial differences in the rights on which it would be based (with no right to capitalist private property being the most important).

All this means that to go on and on about individualist anarchism and it support for a free market simply misses the point. No one denies that individualist anarchists were (and are) in favour of a "free market" but this did not mean they were not socialists nor that they wanted the same kind of "free market" desired by "anarcho"-capitalism or that has existed under capitalism. Of course, whether their economic system would actually result in the abolition of exploitation and oppression is another matter and it is on this issue which social anarchists disagree with individualist anarchism **not** whether they are socialists or not.



This means that, for example, section H.2 (which debunks various Marxist myths about anarchism) ends on section H.2.11 in print but goes to section H.2.14 on-line. This was done with a heavy heart.

Since volume 1 has been published, significant changes have occurred in the world. Neo-liberalism has taken a battering as the inevitable consequences of its policies resolved themselves in economic crisis. While reality has struck a blow to that ideology, it is fair to say that it will survive — after all, the ideology is so unrealistic already why should mere reality impact on its beauty for the true believer? Not to mention, of course, the significant class interests expressed in it. One thing is true, unless working class people organise and resist then governments, political discourse, economies and economic ideology will simply continue on as before — and those who will pay the costs of the crisis will not be the ruling class that created it.

On a more positive note, section B.1 of **AFAQ** indicated how hierarchies of wealth and power adversely affect those subject to them. **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better** by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett presents more evidence on this subject, noting that on almost every index of quality of life or wellness there is a strong correlation between a country's level of economic inequality and its social outcomes. Significantly, it is not just the poor that are adversely affected by inequality, but society as a whole. So more equal societies have less crime and smaller prison populations as well as consistently delivering other advantages such as better physical and mental health, lower rates of teenage pregnancy and obesity, and higher rates of literacy and social trust. All of which confirm the anarchist analysis of the harmful effects of inequality in wealth and power.

**AFAQ** has moved its main site location (although the various aliases we have remain the same).[11] As a result, it also has a blog in which we post supplemental material on anarchism and news about the FAQ itself (such as updates).[12] Notable postings include the 2008 article marking the 150th anniversary of the use of the term "libertarian" by anarchists (*150 years of libertarian*), a supplement to our appendix on anarchist symbols contained in volume 1 (*The Red Flag of Anarchy*) and an unfinished appendix to section C explaining classical economics from a socialist perspective.

Finally, on a personal note, I dedicate this volume, like the first, to my family. I hope that this work will help, however slightly, to make the world a better place for them and that my children will grow up in a freer, more sustainable, world. Whether they do or not really is up to us, the current generation. Are we up for the challenge? Are we ready to fight for freedom and equality? The answer to that lies in your hands.

Either you can read **AFAQ** and leave it at that or you can join in the struggle for freedom and equality. The anarchist movement is not perfect, nor does it have all the answers. However, it remains for all that our best chance of making the world a fit place for unique individuals to live and flourish in. The question is whether we will remain happy to keep surviving within capitalism or whether we will seek to transform ourselves and our world for the better. We may fail. We may not stop the slide towards increased authoritarianism and atomisation. One thing is sure, if we do not resist then that slide will accelerate.

And if we do resist? Well, we may well change the world…

Iain McKay
www.anarchistfaq.org.uk

[11] Namely: www.anarchistfaq.org, www.anarchismfaq.org, www.anarchyfaq.org and www.anarchistfaq.org.uk.

[12] It can be found at: `http://anarchism.pageabode.com/blogs/afaq`



*and forces [which] tended to undermine and discredit that movement"* was *"the amazing growth of trusts and syndicates, of holding companies and huge corporations, of chain banks and chain stores."* This *"gradually and insidiously shook the faith of many in the efficacy of mutual banks, co-operative associations of producers and consumers, and the competition of little fellows. Proudhon's plan for a bank of the people to make industrial loans without interest to workers' co-operatives, or other members, seemed remote and inapplicable to an age of mass production, mechanisation, continental and international markets."* [*"Philosophical Anarchism: Its Rise, Decline, and Eclipse"*, pp. 470–483, **The American Journal of Sociology**, vol. 41, no. 4, p. 481]

If the individualist anarchists shared the "anarcho"-capitalist position or even shared a common definition of "free markets" then the *"power of the trusts"* would simply not be an issue. This is because "anarcho"-capitalism does not acknowledge the existence of such power, as, by definition, it does not exist in capitalism (although as noted in section F.1 Rothbard himself proved critics of this assertion right). Tucker's comments, therefore, indicate well how far individualist anarchism actually is from "anarcho"-capitalism. The "anarcho"-capitalist desires free markets no matter their result or the concentration of wealth existing at their introduction. As can be seen, Tucker saw the existence of concentrations of wealth as a problem and a hindrance towards anarchy. Thus Tucker was well aware of the dangers to individual liberty of inequalities of wealth and the economic power they produce. Equally, if Tucker supported the "free market" above all else then he would not have argued this point. Clearly, then, Tucker's support for the "free market" cannot be abstracted from his fundamental principles nor can it be equated with a "free market" based on capitalist property rights and massive inequalities in wealth (and so economic power). Thus individualist anarchist support for the free market does not mean support for a **capitalist** "free market."

*competition, could it be instituted, would be unable to destroy"* as *"concentrated capital"* could set aside a sacrifice fund to bankrupt smaller competitors and continue the process of expansion of reserves. Thus the growth of economic power, producing as it does natural barriers to entry from the process of capitalist production and accumulation, had resulted in a situation where individualist anarchist solutions could no longer reform capitalism away. The centralisation of capital had *"passed for the moment beyond their reach."* The problem of the trusts, he argued, *"must be grappled with for a time solely by forces political or revolutionary,"* i.e., through confiscation either through the machinery of government *"or in denial of it."* Until this *"great levelling"* occurred, all individualist anarchists could do was to spread their ideas as those trying to *"hasten it by joining in the propaganda of State Socialism or revolution make a sad mistake indeed."* [quoted by James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 273–4]

In other words, the economic power of *"concentrated capital"* and *"enormous concentration of wealth"* placed an insurmountable obstacle to the realisation of anarchy. Which means that the abolition of usury and relative equality were considered **ends** rather than side effects for Tucker and if free competition could not achieve these then such a society would **not** be anarchist. If economic inequality was large enough, it meant anarchism was impossible as the rule of capital could be maintained by economic power alone without the need for extensive state intervention (this was, of course, the position of revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin, Most and Kropotkin in the 1870s and onwards whom Tucker dismissed as not being anarchists).

Victor Yarros is another example, an individualist anarchist and associate of Tucker, who by the 1920s had abandoned anarchism for social democracy, in part because he had become convinced that economic privilege could not be fought by economic means. As he put it, the most *"potent"* of the *"factors*



# Section G — Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?

The short answer is, no, it is not. While a diverse tendency, the individualist anarchists were opposed to the exploitation of labour, all forms of non-labour income (such as profits, interest and rent) as well as capitalist property rights (particularly in land). While aiming for a free market system, they considered laissez-faire capitalism to be based on various kinds of state enforced class monopoly which ensured that labour was subjected to rule, domination and exploitation by capital. As such it is deeply **anti**-capitalist and many individualist anarchists, including its leading figure Benjamin Tucker, explicitly called themselves socialists (indeed, Tucker often referred to his theory as ***"Anarchistic-Socialism"***).

So, in this section of our anarchist FAQ we indicate why the individualist anarchists cannot be classified as "ancestors" of the bogus libertarians of the "anarcho"-capitalist school. Rather, they must be classified as libertarian **socialists** due to their opposition to exploitation, critique of capitalist property rights and concern for equality, albeit being on the liberal wing of anarchist thought. Moreover, while all wanted to have an economy in which all incomes were based on labour, many also opposed wage labour, i.e. the situation where one person sells their labour to another rather than the product of that labour (a position which, we argue, their ideas logically imply). So while **some** of their ideas do overlap with those of the "anarcho"-capitalist school they are not capitalistic, no more than the overlap between their ideas and anarcho-communism makes them communistic.

In this context, the creation of "anarcho"-capitalism may be regarded as yet another tactic by capitalists to reinforce the public's perception that there are no viable alternatives to capitalism, i.e. by claiming that "even anarchism implies capitalism." In order to justify this claim, they have searched the history of anarchism in an effort to find some thread in the movement that can be used for this purpose. They think that with the individualist anarchists they have found such a thread. How-



noted, it *"began to dwindle rapidly after 1900. Some of its former adherents joined the more aggressive communistic faction ... many others began to favour the rising socialist movement as the only effective weapon against billion-dollar corporations."* [*"Benjamin R. Tucker: Individualist and Anarchist,"* pp. 444–67, **The New England Quarterly**, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. p. 464] Other historians have noted the same. *"By 1908,"* argued Eunice Minette Schuster *"the industrial system had fastened its claws into American soil"* and while the *"Individualist Anarchists had attempted to destroy monopoly, privilege, and inequality, originating in the lack of opportunity"* the *"superior force of the system which they opposed ... overwhelmed"* them. Tucker left America in 1908 and those who remained *"embraced either Anarchist-Communism as the result of governmental violence against the labourers and their cause, or abandoned the cause entirely."* [**Native American Anarchism**, p. 158, pp. 159–60 and p. 156] While individualist anarchism did not entirely disappear with the ending of **Liberty**, social anarchism became the dominant trend in America as it had elsewhere in the world.

As we note in section G.4, the apparent impossibility of mutual banking to eliminate corporations by economic competition was one of the reasons Voltairine de Cleyre pointed to for rejecting individualist anarchism in favour of communist-anarchism. This problem was recognised by Tucker himself thirty years after **Liberty** had been founded. In the postscript to a 1911 edition of his famous essay *"State Socialism and Anarchism"*, he argued that when he wrote it 25 years earlier *"the denial of competition had not effected the enormous concentration of wealth that now so gravely threatens social order"* and so while a policy of mutual banking might have stopped and reversed the process of accumulation in the past, the way now was *"not so clear."* This was because the tremendous capitalisation of industry now made the money monopoly a convenience, but no longer a necessity. Admitted Tucker, the *"trust is now a monster which ... even the freest*

in calling many things "free" that anarchists would not accept, and seeing "constraint" in what the anarchists simply thought of as "consistency." This explains both his criticism of capitalism **and** state socialism:

> *"The complaint of the Archist Socialists that the Anarchists are bourgeois is true to this extent and no further — that, great as is their detestation for a bourgeois society, they prefer its partial liberty to the complete slavery of State Socialism."* [*"Why I am an Anarchist"*, pp. 132–6, **Man!**, M. Graham (ed.), p. 136]

It should be clear that a "free market" will look somewhat different depending on your economic presuppositions. Ironically, this is something "anarcho"-capitalists implicitly acknowledge when they admit they do not agree with the likes of Spooner and Tucker on many of their key premises and conclusions (but that does not stop them claiming — despite all that — that their ideas are a modern version of individualist anarchism!). Moreover, the "anarcho"-capitalist simply dismisses all the reasoning that got Tucker there — that is like trying to justify a law citing Leviticus but then saying "but of course all that God stuff is just absurd." You cannot have it both ways. And, of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist support for non-labour based economics allow them to side-step (and so ignore) much of what anarchists — communists, collectivists, individualists, mutualists and syndicalists alike — consider authoritarian and coercive about "actually existing" capitalism. But the difference in economic analysis is critical. No matter what they are called, it is pretty clear that individualist anarchist standards for the freedom of markets are far more demanding than those associated with even the freest capitalist market system.

This is best seen from the development of individualist anarchism in the 20th century. As historian Charles A. Madison



ever, such an appropriation requires the systematic ignoring or dismissal of key aspects of individualist-anarchism (which, of course, the right-"libertarian" does). Somewhat ironically, this attempt by right-"libertarians" to exclude individualist anarchism from socialism parallels an earlier attempt by state socialists to do the same. Tucker furiously refuted such attempts in an article entitled *"Socialism and the Lexicographers"*, arguing that *"the Anarchistic Socialists are not to be stripped of one half of their title by the mere dictum of the last lexicographer."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 365]

Nevertheless, in the individualists we find anarchism coming closest to "classical" liberalism and being influenced by the ideas of Herbert Spencer, a forefather of "libertarian" capitalism (of the minimal state variety). As Kropotkin summarised, their ideas were *"a combination of those of Proudhon with those of Herbert Spencer."* [**Anarchism**, p. 296] What the "anarcho"-capitalist is trying to is to ignore Proudhon's influence (i.e. the socialist aspect of their theories) which just leaves Spencer, who was a right-wing liberal. To reduce individualist anarchism so is to destroy what makes it a unique political theory and movement. While both Kropotkin and Tucker praised Spencer as a synthetic philosopher and social scientist, they were both painfully aware of the limitations in his socio-political ideas. Tucker considered his attacks on all forms of socialism (including Proudhon) as authoritarian as being, at best, misinformed or, at worse, dishonest. He also recognised the apologetic and limited nature of his attacks on state intervention, noting that *"amid his multitudinous illustrations ... of the evils of legislation, he in every instance cites some law passed ostensibly at least to protect labour, alleviating suffering, or promote the people's welfare. But never once does he call attention to the far more deadly and deep-seated evils growing out of the innumerable laws creating privilege and sustaining monopoly."* Unsurprisingly, he considered Spencer as a *"champion of the capitalistic class."* [quoted by James J.

Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 240] As we will discuss in section G.3, it is likely that he would have drawn the same conclusion about "anarcho"-capitalism.

This does not mean that the majority thread within the anarchist movement is uncritical of individualist anarchism. Far from it! Social anarchists have argued that this influence of non-anarchist ideas means that while its *"criticism of the State is very searching, and [its] defence of the rights of the individual very powerful,"* like Spencer it *"opens ... the way for reconstituting under the heading of 'defence' all the functions of the State."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 297] This flows, social anarchists argue, from the impact of liberal principles and led some individualist anarchists like Benjamin Tucker to support contract theory in the name of freedom, without being aware of the authoritarian social relationships that could be implied by it, as can be seen under capitalism (other individualist anarchists were more aware of this contradiction as we will see). Therefore, social anarchists tend to think of individualist anarchism as an inconsistent form of anarchism, one which could become consistent by simply logically applying its own principles (see section G.4). On their part, many individualist anarchists simply denied that social anarchists where anarchists, a position other anarchists refute (see section G.2). As such, this section can also be considered, in part, as a continuation of the discussion begun in section A.3.

Few thinkers are completely consistent. Given Tucker's adamant anti-statism and anti-capitalism, it is likely that had he realised the authoritarian social relationships which contract theory tends to produce (and justify) when involving employing labour, he would have modified his views in such a way as to eliminate the contradiction (particularly as contracts involving wage labour directly contradicts his support for "occupancy and use"). It is understandable why he failed to do so, however, given the social context in which he lived and agitated. In Tucker's America, self-employment was still a



of the individualist anarchists and the society which shaped them.

The "anarcho"-capitalist usually admits that they totally disagree with many of the essential premises and conclusions of the individualist anarchist analyses (see next section). The most basic difference is that the individualist anarchists rooted their ideas in the labour theory of value while the "anarcho"-capitalists favour mainstream marginalist theory. It does not take much thought to realise that advocates of socialist theories and those of capitalist ones will naturally develop differing notions of what is and what should be happening within a given economic system. One difference that **has** in fact arisen is that the notion of what constitutes a "free market" has differed according to the theory of value applied. Many things can be attributed to the workings of a "free" market under a capitalist analysis that would be considered symptoms of economic unfreedom under most socialist driven analyses.

This can be seen if you look closely at the case of Tucker's comments that anarchism was simply *"consistent Manchesterianism."* If this is done then a simple example of this potential confusion can be found. Tucker argued that anarchists *"accused"* the Manchester men *"of being inconsistent,"* that while being in favour of laissez faire for *"the labourer in order to reduce his wages"* they did not believe *"in liberty to compete with the capitalist in order to reduce his usury."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 83] To be consistent in this case is to be something other — and more demanding in terms of what is accepted as "freedom" — than the average Manchesterian (i.e. a supporter of "free market" capitalism). By *"consistent Manchesterism"*, Tucker meant a laissez-faire system in which class monopolies did not exist, where capitalist private property in land and intellectual property did not exist. In other words, a free market purged of its capitalist aspects. Partisans of the capitalist theory see things differently, of course, feeling justified

restrictions on private property and so the "free market." The individualist anarchist would consider the "anarcho"-capitalist "free market" as another system of legally maintained privilege, with the free market distorted in favour of the wealthy. That capitalist property rights were being maintained by private police would not stop that regime being unfree. This can be seen when "anarcho"-capitalist Wendy McElroy states that *"radical individualism hindered itself ... Perhaps most destructively, individualism clung to the labour theory of value and refused to incorporate the economic theories arising within other branches of individualist thought, theories such as marginal utility. Unable to embrace statism, the stagnant movement failed to adequately comprehend the logical alternative to the state — a free market."* [*"Benjamin Tucker, **Liberty**, and Individualist Anarchism"*, pp. 421–434, **The Independent Review**, vol. II, No. 3, p. 433] Therefore, rather than being a source of commonality, individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism actually differ quite considerably on what counts as a genuinely free market.

So it should be remembered that "anarcho"-capitalists at best agree with Tucker, Spooner, et al on fairly vague notions like the "free market." They do not bother to find out what the individualist anarchists meant by that term. Indeed, the "anarcho"-capitalist embrace of different economic theories means that they actually reject the reasoning that leads up to these nominal "agreements." It is the "anarcho"-capitalists who, by rejecting the underlying economics of the mutualists, are forced to take any "agreements" out of context. It also means that when faced with obviously anti-capitalist arguments and conclusions of the individualist anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist cannot explain them and are reduced to arguing that the anti-capitalist concepts and opinions expressed by the likes of Tucker are somehow "out of context." In contrast, the anarchist can explain these so-called "out of context" concepts by placing them into the context of the ideas



possibility on a wide scale (in fact, for much of the nineteenth century it was the dominant form of economic activity). His reforms were aimed at making it easier for workers to gain access to both land and machinery, so allowing wage workers to become independent farmers or artisans. Unsurprisingly, therefore, he viewed individualist anarchism as a society of workers, not one of capitalists and workers. Moreover, as we will argue in section G.4.1, his love for freedom and opposition to usury logically implies artisan and co-operative labour — people selling the products of their labour, as opposed to the labour itself — which itself implies self-management in production (and society in general), not authoritarianism within the workplace (this was the conclusion of Proudhon as well as Kropotkin). Nevertheless, it is this inconsistency — the non-anarchist aspect of individualist anarchism — which right "libertarians" like Murray Rothbard select and concentrate on, ignoring the anti-capitalist context in which this aspect of individualist thought exists within. As David Wieck pointed out:

> *"Out of the history of anarchist thought and action Rothbard has pulled forth a single thread, the thread of individualism, and defines that individualism in a way alien even to the spirit of a Max Stirner or a Benjamin Tucker, whose heritage I presume he would claim — to say nothing of how alien is his way to the spirit of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and the historically anonymous persons who through their thoughts and action have tried to give anarchism a living meaning. Out of this thread Rothbard manufactures one more bourgeois ideology."* [**Anarchist Justice**, pp. 227–228]

It is with this in mind that we discuss the ideas of people like Tucker. As this section of the FAQ will indicate, even at its

most liberal, individualist, extreme anarchism was fundamentally **anti**-capitalist. Any concepts which "anarcho"-capitalism imports from the individualist tradition ignore both the theoretical underpinnings of their ideas as well as the social context of self-employment and artisan production within which those concepts arose, thus turning them into something radically different from what was intended by their originators. As we discuss in section G.1.4 the social context in which individualist anarchism developed is essential to understanding both its politics and its limitations (*"Anarchism in America is not a **foreign importation** but a product of the social conditions of this country and its historical traditions,"* although it is *"true that American anarchism was also influenced later by European ideas."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 163]).

Saying that, it would be a mistake to suggest (as some writers have) that individualist anarchism can be viewed purely in American terms. While understanding the nature of American society and economy at the time is essential to understanding individualist anarchism, it would be false to imply that only individualist anarchism was the product of America conditions and subscribed to by Americans while social anarchism was imported from Europe by immigrants. After all, Albert and Lucy Parsons were both native-born Americans who became communist-anarchists while Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman only become anarchists once they had arrived in America. Native-born Voltairine de Cleyre moved from individualist to communist anarchism. Josiah Warren may have been born in Boston, but he developed his anarchism after his experiences in a experimental community set up by Welsh socialist Robert Owen (who, in turn, was inspired by William Godwin's ideas). While Warren and Proudhon may have developed their ideas independently, American libertarians became aware of Proudhon and other European socialists as radical journals had correspondents



treat the occupier and user as the rightful owner, and defend them against the aggression of an absentee landlord who attempted to collect rent. An "anarcho"-capitalist would consider this as aggression **against** the landlord and a violation of "free market" principles. Such a system of "occupancy and use" would involve massive violations of what is considered normal in a capitalist "free market." Equally, a market system which was based on capitalist property rights in land would **not** be considered as genuinely free by the likes of Tucker.

This can be seen from Tucker's debates with supporters of laissez-faire capitalism such as Auberon Herbert (who, as discussed in section F.7.2, was an English minimal statist and sometimes called a forerunner of "anarcho"-capitalism). Tucker quoted an English critic of Herbert, who noted that *"When we come to the question of the ethical basis of property, Mr. Herbert refers us to 'the open market'. But this is an evasion. The question is not whether we should be able to sell or acquire 'in the open market' anything which we rightfully possess, but how we come into rightful possession."* [**Liberty**, no. 172, p. 7] Tucker rejected the idea *"that a man should be allowed a title to as much of the earth as he, in the course of his life, with the aid of all the workmen that he can employ, may succeed in covering with buildings. It is occupancy **and** use that Anarchism regards as the basis of land ownership, ... A man cannot be allowed, merely by putting labour, to the limit of his capacity and beyond the limit of his person use, into material of which there is a limited supply and the use of which is essential to the existence of other men, to withhold that material from other men's use; and any contract based upon or involving such withholding is as lacking in sanctity or legitimacy as a contract to deliver stolen goods."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 331, p. 4]

In other words, an individualist anarchist would consider an "anarcho"-capitalist "free market" as nothing of the kind and vice versa. For the former, the individualist anarchist position on "property" would be considered as forms of regulation and

the same word often means different things to different people. Both Kropotkin and Lenin said they were "communists" and aimed for "communism." However, it does not mean that the society Kropotkin aimed for was the same as that desired by Lenin. Kropotkin's communism was decentralised, created and run from the bottom-up while Lenin's was fundamentally centralised and top-down. Similarly, both Tucker and the Social-Democrat (and leading Marxist) Karl Kautsky called themselves a "socialist" yet their ideas on what a socialist society would be like were extremely different. As J.W. Baker notes, *"Tucker considered himself a socialist ... as the result of his struggle against 'usury and capitalism,' but anything that smelled of 'state socialism' was thoroughly rejected."* [*"Native American Anarchism,"* pp. 43–62, **The Raven**, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 60] This, of course, does not stop many "anarcho"-capitalists talking about "socialist" goals as if all socialists were Stalinists (or, at best, social democrats). In fact, "socialist anarchism" has included (and continues to include) advocates of truly free markets as well as advocates of a non-market socialism which has absolutely nothing in common with the state capitalist tyranny of Stalinism. Similarly, they accept a completely ahistorical definition of "capitalism," so ignoring the massive state violence and support by which that system was created and is maintained.

The same with terms like "property" and the "free market," by which the "anarcho"-capitalist assumes the individualist anarchist means the same thing as they do. We can take land as an example. The individualist anarchists argued for an ***"occupancy and use"*** system of "property" (see next section for details). Thus in their "free market," land would not be a commodity as it is under capitalism and so under individualist anarchism absentee landlords would be considered as aggressors (for under capitalism they use state coercion to back up their collection of rent against the actual occupiers of property). Tucker argued that local defence associations should



in France during the 1848 revolution and partial translations of radical writings from Europe appeared as quickly as they could be transmitted and translated. Individualist anarchists like William Greene and Tucker were heavily influenced by the ideas of Proudhon and so imported aspects of European anarchism into American individualist anarchism while the likes of the French individualist E. Armand brought aspects of American anarchism into the European movement. Similarly, both Spooner and Greene had been members of the First International while individualist anarchists Joseph Labadie and Dyer Lum where organisers of the **Knights of Labor** union along with Albert and Lucy Parsons. Lum later joined the anarcho-communist inspired **International Working People's Association** (IWPA) and edited its English language paper (the **Alarm**) when Parson was imprisoned awaiting execution. All forms of anarchism were, in other words, a combination of European and American influences, both in terms of ideas and in terms of social experiences and struggles, even organisations.

While red-baiting and cries of "Un-American" may incline some to stress the "native-born" aspect of individualist anarchism (particularly those seeking to appropriate that tendency for their own ends), both wings of the US movement had native-born and foreign members, aspects and influences (and, as Rocker noted, the *"so-called white civilisation of [the American] continent is the work of European immigrants."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163]). While both sides tended to denounce and attack the other (particularly after the Haymarket events), they had more in common than the likes of Benjamin Tucker and Johann Most would have been prepared to admit and each tendency, in its own way, reflected aspects of American society and the drastic transformation it was going through at the time. Moreover, it was changes in American society which lead to the steady rise of social anarchism and its eclipse of individualist anarchism from the 1880s onwards. While there has

been a tendency to stress individualist tendency in accounts of American anarchism due to its unique characteristics, only those *"without a background in anarchist history"* would think *"that the individualist anarchists were the larger segment of the anarchist movement in the U.S. at the time. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The collectivist branch of anarchism was much stronger among radicals and workers during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century than the individualist brand. Before the Civil War, the opposite would be true."* [Greg Hall, **Social Anarchism**, no. 30, pp. 90–91]

By the 1880s, social anarchism had probably exceeded the size of the "home-grown" individualists in the United States. The IWPA had some five thousand members at its peak with perhaps three times as many supporters. [Paul Avrich, **The Haymarket Tragedy**, p. 83] Its journals had an aggregate circulation of over 30,000. [George Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 395] In contrast, the leading individualist newspaper **Liberty** *"probably never had more than 600 to 1000 subscribers, but it was undoubtedly read by more than that."* [Charles H. Hamilton, *"Introduction"*, p. 1–19, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 10] The repression after Haymarket took its toll and the progress of social anarchism was hindered for a decade. However, *"[b]y the turn of the century, the anarchist movement in America had become predominantly communist in orientation."* [Paul Avrich, **Anarchist Voices**, p. 5] As an added irony for those who stress the individualist nature of anarchism in America while dismissing social anarchism as a foreign import, the first American newspaper to use the name **"An-archist"** was published in Boston in 1881 by anarchists within the social revolutionary branch of the movement. [Paul Avrich, **The Haymarket Tragedy**, p. 57] Equally ironic, given the appropriation of the term by the American right, the first anarchist journal to use the term "libertarian" (**La Libertaire, Journal du Mouvement Social**) was published in New York



before concluding that it was *"non-socialism"* because it has *"wage-labour and exploitation."* [**Against the Market**, p. 139 and p. 169] Of course, that this is not true (even in a Marxist sense) did not stop him asserting it. As one reviewer correctly points out, *"McNally is right that even in market socialism, market forces rule workers' lives"* and this is *"a serious objection. But it is not tantamount to capitalism or to wage labour"* and it *"does not have exploitation in Marx's sense (i.e., wrongful expropriation of surplus by non-producers)"* [Justin Schwartz, **The American Political Science Review**, Vol. 88, No. 4, p. 982] For Marx, as we noted in section C.2, commodity production only becomes capitalism when there is the exploitation of wage labour. This is the case with Proudhon as well, who differentiated between possession and private property and argued that co-operatives should replace capitalist firms. While their specific solutions may have differed (with Proudhon aiming for a market economy consisting of artisans, peasants and co-operatives while Marx aimed for communism, i.e. the abolition of money via state ownership of capital) their analysis of capitalism and private property were identical — which Tucker consistently noted (as regards the theory of surplus value, for example, he argued that *"Proudhon propounded and proved [it] long before Marx advanced it."* [**Liberty**, no. 92, p. 1])

As Tucker argued, *"the fact that State Socialism ... has overshadowed other forms of Socialism gives it no right to a monopoly of the Socialistic idea."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 363–4] It is no surprise that the authoritarian left and "libertarian" right have united to define socialism in such a way as to eliminate anarchism from its ranks — they both have an interest in removing a theory which exposes the inadequacies of their dogmas, which explains how we can have both liberty **and** equality and have a decent, free and just society.

There is another fallacy at the heart of the claim that markets and socialism do not go together, namely that all markets are capitalist markets. So another part of the problem is that

*erty. They all regard the free competition of individual and social forces as something inherent in human nature ... They answered the socialists of other schools who saw in* ***free competition*** *one of the destructive elements of capitalist society that the evil lies in the fact we have too little rather than too much competition, since the power of monopoly has made competition impossible."* [**Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 160] Malatesta, likewise, saw many schools of socialism, including *"anarchist or authoritarian, mutualist or individualist."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 95]

Adolph Fischer, one of the Haymarket Martyrs and contemporary of Tucker, argued that *"every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist. The anarchists are divided into two factions: the communistic anarchists and the Proudhon or middle-class anarchists."* The former *"advocate the communistic or co-operative method of production"* while the latter *"do not advocate the co-operative system of production, and the common ownership of the means of production, the products and the land."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 81] However, while not being communists (i.e. aiming to eliminate the market), he obviously recognised the Individualists Anarchists as fellow socialists (we should point out that Proudhon **did** support co-operatives, but they did not carry this to communism as do most social anarchists — as is clear, Fischer means communism by the term *"co-operative system of production"* rather than co-operatives as they exist today and Proudhon supported — see section G.4.2).

Thus claims that the Individualist Anarchists were not "really" socialists because they supported a market system cannot be supported. The simple fact is that those who make this claim are, at best, ignorant of the socialist movement, its ideas and its history or, at worse, desire, like many Marxists, to write out of history competing socialist theories. For example, Leninist David McNally talks of the *"anarcho-socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon"* and how Marx combated *"Proudhonian socialism"* between 1858 and 1861 by French communist-anarchist Joseph Déjacque. [Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 75–6]

All this is not to suggest that individualist anarchism does not have American roots nor that many of its ideas and visions were not significantly shaped by American social conditions and developments. Far from it! It is simply to stress that it did not develop in complete isolation of European anarchism during the latter half of the nineteenth century and that the social anarchism which overtook by the end of that century was also a product of American conditions (in this case, the transformation of a pre-capitalist society into a capitalist one). In other words, the rise of communist anarchism and the decline of individualist anarchism by the end of the nineteenth century reflected American society just as much as the development of the latter in the first place. Thus the rise of capitalism in America meant the rise of an anarchism more suitable to the social conditions and social relationships produced by that change. Unsurprisingly, therefore, individualist anarchism remains the minority trend in American anarchism to this day with such comrades as Joe Peacott (see his pamphlet **Individualism Reconsidered**), Kevin Carson (see his book **Studies in Mutualist Political Economy**) and Shawn Wilbur (who has painstakingly placed many rare early individualist and mutualist anarchist works onto the internet) keeping its ideas alive.

So like social anarchism, individualist anarchism developed as a response to the rise of capitalism and the transformation of American society this produced. As one academic put it, the *"early anarchists, though staunchly individualistic, did not entertain a penchant for ... capitalism. Rather, they saw themselves as socialists opposed to the state socialism of Karl Marx. The individualist anarchists saw no contradiction between their individualist stance and their rejection of capitalism."* She stresses that they were *"fervent anti-capitalists"* and thought that *"workers created value through their labour, a value appro-*

*priated by owners of businesses ... The individualist anarchists blamed capitalism for creating inhumane working conditions and for increasing inequalities of wealth. Their self-avowed 'socialism' was rooted in their firm belief in equality, material as well as legal."* This, however, did not stop her asserting that *"contemporary anarcho-capitalists are descendants of nineteenth-century individualist anarchists such as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, and Benjamin Tucker."* [Susan Love Brown, pp. 99–128, *"The Free Market as Salvation from Government"*, **Meanings of the Market**, James G. Carrier (ed.), p. 104, p. 107, p. 104 and p. 103] Trust an academic to ignore the question of how related **are** two theories which differ on such a key issue as whether to be anti-capitalist or not!

Needless to say, some "anarcho"-capitalists are well aware of the fact that individualist anarchists were extremely hostile to capitalism while supporting the "free market." Unsurprisingly, they tend to downplay this opposition, often arguing that the anarchists who point out the anti-capitalist positions of the likes of Tucker and Spooner are quoting them out of context. The truth is different. In fact, it is the "anarcho"-capitalist who takes the ideas of the individualist anarchists from both the historical and theoretical context. This can be seen from the "anarcho"-capitalist dismissal of the individualist anarchists' "bad" economics as well as the nature of the free society wanted by them.

It is possible, no doubt, to trawl through the many issues of, say, **Liberty** or the works of individualist anarchism to find a few comments which may be used to bolster a claim that anarchism need not imply socialism. However, a few scattered comments here and there are hardly a firm basis to ignore the vast bulk of anarchist theory and its history as a movement. This is particularly the case when applying this criteria consistently would mean that communist anarchism, for example, would be excommunicated from anarchism simply because of



meant." For this to be the case, **other**, more obviously socialist, writers and thinkers would dismiss them as not being socialists. This, however, is not the case. Thus we find Karl Marx, for example, writing of *"the socialism of Proudhon."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 161f] Engels talked about Proudhon being *"the Socialist of the small peasant and master-craftsman"* and of *"the Proudhon school of Socialism."* [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 254 and p. 255] Bakunin talked about Proudhon's *"socialism, based on individual and collective liberty and upon the spontaneous action of free associations."* He considered his own ideas as *"Proudhonism widely developed and pushed right to these, its final consequences"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 100 and p. 198] For Kropotkin, while Godwin was *"first theoriser of Socialism without government — that is to say, of Anarchism"* Proudhon was the second as he, *"without knowing Godwin's work, laid anew the foundations of Anarchism."* He lamented that *"many modern Socialists"* supported *"centralisation and the cult of authority"* and so *"have not yet reached the level of their two predecessors, Godwin and Proudhon."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 26–7] These renown socialists did not consider Proudhon's position to be in any way anti-socialist (although, of course, being critical of whether it would work and its desirability if it did). Tucker, it should be noted, called Proudhon *"the father of the Anarchistic school of Socialism."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 381] Little wonder, then, that the likes of Tucker considered themselves socialists and stated numerous times that they were.

Looking at Tucker and the Individualist anarchists we discover that other socialists considered them socialists. Rudolf Rocker stated that *"it is not difficult to discover certain fundamental principles which are common to all of them and which divide them from all other varieties of socialism. They all agree on the point that man be given the full reward of his labour and recognise in this right the economic basis of all personal lib-*

> *trary, the most perfect Socialism is possible only on condition of the most perfect Individualism; and that Socialism includes, not only Collectivism and Communism, but also that school of Individualist Anarchism which conceives liberty as a means of destroying usury and the exploitation of labour."* [**Liberty**, no. 129, p. 2]

Hence we find Tucker calling his ideas both *"Anarchistic Socialism"* and *"Individualist Socialism"* while other individualist anarchists have used the terms *"free market anti-capitalism"* and *"free market socialism"* to describe the ideas.

The central fallacy of the argument that support for markets equals support for capitalism is that many self-proclaimed socialists are not opposed to the market. Indeed, some of the earliest socialists were market socialists (people like Thomas Hodgskin and William Thompson, although the former ended up rejecting socialism and the latter became a communal-socialist). Proudhon, as noted, was a well known supporter of market exchange. German sociologist Franz Oppenheimer expounded a similar vision to Proudhon and called himself a *"liberal socialist"* as he favoured a free market but recognised that capitalism was a system of exploitation. [*"Introduction"*, **The State**, p. vii] Today, market socialists like David Schweickart (see his **Against Capitalism** and **After Capitalism**) and David Miller (see his **Market, State, and community: theoretical foundations of market socialism**) are expounding a similar vision to Proudhon's, namely of a market economy based on co-operatives (albeit one which retains a state). Unfortunately, they rarely, if ever, acknowledge their debt to Proudhon (needless to say, their Leninist opponents do as, from their perspective, it damns the market socialists as not being real socialists).

It could, possibly, be argued that these self-proclaimed socialists did not, in fact, understand what socialism "really



the opinions of **some** individualist anarchists. Equally, it may be possible to cobble together all the non-anarchist positions of individualist anarchists and so construct an ideology which justified wage labour, the land monopoly, usury, intellectual property rights, and so on but such an ideology would be nothing more than a mockery of individualist anarchism, distinctly at odds with its spirits and aims. It would only convince those ignorant of the anarchist tradition.

It is not a fitting tribute to the individualist anarchists that their ideas are today being associated with the capitalism that they so clearly despised and wished to abolish. As one modern day Individualist Anarchist argues:

> *"It is time that anarchists recognise the valuable contributions of .. . individualist anarchist theory and take advantage of its ideas. It would be both futile and criminal to leave it to the capitalist libertarians, whose claims on Tucker and the others can be made only by ignoring the violent opposition they had to capitalist exploitation and monopolistic 'free enterprise' supported by the state."* [J.W. Baker, *"Native American Anarchism,"* pp. 43–62, **The Raven**, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 61–2]

We hope that this section of the FAQ will go some way to explaining the ideas and contributions of individualist anarchism to a new generation of rebels. Given the diversity of individualist anarchism, it is hard to generalise about it (some are closer to classical liberalism than others, for example, while a few embraced revolutionary means of change such as Dyer Lum). However, we will do our best to draw out the common themes of the movement, indicating where certain people differed from others. Similarly, there are distinct differences between European and American forms of mutualism, regardless of how often Tucker invoked Proudhon's name

to justify his own interpretations of anarchism and we will indicate these (these differences, we think, justify calling the American branch individualist anarchism rather than mutualism). We will also seek to show why social anarchism rejects individualist anarchism (and vice versa) as well as giving a critical evaluation of both positions. Given the diverse nature of individualist anarchism, we are sure that we will not cover all the positions and individuals associated with it but we hope to present enough to indicate why the likes of Tucker, Labadie, Yarros and Spooner deserve better than to be reduced to footnotes in books defending an even more extreme version of the capitalism they spent their lives fighting.



mon goal and whether its proposed solution would, in fact, secure meaningful individual liberty for all.

## G.1.1 What about their support of the free market?

Many, particularly on the "libertarian"-right, would dismiss claims that the Individualist Anarchists were socialists. By their support of the "free market" the Individualist Anarchists, they would claim, show themselves as really supporters of capitalism. Most, if not all, anarchists would reject this claim. Why is this the case?

This because such claims show an amazing ignorance of socialist ideas and history. The socialist movement has had a many schools, many of which, but not all, opposed the market and private property. Given that the right "libertarians" who make such claims are usually not well informed of the ideas they oppose (i.e. of socialism, particularly **libertarian** socialism) it is unsurprising they claim that the Individualist Anarchists are not socialists (of course the fact that many Individualist Anarchists argued they **were** socialists is ignored). Coming from a different tradition, it is unsurprising they are not aware of the fact that socialism is not monolithic. Hence we discover right-"libertarian" guru von Mises claiming that the *"essence of socialism is the entire elimination of the market."* [**Human Action**, p. 702] This would have come as something of a surprise to, say, Proudhon, who argued that *"[t]o suppress competition is to suppress liberty itself."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 50] Similarly, it would have surprised Tucker, who called himself a socialist while supporting a freer market than von Mises ever dreamt of. As Tucker put it:

> *"**Liberty** has always insisted that Individualism and Socialism are not antithetical terms; that, on the con-*

*of the monopoly privileges of capital and interest-taking, and the return to labour of the full value of its production.*" [Victor Yarros, quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206f]

Therefore, it is clear that both social and Individualist Anarchists share much in common, including an opposition to capitalism. The former may have been in favour of free exchange but between equally situated individuals. Only given a context of equality can free exchange be considered to benefit both parties equally and not generate growing inequalities which benefit the stronger of the parties involved which, in turn, skews the bargaining position of those involved in favour of the stronger (also see section F.3).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the individualist anarchists considered themselves as socialists. Like Proudhon, they desired a (libertarian) socialist system based on the market but without exploitation and which rested on possession rather than capitalist private property. With Proudhon, only the ignorant or mischievous would suggest that such a system was capitalistic. The Individualist Anarchists, as can be seen, fit very easily into Kropotkin's comments that *"the anarchists, in common with all socialists ... maintain that the now prevailing system of private ownership in land, and our capitalist production for the sake of profits, represent a monopoly which runs against both the principles of justice and the dictates of utility."* [**Anarchism**, p. 285] While they rejected the communist-anarchist solution to the social question, they knew that such a question existed and was rooted in the exploitation of labour and the prevailing system of property rights.

So why is Individualist Anarchism and Proudhon's mutualism socialist? Simply because they opposed the exploitation of labour by capital and proposed a means of ending it. The big debate between social and individualist anarchists is revolves around whether the other school can **really** achieve this com-



# G.1 Are individualist anarchists anti-capitalist?

To answer this question, it is necessary to first define what we mean by capitalism and socialism. While there is a tendency for supporters of capitalism (and a few socialists!) to equate it with the market and private property, this is not the case. It is possible to have both and not have capitalism (as we discuss in section G.1.1 and section G.1.2, respectively). Similarly, the notion that "socialism" means, by definition, state ownership and/or control, or that being employed by the state rather than by private capital is "socialism" is distinctly wrong. While some socialists have, undoubtedly, defined socialism in precisely such terms, socialism as a historic movement is much wider than that. As Proudhon put it, *"[m]odern Socialism was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 177]

As Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Tucker all stressed, anarchism is one of those schools. For Kropotkin, anarchism was *"the no-government system of socialism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 46] Likewise, for Tucker, there were *"two schools of socialistic thought"*, one of which represented authority and the other liberty, namely *"State Socialism and Anarchism."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 78–9] It was *"not Socialist Anarchism against Individualist Anarchism, but of Communist Socialism against Individualist Socialism."* [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 129, p. 2] As one expert on Individualist Anarchism noted, Tucker *"looked upon anarchism as a branch of the general socialist*

*movement."* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, pp. 226–7] Thus we find Individualist anarchist Victor Yarros, like Tucker, talking about *"the position and teachings of the Anarchistic Socialists"* when referring to his ideas. [**Liberty**, no. 98, p. 5]

Part of problem is that in the 20th century, the statist school of socialism prevailed both within the labour movement (at least in English speaking countries or until fascism destroyed it in mainland Europe and elsewhere) and within the revolutionary movement (first as social democracy, then as Communism after the Russian Revolution). This lead, it should be noted, to anarchists not using the term "socialist" to describe their ideas as they did not want to be confused with either reformed capitalism (social democracy) or state capitalism (Leninism and Stalinism). As anarchism was understood as being inherently anti-capitalist, this did not become an issue until certain right-wing liberals started calling themselves "anarcho"-capitalists (somewhat ironically, these liberals joined with the state socialists in trying to limit anarchism to anti-statism and denying their socialist credentials). Another part of the problem is that many, particularly those in America, derive their notion of what socialism is from right-wing sources who are more than happy to agree with the Stalinists that socialism **is** state ownership. This is case with right-"libertarians", who rarely study the history or ideas of socialism and instead take their lead from such fanatical anti-socialists as Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard. Thus they equate socialism with social democracy or Leninism/Stalinism, i.e. with state ownership of the means of life, the turning of part or the whole working population into employees of the government or state regulation and the welfare state. In this they are often joined by social democrats and Marxists who seek to excommunicate all other kinds of socialism from the anti-capitalist movement.

All of which leads to some strange contradictions. If "socialism" **is** equated to state ownership then, clearly, the individual-



*"the tremendous and dangerous power now wielded by capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 39, p. 1] The *"capitalists and their tools, the legislatures, already begin to scent the impending dangers of trades-union socialism and initiatory steps are on foot in the legislatures of several states to construe labour combinations as conspiracies against commerce and industry, and suppress them by law."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 22, p. 3]

Some individualist anarchists, like Dyer Lum and Joseph Labadie, were union organisers while Ezra Heywood *"scoffed at supporters of the status quo, who saw no evidence of the tyranny on the part of capital, and who brought up the matter of free contract with reference to labourers. This argument was no longer valid. Capital controlled land, machinery, steam power, waterfalls, ships, railways, and above all, money and public opinion, and was in a position to wait out recalcitrancy at its leisure."* [Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] For Lum, *"behind the capitalist … privilege stands as support"* and so social circumstances matter. *"Does liberty exist,"* he argued, *"where rent, interest, and profit hold the employee in economic subjection to the legalised possessor of the means of life? To plead for individual liberty under the present social conditions, to refuse to abate one jot of control that legalised capital has over individual labour, and to assert that the demand for restrictive or class legislation comes only from the voluntary associations of workmen [i.e., trade unions] is not alone the height of impudence, but a barefaced jugglery of words."* [**Liberty**, no. 101, p. 5]

Likewise, Tucker advocated and supported many other forms of non-violent direct action as well as workplace strikes, such as boycotts and rent strikes, seeing them as important means of radicalising the working class and creating an anarchist society. However, like social anarchists the Individualist Anarchists did not consider labour struggle as an end in itself — they considered reforms (and discussion of a *"fair wage"* and *"harmony between capital and labour"*) as essentially *"conservative"* and would be satisfied with no less than *"the abolition*

*present economic system,"* Tucker stressed, *"almost every strike is just. For what is justice in production and distribution? That labour, which creates all, shall have **all.**"* [**Liberty**, no. 19, p. 1]

Another important aspects of unions and strikes were that they represented both a growing class consciousness and the ability to change society. *"It is the power of the great unions to paralyse industry and **ignore** the government that has alarmed the political burglars,"* argued Victor Yarrows. This explained why unions and strikes were crushed by force as *"the State can have no rival, say the plutocrats, and the trades unions, with the sympathetic strike and boycott as weapons, are becoming too formidable."* Even defeated strikes were useful as they ensured that *"the strikers and their sympathisers will have acquired some additional knowledge of the essential nature of the beast, government, which plainly has no other purpose at present than to protect monopoly and put down all opposition to it." "There is such a thing as the solidarity of labour,"* Yarrows went on, *"and it is a healthy and encouraging sign that workmen recognise the need of mutual support and co-operation in their conflict with monopoly and its official and unofficial servants. Labour has to fight government as well as capital, 'law and order' as well as plutocracy. It cannot make the slightest movement against monopoly without colliding with some sort of 'authority', Federal, State, or municipal."* The problem was that the unions *"have no clear general aims and deal with results rather than causes."* [**Liberty**, no. 291, p. 3]

This analysis echoed Tucker's, who applauded the fact that *"[a]nother era of strikes apparently is upon us. In all trades and in all sections of the country labour is busy with its demands and its protests. Liberty rejoices in them. They give evidence of life and spirit and hope and growing intelligence. They show that the people are beginning to know their rights, and, knowing, dare to maintain them. Strikes, whenever and wherever inaugurated, deserve encouragement from all true friends of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 19, p. 1] Even failed strikes were useful, for they exposed



ist anarchists are not socialists but, then, neither are the social anarchists! Thus if we assume that the prevailing socialism of the 20th century defines what socialism is, then quite a few self-proclaimed socialists are not, in fact, socialists. This suggests that socialism cannot be limited to state socialism. Perhaps it would be easier to define "socialism" as restrictions on private property? If so, then, clearly, social anarchists are socialists but then, as we will prove, so are the individualist anarchists!

Of course, not all the individualist anarchists used the term "socialist" or "socialism" to describe their ideas although many did. Some called their ideas Mutualism and explicitly opposed socialism (William Greene being the most obvious example). However, at root the ideas were part of the wider socialist movement and, in fact, they followed Proudhon in this as he both proclaimed himself a socialist while also attacking it. The apparent contradiction is easily explained by noting there are two schools of socialism, state and libertarian. Thus it is possible to be both a (libertarian) socialist and condemn (state) socialist in the harshest terms.

So what, then, is socialism? Tucker stated that *"the bottom claim of Socialism"* was *"that labour should be put in possession of its own,"* that *"the natural wage of labour is its product"* and *"interest, rent, and profit ... constitute the trinity of usury."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 78 and p. 80] This definition also found favour with Kropotkin who stated that socialism *"in its wide, generic, and true sense"* was an *"effort to **abolish** the exploitation of labour by capital."* [**Anarchism**, p. 169] For Kropotkin, anarchism was *"brought forth by the same critical and revolutionary protest which gave rise to Socialism in general"*, socialism aiming for *"the negation of Capitalism and of society based on the subjection of labour to capital."* Anarchism, unlike other socialists, extended this to oppose *"what constitutes the real strength of Capitalism: the State and its principle supports."* [**Environment and Evolution**, p. 19] Tucker, similarly, argued that Individualist anarchism was a form of social-

ism and would result in the *"emancipation of the workingman from his present slavery to capital."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 323]

The various schools of socialism present different solutions to this exploitation and subjection. From the nationalisation of capitalist property by the state socialists, to the socialisation of property by the libertarian communists, to the co-operatives of mutualism, to the free market of the individualist anarchists, all are seeking, in one way or the other, to ensure the end of the domination and exploitation of labour by capital. The disagreements between them all rest in whether their solutions achieve this aim and whether they will make life worth living and enjoyable (which also explains why individualist and social anarchists disagree so much!). For anarchists, state socialism is little more than state **capitalism**, with a state monopoly replacing capitalist monopolies and workers being exploited by one boss (the state) rather than many. So all anarchists would agree with Yarrows when he argued that *"[w]hile **State** Socialism removes the disease by killing the patient, **no**-State Socialism offers him the means of recovering strength, health, and vigour."* [**Liberty**, no. 98, p. 5]

So, why are the individualist anarchists anti-capitalists? There are two main reasons.

Firstly, the Individualist Anarchists opposed profits, interest and rent as forms of exploitation (they termed these non-labour incomes ***"usury"***, but as Tucker stressed usury was *"but another name for the exploitation of labour."* [**Liberty**, no. 122, p. 4]). To use the words of Ezra Heywood, the Individualist Anarchists thought *"Interest is theft, Rent Robbery, and Profit Only Another Name for Plunder."* [quoted by Martin Blatt, *"Ezra Heywood & Benjamin Tucker,"*, pp. 28–43, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 29] Non-labour incomes are merely *"different methods of levying tribute for the use of capital."* Their vision of the good society was one in which *"the usurer, the receiver of interest, rent and profit"* would not exist and Labour would



They were aware that it was a vehicle of **class rule,** namely the rule of the capitalist class over the working class. Spooner thought that that *"holders of this monopoly [of the money supply] now rule and rob this nation; and the government, in all its branches, is simply their tool"* and that *"the employers of wage labour ... are also the monopolists of money."* [Spooner, **A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 42 and p. 48] Tucker recognised that *"capital had so manipulated legislation"* that they gained an advantage on the capitalist market which allowed them to exploit labour. [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 82–3] He was quite clear that the state was a **capitalist** state, with *"Capitalists hav[ing] placed and kept on the statute books all sorts of prohibitions and taxes"* to ensure a "free market" skewed in favour of themselves. [**Instead of a Book**, p. 454] A.H. Simpson argued that the Individualist Anarchist *"knows very well that the present State ... is simply the tool of the property-owning class."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 92] Thus both wings of the anarchist movement were united in their opposition to capitalist exploitation and their common recognition that the state was a tool of the capitalist class, used to allow them to exploit the working class.

Tucker, like other individualist anarchists, also supported labour unions, and although he opposed violence during strikes he recognised that it was caused by frustration due to an unjust system. Indeed, like social anarchists, he considered *"the labourer in these days [as] a soldier... His employer is ... a member of an opposing army. The whole industrial and commercial world is in a state of internecine war, in which the proletaires are massed on one side and the proprietors on the other."* The cause of strikes rested in the fact that *"before ... strikers violated the equal liberty of others, their own right to equality of liberty had been wantonly and continuously violated"* by the capitalists using the state, for the *"capitalists ... in denying [a free market] to [the workers] are guilty of criminal invasion."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 460 and p. 454] *"With our*

*of his labours."* [quoted by Stephan L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 72 and p. 73]

As one commentator on individualist anarchism, Wm. Gary Kline, correctly tsummarised:

> *"Their proposals were designed to establish true equality of opportunity ... and they expected this to result in a society without great wealth or poverty. In the absence of monopolistic factors which would distort competition, they expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them since all would be required to live at their own expense and not at the expense of exploited fellow human beings."* [**The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism**, pp. 103–4]

Hence, like social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchists saw their ideas as a means towards equality. By eliminating exploitation, inequality would soon decrease as wealth would no longer accumulate in the hands of the few (the owners). Rather, it would flow back into the hands of those who produced it (i.e. the workers). Until this occurred, society would see *"[o]n one side a dependent class of wage-workers and on the other a privileged class of wealth-monopolisers, each become more and more distinct from the other as capitalism advances."* This has *"resulted in a grouping and consolidation of wealth which grows apace by attracting all property, no matter by whom produced, into the hands of the privileged, and hence property becomes a social power, an economic force destructive of rights, a fertile source of injustice, a means of enslaving the dispossessed."* [William Ballie, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 121]

Moreover, like the social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchists were aware that the state was not some neutral machine or one that exploited all classes purely for its own ends.



*"secure its natural wage, its entire product."* [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 80, p. 82 and p. 85] This would also apply to dividends, *"since no idle shareholders could continue in receipt of dividends were it not for the support of monopoly, it follows that these dividends are no part of the proper reward of ability."* [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 282, p. 2]

In addition, as a means of social change, the individualists suggested that activists start *"inducing the people to steadily refuse the payment of rents and taxes."* [**Instead of a Book** pp. 299–300] These are hardly statements with which capitalists would agree. Tucker, as noted, also opposed interest, considering it usury (exploitation and a *"crime"*) pure and simple and one of the means by which workers were denied the full fruits of their labour. Indeed, he looked forward to the day when *"any person who charges more than cost for any product [will] ... be regarded very much as we now regard a pickpocket."* This *"attitude of hostility to usury, in any form"* hardly fits into the capitalist mentality or belief system. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155] Similarly, Ezra Heywood considered profit-taking *"an injustice which ranked second only to legalising titles to absolute ownership of land or raw-materials."* [James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111] Opposition to profits, rent or interest is hardly capitalistic — indeed, the reverse.

Thus the Individualist Anarchists, like the social anarchists, opposed the exploitation of labour and desired to see the end of capitalism by ensuring that labour would own what it produced. They desired a society in which there would no longer be capitalists and workers, only workers. The worker would receive the full product of his/her labour, so ending the exploitation of labour by capital. In Tucker's words, a free society would see *"each man reaping the fruits of his labour and no man able to live in idleness on an income from capital"* and so society would *"become a great hive of Anarchistic workers, prosperous and free individuals"* combining *"to carry on their production*

*and distribution on the cost principle."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 276]

Secondly, the Individualist Anarchists favoured a new system of land ownership based on ***"occupancy and use."*** So, as well as this opposition to capitalist usury, the individualist anarchists also expressed opposition to capitalist ideas on property (particularly property in land). J.K. Ingalls, for example, considered that *"the private domination of the land"* originated in *"usurpation only, whether of the camp, the court or the market. Whenever such a domination excludes or deprives a single human being of his equal opportunity, it is a violation, not only of the public right, and of the social duty, but of the very principle of law and morals upon which property itself is based."* [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 148f] As Martin comments, for Ingalls, *"[t]o reduce land to the status of a commodity was an act of usurpation, enabling a group to 'profit by its relation to production' without the expenditure of labour time."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 148] These ideas are identical to Proudhon's and Ingalls continues in this Proudhonian *"occupancy and use"* vein when he argues that possession *"remains **possession**, and can never become **property**, in the sense of absolute dominion, except by positive statue [i.e. state action]. Labour can only claim **occupancy**, and can lay no claim to more than the usufruct."* Current property ownership in land were created by *"forceful and fraudulent taking"* of land, which *"could give no justification to the system."* [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

The capitalist system of land ownership was usually termed the ***"land monopoly"***, which consisted of *"the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation."* Under anarchism, individuals would *"no longer be protected by their fellows in anything but personal occupancy and cultivation of land"* and so *"ground rent would disappear."* [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 85] This applied to what was on the land as well, such as housing:



reduce income and wealth inequalities substantially. However, there was *"one exception, and that a comparatively trivial one"*, namely economic rent (the natural differences between different bits of land and individual labour). This *"will probably remain with us always. Complete liberty will very much lessen it; of that I have no doubt ... At the worst, it will be a small matter, no more worth consideration in comparison with the liberty than the slight disparity that will always exist in consequence of inequalities of skill."* [*"Why I am an Anarchist"*, pp. 132–6, **Man!**, M. Graham (ed.), pp. 135–6] Another individualist anarchist, John Beverley Robinson, agreed:

> *"When privilege is abolished, and the worker retains all that he produces, then will come the powerful trend toward equality of material reward for labour that will produce substantial financial and social equality, instead of the mere political equality that now exists."* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, pp. 278–9]

As did Lysander Spooner, who pointed out that the *"wheel of fortune, in the present state of things, is of such enormous diameter"* and *"those on its top are on so showy a height"* wjile *"those underneath it are in such a pit of debt, oppression, and despair."* He argued that under his system *"fortunes could hardly be represented by a wheel; for it would present no such height, no such depth, no such irregularity of motion as now. It should rather be represented by an extended surface, varied somewhat by inequalities, but still exhibiting a general level, affording a safe position for all, and creating no necessity, for either force or fraud, on the part of anyone to secure his standing."* Thus Individualist anarchism would create a condition *"neither of poverty, nor riches; but of moderate competency — such as will neither enervate him by luxury, nor disable him by destitution; but which will at once give him and opportunity to labour, (both mentally and physically) and stimulate him by offering him all the fruits*

mon position to capitalism. The social anarchist Rudolf Rocker indicates well this common position when he argues:

> *"it is difficult to reconcile personal freedom with the existing economic system. Without doubt the present inequality of economic interests and the resulting class conflicts in society are a continual danger to the freedom of the individual ... [T]he undisturbed natural development of human personality is impossible in a system which has its root in the shameless exploitation of the great mass of the members of society. One cannot be free either politically or personally so long as one is in economic servitude of another and cannot escape from this condition. This was recognised by men like Godwin, Warren, Proudhon, Bakunin, [and women like Goldman and de Cleyre, we must add!] and many others who subsequently reached the conviction that the domination of man over man will not disappear until there is an end of the exploitation of man by man."* [**Nationalism and Culture**, p. 167]

There are other, related, reasons why the individualist anarchists must be considered left-wing libertarians rather than right-wing ones. Given their opposition to non-labour income, they saw their proposals as having egalitarian implications. As regards equality, we discover that they saw their ideas as promoting it. Thus we find Tucker arguing that that the *"happiness possible in any society that does not improve upon the present in the matter of distribution of wealth, can hardly be described as beatific."* He was clearly opposed to *"the inequitable distribution of wealth"* under capitalism and equally clearly saw his proposals as a means of reducing it substantially. The abolition of those class monopolies which create interest, rent and profit would



> *"If a man exerts himself by erecting a building on land which afterward, by the operation of the principle of occupancy and use, rightfully becomes another's, he must, upon demand of the subsequent occupant, remove from this land the results of his self-exertion, or, failing so to do, sacrifice his property therein."* [**Liberty**, no. 331, p. 4]

This would apply to both the land and what was on it. This meant that *"tenants would not be forced to pay ... rent"* nor would landlords *"be allowed to seize their property."* This, as Tucker noted, was a complete rejection of the capitalist system of property rights and saw anarchism being dependent on *"the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becom[ing] the prevailing view."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 162 and p. 159] As Joseph Labadie put it, socialism includes any theory *"which has for its object the* ***changing of the present status of property*** *and the relations one person or class holds to another. In other words, any movement which has for its aim the changing of social relations, of companionships, of associations, of powers of one class over another class, is Socialism."* [our emphasis, **Liberty**, no. 158, p. 8] As such, both social and individualist anarchists are socialists as both aimed at changing the present status of property.

It should also be noted here that the individualist anarchist ideal that competition in banking would drive interest to approximately zero is their equivalent to the social anarchist principle of free access to the means of life. As the only cost involved would be an administration charge which covers the labour involved in running the mutual bank, all workers would have access to "capital" for (in effect) free. Combine this with "occupancy and use" in terms of land use and it can be seen that both individualist and social anarchists shared a common aim to make the means of life available to all without having to

pay a tribute to an owner or be dependent on a ruling capitalist or landlord class.

For these reasons, the Individualist Anarchists are clearly anti-capitalist. While an Individualist Anarchy would be a market system, it would not be a capitalist one. As Tucker argued, the anarchists realised *"the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labour, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labour by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labour... . And to such a state of things I am as much opposed as any one. But the minute you remove privilege... every man will be a labourer exchanging with fellow-labourers ... What Anarchistic-Socialism aims to abolish is usury ... it wants to deprive capital of its reward."* As noted above, the term *"usury,"* for Tucker, was simply a synonym for *"the exploitation of labour."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 404 and p. 396]

The similarities with social anarchism are obvious. Like them, the individualist anarchists opposed capitalism because they saw that profit, rent and interest were all forms of exploitation. As communist-anarchist Alexander Berkman noted, *"[i]f the worker would get his due — that is, the things he produces or their equivalent — where would the profits of the capitalist come from? If labour owned the wealth it produced, there would be no capitalism."* Like social anarchists they opposed usury, to have to pay purely for access/use for a resource. It ensured that a *"slice of their daily labour is taken from [the workers] for the privilege of **using** these factories"* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 44 and p. 8] For Marx, abolishing interest and interest-bearing capital *"means the abolition of capital and of capitalist production itself."* [**Theories of Surplus Value**, vol. 3, p. 472] A position, incidentally, also held by Proudhon who maintained that *"reduction of interest rates to vanishing point is itself a revolutionary act, because it is destructive of capitalism."* [quoted by Edward Hyams, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works**, p. 188] Like many



socialists, Individualist Anarchists used the term "interest" to cover all forms of surplus value: *"the use of money"* plus *"house-rent, dividends, or share of profits"* and having to *"pay a tax to somebody who owns the land." "In doing away with interest, the cause of inequality in material circumstances will be done away with."* [John Beverley Robinson, **The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 144–5]

Given that Individualist Anarchism aimed to abolish interest along with rent and profit it would suggest that it is a socialist theory. Unsurprisingly, then, Tucker agreed with Marx's analysis on capitalism, namely that it lead to industry concentrating into the hands of a few and that it robbed workers of the fruits of the toil (for Francis Tandy it was a case of *"the Marxian theory of surplus value, upon which all Socialistic philosophy — whether State or Anarchistic — is necessarily based"* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 312, p. 3]). Tucker quoted a leading Marxist's analysis of capitalism and noted that *"Liberty endorses the whole of it, excepting a few phrases concerning the nationalisation of industry and the assumption of political power by working people."* However, he was at pains to argue that this analysis was first expounded by Proudhon, *"that the tendency and consequences of capitalistic production ... were demonstrated to the world time and time again during the twenty years preceding the publication of 'Das Kapital'"* by the French anarchist. This included *"the historical persistence of class struggles in successive manifestations"* as well as *"the theory that labour is the source and measure of value." "Call Marx, then, the father of State socialism, if you will,"* argued Tucker, *"but we dispute his paternity of the general principles of economy on which all schools of socialism agree."* [**Liberty**, no. 35, p. 2]

This opposition to profits, rent and interest as forms of exploitation and property as a form of theft clearly makes individualist anarchism anti-capitalist and a form of (libertarian) socialism. In addition, it also indicates well the common ground between the two threads of anarchism, in particular their com-

So few anarchists found the individualist solution to the social question or the attempts of some of them to excommunicate social anarchism from the movement convincing. Across the world, including in America itself, communist anarchism became the bulk of the movement (social anarchism is the *"mainstream of anarchist theory"* and in the *"historical anarchist movement"* where anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism have been *"predominating."* [John Clark, **The Anarchist Moment**, p. 143]). That is still the situation to this day, with individualist anarchism being a small part of the movement (again, it mostly exists in America and, to an even lesser degree, Britain). Moreover, with the notable exception of Johann Most, most leading communist-anarchists refused to respond in kind and recognised individualist anarchism as a form of anarchism (usually one suited to conditions in pre-industrial America). Kropotkin, for example, included Individualist Anarchism in his 1911 account of Anarchism for the **Encyclopaedia Britannica** as well as his pamphlet **Modern Science and Anarchism**.

It should also be stressed that not all individualist anarchists followed Tucker's lead in refusing to call communist anarchism a form of anarchism. Joseph Labadie, Dyer Lum and Voltairine de Cleyre (when she was an individualist), for example, recognised the likes of Albert and Lucy Parsons, Kropotkin, Goldman and Berkman as fellow anarchists even if they disagreed with some of their methods and aspects of their preferred solution to the social problem. For Labadie, *"[o]ne may want liberty to advance the interests of Communism, another to further the cause of individualism"* and so nothing can *"stand in the way of uniting with other Anarchists who believe in Communism to get more liberty"* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 260 and p. 262] Today, few (if any) individualist anarchists try to excommunicate other anarchists from the movement, thankfully leaving the diatribes and sectarianism of a few individuals in the nineteenth century where they belong.



cal organisation, some (like Tucker) did not. The question is whether supporting wage labour disqualifies them from the socialist movement or not.

Within individualist anarchism, there are two different positions on this matter. Some of them clearly opposed wage labour as inherently exploitative and saw their socio-economic ideas as a means of ending it. Others argued that it was not wage labour **as such** which was the problem and, as a consequence, they did not expect it to disappear under anarchy. So opposition to exploitation of labour was a universal thread in Individualist Anarchist thought, as it was in the social anarchist movement. However, opposition to wage slavery was a common, but not universal, thread within the individualist anarchist tradition. As we discuss in section G.4, this is one of the key reasons why social anarchists reject individualist anarchism, arguing that this makes it both inconsistent in terms of general anarchist principles as well in the principles of individualist anarchism.

Voltairine de Cleyre in her overview of anarchism put the difference in terms of individualist anarchism and mutualist anarchism. As she put it, the *"extreme individualists"* held that the *"essential institutions of Commercialism are in themselves good, and are rendered vicious merely by the interference by the State."* This meant *"the system of employer and employed, buying and selling, banking, and all the other essential institutions of Commercialism"* would exist under their form of anarchism. Two key differences were that property in land would be modified so that it could be *"held by individuals or companies for such time and in such allotments as they use only"* and that *"wages would rise to the full measure of the individual production, and forever remain there"* as *"bosses would be hunting for men rather than men bosses."* In other words, land would no longer owned as under capitalism and workers would no longer be exploited as profit, interest and rent could not exist and the worker would get the full product of his or her labour in wages. In contrast,

mutualist anarchism *"is a modification of the program of Individualism, laying more emphasis upon organisation, co-operation and free federation of the workers. To these the trade union is the nucleus of the free co-operative group, which will obviate the necessity of an employer ... The mutualist position on the land question is identical with that of the Individualists."* The *"material factor which accounts for such differences as there are between Individualists and Mutualists"* was due to the former being intellectual workers and so *"never know[ing] directly the oppressions of the large factory, nor mingled with workers' associations. The Mutualists had; consequently their leaning towards a greater Communism."* [*"Anarchism"*, **Exquisite Rebel**, p. 77 and p. 78]

Next, we must clarify what is meant by ***"wage labour"*** and the related term ***"wages system."*** They are not identical. Marx, for example, corrected the Gotha Programme's *"abolition of the wage system"* by saying *"it should read: system of wage labour"* (although that did not stop him demanding *"the ultimate abolition of the wages system"* elsewhere). [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 324 and p. 226] The difference lies in whether there is communism (distribution according to need) or socialism (distribution according to work done), as in Marx's (in)famous difference between a lower and higher phase of communism. It is the difference between a distribution of goods based on deeds and one based on needs and Kropotkin famous polemic *"The collectivist Wages System"* rests on it. He argued that the wages system was based on *"renumeration to each according to the time spent in producing, while taking into account the productivity of his labour"*. In other words: *"To each according to his deeds."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 162 and p. 167] Such a wages system could exist in different forms. Most obviously, and the focus of Kropotkin's critique, it could be a regime where the state owned the means of production and paid its subjects according to their labour (i.e., state socialism). It could also refer to a system of artisans, peasants and co-operatives which sold the product of their



tifying how much land or credit is worth and so resource use will be inefficient. Of course, this assumes that capitalist definitions of efficiency and "cost" are the only valid ones which is not the case. So, arguing that markets are required to correctly value goods and services is a two-edged sword, argue communist-anarchists.

One of the joys of Proudhon is that he provides material to critique both Kropotkin's communist-anarchism **and** Tucker's individualist anarchism for while opposed to communism he was equally opposed to wage labour, as we indicate in section G.4.2 (as such, those who quote Proudhon's attacks on communism but fail to note his attacks on wage slavery are extremely dishonest). Under mutualism, there would not be wage labour. Rather than employers paying wages to workers, workers would form co-operatives and pay themselves a share of the income they collectively produced. As Robert Graham put it, *"[t]hat both Tucker and Bakunin could claim Proudhon as their own illustrates the inherent ambiguity and elusiveness of his thought ... With his death, that synthesis broke down into its conflicting parts."* [*"Introduction"*, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, **The General idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxi] Social anarchism emphasised the self-management, associational and federalist aspects of Proudhon's ideas along with his critique of private property while individualist anarchism tended to stress his support for possession, "wages" (i.e., labour income), competition and markets.

## G.2.5 Do most anarchists agree with the individualists on communist-anarchism?

No, far from it. Most anarchists in the late nineteenth century recognised communist-anarchism as a genuine form of anarchism and it quickly replaced collectivist anarchism as the dominant tendency.

> *"How much does the tobacco sold by the administration cost? How much is it worth? You can answer the first of these questions: you need only call at the first tobacco shop you see. But you can tell me nothing about the second, because you have no standard of comparison and are forbidden to verify by experiment the items of cost of administration.... Therefore the tobacco business, made into a monopoly, necessarily costs society more than it brings in; it is an industry which, instead of subsisting by its own product, lives by subsidies."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, pp. 232–3]

Communist-anarchists reply by noting that the price of something is not independent of the degree of monopoly of an industry and so natural barriers to competition can skew prices. Equally, competition can be a race to the bottom and that competitors can undermine their own working conditions and enjoyment of life in order to gain an advantage (or, more often, simply survive) on the market. As we argue in section I.1.3, markets have a tendency to undermine equality and solidarity and, over time, erode the basis of a free society.

As an aside, Proudhon's argument has obvious similarities with von Mises' much later attack on communism which is usually called the "socialist calculation argument" (see section I.1.1). As discussed in section I.1.2, von Mises' argument was question begging in the extreme and our critique of that applies equally to Proudhon's claims. As such, communist-anarchists argue that market prices usually do **not** reflect the real costs (in terms of their effects on individuals, society and the planet's ecology) — even those prices generated by non-capitalist markets. Moreover, due to Proudhon's opposition to rent and interest, his own argument could be turned against mutualism and individualist anarchism as followers of von Mises have done. Without rent and interest, they argue, there is no way of iden-



labour on a market or exchanged their goods with others based on labour-time notes (i.e., associational socialism).

This should not be confused with wage labour, in which a worker sells their labour to a boss. This results in a hierarchical social relationship being created in which the worker is the servant of the employer. The employer, as they own the labour of the worker, also keeps the product of said labour and as we argued in section C.2, this places the boss is in a position to get the worker to produce more than they get back in wages. In other words, wage labour is based on oppression and can result in exploitation as the bosses control both the production process (i.e., the labour of the workers) and the goods it produces. It is this which explains socialist opposition to wage labour — it is the means by which labour is exploited under capitalism (anarchist opposition to wage labour includes this but also extends it to include its denial of freedom to those subject to workplace hierarchy).

So for the purposes of this discussion ***"wage labour"*** refers to hierarchical social relationships **within** production while ***"wages system"*** refers to how goods are distributed once they are produced. Thus you can have a wages system without wage labour but not wage labour without a wages system. Communist-anarchists aim for the abolition of both wage labour and the wages system while mutualist-anarchists only aim to get rid of the first one.

The problem is that the terms are sometimes mixed up, with "wages" and "wages system" being confused with "wage labour." This is the case with the nineteenth century American labour movement which tended to use the term "wages system" to refer to wage labour and the expression *"abolition of the wages system"* to refer to the aim of replacing capitalism with a market system based on producer co-operatives. This is reflected in certain translations of Proudhon. Discussing the *"workmen's associations"* founded in France during the 1848 revolution, Proudhon noted that *"the workmen, in order*

*to dispense with middlemen . .. , capitalists, etc., ... have had to work a little more, and get along with less wages.*" So he considered workers associations as paying "wages" and so, obviously, meant by "wages" labour income, **not** wage labour. The term "wage labour" was translated as "wages system," so we find Proudhon arguing that the *"workmen's associations"* are *"a protest against the wage system"* and a *"denial of the rule of capitalists."* Proudhon's aim was *"Capitalistic and proprietary exploitation, stopped everywhere, the wage system abolished, equal and just exchange guaranteed."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 89–90, p. 98 and p. 281] This has been translated as *"Capitalist and landlord exploitation halted everywhere, wage-labour abolished."* [quoted by John Ehrenberg, **Proudhon and his Age**, p. 116]

We are sorry to belabour this point, but it is essential for understanding the anarchist position on wage labour and the differences between different schools of socialism. So before discussing the relation of individualist anarchism to wage labour we needed to clarify what is meant by the term, particularly as some people use the term wages to mean any kind of direct payment for labour and so wage labour is sometimes confused with the wages system. Similarly, the terms wage labour and wages systems are often used interchangeably when, in fact, they refer to different things and abolition the wages system can mean different things depending on who is using the expression.

So after this unfortunately essential diversion, we can now discuss the position of individualist anarchism on wage labour. Unfortunately, there is no consistent position on this issue within the tradition. Some follow social anarchism in arguing that a free society would see its end, others see no contradiction between their ideas and wage labour. We will discuss each in turn.

Joshua King Ingalls, for example, praised attempts to set up communities based on libertarian principles as *"a demonstra-*



the individual is free to leave (and, conversely, the commune is free to expel an individual). Said individuals can seek another communist commune and join it or, conversely, work for themselves in their present location. Ultimately, free association means the freedom **not** to associate and libertarian communism is rooted in that truism. Thus, communist-anarchists would agree with the French anarchism when he *"conclude[d] that a single association can never include all the workmen in one industry, nor all industrial corporations, nor, **a fortiori**, a nation of 36 millions of men; therefore that the principle of association does not offer the required solution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85] Like Proudhon, communist-anarchists base their anarchism on federations of associations and communes, with these federations and associations formed as and when they were required for joint activity. Thus the federation of communist communes and workplaces would play a similar role as Proudhon's *"agro-industrial federation,"* namely to end *"wage labour or economic servitude"* and *"to protect"* against *"capitalist and financial feudalism, both within them and from the outside"* as well as ensuring *"increasing equality"* and the *"application of application on the largest possible scale of the principles of mutualism"* and *"economic solidarity."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 70 and p. 71]

The key difference, of course, between Proudhon's mutualism and Kropotkin's communism was (as latter stressed) that the former supported payment for labour in terms of money or labour-cheques while the latter argued that this would be a modification of the wages system rather than its total abolition. Yet by divorcing payment for labour from its consumption, Proudhon argued that communism, like monopoly, made it difficult to determine exactly the costs involved in producing goods. The French anarchist argued that there was no way of knowing the real cost of anything produced outside the market. This could be seen from monopolies within capitalism:

rewarding labour for its actual work done would be a great incentive in ensuring that it was efficiently done and meet the consumers requirements. Secondly, he considered communism as being potentially authoritarian in that society would determine what an individual should contribute and consume. As he put it:

> *"Who then shall determine the capacity? who shall be the judge of the needs?*
>
> *"You say that my capacity is 100: I maintain that it is only 90. You add that my needs are 90: I affirm that they are 100. There is a difference between us of twenty upon needs and capacity. It is, in other words, the well-known debate between* ***demand*** *and* ***supply****. Who shall judge between the society and me?*
>
> *"If the society persists, despite my protests, I resign from it, and that is all there is to it. The society comes to an end from lack of associates.*
>
> *"If, having recourse to force, the society undertakes to compel me; if it demands from me sacrifice and devotion, I say to it: Hypocrite! you promised to deliver me from being plundered by capital and power; and now, in the name of equality and fraternity, in your turn, you plunder me. Formerly, in order to rob me, they exaggerated my capacity and minimised my needs. They said that products cost me so little, that I needed so little to live! You are doing the same thing. What difference is there then between fraternity and the wage system?"* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 96–7]

Yet even here Proudhon shows the libertarian communist solution to this possible problem, namely free association. If there were a conflict between individuals within a free commune in terms of their contributions and consumption then



*tion ... that none need longer submit to the tyranny and exactions of the swindler and speculator in the products of others toil. The example would be speedily followed by others who would break away from the slavery of wages, and assert their independence of capital."* [*"Method of Transition for the Consideration of the True Friends of Human Rights and Human Progress,"* **Spirit of the Age**, Vol. I, No. 25, pp. 385–387] The *"present relation of 'Capital and Labor' is ... really a mixed relation between contract and status; held by fiction of law as one of 'freedom of contract,' while it retains potentially all the essential features of serfdom. Industrially and economically, the relation is substantially the same as that which existed between the chattel and his owner, and the serf and his lord."* Ingalls pointed to *"the terrible fear of being 'out of a job,' which freedom of contract means to a wage-worker."* [*"Industrial Wars and Governmental Interference,"* **The Twentieth Century**, September 6, 1894, pp. 11–12] *"To reward capital,"* he argued, *"is a direct inversion of natural right, as the right of man must be acknowledged paramount to that of property ... Any system, securing a premium to capital, however small, must result in the want, degradation and servitude of one class, and in bestowing unearned wealth and power upon another."* [*"Man and Property, their Rights and Relations,"* **Spirit of the Age**, vol. I, no. 8, pp. 114–116] Like Proudhon, he recognised that joint productive activity resulted in an output greater than that possible by the same number of people working in isolation, an output monopolised by those who owned the workplace or land in question:

> *"That the operation of any wealth increasing enterprise is co-operative needs only stating ... and its logic in division of the product of the conjoint labour, can only be frustrated by the fiction that the worker has contracted away his share of the increase by accepting wages. But, being dispossessed of his common right to land, and to opportunity to use the com-*

*mon materials and forces, he can make no equitable contract and cannot be lawfully thus concluded … The only pretence which prevents this distribution, is the plea that the worker in accepting wages, has tacitly contracted away his share of the increase, has made a sale of his interest. Even this subterfuge fails logically however, whenever the operators reduce the rate of compensation without the full concurrence of the co-operative workers, and their just claim to joint ownership obtains again. It is altogether too late, to urge that this is a mere matter of exchange; so much money, so much labour-; and that the operator may lay off and take on whom he pleases. It never was, as economists teach, a matter of exchange, but one of co-operative endeavour."* [*"Industrial Wars and Governmental Interference,"* **The Twentieth Century**, September 6, 1894, pp. 11–12]

Unsurprisingly given this analysis he saw the need to replace wage labour (which he called *"false and immoral"*) with a better system: *"the adoption of honesty in our useful industries, and a reciprocal system of exchange, would unfold a grand and universal cooperative movement, seems so clear to me."* [*"The Wage Question"*, **The American Socialist**, Vol. 2, No. 38, p. 298] This would result in a boost to economic activity:

*"No one, say they, will do anything but for profits. But the man who works for wages has no profits; and is not only destitute of this stimulus, but his labour product is minus the profits of the capitalist, landlord, and forestaller. A rational economy would seem to require, that if any one received extra inducement to act, it should be that one who did the most labourious and repulsive work. It is thus seen, that while exorbitant profits afford an unnatural stimulus, in mere wages we have an inadequate motive*



individualist anarchists argue they seek to get rid of the state, they **also** mean the end of capitalist property rights (particularly in land). That this can lead to confusion is obvious as, in the usual sense of the word, rent **is** caused by private property. The communists-anarchists, in contrast, generally used the term "private property" and "property" in the same way that Proudhon used it in 1840, namely property which allows its owner to exploit the labour of another. As such, they had no problem with those who laboured by themselves on their own property.

The lack of a market in communist-anarchism led some individualist anarchists like William Bailie to argue that it *"ignores the necessity for any machinery to adjust economic activities to their ends."* Either its supporters *"exalt a chaotic and unbalanced condition"* or they will produce an *"insufferable hierarchy."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 116] Thus, to use modern terms, either communist-anarchists embrace central planning or their system simply cannot produce goods to meet demand with over-production of unwanted goods and under-production of desired ones. Needless to say, communist-anarchists argue that it is possible to bring the demand and production of goods into line without requiring centralised planning (which would be inefficient and a dire threat to individual freedom — Kropotkin's arguments against state capitalism were proved right in Soviet Russia). It would require a system of horizontal links between self-managed workplaces and the transmission of appropriate information to make informed decisions (see section I for a discussion of some possibilities).

Another objection to communist-anarchism was raised by Proudhon during his debates with the state communists of his time who also raised the slogan *"from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs."* For Proudhon, wages in the sense of payment for labour would still exist in a anarchist society. This was because of two main reasons. Firstly,

being generated within capitalism but in opposition to its hierarchical nature (see section I.2.3). Fourthly, presenting more than a sketch would be authoritarian as it is up to a free people to create their own society and solve their problems themselves (see section I.2).

Clearly, A. H. Simpson was wrong when he asserted that communist-anarchists argued thusly: *"Abolish private property by instituting compulsory Communism, and the State will go."* No communist-anarchist has ever argued for compulsory communism. Somewhat ironically, Simpson went on to argue that *"difference between Communism and Anarchy is plainly observable in their methods. Abolish the State . .. that bulwark of the robber system ... says the Anarchist. Abolish private property, the source of all evil and injustice, parent of the State, says the Communist."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 92] Yet communist-anarchists do **not** subscribe to the position of abolishing private property first, **then** the state. As we note when refuting the opposite assertion by Marxists in section H.2.4, anarchists like Kropotkin and Malatesta followed Bakunin in arguing that **both** needed to be abolished at the same time. Kropotkin, for example, did not divide economic and political issues, for him it was a case of *"the political and economic principles of Anarchism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 159]

This unity of economic and political aspects of anarchism exists within Individualist Anarchism too, but it is hidden by the unfortunately tendency of its supporters of discussing certain forms of private property as state enforced monopolies. So to a large degree many of the disagreements between the two schools of anarchism were rooted in semantics. Thus we find William Bailie arguing that the anarchist-communist *"assumption that rent and interest are due to private property is not proven"* as *"both rent and interest are the result of monopoly, of restricted individual liberty."* [**Liberty**, no. 261, p. 1] In other words, rent is caused because the state enforces property rights which the individualist anarchists disagree with. Thus when



> *to action."* [*"Labor, Wages, And Capital. Division Of Profits Scientifically Considered"*, **Brittan's Quarterly Journal**, No. I, pp. 66–79]

The land monopoly was *"the foundation of class dominion and of poverty and industrial subjection."* [quoted by Bowman N. Hall, *"Joshua K. Ingalls, American Individualist: Land Reformer, Opponent of Henry George and Advocate of Land Leasing, Now an Established Mode"*, pp. 383–96, **American Journal of Economics and Sociology**, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 387] Without access to land, people would have no option to sell their liberty to others and, as such, the abolition of slavery and wage labour were related:

> *"The right to life involves the right to land to live and labour upon. Commercial ownership of land which enables one to exclude another from it, and thus enforces involuntary idleness, is as destructive of human freedom as ownership of the person, enforcing involuntary service ... Liberation of the slaves would bring their labour in more direct competition with our over-crowded and poorly paid wage-workers. I did not offer this as a reason against the abolition of chattel slavery, but as a reason why the friends of emancipation from chattel slavery should unite with the friends for the emancipation of the wage worker, by restoring him the right to land, for the production of the means of life ... The real issue was between the rights of labour and the rights of ownership."* [quoted by Bowman N. Hall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 385]

This analysis was a common theme in pre-civil war libertarian circles. As historian James J. Martin noted, *"[t]o men like Warren and Evens chattel slavery was merely one side of a bru-*

*tal situation, and although sympathetic with its opponents, refused to take part in the struggle [against slavery] unless it was extended to a wholesale attack on what they termed 'wage slavery' in the states where Negro slavery no longer existed."* [**Men Against the State**, p. 81] Such a view, we may add, was commonplace in radical working class journals and movements of the time. Thus we find George Henry Evans (who heavily influenced Individualist Anarchists like Warren and Ingalls with the ideas of land reform based on *"occupancy and use"*) writing:

> *"I was formally, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of (black) slavery. This was before I saw that there was white slavery. Since I saw this, I have materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing Negro slavery. I now see clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless white, would hardly be a benefit to him in exchange for his surety of support in sickness and old age, although he is in a favourable climate."* [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81f]

Ingalls, likewise, *"considered the only 'intelligent' strike [by workers as] one which would be directed against wage work altogether."* For Lysander Spooner, liberty meant that the worker was entitled to *"all the fruits of his own labour"* and argued that this *"might be feasible"* only when *"every man [was] own employer or work for himself in a direct way, since working for another resulted in a portion being diverted to the employer."* [Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 153 and p. 172] To quote Spooner:

> *"When a man knows that he is to have **all** the fruits of his labour, he labours with more zeal, skill, and physical energy, than when he knows — as in the case of one labouring for wages — that a portion of*



no. 149, p. 1] Clearly, his anti-communism got in the way of any attempt to build bridges or acknowledge that communist-anarchists had no desire (as noted above) to force people to be communists nor to have the "communism" of those unwilling (rather than unable) to contribute imposed on them!

## G.2.4 What other reasons do individualists give for rejecting communist-anarchism?

The other differences are not as major. Some individualist anarchists took umbrage because the communist-anarchists predicted that an anarchist society would take a communal form, so prescribing the future development of a free society in potentially authoritarian ways. As James Martin summarised, it was Tucker's *"belief that 'in all subsequent social co-operation no manner of organisation or combination whatsoever shall be binding upon any individual without his consent,' and to decide in advance upon a communal structure violated this maxim from the start."* [**Men Against the State**, p. 222] Others took umbrage because the communist-anarchists refused to spell out in sufficient detail exactly how their vision would work.

Communist-anarchists reply in four main ways. Firstly, the individualist anarchists themselves predicted roughly how they thought a free society would look and function, namely one on individual ownership of production based around mutual banks. Secondly, communist-anarchists presented any vision as one which was consistent with libertarian principles, i.e., their suggestions for a free society was based on thinking about the implication of anarchist principles in real life. There seemed little point in advocating anarchism if any future society would be marked by authority. To not discuss how a free society could work would result in authoritarian solutions being imposed (see section I.2.1). Thirdly, they were at pains to link the institutions of a free society to those already

A firmer critique of communist-anarchism can be found when Tucker argued that *"Kropotkinian anarchism means the liberty to eat, but not to cook; to drink, but not to brew; to wear, but not to spin; to dwell, but not to build; to give, but not to sell or buy; to think, but not to print; to speak, but not to hire a hall; to dance, but not to pay the fiddler."* [quoted by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, **Op. Cit.**, p. 279] Yet even this contains a distortion, as it is clear that communist-anarchism is based on the assumption that members of a communist society **would** have to contribute (if physically able, of course) to the common resources in order to gain access to them. The notion that Kropotkin thought that a communist society would only take into account *"to each according to their needs"* while ignoring *"from each according to their abilities"* seems hard to square with his published arguments. While it is true that individual contributions would not be exactly determined, it is false to suggest that communist-anarchism ignores the obvious truism that in order to consume you first need to produce. Simply put, if someone seeks to live off the work of others in a free society those within it would be asked to leave and provide for themselves. By their actions, they have shown that they do not want to live in a communist commune and those who do wish to live as communists would feel no particular need to provide for those who do not (see section I.4.14).

This can be seen when Tucker quoted **Freedom** saying that *"in the transitional revolutionary period communities and individuals may be obliged in self-defence to make it their rule that 'He who will not work neither shall he eat.' It is not always possible for us to act up to our principles and ... expediency may force us to confine our Communism to those who are willing to be our brothers and equals."* Somewhat incredibly, Tucker stated *"I am not quite clear as to the meaning of this, and would ask to be enlightened on the question whether those objectionable individuals are to be let alone to live in their own way, or whether the State Socialistic plan would be pursued in dealing with them."* [**Liberty**,



> *the fruits of his labour are going to another... In order that each man may have the fruits of his own labour, it is important, as a general rule, that each man should be his own employer, or work directly for himself, and not for another for wages; because, in the latter case, a part of the fruits of his labour go to his employer, instead of coming to himself ... That each man may be his own employer, it is necessary that he have materials, or capital, upon which to bestow his labour."* [**Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure**, p. 8]

Wage labour had a negative impact on those subject to it in terms of their personal development. *"The mental independence of each individual would be greatly promoted by his pecuniary independence,"* Spooner argued. *"Freedom of thought, and the free utterance of thought, are, to a great degree, suppressed ... by their dependence upon the will and favour of others, for that employment by which they must obtain their daily bread. They dare not investigate, or if they investigate, dare not freely avow and advocate those moral, social, religious, political, and economical truths, which alone calm rescue them from their degradation, lest they should thereby sacrifice their bread by stirring the jealousy of those out whom they are dependent, and who derive their power, wealth, and consequence from the ignorance and servitude of the poor."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54] As we argued in section B.1, all forms of hierarchy (including wage labour) distorts the personality and harms the individual psychologically.

Spooner argued that it was state restrictions on credit and money (the *"money monopoly"* based on banks requiring specie to operate) as the reason why people sell themselves to others on the labour market. As he put it, *"a monopoly of money ... . put[s] it wholly out of the power of the great body of wealth-producers to hire the capital needed for their industries; and thus compel them ... — by the alternative of starvation — to sell their*

*labour to the monopolists of money ... [who] plunder all the producing classes in the prices of their labour."* Spooner was well aware that it was capitalists who ran the state (*"the employers of wage labour ... are also the monopolists of money"*). In his ideal society, the *"amount of money capable of being furnished .. . is so great that every man, woman, and child... could get it, and go into business for himself, or herself — either singly, or in partnerships — and be under no necessity to act as a servant, or sell his or her labour to others. All the great establishments, of every kind, now in the hands of a few proprietors, but employing a great number of wage labourers, would be broken up; for few, or no persons, who could hire capital, and do business for themselves, would consent to labour for wages for another."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 20, p. 48 and p. 41]

As Eunice Minette Schuster noted, Spooner's *"was a revolt against the industrial system"*, a *"**return** to **pre-industrial** society."* He *"would destroy the factory system, wage labour ... by making every individual a small capitalist, an independent producer"* and *"turn the clock of time backwards, not forward."* This position seems to have been a common one, for *"the early American Individualists aimed to return . .. to an economic system where everyone would be a small, independent proprietor."* [**Native American Anarchism**, p. 148, pp. 151–2 and p. 157] As another commentator on individualist anarchism also noted, *"the dominant vision of the future was obviously that of a relatively modest scale of production ... underpinned by individual, self-employed workers"* and so the individualist anarchists *"expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them."* [Wm. Gary Kline **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 95 and p. 104]

This is not to say that all the individualist anarchists ignored the rise of large scale industrial production. Far from it. Tucker, Greene and Lum all recognised that anarchism had to adjust to the industrial system and proposed different solutions



*able only on the basis of equal economic advantages for everybody.* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11] As Kropotkin stressed, anarchists recognise that there are two types of communism, libertarian and authoritarian and *"our communism, is not that of the authoritarian school: it is anarchist communism, communism without government, free communism. It is a synthesis of the two chief aims pursued by humanity since the dawn of its history — economic freedom and political freedom."* It is based on *"everybody, contributing for the common well-being to the full extent of his [or her] capacities .. . enjoy[ing] also from the common stock of society to the fullest possible extent of his [or her] needs."* Thus it is rooted in individual tastes and diversity, on *"putting the wants of the individual **above** the valuation of the services he [or she] has rendered, or might render, to society."* Thus communism was *"the best basis for individual development and freedom"* and so *"the full expansion of man's faculties, the superior development of what is original in him, the greatest fruitfulness of intelligences, feeling and will."* It would ensure the *"most powerful development of individuality, of individual originality."* The *"most powerful development of individuality, of individual originality ... can only be produced when the first needs of food and shelter are satisfied"* and this was why *"communism and anarchism"* are *"a necessary complement to one another."* [**Anarchism**, p. 61, p. 59, p. 60 and p. 141]

So, communist-anarchists would actually agree with individualist anarchists like Simpson and oppose any notion of *"levelling"* (artificial or otherwise). The aim of libertarian communism is to increase diversity and individuality, **not** to end it by imposing an abstract equality of outcome or of consumption that would utter ignore individual tastes or preferences. Given that communist-anarchists like Kropotkin and Malatesta continually stressed this aspect of their ideas, Simpson was simply confusing libertarian and authoritarian forms of communism for polemical effect rather than presenting a true account of the issues at hand.

*and another is more fortunate, they are not to be granted an equal amount of medical care, and the same is true of other human needs.* Hence Chomsky talks of the *"authentic left"* who recognise that individuals *"will differ in their aspirations, their abilities, and their personal goals"* and seek a society which allows that diversity to fully flourish. [**The Chomsky Reader**, p. 191 and p. 192] In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

> *"a far greater degree of economic equality ... would ... be no guarantee against political and social oppression. Economic equality alone is not social liberation. It is just this which Marxism and all the other schools of authoritarian Socialism have never understood. Even in prison, in the cloister, or in the barracks one finds a fairly high degree of economic equality, as all the inmates are provided with the same dwelling, the same food, the same uniform, and the same tasks ... [this was] the vilest despotism ... the human being was merely the automation of a higher will, on whose decisions he had not the slightest influence. It was not without reason that Proudhon saw in a 'Socialism' without freedom the worst form of slavery. The urge for social justice can only develop properly and be effective, when it grows out of man's sense of personal freedom and is based on that. In other words* ***Socialism will be free, or it will not be at all****. In its recognition of this lies the genuine and profound justification for the existence of Anarchism."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 14]

Therefore, anarchists *"demand the abolition of all economic monopolies and the common ownership of the soil and all other means of production, the use of which must be available to all without distinction; for personal and social freedom is conceiv-*



for it. Greene and Lum followed Proudhon and advocated co-operative production while Tucker argued that mutual banks could result in a non-exploitative form of wage labour developing.

William Greene pronounced that *"[t]here is no device of the political economists so infernal as the one which ranks labour as a commodity, varying in value according to supply and demand ... To speak of labour as merchandise is treason; for such speech denies the true dignity of man ... Where labour is merchandise in fact ... there man is merchandise also, whether in England or South Carolina."* This meant that, *"[c]onsidered from this point of view, the price of commodities is regulated not by the labour expended in their production, but by the distress and want of the labouring class. The greater the distress of the labourer, the more willing will he be to work for low wages, that is, the higher will be the price he is willing to give for the necessaries of life. When the wife and children of the labourer ask for bread, and he has none to give them, then, according to the political economists, is the community prosperous and happy; for then the rate of wages is low, and commodities command a high price in labour."* [**Mutual Banking**, pp. 49–50 and p. 49]

Greene's alternative was co-operation in production, consumption and exchange. *"The triple formula of practical mutualism"*, he argued, was *"the associated workshop"* for production, the *"protective union store"* for consumption and the *"the Mutual Bank"* for exchange. All three were required, for *"the Associated Workshop cannot exist for a single day without the Mutual Bank and the Protective Union Store."* Without mutual banking, the productive co-operatives would not survive as it would not gain access to credit or at a high rate (*"How do you advance the cause of labour by putting your associated neck under the heel of capital? Your talk about 'the emancipation of labour' is wind and vapour; labour cannot be emancipated by any such process."*) Thus the *"Associated Workshop ought to be an organisation of personal credit. For what is its aim and purpose? Is it*

*not the emancipation of the labourer from all dependence upon capital and capitalists?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37, p. 34, p. 35 and p. 34] The example of the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque country confirms the soundness of Greene's analysis.

Here we see a similar opposition to the commodification of labour (and so labourers) within capitalism that also marks social anarchist thought. As Rocker notes, Greene *"emphasised more strongly the* ***principle of association*** *than did Josiah Warren and more so than Spooner had done."* He had a *"strong sympathy for the* ***principle of association.*** *In fact, the theory of Mutualism is nothing less that co-operative labour based on the cost principle."* He also *"rejected . .. the designation of labour as a* ***commodity****"* and *"constantly endeavoured to introduce his ideas into the youthful labour movement .. . so as to prevent the social problem being regarded by labour as only a question of wages."* [**Pioneers of American Freedom**„ p. 108, p. 109, pp. 111–2 and p. 112] This support for producers' associations alongside mutual banks is identical to Proudhon's ideas — which is unsurprising as Greene was a declared follower of the French anarchist. Martin also indicates Greene's support for co-operation and associative labour and its relation to the wider labour movement:

> *"Coming at a time when the labour and consumer groups were experimenting with 'associated workshops' and 'protective union stores,' Greene suggested that the mutual bank be incorporated into the movement, forming what he called 'complementary units of production, consumption, and exchange ... the triple formula of practical mutualism.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 134–5]

Dyer Lum was another individualist anarchist who opposed wage labour and supported co-operative production. Like Greene, Lum took an active part in the labour movement



Of course, there is slight irony to Simpson's diatribe against communism in that it implicitly assumes that private property is not a god and that individuals should respect it regardless of how it impacts on them and their liberty. Would it not be altruism of the worse kind if working class people did not simply take the land and capital they need to survive rather than sell their labour and liberty to its owners? So why exclude private property (even in a modified form) from individualist anarchist scorn? As we argue in section G.6 this was Max Stirner's position and, fundamentally, the communist-anarchist one too. Communist-anarchists oppose private property as it generates relationships of authority and these harm those subject to them and, as a consequence, they argue that it is in the **self**-interest of the individuals so oppressed to expropriate private property and share the whole world.

The issue of sharing and what it implied also caused some individualist anarchists to oppose it. Henry Appleton argued that *"all communism rests upon an artificial attempt to level things, as against a social development resting upon untrammelled individual sovereignty."* The *"true Anarchist ... is opposed to all manner of artificial levelling machines. How pitiful the ignorance which accuses him of wanting to level everything, when the very integral thought of Anarchism is opposed to levelling!"* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 89] However, as we have indicated in section A.2.5, all genuine anarchists, **including communist-anarchists**, are opposed to making or treating people as if they were identical. In fact, the goal of communist-anarchism has always been to ensure and protect the natural diversity of individuals by creating social conditions in which individuality can flourish. The fundamental principle of communism is the maxim ***"from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs."*** There is nothing there about *"levelling"* or (which amounts to the same thing), *"equality of outcome."* To make an obvious point: *"If one person need medical treatment*

> *"Anarchist Communism maintains that most valuable of all conquests — individual liberty — and moreover extends it and gives it a solid basis — economic liberty — without which political liberty is delusive; it does not ask the individual who has rejected god, god the king, and god the parliament, to give himself unto himself a god more terrible than any of the preceding — god the Community, or to abdicate upon its alter his independence, his will, his tastes, and to renew the vow of asceticism which he formally made before the crucified god. It says to him, on the contrary, 'No society is free so long as the individual is not so! Do not seek to modify society by imposing upon it an authority which shall make everything right; if you do you will fail ... abolish the conditions which allow some to monopolise the fruit of labour of others.'"* [**The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution**, pp. 14–5]

Of course, denying that communist-anarchists seek such a regime is not the same as saying that such a regime would not be created by accident. Unsurprisingly, communist-anarchists have spent some time arguing that their system would not be subject to such a degeneration as its members would be aware of the danger and act to stop it (see, for example, section I.5.6). The key to understanding communist-anarchism is to recognise that it is based on free access. It does not deny an individual (or even a group of individuals) the ability to work their own land or workplace, it simply denies them the ability to exclude others from it unless they agree to be their servant first. The sharing of the products of labour is considered as the means to reduce even more any authority in society as people can swap workplaces and communities with ease, without worrying about whether they can put food on their table or not.



and was a union organiser. As he put it, the Knights of Labor aimed to work for the *"abolishment of the wage-system"* as well as the right of life requiring the right to the means of living. Dyer, while rejecting their infatuation with political action, had *"the fullest sympathy"* for their aims and supported their economic measures. [**Liberty**, no. 82, p. 7] Unsurprisingly, as one historian notes, *"Lum began to develop an ideology that centred on the labour reformers' demand: 'The Wage System must go!'"* He joined *"the ideological path of labour reformers who turned to a radicalised laissez-faire explanation of wage slavery."* [Frank H. Brooks, *"Ideology, Strategy, and Organization: Dyer Lum and the American Anarchist Movement"*, pp. 57–83, **Labor History**, vol. 34, No. 1, p. 63 and p. 67] Like the communist-anarchists of the IWPA, for Lum trade unions were both the means of fighting capitalism and the way to abolish wage labour:

> *"Anarchists in Chicago tended to be much more sympathetic to class organisation, specifically unions, because they had many contacts to local unions and the Knights of Labor. The issue was not resolved at the founding conference of the IWPA, but the Chicago anarchists did manage to get a resolution passed stating that 'we view in trades unions based upon progressive principles — the abolition of the wages-system — the corner-stone of a better society structure than the present one.'*
>
> *"Lum agreed wholeheartedly with this resolution, particularly the phrase 'abolition of the wages-system.' This phrase not only confirmed the ideological link between anarchism and labour reform, but also paralleled similar language in the declaration of principles of the Knights of Labor. By 1886, Lum had joined the Knights and he urged other anarchists, particularly individualists,*

> *to support their struggles. Lum continued to be involved with organised labour for the next seven years, seeing unions as a practical necessity in the struggle against class politics and state repression."* [Brooks, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 70–1]

However, *"[d]espite the similarity between the evolution of Lum's strategy and that of the revolutionary anti-statist socialists in the IWPA, his analysis of 'wage slavery' was considerably more individualistic."* [Brooks, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66] Lum saw it as resulting primarily from state interference in the economy which reduced the options available to working class people. With a genuine free market based on free land and free credit workers would work for themselves, either as independent producers or in co-operatives (*"where capital seeks labour ... where authority dissolves under the genial glow of liberty, and necessity for wage-labour disappears."* [Dyer D. Lum, contained in Albert Parsons, **Anarchism**, p. 153]). Thus a key element of *"Lum's anarchism was his mutualist economics, an analysis of 'wage slavery' and a set of reforms that would 'abolish the wage system.'"* [Brooks, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] Voltairine de Cleyre, in her individualist anarchist days, concurred with her mentor Lum, arguing for a *"complete international federation of labour, whose constituent groups shall take possession of land, mines, factories, all the instruments of production, issue their own certificates of exchange, and, in short, conduct their own industry without regulative interference from law-makers or employers."* [**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 6]

European individualist anarchists, it should be noted had a similar perspective. As mentioned in section A.3.1, Frenchman E. Armand argued that *"ownership of the means of production and free disposal of his produce"* was *"the quintessential guarantee of the autonomy of the individual"* but only as long as *"the proprietor does not transfer it to someone else or reply upon the services of someone else in operating it."* [*"Mini-Manual*



erty within the limits of occupancy and use, and within an economy dominated by the cost principle or some close equivalent, had to be a necessary protection for the individual from both the potential tyranny of the group (communism) and from inequalities in wealth (capitalism).

In return, communist-anarchists would agree. *"Phalansteries,* argued Kropotkin, *"are repugnant to millions of human beings."* While most people feel *"the necessity of meeting his [or her] fellows for the pursue of common work ... it is not so for the hours of leisure"* and such communities *"do not take this into account."* Thus a commune system does not imply communal living (although such arrangements *"can please some"*). Rather it was a case of *"isolated apartments ... Isolation, alternating with time spent in society, is the normal desire of human nature."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 123–4] Kropotkin in his discussion on why intentional communities like that of Owen's failed repeated many of Warren's points and stressed that they were based on the authoritarian spirit and violated the need for individual liberty, isolation and diversity (see his **Small Communal Experiments and Why They Fail**). The aim of communist-anarchism is to create a communist society based on individual liberty and freely joined functional groups. It does not aim to burden individuals with communal issues beyond those required by said groupings. Thus self-managed communities involve managing only those affairs which truly rest in joint needs, with the interests of individuals and other groups only being discussed if they are harming others and other means of resolving disputes have failed. Whether this can actually happen, of course, will be discovered in a free society. If it did not, the communist-anarchists would be the first to seek alternative economic and social arrangements which guaranteed liberty.

It should also go without saying that no communist-anarchist sought a system by which individuals would have their personality destroyed. As Kropotkin stressed:

priation of capital would provoke the state into attacking and it would be unlikely that the rebels would win. Both, however, can agree that violence should only be used in self-defence and that for most of the time it is not required as other forms of resistance are far more effective.

## G.2.3 Does communist-anarchism aim to destroy individuality?

Then there is the desirability of communism as such. A. H. Simpson argued that *"Anarchism is egoism; Communism is altruism"* and altruism in any form will involve *"the duty of the individual to sacrifice himself to God, the State, the community, the 'cause' of anything, superstition that always makes for tyranny. This idea, whether under Theocracy or Communism, will result in the same thing — always authority."* He did, though, argue that in a free society people who *"desire to have their individuality submerged in the crowd"* would be free to set up their own communes. [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 92 and p. 94] This flows from Joshua Warren's experiences on Robert Owen's co-operative community **New Harmony** and the conclusions he drew from its collapse. Warren essentially began the individualist anarchist tradition by concluding that any sort of collective emphasis was bound to fail because it prevented people from sufficiently addressing individual concerns, since supposed collective concerns would inevitably take their place. The failure of these communities was rooted in a failure to understand the need for individual self-government. Thus, for Warren, it *"seemed that the differences of opinion, tastes, and purposes **increased** just in proportion to the demand for conformity"* and so it *"appeared that it was nature's own inherent law of diversity that had conquered us ... Our 'united interests' were directly at war with the individualities of persons and circumstances."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 390] Thus, prop-



*of the Anarchist Individualist"*, pp. 145–9, **Anarchism**, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 147] Another French individualist anarchist, Ernest Lesigne, argued that in a free society, *"there should be no more proletaires"* as *"everybody"* would be *"proprietor."* This would result in *"The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer."* [quoted approvingly by Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 17 and p. 18] Lesigne considered *"co-operative production"* as *"a solution to the great problem of social economy, — the delivery of products to the consumer at cost"* and as a means of producers to *"receive the value of your product, of your effort, without having to deal with a mass of hucksters and exploiters."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 123]

In other words, many individualist anarchists envisioned a society without wage labour and, instead, based upon peasant, artisan and associated/co-operative labour (as in Proudhon's vision). In other words, a **non**-capitalist society or, more positively, a (libertarian) socialist one as the workers' own and control the means of production they use. Like social anarchists, they opposed capitalist exploitation, wage slavery and property rights. However, not all individualist anarchists held this position, a notable exception being Benjamin Tucker and many of his fellow contributors of **Liberty**. Tucker asserted against the common labour movement and social anarchist equation of capitalism with wage slavery that *"[w]ages is not slavery. Wages is a form of voluntary exchange, and voluntary exchange is a form of Liberty."* [**Liberty**, no. 3, p. 1]

The question how is, does this support of wage labour equate to support for capitalism? The answer to that depends on whether you see such a system as resulting in the exploitation of labour. If socialism is, to requote Kropotkin, *"understood in its wide, generic, and true sense"* as *"an effort to **abolish** the exploitation of labour by capital"* then even those Individualist Anarchists who support wage labour must be considered as socialists due to their opposition to usury. It is for this reason we

discover Rudolf Rocker arguing that Stephan P. Andrews was *"one of the most versatile and significant exponents of libertarian socialism"* in the USA in spite of his belief that *"the specific cause of the economic evil [of capitalism] is founded not on the existence of the wage system"* but, rather, on the exploitation of labour, *"on the unjust compensation of the worker"* and the usury that *"deprives him of a part of his labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85 and pp. 77–8] His opposition to exploitation meant he was a socialist, an opposition which individualist anarchism was rooted in from its earliest days and the ideas of Josiah Warren:

> *"The aim was to circumvent the exploitation inherent in capitalism, which Warren characterised as a sort of 'civilised cannibalism,' by exchanging goods on co-operative rather than supply and demand principles."* [J.W. Baker, *"Native American Anarchism,"* pp. 43–62, **The Raven**, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 51]

So should not be implied that the term socialist is restricted simply to those who oppose wage labour. It should be noted that for many socialists, wage labour is perfectly acceptable — as long as the state is the boss. As Tucker noted, State Socialism's *"principle plank"* is *"the confiscation of **all** capital by the State"*, so stopping *"the liberty of those non-aggressive individuals who are thus prevented from carrying on business for themselves or assuming relations between themselves as employer and employee if they prefer, and who are obliged to become employees of the State against their will."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 378] Of course, such a position is not a very good form of socialism which is why anarchists have tended to call such schemes state-capitalism (an analysis which was confirmed once the Soviet Union was created, incidentally). If state bureaucrats own and control the means of production, it would not come as too great a surprise if they, like private bosses, did so to maximise their incomes and minimise that of their employees.



*power; by every lock-out, by every discharge; by every black-list."* [Parsons, **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 105] Ultimately, the workings of capitalism itself provokes resistance to it. Even if no anarchist participated in, or help organise, strikes and protests they would occur anyway and the state would inevitably intervene to defend "law and order" and "private property" — as the history of every class system proves. So communist-anarchism does not produce the class war, the class war produces communist-anarchism.

In addition, Tucker thought that a violent revolution would not succeed for without an awareness of anarchist ideals in the general public, the old system would soon return. *"If government should be abruptly and entirely abolished tomorrow,"* he argued, *"there would probably ensue a series of physical conflicts about land and many other things, ending in reaction and a revival of the old tyranny."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 329] Almost all revolutionary anarchists would agree with his analysis (see section A.2.16). Such anarchists have always seen revolution as the end of a long process of self-liberation and self-education through struggle. All anarchists reject the idea that all that was required was to eliminate the government, by whatever means, and the world would be made right. Rather, we have seen anarchism as a social movement which, like anarchy itself, requires the participation of the vast majority to be viable. Hence anarchist support for unions and strikes, for example, as a means of creating more awareness of anarchism and its solutions to the social question (see section J.1). This means that communist-anarchists do not see revolution as imposing anarchism, but rather as an act of self-liberation by a people sick of being ruled by others and act to free themselves of tyranny.

So, in summary, in terms of tactics there is significant overlap between the strategies advocated by both social and individualist anarchists. The key difference is that the former do not think that the latter's mutual banks make expropriation unnecessary while the individualist anarchists think that expro-

Yet as subsequent history has shown, landlords are just as likely to organise and support violent counter-revolutionary movements in the face of land reform as are industrial capitalists. Both sections of the capitalist class supported fascists like Mussolini, Franco and Pinochet in the face of even moderate attempts at expropriation by either reformist governments or the peasants themselves. So as the history of land reform shows, landlords are more than willing to turn to death squads and fascism to resist it. To suggest that squatting land would provoke less capitalist violence than, say, expropriating workplaces simply cannot be supported in the light of 20th century history. The choice, then, is simply to allow the landlords and capitalists to keep their property and try to but it back from them or use political or revolutionary means to expropriate them. Communist-anarchists thought that the mutual banks would not work and so supported expropriation by means of a mass revolt, a social revolution.

As such, communist-anarchists are not revolutionaries by choice but rather because they do not think capitalism can be reformed away nor that the ruling class will freely see their power, property and privileges taken from them. They reject the mutualist and individualist anarchist suggestion that mutual banks could provide enough credit to compete capitalism away and, even if it could, the state would simply outlaw it. This perspective does **not** imply, as many enemies of anarchist suggest, that social anarchists always seek to use violence but rather that we are aware that the state and capitalists will use violence against any effective protest. So, the methods social anarchists urge — strikes, occupations, protests, and so forth — are all inherently non-violent but resistance by the state and capitalist class to these acts of rebellion often results in violence (which is dutifully reported as violence by the rebels, not the powerful, in the media). That the capitalist class will use violence and force to maintain its position *"is demonstrated in every strike which threatens their*



Which explains why the vast majority of anarchists do not agree with Tucker's position. Individualist anarchists like Tucker considered it as a truism that in their society the exploitation of labour could not exist. Thus even if some workers did sell their liberty, they would still receive the full product of their labour. As Tucker put it, *"when interest, rent and profit disappear under the influence of free money, free land, and free trade, it will make no difference whether men work for themselves, or are employed, or employ others. In any case they can get nothing but that wage for their labour which free competition determines."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 274] Whether this could actually happen when workers sell their liberty to an employer is, of course, where other anarchists disagree. The owner of a workplace does not own simply his (labour) share of the total product produced within it. He (and it usually is a he) owns everything produced while workers get their wages. The employer, therefore, has an interest in getting workers to produce as much as they can during the period they are employed. As the future price of the commodity is unknown, it is extremely unlikely that workers will be able to accurately predict it and so it is unlikely that their wages will always equal the cost price of the product. As such, the situation that an individual worker would get his "natural" wage would be unlikely and so they would be exploited by their employer. At best, it could be argued that in the long run wages will rise to that level but, as Keynes noted, in the long run we are all dead and Tucker did not say that the free market would end exploitation eventually. So individual ownership of large-scale workplaces would not, therefore, end exploitation.

In other words, if (as Tucker argued) individualist anarchism desires *"[n]ot to abolish wages, but to make **every** man dependent upon wages and to secure every man his **whole** wages"* then this, logically, can only occur under workers control. We discuss this in more detail in section G.4.1, where we also indicate how social anarchists consider Tucker's

position to be in a basic contradiction to anarchist principles. Not only that, as well as being unlikely to ensure that labour received its full product, it also contradicts his own principle of ***"occupancy and use"***. As such, while his support for non-exploitative wage labour does not exclude him from the socialist (and so anarchist) movement, it does suggest an inconsistent anarchism, one which can (fortunately) be easily made consistent by bringing it fully in line with its own stated ideals and principles.

Finally, we must note that there is a certain irony in this, given how keenly Tucker presented himself as a follower of Proudhon. This was because Proudhon agreed with Tucker's anarchist opponents, arguing continually that wage labour needed to be replaced by co-operative production to end exploitation and oppression in production. Proudhon and his followers, in the words of one historian, thought workers *"should be striving for the abolition of salaried labour and capitalist enterprise."* This was by means of co-operatives and their *"perspective was that of artisan labour ... The manager/employer (patron) was a superfluous element in the production process who was able to deny the worker just compensation for his labour merely by possessing the capital that paid for the workshop, tools, and materials."* [Julian P. W. Archer, **The First International in France, 1864–1872**, p. 45] As Frank H. Brooks put it, *"Lum drew from the French anarchist Proudhon . .. a radical critique of classical political economy and ... a set of positive reforms in land tenure and banking ... Proudhon paralleled the native labour reform tradition in several ways. Besides suggesting reforms in land and money, Proudhon urged producer cooperation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72] We discuss this aspect of Proudhon's ideas in section G.4.2.

So, to conclude, it can be seen that individualist anarchists hold two positions on wage labour. Some are closer to Proudhon and the mainstream anarchist tradition than others while a few veer extremely close to liberalism. While all are agreed



the individualist/social anarchist divide, although it is fair to say that most individualist anarchists were and are reformists.

So, it must be stressed that most individualist anarchists did not oppose revolution **as such**. Rather they considered it as both unlikely to succeed and unnecessary. They rejected revolutionary expropriation *"not because we deem such expropriation unjust, invasive, criminal, but solely because we are we are convinced that there is a better, safer, and wiser way for labour to pursue with a view to emancipation."* With mutual banks, they argued, it became possible *"for labour to gradually lift itself into the position to command its full share of wealth, and absorb in the shape of wages all that is now alienated from it in the forms of profit, interest proper, and monopoly rent."* [Yarrows, **Liberty**, no. 171, p. 5] As such, their aims were the same as communist-anarchism (namely to end exploitation of labour and the abolition of the state) but their means were different. Both, however, were well aware that the capitalism could not be ended by political action (i.e., voting). *"That the privileged class"*, argued William Bailie *"will submit to expropriation, even if demanded at the ballot-box, is a delusion possible only to him who knows not the actual situation confronting the people of this country."* [*"The Rule of the Monopolists"*, **Liberty**, no. 368, p. 4]

However, there was one area of life that was excluded from their opposition to expropriation: the land. As Yarros put it, *"the Anarchists' position on the land question, which involves the dispossession of present landlords and the entire abolition of the existing system of land tenure ... They wish to expropriate the landlords, and allow the landless to settle on land which does not now belong to them."* This *"[o]ne exception ... we are compelled to make"* involved *"believ[ing] that the landless **will**, individually and for the purpose of occupying ownership, take possession of the land not personally occupied and used by landlord, and **will** protect each other in the possession of such lands against any power hostile to them."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 171, p. 4 and p. 5]

> *"But is it not a fact that on occasion of almost every strike the minions of the institutions of private property — militia, police, deputy sheriffs; yes, even federal troops — are being called to the scenes of conflict between capital and labour, in order to protect the interests of capital? ... What peaceful means should the toilers employ? There is, for example, the strike? If the ruling classes want to enforce the 'law' they can have every striker arrested and punished for 'intimidation' and conspiracy. A strike can only be successful if the striking workingmen prevent their places being occupied by others. But this prevention is a crime in the eyes of the law. Boycott? In several states the 'courts of justice' have decided that the boycott is a violation of the law, and in consequence thereof, a number of boycotts have had the pleasure of examining the inner construction of penitentiaries 'for 'conspiracy' against the interests of capital."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, pp. 85–6]

Some individualist anarchists did agree with this position. Dyer Lum, for example, *"supported revolutionary violence on practical and historical grounds. Practically speaking, Lum did not believe that 'wage slavery' could be ended by non-violence because capitalists would surely use force to resist."* [Frank H. Brooks, *"Ideology, Strategy, and Organization: Dyer Lum and the American Anarchist Movement"*, pp. 57–83, **Labor History**, vol. 34, No. 1, p. 71] Spooner's rhetoric could be as violent sounding as Johann Most at his worse and he called upon the subjects of the British Empire to rise in revolt (see his pamphlet **Revolution**). Equally, many social anarchists are pacifists or believe that anarchism can come about by means of reform and not revolution. Thus the reform/revolution divide does not quite equal



that their system would end the exploitation of labour, some of them saw the possibility of a non-exploitative wage labour while others aimed for artisan and/or co-operative production to replace it. Suffice to say, while few social anarchists consider non-exploitative wage labour as being very likely it is the opposition to non-labour income which makes individualist anarchism socialist (albeit, an inconsistent and flawed version of libertarian socialism).

## G.1.4 Why is the social context important in evaluating Individualist Anarchism?

When reading the work of anarchists like Tucker and Warren, we must remember the social context of their ideas, namely the transformation of America from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist society. The individualist anarchists, like other socialists and reformers, viewed with horror the rise of capitalism and its imposition on an unsuspecting American population, supported and encouraged by state action (in the form of protection of private property in land, restricting money issuing to state approved banks using specie, government orders supporting capitalist industry, tariffs, suppression of unions and strikes, and so on). In other words, the individualist anarchists were a response to the social conditions and changes being inflicted on their country by a process of *"primitive accumulation"* (see section F.8).

The non-capitalist nature of the early USA can be seen from the early dominance of self-employment (artisan and peasant production). At the beginning of the 19$^{th}$ century, around 80% of the working (non-slave) male population were self-employed. The great majority of Americans during this time were farmers working their own land, primarily for their own needs. Most of the rest were self-employed artisans, merchants, traders, and professionals. Other classes

— employees (wage workers) and employers (capitalists) in the North, slaves and planters in the South — were relatively small. The great majority of Americans were independent and free from anybody's command — they owned and controlled their means of production. Thus early America was, essentially, a pre-capitalist society. However, by 1880, the year before Tucker started **Liberty**, the number of self-employed had fallen to approximately 33% of the working population. Now it is less than 10%. [Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, **Schooling in Capitalist America**, p. 59] As the US Census described in 1900, until about 1850 *"the bulk of general manufacturing done in the United States was carried on in the shop and the household, by the labour of the family or individual proprietors, with apprentice assistants, as contrasted with the present system of factory labour, compensated by wages, and assisted by power."* [quoted by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, p. 35] Thus the post-civil war period saw *"the factory system become general. This led to a large increase in the class of unskilled and semi-skilled labour with inferior bargaining power. Population shifted from the country to the city ... It was this milieu that the anarchism of Warren-Proudhon wandered."* [Eunice Minette Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, pp. 136–7]

It is **only** in this context that we can understand individualist anarchism, namely as a revolt against the destruction of working-class independence and the growth of capitalism, accompanied by the growth of two opposing classes, capitalists and proletarians. This transformation of society by the rise of capitalism explains the development of **both** schools of anarchism, social and individualist. *"American anarchism,"* Frank H. Brooks argues, *"like its European counterpart, is best seen as a nineteenth century development, an ideology that, like socialism generally, responded to the growth of industrial capitalism, republican government, and nationalism. Although this is clearest in the more collectivistic anarchist theories and movements of the gone by. It is too easily put down."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 430, p. 439 and p. 440]

Except for a small group of hard-core insurrectionists, few social anarchists think that violence should be the first recourse in social struggle. The ultra-revolutionary rhetoric associated with the 1883–6 period is not feature of the anarchist movement in general and so lessons have been learned. As far as strategy goes, the tactics advocated by social anarchists involve the same ones that individualist anarchists support, namely refusal of obedience to all forms of authority. This would include workplace, rent and tax strikes, occupations, protests and such like. Violence has always been seen as the last option, to be used only in self-defence (or, sometimes, in revenge for greater acts of violence by oppressors). The problem is that any effective protest will result in the protesters coming into conflict with either the state or property owners. For example, a rent strike will see the agents of the property owner trying to evict tenants, as would a workers strike which occupied the workplace. Similarly, in the Seattle protests in 1999 the police used force against the non-violent protesters blocking the roads long before the Black Bloc started breaking windows (which is, in itself, non-violent as it was directed against corporate property, not people — unlike the police action). Unless the rebels simply did what they were told, then any non-violent protest could become violent — but only because private property ultimately rests on state violence, a fact which becomes obvious when people refuse to acknowledge it and its privileges (*"There is only one law for the poor, to wit: Obey the rich."* [Parsons, **Op. Cit.**, p. 97]). Thus Adolph Fischer, one of the Haymarket Martyrs:

> *"Would a peaceful solution of the social question be possible, the anarchists would be the first ones to rejoice over it.*

it is easy to see why so many individualist anarchists thought that a small group of anarchists sought to impose communism by means of violence. However, this was not the case. According to Albert Parsons, the communist-anarchists argued that the working class *"will be driven to use [force] in self-defence, in self-preservation against those who are degrading, enslaving and destroying them."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 46] As August Spies put it, *"[t]o charge us with an attempt to overthrow the present system on or about May 4th, and then establish anarchy, is too absurd a statement, I think, even for a political office-holder to make ... Only mad men could have planned such a brilliant scheme."* Rather, *"we have predicted from the lessons history teaches, that the ruling classes of to-day would no more listen to the voice of reason than their predecessors; that they would attempt by brute force to stay the wheel of progress."* [contained in Parsons, **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 55] Subsequent events have proven that Spies and Parsons had a point!

Thus arguments about violence should not result in the assumption that the individualist anarchists were pacifists as the subject usually is not violence as such but rather assassinations and attempts of minorities to use violence to create "anarchy" by destroying the state on behalf of the general population. *"To brand the policy of terrorism and assassination as immoral is ridiculously weak,"* argued Tucker. *"**Liberty** does not assume to set any limit on the right of an invaded individual to choose his own methods of defence. The invader, whether an individual or a government forfeits all claim to consideration from the invaded. This truth is independent of the character of the invasion."* This meant that the *"right to resist oppression by violence is beyond doubt. But its exercise would be unwise unless the suppression of free thought, free speech, and a free press were enforced so stringently that all other means of throwing it off had become hopeless."* Ultimately, though, the *"days of armed revolution have late nineteenth century (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism), it also helps to explain anarchists of early- to mid-century such as Proudhon, Stirner and, in America, Warren. For all of these theorists, a primary concern was the 'labour problem' — the increasing dependence and immiseration of manual workers in industrialising economies."* [*"Introduction"*, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 4]

The Individualist Anarchists cannot be viewed in isolation. They were part of a wider movement seeking to stop the capitalist transformation of America. As Bowles and Ginitis note, this *"process has been far from placid. Rather, it has involved extended struggles with sections of U.S. labour trying to counter and temper the effects of their reduction to the status of wage labour."* The rise of capitalism *"marked the transition to control of work by nonworkers"* and *"with the rise of entrepreneurial capital, groups of formerly independent workers were increasingly drawn into the wage-labour system. Working people's organisations advocated alternatives to this system; land reform, thought to allow all to become an independent producer, was a common demand. Worker co-operatives were a widespread and influential part of the labour movement as early as the 1840s ... but failed because sufficient capital could not be raised."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59 and p. 62] It is no coincidence that the issues raised by the Individualist Anarchists (land reform via *"occupancy-and-use"*, increasing the supply of money via mutual banks and so on) reflect these alternatives raised by working class people and their organisations. Little wonder Tucker argued that:

> *"Make capital free by organising credit on a mutual plan, and then these vacant lands will come into use ... operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labour problem will solved."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 321]

Thus the Individualist Anarchists reflect the aspirations of working class people facing the transformation of an society from a pre-capitalist state into a capitalist one. Changing social conditions explain why Individualist Anarchism must be considered socialistic. As Murray Bookchin noted:

> *"Th[e] growing shift from artisanal to an industrial economy gave rise to a gradual but major shift in socialism itself. For the artisan, socialism meant producers' co-operatives composed of men who worked together in small shared collectivist associations, although for master craftsmen it meant mutual aid societies that acknowledged their autonomy as private producers. For the industrial proletarian, by contrast, socialism came to mean the formation of a mass organisation that gave factory workers the collective power to expropriate a plant that no single worker could properly own. These distinctions led to two different interpretations of the 'social question' ... The more progressive craftsmen of the nineteenth century had tried to form networks of co-operatives, based on individually or collectively owned shops, and a market knitted together by a moral agreement to sell commodities according to a 'just price' or the amount of labour that was necessary to produce them. Presumably such small-scale ownership and shared moral precepts would abolish exploitation and greedy profit-taking. The class-conscious proletarian ... thought in terms of the complete socialisation of the means of production, including land, and even of abolishing the market* ***as such****, distributing goods according to needs rather than labour ... They advocated* ***public*** *ownership of the means of production, whether by*



*"propaganda by the deed"* period in anarchist history (see section A.2.18). As George Woodcock noted, a *"cult of violence ... marked and marred"* the IWPA and alienated the individualist anarchists. [**Anarchism**, p. 393] Johann Most was the focus for much of this rhetoric (see Paul Avrich's **The Haymarket Tragedy**, particularly the chapter entitled *"Cult of Dynamite"*). However, the reason why talk of dynamite found an audience had nothing to do with anarchism but rather because of the violence regularly directed against striking workers and unions. As we discuss more fully in section G.3.1, strikes were habitually repressed by violence (by the state or by the employer's private police). The massive 1877 strike wave, for example, saw the **Chicago Times** urge the use of hand grenades against strikers while employers organised *"private guards and bands of uniformed vigilantes"* which *"roamed the streets, attacking and dispersing groups of workers.* Business leaders concluded that *"the chief lesson of the strike as the need for a stronger apparatus of repression"* and presented the city of Chicago with two Gatling guns to aid that task. *"The erection of government armouries in the centres of American cities dates from this period."* This repression and the vitriolic ruling class rhetoric used *"set a pattern for the future and fuelled the hatreds and passions without which the Haymarket tragedy would not have occurred."* [Paul Avrich, **The Haymarket Tragedy**, p. 33 and p. 35]

Given this general infatuation with dynamite and violence which this state and employer violence provoked, the possibility for misunderstanding was more than likely (as well as giving the enemies of anarchism ample evidence to demonise it while allowing the violence of the system they support to be downplayed). Rather than seeing communist-anarchists as thinking a revolution was the product of mass struggle, it was easy to assume that by revolution they meant acts of violence or terrorism conducted by a few anarchists on behalf of everyone else (this false perspective is one which Marxists to this day tend to repeat when dismissing anarchism). In such a situation,

*last or the blacksmith in his small forge."* Thus these two very famous communist-anarchists also supported "property" but they are recognised as obviously socialists. This apparent contradiction is resolved when it is understood that for communist-anarchists (like all anarchists) the abolition of property does not mean the end of possession and so *"would not harm the independent worker whose real title is possession and the work done"* unlike capitalist property. [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103] Compare this with Yarros' comment that *"[s]mall owners would not suffer from the application of the 'personal use' principle, while large owners, who have come into possession of the landed property, or the capital with which they purchased the landed property, by means that equal liberty could not sanction, would have no principle to base any protest on."* [**Liberty**, no. 197, p. 2] In other words, **all** anarchists (as we argue in section B.3) oppose private property but support possession (we return to this issue in section I.6.2 as it is an all too common fallacy).

## G.2.2 Is communist-anarchism violent?

Having shown that communist-anarchist is a valid form of anarchism even in terms of individualist anarchism in the last section, it is now necessary to discuss the issue of methods, i.e., the question of revolution and violence. This is related to the first objection, with Tucker arguing that *"their Communism is another State, while my voluntary cooperation is not a State at all. It is a very easy matter to tell who is an Anarchist and who is not. Do you believe in any form of imposition upon the human will by force?"* [**Liberty**, no. 94, p. 4] However, Tucker was well aware that the state imposed its will on others by force and so the question was whether revolution was the right means of ending its oppression.

To a large degree, discussion on the question of revolution was clouded by the fact it took place during the height of the



> *the state or by the working class organised in trade unions."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 262]

So, in this evolution of socialism we can place the various brands of anarchism. Individualist anarchism is clearly a form of artisanal socialism (which reflects its American roots) while communist anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism are forms of industrial (or proletarian) socialism (which reflects its roots in Europe). Proudhon's mutualism bridges these extremes, advocating as it does artisan socialism for small-scale industry and agriculture and co-operative associations for large-scale industry (which reflects the state of the French economy in the 1840s to 1860s). With the changing social conditions in the US, the anarchist movement changed too, as it had in Europe. Hence the rise of communist-anarchism in addition to the more native individualist tradition and the change in Individualist Anarchism itself:

> *"Green emphasised more strongly the **principle of association** than did Josiah Warren and more so than Spooner had done. Here too Proudhon's influence asserts itself... In principle there is essentially no difference between Warren and Proudhon. The difference between them arises from a dissimilarity of their respective environments. Proudhon lived in a country where the sub-division of labour made co-operation in social production essential, while Warren had to deal with predominantly small individual producers. For this reason Proudhon emphasised the **principle of association** far more than Warren and his followers did, although Warren was by no means opposed to this view."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 108]

As noted in section A.3, Voltairine de Cleyre subscribed to a similar analysis, as does another anarchist, Peter Sabatini, more recently:

> "The chronology of anarchism within the United States corresponds to what transpired in Europe and other locations. An organised anarchist movement imbued with a revolutionary collectivist, then communist, orientation came to fruition in the late 1870s. At that time, Chicago was a primary centre of anarchist activity within the USA, due in part to its large immigrant population…
>
> "The Proudhonist anarchy that Tucker represented was largely superseded in Europe by revolutionary collectivism and anarcho-communism. The same changeover occurred in the US, although mainly among subgroups of working class immigrants who were settling in urban areas. For these recent immigrants caught up in tenuous circumstances within the vortex of emerging corporate capitalism, a revolutionary anarchy had greater relevancy than go slow mutualism." [**Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**]

Murray Bookchin argued that the development of communist-anarchism *"made it possible for anarchists to adapt themselves to the new working class, the industrial proletariat, … This adaptation was all the more necessary because capitalism was now transforming not only European [and American] society but the very nature of the European [and American] labour movement itself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259] In other words, there have been many schools of socialism, all influenced by the changing society around them. As Frank H. Brooks notes, *"before Marxists monopolised the term, socialism, was a broad concept, as indeed Marx's critique of the 'unscientific' varieties*



Tucker, at times, admits that this is the case. For example, he once noted that *"Kropotkin says, it is true, that he would allow the individual access to the land; but he proposes to strip him of capital entirely, and as he declares a few pages further on that without capital agriculture is impossible, it follows that such access is an empty privilege not at all equivalent to the liberty of individual production."* [quoted by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, **The Anarchist Prince**, p. 279] However, as two biographers of Kropotkin note, Tucker *"partly misinterprets his opponent, as when he suggests that the latter's idea of communist anarchism would* ***prevent*** *the individual from working on his own if he wished (a fact which Kropotkin always explicitly denied, since the basis of his theory was the voluntary principle)."* [Woodcock and Avakumovic, **Op. Cit.**, p. 280] To quote Kropotkin himself:

> *"when we see a Sheffield cutler, or a Leeds clothier working with their own tools or handloom, we see no use in taking the tools or the handloom to give to another worker. The clothier or cutler exploit nobody. But when we see a factory whose owners claim to keep to themselves the instruments of labour used by 1,400 girls, and consequently exact from the labour of these girls … profit … we consider that the people … are fully entitled to take possession of that factory and to let the girls produce … for themselves and the rest of the community .. . and take what they need of house room, food and clothing in return."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 105]

So Kropotkin argued that a communist-anarchist revolution would **not** expropriate the tools of self-employed workers who exploited no-one. Malatesta also argued that in an anarchist society *"the peasant [is free] to cultivate his piece of land, alone if he wishes; free is the shoe maker to remain at his*

Tucker, namely *"possession"* or *"occupancy and use"*: *"The workshops will drop into the hands of the workers, the mines will fall to the miners, and the land and all other things will be controlled by those who posses and use them. There will be, there can then be no title to anything aside from its possession and use."* The likes of Parsons supported communism was not because of an opposition between "communism" and "occupancy and use" but rather, like Kropotkin, because of *"the utter impossibility of awarding to each an exact return for the amount of labour performed will render absolute communism a necessity sooner or later."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105 and p. 176] So while capitalism *"expropriates the masses for the benefit of the privileged class ... socialism teaches how all may possess property ... [and] establish a universal system of co-operation, and to render accessible to each and every member of the human family the achievements and benefits of civilisation which, under capitalism, are being monopolised by a privileged class."* [August Spies, contained in Parsons, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 63–4]

All of which indicates that Tucker did not really understand communist-anarchism when he argued that communism is *"the force which compels the labourer to pool his product with the products of all and forbids him to sell his labour or his products."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 400] Rather, communist-anarchists argue that communism must be free and voluntary. In other words, a communist-anarchist society would not "forbid" anything as those who are part of it must be in favour of communism for it to work. The option of remaining outside the communist-anarchist society is there, as (to requote Kropotkin) expropriation would *"apply to everything that enables any man [or woman] ... to appropriate the product of others' toil."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61] Thus communist-anarchism would "forbid" exactly what Individualist Anarchism would "forbid" — property, not possession (i.e. any form of "ownership" not based on "occupancy and use").



*of socialism in the* ***Communist Manifesto*** *indicated. Thus, when Tucker claimed that the individualist anarchism advocated in the pages of* ***Liberty*** *was socialist, he was not engaged in obfuscation or rhetorical bravado."* [*"Libertarian Socialism"*, pp. 75–7, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 75]

Looking at the society in which their ideas developed (rather than ahistorically projecting modern ideas backward) we can see the socialist core of Individualist Anarchism. It was, in other words, an un-Marxian form of socialism (as was mutualism and communist-anarchism). Thus, to look at the Individualist Anarchists from the perspective of "modern socialism" (say, communist-anarchism or Marxism) means to miss the point. The social conditions which produced Individualist Anarchism were substantially different from those existing today (and those which produced communist-anarchism and Marxism) and so what was a possible solution to the *"social problem"* **then** may not be one suitable **now** (and, indeed, point to a different kind of socialism than that which developed later). Moreover, Europe in the 1870s was distinctly different than America (although, of course, the USA **was** catching up). For example, there was still vast tracks of unclaimed land (once the Native Americans had been removed, of course) available to workers. In the towns and cities, artisan production *"remained important ... into the 1880s"* [David Montgomery, **The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 52] Until the 1880s, the possibility of self-employment was a real one for many workers, a possibility being hindered by state action (for example, by forcing people to buy land via Homestead Acts, restricting banking to those with specie, suppressing unions and strikes and so on — see section F.8.5). Little wonder that Individualist Anarchism was considered a real solution to the problems generated by the creation of capitalism in the USA and that, by the 1880s, Communist Anarchist became the dominant form of anarchism. By that time the transformation

of America was nearing completion and self-employment was no longer a real solution for the majority of workers.

This social context is essential for understanding the thought of people like Greene, Spooner and Tucker. For example, as Stephen L. Newman points out, Spooner *"argues that every man ought to be his own employer, and he envisions a world of yeoman farmers and independent entrepreneurs."* [**Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 72] This sort of society was in the process of being destroyed when Spooner was writing. Needless to say, the Individualist Anarchists did not think this transformation was unstoppable and proposed, like other sections of US labour, various solutions to problems society faced. Given the commonplace awareness in the population of artisan production and its advantages in terms of liberty, it is hardly surprising that the individualist anarchists supported "free market" solutions to social problems. For, given the era, this solution implied workers' control and the selling of the product of labour, not the labourer him/herself. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the *"greatest part [of **Liberty**'s readers] proves to be of the professional/intellectual class: the remainder includes independent manufacturers and merchants, artisans and skilled workers ... The anarchists' hard-core supporters were the socio-economic equivalents of Jefferson's yeoman-farmers and craftsworkers: a freeholder-artisan-independent merchant class allied with freethinking professionals and intellectuals. These groups — in Europe as well as in America — had socio-economic independence, and through their desire to maintain and improve their relatively free positions, had also the incentive to oppose the growing encroachments of the capitalist State."* [Morgan Edwards, *"Neither Bombs Nor Ballots: **Liberty** & the Strategy of Anarchism"*, pp. 65–91, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 85]

Individualist anarchism is obviously an aspect of a struggle between the system of peasant and artisan production of



*to work."* This implied that *"[a]ll organisation will be voluntary with the sacred right forever reserved for each individual 'to think and to rebel.'"* This meant that as far as the *"final outcome"* of social change was involved *"many disciples of anarchism believe [it] will be communism — the common possession of the resources of life and the productions of united labour. No anarchist is compromised by this statement, who does not reason out the future outlook in this way."* [**Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 97, p. 99, p. 96 ,p. 174 and pp. 174–5] This did not exclude mutualism or individualist anarchism:

> *"Many expedients will be tried by which a just return may be awarded the worker for his exertions. The time check or labour certificate, which will be honoured at the store-houses hour for hour, will no doubt have its day. But the elaborate and complicated system of book-keeping this would necessitate, the impossibility of balancing one man's hour against another's with accuracy, and the difficulty in determining how much more one man owed natural resources, condition, and the studies and achievements of past generations, than did another, would, we believe, prevent this system from obtaining a thorough and permanent establishment. The mutual banking system ... may be in operation in the future free society. Another system, more simple ... appears the most acceptable and likely to prevail. Members of the groups ... if honest producers ... will be honoured in any other group they may visit, and given whatever is necessary for their welfare and comfort."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

As we discuss in section G.4, this was the same conclusion that Voltairine de Cleyre reached three decades later. This was rooted in a similar analysis of property as Proudhon and

> *"Communism is a free agreement: who doesn't accept it or maintain it remains outside of it ... Everyone has* ***the right to land, to the instruments of production*** *and all the advantages that human beings can enjoy in the state of civilisation that humanity has reached. If someone does not want to accept a communist life and the obligations that it supposes, it is their business. They and those of a like mind will come to an agreement ... [They] will have* ***the same rights as the communists*** *over the natural wealth and accumulated products of previous generations ... I have always spoken of free agreement, of free communism. How can there be liberty without a possible alternative?"* [our emphasis, **At the café**, pp. 69–70]

Compare this to individualist anarchist Stephen Byington's comment that *"[t]hose who wish to unite in the communistic enjoyment of their labour will be free to do so; those who wish to hold the products of their labour as private property will be equally free to do so."* [quoted by Wm. Gary Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism**, p. 93] The similarities are as obvious as between Proudhon's and Kropotkin's arguments.

The same, it must be stressed, can be said of the *"Chicago Anarchists"* whom Tucker labelled as authoritarians. Thus we find Albert Parsons, for example, denouncing that kind of private property which allows exploitation to happen. The key problem was that *"the necessary means for the existence of all has been appropriated and monopolised by a few. The land, the implements of production and communication, the resources of life, are now held as private property, and its owners exact tribute from the propertyless"* (*"Wealth is power"*). The aim of communist-anarchism was to ensure the *"[f]ree access to the means of production [which] is the natural right of every man able and willing*



early America and the state encouraged system of capitalism. Indeed, their analysis of the change in American society from one of mainly independent producers into one based mainly upon wage labour has many parallels with Karl Marx's analysis of *"primitive accumulation"* in the Americas and elsewhere presented in chapter 33 of **Capital** (*"The Modern Theory of Colonization"*). It is this process which Individualist Anarchism protested against, the use of the state to favour the rising capitalist class. So the social context the individualist anarchists lived in must be remembered. America at the times was a predominantly rural society and industry was not as developed as it is now wage labour would have been minimised. As Wm. Gary Kline argues:

> *"Committed as they were to equality in the pursuit of property, the objective for the anarchist became the construction of a society providing equal access to those things necessary for creating wealth. The goal of the anarchists who extolled mutualism and the abolition of all monopolies was, then, a society where everyone willing to work would have the tools and raw materials necessary for production in a non-exploitative system ... the dominant vision of the future society ... [was] underpinned by individual, self-employed workers."* [**The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism**, p. 95]

This social context helps explain why some of the individualist anarchists were indifferent to the issue of wage labour, unlike most anarchists. A limited amount of wage labour within a predominantly self-employed economy does not make a given society capitalist any more than a small amount of governmental communities within an predominantly anarchist world would make it statist. As Marx put it, in such socities *"the separation of the worker from the*

*conditions of labour and from the soil … does not yet exist, or only sporadically, or on too limited a scale … Where, amongst such curious characters, is the 'field of abstinence' for the capitalists? … Today's wage-labourer is tomorrow's independent peasant or artisan, working for himself. He vanishes from the labour-market — but not into the workhouse."* There is a *"constant transformation of wage-labourers into independent producers, who work for themselves instead of for capital"* and so *"the degree of exploitation of the wage-labourer remain[s] indecently low."* In addition, the *"wage-labourer also loses, along with the relation of dependence, the feeling of dependence on the abstemious capitalist."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 935–6] Within such a social context, the anti-libertarian aspects of wage labour are minimised and so could be overlooked by otherwise sharp critics of authoritarianism as Tucker and Andrews.

Therefore Rocker was correct when he argued that Individualist Anarchism was *"above all … rooted in the peculiar social conditions of America which differed fundamentally from those of Europe."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155] As these conditions changed, the viability of Individualist Anarchism's solution to the social problem decreased (as acknowledged by Tucker in 1911, for example — see section G.1.1). Individualist Anarchism, argued Morgan Edwards, *"appears to have dwindled into political insignificance largely because of the erosion of its political-economic base, rather than from a simple failure of strategy. With the impetus of the Civil War, capitalism and the State had too great a head start on the centralisation of economic and political life for the anarchists to catch up. This centralisation reduced the independence of the intellectual/professional and merchant artisan group that were the mainstay of the **Liberty** circle."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 85–6] While many of the individualist anarchists adjusted their own ideas to changing social circumstances, as can be seen by Greene's support for co-operatives (*"the principle of association"*) as the only means of ending exploitation of labour by capital, the main forum of the movement (**Liberty**) did not



**Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7] Thus individual ownership meant individual ownership of resources used by others rather than individual possession of resources which individuals used. This can be seen from his comment that *"some poor fellow"* who *"has contrived to buy a house just large enough to hold his family"* would not be expropriated by the commune (*"by all means let him stay there"*) while also asserting *"[w]ho, then, can appropriate for himself the tiniest plot of ground in such a city, without committing a flagrant injustice?"* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 90]

Kropotkin's opposition to private appropriation of land can only be understood in context, namely from his discussion on the *"abolition of rent"* and the need for *"free dwellings"*, i.e. the end of landlordism. Kropotkin accepted that land could and would be occupied for personal use — after all, people need a place to live! In this he followed Proudhon, who also argued that *"Land cannot be appropriated"* (Chapter 3, part 1 of **What is Property?**). For the French anarchist, the land *"is limited in amount"* and so *"it ought not to be appropriated"* (*"let any living man dare change his right of territorial possession into the right of property, and I will declare war upon him, and wage it to the death!"*). This meant that *"the land is indispensable to our existence, — consequently a common thing, consequently insusceptible of appropriation."* Overall, *"labour has no inherent power to appropriate natural wealth."* [**What is Property?**, p. 106, p. 107 and p. 116] Proudhon, it is well known, supported the use of land (and other resources) for personal use. How, then, can he argue that the *"land cannot be appropriated"*? Is Proudhon subject to the same contradiction as Kropotkin? Of course not, once we take into account the fundamental difference between private property and possession, appropriation and use which underlies both individualist **and** communist anarchism. As Malatesta argued:

*the more human beings are joined in brotherhood, and the more closely they co-operate in their efforts for the benefit of all concerned, the greater is the well-being and freedom which each can enjoy." Imposed communism,"* he stressed, *"would be the most detestable tyranny that the human mind could conceive. And free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* He agreed with Tucker that *"State communism, which is authoritarian and imposed, is the most hateful tyranny that has ever afflicted, tormented and handicapped mankind."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 21, p. 34, p. 103 and p. 34]

Therefore, arguing that the land and machinery should be common property does **not** preclude individuals possessing it independently of communes as both are rooted in individual possession (or "occupancy and use") rather than private property. The key anarchist difference between property and possession explains any perceived contradiction in the communist position. Thus we find Kropotkin arguing that a communist-anarchist society is one *"without having the soil, the machinery, the capital in short, in the hands of private owners. We all believe that free organisations of workers would be able to carry on production on the farm and on the factory, as well, and probably much better, than it is conducted now under the individual ownership of the capitalist."* The commune *"shall take into possession of all the soil, the dwelling-houses, the manufactures, the mines and the means of communication."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 103 and p. 104]

This in no way contradicts his argument that the individuals will not be forced to join a commune. This is because the aim of anarchist-communism is, to quote another of Kropotkin's works, to place *"the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in the**



consistently subscribe to this position nor did their support for union struggles play a major role in their strategy. Faced with another form of anarchism which supported both, unsurprisingly communist-anarchism replaced it as the dominant form of anarchism by the start of the 20th century in America.

If these social conditions are not taken into account then the ideas of the likes of Tucker and Spooner will be distorted beyond recognition. Similarly, by ignoring the changing nature of socialism in the face of a changing society and economy, the obvious socialistic aspects of their ideas will be lost. Ultimately, to analyse the Individualist Anarchists in an a-historic manner means to distort their ideas and ideals. Moreover, to apply those ideas in a non-artisan economy without the intention of radically transforming the socio-economic nature of that society towards one based on artisan production one would mean to create a society distinctly different than one they envisioned (see section G.3 for further discussion).

# G.2 Why do individualist anarchists reject social anarchism?

As noted in the last section, the individualist anarchists considered themselves as anti-capitalists and many called themselves mutualists and socialists. It may be objected that they opposed the more obviously socialist types of anarchism like communist-anarchism and, as a consequence, should be considered as supporters of capitalism. This is not the case as can be seen from **why** they rejected communist-anarchism. The key thing to remember is that capitalism does not equal the market. So while the individualist anarchists advocated a market economy, it *"is evident from their writings that they rejected both capitalism and communism — as did Proudhon."* [Brian Morris, *"Global Anti-Capitalism"*, pp. 170–6, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 175]

It should noted that while Tucker came to excommunicate non-individualist forms of anarchism from the movement, his initial comments on the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin were very favourable. He reprinted articles by Kropotkin from his paper **La Revolte**, for example, and discussed *"the Anarchistic philosophy, as developed by the great Proudhon and actively propagated by the heroic Bakunin and his successors on both sides of the Atlantic."* [**Liberty**, no. 26, p. 3] After the rise of the IWPA in the early 1880s and the Haymarket police riot of 1886, Tucker changed his position. Now it was a case that the *"Anarchistic social ideal"* was *"utterly inconsistent with that of those*



*to hold his family. And we are going to deprive him of his hard-earned happiness, to turn him into the street! Certainly not ... Let him work in his little garden, too."* Anarchist-communism *"will make the lodger understand that he need not pay his former landlord any more rent. Stay where you are, but rent free."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61, p. 95, pp. 95–6 and p. 96]

Which, incidentally, was **exactly** the same position as Tucker (see section G.1.2) and so Kropotkin's analysis of the land monopoly was identical:

> *"when we see a peasant who is in possession of just the amount of land he can cultivate, we do not think it reasonable to turn him off his little farm. He exploits nobody, and nobody would have the right to interfere with his work. But if he possesses under the capitalist law more than he can cultivate himself, we consider that we must not give him the right of keeping that soil for himself, leaving it uncultivated when it might be cultivated by others, or of making others cultivate it for his benefit."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 104]

For Kropotkin, communism *"must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."* [**Anarchism**, p. 140]

Malatesta agreed. Anarchism, he stressed, *"cannot be imposed, both on moral grounds in regard to freedom, as well as because it is impossible to apply 'willy nilly' a regime of justice for all. It cannot be imposed on a minority by a majority. Neither can it be imposed by a majority on one or more minorities."* Thus *"anarchists who call themselves communists"* do so *"not because they wish to impose their particular way of seeing things on others"* but because *"they are convinced, until proved wrong, that*

surprisingly, we discover that communist-anarchists have long argued that their communism was voluntary in nature and that working people who did not desire to be communists would be free not to be.

This position can be found in Kropotkin, from his earliest writings to his last. Thus we discover him arguing that an anarchist revolution *"would take care not to touch the holding of the peasant who cultivates it himself ... without wage labour. But we would expropriate all land that was not cultivated by the hands of those who at present possess the land."* This was compatible with communism because libertarian communists aimed at *"the complete expropriation of all those who have the means of exploiting human beings; the return to the community of the nation of everything that in the hands of anyone can be used to exploit others."* Following Proudhon's analysis, private property was different from individual possession and as long as *"social wealth remains in the hands of the few who possess it today"* there would be exploitation. Instead, the aim was to see such social wealth currently monopolised by the capitalist class *"being placed, on the day of the revolution, at the free disposition of all the workers."* This would *"create the situation where each person may live by working freely, without being forced to sell his work and his liberty to others."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 214, pp. 207–8, p. 207 and p. 208] If someone desired to work outside of the commune, then that was perfectly compatible with this aim.

This position was followed in later works. The *"scope of Expropriation,"* Kropotkin argued was clear and would only *"apply to everything that enables any man — be he financier, mill-owner, or landlord — to appropriate the product of others' toil."* Thus only those forms of property based on wage labour would be expropriated. In terms of housing, the same general rule applies (*"the expropriation of dwellings contains the whole social revolution"*). Kropotkin explicitly discusses the man who *"by dint of privation has contrived to buy a house just large enough*



*Communists who falsely call themselves Anarchists while at the same time advocating a* ***regime*** *of Archism fully as despotic as that of the State Socialists themselves."* For Tucker, real anarchists did not advocate, like communist anarchists, *"forcible expropriation"* nor *"force as a revolutionary agent and authority as a safeguard of the new social order."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 88–9] As will become clear, Tucker's summation of communist-anarchism leaves a lot to be desired. However, even after the break between individualist and communist anarchism in America, Tucker saw that both had things in common as both were socialists:

> *"To be sure, there is a certain and very sincere comradeship that must exist between all honest antagonists of the exploitation of labour, but the word comrade cannot gloss over the vital difference between so-called Communist-Anarchism and Anarchism proper."* [**Liberty**, no. 172, p. 1]

Social anarchists would agree with Tucker in part, namely the need not to gloss over vital differences between anarchist schools but most reject Tucker's attempts to exclude other tendencies from *"Anarchism proper."* Instead, they would agree with Kropotkin and, while disagreeing with certain aspects of the theory, refuse to excommunicate him from the anarchist movement. As we discuss in section G.2.5, few anarchists agreed with Tucker's sectarianism at the time and communist-anarchism was, and remains, the dominant tendency within anarchism.

It is these disagreements to which we now turn. It should be stressed, though, that the individualist anarchists, while tending to excommunicate social anarchism, also had many inclusive moments and so it makes these objections often seem petty and silly. Yes, there was certainly pettiness involved and it worked both ways and there was a certain amount of tit-for-tat, just as there is now (although to a much lesser degree

these days). Anarchist-communist opposition to what some of them sadly called *"bourgeois anarchism"* was a fact, as was individualist anarchist opposition to communist-anarchism. Yet this should not blind us to what both schools had in common. However, if it were not for some opponents of anarchism (particularly those seeking to confuse libertarian ideas with propertarian ones) dragging these (mostly resolved) disagreements back into the light of day this section would be a lot shorter. As it is, covering these disagreements and showing how they could be resolved is a useful task — if only to show how individualist and communist anarchism are not as alien as some make out.

There were four main objections made to communist-anarchism by the individualists. Firstly, that communist-anarchism was compulsory and any compulsory system could not be anarchist. Secondly, that a revolution would be imposing anarchism and so contradicted its principles. Thirdly, that distribution by need was based on altruism and, consequently, unlikely to succeed. Fourthly, that the communist-anarchists are determining how a free society would be organised which is authoritarian. Needless to say, communist-anarchists rejected these claims as being false and while we have already sketched these arguments, objections and replies in section A.3.1 it is worthwhile to repeat (and expand on) them here as these disagreements are sometimes highlighted by those who fail to stress what both schools have in common and, consequently, distort the debates and issues involved.

We will discuss these objections in the following sections.



## G.2.1 Is communist-anarchism compulsory?

Some individualist anarchists argued that communist-anarchists wanted to force everyone to be communists and, as such, this proved they were not anarchists. This objection is, ironically, both the most serious **and** the easiest to refute. As Tucker noted, *"to eliminate the compulsory element from Communism is to remove, in the view of every man who values liberty above aught else, the **chief** objection to it."* [**Liberty**, no. 122, p. 5] For Henry Appleton, there was *"a class of ranting enthusiasts who falsely call themselves Anarchists"* who advocated both violence and *"levelling". "All Communism,"* he asserted, *"under whatever guise, is the natural enemy of Anarchism and a Communist sailing under the flag of Anarchism is as false a figure as could be invented."* Yet, ironically, A. H. Simpson disproved that particular claim for while attacking communism he ended by stating his *"argument applies only to aggressive Communists"* and that *"[v]oluntary Communism can exist and, if successful, flourish under Anarchy."* So, apparently, **some** kinds of communism are compatible with anarchism after all! Victor Yarrows, likewise, pointed to *"two different schools"* of communists, those who support *"voluntary Communism, which they intend to reach by the Anarchistic method"* and those who *"plot the forcible suppression of the entire system"* of private property. Only the former was *"voluntary or Anarchistic Communism."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 89–90, p. 94, p. 95 and p. 96]

This, it should be noted, is more than enough to disprove any claims that genuine anarchists cannot be communists.

So, the question is whether communist-anarchists are in favour of forcing people to be communists. If their communism is based on voluntary association then, according to the Individualist Anarchists themselves, it is a form of anarchism. Un-

wrong. Mutual banks operate on the basis of providing loans to people to set up or expand business, either as individuals or as co-operatives. When they provide a loan, in other words, they **increase** the amount of goods and services in the economy. Similarly, they do not simply increase the money supply to reduce interest rates. Rather, they reduce interest rates to increase the demand for money in order to increase the productive activity in an economy. By producing new goods and services, inflation is kept at bay. Would increased demand for goods by the new firms create inflation? Only if every firm was operating at maximum output, which would be a highly unlikely occurrence in reality (unlike in economic textbooks).

So what, then does case inflation? Inflation, rather than being the result of monetary factors, is, in fact, a result of profit levels and the dynamic of the class struggle. In this most anarchists agree with post-Keynesian economics which views inflation as *"a symptom of an on-going struggle over income distribution by the exertion of market power."* [Paul Davidson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] As workers' market power increases via fuller employment, their organisation, militancy and solidarity increases so eroding profits as workers keep more of the value they produce. Capitalists try and maintain their profits by rising prices, thus generating inflation (i.e. general price rises). Rather than accept the judgement of market forces in the form of lower profits, capitalists use their control over industry and market power of their firms to maintain their profit levels at the expense of the consumer (i.e., the workers and their families).

In this sense, mutual banks **could** contribute to inflation — by reducing unemployment by providing the credit needed for workers to start their own businesses and co-operatives, workers' power would increase and so reduce the power of managers to extract more work for a given wage and give workers a better economic environment to ask for better wages and conditions. This was, it should be stressed, a key reason why the individualist anarchists supported mutual banking:



Suffice to say, an account of anarchism which excluded social anarchism would be a very short work indeed and, unsurprisingly, all serious accounts of anarchism concentrate on social anarchism, its thinkers and its organisations. Which, unfortunately, ensures that the diversity and richness of individualist anarchism is somewhat lost, as are its social roots and context (which, in turn, allows some academics to confuse individualist anarchism with "anarcho"-capitalism based on a superficial analysis of words like "property" and "markets"). This predominance of social anarchism is reflected in the movements journals.

While some of its admirers stress that **Liberty** was the longest lasting American anarchist paper, in fact a social anarchist paper has that claim to fame. **Fraye Arbeter Shtime** (**The Free Voice of Labour**) was a Yiddish language anarchist periodical which was first published in 1890 and lasted until 1977. This was followed by the Italian anarchist paper **L'Adunata dei Refrattari** which was published between 1922 and 1971. So when James Martin stated that **Liberty** was *"the longest-lived of any radical periodical of economic or political nature in the nation's history"* in 1953 he was wrong. [**Men Against the State**, p. 208] In terms of the English language, the London based communist-anarchist journal **Freedom** has existed (in various forms) from 1886 and so beats any claim made for **Liberty** as being the longest lasting English language anarchist journal by several decades. The anarcho-syndicalist **Black Flag**, another British based journal, began publication in 1971 and was still being published over 30 years later. As far as the longest running US-based anarchist journal, that title now goes to the social anarchist magazine **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** which was founded in 1980 and is still going strong. This is, we stress, not to diminish **Liberty** and its achievement but simply to put it into the context of the wider movement and the fact that, outside of America,

social anarchism **is** the anarchist movement (and even within America, social anarchism was and is the bulk of it).

In summary, then, while individualist anarchism opposed communist-anarchism much of this opposition was rooted in misunderstandings and, at times, outright distortion. Once these are corrected, it becomes clear that both schools of anarchism share significant ideas in common. This is unsurprisingly, given the impact of Proudhon on both of them as well as their common concerns on the social question and participation in the labour and other popular movements. As both are (libertarian) socialists inspired by many of the same intellectual and social influences, this should come as no surprise. That a few individualist and communist anarchists tried to deny those common influences should not blind us to them or the fact that both schools of anarchism are compatible.

Ultimately, though, anarchism should be wide enough and generous enough to include both communist and individualist anarchism. Attempts to excommunicate one or the other seem petty given how much each has in common and, moreover, given that both are compatible with each other as both are rooted in similar perspectives on possession, capitalist property rights and voluntary association. Once the differences in terminology are understood, the differences are not impossible to reconcile.



investments and any firm will respond to increasing demand by increasing production as their inventories start to decline. In effect, Rothbard's analysis is just as static and unrealistic as the notion of money suddenly appearing overnight in people's wallets. Perhaps unsurprisingly Rothbard compared the credit generation of banks to the act of counterfeiters so showing his utter lack of awareness of how banks work in a credit-money (i.e., real) economy.

The "Austrian" theory of the business cycle is rooted in the notion that banks artificially lower the rate of interest by providing more credit than their savings and specie reverses warrant. Even in terms of pure logic, such an analysis is flawed as it cannot reasonably be asserted that all "malinvestment" is caused by credit expansion as capitalists and investors make unwise decisions all the time, irrespective of the supply of credit. Thus it is simply false to assert, as Rothbard did, that the *"process of inflation, as carried out in the real [sic!] world"* is based on *"new money"* entered the market by means of *"the loan market"* but *"this fall is strictly temporary, and the market soon restores the rate to its proper level."* A crash, according to Rothbard, is the process of restoring the rate of interest to its *"proper"* level yet a crash can occur even if the interest rate is at that rate, assuming that the banks can discover this equilibrium rate and have an incentive to do so (as we discussed in section C.8 both are unlikely). Ultimately, credit expansion fails under capitalism because it runs into the contradictions within the capitalist economy, the need for capitalists, financiers and landlords to make profits via exploiting labour. As interest rates increase, capitalists have to service their rising debts putting pressure on their profit margins and so raising the number of bankruptcies. In an economy without non-labour income, the individualist anarchists argued, this process is undercut if not eliminated.

So expanding this from the world of fictional government helicopters and money fairies, we can see why Rothbard is

> *"A is a farmer owning a farm. He mortgages his farm to a bank for $1,000, giving the bank a mortgage note for that sum and receiving in exchange the bank's notes for the same sum, which are secured by the mortgage. With the bank-notes A buys farming tools of B. The next day B uses the notes to buy of C the materials used in the manufacture of tools. The day after, C in turn pays them to D in exchange for something he needs. At the end of a year, after a constant succession of exchanges, the notes are in the hands of Z, a dealer in farm produce. He pays them to A, who gives in return $1,000 worth of farm products which he has raised during the year. Then A carries the notes to the bank, receives in exchange for them his mortgage note, and the bank cancels the mortgage. Now, in this whole circle of transactions, has there been any lending of capital? If so, who was the lender? If not, who is entitled to interest?"* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 198]

Obviously, in a real economy, as Rothbard admits *"inflation of the money supply takes place a step at a time and that the first beneficiaries, the people who get the new money first, gain at the expense of the people unfortunate enough to come last in line."* This process is *"plunder and exploitation"* as the *"prices of things they [those last in line] have to buy shooting up before the new injection [of money] filters down to them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11] Yet this expansion of the initial example, again, assumes that there is no increase in goods and services in the economy, that the *"first beneficiaries"* do nothing with the money bar simply buying more of the existing goods and services. It further assumes that this existing supply of goods and services is unchangeable, that firms do not have inventories of goods and sufficient slack to meet unexpected increases in demand. In reality, of course, a mutual bank would be funding productive



# G.3 Is "anarcho"-capitalism a new form of individualist anarchism?

No. As Carole Pateman once pointed out, *"[t]here has always been a strong radical individualist tradition in the USA. Its adherents have been divided between those who drew anarchist, egalitarian conclusions, and those who reduced political life to the capitalist economy writ large, to a series of exchanges between unequally situated individuals."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 205] What right-"libertarians" and "anarcho"-capitalists do is to confuse these two traditions, ignoring fundamental aspects of individualist anarchism in order to do so. Thus anarchist Peter Sabatini:

> *"in those rare moments when [Murray] Rothbard (or any other [right-wing] Libertarian) does draw upon individualist anarchism, he is always highly selective about what he pulls out. Most of the doctrine's core principles, being decidedly anti-Libertarianism, are conveniently ignored, and so what remains is shrill anti-statism conjoined to a vacuous freedom in hackneyed defence of capitalism. In sum, the 'anarchy' of Libertarianism reduces to a liberal fraud."* [**Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**]

As class struggle anarchist Benjamin Franks notes individualist anarchism *"has similarities with, but is not identical to, anarcho-capitalism."* [**Rebel Alliances**, p. 44] For Colin

Ward, while the *"mainstream"* of anarchist propaganda *"has been **anarchist-communism**"* there are *"several traditions of **individualist anarchism**"*, including that associated with Max Stirner and *"a remarkable series of 19th-century American figures"* who *"differed from free-market liberals in their absolute mistrust of American capitalism, and in their emphasis on mutualism."* Ward was careful to note that by the *"late 20th century the word 'libertarian' . .. was appropriated by a new group of American thinkers"* and so *"it is necessary to examine the modern individualist 'libertarian' response from the standpoint of the anarchist tradition."* It was found to be wanting, for while Rothbard was *"the most aware of the actual anarchist tradition among the anarcho-capitalist apologists"* he may have been *"aware of a tradition, but he is singularly unaware of the old proverb that freedom for the pike means death for the minnow."* The individualist anarchists were *"busy social inventors exploring the potential of autonomy."* The *"American 'libertarians' of the 20th century are academics rather than social activists, and their inventiveness seems to be limited to providing an ideology for untrammelled market capitalism."* [**Anarchism: A Short Introduction**, pp. 2–3, p. 62, p. 67, and p. 69]

In this section we will sketch these differences between the genuine libertarian ideas of Individualist Anarchism and the bogus "anarchism" of right-"libertarian" ideology. This discussion builds upon our general critique of "anarcho"-capitalism we presented in section F. However, here we will concentrate on presenting individualist anarchist analysis of "anarcho"-capitalist positions rather than, as before, mostly social anarchist ones (although, of course, there are significant overlaps and similarities). In this way, we can show the fundamental differences between the two theories for while there are often great differences between specific individualist anarchist thinkers all share a vision of a free society distinctly at odds with the capitalism of their time as well as the "pure"



*increase in the money supply is not associated with higher prices but with greater output."* [**Controversies in Post Keynesian Economics**, p. 100] Davidson is unknowingly echoing Tucker (*"It is the especial claim of free banking that it will increase production ... If free banking were only a picayanish attempt to distribute more equitably the small amount of wealth now produced, I would not waste a moment's energy on it."* [**Liberty**, no. 193, p. 3]).

This, in reply to the claims of neo-classical economics, indicates why mutual banking would not increase inflation. Like the neo-classical position, Rothbard's viewpoint is static in nature and does not understand how a real economy works. Needless to say, he (like Friedman) did not discuss how the new money gets into circulation. Perhaps, like Hume, it was a case of the money fairy (laissez-fairy?) placing the money into people's wallets. Maybe it was a case, like Friedman, of government (black?) helicopters dropping it from the skies. Rothbard did not expound on the mechanism by which money would be created or placed into circulation, rather it just appears one day out of the blue and starts chasing a given amount of goods. However, the individualist anarchists and mutualists did not think in such bizarre (typically, economist) ways. Rather than think that mutual banks would hand out cash willy-nilly to passing strangers, they realistically considered the role of the banks to be one of evaluating useful investment opportunities (i.e., ones which would be likely to succeed). As such, the role of credit would be to **increase** the number of goods and services in circulation along with money, so ensuring that inflation is not generated (assuming that it is caused by the money supply, of course). As one Individualist Anarchist put it, *"[i]n the absence of such restrictions [on money and credit], imagine the rapid growth of wealth, and the equity in its distribution, that would result."* [John Beverley Robinson, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 144] Thus Tucker:

increases in money will increase prices is flawed. Defenders of this argument usually present mental exercises to prove their case (as in Hume and Friedman). Needless to say, such an argument is spurious in the extreme simply because money does not enter the economy in this fashion. It is generated to meet specific demands for money and is so, generally, used productively. In other words, money creation is a function of the demand for credit, which is a function of the needs of the economy (i.e. it is endogenous) and **not** determined by the central bank injecting it into the system (i.e. it is **not** exogenous). And this indicates why the argument that mutual banking would produce inflation is flawed. It does not take into account the fact that money will be used to generate ***new*** goods and services.

As leading Post-Keynesian economist Paul Davidson argued, the notion that *"inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon"* (to use Friedman's expression) is *"ultimately based on the old homily that inflation is merely 'too many dollars chasing too few goods.'"* Davidson notes that *"[t]his 'too many dollars cliché is usually illustrated by employing a two-island parable. Imagine a hypothetical island where the only available goods are 10 apples and the money supply consists of, say, 10 $1 bills. If all the dollars are used to purchase the apples, the price per apple will be $1. For comparison, assume that on a second island there are 20 $1 bills and only 10 apples. All other things being equal, the price will be $2 per apple. Ergo, inflation occurs whenever the money supply is excessive relative to the available goods."* The similarities with Rothbard's argument are clear. So are its flaws as *"no explanation is given as to why the money supply was greater on the second island. Nor is it admitted that, if the increase in the money supply is associated with entrepreneurs borrowing 'real bills' from banks to finance an increase in payrolls necessary to harvest, say, 30 additional apples so that the $20 chases 40 apples, then the price will be only $0.50 per apple. If a case of 'real bills' finance occurs, then an*



system of economic textbooks and right-"libertarian" dreams (which, ironically, so often reflects the 19th century capitalism the individualist anarchists were fighting).

First it should be noted that some "anarcho"-capitalists shy away from the term, preferring such expressions as "market anarchist" or "individualist anarchist." This suggests that there is some link between their ideology and that of Tucker and his comrades. However, the founder of "anarcho"-capitalism, Murray Rothbard, refused that label for, while *"strongly tempted,"* he could not do so because *"Spooner and Tucker have in a sense pre-empted that name for their doctrine and that from that doctrine I have certain differences."* Somewhat incredibly Rothbard argued that on the whole politically *"these differences are minor,"* economically *"the differences are substantial, and this means that my view of the consequences of putting our more of less common system into practice is very far from theirs."* [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, pp. 5–15, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 7]

What an understatement! Individualist anarchists advocated an economic system in which there would have been very little inequality of wealth and so of power (and the accumulation of capital would have been minimal without profit, interest and rent). Removing this social and economic basis would result in **substantially** different political regimes. In other words, politics is not isolated from economics. As anarchist David Wieck put it, Rothbard *"writes of society as though some part of it (government) can be extracted and replaced by another arrangement while other things go on before, and he constructs a system of police and judicial power without any consideration of the influence of historical and economic context."* [**Anarchist Justice**, p. 227]

Unsurprisingly, the political differences he highlights **are** significant, namely *"the role of law and the jury system"* and *"the land question."* The former difference relates to the fact that the individualist anarchists *"allow[ed] each individual free-*

*market court, and more specifically, each free-market jury, totally free rein over judicial decision.*" This horrified Rothbard. The reason is obvious, as it allows real people to judge the law as well as the facts, modifying the former as society changes and evolves. For Rothbard, the idea that ordinary people should have a say in the law is dismissed. Rather, *"it would not be a very difficult task for Libertarian lawyers and jurists to arrive at a rational and objective code of libertarian legal principles and procedures."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 7–8] Of course, the fact that *"lawyers"* and *"jurists"* may have a radically different idea of what is just than those subject to their laws is not raised by Rothbard, never mind answered. While Rothbard notes that juries may defend the people against the state, the notion that they may defend the people against the authority and power of the rich is not even raised. That is why the rich have tended to oppose juries as well as popular assemblies. Unsurprisingly, as we indicated in section F.6.1, Rothbard wanted laws to be made by judges, lawyers, jurists and other "libertarian" experts rather than jury judged and driven. In other words, to exclude the general population from any say in the law and how it changes. This hardly a *"minor"* difference! It is like a supporter of the state saying that it is a *"minor"* difference if you favour a dictatorship rather than a democratically elected government. As Tucker argued, "*it is precisely in the tempering of the rigidity of enforcement that one of the chief excellences of Anarchism consists .. . under Anarchism all rules and laws will be little more than suggestions for the guidance of juries, and that all disputes ... will be submitted to juries which will judge not only the facts but the law, the justice of the law, its applicability to the given circumstances, and the penalty or damage to be inflicted because of its infraction .. . under Anarchism the law ... will be regarded as* ***just*** *in proportion to its flexibility, instead of now in proportion to its rigidity.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 160–1] In others, the law will evolve to take into account changing social circumstances and, as a consequence, public opinion on specific events and rights.



as it comes to us via neo-classical economics. In neo-classical economics inflation is always a monetary phenomena — too much money chasing too few goods. Milton Friedman's Monetarism was the logical conclusion of this perspective and although "Austrian" economics is extremely critical of Monetarism it does, however, share many of the same assumptions and fallacies (as Hayek's one-time follower Nicholas Kaldor noted, key parts of Friedman's doctrine are *"closely reminiscent of the Austrian school of the twenties and the early thirties"* although it *"misses some of the subtleties of the Hayekian transmission mechanism and of the money-induced distortions in the 'structure of production.'"* [**The Essential Kaldor**, pp. 476–7]). We can reject this argument on numerous points.

Firstly, the claim that inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomena has been empirically refuted — often using Friedman's own data and attempts to apply his dogma in real life. As we noted in section C.8.3, the growth of the money supply and inflation have no fixed relationship, with money supply increasing while inflation falling. As such, *"the claim that inflation is always and everywhere caused by increases in the money supply, and that the rate of inflation bears a stable, predictable relationship to increases in the money supply is ridiculous."* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 96] This means that the assumption that increasing the money supply by generating credit will always simply result in inflation cannot be supported by the empirical evidence we have. As Kaldor stressed, the *"the 'first-round effects' of the helicopter operation could be anything, depending on where the scatter occurred ... there is no reason to suppose that the ultimate effect on the amount of money in circulation or on incomes would bear any close relation to the initial injections."* [**The Scourge of Monetarism**, p. 29]

Secondly, even if we ignore the empirical record (as "Austrian" economics tends to do when faced with inconvenient facts) the "logical" argument used to explain the theory that

Rothbard, for example, dismissed individualist anarchist ideas on mutual banking as being *"totally fallacious monetary views."* He based his critique on "Austrian" economics and its notion of *"time preference"* (see section C.2.7 for a critique of this position). Mutual banking would artificially lower the interest rate by generating credit, Rothbard argued, with the new money only benefiting those who initially get it. This process "exploits" those further down the line in the form accelerating inflation. As more and more money was be pumped into the economy, it would lead to more and more money chasing a given set of goods, so leading to price rises and inflation. To prove this, Rothbard repeated Hume's argument that *"if everybody magically woke up one morning with the quantity of money in his possession doubled"* then prices would simply doubled. [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 14 and p. 10]

However, Rothbard is assuming that the amount of goods and services are fixed. This is just wrong and shows a real lack of understanding of how money works in a real economy. This is shown by the lack of agency in his example, the money just "appears" by magic (perhaps by means of a laissez-fairy?). Milton Friedman made the same mistake, although he used the more up to date example of government helicopters dropping bank notes. As post-Keynesian economist Nicholas Kaldor pointed out with regards to Friedman's position, the *"transmission mechanism from money to income remained a 'black box' — he could not explain it, and he did not attempt to explain it either. When it came to the question of* ***how*** *the authorities increase the supply of bank notes in circulation he answered that they are scattered over populated areas by means of a helicopter — though he did not go into the ultimate consequences of such an aerial Santa Claus."* [**The Scourge of Monetarism**, p. 28]

Friedman's and Rothbard's analysis betrays a lack of understanding of economics and money. This is unsurprising



Tucker's position is fundamentally **democratic** and evolutionary while Rothbard's is autocratic and fossilised.

This is particularly the case if you are proposing an economic system which is based on inequalities of wealth, power and influence and the means of accumulating more. As we note in section G.3.3, one of individualist anarchists that remained pointed this out and opposed Rothbard's arguments. As such, while Rothbard may have subscribed to a system of competing defence companies like Tucker, he expected them to operate in a substantially different legal system, enforcing different (capitalist) property rights and within a radically different socio-economic system. These differences are hardly *"minor"*. As such, to claim that "anarcho"-capitalism is simply individualist anarchism with "Austrian" economics shows an utter lack of understanding of what individualist anarchism stood and aimed for.

On the land question, Rothbard opposed the individualist position of *"occupancy and use"* as it *"would automatically abolish all rent payments for land."* Which was precisely **why** the individualist anarchists advocated it! In a predominantly rural economy, as was the case during most of the 19th century in America, this would result in a significant levelling of income and social power as well as bolstering the bargaining position of non-land workers by reducing the numbers forced onto the labour market (which, as we note in section F.8.5, was the rationale for the state enforcing the land monopoly in the first place). He bemoans that landlords cannot charge rent on their *"justly-acquired private property"* without noticing that is begging the question as anarchists deny that this is *"justly-acquired"* land in the first place. Unsurprising, Rothbard considered *"the proper theory of justice in landed property can be found in John Locke"*, ignoring the awkward fact that the first self-proclaimed anarchist book was written **precisely** to refute that kind of theory and expose its anti-libertarian implications. His argument simply shows how far from anarchism his ideol-

ogy is. For Rothbard, it goes without saying that the landlord's *"freedom of contract"* tops the worker's freedom to control their own work and live and, of course, their right to life. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 8 and p. 9]

For anarchists, *"the land is indispensable to our existence, consequently a common thing, consequently insusceptible of appropriation."* [Proudhon, **What is Property?**, p. 107] Tucker looked forward to a time when capitalist property rights in land were ended and *"the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becomes the prevailing view."* This *"does not simply mean the freeing of unoccupied land. It means the freeing of all land not occupied **by the owner**"* and *"tenants would not be forced to pay you rent, nor would you be allowed to seize their property. The Anarchic associations would look upon your tenants very much as they would look upon your guests."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 159, p. 155 and p. 162] The ramifications of this position on land use are significant. At its most basic, what counts as force and coercion, and so state intervention, are fundamentally different due to the differing conceptions of property held by Tucker and Rothbard. If we apply, for example, the individualist anarchist position on land to the workplace, we would treat the workers in a factory as the rightful owners, on the basis of occupation and use; at the same time, we could treat the share owners and capitalists as aggressors for attempting to force their representatives as managers on those actually occupying and using the premises. The same applies to the landlord against the tenant farmer. Equally, the outcome of such differing property systems will be radically different — in terms of inequalities of wealth and so power (with having others working for them, it is unlikely that would-be capitalists or landlords would get rich). Rather than a *"minor"* difference, the question of land use fundamentally changes the nature of the society built upon it and whether it counts as genuinely libertarian or not.



*individualisation they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts, and ... [some] abandon the ranks of the anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economists."* [**Anarchism**, p. 297] "Anarcho"-capitalists confuse the ending place of **ex**-anarchists with their starting point. As can be seen from their attempt to co-opt the likes of Spooner and Tucker, this confusion only appears persuasive by ignoring the bulk of their ideas as well as rewriting the history of anarchism.

So it can, we think, be save to assume that Tucker and other individualist anarchists would have little problem in refuting Rothbard's economic fallacies as well as his goldbug notions (which seem to be a form of the money monopoly in another form) and support for the land monopoly. Significantly, modern individualist anarchists like Kevin Carson have felt no need to embrace "Austrian" economics and retain their socialist analysis while, at the same time, making telling criticisms of Rothbard's favourite economic ideology and the apologetics for "actually existing" capitalism its supporters too often indulge in (Carson calls this *"vulgar libertarianism"*, wherein right-"libertarians" forget that the current economuy is far from their stated ideal when it is a case of defending corporations or the wealthy).

## G.3.6 Would mutual banking simply cause inflation?

One of the arguments against Individualist and mutualist anarchism, and mutual banking in general, is that it would just produce accelerating inflation. The argument is that by providing credit without interest, more and more money would be pumped into the economy. This would lead to more and more money chasing a given set of goods, so leading to price rises and inflation.

produced. He, like the other individualist anarchists, was well aware that labour produces the "surplus value" which was appropriated in the name of interest, rent and profit. In other words, he very forcibly rejected the idea that the market price of labour reflects the value of that labour, considering *"the natural wage of labour is its product"* and *"that this wage, or product, is the only just source of income."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 6]

**Liberty** also favourably quoted a supporter of the silver coinage, General Francis A. Walker, and his arguments in favour of ending the gold standard. It praised his argument as *"far more sound and rational than that of the supercilios, narrow, bigoted monomentallists."* Walker attacked those *"economists of the **a priori** school, who treat all things industrial as if they were in a state of flux, ready to be poured indifferently into any kind of mould or pattern."* These economists *"are always on hand with the answer that industrial society will 'readjust' itself to the new conditions"* and *"it would not matter if wages were at any time unduly depressed by combinations of employers, inasmuch as the excess of profits resulting would infallibly become capital, and as such, constitute an additional demand for labour ... It has been the teaching of the economists of this sort which has so deeply discredited political economy with the labouring men on the one hand, and with practical business men on the other."* The *"greatest part of the evil of a diminishing money supply is wrought through the discouragement of enterprise."* [**Liberty**, no. 287, p. 11] Given that the "Austrian" school takes the **a priori** methodology to ridiculous extremes and is always on hand to defend *"excess of profits"*, *"combinations of employers"* and the gold standard we can surmise Tucker's reaction to Rothbard's pet economic ideology.

Somewhat ironically, give Rothbard's attempts to inflict bourgeois economics along with lots of other capitalist ideology onto individualist anarchism, Kropotkin noted that supporters of *"individualist anarchism ... soon realise that the*



Tucke was well aware of the implications of such differences. Supporting a scheme like Rothbard's meant *"departing from Anarchistic ground,"* it was *"Archism"* and, as he stressed in reply to one supporter of such property rights, it opened the door to other authoritarian positions: *"Archism in one point is taking him to Archism is another. Soon, if he is logical, he will be an Archist in all respects."* It was a *"fundamentally foolish"* position, because it *"starts with a basic proposition that must be looked upon by all consistent Anarchists as obvious nonsense."* *"What follows from this?"* asked Tucker. *"Evidently that a man may go to a piece of vacant land and fence it off; that he may then go to a second piece and fence that off; then to a third, and fence that off; then to a fourth, a fifth, a hundredth, a thousandth, fencing them all off; that, unable to fence off himself as many as he wishes, he may hire other men to do the fencing for him; and that then he may stand back and bar all other men from using these lands, or admit them as tenants at such rental as he may choose to extract."* It was *"a theory of landed property which all Anarchists agree in viewing as a denial of equal liberty."* It is *"utterly inconsistent with the Anarchistic doctrine of occupancy and use as the limit of property in land."* [**Liberty**, No. 180, p. 4 and p. 6] This was because of the dangers to liberty capitalist property rights in land implied:

> *"I put the right of occupancy and use above the right of contract ... principally by my interest in the right of contract. Without such a preference the theory of occupancy and use is utterly untenable; without it ... it would be possible for an individual to acquire, and hold simultaneously, virtual titles to innumerable parcels of land, by the merest show of labour performed thereon ... [This would lead to] the virtual ownership of the entire world by a small fraction of its inhabitants ... [which would see] the right of contract, if not destroyed absolutely, would surely*

*be impaired in an intolerable degree."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 350, p. 4]

Clearly a position which Rothbard had no sympathy for, unlike landlords. Strange, though, that Rothbard did not consider the obvious liberty destroying effects of the monopolisation of land and natural resources as *"rational grounds"* for opposing landlords but, then, as we noted in section F.1 when it came to private property Rothbard simply could not see its state-like qualities — even when he pointed them out himself! For Rothbard, the individualist anarchist position involved a *"hobbling of land sites or of optimum use of land ownership and cultivation and such arbitrary misallocation of land injures all of society."* [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, p. 9] Obviously, those subject to the arbitrary authority of landlords and pay them rent are not part of *"society"* and it is a strange coincidence that the interests of landlords just happen to coincide so completely with that of *"all of society"* (including their tenants?). And it would be churlish to remind Rothbard's readers that, as a methodological individualist, he was meant to think that there is no such thing as *"society"* — just individuals. And in terms of these individuals, he clearly favoured the landlords over their tenants and justifies this by appealing, like any crude collectivist, to an abstraction (*"society"*) to which the tenants must sacrifice themselves and their liberty. Tucker would not have been impressed.

For Rothbard, the nineteenth century saw *"the establishment in North America of a truly libertarian land system."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 73] In contrast, the Individualist Anarchists attacked that land system as the *"land monopoly"* and looked forward to a time when *"the libertarian principle to the tenure of land"* was actually applied [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 350, p. 5] So given the central place that "occupancy and use" lies in individualist anarchism, it was extremely patronising for Rothbard to assert that *"it seems ... a complete violation*



turn the state into the only landlord. In an unequal society, leasing land from the state *"would greatly enhance the power of capitalism to engross the control of the land, since it would relieve it of the necessity of applying large amounts in purchasing land which it could secure the same control of by lease ... It would greatly augment and promote the reign of the capitalism and displace the independent worker who now cultivates his own acres, but who would be then unable to compete with organised capital ... and would be compelled to give up his holding and sink into the ranks of the proletariat."* [Joshua King Ingalls, Bowman N. Hall, *"Joshua K. Ingalls, American Individualist: Land Reformer, Opponent of Henry George and Advocate of Land Leasing, Now an Established Mode"*, pp. 383–96, **American Journal of Economics and Sociology**, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 394]

Given Tucker's opposition to rent, interest and profit is should go without saying that he rejected the neo-classical and "Austrian" notion that a workers' wages equalled the "marginal product," i.e. its contribution to the production process (see section C.2 for a critique of this position). Basing himself on the socialist critique of classical economics developed by Proudhon and Marx, he argued that non-labour income was usury and would be driven to zero in a genuinely free market. As such, any notion that Tucker thought that workers in a "free market" are paid according to their marginal product is simply wrong and any claim otherwise shows a utter ignorance of the subject matter. Individualist anarchists like Tucker strongly believed that a truly free (i.e. non-capitalist) market would ensure that the worker would receive the *"full product"* of his or her labour. Nevertheless, in order to claim Tucker as a proto-"anarcho"-capitalist, "anarcho"-capitalists may argue that capitalism pays the "market price" of labour power, and that this price **does** reflect the *"full product"* (or value) of the worker's labour. As Tucker was a socialist, we doubt that he would have agreed with the "anarcho"-capitalist argument that market price of labour reflected the value it

named in the late nineteenth century) was *"a term with which our cowardly moral scientists and political economists attempt to conjure up a spirit that will justify the greed of our land and money systems; by a casuistry similar to that which once would have justified human slavery."* [*"Labor, Wages, And Capital. Division Of Profits Scientifically Considered,"* **Brittan's Quarterly Journal**, I (1873), pp. 66–79]

What of the economic justification for that other great evil for individualist anarchists, rent? Rothbard attacked Adam Smith comment that landlords were monopolists who demanded rent for nature's produce and like to reap where they never sowed. As he put it, Smith showed *"no hint of recognition here that the landlord performs the vital function of allocating the land to its most productive use."* [**An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought**, vol. 1, p. 456] Yet, as Smith was well aware, it is the farmer who has to feed himself and pay rent who decides how best to use the land, not the landlord. All the landlord does is decide whether to throw the farmer off the land when a more profitable business opportunity arrives (as in, say, during the Highland clearances) or that it is more "productive" to export food while local people starve (as in, say, the great Irish famine). It was precisely this kind of arbitrary power which the individualist anarchists opposed. As John Beverley Robinson put it, the *"land owner gives nothing whatever, but permission to you to live and work on his land. He does not give his product in exchange for yours. He did not produce the land. He obtained a title at law to it; that is, a privilege to keep everybody off his land until they paid him his price. He is well called the lord of the land — the landlord!"* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 271]

Significantly, while Rothbard attacked Henry George's scheme for land nationalisation as being a tax on property owners and stopping rent playing the role "Austrian" economic theory assigns it, the individualist anarchists opposed it because, at best, it would not end landlordism or, at worse,



*of the Spooner-Tucker 'law of equal liberty' to prevent the legitimate owner from selling his land to someone else."* [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 9] Particularly as Tucker had explicitly addressed this issue and indicated the logical and common sense basis for this so-called "violation" of their principles. Thus "occupancy and use" was *"the libertarian principle to the tenure of land"* because it stopped a class of all powerful landlords developing, ensuring a real equality of opportunity and liberty rather than the formal "liberty" associated with capitalism which, in practice, means selling your liberty to the rich.

Somewhat ironically, Rothbard bemoaned that it *"seems to be a highly unfortunate trait of libertarian and quasi-libertarian groups to spend the bulk of their time and energy emphasising their most fallacious or unlibertarian points."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14] He pointed to the followers of Henry George and their opposition to the current land holding system and the monetary views of the individualist anarchists as examples (see section G.3.6 for a critique of Rothbard's position on mutual banking). Of course, both groups would reply that Rothbard's positions were, in fact, both fallacious and unlibertarian in nature. As, indeed, did Tucker decades before Rothbard proclaimed his private statism a form of "anarchism." Yarros' critique of those who praised capitalism but ignored the state imposed restrictions that limited choice within it seems as applicable to Rothbard as it did Herbert Spencer:

> *"A system is voluntary when it is voluntary all round … not when certain transactions, regarded from certain points of view, appear Voluntary. Are the circumstances which compel the labourer to accept unfair terms law-created, artificial, and subversive of equal liberty? That is the question, and an affirmative answer to it is tantamount to an admission that*

*the present system is not voluntary in the true sense."* [**Liberty**, no. 184, p. 2]

So while "anarcho"-capitalists like Walter Block speculate on how starving families renting their children to wealthy paedophiles is acceptable *"on libertarian grounds"* it is doubtful that any individualist anarchist would be so blasé about such an evil. [*"Libertarianism vs. Objectivism: A Response to Peter Schwartz,"* pp. 39–62, **Reason Papers**, Vol. 26, Summer 2003, p. 20] Tucker, for example, was well aware that liberty without equality was little more than a bad joke. *"If,"* he argued, *"after the achievement of all industrial freedoms, economic rent should prove to be the cause of such inequalities in comfort that an effective majority found themselves at the point of starvation, they would undoubtedly cry, 'Liberty be damned!' and proceed to even up; and I think that at that stage of the game they would be great fools if they didn't. From this it will be seen that I am no[t] ... a stickler for absolute equal liberty under all circumstances."* Needless to say, he considered this outcome as unlikely and was keen to *"[t]ry freedom first."* [**Liberty**, no. 267, p. 2 and p. 3]

The real question is why Rothbard considered this a **political** difference rather than an economic one. Unfortunately, he did not explain. Perhaps because of the underlying **socialist** perspective behind the anarchist position? Or perhaps the fact that feudalism and monarchism was based on the owner of the land being its ruler suggests a political aspect to propertarian ideology best left unexplored? Given that the idea of grounding rulership on land ownership receded during the Middle Ages, it may be unwise to note that under "anarcho"-capitalism the landlord and capitalist would, likewise, be sovereign over the land **and** those who used it? As we noted in section F.1, this is the conclusion that Rothbard does draw. As such, there **is** a political aspect to this difference, namely the difference between a libertarian social system and one rooted in authority.



products are sold? The reason why workers do not work for themselves has nothing to do with "time preference" but their lack of resources, their **class** position. Showing how capitalist ideology clouds the mind, Rothbard asserted that interest (*"in the shape of 'long-run' profit"*) would still exist in a *"world in which everyone invested his own money and nobody loaned or borrowed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 12] Presumably, this means that the self-employed worker who invests her own money into her own farm pays herself interest payments just as her labour income is, presumably, the "profits" from which this "interest" payment is deducted along with the "rent" for access to the land she owns!

So it seems extremely unlikely that the individualist anarchists would have considered "Austrian" economics as anything other than an attempt to justify exploitation and capitalism, like the other theories they spent so much time refuting. They would quickly have noted that "time preference", like the "waiting"/"abstinence" justifications for interest, is based on taking the current class system for granted and ignoring the economic pressures which shape individual decisions. In Tucker's words (when he critiqued Henry George's argument that interest is related to time) *"increase which is purely the work of time bears a price only because of monopoly."* The notion that "time" produced profit or interest was one Tucker was well aware of, and refuted on many occasions. He argued that it was class monopoly, restrictions on banking, which caused interest and *"where there is no monopoly there will be little or no interest."* If someone *"is to be rewarded for his mere time, what will reward him save [another]'s labour? There is no escape from this dilemma. The proposition that the man who for time spent in idleness receives the product of time employed in labour is a parasite upon the body industrial is one which ... [its supporters] can never successfully dispute with men who understand the rudiments of political economy."* [**Liberty**, no. 109, p. 4 and p. 5] For Joshua King Ingalls, *"abstinence"* (or the ability to *"wait,"* as it was re-

*and Interest'"* for in this volume *"the fructification theory is ... completely refuted."* Bilgram, needless to say, did not support Böhm-Bawerk's defence of usury, instead arguing that restrictions in the amount of money forced people to pay for its use and *"[t]his, and nothing else, [causes] the interest accruing to capital, regarding which the modern economists are doing their utmost to find a theory that will not expose the system of industrial piracy of today."* He did not exclude Böhm-Bawerk's theory from his conclusion that *"since every one of these pet theories is based on some fallacy, [economists] cannot agree upon any one."* The abolition of the money monopoly will *"abolish the power of capital to appropriate a net profit."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 282, p. 11] Tucker himself noted that Böhm-Bawerk *"has refuted all these ancient apologies for interest — productivity of capital, abstinence, etc."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 287, p. 5] **Liberty** also published a synopsis of Francis Tandy's **Voluntary Socialism**, whose chapter 6 was *"devoted to an analysis of value according to the marginal utility value of Böhm-Bawerk. It also deals with the Marxian theory of surplus value, showing that all our economic ills are due to the existence of that surplus value."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 334, p. 5] Clearly, then, the individualist anarchists were aware of the "Austrian" tradition and only embraced its critique of previous defences of non-labour incomes.

We have already critiqued the "time preference" justification for interest in section C.2.7 so will not go into it in much detail here. Rothbard argued that it *"should be remembered by radicals that, if they wanted to, all workers could refuse to work for wages and instead form their own producers' co-operatives and wait for years for their pay until the producers are sold to the consumers; the fact that they do not do so, shows the enormous advantage of the capital investment, wage-paying system as a means of allowing workers to earn money far in advance of the sale of their products."* And how, Professor Rothbard, are these workers to live during the years they wait until their



Ultimately, *"the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production."* [Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 934] For there are *"two ways of oppressing men: either directly by brute force, by physical violence; or indirectly by denying them the means of life and this reducing them to a state of surrender."* In the second case, government is *"an organised instrument to ensure that dominion and privilege will be in the hands of those who ... have cornered all the means of life, first and foremost the land, which they make use of to keep the people in bondage and to make them work for their benefit."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 21] Privatising the coercive functions of said government hardly makes much difference.

As such, Rothbard was right to distance himself from the term individualist anarchism. It is a shame he did not do the same with anarchism as well!

## G.3.1 Is "anarcho"-capitalism American anarchism?

Unlike Rothbard, some "anarcho"-capitalists are more than happy to proclaim themselves "individualist anarchists" and so suggest that their notions are identical, or nearly so, with the likes of Tucker, Ingalls and Labadie. As part of this, they tend to stress that individualist anarchism is uniquely American, an indigenous form of anarchism unlike social anarchism. To do so, however, means ignoring not only the many European influences on individualist anarchism itself (most notably, Proudhon) but also downplaying the realities of American capitalism which quickly made social anarchism the dominant form of Anarchism in America. Ironically, such a position is deeply contradictory as "anarcho"-capitalism itself is most heavily influenced by a European ideology, namely "Austrian" economics, which has lead its proponents to reject key aspects of the indigenous American anarchist tradition.

For example, "anarcho"-capitalist Wendy McElroy does this in a short essay provoked by the Seattle protests in 1999. While Canadian, her rampant American nationalism is at odds with the internationalism of the individualist anarchists, stating that after property destruction in Seattle which placed American anarchists back in the media social anarchism *"is not American anarchism. Individualist anarchism, the indigenous form of the political philosophy, stands in rigorous opposition to attacking the person or property of individuals."* Like an ideological protectionist, she argued that *"Left [sic!] anarchism (socialist and communist) are foreign imports that flooded the country like cheap goods during the 19th century."* [**Anarchism: Two Kinds**] Apparently Albert and Lucy Parsons were un-Americans, as was Voltairine de Cleyre who turned from individualist to communist anarchism. And best not mention the social conditions in America which quickly made communist-anarchism predominant in the movement or that individualist anarchists like Tucker proudly proclaimed their ideas socialist!

She argued that *"[m]any of these anarchists (especially those escaping Russia) introduced lamentable traits into American radicalism"* such as *"propaganda by deed"* as well as a class analysis which *"divided society into economic classes that were at war with each other."* Taking the issue of *"propaganda by the deed"* first, it should be noted that use of violence against person or property was hardly alien to American traditions. The Boston Tea Party was just as *"lamentable"* an attack on *"property of individuals"* as the window breaking at Seattle while the revolution and revolutionary war were hardly fought using pacifist methods or respecting the *"person or property of individuals"* who supported imperialist Britain. Similarly, the struggle against slavery was not conducted purely by means Quakers would have supported (John Brown springs to mind), nor was (to use just one example) Shay's rebellion. So *"attacking the person or property of individuals"* was hardly alien to



*the body of thought known as 'Austrian economics,' a scientific [sic!] explanation of the workings of the free market ... which individualist anarchists could easily incorporate into their so political and social* ***Weltanshauung****. But to do this, they must throw out the worthless excess baggage of money-crankism and reconsider the nature and justification of the economic categories of interest, rent and profit."* Yet Rothbard's assertion is nonsense, given that the individualist anarchists were well aware of various justifications for exploitation expounded by the defenders of capitalism and rejected everyone. He himself noted that the *"individualist anarchists were exposed to critiques of their economic fallacies; but, unfortunately, the lesson, despite the weakness of Tucker's replies, did not take."* [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 14] As such, it seems like extremely wishful thinking that the likes of Tucker would have rushed to embrace an economic ideology whose basic aim has always been to refute the claims of socialism and defend capitalism from attacks on it.

Nor can it be suggested that the individualist anarchists were ignorant of the developments within bourgeois economics which the "Austrian" school was part of. Both Tucker and Yarros, for example, attacked marginal productivity theory as advocated by John B. Clark. [**Liberty**, no. 305] Tucker critiqued another anarchist for once being an *"Anarchistic socialist, standing squarely upon the principles of Liberty and Equity"* but then *"abandon[ing] Equity by repudiating the Socialistic theory of value and adopting one which differs but little, if any, from that held by the ordinary economist."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 80, p. 4] So the likes of Tucker were well aware of the so-called marginalist revolution and rejected it.

Somewhat ironically, a key founders of "Austrian" economics was quoted favourably in **Liberty** but only with regards to his devastating critique of existing theories of interest and profit. Hugo Bilgram asked a defender of interest whether he had *"ever read Volume 1 of Böhm-Bawerk's 'Capital*

assume that land can be monopolised by landlords (as the "anarcho"-capitalists do) and a radically different society is produced. One in which economic power means that the vast majority have to sell themselves to get access to the means of life and are exploited by those who own them in the process. A condition of "free markets" may exist, but as Tucker argued in 1911, it would not be anarchism. The ***deus ex machina*** of invisible hands takes a beating in the age of monopolies.

So we must stress that the social situation is important as it shows how apparently superficially similar arguments can have radically different aims and results depending on who suggests them and in what circumstances. Hence the importance of individualist anarchist support for equality. Without it, genuine freedom would not exist for the many and "anarchy" would simply be private statism enforcing rule by the rich.

## G.3.5 Would individualist anarchists have accepted "Austrian" economics?

One of the great myths perpetrated by "anarcho"-capitalists is the notion that "anarcho"-capitalism is simply individualist anarchism plus "Austrian" economics. Nothing could be further from the truth, as is clear once the individualist anarchist positions on capitalist property rights, exploitation and equality are understood. Combine this with their vision of a free society as well as the social and political environment they were part of and the ridiculous nature of such claims become obvious.

At its most basic, Individualist anarchism was rooted in socialist economic analysis as would be expected of a self-proclaimed socialist theory and movement. The "anarcho"-capitalists, in a roundabout way, recognise this with Rothbard dismissing the economic fallacies of individualist anarchism in favour of "Austrian" economics. *"There is,"* he stated, *"in*



American radicalism and so was definitely **not** imported by *"foreign"* anarchists.

Of course, anarchism in American became associated with terrorism (or *"propaganda by the deed"*) due to the Haymarket events of 1886 and Berkman's assassination attempt against Frick during the Homestead strike. Significantly, McElroy makes no mention of the substantial state and employer violence which provoked many anarchists to advocate violence in self-defence. For example, the great strike of 1877 saw the police opened fire on strikers on July 25th, killing five and injuring many more. *"For several days, meetings of workmen were broken up by the police, who again and again interfered with the rights of free speech and assembly."* The **Chicago Times** called for the use of hand grenades against strikers and state troops were called in, killing a dozen strikers. *"In two days of fighting, between 25 and 50 civilians had been killed, some 200 seriously injured, and between 300 and 400 arrested. Not a single policeman or soldier had lost his life."* This context explains why many workers, including those in reformist trade unions as well as anarchist groups like the IWPA, turned to armed self-defence ("violence"). The Haymarket meeting itself was organised in response to the police firing on strikers and killing at least two. The Haymarket bomb was thrown after the police tried to break-up a peaceful meeting by force: *"It is clear then that ... it was the police and not the anarchists who were the perpetrators of the violence at the Haymarket."* All but one of the deaths and most of the injuries were caused by the police firing indiscriminately in the panic after the explosion. [Paul Avrich, **The Maymarket Tragedy**, pp. 32–4, p. 189, p. 210, and pp. 208–9] As for Berkman's assassination attempt, this was provoked by the employer's Pinkerton police opening fire on strikers, killing and wounding many. [Emma Goldman, **Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 86]

In other words, it was **not** foreign anarchists or alien ideas which associated anarchism with violence but, rather, the re-

ality of American capitalism. As historian Eugenia C. Delamotte puts it, *"the view that anarchism stood for violence ... spread rapidly in the mainstream press from the 1870s"* because of *"the use of violence against strikers and demonstrators in the labour agitation that marked these decades — struggles for the eight-hour day, better wages, and the right to unionise, for example. Police, militia, and private security guards harassed, intimidated, bludgeoned, and shot workers routinely in conflicts that were just as routinely portrayed in the media as worker violence rather than state violence; labour activists were also subject to brutal attacks, threats of lynching, and many other forms of physical assault and intimidation ... the question of how to respond to such violence became a critical issue in the 1870s, with the upswelling of labour agitation and attempts to suppress it violently."* [**Voltairine de Cleyre and the Revolution of the Mind**, pp. 51–2]

Joseph Labadie, it should be noted, thought the *"Beastly police"* got what they deserved at Haymarket as they had attempted to break up a peaceful public meeting and such people should *"go at the peril of their lives. If it is necessary to use dynamite to protect the rights of free meeting, free press and free speech, then the sooner we learn its manufacture and use ... the better it will be for the toilers of the world."* The radical paper he was involved in, the **Labor Leaf**, had previously argued that *"should trouble come, the capitalists will use the regular army and militia to shoot down those who are not satisfied. It won't be so if the people are equally ready."* Even reformist unions were arming themselves to protect themselves, with many workers applauding their attempts to organise union militias. As worker put it, *"[w]ith union men well armed and accustomed to military tactics, we could keep Pinkerton's men at a distance ... Employers would think twice, too, before they attempted to use troops against us ... Every union ought to have its company of sharpshooters."* [quoted by Richard Jules Oestreicher, **Solidarity and Fragmentation**, p. 200 and p. 135]



> *himself the sympathy of all. And thus the social virtues of mankind would be greatly increased."* [**Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure**, pp. 46–7]

Because of the evil effects of inequality on freedom, both social and individualist anarchists desire to create an environment in which circumstances would not drive people to sell their liberty to others at a disadvantage. In other words, they desired an equalisation of market power by opposing interest, rent and profit and capitalist definitions of private property. Kline summarises this by saying *"the American [individualist] anarchists exposed the tension existing in liberal thought between private property and the ideal of equal access. The Individual Anarchists were, at least, aware that existing conditions were far from ideal, that the system itself working against the majority of individuals in their efforts to attain its promises. Lack of capital, the means to creation and accumulation of wealth, usually doomed a labourer to a life of exploitation. This the anarchists knew and they abhorred such a system."* [**The Individualist Anarchists: A critique of liberalism**, p. 102]

And this desire for bargaining equality is reflected in their economic ideas and by removing these underlying economic ideas of the individualist anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalism makes a mockery of any ideas they do appropriate. Essentially, the Individualist Anarchists agreed with Rousseau that in order to prevent extreme inequality of fortunes you deprive people of the means to accumulate in the first place and **not** take away wealth from the rich. An important point which "anarcho"-capitalism fails to understand or appreciate.

The Individualist Anarchists assumed that exploitation of labour would be non-existent in their system, so a general equality would prevail and so economic power would not undermine liberty. Remove this underlying assumption, assume that profits could be made and capital accumulated,

By removing the underlying commitment to abolish non-labour income, any "anarchist" capitalist society would have vast differences in wealth and so power. Instead of a government imposed monopolies in land, money and so on, the economic power flowing from private property and capital would ensure that the majority remained in (to use Spooner's words) *"the condition of servants"* (see sections F.2 and F.3.1 for more on this). The Individualist Anarchists were aware of this danger and so supported economic ideas that opposed usury (i.e. rent, profit and interest) and ensured the worker the full value of her labour. While not all of them called these ideas "socialist" it is clear that these ideas **are** socialist in nature and in aim (similarly, not all the Individualist Anarchists called themselves anarchists but their ideas are clearly anarchist in nature and in aim). This combination of the political and economic is essential as they mutually reinforce each other. Without the economic ideas, the political ideas would be meaningless as inequality would make a mockery of them. As Spooner argued, inequality lead to many social evils:

> *"Extremes of difference, in their pecuniary circumstances, divide society into castes; set up barriers to personal acquaintance; prevent or suppress sympathy; give to different individuals a widely different experience, and thus become the fertile source of alienation, contempt, envy, hatred, and wrong. But give to each man all the fruits of his own labour, and a comparative equality with others in his pecuniary condition, and caste is broken down; education is given more equally to all; and the object is promoted of placing each on a social level with all: of introducing each to the acquaintance of all; and of giving to each the greatest amount of that experience, which, being common to all, enables him to sympathise with all, and insures to*



While the violent rhetoric of the Chicago anarchists was used at their trial and is remembered (in part because enemies of anarchism take great glee in repeating it), the state and employer violence which provoked it has been forgotten or ignored. Unless this is mentioned, a seriously distorted picture of both communist-anarchism **and** capitalism are created. It is significant, of course, that while the **words** of the Martyrs are taken as evidence of anarchism's violent nature, the actual violence (up to and including murder) against strikers by state and private police apparently tells us nothing about the nature of the state or capitalist system (Ward Churchill presents an excellent summary such activities in his article *"From the Pinkertons to the PATRIOT Act: The Trajectory of Political Policing in the United States, 1870 to the Present"* [**CR: The New Centennial Review**, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1–72]).

So, as can be seen, McElroy distorts the context of anarchist violence by utterly ignoring the far worse capitalist violence which provoked it. Like more obvious statists, she demonises the resistance to the oppressed while ignoring that of the oppressor. Equally, it should also be noted Tucker rejected violent methods to end class oppression not out of principle, but rather strategy as there *"was no doubt in his mind as to the righteousness of resistance to oppression by recourse to violence, but his concern now was with its expedience ... he was absolutely convinced that the desired social revolution would be possible only through the utility of peaceful propaganda and passive resistance."* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 225] For Tucker *"as long as freedom of speech and of the press is not struck down, there should be no resort to physical force in the struggle against oppression."* [quoted by Morgan Edwards, *"Neither Bombs Nor Ballots: Liberty & the Strategy of Anarchism"*, pp. 65–91, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 67] Nor should we forget that Spooner's rhetoric could be as blood-thirsty as Johann Most's at times

and that American individualist anarchist Dyer Lum was an advocate of insurrection.

As far as class analysis does, which *"divided society into economic classes that were at war with each other"*, it can be seen that the "left" anarchists were simply acknowledging the reality of the situation — as did, it must be stressed, the individualist anarchists. As we noted in section G.1, the individualist anarchists were well aware that there was a class war going on, one in which the capitalist class used the state to ensure its position (the individualist anarchist *"knows very well that the present State is an historical development, that it is simply the tool of the property-owning class; he knows that primitive accumulation began through robbery bold and daring, and that the freebooters then organised the State in its present form for their own self-preservation."* [A.H. Simpson, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 92]). Thus workers had a right to a genuinely free market for *"[i]f the man with labour to sell has not this free market, then his liberty is violated and his property virtually taken from him. Now, such a market has constantly been denied ... to labourers of the entire civilised world. And the men who have denied it are ... Capitalists ... [who] have placed and kept on the statue-books all sorts of prohibitions and taxes designed to limit and effective in limiting the number of bidders for the labour of those who have labour to sell."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 454] For Joshua King Ingalls, *"[i]n any question as between the worker and the holder of privilege, [the state] is certain to throw itself into the scale with the latter, for it is itself the source of privilege, the creator of class rule."* [quoted by Bowman N. Hall, *"Joshua K. Ingalls, American Individualist: Land Reformer, Opponent of Henry George and Advocate of Land Leasing, Now an Established Mode,"* pp. 383–96, **American Journal of Economics and Sociology**, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 292] Ultimately, the state was *"a police force to regulate the people in the interests of the plutocracy."* [Ingalls, quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 152]



*and working on the soil."* [**Liberty**, no. 102, p. 4] He would have had little problem recognising "anarcho"-capitalism as being a supporter of *"that particular kind of freedom which the **bourgeoisie** favours, and which is championed by the **bourgeoisie's** loyal servants, [but] will never prove fascinating to the disinherited and oppressed."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 93, p. 4]

## G.3.4 Why is individualist anarchist support for equality important?

Another another key difference between genuine individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism is the former's support for equality and the latter's a lack of concern for it.

In stark contrast to anarchists of all schools, inequality is not seen to be a problem with "anarcho"-capitalists (see section F.3). However, it is a truism that not all "traders" are equally subject to the market (i.e., have the same market power). In many cases, a few have sufficient control of resources to influence or determine price and in such cases, all others must submit to those terms or not buy the commodity. When the commodity is labour power, even this option is lacking — workers have to accept a job in order to live. As we argued in section C.9, workers are usually at a disadvantage on the labour market when compared to capitalists, and this forces them to sell their liberty in return for making profits for others. These profits increase inequality in society as the property owners receive the surplus value their workers produce. This increases inequality further, consolidating market power and so weakens the bargaining position of workers further, ensuring that even the freest competition possible could not eliminate class power and society (something Tucker eventually recognised as occurring with the development of trusts within capitalism — see section G.1.1).

between "anarcho"-capitalism and individualist anarchism to be ignored is just nonsense. This can best be seen from the fate of any individualist anarchist defence association within "anarcho"-capitalism. As it would not subscribe to Rothbard's preferred system of property rights it would be in violation of the *"general libertarian law code"* drawn up and implemented by right-"libertarian" jurists, judges and lawyers. This would, by definition, make such an association *"outlaw"* when it defended tenants against attempts to extract rents from them or to evict them from the land or buildings they used but did not own. As it is a judge-run system, no jury would be able to judge the law as well as the crime, so isolating the capitalist and landlord class from popular opposition. Thus the ironic situation arises that the ***"Benjamin Tucker defence association"*** would be declared an outlaw organisation under "anarcho"-capitalism and driven out of business (i.e., destroyed) as it broke the land monopoly which the law monopoly enforces. Even more ironically, such an organisation would survive in an communist anarchist society (assuming it could find enough demand to make it worthwhile).

If the world had had the misfortune of having "anarcho"-capitalism imposed on it in the nineteenth century, individualist anarchists like Warren, Tucker, Labadie, Ingalls and Lum would have joined Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Parsons and Goldman in prison for practising *"occupancy and use"* in direct violation of the *"general libertarian law code."* That it was private police, private courts and private prisons which were enforcing such a regime would not have been considered that much of an improvement.

Unsurprisingly, Victor Yarros explicitly distanced himself from those *"want liberty to still further crush and oppress the people; liberty to enjoy their plunder without fear of the State's interfering with them . .. liberty to summarily deal with impudent tenants who refuse to pay tribute for the privilege of living*



Discussing Henry Frick, manager of the Homestead steelworkers who was shot by Berkman for using violence against striking workers, Tucker noted that Frick did not *"aspire, as I do, to live in a society of mutually helpful equals"* but rather it was *"his determination to live in luxury produced by the toil and suffering of men whose necks are under his heel. He has deliberately chosen to live on terms of hostility with the greater part of the human race."* While opposing Berkman's act, Tucker believed that he was *"a man with whom I have much in common, — much more at any rate than with such a man as Frick."* Berkman *"would like to live on terms of equality with his fellows, doing his share of work for not more than his share of pay."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 307–8] Clearly, Tucker was well aware of the class struggle and why, while not supporting such actions, violence occurred when fighting it.

As Victor Yarros summarised, for the individualist anarchists the *"State is the servant of the robbers, and it exists chiefly to prevent the expropriation of the robbers and the restoration of a free and fair field for legitimate competition and wholesome, effective voluntary cooperation."* [*"Philosophical Anarchism: Its Rise, Decline, and Eclipse"*, pp. 470–483, **The American Journal of Sociology**, vol. 41, no. 4, p. 475] For "anarcho"-capitalists, the state exploits all classes subject to it (perhaps the rich most, by means of taxation to fund welfare programmes and legal support for union rights and strikes).

So when McElroy states that, *"Individualist anarchism rejects the State because it is the institutionalisation of force against peaceful individuals"*, she is only partly correct. While it may be true for "anarcho"-capitalism, it fails to note that for the individualist anarchists the modern state was the institutionalisation of force by the capitalist class to deny the working class a free market. The individualist anarchists, in other words, like social anarchists also rejected the state because it imposed certain class monopolies and class legislation which ensured the exploitation of labour by capital — a significant omission

on McElroy's part. *"Can it be soberly pretended for a moment that the State ... is purely a defensive institution?"* asked Tucker. *"Surely not ... you will find that a good nine-tenths of existing legislation serves ... either to prescribe the individual's personal habits, or, worse still, to create and sustain commercial, industrial, financial, and proprietary monopolies which deprive labour of a large part of the reward that it would receive in a perfectly free market."* [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, pp. 25–6] In fact:

> *"As long as a portion of the products of labour are appropriated for the payment of fat salaries to useless officials and big dividends to idle stockholders, labour is entitled to consider itself defrauded, and all just men will sympathise with its protest."* [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 19, p. 1]

It goes without saying that almost all "anarcho"-capitalists follow Rothbard in being totally opposed to labour unions, strikes and other forms of working class protest. As such, the individualist anarchists, just as much as the "left" anarchists McElroy is so keen to disassociate them from, argued that *"[t]hose who made a profit from buying or selling were class criminals and their customers or employees were class victims. It did not matter if the exchanges were voluntary ones. Thus, left anarchists hated the free market as deeply as they hated the State."* [McElroy, **Op. Cit.**] Yet, as any individualist anarchist of the time would have told her, the "free market" did not exist because the capitalist class used the state to oppress the working class and reduce the options available to choose from so allowing the exploitation of labour to occur. Class analysis, in other words, was not limited to *"foreign"* anarchism, nor was the notion that making a profit was a form of exploitation (usury). As Tucker continually stressed: *"Liberty will abolish interest; it will abolish profit; it will abolish monopolistic rent; it will abolish taxation; it will abolish the exploitation of labour."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 157]



ends. If Tucker and Spooner did not think their system would result in their goals they would have either changed their goals or changed their method. As noted in section G.1.1, Tucker explicitly argued that concentrations of wealth under capitalism had reached such levels that his system of free competition would not end it. Clearly, then, outcomes were important to individualist anarchists.

The lack of commonality can also be seen from the right-"libertarian" response to Kevin Carson's excellent **Studies in Mutualist Political Economy**, an impressive modern restatement of the ideas of Tucker and other individualist anarchists. Leading "anarcho"-capitalist Walter Block dismissed *"Marxists like Carson"* and labelled him *"a supposed anarchist"* who on many issues *"is out there, way, way out there in some sort of Marxist never-never land."* [*"Kevin Carson as Dr. Jeryll and Mr. Hyde"*, pp. 35–46, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 40, p. 43 and p. 45] Another right-"libertarian", George Reisman, concurred stated that for the most part *"Carson is a Marxist"*, while arguing that *"the 'individualist' anarchist shows himself to be quite the collectivist, attributing to the average person qualities of independent thought and judgement that are found only in exceptional individuals."* Carson's *"views on the nature of ownership give full support to the conception of anarchy ... as being nothing but chaos."* Overall, *"Carson is essentially a Marxist and his book filled with ignorant Marxist diatribes against capitalism."* [*"Freedom is Slavery: Laissez-Faire capitalism is government intervention"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 47–86, p. 47, p. 55, p. 61 and p. 84] Needless to say, all the issues which Block and Geisman take umbridge at can be found in the works of individualist anarchists like Tucker (Carson's excellent dissection of these remarkably ignorant diatribes is well worth reading [*"Carson's Rejoinders"*, pp. 97–136, **Op. Cit.**]).

So the notion that a joint support for a market in "defence services" can allow the social and theoretical differences

As we argued in detail in section F.6, a market for "defence associations" within an unequal system based on extensive wage labour would simply be a system of private states, enforcing the authority of the property owner over those who use but do not own their property. Such an outcome can only be avoided within an egalitarian society where wage-labour is minimised, if not abolished totally, in favour of self-employment (whether individually or co-operatively). In other words, the kind of social context which the individualist anarchists explicitly or implicitly assumed and aimed for. By focusing selectively on a few individualist proposals taken out of their social context, Rothbard and other "anarcho"-capitalists have turned the libertarianism of the individualist anarchists into yet another ideological weapon in the hands of (private) statism and capitalism.

When faced with the actual visions of a good society proposed by such people as Tucker and Spooner, "anarcho"-capitalists tend to dismiss them as irrelevant. They argue that it does not matter what Tucker or Spooner thought would emerge from the application of their system, it is the fact they advocated the "free market", "private property" and "defence associations" that counts. In response anarchists note three things. Firstly, individualist anarchists generally held radically different concepts of what a "free market" and "private property" would be in their system and so the tasks of any "defence association" would be radically different. As such, anarchists argue that "anarcho"-capitalists simply look at the words people use rather than what they meant by them and the social context in which they are used. Secondly, it seems a strange form of support to rubbish the desired goals of people you claim to follow. If someone claimed to be a Marxist while, at the same time, arguing that Marx was wrong about socialism people would be justified in questioning their use of that label. Thirdly, and most importantly, no one advocates a means which would not result in their desired



It should also be noted that the "left" anarchist opposition to the individualist anarchist "free market" is due to an analysis which argues that it will not, in fact, result in the anarchist aim of ending exploitation nor will it maximise individual freedom (see section G.4). We do not "hate" the free market, rather we love individual liberty and seek the best kind of society to ensure free people. By concentrating on markets being free, "anarcho"-capitalism ensures that it is wilfully blind to the freedom-destroying similarities between capitalist property and the state (as we discussed in section F.1). An analysis which many individualist anarchists recognised, with the likes of Dyer Lum seeing that replacing the authority of the state with that of the boss was no great improvement in terms of freedom and so advocating co-operative workplaces to abolish wage slavery. Equally, in terms of land ownership the individualist anarchists opposed any voluntary exchanges which violated *"occupancy and use"* and so they, so, *"hated the free market as deeply as they hated the State."* Or, more correctly, they recognised that voluntary exchanges can result in concentrations of wealth and so power which made a mockery of individual freedom. In other words, that while the market may be free the individuals within it would not be.

McElroy partly admits this, saying that *"the two schools of anarchism had enough in common to shake hands when they first met. To some degree, they spoke a mutual language. For example, they both reviled the State and denounced capitalism. But, by the latter, individualist anarchists meant 'state-capitalism' the alliance of government and business."* Yet this *"alliance of government and business"* has been the only kind of capitalism that has ever existed. They were well aware that such an alliance made the capitalist system what it was, i.e., a system based on the exploitation of labour. William Bailie, in an article entitled *"The Rule of the Monopolists"* simply repeated the standard socialist analysis of the state when he talked about the *"gigantic monopolies, which control not only our industry, but all the ma-*

*chinery of the State, — legislative, judicial, executive, — together with school, college, press, and pulpit."* Thus the *"preponderance in the number of injunctions against striking, boycotting, and agitating, compared with the number against locking-out, blacklisting, and the employment of armed mercenaries."* The courts could not ensure justice because of the *"subserviency of the judiciary to the capitalist class … and the nature of the reward in store for the accommodating judge."* Government *"is the instrument by means of which the monopolist maintains his supremacy"* as the law-makers *"enact what he desires; the judiciary interprets his will; the executive is his submissive agent; the military arm exists in reality to defend **his** country, protect **his** property, and suppress **his** enemies, the workers on strike."* Ultimately, *"when the producer no longer obeys the State, his economic master will have lost his power."* [**Liberty**, no. 368, p. 4 and p. 5] Little wonder, then, that the individualist anarchists thought that the end of the state and the class monopolies it enforces would produce a radically different society rather than one essentially similar to the current one but without taxes. Their support for the "free market" implied the end of capitalism and its replacement with a new social system, one which would end the exploitation of labour.

She herself admits, in a roundabout way, that "anarcho"-capitalism is significantly different that individualist anarchism. *"The schism between the two forms of anarchism has deepened with time,"* she asserts. This was *"[l]argely due to the path breaking work of Murray Rothbard"* and so, unlike genuine individualist anarchism, the new *"individualist anarchism"* (i.e., "anarcho"-capitalism) *"is no longer inherently suspicious of profit-making practices, such as charging interest. Indeed, it embraces the free market as the voluntary vehicle of economic exchange"* (does this mean that the old version of it did not, in fact, embrace *"the free market"* after all?) This is because it *"draws increasingly upon the work of Austrian economists such as Mises and Hayek"* and so *"it draws increas-*



Spooner would have had no problem recognising that replacing government imposed laws with those made by judges, jurists and lawyers would hardly change the situation much. Nor would he have been too surprised at the results of a free market in laws in a society with substantial inequalities in income and wealth.

Individualist Anarchist Laurance Labadie, the son of Tucker associate Joseph Labadie, argued in response to Rothbard as follows:

> *"Mere common sense would suggest that any court would be influenced by experience; and any free-market court or judge would in the very nature of things have some precedents guiding them in their instructions to a jury. But since no case is exactly the same, a jury would have considerable say about the heinousness of the offence in each case, realising that circumstances alter cases, and prescribing penalty accordingly. This appeared to Spooner and Tucker to be a more flexible and equitable administration of justice possible or feasible, human beings being what they are …*
>
> *"But when Mr. Rothbard quibbles about the jurisprudential ideas of Spooner and Tucker, and at the same time upholds **presumably in his courts** the very economic evils which are at bottom the very reason for human contention and conflict, he would seem to be a man who chokes at a gnat while swallowing a camel."* [quoted by Mildred J. Loomis and Mark A. Sullivan, *"Laurance Labadie: Keeper Of The Flame"*, pp. 116–30, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 124]

not be private states, enforcing the power of capitalists and landlords upon wage workers. Instead, they would be like insurance companies, protecting possessions against theft (as opposed to protecting capitalist theft from the dispossessed as would be the case in "anarcho"-capitalism — an important difference lost on the private staters). Where social anarchists disagree with individualist anarchists is on whether a market system will actually produce such equality, particularly one without workers' self-management replacing the authority inherent in the capitalist-labourer social relationship. As we discuss in section G.4, without the equality and the egalitarian relationships of co-operative and artisan production there would be a tendency for capitalism and private statism to erode anarchy.

In addition, the emphasis given by Tucker and Lysander Spooner to the place of juries in a free society is equally important for understanding how their ideas about defence associations fit into a non-capitalist scheme. For by emphasising the importance of trial by jury, they knock an important leg from under the private statism associated with "anarcho"-capitalism. Unlike a wealthy judge, a jury made up mainly of fellow workers would be more inclined to give verdicts in favour of workers struggling against bosses or of peasants being forced off their land by immoral, but legal, means. As Lysander Spooner argued in 1852, *"[i]f a jury have not the right to judge between the government and those who disobey its laws, and resist its oppressions, the government is absolute, and the people, legally speaking, are slaves. Like many other slaves they may have sufficient courage and strength to keep their masters somewhat in check; but they are nevertheless known to the law only as slaves."* [**Trial by Jury**] It is hardly surprising that Rothbard rejects this in favour of a legal system determined and interpreted by lawyers, judges and jurists. Indeed, as we noted in section F.6.1, Rothbard explicitly rejected the idea that juries should be able to judge the law as well as the facts of a case under his system.



*ingly farther away from left anarchism"* and, she fails to note, the likes of Warren and Tucker. As such, it would be churlish to note that "Austrian" economics was even more of a *"foreign import"* much at odds with American anarchist traditions as communist anarchism, but we will! After all, Rothbard's support of usury (interest, rent and profit) would be unlikely to find much support from someone who looked forward to the development of *"an attitude of hostility to usury, in any form, which will ultimately cause any person who charges more than cost for any product to be regarded very much as we now regard a pickpocket."* [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 155] Nor, as noted above, would Rothbard's support for an *"Archist"* (capitalist) land ownership system have won him anything but dismissal nor would his judge, jurist and lawyer driven political system have been seen as anything other than rule by the few rather than rule by none.

Ultimately, it is a case of influences and the kind of socio-political analysis and aims it inspires. Unsurprisingly, the main influences in individualist anarchism came from social movements and protests. Thus poverty-stricken farmers and labour unions seeking monetary and land reform to ease their position and subservience to capital all plainly played their part in shaping the theory, as did the Single-Tax ideas of Henry George and the radical critiques of capitalism provided by Proudhon and Marx. In contrast, "anarcho"-capitalism's major (indeed, predominant) influence is "Austrian" economists, an ideology developed (in part) to provide intellectual support against such movements and their proposals for reform. As we will discuss in the next section, this explains the quite fundamental differences between the two systems for all the attempts of "anarcho"-capitalists to appropriate the legacy of the likes of Tucker.

## G.3.2 What are the differences between "anarcho"-capitalism and individualist anarchism?

The key differences between individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism derive from the fact the former were socialists while the latter embrace capitalism with unqualified enthusiasm. Unsurprisingly, this leans to radically different analyses, conclusions and strategies. It also expresses itself in the vision of the free society expected from their respective systems. Such differences, we stress, all ultimately flow from fact that the individualist anarchists were/are socialists while the likes of Rothbard are wholeheartedly supporters of capitalism.

As scholar Frank H. Brooks notes, *"the individualist anarchists hoped to achieve socialism by removing the obstacles to individual liberty in the economic realm."* This involved making equality of opportunity a reality rather than mere rhetoric by ending capitalist property rights in land and ensuring access to credit to set-up in business for themselves. So while supporting a market economy *"they were also advocates of socialism and critics of industrial capitalism, positions that make them less useful as ideological tools of a resurgent capitalism."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 111] Perhaps unsurprisingly, most right-"libertarians" get round this problem by hiding or downplaying this awkward fact. Yet it remains essential for understanding both individualist anarchism and why "anarcho"-capitalism is not a form of anarchism.

Unlike both individualist and social anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists support capitalism (a "pure" free market type, which has never existed although it has been approximated occasionally as in 19th century America). This means that they totally reject the ideas of anarchists with regards to property and economic analysis. For example, like all supporters of capitalists they consider rent, profit and interest as valid incomes. In contrast to that system. They did not consider the state as some alien body grafted onto capitalism which could be removed and replaced with "defence associations" leaving the rest of society more or less the same. Rather, they saw the state as being an essential aspect of capitalism, defending key class monopolies and restricting freedom for the working class. By abolishing the state, they automatically abolished these class monopolies and so capitalism. In other words, they had political **and** economic goals and ignoring the second cannot help but produce **different** results. As Voltairine de Cleyre put it in her individualist days, Anarchism *"means not only the denial of authority, not only a new economy, but a revision of the principles of morality. It means the development of the individual as well as the assertion of the individual."* [**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 9]

Right-"libertarians" reject all of this, the social context of Tucker's ideas on "defence associations." They do not aim for a *"new economy"*, but simply the existing one without a public state. They have no critique of capitalist property rights nor any understanding of how such rights can produce economic power and limit individual freedom. In fact, they attack what they consider the "bad economics" of the individualists without realising it is **precisely** these "bad" (i.e. anti-capitalist) economics which will minimise, if not totally eliminate, any potential threat to freedom associated with "defence associations." Without the accumulations of wealth inevitable when workers' do not receive the full product of their labour, it is unlikely that a "defence association" would act like the private police forces American capitalists utilised to break unions and strikes both in Tucker's time and now. Unless this social context exists, any defence associations will soon become mini-states, serving to enrich the elite few by protecting the usury they gain from, and their power and control (i.e. government) over, those who toil. In other words, the "defence associations" of Tucker and Spooner would

It comes as no surprise to discover that Tucker translated Proudhon's **What is Property?** and subscribed to its conclusion that *"property is robbery"*!

This opposition to the *"land monopoly"* was, like all the various economic proposals made by the individualist anarchists, designed to eliminate the vast differences in wealth accruing from the *"usury"* of industrial capitalists, bankers, and landlords. For example, Josiah Warren *"proposed like Robert Owen an exchange of notes based on labour time ... He wanted to establish an 'equitable commerce' in which all goods are exchanged for their cost of production ... In this way profit and interest would be eradicated and a highly egalitarian order would emerge."* [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 385] Given that the Warrenites considered that both workers and managers would receive equal payment for equal hours worked (the manager may, in fact earn less if it were concluded that their work was less unpleasant than that done on the shopfloor), the end of a parasitic class of wealthy capitalists was inevitable.

In the case of Benjamin Tucker, he was a firm adherent of socialist economic analysis, believing that a free market and interest-free credit would reduce prices to the cost of production and increase demand for labour to the point where workers would receive the full value of their labour. In addition, recognising that gold was a rare commodity, he rejected a gold-backed money supply in favour of a land-backed one, as land with *"permanent improvements on"* it is *"an excellent basis for currency."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 198] Given that much of the population at the time worked on their own land, such a money system would have ensured easy credit secured by land. Mutualism replaced the gold standard (which, by its very nature would produce an oligarchy of banks) with money backed by other, more available, commodities.

Such a system, the individualist anarchists argued, would be unlikely to reproduce the massive inequalities of wealth associated with capitalism and have a dynamic utterly different



trast, all Anarchists consider these as exploitation and agree with the Tucker when he argued that *"[w]hoever contributes to production is alone entitled. **What** has no rights that **who** is bound to respect. **What** is a thing. **Who** is a person. Things have no claims; they exist only to be claimed. The possession of a right cannot be predicted of dead material, but only a living person."* [quoted by Wm. Gary Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 73]

This, we must note, is the fundamental critique of the capitalist theory that capital is productive. In and of themselves, fixed costs do not create value. Rather value is creation depends on how investments are developed and used once in place. Because of this the Individualist Anarchists, like other anarchists, considered non-labour derived income as usury, unlike "anarcho"-capitalists. Similarly, anarchists reject the notion of capitalist property rights in favour of possession (including the full fruits of one's labour). For example, anarchists reject private ownership of land in favour of a "occupancy and use" regime. In this we follow Proudhon's **What is Property?** and argue that *"property is theft"* as well as *"despotism"*. Rothbard, as noted in the section F.1, rejected this perspective.

As these ideas are an **essential** part of anarchist politics, they cannot be removed without seriously damaging the rest of the theory. This can be seen from Tucker's comments that *"**Liberty** insists... [on] the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no more exploitation of man by man."* [quoted by Eunice Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, p. 140] Tucker indicates here that anarchism has specific economic **and** political ideas, that it opposes capitalism along with the state. Therefore anarchism was never purely a "political" concept, but always combined an opposition to oppression with an opposition to exploitation. The social anarchists made exactly the same point. Which means that when Tucker argued that *"**Liberty** insists on Socialism... — true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalence on earth of*

*Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity"* he knew exactly what he was saying and meant it wholeheartedly. [**Instead of a Book**, p. 363] So because "anarcho"-capitalists embrace capitalism and reject socialism, they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition.

There are, of course, overlaps between individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism, just as there are overlaps between it and Marxism (and social anarchism, of course). However, just as a similar analysis of capitalism does not make individualist anarchists Marxists, so apparent similarities between individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism does not make the former a forerunner of the latter. For example, both schools support the idea of "free markets." Yet the question of markets is fundamentally second to the issue of property rights for what is exchanged on the market is dependent on what is considered legitimate property. In this, as Rothbard noted, individualist anarchists and "anarcho"-capitalists differ and different property rights produce different market structures and dynamics. This means that capitalism is not the only economy with markets and so support for markets cannot be equated with support for capitalism. Equally, opposition to markets is **not** the defining characteristic of socialism. As such, it **is** possible to be a market socialist (and many socialist are) as "markets" and "property" do not equate to capitalism as we proved in sections G.1.1 and G.1.2 respectively.

One apparent area of overlap between individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism is the issue of wage labour. As we noted in section G.1.3, unlike social anarchists, some individualist anarchists were not consistently against it. However, this similarity is more apparent than real as the individualist anarchists were opposed to exploitation and argued (unlike "anarcho"-capitalism) that in their system workers bargaining powers would be raised to such a level that their wages would equal the full product of their labour and so it would not be



> *the existence of other men, to withhold that material from other men's use; and any contract based upon or involving such withholding is lacking in sanctity or legitimacy as a contract to deliver stolen goods."* [**Liberty**, No. 321, p. 4]

Refusal to pay rent on land is a key aspect of Tucker's thought, and it is significant that he explicitly rejects the idea that a defence association can be used to collect it. In addition, as a means towards anarchy, Tucker suggests *"inducing the people to steadily refuse the payment of rent and taxes."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 299] It is hard to imagine that a landowner influenced by Murray Rothbard or David Friedman would support such an arrangement or a "defence association" that supported it. As such, the individualist anarchist system would impose restrictions on the market from an "anarcho"-capitalist perspective. Equally, from an individualist anarchist perspective, "anarcho"-capitalism would be enforcing a key class monopoly by force and so would simply be another kind of state. As Tucker put it in reply to the proto-right-"libertarian" Auberon Herbert:

> *"It is true that Anarchists ... do, in a sense, propose to get rid of ground-rent by force. That is to say, if landlords should try to evict occupants, the Anarchists advice the occupants to combine to maintain their ground by force ... But it is also true that the Individualists ... propose to get rid of theft by force ... The Anarchists justify the use of machinery (local juries, etc.) to adjust the property question involved in rent just as the Individualists justify similar machinery to adjust the property question involved in theft."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 172, p. 7]

proposed, using those ideas in an attempt to turn the individualists into defenders of capitalism.

As indicated in section G.1.4, the social context in question was one in which an economy of artisans and peasant farmers was being replaced by a state-backed capitalism. This context is crucial for understanding the idea of the "defence associations" that Tucker suggested. For what he proposed was clearly **not** the defence of capitalist property relations. This can be seen, for example, in his comments on land use. Thus:

> *"'The land for the people' ... means the protection by ... voluntary associations for the maintenance of justice ... of all people who desire to cultivate land in possession of whatever land they personally cultivate ... and the positive refusal of the protecting power to lend its aid to the collection of any rent, whatsoever."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 299]

There is no mention here of protecting **capitalist** farming, i.e. employing wage labour; rather, there is explicit mention that only land being used for **personal** cultivation — thus **without** employing wage labour — would be defended. In other words, the defence association would defend *"occupancy and use"* (which is a clear break with capitalist property rights) and not the domination of the landlord over society or those who use the land the landlord claims to own. This means that certain contracts were not considered valid within individualist anarchism even if they were voluntarily agreed to by the parties involved and so would not be enforceable by the "defence associations." As Tucker put it:

> *"A man cannot be allowed, merely by putting labour, to the limit of his capacity and beyond the limit of his personal use, into material of which there is a limited supply and the use of which is essential to*



an exploitative arrangement. Needless to say, social anarchists think this is unlikely to be the case and, as we discuss in section G.4.1, individualist anarchist support for wage labour is in contradiction to many of the stated basic principles of the individualist anarchists themselves. In particular, wage labour violates "occupancy and use" as well as having more than a passing similarity to the state.

However, these problems can be solved by consistently applying the principles of individualist anarchism, unlike "anarcho"-capitalism, and that is why it is a real (if inconsistent) school of anarchism. Moreover, the social context these ideas were developed in and would have been applied ensure that these contradictions would have been minimised. If they had been applied, a genuine anarchist society of self-employed workers would, in all likelihood, have been created (at least at first, whether the market would increase inequalities is a moot point between anarchists). Thus we find Tucker criticising Henry George by noting that he was *"enough of an economist to be very well aware that, whether it has land or not, labour which can get no capital — that is, which is oppressed by capital — cannot, without accepting the alternative of starvation, refuse to reproduce capital for the capitalists."* Abolition of the money monopoly will increase wages, so allowing workers to *"steadily lay up money, with which he can buy tools to compete with his employer or to till his bit of land with comfort and advantage. In short, he will be an independent man, receiving what he produces or an equivalent thereof. How to make this the lot of all men is the labour question. Free land will not solve it. Free money, supplemented by free land, will."* [**Liberty**, no. 99 , p. 4 and p. 5] Sadly, Rothbard failed to reach George's level of understanding (at least as regards his beloved capitalism).

Which brings us another source of disagreement, namely on the effects of state intervention and what to do about it. As noted, during the rise of capitalism the bourgeoisie were not shy in urging state intervention against the masses. Unsurpris-

ingly, working class people generally took an anti-state position during this period. The individualist anarchists were part of that tradition, opposing what Marx termed *"primitive accumulation"* in favour of the pre-capitalist forms of property and society it was destroying.

However, when capitalism found its feet and could do without such obvious intervention, the possibility of an "anti-state" capitalism could arise. Such a possibility became a definite once the state started to intervene in ways which, while benefiting the system as a whole, came into conflict with the property and power of individual members of the capitalist and landlord class. Thus social legislation which attempted to restrict the negative effects of unbridled exploitation and oppression on workers and the environment were having on the economy were the source of much outrage in certain bourgeois circles:

> *"Quite independently of these tendencies [of individualist anarchism] . .. the anti-state bourgeoisie (which is also anti-statist, being hostile to any social intervention on the part of the State to protect the victims of exploitation — in the matter of working hours, hygienic working conditions and so on), and the greed of unlimited exploitation, had stirred up in England a certain agitation in favour of pseudo-individualism, an unrestrained exploitation. To this end, they enlisted the services of a mercenary pseudo-literature ... which played with doctrinaire and fanatical ideas in order to project a species of 'individualism' that was absolutely sterile, and a species of 'non-interventionism' that would let a man die of hunger rather than offend his dignity."* [Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 39]

This perspective can be seen when Tucker denounced Herbert Spencer as a champion of the capitalistic class for his vocal



> *of voluntary taxation and protection."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 212, p. 2]

While most of the rest of the theory is ignored or dismissed as being the product of "bad" economics, this position is considered the key link between the two schools of thought. However, it is not enough to say that both the individualist anarchists and "anarcho"-capitalists support a market in protection, you need to look at what forms of property are being defended and the kind of society within which it is done. Change the social context, change the kinds of property which are being defended and you change the nature of the society in question. In other words, defending capitalist property rights within an unequal society is radically different in terms of individual liberty than defending socialistic property rights within an equal society — just as a market economy based on artisan, peasant and co-operative production is fundamentally different to one based on huge corporations and the bulk of the population being wage slaves. Only the most superficial analysis would suggest that they are the same and label both as being "capitalist" in nature.

It should, therefore, not be forgotten that the individualist anarchists advocated a system rooted in individual possession of land and tools plus the free exchange of the products of labour between self-employed people or wage workers who receive the full equivalent of their product. This means that they supported the idea of a market in "defence associations" to ensure that the fruits of an individual's labour would not be stolen by others. Again, the social context of individualist anarchism — namely, an egalitarian economy without exploitation of labour (see section G.3.4) — is crucial for understanding these proposals. However, as in their treatment of Tucker's support for contract theory, "anarcho"-capitalists remove the individualist anarchists' ideas about free-market defence associations and courts from the social context in which they were

of workplace organisation (the latter depends on the former, of course, for without the necessary social preconditions a preference for self-employment will remain precisely that). As Individualist Anarchist Shawn Wilbur put, there is a difference between those "anarcho"-capitalists who are ideologues for capitalism first and foremost and the minority who are closer to traditional anarchist aspirations. If the latter manage to jettison the baggage they have inherited from "Austrian" economics as well as the likes of Murray Rothbard and realise that they are, in fact, free market socialists and **not** in favour of capitalism then few anarchists would hold their past against them any more than they would a state socialist or left-liberal who realised the error of their ways. Until they do, though, few anarchists would accept them as anarchists.

## G.3.3 What about "anarcho"-capitalists' support of "defence associations"?

It would be fair to say that "anarcho"-capitalist interest in individualist anarchism rests on their argument that, to quote Tucker, *"defense is a service, like any other service"*, and that such a service could and should be provided by private agencies paid for like any other commodity on the market. [**Liberty**, no. 104, p. 4] Therefore:

> *"Anarchism means no government, but it does not mean no laws and no coercion. This may seem paradoxical, but the paradox vanishes when the Anarchist definition of government is kept in view. Anarchists oppose government, not because they disbelieve in punishment of crime and resistance to aggression, but because they disbelieve in compulsory protection. Protection and taxation without consent is itself invasion; hence Anarchism favours a system*



attacks on social legislation which claimed to benefit working class people but staying strangely silent on the laws passed to benefit (usually indirectly) capital and the rich. "Anarcho"-capitalism is part of that tradition, the tradition associated with a capitalism which no longer needs obvious state intervention as enough wealth as been accumulated to keep workers under control by means of market power.

In other words, there is substantial differences between the victims of a thief trying to stop being robbed and be left alone to enjoy their property and the successful thief doing the same! Individualist Anarchist's were aware of this. For example, Victor Yarros stressed this key difference between individualist anarchism and the proto-"libertarian" capitalists of "voluntaryism":

> *"[Auberon Herbert] believes in allowing people to retain all their possessions, no matter how unjustly and basely acquired, while getting them, so to speak, to swear off stealing and usurping and to promise to behave well in the future. We, on the other hand, while insisting on the principle of private property, in wealth honestly obtained under the reign of liberty, do not think it either unjust or unwise to dispossess the landlords who have monopolised natural wealth by force and fraud. We hold that the poor and disinherited toilers would be justified in expropriating, not alone the landlords, who notoriously have no equitable titles to their lands, but **all** the financial lords and rulers, all the millionaires and very wealthy individuals… . Almost all possessors of great wealth enjoy neither what they nor their ancestors rightfully acquired (and if Mr. Herbert wishes to challenge the correctness of this statement, we are ready to go with him into a full discussion of the subject)… .*

> *"If he holds that the landlords are justly entitled to their lands, let him make a defence of the landlords or an attack on our unjust proposal."* [quoted by Carl Watner, *"The English Individualists As They Appear In Liberty,"* pp. 191–211, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), pp. 199–200]

It could be argued, in reply, that some "anarcho"-capitalists do argue that stolen property should be returned to its rightful owners and, as a result, do sometimes argue for land reform (namely, the seizing of land by peasants from their feudal landlords). However, this position is, at best, a pale shadow of the individualist anarchist position or, at worse, simply rhetoric. As leading "anarcho"-capitalist Walter Block pointed out:

> *"While this aspect of libertarian theory sounds very radical, in practice it is less so. This is because the claimant always needs proof. Possession is nine tenths of the law, and to overcome the presumption that property is now in the hands of its rightful owners required that an evidentiary burden by overcome. The further back in history was the initial act of aggression (not only because written evidence is less likely to be available), the less likely it is that there can be proof of it."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 54–5]

Somewhat ironically, Block appears to support land reform in Third World countries in spite of the fact that the native peoples have no evidence to show that they are the rightful owners of the land they work. Nor does he bother himself to wonder about the wider social impact of such theft, namely in the capital that was funded using it. If the land was stolen, then so was its products and so was any capital bought with the prof-



*mutual benefit of its members, using the boycott and other passive weapons in its fight against capitalism and the State."* This was *"very near the Anarchist idea."* Some individualists were more critical of unions than others. One, A.H. Simpson, argued that the trade unions *"are as despotic and arbitrary as any other organisation, and no more Anarchistic than the Pullman or Carnegie companies."* In other words, the unions were to be opposed because they were like capitalist corporations! [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 285 and p. 288] For Tucker, as we note in section G.5, unions were *"a movement for self-government on the part of the people"* and it was *"in supplanting"* the state *"by an intelligent and self-governing socialism that the trades unions develop their chief significance."* [**Liberty**, no. 22, p. 3]

So the claims that "anarcho"-capitalism is a new form of individualist anarchism can only be done on the basis of completely ignoring the actual history of capitalism as well as ignoring the history, social context, arguments, aims and spirit of individualist anarchism. This is only convincing if the actual ideas and aims of individualist anarchism are unknown or ignored and focus is placed on certain words used (like "markets" and "property") rather than the specific meanings provided to them by its supporters. Sadly, this extremely superficial analysis is all too common — particularly in academic circles and, of course, in right-"libertarian" ones.

Finally, it may be objected that "anarcho"-capitalism is a diverse, if small, collection of individuals and some of them are closer to individualist anarchism than others. Which is, of course, true (just as some Marxists are closer to social anarchism than others). A few of them do reject the notion than hundreds of years of state-capitalist intervention has had little impact on the evolution of the economy and argue that a genuinely free economy would see the end of the current form of property rights and non-labour income as well as the self-employment and co-operatives becoming the dominant form

its made from such goods. But, as he says, this aspect of right-"libertarian" ideology *"sounds very radical"* but *"in practice it is less so."* Apparently, theft **is** property! Not to mention that nine tenths of property is currently possessed (i.e., used) not by its "rightful owners" but rather those who by economic necessity have to work for them. This is a situation the law was designed to protect, including (apparently) a so-called "libertarian" one.

This wider impact is key. As we indicated in section F.8, state coercion (particularly in the form of the land monopoly) was essential in the development of capitalism. By restricting access to land, working class people had little option but to seek work from landlords and capitalists. Thus the stolen land ensured that workers were exploited by the landlord and the capitalist and so the exploitation of the land monopoly was spread throughout the economy, with the resulting exploited labour being used to ensure that capital accumulated. For Rothbard, unlike the individualist anarchists, the land monopoly had limited impact and can be considered separately from the rise of capitalism:

> *"the emergence of wage-labour was an enormous boon for many thousands of poor workers and saved them from starvation. If there is no wage labour, as there was not in most production before the Industrial Revolution, then each worker must have enough money to purchase his own capital and tools. One of the great things about the emergence of the factory system and wage labour is that poor workers did not have to purchase their own capital equipment; this could be left to the capitalists."* [**Konkin on Libertarian Strategy**]

Except, of course, **before** the industrial revolution almost all workers did, in fact, have their own capital and tools. The rise of capitalism was based on what the exclusion of working



Rothbard's position indicates an interesting paradox. Rothbard wholeheartedly supported *"political action"* as the only means of achieving the end of the state. Marxists (when not excommunicating anarchism from the socialist movement) often argue that they agree with the anarchists on the ends (abolition of the state) but only differed on the means (i.e., political action over direct action). Obviously, no one calls Marx an anarchist and this is precisely because he aimed to use political action to achieve the abolition of the state. Yet, for some reason, Rothbard's **identical** position on tactics makes some call him an anarchist. So, given Rothbard's argument that the state must be seized first by a political party by means of *"political action"* in order to achieve his end, the question must be raised why he is considered an anarchist at all. Marx and Engels, like Lenin, all made identical arguments against anarchism, namely that political action was essential so that the Socialist Party could seize state power and implement the necessary changes to ensure that the state withered away. No one has ever considered them anarchists in spite of the common aim of ending the state yet many consider Rothbard to be an anarchist despite advocating the same methods as the Marxists. As we noted in section F.8, a better term for "anarcho"-capitalism could be "Marxist-capitalism" and Rothbard's argument for "political action" confirms that suggestion.

Needless to say, other strategies favoured by many individualists anarchists were rejected by "anarcho"-capitalists. Unlike Tucker, Lum and others, Rothbard was totally opposed to trade unions and strikes, viewing unions as coercive institutions which could not survive under genuine capitalism (given the powers of property owners and the inequalities of such a society, he may well have been right in thinking workers would be unable to successfully defend their basic freedoms against their masters but that is another issue). The individualist anarchists were far more supportive. Henry Cohen, for example, considered the union as a *"voluntary association formed for the*

people from the land by means of the land monopoly. Farmers were barred, by the state, from utilising the land of the aristocracy while their access to the commons was stripped from them by the imposition of capitalist property rights by the state. Thus Rothbard is right, in a sense. The emergence of wage-labour was based on the fact that workers had to purchase access to the land from those who monopolised it by means of state action — which was precisely what the individualist anarchists opposed. Wage labour, after all, first developed **on the land** not with the rise of the factory system. Even Rothbard, we hope, would not have been so crass as to say that landlordism was an enormous boon for those poor workers as it saved them from starvation for, after all, one of the great things about landlordism is that poor workers did not have to purchase their own land; that could be left to the landlords.

The landless workers, therefore, had little option but to seek work from those who monopolised the land. Over time, increasing numbers found work in industry where employers happily took advantage of the effects of the land monopoly to extract as much work for as little pay as possible. The profits of both landlord and capitalist exploitation were then used to accumulate capital, reducing the bargaining power of the landless workers even more as it became increasingly difficult to set-up in business due to natural barriers to competition. It should also be stressed that once forced onto the labour market, the proletariat found itself subjected to numerous state laws which prevented their free association (for example, the banning of unions and strikes as conspiracies) as well as their ability to purchase their own capital and tools. Needless to say, the individualist anarchists recognised this and considered the ability of workers to be able to purchase their own capital and tools as an essential reform and, consequently, fought against the money monopoly. They reasoned, quite rightly, that this was a system of class privilege designed to keep workers in a position of dependency on the landlords and capitalists, which (in



turn) allowed exploitation to occur. This was also the position of many workers, who rather than consider capitalism a boon, organised to defend their freedom and to resist exploitation — and the state complied with the wishes of the capitalists and broke that resistance.

Significantly, Tucker and other individualist anarchists saw state intervention has a result of capital manipulating legislation to gain an advantage on the so-called free market which allowed them to exploit labour and, as such, it benefited the **whole** capitalist class (*"If, then, the capitalist, by abolishing the free market, compels other men to procure their tools and advantages of him on less favourable terms than they could get before, while it may be better for them to come to his terms than to go without the capital, does he not deduct from their earnings?"* [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 109, p. 4]). Rothbard, at best, acknowledges that **some** sections of big business benefit from the current system and so fails to have a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of capitalism as a **system** (rather as an ideology). This lack of understanding of capitalism as a historic and dynamic system rooted in class rule and economic power is important in evaluating "anarcho"-capitalist claims to anarchism.

Then there is the issue of strategy, with Rothbard insisting on *"political action,"* namely voting for the Libertarian Party (or least non-"libertarian" party). *"I see no other conceivable strategy for the achievement of liberty than political action,"* he stated. Like Marxists, voting was seen as the means of achieving the abolition of the state, as *"a militant and abolitionist [Libertarian Party] in control of Congress could wipe out all the ['non-'libertarian'] laws overnight . .. No other strategy for liberty can work."* [**Op. Cit.**] The individualist anarchists, like other anarchists, rejected such arguments as incompatible with genuine libertarian principles. As Tucker put it, voting could not be libertarian as it would make the voter *"an accomplice in aggression."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 305]

of capitalism and so statism — a highly unlikely intention of individualists like Tucker, who hated both.

Therefore, given the assumptions of individualist anarchism in both their economic and political aspects, it is forced along the path of co-operative, not wage, labour. In other words, individualist anarchism is a form of socialism as workers receive the full product of their labour (i.e. there is no non-labour income) and this, in turn, logically implies a society in which self-managed firms compete against each other on the free market, with workers selling the product of their labour and not the labour itself. As this unites workers with the means of production they use, it is **not** capitalism and instead a form of socialism based upon worker ownership and control of the places they work.

For individualist anarchists not to support co-operatives results in a contradiction, namely that the individualist anarchism which aims to secure the worker's *"natural wage"* cannot in fact do so, while dividing society into a class of order givers and order takers which violates individual self-government. It is this contradiction within Tucker's thought which the self-styled "anarcho"-capitalists take advantage of in order to maintain that individualist anarchism in fact implies capitalism (and so private-statism), not workers' control. In order to reach this implausible conclusion, a few individualist anarchist ideas are ripped from their social context and applied in a way that makes a mockery of them.

Given this analysis, it becomes clear why few social anarchists exclude individualist anarchism from the anarchist tradition while almost all do so for "anarcho"-capitalism. The reason is simple and lies in the analysis that any individualist anarchism which supports wage labour is **inconsistent** anarchism. It **can** easily be made **consistent** anarchism by applying its own principles consistently. In contrast, "anarcho"-capitalism rejects so many of the basic, underlying, principles of anarchism and has consistently followed the logical conclusions of



> *"people who are now deterred from going into business by the ruinously high rates which they must pay for capital with which to start and carry on business will find their difficulties removed ... This facility of acquiring capital will give an unheard of impetus to business, and consequently create an unprecedented demand for labour — a demand which will always be in excess of the supply, directly to the contrary of the present condition of the labour market ... Labour will then be in a position to dictate its wages."* [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 84–5]

And, it must also be stressed, this was a key reason why the capitalist class turned against Keynesian full employment policies in the 1970s (see section C.8.3). Lower interest rates and demand management by the state lead precisely to the outcome predicted by the likes of Tucker, namely an increase in working class power in the labour market as a result of a lowering of unemployment to unprecedented levels. This, however, lead to rising prices as capitalists tried to maintain their profits by passing on wage increases rather than take the cut in profits indicated by economic forces. This could also occur if mutual banking took off and, in this sense, mutual banking could produce inflation. However, such an argument against the scheme requires the neo-classical and "Austrian" economist to acknowledge that capitalism cannot produce full employment and that the labour market must always be skewed in favour of the capitalist to keep it working, to maintain the inequality of bargaining power between worker and capitalist. In other words, that capitalism needs unemployment to exist and so cannot produce an efficient and humane allocation of resources.

By supplying working people with money which is used to create productive co-operatives and demand for their products, mutual banks increase the amount of goods and services in cir-

culation as it increases the money supply. Combined with the elimination of profit, rent and interest, inflationary pressures are effectively undercut (it makes much more sense to talk of a interest/rent/profits-prices spiral rather than a wages-prices spiral when discussing inflation). Only in the context of the ridiculous examples presented by neo-classical and "Austrian" economics does increasing the money supply result in rising inflation. Indeed, the "sound economic" view, in which if the various money-substitutes are in a fixed and constant proportion to "real money" (i.e. gold or silver) then inflation would not exist, ignores the history of money and the nature of the banking system. It overlooks the fact that the emergence of bank notes, fractional reserve banking and credit was a spontaneous process, not planned or imposed by the state, but rather came from the profit needs of capitalist banks which, in turn, reflected the real needs of the economy (*"The truth is that, as the exchanges of the world increased, and the time came when there was not enough gold and silver to effect these exchanges, so … people had to resort to paper promises."* [John Beverley Robinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 139]). What **was** imposed by the state, however, was the imposition of legal tender, the use of specie and a money monopoly (*"attempt after attempt has been made to introduce credit money outside of government and national bank channels, and the promptness of the suppression has always been proportional to the success of the attempt."* [Tucker, **Liberty**, no. 193, p. 3]).

Given that the money supply is endogenous in nature, any attempt to control the money supply will fail. Rather than control the money supply, which would be impossible, the state would have to use interest rates. To reduce the demand for money, interest rates would be raised higher and higher, causing a deep recession as business cannot maintain their debt payments and go bankrupt. This would cause unemployment to rise, weakening workers' bargaining power and skewing the economy back towards the bosses and profits — so making



*tion and preaches free agreement."* [**Anarchism**, p. 137] To do otherwise is to contradict the basic ideas of anarchism.

Peter Kropotkin recognised the statist implications of some aspects of anarchist individualism which Tucker's strike example highlights. Tucker's anarchism, due to its uncritical support for contract theory, could result in a few people dominating economic life, because *"no force"* would result in the perpetuation of authority structures, with freedom simply becoming the *"right to full development"* of *"privileged minorities."* But, Kropotkin argued, *"as such monopolies cannot be maintained otherwise than under the protection of a monopolist legislation and an organised coercion by the State, the claims of these individualists necessarily end up in a return to the State idea and to that same coercion which they so fiercely attack themselves. Their position is thus the same as that of Spencer and of the so-called 'Manchester school' of economists, who also begin by a severe criticism of the State and end up in its full recognition in order to maintain the property monopolies, of which the State is the necessary stronghold."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 162]

Such would be the possible (perhaps probable) result of the individualists' contract theory of freedom without a social background of communal self-management and ownership. As can be seen from capitalism, a society based on the abstract individualism associated with contract theory would, in practice, produce social relationships based on power and authority (and so force — which would be needed to back up that authority), **not** liberty. As we argued in section A.2.14, voluntarism is **not** enough in itself to preserve freedom. This result, as noted in section A.3, could **only** be avoided by workers' control, which is in fact the logical implication of Tucker's and other individualists' proposals. This is hardly a surprising implication, since as we've seen, artisan production was commonplace in 19$^{th}$-century America and its benefits were extolled by many individualists. Without workers' control, individualist anarchism would soon become a form

state allows people to leave its borders and join another one — that the citizen does not leave indicates they consent to the state (this flows from Locke). When it came to the state, anarchists are well aware of the limited nature of this argument (as one individualist anarchist put it: *"As well say that the government of New York or even of the United States is voluntary, and, if you don't like New York Sunday laws, etc., you can secede and go to — South Carolina."* [A. H. Simpson, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 287]). In other words, consent of and by itself does not justify hierarchy for if it did, the current state system would be anarchistic. This indicates the weakness of contract theory as a means of guaranteeing liberty and its potential to generate, and justify, authoritarian social relationships rather than libertarian and liberty enhancing ones.

This explains anarchist opposition to wage labour, it undermines liberty and, as a result, allows exploitation to happen. Albert Parsons put it well. Under capitalism labour *"is a commodity and wages is the price paid for it. The owner of this commodity — of labour — sells it, that is himself, to the owner of capital in order to live ... The reward of the wage labourer's activity is not the product of his labour — far from it."* This implies exploitation and so class struggle as there is a *"irreconcilable conflict between wage labourers and capitalists, between those who buy labour or sell its products, and the wage worker who sells labour (himself) in order to live."* This is because the boss will seek to use their authority over the worker to make them produce more for the agreed wage. Given this, during a social revolution the workers *"first act will, of necessity, be the application of communistic principles. They will expropriate all wealth; they will take possession of all foundries, workshops, factories, mines, etc., for in no other way could they be able to continue to produce what they require on a basis of equality, and be, at the same time, independent of any authority."* [**Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 99, p. 104 and p. 166] Hence Kropotkin's comment that *"anarchism ... refuses all hierarchical organisa-*



working people pay for capitalism's crisis. Which, essentially, is what the Thatcher and Reagan governments did in the early 1980s. Finding it impossible to control the money supply, they raised interest rates to dampen down the demand for credit, which provoked a deep recession. Faced with massive unemployment, workers' market power decreased and their bosses increased, causing a shift in power and income towards capital.

So, obviously, in a capitalist economy the increasing of credit is a source of instability. While not causing the business cycle, it does increase its magnitude. As the boom gathers strength, banks want to make money and increase credit by lowering interest rates below what they should be to match savings. Capitalists rush to invest, so soaking up some of the unemployment which always marks capitalism. The lack of unemployment as a disciplinary tool is why the boom turns to bust, not the increased investment. Given that in a mutualist system, profits, interest and rent do not exist then erosion of profits which marks the top of a boom would not be applicable. If prices drop, then labour income drops. Thus a mutualist society need not fear inflation. As Kaldor argued with regard to the current system, *"under a 'credit-money' system ... unwanted or excess amounts of money* ***could never come into existence****; it is the increase in the value of transactions ... which calls forth an increase in the 'money supply' (whether in the form of bank balances or notes in circulation) as a result of the net increase in the value of working capital at the various stages of production and distribution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46] The gold standard cannot do what a well-run credit-currency can do, namely tailor the money supply to the economy's demand for money. The problem in the nineteenth century was that a capitalist credit-money economy was built upon a commodity-money base, with predictably bad results.

Would this be any different under Rothbard's system? Probably not. For Rothbard, each bank would have 100% reserve of gold with a law passed that defined fractional reserve banking

as fraud. How would this affect mutual banks? Rothbard argued that attempts to create mutual banks or other non-gold based banking systems would be allowed under his system. Yet, how does this fit into his repeated call for a 100% gold standard for banks? Why would a mutual bank be excluded from a law on banking? Is there a difference between a mutual bank issuing credit on the basis of a secured loan rather than gold and a normal bank doing so? Needless to say, Rothbard never did address the fact that the customers of the banks **know** that they practised fractional reserve banking and still did business with them. Nor did he wonder why no enterprising banker exploited a market niche by advertising a 100% reserve policy. He simply assumed that the general public subscribed to his goldbug prejudices and so would not frequent mutual banks. As for other banks, the full might of the law would be used to stop them practising the same policies and freedoms he allowed for mutual ones. So rather than give people the freedom to choose whether to save with a fractional reserve bank or not, Rothbard simply outlawed that option. Would a regime inspired by Rothbard's goldbug dogmas really allow mutual banks to operate when it refuses other banks the freedom to issue credit and money on the same basis? It seems illogical for that to be the case and so would such a regime not, in fact, simply be a new form of the money monopoly Tucker and his colleagues spent so much time combating? One thing is sure, though, even a 100% gold standard will not stop credit expansion as firms and banks would find ways around the law and it is doubtful that private defence firms would be in a position to enforce it.

Once we understand the absurd examples used to refute mutual banking plus the real reasons for inflation (i.e., *"a symptom of a struggle over the distribution of income."* [Davidson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89]) and how credit-money actually works, it becomes clear that the case against mutual banking is far from clear. Somewhat ironically, the post-Keynesian school of economics provides a firm understanding of how a real credit



> *"Neither ... is there any reason to consider such a position a very consistent or convincing form of anarchism ... A view of anarchism which seeks to eliminate coercion and the state, but which overlooks other ways in which people dominate other people, is very incomplete and quite contradictory type of anarchism. The most thorough-going and perceptive anarchist theories have shown that all types of domination are interrelated, all are destructive, and all must be eliminated ... Anarchism may begin as a revolt against political authority, but if followed to its logical conclusion it becomes an all-encompassing critique of the will to dominate and all its manifestations."* [**Max Stirner's Egoism**, pp. 92–3]

Certain individualist anarchists were keenly aware of the fact that even free association need not be based on freedom for both parties. Take, for example, marriage. Marriage, correctly argued John Beverley Robinson, is based on *"the promise to obey"* and this results in *"a very real subordination."* As part of *"the general progress toward freedom in all things,"* marriage will *"become the union of those who are both equal and both free."* [**Liberty**, no. 287, p. 2] Why should property associated subordination be any better than patriarchal subordination? Does the fact that one only lasts 8 or 12 hours rather than 24 hours a day really make one consistent with libertarian principles and the other not?

Thus Tucker's comments on wage labour indicates a distinct contradiction in his ideas. It violates his support for *"occupancy and use"* as well as his opposition to the state and usury. It could, of course, be argued that the contradiction is resolved because the worker consents to the authority of the boss by taking the job. However, it can be replied that, by this logic, the citizen consents to the authority of the state as a democratic

This violates Tucker's concept of *"equality of liberty,"* since the boss has obviously more liberty than the worker during working hours.

Therefore, logically, individualist anarchism must follow Proudhon and support co-operatives and self-employment in order to ensure the maximum individual self-government and labour's *"natural wage."* So Tucker's comments about strikers and wage labour show a basic inconsistency in his basic ideas. This conclusion is not surprising. As Malatesta argued:

> *"The individualists give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail to take into account, or dwell on the fact, that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of solidarity and voluntary co-operation … They certainly believe that to work in isolation is fruitless and that an individual, to ensure a living as a human being and to materially and morally enjoy all the benefits of civilisation, must either exploit — directly or indirectly — the labour of others . .. or associate with his [or her] fellows and share their pains and the joys of life. And since, being anarchists, they cannot allow the exploitation of one by another, they must necessarily agree that to be free and live as human beings they have to accept some degree and form of voluntary communism."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 16]

Occupancy and use, therefore, implies the collective ownership of resources used by groups which, in turn, implies associative labour and self-management. In other words, *"some degree and form of voluntary communism."* Ultimately, as John P. Clark summarised, opposition to authority which is limited to just the state hardly makes much sense from a libertarian perspective:



system works compared to Rothbard's logical deductions from imaginary events based on propositions which are, at root, identical with Walrasian general equilibrium theory (an analysis "Austrians" tend to dismiss). It may be ironic, but not unsurprising as Keynes praised Proudhon's follower Silvio Gesell in **The General Theory** (also see Dudley Dillard's essay *"Keynes and Proudhon"* [**The Journal of Economic History**, vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 63–76]). Libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick noted Keynes debt to Proudhon, and although Keynes did not subscribe to Proudhon's desire to use free credit to fund *"independent producers and workers' syndicates"* as a means create an economic system *"without exploitation"* he did share the Frenchman's *"attack upon the payment of interest"* and wish to see the end of the rentier. [**Marx and Keynes**, p. 5 and p. 6]

Undoubtedly, given the "Austrian" hatred of Keynes and his economics (inspired, in part, by the defeat inflicted on Hayek's business cycle theory in the 1930s by the Keynesians) this will simply confirm their opinion that the Individualist Anarchists did not have a sound economic analysis! As Rothbard noted, the individualist anarchist position was *"simply pushing to its logical conclusion a fallacy adopted widely by preclassical and by current Keynesian writers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 10] However, Keynes was trying to analyse the economy as it is rather than deducing logically desired conclusions from the appropriate assumptions needed to confirm the prejudices of the assumer (like Rothbard). In this, he did share the same method if not exactly the same conclusions as the Individualist Anarchists and Mutualists.

Needless to say, social anarchists do not agree that mutual banking can reform capitalism away. As we discuss in section G.4, this is due to many factors, including the nature barriers to competition capital accumulation creates. However, this critique is based on the real economy and does not reflect Rothbard's abstract theorising based on pre-scientific methodology.

While other anarchists may reject certain aspects of Tucker's ideas on money, we are well aware, as one commentator noted, that his *"position regarding the State and money monopoly derived from his Socialist convictions"* where socialism *"referred to an intent to fundamentally reorganise the societal systems so as to return the full product of labour to the labourers."* [Don Werkheiser, *"Benjamin R. Tucker: Champion of Free Money"*, pp. 212–221, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 212]



within anarchism. Again we see a support for contract theory creating authoritarian, not libertarian, relationships between people. Simply out, the social relationships produced by wage labour shares far too much in common with those created by the state **not** to be of concern to any genuine libertarian. Arguing that it is based on consent is as unconvincing as those who defend the state in similar terms.

And we must add that John Stuart Mill (who agreed with the Warrenite slogan *"Individual Sovereignty"*) faced with the same problem that wage labour made a mockery of individual liberty came to the same conclusion as Proudhon. He thought that if *"mankind is to continue to improve"* (and it can only improve within liberty, we must add) then in the end one form of association will predominate, *"not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves."* [quoted by Carole Pateman, **Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 34]

Tucker himself pointed out that *"the essence of government is control. .. He who attempts to control another is a governor, an aggressor, an invader."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 23] So when Tucker suggests that (non-exploitative, and so non-capitalist) wage labour could exist in individualist anarchy there is a distinct contradiction. Unlike wage labour under capitalism, workers would employ other workers and all would (in theory) receive the full product of their labour. Be that as it may, such relationships are not libertarian and so contradict Tucker's own theories on individual liberty (as Proudhon and Mill recognised with their own, similar, positions). Wage labour is based on the control of the worker by the employer; hence Tucker's contract theory can lead to a form of "voluntary" and "private" government within the workplace. This means that, while outside of a contract an individual is free, within it he or she is governed.

*worker his own employer; but, in order to completely gain that end, the associations must be associated, united in one body for mutual aid."* This is *"the Syndicate of Production."* [**Proudhon and His *"Bank of the People"***, p. 45, p. 50 and p. 54] Tucker, however, asserted that Proudhon included the syndicate of production *"to humour those of his associated who placed stress on these features. He did not consider them of any value."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 51–2] However, he was simply incorrect. Industrial democracy was a key aspect of Proudhon's ideas, as was the creation of an *"agro-industrial federation"* based on these self-managed associations. This can be seen from Tucker's own comparison of Marx and Proudhon made on the formers death:

> *"For Karl Marx, the 'egalitaire', we feel the profoundest respect; as for Karl Marx, the 'authoritaire', we must consider him an enemy... . Proudhon was years before Marx [in discussing the struggle of the classes and the privileges and monopolies of capital]... . The vital difference between Proudhon and Marx [was] to be found in their respective remedies which they proposed. Man would nationalise the productive and distributive forces; Proudhon would individualise and associate them. Marx would make the labourers political masters; Proudhon would abolish political mastership entirely ... Man believed in compulsory majority rule; Proudhon believed in the voluntary principle. In short, Marx was an 'authoritaire'; Proudhon was a champion of Liberty."* [**Liberty**, no. 35, p. 2]

Ironically, therefore, by Tucker placing so much stress in opposing capitalist **exploitation,** instead of capitalist **oppression,** he was actually closer to the *"authoritaire"* Marx than Proudhon and, like Marx, opened the door to various kinds of domination and restrictions on individual self-government



# G.4 Why do social anarchists reject individualist anarchism?

As James J. Martin notes, *"paralleling"* European social anarchism *"chronologically was a kindred but nearly unconnected phenomenon in America, seeking the same ends through individualistic rather than collectivistic dynamics."* [**Men Against the State**, p. ix]

When the two movements meet in American in the 1880s, the similarities and differences of both came into sharp relief. While both social and individualist anarchists reject capitalism as well as the state and seek an end to the exploitation of labour by capital (i.e. to usury in all its forms), both schools of anarchism rejected each others solutions to the social problem. The vision of the social anarchists was more communally based, urging social ownership of the means of life. In contrast, reflecting the pre-dominantly pre-capitalist nature of post-revolution US society, the Individualist Anarchists urged possession of the means of life and mutual banking to end profit, interest and rent and ensure every worker access to the capital they needed to work for themselves (if they so desired). While social anarchists placed co-operatives (i.e., workers' self-management) at the centre of their vision of a free society, many individualist anarchists did not as they thought that mutual banking would end exploitation by ensuring that workers received the full product of their labour.

Thus their vision of a free society and the means to achieve it were somewhat different (although, we stress, **not** mutually exclusive as communist anarchists supported artisan possession of the means of possession for those who rejected communism and the Individualist Anarchists supported voluntary communism). Tucker argued that a communist could not be an anarchist and the communist-anarchists argued that Individualist Anarchism could not end the exploitation of capital by labour. Here we indicate why social anarchists reject individualist anarchism (see section G.2 for a summary of why Individualist Anarchists reject social anarchism).

Malatesta summarises the essential points of difference as well as the source of much of the misunderstandings:

> *"The individualists assume, or speak as if they assumed, that the (anarchist) communists wish to impose communism, which of course would put them right outside the ranks of anarchism.*
>
> *"The communists assume, or speak as if they assumed, that the (anarchist) individualists reject every idea of association, want the struggle between men, the domination of the strongest — and this would put them not only outside the anarchist movement but outside humanity.*
>
> *"In reality those who are communists are such because they see in communism freely accepted the realisation of brotherhood, and the best guarantee for individual freedom. And individualists, those who are really anarchists, are anti-communist because they fear that communism would subject individuals nominally to the tyranny of the collectivity and in fact to that of the party or caste which, with the excuse of administering things, would succeed in taking possession of the power to dispose of material*



being *"the complete emancipation of the workers ... the abolition of the wage worker."* Thus a key idea of Proudhon's politics is the abolition of wage labour: *"Industrial Democracy must... succeed Industrial Feudalism."* [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism** p. 222 and p. 167] *"In democratising us,"* Proudhon argued, *"revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 63]

(As an aside, it is deeply significant how different Proudhon's analysis of hierarchy and wage-labour is to Murray Rothbard's. For Rothbard, both *"hierarchy"* and *"wage-work"* were part of *"a whole slew of institutions necessary to the triumph of liberty"* (others included *"granting of funds by libertarian millionaires, and a libertarian political party"*). He strenuously objected to those *"indicting"* such institutions *"as non-libertarian or non-market"*. [**Konkin on Libertarian Strategy**] For Proudhon — as well as Bakunin, Kropotkin, and others — both wage-labour and hierarchy were anti-libertarian by their very nature. How could hier-archy be *"necessary"* for the triumph of an-archy? Logically, it makes no sense. An-**archy**, by definition, means no-archy rather than wholehearted support for a specific form of **archy**, namely hier-**archy**! At best, Rothbard was a "voluntary archist" not an anarchist.)

As Charles A. Dana put it (in a work published by Tucker and described by him as *"a really intelligent, forceful, and sympathetic exposition of mutual banking"*), *"[b]y introducing mutualism into exchanges and credit we introduce it everywhere, and labour will assume a new aspect and become truly democratic."* Labour *"must be reformed by means of association as well as banking"* for *"if labour be not organised, the labourers will be made to toil for others to receive the fruit thereof as heretofore."* These co-operatives *"to a great extent abolish the exploitation of the employed worker by the employing capitalist, and make the*

*various names of … Power, Authority."* Thus, under capitalism, the workplace has a *"hierarchical organisation."* There are three alternatives, capitalism (*"that is, monopoly and what follows"*), state socialism (*"exploitation by the State"*) *"or else … a solution based on equality, — in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, pp. 203–4 and p. 253]

For Proudhon, employees are *"subordinated, exploited"* and their *"permanent condition is one of obedience."* The wage worker is, therefore, a *"slave."* Indeed, capitalist companies *"plunder the bodies and souls of wage workers"* and they are *"an outrage upon human dignity and personality."* However, in a co-operative the situation changes and the worker is an *"associate"* and *"forms a part of the producing organisation"* and *"forms a part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject."* Without co-operation and association, *"the workers … would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century**, p. 216, p. 219 and p. 216] As Robert Graham notes, *"Proudhon's market socialism is indissolubly linked to his notions of industry democracy and workers' self-management."* [*"Introduction"*, **Op. Cit.,**, p. xxxii]

This analysis lead Proudhon to call for co-operatives to end wage labour. This was most consistently advocated in his **The General Idea of the Revolution** but appears repeatedly in his work. Thus we find him arguing in 1851 that socialism is *"the elimination of misery, the abolition of capitalism and of wage-labour, the transformation of property, … the effective and direct sovereignty of the workers, .. . the substitution of the contractual regime for the legal regime."* [quoted by John Ehrenberg, **Proudhon and his Age**, p. 111] Fourteen years later, he argued the same, with the aim of his mutualist ideas



> *things and thus of the people who need them. Therefore they want each individual, or each group, to be in a position to enjoy freely the product of their labour in conditions of equality with other individuals and groups, with whom they would maintain relations of justice and equity.*
>
> *"In which case it is clear that there is no basic difference between us. But, according to the communists, justice and equity are, under natural conditions impossible of attainment in an individualistic society, and thus freedom too would not be attained.*
>
> *"If climatic conditions throughout the world were the same, if the land were everywhere equally fertile, if raw materials were evenly distributed and within reach of all who needed them, if social development were the same everywhere in the world … then one could conceive of everyone … finding the land, tools and raw materials needed to work and produce independently, without exploiting or being exploited. But natural and historical conditions being what they are, how is it possible to establish equality and justice between he who by chance finds himself with a piece of arid land which demands much labour for small returns with him who has a piece of fertile and well sited land?" Of between the inhabitant of a village lost in the mountains or in the middle of a marshy area, with the inhabitants of a city which hundreds of generations of man have enriched with all the skill of human genius and labour?* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 31–2]

The social anarchist opposition to individualist anarchism, therefore, resolves around the issues of inequality, the limitations and negative impact of markets and whether wage-labour

is consistent with anarchist principles (both in general and in terms of individualist anarchism itself). We discuss the issue of wage labour and anarchist principles in the next section and argue in section G.4.2 that Tucker's support for wage-labour, like any authoritarian social relationship, ensures that this is an inconsistent form of anarchism. Here we concentration on issues of inequality and markets.

First, we must stress that individualist anarchism plays an important role in reminding all socialists that capitalism does **not** equal the market. Markets have existed before capitalism and may, if we believe market socialists like David Schweickart and free market socialists like Benjamin Tucker and Kevin Carson, even survive it. While some socialists (particularly Leninists echoing, ironically, supporters of capitalism) equate capitalism with the market, this is not the case. Capitalism is a specific form of market economy based on certain kinds of property rights which result in generalised wage labour and non-labour incomes (exploitation). This means that the libertarian communist critique of capitalism is to a large degree independent of its critique of markets and their negative impact. Equally, the libertarian communist critique of markets, while applicable to capitalism, applies to other kinds of economy. It is fair to say, though, that capitalism tends to intensify and worsen the negative effects of markets.

Second, we must also note that social anarchists are a diverse grouping and include the mutualism of Proudhon, Bakunin's collectivism and Kropotkin's communism. All share a common hostility to wage labour and recognise, to varying degrees, that markets tend to have negative aspects which can undermine the libertarian nature of a society. While Proudhon was the social anarchist most in favour of competition, he was well aware of the need for self-managed workplaces to federate together to protect themselves from its negative aspects — aspects he discussed at length. His *"agro-industrial federation"* was seen as a means of socialising the market,



quent anarchists (from Bakunin onwards) solved this obvious contradiction by consistently applying anarchist principles and opposing sexism and patriarchy. In other words, by critiquing Proudhon's sexism by means of the very principles he himself used to critique the state and capitalism.

Much the same applies to individualist anarchists. The key issue is that, given their own principles, individualist anarchism can easily become **consistent** anarchism. That is why it is a school of anarchism, unlike "anarcho"-capitalism. All that is required is to consistently apply "occupancy and use" to workplaces (as Proudhon advocated). By consistently applying this principle they can finally end exploitation along with hierarchy, so bringing all their ideas into line.

Tucker's position is also in direct opposition to Proudhon's arguments, which is somewhat ironic since Tucker stressed being inspired by and following the French anarchist and his ideas (Tucker referred to Proudhon as being both *"the father of the Anarchistic school of socialism"* as well as *"being the Anarchist **par excellence**"* [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 391]). Tucker is distinctly at odds with Proudhon who consistently opposed wage-labour and so, presumably, was also an advocate of *"pseudo-Anarchism"* alongside Kropotkin and Most. For Proudhon, the worker has *"sold and surrendered his liberty"* to the proprietor, with the proprietor being *"a man, who, having absolute control of an instrument of production, claims the right to enjoy the product of the instrument without using it himself."* This leads to exploitation and if *"the labourer is proprietor of the value which he creates, it follows"* that *"all production being necessarily collective, the labourer is entitled to a share of the products and profits commensurate with his labour"* and that, *"all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor."* [**What is Property?**, p. 130, p. 293 and p. 130] With *"machinery and the workshop, divine right — that is, the principle of authority — makes its entrance into political economy. Capital ... Property ... are, in economic language, the*

*Manchester men lies in their infidelity to liberty in some of its phases. And these infidelity to liberty in some of its phases is precisely the fatal inconsistency of the 'Freiheit' school … Yes, genuine A narchism is consistent Manchesterism, and Communistic or pseudo-Anarchism is inconsistent Manchesterism."* [**Liberty**, no. 123, p. 4]

In other words, if individualist anarchism is, as Tucker claimed, *"consistent Manchesterism"* then, argue social anarchists, individualist anarchism is "inconsistent" anarchism. This means that some of Tucker's arguments contradict some of his own fundamental principles, most obviously his indifference to wage labour. This, as argued, violates "occupancy and use", his opposition to exploitation and, as it is a form of hierarchy, his anarchism.

To see what we mean we must point out that certain individualist anarchists are not the only "inconsistent" ones that have existed. The most obvious example is Proudhon, whose sexism is well known, utterly disgraceful and is in direct contradiction to his other ideas and principles. While Proudhon attacked hierarchy in politics and economics, he fully supported patriarchy in the home. This support for a form of archy does not refute claims that Proudhon was an anarchist, it just means that certain of his ideas were inconsistent with his key principles. As one French anarcha-feminist critic of Proudhon put it in 1869: *"These so-called lovers of liberty, if they are unable to take part in the direction of the state, at least they will be able to have a little monarchy for their personal use, each in his own home … Order in the family seems impossible to them — well then, what about in the state?"* [André Léo, quoted by Carolyn J. Eichner, *"'Vive La Commune!' Feminism, Socialism, and Revolutionary Revival in the Aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune,"*, pp. 68–98, **Journal of Women's History**, Vol. 15, No.2, p. 75] Rejecting monarchy and hierarchy on the state level and within the workplace while supporting it — in the form of rule by the father — on the family level was simply illogical and inconsistent. Subse-



of ensuring that competition would not reach such levels as to undermine the freedom and equality of those within it. Individualist anarchists, in contrast, tended not to discuss the negative effects of markets in any great depth (if at all), presumably because they thought that most of the negative effects would disappear along with capitalism and the state. Other anarchists are not so optimistic.

So, two key issues between social and individualist anarchism are the related subjects of property and competition. As Voltairine de Cleyre put it when she was an individualist anarchist:

> *"She and I hold many differing views on both Economy and Morals … Miss Goldmann [sic!] is a communist; I am an individualist. She wishes to destroy the right of property, I wish to assert it. I make my war upon privilege and authority, whereby the right of property, the true right in that which is proper to the individual, is annihilated. She believes that co-operation would entirely supplant competition; I hold that competition in one form or another will always exist, and that it is highly desirable it should."* [**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 9]

The question of "property" is subject to much confusion and distortion. It should be stressed that both social and individualist anarchists argue that the only true property is that produced by labour (mental and physical) and capitalism results in some of that being diverted to property owners in the form of interest, rent and profits. Where they disagree is whether it is possible and desirable to calculate an individual's contribution to social production, particularly within a situation of joint labour. For Tucker, it was a case of creating *"the economic law by which every man may get the equivalent of his product."* [quoted by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, **The An-**

**archist Prince**, p. 279] Social anarchists, particularly communist ones, question whether it is possible in reality to discover such a thing in any society based on joint labour (*"which it would be difficult to imagine could exist in any society where there is the least complexity of production."* [George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, **Op. Cit.**, p. 280]).

This was the crux of Kropotkin's critique of the various schemes of "labour money" and "labour vouchers" raised by other schools of socialism (like mutualism, collectivism and various state socialist systems). They may abolish wage labour (or, at worse, create state capitalism) but they did not abolish the wages system, i.e., payment according to work done. This meant that a system of individualist distribution was forced upon a fundamentally co-operative system of production and so was illogical and unjust (see Kropotkin's *"The Collectivist Wage System"* in **The Conquest of Bread**). Thus Daniel Guérin:

> *"This method of remuneration, derived from modified individualism, is in contradiction to collective ownership of the means of production, and cannot bring about a profound revolutionary change in man. It is incompatible with anarchism; a new form of ownership requires a new form of remuneration. Service to the community cannot be measured in units of money. Needs will have to be given precedence over services, and all the products of the labour of all must belong to all, each to take his share of them freely.* ***To each according to his need*** *should be the motto of libertarian communism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 50]

Simply put, wages rarely reflect the actual contribution of a specific person to social well-being and production nor do they reflect their actual needs. To try and get actual labour income to



From our discussion of wage labour in the last section, some may consider that Tucker's support for wage labour would place him outside the ranks of anarchism. After all, this is one of the key reasons why most anarchists reject "anarcho"-capitalism as a form of anarchism. Surely, it could be argued, if Murray Rothbard is not an anarchist, then why is Tucker?

That is not the case and the reason is obvious — Tucker's support for wage labour is inconsistent with his ideas on "occupancy and use" while Rothbard's are in line with his capitalist property rights. Given the key place self-management holds in almost all anarchist thought, unsurprisingly we find Chomsky summarising the anarchist position thusly:

> *"A consistent anarchist must oppose private ownership of the means of production and the wage slavery which is a component of this system, as incompatible with the principle that labour must be freely undertaken and under the control of the producer … A consistent anarchist must oppose not only alienated labour but also the stupefying specialisation of labour that takes place when the means for developing production."* [*"Notes on Anarchism"*, **Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 123]

Thus the *"consistent anarchist, then, will be a socialist, but a socialist of a particular sort."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 125] Which suggests that Tucker's position is one of inconsistent anarchism. While a socialist, he did not take his libertarian positions to their logical conclusions — the abolition of wage labour. There is, of course, a certain irony in this. In response to Johann Most calling his ideas *"Manchesterism"*, Tucker wrote *"what better can a man who professes Anarchism want than that? For the principle of Manchesterism is liberty, and consistent Manchesterism is consistent adherence to liberty. The only inconsistency of the*

*and the American Anarchist Movement"*, pp. 57–83, **Labor History**, Vol. 34, No. 1, p. 72]

So, somewhat ironically given his love of Proudhon, it was, in fact, Most who was closer to the French anarchist's position on this issue than Tucker. Kropotkin echoed Proudhon's analysis when he noted that *"the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145] In other words, for a self-proclaimed follower of Proudhon, Tucker ignored the French anarchist's libertarian arguments against wage labour. The key difference between the communist-anarchists and Proudhon was on the desirability of making the product of labour communal or not (although both recognised the right of people to share as they desired). However, it must be stressed that Proudhon's analysis was not an alien one to the individualist anarchist tradition. Joshua King Ingalls, for example, presented a similar analysis to Proudhon on the issue of joint production as well as its solution in the form of co-operatives (see section G.1.3 for details) and Dyer Lum was a firm advocator of the abolition of wage labour. So integrating the insights of social anarchism on this issue with individualist anarchism would not be difficult and would build upon existing tendencies within it.

In summary, social anarchists argue that individualist anarchism does not solve the social question. If it did, then they would be individualists. They argue that in spite of Tucker's claims, workers would still be exploited in any form of individualist anarchism which retained significant amounts of wage labour as well as being a predominantly hierarchical, rather than libertarian, society. As we argue in the next section, this is why most anarchists consider individualist anarchism as being an inconsistent form of anarchism.

G.4.2 Why do social anarchists think individualism is inconsistent anarchism?



reflect the actual contribution to society would be, communist-anarchists argued, immensely difficult. How much of a product's price was the result of better land or more machinery, luck, the willingness to externalise costs, and so on? Voltairine de Cleyre summarised this problem and the obvious solution:

> *"I concluded that as to the question of exchange and money, it was so exceedingly bewildering, so impossible of settlement among the professors themselves, as to the nature of value, and the representation of value, and the unit of value, and the numberless multiplications and divisions of the subject, that the best thing ordinary workingmen or women could do was to organise their industry so as to get rid of money altogether. I figured it this way: I'm not any more a fool than the rest of ordinary humanity; I've figured and figured away on this thing for years, and directly I thought myself middling straight, there came another money reformer and showed me the hole in that scheme, till, at last , it appears that between 'bills of credit,' and 'labour notes' and 'time checks,' and 'mutual bank issues,' and 'the invariable unit of value,' none of them have any sense. How many thousands of years is it going to get this sort of thing into people's heads by mere preaching of theories. Let it be this way: Let there be an end of the special monopoly on securities for money issues. Let every community go ahead and try some member's money scheme if it wants; — let every individual try it if he pleases. But better for the working people let them all go. Let them produce together, co-operatively rather than as employer and employed; let them fraternise group by group, let each use what he needs of his own product, and deposit the rest in the storage-houses,*

*and let those others who need goods have them as occasion arises."* [**Exquisite Rebel**, p. 62]

And, obviously, it must be stressed that "property" in the sense of personal possessions would still exist in communist-anarchism. As the co-founder of **Freedom** put it:

> *"Does Anarchism, then, it may be asked, acknowledge no **Meum** or **Tuum**, no personal property? In a society in which every man is free to take what he requires, it is hardly conceivable that personal necessaries and conveniences will not be appropriated, and difficult to imagine why they should not ... When property is protected by no legal enactments, backed by armed force, and is unable to buy personal service, it resuscitation on such a scale as to be dangerous to society is little to be dreaded. The amount appropriated by each individual, and the manner of his appropriation, must be left to his own conscience, and the pressure exercised upon him by the moral sense and distinct interests of his neighbours."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 24]

To use an appropriate example, public libraries are open to all local residents and they are free to borrow books from the stock available. When the book is borrowed, others cannot come along and take the books from a person's home. Similarly, an individual in a communist society can take what they like from the common stocks and use it as they see fit. They do not need permission from others to do so, just as people freely go to public parks without requiring a vote by the local community on whether to allow access or not. Communism, in other words, does not imply community control of personal consumption nor the denial of individuals to appropriate and use the common stock of available goods. Socialised consumption does **not** mean "society" telling people what to consume



would get its full product **eventually** in a free society, rather he stressed that liberty would result in the end of exploitation. Nor should we be blind to the fact that a market economy is a dynamic one, making the long run unlikely to ever appear (*"in the long run we are all dead"* as Keynes memorably put it). Combine this with the natural barriers to competition we indicated in section G.4 and we are left with problems of usury/exploitation in an individualist anarchist system.

The obvious solution to these problems is to be found in Proudhon, namely the use of co-operatives for any workplace which cannot be operated by an individual. This was the also the position of the Haymarket anarchists, with August Spies (for example) arguing that *"large factories and mines, and the machinery of exchange and transportation ... have become too vast for private control. Individuals can no longer monopolise them."* [contained in Albert Parsons, **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, pp. 60–1] Proudhon denounced property as *"despotism"*, for Albert Parsons the *"wage system of labour is a despotism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21]

As Frank H. Brooks notes, *"producer and consumer co-operatives were a staple of American labour reform (and of Proudhonian anarchism)."* This was because they *"promised the full reward of labour to the producer, and commodities at cost to the consumer."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 110] This was the position of Voltairine de Cleyre (during her individualist phase) as well as her mentor Dyer Lum:

> *"Lum drew from the French anarchist Proudhon ... a radical critique of classical political economy and ... a set of positive reforms in land tenure and banking ... Proudhon paralleled the native labour reform tradition in several ways. Besides suggesting reforms in land and money, Proudhon urged producer co-operation."* [Frank H. Brooks, *"Ideology, Strategy, and Organization: Dyer Lum*

work **The Steel Workers**, after the union was broken *"the steel workers output doubled in exchange for an income rise of one-fifth ... The accomplishment was possible only with a labour force powerless to oppose the decisions of the steel men."* [quoted by Jeremy Brecher, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] At Homestead, between 1892 and 1907 the daily earnings of highly-skilled plate-mill workers fell by a fifth while their hours increased from eight to twelve. [Brecher, **Op. Cit.**, p. 63] Who would dare claim that the profits this increased exploitation created somehow reflected the labour of the managers rather than their total monopoly of authority within the workplace?

The logic is simple — which boss would employ a worker unless they expected to get more out of their labour than they pay in wages? And why does the capitalist get this reward? They own "capital" and, consequently, their "labour" partly involves excluding others from using it and ordering about those whom they do allow in — in exchange for keeping the product of their labour. As Marx put it, *"the worker works under the control of the capitalist to whom his labour belongs"* and *"the product is the property of the capitalist and not that of the worker, its immediate producer."* And so *"[f]rom the instant he steps into the workshop, the use-value of his labour-power and therefore its use, which is labour, belongs to the capitalist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 291 and p. 292] This suggests that exploitation takes place within production and so a contract for wages made beforehand simply cannot be expected to anticipate the use-value extracted by the boss from the workers subjected to his authority. Thus wage labour and exploitation would go hand-in-hand — and so Most's horror at Tucker's support for it.

As best, it could be argued that such "wages" would be minimal as workers would be able to swap jobs to get higher wages and, possibly, set up co-operatives in competition. However, this amounts to saying that, in the long run, labour gets its full product and to say that is to admit in the short term that labour **is** exploited. Yet nowhere did Tucker argue that labour



but rather ensuring that all individuals have free access to the goods produced by all. As such, the issue is not about "property" in the sense of personal property but rather "property" in the sense of access to the means of life by those who use them. Will owner occupiers be able to exclude others from, say, their land and workplaces unless they agree to be their servants?

Which brings us to a key issue between certain forms of individualist anarchism and social anarchism, namely the issue of wage labour. As capitalism has progressed, the size of workplaces and firms have increased. This has lead to a situation were ownership and use has divorced, with property being used by a group of individuals distinct from the few who are legally proclaimed to be its owners. The key problem arises in the case of workplaces and how do non-possessors gain access to them. Under social anarchism, any new members of the collective automatically become part of it, with the same rights and ability to participate in decision making as the existing ones. In other words, socialised production does **not** mean that "society" will allocate individuals work tasks but rather it ensures that all individuals have free access to the means of life. Under individualist anarchism, however, the situation is not as clear with some (like Tucker) supporting wage labour. This suggests that the holders of workplaces can exclude others from the means of life they possess and only allow them access only under conditions which create hierarchical social relationships between them. Thus we could have a situation in which the owners who actually manage their own workplaces are, in effect, working capitalists who hire others to do specific tasks in return for a wage.

The problem is highlighted in Tucker's description of what would replace the current system of statism (and note he calls it *"scientific socialism"* thus squarely placing his ideas in the anti-capitalist camp):

> *"we have something very tangible to offer , .. We offer non-compulsive organisation. We offer associative combination. We offer every possible method of voluntary social union by which men and women may act together for the furtherance of well-being. In short, we offer voluntary scientific socialism in place of the present compulsory, unscientific organisation which characterises the State and all of its ramifications."* [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 218]

Yet it is more than possible for voluntary social unions to be authoritarian and exploitative (we see this every day under capitalism). In other words, not every form of non-compulsive organisation is consistent with libertarian principles. Given Tucker's egoism, it is not hard to conclude that those in stronger positions on the market will seek to maximise their advantages and exploit those who are subject to their will. As he put it, *"[s]o far as inherent right is concerned, might is the only measure. Any man ... and any set of men ... have the right, if they have the power, to kill or coerce other men and to make the entire world subservient to their ends. Society's right to enslave the individual and the individual's right to enslave society are only unequal because their powers are unequal."* In the market, all contracts are based ownership of resources which exist before any specific contracts is made. If one side of the contract has more economic power than the other (say, because of their ownership of capital) then it staggers belief that egoists will not seek to maximise said advantage and so the market will tend to increase inequalities over time rather than reduce them. If, as Tucker argued, *"Anarchic associations would recognise the right of individual occupants to combine their holdings and work them under any system they might agree upon, the arrangement being always terminable at will, with reversion to original rights"* then we have the unfortunate situation where inequalities will undermine anarchism and



*them."* Thus, *"all workers must associate, inasmuch as collective force and division of labour exist everywhere, to however slight a degree."* Industrial democracy, in which *"all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members*, would ensure that *"the collective force, which is a product of the community, ceases to be a source of profit to a small number of managers"* and becomes *"the property of all the workers."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 81–2, p. 217, p. 222 and p. 223]

Proudhon had first expounded this analysis in **What is Property?** in 1840 and, as K. Steven Vincent notes, this was *"[o]one of the reasons Proudhon gave for rejecting 'property' [and] was to become an important motif of subsequent socialist thought."* Thus *"collective endeavours produced an additional value"* which was *"unjustly appropriated by the **proprietaire.**"* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon the Rise of French Republican Socialism** p. 64 and p. 65] Marx, it should be noted, concurred. Without mentioning Proudhon, he stressed how a capitalist buys the labour-power of 100 men and *"can set the 100 men to work. He pays them the value of 100 independent labour-powers, but does not pay them for the combined labour power of the 100."* [**Capital**, Vol. 1, p. 451] Only co-operative workplaces can ensure that the benefits of co-operative labour are not monopolised by the few who happen to own, and so control, the means of production.

If this is not done, then it becomes a case of simply renaming "profits" to "wages" and saying that they are the result of the employers work rather than their ownership of capital. However, this is not the case as some part of the "wages" of the employer is derived purely from their owning capital (and is usury, charging to allow use) while, for the workers, it is unlikely to equal their product in the short run. Given that the major rationale for the Homestead strike of 1892 **was** to secure the despotism of the property owner, the results of breaking the union should be obvious. According to David Brody in his

is precisely why most anarchists have opposed wage labour as being incompatible with general anarchist principles. In other words, a consistent anarchism precludes all forms of authoritarian social relationships.

There is another reason why wage labour is at odds with anarchist principles. This is to do with our opposition to exploitation and usury. Simply put, there are the problems in determining what are the "whole wages" of the employer and the employee. The employer, of course, does not simply get his "share" of the collectively produced output, they get the whole amount. This would mean that the employer's "wages" are simply the difference between the cost of inputs and the price the goods were sold on the market. This would imply that the market wage of the labour has to be considered as equalling the workers' *"whole wage"* and any profits equalling the bosses *"whole wage"* (some early defences of profit did argue precisely this, although the rise of shareholding made such arguments obviously false). The problem arises in that the employer's income is not determined independently of their ownership of capital and their monopoly of power in the workplace. This means that the boss can appropriate for themselves all the advantages of co-operation and self-activity within the workplace simply because they owned it. Thus, "profits" do not reflect the labour ("wages") of the employer.

It was this aspect of ownership which made Proudhon such a firm supporter of workers associations. As he put it, a *"hundred men, uniting or combining their forces, produce, in certain cases, not a hundred times, but two hundred, three hundred, a thousand times as much. This is what I have called* ***collective force****. I even drew from this an argument, which, like so many others, remains unanswered, against certain forms of appropriation: that it is not sufficient to pay merely the wages of a given number of workmen, in order to acquire their product legitimately; that they must be paid twice, thrice or ten times their wages, or an equivalent service rendered to each one of*



defence associations arising which will defend them against attempts by those subject to them to use direct action to rectify the situation. [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 25 and p. 162]

Kropotkin saw the danger, arguing that such an idea *"runs against the feelings of equality of most of us"* and *"brings the would-be 'Individualists' dangerously near to those who imagine themselves to represent a 'superior breed' — those to whom we owe the State ... and all other forms of oppression."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 84] As we discuss in the next section, it is clear that wage labour (like any hierarchical organisation) is not consistent with general anarchist principles and, furthermore, in direct contradiction to individualist anarchist principles of "occupancy and use." Only if "occupancy and use" is consistently applied and so wage labour replaced by workers associations can the inequalities associated with market exchanges not become so great as to destroy the equal freedom of all required for anarchism to work.

Individualist anarchists reply to this criticism by arguing that this is derived from a narrow reading of Stirner's ideas and that they are in favour of universal egoism. This universal egoism and the increase in competition made possible by mutual banking will ensure that workers will have the upper-hand in the market, with the possibility of setting up in business themselves always available. In this way the ability of bosses to become autocrats is limited, as is their power to exploit their workers as a result. Social anarchists argue, in response, that the individualists tend to underestimate the problems associated with natural barriers to entry in an industry. This could help generate generalised wage labour (and so a new class of exploiters) as workers face the unpleasant choice of working for a successful firm, being unemployed or working for low wages in an industry with lower barriers to entry. This process can be seen under capitalism when co-operatives hire wage workers and not include them as members of the association

(i.e. they exercise their ownership rights to exclude others). As Proudhon argued:

> *"I have shown the contractor, at the birth of industry, negotiating on equal terms with his comrades, who have since become his workmen. It is plain, in fact, that this original equality was bound to disappear through the advantageous position of the master and the dependent position of the wage-workers. In vain does the law assure the right of each to enterprise … When an establishment has had leisure to develop itself, enlarge its foundations, ballast itself with capital, and assure itself a body of patrons, what can a workman do against a power so superior?"* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 202]

Voltairine de Cleyre also came to this conclusion. Discussing the limitations of the Single Tax land reform, she noted that *"the stubborn fact always came up that no man would employ another to work for him unless he could get more for his product than he had to pay for it, and that being the case, the inevitable course of exchange and re-exchange would be that the man having received less than the full amount, could buy back less than the full amount, so that eventually the unsold products must again accumulate in the capitalist's hands; and again the period of non-employment arrives."* This obviously applied to individualist anarchism. In response to objections like this, individualists tend to argue that competition for labour would force wages to equal output. Yet this ignores natural barriers to competition: *"it is well enough to talk of his buying hand tools, or small machinery which can be moved about; but what about the gigantic machinery necessary to the operation of a mine, or a mill? It requires many to work it. If one owns it, will he not make the others pay tribute for using it?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60 and p. 61]



*dimensions of workplace struggles."* [**The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 39] This defeat of America's most powerful trade union was achieved by means of a private police, supported by the State militia.

Thus we have numerous contradictions in Tucker's position. On the one hand, occupancy and use precludes landlords renting land and housing but includes capitalists hiring workers to "occupancy and use" their land and workplaces; the state is attacked for being a monopoly of power over a given area while the boss can have the same authority; opposing voluntary wage labour shows that you are an authoritarian, but opposing voluntary landlordism is libertarian. Yet, there is no logical reason for workplaces to be excluded from "occupancy and use." As Tucker put it:

> *"Occupancy and use is the only title to land in which we will protect you; if you attempt to use land which another is occupying and using, we will protect him against you; if another attempts to use land to which you lay claim, but which you are not occupying and using, we will not interfere with him; but of such land as you occupy and use you are the sole master, and we will not ourselves take from you, or allow anyone else to take from you, whatever you may get out of such land."* [**Liberty**, no. 252, p. 3]

Needless to say, neither Carnegie nor Frick were occupying and using the Homestead steel-mills nor were any of the other shareholders. It was precisely the autocratic authority of the owners which their private army and the state militia sought to impose on those who used, but did not own, the steel-mills (as the commander of the state troops noted, others *"can hardly believe the actual communism of these people. They believe the works are theirs quite as much as Carnegie's."* [quoted by Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 60] As we discuss in the next section, this

*all workers,"* not just union members. This union democracy was the key to the strike, as Carnegie and his associates *"were deeply troubled by its effects in the workplace. So troubled, in fact, that beyond the issue of wages or any issues related to it, it was unionism itself that was the primary target of Carnegie's concern."* [Krause, **Op. Cit.**, p. 293]

Instead of a relatively libertarian regime, in which those who did the work managed it, the lockout resulted in the imposition of a totalitarian regime for the *"purpose of more complete oppression of its subjects"* and by its competitive advantage on the market, the *"extension of its boundaries"* (to use Tucker's description of the state). *"Without the encumbrance of the union,"* notes Krause, *"Carnegie was able to slash wages, impose twelve-hour workdays, eliminate five hundred jobs, and suitably assuage his republican conscience with the endowment of a library."* And so *"the labour difficulties that precipitated the Homestead Lockout had less to do with quantifiable matter such as wages and wage scales than with the politics of the workers' claim to a franchise within the mill — that is, the legitimacy, authority, and power of the union."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361 and p. 294]

The contradictions in wage labour become clear when Secretary Lovejoy stated that with the lockout the owners had declared that *"we have decided to run our Homestead Mill ourselves."* [quoted by Krause, **Op. Cit.**, p. 294] Except, of course, they did no such thing. The workers who occupied and used the steel mills still did the work, but without even the smallest say in their labour. A clearer example of why wage labour violates the individualist anarchist principle of "occupancy and use" would be harder to find. As labour historian David Montgomery put it, the Homestead lockout was a *"crisp and firm declaration that workers' control was illegal — that the group discipline in the workplace and community by which workers enforced their code of mutualism in opposition to the authority and power of the mill owners was tantamount to insurrection against the republic — clearly illuminated the ideological and political*



As such, a free market based on wage labour would be extremely unlikely to produce a non-exploitative society and, consequently, it would not be socialist and so not anarchist. Moreover, the successful business person would seek to secure his or her property and power and so employ police to do so. *"I confess that I am not in love with all these little states,"* proclaimed de Cleyre, *"and it is ... the thought of the anarchist policeman that has driven me out of the individualist's camp, wherein I for some time resided."* [quoted by Eugenia C. Delamotte, **Gates of Freedom**, p. 25] This outcome can only be avoided by consistently applying "occupancy and use" in such as way as to eliminate wage labour totally. Only this can achieve a society based on freedom **of** association as well as freedom **within** association.

As we noted in section G.2, one of the worries of individualist anarchists is that social anarchism would subject individuals to group pressures and concerns, violating individual autonomy in the name of collective interests. Thus, it is argued, the individual will become of slave of the group in practice if not in theory under social anarchism. However, an inherent part of our humanity is that we associate with others, that we form groups and communities. To suggest that there are no group issues within anarchism seems at odds with reality. Taken literally, of course, this implies that such a version of "anarchy" there would be no forms of association at all. No groups, no families, no clubs: nothing bar the isolated individual. It implies no economic activity beyond the level of peasant farming and one-person artisan workplaces. Why? Simply because any form of organisation implies "group issues." Two people deciding to live together or one hundred people working together becomes a group, twenty people forming a football club becomes a group. And these people have joint interests and so group issues. In other words, to deny group issues is implying a social situation that has never existed nor ever will. Thus Kropotkin:

> *"to reason in this way is to pay ... too large a tribute to metaphysical dialectics, and to ignore the facts of life. It is impossible to conceive a society in which the affairs of any one of its members would not concern many other members, if not all; still less a society in which a continual contact between its members would not have established an interest of every one towards all others, which would render it* ***impossible*** *to act without thinking of the effects which our actions may have on others."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 85]

Once the reality of "group issues" is acknowledged, as most individualist anarchists do, then the issue of collective decision making automatically arises. There are two ways of having a group. You can be an association of equals, governing yourselves collectively as regards collective issues. Or you can have capitalists and wage slaves, bosses and servants, government and governed. Only the first, for obvious reasons, is compatible with anarchist principles. Freedom, in other words, is a product of how we interact with each other, not of isolation. Simply put, anarchism is based on self-management of group issues, not in their denial. Free association is, in this perspective, a necessary but not sufficient to guarantee freedom. Therefore, social anarchists reject the individualists' conception of anarchy, simply because it can, unfortunately, allow hierarchy (i.e. government) back into a free society in the name of "liberty" and "free contracts." Freedom is fundamentally a social product, created in and by community. It is a fragile flower and does not fare well when bought and sold on the market.

Moreover, without communal institutions, social anarchists argue, it would be impossible to specify or supply group or public goods. In addition, occupancy and use would, on the face of it, preclude such amenities which are utilised by members of a community such as parks, roads or bridges — anything



*force the authority putatively designated to them by Henry Clay Frick"* (although Frick *"had been counting on the ultimate authority of the state from the outset."*). [Peter Krause, **Op. Cit.**, p. 13, p. 14 and p. 25]

Nor was the 1892 lockout an isolated event. There had been a long history of labour disputes at Homestead. In 1882, for example, a strike occurred over the *"question of complete and absolute submission on the part of manufacturers to the demands of their men,"* in the words of one ironmaster. [quoted by Krause, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178] It was a question of power, whether bosses would have sole and total authority over a given area and all within it. The workers won that strike, considering it *"a fight for freedom."* As such, the 1892 lockout was the end result of years of management attempts to break the union and so *"in creating and fortifying the system that had, over the years, produced the conditions for this violence, Carnegie's role cannot be denied. What provoked the apparently 'barbaric' and 'thankless' workers of Homestead was not, as an account limited to that day might indicate, the sudden intrusion of Pinkerton agents into their dispute but the slow and steady erosion of their rights and their power, over which Carnegie and his associates in steel and politics had presided for years, invisibly but no less violently."* [Krause, **Op. Cit.**, p. 181 and p. 43]

The conflict at Homestead was thus directly related to the issue of ensuring that the *"sole authority over a given area and all within it"* rested in the hands of the capitalists. This required smashing the union for, as Tucker noted, no state *"has ever tolerated a rival State within its borders."* The union was a democratic organisation, whose *"basic organisation ... was the lodge, which elected its own president and also appointed a mill committee to enforce union rules within a given department of the steelworks. The union maintained a joint committee of the entire works."* Elected union officials who *"act[ed] without the committee's authorisation"* were *"replaced. Over and above the Advisory Committee stood the mass meeting"* which was *"often open to*

but not for workplaces? There is no reason and so wage labour, logically, violates *"occupancy and use"* — for under wage labour, those who occupy and use a workplace do not own or control it. Hence *"occupancy and use"* logically implies workers' control and ownership.

The Homestead lockout of 1892, ironically enough, occurred when the owners of the steel mill provoked the union in order to break its influence in the works. In other words, the property owners practised *"aggression"* to ensure their *"sole authority over a given area and all within it"* (to use Tucker's words). As such, the actions of the capitalist property owners meets Tucker's definition of the state exactly. According to the Carnegie Steel Company, it had *"a legal right to the enjoyment of our property, and to operate it as we please … But for years our works have been managed … by men who do not own a dollar in them. This will stop right here. The Carnegie Steel Company will hereafter control their works in the employment of labour."* Secretary Lovejoy of the corporation was clear on this, and its wider impact, arguing that *"[t]his outbreak will settle one matter forever, and that is that the Homestead mill hereafter will be run non-union .. . other mills heretofore union [will] become non-union and thus free their owners from the arbitrary dictation of labour unions."* [quoted by Peter Krause, **The Battle for Homestead 1880–1892**, p. 12 and pp. 39–40]

In other words, the workers will henceforth be submit to the arbitrary dictation of the owners, who would be free to exercise their authority without hindrance of those subject to it. Unsurprisingly, for the workers, the strike was over their freedom and independence, of their ability to control their own labour. As one historian notes, the *"lockout crushed the largest trade union in America … the victory at Homestead gave Carnegie and his fellow steelmasters carte blanche in the administration of their works. The lockout put 'the employers in the saddle' — precisely where they would remain, without union interference, for four decades."* The Pinkerton agents *"were preparing to en-*



which is used but not occupied continually. In terms of roads and bridges, who actually occupies and uses them? The drivers? Those who maintain it? The occupiers of the houses which it passes? Those who funded it construction? If the last, then why does this not apply to housing and other buildings left on land? And how are the owners to collect a return on their investment unless by employing police to bar access to non-payers? And would such absentee owners not also seek to extend their appropriations to other forms of property? Would it not be far easier to simply communalise such forms of commonly used "property" rather than seek to burden individuals and society with the costs of policing and restricting access to them?

After all, social anarchists note, for Proudhon there was a series of industries and services that he had no qualms about calling *"public works"* and which he considered best handled by communes and their federations. Thus *"the control undertaking such works will belong to the municipalities, and to districts within their jurisdiction"* while *"the control of carrying them out will rest with the workmen's associations."* This was due to both their nature and libertarian values and so the *"direct, sovereign initiative of localities, in arranging for public works that belong to them, is a consequence of the democratic principle and the free contract: their subordination to the State is .. . a return to feudalism."* Workers' self-management of such public workers was, again, a matter of libertarian principles for *"it becomes necessary for the workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 276 and p. 277]

In the case of a park, either it is open to all or it is fenced off and police used to bar access. Taking "occupancy and use" as our starting point then it becomes clear that, over time, either the community organises itself communally or a park becomes private property. If a group of people frequent a common area then they will have to discuss how to maintain it — for ex-

ample, arrange for labour to be done on it, whether to have a play-ground for children or to have a duck pond, whether to increase the numbers and types of trees, and so forth. That implies the development of communal structures. In the case of new people using the amenity, either they are excluded from it (and have to pay for access) or they automatically join the users group and so the park is, in effect, common property and socialised. In such circumstances, it would be far easier simply to ignore the issue of individual contributions and base access on need (i.e., communistic principles). However, as already indicated in section G.2.1, social anarchists reject attempts to coerce other workers into joining a co-operative or commune. Freedom cannot be given, it must be taken and social anarchism, like all forms of anarchy, cannot be imposed. How those who reject social anarchism will gain access to common property will depend, undoubtedly, on specific circumstances and who exactly is involved and how they wish to utilise it. As such, it will be difficult to generalise as each commune will determine what is best and reach the appropriate contracts with any individualist anarchists in their midst or vicinity.

It should also be pointed out (and this may seem ironic), wage labour does have the advantage that people can move to new locations and work without having to sell their old means of living. Often moving somewhere can be a hassle if one has to sell a shop or home. Many people prefer not to be tied down to one place. This is a problem in a system based on "occupancy and use" as permanently leaving a property means that it automatically becomes abandoned and so its users may be forced to stay in one location until they find a buyer for it. This is not an issue in social anarchism as access to the means of life is guaranteed to all members of the free society.

Most social anarchists also are critical of the means which individualists anarchists support to achieve anarchy, namely to abolish capitalism by the creation of mutual banks which would compete exploitation and oppression away. While mu-



issues. Competition is inherently aggressive, with companies seeking to expand their market share, go into new markets, drive their competitors out of business, and so forth. Within the firm itself, bosses always seek to make workers do more work for less, threatening them with the sack if they object.

Tucker's comments on strikers brings to light an interesting contradiction in his ideas. After all, he favoured a system of "property" generally defined by use and occupancy, that is whoever uses and possesses is to be consider the owner. As we indicated in section G.1.2, this applied to both the land and what was on it. In particular, Tucker pointed to the example of housing and argued that rent would not be collected from tenants nor would they be evicted for not paying it. Why should this position change when it is a workplace rather than a house? Both are products of labour, so that cannot be the criteria. Nor can it be because one is used for work as Tucker explicitly includes the possibility that a house could be used as a workplace.

Thus we have a massive contradiction between Tucker's "occupancy and use" perspective on land use and his support for wage labour. One letter to **Liberty** (by "Egoist") pointed out this contradiction. As the letter put it, *"if production is carried on in groups, as it now is, who is the legal occupier of the land? The employer, the manager, or the ensemble of those engaged in the co-operative work? The latter appearing the only rational answer."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 143, p. 4] Sadly, Tucker's reply did not address this particular question and so we are left with an unresolved contradiction.

Looking at the Homestead strike which provoked Tucker's rant against strikers, the similarities between wage labour and statism become even clearer. The 3,800 workers locked out by Carnegie at Homestead in 1892 definitely occupied and used the works from which they were barred entry by the owners. The owners, obviously, did not use the workplace themselves — they hired **others** to occupy and use it **for** them. Now, why should *"occupancy and use"* be acceptable for land and housing

*health care as was available. Conditions in these 'company towns' were such that, by 1915, the Commission on Industrial Relations was led to observe that they displayed 'every aspect of feudalism except the recognition of special duties on the part of the employer.' The job of the Pinkertons — first for the railroads, then more generally — was to prevent workers from organising in a manner that might enable them to improve their own circumstances, thus reducing corporate profits."* ["From the Pinkertons to the PATRIOT Act: The Trajectory of Political Policing in the United States, 1870 to the Present", pp. 1–72, **CR: The New Centennial Review**, vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 11–2] In the words of one historian of the Pinkerton Agency *"[b]y the mid-1850s a few businessmen saw the need for greater control over their employees; their solution was to sponsor a private detective system. In February 1855, Allan Pinkerton, after consulting with six midwestern railroads, created such an agency in Chicago."* [Frank Morn, quoted by Churchill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 4] As we have noted in section F.7.1, such regimes remained into the 1930s, with corporations having their own well armed private police to enforce the propertarian hierarchy (see also section F.6.2).

So, in terms of monopoly of authority over a given area the capitalist company and the state share a common feature. The reason why wage labour violates Individualist Anarchist principles is clear. If the workers who use a workplace do not own it, then someone else will (i.e. the owner, the boss). This in turn means that the owner can tell those who use the resource what to do, how to do it and when. That is, they are the sole authority over the workplace and those who use it. However, according to Tucker, the state can be defined (in part) as *"the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it."* Tucker considered this element as *"common to all States"* and so opposition to the state logically implies support for workers' self-management for only in this case can people govern themselves during the working day (see section B.4 for more discussion). Even with Tucker's other aspect, *"aggression"*, there are



tual banks could aid the position of working class people under capitalism (which is why Bakunin and other social anarchists recommended them), they cannot undermine or eliminate it. This is because capitalism, due to its need to accumulate, creates **natural** barriers to entry into a market (see section C.4). Thus the physical size of the large corporation would make it immune to the influence of mutual banking and so usury could not be abolished. Even if we look at the claimed indirect impact of mutual banking, namely an increase in the demand of labour and so wages, the problem arises that if this happens then capitalism would soon go into a slump (with obvious negative effects on small firms and co-operatives). In such circumstances, the number of labourers seeking work would rise and so wages would fall and profits rise. Then it is a case of whether the workers would simply tolerate the slump and let capitalism continue or whether they would seize their workplaces and practice the kind of expropriation individualist anarchists tended to oppose.

This problem was recognised by many individualist anarchists themselves and it played a significant role in its decline as a movement. By 1911 Tucker had come to the same conclusions as communist-anarchists on whether capitalism could be reformed away. As we noted in section G.1.1, he *"had come to believe that free banking and similar measures, even if inaugurated, were no longer adequate to break the monopoly of capitalism or weaken the authority of the state."* [Paul Avrich, **Anarchist Voices**, p. 6] While admitted that political or revolutionary action was required to destroy the concentrations of capital which made anarchy impossible even with free competition, he rejected the suggestion that individualist anarchists should join in such activity. Voltairine de Cleyre came to similar conclusions earlier and started working with Emma Goldman before becoming a communist-anarchist sometime in 1908. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one historian argues that as the *"native American variety of anarchism dissolved in the face of increasing*

*State repression and industrialisation, rationalisation, and concentration of capital, American anarchists were forced either to acquiesce or to seek a more militant stain of anarchism: this latter presented itself in the form of Communist Anarchism … Faith in peaceful evolution toward an anarchist society seemed archaic and gradually faded."* [Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 83]

So while state action may increase the degree of monopoly in an industry, the natural tendency for any market is to place barriers (natural ones) to new entries in terms of set-up costs and so on. This applies just as much to co-operatives as it does to companies based on wage-labour. It means that if the relation between capital and labour was abolished **within** the workplace (by their transformation into co-operatives) but they remained the property of their workers, it would only be a matter of time before the separation of the producers from their means of production reproduced itself. This is because, within any market system, some firms fail and others succeed. Those which fail will create a pool of unemployed workers who will need a job. The successful co-operatives, safe behind their natural barriers to entry, would be in a stronger position than the unemployed workers and so may hire them as wage labourers — in effect, the co-operative workers would become "collective capitalists" hiring other workers. This would end workers' self-management (as not all workers are involved in the decision making process) as well as workers' ownership, i.e. *"occupancy and use,"* (as not all workers' would own the means of production they used). The individual workers involved may "consent" to becoming wage slaves, but that is because it is the best option available rather than what they really want. Which, of course, is the same as under capitalism.

This was why Proudhon argued that *"every worker employed in the association"* must have *"an undivided share in the property of the company"* in order to ensure workers' self-management. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 222] Only this could ensure



> *"I was amazed and was shocked when I became acquainted with the condition of the wage-workers in the New World.*
>
> *"The factory: the ignominious regulations, the surveillance, the spy system, the servility and lack of manhood among the workers and the arrogant arbitrary behaviour of the boss and his associates — all this made an impression upon me that I have never been able to divest myself of. At first I could not understand why the workers, among them many old men with bent backs, silently and without a sign of protest bore every insult the caprice of the foreman or boss would heap upon them. I was not then aware of the fact that the opportunity to work was a privilege, a favour, and that it was in the power of those who were in the possession of the factories and instruments of labour to deny or grant this privilege. I did not then understand how difficult it was to find a purchaser for ones labour, I did not know then that there were thousands and thousands of idle human bodies in the market, ready to hire out upon most any conditions, actually begging for employment. I became conscious of this, very soon, however, and I knew then why these people were so servile, whey suffered the humiliating dictates and capricious whims of their employers."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, pp. 66–7]

That this is a kind of state-like authority becomes clear when we consider company towns. As Ward Churchill notes, the *"extent of company power over workers included outright ownership of the towns in which they lived, a matter enabling employers to garner additional profits by imposing exorbitant rates of rent, prices for subsistence commodities, tools, and such*

*is also justified for enforcing the duty of keeping an agreement. Tucker … opens … the way for reconstructing under the heading of the 'defence' all the functions of the State."* [**Anarchism**, p. 297]

Such an outcome is easy to avoid, however, by simply consistently applying individualist anarchist principles and analysis to wage labour. To see why, it is necessary simply to compare private property with Tucker's definition of the state.

How did Tucker define the state? All states have two common elements, *"aggression"* and *"the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it, exercised generally for the double purpose of more complete oppression of its subjects and extension of its boundaries."* This monopoly of authority is important, as *"I am not aware that any State has ever tolerated a rival State within its borders."* So the state, Tucker stated, is *"the embodiment of the principle of invasion in an individual, or a band of individuals, assuming to act as representatives or masters of the entire people within a given area."* The *"essence of government is control, or the attempt to control. He who attempts to control another is a governor, an aggressor, an invader … he who resists another's attempt to control is not an aggressor, an invader, a governor, but simply a defender, a protector."* In short, *"the Anarchistic definition of government: the subjection of the non-invasive individual to an external will."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 24]

The similarities with capitalist property (i.e., one based on wage labour) is obvious. The employer assumes and exercises *"sole authority over a given area and all within it,"* they are the boss after all and so capitalists are the *"masters of the entire people within a given area."* That authority is used to control the employees in order to maximise the difference between what they produce and what they get paid (i.e., to ensure exploitation). As August Spies, one of the Haymarket Martyrs, noted:



*"occupancy and use"* and so self-management in a free society (i.e. keep that society free). Thus in anarchism, as de Cleyre summarised, it is *"a settled thing that to be free one must have liberty of access to the sources and means of production"* Without socialisation of the means of life, liberty of access could be denied. Little wonder she argued that she had become *"convinced that a number of the fundamental propositions of individualistic economy would result in the destruction of equal liberty."* The only logical anarchist position is *"that some settlement of the whole labour question was needed which would not split up the people again into land possessors and employed wage-earners."* Hence her movement from individualism towards, first, mutualism and then communism — it was the only logical position to take in a rapidly industrialising America which had made certain concepts of individualism obsolete. It was her love of freedom which made her sensitive to the possibility of any degeneration back into capitalism: *"the instinct of liberty naturally revolted not only at economic servitude, but at the outcome of it, class-lines."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58, p. 105, p. 61 and p. 55] As we argue in section G.4.2 such a possibility can be avoided only by a consistent application of "occupancy and use" which, in practice, would be nearly identical to the communalisation or socialisation of the means of life.

This issue is related to the question of inequality within a market economy and whether free exchanges tend to reduce or increase any initial inequalities. While Individualist Anarchists argue for the *"cost principle"* (i.e. cost being the limit of price) the cost of creating the same commodity in different areas or by different people is not equal. Thus the market price of a good **cannot** really equal the multitude of costs within it (and so price can only equal a workers' labour in those few cases where that labour was applied in average circumstances). This issue was recognised by Tucker, who argued that *"economic rent … is one of nature's inequalities. It will probably remain*

*with us always. Complete liberty will every much lessen it; of that I have no doubt.*" [*"Why I am an Anarchist"*, pp. 132–6, **Man!**, M. Graham (ed.), pp. 135–6] However, argue social anarchists, the logic of market exchange produces a situation where the stronger party to a contract seeks to maximise their advantage. Given this, free exchange will tend to **increase** differences in wealth and income over time, not eliminate them. As Daniel Guérin summarised:

> *"Competition and the so-called market economy inevitably produce inequality and exploitation, and would do so even if one started from complete equality. They could not be combined with workers' self-management unless it were on a temporary basis, as a necessary evil, until (1) a psychology of 'honest exchange' had developed among the workers; (2) most important, society as a whole had passed from conditions of shortage to the stage of abundance, when competition would lose its purpose ... The libertarian communist would condemn Proudhon's version of a collective economy as being based on a principle of conflict; competitors would be in a position of equality at the start, only to be hurled into a struggle which would inevitably produce victors and vanquished, and where goods would end up by being exchanged according to the principles of supply and demand.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 53–4]

Thus, even a non-capitalist market could evolve towards inequality and away from fair exchange. It was for this reason that Proudhon argued that a portion of income from agricultural produce be paid into a central fund which would be used to make equalisation payments to compensate farmers with less favourably situated or less fertile land. As he put it, eco-



> *wants to deprive capital of its reward. It does not hold that labour should not be sold; it holds that capital should not be hired at usury.*" [**Liberty**, no. 123, p. 4]

Social anarchists, in reply, would argue that Tucker is missing the point. The reason why almost all anarchists are against wage labour is because it generates social relationships based on authority and, as such, it sets the necessary conditions for the exploitation of labour to occur. If we take the creation of employer-employee relationships within an anarchy, we see the danger of private statism arising (as in "anarcho"-capitalism) and so the end of anarchy. Such a development can be seen when Tucker argued that if, in an anarchy, *"any labourers shall interfere with the rights of their employers, or shall use force upon inoffensive 'scabs,' or shall attack their employers' watchmen ... I pledge myself that, as an Anarchist and in consequence of my Anarchistic faith, I will be among the first to volunteer as a member of a force to repress these disturbers of order, and, if necessary, sweep them from the earth.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 455] Tucker's comments were provoked by the Homestead strike of 1892, where the striking steelworkers fought with, and defeated, their employer's Pinkerton thugs sent to break the strike (Tucker, it should be stressed supported the strikers but not their methods and considered the capitalist class as responsible for the strike by denying workers a free market).

In such a situation, these defence associations would be indeed "private states" and here Tucker's ideas unfortunately do parallel those of the "anarcho"-capitalists (although, as Tucker thought that the employees would not be exploited by the employer, this does not suggest that Tucker can be considered a forefather of "anarcho"-capitalism). As Kropotkin warned, *"[f]or their self-defence, both the citizen and group have a right to any violence [within individualist anarchy] ... Violence*

> *"Wages is not slavery. Wages is a form of voluntary exchange, and voluntary exchange is a form of Liberty."* [**Liberty**, no. 3, p. 1]

The question of wage labour was one of the key differences between Tucker and communist-anarchist Johann Most. For Most, it signified that Tucker supported the exploitation of labour. For Tucker, Most's opposition to it signified that he was not a real anarchist, seeking to end freedom by imposing communism onto all. In response to Most highlighting the fact that Tucker supported wage labour, Tucker argued as followed:

> *"If the men who oppose wages — that is, the purchase and sale of labour — were capable of analysing their thought and feelings, they would see that what really excites their anger is not the fact that labour is bought and sold, but the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labour, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labour by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labour, and that, but for the privilege, would be enjoyed by all gratuitously. And to such a state of things I am as much opposed as any one. But the minute you remove privilege, the class that now enjoy it will be forced to sell their labour, and then, when there will be nothing but labour with which to buy labour, the distinction between wage-payers and wage-receivers will be wiped out, and every man will be a labourer exchanging with fellow-labourers. Not to abolish wages, but to make every man dependent upon wages and secure to every man his whole wages is the aim of Anarchistic Socialism. What Anarchistic Socialism aims to abolish is usury. It does not want to deprive labour of its reward; it*



nomic rent *"in agriculture has no other cause than the inequality in the quality of land … if anyone has a claim on account of this inequality … [it is] the other land workers who hold inferior land. That is why in our scheme for liquidation [of capitalism] we stipulated that every variety of cultivation should pay a proportional contribution, destined to accomplish a balancing of returns among farm workers and an assurance of products."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 209] His advocacy of federations of workers' associations was, likewise, seen as a means of abolishing inequalities.

Unlike Proudhon, however, individualist anarchists did not propose any scheme to equalise income. Perhaps Tucker was correct and the differences would be slight, but in a market situation exchanges tend to magnify differences, **not** reduce them as the actions of self-interested individuals in unequal positions will tend to exacerbate differences. Over time these slight differences would become larger and larger, subjecting the weaker party to relatively increasingly worse contracts. Without equality, individualist anarchism would quickly become hierarchical and non-anarchist. As the communist-anarchist paper **Freedom** argued in the 1880s:

> *"Are not the scandalous inequalities in the distribution of wealth today merely the culminate effect of the principle that every man is justified in securing to himself everything that his chances and capacities enable him to lay hands on?*
>
> *"If the social revolution which we are living means anything, it means the destruction of this detestable economic principle, which delivers over the more social members of the community to the domination of the most unsocial and self-interested."* [**Freedom**, vol. 2, no. 19]

**Freedom**, it should be noted, is slightly misrepresenting the position of individualist anarchists. They did **not** argue

that every person could appropriate all the property he or she could. Most obviously, in terms of land they were consistently opposed to a person owning more of it than they actually used. They also tended to apply this to what was on the land as well, arguing that any buildings on it were abandoned when the owner no longer used them. Given this, individualist anarchists have stressed that such a system would be unlikely to produce the inequalities associated with capitalism (as Kropotkin noted, equality was essential and was implicitly acknowledged by individualists themselves who argued that their system *"would offer no danger, because the rights of each individual would have been limited by the equal rights of all others."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 85]). Thus contemporary individualist anarchist Joe Peacott:

> *"Although individualists envision a society based on private property, we oppose the economic relationships of capitalism, whose supporters misuse words like private enterprise and free markets to justify a system of monopoly ownership in land and the means of production which allows some to skim off part or even most of the wealth produced by the labour of others. Such a system exists only because it is protected by the armed power of government, which secures title to unjustly acquired and held land, monopolises the supply of credit and money, and criminalises attempts by workers to take full ownership of the means of production they use to create wealth. This state intervention in economic transactions makes it impossible for most workers to become truly independent of the predation of capitalists, banks, and landlords. Individualists argue that without the state to enforce the rules of the capitalist economy, workers would not allow*



ruling class would be as unlikely to tolerate being competed away as they would be voted away. The collapse of social Keynesianism into neo-liberalism shows that even a moderately reformed capitalism which increased working class power will not be tolerated for too long. In other words, there was a need for social revolution which mutual banks do not, and could not, eliminate.

However, while social anarchists disagree with the proposals of individualist anarchists, we do still consider them to be a form of anarchism — one with many flaws and one perhaps more suited to an earlier age when capitalism was less developed and its impact upon society far less than it is now (see section G.1.4). Individualist and social anarchism could co-exist happily in a free society and neither believes in forcing the other to subscribe to their system. As Paul Nursey-Bray notes *"linking all of these approaches ... is not just the belief in individual liberty and its corollary, the opposition to central or state authority, but also a belief in community, and an equality of community members."* The *"discussion over forms of property ... should not be allowed to obscure the commonality of the idea of the free community of self-regulating individuals."* And so *"there are meeting points in the crucial ideas of individual autonomy and community that suggest, at least, a basis for the discussion of equality and property relations."* [**Anarchist Thinkers and Thought**, p. xvi]

G.4.1 Is wage labour consistent with anarchist principles?

No, it is not. This can be seen from social anarchism, where opposition to wage labour as hierarchical and exploitative is taken as an obvious and logical aspect of anarchist principles. However, ironically, this conclusion must also be drawn from the principles expounded by individualist anarchism. However, as noted in section G.1.3, while many individualist anarchists opposed wage labour and sought it end not all did. Benjamin Tucker was one of the latter. To requote him:

capitalist ones (as trade unions often find out). In other words, reforming capitalism would not be as non-violent or as simple as Tucker maintained. The vested powers which the state defends will find other means to protect themselves when required (for example, when capitalists and landlords backed fascism and fascist squads in Italy after workers "occupied and used" their workplaces and land workers and peasants "occupied and used" the land in 1920). We are sure that economists will then rush to argue that the resulting law system that defended the collection of rent and capitalist property against "occupancy and use" was the most "economically efficient" result for "society."

In addition, even if individualist mutualism **did** result in an increase in wages by developing artisan and co-operative ventures that decreased the supply of labour in relation to its demand, this would not eliminate the subjective and objective pressures on profits that produce the business cycle within capitalism (see section C.7). In fact, it was increase the subjective pressures considerably as was the case under the social Keynesian of the post-war period. Unsurprisingly, business interests sought the necessary "reforms" and ruthlessly fought the subsequent strikes and protests to achieve a labour market more to their liking (see section C.8.2 for more on this). This means that an increase in the bargaining power of labour would soon see capital moving to non-anarchist areas and so deepening any recession caused by a lowering of profits and other non-labour income. This could mean that during an economic slump, when workers' savings and bargaining position were weak, the gains associated with mutualism could be lost as co-operative firms go bust and mutual banks find it hard to survive in a hostile environment.

Mutual banks would not, therefore, undermine modern capitalism, as recognised by social anarchists from Bakunin onward. They placed their hopes in a social revolution organised by workplace and community organisations, arguing that the



*themselves to be exploited by these thieves and capitalism would not be able to exist ...*

*"One of the criticisms of individualist economic proposals raised by other anarchists is that a system based on private ownership would result in some level of difference among people in regard to the quality or quantity of possessions they have. In a society where people are able to realise the full value of their labour, one who works harder or better than another will possess or have the ability to acquire more things than someone who works less or is less skilled at a particular occupation ...*

*"The differences in wealth that arise in an individualist community would likely be relatively small. Without the ability to profit from the labour of others, generate interest from providing credit, or extort rent from letting out land or property, individuals would not be capable of generating the huge quantities of assets that people can in a capitalist system. Furthermore, the anarchist with more things does not have them at the expense of another, since they are the result of the owner's own effort. If someone with less wealth wishes to have more, they can work more, harder, or better. There is no injustice in one person working 12 hours a day and six days a week in order to buy a boat, while another chooses to work three eight hour days a week and is content with a less extravagant lifestyle. If one can generate income only by hard work, there is an upper limit to the number and kind of things one can buy and own."* [**Individualism and Inequality**]

However, argue social anarchists, market forces may make such an ideal impossible to achieve or maintain. Most would

agree with Peter Marshall's point that *"[u]ndoubtedly real difficulties exist with the economic position of the individualists. If occupiers became owners overnight as Benjamin Tucker recommended, it would mean in practice that those with good land or houses would merely become better off than those with bad. Tucker's advocacy of 'competition everywhere and always' among occupying owners, subject to the only moral law of minding your own business might will encourage individual greed rather than fair play for all."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 653]

Few social anarchists are convinced that all the problems associated with markets and competition are purely the result of state intervention. They argue that it is impossible to have most of the underlying pre-conditions of a competitive economy without the logical consequences of them. It is fair to say that individualist anarchists tend to ignore or downplay the negative effects of markets while stressing their positive ones.

While we discuss the limitations of markets in section I.1.3, suffice to say here that competition results in economic forces developing which those within the market have to adjust to. In other words, the market may be free but those within it are not. To survive on the market, firms would seek to reduce costs and so implement a host of dehumanising working practices in order to compete successfully on the market, things which they would resist if bosses did it. Work hours could get longer and longer, for example, in order to secure and maintain market position. This, in turn, affects our quality of life and our relationship with our partners, children, parents, friends, neighbours and so on. That the profits do not go to the executives and owners of businesses may be a benefit, it matters little if people are working longer and harder in order to invest in machinery to ensure market survival. Hence **survival,** not **living,** would be the norm within such a society, just as it is, unfortunately, in capitalism.



> *to a tyranny over the individual. They meet the same dilemma in 'method.' If they were consistent libertarian individualists they could not force from 'those who had' what they had acquired justly or unjustly, but if they did not force it from them, they perpetuated inequalities. They met a stone wall."* [Eunice Minette Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, p. 158]

So while Tucker believed in direct action, he opposed the "forceful" expropriation of social capital by the working class, instead favouring the creation of a mutualist banking system to replace capitalism with a non-exploitative system. Tucker was therefore fundamentally a **reformist,** thinking that anarchy would evolve from capitalism as mutual banks spread across society, increasing the bargaining power of labour. And reforming capitalism over time, by implication, always means tolerating boss's control during that time. So, at its worse, this is a reformist position which becomes little more than an excuse for tolerating landlord and capitalist domination.

Also, we may note, in the slow transition towards anarchism, we would see the rise of pro-capitalist "defence associations" which **would** collect rent from land, break strikes, attempt to crush unions and so on. Tucker seemed to have assumed that the anarchist vision of *"occupancy-and-use"* would become universal. Unfortunately, landlords and capitalists would resist it and so, ultimately, an Individualist Anarchist society would have to either force the minority to accept the majority wishes on land use (hence his comments on there being *"no legal power to collect rent"*) or the majority are dictated to by the minority who are in favour of collecting rent and hire "defence associations" to enforce those wishes. With the head start big business and the wealthy have in terms of resources, conflicts between pro- and anti-capitalist "defence associations" would usually work against the anti-

*mating the **market** value"* of a product based on *"average time"* or cost necessary to produce it and, secondly, if that could be done then to get people *"to agree upon such an estimation of their work would already require a deep penetration of the Communist principles into their ideas."* [**Environment and Evolution**, p. 84] In addition, the free market in banking would also result in **its** market being dominated by a few big banks, with similar results. As such, it is all fine and well to argue that with rising interest rates more competitors would be drawn into the market and so the increased competition would automatically reduce them but that is only possible if there are no serious natural barriers to entry.

This obviously impacts on how we get from capitalism to anarchism. Natural barriers to competition limit the ability to compete exploitation away. So as to its means of activism, individualist anarchism exaggerates the potential of mutual banks to fund co-operatives. While the creation of community-owned and -managed mutual credit banks would help in the struggle for a free society, such banks are not enough in themselves. Unless created as part of the social struggle against capitalism and the state, and unless combined with community and strike assemblies, mutual banks would quickly die, because the necessary social support required to nurture them would not exist. Mutual banks must be part of a network of other new socio-economic and political structures and cannot be sustained in isolation from them. This is simply to repeat our earlier point that, for most social anarchists, capitalism cannot be reformed away. As such, social anarchists would tend to agree with the summary provided by this historian:

> *"If [individualist anarchists] rejected private ownership of property, they destroyed their individualism and 'levelled' mankind. If they accepted it, they had the problem of offering a solution whereby the inequalities [of wealth] would not amount*



Ultimately, Individualist Anarchists lose sight of the fact that success and competition are not the same thing. One can set and reach goals without competing. That we may loose more by competing than by co-operating is an insight which social anarchists base their ideas on. In the end, a person can become a success in terms of business but lose sight of their humanity and individuality in the process. In contrast, social anarchists stress community and co-operation in order to develop us as fully rounded individuals. As Kropotkin put it, *"the **individualisation** they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts."* [**Anarchism**, p. 297]

As we noted in section D.1, the capitalist state intervenes into the economy and society to counteract the negative impact of market forces on social life and the environment as well as, of course, protecting and enhancing the position of itself and the capitalist class. As individualist anarchism is based on markets (to some degree), it seems likely that market forces would have similar negative impacts (albeit to a lesser degree due to the reduced levels of inequality implied by the elimination of non-labour incomes). Without communal institutions, social anarchists argue, individualist anarchism has no means of counteracting the impact of such forces except, perhaps, by means of continual court cases and juries. Thus social issues would not be discussed by all affected but rather by small subgroups retroactively addressing individual cases.

Moreover, while state action may have given the modern capitalist an initial advantage on the market, it does not follow that a truly free market will not create similar advantages naturally over time. And if it did, then surely a similar system would develop? As such, it does not follow that a non-capitalist market system would remain such. In other words, it is true that extensive state intervention was required to **create** capitalism but after a time economic forces can usually be relied upon to allow wage workers to be exploited. The key factor is that while markets have existed long before capitalism, that system

has placed them at the centre of economic activity. In the past, artisans and farmers produced for local consumers, with the former taking their surplus to markets. In contrast, capitalism has produced a system where producers are primarily geared to exchanging **all** goods they create on an extensive market rather simply a surplus locally. This implies that the dynamics of a predominantly market system may be different from those in the past in which the market played a much smaller role and where self-sufficiency was always a possibility. It is difficult to see how, for example, car workers or IT programmers could produce for their own consumption using their own tools.

So in a market economy with a well developed division of labour it is possible for a separation of workers from their means of production to occur. This is particularly the case when the predominant economic activity is not farming. Thus the net effect of market transactions could be to re-introduce class society simply by their negative long-term consequences. That such a system developed without state aid would make it no less unfree and unjust. It is of little use to point out that such a situation is **not** what the Individualist Anarchists desired for it is a question of whether their ideas would actually result in what they wanted. Social anarchists have fears that it will not. Significantly, as we noted in section G.3, Tucker was sensible enough to argue that those subject to such developments should rebel against it.

In response, individualist anarchists could argue that the alternative to markets would be authoritarian (i.e., some form of central planning) and/or inefficient as without markets to reward effort most people would not bother to work well and provide for the consumer. So while markets do have problems with them, the alternatives are worse. Moreover, when social anarchists note that there is a remarkable correlation between competitiveness in a society and the presence of clearly defined "have" and "have-not" groups individualist anarchists would answer that the causation flows not from competitiveness to



inequality but from inequality to competitiveness. In a more equal society people would be less inclined to compete as ruthlessly as under capitalism and so the market would not generate as many problems as it does today. Moreover, eliminating the artificial barriers erected by the state would allow a universal competition to develop rather than the one sided form associated with capitalism. With a balance of market power, competition would no longer take the form it currently does.

Yet, as noted above, this position ignores natural barriers to competition The accumulation needs of a competitive market economy do not disappear just because capitalism has been replaced by co-operatives and mutual credit banks. In any market economy, firms will try to improve their market position by investing in new machinery, reducing prices by improving productivity and so on. This creates barriers to new competitors who have to expend more money in order to match the advantages of existing firms. Such amounts of money may not be forthcoming from even the biggest mutual bank and so certain firms would enjoy a privileged position on the market. Given that Tucker defined a monopolist as *"any person, corporation, or institution whose right to engage in any given pursuit of life is secured, either wholly or partially, by any agency whatsoever — whether the nature of things or the force of events or the decree of arbitrary power — against the influence of competition"* we may suggest that due to **natural** barriers, an individualist anarchist society would not be free of monopolists and so of usury. [quoted by James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 210]

For this reason, even in a mutualist market certain companies would receive a bigger slice of profits than (and at the expense of) others. This means that exploitation would still exist as larger companies could charge more than cost for their products. It could be argued that the ethos of an anarchist society would prevent such developments happening but, as Kropotkin noted, this has problems, firstly because of *"the difficulty if esti-*

analysis of Marxism, looking at its claims and comparing them to what they achieved in practice. Few, if any, Marxists present such an analysis of their own politics, which makes Marxism more a belief system than analysis. For example, many Marxists point to the success of the Russian Revolution and argue that while anarchists attack Trotsky and Lenin for being statists and authoritarians, that statism and authoritarianism saved the revolution. In reply, anarchists point out that the revolution did, in fact, **fail.** The aim of that revolution was to create a free, democratic, classless society of equals. It created a one party dictatorship based around a class system of bureaucrats exploiting and oppressing working class people and a society lacking equality and freedom. As the stated aims of the Marxist revolution failed to materialise, anarchists would argue that it failed even though a "Communist" Party remained in power for over 70 years. And as for statism and authoritarianism "saving" the revolution, they saved it for Stalin, not socialism. That is nothing to be proud of.

From an anarchist perspective, this makes perfect sense as *"[n]o revolution can ever succeed as factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSE to be achieved."* [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 261] In other words, statist and authoritarian means will result in statist and authoritarian ends. Calling a new state a "workers state" will not change its nature as a form of minority (and so class) rule. It has nothing to do with the intentions of those who gain power, it has to do with the nature of the state and the social relationships it generates. The state structure is an instrument of minority rule, it **cannot** be used by the majority because it is based on hierarchy, centralisation and the empowerment of the minority at the top at the expense of everyone else. States have certain properties **just because they are states.** They have their own dynamics which place them outside popular control and are not simply a tool in the hands of the economically dominant class. Making



such a rejection into private statism and support for hierarchical authority associated with private property that it cannot be made consistent with the ideals of anarchism. In constrast, given its **own** principles, individualist anarchism can easily become **consistent** anarchism. That is why it is a school of anarchism, unlike "anarcho"-capitalism. All that is required is to consistently apply "occupancy and use" to workplaces (as Proudhon advocated as did many individualist anarchists). By consistently applying this principle it finally ends exploitation along with hierarchy, so bringing all its ideals into line.

As Malatesta argued, *"anarchy, as understood by the anarchists and as only they can interpret it, is based on socialism. Indeed were it not for those schools of socialism which artificially divide the natural unity of the social question, and consider some aspects out of context . .. we could say straight out that anarchy is synonymous with socialism, for both stand for the abolition of the domination and exploitation of man by man, whether exercised at bayonet point or by a monopoly of the means of life."* Without socialism, liberty is purely *"liberty ... for the strong and the property owners to oppress and exploit the weak, those who have nothing ... [so] lead[ing] to exploitation and domination, in other words, to authority ... for freedom is not possible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism."* [**Anarchy**, p. 48 and p. 47]

# G.5 Benjamin Tucker: Capitalist or Anarchist?

Benjamin Tucker, like all genuine anarchists, was against both the state and capitalism, against both oppression and exploitation. While not against the market and property he was firmly against capitalism as it was, in his eyes, a state-supported monopoly of social capital (tools, machinery, etc.) which allows owners to exploit their employees, i.e., to avoid paying workers the full value of their labour. He thought that the *"labouring classes are deprived of their earnings by usury in its three forms, interest, rent and profit."* [quoted by James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 210f] Therefore *"Liberty will abolish interest; it will abolish profit; it will abolish monopolistic rent; it will abolish taxation; it will abolish the exploitation of labour; it will abolish all means whereby any labourer can be deprived of any of his product."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 157]

This stance puts him squarely in the libertarian socialist tradition and, unsurprisingly, Tucker referred to himself many times as a socialist and considered his philosophy to be *"Anarchistic socialism."* For Tucker, capitalist society was exploitative and stopped the full development of all and so had to be replaced:

> *"[This] society is fundamentally anti-social. The whole so-called social fabric rests on privilege and power, and is disordered and strained in every direction by the inequalities that necessarily result*



minority of the German Social-Democrats did not support the war, initially many of this anti-war minority went along with the majority of party in the name of "discipline" and "democratic" principles.

In contrast, only a **very** small minority of anarchists supported any side during the conflict. The bulk of the anarchist movement (including such leading lights as Malatesta, Rocker, Goldman and Berkman) opposed the war, arguing that anarchists must *"capitalise upon every stirring of rebellion, every discontent in order to foment insurrection, to organise the revolution to which we look for the ending of all of society's iniquities."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2., p. 36] As Malatesta noted at the time, the pro-war anarchists were *"not numerous, it is true, but [did have] amongst them comrades whom we love and respect most."* He stressed that the *"almost all"* of the anarchists *"have remained faithful to their convictions"* namely *"to awaken a consciousness of the antagonism of interests between dominators and dominated, between exploiters and workers, and to develop the class struggle inside each country, and solidarity among all workers across the frontiers, as against any prejudice and any passion of either race or nationality."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 243, p. 248 and p. 244] By pointing to Kropotkin, Marxists hide the facts that he was very much in a minority within the anarchist movement and that it was the official Marxist movement which betrayed the cause of internationalism, not anarchism. Indeed, the betrayal of the Second International was the natural result of the *"ascendancy"* of Marxism over anarchism that Marx had hoped. The rise of Marxism, in the form of social-democracy, ended as Bakunin predicted, with the corruption of socialism in the quagmire of electioneering and statism. As Rudolf Rocker correctly argued, *"the Great War of 1914 was the exposure of the bankruptcy of political socialism."* [**Marx and Anarchism**]

Here we will analyse Marxism in terms of its theories and how they worked in practice. Thus we will conduct a scientific

If we look at Kropotkin's support for the Allies in the First World War we discover a strange hypocrisy on the part of Marxists as well as an attempt to distort history. Why hypocrisy? Simply because Marx and Engels supported Prussia during the Franco-Prussian war while, in contrast, Bakunin argued for a popular uprising and social revolution to stop the war. As Marx wrote to Engels on July 20th, 1870:

> *"The French need to be overcome. If the Prussians are victorious, the centralisation of the power of the State will be useful for the centralisation of the German working class. Moreover, German ascendancy will transfer the centre of gravity of the European worker's movement from France to Germany ... On a world scale, the ascendancy of the German proletariat the French proletariat will at the same time constitute the ascendancy of* ***our*** *theory over Proudhon's."* [quoted by Arthur Lehning, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 284]

Marx, in part, supported the deaths of working class people in war in order to see **his** ideas become more important than Proudhon's! The hypocrisy of the Marxists is clear — if anarchism is to be condemned for Kropotkin's actions, then Marxism must be equally condemned for Marx's.

This analysis also rewrites history as the bulk of the Marxist movement supported their respective states during the conflict. A handful of the parties of the Second International opposed the war (and those were the smallest ones as well). The father of Russian Marxism, George Plekhanov, supported the Allies while the German Social Democratic Party (the jewel in the crown of the Second International) supported its nation-state in the war. There was just one man in the German Reichstag in August 1914 who did not vote for war credits (and he did not even vote against them, he abstained). While there was a small



> *therefrom. The welfare of each, instead of contributing to that of all, as it naturally should and would, almost invariably detracts from that of all. Wealth is made by legal privilege a hook with which to filch from labour's pockets. Every man who gets rich thereby makes his neighbours poor. The better off one is, the worse the rest are ... Labour's Deficit is precisely equal to the Capitalist's Efficit.*
>
> *"Now, Socialism wants to change all this. Socialism says ... that no man shall be able to add to his riches except by labour; that is adding to his riches by his labour alone no man makes another man poorer; that on the contrary every man this adding to his riches makes every other man richer; ... that every increase in capital in the hands of the labourer tends, in the absence of legal monopoly, to put more products, better products, cheaper products, and a greater variety of products within the reach of every man who works; and that this fact means the physical, mental, and moral perfecting of mankind, and the realisation of human fraternity."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 361–2]

It is true that he also sometimes railed against "socialism," but in those cases it is clear that he was referring to **state** socialism. Like many anarchists (including Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin), he argued that there are two kinds of socialism based upon two different principles:

> *"The two principles referred to are Authority and Liberty, and the names of the two schools of Socialistic thought which fully and unreservedly represent one or the other of them are, respectively, State Socialism and Anarchism. Whoso knows what these two schools want and how they propose to get it under-*

> *stands the Socialistic movement. For, just as it has been said that there is no half-way house between Rome and Reason, so it may be said that there is no half-way house between State Socialism and Anarchism.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150]

Like other socialists, Tucker argued that profits *"to a few mean robbery of others, — monopoly. Andrews and Warren, realising this, make individual sovereignty* ***and*** *the cost principle the essential conditions of a true civilisation."* [**Liberty**, no. 94, p. 1] Like Proudhon, he argued that *"property, in the sense of individual possession, is liberty."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 122, p. 4] However, unlike state socialists and communist-anarchists, Tucker saw a key role for a market system under socialism. In this he followed Proudhon who also argued that competition was required to ensure that prices reflected the labour costs involved in producing it and so interest, rent and profit were opposed because they did not reflect actual costs but simply usury paid to the wealthy for being allowed to use part of their wealth, a part the rich could comfortably lend out to others as they were not using it. Once capitalism was abolished, the market would be able to reach its full promise and become a means of enriching all rather than the few:

> *"Liberty's aim — universal happiness — is that of all Socialists, in contrast with that of the Manchester men — luxury fed by misery. But its principle — individual sovereignty — is that of the Manchester men, in contrast with that of the Socialists — individual subordination. But individual sovereignty,* ***when logically carried out****, leads, not to luxury fed by misery, but to comfort for all industrious persons and death for all idle ones."* [**Liberty**, no. 89, p. 1]



weighting with Lenin's and the Bolsheviks' behaviour (for example, the creation of a party dictatorship, the repression of strikes, free speech, independent working class organisation, the creation of a secret police force, the attack on Kronstadt, the betrayal of the Makhnovists, the violent repression of the Russian anarchist movement, etc.) in the league table of despicable activity. It seems strange that personal bigotry is of equal, or even more, importance in evaluating a political theory than its practice during a revolution.

Moreover, such a technique is ultimately dishonest. Looking at Proudhon, for example, his anti-Semitic outbursts remained unpublished in his note books until well after his ideas and, as Robert Graham points out, *"a reading of* ***General Idea of the Revolution*** *will show, anti-Semitism forms no part of Proudhon's revolutionary programme."* [*"Introduction"*, **The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxvi] Similarly, Bakunin's racism is an unfortunate aspect of his life, an aspect which is ultimately irrelevant to the core principles and ideas he argued for. As for Proudhon's sexism it should be noted that Bakunin and subsequent anarchists totally rejected it and argued for complete equality between the sexes. Likewise, anarchists from Kropotkin onwards have opposed racism in all its forms (and the large Jewish anarchist movement saw that Bakunin's anti-Semitic comments were not a defining aspect to his ideas). Why mention these aspects of their ideas at all?

Nor were Marx and Engels free from racist, sexism or homophobic comments yet no anarchist would dream these were worthy of mention when critiquing their ideology (for those interested in such matters, Peter Fryer's essay **"Engels: A Man of his Time"** should be consulted. This is because the anarchist critique of Marxism is robust and confirmed by substantial empirical evidence (namely, the failures of social democracy and the Russian Revolution).

as the anti-Poll Tax riots in the UK at the start of the 1990s, the London J18 and N30 demonstrations in 1999 as well as those in Prague, Quebec, Genoa and Gothenburg anarchism has become synonymous with anti-capitalism.

Needless to say, when anarchists re-appear in the media and news bulletins the self-proclaimed "vanguard(s) of the proletariat" become worried and hurriedly write patronising articles on "anarchism" (without bothering to really understand it or its arguments against Marxism). These articles are usually a mishmash of lies, irrelevant personal attacks, distortions of the anarchist position and the ridiculous assumption that anarchists are anarchists because no one has bothered to inform of us of what "Marxism" is "really" about. We do not aim to repeat such "scientific" analysis in our FAQ so we shall concentrate on politics and history. By so doing we will indicate that anarchists are anarchists because we understand Marxism and reject it as being unable to lead to a socialist society.

It is unfortunately common for many Marxists, particularly Leninist influenced ones, to concentrate on personalities and not politics when discussing anarchist ideas. In other words, they attack **anarchists** rather than present a critique of **anarchism**. This can be seen, for example, when many Leninists attempt to "refute" the whole of anarchism, its theory and history, by pointing out the personal failings of specific anarchists. They say that Proudhon was anti-Jewish and sexist, that Bakunin was racist, that Kropotkin supported the Allies in the First World War and so anarchism is flawed. Yet this is irrelevant to a critique of anarchism as it does not address anarchist ideas but rather points to when anarchists fail to live up to them. Anarchist ideas are ignored by this approach, which is understandable as any critique which tried to do this would not only fail but also expose the authoritarianism of mainstream Marxism in the process.

Even taken at face value, you would have to be stupid to assume that Proudhon's misogyny or Bakunin's racism had equal



As other anarchists have also argued, likewise for Tucker — the state is the *"protector"* of the exploiter. *"Usury is the serpent gnawing at labour's vitals, and only liberty can detach and kill it. Give labourers their liberty and they will keep their wealth."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 89] From this it is clear that he considered laissez-faire capitalism to be opposed to genuine individual sovereignty. This was because it was based on the state interfering in the market by enforcing certain restrictions on competition in favour of the capitalist class and certain types of private property. Thus his opposition to the state reflected his opposition to capitalist property rights and the abolition of the state automatically meant their abolition as well.

Tucker spent considerable time making it clear that he was against capitalist private property rights, most notably in land and what was on it. He supported Proudhon's argument that *"property is theft,"* even translating many of Proudhon's works including the classic *"What is Property?"* where that phrase originated. Tucker advocated **possession** (or *"occupancy and use,"* to use his preferred expression for the concept) but not private property, believing that empty land, houses, and so on should be squatted by those who could use them, as labour (i.e. use) would be the only title to "property" (Tucker opposed all non-labour income as usury). For Tucker, the true *"Anarchistic doctrine"* was *"occupancy and use as the basis and limit of land ownership."* Supporting the current property rights regime meant *"departing from Anarchistic ground."* It was *"Archism"* and *"all Anarchists agree in viewing [it] as a denial of equal liberty"* and *"utterly inconsistent with the Anarchistic doctrine of occupancy and use as the limit of property in land."* [**Liberty**, no. 180, p. 4 and p. 6] He looked forward to the day when *"the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becomes the prevailing view."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 162, p. 5]

This was because Tucker did not believe in a *"natural right"* to property nor did he approve of unlimited holdings of scarce

goods and *"in the case of land, or of any other material the supply of which is so limited that all cannot hold it in unlimited quantities, Anarchism undertakes to protect no titles except such as are based on actual occupancy and use."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 61] He clearly recognised that allowing "absolute" rights to private property in land would result in the liberty of non-owners being diminished and so *"I put the right of occupancy and use above the right of contract ... principally by my interest in the right of contract. Without such a preference the theory of occupancy and use is utterly untenable; without it ... it would be possible for an individual to acquire, and hold simultaneously, virtual titles to innumerable parcels of land, by the merest show of labour performed thereon.* This would lead to *"the virtual ownership of the entire world by a small fraction of its inhabitants"* which would result in *"the right of contract, if not destroyed absolutely, would surely be impaired in an intolerable degree."* [**Liberty**, no. 350, p. 4] Thus *"[i]t is true ... that Anarchism does not recognise the principle of human rights. But it recognises human equality as a necessity of stable society."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 64]

So Tucker considered private property in land use (which he called the *"land monopoly"*) as one of the four great evils of capitalism. According to Tucker, *"the land monopoly ... consists in the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation ... the individual should no longer be protected by their fellows in anything but personal occupation and cultivation of land." "Rent"*, he argued, *"is due to the denial of liberty which takes the shape of the land monopoly, vesting titles to land in individuals and associations which do not use it, and thereby compelling the non-owning users to pay tribute to the non-using owners as a condition of admission to the competitive market."* the land *"should be free to all, and no one would control more than he [or she] used."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 85, p. 130 and p. 114] Ending this monopoly would, he thought, reduce the evils of capitalism and increase liberty (particularly in predominantly agricultural so-



*as many different kinds of anarchists are there are socialists. In both cases, the spectrum ranges from individuals whose views derive from an extension of liberalism (the 'individualist anarchists', the social-democrats) to revolutionary communists (the anarcho-communists, the revolutionary Marxists, Leninists and Trotskyites)."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 138f]

In this section of the FAQ we concentrate on the conflict between the revolutionary wings of both movements. Here we discuss why communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and other revolutionary anarchists reject Marxist theories, particularly the ideas of Leninists and Trotskyites. We will concentrate almost entirely on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky as well as the Russian Revolution. This is because many Marxists reject the Chinese, Cuban and other revolutions as being infected from the start by Stalinism. In contrast, there is a general agreement in Marxist circles that the Russian Revolution was a true socialist revolution and the ideas of Lenin (and usually Trotsky) follow in Marx's footsteps. What we say against Marx and Lenin is also applicable to their more controversial followers and, therefore, we ignore them. We also dismiss out of hand any suggestion that the Stalinist regime was remotely socialist. Unfortunately many serious revolutionaries consider Lenin's regime to be an example of a valid socialist revolution so we have to discuss why it was not.

As noted, two main wings of the revolutionary socialist movement, anarchism and Marxism, have always been in conflict. While, with the apparent success of the Russian revolution, the anarchist movement was overshadowed by Leninism in many countries, this situation has been changing. In recent years anarchism has seen a revival as more and more people recognise the fundamentally anti-socialist nature of the Russian "experiment" and the politics that inspired it. With this re-evaluation of socialism and the Soviet Union, more and more people are rejecting Marxism and embracing libertarian socialism. As can be seen from the press coverage from such events

The socialist movement has been continually divided, with various different tendencies and movements. The main tendencies of socialism are state socialism (Social Democracy, Leninism, Maoism and so on) and libertarian socialism (anarchism mostly, but also libertarian Marxists and others). The conflict and disagreement between anarchists and Marxists is legendary. As Benjamin Tucker noted:

> *"[I]t is a curious fact that the two extremes of the [socialist movement] ... though united ... by the common claim that labour should be put in possession of its own, are more diametrically opposed to each other in their fundamental principles of social action and their methods of reaching the ends aimed at than either is to their common enemy, existing society. They are based on two principles the history of whose conflict is almost equivalent to the history of the world since man came into it ...*
>
> *"The two principles referred to are AUTHORITY and LIBERTY, and the names of the two schools of Socialistic thought which fully and unreservedly represent one or the other are, respectively, State Socialism and Anarchism. Whoso knows that these two schools want and how they propose to get it understands the Socialistic movement. For, just as it has been said that there is no half-way house between Rome and Reason, so it may be said that there is no half-way house between State Socialism and Anarchism."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 78–9]

In addition to this divide between libertarian and authoritarian forms of socialism, there is another divide between reformist and revolutionary wings of these two tendencies. *"The term 'anarchist,'"* Murray Bookchin wrote, *"is a generic word like the term 'socialist,' and there are probably*



cieties such as the America of his era). For those who own no property have no room for the soles of their feet unless they have the permission of those who do own property, hardly a situation that would increase, never mind protect, freedom for all. Significantly, Tucker extended this principle to what was on the land, and so Tucker would *"accord the actual occupant and user of land the right to that which is upon the land, who left it there when abandoning the land."* [**Liberty**, no. 350, p. 4] The freedom to squat empty land and buildings would, in the absence of a state to protect titles, further contribute to the elimination of rent:

> *"Ground rent exists only because the State stands by to collect it and to protect land titles rooted in force or fraud. Otherwise land would be free to all, and no one could control more than he used."* [quoted by James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

This would lead to *"the abolition of landlordism and the annihilation of rent."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 300] Significantly, Tucker considered the **Irish Land League** (an organisation which used non-payment of rent to secure reforms against the British state) as *"the nearest approach, on a large scale, to perfect Anarchistic organisation that the world has yet seen. An immense number of local groups ... each group autonomous, each free ... each obeying its own judgement ... all co-ordinated and federated."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 263]

The other capitalist monopolies were based on credit, tariffs and patents and all were reflected in (and supported by) the law. As far as tariffs went, this was seen as a statist means of *"fostering production at high prices"* which the workers paid for. Its abolition *"would result in a great reduction in the prices of all articles taxed.* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85 and p. 86] With capitalists in the protected industries being unable to reap high profits, they would be unable to accumulate capital to the same degree and so the

market would also become more equal. As for patents, Tucker considered that there was *"no more justification for the claim of the discoverer of an idea to exclusive use of it than there would have been for a claim on the part of the man who first 'struck oil' to ownership of the entire oil region or petroleum product ... The central injustice of copyright and patent law is that it compels the race to pay an individual through a long term of years a monopoly price for knowledge that he has discovered today, although some other man or men might, and in many cases very probably would, have discovered it tomorrow."* [**Liberty**, no. 173, p. 4] The state, therefore, protects the inventors (or, these days, the company the inventors work for) *"against competition for a period long enough to enable them to extort from the people a reward enormously in excess of the labour measure of their services — in other words, in giving certain people a right of property for a term of years in laws and facts of Nature, and the power to extract tribute from others for the use of this natural wealth, which should be open to all."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 86]

However, the key monopoly was the credit monopoly. Tucker believed that bankers monopoly of the power to create credit and currency was the linchpin of capitalism. Although he thought that all forms of monopoly are detrimental to society, he maintained that the banking monopoly is the worst, since it is the root from which both the industrial-capitalist and landlordist monopolies grow and without which they would wither and die. For, if credit were not monopolised, its price (i.e. interest rates) would be much lower, which in turn would drastically lower the price of capital goods and buildings — expensive items that generally cannot be purchased without access to credit. This would mean that the people currently *"deterred from going into business by the ruinously high rates they must pay for capital with which to start and carry on business will find their difficulties removed"* (they would simply *"pay for the labour of running the banks"*). This *"facility of acquiring capital will give an unheard of impetus to*



# Section H — Why do anarchists oppose state socialism?

and so joins the *"critics of modern capitalism and champions of the Jeffersonian idea of the autonomous individual — independent yeoman and the self-employed mechanic."* **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 76, p. 74 and p. 91]

In summary, as can be seen, as with other individualist anarchists, there is a great deal of commonality between Spooner's ideas and those of social anarchists. Spooner perceives the same sources of exploitation and oppression inherent in monopolistic control of the means of production by a wealth-owning class as do social anarchists. His solutions may differ, but he observes exactly the same problems. In other words, Spooner is a left libertarian, and his individualist anarchism is just as anti-capitalist as the ideas of, say, Bakunin, Kropotkin or Chomsky. Spooner, in spite of his closeness to classical liberalism, was no more a capitalist than Rothbard was an anarchist.



*business, and consequently create an unprecedented demand for labour — a demand which will always be in excess of the supply, directly to the contrary of the present condition of the labour market ... Labour will then be in a position to dictate its wages."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 84 and p. 85]

Following Proudhon, Tucker argued that if any group of people could legally form a "mutual bank" and issue credit based on any form of collateral they saw fit to accept, the price of credit would fall to the labour cost of the paperwork involved in running the bank. He claimed that banking statistics show this cost to be less than one percent of principal, and hence, that a one-time service fee which covers this cost and no more is the only **non-usurious** charge a bank can make for extending credit. This charge should not be called "interest" since, as it represented the labour-cost in providing, it is non-exploitative. This would ensure that workers could gain free access to the means of production (and so, in effect, be the individualist equivalent of the communist-anarchist argument for socialisation).

Tucker believed that under mutual banking, capitalists' ability to extract surplus value from workers in return for the use of tools, machinery, etc. would be eliminated because workers would be able to obtain zero-interest credit and use it to buy their own instruments of production instead of "renting" them, as it were, from capitalists. *"Make capital free by organising credit on a mutual plan,"* stressed Tucker, *"and then these vacant lands will come into use ... operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labour problem will solved."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 321] Easy access to mutual credit would result in a huge increase in the purchase of capital goods, creating a high demand for labour, which in turn would greatly increase workers' bargaining power and thus raise their wages toward equivalence with the value their labour produces.

For Tucker, reforms had to be applied at the heart of the system and so he rejected the notion of setting up intentional communities based on anarchist principles in the countryside or in other countries. *"Government makes itself felt alike in city and in country,"* he argued, *"capital has its usurious grip on the farm as surely as on the workshop, and the oppression and exactions of neither government nor capital can be avoided by migration. The State is the enemy, and the best means of fighting it can be found in communities already existing."* He stressed that *"I care nothing for any reform that cannot be effected right here in Boston among the every day people whom I meet in the streets."* [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 249 and p. 248]

It should be noted that while his social and political vision remained mostly the same over his lifetime, Tucker's rationale for his system changed significantly. Originally, like the rest of the American individualist anarchist tradition he subscribed to a system of natural rights. Thus he advocated "occupancy and use" based on a person's right to have access to the means of life as well as its positive effects on individual liberty. However, under the influence of Max Stirner's book **The Ego and Its Own**, Tucker along with many of his comrades, became egoists (see next section for a discussion of Stirner). This resulted in Tucker arguing that while previously *"it was my habit to talk glibly of the right of man to land"* this was *"a bad habit, and I long ago sloughed it off."* Now a person's *"only right over the land is his might over it."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 350] Contracts were seen as the means of securing the peaceful preservation of the ego's personality as it would be against a person's self-interest to aggress against others (backed-up, of course, by means of freely joined defence associations). It should be noted that the issue of egoism split the individualist anarchist movement and lead to its further decline.

Tucker's ideal society was one of small entrepreneurs, farmers, artisans, independent contractors and co-operative associations based around a network of mutual banks. He looked to



exact opposition of that of the "anarcho"-capitalist guru. For Spooner, rather than being a revolt against nature, equality and liberty were seen to be mutually self-enforcing; rather than a necessary and essential aspect of a (so-called) free economy, wage labour was condemned as producing inequality, servitude and a servile mentality. Moreover, the argument that capitalists deny workers *"all the fruits"* of their labour is identical to the general **socialist** position that capitalism is exploitative. All of which undoubtedly explains why Rothbard only selectively quoted from Spooner's critique of the state rather and ignored the socio-economic principles which underlay his political analysis and hopes for a free society. Yet without those aspects of his ideas, Spooner's political analysis is pressed into service of an ideology it is doubtful he would have agreed with.

As such, we must agree with Peter Marshall, who notes that Spooner *"recommends that every man should be his own employer, and he depicts an ideal society of independent farmers and entrepreneurs who have access to easy credit. If every person received the fruits of his own labour, the just and equal distribution of wealth would result."* Because of this, he classifies Spooner as a **left** libertarian as *"his concern with equality as well as liberty makes him a left-wing individualist anarchist. Indeed, while his starting-point is the individual, Spooner goes beyond classical liberalism in his search for a form of rough equality and a community of interests.* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 389] This is also noted by Stephan L. Newman, who writes that while right-"libertarians" are generally *"sympathic to Spooner's individualist anarchism, they fail to notice or conveniently overlook its egalitarian implications … They accept inequality as the price of freedom"* and *"habour no reservations about the social consequences of capitalism."* Spooner *"insist[s] that inequality corrupts freedom. [His] anarchism is directed as much against inequality as against tyranny."* Spooner *"attempt[s] to realise th[e] promise of social harmony by recreating [a] rough equality of condition"*

[**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 33] Yet what happens if, by market forces, all the land and capital becomes owned by a few people? The socio-economic situation of the mass of the population is in exactly the same situation as under a system founded by stealing the land by the few. Equally, having to pay for access to the land results in just as much a deduction from the product of work as wage labour. If property is a "natural right" then they must be universal and so must be extended to everyone — like all rights — and this implies an end to absolute property rights (*"Because the right to live and to develop oneself fully is equal for all,"* Proudhon argued, *"and because inequality of conditions is an obstacle to the exercise of this right."* [quoted by John Enrenberg, **Proudhon and his Age**, pp. 48–9]). However, saying that it is fair to suggest, given his arguments in favour of universal self-employment, that Spooner did not think that his system of property rights would be abused to produce a landlord class and, as such, did not see the need to resolve the obvious contradictions in his ideology. Whether he was correct in that assumption is another matter.

Which indicates why Spooner must be considered an anarchist regardless of his unique position on property rights within the movement. As we argued in section A.3.1, only a system where the users of land or a workplace own it can it be consistent with anarchist principles. Otherwise, if there are bosses and landlords, then that society would be inherently hierarchical and so ***Archist***. Spooner's vision of a free society, rooted as it is in self-employment, meets the criteria of being genuinely libertarian in spite of the property rights used to justify it. Certain "anarcho"-capitalists may subscribe to a similar theory of property but they use it to justify an economy rooted in wage labour and so hierarchy.

Somewhat ironically, then, while certain of Spooner's ideas were closer to Rothbard's than other individualist anarchists (most notably, a "natural rights" defence of property) in terms of actual outcomes of applying his ideas, his vision is the



alternative institutions such as co-operative banks and firms, schools and trade unions, combined with civil disobedience in the form of strikes, general strikes, tax and rent strikes and boycotts to bring anarchism closer. He was firm supporter of the labour movement and *"strikes, whenever and wherever inaugurated, deserve encouragement from all the friends of labour … They show that people are beginning to know their rights, and knowing, dare to maintain them."* Echoing Bakunin's thoughts on the subject, Tucker maintained that strikes should be supported and encouraged because *"as an awakening agent, as an agitating force, the beneficent influence of a strike is immeasurable … with our present economic system almost every strike is just. For what is justice in production and distribution? That labour, which creates all, shall have **all.**"* [**Liberty**, no. 19, p. 7] While critical of certain aspects of trade unionism, Tucker was keen to stress that *"it is not to be denied for a moment that workingmen are obliged to unite and act together in order, not to successfully contend with, but to defend themselves at least to some extent from, the all-powerful possessors of natural wealth and capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 158, p. 1]

Like the anarcho-syndicalists and many other social anarchists, Tucker considered Labour unions as a positive development, being a *"crude step in the direction of supplanting the State"* and involved a *"movement for self-government on the part of the people, the logical outcome of which is ultimate revolt against those usurping political conspiracies which manifest themselves in courts and legislatures. Just as the [Irish] Land League has become a formidable rival of the British State, so the amalgamated trades unions may yet become a power sufficiently strong to defy the legislatures and overthrow them."* Thus unions were *"a potent sign of emancipation."* Indeed, he called the rise of the unions *"trades-union socialism,"* saw in it a means of *"supplanting"* the state by *"an intelligent and self-governing socialism"* and indicated that *"imperfect as they are, they are the beginnings of a revolt against the authority of the political State.*

*They promise the coming substitution of industrial socialism for usurping legislative mobism.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 283–284] Hence we see the co-operative nature of the voluntary organisations supported by Tucker and a vision of socialism being based on self-governing associations of working people.

In this way working people would reform capitalism away by non-violent social protest combined with an increase in workers' bargaining power by alternative voluntary institutions and free credit. Exploitation would be eliminated and workers would gain economic liberty. His ideal society would be classless, with *"each man reaping the fruit of his labour and no man able to live in idleness on an income from capital"* and society *"would become a great hive of Anarchistic workers, prosperous and free individuals."* While, like all anarchists, he rejected *"abolute equality"* he did envision an egalitarian society whose small differences in wealth were rooted in labour, not property, and so liberty, while abolishing exploitation, would *"not abolish the limited inequality between one labourer's product and another's ... Liberty will ultimately make all men rich; it will not make all men equally rich."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 276, p. 156 and p. 157] He firmly believed that the *"most perfect Socialism is possible only on the condition of the most perfect individualism."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 390]

As we noted in section G.1.3, there is one apparent area of disagreement between Tucker and most other socialists, namely the issue of wage labour. For almost all anarchists the employer/employee social relationship does not fit in well with Tucker's statement that *"if the individual has the right to govern himself, all external government is tyranny."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 86] However, even here the differences are not impossible to overcome. It is important to note that because of Tucker's proposal to increase the bargaining power of workers through access to mutual credit, his



property rights forever, a position in direct contradiction to the opinions of other anarchists (and even capitalist law and right-"libertarians" like Murray Rothbard).

Unsurprisingly, Tucker called Spooner's work on Intellectual Property *"positively foolish because it is fundamentally foolish, — because, that is to say, its discussion of the acquisition of the right of property starts with a basic proposition that must be looked upon by all consistent Anarchists as obvious nonsense."* This was because it *"defines taking possession of a thing as the bestowing of valuable labour upon it, such, for instance, in the case of land, as cutting down the trees or building a fence around it. What follows from this? Evidently that a man may go to a piece of vacant land and fence it off; that he may then go to a second piece and fence that off; then to a third, and fence that off; then to a fourth, a fifth, a hundredth, a thousandth, fencing them all off; that, unable to fence off himself as many as he wishes, he may hire other men to do the fencing for him; and that then he may stand back and bar all other men from using these lands, or admit them as tenants at such rental as he may choose to extract.* According to Tucker, Spooner *"bases his opposition to ... landlords on the **sole** ground that they or their ancestors took their lands **by the sword** from the original holders ... I then asked him whether if"* a landlord *"had found unoccupied the very lands that he now holds, and had fenced them off, he would have any objection to raise against [his] title to and leasing of these lands. He declared emphatically that he would not. Whereupon I protested that his pamphlet, powerful as it was within its scope, did not go to the bottom of the land question."* [**Liberty**, no. 182, p. 6] For Tucker, the implications of Spooner's argument were such that he stressed that it was not, in fact, anarchist at all (he called it *"Archist"*) and, as a result, rejected them.

Thus we have a contradiction. Spooner attacked the government for it *"denies the **natural** right of human beings to live on this planet. This it does by denying their **natural** right to those things that are indispensable to the maintenance of life."*

**to Grover Cleveland**, p. 48, p. 39, p. 48] Thus Spooner came to see, like other socialists that both finance and industrial capital share a common goal in oppressing and exploiting the working class and that the state is simply an organ of (minority) class rule. In this, his politics became more in line with other individualist anarchists. This analysis is, needless to say, a left-libertarian one rather than right-"libertarian."

Of course, it may be objected that Spooner was a right-Libertarian" because he supported the market and private property. However, as we argued in section G.1.1 support for the market does not equate to support for capitalism (no matter how often the ideologues of capitalism proclaim it so). As noted, markets are not the defining feature of capitalism as there were markets long before capitalism existed. So the fact that Spooner retained the concept of markets does not necessarily make him a supporter of capitalism. As for "property", this question is more complex as Spooner is the only individualist anarchist to apparently reject the idea of "occupancy and use." Somewhat ironically, he termed the doctrine that *"which holds that a man has a right to lay his hands on any thing, which has no other man's hands upon it, no matter who may have been the producer"* as *"absolute communism"* and contrasted this with *"individual property . .. which says that each man has an absolute dominion, as against all other men, over the products and acquisitions of his own labour, whether he retains them in his actual possession or not."* This Spooner subscribed to Locke's theory and argued that the *"**natural** wealth of the world belongs to those who **first** take possession of it ... There is no limit, fixed by the law of nature, to the amount of property one may acquire, simply by taking possession of natural wealth, not already possessed, except the limit fixed by power or ability to take such possession, without doing violence to the person or property of others."* [**The Law of Intellectual Property**, p. 88 and pp. 21–2] From this position he argued that the inventor should have intellectual



individualist anarchism is not only compatible with workers' control but would in fact **promote** it (as well as logically requiring it — see section G.4.1).

For if access to mutual credit were to increase the bargaining power of workers to the extent that Tucker claimed it would, they would then be able to: (1) demand and get workplace democracy; and (2) pool their credit to buy and own companies collectively. This would eliminate the top-down structure of the firm and the ability of owners to pay themselves unfairly large salaries as well as reducing capitalist profits to zero by ensuring that workers received the full value of their labour. Tucker himself pointed this out when he argued that Proudhon (like himself) *"would individualise and associate"* workplaces by mutualism, which would *"place the means of production within the reach of all."* [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 228] Proudhon used the word *"associate"* to denote co-operative (i.e. directly democratic) workplaces (and given Proudhon's comments — quoted in section G.4.2 — on capitalist firms we can dismiss any attempt to suggest that the term *"individualise"* indicates support for capitalist rather than artisan/peasant production, which is the classic example of individualised production). For as Proudhon recognised, only a system without wage slavery (and so exploitation) would ensure the goal of all anarchists: *"the greatest amount of liberty compatible with equality of liberty."* [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 131]

Thus the logical consequence of Tucker's proposals would be a system equivalent in most important respects to the kind of system advocated by other left libertarians. In terms of aspirations, Tucker's ideas reflected those of social anarchists — a form of socialism rooted in individual liberty. His fire was directed against the same targets, exploitation and oppression and so state and capital. He aimed for a society without inequalities of wealth where it would be impossible to exploit another's labour and where free access to the means of life were

secured by mutual banking and "occupancy and use" applied to land and what was on it. He considered laissez-faire capitalism to be a system of state-supported privilege rather than as an ideal to be aimed for. He argued extensively that getting rid of the state would mean getting rid of capitalist property rights and so, like other anarchists, he did not artificially divide economic and political issues. In other words, like social anarchists, he was against the state because it protected specific kinds of private property, kinds which allowed its owners to extract tribute from labour.

In summary, then, Tucker *"remained a left rather than a right-wing libertarian."* [Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 391] When he called himself a socialist he knew well what it meant and systematically fought those (usually, as today, Marxists and capitalists) who sought to equate it with state ownership. John Quail, in his history of British Anarchism, puts his finger on the contextual implications and limitations of Tucker's ideas when he wrote:

> *"Tucker was a Proudhonist and thus fundamentally committed to a society based on small proprietorship. In the American context, however, where the small landowner was often locked in battle with large capitalist interests, this did not represent the reactionary position it often did later where it could easily degenerate into an 'Anarchism for small business-men.' Tucker had a keen sense of the right of the oppressed to struggle against oppression."* [**The Slow Burning Fuse**, p. 19]

As we stressed in section G.1.4, many of Tucker's arguments can only be fully understood in the context of the society in which he developed them, namely the transformation of America from a pre-capitalist into a capitalist one by means of state intervention (the process of *"primitive accumulation"*



*bank loans would be within the reach of everybody."* [**Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure**, p. 35, p. 11 and p. 15]

This is a wonderfully self-contradictory analysis, with Spooner suggesting that industrial capitalists are both the only wealthy people around and, at the same time, sponge money off the rich who have more money than them! Equally, he seemed to believe that allowing interest rates to rise without legal limit will, first, produce more people willing to take out loans and then, when it fell below the legal limit, would produce more rich people willing to loan their cash. And as the aim of these reforms was to promote equality, how would paying interest payments to the already very wealthy help achieve that goal? As can be seen, his early work was directed at industrial capital only and he sought *"the establishment of a sort of partnership relation between the capitalist and labourer, or lender and borrower — the former furnishing capital, the latter labour."* However, he opposed the idea that debtors should pay their debts in case of failure, stating *"the capitalist is made to risk his capital on the final success of the enterprise, without any claim upon the debtor in case of failure"* and this *"is the true relation between capital and labour, (or, what is the same thing, between the lender and borrower.)"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 29–30] It is doubtful that rich lenders would concur with Spooner on that!

However, by the 1880s Spooner had lost his illusions that finance capital was fundamentally different from industrial capital. Now it was a case, like the wider individualist anarchist movement he had become aware of and joined, of attacking the money monopoly. His mature analysis recognised that *"the employers of wage labour"* were *"also the monopolists of money"* and so both wings of the capitalist class aimed to *"reduce [the public] to the condition of servants; and to subject them to all the extortions as their employers — the holders of privileged money — may choose to practice upon them." "The holders of this monopoly now rule and rob this nation; and the government, in all its branches, is simply their tool."* [**A Letter**

*to kill those who would deny these rights. Spooner called for a class war.*" [Wm. Gary Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 41] Elsewhere he thundered:

> "***Who*** *compose the real governing power in the country? ... How shall we find these men? How shall we know them from others? ... Who, of our neighbours, are members of this secret band of robbers and murderers? How can we know which are* ***their*** *houses, that we may burn or demolish them? Which* ***their*** *property, that we may destroy it? Which their persons, that we may kill them, and rid the world and ourselves of such tyrants and monsters?*" [**No Treason**, p. 46]

It should be noted that this fierce and militant rhetoric is never mentioned by those who seek to associate social anarchism with violence.

Spooner's analysis of the root causes of social problems grew more radical and consistent over time. Initially, he argued that there was a *"class of employers, who now stand between the capitalist and labourer, and, by means of usury laws, sponge money from the former, and labour from the latter, and put the plunder into their own pockets."* These usury laws *"are the contrivances, not of the retired rich men, who have capital to loan ... but of those few 'enterprising' 'business men,' as they are called, who, in and out of legislatures, are more influential than either the rich or the poor; who control the legislation of the country, and who, by means of usury laws, can sponge money from those who are richer, and labour from those who are poorer than themselves — and thus make fortunes... . And they are almost the only men who do make fortunes ... large fortunes could rarely be made at all by one individual, except by his sponging capital and labour from others."* If *"free competition in banking were allowed, the rate of interest would be brought very low, and*



to use Marx's phrase — see section F.8.5). At that time, it was possible to argue that access to credit would allow workers to set-up business and undermine big business. However, eventually Tucker had come to argue that this possibility had effectively ended and even the freest market would not be able to break-up the economic power of corporations and trusts (see section G.1.1).

In this, ironically, Tucker came to the same conclusion as his old enemy Johann Most had done three decades previously. In the 1880s, Tucker had argued that wage labour would be non-exploitative under individualist anarchy. This was part of the reason why Most had excommunicated Tucker from anarchism, for he thought that Tucker's system could not, by definition, end exploitation due to its tolerance of wage labour, an argument Tucker disputed but did not disprove (see section G.4.1 for more discussion on this issue). In 1888 Tucker had speculated that *"the question whether large concentrations of capital for production on the large scale confronts us with the disagreeable alternative of either abolishing private property or continuing to hold labour under the capitalistic yoke."* [**Liberty**, no. 122, p. 4] By 1911, he had come to the conclusion that the latter had come to pass and considered revolutionary or political action as the only means of breaking up such concentrations of wealth (although he was against individualists anarchists participating in either strategy). [Martin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 273–4] In other words, Tucker recognised that economic power existed and, as a consequence, free markets were not enough to secure free people in conditions of economic inequality.

There are, of course, many differences between the anarchism of, say, Bakunin and Kropotkin and that of Tucker. Tucker's system, for example, does retain some features usually associated with capitalism, such as competition between firms in a free market. However, the fundamental socialist objection to capitalism is not that it involves markets or "private property" but that it results in exploitation. Most

socialists oppose private property and markets because they result in exploitation and have other negative consequences rather than an opposition to them as such. Tucker's system was intended to eliminate exploitation and involves a radical change in property rights, which is why he called himself a socialist and why most other anarchists concurred. This is why we find Kropotkin discussing Tucker in his general accounts of anarchism, accounts which note that the anarchists *"constitute the left wing"* of the socialists and which make no comment that Tucker's ideas were any different in this respect. [**Anarchism**, p. 285] A position, needless to say, Tucker also held as he considered his ideas as part of the wider socialist movement.

This fact is overlooked by "anarcho"-capitalists who, in seeking to make Tucker one of their "founding fathers," point to the fact that he spoke of the advantages of owning "property." But it is apparent that by "property" he was referring to simple "possession" of land, tools, etc. by independent artisans, farmers, and co-operating workers (he used the word property *"as denoting the labourer's individual possession of his product or his share of the joint product of himself and others."* [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 394]. For, since Tucker saw his system as eliminating the ability of capitalists to maintain exploitative monopolies over the means of production, it is therefore true **by definition** that he advocated the elimination of "private property" in the capitalist sense.

So while it is true that Tucker placed "property" and markets at the heart of his vision of anarchy, this does not make he a supporter of capitalism (see sections G.1.1 and G.1.2). Unlike supporters of capitalism, the individualist anarchists identified "property" with simple "possession," or *"occupancy and use"* and considered profit, rent and interest as exploitation. Indeed, Tucker explicitly stated that *"all property rests on a labour title, and no other property do I favour."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 400] Because of their critique of capitalist property rights and



> *"The purpose and effect of these laws have been to maintain, in the hands of robber, or slave holding class, a monopoly of all lands, and, as far as possible, of all other means of creating wealth; and thus to keep the great body of labourers in such a state of poverty and dependence, as would compel them to sell their labour to their tyrants for the lowest prices at which life could be sustained."*

Thus Spooner identified the underlying basis for legislation (as well as the source of much misery, exploitation and oppression throughout history) as the result of the monopolisation of the means of wealth creation by an elite class. We doubt he would have considered that calling these laws "libertarian" would in any change their oppressive and class-based nature. The state was an instrument of the wealthy few, not some neutral machine which furthered its own interests, and so *"the whole business of legislation, which has now grown to such gigantic proportions, had its origin in the conspiracies, which have always existed among the few, for the purpose of holding the many in subjection, and extorting from them their labour, and all the profits of their labour."* Characterising employment as extortion may seem rather extreme, but it makes sense given the exploitative nature of profit under capitalism, as left libertarians have long recognised (see section C.2).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Spooner's rhetorical denunciation of the state as being a gang of murderers and thieves employed by the wealthy few to oppress and exploit the many, he was not shy in similarly extreme rhetoric in advocating revolution. In this (as in many other things) Spooner was a very atypical individualist anarchist and his language could be, at times, as extreme as Johann Most. Thus we find Spooner in 1880 *"advocat[ing] that the Irish rise up and kill their British landlords since be believed that when a person's life, liberty, and property — his natural rights — are denied, that person has a natural right*

This is an interesting comment. Spooner suggests that the liberated slave class were perhaps **better off as slaves.** Most anarchists would not go so far, although we would agree that employees are subject to the power of those who employ them and so are no long self-governing individuals — in other words, that capitalist social relationships deny self-ownership and freedom. Spooner denounced the power of the economically dominant class, noting that the workers *"were liable, at the caprice or interest of the landholders, to be thrown out of home, employment, and the opportunity of even earning a subsistence by their labour."* Lest the reader doubt that Spooner is actually discussing employment here (and not slavery), he explicitly includes being made unemployed as an example of the arbitrary nature of wage labour and indicates that this is a source of class conflict and danger for the ruling class: *"They were, therefore, in large numbers, driven to the necessity of begging, stealing, or starving; and became, of course, dangerous to the property and quiet of their late masters."* And so the *"consequence was, that these late owners found it necessary, for their own safety and the safety of their property, to organise themselves more perfectly as a government* ***and make laws for keeping these dangerous people in subjection."***

In other words, the robber class creates legislation which will protect its power, namely its property, against the dispossessed. Hence we see the creation of "law code" by the wealthy which serves to protect their interests while effectively making attempts to change the status quo illegal. This process is in effect similar to the right-"libertarian" concept of a judge interpreted and developed "general libertarian law code" which exercises a monopoly over a given area and which exists to defend the "rights" of property against "initiation of force," i.e. attempts to change the system into a new one. Spooner goes on:



their explicit opposition to usury (profits, rent and interest) individualist anarchists like Tucker could and did consider themselves as part of the wider socialist movement, the libertarian wing as opposed to the statist/Marxist wing.

Thus, Tucker is clearly a left libertarian rather than a forefather of right-wing "libertarianism". In this he comes close to what today would be called a market socialist, albeit a non-statist variety. As can be seen, his views are directly opposed to those of right "libertarians" like Murray Rothbard on a number of key issues. Most fundamentally, he rejected "absolute" property rights in land which are protected by laws enforced either by private security forces or a "night watchman state." He also recognised that workers were exploited by capitalists, who use the state to ensure that the market was skewed in their favour, and so urged working people to organise themselves to resist such exploitation and, as a consequence, supported unions and strikes. He recognised that while formal freedom may exist in an unequal society, it could not be an anarchy due to the existence of economic power and the exploitation and limitations in freedom it produced. His aim was a society of equals, one in which wealth was equally distributed and any differences would be minor and rooted in actual work done rather than by owning capital or land and making others produce it for them. This clearly indicates that Rothbard's claim to have somehow modernised Tucker's thought is **false** — "ignored" or "changed beyond recognition" would be more appropriate.

# G.6 What are the ideas of Max Stirner?

To some extent, Stirner's work **The Ego and Its Own** is like a Rorschach test. Depending on the reader's psychology, he or she can interpret it in drastically different ways. Hence, a few have tried to use Stirner's ideas to defend capitalism while others have used them to argue for anarcho-syndicalism. For example, many in the anarchist movement in Glasgow, Scotland, took Stirner's *"Union of Egoists"* literally as the basis for their anarcho-syndicalist organising in the 1940s and beyond. Similarly, we discover the noted anarchist historian Max Nettlau stating that *"[o]n reading Stirner, I maintain that he cannot be interpreted except in a socialist sense."* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 55] In this section of the FAQ, we will indicate why, in our view, the latter, syndicalistic, interpretation of egoism is far more appropriate than the capitalistic one.

It should be noted, before continuing, that Stirner's work has had a bigger impact on individualist anarchism than social anarchism. Benjamin Tucker and many of his comrades embraced egoism when they became aware of **The Ego and Its Own** (a development which provoked a split in individualist circles which, undoubtedly, contributed to its decline). However, his influence was not limited to individualist anarchism. As John P. Clark notes, Stirner *"has also been seen as a significant figure by figures who are more in the mainstream of the anarchist tradition. Emma Goldman, for example, combines an acceptance of many of the principles of anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism with a strong emphasis on individuality*



rather about economic relations between a wealth-holding class and a 'freed' class of workers and tenant farmers. Clearly he does **not** view this relation –wage labour — as a voluntary association, because the former slaves have little option but to be employed by members of the wealth-owning class. As he put it elsewhere, their wealth ensures that they have *"control of those great armies of servants — the wage labourers — from whom all their wealth is derived, and whom they can now coerce by the alternative of starvation, to labour for them."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 48] Thus we have the standard socialist analysis that economic power, wealth itself, is a source of coercion.

Spooner points out that by monopolising the means of wealth creation while at the same time requiring the newly 'liberated' slaves to provide for themselves, the robber class thus continues to receive the benefits of the labour of the former slaves while accepting none of the responsibility for their welfare. *"Of course,"* Spooner continued *"these liberated slaves, as some have erroneously called them, having no lands, or other property, and no means of obtaining an independent subsistence, had no alternative — to save themselves from starvation — but to sell their labour to the landholders, in exchange only for the coarsest necessaries of life; not always for so much even as that."* Thus while technically "free," the apparently liberated working class lack the ability to provide for their own needs and hence remain dependent on the wealth-owning class. This echoes not right-"libertarian" analysis of capitalism, but left-libertarian and other socialist viewpoints:

> *"These liberated slaves, as they were called, were now scarcely less slaves than they were before. Their means of subsistence were perhaps even more precarious than when each had his own owner, who had an interest to preserve his life."*

*energies to the seizure of still more plunder, and the enslavement of still other defenceless persons; increasing, too, their numbers, perfecting their organisations, and multiplying their weapons of war, they extend their conquests until, in order to hold what they have already got, it becomes necessary for them to act systematically, and co-operate with each other in holding their slaves in subjection.*

*"But all this they can do only by establishing what they call a government, and making what they call laws ... Thus substantially all the legislation of the world has had its origin in the desires of one class of persons to plunder and enslave others,* ***and hold them as property."***

Nothing too provocative here, simply Spooner's view of government as a tool of the wealth-holding, slave-owning class. What is more interesting is Spooner's view of the subsequent development of (post-slavery) socio-economic systems:

*"In process of time, the robber, or slaveholding, class — who had seized all the lands, and held all the means of creating wealth — began to discover that the easiest mode of managing their slaves, and making them profitable, was* ***not*** *for each slaveholder to hold his specified number of slaves, as he had done before, and as he would hold so many cattle, but to give them so much liberty as would throw upon themselves (the slaves) the responsibility of their own subsistence, and yet compel them to sell their labour to the land-holding class — their former owners — for just what the latter might choose to give them."*

Here Spooner echoes the standard anarchist critique of capitalism. Note that he is no longer talking about slavery but



*and personal uniqueness. The inspiration for this latter part of her outlook comes from thinkers like ... Stirner. Herbert Read has commented on the value of Stirner's defence of individuality."* [**Max Stirner's Egoism**, p. 90] Daniel Guérin's classic introduction to anarchism gives significant space to the German egoist, arguing he *"rehabilitated the individual at a time when the philosophical field was dominated by Hegelian anti-individualism and most reformers in the social field had been led by the misdeeds of bourgeois egotism to stress its opposite"* and pointed to *"the boldness and scope of his thought."* [**Anarchism**, p. 27] From meeting anarchists in Glasgow during the Second World War, longtime anarchist activist and artist Donald Rooum likewise combined Stirner and anarcho-communism. In America, the shortlived Situationist influenced group *"For Ourselves"* produced the inspired **The Right to Be Greedy: Theses on the Practical Necessity of Demanding Everything**, a fusion of Marx and Stirner which proclaimed a *"communist egoism"* based on the awareness that greed *"in its fullest sense is the* ***only possible*** *basis of communist society."*

It is not hard to see why so many people are influenced by Stirner's work. It is a classic, full of ideas and a sense of fun which is lacking in many political writers. For many, it is only known through the criticism Marx and Engels subjected it too in their book **The German Ideology**. As with their later attacks on Proudhon and Bakunin, the two Germans did not accurately reflect the ideas they were attacking and, in the case of Stirner, they made it their task to make them appear ridiculous and preposterous. That they took so much time and energy to do so suggests that Stirner's work is far more important and difficult to refute than their notoriously misleading diatribe suggests. That in itself should prompt interest in his work.

As will become clear from our discussion, social anarchists have much to gain from understanding Stirner's ideas and applying what is useful in them. While some may object to our attempt to place egoism and communism together, pointing out

that Stirner rejected "communism". Quite! Stirner did not subscribe to libertarian communism, because it did not exist when he was writing and so he was directing his critique against the various forms of **state** communism which did. Moreover, this does not mean that anarcho-communists and others may not find his work of use to them. And Stirner would have approved, for nothing could be more foreign to his ideas than to limit what an individual considers to be in their best interest. Unlike the narrow and self-defeating "egoism" of, say, Ayn Rand, Stirner did not prescribe what was and was not in a person's self-interest. He did not say you should act in certain ways because he preferred it, he did not redefine selfishness to allow most of bourgeois morality to remain intact. Rather he urged the individual to think for themselves and seek their own path. Not for Stirner the grim "egoism" of "selfishly" living a life determined by some guru and which only that authority figure would approve of. True egoism is not parroting what Stirner wrote and agreeing with everything he expounded. Nothing could be more foreign to Stirner's work than to invent "Stirnerism." As Donald Rooum put it:

> *"I am happy to be called a Stirnerite anarchist, provided 'Stirnerite' means one who agrees with Stirner's general drift, not one who agrees with Stirner's every word. Please judge my arguments on their merits, not on the merits of Stirner's arguments, and not by the test of whether I conform to Stirner."* [*"Anarchism and Selfishness"*, pp. 251–9, **The Raven**, no. 3, p. 259fn]

With that in mind, we will summarise Stirner's main arguments and indicate why social anarchists have been, and should be, interested in his ideas. Saying that, John P. Clark presents a sympathetic and useful social anarchist critique of his work in **Max Stirner's Egoism**. Unless otherwise indicated all quotes are from Stirner's **The Ego and Its Own**.



*loan-mongers, on whom they rely for the means to carry on their crimes."* Thus the wealthy can *"make [governments] and use them"* as well as being able to *"unmake them ... the moment they refuse to commit any crime we require of them, or to pay over to us such share of the proceeds of their robberies as we see fit to demand."* Indeed, Spooner considers *"these soulless blood-money loan-mongers"* as *"the real rulers,"* not the government (who are simply their agents). Thus governments are *"little or nothing else than mere tools, employed by the wealthy to rob, enslave, and (if need be) murder those who have less wealth, or none at all."* [**No Treason**, p. 50, p. 51, p. 52 and p. 47] This is an extremely class conscious analysis of the state, one which mirrors the standard socialist one closely.

If one grants that highly concentrated wealth has intrinsic power and may be used in such a Machiavellian manner as Spooner claims, then simple opposition to the state is not sufficient. Logically, any political theory claiming to promote liberty should also seek to limit or abolish the institutions that facilitate large concentrations of wealth. As shown above, Spooner regarded wage labour under capitalism as one of these institutions, because without it *"large fortunes could rarely be made at all by one individual."* Hence for Spooner, as for social anarchists, to be anti-statist also necessitates being anti-capitalist.

This can be clearly seen for his analysis of history, when he asks: *"Why is it that [Natural Law] has not, ages ago, been established throughout the world as the one only law that any man, or all men, could rightfully be compelled to obey?"* Spooner's answer is given in his interpretation of how the State evolved, where he postulates that it was formed through the initial ascendancy of a land-holding, slave-holding class by military conquest and oppressive enslavement of the peasantry:

> *"These tyrants, living solely on plunder, and on the labour of their slaves, and applying all their*

> *"it is evidently desirable that men should associate, so far as they freely and voluntarily can do so, for the maintenance of justice among themselves, and for mutual protection against other wrong-doers. It is also in the highest degree desirable that they should agree upon some plan or system of judicial proceedings"*

At first glance, one may be tempted to interpret Spooner's justice organisations as a subscription to "anarcho"-capitalist style protection firms. A more careful reading suggests that Spooner's actual conception is more based on the concept of mutual aid, whereby people provide such services for themselves and for others rather than buying them on a fee-per-service basis. A very different concept. As he put it elsewhere, *"[a]ll legitimate government is a mutual insurance company"* in which *"insured persons are shareholders of a company."* It is likely that this would be a co-operative as the *"free administration of justice .. . must necessarily be a part of every system of government which is not designed to be an engine in the hands of the rich for the oppression of the poor."* It seems unlikely that Spooner would have supported unequal voting rights based on wealth particularly as *"all questions as to the **rights** of the corporation itself, must be determined by members of the corporation itself ... by the unanimous verdict of a tribunal fairly representing the whole people"* such as a jury [**Trial by Jury**, p. 223, p. 172 and p. 214]

These comments are particularly important when we consider Spooner's criticisms of finance capitalists, like the Rothschilds. Here he departs even more strikingly from right-"libertarian" positions. For he believes that sheer wealth has intrinsic power, even to the extent of allowing the wealthy to coerce the government into behaving at their behest. For Spooner, governments are *"the merest hangers on, the servile, obsequious, fawning dependants and tools of these blood-money*



So what is Stirner all about? Simply put, he is an Egoist, which means that he considers self-interest to be the root cause of an individual's every action, even when he or she is apparently doing "altruistic" actions. Thus: *"I am everything to myself and I do everything **on my account**."* Even love is an example of selfishness, *"because love makes me happy, I love because loving is natural to me, because it pleases me."* He urges others to follow him and *"take courage now to really make **yourselves** the central point and the main thing altogether."* As for other people, he sees them purely as a means for self-enjoyment, a self-enjoyment which is mutual: *"For me you are nothing but my food, even as I am fed upon and turned to use by you. We have only one relation to each other, that of **usableness,** of utility, of use."* [p. 162, p. 291 and pp. 296–7]

For Stirner, all individuals are unique (*"My flesh is not their flesh, my mind is not their mind,"*) and should reject any attempts to restrict or deny their uniqueness: *"To be looked upon as a mere **part,** part of society, the individual cannot bear — because he is **more**; his uniqueness puts from it this limited conception."* Individuals, in order to maximise their uniqueness, must become aware of the **real** reasons for their actions. In other words they must become conscious, not unconscious, egoists. An unconscious, or involuntary, egoist is one *"who is always looking after his own and yet does not count himself as the highest being, who serves only himself and at the same time always thinks he is serving a higher being, who knows nothing higher than himself and yet is infatuated about something higher."* [p. 138, p. 265 and p. 36] In contrast, egoists are aware that they act purely out of self-interest, and if they support a "higher being," it is not because it is a noble thought but because it will benefit them.

Stirner himself, however, has no truck with "higher beings." Indeed, with the aim of concerning himself purely with his own interests, he attacks all "higher beings," regarding them as a variety of what he calls *"spooks,"* or ideas to which individuals

sacrifice themselves and by which they are dominated. First amongst these is the abstraction *"Man"*, into which all unique individuals are submerged and lost. As he put it, *"liberalism is a religion because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts 'Man' to the same extent as any other religion does to God ... it sets me beneath Man."* Indeed, he *"who is infatuated with* ***Man*** *leaves persons out of account so far as that infatuation extends, and floats in an ideal, sacred interest.* ***Man****, you see, is not a person, but an ideal, a spook."* [p. 176 and p.79] Among the many *"spooks"* Stirner attacks are such notable aspects of capitalist life as private property, the division of labour, the state, religion, and (at times) society itself. We will discuss Stirner's critique of capitalism before moving onto his vision of an egoist society and how it relates to social anarchism.

For the egoist, private property is a spook which *"lives by the grace of* ***law****"* and it *"becomes 'mine' only by effect of the law"*. In other words, private property exists purely *"through the* ***protection of the State,*** *through the State's grace."* Recognising its need for state protection, Stirner is also aware that *"[i]t need not make any difference to the 'good citizens' who protects them and their principles, whether an absolute King or a constitutional one, a republic, if only they are protected. And what is their principle, whose protector they always 'love'? Not that of labour"*, rather it is *"****interesting-bearing possession*** *...* ***labouring capital****, therefore ... labour certainly, yet little or none at all of one's own, but labour of capital and of the — subject labourers."* [p. 251, p. 114, p. 113 and p. 114]

As can be seen from capitalist support for fascism, Stirner was correct — as long as a regime supports capitalist interests, the 'good citizens' (including many on the so-called "libertarian" right)) will support it. Stirner sees that not only does private property require state protection, it also leads to exploitation and oppression. As noted in section D.10, like subsequent anarchists like Kropotkin, Stirner attacked the division



*cannot avoid learning natural law."* This indicates the **social** nature of rights, of our sense of right and wrong, and so rights and ethics can exist without believing in religious concepts as "Natural Law." In addition, we can say that his support for juries indicates an unconscious recognition of the **social** nature (and so evolution) of any concepts of human rights. In other words, by arguing strongly for juries to judge human conflict, he implicitly recognises that the concepts of right and wrong in society are **not** indelibly inscribed in law tomes as the "true law," but instead change and develop as society does (as reflected in the decisions of the juries). In addition, he states that *"[h]onesty, justice, natural law, is usually a very plain and simple matter,"* which is *"made up of a few simple elementary principles, of the truth and justice of which every ordinary mind has an almost intuitive perception,"* thus indicating that what is right and wrong exists in "ordinary people" and not in "prosperous judges" or any other small group claiming to speak on behalf of "truth."

As can be seen, Spooner's account of how "natural law" will be administered is radically different from, say, Murray Rothbard's and indicates a strong egalitarian context foreign to right-libertarianism. As we noted in section G.3, Rothbard explicitly rejected Spooner's ideas on the importance of jury driven law (for Spooner, *"the jurors were to judge the law, and the justice of the law."* [**Trial by Jury**, p. 134]). As far as "anarcho"-capitalism goes, one wonders how Spooner would regard the "anarcho"-capitalist "protection firm," given his comment that *"[a]ny number of scoundrels, having money enough to start with, can establish themselves as a 'government'; because, with money, they can hire soldiers, and with soldiers extort more money; and also compel general obedience to their will."* [**No Treason**, p. 22] This is the use of private police to break strikes and unions in a nutshell. Compare this to Spooner's description of his voluntary justice associations:

in the following passage shows the inherent weakness of his argument:

> *"if there be no such principle as justice, or natural law, then every human being came into the world utterly destitute of rights; and coming so into the world destitute of rights, he must forever remain so. For if no one brings any rights with him into the world, clearly no one can ever have any rights of his own, or give any to another. And the consequence would be that mankind could never have any rights; and for them to talk of any such things as their rights, would be to talk of things that had, never will, and never can have any existence."*

And, we add, unlike the "Natural Laws" of *"gravitation, ... of light, the principles of mathematics"* to which Spooner compares them, he is perfectly aware that his "Natural Law" can be *"trampled upon"* by other humans. However, unlike gravity (which does not need enforcing) it is obvious that Spooner's "Natural Law" has to be enforced by human beings as it is within human nature to steal. In other words, it is a moral code, **not** a "Natural Law" like gravity. Appeals to make this specific moral code to be considered the universal one required by nature are unconvincing, particularly as such absolutist schemes generally end up treating the rights in question (usually property related ones) as more important than actual people. Hence we find, for example, supporters of "natural rights" to property (like Murray Rothbard) willing to deny economic power, the restrictions of liberty it creates and its similarity to the state in the social relations it creates simply because property is sacred (see section F.1).

Interestingly, Spooner did come close to a **rational,** non-metaphysical source for rights when he pointed out that *"Men living in contact with each other, and having intercourse together,*



of labour resulting from private property for its deadening effects on the ego and individuality of the worker:

> *"When everyone is to cultivate himself into man, condemning a man to **machine-like labour** amounts to the same thing as slavery ... Every labour is to have the intent that the man be satisfied. Therefore he must become a **master** in it too, be able to perform it as a totality. He who in a pin-factory only puts on heads, only draws the wire, works, as it were mechanically, like a machine; he remains half-trained, does not become a master: his labour cannot **satisfy** him, it can only **fatigue** him. His labour is nothing by itself, has no object **in itself,** is nothing complete in itself; he labours only into another's hands, and is **used** (exploited) by this other."* [p. 121]

Stirner had nothing but contempt for those who defended property in terms of "natural rights" and opposed theft and taxation with a passion because it violates said rights. *"Rightful, or legitimate property of another,"* he stated, *"will by only that which **you** are content to recognise as such. If your content ceases, then this property has lost legitimacy for you, and you will laugh at absolute right to it."* After all, *"what well-founded objection could be made against theft"* [p. 278 and p. 251] He was well aware that inequality was only possible as long as the masses were convinced of the sacredness of property. In this way, the majority end up without property:

> *"Property in the civic sense means **sacred** property, such that I must **respect** your property ... Be it ever so little, if one only has somewhat of his own — to wit, a **respected** property: The more such owners ... the more 'free people and good patriots' has the State.*

> *"Political liberalism, like everything religious, counts on **respect**, humaneness, the virtues of love ... For in practice people respect nothing, and everyday the small possessions are bought up again by greater proprietors, and the 'free people' change into day labourers."* [p. 248]

Thus free competition *"is not 'free,' because I lack the **things** for competition."* Due to this basic inequality of wealth (of "things"), *"[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors ... of the capitalists, therefore. The labourer cannot **realise** on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the customer."* [p. 262 and p. 115] In other words, the working class is exploited by the capitalists and landlords.

Moreover, it is the exploitation of labour which is the basis of the state, for the state *"rests on the **slavery of labour.** If **labour becomes free**, the State is lost."* Without surplus value to feed off, a state could not exist. For Stirner, the state is the greatest threat to his individuality: *"**I** am free in **no** State."* This is because the state claims to be sovereign over a given area, while, for Stirner, only the ego can be sovereign over itself and that which it uses (its *"property"*): *"I am my **own** only when I am master of myself."* Thus the state *"is not thinkable without lordship and servitude (subjection); for the State must will to be the lord of all that it embraces."* Stirner also warned against the illusion in thinking that political liberty means that the state need not be a cause of concern for *"[p]olitical liberty means that the **polis**, the State, is free; ... not, therefore, that I am free of the State... It does not mean **my** liberty, but the liberty of a power that rules and subjugates me; it means that one of my **despots** ... is free."* [p. 116, p. 226, p. 169, p. 195 and p. 107]

Therefore Stirner urges insurrection against all forms of authority and **dis**-respect for property. For *"[i]f man reaches the point of losing respect for property, everyone will have property,*



more obvious socialists like Proudhon and Marx, Spooner was well aware that wage labour resulted in exploitation and, as a result, urged its abolition to secure the worker the full produce of their labour.

As such, Spooner's analysis of capitalism was close to that of social anarchists and Marxists. This is confirmed by an analysis of his famous works **Natural Law** (unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotes are from this work).

Spooner's support of "Natural Law" has also been taken as "evidence" that Spooner was a proto-right-"libertarian." Most obviously, this ignores the fact that support for "Natural Law" is not limited to right-"libertarians" and has been used to justify, among other things, feudalism, slavery, theocracy, liberty, fascism as well as communism. As such, "natural rights" justification for property need not imply a support for capitalism or suggest that those who hold similar views on them will subscribe to the same vision of a good society. Of course, most anarchists do not find theories of "natural law," be they those of right-"libertarians", fascists or whatever, to be particularly compelling. Certainly the ideas of "Natural Law" and "Natural Rights," as existing independently of human beings in the sense of the ideal Platonic Forms, are difficult for most anarchists to accept **per se**, because such ideas are inherently authoritarian as they suggest a duty to perform certain actions for no other reason than obedience to some higher authority regardless of their impact on individuals and personal goals. Most anarchists would agree with Tucker when he called such concepts *"religious"* (Robert Anton Wilson's **Natural Law: or don't put a rubber on your willy** is an excellent discussion of the flaws of such concepts).

Spooner, unfortunately, did subscribe to the cult of *"immutable and universal"* Natural Laws. If we look at his "defence" of Natural Law we can see how weak (and indeed silly) it is. Replacing the word *"rights"* with the word *"clothes"*

*also, which a man feels, and the higher social position he enjoys, when he is master of his own industry, than when he labours for another."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35] It is quite apparent, then, that Spooner was against wage labour and, therefore, was no supporter of capitalism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Spooner (like William Greene) had been a member of the **First International**. [George Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 393]

Whether Spooner's ideas are relevant now, given the vast amount of capital needed to start companies in established sectors of the economy, is another question. Equally, it seems unlikely that a reversion to pre-industrial forms of economy is feasible even if we assume that Spooner's claims about the virtues of a free market in credit are correct. But one thing is clear: Spooner was opposed to the way America was developing in the 19th century. He had no illusions about tariffs, for example, seeing them as a means of accumulating capital as they *"enable[d] the home producers ... to make fortunes by robbing everybody else in the prices of their goods."* Such protectionism *"originated with the employers"* as the workers *"could not have had no hope of carrying through such a scheme, if they alone were to profit; because they could have had no such influence with governments."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland** p. 20 and p. 44] He had no illusions that the state was anything else than a machine run by and for the wealthy.

Spooner viewed the rise of capitalism with disgust and suggested a way for non-exploitative and non-oppressive economic relationships to become the norm again in US society, a way based on eliminating a root feature of capitalism — wage-labour — through a system of easy credit, which he believed would enable artisans and farmers to obtain their own means of production and work for themselves. As we stressed in section G.1.2 capitalism is based not on property as such but rather property which is not owned by those who use it (i.e., Proudhon's distinction between property and possession which was echoed by, among others, Marx). Like



*as all slaves become free men as soon as they no longer respect the master as master."* And in order for labour to become free, all must have *"property." "The poor become free and proprietors only when they **rise.**"* Thus, *"[i]f we want no longer to leave the land to the landed proprietors, but to appropriate it to ourselves, we unite ourselves to this end, form a union, a **société**, that makes **itself** proprietor ... we can drive them out of many another property yet, in order to make it **our** property, the property of the — **conquerors**."* Thus property *"deserves the attacks of the Communists and Proudhon: it is untenable, because the civic proprietor is in truth nothing but a propertyless man, one who is everywhere **shut out**. Instead of owning the world, as he might, he does not own even the paltry point on which he turns around."* [p. 258, p. 260, p. 249 and pp. 248–9]

Stirner recognises the importance of self-liberation and the way that authority often exists purely through its acceptance by the governed. As he argues, *"no thing is sacred of itself, but my **declaring it sacred,** by my declaration, my judgement, my bending the knee; in short, by my conscience."* It is from this worship of what society deems *"sacred"* that individuals must liberate themselves in order to discover their true selves. And, significantly, part of this process of liberation involves the destruction of **hierarchy.** For Stirner, *"Hierarchy is domination of thoughts, domination of mind!,"* and this means that we are *"kept down by those who are supported by thoughts."* [p. 72 and p. 74] That is, by our own willingness to not question authority and the sources of that authority, such as private property and the state:

> *"Proudhon calls property 'robbery' (**le vol**) But alien property — and he is talking of this alone — is not less existent by renunciation, cession, and humility; it is a **present**. Who so sentimentally call for compassion as a poor victim of robbery, when one is just a foolish, cowardly giver of presents? Why here*

> *again put the fault on others as if they were robbing us, while we ourselves do bear the fault in leaving the others unrobbed? The poor are to blame for there being rich men."* [p. 315]

For those, like modern-day "libertarian" capitalists, who regard "profit" as the key to "selfishness," Stirner has nothing but contempt. Because "greed" is just one part of the ego, and to spend one's life pursuing only that part is to deny all other parts. Stirner called such pursuit *"self-sacrificing,"* or a *"one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism,"* which leads to the ego being possessed by one aspect of itself. For *"he who ventures everything else for* ***one thing,*** *one object, one will, one passion ... is ruled by a passion to which he brings the rest as sacrifices."* [p. 76]

For the true egoist, capitalists are *"self-sacrificing"* in this sense, because they are driven only by profit. In the end, their behaviour is just another form of self-denial, as the worship of money leads them to slight other aspects of themselves such as empathy and critical thought (the bank balance becomes the rule book). A society based on such "egoism" ends up undermining the egos which inhabit it, deadening one's own and other people's individuality and so reducing the vast potential "utility" of others to oneself. In addition, the drive for profit is not even based on self-interest, it is forced upon the individual by the workings of the market (an alien authority) and results in labour *"claim[ing] all our time and toil,"* leaving no time for the individual *"to take comfort in himself as the unique."* [pp. 268–9]

Stirner also turns his analysis to "socialism" and "communism," and his critique is as powerful as the one he directs against capitalism. This attack, for some, gives his work an appearance of being pro-capitalist, while, as indicated above, it is not. Stirner did attack socialism, but he (rightly) attacked **state** socialism, not libertarian socialism, which did not really exist at



> *producing it."* [**Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure**, p. 7]

For Spooner, as with other left-libertarians, equality was seen as the necessary basis for liberty. As he put it, the *"practice of each man's labouring for himself, instead of labouring for another for wages"* would *"be greatly promoted by a greater equality of wealth."* Not only that, it *"would also contribute to the increase of labour-saving inventions — because when a man is labouring for himself, and is to have all the proceeds of his labour, he applies his mind, with his hands, much more than when he is labouring for another."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42] As he stressed equality will have many positive outcomes beyond the abolition of wage labour and increased productiveness:

> *"Extremes of difference, in their pecuniary circumstances, divide society into castes; set up barriers to personal acquaintance; prevent or suppress sympathy; give to different individuals a widely different experience, and thus become the fertile source of alienation, contempt, envy, hatred, and wrong. But give to each man all the fruits of his own labour, and a comparative equality with others in his pecuniary condition, and caste is broken down; education is given more equally to all; and the object is promoted of placing each on a social level with all: of introducing each to the acquaintance of all; and of giving to each the greatest amount of that experience, wealth, being common to all, enables him to sympathise with all, and insures to himself the sympathy of all. And thus the social virtues of mankind would be greatly increased."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 46–7]

Independence in producing would lead to independence in all aspects of life, for it was a case of the *"higher self-respect*

> *labour, it is important, as a general rule, that each man should be his own employer, or work directly for himself, and not for another for wages; because, in the latter case, a part of the fruits of his labour go to his employer, instead of coming to himself … That each man may be his own employer, it is necessary that he have materials, or capital, upon which to bestow his labour."* [**Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure**, p. 8]

This preference for a system based on simple commodity production in which capitalists and wage slaves are replaced by self-employed and co-operating workers puts Spooner squarely in the **anti-capitalist** camp with other anarchists. And, we may add, the egalitarianism he expected to result from his system indicates the left-libertarian nature of his ideas, turning the present *"wheel of fortune"* into *"an extended surface, varied somewhat by inequalities, but still exhibiting a general level, affording a safe position for all, and creating no necessity, for either force or fraud, on the part of anyone, to enable him to secure his standing."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, pp. 388–9] Thus:

> *"That the principle of allowing each man to have, (so far as it is consistent with the principles of natural law that he can have,) all the fruits of his own labour, would conduce to a more just and equal distribution of wealth than now exists, is a proposition too self-evident almost to need illustration. It is an obvious principle of natural justice, that each man should have the fruits of his own labour … It is also an obvious fact, that the property produced by society, is now distributed in very unequal proportions among those whose labour produced it, and with very little regard to the actual value of each one's labour in*



that time (the only well known anarchist work at the time was Proudhon's **What is Property?**, published in 1840 and this work obviously could not fully reflect the developments within anarchism that were to come). He also indicated why moralistic (or altruistic) socialism is doomed to failure, and laid the foundations of the theory that socialism will work only on the basis of egoism (communist-egoism, as it is sometimes called). Stirner correctly pointed out that much of what is called socialism was nothing but warmed up liberalism, and as such ignores the individual: *"Whom does the liberal look upon as his equal? Man! …, In other words, he sees in you, not **you**, but the **species.**"* A socialism that ignores the individual consigns itself to being state capitalism, nothing more. "Socialists" of this school forget that "society" is made up of individuals and that it is individuals who work, think, love, play and enjoy themselves. Thus: *"That society is no ego at all, which could give, bestow, or grant, but an instrument or means, from which we may derive benefit … of this the socialists do not think, because they — as liberals — are imprisoned in the religious principle and zealously aspire after — a sacred society, such as the State was hitherto."* [p. 123]

Of course, for the egoist libertarian communism can be just as much an option as any other socio-political regime. As Stirner stressed, egoism *"is not hostile to the tenderest of cordiality … nor of socialism: in short, it is not inimical to any interest: it excludes no interest. It simply runs counter to un-interest and to the uninteresting: it is not against love but against sacred love … not against socialists, but against the sacred socialists."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 23] After all, if it aids the individual then Stirner had no more problems with libertarian communism that, say, rulers or exploitation. Yet this position does not imply that egoism tolerates the latter. Stirner's argument is, of course, that those who are subject to either have an interest in ending both and should unite with those in the same position to end it rather than appealing to the good will of those in power. As such, it goes without

saying that those who find in egoism fascistic tendencies are fundamentally wrong. Fascism, like any class system, aims for the elite to rule and provides various spooks for the masses to ensure this (the nation, tradition, property, and so on). Stirner, on the other hand, urges an universal egoism rather than one limited to just a few. In other words, he would wish those subjected to fascistic domination to reject such spooks and to unite and rise against those oppressing them:

> *"Well, who says that every one can do everything? What are you there for, pray, you who do not need to put up with everything? Defend yourself, and no one will do anything to you! He who would break your will has to do with you, and is your* ***enemy****. Deal with him as such. If there stand behind you for your protection some millions more, then you are an imposing power and will have an easy victory."* [p. 197]

That Stirner's desire for individual autonomy becomes transferred into support for rulership for the few and subjection for the many by many of his critics simply reflects the fact we are conditioned by class society to accept such rule as normal — and hope that our masters will be kind and subscribe to the same spooks they inflict on their subjects. It is true, of course, that a narrow "egoism" would accept and seek such relationships of domination but such a perspective is not Stirner's. This can be seen from how Stirner's egoist vision could fit with social anarchist ideas.

The key to understanding the connection lies in Stirner's idea of the *"union of egoists,"* his proposed alternative mode of organising society. Stirner believed that as more and more people become egoists, conflict in society will decrease as each individual recognises the uniqueness of others, thus ensuring a suitable environment within which they can co-operate (or



That Spooner was against capitalism can be seen in his opposition to wage labour, which he wished to eliminate by turning capital over to those who work it. Like other anarchists, he wanted to create a society of associated producers — self-employed farmers, artisans and co-operating workers — rather than wage-slaves and capitalists. For example, Spooner writes:

> *"every man, woman, and child... could ... go into business for himself, or herself — either singly, or in partnerships — and be under no necessity to act as a servant, or sell his or her labour to others. All the great establishments, of every kind, now in the hands of a few proprietors, but employing a great number of wage labourers, would be broken up; for few, or no persons, who could hire capital, and do business for themselves, would consent to labour for wages for another."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 41]

Wage-labour, Spooner argued, meant that workers did not labour for their own benefit *"but only for the benefit of their employers."* The workers are *"mere tools and machines in the hands of their employers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50] Thus he considered that *"it was necessary that every man be his own employer or work for himself in a direct way, since working for another resulted in a portion being diverted to the employer. To be one's own employer, it was necessary for one to have access to one's own capital."* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 172] This was because wage labour resulted in exploitation:

> *"When a man knows that he is to have* ***all*** *the fruits of his labour, he labours with more zeal, skill, and physical energy, than when he knows — as in the case of one labouring for wages — that a portion of the fruits of his labour are going to another... In order that each man may have the fruits of his own*

# G.7 Lysander Spooner: right-"libertarian" or libertarian socialist?

Murray Rothbard and others on the "libertarian" right have argued that Lysander Spooner is another individualist anarchist whose ideas support "anarcho"-capitalism's claim to be part of the anarchist tradition. It is fair to say that Spooner's critique of the state, rooted in *"natural rights"* doctrine, was quoted favourably by Rothbard on many occasions, making Spooner the 19th century anarchist most likely to be referenced by him. This is understandable as Spooner was undoubtedly the closest to liberalism of the individualist anarchists, making him more amenable to appropriation than the others (particularly those, like Tucker, who called themselves socialists).

As will be shown below, however, any claim that Spooner provides retroactive support for "anarcho"-capitalist claims of being a form of anarchism is untrue. This is because, regardless of his closeness to liberalism, Spooner's vision of a free society was fundamentally anti-capitalist. It is clear that Spooner was a left-libertarian who was firmly opposed to capitalism. The ignoring (at best) or outright dismissal (at worse) of Spooner's economic ideas and vision of a free society by right-"libertarians" should be more than enough to show that Spooner cannot be easily appropriated by the right regardless of his (from an anarchist position) unique, even idiosyncratic, perspective on property rights.



find *"truces"* in the *"war of all against all"*). These *"truces"* Stirner termed

**"Unions of Egoists."** They are the means by which egoists could, firstly, *"annihilate"* the state, and secondly, destroy its creature, private property, since they would *"multiply the individual's means and secure his assailed property."* [p. 258]

The unions Stirner desires would be based on free agreement, being spontaneous and voluntary associations drawn together out of the mutual interests of those involved, who would *"care best for their welfare if they **unite** with others."* [p. 309] The unions, unlike the state, exist to ensure what Stirner calls *"intercourse,"* or *"union"* between individuals. To better understand the nature of these associations, which will replace the state, Stirner lists the relationships between friends, lovers, and children at play as examples. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 25] These illustrate the kinds of relationships that maximise an individual's self-enjoyment, pleasure, freedom, and individuality, as well as ensuring that those involved sacrifice nothing while belonging to them. Such associations are based on mutuality and a free and spontaneous co-operation between equals. As Stirner puts it, *"intercourse is mutuality, it is the action, the **commercium,** of individuals."* [p. 218] Its aim is *"pleasure"* and *"self-enjoyment."* Thus Stirner sought a broad egoism, one which appreciated others and their uniqueness, and so criticised the narrow egoism of people who forgot the wealth others are:

> *"But that would be a man who does not know and cannot appreciate any of the delights emanating from an interest taken in others, from the consideration shown to others. That would be a man bereft of innumerable pleasures, a wretched character … would he not be a wretched egoist, rather than a genuine Egoist? … The person who loves a human being is, by virtue of that love, a wealthier man that*

> *someone else who loves no one."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 23]

In order to ensure that those involved do not sacrifice any of their uniqueness and freedom, the contracting parties have to have roughly the same bargaining power and the association created must be based on self-management (i.e. equality of power). Only under self-management can all participate in the affairs of the union and express their individuality. Otherwise, we have to assume that some of the egoists involved will stop being egoists and will allow themselves to be dominated by another, which is unlikely. As Stirner himself argued:

> "But is an association, wherein most members allow themselves to be lulled as regards their most natural and most obvious interests, actually an Egoist's association? Can they really be 'Egoists' who have banded together when one is a slave or a serf of the other?…
>
> "Societies wherein the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the rest, where, say, some may satisfy their need for rest thanks to the fact that the rest must work to the point of exhaustion, and can lead a life of ease because others live in misery and perish of hunger, or indeed who live a life of dissipation because others are foolish enough to live in indigence, etc., such societies … [are] more of a religious society, a communion held as sacrosanct by right, by law and by all the pomp and circumstance of the courts." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

Therefore, egoism's revolt against all hierarchies that restrict the ego logically leads to the end of authoritarian social relationships, particularly those associated with private property and the state. Given that capitalism is marked by extensive



defence against hierarchy and for the pleasure of co-operative intercourse between unique individuals.

Stirner demonstrates brilliantly how abstractions and fixed ideas (*"spooks"*) influence the very way we think, see ourselves, and act. He shows how hierarchy has its roots within our own minds, in how we view the world. He offers a powerful defence of individuality in an authoritarian and alienated world, and places subjectivity at the centre of any revolutionary project, where it belongs. Finally, he reminds us that a free society must exist in the interests of all, and must be based upon the self-fulfilment, liberation and enjoyment of the individual.

differences in bargaining power outside its "associations" (i.e. firms) and power within these "associations" (i.e. the worker/boss hierarchy), from an egoist point of view it is in the self-interest of those subjected to such relationships to get rid of them and replace them with unions based on mutuality, free association, and self-management. Ultimately, Stirner stresses that it is in the workers' **self-interest** to free themselves from both state and capitalist oppression. Sounding like an anarcho-syndicalist, Stirner recognised the potential for strike action as a means of self-liberation:

> *"The labourers have the most enormous power in their hands, and, if they once become thoroughly conscious of it and used it, nothing could withstand them; they would only have to stop labour, regard the product of labour as theirs, and enjoy it. This is the sense of the labour disturbances which show themselves here and there."* [p. 116]

Given the holistic and egalitarian nature of the union of egoists, it can be seen that it shares little with the so-called free agreements of capitalism (in particular wage labour). The hierarchical structure of capitalist firms hardly produces associations in which the individual's experiences can be compared to those involved in friendship or play, nor do they involve equality. An essential aspect of the *"union of egoists"* for Stirner was such groups should be "owned" by their members, not the members by the group. That points to a **libertarian** form of organisation within these "unions" (i.e. one based on equality and participation), **not** a hierarchical one. If you have no say in how a group functions (as in wage slavery, where workers have the "option" of "love it or leave it") then you can hardly be said to own it, can you? Indeed, Stirner argues, for *"[o]nly in the union can you assert yourself as unique, because the union does not possess you, but you possess it or make it of use to you."* [p. 312]



Stirner notes that socialising property need not result in genuine freedom if it is not rooted in individual use and control. He states *"the lord is proprietor. Choose then whether you want to be lord, or whether society shall be!"* He notes that many communists of his time attacked alienated property but did not stress that the aim was to ensure access for all individuals. *"Instead of transforming the alien into own,"* Stirner noted, *"they play impartial and ask only that all property be left to a third party, such as human society. They revindicate the alien not in their own name, but in a third party's"* Ultimately, of course, under libertarian communism it is not "society" which uses the means of life but individuals and associations of individuals. As Stirner stressed: *"Neither God nor Man ('human society') is proprietor, but the individual."* [p. 313, p. 315 and p. 251] This is why social anarchists have always stressed self-management — only that can bring collectivised property into the hands of those who utilise it. Stirner places the focus on decision making back where it belongs — in the individuals who make up a given community rather than abstractions like "society."

Therefore Stirner's union of egoists has strong connections with social anarchism's desire for a society based on freely federated individuals, co-operating as equals. His central idea of "property" — that which is used by the ego — is an important concept for social anarchism because it stresses that hierarchy develops when we let ideas and organisations own us rather than vice versa. A participatory anarchist community will be made up of individuals who must ensure that it remains their "property" and be under their control; hence the importance of decentralised, confederal organisations which ensure that control. A free society must be organised in such a way to ensure the free and full development of individuality and maximise the pleasure to be gained from individual interaction and activity. Lastly, Stirner indicates that mutual aid and equality are based not upon an abstract morality but upon self-interest, both for

Thus, Stirner's *"union of egoists"* cannot be compared to the employer-employee contract as the employees cannot be said to "own" the organisation resulting from the contract (nor do they own themselves during work time, having sold their labour/liberty to the boss in return for wages — see section B.4). Only within a participatory association can you *"assert"* yourself freely and subject your maxims, and association, to your *"ongoing criticism"* — in capitalist contracts you can do both only with your bosses' permission.

And by the same token, capitalist contracts do not involve "leaving each other alone" (a la "anarcho"-capitalism). No boss will "leave alone" the workers in his factory, nor will a landowner "leave alone" a squatter on land he owns but does not use. Stirner rejects the narrow concept of "property" as private property and recognises the **social** nature of "property," whose use often affects far more people than those who claim to "own" it: *"I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as **my** property, in which I 'respect' nothing. Pray do the like with what you call my property!"* [p. 248] This view logically leads to the idea of both workers' self-management and grassroots community control (as will be discussed more fully in section I) as those affected by an activity will take a direct interest in it and not let "respect" for "private" property allow them to be oppressed by others.

Moreover, egoism (self-interest) must lead to self-management and mutual aid (solidarity), for by coming to agreements based on mutual respect and social equality, we ensure non-hierarchical relationships. If I dominate someone, then in all likelihood I will be dominated in turn. By removing hierarchy and domination, the ego is free to experience and utilise the full potential of others. As Kropotkin argued in **Mutual Aid**, individual freedom and social co-operation are not only compatible but, when united, create the most productive conditions for all individuals within society.



Stirner reminds the social anarchist that communism and collectivism are not sought for their own sake but to ensure individual freedom and enjoyment. As he argued: *"But should competition some day disappear, because concerted effort will have been acknowledged as more beneficial than isolation, then will not every single individual inside the associations be equally egoistic and out for his own interests?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] This is because competition has its drawbacks, for *"[r]estless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm **enjoyment**. We do not get the comfort of our possessions... Hence it is at any rate helpful that we come to an agreement about **human** labours that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil."* [p. 268] In other words, in the market only the market is free not those subject to its pressures and necessities — an important truism which defenders of capitalism always ignore.

Forgetting about the individual was, for Stirner, the key problem with the forms of communism he was familiar with and so this *"organisation of labour touches only such labours as others can do for us ... the rest remain egoistic, because no one can in your stead elaborate your musical compositions, carry out your projects of painting, etc.; nobody can replace Raphael's labours. The latter are labours of a unique person, which only he is competent to achieve."* He went on to ask *"for whom is time to be gained [by association]? For what does man require more time than is necessary to refresh his wearied powers of labour? Here Communism is silent."* Unlike egoism, which answers: *"To take comfort in himself as unique, after he has done his part as man!"* In other words, competition *"has a continued existence"* because *"all do not attend to **their affair** and come to an **understanding** with each other about it."* [p. 269 and p. 275] As can be seen from Chapter 8 of Kropotkin's **Conquest of Bread** (*"The Need for Luxury"*), communist-anarchism builds upon this insight, arguing that communism is required to ensure that all individuals have the time and energy to pursue their own unique interests and dreams (see section I.4).

*forms would remain a vain hope.*" [Luigi Galleani, **The End of Anarchism?**, pp. 13–4, p. 14 and p. 12]

Anarchists, therefore, argue that we need to reclaim the power which has been concentrated into the hands of the state. That is why we stress direct action. Direct action means action by the people themselves, that is action directly taken by those directly affected. Through direct action, we dominate our own struggles, it is we who conduct it, organise it, manage it. We do not hand over to others our own acts and task of self-liberation. That way, we become accustomed to managing our own affairs, creating alternative, libertarian, forms of social organisation which can become a force to resist the state, win reforms and, ultimately, become the framework of a free society. In other words, direct action creates organs of self-activity (such as community assemblies, factory committees, workers' councils, and so on) which, to use Bakunin's words, are *"creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."*

The idea that socialists standing for elections somehow prepares working class people for revolution is simply wrong. Utilising the state, standing in elections, only prepares people for following leaders — it does not encourage the self-activity, self-organisation, direct action and mass struggle required for a social revolution. Moreover, as Bakunin predicted use of elections has a corrupting effect on those who use it. The history of radicals using elections has been a long one of betrayal and the transformation of revolutionary parties into reformist ones (see section J.2.6 for more discussion). Using the existing state ensures that the division at the heart of existing society (namely a few who govern and the many who obey) is reproduced in the movements trying to abolish it. It boils down to handing effective leadership to special people, to "leaders," just when the situation requires working people to solve their own problems and take matters into their own hands:



the minority Socialists within a "workers' state" just changes the minority in charge, the minority exploiting and oppressing the majority. As Emma Goldman put it:

> *"It would be an error to assume that the failure of the Revolution was due entirely to the character of the Bolsheviki. Fundamentally, it was the result of the principles and methods of Bolshevism. It was the authoritarian spirit and principles of the State which stifled the libertarian and liberating aspirations [unleashed by the revolution] .. . Only this understanding of the underlying forces that crushed the Revolution can present the true lesson of that world-stirring event."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 250]

Similarly, in spite of over 100 years of socialists and radicals using elections to put forward their ideas and the resulting corruption of every party which has done so, most Marxists still call for socialists to take part in elections. For a theory which calls itself scientific this ignoring of empirical evidence, the facts of history, is truly amazing. Marxism ranks with economics as the "science" which most consistently ignores history and evidence.

As this section of the FAQ will make clear, this name calling and concentration on the personal failings of individual anarchists by Marxists is not an accident. If we take the ability of a theory to predict future events as an indication of its power then it soon becomes clear that anarchism is a far more useful tool in working class struggle and self-liberation than Marxism. After all, anarchists predicted with amazing accuracy the future development of Marxism. Bakunin argued that electioneering would corrupt the socialist movement, making it reformist and just another bourgeois party (see section J.2). This is what in fact happened to the Social-Democratic movement across the world by the turn of the twentieth century (the rhetoric remained radical for a few more years, of course).

If we look at the "workers' states" created by Marxists, we discover, yet again, anarchist predictions proved right. Bakunin argued that *"[b]y popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people... [That is,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of* ***former*** *workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178] The history of every Marxist revolution proves his critique was correct.

Due to these "workers' states" socialism has become associated with repressive regimes, with totalitarian state capitalist systems the total opposite of what socialism is actually about. Nor does it help when self-proclaimed socialists (such as Trotskyites) obscenely describe regimes that exploit, imprison and murder wage labourers in Cuba, North Korea, and China as 'workers' states'. While some neo-Trotskyists (like the British SWP) refuse to defend, in any way, Stalinist states (as they argue — correctly, even if their analysis is flawed — that they are state capitalist) most Trotskyists do not. Little wonder many anarchists do not use the terms "socialist" or "communist" and just call themselves "anarchists." This is because such terms are associated with regimes and parties which have nothing in common with our ideas, or, indeed, the ideals of socialism as such.

This does not mean that anarchists reject everything Marx wrote. Far from it. Much of his analysis of capitalism is acceptable to anarchists, for example (both Bakunin and Tucker considered Marx's economic analysis as important). Indeed, there are some schools of Marxism which are very libertarian and are close cousins to anarchism (for example, council commu-



ing candidates for office and having socialist representatives in Parliament and other local and national state bodies. In other words, what Marx termed *"political action"* and the Bolsheviks *"revolutionary Parliamentarianism."*

For anarchists, the use of elections does not "prepare" the working class for revolution (i.e. managing their own affairs and society). Rather, it prepares them to follow leaders and let others act for them. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

> *"Participation in the politics of the bourgeois States has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but thanks to this method, Socialism has almost been completely crushed and condemned to insignificance ... Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist Labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity, and, worse of all, the impulse to self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54]

While electoral ("political") activity ensures that the masses become accustomed to following leaders and letting them act on their behalf, anarchists' support direct action as *"the best available means for preparing the masses to manage their own personal and collective interests; and besides, anarchists feel that even now the working people are fully capable of handling their own political and administrative interests."* Political action, in contrast, needs centralised *"authoritarian organisations"* and results in *"ceding power by all to someone, the delegate, the representative"*. "For direct pressure put against the ruling classes by the masses, the Socialist Party has substituted representation" and *"instead of fostering the class struggle ... it has adopted class collaboration in the legislative arena, without which all re-*

of the 18th century itself? Did they not realise that the leaders of the vanguard party know better than themselves how they should organise and conduct their struggles? That the people of the 21st century knew best how to organise their own revolts is lost of Harman, who prefers to squeeze the realities of modern struggles into the forms which Marxists took so long to recognise in the first place. Given that anarchists have been discussing the possibilities of community assemblies for some time, perhaps we can expect Leninists to recognise their importance in a few decades? After all, the Bolsheviks in Russia were slow to realise the significance of the soviets in 1905 so Harman's position is hardly surprising.

So, it is easy to see what anarchists think of Lenin's assertion that *"Anarchism had failed to give anything even approaching a true solution of the concrete political problems,* ***viz****., must the old state machine be* ***smashed****? and* ***what*** *should supersede it?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 350] We simply point out that Lenin was utterly distorting the anarchist position on social revolution. Revolutionary anarchists had, since the 1860s, argued that workers' councils (soviets) could be both a weapon of class struggle against capitalism and the state as well as the framework of the future (libertarian) socialist society. Lenin only came to superficially similar conclusions in 1917. Which means that when he talked of workers' councils, Lenin was only repeating Bakunin — the difference being we anarchists mean it!

## H.1.5 Why do anarchists reject *"utilising the present state"*?

This is another key issue, the question of Marxists demanding (in the words of Lenin) *"that the proletariat be prepared for revolution by utilising the present state"* while anarchists *"reject this."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 358] By this, Lenin meant the taking part of socialists in bourgeois elections, standnism and Autonomist Marxism are close to revolutionary anarchism). Unfortunately, these forms of Libertarian Marxism are a minority current within that movement. So, Marxism is not all bad — unfortunately the vast bulk of it is and those elements which are not are found in anarchism anyway. For most, Marxism is the school of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, not Marx, Pannekoek, Gorter, Ruhle and Mattick.

The minority libertarian trend of Marxism is based, like anarchism, on a rejection of party rule, electioneering and creating a "workers' state." Its supporters also, like anarchists, advocate direct action, self-managed class struggle, working class autonomy and a self-managed socialist society. These Marxists oppose the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat and, in effect, agree with Bakunin on many key issues (such as anti-parliamentarianism, direct action, workers' councils, etc.).

These libertarian forms of Marxism should be encouraged and not tarred with the same brush as Leninism and social democracy (indeed Lenin commented upon *"the anarchist deviation of the German Communist Workers' Party"* and the *"semi-anarchist elements"* of the very groups we are referring to here under the term libertarian Marxism. [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 252 and p. 514]). Over time, hopefully, such comrades will see that the libertarian element of their thought outweighs the Marxist legacy. So our comments in this section of the FAQ are mostly directed to the majority form of Marxism, not to its libertarian wing.

One last point. We must note that in the past many leading Marxists have slandered anarchists. Engels, for example, wrote that the anarchist movement survived because *"the governments in Europe and America are much too interested in its continued existence, and spend too much money on supporting it."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 414] So there is often no love lost between the two schools of socialism. Indeed, Marxists have argued that anarchism and socialism were miles apart and some even asserted that anarchism was not even a form

of socialism. Lenin (at times) and leading American Marxist Daniel De Leon took this line, along with many others. This is true, in a sense, as anarchists are not **state** socialists — we reject such "socialism" as deeply authoritarian. However, all anarchists **are** members of the socialist movement and we reject attempts by Marxists to monopolise the term. Be that as it may, sometimes in this section we may find it useful to use the term socialist/communist to describe "state socialist" and anarchist to describe "libertarian socialist/communist." This in no way implies that anarchists are not socialists. It is purely a tool to make our arguments easier to read.



who do not implement their mandate! But given that Leninism aims at party power, this concern for representation is perfectly understandable, if lamentable.

So rather than celebrate this rise in mass self-management and self-organisation, Harman complains that these *"popular assemblies are not anchored in the workplaces where millions of Argentineans are still drawn together on a daily basis to toil."* Need it be said that such an SWP approved organisation will automatically exclude the unemployed, housewives, the elderly, children and other working class people who were taking part in the struggle? In addition, any capitalist crisis is marked by rising unemployment, firms closing and so on. While workplaces must and have been seized by their workers, it is a law of revolutions that the economic disruption they cause results in increased unemployment (in this Kropotkin's arguments in **The Conquest of Bread** have been confirmed time and time again). Significantly, Harman admits that they include *"organisations of unemployed workers"* as well as *"that in some of the assemblies an important leading role is played by unemployed activists shaped by their role in past industrial struggles."* He does not, however, note that creating workers' councils would end their active participation in the revolt. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

That the Argentine working class formed organs of power which were not totally dependent on the workplace was, therefore, a good sign. Factory assemblies and federations must be formed but as a complement to, rather than as a replacement of, the community assemblies. Harman states that the assemblies were *"closer to the sections — the nightly district mass meetings — of the French Revolution than to the workers' councils of 1905 and 1917 in Russia"* and complains that a *"21st century uprising was taking the form of the archetypal 18th century revolution!"* [**Op. Cit.**. p. 25 and p. 22] Did the Argentineans not realise that a 21st century uprising should mimic *"the great working class struggles of the 20th century"*, particularly that which took place in a mostly pre-capitalist Tsarist regime which was barely out

*centralisation."* [*"Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism"*, pp. 51–2, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 52]

Clearly, Lenin's assertions are little more than straw men. Anarchists are not only well aware of the need for a federation of working class associations (workers' councils or soviets) to replace the state, they were advocating it long before Lenin took up this perspective in 1917 (as we discuss in section H.3.10). The key difference being, of course, anarchists meant it will Lenin saw it as a means of securing Bolshevik party power.

Lastly, it should also be noted that Marxists, having taken so long to draw the same conclusions as anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin, have tended to make a fetish of workers councils. As an example, we find Chris Harman of the British SWP complaining that the Argentinean masses organised themselves in the wrong way as part of their revolt against neo-liberalism which started in December 2001. He states that the *"neighbourhood committees and popular assemblies"* created by the revolt *"express the need of those who have overthrown presidents to organise themselves"* and notes *"they have certain similarities with the characteristic forms of mass self organisation that arose in the great working class struggles of the 20$^{th}$ century — the workers' councils or soviets."* But, he stressed, *"they also have very important differences from these."* Yet Harman's complaints show his own confusions, seriously arguing that *"the popular assemblies are not yet bodies of delegates. The people at them represent themselves, but do not have an organic connection with some group of people who they represent — and who can recall them if they do not carry out their will."* [*"Argentina: rebellion at the sharp end of the world crisis"*, pp. 3–48, **International Socialism**, vol. 94, p. 25] That, of course, is the whole point — they are popular **assemblies**! A popular assembly does not "represent" anyone because its members govern themselves, i.e. are directly democratic. They are the elemental bodies which recall any delegates



# H.1 Have anarchists always opposed state socialism?

Yes. Anarchists have always argued that real socialism cannot be created using a state. The basic core of the argument is simple. Socialism implies equality, yet the state signifies inequality — inequality in terms of power. As we argued in section B.2, anarchists consider one of the defining aspects of the state is its hierarchical nature. In other words, the delegation of **power** into the hands of a few. As such, it violates a core idea of socialism, namely social equality. Those who make up the governing bodies in a state have more power than those who have elected them (see section I.1).

It is with this perspective that anarchists have combated the idea of state socialism and Marxism (although we should stress that libertarian forms of Marxism, such as council communism, have strong similarities to anarchism). In the case of the Russian Revolution, the anarchists were amongst the first on the left to be suppressed by the Bolsheviks. Indeed, the history of Marxism is, in part, a history of its struggles against anarchists just as the history of anarchism is also, in part, a history of its struggle against the various forms of Marxism and its offshoots.

While both Stirner and Proudhon wrote many pages against the evils and contradictions of state socialism, anarchists have only really been fighting the Marxist form of state socialism since Bakunin. This is because, until the First International, Marx and Engels were relatively unknown socialist thinkers. Proudhon was aware of Marx (they had

meant in France in the 1840s and had corresponded) but Marxism was unknown in France during his life time and so Proudhon did not directly argue against Marxism (he did, however, critique Louis Blanc and other French state socialists). Similarly, when Stirner wrote **The Ego and Its Own** Marxism did not exist bar a few works by Marx and Engels. Indeed, it could be argued that Marxism finally took shape after Marx and Engels had read Stirner's classic work and produced their notoriously inaccurate diatribe, **The German Ideology**, against him. However, like Proudhon, Stirner attacked **other** state socialists and communists.

Before discussing Bakunin's opposition and critique of Marxism in the next section, we should consider the thoughts of Stirner and Proudhon on state socialism. These critiques contain may important ideas and so are worth summarising. However, it is worth noting that when both Stirner and Proudhon were writing communist ideas were all authoritarian in nature. Libertarian communism only developed after Bakunin's death in 1876. This means that when Proudhon and Stirner were critiquing "communism" they were attacking a specific form of communism, the form which subordinated the individual to the community. Anarchist communists like Kropotkin and Malatesta also opposed such kinds of "communism" (as Kropotkin put it, *"before and in 1848"* communism *"was put forward in such a shape as to fully account for Proudhon's distrust as to its effect upon liberty. The old idea of Communism was the idea of monastic communities ... The last vestiges of liberty and of individual energy would be destroyed, if humanity ever had to go through such a communism."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 98]). Of course, it may be likely that Stirner and Proudhon would have rejected libertarian communism as well, but bear in mind that not all forms of "communism" are identical.

For Stirner, the key issue was that communism (or socialism), like liberalism, looked to the *"human"* rather than the



*its revolutionary dictatorship"* again distorts the anarchist position. As we argued in the last section, our objection to the "state power" of the proletariat is precisely **because** it cannot, by its very nature as a state, actually allow the working class to manage society directly (and, of course, it automatically excludes other sections of the working masses, such as the peasantry and artisans). We argued that, in practice, it would simply mean the dictatorship of a few party leaders. This position, we must stress, was one Lenin himself was arguing in the year after completing **State and Revolution** and so the leading Bolsheviks confirmed the anarchist argument that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would, in fact, become a dictatorship **over** the proletariat by the party.

Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri summed up the differences well:

> *"The Marxists ... foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration-corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national-freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrational*

> *"The following measures strike us as essential to the welfare of the revolution, every bit as much as armed struggle against its enemies:*
>
> *"The insurgents must confiscate social capital, landed estates, mines, housing, religious and public buildings, instruments of labour, raw materials, gems and precious stones and manufactured products:*
>
> *"All political, administrative and judicial authorities are to be deposed … What should the organisational measures of the revolution be?*
>
> *"Immediate and spontaneous establishment of trade bodies: provisional assumption by those of … social capital …: local federation of a trades bodies and labour organisation:*
>
> *"Establishment of neighbourhood groups and federations of same …*
>
> *"Organisation of the insurgent forces … the federation of all the revolutionary forces of the insurgent Communes … Federation of Communes and organisation of the masses, with an eye to the revolution's enduring until such time as all reactionary activity has been completely eradicated … Once trade bodies have been have been established, the next step is to organise local life. The organ of this life is to be the federation of trades bodies and it is this local federation which is to constitute the future Commune."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 246–7]

Clearly, anarchists do have some ideas on what the working class will *"replace"* the state with and how it will use its *"revolutionary power"*!

Similarly, Lenin's statement that *"the anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should utilise its state power,*



unique. *"To be looked upon as a mere **part**, part of society,"* asserted Stirner, *"the individual cannot bear — because he is **more**; his uniqueness puts from it this limited conception."* As such, his protest against socialism was similar to his protest against liberalism (indeed, he drew attention to their similarity by calling it *"social liberalism"*). Stirner was aware that capitalism was not the great defender of freedom it was claimed to be by its supporters. *"Restless acquisition,"* he argued, *"does not let us take breath, take a claim **enjoyment**: we do not get the comfort of our possessions."* Communism, by the *"organisation of labour,"* can *"bear its fruit"* so that *"we come to an agreement about **human** labours, that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil."* However, communism *"is silent"* over *"for whom is time to be gained."* He, in contrast, stresses that it is for the individual, *"To take comfort in himself as the unique."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 265 and pp. 268–9] Thus state socialism does not recognise that the purpose of association is to free the individual and instead subjects the individual to a new tyranny:

> *"it is not another State (such as a 'people's State') that men aim at, but their **union,** uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing — A State exists even without my co-operation … the independent establishment of the State founds my lack of independence; its condition as a 'natural growth,' its organism, demands that my nature do not grow freely, but be cut to fit it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224]

Similarly, Stirner argued that *"Communism, by the abolition of all personal property, only presses me back still more into dependence on another, to wit, on the generality or collectivity"* which is *"a condition hindering my free movement, a sovereign power over me. Communism rightly revolts against the pressure that I experience from individual proprietors; but still more horrible is the might that it puts in the hands of the collectivity."* [**Op.**

**Cit.**, p. 257] History has definitely confirmed this fear. By nationalising property, the various state socialist regimes turned the worker from a servant of the capitalist into a serf of the state. In contrast, communist-anarchists argue for free association and workers' self-management as the means of ensuring that socialised property does not turn into the denial of freedom rather than as a means of ensuring it. As such, Stirner's attack on what Marx termed *"vulgar communism"* is still important and finds echoes in communist-anarchist writings as well as the best works of Marx and his more libertarian followers (see section I.4 on how libertarian communism is not *"silent"* on these matters and incorporates Stirner's legitimate concerns and arguments).

Similar arguments to Stirner's can be found in Proudhon's works against the various schemes of state socialism that existing in France in the middle of the nineteenth century. He particularly attacked the ideas of Louis Blanc. Blanc, whose most famous book was **Organisation du Travail** (**Organisation of Work**, first published in 1840) argued that social ills resulted from competition and they could be solved by means of eliminating it via government initiated and financed reforms. More specifically, Blanc argued that it was *"necessary to use the whole power of the state"* to ensure the creation and success of workers' associations (or *"social workshops"*). Since that *"which the proletarians lack to free themselves are the tools of labour,"* the government *"must furnish them"* with these. *"The state,"* in short, *"should place itself resolutely at the head of industry."* [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 139] Capitalists would be encouraged to invest money in these workshops, for which they would be guaranteed interest payments but the workers would keep the remaining profits generated by the workshops. Such state-initiated workshops would soon prove to be more efficient than privately owned industry and, by charging lower prices, force privately owned industry either



> *communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206]

Similar ideas can easily be found in the works of other anarchists. While the actual names and specific details of these federations of workers' associations may change (for example, the factory committees and soviets in the Russian Revolution, the collectives in Spain, the section assemblies in the French Revolution are a few of them) the basic ideas are the same. Bakunin also pointed to the means of defence, a workers' militia (the people armed, as per the Paris Commune — section H.2.1).

A major difference between anarchism and Marxism which Lenin points to is, clearly, false. Anarchists are well aware of what should *"replace"* the bourgeois state and have always been so. The **real** difference is simply that anarchists say what they mean while Lenin's "new" state did not, in fact, mean working class power but rather party power.

As for Lenin's comment that we have *"absolutely no ideas"* of how the working class *"will use its revolutionary power"* suggests more ignorance, as we have urged working people to expropriate the expropriators, reorganise production under workers' self-management and start to construct society from the bottom upwards (a quick glance at Kropotkin's **Conquest of Bread**, for example, would soon convince any reader of the inaccuracy of Lenin's comment). This summary by the anarchist Jura Federation (written in 1880) gives a flavour of anarchist ideas on this subject:

> *"The bourgeoisie's power over the popular masses springs from economic privileges, political domination and the enshrining of such privileges in the laws. So we must strike at the wellsprings of bourgeois power, as well as its various manifestations.*

of armed workers, inspired by the Paris Commune (although predicted by Bakunin).

Moreover, for anarchists Lenin's comment seems somewhat incredulous. As George Barrett put it, in reply to the question *"if you abolish government, what will you put it its place,"* this *"seems to an Anarchist very much as if a patient asked the doctor, 'If you take away my illness, what will you give me in its place?' The Anarchist's argument is that government fulfils no useful purpose ... It is the headquarters of the profit-makers, the rent-takers, and of all those who take from but who do not give to society. When this class is abolished by the people so organising themselves to run the factories and use the land for the benefit of their free communities, i.e. for their own benefit, then the Government must also be swept away, since its purpose will be gone. The only thing then that will be put in the place of government will be the free organisation of the workers. When Tyranny is abolished, Liberty remains, just as when disease is eradicated health remains."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, p. 356]

Barrett's answer contains the standard anarchist position on what will be the organisational basis of a revolutionary society, namely that the *"only thing then that will be put in the place of government will be the free organisation of the workers."* This is a concise summary of anarchist theory and cannot be bettered. This vision, as we discuss in section I.2.3 in some detail, can be found in the work of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and a host of other anarchist thinkers. Since anarchists from Bakunin onwards have stressed that a federation of workers' associations would constitute the framework of a free society, to assert otherwise (as Lenin did) is little more than a joke or a slander. To quote Bakunin:

> *"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the*



out of business or to change into social workshops, so eliminating competition.

Proudhon objected to this scheme on many levels. He argued that Blanc's scheme appealed *"to the state for its silent partnership; that is, he gets down on his knees before the capitalists and recognises the sovereignty of monopoly."* Given that Proudhon saw the state as an instrument of the capitalist class, asking that state to abolish capitalism was illogical and impossible. Moreover, by getting the funds for the "social workshop" from capitalists, Blanc's scheme was hardly undermining their power. *"Capital and power,"* Proudhon argued, *"secondary organs of society, are always the gods whom socialism adores; if capital and power did not exist, it would invent them."* [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157] He stressed the authoritarian nature of Blanc's scheme:

> *"M. Blanc is never tired of appealing to authority, and socialism loudly declares itself anarchistic; M. Blanc places power above society, and socialism tends to subordinate it to society; M. Blanc makes social life descend from above, and socialism maintains that it springs up and grows from below; M. Blanc runs after politics, and socialism is in quest of science. No more hypocrisy, let me say to M. Blanc: you desire neither Catholicism nor monarchy nor nobility, but you must have a God, a religion, a dictatorship, a censorship, a hierarchy, distinctions, and ranks. For my part, I deny your God, your authority, your sovereignty, your judicial State, and all your representative mystifications."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 263]

Equally, Proudhon opposed the "top-down" nature of Blanc's ideas. As it was run by the state, the system of workshops would hardly be libertarian as *"hierarchy would result*

*from the elective principle .. . as in constitutional politics. But these social workshops again, regulated by law, — will they be anything but corporations? What is the bond of corporations? The law. Who will make the law? The government."* Such a regime, Proudhon argued, would be unlikely to function well and the net result would be *"all reforms ending, now in hierarchical corporation, now in State monopoly, or the tyranny of communism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 269 and p. 271] This was because of the perspective of state socialists:

> *"As you cannot conceive of society without hierarchy, you have made yourselves the apostles of authority; worshippers of power, you think only of strengthening it and muzzling liberty; your favourite maxim is that the welfare of the people must be achieved in spite of the people; instead of proceeding to social reform by the extermination of power and politics, you insist on a reconstruction of power and politics."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 397]

Instead of reform from above, Proudhon stressed the need for working class people to organise themselves for their own liberation. As he put it, the *"problem before the labouring classes ... [is] not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, — that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the state and subjugate them."* For, *"to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* This was because the state *"finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 398, p. 397 and p. 399] Unsurprisingly, Proudhon stressed in 1848 that



the former, suggested by the Paris Commune. Lenin argued that some *"simply cannot conceive of the possibility of voluntary centralism, of the voluntary fusion of the proletarian communes, for the sole purpose of destroying bourgeois rule and the bourgeois state machine."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 348] Yet *"voluntary centralism"* is, at best, just another why of describing federalism — assuming that "voluntary" really means that, of course. At worse, and in practice, such centralism simply places all the decision making at the centre, at the top, and all that is left is for the communes to obey the decisions of a few party leaders.

As we discuss in the next section, anarchists see this federation of workers' associations and communes (the framework of a free society) as being based on the organisations working class people create in their struggle against capitalism. These self-managed organisations, by refusing to become part of a centralised state, will ensure the success of a revolution.

## H.1.4 Do anarchists have *"absolutely no idea"* of what to put in place of the state?

Lenin's second claim was that anarchists, *"while advocating the destruction of the state machine, have absolutely no idea of* ***what*** *the proletariat will put in its place"* and compared this to the Marxists who argued for a new state machine *"consisting of armed workers, after the type of the [Paris] Commune."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 358]

For anarchists, Lenin's assertion simply shows his unfamiliarity with anarchist literature and need not be taken seriously — anyone familiar with anarchist theory would simply laugh at such comments. Sadly, most Marxists are **not** familiar with that theory, so we need to explain two things. Firstly, anarchists have very clear ideas on what to "replace" the state with (namely a federation of communes based on working class associations). Secondly, that this idea is based on the idea

*spring up in the society of the future. This elaboration of new social forms can only be made by the collective work of the masses"* and *"[a]ny authority external to it will only be an obstacle*, a *"drag on the action of the people."* A revolutionary state, therefore, *"becomes the greatest obstacle to the revolution"* and to *"dislodge it"* requires the people *"to take up arms, to make another revolution."* [**Anarchism**, p. 240, p. 241, pp. 247–8, p. 248, p. 249, p. 241 and p. 242] Which, we should stress, was exactly what happened in Russia, where anarchists and others (such as the Kronstadt rebels) called for a *"Third Revolution"* against the Bolshevik state and the party dictatorship and state capitalism it had created.

For anarchists, the abolition of the state does not mean rejecting the need to extend or defend a revolution (quite the reverse!). It means rejecting a system of organisation designed by and for minorities to ensure their rule. To create a state (even a "workers' state") means to delegate power away from the working class and eliminate their power in favour of party power (*"the principle error of the [Paris] Commune, an unavoidable error, since it derived from the very principle on which power was constituted, was precisely that of being a government, and of substituting itself for the people by force of circumstances."* [Elisée Reclus, quoted John P. Clark and Camille Martin, **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 72]).

In place of a state anarchists' argue for a free federation of workers' organisations as the means of conducting a revolution (and the framework for its defence). Most Marxists seem to confuse centralism and federalism, with Lenin stating that *"if the proletariat and the poor peasants take state power into their own hands, organise themselves quite freely in communes, and unite the action of all the communes in striking at capital … won't that be centralism? Won't that be the most consistent democratic centralism and, moreover, proletarian centralism?"* No, it would be federalism, the most consistent federalism as advocated by Proudhon and Bakunin and, under the influence of



*"the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 125] In addition, by guaranteeing interest payments, Blanc's scheme insured the continued exploitation of labour by capital and, of course, while opposing capitalist competition, Proudhon did not consider it wise to abolish all forms of the market.

Proudhon argued for a two-way approach to undermining capitalism from below: the creation of workers associations and the organisation of credit. By creating mutual banks, which provided credit at cost, workers could create associations to compete with capitalist firms, drive them out of business and so eliminate exploitation once and for all by workers' self-management. In this way, the working class would emancipate itself from capitalism and build a socialist society from below upwards by their own efforts and activities. Proudhon, as Marxist Paul Thomas notes, *"believed fervently … in the salvation of working men, by their own efforts, through economic and social action alone … Proudhon advocated, and to a considerable extent inspired, the undercutting of this terrain [of the state] from without by means of autonomous working-class associations."* [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, pp. 177–8] Rejecting violent revolution (as well as strikes as counter-productive), Proudhon argued for economic means to end economic exploitation and, as such, he saw anarchism as coming about by reform (unlike later social anarchists, who were generally revolutionaries and argued that capitalism cannot be reformed away and so supported strikes and other forms of collective working class direct action, struggle and combative organisation).

Unsurprisingly, Proudhon's ideas were shaped by the society in lived and agitated in. In the mid-nineteenth century, the bulk of the French working class were artisans and peasants and so such an approach reflected the social context in which it was proposed. With a predominance of small-scale industry,

the notion of free credit provided by mutual banks as the means of securing working class people access to the means of production is theoretically feasible. It was this social context which informed Proudhon's ideas (see section H.2.3). He never failed to stress that association would be tyranny if imposed upon peasants and artisans (rather, he thought that associations would be freely embraced by these workers if they thought it was in their interests to). However, he did not ignore the rise of large-scale industry and explicitly proposed workers' associations (i.e., cooperatives) for those industries which objectively needed it (i.e. capitalist industry) and for those other toilers who desired it. The net effect was the same, though, namely to abolish wage labour.

It was this opposition to wage labour which drove Proudhon's critique of state socialism. He continually stressed that state ownership of the means of production was a danger to the liberty of the worker and simply the continuation of capitalism with the state as the new boss. As he put it in 1848, he *"did not want to see the State confiscate the mines, canals and railways; that would add to monarchy, and more wage slavery. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations ... these associations [will] be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic."* He contrasted workers' associations run by and for their members to those *"subsidised, commanded and directed by the State,"* which would crush *"all liberty and all wealth, precisely as the great limited companies are doing."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62 and p. 105]

Marx, of course, had replied to Proudhon's work **System of Economic Contradictions** with his **Poverty of Philosophy**. However, Marx's work aroused little interest when published although Proudhon did carefully read and annotate his copy of it, claiming it to be *"a libel"* and a *"tissue of abuse, calumny, fal-*



*their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.*

> *"Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and ... if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle."* [Luigi Fabbri, *"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 27]

This is because of the hierarchical nature of the state, its delegation of power into the hands of the few and so a so-called "revolutionary" government can have no other result than a substitution of the few (the government) for the many (the masses). This, in turn, undermines the mass participation and action from below that a revolution needs to succeed and flourish. *"Instead of acting for themselves,"* Kropotkin argued, *"instead of marching forward, instead of advancing in the direction of the new order of things, the people, confiding in their governors, entrusted to them the charge of taking the initiative."* However, social change is the product of *"the people in action"* and *"the brain of a few individuals [are] absolutely incapable of finding solutions"* to the problems it will face *"which can only spring from the life of the people."* For anarchists, a revolution *"is not a simple change of governors. It is the taking possession by the people of all social wealth"* and this cannot be achieved *"be decrees emanating from a government."* This *"economic change"* will be *"so immense and so profound"* that it is *"impossible for one or any individual to elaborate the different social forms which must*

*a bourgeoisie that has been defeated as a class) then the setting up of dictatorship means nothing but the need for the majority to efficiently arrange for its defence its own social Organisation.*

*[…]*

*"The terms 'domination', 'dictatorship' and 'state' are as little appropriate as the expression 'taking power' for the revolutionary act of the seizure of the factories by the workers.*

*"We reject then as inaccurate and causes of confusion the expressions 'dictatorship of the proletariat', 'taking political power', 'workers state', 'socialist state' and 'proletarian state'."* [**Manifesto of Libertarian Communism**, pp. 22–3]

So anarchists argue that the state has to be abolished "overnight" simply because a state is marked by hierarchical power and the exclusion of the bulk of the population from the decision making process. It cannot be used to implement socialism simply because it is not designed that way. To extend and defend a revolution a state is not required. Indeed, it is a hindrance:

*"The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists … as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of*



*sification and plagiarism"* (he even called Marx *"the tapeworm of Socialism."*) [quoted by Woodcock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] Sadly, Proudhon did not reply publicly to Marx's work due to an acute family crisis and then the start of the 1848 revolution in France. However, given his views of Louis Blanc and other socialists who saw socialism being introduced after the seizing of state power, he would hardly have been supportive of Marx's ideas.

So while none of Proudhon's and Stirner's arguments were directly aimed at Marxism, their critiques are applicable to much of mainstream Marxism as this inherited many of the ideas of the state socialism they attacked. Much of their analysis was incorporated in the collectivist and communist ideas of the anarchists that followed them (some directly, as from Proudhon, some by co-incidence as Stirner's work was quickly forgotten and only had an impact on the anarchist movement when he was rediscovered in the 1890s). This can be seen from the fact that Proudhon's ideas on the management of production by workers' associations, opposition to nationalisation as state-capitalism and the need for action from below by working people themselves, all found their place in communist-anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism and in their critique of mainstream Marxism (such as social democracy) and Leninism. Echoes of these critiques can be found Bakunin's comments of 1868:

*"I hate Communism because it is the negation of liberty and because for me humanity is unthinkable without liberty. I am not a Communist, because Communism concentrates and swallows up in itself for the benefit of the State all the forces of society, because it inevitably leads to the concentration of property in the hands of the State … I want to see society and collective or social property organised from below upwards, by way of free associations, not from above downwards, by means of any kind*

*of authority whatsoever … That is the sense in which I am a Collectivist and not a Communist."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 67–8]

It is with Bakunin that Marxism and Anarchism came into direct conflict as it was Bakunin who lead the struggle against Marx in the **International Workingmen's Association** between 1868 and 1872. It was in these exchanges that the two schools of socialism (the libertarian and the authoritarian) clarified themselves. With Bakunin, the anarchist critique of Marxism (and state socialism in general) starts to reach its mature form. We discuss Bakunin's critique in the next section.

## H.1.1 What was Bakunin's critique of Marxism?

Bakunin and Marx famously clashed in the first **International Working Men's Association** between 1868 and 1872. This conflict helped clarify the anarchist opposition to the ideas of Marxism and can be considered as the first major theoretical analysis and critique of Marxism by anarchists. Later critiques followed, of course, particularly after the degeneration of Social Democracy into reformism and the failure of the Russian Revolution (both of which allowed the theoretical critiques to be enriched by empirical evidence) but the Bakunin/Marx conflict laid the ground for what came after. As such, an overview of Bakunin's critique is essential as anarchists continued to develop and expand upon it (particularly after the experiences of actual Marxist movements and revolutions confirmed it).

First, however, we must stress that Marx and Bakunin had many similar ideas. They both stressed the need for working people to organise themselves to overthrow capitalism by a social revolution. They argued for collective ownership of the



nature, the active participation of the bulk of the population and ensures a new class division in society: those in power (the party) and those subject to it (the working class). Georges Fontenis sums up anarchist concerns on this issue:

*"The formula 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has been used to mean many different things. If for no other reason it should be condemned as a cause of confusion. With Marx it can just as easily mean the centralised dictatorship of the party which claims to represent the proletariat as it can the federalist conception of the Commune.*

*"Can it mean the exercise of political power by the victorious working class? No, because the exercise of political power in the recognised sense of the term can only take place through the agency of an exclusive group practising a monopoly of power, separating itself from the class and oppressing it. And this is how the attempt to use a State apparatus can reduce the dictatorship of the proletariat to the dictatorship of the party over the masses.*

*"But if by dictatorship of the proletariat is understood collective and direct exercise of 'political power', this would mean the disappearance of 'political power' since its distinctive characteristics are supremacy, exclusivity and monopoly. It is no longer a question of exercising or seizing political power, it is about doing away with it all together!*

*"If by dictatorship is meant the domination of the majority by a minority, then it is not a question of giving power to the proletariat but to a party, a distinct political group. If by dictatorship is meant the domination of a minority by the majority (domination by the victorious proletariat of the remnants of*

*but to protect the exploitation of the people by the economically privileged classes.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 221] *"Throughout history, just as in our time, government is either the brutal, violent, arbitrary rule of the few over the many or it is an organised instrument to ensure that domination and privilege will be in the hands of those who ... have cornered all the means of life."* Under capitalism, as Malatesta succulently put, the state is *"the bourgeoisie's servant and* ***gendarme****."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21 and p. 23] The reason why the state is marked by centralised power is due to its role as the protector of (minority) class rule. As such, a state cannot be anything but a defender of minority power as its centralised and hierarchical structure is designed for that purpose. If the working class really were running society, as Marxists claim they would be in the "dictatorship of the proletariat," then it would not be a state. As Bakunin put it: *"Where all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 223]

The idea that anarchists, by rejecting the "dictatorship of the proletariat," also reject defending a revolution is false. We do not equate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with the need to defend a revolution or expropriating the capitalist class, ending capitalism and building socialism. Anarchists from Bakunin onwards have taken both of these necessities for granted. As we discuss this particular Marxist straw man in section H.2.1, we will leave our comments on anarchist awareness of the need to defend a revolution at this.

Anarchists, then, do not reject defending a revolution and our opposition to the so-called "revolutionary" or "socialist" state is not based on this, regardless of what Marx and Lenin asserted. Rather, we argue that the state can and must be abolished "overnight" during a social revolution because any state, including the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat", is marked by hierarchical power and can only empower the few at the expense of the many. The state will not "wither away" as Marxists claim simply because it excludes, by its very



means of production. They both constantly stressed that the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves. They differed, of course, in exactly how these common points should be implemented in practice. Both, moreover, had a tendency to misrepresent the opinions of the other on certain issues (particularly as their struggle reached its climax). Anarchists, unsurprisingly, argue Bakunin has been proved right by history, so confirming the key aspects of his critique of Marx.

So what was Bakunin's critique of Marxism? There are six main areas. Firstly, there is the question of current activity (i.e. whether the workers' movement should participate in "politics" and the nature of revolutionary working class organisation). Secondly, there is the issue of the form of the revolution (i.e. whether it should be a political **then** an economic one, or whether it should be both at the same time). Thirdly, there is the prediction that state socialism will be exploitative, replacing the capitalist class with the state bureaucracy. Fourthly, there is the issue of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Fifthly, there is the question of whether political power **can** be seized by the working class as a whole or whether it can only be exercised by a small minority. Sixthly, there was the issue of whether the revolution be centralised or decentralised in nature. We shall discuss each in turn.

On the issue of current struggle, the differences between Marx and Bakunin are clear. For Marx, the proletariat had to take part in bourgeois elections as an organised political party. As the resolution of the (gerrymandered) Hague Congress of First International put it: *"In its struggle against the collective power of the propertied classes the proletariat cannot act as a class except by constituting itself a political party, distinct from and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes ... The conquest of political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 243]

This political party must stand for elections and win votes. As Marx argued in the preamble of the French Workers' Party, the workers must turn the franchise *"from a means of deception ... into an instrument of emancipation."* This can be considered as part of the process outlined in the **Communist Manifesto**, where it was argued that the *"immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties,"* namely the *"conquest of political power by the proletariat,"* the *"first step in the revolution by the working class"* being *"to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."* Engels later stressed (in 1895) that the ***"Communist Manifesto** had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat"* and that German Social Democracy had showed workers of all countries *"how to make use of universal suffrage."* [**Marx and Engels Reader**, p. 566, p. 484, p. 490 and p. 565]

With this analysis in mind, Marxist influenced political parties have consistently argued for and taken part in election campaigns, seeking office as a means of spreading socialist ideas and as a means of pursuing the socialist revolution. The Social Democratic parties which were the first Marxist parties (and which developed under the watchful eyes of Marx and Engels) saw revolution in terms of winning a majority within Parliamentary elections and using this political power to abolish capitalism (once this was done, the state would "wither away" as classes would no longer exist). In effect, as we discuss in section H.3.10, these parties aimed to reproduce Marx's account of the forming of the Paris Commune on the level of the national Parliament.

Bakunin, in contrast, argued that while the communists *"imagine they can attain their goal by the development and organisation of the political power of the working classes ... aided by bourgeois radicalism"* anarchists *"believe they can succeed only through the development and organisation of the*



is called by Marxists ***"the dictatorship of the proletariat"*** or a workers' state. Anarchists reject this transitional state while Marxists embrace it. Indeed, according to Lenin *"a Marxist is one who **extends** the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the **dictatorship of the proletariat**."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 358 and p. 294]

So what does the "dictatorship of the proletariat" actually mean? Generally, Marxists seem to imply that this term simply means the defence of the revolution and so the anarchist rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat means, for Marxists, the denial the need to defend a revolution. This particular straw man was used by Lenin in **The State and Revolution** when he quoted Marx's article *"Indifference to Politics"* to suggest that anarchists advocated workers *"laying down their arms"* after a successful revolution. Such a *"laying down [of] their arms"* would mean *"abolishing the state"* while keeping their arms *"in order to crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie"* would mean *"giv[ing] the state a revolutionary and transitory form,"* so setting up *"their revolutionary dictatorship in place of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie."* [Marx, quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 315]

That such an argument can be made, never mind repeated, suggests a lack of honesty. It assumes that the Marxist and Anarchist definitions of "the state" are identical. They are not. For anarchists the state, government, means *"the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 41] For Marxists, the state is *"an organ of class **rule**, an organ for the **oppression** of one class by another."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 274] That these definitions are in conflict is clear and unless this difference is made explicit, anarchist opposition to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" cannot be clearly understood.

Anarchists, of course, agree that the current state is the means by which the bourgeois class enforces its rule over society. In Bakunin's words, *"the political state has no other mission*

*been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of socialism which leads to the withering away of the state. The latter want to abolish the state completely overnight, failing to understand the conditions under which the state can be abolished 2) the former recognise that after the proletariat has conquered political power it must utterly destroy the old state machine and substitute for it a new one consisting of the organisation of armed workers, after the type of the Commune. The latter, while advocating the destruction of the state machine, have absolutely no idea of* ***what*** *the proletariat will put in its place and* ***how*** *it will use its revolutionary power; the anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should utilise its state power, its revolutionary dictatorship; 3) the former demand that the proletariat be prepared for revolution by utilising the present state; the latter reject this."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 358]

We will discuss each of these points in the next three sections. Point one will be discussed in section H.1.3, the second in section H.1.4 and the third and final one in section H.1.5.

## H.1.3 Why do anarchists wish to abolish the state *"overnight"*?

As indicated at the end of the last section, Lenin argued that while Marxists aimed *"at the complete abolition of the state"* they *"recognise that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution"* while anarchists *"want to abolish the state completely overnight."* This issue is usually summarised by Marxists arguing that a new state is required to replace the destroyed bourgeois one. This new state



*non-political or anti-political power of the working classes."* The Communists *"believe it necessary to organise the workers' forces in order to seize the political power of the State,"* while anarchists *"organise for the purpose of destroying it."* Bakunin saw this in terms of creating new organs of working class power in opposition to the state, organised *"from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with the associations, then going on to the communes, the region, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation."* In other words, a system of workers' councils. As such, he constantly argued for workers, peasants and artisans to organise into unions and join the **International Workingmen's Association**, so becoming *"a real force ... which knows what to do and is therefore capable of guiding the revolution in the direction marked out by the aspirations of the people: a serious international organisation of workers' associations of all lands capable of replacing this departing world of* ***states.****"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 262–3, p. 270 and p. 174] To Marx's argument that workers should organise politically (i.e., send their representations to Parliament) Bakunin realised that when *"common workers"* are sent *"to Legislative Assemblies"* the result is that the *"worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 108]

As far as history goes, the experience of Social Democracy confirmed Bakunin's analysis. A few years after Engels death in 1895, German Social Democracy was racked by the "revisionism" debate. This debate did not spring from the minds of a few leaders, isolated from the movement, but rather expressed developments **within** the movement itself. In effect, the revisionists wanted to adjust the party rhetoric to what the party was actually doing and so the battle against the revisionists ba-

sically represented a battle between what the party **said** it was doing and its actual practice. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the *"distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action."* [C. Schorske, **German Social Democracy**, p. 38] By the start of the First World War, the Social Democrats had become so corrupted by its activities in bourgeois institutions they supported its state (and ruling class) and voted for war credits rather than denounce the war as Imperialist slaughter for profits. Clearly, Bakunin was proved right. (see also section J.2.6 for more discussion on the effect of electioneering on radical parties).

However, we must stress that because Bakunin rejected participating in bourgeois politics, it did not mean that he rejected "politics" or "political struggle" in general (see section J.2.10). Bakunin clearly advocated what would later by termed a syndicalist strategy (see section H.2.8). This union movement would be complemented by a specific anarchist organisation which would work within it to influence it towards anarchist aims by the *"natural influence"* of its members (see section J.3.7).

Comparing Bakunin and Marx, it is clear whom history has validated. Even that anti-anarchist Stalinist hack Eric Hobsbawn could not avoid admitting that *"the remarkable achievement of Spanish anarchism which was to create a working-class movement that remained genuinely revolutionary. Social democratic and ... even communist trade unions have rarely been able to escape either schizophrenia [i.e., revolutionary rhetoric hiding reformist practice] or betrayal of their socialist convictions."* [**Revolutionaries**, p. 104] This is probably the only accurate comment made in his various diatribes on anarchism but, of course, he did not allow the implications of his statement to bother his faith in Leninist ideology. So given the long history of reformism and betrayal of socialist principles by radicals utilising elections and political parties, it comes as no surprise that



*interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools?"* [**Anarchy**, pp. 53–4] As such, anarchists think that power should be in the hands of the masses themselves. Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school of freedom. That means that, to quote Bakunin, *"since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere ... the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations ... organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation."* [**No God, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 155–6]

Clearly, then, the question of state/party power is one dividing anarchists and most Marxists. Again, though, we must stress that libertarian Marxists agree with anarchists on this subject and reject the whole idea that rule/dictatorship of a party equals the dictatorship of the working class. As such, the Marxist tradition as a whole does not confuse this issue, although the majority of it does. So not all Marxists are Leninists. A few (council communists, Situationists, and so on) are far closer to anarchism. They also reject the idea of party power/dictatorship, the use of elections, for direct action, argue for the abolition of wage slavery by workers' self-management of production and so on. They represent the best in Marx's work and should not be lumped with the followers of Bolshevism. Sadly, they are in the minority.

Finally, we should indicate other important areas of difference as summarised by Lenin in his work **The State and Revolution**:

> *"The difference between the Marxists and the anarchists is this: 1) the former, while aiming at the complete abolition of the state, recognise that this aim can only be achieved after classes have*

Trotsky's **Left Opposition** *"framed a policy along [the] lines"* of *"returning to genuine workers' democracy"*. [Chris Harman, **Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 19] In reality, as "Left Oppositionist" Victor Serge pointed out, *"the greatest reach of boldness of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party was to demand the restoration of inner-Party democracy, and it never dared dispute the theory of single-party government — by this time, it was too late."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 181]

Significantly, this position on party rule has its roots in the uneven political development within the working class (i.e. that the working class contains numerous political perspectives within it). As the party (according to Leninist theory) contains the most advanced ideas (and, again according to Leninist theory, the working class cannot reach beyond a trade union consciousness by its own efforts), the party must take power to ensure that the masses do not make "mistakes" or "waver" (show "vacillation") during a revolution. From such a perspective to the position of party dictatorship is not far (and a journey that all the leading Bolsheviks, including Lenin and Trotsky did in fact take).

These arguments by leading Bolsheviks confirm Bakunin's fear that the Marxists aimed for *"a tyranny of the minority over a majority in the name of the people — in the name of the stupidity of the many and the superior wisdom of the few."* [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 63]

In contrast, anarchists argue that precisely because of political differences we need the fullest possible democracy and freedom to discuss issues and reach agreements. Only by discussion and self-activity can the political perspectives of those in struggle develop and change. In other words, the fact Bolshevism uses to justify its support for party power is the strongest argument against it. For anarchists, the idea of a revolutionary government is a contradiction. As Malatesta put it, *"if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own*



anarchists consider both Bakunin's critique and alternative to be confirmed by experience (section J.2 discusses direct action and electioneering).

Which brings us to the second issue, namely the nature of the revolution itself. For Bakunin, a revolution meant a **social** revolution from below. This involved both the abolition of the state **and** the expropriation of capital. In his words, *"the revolution must set out from the first [to] radically and totally to destroy the State."* The *"natural and necessary consequences"* of which will be the *"confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to collective use . .. the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... will constitute the Commune."* There *"can no longer be any successful political ... revolution unless the political revolution is transformed into social revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170 and p. 171]

Which, incidentally, disproves Engels' claims that Bakunin *"does not regard capital ... but the **state** as the main evil to be abolished"* after which *"capitalism will go to blazes of itself."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 728] This misrepresents Bakunin's position, as he always stressed that economic and political transformation *"must be accomplished together and simultaneously."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 106] Given that Bakunin thought the state was the protector of capitalism, no economic change could be achieved until such time as it was abolished. This also meant that Bakunin considered a political revolution before an economic one to mean the continued slavery of the workers. As he argued, *"[t]o win political freedom first can signify no other thing but to win this freedom only, leaving for the first days at least economic and social relations in the same old state, — that is, leaving the proprietors and capitalists with their insolent wealth, and the workers with their poverty."* With capitalists' economic power intact, could the workers' **political** power remain strong? As such, *"every political revolution taking place prior to and*

*consequently without a social revolution must necessarily be a bourgeois revolution, and a bourgeois revolution can only be instrumental in bringing about bourgeois Socialism — that is, it is bound to end in a new, more hypocritical and more skilful, but no less oppressive, exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeois.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 294 and p. 289]

Did Marx and Engels hold this position? Apparently so. Discussing the Paris Commune, Marx noted that it was *"the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour,"* and as the *"political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery"* the Commune was to *"serve as a lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rests the existence of classes."* Engels argued that the *"proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the ... means of production ... into public property."* In the **Communist Manifesto** they argued that *"the first step in the revolution by the working class"* is the *"rais[ing] the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."* The proletariat *"will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeois, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 635, p. 717 and p. 490]

This is made even clearer in Engels' *"Principles of Communism"* (often considered as a draft of the **Manifesto**). That document stressed that it was not possible for *"private property to be abolished at one stroke"*, arguing that *"the proletarian revolution will transform existing society gradually."* The revolution *"will establish a **democratic constitution**, and through this, the direct or indirect dominance of the proletariat. Direct in England, where the proletarians are already a majority of the people." "Democracy"*, Engels went on, *"would be quite useless to the proletariat if it were not immediately used as a means of carrying through further measures directly attacking private*



He went on to argue that what was needed was *"a **single** powerful central committee which is leader of everything ... in this is expressed the dictatorship of the party."* The Congress itself resolved that *"the dictatorship of the working class cannot be assured otherwise than in the form of a dictatorship of its leading vanguard, i.e., the Communist Party."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923**, vol. 1, p. 236, pp. 236–7 and p. 237]

How these positions can be reconciled with workers' democracy, power or freedom is not explained. As such, the idea that Leninism (usually considered as mainstream Marxism) is inherently democratic or a supporter of power to the people is clearly flawed. Equally flawed are the attempts by Leninists to distance themselves from, and rationalise, these positions in terms of the "objective circumstances" (such as civil war) facing the Russian Revolution. As we discuss in section H.6, Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** these problems began and continued long after they ended (in part because the policies pursued by the Bolshevik leadership had roots in their ideology and, as a result, that ideology itself played a key role in the failure of the revolution).

Ultimately, though, the leading lights of Bolshevism concluded from their experiences that the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be achieved by the dictatorship of the party and they generalised this position for **all** revolutions. Even in the prison camps in the late 1920s and early 1930s, *"almost all the Trotskyists continued to consider that 'freedom of party' would be 'the end of the revolution.' 'Freedom to choose one's party — that is Menshevism,' was the Trotskyists' final verdict."* [Ante Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 280] While few Leninists today would subscribe to this position, the fact is when faced with the test of revolution the founders of their ideology not only practised the dictatorship of the party, they raised it to an ideological truism. Sadly, most modern day Trotskyists ignore this awkward fact in favour of inaccurate claims that

> *conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.*" [**Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]

Significantly, this was the year after his apparent (and much belated) embrace of soviet democracy in **The Revolution Betrayed**. Moreover, as we discuss in section H.3.8, he was just repeating the same arguments he had made while in power during the Russian Revolution. Nor was he the only one. Zinoviev, another leading Bolshevik, argued in 1920 along the same lines:

> *"soviet rule in Russia could not have been maintained for three years — not even three weeks — without the iron dictatorship of the Communist Party. Any class conscious worker must understand that the dictatorship of the working class can be achieved only by the dictatorship of its vanguard, i.e., by the Communist Party ... All questions of economic reconstruction, military organisation, education, food supply — all these questions, on which the fate of the proletarian revolution depends absolutely, are decided in Russia before all other matters and mostly in the framework of the party organisations ... Control by the party over soviet organs, over the trade unions, is the single durable guarantee that any measures taken will serve not special interests, but the interests of the entire proletariat."* [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, pp. 239–40]

Three years later, at the Communist Party's congress, he made light of *"comrades who think that the dictatorship of the party is a thing to be realised in practice but not spoken about."*



*ownership."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 350] Decades later, when Marx discussed what the "dictatorship of the proletariat" meant, he argued (in reply to Bakunin's question of *"over whom will the proletariat rule?"*) that it simply meant *"that so long as other classes continue to exist, the capitalist class in particular, the proletariat fights it (for with the coming of the proletariat to power, its enemies will not yet have disappeared), it must use measures of **force**, hence governmental measures; if it itself still remains a class and the economic conditions on which the class struggle and the existence of classes have not yet disappeared, they must be forcibly removed or transformed, and the process of their transformation must be forcibly accelerated."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 542–3] Note, "capitalists," not "former capitalists," so implying that the members of the proletariat are, in fact, still proletarians after the "socialist" revolution and so still subject to wage slavery under economic masters. Which makes perfect sense, as otherwise the term *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would be meaningless.

Then there is the issue of when the working class could seize political power. As Engels put it, the struggle *"between bourgeoisie and proletariat can only be fought out in a republic."* This is *"the form in which the struggle must be fought out"* and in countries without a republic, such as Germany at the time, workers would *"have to **conquer** it."* [Marx and Engels, **The Socialist Revolution**, p. 264] Decades previously, Engels has argued that the *"first, fundamental condition for the introduction of community of property is the political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 102] Thus the bourgeois revolution would come first, then the proletarian one. The **Communist Manifesto** had raised the possibility of a bourgeois revolution in Germany being *"but a prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 63] Within two years, Marx and Engels argued that this was wrong, that a socialist revolution was not possible in Continental Europe

for some time. Even in the 1880s, Engels was still arguing that a proletarian revolution was not immediately possible in Germany and the first results of any revolution would be a bourgeois republic within which the task of social democracy was to build its forces and influence.

Clearly, then, Marx and Engels considered the creation of a republic in a well developed capitalist economy as the basis for seizing of state power as the key event and, later, the expropriation of the expropriators would occur. Thus the economic power of the capitalists would remain, with the proletariat utilising political power to combat and reduce it. Anarchists argue that if the proletariat does not hold economic power, its political power would at best be insecure and would in fact degenerate. Would the capitalists just sit and wait while their economic power was gradually eliminated by political action? And what of the proletariat during this period? Will they patiently obey their bosses, continue to be oppressed and exploited by them until such time as the end of their "social slavery" has been worked out (and by whom)? Would they be happy to fight for a bourgeois republic first, then wait for an unspecified period of time before the party leadership proclaimed that the time was ripe to introduce socialism?

As the experience of the Russian Revolution showed, the position of Marx and Engels proved to be untenable. Bakunin's perspective was repeated by a Russian worker in 1906 when he expressed his impatience with Menshevik strategy:

> *"Here [the Mensheviks] ... tells us that the workers' congress is the best means of assuring the independence of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution; otherwise, we workers will play the role of cannon fodder in it. So I ask: what is the insurance for? Will we really make the bourgeois revolution? Is it possible that we will spill blood twice — once for the victory of the bourgeois revolution, and the time for*



> *"Of course, the foundation of our regime is the dictatorship of a class. But this in turn assumes ... it is class that has come to self-consciousness through its vanguard, which is to say, through the party. Without this, the dictatorship could not exist ... Dictatorship is the most highly concentrated function of function of a class, and therefore the basic instrument of a dictatorship is a party. In the most fundamental aspects a class realises its dictatorship through a party. That is why Lenin spoke not only of the dictatorship of the class but also the dictatorship of the party and,* ***in a certain sense****, made them identical."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 75–6]

He repeated this position on party dictatorship into the late 1930s, long after it had resulted in the horrors of Stalinism:

> *"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution .. . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist*

*if necessary, in order then to exercise exclusive dictatorship."* The militants *"leading the masses … cannot rely on the consciousness, the goodwill or the determination of those they have to deal with; for the masses who will follow them or surround them will be warped by the old regime, relatively uncultivated, often unaware, torn by feelings and instincts inherited from the past."* So *"revolutionaries will have to take on the dictatorship without delay."* The experience of Russia *"reveals an energetic and innovative minority which is compelled to make up for the deficiencies in the education of the backward masses by the use of compulsion."* And so the party *"is in a sense the nervous system of the class. Simultaneously the consciousness and the active, physical organisation of the dispersed forces of the proletariat, which are often ignorant of themselves and often remain latent or express themselves contradictorily."* And what of the masses? What was their role? Serge was equally blunt. While the party is *"supported by the entire working population,"* strangely enough, *"it maintains its unique situation in dictatorial fashion"* while the workers are *"[b]ehind"* the communists, *"sympathising instinctively with the party and carrying out the menial tasks required by the revolution."* [**Revolution in Danger**, p. 106, p. 92, p. 115, p. 67, p. 66 and p. 6]

Such are the joys of socialist liberation. The party thinks for the worker while they carry out the *"menial tasks"* of the revolution. Like doing the work and following the orders — as in any class system.

Trotsky agreed with this lesson and in 1926 opined that the *"dictatorship of the party does not contradict the dictatorship of the class either theoretically or practically; but is the expression of it, if the regime of workers' democracy is constantly developed more and more."* [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–27)**, p. 76] The obvious contradictions and absurdities of this assertion are all too plain. Needless to say, when defending the concept of *"the dictatorship of the party"* he linked it to Lenin (and so to Leninist orthodoxy):



> *the victory of our proletarian revolution? No, comrades, it is not to be found in the party programme [that this must be so]; but if we workers are to spill blood, then only once, for freedom and socialism."* [quoted by Abraham Ascher, **The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution**, p. 43]

In 1917, this lesson was well learned and the Russian workers initially followed Bakunin's path (mostly spontaneously and without significant influence by anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists). The Mensheviks repeated their mistakes of 1905 as they *"proved unable to harness this revolutionary potential to any practical purpose. They were blinded by their rigid marxist formula of 'bourgeois revolution first, socialist revolution later' and tired to restrain the masses. They preached self-abnegation to them, told them to stand aside until such times as the bourgeoisie had built a solid capitalist system. This made no sense to workers and peasants — why should they renounce the power that was in their hands already?"* Leading Menshevik Fedor Dan *"admitted in 1946 that the Menshevik concept of the bourgeois revolution rested on 'illusions'"* [Vera Broido, **Lenin and the Mensheviks**, p 14 and p. 15] Once Lenin returned to Russia, the Bolsheviks broke with this previously shared perspective and started to support and encourage the radicalisation of the workers and so managed to gain popular support. However, they did so partially and incompletely and, as a consequence, finally held back and so fatally undermined the revolution.

After the February revolution paralysed the state, the workers organised factory committees and raised the idea and practice of workers self-management of production. The Russian anarchists supported this movement whole-heartedly, arguing that it should be pushed as far as it would go. In contrast, Lenin argued for *"workers' control over the capitalists."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 402] This was, unsurprisingly, the policy applied immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of

power. However, as one Leninist writer admits, *"[t]wo overwhelmingly powerful forces obliged the Bolsheviks to abandon this 'reformist' course."* One was the start of the civil war, the other *"was the fact that the capitalists used their remaining power to make the system unworkable. At the end of 1917 the All Russian Congress of employers declared that those 'factories in which the control is exercised by means of active interference in the administration will be closed.' The workers' natural response to the wave of lockouts which followed was to demand that their [sic!] state nationalise the factories."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October"*, pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 42] By July 1918, only one-fifth of nationalised firms had been done so by the state, the rest by local committees from below (which, incidentally, shows the unresponsiveness of centralised power). Clearly, the idea that a social revolution can come after a political was shown to be a failure — the capitalist class used its powers to disrupt the economic life of Russia.

Faced with the predictable opposition by capitalists to their system of "control" the Bolsheviks nationalised the means of production. Sadly, **within** the nationalised workplace the situation of the worker remained essentially unchanged. Lenin had been arguing for one-man management (appointed from above and armed with "dictatorial" powers) since late April 1918 (see section H.3.14). This aimed at replacing the capitalists with state appointed managers, **not** workers self-management. In fact, as we discuss in section H.6.2 the party leaders repeatedly overruled the factory committees' suggestions to build socialism based on their management of the economy in favour of centralised state control. Bakunin's fear of what would happen if a political revolution preceded a social one came true. The working class continued to be exploited and oppressed as before, first by the bourgeoisie and then by the new bourgeoisie of state appointed managers armed with all the powers of the old ones (plus a few more). Russia confirmed Bakunin's anal-



*ship (party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (party) of the masses?' — testifies to most incredible and hopelessly muddled thinking"* and *"[t]o go so far ... as to contrast, **in general**, the dictatorship of the masses with a dictatorship of the leaders is ridiculously absurd, and stupid."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 575, p. 567 and p. 568]

Lenin stressed this idea numerous times. For example, he argued that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transition from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21] This position had became Communist orthodoxy both in Russia and internationally since early 1919. The American socialist John Reed, author of **Ten Days that Shook the World**, was a defender of *"the value of centralisation"* and *"the dictatorship of a revolutionary minority"* (noting that *"the Communist Party is supreme in Russia"*). [**Shaking the World**, p. 238] Similarly with the likes of Amedeo Bordiga, the first leader of the Communist Party in Italy.

Victor Serge, the ex-anarchist and enthusiastic convert to Bolshevism, argued this mainstream Bolshevik position until the mid-1930s. In 1919, it was a case that *"dictatorship"* was not some kind of "proletarian" dictatorship by the masses. He, like the leading Bolsheviks, explicitly argued against this. Yes, he wrote, *"if we are looking at what should, that is at what **ought to**, be the case"* but this *"seems doubtful"* in reality. *"For it appears that by force of circumstances one group is obliged to impose itself on the others and to go ahead of them, breaking them*

Thus the **real** meaning of a workers state is simply that the **party** has the real power, not the workers. That is nature of a state. Marxist rhetoric tends to hide this reality. As an example, we can point to Lenin's comments in October, 1921. In an essay marking the fourth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin stated that the Soviet system *"provides the maximum of democracy for the workers and peasants; at the same time, it marks a break with* ***bourgeois*** *democracy and the rise of a new, epoch-making type of democracy, namely, proletarian democracy, or the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 33, p. 55] Yet Lenin's comments came just a few months after factions within the Communist Party had been banned and after the Kronstadt rebellion and a wave of strikes calling for free soviet elections had been repressed. It was written years after Lenin had asserted that *"[w]hen we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party ... we say, 'Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position ...'"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 29, p. 535] And, of course, they had not shifted from that position! Clearly, the term *"proletarian democracy"* had a drastically different meaning to Lenin than to most people!

The identification of party power and working class power reaches its height (or, more correctly, depth) in the works of Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin, for example, argued that *"the Communists' correct understanding of his tasks"* lies in *"correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully assume power, when it will be able — during and after the seizure of power — to win adequate support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian working masses, and when it is able thereafter to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule by educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the working people."* Note, the vanguard (the party) seizes power, **not** the masses. Indeed, he stressed that the *"mere presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the party* ***or*** *dictatorship of the class: dictatorysis that a revolution must immediately combine political and economic goals in order for it to be successful.

The experience of Bolshevik Russia also confirms Bakunin's prediction that state socialism would simply be state capitalism. As Bakunin stressed, the state *"is the government from above downwards of an immense number of men [and women], very different from the point of view of the degree of their culture, the nature of the countries or localities that they inhabit, the occupations they follow, the interests and aspirations directing them — the State is the government of all these by one or another minority."* The state *"has always been the patrimony of some privileged class"* and *"when all other classes have exhausted themselves"* it *"becomes the patrimony of the bureaucratic class."* The Marxist state *"will not content itself with administering and governing the masses politically"* it will *"also administer the masses economically, concentrating in the hands of the State the production and distribution of wealth."* This will result in *"a new class, a new hierarchy of real and counterfeit scientists and scholars, and the world will be divided into a minority ruling in the name of knowledge, and an immense ignorant majority. And then, woe unto the mass of ignorant ones!"* Thus exploitation by a new bureaucratic class would be the only result when the state becomes *"the sole proprietor"* and *"the only banker, capitalist, organiser, and director of all national labour, and the distributor of all its products."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 317–8, p. 318 and p. 217] Subsequent anarchists have tended to call such a regime **state capitalism** (see section H.3.13).

The Bolshevik leadership's rejection of the factory committees and their vision of socialism also confirmed Bakunin's fear that Marxism urges the people *"not only not abolish the State, but, on the contrary, they must strengthen it and enlarge it, and turn it over to ... the leaders of the Communist party ... who will then liberate them in their own way."* The economic regime imposed by the Bolsheviks, likewise, confirmed Bakunin critique as the state *"control[led] all the commerce, industry, agriculture,*

*and even science. The mass of the people will be divided into two armies, the agricultural and the industrial under the direct command of the state engineers, who will constitute the new privileged political-scientific class.*" Unsurprisingly, this new state-run economy was a disaster which, again, confirmed his warning that unless this minority *"were endowed with omniscience, omnipresence, and the omnipotence which the theologians attribute to God, [it] could not possibly know and foresee the needs of its people, or satisfy with an even justice those needs which are most legitimate and pressing.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 332, pp. 332–3 and p. 318]

Which brings us to the "dictatorship of the proletariat." While many Marxists basically use this term to describe the defence of the revolution and so argue that anarchists do not see the for that, this is incorrect. Anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued that a revolution would have to defend itself from counter revolution and yet we reject the concept totally (see section H.2.1 for a refutation of claims that anarchists think a revolution does not need defending). To understand why Bakunin rejected the concept, we must provide some historical context.

Anarchists in the nineteenth century rejected the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in part because the proletariat was a **minority** of working class people at the time. To argue for a dictatorship of the proletariat meant to argue for the dictatorship of a **minority** class, a class which excluded the majority of toiling people. When Marx and Engels wrote the **Communist Manifesto**, for example, over 80% of the population of France and Germany were peasants or artisans — what they termed the "petit-bourgeois". This meant that their claim that the *"proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority"* was simply not true. Rather, for Marx's lifetime (and for many decades afterwards) the proletarian movement was like *"[a]ll previous movements,"* namely *"movements*



> *a nationalised economy, a 'workers' republic' might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin's more favourite terms) of unparalleled oppression …*
>
> *"Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a 'proletariat organised as a ruling class.' If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally co-ordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty … [I]f the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish — and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established — well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society.*" [*"The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems"*, pp. 14–17, **Black Flag**, no. 226, pp. 16–7]

This is why anarchists stress direct democracy (self-management) in free federations of free associations. It is the only way to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people and is not turned into an alien power above them. Thus Marxist support for statist forms of organisation will inevitably undermine the liberatory nature of the revolution.

and so on. A short list of these differences would include the question of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", the standing of revolutionaries in elections, centralisation versus federalism, the role and organisation of revolutionaries, whether socialism can only come *"from below"* or whether it is possible for it come *"from below"* and *"from above"* and a host of others (i.e. some of the differences we indicated in the last section during our discussion of Bakunin's critique of Marxism). Indeed, there are so many it is difficult to address them all here. As such, we can only concentrate on a few in this and the following sections.

One of the key issues is on the issue of confusing party power with popular power. The logic of the anarchist case is simple. In any system of hierarchical and centralised power (for example, in a state or governmental structure) then those at the top are in charge (i.e. are in positions of power). It is **not** "the people," nor "the proletariat," nor "the masses," it is those who make up the government who have and exercise real power. As Malatesta argued, government means *"the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few"* and *"if ... , as do the authoritarians, one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government."* [**Anarchy**, p. 40 and p. 36] Therefore, anarchists argue, the replacement of party power for working class power is inevitable because of the nature of the state. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

> *"Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines. Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of*



*of minorities, or in the interests of minorities."* Not that Marx and Engels were unaware of this for they also noted that *"[i]n countries like France"* the peasants *"constitute far more than half of the population."* In 1875 Marx commented that *"the majority of the 'toiling people' in Germany consists of peasants, and not of proletarians."* He stressed elsewhere around the same time that *"the peasant ... forms a more of less considerable majority ... in the countries of the West European continent."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 482, p. 493, p. 536 and p. 543]

Clearly, then, Marx and Engels vision of proletarian revolution was one which involved a minority dictating to the majority and so Bakunin rejected it. His opposition rested on the fact that a "dictatorship of the proletariat," at the time, actually meant a dictatorship by a **minority** of working people and so a "revolution" which excluded the majority of working people (i.e. artisans and peasants). As he argued in 1873:

> *"If the proletariat is to be the ruling class ... then whom will it rule? There must be yet another proletariat which will be subject to this new rule, this new state. It may be the peasant rabble ... which, finding itself on a lower cultural level, will probably be governed by the urban and factory proletariat."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 177–8]

For Bakunin, to advocate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in an environment where the vast majority of working people were peasants would be a disaster. It is only when we understand this social context that we can understand Bakunin's opposition to Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" — it would be a dictatorship of a minority class over the rest of the working population (he took it as a truism that the capitalist and landlord classes should be expropriated and stopped from destroying the revolution!). Bakunin continually stressed the need for a movement and revolution of **all**

working class people (see section H.2.7) and that the peasants *"will join cause with the city workers as soon as they become convinced that the latter do not pretend to impose their will or some political or social order invented by the cities for the greater happiness of the villages; they will join cause as soon as they are assured that the industrial workers will not take their lands away."* For an *"uprising by the proletariat alone would not be enough; with that we would have only a political revolution which would necessarily produce a natural and legitimate reaction on the part of the peasants, and that reaction, or merely the indifference of the peasants, would strangle the revolution of the cities."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 401 and p. 378]

This explains why the anarchists at the St. Imier Congress argued that *"every political state can be nothing but organised domination for the benefit of one class, to the detriment of the masses, and that should the proletariat itself seize power, it would in turn become a new dominating and exploiting class."* As the proletariat was a minority class at the time, their concerns can be understood. For anarchists then, and now, a social revolution has to be truly popular and involve the majority of the population in order to succeed. Unsurprisingly, the congress stressed the role of the proletariat in the struggle for socialism, arguing that *"the proletariat of all lands ... must create the solidarity of revolutionary action ... independently of and in opposition to all forms of bourgeois politics."* Moreover, the aim of the workers' movement was *"free organisations and federations ... created by the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself, [that is, by] the trade bodies and the autonomous communes."* [quoted in **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 438, p. 439 and p. 438]

Hence Bakunin's comment that *"the designation of the proletariat, the world of the workers, as **class** rather than as **mass**"* was *"deeply antipathetic to us revolutionary anarchists who unconditionally advocate full popular emancipation."* To do so, he argued, meant *"[n]othing more or less than a new*



isation and action and see class struggle as the means of creating a social revolution which will transform society into a new one. However, the differences between these socialist theories are equally important. In the words of Errico Malatesta:

> *"The important, fundamental dissension [between anarchists and Marxists] is [that] ... [Marxist] socialists are authoritarians, anarchists are libertarians.*
>
> *"Socialists want power ... and once in power wish to impose their programme on the people... Anarchists instead maintain, that government cannot be other than harmful, and by its very nature it defends either an existing privileged class or creates a new one; and instead of inspiring to take the place of the existing government anarchists seek to destroy every organism which empowers some to impose their own ideas and interests on others, for they want to free the way for development towards better forms of human fellowship which will emerge from experience, by everyone being free and, having, of course, the economic means to make freedom possible as well as a reality."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 142]

The other differences derive from this fundamental one. So while there are numerous ways in which anarchists and Marxists differ, their root lies in the question of power. Socialists seek power (in the name of the working class and usually hidden under rhetoric arguing that party and class power are the same). Anarchists seek to destroy hierarchical power in all its forms and ensure that everyone is free to manage their own affairs (both individually and collectively). From this comes the differences on the nature of a revolution, the way the working class movement should organise and the tactics it should apply

*but accountable and removable mandates."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 261 and pp. 170–1] As such, the Paris Commune was a striking confirmation of Bakunin's ideas on many levels, **not** Marx's (who adjusted his ideas to bring them in line with Bakunin's!).

Since Bakunin, anarchists have deepen this critique of Marxism and, with the experience of both Social-Democracy and Bolshevism, argue that he predicted key failures in Marx's ideas. Given that his followers, particularly Lenin and Trotsky, have emphasised (although, in many ways, changed them) the centralisation and "socialist government" aspects of Marx's thoughts, anarchists argue that Bakunin's critique is as relevant as ever. Real socialism can only come from below.

For more on Bakunin's critique of Marxism, Mark Leier's excellent biography of the Russian Anarchist (**Bakunin: The Creative Passion**) is worth consulting, as is Brian Morris's **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**. John Clark has two useful essays on this subject in his **The Anarchist Moment** while Richard B. Saltman's **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin** contains an excellent chapter on Bakunin and Marx. A good academic account can be found in Alvin W. Gouldner's *"Marx's Last Battle: Bakunin and the First International"* (**Theory and Society**, Vol. 11, No. 6) which is a revised and shortened version of a chapter of his **Against Fragmentation: the Origins of Marxism and the Sociology of Intellectuals**. Obviously, though, Bakunin's original writings should be the first starting point.

## H.1.2 What are the key differences between Anarchists and Marxists?

There are, of course, important similarities between anarchism and Marxism. Both are socialist, oppose capitalism and the current state, support and encourage working class organ-



*aristocracy, that of the urban and industrial workers, to the exclusion of the millions who make up the rural proletariat and who ... will in effect become subjects of this great so-called popular State."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 253–4]

Again, the experiences of the Russian Revolution confirm Bakunin's worries. The Bolsheviks implemented the dictatorship of the city over the countryside, with disastrous results (see section H.6.2 for more details).

One last point on this subject. While anarchists reject the "dictatorship of the proletariat" we clearly do not reject the key role the proletariat must play in any social revolution (see section H.2.2 on why the Marxist assertion anarchists reject class struggle is false). We only reject the idea that the proletariat must dictate over other working people like peasants and artisans. We do not reject the need for working class people to defend a revolution, nor the need for them to expropriate the capitalist class nor for them to manage their own activities and so society.

Then there is the issue of whether, even if the proletariat **does** seize political power, whether the whole class can actually exercise it. Bakunin raised the obvious questions:

> *"For, even from the standpoint of that urban proletariat who are supposed to reap the sole reward of the seizure of political power, surely it is obvious that this power will never be anything but a sham? It is bound to be impossible for a few thousand, let alone tens or hundreds of thousands of men to wield that power effectively. It will have to be exercised by proxy, which means entrusting it to a group of men elected to represent and govern them, which in turn will unfailingly return them to all the deceit and subservience of representative or bourgeois rule. After a brief flash of liberty or orgiastic revolution, the cit-*

*izens of the new State will wake up slaves, puppets and victims of a new group of ambitious men."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 254–5]

He repeated this argument: *"What does it mean, 'the proletariat raised to a governing class?' Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 millions be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one will be ruled. Then there will be no government, no state; but if there is a state, there will also be those who are ruled, there will be slaves."* Bakunin argued that Marxism resolves this dilemma *"in a simple fashion. By popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage — the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school — is a lie behind which lies the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178]

So where does Marx stand on this question. Clearly, the self-proclaimed followers of Marx support the idea of "socialist" governments (indeed, many, including Lenin and Trotsky, went so far as to argue that party dictatorship was essential for the success of a revolution — see next section). Marx, however, is less clear. He argued, in reply to Bakunin's question if all Germans would be members of the government, that *"[c]ertainly, because the thing starts with the self-government of the township."* However, he also commented that *"[c]an it really be that in a trade union, for example, the entire union forms its executive committee,"* suggesting that there **will** be a division of labour between those who govern and those who obey in the Marxist system of socialism. [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 545 and p. 544] Elsewhere he talks about *"a socialist government"* coming *"to the helm in a country"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 46, p. 66] As



p. 510f] Marx's original comments imply the imposition of freedom by the centre on a population not desiring it (and how could the centre be representative of the majority in such a case?). Moreover, how could a revolution be truly social if it was not occurring in the grassroots across a country? Unsurprisingly, local autonomy has played a key role in every real revolution.

As such, Bakunin has been proved right. Centralism has always killed a revolution and, as he always argued, real socialism can only be worked from below, by the people of every village, town, and city. The problems facing the world or a revolution cannot be solved by a few people at the top issuing decrees. They can only be solved by the active participation of the mass of working class people, the kind of participation centralism and government by their nature exclude.

Given Marx's support for the federal ideas of the Paris Commune, it can be argued that Marxism is not committed to a policy of strict centralisation (although Lenin, of course, argued that Marx **was** a firm supporter of centralisation). What is true is, to quote Daniel Guérin, that Marx's comments on the Commune differ *"noticeably from Marx's writings of before and after 1871"* while Bakunin's were *"in fact quite consistent with the lines he adopted in his earlier writings."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 167] Indeed, as Bakunin himself noted, while the Marxists *"saw all their ideas upset by the uprising"* of the Commune, they *"found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it. They went even further, and proclaimed that its programme and purpose were their own, in face of the simplest logic and their own true sentiments."* This modification of ideas by Marx in the light of the Commune was not limited just to federalism, he also praised its system of mandating recallable delegates. This was a position which Bakunin had been arguing for a number of years previously but which Marx had never advocated. In 1868, for example, Bakunin was talking about a *"Revolutionary Communal Council"* composed of *"delegates ... vested with plenary*

olution requires in order to succeed. Therefore we do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* Rather, the revolution *"everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 179–80, p. 237 and p. 172]

This, we must stress, does not imply isolation. Bakunin always emphasised the importance of federal organisation to coordinate struggle and defence of the revolution. As he put it, all revolutionary communes would need to federate in order *"to organise the necessary common services and arrangements for production and exchange, to establish the charter of equality, the basis of all liberty — a charter utterly negative in character, defining what has to be abolished for ever rather than the positive forms of local life which can be created only by the living practice of each locality — and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 179]

Ironically, it is a note by Engels to the 1885 edition of Marx's 1850 article which shows the fallacy of the standard Marxist position on centralisation and the validity of Bakunin's position. As Engels put it, *"this passage is based on a misunderstanding"* and it was now *"a well known fact that throughout the whole [Great French] revolution ... the whole administration of the departments, arrondissements and communes consisted of authorities elected by the respective constituents themselves, and that these authorities acted with complete freedom within general state laws [and] that precisely this provincial and local self-government ... became the most powerful lever of the revolution."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**,



we discuss in section H.3.10, both Marx and Engels saw universal suffrage in a republic as expressing the political power of the working class.

So Bakunin's critique holds, as Marx clearly saw the "dictatorship of the proletariat" involving a socialist government having power. For Bakunin, like all anarchists, if a political party is the government, then clearly its leaders are in power, not the mass of working people they claim to represent. Anarchists have, from the beginning, argued that Marx made a grave mistake confusing working class power with the state. This is because the state is the means by which the management of people's affairs is taken from them and placed into the hands of a few. It signifies delegated **power.** As such, the so-called "workers' state" or "dictatorship of the proletariat" is a contradiction in terms. Instead of signifying the power of the working class to manage society it, in fact, signifies the opposite, namely the handing over of that power to a few party leaders at the top of a centralised structure. This is because *"all State rule, all governments being by their very nature placed outside the people, must necessarily seek to subject it to customs and purposes entirely foreign to it. We therefore declare ourselves to be foes ... of all State organisations as such, and believe that the people can be happy and free, when, organised from below upwards by means of its own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of any guardians, it will create its own life."* [Bakunin, **Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 63] Hence Bakunin's constant arguments for a decentralised, federal system of workers councils organised from the bottom-up. Again, the transformation of the Bolshevik government into a dictatorship **over** the proletariat during the early stages of the Russian Revolution supports Bakunin's critique of Marxism.

Related to this issue is Bakunin's argument that Marxism created a privileged position for socialist intellectuals in both the current social movement and in the social revolution. This was because Marx stressed that his theory was a "scientific so-

cialism" and, Bakunin argued, that implied *"because thought, theory and science, at least in our times, are in the possession of very few, these few ought to be the leaders of social life"* and they, not the masses, should organise the revolution *"by the dictatorial powers of this learned minority, which presumes to express the will of the people."* This would be *"nothing but a despotic control of the populace by a new and not at all numerous aristocracy of real and pseudoscientists"* and so there would *"be a new [ruling] class, a new hierarchy of real and counterfeit scientists and scholars, and the world will be divided into a minority ruling in the name of knowledge, and an immense ignorant majority. And then, woe unto the mass of ignorant ones!"* Thus *"every state, even the pseudo-People's State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves."* The Russian anarchist predicted that *"the organisation and the rule of the new society by socialist savants"* would be *"the worse of all despotic governments!"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 328–9, p. 331, p. 319, p. 338 and p. 295] History proved Bakunin right, with the Bolshevik regime being precisely that. As we discuss in section H.5, Lenin's vanguardism did produce such a result, with the argument that the party leadership knew the objective needs of working class people better than they themselves did being used to justify party dictatorship and the strict centralisation of social life in the hands of its leadership.

Which brings us to the last issue, namely whether the revolution will be decentralised or centralised. For Marx, the issue is somewhat confused by his support for the Paris Commune and its federalist programme (written, we must note, by a follower of Proudhon). However, in 1850, Marx stood for extreme centralisation of power, arguing that the workers *"must not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation*



*of power in the hands of the state authority."* He argued that in a nation like Germany *"where there is so many relics of the Middle Ages to be abolished"* it *"must under no circumstances be permitted that every village, every town and every province should put a new obstacle in the path of revolutionary activity, which can proceed with full force from the centre."* He stressed that *"[a]s in France in 1793 so today in Germany it is the task of the really revolutionary party to carry through the strictest centralisation."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 509–10] Lenin followed this aspect of Marx's ideas, arguing that *"Marx was a centralist"* and applying this perspective both in the party and once in power [**The Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 310]

Obviously, this issue dove-tails into the question of whether the whole class exercises power under the "dictatorship of the proletariat." In a centralised system, obviously, power **has to be** exercised by a few (as Marx's argument in 1850 showed). Centralism, by its very nature excludes the possibility of extensive participation in the decision making process. Moreover, the decisions reached by such a body could not reflect the real needs of society. In the words of Bakunin:

> *"What man, what group of individuals, no matter how great their genius, would dare to think themselves able to embrace and understand the plethora of interests, attitudes and activities so various in every country, every province, locality and profession."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 240]

He stressed that *"the revolution should be and should everywhere remain independent of the central point, which must be its expression and product — not its source, guide and cause ... the awakening of all local passions and the awakening of spontaneous life at all points, must be well developed in order for the revolution to remain alive, real and powerful."* Anarchists reject centralisation because it destroys the mass participation a rev-

*stations in life."* He stressed that *"war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is unavoidable"* and would only end with the *"abolition of the bourgeoisie as a distinct class."* In order for the worker to *"become strong"* he *"must unite"* with other workers in *"the union of all local and national workers' associations into a world-wide association, **the great International Working-Men's Association.**"* It was only *"through practice and collective experience"* and *"the progressive expansion and development of the economic struggle [that] will bring [the worker] more to recognise his [or her] true enemies: the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeoisie, and the nobility; and the State, which exists only to safeguard all the privileges of those classes."* There was *"but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action**"* which *"has only one meaning. It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds.**"* Then, *"when the revolution — brought about by the force of circumstances — breaks out, the International will be a real force and know what it has to do"*, namely to *"take the revolution into its own hands"* and become *"an earnest international organisation of workers' associations from all countries"* which will be *"capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 97–8, p. 103 and p. 110]

Hardly the words of a man who rejected class conflict, the working class and the collective nature of change! Nor is this an isolated argument from Bakunin, it recurs continuously throughout Bakunin's works. For Bakunin, the *"initiative in the new movement will belong to the people … in Western Europe, to the city and factory workers — in Russia, Poland, and most of the Slavic countries, to the peasants."* However, *"in order that the peasants rise up, it is absolutely necessary that the initiative in this revolutionary movement be taken up by the city workers … who combine in themselves the instincts, ideas, and conscious will of the Social Revolution."* [**The Political Philosophy of**



> *"The Social Question will be put … long before the Socialists have conquered a few seats in Parliament, and thus the solution of the question will be actually in the hands of the workmen [and women] themselves …*
>
> *"Under the influence of government worship, they may try to nominate a new government … and they may entrust it with the solution of all difficulties. It is so simple, so easy, to throw a vote into the ballot-box, and to return home! So gratifying to know that there is somebody who will arrange your own affairs for the best, while you are quietly smoking your pipe and waiting for orders which you have only to execute, not to reason about."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 34]

Only the struggle for freedom (or freedom itself) can be the school for freedom, and by placing power into the hands of leaders, utilising the existing state ensures that socialism is postponed rather than prepared for. As such, strikes and other forms of direct action *"are of enormous value; they create, organise, and form a workers' army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 384–5] In contrast, utilising the present state only trains people in following leaders and so socialism *"lost its creative initiative and became an ordinary reform movement … content with success at the polls, and no longer attributed any importance to social upbuilding."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

Which highlights another key problem with the notion of utilising the present state as Marxist support for electioneering is somewhat at odds with their claims of being in favour of collective, mass action. There is nothing more isolated, atomised and individualistic than voting. It is the act of one person in a box by themselves. It is the total opposite of collective

struggle. The individual is alone before, during and after the act of voting. Indeed, unlike direct action, which, by its very nature, throws up new forms of organisation in order to manage and co-ordinate the struggle, voting creates no alternative social structures. Nor can it as it is not based on nor does it create collective action or organisation. It simply empowers an individual (the elected representative) to act on behalf of a collection of other individuals (the voters). Such delegation will hinder collective organisation and action as the voters expect their representative to act and fight for them — if they did not, they would not vote for them in the first place!

Given that Marxists usually slander anarchists as "individualists" the irony is delicious!

If we look at the anti-Poll-Tax campaign in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we can see what would happen to a mass movement which utilised electioneering. The various left-wing parties, particularly Militant (now the Socialist Party) spent a lot of time and effort lobbying Labour Councillors not to implement the tax (with no success). Let us assume they had succeeded and the Labour Councillors had refused to implement the tax (or "socialist" candidates had been elected to stop it). What would have happened? Simply that there would not have been a mass movement or mass organisation based on non-payment, nor self-organised direct action to resist warrant sales, nor community activism of any form. Rather, the campaign would have consisted to supporting the councillors in their actions, mass rallies in which the leaders would have informed us of their activities on our behalf and, perhaps, rallies and marches to protest any action the government had inflicted on them. The leaders may have called for some form of mass action but this action would not have come from below and so not a product of working class self-organisation, self-activity and self-reliance. Rather, it would have been purely re-active and a case of follow the leader, without the empowering and liberating aspects of taking action by yourself, as a conscious



archism. Sadly, Marxists have been known to make such an assertion.

For example, Pat Stack of the British SWP argued that anarchists *"dismiss ... the importance of the collective nature of change"* and so *"downplays the centrality of the working class"* in the revolutionary process. This, he argues, means that for anarchism the working class *"is not the key to change."* He stresses that for Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin *"revolutions were not about ... collective struggle or advance"* and that anarchism *"despises the collectivity."* Amazingly he argues that for Kropotkin, *"far from seeing class conflict as the dynamic for social change as Marx did, saw co-operation being at the root of the social process."* Therefore, *"[i]t follows that if class conflict is not the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means. Therefore everything from riot to bomb, and all that might become between the two, was legitimate when ranged against the state, each with equal merit."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246] Needless to say, he makes the usual exception for anarcho-syndicalists, thereby showing his total ignorance of anarchism **and** syndicalism (see section H.2.8).

Assertions like these are simply incredible. It is hard to believe that anyone who is a leading member of a Leninist party could write such nonsense which suggests that Stack is aware of the truth and simply decides to ignore it. All in all, it is **very** easy to refute these assertions. All we have to do is, unlike Stack, to quote from the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin and other anarchists. Even the briefest familiarity with the writings of revolutionary anarchism would soon convince the reader that Stack really does not know what he is talking about.

Take, for example, Bakunin. Rather than reject class conflict, collective struggle or the key role of the working class, Bakunin based his political ideas on all three. As he put it, there was, *"between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, an irreconcilable antagonism which results inevitably from their respective*

*solidarity of revolutionary action' ... This was certainly the first anarchist movement, and this movement was certainly based on a libertarian version of the concept of the class struggle.*

*"Most of the leaders of this movement — first Michael Bakunin, James Guillaume, Errico Malatesta, Carlo Caliero, later Peter Kropotkin, Louise Michel, Emile Pouget, Jean Grave, and so on — took for granted that there was a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and that the social revolution would be conducted by the former against the latter. They derived such ideas ... from the traditional theory of revolutionary socialism and the traditional practice of working-class action ...*

*"The great revolutions of the early twentieth century — in Mexico, Russia, Spain — all derived from the class struggle and all involved anarchist intervention on the side of the working class. The great martyrs of the anarchist movement — from Haymarket in 1887 through Francisco Ferrer in 1909 to Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 — were killed in the class struggle. The great partisans of anarchist warfare — from Emiliano Zapata through Nestor Makhno to Buenaventura Durruti — were all fighting in the class struggle.*

*"So ... class struggle in anarchism ... [and] its importance in the anarchist movement is incontrovertible."* [**The Anarchist Past and other essays**, pp. 60–2]

Anyone even remotely aware of anarchism and its history could not fail to notice that class struggle plays a key role in anarchist theory, particularly (but not exclusively) in its revolutionary form. To assert otherwise is simply to lie about an-



and organised group. It would have replaced the struggle of millions with the actions of a handful of leaders.

Of course, even discussing this possibility indicates how remote it is from reality. The Labour Councillors were not going to act — they were far too "practical" for that. Years of working within the system, of using elections, had taken their toll decades ago. Anarchists, of course, saw the usefulness of picketing the council meetings, of protesting against the Councillors and showing them a small example of the power that existed to resist them if they implemented the tax. As such, the picket would have been an expression of direct action, as it was based on showing the power of our direct action and class organisations. Lobbying, however, was building illusions in "leaders" acting for us and based on pleading rather than defiance. But, then again, Militant desired to replace the current leaders with themselves and so had an interest in promoting such tactics and focusing the struggle on leaders and whether they would act for people or not.

Unfortunately, the Socialists never really questioned **why** they had to lobby the councillors in the first place — if utilising the existing state **was** a valid radical or revolutionary tactic, why has it always resulted in a de-radicalising of those who use it? This would be the inevitable results of any movement which "complements" direct action with electioneering. The focus of the movement will change from the base to the top, from self-organisation and direct action from below to passively supporting the leaders. This may not happen instantly, but over time, just as the party degenerates by working within the system, the mass movement will be turned into an electoral machine for the party — even arguing against direct action in case it harms the election chances of the leaders. Just as the trade union leaders have done again and again in Britain and elsewhere.

So anarchists point to the actual record of Marxists *"utilising the present state"*. Murray Bookchin's comments about the German Social Democrats are appropriate here:

> *"[T]he party's preoccupation with parliamentarism was taking it ever away from anything Marx had envisioned. Instead of working to overthrow the bourgeois state, the SPD, with its intense focus on elections, had virtually become an engine for getting votes and increasing its Reichstag representation within the bourgeois state ... The more artful the SPD became in these realms, the more its membership and electorate increased and, with the growth of new pragmatic and opportunistic adherents, the more it came to resemble a bureaucratic machine for acquiring power under capitalism rather than a revolutionary organisation to eliminate it."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 300]

The reality of working within the state soon transformed the party and its leadership, as Bakunin predicted. If we look at Leninism, we discover a similar failure to consider the evidence:

> *"From the early 1920s on, the Leninist attachment to pre-WWI social democratic tactics such as electoral politics and political activity within pro-capitalist labour unions dominated the perspectives of the so-called Communist. But if these tactics were correct ones, why didn't they lead to a less dismal set of results? We must be materialists, not idealists. What was the actual outcome of the Leninist strategies? Did Leninist strategies result in successful proletarian revolutions, giving rise to societies worthy of the human beings that live in them? The*



## H.2.2 Do anarchists reject *"class conflict"* and *"collective struggle"*?

Of course not. Anarchists have always taken a keen interest in the class struggle, in the organisation, solidarity and actions of working class people. Anarchist Nicholas Walter summarised the obvious and is worth quoting at length:

> *"Virtually all forms of revolutionary socialism during the nineteenth century, whether authoritarian or libertarian, were based on the concept of class struggle ... The term anarchist was first adopted by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1840, and although he disliked the class struggle, he recognised it existed, and took sides in it when he had to ... during the French Revolution of 1848, he insisted that he was on the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie ... his last book was a positive study of the need for specially proletarian politics .. .*
>
> *"The actual anarchist movement was founded later, by the anti-authoritarian sections of the First International ... They accepted [its] founding Address ..., drafted by Karl Marx, which assumed the primacy of the class struggle and insisted that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves'; they accepted the Programme of the International Alliance of Social Democracy (1869), drafted by Michael Bakunin, which assumed the primacy of the class struggle ... and they accepted the declaration of the St. Imier Congress which assumed the primacy of the class struggle and insisted that 'rejecting all compromise to arrive at the accomplishment of the social revolution, the proletarians of all countries must establish, outside all bourgeois politics, the*

*the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society — and organises to this end."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiv]

In summary, therefore, anarchists reject the idea that the defence of a revolution can be conducted by a state. As Bakunin once put it, there is the *"Republic-State"* and there is *"the system of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, i.e. the system of* ***Anarchism.*** *This is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the* ***State*** *and establishment of the economic, entirely free organisation of the people — organisation from bottom to top by means of federation."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 314] Indeed, creating a new state will simply destroy the most important gain of any revolution — working class autonomy — and its replacement by another form of minority rule (by the party). Anarchists have always argued that the defence of a revolution must not be confused with the state and so argue for the abolition of the state **and** the defence of a revolution. Only when working class people actually run themselves society will a revolution be successful. For anarchists, this means that *"effective emancipation can be achieved only by the* ***direct, widespread, and independent action*** *...* ***of the workers themselves****, grouped ... in their own class organisations ... on the basis of concrete action and self-government,* ***helped but not governed****, by revolutionaries working in the very midst of, and not above the mass and the professional, technical, defence and other branches."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 197]

This means that anarchists argue that the state cannot be transformed or adjusted, but has to be smashed by a social revolution and replaced with organisations and structures created by working class people during their own struggles (see section H.1.4 for details). Anarchist opposition to the so-called workers' state has absolutely **nothing** to do with the issue of defending a revolution, regardless of what Marxists assert.



> *revolutionary movement in the inter-war period was defeated."* [Max Anger, *"The Spartacist School of Falsification"*, pp. 50–2, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 43, pp. 51–2]

As Scottish Anarchist Ethel McDonald argued in 1937, the tactics urged by Lenin were a disaster in practice:

> *"At the Second Congress of the Third International, Moscow, a comrade who is with us now in Spain, answering Zinoviev, urged faith in the syndicalist movement in Germany and the end of parliamentary communism. He was ridiculed. Parliamentarianism, communist parliamentarianism, but still parliamentarianism would save Germany. And it did ... Saved it from Socialism. Saved it for Fascism. Parliamentary social democracy and parliamentary communism have destroyed the socialist hope of Europe, has made a carnage of human liberty. In Britain, parliamentarianism saved the workers from Socialism ... Have you not had enough of this huge deception? Are you still prepared to continue in the same old way, along the same old lines, talking and talking and doing nothing?"* [*"The Volunteer Ban"*, pp. 72–5, **Workers City**, Farquhar McLay (ed.), p. 74]

When the Nazis took power in 1933 in Germany the 12 million Socialist and Communist voters and 6 million organised workers took no action. In Spain, it was the anarcho-syndicalist CNT which lead the battle against fascism on the streets and helped create one of the most important social revolutions the world has seen. The contrast could not be more clear. And many Marxists urge us to follow Lenin's advice today!

All in all, the history of socialists actually using elections has been a dismal failure and was obviously a failure long be-

fore 1917. Subsequent experience has only confirmed that conclusion. Rather than prepare the masses for revolution, it has done the opposite. As we argue in section J.2, this is to be expected. That Lenin could still argue along these lines even after the rise of reformism ("revisionism") in the 1890s and the betrayal of social democracy in 1914 indicates a lack of desire to learn the lessons of history.

The negative effects of *"utilising"* the present state are, sometimes, acknowledged by Marxists although this rarely interferes with their support for standing in elections. Thus we find that advocate of "revolutionary" parliamentarianism, Trotsky, noting that *[i]f parliamentarianism served the proletariat to a certain extent as a training school for revolution, then it also served the bourgeoisie to a far greater extent as the school of counter-revolutionary strategy. Suffice it to say that by means of parliamentarianism the bourgeoisie was able so to educate the Social Democracy that it is today [1924] the main prop of private property."* [**Lessons of October**, pp. 170–1] Of course, the followers of Lenin and Trotsky are made of sterner stuff than those of Marx and Engels and so utilising the same tactics will have a different outcome. As one-time syndicalist William Gallacher put it in reply to Lenin's question *"[i]f the workers sent you to represent them in Parliament, would you become corrupt?"*: *"No, I'm sure that under no circumstances could the bourgeoisie corrupt me."* [quoted by Mark Shipway, **Anti-Parliamentary Communism**, p. 21] Mere will-power, apparently, is sufficient to counteract the pressures and influences of parliamentarianism which Marx and Engels, unlike Bakunin, failed to predict but whose legacy still haunts the minds of those who claim to be *"scientific socialists"* and so, presumably, base their politics on facts and experience rather than wishful thinking.

This is why anarchists reject the notion of radicals utilising the existing state and instead urge direct action and solidarity outside of bourgeois institutions. Only this kind of struggle



leading Bolsheviks (including Lenin and Trotsky) argued for a workers state. The centralisation of power implied by the state was essential so that the vanguard party could ignore (to use **Worker's Power**'s phrase) *"the will of the majority."* This particular perspective was clearly a lesson they learned from their experiences during the Russian Revolution — as we discussed in section H.1.2 the notion that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* was, in fact, the *"dictatorship of the party"* was a commonplace ideological truism in Leninist circles. As anarchists had warned, it was a dictatorship **over** the proletariat and acknowledged as such by the likes of Lenin and Trotsky.

Needless to say, **Workers' Power** (like most Trotskyists) blame the degeneration of the Russian revolution on the Civil War and its isolation. However, the creation of a party dictatorship was not seen in these terms and, moreover, as we discuss in detail in section H.6 the Bolshevik undermining of working class autonomy and democracy started well **before** the outbreak of civil war, thus confirming anarchist theory. These conclusions of leading Leninists simply justified the actions undertaken by the Bolsheviks from the start.

This is why anarchists reject the idea of a *"democratic workers' state."* Simply put, as far as it is a state, it cannot be democratic and in as far as it is democratic, it cannot be a state. The Leninist idea of a *"workers' state"* means, in fact, the seizure of power by the party. This, we must stress, naturally follows from the reality of the state. It is designed for minority rule and excludes, by its very nature, mass participation and this aspect of the state was one which the leading lights of Bolshevism agreed with. Little wonder, then, that in practice the Bolshevik regime suppressed of any form of democracy which hindered the power of the party. Maurice Brinton summed up the issue well when he argued that *"'workers' power' cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party — as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks ... What 'taking power' really implies is that*

*the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.*

*"But the real supporters of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' do not take that line, as they are making quite plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one party's leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator's will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses."* [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38–9]

The question is, therefore, one of **who** *"seizes power"* — will it be the mass of the population or will it be a party claiming to represent it. The difference is vital and it confuses the issue to use the same word "state" to describe two such fundamentally different structures as a "bottom-up" self-managed communal federation and a "top-down" hierarchical centralised organisation (such as has been every state that has existed). This explains why anarchists reject the idea of a *"democratic workers' state"* as the means by which a revolution defends itself. Rather than signify working class power or management of society, it signifies the opposite — the seizure of power of a minority (in this case, the leaders of the vanguard party).

Anarchists argue that the state is designed to exclude the mass of the population from the decision making process. This, ironically for Trotskyism, was one of the reasons why



creates the spirit of revolt and new popular forms of organisation which can fight and replace the hierarchical structures of capitalist society. Hence anarchists stress the need of working class people to *"rely on themselves to get rid of the oppression of Capital, without expecting that the same thing can be done for them by anybody else. The emancipation of the workmen [and women] must be the act of the workmen [and women] themselves."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32] Only this kind of movement and struggle can maximise the revolutionary potential of struggles for reforms within capitalism. As history shows, the alternative has repeatedly failed.

It should be noted, however, that not all Marxists have refused to recognise the lessons of history. Libertarian Marxists, such as council communists, also reject *"utilising the present state"* to train the proletariat for revolution (i.e. for socialists to stand for elections). Lenin attacked these Marxists who had drawn similar conclusions as the anarchists (**after** the failure of social-democracy) in his 1920 diatribe **Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**. In that pamphlet he used the experiences of the Bolsheviks in semi-Feudal Tsarist Russia to combat the conclusions drawn by socialists in the advanced capitalist countries with sizeable social democratic parties. Lenin's arguments for revolutionary Parliamentarianism did not convince the anti-Parliamentarians who argued that its *"significance lies not in its content, but in the person of the author, for the arguments are scarcely original and have for the most part already been used by others ... their fallacy resides mainly in the equation of the conditions, parties, organisations and parliamentary practice of Western Europe with their Russian counterparts."* [Anton Pannekoek, **Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism**, p. 143] While anarchists would disagree with the underlying assumption that Marx was right in considering parliamentarianism as essential and it only became problematic later, we would agree whole-heartedly with the critique presented (unsurprisingly, as we made it first).

Pannekoek's article along with Herman Gorter's **Open Letter to Comrade Lenin** are essential reading for those who are taken in with Lenin's arguments, along with the chapter on *"Socialism"* in Alexander Berkman's **What is Anarchism?**. Interestingly, the Comintern asked Berkman to translate Lenin's **Left-Wing Communism** and he agreed until he read its contents. He then said he would continue if he could write a rebuttal, a request which was rejected. For anarchists, placing the word "revolutionary" in front of "parliamentarianism" does not provide a shield against the negative influences and pressures which naturally arise by utilising that tactic. Given the sorry history of radicals doing so, this is unsurprising. What is surprising is how so many Marxists are willing to ignore that history in favour of Lenin's pamphlet.

## H.1.6 Why do anarchists try to *"build the new world in the shell of the old"*?

Another key difference between anarchists and Marxists is on how the movement against capitalism should organise in the here and now. Anarchists argue that it should prefigure the society we desire — namely it should be self-managed, decentralised, built and organised from the bottom-up in a federal structure. This perspective can be seen from the justly famous *"Circular of the Sixteen"* issued at the Sonvillier congress by the libertarian wing of the First International:

> *"The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself. We must therefore take care to make this organisation as close as possible to our ideal. How could one want an equalitarian and free society to issue from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, the* ***bureaucratic apparatus****, indispensable to all authority which wants to maintain itself, to command, to order — in a word, 'to govern'. Rapidly, it attracts around itself all sorts of elements eager to dominate and exploit.*
>
> *"****Thus it forms a new privileged caste****, at first politically and later economically ... It sows everywhere the seed of inequality and soon infects the whole social organism."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 249]

So if it **were** simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument:

> *"But perhaps the truth is simply this: ... [some] take the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.*
>
> *"Thus constructed, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in*

This not a matter of mere "labels" as Marxists assert, but rather gets to the key issue of who has the real power in a revolution — the people armed or a new minority (the "revolutionary" government). In other words, most Marxists cannot tell the difference between libertarian organisation (power to the base and decision making from the bottom-up) and the state (centralised power in a few hands and top-down decision making). Which helps explain why the Bolshevik revolution was such a failure. The confusion of working class power with party power is one of the root problems with Marxism. So why do most Marxists tend to call their post-revolutionary organisation a state? Simply because, at some level, they recognise that, in reality, the working class does not wield power in the so-called "workers' state": the party does. This was the case in Russia. The working class never wielded power under the Bolsheviks and here is the most obvious contradiction in the Marxist theory of the state — a contradiction which, as we discuss in section H.3.8 the Leninists solved by arguing that the party had to assert its power **over** the working class for its own good.

Moreover, as we discuss in section H.3.9, it is both simplistic and wrong to argue that the state is simply the tool of economic classes. The state is a source of social inequality in and of itself and, consequently, can oppress and exploit the working class just as much as, and independently of, any economically dominant class:

> *"**All political power inevitably creates a privileged situation** for the men who exercise it. Thus it violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle and strikes at the heart of the Social Revolution ... [It] inevitably becomes a source of other privileges, even if it does not depend on the bourgeoisie. Having taken over the Revolution, having mastered it, and bridled it, **power is compelled to create a***



> *embryo of the future human society is held to be henceforward, the faithful image of our principles of liberty and of federation, and is considered to reject any principle tending to authority and dictatorship."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 262–3]

Anarchists apply this insight to all organisations they take part in, stressing that the only way we can create a self-managed society is by self-managing our own struggles and organisations today. It is an essential part of our politics that we encourage people to *"learn how to participate in the life of the organisation and to do without leaders and permanent officials"* and *"practice direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and free initiative."* This flows logically from our politics, as it is *"obvious that anarchists should seek to apply to their personal and political lives this same principle upon which, they believe, the whole of human society should be based."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 94] In this way we turn our class organisations (indeed, the class struggle itself) into practical and effective *"schools of anarchism"* in which we learn to manage our own affairs without hierarchy and bosses and so popular organisations become the cells of the new society:

> *"Libertarian forms of organisation have the enormous responsibility of trying to resemble the society they are seeking to develop. They can tolerate no disjunction between ends and means. Direct action, so integral to the management of a future society, has its parallel in the use of direct action to change society. Communal forms, so integral to the structure of a future society, have their parallel in the use of communal forms — collectives, affinity groups, and the like — to change society. The ecological ethics, confederal relationships, and decentralised*

> *structures we would expect to find in a future society, are fostered by the values and networks we try to use in achieving an ecological society."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, pp. 446–7]

Marxists reject this argument. Instead they stress the importance of centralisation and consider the anarchist argument as utopian. For effective struggle, strict centralisation is required as the capitalist class and state is also centralised. In other words, to fight for socialism there is a need to organise in a way which the capitalists have utilised — to fight fire with fire. Unfortunately they forget to extinguish a fire you have to use water. Adding more flame will only increase the combustion, **not** put it out!

Of course, Marx and Engels misrepresented the anarchist position. They asserted that the anarchist position implied that the Paris Communards *"would not have failed if they had understood that the Commune was 'the embryo of the future human society' and had cast away all discipline and all arms, that is, the things which must disappear when there are no more wars!"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 115] Needless to say this is simply a slander on the anarchist position particularly as anarchists are well aware of the need to defend a revolution (see section H.2.1) and the need for **self**-discipline (see section H.4). Anarchists, as the Circular makes clear, recognise that we cannot totally reflect the future and so the current movement can only be *"as near as possible to our ideal."* Thus we have to do things, such as fighting the bosses, rising in insurrection, smashing the state or defending a revolution, which we would not have to do in a socialist society. However, we can do these things in a manner which is consistent with our values and our aims. For example, a strike can be run in two ways. Either it can be managed via assemblies of strikers and co-ordinated by councils of elected, mandated and recallable delegates or it



up communal system anarchists aim for a "state" when its role is to promote and ensure mass participation in social life is nonsense. That Marxists are vaguely aware of this obvious fact explains why they often talk of a "semi-state", a "new kind of state", a state "unique in history," or use some other expression to describe their post-revolutionary system. This would be a state (to use Engels words) which is *"no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."* [quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 319] If that **is** the case, then why call it state?

Somewhat ironically, Engels provided more than enough support for the anarchist position. It is perfectly possible to have social organisation and it **not** be a state. When discussing the Native American Iroquois Confederacy, Engels noted that *"organ of the Confederacy was a Federal Council"* which was *"elected ... and could always be removed"* by popular assemblies. There was *"no chief executive"* but *"two supreme war chiefs"* and *"[w]hen war broke out it was carried on mainly by volunteers."* Yet this was *"the organisation of a society which as yet knows no **state**."* [**Selected Works**, p. 517, p. 518 and p. 516] In the anarchist commune there is a federal council elected and mandated by popular assemblies. These, in turn, are federated in a similar bottom-up manner. The means of production have been expropriated and held by society as a whole and so classes have been abolished. Volunteer militias have been organised for self-defence against counter-revolutionary attempts to subject the free people to authority. Why is this **not** a society which *"knows no **state**"*? Is it because the anarchist commune is fighting against the capitalist class? If so, does this mean that the Iroquois Confederacy became a state when it waged war against those seeking to impose bourgeois rule on it? That is doubtful and so Marx's assertion is simply wrong and reflects both the confusion at the heart of the Marxist theory of the state and the illogical depths Marxists sink to when attacking anarchism.

the former working class manage (and defend) a free society a state.

However, as **Workers Power** indicate, it could be objected that the anarchist vision of a federation of communal and workplace assemblies and volunteer militias to defend it is simply a new form of state. In other words, that the anarchists advocate what most people (including most Marxists) would call a state as this federal system is based on social organisation, collective decision making and (ultimately) the armed people. This was the position of Marx and Engels, who asserted against Bakunin that *"to call this machine a 'revolutionary Commune organised from the bottom to top' makes little difference. The name changes nothing of the substance"* for to be able to do anything at all the communal councils *"must be vested with some power and supported by a public force."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 469]

Anarchists reject this argument. To quote Daniel Guérin, initially Bakunin used the term state *"as synonyms for 'social collective.' The anarchists soon saw, however, that it was rather dangerous for them to use the same word as the authoritarians while giving it a quite different meaning. They felt that a new concept called for a new word and that the use of the old term could be dangerously ambiguous; so they ceased to give the name 'State' to the social collective of the future."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 60–1] This is more than mere labels or semantics as it gets to the heart of the difference between libertarian and authoritarian conceptions of society and social change. Anarchists argue that the state is structured to ensure minority rule and, consequently, a "workers' state" would be a new form of minority rule over the workers. For this reason we argue that working class self-management from the bottom-up cannot be confused with a "state." The Russian Revolution showed the validity of this, with the Bolsheviks calling their dictatorship a "workers' state" in spite of the workers having no power in it.

Anarchists have long pointed out that government is not the same as collective decision making and to call the bottom-



can be run from the top-down by a few trade union leaders. The former, of course, is the anarchist way and it reflects *"the future human society"* (and, ironically, is paid lip-service to by Marxists).

Such common sense, unfortunately, was lacking in Marx and Engels, who instead decided to utter nonsense for a cheap polemical point. Neither answered the basic point — how do people become able to manage society if they do not directly manage their own organisations and struggles today? How can a self-managed society come about unless people practice it in the here and now? Can people create a socialist society if they do not implement its basic ideas in their current struggles and organisations? Equally, it would be churlish to note that the Commune's system of federalism by mandated delegates had been advocated by Bakunin for a number of years before 1871 and, unsurprisingly, he took the revolt as a striking, if incomplete, confirmation of anarchism (see section A.5.1).

The Paris Commune, it must be stressed, brought the contradictions of the Marxist attacks on anarchism to the surface. It is deeply sad to read, say, Engels attacking anarchists for holding certain position yet praising the 1871 revolution when it implement exactly the same ideas. For example, in his deeply inaccurate diatribe *"The Bakuninists at Work"*, Engels was keen to distort the federalist ideas of anarchism, dismissing *"the so-called principles of anarchy, free federation of independent groups."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 297] Compare this to his praise for the Paris Commune which, he gushed, refuted the Blanquist notion of a revolution sprung by a vanguard which would create *"the strictest, dictatorial centralisation of all power in the hands of the new revolutionary government."* Instead the Commune *"appealed to [the provinces] to form a free federation of all French Communes ... a national organisation which for the first time was really created by the nation itself. It was precisely the oppressing power of the former centralised*

*government ... which was to fall everywhere, just as it had fallen in Paris."* [**Selected Writings**, pp. 256–7]

Likewise, Engels praised the fact that, to combat the independence of the state from society, the Commune introduced wages for officials the same as that *"received by other workers"* and the use of *"the binding mandate to delegates to representative bodies."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258] Compare this to Engels attack on anarchist support for binding mandates (which, like our support for free federation, pre-dated the Commune). Then it was a case of this being part of Bakunin's plans to control the international *"for a secret society ... there is nothing more convenient than the imperative mandate"* as all its members vote one way, while the others will *"contradict one another."* Without these binding mandates, *"the common sense of the independent delegates will swiftly unite them in a common party against the party of the secret society."* Obviously the notion that delegates from a group should reflect the wishes of that group was lost on Engels. He even questioned the utility of this system for *"if all electors gave their delegates imperative mandates concerning all points in the agenda, meetings and debates of the delegates would be superfluous."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 281 and p. 277] It should be noted that Trotsky shared Engels dislike of "representatives" being forced to actually represent the views of their constituents within the party. [**In Defense of Marxism**, pp. 80–1]

Clearly a *"free federation"* of Communes and binding mandates are bad when anarchists advocate them but excellent when workers in revolt implement them! Why this was the case Engels failed to explain. However, it does suggest that anarchist ideas that we must reflect the future in how we organise today is no hindrance to revolutionary change and, in fact, reflects what is required to turn a revolt into a genuine social revolution.

Engels asserted that the anarchist position meant that *"the proletariat is told to organise not in accordance with the require-*



of class system in which a new ruling elite govern and exploit the many. So while we agree with Marxists that the main function of the state is to defend class society, we also stress the structure of the state has evolved to execute that role. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

> *"[S]ocial institutions ... do not arise arbitrarily, but are called into being by special needs to serve definite purposes ... The newly arisen possessing classes had need of a political instrument of power to maintain their economic and social privileges over the masses of their own people ... Thus arose the appropriate social conditions for the evolution of the modern state, as the organ of political power of privileged castes and classes for the forcible subjugation and oppression of the non-possessing classes ... Its external forms have altered in the course of its historical development, but its functions have always been the same ... And just as the functions of the bodily organs of ... animals cannot be arbitrarily altered, so that, for example, one cannot at will hear with his eyes and see with his ears, so also one cannot at pleasure transform an organ of social oppression into an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. The state can only be what it is: the defender of mass-exploitation and social privileges, and creator of privileged classes."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 14–5]

As such, a new form of society, one based on the participation of all in the affairs of society (and a classless society can be nothing else) means the end of the state. This is because it has been designed to **exclude** the participation a classless society needs in order to exist. In anarchist eyes, it is an abuse of the language to call the self-managed organisations by which

*the life of societies in the hands of a few."* It *"implies some new relationships between members of society ... in order to subject some classes to the domination of others"* and this becomes obvious *"when one studies the origins of the State."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 10] This was the case with representative democracy:

> *"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

This meant, Kropotkin continued, that the *"representative system was organised by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them. For the new economic phase that is about to begin we must seek a new form of political organisation, based on a principle quite different from that of representation. The logic of events imposes it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 125] This suggests that the Marxist notion that we can use a state (i.e., any centralised and hierarchical social structure) to organise and defend a social revolution is based on flawed reasoning in which it *"seems to be taken for granted that Capitalism and the workers' movement both have the same end in view. If this were so, they might perhaps use the same means; but as the capitalist is out to perfect his system of exploitation and government, whilst the worker is out for emancipation and liberty, naturally the same means cannot be employed for both purposes."* [George Barrett, **Objections to Anarchism**, p. 343]

To reproduce in the new society social structures which share the same characteristics (such as centralisation and delegation of power) which mark the institutions of class society would be a false step, one which can only recreate a new form



*ments of the struggle ... but according to the vague notions of a future society entertained by some dreamers."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 23, p. 66] In this he was wrong, as he failed to understand that the anarchist position was produced by the class struggle itself. He failed to understand how that struggle reflects our aspirations for a better world, how we see what is wrong with modern society and seek to organise to end such abuses rather than perpetuate them in new forms. Thus the trade unions which Bakunin argued would be the basis of a free society are organised from the bottom-up and based upon the direct participation of the workers. This form of organisation was not forced upon the workers by some intellectuals thinking they were a good idea. Rather they were created to fight the bosses and reflected the fact that workers were sick of being treating as servants and did not wish to see that repeated in their own organisations.

As Bakunin argued, when a union delegates authority to its officials it may be *"very good for the committees, but [it is] not at all favourable for the social, intellectual, and moral progress of the collective power of the International."* The committees *"substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership"* while the membership expressed *"indifference to general problems"* and left *"all problems to the decisions of committees."* This could only be solved by *"call[ing] general membership meetings,"* that is *"popular assemblies."* Bakunin goes on to argue that the *"organisation of the International, having as its objective not the creation of new despotism but the uprooting of all domination, will take on an essentially different character than the organisation of the State."* This must be the *"organisation of the trade sections and their representation by the Chambers of Labour"* and these *"bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 246–7 and p. 255]

Ou Shengbai, a Chinese anarchist, argued that libertarians *"deeply feel that the causes of popular misery are these: (1) Be-*

*cause of the present political system power is concentrated in a few hands with the result that the majority of the people do not have the opportunity for free participation. (2) Because of the capitalist system all means of production are concentrated in the hands of the capitalists with the results that the benefits that ought to accrue to labourers are usurped by capitalists.* [quoted by Arif Dirlik, **Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution**, p. 235] Does it make much sense to organise in ways which reflect these problems? Surely the reason why people become socialists is because they seek to change society, to give the mass of the population an opportunity for free participation and to manage their own affairs. Why destroy those hopes and dreams by organising in a way which reflects the society we oppose rather than the one we desire?

Ultimately, Engels dismissed the practical experiences of working class people, dismissed our ability to create a better world and our ability to dream. In fact, he seems to think there is some division of labour between *"the proletariat"* who do the struggling and *"some dreamers"* who provide the ideas. The notion that working class people can both struggle **and** dream was lost on him, as was the notion that our dreams shape our struggles and our struggles shape our dreams. People resist oppression and exploitation because we want to determine what goes on in our lives and to manage our own affairs. In that process, we create new forms of organisation which allows that to happen, ones that reflect our dreams of a better world. This is not in opposition to the needs of the struggle, as Engels asserted, but are rather an expression of it. To dismiss this process, to advocate organisational methods which are the very antithesis of what working class people have shown, repeatedly, what they want, is the height of arrogance and, ultimately, little more than a dismissal of the hopes, dreams and creative self-activity of working class people. As libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis put it:



*tablish libertarian communism is by destroying the bourgeoisie"* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 484] Clearly, anarchism has always recognised the necessity of defending a revolution and proposed ideas to ensure it (ideas applied with great success by, for example, the Makhnovists in the Ukrainian Revolution and the CNT militias during the Spanish). As such, any assertion that anarchism rejects the necessity of defending a revolution is simply false. Sadly, it is one Marxists make repeatedly (undoubtedly inspired by Engels similar distortions — see section H.4.7).

Which, of course, brings us to the second assertion, namely that any attempt to defend a revolution means that a state has been created (regardless of what it may be called). For anarchists, such an argument simply shows that Marxists do not really understand what a state is. While the Trotskyist definition of a *"state"* may be (to quote **Workers' Power**) *"an apparatus designed to enable one class to rule another,"* the anarchist definition is somewhat different. Anarchists, of course, do not deny that the modern state is (to use Malatesta's excellent expression) *"the bourgeoisie's servant and **gendarme**."* [**Anarchy**, p. 23] However, as we discuss in section H.3.7, the Marxist analysis is superficial and fundamentally metaphysical rather than scientific. Anarchists take an evolutionary perspective on the state and, as a result, argue that every state that has ever existed has defended the power of a minority class and, unsurprisingly, has developed certain features to facilitate this. The key one is centralisation of power. This ensures that the working people are excluded from the decision making process and power remains a tool of the ruling class. As such, the centralisation of power (while it may take many forms) is the key means by which a class system is maintained and, therefore, a key aspect of a state.

As Kropotkin put, the State idea *"includes the existence of a power situated above society"* as well as *"a **territorial concentration** as well as the concentration of many functions of*

Alexander Berkman concurred. In his classic introduction to anarchism, he devoted a whole chapter to the issue which he helpfully entitled *"Defense of the Revolution"*. He noted that it was *"your duty, as an Anarchist, to protect your liberty, to resist coercion and compulsion . .. the social revolution ... will defend itself against invasion from any quarter ... The armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution. By means of their unions and syndicates they must always be on guard against counter-revolutionary attack."* [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 231–2] Emma Goldman clearly and unambiguously stated that she had *"always insisted that an armed attack on the Revolution must be met with armed force"* and that *"an armed counter-revolutionary and fascist attack can be met in no way except by an armed defence."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 222 and p. 217] Kropotkin, likewise, took it as a given that *"a society in which the workers would have a dominant voice"* would require a revolution to create and *"each time that such a period of accelerated evolution and reconstruction on a grand scale begins, civil war is liable to break out on a small or large scale."* The question was *"how to attain the greatest results with the most limited amount of civil war, the smallest number of victims, and a minimum of mutual embitterment."* To achieve this there was *"only one means; namely, that the oppressed part of society should obtain the clearest possible conception of what they intend to achieve, and how, and that they should be imbued with the enthusiasm which is necessary for that achievement."* Thus, *"there are periods in human development when a conflict is unavoidable, and civil war breaks out quite independently of the will of particular individuals."* [**Memiors of a Revolutionist**, pp. 270–1]

So Durruti, while fighting at the front during the Spanish revolution, was not saying anything new or against anarchist theory when he stated that *"the bourgeois won't let us create a libertarian communist society simply because we want to. They'll fight back and defend their privileges. The only way we can es-*



> *"the organisation's inspiration can come only from the socialist structures created by the working class in the course of its own history. It must let itself be guided by the principles on which the soviet and the factory council were founded ... the principles of workers' management must govern the operation and structure of the organisation. Apart from them, there are only capitalist principles, which, as we have seen, can only result in the establishment of capitalist relationships."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, pp. 217–8]

Ironically enough, given their own and their followers claims of Marxism's proletarian core, it was Marx and Engels who were at odds with the early labour movement, **not** Bakunin and the anarchists. Historian Gwyn A. Williams notes in the early British labour movement there were *"to be no leaders"* and the organisations were *"consciously modelled on the civil society they wished to create."* [**Artisans and Sans-Culottes**, p. 72] Lenin, unsurprisingly, dismissed the fact that the British workers *"thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions"* as *"primitive democracy"* and *"absurd."* He also complained about *"how widespread is the 'primitive' conception of democracy among the masses of the students and workers"* in Russia. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 162–3] Clearly, the anarchist perspective reflects the ideas the workers' movement before it degenerates into reformism and bureaucracy while Marxism reflects it during this process of degeneration. Needless to say, the revolutionary nature of the early union movement clearly shows who was correct!

Anarchists, in other words, simply generalised the experiences of the workers in struggle and Bakunin and his followers were expressing a common position held by many in the International. Even Marx paid lip-service to this when he stated *"in*

*contrast to old society ... a new society is springing up"* and the *"Pioneer of that new society is the International Working Men's Association."* [**Selected Works**, p. 263] Clearly, considering the International as the embryo of the future society is worthy only of scorn as the correct position is to consider it merely as a pioneer!

As such, libertarians *"lay no claims to originality in proposing this [kind of prefigurative organisation]. In every revolution, during most strikes and daily at the level of workshop organisation, the working class resorts to this type of direct democracy."* [Maurice Brinton, **For Workers' Power**, p. 48] Given how Marxists pay lip-service to such forms of working class self-organisation, it seems amusing to hear them argue that this is correct for everyone else but not themselves and their own organisations! Apparently, the same workers who are expected to have the determination and consciousness necessary to overthrow capitalism and create a new world in the future are unable to organise themselves in a socialist manner today. Instead, we have to tolerate so-called "revolutionary" organisations which are just as hierarchical, top-down and centralised as the system which provoked our anger at its injustice in the first and which we are trying to end!

Related to this is the fact that Marxists (particularly Leninists) favour centralisation while anarchists favour decentralisation within a federal organisation. Anarchists do not think that decentralisation implies isolation or narrow localism. We have always stressed the importance of federalism to co-ordinate decisions. Power would be decentralised, but federalism ensures collective decisions and action. Under centralised systems, anarchists argue, power is placed into the hands of a few leaders. Rather than the real interests and needs of the people being co-ordinated, centralism simply means the imposition of the will of a handful of leaders, who claim to "represent" the masses. Co-ordination from below, in other words, is replaced by coercion from above in the centralised system and the needs and



And:

> *"the Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune ... there will be a standing federation of the barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council ... [made up of] delegates ... invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times ... all provinces, communes and associations ... [will] delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all ... invested with binding mandated and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... and to organise a revolutionary force with the capacity of defeating the reaction ... it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the universality of the Revolution ... will emerge triumphant."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 155–6]

Malatesta agreed, explicitly pointing to *"corps of volunteers (anarchist formations)"* as a means of defending a revolution from *"attempts to reduce a free people to a state of slavery again."* To defend a revolution required *"the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter."* [**Anarchy**, p. 42] Decades later, his position had not changed and he was still arguing for the *"creation of voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention"* for only *"the people in arms, in possession of the land, the factories and all the natural wealth"* could *"defend ... the revolution."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 166 and p. 170]

*and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 42–3] Pretty much common sense, so you would think! Sadly, this appears to not be the case. As such, we have to explain anarchist ideas on the defence of a revolution and why this necessity need not imply a state and, if it did, then it signifies the end of the revolution.

The argument by **Workers' Power** is very common with the Leninist left and contains three fallacies, which we expose in turn. Firstly, we have to show that anarchists have always seen the necessity of defending a revolution. This shows that the anarchist opposition to the *"democratic workers' state"* (or *"dictatorship of the proletariat"*) has nothing to do with beating the ruling class and stopping them regaining their positions of power. Secondly, we have to discuss the anarchist and Marxist definitions of what constitutes a *"state"* and show what they have in common and how they differ. Thirdly, we must summarise why anarchists oppose the idea of a *"workers' state"* in order for the **real** reasons why anarchists oppose it to be understood. Each issue will be discussed in turn.

For revolutionary anarchists, it is a truism that a revolution will need to defend itself against counter-revolutionary threats. Bakunin, for example, while strenuously objecting to the idea of a *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* also thought a revolution would need to defend itself:

> *"Immediately after established governments have been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines . .. In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary to radiate revolution outward, to raise all of its neighbouring communes in revolt ... and to federate with them for common defence."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 142]



interests of all are replaced by those of a few leaders at the centre.

Such a centralised, inevitably top-down, system can only be counter-productive, both practically and in terms of generating socialist consciousness:

> *"Bolsheviks argue that to fight the highly centralised forces of modern capitalism requires an equally centralised type of party. This ignores the fact that capitalist centralisation is based on coercion and force and the exclusion of the overwhelming majority of the population from participating in any of its decisions ...*
>
> *"The very structure of these organisations ensures that their personnel do not think for themselves, but unquestioningly carry out the instructions of their superiors ...*
>
> *"Advocates of 'democratic centralism' insist that it is the only type of organisations which can function effectively under conditions of illegality. This is nonsense. The 'democratic centralist' organisation particularly vulnerable to police persecution. When all power is concentrated in the hands of the leaders, their arrest immediately paralyses the whole organisation. Members trained to accept unquestioningly the instruction of an all-wise Central Committee will find it very difficult to think and act for themselves. The experiences of the German Communist Party [under the Nazis] confirm this. With their usual inconsistency, the Trotskyists even explain the demise of their Western European sections during World War II by telling people how their leaders were murdered by the Gestapo!"* [Maurice Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

As we discuss in depth in section H.5 the Leninist vanguard party does, ironically, create in embryo a new world simply because once in power it refashions society in **its** image. However, no anarchist would consider such a centralised, hierarchical top-down class system rooted in bureaucratic power as being remotely desirable or remotely socialist.

Therefore anarchists *"recognised neither the state nor pyramidal organisation"* Kropotkin argued, while Marxists *"recognised the state and pyramidal methods of organisation"* which *"stifled the revolutionary spirit of the rank-and-file workers."* [**Conquest of Bread and Other Writings**, p. 212] The Marxist perspective inevitably places power into the hands of a few leaders, who then decree which movements to support and encourage based on what is best for the long term benefit of the party itself rather than the working class. Thus we find Engels arguing while Marxists were *"obliged to support every **real** popular movement"* they also had to ensure *"that the scarcely formed nucleus of our proletarian Party is not sacrificed in vain and that the proletariat is not decimated in futile local revolts,"* for example *"a blood-letting like that of 1871 in Paris."* [Marx and Engels, **The Socialist Revolution**, p. 294 and p. 320] This produces a conservative approach to social struggle, with mass actions and revolutionary situations ignored or warned against because of the potential harm it could inflict on the party. Unsurprisingly, every popular revolution has occurred against the advice of the so-called "revolutionary" Marxist leadership including the Paris Commune and the 1917 February revolution in Russia (even the October seize of power was done in the face of resistance from the Bolshevik party machine).

It is for these reasons that anarchists *"[a]s much as is humanly possible ... try to reflect the liberated society they seek to achieve"* and *"not slavishly duplicate the prevailing system of hierarchy, class and authority."* Rather than being the abstract dreams of isolated thinkers, these *"conclusions ... emerge from*



## H.2.1 Do anarchists reject defending a revolution?

According to many Marxists anarchists either reject the idea of defending a revolution or think that it is not necessary. The Trotskyists of **Workers' Power** present a typical Marxist account of what **they** consider as anarchist ideas on this subject:

> *"the anarchist conclusion is not to build any sort of state in the first place — not even a democratic workers' state. But how could we stop the capitalists trying to get their property back, something they will definitely try and do?*
>
> *"Should the people organise to stop the capitalists raising private armies and resisting the will of the majority? If the answer is yes, then that organisation — whatever you prefer to call it — is a state: an apparatus designed to enable one class to rule over another.*
>
> *"The anarchists are rejecting something which is necessary if we are to beat the capitalists and have a chance of developing a classless society."* [*"What's wrong with anarchism?"*, pp. 12–13, **World Revolution: Prague S26 2000**, p. 13]

It would be simple to quote Malatesta from 1891 on this issue and leave it at that. As he put some seem to suppose *"that anarchists, in the name of their principles, would wish to see that strange freedom respected which violates and destroys the freedom and life of others. They seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers*

So anarchist theory has developed since Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. At each period in history anarchism advanced in its understanding of the world, the anarchism of Bakunin was a development of that of Proudhon, these ideas were again developed by the anarcho-communists of the 1880s and by the syndicalists of the 1890's, by the Italian Malatesta, the Russian Kropotkin, the Mexican Flores Magon and many other individuals and movements. Today we stand on their shoulders, not at their feet.

As such, to concentrate on the ideas of a few *"leaders"* misses the point totally. While anarchism contains many of the core insights of, say, Bakunin, it has also developed them and added to them. It has, concretely, taken into account, say, the lessons of the Russian and Spanish revolutions and so on. As such, even assuming that Marxist accounts of certain aspects of the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin were correct, they would have to be shown to be relevant to modern anarchism to be of any but historical interest. Sadly, Marxists generally fail to do this and, instead, we are subject to a (usually inaccurate) history lesson.

In order to understand, learn from and transcend previous theorists we must honestly present their ideas. Unfortunately many Marxists do not do this and so this section of the FAQ involves correcting the many mistakes, distortions, errors and lies that Marxists have subjected anarchism to. Hopefully, with this done, a real dialogue can develop between Marxists and anarchists. Indeed, this has happened between libertarian Marxists (such as council communists and Situationists) and anarchists and both tendencies have benefited from it. Perhaps this dialogue between libertarian Marxists and anarchists is to be expected, as the mainstream Marxists have often misrepresented the ideas of libertarian Marxists as well — when not dismissing them as anarchists!



*an exacting study of past revolutions, of the impact centralised parties have had on the revolutionary process"* and history has more than confirmed the anarchist warning that the *"revolutionary party, by duplicating these centralistic, hierarchical features would reproduce hierarchy and centralism in the post revolutionary society."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 138, p. 139 and p. 137] Moreover, we base our arguments on how social movements should organise on the experiences of past struggles, of the forms of organisation spontaneously produced by those struggles and which, therefore, reflect the needs of those struggles and the desire for a better way of life which produced them. Ultimately, no one knows when a revolution turns the hopes and aspirations of today into tomorrow's reality and it would be wise to have some experience of managing our own affairs before hand.

By failing to understand the importance of applying a vision of a free society to the current class struggle, Marxists help ensure that society never is created. By copying bourgeois methods within their "revolutionary" organisations (parties and unions) they ensure bourgeois ends (inequality and oppression).

## H.1.7 Haven't you read Lenin's *"State and Revolution"*?

This question is often asked of people who critique Marxism, particularly its Leninist form. Lenin's **State and Revolution** is often considered his most democratic work and Leninists are quick to point to it as proof that Lenin and those who follow his ideas are not authoritarian. As such, it is an important question. So how do anarchists reply when people point them to Lenin's work as evidence of the democratic (even libertarian) nature of Marxism? Anarchists reply in two ways.

Firstly, we argue many of the essential features of Lenin's ideas are to be found in anarchist theory and, in fact, had been aspects of anarchism for decades **before** Lenin put pen to paper. Bakunin, for example, talked about mandated delegates from workplaces federating into workers' councils as the framework of a (libertarian) socialist society in the 1860s as well as popular militias to defend a revolution. Moreover, he was well aware that revolution was a **process** rather than an event and so would take time to develop and flourish. Hence Murray Bookchin:

> *"Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta were not so naive as to believe that anarchism could be established over night. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist's views. Nor did the anarchists ... believe that abolition of the state involved 'laying down of arms' immediately after the revolution, to use Marx's obscurantist choice of terms, thoughtlessly repeated by Lenin in* ***State and Revolution****. Indeed, much that passes for 'Marxism' in* ***State and Revolution*** *is pure anarchism — for example, the substitution of revolutionary militias for professional armed bodies and the substitution of organs of self-management for parliamentary bodies. What is authentically Marxist in Lenin's pamphlet is the demand for 'strict centralism,' the acceptance of a 'new' bureaucracy, and the identification of soviets with a state."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 137]

That this is the case is hidden in Lenin's work as he deliberately distorts anarchist ideas in it (see sections H.1.3 and H.1.4 for example). Therefore, when Marxists ask whether anarchist have read Lenin's **State and Revolution** we reply by arguing



has to be taken into account). As Max Nettlau put it with regards to Proudhon, *"we have to extract from his work useful teachings that would be of great service to our modern libertarians, who nevertheless have to find their own way from theory to practice and to the critique of our present-day conditions, as Proudhon did in his time. This does not call for a slavish imitation; it implies using his work to inspire us and enable us to profit by his experience."* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 46–7] Similarly for other anarchists — we see them as a source of inspiration upon which to build rather than a template which to copy. This means to attack anarchism by, say, attacking Bakunin's or Proudhon's personal failings is to totally miss the point. While anarchists may be inspired by the ideas of, say, Bakunin or Proudhon it does not mean we blindly follow all of their ideas. Far from it! We critically analysis their ideas and keep what is living and reject what is useless or dead. Sadly, such common sense is lacking in many who critique anarchism.

However, the typical Marxist approach does have its benefits from a political perspective. It is very difficult for Marxists and Leninists to make an objective criticism of Anarchism for, as Albert Meltzer pointed out, *"by its nature it undermines all the suppositions basic to Marxism. Marxism was held out to be the basic working class philosophy (a belief which has utterly ruined the working class movement everywhere). It holds that the industrial proletariat cannot owe its emancipation to anyone but themselves alone. It is hard to go back on that and say that the working class is not yet ready to dispense with authority placed over it ... Marxism normally tries to refrain from criticising anarchism as such — unless driven to doing so, when it exposes its own authoritarianism ... and concentrates its attacks not on Anarchism, but on Anarchists."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and Against**, p. 62] Needless to say, this technique is the one usually applied by Marxists (although, we must stress that usually their account of the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin are so distorted that they fail even to do this!).

have always rejected this approach. We deliberately call ourselves **anarchists** rather than Proudhonists, Bakuninists, Kropotkinists, or after any other person. As Malatesta argued in 1876 (the year of Bakunin's death) *"[w]e follow ideas and not men, and rebel against this habit of embodying a principle in a man."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 198]

Therefore, anarchists, unlike many (most?) Marxists do not believe that some prophet wrote down the scriptures in past centuries and if only we could reach a correct understanding of these writings today we would see the way forward. Chomsky put it extremely well:

> *"The whole concept of Marxist or Freudian or anything like that is very odd. These concepts belong to the history of organised religion. Any living person, no matter how gifted, will make some contributions intermingled with error and partial understanding. We try to understand and improve on their contributions and eliminate the errors. But how can you identify yourself as a Marxist, or a Freudian, or an X-ist, whoever X may be? That would be to treat the person as a God to be revered, not a human being whose contributions are to be assimilated and transcended. It's a crazy idea, a kind of idolatry."* [**The Chomsky Reader**, pp. 29–30]

This means that anarchists recognise that any person, no matter how great or influential, are just human. They make mistakes, they fail to live up to all the ideals they express, they are shaped by the society they live in, and so on. Anarchists recognise this fact and extract the positive aspects of past anarchist thinkers, reject the rest and develop what we consider the living core of their ideas, learn from history and constantly try to bring anarchist ideas up-to-date (after all, a lot has changed since the days of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin and this



that most of Lenin's ideas were first expressed by anarchists and his work just strikes anarchists as little more than a rehash of many of our own ideas but placed in a statist context which totally and utterly undermines them in favour of party rule.

Secondly, anarchists argue that regardless of what Lenin argued for in **State and Revolution**, he did not apply those ideas in practice (indeed, he did the exact opposite). Therefore, the question of whether we have read Lenin's work simply drives home how the ideological nature and theoretical bankruptcy of Leninism. This is because the person is asking you to evaluate their politics based on what they say rather than on what they do, like any politician.

To use an analogy, what would you say to a politician who has cut welfare spending by 50% and increased spending on the military and who argues that this act is irrelevant and that you should look at their manifesto which states that they were going to do the opposite? You would dismiss this argument as laughable and them as liars as you would evaluate them by their actions, not by what they say. Leninists, by urging you to read Lenin's **State and Revolution** are asking you to evaluate them by what their manifesto says and ignore what they did. Anarchists, on the other hand, ask you to evaluate the Leninist manifesto by comparing it to what they actually did in power. Such an evaluation is the only means by which we can judge the validity of Leninist claims and politics.

As we discuss the role of Leninist ideology in the fate of the Russian Revolution in section H.6 we will provide a summary of Lenin's claims in his famous work **State and Revolution** and what he did in practice here. Suffice to say the difference between reality and rhetoric was extremely large and, therefore, it is a damning indictment of Bolshevism. Post-October, the Bolsheviks not only failed to introduce the ideas of Lenin's book, they in fact introduced the exact opposite. As one historian puts it:

> *"To consider 'State and Revolution' as the basic statement of Lenin's political philosophy — which non-Communists as well as Communists usually do — is a serious error. Its argument for a utopian anarchism never actually became official policy. The Leninism of 1917 ... came to grief in a few short years; it was the revived Leninism of 1902 which prevailed as the basis for the political development of the USSR."* [Robert V. Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, pp. 51–2]

Daniels is being far too lenient with the Bolsheviks. It was not, in fact, *"a few short years"* before the promises of 1917 were broken. In some cases, it was a few short hours. In others, a few short months. However, in a sense Daniels is right. It did take until 1921 before all hope for saving the Russian Revolution finally ended.

Simply put, if the **State and Revolution** is the manifesto of Bolshevism, then not a single promise in that work was kept by the Bolsheviks when they got into power. As such, Lenin's work cannot be used to evaluate Bolshevik ideology as Bolshevism paid no attention to it once it had taken state power. While Lenin and his followers chant rhapsodies about the Soviet State (this 'highest and most perfect system of democracy") they quickly turned its democratic ideas into a fairy-tale, and an ugly fairy-tale at that, by simply ignoring it in favour of party power (and party dictatorship). To state the obvious, to quote theory and not relate it to the practice of those who claim to follow it is a joke. If you look at the actions of the Bolsheviks after the October Russian Revolution you cannot help draw the conclusion that Lenin's **State and Revolution** has nothing to do with Bolshevik policy and presents a false image of what Leninists desire. As such, we must present a comparison between rhetoric and realty.



**Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 215] Bakunin saw the process of class struggle as the means of transforming instinct into conscious thought. As he put it, the *"goal, then, is to make the worker fully aware of what he [or she] wants, to unjam within him [or her] a steam of thought corresponding to his [or her] instinct."* This is done by *"a single path, that of* ***emancipation through practical action****,"* by *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses,"* of *"collective struggle of the workers against the bosses."* This would be complemented by socialist organisations *"propagandis[ing] its principles."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 102, p. 103 and p. 109] Clearly, Stack is totally distorting Bakunin's ideas on the subject.

This technique of quoting Bakunin when he spoke about (or when he wrote in) his pre-anarchist days in the 1840s, i.e. nearly 20 years **before** he became an anarchist, or from Proudhon's non-anarchist and posthumously published work on property (in which Proudhon saw small-scale property as a bulwark against state tyranny) to attack anarchism is commonplace. So it is always wise to check the source material and any references (assuming that they are provided). Only by doing this can it be discovered whether a quote reflects the opinions of individuals when they were anarchists or whether they are referring to periods when they were no longer, or had not yet become, anarchists.

Ultimately, though, these kinds of articles by Marxists simply show the ideological nature of their own politics and say far more about Marxism than anarchism. After all, if their politics were strong they would not need to distort anarchist ideas! In addition, these essays are usually marked by a lot of (usually inaccurate) attacks on the ideas (or personal failings) of individual anarchists (usually Proudhon and Bakunin and sometimes Kropotkin). No modern anarchist theorist is usually mentioned, never mind discussed. Obviously, for most Marxists, anarchists must repeat parrot-like the ideas of these "great men." However, while Marxists may do this, anarchists

*"embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real aspirations, wishes and needs whose sum total constitutes the collective will of a people."* He explicitly contrasted the Marxist system of *"want[ing] to impose science upon the people"* with the anarchist desire *"to diffuse science and knowledge among the people, so that the various groups of human society, when convinced by propaganda, may organise and spontaneously combine into federations, in accordance with their natural tendencies and their real interests, but never according to a plan traced in advance and* ***imposed upon the ignorant masses*** *by a few 'superior' minds."* [**The Political Theory of Bakunin**, p. 300] A clear misreading of Bakunin's argument but one which fits nicely into Marxist preconceptions of Bakunin and anarchism in general.

This tendency to quote out of context or from periods when anarchists were not anarchists probably explains why so many of these Marxist accounts of anarchism are completely lacking in references. Take, for example, the British SWP's Pat Stack who, in the face of stiff competition, wrote one of the most inaccurate diatribes against anarchism the world has had the misfortunate to see (namely *"Anarchy in the UK?"* [**Socialist Review**, no. 246]). There is not a single reference in the whole article, which is just as well, given the inaccuracies contained in it. Without references, the reader would not be able to discover for themselves the distortions and simple errors contained in it.

For example, Stack asserts that Bakunin *"claimed a purely 'instinctive socialism.'"* However, the truth is different and this quote from Bakunin is one by him comparing himself and Marx in the 1840s! In fact, the **anarchist** Bakunin argued that *"instinct as a weapon is not sufficient to safeguard the proletariat against the reactionary machinations of the privileged classes,"* as instinct *"left to itself, and inasmuch as it has not been transformed into consciously reflected, clearly determined thought, lends itself easily to falsification, distortion and deceit."* [**The**



In order to show that this is the case, we need to summarise the main ideas contained in Lenin's work. Moreover, we need to indicate what the Bolsheviks did, in fact, do. Finally, we need to see if the various rationales justifying these actions hold water.

So what did Lenin argue for in **State and Revolution**? Writing in the mid-1930s, anarchist Camillo Berneri summarised the main ideas of that work as follows:

> *"The Leninist programme of 1917 included these points: the discontinuance of the police and standing army, abolition of the professional bureaucracy, elections for all public positions and offices, revocability of all officials, equality of bureaucratic wages with workers' wages, the maximum of democracy, peaceful competition among the parties within the soviets, abolition of the death penalty."* [*"The Abolition and Extinction of the State,"* pp. 50–1, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 50]

As he noted, *"[n]ot a single one of the points of this programme has been achieved."* This was, of course, under Stalinism and most Leninists will concur with Berneri. However what Leninists tend not to mention is that by the end of the 7 month period of Bolshevik rule before the start of the civil war (i.e., from November 1917 to May 1918) none of these points existed. So, as an example of what Bolshevism "really" stands for it seems strange to harp on about a work which was never really implemented when the its author was in a position to do so (i.e. before the onslaught of a civil war Lenin thought was inevitable anyway!). Similarly, if **State and Revolution** indicates the features a "workers' state" must have then, by May 1918, Russia did not have such a state and so, logically, it can only be considered as such only if we assume that the good in-

tentions of its rulers somehow overcome its political and economic structure (which, sadly, **is** the basic Trotskyist defence of Leninism against Stalinism!).

To see that Berneri's summary is correct, we need to quote Lenin directly. Obviously the work is a wide ranging defence of Lenin's interpretation of Marxist theory on the state. As it is an attempt to overturn decades of Marxist orthodoxy, much of the work is quotes from Marx and Engels and Lenin's attempts to enlist them for his case (we discuss this issue in section H.3.10). Equally, we need to ignore the numerous straw men arguments about anarchism Lenin inflicts on his reader. Here we simply list the key points as regards Lenin's arguments about his "workers' state" and how the workers would maintain control of it:

> 1) Using the Paris Commune as a prototype, Lenin argued for the abolition of *"parliamentarianism"* by turning *"representative institutions from mere 'talking shops' into working bodies."* This would be done by removing *"the division of labour between the legislative and the executive."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 304 and p. 306]
>
> 2) *"All officials, without exception, to be elected and subject to recall* ***at any time****"* and so *"directly responsible to their constituents."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 302 and p. 306]
>
> 3) The *"immediate introduction of control and superintendence by* ***all,*** *so that* ***all*** *shall become 'bureaucrats' for a time and so that, therefore,* ***no one*** *can become a 'bureaucrat'."* Proletarian democracy would *"take immediate steps to cut bureaucracy down to the roots ... to the complete abolition of bureaucracy"* as the *"****essence*** *of bureaucracy"* is officials becoming transformed*" into privileged persons divorced*



*patriarchalism is now being waged in virtually every village and every family."*[**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 206, pp. 209–10, p. 210 and p. 214]

As can be seen Trotsky's summary of Bakunin's ideas is totally wrong. Not only did his ideas on the organisation of the free commune as a federation of workers' associations predate the soviets by decades, he also argued against patriarchal relationships and urged their destruction in the Russian peasant commune (and elsewhere). Indeed, if any one fits Trotsky's invention it is Marx, not Bakunin. After all, Marx came round (eventually) to Bakunin's position that the peasant commune could be the basis for Russia to jump straight to socialism (and so by-passing capitalism) but without Bakunin's critical analysis of that institution and its patriarchal and other *"dark"* features. Similarly, Marx never argued that the future socialist society would be based on workers' associations and their federation (i.e. workers' councils). His vision of revolution was formulated in typically bourgeois structures such as the Paris Commune's municipal council.

We could go on, but space precludes discussing every example. Suffice to say, it is not wise to take any Marxist assertion of anarchist thought or history at face value. A common technique is to quote anarchist writers out of context or before they become anarchists. For example, Marxist Paul Thomas argues that Bakunin favoured *"blind destructiveness"* and yet quotes more from Bakunin's pre-anarchist works (as well as Russian nihilists) than Bakunin's anarchist works to prove his claim. Similarly, Thomas claims that Bakunin *"defended the* ***federes*** *of the Paris Commune of 1871 on the grounds that they were strong enough to dispense with theory altogether,"* yet his supporting quote clearly does not, in fact, say this. [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, pp. 288–90 and p. 285] What Bakunin was, in fact, arguing was simply that theory must progress from experience and that any attempt to impose a theory on society would be doomed to create a *"Procrustean bed"* as no government could

> *in general, not to attack the State in which they live and which oppresses them, but to attack the State as such which exists nowhere and which accordingly cannot defend itself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 583]

For some reason, few Leninist quote these recommendations to the Spanish workers nor do they dwell on the reformist and bureaucratic nature of the Socialist party inspired by this advice. As we discuss in section H.3.10, the notion that voting in elections was to *"attack the State"* fits in well with the concept that universal suffrage equalled the *"political power"* of the proletariat and the democratic republic was the *"specific form"* of its dictatorship. Again, for some strange reason, few Leninists mention that either.

The distortions can be somewhat ironic, as can be seen when Trotsky asserted in 1937 that anarchists are *"willing to replace Bakunin's patriarchal 'federation of free communes' by the more modern federation of free soviets."* [**Writings 1936–37**, p. 487] It is hard to know where to start in this incredulous rewriting of history. Firstly, Bakunin's federation of free communes was, in fact, based on workers' councils ("soviets") — see section I.2.3. As for the charge of supporting *"patriarchal"* communes, nothing could be further from the truth. In his discussion of the Russian peasant commune (the mir) Bakunin argued that *"patriarchalism"* was one of its *"three dark features,"* indeed *"the main historical evil ... against which we are obliged to struggle with all our might."* This *"evil"*, he stressed, *"has distorted the whole of Russian life"* and the *"despotism of the father"* turned the family *"into a school of triumphant force and tyranny, of daily domestic baseness and depravity."* The *"same patriarchal principle, the same vile despotism, and the same base obedience prevail within"* the peasant commune. Any revolt against *"the hated state power and bureaucratic arbitrariness . .. simultaneously becomes a revolt against the despotism of the commune."* The *"war against*



> *from the masses and* ***superior to*** *the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 355 and p. 360]
>
> 4) There should be no *"special bodies of armed men"* standing apart from the people *"since the majority of the people itself suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' is no longer necessary."* Using the example of the Paris Commune, Lenin suggested this meant *"abolition of the standing army"* by the *"armed masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 275, p. 301 and p. 339]
>
> 5) The new (workers) state would be *"the organisation of violence for the suppression of ... the exploiting class, i.e. the bourgeoisie. The toilers need a state only to overcome the resistance of the exploiters"* who are *"an insignificant minority,"* that is *"the landlords and the capitalists."* This would see *"an immense expansion of democracy ... for the poor, democracy for the people"* while, simultaneously, imposing *"a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists ... their resistance must be broken by force: it is clear that where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 287 and pp. 337–8]

This would be implemented after the current, bourgeois, state had been smashed. This would be the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* and be *"the introduction of complete democracy for the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 355] However, the key practical ideas on what the new "semi-state" would be are contained in these five points. He generalised these points, considering them valid for all countries.

The first point as the creation of "working bodies", the combining of legislative and executive bodies. The first body to be

created by the Bolshevik revolution was the "Council of People's Commissars" (CPC) This was a government separate from and above the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the soviets congress which, in turn, was separate from and above the national soviet congress. It was an executive body elected by the soviet congress, but the soviets themselves were not turned into "working bodies." The promises of Lenin's **State and Revolution** did not last the night.

The Bolsheviks, it must be stressed, clearly recognised that the Soviets had alienated their power to this body with the party's Central Committee arguing in November 1917 that *"it is impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets ... handed power over to this government."* [contained in Robert V. Daniels (ed.), **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, pp. 128–9] However, it could be argued that Lenin's promises were kept as the new government simply gave itself legislative powers four days later. Sadly, this is not the case. In the Paris Commune the delegates of the people took executive power into their own hands. Lenin reversed this and his executive took legislative power from the hands of the people's delegates. As we discuss in section H.6.1, this concentration of power into executive committees occurred at all levels of the soviet hierarchy.

What of the next principle, namely the election and recall of all officials? This lasted slightly longer, namely around 5 months. By March of 1918, the Bolsheviks started a systematic campaign against the elective principle in the workplace, in the military and even in the soviets. In the workplace, Lenin was arguing for appointed one-man managers *"vested with dictatorial powers"* by April 1918 (see section H.3.14). In the military, Trotsky simply decreed the end of elected officers in favour of appointed officers. As far as the soviets go, the Bolsheviks were refusing to hold elections because they *"feared*



*derstanding, and form some kind of organisation ... to further their mutual interests ... the necessity to defend their homes, their families, and their own lives against unforeseen attack .. . will undoubtedly soon compel them to contract new and mutually suitable arrangements."* The peasants would be *"freely organised from the bottom up."* Rather than deny the need for co-ordination, Bakunin stressed it: *"the peasants, like the industrial city workers, should unite by federating the fighting battalions, district by district, assuring a common co-ordinated defence against internal and external enemies."* [*"Letters to a Frenchman on the present crisis"*, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 196, p. 206, p. 207 and p. 190] In this he repeated his earlier arguments concerning social revolution — arguments that Engels was well aware of.

In other words, Engels deliberately misrepresented Bakunin's ideas while being an attack on federalism when, in fact, federalism was **not** actually implemented. It should also be mentioned that Engels opposed the Spanish workers rising in revolt in the first place. *"A few years of peaceful bourgeois republic,"* he argued, *"would prepare the ground in Spain for a proletarian revolution"* and *"instead of staging isolated, easily crushed rebellions,"* he hoped that the *"Spanish workers will make use of the republic"* with a *"view to an approaching revolution."* He ended by asking them not to give the bourgeois government *"an excuse to suppress the revolutionary movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 420–1] In his post-revolt diatribe, Engels repeated this analysis and suggested that the "Bakuninists" should have simply stood for election:

> *"At quiet times, when the proletariat knows beforehand that at best it can get only a few representatives to parliament and have no chance whatever of winning a parliamentary majority, the workers may sometimes be made to believe that it is a great revolutionary action to sit out the elections at home, and*

ply been repeated so often by Marxists that they have entered the ideology (the idea that anarchists think the capitalist class will just disappear being, probably, the most famous one).

Moreover, Marxists make many major and minor distortions of anarchist theory in passing. For example, Eric Hobsbawm wrote of the *"extremism of the anarchist rejection of state and organisation"* while being well aware, as a leading Marxist historian, of numerous anarchist organisations. [**Revolutionaries**, p. 113] This kind of nonsense has a long history, with Engels asserting in his infamous diatribe *"The Bakuninists at work"* that Bakunin *"[a]s early as September 1870 (in his **Lettres a un francais** [Letters to a Frenchman]) ... had declared that the only way to drive the Prussians out of France by a revolutionary struggle was to do away with all forms of centralised leadership and leave each town, each village, each parish to wage war on its own."* For Engels anarchist federalism *"consisted precisely in the fact that each town acted on its own, declaring that the important thing was not co-operation with other towns but separation from them, this precluding any possibility of a combined attack."* This meant *"the fragmentation and isolation of the revolutionary forces which enabled the government troops to smash one revolt after the other."* According to Engels, the anarchists *"proclaimed [this] a principle of supreme revolutionary wisdom."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 592]

In fact, the truth is totally different. Bakunin did, of course, reject *"centralised leadership"* as it would be *"necessarily very circumscribed, very short-sighted, and its limited perception cannot, therefore, penetrate the depth and encompass the whole complex range of popular life."* However, it is a falsehood to state that he denied the need for co-ordination of struggles and federal organisations from the bottom up. As he put it, the revolution must *"foster the self-organisation of the masses into autonomous bodies, federated from the bottom upwards."* With regards to the peasants, he thought they will *"come to an un-*



*that the opposition parties would show gains."* When elections were held, *"Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results"* in provincial towns. Moreover, the Bolsheviks *"pack[ed] local soviets"* with representatives of organisations they controlled *"once they could not longer count on an electoral majority."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22, p. 24 and p. 33] This kind of packing was even practised at the national level when the Bolsheviks gerrymandered a Bolshevik majority at the Fifth Congress of Soviets. So much for competition among the parties within the soviets! And as far as the right of recall went, the Bolsheviks only supported this when the workers were recalling the opponents of the Bolsheviks, not when the workers were recalling them.

Then there was the elimination of bureaucracy. The new state soon had a new bureaucratic and centralised system quickly emerge around it. Rather than immediately cutting the size and power of the bureaucracy, it *"grew by leaps and bounds. Control over the new bureaucracy constantly diminished, partly because no genuine opposition existed. The alienation between 'people' and 'officials,' which the soviet system was supposed to remove, was back again. Beginning in 1918, complaints about 'bureaucratic excesses,' lack of contact with voters, and new proletarian bureaucrats grew louder and louder."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 242] So the rise of a state bureaucracy started immediately with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, particularly as the state's functions grew to include economic decisions as well as political ones. Instead of the state starting to *"wither away"* it grew:

> *"The old state's political apparatus was 'smashed,' but in its place a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity. After the transfer of government to Moscow in March 1918 it continued to expand ... As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy, and by Au-*

*gust 1918 nearly a third of Moscow's working population were employed in offices. The great increase in the number of employees ... took place in early to mid-1918 and, thereafter, despite many campaigns to reduce their number, they remained a steady proportion of the falling population"* [Richard Sakwa, *"The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,"* pp. 429–449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437–8]

This, anarchists would stress, is an inherent feature of centralised system. As such, this rise of bureaucracy confirmed anarchist predictions that centralisation will recreate bureaucracy. After all, some means were required to gather, collate and provide information by which the central bodies made their decisions. Overtime, this permanent collection of bodies would become the real power in the state, with the party members nominally in charge really under the control of an unelected and uncontrolled officialdom. Thus a necessary side-effect of Bolshevik centralism was bureaucracy and it soon became the real power in the state (and, ultimately, in the 1920s became the social base for the rise of Stalin). This is to be expected as any state *"is already a privileged class and cut off from the people"* and would *"seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to special interests."* Moreover, *"what an all-powerful, oppressive, all-absorbing oligarchy must be one which has at its services, that is at its disposal, all social wealth, all public services."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 36 and p. 37]

Then there is the fourth point, namely the elimination of the standing army, the suppression of *"special bodies of armed men"* by the *"armed masses."* This promise did not last two months. On the 20th of December, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars decreed the formation of a political (secret) police force, the *"Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-*



a real debate. If the reader does not believe this summary we would encourage them to attend such a meeting and see for themselves.

Needless to say, we cannot hope to reproduce the many distortions produced in such meetings. However, when anarchists do hit the headlines (such as in the 1990 poll tax riot in London and the anti-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s), various Marxist papers will produce articles on "Anarchism" as well. Like the meetings, the articles are full of so many elementary errors that it takes a lot of effort to think they are the product of ignorance rather than a conscious desire to lie (the appendix *"Anarchism and Marxism"* contains a few replies to such articles). In addition, many of the founding fathers of Marxism (and Leninism) also decided to attack anarchism in similar ways, so this activity does have a long tradition in Marxist circles (particularly in Leninist and Trotskyist ones). Sadly, Max Nettlau's comments on Marx and Engels are applicable to many of their followers today. He argued that they *"acted with that shocking lack of honesty which was characteristic of **all** their polemics. They worked with inadequate documentation, which, according to their custom, they supplemented with arbitrary declarations and conclusions — accepted as truth by their followers although they were exposed as deplorable misrepresentations, errors and unscrupulous perversions of the truth."* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 132] As the reader will discover, this summary has not lost its relevance today. If you read Marxist "critiques" of anarchism you will soon discover the same repetition of "accepted" truths, the same inadequate documentation, the same arbitrary declarations and conclusions as well as an apparent total lack of familiarity with the source material they claim to be analysing.

This section of the FAQ lists and refutes many of the most common distortions Marxists make with regards to anarchism. As will become clear, many of the most common Marxist attacks on anarchism have little or no basis in fact but have sim-

# H.2 What parts of anarchism do Marxists particularly misrepresent?

Many people involved in politics will soon discover that Marxist groups (particularly Leninist ones) organise "debates" about anarchism. These meetings are usually entitled *"Marxism and Anarchism"* and are usually organised after anarchists have been active in the area or have made the headlines somewhere.

These meetings, contrary to common sense, are usually not a debate as (almost always) no anarchists are invited to argue the anarchist viewpoint and, therefore, they present a one-sided account of *"Marxism and Anarchism"* in a manner which benefits the organisers. Usually, the format is a speaker distorting anarchist ideas and history for a long period of time (both absolutely in terms of the length of the meeting and relatively in terms of the boredom inflicted on the unfortunate attendees). It will soon become obvious to those attending that any such meeting is little more than an unprincipled attack on anarchism with little or no relationship to what anarchism is actually about. Those anarchists who attend such meetings usually spend most of their allotted (usually short) speaking time refuting the nonsense that is undoubtedly presented. Rather than a **real** discussion between the differences between anarchism and "Marxism" (i.e. Leninism), the meeting simply becomes one where anarchists correct the distortions and misrepresentations of the speaker in order to create the basis of



*Revolution."* This was more commonly known by the Russian initials of the first two terms of its official name: The Cheka.

While it was initially a small organisation, as 1918 progressed it grew in size and activity. The Cheka soon became a key instrument of Bolshevik rule and it was most definitely a *"special body of armed men"* and not the same as the *"armed workers."* In other words, Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** did not last two months and in under six months the Bolshevik state had a mighty group of *"armed men"* to impose its will. This is not all. The Bolsheviks also conducted a sweeping transformation of the military within the first six months of taking power. During 1917, the soldiers and sailors (encouraged by the Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries) had formed their own committees and elected officers. In March 1918, Trotsky simply abolished all this by decree and replaced it with appointed officers (usually ex-Tsarist ones). In this way, the Red Army was turned from a workers' militia (i.e. an armed people) into a *"special body"* separate from the general population.

So instead of eliminating a *"special force"* above the people, the Bolsheviks did the opposite by creating a political police force (the Cheka) and a standing army (in which elections were a set aside by decree). These were special, professional, armed forces standing apart from the people and unaccountable to them. Indeed, they were used to repress strikes and working class unrest which refutes the idea that Lenin's "workers' state" would simply be an instrument of violence directed at the exploiters. As the Bolsheviks lost popular support, they turned the violence of the "worker's state" against the workers (and, of course, the peasants). When the Bolsheviks lost soviet elections, force was used to disband them. Faced with strikes and working class protest during this period, the Bolsheviks responded with state violence (see section H.6.3). So, as regards the claim that the new ("workers") state would repress only the exploiters, the truth was that it was used to repress whoever

opposed Bolshevik power, including workers and peasants. If, as Lenin stressed, *"where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy"* then there cannot be working class freedom or democracy if the "workers' state" is suppressing that class.

As can be seen, after the first six months of Bolshevik rule not a single measure advocated by Lenin in **State and Revolution** existed in "revolutionary" Russia. Some of the promises were broken quite quickly (overnight, in one case). Most took longer. Yet Leninists may object by noting that many Bolshevik degrees did, in fact, reflect **State and Revolution**. For example, the democratisation of the armed forces was decreed in late December 1917. However, this was simply acknowledging the existing revolutionary gains of the military personnel. Similarly, the Bolsheviks passed a decree on workers' control which, again, simply acknowledged the actual gains by the grassroots (and, in fact, limited them for further development).

Yet this cannot be taken as evidence of the democratic nature of Bolshevism as most governments faced with a revolutionary movement will acknowledge and "legalise" the facts on the ground (until such time as they can neutralise or destroy them). For example, the Provisional Government created after the February Revolution also legalised the revolutionary gains of the workers (for example, legalising the soviets, factory committees, unions, strikes and so forth). The real question is whether Bolshevism continued to encourage these revolutionary gains once it had consolidated its power. It did not. Indeed, it can be argued that the Bolsheviks simply managed to do what the Provisional Government it replaced had failed to do, namely destroy the various organs of popular self-management created by the revolutionary masses. So the significant fact is not that the Bolsheviks recognised the gains of the masses but that their toleration of the application of what their followers say were their real principles did not last



ian means can ensure libertarian ends and they have to be applied consistently within libertarian structures to work. To apply them to statist ones will simply fail.

is what the leading Bolsheviks actually **did** end up arguing by their support for party dictatorship). You cannot have it both ways.

Lenin at no time indicated in **State and Revolution** that it was impossible or inapplicable to apply those ideas during a revolution in Russia (quite the reverse!). Given that Marxists, including Lenin, argue that a "dictatorship of the proletariat" is required to defend the revolution against capitalist resistance it seems incredulous to argue that Lenin's major theoretical work on that regime was impossible to apply in precisely the circumstances it was designed for.

All in all, discussing Lenin's **State and Revolution** without indicating that the Bolsheviks failed to implement its ideas (indeed, did the exact opposite) suggests a lack of honesty. It also suggests that the libertarian ideas Lenin appropriated in that work could not survive being grafted onto the statist ideas of mainstream Marxism. In the words of historian Marc Ferro:

> *"In a way,* ***The State and Revolution*** *even laid the foundations and sketched out the essential features of an alternative to Bolshevik power, and only the pro-Leninist tradition has used it, almost to quieten its conscience, because Lenin, once in power, ignored its conclusions. The Bolsheviks, far from causing the state to wither away, found endless reasons for justifying its enforcement."* [**October 1917**, pp. 213–4]

Anarchists would suggest that this alternative was anarchism. The Russian Revolution shows that a workers state, as anarchists have long argued, means minority power, not working class self-management of society. As such, Lenin's work indicates the contradictory nature of Marxism — while claiming to support democratic/libertarian ideals they promote structures (such as centralised states) which undermine those values in favour of party rule. The lesson is clear, only libertar-



long and, significantly, the leading Bolsheviks did not consider the abolition of such principles as harming the "communist" nature of the regime.

We have stressed this period for a reason. This was the period **before** the out-break of major Civil War and thus the policies applied show the actual nature of Bolshevism, it's essence if you like. This is a significant period as most Leninists blame the failure of Lenin to live up to his promises on this even. In reality, the civil war was **not** the reason for these betrayals — simply because it had not started yet. Each of the promises were broken in turn months before the civil war happened. *"All Power to the Soviets"* became, very quickly, "All Power to the Bolsheviks." Unsurprisingly, as this was Lenin's aim all along and so we find him in 1917 continually repeating this basic idea (see section H.3.3).

Given this, the almost utter non-mention of the party and its role in **State and Revolution** is deeply significant. Given the emphasis that Lenin had always placed on the party, it's absence is worrying. When the party is mentioned in that work, it is done so in an ambiguous manner. For example, Lenin noted that *"[b]y educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of* ***leading the whole people*** *to socialism, of directing and organising the new order."* It is not clear whether it is the vanguard or the proletariat as a whole which assumes power. Later, he stated that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat"* was *"the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of crushing the oppressors."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 288 and p. 337] Based on subsequent Bolshevik practice after the party seized power, it seems clear that it is the vanguard which assumes power rather than the whole class.

As such, given this clear and unambiguous position throughout 1917 by Lenin, it seems incredulous, to say the least, for Leninist Tony Cliff to assert that *"[t]o start with Lenin spoke of the* ***proletariat,*** *the* ***class*** *— not the Bolshevik*

*Party — assuming state power.*" [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 161] Surely the title of one of Lenin's most famous pre-October essays, usually translated as *"Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?"*, should have given the game away? As would, surely, quoting numerous calls by Lenin for the Bolsheviks to seize power? Apparently not.

Where does that leave Lenin's **State and Revolution**? Well, modern-day Leninists still urge us to read it, considering it his greatest work and the best introduction to what Leninism really stands for. For example, we find Leninist Tony Cliff calling that book *"Lenin's real testament"* while, at the same time, acknowledging that its *"message ... which was the guide for the first victorious proletarian revolution, was violated again and again during the civil war."* Not a very good *"guide"* or that convincing a *"message"* if it was not applicable in the very circumstances it was designed to be applied in (a bit like saying you have an excellent umbrella but it only works when it is not raining). Moreover, Cliff is factually incorrect. As we discuss in section H.6, the Bolsheviks *"violated"* that *"guide"* before the civil war started (i.e. when *"the victories of the Czechoslovak troops over the Red Army in June 1918, that threatened the greatest danger to the Soviet republic,"* to quote Cliff). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 161 and p. 18] Similarly, much of the economic policies implemented by the Bolsheviks had their roots in that book and the other writings by Lenin from 1917.

The conclusions of dissent Marxist Samuel Farber seem appropriate here. As he puts it, *"the very fact that a Sovnarkom had been created as a separate body from the CEC [Central Executive Committee] of the soviets clearly indicates that, Lenin's **State and Revolution** notwithstanding, the separation of at least the top bodies of the executive and the legislative wings of the government remained in effect in the new Soviet system."* This suggests *"that **State and Revolution** did not play a decisive role as a source of policy guidelines for 'Leninism in power.'"* After all, *"immediately after the Revolution the Bolsheviks established an*



*executive power ... as a clearly separate body from the leading body of the legislature ... Therefore, some sections of the contemporary Left appear to have greatly overestimated the importance that **State and Revolution** had for Lenin's government. I would suggest that this document ... can be better understood as a distant, although doubtless sincere [!], socio-political vision ... as opposed to its having been a programmatic political statement, let alone a guide to action, for the period immediately after the successful seizure of power."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 20–1 and p. 38]

That is **one** way of looking at it. Another would be to draw the conclusion that a *"distant ... socio-political vision"* drawn up to sound like a *"guide to action"* which was then immediately ignored is, at worse, little more than a deception, or, at best, a theoretical justification for seizing power in the face of orthodox Marxist dogma. Whatever the rationale for Lenin writing his book, one thing is true — it was never implemented. Strange, then, that Leninists today urge use to read it to see what "Lenin really wanted." Particularly given that so few of its promises were actually implemented (those that were just recognised the facts on the ground) and **all** of were no longer applied in less than six months after the seize of power.

It will be objected in defence of Leninism that it is unfair to hold Lenin responsible for the failure to apply his ideas in practice. The terrible Civil War, in which Soviet Russia was attacked by numerous armies, and the resulting economic chaos meant that the objective circumstances made it impossible to implement his democratic ideas. This argument contains flaws. Firstly, as we indicated above, the undemocratic policies of the Bolsheviks started **before** the start of the Civil War (so suggesting that the hardships of the Civil War were not to blame). Secondly, Lenin himself mocked those who argued that revolution was out of the question because of difficult circumstances and so to blame these for the failure of the Bolsheviks to apply the ideas in **State and Revolution** means to argue that those ideas are inappropriate for a revolution (which, we must stress,

*total abolition of classes and the political, economic and social equalisation of individuals of either sex.*" [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.** p. 174] This change ensured the admittance of the Alliance sections into the International Workingmen's Association (although this did not stop Marx, like his followers, bringing up this *"mere slip of the pen"* years later). However, Howl repeating the changed phrase *"equalisation of classes"* out of context helps discredit anarchism and so it is done.

Simply put, anarchists are **not** liberals. We are well aware of the fact that without equality, liberty is impossible except for the rich. As Nicolas Walter put it, *"[l]ike liberals, anarchists want freedom; like socialists, anarchists want equality. But we are not satisfied by liberalism alone or by socialism alone. Freedom without equality means that the poor and weak are less free than the rich and strong, and equality without freedom means that we are all slaves together. Freedom and equality are not contradictory, but complementary; in place of the old polarisation of freedom versus equality — according to which we are told that more freedom equals less equality, and more equality equals less freedom — anarchists point out that in practice you cannot have one without the other. Freedom is not genuine if some people are too poor or too weak to enjoy it, and equality is not genuine is some people are ruled by others."* [**About Anarchism**, p. 29] Clearly, anarchists do **not** have liberal politics. Quite the reverse, as we subject it to extensive critique from a working class perspective.

To the claim that anarchism *"combines a socialist critique of capitalism with a liberal critique of socialism,"* anarchists reply that it is mistaken. [Paul Thomas, **Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 7] Rather, anarchism is simply a socialist critique of both capitalism and the state. Freedom under capitalism is fatally undermined by inequality — it simply becomes the freedom to pick a master. This violates liberty and equality, as does the state. *"Any State at all,"* argued Bakunin, *"no matter what kind, is a domination and exploitation. It is a negation of Social-*



**Bakunin**, p. 375] Similarly, he argued that *"equality"* was the *"aim"* of the International Workers' Association and *"the organisation of the working class its strength, the unification of the proletariat the world over ... its weapon, its only policy."* He stressed that *"to create a people's force capable of crushing the military and civil force of the State, it is necessary to organise the proletariat."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, p. 95 and p. 254]

Strikes played a very important role in Bakunin's ideas (as they do in all revolutionary anarchist thought). He saw the strike as *"the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie ... Strikes are a valuable instrument from two points of view. Firstly, they electrify the masses ... awaken in them the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie ... secondly they help immensely to provoke and establish between the workers of all trades, localities and countries the consciousness and very fact of solidarity: a twofold action, both negative and positive, which tends to constitute directly the new world of the proletariat, opposing it almost in an absolute way to the bourgeois world."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886**, pp. 216–217] For Bakunin, strikes train workers for social revolution as they *"create, organise, and form a workers' army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 384–5]

The revolution would be *"an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179] As we argue in section I.2.3, the very process of collective class struggle would, for Bakunin and other anarchists, create the basis of a free society. Thus, in Bakunin's eyes, the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the com-*

*munes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206]

In other words, the basic structure created by the revolution would be based on the working classes own combat organisations, as created in their struggles against oppression and exploitation. The link between present and future would be labour unions (workers' associations), which played the key role of both the means to abolish capitalism and the state and as the framework of a socialist society. For Bakunin, the *"very essence of socialism"* lies in *"the irrepressible conflict between the workers and the exploiters of labour."* A *"living, powerful, socialist movement"* can *"be made a reality only by the awakened revolutionary consciousness, the collective will, and the organisation of the working masses themselves."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 191 and p. 212] Therefore, it was essential to *"[o]rganise always more and more the practical militant international solidarity of the toilers of all trades and of all countries, and remember … you will find an immense, an irresistible force in this universal collectivity."* Hence Bakunin's support for self-discipline within self-managed organisations, which came directly from the his awareness of the **collective** nature of social change: *"Today, in revolutionary action as in labour itself, collectivism must replace individualism. Understand clearly that in organising yourselves you will be stronger than all the political leaders in the world."* [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 291 and p. 244]

All of which is quite impressive for someone who was a founding father of a theory which, according to Stack, downplayed the *"centrality of the working class,"* argued that the working class was *"not the key to change,"* dismissed *"the importance of the collective nature of change"* as well as *"collective struggle or advance"* and *"despises the collectivity"*! Clearly, to argue that Bakunin held any of these views simply shows that the person making such statements does not have a clue what they are talking about.



Equally as dishonest as this quoting out of context is Howl's non-mention of the history of the expression *"political, economic and social equalisation of classes and individuals of both sexes."* After Bakunin sent the Alliance programme to the General Council of the **International Workingmen's Association**, he received a letter date March 9, 1869 from Marx which stated that the term *"the equalisation of classes" "literally interpreted"* would mean *"harmony of capital and labour"* as *"persistently preached by the bourgeois socialists."* The letter argued that it was *"not the logically impossible 'equalisation of classes', but the historically necessary, superseding 'abolition of classes'"* which was the *"true secret of the proletarian movement"* and which *"forms the great aim of the International Working Men's Association."* Significantly, the letter adds the following:

> *"Considering, however, the context in which that phrase 'equalisation of classes' occurs, it seems to be a mere slip of the pen, and the General Council feels confident that you will be anxious to remove from your program an expression which offers such a dangerous misunderstanding."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 21, p. 46]

And, given the context, Marx was right. The phrase *"equalisation of classes"* placed in the context of the political, economic and social equalisation of individuals obviously implies the abolition of classes. The logic is simple. If both worker and capitalist shared the same economic and social position then wage labour would not exist (in fact, it would be impossible as it is based on social and economic **inequality**) and so class society would not exist. Similarly, if the tenant and the landlord were socially equal then the landlord would have no power over the tenant, which would be impossible. Bakunin agreed with Marx on the ambiguity of the term and the Alliance changed its Programme to call for *"the final and*

*place) and the need for collective action"*! This, in itself, shows the bankruptcy of Stack's claims and those like it.

## H.2.9 Do anarchists have *"liberal"* politics?

Another assertion by Marxists is that anarchists have *"liberal"* politics or ideas. For example, one Marxist argues that the *"programme with which Bakunin armed his super-revolutionary vanguard called for the 'political, economic and social equalisation of classes and individuals of both sexes, beginning with the abolition of the right of inheritance.' This is **liberal** politics, implying nothing about the abolition of capitalism."* [Derek Howl, *"The Legacy of Hal Draper,"* pp. 137–49, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 148]

That Howl is totally distorting Bakunin's ideas can quickly be seen by looking at the whole of the programme. The passage quoted is from item 2 of the *"Programme of the Alliance."* Strangely Howle fails to quote the end of that item, namely when it states this *"equalisation"* was *"in pursuance of the decision reached by the last working men's Congress in Brussels, the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* If this was not enough to indicate the abolition of capitalism, item 4 states that the Alliance *"repudiates all political action whose target is anything except the triumph of the workers' cause over Capital."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174]

Howl's dishonesty is clear. Bakunin **explicitly** argued for the abolition of capitalism in the same item Howl (selectively) quotes from. If the socialisation of land and capital under the control of workers' associations is not the abolition of capitalism, we wonder what is!



The same, needless to say, applies to all revolutionary anarchists. Kropotkin built upon Bakunin's arguments and, like him, based his politics on collective working class struggle and organisation. He consistently stressed that *"the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector — the State."* Such struggle, *"better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 82–3] In his article on *"Anarchism"* for the **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, Kropotkin stressed that anarchists *"have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation."* [**Anarchism**, p. 287]

Far from denying the importance of collective class struggle, he actually stressed it again and again. As he once wrote, *"to make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise themselves. Resistance and the strike are excellent means of organisation for doing this."* He argued that it was *"a question of organising societies of resistance for all trades in each town, of creating resistance funds against the exploiters, of giving more solidarity to the workers' organisations of each town and of putting them in contact with those of other towns, of federating them ... Workers' solidarity must no longer be an empty word by practised each day between all trades and all nations."* [quoted by Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 255–6]

As can be seen, Kropotkin was well aware of the importance of popular, mass, struggles. As he put it, anarchists *"know very well that any popular movement is a step towards the social revolution. It awakens the spirit of revolt, it makes men [and women]*

*accustomed to seeing the established order (or rather the established disorder) as eminently unstable."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 203] As regards the social revolution, he argues that *"a decisive blow will have to be administered to private property: from the beginning, the workers will have to proceed to take over all social wealth so as to put it into common ownership. This revolution can only be carried out by the workers themselves."* In order to do this, the masses have to build their own organisation as the *"great mass of workers will not only have to constitute itself outside the bourgeoisie ... it will have to take action of its own during the period which will precede the revolution . .. and this sort of action can only be carried out when a strong* ***workers' organisation*** *exists."* This meant, of course, it was *"the mass of workers we have to seek to organise. We ... have to submerge ourselves in the organisation of the people ... When the mass of workers is organised and we are with it to strengthen its revolutionary idea, to make the spirit of revolt against capital germinate there ... then it will be the social revolution."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 153–4]

He saw the class struggle in terms of *"a multitude of acts of revolt in all countries, under all possible conditions: first, individual revolt against capital and State; then collective revolt — strikes and working-class insurrections — both preparing, in men's minds as in actions, a revolt of the masses, a revolution."* Clearly, the mass, collective nature of social change was not lost on Kropotkin who pointed to a *"multitude of risings of working masses and peasants"* as a positive sign. Strikes, he argued, *"were once 'a war of folded arms'"* but now were *"easily turning to revolt, and sometimes taking the proportions of vast insurrections."* [**Anarchism**, p. 144]

Kropotkin could not have been clearer. Somewhat ironically, given Stack's assertions, Kropotkin explicitly opposed the Marxism of his time (Social Democracy) precisely **because** it had *"moved away from a pure labour movement, in the sense of a direct struggle against capitalists by means of*



*"remarkable fusion of anarchist communist ideas with both the bakuninist [sic!] internationalist views adopted by the Spanish Federation and the syndicalist ideas developed in the Jura Federation in the 1870s."* This included seeing the importance of revolutionary labour unions, the value of the strikes as a mode of direct action and syndicalist action developing solidarity. *"For Kropotkin,"* she summarises, *"revolutionary syndicalism represented a revival of the great movement of the Anti-authoritarian International ... It seems likely that he saw in it the [strikers International] which he had advocated earlier."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 257 and p. 268]

Clearly, any one claiming that there is a fundamental difference between anarchism and syndicalism is talking nonsense. Syndicalist ideas were being argued by the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin before syndicalism emerged in the French CGT in the 1890s as a clearly labelled revolutionary theory. Rather than being in conflict, the ideas of syndicalism find their roots in the ideas of Bakunin and "classical" anarchism. This would be quickly seen if the actual writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin were consulted. There **are,** of course, differences between anarchism and syndicalism, but they are **not** those usually listed by Marxists (section J.3.9 discusses these differences and, as will quickly be discovered, they are **not** based on a rejection of working class organisation, direct action, solidarity and collective struggle!).

Ultimately, claims like Pat Stack's simply show how unfamiliar the author is with the ideas they are pathetically attempting to critique. Anarchists from Bakunin onwards shared most of the same ideas as syndicalism (which is unsurprising as most of the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism have direct roots in the ideas of Bakunin). In other words, for Stack, the *"huge advantage"* anarcho-syndicalists have *"over other anarchists"* is that they, in fact, share the same *"understanding of the power of the working class, the centrality of the point of production (the work-*

*Anarchism, Syndicalism prepares the workers along direct economic lines, as conscious factors in the great struggles of to-day, as well as conscious factors in the task of reconstructing society."* After seeing syndicalist ideas in action in France in 1900, she *"immediately began to propagate Syndicalist ideas."* The *"most powerful weapon"* for liberation was *"the conscious, intelligent, organised, economic protest of the masses through direct action and the general strike."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 89, p. 91, p. 90 and p. 60]

Kropotkin argued anarchist communism *"wins more and more ground among those working-men who try to get a clear conception as to the forthcoming revolutionary action. The syndicalist and trade union movements, which permit the workingmen to realise their solidarity and to feel the community of their interests better than any election, prepare the way for these conceptions."* [**Anarchism**, p. 174] His support for anarchist participation in the labour movement was strong, considering it a key method of preparing for a revolution and spreading anarchist ideas amongst the working classes: *"The **syndicat** is absolutely necessary. It is the sole force of the workers which continues the direct struggle against capital without turning to parliamentarism."* [quoted by Miller, **Op. Cit.**, p. 177]

*"Revolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda within the Labour Unions,"* Kropotkin stressed, *"had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist or 'Bakuninist' section of the International Working Men's Association. In Spain and in Italy it had been especially successful. Now it was resorted to, with evident success, in France and **Freedom** [the British Anarchist paper he helped create in 1886] eagerly advocated this sort of propaganda."* [**Act For Yourselves**, pp. 119–20] Caroline Cahm notes in her excellent account of Kropotkin's ideas between 1872 and 1886, he *"was anxious to revive the International as an organisation for aggressive strike action to counteract the influence of parliamentary socialists on the labour movement."* This resulted in Kropotkin advocating a



*strikes, unions, and so forth."* The Marxists, he stated, opposed strikes and unions because they *"diverted forces from electoral agitation"* while anarchists *"reject[ed] a narrowly political struggle [and] inevitably became a more revolutionary party, both in theory and in practice."* [**The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings**, pp. 207–8, p. 208 and p. 209]

And Pat Stack argues that Kropotkin did not see *"class conflict as the dynamic for social change,"* nor *"class conflict"* as *"the motor of change"* and the working class *"not the agent and collective struggle not the means"*! Truly incredible and a total and utter distortion of Kropotkin's ideas on the subject.

As for other anarchists, we discover the same concern over class conflict, collective struggle and organisation and the awareness of a mass social revolution by the working class. Emma Goldman, for example, argued that anarchism *"stands for direct action"* and that *"[t]rade unionism, the economic area of the modern gladiator, owes its existence to direct action ... In France, in Spain, in Italy, in Russian, nay even in England (witness the growing rebellion of English labour unions), direct, revolutionary economic action has become so strong a force in the battle for industrial liberty as to make the world realise the tremendous importance of labour's power. The General Strike [is] the supreme expression of the economic consciousness of the workers ... Today every great strike, in order to win, must realise the importance of the solidaric general protest."* [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, pp. 65–6] She placed collective class struggle at the centre of her ideas and, crucially, she saw it as the way to create an anarchist society:

> *"It is this war of classes that we must concentrate upon, and in that connection the war against false values, against evil institutions, against all social atrocities. Those who appreciate the urgent need of co-operating in great struggles ... must organise the preparedness of the masses for the overthrow*

*of both capitalism and the state. Industrial and economic preparedness is what the workers need. That alone leads to revolution at the bottom ... That alone will give the people the means to take their children out of the slums, out of the sweat shops and the cotton mills ... That alone leads to economic and social freedom, and does away with all wars, all crimes, and all injustice."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 355–6]

For Malatesta, *"the most powerful force for social transformation is the working class movement ... Through the organisations established for the defence of their interests, workers acquire an awareness of the oppression under which they live and of the antagonisms which divide them from their employers, and so begin to aspire to a better life, get used to collective struggle and to solidarity."* This meant that anarchists *"must recognise the usefulness and importance of the workers' movement, must favour its development, and make it one of the levers of their action, doing all they can so that it ... will culminate in a social revolution."* Anarchists must *"deepen the chasm between capitalists and wage-slaves, between rulers and ruled; preach expropriation of private property and the destruction of State."* The new society would be organised *"by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 113, pp. 250–1 and p. 184] Alexander Berkman, unsurprisingly, argued the same thing. As he put it, only *"the workers"* as *"the worst victims of present institutions,"* could abolish capitalism an the state as *"it is to their own interest to abolish them ... labour's emancipation means at the same time the redemption of the whole of society."* He stressed that *"**only the right organisation of the workers** can accomplish what we are striving for ... Organisation from the bottom up, beginning with the shop and factory, on the foundation of the joint interests of the workers everywhere ... alone can solve the labour*



*IWMA was ... distinctly syndicalist."* [*"Looking Back at Spain,"* pp. 53–96, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), **The Radical Papers**, p. 67]

Perhaps, in the face of such evidence (and the writings of Bakunin himself), Marxists could claim that the sources we quote are either anarchists or "sympathetic" to anarchism. To counter this is very easy, we need only quote Marx and Engels. Marx attacked Bakunin for thinking that the *"working class ... must only organise themselves by trades-unions"* and *"not occupy itself with **politics.**"* Engels argued along the same lines, having a go at the anarchists because in the *"Bakuninist programme a general strike is the lever employed by which the social revolution is started"* and that they admitted *"this required a well-formed organisation of the working class"* (i.e. a trade union federation). Indeed, he summarised Bakunin's strategy as being to *"organise, and when **all** the workers, hence the majority, are won over, dispose all the authorities, abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48, p. 132, p. 133 and p. 72] Ignoring the misrepresentations of Marx and Engels about the ideas of their enemies, we can state that they got the basic point of Bakunin's ideas — the centrality of trade union organisation and struggle as well as the use of strikes and the general strike. Therefore, you do not have to read Bakunin to find out the similarities between his ideas and syndicalism, you can read Marx and Engels. Clearly, most Marxist critiques of anarchism have not even done that!

Latter anarchists, needless to say, supported the syndicalist movement and, moreover, drew attention to its anarchist roots. Emma Goldman noted that in the First International *"Bakunin and the Latin workers"* forged ahead *"along industrial and Syndicalist lines"* and stated that syndicalism *"is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism"* and that *"accounts for the presence of so many Anarchists in the Syndicalist movement. Like*

*initially by the Proudhonists and later and more influentially by the Bakuninists.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 2]

Needless to say, anarchists agree with this perspective. Arthur Lehning, for example, summarises the anarchist perspective when he commented that *"Bakunin's collectivist anarchism ... ultimately formed the ideological and theoretical basis of anarcho-syndicalism."* [*"Introduction"*, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 29] Anarchist academic David Berry also notes that *"anarchist syndicalist were keen to establish a lineage with Bakunin ... the anarchist syndicalism of the turn of the century was a revival of a tactic"* associated with *"the Bakuninist International."* [**A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945**, p. 17] Another, Mark Leier, points out that *"the Wobblies drew heavily on anarchist ideas pioneered by Bakunin."* [**Bakunin: The Creative Passion**, p. 298] Kropotkin argued that syndicalism *"is nothing other than the rebirth of the International — federalist, worker, Latin."* [quoted by Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 176] Malatesta stated in 1907 that he had *"never ceased to urge the comrades into that direction which the syndicalists, forgetting the past, call* ***new****, even though it was already glimpsed and followed, in the International, by the first of the anarchists."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 221] Little wonder that Rudolf Rocker stated in his classic introduction to the subject that anarcho-syndicalism was *"a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54] Murray Bookchin just stated the obvious:

> *"Long before syndicalism became a popular term in the French labour movement of the late [eighteen]nineties, it already existed in the Spanish labour movement of the early seventies. The anarchist-influenced Spanish Federation of the old*



*question and serve the true emancipation of man[kind]."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 187 and p. 207]

As can be seen, the claim that Kropotkin or Bakunin, or anarchists in general, ignored the class struggle and collective working class struggle and organisation is either a lie or indicates ignorance. Clearly, anarchists have placed working class struggle, organisation and collective direct action and solidarity at the core of their politics (and as the means of creating a libertarian socialist society) from the start. Moreover, this perspective is reflected in the anarchist flag itself as we discuss in our appendix on the symbols of anarchism. According to Louise Michel the *"black flag is the flag of strikes."* [**The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, p. 168] If anarchism does, as some Marxists assert, reject class conflict and collective struggle then using a flag associated with an action which expresses both seems somewhat paradoxical. However, for those with even a basic understanding of anarchism and its history there is no paradox as anarchism is obviously based on class conflict and collective struggle.

Also see section H.2.8 for a discussion of the relationship of anarchism to syndicalism.

## H.2.3 Does anarchism yearn *"for what has gone before"*?

Leninist Pat Stack states that one of the *"key points of divergence"* between anarchism and Marxism is that the former, *"far from understanding the advances that capitalism represented, tended to take a wistful look back. Anarchism shares with Marxism an abhorrence of the horrors of capitalism, but yearns for what has gone before."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

Like his other *"key point"* (namely the rejection of class struggle — see last section), Stack is simply wrong. Even

the quickest look at the works of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin would convince the reader that this is simply distortion. Rather than look backwards for our ideas of social life, anarchists have always been careful to base our ideas on the current state of society and what anarchist thinkers considered positive current trends within it.

The dual element of progress is important to remember. Capitalism is a class society, marked by exploitation, oppression and various social hierarchies. In such a society progress can hardly be neutral. It will reflect vested interests, the needs of those in power, the rationales of the economic system (e.g. the drive for profits) and those who benefit from it, the differences in power between states and companies and so on. Equally, it will be shaped by the class struggle, the resistance of the working classes to exploitation and oppression, the objective needs of production, etc. As such, trends in society will reflect the various class conflicts, social hierarchies, power relationships and so on which exist within it.

This is particularly true of the economy. The development of the industrial structure of a capitalist economy will be based on the fundamental need to maximise the profits and power of the capitalists. As such, it will develop (either by market forces or by state intervention) in order to ensure this. This means that various tendencies apparent in capitalist society exist specifically to aid the development of capital. It does not follow that because a society which places profits above people has found a specific way of organising production "efficient" it means that a socialist society will do. As such, anarchist opposition to specific tendencies within capitalism (such as the increased concentration and centralisation of companies) does not mean a *"yearning"* for the past. Rather, it shows an awareness that capitalist methods are precisely that and that they need not be suited for a society which replaces the profit system with human and ecological need as the criteria for decision making.



*tion and distribution, the basis of social reorganisation."* [quoted by Wayne Thorpe, **"The Workers Themselves"**, p. 201]

The similarities with revolutionary syndicalism could not be clearer. Little wonder that all serious historians see the obvious similarities between anarcho-syndicalism and Bakunin's anarchism. For example, George R. Esenwein's (in his study of early Spanish anarchism) comments that syndicalism *"had deep roots in the Spanish libertarian tradition. It can be traced to Bakunin's revolutionary collectivism."* He also notes that the class struggle was *"central to Bakunin's theory."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898**, p. 209 and p. 20] Caroline Cahm, likewise, points to *"the basic syndicalist ideas of Bakunin"* and that he *"argued that trade union organisation and activity in the International [Working Men's Association] were important in the building of working-class power in the struggle against capital ... He also declared that trade union based organisation of the International would not only guide the revolution but also provide the basis for the organisation of the society of the future."* Indeed, he *"believed that trade unions had an essential part to play in the developing of revolutionary capacities of the workers as well as building up the organisation of the masses for revolution."* [**Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 219, p. 215 and p. 216] Paul Avrich, in his essay *"The Legacy of Bakunin,"* agreed. *"Bakunin,"* he stated, *"perhaps even more than Proudhon, was a prophet of revolutionary syndicalism, who believed that a free federation of trade unions would be the 'living germs of a new social order which is to replace the bourgeois world.'"* [**Anarchist Portraits**, pp. 14–15] Bertrand Russell noted that *"[h]ardly any of these ideas [associated with syndicalism] are new: almost all are derived from the Bakunist [sic!] section of the old International"* and that this was *"often recognised by Syndicalists themselves."* [**Roads to Freedom**, p. 52] The syndicalists, notes Wayne Thorpe, *"identified the First International with its federalist wing ... [r]epresented .. .*

Like the later syndicalists, Bakunin was in favour of a general strike as a means of bringing about a social revolution. As *"strikes spread from one place to another, they come close to turning into a general strike. And with the ideas of emancipation that now hold sway over the proletariat, a general strike can result only in a great cataclysm which forces society to shed its old skin."* He raised the possibility that this could *"arrive before the proletariat is sufficiently organised"* and dismissed it because the strikes expressed the self-organisation of the workers for the *"necessities of the struggle impel the workers to support one another"* and the *"more active the struggle becomes ... the stronger and more extensive this federation of proletarians must become."* Thus strikes *"indicate a certain collective strength already"* and *"each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups."* He rejected the idea that a revolution could be *"arbitrarily"* made by *"the most powerful associations."* Rather they were produced by *"the force of circumstances."* As with the syndicalists, Bakunin argued that not all workers needed to be in unions before a general strike or revolution could take place. A minority (perhaps *"one worker in ten")* needed to be organised and they would influence the rest so ensuring *"at critical moments"* the majority would *"follow the International's lead."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 149–50, p. 109 and p. 139]

As with the syndicalists, the new society would be organised *"by free federation, from below upwards, of workers' associations, industrial as well as agricultural ... in districts and municipalities at first; federation of these into regions, of the regions into nations, and the nations into a fraternal Internationalism."* Moreover, *"capital, factories, all the means of production and raw material"* would be owned by *"the workers' organisations"* while the land would be given *"to those who work it with their own hands."* [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 241 and p. 240] Compare this to the syndicalist CGT's 1906 **Charter of Amiens** which declared *"the trade union today is an organisation of resistance"* but *"in the future [it will] be the organisation of produc-*



For anarchists, this means questioning the assumptions of capitalist progress and so the first task of a revolution after the expropriation of the capitalists and the destruction of the state will be to transform the industrial structure and how it operates, not keep it as it is. Anarchists have long argued that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise and socialise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming their work situation, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them. Moreover, the structure of industry has developed to maximise profits. Why assume that this structure will be equally as efficient in producing useful products by meaningful work which does not harm the environment, society or those who do the actual tasks? A further aspect of this is that many of the struggles today, from the Zapatistas in Chiapas to those against Genetically Modified (GM) food and nuclear power are precisely based on the understanding that capitalist "progress" can not be uncritically accepted. To resist the expulsion of people from the land in the name of progress or the introduction of terminator seeds is not to look back to *"what had gone"*, although this is also precisely what the proponents of capitalist globalisation often accuse us of. Rather, it is to put ***"people before profit."***

That so many Marxists fail to understand this suggests that their ideology subscribes to notions of "progress" which simply builds upon capitalist ones. As such, only a sophist would confuse a critical evaluation of trends within capitalism with a yearning for the past. It means to buy into the whole capitalist notion of "progress" which has always been part of justifying the inhumanities of the status quo. Simply put, just because a process is rewarded by the profit driven market it does not mean that it makes sense from a human or ecological per-

spective. For example, as we argue in section J.5.11, the capitalist market hinders the spread of co-operatives and workers' self-management in spite of their well documented higher efficiency and productivity. From the perspective of the needs of the capitalists, this makes perfect sense. In terms of the workers and efficient allocation and use of resources, it does not. Would Marxists argue that because co-operatives and workers' self-management of production are marginal aspects of the capitalist economy it means that they will play no part in a sane society or that if a socialist expresses interest in them it means that are *"yearning"* for a past mode of production? We hope not.

This common Marxist failure to understand anarchist investigations of the future is, ironically enough, joined with a total failure to understand the social conditions in which anarchists have put forward their ideas. For all his claims that anarchists ignore *"material conditions,"* it is Pat Stack (and others like him) who does so in his claims against Proudhon. Stack calls the Frenchman *"the founder of modern anarchism"* and states that Marx dubbed Proudhon *"the socialist of the small peasant or master craftsman."* Typically, Stack gets even this wrong as it was Engels who used those words, although Marx would probably have not disagreed if he had been alive when they were penned. [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 626] From this, Stack implies that Proudhon was *"yearning for the past"* when he advanced his mutualist ideas.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. This is because the society in which the French anarchist lived was predominately artisan and peasant in nature. This was admitted by Marx and Engels in the **Communist Manifesto** (*"[i]n countries like France"* the peasants *"constitute far more than half of the population."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 493]). As such, for Proudhon to incorporate the aspirations of the majority of the population is not to *"yearn for what has gone before"* but rather an extremely sensible position to take. This suggests that for Engels to state



*geois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 50] Like the syndicalists, he argued *"the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association"* and once *"every occupation ... is represented within the International [Working-Men's Association], its organisation, the organisation of the masses of the people will be complete."* Moreover, Bakunin stressed that the working class had *"but a single path, that of* ***emancipation through practical action*** which meant *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses"* by "***trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds***" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139 and p. 103]

Like the syndicalists, Bakunin stressed working class self-activity and control over the class struggle:

> *"Toilers count no longer on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and paralyse your growing strength by being duped into alliances with bourgeois Radicalism ... Abstain from all participation in bourgeois Radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The bases of this organisation are already completely given: they are the workshops and the federation of workshops, the creation of fighting funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation, not only national, but international.*
>
> *"And when the hour of revolution sounds, you will proclaim the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society, anarchy, that is to say the true, frank people's revolution ... and the new organisation from below upwards and from the circumference to the centre."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 120–1]

Marxism). Sadly, such arguments simply show the ignorance of the author rather than any form of factual basis. When the ideas of revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin are compared to revolutionary syndicalism, the similarities are soon discovered.

This kind of argument can be found in Pat Stack's essay *"Anarchy in the UK?"* After totally distorting the ideas of anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin, Stack argues that anarcho-syndicalists *"tended to look to the spontaneity and anti-statism of anarchism, the economic and materialist analysis of Marxism, and the organisational tools of trade unionism. Practically every serious anarchist organisation came from or leant on this tradition ... The huge advantage they had over other anarchists was their understanding of the power of the working class, the centrality of the point of production (the workplace) and the need for collective action."* [**Socialist Review**, no. 246]

Given that Stack's claims that anarchists reject the *"need for collective action,"* do not understand *"the power of the working class"* and the *"centrality"* of the workplace are simply inventions, it would suggest that Stack's *"huge advantage"* does not, in fact, exist and is pure nonsense. Bakunin, Kropotkin and all revolutionary anarchists, as proven in section H.2.2, already understood all this and based their politics on the need for collective working class struggle at the point of production. As such, by contrasting anarcho-syndicalism with anarchism (as expressed by the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin) Stack simply shows his utter and total ignorance of his subject matter.

Moreover, if he bothered to read the works of the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin he would discover that many of their ideas were identical to those of revolutionary syndicalism. For example, Bakunin argued that the *"organisation of the trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by Chambers of Labour, ... [allow] the workers ... [to] combin[e] theory and practice ... [and] bear in themselves the living germs of* ***the social order****, which is to replace the bour-*



that the French anarchist was *"the socialist of the small peasant or master craftsman"* was unsurprising, a simple statement of fact, as the French working classes were, at the time, predominately small peasants or master craftsmen (or artisans). It, in other words, reflected the society Proudhon lived in and, as such, did not reflect desires for the past but rather a wish to end exploitation and oppression **now** rather than some unspecified time in the future.

Moreover, Proudhon's ideas cannot be limited to just that as Marxists try to do. As K. Steven Vincent points out Proudhon's *"social theories may not be reduced to a socialism for only the peasant class, nor was it a socialism only for the petite bourgeois; it was a socialism of and for French workers. And in the mid-nineteenth century ... most French workers were still artisans."* Indeed, *"[w]hile Marx was correct in predicting the eventual predominance of the industrial proletariat vis-à-vis skilled workers, such predominance was neither obvious nor a foregone conclusion in France during the nineteenth century. The absolute number of small industries even increased during most of the century."* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 5 and p. 282] Proudhon himself noted in 1851 that of a population of 36 million, 24 million were peasants and 6 million were artisans. Of the remaining 6 million, these included wage-workers for whom *"workmen's associations"* would be essential as *"a protest against the wage system,"* the *"denial of the rule of capitalists"* and for *"the management of large instruments of labour."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 97–8]

To summarise, if the society in which you live is predominately made-up of peasants and artisans then it is hardly an insult to be called *"the socialist of the small peasant or master craftsman."* Equally, it can hardly represent a desire for *"what has gone before"* to tailor your ideas to the actual conditions in the country in which you live! And Stack accuses **anarchists** of ignoring *"material conditions"*!

Neither can it be said that Proudhon ignored the development of industrialisation in France during his lifetime. Quite the reverse, in fact, as indicated above. Proudhon did **not** ignore the rise of large-scale industry and argued that such industry should be managed by the workers' themselves via workers associations. As he put it, *"certain industries"* required *"the combined employment of a large number of workers"* and so the producer is *"a collectivity."* In such industries *"we have no choice"* and so *"it is necessary to form an **association** among the workers"* because *"without that they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 215–6] Even Engels had to grudgingly admit that Proudhon supported *"the association of workers"* for *"large-industry and large establishments, such as railways."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 626]

All in all, Stack is simply showing his ignorance of both Proudhon's ideas **and** the society (the *"material conditions"*) in which they were shaped and were aimed for. As can be seen, Proudhon incorporated the development of large-scale industry within his mutualist ideas and so the need to abolish wage labour by workers' associations and workers' control of production. Perhaps Stack can fault Proudhon for seeking the end of capitalism too soon and for not waiting patiently will it developed further (if he does, he will also have to attack Marx, Lenin and Trotsky as well for the same failing!), but this has little to do with *"yearn[ing] for what has gone before."*

After distorting Proudhon's ideas on industry, Stack does the same with Bakunin. He asserts the following:

> *"Similarly, the Russian anarchist leader Bakunin argued that it was the progress of capitalism that represented the fundamental problem. For him industrialisation was an evil. He believed it had created a decadent western Europe, and therefore had held up*



Engels considered that class as *"reaching its most advanced form in the **industrial** proletariat, which corresponded to the most advanced form of capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115fn] Sadly, Bookchin reinforced this debased notion of working class and our struggle in the very process of trying to overcome it. Yet he always argued for a wider concept of social struggle which included, but was not limited to, economic class and exploitation and, as a result, included all sections of the working class and not just workers in large-scale industry. In this he followed a long anarchist tradition.

To conclude, for anarchists, the social revolution will be made by the working class (*"Anarchists, like Socialists, usually believe in the doctrine of class war."* [Bertrand Russell, **Roads to Freedom**, p. 38]). However, as British anarchist Benjamin Franks summarises, *"[b]ecause anarchists hold to a broader view of the working class, which includes the lumpenproletariat, they have been accused of promoting this section above others. This standard marxist interpretation of anarchism is inaccurate; anarchists simply include the lumpenproletariat as part of the working class, rather than exclude or exalt it."* [**Rebel Alliances**, p. 168] Ultimately, for anyone to claim that Bakunin, for any social anarchist, rejects the working class as an agent of social change simply shows their ignorance of the politics they are trying to attack.

## H.2.8 What is the relationship of anarchism to syndicalism?

One of the most common Marxist techniques when they discuss anarchism is to contrast the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin to the revolutionary syndicalists. The argument runs along the lines that "classical" anarchism is individualistic and rejects working class organisation and power while syndicalism is a step forward from it (i.e. a step closer to

their writings and activism would confirm. Of all the major anarchist thinkers, it could be objected that Murray Bookchin fits Stack's distortions. After all, he did attack *"The Myth of the Proletariat"* as the agent of revolutionary change, arguing that *"the traditional class struggle ceases to have revolutionary implications; it reveals itself as the physiology of the prevailing society, not as the labour pains of birth."* Yet, even here, Bookchin explicitly argued that he made *"no claims that a social revolution is possible without the participation of the industrial proletariat"* and noted that he *"tries to show how the proletariat can be won to the revolutionary movement by stressing issues that concern quality of life and work."* Thus *"class struggle does not centre around material exploitation alone"* but has a wider understanding which cannot be reduced to *"a single class defined by its relationship to the means of production."* Like other anarchists, he saw social change coming from the oppressed, as *"the alienated and oppressed sectors of society are now the* ***majority*** *of the people."* In other words, for Bookchin (if not other anarchists) expressions like *"class struggle"* simply *"fail to encompass the cultural and spiritual revolt that is taking place along with the economic struggle."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 117, p. 150, p. 151 and p. 152]

So Bookchin's apparent rejection of class struggle and the "proletariat" is not, on closer reading, any such thing. He urged a wider form of struggle, one which includes issues such as hierarchy, oppression, ecological matters and so on rather than the exclusive concern with economic exploitation and class which many radicals (usually Marxists) focus on. Somewhat ironically, it should be noted that this "rejection" in part flowed from Bookchin's own past in the Stalinist and Trotskyist movements, both of which tended to idealise the industrial worker and limit "proletarian" to that specific sub-section of the working class. Bookchin himself expressed this blinkered perspective when he *"dispose[d] of the notion that anyone is a 'proletarian' who has nothing to sell but his labour power"* as Marx and



*the more primitive, less industrialised Slav regions as the hope for change."*

Now, it would be extremely interesting to find out where, exactly, Stack discovered that Bakunin made these claims. After all, they are at such odds with Bakunin's anarchist ideas that it is temping to conclude that Stack is simply making it up. This, we suggest, explains the total lack of references for such an outrageous claim. Looking at what appears to be his main source, we discover Paul Avrich writing that *"[i]n 1848"* (i.e. nearly 20 years **before** Bakunin became an anarchist!) Bakunin *"spoke of the decadence of Western Europe and saw hope in the primitive, less industrialised Slavs for the regeneration of the Continent."* [**Anarchist Portraits**, p. 8] The plagiarism is obvious, as are the distortions. Given that Bakunin became an anarchist in the mid-1860s, how his pre-anarchist ideas are relevant to an evaluation of anarchism escapes logic. It makes as much sense as quoting Marx to refute fascism as Mussolini was originally the leader of the left-wing of the Italian Socialist Party!

It is, of course, simple to refute Stack's claims. We need only do that which he does not, namely quote Bakunin. For someone who thought *"industrialisation was an evil,"* a key aspect of Bakunin's ideas on social revolution was the seizing of industry and its placing under social ownership. As he put it, *"capital and all tools of labour belong to the city workers — to the workers associations. The whole organisation of the future should be nothing but a free federation of workers — agricultural workers as well as factory workers and associations of craftsmen."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 410] Bakunin argued that *"to destroy ... all the instruments of labour ... would be to condemn all humanity — which is infinity too numerous today to exist ... on the simple gifts of nature ... — to . .. death by starvation. Thus capital cannot and must not be destroyed. It must be preserved."* Only when workers *"obtain not individual but* ***collective*** *property in capital"* and when capital is no longer *"concentrated in*

*the hands of a separate, exploiting class"* will they be able *"to smash the tyranny of capital."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 90–1] He stressed that only *"associated labour, this is labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining the existence of a large and somewhat civilised society."* Moreover, the *"whole secret of the boundless productivity of human labour consists first of all in applying … scientifically developed reason … and then in the division of that labour."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 341–2] Hardly the thoughts of someone opposed to industrialisation! Unsurprisingly, then, Eugene Pyziu noted that *"[i]n an article printed in 1868 [Bakunin] rejected outright the doctrine of the rottenness of the West and of the messianic destiny of Russia."* [**The Doctrine of Anarchism of Michael A. Bakunin**, p. 61]

Rather than oppose industrialisation and urge the destruction of industry, Bakunin considered one of the first acts of the revolution would be workers' associations taking over the means of production and turning them into collective property managed by the workers themselves. Hence Daniel Guérin's comment:

> *"Proudhon and Bakunin were 'collectivists,' which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property."* [*"From Proudhon to Bakunin"*, pp. 23–33, **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 32]

Clearly, Stack does not have the faintest idea of what he is talking about! Nor is Kropotkin any safer than Proudhon or Bakunin from Stack's distortions:



as the social revolution's *"agents of change"*: the working class (i.e. wage workers, artisans, peasants and so on). In this, other revolutionary anarchists follow him. Looking at Kropotkin we find a similar perspective to Bakunin's. In his first political work, Kropotkin explicitly raised the question of *"where our activity be directed"* and answered it *"categorically" — "unquestionably among the peasantry and urban workers."* In fact, he *"consider[ed] this answer the fundamental position in our practical program."* This was because *"the insurrection must proceed among the peasantry and urban workers themselves"* if it were to succeed. As such, revolutionaries *"must not stand outside the people but among them, must serve not as a champion of some alien opinions worked out in isolation, but only as a more distinct, more complete expression of the demands of the people themselves."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, pp. 85–6]

That was in 1873. Nearly 30 years later, Kropotkin expressed identical opinions stating that he *"did not need to overrate the qualities of the workers in order to espouse the cause of the social, predominantly workers' revolution."* The need was to *"forge solidarity"* between workers and it was *"precisely to awaken this solidarity — without which progress would be difficult — that we must work to insure that the syndicates and the trade unions not be pushed aside by the bourgeois."* The social position of the working class people ensured their key role in the revolution: *"Being exploited today at the bottom of the social ladder, it is to his advantage to demand equality. He has never ceased demanding it, he has fought for it and will fight for it again, whereas the bourgeois … thinks it is to his advantage to maintain inequality."* Unsurprisingly, Kropotkin stressed that *"I have always preached active participation in the workers' movement, in the* ***revolutionary workers' movement****"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 299, pp. 299–300, p. 300 and p. 304]

Much the same can be said for the likes of Goldman, Berkman, Malatesta and so on — as even a basic familiarity with

It should be noted that this analysis is confirmed by non-anarchists who have actually studied Bakunin. Wayne Thorpe, an academic who specialises in syndicalism, presents an identical summary of Bakunin's ideas on this matter. [**"The Workers Themselves"**, p. 280] Marxist selective quoting not withstanding, for Bakunin (as another academic noted) *"it seemed self-evident that the revolution, even in Eastern Europe, required the unity of peasantry and city workers because of the latter's more advanced consciousness."* The notion that Bakunin stressed the role of the lumpenproletariat is a *"popular stereotype"* but is one *"more distorted by its decisive omissions than in what it says." "Marx"*, he correctly summarised, *"accented the revolutionary role of the urban proletariat and tended to deprecate the peasantry, while Bakunin, although* ***accepting*** *the vanguard role of the proletariat in the revolution, felt that the peasantry, too, approached correctly, also had great potential for revolution."* [Alvin W. Gouldner, *"Marx's Last Battle: Bakunin and the First International"*, pp. 853–884, **Theory and Society**, Vol. 11, No. 6, p. 871, p. 869 and p. 869] This flowed from Bakunin's materialist politics:

> *"Not restricting the revolution to those societies in which an advanced industrialism had produced a massive urban proletariat, Bakunin observed sensibly that the class composition of the revolution was bound to differ in industrially advanced Western Europe and in Eastern European where the economy was still largely agricultural … This is a far cry, then, from the Marxist stereotype of Bakunin-the-anarchist who relied exclusively on the backward peasantry and ignored the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 870]

All in all, once a historic and textual context is placed on Bakunin's words, it is clear which social class was considered



> *"Peter Kropotkin, another famous anarchist leader to emerge in Russia, also looked backwards for change. He believed the ideal society would be based on small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production. He had witnessed such communities among Siberian peasants and watchmakers in the Swiss mountains."*

First, we must note the plagiarism. Stack is summarising Paul Avrich's summary of Kropotkin's ideas. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62] Rather than go to the source material, Stack provides an interpretation of someone else's interpretation of someone else's ideas! Clearly, the number of links in the chain means that something is going to get lost in the process and, of course, it does. The something which "gets lost" is, unfortunately, Kropotkin's ideas.

Ultimately, Stack is simply showing his total ignorance of Kropotkin's ideas by making such a statement. At least Avrich expanded upon his summary to mention that Kropotkin's positive evaluation of using modern technology and the need to apply it on an appropriate level to make work and the working environment as pleasant as possible. As Avrich summarises, *"[p]laced in small voluntary workshops, machinery would rescue human beings from the monotony and toil of large-scale capitalist enterprise, allow time for leisure and cultural pursuits, and remove forever the stamp of inferiority traditionally borne by manual labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63] Hardly *"backward looking"* to desire the application of science and technology to transform the industrial system into one based on the needs of people rather than profit!

Stack must be hoping that the reader has, like himself, not read Kropotkin's classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops** for if they have then they would be aware of the distortion Stack subjects Kropotkin's ideas to. While Avrich does present, in general, a reasonable summary of Kropotkin's

ideas, he does place it into a framework of his own making. Kropotkin while stressing the importance of decentralising industry within a free society did not look backward for his inspiration. Rather, he looked to trends within existing society, trends he thought pointed in an anti-capitalist direction. This can be seen from the fact he based his ideas on detailed analysis of current developments in the economy and came to the conclusion that industry would spread across the global (which has happened) and that small industries will continue to exist side by side with large ones (which also has been confirmed). From these facts he argued that a socialist society would aim to decentralise production, combining agriculture with industry and both using modern technology to the fullest. This was possible only after a social revolution which expropriated industry and the land and placed social wealth into the hands of the producers. Until then, the positive trends he saw in modern society would remain circumcised by the workings of the capitalist market and the state.

As we discuss the fallacy that Kropotkin (or anarchists in general) have argued for *"small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production"* in section I.3.8, we will not do so here. Suffice to say, he did not, as is often asserted, argue for *"small-scale production"* (he still saw the need for factories, for example) but rather for production geared to ***appropriate*** levels, based on the objective needs of production (without the distorting effects generated by the needs of capitalist profits and power) and, of necessity, the needs of those who work in and live alongside industry (and today we would add, the needs of the environment). In other words, the transformation of capitalism into a society human beings could live full and meaningful lives in. Part of this would involve creating an industry based on human needs. *"Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens and work in them,"* he argued. *"Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed*



*"upper strata"* of the working class as Bakunin did. Indeed, Marxists have a specific term to describe this semi-bourgeois strata of workers, namely the *"labour aristocracy."* Marx, for example, talked about the trade unions in Britain being *"an aristocratic minority"* and the *"great mass of workers ... has long been outside"* them (indeed, *"the most wretched mass has never belonged."*) [**Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 614] Engels also talked about *"a small, privileged, 'protected' minority"* within the working class, which he also called *"the working-class aristocracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 320 and p. 321] Lenin approvingly quotes Engels arguing that the *"English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming at the possession of ... a bourgeois proletariat* ***alongside*** *the bourgeoisie."* [quoted by Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 283] Like Lenin, Engels explained this by the dominant position of Britain within the world market. Indeed, Lenin argued that *"a section of the British proletariat becomes bourgeois."* For Lenin, imperialist *"superprofits"* make it *"****possible to bribe*** *the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy."* This *"stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook ... are the real* ***agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class*** *movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 284 and p. 194]

As can be seen, this is similar to Bakunin's ideas and, ironically enough, nearly identical to Stack's distortion of those ideas (particularly in the case of Marx). However, only someone with a desire to lie would suggest that any of them dismissed the working class as their *"agent of change"* based on this (selective) quoting. Unfortunately, that is what Stack does with Bakunin. Ultimately, Stack's comments seem hypocritical in the extreme attacking Bakunin while remaining quiet on the near identical comments of his heroes.

*tariat and the peasantry, not the lumpenproletariat."* [ **Bakunin: The Creative Passion**, p. 221]

Nor is Stack the only Marxist to make such arguments as regards Bakunin. Paul Thomas quotes Bakunin arguing that the working class *"remains socialist without knowing it"* because of *"the very force of its position"* and *"all the conditions of its material existence"* and then, incredulously, adds that *"[i]t is for this reason that Bakunin turned away from the proletariat and its scientific socialism"* towards the peasantry. [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 291] A more distorted account of Bakunin's ideas would be hard to find (and there is a lot of competition for that particular honour). The quotes Thomas provides are from Bakunin's *"The Policy of the International"* in which he discussed his ideas on how the International Working-Men's Association should operate (namely *"the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses"*). At the time (and for some time after) Bakunin called himself a revolutionary socialist and argued that by class struggle, the worker would soon *"recognise himself [or herself] to be a revolutionary socialist, and he [or she] will act like one."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 103] As such, the argument that the social position workers are placed makes them *"socialist without knowing"* does not, in fact, imply that Bakunin thought they would become Marxists (*"scientific socialism"*) and, therefore, he turned against them. Rather, it meant that, for Bakunin, anarchist ideas were a product of working class life and it was a case of turning instinctive feelings into conscious thought by collective struggle. As noted above, Bakunin did not *"turn away"* from these ideas nor the proletariat. Indeed, Bakunin held to the importance of organising the proletariat (along with artisans and peasants) to the end of his life. Quite simply, Thomas is distorting Bakunin's ideas.

Lastly, we have to point out a certain irony (and hypocrisy) in Marxist attacks on Bakunin on this subject. This is because Marx, Engels and Lenin held similar views on the corrupted



*at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men [and women]."* The new factories and workplaces would be *"airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, ... in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 197] Under capitalism, he argued, the whole discourse of economics (like industrial development itself) was based on the logic and rationale of the profit motive:

> *"Under the name of profits, rent and interest upon capital, surplus value, and the like, economists have eagerly discussed the benefits which the owners of land or capital, or some privileged nations, can derive, either from the under-paid work of the wage-labourer, or from the inferior position of one class of the community towards another class, or from the inferior economical development of one nation towards another nation...*
>
> *"In the meantime the great question — 'What have we to produce, and how?' necessarily remained in the background ... The main subject of social economy — that is, the* ***economy of energy required for the satisfaction of human needs*** *— is consequently the last subject which one expects to find treated in a concrete form in economical treatises."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 17]

Kropotkin's ideas were, therefore, an attempt to discuss how a post-capitalist society could develop, based on an extensive investigation of current trends within capitalism, and reflecting the needs which capitalism ignores. To fetishise big industry, as Leninists tend to do, means locking socialism itself into the logic of capitalism and, by implication, sees a

socialist society which will basically be the same as capitalism, using the technology, industrial structure and industry developed under class society without change (see section H.3.12). Rather than condemn Kropotkin, Stack's comments (and those like them) simply show the poverty of the Leninist critique of capitalism and its vision of the socialist future.

All in all, anyone who claims that anarchism is *"backward looking"* or *"yearns for the past"* simply has no idea what they are talking about.

## H.2.4 Do anarchists think *"the state is the main enemy"*?

Pat Stack argues that *"the idea that dominates anarchist thought"* is *"that the state is the main enemy, rather than identifying the state as one aspect of a class society that has to be destroyed."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246] Marxist Paul Thomas states that *"Anarchists insist that the basis source of social injustice is the state."* [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 2]

On the face of it, such assertions make little sense. After all, was not the first work by the first self-declared anarchist called **What is Property?** and contained the revolutionary maxim ***"property is theft"***? Surely this fact alone would be enough to put to rest the notion that anarchists view the state as the main problem in the world? Obviously not. Flying in the face of this well known fact as well as anarchist theory, Marxists have constantly repeated the falsehood that anarchists consider the state as the main enemy. Indeed, Stack and Thomas are simply repeating an earlier assertion by Engels:

> *"Bakunin has a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and communism. The chief point concerning the former is that he does not regard capi-*



to an underclass, not to what Marx termed the "lumpenproletariat". As proven above, Bakunin's *"lumpenproletariat"* is not what Marxists mean by the term. If Bakunin had meant the same as Marx by the "lumpenproletariat" then this would not make sense as the "lumpenproletariat" for Marx were not wage workers. This can best be seen when Bakunin argues that the International must organise this *"flower of the proletariat"* and conduct economic collective struggle against the capitalist class. In his other works (and in the specific essay these quotes are derived from) Bakunin stressed the need to organise all workers and peasants into unions to fight the state and bosses and his arguments that workers associations should not only be the means to fight capitalism but also the framework of an anarchist society. Clearly, Sam Dolgoff's summary of Bakunin's ideas on this subject is the correct one:

> *"Bakunin's **Lumpenproletariat** ... was broader than Marx's, since it included all the submerged classes: unskilled, unemployed, and poor workers, poor peasant proprietors, landless agricultural labourers, oppressed racial minorities, alienated and idealistic youth, declasse intellectuals, and 'bandits' (by whom Bakunin meant insurrectionary 'Robin Hoods' like Pugachev, Stenka Razin, and the Italian Carbonari)."* [*"Introduction"*, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 13–4]

Moreover, the issue is clouded by translation issues as well. As Mark Leier notes Bakunin *"rarely used the word 'lumpenproletariat.' While he does use the French word **canaille**, this is better translated as 'mob' or 'rabble' ... When Bakunin does talk about the **canaille** or rabble, he usually refers not to the lumpenproletariat as such but to the poorer sections of the working class ... While we might translate 'destitute proletariat' as 'lumpenproletariat,' Bakunin himself ... is referring to a portion of the prole-*

people into revolutionary unions, quite the reverse. As can be seen, Bakunin argued there was a group of workers who accepted bourgeois society and did relatively well under it. It was **these** workers who were *"frequently no less egoistic than bourgeois exploiters, no less pernicious to the International than bourgeois socialists, and no less vain and ridiculous than bourgeois nobles."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 108] It is comments like this that Marxists quote out of context and use for their claims that Bakunin did not see the working class as the agent of social change. However, rather than refer to the whole working class, Stack quotes Bakunin's thoughts in relation to a minority strata within it. Clearly, from the context, Bakunin **did not** mean **all** working class people.

Also, let us not forget the historical context. After all, when Bakunin was writing the vast majority of the working population across the world was, in fact, illiterate and disinherited. To get some sort of idea of the numbers of working people who would have been classed as *"the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates"* we have to provide some numbers. In Spain, for example, *"in 1870, something like 60 per cent of the population was illiterate."* [Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, p. 50] In Russia, in 1897 (i.e. 21 years after Bakunin's death), *"only 21% of the total population of European Russia was literate. This was mainly because of the appallingly low rate of literacy in the countryside — 17% compared to 45% in the towns."* [S.A. Smith, **Red Petrograd**, p. 34] Stack, in effect, is excluding the majority of the working masses from the working class movement **and** the revolution in the 1860-70s by his comments. Little wonder Bakunin said what he said. By ignoring the historical context (as he ignores the context of Bakunin's comments), Stack misleads the reader and presents a distinctly distorted picture of Bakunin's thought.

In other words, Bakunin's comments on the *"flower of the proletariat"* apply to the majority of the working class during his lifetime and for a number of decades afterwards and **not**



> *tal, i.e. the class antagonism between capitalists and wage workers which has arisen through social development, but the **state** as the main enemy to be abolished … our view [is] that state power is nothing more than the organisation which the ruling classes — landowners and capitalists — have provided for themselves in order to protect their social privileges, Bakunin maintains that it is the **state** which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital **only be the grace of the state.** As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself. We, on the contrary, say: Do away with capital, the concentration of all means of production in the hands of a few, and the state will fall of itself. The difference is an essential one … the abolition of capital **is** precisely the social revolution."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 71]

As will come as no surprise, Engels did not bother to indicate where he discovered Bakunin's ideas on these matters. Similarly, his followers raise this kind of assertion as a truism, apparently without the need for evidence to support the claim. This is hardly surprising as anarchists, including Bakunin, have expressed an idea distinctly at odds with Engels' claims, namely that the social revolution would be marked by the abolition of capitalism and the state at the same time. That this is the case can be seen from John Stuart Mill who, unlike Engels, saw that Bakunin's ideas meant *"not only the annihilation of all government, but getting all property of all kinds out of the hands of the possessors to be used for the general benefit."* [*"Chapters on Socialism,"* **Principles of Political Economy**, p. 376] If the great liberal thinker could discern this aspect of anarchism, why not Engels?

After all, this vision of a **social** revolution (i.e. one that combined political, social **and** economic goals) occurred continuously throughout Bakunin's writings when he was an anarchist. Indeed, to claim that he, or anarchists in general, just opposed the state suggests a total unfamiliarity with anarchist theory. For Bakunin, like all anarchists, the abolition of the state occurs at the same time as the abolition of capital. This joint abolition **is** precisely the social revolution. As one academic put it:

> *"In Bakunin's view, the struggle against the main concentration of power in society, the state, was* ***no less necessary*** *than the struggle against capital. Engels, however, puts the matter somewhat differently, arguing that for Bakunin the state was the main enemy, as if Bakunin had not held that capital, too, was an enemy and that its expropriation was a necessary even if not sufficient condition for the social revolution . .. [Engels'] formulation ... distorts Bakunin's argument, which also held capital to be an evil necessary to abolish"* [Alvin W. Gouldner, *"Marx's Last Battle: Bakunin and the First International"*, pp. 853–884, **Theory and Society**, Vol. 11, No. 6, pp. 863–4]

In 1865, for example, we discover Bakunin arguing that anarchists *"seek the destruction of all States"* in his *"Program of the Brotherhood."* Yet he also argued that a member of this association *"must be socialist"* and see that *"labour"* was the *"sole producer of social assets"* and so *"anyone enjoying these without working is an exploiter of another man's labour, a thief."* They must also *"understand that there is no liberty in the absence of equality"* and so the *"attainment of the widest liberty"* is possible only *"amid the most perfect (de jure and de facto) political, economic and social equality."* The *"sole and supreme objective"*



> *and all the narrow aspirations and pretensions of the bourgeoisie. Of all the proletariat, this upper layer is the least socialist, the most individualist.*
>
> *"By the* ***flower of the proletariat****, I mean above all that great mass, those millions of the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates ... I mean precisely that eternal 'meat' (on which governments thrive), that great* ***rabble of the people*** *(underdogs, 'dregs of society') ordinarily designated by Marx and Engels by the phrase ... Lumpenproletariat"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 294]

Thus Bakunin contrasted a *"semi-bourgeois"* layer to the *"great mass of the proletariat."* In a later work, Bakunin makes the same point, namely that there was *"a special category of relatively affluent workers, earning higher wages, boasting of their literary capacities and ... impregnated by a variety of bourgeois prejudices ... in Italy . .. they are insignificant in number and influence ... In Italy it is the extremely poor proletariat that predominates. Marx speaks disdainfully, but quite unjustly, of this* ***Lumpenproletariat.*** *For in them, and only in them, and not in the bourgeois strata of workers, are there crystallised the entire intelligence and power of the coming Social Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 334] Again it is clear that Bakunin is referring to a small minority within the working class and **not** dismissing the working class as a whole. He explicitly pointed to the *"****bourgeois-influenced*** *minority of the urban proletariat"* and contrasted this minority to *"the mass of the proletariat, both rural and urban."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 254]

Clearly, Stack is distorting Bakunin's ideas on this subject when he claims that Bakunin thought **all** workers were *"tainted by pretensions and aspirations."* In fact, like Marx, Engels and Lenin, Bakunin differentiated between different types of workers. This did not mean he rejected organised workers or skilled artisans nor the organisation of working

*tion by the bourgeoisie."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 297–8, pp. 298–9 and pp. 301–2]

All this, needless to say, makes a total mockery of Stack's claim that Bakunin did not see *"skilled artisans and organised factory workers"* as *"the source of the destruction of capitalism"* and *"agents for change."* Indeed, it is hard to find a greater distortion of Bakunin's ideas. Rather than dismiss *"skilled artisans"* and *"organised factory workers"* Bakunin desired to organise them along with agricultural workers into unions and get these unions to affiliate to the **International Workers' Association**. He argued again and again that the working class, organised in union, were the means of making a revolution (i.e. *"the source of the destruction of capitalism,"* to use Stack's words).

Only in **this** context can we understand Bakunin's comments which Stack (selectively) quotes. Any apparent contradiction generated by Stack's quoting out of context is quickly solved by looking at Bakunin's work. This reference to the *"uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate"* comes from a polemic against Marx. From the context, it can quickly be seen that by these terms Bakunin meant the bulk of the working class. In his words:

> *"To me the flower of the proletariat is not, as it is to the Marxists, the upper layer, the aristocracy of labour, those who are the most cultured, who earn more and live more comfortably that all the other workers. Precisely this semi-bourgeois layer of workers would, if the Marxists had their way, constitute their* ***fourth governing class.*** *This could indeed happen if the great mass of the proletariat does not guard against it. By virtue of its relative well-being and semi-bourgeois position, this upper layer of workers is unfortunately only too deeply saturated with all the political and social prejudices*



of the revolution *"will be the effective political, economic and social emancipation of the people."* This was because political liberty *"is not feasible without political equality. And the latter is impossible without economic and social equality."* This means that the *"land belongs to everyone. But usufruct of it will belong only to those who till it with their own hands."* As regards industry, *"through the unaided efforts and economic powers of the workers' associations, capital and the instruments of labour will pass into the possession of those who will apply them ... through their own labours."* He opposed sexism, for women are *"equal in all political and social rights."* Ultimately, *"[n]o revolution could succeed ... unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution. Any exclusively political revolution ... will, insofar as it consequently does not have the immediate, effective, political and economic emancipation of the people as its primary objective, prove to be ... illusory, phoney."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 134–41]

In 1868, Bakunin was arguing the same ideas. The *"Association of the International Brethren seeks simultaneously universal, social, philosophical, economic and political revolution, so that the present order of things, rooted in property, exploitation, domination and the authority principle"* will be destroyed. The *"revolution as we understand it will ... set about the ... complete destruction of the State ... The natural and necessary upshot of that destruction"* will include the *"[d]issolution of the army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and clergy"* and *"[a]ll productive capital and instruments of labour . .. be[ing] confiscated for the benefit of toilers associations, which will have to put them to use in collective production"* as well as the *"[s]eizure of all Church and State properties."* The *"federated Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune."* The people *"must make the revolution everywhere, and ... ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom up."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 152–6]

As these the words of a person who considered the state as the *"chief evil"* or *"that the state is the main enemy"*? Of course not, rather Bakunin clearly identified the state as one aspect of a class society that has to be destroyed. As he put it, the *"State, which has never had any task other than to regularise, sanction and ... protect the rule of the privileged classes and exploitation of the people's labour for the rich, must be abolished. Consequently, this requires that society be organised from the bottom up through the free formation and free federation of worker associations, industrial, agricultural, scientific and artisan alike, ... founded upon collective ownership of the land, capital, raw materials and the instruments of labour, which is to say, all large-scale property ... leaving to private and hereditary possession only those items that are actually for personal use."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 182] Clearly, as Wayne Thorpe notes, for Bakunin *"[o]nly the simultaneous destruction of the state and of the capitalist system, accompanied by the organisation from below of a federalist system of administration based upon labour's economic associations ... could achieve true liberty."* [**"The Workers Themselves"**, p. 6]

Rather than seeing the state as the main evil to be abolished, Bakunin always stressed that a revolution must be economic **and** political in nature, that it must ensure political, economic and social liberty and equality. As such, he argued for **both** the destruction of the state and the expropriation of capital (both acts conducted, incidentally, by a federation of workers' associations or workers' councils). While the apparatus of the state was being destroyed (*"Dissolution of the army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and clergy"*), capitalism was also being uprooted and destroyed (*"All productive capital and instruments of labour ... confiscated for the benefit of toilers associations"*). To assert, as Engels did, that Bakunin ignored the necessity of abolishing capitalism and the other evils of the current system while focusing exclusively on the state, is simply distorting his ideas. As Mark Leier summarises in his excellent biography of Bakunin, Engels *"was just flat-out wrong ... What Bakunin did*



*ternational the masses of the proletariat, those masses without whose practical co-operation ... the Social Revolution will never be able to triumph."* The International, in Bakunin's words, *"organises the working masses ... from the bottom up"* and that this was *"the proper aim of the organisation of trade union sections."* He stressed that revolutionaries must *"[o]rganise the city proletariat in the name of revolutionary Socialism ... [and] unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasantry."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 300, p. 310, p. 319 and p. 378]

This support for organised workers and artisans can also be seen from the rest of the essay Stack distorts, in which Bakunin discusses the *"flower of the proletariat"* as well as the policy that the **International Workingmen's Association** should follow (i.e. the organised revolutionary workers). He argued that its *"sections and federations [must be] free to develop its own policies ... [to] attain real unity, basically economic, which will necessarily lead to real political unity ... The foundation for the unity of the International ... has already been laid by the common sufferings, interests, needs, and real aspirations of the workers of the whole world."* He stressed that *"the International has been ... the work of the proletariat itself ... It was their keen and profound instinct as workers ... which impelled them to find the principle and true purpose of the International. They took the common needs already in existence as the foundation and saw the* ***international organisation of economic conflict against capitalism*** *as the true objective of this association. In giving it exclusively this base and aim, the workers at once established the entire power of the International. They opened wide the gates to all the millions of the oppressed and exploited."* The International, as well as *"organising local, national and international strikes"* and *"establishing national and international trade unions,"* would discuss *"political and philosophical questions."* The workers *"join the International for one very practical purpose: solidarity in the struggle for full economic rights against the oppressive exploita-*

*from being the source of the destruction of capitalism, were 'tainted by pretensions and aspirations'. Instead Bakunin looked to those cast aside by capitalism, those most damaged, brutalised and marginalised. The lumpen proletariat, the outlaws, the 'uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate', as he put it, would be his agents for change."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246] He fails to provide any references for his accusations. This is unsurprising, as to do so would mean that the reader could check for themselves the validity of Stack's claims.

Take, for example, the quote *"uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate"* Stack uses as evidence. This expression is from an essay written by Bakunin in 1872 and which expressed what he considered the differences between his ideas and those of Marx. The quote can be found on page 294 of **Bakunin on Anarchism**. On the previous page, we discover Bakunin arguing that *"for the International to be a real power, it must be able to organise within its ranks the immense majority of the proletariat of Europe, of America, of all lands."* [p. 293] Clearly Stack is quoting out of context, distorting Bakunin's position to present a radically false image of anarchism. Moreover, as we will indicate, Stack's also quotes them outside the historical context as well.

Let us begin with Bakunin's views on *"skilled artisans and organised factory workers."* In **Statism and Anarchy**, for example, we discover Bakunin arguing that the *"proletariat ... must enter the International [Workers' Association] en masse, form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations"* for *"the sake of its own liberation."* [p. 51] This perspective is the predominant one in Bakunin's ideas with the Russian continually arguing that anarchists saw *"the new social order"* being *"attained ... through the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and villages."* He argued that *"only the trade union sections can give their members ... practical education and consequently only they can draw into the organisation of the In-*



*argue was that the social revolution had to be launched against the state and capitalism simultaneously, for the two reinforced each other."* [**Bakunin: The Creative Passion**, p. 274]

Kropotkin, unsurprisingly, argued along identical lines as Bakunin. He stressed that *"the revolution will burn on until it has accomplished its mission: the abolition of property-owning and of the State."* This revolution, he re-iterated, would be a *"mass rising up against property and the State."* Indeed, Kropotkin always stressed that *"there is one point to which all socialists adhere: the expropriation of capital must result from the coming revolution."* This mean that *"the area of struggle against capital, and against the sustainer of capital — government"* could be one in which *"various groups can act in agreement"* and so *"any struggle that prepares for that expropriation should be sustained in unanimity by all the socialist groups, to whatever shading they belong."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 75 and p. 204] Little wonder Kropotkin wrote his famous article *"Expropriation"* on this subject! As he put it:

> *"Expropriation — that is the guiding word of the coming revolution, without which it will fail in its historic mission: the complete expropriation of all those who have the means of exploiting human beings; the return to the community of the nation of everything that in the hands of anyone can be used to exploit others."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 207–8]

This was because he was well aware of the oppressive nature of capitalism: *"For the worker who **must sell** his labour, it is impossible to remain **free**, and it is precisely because it is impossible that we are anarchists and communists."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 305] For Kropotkin, *"the task we impose ourselves"* is to acquire *"sufficient influence to induce the workmen to avail themselves of the first opportunity of taking possession of land and the mines, of railways and*

*factories,"* to bring working class people *"to the conviction that they must reply on themselves to get rid of the oppression of Capital."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 32] Strange words if Marxist assertions were true. As can be seen, Kropotkin is simply following Bakunin's ideas on the matter. He, like Bakunin, was well aware of the evils of capitalism and that the state protects these evils.

Unsurprisingly, he called anarchism *"the no-government system of socialism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 46] For Kropotkin, the *"State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletariat must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 27] Rather than see the state as the main evil, he clearly saw it as the protector of capitalism — in other words, as one aspect of a class system which needed to be replaced by a better society:

> *"The very words Anarchist-Communism show in what direction society, in our opinion, is already going, and one what lines it can get rid of the oppressive powers of Capital and Government … The first conviction to acquire is that nothing short of expropriation on a vast scale, carried out by the workmen themselves, can be the first step towards a reorganisation of our production on Socialist principles."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 32–3]

Similarly with all other anarchists. Emma Goldman, for example, summarised for all anarchists when she argued that anarchism *"really stands for"* the *"liberation of the human body from the domination of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government."* Goldman was well aware that wealth *"means power; the power to subdue, to crush, to exploit, the power*



*richer classes' rule have been promoted, established, and maintained."* The *"mutual aid factor has been hitherto totally lost sight of; it was simply denied, or even scoffed at."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 231] He was well aware that mutual aid (or solidarity) could not be applied between classes in a class society. Indeed, as noted, his chapters on mutual aid under capitalism contain the strike and union. As he put it in an earlier work:

> *"What solidarity can exist between the capitalist and the worker he exploits? Between the head of an army and the soldier? Between the governing and the governed?"* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 30]

In summary, Stack's assertions about Kropotkin's theory of *"Mutual Aid"* are simply false. He simply distorts the source material and shows a total ignorance of Kropotkin's work (which he obviously has not bothered to read before criticising it). A truthful account of *"Mutual Aid"* would involve recognising that Kropotkin showed it being expressed in both strikes and labour unions and that he saw solidarity between working people as the means of not only surviving within the hostile environment of capitalism but also as the basis of a mass revolution which would end it.

## H.2.7 Who do anarchists see as their *"agents of social change"*?

It is often charged, usually without any evidence, that anarchists do not see the working class as the *"agent"* of the social revolution. Pat Stack, for example, states *"the failure of anarchism [is] to understand the centrality of the working class itself."* He argues that for Marx, *"the working class would change the world and in the process change itself. It would become the agent for social advance and human liberty."* For Bakunin, however, *"skilled artisans and organised factory workers, far*

at face value, then he clearly is arguing that solidarity is not an important factor in the class struggle and that mutual aid and co-operation cannot change the world! Hardly what you would expect a socialist to argue. In other words, his inaccurate diatribe against Kropotkin backfires on his own ideas.

Thirdly, **Mutual Aid** is primarily a work of popular science and not a work on revolutionary anarchist theory like, say, **The Conquest of Bread** or **Words of a Rebel**. As such, it does not present a full example of Kropotkin's revolutionary ideas and how mutual aid fits into them. However, it does present some insights on the question of social progress which indicate that he did not think that *"co-operation"* was *"at the root of the social process,"* as Stack claims. For example, Kropotkin noted that *"[w]hen Mutual Aid institutions ... began ... to lose their primitive character, to be invaded by parasitic growths, and thus to become hindrances to process, the revolt of individuals against these institutions took always two different aspects. Part of those who rose up strove to purify the old institutions, or to work out a higher form of commonwealth."* But at the same time, others *"endeavoured to break down the protective institutions of mutual support, with no other intention but to increase their own wealth and their own powers."* In this conflict *"lies the real tragedy of history."* He also noted that the mutual aid tendency *"continued to live in the villages and among the poorer classes in the towns."* Indeed, *"in so far as"* as new *"economical and social institutions"* were *"a creation of the masses"* they *"have all originated from the same source"* of mutual aid. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 18–9 and p. 180] Clearly, Kropotkin saw history marked by both co-operation and conflict as you would expect in a society divided by class and hierarchy.

Significantly, Kropotkin considered **Mutual Aid** as an attempt to write history from below, from the perspective of the oppressed. As he put it, history, *"such as it has hitherto been written, is almost entirely a description of the ways and means by which theocracy, military power, autocracy, and, later on, the*



*to enslave, to outrage, to degrade."* She considered property *"not only a hindrance to human well-being, but an obstacle, a deadly barrier, to all progress."* A key problem of modern society was that *"man must sell his labour"* and so *"his inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master."* Anarchism, she stressed, was the *"the only philosophy that can and will do away with this humiliating and degrading situation ... There can be no freedom in the large sense of the word ... so long as mercenary and commercial considerations play an important part in the determination of personal conduct."* The state, ironically for Stack's claim, was *"necessary **only** to maintain or protect property and monopoly."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 73, p. 66, p. 50 and p. 51]

Errico Malatesta, likewise, stressed that, for *"all anarchists,"* it was definitely a case that the *"abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege."* The *"Anarchist Programme"* he drafted listed *"Abolition of private property"* before *"Abolition of government"* and argued that *"the present state of society"* was one in *"which some have inherited the land and all social wealth, while the mass of the people, disinherited in all respects, is exploited and oppressed by a small possessing class."* It ends by arguing that anarchism wants *"the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man"* and for *"expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all; and the abolition of government."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 158, p. 184, p. 183, p. 197 and p. 198] Nearly three decades previously, we find Malatesta arguing the same idea. As he put it in 1891, anarchists *"struggle for anarchy, and for socialism, because we believe that anarchy and socialism must be realised immediately, that is to say that in the revolutionary act we must drive government away, abolish property ... human progress is measured by the extent government power and private property are reduced."* [**Anarchy**, p. 54]

Little wonder Bertrand Russell stated that anarchism *"is associated with belief in the communal ownership of land and capi-*

*tal"* because, like Marxism, it has the *"perception that private capital is a source of tyranny by certain individuals over others."* [**Roads to Freedom**, p. 40] Russell was, of course, simply pointing out the obvious. As Brian Morris correctly summarises:

> *"Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined, and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists... as well as the character of anarchist movements... it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state."* [*"Anthropology and Anarchism,"* pp. 35–41, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p, p. 40]

All in all, Marxist claims that anarchists view the state as the *"chief evil"* or see the destruction of the state as the *"main idea"* of anarchism are simply talking nonsense. In fact, rather than anarchists having a narrow view of social liberation, it is, in fact, Marxists who do so. By concentrating almost exclusively on the (economic) class source of exploitation, they blind themselves to other forms of exploitation and domination that can exist independently of (economic) class relationships. This can be seen from the amazing difficulty that many of them got themselves into when trying to analyse the Stalinist regime in Russia. Anarchists are well aware that the state is just one aspect of the current class system but unlike Marxists we recognise that *"class rule must be placed in the much **larger** context of*



*miss[es] the importance of the collective nature of change"* (see section H.2.2). How can you have co-operation without forming a collective? And, equally, surely support for co-operation clearly implies the recognition of the *"collective nature of change"*? Moreover, had Stack bothered to ***read*** Kropotkin's classic he would have been aware that both unions and strikes are listed as expressions of *"mutual aid"* (a fact, of course, which would undermine Stack's silly assertion that anarchists reject collective working class struggle and organisation). Thus we find Kropotkin stating that *"Unionism"* expressed the *"worker's need of mutual support"* as well as discussing how the state *"legislated against the workers' unions"* and that these were *"the conditions under which the mutual-aid tendency had to make its way." "To practise mutual support under such circumstances was anything but an easy task."* This repression failed, as *"the workers' unions were continually reconstituted"* and spread, forming *"vigourous federal organisations ... to support the branches during strikes and prosecutions."* In spite of the difficulties in organising unions and fighting strikes, he noted that *"every year there are thousands of strikes ... the most severe and protracted contests being, as a rule, the so-called 'sympathy strikes,' which are entered upon to support locked-out comrades or to maintain the rights of the unions."* Anyone (like Kropotkin) who had *"lived among strikers speak with admiration of the mutual aid and support which are constantly practised by them."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 210–3]

Kropotkin, as noted, recognised the importance of struggle or competition as a means of survival but also argued that co-operation within a species was the best means for it to survive in a hostile environment. This applied to life under capitalism. In the hostile environment of class society, then the only way in which working class people could survive would be to practice mutual aid (in other words, solidarity). Little wonder, then, that Kropotkin listed strikes and unions as expressions of mutual aid in capitalist society. Moreover, if we take Stack's arguments

*selves"* achieved by means of *"expropriation"* of social wealth. [**Anarchist Portraits**, p. 58, p. 62 and p. 66]

So much for Stack's claims. As can be seen, they are not only a total misrepresentation of Kropotkin's work, they are also a distortion of his source!

A few more points need to be raised on this subject.

Firstly, Kropotkin never claimed that mutual aid *"was the natural order."* Rather, he stressed that Mutual Aid was (to use the subtitle of his book on the subject) *"a factor of evolution."* As he put it, mutual aid *"represents one of the factors of evolution"*, another being *"the self-assertion of the individual, not only to attain personal or caste superiority, economical, political, and spiritual, but also in its much more important although less evident function of breaking through the bonds, always prone to become crystallised, which the tribe, the village community, the city, and the State impose upon the individual."* Thus Kropotkin recognised that there is class struggle within society as well as *"the self-assertion of the individual taken as a progressive element"* (i.e., struggle against forms of social association which now hinder individual freedom and development). Kropotkin did not deny the role of struggle, in fact the opposite as he stressed that the book's examples concentrated on mutual aid simply because mutual struggle (between individuals of the same species) had *"already been analysed, described, and glorified from time immemorial"* and, as such, he felt no need to illustrate it. He did note that it *"was necessary to show, first of all, the immense part which this factor plays in the evolution of both the animal world and human societies. Only after this has been fully recognised will it be possible to proceed to a comparison between the two factors."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 231 and pp. 231–2] So at no stage did Kropotkin deny either factor (unlike the bourgeois apologists he was refuting).

Secondly, Stack's argument that Kropotkin argued that co-operation was the natural order is in contradiction with his other claims that anarchism *"despises the collectivity"* and *"dis-*



*hierarchy and domination as a whole."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 28] This has been the anarchist position from the nineteenth century onwards and one which is hard not to recognise if you are at all familiar with the anarchist movement and its theory. As one historian notes, we have never been purely anti-state, but also anti-capitalist and opposed to all forms of oppression:

> *"Anarchism rejected capitalism ... not only because it viewed it as inimical to social equality, but also because it saw it as a form of domination detrimental to individual freedom. Its basic tenet regarded hierarchical authority — be it the state, the church, the economic elite, or patriarchy — as unnecessary and deleterious to the maximisation of human potential."* [Jose Moya, **Italians in Buenos Aires's Anarchist Movement**, p. 197]

So we oppose the state because it is just one aspect of a class ridden and hierarchical system. We just recognise that all the evils of that system must be destroyed at the same time to ensure a **social** revolution rather than just a change in who the boss is.

## H.2.5 Do anarchists think *"full blown"* socialism will be created overnight?

Another area in which Marxists misrepresent anarchism is in the assertion that anarchists believe a completely socialist society (an ideal or *"utopian"* society, in other words) can be created *"overnight."* As Marxist Bertell Ollman puts it, *"[u]nlike anarcho-communists, none of us [Marxists] believe that communism will emerge full blown from a socialist revolution. Some kind of transition and period of indeterminate length for it to occur are required."* [Bertell Ollman (ed.), **Market Socialism:**

**The Debate among Socialists**, p. 177] This assertion, while it is common, fails to understand the anarchist vision of revolution. We consider it a **process** and not an event: *"By revolution we do not mean just the insurrectionary act."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 156]

Once this is understood, the idea that anarchists think a *"full blown"* anarchist society will be created *"overnight"* is a fallacy. As Murray Bookchin pointed out, *"Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta were not so naive as to believe that anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist's views."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 137] Indeed, Kropotkin stressed that anarchists *"do not believe that in any country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of a eye, as some socialists dream."* Moreover, *"[n]o fallacy more harmful has ever been spread than the fallacy of a 'One-day Revolution.'"* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 81] Bakunin argued that a *"more or less prolonged transitional period"* would *"naturally follow in the wake of the great social crisis"* implied by social revolution. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 412] The question, therefore, is not whether there will be a *"transitional"* society after a revolution but what **kind** of transition will it be.

So anarchists are aware that a *"full blown"* communist society will not come about immediately. Rather, the creation of such a society will be a **process** which the revolution will start off. As Alexander Berkman put it in his classic introduction to communist-anarchist ideas *"you must not confuse the social revolution with anarchy. Revolution, in some of its stages, is a violent upheaval; anarchy is a social condition of freedom and peace. The revolution is the **means** of bringing anarchy about but it is not anarchy itself. It is to pave the road for anarchy, to establish conditions which will make a life of liberty possible."* However, the *"end shapes the means"* and so *"to achieve its purpose the revolution must be imbued with and directed by the anarchist spirit*



Similarly with Stack's other examples, which are **not** used as expressions of *"mutual aid"* but rather as evidence that social life can be organised without government. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 65–7] Just as with communism, he gave concrete examples of libertarian tendencies within society to prove the possibility of an anarchist society. And just like his examples of communistic activities within capitalism, his examples of co-operation without the state are not listed as examples of *"mutual aid."*

All this would suggest that Stack has either not read Kropotkin's works or that he has and consciously decided to misrepresent his ideas. In fact, its a combination of the two. Stack (as proven by his talk at **Marxism 2001**) gathered his examples of *"mutual aid"* from Paul Avrich's essay *"Kropotkin's Ethical Anarchism"* contained in his **Anarchist Portraits**. As such, he has not read the source material. Moreover, he simply distorted what Avrich wrote. In other words, not only has he not read Kropotkin's works, he consciously decided to misrepresent the secondary source he used. This indicates the quality of almost all Marxist critiques of anarchism.

For example, Avrich correctly noted that Kropotkin did not *"deny that the 'struggle for existence' played an important role in the evolution of species. In **Mutual Aid** he declares unequivocally that 'life **is** struggle; and in that struggle the fittest survive.'"* Kropotkin simply argued that co-operation played a key role in determining who was, in fact, the fittest. Similarly, Avrich listed many of the same examples Stack presents but not in his discussion of Kropotkin's ideas on mutual aid. Rather, he correctly did so in his discussion of how Kropotkin saw examples of anarchist communism *"manifesting itself 'in the thousands of developments of modern life.'"* This did not mean that Kropotkin did not see the need for a social revolution, quite the reverse. As Avrich noted, Kropotkin *"did not shrink from the necessity of revolution"* as he *"did not expect the propertied classes to give up their privileges and possession without a fight."* This *"was to be a **social** revolution, carried out by the masses them-*

> *of wealth to maintain the partial communism of old, as well as to reintroduce communist principles in a new shape, as soon as favourable conditions permit it… the communist tendency is continually reasserting itself and trying to make its way into public life. The penny bridge disappears before the public bridge; and the turnpike road before the free road. The same spirit pervades thousands of other institutions. Museums, free libraries, and free public schools; parks and pleasure grounds; paved and lighted streets, free for everybody's use; water supplied to private dwellings, with a growing tendency towards disregarding the exact amount of it used by the individual; tramways and railways which have already begun to introduce the season ticket or the uniform tax, and will surely go much further in this line when they are no longer private property: all these are tokens showing in what direction further progress is to be expected.*
>
> *"It is in the direction of putting the wants of the individual* ***above*** *the valuation of the service he has rendered, or might render, to society; in considering society as a whole, so intimately connected together that a service rendered to any individual is a service rendered to the whole society."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 59–60]

As is clear, the examples Stack selects have nothing to do with mutual aid in Kropotkin's eyes. Rather, they are examples of communistic tendencies within capitalism, empirical evidence that can be used to not only show that communism can work but also that it is not a utopian social solution but an expression of tendencies within society. Simply put, he is using examples from existing society to show that communism is not impossible.



*and ideas … the social revolution must be anarchist in method as in aim."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 231]

Berkman also acknowledged that *"full blown"* communism was not likely after a successful revolution. *"Of course,"* he argued, *"when the social revolution has become thoroughly organised and production is functioning normally there will be enough for everybody. But in the first stages of the revolution, during the process of re-construction, we must take care to supply the people as best we can, and equally, which means rationing."* Clearly, in such circumstances *"full blown"* communism would be impossible and, unsurprisingly, Berkman argued that would not exist. However, the principles that inspire communism and anarchism could be applied immediately. This meant that both the state and capitalism would be abolished. While arguing that *"[t]here is no other way of securing economic equality, which alone is liberty"* than communist anarchism, he also stated that it is *"likely … that a country in social revolution may try various economic experiments … different countries and regions will probably try out various methods, and by practical experience learn the best way. The revolution is at the same time the opportunity and justification for it."* Rather than *"dictate to the future, to prescribe its mode of conduct"*, Berkman argued that his *"purpose is to suggest, in board outline the principles which must animate the revolution, the general lines of action it should follow if it is to accomplish its aim — the reconstruction of society on a foundation of freedom and equality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 215 and p. 230]

Malatesta argued along similar lines. While urging the *"complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man"* by the *"expropriation of landlords and capitalists for the benefit of all"* and *"the abolition of government,"* he recognised that in *"the post-revolutionary period, in the period of reorganisation and transition, there might be 'offices for the concentration and distribution of the capital of collective enterprises', that there might or might not be titles recording the work done and the quantity of goods to which one is entitled."*

However, he stressed that this *"is something we shall have to wait and see about, or rather, it is a problem which will have many and varied solutions according to the system of production and distribution which will prevail in the different localities and among the many ... groupings that will exist."* He argued that while, eventually, all groups of workers (particularly the peasants) will *"understand the advantages of communism or at least of the direct exchange of goods for goods,"* this may not happen *"in a day."* If some kind of money was used, then people should *"ensure that [it] truly represents the useful work performed by its possessors"* rather than being that *"powerful means of exploitation and oppression"* is currently is. [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 198–9 and pp. 100–1] Emma Goldman, also, saw *"a society based on voluntary co-operation of productive groups, communities and societies loosely federated together, eventually developing into a free communism, actuated by a solidarity of interests."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 50]

So rather than seeing a *"full blown"* communist society appearing instantly from a revolution, anarcho-communists see a period of transition in which the degree of communism in a given community or area is dependent on the objective conditions facing it. This period of transition would see different forms of social experimentation but the desire is to see libertarian communist principles as the basis of as much of this experimentation as possible. To claim that anarcho-communists ignore reality and see communism as being created overnight is simply a distortion of their ideas. Rather, they are aware that the development towards communism is dependent on local conditions, conditions which can only be overcome in time and by the liberated community re-organising production and extending it as required. Thus we find Malatesta arguing 1884 that communism could be brought about immediately only in a very limited number of areas and, *"for the rest,"* collectivism would have to be accepted *"for a transitional period."* This was



There are three issues with Stack's summary. Firstly, Kropotkin did not, in fact, reject class conflict as the *"dynamic of social change"* nor reject the working class as its *"agent."* Secondly, all of Stack's examples of *"Mutual Aid"* do not, in fact, appear in Kropotkin's classic book **Mutual Aid**. They do appear in other works by Kropotkin but **not** as examples of *"mutual aid."* Thirdly, in **Mutual Aid** Kropotkin discusses such aspects of working class *"collective struggle"* as strikes and unions. All in all, it is Stack's total and utter lack of understanding of Kropotkin's ideas which immediately stands out from his comments.

As we have discussed how collective, working class direct action, organisation and solidarity in the class struggle were at the core of Kropotkin's politics in section H.2.2, we will not do so here. Rather, we will discuss how Stack lies about Kropotkin's ideas on mutual aid. As just noted, the examples Stack lists are not to be found in Kropotkin's classic work **Mutual Aid**. Now, **if** Kropotkin **had** considered them as examples of *"mutual aid"* then he would have listed them in that work. This does not mean, however, that Kropotkin did not mention these examples. He does, but in other works (notably his essay **Anarchist-Communism: Its Basis and Principles**) and he does **not** use them as examples of mutual aid. Here are Kropotkin's own words on these examples:

> *"We maintain, moreover, not only that communism is a desirable state of society, but that the growing tendency of modern society is precisely towards communism — free communism — notwithstanding the seemingly contradictory growth of individualism. In the growth of individualism . .. we see merely the endeavours of the individual towards emancipating himself from the steadily growing powers of capital and the State. But side by side with this growth we see also ... the latent struggle of the producers*

comes after it. A *"full blown"* communist economy will develop as society becomes ready for it. What we **do** argue is that any transitional economic form must be based on the principles of the type of society it desires. In other words, any transitional period must be as communistic as possible if communism is your final aim and, equally, it must be libertarian if your final goal is freedom.

Also see section I.2.2 for further discussion on this issue.

## H.2.6 How do Marxists misrepresent Anarchist ideas on mutual aid?

Anarchist ideas on mutual aid are often misrepresented by Marxists. Looking at Pat Stack's *"Anarchy in the UK?"* article, for example, we find a particularly terrible misrepresentation of Kropotkin's ideas. Indeed, it is so incorrect that it is either a product of ignorance or a desire to deceive (and as we shall indicate, it is probably the latter). Here is Stack's account of Kropotkin's ideas:

> *"And the anarchist Peter Kropotkin, far from seeing class conflict as the dynamic for social change as Marx did, saw co-operation being at the root of the social process. He believed the co-operation of what he termed 'mutual aid' was the natural order, which was disrupted by centralised states. Indeed in everything from public walkways and libraries through to the Red Cross, Kropotkin felt he was witnessing confirmation that society was moving towards his mutual aid, prevented only from completing the journey by the state. It follows that if class conflict is not the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246]



because, *"[f]or communism to be possible, a high stage of moral development is required of the members of society, a sense of solidarity both elevated and profound, which the upsurge of the revolution may not suffice to induce. This doubt is the more justified in that material conditions favourable to this development will not exist at the beginning."* [quoted by Daniel Guérin, **Anarchism**, p. 51]

Clearly, our argument contradicts the widely held view that anarchists believed an utopian world would be created instantly after a revolution. Of course, by asserting that anarchists think *"full blown communism"* will occur without some form of transitional period, Marxists paint a picture of anarchism as simply utopian, a theory which ignores objective reality in favour of wishful thinking. However, as seen above, such is not the case. Anarchists are aware that *"full blown communism"* is dependent on objective conditions and, therefore, cannot be implemented until those conditions are meet. Until such time as the objective conditions are reached, various means of distributing goods, organising and managing production, and so on will be tried. Such schemes will be based as far as possible on communistic principles.

Such a period of transition would be based on libertarian and communist principles. The organisation of society would be anarchist — the state would be abolished and replaced by a free federation of workers and community associations. The economic structure would be socialist — production would be based on self-managed workplaces and the principles of distribution would be as communistic as possible under the given objective conditions.

It also seems strange for Marxists to claim that anarchists thought a *"full blown"* communist society was possible *"overnight"* given that anarchists had always noted the difficulties facing a social revolution. Kropotkin, for example, continually stressed that a revolution would face extensive economic disruption. In his words:

> *"A political revolution can be accomplished without shaking the foundations of industry, but a revolution where the people lay hands upon property will inevitably paralyse exchange and production ... This point cannot be too much insisted upon; the reorganisation of industry on a new basis ... cannot be accomplished in a few days; nor, on the other hand, will people submit to be half starved for years in order to oblige the theorists who uphold the wage system. To tide over the period of stress they will demand what they have always demanded in such cases — communisation of supplies — the giving of rations."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 72–3]

The basic principles of this "transition" period would, therefore, be based on the *"socialising of production, consumption and exchange."* The state would be abolished and *"federated Communes"* would be created. The end of capitalism would be achieved by the *"expropriation"* of *"everything that enables any man — be he financier, mill-owner, or landlord — — to appropriate the product of others' toil."* Distribution of goods would be based on *"no stint or limit to what the community possesses in abundance, but equal sharing and dividing of those commodities which are scare or apt to run short."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 136, p. 61 and p. 76] Clearly, while not *"full blown"* communism by any means, such a regime does lay the ground for its eventual arrival. As Max Nettlau summarised, *"[n]othing but a superficial interpretation of some of Kropotkin's observations could lead one to conclude that anarchist communism could spring into life through an act of sweeping improvisation, with the waving of a magic wand."* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 80]

This was what happened in the Spanish Revolution, for example. Different collectives operated in different ways. Some tried to introduce free communism, some a combination of rationing and communism, others introduced equal pay, others



equalised pay as much as possible and so on. Over time, as economic conditions changed and difficulties developed the collectives changed their mode of distribution to take them into account. These collectives indicate well the practical aspects of anarchist and its desire to accommodate and not ignore reality.

Lastly, and as an aside, it this anarchist awareness of the disruptive effects of a revolution on a country's economy which, in part, makes anarchists extremely sceptical of pro-Bolshevik rationales that blame the difficult economic conditions facing the Russian Revolution for Bolshevik authoritarianism (see section H.6.1 for a fuller discussion of this). If, as Kropotkin argued, a social revolution inevitably results in massive economic disruption then, clearly, Bolshevism should be avoided if it cannot handle such inevitable events. In such circumstances, centralisation would only aid the disruption, not reduce it. This awareness of the problems facing a social revolution also led anarchists to stress the importance of local action and mass participation. As Kropotkin put it, the *"immense constructive work demanded by a social revolution cannot be accomplished by a central government ... It has need of knowledge, of brains and of the voluntary collaboration of a host of local and specialised forces which alone can attack the diversity of economic problems in their local aspects."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 255–6] Without this local action, co-ordinated joint activity would remain a dead letter.

In summary, anarchists acknowledge that **politically** there is no transitional period (i.e. the state must be abolished and replaced by a free federation of self-managed working class organisations). Economically anarchists recognise that different areas will develop in different ways and so there will be various economical transitional forms. Rather than seeing *"full blown communism"* being the instant result of a socialist revolution, anarchist-communists actually argue the opposite — *"full blown communism"* will develop only after a successful revolution and the inevitable period of social reconstruction which

*'April Theses' and* ***State and Revolution****. That's one Lenin. And then there's the Lenin who took power and acted in ways that are unrecognisable … compared with, say, the doctrines of 'State and Revolution.' … this [is] not very hard to explain. There's a big difference between the libertarian doctrines of a person who is trying to associate himself with a mass popular movement to acquire power and the authoritarian power of somebody who's taken power and is trying to consolidate it… that is true of Marx also. There are competing strains in Marx."* As such, this section of our FAQ will try and draw out the contradictions within Marxism and indicate what aspects of the doctrine aided the development of the "second" Lenin for the seeds from which authoritarianism grew post-October 1917 existed from the start. Anarchists agree with Chomsky, namely that he considered it *"characteristic and unfortunate that the lesson that was drawn from Marx and Lenin for the later period was the authoritarian lesson. That is, it's the authoritarian power of the vanguard party and destruction of all popular forums in the interests of the masses. That's the Lenin who became know to later generations. Again, not very surprisingly, because that's what Leninism really was in practice."* [**Language and Politics**, p. 152]

Ironically, given Marx's own comments on the subject, a key hindrance to such an evaluation is the whole idea and history of Marxism itself. While, as Murray Bookchin noted *"to his lasting credit,"* Marx tried (to some degree) *"to create a movement that looks to the future instead of to the past,"* his followers have not done so. *"Once again,"* Bookchin argued, *"the dead are walking in our midst — ironically, draped in the name of Marx, the man who tried to bury the dead of the nineteenth century. So the revolution of our own day can do nothing better than parody, in turn, the October Revolution of 1918 and the civil war of 1918–1920 … The complete, all-sided revolution of our own day … follows the partial, the incomplete, the one-sided revolutions of the past, which merely changed the form of the 'social question,' replacing one system of domination and hierarchy*



*ism, which wants an equitable human society delivered from all tutelage, from all authority and political domination as well as economic exploitation."* [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 95–6] As such, state structures violate not only liberty but also equality. There is no real equality in power between, say, the head of the government and one of the millions who may, or may not, have voted for them. As the Russian Revolution proved, there can be no meaningful equality between a striking worker and the "socialist" political police sent to impose the will of the state, i.e., the "socialist" ruling elite.

This means that if anarchists are concerned about freedom (both individual **and** collective) it is not because we are influenced by liberalism. Quite the reverse, as liberalism happily tolerates hierarchy and the restrictions of liberty implied by private property, wage labour and the state. As Bakunin argued, capitalism turns *"the worker into a subordinate, a passive and obedient servant."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 188] So anarchism rejects liberalism (although, as Bakunin put it, *"[i]f socialism disputes radicalism, this is hardly to reverse it but rather to advance it."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 87]). Therefore, anarchism rejects liberalism, not because it supports the idea of freedom, but precisely because it does not go far enough and fails to understand that without equality, freedom is little more than freedom for the master. In fact, as we argue in section H.4, it is Marxism itself which has a distinctly liberal perspective of freedom, seeing it restricted by association rather than association being an expression of it.

Lastly, a few words on the mentality that could suggest that anarchist concern for liberty means that it is a form of liberalism. Rather than suggest the bankruptcy of anarchism it, in fact, suggests the bankruptcy of the politics of the person making the accusation. After all, the clear implication is that a concern with individual, collective and social freedom is alien to socialist ideas. It also strikes at the heart of socialism — its concern for equality — as it clearly implies that some have more power

(namely the right to suppress the liberty of others) than the rest. As such, it suggests a superficial understanding of **real** socialism (see also our discussion of Marxist claims about anarchist "elitism" in section H.2.11).

To argue that a concern for freedom means *"liberalism"* (or, equally, *"individualism"*) indicates that the person is not a socialist. After all, a concern that every individual controls their daily lives (i.e. to be free) means a wholehearted support for collective self-management of group affairs. It means a vision of a revolution (and post-revolutionary society) based on direct working class participation and management of society from below upwards. To dismiss this vision by dismissing the principles which inspire it as *"liberalism"* means to support rule from above by the "enlightened" elite (i.e. the party) and the hierarchical state structures. It means arguing for **party** power, not **class** power, as liberty is seen as a **danger** to the revolution and so the people must be protected against the "petty-bourgeois"/"reactionary" narrowness of the people (to requote Bakunin, *"every state, even the pseudo-People's State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 338]). Rather than seeing free debate of ideas and mass participation as a source of strength, it sees it as a source of "bad influences" which the masses must be protected from.

Moreover, it suggests a total lack of understanding of the difficulties that a social revolution will face. Unless it is based on the active participation of the majority of a population, any revolution will fail. The construction of socialism, of a new society, will face thousands of unexpected problems and seek to meet the needs of millions of individuals, thousands of communities and hundreds of cultures. Without the individuals and groups within that society being in a position to freely contribute to that constructive task, it will simply wither under



stating there are as many forms of anarchism as anarchists!). Equally, many Marxists go further than dismissing specific groups. Some even totally reject other branches of their movement as being non-Marxist (for example, some Marxists dismiss Leninism as having little, or nothing, to do with what they consider the *"real"* Marxist tradition to be). This means that discussing Marxism can be difficult as Marxists can argue that our FAQ does not address the arguments of this or that Marxist thinker, group or tendency.

With this in mind, this section of the FAQ will concentrate on the works of Marx and Engels (and so the movement they generated, namely Social Democracy) as well as the Bolshevik tradition started by Lenin and continued (by and large) by Trotsky. These are the core thinkers (and the recognised authorities) of most Marxists and so latter derivations of these tendencies can be ignored (for example Maoism, Castroism and so on). It should also be noted that even this grouping will produce dissent as some Marxists argue that the Bolshevik tradition is not part of Marxism. This perspective can be seen in the *"impossiblist"* tradition of Marxism (e.g. the **Socialist Party of Great Britain** and its sister parties) as well as in the left/council communist tradition (e.g. in the work of such Marxists as Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick). The arguments for their positions are strong and well worth reading (indeed, any honest analysis of Marxism and Leninism cannot help but show important differences between the two). However, as the vast majority of Marxists today are also Leninists, we have to reflect this in our FAQ (and, in general, we do so by referring to "mainstream Marxists" as opposed to the small minority of libertarian Marxists).

Another problem arises when we consider the differences not only between Marxist tendencies, but also within a specific tendency before and after its representatives seize power. For example, as Chomsky pointed out, *"there are ... very different strains of Leninism ... there's the Lenin of 1917, the Lenin of the*

as state capitalism). This restriction of "socialism" has been supported by both Stalinist and Capitalist ruling elites, for their own reasons (the former to secure their own power and gain support by associating themselves with socialist ideals, the latter by discrediting those ideas by associating them with the horror of Stalinism). The Stalinist *"leadership thus portrays itself as socialist to protect its right to wield the club, and Western ideologists adopt the same pretence in order to forestall the threat of a more free and just society."* The latter use it as *"a powerful ideological weapon to enforce conformity and obedience,"* to *"ensure that the necessity to rent oneself to the owners and managers of these [capitalist] institutions will be regarded as virtually a natural law, the only alternative to the 'socialist' dungeon."* In reality, *"if there is a relation"* between Bolshevism and socialism, *"it is the relation of contradiction."* [*"The Soviet Union versus Socialism"*, pp. 47–52, **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), pp. 47–8]

This means that anarchists and other libertarian socialists have a major task on their hands — to reclaim the promise of socialism from the distortions inflicted upon it by both its enemies (Stalinists and capitalists) and its erstwhile and self-proclaimed supporters (Social Democracy and its offspring Bolshevism). A key aspect of this process is a critique of both the practice and ideology of Marxism and its various offshoots. Only by doing this can anarchists prove, to quote Rocker, that *"**Socialism will be free, or it will not be at all**."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 14]

Such a critique raises the problem of which forms of "Marxism" to discuss. There is an extremely diverse range of Marxist viewpoints and groups in existence. Indeed, the different groups spend a lot of time indicating why all the others are not "real" Marxists (or Marxist-Leninists, or Trotskyists, and so on) and are just "sects" without "real" Marxist theory or ideas. This "diversity" is, of course, a major problem (and somewhat ironic, given that some Marxists like to insult anarchists by



the bureaucratic and authoritarian rule of a few party leaders. As such, individual liberties are an essential aspect of **genuine** social reconstruction — without freedom of association, assembly, organisation, speech and so on, the active participation of the masses will be replaced by an isolated and atomised collective of individuals subjected to autocratic rule from above.

As ex-anarchist turned Bolshevik Victor Serge concluded in the late 1930s (when it was far too late) the *"fear of liberty, which is the fear of the masses, marks almost the entire course of the Russian Revolution. If it is possible to discover a major lesson, capable of revitalising Marxism ... one might formulate it in these terms: Socialism is essentially democratic — the word, 'democratic', being used here in its libertarian sense."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 181]

Ultimately, as Rudolf Rocker suggested, the *"urge for social justice can only develop properly and be effective, when it grows out of man's sense of personal freedom and it based on that. In other words **Socialism will be free, or it will not be at all.** In its recognition of this lies the genuine and profound justification for the existence of Anarchism."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 14]

## H.2.10 Are anarchists against leadership?

It is a common assertion by Marxists that anarchists reject the idea of *"leadership"* and so think in terms of a totally spontaneous revolution. This is also generally understood to imply that anarchists do not see the need for revolutionaries to organise together to influence the class struggle in the here and now. Hence the British SWP's Duncan Hallas:

> *"That an organisation of socialist militants is necessary is common ground on the left, a few anarchist purists apart. But what kind of organisation? One view, widespread amongst newly radicalised students and young workers, is that of the libertarians*

> *… [They have] hostility to centralised, co-ordinated activity and profound suspicion of anything smacking of 'leadership.' On this view nothing more than a loose federation of working groups is necessary or desirable. The underlying assumptions are that centralised organisations inevitably undergo bureaucratic degeneration and that the spontaneous activities of working people are the sole and sufficient basis for the achievement of socialism … some libertarians draw the conclusion that a revolutionary socialist party is a contradiction in terms. This, of course, is the traditional anarcho-syndicalist position."* [**Towards a revolutionary socialist party**, p. 39]

Ignoring the usual patronising references to the age and experience of non-Leninists, this argument can be faulted on many levels. Firstly, while libertarians do reject centralised structures, it does **not** mean we reject co-ordinated activity. This may be a common Marxist argument, but it is a straw man one. Secondly, anarchists do **not** reject the idea of *"leadership."* We simply reject the idea of hierarchical leadership. Thirdly, while all anarchists do think that a *"revolutionary socialist party"* is a contradiction in terms, it does not mean that we reject the need for revolutionary organisations (i.e. organisations of anarchists). While opposing centralised and hierarchical political parties, anarchists have long saw the need for anarchist groups and federations to discuss and spread our ideas and influence. We will discuss each issue in turn.

The first argument is the least important. For Marxists, co-ordination equals centralism and to reject centralisation means to reject co-ordination of joint activity. For anarchists, co-ordination does not each centralism or centralisation. This is why anarchism stresses federation and federalism as the



> *of socialism and maintained and still maintain that we are the true socialists in the broad and human sense of the word, ended by abandoning the term to avoid confusion with the many and various authoritarian and bourgeois deviations of socialism. Thus too we may have to abandon the term 'communist' for fear that our ideal of free human solidarity will be confused with the avaricious despotism which has for some time triumphed in Russia and which one party, inspired by the Russian example, seeks to impose world-wide."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 20]

That, to a large degree happened with anarchists simply calling themselves by that name (without adjectives) or libertarians to avoid confusion. This, sadly, resulted in two problems. Firstly, it gave Marxists even more potential to portray anarchism as being primarily against the state and not being as equally opposed to capitalism, hierarchy and inequality (as we argue in section H.2.4, anarchists have opposed the state as just one aspect of class and hierarchical society). Secondly, extreme right-wingers tried to appropriate the names *"libertarian"* and *"anarchist"* to describe their vision of extreme capitalism as *"anarchism,"* they claimed, was simply *"anti-government"* (see section F for discussion on why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist). To counter these distortions of anarchist ideas, many anarchists have re-appropriated the use of the words *"socialist"* and *"communist,"* although always in combination with the words *"anarchist"* and *"libertarian."*

Such combination of words is essential as the problem Malatesta predicted still remains. If one thing can be claimed for the 20th century, it is that it has seen the word *"socialism"* become narrowed and restricted into what anarchists call *"state socialism"* — socialism created and run from above, by the state (i.e. by the state bureaucracy and better described

# H.3 What are the myths of state socialism?

Ask most people what socialism means and they will point to the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and a host of other authoritarian, centralised, exploitative and oppressive party dictatorships. These regimes have in common two things. Firstly, the claim that their rulers are Marxists or socialists. Secondly, that they have successfully alienated millions of working class people from the very idea of socialism. Indeed, the supporters of capitalism simply had to describe the "socialist paradises" as they really are in order to put people off socialism. The Stalinist regimes and their various apologists (and even "opponents", like the Trotskyists, who defended them as *"degenerated workers' states"*) let the bourgeoisie have an easy time in dismissing all working-class demands and struggles as so many attempts to set up similar party dictatorships.

The association of *"socialism"* or *"communism"* with these dictatorships has often made anarchists wary of calling themselves socialists or communists in case our ideas are associated with them. As Errico Malatesta argued in 1924:

> *"I foresee the possibility that the communist anarchists will gradually abandon the term 'communist': it is growing in ambivalence and falling into disrepute as a result of Russian 'communist' despotism. If the term is eventually abandoned this will be a repetition of what happened with the word 'socialist.' We who, in Italy at least, were the first champions*



means of co-ordinating joint activity. Under a centralised system, the affairs of all are handed over to a handful of people at the centre. Their decisions are then binding on the mass of the members of the organisation whose position is simply that of executing the orders of those whom the majority elect. This means that power rests at the top and decisions flow from the top downwards. As such, the "revolutionary" party simply mimics the very society it claims to oppose (see section H.5.6) as well as being extremely ineffective (see section H.5.8)

In a federal structure, in contrast, decisions flow from the bottom up by means of councils of elected, mandated and recallable **delegates**. In fact, we discover anarchists like Bakunin and Proudhon arguing for elected, mandated and recallable delegates rather than for representatives in their ideas of how a free society worked years before the Paris Commune applied them in practice. The federal structure exists to ensure that any co-ordinated activity accurately reflects the decisions of the membership. As such, anarchists *"do not deny the need for co-ordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But they believe that co-ordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved* ***voluntarily,*** *by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above."* This means we *"vigorously oppose the establishment of an organisational structure that becomes an end in itself, of committees that linger on after their practical tasks have been completed, of a 'leadership' that reduces the 'revolutionary' to a mindless robot."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 139] In other words, co-ordination comes ***from below*** rather than being imposed from above by a few leaders. To use an analogy, federalist co-ordination is the co-ordination created in a strike by workers resisting their bosses. It is created by debate amongst equals and flows from below upwards. Centralised

co-ordination is the co-ordination imposed from the top-down by the boss.

Secondly, anarchists are not against all forms of *"leadership."* We are against hierarchical and institutionalised forms of leadership. In other words, of giving **power** to leaders. This is the key difference, as Albert Meltzer explained. *"In any grouping some people,"* he argued, *"do naturally 'give a lead.' But this should not mean they are a class apart. What they always reject is institutionalised leadership. That means their supporters become blind followers and the leadership not one of example or originality but of unthinking acceptance."* Any revolutionary in a factory where the majority have no revolutionary experience, will at times, "give a lead." However, *"no real Anarchist . .. would agree to be part of an* ***institutionalised leadership.*** *Neither would an Anarchist wait for a lead, but give one."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 58 and p. 59]

This means, as we argue in section J.3.6, that anarchists seek to influence the class struggle as **equals.** Rather than aim for positions of power, anarchists want to influence people by the power of their ideas as expressed in the debates that occur in the organisations created in the social struggle itself. This is because anarchists recognise that there is an unevenness in the level of ideas within the working class. This fact is obvious. Some workers accept the logic of the current system, others are critical of certain aspects, others (usually a minority) are consciously seeking a better society (and are anarchists, ecologists, Marxists, etc.) and so on. Only constant discussion, the clash of ideas, combined with collective struggle can develop political awareness and narrow the unevenness of ideas within the oppressed. As Malatesta argued, *"[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 59]

From this perspective, it follows that any attempt to create an institutionalised leadership structure means the end of the revolutionary process. Such "leadership" automatically means



Clearly, the standard Marxist account of anarchist organisations leave a lot to be desired. They concentrate on just one or two examples (almost always Bakunin's Alliance or the FAI, usually both) and ignore the vast bulk of anarchist organisations. Their accounts of the atypical organisations they do pick is usually flawed, particularly in the case of the FAI where they simply do not understand the historic context nor how it actually did organise. Finally, somewhat ironically, in their attacks on Bakunin's ideas they fail to note the similarities between his ideas and Lenin's and, equally significantly, the key areas in which they differ. All in all, anarchists would argue that it is Leninist ideas on the vanguard party which are *"elitist," "ineffective"* and *"downright bizarre."* As we discuss in section H.5, the only thing the Leninist "revolutionary" party is effective for is replacing one set of bosses with a new set (the leaders of the party).

Did the F.A.I. ignore *"open debate and common struggle."* No, of course not. The members of the F.A.I. were also members of the C.N.T. The C.N.T. was based around mass assemblies in which all members could speak. It was here that members of the F.A.I. took part in forming C.N.T. policy along with other C.N.T. members. Anarchists in the C.N.T. who were not members of the F.A.I. indicate this. Jose Borras Casacarosa noted that *"[o]ne has to recognise that the F.A.I. did not intervene in the C.N.T. from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants ... the decisions which determined the course taken by the C.N.T. were taken under constant pressure from these militants."* Jose Campos states that F.A.I. militants *"tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occasions ... if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other F.A.I. members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the faista in open assembly."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] It should be remembered that at union conferences and congresses the *"delegates, whether or not they were members of the FAI, were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 121]

Significantly, it should be noted that Morrow was re-cycling an argument which was produced by the reformist wing of the CNT in the 1930s after it had lost influence in the union rank-and-file (*"The myth of the FAI as conqueror and ruler of the CNT was created basically by the **Treinistas**."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Op. Cit.**, p. 134] ). That a Trotskyist should repeat the arguments of failed bureaucrats in the CNT is not too surprising in that Trotskyism itself is simply the ideology of Russian failed bureaucrats.



a hierarchical structure, one in which the leaders have power and make the decisions for the rest. This just reproduces the old class division of labour between those who think and those who act (i.e. between order givers and order takers). Rather than the revolutionary masses taking power in such a system, it is the "leaders" (i.e. a specific party hierarchy) who do so and the masses role becomes, yet again, simply that of selecting which boss tells them what to do.

So the anarchist federation does not reject the need of "leadership" in the sense of giving a led, of arguing its ideas and trying to win people to them. It does reject the idea that "leadership" should become separated from the mass of the people. Simply put, no party, no group of leaders have all the answers and so the active participation of all is required for a successful revolution. It is not a question of organisation versus non-organisation, or "leadership" versus non-"leadership" but rather what ***kind*** of organisation and the ***kind*** of leadership.

Clearly, then, anarchists do not reject or dismiss the importance of politically aware minorities organising and spreading their ideas within social struggles. As Caroline Cahm summarised in her excellent study of Kropotkin's thought, *"Kropotkin stressed the role of heroic minorities in the preparation for revolution."* [**Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–86**, p. 276] Yet, as John Crump correctly argued, the *"key words here are **in the preparation for revolution.** By their courage and daring in opposing capitalism and the state, anarchist minorities could teach by example and thereby draw increasing numbers into the struggle. But Kropotkin was not advocating substitutionism; the idea that a minority might carry out the revolution in place of the people was as alien to him as the notion that a minority would exercise rule after the revolution. In fact, Kropotkin recognised that the former would be a prescription for the latter."* [**Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, p. 9] In Kropotkin's own words:

> *"The idea of anarchist communism, today represented by feeble minorities, but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist groups ... will take strength from the support they find among the people, and will raise the red flag of the revolution ... On that day, what is now the minority will become the People, the great mass, and that mass rising against property and the State, will march forward towards anarchist communism."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 75]

This influence would be gained simply by the correctness of our ideas and the validity of our suggestions. This means that anarchists seek influence *"through advice and example, leaving the people ... to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others."* As such, any anarchist organisation would *"strive acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the [revolutionary] movement towards the realisation of our ideas. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will be useful if won in that way."* This means rejecting *"taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 108–9]

Moreover, unlike leading Marxists like Lenin and Karl Kautsky, anarchists think that socialist ideas are developed **within** the class struggle rather than outside it by the radical intelligentsia (see section H.5). Kropotkin argued that *"modern socialism has emerged out of the depths of the people's consciousness. If a few thinkers emerging from the bourgeoisie have given it the approval of science and the support of philosophy, the basis of the idea which they have given their own expression has nonetheless been the product of the collective spirit of the working people. The rational socialism of the International is still today our great-*



*reaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks... They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies — a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation . .. It had no official program by which all **faistas** could mechanically guide their actions."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 197–8] So regardless of Morrow's claims, the FAI was a federation of autonomous affinity groups in which, as one member put it, *"[e]ach FAI group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding ... they had no ... opportunity or jurisdiction ... to foist a party line upon the grass-roots."* [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 28]

Was the F.A.I. a "secret" organisation? When it was founded in 1927, Spain was under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and so it was illegal and secret by necessity. As Stuart Christie correctly notes, *"[a]s an organisation publicly committed to the overthrow of the dictatorship, the F.A.I. functioned, from 1927 to 1931, as an illegal rather than a secret organisation. From the birth of the Republic in 1931 onwards, the F.A.I. was simply an organisation which, until 1937, refused to register as an organisation as required by Republican Law."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 24] Thus it was illegal rather than secret. As one anarchist militant asked, *"[i]f it was secret, how come I was able to attend F.A.I. meetings without ever having joined or paid dues to the 'specific' organisation?"* [Francesco Carrasquer, quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24] The organisation held public meetings, attended by thousands, as well as journals and newspapers. Its most notable members, such as Durruti, hardly kept their affiliation secret. Moreover, given the periods of repression suffered by the Spanish libertarian movement throughout its history (including being banned and forced underground during the Republic) being an illegal organisation made perfect sense. The SWP, like most Marxists, ignore historical context and so mislead the reader.

In terms of size, the UAI was equal to the F.A.I. and outnumbered the "Alliance" considerably. Why was the UAI not a *"major anarchist organisation"*? Then there are the French anarchist organisations. In the 1930, the **Union Anarchiste** had over 2,000 members, an influential newspaper and organised many successful public meetings and campaigns (see David Berry's **A History of the French Anarchist movement, 1917–1945** for details). Surely that counts as a *"major anarchist organisation"*? Today, the French Anarchist Federation has a weekly newspaper and groups all across France as well as in Belgium. That is not secret and is one of the largest anarchist organisations in the world. We wonder why the SWP excluded such examples? Needless to say, all of these were based on federal structures rather than centralised ones.

As for the Spanish Anarchists, the common Leninist notion that it was centralised seems to flow from Felix Morrow's assertion that *"Spanish Anarchism had in the FAI a highly centralised party apparatus through which it maintained control of the CNT."* [**Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 100] Like the SWP, no attempt was made to provide evidence to support this claim. It undoubtedly flows from the dogmatic Leninist belief that centralism is automatically more efficient than federalism combined with the fact that the Leninists could not take over the CNT. However, in reality, the FAI neither controlled the CNT nor was it centralised or secret.

The FAI — the Iberian Anarchist Federation — was a federation of regional federations (including the Portuguese Anarchist Union). These regional federations, in turn, were federations of highly autonomous anarchist affinity groups. *"Like the CNT,"* noted Murray Bookchin, *"the FAI was structured along confederal lines ... Almost as a matter of second nature, dissidents were permitted a considerable amount of freedom in voicing and publishing material against the leadership and established policies."* The FAI *"was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bu-*



*est strength, and it was elaborated in working class organisation, under the first influence of the masses. The few writers who offered their help in the work of elaborating socialist ideas have merely been giving form to the aspirations that first saw their light among the workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] In other words, anarchists are a part of the working class (either by birth or by rejecting their previous class background and becoming part of it), the part which has generalised its own experiences, ideas and needs into a theory called *"anarchism"* and seeks to convince the rest of the validity of its ideas and tactics. This would be a dialogue, based on both learning **and** teaching.

As such, this means that the relationship between the specifically anarchist groups and oppressed peoples in struggle is a two way one. As well as trying to influence the social struggle, anarchists also try and learn from the class struggle and try to generalise from the experiences of their own struggles and the struggles of other working class people. Rather than seeing the anarchist group as some sort of teacher, anarchists see it as simply part of the social struggle and its ideas can and must develop from active participation within that struggle. As anarchists agree with Bakunin and reject the idea that their organisations should take power on behalf of the masses, it is clear that such groups are not imposing alien ideas upon people but rather try to clarify the ideas generated by working class people in struggle. It is an objective fact that there is a great difference in the political awareness within the masses of oppressed people. This uneven development means that they do not accept, all at once or in their totality, revolutionary ideas. There are layers. Groups of people, by ones and twos and then in larger numbers, become interested, read literature, talk with others, and create new ideas. The first groups that explicitly call their ideas *"anarchism"* have the right and duty to try to persuade others to join them. This is not opposed to the self-organisation of the working class, rather it is how working class people self-organise.

Lastly, most anarchists recognise the need to create specifically anarchist organisations to spread anarchist ideas and influence the class struggle. Suffice to say, the idea that anarchists reject this need to organise politically in order to achieve a revolution is not to be found in the theory and practice of all the major anarchist thinkers nor in the history and current practice of the anarchist movement itself. As Leninists themselves, at times, admit. Ultimately, if spontaneity was enough to create (and ensure the success of) a social revolution then we would be living in a libertarian socialist society. The fact that we are not suggests that spontaneity, however important, is not enough in itself. This simple fact of history is understood by anarchists and we organise ourselves appropriately.

See section J.3 for more details on what organisations anarchists create and their role in anarchist revolutionary theory (Section J.3.6, for example, has a fuller discussion of the role of anarchist groups in the class struggle). For a discussion of the role of anarchists in a revolution, see section J.7.5.

## H.2.11 Are anarchists *"anti-democratic"*?

One of the common arguments against anarchism is that it is *"anti-democratic"* (or *"elitist"*). For example, a member of the British **Socialist Workers Party** denounces anarchism for being *"necessarily deeply anti-democratic"* due to its *"thesis of the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego as against the imposition of **any** 'authority' over it,"* which, its is claimed, is the *"distinctly anarchist concept."* This position is an *"idealist conception"* in which *"**any** authority is seen as despotic; 'freedom' and 'authority' (and therefore 'freedom' and 'democracy') are opposites. This presumption of opposition to 'authority' was fostered by liberalism."* This is contrasted with the Marxist *"materialist understanding of society"* in which it *"was clear that 'authority' is necessary in **any** society where labour is collaborative."* [Derek



olution which overthrew the Tsar. Simply put, the one event that validates the Bolshevik model is the October Revolution of 1917 and even that failed (see section H.5.12).

Moreover, it backfires on his own politics. The very issues which Stack raises as being *"elitist"* in Bakunin (secret and open organisation, centralisation, top-down decision making) are shared by Lenin. Given that no other anarchist organisation has ever followed the Alliance structure (and, indeed, it is even doubtful the Alliance followed it!), it makes a mockery of the scientific method to base a generalisation on an exception rather than the norm (indeed, the only exception). For Stack to use Bakunin's ideas on this issue as some kind of evidence against anarchism staggers belief. Given that anarchists reject Bakunin's ideas on this subject while Leninists continue to subscribe to Lenin's, it is very clear that Stack is being extremely hypocritical in this matter.

One of Stack's comrades in the SWP highlighted another of the great Marxist myths about anarchist organisation when he stated categorically that *"[a]ll the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised but have operated in secret."* As evidence they echo Stack's distortions of Bakunin's Alliance before stating that the *"anarchist organisation inside the Spanish C.N.T., the F.A.I., was centralised and secret. A revolutionary party thrives on open debate and common struggle with wider groups of workers."* [**Socialist Worker**, no. 1714, 16/09/2000]

It is just as well it stated *"all the major anarchist organisations"* as it is vague enough to allow the denial of obvious counter-examples as not being "major" enough. We can point to hundreds of anarchist organisations that are/were not secret. For example, the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI) was a non-secret organisation. Given that it had around 20,000 members in 1920, we wonder by what criteria the SWP excludes it from being a *"major anarchist organisation"*? After all, estimates of the membership of the F.A.I. vary from around 6,000 to around 30,000. Bakunin's "Alliance" amounted to, at most, under 100.

*were matters of sheer survival.*" [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 24]

For anarchists, the similarity in structure between Bakunin and Lenin is no source of embarrassment. Rather, we argue that it is due to a similarity in political conditions in Russia and **not** similarities in political ideas. If we look at Bakunin's ideas on social revolution and the workers' movement we see a fully libertarian perspective — of a movement from the bottom-up, based on the principles of direct action, self-management and federalism. Anarchists since his death have applied **these** ideas to the specific anarchist organisation as well, rejecting the non-libertarian elements of Bakunin's ideas which Stack correctly (if somewhat hypocritically and dishonestly) denounces. All in all, Stack has shown himself to be a hypocrite or, at best, a *"most reactionary philistine"* (to use Lenin's choice expression).

In addition, it would be useful to evaluate the effectiveness of Stack's Leninist alternative. Looking at the outcome of the Russian Revolution, we can only surmise that it is not very effective. This was because its goal is meant to be a socialist society based on soviet democracy. Did the Russian Revolution actually result in such a society? Far from it. The Kronstadt revolt was repressed in 1921 because it demanded soviet democracy. Nor was this an isolated example. The Bolsheviks had been disbanding soviets with elected non-Bolshevik majorities since early 1918 (i.e. **before** the start of the Civil War) and by 1920 leading Bolsheviks were arguing that dictatorship of the proletariat could only be expressed by means of the dictatorship of the party. Clearly, the Bolshevik method is hardly *"effective"* in the sense of achieving its stated goals. Nor was it particularly effective before the revolution either. During the 1905 revolution, the Bolsheviks opposed the councils of workers' deputies (soviets) which had been formed and gave them an ultimatum: either accept the programme of the Bolsheviks or else disband! The soviets ignored them. In February 1917 the Bolshevik party opposed the actions that produced the rev-



Howl, *"The Legacy of Hal Draper,"* pp. 137–49, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 145] Hal Draper is quoted arguing that:

> *By the 'principle of authority' the consistent anarchist means principled opposition to any exercise of authority, including opposition to authority derived from the most complete democracy and exercised in completely democratic fashion ... Of all ideologies, anarchism is the one most fundamentally anti-democratic in principle, since it is not only unalterably hostile to democracy in general but particularly to any socialist democracy of the most ideal kind that could be imagined."*

Such as argument is, of course, just ridiculous. Indeed, it is flawed on so many levels its hard to know where to start. The obvious place is the claim that anarchism is the most *"fundamentally anti-democratic in principle."* Now, given that there are fascists, monarchists, supporters (like Trotsky) of *"party dictatorship"* and a host of others who advocate minority rule (even by one person) over everyone else, can it be argued with a straight face that anarchism is the most *"anti-democratic"* because it argues for the liberty of all? Is the idea and practice of absolute monarchy and fascism **really** more democratic than anarchism? Clearly not, although this does indicate the quality of this kind of argument. Equally, the notion that liberalism rests on a *"presumption of opposition to 'authority'"* cannot be supported by even a casual understanding of the subject. That ideology has always sought ways to justify the authority structures of the liberal state not to mention the hierarchies produced by capitalist private property. So the notion that liberalism is against "authority" is hard to square with both its theory and reality.

Another obvious point is that anarchists do not see **any** authority as *"despotic."* As we discuss in section H.4, this common

Marxist assertion is simply not true. Anarchists have always been very clear on the fact they reject specific kinds of authority and not *"authority"* as such. In fact, by the term *"principal of authority,"* Bakunin meant **hierarchical** authority, and not all forms of *"authority"*. This explains why Kropotkin argued that *"the origin of the anarchist conception of society"* lies in *"the criticism"* of the *"hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society"* and stressed that anarchism *"refuses all hierarchical organisation."* [**Anarchism**, p. 158 and p. 137]

This means, just to state the obvious, that making and sticking by collective decisions are **not** acts of authority. Rather they simply expressions of individual autonomy. Clearly in most activities there is a need to co-operate with other people. Indeed, **living** involves the *"absolute sovereignty of the individual ego"* (as if anarchists like Bakunin used such terms!) being *"restricted"* by exercising that *"sovereignty."* Take, for example, playing football. This involves finding others who seek to play the game, organising into teams, agreeing on rules and so on. All terrible violations of the *"absolute sovereignty of the individual ego,"* yet it was precisely the *"sovereignty"* of the *"individual"* which produced the desire to play the game in the first place. What sort of *"sovereignty"* is it that negates itself when it is exercised? Clearly, then, the Marxist "summary" of anarchist ideas on this matter, like of many others, is poverty stricken.

And, unsurprisingly enough, we find anarchist thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin attacking this idea of *"the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego"* in the most severe terms. Indeed, they thought was a bourgeois theory which simply existed to justify the continued domination and exploitation of working class people by the ruling class. Kropotkin quite clearly recognised its anti-individual and unfree nature by labelling it *"the authoritarian individualism which stifles us"* and stressing its *"narrow-minded, and therefore foolish"* nature. [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 130] Similarly, it would do the Marx-



**Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 769] Moreover, *"Communist cells of all kinds must be subordinate to each other in a strictly hierarchical order of rank as precisely as possible."* Democratic centralism itself was fundamentally hierarchical, with its *"basic principles"* being that *"the higher bodies shall be elected by the lower, that all instructions of the higher bodies are categorically and necessarily binding on the lower."* Indeed, *"there shall be a strong party centre whose authority is universally and unquestionably recognised for all leading party comrades in the period between congresses."* Any *"advocacy of broad 'autonomy' for the local party organisations only weakens the ranks of the Communist Party"* and *"favours petty-bourgeois, anarchist and disruptive tendencies."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 198]

It seems strange for Stack to argue that Bakunin's ideas (assuming he presents an honest account of them, of course) were *"far more elitist and less democratic than Lenin's model"* as they obviously were not. Indeed, the similarities between Stack's summary of Bakunin's ideas and Leninist theory are striking. The Leninist party has the same division between open and secret (legal and illegal) structures as in Bakunin's, the same centralism and top-down nature. Lenin argued that *"[i]n all countries, even in those that are freest, most 'legal,' and most 'peaceful' ... it is now absolutely indispensable for every Communist Party to systematically combine legal and illegal work, legal and illegal organisation."* He stressed that *"[o]nly the most reactionary philistine, no matter what cloak of fine 'democratic' and pacifist phrases he may don, will deny this fact or the conclusion that of necessity follows from it, viz., that all legal Communist parties must immediately form illegal organisations for the systematic conduct of illegal work."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 195] This was due to the threat of state repression, which also faced Bakunin's Alliance. As Murray Bookchin argued, *"Bakunin's emphasis on conspiracy and secrecy can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy*

*ditions of Communism"* and *"Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution."* These two documents provide a vision of Leninist organisation which is fundamentally elitist.

Lenin's *"model"* is clear from these documents. The parties adhering to the Communist International had to have two overlapping forms, one legal (i.e. public) and another *"illegal"* (i.e. secret). It was the *"duty"* of these parties *"to create everywhere a parallel illegal organisational apparatus."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 767] Needless to say, this illegal organisation would be the real controlling body, as it would have to be made up of trusted communists and could only be even more tightly centralised than the open party as its members could only be appointed from above by the illegal organisation's central committee. To stress that the *"illegal"* (i.e. secret) organisation controlled the party, the Communist International agreed that that *"[i]n countries where the bourgeoisie ... is still in power, the Communist parties must learn to combine legal and illegal activity in a planned way. However, the legal work must be placed under the actual control of the illegal party at all times."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 198–9] In this, it should be noted, the Leninists followed Marx's in 1850 comments (which he later rejected) on the need to *"establish an independent secret and public organisation of the workers' party."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 10, p. 282]

Even in its open, public mode, the Communist Party was to be a highly centralised organisation, with all decisions on the national level made by the Central Committee. The parties must be as centralised as possible, with a party centre which has strength and authority and is equipped with the most comprehensive powers. Also, the party press and other publications, and all party publishing houses, must be subordinated to the party presidium. This applied on an international level as well, with the decisions of the Communist International's Executive Committee binding on all parties belonging to it. [**Op.**



ist argument little good if they quoted Bakunin arguing that the *"freedom of individuals is by no means an individual matter. It is a collective matter, a collective product. No individual can be free outside of human society or without its co-operation"* or that he considered *"individualism"* as a *"bourgeois principle."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 46 and p. 57] He had nothing but contempt for, as he put it, *"that individualistic, egotistical, malicious and illusory freedom"* which was *"extolled"* by all the *"schools of bourgeois liberalism."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 196]

Perhaps, of course, these two famous anarchists were not, in fact, *"consistent"* anarchists, but that claim is doubtful.

The notion that anarchism is inherently an extreme form of "individualism" seems to be the great assumption of Marxism. Hence the continual repetition of this "fact" and the continual attempt to link revolutionary anarchism with Stirner's ideas (the only anarchist to stress the importance of the *"ego"*). Thus we find Engels talking about *"Stirner, the great prophet of contemporary anarchism — Bakunin has taken a great deal from him ... Bakunin blended [Stirner] with Proudhon and labelled the blend 'anarchism'"* For Marx, *"Bakunin has merely translated Proudhon's and Stirner's anarchy into the crude language of the Tartars."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 175 and p. 153] In reality, of course, Stirner was essentially unknown to the anarchist movement until his book was rediscovered in the late nineteenth century and even then his impact was limited. In terms of Bakunin, while his debt to Proudhon is well known and obvious, the link with Stirner seems to have existed only in the heads of Marx and Engels. As Mark Leier notes, *"there is no evidence of this ... Bakunin mentions Stirner precisely once in his collected works, and then only in passing ... as far as can be determined, Bakunin had no interest, even a negative one, in Stirner's ideas."* [**Bakunin: The Creative Passion**, p. 97] Nor was Proudhon influenced by Stirner (it is doubtful he even knew of him) while Stirner criticised the

French anarchist. Does that mean Stirner is the only "consistent" anarchist? Moreover, even in terms of Stirner, Marxist diatribes about the *"absolute sovereignty of the individual ego"* fail to note that the egoist himself advocated organisation (*"the union of egos"*) and was well aware that it required agreements between individuals which, in the abstract, reduced "liberty" (the union *"offer[s] a greater measure of liberty"* while containing a lesser amount of *"unfreedom"* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 308]).

Anarchism does, of course, derive from the Greek for *"without authority"* or *"without rulers"* and this, unsurprisingly, informs anarchist theory and visions of a better world. This means that anarchism is against the *"domination of man by man"* (and woman by woman, woman by man, and so on). However, *"[a]s knowledge has penetrated the governed masses ... the people have revolted against the form of authority then felt most intolerable. This spirit of revolt in the individual and the masses, is the natural and necessary fruit of the spirit of domination; the vindication of human dignity, and the saviour of social life."* Thus *"freedom is the necessary preliminary to any true and equal human association."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 54 and p. 40] In other words, anarchism comes from the struggle of the oppressed against their rulers and is an expression of individual and social freedom. Anarchism was born from the class struggle.

Taking individual liberty as a good thing, the next question is how do free individuals co-operate together in such a way as to ensure their continued liberty (*"The belief in freedom assumes that human beings can co-operate."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 442]). This suggests that any association must be one of equality between the associating individuals. This can only be done when everyone involved takes a meaningful role in the decision making process and because of this anarchists stress the need for **self-government** (usually called ***self-management***) of both individuals and groups.



*popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments — a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations; and, finally, ... universal human brotherhood triumphing on the ruins of all the states."* [Bakunin, **Statism and Anarchy**, p. 33] In other words, Bakunin saw the social revolution in terms of popular participation and control, **not** the seizing of power by a "revolutionary" party or group.

Unlike Lenin, Bakunin did not confuse party power with people power. His organisation, for all it faults (and they were many), did not aim to take power in the name of the working class and exercise power through a centralised, top-down state. Rather, its would be based on the *"natural influence"* of its members within mass organisations. The influence of anarchists would, therefore, be limited to the level by which their specific ideas were accepted by other members of the same organisations after discussion and debate. As regards the nature of the labour movement, we must point out that Bakunin provided the same *"serious"* answer as the anarcho-syndicalists — namely, revolutionary labour unionism. As we discuss in section H.2.8, Bakunin's ideas on this matter are nearly identical to those of the syndicalists Stack praises.

As noted, however, no anarchist group has reproduced the internal structure of the Alliance, which means that Stack's point is simply historical in nature. Sadly this is not the case with his own politics as the ideas he attacks actually parallel Lenin's model in many ways (although, as indicated above, how Bakunin's organisation would function in the class struggle was fundamentally different, as Lenin's party sought power for itself). Given that Stack is proposing Lenin's model as a viable means of organising revolutionaries, it is useful to summarise it. We shall take as an example two statements issued by the Second World Congress of the Communist International in 1920 under the direction of Lenin. These are *"Twenty-One Con-*

Spanish labour movement the most dynamic and revolutionary in the world.

As regards Stack's summary of Bakunin's organisation goes, we must note that Stack is quoting an unnamed source on Bakunin's views on this subject. We, therefore, have no way of evaluating whether this is a valid summary of Bakunin's ideas on this matter. As we indicate elsewhere (see section J.3.7) Leninist summaries of Bakunin's ideas on secret organising usually leave a lot to be desired (by usually leaving a lot out or quoting out of context certain phrases). As such, and given the total lack of relevance of this model for anarchists since the 1870s, we will not bother to discuss this summary. Simply put, it is a waste of time to discuss an organisational model which no modern anarchist supports.

Moreover, there is a key way in which Bakunin's ideas on this issue were far **less** *"elitist"* and **more** *"democratic"* than Lenin's model. Simply, Bakunin always stressed that his organisation *"rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172] The *"main purpose and task of the organisation,"* he argued, would be to *"help the people to achieve self-determination."* It would *"not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character"* and *"not placed above the people like state power."* Its programme *"consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people"* and its influence is *"not contrary to the free development and self-determination of the people, or its organisation from below according to its own customs and instincts because it acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power."* Thus the revolutionary group would be the *"helper"* of the masses, with an "organisation within the people itself." [quoted by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, p. 259, p. 261, p. 256 and p. 261] The revolution itself would see *"an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with*



Self-management within free associations and decision making from the bottom-up is the only way domination can be eliminated. This is because, by making our own decisions ourselves, we automatically end the division of society into governors and governed (i.e. end hierarchy). As Anarchism clearly means support for freedom and equality, it automatically implies opposition to all forms of hierarchical organisation and authoritarian social relationship. This means that anarchist support for individual liberty does not end, as many Marxists assert, in the denial of organisation or collective decision making but rather in support for **self-managed** groups. Only this form of organisation can end the division of society into rulers and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and create an environment in which individuals can associate without denying their freedom and equality.

Therefore, the **positive** side of anarchism (which naturally flows from its opposition to authority) results in a political theory which argues that people must control their own struggles, organisations and affairs directly. This means we support mass assemblies and their federation via councils of mandated delegates subject to recall if they break their mandates (i.e. they act as they see fit, i.e. as politicians or bureaucrats, and not as the people who elected them desire). This way people directly govern themselves and control their own lives, allowing those affected by a decision to have a say in it and so they manage their own affairs directly and without hierarchy. Rather than imply an "individualism" which denies the importance of association and the freedom it can generate, anarchism implies an opposition to hierarchy in all its forms and the support free association of equals. In other words, anarchism can generally be taken to mean support for self-government or self-management, both by individuals and by groups.

In summary, anarchist support for individual liberty incurs a similar support for self-managed groups. In such groups, individuals co-operate as equals to maximise their liberty. This

means, for anarchists, Marxists are just confusing co-operation with coercion, agreement with authority, association with subordination. Thus the Marxist *"materialist"* concept of authority distorts the anarchist position and, secondly, is supra-historical in the extreme. Different forms of decision making are lumped together, independent of the various forms it may assume. To equate hierarchical and self-managed decision making, antagonistic and harmonious forms of organisation, alienated authority or authority retained in the hands of those directly affected by it, can only be a source of confusion. Rather than being a *"materialistic"* approach, the Marxist one is pure philosophical idealism — the postulating of a-historic concepts independently of the individuals and societies that generate specific social relationships and ways of working together.

Similarly, it would be churlish to note that Marxists themselves have habitually rejected democratic authority when it suited them. Even that *"higher type of democracy"* of the soviets was ignored by the Bolshevik party once it was in power. As we discuss in section H.6.1, faced with the election of non-Bolshevik majorities to the soviets, Bolshevik armed force was used to overthrow the results. In addition, they also gerrymanderd soviets once they could not longer count on an electoral majority. In the workplace, the Bolsheviks replaced workers' economic democracy with *"one-man management"* appointed from above, by the state, armed with *"dictatorial power"* (see section H.3.14). As discussed in section H.3.8, the Bolsheviks generalised their experiences exercising power into explicit support for party dictatorship. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Trotsky repeated this conclusion and repeated advocated party dictatorship, urging the party to use its power to crush opposition in the working class to its rule. For the Bolshevik tradition, the power of the party to ignore the wishes of the class it claims to represent is a fundamental ideological position.



count of anarchist ideas then his claims would quickly be seen to be nonsense. And as for the claim of being *"ineffective,"* well, given that Stack's article is an attempt to combat anarchist influence in the anti-globalisation movement it would suggest the opposite.

Even looking at the example of Bakunin's Alliance, we can see evidence that Stack's summary is simply wrong. It seems strange for Stack to claim that the Alliance was *"ineffective."* After all, Marx spent many years combating it (and Bakunin's influence) in the First International. Indeed, so effective was it that anarchist ideas dominated most sections of that organisation, forcing Marx to move the General Council to America to ensure that it did not fall into the hands of the anarchists (i.e. of the majority). Moreover, it was hardly *"ineffective"* when it came to building the International. As Marxist Paul Thomas notes, *"the International was to prove capable of expanding its membership only at the behest of the Bakuninists [sic!]"* and *"[w]herever the International was spreading, it was doing so under the mantle of Bakuninism."* [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 315 and p. 319] Even Engels had to admit that the Spanish section was *"one of finest organisations within the International* (which the Spanish Marxists had to *"rescue from the influence of the Alliance humbugs"*). [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 292]

Yet Stack considers this as an example of an *"ineffective"* organisation! But, to be fair, this seems to have been a common failing with Marxists. In 1877, for example, Engels showed his grasp of things by saying *"we may safely predict that the new departure [in Spain] will not come from these 'anarchist' spouters, but from the small body of intelligent and energetic workmen who, in 1872, remained true to the International."* [Marx, Engels, Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 163] In reality, the Spanish Socialist Party was bureaucratic and reformist to the core while it was the anarchists who made the

> *"That this was far more elitist and less democratic than Lenin's model is clear."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

There are, as is obvious, numerous problems with Stack's assertions. Firstly, he makes absolutely **no** attempt to discuss anarchist ideas on the question of revolutionary organisation. Rather, he prefers to present a somewhat distorted account of the ideas of Bakunin on the structural aspects of his organisation, ideas which died with him in 1876! Secondly, as Stack fails to discuss how anarchists (including Bakunin) see their organisations operating, its hard to determine whether they are *"ineffective"* or *"elitist."* This is hardly surprising, as they are neither. Thirdly, even as regards his own example (Bakunin's Alliance) his claim that it was *"ineffectual"* seems inappropriate in the extreme. Whether it was *"elitist"* or *"downright bizarre"* is hard to determine, as Stack quotes an unnamed author and their quotes from its structure. Fourthly, and ironically for Stack, Lenin's *"model"* shared many of the same features as those of Bakunin's!

Significantly, Stack fails to discuss any of the standard anarchist ideas on how revolutionaries should organise. As we discuss in section J.3, there are three main types: the *"synthesis"* federation, the *"class struggle"* federation and those inspired by the *"Platform."* In the twenty-first century, these are the main types of anarchist organisation. As such, it would be extremely hard to argue that these are *"elitist," "ineffective"* or *"downright bizarre."* What these organisational ideas have in common is the vision of an anarchist organisation as a federation of autonomous self-managed groups which work with others as equals. How can directly democratic organisations, which influence others by the force of their ideas and by their example, be *"elitist"* or *"downright bizarre"*? Little wonder, then, that Stack used an example from 1868 to attack anarchism in the twenty-first century! If he actually presented an honest ac-



So, remember when Lenin or Trotsky argue for *"party dictatorship"*, the over-riding of the democratic decisions of the masses by the party, the elimination of workers factory committees in favour of appointed managers armed with *"dictatorial"* power or when the Bolshevik disbanded soviets with non-Bolshevik majorities, it is **anarchism** which is fundamentally *"anti-democratic"*! All in all, that anyone can claim that anarchism is more *"anti-democratic"* than Leninism is a joke.

However, all these anti-democratic acts do fit in nicely with Howl's *"materialist"* Marxist concept that *"'authority' is necessary in **any** society where labour is collaborative."* Since *"authority"* is essential and all forms of collective decision making are necessarily *"authoritarian"* and involve *"subordination,"* then it clearly does not really matter how collectives are organised and how decisions are reached. Hence the lack of concern for the liberty of the working people subjected to the (peculiarly bourgeois-like) forms of authority preferred by Lenin and Trotsky. It was precisely for this reason, to differentiate between egalitarian (and so libertarian) forms of organisation and decision making and authoritarian ones, that anarchists called themselves *"anti-authoritarians."*

Even if we ignore all the anti-democratic acts of Bolshevism (or justify them in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution, as most Leninists do), the anti-democratic nature of Leninist ideas still come to the fore. The Leninist support for centralised state power brings their attack on anarchism as being *"anti-democratic"* into clear perspective and, ultimately, results in the affairs of millions being decided upon by a handful of people in the Central Committee of the vanguard party. As an example, we will discuss Trotsky's arguments against the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine.

For Trotsky, the Makhnovists were against *"Soviet power."* This, he argued, was simply *"the authority of all the local soviets in the Ukraine"* as they all *"recognise the central power which they themselves have elected."* Consequently, the Makhnovists

rejected not only central authority but also the local soviets as well. Trotsky also suggested that there were no *"appointed"* persons in Russia as *"there is no authority in Russia but that which is elected by the whole working class and working peasantry. It follows [!] that commanders appointed by the central Soviet Government are installed in their positions by the will of the working millions."* He stressed that one can speak of *"appointed"* persons *"only under the bourgeois order, when Tsarist officials or bourgeois ministers appointed at their own discretion commanders who kept the soldier masses subject to the bourgeois classes."* When the Makhnovists tried to call the fourth regional conference of peasants, workers and partisans to discuss the progress of the Civil War in early 1919, Trotsky, unsurprisingly enough, *"categorically banned"* it. With typical elitism, he noted that the Makhnovist movement had *"its roots in the ignorant masses"*! [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, p. 277, p. 280, p. 295 and p. 302]

In other words, because the Bolshevik government had been given power by a national Soviet Congress in the past (and only remained there by gerrymandering and disbanding soviets), he (as its representative) had the right to ban a conference which would have expressed the wishes of millions of workers, peasants and partisans fighting for the revolution! The fallacious nature of his arguments is easily seen. Rather than executing the will of millions of toilers, Trotsky was simply executing his own will. He did not consult those millions nor the local soviets which had, in Bolshevik ideology, surrendered their power to the handful of people in the central committee of the Bolshevik Party. By banning the conference he was very effectively undermining the practical, functional democracy of millions and replacing it with a purely formal "democracy" based on empowering a few leaders at the centre. Yes, indeed, truly democracy in action when one person can deny a revolutionary people its right to decide its own fate!



## H.2.14 Are anarchist organisations *"ineffective," "elitist"* or *"downright bizarre"*?

Marxists often accuse anarchist organisations of being *"elitist"* or *"secret."* Pat Stack (of the British SWP) ponders the history of anarchist organisation (at least the SWP version of that history):

> *"how otherwise [than Leninist vanguard political parties] do revolutionaries organise? Apart from the serious efforts of anarcho-syndicalists to grapple with this problem, anarchists have failed to pose any serious alternative. In as much as they do, they have produced either the ineffective, the elitist or the downright bizarre. Bakunin's organisation, the 'Alliance of Social Democracy', managed all three: 'The organisation had two overlapping forms, one secret, involving only the "intimates", and one public, the Alliance of Social Democracy. Even in its open, public mode, the alliance was to be a highly centralised organisation, with all decisions on the national level approved by the Central Committee. Since it was the real controlling body, the secret organisation was even more tightly centralised ... with first a Central Committee, then a "central Geneva section" acting as the "permanent delegation of the permanent Central Committee", and, finally, within the central Geneva section a "Central Bureau", which was to be both the "executive power ... composed of three, or five, or even seven members" of the secret organisation and the executive directory of the public organisation.'*

social changes becomes a few leaders working in existing (i.e. bourgeois) structures and bodies (see section H.1.5).

As can be seen, anarchists reject *"political"* struggle (i.e. electioneering) for good (and historically vindicated) reasons. This makes a mockery of Marxists assertions (beginning with Marx) that anarchists like Bakunin *"opposed all political action by the working class since this would imply 'recognition' of the existing state."* [Derek Howl, *"The Legacy of Hal Draper,"* pp. 13–49, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 147] This, in fact, is a common Marxist claim, namely that anarchists reject *"political struggle"* on principle (i.e. for idealistic purposes). In the words of Engels, Bakunin was *"opposed to all political action by the working class, since this would in fact involve recognition of the existing state."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49] Sadly, like all Marxists, he failed to indicate where, in fact, Bakunin actually said that. As can be seen, this was **not** the case. Bakunin, like all revolutionary anarchists, rejected *"political action"* (in the sense of electioneering) simply because they feared that such tactics would be counterproductive and undermine the revolutionary nature of the labour movement. As the experience of Marxist Social Democracy showed, he was correct.

In summary, while anarchists reject standing of socialists in elections (*"political action,"* narrowly defined), we do not reject the need to fight for political reforms or specific political issues. However, we see such action as being based on collective working class **direct action** organised around combative organs of working class self-management and power rather than the individualistic act of placing a cross on a piece of power once every few years and letting leaders fight your struggles for you.



Unsurprisingly, the anarchist Nestor Makhno replied by arguing that he considered it *"an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call congresses on their own account, to discuss their affairs. That is why the prohibition by the central authorities on the calling of such congresses ... represent a direct and insolent violation of the rights of the workers."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 129] We will leave it to the readers to decide which of the two, Trotsky or Makhno, showed the fundamentally *"anti-democratic"* perspective.

Moreover, there are a few theoretical issues that need to be raised on this matter. Notice, for example, that no attempt is made to answer the simple question of why having 51% of a group automatically makes you right! It is taken for granted that the minority should subject themselves to the will of the majority before that will is even decided upon. Does that mean, for example, that Marxists refuse minorities the right of civil disobedience if the majority acts in a way which harms their liberties and equality? If, for example, the majority in community decides to implement race laws, does that mean that Marxists would **oppose** the discriminated minority taking direct action to undermine and abolish them? Or, to take an example closer to Marxism, in 1914 the leaders of the Social Democratic Party in the German Parliament voted for war credits. The anti-war minority of that group went along with the majority in the name of "democracy," "unity" and "discipline". Would Howl and Draper argue that they were right to do so? If they were not right to betray the ideas of Marxism and international working class solidarity, then why not? They did, after all, subject themselves to the *"most perfect socialist democracy"* and so, presumably, made the correct decision.

Simply put, the arguments that anarchists are *"anti-democratic"* are question-begging in the extreme, when not simply hypocritical.

As a general rule-of-thumb, anarchists have little problem with the minority accepting the decisions of the majority after a process of free debate and discussion. As we argue in section A.2.11, such collective decision making is compatible with anarchist principles — indeed, is based on them. By governing ourselves directly, we exclude others governing us. However, we do not make a fetish of this, recognising that, in certain circumstances, the minority must and should ignore majority decisions. For example, if the majority of an organisation decide on a policy which the minority thinks is disastrous then why should they follow the majority? Equally, if the majority make a decision which harms the liberty and equality of a non-oppressive and non-exploitative minority, then that minority has the right to reject the "authority" of the majority. Hence Carole Pateman:

> *"The essence of liberal social contract theory is that individuals ought to promise to, or enter an agreement to, obey representatives, to whom they have alienated their right to make political decisions ... Promising ... is an expression of individual freedom and equality, yet commits individuals for the future. Promising also implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation, and of evaluating and changing their own actions and relationships; promises may sometimes justifiably be broken. However, to promise to obey is to deny or limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities. To promise to obey is to state that, in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 19]



> *programme, however advanced it may have been at the beginning."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252]

Ultimately, the bourgeois tactics used ended up with bourgeois results. As Emma Goldman argued, socialism *"was led astray by the evil spirit of politics"* and *"landed in the [political] trap and has now but one desire — to adjust itself to the narrow confines of its cage, to become part of the authority, part of the very power that has slain the beautiful child Socialism and left behind a hideous monster."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 103] The net effect of *"political action"* was the corruption of the socialist movement into a reformist party which betrayed the promise of socialism in favour of making existing society better (so it can last longer). This process confirmed Bakunin's predictions. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"The middle class will not give up its power without a struggle. It will resist. And in proportion as Socialists will become part of the Government and share power with the middle class, their Socialism will grow paler and paler. This is, indeed, what Socialism is rapidly doing. Were this no so, the middle classes ... would not share their power with the Socialists."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 102]

In addition, as we argue in section J.2.5, direct action is either based on (or creates) forms of self-managed working class organisations. The process of collective struggle, in other words, necessitates collective forms of organisation and decision making. These combative organisations, as well as conducting the class struggle under capitalism, can also be the framework of a free society (see section H.1.4). However, standing in elections does **not** produce such alternative social structures and, indeed, hinders them as the focus for

*of the interests of the proletariat and the conquest of political power."* [quoted by Susan Milner, **The Dilemmas of Internationalism**, p. 49] Significantly, while this International and its member parties (particular the German Social Democrats) were happy to expel anarchists, they never expelled the leading reformists from their ranks.

So, in general, anarchists use the word *"political action"* to refer exclusively to the taking part of revolutionaries in bourgeois elections (i.e. electioneering or parliamentarianism). It does not mean a rejection of fighting for political reforms or a lack of interest in political issues, quite the reverse in fact. The reason **why** anarchists reject this tactic is discussed in section J.2.6).

For Kropotkin, the idea that you could somehow "prepare" for a revolution by electioneering was simply a joke. *"As if the bourgeoisie,"* he argued, *"still holding on to its capital, could allow them [the socialists] to experiment with socialism even if they succeeded in gaining control of power! As if the conquest of the municipalities were possible without the conquest of the factories."* He saw that *"those who yesterday were considered socialists are today letting go of socialism, by renouncing its mother idea ["the need to replace the wage system and to abolish individual ownership of ... social capital"] and passing over into the camp of the bourgeoisie, while retaining, so as to hide their turnabout, the label of socialism."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 181 and p. 180] The differences in results between direct action and electioneering were obvious:

> *"However moderate the war cry — provided it is in the domain of relations between capital and labour — as soon as it proceeds to put it into practice by revolutionary methods, it ends by increasing it and will be led to demand the overthrow of the regime of property. On the other hand a party which confines itself to parliamentary politics ends up abandoning its*



Thus, for anarchists, a democracy which does not involve individual rights to dissent, to disagree and to practice civil disobedience would violate freedom and equality, the very values Marxists usually claim to be at the heart of their politics. The claim that anarchism is *"anti-democratic"* basically hides the argument that the minority must become the slave of the majority — with no right of dissent when the majority is wrong (in practice, of course, it is usually meant the orders and laws of the minority who are elected to power). In effect, it wishes the minority to be subordinate, not equal, to the majority. Anarchists, in contrast, because we support self-management also recognise the importance of dissent and individuality — in essence, because we are in favour of self-management ("democracy" does not do the concept justice) we also favour the individual freedom that is its rationale. We support the liberty of individuals because we believe in self-management ("democracy") so passionately.

So Howl and Draper fail to understand the rationale for democratic decision making — it is not based on the idea that the majority is always right but that individual freedom requires democracy to express and defend itself. By placing the collective above the individual, they undermine democratic values and replace them with little more than tyranny by the majority (or, more likely, a tiny minority who claim to represent the majority).

Moreover, progress is determined by those who dissent and rebel against the status quo and the decisions of the majority. That is why anarchists support the right of dissent in self-managed groups — in fact, dissent, refusal, revolt by individuals and minorities is a key aspect of self-management. Given that Leninists do not support self-management (rather they, at best, support the Lockean notion of electing a government as being "democracy") it is hardly surprising they, like Locke, view dissent as a danger and something to denounce. Anarchists, on the other hand, recognising that self-management's (i.e. direct

democracy's) rationale and base is in individual freedom, recognise and support the rights of individuals to rebel against what they consider as unjust impositions. As history shows, the anarchist position is the correct one — without rebellion, numerous minorities would never have improved their position and society would stagnate. Indeed, Howl's and Draper's comments are just a reflection of the standard capitalist diatribe against strikers and protestors — they do not need to protest, for they live in a "democracy."

This Marxist notion that anarchists are "anti-democratic" gets them into massive contradictions. Lance Selfa's highly inaccurate and misleading article *"Emma Goldman: A life of controversy"* is an example of this [**International Socialist Review**, no. 34, March-April 2004] Ignoring the far more substantial evidence for Leninist elitism, Selfa asserted that *"Goldman never turned away from the idea that heroic individuals, not masses, make history"* and quotes from her 1910 essay *"Minorities Versus Majorities"* to prove this. Significantly, he does not actually refute the arguments Goldman expounded. He does, needless to say, misrepresent them.

The aim of Goldman's essay was to state the obvious — that the mass is not the source for new ideas. Rather, new, progressive, ideas are the product of minorities and which then spread to the majority by the actions of those minorities. Even social movements and revolutions start when a minority takes action. Trade unionism, for example, was (and still is) a minority movement in most countries. Support for racial and sexual equality was long despised (or, at best, ignored) by the majority and it took a resolute minority to advance that cause and spread the idea in the majority. The Russian Revolution did not start with the majority. It started when a minority of women workers (ignoring the advice of the local Bolsheviks) took to the streets and from these hundreds grew into a movement of hundreds of thousands.



> *"There is no serious strike that occurs today without the appearance of troops, the exchange of blows and some acts of revolt. Here they fight with the troops; there they march on the factories; ... in Pittsburgh in the United States, the strikers found themselves masters of a territory as large as France, and the strike became the signal for a general revolt against the State; in Ireland the peasants on strike found themselves in open revolt against the State. Thanks to government intervention the rebel against the factory becomes the rebel against the State."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 256]

As Malatesta argued, from *"the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to struggle against government; and instead of opposing the capitalist millions with the workers' few pennies scraped together with difficulty, one must oppose the rifles and guns which defend property with the more effective means that the people will be able to defeat force by force."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 193–4]

This means that the question of whether to conduct political struggles is **not** the one which divides anarchists from Marxists. Rather, it is a question of **how** this struggle is fought. For anarchists, this struggle is best fought using **direct action** (see section J.2) and fighting working class organisations based in our workplaces and communities. For Marxists, the political struggle is seen as being based on standing candidates in bourgeois elections. This can be seen from the resolution passed by the socialist ("Second") International in 1893. This resolution was designed to exclude anarchists and stated that only *"those Socialist Parties and Organisations which recognise the organisation of workers and of political action"* could join the International. By *"political action"* it meant *"that the working-class organisations seek, in as far as possible, to use or conquer political rights and the machinery of legislation for the furthering*

## H.2.13 Do anarchists reject *"political"* struggles and action?

A common Marxist claim is that anarchists and syndicalists ignore or dismiss the importance of *"political"* struggles or action. This is not true. Rather, as we discuss in section J.2.10, we think that *"political"* struggles should be conducted by the same means as social and economic struggles, namely by direct action, solidarity and working class self-organisation.

As this is a common assertion, it is useful to provide a quick summary of why anarchists do not, in fact, reject *"political"* struggles and action as such. Rather, to quote Bakunin, anarchism *"does not reject politics generally. It will certainly be forced to involve itself insofar as it will be forced to struggle against the bourgeois class. It only rejects bourgeois politics"* as it *"establishes the predatory domination of the bourgeoisie."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 313] For Kropotkin, it was a truism that it was *"absolutely impossible ... to confine the ideas of the working mass within the narrow circle of reductions in working hours and wage increases ... The social question compels attention."* This fact implied two responses: *"the workers' organisation propels itself either into the sterile path of parliamentary politics as in Germany, or into the path of revolution."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886**, p. 241]

So while Marxists often argue that anarchists are exclusively interested in economic struggle and reject *"politics"* or *"political action,"* the truth of the matter is different. We are well aware of the importance of political issues, although anarchists reject using bourgeois methods in favour of direct action. Moreover, we are aware that any social or economic struggle has its political aspects and that such struggles bring the role of the state as defender of capitalism and the need to struggle against it into focus:



The facts are clearly on the side of Goldman, not Selfa. Given that Goldman was expounding such an obvious law of social evolution, it seems incredulous that Selfa has a problem with it. This is particularly the case as Marxism (particularly its Leninist version) implicitly recognises this. As Marx argued, the ruling ideas of any epoch are those of the ruling class. Likewise for Goldman: *"Human thought has always been falsified by tradition and custom, and perverted false education in the interests of those who held power ... by the State and the ruling class."* Hence the *"continuous struggle"* against *"the State and even against 'society,' that is, against the majority subdued and hypnotised by the State and State worship."* If this were not the case, as Goldman noted, no state could save itself or private property from the masses. Hence the need for people to break from their conditioning, to act for themselves. As she argued, such direct action is *"the salvation of man"* as it *"necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 111 and p. 76]

Thus Goldman, like other anarchists, was not dismissing the masses, just stressing the obvious: namely that socialism is a process of self-liberation and the task of the conscious minority is to encourage this process by encouraging the direct action of the masses. Hence Goldman's support for syndicalism and direct action, a support Selfa (significantly) fails to inform his readers of.

So was Goldman's rejection of "majorities" the elitism Selfa claims it was? No, far from it. This is clear from looking at that work in context. For example, in a debate between her and a socialist she used the Lawrence strike *"as an example of direct action."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 1., p. 491] The workers in one of the mills started the strike by walking out. The next day five thousand at another mill struck and marched to another mill and soon doubled their number. The strikers soon had to supply food and fuel for 50,000. [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, pp. 327–8] Rather than the strike being

the act of the majority, it was the direct action of a minority which started it and it then spread to the majority (a strike, incidentally, Goldman supported and fund raised for). It should also be noted that the Lawrence strike reflected her ideas of how a general strike could be started by *"one industry or by a small, conscious minority among the workers"* which *"is soon taken up by many other industries, spreading like wildfire."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 95]

Do Marxists really argue that this was "elitist"? If so, then every spontaneous revolt is "elitist". Every attempt by oppressed minorities to resist their oppression is "elitist." Indeed, every attempt to change society is "elitist" as if it involves a minority not limiting themselves to simply advancing new ideas but, instead, taking direct action to raise awareness or to resist hierarchy in the here and now. Revolutions occur when the ideas of the majority catch up with the minority who inspire others with their ideas and activity. So in his keenness to label the anarchist movement "elitist", Selfa has also, logically, so-labelled the labour, feminist, peace and civil rights movements (among many others).

Equally embarrassing for Selfa, Trotsky (a person whom he contrasts favourably with Goldman despite the fact he was a practitioner and advocate of party dictatorship) agreed with the anarchists on the importance of minorities. As he put it during the debate on Kronstadt in the late 1930s, a *"revolution is 'made' directly by a* ***minority****. The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality, on the part of the majority. The shift in different stages of the revolution ... is directly determined by changing political relations between the minority and the majority, between the vanguard and the class."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 85] Not that this makes Trotsky an elitist for Selfa, of course. The key difference is that Goldman did not argue that this minority should seize power and rule the masses, regardless of the wishes of that majority, as Trotsky



upon the working class, anarchism reflected the politics required to built a **revolutionary** workers' movement rather than a reformist mass party.

As such, perhaps we can finally lay to rest the idea that Marx predicted the whole future of the labour movement and the path it must take like some kind of socialist Nostradamus. Equally, we can dismiss Marxist claims of the *"non-proletarian"* nature of anarchism as uninformed and little more than an attempt to squeeze history into an ideological prison. As noted above, in order to present such an analysis, the actual class compositions of significant events and social movements have to be manipulated. This is the case of the Paris Commune, for example, which was predominantly a product of artisans (i.e. the *"petit bourgeoisie"*), **not** the industrial working class and yet claimed by Marxists as an example of the *"dictatorship of the proletariat."* Ironically, many of the elements of the Commune praised by Marx can be found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin which pre-date the uprising. Similarly, the idea that workers' fighting organisations ("soviets") would be the means to abolish the state and the framework of a socialist society can be found in Bakunin's works, decades before Lenin paid lip-service to this idea in 1917. For a theory allegedly resting on *"non-proletarian"* elements anarchism has successfully predicted many of the ideas Marxists claim to have learnt from proletarian class struggle!

So, in summary, the claims that anarchism is *"alien"* to working class life, that it is *"non-proletarian"* or *"survives in the absence of a strong workers' movement"* are simply false. Looking objectively at the facts of the matter quickly shows that this is the case.

> *"It must be granted that among revolutionary workers the tendency toward parliamentarism is disappearing more and more. On the contrary, a strong anti-parliamentary tendency is becoming apparent in the ranks of the most advanced part of the proletariat. Look at the Shop Stewards' movement [in Britain] or Spanish syndicalism ... The IWW is absolutely antiparliamentary ... I want to point out that the idea of antiparliamentarism is asserting itself more strongly in Germany ... as a result of the revolution itself ... We must view the question in this light."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, pp. 176–7]

Of course, this perspective of basing yourself on the ideas and tactics generated by the class struggle was rejected in favour of a return to the principles of Marx and Engels and their vision of what constituted a genuine *"proletarian"* movement. If these tactics were the correct ones, then why did they not lead to a less dismal set of results? After all, the degeneration of social democracy into reformism would suggest their failure and sticking *"revolutionary"* before their tactics (as in *"revolutionary parliamentarianism"*) changes little. Marxists, like anarchists, are meant to be materialists, not idealists. What was the actual outcome of the Leninist strategies? Did they result in successful proletarian revolutions. No, they did not. The revolutionary wave peaked and fell and the Leninist parties themselves very easily and quickly became Stalinised. Significantly, those areas with a large anarchist, syndicalist or quasi-syndicalist (e.g. the council communists) workers movements (Italy, Spain and certain parts of Germany) came closest to revolution and by the mid-1930s, only Spain with its strong anarchist movement had a revolutionary labour movement. Therefore, rather than representing *"non-proletarian"* or *"sectarian"* politics forced



did (see section H.1.2). As Goldman noted, the *"Socialist demagogues know that [her argument is true] as well as I, but they maintain the myth of the virtues of the majority, because their very scheme means the perpetuation of power"* and *"authority, coercion and dependence rest on the mass, but never freedom."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

So, yes, anarchists do support individual freedom to resist even democratically made decisions simply because democracy **has to be** based on individual liberty. Without the right of dissent, democracy becomes a joke and little more than a numerical justification for tyranny. This does not mean we are *"anti-democratic,"* indeed the reverse as we hold true to the fundamental rationale for democratic decision-making — it allows individuals to combine as equals and not as subordinates and masters. Moreover, diversity is essential for any viable ecosystem and it is essential in any viable society (and, of course, any society worth living in). This means that a healthy society is one which encourages diversity, individuality, dissent and, equally, self-managed associations to ensure the freedom of all. As Malatesta argued:

> *"There are matters over which it is worth accepting the will of the majority because the damage caused by a split would be greater than that caused by error; there are circumstances in which discipline becomes a duty because to fail in it would be to fail in the solidarity between the oppressed and would mean betrayal in face of the enemy. But when one is convinced that the organisation is pursuing a course which threatens the future and makes it difficult to remedy the harm done, then it is a duty to rebel and to resist even at the risk of providing a split ... What is essential is that individuals should develop a sense of organisation and solidarity, and the conviction that fraternal co-operation is necessary to fight op-*

*pression and to achieve a society in which everyone will be able to enjoy his [or her] own life.*" [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 132–3]

This means that anarchists are not against majority decision making as such. We simply recognise it has limitations. In practice, the need for majority and minority to come to an agreement is one most anarchists would recognise:

> *"But such an adaptation [of the minority to the decisions of the majority] on the one hand by one group must be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm...*
>
> *"So ... anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern in human society in general ... how is it possible ... to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?"* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 100–1]

Therefore, while accepting majority decision making as a key aspect of a revolutionary movement and a free society, anarchists do not make a fetish of it. We recognise that we must use our own judgement in evaluating each decision reached simply because the majority is not always right. We must balance the need for solidarity in the common struggle and needs of common life with critical analysis and judgement. As Malatesta argued:

> *"In any case it is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each individual so long as he [or she]*



tralised, leadership and those who reject this model and political action (electioneering) are sects and sectarians is simply their option and little more. Once we look at the workers' movement without the blinkers created by Marxism, we see that Anarchism was a movement of working class people using what they considered valid tactics to meet their own social, economic and political goals — tactics and goals which evolved to meet changing circumstances. Seeing the rise of anarchism and syndicalism as the political expression of the class struggle, guided by the needs of the practical struggle they faced naturally follows when we recognise the Marxist model for what it is — just one possible interpretation of the future of the workers' movement rather than **the** future of that movement (and as the history of Social Democracy indicates, the predictions of Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International were proved correct).

This tendency to squeeze the revolutionary workers' movement into the forms decreed by two people in the mid-nineteenth century has proved to be disastrous for it. Even after the total failure of social democracy, the idea of *"revolutionary"* parliamentarianism was fostered onto the Third International by the Bolsheviks in spite of the fact that more and more revolutionary workers in advanced capitalist nations were rejecting it in favour of direct action and autonomous working class self-organisation. Anarchists and libertarian Marxists based themselves on this actual movement of working people, influenced by the failure of *"political action,"* while the Bolsheviks based themselves on the works of Marx and Engels and their own experiences in a backward, semi-feudal society whose workers had already created factory committees and soviets by direct action. It was for this reason that the anarcho-syndicalist Augustin Souchy said he referred *"to the tendencies that exist in the modern workers' movement"* when he argued at the Second Congress of the Communist International:

> *"Marx had indeed insisted, in the earlier years of the First International, on the need for building on actual movements rather than constructing a dogma which movements were then required to fit. But when the actual movements took forms which he disliked, as they largely did in Spain and Italy, in Germany under Lassalle's influence, and in Great Britain as soon as the Trade Unions' most immediate demands had been met, he was apt to forget his own precepts and to become the grand inquisitor into heretical misdeeds."* [G.D.H. Cole, **A History of Socialist Thought**, vol. 2, p. 256]

That support for *"political action"* was just as "sectarian" as support for non-participation in elections can be seen from Engels 1895 comment that *"[t]here had long been universal suffrage in France, but it had fallen into disrepute through the misuse to which the Bonapartist government had put it ... It also existed in Spain since the republic, but in Spain boycott of elections was ever the rule of all serious opposition parties ... The revolutionary workers of the Latin countries had been wont to regard the suffrage as a snare, as an instrument of government trickery."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 565] Needless to say, he had failed to mention those little facts when he was attacking anarchists for expressing the opinions of the *"revolutionary workers of the Latin countries"* and *"all serious opposition parties"* in the 1870s! Similarly, the Haymarket Martyrs had moved from a Marxist position on elections to an anarchist one after their own experiences using the ballot box, as did the many British socialists who became syndicalists in the early years of the 20th century. It seems strange to conclude that these positions are not expressions of working class struggle while that of Marx and Engels are, particularly given the terrible results of that strategy!

Thus the Marxist claim that true working class movements are based on mass political parties based on hierarchical, cen-



> *does not violate the equal freedom of others. No one can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is closer to the truth and which is the best road for the greatest good for each and everyone. Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.*
>
> *"In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 72]

Needless to say, our arguments apply with even more force to the decisions of the **representatives** of the majority, who are in practice a very small minority. Leninists usually try and confuse these two distinct forms of decision making. When Leninists discuss majority decision making they almost always mean the decisions of those elected by the majority — the central committee or the government — rather than the majority of the masses or an organisation. Ultimately, the Leninist support for democracy (as the Russian Revolution showed) is conditional on whether the majority supports them or not. Anarchists are not as hypocritical or as elitist as this, arguing that everyone should have the same rights the Leninists usurp for their leaders.

This counterpoising of socialism to "individualism" is significant. The aim of socialism is, after all, to increase individual liberty (to quote the **Communist Manifesto**, to create *"an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 491]). As such, authentic socialism **is** "individualist" in its

aspirations and denounces capitalism for being a partial and flawed individualism which benefits the few at the expense of the many (in terms of their development and individuality). This can be seen when Goldman, for example, argued that anarchism *"alone stresses the importance of the individual, his [or her] possibilities and needs in a free society."* It *"insists that the centre of gravity in society is the individual — that he must think for himself, act freely, and live fully. The aim of Anarchism is that every individual in the world shall be able to do so."* Needless to say, she differentiated her position from bourgeois ideology: *"Of course, this has nothing in common with a much boasted 'rugged individualism.' Such predatory individualism is really flabby, not rugged ... Their 'rugged individualism' is simply one of the many pretences the ruling class makes to unbridled business and political extortion."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 442 and p. 443] This support for individuality did not preclude solidarity, organising unions, practising direct action, supporting syndicalism, desiring communism and so on, but rather **required** it (as Goldman's own life showed). It flows automatically from a love of freedom for all. Given this, the typical Leninist attacks against anarchism for being "individualism" simply exposes the state capitalist nature of Bolshevism:

> *"capitalism promotes egotism, not individuality or 'individualism.' .. . the ego it created ... [is] shrivelled ... The term 'bourgeois individualism,' an epithet widely used by the left today against libertarian elements, reflects the extent to which bourgeois ideology permeates the socialist project; indeed, the extent to which the 'socialist' project (as distinguished from the libertarian communist project) is a mode of state capitalism."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 194fn]

Therefore the Marxist attack on anarchism as *"anti-democratic"* is not only false, it is ironic and hypocritical.



*letarian"* politics before a modern working class actually developed in any country bar Britain. This means, that from the experience of **one** section of the proletariat in **one** country in the 1840s, Marx and Engels have decreed for all time what is and is not a *"proletarian"* set of politics! On the face of it, it is hardly a convincing argument, particularly as we have over 150 years of experience of these tactics with which to evaluate them!

Based on this perspective, Marx and Engels opposed all other socialist groups as *"sects"* if they did not subscribe to their ideas. Ironically, while arguing that all other socialists were fostering their sectarian politics onto the workers movement, they themselves fostered their own perspective onto it. Originally, because the various sections of the International worked under different circumstances and had attained different degrees of development, the theoretical ideals which reflected the real movement also diverged. The International, therefore, was open to all socialist and working class tendencies and its general policies would be, by necessity, based on conference decisions that reflected this divergence. These decisions would be determined by free discussion within and between sections of all economic, social and political ideas. Marx, however, replaced this policy with a common program of *"political action"* (i.e. electioneering) by mass political parties via the fixed Hague conference of 1872. Rather than having this position agreed by the normal exchange of ideas and theoretical discussion in the sections guided by the needs of the practical struggle, Marx imposed what **he** considered as the future of the workers movement onto the International — and denounced those who disagreed with him as sectarians. The notion that what Marx considered as necessary might be another sectarian position imposed on the workers' movement did not enter his head nor those of his followers:

aided that spread by its tactics — the role of electioneering focused struggle away from direct action and into the ballot-box and so onto leaders rather than working class self-activity.

Moreover, if we look at the current state of the labour movement, then we would have to conclude that Marxism is *"an ideology alien to the life of modern working people."* Where are the large Marxist working class unions and parties? There are a few large reformist socialist and Stalinist parties in continental Europe, but these are not Marxist in any meaningful sense of the word. Most of the socialist ones used to be Marxist, although they relatively quickly stopped being revolutionary in any meaningful sense of the word a very long time ago (some, like the German Social Democrats, organised counter-revolutionary forces to crush working class revolt after the First World War). As for the Stalinist parties, it would be better to consider it a sign of shame that they get any support in the working class at all. In terms of revolutionary Marxists, there are various Trotskyist sects arguing amongst themselves on who is the **real** vanguard of the proletariat, but **no** Marxist labour movement.

Which, of course, brings us to the next point, namely the ideological problems for Leninists themselves by such an assertion. After all, Lenin himself argued that *"the life of modern working people"* could only produce *"trade-union consciousness."* According to him, socialist ideas were developed independently of working people by the socialist (middle-class) *"intelligentsia."* As we discuss in section H.5.1, for Lenin, socialism was an ideology which was alien to the life of modern working class people.

Lastly, there is the question of whether Marx and Engels can seriously be thought of as being able to decree once and for all what is and is not *"proletarian"* politics. Given that neither of these men were working class (one was a capitalist!) it makes the claim that they would know *"proletarian"* politics suspect. Moreover, they formulated their ideas of what constitute *"pro-*



Firstly, anarchists do **not** argue for *"the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego."* Rather, we argue for individual freedom. This, in turn, implies a commitment to self-managed forms of social organisation. This means that anarchists do not confuse agreement with (hierarchical) authority. Secondly, Marxists do not explain why the majority is always right or why their opinions are automatically the truth. Thirdly, the logical conclusions of their arguments would result in the absolute enserfment of the individual to the representatives of the majority. Fourthly, rather than being supporters of democracy, Marxists like Lenin and Trotsky explicitly argued for minority rule and the ignoring of majority decisions when they clashed with the decisions of the ruling party. Fifthly, their support for "democratic" centralised power means, in practice, the elimination of democracy in the grassroots. As can be seen from Trotsky's arguments against the Makhnovists, the democratic organisation and decisions of millions can be banned by a single individual.

All in all, Marxists claims that anarchists are *"anti-democratic"* just backfire on Marxism.

## H.2.12 Does anarchism survive only in the absence of a strong workers' movement?

Derek Howl argues that anarchism *"survives only in the absence of a strong workers movement"* and is the politics of *"non-proletarians."* As he puts it, there *"is a class basis to this. Just as Proudhon's 'anarchism' reflected the petty bourgeoisie under pressure, so too Bakuninism as a movement rested upon non-proletarians ... In Italy Bakuninism was based upon the large 'lumpen bourgeoisie', doomed petty bourgeois layers. In Switzerland the Jura Federation ... was composed of a world of cottage industry stranded between the old world and the new, as were pockets of newly proletarianised peasants that*

*characterised anarchism in Spain.*" He approvingly quotes Hal Draper assertion that anarchism *"was an ideology alien to the life of modern working people."* [*"The Legacy of Hal Draper,"* pp. 137–49, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 148]

Ignoring the obvious contradiction of *"newly proletarianised peasants"* being *"non-proletarians,"* we have the standard Marxist *"class analysis"* of anarchism. This is to assert that anarchism is *"non-proletarian"* while Marxism is *"proletarian."* On the face of it, such an assertion seems to fly in the face of historical facts. After all, when Marx and Engels were writing the **Communist Manifesto**, the proletariat was a tiny minority of the population of a mostly rural, barely industrialised Germany. Perhaps it was Engels' experiences as a capitalist in England that allowed him an insight into *"the life of modern working people?"* It should also be noted that neither Howel or Draper is being original, they are simply repeating Marx's assertion that anarchism *"continues to exist only where there is as yet no proper workers' movement. This is a fact."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 247]

Beyond this there are a few problems with this type of argument. Firstly, there are the factual problems. Simply put, anarchism appealed to *"modern"* working people and Marxism has appealed to the *"non-proletarian"* groups and individuals (and vice versa, of course). This can be seen from the examples Howl lists as well as the rise of syndicalist ideas after the reformism of the first Marxist movement (social democracy) became apparent. In fact, the rise of Marxism within the labour movement is associated with its descent into reformism, **not** revolution. Secondly, there is the slight ideological problem that Lenin himself argued that the working class, by its own efforts, did not produce socialist ideas which were generated far from *"the life of modern working people"* by the intelligentsia. Lastly, there is the assumption that two long dead Germans, living in an environment where *"modern working people"* (proletarians)



is hardly backward (indeed, since 1917 most Marxists pay lip-service to this vision!).

Which brings us to the next major problem with Howl's argument, namely the fate of Marxism and the *"strong"* labour movement it allegedly is suited for. Looking at the only nation which did have a *"modern"* working class during the most of Marx's life, Britain, the *"strong"* labour movement it produced was (and has) not been anarchist, it is true, but neither was it (nor did it become) Marxist. Rather, it has been a mish-mash of conflicting ideas, predominately reformist state socialist ones which owe little, if anything, to Marx. Indeed, the closest Britain came to developing a wide scale revolutionary working class movement was during the *"syndicalist revolt"* of the 1910s. Ironically, some Marxists joined this movement simply because the existing Marxist parties were so reformist or irrelevant to the *"life of modern working people."*

Looking at other countries, we find the same process. The rise of social democracy (Marxism) in the international labour movement simply signified the rise of reformism. Instead of producing a **revolutionary** labour movement, Marxism helped produce the opposite (although, initially, hiding reformist activity behind revolutionary rhetoric). So when Howl asserts that anarchism *"survives in the absence of a strong workers' movement,"* we have to wonder what planet he is on.

Thus, to state matters more correctly, anarchism flourishes during those periods when the labour movement and its members are radical, taking direct action and creating new forms of organisation which are still based on workers' self-management. This is to be expected as anarchism is both based upon and is the result of workers' self-liberation through struggle. In less militant times, the effects of bourgeois society and the role of unions within the capitalist economy can de-radicalise the labour movement and lead to the rise of bureaucracy within it. It is then, during periods when the class struggle is low, that reformist ideas spread. Sadly, Marxism

the Socialists. Ironically, the UGT only started to approach the size of the CNT once it had started to organise *"newly proletarianised peasants"* in the 1930s (i.e., anarchist unions organised more of the industrial working class than the Socialist ones). From such a fact, we wonder if Marxists would argue that socialism rested on *"non-proletarian"* elements?

Moreover, the logic of dismissing anarchism as *"non-proletarian"* because it organised *"newly proletarianised peasants"* is simply laughable. After all, capitalism needed landless labours in order to start. This meant that the first proletarians lived in rural areas and were made up of ex-peasants. When these ex-peasants arrived in the towns and cities, they were still *"newly proletarianised peasants."* To ignore these groups of workers would mean potentially harming the labour movement. And, of course, a large section of Bolshevik support in 1917 was to be found in *"newly proletarianised peasants"* whether in the army or working in the factories. Ironically enough, the Mensheviks argued that the Bolsheviks gained their influence from worker-peasant industrial *"raw recruits"* and not from the genuine working class. [Orlando Figes, **A People's Tragedy**, p. 830] As such, to dismiss anarchism because it gained converts from similar social strata as the Bolsheviks seems, on the face of it, a joke.

As can be seen Howl's attempts to subject anarchism to a *"class analysis"* simply fails. He selects the evidence which fits his theory and ignores that which does not. However, looking at the very examples he bases his case on shows how nonsensical it is. Simply put, anarchist ideas appealed to many types of workers, including typically *"proletarian"* ones who worked in large-scale industries. What they seem to have in common is a desire for radical social change, organised by themselves in their own combative class organs (such as unions). Moreover, like the early British workers movement, they considered these unions, as well as being organs of class struggle, could also be the framework of a free socialist society. Such a perspective



were a small minority of the working population, could really determine for all time what is (and is not) *"proletarian"* politics.

Taking the countries Howl lists, we can see that any claim that anarchism is *"alien"* to the working class is simply false. Looking at each one, it is clearly the case that, for Marxists, the **politics** of the people involved signify their working class credentials, **not** their actual economic or social class. Thus we have the sociological absurdity that makes anarchist workers *"petty bourgeois"* while actual members of the bourgeoisie (like Engels) or professional revolutionaries (and the sons of middle class families like Marx, Lenin and Trotsky) are considered as representatives of *"proletarian"* politics. Indeed, when these radical members of the middle-class repress working class people (as did Lenin and Trotsky were in power) they **remain** figures to be followed and their acts justified in terms of the "objective" needs of the working people they are oppressing! Ultimately, for most Marxists, whether someone is *"non-proletariat"* depends on their ideological viewpoint and not, in fact, their actual class.

Hence we discover Marx and Engels (like their followers) blaming Bakunin's success in the International, as one historian notes, *"on the middle-class leadership of Italy's socialist movement and the backwardness of the country. But if middle-class leaders were the catalysts of proletarian revolutionary efforts in Italy, this was also true of every other country in Europe, not excluding the General Council in London."* [T.R. Ravindranathan, **Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 168] And by interpreting the difficulties for Marxism in this way, Marx and Engels (like their followers) need not question their own ideas and assumptions. As Nunzio Pernicone notes, *"[f]rom the outset, Engels had consistently underestimated Bakunin as a political adversary and refused to believe that Italian workers might embrace anarchist doctrines."* However, *"even a casual perusal of the internationalist and dissident democratic press would have revealed to Engels that Bakuninism was rapidly*

*developing a following among Italian artisans and workers. But this reality flew in the face of his unshakeable belief that Italian internationalists were all a 'gang of declasses, the refuse of the bourgeoisie.'"* Even after the rise of the Italian Marxism in the 1890s, *"the anarchist movement was proportionately more working-class than the PSI"* and the *"the number of bourgeois intellectuals and professionals that supported the PSI [Italian Socialist Party] was vastly greater"* than those supporting anarchism. Indeed, *"the percentage of party membership derived from the bourgeoisie was significantly higher in the PSI than among the anarchists."* [**Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892**, p. 82 and p. 282] Ironically, given Engels diatribes against the Italian anarchists stopping workers following *"proletarian"* (i.e. Marxist) politics and standing for elections, *"as the PSI grew more working-class, just before the outbreak of war [in 1914], its Directorate [elected by the party congress] grew more anti-parliamentary."* [Gwyn A. Williams, **Proletarian Order**, p. 29]

As we noted in section A.5.5, the role of the anarchists and syndicalists compared to the Marxists during the 1920 near revolution suggested that the real *"proletarian"* revolutionaries were, in fact, the former and **not** the latter. All in all, the history of the Italian labour movement clearly show that, for most Marxists, whether a group represents the *"proletariat"* is simply dependent on their ideological commitment, **not** their actual class.

As regards the Jura Federation, we discover that its support was wider than suggested. As Marxist Paul Thomas noted, *"Bakunin's initial support in Switzerland — like Marx's in England — came from resident aliens, political refugees ... but he also gathered support among **Gastarbeitier** for whom Geneva was already a centre, where builders, carpenters and workers in heavy industry tended to be French or Italian ... Bakunin ... also marshalled considerable support among French speaking domestic workers and watchmakers in the Jura."* [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 390] It would be interesting to hear a Marxist claim that *"heavy industry"* represented the past or *"non-proletarian"* elements! Similarly, E. H. Carr in his (hostile) biography of Bakunin, noted that the *"sections of the International at Geneva fell into two groups."* Skilled craftsmen formed the *"Right wing"* while *"the builders, carpenters, and workers in the heavier trades, the majority of whom were immigrants from France and Italy, represented the Left."* Unsurprisingly, these different groups of workers had different politics. The craftsmen *"concentrated on ... reform"* while the others *"nourished hopes of a complete social upheaval."* Bakunin, as would be expected, *"fanned the spirit of revolt"* among these, the proletarian workers and soon had a *"commanding position in the Geneva International."* [**Michael Bakunin**, p. 361] It should be noted that Marx and the General Council of the International consistently supported the reformist wing of the International in Geneva which organised political alliances with the middle-class liberals during elections. Given these facts, it is little wonder that Howl concentrates on the support Bakunin received from domestic workers producing watches. To mention the support for Bakunin by organised, obviously proletarian, workers would undermine his case and so it is ignored.

Lastly, there is Spain. It seems funny that a Marxist would use Spain as an example **against** the class roots of anarchism. After all, that is one of the countries where anarchism dominated the working class movement. As one historian points out, *"it was not until the 1860s — when anarchism was introduced — that a substantive working class movement began to emerge"* and *"throughout the history of Spanish anarchism, its survival depended in large measure on the anarchists' ability to maintain direct links with the workers."* [George R. Esenwein, **Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898**, p. 6 and p. 207] As well as organising *"newly proletarianised peasants,"* the "Bakuninists" also organised industrial workers — indeed, far more successfully than

As we discussed in section B.2, the state is defined by certain characteristics (most importantly, the centralisation of power into the hands of a few). Thus, for anarchists, *"the word 'State' ... should be reserved for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Ethics**, p. 317f] This defining feature of the state has not come about by chance. As Kropotkin argued in his classic history of the state, *"a social institution cannot lend itself to **all** the desired goals, since, as with every organ, [the state] developed according to the function it performed, in a definite direction and not in all possible directions."* This means, by *"seeing the State as it has been in history, and as it is in essence today"* the conclusion anarchists *"arrive at is for the abolition of the State."* Thus the state has *"developed in the history of human societies to prevent the direct association among men [and women] to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to prevent their new blossoming — all this in order to subject the masses to the will of minorities."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 56]

So if the state, as Kropotkin stressed, is defined by *"the existence of a power situated above society, but also of a **territorial concentration** as well as the concentration **in the hands of a few of many functions in the life of societies**"* then such a structure has not evolved by chance. Therefore *"the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the State"* simply *"cannot lend itself to a function opposed to the one for which it was developed in the course of history,"* such as the popular participation from below required by social revolution and socialism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 10, p. 59 and p. 56] Based on this evolutionary analysis of the state, Kropotkin, like all anarchists, drew the conclusion *"that the State organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 82]



*by another."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 108 and p. 109] In Marx's words, the *"tradition of all the dead generations weighs down like a nightmare on the brain of the living."* Yet his own work, and the movements it inspired, now add to this deadweight. In order to ensure, as Marx put it, the social revolution draws is poetry from the future rather than the past, Marxism itself must be transcended.

Which, of course, means evaluating both the theory **and** practice of Marxism. For anarchists, it seems strange that for a body of work whose followers stress is revolutionary and liberating, its results have been so bad. If Marxism is so obviously revolutionary and democratic, then why have so few of the people who read it drawn those conclusions? How could it be transmuted so easily into Stalinism? Why are there so few **libertarian** Marxists, if it were Lenin (or, following Lenin, Social Democracy) which "misinterpreted" Marx and Engels? So when Marxists argue that the problem is in the interpretation of the message not in the message itself, anarchists reply that the reason these numerous, allegedly false, interpretations exist at all simply suggests that there are limitations within Marxism **as such** rather than the readings it has been subjected to. When something repeatedly fails and produces such terrible results in the progress then there has to be a fundamental flaw somewhere. Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

> *"Marx was, in fact, the first to stress that the significance of a theory cannot be grasped independently of the historical and social practice it inspires and initiates, to which it gives rise, in which it prolongs itself and under cover of which a given practice seeks to justify itself.*
>
> *"Who, today, would dare proclaim that the only significance of Christianity for history is to be found in reading unaltered versions of the Gospels or that the historical practice of various Churches over a pe-*

*riod of some 2,000 years can teach us nothing fundamental about the significance of this religious movement? A 'faithfulness to Marx' which would see the historical fate of Marxism as something unimportant would be just as laughable. It would in fact be quite ridiculous. Whereas for the Christian the revelations of the Gospels have a transcendental kernel and an intemporal validity, no theory could ever have such qualities in the eyes of a Marxist. To seek to discover the meaning of Marxism only in what Marx wrote (while keeping quiet about what the doctrine has become in history) is to pretend — in flagrant contradiction with the central ideas of that doctrine — that real history doesn't count and that the truth of a theory is always and exclusively to be found 'further on.' It finally comes to replacing revolution by revelation and the understanding of events by the exegesis of texts."* [*"The Fate of Marxism,"* pp. 75–84 **The Anarchist Papers**, Dimitrios Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 77]

This does not mean forsaking the work of Marx and Engels. It means rejecting once and for all the idea that two people, writing over a period of decades over a hundred years ago have all the answers. As should be obvious! Ultimately, anarchists think we have to **build** upon the legacy of the past, not squeeze current events into it. We should stand on the shoulders of giants, not at their feet.

Thus this section of our FAQ will attempt to explain the various myths of Marxism and provide an anarchist critique of it and its offshoots. Of course, the ultimate myth of Marxism is what Alexander Berkman called *"The Bolshevik Myth,"* namely the idea that the Russian Revolution was a success. However, given the scope of this revolution, we will not discuss it fully here except when it provides useful empirical evidence for our



*"A theory which is so readily 'vulgarised,' 'betrayed,' or, more sinisterly, institutionalised into bureaucratic power by nearly all its adherents may well be one that lends itself to such 'vulgarisations,' 'betrayals,' and bureaucratic forms* ***as a normal condition of its existence.*** *What may seem to be 'vulgarisations, 'betrayals,' and bureaucratic manifestations of its tenets in the heated light of doctrinal disputes may prove to be the fulfilment of its tenets in the cold light of historical development."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 196]

Hence the overwhelming need to critically evaluate Marxist ideas and history (such as the Russian Revolution — see section H.6). Unless we honestly discuss and evaluate all aspects of revolutionary ideas, we will never be able to build a positive and constructive revolutionary movement. By seeking the roots of Marxism's problems, we can enrich anarchism by avoiding possible pitfalls and recognising and building upon its strengths (e.g., where anarchists have identified, however incompletely, problems in Marxism which bear on revolutionary ideas, practice and transformation).

If this is done, anarchists are sure that Marxist claims that Marxism is **the** revolutionary theory will be exposed for the baseless rhetoric they are.

## H.3.7 What is wrong with the Marxist theory of the state?

For anarchists, the idea that a state (any state) can be used for socialist ends is simply ridiculous. This is because of the nature of the state as an instrument of minority class rule. As such, it precludes the mass participation required for socialism and would create a new form of class society.

*and always directed to the accomplishment of the final aim"* in his obituary of August Bebel in 1913! [**Collected Works**, vol. 19, p. 298] For those that way inclined, some amusement can be gathered comparing Engels glowing predictions for these parties and their actual performance (in the case of Spain and Italy, his comments seem particularly ironic).

As regards Bolshevism itself, the one "revolutionary" party in the world, it avoided the fate of its sister parties simply because there no question of applying social democratic tactics within bourgeois institutions as these did not exist in Tsarist Russia. Moreover, the net result of its seizure of power was, first, a party dictatorship and state capitalism under Lenin, then their intensification under Stalin and the creation of a host of Trotskyist sects who spend a considerable amount of time justifying and rationalising the ideology and actions of the Bolsheviks which helped create the Stalinism. Given the fate of Bolshevism in power, Bookchin simply stated the obviously:

> *"None of the authoritarian technics of change has provided successful 'paradigms', unless we are prepared to ignore the harsh fact that the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban 'revolutions' were massive counterrevolutions that blight our entire century."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 446]

Clearly, a key myth of Marxism is the idea that it has been a successful movement. In reality, its failures have been consistent and devastating so suggesting it is time to re-evaluate the whole ideology and embrace a revolutionary theory like anarchism. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to argue that every *"success"* of Marxism has, in fact, proved that the anarchist critique of Marxism was correct. Thus, as Bakunin predicted, the Social-Democratic parties became reformist and the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* became the *"dictatorship **over** the proletariat."* With "victories" like these, Marxism does not need failures! Thus Murray Bookchin:



critique (see section H.6 for more on the Russian Revolution). Our discussion here will concentrate for the most part on Marxist theory, showing its inadequacies, its problems, where it appropriated anarchist ideas and how anarchism and Marxism differ. This is a big task and this section of the FAQ can only be a small contribution to it.

As noted above, there are minority trends in Marxism which are libertarian in nature (i.e. close to anarchism). As such, it would be simplistic to say that anarchists are *"anti-Marxist"* and we generally do differentiate between the (minority) libertarian element and the authoritarian mainstream of Marxism (i.e. Social-Democracy and Leninism in its many forms). Without doubt, Marx contributed immensely to the enrichment of socialist ideas and analysis (as acknowledged by Bakunin, for example). His influence, as to be expected, was both positive and negative. For this reason he must be read and discussed critically. This FAQ is a contribution to this task of transcending the work of Marx. As with anarchist thinkers, we must take what is useful from Marx and reject the rubbish. But never forget that anarchists are anarchists precisely because we think that anarchist thinkers have got more right than wrong and we reject the idea of tying our politics to the name of a long dead thinker.

## H.3.1 Do Anarchists and Marxists want the same thing?

Ultimately, the greatest myth of Marxism is the idea that anarchists and most Marxists want the same thing. Indeed, it could be argued that it is anarchist criticism of Marxism which has made them stress the similarity of long term goals with anarchism. *"Our polemics against [the Marxists],"* Bakunin argued, *"have forced them to recognise that freedom, or anarchy — that is, the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward*

— *is the ultimate goal of social development.*" He stressed that the means to this apparently similar end were different. The Marxists *"say that [a] state yoke, [a] dictatorship, is a necessary transitional device for achieving the total liberation of the people: anarchy, or freedom, is the goal, and the state, or dictatorship, is the means ... We reply that no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself, and that it can engender and nurture only slavery in the people who endure it. Liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upwards."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179]

As such, it is commonly taken for granted that the ends of both Marxists and Anarchists are the same, we just disagree over the means. However, within this general agreement over the ultimate end (a classless and stateless society), the details of such a society are somewhat different. This, perhaps, is to be expected given the differences in means. As is obvious from Bakunin's argument, anarchists stress the unity of means and goals, that the means which are used affect the goal reached. This unity between means and ends is expressed well by Martin Buber's observation that *"[o]ne cannot in the nature of things expect a little tree that has been turned into a club to put forth leaves."* [**Paths in Utopia**, p. 127] In summary, we cannot expect to reach our end destination if we take a path going in the opposite direction. As such, the agreement on ends may not be as close as often imagined.

So when it is stated that anarchists and state socialists want the same thing, the following should be borne in mind. Firstly, there are key differences on the question of current tactics. Secondly, there is the question of the immediate aims of a revolution. Thirdly, there is the long term goals of such a revolution. These three aspects form a coherent whole, with each one logically following on from the last. As we will show, the anarchist and Marxist vision of each aspect are distinctly different, so suggesting that the short, medium **and** long term goals of



For Anarchists, such arguments simply show the ideological nature of most forms of Marxism. The fact is, of course, that there has been many anarchistic revolutions which, while ultimately defeated, show the validity of anarchist theory (the ones in Spain and in the Ukraine being the most significant). Moreover, there have been serious revolutionary anarchist movements across the world, the majority of them crushed by state repression (usually fascist or communist based). However, this is not the most important issue, which is the fate of these "successful" Marxist movements and revolutions. The fact that there has never been a "Marxist" revolution which has not become a party dictatorship proves the need to critique Marxism.

So, given that Marxists argue that Marxism is **the** revolutionary working class political theory, its actual track record has been appalling. After all, while many Marxist parties have taken part in revolutions and even seized power, the net effect of their "success" have been societies bearing little or no relationship to socialism. Rather, the net effect of these revolutions has been to discredit socialism by associating it with one-party states presiding over state capitalist economies.

Equally, the role of Marxism in the labour movement has also been less than successful. Looking at the first Marxist movement, social democracy, it ended by becoming reformist, betraying socialist ideas by (almost always) supporting their own state during the First World War and going so far as crushing the German revolution and betraying the Italian factory occupations in 1920. Indeed, Trotsky stated that the Bolshevik party was *"the only revolutionary"* section of the Second International, which is a damning indictment of Marxism. [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 248] Just as damning is the fact that neither Lenin or Trotsky noticed it before 1914! In fact, Lenin praised the *"fundamentals of parliamentary tactics"* of German and International Social Democracy, expressing the opinion that they were *"at the same time implacable on questions of principle*

*sation to the side of centralisation, direct democracy to the side of delegated power, libertarian institutions to the side of bureaucracy, and spontaneity to the side of authority. Such a line, like a physical barrier, must irrevocably separate a libertarian zone of theory and practice from the hybridised socialisms that tend to denature it. This zone must build its anti-authoritarian, utopian, and revolutionary commitments into the very recognition it has of itself, in short, into the very way it defines itself... . to admit of domination is to cross the line that separates the libertarian zone from the [state] socialist."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 223–4]

Unless we know exactly what we aim for, how to get there and who our **real** allies are we will get a nasty surprise once our self-proclaimed "allies" take power. As such, any attempt to appropriate anarchist rhetoric into an authoritarian ideology will simply fail and become little more than a mask obscuring the real aims of the party in question. As history shows.

## H.3.6 Is Marxism the only revolutionary politics which have worked?

Some Marxists will dismiss our arguments, and anarchism, out of hand. This is because anarchism has not lead a "successful" revolution while Marxism has. The fact, they assert, that there has never been a serious anarchist revolutionary movement, let alone a successful anarchist revolution, in the whole of history proves that Marxism works. For some Marxists, practice determines validity. Whether something is true or not is not decided intellectually in wordy publications and debates, but in reality.



each theory are, in fact, different. We will discuss each aspect in turn.

First, there is the question of the nature of the revolutionary movement. Here anarchists and most Marxists have distinctly opposing ideas. The former argue that both the revolutionary organisation (i.e. an anarchist federation) and the wider labour movement should be organised in line with the vision of society which inspires us. This means that it should be a federation of self-managed groups based on the direct participation of its membership in the decision making process. Power, therefore, is decentralised and there is no division between those who make the decisions and those who execute them. We reject the idea of others acting on our behalf or on behalf of the people and so urge the use of direct action and solidarity, based upon working class self-organisation, self-management and autonomy. Thus, anarchists apply their ideas in the struggle against the current system, arguing what is "efficient" from a hierarchical or class position is deeply inefficient from a revolutionary perspective.

Marxists disagree. Most Marxists are also Leninists. They argue that we must form a *"vanguard"* party based on the principles of *"democratic centralism"* complete with institutionalised and hierarchical leadership. They argue that how we organise today is independent of the kind of society we seek and that the party should aim to become the recognised leadership of the working class. Every thing they do is subordinated to this end, meaning that no struggle is seen as an end in itself but rather as a means to gaining membership and influence for the party until such time as it gathers enough support to seize power. As this is a key point of contention between anarchists and Leninists, we discuss this in some detail in section H.5 and its related sections and so not do so here.

Obviously, in the short term anarchists and Leninists cannot be said to want the same thing. While we seek a revolutionary movement based on libertarian (i.e. revolutionary) princi-

ples, the Leninists seek a party based on distinctly bourgeois principles of centralisation, delegation of power and representative over direct democracy. Both, of course, argue that only their system of organisation is effective and efficient (see section H.5.8 on a discussion why anarchists argue that the Leninist model is not effective from a revolutionary perspective). The anarchist perspective is to see the revolutionary organisation as part of the working class, encouraging and helping those in struggle to clarify the ideas they draw from their own experiences and its role is to provide a lead rather than a new set of leaders to be followed (see section J.3.6 for more on this). The Leninist perspective is to see the revolutionary party as the leadership of the working class, introducing socialist consciousness into a class which cannot generate itself (see section H.5.1).

Given the Leninist preference for centralisation and a leadership role by hierarchical organisation, it will come as no surprise that their ideas on the nature of post-revolutionary society are distinctly different from anarchists. While there is a tendency for Leninists to deny that anarchists have a clear idea of what will immediately be created by a revolution (see section H.1.4), we do have concrete ideas on the kind of society a revolution will immediately create. This vision is in almost every way different from that proposed by most Marxists.

Then there is the question of the state. Anarchists, unsurprisingly enough, seek to destroy it. Simply put, while anarchists want a stateless and classless society and advocate the means appropriate to those ends, most Marxists argue that in order to reach a stateless society we need a new "workers'" state, a state, moreover, in which their party will be in charge. Trotsky, writing in 1906, made this clear: *"Every political party deserving of the name aims at seizing governmental power and thus putting the state at the service of the class whose interests it represents."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Marxist Revolutionaries and the Dilemma of Power**, p. 105] This fits in with



*vested in 'providence' (no matter what they may be) it announces that it will act upon the maxim: salvation lies within ourselves!"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 3] As such, they draw upon anarchistic ideas and rhetoric (for many, undoubtedly unknowingly) and draw anarchistic conclusions. This can be seen from the works of the leading US Autonomist Marxist Harry Cleaver. His excellent essay *"Kropotkin, Self-Valorisation and the Crisis of Marxism"* is by far the best Marxist account of Kropotkin's ideas and shows the similarities between communist-anarchism and Autonomist Marxism. [**Anarchist Studies**, vol.2 , no. 2, pp. 119–36] Both, he points out, share a *"common perception and sympathy for the power of workers to act autonomously"* regardless of the *"substantial differences"* on other issues. [**Reading Capital Politically**, p. 15]

As such, the links between the best Marxists and anarchism can be substantial. This means that some Marxists have taken on board many anarchist ideas and have forged a version of Marxism which is basically libertarian in nature. Unfortunately, such forms of Marxism have always been a minority current within it. Most cases have seen the appropriation of anarchist ideas by Marxists simply as part of an attempt to make mainstream, authoritarian Marxism more appealing and such borrowings have been quickly forgotten once power has been seized.

Therefore appropriation of rhetoric and labels should not be confused with similarity of goals and ideas. The list of groupings which have used inappropriate labels to associate their ideas with other, more appealing, ones is lengthy. Content is what counts. If libertarian sounding ideas **are** being raised, the question becomes one of whether they are being used simply to gain influence or whether they signify a change of heart. As Bookchin argued:

> *"Ultimately, a line will have to be drawn that, by definition, excludes any project that can tip decentrali-*

> *"A novel factor has appeared on the labour market: the will of the worker! And this factor, not pertinent when it comes to setting the price of a bushel of potatoes, has a bearing upon the setting of wages; its impact may be large or small, according to the degree of tension of the labour force which is a product of the accord of individual wills beating in unison — but, whether it be strong or weak, there is no denying it.*
>
> *"Thus, worker cohesion conjures up against capitalist might a might capable of standing up to it. The inequality between the two adversaries — which cannot be denied when the exploiter is confronted only by the working man on his own — is redressed in proportion with the degree of cohesion achieved by the labour bloc. From then on, proletarian resistance, be it latent or acute, is an everyday phenomenon: disputes between labour and capital quicken and become more acute. Labour does not always emerge victorious from these partial struggles: however, even when defeated, the struggle workers still reap some benefit: resistance from them has obstructed pressure from the employers and often forced the employer to grant some of the demands put."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 10]

The best currents of Autonomist Marxism share this anarchist stress on the power of working people to transform society and to impact on how capitalism operates. Unsurprisingly, most Autonomist Marxists reject the idea of the vanguard party and instead, like the council communists, stress the need for **autonomist** working class self-organisation and self-activity (hence the name!). They agree with Pouget when he argued that direct action *"spells liberation for the masses of humanity"*, it *"puts paid to the age of miracles — miracles from Heaven, miracles from the State — and, in contraposition to hopes*



Marx's and Engels's repeated equation of universal suffrage with the political power or political supremacy of the working class. In other words, *"political power"* simply means the ability to nominate a government (see section H.3.10).

While Marxists like to portray this new government as *"the dictatorship of the proletariat,"* anarchist argue that, in fact, it will be the dictatorship **over** the proletariat. This is because if the working class **is** the ruling class (as Marxists claim) then, anarchists argue, how can they delegate their power to a government and remain so? Either the working class directly manages its own affairs (and so society) or the government does. Any state is simply rule by a few and so is incompatible with socialism (we discuss this issue in section H.3.7). The obvious implication of this is that Marxism seeks party rule, not working class direct management of society (as we discuss in section H.3.8, the Leninist tradition is extremely clear on this matter).

Then there is the question of the building blocks of socialism. Yet again, there is a clear difference between anarchism and Marxism. Anarchists have always argued that the basis of socialism is working class organisations, created in the struggle against capitalism and the state. This applies to both the social and economic structure of a post-revolutionary society. For most forms of Marxism, a radically different picture has been the dominant one. As we discuss in section H.3.10, Marxists only reached a similar vision for the political structure of socialism in 1917 when Lenin supported the soviets as the framework of his workers' state. However, as we prove in section H.3.11, he did so for instrumental purposes only, namely as the best means of assuring Bolshevik power. If the soviets clashed with the party, it was the latter which took precedence. Unsurprisingly, the Bolshevik mainstream moved from *"All Power to the Soviets"* to *"dictatorship of the party"* rather quickly. Thus, unlike anarchism, most forms of Marxism aim for party power, a "revolutionary" government above the organs of working class self-management.

Economically, there are also clear differences. Anarchists have consistently argued that the workers *"ought to be the real managers of industries."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 157] To achieve this, we have pointed to various organisations over time, such as factory committees and labour unions. As we discuss in more detail in section H.3.12, Lenin, in contrast, saw socialism as being constructed on the basis of structures and techniques (including management ones) developed under capitalism. Rather than see socialism as being built around new, working class organisations, Lenin saw it being constructed on the basis of developments in capitalist organisation. *"The Leninist road to socialism,"* notes one expert on Lenin, *"emphatically ran through the terrain of monopoly capitalism. It would, according to Lenin, abolish neither its advanced technological base nor its institutionalised means for allocating resources or structuring industry... The institutionalised framework of advanced capitalism could, to put it shortly, be utilised for realisation of specifically socialist goals. They were to become, indeed, the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of socialist transformation."* [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p.145]

The role of workers' in this vision was basically unchanged. Rather than demand, like anarchists, workers' self-management of production in 1917, Lenin raised the demand for *"country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists"* (and this is the *"important thing"*, **not** *"confiscation of the capitalists' property"*) [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 402] Once the Bolsheviks were in power, the workers' own organs (the factory committees) were integrated into a system of state control, losing whatever power they once held at the point of production. Lenin then modified this vision by replacing capitalists with (state appointed) *"one-man management"* over the workers (see section H.3.14). In other words, a form of **state** capitalism in which workers would still be wage slaves under bosses appointed by the state. Unsurprisingly, the *"control"*



> *price rises ... It is the same with the working man, it was said: his wages fluctuate in accordance with the plentiful supply or dearth of labour!*
>
> *"No voice was raised against the relentless arguments of this absurd reasoning: so the law of wages may be taken as right ... for as long as the working man [or woman] is content to be a commodity! For as long as, like a sack of potatoes, she remains passive and inert and endures the fluctuations of the market ... For as long as he bends his back and puts up with all of the bosses' snubs, ... the law of wages obtains.*
>
> *"But things take a different turn the moment that a glimmer of consciousness stirs this worker-potato into life. When, instead off dooming himself to inertia, spinelessness, resignation and passivity, the worker wakes up to his worth as a human being and the spirit of revolt washes over him: when he bestirs himself, energetic, wilful and active ... [and] once the labour bloc comes to life and bestirs itself ... then, the laughable equilibrium of the law of wages is undone."* [Emile Pouget, **Direct Action**, pp. 9–10]

And Marx, indeed, had compared the worker to a commodity, stating that labour power *"is a commodity, neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scale."* [**Selected Works**, p. 72] However, as Castoridias argued, unlike sugar the extraction of the use value of labour power *"is not a technical operation; it is a process of bitter struggle in which half the time, so to speak, the capitalists turn out to be losers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248] A fact which Pouget stressed in his critique of the mainstream socialist position:

*model Marx followed … But he contradicts the most essential fact of capitalism, namely, that the use value and exchange value of labour power are objectively indeterminate; they are determined rather by the struggle between labour and capital both in production and in society. Here is the ultimate root of the 'objective' contradictions of capitalism … The paradox is that Marx, the 'inventor' of class struggle, wrote a monumental work on phenomena determined by this struggle in which the struggle itself was entirely absent."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, pp. 202–3] Castoriadis explained the limitations of Marx's vision most famously in his *"Modern Capitalism and Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 226–343]

By rejecting this heritage which mainstream Marxism bases itself on and stressing the role of class struggle, Autonomist Marxism breaks decisively with the Marxist mainstream and embraces a position previously associated with anarchists and other libertarian socialists. The key role of class struggle in invalidating all deterministic economic *"laws"* was expressed by French syndicalists at the start of the twentieth century. This insight predated the work of Castoriadis and the development of Autonomist Marxism by over 50 years and is worth quoting at length:

> *"the keystone of socialism … proclaimed that 'as a general rule, the average wage would be no more than what the worker strictly required for survival'. And it was said: 'That figure is governed by capitalist pressure alone and this can even push it below the minimum necessary for the working man's subsistence … The only rule with regard to wage levels is the plentiful or scarce supply of man-power …'*
>
> *"By way of evidence of the relentless operation of this law of wages, comparisons were made between the worker and a commodity: if there is a glut of potatoes on the market, they are cheap; if they are scarce, the*



workers exercised over their bosses (i.e. those with **real** power in production) proved to be as elusive in production as it was in the state. In this, Lenin undoubtedly followed the lead of the **Communist Manifesto** which stressed state ownership of the means of production without a word about workers' self-management of production. As we discuss in section H.3.13, state "socialism" cannot help being *"state capitalism"* by its very nature.

Needless to say, as far as means go, few anarchists and syndicalists are complete pacifists. As syndicalist Emile Pouget argued, *"[h]istory teaches that the privileged have never surrendered their privileges without having been compelled so to do and forced into it by their rebellious victims. It is unlikely that the bourgeoisie is blessed with an exceptional greatness of soul and will abdicate voluntarily"* and so *"[r]ecourse to force … will be required."* [**The Party Of Labour**] This does not mean that libertarians glorify violence or argue that all forms of violence are acceptable (quite the reverse!), it simply means that for self-defence against violent opponents violence is, unfortunately, sometimes required.

The way an anarchist revolution would defend itself also shows a key difference between anarchism and Marxism. As we discussed in section H.2.1, anarchists (regardless of Marxist claims) have always argued that a revolution needs to defend itself. This would be organised in a federal, bottom-up way as the social structure of a free society. It would be based on voluntary working class militias. This model of working class self-defence was applied successfully in both the Spanish and Ukrainian revolutions (by the CNT-FAI and the Makhnovists, respectively). In contrast, the Bolshevik method of defending a revolution was the top-down, hierarchical and centralised "Red Army". As the example of the Makhnovists showed, the "Red Army" was not the only way the Russian Revolution could have been defended although it was the only way Bolshevik power could be.

So while Anarchists have consistently argued that socialism must be based on working class self-management of production and society based on working class organisations, the Leninist tradition has not supported this vision (although it has appropriated some of its imagery to gain popular support). Clearly, in terms of the immediate aftermath of a revolution, anarchists and Leninists do not seek the same thing. The former want a free society organised and run from below-upwards by the working class based on workers self-management of production while the latter seek party power in a new state structure which would preside over an essentially state capitalist economy.

Lastly, there is the question of the long term goal. Even in this vision of a classless and stateless society there is very little in common between anarchist communism and Marxist communism, beyond the similar terminology used to describe it. This is blurred by the differences in terminology used by both theories. Marx and Engels had raised in the 1840s the (long term) goal of *"an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all"* replacing *"the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms,"* in the **Communist Manifesto**. Before this *"vast association of the whole nation"* was possible, the proletariat would be *"raise[d] ... to the position of ruling class"* and *"all capital"* would be *"centralise[d] ... in the hands of the State, i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class."* As economic classes would no longer exist, *"the public power would lose its political character"* as political power *"is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another."* [**Selected Works**, p. 53]

It was this, the means to the end, which was the focus of much debate (see section H.1.1 for details). However, it cannot be assumed that the ends desired by Marxists and anarchists are identical. The argument that the *"public power"* could stop being *"political"* (i.e. a state) is a tautology, and a particularly unconvincing one at that. After all, if *"political power"* is de-



The other fact is that while mainstream Marxism often appropriated certain aspects of libertarian theory and practice, it does so selectively and places them into an authoritarian context which undermines their libertarian nature. Hence anarchist support for workers councils becomes transformed by Leninists into a means to ensure party power (i.e. state authority) rather than working class power or self-management (i.e. no authority). Similarly, anarchist support for leading by example becomes transformed into support for party rule (and often dictatorship). Ultimately, the practice of mainstream Marxism shows that libertarian ideas cannot be transplanted selectively into an authoritarian ideology and be expected to blossom.

Significantly, those Marxists who **do** apply anarchist ideas honestly are usually labelled by their orthodox comrades as *"anarchists."* As an example of Marxists appropriating libertarian ideas honestly, we can point to the council communist and currents within Autonomist Marxism. The council communists broke with the Bolsheviks over the question of whether the party would exercise power or whether the workers' councils would. Needless to say, Lenin labelled them an *"anarchist deviation."* Currents within Autonomist Marxism have built upon the council communist tradition, stressing the importance of focusing analysis on working class struggle as the key dynamic in capitalist society.

In this they go against the mainstream Marxist orthodoxy and embrace a libertarian perspective. As libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis argued, *"the economic theory expounded [by Marx] in **Capital** is based on the postulate that capitalism has managed completely and effectively to transform the worker — who appears there only as labour power — into a commodity; therefore the use value of labour power — the use the capitalist makes of it — is, as for any commodity, completely determined by the use, since its exchange value — wages — is determined solely by the laws of the market ... This postulate is necessary for there to be a 'science of economics' along the physico-mathematical*

class revolts are praised, their obvious anarchistic elements (which were usually often predicted by anarchist thinkers) are not mentioned. This results in some strange dichotomies. For example, Bakunin's vision of revolution is based on a federation of workers' councils, predating Marxist support for such bodies by decades, yet Marxists argue that Bakunin's ideas have nothing to teach us. Or, the Paris Commune being praised by Marxists as the first *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* when it implements federalism, delegates being subjected to mandates and recall and raises the vision of a socialism of associations while anarchism is labelled "petit-bourgeois" in spite of the fact that these ideas can be found in works of Proudhon and Bakunin which predate the 1871 revolt!

From this, we can draw two facts. Firstly, anarchism has successfully predicted certain aspects of working class revolution. Anarchist K.J. Kenafick stated the obvious when he argues that any *"comparison will show that the programme set out [by the Paris Commune] is ... the system of Federalism, which Bakunin had been advocating for years, and which had first been enunciated by Proudhon. The Proudhonists ... exercised considerable influence in the Commune. This 'political form' was therefore not 'at last' discovered; it had been discovered years ago; and now it was proven to be correct by the very fact that in the crisis the Paris workers adopted it almost automatically, under the pressure of circumstance, rather than as the result of theory, as being the form most suitable to express working class aspirations."* [**Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 212–3] Rather than being somehow alien to the working class and its struggle for freedom, anarchism in fact bases itself on the class struggle. This means that it should come as no surprise when the ideas of anarchism are developed and applied by those in struggle, for those ideas are just generalisations derived from past working class struggles! If anarchism ideas are applied spontaneously by those in struggle, it is because those involved are themselves drawing similar conclusions from their own experiences.



fined as being an instrument of class rule it automatically follows that a classless society would have a non-political *"public power"* and so be without a state! This does not imply that a *"public power"* would no longer exist as a structure within (or, more correctly, over) society, it just implies that its role would no longer be *"political"* (i.e. an instrument of class rule). Given that, according to the Manifesto, the state would centralise the means of production, credit and transportation and then organise it *"in accordance with a common plan"* using *"industrial armies, especially for agriculture"* this would suggest that the state structure would remain even after its *"political"* aspects had, to use Engels words, *"die[d] out."* [Marx and Engels, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 52–3 and p. 424]

From this perspective, the difference between anarchist communism and Marxist-communism is clear. *"While both,"* notes John Clark, *"foresee the disappearance of the state, the achievement of social management of the economy, the end of class rule, and the attainment of human equality, to mention a few common goals, significant differences in ends still remain. Marxist thought has inherited a vision which looks to high development of technology with a corresponding degree of centralisation of social institutions which will continue even after the coming of the social revolution... . The anarchist vision sees the human scale as essential, both in the techniques which are used for production, and for the institutions which arise from the new modes of association ... In addition, the anarchist ideal has a strong hedonistic element which has seen Germanic socialism as ascetic and Puritanical."* [**The Anarchist Moment**, p. 68] Thus Marx presents *"a formulation that calls not for the ultimate abolition of the State but suggests that it will continue to exist (however differently it is reconstituted by the proletariat) as a 'nonpolitical' (i.e., administrative) source of authority."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 196fn]

Moreover, it is unlikely that such a centralised system could become stateless and classless in actuality. As Bakunin argued,

in the Marxist state *"there will be no privileged class. Everybody will be equal, not only from the judicial and political but also from the economic standpoint. This is the promise at any rate … So there will be no more class, but a government, and, please note, an extremely complicated government which, not content with governing and administering the masses politically … will also administer them economically, by taking over the production and* ***fair*** *sharing of wealth, agriculture, the establishment and development of factories, the organisation and control of trade, and lastly the injection of capital into production by a single banker, the State."* Such a system would be, in reality, *"the reign of the* ***scientific mind,*** *the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes"* base on *"a new class, a new hierarchy of real or bogus learning, and the world will be divided into a dominant, science-based minority and a vast, ignorant majority."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 266]

George Barrett's words also seem appropriate:

> *"The modern Socialist … have steadily worked for centralisation, and complete and perfect organisation and control by those in authority above the people. The anarchist, on the other hand, believes in the abolition of that central power, and expects the free society to grow into existence from below, starting with those organisations and free agreements among the people themselves. It is difficult to see how, by making a central power control everything, we can be making a step towards the abolition of that power."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, p. 348]

Indeed, by giving the state increased economic activities it ensures that this so-called "transitional" state grows with the implementation of the Marxist programme. Moreover, given the economic tasks the state now does it hardly makes much sense to assert it will "wither away" — unless you think that



*in workers' control the universally valid foundation of a new social order, rather than just a* ***slogan*** *to be used for manipulatory purposes in specific and very limited historical contexts."* [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. iv] This clash between the popular idea of workers' control and the Leninist one was a key reason for the failure of the Russian Revolution precisely because, once in power, the latter was imposed.

Thus the fact that Leninists have appropriated libertarian (and working class) ideas and demands does not, in fact, mean that we aim for the same thing (as we discussed in section H.3.1, this is far from the case). The use of anarchist/popular rhetoric and slogans means little and we need to look at the content of the ideas proposed. Given the legacy of the appropriation of libertarian terminology to popularise authoritarian parties and its subsequent jettison in favour of authoritarian policies once the party is in power, anarchists have strong grounds to take Leninist claims with a large pinch of salt!

Equally with examples of actual revolutions. As Martin Buber noted, while *"Lenin praises Marx for having 'not yet, in 1852, put the concrete question as to what should be set up in place of the State machinery after it had been abolished,'"* Lenin argued that *"it was only the Paris Commune that taught Marx this."* However, as Buber correctly pointed out, the Paris Commune *"was the realisation of the thoughts of people who had put this question very concretely indeed .. . the historical experience of the Commune became possible only because in the hearts of passionate revolutionaries there lived the picture of a decentralised, very much 'de-Stated' society, which picture they undertook to translate into reality. The spiritual fathers of the Commune had such that ideal aiming at decentralisation which Marx and Engels did not have, and the leaders of the Revolution of 1871 tried, albeit with inadequate powers, to begin the realisation of that idea in the midst of revolution."* [**Paths in Utopia**, pp. 103–4] Thus, while the Paris Commune and other working

similar sounding rhetoric. As Murray Bookchin argued, many Marxist tendencies *"attach basically alien ideas to the withering conceptual framework of Marxism — not to say anything new but to preserve something old with ideological formaldehyde — to the detriment of any intellectual growth that the distinctions are designed to foster. This is mystification at its worst, for it not only corrupts ideas but the very capacity of the mind to deal with them. If Marx's work can be rescued for our time, it will be by dealing with it as an invaluable part of the development of ideas, not as pastiche that is legitimated as a 'method' or continually 'updated' by concepts that come from an alien zone of ideas."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 242f]

This is not some academic point. The ramifications of Marxists appropriating such *"alien ideas"* (or, more correctly, the rhetoric associated with those ideas) has had negative impacts on actual revolutionary movements. For example, Lenin's definition of *"workers' control"* was radically different than that current in the factory committee movement during the Russian Revolution (which had more in common with anarchist and syndicalist use of the term). The similarities in rhetoric allowed the factory committee movement to put its weight behind the Bolsheviks. Once in power, Lenin's position was implemented while that of the factory committees was ignored. Ultimately, Lenin's position was a key factor in creating state capitalism rather than socialism in Russia (see section H.3.14 for more details).

This, of course, does not stop modern day Leninists appropriating the term workers' control *"without bating an eyelid. Seeking to capitalise on the confusion now rampant in the movement, these people talk of 'workers' control' as if a) they meant by those words what the politically unsophisticated mean (i.e. that working people should themselves decide about the fundamental matters relating to production) and b) as if they — and the Leninist doctrine to which they claim to adhere — had always supported demands of this kind, or as if Leninism had always seen*



the centralised economic planning which this regime does also "withers away." Marx argued that once the *"abolition of classes"* has *"been attained"* then *"the power of the State … disappears, and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 76] In other words, the state apparatus does not "wither away" rather its function as an instrument of class rule does. This is an automatic result of classes themselves withering away as private property is nationalised. Yet as class is defined as being rooted in ownership of the means of production, this becomes a meaningless tautology. Obviously, as the state centralises the means of production into its own hands then (the existing) economic classes cease to exist and, as a result, the state "disappears." Yet the power and size of the State is, in fact, increased by this process and so the elimination of economic classes actually increases the power and size of the state machine.

As Brain Morris notes, *"Bakunin's fears that under Marx's kind of socialism the workers would continue to labour under a regimented, mechanised, hierarchical system of production, without direct control over their labour, has been more than confirmed by the realities of the Bolshevik system. Thus, Bakunin's critique of Marxism has taken on an increasing relevance in the age of bureaucratic State capitalism."* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 132] Thus the *"central confusions of Marxist political theorists"* are found in the discussion on the state in **The Communist Manifesto**. If class is *"an exclusively economic category, and if the old conditions of production are changed so that there is no longer any private ownership of the means of production, then classes no longer exist by definition when they are defined in terms of … the private ownership of the means of production … If Marx also defines 'political power' as 'the organised power of one [economic] class for oppressing another', then the … argument is no more than a tautology, and is trivially true."* Unfortunately, as history has confirmed, *"we cannot conclude*

*... if it is a mere tautology, that with a condition of no private ownership of the means of production there could be no ... dominant and subordinate strata."* [Alan Carter, **Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 221 and pp. 221–2]

Unsurprisingly, therefore, anarchists are not convinced that a highly centralised structure (as a state is) managing the economic life of society can be part of a truly classless society. While economic class as defined in terms of ownership of the means of production may not exist, social classes (defined in terms of inequality of power, authority and control) will continue simply because the state is designed to create and protect minority rule (see section H.3.7). As Bolshevik and Stalinist Russia showed, nationalising the means of production does not end class society. As Malatesta argued:

> *"When F. Engels, perhaps to counter anarchist criticisms, said that once classes disappear the State as such has no* ***raison d'être*** *and transforms itself from a government of men into an administration of thing, he was merely playing with words. Whoever has power over things has power over men; whoever governs production also governs the producers; who determines consumption is master over the consumer.*
>
> *"This is the question; either things are administered on the basis of free agreement of the interested parties, and this is anarchy; or they are administered according to laws made by administrators and this is government, it is the State, and inevitably it turns out to be tyrannical.*
>
> *"It is not a question of the good intentions or the good will of this or that man, but of the inevitability of the situation, and of the tendencies which man generally develops in given circumstances."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 145]



As Nicholas Walter argued, while the numbers of actual anarchists was small, *"the 1905 Revolution was objectively an anarchist revolution. The military mutinies, peasant uprisings and workers' strikes (culminating in a general strike), led to the establishment of soldiers' and workers' councils ... and peasants' communes, and the beginning of agrarian and industrial expropriation — all along the lines suggested by anarchist writers since Bakunin."* [**The Anarchist Past and Other Essays**, p. 122] The real question must be when will Marxists realise that quoting Engels does not make it true?

Moreover, without becoming an insurrection, as anarchists had stressed, the limits of the general strike were exposed in 1905. Unlike the some of the syndicalists in the 1890s and 1900s, this limitation was understood by the earliest anarchists. Consequently, they saw the general strike as the start of a revolution and not as the revolution itself. So, for all the Leninist accounts of the 1905 revolution claiming it for their ideology, the facts suggest that it was anarchism, not Marxism, which was vindicated by it. Luxemburg was wrong. The *"land of Bakunin's birth"* provided an unsurpassed example of how to make a revolution precisely because it applied (and confirmed) anarchist ideas on the general strike (and, it should be added, workers' councils). Marxists (who had previously quoted Engels to dismiss such things) found themselves repudiating aspect upon aspect of their dogma to remain relevant. Luxemburg, as Bookchin noted, *"grossly misrepresented the anarchist emphasis on the general strike after the 1905 revolution in Russia in order to make it acceptable to Social Democracy."* (he added that Lenin *"was to engage in the same misrepresentation on the issue of popular control in* ***State and Revolution***"). [**Towards an Ecological Society**, p. 227fn]

As such, while Marxists have appropriated certain anarchist concepts, it does not automatically mean that they mean exactly the same thing by them. Rather, as history shows, radically different concepts can be hidden behind

[quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886**, p. 223 and p. 224]

Another account of this meeting notes that how the general strike was to start was *"left unsaid"*, with Guillaume *"recognis[ing] that it as impossible for the anarchists simply to set the hour for the general strike."* Another anarchist did *"not believe that the strike was a sufficient means to win the social revolution"* but could *"set the stage for the success of an armed insurrection."* Only one delegate, regardless of Engels' claims, thought it *"demanded the utmost organisation of the working class"* and if that were the case *"then the general strike would not be necessary."* This was the delegate from the reformist British trade unions and he was *"attack[ing]"* the general strike as *"an absurd and impractical proposition."* [Phil H. Goodstein, **The Theory of the General Strike**, pp. 43–5]

Perhaps this is why Engels did not bother to quote a single anarchist when recounting their position on this matter? Needless to say, Leninists continue to parrot Engels assertions to this day. The facts are somewhat different. Clearly, the "anarchist" strategy of overthrowing the bourgeoisie with one big general strike set for a specific date exists only in Marxist heads, nowhere else. Once we remove the distortions promulgated by Engels and repeated by Luxemburg, we see that the 1905 revolution and *"historical dialectics"* did not, as Luxemburg claim, validate Engels and disprove anarchism. Quite the reverse as the general strikes in Russia followed the anarchist ideas of a what a general strike would be like quite closely. Little wonder, then, that Kropotkin argued that the 1905 general strike *"demonstrated"* that the Latin workers who had been advocating the general strike *"as a weapon which would irresistible in the hands of labour for imposing its will"* had been *"right."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 288]

So, contra Luxemburg, *"the fatherland of Bakunin"* was **not** *"the burial-place of [anarchism's] teachings."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 157]



The anarchist vision of the future society, therefore, does not exactly match the state communist vision, as much as the latter would like to suggest it does. The difference between the two is authority, which cannot be anything but the largest difference possible. Anarchist economic and organisational theories are built around an anti-authoritarian core and this informs both our means and aims. For anarchists, the Leninist vision of socialism is unattractive. Lenin continually stressed that his conception of socialism and *"state capitalism"* were basically identical. Even in **State and Revolution**, allegedly Lenin's most libertarian work, we discover this particularly unvisionary and uninspiring vision of "socialism":

> *"**All** citizens are transformed into the salaried employees of the state ... **All** citizens become employees and workers of a **single** national state 'syndicate' ... The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory with equality of work and equality of pay."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 348]

To which, anarchists point to Engels and his comments on the tyrannical and authoritarian character of the modern factory (as we discuss in section H.4.4). Clearly, Lenin's idea of turning the world into one big factory takes on an extremely frightening nature given Engels' lovely vision of the lack of freedom in the workplace.

For these reasons anarchists reject the simplistic Marxist analysis of inequality being rooted simply in economic class. Such an analysis, as the comments of Lenin and Engels prove, show that social inequality can be smuggled in by the backdoor of a proposed classless and stateless society. Thus Bookchin:

> *"Basic to anti-authoritarian Socialism –specifically, to Anarchist Communism — is the notion that*

> *hierarchy and domination cannot be subsumed by class rule and economic exploitation, indeed, that they are more fundamental to an understanding of the modern revolutionary project … Power of human over human long antedates* ***the very formation of classes and economic modes of social oppression.*** *… This much is clear: it will no longer do to insist that a classless society, freed from material exploitation, will necessarily be a liberated society. There is nothing in the social future to suggest that bureaucracy is incompatible with a classless society, the domination of women, the young, ethnic groups or even professional strata."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, pp. 208–9]

Ultimately, anarchists see that *"there is a realm of domination that is broader than the realm of material exploitation. The tragedy of the socialist movement is that, steeped in the past, it uses the methods of domination to try to 'liberate' us from material exploitation."* Needless to say, this is doomed to failure. Socialism *"will simply mire us in a world we are trying to overcome. A non-hierarchical society, self-managed and free of domination in all its forms, stands on the agenda today, not a hierarchical system draped in a red flag."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 272 and pp. 273–4]

In summary, it cannot be said that anarchists and most Marxists want the same thing. While they often use the same terms, these terms often hide radically different concepts. Just because, say, anarchists and mainstream Marxists talk about *"social revolution," "socialism," "all power to the soviets"* and so on, it does not mean that we mean the same thing by them. For example, the phrase *"all power to the soviets"* for anarchists means exactly that (i.e. that the revolution must be directly managed by working class organs). Leninists mean *"all power to a central government elected by a national soviet*



no way contrary to Marxism. [**Rosa Luxemburg Speaks**, pp. 153–218] Her "mass strike" was different from the anarchist "general strike" as mocked by Engels as it was dynamic process and could not be seen as one act, one isolated action which overthrows the bourgeoisie. Rather, the mass strike to the product of the everyday class struggle within society, leads to a direct confrontation with the capitalist state and so it was inseparable from the revolution.

The only problem with all this is that the anarchists did not actually argue along the lines Engels and Luxemburg claimed. Most obviously, as we indicated in section H.2.8, Bakunin saw the general strike as a **dynamic** process which would **not** be set for a specific date and did **not** need all workers to be organised before hand. As such, Bakunin's ideas are totally at odds with Engels assertions on what anarchist ideas on the general strike were about (they, in fact, reflect what actually happened in 1905).

But what of the "Bakuninists"? Again, Engels account leaves a lot to be desired. Rather than the September 1873 Geneva congress being, as he claimed, of the (disbanded) Alliance of Social Democracy, it was in fact a meeting of the non-Marxist federations of the First International. Contra Engels, anarchists did not see the general strike as requiring all workers to be perfectly organised and then passively folding arms *"one fine morning."* The Belgian libertarians who proposed the idea at the congress saw it as a tactic which could mobilise workers for revolution, *"a means of bringing a movement onto the street and leading the workers to the barricades."* Moreover, leading anarchist James Guillaume explicitly rejected the idea that it had *"to break out everywhere at an appointed day and hour"* with a resounding *"No!"* In fact, he stressed that they did *"not even need to bring up this question and suppose things could be like this. Such a supposition could lead to fatal mistakes. The revolution has to be contagious."*

them as "anarchists." This meant that Luxemburg was faced with the problem of proving Engels was right, even when he was wrong.

She did so in an ingenious way. Like Engels himself, she simply distorted what the anarchists thought about the general strike in order to make it acceptable to Social Democracy. Her argument was simple. Yes, Engels had been right to dismiss the "general strike" idea of the anarchists in the 1870s. But today, thirty years later, Social Democrats should support the general strike (or mass strike, as she called it) because the concepts were different. The anarchist "general strike" was utopian. The Marxist "mass strike" was practical.

To discover why, we need to see what Engels had argued in the 1870s. Engels, mocked the anarchists (or "Bakuninists") for thinking that *"a general strike is the lever employed by which the social revolution is started."* He accusing them of imagining that *"[o]ne fine morning, all the workers in all the industries of a country, or even of the whole world, stop work, thus forcing the propertied classes either humbly to submit within four weeks at most, or to attack the workers, who would then have the right to defend themselves and use the opportunity to pull down the entire old society."* He stated that at the September 1 1873 Geneva congress of the anarchist Alliance of Social Democracy, it was *"universally admitted that to carry out the general strike strategy, there had to be a perfect organisation of the working class and a plentiful funds."* He noted that that was *"the rub"* as no government would stand by and *"allow the organisation or funds of the workers to reach such a level."* Moreover, the revolution would happen long before *"such an ideal organisation"* was set up and if they had been *"there would be no need to use the roundabout way of a general strike"* to achieve it. [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, pp. 584–5]

Rosa Luxemburg repeated Engels arguments in her essay *"The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions"* in order to show how her support for the general strike was in



*congress."* Similarly with other similar phrases (which shows the importance of looking at the details of any political theory and its history).

We have shown that discussion over ends is as important as discussion over means as they are related. As Kropotkin once pointed out, those who downplay the importance of discussing the *"order of things which ... should emerge from the coming revolution"* in favour of concentrating on *"practical things"* are being less than honest as *"far from making light of such theories, they propagate them, and all that they do now is a logical extension of their ideas. In the end those words 'Let us not discuss theoretical questions' really mean: 'Do not subject our theory to discussion, but help us to put it into execution.'"* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 200]

Hence the need to critically evaluate both ends and means. This shows the weakness of the common argument that anarchists and Leftists share some common visions and so we should work with them to achieve those common things. Who knows what happens after that? As can be seen, this is not the case. Many aspects of anarchism and Marxism are in opposition and cannot be considered similar (for example, what a Leninist considers as socialism is extremely different to what an anarchist thinks it is). If you consider "socialism" as being a "workers' state" presided over by a "revolutionary" government, then how can this be reconciled with the anarchist vision of a federation of self-managed communes and workers' associations? As the Russian Revolution shows, only by the armed might of the *"revolutionary"* government crushing the anarchist vision.

The only thing we truly share with these groups is a mutual opposition to existing capitalism. Having a common enemy does not make someone friends. Hence anarchists, while willing to work on certain mutual struggles, are well aware there is substantial differences in both terms of means and goals. The lessons of revolution in the 20th Century is that once in power,

Leninists will repress anarchists, their current allies against the capitalist system. This is does not occur by accident, it flows from the differences in vision between the two movements, both in terms of means and goals.

## H.3.2 Is Marxism *"socialism from below"*?

Some Marxists, such as the **International Socialist Tendency**, like to portray their tradition as being *"socialism from below."* Under *"socialism from below,"* they place the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, arguing that they and they alone have continued this, the true, ideal of socialism (Hal Draper's essay *"The Two Souls of Socialism"* seems to have been the first to argue along these lines). They contrast this idea of socialism *"from below"* with *"socialism from above,"* in which they place reformist socialism (social democracy, Labourism, etc.), elitist socialism (Lassalle and others who wanted educated and liberal members of the middle classes to liberate the working class) and Stalinism (bureaucratic dictatorship over the working class). Anarchism, it is argued, should be placed in the latter camp, with Proudhon and Bakunin showing that anarchist libertarianism simply a *"myth"*.

For those who uphold this idea, *"Socialism from below"* is simply the self-emancipation of the working class by its own efforts. To anarchist ears, the claim that Marxism (and in particular Leninism) is socialism *"from below"* sounds paradoxical, indeed laughable. This is because anarchists from Proudhon onwards have used the imagery of socialism being created and run from below upwards. They have been doing so for far longer than Marxists have. As such, *"socialism from below"* simply sums up the ***anarchist*** ideal!

Thus we find Proudhon in 1848 talking about being a *"revolutionary **from below**"* and that every *"serious and lasting Revolution"* was *"made **from below,** by the people."* A *"Revolution*



differences. Firstly that the libertarian *"militant minority"* did not aim to take power on behalf of the working class but rather to encourage it, by example, to manage its own struggles and affairs (and, ultimately, society). Secondly, that *"vanguard parties"* are organised in hierarchical ways alien to the spirit of anarchism. While both the *"militant minority"* and *"vanguard party"* approaches are based on an appreciation of the uneven development of ideas within the working class, vanguardism transforms this into a justification for party rule **over** the working class by a so-called *"advanced"* minority (see section H.5 for a full discussion). Other concepts, such as *"workers' control,"* direct action, and so on have suffered a similar fate.

A classic example of this appropriation of anarchist ideas into Marxism is provided by the general strike. In 1905, Russia had a near revolution in which the general strike played a key role. Unsurprisingly, as anarchists had been arguing for the general strike since the 1870s, we embraced these events as a striking confirmation of our long held ideas on revolutionary change. Marxists had a harder task as such ideas were alien to mainstream Social Democracy. Yet faced with the success and power of the general strike in practice, the more radical Marxists, like Rosa Luxemburg, had to incorporate it into their politics.

Yet they faced a problem. The general strike was indelibly linked with such hearsays as anarchism and syndicalism. Had not Engels himself proclaimed the nonsense of the general strike in his diatribe *"The Bakuninists at work"*? Had his words not been repeated ad infinitum against anarchists (and radical socialists) who questioned the wisdom of social democratic tactics, its reformism and bureaucratic inertia? The Marxist radicals knew that Engels would again be invoked by the bureaucrats and reformists in the Social Democratic movement to throw cold water over any attempt to adjust Marxist politics to the economic power of the masses as expressed in mass strikes. The Social Democratic hierarchy would simply dismiss

In summary, rather than quote *"selectively"* from the works and practice of Marxism, anarchists summarise those tendencies of both which, we argue, contribute to its continual failure in practice as a revolutionary theory. Moreover, Marxists themselves are equally as *"selective"* as anarchists in this respect. Firstly, as regards anarchist theory and practice and, secondly, as regards their own.

## H.3.5 Has Marxist appropriation of anarchist ideas changed it?

As is obvious in any account of the history of socialism, Marxists (of various schools) have appropriated key anarchist ideas and (often) present them as if Marxists thought of them first.

For example, as we discuss in section H.3.10, it was anarchists who first raised the idea of smashing the bourgeois state and replacing it with the fighting organisations of the working class (such as unions, workers' councils, etc.). It was only in 1917, decades after anarchists had first raised the idea, that Marxists started to argue these ideas but, of course, with a twist. While anarchists meant that working class organisations would be the basis of a free society, Lenin saw these organs as the best means of achieving Bolshevik party power.

Similarly with the libertarian idea of the *"militant minority."* By this, anarchists and syndicalists meant groups of workers who gave an example by their direct action which their fellow workers could imitate (for example by leading wildcat strikes which would use flying pickets to get other workers to join in). This "militant minority" would be at the forefront of social struggle and would show, by example, practice and discussion, that their ideas and tactics were the correct ones. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Bolsheviks argued that this idea was similar to their idea of a vanguard party. This ignored two key



***from above"*** was *"pure governmentalism," "the negation of collective activity, of popular spontaneity"* and is *"the oppression of the wills of those below."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 143] For Proudhon, the means of this revolution *"from below"* would be federations of working class associations for both credit (mutual banks) and production (workers' associations or co-operatives) as well as federations of communes (democratically organised communities). The workers, *"organised among themselves, without the assistance of the capitalist"* would march by *"[w]ork to the conquest of the world"* by the *"force of principle."* Thus capitalism would be reformed away by the actions of the workers themselves. The *"problem of association,"* Proudhon argued, *"consists in organising ... the **producers,** and by this subjecting capital and subordinating power. Such is the war of liberty against authority, a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege ... An agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 148 and p. 157] Ultimately, *"any revolution, to be effective, must be spontaneous and emanate, not from the heads of authorities, but from the bowels of the people ... the only connection between government and labour is that labour, in organising itself, has the abrogation of governments as its mission."* [Proudhon, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 52]

Similarly, Bakunin saw an anarchist revolution as coming *"from below."* As he put it, *"liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179] Elsewhere he wrote that *"popular revolution"* would *"create its own organisation from the bottom upwards and from the circumference inwards, in accordance with the principle of liberty, and not from the top downwards and from the centre outwards, as in the way of authority."* [**Michael Bakunin:**

**Selected Writings**, p. 170] His vision of revolution and revolutionary self-organisation and construction from below was a core aspect of his anarchist ideas and he argued repeatedly for *"the free organisation of the people's lives in accordance with their needs — not from the top down, as we have it in the State, but from the bottom up, an organisation formed by the people themselves ... a free union of associations of agricultural and factory workers, of communes, regions, and nations."* He stressed that *"the politics of the Social Revolution"* was *"the abolition of the State"* and *"the economic, altogether free organisation of the people, an organisation from below upward, by means of federation."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 297–8]

While Proudhon wanted to revolutionise society, he rejected revolutionary means to do so (i.e. collective struggle, strikes, insurrection, etc.). Bakunin, however, was a revolutionary in this, the popular, sense of the word. Yet he shared with Proudhon the idea of socialism being created by the working class itself. As he put it, in *"a social revolution, which in everything is diametrically opposed to a political revolution, the actions of individuals hardly count at all, whereas the spontaneous action of the masses is everything. All that individuals can do is clarify, propagate and work out the ideas corresponding to the popular instinct, and, what is more, to contribute their incessant efforts to revolutionary organisation of the natural power of the masses — but nothing else beyond that; the rest can and should be done by the people themselves ... revolution can be waged and brought to its full development only through the spontaneous and continued mass action of groups and associations of the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 298–9]

Therefore, the idea of *"socialism from below"* is a distinctly anarchist notion, one found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin and repeated by anarchists ever since. As such, to hear Marxists appropriate this obviously anarchist terminology and imagery appears to many anarchists as opportunistic and attempt to cover the authoritarian reality of mainstream



In addition there is the question of what could be called the *"social context."* Marxists often accuse anarchists of failing to place the quotations and actions of, say, the Bolsheviks into the circumstances which generated them. By this they mean that Bolshevik authoritarianism can be explained purely in terms of the massive problems facing them (i.e. the rigours of the Civil War, the economic collapse and chaos in Russia and so on). As we discuss this question in section H.6, we will simply summarise the anarchist reply by noting that this argument has three major problems with it. Firstly, there is the problem that Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** the start of the Civil War and, moreover, intensified **after** its end. As such, the Civil War cannot be blamed. The second problem is simply that Lenin continually stressed that civil war and economic chaos was inevitable during a revolution. If Leninist politics cannot handle the inevitable then they are to be avoided. Equally, if Leninists blame what they should **know** is inevitable for the degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution it would suggest their understanding of what revolution entails is deeply flawed. The last problem is simply that the Bolsheviks did not care. As Samuel Farber notes, *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921. In fact ... the very opposite is the case."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44] Hence the continuation (indeed, intensification) of Bolshevik authoritarianism after their victory in the civil war. Given this, it is significant that many of the quotes from Trotsky given above date from the late 1930s. To argue, therefore, that "social context" explains the politics and actions of the Bolsheviks seems incredulous.

Lastly, it seems ironic that Marxists accuse anarchists of quoting *"selectively."* After all, as proven in section H.2, this is **exactly** what Marxists do to anarchism!

flawed). Morrow stated that the *"essential points of a revolutionary program [are] all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power."* [**Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 133] How this can be reconciled with, say, Trotsky's opinion of ten years previously that *"[w]ith us the dictatorship of the party (quite falsely disputed theoretically by Stalin) is the expression of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat ... The dictatorship of a party is a part of the socialist revolution"*? [**Leon Trotsky on China**, p. 251] Or with Lenin's and Trotsky's repeated call for the party to seize and exercise power? Or their opinion that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise the proletarian dictatorship? How can the working class *"have all power"* if power is held not by mass organisations but rather by a vanguard party? Particularly, as we note in section H.1.2 when party dictatorship is placed at the heart of Leninist ideology.

Given all this, who is quoting who *"selectively"*? The Marxists who ignore what the Bolsheviks did when in power and repeatedly point to Lenin's **The State and Revolution** or the anarchists who link what they did with what they said outside of that holy text? Considering this absolutely contradictory inheritance, anarchists feel entitled to ask the question *"Will the real Leninist please stand up?"* What is it to be, popular democracy or party rule? If we look at Bolshevik practice, the answer is the latter anarchists argue. Ironically, the likes of Lenin and Trotsky concurred, incorporating the necessity of party power into their ideology as a key lesson of the Russian revolution. As such, anarchists do not feel they are quoting Leninism *"selectively"* when they argue that it is based on party power, not working class self-management. That Leninists often publicly deny this aspect of their own ideology or, at best, try to rationalise and justify it, suggests that when push comes to shove (as it does in every revolution) they will make the same decisions and act in the same way.



Marxism with anarchist rhetoric. Moreover, the attempt to suggest that anarchism is part of the elitist *"socialism from above"* school rests on little more that selective quoting of Proudhon and Bakunin (including from Bakunin's pre-anarchist days) to present a picture of their ideas distinctly at odds with reality. However, there are "libertarian" strains of Marxism which are close to anarchism. Does this mean that there are no elements of a *"socialism from below"* to be found in Marx and Engels?

If we look at Marx, we get contradictory impressions. On the one hand, he argued that freedom *"consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it."* Combine this with his comments on the Paris Commune (see his *"The Civil War in France"*), we can say that there are clearly elements of *"socialism from below"* in Marx's work. On the other hand, he often stresses the need for strict centralisation of power. In 1850, for example, he argued that the workers must *"not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority."* This was because *"the path of revolutionary activity"* can *"proceed only from the centre."* This meant that the workers must be opposed to the *"federative republic"* planned by the democrats and *"must not allow themselves to be misguided by the democratic talk of freedom for the communities, of self-government, etc."* This centralisation of power was essential to overcome local autonomy, which would allow *"every village, every town and every province"* to put *"a new obstacle in the path"* the revolution due to *"local and provincial obstinacy."* Decades later, Marx dismissed Bakunin's vision of *"the free organisation of the worker masses from bottom to top"* as *"nonsense."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 537, p. 509 and p. 547]

Thus we have a contradiction. While arguing that the state must become subordinate to society, we have a central power imposing its will on *"local and provincial obstinacy."* This implies a vision of revolution in which the centre (indeed, *"the*

*state authority"*) forces its will on the population, which (by necessity) means that the centre power is *"superimposed upon society"* rather than *"subordinate"* to it. Given his dismissal of the idea of organisation from bottom to top, we cannot argue that by this he meant simply the co-ordination of local initiatives. Rather, we are struck by the *"top-down"* picture of revolution Marx presents. Indeed, his argument from 1850 suggests that Marx favoured centralism not only in order to prevent the masses from creating obstacles to the revolutionary activity of the *"centre,"* but also to prevent them from interfering with their own liberation.

Looking at Engels, we discover him writing that *"[a]s soon as our Party is in possession of political power it has simply to expropriate the big landed proprietors just like the manufacturers in industry ... thus restored to the community [they] are to be turned over by us to the rural workers who are already cultivating them and are to be organised into co-operatives."* He even states that this expropriation may *"be compensated,"* depending on *"the circumstances which we obtain power, and particularly by the attitude adopted by these gentry."* [**Selected Writings**, pp. 638–9] Thus we have the party taking power, then expropriating the means of life **for the workers** and, lastly, *"turning over"* these to them. While this fits into the general scheme of the **Communist Manifesto**, it cannot be said to be *"socialism from below"* which can only signify the direct expropriation of the means of production by the workers themselves, organising themselves into free producer associations to do so.

It may be argued that Marx and Engels did not exclude such a solution to the social question. For example, we find Engels stating that *"the question is not whether the proletariat when it comes to power will simply seize by force the tools of production, the raw materials and means of subsistence"* or *"whether it will redeem property therein by instalments spread over a long period."* To attempt to predict this *"for all cases would be utopia-making."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 386] However, Engels



**fail** to note this link between Lenin and the Stalinist bureaucracy on this issue is quoting *"selectively."*

The contradictions pile up. Harman argues that *"people who seriously believe that workers at the height of revolution need a police guard to stop them handing their factories over to capitalists certainly have no real faith in the possibilities of a socialist future."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 144] Yet this does not stop him praising the regime of Lenin and Trotsky and contrasting it with Stalinism, in spite of the fact that this was precisely what the Bolsheviks **did** from 1918 onwards! Indeed this tyrannical practice played a role in provoking the strikes in Petrograd which preceded the Kronstadt revolt in 1921, when *"the workers wanted the special squads of armed Bolsheviks, who carried out a purely police function, withdrawn from the factories."* [Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, p. 42] It seems equally strange that Harman denounces the Stalinist suppression of the Hungarian revolution for workers' democracy and genuine socialism while he defends the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt revolt for the same goals. Similarly, when Harman argues that if by *"political party"* it is *"meant a party of the usual sort, in which a few leaders give orders and the masses merely obey ... then certainly such organisations added nothing to the Hungarian revolution."* However, as we discuss in section H.5, such a party was **precisely** what Leninism argued for and applied in practice. Simply put, the Bolsheviks were never a party *"that stood for the councils taking power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 186 and p. 187] As Lenin repeatedly stressed, its aim was for the Bolshevik party to take power **through** the councils (see section H.3.11). Once in power, the councils were quickly marginalised and became little more than a fig-leaf for party rule.

This confusion between what was promised and what was done is a common feature of Leninism. Felix Morrow, for example, wrote what is usually considered the definitive Trotskyist work on the Spanish Revolution (in spite of it being, as we discuss in the appendix *"Marxists and Spanish Anarchism,"* deeply

*the dictatorship of the working class ... [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 928 and pp. 151–2]

It seems redundant to note that the second quote is the accurate one, the one which matches the reality of Bolshevik Russia. Therefore it is hardly *"selective"* to quote the latter and not the former, as it expresses the reality of Bolshevism rather than its rhetoric.

This duality and the divergence between practice and rhetoric comes to the fore when Trotskyists discuss Stalinism and try to counter pose the Leninist tradition to it. For example, we find the British SWP's Chris Harman arguing that the *"whole experience of the workers' movement internationally teaches that only by regular elections, combined with the right of recall by shop-floor meetings can rank-and-file delegates be made really responsible to those who elect them."* [**Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, pp. 238–9] Significantly, Harman does not mention that both Lenin and Trotsky rejected this experience once in power. As we discuss in section H.3.8, Leninism came not only to practice but to argue theoretically for state power explicitly to eliminate such control from below. How can the numerous statements of leading Leninists (including Lenin and Trotsky) on the necessity of party dictatorship be reconciled with it?

The ironies do not stop there, of course. Harman correctly notes that under Stalinism, the *"bureaucracy is characterised, like the private capitalist class in the West, by its control over the means of production."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 147] However, he fails to note that it was **Lenin,** in early 1918, who had raised and then implemented such *"control"* in the form of *"one-man management."* As he put it: *"Obedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 316] To



is assuming that the social revolution (the proletariat *"com[ing] to power"*) comes **before** the social revolution (the seizure of the means of production). In this, we can assume that it is the "revolutionary" government which does the seizing (or redeeming) rather than rebel workers.

This vision of revolution as the party coming to power can be seen from Engels' warning that the *"worse thing that can befall the leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to assume power at a time when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class he represents and for the measures this domination implies."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 10, p. 469] Needless to say, such a vision is hard to equate with *"socialism from below"* which implies the active participation of the working class in the direct management of society from the bottom-up. If the leaders *"assume power"* then **they** have the real power, not the class they claim to *"represent."* Equally, it seems strange that socialism can be equated with a vision which equates *"domination"* of a class being achieved by the fact a leader *"represents"* it. Can the working class really be said to be the ruling class if its role in society is to select those who exercise power on its behalf (i.e. to elect representatives)? Bakunin quite rightly answered in the negative. While representative democracy may be acceptable to ensure bourgeois rule, it cannot be assumed that it can be utilised to create a socialist society. It was designed to defend class society and its centralised and top-down nature reflects this role.

Moreover, Marx and Engels had argued in **The Holy Family** that the *"question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment **considers** as its aim. The question is **what the proletariat is**, and what, consequent on that **being**, it will be compelled to do."* [quoted by Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 280] As Murray Bookchin argued:

> *"These lines and others like them in Marx's writings were to provide the rationale for asserting the authority of Marxist parties and their armed detachments over and even against the proletariat. Claiming a deeper and more informed comprehension of the situation than 'even the whole of the proletariat at the given moment,' Marxist parties went on to dissolve such revolutionary forms of proletarian organisation as factory committees and ultimately to totally regiment the proletariat according to lines established by the party leadership."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 289]

Thus the ideological underpinning of a *"socialism from above"* is expounded, one which dismisses what the members of the working class actually want or desire at a given point (a position which Trotsky, for one, explicitly argued). A few years later, they argued in **The Communist Manifesto** that *"a portion of the bourgeois goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."* They also noted that the Communists are *"the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties"* and *"they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement."* This gives a privileged place to the party (particularly the *"bourgeois ideologists"* who join it), a privileged place which their followers had no problem abusing in favour of party power and hierarchical leadership from above. As we discuss in section H.5, Lenin was just expressing orthodox Social-Democratic (i.e. Marxist) policy when he argued that socialist consciousness was created by bourgeois intellectuals and introduced into the working class from outside. Against this, we have to note that the Manifesto states that the proletarian movement was *"the self-conscious,*



passes for 'Marxism' in **State and Revolution** is anarchist and, equally important, it was not applied in practice. This explains an apparent contradiction. Leninists point to the Russian Revolution as evidence for the democratic nature of their politics. Anarchists point to it as evidence of Leninism's authoritarian nature. Both can do this because there is a substantial difference between Bolshevism before it took power and afterwards. While the Leninists ask you to judge them by their manifesto, anarchists say judge them by their record!

Simply put, Marxists quote selectively from their own tradition, ignoring those aspects of it which would be unappealing to potential recruits. While the leaders may know their tradition has skeletons in its closet, they try their best to ensure no one else gets to know. Which, of course, explains their hostility to anarchists doing so! That there is a deep divide between aspects of Marxist rhetoric and its practice and that even its rhetoric is not consistent we will now prove. By so doing, we can show that anarchists do not, in fact, quote Marxist's *"selectively."*

As an example, we can point to the leading Bolshevik Grigorii Zinoviev. In 1920, as head of the Communist International he wrote a letter to the **Industrial Workers of the World**, a revolutionary labour union, which stated that the *"Russian Soviet Republic ... is the most highly centralised government that exists. It is also the most democratic government in history. For all the organs of government are in constant touch with the working masses, and constantly sensitive to their will."* The same year he explained to the Second Congress of the Communist International that *"[t]oday, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of*

with both. As Maurice Brinton put it in the introduction to his classic account of workers' control in the Russian Revolution:

> *"Other charges will also be made. The quotations from Lenin and Trotsky will not be denied but it will be stated that they are 'selective' and that 'other things, too' were said. Again, we plead guilty. But we would stress that there are hagiographers enough in the trade whose 'objectivity' ... is but a cloak for sophisticated apologetics ... It therefore seems more relevant to quote those statements of the Bolshevik leaders of 1917 which helped determine Russia's evolution [towards Stalinism] rather those other statements which, like the May Day speeches of Labour leaders, were forever to remain in the realm of rhetoric."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xv]

Hence the need to discuss all aspects of Marxism rather than take what its adherents like to claim for it as granted. In this, we agree with Marx himself who argued that we cannot judge people by what they say about themselves but rather what they do. Unfortunately while many self-proclaimed Marxists (like Trotsky) may quote these comments, fewer apply them to their own ideology or actions (again, like Trotsky).

This can be seen from the almost ritualistic way many Marxists response to anarchist (or other) criticisms of their ideas. When they complain that anarchists *"selectively"* quote from the leading proponents of Marxism, they are usually at pains to point people to some document which they have selected as being more *"representative"* of their tradition. Leninists usually point to Lenin's **State and Revolution**, for example, for a vision of what Lenin *"really"* wanted. To this anarchists reply by, as we discussed in section H.1.7, pointing out that much of that



*independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority"* (although, as discussed in section H.1.1, when they wrote this the proletariat was a **minority** in all countries bar Britain). [**Selected Works**, p. 44, p. 46 and p. 45]

Looking at the tactics advocated by Marx and Engels, we see a strong support for *"political action"* in the sense of participating in elections. This support undoubtedly flows from Engels's comments that universal suffrage *"in an England two-thirds of whose inhabitants are industrial proletarians means the exclusive political rule of the working class with all the revolutionary changes in social conditions which are inseparable from it."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 10, p. 298] Marx, likewise, repeatedly argued along identical lines. For example, in 1855, he stated that *"universal suffrage ... implies the assumption of political power as means of satisfying [the workers'] social means"* and, in Britain, *"revolution is the direct content of universal suffrage."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 11, pp. 335–6] Yet how could an entire class, the proletariat organised as a *"movement"* exercise its power under such a system? While the atomised voting to nominate representatives (who, in reality, held the real power in society) may be more than adequate to ensure bourgeois, i.e. minority, power, could it be used for working class, i.e. majority, power?

This seems highly unlikely because such institutions are designed to place policy-making in the hands of representatives and were created explicitly to **exclude** mass participation in order to ensure bourgeois control (see section B.2.5). They do not (indeed, cannot) constitute a *"proletariat organised as a ruling class."* If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people themselves, in federations of self-managed assemblies, then a movement of the vast majority does not, cannot, exist. For people to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish institutions organised and run, as Bakunin constantly stressed, from below. This would necessitate that they themselves directly

manage their own affairs, communities and workplaces and, for co-ordination, mandate federal assemblies of revocable and strictly controllable delegates, who will execute their decisions. Only in this sense can a majority class, especially one committed to the abolition of all classes, organise as a class to manage society.

As such, Marx and Engels tactics are at odds with any idea of *"socialism from below."* While, correctly, supporting strikes and other forms of working class direct action (although, significantly, Engels dismissed the general strike) they placed that support within a general political strategy which emphasised electioneering and representative forms. This, however, is a form of struggle which can only really be carried out by means of leaders. The role of the masses is minor, that of voters. The focus of the struggle is at the top, in parliament, where the duly elected leaders are. As Luigi Galleani argued, this form of action involved the *"ceding of power by all to someone, the delegate, the representative, individual or group."* This meant that rather than the anarchist tactic of *"direct pressure put against the ruling classes by the masses,"* the Socialist Party *"substituted representation and the rigid discipline of the parliamentary socialists,"* which inevitably resulted in it *"adopt[ing] class collaboration in the legislative arena, without which all reforms would remain a vain hope."* It also resulted in the socialists needing *"authoritarian organisations"*, i.e. ones which are centralised and disciplined from above down. [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 14, p. 12 and p. 14] The end result was the encouragement of a viewpoint that reforms (indeed, the revolution) would be the work of leaders acting on behalf of the masses whose role would be that of voters and followers, not active participants in the struggle (see section J.2 for a discussion on direct action and why anarchists reject electioneering).

By the 1890s, the top-down and essentially reformist nature of these tactics had made their mark in both Engels' politics and the practical activities of the Social-Democratic parties. En-



(i.e. the only condition when the majority can *"rule"* and decisions truly flow from below upwards). At best, they subscribe to the distinctly bourgeois vision of *"democracy"* as being simply the majority designating (and trying to control) its rulers. At worse, they defend politics which have eliminated even this form of democracy in favour of party dictatorship and *"one-man management"* armed with *"dictatorial"* powers in industry (most members of such parties do not know how the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and disbanded soviets to maintain power, raised the dictatorship of the party to an ideological truism and wholeheartedly advocated *"one-man management"* rather than workers' self-management of production). As we discuss in section H.5, this latter position flows easily from the underlying assumptions of vanguardism which Leninism is based on.

So, Lenin, Trotsky and so on simply cannot be considered as exponents of *"socialism from below."* Any one who makes such a claim is either ignorant of the actual ideas and practice of Bolshevism or they seek to deceive. For anarchists, *"socialism from below"* can only be another name, like libertarian socialism, for anarchism (as Lenin, ironically enough, acknowledged). This does not mean that *"socialism from below,"* like *"libertarian socialism,"* is identical to anarchism, it simply means that libertarian Marxists and other socialists are far closer to anarchism than mainstream Marxism.

## H.3.4 Don't anarchists just quote Marxists selectively?

No, far from it. While it is impossible to quote everything a person or an ideology says, it is possible to summarise those aspects of a theory which influenced the way it developed in practice. As such, **any** account is *"selective"* in some sense, the question is whether this results in a critique rooted in the ideology and its practice or whether it presents a picture at odds

Clearly, the claim that Leninism (and its various off-shoots like Trotskyism) is *"socialism from below"* is hard to take seriously. As proven above, the Leninist tradition is explicitly against the idea of *"only from below,"* with Lenin explicitly stating that it was an *"anarchist stand"* to be for *"'action only from below', not 'from below and from above'"* which was the position of Marxism. [**Collected Works**, vol. 9, p. 77] Once in power, Lenin and the Bolsheviks implemented this vision of *"from below and from above,"* with the highly unsurprising result that *"from above"* quickly repressed *"from below"* (which was dismissed as *"wavering"* by the masses). This was to be expected, for a government to enforce its laws, it has to have power over its citizens and so socialism *"from above"* is a necessary side-effect of Leninist theory.

Ironically, Lenin's argument in **State and Revolution** comes back to haunt him. In that work he had argued that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* meant *"democracy for the people"* which *"imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists."* These must be crushed *"in order to free humanity from wage-slavery; their resistance must be broken by force; it is clear that where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 337–8] If the working class itself is being subject to *"suppression"* then, clearly, there is *"no freedom, no democracy"* for that class — and the people *"will feel no better if the stick with which they are being beaten is labelled 'the people's stick'."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 338]

So when Leninists argue that they stand for the *"principles of socialism from below"* and state that this means the direct and democratic control of society by the working class then, clearly, they are being less than honest. Looking at the tradition they place themselves, the obvious conclusion which must be reached is that Leninism is **not** based on *"socialism from below"* in the sense of working class self-management of society



gels *"introduction"* to Marx's **The Class Struggles in France** indicated how far Marxism had progressed and undoubtedly influenced by the rise of Social-Democracy as an electoral power, it stressed the use of the ballot box as the ideal way, if not the only way, for the party to take power. He noted that *"[w]e, the 'revolutionists', the 'overthrowers'"* were *"thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and overthrow"* and the bourgeoisie *"cry despairingly ... legality is the death of us"* and were *"much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion."* He argued that it was essential *"not to fitter away this daily increasing shock force [of party voters] in vanguard skirmishes, but to keep it intact until the decisive day."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 656, p. 650 and p. 655]

The net effect of this would simply be keeping the class struggle within the bounds decided upon by the party leaders, so placing the emphasis on the activities and decisions of those at the top rather than the struggle and decisions of the mass of working class people themselves. As we noted in section H.1.1, when the party was racked by the *"revisionism"* controversy after Engels death, it was fundamentally a conflict between those who wanted the party's rhetoric to reflect its reformist tactics and those who sought the illusion of radical words to cover the reformist practice. The decision of the Party leadership to support their state in the First World War simply proved that radical words cannot defeat reformist tactics.

Needless to say, from this contradictory inheritance Marxists had two ways of proceeding. Either they become explicitly anti-state (and so approach anarchism) or become explicitly in favour of party and state power and so, by necessity, *"revolution from above."* The council communists and other libertarian Marxists followed the first path, the Bolsheviks and their followers the second. As we discuss in the next section, Lenin explicitly dismissed the idea that Marxism proceeded *"only from below,"* stating that this was an anarchist principle. Nor was he

shy in equating party power with working class power. Indeed, this vision of socialism as involving party power was not alien to the mainstream social-democracy Leninism split from. The leading left-wing Menshevik Martov argued as follows:

> *"In a class struggle which has entered the phase of civil war, there are bound to be times when the advance guard of the revolutionary class, representing the interests of the broad masses but ahead of them in political consciousness, is obliged to exercise state power by means of a dictatorship of the revolutionary minority. Only a short-sighted and doctrinaire viewpoint would reject this prospect as such. The real question at stake is whether this dictatorship, which is unavoidable at a certain stage of any revolution, is exercised in such a way as to consolidate itself and create a system of institutions enabling it to become a permanent feature, or whether, on the contrary, it is replaced as soon as possible by the organised initiative and autonomy of the revolutionary class or classes as a whole. The second of these methods is that of the revolutionary Marxists who, for this reason, style themselves Social Democrats; the first is that of the Communists."* [**The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution**, Abraham Ascher (ed.), p. 119]

All this is to be expected, given the weakness of the Marxist theory of the state. As we discuss in section H.3.7, Marxists have always had an a-historic perspective on the state, considering it as purely an instrument of class rule rather than what it is, an instrument of **minority** class rule. For anarchists, the *"State is the minority government, from the top downward, of a vast quantity of men."* This automatically means that a socialism, like Marx's, which aims for a socialist government and



**of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 152] Trotsky also universalised Lenin's argument when he pondered the important decisions of the revolution and who would make them in his reply to the delegate from the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT:

> *"Who decides this question [and others like it]? We have the Council of People's Commissars but it has to be subject to some supervision. Whose supervision? That of the working class as an amorphous, chaotic mass? No. The Central Committee of the party is convened to discuss ... and to decide ... Who will solve these questions in Spain? The Communist Party of Spain."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 174]

As is obvious, Trotsky was drawing general lessons from the Russian Revolution for the international revolutionary movement. Needless to say, he still argued that the *"working class, represented and led by the Communist Party, [was] in power here"* in spite of it being *"an amorphous, chaotic mass"* which did not make any decisions on important questions affecting the revolution!

Incidentally, his and Lenin's comments of 1920 disprove Trotsky's later assertion that it was *"[o]nly after the conquest of power, the end of the civil war, and the establishment of a stable regime"* when *"the Central Committee little by little begin to concentrate the leadership of Soviet activity in its hands. Then would come Stalin's turn."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 328] While it was definitely the *"conquest of power"* by the Bolsheviks which lead to the marginalisation of the soviets, this event cannot be shunted to after the civil war as Trotsky would like (particularly as Trotsky admitted that in 1917 *"[a]fter eight months of inertia and of democratic chaos, came the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 242]). We must note Trotsky argued for the *"objective necessity"* of the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* well into the 1930s (see section H.1.2) .

> *political or organisational question is decided by any state institution in our republic [sic!] without the guidance of the Party's Central Committee.*
>
> *"In its work, the Party relies directly on the **trade unions**, which ...have a membership of over four million and are formally **non-Party**. Actually, all the directing bodies of the vast majority of the unions ... are made up of Communists, and carry out of all the directives of the Party. Thus ... we have a formally non-communist .. . very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the **class** and **the masses,** and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the **class dictatorship** of the class is exercised."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 571–2]

This was *"the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed 'from above,' from the standpoint of the practical realisation of the dictatorship"* and so *"all this talk about 'from above' **or** 'from below,' about 'the dictatorship of leaders' **or** 'the dictatorship of the masses,'"* is *"ridiculous and childish nonsense."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 573] Lenin, of course, did not bother to view *"proletarian"* state power *"from below,"* from the viewpoint of the proletariat. If he had, perhaps he would have recounted the numerous strikes and protests broken by the Cheka under martial law, the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the imposition of *"one-man management"* onto the workers in production, the turning of the unions into agents of the state/party and the elimination of working class freedom by party power? Which suggests that there are fundamental differences, at least for the masses, between *"from above"* and *"from below."*

At the Comintern congress itself, Zinoviev announced that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents**



a workers' state automatically becomes, against the wishes of its best activists, *"socialism from above."* As Bakunin argued, Marxists are *"worshippers of State power, and necessarily also prophets of political and social discipline and champions of order established from the top downwards, always in the name of universal suffrage and the sovereignty of the masses, for whom they save the honour and privilege of obeying leaders, elected masters."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 265 and pp. 237–8]

For this reason anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the basis of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished. If these organs of workers' self-management are co-opted into a state structure (as happened in Russia) then their power will be handed over to the real power in any state — the government and its bureaucracy. The state is the delegation of power — as such, it means that the idea of a *"workers' state"* expressing *"workers' power"* is a logical impossibility. If workers are running society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, not in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design.

So, while there are elements of *"socialism from below"* in the works of Marx and Engels they are placed within a distinctly centralised and authoritarian context which undermines them. As John Clark summarises, *"in the context of Marx's consistent advocacy of centralist programmes, and the part these programmes play in his theory of social development, the attempt to construct a **libertarian** Marxism by citing Marx's own proposals for social change would seem to present insuperable difficulties."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 93]

## H.3.3 Is Leninism *"socialism from below"*?

As discussed in the last section, Marx and Engels left their followers with an ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, there **are** elements of *"socialism from below"* in their politics (most explicitly in Marx's comments on the libertarian influenced Paris Commune). On the other, there are distinctly centralist and statist themes in their work.

From this legacy, Leninism took the statist themes. This explains why anarchists think the idea of Leninism being *"socialism from below"* is incredible. Simply put, the actual comments and actions of Lenin and his followers show that they had no commitment to a *"socialism from below."* As we will indicate, Lenin disassociated himself repeatedly from the idea of politics *"from below,"* considering it (quite rightly) an anarchist idea. In contrast, he stressed the importance of a politics which somehow combined action *"from above"* and *"from below."* For those Leninists who maintain that their tradition is *"socialism from below"* (indeed, the only *"real"* socialism *"from below"*), this is a major problem and, unsurprisingly, they generally fail to mention it.

So what was Lenin's position on *"from below"*? In 1904, during the debate over the party split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Lenin stated that the argument *"[b]ureaucracy* ***versus*** *democracy is in fact centralism* ***versus*** *autonomism; it is the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of opportunist Social-Democracy. The latter strives to proceed from the bottom upward, and, therefore, wherever possible ... upholds autonomism and 'democracy,' carried (by the overzealous) to the point of anarchism. The former strives to proceed from the top downward."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 396–7] Thus it is the non-Bolshevik (*"opportunist"*) wing of Marxism which bases itself on the *"organisational principle"* of *"from the bottom upward,"* not the Bolshevik tradition (as we note in section H.5.5, Lenin



to influence its policies. As we noted in section H.1.2, it was in this period (1919 and 1920) that the Bolsheviks openly argued that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* was, in fact, the *"dictatorship of the party"* (see section H.3.8 on how the Bolsheviks modified the Marxist theory of the state in line with this). Rather than the result of the problems facing Russia at the time, Lenin's comments simply reflect the unfolding of certain aspects of his ideology when his party held power (as we make clear in section H.6" the ideology of the ruling party and the ideas held by the masses are also factors in history).

To show that Lenin's comments were not caused by circumstantial factors, we can turn to his infamous work **Left-Wing Communism**. In this 1920 tract, written for the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin lambasted those Marxists who argued for direct working class power against the idea of party rule (i.e. the various council communists around Europe). We have already noted in section H.1.2 that Lenin had argued in that work that it was *"ridiculously absurd, and stupid"* to *"a contrast,* ***in general****, between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 568] Here we provide his description of the *"top-down"* nature of Bolshevik rule:

> *"In Russia today, the connection between leaders, party, class and masses ... are concretely as follows: the dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat organised in the Soviets and is guided by the Communist Party ... The Party, which holds annual congresses ..., is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress, while the current work in Moscow has to be carried on by [two] still smaller bodies ... which are elected at the plenary sessions of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee to each bureau. This, it would appear, is a full-fledged 'oligarchy.' No important*

tion, informing them that *"the revolution has won."* The workers were called upon to *"show ... **the greatest firmness and endurance,** in order to facilitate the execution of all the aims of the new People's Government."* They were asked to *"cease immediately all economic and political strikes, to take up your work, and do it in perfect order ... All to your places"* as the *"best way to support the new Government of Soviets in these days"* was *"by doing your job."* [quoted by John Read, **Ten Days that Shook the World**, pp. 341–2] Which smacks far more of *"socialism from above"* than *"socialism from below"*!

The implications of Lenin's position became clearer after the Bolsheviks had taken power. Now it was the concrete situation of a "revolutionary" government exercising power *"from above"* onto the very class it claimed to represent. As Lenin explained to his political police, the Cheka, in 1920:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 42, p. 170]

It could be argued that this position was forced on Lenin by the problems facing the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, but such an argument is flawed. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, according to Lenin himself civil war was inevitable and so, unsurprisingly, Lenin considered his comments as universally applicable. Secondly, this position fits in well with the idea of pressure *"from above"* exercised by the "revolutionary" government against the masses (and nothing to do with any sort of *"socialism from below"*). Indeed, *"wavering"* and *"unstable"* elements is just another way of saying *"pressure from below,"* the attempts by those subject to the "revolutionary" government



also rejected the *"primitive democracy"* of mass assemblies as the basis of the labour and revolutionary movements). Moreover, this vision of a party run from the top down was enshrined in the Bolshevik ideal of *"democratic centralism"*. How you can have *"socialism from below"* when your *"organisational principle"* is *"from the top downward"* is not explained by Leninist exponents of *"socialism from below."*

Lenin repeated this argument in his discussion on the right tactics to apply during the near revolution of 1905. He mocked the Mensheviks for only wanting *"pressure from below"* which was *"pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government."* Instead, he argued for *"pressure ... from above as well as from below,"* where *"pressure from above"* was *"pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens."* He notes that Engels *"appreciated the importance of action from above"* and that he saw the need for *"the utilisation of the revolutionary governmental power."* Lenin summarised his position (which he considered as being in line with that of orthodox Marxism) by stating: *"Limitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is **anarchism.**"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 8, p. 474, p. 478, p. 480 and p. 481] This seems to have been a common Bolshevik position at the time, with Stalin stressing in the same year that *"action only from 'below'"* was *"an anarchist principle, which does, indeed, fundamentally contradict Social-Democratic tactics."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 1, p. 149]

It is in this context of *"above and below"* in which we must place Lenin's comments in 1917 that socialism was *"democracy from below, without a police, without a standing army, voluntary social duty by a **militia** formed from a universally armed people."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p. 170] Given that Lenin had rejected the idea of *"only from below"* as an anarchist principle (which it is), we need to bear in mind that this *"democracy from below"* was **always** placed in the context of a Bolshevik government. Lenin always stressed that the *"Bolsheviks must assume*

*power."* The Bolsheviks *"can and **must** take state power into their own hands."* He raised the question of *"will the Bolsheviks dare take over full state power alone?"* and answered it: *"I have already had occasion ... to answer this question in the affirmative."* Moreover, *"a political party ... would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the name of party ... if it refused to take power when opportunity offers."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 19 and p. 90] Lenin's *"democracy from below"* always meant representative government, **not** popular power or self-management. The role of the working class was that of voters and so the Bolsheviks' first task was *"to convince the majority of the people that its programme and tactics are correct."* The second task *"that confronted our Party was to capture political power."* The third task was for *"the Bolshevik Party"* to *"**administer** Russia,"* to be the *"governing party."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, pp. 241–2] Thus Bolshevik power was equated with working class power.

Towards the end of 1917, he stressed this vision of a Bolshevik run *"democracy from below"* by arguing that since *"the 1905 revolution Russia has been governed by 130,000 landowners ... Yet we are told that the 240,000 members of the Bolshevik party will not be able to govern Russia, govern her in the interests of the poor."* He even equated rule by the party with rule by the class, noting that *"proletarian revolutionary power"* and *Bolshevik power"* are *"now one the same thing."* He admitted that the proletariat could not actually govern itself for *"[w]e know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration ... We demand that **training** in th[is] work ... be conducted by the class-conscious workers and soldiers."* The *"class-conscious workers must lead, but for the work of administration they can enlist the vast mass of the working and oppressed people."* Thus democratic sounding rhetoric, in reality, hide the fact that the party would govern (i.e., have power) and working people would simply administer the means by which its decisions would be implemented. Lenin also indicated that once in power, the Bolsheviks *"shall*



*be fully and unreservedly in favour of a strong state power and of centralism."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 111, p. 179, p. 113, p. 114 and p. 116]

Clearly, Lenin's position had not changed. The goal of the revolution was simply a Bolshevik government, which, if it were to be effective, had to have the real power in society. Thus, socialism would be implemented from above, by the *"strong"* and centralised government of the *"class-conscious workers"* who would *"lead"* and so the party would *"govern"* Russia, in the *"interests"* of the masses. Rather than govern themselves, they would be subject to *"the power of the Bolsheviks"*. While, eventually, the *"working"* masses would take part in the administration of state decisions, their role would be the same as under capitalism as, we must note, there is a difference between making policy and carrying it out, between the *"work of administration"* and governing, a difference Lenin obscures. In fact, the name of this essay clearly shows who would be in control under Lenin: *"Can the Bolsheviks retain State Power?"*

As one expert noted, the Bolsheviks made *"a distinction between the execution of policy and the making of policy. The 'broad masses' were to be the executors of state decrees, not the formulators of legislation."* However, by *"claiming to draw 'all people' into [the state] administration, the Bolsheviks claimed also that they were providing a greater degree of democracy than the parliamentary state."* [Frederick I. Kaplan, **Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor**, p. 212] The difference is important. Ante Ciliga, once a political prisoner under Stalin, once noted how the secret police *"liked to boast of the working class origin of its henchmen."* He quoted a fellow prisoner, and ex-Tsarist convict, who retorted: *"You are wrong if you believe that in the days of the Tsar the gaolers were recruited from among dukes and the executioners from among the princes!"* [**The Russian Enigma**, pp. 255–6]

All of which explains the famous leaflet addressed to the workers of Petrograd immediately after the October Revolu-

**lected Works**, vol. 26, p. 435 and p. 437] Significantly, 40 years previously in 1847, Engels had argued that the revolution *"will establish a **democratic constitution**, and through this, the direct ... dominance of the proletariat"* where *"the proletarians are already a majority of the people."* He noted that *"a democratic constitution has been introduced"* in America. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 6, p. 350 and p. 356] The continuity is significant, particularly as these identical arguments come before and after the Paris Commune of 1871.

This was no isolated statement. Engels had argued along the same lines (and, likewise, echoed early statements) as regards Britain in 1881, *"where the industrial and agricultural working class forms the immense majority of the people, democracy means the dominion of the working class, neither more nor less. Let, then, that working class prepare itself for the task in store for it — the ruling of this great Empire . .. And the best way to do this is to use the power already in their hands, the actual majority they possess ... to send to Parliament men of their own order."* In case this was not clear enough, he lamented that *"[e]verywhere the labourer struggles for political power, for direct representation of his class in the legislature — everywhere but in Great Britain."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p. 405] For Engels:

> *"In every struggle of class against class, the next end fought for is political power; the ruling class defends its political supremacy, that is to say its safe majority in the Legislature; the inferior class fights for, first a share, then the whole of that power, in order to become enabled to change existing laws in conformity with their own interests and requirements. Thus the working class of Great Britain for years fought ardently and even violently for the People's Charter [which demanded universal suffrage and yearly general elections], which was to give it that political power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 386]



This does **not** mean that anarchists dismiss differences between types of state, think the state has not changed over time or refuse to see that different states exist to defend different ruling minorities. Far from it. Anarchists argue that *"[e]very economic phase has a political phase corresponding to it, and it would be impossible to touch private property unless a new mode of political life be found at the same time." "A society founded on serfdom,"* Kropotkin explained, *"is in keeping with absolute monarchy; a society based on the wage system, and the exploitation of the masses by the capitalists finds it political expression in parliamentarianism."* As such, the state form changes and evolves, but its basic function (defender of minority rule) and structure (delegated power into the hands of a few) remains. Which means that *"a free society regaining possession of the common inheritance must seek, in free groups and free federations of groups, a new organisation, in harmony with the new economic phase of history."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 54]

As with any social structure, the state has evolved to ensure that it carries out its function. In other words, the state is centralised because it is an instrument of minority domination and oppression. Insofar as a social system is based on decentralisation of power, popular self-management, mass participation and free federation from below upwards, it is not a state. If a social system is, however, marked by delegated power and centralisation it is a state and cannot be, therefore, a instrument of social liberation. Rather it will become, slowly but surely, *"whatever title it adopts and whatever its origin and organisation may be"* what the state has always been, a instrument for *"oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 23] Which, for obvious reasons, is why anarchists argue for the destruction of the state by a free federation of self-managed communes and workers' councils (see section H.1.4 for further discussion).

This explains why anarchists reject the Marxist definition and theory of the state. For Marxists, *"the state is nothing but*

*a machine for the oppression of one class by another."* While it has been true that, historically, it is *"the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and this acquires the means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class,"* this need not always be the case. The state is *"at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy,"* although it *"cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible"* of it *"until such time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap."* This new state, often called the *"dictatorship of the proletariat,"* would slowly *"wither away"* (or *"dies out"*) as classes disappear and the state *"at last … becomes the real representative of the whole of society"* and so *"renders itself unnecessary."* Engels is at pains to differentiate this position from that of the anarchists, who demand *"the abolition of the state out of hand."* [**Selected Works**, p. 258, pp. 577–8, p. 528 and p. 424]

For anarchists, this argument has deep flaws. Simply put, unlike the anarchist one, this is not an empirically based theory of the state. Rather, we find such a theory mixed up with a metaphysical, non-empirical, a-historic definition which is based not on what the state **is** but rather what it **could** be. Thus the argument that the state *"is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another"* is trying to draw out an abstract essence of the state rather than ground what the state is on empirical evidence and analysis. This perspective, anarchists argue, simply confuses two very different things, namely the state and popular social organisation, with potentially disastrous results. By calling the popular self-organisation required by a social revolution the same name as a hierarchical and centralised body constructed for, and evolved to ensure, minority rule, the door is wide open to confuse popular power with party power, to confuse rule by



stroying feudalism, something which the bourgeoisie was not capable of. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 6, p. 373, p. 5 and p. 319]

Apparently Engels did **not** consider it *"too absurd to entertain"* that the French Republic of 1793 was *"a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'"* and, ironically, Draper's *"anyone else"* turned out to be Marx! Moreover, this was well known in Marxist circles long before Draper made his assertion. Julius Martov (for example) after quoting Marx on this issue summarised that, for Marx and Engels, the *"Reign of Terror in France was the momentary domination of the democratic petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat over all the possessing classes, including the authentic bourgeoisie."* [**The State and Socialist Revolution**, p. 51]

Similarly, Lenin quoted Engels on the proletariat seizing *"state power"* and nationalising the means of production, an act by which it *"abolishes itself as proletariat"* **and** *"abolishes the state as state."* Significantly, it is **Lenin** who has to write that *"Engels speaks here of the proletarian revolution 'abolishing' the* ***bourgeois*** *state, while the words about the state withering away refer to the remnants of the* ***proletariat*** *state* ***after*** *the socialist revolution."* Yet Engels himself makes no such differentiation and talks purely of *"the state"* and it *"becom[ing] the real representative of the whole of society"* by *"taking possession of the means of production in the name of society."* Perhaps Lenin was right and Engels really meant two different states but, sadly, he failed to make that point explicitly, so allowing Marxism, to use Lenin's words, to be subjected to *"the crudest distortion"* by its followers, *"prune[d]"* and *"reduc[ed] … to opportunism."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 320–2]

Then there are Engels 1887 comments that in the USA the workers *"next step towards their deliverance"* was *"the formation of a political workingmen's party, with a platform of its own, and the conquest of the Capitol and the White House for its goal."* This new party *"like all political parties everywhere … aspires to the conquest of political power."* Engels then discusses the *"electoral battle"* going on in America. [Marx and Engels, **Col-**

and makes no mention of the Commune but **does** mention the republic of 1792 to 1799 (significantly, Lenin makes no attempt to suggest that Engels meant the Paris Commune or anything else bar a democratic republic). In fact, Engels goes on to argue that *"[f]rom 1792 to 1799 each French department, each commune, enjoyed complete self-government on the American model, and this is what we too must have. How self-government is to be organised and how we can manage without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America and the first French Republic."* Significantly, Engels was explicitly discussing the need for a *"republican party programme"*, commenting that it would be impossible for *"our best people to become ministers"* under an Emperor and arguing that, in Germany at the time, they could not call for a republic and had to raise the *"demand for* ***the concentration of all political power in the hands of the people's representatives****."* Engels stressed that *"the proletariat can only use the form of the one and indivisible republic"* with *"self-government"* meaning *"officials elected by universal suffrage"*. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 227–9]

Clearly, the *"assumption"* Draper denounced makes more sense than his own or Lenin's. This is particularly the case when it is clear that both Marx and Engels viewed the French Republic under the Jacobins as a situation where the proletariat held political power (although, like Marx with the Paris Commune, they do not use the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" to describe it). Engels wrote of *"the rule of the Mountain party"* as being *"the short time when the proletariat was at the helm of the state in the French Revolution"* and *"from May 31, 1793 to July 26, 1794 … not a single bourgeois dared show his face in the whole of France."* Marx, similarly, wrote of this period as one in which *"the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie"* but due to the *"material conditions"* its acts were *"in service"* of the bourgeois revolution. The *"bloody action of the people"* only *"prepared the way for"* the bourgeoisie by de-



the representatives of the working class with working class self-management of the revolution and society.

Indeed, at times, Marx seemed to suggest that **any** form of social organisation is a state. At one point he complained that the French mutualists argued that *"[e]verything [was] to broken down into small '****groupes****' or '****communes****', which in turn form an 'association', but not a state."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 287] Unsurprisingly, then, that Kropotkin noted *"the German school which takes pleasure in confusing* ***State*** *with* ***Society****."* This was a *"confusion"* made by those *"who cannot visualise Society without a concentration of the State."* Yet this *"is to overlook the fact that Man lived in Societies for thousands of years before the State had been heard of"* and that *"communal life"* had *"been destroyed by the State."* So *"large numbers of people [have] lived in communes and free federations"* and these were not states as the state *"is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history. Why then make no distinction between what is permanent and what is accidental?"* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, pp. 9–10]

As we discussed in section H.2.1, anarchist opposition to the idea of a "dictatorship of the proletariat" should not be confused with idea that anarchists do not think that a social revolution needs to be defended. Rather, our opposition to the concept rests on the confusion which inevitably occurs when you mix up scientific analysis with metaphysical concepts. By drawing out an a-historic definition of the state, Engels helped ensure that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* became the *"dictatorship over the proletariat"* by implying that centralisation and delegated power into the hands of the few can be considered as an expression of popular power.

To explain why, we need only to study the works of Engels himself. Engels, in his famous account of the **Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**, defined the state as follows:

> *"The state is … by no means a power forced on society from without … Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is an admission … that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms … in order that these antagonisms and classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict … this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 576]

The state has two distinguishing features, firstly (and least importantly) it *"divides its subjects* ***according to territory.***" The second *"is the establishment of a* ***public power*** *which no longer directly coincides with the population organising itself as an armed force. This special public power is necessary because a self-acting armed organisation of the population has become impossible since the split into classes … This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds."* Thus *"an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 576–7 and pp. 535–6]

In this, the Marxist position concurs with the anarchist. Engels discussed the development of numerous ancient societies to prove his point. Talking of Greek society, he argued that it was based on a popular assembly which was *"sovereign"* plus a council. This social system was not a state because *"when every adult male member of the tribe was a warrior, there was as yet no public authority separated from the people that could have been set up against it. Primitive democracy was still in full bloom, and this must remain the point of departure in judging power and the status of the council."* Discussing the descent of



> *"If one thing is certain it is that our Party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 227]

Clearly Engels does not speak of a "commune-republic" or anything close to a soviet republic, as expressed in Bakunin's work or the libertarian wing of the First International with their ideas of a "trade-union republic" or a free federation of workers' associations. Clearly and explicitly he speaks of the democratic republic, the current state (*"an evil inherited by the proletariat"*) which is to be seized and transformed.

Unsurprisingly, when Lenin came to quote this passage in **State and Revolution** he immediately tried to obscure its meaning. *"Engels,"* he wrote, *"repeated here in a particularly striking form the fundamental idea which runs through all of Marx's work, namely, that the democratic republic is the nearest approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 360] However, obviously Engels did nothing of the kind. He did not speak of the political form which *"is the nearest approach"* to the dictatorship, rather he wrote only of *"the specific form"* of the dictatorship, the *"only"* form in which *"our Party"* can come to power. Hal Draper, likewise, denied that Engels meant what he clearly wrote, arguing that he **really** meant the Paris Commune. *"Because of the expression 'great French revolution,'"* Draper asserted, *"the assumption has often been made that Engels meant the French Revolution of 1789; but the idea that he, or anyone else, could view 1789 (or 1793) as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is too absurd to entertain."* [**The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' from Marx to Lenin**, p. 37fn]

Yet, contextually, no evidence exists to support such a claim and what does disputes it — Engels discusses French history

*ing the political organisation of the State."* For Marxists *"the only organisation the victorious working class finds **ready-made** for use, is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the working class can exert its newly conquered power."* [our emphasis, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 47, p. 10]

Obviously the only institution which the working class *"finds ready-made for use"* is the democratic (i.e., bourgeois) state, although, as Engels stressed, it *"may require adaptation."* In Engels' 1871 introduction to Marx's *"The Civil War in France"*, this analysis is repeated when Engels asserted that the state *"is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another"* and that it is *"at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible."* [**Selected Works**, p. 258]

If the proletariat creates a **new** state to replace the bourgeois one, then how can it be *"ready-made for use"* and *"an evil inherited"* by it? If, as Lenin argued, Marx and Engels thought that the working class had to smash the bourgeois state and replace it with a new one, why would it have *"to lop off at once as much as possible"* from the state it had just *"inherited"*?

Three years later, Engels made his position clear: *"With respect to the proletariat the republic differs from the monarchy only in that it is the **ready-for-use** form for the future rule of the proletariat."* He went on to state that the French socialists *"are at an advantage compared to us in already having it"* and warned against *"baseless"* illusions such as seeking to *"entrust socialist tasks to it while it is dominated by the bourgeoisie."* [Marx and Engels, **The Socialist Revolution**, p. 296] This was, significantly, simply repeating Engels 1891 argument from his critique of the draft of the Erfurt program of the German Social Democrats:



this society into classes, he argued that this required *"an institution that would perpetuate, not only the newly-rising class division of society, but the right of the possessing class to exploit the non-possessing class and the rule of the former over the latter."* Unsurprisingly, *"this institution arrived. The **state** was invented."* The original communal organs of society were *"superseded by real governmental authorities"* and the defence of society (*"the actual 'people in arms'"*) was *"taken by an armed 'public power' at the service of these authorities and, therefore, also available against the people."* With the rise of the state, the communal council was *"transformed into a senate."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 525–6, p. 528 and p. 525]

Thus the state arises specifically to exclude popular self-government, replacing it with minority rule conducted via a centralised, hierarchical top-down structure (*"government ... is the natural protector of capitalism and other exploiters of popular labour."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 239]).

This account of the rise of the state is at direct odds with Engels argument that the state is simply an instrument of class rule. For the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* to be a state, it would have to constitute a power above society, be different from the people armed, and so be *"a public power distinct from the mass of the people."* However, Marx and Engels are at pains to stress that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* will not be such a regime. However, how can you have something (namely *"a public power distinct from the mass of the people"*) you consider as *"an essential feature"* of a state missing in an institution you call the same name? It is a bit like calling a mammal a *"new kind of reptile"* in spite of the former not being cold-blooded, something you consider as *"an essential feature"* of the latter!

This contradiction helps explains Engels comments that *"[w]e would therefore propose to replace **state** everywhere by **Gemeinwesen,** a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word '**commune**'"* He even

states that the Paris Commune *"was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."* However, this comment does not mean that Engels sought to remove any possible confusion on the matter, for he still talked of *"the state"* as *"only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, to hold down's one's adversaries by force ... so long as the proletariat still **uses** the state, it does not use it the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 335] Thus the state would still exist and, furthermore, is **not** identified with the working class as a whole (*"a self-acting armed organisation of the population"*), rather it is an institution standing apart from the *"people armed"* which is used, by the proletariat, to crush its enemies.

(As an aside, we must stress that to state that it only becomes possible to *"speak of freedom"* after the state and classes cease to exist is a serious theoretical error. Firstly, it means to talk about *"freedom"* in the abstract, ignoring the reality of class and hierarchical society. To state the obvious, in class society working class people have their freedom restricted by the state, wage labour and other forms of social hierarchy. The aim of social revolution is the conquest of liberty by the working class by overthrowing hierarchical rule. Freedom for the working class, by definition, means stopping any attempts to restrict that freedom by its adversaries. To state the obvious, it is not a *"restriction"* of the freedom of would-be bosses to resist their attempts to impose their rule! As such, Engels failed to consider revolution from a working class perspective — see section H.4.7 for another example of this flaw. Moreover his comments have been used to justify restrictions on working class freedom, power and political rights by Marxist parties once they have seized power. *"Whatever power the State gains,"* correctly argued Bookchin, *"it always does so at the expense of popular power. Conversely, whatever power the people gain, they always acquire at the expense of the State. To legitimate State power, in*



presented here). For the council communists, who embraced the idea of workers' councils but broke with the Bolsheviks over the issue of whether the councils or the party had power, Lenin's analysis, while flawed in parts, is in the general spirit of Marx and they stress the need to smash the state and replace it with workers' councils. In this, they express the best in Marx. When faced with the Paris Commune and its libertarian influences he embraced it, distancing himself (for a while at least) with many of his previous ideas.

So what was the original (orthodox) Marxist position? It can be seen from Lenin who, as late December 1916 argued that *"Socialists are in favour of utilising the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism."* Lenin attacked Bukharin for *"erroneously ascribing this [the anarchist] view to the socialist"* when he had stated socialists wanted to *"abolish"* the state or *"blow it up."* He called this *"transitional form"* the dictatorship of the proletariat, *"which is **also** a state."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 165] In other words, the socialist party would aim to seize power within the existing republican state and, after making suitable modifications to it, use it to create socialism.

That this position was the orthodox one is hardly surprising, given the actual comments of both Marx and Engels. For example Engels argued in April 1883 while he and Marx saw *"the gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance of that political organisation called **the State**"* as *"**one** of the final results of the future revolution,"* they *"at the same time ... have always held that ... the proletarian class will first have to possess itself of the organised political force of the State and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society."* The idea that the proletariat needs to *"possess"* the existing state is made clear when he notes that the anarchists *"reverse the matter"* by advocating that the revolution *"has to **begin** by abolish-*

the syndicalists *"regarded the soviets ... as admirable versions of the **bourses du travail**, but with a revolutionary function added to suit Russian conditions. Open to all leftist workers regardless of specific political affiliation, the soviets were to act as nonpartisan labour councils improvised 'from below' ... with the aim of bringing down the old regime."* The anarchists of **Khleb i Volia** *"also likened the 1905 Petersburg Soviet — as a non-party mass organisation — to the central committee of the Paris Commune of 1871."* [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, pp. 80–1] In 1907, it was concluded that the revolution required *"the proclamation in villages and towns of workers' communes with soviets of workers' deputies ... at their head."* [quoted by Alexandre Skirda, **Facing the Enemy**, p. 77] These ideas can be traced back to Bakunin, so, ironically, the idea of the superiority of workers' councils **has** existed from around the time of the Paris Commune, but only in anarchist theory.

So, if Marxists did not support workers' councils until 1917, what **did** Marxists argue should be the framework of a socialist society before this date? To discover this, we must look to Marx and Engels. Once we do, we discover that their works suggest that their vision of socialist transformation was fundamentally based on the bourgeois state, suitably modified and democratised to achieve this task. As such, rather than present the true account of the Marxist theory of the state Lenin interpreted various inexact and ambiguous statements by Marx and Engels (particularly from Marx's defence of the Paris Commune) to justify his own actions in 1917. Whether his 1917 revision of Marxism in favour of workers' councils as the means to socialism is in keeping with the **spirit** of Marx is another matter of course. For the **Socialist Party of Great Britain** and its sister parties, Lenin violated both the letter **and** the spirit of Marx and they stress his arguments in favour of utilising universal suffrage to introduce socialism (indeed, their analysis of Marx and critique of Lenin is substantially the same as the one



*effect, is to delegitimate popular power."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 160])

Elsewhere, we have Engels arguing that *"the characteristic attribute of the former state"* is that while society *"had created its own organs to look after its own special interests"* in the course of time *"these organs, at whose head was the state power, transformed themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 257] Ignoring the obvious contradiction with his earlier claims that the state and communal organs were different, with the former destroying the latter, we are struck yet again by the idea of the state as being defined as an institution above society. Thus, if the post revolutionary society is marked by *"the state"* being dissolved into society, placed under its control, then it is not a state. To call it a *"new and truly democratic"* form of *"state power"* makes as little sense as calling a motorcar a *"new"* form of bicycle. As such, when Engels argues that the Paris Commune *"was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word"* or that when the proletariat seizes political power it *"abolishes the state as state"* we may be entitled to ask what it is, a state or not a state. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 335 and p. 424] It cannot be both, it cannot be a *"public power distinct from the mass of the people"* **and** *"a self-acting armed organisation of the population."* If it is the latter, then it does not have what Engels considered as *"an essential feature of the state"* and cannot be considered one. If it is the former, then any claim that such a regime is the rule of the working class is automatically invalidated. That Engels mocked the anarchists for seeking a revolution *"without a provisional government and in the total absence of any state or state-like institution, which are to be destroyed"* we can safely say that it is the former. [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 156]

Given that *"primitive democracy,"* as Engels noted, defended itself against its adversaries without such an institution shows that to equate the defence of working class freedom with the state is not only unnecessary, it simply leads to confusion. For

this reason anarchists do not confuse the necessary task of defending and organising a social revolution with creating a state. Thus, the problem for Marxism is that the empirical definition of the state collides with the metaphysical, the actual state with its Marxist essence. As Italian Anarchist Camillo Berneri argued: *"'The Proletariat' which seizes the state, bestowing on it the complete ownership of the means of production and destroying itself as proletariat and the state 'as the state' is a metaphysical fantasy, a political hypostasis of social abstractions."* [*"The Abolition and Extinction of the State,"* pp. 50–1, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 50]

This is no academic point, as we explain in the next section this confusion has been exploited to justify party power **over** the proletariat. Thus, as Berneri argued, Marxists *"do not propose the armed conquest of the commune by the whole proletariat, but they propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration — corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national — freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrational centralisation."* Thus *"the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State."* [*"Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism"*, pp 51–2, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] Anarchists are opposed to the state because it is not neutral, it cannot be made to serve our interests. The structures of the state are only necessary when a minority seeks to rule over the majority. We argue that the working class can create our own structures, organised and run from below upwards, to ensure the efficient running of everyday life.



the Russian Revolution, that *"not a single Marxist revolutionary repudiated me, neither Rosa Luxemburg nor Klara Zetkin, neither Lenin nor Trotsky."* [**The Road to Power**, p. 34 and p. xlviii]

Lenin himself, even after Social Democracy supported their respective states in the First World War and before his return to Russia, still argued that Kautsky's work contained *"a most complete exposition of the tasks of our times"* and *"it was most advantageous to the German Social-Democrats (in the sense of the promise they held out), and moreover came from the pen of the most eminent writer of the Second International ... Social-Democracy ... wants conquest of political power by the proletariat, the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 21, p. 94] There was no hint that Marxism stood for anything other than seizing power in a republic, as expounded by the likes of Kautsky.

Before continuing it should be stressed that Harman's summary is correct only if we are talking about the Marxist movement. Looking at the wider revolutionary movement, two groups definitely recognised the importance of the soviets as a form of working class power and as the framework of a socialist society. These were the anarchists and the Social-Revolutionary Maximalists, both of whom *"espoused views that corresponded almost word for word with Lenin's April 1917 program of 'All power to the soviets.'"* The *"aims of the revolutionary far left in 1905"* Lenin *"combined in his call for soviet power [in 1917], when he apparently assimilated the anarchist program to secure the support of the masses for the Bolsheviks."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 94 and p. 96]

So before 1917, when Lenin claimed to have discovered what had eluded all the previous followers of Marx and Engels (including himself!), it was only anarchists (or those close to them such as the SR-Maximalists) who argued that the future socialist society would be structurally based around the organs working class people themselves created in the process of the class struggle and revolution. For example,

**International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 25] In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, as Marx's writings on the Paris Commune prove beyond doubt.

The Paris Commune, as Marx himself noted, was *"formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town."* [**Selected Works**, p. 287] As Marx made clear, it was definitely **not** based on delegates from workplaces and so could **not** unify political and economic power. Indeed, to state that the Paris Commune was a soviet is simply a joke, as is the claim that Marxists supported soviets as revolutionary organs to smash and replace the state from 1871. In fact Marxists did not subscribe to this *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* until 1917 when Lenin argued that the Soviets would be the best means of ensuring a Bolshevik government. Which explains why Lenin's use of the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* and call for the destruction of the bourgeois state came as such a shock to his fellow Marxists. Unsurprisingly, given the long legacy of anarchist calls to smash the state and their vision of a socialist society built from below by workers councils, many Marxists called Lenin an anarchist! Therefore, the idea that Marxists have always supported workers councils' is untrue and any attempt to push this support back to 1871 simply a farcical.

Not all Marxists are as ignorant of their political tradition as Rees. As his fellow party member Chris Harman recognised, *"[e]ven the 1905 [Russian] revolution gave only the most embryonic expression of how a workers' state would in fact be organised. The fundamental forms of workers' power — the soviets (workers' councils) — were not recognised."* It was *"[n]ot until the February revolution [of 1917 that] soviets became central in Lenin's writings and thought."* [**Party and Class**, p. 18 and p. 19] Before then, Marxists had held the position, to quote Karl Kautsky from 1909 (who is, in turn, quoting his own words from 1893), that the democratic republic *"was the particular form of government in which alone socialism can be realised."* He added, after



By confusing two radically different things, Marxism ensures that popular power is consumed and destroyed by the state, by a new ruling elite. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

> *"Marx, in his analysis of the Paris Commune of 1871, has done radical social theory a considerable disservice. The Commune's combination of delegated policy-making with the execution of policy by its own administrators, a feature of the Commune which Marx celebrated, is a major failing of that body. Rousseau quite rightly emphasised that popular power cannot be delegated without being destroyed. One either has a fully empowered popular assembly or power belongs to the State."* [*"Theses on Libertarian Municipalism"*, pp. 9–22, **The Anarchist Papers**, Dimitrios Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 14]

If power belongs to the state, then the state is a public body distinct from the population and, therefore, not an instrument of working class power. Rather, as an institution designed to ensure minority rule, it would ensure its position within society and become either the ruling class itself or create a new class which instrument it would be. As we discuss in section H.3.9 the state cannot be considered as a neutral instrument of economic class rule, it has specific interests in itself which can and does mean it can play an oppressive and exploitative role in society independently of an economically dominant class.

Which brings us to the crux of the issue whether this "new" state will, in fact, be unlike any other state that has ever existed. Insofar as this "new" state is based on popular self-management and self-organisation, anarchists argue that such an organisation cannot be called a state as it is **not** based on delegated power. *"As long as,"* as Bookchin stressed, *"the institutions of power consisted of armed workers and peasants*

*as distinguished from a professional bureaucracy, police force, army, and cabal of politicians and judges, they were no[t] a State … These institutions, in fact comprised a revolutionary people in arms … not a professional apparatus that could be regarded as a State in any meaningful sense of the term."* [*"Looking Back at Spain,"* pp. 53–96, **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 86] This was why Bakunin was at pains to emphasis that a *"federal organisation, from below upward, of workers' associations, groups, communes, districts, and ultimately, regions and nations"* could not be considered as the same as *"centralised states"* and were *"contrary to their essence."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 13]

So when Lenin argued in **State and Revolution** that in the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* the *"organ of suppression is now the majority of the population, and not the minority"* and that *"since the majority of the people **itself** suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' for the suppression [of the bourgeoisie] is **no longer necessary**"* he is confusing two fundamentally different things. As Engels made clear, such a social system of *"primitive democracy"* is not a state. However, when Lenin argued that *"the more the functions of state power devolve upon the people generally, the less need is there for the existence of this power,"* he was implicitly arguing that there would be, in fact, a *"public power distinct from mass of the people"* and so a state in the normal sense of the word based on delegated power, *"special forces"* separate from the armed people and so on. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 301]

That such a regime would not *"wither away"* has been proven by history. The state machine does not (indeed, **cannot**) represent the interests of the working classes due to its centralised, hierarchical and elitist nature — all it can do is represent the interests of the party in power, its own bureaucratic needs and privileges and slowly, but surely, remove itself from popular control. This, as anarchists have constantly stressed, is why the state is based on the delegation of power,



As Mark Leier quips, Marxism *"has usually — save when battling anarchists — argued that the state has some 'relative autonomy' and is not a direct, simple reflex of a given economic system."* [**Bakunin: The Constructive Passion**, p. 275] The reason why the more sophisticated Marxist analysis of the state is forgotten when it comes to attacking anarchism should be obvious — it undermines the both the Marxist critique of anarchism and its own theory of the state. Ironically, arguments and warnings about the *"independence"* of the state by Marxists imply that the state has interests of its own and cannot be considered simply as an instrument of class rule. They suggest that the anarchist analysis of the state is correct, namely that any structure based on delegated power, centralisation and hierarchy must, inevitably, have a privileged class in charge of it, a class whose position enables it to not only exploit and oppress the rest of society but also to effectively escape from popular control and accountability. This is no accident. The state is structured to enforce minority rule and exclude the majority.

## H.3.10 Has Marxism always supported the idea of workers' councils?

One of the most widespread myths associated with Marxism is the idea that Marxism has consistently aimed to smash the current (bourgeois) state and replace it by a *"workers' state"* based on working class organisations created during a revolution.

This myth is sometimes expressed by those who should know better (i.e. Marxists). According to John Rees (of the British Socialist Workers Party) it has been a *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* that *"the soviet is a superior form of democracy because it unifies political and economic power."* This *"cornerstone"* has, apparently, existed *"since Marx's writings on the Paris Commune."* [*"In Defence of October,"*, pp. 3–82,

*(that is, state power) is also an economic power!"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 686 and p. 689]

Conversely, anarchists reply, why fight for *"the political dictatorship of the proletariat"* when you yourself admit that the state can become *"independent"* of the classes you claim it represents? Particularly when you **increase** its potential for becoming independent by centralising it even more and giving it economic powers to complement its political ones!

So the Marxist theory of the state is that is an instrument of class rule — except when it is not. Its origins lie in the rise of class antagonisms — except when it does not. It arises after the break up of society into classes — except when it does not. Which means, of course, the state is **not** just an instrument of class rule and, correspondingly, the anarchist critique is confirmed. This explains why the analysis of the *"Asiatic Mode of Production"* is so woefully underdeveloped in Marx and Engels as well as the confused and contradictory attempt to understand Bonapartism.

To summarise, if the state can become *"independent"* of economic classes or even exist without an economically dominant class, then that implies that it is no mere machine, no mere *"instrument"* of class rule. It implies the anarchist argument that the state has interests of its own, generated by its essential features and so, therefore, cannot be used by a majority class as part of its struggle for liberation is correct. Simply put, Anarchists have long *"realised — feared — that any State structure, whether or not socialist or based on universal suffrage, has a certain independence from society, and so may serve the interests of those within State institutions rather than the people as a whole or the proletariat."* [Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 134] Thus *"the state certainly has interests of its own . .. [,] acts to protect [them] ... and protects the interests of the bourgeoisie when these interests happen to coincide with its own, as, indeed, they usually do."* [Carter, **Op. Cit.**, p. 226]



on hierarchy and centralisation. The state is organised in this way to facilitate minority rule by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. If the masses actually did manage society directly, it would be impossible for a minority class to dominate it. Hence the need for a state. Which shows the central fallacy of the Marxist theory of the state, namely it argues that the rule of the proletariat will be conducted by a structure, the state, which is designed to exclude the popular participation such a concept demands!

Considered another way, *"political power"* (the state) is simply the power of minorities to enforce their wills. This means that a social revolution which aims to create socialism cannot use it to further its aims. After all, if the state (i.e. *"political power"*) has been created to further minority class rule (as Marxists and anarchists agree) then, surely, this function has determined how the organ which exercises it has developed. Therefore, we would expect organ and function to be related and impossible to separate. So when Marx argued that the conquest of political power had become the great duty of the working class because landlords and capitalists always make use of their political privileges to defend their economic monopolies and enslave labour, he drew the wrong conclusion.

Building on a historically based (and so evolutionary) understanding of the state, anarchists concluded that it was necessary not to seize political power (which could only be exercised by a minority within any state) but rather to destroy it, to dissipate power into the hands of the working class, the majority. By ending the regime of the powerful by destroying their instrument of rule, the power which was concentrated into their hands automatically falls back into the hands of society. Thus, working class power can only be concrete once *"political power"* is shattered and replaced by the social power of the working class based on its own class organisations (such as factory com-

mittees, workers' councils, unions, neighbourhood assemblies and so on). As Murray Bookchin put it:

> *"the slogan 'Power to the people' can only be put into practice when the power exercised by social elites is dissolved into the people. Each individual can then take control of his [or her] daily life. If 'Power to the people' means nothing more than power to the 'leaders' of the people, then the people remain an undifferentiated, manipulated mass, as powerless after the revolution as they were before."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. xif]

In practice, this means that any valid social revolution needs to break the state and **not** replace it with another one. This is because, in order to be a state, any state structure must be based on delegated power, hierarchy and centralisation (*"every State, even the most Republican and the most democratic … . are in essence only machines governing the masses from above"* and *"[i]f there is a State, there must necessarily be domination, and therefore slavery; a State without slavery, overt or concealed, is unthinkable — and that is why we are enemies of the State."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 211 and p. 287]). If power is devolved to the working class then the state no longer exists as its *"essential feature"* (of delegated power) is absent. What you have is a new form of the *"primitive democracy"* which existed before the rise of the state. While this new, modern, form of self-management will have to defend itself against those seeking to recreate minority power, this does not mean that it becomes a state. After all, the tribes with *"primitive democracy"* had to defend themselves against their adversaries and so that, in itself, does not means that these communities had a state (see section H.2.1). Thus defence of a revolution, as anarchists have constantly stressed, does not equate to a state as it fails to address the key issue,



*an organ for the safeguarding of its common interests against internal and external attacks. This organ is the state power. Hardly come into being, this organ makes itself independent* ***vis-à-vis*** *society: and, indeed, the more so, the more it becomes the organ of a particular class, the more it directly enforces the supremacy of that class." "Society",* he argued four years later, *"gives rise to certain common function which it cannot dispense with. The persons appointed for this purpose form a new branch of the division of labour* ***within society****. This gives them particular interests, distinct, too, from the interests of those who empowered them; they make themselves independent of the latter and — the state is in being."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 617 and pp. 685–6] In this schema, the independence of the state comes **first** and is then captured by rising economically powerful class.

Regardless of when and how the state arises, the key thing is that Engels recognised that the state was *"endowed with relative independence."* Rather than being a simple expression of economic classes and their interests, this *"new independent power, while having in the main to follow the movement of production, reacts in its turn, by virtue of its inherent relative independence — that is, the relative independence once transferred to it and gradually further developed — upon the conditions and course of production. It is the interaction of two unequal forces: on the one hand, the economic movement, on the other, the new political power, which strives for as much independence as possible, and which, having once been established, is endowed with a movement of its own."* There were three types of *"reaction of the state power upon economic development."* The state can act *"in the same direction"* and then it is *"more rapid"* or it can *"oppose"* it and *"can do great damage to the economic development."* Finally, it can *"prevent the economic development proceeding along certain lines, and prescribe other lines."* Finally he stated *"why do we fight for the political dictatorship of the proletariat if political power is economically impotent? Force*

It is simply nonsense to claim, as Trotsky did, that the *"anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class."* [**Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933–34**, p. 125] How could the proletariat be the *"ruling class"* if it were under the heel of a totalitarian dictatorship? State ownership of property was precisely the means by which the bureaucracy enforced its control over production and so the source of its economic power and privileges. To state the obvious, if the working class does not control the property it is claimed to own then someone else does. The economic relationship thus generated is a hierarchical one, in which the working class is an oppressed class.

Significantly, Trotsky combated those of his followers who drew the same conclusions as had anarchists and libertarian Marxists while he and Lenin held the reigns of power. Perhaps this ideological blindness is understandable, given Trotsky's key role in creating the bureaucracy in the first place. So Trotsky did criticise, if in a confused manner, the Stalinist regime for its *"injustice, oppression, differential consumption, and so on, even if he had supported them when he himself was in the elite."* [Neil C. Fernandez, **Capitalism and Class Struggle in the USSR**, p. 180]). Then there is the awkward conclusion that if the bureaucracy were a ruling class under Stalin then Russia was also state capitalist under Lenin and Trotsky for the economic relations were identical in both (this obvious conclusion haunts those, like the British SWP, who maintain that Stalinism was State Capitalist but not Bolshevism — see section H.3.13). Suffice to say, if the state itself can be the "economically dominant class" then the state cannot be a mere instrument of an economic class.

Moreover, Engels also presented another analysis of the state which suggested that it arose **before** economic classes appeared. In 1886 he wrote of how society *"creates for itself*



namely who has **power** in the system — the masses or their leaders.

This issue is fudged by Marx. When Bakunin, in *"Statism and Anarchy"*, asked the question *"Will the entire proletariat head the government?"*, Marx argued in response:

> *"Does in a trade union, for instance, the whole union constitute the executive committee? Will all division of labour in a factory disappear and also the various functions arising from it? And will everybody be at the top in Bakunin's construction built from the bottom upwards? There will in fact be no below then. Will all members of the commune also administer the common affairs of the region? In that case there will be no difference between commune and region. 'The Germans [says Bakunin] number nearly 40 million. Will, for example, all 40 million be members of the government?' Certainly, for the thing begins with the self-government of the commune."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 150–1]

As Alan Carter argues, *"this might have seemed to Marx [over] a century ago to be satisfactory rejoinder, but it can hardly do today. In the infancy of the trade unions, which is all Marx knew, the possibility of the executives of a trade union becoming divorced from the ordinary members may not have seemed to him to be a likely outcome, We, however, have behind us a long history of union leaders 'selling out' and being out of touch with their members. Time has ably demonstrated that to reject Bakunin's fears on the basis of the practice of trade union officials constitutes a woeful complacency with regard to power and privilege — a complacency that was born ample fruit in the form of present Marxist parties and 'communist' societies ... [His] dispute with Bakunin shows quite clearly that Marx did not stress*

*the continued control of the revolution by the mass of the people as a prerequisite for the transcendence of all significant social antagonisms."* [**Marx: A Radical Critique**, pp. 217–8] Non-anarchists have also noticed the poverty of Marx's response. For example, as David W. Lovell puts it, *"[t]aken as a whole, Marx's comments have dodged the issue. Bakunin is clearly grappling with the problems of Marx's transition period, in particular the problem of leadership, while Marx refuses to discuss the political form of what must be (at least in part) class rule by the proletariat."* [**From Marx to Lenin**, p. 64]

As we discussed in section H.3.1, Marx's *"Address to the Communist League,"* with its stress on *"the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority"* and that *"the path of revolutionary activity ... can only proceed with full force from the centre,"* suggests that Bakunin's fears were valid and Marx's answer simply inadequate. [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 509] Simply put, if, as Engels argued, *"an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people,"* then, clearly Marx's argument of 1850 (and others like it) signifies a state in the usual sense of the word, one which has to be *"distinct"* from the mass of the population in order to ensure that the masses are prevented from interfering with their own revolution. This was not, of course, the desire of Marx and Engels but this result flows from their theory of the state and its fundamental flaws. These flaws can be best seen from their repeated assertion that the capitalist democratic state could be captured via universal suffrage and used to introduce socialism (see section H.3.10) but it equally applies to notions of creating new states based on the centralisation of power favoured by ruling elites since class society began.

As Kropotkin stressed, *"one does not make an historical institution follow in the direction to which one points — that is in the opposite direction to the one it has taken over the centuries."* To expect this would be a *"a sad and tragic mistake"* simply because *"the old machine, the old organisation, [was] slowly de-*



of life (which *"constitute the basis of the Soviet social structure"*). He admitted that the *"Soviet Bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically"* but has done so *"in order by methods of **its own** to defend the social conquests"* of the October Revolution. He did not ponder too deeply the implications of admitting that the *"means of production belong to the State. But the State, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 93, p. 136, p. 228, p. 235 and p. 236] If that is so, only ideology can stop the obvious confusion being drawn, namely that the state bureaucracy was the ruling class. But that is precisely what happened with Trotsky's confusion expressing itself thusly:

> *"In no other regime has a bureaucracy ever achieved such a degree of independence from the dominating class ... it is something more than a bureaucracy. It is in the full sense of the word the sole privileged and commanding stratum in the Soviet society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 235]

By this, Trotsky suggested that the working class was the *"dominating class"* under Stalinism! In fact, the bureaucracy *"continues to preserve State property only to the extent it fears the proletariat"* while, at the same time, the bureaucracy has *"become [society's] lord"* and *"the Soviet state has acquired a totalitarian-bureaucratic character"*! This nonsense is understandable, given the unwillingness to draw the obvious conclusion from the fact that the bureaucracy was *"compelled to defend State property as the source of its power and its income. In this aspect of its activity it still remains a weapon of proletarian dictatorship."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112, p. 107, p. 238 and p. 236] By commanding nationalised property, the bureaucracy, like private capitalists, could exploit the labour of the working class and did. That the state owned the means of production did not stop this being a form of class system.

*the state is the supreme landlord. Sovereignty here is landed property concentrated on a national scale."* [**Capital**, vol. 3, p. 927] Thus *"the State [is] the real landlord"* in the *"Asiatic system"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 12, p. 215] In other words, the ruling class could be a state bureaucracy and so be independent of economic classes. Unfortunately this analysis remained woefully undeveloped and no conclusions were drawn from these few comments, perhaps unsurprisingly as it undermines the claim that the state is merely the instrument of the economically dominant class. It also, of course, has applicability to state socialism and certain conclusions could be reached that suggested it, as Bakunin warned, would be a new form of class rule.

The state bureaucracy as the ruling class can be seen in Soviet Russia (and the other so-called "socialist" regimes such as China and Cuba). As libertarian socialist Ante Ciliga put it, *"the manner in which Lenin organised industry had handed it over entirely into the hands of the bureaucracy,"* and so the workers *"became once more the wage-earning manpower in other people's factories. Of socialism there remained in Russia no more than the word."* [**The Russian Enigma**, p. 280 and p. 286] Capitalism became state capitalism under Lenin and Trotsky and so the state, as Bakunin predicted and feared, became the new ruling class under Marxism (see section H.3.14 for more discussion of this).

The confusions of the Marxist theory of the state ensured that Trotsky, for example, failed to recognise the obvious, namely that the Stalinist state bureaucracy was a ruling class. Rather, it was the *"new ruling caste"*, or *"the ruling stratum"*. While admitting, at one stage, that the *"transfer of the factories to the State changed the situation of the workers only juridically"* Trotsky then ignored the obvious conclusion that this has left the working class as an exploited class under a (new) form of capitalism to assert that the *"nature"* of Stalinist Russia was *"a proletarian State"* because of its *"nationalisation"* of the means



*veloped in the course of history to crush freedom, to crush the individual, to establish oppression on a legal basis, to create monopolists, to lead minds astray by accustoming them to servitude"*. [**The State: Its Historic Role**, pp. 57–8] A social revolution needs new, non-statist, forms of social organisation to succeed:

> *"To give full scope to socialism entails rebuilding from top to bottom a society dominated by the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper. It is not as has sometimes been said by those indulging in metaphysical wooliness just a question of giving the worker 'the total product of his labour'; it is a question of completely reshaping all relationships .. . In ever street, in every hamlet, in every group of men gathered around a factory or along a section of the railway line, the creative, constructive and organisational spirit must be awakened in order to rebuild life — in the factory, in the village, in the store, in production and in distribution of supplies. All relations between individuals and great centres of population have to be made all over again, from the very day, from the very moment one alters the existing commercial or administrative organisation.*
>
> *"And they expect this immense task, requiring the free expression of popular genius, to be carried out within the framework of the State and the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the State! They expect the State ... to become the lever for the accomplishment of this immense transformation. They want to direct the renewal of a society by means of decrees and electoral majorities... How ridiculous!"* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 58–9]

Ultimately, the question, of course, is one of power. Does the *"executive committee"* have the fundamental decision mak-

ing power in society, or does that power lie in the mass assemblies upon which a federal socialist society is built? If the former, we have rule by a few party leaders and the inevitable bureaucratisation of the society and a state in the accepted sense of the word. If the latter, we have a basic structure of a free and equal society and a new organisation of popular self-management which eliminates the existence of a public power above society. This is not playing with words. It signifies the key issue of social transformation, an issue which Marxism tends to ignore or confuse matters about when discussing. Bookchin clarified what is at stake:

> *"To some neo-Marxists who see centralisation and decentralisation merely as difference of degree, the word 'centralisation' may merely be an awkward way of denoting means for* ***co-ordinating*** *the decisions made by decentralised bodies. Marx, it is worth noting, greatly confused this distinction when he praised the Paris Commune as a 'working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time.' In point of fact, the consolidation of 'executive and legislative' functions in a single body was regressive. It simply identified the process of policy-making, a function that rightly should belong to the people in assembly, with the technical execution of these policies, a function that should be left to strictly administrative bodies subject to rotation, recall, limitations of tenure … Accordingly, the melding of policy formation with administration placed the institutional emphasis of classical [Marxist] socialism on centralised bodies, indeed, by an ironical twist of historical events, bestowing the privilege of formulating policy on the 'higher bodies' of socialist hierarchies and their execution precisely on the more popular 'revolutionary com-*



ply wrong (on both counts) as he, himself, seemed to became aware of two decades later.

In 1871 he argued that *"the State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism."* This meant that *"in view of the threatened upheaval of the proletariat, [the bourgeoisie] now used that State power mercilessly and ostentatiously as the national war-engine of capital against labour"* and so were *"bound not only to invest the executive with continually increased powers of repression, but at the same time to divest their own parliamentary stronghold … of all its own means of defence against the Executive. The Executive, in the person of Louis Bonaparte, turned them out."* Marx now admitted that this regime only *"professed to rest upon the peasantry"* while, *"[i]n reality, it was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation."* However, *"[u]nder its sway, bourgeois society, freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself."* [**Selected Works**, p. 285, p. 286, pp. 286–7 and p. 287]

Yet capitalists often do well under regimes which suppress the basic liberties of the working class and so the bourgeoisie remained the ruling class and the state remained its organ. In other words, there is no "balance" between classes under Bonapartism even if the political regime is not subject to electoral control by the bourgeoisie and has more independence to pursue its own agenda.

This is not the only confirmation of the anarchist critique of the Marxist theory of the state which can be found in Marxism itself. Marx, at times, also admitted the possibility of the state **not** being an instrument of (economic) class rule. For example, he mentioned the so-called ***"Asiatic Mode of Production"*** in which *"there are no private landowners"* but rather *"the state … which confronts"* the peasants *"directly as simultaneously landowner and sovereign, rent and tax coincide … Here*

> *downfallen class ... into the arms of the dictatorship of Napoleon III ... We should not think that the Bourgeois Gentlemen were too inconvenienced ... [Those who] applied themselves earnestly and exclusively to the great concern of the bourgeoisie, the exploitation of the people ... were well protected and powerfully supported ... All went well, according to the desires of the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 62–3]

Somewhat ironically, then, a key example used by Marxists for the "independence" of the state is no such thing. Bonapartism did not represent a "balance" between the proletariat and bourgeoisie but rather the most naked form of state rule required in the fact of working class revolt. It was a counter-revolutionary regime which reflected a defeat for the working class, not a "balance" between it and the capitalist class.

Marx's confusions arose from his belief that, for the bourgeoisie, the parliamentary republic *"was the unavoidable condition of their **common** rule, the sole form of state in which their general class interest subjected itself at the same time both the claims of their particular factions and all the remaining classes of society."* [**Selected Works**, pp. 152–3] The abolition of the republic, the replacement of the government, was, for him, the end of the political rule of the bourgeoisie as he argued that *"the industrial bourgeoisie applauds with servile bravos the **coup d'état** of December 2, the annihilation of parliament, the downfall of its own rule, the dictatorship of Bonaparte."* He repeated this identification: *"Passing of the parliamentary regime and of bourgeois rule. Victory of Bonaparte."* [**Selected Writings**, pp. 164–5 and p. 166] Political rule was equated to which party held power and so, logically, universal suffrage was *"the equivalent of political power for the working class . .. where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population."* Its *"inevitable result* would be *"**the political supremacy of the working class**."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 11, pp. 335–6] This was, of course, sim-



> *mittees' below."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, pp. 215–6]

By confusing co-ordination with the state (i.e. with delegation of power), Marxism opens the door wide open to the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* being a state *"in the proper sense."* In fact, not only does Marxism open that door, it even invites the state *"in the proper sense"* in! This can be seen from Engels comment that just as *"each political party sets out to establish its rule in the state, so the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party is striving to establish **its** rule, the rule of the working class."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 372] By confusing rule by the party *"in the state"* with *"rule of the working class,"* Engels is confusing party power and popular power. For the party to *"establish **its** rule,"* the state in the normal sense (i.e. a structure based on the delegation of power) has to be maintained. As such, the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* signifies the delegation of power by the proletariat into the hands of the party and that implies a *"public power distinct from the mass of the people"* and so minority rule. This aspect of Marxism, as we argue in the next section, was developed under the Bolsheviks and became *"the dictatorship of the party"* (i.e. the dictatorship **over** the proletariat):

> *"since Marx vigorously opposed Bakunin's efforts to ensure that only libertarian and decentralist means were employed by revolutionaries so as to facilitate the revolution remaining in the hands of the mass of workers, he must accept a fair measure of culpability for the authoritarian outcome of the Russian Revolution ...*
>
> *"Bakunin was not satisfied with trusting revolutionary leaders to liberate the oppressed ... The oppressed people had to made aware that the only security against replacing one repressive structure with an-*

*other was the deliberate retaining of control of the revolution by the whole of the working classes, and not naively trusting it to some vanguard."* [Alan Carter, **Marx: A Radical Critique** pp. 218–9]

It is for this reason why anarchists are extremely critical of Marxist ideas of social revolution. As Alan Carter argues:

> *"It is to argue not against revolution, but against 'revolutionary' praxis employing central authority. It is to argue that any revolution must remain in the hands of the mass of people and that they must be aware of the dangers of allowing power to fall into the hands of a minority in the course of the revolution. Latent within Marxist theory . .. is the tacit condoning of political inequality in the course and aftermath of revolutionary praxis. Only when such inequality is openly and widely rejected can there be any hope of a libertarian communist revolution. The lesson to learn is that we must oppose not revolutionary practice, but* ***authoritarian*** *'revolutionary' practice. Such authoritarian practice will continue to prevail in revolutionary circles as long as the Marxist theory of the state and the corresponding theory of power remain above criticism within them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 231]

In summary, the Marxist theory of the state is simply ahistoric and postulates some kind of state "essence" which exists independently of actual states and their role in society. To confuse the organ required by a minority class to execute and maintain its rule and that required by a majority class to manage society is to make a theoretical error of great magnitude. It opens the door to the idea of party power and even party dictatorship. As such, the Marxism of Marx and Engels is confused



*of enforcing their class interests in their own name ... They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power . .. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself."* Yet Marx himself admits that this regime experienced *"peasant risings in half of France"*, organised *"raids on the peasants by the army"* and the *"mass incarceration and transportation of peasants."* A strange form of class rule, when the class represented is oppressed by the regime! Rest assured, though, the *"Bonaparte dynasty represents not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant."* Then Marx, without comment, pronounced Bonaparte to be *"the representative of the* ***lumpenproletariat*** *to which he himself, his entourage, his government and his army belong."* [**Selected Works**, p. 170, p. 171 and p. 176]

It would be fair to say that Marx's analysis is somewhat confused and seems an ad hoc explanation to the fact that in a modern society the state appeared to become independent of the economically dominant class. Yet if a regime is systematically oppressing a class then it is fair to conclude that is **not** representing that class in any way. Bonaparte's power did not, in other words, rest on the peasantry. Rather, like fascism, it was a means by which the bourgeoisie could break the power of the working class and secure its own class position against possible social revolution. As Bakunin argued, it was a *"despotic imperial system"* which the bourgeois *"themselves founded out of fear of the Social Revolution."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 63] Thus the abolition of bourgeois rule was more apparent than real:

> *"As soon as the people took equality and liberty seriously, the bourgeoisie ... retreated into reaction ... They began by suppressing universal suffrage ... The fear of Social Revolution ... . hurled this*

*bourgeoisie — the basic condition of modern Bonapartism — an equilibrium between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.*" This meant that *"both in the old absolute monarchy and in the modern Bonapartist monarchy the real government power lies in the hands of a special caste of army officers and state officials"* and so the *"independence of this case, which appears to occupy a position outside and, so to speak, above society, gives the state the semblance of independence in relation to society."* However, this did not stop Engels asserting that the *"state is nothing but the organised collective power of the exploiting classes, the landlords and the capitalists as against the exploited classes, the peasants and the workers. What the individual capitalists ... do not want, their state also does not want."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 363 and p. 362]

So, according to Engels, the executive of the state, like the state itself, can become independent from classes if the opposing classes were balanced. This analysis, it must be pointed out, was an improvement on the earliest assertions of Marx and Engels on the state. In the 1840s, it was a case of the *"independence of the state is only found nowadays in those countries where the estates have not yet completely developed into classes ... where consequently no section of the population can achieve dominance over the others."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 5, p. 90] For Engels, *"[f]rom the moment the state administration and legislature fall under the control of the bourgeoisie, the independence of the bureaucracy ceases to exist."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 6, p. 88] It must, therefore, have come as a surprise for Marx and Engels when the state and its bureaucracy appeared to become independent in France under Napoleon III.

Talking of which, it should be noted that, initially for Marx, under Bonapartism *"the state power is not suspended in mid air. Bonaparte represents a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the* ***small-holding [Parzellen] peasants****."* The Bonaparte *"who dispersed the bourgeois parliament is the chosen of the peasantry."* However, this class is *"incapable*



on the issue of the state. Their comments fluctuate between the anarchist definition of the state (based, as it is, on generalisations from historical examples) and the a-historic definition (based not on historical example but rather derived from a supra-historical analysis). Trying to combine the metaphysical with the scientific, the authoritarian with the libertarian, could only leave their followers with a confused legacy and that is what we find.

Since the death of the founding fathers of Marxism, their followers have diverged into two camps. The majority have embraced the metaphysical and authoritarian concept of the state and proclaimed their support for a *"workers' state."* This is represented by social-democracy and it radical offshoot, Leninism. As we discuss in the next section, this school has used the Marxist conception of the state to allow for rule over the working class by the *"revolutionary"* party. The minority has become increasingly and explicitly anti-state, recognising that the Marxist legacy is contradictory and that for the proletarian to directly manage society then there can be no power above them. To this camp belongs the libertarian Marxists of the council communist, Situationist and other schools of thought which are close to anarchism.

## H.3.8 What is wrong with the Leninist theory of the state?

As discussed in the last section, there is a contradiction at the heart of the Marxist theory of the state. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the state, historically, has always been an instrument of minority rule and is structured to ensure this. On the other, it argues that you can have a state (the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"*) which transcends this historical reality to express an abstract essence of the state as an *"instrument of class rule."* This means that Marxism usually confuses two very dif-

ferent concepts, namely the state (a structure based on centralisation and delegated power) and the popular self-management and self-organisation required to create and defend a socialist society.

This confusion between two fundamentally different concepts proved to be disastrous when the Russian Revolution broke out. Confusing party power with working class power, the Bolsheviks aimed to create a "workers' state" in which their party would be in power (see section H.3.3). As the state was an instrument of class rule, it did not matter if the new "workers' state" was centralised, hierarchical and top-down like the old state as the structure of the state was considered irrelevant in evaluating its role in society. Thus, while Lenin seemed to promise a radical democracy in which the working class would directly manage its own affairs in his **State and Revolution**, in practice he implemented a *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* which was, in fact, *"the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 337] In other words, the vanguard party in the position of head of the state, governing on behalf of the working class which, in turn, meant that the new "workers' state" was fundamentally a state in the usual sense of the word. This quickly lead to a dictatorship **over**, not of, the proletariat (as Bakunin had predicted). This development did not come as a surprise to anarchists, who had long argued that a state is an instrument of minority rule and cannot change its nature. To use the state to affect socialist change is impossible, simply because it is not designed for such a task. As we argued in section B.2, the state is based on centralisation of power explicitly to ensure minority rule and for this reason has to be abolished during a social revolution.

As Voline summarised, there is *"an explicit, irreconcilable contradiction between the very essence of State Socialist power (if it triumphs) and that of the true Social Revolutionary process."* This was because *"**the basis of State Socialism** and delegated power is **the explicit non-recognition of [the] principles of***



awareness that the state can have interests of its own, that it is not simply a machine of class rule.

Aware of the obvious contradiction, Engels argued that the state *"is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class which, through the medium of the state, becomes the politically dominant class ... By way of exception, however, periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other, so nearly that the state power, as ostensible mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both."* He pointed to the *"absolute monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries"*, which held the balance between the nobility and the bourgeoisie against one another as well as *"the Bonapartism of the First, and still more of the Second French Empire."* It should be noted that, elsewhere, Engels was more precise on how long the state was, in fact, controlled by the bourgeoisie, namely two years: *"In France, where the bourgeoisie as such, as a class in its entirety, held power for only two years, 1849 and 1850, under the republic, it was able to continue its social existence only by abdicating its political power to Louis Bonaparte and the army."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 577–8 and p. 238] So, in terms of French history, Engels argued that *"by way of exception"* accounted for over 250 hundred years, the 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ centuries and most of the 19$^{th}$, bar a two year period! Even if we are generous and argue that the 1830 revolution placed one section of the bourgeoisie (finance capital) into political power, we are still left with over 200 hundred years of state "independence" from classes! Given this, it would be fair to suggest that the "exception" should be when it **is** an instrument of class rule, not when it is not!

This was no isolated case. In Prussia *"members of the bourgeoisie have a majority in the Chamber ... But where is their power over the state? ... the mass of the bourgeoisie ... does not **want** to rule."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 236–7] And so, in Germany, there exists *"alongside the basic condition of the old absolute monarchy — an equilibrium between the landowner aristocracy and the*

> *legacy we would done better not to inherit. The perceived need for authoritarian and centralised revolutionary organisation is sanctioned by Marx's theory because his theoretical subordination of political power to economic classes apparently renders post-revolutionary political power unproblematic."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 231]

Many factors contributed to Stalinism, including Marxism's defective theory of the state. In stressing that socialism meant nationalising property, it lead to state management which, in turn, expropriated the working class as a vast managerial bureaucracy was required to run it. Moreover, Marxism disguised this new ruling class as it argues that the state 'represents' a class and had no interests of itself. Thus we have Trotsky's utter inability to understand Stalinism and his insane formula that the proletariat remained the ruling class under Stalin (or, for that matter, under himself and Lenin)! Simply put, by arguing that the state was an instrument of class rule, Marxism ensured it presented a false theory of social change and could not analysis its resulting class rule when the inevitable consequences of this approach was implemented.

However, there is more to Marxism than its dominant theory of the state. Given this blindness of orthodox Marxism to this issue, it seems ironic that one of the people responsible for it also provides anarchists with evidence to back up our argument that the state is not simply an instrument of class rule but rather has interests of its own. Thus we find Engels arguing that proletariat, *"in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy,"* would have *"to safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment."* [**Selected Works**, p. 257] Yet, if the state was simply an instrument of class rule such precautions would not be necessary. Engels comments show an



***the Social Revolution.*** *The characteristic traits of Socialist ideology and practice ... do not belong to the future, but are wholly a part of the bourgeois past . .. Once this model has been applied, the true principles of the Revolution are fatally abandoned. Then follows, inevitably, the rebirth, under another name, of the exploitation of the labouring masses, with all its consequences."* Thus *"the forward march of the revolutionary masses towards real emancipation, towards the creation of new forms of social life, is incompatible with the very principle of State power .. . the authoritarian principle and the revolutionary principle are diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 247 and p. 248]

Ironically, the theoretical lessons Leninists gained from the experience of the Russian Revolution confirm the anarchist analysis that the state structure exists to facilitate minority rule and marginalise and disempower the majority to achieve that rule. This can be seen from the significant revision of the Marxist position which occurred once the Bolshevik party become the ruling party. Simply put, after 1917 leading representatives of Leninism stressed that state power was **not** required to repress resistance by the ex-ruling class as such, but, in fact, was also necessitated by the divisions within the working class. In other words, state power was required because the working class was not able to govern itself and so required a grouping (the party) above it to ensure the success of the revolution and overcome any *"wavering"* within the masses themselves.

While we have discussed this position in section H.1.2 and so will be repeating ourselves to some degree, it is worth summarising again the arguments put forward to justify this revision. This is because they confirm what anarchists have always argued, namely that the state is an instrument of minority rule and **not** one by which working class people can manage their own affairs directly. As the quotations from leading Leninists make clear, it is **precisely** this feature of the state which rec-

ommends it for party (i.e. minority) power. The contradiction at the heart of the Marxist theory of the state we pointed out in the section H.3.7 has been resolved in Leninism. It supports the state precisely because it is *"a public power distinct from the mass of the people,"* rather than an instrument of working class self-management of society.

Needless to say, his latter day followers point to Lenin's apparently democratic, even libertarian, sounding 1917 work, **The State and Revolution** when asked about the Leninist theory of the state. As our discussion in section H.1.7 proved, the ideas expounded in his pamphlet were rarely, if at all, applied in practice by the Bolsheviks. Moreover, it was written before the seizure of power. In order to see the validity of his argument we must compare it to his and his fellow Bolshevik leaders opinions once the revolution had "succeeded." What lessons did they generalise from their experiences and how did these lessons relate to **State and Revolution**?

The change can be seen from Trotsky, who argued quite explicitly that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard"* and that *"the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity."* Only with *"support of the vanguard by the class"* can there be the *"conquest of power"* and it was in *"this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the *"vanguard"* which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* Thus state power is required to **govern the masses,** who cannot exercise power themselves. As Trotsky put it, *"[t]hose who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Writings 1936–37**, p. 490, p. 488 and p. 495]



> *resented' nothing other than itself."* [**Remaking Society**, pp. 67–8]

Bakunin pointed to Turkish Serbia, where economically dominant classes *"do not even exist — there is only a bureaucratic class. Thus, the Serbian state will crush the Serbian people for the sole purpose of enabling Serbian bureaucrats to live a fatter life."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 54] Leninist Tony Cliff, in his attempt to prove that Stalinist Russia was state capitalist and its bureaucracy a ruling class, pointed to various societies which *"had deep class differentiation, based not on private property but on state property. Such systems existed in Pharaonic Egypt, Moslem Egypt, Iraq, Persia and India."* He discusses the example of Arab feudalism in more detail, where *"the feudal lord had no permanent domain of his own, but a member of a class which collectively controlled the land and had the right to appropriate rent."* This was *"ownership of the land by the state"* rather than by individuals. [**State Capitalism in Russia**, pp. 316–8] As such, the idea that the state is simply an instrument of class rule seems unsupportable. As Gaston Leval argued, *"the State, by its nature, tends to have a life of its own."* [quoted by Sam Dolgoff, **A Critique of Marxism**, p. 10]

Marx's *"implicit theory of the state — a theory which, in reducing political power to the realisation of the interests of the dominant economic classes, precludes any concern with the potentially authoritarian and oppressive outcome of authoritarian and centralised revolutionary methods ... This danger (namely, the dismissal of warranted fears concerning political power) is latent in the central features of Marx's approach to politics."* [Alan Carter, **Op. Cit.**, p. 219] To summarise the obvious conclusion:

> *"By focusing too much attention on the economic structure of society and insufficient attention on the problems of political power, Marx has left a*

*class, as Marxism would have us believe. There are many examples of States that **were** the 'ruling class' and whose own interests existed quite apart from — even in antagonism to — privileged, presumably 'ruling' classes in a given society. The ancient world bears witness to distinctly capitalistic classes, often highly privileged and exploitative, that were bilked by the State, circumscribed by it, and ultimately devoured by it — which is in part why a capitalist society never emerged out of the ancient world. Nor did the State 'represent' other class interests, such as landed nobles, merchants, craftsmen, and the like. The Ptolemaic State in Hellenistic Egypt was an interest in its own right and 'represented' no other interest than its own. The same is true of the Aztec and the Inca States until they were replaced by Spanish invaders. Under the Emperor Domitian, the Roman State became the principal 'interest' in the empire, superseding the interests of even the landed aristocracy which held such primacy in Mediterranean society…*

*"Near-Eastern State, like the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian, were virtually extended households of individual monarchs … Pharaohs, kings, and emperors nominally held the land (often co-jointly with the priesthood) in the trust of the deities, who were either embodied in the monarch or were represented by him. The empires of Asian and North African kings were 'households' and the population was seen as 'servants of the palace' …*

*"These 'states,' in effect, were not simply engines of exploitation or control in the interests of a privileged 'class.' … The Egyptian State was very real but it 'rep-*



Logically, though, this places the party in a privileged position. So what happens if the working class no longer supports the vanguard? Who takes priority? Unsurprisingly, in both theory and practice, the party is expected to rule over the masses. This idea that state power was required due to the limitations within the working class is reiterated a few years later in 1939. Moreover, the whole rationale for party dictatorship came from the fundamental rationale for democracy, namely that any government should reflect the changing opinions of the masses:

> *"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves … if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself."* [*"The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism"*, pp. 53–66, **Their Morals and Ours**, p. 59]

Needless to say, **by definition** everyone is *"backward"* when compared to the *"vanguard of the proletariat."* Moreover, as it is this *"vanguard"* which is *"armed with the resources of the state"* and **not** the proletariat as a whole we are left with one obvious conclusion, namely party dictatorship rather than working class democracy. How Trotsky's position is compatible with the idea of the working class as the "ruling class" is not explained. However, it fits in well with the anarchist analysis of the state as an instrument designed to ensure minority rule.

Thus the possibility of party dictatorship exists if popular support fades. Which is, significantly, precisely what **had** happened when Lenin and Trotsky were in power. In fact, these arguments built upon other, equally elitist statement which had been expressed by Trotsky when he held the reins of power. In 1920, for example, he argued that while the Bolsheviks have *"more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party,"* in fact *"it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party."* This, just to state the obvious, was his argument seventeen years later. *"In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class,"* Trotsky added, *"there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109] In early 1921, he argued again for Party dictatorship at the Tenth Party Congress:

> *"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]



*formation"* being in the informal social hierarchies which exist in tribal societies. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133 and p. 134] Thus the state is not, initially, a product of economic classes but rather an independent development based on inequalities of social power. Harold Barclay, an anarchist who has studied anthropological evidence on this matter, concurs:

> *"In Marxist theory power derives primarily, if not exclusively, from control of the means of production and distribution of wealth, that is, from economic factors. Yet, it is evident that power derived from knowledge — and usually 'religious' style knowledge — is often highly significant, at least in the social dynamics of small societies... Economic factors are hardly the only source of power. Indeed, we see this in modern society as well, where the capitalist owner does not wield total power. Rather technicians and other specialists command it as well, not because of their economic wealth, but because of their knowledge."* [quoted by Alan Carter, **Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 191]

If, as Bookchin summarises, *"hierarchies precede classes"* then trying to use a hierarchical structure like the state to abolish them is simply wishful thinking.

As regards more recent human history, there have been numerous examples of the state existing without being an instrument of (economic) class rule. Rather, the state **was** the ruling class. While the most obvious example is the Stalinist regimes where the state bureaucracy ruled over a state capitalist economy, there have been plenty of others, as Murray Bookchin pointed out:

> *"Each State is not necessarily an institutionalised system of violence in the interests of a specific ruling*

> *classes have exhausted themselves, the class of the bureaucracy enters upon the stage and then the State falls, or rises, if you please to the position of a machine."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 208]

Thus the state cannot simply be considered as an instrument of rule by economic classes. It can be quite an effective parasitical force in its own right, as both anthropological and historical evidence suggest. The former raises the possibility that the state arose before economic classes and that its roots are in inequalities in power (i.e. hierarchy) within society, not inequalities of wealth. The latter points to examples of societies in which the state was not, in fact, an instrument of (economic) class rule but rather pursued an interest of its own.

As regards anthropology, Michael Taylor summarises that the *"evidence does not give [the Marxist] proposition [that the rise of economic classes caused the creation of the state] a great deal of support. Much of the evidence which has been offered in support of it shows only that the primary states, not long after their emergence, were economically stratified. But this is of course consistent also with the simultaneous rise ... of political and economic stratification, or with the **prior** development of the state — i.e. of **political** stratification — and the creation of economic stratification by the ruling class."* [**Community, Anarchy and Liberty**, p. 132] He quotes Elman Service on this:

> *"In all of the archaic civilisations and historically known chiefdoms and primitive states the 'stratification' was ... mainly of two classes, the governors and the governed — political strata, not strata of ownership groups."* [quoted by Taylor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 133]

Taylor argues that it the *"weakening of community and the development of gross inequalities are the **concomitants** and **consequences** of state formation."* He points to the *"germ of state*



The similarities with his arguments of 1939 are obvious. Unsurprisingly, he maintained this position in the intervening years. He stated in 1922 that *"we maintain the dictatorship of our party!"* [**The First Five Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 255] The next year saw him arguing that *"[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party."* He stressed that *"[o]ur party is the ruling party"* and that *"[t]o allow any changes whatever in this field"* meant *"bring[ing] into question all the achievements of the revolution and its future."* He indicated the fate of those who **did** question the party's position: *"Whoever makes an attempt on the party's leading role will, I hope, be unanimously dumped by all of us on the other side of the barricade."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158 and p. 160]

By 1927, when Trotsky was in the process of being *"dumped"* on the *"other side of the barricade"* by the ruling bureaucracy, he **still** argued for *"the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* It was stressed that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat [sic!] demands as its very core a single proletarian party."* [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–7)**, p. 395 and p. 441] As we noted in section H.1.2, ten years later, he was still explicitly arguing for the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"*.

Thus, for Trotsky over a twenty year period, the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* was fundamentally a *"dictatorship of the party."* While the working class may be allowed some level of democracy, the rule of the party was repeatedly given precedence. While the party may be placed into power by a mass revolution, once there the party would maintain its position of power and dismiss attempts by the working class to replace it as *"wavering"* or *"vacillation"* due to the *"insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity."* In other words, the party dictatorship was required to protect working class people

from themselves, their tendency to change their minds based on changing circumstances, evaluating the results of past decisions, debates between different political ideas and positions, make their own decisions, reject what is in their best interests (as determined by the party), and so on. Thus the underlying rationale for democracy (namely that it reflects the changing will of the voters, their *"passing moods"* so to speak) is used to justify party dictatorship!

The importance of party power **over** the working class was not limited to Trotsky. It was considered of general validity by all leading Bolsheviks and, moreover, quickly became mainstream Bolshevik ideology. In March 1923, for example, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in a statement issued to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Bolshevik Party. This statement summarised the lessons gained from the Russian revolution. It stated that *"the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat."* Vacillations, of course, are expressed by workers' democracy. Little wonder the statement rejects it: *"The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party."* [*"To the Workers of the USSR"* in G. Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party**, p. 213 and p. 214]

Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks were simply following Lenin's lead, who had admitted at the end of 1920 that while *"the dictatorship of the proletariat"* was *"inevitable"* in the *"transition of socialism,"* it is *"not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers."* The reason *"is given in the theses of the Second Congress of the Communist International on the role of political parties"* (more on which later). This means that *"the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat."* This was required because *"in all capitalist countries ... the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts"*



*ship and the Terror , which suppressed not only the right in the Great [French] Revolution of a century earlier, but also the left."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 90] A minority of council members (essentially those active in the International) stated that *"the Paris Commune has surrendered its authority to a dictatorship"* and it was *"hiding behind a dictatorship that the electorate have not authorised us to accept or to recognise."* [**The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left**, Eugene Schulkind (ed.), p. 187] The Commune was crushed before this process could fully unfold, but the omens were there (although it would have undoubtedly been hindered by the local scale of the institutions involved). As we discuss in section H.6, a similar process of a "revolutionary" government escaping from popular control occurred right from the start of the Russian Revolution. The fact the Bolshevik regime lasted longer and was more centralised (and covered a larger area) ensured that this process developed fully, with the "revolutionary" government creating around itself the institutions (the bureaucracy) which finally subjected the politicians and party leaders to its influence and then domination.

Simply put, the vision of the state as merely an instrument of class rule blinds its supporters to the dangers of **political** inequality in terms of power, the dangers inherent in giving a small group of people power over everyone else. The state has certain properties **because it is a state** and one of these is that it creates a bureaucratic class around it due to its centralised, hierarchical nature. Within capitalism, the state bureaucracy is (generally) under the control of the capitalist class. However, to generalise from this specific case is wrong as the state bureaucracy is a class in itself — and so trying to abolish classes without abolishing the state is doomed to failure:

> *"The State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: the sacerdotal class, the nobility, the bourgeoisie — and finally, when all the other*

*be no better than a source of discord and of hatreds."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 169 and pp. 176–7]

Rather than "withering away," any "workers' state" would tend to grow in terms of administration and so the government creates around itself a class of bureaucrats whose position is different from the rest of society. This would apply to production as well. Being unable to manage everything, the state would have to re-introduce hierarchical management in order to ensure its orders are met and that a suitable surplus is extracted from the workers to feed the needs of the state machine. By creating an economically powerful class which it can rely on to discipline the workforce, it would simply recreate capitalism anew in the form of *"state capitalism"* (this is precisely what happened during the Russian Revolution). To enforce its will onto the people it claims to represent, specialised bodies of armed people (police, army) would be required and soon created. All of which is to be expected, as state socialism *"entrusts to a few the management of social life and [so] leads to the exploitation and oppression of the masses by the few."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 47]

This process takes time. However, the tendency for government to escape from popular control and to generate privileged and powerful institutions around it can be seen in all revolutions, including the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution. In the former, the Communal Council was *"largely ignored ... after it was installed. The insurrection, the actual management of the city's affairs and finally the fighting against the Versaillese, were undertaken mainly by popular clubs, the neighbourhood vigilance committees, and the battalions of the National Guard. Had the Paris Commune (the Municipal Council) survived, it is extremely doubtful that it could have avoided conflict with these loosely formed street and militia formations. Indeed, by the end of April, some six weeks after the insurrection, the Commune constituted an 'all-powerful' Committee of Public Safety, a body redolent with memories of the Jacobin dictator-*



that it *"can be exercised only by a vanguard ... the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 20 and p. 21] For Lenin, *"revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 42, p. 170] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution** (a failure usually repeated by his followers). It is, however, a striking confirmation of Bakunin's comments *"the State cannot be sure of its own self-preservation without an armed force to defend it against its own **internal enemies,** against the discontent of its own people."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 265]

Looking at the lessons leading leaders of Leninism gained from the experience of the Russian Revolution, we have to admit that the Leninist *"workers' state"* will not be, in fact, a *"new"* kind of state, a *"semi-state,"* or, to quote Lenin, a *"new state"* which *"is **no longer** a state in the proper sense of the word."* If, as Lenin argued in early 1917, the state *"in the proper sense of the term is domination over the people by contingents of armed men divorced from the people,"* then Bolshevism in power quickly saw the need for a state *"in the proper sense."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p. 85] While this state *"in the proper sense"* had existed from the start of Bolshevik rule, it was only from early 1919 onwards (at the latest) that the leaders of Bolshevism had openly brought what they said into line with what they did. It was only by being a *"state in the proper sense"* could the Bolshevik party rule and exercise *"the dictatorship of the party"* over the *"wavering"* working class.

So when Lenin stated that *"Marxism differs from anarchism in that it recognises **the need for a state** for the purpose of the transition to socialism,"* anarchists agree. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p. 85] Insofar as "Marxism" aims for, to quote Lenin, the party to *"take state power into [its] own hands,"* to become *"the governing party"* and considers one of its key tasks for *"our Party to capture political power"* and to *"administer"* a country, then we can

safely say that the state needed is a state *"in the proper sense,"* based on the centralisation and delegation of power into the hands of a few (see our discussion of Leninism as ***"socialism from above"*** in section H.3.3 for details).

This recreation of the state *"in the proper sense"* did not come about by chance or simply because of the *"will to power"* of the leaders of Bolshevism. Rather, there are strong institutional pressures at work within any state structure (even a so-called *"semi-state"*) to turn it back into a *"proper"* state. We discuss this in more detail in section H.3.9. However, we should not ignore that many of the roots of Bolshevik tyranny can be found in the contradictions of the Marxist theory of the state. As noted in the last section, for Engels, the seizure of power by the party meant that the working class was in power. The Leninist tradition builds on this confusion between party and class power. It is clear that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* is, in fact, rule by the party. In Lenin's words:

> *"Engels speaks of* ***a government that is required for the domination of a class*** *... Applied to the proletariat, it consequently means a government* ***that is required for the domination of the proletariat,*** *i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat for the effectuation of the socialist revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 8, p. 279]

The role of the working class in this state was also indicated, as *"only a revolutionary dictatorship supported by the vast majority of the people can be at all durable."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 291] In other words the *"revolutionary government"* has the power, not the working class in whose name it governs. In 1921 he made this explicit: *"To govern you need an army of steeled revolutionary Communists. We have it, and it is called the Party."* The *"Party is the leader, the vanguard of the proletariat, which rules directly."* For Lenin, as *"long as we, the Party's Central Committee and*



name of the soviets yet soon marginalised, gerrymandered and disbanded them to remain in power while imposing a vision of socialism (more correctly, state capitalism) at odds with popular aspirations.

Why this would be the case is not hard to discover. Given that the state is a highly centralised, top-down structure it is unsurprising that it develops around itself a privileged class, a bureaucracy, around it. The inequality in power implied by the state is a source of privilege and oppression independent of property and economic class. Those in charge of the state's institutions would aim to protect (and expand) their area of operation, ensuring that they select individuals who share their perspectives and who they can pass on their positions. By controlling the flow of information, of personnel and resources, the members of the state's higher circles can ensure its, and their own, survival and prosperity. As such, politicians who are elected are at a disadvantage. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The politicians come and go while the power in the state lies in its institutions due to their permanence. It is to be expected that such institutions would have their own interests and would pursue them whenever they can.

This would not fundamentally change in a new "workers' state" as it is, like all states, based on the delegation and centralisation of power into a few hands. Any "workers' government" would need a new apparatus to enforce its laws and decrees. It would need effective means of gathering and collating information. It would thus create *"an entirely new ladder of administration to extend it rule and make itself obeyed."* While a social revolution needs mass participation, the state limits initiative to the few who are in power and *"it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the social forms"* required, which *"can only be the collective work of the masses ... Any kind of external authority will merely be an obstacle, a hindrance to the organic work that has to be accomplished; it will*

For anarchists, this position is a fundamental weakness of Marxism, a sign that the mainstream Marxist position significantly misunderstands the nature of the state and the needs of social revolution. However, we must stress that anarchists would agree that the state generally does serve the interests of the economically dominant classes. Bakunin, for example, argued that the State *"is authority, domination, and forced, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses."* He saw the social revolution as destroying capitalism and the state at the same time, that is *"to overturn the State's domination, and that of the privileged classes whom it solely represents."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140] However, anarchists do not reduce our analysis and understanding of the state to this simplistic Marxist level. While being well aware that the state is the means of ensuring the domination of an economic elite, as we discussed in section B.2.5, anarchists recognise that the state machine also has interests of its own. The state, for anarchists, is the delegation of power into the hands of a few. This creates, by its very nature, a privileged position for those at the top of the hierarchy:

> *"A government [or state], that is a group of people entrusted with making the laws and empowered to use the collective force to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 36]

The Bolshevik regime during the Russia revolution proved the validity of this analysis. The Bolsheviks seized power in the



*the whole Party, continue to run things, that is govern we shall never — we cannot — dispense with ... removals, transfers, appointments, dismissals, etc."* of workers, officials and party members from above. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 62, p. 98 and p. 99] Unsurprisingly, these powers were used by Lenin, and then Stalin, to destroy opposition (although the latter applied coercive measures **within** the party which Lenin only applied to non-party opponents).

So much for *"workers' power," "socialism from below"* and other such rhetoric.

This vision of "socialism" being rooted in party power over the working class was the basis of the Communist International's resolution of the role of the party. This resolution is, therefore, important and worth discussing. It argues that the Communist Party *"is **part** of the working class,"* namely its *"most advanced, most class-conscious, and therefore most revolutionary part."* It is *"distinguished from the working class as a whole in that it grasps the whole historic path of the working class in its entirety and at every bend in that road endeavours to defend not the interests of individual groups or occupations but the interests of the working class as a whole."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 191] However, in response it can be argued that this simply means the *"interests of the party"* as only it can understand what *"the interests of the working class as a whole"* actually are. Thus we have the possibility of the party substituting its will for that of the working class simply because of what Leninists term the *"uneven development"* of the working class. As Alan Carter argues, these *"conceptions of revolutionary organisation maintain political and ideological domination by retaining supervisory roles and notions of privileged access to knowledge ... the term 'class consciousness' is employed to facilitate such domination over the workers. It is not what the workers think, but what the party leaders think they ought to think that constitutes the revolutionary consciousness imputed*

*to the workers."* The ideological basis for a new class structure is created as the *"Leninist revolutionary praxis ... is carried forward to post-revolutionary institutions,"* [**Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 175]

The resolution stresses that before the revolution, the party *"will encompass ... only a minority of the workers."* Even after the *"seizure of power,"* it will still *"not be able to unite them all into its ranks organisationally."* It is only after the *"final defeat of the bourgeois order"* will *"all or almost all workers begin to join"* it. Thus the party is a **minority** of the working class. The resolution then goes on to state that *"[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. This struggle, which inevitably becomes transformed into civil war, has as its goal the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised, and directed other than by some kind of political party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 192, p. 193] And as the party is a *"part"* of the working class which cannot *"unite"* all workers *"into its ranks,"* this means that political power can only be *"seized, organised, and directed"* by a **minority.**

Thus we have minority rule, with the party (or more correctly its leaders) exercising political power. The idea that the party *"must **dissolve** into the councils, that the councils can **replace** the Communist Party"* is *"fundamentally wrong and reactionary."* This is because, to *"enable the soviets to fulfil their historic tasks, there must ... be a strong Communist Party, one that does not simply 'adapt' to the soviets but is able to make them renounce 'adaptation' to the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 196] Thus rather than the workers' councils exercising power, their role is simply that of allowing the Communist Party to seize political power.

As we indicated in section H.3.4, the underlying assumption behind this resolution was made clear by Zinoviev during his introductory speech to the congress meeting which finally agreed the resolution: the dictatorship of the party **was** the dic-



## H.3.9 Is the state simply an agent of economic power?

As we discussed in section H.3.7, the Marxist theory of the state confuses an empirical analysis of the state with a metaphysical one. While Engels is aware that the state developed to ensure minority class rule and, as befits its task, evolved specific characteristics to execute that role, he also raised the idea that the state (*"as a rule"*) is *"the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class"* and *"through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class."* Thus the state can be considered, in essence, as *"nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another." "At a certain stage of economic development"*, Engels stressed, *"which was necessarily bound up with the split in society into classes, the state became a necessity owning to this split."* [**Selected Works**, pp. 577–8, p. 579 and p. 258] For Lenin, this was *"the basic idea of Marxism on the question of the historical role and meaning of the state,"* namely that *"the state is an organ of class **rule**, the organ for the **oppression** of one class by another."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 273 and p. 274]

The clear implication is that the state is simply an instrument, without special interests of its own. If this is the case, the use of a state by the proletariat is unproblematic (and so the confusion between working class self-organisation and the state we have discussed in various sections above is irrelevant). This argument can lead to simplistic conclusions, such as once a "revolutionary" government is in power in a "workers state" we need not worry about abuses of power or even civil liberties (this position was commonplace in Bolshevik ranks during the Russian Civil War, for example). It also is at the heart of Trotsky's contortions with regards to Stalinism, refusing to see the state bureaucracy as a new ruling class simply because the state, by definition, could not play such a role.

tatorship of the proletariat. Little wonder that Bertrand Russell, on his return from Lenin's Russia in 1920, wrote that:

> *"Friends of Russia here [in Britain] think of the dictatorship of the proletariat as merely a new form of representative government, in which only working men and women have votes, and the constituencies are partly occupational, not geographical. They think that 'proletariat' means 'proletariat,' but 'dictatorship' does not quite mean 'dictatorship.' This is the opposite of the truth. When a Russian Communist speak of a dictatorship, he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian sense. He means the 'class-conscious' part of the proletariat, i.e. the Communist Party. He includes people by no means proletarian (such as Lenin and Tchicherin) who have the right opinions, and he excludes such wage-earners as have not the right opinions, whom he classifies as lackeys of the* ***bourgeoisie.****"* [**The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism**, pp. 26–27]

Significantly, Russell pointed, like Lenin, to the Comintern resolution on the role of the Communist Party. In addition, he noted the reason why this party dictatorship was required: *"No conceivable system of free elections would give majorities to the Communists, either in the town or country."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 40–1]

Nor are followers of Bolshevism shy in repeating its elitist conclusions. Founder and leader of the British SWP, Tony Cliff, for example, showed his lack of commitment to working class democracy when he opined that the *"actual level of democracy, as well as centralism, [during a revolution] depends on three basic factors: 1. the strength of the proletariat; 2. the material and cultural legacy left to it by the old regime; and 3. the strength of capitalist resistance. The level of democracy feasible must be in*



While anarchists are well aware of the need to defend a revolution (see section H.2.1), we do not make the mistake of equating this with a state. Ultimately, the state cannot be used as an instrument of liberation — it is not designed for it. Which, incidentally, is why we have not discussed the impact of the Russian Civil War on the development of Bolshevik ideology. Simply put, the *"workers' state"* is proposed, by Leninists, as the means to defend a revolution. As such, you cannot blame what it is meant to be designed to withstand (counter-revolution and civil war) for its *"degeneration."* If the *"workers' state"* cannot handle what its advocates claim it exists for, then its time to look for an alternative and dump the concept in the dustbin of history.

In summary, Bolshevism is based on a substantial revision of the Marxist theory of the state. While Marx and Engels were at pains to stress the accountability of their new state to the population under it, Leninism has made a virtue of the fact that the state has evolved to exclude that mass participation in order to ensure minority rule. Leninism has done so explicitly to allow the party to overcome the *"wavering"* of the working class, the very class it claims is the "ruling class" under socialism! In doing this, the Leninist tradition exploited the confused nature of the state theory of traditional Marxism. The Leninist theory of the state is flawed simply because it is based on creating a *"state in the proper sense of the word,"* with a public power distinct from the mass of the people. This was the major lesson gained by the leading Bolsheviks (including Lenin and Trotsky) from the Russian Revolution and has its roots in the common Marxist error of confusing party power with working class power. So when Leninists point to Lenin's **State and Revolution** as the definitive Leninist theory of the state, anarchists simply point to the lessons Lenin himself gained from actually conducting a revolution. Once we do, the slippery slope to the Leninist solution to the contradictions inherit in the Marxist theory of the state can be seen, understood and combated.

*direct proportion to the first two factors, and in inverse proportion to the third. The captain of an ocean liner can allow football to be played on his vessel; on a tiny raft in a stormy sea the level of tolerance is far lower."* [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 179] That Cliff compares working class democracy to football says it all. Rather than seeing it as the core gain of a revolution, he relegates it to the level of a **game,** which may or may not be *"tolerated"*! And need we speculate who the paternalistic *"captain"* in charge of the ship of the state would be?

Replacing Cliff's revealing analogies we get the following: *"The party in charge of a workers' state can allow democracy when the capitalist class is not resisting; when it is resisting strongly, the level of tolerance is far lower."* So, democracy will be *"tolerated"* in the extremely unlikely situation that the capitalist class will not resist a revolution! That the party has no right to *"tolerate"* democracy or not is not even entertained by Cliff, its right to negate the basic rights of the working class is taken as a given. Clearly the key factor is that the party is in power. It **may** *"tolerate"* democracy, but ultimately his analogy shows that Bolshevism considers it as an added extra whose (lack of) existence in no way determines the nature of the *"workers' state"* (unless, of course, he is analysing Stalin's regime rather than Lenin's then it becomes of critical importance!). Perhaps, therefore, we may add another *"basic factor"* to Cliff's three; namely *"4. the strength of working class support for the party."* The level of democracy feasible must be in direct proportion to this factor, as the Bolsheviks made clear. As long as the workers vote for the party, then democracy is wonderful. If they do not, then their *"wavering"* and *"passing moods"* cannot be *"tolerated"* and democracy is replaced by the dictatorship of the party. Which is no democracy at all.

Obviously, then, if, as Engels argued, *"an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people"* then the regime advocated by Bolshevism is not a *"semi-state"* but, in fact, a normal state. Trotsky and Lenin are equally clear



that said state exists to ensure that the *"mass of the people"* do not participate in public power, which is exercised by a minority, the party (or, more correctly, the leaders of the party). One of the key aims of this new state is to repress the *"backward"* or *"wavering"* sections of the working class (although, by definition, all sections of the working class are *"backward"* in relation to the *"vanguard"*). Hence the need for a *"public power distinct from the people"* (as the suppression of the strike wave and Kronstadt in 1921 shows, elite troops are always needed to stop the army siding with their fellow workers). And as proven by Trotsky's comments after he was squeezed out of power, this perspective was **not** considered as a product of *"exceptional circumstances."* Rather it was considered a basic lesson of the revolution, a position which was applicable to all future revolutions. In this, Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks concurred.

The irony (and tragedy) of all this should not be lost. In his 1905 diatribe against anarchism, Stalin had denied that Marxists aimed for party dictatorship. He stressed that there was *"a dictatorship of the minority, the dictatorship of a small group ... which is directed against the people ... Marxists are the enemies of such a dictatorship, and they fight such a dictatorship far more stubbornly and self-sacrificingly than do our noisy Anarchists."* The practice of Bolshevism and the ideological revisions it generated easily refutes Stalin's claims. The practice of Bolshevism showed that his claim that *"[a]t the head"* of the *"dictatorship of the proletarian majority .. . stand the masses"* is in sharp contradiction with Bolshevik support for *"revolutionary"* governments. Either you have (to use Stalin's expression) *"the dictatorship of the streets, of the masses, a dictatorship directed against all oppressors"* or you have party power **in the name of the street, of the masses.** [**Collected Works**, vol. 1, p. 371–2] The fundamental flaw in Leninism is that it confuses the two and so lays the ground for the very result anarchists predicted and Stalin denied.

he meant, arguing for *"country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists"* who would still manage production. Significantly, he considered that *"as much as nine-tenths of the **socialist** apparatus"* required for this *"country-wide **book-keeping,** country-wide **accounting** of the production and distribution of goods"* would be achieved by nationalising the *"big banks,"* which *"**are** the 'state apparatus' which we **need** to bring about socialism"* (indeed, this was considered *"something in the nature of the **skeleton** of socialist society"*). This structure would be taken intact from capitalism for *"the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connection with the banks and [business] syndicates ... this apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 26, p. 105, p. 107, p. 106 and pp. 105–6] Over time, this system would move towards full socialism.

Thus, what Leninists mean by *"workers' control"* is radically different than what anarchists traditionally meant by that term (indeed, it was radically different from the workers' definition, as can be seen from a resolution of the Bolshevik dominated First Trade Union Congress which complained that *"the workers misunderstand and falsely interpret workers' control."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 32]). It is for this reason that from the 1960s English speaking anarchists and other libertarian socialists have been explicit and have used the term *"workers' self-management"* rather than *"workers' control"* to describe their aims. Mainstream Marxists, however have continued to use the latter slogan, undoubtedly, as we note in section H.3.5, to gain members from the confusion in meanings.

Secondly, there is the example of the Russian Revolution itself. As historian S.A. Smith correctly summarises, the Bolshevik party *"had no position on the question of workers' control prior to 1917."* The *"factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up."*



The 1st of May, 1893, saw Engels argue that the task of the British working class was not only to pursue economic struggles *"but above all in winning political rights, parliament, through the working class organised into an independent party"* (significantly, the original manuscript stated *"but in winning parliament, the political power"*). He went on to state that the 1892 general election saw the workers give a *"taste of their power, hitherto unexerted."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 395] This, significantly, is in line with his 1870 comment that in Britain *"the bourgeoisie could only get its real representative ... into government only by extension of the franchise, whose consequences are bound to put an end to all bourgeois rule."* [**Selected Works**, p. 238]

Marx seems to see voting for a government as being the same as political power as the *"fundamental contradiction"* of a democracy under capitalism is that the classes *"whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate"* it *"puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 10, p. 79] For Engels in 1847, *"democracy has as its necessary consequence the political rule of the proletariat."* Universal suffrage would *"make political power pass from the middle class to the working class"* and so *"the democratic movement"* is *"striving for the political domination of the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 7, p. 299, p. 440 and p. 368] As noted in section H.3.9, Marx concluded that Bonaparte's coup ended the political power of the bourgeoisie and, for Engels, *"the whole bourgeoisie ruled, but for three years only"* during the Second French Republic of 1848–51. Significantly, during the previous regime of Louis-Philippe (1830–48) *"a very small portion of the bourgeois ruled the kingdom"* as *"by far the larger part were excluded from the suffrage by high [property] qualifications."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 297]

All of which, of course, fits into Marx's account of the Paris Commune where, as noted above, the Commune *"was formed of the municipal councillors"* who had been *"chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town"* in the munici-

pal elections held on March 26th, 1871. Once voted into office, the Commune then smashed the state machine inherited by it, recognising that *"the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."* The *"first decree of the Commune ... was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people."* Thus the Commune lops off one of the *"ubiquitous organs"* associated with the *"centralised State power"* once it had inherited the state via elections. [**Selected Works**, p. 287, p. 285, p. 287 and p. 285] Indeed, this is precisely what **was** meant, as confirmed by Engels in a letter written in 1884 clarifying what Marx meant:

> *"It is simply a question of showing that the victorious proletariat must first refashion the old bureaucratic, administrative centralised state power before it can use it for its own purposes: whereas all bourgeois republicans since 1848 inveighed against this machinery so long as they were in the opposition, but once they were in the government they took it over without altering it and used it partly against the reaction but still more against the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 47, p. 74]

Interestingly, in the second outline of the **Civil War in France**, Marx used words almost identical to Engels latter explanation:

> *"But the proletariat cannot, as the ruling classes and their different rival fractions have done in the successive hours of their triumph, simply lay hold on the existent State body and wield this ready-made agency for their own purpose. The first condition for the holding of political power, is to* ***transform its working machinery*** *and destroy*



work. However, after the Russian Revolution a certain ambiguity arose in using that term. This is because specific demands which were raised during that revolution were translated into English as *"workers' control"* when, in fact, the Russian meaning of the word (**kontrolia**) was far closer to *"supervision"* or *"steering."* Thus the term *"workers' control"* is used to describe two radically different concepts.

This can be seen from Trotsky when he argued that the workers should *"demand resumption, as public utilities, of work in private businesses closed as a result of the crisis. Workers' control in such case would be replaced by direct workers' management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] Why workers' employed in open capitalist firms were not considered suitable for *"direct workers' management"* is not explained, but the fact remains Trotsky clearly differentiated between management and control. For him, *"workers' control"* meant *"workers supervision"* over the capitalist who retained power. Thus the *"slogan of workers' control of production"* was not equated to actual workers' control over production. Rather, it was *"a sort of economic dual power"* which meant that *"ownership and right of disposition remain in the hands of the capitalists."* This was because it was *"obvious that the power is not yet in the hands of the proletariat, otherwise we would have not workers' control of production but the control of production by the workers' state as an introduction to a regime of state production on the foundations of nationalisation."* [Trotsky, **The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany**, p. 91 and p. 92]

This vision of *"workers' control"* as simply supervision of the capitalist managers and a prelude to state control and, ultimately, nationalisation can be found in Lenin. Rather than seeing *"workers' control"* as workers managing production directly, he always saw it in terms of workers' *"controlling"* those who did. It simply meant *"the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious* ***accounting*** *of the production and distribution of goods."* He clarified what

*control ... the penetration of the workers' eye into all open and concealed springs of capitalist economy ... workers' control becomes a school for planned economy. On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalised industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes."* This, it is argued, proves that nationalisation (state ownership and control) is not *"state capitalism"* but rather *"control is the first step along the road to the socialist guidance of economy."* [**The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International**, p. 73 and p. 74] This explains why many modern day Leninists are often heard voicing support for what anarchists consider an obvious oxymoron, namely *"nationalisation under workers' control."*

Anarchists are not convinced. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, because by the term *"workers' control"* anarchists and Leninists mean two radically different things. Secondly, when in **power** Trotsky advocated radically different ideas. Based on these reasons, anarchists view Leninist calls for *"workers' control"* simply as a means of gaining popular support, calls which will be ignored once the real aim, party power, has been achieved: it is an example of Trotsky's comment that *"[s]logans as well as organisational forms should be subordinated to the indices of the movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72] In other words, rather than express a commitment to the ideas of worker's control of production, mainstream Marxist use of the term *"workers' control"* is simply an opportunistic technique aiming at securing support for the party's seizure of power and once this is achieved it will be cast aside in favour of the first part of the demands, namely state ownership and so control. In making this claim anarchists feel they have more than enough evidence, evidence which many members of Leninist parties simply know nothing about.

We will look first at the question of terminology. Anarchists traditionally used the term *"workers' control"* to mean workers' full and direct control over their workplaces, and their



*it as an instrument of class rule."* [our emphasis, **Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 533]

It is, of course, true that Marx expressed in his defence of the Commune the opinion that new *"Communal Constitution"* was to become a *"reality by the destruction of the State power"* yet he immediately argues that *"the merely repressive organs of the old government power were to be amputated"* and *"its legitimate functions were to be wrestles from"* it and *"restored to the responsible agents of society."* [**Selected Works**, pp. 288–9] This corresponds to Engels arguments about removing aspects from the state inherited by the proletariat and signifies the *"destruction"* of the state machinery (its bureaucratic-military aspects) rather than the republic itself.

In other words, Lenin was right to state that *"Marx's idea is that the working class must* ***break up, smash*** *the 'ready-made state machinery,' and not confine itself to merely laying hold of it."* This was never denied by thinkers like Karl Kautsky, rather they stressed that for Marx and Engels universal suffrage was the means by which political power would be seized (at least in a republic) while violent revolution would be the means to create a republic and to defend it against attempts to restore the old order. As Engels put it in 1886, Marx had drawn *"the conclusion that, at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means. He certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling classes to submit, without a 'pro-slavery rebellion,' to this peaceful and legal revolution."* [*"Preface to the English edition"* in Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 113] Thus Kautsky stressed that the abolition of the standing army was *"absolutely necessary if the state is to be able to carry out significant social reforms"* once the party of the proletariat was in a position to *"control legislation."* This would mean *"the most complete democracy, a militia system"* after, echoing

the **Communist Manifesto**, *"the conquest of democracy"* had been achieved. [**The Road to Power**, p. 69, p. 70 and p. 72]

Essentially, then, Lenin was utilising a confusion between smashing the state and smashing the state machine once the workers' party had achieved a majority within a democratic republic. In other words, Lenin was wrong to assert that *"this lesson ... had not only been completely ignored, but positively distorted by the prevailing, Kautskyite, 'interpretation' of Marxism."* As we have proved *"the false notion that universal suffrage 'in the **present-day** state' is really capable of revealing the will of the majority of the working people and of securing its realisation"* was **not** invented by the *"petty-bourgeois democrats"* nor *"the social-chauvinists and opportunists."* It can be found repeatedly in the works of Engels and Marx themselves and so *"Engels's perfectly clear, concise and concrete statement is distorted at every step"* not only *"at every step in the propaganda and agitation of the 'official' (i.e., opportunist) socialist parties"* but also by Engels himself! [**Op. Cit.** p. 336 and pp. 319–20]

Significantly, we find Marx recounting in 1852 how the *"executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its wide-ranging and ingenious state machinery ... sprang up in the days of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system which it had helped to hasten."* After 1848, *"in its struggle against the revolution, the parliamentary republic found itself compelled to strengthen, along with the repressive, the resources and centralisation of governmental power. All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it. The parties that contended in turn for domination regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor."* However, *"under the absolute monarchy, during the first Revolution, under Napoleon, bureaucracy was only the means of preparing the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Under the Restoration, under Louis Philippe, under the parliamentary republic, it was the instrument of the ruling class, however much it strove for power of its own."* It was *"[o]nly under the second Bonaparte*



inism "state capitalist" then, surely, so was Bolshevik Russia when it was fighting the White and Imperialist armies during the Civil War. Nor does Cliff prove that a proletariat actually existed under Stalinism, raising the clear contradiction that *"[i]f there is only one employer, a 'change of masters' is impossible ... a mere formality"* while also attacking those who argued that Stalinism was *"bureaucratic collectivism"* because Russian workers were **not** proletarians but rather slaves. So this *"mere formality"* is used to explain that the Russian worker is a proletarian, not a slave, and so Russia was state capitalist in nature! [Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 310, p. 219, p. 350 and p. 348]

All in all, attempts to draw a clear line between Leninism and Stalinism as regards its state capitalist nature are doomed to failure. The similarities are far too obvious and simply support the anarchist critique of state socialism as nothing more than state capitalism. Ultimately, *"Trotskyism merely promises socialism by adopting the same methods, and mistakes, which have produced Stalinism."* [J.H., *"The Fourth International"*, pp. 37–43, **The Left and World War II**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 43]

## H.3.14 Don't Marxists believe in workers' control?

As we discussed in the last section, anarchists consider the usual association of state ownership with socialism to be false. We argue that it is just another form of the wages system, of capitalism, albeit with the state replacing the capitalist and so state ownership, for anarchists, is simply state capitalism. Instead we urge socialisation based on workers' self-management of production. Libertarian Marxists concur.

Some mainstream Marxists, however, say they seek to combine state ownership with *"workers' control."* This can be seen from Trotsky, for example, who argued in 1938 for *"workers'*

> *"Cliff's position appears untenable when it is remembered that whatever capitalism may or may not entail, what it* ***is*** *a mode of production, defined by a certain type of social production relations. If the USSR is capitalist simply because it produces weaponry to compete with those countries that themselves would have been capitalist even without such competition, then one might as well say the same about tribes whose production is directed to the provision of tomahawks in the fight against colonialism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 65]

Strangely, as Marxist, Cliff seemed unaware that, for Marx, "competition" did not define capitalism. As far as trade goes, the *"character of the production process from which [goods] derive is immaterial"* and so on the market commodities come *"from all modes of production"* (for example, they could be *"the produce of production based on slavery, the product of peasants ..., of a community ... , of state production (such as existed in earlier epochs of Russian history, based on serfdom) or half-savage hunting peoples"*). [**Capital**, vol. 2, pp. 189–90] This means that trade *"exploits a given mode of production but does not create it"* and so relates *"to the mode of production from outside."* [**Capital**, vol. 3, p. 745] Much the same can be said of military competition — it does not define the mode of production.

There are other problems with Cliff's argument, namely that it implies that Lenin's regime was also state capitalist (as anarchists stress, but Leninists deny). If, as Cliff suggests, a "workers' state" is one in which *"the proletariat has direct or indirect control, no matter how restricted, over the state power"* then Lenin's regime was not one within six months. Similarly, workers' self-management was replaced by one-man management under Lenin, meaning that Stalin inherited the (capitalistic) relations of production rather than created them. Moreover, if it were military competition which made Stal-



*does the state seem to have made itself completely independent."* [**Selected Works**, pp. 169–70]

This analysis is repeated in **The Civil War in France**, except the expression *"the State power"* is used as an equivalent to the *"state machinery."* Again, the state machine/power is portrayed as coming into existence **before** the republic: *"The centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature ... originates from the days of absolute monarchy."* Again, the *"bourgeois republicans ... took the state power"* and used it to repress the working class. Again, Marx called for *"the destruction of the state power"* and noted that the Commune abolished the standing army, the privileged role of the clergy, and so on. The Commune's *"very existence presupposed the non-existence of monarchy, which, in Europe at least, is the normal encumbrance and indispensable cloak of class rule. It supplied the republic with the basis of really democratic institutions."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 285, p. 286, p. 288 and p. 290]

Obviously, then, what the socialist revolution had to smash existed **before** the republican state was created and was an inheritance of pre-bourgeois rule (even if the bourgeoisie utilised it for its own ends). How this machine was to be smashed was left unspecified but given that it was not identical to the *"parliamentary republic"* Marx's arguments cannot be taken as evidence that the democratic state needed to be smashed or destroyed rather than seized by means of universal suffrage (and reformed appropriately, by *"smashing"* the *"state machinery"* as well as including recall of representatives and the combining of administrative and legislative tasks into their hands). Clearly, Lenin's attempt to equate the *"parliamentary republic"* with the *"state machinery"* cannot be supported in Marx's account. At best, it could be argued that it is the spirit of Marx's analysis, perhaps bringing it up to date. However, this was **not** Lenin's position (he maintained that social democracy had hidden Marx's clear call to smash the bourgeois democratic state).

Unsurprisingly, Lenin does not discuss the numerous quotes by Marx and Engels on this matter which clearly contradict his thesis. Nor mention that in 1871, a few months after the Commune, Marx argued that in Britain, *"the way to show [i.e., manifest] political power lies open to the working class. Insurrection would be madness where peaceful agitation would more swiftly and surely do the work."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 602] The following year, saw him suggest that America could join it as *"the workers can achieve their aims by peaceful means"* there as well [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 23, p. 255] How if Marx **had** concluded that the capitalist state had to be destroyed rather than captured and refashioned then he quickly changed his mind! In fact, during the Commune itself, in April 1871, Marx had written to his friend Ludwig Kugelman *"[i]f you look at the last chapter of my **Eighteenth Brumaire** you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but to break it, and that is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party [sic!] comrades in Paris are attempting."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 44, p. 131] As noted above, Marx explicitly noted that the bureaucratic military machine predated the republic and was, in effect, inherited by it.

Lenin did note that Marx *"restricts his conclusion to the Continent"* on the issue of smashing the state machine, but does not list an obvious factor, that the UK approximated universal suffrage, in why this was the case (thus Lenin did not note that Engels, in 1891, added *"democratic republics like France"* to the list of states where *"the old society may peacefully evolve into the new."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 226]). In 1917, Lenin argued, *"this restriction"* was *"no longer valid"* as both Britain and America had *"completely sunk into the all-European filthy, bloody morass of bureaucratic-military institutions."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 336–7] Subsequently, he repeated this claim in his polemic against Karl



start to accumulate when Cliff tries to explain why Stalinism was (state) capitalist.

For Cliff, internally the USSR could be viewed as one big factory and the division of labour driven by bureaucratic decree. Only when Stalinism was *"viewed within the international economy the basic features of capitalism can be discerned."* Thus it is international competition which makes the USSR subject to "the law of value" and, consequently, capitalist. However, as international trade was tiny under Stalinism *"competition with other countries is mainly military."* It is this indirect competition in military matters which made Stalinist Russia capitalist rather than any internal factor. [**State capitalism in Russia**, pp. 311–2, p. 221 and p. 223]

The weakness of this argument should be obvious. From an anarchist position, it fails to discuss the social relations within production and the obvious fact that workers could, and did, move workplaces (i.e., there was a market for labour). Cliff only mentions the fact that the Stalinist regime's plans were never fulfilled when he shows up the inefficiencies of Stalinist mismanagement. With regards to labour, that appears to be divided according to the plan. Similarly, to explain Stalinism's "capitalist" nature as being a product of military competition with other, more obviously, capitalist states is a joke. It is like arguing that Ford is a capitalist company because BMW is! As one libertarian Marxist put it: *"One can only wonder as to the type of contortions Cliff might have got into if Soviet military competition had been with China alone!"* [Neil C. Fernandez, **Capitalism and Class Struggle in the USSR**, p. 65] Significantly, Cliff raised the possibility of single world-wide Stalinist regime and concluded it would **not** be state capitalist, it would *"be a system of exploitation not subject to the law of value and all its implications."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 225] As Fernandez correctly summarises:

As we discuss in more depth in next section, while they mean the same thing as anarchists do by the first term, they have a radically different meaning for the second (it is for this reason modern-day anarchists generally use the term *"workers' self-management"*). To anarchist ears, the combination of nationalisation (state ownership) and *"workers' control"* (and even more so, self-management) simply expresses political confusion, a mishmash of contradictory ideas which simply hides the reality that state ownership, by its very nature, precludes workers' control. As such, anarchists reject such contradictory rhetoric in favour of *"socialisation"* and *"workers' self-management of production."* History shows that nationalisation will always undermine workers' control at the point of production and such rhetoric always paves the way for state capitalism.

Therefore, anarchists are against both nationalisation **and** privatisation, recognising both as forms of capitalism, of wage slavery. We believe in genuine public ownership of productive assets, rather than corporate/private or state/bureaucratic control. Only in this manner can the public address their own economic needs. Thus, we see a third way that is distinct from the popular "either/or" options forwarded by capitalists and state socialists, a way that is entirely more democratic. This is workers' self-management of production, based on social ownership of the means of life by federations of self-managed syndicates and communes.

Finally, it should be mentioned that some Leninists do have an analysis of Stalinism as "state capitalist," most noticeably the British SWP. According to the creator of this theory, Tony Cliff, Stalinism had to be considered a class system because *"[i]f the state is the repository of the means of production and the workers do not control it, they do not own the means of production, i.e., they are not the ruling class."* Which is fine, as far as it goes (anarchists would stress the social relations **within** production as part of our criteria for what counts as socialism). The problems



Kautsky, stating that notions that reforming the state were now out of date because of *"the existence of **militarism** and a **bureaucracy**"* which *"were **non-existent** in Britain and America"* in the 1870s. He pointed to how *"the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie in America ... deal with workers on strike"* as further proof of his position. [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 238 and p. 244] However, this does not impact on the question of whether universal suffrage could be utilised in order to be in a position to smash this state machine or not. Equally, Lenin failed to acknowledge the violent repression of strikes in the 1870s and 1880s in America (such as the Great Upheaval of 1877 or the crushing of the 8 hour day movement after the Haymarket police riot of 1886). As Martov argued correctly:

> *"The theoretic possibility [of peaceful reform] has not revealed itself in reality. But the sole fact that he admitted such a possibility shows us clearly Marx's opinion, leaving no room for arbitrary interpretation. What Marx designated as the 'destruction of the State machine' ... was the destruction of the **military and bureaucratic apparatus** that the bourgeois democracy had inherited from the monarchy and perfected in the process of consolidating the rule of the bourgeois class. There is nothing in Marx's reasoning that even suggests the destruction of the **State organisation as such** and the replacement of the State during the revolutionary period, that is during the dictatorship of the proletariat, with a social bond formed on a **principle opposed to that of the State.** Marx and Engels foresaw such a substitution only at the end of a process of 'a progressive withering away' of the State and all the functions of social **coercion**. They foresaw this atrophy of the State and the functions of social coercion to be*

> *the result of the prolonged existence of the socialist regime.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 31]

It should also be remembered that Marx's comments on smashing the state machine were made in response to developments in France, a regime that Marx and Engels viewed as **not** being purely bourgeois. Marx notes in his account of the Commune how, in France, *"[p]eculiar historical circumstances"* had *"prevented the classical development ... of the bourgeois form of government."* [**Selected Works**, p. 289] For Engels, Proudhon *"confuses the French Bureaucratic government with the normal state of a bourgeoisie that rules both itself and the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 11, p. 548] In the 1870s, Marx considered Holland, Britain and the USA to have *"the genuine capitalist state."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p. 499] Significantly, it was precisely these states in which Marx had previously stated a peaceful revolution could occur:

> *"We know that the institutions, customs and traditions in the different countries must be taken into account; and we do not deny the existence of countries like America, England, and if I knew your institutions better I might add Holland, where the workers may achieve their aims by peaceful means. That being the true, we must admit that in most countries on the continent it is force which must be the lever of our revolution; it is force which will have to be resorted to for a time in order to establish the rule of the workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 23, p. 255]

Interestingly, in 1886, Engels expanded on Marx's speculation as regards Holland and confirmed it. Holland, he argued, as well as *"a residue of local and provincial self-government"* also had *"an absence of any real bureaucracy in the French or Prussian sense"* because, alone in Western Europe, it did not have



clusive right to decide how things are used, **not** those using them. The existence of this central administrative strata excludes the abolition of property, replacing socialism or communism with state owned "property," i.e. **state** capitalism. As such, state ownership does **not** end wage labour and, therefore, social inequalities in terms of wealth and access to resources. Workers are still order-takers under state ownership (whose bureaucrats control the product of their labour and determine who gets what). The only difference between workers under private property and state property is the person telling them what to do. Simply put, the capitalist or company appointed manager is replaced by a state appointed one.

As anarcho-syndicalist Tom Brown stressed, when *"the many control the means whereby they live, they will do so by abolishing private ownership and establishing common ownership of the means of production, with workers' control of industry."* However, this is *"not to be confused with nationalisation and state control"* as *"ownership is, in theory, said to be vested in the people"* but, in fact *"control is in the hands of a small class of bureaucrats."* Then *"common ownership does not exist, but the labour market and wage labour go on, the worker remaining a wage slave to State capitalism."* Simply put, common ownership *"demands common control. This is possible only in a condition of industrial democracy by workers' control."* [**Syndicalism**, p. 94] In summary:

> *"Nationalisation is not Socialisation, but State Capitalism ... Socialisation ... is not State ownership, but the common, social ownership of the means of production, and social ownership implies control by the producers, not by new bosses. It implies Workers' Control of Industry — and that is Syndicalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 111]

However, many Marxists (in particular Leninists) state they are in favour of both state ownership **and** *"workers' control."*

In this fashion, decisions about the allocation and use of the productive assets are not made by the people themselves, but by the administration, by economic planners. Similarly, in "private" capitalist economies, economic decisions are made by a coterie of managers. In both cases the managers make decisions which reflect their own interests and the interests of the owners (be it shareholders or the state bureaucracy) and **not** the workers involved or society as a whole. In both cases, economic decision-making is top-down in nature, made by an elite of administrators — bureaucrats in the state socialist economy, capitalists or managers in the "private" capitalist economy. The much-lauded distinction of capitalism is that unlike the monolithic, centralised state socialist bureaucracy it has a **choice** of bosses (and choosing a master is not freedom). And given the similarities in the relations of production between capitalism and state "socialism," the obvious inequalities in wealth in so-called "socialist" states are easily explained. The relations of production and the relations of distribution are inter-linked and so inequality in terms of power in production means inequality in control of the social product, which will be reflected in inequality in terms of wealth. The mode of distributing the social product is inseparable from the mode of production and its social relationships. Which shows the fundamentally confused nature of Trotsky's attempts to denounce the Stalinist regime's privileges as "bourgeois" while defending its "socialist" economic base (see Cornelius Castoriadis, *"The Relations of Production in Russia"*, pp. 107–158, **Political and Social Writings**, vol. 1).

In other words, private property exists if some individuals (or groups) control/own things which are used by other people. This means, unsurprising, that state ownership is just a form of property rather than the negation of it. If you have a highly centralised structure (as the state is) which plans and decides about all things within production, then this central administrative would be the real owner because it has the ex-



an *"absolute monarchy"* between the 16th and 18th century. This meant that *"only a few changes will have to be made to establish that free self-government by the working [people] which will necessarily be our best tool in the organisation of the mode of production."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 47, pp. 397–8] Few would argue that smashing the state and its replacement with a new workers' one would really constitute a *"few changes"*! However, Engels position does fit in with the notion that the *"state machine"* to be smashed is a legacy of absolute monarchy rather than the state structure of a bourgeois democratic republic. It also shows the nature of a Marxist revolution in a republic, in a *"genuine capitalist state"* of the type Marx and Engels expected to be the result of the first stage of any revolt.

The source of Lenin's restatement of the Marxist theory of the state which came as such a shock to so many Marxists can be found in the nature of the Paris Commune. After all, the major influence in terms of *"political vision"* of the Commune was anarchism. The *"rough sketch of national organisation which the Commune had no time to develop"* which Marx praises but does not quote was written by a follower of Proudhon. [**Selected Works**, p. 288] It expounded a clearly **federalist** and "bottom-up" organisational structure. It clearly implied *"the destruction of the State power"* rather than seeking to *"inherit"* it. Based on this libertarian revolt, it is unsurprising that Marx's defence of it took on a libertarian twist. As noted by Bakunin, who argued that its *"general effect was so striking that the Marxists themselves, who saw their ideas upset by the uprising, found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it. They went further, and proclaimed that its programme and purpose where their own, in face of the simplest logic .. . This was a truly farcical change of costume, but they were bound to make it, for fear of being overtaken and left behind in the wave of feeling which the rising produced throughout the world."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 261]

The nature of **The Civil War in France** and the circumstances in which it was written explains why. Marx, while publicly opposing any kind of revolt before hand, did support the Commune once it began. His essay is primarily a propaganda piece in defence of it and is, fundamentally, reporting on what the Commune actually did and advocated. Thus, as well as reporting the Communal Constitution's vision of a federation of communes, we find Marx noting, also without comment, that Commune decreed *"the surrender to associations of workmen, under reserve of compensation, of all closed workshops and factories."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 294] While Engels, at times, suggested that this could be a possible policy for a socialist government, it is fair to say that few Marxists consider Marx's reporting of this particular aspect of the Commune as being a key aspect of his ideology. As Marx's account reports on the facts of the Commune it could hardly **not** reflect the libertarian ideas which were so strong in both it and the French sections of the International — ideas he had spent much time and energy opposing. Moreover, given the frenzy of abuse the Communards were subject to it by the bourgeoisie, it was unlikely that Marx would have aided the reaction by being overly critical. Equally, given how positively the Commune had been received in working class and radical circles Marx would have been keen to gain maximum benefit from it for both the International and his own ideology and influence. This would also have ensured that Marx kept his criticisms quiet, particularly as he was writing on behalf of an organisation which was not Marxist and included various different socialist tendencies.

This means that to fully understand Marx and Engels, we need to look at **all** their writings, before and after the Paris Commune. It is, therefore, significant that **immediately** after the Commune Marx stated that workers could achieve socialism by utilising existing democratic states **and** that the labour movement should take part in political action and send workers to Parliament. There is no mention of a federation of com-



designed to exclude mass participation and so, therefore, necessarily composed of a ruling administrative body. As such, the "public" cannot actually "own" the property the state claims to hold in its name. The ownership and thus control of the productive means is then in the hands of a ruling elite, the state administration (i.e. bureaucracy). The *"means of wealth production"* are *"owned by the state which represents, as always, a privileged class — the bureaucracy."* The workers *"do not either individually or collectively own anything, and so, as elsewhere, are compelled to sell their labour power to the employer, in this case the state."* [*"USSR — The Anarchist Position"*, pp. 21–24, **Op. Cit.**, p. 23] Thus, the means of production and land of a state "socialist" regime are **not** publicly owned — rather, they are owned by a bureaucratic elite, **in the name of the people**, a subtle but important distinction. As one Chinese anarchist put it:

> *"Marxian socialism advocates the centralisation not only of political power but also of capital. The centralisation of political power is dangerous enough in itself; add to that the placing of all sources of wealth in the hands of the government, and the so-called state socialism becomes merely state capitalism, with the state as the owner of the means of production and the workers as its labourers, who hand over the value produced by their labour. The bureaucrats are the masters, the workers their slaves. Even though they advocate a state of the dictatorship of workers, the rulers are bureaucrats who do not labour, while workers are the sole producers. Therefore, the suffering of workers under state socialism is no different from that under private capitalism."* [Ou Shengbai, quoted by Arif Dirlik, **Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution**, p. 224]

did so as well, and they ensured that it was marginalised within a centralised system of state control based on nationalisation.

As such, anarchists think that a utterly false dichotomy has been built up in discussions of socialism, one which has served the interests of both capitalists and state bureaucrats. This dichotomy is simply that the economic choices available to humanity are "private" ownership of productive means (capitalism), or state ownership of productive means (usually defined as "socialism"). In this manner, capitalist nations used the Soviet Union, and continue to use autocracies like North Korea, China, and Cuba as examples of the evils of "public" ownership of productive assets. While the hostility of the capitalist class to such regimes is often used by Leninists as a rationale to defend them (as *"degenerated workers' states"*, to use the Trotskyist term) this is a radically false conclusion. As one anarchist argued in 1940 against Trotsky (who first raised this notion):

> *"Expropriation of the capitalist class is naturally terrifying to 'the bourgeoisie of the whole world,' but that does not prove anything about a workers' state ... In Stalinist Russia expropriation is carried out ... by, and ultimately for the benefit of, the bureaucracy, not by the workers at all. The bourgeoisie are afraid of expropriation, of power passing out of their hands, whoever seizes it from them. They will defend their property against any class or clique. The fact that they are indignant [about Stalinism] proves their fear — it tells us nothing at all about the agents inspiring that fear."* [J.H., *"The Fourth International"*, pp. 37–43, **The Left and World War II**, Vernon Richards (ed.), pp. 41–2]

Anarchists see little distinction between "private" ownership of the means of life and "state" ownership. This is because the state is a highly centralised structure specifically



munes in these proposals and they reflect ideas both he and Engels had expressed since the 1840s. Ten years after the Commune, Marx stated that it was *"merely an uprising of one city in exceptional circumstances."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 46, p. 66] Similarly, a mere 3 years after the Commune, Engels argued that the key thing in Britain was *"to form anew a strong workers' party with a definite programme, and the best political programme they could wish for was the People's Charter."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 23, p. 614] The Commune was not mentioned and, significantly, Marx had previously defined this programme in 1855 as being *"to increase and extend the omnipotence of Parliament by elevating it to people's power. They [the Chartists] are not breaking up parliamentarism but are raising it to a higher power."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 14, p. 243]

As such, Marx's defence of the Commune should not mean ignoring the whole body of his and Engels work, nor should Marx's conclusion that the *"state machinery"* must be smashed in a successful revolution be considered to be in contradiction with his comments on utilising the existing democratic republic. It does, however, suggest that Marx's reporting of the Proudhon-influenced ideas of the Communards cannot be taken as a definitive account of his ideas on social transformation.

The fact that Marx did not mention anything about abolishing the existing state and replacing it with a new one in his contribution to the *"Program of the French Workers Party"* in 1880 is significant. It said that the *"collective appropriation"* of the means of production *"can only proceed from a revolutionary action of the class of producers — the proletariat — organised in an independent political party."* This would be *"pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal including universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p. 340] There is nothing about overthrowing the existing state and replacing it with a

new state, rather the obvious conclusion which is to be drawn is that universal suffrage was the tool by which the workers would achieve socialism. It does fit in, however, with Marx's repeated comments that universal suffrage was the equivalent of political power for the working class where the proletariat was the majority of the population. Or, indeed, Engels numerous similar comments. It explains the repeated suggestion by Marx that there were countries like America and Britain *"where the workers can achieve their aims by peaceful means."* There is Engels:

> *"One can imagine that the old society could peacefully grow into the new in countries where all power is concentrated in the people's representatives, where one can constitutionally do as one pleases as soon as a majority of the people give their support; in democratic republics like France and America, in monarchies such as England, where the dynasty is powerless against the popular will. But in Germany, where the government is virtually all-powerful and the Reichstag and other representative bodies are without real power, to proclaim likewise in Germany ... is to accept the fig leaf of absolutism and to bind oneself to it."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 226]

This, significantly, repeats Marx's comments in an unpublished article from 1878 on the Reichstag debates on the anti-socialist laws where, in part, he suggested that *"[i]f in England ... or the United States, the working class were to gain a majority in Parliament or Congress, they could by lawful means, rid themselves of such laws and institutions as impeded their development ... However, the 'peaceful' movement might be transformed into a 'forcible' one by resistance on the part of those interested in restoring the former state of affairs; if ... they are put down by* ***force****, it is as rebels against 'lawful' force."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 24, p.



*capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 286] Needless to say, a society which was not democratic in the workplace would not remain democratic politically either. Either democracy would become as formal as it is within any capitalist republic or it would be replaced by dictatorship. So, without a firm base in the direct management of production, any "socialist" society would see working class social power (*"political power"*) and liberty wither and die, just like a flower ripped out of the soil.

Unsurprisingly, given all this, we discover throughout history the co-existence of private and state property. Indeed, the nationalisation of key services and industries has been implemented under all kinds of capitalist governments and within all kinds of capitalist states (which proves the non-socialist nature of state ownership). Moreover, anarchists can point to specific events where the capitalist class has used nationalisation to undermine revolutionary gains by the working class. The best example by far is in the Spanish Revolution, when the Catalan government used nationalisation against the wave of spontaneous, anarchist inspired, collectivisation which had placed most of industry into the direct hands of the workers. The government, under the guise of legalising the gains of the workers, placed them under state ownership to stop their development, ensure hierarchical control and so class society. A similar process occurred during the Russian Revolution under the Bolsheviks. Significantly, *"many managers, at least those who remained, appear to have preferred nationalisation (state control) to workers' control and co-operated with Bolshevik commissars to introduce it. Their motives are not too difficult to understand ... The issue of who runs the plants — who makes decisions — is, and probably always will be, the crucial question for managers in any industrial relations system."* [Jay B. Sorenson, **The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism**, pp. 67–8] As we discuss in the next section, the managers and capitalists were not the only ones who disliked *"workers' control,"* the Bolsheviks

*common denominator of all class societies. This pattern is one in which the producer does not dominate the means of production but on the contrary both is 'separated from them' and from the products of his [or her] own labour. In all class societies the producer is in a position of subordination to those who manage the productive process. Workers' management of production — implying as it does the total domination of the producer over the productive process — is not for us a marginal matter. It is the core of our politics. It is the only means whereby authoritarian (order-giving, order-taking) relations in production can be transcended and a free, communist or anarchist, society introduced."* He went on to note that *"the means of production may change hands (passing for instance from private hands into those of a bureaucracy, collectively owning them) without this revolutionising the relations of production. Under such circumstances — and whatever the formal status of property — the society is still a class society for production is still managed by an agency other than the producers themselves. Property relations, in other words, do not necessarily reflect the relations of production. They may serve to mask them — and in fact they often have."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, pp. vii-vii]

As such, for anarchists (and libertarian Marxists) the idea that state ownership of the means of life (the land, workplaces, factories, etc.) is the basis of socialism is simply wrong. Therefore, *"Anarchism cannot look upon the coming revolution as a mere substitution ... of the State as the universal capitalist for the present capitalists."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 106] Given that the *"State organisation having always been ... the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, [it] cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economic life — the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on — as also the management of all the main branches of industry ... would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State*



248] Sadly, he never finished and published it but it is in line with many of his public pronouncements on this subject.

Marx also excluded countries on the European mainland (with the possible exception of Holland) from his suggestions of peaceful reform. In those countries, presumably, the first stage of the revolution would be, as stressed in the **Communist Manifesto**, creating a fully democratic republic (*"to win the battle for democracy"* — see section H.1.1). As Engels put it, *"the first and direct result of the revolution with regard to the **form** can and **must** be nothing but the **bourgeois** republic. But this will be here only a brief transitional period ... The bourgeois republic ... will enable us to **win over the great masses of the workers to revolutionary socialism** ... Only them can we successfully take over."* The *"proletariat can only use the form of the one and indivisible republic"* for it is *"the sole political form in which the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie can be fought to a finish."* [Marx and Engels, **The Socialist Revolution**, p. 265, p. 283 and p. 294] As he summarised:

> *"Marx and I, for forty years, repeated ad nauseam that for us the democratic republic is the only political form in which the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class can first be universalised and then culminate in the decisive victory of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 271]

It is for these reasons that orthodox Marxism up until 1917 held the position that the socialist revolution would be commenced by seizing the existing state (usually by the ballot box, or by insurrection if that was impossible). Martov in his discussion of Lenin's "discovery" of the "real" Marxist theory on the state (in **State and Revolution**) stressed that the idea that the state should be smashed by the workers who would then *"transplant into the structure of society the forms of **their own** combat organisations"* was a libertarian idea, alien to Marx and

Engels. While acknowledging that *"in our time, working people take to 'the idea of the soviets' after knowing them as combat organisations formed in the process of the class struggle at a sharp revolutionary stage,"* he distanced Marx and Engels quite successfully from such a position. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42] As such, he makes a valid contribution to Marxism and presents a necessary counter-argument to Lenin's claims (at which point, we are sure, nine out of ten Leninists will dismiss our argument regardless of how well it explains apparent contradictions in Marx and Engels or how much evidence can be presented in support of it!).

This position should not be confused with a totally reformist position, as social-democracy became. Marx and Engels were well aware that a revolution would be needed to create and defend a republic. Engels, for example, noted *"how totally mistaken is the belief that a republic, and not only a republic, but also a communist society, can be established in a cosy, peaceful way."* Thus violent revolution was required to create a republic — Marx and Engels were revolutionaries, after all. Within a republic, both recognised that insurrection would be required to defend democratic government against attempts by the capitalist class to maintain its economic position. Universal suffrage was, to quote Engels, *"a splendid weapon"* which, while *"slower and more boring than the call to revolution"*, was *"ten times more sure and what is even better, it indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made."* This was because it was *"even ten to one that universal suffrage, intelligently used by the workers, will drive the rulers to overthrow legality, that is, to put us in the most favourable position to make revolution." "The big mistake"*, Engels argued, was *"to think that the revolution is something that can be made overnight. As a matter of fact it is a process of development of the masses that takes several years even under conditions accelerating this process."* Thus it was a case of, *"as a revolutionary, any means which leads to the*



would see *"the gradual or violent expropriation of the present landlords and capitalists, or of the appropriation of all land and capital by the State. In order to be able to carry out its great economic and social mission, this State will have to be very far-reaching, very powerful and highly centralised. It will administer and supervise agriculture by means of its appointed mangers, who will command armies of rural workers organised and disciplined for that purpose. At the same time, it will set up a single bank on the ruins of all existing banks."* Such a system, Bakunin correctly predicted, would be *"a barracks regime for the proletariat, in which a standardised mass of men and women workers would wake, sleep, work and live by rote; a regime of privilege for the able and the clever."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 258 and p. 259]

Proudhon, likewise was well aware that state ownership did not mean the end of private property, rather it meant a change in who ordered the working class about. *"We do not want,"* he stated, *"to see the State confiscate the mines, canals and railways; that would be to add to monarchy, and more wage slavery. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations"* which would be the start of a *"vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic."* He contrasted workers' associations run by and for their members to those *"subsidised, commanded and directed by the State,"* which would crush *"all liberty and all wealth, precisely as the great limited companies are doing."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62 and p. 105]

Simply put, if workers did not directly manage their own work then it matters little who formally owns the workplaces in which they toil. As Maurice Brinton argued, libertarian socialists *"hold that the 'relations of production' — the relations which individuals or groups enter into with one another in the process of producing wealth — are the essential foundations of any society. A certain pattern of relations of production is the*

dination, authority, lack of freedom and *"a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation,"* Lenin's idea of turning the world into one big factory takes on an extremely frightening nature. [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 731] A reality which one anarchist described in 1923 as being the case in Lenin's Russia:

> *"The nationalisation of industry, removing the workers from the hands of individual capitalists, delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single, ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital, with the sole difference that the Communist boss, the State, not only exploits the workers, but also punishes them himself ... Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State ... It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."* [Peter Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 71]

All of which makes Bakunin's comments seem justified (as well as stunningly accurate):

> *"**Labour financed by the State** — such is the fundamental principle of **authoritarian Communism,** of State Socialism. The State, **having become the sole proprietor** ... will have become sole capitalist, banker, money-lender, organiser, director of all national work, and the distributor of its profits."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 293]

Such a system, based on those countries *"where modern capitalist development has reached its highest point of development"*



*goal is suitable, including the most violent and the most pacific."* [Marx and Engels, **The Socialist Revolution**, p. 283, p. 189, p. 265 and p. 274] However, over time and as social democratic parties and universal suffrage spread, the emphasis did change from insurrection (the **Communist Manifesto**'s *"violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie"*) to Engels last pronouncement that *"the conditions of struggle had essentially changed. Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades ... , was to a considerable extent obsolete."* [**Selected Works**, p. 45 and pp. 653–4]

Obviously, neither Marx nor Engels (unlike Bakunin, significantly) saw the rise of reformism which usually made this need for the ruling class to *"overthrow legality"* redundant. Nor, for that matter, did they see the effect of economic power in controlling workers parties once in office. Sure, armed coups have taken place to overthrow even slightly reformist governments but, thanks to the use of "political action", the working class was in no position to *"make revolution"* in response. Not, of course, that these have been required in most republics as utilising Marxist methods have made many radical parties so reformist that the capitalists can easily tolerate their taking office or can utilise economic and bureaucratic pressures to control them.

So far from arguing, as Lenin suggested, for the destruction of the capitalist state, Marx and Engels consistently advocated the use of universal suffrage to gain control over the state, control which then would be used to smash or shatter the *"state machine."* Revolution would be required to create a republic and to defend it against reaction, but the key was the utilisation of political action to take political power within a democratic state. The closest that Marx or Engels came to advocating workers councils was in 1850 when Marx suggested that the German workers *"establish their own revolutionary workers' governments"* alongside of the *"new official governments"*. These could be of two forms, either of *"municipal committees and munici-*

*pal councils"* or *"workers' clubs or workers' committees."* There is no mention of how these would be organised but their aim would be to supervise and threaten the official governments *"by authorities backed by the whole mass of the workers."* These clubs would be *"centralised"*. In addition, *"workers candidates are [to be] put up alongside of the bourgeois-democratic candidates"* to *"preserve their independence"*. (although this "independence" meant taking part in bourgeois institutions so that *"the demands of the workers must everywhere be governed by the concessions and measures of the democrats."*). [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 507, p. 508 and p. 510] So while these *"workers' committees"* could, in theory, be elected from the workplace Marx made no mention of this possibility (talk of *"municipal councils"* suggests that such a possibility was alien to him). It also should be noted that Marx was echoing Proudhon who, the year before, had argued that the clubs *"had to be organised. The organisation of popular societies was the fulcrum of democracy, the corner-stone of the republican order."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 48] So, as with the soviets, even the idea of workers' clubs as a means of ensuring mass participation was first raised by anarchists (although, of course, inspired by working class self-organisation during the 1848 French revolution).

All this may seem a bit academic to many. Does it matter? After all, most Marxists today subscribe to some variation of Lenin's position and so, in some aspects, what Marx and Engels really thought is irrelevant. Indeed, it is possible that Marx faced with workers' councils, as he was with the Commune, would have embraced them (perhaps not, as he was dismissive of similar ideas expressed in the libertarian wing of the First International). After all, the Mensheviks used Marx's 1850s arguments to support their activities in the soviets in 1905 (while the Bolshevik's expressed hostility to both the policy and the soviets) and, of course, there is nothing in them to exclude such a position. What is important is that the idea that Marxists have always subscribed to the idea that a social revolution



> *"If instead of the present capitalist class there were a set of officials appointed by the Government and set in a position to control our factories, it would bring about no revolutionary change. The officials would have to be paid, and we may depend that, in their privileged positions, they would expect good remuneration. The politicians would have to be paid, and we already know their tastes. You would, in fact, have a non-productive class dictating to the producers the conditions upon which they were allowed to use the means of production. As this is exactly what is wrong with the present system of society, we can see that State control would be no remedy, while it would bring with it a host of new troubles ... under a governmental system of society, whether it is the capitalism of today or a more a perfected Government control of the Socialist State, the essential relationship between the governed and the governing, the worker and the controller, will be the same; and this relationship so long as it lasts can be maintained only by the bloody brutality of the policeman's bludgeon and the soldier's rifle."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 8–9]

The key to seeing why state socialism is simply state capitalism can be found in the lack of change in the social relationships at the point of production. The workers are still wage slaves, employed by the state and subject to its orders. As Lenin stressed in **State and Revolution**, under Marxist Socialism *"**[a]ll** citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state ... **All** citizens become employees and workers of a single country-wide state 'syndicate' ... The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 25, pp. 473–4] Given that Engels had argued, against anarchism, that a factory required subor-

*cialised organisation of production within the factory,"* this has become *"incompatible with the anarchy of production in society."* The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that "socialism" will inherit, without change, the *"socialised"* workplace of capitalism and that the fundamental change is that of ownership: *"The proletariat seized the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production ... into public property. By this act, the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne."* [Engels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 709 and p. 717]

That the Marxist movement came to see state ownership rather than workers' management of production as the key issue is hardly surprising. Thus we find leading Social-Democrats arguing that socialism basically meant the state, under Social-Democratic control of course, acquiring the means of production and nationalising them. Rudolf Hilferding presented what was Marxist orthodoxy at the time when he argued that in *"a communist society"* production *"is consciously determined by the social central organ,"* which would decide *"what is to be produced and how much, where and by whom."* While this information is determined by the market forces under capitalism, in socialism it *"is given to the members of the socialist society by their authorities ... we must derive the undisturbed progress of the socialist economy from the laws, ordinances and regulations of socialist authorities."* [quoted by Nikolai Bukharin, **Economy Theory of the Leisure Class**, p. 157] The Bolsheviks inherited this concept of "socialism" and implemented it, with terrible results.

This vision of society in which the lives of the population are controlled by *"authorities"* in a *"social central organ"* which tells the workers what to do, while in line with the **Communist Manifesto**, seems less that appealing. It also shows why state socialism is not socialism at all. Thus George Barrett:



would be based on the workers' own combat organisations (be they unions, soviets or whatever) is a relatively new one to the ideology. If, as John Rees asserts, *"the socialist revolution must counterpoise the soviet to parliament ... precisely because it needs an organ which combines economic power — the power to strike and take control of the workplaces — with an insurrectionary bid for political power"* and *"breaking the old state"* then the ironic thing is that it was Bakunin, **not** Marx, who advocated such a position. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Given this, the shock which met Lenin's arguments in 1917 can be easily understood.

Rather than being rooted in the Marxist vision of revolution, as it has been in anarchism since at least the 1860s, workers councils have played, rhetoric aside, the role of fig-leaf for party power (libertarian Marxism being a notable exception). They have been embraced by its Leninist wing purely as a means of ensuring party power. Rather than being seen as the most important gain of a revolution as they allow mass participation, workers' councils have been seen, and used, simply as a means by which the party can seize power. Once this is achieved, the soviets can be marginalised and ignored without affecting the "proletarian" nature of the revolution in the eyes of the party:

> *"while it is true that Lenin recognised the different functions and democratic raison d'être for both the soviets and his party, in the last analysis it was the party that was more important than the soviets. In other words, the party was the final repository of working-class sovereignty. Thus, Lenin did not seem to have been reflected on or have been particularly perturbed by the decline of the soviets after 1918."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 212]

This perspective can be traced back to the lack of interest Marx and Engels expressed in the forms which a proletarian

revolution would take, as exemplified by Engels comments on having to *"lop off"* aspects of the state *"inherited"* by the working class. The idea that the organisations people create in their struggle for freedom may help determine the outcome of the revolution is missing. Rather, the idea that any structure can be appropriated and (after suitable modification) used to rebuild society is clear. This cannot but flow from the flawed Marxist theory of the state we discussed in section H.3.7. If, as Marx and Engels argued, the state is simply an instrument of class rule then it becomes unproblematic to utilise the existing republican state or create a new form of state complete with representative structures. The Marxist perspective, moreover, cannot help take emphasis away from the mass working class organisations required to rebuild society in a socialist manner and place it on the group who will *"inherit"* the state and *"lop off"* its negative aspects, namely the party and the leaders in charge of both it and the new "workers' state."

This focus towards the party became, under Lenin (and the Bolsheviks in general) a purely instrumental perspective on workers' councils and other organisations. They were of use purely in so far as they allowed the Bolshevik party to take power (indeed Lenin constantly identified workers' power and soviet power with Bolshevik power and as Martin Buber noted, for Lenin ***"All power to the Soviets!"*** meant, at bottom, ***"All power to the Party through the Soviets!"***). It can, therefore, be argued that his book **State and Revolution** was a means to use Marx and Engels to support his new found idea of the soviets as being the basis of creating a Bolshevik government rather than a principled defence of workers' councils as the framework of a socialist revolution. We discuss this issue in the next section.



*from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production into the hands of the State."* This meant the *"[c]entralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly,"* the *"[c]entralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State," "[e]xtension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State"* and the *"[e]stablishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture."* [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, pp. 52–3] Thus *"feudal estates ... mines, pits, and so forth, would become property of the state"* as well as *"[a]ll means of transport,"* with *"the running of large-scale industry and the railways by the state."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 3, p. 4 and p. 299]

Engels repeats this formula thirty-two years later in **Socialism: Utopian and Scientific** by asserting that capitalism itself *"forces on more and more the transformation of the vast means of production, already socialised, into state property.* ***The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property."*** Socialism is **not** equated with state ownership of productive forces by a capitalist state, *"but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution"* to the social problem. It simply *"shows itself the way to accomplishing this revolution.* ***The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property."*** Thus state ownership **after** the proletariat seizes power is the basis of socialism, when by this *"first act"* of the revolution the state *"really constitutes itself as the representative of the whole of society."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 713, p. 712 and p. 713]

What is significant from these programmatic statements on the first steps of socialism is the total non-discussion of what is happening at the point of production, the non-discussion of the social relations in the workplace. Rather we are subjected to discussion of *"the contradiction between socialised production and capitalist appropriation"* and claims that while there is *"so-*

the state bureaucracy rather than to the capitalist class. Marxism would, as Kropotkin predicted, be *"the worship of the State, of authority and of State Socialism, which is in reality nothing but State capitalism."* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context"*, pp. 259–283, **International Review of Social History**, No. 40, p. 262]

However, before beginning our discussion of why anarchists think this we need to clarify our terminology. This is because the expression *"state capitalism"* has three distinct, if related, meanings in socialist (particularly Marxist) thought. Firstly, *"state capitalism"* was/is used to describe the current system of big business subject to extensive state control (particularly if, as in war, the capitalist state accrues **extensive** powers over industry). Secondly, it was used by Lenin to describe his immediate aims after the October Revolution, namely a regime in which the capitalists would remain but would be subject to a system of state control inherited by the new *"proletarian"* state from the old capitalist one. The third use of the term is to signify a regime in which the state **replaces** the capitalist class **totally** via nationalisation of the means of production. In such a regime, the state would own, manage and accumulate capital rather than individual capitalists.

Anarchists are opposed to all three systems described by the term *"state capitalism."* Here we concentrate on the third definition, arguing that state socialism would be better described as *"state capitalism"* as state ownership of the means of life does not get to the heart of capitalism, namely wage labour. Rather it simply replaces private bosses with the state and changes the form of property (from private to state property) rather than getting rid of it.

The idea that socialism simply equals state ownership (nationalisation) is easy to find in the works of Marxism. The **Communist Manifesto**, for example, states that the *"proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital*



## H.3.11 Does Marxism aim to give power to workers organisations?

The short answer depends on which branch of Marxism you mean.

If you are talking about libertarian Marxists such as council communists, Situationists and so on, then the answer is a resounding "yes." Like anarchists, these Marxists see a social revolution as being based on working class self-management and, indeed, criticised (and broke with) Bolshevism precisely on this question. Some Marxists, like the **Socialist Party of Great Britain**, stay true to Marx and Engels and argue for using the ballot box (see last section) although this not exclude utilising such organs once political power is seized by those means. However, if we look at the mainstream Marxist tradition (namely Leninism), the answer has to be an empathic "no."

As we noted in section H.1.4, anarchists have long argued that the organisations created by the working class in struggle would be the initial framework of a free society. These organs, created to resist capitalism and the state, would be the means to overthrow both as well as extending and defending the revolution (such bodies have included the "soviets" and "factory committees" of the Russian Revolution, the collectives in the Spanish revolution, popular assemblies of the 2001 Argentine revolt against neo-liberalism and the French Revolution, revolutionary unions and so on). Thus working class self-management is at the core of the anarchist vision and so we stress the importance (and autonomy) of working class organisations in the revolutionary movement and the revolution itself. Anarchists work within such bodies at the base, in the mass assemblies, and do not seek to replace their power with that of their own organisation (see section J.3.6).

Leninists, in contrast, have a different perspective on such bodies. Rather than placing them at the heart of the revolution,

Leninism views them purely in instrumental terms — namely, as a means of achieving party power. Writing in 1907, Lenin argued that *"Social-Democratic Party organisations may, in case of necessity, participate in inter-party Soviets of Workers' Delegates ... and in congresses ... of these organisations, and may organise such institutions, provided this is done on strict Party lines for the purpose of developing and strengthening the Social-Democratic Labour Party"*, that is *"utilise"* such organs *"for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement."* Significantly, given the fate of the soviets post-1917, Lenin noted that the party *"must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 12, pp. 143–4] Thus the means by which working class can manage their own affairs would become *"superfluous"* once the party was in power. How the working class could be considered the "ruling class" in such a society is hard to understand.

As Oscar Anweiler summarises in his account of the soviets during the two Russian Revolutions:

> *"The drawback of the new 'soviet democracy' hailed by Lenin in 1906 is that he could envisage the soviets only as **controlled** organisations; for him they were instruments by which the party controlled the working masses, rather than true forms of a workers democracy. The basic contradiction of the Bolshevik soviet system — which purports to be a democracy of all working people but in reality recognises only the rule of one party — is already contained in Lenin's interpretation of the soviets during the first Russian revolution."* [**The Soviets**, p. 85]

Thirteen years later, Lenin repeated this same vision of party power as the goal of revolution in his infamous diatribe



provides the necessary understanding of where socialism will come from, from **below**, in the spontaneous self-activity of the oppressed fighting for their freedom. This means that the basic structures of socialism will be the organs created by working class people in their struggles against exploitation and oppress (see section I.2.3 for more details). Gustav Landauer's basic insight is correct (if his means were not totally so) when he wrote that *"Socialism will not grow out of capitalism but away from it"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140] In other words, tendencies **opposed** to capitalism rather than ones which are part and parcel of it.

Anarchism's recognition of the importance of these tendencies towards mutual aid within capitalism is a key to understanding what anarchists do in the here and now, as will be discussed in section J. In addition, it also laid the foundation of understanding the nature of an anarchist society and what creates the framework of such a society in the here and now. Anarchists do not abstractly place a better society (anarchy) against the current, oppressive one. Instead, we analysis what tendencies exist within current society and encourage those which empower and liberate people. Based on these tendencies, anarchists propose a society which develops them to their logical conclusion. Therefore an anarchist society is created not through the developments within capitalism, but in social struggle against it.

## H.3.13 Why is state socialism just state capitalism?

For anarchists, the idea that socialism can be achieved via state ownership is simply ridiculous. For reasons which will become abundantly clear, anarchists argue that any such *"socialist"* system would simply be a form of *"state capitalism."* Such a regime would not fundamentally change the position of the working class, whose members would simply be wage slaves to

anarchists have raised the idea that the *"free commune"* would be the *"medium in which the ideas of modern Socialism may come to realisation."* These *"communes would federate"* into wider groupings. Labour unions (or other working class organs created in the class struggle such as factory committees) were *"not only an instrument for the improvement of the conditions of labour, but also ... an organisation which might ... take into its hands the management of production."* Large labour associations would *"come into existence for the inter-communal service[s]."* Such communes and workers' organisations as the basis of *"Socialist forms of life could find a much easier realisation"* than the *"seizure of all industrial property by the State, and the State organisation of agriculture and industry."* Thus railway networks *"could be much better handled by a Federated Union of railway employees, than by a State organisation."* Combined with co-operation *"both for production and for distribution, both in industry and agriculture,"* workers' self-management of production would create *"samples of the bricks"* of the future society (*"even samples of some of its rooms"*). [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 21–23]

This means that anarchists also root our arguments for socialism in a scientific analysis of tendencies within capitalism. However, in opposition to the analysis of mainstream Marxism which focuses on the objective tendencies within capitalist development, anarchists emphasis the **oppositional** nature of socialism to capitalism. Both the *"law of value"* and the *"law of planning"* are tendencies **within** capitalism, that is aspects of capitalism. Anarchists encourage class struggle, the direct conflict of working class people against the workings of all capitalism's "laws". This struggle produces **mutual aid** and the awareness that we can care best for our own welfare if we **unite** with others — what we can loosely term the *"law of co-operation"* or *"law of mutual aid"*. This law, in contrast to the Marxian *"law of planning"* is based on working class subjectively and develops within society only in **opposition** to capitalism. As such, it



against "Left-wing" Communism (i.e. those Marxists close to anarchism) as we noted in section H.3.3. The Bolsheviks had, by this stage, explicitly argued for party dictatorship and considered it a truism that the whole proletariat could not rule nor could the proletarian dictatorship be exercised by a mass working class organisation. Therefore, rather than seeing revolution being based upon the empowerment of working class organisation and the socialist society being based on this, Leninists see workers organisations in purely instrumental terms as the means of achieving a Leninist government:

> *"With all the idealised glorification of the soviets as a new, higher, and more democratic type of state, Lenin's principal aim was revolutionary-strategic rather than social-structural ... The slogan of the soviets was primarily tactical in nature; the soviets were in theory organs of mass democracy, but in practice tools for the Bolshevik Party. In 1917 Lenin outlined his transitional utopia without naming the definitive factor: the party. To understand the soviets' true place in Bolshevism, it is not enough, therefore, to accept the idealised picture in Lenin's state theory. Only an examination of the actual give-and-take between Bolsheviks and soviets during the revolution allows a correct understanding of their relationship."* [Oscar Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 160–1]

Simply out, Leninism confuses the party power and workers' power. An example of this "confusion" can be found in most Leninist works. For example, John Rees argues that *"the essence of the Bolsheviks' strategy ... was to take power from the Provisional government and put it in the hands of popular organs of working class power — a point later made explicit by Trotsky in his **Lessons of October**."* [*"In Defence of October"*, pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 73] However, in reality Lenin

had always been clear that the essence of the Bolsheviks' strategy was the taking of power by the Bolshevik party **itself.** He explicitly argued for Bolshevik power during 1917, considering the soviets as the best means of achieving this. He constantly equated Bolshevik rule with working class rule. Once in power, this identification did not change. As such, rather than argue for power to be placed into *"the hands of popular organs of working class power"* Lenin argued this only insofar as he was sure that these organs would then **immediately** pass that power into the hands of a Bolshevik government.

This explains his turn against the soviets after July 1917 when he considered it impossible for the Bolsheviks to gain a majority in them. It can be seen when the Bolshevik party's Central Committee opposed the idea of a coalition government immediately after the overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917. As it explained, *"a purely Bolshevik government"* was *"impossible to refuse"* since *"a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets ... handed power over to this government."* [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, pp. 127–8] A mere ten days after the October Revolution the Left Social Revolutionaries charged that the Bolshevik government was ignoring the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, established by the second Congress of Soviets as the supreme organ in society. Lenin dismissed their charges, stating that *"the new power could not take into account, in its activity, all the rigmarole which would set it on the road of the meticulous observation of all the formalities."* [quoted by Frederick I. Kaplan, **Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labour**, p. 124] Clearly, the soviets did not have *"All Power,"* they promptly handed it over to a Bolshevik government (and Lenin implies that he was not bound in any way to the supreme organ of the soviets in whose name he ruled). All of which places Rees' assertions into the proper context and shows that the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* is used by Leninists in a radically different way than most peo-



As should be obvious, anarchism is based on critical evaluation of technology and industrial structure, rejecting the whole capitalist notion of "progress" which has always been part of justifying the inhumanities of the status quo. Just because something is rewarded by capitalism it does not mean that it makes sense from a human or ecological perspective. This informs our vision of a free society and the current struggle. We have long argued that that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise and socialise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming their work situation, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute.

It goes without saying that anarchists recognise that a social revolution will have to start with the industry and technology which is left to it by capitalism and that this will have to be expropriated by the working class (this expropriation will, of course, involve transforming it and, in all likelihood, rejecting of numerous technologies, techniques and practices considered as "efficient" under capitalism). This is **not** the issue. The issue is who expropriates it and what happens to it next. For anarchists, the means of life are expropriated directly by society, for most Marxists they are expropriated by the state. For anarchists, such expropriation is based workers' self-management and so the fundamental capitalist *"relation of production"* (wage labour) is abolished. For most Marxists, state ownership of production is considered sufficient to ensure the end of capitalism (with, if we are lucky, some form of *"workers' control"* over those state officials who do management production — see section H.3.14).

In contrast to the mainstream Marxist vision of socialism being based around the institutions inherited from capitalism,

by his followers as evils of Stalinism and as proof of its anti-socialist nature.

Equally, it can be argued that part of the reason why large capitalist firms can "plan" production on a large scale is because they reduce the decision making criteria to a few variables, the most significant being profit and loss. That such simplification of input data may result in decisions which harm people and the environment goes without a saying. *"The lack of context and particularity,"* James C. Scott correctly notes, *"is not an oversight; it is the necessary first premise of any large-scale planning exercise. To the degree that the subjects can be treated as standardised units, the power of resolution in the planning exercise is enhanced. Questions posed within these strict confines can have definitive, quantitative answers. The same logic applies to the transformation of the natural world. Questions about the volume of commercial wood or the yield of wheat in bushels permit more precise calculations than questions about, say, the quality of the soil, the versatility and taste of the grain, or the well-being of the community. The discipline of economics achieves its formidable resolving power by transforming what might otherwise be considered qualitative matters into quantitative issues with a single metric and, as it were, a bottom line: profit or loss."* [**Seeing like a State**, p. 346] Whether a socialist society could factor in all the important inputs which capitalism ignores within an even more centralised planning structure is an important question. It is extremely doubtful that there could be a positive answer to it. This does not mean, we just stress, that anarchists argue exclusively for "small-scale" production as many Marxists, like Lenin, assert (as we prove in section I.3.8, anarchists have always argued for **appropriate** levels of production and scale). It is simply to raise the possibility of what works under capitalism may be undesirable from a perspective which values people and planet instead of power and profit.



ple would understand by it! It also explains why soviets were disbanded if the opposition won majorities in them in early 1918 (see section H.6.1). The Bolsheviks only supported *"Soviet power"* when the soviets were Bolshevik. As was recognised by leading left-Menshevik Julius Martov, who argued that the Bolsheviks loved Soviets only when they were *"in the hands of the Bolshevik party."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 174] Which explains Lenin's comment that *"[o]nly the development of this war [Kornilov's counter-revolutionary rebellion in August 1917] can bring **us** to power but we must **speak** of this as little as possible in our agitation (remembering very well that even tomorrow events may put us in power and then we will not let it go)."* [quoted by Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253]

All this can be confirmed, unsurprisingly enough, by looking at the essay Rees references. When studying Trotsky's work we find the same instrumentalist approach to the question of the *"popular organs of working class power."* Yes, there is some discussion on whether soviets or *"some of form of organisation"* like factory committees could become *"organs of state power"* but this is always within the context of party power. This is stated quite clearly by Trotsky in his essay when he argued that the *"essential aspect"* of Bolshevism was the *"training, tempering, and organisation of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand."* [**Lessons of October**, p. 167 and p. 127] As such, the vanguard seizes power, **not** *"popular organs of working class power."* Indeed, the idea that the working class can seize power itself is raised and dismissed:

> *"But the events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising … there is nothing else that can serve the*

*proletariat as a substitute for its own party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 117]

Hence soviets were not considered as the *"essence"* of Bolshevism, rather the *"fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party."* Popular organs are seen purely in instrumental terms, with such organs of "workers' power" discussed in terms of the strategy and program of the party not in terms of the value that such organs have as forms of working class self-management of society. Why should he, when *"the task of the Communist party is the conquest of power for the purpose of reconstructing society"*? [**Op. Cit.**, p. 118 and p. 174]

This can be clearly seen from Trotsky's discussion of the "October Revolution" of 1917 in **Lessons of October**. Commenting on the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917, he stated that the *"whole of ... [the] Conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? ... Lenin's position was this: .. . the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134] Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets, thus showing that the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. This is confirmed when Trotsky stated that *"to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us"* and that it was *"one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets."* The Soviet Congress just provided *"the legal cover"* for the Bolshevik plans. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134, p. 158 and p. 161]



*production what is only a typically capitalist means of speculation, a means of exercising oppression all the more securely; and they do not appreciate that that sort of centralisation, far from fulfilling the real needs of production, is, on the contrary, precisely what restricts it, obstructs it and applies a brake to it in the interests of capital.*

*"Whenever [they] talk about 'necessity of production' they make no distinction between those necessities upon which hinge the procurement of a greater quantity and higher quality of products — this being all that matters from the social and communist point of view — and the necessities inherent in the bourgeois regime, the capitalists' necessity to make more profit even should it mean producing less to do so. If capitalism tends to centralise its operations, it does so not for the sake of production, but only for the sake of making and accumulating more money."* [*"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 21–22]

Efficiency, in other words, does not exist independently of a given society or economy. What is considered "efficient" under capitalism may be the worse form of inefficiency in a free society. The idea that socialism may have **different** priorities, need **different** methods of organising production, have **different** visions of how an economy was structured than capitalism, is absent in mainstream Marxism. Lenin thought that the institutions of bourgeois economic power, industrial structure and capitalist technology and techniques could be "captured" and used for other ends. Ultimately, though, capitalist means and organisations can only generate capitalist ends. It is significant that the *"one-man management,"* piece-work, Taylorism, etc. advocated and implemented under Lenin are usually listed

> *dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 229]

That mainstream Marxism is soaked in capitalist ideology can be seen from Lenin's comments that when *"the separate establishments are amalgamated into a single syndicate, this economy [of production] can attain tremendous proportions, as economic science teaches us."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, p. 344] Yes, **capitalist** economic science, based on **capitalist** definitions of efficiency and economy and on **capitalist** criteria! That Bolshevism bases itself on centralised, large scale industry because it is more "efficient" and "economic" suggests nothing less than that its "socialism" will be based on the same priorities of capitalism. This can be seen from Lenin's idea that Russia had to learn from the advanced capitalist countries, that there was only one way to develop production and that was by adopting capitalist methods of "rationalisation" and management. Thus, for Lenin in early 1918 *"our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare* ***no effort*** *in copying it and not to shrink from adopting* ***dictorial*** *methods to hasten the copying of it."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 340] In the words of Luigi Fabbri:

> *"Marxist communists, especially Russian ones, are beguiled by the distant mirage of big industry in the West or America and mistake for a system of*



Thus we have the *"seizure of power through the soviets"* with *"an armed insurrection"* for *"the seizure of power by the party"* being hidden by *"the slogan"* (*"the legal cover"*) of defending the Soviets! Hardly a case of placing power in the hands of working class organisations. Trotsky **did** note that in 1917 the *"soviets had to either disappear entirely or take real power into their hands."* However, he immediately added that *"they could take power ... only as the dictatorship of the proletariat directed by a single party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 126] Clearly, the *"single party"* has the real power, **not** the soviets an unsurprisingly the rule of *"a single party"* also amounted to the soviets effectively disappearing as they quickly became mere ciphers it. Soon the *"direction"* by *"a single party"* became the dictatorship of that party **over** the soviets, which (it should be noted) Trotsky defended wholeheartedly when he wrote **Lessons of October** (and, indeed, into the 1930s).

This cannot be considered as a one-off. Trotsky repeated this analysis in his **History of the Russian Revolution**, when he stated that the *"question, what mass organisations were to serve the party for leadership in the insurrection, did not permit an* ***a priori,*** *much less a categorical, answer."* Thus the *"mass organisations"* serve the party, not vice versa. This instrumentalist perspective can be seen when Trotsky noted that when *"the Bolsheviks got a majority in the Petrograd Soviet, and afterward a number of others,"* the *"phrase 'Power to the Soviets' was not, therefore, again removed from the order of the day, but received a new meaning: All power to the* ***Bolshevik*** *soviets."* This meant that the *"party was launched on the road of armed insurrection through the soviets and in the name of the soviets."* As he put it in his discussion of the July days in 1917, the army *"was far from ready to raise an insurrection in order to give power to the Bolshevik Party"* and so *"the state of popular consciousness ... made impossible the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in July."* [vol. 2, p. 303, p. 307, p. 78 and p. 81] So much for *"all power to the Soviets"*! He even quotes Lenin: *"The*

*Bolsheviks have no right to await the Congress of Soviets. They ought to seize the power right* ***now.*** *"* Ultimately, the *"Central Committee adopted the motion of Lenin as the only thinkable one: to form a government of the Bolsheviks only."* [vol. 3, pp. 131–2 and p. 299]

So where does this leave the assertion that the Bolsheviks aimed to put power into the hands of working class organisations? Clearly, Rees' summary of both Trotsky's essay and the *"essence"* of Bolshevism leave a lot to be desired. As can be seen, the *"essence"* of Trotsky's essay and of Bolshevism is the importance of party power, not workers' power (as recognised by another member of the SWP: *"The masses needed to be profoundly convinced that there was no alternative to Bolshevik power."* [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 265]). Trotsky even provided us with an analogy which effectively and simply refutes Rees' claims. *"Just as the blacksmith cannot seize the red hot iron in his naked hand,"* Trotsky asserted, *"so the proletariat cannot directly seize power; it has to have an organisation accommodated to this task."* While paying lip service to the soviets as the organisation *"by means of which the proletariat can both overthrow the old power and replace it,"* he added that *"the soviets by themselves do not settle the question"* as they may *"serve different goals according to the programme and leadership. The soviets receive their programme from the party ... the revolutionary party represents the brain of the class. The problem of conquering the power can be solved only by a definite combination of party with soviets."* [**The History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, pp. 160–1 and p. 163]

Thus the key organisation was the party, **not** the mass organisations of the working class. Indeed, Trotsky was quite explicit that such organisations could only become the state form of the proletariat under the party dictatorship. Significantly, Trotsky fails to indicate what would happen when these two powers clash. Certainly Trotsky's role in the Russian revolution tells us that the power of the party was more important



Engels, while Lenin's support for capitalist production techniques can be explained by mainstream Marxism's lack of focus on the social relationships at the point of production.

For anarchists, the idea that socialism can be built on the framework provided to us by capitalism is simply ridiculous. Capitalism has developed industry and technology to further the ends of those with power, namely capitalists and managers. Why should they use that power to develop technology and industrial structures which lead to workers' self-management and power rather than technologies and structures which enhance their own position vis-à-vis their workers and society as a whole? As such, technological and industrial development is not "neutral" or just the "application of science." They are shaped by class struggle and class interest and cannot be used for different ends. Simply put, socialism will need to develop **new** forms of economic organisation based on socialist principles. The concept that monopoly capitalism paves the way for socialist society is rooted in the false assumption that the forms of social organisation accompanying capital concentration are identical with the socialisation of production, that the structures associated with collective labour under capitalism are the same as those required under socialism is achieve **genuine** socialisation. This false assumption, as can be seen, goes back to Engels and was shared by both Social Democracy and Leninism despite their other differences.

While anarchists are inspired by a vision of a non-capitalist, decentralised, diverse society based on appropriate technology and appropriate scale, mainstream Marxism is not. Rather, it sees the problem with capitalism is that its institutions are not centralised and big enough. As Alexander Berkman correctly argues:

> *"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated... Most people are still in the thraldom of the Marxian*

meant that the Bolsheviks would *"not invent the organisational form of work, but take it ready-made from capitalism"* and *"borrow the best models furnished by the advanced countries."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, pp. 105–6 and p. 110]

The institutional framework of capitalism would be utilised as the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of "socialist" transformation. *"**Without big banks Socialism would be impossible,**"* argued Lenin, as they *"are the 'state apparatus' which we need to bring about socialism, and which we **take ready-made** from capitalism; our task here is merely to **lop off** what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it **even bigger,** even more democratic, even more comprehensive. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big .. . will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the **socialist** apparatus. This will be country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods."* While this is *"not fully a state apparatus under capitalism,"* it *"will be so with us, under socialism."* For Lenin, building socialism was easy. This *"nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus"* would be created *"at one stroke, by a single decree."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 106] Once in power, the Bolsheviks implemented this vision of socialism being built upon the institutions created by monopoly capitalism. Moreover, Lenin quickly started to advocate and implement the most sophisticated capitalist methods of organising labour, including *"one-man management"* of production, piece-rates and Taylorism (*"scientific management"*). This was not done accidentally or because no alternative existed (as we discuss in section H.6.2, workers were organising federations of factory committees which could have been, as anarchists argued at the time, the basis of a genuine socialist economy).

As Gustav Landuer commented, when mainstream Marxists *"call the capitalist factory system a social production … we know the real implications of their socialist forms of labour."* [**For Socialism**, p. 70] As can be seen, this glorification of large-scale, state-capitalist structures can be traced back to Marx and



to him than democratic control by workers through mass bodies and as we have shown in section H.3.8, Trotsky explicitly argued that a state was required to overcome the *"wavering"* in the working class which could be expressed by democratic decision making.

Given this legacy of viewing workers' organisations in purely instrumental terms, the opinion of Martov (the leading left-Menshevik during the Russian Revolution) seems appropriate. He argued that *"[a]t the moment when the revolutionary masses expressed their emancipation from the centuries old yoke of the old State by forming 'autonomous republics of Kronstadt' and trying Anarchist experiments such as 'workers' control,' etc. — at that moment, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry' (said to be incarnated in the real dictatorship of the opposed 'true' interpreters of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry: the chosen of Bolshevist Communism) could only consolidate itself by first dressing itself in such Anarchist and anti-State ideology."* [**The State and Socialist Revolution**, p. 47] As can be seen, Martov had a point. As the text used as evidence that the Bolsheviks aimed to give power to workers organisations shows, this was **not** an aim of the Bolshevik party. Rather, such workers organs were seen purely as a means to the end of party power.

In contrast, anarchists argue for direct working class self-management of society. When we argue that working class organisations must be the framework of a free society we mean it. We do not equate party power with working class power or think that *"All power to the Soviets"* is possible if they immediately delegate that power to the leaders of the party. This is for obvious reasons:

> *"If the revolutionary means are out of their hands, if they are in the hands of a techno-bureaucratic elite, then such an elite will be in a position to direct to their own benefit not only the course of the*

*revolution, but the future society as well. If the proletariat are to **ensure** that an elite will not control the future society, they must prevent them from controlling the course of the revolution."* [Alan Carter, **Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 165]

Thus the slogan *"All power to the Soviets"* for anarchists means exactly that — organs for the working class to run society directly, based on mandated, recallable delegates. This slogan fitted perfectly with our ideas, as anarchists had been arguing since the 1860's that such workers' councils were both a weapon of class struggle against capitalism and the framework of the future libertarian society. For the Bolshevik tradition, that slogan simply means that a Bolshevik government will be formed over and above the soviets. The difference is important, *"for the Anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 213] Reducing the soviets to simply executing the decrees of the central (Bolshevik) government and having their All-Russian Congress be able to recall the government (i.e. those with **real** power) does not equal *"all power,"* quite the reverse — the soviets will simply be a fig-leaf for party power.

In summary, rather than aim to place power into the hands of workers' organisations, most Marxists do not. Their aim is to place power into the hands of the party. Workers' organisations are simply means to this end and, as the Bolshevik regime showed, if they clash with that goal, they will be simply be disbanded. However, we must stress that not all Marxist tendencies subscribe to this. The council communists, for example, broke with the Bolsheviks precisely over this issue, the difference between party and class power.



*ing might still prove useful."* [**Finance Capital**, pp. 367–8]

Lenin basically disagreed with this only in-so-far as the party of the proletariat would take power via revolution rather than by election (*"the state conquered by the working class"* equals the election of a socialist party). Lenin took it for granted that the difference between Marxists and anarchists is that *"the former stand for centralised, large-scale communist production, while the latter stand for disconnected small production."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 325] The obvious implication of this is that anarchist views *"express, not the future of bourgeois society, which is striving with irresistible force towards the socialisation of labour, but the present and even the past of that society, the domination of blind chance over the scattered and isolated small producer."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 10, p. 73]

Lenin applied this perspective during the Russian Revolution. For example, he argued in 1917 that his immediate aim was for a *"state capitalist"* economy, this being a necessary stage to socialism. As he put it, *"socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly ... socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly **which is made to serve the interests of the whole people** and has to that extent **ceased** to be capitalist monopoly."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, p. 358] The Bolshevik road to "socialism" ran through the terrain of state capitalism and, in fact, simply built upon its institutionalised means of allocating recourses and structuring industry. As Lenin put it, *"the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connections with the banks and syndicates [i.e., trusts] , an apparatus which performs an enormous amount of accounting and registration work ... This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed. It must be wrestled from the control of the capitalists,"* it *"must be subordinated to the proletarian Soviets"* and *"it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nation-wide."* This

*socialist revolution and a bourgeois revolution is that in the latter case there are ready made forms of capitalist relationships; Soviet power [in Russia] does not inherit such ready made relationships, if we leave out of account the most developed forms of capitalism, which, strictly speaking, extended to a small top layer of industry and hardly touched agriculture."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 90] Thus, for Lenin, *"socialist"* relationships are generated within big business, relationships "socialism" would *"inherit"* and universalise. As such, his comments fit in with the analysis of Marx and Engels we have presented above. However, his comments also reveal that Lenin had no idea that socialism meant the transformation of the relations of production, i.e. workers managing their own activity. This, undoubtedly, explains the systematic undermining of the factory committee movement by the Bolsheviks in favour of state control (see Maurice Brinton's classic account of this process, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**).

The idea that socialism involved simply taking over the state and nationalising the *"objectively socialised"* means of production can be seen in both mainstream social-democracy and its Leninist child. Rudolf Hilferding argued that capitalism was evolving into a highly centralised economy, run by big banks and big firms. All what was required to turn this into socialism would be its nationalisation:

> *"Once finance capital has brought the most important branches of production under its control, it is enough for society, through its conscious executive organ — the state conquered by the working class — to seize finance capital in order to gain immediate control of these branches of production ... taking possession of six large Berlin banks would ... greatly facilitate the initial phases of socialist policy during the transition period, when capitalist account-*



## H.3.12 Is big business the precondition for socialism?

A key idea in most forms of Marxism is that the evolution of capitalism itself will create the preconditions for socialism. This is because capitalism tends to result in big business and, correspondingly, increased numbers of workers subject to the *"socialised"* production process within the workplace. The conflict between the socialised means of production and their private ownership is at the heart of the Marxist case for socialism:

> "Then came the concentration of the means of production and of the producers in large workshops and manufactories, their transformation into actual socialised means of production and socialised producers. But the socialised producers and means of production and their products were still treated, after this change, just as they had been before ... the owner of the instruments of labour ... appropriated to himself ... exclusively the product of the **labour of others.** Thus, the products now produced socially were not appropriated by those who actually set in motion the means of production and actually produced the commodities, but by the **capitalists** ... The mode of production is subjected to this [individual or private] form of appropriation, although it abolishes the conditions upon which the latter rests.
>
> "This contradiction, which gives to the new mode of production its capitalistic character, **contains the germ of the whole of the social antagonisms of today.**" [Engels, **Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 703–4]

It is the business cycle of capitalism which show this contradiction between socialised production and capitalist appropriation the best. Indeed, the *"fact that the socialised organisation of production within the factory has developed so far that it has become incompatible with the anarchy of production in society, which exists side by side with and dominates it, is brought home to the capitalists themselves by the violent concentration of capital that occurs during crises."* The pressures of socialised production results in capitalists merging their properties *"in a particular branch of industry in a particular country"* into *"a trust, a union for the purpose of regulating production."* In this way, *"the production of capitalistic society capitulates to the production upon a definite plan of the invading socialistic society."* This *"transformation"* can take the form of *"joint-stock companies and trusts, or into state ownership."* The later does not change the *"capitalist relation"* although it does have *"concealed within it"* the *"technical conditions that form the elements of that solution."* This *"shows itself the way to accomplishing this revolution.* ***The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property."*** [**Op. Cit.**, p. 709, p. 710, p. 711, p. 712 and p. 713]

Thus the centralisation and concentration of production into bigger and bigger units, into big business, is seen as the evidence of the need for socialism. It provides the objective grounding for socialism, and, in fact, this analysis is what makes Marxism *"scientific socialism."* This process explains how human society develops through time:

> *"In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a*



> *and a highly despotic empire such as the Inca. From a strictly instrumental viewpoint, the two structures were supported by almost identical 'tool kits.' Both engaged in horticultural practices that were organised around primitive implements and wooden hoes. Their weaving and metalworking techniques were very similar … At the* ***community*** *level, Iroquois and Inca populations were immensely similar …*
>
> *"Yet at the* ***political*** *level of social life, a democratic confederal structure of five woodland tribes obviously differs decisively from a centralised, despotic structure of mountain Indian chiefdoms. The former, a highly libertarian confederation … The latter, a massively authoritarian state … Communal management of resources and produce among the Iroquois tribes occurred at the clan level. By contrast, Inca resources were largely state-owned, and much of the empire's produce was simply confiscation … and their redistribution from central and local storehouses. The Iroquois worked together freely … the Inca peasantry provided corvee labour to a patently exploitative priesthood and state apparatus under a nearly industrial system of management."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, pp. 331–2]

Marx's claim that a given technological level implies a specific social structure is wrong. However, it does suggest that our comments that, for Marx and Engels, the new *"social relationships"* which develop under capitalism which imply socialism are relations between workplaces, **not** those between individuals and so classes are correct. The implications of this position became clear during the Russian revolution.

Later Marxists built upon this "scientific" groundwork. Lenin, for example, argued that *"the difference between a*

*mechanism of the capitalist process of production."* Even in his most libertarian work, *"The Civil War in France"*, this perspective can be found. He, rightly, praised attempts by the Communards to set up co-operatives (although distinctly failed to mention Proudhon's obvious influence) but then went on to argue that the working class had *"no ready-made utopias to introduce"* and that *"to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies"* they simply had *"to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 635–6]

Then we have Marx, in his polemic against Proudhon, arguing that social relations *"are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 166] On the face of it, this had better **not** be true. After all, the aim of socialism is to expropriate the property of the industrial capitalist. If the social relationships **are** dependent on the productive forces then, clearly, socialism is impossible as it will have to be based, initially, on the legacy of capitalism. Fortunately, the way a workplace is managed is not predetermined by the technological base of society. As is obvious, a steam-mill can be operated by a co-operative, so making the industrial capitalist redundant. That a given technological basis (or productive forces) can produces many different social and political systems can easily be seen from history. Murray Bookchin gives one example:

> *"Technics ... does not fully or even adequately account for the institutional differences between a fairly democratic federation such as the Iroquois*



> *legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness ... At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces come in conflict with the existing relations of production or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."* [Marx, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 4–5]

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that socialism will come about due to tendencies inherent within the development of capitalism. The *"socialisation"* implied by collective labour within a firm grows steadily as capitalist companies grow larger and larger. The objective need for socialism is therefore created and so, for most Marxists, ***"big is beautiful."*** Indeed, some Leninists have invented terminology to describe this, which can be traced back to at least as far as Bolshevik (and Left Oppositionist) Evgeny Preobrazhensky (although his perspective, like most Leninist ones, has deep roots in the Social Democratic orthodoxy of the Second International). Preobrazhensky, as well as expounding the need for *"primitive socialist accumulation"* to build up Soviet Russia's industry, also discussed *"the contradiction of the law of planning and the law of value."* [Hillel Ticktin, *"Leon Trotsky and the Social Forces Leading to Bureaucracy, 1923–29"*, pp. 45–64, **The Ideas of Leon Trotsky**, Hillel Ticktin and Michael Cox (eds.), p. 45] Thus Marxists in this tradition (like Hillel Ticktin) argue that the increased size of capital means that more and more of the economy is subject to the despotism of the owners and managers of capital and so the *"anarchy"* of the market is slowly replaced

with the conscious planning of resources. Marxists sometimes call this the *"objective socialisation of labour"* (to use Ernest Mandel's term). Thus there is a tendency for Marxists to see the increased size and power of big business as providing objective evidence for socialism, which will bring these socialistic tendencies within capitalism to full light and full development. Needless to say, most will argue that socialism, while developing planning fully, will replace the autocratic and hierarchical planning of big business with democratic, society-wide planning.

This position, for anarchists, has certain problems associated with it. One key drawback, as we discuss in the next section, is it focuses attention away from the internal organisation within the workplace onto ownership and links between economic units. It ends up confusing capitalism with the market relations between firms rather than identifying it with its essence, wage slavery. This meant that many Marxists consider that the basis of a socialist economy was guaranteed once property was nationalised. This perspective tends to dismiss as irrelevant the way production is managed. The anarchist critique that this simply replaced a multitude of bosses with one, the state, was (and is) ignored. Rather than seeing socialism as being dependent on workers' management of production, this position ends up seeing socialism as being dependent on organisational links between workplaces, as exemplified by big business under capitalism. Thus the *"relations of production"* which matter are **not** those associated with wage labour but rather those associated with the market. This can be seen from the famous comment in **The Manifesto of the Communist Party** that the bourgeoisie *"cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."* [Marx and Engels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 476] But the one relation of production it **cannot** revolutionise is the one generated by the wage labour at the heart of capitalism, the hierarchical relations at



the point of production. As such, it is clear that by *"relations of production"* Marx and Engels meant something else than wage slavery, namely, the internal organisation of what they term *"socialised production."*

Capitalism is, in general, as dynamic as Marx and Engels stressed. It transforms the means of production, the structure of industry and the links between workplaces constantly. Yet it only modifies the form of the organisation of labour, not its content. No matter how it transforms machinery and the internal structure of companies, the workers are still wage slaves. At best, it simply transforms much of the hierarchy which governs the workforce into hired managers. This does not transform the fundamental social relationship of capitalism, however and so the *"relations of production"* which prefigure socialism are, precisely, those associated with the *"socialisation of the labour process"* which occurs **within** capitalism and are no way antagonistic to it.

This mirrors Marx's famous prediction that the capitalist mode of production produces *"the centralisation of capitals"* as one capitalist *"always strikes down many others."* This leads to *"the further socialisation of labour and the further transformation of the soil and other means of production into socially exploited and therefore communal means of production takes on a new form."* Thus capitalist progress itself objectively produces the necessity for socialism as it socialises the production process and produces a working class *"constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopolisation of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production ... The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, pp. 928–9] Note, it is not the workers who organise themselves but rather they are *"organised by the very*

longer part of the working class then they no longer are rooted in the social conditions which generate socialist theory and action. No longer connected with collective labour and working class life, the *"professional"* revolutionary is more likely to be influenced by the social milieu he or she now is part of (i.e. a bourgeois, or at best petit-bourgeois, environment).

This tendency for the *"professional"* revolutionary to be subject to bourgeois influences can continually be seen from the history of the Bolshevik party. As Trotsky himself noted:

> *"It should not be forgotten that the political machine of the Bolshevik Party was predominantly made up of the intelligentsia, which was petty bourgeois in its origin and conditions of life and Marxist in its ideas and in its relations with the proletariat. Workers who turned professional revolutionists joined this set with great eagerness and lost their identity in it. The peculiar social structure of the Party machine and its authority over the proletariat (neither of which is accidental but dictated by strict historical necessity) were more than once the cause of the Party's vacillation and finally became the source of its degeneration ... In most cases they lacked independent daily contact with the labouring masses as well as a comprehensive understanding of the historical process. They thus left themselves exposed to the influence of alien classes."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, pp. 297–8]

He pointed to the example of the First World War, when, *"even the Bolshevik party did not at once find its way in the labyrinth of war. As a general rule, the confusion was most pervasive and lasted longest amongst the Party's higher-ups, who came in direct contact with bourgeois public opinion."* Thus the professional revolutionaries *"were largely affected by compromisist tendencies, which emanated from bourgeois circles, while*



However, Lenin used *"the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees."* In fact Lenin's proposals were *"thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous."* While those Bolsheviks *"connected with the factory committees assigned responsibility for workers' control of production chiefly to the committees"* this *"never became official Bolshevik party policy."* In fact, *"the Bolsheviks never deviated before or after October from a commitment to a statist, centralised solution to economic disorder. The disagreement between the two wings of the socialist movement [i.e., the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks] was not about state control in the abstract, but what* ***kind*** *of state should co-ordinate control of the economy: a bourgeois state or a workers' state?"* They *"did not disagree radically in the specific measures which they advocated for control of the economy."* Lenin *"never developed a conception of workers' self-management. Even after October, workers' control remained for him fundamentally a matter of 'inspection' and 'accounting' ... rather than as being necessary to the transformation of the process of production by the direct producers. For Lenin, the transformation of capitalist relations of production was achieved at central-state level, rather than at enterprise level. Progress to socialism was guaranteed by the character of the state and achieved through policies by the central state — not by the degree of power exercised by workers on the shop floor."* [**Red Petrograd**, p. 153, p. 154, p. 159, p. 153, p. 154 and p. 228]

Thus the Bolshevik vision of *"workers' control"* was always placed in a statist context and it would be exercised not by workers' organisations but rather by state capitalist institutions. This has nothing in common with control by the workers themselves and their own class organisations as advocated by anarchists. In May 1917, Lenin was arguing for the *"establishment of state control over all banks, and their amalgamation into a single central bank; also control over the insurance agencies and big capitalist syndicates."* [**Collected**

**Works**, vol. 24, p. 311] He reiterated this framework later that year, arguing that *"the new means of control have been created **not** by us, but by capitalism in its military-imperialist stage"* and so *"the proletariat takes its weapons from capitalism and does not 'invent' or 'create them out of nothing.'"* The aim was *"compulsory amalgamation in associations under state control," "by workers' control of the **workers' state**."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 108, p. 109 and p. 108] The factory committees were added to this *"state capitalist"* system but they played only a very minor role in it. Indeed, this system of state control was designed to limit the power of the factory committees:

> *"One of the first decrees issues by the Bolshevik Government was the Decree on Workers' Control of 27 November 1917. By this decree workers' control was institutionalised ... Workers' control implied the persistence of private ownership of the means of production, though with a 'diminished' right of disposal. The organs of workers' control, the factory committees, were not supposed to evolve into workers' management organs after the nationalisation of the factories. The hierarchical structure of factory work was not questioned by Lenin ... To the Bolshevik leadership the transfer of power to the working class meant power to its leadership, i.e. to the party. Central control was the main goal of the Bolshevik leadership. The hasty creation of the VSNKh (the Supreme Council of the National Economy) on 1 December 1917, with precise tasks in the economic field, was a significant indication of fact that decentralised management was not among the projects of the party, and that the Bolsheviks intended to counterpoise central direction of the economy to the possible evolution of workers' control toward self-management."* [Sil-



## H.5.2 Have vanguardist assumptions been validated?

Lenin claimed that workers can only reach a *"trade union consciousness"* by their own efforts. Anarchists argue that such an assertion is empirically false. The history of the labour movement is marked by revolts and struggles which went far further than just seeking reforms as well as revolutionary theories derived from such experiences.

The category of *"economic struggle"* corresponds to no known social reality. Every *"economic"* struggle is *"political"* in some sense and those involved can, and do, learn political lessons from them. As Kropotkin noted in the 1880s, there *"is almost no serious strike which occurs together with the appearance of troops, the exchange of blows and some acts of revolt. Here they fight with the troops; there they march on the factories ... Thanks to government intervention the rebel against the factory becomes the rebel against the State."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 256] If history shows anything, it shows that workers are more than capable of going beyond *"trade union consciousness."* The Paris Commune, the 1848 revolts and, ironically enough, the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions show that the masses are capable of revolutionary struggles in which the self-proclaimed *"vanguard"* of socialists spend most of their time trying to catch up with them!

The history of Bolshevism also helps discredit Lenin's argument that the workers cannot develop socialist consciousness alone due to the power of bourgeois ideology. Simply put, if the working class is subjected to bourgeois influences, then so are the *"professional"* revolutionaries within the party. Indeed, the strength of such influences on the "professionals" of revolution **must** be higher as they are not part of proletarian life. If social being influences consciousness then if a revolutionary is no

*view, the only salvation of society.* ***Quite logically,*** *I say, having taken as their basis the tenet — a fallacious tenet in our opinion — that thought is prior to life, and abstract theory is prior to social practice, and that therefore sociological science must become the starting point for social upheavals and social reconstruction — they necessarily arrived at the conclusion that since thought, theory, and science are, for the present at least, the property of only a very few people, those few should direct social life; and that on the morrow of the Revolution the new social organisation should be set up not by the free integration of workers' associations, villages, communes, and regions from below upward, conforming to the needs and instincts of the people, but solely by the dictatorial power of this learned minority, allegedly expressing the general will of the people."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 283–4]

The idea that *"socialist consciousness"* can exist independently of the working class and its struggle suggests exactly the perspective Bakunin was critiquing. For vanguardism, the abstract theory of socialism exists prior to the class struggle and exists waiting to be brought to the masses by the educated few. The net effect is, as we have argued, to lay the ground for party dictatorship. The concept is fundamentally anti-socialist, a justification for elite rule and the continuation of class society in new, party approved, ways.



vana Malle, **The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921**, p. 47]

Once in power, the Bolsheviks soon turned away from even this limited vision of workers' control and in favour of *"one-man management."* Lenin raised this idea in late April 1918 and it involved granting state appointed *"individual executives dictatorial powers (or 'unlimited' powers)."* Large-scale industry required *"thousands subordinating their will to the will of one,"* and so the revolution *"demands"* that *"the people unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour."* Lenin's *"superior forms of labour discipline"* were simply hyper-developed capitalist forms. The role of workers in production was the same, but with a novel twist, namely *"unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during the work."* This support for wage slavery was combined with support for capitalist management techniques. *"We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice,"* argued Lenin, *"we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 267, p. 269, p. 271 and p. 258]

This vision had already been applied in practice, with the *"first decree on the management of nationalised enterprises in March 1918"* which had *"established two directors at the head of each enterprise .. . Both directors were appointed by the central administrators."* An *"economic and administrative council"* was also created in the workplace, but this *"did not reflect a syndicalist concept of management."* Rather it included representatives of the employees, employers, engineers, trade unions, the local soviets, co-operatives, the local economic councils and peasants. This composition *"weakened the impact of the factory workers on decision-making … The workers' control organs [the factory committees] remained in a subordinate position with respect to the council."* Once the Civil War broke out in May

1918, this process was accelerated. By 1920, most workplaces were under one-man management and the Communist Party at its Ninth Congress had *"promoted one-man management as the most suitable form of management."* [Malle, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111, p. 112, p. 141 and p. 128] In other words, the manner in which Lenin organised industry had handed it over entirely into the hands of the bureaucracy.

Trotsky did not disagree with all this, quite the reverse — he wholeheartedly defended the imposing of *"one-man management"*. As he put it in 1920, *"our Party Congress ... expressed itself in favour of the principle of one-man management in the administration of industry . .. It would be the greatest possible mistake, however, to consider this decision as a blow to the independence of the working class. The independence of the workers is determined and measured not by whether three workers or one are placed at the head of a factory."* As such, it *"would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered."* The term *"collective will of the workers"* is simply a euphemism for the Party which Trotsky had admitted had *"substituted"* its dictatorship for that of the Soviets (indeed, *"there is nothing accidental"* in this *"'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class"* and *"in reality there is no substitution at all."* The *"dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party"*). The unions *"should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands."* He even argued that *"the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power*



*ing the proletariat, and then insinuating the Party as the head ... Lenin was wrong, and in fact, in Russia the Party was forced to decapitate the workers' movement with the help of the political police and the Red Army under the brilliant leadership of Trotsky and Lenin."* [**Obsolute Communism**, pp. 194–5]

As well as explaining the subsequent embrace of party dictatorship **over** the working class, vanguardism also explains the notorious inefficiency of Leninist parties faced with revolutionary situations we discuss in section H.5.8. Basing themselves on the perspective that all spontaneous movements are inherently bourgeois they could not help but be opposed to autonomous class struggle and the organisations and tactics it generates. James C. Scott, in his excellent discussion of the roots and flaws in Lenin's ideas on the party, makes the obvious point that since, for Lenin, *"authentic, revolutionary class consciousness could never develop autonomously within the working class, it followed that that the actual political outlook of workers was always a threat to the vanguard party."* [**Seeing like a State**, p. 155] As Maurice Brinton argued, the *"Bolshevik cadres saw their role as the leadership of the revolution. Any movement not initiated by them or independent of their control could only evoke their suspicion."* These developments, of course, did not occur by chance or accidentally for *"a given ideological premise (the preordained hegemony of the Party) led necessarily to certain conclusions in practice."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xi and p. xii]

Bakunin expressed the implications of the vanguardist perspective extremely well. It is worthwhile quoting him at length:

> *"Idealists of all sorts, metaphysicians, positivists, those who uphold the priority of science over life, the doctrinaire revolutionists — all of them champion with equal zeal although differing in their argumentation, the idea of the State and State power, seeing in them, quite logically from their point of*

consciousness, any deviation in working class support for it simply meant that the working class was being *"subordinated"* to the bourgeoisie. This meant, obviously, that to *"belittle"* the *"role"* of the party by questioning its rule meant to *"strengthen bourgeois ideology"* and when workers spontaneously went on strike or protested against the party's rule, the party had to *"combat"* these strivings in order to maintain working class rule! As the *"masses of the workers"* cannot develop an *"independent ideology,"* the workers are rejecting socialist ideology in favour of bourgeois ideology. The party, in order to defend the "the revolution" (even the "rule of the workers"!) has to impose its will onto the class, to *"combat spontaneity."*

As we saw in section H.1.2, none of the leading Bolsheviks were shy about drawing these conclusions once in power and faced with working class revolt against their rule. Indeed, they raised the idea that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* was also, in fact, the *"dictatorship of the party"* and, as we discussed in section H.3.8 integrated this into their theory of the state. Thus, Leninist ideology implies that *"workers' power"* exists independently of the workers. This means that the sight of the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* (i.e. the Bolshevik government) repressing the proletariat is to be expected.

This elitist perspective of the party, the idea that it and it alone possesses knowledge can be seen from the resolution of the Communist International on the role of the party. It stated that *"the working class without an independent political party is a body without a head."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 194] This use of biological analogies says more about Bolshevism that its authors intended. After all, it suggests a division of labour which is unchangeable. Can the hands evolve to do their own thinking? Of course not. Yet again, we have an image of the class as unthinking brute force. As the Cohen-Bendit brothers argued, the *"Leninist belief that the workers cannot spontaneously go beyond the level of trade union consciousness is tantamount to behead-*



*... and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 162, p. 109, p. 143 and p. 135]

Trotsky did not consider this a result of the Civil War. Again, the opposite was the case: *"I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 162–3] Significantly, discussing developments in Russia since the N.E.P, Trotsky a few years later argued that it was *"necessary for each state-owned factory, with its technical director and with its commercial director, to be subjected not only to control from the top — by the state organs — but also from below, by the market which will remain the regulator of the state economy for a long time to come."* Workers' control, as can be seen, was not even mentioned, nor considered as an essential aspect of control *"from below."* As Trotsky also stated that *"[u]nder socialism economic life will be directed in a centralised manner,"* our discussion of the state capitalist nature of mainstream Marxism we presented in the last section is confirmed. [**The First Five Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 237 and p. 229]

The contrast between what Trotsky did when he was in power and what he argued for after he had been expelled is obvious. Indeed, the arguments of 1938 and 1920 are in direct contradiction to each other. Needless to say, Leninists and Trotskyists today are fonder of quoting Trotsky and Lenin when they did not have state power rather than when they did. Rather than compare what they said to what they did, they simply repeat ambiguous slogans which meant radically different things to Lenin and Trotsky than to the workers' who thrust them into power. For obvious reasons, we feel. Given the opportunity for latter day Leninists to exercise power, we wonder if a similar

process would occur again? Who would be willing to take that chance?

As such, any claim that mainstream Marxism considers *"workers' control"* as an essential feature of its politics is simply nonsense. For a comprehensive discussion of *"workers' control"* during the Russian Revolution Maurice Brinton's account cannot be bettered. As he stressed, *"only the ignorant or those willing to be deceived can still kid themselves into believing that proletarian power* ***at the point of production*** *was ever a fundamental tenet or objective of Bolshevism."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 14]

All this is not some academic point. As Brinton noted, faced *"with the bureaucratic monstrosity of Stalinist and post-Stalinist Russia, yet wishing to retain some credibility among their working class supporters, various strands of Bolshevism have sought posthumously to rehabilitate the concept of 'workers' control.'"* The facts show that between 1917 and 1921 *"all attempts by the working class to assert real power over production — or to transcend the narrow role allocated by to it by the Party — were smashed by the Bolsheviks, after first having been denounced as anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist deviations. Today workers' control is presented as a sort of sugar coating to the pill of nationalisation of every Trotskyist or Leninist micro-bureaucrat on the make. Those who strangled the viable infant are now hawking the corpse around "* [**For Workers' Power**, p. 165] Little has changes since Brinton wrote those words in the 1960s, with Leninists today proclaiming with a straight face that they stand for "self-management"!

The roots of this confusion can be found in Marx and Engels. In the struggle between authentic socialism (i.e. workers' self-management) and state capitalism (i.e. state ownership) there **are** elements of the correct solution to be found in their ideas, namely their support for co-operatives. For example, Marx praised the efforts made within the Paris Commune to create co-operatives, so *"transforming the means of produc-*



Thus we have a privileged position for the party and a perspective which can (and did) justify party dictatorship **over** the proletariat. Given the perspective that the working class cannot formulate its own "ideology" by its own efforts, of its incapacity to move beyond *"trade union consciousness"* independently of the party, the clear implication is that the party could in no way be bound by the predominant views of the working class. As the party embodies *"socialist consciousness"* (and this arises outside the working class and its struggles) then opposition of the working class to the party signifies a failure of the class to resist alien influences. As Lenin put it:

> *"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement,* ***the only choice is****: either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course ... Hence, to belittle socialist ideology* ***in any way,*** *to* ***deviate from it in the slightest degree*** *means strengthening bourgeois ideology. There is a lot of talk about spontaneity, but the* ***spontaneous*** *development of the labour movement leads to its becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology ... Hence our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to* ***combat spontaneity,*** *to* ***divert*** *the labour movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving to go under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 82–3]

The implications of this argument became clear once the Bolsheviks seized power. As a justification for party dictatorship, you would be hard pressed to find any better. If the working class revolts against the ruling party, then we have a *"spontaneous"* development which, inevitably, is an expression of bourgeois ideology. As the party represents socialist

*"No positive content, nothing new capable of providing the foundation for the reconstruction of society could arise out of a mere awareness of poverty. From the experience of life under capitalism the proletariat could derive no new principles either for organising this new society or for orientating it in another direction. Under such conditions, the proletarian revolution becomes ... a simple reflex revolt against hunger. It is impossible to see how socialist society could ever be the result of such a reflex ... Their situation forces them to suffer the consequences of capitalism's contradictions, but in no way does it lead them to discover its causes. An acquaintance with these causes comes not from experiencing the production process but from theoretical knowledge ... This knowledge may be accessible to individual workers, but not to the proletariat* ***qua*** *proletariat. Driven by its revolt against poverty, but incapable of self-direction since its experiences does not give it a privileged viewpoint on reality, the proletariat according to this outlook, can only be an infantry in the service of a general staff of specialists. These specialists* ***know*** *(from considerations that the proletariat as such does not have access to) what is going wrong with present-day society and how it must be modified. The traditional view of the economy and its revolutionary perspective can only found, and actually throughout history has only founded, a* ***bureaucratic politics*** *... [W]hat we have outlined are the consequences that follow objectively from this theory. And they have been affirmed in an ever clearer fashion within the actual historical movement of Marxism, culminating in Stalinism."* [**Social and Political Writings**, vol. 2, pp. 257–8]



*tion, land and capital ... into mere instruments of free and associated labour."* He argued that *"[i]f co-operative production is not to remain a shame and a snare; if it is to supersede the Capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon a common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of Capitalist production — what else ... would it be but Communism, 'possible' Communism?"* [**Selected Works**, pp. 290–1] In the 1880s, Engels suggested as a reform the putting of public works and state-owned land into the hands of workers' co-operatives rather than capitalists. [**Collected Works**, vol. 47, p. 239]

These comments should not be taken as being totally without aspects of nationalisation. Engels argued for *"the transfer — initially on lease — of large estates to autonomous co-operatives under state management and effected in such a way that the State retains ownership of the land."* He stated that neither he nor Marx *"ever doubted that, in the course of transition to a wholly communist economy, widespread use would have to be made of co-operative management as an intermediate stage. Only it will mean so organising things that society, i.e. initially the State, retains ownership of the means of production and thus prevents the particular interests of the co-operatives from taking precedence over those of society as a whole."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 389] However, Engels comments simply bring home the impossibilities of trying to reconcile state ownership and workers' self-management. While the advocacy of co-operatives is a positive step forward from the statist arguments of the **Communist Manifesto**, Engels squeezes these libertarian forms of organising production into typically statist structures. How *"autonomous co-operatives"* can co-exist with (and under!) *"state management"* and *"ownership"* is not explained, not to mention the fatal confusion of socialisation with nationalisation.

In addition, the differences between the comments of Marx and Engels are obvious. While Marx talks of *"united*

*co-operative societies,"* Engels talks of *"the State."* The former implies a free federation of co-operatives, the latter a centralised structure which the co-operatives are squeezed into and under. The former is socialist, the latter is state capitalist. From Engels argument, it is obvious that the stress is on state ownership and management rather than self-management. This confusion became a source of tragedy during the Russian Revolution when the workers, like their comrades during the Commune, started to form a federation of factory committees while the Bolsheviks squeezed these bodies into a system of state control which was designed to marginalise them.

Moreover, the aims of the Paris workers were at odds with the vision of the **Communist Manifesto** and in line with anarchism — most obviously Proudhon's demands for workers associations to replace wage labour and what he called, in his **Principle of Federation**, an *"agro-industrial federation."* Thus the Commune's idea of co-operative production was a clear expression of what Proudhon explicitly called *"industrial democracy,"* a *"reorganisation of industry, under the jurisdiction of all those who compose it."* [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 225] Thus, while Engels (in part) echoes Proudhon's ideas, he does not go fully towards a self-managed system of co-operation and co-ordination based on the workers' own organisations. Significantly, Bakunin and later anarchists simply developed these ideas to their logical conclusion.

Marx, to his credit, supported these libertarian visions when applied in practice by the Paris workers during the Commune and promptly revised his ideas. This fact has been obscured somewhat by Engels historical revisionism in this matter. In his 1891 introduction to Marx's *"The Civil War in France"*, Engels painted a picture of Proudhon being opposed to association (except for large-scale industry) and stressed that *"to combine all these associations in one great union"* was *"the direct opposite of the Proudhon doctrine"* and so *"the*



and, at best, can see only the need to work within capitalism for reforms to improve its position in society. A class whose members cannot develop political knowledge by its own actions cannot emancipate itself. It is, by necessity, dependent on others to shape and form its movements. To quote Trotsky's telling analogy on the respective roles of party and class, leaders and led:

> *"Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston. But nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 17]

While Trotsky's mechanistic analogy may be considered as somewhat crude, it does expose the underlying assumptions of Bolshevism. After all, did not Lenin argue that the working class could not develop *"socialist consciousness"* by themselves and that it had to be introduced from without? How can you expect steam to create a piston? You cannot. Thus we have a blind, elemental force incapable of conscious thought being guided by a creation of science, the piston (which, of course, is a product of the work of the *"vehicles of science,"* namely the **bourgeois intelligentsia**). In the Leninist perspective, if revolutions are the locomotives of history (to use Marx's words) then the masses are the steam, the party the locomotive and the leaders the train driver. The idea of a future society being constructed democratically from below by the workers themselves rather than through periodically elected leaders seems to have passed Bolshevism past. This is unsurprising, given that the Bolsheviks saw the workers in terms of blindly moving steam in a box, something incapable of being creative unless an outside force gave them direction (instructions).

Libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis provides a good critique of the implications of the Leninist position:

considered the "pope" of Social-Democracy, stated that it was *"absolutely untrue"* that *"socialist consciousness"* was a *"necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle."* Rather, *"socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other ... Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge ... The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the* ***bourgeois intelligentsia****: it was in the minds of some members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduced it into the proletarian class struggle."* Kautsky stressed that *"socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without."* [quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 81–2]

So Lenin, it must be stressed, was not inventing anything new here. He was simply repeating the orthodox Marxist position and, as is obvious, wholeheartedly agreed with Kautsky's pronouncements (any attempt to claim that he did not or later rejected it is nonsense, as we prove in section H.5.4). Lenin, with his usual modesty, claimed to speak on behalf of the workers when he wrote that *"intellectuals must talk to us, and tell us more about what we do not know and what we can never learn from our factory and 'economic' experience, that is, you must give us political knowledge."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 108] Thus we have Lenin painting a picture of a working class incapable of developing *"political knowledge"* or *"socialist consciousness"* by its own efforts and so is reliant on members of the party, themselves either radical elements of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie or educated by them, to provide it with such knowledge.

The obvious implication of this argument is that the working class cannot liberate itself by its own efforts. Without the radical bourgeois to provide the working class with "socialist" ideas, a socialist movement, let alone society, is impossible. If the working class cannot develop its own political theory by its own efforts then it cannot conceive of transforming society



*Commune was the grave of the Proudhon doctrine."* [**Selected Works**, p. 256] However, as noted, this is nonsense. The forming of workers' associations and their federation was a key aspect of Proudhon's ideas and so the Communards were obviously acting in his spirit. Given that the **Communist Manifesto** stressed state ownership and failed to mention co-operatives at all, the claim that the Commune acted in its spirit seems a tad optimistic. He also argued that the *"economic measures"* of the Commune were driven not by *"principles"* but by *"simple, practical needs."* This meant that *"the confiscation of shut-down factories and workshops and handing them over to workers' associations"* were *"not at all in accordance with the spirit of Proudhonism but certainly in accordance with the spirit of German scientific socialism"*! This seems unlikely, given Proudhon's well known and long-standing advocacy of co-operatives as well as Marx's comment in 1866 that in France the workers (*"particularly those of Paris"*!) *"are strongly attached, without knowing it [!], to the old rubbish"* and that the *"Parisian gentlemen had their heads full of the emptiest Proudhonist phrases."* [Marx, Engels, Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 92, p. 46 and p. 45]

What did this *"old rubbish"* consist of? Well, in 1869 the delegate of the Parisian Construction Workers' Trade Union argued that *"[a]ssociation of the different corporations [labour unions/associations] on the basis of town or country ... leads to the commune of the future ... Government is replaced by the assembled councils of the trade bodies, and by a committee of their respective delegates."* In addition, *"a local grouping which allows the workers in the same area to liase on a day to day basis"* and *"a linking up of the various localities, fields, regions, etc."* (i.e. international trade or industrial union federations) would ensure that *"labour organises for present and future by doing away with wage slavery."* This *"mode of organisation leads to the labour representation of the future."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 184]

To state the obvious, this had clear links with both Proudhon's ideas **and** what the Commune did in practice. Rather than being the *"grave"* of Proudhon's ideas on workers' associations, the Commune saw their birth, i.e. their application. Rather than the Parisian workers becoming Marxists without knowing it, Marx had become a follower of Proudhon! The idea of socialism being based on a federation of workers' associations was not buried with the Paris Commune. It was integrated into all forms of social anarchism (including communist-anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism) and recreated every time there is a social revolution.

In ending we must note that anarchists are well aware that individual workplaces could pursue aims at odds with the rest of society (to use Engels expression, their *"particular interests"*). This is often termed *"localism."* Anarchists, however, argue that the mainstream Marxist solution is worse than the problem. By placing self-managed workplaces under state control (or ownership) they become subject to even worse *"particular interests,"* namely those of the state bureaucracy who will use their power to further their own interests. In contrast, anarchists advocate federations of self-managed workplaces to solve this problem. This is because the problem of *"localism"* and any other problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a "revolutionary" party or state. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141]



So these are key aspects of the anarchist critique of vanguardism, which we discuss in more depth in the following sections. It is a bit artificial to divide these issues into different sections because they are all related. The role of the party implies a specific form of organisation (as Lenin himself stressed), the form of the party influences its effectiveness. It is for ease of presentation we divide up our discussion so.

## H.5.1 Why are vanguard parties anti-socialist?

The reason why vanguard parties are anti-socialist is simply because of the role assigned to them by Lenin, which he thought was vital. Simply put, without the party, no revolution would be possible. As Lenin put it in 1900, *"[i]solated from Social-Democracy, the working class movement becomes petty and inevitably becomes bourgeois."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 4, p. 368] In **What is to be Done?**, he expands on this position:

> *"Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers **only from without,** that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships between **all** the various classes and strata and the state and the government — the sphere of the interrelations between **all** the various classes."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 112]

Thus the role of the party is to inject socialist politics into a class incapable of developing them itself.

Lenin is at pains to stress the Marxist orthodoxy of his claims and quotes the *"profoundly true and important"* comments of Karl Kautsky on the subject. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 81] Kautsky,

the idea of institutionalised leadership and the creation of a leader/led hierarchy implicit (and sometimes no so implicit) in vanguardism.

As such, we do not oppose *"vanguardism"* for these reasons. So when Leninists like Tony Cliff argue that it is *"unevenness in the class [which] makes the party necessary,"* anarchists reply that *"unevenness in the class"* makes it essential that revolutionaries organise together to influence the class but that organisation does not and need not take the form of a vanguard party. [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 149] This is because we reject the concept and practice for three reasons.

Firstly, and most importantly, anarchists reject the underlying assumption of vanguardism. It is based on the argument that *"socialist consciousness"* has to be introduced into the working class from outside. We argue that not only is this position empirically false, it is fundamentally anti-socialist in nature. This is because it logically denies that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Moreover, it serves to justify elite rule. Some Leninists, embarrassed by the obvious anti-socialist nature of this concept, try and argue that Lenin (and so Leninism) does not hold this position. We show that such claims are false.

Secondly, there is the question of organisational structure. Vanguard parties are based on the principle of *"democratic centralism"*. Anarchists argue that such parties, while centralised, are not, in fact, democratic nor can they be. As such, the *"revolutionary"* or *"socialist"* party is no such thing as it reflects the structure of the capitalist system it claims to oppose.

Lastly, anarchists argue that such parties are, despite the claims of their supporters, not actually very efficient or effective in the revolutionary sense of the word. At best, they hinder the class struggle by being slow to respond to rapidly changing situations. At worse, they are "efficient" in shaping both the revolution and the post-revolutionary society in a hierarchical fashion, so re-creating class rule.



# H.4 Didn't Engels refute anarchism in *"On Authority"*?

No, far from it. Engels (in)famous essay *"On Authority"* is often pointed to by Marxists of various schools as refuting anarchism. Indeed, it is often considered the essential Marxist work for this and is often trotted out (pun intended) when anarchist influence is on the rise. However this is not the case. In fact, his essay is both politically flawed and misrepresentative. As such, anarchists do not think that Engels refuted anarchism in his essay but rather just showed his ignorance of the ideas he was critiquing. This ignorance essentially rests on the fact that the whole concept of authority was defined and understood differently by Bakunin and Engels, meaning that the latter's critique was flawed. While Engels may have thought that they both were speaking of the same thing, in fact they were not.

For Engels, all forms of group activity meant the subjection of the individuals that make it up. As he put it, *"whoever mentions combined action speaks of organisation"* and so it is not possible *"to have organisation without authority,"* as authority means *"the imposition of the will of another upon ours ... authority presupposes subordination."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 731 and p. 730] Given that, Engels considered the ideas of Bakunin to fly in the face of common sense and so show that he, Bakunin, did not know what he was talking about. However, in reality, it was Engels who did this.

The first fallacy in Engels account is that anarchists, as we indicated in section B.1, do not oppose all forms of authority. Bakunin was extremely clear on this issue and differentiated between **types** of authority, of which he opposed only certain kinds. For example, he asked the question *"[d]oes it follow that I reject all authority?"* and answered quite clearly: *"No, far be it from me to entertain such a thought."* He acknowledged the difference between being **an** authority — an expert — and being **in** authority. This meant that *"[i]f I bow before the authority of the specialists and declare myself ready to follow, to a certain extent and so long as it may seem to me to be necessary, their general indications and even their directions, it is because their authority is imposed upon me by no one . .. I bow before the authority of specialists because it is imposed upon me by my own reason."* Similarly, he argued that anarchists *"recognise all natural authority, and all influence of fact upon us, but none of right; for all authority and all influence of right, officially imposed upon us, immediately becomes a falsehood and an oppression."* He stressed that the *"only great and omnipotent authority, at once natural and rational, the only one we respect, will be that of the collective and public spirit of a society founded on equality and solidarity and the mutual respect of all its members."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 253, p. 241 and p. 255]

Bakunin contrasted this position with the Marxist one, whom he argued were *"champions of the social order built from the top down, always in the name of universal suffrage and the sovereignty of the masses upon whom they bestow the honour of obeying their leaders, their elected masters."* In other words, a system based on delegated **power** and so **hierarchical** authority. This excludes the masses from governing themselves (as in the state) and this, in turn, *"means domination, and any domination presupposes the subjugation of the masses and, consequently, their exploitation for the benefit of some ruling minority."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 277]



Bolshevik arguments, tactics and assumptions). This attempt to squeeze every working class movement into **one** "officially approved" model dates back to Marx and Engels. Faced with any working class movement which did **not** subscribe to their vision of what they should be doing (namely organising in political parties to take part in "political action," i.e. standing in bourgeois elections) they simply labelled it as the product of non-proletarian "sects." They went so far as to gerrymander the 1872 conference of the First International to make acceptance of "political action" mandatory on all sections in an attempt to destroy anarchist influence in it.

So this section of our FAQ will explain why anarchists reject this model. In our view, the whole concept of a *"vanguard party"* is fundamentally anti-socialist. Rather than present an effective and efficient means of achieving revolution, the Leninist model is elitist, hierarchical and highly inefficient in achieving a socialist society. At best, these parties play a harmful role in the class struggle by alienating activists and militants with their organisational principles and manipulative tactics within popular structures and groups. At worse, these parties can seize power and create a new form of class society (a state capitalist one) in which the working class is oppressed by new bosses (namely, the party hierarchy and its appointees).

However, before discussing why anarchists reject "vanguardism" we need to stress a few points. Firstly, anarchists recognise the obvious fact that the working class is divided in terms of political consciousness. Secondly, from this fact most anarchists recognise the need to organise together to spread our ideas as well as taking part in, influencing and learning from the class struggle. As such, anarchists have long been aware of the need for revolutionaries to organise **as revolutionaries.** Thirdly, anarchists are well aware of the importance of revolutionary minorities playing an inspiring and "leading" role in the class struggle. We do not reject the need for revolutionaries to *"give a lead"* in struggles, we reject

Bolshevik ideas on party organisation were raised as a model for revolutionaries across the world. Since then, the various followers of Leninism and its offshoots like Trotskyism have organised themselves in this manner (with varying success).

The wisdom of applying an organisational model that had been developed in the semi-feudal conditions of Tsarist Russia to **every** country, regardless of its level of development, has been questioned by anarchists from the start. After all, could it not be wiser to build upon the revolutionary tendencies which had developed in specific countries rather than import a new model which had been created for, and shaped by, radically different social, political and economic conditions? The wisdom of applying the vanguard model is not questioned on these (essentially materialist) points by those who subscribe to it. While revolutionary workers in the advanced capitalist nations subscribed to anarchist and syndicalist ideas, this tradition is rejected in favour of one developed by, in the main, bourgeois intellectuals in a nation which was still primarily feudal and absolutist. The lessons learned from years of struggle in actual capitalist societies were simply rejected in favour of those from a party operating under Tsarism. While most supporters of vanguardism will admit that conditions now are different than in Tsarist Russia, they still subscribe to organisational method developed in that context and justify it, ironically enough, because of its "success" in the totally different conditions that prevailed in Russia in the early 20th Century! And Leninists claim to be materialists!

Perhaps the reason why Bolshevism rejected the materialist approach was because most of the revolutionary movements in advanced capitalist countries were explicitly anti-parliamentarian, direct actionist, decentralist, federalist and influenced by libertarian ideas? This materialist analysis was a key aspect of the council communist critique of Lenin's **Left-Wing Communism**, for example (see Herman Gorter's **Open Letter to Comrade Lenin** for one excellent reply to



So while Bakunin and other anarchists, on occasion, **did** argue that anarchists reject *"all authority"* they, as Carole Pateman correctly notes, *"tended to treat 'authority' as a synonym for 'authoritarian,' and so have identified 'authority' with hierarchical power structures, especially those of the state. Nevertheless, their practical proposals and some of their theoretical discussions present a different picture."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 141] This can be seen when Bakunin noted that *"the principle of* ***authority****"* was the *"eminently theological, metaphysical and political idea that the masses,* ***always*** *incapable of governing themselves, must submit at all times to the benevolent yoke of a wisdom and a justice, which in one way or another, is imposed from above."* [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 33] Clearly, by the term *"principle of authority"* Bakunin meant **hierarchy** rather than organisation and the need to make agreements (what is now called self-management).

Bakunin, clearly, did not oppose **all** authority but rather a specific kind of authority, namely **hierarchical** authority. This kind of authority placed power into the hands of a few. For example, wage labour produced this kind of authority, with a *"meeting ... between master and slave ... the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time."* The state is also based hierarchical authority, with *"those who govern"* (i.e. *"those who frame the laws of the country as well as those who exercise the executive power"*) being in an *"exceptional position diametrically opposed to ... popular aspirations"* towards liberty. They end up *"viewing society from the high position in which they find themselves"* and so *"[w]hoever says political power says domination"* over *"a more or less considerable section of the population."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 187 and p. 218]

Thus hierarchical authority is top-down, centralised and imposed. It is **this** kind of authority Bakunin had in mind when he argued that anarchists *"are in fact enemies of all authority"* and it will *"corrupt those who exercise [it] as much as those who are compelled to submit to [it]."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 249] In

other words, "authority" was used as shorthand for "hierarchy" (or "hierarchical authority"), the imposition of decisions rather than agreement to abide by the collective decisions you make with others when you freely associate with them. In place of this kind of authority, Bakunin proposed a *"natural authority"* based on the masses *"governing themselves."* He did not object to the need for individuals associating themselves into groups and managing their own affairs, rather he opposed the idea that co-operation necessitated hierarchy:

> *"Hence there results, for science as well as for industry, the necessity of division and association of labour. I take and I give — such is human life. Each is an authoritative leader and in turn is led by others. Accordingly there is no fixed and constant authority, but continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 353–4]

This kind of free association would be the expression of liberty rather than (as in hierarchical structures) its denial. Anarchists reject the idea of giving a minority (a government) the power to make our decisions for us. Rather, power should rest in the hands of all, not concentrated in the hands of a few. We are well aware of the need to organise together and, therefore, the need to stick by decisions reached. The importance of solidarity in anarchist theory is an expression of this awareness. However, there are different kinds of organisation. There can be no denying that in a capitalist workplace or army there is "organisation" and "discipline" yet few, if any, sane persons would argue that this distinctly top-down and hierarchical form of working together is something to aspire to, particularly if you seek a free society. This cannot be compared to making and sticking by a collective decision reached by free discussion and debate within a self-governing associations. As Bakunin argued:



# H.5 What is vanguardism and why do anarchists reject it?

Many socialists follow the ideas of Lenin and, in particular, his ideas on vanguard parties. These ideas were expounded by Lenin in his (in)famous work **What is to be Done?** which is considered as one of the important books in the development of Bolshevism.

The core of these ideas is the concept of *"vanguardism,"* or the *"vanguard party."* According to this perspective, socialists need to organise together in a party, based on the principles of *"democratic centralism,"* which aims to gain a decisive influence in the class struggle. The ultimate aim of such a party is revolution and its seizure of power. Its short term aim is to gather into it all *"class conscious"* workers into a *"efficient"* and *"effective"* party, alongside members of other classes who consider themselves as revolutionary Marxists. The party would be strictly centralised, with all members expected to submit to party decisions, speak in one voice and act in one way. Without this *"vanguard,"* injecting its politics into the working class (who, it is asserted, can only reach trade union consciousness by its own efforts), a revolution is impossible.

Lenin laid the foundation of this kind of party in his book **What is to be Done?** and the vision of the *"vanguard"* party was explicitly formalised in the Communist International. As Lenin put it, *"Bolshevism **has created** the ideological and tactical foundations of a Third International ... Bolshevism **can serve as a model of tactics for all.**"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, pp. 292–3] Using the Russian Communist Party as its model,

> *"And so against the idea of State, where power is exercised by a specialised group isolated from the masses, we put the idea of direct workers power, where accountable and controlled elected delegates (who can be recalled at any time and are remunerated at the same rate as other workers) replace hierarchical, specialised and privileged bureaucracy; where militias, controlled by administrative bodies such as soviets, unions and communes, with no special privileges for military technicians, realising the idea of the armed people, replace an army cut off from the body of Society and subordinated to the arbitrary power of a State or government."* [**Manifesto of Libertarian Communism**, p. 24]

Anarchists, therefore, are no more impressed with this aspect of Engels critique than his "organisation equals authority" argument. In summary, his argument is simply a liberal analysis of revolution, totally without a class basis or analysis and so fails to understand the anarchist case nor answer it. To argue that a revolution is made up of two groups of people, one of which *"imposes its will upon the other"* fails to indicate the social relations that exist between these groups (classes) and the relations of authority between them which the revolution is seeking to overthrow. As such, Engels critique totally misses the point.



*"Discipline, mutual trust as well as unity are all excellent qualities when properly understood and practised, but disastrous when abused ... [one use of the word] discipline almost always signifies despotism on the one hand and blind automatic submission to authority on the other . ..*

*"Hostile as I am to [this,] the authoritarian conception of discipline, I nevertheless recognise that a certain kind of discipline, not automatic but voluntary and intelligently understood is, and will ever be, necessary whenever a greater number of individuals undertake any kind of collective work or action. Under these circumstances, discipline is simply the voluntary and considered co-ordination of all individual efforts for a common purpose. At the moment of revolution, in the midst of the struggle, there is a natural division of functions according to the aptitude of each, assessed and judged by the collective whole: Some direct and others carry out orders. But no function remains fixed and it will not remain permanently and irrevocably attached to any one person. Hierarchical order and promotion do not exist, so that the executive of yesterday can become the subordinate of tomorrow. No one rises above the others, and if he does rise, it is only to fall back again a moment later, like the waves of the sea forever returning to the salutary level of equality.*

*"In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all ... this is the only true discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom. This is not the kind of discipline preached by the*

> *State … which wants the old, routine-like, automatic blind discipline. Passive discipline is the foundation of every despotism.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 414–5]

Clearly Engels misunderstood the anarchist conception of liberty. Rather than seeing it as essentially negative, anarchists argue that liberty is expressed in two different, but integrated, ways. Firstly, there is rebellion, the expression of autonomy in the face of authority. This is the negative aspect of it. Secondly, there is association, the expression of autonomy by working with your equals. This is the positive aspect of it. As such, Engels concentrates on the negative aspect of anarchist ideas, ignoring the positive, and so paints a false picture of anarchism. Freedom, as Bakunin argued, is a product of connection, not of isolation. How a group organises itself determines whether it is authoritarian or libertarian. If the individuals who take part in a group manage the affairs of that group (including what kinds of decisions can be delegated) then that group is based on liberty. If that power is left to a few individuals (whether elected or not) then that group is structured in an authoritarian manner. This can be seen from Bakunin's argument that power must be *"diffused"* into the collective in an anarchist society. Clearly, anarchists do not reject the need for organisation nor the need to make and abide by collective decisions. Rather, the question is how these decisions are to be made — are they to be made from below, by those affected by them, or from above, imposed by a few people in authority.

Only a sophist would confuse hierarchical power with the power of people managing their own affairs. It is an improper use of words to denote equally as "authority" two such opposed concepts as individuals subjected to the autocratic power of a boss and the voluntary co-operation of conscious individuals working together as equals. The lifeless obedience of a governed mass cannot be compared to the organised co-operation



To equate the defence of freedom with "authority" is, in anarchist eyes, an expression of confused politics. Ultimately, Engels is like the liberal who equates the violence of the oppressed to end oppression with that the oppressors!

Needless to say, this applies to the class struggle as well. Is, for example, a picket line really authoritarian because it tries to impose its will on the boss, police or scabs? Rather, is it not defending the workers' freedom against the authoritarian power of the boss and their lackeys (the police and scabs)? Is it "authoritarian" to resist authority and create a structure — a strike assembly and picket line — which allows the formally subordinated workers to manage their own affairs directly and without bosses? Is it "authoritarian" to combat the authority of the boss, to proclaim your freedom and exercise it? Of course not.

Structurally, a strikers' assembly and picket line — which are forms of self-managed association — cannot be compared to an "authority" (such as a state). To try and do so fails to recognise the fundamental difference. In the strikers' assembly and picket line the strikers themselves decide policy and do not delegate power away into the hands of an authority (any strike committee executes the strikers decisions or is replaced). In a state, **power** is delegated into the hands of a few who then use that power as they see fit. This by necessity disempowers those at the base, who are turned into mere electors and order takers (i.e. an authoritarian relationship is created). Such a situation can only spell death of a social revolution, which requires the active participation of all if it is to succeed. It also, incidentally, exposes a central fallacy of Marxism, namely that it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — that excludes that participation.

Georges Fontenis summarises anarchist ideas on this subject when he wrote:

*the means of exercising our freedom, in effect, take it away from us.*

*"We want to overthrow the government, all governments — and overthrow them with violence since it is by the use of violence that they force us into obeying — and once again, not because we sneer at freedom when it does not serve our interests but because governments are the negation of freedom and it is not possible to be free without getting rid of them . ..*

*"The freedom to oppress, to exploit ... is the denial of freedom: and the fact that our enemies make irrelevant and hypocritical use of the word freedom is not enough to make us deny the principle of freedom which is the outstanding characteristic of our movement and a permanent, constant and necessary factor in the life and progress of humanity."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 51]

It seems strange that Engels, in effect, is arguing that the abolition of tyranny is tyranny against the tyrants! As Malatesta so clearly argued, anarchists *"recognise violence only as a means of legitimate self-defence; and if today they are in favour of violence it is because they maintain that slaves are always in a state of legitimate defence."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] As such, Engels fails to understand the revolution from a **working class** perspective (perhaps unsurprisingly, as he was a capitalist). The "authority" of the "armed workers" over the bourgeois is, simply, the defence of the workers' freedom against those who seek to end it by exercising/recreating the very authoritarian social relationships the revolution sought to end in the first place. This explains why, as we discussed in section H.2.1 anarchists have always argued that a revolution would need to defend itself against those seeking to return the masses to their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy.



of free individuals, yet this is what Engels did. The former is marked by hierarchical power and the turning of the subjected into automations performing mechanical movements without will and thought. The latter is marked by participation, discussion and agreement. Both are, of course, based on co-operation but to argue that latter restricts liberty as much as the former simply confuses co-operation with coercion. It also indicates a distinctly liberal conception of liberty, seeing it restricted by association with others rather than seeing association as an expression of liberty. As Malatesta argued:

*"The basic error ... is in believing that organisation is not possible without authority.*

*"Now, it seems to us that organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast ... Having therefore to join with other humans ... he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 84–5]

Therefore, organisation is *"only the practice of co-operation and solidarity"* and is a *"natural and necessary condition of social life."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83] Clearly, the question is not whether we organise, but how do we do so. This means that, for anarchists, Engels confused vastly different concepts: *"Co-ordination is dutifully confused with command, organisation with hierarchy, agreement with domination — indeed, 'imperious' domination."* [Murray Bookchin, **Towards an Ecological Society**, pp. 126–7]

Socialism will only exist when the discipline currently enforced by the stick in the hand of the boss is replaced by the conscious self-discipline of free individuals. It is not by changing who holds the stick (from a capitalist to a "socialist" boss) that socialism will be created. It is only by the breaking up and uprooting of this slavish spirit of discipline, and its replacement by self-management, that working people will create a new discipline what will be the basis of socialism (the voluntary self-discipline Bakunin talked about). As Kropotkin memorably put it:

> *"Having been brought up in a serf-owner's family, I entered active life, like all young men of my time, with a great deal of confidence in the necessity of commanding, ordering, scolding, punishing, and the like. But when, at an early stage, I had to manage serious enterprises and to deal with men, and when each mistake would lead at once to heavy consequences, I began to appreciate the difference between acting on the principle of command and discipline and acting on the principle of common understanding. The former works admirably in a military parade, but it is worth nothing where real life is concerned, and the aim can be achieved only through the severe effort of many converging wills."*
> [**Memoirs of a Revolutionist**, p. 202]

Clearly, then, Engels did not refute anarchism by his essay. Rather, he refuted a straw man of his own creation. The question was **never** one of whether certain tasks need co-operation, co-ordination, joint activity and agreement. It was, in fact, a question of **how** that is achieved. As such, Engels diatribe misses the point. Instead of addressing the actual politics of anarchism or their actual use of the word "authority," he rather addressed a series of logical deductions



that revolution is the imposition by *"one part of the population"* on another. Very true — but Engels fails to indicate the nature of class society and, therefore, of a social revolution. In a class society *"one part of the population"* constantly *"imposes its will upon the other part"* — those with power impose their decisions to those beneath them in the social hierarchy. In other words, the ruling class imposes its will on the working class everyday in work by the hierarchical structure of the workplace and in society by the state. Discussing the "population" as if it were not divided by classes and so subject to specific forms of authoritarian social relationships is liberal nonsense.

Once we recognise that the "population" in question is divided into classes we can easily see the fallacy of Engels argument. In a social revolution, the act of revolution is the overthrow of the power and authority of an oppressing and exploiting class by those subject to that oppression and exploitation. In other words, it is an act of **liberation** in which the hierarchical power of the few over the many is eliminated and replaced by the freedom of the many to control their own lives. It is hardly authoritarian to destroy authority! Thus a social revolution is, fundamentally, an act of liberation for the oppressed who act in their own interests to end the system in which *"one part of population imposes its will upon the other"* everyday.

Malatesta stated the obvious:

> *"To fight our enemies effectively, we do not need to deny the principle of freedom, not even for one moment: it is sufficient for us to want real freedom and to want it for all, for ourselves as well as for others.*
>
> *"We want to expropriate the property-owning class, and with violence, since it is with violence that they hold on to social wealth and use it to exploit the working class. Not because freedom is a good thing for the future, but because it is a good thing, today as well as tomorrow, and the property owners, be denying us*

*large the scope of this authority."* Given that this is *"a veritable despotism"* and Marxism aims at *"one single vast plan"* in modern industry, then the scope for autonomy, for freedom, is continually reduced during the working day. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 732, p. 731 and p. 723] If machinery and industry means despotism, as Engels claimed against Bakunin, then what does that mean for Lenin's aim to ensure *"the transformation of the whole state economic mechanism into a single huge machine ... as to enable hundreds of millions of people to be guided by a single plan?"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, pp. 90–1] Surely such an economy would be, to use Engels' words, a *"a veritable despotism"*?

The only possible solution is reducing the working day to a minimum and so the time spent as a slave to the machine (and plan) is reduced. The idea that work should be transformed into creative, empowering and liberating experience is automatically destroyed by Engels' argument. Like capitalism, Marxist-Socialism is based on "work is hell" and the domination of the producer. Hardly an inspiring vision of the future.

## H.4.7 Is revolution *"the most authoritarian thing there is"*?

As well as the argument that "authority" is essential for every collective activity, Engels raises another argument against anarchism. This second argument is that revolutions are by nature authoritarian. In his words, a *"revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror its arms inspire in the reactionaries."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 733]

Yet such an analysis is without class analysis and so will, by necessity, mislead the writer and the reader. Engels argues



he draws from a false assumption regarding those politics. Engels essay shows, to paraphrase Keynes cutting remarks against von Hayek, the bedlam that can be created when a remorseless logician deduces away from an incorrect starting assumption.

For collective activity anarchists recognise the need to make and stick by agreements. Collective activity of course needs collective decision making and organisation. In so far as Engels had a point to his diatribe (namely that group efforts meant co-operating with others), Bakunin (like any anarchist) would have agreed. The question was how are these decisions to be made, not whether they should be or not. Ultimately, Engels confused agreement with hierarchy. Anarchists do not.

## H.4.1 Does organisation imply the end of liberty?

Engels argument in *"On Authority"* can be summed up as any form of collective activity means co-operating with others and that this means the individual subordinates themselves to others, specifically the group. As such, authority cannot be abolished as organisation means that *"the will of a single individual will always have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 731]

Engels argument proves too much. As every form of joint activity involves agreement and *"subordination,"* then life itself becomes *"authoritarian."* The only free person, according to Engels' logic, would be the hermit. Anarchists reject such nonsense. As George Barrett argued:

> *"To get the full meaning out of life we must co-operate, and to co-operate we must make agreements with our fellow-men. But to suppose that such agreements mean a limitation of freedom is*

*surely an absurdity; on the contrary, they are the exercise of our freedom.*

*"If we are going to invent a dogma that to make agreements is to damage freedom, then at once freedom becomes tyrannical, for it forbids men [and women] to take the most ordinary everyday pleasures. For example, I cannot go for a walk with my friend because it is against the principle of Liberty that I should agree to be at a certain place at a certain time to meet him. I cannot in the least extend my own power beyond myself, because to do so I must co-operate with someone else, and co-operation implies an agreement, and that is against Liberty. It will be seen at once that this argument is absurd. I do not limit my liberty, but simply exercise it, when I agree with my friend to go for a walk.*

*"If, on the other hand, I decide from my superior knowledge that it is good for my friend to take exercise, and therefore I attempt to compel him to go for a walk, then I begin to limit freedom. This is the difference between free agreement and government."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, pp. 348–9]

If we took Engels' argument seriously then we would have to conclude that living makes freedom impossible! After all by doing any joint activity you "subordinate" yourself to others and so, ironically, exercising your liberty by making decisions and associating with others would become a denial of liberty. Clearly Engels argument is lacking something!

Perhaps this paradox can be explained once we recognise that Engels is using a distinctly liberal view of freedom — i.e. freedom from. Anarchists reject this. We see freedom as holistic — freedom from and freedom to. This means that freedom



*ery of a big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalists who employ workers ever have been"* and *"subdu[ing] the forces of nature ... avenge themselves"* upon *"man"* by *"subjecting him ... to a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 720, p. 721 and p. 731] Engels is clearly contradicting himself. When attacking the anarchists, he argues that the *"subjection"* of people to the means of production was inevitable and utterly *"independent of all social organisation."* Six years later he proclaims that socialism will abolish this inescapable subjection to the *"veritable despotism"* of modern industry!

As can be seen from both Engels and Lenin, we have a contradiction within Marxism. On the one hand, they argue that authority (*"subjection"*) will always be with us, no matter what, as *"subordination"* and *"authority"* is independent of the specific social society we live in. On the other, they argue that Marxist socialism will be without a state, *"without subordination"*, *"without force"* and will end the *"subjection of men to their own means of production."* The two positions cannot be reconciled.

Simply put, if **"On Authority"** is correct then, logically, it means that not only is anarchism impossible but also Marxist socialism. Lenin and Engels are trying to have it both ways. On the one hand, arguing that anarchism is impossible as any collective activity means subjection and subordination, on the other, that socialism will end that inevitable subjection. And, of course, arguing that democracy will be "overcome" while, at the same time, arguing that it can never be. Ultimately, it shows that Engels essay is little more than a cheap polemic without much merit.

Even worse for Marxism is Engels' comment that authority and autonomy *"are relative things whose spheres vary with the various phases of society"* and that *"the material conditions of production and circulation inevitably develop with large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture, and increasingly tend to en-*

*the subordination of the minority to the majority will not be respected."* That was not the case, however. He simply rejected the idea that democracy was *"the recognition of this principle"* arguing that *"democracy is a **state** which recognises the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e. an organisation for the systematic use of **violence** by one class against the other, by one section of the population against another."* He argued that *"the need for violence against people in general, the need for the **subjection** of one man to another, will vanish, since people will **become accustomed** to observing the elementary conditions of social life **without force** and **without subordination.**"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 332–3]

Talk about playing with words! Earlier in his work Lenin summarised Engels **"On Authority"** by stating that *"is it not clear that ... complex technical units, based on the employment of machinery and the ordered co-operation of many people, could function without a certain amount of subordination, without some authority or power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 316] Now, however, he argued that communism would involve no *"subordination"* while, at the same time, be based on the *"the principle of the subordination of the minority to the majority"*! A contradiction? Perhaps no, as he argued that the minority would *"become accustomed"* to the conditions of *"social life"* — in other words the recognition that sticking to your agreements you make with others does not involve "subordination." This, ironically, would confirm anarchist ideas as we argue that making agreements with others, as equals, does not involve domination or subordination but rather is an expression of autonomy, of liberty.

Similarly, we find Engels arguing in **Anti-Duhring** that socialism *"puts an end to the former subjection of men to their own means of production"* and that *"productive labour, instead of being a means of subjugating men, will become a means of their emancipation."* This work was written in 1878, six years after *"On Authority"* where he stressed that *"the automatic machin-*



is maintained by the kind of relationships we form with others, **not** by isolation. As Bakunin argued, *"man in isolation can have no awareness of his liberty. Being free for man means being acknowledged, considered and treated as such by another man. Liberty is therefore a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection"*. [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 147] Liberty is denied when we form hierarchical relationships with others not necessarily when we associate with others. To combine with other individuals is an expression of individual liberty, **not** its denial! We are aware that freedom is impossible outside of association. Within an association absolute "autonomy" cannot exist, but such a concept of "autonomy" would restrict freedom to such a degree that it would be so self-defeating as to make a mockery of the concept of autonomy and no sane person would seek it. To requote Malatesta, freedom we want *"is not an absolute metaphysical, abstract freedom"* but *"a real freedom, possible freedom, which is the conscious community of interests, voluntary solidarity."* [**Anarchy**, p. 43]

To state the obvious, anarchists are well aware that *"anyone who associates and co-operates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to co-ordinate his [or her] actions with those of his [or her] fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made — except when wishing sincerely to leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make co-operation impossible or inappropriate."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 107–8] For anarchists, collective organisation and co-operation does not mean the end of individuality. Bakunin expressed it well:

> *"You will think, you will exist, you will act collectively, which nevertheless will not prevent in the least the full development of the intellectual and*

*moral faculties of each individual. Each of you will bring to you his own talents, and in all joining together you will multiply your value a hundred fold. Such is the law of collective action ... in giving your hands to each other for this action in common, you will promise to each other a mutual fraternity which will be ... a sort of free contract ... Then proceed collectively to action you will necessarily commence by practising this fraternity between yourselves . .. by means of regional and local organisations ... you will find in yourselves strength that you had never imagined, if each of you acted individually, according to his own inclination and not as a consequence of a unanimous resolution, discussed and accepted beforehand."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 244–5]

So, unlike the essentially (classical) liberal position of Engels, anarchists recognise that freedom is a product of how we associate. This need not imply continual agreement nor an unrealistic assumption that conflict and uncooperative behaviour will disappear. For those within an organisation who refuse to co-operate, anarchists argue that this problem is easily solved. Freedom of association implies the freedom **not** to associate and so those who ignore the decisions reached collectively and disrupt the organisation's workings would simply be *"compelled to leave"* the association. In this way, a free association *"could protect itself without the authoritarian organisation we have nowadays."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 152]

Clearly, Engels "critique" hides more than it explains. Yes, co-operation and coercion both involve people working jointly together, but they are **not** to be equated. While Bakunin recognised this fundamental difference and tried, perhaps incom-



for the Bolsheviks disregard for workers' self-management of production.

Simply put, Engels was wrong. The need to co-operate and co-ordinate activity may be independent of social development, but the nature of a society does impact on how this co-operation is achieved. If it is achieved by hierarchical means, then it is a class society. If it is achieved by agreements between equals, then it is a socialist one. As such, how industry operates **is** dependent on the society it is part of. An anarchist society would run industry based on the free agreement of workers united in free associations. This would necessitate making and sticking to joint decisions but this co-ordination would be between equals, not master and servant. By not recognising this fact, Engels fatally undermined the cause of socialism.

## H.4.6 Why does Engels' "On Authority" harm Marxism?

Ironically, Engels' essay *"On Authority"* also strikes at the heart of Marxism and its critique of anarchism. Forgetting what he had written in 1873, Engels argued in 1894 that for him and Marx the *"ultimate political aim is to overcome the whole state and therefore democracy as well."* [quoted by Lenin, *"State and Revolution"*, **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 331] Lenin argued that *"the abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 332]

The problems arise from the awkward fact that Engels' *"On Authority"* had stated that any form of collective activity meant "authority" and so the subjection of the minority to the majority (*"if possible"*) and *"the imposition of the will of another upon ours."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 731 and p. 730] Aware of the contradiction, Lenin stresses that *"someone may even begin to fear we are expecting the advent of an order of society in which*

> *the present moment, it must be said that large-scale machine industry — which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism — calls for absolute and strict unity of will, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people ... But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one ...* ***unquestioning subordination*** *to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry. On the railways it is twice and three times as necessary ... Today ... revolution demands — precisely in the interests of its development and consolidation, precisely in the interests of socialism — that the people* ***unquestioningly obey the single will*** *of the leaders of labour."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, pp. 267–9]

Hence the Bolsheviks need not have to consider whether replacing factory committees with appointed managers armed with *"dictatorial powers"* would have any effect on the position of workers in socialism (after all, the were subject to subordination either way). Nor did they have to worry about putting economic power into the hands of a state-appointed bureaucracy as "authority" and subordination were required to run industry no matter what. Engels had used the modern factory system of mass production as a direct analogy to argue against the anarchist call for workers' councils, for autonomy, for participation, for self-management. Authority, hierarchy, and the need for submission and domination is inevitable given the current mode of production, both Engels and Lenin argued. Little wonder, then, the worker become the serf of the state under the Bolsheviks. In his own way, Engels contributed to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution by providing the rationale



pletely, to differentiate them (by arguing against *"the principle of authority"*) and to base his politics on the difference, Engels obscures the differences and muddies the water by confusing the two radically different concepts within the word "authority." Any organisation or group is based on co-operation and co-ordination (Engels' "principle of authority"). How that co-operation is achieved is dependent on the **type** of organisation in question and that, in turn, specifies the **social** relationships within it. It is these social relationships which determine whether an organisation is authoritarian or libertarian, not the universal need to make and stick by agreements.

Ultimately, Engels is simply confusing obedience with agreement, coercion with co-operation, organisation with authority, objective reality with despotism.

Rather than seeing organisation as restricting freedom, anarchists argue that the **kind** of organisation we create is what matters. We can form relationships with others which are based on equality, not subordination. As an example, we point to the differences between marriage and free love (see next section). Once it is recognised that decisions can be made on the basis of co-operation between equals, Engels essay can be seen for what it is — a deeply flawed piece of cheap and inaccurate diatribe.

## H.4.2 Does free love show the weakness of Engels' argument?

Yes! Engels, let us not forget, argued, in effect, that any activities which *"replace isolated action by combined action of individuals"* meant *"the imposition of the will of another upon ours"* and so *"the will of the single individual will have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian manner."* This, for Engels, means that *"authority"* has not *"dis-*

*appeared"* under anarchism but rather it has only *"changed its form."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 730–1]

However, to say that authority just changes its form misses the qualitative differences between authoritarian and libertarian organisation. Precisely the differences which Bakunin and other anarchists tried to stress by calling themselves anti-authoritarians and being against the *"principle of authority."* By arguing that all forms of association are necessarily "authoritarian," Engels is impoverishing the liberatory potential of socialism. He ensures that the key question of liberty within our associations is hidden behind a mass of sophistry.

As an example, look at the difference between marriage and free love. Both forms necessitate two individuals living together, sharing the same home, organising their lives together. The same situation and the same commitments. But do both imply the same social relationships? Are they both *"authoritarian"*?

Traditionally, the marriage vow is based on the wife promising to obey the husband. Her role is simply that of obedience (in theory, at least). As Carole Pateman argues, *"[u]ntil late into the nineteenth century the legal and civil position of a wife resembled that of a slave"* and, in theory, she *"became the property of her husband and stood to him as a slave/servant to a master."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 119 and pp. 130–1] As such, an obvious social relationship exists — an authoritarian one in which the man has power over the woman. We have a relationship based on domination and subordination.

In free love, the couple are equals. They decide their own affairs, together. The decisions they reach are agreed between them and no domination takes place (unless you think making an agreement equals domination or subordination). They both agree to the decisions they reach, based on mutual respect and give and take. Subordination to individuals does not meaningfully exist (at best, it could be argued that both parties are



> *mand and obedience, of ruler and ruled. In a fashion totally congruent with all class ideologists from the inception of class society, Engels weds Socialism to command and rule as a natural fact. Domination is reworked from a social attribute into a precondition for self-preservation in a technically advanced society."* [**Towards an Ecological Society**, p. 206]

Given this, it can be argued that Engels' *"On Authority"* had a significant impact in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into state capitalism. By deliberately obscuring the differences between self-managed and authoritarian organisation, he helped provide Bolshevism with ideological justification for eliminating workers self-management in production. After all, if self-management and hierarchical management both involve the same *"principle of authority,"* then it does not really matter how production is organised and whether industry is managed by the workers or by appointed managers (as Engels stressed, authority in industry was independent of the social system and all forms of organisation meant subordination). Murray Bookchin draws the obvious conclusion from Engels' (and Marx's) position: *"Obviously, the factory conceived of as a 'realm of necessity' [as opposed to a 'realm of freedom'] requires no need for self-management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 126] Thus it is no great leap from the arguments of Engels in *"On Authority"* to Lenin's arguments justifying the imposition of capitalist organisational forms during the Russian Revolution:

> *"Firstly, the question of principle, namely, is the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers, in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government? … concerning the significance of individual dictatorial powers from the point of view of the specific tasks of*

*despotic than the small capitalist who employ workers ever have been."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 731] Authority and liberty become detached from human beings, as if authoritarian social relationships can exist independently of individuals! It is a **social** relationship anarchists oppose, not an abstraction.

Engels' argument is applicable to **any** society and to **any** task which requires joint effort. If, for example, a table needs four people to move it then those four people are subject to the "despotism" of gravity! Under such "despotism" can we say its irrelevant whether these four people are slaves to a master who wants the table moved or whether they agree between themselves to move the table and on the best way to do it? In both cases the table movers are subject to the same "despotism" of gravity, yet in the latter example they are **not** subject to the despotism of other human beings as they clearly are in the former. Engels is simply playing with words!

The fallacy of Engels' basic argument can be seen from this simple example. He essentially uses a **liberal** concept of freedom (i.e. freedom exists prior to society and is reduced within it) when attacking anarchism. Rather than see freedom as a product of interaction, as Bakunin did, Engels sees it as a product of isolation. Collective activity is seen as a realm of necessity (to use Marx's phrase) and not one of freedom. Indeed, machines and the forces of nature are considered by Engels' as "despots"! As if despotism were not a specific set of relationships between **humans.** As Bookchin argued:

> *"To Engels, the factory is a natural fact of technics, not a specifically bourgeois mode of rationalising labour; hence it will exist under communism as well as capitalism. It will persist 'independently of all social organisation.' To co-ordinate a factory's operations requires 'imperious obedience,' in which factory hands lack all 'autonomy.' Class society or classless, the realm of necessity is also a realm of com-*



"dominated" by their decisions, hardly a meaningful use of the word). Instead of subordination, there is free agreement.

Both types of organisation apply to the same activities — a couple living together. Has "authority" just changed its form as Engels argued? Of course not. There is a substantial difference between the two. The former is authoritarian. One part of the organisation dictates to the other. The latter is libertarian as neither dominates (or they, as a couple, "dominate" each other as individuals — surely an abuse of the language, we hope you agree!). Each part of the organisation agrees to the decision. Do all these differences just mean that we have changed name of "authority" or has authority been abolished and liberty created? This was the aim of Bakunin's terminology, namely to draw attention to the qualitative change that has occurred in the social relationships generated by the association of individuals when organised in an anarchist way. A few Marxists have also seen this difference. For example, Rosa Luxemburg repeated (probably unknowingly) Bakunin's distinction between forms of discipline and organisation when she argued that:

> *"We misuse words and we practice self-deception when we apply the same term — discipline — to such dissimilar notions as: (1) the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs, and (2) the spontaneous co-ordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men. What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class and the self-discipline and organisation of a class struggling for its emancipation? ... The working class will acquire the sense of the new discipline, the freely assumed self-discipline of the social democracy, not as a result of the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by extirpating, to the last root,*

*its old habits of obedience and servility.*" [**Rosa Luxemburg Speaks**, pp. 119–20]

Engels is confusing two radically different means of decision making by arguing both involve subordination and authority. The difference is clear: the first involves the domination of an individual over another while the second involves the "subordination" of individuals to the decisions and agreements they make. The first is authority, the second is liberty. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"This applies to all forms of association. Cohabitation of two individuals under the same roof may lead to the enslavement of one by the will of the other, as it may also lead to liberty for both. The same applies to the family or ... to large or small associations, to each social institution ...*
>
> *"Communism is capable of assuming all forms of freedom or of oppression — which other institutions are unable to do. It may produce a monastery where all implicitly obey the orders of their superior, and it may produce an absolutely free organisation, leaving his full freedom to the individual, existing only as long as the associates wish to remain together, imposing nothing on anybody, being anxious rather to defend, enlarge, extend in all directions the liberty of the individual. Communism may be authoritarian (in which case the community will soon decay) or it may be Anarchist. The State, on the contrary, cannot be this. It is authoritarian or it ceases to be the State."* [**Small Communal Experiments and Why They Fail**, pp. 12–3]

Therefore, the example of free love indicates that, for anarchists, Engels arguments are simply pedantic sophistry. It goes



> *taken from the world that we're destroying. We have to build on new foundations. My comrades and I are convinced that solidarity is the best incentive for arousing an individual's sense of responsibility and a willingness to accept discipline as an act of self-discipline.*
>
> *"War has been imposed upon us ... but our goal is revolutionary victory. This means defeating the enemy, but also a radical change in men. For that change to occur, man must learn to live and conduct himself as a free man, an apprenticeship that develops his personality and sense of responsibility, his capacity to be master of his own acts. The workers on the job not only transforms the material on which he works, but also transforms himself through that work. The combatant is nothing more than a worker whose tool is a rifle — and he should strive toward the same objective as a worker. One can't behave like an obedient soldier but rather as a conscious man who understands the importance of what he's doing. I know that it's not easy to achieve this, but I also know that what can't be accomplished with reason will not be obtained by force. If we have to sustain our military apparatus by fear, then we won't have changed anything except the colour of the fear. It's only by freeing itself from free that society can build itself in freedom."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: In The Spanish Revolution**, p. 474]

Is it really convincing to argue that the individuals who made up the militia are subject to the same social relationships as those in a capitalist or Leninist army? The same, surely, goes for workers associations and wage labour. Ultimately, the flaw in Engels' argument can be best seen simply because he thinks that the *"automatic machinery of a big factory is much more*

Needless to say, like Engels, von Mises is fundamentally flawed simply because the boss is not just repeating the instructions of the market (assuming that it is a "consumers' democracy," which it is not). Rather, they give their own instructions based on their own sovereignty over the workers. The workers could, of course, manage their own affairs and meet the demands of consumers directly. The "sovereignty" of the market (just like the "despotism" of machines and joint action) is independent of the social relationships which exist within the workplace, but the social relationships themselves are not predetermined by it. Thus the same workshop can be organised in different ways and so the way industry operates **is** dependent on social organisation. The workers can manage their own affairs or be subjected to the rule of a boss. To say that "authority" still exists simply means to confuse agreement with obedience.

The importance of differentiating between types of organisation and ways of making decisions can be seen from the experience of the class struggle. During the Spanish Revolution anarchists organised militias to fight the fascists. One was lead by anarchist militant Durruti. His military adviser, Pérez Farras, a professional soldier, was concerned about the application of libertarian principles to military organisation. Durruti replied:

> *"I've said it once and I'll say it again: I've been an anarchist my entire life and the fact that I'm responsible for this human collectivity won't change my convictions. It was as an anarchist that I agreed to carry out the task that the Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Militias entrusted me.*
>
> *"I don't believe — and everything happening around us confirms this — that you can run a workers' militia according to classic military rules. I believe that discipline, co-ordination, and planning are indispensable, but we shouldn't define them in terms*



without saying that organisation involves co-operation and that, by necessity, means that individuals come to agreements between themselves to work together. The question is **how** do they do that, not whether they do so or not. As such, Engels' arguments confuse agreement with hierarchy, co-operation with coercion. Simply put, the **way** people conduct joint activity determines whether an organisation is libertarian or authoritarian. That was why anarchists called themselves anti-authoritarians, to draw attention to the different ways of organising collective life.

## H.4.3 How do anarchists propose to run a factory?

In his campaign against anti-authoritarian ideas within the First International, Engels asks in a letter written in January 1872 *"how do these people [the anarchists] propose to run a factory, operate a railway or steer a ship without having in the last resort one deciding will, without a single management"*? [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 729]

This could only be asked if Engels was totally ignorant of Bakunin's ideas and his many comments supporting co-operatives as the means by which workers would *"organise and themselves conduct the economy without guardian angels, the state or their former employers."* Bakunin was *"convinced that the co-operative movement will flourish and reach its full potential only in a society where the land, the instruments of production, and hereditary property will be owned and operated by the workers themselves: by their freely organised federations of industrial and agricultural workers."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 399 and p. 400] Which meant that Bakunin, like all anarchists, was well aware of how a factory or other workplace would be organised:

> *"Only associated labour, that is, labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining ... civilised society."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 341]

By October of that year, Engels had finally *"submitted arguments like these to the most rabid anti-authoritarians"* who replied to run a factory, railway or ship did require organisation *"but here it was not a case of authority which we confer on our delegates, **but of a commission entrusted!**"* Engels commented that the anarchists *"think that when they have changed the names of things they have changed the things themselves."* He, therefore, thought that authority will *"only have changed its form"* rather than being abolished under anarchism as *"whoever mentions combined action speaks of organisation"* and it is not possible *"to have organisation without authority."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 732 and p. 731]

However, Engels is simply confusing two different things, authority and agreement. To make an agreement with another person is an exercise of your freedom, not its restriction. As Malatesta argued, *"the advantages which association and the consequent division of labour offer"* meant that humanity *"developed towards solidarity."* However, under class society *"the advantages of association, the good that Man could drive from the support of his fellows"* was distorted and a few gained *"the advantages of co-operation by subjecting other men to [their] will instead of joining with them."* This oppression *"was still association and co-operation, outside of which there is no possible human life; but it was a way of co-operation, imposed and controlled by a few for their personal interest."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 30–1] Anarchists seek to organise association to eliminate domination. This would be done by workers organising themselves collectively to make their own decisions about their work (workers' self-management, to use modern terminology). This did not ne-



to do — rather it could be organised by the workers themselves, using collective self-discipline to co-ordinate their joint effort.

David Noble quotes one shop steward who stated the obvious, namely that workers are *"not automatons. We have eyes to see with, ears to hear with, and mouths to talk."* As Noble comments, *"[f]or management ... that was precisely the problem. Workers controlled the machines, and through their unions had real authority over the division of labour and job content."* [**Forces of Production**, p. 37] This autonomy was what managers constantly struggled against and introduced technology to combat. So Engels' notion that machinery was "despotic" hides the nature of class society and the fact that authority is a social relationship, a relationship between people and not people and things. And, equally, that different kinds of organisation meant different social relationships to do collective tasks. It was precisely to draw attention to this that anarchists called themselves anti-authoritarians.

Clearly, Engels is simply ignoring the actual relations of authority within capitalist industry and, like the capitalism he claims to oppose, is raising the needs of the bosses to the plane of "natural fact." Indeed, is this not the refrain of every boss or supporter of capitalism? Right-wing "libertarian" guru Ludwig von Mises spouted this kind of nonsense when he argued that *"[t]he root of the syndicalist idea is to be seen in the belief that entrepreneurs and capitalists are irresponsible autocrats who are free to conduct their affairs arbitrarily... . The fundamental error of this argument is obvious [sic!]. The entrepreneurs and capitalists are not irresponsible autocrats. They are unconditionally subject to the sovereignty of the consumers. The market is a consumers' democracy."* [**Human Action**, p. 814] In other words, it is not the bosses fault that they dictate to the worker. No, of course not, it is the despotism of the machine, of nature, of the market, of the customer, anyone and anything **but** the person **with** authority who is actually giving the orders and punishing those who do not obey!

> *revolt against production itself … To combat the resistance of the workers, the management institutes an ever more minute division of labour and tasks … Machines are invented, or selected, according to one fundamental criterion: Do they assist in the struggle of management against workers, do they reduce yet further the worker's margin of autonomy, do they assist in eventually replacing him [or her] altogether? In this sense, the organisation of production today … is* ***class organisation.*** *Technology is predominantly* ***class technology.*** *No … manager would ever introduce into his plant a machine which would increase the freedom of a particular worker or of a group of workers to run the job themselves, even if such a machine increased production.*
>
> *"The workers are by no means helpless in this struggle. They constantly invent methods of self-defence. They break the rules, while 'officially' keeping them. They organise informally, maintain a collective solidarity and discipline."* [**The Meaning of Socialism**, pp. 9–10]

So one of the key aspects of the class struggle is the conflict of workers against attempts by management to eliminate their autonomy within the production process. This struggle generates the machines which Engels claims produce a *"veritable despotism independent of all social organisation."* Regardless of what Engels implies, the way industry has developed is not independent of class society and its "despotism" has been engineered that way. For example, it may be a fact of nature that ten people may be required to operate a machine, but that machine is not such a fact, it is a human invention and so can be changed. Nor is it a fact of nature that work organisation should be based on a manager dictating to the workers what



necessitate the same authoritarian social relationships as exist under capitalism:

> *"Of course in every large collective undertaking, a division of labour, technical management, administration, etc., is necessary. But authoritarians clumsily play on words to produce a* ***raison d'être*** *for government out of the very real need for the organisation of work. Government … is the concourse of individuals who have had, or have seized, the right and the means to make laws and to oblige people to obey; the administrator, the engineer, etc., instead are people who are appointed or assume the responsibility to carry out a particular job and do so. Government means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few; administration means the delegation of work, that is tasks given and received, free exchange of services based on free agreement… Let one not confuse the function of government with that of administration, for they are essentially different, and if today the two are often confused, it is only because of economic and political privilege."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 41–2]

For a given task, co-operation and joint activity may be required by its very nature. Take, for example, a train network. The joint activity of numerous workers are required to ensure that it operates successfully. The driver depends on the work of signal operators, for example, and guards to inform them of necessary information essential for the smooth running of the network. The passengers are dependent on the driver and the other workers to ensure their journey is safe and quick. As such, there is an objective need to co-operate but this need is understood and agreed to by the people involved.

If a specific activity needs the co-operation of a number of people and can only be achieved if these people work together as a team and, therefore, need to make and stick by agreements, then this is undoubtedly a natural fact which the individual can only rebel against by leaving the association. Similarly, if an association considers it wise to elect a delegate whose tasks have been allocated by that group then, again, this is a natural fact which the individuals in question have agreed to and so has not been imposed upon them by any external will — the individual has been convinced of the need to co-operate and does so.

If an activity requires the co-operation of numerous individuals then, clearly, that is a natural fact and there is not much the individuals involved can do about it. Anarchists are not in the habit of denying common sense. The question is simply **how** do these individuals co-ordinate their activities. Is it by means of self-management or by hierarchy (authority)? So anarchists have always been clear on how industry would be run — by the workers' themselves in their own free associations. In this way the domination of the boss would be replaced by agreements between equals.

## H.4.4 How does the class struggle refute Engels' arguments?

Engels argued that large-scale industry (or, indeed, any form of organisation) meant that "authority" was required. He stated that factories should have *"Lasciate ogni autonomia, voi che entrate"* (*"Leave, ye that enter in, all autonomy behind"*) written above their doors. That is the basis of capitalism, with the wage worker being paid to obey. This obedience, Engels argued, was necessary even under socialism, as applying the *"forces of nature"* meant *"a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation."* This meant that *"[w]anting to abolish*



As the experience of workers' in struggle shows, it is the **abolition** of autonomy which ensures the abolition of large-scale industry, not its exercise. The conscious decision by workers to **not** exercise their autonomy brings industry grinding to a halt and are effective tools in the class struggle. As any worker know, it is only our ability to make decisions autonomously that keeps industry going.

Rather than abolishing authority making large-scale industry impossible, it is the abolishing of autonomy which quickly achieves this. The issue is how do we organise industry so that this essential autonomy is respected and co-operation between workers achieved based on it. For anarchists, this is done by self-managed workers associations in which hierarchical authority is replaced by collective self-discipline.

## H.4.5 Is the way industry operates *"independent of all social organisation"*?

As noted in the last section, Engels argued that applying the *"forces of nature"* meant *"a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation."* This meant that *"[w]anting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 731]

For anarchists, Engels' comments ignore the reality of class society in an important way. Modern (*"large-scale"*) industry has not developed neutrally or naturally, independently of all social organisation as Engels claimed. Rather it has been shaped by the class struggle along with technology (which is often a weapon in that conflict — see section D.10). As Castoriadis argued:

> *"Management organises production with a view of achieving 'maximum efficiency.' But the first result of this sort of organisation is to stir up the workers'*

Needless to say, co-operation and co-ordination are required in any collective activity. Anarchists do not deny this fact of nature, but the example Engels considered as irrefutable simply shows the fallacy of his argument. If large-scale industry were run along the lines argued by Engels, it would quickly grind to halt. So trying to eliminate workers' autonomy is difficult as *"[i]ndustrial history shows"* that *"such management attempts to control the freedom of the work force invariably run up against the contradiction that the freedom is necessary for quality production."* [David Noble, **Forces of Production**, p. 277]

Ironically, the example of Russia under Lenin and Trotsky reinforces this fact. *"Administrative centralisation"* was enforced on the railway workers which, in turn, *"led more to ignorance of distance and the inability to respond properly to local circumstances ... 'I have no instructions' became all the more effective as a defensive and self-protective rationalisation as party officials vested with unilateral power insisted all their orders be strictly obeyed. Cheka ruthlessness instilled fear, but repression ... only impaired the exercise of initiative that daily operations required."* [William G. Rosenberg, *"The Social Background to Tsektran"*, pp. 349–373, **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 369] Without the autonomy required to manage local problems, the operation of the railways was seriously harmed and, unsurprisingly, a few months after Trotsky subjected to railway workers to the *"militarisation of labour"* in September 1920, there was a *"disastrous collapse of the railway network in the winter of 1920–1."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers against Lenin**, p. 102] There can be no better way to cripple an economy than to impose Lenin's demand that the task of workers was that of *"unquestioningly obeying the will of the Soviet leader, of the dictator, **during** the work."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 270]



*authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 731]

The best answer to Engels claims can be found in the class struggle. Given that Engels was a capitalist (an actual owner of a factory), he may have not been aware of the effectiveness of *"working to rule"* when practised by workers. This basically involves doing **exactly** what the boss tells you to do, regardless of the consequences as regards efficiency, production and so on. Quite simply, workers refusing to practice autonomy can be an extremely effective and powerful weapon in the class struggle.

This weapon has long been used by workers and advocated by anarchists, syndicalists and wobblies. For example, the IWW booklet **How to fire your boss** argues that *"[w]orkers often violate orders, resort to their own techniques of doing things, and disregard lines of authority simply to meet the goals of the company. There is often a tacit understanding, even by the managers whose job it is to enforce the rules, that these shortcuts must be taken in order to meet production quotas on time."* It argues, correctly, that *"if each of these rules and regulations were followed to the letter"* then *"[c]onfusion would result — production and morale would plummet. And best of all, the workers can't get in trouble with the tactic because they are, after all, 'just following the rules.'"* The British anarcho-syndicalists of the **Direct Action Movement** agreed and even quoted an industrial expert on the situation:

> *"If managers' orders were completely obeyed, confusion would result and production and morale would be lowered. In order to achieve the goals of the organisation workers must often violate orders, resort to their own techniques of doing things, and disregard lines of authority. Without this kind of systematic sabotage much work could not be done. This unsolicited sabotage in the form of disobedience and subterfuge is especially necessary to enable large bu-*

*reaucracies to function effectively."* [J.A.C. Brown, quoted in **Direct Action in Industry**]

Another weapon of workers' resistance is what has been called *"Working without enthusiasm"* and is related to the "work to rule." This tactic aims at *"slowing production"* in order to win gains from management:

> *"Even the simplest repetitive job demands a certain minimum of initiative and in this case it is failing to show any non-obligatory initiative ... [This] leads to a fall in production — above all in quality. The worker carries out every operation minimally; the moment there is a hitch of any kind he abandons all responsibility and hands over to the next man above him in the hierarchy; he works mechanically, not checking the finished object, not troubling to regulate his machine. In short he gets away with as much as he can, but never actually does anything positively illegal."* [Pierre Dubois, **Sabotage in Industry**, p. 51]

The practice of *"working to rule"* and *"working without enthusiasm"* shows how out of touch Engels (like any capitalist) was with the realities of shop floor life. These forms of direct action are extremely effective **because** the workers refuse to act autonomously in industry, to work out the problems they face during the working day themselves, and instead place all the decisions on the authority required, according to Engels, to run the factory. The factory itself quickly grinds to a halt. What keeps it going is not the *"imperious"* will of authority, but rather the autonomous activity of workers thinking and acting for themselves to solve the numerous problems they face during the working day. In contrast, the hierarchical perspective *"ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order.*



*This truth is best illustrated in a work-to-rule strike, which turns on the fact that any production process depends on a host of informal practices and improvisations that could never be codified. By merely following the rules meticulously, the workforce can virtually halt production."* [James C. Scott, **Seeing like a State**, p. 6] As Cornelius Castoriadis argued:

> *"Resistance to exploitation expresses itself in a drop in **productivity as well as exertion on the workers' part** ... At the same time it is expressed in the disappearance of the **minimum** collective and spontaneous **management and organisation** of work that the workers normally and of necessity puts out. No modern factory could function for twenty-four hours without this spontaneous organisation of work that groups of workers, independent of the official business management, carry out by filling in the gaps of official production directives, by preparing for the unforeseen and for regular breakdowns of equipment, by compensating for management's mistakes, etc.*
>
> *"Under 'normal' conditions of exploitation, workers are torn between the need to organise themselves in this way in order to carry out their work — otherwise there are repercussions for them — and their natural desire to do their work, on the one hand, and, on the other, the awareness that by doing so they only are serving the boss's interests. Added to those conflicting concerns are the continual efforts of factory's management apparatus to 'direct' all aspects of the workers' activity, which often results only in preventing them from organising themselves."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 68]

even Leninist commentators argue, it was this influx of members who allowed Lenin to gain support for his radical revision of party aims in April. However, in spite of this radicalisation of the party base, the party machine still was at odds with the desires of the party. As Trotsky acknowledged, the situation *"called for resolute confrontation of the sluggish Party machine with masses and ideas in motion."* He stressed that *"the masses were incomparably more revolutionary than the Party, which in turn was more revolutionary than its committeemen."* Ironically, given the role Trotsky usually gave the party, he admits that *"[w]ithout Lenin, no one had known what to make of the unprecedented situation."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 301, p. 305 and p. 297]

Which is significant in itself. The Bolshevik party is usually claimed as being the most "revolutionary" that ever existed, yet here is Trotsky admitting that its leading members did not have a clue what to do. He even argued that *"[e]very time the Bolshevik leaders had to act without Lenin they fell into error, usually inclining to the Right."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 299] This negative opinion of the Bolsheviks applied even to the *"left Bolsheviks, especially the workers"* whom we are informed *"tried with all their force to break through this quarantine"* created by the Bolshevik leaders policy *"of waiting, of accommodation, and of actual retreat before the Compromisers"* after the February revolution and before the arrival of Lenin. Trotsky argued that *"they did not know how to refute the premise about the bourgeois character of the revolution and the danger of an isolation of the proletariat. They submitted, gritting their teeth, to the directions of their leaders."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 273] It seems strange, to say the least, that without one person the whole of the party was reduced to such a level given that the aim of the "revolutionary" party was to develop the political awareness of its members.

Lenin's arrival, according to Trotsky, allowed the influence of the more radical rank and file to defeat the conservatism of the party machine. By the end of April, Lenin had managed



*the rank and file Bolshevik workingmen displayed far greater stability resisting the patriotic hysteria that had swept the country."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248 and p. 298] It should be noted that he was repeating earlier comments on the *"immense intellectual backsliding of the upper stratum of the Bolsheviks during the war"* was caused by *"isolation from the masses and isolation from those abroad — that is primarily from Lenin."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 134] As we discuss in section H.5.12, even Trotsky had to admit that during 1917 the working class was far more revolutionary than the party and the party more revolutionary than the *"party machine"* of *"professional revolutionaries."*

Ironically enough, Lenin himself recognised this aspect of intellectuals after he had praised their role in bringing "revolutionary" consciousness to the working class. In his 1904 work **One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**, he argued that it was now the presence of *"large numbers of radical intellectuals in the ranks"* which has ensured that *"the opportunism which their mentality produces had been, and is, bound to exist."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 403–4] According to Lenin's new philosophy, the working class simply needs to have been through the *"schooling of the factory"* in order to give the intelligentsia lessons in political discipline, the very same intelligentsia which up until then had played the leading role in the Party and had given political consciousness to the working class. In his words:

> *"For the factory, which seems only a bogey to some, represents that highest form of capitalist co-operation which has united and disciplined the proletariat, taught it to organise ... And it is Marxism, the ideology of the proletariat trained by capitalism, has been and is teaching ... unstable intellectuals to distinguish between the factory as a means of exploitation (discipline based on*

> *fear of starvation) and the factory as a means of organisation (discipline based on collective work …). The discipline and organisation which come so hard to the bourgeois intellectual are very easily acquired by the proletariat just because of this factory 'schooling.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 392–3]

Lenin's analogy is, of course, flawed. The factory is a *"means of exploitation"* because its *"means of organisation"* is top-down and hierarchical. The *"collective work"* which the workers are subjected to is organised by the boss and the *"discipline"* is that of the barracks, not that of free individuals. In fact, the *"schooling"* for revolutionaries is **not** the factory, but the class struggle — healthy and positive self-discipline is generated by the struggle against the way the workplace is organised under capitalism. Factory discipline, in other words, is completely different from the discipline required for social struggle or revolution. Workers become revolutionary in so far as they reject the hierarchical discipline of the workplace and develop the self-discipline required to fight it.

A key task of anarchism is to encourage working class revolt against this type of discipline, particularly in the capitalist workplace. The *"discipline"* Lenin praises simply replaces human thought and association with the following of orders and hierarchy. Thus anarchism aims to undermine capitalist (imposed and brutalising) discipline in favour of solidarity, the *"discipline"* of free association and agreement based on the community of struggle and the political consciousness and revolutionary enthusiasm that struggle creates. Thus, for anarchists, the model of the factory can never be the model for a revolutionary organisation any more than Lenin's vision of society as *"one big workplace"* could be our vision of socialism (see section H.3.1). Ultimately, the factory exists to reproduce hierarchical social relationships and class society just as much as it exists to produce goods.



This worked both ways, of course. Town committees did *"snub their nose at lower-echelon viewpoints in the time before the next election. Try as hard as they might, suburb committees and ordinary cells could meanwhile do little to rectify matters beyond telling their own representative on their town committee to speak on their behalf. Or, if this too failed, they could resort to disruptive tactics by criticising it in public and refusing it all collaboration."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 52–3] Even by early 1918, the Bolshevik party bore little resemblance to the "democratic centralist" model desires by Lenin:

> *"The image of a disciplined hierarchy of party committees was therefore but a thin, artificial veneer which was used by Bolshevik leaders to cover up the cracked surface of the real picture underneath. Cells and suburb committees saw no reason to kow-tow to town committees; nor did town committees feel under compulsion to show any greater respect to their provincial and regional committees than before."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

It is this insubordination, this local autonomy and action in spite of central orders which explains the success of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Rather than a highly centralised and disciplined body of "professional" revolutionaries, the party saw a *"significant change … within the membership of the party at local level … From the time of the February revolution requirements for party membership had been all but suspended, and now Bolshevik ranks swelled with impetuous recruits who knew next to nothing about Marxism and who were united by little more than overwhelming impatience for revolutionary action."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Prelude to Revolution**, p. 41]

This mass of new members (many of whom were peasants who had just recently joined the industrial workforce) had a radicalising effect on the party's policies and structures. As

> *practice had the devil's own job in imposing firm leadership … Insubordination was the rule of the day whenever lower party bodies thought questions of importance were at stake.*
>
> *"Suburb committees too faced difficulties in imposing discipline. Many a party cell saw fit to thumb its nose at higher authority and to pursue policies which it felt to be more suited to local circumstances or more desirable in general. No great secret was made of this. In fact, it was openly admitted that hardly a party committee existed which did not encounter problems in enforcing its will even upon individual activists."* [Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution 1917–1923**, pp. 51–2]

So while Lenin's ideal model of a disciplined, centralised and top-down party had been expounded since 1902, the operation of the party never matched his desire. As Service notes, *"a disciplined hierarchy of command stretching down from the regional committees to party cells"* had *"never existed in Bolshevik history."* In the heady days of the revolution, when the party was flooded by new members, Bolshevik party life was the exact opposite of that usually considered (by both opponents and supporters of Bolshevism) as it normal mode of operation. *"Anarchist attitudes to higher authority,"* he argues, *"were the rule of the day"* and *"no Bolshevik leader in his right mind could have contemplated a regular insistence upon rigid standards of hierarchical control and discipline unless he had abandoned all hope of establishing a mass socialist party."* This meant that *"in the Russia of 1917 it was the easiest thing in the world for lower party bodies to rebut the demands and pleas by higher authority."* He stresses that *"[s]uburb and town committees … often refused to go along with official policies . .. they also … sometimes took it into their heads to engage in active obstruction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 80, p. 62 p. 56 and p. 60]



It should be noted that Lenin's argument does not contradict his earlier ones. The proletarian and intellectual have complementary jobs in the party. The proletariat is to give lessons in political discipline to the intellectuals as they have been through the process of factory (i.e. hierarchical) discipline. The role of the intellectuals as providers of *"political consciousness"* is the same and so they give political lessons to the workers. Moreover, his vision of the vanguard party is basically the same as in **What is to Be Done?**. This can be seen from his comments that the leading Menshevik Martov *"**lumps together** in the party organised and unorganised elements, those who lend themselves to direction and those who do not, the advanced and the incorrigibly backward."* He stressed that the *"division of labour under the direction of a centre evokes from him [the intellectual] a tragicomical outcry against transforming people into 'cogs and wheels.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258 and p. 392] Thus there is the same division of labour as in the capitalist factory, with the boss (the *"centre"*) having the power to direct the workers (who submit to *"direction"*). Thus we have a "revolutionary" party organised in a **capitalist** manner, with the same *"division of labour"* between order givers and order takers.

## H.5.3 Why does vanguardism imply party power?

As we discussed in section H.5.1, anarchists argue that the assumptions of vanguardism lead to party rule over the working class. Needless to say, followers of Lenin disagree. For example, Chris Harman of the British **Socialist Workers Party** argues the opposite case in his essay *"Party and Class."* However, his own argument suggests the elitist conclusions libertarians have draw from Lenin's.

Harman argues that there are two ways to look at the revolutionary party, the Leninist way and the traditional social-democratic way (as represented by the likes of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg in 1903–5). *"The latter,"* he argues, *"was thought of as a party of the whole [working] class ... All the tendencies within the class had to be represented within it. Any split within it was to be conceived of as a split within the class. Centralisation, although recognised as necessary, was feared as a centralisation over and against the spontaneous activity of the class. Yet it was precisely in this kind of party that the 'autocratic' tendencies warned against by Luxemburg were to develop most. For within it the confusion of member and sympathiser, the massive apparatus needed to hold together a mass of only half-politicised members in a series of social activities, led to a toning down of political debate, a lack of political seriousness, which in turn reduced the ability of the members to make independent political evaluations and increased the need for apparatus-induced involvement."* [**Party and Class**, p. 32]

Thus, the lumping together into one organisation all those who consider themselves as *"socialist"* and agree with the party's aims creates in a mass which results in *"autocratic"* tendencies within the party organisation. As such, it is important to remember that *"the Party, as the vanguard of the working class, must not be confused with the entire class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] For this reason, the party must be organised in a specific manner which reflect his Leninist assumptions:

> *"The alternative [to the vanguard party] is the 'marsh' — where elements motivated by scientific precision are so mixed up with those who are irremediably confused as to prevent any decisive action, effectively allowing the most backward to lead."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

The problem for Harman is to explain how the proletariat can become the ruling class if this were true. He argues that



*of the revolution which was destined to overthrow the Tsar. Fortunately, the workers ignored the Bolshevik 'directives' and went on strike anyway. In the events which followed, no one was more surprised by the revolution than the 'revolutionary' parties, including the Bolsheviks."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 123] Trotsky quoted one of the Bolshevik leaders at the time:

> *"Absolutely no guiding initiative from the party centres was felt ... the Petrograd Committee had been arrested and the representative of the Central Committee ... was unable to give any directives for the coming day."* [quoted by Trotsky, **History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 147]

Not the best of starts. Of course rank and file Bolsheviks took part in the demonstrations, street fights and strikes and so violated the principles their party was meant to be based on. As the revolution progressed, so did the dual nature of the Bolshevik party (i.e. its practical divergence from "democratic centralism" in order to be effective and attempts to force it back into that schema which handicapped the revolution). However, during 1917, "democratic centralism" was ignored in order to ensure the Bolsheviks played any role at all in the revolution. As one historian of the party makes clear, in 1917 and until the outbreak of the Civil War, the party operated in ways that few modern "vanguard" parties would tolerate:

> *"The committees were a law unto themselves when it came to accepting orders from above. Democratic centralism, as vague a principle of internal administration as there ever has been, was commonly held at least to enjoin lower executive bodies that they should obey the behests of all higher bodies in the organisational hierarchy. But town committees in*

by noting that the *"figures hardly bear [the claims] out."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112 and p. 117] Shame he did not apply this criteria to his own assertions.

Of course, every party makes mistakes. The question is, how did the *"most revolutionary party of all time"* fare in 1917. Surely that revolution proves the validity of vanguardism and "democratic centralism"? After all, there was a successful revolution, the Bolshevik party did seize power. However, the apparent success of 1917 was not due to the application of "democratic centralism," quite the reverse. While the myth of 1917 is that a highly efficient, democratic centralist vanguard party ensured the overthrow of the Provisional Government in November 1917 in favour of the Soviets (or so it seemed at the time) the facts are somewhat different. Rather, the Bolshevik party throughout 1917 was a fairly loose collection of local organisations (each more than willing to ignore central commands and express their autonomy), with much internal dissent and infighting and no discipline beyond what was created by common loyalty. The "democratic centralist" party, as desired by Lenin, was only created in the course of the Civil War and the tightening of the party dictatorship. In other words, the party became more like a "democratic centralist" one as the revolution degenerated. As such, the various followers of Lenin (Stalinists, Trotskyists and their multitude of offshoots) subscribe to a myth, which probably explains their lack of success in reproducing a similar organisation since. So assuming that the Bolsheviks did play an important role in the Russian revolution, it was because it was **not** the centralised, disciplined Bolshevik party of Leninist myth. Indeed, when the party **did** operate in a vanguardist manner, failure was soon to follow.

This claim can be proven by looking at the history of the 1917 revolution. The February revolution started with a spontaneous protests and strikes yet *"the Petrograd organisation of the Bolsheviks opposed the calling of strikes precisely on the eve*



*"the party is not the embryo of the workers' state — the workers' council is. The working class as a whole will be involved in the organisations that constitute the state, the most backward as well as the most progressive elements."* The *"function of the party is not to be the state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] The implication is that the working class will take an active part in the decision making process during the revolution (although the level of this *"involvement"* is unspecified, probably for good reasons as we explain). If this **is** the case, then the problem of the mass party reappears, but in a new form (we must also note that this problem must have also appearing in 1917, when the Bolshevik party opened its doors to become a mass party).

As the *"organisations that constitute the state"* are made up of the working class *"as a whole,"* then, obviously, they cannot be expected to wield power (i.e. directly manage the revolution from below). If they did, then the party would be *"mixed up"* with the *"irremediably confused"* and so could not lead (as we discuss in section H.5.5, Lenin linked *"opportunism"* to *"primitive"* democracy, i.e. self-management, within the party). Hence the need for party power. Which, of course, explains Lenin's 1920 comments that an organisation embracing the whole working class cannot exercise the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* and that a *"vanguard"* is required to do so (see section H.1.2 for details). Of course, Harman does not explain how the *"irremediably confused"* are able to judge that the party is the best representative of its interests. Surely if someone is competent enough to pick their ruler, they must also be competent enough to manage their own affairs directly? Equally, if the *"irremediably confused"* vote against the party once it is in power, what happens? Will the party submit to the *"leadership"* of what it considers *"the most backward"*? If the Bolsheviks are anything to go by, the answer has to be no.

Ironically, Harman argues that it *"is worth noting that in Russia a real victory of the apparatus over the party required precisely the bringing into the party hundreds of thousands of 'sym-*

*pathisers,' a dilution of the 'party' by the 'class.' ... The Leninist party does not suffer from this tendency to bureaucratic control precisely because it restricts its membership to those willing to be serious and disciplined enough to take **political** and **theoretical** issues as their starting point, and to subordinate all their activities to those."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] It would be churlish to note that, firstly, the party had already imposed its dictatorship on the working class by that time and, secondly, his own party is regularly attacked by its own dissidents for being bureaucratic (see section H.5.11).

Significantly, this substitution of the rule of the party for working class self-government and the party apparatus for the party membership does not happen by accident. In order to have a socialist revolution, the working class as a whole must participate in the process so the decision making organisations will be based on the party being *"mixed up"* with the *"irremediably confused"* as if they were part of a non-Leninist party. So from Harman's own assumptions, this by necessity results in an *"autocratic"* regime within the new *"workers' state."*

This was implicitly recognised by the Bolsheviks when they stressed that the function of the party was to become the government, the head of the state, to *"assume power"*, (see section H.3.3). Thus, while the working class *"as a whole"* will be *"involved in the organisations that constitute the state,"* the party (in practice, its leadership) will hold power. And for Trotsky, this substitution of the party for the class was inevitable:

> *"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of*



gerrymandered and disbanded soviets to remain in power (see section H.6.1). That the Bolshevik's position flowed naturally from Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?** is clear. Thus the underlying logic of Lenin's vanguardism ensured that the Bolsheviks played a negative role with regards the soviets which, combined with "democratic centralism" ensured that it was spread far and wide. Only by ignoring their own party's principles and staying in the Soviet did rank and file Bolsheviks play a positive role in the revolution. This divergence of top and bottom would be repeated in 1917.

Given this, perhaps it is unsurprising that Leninists started to rewrite the history of the 1905 revolution. Victor Serge, an anti-Stalinist Leninist, asserted in the late 1920s that in 1905 the Petrograd Soviet was *"led by Trotsky and inspired by the Bolsheviks."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 36]. While the former claim is partially correct, the latter is not. As noted, the Bolsheviks were initially opposed the soviets and systematically worked to undermine them. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky at that time was a Menshevik, not a Bolshevik. After all, how could the most revolutionary party that ever existed have messed up so badly? How could democratic centralism faired so badly in practice? Best, then, to suggest that it did not and give the Bolsheviks a role better suited to the rhetoric of Bolshevism than its reality.

Trotsky was no different. He, needless to say, denied the obvious implications of these events in 1905. While admitting that the Bolsheviks *"adjusted themselves more slowly to the sweep of the movement"* and that the Mensheviks *"were preponderant in the Soviet,"* he tries to save vanguardism by asserting that *"the general direction of the Soviet's policy proceeded in the main along Bolshevik lines."* So, in spite of the lack of Bolshevik influence, in spite of the slowness in adjusting to the revolution, Bolshevism was, in fact, the leading set of ideas in the revolution! Ironically, a few pages later, he mocks the claims of Stalinists that Stalin had *"isolated the Mensheviks from the masses"*

Even Leninists acknowledge that, to quote Tony Cliff, throughout the history of Bolshevism, *"a certain conservatism arose."* Indeed, *"[a]t practically all sharp turning points, Lenin had to rely on the lower strata of the party machine against the higher, or on the rank and file against the machine as a whole."* [**Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 135] This fact, incidentally, refutes the basic assumptions of Lenin's party schema, namely that the broad party membership, like the working class, was subject to bourgeois influences so necessitating central leadership and control from above.

Looking at both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, we are struck by how often this *"conservatism"* arose and how often the higher bodies lagged behind the spontaneous actions of the masses and the party membership. Looking at the 1905 revolution, we discover a classic example of the inefficiency of "democratic centralism." Facing the rise of the soviets, councils of workers' delegates elected to co-ordinate strikes and other forms of struggle, the Bolsheviks did not know what to do. *"The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks,"* noted Trotsky, *"was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses, and could find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social-Democratic program or disband. The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik workingmen as well ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelash."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 106] More than that, *"[t]he party's Central Committee published the resolution on October 27, thereby making it the binding directive for all other Bolshevik organisations."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 77] It was only the return of Lenin which stopped the Bolshevik's open attacks against the Soviet. As we discuss in section H.6.2, the rationale for these attacks is significant as they were based on arguing that the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers! The implications of this perspective came clear in 1918, when the Bolsheviks



> *becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests ... the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109]

He noted that within the state, *"the last word belongs to the Central Committee of the party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 107] As we discuss in section H.3.8, he held this position into the 1930s.

This means that given Harman's own assumptions, autocratic rule by the party is inevitable. Ironically, he argues that *"to be a 'vanguard' is not the same as to substitute one's own desires, or policies or interests, for those of the class."* He stresses that an *"organisation that is concerned with participating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class cannot conceive of substituting itself for the organs of the direct rule of that class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33 and p. 34] However, the logic of his argument suggests otherwise. Simply put, his arguments against a broad party organisation are also applicable to self-management during the class struggle and revolution. The rank and file party members are *"mixed up"* in the class. This leads to party members becoming subject to bourgeois influences. This necessitates the power of the higher bodies over the lower (see section H.5.5). The highest party organ, the central committee, must rule over the party machine, which in turn rules over the party members, who, in turn, rule over the workers. This logical chain was, ironically enough, recognised by Trotsky in 1904 in his polemic against Lenin:

> *"The organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the central committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the 'dictator' substitutes himself for the central committee."* [quoted by Harman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22]

Obviously once in power this substitution was less of a concern for him! Which, however, does not deny the insight Trotsky had previously showed about the dangers inherent in the Bolshevik assumptions on working class spontaneity and how revolutionary ideas develop. Dangers which he, ironically, helped provide empirical evidence for.

This false picture of the party (and its role) explains the progression of the Bolshevik party after 1917. As the soviets organised all workers, we have the problem that the party (with its *"scientific"* knowledge) is swamped by the class. The task of the party is to *"persuade, not coerce these [workers] into accepting its lead"* and, as Lenin made clear, for it to take political power. [Harman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34] Once in power, the decisions of the party are in constant danger of being overthrown by the working class, which necessitates a state run with *"iron discipline"* (and the necessary means of coercion) by the party. With the disempowering of the mass organisations by the party, the party itself becomes a substitute for popular democracy as being a party member is the only way to influence policy. As the party grows, the influx of new members *"dilutes"* the organisation, necessitating a similar growth of centralised power at the top of the organisation. This eliminated the substitute for proletarian democracy which had developed within the party (which explains the banning of factions within the Bolshevik party in 1921). Slowly but surely, power concentrates into fewer and fewer hands, which, ironically enough, necessitates a bureaucracy to feed the party leaders information and execute its will. Isolated from all, the party inevitably degenerates and Stalinism results.



the desired goals" then vanguardism has not been proven to be effective, quite the reverse (assuming that your desired goal is a socialist society, rather than party power). Needless to say, Trotsky blames the failure of the Russian Revolution on *"objective"* factors rather than Bolshevik policies and practice, an argument we address in section H.6 and will not do so here.

So while Leninists make great claims for the effectiveness of their chosen kind of party, the hard facts of history are against their positive evaluation of vanguard parties. Ironically, even the Russian Revolution disproves the claims of Leninists. The fact is that the Bolshevik party in 1917 was very far from the *"democratic centralist"* organisation which supporters of vanguardism like to claim it is. As such, its success in 1917 lies more in its divergence from the principles of *"democratic centralism"* than in their application. The subsequent degeneration of the revolution and the party is marked by the increasing **application** of those principles in the life of the party.

Thus, to refute the claims of the *"effectiveness"* and *"efficiency"* of vanguardism, we need to look at its one and only success, namely the Russian Revolution. As the Cohen-Bendit brothers argued, *"far from leading the Russian Revolution forwards, the Bolsheviks were responsible for holding back the struggle of the masses between February and October 1917, and later for turning the revolution into a bureaucratic counter-revolution — in both cases because of the party's very nature, structure and ideology."* Indeed, *"[f]rom April to October, Lenin had to fight a constant battle to keep the Party leadership in tune with the masses."* [**Obsolete Communism**, p. 183 and p. 187] It was only by continually violating its own *"nature, structure and ideology"* that the Bolshevik party played an important role in the revolution. Whenever the principles of *"democratic centralism"* were applied, the Bolshevik party played the role the Cohen-Bendit brothers subscribed to it (and once in power, the party's negative features came to the fore).

## H.5.12 Surely the Russian Revolution proves that vanguard parties work?

No, far from it. Looking at the history of vanguardism we are struck by its failures, not its successes. Indeed, the proponents of *"democratic centralism"* can point to only one apparent success of their model, namely the Russian Revolution. Strangely, though, we are warned by Leninists that failure to use the vanguard party will inevitably condemn future revolutions to failure:

> *"The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard... Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power ... The Soviets are the only organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be given to this form only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally, Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants."* [Trotsky, **Writings 1936–37**, p. 490]

To anarchist ears, such claims seem out of place. After all, did the Russian Revolution actually result in socialism or even a viable form of soviet democracy? Far from it. Unless you picture revolution as simply the changing of the party in power, you have to acknowledge that while the Bolshevik party **did** take power in Russian in November 1917, the net effect of this was **not** the stated goals that justified that action. Thus, if we take the term "effective" to mean "an efficient means to achieve



We are sure that many Trotskyists will object to our analysis, arguing that we ignore the problems facing the Russian Revolution in our discussion. Harman argues that it was *"not the form of the party that produces party as opposed to soviet rule, but the decimation of the working class"* that occurred during the Russian Revolution. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37] This is false. As noted, Lenin was always explicit about the fact that the Bolshevik's sought party rule (*"full state power"*) and that their rule **was** working class rule. As such, we have the first, most basic, substitution of party power for workers power. Secondly, as we discuss in section H.6.1, the Bolshevik party had been gerrymandering and disbanding soviets before the start of the Civil War, so proving that the war cannot be held accountable for this process of substitution. Thirdly, Leninists are meant to know that civil war is inevitable during a revolution. To blame the inevitable for the degeneration of the revolution is hardly convincing (particularly as the degeneration started before the civil war broke out).

Unsurprisingly, anarchists reject the underlying basis of this progression, the idea that the working class, by its own efforts, is incapable of developing beyond a *"trade union consciousness."* The actions of the working class itself condemned these attitudes as outdated and simply wrong long before Lenin's infamous comments were put on paper. In every struggle, the working class has created its own organisations to co-ordinate its struggle. In the process of struggle, the working class changes its perspectives. This process is uneven in both quantity and quality, but it does happen. However, anarchists do not think that **all** working class people will, at the same time, spontaneously become anarchists. If they did, we would be in an anarchist society today! As we argue in section J.3, anarchists acknowledge that political development within the working class is uneven. The difference between anarchism and Leninism is how we see socialist ideas developing and how revolutionaries influence that process.

In every class struggle there is a radical minority which takes the lead and many of this minority develop revolutionary conclusions from their experiences. As such, members of the working class develop their own revolutionary theory and it does not need bourgeois intellectuals to inject it into them. Anarchists go on to argue that this minority (along with any members of other classes who have broken with their background and become libertarians) should organise and work together. The role of this revolutionary organisation is to spread, discuss and revise its ideas and help others draw the same conclusions as they have from their own, and others, experiences. The aim of such a group is, by word and deed, to assist the working class in its struggles and to draw out and clarify the libertarian aspects of this struggle. It seeks to abolish the rigid division between leaders and led which is the hallmark of class society by drawing the vast majority of the working class into social struggle and revolutionary politics by encouraging their direct management of the struggle. Only this participation and the political discussion it generates will allow revolutionary ideas to become widespread.

In other words, anarchists argue that precisely **because** of political differences ("unevenness") we need the fullest possible democracy and freedom to discuss issues and reach agreements. Only by discussion and self-activity can the political perspectives of those in struggle develop and change. In other words, the fact Bolshevism uses to justify its support for party power is the strongest argument against it.

Our differences with vanguardism could not be more clear.

## H.5.4 Did Lenin abandon vanguardism?

Vanguardism rests on the premise that the working class cannot emancipate itself. As such, the ideas of Lenin as expounded in **What is to be Done?** (**WITBD**) contradicts



**vs. the SWP: Bureaucratic Centralism Or Democratic Centralism?**] This is a common refrain with Leninists — when reality says one thing and the theory another, it must be reality that is at fault. Yes, every Leninist organisation may be bureaucratic and authoritarian but it is not the theory's fault that those who apply it are not capable of actually doing so successfully. Such an application of scientific principles by the followers of *"scientific socialism"* is worthy of note — obviously the usual scientific method of generalising from facts to produce a theory is inapplicable when evaluating *"scientific socialism"* itself. However, rather than ponder the possibility that *"democratic centralism"* does not actually work and automatically generates the *"bureaucratic centralism,"* they point to the example of the Russian revolution and the original Bolshevik party as proof of the validity of their hopes.

Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to argue that the only reason people take the vanguard party organisational structure seriously is the apparent success of the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution. However, as noted above, even the Bolshevik party was subject to bureaucratic tendencies and as we discuss in the next section, the experience of the 1917 Russian Revolutions disprove the effectiveness of *"vanguard"* style parties. The Bolshevik party of 1917 was a totally different form of organisation than the ideal *"democratic centralist"* type argued for by Lenin in 1902 and 1920. As a model of revolutionary organisation, the "vanguardist" one has been proven false rather than confirmed by the experience of the Russian revolution. Insofar as the Bolshevik party was effective, it operated in a non-vanguardist way and insofar as it did operate in such a manner, it held back the struggle.

[ISG, **Discussion Document of Ex-SWP Comrades**]

The dissidents argue that a *"democratic"* party would involve the *"[r]egular election of all party full-timers, branch and district leadership, conference delegates, etc. with the right of recall,"* which means that in the SWP appointment of full-timers, leaders and so on is the norm. They argue for the *"right of branches to propose motions to the party conference"* and for the *"right for members to communicate horizontally in the party, to produce and distribute their own documents."* They stress the need for *"an independent Control Commission to review all disciplinary cases (independent of the leadership bodies that exercise discipline), and the right of any disciplined comrades to appeal directly to party conference."* They argue that in a democratic party *"no section of the party would have a monopoly of information"* which indicates that the SWP's leadership is essentially secretive, withholding information from the party membership. Even more significantly, given our discussion on the influence of the party structure on post-revolutionary society in section H.5.7, they argue that *"[w]orst of all, the SWP are training a layer of revolutionaries to believe that the organisational norms of the SWP are a shining example of proletarian democracy, applicable to a future socialist society. Not surprisingly, many people are instinctively repelled by this idea."*

Some of these critics of specific Leninist parties do not give up hope and still look for a truly democratic centralist party rather than the bureaucratic centralist ones which seem so common. For example, our group of ex-SWP dissidents argue that *"[a]nybody who has spent time involved in 'Leninist' organisations will have come across workers who agree with Marxist politics but refuse to join the party because they believe it to be undemocratic and authoritarian. Many draw the conclusion that Leninism itself is at fault, as every organisation that proclaims itself Leninist appears to follow the same pattern."* [ISG, **Lenin**



the key idea of Marx that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Thus the paradox of Leninism. On the one hand, it subscribes to an ideology allegedly based on working class self-liberation. On the other, the founder of that school wrote an obviously influential work whose premise not only logically implies that they cannot, it also provides the perfect rationale for party dictatorship over the working class (and as the history of Leninism in power shows, this underlying premise was much stronger than any democratic-sounding rhetoric).

It is for this reason that many Leninists are somewhat embarrassed by Lenin's argument in that key text. Hence we see Chris Harman writing that *"the real theoretical basis for [Lenin's] argument on the party is not that the working class is incapable on its own of coming to theoretical socialist consciousness ... The real basis for his argument is that the level of consciousness in the working class is never uniform."* [**Party and Class**, pp. 25–6] In other words, Harman changes the focus of the question away from the point explicitly and repeatedly stated by Lenin that the working class was incapable on its own of coming to socialist consciousness and that he was simply repeating Marxist orthodoxy when he did.

Harman bases his revision on Lenin's later comments regarding his book, namely that he sought to *"straighten matters out"* by *"pull[ing] in the other direction"* to the *"extreme"* which the *"economists"* had went to. [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 491] He repeated this in 1907, as we will discuss shortly. While Lenin may have been right to attack the *"economists"*, his argument that socialist consciousness comes to the working class only *"from without"* is not a case of going too far in the other direction; it is wrong. Simply put, you do not attack ideas you disagree with by arguing an equally false set of ideas. This suggests that Harman's attempt to downplay Lenin's elitist position is flawed. Simply put, the *"real theoretical basis"* of the argument was precisely the issue Lenin himself raised,

namely the incapacity of the working class to achieve socialist consciousness by itself. It is probably the elitist conclusions of this argument which drives Harman to try and change the focus to another issue, namely the political unevenness within the working class.

Some go to even more extreme lengths, denying that Lenin even held such a position. For example, Hal Draper argued at length that Lenin did not, in fact, hold the opinions he actually expressed in his book! While Draper covers many aspects of what he called the *"Myth of Lenin's 'Concept of The Party'"* in his essay of the same name, we will concentrate on the key idea, namely that socialist ideas are developed outside the class struggle by the radical intelligentsia and introduced into the working class from without. Here, as argued in section H.5.1, is the root of the anti-socialist basis of Leninism.

So what did Draper say? On the one hand, he denied that Lenin held this theory (he states that it is a *"virtually non-existent theory"* and *"non-existent after **WITBD**"*). He argued that those who hold the position that Lenin actually meant what he said in his book *"never quote anything other than **WITBD**,"* and stated that this is a *"curious fact"* (a fact we will disprove shortly). Draper argued as follows: *"Did Lenin put this theory forward even in **WITBD**? Not exactly."* He then noted that Lenin *"had just read this theory in the most prestigious theoretical organ of Marxism of the whole international socialist movement"* and it had been *"put forward in an important article by the leading Marxist authority,"* Karl Kautsky and so *"Lenin first paraphrased Kautsky"* before *"quot[ing] a long passage from Kautsky's article."*

This much, of course, is well known by anyone who has read Lenin's book. By paraphrasing and quoting Kautsky as he does, Lenin is showing his agreement with Kautsky's argument. Indeed, Lenin states before quoting Kautsky that his comments are *"profoundly true and important"*. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 79] By explicitly agreeing with Kautsky, it can be



*presented from the top down, as pre-digested instructions for action. At every level, the comrades 'below' are seen only as a passive mass to be shifted into action, rather than as a source of new initiatives …*

*"The only exception is when a branch thinks up a new tactic to carry out the CC's perspective. In this case, the CC may take up this tactic and apply it across the party. In no way do rank and file members play an active role in determining the strategy and theory of the party — except in the negative sense that if they refuse to implement a perspective eventually even the CC notice, and will modify the line to suit. A political culture has been created in which the leadership outside of the CC consists almost solely of comrades loyal to the CC, willing to follow every turn of the perspective without criticism … Increasingly, the bureaucratic methods used by the CC to enforce their control over the political direction of the party have been extended to other areas of party life. In debates over questions of philosophy, culture and even anthropology an informal party 'line' emerged (i.e. concerning matters in which there can be no question of the party taking a 'line'). Often behind these positions lay nothing more substantial than the opinions of this or that CC member, but adherence to the line quickly became a badge of party loyalty, disagreement became a stigma, and the effect was to close down the democracy of the party yet further by placing even questions of theory beyond debate. Many militants, especially working class militants with some experience of trade union democracy, etc., are often repelled by the undemocratic norms in the party and refuse to join, or keep their distance despite accepting our formal politics."*

*"These methods have been disastrous for the SWP in a number of ways: Each new perspective requires a new cadre (below the level of the CC), so the existing cadre are actively marginalised in the party. In this way, the SWP has failed to build a stable and experienced cadre capable of acting independently of the leadership. Successive layers of cadres have been driven into passivity, and even out of the revolutionary movement altogether. The result is the loss of hundreds of potential cadres. Instead of appraising the real, uneven development of individual cadres, the history of the party is written in terms of a star system (comrades currently favoured by the party) and a demonology (the 'renegades' who are brushed aside with each turn of the party). As a result of this systematic dissolution of the cadre, the CC grows ever more remote from the membership and increasingly bureaucratic in its methods. In recent years the national committee has been abolished (it obediently voted for its own dissolution, on the recommendation of the CC), to be replaced by party councils made up of those comrades active at any one time (i.e. those who already agree with current perspectives); district committees are appointed rather than elected; the CC monopolise all information concerning the party, so that it is impossible for members to know much about what happens in the party outside their own branch; the CC give a distorted account of events rather than admit their mistakes … history is rewritten to reinforce the prestige of the CC … The outcome is a party whose conferences have no democratic function, but serve only to orientate party activists to carry out perspectives drawn up before the delegates even set out from their branches. At every level of the party, strategy and tactics are*



said that it also becomes Lenin's theory as well! Over time, particularly after Kautsky had been labelled a *"renegade"* by Lenin, Kautsky's star waned and Lenin's rose. Little wonder the argument became associated with Lenin rather than the discredited Kautsky. Draper then speculated that *"it is curious … that no one has sought to prove that by launching this theory … Kautsky was laying the basis for the demon of totalitarianism."* A simply reason exists for this, namely the fact that Kautsky, unlike Lenin, was never the head of a one-party dictatorship and justified this system politically. Indeed, Kautsky attacked the Bolsheviks for this, which caused Lenin to label him a *"renegade."* Kautsky, in this sense, can be considered as being inconsistent with his political assumptions, unlike Lenin who took these assumptions to their logical conclusions.

How, after showing the obvious fact that *"the crucial 'Leninist' theory was really Kautsky's,"* he then wondered: *"Did Lenin, in **WITBD**, adopt Kautsky's theory?"* He answered his own question with an astounding *"Again, not exactly"*! Clearly, quoting approvingly of a theory and stating it is *"profoundly true"* does not, in fact, make you a supporter of it! What evidence does Draper present for his amazing answer? Well, Draper argued that Lenin *"tried to get maximum mileage out of it against the right wing; this was the point of his quoting it. If it did something for Kautsky's polemic, he no doubt figured that it would do something for his."* Or, to present a more simple and obvious explanation, Lenin **agreed** with Kautsky's *"profoundly true"* argument!

Aware of this possibility, Draper tried to combat it. *"Certainly,"* he argued, *"this young man Lenin was not (yet) so brash as to attack his 'pope' or correct him overtly. But there was obviously a feeling of discomfort. While showing some modesty and attempting to avoid the appearance of a head-on criticism, the fact is that Lenin inserted two longish footnotes rejecting (or if you wish, amending) precisely what was worst about the Kautsky theory on the role of the proletariat."* So, here we have Lenin

quoting Kautsky to prove his own argument (and noting that Kautsky's words were *"profoundly true and important"*!) but *"feeling discomfort"* over what he has just approvingly quoted! Incredible!

So how does Lenin *"amend"* Kautsky's *"profoundly true and important"* argument? In two ways, according to Draper. Firstly, in a footnote which *"was appended right after the Kautsky passage"* Lenin quoted. Draper argued that it *"was specifically formulated to undermine and weaken the theoretical content of Kautsky's position. It began: 'This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology.' But this was exactly what Kautsky did mean and say. In the guise of offering a caution, Lenin was proposing a modified view. 'They [the workers] take part, however,' Lenin's footnote continued, 'not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able ...' In short, Lenin was reminding the reader that Kautsky's sweeping statements were not even 100% true historically; he pointed to exceptions."* Yes, Lenin **did** point to exceptions **in order to refute objections to Kautsky's argument before they were raised**! It is clear that Lenin was **not** refuting Kautsky. Thus Proudhon adds to socialist ideology in so far as he is a *"socialist theoretician"* and not a worker! How clear can you be? This can be seen from the rest of the sentence Draper truncates. Lenin continued by noting that people like Proudhon *"take part only to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and advance that knowledge."* {

Op. Cit., p. 82f] In other words, insofar as they learn from the *"vehicles of science."* Neither Kautsky or Lenin denied that it was possible for workers to acquire such knowledge and pass it on (sometimes even develop it). However this does **not** mean that they thought workers, as part of their daily life and struggle **as workers,** could develop *"socialist theory."* Thus Lenin's



## H.5.11 Can you provide an example of the negative nature of vanguard parties?

Yes. Our theoretical critique of vanguardism we have presented in the last few sections is more than proved by the empirical evidence of such parties in operation today. Rarely do "vanguard" parties reach in practice the high hopes their supporters like to claim for them. Such parties are usually small, prone to splitting as well as leadership cults, and usually play a negative role in social struggle. A long line of ex-members complain that such parties are elitist, hierarchical and bureaucratic.

Obviously we cannot hope to discuss all such parties. As such, we will take just one example, namely the arguments of one group of dissidents of the biggest British Leninist party, the **Socialist Workers Party**. It is worth quoting their account of the internal workings of the SWP at length:

> *"The SWP is not democratic centralist but bureaucratic centralist. The leadership's control of the party is unchecked by the members. New perspectives are initiated exclusively by the central committee (CC), who then implement their perspective against all party opposition, implicit or explicit, legitimate or otherwise.*
>
> *"Once a new perspective is declared, a new cadre is selected from the top down. The CC select the organisers, who select the district and branch committees — any elections that take place are carried out on the basis of 'slates' so that it is virtually impossible for members to vote against the slate proposed by the leadership. Any members who have doubts or disagreements are written off as 'burnt out' and, depending on their reaction to this, may be marginalised within the party and even expelled.*

practical accountability of the leaders to the membership for their actions is eliminated. Usually this authoritarian structure is combined with militaristic sounding rhetoric and the argument that the "revolutionary" movement needs to be organised in a more centralised way than the current class system, with references to the state's forces of repression (notably the army). As Murray Bookchin argued, the Leninist *"has always had a grudging admiration and respect for that most inhuman of all hierarchical institutions, the military."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 254f]

The modern day effectiveness of the vanguard party can be seen by the strange fact that many Leninists fail to join any of the existing parties due to their bureaucratic internal organisation and that many members are expelled (or leave in disgust) as a result of their failed attempts to make them more democratic. If vanguard parties are such positive organisations to be a member of, why do they have such big problems with member retention? Why are there so many vocal ex-members? Why are so many Leninists ex-members of vanguard parties, desperately trying to find an actual party which matches their own vision of democratic centralism rather than the bureaucratic centralism which seems the norm?

Our account of the workings of vanguard parties explains, in part, why many anarchists and other libertarians voice concern about them and their underlying ideology. We do so because their practices are disruptive and alienate new activists, hindering the very goal (socialism/revolution) they claim to be aiming for. As anyone familiar with the numerous groupings and parties in the Leninist left will attest, the anarchist critique of vanguardism seems to be confirmed in reality while the Leninist defence seems sadly lacking (unless, of course, the person is a member of such a party and then their organisation is the exception to the rule!).



footnote reiterated Kautsky's argument rather than, as Draper hoped, refute it.

Draper turns to another footnote, which he noted *"was not directly tied to the Kautsky article, but discussed the 'spontaneity' of the socialist idea. 'It is often said,' Lenin began, 'that the working class **spontaneously** gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class ... and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily,' but he reminded that this process itself was not subordinated to mere spontaneity. 'The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless, ... bourgeois ideology spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree.'"* Draper argued that this *"was obviously written to modify and recast the Kautsky theory, without coming out and saying that the Master was wrong."* So, here we have Lenin approvingly quoting Kautsky in the main text while, at the same time, providing a footnote to show that, in fact, he did not agree with what he has just quoted! Truly amazing — and easily refuted.

Lenin's footnote stressed, in a part Draper did not consider it wise to quote, that workers appreciate socialist theory *"**provided,** however, that this theory does not step aside for spontaneity and **provided** it subordinates spontaneity to itself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 84f] In other words, workers *"assimilate"* socialist theory only when socialist theory does not adjust itself to the *"spontaneous"* forces at work in the class struggle. The workers adjust to socialist theory, they do not create it. Thus, rather than refuting Kautsky by the backdoor, Lenin in this footnote still agreed with him. Socialism does not develop, as Kautsky stressed, from the class struggle but rather has to be injected into it. This means, by necessity, the party *"subordinates spontaneity to itself."*

Draper argued that this *"modification"* simply meant that there *"are several things that happen 'spontaneously,' and what will win out is not decided only by spontaneity"* but as can be

seen, this is not the case. Only when *"spontaneity"* is subordinated to the theory (i.e. the party) can socialism be won, a totally different position. As such, when Draper asserted that *"[a]ll that was clear at this point was that Lenin was justifiably dissatisfied with the formulation of Kautsky's theory,"* he was simply expressing wishful thinking. This footnote, like the first one, continued the argument developed by Lenin in the main text and in no way is in contradiction to it. As is obvious.

Draper as final evidence of his case asserted that it *"is a curious fact that no one has ever found this alleged theory anywhere else in Lenin's voluminous writings, not before and not after [**WITBD**]. It never appeared in Lenin again. No Leninologist has ever quoted such a theory from any other place in Lenin."* However, as this theory was the orthodox Marxist position, Lenin had no real need to reiterate this argument continuously. After all, he had quoted the acknowledged leader of Marxism on the subject explicitly to show the orthodoxy of his argument and the non-Marxist base of those he argued against. Once the debate had been won and orthodox Marxism triumphant, why repeat the argument again? This, as we will see, was exactly the position Lenin **did** take in 1907 when he wrote an introduction to a book which contained **What is to Be Done?**.

In contradiction to Draper's claim, Lenin **did** return to this matter. In October 1905 he wrote an a short article in praise of an article by Stalin on this very subject. Stalin had sought to explain Lenin's ideas to the Georgian Social-Democracy and, like Lenin, had sought to root the argument in Marxist orthodoxy (partly to justify the argument, partly to expose the Menshevik opposition as being non-Marxists). Stalin argued along similar lines to Lenin:

> *"the question now is: who works out, who is able to work out this socialist consciousness (i.e. scientific socialism)? Kautsky says, and I repeat his idea, that the masses of proletarians, as long as they remain*



and corruption were rife. In Miasnikov's eyes a new type of Communist was emerging, the toadying careerist who *"knows how to please his superiors."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin**, p. 8 and p. 7] At the last party congress Lenin attended, Miasnikov was expelled. Only one delegate, V. V. Kosior, *"argued that Lenin had taken the wrong approach to the question of dissent. If someone ... had the courage to point out deficiencies in party work, he was marked down as an oppositionist, relieved of authority, placed under surveillance, and — a reference to Miasnikov — even expelled from the party."* [Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15] Serge noted about the same period that Lenin *"proclaimed a purge of the Party, aimed at those revolutionaries who had come in from other parties — i.e. those who were not saturated with the Bolshevik mentality. This meant the establishment within the Party of a dictatorship of the old Bolsheviks, and the direction of disciplinary measures, not against the unprincipled careerists and conformist late-comers, but against those sections with a critical outlook."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 135]

This, of course, also applies to the party congress, on paper the sovereign body of the organisation. All too often resolutions at party conferences will either come from the leadership or be completely supportive of its position. If branches or members submit resolutions which are critical of the leadership, enormous pressure is exerted to ensure that they are withdrawn. Moreover, often delegates to the congress are not mandated by their branches, so ensuring that rank and file opinions are not raised, never mind discussed. Other, more drastic measures have been known to occur. Victor Serge saw what he termed the *"Party steamroller"* at work in early 1921 when *"the voting [was] rigged for Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority'"* in one of the districts of Petrograd. [**Op. Cit.**, p.123]

All to often, such parties have "elected" bodies which have, in practice, usurped the normal democratic rights of members and become increasingly removed from formal controls. All

this inner authoritarianism is a growing tendency toward the abuse of power by the leaders, who act in arbitrary ways, accrue personal power and so on (as noted by Trotsky with regards to the Bolshevik party machine). Indeed, it is often the case that activities that would provoke outrage if engaged in by rank-and-file members are tolerated when their leaders do it. As one group of Scottish libertarians noted:

> *"Further, in so far as our Bolshevik friends reject and defy capitalist and orthodox labourist conceptions, they also are as much 'individualistic' as the anarchist. Is it not boasted, for example, that on many occasions Marx, Lenin and Trotsky were prepared to be in a minority of one — if they thought they were more correct than all others on the question at issue? In this, like Galileo, they were quite in order. Where they and their followers, obsessed by the importance of their own judgement go wrong, is in their tendency to refuse this inalienable right to other protagonists and fighters for the working class."* [APCF, *"Our Reply,"* **Class War on the Home Front**, p. 70]

As in any hierarchical structure, the tendency is for those in power to encourage and promote those who agree with them. This means that members usually find their influence and position in the party dependent on their willingness to conform to the hierarchy and its leadership. Dissenters will rarely find their contribution valued and advancement is limited, which produces a strong tendency not to make waves. As Miasnikov, a working class Bolshevik dissident, argued in 1921, *"the regime within the party"* meant that *"if someone dares to have the courage of his convictions,"* they are called either a self-seeker or, worse, a counter-revolutionary, a Menshevik or an SR. Moreover, within the party, favouritism



> *proletarians, have neither the time nor the opportunity to work out socialist consciousness ... The vehicles of science are the intellectuals ... who have both the time and opportunity to put themselves in the van of science and workout socialist consciousness. Clearly, socialist consciousness is worked out by a few Social-Democratic intellectuals who posses the time and opportunity to do so."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 1, p. 164]

Stalin stressed the Marxist orthodoxy by stating Social-Democracy *"comes in and introduces socialist consciousness into the working class movement. This is what Kautsky has in mind when he says 'socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 164–5] That Stalin was simply repeating Lenin's and Kautsky's arguments is clear, as is the fact it was considered the orthodox position within social-democracy.

If Draper was right, then Lenin would have taken the opportunity to attack Stalin's article and express the alternative viewpoint Draper was convinced he held. Lenin, however, put pen to paper to **praise** Stalin's work, noting *"the splendid way in which the problem of the celebrated 'introduction of a consciousness from without' had been posed."* Lenin explicitly agreed with Stalin's summary of his argument, writing that *"social being determines consciousness ... Socialist consciousness corresponds to the position of the proletariat"* before quoting Stalin: *"'Who can and does evolve this consciousness (scientific socialism)?'"* He answers by again approvingly quoting Stalin: *"its 'evolution' is a matter for a few Social-Democratic intellectuals who posses the necessary means and time.'"* Lenin did argue that Social-Democracy meets *"an instinctive **urge** towards socialism"* when it *"comes to the proletariat with the message of socialism,"* but this does not counter the main argument that the working class cannot develop socialist consciousness by it own efforts and

the, by necessity, elitist and hierarchical politics that flow from this position. [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 9, p. 388]

That Lenin did not reject his early formulations can also be seen from in his introduction to the pamphlet *"Twelve Years"* which contained **What is to be Done?**. Rather than explaining the false nature of that work's more infamous arguments, Lenin in fact defended them. For example, as regards the question of professional revolutionaries, he argued that the statements of his opponents now *"look ridiculous"* as *"**today** the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries has **already** scored a complete victory,"* a victory which *"would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the **forefront** at the time."* He noted that his work had *"vanquished Economism ... and finally **created** this organisation."* On the question of socialist consciousness, he simply reiterated the Marxist orthodoxy of his position, noting that its *"formulation of the relationship between spontaneity and political consciousness was agreed upon by all the **Iskra** editors ... Consequently, there could be no question of any difference in principle between the draft Party programme and **What is to be Done?** on this issue."* So while Lenin argued that his book *"straightens out what had been twisted by the Economists,"* (who had *"gone to one extreme"*) he did not correct his earlier arguments. [**Collected Works**, vol. 13, p. 101, p. 102 and p. 107]

Looking at Lenin's arguments at the Communist International on the question of the party we see an obvious return to the ideas of **WITBD** (see section H.5.5). Here was have a similar legal/illegal duality, strict centralism, strong hierarchy and the vision of the party as the *"head"* of the working class (i.e. its consciousness). In **Left-Wing Communism**, Lenin mocks those who reject the idea that dictatorship by the party is the same as that of the class (see section H.3.3).

For Draper, the key problem was that critics of Lenin *"run two different questions together: (a) What was, historically, the **initial** role of intellectuals in the beginnings of the socialist move-*



harmonise with their public behaviour. It is difficult to say one thing in public and hold to a set of private beliefs at variance with what is publicly expressed. In short, if people tell others that they support X (for whatever reason), they will slowly begin to change their own opinions and, indeed, internally come to support X. The more public such declarations have been, the more likely it is that such a shift will take place. This has been confirmed by empirical research (see R. Cialdini's **Influence: Science and Practice**). This suggests that if, in the name of democratic centralism, party members publicly uphold the party line, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold a private belief at variance with publicly expressed opinions. The evidence suggests that it is not possible to have a group of people presenting a conformist image to society at large while maintaining an inner party regime characterised by frank and full discussion. Conformity in public tends to produce conformity in private. So given what is now known of social influence, *"democratic centralism"* is almost certainly destined to prevent genuine internal discussion. This is sadly all too often confirmed in the internal regimes of vanguard parties, where debate is often narrowly focused on a few minor issues of emphasis rather than fundamental issues of policy and theory.

It has already been noted (in section H.5.5) that the organisational norms of democratic centralism imply a concentration of power at the top. There is abundant evidence that such a concentration has been a vital feature of every vanguard party and that such a concentration limits party democracy. An authoritarian inner party regime is maintained, which ensures that decision making is concentrated in elite hands. This regime gradually dismantles or ignores all formal controls on its activities. Members are excluded from participation in determining policy, calling leaders to account, or expressing dissent. This is usually combined with persistent assurances about the essentially democratic nature of the organisation, and the existence of exemplary democratic controls — on paper. Correlated with

tensive authority to govern the party's affairs, including updating party doctrine and deciding the party's response to current political events.

As unity is the key, there is a tendency to view any opposition as a potential threat. It is not at all clear when *"full freedom to criticise"* policy internally can be said to disturb the unity of a defined action. The norms of democratic centralism confer all power between conferences onto a central committee, allowing it to become the arbiter of when a dissident viewpoint is in danger of weakening unity. The evidence from numerous vanguard parties suggest that their leaderships usually view **any** dissent as precisely such a disruption and demand that dissidents cease their action or face expulsion from the party.

It should also be borne in mind that Leninist parties also view themselves as vitally important to the success of any future revolution. This cannot help but reinforce the tendency to view dissent as something which automatically imperils the future of the planet and, therefore, something which must be combated at all costs. As Lenin stressed an a polemic directed to the international communist movement in 1920, *"[w]hoever brings about even the slightest weakening of the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship) is actually aiding the bourgeoisie against the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 45] As can be seen, Lenin stresses the importance of *"iron discipline"* at all times, not only during the revolution when *"the party"* is applying *"its dictatorship"* (see section H.3.8 for more on this aspect of Leninism). This provides a justification of whatever measures are required to restore the illusion of unanimity, including the trampling underfoot of whatever rights the membership may have on paper and the imposition of any decisions the leadership considers as essential between conferences.

Fourthly, and more subtly, it is well known that when people take a public position in defence of a proposition, there is a strong tendency for their private attitudes to shift so that they



*ment, and (b) what **is** — and above all, what should be — the role of bourgeois intellectuals in a working-class party today."* He argued that Kautsky did not believe that *"**if** it can be shown that intellectuals historically played a certain initiatory role, they **must** and **should** continue to play the same role now and forever. It does not follow; as the working class matured, it tended to throw off leading strings."* However, this is unconvincing. If socialist consciousness cannot be generated by the working class by its own struggles then this is applicable now and in the future. Thus workers who join the socialist movement will be repeating the party ideology, as developed by intellectuals in the past. If they **do** develop new theory, it would be, as Lenin stressed, *"not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians"* and so socialist consciousness still does not derive from their own class experiences. This places the party in a privileged position vis-à-vis the working class and so the elitism remains.

Somewhat ironically given how much Draper is at pains to distance his hero Lenin from claims of elitism, he himself **agreed** with the arguments of Kautsky and Lenin. For Draper socialism did **not** develop out of the class struggle: *"As a matter of fact, in the International of 1902 no one really had any doubts about the historical facts concerning the beginnings of the movement."* This was true. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, made similar arguments to Kautsky's before Lenin put pen to paper. For Plekhanov, the socialist intelligentsia *"will bring **consciousness** into the working class."* It must *"become the leader of the working class"* and *"explain to it its political and economic interests."* This would *"prepare them to play an independent role in the social life of Russia."* [quoted by Neil Harding, **Lenin's Political Thought**, vol. 1, p. 50 and p. 51]

As one expert notes, *"Lenin's position ... did not differ in any essentials"* from those *"Plekhanov had himself expressed."* Its *"basic theses were his own"*, namely that it is *"clear from Plekhanov's writing that it was the intelligentsia which virtually created the working class movement in its conscious form. It*

*brought it science, revolutionary theory and organisation.*" In summary, *"Lenin's views of the Party ... are not to be regarded as extraordinary, innovatory, perverse, essentially Jacobin or unorthodox. On the contrary"* they were *"the touchstone of orthodoxy"* and so *"what it [**What is to be Done?**] presented at the time"* was *"a restatement of the principles of Russian Marxist orthodoxy.*" By quoting Kautsky, Lenin also proved that he was simply repeating the general Marxist orthodoxy: *"Those who dispute Lenin's conclusions on the genesis of socialist consciousness must it seems, also dispute Kautsky's claim to represent Social-Democratic orthodoxy.*" [Harding, **Op. Cit.**, p. 170, p. 172, pp. 50–1, p. 187, p. 188, p. 189 and p. 169]

Moreover, Engels wrote some interesting words in the 1840s on this issue which places the subsequent development of Marxism into sharper light. He noted that *"it is evident that the working-men's movement is divided into two sections, the Chartists and the Socialists. The Chartists are theoretically the more backward, the less developed, but they are genuine proletarians ... The Socialists are more far-seeing ... but proceeding originally from the bourgeoisie, are for this reason unable to amalgamate completely with the working class. The union of Socialism with Chartism ... will be the next step ... Then, only when this has been achieved, will the working class be the true intellectual leader of England."* Thus socialist ideas have to be introduced into the proletariat, as they are *"more backward"* and cannot be expected to develop theory for themselves! In the same year, he expounded on what this *"union"* would entail, writing in an Owenite paper that *"the union between the German philosophers ... and the German working men . .. is all but accomplished. With the philosophers to think, and the working mean to fight for us, will any earthly power be strong enough to resist our progress?"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 4, pp. 526–7 and p. 236] This, of course, fits in with the **Communist Manifesto**'s assertion that *"a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class."* Today, this



edging mistakes, and removes the need to seek meaningful intellectual input outside the party's own ideological fortress. As Victor Serge, anarchist turned Bolshevik, admitted in his memoirs: *"Bolshevik thinking is grounded in the possession of the truth. The Party is the repository of truth, and any form of thinking which differs from it is a dangerous or reactionary error. Here lies the spiritual source of its intolerance. The absolute conviction of its lofty mission assures it of a moral energy quite astonishing in its intensity — and, at the same time, a clerical mentality which is quick to become Inquisitorial."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 134]

The intense level of activism means that members are bombarded with party propaganda, are in endless party meetings, or spend time reading party literature and so, by virtue of the fact that there is not enough time to read anything, members end up reading nothing but party publications. Most points of contact with the external world are eliminated or drastically curtailed. Indeed, such alternative sources of information and such thinking is regularly dismissed as being contaminated by bourgeois influences. This often goes so far as to label those who question any aspect of the party's analysis revisionists or deviationists, bending to the *"pressures of capitalism,"* and are usually driven from the ranks as heretics. All this is almost always combined with contempt for all other organisations on the Left (indeed, the closer they are to the party's own ideological position the more likely they are to be the targets of abuse).

Thirdly, the practice of *"democratic centralism"* also aids this process towards conformity. Based on the idea that the party must be a highly disciplined fighting force, the party is endowed with a powerful central committee and a rule that all members must publicly defend the agreed-upon positions of the party and the decisions of the central committee, whatever opinions they might hold to the contrary in private. Between conferences, the party's leading bodies usually have ex-

been elected to such an important position. Thus many in the membership come to believe that disagreements with the leadership's analysis, even before they had been clearly articulated, are liable to be wrong. Doubt dares not speak its name. Unquestioning belief in the party leadership has been an all to common recurring theme in many accounts of vanguard parties. The hierarchical structure of the party promotes a hierarchical mentality in its members.

Conformity within such parties is also reinforced by the intense activism expected by members, particularly leading activists and full-time members. Paradoxically, the more deeply people participate in activism, the harder it becomes to reflect on what they are doing. The unrelenting pace often induces exhaustion and depression, while making it harder to *"think your way out"* — too many commitments have been made and too little time is left over from party activity for reflection. Moreover, high levels of activism prevent many, particularly the most committed, from having a personal life outside their role as party members. This high-speed political existence means that rival social networks atrophy through neglect, so ensuring that the party line is the only perspective which members get exposed to. Members tend to leave, typically, because of exhaustion, crisis, even despair rather than as the result of rational reflection and conscious decision.

Secondly, given that vanguard parties are based on the belief that they are the guardians of *"scientific socialism,"* this means that there is a tendency to squeeze all of social life into the confines of the party's ideology. Moreover, as the party's ideology is a "science" it is expected to explain everything (hence the tendency of Leninists to expound on every subject imaginable, regardless of whether the author knows enough about the subject to discuss it in an informed way). The view that the party's ideology explains everything eliminates the need for fresh or independent thought, precludes the possibility of critically appraising past practice or acknowl-



*"portion of the bourgeois ideologists"* have *"raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 481] This, needless to say, places *"bourgeois ideologists"* (like Marx, Engels, Kautsky and Lenin) in a privileged position within the movement and has distinctly vanguardist undercurrents.

Seemingly unaware how this admission destroyed his case, Draper went on to ask: *"But what followed from those facts?"* To which he argued that Marx and Engels *"concluded, from the same facts and subsequent experiences, that the movement had to be sternly warned against the influence of bourgeois intellectuals inside the party."* (We wonder if Marx and Engels included themselves in the list of *"bourgeois intellectuals"* the workers had to be *"sternly warned"* about?) Thus, amusingly enough, Draper argued that Marx, Engels, Kautsky and Lenin all held to the *"same facts"* that socialist consciousness developed outside the experiences of the working classes!

Ultimately, the whole rationale for the kind of wishful thinking that Draper inflicted on us is flawed. As noted above, you do not combat what you think is an incorrect position with one which you consider as also being wrong or do not agree with! You counter what you consider as an incorrect position with one you consider correct and agree with. As Lenin, in **WITBD**, explicitly did. This means that later attempts by his followers to downplay the ideas raised in Lenin's book are unconvincing. Moreover, as he was simply repeating Social-Democratic orthodoxy it seems doubly unconvincing.

Clearly, Draper was wrong. Lenin did, as indicated above, actually meant what he said in **WITBD**. The fact that Lenin quoted Kautsky simply shows, as Lenin intended, that this position was the orthodox Social Democratic one, held by the mainstream of the party (one with roots in Marx and Engels). Given that Leninism was (and still is) a "radical" offshoot of this movement, this should come as no surprise. However, Draper's com-

ments remind us how religious many forms of Marxism are — why do we need facts when we have the true faith?

## H.5.5 What is *"democratic centralism"*?

Anarchists oppose vanguardism for three reasons, one of which is the way it recommends how revolutionaries should organise to influence the class struggle.

So how is a "vanguard" party organised? To quote the Communist International's 1920 resolution on the role of the Communist Party in the revolution, the party must have a *"centralised political apparatus"* and *"must be organised on the basis of iron proletarian centralism."* This, of course, suggests a top-down structure internally, which the resolution explicitly calls for. In its words, *"Communist cells of every kind must be subordinate to one another as precisely as possible in a strict hierarchy."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 193, p. 198 and p. 199] Therefore, the vanguard party is organised in a centralised, top-down way. However, this is not all, as well as being *"centralised,"* the party is also meant to be democratic, hence the expression *"democratic centralism."* On this the resolution states:

> *"The Communist Party must be organised on the basis of democratic centralism. The most important principle of democratic centralism is election of the higher party organs by the lowest, the fact that all instructions by a superior body are unconditionally and necessarily binding on lower ones, and existence of a strong central party leadership whose authority over all leading party comrades in the period between one party congress and the next is universally accepted."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 198]



incidentally. It would be no exaggeration to argue that the Russian revolution occurred in spite of, rather than because of, Bolshevik organisational principles (see section H.5.12). These principles, however, came into their own once the party had seized power, ensuring the consolidation of bureaucratic rule by an elite.

That a vanguard party helps to produces a bureaucratic regime once in power should not come as a surprise. If the party, to use Trotsky's expression, exhibits a *"caste tendency of the committeemen"* can we be surprised if once in power it reproduces such a tendency in the state it is now the master of? [**Op. Cit.**, p. 102] And this *"tendency"* can be seen today in the multitude of Leninist sects that exist.

## H.5.10 Why does *"democratic centralism"* produce *"bureaucratic centralism"*?

In spite of the almost ritualistic assertions that vanguard parties are *"the most democratic the world has seen,"* an army of ex-members, expelled dissidents and disgruntled members testify that they do not live up to the hype. They argue that most, if not all, "vanguard" parties are not *"democratic centralist"* but are, in fact, *"bureaucratic centralist."* Within the party, in other words, a bureaucratic clique controls it from the top-down with little democratic control, never mind participation. For anarchists, this is hardly surprising. The reasons why this continually happens are rooted in the nature of *"democratic centralism"* itself.

Firstly, the assumption of *"democratic centralism"* is that the membership elect a leadership and give them the power to decide policy between conferences and congresses. This has a subtle impact on the membership, as it is assumed that the leadership has a special insight into social problems above and beyond that of anyone else, otherwise they would not have

> *cadres, who enjoyed the benefit of exceptional revolutionary training, were definitely inclined to disregard the masses and to identify their own special interests and the interests of the machine on the very day after the monarchy was overthrown. What, then, could be expected of these cadres when they became an all-powerful state bureaucracy?"* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 298]

In such circumstances, it is unsurprising that urging party power and identifying it with working class power would have less than revolutionary results. Discussing the Bolsheviks in 1905 Trotsky points out this tendency existed from the start:

> *"The habits peculiar to a political machine were already forming in the underground. The young revolutionary bureaucrat was already emerging as a type. The conditions of conspiracy, true enough, offered rather merge scope for such formalities of democracy as electiveness, accountability and control. Yet, undoubtedly the committeemen narrowed these limitations considerably more than necessity demanded and were far more intransigent and severe with the revolutionary workingmen than with themselves, preferring to domineer even on occasions that called for lending an attentive ear to the voice of the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

He quoted Krupskaya, a party member, on these party bureaucrats, the *"committeemen."* Krupskaya stated that *"as a rule"* they *"did not recognise any party democracy"* and *"did not want any innovations. The 'committeeman' did not desire, and did not know how to, adapt himself to rapidly changing conditions."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101] This conservatism played havoc in the party during 1917,



For Lenin, speaking in the same year, democratic centralism meant *"only that representatives from the localities meet and elect a responsible body which must then govern ... Democratic centralism consists in the Congress checking on the Central Committee, removing it and electing a new one."* [quoted by Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution**, p. 131] Thus, *"democratic centralism"* is inherently top-down, although the *"higher"* party organs are, in principle, elected by the *"lower."* However, the key point is that the central committee is the active element, the one whose decisions are implemented and so the focus of the structure is in the *"centralism"* rather than the *"democratic"* part of the formula.

As we noted in section H.2.14, the Communist Party was expected to have a dual structure, one legal and the other illegal. It goes without saying that the illegal structure is the real power in the party and that it cannot be expected to be as democratic as the legal party, which in turn would be less than democratic as the illegal would have the real power within the organisation.

All this has clear parallels with Lenin's **What is to be done?**, where he argued for *"a powerful and strictly secret organisation, which concentrates in its hands all the threads of secret activities, an organisation which of necessity must be a centralised organisation."* This call for centralisation is not totally dependent on secrecy, though. As he noted, *"specialisation necessarily presupposes centralisation, and in its turn imperatively calls for it."* Such a centralised organisation would need leaders and Lenin argued that *"no movement can be durable without a stable organisation of leaders to maintain continuity."* As such, *"the organisation must consist chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession."* Thus, we have a centralised organisation which is managed by specialists, by *"professional revolutionaries."* This does not mean that these all come from the bourgeoisie or petit bourgeoisie. According to Lenin a *"workingman agitator who*

*is at all talented and 'promising'* ***must not be left*** *to work eleven hours a day in a factory. We must arrange that he be maintained by the Party, that he may in due time go underground."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 158, p. 153, p. 147, p. 148 and p. 155]

Thus the full time professional revolutionaries are drawn from all classes into the party apparatus. However, in practice the majority of such full-timers were/are middle class. Trotsky noted that *"just as in the Bolshevik committees, so at the [1905] Congress itself, there were almost no workingmen. The intellectuals predominated."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 101] This did not change, even after the influx of working class members in 1917 the *"incidence of middle-class activists increases at the highest echelons of the hierarchy of executive committees."* [Robert Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 47] An ex-worker was a rare sight in the Bolshevik Central Committee, an actual worker non-existent. However, regardless of their original class background what unites the full-timers is not their origin but rather their current relationship with the working class, one of separation and hierarchy.

The organisational structure of this system was made clear at around the same time as **What is to be Done?**, with Lenin arguing that the factory group (or cell) of the party *"must consist of a small number of* ***revolutionaries,*** *receiving* ***direct from the [central] committee*** *orders and power to conduct the whole social-democratic work in the factory. All members of the factory committee must regard themselves as agents of the [central] committee, bound to submit to all its directions, bound to observe all 'laws and customs' of this 'army in the field' in which they have entered and which they cannot leave without permission of the commander."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 33] The similarities to the structure proposed by Lenin and agreed to by the Comintern in 1920 is obvious. Thus we have a highly centralised party, one run by *"professional revolutionaries"* from the top down.



sity produced and required by revolutionary movements with the drab conformity produced by centralisation and to replace popular power and freedom with party power and tyranny.

## H.5.9 What are vanguard parties effective at?

As we discussed the last section, vanguard parties are not efficient as agents of revolutionary change. So, it may be asked, what **are** vanguard parties effective at? If they are harmful to revolutionary struggle, what are they good at? The answer to this is simple. No anarchist would deny that vanguard parties are extremely efficient and effective at certain things, most notably reproducing hierarchy and bourgeois values into so-called *"revolutionary"* organisations and movements. As Murray Bookchin put it, the party *"is efficient in only one respect — in moulding society in its own hierarchical image if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of 'withering away,' the state controlled by the 'glorious party' preserves the very conditions which 'necessitate' the existence of a state — and a party to 'guard' it."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 125–6]

By being structured along hierarchical lines that reflect the very system that it professes to oppose, the vanguard party very "effectively" reproduces that system within both the current radical social movements **and** any revolutionary society that may be created. This means that once in power, it shapes society in its own image. Ironically, this tendency towards conservatism and bureaucracy was noted by Trotsky:

> *"As often happens, a sharp cleavage developed between the classes in motion and the interests of the party machines. Even the Bolshevik Party*

> *patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 61]

As we discuss in section H.5.12, the example of the Bolshevik party during the Russian Revolution amply proves Rocker's point. Rather than being a highly centralised, disciplined vanguard party, the Bolshevik party was marked by extensive autonomy throughout its ranks. Party discipline was regularly ignored, including by Lenin in his attempts to get the central party bureaucracy to catch up with the spontaneous revolutionary actions and ideas of the Russian working class. As Bookchin summarised, the *"Bolshevik leadership was ordinarily extremely conservative, a trait that Lenin had to fight throughout 1917 — first in his efforts to reorient the Central Committee against the provisional government (the famous conflict over the 'April Theses'), later in driving the Central Committee toward insurrection in October. In both cases he threatened to resign from the Central Committee and bring his views to 'the lower ranks of the party.'"* Once in power, however, *"the Bolsheviks tended to centralise their party to the degree that they became isolated from the working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 126 and p. 127]

The "vanguard" model of organising is not only inefficient and ineffective from a revolutionary perspective, it generates bureaucratic and elitist tendencies which undermine any revolution unfortunate enough to be dominated by such a party. For these extremely practical and sensible reasons anarchists reject it wholeheartedly. As we discuss in the next section, the only thing vanguard parties **are** effective at is to supplant the diver-



It will be objected that Lenin was discussing the means of party building under Tsarism and advocated wider democracy under legality. However, given that in 1920 he universalised the Bolshevik experience and urged the creation of a dual party structure (based on legal and illegal structures), his comments on centralisation are applicable to vanguardism in general. Moreover, in 1902 he based his argument on experiences drawn from democratic capitalist regimes. As he argued, *"no revolutionary organisation has ever practised **broad** democracy, nor could it, however much it desired to do so."* This was not considered as just applicable in Russia under the Tsar as Lenin then goes on to quote the Webb's *"book on trade unionism"* in order to clarify what he calls *"the confusion of ideas concerning the meaning of democracy."* He noted that *"in the first period of existence in their unions, the British workers thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all members to do all the work of managing the unions."* This involved *"all questions [being] decided by the votes of all the members"* and all *"official duties"* being *"fulfilled by all the members in turn."* He dismissed *"such a conception of democracy"* as *"absurd"* and *"historical experience"* made them *"understand the necessity for representative institutions"* and *"full-time professional officials."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 161 and pp. 162–3]

Needless to say, Lenin linked this to Kautsky, who *"shows the need for **professional** journalists, parliamentarians, etc., for the Social-Democratic leadership of the proletarian class struggle"* and who *"attacks the 'socialism of anarchists and **litterateurs**' who ... proclaim the principle that laws should be passed directly by the whole people, completely failing to understand that in modern society this principle can have only a relative application."* The universal nature of his dismissal of self-management within the revolutionary organisation in favour of representative forms is thus stressed. Significantly, Lenin stated that this *"'primitive' conception of democracy"* exists in two groups,

the *"masses of the students and workers"* and the *"Economists of the Bernstein persuasion"* (i.e. reformists). Thus the idea of directly democratic working class organisations is associated with opportunism. He was generous, noting that he *"would not, of course, ... condemn practical workers who have had too few opportunities for studying the theory and practice of real democratic [sic!] organisation"* but individuals *"play[ing] a leading role"* in the movement should be so condemned! [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163] These people should know better! Thus *"real"* democratic organisation implies the restriction of democracy to that of electing leaders and any attempt to widen the input of ordinary members is simply an expression of workers who need educating from their *"primitive"* failings!

In summary, we have a model of a *"revolutionary"* party which is based on full-time *"professional revolutionaries"* in which the concept of direct democracy is replaced by a system of, at best, representative democracy. It is highly centralised, as befitting a specialised organisation. As noted in section H.3.3, the *"organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy"* was *"to proceed from the top downward"* rather than *"from the bottom upward."* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 396–7] Rather than being only applicable in Tsarist Russia, Lenin drew on examples from advanced, democratic capitalist countries to justify his model in 1902 and in 1920 he advocated a similar hierarchical and top-down organisation with a dual secret and public organisation in the **Communist International**. The continuity of ideas is clear.

## H.5.6 Why do anarchists oppose *"democratic centralism"*?

What to make of Lenin's suggested model of *"democratic centralism"* discussed in the last section? It is, to use Cornelius Castoriadis's term, a *"revolutionary party organised on a capital-*



> *Democrats, the Communists and the Trotskyist party of Ceylon (the only mass party of its kind). To claim that these parties failed to take their Marxian principles seriously merely conceals another question: why did this failure happen in the first place? The fact is, these parties were co-opted into bourgeois society because they were structured along bourgeois lines. The germ of treachery existed in them from birth."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 123–6]

The evidence Bookchin summarises suggests that vanguard parties are less than efficient in promoting revolutionary change. Sluggish, unresponsive, undemocratic, they simply cannot adjust to the dynamic nature of social struggle, never mind revolution. This is to be expected:

> *"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as*

*better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently. Although it stakes out a claim to the 'larger view,' to greater 'theoretical competence,' the competence of the leadership tends to diminish as one ascends the hierarchy of command. The more one approaches the level where the real decisions are made, the more conservative is the nature of the decision-making process, the more bureaucratic and extraneous are the factors which come into play, the more considerations of prestige and retrenchment supplant creativity, imagination, and a disinterested dedication to revolutionary goals.*

*"The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns — as they do in all revolutions…*

*"On the other hand, this kind of party is extremely vulnerable in periods of repression. The bourgeoisie has only to grab its leadership to destroy virtually the entire movement. With its leaders in prison or in hiding, the party becomes paralysed; the obedient membership has no one to obey and tends to flounder. Demoralisation sets in rapidly. The party decomposes not only because of the repressive atmosphere but also because of its poverty of inner resources.*

*"The foregoing account is not a series of hypothetical inferences, it is a composite sketch of all the mass Marxian parties of the past century — the Social*



*ist manner"* and so in practice the *"democratic centralist"* party, while being centralised, will not be very democratic. In fact, the level of democracy would reflect that in a capitalist republic rather than a socialist society:

> *"The dividing up of tasks, which is indispensable wherever there is a need for co-operation, becomes a real division of labour, the labour of giving orders being separate from that of carrying them out … this division between directors and executants tends to broaden and deepen by itself. The leaders specialise in their role and become indispensable while those who carry out orders become absorbed in their concrete tasks. Deprived of information, of the general view of the situation, and of the problems of organisation, arrested in their development by their lack of participation in the overall life of the Party, the organisation's rank-and-file militants less and less have the means or the possibility of having any control over those at the top.*
>
> *"This division of labour is supposed to be limited by 'democracy.' But democracy, which should mean that* ***the majority rules,*** *is reduced to meaning that the majority* ***designates its rulers;*** *copied in this way from the model of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, drained of any real meaning, it quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The base does not run the organisation just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government.*
>
> *"Let us consider, for example, 'democratic centralism' as it is supposed to function in an ideal Leninist*

> *party. That the central committee is designated by a 'democratically elected' congress makes no difference since, once it is elected, it has complete (statutory) control over the body of the Party (and can dissolve the base organisations, kick out militants, etc.) or that, under such conditions, it can determine the composition of the next congress. The central committee could use its powers in an honourable way, these powers could be reduced; the members of the Party might enjoy 'political rights' such as being able to form factions, etc. Fundamentally this would not change the situation, for the central committee would still remain the organ that defines the political line of the organisation and controls its application from top to bottom, that, in a word, has permanent monopoly on the job of leadership. The expression of opinions only has a limited value once the way the group functions prevents this opinion from forming on solid bases, i.e. permanent* ***participation*** *in the organisation's activities and in the solution of problems that arise. If the way the organisation is run makes the solution of general problems the specific task and permanent work of a separate category of militants, only their opinion will, or will appear, to count to the others."* [Castoriadis, **Social and Political Writings**, vol. 2, pp. 204–5]

Castoriadis' insight is important and strikes at the heart of the problem with vanguard parties. They simply reflect the capitalist society they claim to represent. As such, Lenin's argument against *"primitive"* democracy in the revolutionary and labour movements is significant. When he asserts that those who argue for direct democracy *"completely"* fail to *"understand that in modern society this principle can have only a relative application,"* he is letting the cat out of the bag. [Lenin,



*"proletarian"* struggle. The example of Bolshevik hostility to the soviets spontaneously formed by workers during the 1905 Russian revolution is one of the best known examples of this tendency.

Murray Bookchin is worth quoting at length on this subject:

> *"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events ... In the beginning ... it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forces. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines* ***that reflect the very society it professes to oppose.*** *Despite its theoretical pretensions, it is a bourgeois organism, a miniature state, with an apparatus and a cadre whose function it is to* ***seize*** *power, not* ***dissolve*** *power. Rooted in the pre-revolutionary period, it assimilates all the forms, techniques and mentality of bureaucracy. Its membership is schooled in obedience and in the preconceptions of a rigid dogma and is taught to revere the leadership. The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation and egomania. This situation is worsened when the party participates in parliamentary elections. In election campaigns, the vanguard party models itself completely on existing bourgeois forms and even acquires the paraphernalia of the electoral party...*
>
> *"As the party expands, the distance between the leadership and the ranks inevitably increases. Its leaders not only become 'personages,' they lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation*

being in the vanguard of social struggle, the Leninist parties are often the last to recognise, let alone understand, the initial stirrings of important social movements and events. It is only once these movements have exploded in the streets that the self-proclaimed "vanguards" notice them and decide they require the party's leadership.

Part of this process are constant attempts to install their political program onto movements that they do not understand, movements that have proven to be successful using different tactics and methods of organisation. Rather than learn from the experiences of others, social movements are seen as raw material, as a source of new party members, to be used in order to advance the party rather than the autonomy and combativeness of the working class. This process was seen in the *"anti-globalisation"* or *"anti-capitalist"* movement at the end of the 20th century. This started without the help of these self-appointed vanguards, who once it appeared spent a lot of time trying to catch up with the movement while criticising its proven organisational principles and tactics.

The reasons for such behaviour are not too difficult to find. They lie in the organisational structure favoured by these parties and the mentality lying behind them. As anarchists have long argued, a centralised, top-down structure will simply be unresponsive to the needs of those in struggle. The inertia associated with the party hierarchy will ensure that it responds slowly to new developments and its centralised structure means that the leadership is isolated from what is happening on the ground and cannot respond appropriately. The underlying assumption of the vanguard party, namely that the party represents the interests of the working class, makes it unresponsive to new developments within the class struggle. As Lenin argued that spontaneous working class struggle tends to reformism, the leaders of a vanguard party automatically are suspicious of new developments which, by their very nature, rarely fit into previously agreed models of



**Op. Cit.**, p. 163] After all, *"modern society"* is capitalism, a class society. In such a society, it is understandable that self-management should not be applied as it strikes at the heart of class society and how it operates. That Lenin can appeal to *"modern society"* without recognising its class basis says a lot. The question becomes, if such a *"principle"* is valid for a class system, is it applicable in a socialist society and in the movement aiming to create such a society? Can we postpone the application of our ideas until *"after the revolution"* or can the revolution only occur when we apply our socialist principles in resisting class society?

In a nutshell, can the same set of organisational structures be used for the different ends? Can bourgeois structures be considered neutral or have they, in fact, evolved to ensure and protect minority rule? Ultimately, form and content are not independent of each other. Form and content adapt to fit each other and they cannot be divorced in reality. Thus, if the bourgeoisie embrace centralisation and representation they have done so because it fits perfectly with their specific form of class society. Neither centralisation and representation can undermine minority rule and, if they did, they would quickly be eliminated.

Interestingly, both Bukharin and Trotsky acknowledged that fascism had appropriated Bolshevik ideas. The former demonstrated at the 12th Congress of the Communist Party in 1923 how Italian fascism had *"adopted and applied in practice the experiences of the Russian revolution"* in terms of their *"methods of combat."* In fact, *"[i]f one regards them from the* ***formal*** *point of view, that is, from the point of view of the technique of their political methods, then one discovers in them a complete application of Bolshevik tactics… in the sense of the rapid concentration of forced [and] energetic action of a tightly structured military organisation."* [quoted by R. Pipes, **Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919–1924**, p. 253] The latter, in his uncompleted biography on Stalin noted that *"Mussolini stole from the Bolsheviks … Hitler imitated the*

*Bolsheviks and Mussolini."* [**Stalin**, vol. 2, p. 243] The question arises as to whether the same tactics and structures serve both the needs of fascist reaction **and** socialist revolution? Now, if Bolshevism can serve as a model for fascism, it must contain structural and functional elements which are also common to fascism. After all, no one has detected a tendency of Hitler or Mussolini, in their crusade against democracy, the organised labour movement and the left, to imitate the organisational principles of anarchism.

Surely we can expect decisive structural differences to exist between capitalism and socialism if these societies are to have different aims. Where one is centralised to facilitate minority rule, the other must be decentralised and federal to facilitate mass participation. Where one is top-down, the other must be from the bottom-up. If a *"socialism"* exists which uses bourgeois organisational elements then we should not be surprised if it turns out to be socialist in name only. The same applies to revolutionary organisations. As the anarchists of **Trotwatch** explain:

> *"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class."* [**Carry on Recruiting!**, p. 41]

If you have an organisation which celebrates centralisation, having an institutionalised *"leadership"* separate from the mass of members becomes inevitable. Thus the division of labour which exists in the capitalist workplace or state is created. Forms cannot and do not exist independently of people and so imply specific forms of social relationships



are created. As the aim of such organisations is to facilitate the creation of socialism, the obvious implication is that the revolutionary organisation must, itself, reflect the society it is trying to create. Clearly, then, the idea that how we organise as revolutionaries today can be considered somehow independent of the revolutionary process and the nature of post-capitalist society and its institutions cannot be maintained (particularly if the aim of the *"revolutionary"* organisation is to seize power on behalf of the working class).

As we argue elsewhere (see section J.3) anarchists argue for revolutionary groups based on self-management, federalism and decision making from below. In other words, we apply within our organisations the same principles as those which the working class has evolved in the course of its own struggles. Autonomy is combined with federalism, so ensuring co-ordination of decisions and activities is achieved from below upwards by means of mandated and recallable delegates. Effective co-operation is achieved as it is informed by and reflects the needs on the ground. Simply put, working class organisation and discipline — as exemplified by the workers' council or strike committee — represents a completely different thing from **capitalist** organisation and discipline, of which Leninists are constantly asking for more (albeit draped with the Red Flag and labelled *"revolutionary"*). And as we discuss in the next section, the Leninist model of top-down centralised parties is marked more by its failures than its successes, suggesting that not only is the vanguard model undesirable, it is also unnecessary.

## H.5.8 Are vanguard parties effective?

In a word, no. Vanguard parties have rarely been proven to be effective organs for fermenting revolutionary change which is, let us not forget, their stated purpose. Indeed, rather than

Therefore, as the **vanguard** the party represents the level to which the working class is supposed to reach then its organisational principles must, similarly, be those which the class must reach. As such, Harman's comments are incredulous. How we organise today is hardly irrelevant, particularly if the revolutionary organisation in question seeks (to use Lenin's words) to *"tak[e] full state power alone."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 94] These prejudices (and the political and organisational habits they generate) will influence the shaping of the *"workers' state"* by the party once it has taken power. This decisive influence of the party and its ideological as well as organisational assumptions can be seen when Trotsky argued in 1923 that *"the party created the state apparatus and can rebuild it anew ... from the party you get the state, but not the party from the state."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 161] This is to be expected, after all the aim of the party is to take, hold and execute power. Given that the vanguard party is organised as it is to ensure effectiveness and efficiency, why should we assume that the ruling party will not seek to recreate these organisational principles once in power? As the Russian Revolution proves, this is the case (see section H.6)

To claim how we organise under capitalism is not important to a revolutionary movement is simply not true. The way revolutionaries organise have an impact both on themselves and how they will view the revolution developing. An ideological prejudice for centralisation and "top-down" organisation will not disappear once the revolution starts. Rather, it will influence the way the party acts within it and, if it aims to seize power, how it will exercise that power once it has.

For these reasons anarchists stress the importance of building the new world in the shell of the old (see section H.1.6). All organisations create social relationships which shape their memberships. As the members of these parties will be part of the revolutionary process, they will influence how that revolution will develop and any "transitional" institutions which



within them. These social relationships shape those subject to them. Can we expect the same forms of authority to have different impacts simply because the organisation has *"socialist"* or *"revolutionary"* in its name? Of course not. It is for this reason that anarchists argue that only in a *"libertarian socialist movement the workers learn about non-dominating forms of association through creating and experimenting with forms such as libertarian labour organisations, which put into practice, through struggle against exploitation, principles of equality and free association."* [John Clark, **The Anarchist Moment**, p. 79]

As noted above, a *"democratic centralist"* party requires that the *"lower"* party bodies (cells, branches, etc.) should be subordinate to the higher ones (e.g. the central committee). The higher bodies are elected at the (usually) annual conference. As it is impossible to mandate for future developments, the higher bodies therefore are given carte blanche to determine policy which is binding on the whole party (hence the *"from top-down"* principle). In between conferences, the job of full time (ideally elected, but not always) officers is to lead the party and carry out the policy decided by the central committee. At the next conference, the party membership can show its approval of the leadership by electing another. The problems with this scheme are numerous:

> *"The first problem is the issue of hierarchy. Why should 'higher' party organs interpret party policy any more accurately than 'lower' ones? The pat answer is that the 'higher' bodies compromise the most capable and experienced members and are (from their lofty heights) in a better position to take an overall view on a given issue. In fact what may well happen is that, for example, central committee members may be more isolated from the outside world than mere branch members. This might ordinarily be the case because given the fact than*

> *many central committee members are full timers and therefore detached from more real issues such as making a living ...*" [ACF, **Marxism and its Failures**, p. 8]

Equally, in order that the *"higher"* bodies can evaluate the situation they need effective information from the *"lower"* bodies. If the *"lower"* bodies are deemed incapable of formulating their own policies, how can they be wise enough, firstly, to select the right leaders and, secondly, determine the appropriate information to communicate to the *"higher"* bodies? Given the assumptions for centralised power in the party, can we not see that *"democratic centralised"* parties will be extremely inefficient in practice as information and knowledge is lost in the party machine and whatever decisions which are reached at the top are made in ignorance of the real situation on the ground? As we discuss in section H.5.8, this is usually the fate of such parties.

Within the party, as noted, the role of *"professional revolutionaries"* (or *"full timers"*) is stressed. As Lenin argued, any worker which showed any talent must be removed from the workplace and become a party functionary. Is it surprising that the few Bolshevik cadres (i.e. professional revolutionaries) of working class origin soon lost real contact with the working class? Equally, what will their role **within** the party be? As we discuss in section H.5.12, their role in the Bolshevik party was essentially conservative in nature and aimed to maintain their own position.

That the anarchist critique of *"democratic centralism"* is valid, we need only point to the comments and analysis of numerous members (and often soon to be ex-members) of such parties. Thus we get a continual stream of articles discussing why specific parties are, in fact, *"bureaucratic centralist"* rather than "democratic centralist" and what is required to reform them. That every *"democratic centralist"* party in existence is



not that democratic does not hinder their attempts to create one which is. In a way, the truly *"democratic centralist"* party is the Holy Grail of modern Leninism. As we discuss in section H.5.10, their goal may be as mythical as that of the Arthurian legends.

## H.5.7 Is the way revolutionaries organise important?

As we discussed in the last section, anarchists argue that the way revolutionaries organise today is important. However, according to some of Lenin's followers, the fact that the "revolutionary" party is organised in a non-revolutionary manner does not matter. In the words of Chris Harman, a leading member of the British **Socialist Workers Party**, *"[e]xisting under capitalism, the revolutionary organisation [i.e. the vanguard party] will of necessity have a quite different structure to that of the workers' state that will arise in the process of overthrowing capitalism."* [**Party and Class**, p. 34]

However, in practice this distinction is impossible to make. If the party is organised in specific ways then it is so because this is conceived to be *"efficient," "practical"* and so on. Hence we find Lenin arguing against *"backwardness in organisation"* and that the *"point at issue is whether our ideological struggle is to have* ***forms of a higher type*** *to clothe it, forms of Party organisation binding on all."* Why would the "workers' state" be based on "backward" or "lower" kinds of organisational forms? If, as Lenin remarked, *"the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy"* was *"to proceed from the top downward"*, why would the party, once in power, reject its *"organisational principle"* in favour of one it thinks is *"opportunist," "primitive"* and so on? [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 389, p. 388 and pp. 396–7]

the *"atomisation"* or *"declassing"* of the proletariat. Leninist John Rees summarised this argument:

> *"The civil war had reduced industry to rubble. The working class base of the workers' state, mobilised time and again to defeat the Whites, the rock on which Bolshevik power stood, had disintegrated. The Bolsheviks survived three years of civil war and wars in intervention, but only at the cost of reducing the working class to an atomised, individualised mass, a fraction of its former size, and no longer able to exercise the collective power that it had done in 1917 … The bureaucracy of the workers' state was left suspended in mid-air, its class base eroded and demoralised. Such conditions could not help but have an effect on the machinery of the state and organisation of the Bolshevik Party."* [*"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 65]

It should be noted that this perspective originated in Lenin's arguments that the Russian proletariat had become "declassed." In 1921 it was the case that the proletariat, *"owning to the war and to the desperate poverty and ruin, has become declassed, i.e. dislodged from its class groove, and had ceased to exist as proletariat … the proletariat has disappeared."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 33, p. 66] However, unlike his later-day followers, Lenin was sure that while it *"would be absurd and ridiculous to deny that the fact that the proletariat is declassed is a handicap"* it could still *"fulfil its task of winning and holding state power."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 412] Since Lenin, this argument has been utilised repeatedly by Leninists to justify his regime as well as explaining both its authoritarianism and the rise of Stalinism.

It does, of course, contain an element of truth. The numbers of industrial workers **did** decrease dramatically between 1918 and 1921, particularly in Petrograd and Moscow (although the



to win over the majority of the party leadership to his position. However, this *"April conflict between Lenin and the general staff of the party was not the only one of its kind. Throughout the whole history of Bolshevism … all the leaders of the party at all the most important moments stood to the **right** of Lenin."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 305] As such, if "democratic centralism" had worked as intended, the whole party would have been arguing for incorrect positions the bulk of its existence (assuming, of course, that Lenin was correct most of the time).

For Trotsky, *"Lenin exerted influence not so much as an individual but because he embodied the influence of the class on the Party and of the Party on its machine."* Yet, this was the machine which Lenin had forged, which embodied his vision of how a "revolutionary" party should operate and was headed by him. To argue that the party machine was behind the party membership and the membership behind the class shows the bankruptcy of Lenin's organisational scheme. This "backwardness", moreover, indicates an independence of the party bureaucracy from the membership and the membership from the masses. As Lenin's constantly repeated aim was for the party to seize power (based on the dubious assumption that class power would only be expressed, indeed was identical to, party power) this independence held serious dangers, dangers which became apparent once this goal was achieved. This is confirmed when Trotsky asked the question *"by what miracle did Lenin manage in a few short weeks to turn the Party's course into a new channel?"* Significantly, he answers as follows: *"Lenin's personal attributes and the objective situation."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 299] No mention is made of the democratic features of the party organisation, which suggests that without Lenin the rank and file party members would not have been able to shift the weight of the party machine in their favour. Trotsky seemed close to admitting this:

> *"As often happens, a sharp cleavage developed between the classes in motion and the interests of the party machines. Even the Bolshevik Party cadres, who enjoyed the benefit of exceptional revolutionary training, were definitely inclined to disregard the masses and to identify their own special interests and the interests of the machine on the very day after the monarchy was overthrown."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 298]

Thus the party machine, which embodied the principles of "democratic centralism" proved less than able to the task assigned it in practice. Without Lenin, it is doubtful that the party membership would have overcome the party machine:

> *"Lenin was strong not only because he understood the laws of the class struggle but also because his ear was faultlessly attuned to the stirrings of the masses in motion. He represented not so much the Party machine as the vanguard of the proletariat. He was definitely convinced that thousands from among those workers who had borne the brunt of supporting the underground Party would now support him. The masses at the moment were more revolutionary than the Party, and the Party more revolutionary than its machine. As early as March the actual attitude of the workers and soldiers had in many cases become stormily apparent, and it was widely at variance with the instructions issued by all the parties, including the Bolsheviks."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 299]

Little wonder the local party groupings ignored the party machine, practising autonomy and initiative in the face of a party machine inclined to conservatism, inertia, bureaucracy



letariat by the party (and in practice, a few party leaders and justified by the privileged access they had to socialist ideology). Moreover, centralisation proved to be as disempowering and inefficient as Bakunin argued.

Sadly, far too many Marxists seem keen on repeating rather than learning from history while, at the same time, ignoring the awkward fact that anarchism's predictions were confirmed by the Bolshevik experience. It is not hard to conclude that another form of socialism was essential for the Russian revolution to have any chance of success. A decentralised socialism based on workers running their workplaces and the peasants controlling the land was not only possible but was being implemented by the people themselves. For the Bolsheviks, only a centralised planned economy was true socialism and, as a result, fought this alternative socialism and replaced it with a system reflecting that perspective. Yet socialism needs the mass participation of all in order to be created. Centralisation, by its very nature, limits that participation (which is precisely **why** ruling classes have always centralised power into states). As Russian Anarchist Voline argued, state power *"seeks more or less to take in its hands the reins of social life. It* ***predisposes the masses to passivity****, and all spirit of initiative is stifled by the very existence of power"* and so under state socialism the *"tremendous new creative forces which are latent in the masses thus remain unused."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 250] This cannot help have a negative impact on the development of the revolution and, as anarchists had long feared and predicted, it did.

## H.6.3 Were the Russian workers "declassed" and "atomised"?

A standard Leninist explanation for the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party (and subsequent rise of Stalinism) is based on

plement policies which reflected their prejudices in favour of centralism, nationalisation and party power. Unsurprisingly, this also undermined the genuine socialist tendencies which existed at the time and so the Bolshevik vision of socialism and democracy played a key role in the failure of the revolution. Therefore, the Leninist idea that politics of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution, that their policies during the revolution were a product purely of objective forces, is unconvincing. This is enforced by the awkward fact that the Bolshevik leaders *"justified what they were doing in theoretical terms, e.g. in whole books by Bukharin and Trotsky."* [Pirani, **The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24**, p. 9]

Remember, we are talking about the ideology of a ruling party and so it is more than just ideas for after the seizure of power, they became a part of the real social situation within Russia. Individually, party members assumed leadership posts in all spheres of social life and started to make decisions influenced by that ideology and its prejudices in favour of centralisation, the privileged role of the party, the top-down nature of decision making, the notion that socialism built upon state capitalism, amongst others. Then there is the hierarchical position which the party leaders found themselves. *"If it is true that people's real social existence determines their consciousness,"* argued Cornelius Castoriadis, *"it is from that moment illusory to expect the Bolshevik party to act in any other fashion than according to its real social position. The real social situation of the Party is that of a directorial organ, and its point of view toward this society henceforth is not necessarily the same as the one this society has toward itself."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 3, p. 97]

Ultimately, the Bolshevik's acted as if they were trying to prove Bakunin's critique of Marxism was right (see section H.1.1). Implementing a dictatorship of the proletariat in a country where the majority were not proletarians failed while, for the proletariat, it quickly became a dictatorship **over** the pro-



and remoteness. This conflict between the party machine and the principles it was based on and the needs of the revolution and party membership was expressed continually throughout 1917:

> *"In short, the success of the revolution called for action against the 'highest circles of the party,' who, from February to October, utterly failed to play the revolutionary role they ought to have taken in theory. The masses themselves made the revolution, with or even against the party — this much at least was clear to Trotsky the historian. But far from drawing the correct conclusion, Trotsky the theorist continued to argue that the masses are incapable of making a revolution without a leader."* [Daniel & Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Op. Cit.**, p. 188]

Looking at the development of the revolution from April onwards, we are struck by the sluggishness of the party hierarchy. At every revolutionary upsurge, the party simply was not to the task of responding to the needs of masses and the local party groupings closest to them. The can be seen in June, July and October itself. At each turn, the rank and file groupings or Lenin had to constantly violate the principles of their own party in order to be effective.

For example, when discussing the cancellation by the central committee of a demonstration planned for June 10$^{th}$ by the Petrograd Bolsheviks, the unresponsiveness of the party hierarchy can be seen. The *"speeches by Lenin and Zinoviev [justifying their actions] by no means satisfied the Petersburg Committee. If anything, it appears that their explanations served to strengthen the feeling that at best the party leadership had acted irresponsibly and incompetently and was seriously out of touch with reality."* Indeed, many *"blamed the Central Committee for taking so long to respond to Military Organisation appeals for a*

*demonstration.*" During the discussions in late June, 1917, on whether to take direct action against the Provisional Government there was a *"wide gulf"* between lower organs evaluations of the current situation and that of the Central Committee. [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88, p. 92 and p. 129] Indeed, among the delegates from the Bolshevik military groups, only Lashevich (an old Bolshevik) spoke in favour of the Central Committee position and he noted that *"[f]requently it is impossible to make out where the Bolshevik ends and the Anarchist begins."* [quoted by Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

In the July days, the breach between the local party groups and the central committee increased. This spontaneous uprising was opposed to by the Bolshevik leadership, in spite of the leading role of their own militants (along with anarchists) in fermenting it. While calling on their own activists to restrain the masses, the party leadership was ignored by the rank and file membership who played an active role in the event. Sickened by being asked to play the role of *"fireman"*, the party militants rejected party discipline in order to maintain their credibility with the working class. Rank and file activists, pointing to the snowballing of the movement, showed clear dissatisfaction with the Central Committee. One argued that it *"was not aware of the latest developments when it made its decision to oppose the movement into the streets."* Ultimately, the Central Committee appeal *"for restraining the masses ... was removed from"* **Pravda** *"and so the party's indecision was reflected by a large blank space on page one."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 150, p. 159 and p. 175] Ultimately, the indecisive nature of the leadership can be explained by the fact it did not think it could seize state power for itself (*"the state of popular consciousness ... made impossible the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in July."* [Trotsky, **History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 81]).

The indecision of the party hierarchy did have an effect, of course. While the anarchists at Kronstadt looked at the demonstration as the start of an uprising, the Bolsheviks there were



mandered the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets and pushed them into revolt then their links with the countryside would not have been so weak and sensible policies which reflected the reality of village life may have been implemented.

Nor did it help that the Bolsheviks undermined Russia's extensive network of consumer co-operatives because they were associated with the moderate socialists. It should also be noted that the peasants (or "kulaks") were blamed for food shortages when problems on the transport network or general bureaucratic mismanagement was the real reason. That there is *"is little evidence to support the Leninist view"* that kulaks were behind the peasant resistance and revolts resulting from the Bolshevik food requisition policies should go without saying. [Figes, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155]

Given all this, it is not hard to conclude that alternatives existed to Bolshevik policies — particularly as even the Bolsheviks had to admit in 1919 their decisions of the previous year were wrong! The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1921 (under immense popular pressure) in conditions even worse than those in 1918, for example. Since NEP allowed wage labour, it was a step backwards from the ideas of the peasantry itself, peasant based parties like the SRs and Left-SRs as well as such rebels as the Kronstadt sailors. A more socialistic policy, recognising that peasants exchanging the product of their labour was **not** capitalism, could have been implemented much earlier but Bolshevik ignorance and disdain for the peasantry combined with a false belief that centralised state control was more efficient and more socialist ensured that this option was unlikely to be pursued, particularly given the collapse of industrial production Bolshevik state capitalist policies helped deepen.

The pre-revolution Bolshevik vision of a socialist system was fundamentally centralised and, consequently, top-down. This was what was implemented post-October, with disastrous results. At each turning point, the Bolsheviks tended to im-

Alec Nove noted *"at certain moments even the government itself was compelled to 'legalise' illegal trade. For example, in September 1918 the wicked speculators and meshochniki [bag-men] were authorised to take sacks weighing up to 1.5 poods (54 lbs.) to Petrograd and Moscow, and in this month ... they supplied four times more than did the official supply organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

Yet rather than encourage this kind of self-activity, the Bolsheviks denounced it as speculation and did all in their power to suppress it (this included armed pickets around the towns and cities). This, of course, drove the prices on the black market higher due to the risk of arrest and imprisonment this entailed and so the regime made the situation worse: *"it was in fact quite impossible to live on the official rations, and the majority of the supplies even of bread come through the black market. The government was never able to prevent this market from functioning, but did sufficiently disrupt it to make food shortages worse."* By January 1919, only 19% of all food came through official channels and rose to around 30% subsequently. Official sources, however, announced an increase in grain, with total procurements amounting to 30 million poods in the agricultural year 1917–18 to 110 million poods in 1918–19. [Nove, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55 and p. 54] Needless to say, the average worker in the towns saw nothing of this improvement in official statistics (and this in spite of dropping urban populations!).

In the face of repression (up to and including torture and the destruction of whole villages), the peasantry responded by both cutting back on the amount of grain planted (something compounded by the state often taking peasant reserves for next season) and rising in insurrection. Unsurprisingly, opposition groups called for free trade in an attempt to both feed the cities and stop the alienation of the peasantry from the revolution. The Bolsheviks denounced the call, before being forced to accept it in 1921 due to mass pressure from below. Three years of bad policies had made a bad situation worse. Moreover, if the Bolsheviks had not ignored and alienated the Left-SRs, gerry-



*"wavering indecisively in the middle"* between them and the Left-Social Revolutionaries who saw it as a means of applying pressure on the government. This was because they were *"hamstrung by the indecision of the party Central Committee."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] Little wonder so many Bolshevik party organisations developed and protected their own autonomy and ability to act!

Significantly, one of the main Bolshevik groupings which helped organise and support the July uprising, the Military Organisation, started their own paper after the Central Committee had decreed after the failed revolt that neither it, nor the Petersburg Committee, should be allowed to have one. It *"angrily insisted on what it considered its just prerogatives"* and in *"no uncertain terms it affirmed its right to publish an independent newspaper and formally protested what is referred to as 'a system of persecution and repression of an extremely peculiar character which had begun with the election of the new Central Committee.'"* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 227] The Central Committee backed down, undoubtedly due to the fact it could not enforce its decision.

This was but one example of what the Cohn-Bendit brothers pointed to, namely that *"five months after the Revolution and three months before the October uprising, the masses were still governing themselves, and the Bolshevik vanguard simply had to toe the line."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 186] Within that vanguard, the central committee proved to be out of touch with the rank and file, who ignored it rather than break with their fellow workers.

Even by October, the party machine still lagged behind the needs of the revolution. In fact, Lenin could only impose his view by going over the head of the Central Committee. According to Trotsky's account, *"this time he [wa]s not satisfied with furious criticism"* of the *"ruinous Fabianism of the Petrograd leadership"* and *"by way of protest he resign[ed] from the Central Committee."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 131] Trotsky quoted Lenin as follows:

> *"I am compelled to request permission to withdraw from the Central Committee, which I hereby do, and leave myself freedom of agitation in the lower ranks of the party and at the party congress."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 131]

Thus the October revolution was precipitated by a blatant violation of the principles Lenin spent his life advocating. Indeed, if someone else other than Lenin had done this we are sure that Lenin, and his numerous followers, would have dismissed it as the action of a *"petty-bourgeois intellectual"* who cannot handle party *"discipline."* This is itself is significant, as is the fact that he decided to appeal to the *"lower ranks"* of the party — rather than being "democratic" the party machine effectively blocked communication and control from the bottom-up. Looking to the more radical party membership, he *"could only impose his view by going over the head of his Central Committee."* [Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] He made sure to send his letter of protest to *"the Petrograd and Moscow committees"* and also made sure that *"copies fell into the hands of the more reliable party workers of the district locals."* By early October (and *"over the heads of the Central Committee"*) he wrote *"directly to the Petrograd and Moscow committees"* calling for insurrection. He also *"appealed to a Petrograd party conference to speak a firm word in favour of insurrection."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 131 and p. 132]

In October, Lenin had to fight what he called *"a wavering"* in the *"upper circles of the party"* which lead to a *"sort of dread of the struggle for power, an inclination to replace this struggle with resolutions protests, and conferences."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132] For Trotsky, this represented *"almost a direct pitting of the party against the Central Committee,"* required because *"it was a question of the fate of the revolution"* and so *"all other considerations fell away."* On October 8th, when Lenin addressed the Bolshevik delegates of the forthcoming North-



1 per cent of the total of peasant households employed more than one labourer. The revolution itself had an equalising effect on peasant life, and during 1917 *"average size of landholding fell, the extremes of riches and poverty diminished."* [Alec Nove, **An economic history of the USSR: 1917–1991**, p. 103 and p. 102]

By 1919, even Lenin had to admit that the policies pursued in 1918, against the advice and protest of the Left-SRs, were failures and had alienated the peasantry. While admitting to errors, it remains the case that it was Lenin himself, more than anyone, who was responsible for them. Still, there was no fundamental change in policy for another two years. Defenders of the Bolsheviks argue that the Bolshevik had no alternative but to use violence to seize food from the peasants to feed the starving cities. However, this fails to acknowledge two key facts. Firstly, Bolshevik industrial policy made the collapse of industry worse and so the lack of goods to trade for grain was, in part, a result of the government. It is likely that if the factory committees had been fully supported then the lack of goods to trade may been reduced. Secondly, it cannot be said that the peasants did not wish to trade with the cities. They were, but at a fair price as can be seen from the fact that throughout Russia peasants with bags of grains on their backs went to the city to exchange them for goods. In fact, in the Volga region official state sources indicate *"that grain-hoarding and the black market did not become a major problem until the beginning of 1919, and that during the autumn the peasants, in general, were 'wildly enthusiastic to sell as much grain as possible' to the government."* This changed when the state reduced its fixed prices by 25% and *"it became apparent that the new government would be unable to pay for grain procurements in industrial goods."* [Orlando Figes, **Peasant Russia, Civil War**, p. 253 and p. 254] Thus, in that region at least, it was **after** the introduction of central state food requisition in January 1919 that peasants started to hoard food. Thus Bolshevik policy made the situation worse. And as

> *"Only free initiative and popular participation in the affairs of the revolution can prevent the terrible blunders committed in Russia. For instance, with fuel only a hundred versts [about sixty-six miles] from Petrograd there would have been no necessity for that city to suffer from cold had the workers' economic organisations of Petrograd been free to exercise their initiative for the common good. The peasants of the Ukraina would not have been hampered in the cultivation of their land had they had access to the farm implements stacked up in the warehouses of Kharkov and other industrial centres awaiting orders from Moscow for their distribution. These are characteristic examples of Bolshevik governmentalism and centralisation, which should serve as a warning to the workers of Europe and America of the destructive effects of Statism."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 253]

If Bolshevik industrial policy reflected a basic ignorance of local conditions and the nature of industry, their agricultural policies were even worse. Part of the problem was that the Bolsheviks were simply ignorant of peasant life (as one historian put it, *"the deeply held views of the party on class struggle had overcome the need for evidence."* [Christopher Read, **From Tsar to Soviet**, p. 225]). Lenin, for example, thought that inequality in the villages was much, much higher than it actually was, a mistaken assumption which drove the unpopular and counter-productive "Committees of Poor Peasants" (kombedy) policy of 1918. Rather than a countryside dominated by a few rich kulaks (peasants who employed wage labour), Russian villages were predominantly pre-capitalist and based on actual peasant farming (i.e., people who worked their land themselves). While the Bolsheviks attacked kulaks, they, at best, numbered only 5 to 7 per cent of the peasantry and even this is high as only



ern Congress of Soviets on this subject, he did so *"personally"* as there *"was no party decision"* and the *"higher institutions of the party had not yet expressed themselves."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 132–3 and p. 133] Ultimately, the Central Committee came round to Lenin's position but they did so under pressure of means at odds with the principles of the party.

This divergence between the imagine and reality of the Bolsheviks explains their success. If the party had applied or had remained true to the principles of "democratic centralism" it is doubtful that it would have played an important role in the movement. As Alexander Rabinowitch argues, Bolshevik organisational unity and discipline is *"vastly exaggerated"* and, in fact, Bolshevik success in 1917 was down to *"the party's internally relatively democratic, tolerant, and decentralised structure and method of operation, as well as its essentially open and mass character — in striking contrast to the traditional Leninist model."* In 1917, he goes on, *"subordinate party bodies like the Petersburg Committee and the Military Organisation were permitted considerable independence and initiative ... Most importantly, these lower bodies were able to tailor their tactics and appeals to suit their own particular constituencies amid rapidly changing conditions. Vast numbers of new members were recruited into the party ... The newcomers included tens of thousands of workers and soldiers ... who knew little, if anything, about Marxism and cared nothing about party discipline."* For example, while the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* was *"officially withdrawn by the Sixth [Party] Congress in late July, this change did not take hold at the local level."* [**The Bolsheviks Come to Power**, p. 311, p. 312 and p. 313]

It is no exaggeration to argue that if any member of a current vanguard party acted as the Bolshevik rank and file did in 1917, they would quickly be expelled (this probably explains why no such party has been remotely successful since). However, this ferment from below was quickly undermined within the party with the start of the Civil War. It is from this period

when "democratic centralism" was actually applied within the party and clarified as an organisational principle:

> *"It was quite a turnabout since the anarchic days before the Civil War. The Central Committee had always advocated the virtues of obedience and co-operation; but the rank-and-filers of 1917 had cared little about such entreaties as they did about appeals made by other higher authorities. The wartime emergency now supplied an opportunity to expatiate on this theme at will."* [Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

Service stresses that *"it appears quite remarkable how quickly the Bolsheviks, who for years had talked idly about a strict hierarchy of command inside the party, at last began to put ideas into practice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96]

In other words, the conversion of the Bolshevik party into a fully fledged *"democratic centralist"* party occurred during the degeneration of the Revolution. This was both a consequence of the rising authoritarianism within the party, state and society as well as one of its causes so it is quite ironic that the model used by modern day followers of Lenin is that of the party during the decline of the revolution, not its peak. This is not surprising. Once in power, the Bolshevik party imposed a state capitalist regime onto the Russian people. Can it be surprising that the party structure which it developed to aid this process was also based on bourgeois attitudes and organisation? The party model advocated by Lenin may not have been very effective during a revolution but it was exceedingly effective at promoting hierarchy and authority in the post-revolutionary regime. It simply replaced the old ruling elite with another, made up of members of the radical intelligentsia and the odd ex-worker or ex-peasant.

This was due to the hierarchical and top-down nature of the party Lenin had created. While the party base was



activity of the people was replaced by the bureaucratic machinery of the state. The Bolshevik onslaught on workers' control, like their attacks on soviet democracy and workers' protest, undoubtedly engendered apathy and cynicism in the workforce, alienating even more the positive participation required for building socialism which the Bolshevik mania for centralisation had already marginalised. The negative results of Bolshevik economic policy confirmed Kropotkin's prediction that a revolution which *"establish[ed] a strongly centralised Government"*, leaving it to *"draw up a statement of all the produce"* in a country and *"then **command** that a prescribed quantity"* of some good *"be sent to such a place on such a day"* and *"stored in particular warehouses"* would *"not merely"* be *"undesirable, but it never could by any possibility be put into practice." "In any case,"* Kropotkin stressed, *"a system which springs up spontaneously, under stress of immediate need, will be infinitely preferable to anything invented between four-walls by hide-bound theorists sitting on any number of committees."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 82–3 and p. 75]

Some Bolsheviks were aware of the problems. One left-wing Communist, Osinskii, concluded that *"his six weeks in the provinces had taught him that the centre must rely on strong regional and provincial councils, since they were more capable than was the centre of managing the nationalised sector."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] However, Marxist ideology seemed to preclude even finding the words to describe a possible solution to the problems faced by the regime: *"I stand not for a local point of view and not for bureaucratic centralism, but for organised centralism, — I cannot seem to find the actual word just now, — a more balanced centralism."* [Osinskii, quoted by Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] Any anarchist would know that the word he was struggling to find was federalism! Little wonder Goldman concluded that anarcho-syndicalism, not nationalisation, could solve the problems facing Russia:

an abstract "collective" response via the state, which turned the workers into isolated and atomised individuals. As such, the Bolsheviks provided a good example to support Malatesta's argument that *"if ... one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government ... it follows... that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 38–9] Can it be surprising, then, that Bolshevik policies aided the atomisation of the working class by replacing collective organisation and action by state bureaucracy?

The negative impact of Bolshevik ideology showed up in other areas of the economy as well. For example, the Leninist fetish that bigger was better resulted in the *"waste of scare resources"* as the *"general shortage of fuel and materials in the city took its greatest toll on the largest enterprises, whose overhead expenditures for heating the plant and firing the furnaces were proportionately greater than those for smaller enterprises. This point ... was recognised later. Not until 1919 were the regime's leaders prepared to acknowledge that small enterprises, under the conditions of the time, might be more efficient in using resources; and not until 1921 did a few Bolsheviks theorists grasp the economic reasons for this apparent violation of their standing assumption that larger units were inherently more productive."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106] Given how disrupted transport was and how scare supplies were, this kind of ideologically generated mistake could not fail to have substantial impact.

Post-October Bolshevik policy is a striking confirmation of the anarchist argument that a centralised structure would stifle the initiative of the masses and their own organs of self-management. Not only was it disastrous from a revolutionary perspective, it was hopelessly inefficient. The constructive self-



largely working class, the leadership was not. Full-time revolutionaries, they were either middle-class intellectuals or (occasionally) ex-workers and (even rarer) ex-peasants who had left their class to become part of the party machine. Even the delegates at the party congresses did not truly reflect class basis of the party membership. For example, the number of delegates was still dominated by white-collar or others (59.1% to 40.9%) at the sixth party congress at the end of July 1917. [Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 160] So while the party gathered more working class members in 1917, it cannot be said that this was reflected in the party leadership which remained dominated by non-working class elements. Rather than being a genuine working class organisation, the Bolshevik party was a hierarchical group headed by non-working class elements whose working class base could not effectively control them even during the revolution in 1917. It was only effective because these newly joined and radicalised working class members ignored their own party structure and its defining ideology.

After the revolution, the Bolsheviks saw their membership start to decrease. Significantly, *"the decline in numbers which occurred from early 1918 onwards"* started happening *"contrary to what is usually assumed, some months before the Central Committee's decree in midsummer that the party should be purged of its 'undesirable' elements."* These lost members reflected two things. Firstly, the general decline in the size of the industrial working class. This meant that the radicalised new elements from the countryside which had flocked to the Bolsheviks in 1917 returned home. Secondly, the lost of popular support due to the realities of the Bolshevik regime. This can be seen from the fact that while the Bolsheviks were losing members, the Left SRS almost doubled in size to 100,000 (the Mensheviks claimed to have a similar number). Rather than non-proletarians leaving, *"[i]t is more probable by far that it was industrial workers who were leaving in droves. After all, it would have been strange if the growing unpopularity of*

*Sovnarkom in factory milieu had been confined exclusively to non-Bolsheviks.*" Unsurprisingly, given its position in power, *"[a]s the proportion of working-class members declined, so that of entrants from the middle-class rose; the steady drift towards a party in which industrial workers no longer numerically predominated was under way.*" By late 1918 membership started to increase again but *"[m]ost newcomers were not of working-class origin ... the proportion of Bolsheviks of working-class origin fell from 57 per cent at the year's beginning to 48 per cent at the end.*" It should be noted that it was not specified how many were classed as having working-class origin were still employed in working-class jobs. [Robert Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70, pp. 70–1 and p. 90] A new ruling elite was thus born, thanks to the way vanguard parties are structured and the application of vanguardist principles which had previously been ignored.

In summary, the experience of the Russian Revolution does not, in fact, show the validity of the "vanguard" model. The Bolshevik party in 1917 played a leading role in the revolution only insofar as its members violated its own organisational principles (Lenin included). Faced with a real revolution and an influx of more radical new members, the party had to practice anarchist ideas of autonomy, local initiative and the ignoring of central orders which had no bearing to reality on the ground. When the party did try to apply the top-down and hierarchical principles of "democratic centralism" it failed to adjust to the needs of the moment. Moreover, when these principles were finally applied they helped ensure the degeneration of the revolution. This was to be expected, given the nature of vanguardism and the Bolshevik vision of socialism.



noted that the politics of the leading members of the factory committee movement also played its part. While the committees expressed a spontaneous anarchism, almost instinctively moving towards libertarian ideas, the actual influence of conscious anarchists was limited. Most of the leaders of the movement were, or became, Bolsheviks and, as such, shared many of the statist and centralistic assumptions of the party leadership as well as accepting party discipline. As such, they did not have the theoretical accruement to resist their leadership's assault on the factory committees and, as a result, did integrate them into the trade unions when demanded.

As well as advocating one-man management, Lenin's proposals also struck at the heart of workers' power in other ways. For example, he argued that *"we must raise the question of piecework and apply it and test in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system"*. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 258] As Leninist Tony Cliff noted, *"the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th[e] unity [of workers as a class]. One of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems.*" He added that these were used by the Nazis and the Stalinists *"for the same purpose."* [**State Capitalism in Russia**, pp. 18–9] Obviously piece-work is different when Lenin introduces it!

Other policies undermined working class collectivity. Banning trade helped undermine a collective response to the problems of exchange between city and country. For example, a delegation of workers from the Main Workshops of the Nikolaev Railroad to Moscow reported to a well-attended meeting that *"the government had rejected their request [to obtain permission to buy food collectively] arguing that to permit the free purchase of food would destroy its efforts to come to grips with hunger by establishing a 'food dictatorship.'"* [David Mandel, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power**, p. 392] Bolshevik ideology replaced collective working class action with

*'urgent' delegations and submerged in paperwork, even the most committed supporters of the revolution — perhaps one should say* ***especially*** *the most committed — felt impelled to act independently to get what workers and factories needed, even if this circumvented party directives."* [William G. Rosenberg, *"The Social Background to Tsektran,"* pp. 349–373, **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 357] *"Requisition and confiscation of resources,"* as Malle notes, *"largely undertaken by the* ***glavki****, worked against any possible territorial network of complementary industries which might have been more efficient in reducing delays resulting from central financing, central ordering, central supply and delivery."* By integrating the factory committees into a centralised state structure, this kind of activity became harder to do and, moreover, came up against official resistance and opposition. Significantly, due to *"the run-down of large-scale industry and the bureaucratic methods applied to production orders"* the Red Army turned to small-scale workplaces to supply personal equipment. These workplaces *"largely escaped the* ***glavk*** *administration"* and *"allowed the Bolsheviks to support a well equipped army amidst general distress and disorganisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251, p. 477 and p. 502]

Needless to say, Lenin never wavered in his support for one-man management nor in his belief in the efficiency of centralism to solve all problems, particularly the problems it itself created in abundance. Nor did his explicit call to reproduce capitalist social relations in production cause him any concern for, if the primary issue were property and not who **manages** the means of production, then factory committees are irrelevant in determining the socialist nature of the economy. Equally, if (as with Engels) all forms of organisation are inherently authoritarian then it does not fundamentally matter whether that authority is exercised by an elected factory committee or an appointed dictatorial manager (see section H.4). And it must be



# H.6 Why did the Russian Revolution fail?

The greatest myth of Marxism must surely be the idea that the Russian Revolution failed solely due to the impact of objective factors. While the date Leninists consider the revolution to have become beyond reform varies (over time it has moved backwards towards 1917 as the authoritarianism under Lenin and Trotsky has become better known), the actual reasons are common. For Leninists, the failure of the revolution was the product of such things as civil war, foreign intervention, economic collapse and the isolation and backwardness of Russia and **not** Bolshevik ideology. Bolshevik authoritarianism, then, was forced upon the party by difficult objective circumstances. It follows that there are no fundamental problems with Leninism and so it is a case of simply applying it again, hopefully in more fortuitous circumstances.

Anarchists are not impressed by this argument and we will show why by refuting common Leninist explanations for the failure of the revolution. For anarchists, Bolshevik ideology played its part, creating social structures (a new state and centralised economic organisations) which not only disempowered the masses but also made the objective circumstances being faced much worse. Moreover, we argue, vanguardism could not help turn the rebels of 1917 into the ruling elite of 1918. We explore these arguments and the evidence for them in this section.

For those who argue that the civil war provoked Bolshevik policies, the awkward fact is that many of the features of

war communism, such as the imposition of one-man management and centralised state control of the economy, were already apparent before war communism. As one historian argues, *"[f]rom the first days of Bolshevik power there was only a weak correlation between the extent of 'peace' and the mildness or severity of Bolshevik rule, between the intensity of the war and the intensity of proto-war communist measures ... Considered in ideological terms there was little to distinguish the 'breathing space' (April-May 1918) from the war communism that followed."* Unsurprisingly, then, *"the breathing space of the first months of 1920 after the victories over Kolchak and Denikin ... saw their intensification and the militarisation of labour"* and, in fact, *"no serious attempt was made to review the aptness of war communist policies."* Ideology *"constantly impinged on the choices made at various points of the civil war ... Bolshevik authoritarianism cannot be ascribed simply to the Tsarist legacy or to adverse circumstances."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 24, p. 27 and p. 30] The inherent tendencies of Bolshevism were revealed by the civil war, a war which only accelerated the development of what was implicit (and, often, not so implicit) in Bolshevik ideology and its vision of socialism, the state and the role of the party.

Thus *"the effective conclusion of the Civil War at the beginning of 1920 was followed by a more determined and comprehensive attempt to apply these so-called War Communism policies rather than their relaxation"* and so the *"apogee of the War Communism economy occurred after the Civil War was effectively over."* With the fighting over Lenin *"forcefully raised the introduction of one-man management ... Often commissars fresh from the Red Army were drafted into management positions in the factories."* By the autumn of 1920, one-man management was in 82% of surveyed workplaces. This *"intensification of War Communism labour policies would not have been a significant development if they had continued to be applied in the same haphazard manner as in 1919, but in early 1920 the Communist Party*



*authorities." "Hypercentralisation"*, ironically, *"multiplied the lines of command and accountability, which ultimately reduced central control."* For example, one small condensed milk plan, employing fewer than 15 workers, *"became the object of a months-long competition among six organisations."* Moreover, the **glavki** *"were filled with former owners."* Yet *"throughout 1919, as the economic crisis grew worse and the war emergency sharper the leadership strengthened the powers of the **glavki** in the interests of centralisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68, p. 69, p. 70 and p. 69]

A clearer example of the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution would be hard to find. While the situation was pretty chaotic in early 1918, this does not prove that the factory committees' socialism was not the most efficient way of running things under the (difficult) circumstances. Unless of course, like the Bolsheviks, you have a dogmatic belief that centralisation is always more efficient. That favouring the factory committees, as anarchists stressed then and now, could have been a possible solution to the economic problems being faced is not utopian. After all rates of *"output and productivity began to climb steadily after"* January 1918 and *"[i]n some factories, production doubled or tripled in the early months of 1918 ... Many of the reports explicitly credited the factory committees for these increases."* [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy**, p. 109] Another expert notes that there is *"evidence that until late 1919, some factory committees performed managerial tasks successfully. In some regions factories were still active thanks to their workers' initiatives in securing raw materials."* [Malle, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

Moreover, given how inefficient the Bolshevik system was, it was only the autonomous self-activity at the base which keep it going. Thus the Commissariat of Finance was *"not only bureaucratically cumbersome, but [it] involved mountainous accounting problems"* and *"with the various offices of the Sovnarkhoz and commissariat structure literally swamped with*

*two hundred or so were presumed to be nationalised but were not registered as such. In fact, well over two thousand enterprises had been taken over by this time."* The *"centre's information was sketchy at best"* and *"efforts by the centre to exert its power more effectively would provoke resistance from local authorities."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 58–9] This kind of clashing could not help but occur when the centre had no real knowledge nor understanding of local conditions:

> *"Organisations with independent claims to power frequently ignored it. It was deluged with work of an ad hoc character … Demands for fuel and supplies piled up. Factories demanded instructions on demobilisation and conversion. Its presidium … scarcely knew what its tasks were, other than to direct the nationalisation of industry. Control over nationalisation was hard to obtain, however. Although the SEC intended to plan branch-wide nationalisations, it was overwhelmed with requests to order the nationalisation of individual enterprises. Generally it resorted to the method, for want of a better one, of appointing a commissar to carry out each act of nationalisation. These commissars, who worked closely with the Cheka, had almost unlimited powers over both workers and owners, and acted largely on their own discretion."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61–2]

Unsurprisingly, *"[r]esentment of the **glavki** was strongest where local authorities had attained a high level of competence in co-ordinating local production. They were understandably distressed when orders from central organs disrupted local production plans."* Particularly given that the centre *"drew up plans for developing or reorganising the economy of a region, either in ignorance, or against the will, of the local*



*leadership was no longer distracted by the Civil War from concentrating its thoughts and efforts on the formulation and implementation of its labour policies."* While the *" experience of the Civil War was one factor predisposing communists towards applying military methods"* to the economy in early 1920, *"ideological considerations were also important."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 2, p. 17, p. 15, p. 30, p. 17 and p. 11]

So it seems incredulous for Leninist John Rees to assert, for example, that *"[w]ith the civil war came the need for stricter labour discipline and for … 'one man management'. Both these processes developed lock step with the war."* [*"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 43] As we discuss in the next section, Lenin was advocating both of these **before** the outbreak of civil war in May 1918 **and** after it was effectively over. Indeed he explicitly, both before and after the civil war, stressed that these policies were being implemented because the lack of fighting meant that the Bolsheviks could turn their full attention to building socialism. How these facts can be reconciled with claims of policies being in *"lock step"* with the civil war is hard to fathom.

Part of the problem is the rampant confusion within Leninist circles as to when the practices condemned as Stalinism actually started. For example, Chris Harman (of the UK's SWP) in his summary of the rise Stalinism asserted that after *"Lenin's illness and subsequent death"* the *"principles of October were abandoned one by one."* Yet the practice of, and ideological commitment to, party dictatorship, one-man management in industry, banning opposition groups/parties (as well as factions within the Communist Party), censorship, state repression of strikes and protests, piece-work, Taylorism, the end of independent trade unions and a host of other crimes against socialism were all implemented under Lenin and normal practice at the time of his death. In other words, the *"principles of October"* were abandoned under, and by, Lenin. Which, incidentally, explains why, Trotsky *"continued to his death to harbour the illusion that*

*somehow, despite the lack of workers' democracy, Russia was a 'workers' state.'"* [**Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 14 and p. 20] Simply put, there had been no workers' democracy when Trotsky held state power and he considered that regime a *"workers' state"*. The question arises why Harman thinks Lenin's Russia was some kind of "workers' state" if workers' democracy is the criteria by which such things are to be judged.

From this it follows that, unlike Leninists, anarchists do not judge a regime by who happens to be in office. A capitalist state does not become less capitalist just because a social democrat happens to be prime minister or president. Similarly, a regime does not become state capitalist just because Stalin is in power rather than Lenin. While the Marxist analysis concentrates on the transfer of state power from one regime to another, the anarchist one focuses on the transfer of power from the state and bosses to working class people. What makes a regime socialist is the social relationships it has, not the personal opinions of those in power. Thus if the social relationships under Lenin are similar to those under Stalin, then the nature of the regime is similar. That Stalin's regime was far more brutal, oppressive and exploitative than Lenin's does not change the underlying nature of the regime. As such, Chomsky is right to point to *"the techniques of use of terminology to delude"* with respect to the Bolshevik revolution. Under Lenin and Trotsky, *"a popular revolution was taken over by a managerial elite who immediately dismantled all the socialist institutions."* They used state power to *"create a properly managed society, run by smart intellectuals, where everybody does his job and does what he's told ... That's Leninism. That's* ***the exact opposite of socialism****. If socialism means anything, it means workers' control of production and then on from there. That's the first thing they destroyed. So why do we call it socialism?"* [**Language and Politics**, p. 537]

To refute in advance one obvious objection to our argument, the anarchist criticism of the Bolsheviks is **not** based on the



logic centralisation were raised: *"there was a lot of talk about scarcity of raw materials, while small factories and mills were stuffed with them in some provinces: what's better, to let work go on, or to make plans?"* These *"expressed feelings ... about the inefficiency of the* ***glavk*** *system and the waste which was visible locally."* Indeed, *"the inefficiency of central financing seriously jeopardised local activity."* While *"the centre had displayed a great deal of conservatism and routine thinking,"* the localities *"had already found ways of rationing raw materials, a measure which had not yet been decided upon at the centre."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.269, p. 270 and pp. 272–3]

This did not result in changes as such demands *"challenged ... the central directives of the party"* which *"approved the principles on which the* ***glavk*** *system was based"* and *"the maximum centralisation of production."* Even the *"admission that some of the largest works had been closed down, owning to the scarcity of raw materials and fuel, did not induce the economists of the party to question the validity of concentration, although in Russia at the time impediments due to lack of transport jeopardised the whole idea of convergence of all productive activity in a few centres."* The party leadership *"decided to concentrate the tasks of economic reconstruction in the hands of the higher organs of the state."* Sadly, *"the* ***glavk*** *system in Russia did not work ... Confronted with production problems, the central managers needed the collaboration of local organs, which they could not obtain both because of reciprocal suspicion and because of a lack of an efficient system of information, communications and transport. But the failure of* ***glavkism*** *did not bring about a reconsideration of the problems of economic organisation ... On the contrary, the ideology of centralisation was reinforced."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271 and p. 275]

The failings of centralisation can be seen from the fact that in September 1918, the Supreme Economic Council (SEC) chairman reported that *"approximately eight hundred enterprises were known to have been nationalised and another*

*"comparative efficiency of factories remaining outside the **glavki** sphere increased."* In summary, the *"shortcomings of the central administrations and **glavki** increased together with the number of enterprises under their control"*. [Malle, **Op. Cit.**, p. 232, p. 233 and p. 250] In summary:

> *"The most evident shortcoming ... was that it did not ensure central allocation of resources and central distribution of output, in accordance with any priority ranking ... materials were provided to factories in arbitrary proportions: in some places they accumulated, whereas in others there was a shortage. Moreover, the length of the procedure needed to release the products increased scarcity at given moments, since products remained stored until the centre issued a purchase order on behalf of a centrally defined customer. Unused stock coexisted with acute scarcity. The centre was unable to determine the correct proportions among necessary materials and eventually to enforce implementation of the orders for their total quantity. The gap between theory and practice was significant."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 233]

Thus there was a clear *"gulf between the abstraction of the principles on centralisation and its reality."* This was recognised at the time and, unsuccessfully, challenged. Provincial delegates argued that *"[w]aste of time was ... the effect of strict compliance of vertical administration ... semi-finished products [were] transferred to other provinces for further processing, while local factories operating in the field were shut down"* (and given the state of the transport network, this was a doubly inefficient). The local bodies, knowing the grassroots situation, *"had proved to be more far-sighted than the centre."* For example, flax had been substituted for cotton long before the centre had issued instructions for this. Arguments reversing the



utopian notion that they did not create a fully functioning (libertarian) communist society. As we discussed section H.2.5, anarchists have never thought a revolution would immediately produce such an outcome. As Emma Goldman argued, she had not come to Russia *"expecting to find Anarchism realised"* nor did she *"expect Anarchism to follow in the immediate footsteps of centuries of despotism and submission."* Rather, she *"hope[d] to find in Russia at least the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought"* and that *"the Russian workers and peasants as a whole had derived essential social betterment as a result of the Bolshevik regime."* Both hopes were dashed. [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlvii] Equally, anarchists were, and are, well aware of the problems facing the revolution, the impact of the civil war and economic blockade. Indeed, both Goldman and Berkman used these (as Leninists still do) to rationalise their support for the Bolsheviks, in spite of their authoritarianism (for Berkman's account see **The Bolshevik Myth** [pp. 328–31]). Their experiences in Russia, particularly after the end of the civil war, opened their eyes to the impact of Bolshevik ideology on its outcome.

Nor is it a case that anarchists have no solutions to the problems facing the Russian Revolution. As well as the negative critique that statist structures are unsuitable for creating socialism, particularly in the difficult economic circumstances that affects every revolution, anarchists stressed that genuine social construction had to be based on the people's own organisations and self-activity. This was because, as Goldman concluded, the state is a *"menace to the constructive development of the new social structure"* and *"would become a dead weight upon the growth of the new forms of life."* Therefore, she argued, only the *"industrial power of the masses, expressed through their libertarian associations — Anarchosyndicalism — is alone able to organise successfully the economic life and carry on production"* If the revolution had been made a la Bakunin rather than a la Marx *"the result would have been different and more satisfac-*

*tory"* as (echoing Kropotkin) Bolshevik methods *"conclusively demonstrated how a revolution should **not** be made."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 253–4 and p. liv]

It should also be mentioned that the standard Leninist justification for party dictatorship is that the opposition groups supported the counter-revolution or took part in armed rebellions against "soviet power" (i.e., the Bolsheviks). Rees, for example, asserts that some Mensheviks *"joined the Whites. The rest alternated between accepting the legitimacy of the government and agitating for its overthrow. The Bolsheviks treated them accordingly."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 65] However, this is far from the truth. As one historian noted, while the *"charge of violent opposition would be made again and again"* by the Bolsheviks, along with being *"active supporters of intervention and of counter-revolution"*, in fact this *"charge was untrue in relation to the Mensheviks, and the Communists, if they ever believed it, never succeeded in establishing it."* A few individuals did reject the Menshevik *"official policy of confining opposition to strictly constitutional means"* and they were *"expelled from the party, for they had acted without its knowledge."* [Leonard Schapiro, **The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 193] Significantly, the Bolsheviks annulled their June 14th expulsion of the Mensheviks from the soviets on the 30th of November of the same year, 1918. [E. H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 180]

By *"agitating"* for the *"overthrow"* of the Bolshevik government, Rees is referring to the Menshevik tactic of standing for election to soviets with the aim of securing a majority and so forming a new government! Unsurprisingly, the sole piece of evidence presented by Rees is a quote from historian E.H. Carr: *"If it was true that the Bolshevik regime was not prepared after the first few months to tolerate an organised opposition, it was equally true that no opposition party was prepared to remain within legal limits. The premise of dictatorship was common to both sides of the argument."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 190] Yet this *"judgment



*journals argued plaintively about the correlation between failing labour productivity and the proliferation of competing Bolshevik authorities."* Rather than improving things, Lenin's one-man management did the opposite, *"leading in many places ... to a greater degree of confusion and indecision"* and *"this problem of contradictory authorities clearly intensified, rather than lessened."* Indeed, the *"result of replacing workers' committees with one man rule ... on the railways ... was not directiveness, but distance, and increasing inability to make decisions appropriate to local conditions. Despite coercion, orders on the railroads were often ignored as unworkable."* It got so bad that *"a number of local Bolshevik officials ... began in the fall of 1918 to call for the restoration of workers' control, not for ideological reasons, but because workers themselves knew best how to run the line efficiently, and might obey their own central committee's directives if they were not being constantly countermanded."* [William G. Rosenberg, **Workers' Control on the Railroads**, p. D1208, p. D1207, p. D1213 and pp. D1208-9]

That it was Bolshevik policies and not workers' control which was to blame for the state of the economy can be seen from what happened **after** Lenin's one-man management was imposed. The centralised Bolshevik economic system quickly demonstrated how to **really** mismanage an economy. The Bolshevik onslaught against workers' control in favour of a centralised, top-down economic regime ensured that the economy was handicapped by an unresponsive system which wasted the local knowledge in the grassroots in favour of orders from above which were issued in ignorance of local conditions. Thus the **glavki** *"did not know the true number of enterprises in their branch"* of industry. To ensure centralism, customers had to go via a central orders committee, which would then past the details to the appropriate **glavki** and, unsurprisingly, it was *"unable to cope with these enormous tasks"*. As a result, workplaces often *"endeavoured to find less bureaucratic channels"* to get resources and, in fact, the

At this time Lenin *"envisaged a period during which, in a workers' state, the bourgeoisie would still retain the formal ownership and effective management of most of the productive apparatus"* and workers' control *"was seen as the instrument"* by which the *"capitalists would be coerced into co-operation."* [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 13] The Bolsheviks turned to one-management in April, 1918 (it was applied first on the railway workers). As the capitalists refused to co-operate, with many closing down their workplaces, the Bolsheviks were forced to nationalise industry and place it fully under state control in late June 1918. This saw state-appointed "dictatorial" managers replacing the remaining capitalists (when it was not simply a case of the old boss being turned into a state manager). The Bolshevik vision of socialism as nationalised property replacing capitalist property was at the root of the creation of state capitalism within Russia. This was very centralised and very inefficient:

> *"it seems apparent that many workers themselves ... had now come to believe ... that confusion and anarchy [sic!]* ***at the top*** *were the major causes of their difficulties, and with some justification. The fact was that Bolshevik administration was chaotic ... Scores of competitive and conflicting Bolshevik and Soviet authorities issued contradictory orders, often brought to factories by armed Chekists. The Supreme Economic Council... issu[ed] dozens of orders and pass[ed] countless directives with virtually no real knowledge of affairs."* [William G. Rosenberg, **Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 116]

Faced with the chaos that their own politics, in part, had created, like all bosses, the Bolsheviks blamed the workers. Yet abolishing the workers' committees resulted in *"a terrifying proliferation of competitive and contradictory Bolshevik authorities, each with a claim of life or death importance ... Railroad*



*ignores"* the Mensheviks whose policy of legal opposition: *"The charge that the Mensheviks were not prepared to remain within legal limits is part of the Bolsheviks' case; it does not survive an examination of the facts."* [Schapiro, **Op. Cit.**, p. 355fn]

As regards the SRs, this issue is more complicated. The right-SRs welcomed and utilised the rebellion of the Czech Legion in May 1918 to reconvene the Constituent Assembly (within which they had an overwhelming majority and which the Bolsheviks had dissolved). After the White General Kolchak overthrew this government in November 1918 (and so turned the civil war into a Red against White one), most right-SRs sided with the Bolsheviks and, in return, the Bolsheviks restated them to the soviets in February 1919. [Carr, **Op. Cit.**, p. 356 and p. 180] It must be stressed that, contra Carr, the SRs aimed for a democratically elected government, not a dictatorship (and definitely not a White one). With the Left-SRs, it was the Bolsheviks who denied them their majority at the Fifth All-Congress of Soviets. Their rebellion was **not** an attempted coup but rather an attempt to force the end of the Brest-Litovsk treaty with the Germans by restarting the war (as Alexander Rabinowitch proves beyond doubt in his **The Bolsheviks in Power**). It would be fair to say that the anarchists, most SRs, the Left SRs and Mensheviks were not opposed to the revolution, they were opposed to Bolshevik policy.

Ultimately, as Emma Goldman came to conclude, *"what [the Bolsheviks] called 'defence of the Revolution' was really only the defence of [their] party in power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 57]

At best it could be argued that the Bolsheviks had no alternative but to impose their dictatorship, as the other socialist parties would have succumbed to the Whites and so, eventually, a White dictatorship would have replaced the Red one. This was why, for example, Victor Serge claimed he sided with the Communists against the Kronstadt sailors even though the latter had right on their side for *"the country was exhausted,*

*and production practically at a standstill; there was no reserves of any kind … The working-class **elite** that had been moulded in the struggle against the old regime was literally decimated. … If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos … and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian.*" [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, pp. 128–9]

This, however, is shear elitism and utterly violates the notion that socialism is the self-emancipation of the working class. Moreover, it places immense faith on the goodwill of those in power — a utopian position. Equally, it should not be forgotten that both the Reds and Whites were anti-working class. At best it could be argued that the Red repression of working class protests and strikes as well as opposition socialists would not have been as terrible as that of the Whites, but that is hardly a good rationale for betraying the principles of socialism. Yes, libertarians can agree with Serge that embracing socialist principles may not work. Every revolution is a gamble and may fail. As libertarian socialist Ante Ciliga correctly argued:

> *"Let us consider, finally, one last accusation which is commonly circulated: that action such as that at Kronstadt could have **indirectly** let loose the forces of the counter-revolution. It is **possible** indeed that even by placing itself on a footing of workers' democracy the revolution might have been overthrown; but what is **certain** is that it has perished, and that it has perished on account of the policy of its leaders. The repression of Kronstadt, the suppression of the democracy of workers and soviets by the Russian Communist party, the elimination of the proletariat from the management of industry, and the introduction of the NEP, already signified the death of the Revolution."* [*"The Kronstadt*



on the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. The **Supreme Economic Council** (Vesenka) was set up in December of 1917, and *"was widely acknowledged by the Bolsheviks as a move towards 'statisation' (ogosudarstvleniye) of economic authority."* During the early months of 1918, the Bolsheviks began implementing their vision of "socialism" and the Vesenka began *"to build, from the top, its 'unified administration' of particular industries. The pattern is informative"* as it *"gradually took over"* the Tsarist state agencies such as the **Glakvi** (as Lenin had promised) *"and converted them .. . into administrative organs subject to [its] direction and control."* The Bolsheviks *"clearly opted"* for the taking over of *"the institutions of bourgeois economic power and use[d] them to their own ends."* This system *"necessarily implies the perpetuation of hierarchical relations within production itself, and therefore the perpetuation of class society."* [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22, p. 36 and p. 22] Thus the Supreme Council of the National Economy *"was an expression of the principle of centralisation and control from above which was peculiar to the Marxist ideology."* In fact, it is *"likely that the arguments for centralisation in economic policy, which were prevalent among Marxists, determined the short life of the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control."* [Silvana Malle, **The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921**, p. 95 and p. 94]

Moreover, the Bolsheviks had systematically stopped the factory committee organising together, using their controlled unions to come *"out firmly against the attempt of the Factory Committees to form a national organisation."* The unions *"prevented the convocation of a planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees.* [I. Deutscher, quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19] Given that one of the key criticisms of the factory committees by leading Bolsheviks was their "localism", this blocking of co-ordination is doubly damning.

Given this perspective, it is unsurprising that workers' control was not given a high priority once the Bolsheviks seized power. While in order to gain support the Bolsheviks **had** paid lip-service to the idea of workers' control, as we noted in section H.3.14 the party had always given that slogan a radically different interpretation than the factory committees had. While the factory committees had seen workers' control as being exercised directly by the workers and their class organisations, the Bolshevik leadership saw it in terms of state control in which the factory committees would play, at best, a minor role. Given who held actual power in the new regime, it is unsurprising to discover which vision was actually introduced:

> *"On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38]

Given his vision of socialism, Lenin's rejection of the factory committee's model comes as no surprise. As Lenin put it in 1920, the *"domination of the proletariat consists in the fact that the landowners and capitalists have been deprived of their property ... The victorious proletariat has abolished property ... and therein lies its domination as a class. The prime thing is the question of property."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30, p. 456] As we proved in section H.3.13, the Bolsheviks had no notion that socialism required workers' self-management of production and, unsurprisingly, they, as Lenin had promised, built from the top-down their system of unified administration based



*Revolt"*, pp. 330–7, **The Raven**, no, 8, p. 333 p. 335]

So it should be stressed that no anarchist would argue that if an anarchist path had been followed then success would have automatically followed. It is possible that the revolution would have failed but one thing is sure: by following the Bolshevik path it **did** fail. While the Bolsheviks may have remained in power at the end of the civil war, the regime was a party dictatorship preceding over a state capitalist economy. In such circumstances, there could no further development towards socialism and, unsurprisingly, there was none. Ultimately, as the rise of Stalin showed, the notion that socialism could be constructed without basic working class freedom and self-government was a baseless illusion.

As we will show, the notion that objective circumstances (civil war, economic collapse, and so on) cannot fully explain the failure of the Russian Revolution. This becomes clear once the awkward fact that Bolshevik authoritarianism and state capitalist policies started before the outbreak of civil war is recognised (see section H.6.1); that their ideology inspired and shaped the policies they implemented and these policies themselves made the objective circumstances worse (see section H.6.2); and that the Bolsheviks had to repress working class protest and strikes against them throughout the civil war, so suggesting a social base existed for a genuinely socialist approach (see section H.6.3).

Finally, there is a counter-example which, anarchists argue, show the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution. This is the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement (see Peter Arshinov's **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** or Alexandre Skirda's **Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack** for more details). Defending the revolution in the Ukraine against all groups aiming to impose their will on the masses, the Makhnovists were operating in the same objective condi-

tions facing the Bolsheviks — civil war, economic disruption, isolation and so forth. However, the policies the Makhnovists implemented were radically different than those of the Bolsheviks. While the Makhnovists called soviet congresses, the Bolsheviks disbanded them. The former encouraged free speech and organisation, the latter crushed both. While the Bolsheviks raised party dictatorship and one-man management to ideological truisms, the Makhnovists stood for and implemented workplace, army, village and soviet self-management. As one historian suggests, far from being necessary or even functional, Bolshevik policies *"might even have made the war more difficult and more costly. If the counter-example of Makhno is anything to go by then [they] certainly did."* [Christopher Read, **From Tsar to Soviets**, p. 265] Anarchists argue that it shows the failure of Bolshevism cannot be put down to purely objective factors like the civil war: the politics of Leninism played their part.

Needless to say, this section can only be a summary of the arguments and evidence. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive account of the revolution or civil war. It concentrates on the key rationales by modern day Leninists to justify Bolshevik actions and policies. We do so simply because it would be impossible to cover every aspect of the revolution and because these rationales are one of the main reasons why Leninist ideology has not been placed in the dustbin of history where it belongs. For further discussion, see the appendix on the Russian Revolution or Voline's **The Unknown Revolution**, Alexander Berkman's **The Russian Tragedy** and **The Bolshevik Myth**, Emma Goldman's **My Disillusionment in Russia** or Maurice Brinton's essential **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**.



**Cit.**, p. 182] As one historian notes, *"[a]ccording to the Left Communists ... the party was the custodian of an interest higher than that of the soviets."* Unsurprisingly, in the party there was *"a general consensus over the principles of party dictatorship for the greater part of the [civil] war. But the way in which these principles were applied roused increasing opposition."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 182 and p. 30] This consensus existed in all the so-called opposition (including the **Workers' Opposition** and Trotsky's **Left Opposition** in the 1920s). The ease with which the Bolsheviks embraced party dictatorship is suggestive of a fundamental flaw in their political perspective which the problems of the revolution, combined with lost of popular support, simply exposed.

Then there is the Bolshevik vision of socialism. As we discussed in section H.3.12, the Bolsheviks, like other Marxists at the time, saw the socialist economy as being built upon the centralised organisations created by capitalism. They confused state capitalism with socialism. The former, Lenin wrote in May 1917, *"is a complete **material** preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism"* and so socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly."* It is *"merely state-capitalist monopoly **which is made to serve the interests of the whole people** and has to that extent **ceased** to be capitalist monopoly."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 25, p. 359 and p. 358] A few months later, he was talking about how the institutions of state capitalism could be taken over and used to create socialism. Unsurprisingly, when defending the need for state capitalism in the spring of 1918 against the "Left Communists," Lenin stressed that he gave his *"'high' appreciation of state capitalism ... **before** the Bolsheviks seized power."* And, as Lenin noted, his praise for state capitalism can be found in his **State and Revolution** and so it was *"significant that [his opponents] did **not** emphasise **this**"* aspect of his 1917 ideas. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 341 and p. 354] Unsurprisingly, modern-day Leninists do not emphasise that element of Lenin's ideas either.

This can be seen from the Bolsheviks' negative response to the soviets of 1905. At one stage the Bolsheviks demanded the St. Petersburg soviet accept the Bolshevik political programme and then disband. The rationale for these attacks is significant. The St. Petersburg Bolsheviks were convinced that *"only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent."* [quoted by Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 77] In other words, the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers! The implications of this perspective became clear in 1918, as are its obvious roots in Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?**. As one historian argues, the 1905 position on the soviets *"is of particular significance in understanding the Bolshevik's mentality, political ambitions and* ***modus operandi.****"* The Bolshevik campaign *"was repeated in a number of provincial soviets"* and *"reveals that from the outset the Bolsheviks were distrustful of, if not hostile towards the Soviets, to which they had at best an instrumental and always party-minded attitude."* The Bolsheviks actions showed an *"ultimate aim of controlling [the soviets] and turning them into one-party organisations, or, failing that, of destroying them."* [Israel Getzler, *"The Bolshevik Onslaught on the Non-Party 'Political Profile' of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies October-November 1905"*, **Revolutionary History**, pp. 123–146, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 124–5]

That the mainstream of Bolshevism expressed this perspective once in power goes without saying, but even dissident Communists expressed identical views. Left-Communist V. Sorin argued in 1918 that the *"party is in every case and everywhere superior to the soviets ... The soviets represent labouring democracy in general; and its interest, and in particular the interests of the petty bourgeois peasantry, do not always coincide with the interests of the proletariat."* [quoted by Sakwa, **Op.**



## H.6.1 Can objective factors explain the failure of the Russian Revolution?

Leninist John Rees recounts the standard argument, namely that the objective conditions in Russia meant that the *"subjective factor"* of Bolshevik ideology *"was reduced to a choice between capitulation to the Whites or defending the revolution with whatever means were at hands. Within these limits Bolshevik policy was decisive. But it could not wish away the limits and start with a clean sheet."* From this perspective, the key factor was the *"vice-like pressure of the civil war"* which *"transformed the state"* as well as the *"Bolshevik Party itself."* Industry was *"reduced ... to rubble"* and the *"bureaucracy of the workers' state was left suspended in mid-air, its class based eroded and demoralised."* [*"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 30, p. 70, p. 66 and p. 65]

Due to these factors, argue Leninists, the Bolsheviks became dictators **over** the working class and **not** due to their political ideas. Anarchists are not convinced by this analysis, arguing that is factually and logically flawed.

The first problem is factual. Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** the start of the civil war and major economic collapse. Whether it is soviet democracy, workers' economic self-management, democracy in the armed forces or working class power and freedom generally, the fact is the Bolsheviks had systematically attacked and undermined it from the start. They also, as we indicate in section H.6.3 repressed working class protests and strikes along with opposition groups and parties. As such, it is difficult to blame something which had not started yet for causing Bolshevik policies.

Although the Bolsheviks had seized power under the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets,"* as we noted in section H.3.11 the facts are the Bolsheviks aimed for party power and only supported soviets as long as they controlled them. To maintain

party power, they had to undermine the soviets and they did. This onslaught on the soviets started quickly, in fact overnight when the first act of the Bolsheviks was to create an executive body, the the Council of People's Commissars (or Sovnarkon), over and above the soviets. This was in direct contradiction to Lenin's **The State and Revolution**, where he had used the example of the Paris Commune to argue for the merging of executive and legislative powers. Then, a mere four days after this seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, the Sovnarkom unilaterally took for itself legislative power simply by issuing a decree to this effect: *"This was, effectively, a Bolshevik coup d'état that made clear the government's (and party's) pre-eminence over the soviets and their executive organ. Increasingly, the Bolsheviks relied upon the appointment from above of commissars with plenipotentiary powers, and they split up and reconstituted fractious Soviets and intimidated political opponents."* [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253]

The highest organ of soviet power, the Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) was turned into little more than a rubber stamp, with its Bolshevik dominated presidium using its power to control the body. Under the Bolsheviks, the presidium was converted *"into the **de facto** centre of power within VTsIK."* It *"began to award representations to groups and factions which supported the government. With the VTsIK becoming ever more unwieldy in size by the day, the presidium began to expand its activities"* and was used *"to circumvent general meetings."* Thus the Bolsheviks were able *"to increase the power of the presidium, postpone regular sessions, and present VTsIK with policies which had already been implemented by the Sovnarkon. Even in the presidium itself very few people determined policy."* [Charles Duval, *"Yakov M. Sverdlov and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK)"*, pp. 3–22, **Soviet Studies**, vol. XXXI, no. 1, p.7, p. 8 and p. 18]

At the grassroots, a similar process was at work with oligarchic tendencies in the soviets increasing post-October and



elected government with "democracy," the Bolsheviks had the ideological justification to eliminate the functional democracy associated with the soviets, factory committees and soldiers committees. The Bolshevik vision of democracy became the means by which real democracy was eliminated in area after area of Russian working class life. Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic in any meaningful sense for long.

Nor does it come as too great a surprise to discover that a government which considers itself as *"better able to judge"* things than the people finally decides to annul any election results it dislikes. As we discussed in section H.5, this perspective is at the heart of vanguardism, for in Bolshevik ideology the party, not the class, is in the final analysis the repository of class consciousness. This means that once in power it has a built-in tendency to override the decisions of the masses it claimed to represent and justify this in terms of the advanced position of the party (as historian Richard Sakwa notes a *"lack of identification with the Bolshevik party was treated as the absence of political consciousness altogether"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 94]). Combine this with a vision of "democracy" which is highly centralised and which undermines local participation then we have the necessary foundations for the turning of party power into party dictatorship.

Which brings us to the next issue, namely the Bolshevik idea that the party should seize power, not the working class as a whole, equating party power with popular power. The question instantly arises of what happens if the masses turn against the party? The gerrymandering, disbanding and marginalisation of the soviets in the spring and summer of 1918 answers that question (see last section). It is not a great step to party dictatorship **over** the proletariat from the premises of Bolshevism. In a clash between soviet democracy and party power, the Bolsheviks consistently favoured the latter — as would be expected given their ideology.

dictatorship at the core of their politics and universalised it to a general principle for **all** "socialist" revolutions). Nor did they object to the centralisation of power and activity (and so the bureaucratisation of life). As such, the Bolsheviks failed to understand how their own politics helped the rise of this new ruling class. They failed to understand the links between centralism and bureaucracy. Bolshevik nationalisation and centralism (as well as being extremely inefficient) also ensured that the control of society, economic activity and its product would be in the hands of the state and, so, class society would continue. Unsurprisingly, complaints by working class people about the privileges enjoyed by Communist Party and state officials were widespread.

Another problem was the Bolshevik vision of (centralised) democracy. Trotsky is typical. In April 1918 he argued that once elected the government was to be given total power to make decisions and appoint people as required as it is *"better able to judge in the matter than"* the masses. The sovereign people were expected to simply obey their public servants until such time as they *"dismiss that government and appoint another."* Trotsky raised the question of whether it was possible for the government to act *"against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"* And answered no! Yet it is obvious that Trotsky's claim that *"there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members"* is just nonsense. [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 113] The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying their membership. Needless to say, the subsequent history Lenin's government shows that there can be *"antagonism"* between rulers and ruled and that appointments are always a key way to further elite interests.

This vision of top-down "democracy" can, of course, be traced back to Marx and Lenin (see sections H.3.2 and H.3.3). By equating centralised, top-down decision making by an



*"[e]ffective power in the local soviets relentlessly gravitated to the executive committees, and especially their presidia. Plenary sessions became increasingly symbolic and ineffectual."* The party was *"successful in gaining control of soviet executives in the cities and at **uezd** and **guberniya** levels. These executive bodies were usually able to control soviet congresses, though the party often disbanded congresses that opposed major aspects of current policies."* Local soviets *"had little input into the formation of national policy"* and *"[e]ven at higher levels, institutional power shifted away from the soviets."* [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy**, p. 204 and p. 203] In Moscow, for example, power in the soviet *"moved away from the plenum to ever smaller groups at the apex."* The presidium, created in November 1917, *"rapidly accrued massive powers."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 166]

The Bolshevik dominated soviet executives used this power to maintain a Bolshevik majority, by any means possible, in the face of popular disillusionment with their regime. In Saratov, for example, *"as early as the spring of 1918 ... workers clashed with the soviet"* while in the April soviet elections, as elsewhere, the Bolsheviks' *"powerful majority in the Soviet began to erode"* as moderate socialists *"criticised the nondemocratic turn Bolshevik power has taken and the soviet's loss of their independence."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 366 and p. 368] While the influence of the Mensheviks *"had sunk to insignificance by October 1917"*, the *"unpopularity of government policy"* changed that and by the *"middle of 1918 the Mensheviks could claim with some justification that large numbers of the industrial working class were now behind them, and that but for the systematic dispersal and packing of the soviets, and the mass arrests at workers' meeting and congresses, their party could have one power by its policy of constitutional opposition."* The soviet elections in the spring of 1918 across Russia saw *"arrests, military dispersal, even shootings"* whenever Mensheviks *"succeeded in winning majorities or a substantial representation."*

[Leonard Schapiro, **The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 191]

One such technique to maintain power was to postpone new soviet elections, another was to gerrymander the soviets to ensure their majority. The Bolsheviks in Petrograd, for example, faced *"demands from below for the immediate re-election"* of the Soviet. However, before the election, the Bolshevik Soviet confirmed new regulations *"to help offset possible weaknesses"* in their *"electoral strength in factories."* The *"most significant change in the makeup of the new soviet was that numerically decisive representation was given to agencies in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength, among them the Petrograd Trade Union Council, individual trade unions, factory committees in closed enterprises, district soviets, and district non-party workers' conferences."* This ensured that *"[o]nly 260 of roughly 700 deputies in the new soviet were to be elected in factories, which guaranteed a large Bolshevik majority in advance"* and so the Bolsheviks *"contrived a majority"* in the new Soviet long before gaining 127 of the 260 factory delegates. Then there is *"the nagging question of how many Bolshevik deputies from factories were elected instead of the opposition because of press restrictions, voter intimidation, vote fraud, or the short duration of the campaign."* The SR and Menshevik press, for example, were reopened *"only a couple of days before the start of voting."* Moreover, *"Factory Committees from closed factories could and did elect soviet deputies (the so-called dead souls), one deputy for each factory with more than one thousand workers at the time of shutdown"* while the electoral assemblies for unemployed workers *"were organised through Bolshevik-dominated trade union election commissions."* Overall, then, the Bolshevik election victory *"was highly suspect, even on the shop floor."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, pp. 248–9, p. 251 and p. 252] This meant that it was *"possible for one worker to be represented in the soviet five times ... without voting once."* Thus the soviet *"was no longer a popularly elected assembly: it had been*



> *who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 527]

By the end of 1920, there were five times more state officials than industrial workers (5,880,000 were members of the state bureaucracy). However, the bureaucracy had existed since the start. In Moscow, in August 1918, state officials represented 30 per cent of the workforce there and by 1920 the general number of office workers *"still represented about a third of those employed in the city"* (200,000 in November, 1920, rising to 228,000 in July, 1921 and, by October 1922, to 243,000). [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 191–3] And with bureaucracy came the abuse of it simply because it held **real** power:

> *"The prevalence of bureaucracy, of committees and commissions ... permitted, and indeed encouraged, endless permutations of corrupt practices. These raged from the style of living of communist functionaries to bribe-taking by officials. With the power of allocation of scare resources, such as housing, there was an inordinate potential for corruption."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 193]

The growth in **power** of the bureaucracy should not, therefore, come as a major surprise given that it had existed from the start in sizeable numbers. Yet, for the Bolsheviks *"the development of a bureaucracy"* was a puzzle, *"whose emergence and properties mystified them."* It should be noted that, *"[f]or the Bolsheviks, bureaucratism signified the escape of this bureaucracy from the will of the party as it took on a life of its own."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 182 and p. 190] This was the key. They did not object the usurpation of power by the party (indeed they placed party

sheviks to substitute their power for that of the masses, anarchists reply that this substitution had occurred the moment the Bolsheviks centralised power and placed it into their own hands. As a result, popular participation and institutions began to wither and die. Moreover, once in power, the Bolsheviks were shaped by their new position and the social relationships it created and, consequently, implemented policies influenced and constrained by the hierarchical and centralised structures they had created.

This was not the only negative impact of Bolshevik centralism. It also spawned a bureaucracy. As we noted in section H.1.7, the rise of a state bureaucracy started immediately with the seizure of power. Thus *"red tape and vast administrative offices typified Soviet reality"* as the Bolsheviks *"rapidly created their own [state] apparatus to wage the political and economic offensive against the bourgeoisie and capitalism. As the functions of the state expanded, so did the bureaucracy"* and so *"following the revolution the process of institutional proliferation reached unprecedented heights ... a mass of economic organisations [were] created or expanded."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 190 and p. 191] This was a striking confirmation of the anarchist analysis which argued that a new bureaucratic class develops around any centralised body. This body would soon become riddled with personal influences and favours, so ensuring that members could be sheltered from popular control while, at the same time, exploiting its power to feather their own nest. Overtime, this permanent collection of bodies would become the real power in the state, with the party members nominally in charge really under the control of an unelected and uncontrolled officialdom. This was recognised by Lenin in 1922:

> *"If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask:*



*turned into an assembly of Bolshevik functionaries."* [Vladimir N. Brovkin, **The Mensheviks After October**, p. 240]

When postponing and gerrymandering failed, the Bolsheviks turned to state repression to remain in power. For all the provincial soviet elections in the spring and summer of 1918 for which data is available, there was an *"impressive success of the Menshevik-SR block"* followed by *"the Bolshevik practice of disbanding soviets that came under Menshevik-SR control."* The *"subsequent wave of anti-Bolshevik uprisings"* were repressed by force. [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 159] Another historian also notes that by the spring of 1918 *"Menshevik newspapers and activists in the trade unions, the Soviets, and the factories had made a considerable impact on a working class which was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or prevent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities."* [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 179]

When the opposition parties raised such issues at the VTsIK, it had no impact. In April 1918, one deputy *"protested that non-Bolshevik controlled soviets were being dispersed by armed force, and wanted to discuss the issue."* The chairman *"refus[ed] to include it in the agenda because of lack of supporting material"* and requested such information be submitted to the presidium of the soviet. The majority (i.e. the Bolsheviks) *"supported their chairman"* and the facts were *"submitted ... to the presidium, where they apparently remained."* [Charles Duval, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 13–14] Given that the VTsIK was meant to be the highest soviet body between congresses, this lack of concern clearly shows the Bolshevik contempt for soviet democracy.

The Bolsheviks also organised rural poor committees, opposed to by all other parties (particularly the Left-SRs). The Bolshevik leadership *"was well aware that the **labouring peasantry**, largely represented in the countryside by the Left Socialist-Revolutionary party, would be excluded from participation."* These committees were *"subordinated to central*

*policy and thus willing to implement a policy opposing the interests of the mass of the peasants"* and were also used for the *"disbandment of the peasants' soviets in which Bolshevik representation was low or nil"*. It should be noted that between March and August 1918 *"the Bolsheviks were losing power not only in favour of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries"* but also *"in favour of non-party people."* [Silvana Malle, **The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921**, pp. 366–7]

Unsurprisingly, the same contempt was expressed at the fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress in July 1918 when the Bolshevik gerrymandered it to maintain their majority. The Bolsheviks banned the Mensheviks in the context of political loses **before** the Civil War, which gave the Bolsheviks an excuse and they *"drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains"*. While the Bolsheviks *"offered some formidable fictions to justify the expulsions"* there was *"of course no substance in the charge that the Mensheviks had been mixed in counter-revolutionary activities on the Don, in the Urals, in Siberia, with the Czechoslovaks, or that they had joined the worst Black Hundreds."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 181]

With the Mensheviks and Right-SRs banned from the soviets, popular disenchantment with Bolshevik rule was expressed by voting Left-SR. The Bolsheviks ensured their majority in the congress and, therefore, a Bolshevik government by gerrymandering it has they had the Petrograd soviet. Thus *"electoral fraud gave the Bolsheviks a huge majority of congress delegates"*. In reality, *"the number of legitimately elected Left SR delegates was roughly equal to that of the Bolsheviks."* The Left-SRs expected a majority but did not include *"roughly 399 Bolsheviks delegates whose right to be seated was challenged by the Left SR minority in the congress's credentials commission."* Without these dubious delegates, the Left SRs and SR Maximalists would have outnumbered the Bolsheviks by around 30 delegates. This ensured *"the Bolshevik's successful fabrication*



*every critical stage of this critical period."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 84]

This is not to suggest that the circumstances played no role in the development of the revolution. It is simply to indicate that Bolshevik ideology played its part as well by not only shaping the policies implemented but also how the results of those policies themselves contributed to the circumstances being faced. This is to be expected, given that the Bolsheviks were the ruling party and, consequently, state power was utilised to implement their policies, policies which, in turn, were influenced by their ideological preferences and prejudices. Ultimately, to maintain (as Leninists do) that the ideology of the ruling party played no (or, at best, a minor) part hardly makes sense logically nor, equally importantly, can it be supported once even a basic awareness of the development of the Russian Revolution is known.

A key issue is the Bolsheviks support for centralisation. Long before the revolution, Lenin had argued that within the party it was a case of *"the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 367] Such visions of centralised organisation were the model for the revolutionary state and, once in power, they did not disappoint. Thus, *"for the leadership, the principle of maximum centralisation of authority served more than expedience. It consistently resurfaced as the image of a peacetime political system as well."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 91]

However, by its very nature centralism places power into a few hands and effectively eliminates the popular participation required for any successful revolution to develop. The power placed into the hands of the Bolshevik government was automatically no longer in the hands of the working class. So when Leninists argue that "objective" circumstances forced the Bol-

*the fact is that the socialist initiatives were pretty quickly eliminated.*

*"Now, people who want to justify it say, 'The Bolsheviks had to do it' — that's the standard justification: Lenin and Trotsky had to do it, because of the contingencies of the civil war, for survival, there wouldn't have been food otherwise, this and that. Well, obviously the question is, was that true. To answer that, you've got to look at the historical facts: I don't think it was true. In fact, I think the incipient socialist structures in Russia were dismantled* ***before*** *the really dire conditions arose ... But reading their own writings, my feeling is that Lenin and Trotsky knew what they were doing, it was conscious and understandable."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 226]

Chomsky is right on both counts. The attack on the basic building blocks of genuine socialism started before the civil war. Moreover, it did not happen by accident. The attacks were rooted in the Bolshevik vision of socialism. As Maurice Brinton concluded:

*"there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism ... The more one unearths about this period the more difficult it becomes to define — or even to see — the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at*



*of a large majority in the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 396, p. 288, p. 442 and p. 308] Moreover, the Bolsheviks also *"allowed so-called committees of poor peasants to be represented at the congress. .. This blatant gerrymandering ensured a Bolshevik majority ... Deprived of their democratic majority the Left SRs resorted to terror and assassinated the German ambassador Mirbach."* [Geoffrey Swain, **The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 176] The Bolsheviks falsely labelled this an uprising against the soviets and the Left-SRs joined the Mensheviks and Right-SRs in being made illegal. It is hard not to agree with Rabinowitch when he comments that *"however understandable framed against the fraudulent composition of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets and the ominous developments at the congresses's start"* this act *"offered Lenin a better excuse than he could possibly have hoped for to eliminate the Left SRs as a significant political rival."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 308]

So before the start of the civil war all opposition groups, bar the Left-SRs, had suffered some form of state repression by the hands of the Bolshevik regime (the Bolsheviks had attacked the anarchist movement in April, 1918 [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, pp. 184–5]). Within six weeks of it starting **every** opposition group had been excluded from the soviets. Significantly, in spite of being, effectively, a one-party state Lenin later proclaimed that soviet power *"is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic"* and pointed to the 6$^{th}$ Congress of Soviets in November with its 97% of Bolsheviks! [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 248 and p. 303]

A similar authoritarian agenda was aimed at the armed forces and industry. Trotsky simply abolished the soldier's committees and elected officers, stating that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. 1, p. 47] The death penalty for dis-

obedience was restored, along with, more gradually, saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Somewhat ironically, nearly 20 years later, Trotsky himself lamented how the *"demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war."* For some reason he failed to mention who had introduced that very regime, although he felt able to state, without shame, that the *"commanding staff needs democratic control. The organisers of the Red Army were aware of this from the beginning, and considered it necessary to prepare for such a measure as the election of commanding staff."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 90 and p. 211] So it would be churlish to note that *"the root of the problem lay in the very organisation of the army on traditional lines, for which Trotsky himself had been responsible, and against which the Left Communists in 1918 had warned."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 231]

In industry, Lenin, as we discussed in section H.3.14, started to champion one-man management armed with *"dictatorial"* powers in April, 1918. Significantly, he argued that his new policies were **not** driven by the civil war for *"[i]n the main ... the task of suppressing the resistance of the exploiters was fulfilled"* (since *"(approximately) February 1918."*). The task *"now coming to the fore"* was that of *"organising [the] **administration** of Russia."* It *"has become the main and central task"* precisely **because** of *"the peace which has been achieved — despite its extremely onerous character and extreme instability"* and so *"the Russian Soviet Republic has gained an opportunity to concentrate its efforts for a while on the most important and most difficult aspect of the socialist revolution, namely, the task of organisation."* This would involve imposing one-man management, that is *"individual executives"* with *"dictatorial powers (or 'un-*



> *ticular individual: rather it was the State they had created, which discredits every revolutionary ideal, stifles all initiative, and sets a premium on incompetence and waste ... Intervention and blockade were bleeding Russia to death, and were preventing the people from understanding the real nature of the Bolshevik regime."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 99]

Obviously, if the "objective" factors do not explain Bolshevik authoritarianism and the failure of the revolution we are left with the question of which aspects of Bolshevik ideology impacted negatively on the revolution. As Kropotkin's comments indicate, anarchists have good reason to argue that one of the greatest myths of state socialism is the idea that Bolshevik ideology played no role in the fate of the Russian Revolution. We turn to this in the next section.

## H.6.2 Did Bolshevik ideology influence the outcome of the Russian Revolution?

As we discussed in the last section, anarchists reject the Leninist argument that the failure of Bolshevism in the Russian Revolution can be blamed purely on the difficult objective circumstances they faced. As Noam Chomsky summarises:

> *"In the stages leading up to the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, there **were** incipient socialist institutions developing in Russia — workers' councils, collectives, things like that. And they survived to an extent once the Bolsheviks took over — but not for very long; Lenin and Trotsky pretty much eliminated them as they consolidated their power. I mean, you can argue about the **justification** for eliminating them, but*

of 1917 did not stop the development of socialist tendencies to combat it, the seizure of power by a socialist party did.

To conclude, it seems hypocritical in the extreme for Leninists to blame difficult circumstances for the failure of the Russian Revolution. As Lenin himself argued, the Bolsheviks *"never said that the transition from capitalism to socialism would be easy. It will invoke a whole period of violent civil war, it will involve painful measures."* They knew *"that the transition from capitalism to socialism is a struggle of an extremely difficult kind"* and so *"[i]f there ever existed a revolutionary who hoped that we could pass to the socialist system without difficulties, such a revolutionary, such a socialist, would not be worth a brass farthing."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 431, p. 433 and pp. 432–3] He would have been surprised to discover that many of his own followers would be *"such a socialist"*!

Consequently, it is not hard to conclude that for Leninists difficult objective circumstances place socialism off the agenda only when they are holding power. So even if we ignore the extensive evidence that Bolshevik authoritarianism started before the civil war, the logic of the Leninist argument is hardly convincing. Yet it does have advantages, for by focusing attention on the civil war, Leninists also draw attention away from Bolshevik ideology and tactics. As Peter Kropotkin recounted to Emma Goldman this simply cannot be done:

> *"the Communists are a political party firmly adhering to the idea of a centralised State, and that as such they were bound to misdirect the course of the Revolution ... [Their policies] have paralysed the energies of the masses and have terrorised the people. Yet without the direct participation of the masses in the reconstruction of the country, nothing essential could be accomplished ... They created a bureaucracy and officialdom ... [which were] parasites on the social body ... It was not the fault of any par-*



*limited' powers)"* as there was *"absolutely **no** contradiction in principle between Soviet (**that is**, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 242, p. 237, p. 267 and p. 268]

Trotsky concurred, arguing in the same speech which announced the destruction of military democracy that workplace democracy *"is not the last word in the economic constructive work of the proletariat"*. The *"next step must consist in self-limitation of the collegiate principle"* and its replacement by *"[p]olitical collegiate control by the Soviets"*, i.e. the state control Lenin had repeatedly advocated in 1917. However *"for executive functions we must appoint technical specialists."* He ironically called this the working class *"throwing off the one-man management principles of its masters of yesterday"* and failed to recognise it was imposing the one-man management principles of new masters. As with Lenin, the destruction of workers' power at the point of production was of little concern for what mattered was that *"with power in our hands, we, the representatives of the working class"* would introduce socialism. [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. 1, p. 37 and p. 38]

In reality, the Bolshevik vision of socialism simply replaced private capitalism with state capitalism, taking control of the economy out of the hands of the workers and placing it into the hands of the state bureaucracy. As one historian correctly summarises the s-called workers' state *"oversaw the reimposition of alienated labour and hierarchical social relations. It carried out this function in the absence of a ruling class, and them played a central role in ushering that class into existence — a class which subsequently ruled not through its ownership of private property but through its 'ownership' of the state. That state was antagonistic to the forces that could have best resisted the retreat of the revolution, i.e. the working class."* [Simon Pirani, **The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24**, p. 240]

Whether it is in regards to soviet, workplace or army democracy or the rights of the opposition to organise freely

and gather support, the facts are the Bolsheviks had systematically eliminated them **before** the start of the civil war. So when Trotsky asserted that *"[i]n the beginning, the party had wished and hoped to preserve freedom of political struggle within the framework of the Soviets"* but that it was civil war which *"introduced stern amendments into this calculation,"* he was rewriting history. Rather than being *"regarded not as a principle, but as an episodic act of self-defence"* the opposite is the case. As we note in section H.3.8 from roughly October 1918 onwards, the Bolsheviks **did** raise party dictatorship to a *"principle"* and did not care that this was *"obviously in conflict with the spirit of Soviet democracy."* Trotsky was right to state that *"on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 96 and p. 90] He was just utterly wrong to imply that this process happened **after** the end of the civil war rather than before its start and that the Bolsheviks did not play a key role in so doing. Thus, *"in the soviets and in economic management the embryo of centralised and bureaucratic state forms had already emerged by mid-1918."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 96–7]

It may be argued in objection to this analysis that the Bolsheviks faced resistance from the start and, consequently, civil war existed from the moment Lenin seized power and to focus attention on the events of late May 1918 gives a misleading picture of the pressures they were facing. After all, the Bolsheviks had the threat of German Imperialism and there were a few (small) White Armies in existence as well as conspiracies to combat. However, this is unconvincing as Lenin himself pointed to the ease of Bolshevik success post-October. On March 14th, 1918, Lenin had proclaimed that *"the civil war was one continuous triumph for Soviet power"* and in June argued that *"the Russian bourgeoisie was defeated in open conflict … in the period from October 1917 to February and March 1918"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 174 and p. 428] It can be con-



tion produced extensive political conflict, including civil war, which was matched by economic turmoil. Taking 1928 as the base year, the index of industrial production in Germany was slightly lower in 1913, namely 98 in 1913 to 100 in 1928. In 1917, the index was 63 and by 1918, it was 61 (i.e. industrial production had dropped by nearly 40%). In 1919, it fell again to 37, rising to 54 in 1920 and 65 in 1921. Thus, in 1919, the *"industrial production reached an all-time low"* and it *"took until the late 1920s for [food] production to recover its 1912 level."* [V. R. Berghahn, **Modern Germany**, p. 258, pp. 67–8 and p. 71] In Russia, the index for large scale industry fell to 77 in 1917 from 100 in 1913, falling again to 35 in 1918, 26 in 1919 and 18 in 1920. [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 86]

Strangely, Leninists do not doubt that the spread of the Russian Revolution to Germany would have allowed the Bolsheviks more leeway to avoid authoritarianism and so save the Revolution. Yet this does not seem likely given the state of the German economy. Comparing the two countries, there is a similar picture of economic collapse. In the year the revolution started, production had fallen by 23% in Russia (from 1913 to 1917) and by 43% in Germany (from 1913 to 1918). Once revolution had effectively started, production fell even more. In Russia, it fell to 65% of its pre-war level in 1918, in Germany it fell to 62% of its pre-war level in 1919. However, no Leninist argues that the German Revolution was impossible or doomed to failure. Similarly, no Leninist denies that a socialist revolution was possible during the depths of the Great Depression of the 1930s or to post-world war two Europe, marked as it was by economic collapse. This was the case in 1917 as well, when economic crisis had been a fact of Russian life throughout the year. This did not stop the Bolsheviks calling for revolution and seizing power. Nor did this crisis stop the creation of democratic working class organisations, such as soviets, trade unions and factory committees being formed nor did it stop mass collective action. It appears, therefore, that while the economic crisis

*a great industrial crisis … There are millions of unemployed workers in Europe at this moment. It will be worse when Revolution has burst upon us … The number of the out-of-works will be doubled as soon as barricades are erected in Europe and the United States … we know that in time of Revolution exchange and industry suffer most from the general upheaval … A Revolution in Europe means, then, the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops."* The *"smallest attack upon property will bring in its train the complete disorganisation"* of the capitalist economy. This meant that society *"itself will be forced to take production in hand … and to reorganise it to meet the needs of the whole people."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 69–70] This prediction was a common feature of Kropotkin's politics (as can be seen from, say, his *"The First Work of the Revolution"* [**Act for Yourselves**, pp. 56–60]).

Revolutionary anarchism, then, is based on a clear understanding of the nature of a social revolution, the objective problems it will face and the need for mass participation and free initiative to solve them. So it must, therefore, be stressed that the very *"objective factors"* supporters of Bolshevism use to justify the actions of Lenin and Trotsky were predicted correctly by anarchists decades beforehand and integrated into our politics. Moreover, anarchists had developed their ideas on social revolution to make sure that these inevitable disruptions would be minimised. By stressing the need for self-management, mass participation, self-organisation and free federation, anarchism showed how a free people could deal with the difficult problems they would face (as we discuss in the section H.6.2 there is substantial evidence to show that Bolshevik ideology and practice made the problems facing the Russian revolution much worse than they had to be).

It should also be noted that every revolution has confirmed the anarchist analysis. For example, the German Revolution after 1918 faced an economic collapse which was, relatively, just as bad as that facing Russia the year before. The near revolu-



cluded that the period up until March 1918 was not considered by the Bolsheviks themselves as being so bad as requiring the adjustment of their politics. This explains why, as one historian notes, that the *"revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion on 25 May 1918 is often considered to be the beginning of full-scale military activity. There followed a succession of campaigns."* This is reflected in Bolshevik policy as well, with war communism *"lasting from about mid-1918 to March 1921."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22 and p. 19]

Significantly, the introduction of one-man management was seen not as an emergency measure forced upon the Bolsheviks by dire circumstances of civil war but rather as a natural aspect of building socialism itself. In March, 1918, for example, Lenin argued that civil war *"became a fact"* on October, 25, 1917 and *"[i]n this civil war … victory was achieved with … extraordinary ease … The Russia revolution was a continuous triumphal march in the first months."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88–9] Looking back at this time from April 1920, Lenin reiterated his position (*"Dictatorial powers and one-man management are not contradictory to socialist democracy."*) while also stressing that this was not forced upon the Bolsheviks by civil war. Discussing how, again, the civil war was ended and it was time to build socialism he argued that the *"whole attention of the Communist Party and the Soviet government is centred on peaceful economic development, on problems of the dictatorship and of one-man management … When we tackled them for the first time in 1918, there was no civil war and no experience to speak of."* So it was *"not only experience"* of civil war, argued Lenin *"but something more profound … that has induced us now, as it did two years ago, to concentrate all our attention on labour discipline."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30, p. 503 and p. 504] Trotsky also argued that Bolshevik policy was not conditioned by the civil war (see section H.3.14).

As historian Jonathan Aves notes, *"the Communist Party took victory as a sign of the correctness of its ideological approach*

*and set about the task of economic construction on the basis of an intensification of War Communism policies.*" [**Workers Against Lenin**, p. 37] In addition, this perspective flowed, as we argue in the next section, from the Bolshevik ideology, from its vision of socialism, rather than some alien system imposed upon an otherwise healthy set of ideas.

Of course, this can be ignored in favour of the argument that party rule was required for the revolution to succeed. That would be a defendable, if utterly incorrect, position to take. It would, however, also necessitate ripping up Lenin's **State and Revolution** as it is clearly not relevant to a socialist revolution nor can it be considered as the definitive guide of what Leninism really stands for, as Leninists like to portray it to this day. Given that this is extremely unlikely to happen, it is fair to suggest that claims that the Bolsheviks faced "civil war" from the start, so justifying their authoritarianism, can be dismissed as particularly unconvincing special pleading. Much the same can be said for the "objective conditions" produced by the May 1918 to October 1920 civil war argument in general.

Then there is the logical problem. Leninists say that they are revolutionaries. As we noted in section H.2.1, they inaccurately mock anarchists for not believing that a revolution needs to defend itself. Yet, ironically, their whole defence of Bolshevism rests on the *"exceptional circumstances"* produced by the civil war they claim is inevitable. If Leninism cannot handle the problems associated with actually conducting a revolution then, surely, it should be avoided at all costs. This is particularly the case as leading Bolsheviks all argued that the specific problems their latter day followers blame for their authoritarianism were natural results of any revolution and, consequently, unavoidable. Lenin, for example, in 1917 mocked those who opposed revolution because *"the situation is exceptionally complicated."* He noted *"the development of the revolution itself **always** creates an **exceptionally** complicated situation"* and that it was an *"incredibly complicated and painful process."* In fact, it



was *"the most intense, furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has taken place without civil war. And only a 'man in a muffler' can think that civil war is conceivable without an 'exceptionally complicated situation.'" "If the situation were not exceptionally complicated there would be no revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, pp. 118–9]

He reiterated this in 1918, arguing that *"every great revolution, and a socialist revolution in particular, even if there is no external war, is inconceivable without internal war, i.e., civil war, which is even more devastating than external war, and involves thousands and millions of cases of wavering and desertion from one side to another, implies a state of extreme indefiniteness, lack of equilibrium and chaos."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 264] He even argued that revolution in an advanced capitalist nations would be far more devastating and ruinous than in Russia. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 28, p. 298]

Therefore, Lenin stressed, *"it will never be possible to build socialism at a time when everything is running smoothly and tranquilly; it will never be possible to realise socialism without the landowners and capitalists putting up a furious resistance."* Those *"who believe that socialism can be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistaken: it will be everywhere built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine. That is how it must be."* Moreover, *"not one of the great revolutions of history has taken place"* without civil war and *"without which not a single serious Marxist has conceived the transition from capitalism to socialism."* Obviously, *"there can be no civil war — the inevitable condition and concomitant of socialist revolution — without disruption."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 520, p. 517, p. 496 and p. 497]

Moreover, anarchists had long argued that a revolution would be associated with economic disruption, isolation and civil war and, consequently, had developed their ideas to take these into account. For example, Kropotkin was *"certain that the coming Revolution ... will burst upon us in the middle of*

*sues its own interests. This stratum cannot run things well, just as the management apparatus ... [in capitalist] factories cannot run things well. The myth of capitalism's productive efficiency at the level of the individual factory, a myth shared by bourgeois and Stalinist ideologues alike, cannot stand up to the most elemental examination of the facts, and any industrial worker could draw up a devastating indictment against capitalist 'rationalisation'* ***judged on its own terms****.*

*"First of all, the managerial bureaucracy does not* ***know*** *what it is supposed to be managing. The reality of production escapes it, for this reality is nothing but the activity of the producers, and the producers do not inform the managers ... about what is really taking place. Quite often they organise themselves in such a way that the managers won't be informed (in order to avoid increased exploitation, because they feel antagonistic, or quite simply because they have no interest: It isn't* ***their*** *business).*

*"In the second place, the way in which production is organised is set up entirely against the workers. They always are being asked, one way or another, to do more work without getting paid for it. Management's orders, therefore, inevitably meet with fierce resistance on the part of those who have to carry them out."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, pp. 62–3]

This is *"the same objection as that Hayek raises against the possibility of a planned economy. Indeed, the epistemological problems that Hayek raised against centralised planned economies have been echoed within the socialist tradition as a problem within the capitalist firm."* There is *"a real conflict*



drop in both cities was exceptional, with most towns seeing much smaller reductions). As one historian summarises, the *"social turmoil at this time undeniably reduced the size of Russia's working class ... . Yet a substantial core of urban workers remained in the factories, and their attitudes towards the Bolsheviks were indeed transformed."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 348] This core was those with the least ties with the countryside — the genuine industrial worker.

Nor can it be maintained that the Russian working class was incapable of collective action during the civil war. Throughout that period, as well as before and after, the Russian workers proved themselves quite capable of taking collective action — against the Bolshevik state. Simply put, an *"atomised, individualised mass"* does not need extensive state repression to control it. So while the working class **was** *"a fraction of its former size"* it **was** able *"to exercise the collective power it had done in 1917."* Significantly, rather than decrease over the civil war period, the mass protests **grew** in militancy. By 1921 these protests and strikes were threatening the very existence of the Bolshevik dictatorship, forcing it to abandon key aspects of its economic policies.

Which shows a key flaw in the standard Leninist account — the Russian working class, while undoubtedly reduced in size and subject to extreme economic problems, was still able to organise, strike and protest. This awkward fact has been systematically downplayed, when not ignored, in Leninist accounts of this period. As in any class society, the history of the oppressed is ignored in favour of the resolutions and decisions of the enlightened few at the top of the social pyramid. Given the relative lack of awareness of working class protest against the Bolsheviks, it will be necessary to present substantial evidence of it.

This process of collective action by workers and Bolshevik repression started before the Civil War began, continued throughout and after it. For example, *"[t]hroughout the civil*

*war there was an undercurrent of labour militancy in Moscow … both the introduction and the phasing out of war communism were marked by particularly active periods of labour unrest."* In the Moscow area, while it is *"impossible to say what proportion of workers were involved in the various disturbances,"* following the lull after the defeat of the protest movement in mid-1918 *"each wave of unrest was more powerful than the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94 and p. 93] This was the case across Russia, with *"periodic swings in the workers' political temper. When Soviet rule stood in peril … [this] spared the regime the defection of its proletarian base. During lulls in the fighting, strikes and demonstrations broke out."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 101] Workers' resistance and protests against the Bolsheviks shows that not only that a "workers' state" is a contradiction in terms but also that there was a social base for possible alternatives to Leninism.

The early months of Bolshevik rule were marked by *"worker protests, which then precipitated violent repressions against hostile workers. Such treatment further intensified the disenchantment of significant segments of Petrograd labour with Bolshevik-dominated Soviet rule."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 37] The first major act of state repression was an attack on a march in Petrograd in support of the Constituent Assembly when it opened in January 1918. Early May saw *"the shooting of protesting housewives and workers in the suburb of Kolpino"*, the *"arbitrary arrest and abuse of workers"* in Sestroretsk, the *"closure of newspapers and arrests of individuals who protested the Kolpino and Sestroretsk events"* and *"the resumption of labour unrest and conflict with authorities in other Petrograd factories."* This was no isolated event, as *"violent incidents against hungry workers and their family demanding bread occurred with increasing regularity."* [Alexander Rabinowitch,



*market itself counts little or nothing as a source of finance. Shareholders … have no useful role."* [**Wall Street**, p. 292]

Then there is also the ironic nature of Rothbard's assertion that self-management would ensure there *"could be no efficiency in production because the requisite knowledge would be lacking."* This is because capitalist firms are hierarchies, based on top-down central planning, and this hinders the free flow of knowledge and information. As with Stalinism, within the capitalist firm information passes up the organisational hierarchy and becomes increasingly simplified and important local knowledge and details lost (when not deliberately falsified to ensure continual employment by suppressing bad news). The top-management takes decisions based on highly aggregated data, the quality of which is hard to know. The management, then, suffers from information and knowledge deficiencies while the workers below lack sufficient autonomy to act to correct inefficiencies as well as incentive to communicate accurate information and act to improve the production process. As Cornelius Castoriadis correctly noted:

> *"Bureaucratic planning is nothing but the extension to the economy as a whole of the methods created and applied by capitalism in the 'rational' direction of large production units. If we consider the most profound feature of the economy, the concrete situation in which people are placed, we see that bureaucratic planning is the most highly perfected realisation of the spirit of capitalism; it pushes to the limit its most significant tendencies. Just as in the management of a large capitalist production unit, this type of planning is carried out by a separate stratum of managers … Its essence, like that of capitalist production, lies in an effort to reduce the direct producers to the role of pure and simple executants of received orders, orders formulated by a particular stratum that pur-*

Ironically, this situation has a parallel with Stalinist central planning. Under that system the managers of State workplaces had an incentive to lie about their capacity to the planning bureaucracy. The planner would, in turn, assume higher capacity, so harming honest managers and encouraging them to lie. This, of course, had a seriously bad impact on the economy. Unsurprisingly, the similar effects caused by capital markets on economies subject to them are as bad as well as downplaying long term issues and investment. In addition, it should be noted that stock-markets regularly experiences bubbles and subsequent bursts. Stock markets may reflect the collective judgements of investors, but it says little about the quality of those judgements. What use are stock prices if they simply reflect herd mentality, the delusions of people ignorant of the real economy or who fail to see a bubble? Particularly when the real-world impact when such bubbles burst can be devastating to those uninvolved with the stock market?

In summary, then, firms are *"over-whelmingly self-financing — that is, most of their investment expenditures are funded through profits (about 90%, on longer-term averages)"* The stock markets provide *"only a sliver of investment funds."* There are, of course, some *"periods like the 1990s, during which the stock market serves as a conduit for shovelling huge amounts of cash into speculative venues, most of which have evaporated … Much, maybe most, of what was financed in the 1990s didn't deserve the money."* Such booms do not last forever and are *"no advertisement for the efficiency of our capital markets."* [Henwood, **After the New Economy**, p. 187 and p. 188]

Thus there is substantial reason to question the suggestion that a stock market is necessary for the efficient allocation of capital. There is no need for capital markets in a system based on mutual banks and networks of co-operatives. As Henwood concludes, *"the signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock*



**The Bolsheviks in Power**, pp. 229–30] The shooting at Kolpino *"triggered a massive wave of indignation … Work temporarily stopped at a number of plants."* In Moscow, Tula, Kolomna, Nizhnii-Novoprod, Rybinsk, Orel, Tver' and elsewhere *"workers gathered to issue new protests."* In Petrograd, *"textile workers went on strike for increased food rations and a wave of demonstrations spread in response to still more Bolshevik arrests."* This movement was the *"first major wave of labour protest"* against the regime, with *"protests against some form of Bolshevik repression"* being common. [William Rosenberg, **Russian Labor and Bolshevik Power**, pp. 123–4]

This general workers' opposition generated the Menshevik inspired, but independent, Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates (EAD). *"The emergence of the EAD"*, Rabinowitch notes, *"was also stimulated by the widespread view that trade unions, factory committees, and soviets … were no longer representative, democratically run working-class institutions; instead they had been transformed into arbitrary, bureaucratic government agencies. There was ample reason for this concern."* To counter the EAD, the Bolsheviks organised non-party conferences which, in itself, shows that the soviets had become as distant from the masses as the opposition argued. District soviets *"were deeply concerned about their increasing isolation … At the end of March … they resolved to convene successive nonparty workers' conferences … in part to undercut the EAD by strengthening ties between district soviets and workers."* This was done amidst *"unmistakable signs of the widening rift between Bolshevik-dominated political institutions and ordinary factory workers."* The EAD, argues Rabinowitch, was an expression of the *"growing disenchantment of Petrograd workers with economic conditions and the evolving structure and operation of Soviet political institutions"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224, p. 232 and p. 231]

Anarchists should be not too surprised that the turning of popular organisations into parts of a state soon resulted in their growing isolation from the masses. The state, with

its centralised structures, is simply not designed for mass participation — and this does doubly for the highly centralised Leninist state.

These protests and repression continued after the start of the civil war. *"At the end of May and beginning of June, a wave of strikes to protest the lack of bread swept Nivskii district factories"* and *"strikes followed by bloody clashes between workers and Soviet authorities had erupted in scattered parts of central Russia."* On June 21, a general meeting of Obukhov workers *"seized control of the plant"* and the next day the assembled workers *"resolved to demand that the EAD should declare political strikes ... to protest the political repression of workers."* Orders were issued by the authorities *"to shut down Obukhov plant"* and *"the neighbourhood surrounding the plant was placed under martial law."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231 and pp. 246–7] However *"workers were not so readily pacified. In scores of additional factories and shops protests mounted and rapidly spread along the railways."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 126–7]

Faced with this mounting pressure of spontaneous strikes, the EAD declared a general for the 2nd of July. The Bolshevik authorities acted quickly: *"Any sign of sympathy for the strike was declared a criminal act. More arrests were made. In Moscow, Bolsheviks raided the Aleksandrovsk railroad shops, not without bloodshed. Dissidence spread."* On July 1st, *"machine guns were set up at main points throughout the Petrograd and Moscow railroad junctions, and elsewhere in both cities as well. Controls were tightened in factories. Meetings were forcefully dispersed."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 127] Factories were warned *"that if they participated in the general strike they would face immediate shutdown, and individual strikes were threatened with fines or loss of work. Agitators and members of strike committees were subject to immediate arrest."* Opposition printing presses *"were sealed, the offices of hostile trade unions were raided, martial law on lines in the Petrograd rail hub was declared, and armed patrols with authority to prevent work stoppages were formed*



This suggests that the *"efficient allocation of capital in production does not require a stock market (witness the small business sector [under capitalism])."* *"Socialist firms,"* he notes, *"are routinely attacked as being inherently inefficient because they have no equity shares exposed to market valuation. If this argument had any merit, it would imply that the whole sector of unquoted closely-held small and medium-sized firms in the West was 'inherently inefficient' — a conclusion that must be viewed with some scepticism. Indeed, in the comparison to large corporations with publicly-traded shares, the closely-held firms are probably **more** efficient users of capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 200 and p. 199]

In terms of the impact of the stock market on the economy there is good reason to think that this **hinders** economic efficiency by generating a perverse set of incentives and misleading information flows and so their abolition would actually **aid** production and productive efficiency).

Taking the first issue, the existence of a stock market has serious (negative) effects on investment. As Doug Henwood notes, there *"are serious communication problems between managers and shareholders."* This is because *"[e]ven if participants are aware of an upward bias to earnings estimates [of companies], and even if they correct for it, managers would still have an incentive to try to fool the market. If you tell the truth, your accurate estimate will be marked down by a sceptical market. So, it's entirely rational for managers to boost profits in the short term, either through accounting gimmickry or by making only investments with quick paybacks."* So, managers *"facing a market [the stock market] that is famous for its preference for quick profits today rather than patient long-term growth have little choice but to do its bidding. Otherwise, their stock will be marked down, and the firm ripe for take-over."* While *"[f]irms and economies can't get richer by starving themselves"* stock market investors *"can get richer when the companies they own go hungry — at least in the short term. As for the long term, well, that's someone else's problem the week after next."* [**Wall Street**, p. 171]

that a libertarian socialist economy can exist and flourish. Perhaps it will be suggested that an economy needs stock markets to price companies, as Mises did. Thus investment is *"not a matter for the mangers of joint stock companies, it is essentially a matter of the capitalists"* in the *"stock exchanges"*. Investment, he asserted, was *"not a matter of wages"* of managers but of *"the capitalist who buys and sell stocks and shares, who make loans and recover them, who make deposits in the banks."* [**Socialism**, p. 139]

It would be churlish to note that the members of co-operatives under capitalism, like most working class people, are more than able to make deposits in banks and arrange loans. In a mutualist economy, workers will not loose this ability just because the banks are themselves co-operatives. Similarly, it would be equally churlish but essential to note that the stock market is hardly the means by which capital is actually raised within capitalism. As David Engler points out, *"[s]upporters of the system ... claim that stock exchanges mobilise funds for business. Do they? When people buy and sell shares, 'no investment goes into company treasuries ... Shares simply change hands for cash in endless repetition.' Company treasuries get funds only from new equity issues. These accounted for an average of a mere 0.5 per cent of shares trading in the US during the 1980s."* [**Apostles of Greed**, pp. 157–158] This is echoed by David Ellerman:

> *"In spite of the stock market's large symbolic value, it is notorious that it has relatively little to do with the production of goods and services in the economy (the gambling industry aside). The overwhelming bulk of stock transactions are in second-hand shares so that the capital paid for shares usually goes to other stock traders, not to productive enterprises issuing new shares."* [**The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 199]



*and put on twenty-four hour duty at key points around the city."* Perhaps unsurprisingly, given *"the brutal suppression of the EAD's general strike"*, it was not successful. [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 254 and p. 259]

Thus *"[b]y the early summer of 1918"* there were *"widespread anti-Bolshevik protests. Armed clashes occurred in the factory districts of Petrograd and other industrial centres."* [William Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] It should also be noted that at the end of September of that year, there was a revolt by Baltic Fleet sailors demanding (as they did again in 1921) a *"return to government by liberated, democratic soviets — that is, 1917-type soviets."* As after the more famous 1921 revolt, the Left-SR controlled Kronstadt soviet had been disbanded and replaced by a Bolshevik revolutionary committee in July 1918, during the repression after the Left-SR assassination of the German ambassador. [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 352 and p. 302]

As well as state repression, the politics of the opposition played a role in its defeat. Before October 1918, both the Mensheviks and SRs were in favour of the Constituent Assembly and Dumas as the main organs of power, with the soviets playing a minor role. This allowed the Bolsheviks to portray themselves as defenders of "soviet power" (a position which still held popular support). Understandably, many workers were unhappy to support an opposition which aimed to replace the soviets with typically bourgeois institutions. Many also considered the Bolshevik government as a "soviet power" and so, to some degree, their own regime. With the civil war starting, many working class people would also have been uneasy in protesting against a regime which proclaimed its soviet and socialist credentials. After October 1918, the Mensheviks supported the idea of (a democratically elected) soviet power, joining the Left-SRs (who were now effectively illegal after their revolt of July — see section H.6.1). However, by then it was far too late as Bolshevik ideology had adjusted to Bolshevik practice and the party was now advocating party dictatorship. Thus,

we find Victor Serge in the 1930s noting that *"the degeneration of Bolshevism"* was apparent by that time, *"since at the start of 1919 I was horrified to read an article by Zinoviev ... on the monopoly of the party in power."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 188] It should be noted, though, that Serge kept his horror well hidden throughout this period — and well into the 1930s (see section H.1.2 for his public support for this monopoly).

As noted above, this cycle of resistance and repression was not limited to Petrograd. In July 1918, a leading Bolshevik insisted *"that server measures were needed to deal with strikes"* in Petrograd while in other cities *"harsher forms of repression"* were used. For example, in Tula, in June 1918, the regime declared *"martial law and arrested the protestors. Strikes followed and were suppressed by violence"*. In Sormovo, 5,000 workers went on strike after a Menshevik-SR paper was closed. Violence was *"used to break the strike."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105]

Similar waves of protests and strikes as those in 1918 took place the following year with 1919 seeing a *"new outbreak of strikes in March"*, with the *"pattern of repression ... repeated."* One strike saw *"closing of the factory, the firing of a number of workers, and the supervised re-election of its factory committee."* In Astrakhan, a mass meeting of 10,000 workers was fired on by Red Army troops, killing 2,000 (another 2,000 were taken prisoner and subsequently executed). [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109] Moscow, at the end of June, saw a *"committee of defence (KOM) [being] formed to deal with the rising tide of disturbances."* The KOM *"concentrated emergency power in its hands, overriding the Moscow Soviet, and demanding obedience from the population. The disturbances died down under the pressure of repression."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 94–5] In the Volga region, delegates to a conference of railroad workers *"protested the Cheka's arrest of union members, which the delegates insisted further disrupted transport. It certainly curbed the number of strikes."* [Raleigh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 371] In Tula *"after strikes in the spring of 1919"* local



and hierarchies all had absolutely no impact on how society evolved, as the end product of real history (the capitalist economy) just happens to be the same as Rothbard's deductions from a few assumptions predict. Little wonder, then, that "Austrian" economics seems more like rationalisations for some ideologically desired result than a serious economic analysis.

Even some dissident "Austrian" economists recognise the weakness of Rothbard's position. Thus *"Rothbard clearly misunderstands the general principle behind producer co-operatives and self-management in general."* In reality, *"[a]s a democratic method of enterprise organisation, workers' self-management is, in principle, fully compatible with a market system"* and so *"a market economy comprised of self-managed enterprises is consistent with Austrian School theory ... It is fundamentally a* ***market-based system*** *... that doesn't seem to face the epistemological hurdles ... that prohibit rational economic calculation"* under state socialism. Sadly, socialism is still equated with central planning, for such a system *"is certainly not socialism. Nor, however, is it capitalism in the conventional sense of the term."* In fact, it is not capitalism at all and if we assume that free access to resources such as workplaces and credit, then it most definitely **is** socialism (*"Legal ownership is not the chief issue in defining workers' self-management — management is. Worker-managers, though not necessarily the legal owners of all the factors of production collected within the firm, are free to experiment and establish enterprise policy as they see fit."*). [David L. Prychitko, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136, p. 135, pp. 4–5, p. 4 and p. 135] This suggests that non-labour factors can be purchased from other co-operatives, credit provided by mutual banks (credit co-operatives) at cost and so forth. As such, a mutualist system is perfectly feasible.

Thus economic calculation based on competitive market prices is possible under a socialist system. Indeed, we see examples of this even under capitalism. For example, the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque Country indicate

All in all, Rothbard confirms Kropotkin's comments that economics (*"that pseudo-science of the bourgeoisie"*) *"does not cease to give praise in every way to the benefits of individual property"* yet *"the economists do not conclude, 'The land to him who cultivates it.' On the contrary, they hasten to deduce from the situation, 'The land to the lord who will get it cultivated by wage earners!'"* [**Words of a Rebel**, pp. 209–10] In addition, Rothbard implicitly places "efficiency" above liberty, preferring dubious "efficiency" gains to the actual gains in freedom which the abolition of workplace autocracy would create. Given a choice between liberty and "efficiency", the genuine anarchist would prefer liberty. Luckily, though, workplace liberty increases efficiency so Rothbard's decision is a wrong one. It should also be noted that Rothbard's position (as is usually the case) is directly opposite that of Proudhon, who considered it *"inevitable"* that in a free society *"the two functions of **wage-labourer** on the one hand, and of **proprietor-capitalist-contractor** on the other, become equal and inseparable in the person of every workingman"*. This was the *"first principle of the new economy, a principle full of hope and of consolation for the labourer without capital, but a principle full of terror for the parasite and for the tools of parasitism, who see reduced to naught their celebrated formula: **Capital, labour, talent!**"* [**Proudhon's Solution of the Social Problem**, p. 165 and p. 85]

And it does seem a strange co-incidence that someone born into a capitalist economy, ideologically supporting it with a passion and seeking to justify its class system just happens to deduce from a given set of axioms that landlords and capitalists happen to play a vital role in the economy! It would not take too much time to determine if someone in a society without landlords or capitalists would also logically deduce from the same axioms the pressing economic necessity for such classes. Nor would it take long to ponder why Greek philosophers, like Aristotle, concluded that slavery was natural. And it does seem strange that centuries of coercion, authority, statism, classes



Menshevik party activists had been arrested while Petrograd saw *"violent strikes"* at around the same time. [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 19 and p. 23] As Vladimir Brovkin argues in his account of the strikes and protests of 1919:

> *"Data on one strike in one city may be dismissed as incidental. When, however, evidence is available from various sources on simultaneous independent strikes in different cities an overall picture begins to emerge. All strikes developed along a similar timetable: February, brewing discontent; March and April, peak of strikes: May, slackening in strikes; and June and July, a new wave of strikes ...*
>
> *"Workers' unrest took place in Russia's biggest and most important industrial centres ... Strikes affected the largest industries, primarily those involving metal: metallurgical, locomotive, and armaments plants ... In some cities ... textile and other workers were active protesters as well. In at least five cities ... the protests resembled general strikes."* [*"Workers' Unrest and the Bolsheviks' Response in 1919"*, pp. 350–373, **Slavic Review**, Vol. 49, No. 3, p. 370]

These strikes raised both economic and political demands, such as *"free and fair elections to the soviets."* Unsurprisingly, in all known cases the Bolsheviks' *"initial response to strikes was to ban public meetings and rallies"* as well as *"occup[ying] the striking plant and dismiss[ing] the strikers en masse."* They also *"arrested strikers"* and executed some. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 371 and p. 372]

1920 saw similar waves of strikes and protests. In fact, strike action *"remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920."* Soviet figures report a total of 146 strikes, involving 135,442 workers for the 26 provinces covered. In Petrograd province, there were 73 strikes with 85,642 participants. *"This*

*is a high figure indeed, since at this time … there were 109,100 workers"* in the province. Overall, *"the geographical extent of the February-March strike wave is impressive"* and the *"harsh discipline that went with labour militarisation led to an increase in industrial unrest in 1920."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69, p. 70 and p. 80]

Saratov, for example, saw a wave of factory occupations break out in June and mill workers went out in July while in August, strikes and walkouts occurred in its mills and other factories and these *"prompted a spate of arrests and repression."* In September railroad workers went out on strike, with arrests making *"the situation worse, forcing the administration to accept the workers' demands."* [Raleigh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 375] In January 1920, a strike followed a mass meeting at a railway repair shop in Moscow. Attempts to spread were foiled by arrests. The workshop was closed, depriving workers of their rations and 103 workers of the 1,600 employed were imprisoned. *"In late March 1920 there were strikes in some factories"* in Moscow and *"[a]t the height of the Polish war the protests and strikes, usually provoked by economic issues but not restricted to them, became particularly frequent … The assault on non-Bolshevik trade unionism launched at this time was probably associated with the wave of unrest since there was a clear danger that they would provide a focus for opposition."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 95] The *"largest strike in Moscow in the summer of 1920"* was by tram workers over the equalisation of rations. It began on August 12th, when one tram depot went on strike, quickly followed by others while workers *"in other industries joined in to."* The tram workers *"stayed out a further two days before being driven back by arrests and threats of mass sackings."* In the textile manufacturing towns around Moscow *"there were large-scale strikes"* in November 1920, with 1000 workers striking for four days in one district and a strike of 500 mill workers saw 3,000 workers from another mill joining in. [Simon Pirani, **The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24**, p. 32 and p. 43]



[quoted by David L. Prychitko, **Markets, Planning and Democracy**, p. 135 and p. 136]

It is hard to take this argument seriously. Consider, for example, a pre-capitalist society of farmers and artisans. Both groups of people own their own means of production (the land and the tools they use). The farmers grow crops for the artisans who, in turn, provide the farmers with the tools they use. According to Rothbard, the farmers would have no idea what to grow nor would the artisans know which tools to buy to meet the demand of the farmers nor which to use to reduce their working time. Presumably, both the farmers and artisans would stay awake at night worrying what to produce, wishing they had a landlord and boss to tell them how best to use their labour and resources.

Let us add the landlord class to this society. Now the landlord can tell the farmer what to grow as their rent income indicates how to allocate the land to its most productive use. Except, of course, it is still the farmers who decide what to produce. Knowing that they will need to pay rent (for access to the land) they will decide to devote their (rented) land to the most profitable use in order to both pay the rent and have enough to live on. Why they do not seek the most profitable use without the need for rent is not explored by Rothbard. Much the same can be said of artisans subject to a boss, for the worker can evaluate whether an investment in a specific new tool will result in more income or reduced time labouring or whether a new product will likely meet the needs of consumers. Moving from a pre-capitalist society to a post-capitalist one, it is clear that a system of self-managed co-operatives can make the same decisions without requiring economic masters. This is unsurprising, given that Mises' asserted that the boss *"of course exercises power over the workers"* but that the *"lord of production is the consumer."* [**Socialism**, p. 443] In which case, the boss need not be an intermediary between the real "lord" and those who do the production!

other syndicates or communes. As Mises admitted when discussing one scheme of guild socialism, *"associations and sub-associations maintain a mutual exchange-relationship; they receive and give as if they were owners. Thus a market and market-prices are formed."* Thus, when deciding upon a new workplace, railway or house, the designers in question do have access to competitive prices with which to make their decisions. Nor does Mises' argument work against communal ownership in such a system as the commune would be buying products from syndicates in the same way as one part of a company can buy products from another part of the same company under capitalism. That goods produced by self-managed syndicates have market-prices does not imply capitalism for, as they abolish wage labour and are based on free-access (socialisation), it is a form of socialism (as socialists define it, Mises' protestations that *"this is incompatible with socialism"* not-with-standing!). [**Socialism**, p. 518]

Murray Rothbard suggested that a self-managed system would fail, and a system *"composed exclusively of self-managed enterprises is impossible, and would lead ... to calculative chaos and complete breakdown."* When *"each firm is owned jointly by all factor-owners"* then *"there is no separation at all between workers, landowners, capitalists, and entrepreneurs. There would be no way, then, of separating the wage incomes received from the interest or rent incomes or profits received. And now we finally arrive at the real reason why the economy cannot consist completely of such firms (called 'producers' co-operatives'). For, without an external market for wage rates, rents, and interest, there would be no rational way for entrepreneurs to allocate factors in accordance with the wishes of the consumers. No one would know where he could allocate his land or his labour to provide the maximum monetary gains. No entrepreneur would know how to arrange factors in their most value-productive combination to earn greatest profit. There could be no efficiency in production because the requisite knowledge would be lacking."*



In Petrograd the Aleksandrovskii locomotive building works *"had seen strikes in 1918 and 1919"* and in August 1920 it again stopped work. The Bolsheviks locked the workers out and placed guards outside it. The Cheka then arrested the SRs elected to the soviet from that workplace as well as about 30 workers. After the arrests, the workers refused to co-operate with elections for new soviet delegates. The *"opportunity was taken to carry out a general round-up, and arrests were made"* at three other works. The enormous Briansk works *"experienced two major strikes in 1920"*, and second one saw the introduction of martial law on both the works and the settlement it was situated in. A strike in Tula saw the Bolsheviks declare a *"state of siege"*, although the repression *"did not prevent further unrest and the workers put forward new demands"* while, in Moscow, a strike in May by printers resulted in their works *"closed and the strikers sent to concentration camps."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 41, p. 45, p. 47, pp. 48–9, pp. 53–4 and p. 59]

These expressions of mass protest and collective action continued in 1921, unsurprisingly as the civil war was effectively over in the previous autumn. Even John Rees had to acknowledge the general strike in Russia at the time, stating that the Kronstadt revolt was *"preceded by a wave of serious but quickly resolved strikes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61] Significantly, he failed to note that the Kronstadt sailors rebelled in solidarity with those strikes and how it was state repression which *"resolved"* the strikes. Moreover, he seriously downplays the scale and importance of these strikes, perhaps unsurprisingly as *"[b]y the beginning of 1921 a revolutionary situation with workers in the vanguard had emerged in Soviet Russia"* with *"the simultaneous outbreak of strikes in Petrograd and Moscow and in other industrial regions."* In February and March 1921, *"industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent or **volynka**. General strikes, or very widespread unrest"* hit all but one of the country's major industrial regions and *"workers protest consisted not just of strikes but also of factory*

*occupations, 'Italian strikes', demonstrations, mass meetings, the beating up of communists and so on."* Faced with this massive strike wave, the Bolsheviks did what many ruling elites do: they called it something else. Rather than admit it was a strike, they *"usually employed the word **volynka**, which means only a 'go-slow'"*. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 3, p. 109, p. 112, pp. 111–2]

Mid-February 1921 saw workers in Moscow striking and *"massive city-wide protest spread through Petrograd ... Strikes and demonstrations spread. The regime responded as it had done in the past, with lock-outs, mass arrests, heavy show of force — and concessions."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111] As Paul Avrich recounts, in Petrograd these *"street demonstrations were heralded by a rash of protest meetings"* workplaces On the 24th of February, the day after a workplace meeting, the Trubochny factory workforce downed tools and walked out the factory. Additional workers from nearby factories joined in. The crowd of 2,000 was dispersed by armed military cadets. The next day, the Trubochny workers again took to the streets and visited other workplaces, bringing them out on strike too. In the face of a near general strike, three-man Defence Committee was formed. Zinoviev *"proclaimed martial law"* and *"[o]vernight Petrograd became an armed camp."* Strikers were locked out and the *"application of military force and the widespread arrests, not to speak of the tireless propaganda waged by the authorities"* was *"indispensable in restoring order"* (as were economic concessions). [**Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 37–8, p. 39, pp. 46–7 and p. 50]

In Moscow, *"industrial unrest ... turned into open confrontation and protest spilled on to the streets"*, starting with a *"wave of strikes that had its centre in the heart of industrial Moscow."* Strikes were *"also spreading outside Moscow city itself into the surrounding provinces"* and so *"Moscow and Moscow province were put under martial law"*. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130, p. 138, p. 143 and p. 144] This strike wave started when *"[m]eetings in factories and plants gathered and criticised government poli-*



calculation of each part of its enterprise in such a way as to determine the role each co-operative plays in its economy. It can look at each section as if it were a separate entity and appraise it according to the share it contributes as it is assumed that each section "owns" (i.e., has use rights over) its definite part. It can then buy from, and sell to, other co-operatives and a profit or loss can be imputed to evaluate the independent action of each co-operative and so their own interests impel the co-operative workers toward the utmost care and exertion in the conduct of their co-operative's affairs.

So to refute Mises, we need only repeat what he himself argued about large corporations! Thus there can be extensive autonomy for workplaces under socialism and this does not in any way contradict the fact that *"all the means of production are the property of the community."* [*"Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89] Socialisation, in other words, does **not** imply central planning but rather free access and free association. In summary, then, Mises confused property rights with use rights, possession with property, and failed to see now a mutualist system of socialised co-operatives exchanging products can be a viable alternative to the current exploitative and oppressive economic regime.

Such a mutualist economy also strikes at the heart of Mises' claims that socialism was *"impossible."* Given that he accepted that there may be markets, and hence market prices, for consumer goods in a socialist economy his claims of the impossibility of socialism seems unfounded. For Mises, the problem for socialism was that *"because no production-good will ever become the object of exchange, it will be impossible to determine its monetary value."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 92] The flaw in his argument is clear. Taking, for example, coal, we find that it is both a means of production and of consumption. If a market in consumer goods is possible for a socialist system, then competitive prices for production goods is also possible as syndicates producing production-goods would also sell the product of their labour to

(in this case, a large company) can exchange goods via the market. That Mises makes such a statement indicates well the firm basis of his argument in reality. Thus a socialist society can have extensive autonomy for its co-operatives, just as a large capitalist firm can:

> *"the entrepreneur is in a position to separate the calculation of each part of his total enterprise in such a way that he can determine the role it plays within his whole enterprise. Thus he can look at each section as if it were a separate entity and can appraise it according to the share it contributes to the success of the total enterprise. Within this system of business calculation each section of a firm represents an integral entity, a hypothetical independent business, as it were. It is assumed that this section 'owns' a definite part of the whole capital employed in the enterprise, that it buys from other sections and sells to them, that it has its own expenses and its own revenues, that its dealings result either in a profit or in a loss which is imputed to its own conduct of affairs as distinguished from the result of the other sections. Thus the entrepreneur can assign to each section's management a great deal of independence ... Every manager and submanager is responsible for the working of his section or subsection. It is to his credit if the accounts show a profit, and it is to his disadvantage if they show a loss. His own interests impel him toward the utmost care and exertion in the conduct of his section's affairs."* [**Human Action**, pp. 301–2]

So much, then, for the notion that common ownership makes it impossible for market socialism to work. After all, the libertarian community can just as easily separate the



*cies, beginning with supply and developing into general political criticism."* As was typical, the *"first response of the civil authorities to the disturbances was increased repression"* although as *"the number of striking factories increased some concessions were introduced."* Military units called in against striking workers *"refused to open fire, and they were replaced by the armed communist detachments"* which did. *"That evening mass protest meetings were held ... The following day several factories went on strike"* and troops were *"disarmed and locked in as a precaution"* by the government against possible fraternising. February 23rd saw a 10,000 strong street demonstration and *"Moscow was placed under martial law with a 24-hour watch on factories by the communist detachments and trustworthy army units."* The disturbances were accompanied by factory occupations and on the 1st of March the soviet called on workers *"not to go on strike."* However, *"wide-scale arrests deprived the movement of its leadership."* March 5th saw disturbances at the Bromlei works, *"resulting in the now customary arrest of workers. A general meeting at the plant on 25 March called for new elections to the Moscow Soviet. The management dispersed the meeting but the workers called on other plants to support the calls for new elections. As usual, the ringleaders were arrested."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 242–3, p. 245 and p. 246]

The events at the Bromlei works were significant in that the march 25th mass meeting passed an anarchist and Left-SR initiated resolution supporting the Kronstadt rebels. The party *"responded by having them sacked en masse"*. The workers *"demonstrated through"* their district *"and inspired some brief solidarity strikes."* Over 3000 workers joined the strikes and about 1000 of these joined the flying picket (managers at one print shop locked their workers in to stop them joining the protest). While the party was willing to negotiate economic issues, *"it had no wish to discuss politics with workers"* and so arrested those who initiated the resolution, sacked the rest of the workforce and selectively re-employed them. Two more strikes were conducted

*"to defend the political activists in their midst"* and two mass meetings demanded the release of arrested ones. Workers also struck on supply issues in May, July and August. [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 83–4]

While the Kronstadt revolt took place too late to help the Petrograd strikes, it did inspire a strike wave in Ekaterinoslavl (in the Ukraine) in May, 1921. It started in the railway workshops and became *"quickly politicised,"* with the strike committee raising a *"series of political ultimatums that were very similar in content to the demands of the Kronstadt rebels"* (many of the resolutions put to the meeting almost completely coincided with them). The strike *"spread to the other workshops"* and on June 1st the main large Ekaterinoslavl factories joined the strike. The strike was spread via the use of trains and telegraph and soon an area up to fifty miles around the town was affected. The strike was finally ended by the use of the Cheka, using mass arrests and shootings. Unsurprisingly, the local communists called the revolt a *"little Kronstadt."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–3]

Saratov also saw a mass revolt in March 1921, when a strike by railroad workers over a reduction in food rations spread to the metallurgical plants and other large factories *"as workers and non-workers sent representatives to the railroad shops."* They forced the Communists to allow the setting up of a commission to re-examine the activities of all economic organs and the Cheka. During the next two days, *"the assemblies held at factories to elect delegates to the commission bitterly denounced the Communists."* The *"unrest spilled over into Pokrovsk."* The commission of 270 had less than ten Communists and *"demanded the freeing of political prisoners, new elections to the soviets and to all labour organisations, independent unions, and freedom of speech, the press, and assembly."* The Communists *"resolved to shut down the commission before it could issue a public statement"* and set up a Provincial Revolutionary Committee which *"introduced martial law both in the city and the garrison"* as



Rothbard urged the state to impose private shares onto the workers in the former Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe as ownership was *"not to be granted to collectives or co-operatives or workers or peasants holistically, which would only bring back the ills of socialism in a decentralised and chaotic syndicalist form."* [**The Logic of Action II**, p. 210]

Third, syndicalism usually refers to a strategy (revolutionary unionism) used to achieve (libertarian) socialism rather than the goal itself (as Mises himself noted in a tirade against unions, *"Syndicalism is nothing else but the French word for trade unionism"* [**Socialism**, p. 480]). It could be argued that such a mutualist system could be an aim for some syndicalists, although most were and still are in favour of libertarian communism (a simple fact apparently unknown to Mises). Indeed, Mises ignorance of syndicalist thought is striking, asserting that the *"market is a consumers' democracy. The syndicalists want to transform it into a producers' democracy."* [**Human Action**, p. 809] Most syndicalists, however, aim to **abolish** the market and **all** aim for workers' control of production to **complement** (not replace) consumer choice. Syndicalists, like other anarchists, do not aim for workers' control of consumption as Mises asserts. Given that Mises asserts that the market, in which one person can have a thousand votes and another one, is a *"democracy"* his ignorance of syndicalist ideas is perhaps only one aspect of a general ignorance of reality.

More importantly, the whole premise of his critique of mutualism is flawed. *"Exchange relations in productive goods"* he asserted, *"can only be established on the basis of private property in the means of production. If the Coal Syndicate delivers coal to the Iron Syndicate a price can be fixed only if both syndicates own the means of production in industry."* [**Socialism**, p. 132] This may come as a surprise to the many companies whose different workplaces sell each other their products! In other words, capitalism itself shows that workplaces owned by the same body

long as those who join a workplace have the same rights and liberties as existing members then there is socialisation. A market system of co-operatives, in other words, is **not** capitalist as there is no wage labour involved as a new workers become full members of the syndicate, with the same rights and freedoms as existing members. Thus there are no hierarchical relationships between owners and wage slaves (even if these owners also happen to work there). As all workers' control the means of production they use, it is not capitalism.

Second, nor is such a system usually called, as Mises suggests, *"syndicalism"* but rather mutualism and he obviously considered its most famous advocate, Proudhon and his *"fantastic dreams"* of a mutual bank, as a socialist. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88] Significantly, Mises subsequently admitted that it was *"misleading"* to call syndicalism workers' capitalism, although *"the workers are the owners of the means of production"* it was *"not genuine socialism, that is, centralised socialism"*, as it *"must withdraw productive goods from the market. Individual citizens must not dispose of the shares in the means of production which are allotted to them."* Syndicalism, i.e., having those who do the work control of it, was *"the ideal of plundering hordes"*! [**Socialism**, p. 274fn, p. 270, p. 273 and p. 275]

His followers, likewise, concluded that "syndicalism" was not capitalism with Hayek stating that there were *"many types of socialism"* including *"communism, syndicalism, guild socialism"*. Significantly, he indicated that Mises argument was aimed at systems based on the *"central direction of all economic activity"* and so *"earlier systems of more decentralised socialism, like guild-socialism or syndicalism, need not concern us here since it seems now to be fairly generally admitted that they provide no mechanism whatever for a rational direction of economic activity."* [*"The Nature and History of the Problem"*, pp. 1–40, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.),p. 17, p. 36 and p. 19] Sadly he failed to indicate who *"generally admitted"* such a conclusion. More recently, Murray



well as arresting *"the ringleaders of the workers' movement."* The near general strike was broken by a *"wave of repression"* but *"railroad workers and dockworkers and some printers refused to resume work."* [Raleigh, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 388–9]

Post-**volynka**, workplaces *"that had been prominent in unrest were particularly hit by ... purges ... The effect on the willingness of workers to support opposition parties was predictable."* However, *"the ability to organise strikes did not disappear"* and they continued to take place throughout 1921. The spring of 1922 saw *"a new strike wave."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 182 and p. 183] For example, in early March, *"long strikes"* hit the textile towns around Moscow. At the Glukhovskaia mills 5000 workers struck for 5 days, 1000 at a nearby factory for 2 days and 4000 at the Voskresenskaia mills for 6 days. In May, 1921, workers in the city of Moscow reacted to supply problems *"with a wave of strikes. Party officials reckoned that in a 24-day period in May there were stoppages at 66 large enterprises."* These included a sit-down strike at one of Moscow's largest plants, while *"workers at engineering factories in Krasnopresnia followed suit, and Cheka agents reported 'dissent, culminating in strikes and occupation' in Bauman."* August 1922 saw 19,000 workers strike in textile mills in Moscow region for several days. Tram workers also struck that year, while teachers *"organised strikes and mass meetings"*. Workers usually elected delegates to negotiate with their trade unions as well as their bosses as both were Communist Party members. Strike organisers, needless to say, were sacked. [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 82, pp. 111–2 and p. 157]

While the strike wave of early 1921 is the most famous, due to the Kronstadt sailors rebelling in solidarity with it, the fact is that this was just one of many strike waves during the 1918 and 1921 period. In response to protests, *"the government had combined concessions with severe repression to restore order"* as well as *"commonly resort[ing] to the lock out as a means of punishing and purging the work force."* Yet, *"as the strike waves*

*show, the regime's sanctions were not sufficient to prevent all anti-Bolshevik political action."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111, p. 107, and p. 109] In fact, repression *"did not prevent strikes and other forms of protest by workers becoming endemic in 1919 and 1920"* while in early 1921 the Communist Party *"faced what amounted to a revolutionary situation. Industrial unrest was only one aspect of a more general crisis that encompassed the Kronstadt revolt and the peasant rising in Tambov and Western Siberia."* This *"industrial unrest represented a serious political threat to the Soviet regime ... From Ekaterinburg to Moscow, from Petrograd to Ekaterinoslavl, workers took to the streets, often in support of political slogans that called for the end of Communist Party rule ... soldiers in many of the strike areas showed themselves to be unreliable [but] the regime was able to muster enough forces to master the situation. Soldiers could be replaced by Chekists, officer cadets and other special units where Party members predominated."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187, p. 155 and p. 186]

Yet, an *"atomised"* and powerless working class does not need martial law, lockouts, mass arrests and the purging of the workforce to control it. As Russian anarchist Ida Mett succinctly put it: *"And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most heavily industrialised cities?"* [**The Kronstadt Rebellion**, p. 81] The end of the civil war also saw the Bolsheviks finally destroy what was left of non-Bolshevik trade unionism. In Moscow, this took place against fierce resistance of the union members. As one historian concludes:

> *"Reflecting on the determined struggle mounted by printers, bakers and chemical workers in Moscow during 1920–1, in spite of appalling economic conditions, being represented by organisations weakened by constant repression ... to retain their independent labour organisations it is difficult not to feel that the social basis for a political alternative existed."*



be chaos: *"the absurd output of a senseless apparatus."* For Mises, socialism meant central planning with the economy *"subject to the control of a supreme authority."* [*"Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth"*, pp. 87–130, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.), p. 104 and p. 106] While applying his *"economic calculation argument"* to Marxist ideas of a future socialist society, his argument, it is claimed, is applicable to **all** schools of socialist thought, including libertarian ones. It is on the basis of his arguments that many right-wingers claim that libertarian (or any other kind of) socialism is impossible in principle.

Yet as David Schweickart observes *"[i]t has long been recognised that Mises's argument is logically defective. Even without a market in production goods, their monetary values can be determined."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 88] In other words, economic calculation based on prices is perfectly possible in a libertarian socialist system. After all, to build a workplace requires so many tonnes of steel, so many bricks, so many hours of work and so on. If we assume a mutualist society, then the prices of these goods can be easily found as the co-operatives in question would be offer their services on the market. These commodities would be the inputs for the construction of production goods and so the latter's monetary values can be found.

Ironically enough, Mises **did** mention the idea of such a mutualist system in his initial essay. *"Exchange relations between production-goods can only be established on the basis of private ownership of the means of production"* he asserted. *"When the 'coal syndicate' provides the 'iron syndicate' with coal, no price can be formed, except when both syndicates are the owners of the means of production employed in their business. This would not be socialisation but workers' capitalism and syndicalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112] However, his argument is flawed for numerous reasons.

First, and most obvious, socialisation (as we discuss in section I.3.3) simply means free access to the means of life. As

(1) producers (i.e. members of a collective or self-employed artisans); (2) those unable to work (i.e. the old, sick and so on, who **were** producers); or (3) the young (i.e. those who **will be** producers).

Therefore, workers' self-management within a framework of communal ownership is entirely compatible with libertarian and socialist ideas concerning the possession of the means of producing and distributing goods by the producers themselves. Far from there being any contradiction between libertarianism and socialism, libertarian ideals imply socialist ones, and vice versa. As Bakunin put it in 1867:

> *"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 127]

History has proven him correct. Rather that libertarian socialism being the oxymoron, it is state socialism and libertarian capitalism that are. Both historically (in terms of who first used the word) and logically (in terms of opposing all hierarchical organisations) it is anarchists who should be called libertarians, **not** the propertarian right.

## I.1.1 Is socialism impossible?

In 1920, the right-wing economist Ludwig von Mises declared socialism to be impossible. A leading member of the "Austrian" school of economics, he argued this on the grounds that without private ownership of the means of production, there cannot be a competitive market for production goods and without a market for production goods, it is impossible to determine their values. Without knowing their values, economic rationality is impossible and so a socialist economy would simply



> [Jonathan Aves, *"The Demise of Non-Bolshevik Trade Unionism in Moscow: 1920–21"*, pp. 101-33, **Revolutionary Russia**, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 130]

Elsewhere, Aves argues that an *"examination of industrial unrest after the Bolshevik seizure of power ... shows that the Revolution had brought to the surface resilient traditions of organisation in society and had released tremendous forces in favour of greater popular participation ... The survival of the popular movement through the political repression and economic devastation of the Civil War testifies to its strength."* [**Workers Against Lenin**, p. 186] The idea that the Russian working class was incapable of collective struggle is hard to defend given this series of struggles (and state repression). The class struggle in Bolshevik Russia did not stop, it continued except the ruling class had changed. All the popular energy and organisation this expressed, which could have been used to combat the problems facing the revolution and create the foundations of a genuine socialist society, were wasted in fighting the Bolshevik regime. Ultimately, though, the *"sustained, though ultimately futile, attempts to revive an autonomous workers' movement, especially in mid-1918 and from late 1920, failed owing to repression."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Another historian notes that *"immediately after the civil war"* there was *"a revival of working class collective action that culminated in February-March 1921 in a widespread strike movement and the revolt at the Kronstadt naval base."* As such, the position expounded by Rees and other Leninists *"is so one-sided as to be misleading."* [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 7 and p. 23]

Nor is this commonplace Leninist rationale for Bolshevik rule particularly original, as it dates back to Lenin and was first formulated *"to justify a political clamp-down."* Indeed, this argument was developed in response to rising working class protest rather than its lack: *"As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin ... began to argue*

*that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated … workers had become 'declassed.'"* However, there *"is little evidence to suggest that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920 … represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18, p. 90 and p. 91] So while the *"working class had decreased in size and changed in composition,… the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power … Lenin's arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 261]

Nor can it be suggested, as the Bolsheviks did at the time, that these strikes were conducted by newly arrived workers, semi-peasants without an awareness of proletarian socialism or traditions. Links between the events in 1917 and those during the civil war are clear. Jonathan Aves writes that there were *"distinct elements of continuity between the industrial unrest in 1920 and 1917 … As might be anticipated, the leaders of unrest were often to be found amongst the skilled male workers who enjoyed positions of authority in the informal shop-floor hierarchies."* Looking at the strike wave of early 1921 in Petrograd, the *"strongest reason for accepting the idea that it was established workers who were behind the* ***volynka*** *is the form and course of protest. Traditions of protest reaching back through the spring of 1918 to 1917 and beyond were an important factor in the organisation of the* ***volynka****".* In fact, *"an analysis of the industrial unrest of early 1921 shows that long-standing workers were prominent in protest."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39, p. 126 and p. 91] As another example, *"although the ferment touched all strata of Saratov workers, it must be emphasised that the skilled metalworkers, railroad workers, and printers — the most 'conscious' workers — demonstrated the most determined resistance."* They *"contested repression and the Communists' violation of fair play*



we discussed in section B.2, the state is just such an institution). To oppose inequality and not extend that opposition to inequalities in power, especially **political** power, suggests a lack of clear thinking. Thus to be a true socialist requires you to be a libertarian, to be for individual liberty and opposed to inequalities of power which restrict that liberty.

Therefore, rather than being an oxymoron, *"libertarian socialism"* indicates that true socialism must be libertarian and that a libertarian who is not a socialist is a phoney. As true socialists oppose wage labour, they must also oppose the state for the same reasons. Similarly, consistent libertarians must oppose wage labour for the same reasons they must oppose the state. So, libertarian socialism rejects the idea of state ownership and control of the economy, along with the state as such. Through workers' self-management it proposes to bring an end to authority, exploitation, and hierarchy in production. This in itself will increase, not reduce, liberty. Those who argue otherwise rarely claim that political democracy results in less freedom than political dictatorship.

One last point. It could be argued that many social anarchists smuggle the state back in via communal ownership of the means of life. This, however, is not the case. To argue so confuses society with the state. The communal ownership advocated by collectivist and communist anarchists is not the same as state ownership. This is because it is based on horizontal relationships between the actual workers and the "owners" of social capital (i.e. the federated communities as a whole, which includes the workers themselves we must stress), not vertical ones as in nationalisation (which are between state bureaucracies and its "citizens"). Also, such communal ownership is based upon letting workers manage their own work and workplaces. This means that it is based upon, and does not replace, workers' self-management. In addition, all the members of an anarchist community fall into one of three categories:

> *along with that of everybody else, in the administration of public affairs.*" [Malatesta and Hamon, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 20]

The election of someone to administer public affairs **for you** is not having a portion of social power. It is, to use of words of Emile Pouget (a leading French anarcho-syndicalist) *"an act of abdication,"* the delegating of power into the hands of a few. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] This means that ***"[a]ll political power inevitably creates a privileged situation*** *for the men who exercise it. Thus it violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 249]

From this short discussion we see the links between libertarian and socialism. To be a true libertarian requires you to support workers' control otherwise you support authoritarian social relationships. To support workers' control, by necessity, means that you must ensure that the producers own (and so control) the means of producing and distributing the goods they create. Without ownership, they cannot truly control their own activity or the product of their labour. The situation where workers possess the means of producing and distributing goods is socialism. Thus to be a true libertarian requires you to be a socialist.

Similarly, a true socialist must also support individual liberty of thought and action, otherwise the producers "possess" the means of production and distribution in name only. If the state owns the means of life, then the producers do not and so are in no position to manage their own activity. As the experience of Russia under Lenin shows, state ownership soon produces state control and the creation of a bureaucratic class which exploits and oppresses the workers even more so than their old bosses. Since it is an essential principle of socialism that inequalities between people must be abolished in order to ensure liberty, it makes no sense for a genuine socialist to support any institution based on inequalities of power (and as



*and workplace democracy."* [Raleigh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 376] As Ida Mett argued in relation to the strikes in early 1921:

> *"The population was drifting away from the capital. All who had relatives in the country had rejoined them. The authentic proletariat remained till the end, having the most slender connections with the countryside.*
>
> *"This fact must be emphasised, in order to nail the official lies seeking to attribute the Petrograd strikes ... to peasant elements, 'insufficiently steeled in proletarian ideas.' The real situation was the very opposite ... There was certainly no exodus of peasants into the starving towns! ... It was the famous Petrograd proletariat, the proletariat which had played such a leading role in both previous revolutions, that was finally to resort to the classical weapon of the class struggle: the strike."* [**The Kronstadt Uprising**, p. 36]

As one expert on this issue argues, while the number of workers did drop *"a sizeable core of veteran urban proletarians remained in the city; they did not all disappear."* In fact, *"it was the loss of young activists rather than of all skilled and class-conscious urban workers that caused the level of Bolshevik support to decline during the Civil War. Older workers had tended to support the Menshevik Party in 1917"*. Given this, *"it appears that the Bolshevik Party made deurbanisation and declassing the scapegoats for its political difficulties when the party's own policies and its unwillingness to accept changing proletarian attitudes were also to blame."* It should also be noted that the notion of declassing to rationalise the party's misfortunes was used before long before the civil war: *"This was the same argument used to explain the Bolsheviks' lack of success among workers in the early months of 1917 — that the cadres of conscious proletari-*

*ans were diluted by nonproletarian elements."* [Diane P. Koenker, *"Urbanisation and Deurbanisation in the Russian Revolution and Civil War"*, pp. 81–104, **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 96, p. 95, p. 100 and p. 84]

While there is still much research required, what facts that are available suggest that throughout the time of Lenin's regime the Russian workers took collective action in defence of their interests. This is not to say that workers did not also respond to the problems they faced in an individualistic manner, often they did. However, such responses were, in part (as we noted in the last section), because Bolshevik policy **itself** gave them little choice as it limited their ability to respond collectively. Yet in the face of difficult economic circumstances, workers turned to mass meetings and strikes. In response, the Bolshevik's used state repression to break resistance and protest against their regime. In such circumstances it is easy to see how the Bolshevik party became isolated from the masses they claimed to be leading but were, in fact, ruling. This transformation of rebels into a ruling elite comes as no great surprise given that Bolshevik's aimed to seize power themselves in a centralised and hierarchical institution, a state, which has always been the method by which ruling classes secured their position (as we argued in section H.3.7, this perspective flowed from the flawed Marxist theory of the state). Just as they had to, first, gerrymander and disband soviets to regime in power in the spring and summer of 1918, so the Bolsheviks had to clamp down on any form of collective action by the masses. As such, it is incredulous that latter day Leninists justify Bolshevik authoritarianism on a lack of collective action by workers when that authoritarianism was often driven precisely to break it!

So the claim by John Rees that the *"dialectical relationship between the Bolsheviks and the working class was broken, shattered because the working class itself was broke-backed after the*



As we will discuss in section I.3.3, socialisation is advocated to ensure the elimination of wage labour and is a common theme of all genuine forms of socialism. In theory at least, anarchist argue that state socialism does not eliminate wage labour, rather it universalises it. In fact, state socialism shows that socialism is **necessarily** libertarian, not statist. For if the state owns the workplace, then the producers do not, and so they will not be at liberty to manage their own work but will instead be subject to the state as the boss. Moreover, replacing the capitalist owning class by state officials in no way eliminates wage labour; in fact it makes it worse in many cases. Therefore "socialists" who argue for nationalisation of the means of production are **not** socialists (which means that the Soviet Union and the other so-called "socialist" countries are **not** socialist nor are parties which advocate nationalisation socialist).

Indeed, attempts to associate socialism with the state misunderstands the nature of socialism. It is an essential principle of socialism that (social) inequalities between individuals must be abolished to ensure liberty for all (**natural** inequalities cannot be abolished, nor do anarchists desire to do so). Socialism, as Proudhon put it, *"is egalitarian above all else."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 57] This applies to inequalities of power as well, especially to **political** power. And any hierarchical system (particularly the state) is marked by inequalities of power — those at the top (elected or not) have more power than those at the bottom. Hence the following comments provoked by the expulsion of anarchists from the social democratic Second International:

> *"It could be argued with much more reason that we are the most logical and most complete socialists, since we demand for every person not just his [or her] entire measure of the wealth of society but also his [or her] portion of social power, which is to say, the real ability to make his [or her] influence felt,*

> *"It is because the individual does not own himself, and is not permitted to be his true self. He has become a mere market commodity, an instrument for the accumulation of property — for others ... Individuality is stretched on the Procrustes bed of business ... If our individuality were to be made the price of breathing, what ado there would be about the violence done to the personality! And yet our very right to food, drink and shelter is only too often conditioned upon our loss of individuality. These things are granted to the propertyless millions (and how scantily!) only in exchange for their individuality — they become the mere instruments of industry."* [Max Baginski, *"Stirner: The Ego and His Own"*, pp. 142–151, **Mother Earth**, Vol. II, No. 3, p. 150]

Socialism, anarchists argue, can only mean a classless and anti-authoritarian (i.e. libertarian) society in which people manage their own affairs, either as individuals or as part of a group (depending on the situation). In other words, it implies self-management in all aspects of life — including work. It has always struck anarchists as somewhat strange and paradoxical (to say the least) that a system of *"natural"* liberty (Adam Smith's term, misappropriated by supporters of capitalism) involves the vast majority having to sell that liberty in order to survive. Thus to be consistently libertarian is, logically, to advocate self-management, and so socialism (see section G.4.2). This explains the long standing anarchist opposition to the phoney "individualism" associated with classical liberalism (so-called right-wing "libertarian" ideology, although better termed "propertarian" to avoid confusion). Thus we find Emma Goldman dismissing *"this kind of individualism"* in *"whose name . .. social oppression are defended and held up as virtues."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112]



*civil war"* leaves a lot to be desired. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] The Bolsheviks did more than their fair share of breaking the back of the working class. This is unsurprising for a government which grants to the working class the greatest freedom undermines its own power by so doing. Even a limited relaxation of its authority will allow people to organise themselves, listen to alternative points of view and to act on them. That could not but undermine the rule of the party and so could not be supported — nor was it.

For example, in his 1920 diatribe against Left-wing Communism, Lenin pointed to *"non-Party workers' and peasants' conferences"* and Soviet Congresses as means by which the party secured its rule. Yet, **if** the congresses of soviets were *"**democratic** institutions, the like of which even the best democratic republics of the bourgeois have never know"*, the Bolsheviks would have no need to *"support, develop and extend"* non-Party conferences *"to be able to observe the temper of the masses, come closer to them, meet their requirements, promote the best among them to state posts"*. [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 573] How the Bolsheviks met *"their requirements"* is extremely significant — they disbanded them, just as they had with soviets with non-Bolshevik majorities in 1918. This was because *"[d]uring the disturbances"* of late 1920, *"they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies."* Their frequency was decreased and they *"were discontinued soon afterward."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 203]

In the soviets themselves, workers turned to non-partyism, with non-party groups winning majorities in soviet delegates from industrial workers' constituencies in many places. This was the case in Moscow, where Bolshevik support among *"industrial workers collapsed"* in favour of non-party people. Due to support among the state bureaucracy and the usual packing of the soviet with representatives from Bolshevik controlled organisations, the party had, in spite of this, a massive majority. Thus the Moscow soviet elections of April-May 1921 *"provided*

*an opportunity to revive working-class participation. The Bolsheviks turned it down.*" [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 97–100 and p. 23] Indeed, one Moscow Communist leader stated that these soviet elections had seen *"a high level of activity by the masses and a striving to be in power themselves."* [quoted by Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

1921 also saw the Bolshevik disperse provincial trade unions conferences in Vologda and Vitebsk *"because they had anti-communist majorities."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176] At the All-Russian Congress of Metalworkers' Union in May, the delegates voted down the party-list of recommended candidates for union leadership. The Central Committee of the Party *"disregarded every one of the votes and appointed a Metalworkers' Committee of its own. So much for 'elected and revocable delegates'. Elected by the union rank and file and revocable by the Party leadership!"* [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83]

Another telling example is provided in August 1920 by Moscow's striking tram workers who, in addition to economic demands, called for a general meeting of all depots. As one historian notes, this was *"significant: here the workers' movement was trying to get on the first rung of the ladder of organisation, and being knocked off by the Bolsheviks."* The party *"responded to the strike in such a way as to undermine workers' organisation and consciousness"* and *"throttl[ed] independent action"* by *"repression of the strike by means reminiscent of tsarism."* The Bolshevik's *"dismissive rejection"* of the demand for a city-wide meeting *"spoke volumes about their hostility to the development of the workers' movement, and landed a blow at the type of collective democracy that might have better able to confront supply problems."* This, along with the other strikes that took place, showed that *"the workers' movement in Moscow was, despite its numerical weakness and the burdens of civil war, engaged with political as well as industrial issues … the working class was far from non-existent, and when, in 1921, it began to resuscitate soviet democracy, the party's decision to*



do with individual liberty. Removing the state but keeping private property would, therefore, not be a step forward: *"A fine business we would make if we destroyed the State and replaced it with a mass of little States! killing a monster with one head and keeping a monster with a thousand heads!"* [Carlo Cafiero, *"Anarchy and Communism"*, pp. 179–86, **The Raven**, No. 6, p. 181]

This is why we argue that anarchism is more than just a stateless society, for while a society without a state is a necessary condition for anarchy it is not sufficient — private hierarchies also limit freedom. Hence Chomsky:

> *"It's all generally based on the idea that hierarchic and authoritarian structures are not self-justifying. They have to have a justification . .. For example, your workplace is one point of contact and association. So, workplaces ought to be democratically controlled by participants .. . there are all kinds of ways in which people interact with one another. The forms of organisation and association that grow out of those should be, to the extent possible, non-authoritarian, non-hierarchic, managed and directed by the participants."* [**Reluctant Icon**]

Therefore, anarchists argue, **real** libertarian ideas **must** be based on workers self-management, i.e. workers must control and manage the work they do, determining where and how they do it and what happens to the fruit of their labour, which in turn means the elimination of wage labour. Or, to use Proudhon's words, the *"abolition of the proletariat."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 179] Unless this is done then the majority of people will become subject to the authoritarian social relationships the likes of Mises and other right-wing "libertarians" support. As one communist-anarchist put it:

discussed earlier (see section B.4, for example), capitalism denies liberty of thought and action within the workplace (unless one is the boss, of course). As one staunch defender of capitalism (and a classical liberal often listed as a forefather of right-wing "libertarianism") glibly noted, the capitalist *"of course exercises power over the workers"*, although *"he cannot exercise it arbitrarily"* thanks to the market but within this limit *"the entrepreneur is free to give full rein to his whims"* and *"to dismiss workers offhand"* [Ludwig von Mises, **Socialism**, p. 443 and p. 444] Right-wing "libertarians" are utterly blind to the liberty-destroying hierarchies associated with private property, perhaps unsurprisingly as they are fundamentally pro-capitalist and anti-socialist (equally unsurprisingly, genuine libertarians tend to call them "propertarians"). As left-wing economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson correctly notes:

> *"By their own logic, [such] market individualists are forced to disregard the organisational structure of the firm, or to falsely imagine that markets exist inside it. To do otherwise would be to admit that a system as dynamic as capitalism depends upon a mode of organisation from which markets are excluded ... This ... allows market individualists to ignore the reality of non-market organisations in the private sector ... They can thus ignore the reality of control and authority within the private capitalist corporation but remain critical of public sector bureaucracy and state planning."* [**Economics and Utopia**, pp. 85–6]

The propertarian perspective inevitably generates massive contradictions, such as admitting that both the state and private property share a common monopoly of decision making over a given area yet opposing only the former (see section F.1). As anarchists have long pointed out, the hierarchical social relations associated with private property have nothing to



*make the Moscow soviet its 'creature' was not effect but cause."* [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32, p. 33, p. 37 and p. 8]

When such things happen, we can conclude that Bolshevik desire to remain in power had a significant impact on whether workers were able to exercise collective power or not. As Pirani concludes:

> *"one of the most important choices the Bolsheviks made ... was to turn their backs on forms of collective, participatory democracy that workers briefly attempted to revive [post civil war]. [Available evidence] challenges the notion ... that political power was forced on the Bolsheviks because the working class was so weakened by the civil war that it was incapable of wielding it. In reality, non-party workers were willing and able to participate in political processes, but in the Moscow soviet and elsewhere, were pushed out of them by the Bolsheviks. The party's vanguardism, i.e. its conviction that it had the right, and the duty, to make political decisions on the workers' behalf, was now reinforced by its control of the state apparatus. The working class was politically expropriated: power was progressively concentrated in the party, specifically in the party elite."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 4]

It should also be stressed that fear of arrest limited participation. A sadly typical example of this occurred in April 1920, which saw the first conference of railway workers on the Perm-Ekaterinburg line. The meeting of 160 delegates elected a non-Party chairman who *"demanded that delegates be guaranteed freedom of debate and immunity from arrest."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44] A Moscow Metalworkers' Union conference in early February 1921 saw the first speakers calling *"for the personal safety of the delegates to be guaranteed"* before criticisms would be

aired. [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 244] Later that year dissidents in the Moscow soviet demanded *"that delegates be given immunity from arrest unless sanctioned by plenary session of the soviet."* Immediately afterwards two of them, including an anarcho-syndicalist, were detained. It was also proposed that delegates' freedom of speech *"included immunity from administrative or judicial punishment"* along with the right of any number of delegates *"to meet and discuss their work as they chose."* [Pirani, **Op. Cit.** p. 104] Worse, *"[b]y the end of 1920 workers not only had to deal with the imposition of harsh forms of labour discipline, they also had to face the Cheka in their workplace."* This could not help hinder working class collective action, as did the use of the Cheka and other troops to repress strikes. While it is impossible to accurately measure how many workers were shot by the Cheka for participation in labour protest, looking at individual cases *"suggests that shootings were employed to inspire terror and were not simply used in the occasional extreme case."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35] Which means, ironically, those who had seized power in 1917 in the name of the politically conscious proletariat were in fact ensuring their silence by fear of the Cheka or weeding them out, by means of workplace purges and shooting.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, but definitely significantly, of the 17,000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40,913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants of workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution** (a failure shared by later Leninists). Ultimately, the contradictions between Bolshevik rhetoric and the realities of working class life under their rule was closed by coercion.



proletarian (bar the state bureaucracy) — hardly a desirable thing for a political theory aiming for the end of wage slavery!

So what **does** socialism mean? Is it compatible with libertarian ideals? What do the words *"libertarian"* and *"socialism"* actually mean? It is temping to use dictionary definitions as a starting point, although we should stress that such a method holds problems as different dictionaries have different definitions and the fact that dictionaries are rarely politically sophisticated. Use one definition, and someone else will counter with one more to their liking. For example, *"socialism"* is often defined as *"state ownership of wealth"* and *"anarchy"* as *"disorder."* Neither of these definitions are useful when discussing political ideas, particularly anarchism as, obviously, no form of anarchism would be socialist by such a definition nor do anarchists seek disorder. Therefore, the use of dictionaries is not the end of a discussion and often misleading when applied to politics.

Libertarian, though, is generally defined to mean someone who upholds the principles of liberty, especially individual liberty of thought and action. Such a situation cannot but be encouraged by socialism, by free access to the means of life. This is because in such a situation people associate as equals and so. as John Most and Emma Goldman once argued, the *"system of communism logically excludes any and every relation between master and servant, and means really Anarchism."* [*"Talking about Anarchy"*, p. 28, **Black Flag**, no. 228, p. 28] In other words, by basing itself on free association and self-management in every aspect of life the anarchist form of socialism cannot but be libertarian.

In other words, there is a reason why anarchists have used the term libertarian for over 150 years! More to the point, why assume that the right's recent appropriation of the word be considered the base point? That implies that private property defends individual liberty rather than suppresses it. Such an assumption, as anarchists have argued from the start of anarchism as a distinct socio-political theory, is wrong. As we

the claim that the term is self-contradictory rests on the assumption that socialism requires the state in order to exist and that socialism is incompatible with liberty (and the equally fallacious claim that capitalism is libertarian and does not need the state). This assumption, as is often true of many objections to socialism, is based on a misconception of what socialism is, a misconception that many authoritarian socialists and the state capitalism of Soviet Russia have helped to foster. In reality it is the term *"state socialism"* which is the true oxymoron.

Sadly many people take for granted the assertion of many on the right and left that socialism equals Leninism or Marxism and ignore the rich and diverse history of socialist ideas, ideas that spread from communist and individualist-anarchism to Leninism. As Benjamin Tucker once noted, *"the fact that State Socialism ... has overshadowed other forms of Socialism gives it no right to a monopoly of the Socialistic idea."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 363–4] Unfortunately, many on the left combine with the right to do exactly that. Indeed, the right (and, of course, many on the left) consider that, by definition, "socialism" **is** state ownership and control of the means of production, along with centrally planned determination of the national economy (and so social life).

Yet even a quick glance at the history of the socialist movement indicates that the identification of socialism with state ownership and control is not common. For example, Anarchists, many Guild Socialists, council communists (and other libertarian Marxists), as well as followers of Robert Owen, all rejected state ownership. Indeed, anarchists recognised that the means of production did not change their form as capital when the state took over their ownership nor did wage-labour change its nature when it is the state employing labour (for example, see section H.3.13). For anarchists state ownership of capital is not socialistic in the slightest. Indeed, as Tucker was well aware, state ownership turned **everyone** into a



Such forms of repression could not help ensure both economic chaos and push the revolution away from socialism. As such, it is hard to think of a more incorrect assertion than Lenin's 1921 one that *"[i]ndustry is indispensable, democracy is not. Industrial democracy breeds some utterly false ideas."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 27] Yet without industrial democracy, any development towards socialism is aborted and the problems of a revolution cannot be solved in the interests of the working masses.

This account of workers' protest being crushed by the so-called workers' state raises an important theoretical question. Following Marx and Engels, Lenin asserted that the *"state is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 259] Yet here is the working class being suppressed by "its" state. If the state is breaking strikes, including general strikes, by what stretch of the imagination can it be considered a "workers' state"? Particularly as the workers, like the Kronstadt sailors, demanded free soviet elections, **not**, as the Leninists then and now claim, "soviets without Communists" (although one soviet historian noted with regards the 1921 revolt that *"taking account of the mood of the workers, the demand for free elections to the soviets meant the implementation in practice of the infamous slogan of soviets without communists."* [quoted by Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123]). If the workers are being repressed and denied any real say in the state, how can they be considered the ruling class? And what class is doing the *"suppression"*? As we discussed in section H.3.8, Bolshevik ideology adjusted to this reality by integrating the need for party dictatorship to combat the "wavering" within the working class into its theory of the state. Yet it is the party (i.e., the state) which determines what is and is not wavering. This suggests that the state apparatus has to be separate from the working class in order to repress it (as always, in its own interests).

So anarchists argue that the actual experience of the Bolshevik state shows that the state is no mere *"machine"* of class rule but has interests of its own. Which confirms the anarchist theory of the state rather than the Marxist (see section H.3.7). It should be stressed that it was **after** the regular breaking of working class protest and strikes that the notion of the dictatorship of the party became Bolshevik orthodoxy. This makes sense, as protests and strikes express "wavering" within the working class which needs to be solved by state repression. This, however, necessitates a normal state power, one which is isolated from the working class and which, in order to enforce its will, **must** (like any state) atomise the working class people and render them unable, or unwilling, to take collective action in defence of their interests. For the defenders of Bolshevism to turn round and blame Bolshevik authoritarianism on the atomisation required for the party to remain in power and enforce its will is staggering.

Finally, it should be noted that Zinoviev, a leading Bolshevik, tried to justify the hierarchical position of the Bolshevik party arguing that *"[i]n time of strike every worker knows that there must be a Strike Committee — a centralised organ to conduct the strike, whose orders must be obeyed — although this Committee is elected and controlled by the rank and file.* ***Soviet Russia is on strike against the whole capitalist world. The social Revolution is a general strike against the whole capitalist system. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the strike committee of the social Revolution."*** [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 929]

In strikes, however, the decisions which are to be obeyed are those of the strikers. They should make the decisions and the strike committees should carry them out. The actual decisions of the Strike Committee should be accountable to the assembled strikers who have the real power (and so power is **decentralised** in the hands of the strikers and not in the hands



# I.1 Isn't libertarian socialism an oxymoron?

In a word, no. This question is often asked by those who have come across the so-called "libertarian" right. As discussed in section A.1.3, the word *"libertarian"* has been used by anarchists for far longer than the pro-free market right have been using it. In fact, anarchists have been using it as a synonym for anarchist for over 150 years, since 1858. In comparison, widespread use of the term by the so-called "libertarian" right dates from the 1970s in America (with, from the 1940s onwards, limited use by a few individuals). Indeed, outside of North America *"libertarian"* is still essentially used as an equivalent of *"anarchist"* and as a shortened version of *"libertarian socialist."* As Noam Chomsky notes:

> *"Let me just say regarding the terminology, since we happen to be in the United States, we have to be rather careful. Libertarian in the United States has a meaning which is almost the opposite of what it has in the rest of the world traditionally. Here, libertarian means ultra right-wing capitalist. In the European tradition, libertarian meant socialist. So, anarchism was sometimes called libertarian socialism, a large wing of anarchism, so we have to be a little careful about terminology."* [**Reluctant Icon**]

This in itself does not prove that the term *"libertarian socialist"* is free of contradiction. However, as we will show below,

lines only. These suggestions are based on libertarian principles, developments in the class struggle and a keen awareness of what is wrong with class and hierarchical systems (and so what **not** to do!).

When reading this section of the FAQ remember that an anarchist society will be created by the autonomous actions of the mass of the population, not by anarchists writing books about it. This means any real anarchist society will make many mistakes and develop in ways we cannot predict. This implies that this is only a series of suggestions on how things **could** work in an anarchist society — it is **not** a blueprint of any kind. All anarchists can do is present what we believe and why we think such a vision is both desirable **and** viable. We hope that our arguments and ideas presented in this section of the FAQ will inspire more debate and discussion of how a free society would work. In addition, and equally as important, we hope it will help inspire the struggle that will create that society.



of the committee). A far better analogy for what happened in Russia was provided by Emma Goldman:

> *"There is another objection to my criticism on the part of the Communists. Russia is on strike, they say, and it is unethical for a revolutionist to side against the workers when they are striking against their masters. That is pure demagoguery practised by the Bolsheviki to silence criticism.*
>
> *"It is not true that the Russian people are on strike. On the contrary, the truth of the matter is that the Russian people have been **locked out** and that the Bolshevik State — even as the bourgeois industrial master — uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolsheviki this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan: thus they have succeeded in blinding the masses. Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlix]

The isolation of the Bolsheviks from the working class was, in large part, required to ensure their power and, moreover, a natural result of utilising state structures. *"The struggle against oppression — political, economic, and social, against the exploitation of man by man"* argued Alexander Berkman, *"is always simultaneously a struggle against government as such. The political State, whatever its form, and constructive revolutionary effort are irreconcilable. They are mutually exclusive."* Every revolution *"faces this alternative: to build freely, independently and despite of the government, or to choose government with all the limitation and stagnation it involves ... Not by the order of some central authority, but organically from life itself, must grow up the closely knit federation of the industrial, agrarian, and other associations; by the workers themselves must they*

*be organised and managed."* The *"very essence and nature"* of the socialist state *"excludes such an evolution. Its economic and political centralisation, its governmentalism and bureaucratisation of every sphere of activity and effort, its inevitable militarisation and degradation of the human spirit mechanically destroy every germ of new life and extinguish the stimuli of creative, constructive work."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, pp. 340–1] By creating a new state, the Bolsheviks ensured that the mass participation required to create a genuine socialist society could not be expressed and, moreover, came into conflict with the Bolshevik authorities and their attempts to impose their (essentially state capitalist) vision of "socialism".

It need not have been that way. As can be seen from our discussion of labour protest under the Bolsheviks, even in extremely hard circumstances the Russian people were able to organise themselves to conduct protest meetings, demonstrations and strikes. The social base for an alternative to Bolshevik power and policies existed. Sadly Bolshevik politics, policies and the repression they required ensured that it could not be used constructively during the revolution to create a genuine socialist revolution.



However, it would be a mistake to assume that just because there are many choices of community available that it automatically makes a society an anarchist one. For example, the modern world boasts over 200 different states. For most of them, individuals can leave and join another if it will let them. There is no world government as such. This does not make this series of states an anarchy. Similarly, a system based on different corporations is not an anarchy either, nor would be one based on a series of company towns and neither would a (quasi-feudal or neo-feudal?) system based on a multitude of landlords who hire their land and workplaces to workers in return for rent. The nature of the associations is just as important as their voluntary nature. As Kropotkin argued, the *"communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself . .. They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 132] Hence an anarchist society is one that is freely joined and left, is internally non-hierarchical and non-oppressive and non-exploitative. Thus anarchist communities may co-exist with non-anarchist ones but this does **not** mean the non-anarchist ones are in any way anarchistic or libertarian.

To conclude. Anarchists, to state the blindly obvious, do not aim for chaos, anarchy in the popular sense of the word (George Orwell once noted how one right-wing author *"use[d] 'Anarchism' indifferently with 'anarchy', which is a hardly more correct use of words than saying that a Conservative is one who makes jam."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 298]). Nor do anarchists reject any discussion of what a free society would be like (such a rejection is usually based on the somewhat spurious grounds that you cannot prescribe what free people would do). In fact, anarchists have quite strong opinions on the basic outlines of a free society, always premised on the assumption that these are guide-

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

So remember that we are not arguing that everyone will live in an anarchist way in a free society. Far from it. There will be pockets of unfreedom around, simply because the development of ideas varies from area to area. Anarchists, needless to say, are against forcing people to become anarchists (how can you force someone to be free?) Our aim is to encourage those subject to authority to free themselves and to work with them to create an anarchist society but, obviously, how successful we are at this will vary. We can, therefore, expect areas of freedom to co-exist with areas dominated by, say, state socialism, religion or capitalism just as we can expect to see different kinds of anarchism co-existing.



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

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

In this section of the FAQ we will give an outline of what an anarchist society might look like. Such a society has basic features — such as being non-hierarchical, decentralised and, above all else, spontaneous like life itself. To quote Glenn Albrecht, anarchists *"lay great stress on the free unfolding of a spontaneous order without the use of external force or authority."* [*"Ethics, Anarchy and Sustainable Development"*, pp. 95–117, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 110] This type of development implies that anarchist society would be organised from the simple to the complex, from the individual upwards to the community, the bio-region and, ultimately, the planet. The resulting society, which would be the outcome of nature freely unfolding toward greater diversity and complexity, is ethically preferable to any other sort of order simply because it allows for the highest degree of organic solidarity and freedom. Kropotkin described this vision of a truly free society as follows:

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



We must stress, however, that anarchists do not want a "perfect" society (as is often associated with the term *"utopia"*). This would be as impossible as the neo-classical economic vision of perfect competition. Rather we want a free society and so one based on real human beings and so one with its own problems and difficulties. Our use of the word *"utopia"* should not be taken to imply that anarchists assume away all problems and argue that an anarchist society would be ideal and perfect. No society has ever been perfect and no society ever will be. All we argue is that an anarchist society will have fewer problems than those before and be better to live within. Anyone looking for perfection should look elsewhere. Anyone looking for a better, but still human and so imperfect, world may find in anarchism a potential end for their quest.

So anarchists are realistic in their hopes and dreams. We do not conjure up hopes that cannot achieved but rather base our visions in an analysis of what is wrong with society today and a means of changing the world for the better. And even if some people call us utopians, we shrug off the accusation with a smile. After all, dreams are important, not only because they often the source of change in reality but because of the hope they express:

> *"People may ... call us dreamers ... They fail to see that dreams are also a part of the reality of life, that life without dreams would be unbearable. No change in our way of life would be possible without dreams and dreamers. The only people who are never disappointed are those who never hope and never try to realise their hope."* [Rudolf Rocker, **The London Years**, p. 95]

One last point. We must point out here that we are discussing the social and economic structures of areas within which the inhabitants are predominately anarchists. It is

that new society will be like it is difficult to pre-figure it in our activities today! A point not lost on Kropotkin who argued that it is difficult to build *"without extremely careful consideration beforehand, based on the study of social life, of **what** and **how** we want to build — we must reject [Proudhon's] slogan [that "in demolishing we shall build"] . .. and declare: 'in building we shall demolish.'"* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 173f] More recently, Noam Chomsky argued that *"[a]lternatives to existing forms of hierarchy, domination, private power and social control certainly exist in principle... But to make them realistic will require a great deal of committed work, including the work of articulating them clearly."* [Noam Chomsky, **Turning the Tide**, p. 250] This section of the FAQ can be considered as a contribution to the articulating of libertarian alternatives to existing society, of what we want to build for the future.

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

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

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



> [**The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution**, pp. 11–12]

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

As the individual does not exist in a social vacuum, appropriate social conditions are required for individual freedom to develop and blossom according to its full potential. The theory of anarchism is built around the central assertion that individuals and their organisations **cannot** be considered in isolation from each other. That is, social structures shape us, *"that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals"* and that *"the major function of participation is an educative one."* [Carole Pateman, **Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 27] Anarchism presents this position in its most coherent and libertarian form. In other words, freedom is only sustained and protected by activity under conditions of freedom, namely self-

government. Freedom is the only precondition for acquiring the maturity required for continued freedom: *"Only in freedom can man grow to his full stature. Only in freedom will be learn to think and move, and give the very best in him."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 72]

As individual freedom can only be created, developed and defended by self-government and free association, a system which encourages individuality must be decentralised and participatory in order for people to develop a psychology that allows them to accept the responsibilities of self-management. Living under the state or any other authoritarian system produces a servile character, as the individual is constantly placed under hierarchical authority, which blunts their critical and self-governing abilities by lack of use. Such a situation cannot promote freedom, and so anarchists *"realise that power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 249]

Looking at capitalism, we find that under wage labour people sell their creative energy and control over their activity for a given period. The boss does not just take surplus value from the time employees sell, but the time itself — their liberty, their ability to make their own decisions, express themselves through work and with their fellow workers. Wage labour equals wage slavery as you sell your time and skills (i.e. liberty) everyday at work and you will never be able to buy that time back for yourself. Once it is gone; it is gone for good. It also generates, to quote Godwin, a *"sense of dependence"* and a *"servile and truckling spirit"*, so ensuring that the *"feudal spirit still survives that reduced the great mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle for the service of the few."* [**The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin**, pp. 125–6] This is why anarchists see the need to *"create the situation where each person may live by working freely, without being forced to sell his [or her] work and his [or her] liberty to others who*



ample, the anarchist collectives in Spain were organised in a bottom-up manner, similar to the way the C.N.T. (the anarcho-syndicalist labour union) was organised before the revolution. In this sense, anarchy is not some distant goal but rather an expression of working class struggle. The creation of alternatives to the current hierarchical, oppressive, exploitative and alienated society is a necessary part of the struggle and the maintaining of your liberty and humanity in the insane world of hierarchical society. As such, an anarchist society will be the generalisation of the various types of ***"anarchy in action"*** created in the various struggles against all forms of oppression and exploitation (see section I.2.3).

This means that how an anarchist society would look like and work is not independent of the specific societies it is created from nor the means used to create it. In other words, an anarchist society will reflect the economic conditions inherited from capitalism, the social struggles which preceded it and the ideas which existed within that struggle as modified by the practical needs of any given situation. Therefore the vision of a free society indicated in this section of the FAQ is not some sort of abstraction which will be created overnight. If anarchists did think that then we would rightly be called utopian. No, an anarchist society is the outcome of social struggle, self-activity which helps to create a mass movement which contains individuals who can think for themselves and are willing and able to take responsibility for their own lives.

So, when reading this section please remember that this is not a blueprint but only possible suggestions of what anarchy would look like. It is designed to provoke thought and indicate that an anarchist society is possible. We hope that our arguments and ideas presented in this section will inspire more debate and discussion of how a free society could work and, equally as important, help to inspire the struggle which will create that society. After all, anarchists desire to build the new world in the shell of the old. Unless we have some idea of what

*to overlook the fact that Man lived in Societies for thousands of years before the State had been heard of"* and that *"large numbers of people [have] lived in communes and free federations."* These were not states as the state *"is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history. Why then make no distinction between what is permanent and what is accidental?"* [Kropotkin, **The State: Its Historic Role**, pp. 9–10] Similarly, the axioms of capitalist economics **not** withstanding, capitalism is but latest of a series of economies. Just as serfdom replaced slavery and capitalism replaced serfdom, so free (associated) labour can replace hired labour. As Proudhon noted, the *"period through which we are now passing ... is distinguished by a special characteristic, — WAGES."* Capitalism, this system of wage-labour, has not always existed nor need it continue. Thus *"the radical vice of political economy"*, namely *"affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition — namely, the division of society into patricians and proletares."* [**System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 198 and p. 67] Anarchists seek to make that transitory condition shorter rather than longer.

Ultimately, a free society based on self-managed communities and associated labour is, in many ways, a natural evolution of tendencies **within** existing society. For example, the means of production can only be used collectively, so suggesting that relations of equality and freedom based on associations of workers are a sensible alternative to ones based on hierarchy, exploitation and oppression based on masters and servants. It is the struggle against those oppressive social relationships which creates the very associations (workplace strike assemblies) which could expropriate the workplaces and make that possibility a reality.

So an anarchist society will not be created overnight nor without links to the past, and so it will initially be based on structures created in social struggle (i.e. created **within** but **against** capitalism and the state) and will be marked with the ideas that inspired and developed within that struggle. For ex-



*accumulate wealth by the labour of their serfs."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 208]

Thus the aim of anarchism is to create a society in which every person *"should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity"* and so to *"**organise society in such a way that every individual ... should find ... approximately equal means for the development of [their] various faculties and for their utilisation in [their] work**; to create a society which would place every individual ... in such a position that it would be impossible for [them] to exploit the labour of anyone else"* and be *"enabled to participate in the enjoyment of social wealth"* as long as they *"contributed directly toward the production of that wealth."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 409] As such, anarchists would agree with George Orwell: *"The question is very simple. Shall people . .. be allowed to live the decent, fully human life which is now technically achievable, or shan't they? Shall the common man be pushed back into the mud, or shall he not?"* [**Orwell on Spain**, p. 361]

Anarchism, in summary, is about changing society and abolishing all forms of authoritarian social relationship, putting life before the soul-destroying "efficiency" needed to survive under capitalism; for the anarchist *"takes his stand on his positive right to life and all its pleasures, both intellectual, moral and physical. He loves life, and intends to enjoy it to the full."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 101] Thus, to quote Emma Goldman, *"all human-beings, irrespective of race, colour, or sex, are born with the equal right to share at the table of life; that to secure this right, there must be established among men economic, social, and political freedom."* [**A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 2, p. 450] This would be a classless and non-hierarchical society, one without masters and servants, one based on the free association of free individuals which encourages and celebrates individuality and freedom:

> *"The phrase, 'a classless society', no doubt has terrors for any thoughtful person. It calls up immediately the image of dull mediocrity ... all one uniform scale of self-sufficient individuals, living in model-houses, travelling in uniform Fords along endless uniform roads . .. But ... the sharing of this wealth would not produce a uniformity of life, simply because there is no uniformity of desire. Uniformity is an unintelligent nightmare; there can be no uniformity in a free human society. Uniformity can only be created by the tyranny of a totalitarian regime."* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, pp. 87–8]

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

So, as will be seen, the key concept underlying both the social/political and the economic structure of libertarian socialism is *"self-management,"* a term that implies not only workers control of their workplaces but also citizens' control of their communities (where it becomes *"self-government"*), through direct democracy and voluntary federation. Thus



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

Perhaps needless to say, this section is intended as a heuristic device **only**, as a way of helping readers envision how anarchist principles might be embodied in practice. It is not (nor is it intended to be, nor is it desired to be) a definitive statement of how they **must** be embodied. The idea that a few people could determine exactly what a free society would look like is contrary to the anarchist principles of free growth and thought, and is far from our intention. Here we simply try to indicate some of the structures that an anarchist society may contain, based on the what ideals and ideas anarchists hold, informed by the few examples of anarchy in action that have existed and our critical evaluation of their limitations and successes. As Herbert Read once put it, *"it is always a mistake to build **a priori** constitutions. The main thing is to establish your principles — the principles of equity, of individual freedom, of workers' control. The community then aims at the establishment of these principles from the starting-point of local needs and local conditions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51]

Moreover, we must remember that, the state has changed over time and, indeed, has not always existed. Thus it is possible to have a social organisation which is not a state and to confuse the two would be a *"confusion"* made by those *"who cannot visualise Society without a concentration of the State."* Yet this *"is*

*in which 900,000 are without means of livelihood. One million bushels of wheat are produced. The entire crop is sold to 100,000 people at $10 a bushel. Supply and demand are in equilibrium, yet 900 000 people will face starvation."* [**Apostles of Greed**, pp. 50–51] In case anyone thinks that this just happens in theory, the example of numerous famines (from the Irish famine of the 1840s to those in African countries in 1980s) gives a classic example of this occurring in practice, with rich landowners exporting food to the other nations while millions starve in their own.

So the distributional consequences of the market system play havoc with any attempt to define what is and is not an "efficient" use of resources. As markets inform by 'exit' only — some products find a market, others do not — 'voice' is absent. The operation of 'exit' rather than 'voice' leaves behind those without power in the marketplace. For example, the wealthy do not buy food poisoned with additives, the poor consume it. This means a division grows between two environments: one inhabited by those with wealth and one inhabited by those without it. As can be seen from the current capitalist practice of "exporting pollution" to developing countries, this problem can have serious ecological and social effects. So, far from the market being a *"democracy"* based on *"one dollar, one vote,"* it is an oligarchy in which, for example, the *"79,000 Americans who earned the minimum wage in 1987 have the same influence [or* "vote"*] as Michael Milken, who 'earned' as much as all of them combined."* [Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 21] One dissident economist states the blindly obvious, namely that the *"market and democracy clash at a fundamental level. Democracy runs on the principle of 'one man (one person), one vote.' The market runs on the principle of 'one dollar, one vote.' Naturally, the former gives equal weight to each person, regardless of the money she/he has. The latter gives greater weight to richer people."* This means that the market is automatically skewed in favour of the



*within the firm that parallels that which Hayek makes about any centralised economy."* [John O'Neill, **The Market**, p. 142] This is because workers have knowledge about their work and workplace that their bosses lack and a self-managed co-operative workplace would motivate workers to use such information to improve the firm's performance. In a capitalist workplace, as in a Stalinist economy, the workers have no incentive to communicate this information as *"improvements in the organisation and methods of production initiated by workers essentially profit capital, which often then seizes hold of them and turns them against the workers. The workers know it and consequently they restrict their participation in production … They restrict their output; they keep their ideas to themselves . .. They organise among themselves to carry out their work, all the while keeping up a facade of respect for the official way they are supposed to organise their work."* [Castoriadis, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 181–2] An obvious example would be concerns that management would seek to monopolise the workers' knowledge in order to accumulate more profits, better control the workforce or replace them (using the higher productivity as an excuse). Thus self-management rather than hierarchy enhances the flow and use of information in complex organisations and so improves efficiency.

This conclusion, it should be stressed, is not idle speculation and that Mises was utterly wrong in his assertions related to self-management. People, he stated, *"err"* in thinking that profit-sharing *"would spur the worker on to a more zealous fulfilment of his duties"* (indeed, it *"must lead straight to Syndicalism"*) and it was *"nonsensical to give 'labour' … a share in management. The realisation of such a postulate would result in syndicalism."* [**Socialism**, p. 268, p. 269 and p. 305] Yet, as we note in section I.3.2, the empirical evidence is overwhelmingly against Mises (which suggests why "Austrians" are so dismissive of empirical evidence, as it exposes flaws in the great chains of deductive reasoning they so love). In fact, workers' participa-

tion in management and profit sharing enhance productivity. In one sense, though, Mises is right, in that capitalist firms will tend not to encourage participation or even profit sharing as it shows to workers the awkward fact that while the bosses may need them, they do not need the bosses. As discussed in section J.5.12, bosses are fearful that such schemes **will** lead to "syndicalism" and so quickly stop them in order to remain in power — in spite (or, more accurately, because) of the efficiency and productivity gains they result in.

*"Both capitalism and state socialism,"* summarises Ellerman, *"suffer from the motivational inefficiency of the employment relation."* **Op. Cit.**, pp. 210–1] Mutualism would be **more** efficient as well as freer for, once the stock market and workplace hierarchies are removed, serious blocks and distortions to information flow will be eliminated.

Unfortunately, the state socialists who replied to Mises in the 1920s and 1930s did not have such a libertarian economy in mind. In response to Mises initial challenge, a number of economists pointed out that Pareto's disciple, Enrico Barone, had already, 13 years earlier, demonstrated the theoretical possibility of a *"market-simulated socialism."* However, the principal attack on Mises's argument came from Fred Taylor and Oscar Lange (for a collection of their main papers, see **On the Economic Theory of Socialism**). In light of their work, Hayek shifted the question from theoretical impossibility to whether the theoretical solution could be approximated in practice. Which raises an interesting question, for if (state) socialism is *"impossible"* (as Mises assured us) then what **did** collapse in Eastern Europe? If the "Austrians" claim it **was** "socialism" then they are in the somewhat awkward position that something they assure us is *"impossible"* existed for decades. Moreover, it should be noted that both sides of the argument accepted the idea of central planning of some kind or another. This means that most of the arguments of Mises



loss. An investment may fail not because it is not needed but because there is no effective demand for it due to income inequalities. So it is important to remember that the distribution of income determines whether something is an "efficient" use of resources or not. As Thomas Balogh noted, real income *"is measured in terms of a certain set of prices ruling in a given period and that these prices will reflect the prevailing distribution of income. (With no Texan oil millionaires here would be little chance of selling a baby blue Roll-Royce ... at a price ten times the yearly income of a small farmer or sharecropper)."* [**The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics**, pp. 98–9] The market demand for commodities, which allocates resources between uses, is based not on the tastes of consumers but on the distribution of purchasing power between them. This, ironically, was mentioned by Mises as part of his attack on socialism, arguing that the central planners could not use current prices for *"the transition to socialism must, as a consequence of the levelling out of the differences in income and the resultant re-adjustments in consumption, and therefore production, change all economic data."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109] He did not mention the impact this has in terms of "efficiency" or profitability! After all, what is and is not profitable ("efficient") depends on effective demand, which in turn depends of a specific income distribution. Identical production processes become efficient and inefficient simply by a redistribution of income from the rich to the poor, and vice versa. Similarly, changes in market prices may make once profitably investments unprofitable, without affecting the needs they were satisfying. And this, needless to say, can have serious impacts on human well-being.

As discussed in section C.1.5, this becomes most obvious during famines. As Allan Engler points out, *"[w]hen people are denied access to the means of livelihood, the invisible hand of market forces does not intervene on their behalf. Equilibrium between supply and demand has no necessary connection with human need. For example, assume a country of one million people*

resources (assuming, of course, that profitability equates to social usefulness).

In summary, Mises totally ignored the issues of uncertainty (we do not, and cannot, know the future) and the collective impact of individual decisions. Production and investment decisions are made based on expectations about future profits, yet these (expected) profits depend (in part) on what other decisions are being, and will be, made. This is because they will affect the future aggregate supply of a good and so market price, the price of inputs and the distribution of effective demand. In the market-based (and so fragmented and atomistic) decision-making Mises assumes, any production and investment decisions are made on the basis on unavoidable ignorance of the actions of others and the results of those actions. Of course there is uncertainty which would affect every social system (such as the weather, discovery of new sources of energy, raw materials and technology, changing customer needs, and so forth). However, market based systems add extra levels of uncertainty by the lack of communication between decision-makers as well as making profit the be-all-and-end-all of economic rationalism.

So in terms of Mises' claim that only capitalism ensures that success can be *"appraised in advance"*, it is clear that in reality that system is as marked by *"groping in the dark"* as any other. What of the claim that only markets can ensure that a project's success is *"later retrospectively determined"*? By this, Mises makes a flawed assumption — namely the dubious notion that what is profitable is right. Thus economically is identified with profitably. So even if we assume prices provide enough information for rational decision making, that the economy jumps from one state of equilibrium to another and that capitalists can predict the future, the awkward fact is that maximising profit does not equal maximising human well-being.

Neither well-being nor efficiency equals profitability as the latter does not take into account **need**. Meeting needs is not *"retrospectively determined"* under capitalism, only profit and



and Hayek did not apply to libertarian socialism, which rejects central planning along with every other form of centralisation.

Nor was the response by Taylor and Lange particularly convincing in the first place. This was because it was based far more on neo-classical capitalist economic theory than on an appreciation of reality. In place of the Walrasian *"Auctioneer"* (the "god in the machine" of general equilibrium theory which ensures that all markets clear) Taylor and Lange presented the *"Central Planning Board"* whose job it was to adjust prices so that all markets cleared. Neo-classical economists who are inclined to accept Walrasian theory as an adequate account of a working capitalist economy will be forced to accept the validity of their model of "socialism." Little wonder Taylor and Lange were considered, at the time, the victors in the "socialist calculation" debate by most of the economics profession (with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this decision has been revised somewhat — although we must point out that Taylor and Lange's model was not the same as the Soviet system, a fact conveniently ignored by commentators).

Unfortunately, given that Walrasian theory has little bearing to reality, we must also come to the conclusion that the Taylor-Lange "solution" has about the same relevance (even ignoring its non-libertarian aspects, such as its basis in state-ownership, its centralisation, its lack of workers' self-management and so on). Many people consider Taylor and Lange as fore-runners of *"market socialism."* This is incorrect — rather than being market socialists, they are in fact "neo-classical" socialists, building a "socialist" system which mimics capitalist economic **theory** rather than its **reality**. Replacing Walrus's mythical creation of the *"Auctioneer"* with a planning board does not really get to the heart of the problem! Nor does their vision of "socialism" have much appeal — a re-production of capitalism with a planning board and a more equal distribution of money income. Anarchists

reject such "socialism" as little more than a nicer version of capitalism, if that.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has been fashionable to assert that *"Mises was right"* and that socialism is impossible (of course, **during** the cold war such claims were ignored as the Soviet threat had to boosted and used as a means of social control and to justify state aid to capitalist industry). Nothing could be further from the truth as these countries were not socialist at all and did not even approximate the (libertarian) socialist idea (the only true form of socialism). The Stalinist countries had authoritarian *"command economies"* with bureaucratic central planning, and so their failure cannot be taken as proof that a decentralised, libertarian socialism cannot work. Nor can Mises' and Hayek's arguments against Taylor and Lange be used against a libertarian mutualist or collectivist system as such a system is decentralised and dynamic (unlike the "neo-classical" socialist model). Libertarian socialism of this kind did, in fact, work remarkably well during the Spanish Revolution in the face of amazing difficulties, with increased productivity and output in many workplaces as well as increased equality and liberty (see section I.8).

Thus the *"calculation argument"* does not prove that socialism is impossible. Mises was wrong in asserting that *"a socialist system with a market and market prices is as self-contradictory as is the notion of a triangular square."* [**Human Action**, p. 706] This is because capitalism is not defined by markets as such but rather by wage labour, a situation where working class people do not have free access to the means of production and so have to sell their labour (and so liberty) to those who do. If quoting Engels is not **too** out of place, the *"object of production — to produce commodities — **does not import** to the instrument the character of capital"* as the *"production of commodities is one of the preconditions for the existence of capital .. . as long as the producer sells only **what he himself** produces, he is not a capitalist; he becomes so only from the moment he makes use of his instrument*



*uncertainty as to the price"* of inputs with *"smaller, more diffuse and more manageable uncertainties"* such as the costs of labour. A large firm can only control the market, by *"reducing or eliminating the independence of action"* of those it sells to or buys from. This means the behaviour of others can be controlled, so that *"uncertainty as to that behaviour is reduced."* Finally, advertising is used to influence the amount sold. Firms also *"eliminate market uncertainty"* by *"entering into contracts specifying prices and amounts to be provided or bought for substantial periods of time."* Thus *"one of the strategies of eliminating market uncertainty is to eliminate the market."* [**The New Industrial State** p. 47, pp. 30–6 and p. 47]

Of course, such attempts to reduce uncertainty within capitalism are incomplete and subject to breakdown. Such planning systems can come into conflict with others (for example, the rise of Japanese corporations in the 1970s and 1980s and subsequent decline of American industrial power). They are centralised, hierarchically structured and based on top-down central planning (and so subject to the informational problems we highlighted in section I.1.2). Market forces can reassert themselves, making a mockery of even the best organised plans. However, these attempts at transcending the market within capitalism, as incomplete as they are, show a major problem with relying on markets and market prices to allocate resources. They add an extra layer of uncertainty which ensure that investors and firms are as much in the dark about their decisions as Mises argued central planners would be. As such, to state as Mises does that production in socialism can *"never be based upon the foundation of an exact calculation of value"* is somewhat begging the question. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109] This is because knowing the *"exact"* price of an investment is meaningless as the key question is whether it makes a profit or not — and that is unknown when it is made and if it makes a loss, it is still a waste of resources! So it does not follow that a knowledge of current prices allows efficient allocation of

Uncertainty will, of course, afflict a communist-anarchist society. Mistakes in resource allocation will happen, with some goods over produced at times and under-produced at others. However, a communist society removes the added uncertainty associated with a capitalist economy as such mistakes do **not** lead to general slumps as losses result in the failure of firms and rising unemployment. In other words, without Mises' precise economic calculation society will no longer be afflicted by the uncertainty associated with the profit system.

Significantly, there are developments within capitalism which point to the benefits of communism in reducing uncertainty. This is the rise of the large-scale corporation. In fact, many capitalist firms expand precisely to reduce the uncertainties associated with market prices and their (negative) impact on the plans they make. Thus companies integrate horizontally by take-over to gain more control over investment and supply decisions as well as vertically to stabilise costs and secure demand for necessary inputs.

As economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted, when investment is large, *"[n]o form of market uncertainty is so serious as that involving the terms and conditions on which capital is obtained."* As a result internal funds are used as *"the firm has a secure source of capital"* and *"no longer faces the risks of the market."* This applies to other inputs, for a *"firm cannot satisfactorily foresee and schedule future action or prepare for contingencies if it does not know what its prices will be, what its sales will be, what its costs, including labour and capital costs, will be and what will be available at these costs. If the market is uncontrolled, it will not know these things ... Much of what the firm regards as planning consists in minimising uncontrolled market influences."* This partly explains why firms grow (the other reason is to dominate the market and reap oligopolistic profits). The *"market is superseded by vertical integration"* as the firm *"takes over the source of supply or the outlet"*. This *"does not eliminate market uncertainty"* but rather replaces *"the large and unmanageable*



***to exploit the wage labour of others***." [**Collected Works**, Vol. 47, pp. 179–80] In this, as noted in section C.2.1, Engels was merely echoing Marx (who, in turn, was simply repeating Proudhon's distinction between property and possession). As mutualism eliminates wage labour by self-management and free access to the means of production, its use of markets and prices (both of which pre-date capitalism) does not mean it is not socialist (and as we note in section G.1.1 Marx, Engels, Bakunin and Kropotkin, like Mises, acknowledged Proudhon as being a socialist). This focus on the market, as David Schweickart suggests, is no accident:

> *"The identification of capitalism with the market is a pernicious error of both conservative defenders of* ***laissez-faire*** *[capitalism] and most left opponents ... If one looks at the works of the major apologists for capitalism ... one finds the focus of the apology always on the virtues of the market and on the vices of central planning. Rhetorically this is an effective strategy, for it is much easier to defend the market than to defend the other two defining institutions of capitalism. Proponents of capitalism know well that it is better to keep attention toward the market and away from wage labour or private ownership of the means of production."* [*"Market Socialism: A Defense"*, pp. 7–22, **Market Socialism: the debate among socialists**, Bertell Ollman (ed.), p. 11]

The theoretical work of such socialists as David Schweickart (see his books **Against Capitalism** and **After Capitalism**) present an extensive discussion of a dynamic, decentralised market socialist system which has obvious similarities with mutualism — a link which some Leninists recognise and stress in order to discredit market socialism via guilt-by-association (Proudhon *"the anarchist and inveterate*

*foe of Karl Marx ... put forward a conception of society, which is probably the first detailed exposition of a 'socialist market.'"* [Hillel Ticktin, *"The Problem is Market Socialism"*, pp. 55–80, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56]). So far, most models of market socialism have not been fully libertarian, but instead involve the idea of workers' control within a framework of state ownership of capital (Engler in **Apostles of Greed** is an exception to this, supporting community ownership). Ironically, while these Leninists reject the idea of market socialism as contradictory and, basically, not socialist they usually acknowledge that the transition to Marxist-communism under their workers' state would utilise the market.

So, as anarchist Robert Graham points out, *"Market socialism is but one of the ideas defended by Proudhon which is both timely and controversial ... Proudhon's market socialism is indissolubly linked with his notions of industrial democracy and workers' self-management."* [*"Introduction"*, P-J Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxii] As we discuss in section I.3.5 Proudhon's system of agro-industrial federations can be seen as a non-statist way of protecting self-management, liberty and equality in the face of market forces (Proudhon, unlike individualist anarchists, was well aware of the negative aspects of markets and the way market forces can disrupt society). Dissident economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson is right to suggest that Proudhon's system, in which *"each co-operative association would be able to enter into contractual relations with others"*, could be *"described as an early form of 'market socialism'"*. In fact, *"instead of Lange-type models, the term 'market socialism' is more appropriately to such systems. Market socialism, in this more appropriate and meaningful sense, involves producer co-operatives that are owned by the workers within them. Such co-operatives sell their products on markets, with genuine exchanges of property rights"* (somewhat annoyingly, Hodgson incorrectly asserts that *"Proudhon described himself as an anarchist, not a socialist"* when, in reality, the French anarchist



> *investment then leads to a state of unemployment in which the investments, which would have yielded 2 per cent. in conditions of full employment, in fact yield less than nothing. We reach a condition where there is a shortage of houses, but where nevertheless no one can afford to live in the houses that there are."* [Keynes, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 321–2]

Thus uncertainty and expectations of profit can lead to massive allocation inefficiencies and waste. Of course Mises pays lip-service to this uncertainty of markets. He noted that there are *"ceaseless alternations in other economic data"* and that exchange relations are *"subject to constant ... fluctuations"* but those *"fluctuations disturb value calculations only in the slightest degree"*! He admitted that *"some mistakes are inevitable in such a calculation"* but rest assured *"[w]hat remains of uncertainty comes into the calculation of the uncertainty of future conditions, which is an inevitable concomitant of the dynamic nature of economic life."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 98, p. 110 and p. 111] So, somewhat ironically, Mises assumed that, when attacking socialism, that prices are so fluid that no central planning agency could ever compute their correct price and so allocated resources inefficiently yet, when it comes to capitalism, prices are not so fluid that they make investment decisions difficult!

The question is, does capitalism reduce or increase these uncertainties? We can suggest that capitalism adds two extra layers of uncertainty. As with any economy, there is the uncertainty that produced goods will meet an actual need of others (i.e., that it has a use-value). The market adds another layer of uncertainty by adding the need for its price to exceed costs a market. Finally, capitalism adds another level of uncertainty in that the capitalist class must make suffice profits as well. Thus, regardless of how much people need a specific good if capitalists cannot make a profit from it then it will not be produced.

*uation which are in no way relevant to the prospective yield."* He stressed that *"human decisions affecting the future, whether personal or political or economic, cannot depend on strict mathematical expectation, since the basis for making such calculations does not exist."* He also suggested that the *"chief result"* of wage flexibility *"would be to cause a great instability of prices, so violent perhaps as to make business calculations futile."* [**The General Theory**, p. 152, pp. 162–3 and p. 269]

Much the same can be said of other prices as well. As Proudhon argued decades before Mises proclaimed socialism impossible, profit is ultimately an unknown value. Under capitalism wages are the *"least that can be given"* to a worker: *"that is, we do not know."* The *"price of the merchandise put upon the market"* by the capitalist will be the *"highest that he can obtain; that is, again, we do not know."* Economics *"admits"* that *"the prices of merchandise and labour ... can be **estimated**"* and *"that estimation is essentially an arbitrary operation, which never can lead to sure and certain conclusions."* Thus capitalism is based on *"the relation between two unknowns"* which *"cannot be determined."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 64]

So under capitalism **all** decisions are *"groping in the dark"*. Which can, and does, lead to inefficient allocations of resources:

> *"It leads, that is to say, to **misdirected** investment. But over and above this it is an essential characteristic of the boom that investments which will in fact yield, say, 2 per cent. in conditions of full employment are made in the expectation of a yield of, say, 6 per cent., and are valued accordingly. When the disillusion comes, this expectation is replaced by a contrary 'error of pessimism', with the result that the investments, which would in fact yield 2 per cent. in conditions of full employment, are expected to yield less than nothing; and the resulting collapse of new*



repeatedly referred to himself and his mutualist system as socialist). [**Economics and Utopia**, p. 20, p. 37 and p. 20]

Thus it is possible for a socialist economy to allocate resources using markets. By suppressing capital markets and workplace hierarchies, a mutualist system will improve upon capitalism by removing an important source of perverse incentives which hinder efficient use of resources as well as long term investment and social responsibility in addition to reducing inequalities and increasing freedom. As David Ellerman once noted, many *"still look at the world in bipolar terms: capitalism or (state) socialism."* Yet there *"are two broad traditions of socialism: **state socialism** and **self-management socialism**. State socialism is based on government ownership of major industry, while self-management socialism envisions firms being worker self-managed and not owned or managed by the government."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 147] Mutualism is a version of the second vision and anarchists reject the cosy agreement between mainstream Marxists and their ideological opponents on the propertarian right that only state socialism is "real" socialism.

Finally, it should be noted that most anarchists are not mutualists but rather aim for (libertarian) communism, the abolition of money. Many do see a mutualist-like system as an inevitable stage in a social revolution, the transitional form imposed by the objective conditions facing a transformation of a society marked by thousands of years of oppression and exploitation (collectivist-anarchism contains elements of both mutualism and communism, with most of its supporters seeing it as a transitional system). This is discussed in section I.2.2, while section I.1.3 indicates why most anarchists reject even non-capitalist markets. So does Mises's argument mean that a socialism that abolishes the market (such as libertarian communism) is impossible? Given that the vast majority of anarchists seek a libertarian communist society, this is an important question. We address it in the next section.

## I.1.2 Is libertarian communism impossible?

In a word, no. While the *"calculation argument"* (see last section) is often used by propertarians (so-called right-wing "libertarians") as **the** basis for the argument that communism (a moneyless society) is impossible, it is based on certain false ideas of what prices do, the nature of the market and how a communist-anarchist society would function. This is hardly surprising, as Mises based his theory on a variation of neo-classical economics and the Marxist social-democratic (and so Leninist) ideas of what a "socialist" economy would look like. So there has been little discussion of what a true (i.e. libertarian) communist society would be like, one that utterly transformed the existing conditions of production by workers' self-management and the abolition of both wage-labour **and** money. However, it is useful here to indicate exactly why communism would work and why the *"calculation argument"* is flawed as an objection to it.

Mises argued that without money there was no way a socialist economy would make "rational" production decisions. Not even Mises denied that a moneyless society could estimate what is likely to be needed over a given period of time (as expressed as physical quantities of definite types and sorts of objects). As he argued, *"calculation **in natura** in an economy without exchange can embrace consumption-goods only."* His argument was that the next step, working out which productive methods to employ, would not be possible, or at least would not be able to be done "rationally," i.e. avoiding waste and inefficiency. The evaluation of producer goods *"can only be done with some kind of economic calculation. The human mind cannot orient itself properly among the bewildering mass of intermediate products and potentialities without such aid. It would simply stand perplexed before the problems of management and location*



*best upon vague estimates; it would never be based upon the foundation of an exact calculation of value."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109] Yet any investment decision in a **real** capitalist economy depends *"at best upon vague estimates"* of future market conditions and expected returns on the investment. This is because accounting is backward looking, while investment depends on the unknowable future.

In other words, *"people recognise that their economic future is uncertain (nonergodic) and cannot be reliably predicted from existing market information. Consequently, investment expenditures on production facilities and people's desire to save are typically based on differing expectations of an unknowable, uncertain future."* This means that in an uncertain world future profits *"can neither be reliably forecasted from existing market information, nor endogenously determined via today's planned saving propensity of income earners ... Thus, unless one assumes that entrepreneurs can accurately predict the future from here to eternity, current expectations of prospective yield must depend on the animal optimism or pessimism of entrepreneurs"* [Paul Davidson, **John Maynard Keynes**, pp. 62–3] So, yes, under capitalism you can determine the money cost (price) of a building but the decision to build is based on estimates and guesses of the future, to use Mises' words *"vague estimates."* A change in the market can mean that even a building which is constructed exactly to expected costs does not produce a profit and so sits empty. Even in terms of *"exact calculation"* of inputs these can change, so undermining the projected final cost and so its profit margin.

For a good explanation of the problems of uncertainty, we must turn to Keynes who placed it at the heart of his analysis of capitalism. *"The actual results of an investment over a long term of years,"* argued Keynes, *"very seldom agree with the initial expectation"* since *"our existing knowledge does not provide a sufficient basis for a calculated mathematical expectation. In point of fact, all sorts of considerations enter into the market val-*

less to say, the success of an investment **cannot** be appraised beforehand with any real degree of certainty. Somewhat ironically, Mises noted that *"the static nature of economic activity is only a theoretical assumption corresponding to no real state of affairs, however necessary it may be for our thinking and for the perfection of our knowledge of economics."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109] Or, for that matter, our critique of socialism! This can be seen from one his examples against socialism:

> *"Picture the building of a new railroad. Should it be built at all, and if so, which out of a number of conceivable roads should be built? In a competitive and monetary economy, this question would be answered by monetary calculation. The new road will render less expensive the transport of some goods, and it may be possible to calculate whether this reduction of expense transcends that involved in the building and upkeep of the next line. That can only be calculated in money."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 108]

It *"may be possible"*? Not before hand. At best, an investor could **estimate** the willingness of firms to swap to the new railroad and whether those expected costs will result in a profit on both fixed and running costs. The construction costs can be estimated, although unexpected price rises in the future may make a mockery of these too, but the amount of future income cannot. Equally, the impact of building the new railroad will change the distribution of income as well, which in turn affects prices across the market and people's consumption decisions which, in turn, affects the profitability of new railroad investment. Yet all this is ignored in order to attack socialism.

In other words, Mises assumes that the future can be accurately predicted in order to attack socialism. Thus he asserts that a socialist society *"would issue an edict and decide for or against the projected building. Yet this decision would depend at*



*tion."* Thus we would quickly see *"the spectacle of a socialist economic order floundering in the ocean of possible and conceivable economic combinations without the compass of economic calculation."* [*"Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth"*, pp. 87–130, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A. von Hayek (ed.), p. 104, p. 103 and p. 110] Hence the claim that monetary calculation based on market prices is the only solution.

This argument is not without its force. How can a producer be expected to know if tin is a better use of resources than iron when creating a product if all they know is that iron and tin are available and suitable for their purpose? Or, if we have a consumer good which can be made with A + 2B or 2A + B (where A and B are both input factors such as steel, oil electricity, etc.) how can we tell which method is more efficient (i.e. which one used least resources and so left the most over for other uses)? With market prices, Mises' argued, it is simple. If A cost $10 and B $5, then clearly method one would be the most efficient ($20 versus $25). Without the market, Mises argued, such a decision would be impossible and so every decision would be *"groping in the dark."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110]

Mises' argument rests on three flawed assumptions, two against communism and one for capitalism. The first two negative assumptions are that communism entails central planning and that it is impossible to make investment decisions without money values. We discuss why each is wrong in this section. Mises' positive assumption for capitalism, namely that markets allow exact and efficient allocation of resources, is discussed in section I.1.5.

Firstly, Mises assumes a centralised planned economy. As Hayek summarised, the crux of the matter was *"the impossibility of a rational calculation in a centrally directed economy from which prices are necessarily absent"*, one which *"involves planning on a most extensive scale — minute direction of practically all productive activity by one central authority"*. Thus the

*"one central authority has to solve the economic problem of distributing a limited amount of resources between a practically infinite number of competing purposes"* with *"a reasonable degree of accuracy, with a degree of success equally or approaching the results of competitive capitalism"* is what *"constitutes the problem of socialism as a method."* [*"The Nature and History of the Problem"*, pp. 1–40, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35, p. 19 and pp. 16–7]

While this was a common idea in Marxian social democracy (and the Leninism that came from it), centralised organisations are rejected by anarchism. As Bakunin argued, *"where are the intellects powerful enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of real interests, aspirations, wishes, and needs which sum up the collective will of the people? And to invent a social organisation that will not be a Procrustean bed upon which the violence of the State will more or less overtly force unhappy society to stretch out?"* Moreover, a socialist government, *"unless it were endowed with omniscience, omnipresence, and the omnipotence which the theologians attribute to God, could not possibly know and foresee the needs of its people, or satisfy with an even justice those interests which are most legitimate and pressing."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 268–9 and p. 318] For Malatesta, such a system would require *"immense centralisation"* and would either be *"an impossible thing to achieve, or, if possible, would end up as a colossal and very complex tyranny."* [**At the Café**, p. 65]

Kropotkin, likewise, dismissed the notion of central planning as the *"economic changes that will result from the social revolution will be so immense and so profound ... that it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the social forms to which a further society must give birth. The elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 175] The notion that a *"strongly centralised Government"* could *"**command** that a prescribed quantity"* of a good *"be sent to such a place on such a day"* and be *"received on a given day by a specified official*



obvious implications of disequilibrium, help undermine Mises' arguments against socialism.

Even if we assume that prices are at or, at best, near equilibrium when investment decisions are made, the awkward fact is that these prices do not tell you prices in the future nor what will be bought when production is finished. Rather, they tell you what was **thought** to be profitable before **investment began**. There are always differences between the prices used to cost various investments and the prices which prevail on the market when the finished goods are finally sold, suggesting that the market presents systematically misleading signals. In addition, rival companies respond to the same price signals by undertaking long term investments at the same time, so creating the possibility of a general crisis of over-accumulate and over-production when they are complete. As we discussed in section C.7.2, this is a key factor in the business cycle. Hence the recurring possibility of over-production, when the aggregate response to a specific market's rising price results in the market being swamped by good, so driving the market price down. Thus the market is marked by uncertainty, the future is not known. So it seems ironic to read Mises asserting that *"in the socialist commonwealth every economic change becomes an undertaking whose success can be neither appraised in advance nor later retrospectively determined. There is only groping in the dark."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110]

In terms of *"appraised in advance"*, Mises is essentially assuming that capitalists can see the future. In the real world, rather than in the unreal world of capitalist economics, the future is unknown and, as a result, success can only be guessed at. This means that any investment decision under **real** capitalism is, equally, *"groping in the dark"* because there is no way to know, before hand, whether the expectations driving the investment decisions will come to be. As Mises himself noted as part of his attack on socialism, *"a static state is impossible in real life, as our economic data are for ever changing"* and so, need-

> *in income distribution will then affect all other markets, making the dance of many markets even more chaotic."* [**Debunking Economics**, p. 169]

That prices can, and do, convey extremely misleading information is something which "Austrians" have a tendency to downplay. Yet in economies closer to their ideal (for example, nineteenth century America) there were many more recessions (usually triggered by financial crises arising from the collapse of speculative bubbles) than in the twentieth and so the economy was fundamentally more unstable, resulting in the market "precisely" investing in the "wrong" areas. Of course, it could be argued that there was not really free market capitalism then (e.g., protectionism, no true free banking due to regulation by state governments and so on) yet this would be question begging in the extreme (particularly since the end of the 20th and dawn of the 21st centuries saw speculative crises precisely in those areas which were regulated least).

Thus, the notion that prices can ensure the efficient allocation of resources is question begging. If prices are in disequilibrium, as "Austrians" suggest, then the market does not automatically ensure that they move towards equilibrium. Without equilibrium, we cannot say that prices provide companies sufficient information to make rational investment decisions. They may act on price information which is misleading, in that it reflects temporary highs or lows in the market or which is a result of speculative bubbles. An investment decision made on the **mis**-information implied in disequilibrium prices is as likely to produce mal-investment and subsequent macro-economic distortions as decisions made in light of the interest rate not being at its "natural" (equilibrium) value. So unless it is assumed that the market is in equilibrium when an investment decision is made then prices can reflect misinformation as much as information. These, the



*and stored in particular warehouses"* was not only *"undesirable"* but also *"wildly Utopian."* During his discussion of the benefits of free agreement against state tutelage, Kropotkin noted that only the former allowed the utilisation of *"the co-operation, the enthusiasm, the local knowledge"* of the people. [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 82–3 and p. 137]

Kropotkin's own experience had shown how the *"high functionaries"* of the Tsarist bureaucracy *"were simply charming in their innocent ignorance"* of the areas they were meant to be administrating and how, thanks to Marxism, the socialist ideal had *"lost the character of something that had to be worked out by the labour organisations themselves, and became state management of industries — in fact, state socialism; that is, state capitalism."* As an anarchist, he knew that governments become *"isolated from the masses"* and so *"the very success of socialism"* required *"the ideas of no-government, of self-reliance, of free initiative of the individual"* to be *"preached side by side with those of socialised ownership and production."* Thus it was essential that socialism was decentralised, federal and participatory, that the *"structure of the society which we longed for"* was *"worked out, in theory and practice, from beneath"* in by *"all labour unions"* with *"a full knowledge of local needs of each trade and each locality."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionist**, p. 184, p. 360, p. 374–5 and p. 376]

So anarchists can agree with Mises that central planning cannot work in practice as its advocates hope. Or, more correctly, Mises agreed with the anarchists, as we had opposed central planning first. We have long recognised that no small body of people can be expected to know what happens in society and plan accordingly (*"No single brain nor any bureau of brains can see to this organisation."* [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 29]). Moreover, there is the pressing question of freedom as well, for *"the despotism of [the 'socialist'] State would be equal to the despotism of the present state, increased by the economic despotism of all the capital which would pass*

*into the hands of the State, and the whole would be multiplied by all the centralisation necessary for this new State. And it is for this reason that we, the Anarchists, friends of liberty, we intend to fight them to the end."* [Carlo Cafiero, *"Anarchy and Communism"*, pp. 179–86, **The Raven**, No. 6, p. 179]

As John O'Neill summarises, the *"argument against centralised planning is one that has been articulated within the history of socialist planning as an argument for democratic and decentralised decision making."* [**The Market**, p. 132] So, for good economic and political reasons, anarchists reject central planning. This central libertarian socialist position feeds directly into refuting Mises' argument, for while a **centralised** system would need to compare a large (*"infinite"*) number of possible alternatives to a large number of possible needs, this is not the case in a **decentralised** system. Rather than a vast multitude of alternatives which would swamp a centralised planning agency, one workplace comparing different alternatives to meet a specific need faces a much lower number of possibilities as the objective technical requirements (use-values) of a project are known and so local knowledge will eliminate most of the options available to a small number which can be directly compared.

As such, removing the assumption of a central planning body automatically drains Mises' critique of much of its force — rather than an *"the ocean of possible and conceivable economic combinations"* faced by a central body, a specific workplace or community has a more limited number of possible solutions for a limited number of requirements. Moreover, any complex machine is a product of less complex goods, meaning that the workplace is a consumer of other workplace's goods. If, as Mises admitted, a customer can decide between consumption goods without the need for money then the user and producer of a *"higher order"* good can decide between consumption goods required to meet their needs.



other prices becoming distorted because of the ramifications for exchange ratios throughout the economy.

One of the reasons why neo-classical economists stress equilibrium is that prices only provide the basis for rational calculation only in that state for disequilibrium prices can convey extremely misleading information. When people trade at disequilibrium prices, it has serious impacts on the economy (which is why neo-classical economics abstracts from it). As one economist notes, if people *"were to buy and sell at prices which did not clear the market"* then once *"such trading has taken place, there can be no guarantee that, even if an equilibrium exists, the economy will ever converge to it. In fact, it is likely to move in cycles around the equilibrium."* This *"is more than a mere supposition. It is an accurate description of what does happen in the real world."* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, pp. 87–8] Once we dismiss the ideologically driven *"postulate"* of "Austrian" economics, we can see how these opportunities for "pure profit" (and, of course, a corresponding pure lose for the buyer) impacts on the economy and how the market system adds to uncertainty. As dissident economist Steve Keen puts it:

> *"However, a change in prices in one market will affect consumer demand in all other markets. This implies that a move towards equilibrium by one market could cause some or all others to move away from equilibrium. Clearly it is possible that this ... might never settle down to equilibrium.*
>
> *"This will be especially so if trades actually occur at disequilibrium — as in practice they must ... A disequilibrium trade will mean that the people on the winning side of the bargain — sellers if the price is higher than equilibrium — will gain real income at the expense of the losers, compared to the alleged standard of equilibrium. This shift*

products being available. It staggers belief to think that **every** action by a firm will be step towards equilibrium or a better co-ordination of plans, particularly if you include **unsuccessful** entrepreneurs into the process. In other words, the market can be as discoordinating as it can be co-ordinating and it cannot be "postulated" beforehand which will predominate at any given time.

There is an obvious example of entrepreneurial activity which leads to increasing disequilibrium, one (ironically) drawn straight from "Austrian" economics itself. This is the actions of bankers extending credit and so deviating from the "natural" (equilibrium) rate of interest. As one post-Keynesian economist notes, this, the "Austrian" theory of the business cycle, *"not only proved to be vulnerable to the Cambridge capital critique ... , but also appeared to reply upon concepts of equilibrium (the 'natural rate of interest', for example) that were inconsistent with the broader principles of Austrian economic theory."* [J.E. King, **A history of post Keynesian economics since 1936**, p. 230] As we discussed in section C.8, this kind of activity is to be expected of entrepreneurs seeking to make money from meeting market demand. The net result of this activity is a tendency **away** from equilibrium. This can be generalised for all markets, with the profit seeking activities of some businesses frustrating the plans of others. Ultimately, the implication that all entrepreneurial activity is stabilising, virtuous arbitrage that removes disequilibria is unconvincing as the suggestion that the misinformation conveyed by disequilibrium prices can cause very substantial macroeconomic distortions for only one good (credit). Surely, the argument as regards interest rates can apply to other disequilibrium prices, with responses to unsustainable prices for other goods being equally capable of generating mal-investment (which only becomes apparent when the prices adjust towards their "natural" levels). After all, any single price distortion leads to all



In terms of decision making, it is true that a centralised planning agency would be swamped by the multiple options available to it. However, in a decentralised socialist system individual workplaces and communes would be deciding between a much smaller number of alternatives. Moreover, unlike a centralised system, the individual firm or commune knows exactly what is required to meet its needs, and so the number of possible alternatives is reduced as well (for example, certain materials are simply technically unsuitable for certain tasks).

Mises' other assumption is equally flawed. This is that without the market, no information is passed between producers beyond the final outcome of production. In other words, he assumed that the final product is all that counts in evaluating its use. Needless to say, it is true that without more information than the name of a given product it is impossible to determine whether using it would be an efficient utilisation of resources. Yet more information can be provided which can be used to inform decision making. As socialists Adam Buick and John Crump point out, *"at the level of the individual production unit or industry, the only calculations that would be necessary in socialism would be calculations in kind. On the one side would be recorded the resources (materials, energy, equipment, labour) used up in production and on the other the amount of good produced, together with any by-products... . Socialist production is simply the production of use values from use values, and nothing more."* [**State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management**, p. 137] Thus any good used as an input into a production process would require the communication of this kind of information.

The generation and communication of such information implies a decentralised, horizontal network between producers and consumers. This is because what counts as a use-value can only be determined by those directly using it. Thus the production of use-values from use-values cannot be achieved via central planning, as the central planners have no notion of the

use-value of the goods being used or produced. Such knowledge lies in many hands, dispersed throughout society, and so socialist production implies decentralisation. Capitalist ideologues claim that the market allows the utilisation of such dispersed knowledge, but as John O'Neill notes, *"the market may be one way in which dispersed knowledge can be put to good effect. It is not ... the only way". "The strength of the epistemological argument for the market depends in part on the implausibility of assuming that all knowledge could be centralised upon some particular planning agency"* he stresses, but Mises' *"argument ignores, however, the existence of the decentralised but predominantly non-market institutions for the distribution of knowledge ... The assumption that only the market can co-ordinate dispersed non-vocalisable knowledge is false."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 118 and p. 132]

So, in order to determine if a specific good is useful to a person, that person needs to know its "cost." Under capitalism, the notion of cost has been so associated with **price** that we have to put the word "cost" in quotation marks. However, the real cost of, say, writing a book, is not a sum of money but so much paper, so much energy, so much ink, so much human labour. In order to make a rational decision on whether a given good is better for meeting a given need than another, the would-be consumer requires this information. However, under capitalism this information is **hidden** by the price.

Somewhat ironically, given how "Austrian" economics tends to stress that the informational limitations are at the root of its *"impossibility"* of socialism, the fact is that the market hides a significant amount of essential information required to make a sensible investment decision. This can be seen from an analysis of Mises' discussion on why labour-time cannot replace money as a decision-making tool. Using labour, he argued, *"leaves the employment of material factors of production out of account"* and presents an example of two goods, P and Q, which take 10 hours to produce. P takes 8 hours of labour, plus 2 units of raw material A (which is produced by an hour's



*approach postulates a tendency for profit opportunities to be **discovered** and **grasped** by routine-resisting entrepreneurial market participants"*, with this *"tending to nudge the market in the equilibrative direction."* Lip-service is paid to the obvious fact that entrepreneurs can make errors but *"**there is no tendency for entrepreneurial errors to be made.** The tendency which the market generates toward greater mutual awareness, is not offset by any equal but opposite tendency in the direction of diminishing awareness"* and so the *"entrepreneurial market process may indeed reflect a systematically equilibrative **tendency**, but this by no means constitutes a **guaranteed** unidirectional, flawlessly converging trajectory."* All this results on the *"speculative actions of entrepreneurs who see opportunities for pure profit in the conditions of disequilibrium."* [Israel M. Kirzner, *"Entrepreneurial Discovery and the Competitive Market Process: An Austrian Approach"*, pp. 60–85, **Journal of Economic Literature**, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 71, p. 73, p. 82, p. 72 and p. 68]

When evaluating this argument, it is useful to remember that *"postulate"* means **"to assume without proof to be true"** or **"to take as self-evident."** At its most simple, this argument ignores how entrepreneurial activity pushes an economy **away** from equilibrium (unlike radical economists, only a few "Austrian" economists, such as those who follow Ludwig Lachmann, recognise that market forces have both equilibrating **and** disequilibrium effects, acknowledged in passing by Kirzner: *"In a world of incessant change, they argue, it is precisely those acts of entrepreneurial boldness which must frustrate any discovery efforts made by fellow entrepreneurs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79]). In other words, market activity can lead to economic crisis and inefficient allocation decisions. A successful entrepreneur will, by their actions, frustrate the plans of others, most obviously those of his competitors but also those who require the goods they used to produce their commodities and those whose incomes are reduced by the new

The first issue is that prices only provide adequate knowledge for rational decision making only if they are at their equilibrium values as this equates supply and demand. Sadly, for the "Austrian" school and its arguments against socialism, it rejects the notion that prices could be at equilibrium. While modern "Austrian" economics is keen to stress its (somewhat underdeveloped) disequilibrium analysis of capitalism, this was not always the case. When Mises wrote his 1920 essay on socialism his school of economics was considered a branch of the neo-classicalism and this can be seen from Mises' critique of central planning. In fact, it would be fair to say that the neo-"Austrian" focus of prices as information and (lip-service to) disequilibrium flowed from the Economic Calculation debate, specifically the awkward fact that their more orthodox neo-classical peers viewed Lange's "solution" as answering Mises and Hayek.

Thus there is a fundamental inconsistency in Mises' argument, namely that while Austrian economics reject the notion of equilibrium and the perfect competition of neo-classical economics he nonetheless maintains that market prices are the correct prices and can be used to make rational decisions. Yet, in any real market, these correct prices must be ever changing so making the possibility that *"precise"* economic decisions by price can go wrong on a large scale (i.e., in slumps). In other words, Mises effectively assumed away uncertainty and, moreover, failed to mention that this uncertainty is increased dramatically within capitalism.

This can be seen from modern "Austrian" economics which, after the Economic Calculation debates of the 1920s and 1930s, moved increasingly away from neo-classical equilibrium theory. However, this opened up a whole new can of worms which, ironically, weakened the "Austrian" case against socialism. For the modern "Austrian" economist, the economy is considered not to be in equilibrium, with entrepreneur being seen as the means by which it brought towards it. Thus *"this*



socially necessary labour). Q takes 9 hours of labour and one unit of A. He asserts that in terms of labour P and Q *"are equivalent, but in value terms P is more valuable than Q. The former is false, and only the later corresponds to the nature and purpose of calculation."* [*"Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113]

The flaw in his argument is clear. Assuming that an hour of socially necessary labour is £10 then, in price terms, P would have £80 of direct labour costs, with £20 of raw material A while Q would have £90 of direct labour and £10 of A. Both cost £100 so it hard to see how this *"corresponds to the nature and purpose of calculation"*! Using less of raw material A is a judgement made **in addition** to *"calculation"* in this example. The question of whether to economise on the use of A simply cannot be made using prices. If P, for example, can only be produced via a more ecologically destructive process than Q or if the work process by which P is created is marked by dull, mindless work but Q's is more satisfying for the people involved than Q may be considered a better decision. Sadly, that kind of information is **not** communicated by the price mechanism.

As John O'Neill points out, *"Mises' earlier arguments against socialist planning turned on an assumption about commensurability. His central argument was that rational economic decision-making required a single measure on the basis of which the worth of alternative states of affairs could be calculated and compared."* [**Ecology, Policy and Politics**, p. 115] This central assumption was unchallenged by Taylor and Lange in their defence of "socialism", meaning that from the start the debate against Mises was defensive and based on the argument that socialist planning could mimic the market and produce results which were efficient from a capitalist point of view.

Anarchists question whether using prices means basing all decision making on one criterion and ignoring all others is a rational thing to do. As O'Neill suggests, *"the relative scarcity of items ... hardly exhaust the full gamut of information that*

*is distributed throughout society which might be relevant to the co-ordination of economic activities and plans."* [**The Market**, p. 196] Saying that a good costs £10 does not tell you much about the amount of pollution its production or use generates, under what conditions of labour it was produced, whether its price is affected by the market power of the firm producing it, whether it is produced in an ecologically sustainable way, and so forth. Similarly, saying that another, similar, good costs £9 does not tell you whether than £1 difference is due to a more efficient use of inputs or whether it is caused by imposing pollution onto the planet.

And do prices **actually** reflect costs? The question of profit, the reward for owning capital and allowing others to use it, is hardly a cost in the same way as labour, resources and so on (attempts to explain profits as an equivalent sacrifice as labour have always been ridiculous and quickly dropped). When looking at prices to evaluate efficient use for goods, you cannot actually tell by the price if this is so. Two goods may have the same price, but profit levels (perhaps under the influence of market power) may be such that one has a higher cost price than another. The price mechanism fails to indicate which uses least resources as it is influenced by market power. Indeed, as Takis Fotopoulos notes, *"[i]f ... both central planning and the market economy inevitably lead to concentrations of power, then neither the former nor the latter can produce the sort of information flows and incentives which are necessary for the best functioning of any economic system."* [**Towards an Inclusive Democracy**, p. 252] Moreover, a good produced under a authoritarian state which represses its workforce could have a lower price than one produced in a country which allowed unions to organise and has basic human rights. The repression would force down the cost of labour, so making the good in question appear as a more "efficient" use of resources. In other words, the market can mask inhumanity as "efficiency" and actually reward that behaviour by market share.



to them being exploited by others. Rather than waste time trying to record the minutiae of who contributed exactly what to society, most anarchists are happy if people contribute to society roughly equal amounts of time and energy and take what they need in return. To consider such a situation of free co-operation as exploitative is simply ridiculous (just as well consider the family as the exploitation of its working members by their non-working partners and children). Those who do are free to leave such an association and pay their own way in everything (a task which would soon drive home the simplicity and utility of communism, most anarchists would suggest).

## I.1.5 Does capitalism efficiently allocate resources?

We have discussed, in section I.1.1, the negative effects of workplace hierarchy and stock markets and, in section I.1.2, the informational problems of prices and the limitations in using profit as the sole criteria for decision making for the efficient allocation of resources. As such, anarchists have reason to doubt the arguments of the "Austrian" school of economics that (libertarian) socialism is impossible, as first suggested by Ludwig Von Mises in 1920. [*"Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth"*, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.), pp. 87–130] Here, we discuss why anarchists also have strong reason to question the underlying assumption that capitalism efficiently allocates resources and how this impacts on claims that "socialism" is impossible. This is based on an awareness of the flaws in any (implicit) assumption that all prices are at equilibrium, the issue of uncertainty, the assumption that human well-being is best served by market forces and, lastly, the problem of periodic economic crisis under capitalism.

sure that emergencies will be an exception and they will be given free access to communal hospitals, fire services and so forth).

Thus the notion that communism would be exploitative like capitalism misses the point. While all socialists accuse capitalism for failing to live up to its own standards, of not paying workers the full product of their labour, most do not think that a socialist society should seek to make that full payment a reality. Life, for libertarian communists, is just too complex and fleeting to waste time and energy calculating exactly the contribution of each to society. As Malatesta put it:

> *"I say that* ***the worker has the right to the entire product of his work****: but I recognise that this right is only a formula of abstract justice; and means, in practice, that there should be no exploitation, that everyone must work and enjoy the fruits of their labour, according to the custom agreed among them.*
>
> *"Workers are not isolated beings that live for themselves and for themselves, but social beings … Moreover, it is impossible, the more so with modern production methods, to determine the exact labour that each worker contributed, just as it is impossible to determine the differences in productivity of each worker or each group of workers, how much is due to the fertility of the soil, the quality of the implements used, the advantages or difficulties flowing from the geographical situation or the social environment. Hence, the solution cannot be found in respect to the strict rights of each person, but must be sought in fraternal agreement, in solidarity."* [**At the Café**, pp. 56–7]

All in all, most anarchists reject the notion that people sharing the world (which is all communism really means) equates



In other words, market prices can be horribly distorted in that they ignore quality issues. Exchanges therefore occur in light of false information and, moreover, with anti-social motivations — to maximise short-term surplus for the capitalists regardless of losses to others. Thus they distort valuations and impose a crass, narrow and ultimately self-defeating individualism. Prices are shaped by more than costs, with, for example, market power increasing market prices far higher than actual costs. Market prices also fail to take into account public goods and so bias allocation choices against them not to mention ignoring the effects on the wider society, i.e. beyond the direct buyers and sellers. Similarly, in order to make rational decisions relating to using a good, you need to know **why** the price has changed for if a change is permanent or transient implies different responses. Thus the current price is not enough in itself. Has the good become more expensive temporarily, due, say, to a strike? Or is it because the supply of the resource has been exhausted? Actions that are sensible in the former situation will be wrong in the other. As O'Neill suggests, *"the information [in the market] is passed back without dialogue. The market informs by 'exit' — some products find a market, others do not. 'Voice' is not exercised. This failure of dialogue … represents an informational failure of the market, not a virtue … The market … does distribute information … it also blocks a great deal."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99]

So a purely market-based system leaves out information on which to base rational resource allocations (or, at the very least, hides it). The reason for this is that a market system measures, at best, preferences of **individual** buyers among the **available** options. This assumes that all the pertinent use-values that are to be outcomes of production are things that are to be consumed by the individual, rather than use-values that are collectively enjoyed (like clean air). Prices in the market do not measure social costs or externalities, meaning that such costs are not reflected in the price and so you cannot have a ratio-

nal price system. Similarly, if the market measures only preferences amongst things that can be monopolised and sold to individuals, as distinguished from values that are enjoyed collectively, then it follows that information necessary for rational decision-making in production is not provided by the market. In other words, capitalist "calculation" fails because private firms are oblivious to the social cost of their labour and raw materials inputs.

Indeed, prices often **mis**-value goods as companies can gain a competitive advantage by passing costs onto society (in the form of pollution, for example, or de-skilling workers, increasing job insecurity, and so on). This externalisation of costs is actually rewarded in the market as consumers seek the lowest prices, unaware of the reasons **why** it is lower (such information cannot be gathered from looking at the price). Even if we assume that such activity is penalised by fines later, the damage is still done and cannot be undone. Indeed, the company may be able to weather the fines due to the profits it originally made by externalising costs (see section E.3). Thus the market creates a perverse incentive to subsidise their input costs through off-the-book social and environmental externalities. As Chomsky suggests:

> *"it is by now widely realised that the economist's 'externalities can no longer be consigned to footnotes. No one who gives a moment's thought to the problems of contemporary society can fail to be aware of the social costs of consumption and production, the progressive destruction of the environment, the utter irrationality of the utilisation of contemporary technology, the inability of a system based on profit or growth-maximisation to deal with needs that can only be expressed collectively, and the enormous bias this system imposes towards maximisation of commodities for personal use in place of the general im-*



So it is difficult to evaluate how much an individual worker or group of workers actually contribute to society. This can be seen whenever workers strike, particularly so-called "key" areas like transport. Then the media is full of accounts of how much the strike is costing "the economy" and it is always far more than that of the wages lost in strike action. Yet, according to capitalist economics, the wages of a worker are equal to their contribution to production — no more, no less. Striking workers, in other words, should only harm the economy to the value of their wages yet, of course, this is obviously not the case. This is because of the interconnected nature of any advanced economy, where contributions of individuals are so bound together.

Needless to say, this does not imply that a free people would tolerate the able-bodied simply taking without contributing towards the mass of products and services society. As we discuss in section I.4.14, such people will be asked to leave the community and be in the same situation as those who do not wish to be communists.

Ultimately, the focus on calculating exact amounts and on the evaluation of contributions down to the last penny is exactly the kind of narrow-minded account-book mentality which makes most people socialists in the first place. It would be ironic if, in the name of non-exploitation, a similar accounting mentality to that which records how much surplus value is extracted from workers under capitalism is continued into a free society. It makes life easier not to have to worry whether you can afford to visit the doctors or dentists, not to have to pay for use of roads and bridges, know that you can visit a public library for a book and so forth. For those who wish to spend their time calculating such activities and seeking to pay the community for them simply because they hate the idea of being "exploited" by the "less" productive, the ill, the young or the old then we are sure that a libertarian communist society will accommodate them (although we are

themselves agree to distribute part of their product to others (i.e. society as a whole, their neighbours, friends, and so forth). It is based on free agreement, while capitalism is marked by power, authority, and the firm (invisible) hand of market forces (supplemented, as necessary, by the visible fist of the state). As resources are held in common under anarchism, people always have the option of working alone if they so desired (see section I.3.7).

Secondly, unlike under capitalism, there is no separate class which is appropriating the goods produced. The so-called "non-workers" in a libertarian communist society have been, or will be, workers. As the noted Spanish anarchist De Santillan pointed out, *"[n]aturally, children, the aged and the sick are not considered parasites. The children will be productive when they grow up. The aged have already made their contribution to social wealth and the sick are only temporarily unproductive."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 20] In other words, over their life time, everyone contributes to society and so using the "account book" mentality of capitalism misses the point. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"Services rendered to society, be they work in factory or field, or mental services,* ***cannot be*** *valued in money. There can be no exact measure of value (of what has been wrongly-termed exchange value), nor of use value, with regard to production. If two individuals work for the community five hours a day, year in year out, at different work which is equally agreeable to them, we may say that on the whole their labour is equivalent. But we cannot divide their work, and say that the result of any particular day, hour, or minute of work of the one is worth the result of a minute or hour of the other."* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 168]



> *provement of the quality of life."* [**Radical Priorities**, pp. 190–1]

Prices hide the actual costs that production involved for the individual, society, and the environment, and instead boils everything down into **one** factor, namely price. There is a lack of dialogue and information between producer and consumer.

Moreover, without using another means of cost accounting instead of prices how can supporters of capitalism know there is a correlation between actual and price costs? One can determine whether such a correlation exists by measuring one against the other. If this cannot be done, then the claim that prices measure costs is a tautology (in that a price represents a cost and we know that it is a cost because it has a price). If it can be done, then we can calculate costs in some other sense than in market prices and so the argument that only market prices represent costs falls. Equally, there may be costs (in terms of quality of life issues) which **cannot** be reflected in price terms.

Simply put, the market fails to distribute all relevant information and, particularly when prices are at disequilibrium, can communicate distinctly **misleading** information. In the words of two South African anarchists, *"prices in capitalism provided at best incomplete and partial information that obscured the workings of capitalism, and would generate and reproduce economic and social inequalities. Ignoring the social character of the economy with their methodological individualism, economic liberals also ignored the social costs of particular choices and the question of externalities."* [Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, **Black Flame**, p. 92] This suggests that prices cannot be taken to reflect real costs any more that they can reflect the social expression of the valuation of goods. They are the result of a conflict waged over these goods and those that acted as their inputs (including, of course, labour). Market and social power, much more than need or resource usage, decides the issue. The inequality in the means of purchasers, in the market power of

firms and in the bargaining position of labour and capital all play their part, so distorting any relationship a price may have to its costs in terms of resource use. Prices are misshapen.

Little wonder Kropotkin asked whether *"are we not yet bound to analyse that compound result we call price rather than to accept it as a supreme and blind ruler of our actions?"* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 71] It is precisely these **real** costs, hidden by price, which need to be communicated to producers and consumers for them to make informed and rational decisions concerning their economic activity.

It is useful to remember that Mises argued that it is the **complexity** of a modern economy that ensures money is required: *"Within the narrow confines of household economy, for instance, where the father can supervise the entire economic management, it is possible to determine the significance of changes in the processes of production, without such aids to the mind [as monetary calculation], and yet with more or less of accuracy."* However, *"the mind of one man alone — be it ever so cunning, is too weak to grasp the importance of any single one among the countlessly many goods of higher order. No single man can ever master all the possibilities of production, innumerable as they are, as to be in a position to make straightway evident judgements of value without the aid of some system of computation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

A libertarian communist society would, it must be stressed, use various *"aids to the mind"* to help individuals and groups to make economic decisions. This would reduce the complexity of economic decision making, by allowing different options and resources to be compared to each other. Hence the complexity of economic decision making in an economy with a multitude of goods can be reduced by the use of rational algorithmic procedures and methods to aid the process. Such tools would aid decision making, not dominate it as these decisions affect humans and the planet and should never be made automatically.



misses the point as far as communist anarchism goes. This is because of two reasons.

Firstly, *"Anarchist Communism ... means voluntary Communism, Communism from free choice."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism**, p. 148] This means it is not imposed on anyone but is created and practised only by those who believe in it.

Therefore it would be up to the communities and syndicates to decide how they wish to distribute the products of their labour and individuals to join, or create, those that meet their ideas of right and wrong. Some may decide on equal pay, others on payment in terms of labour time, yet others on communistic associations. The important thing to realise is that individuals and the co-operatives they join will decide what to do with their output, whether to exchange it or to distribute it freely. Hence, because it is based on free agreement, communism-anarchism cannot be exploitative. Members of a commune or co-operative which is communistic are free to leave, after all. Needless to say, the co-operatives will usually distribute their product to others within their confederation and exchange with the non-communist ones in a different manner. We say "usually" for in the case of emergencies like earthquakes and so forth the situation would call for, and produce, mutual aid just as it does today to a large degree, even under capitalism.

The reason why capitalism is exploitative is that workers **have** to agree to give the product of their labour to another (the boss, the landlord) in order to be employed in the first place (see section B.4). While they can choose who to be exploited by (and, to varying degrees, pick the best of the limited options available to them) they cannot avoid selling their liberty to property owners (a handful do become self-employed and some manage to join the exploiting class, but not enough to make either a meaningful option for the bulk of the working class). In libertarian communism, by contrast, the workers

In other words, though a system of co-operative selling on the market (what is mistakenly termed "self-managed" capitalism by some) or exchanging labour-time values would not be communism, it is **not** capitalism. This is because the workers are not separated from the means of production. Therefore, the attempts by propertarians to claim that it is capitalism are false, an example of misinformed insistence that virtually **every** economic system, bar state socialism and feudalism, is capitalist. However, it could be argued that communism (based on free access and communal ownership of all resources including the product of labour) would mean that workers are exploited by non-workers (the young, the sick, the elderly and so on). As communism abolishes the link between performance and payment, it could be argued that the workers under communism would be just as exploited as under capitalism, although (of course) not by a class of capitalists and landlords but by the community. As Proudhon put it, while the *"members of a community, it is true, have no private property"* the community itself *"is proprietor"* and so communism *"is inequality, but not as property is. Property is the exploitation of the weak by the strong. Communism is the exploitation of the strong by the weak."* [**What is Property?**, p. 250]

Needless to say, subsequent anarchists rejected Proudhon's blanket opposition to all forms of communism, rejecting this position as only applicable to authoritarian, not libertarian, communism. Which, it must be remembered, was the only kind around when this was written in 1840 (as we noted in section H.1, what was known as communism in Proudhon's time was authoritarian). Suffice to say, Proudhon's opposition to communism shares little with that of the Propertarian-right, which reflects the sad lack of personal empathy (and so ethics) of the typical defender of capitalism. However, the notion that communism (distribution according to need) rather than socialism (distribution according to deed) is exploitative



That being the case, a libertarian communist society would quickly develop the means of comparing the real impact of specific *"higher order"* goods in terms of their real costs (i.e. the amount of labour, energy and raw materials used plus any social and ecological costs). Moreover, it should be remembered that production goods are made up on inputs of other goods, that is, higher goods are made up of consumption goods of a lower order. If, as Mises admits, calculation without money is possible for consumption goods then the creation of *"higher order"* goods can be also achieved and a record of its costs made and communicated to those who seek to use it.

While the specific *"aids to the mind"* as well as "costs" and their relative weight would be determined by the people of a free society, we can speculate that it would include direct and indirect labour, externalities (such as pollution), energy use and materials, and so forth. As such, it must be stressed that a libertarian communist society would seek to communicate the "costs" associated with any specific product as well as its relative scarcity. In other words, it needs a means of determining the objective or absolute costs associated with different alternatives as well as an indication of how much of a given good is available at a given it (i.e., its scarcity). Both of these can be determined without the use of money and markets.

Section I.4 discusses possible frameworks for an anarchist economy, including suggestions for libertarian communist economic decision-making processes. In terms of *"aids to the mind"*, these include methods to compare goods for resource allocation by indicating the absolute costs involved in producing a good and the relative scarcity of a specific good, among other things. Such a framework is necessary because *"an appeal to a necessary role for practical judgements in decision making is **not** to deny any role to general principles. Neither ... does it deny any place for the use of technical rules and algorithmic procedures ... Moreover, there is a necessary role for rules of thumb, standard procedures, the default procedures and*

*institutional arrangements that can be followed unreflectively and which **reduce** the scope for **explicit** judgements comparing different states of affairs. There are limits in time, efficient use of resources and the dispersal of knowledge which require rules and institutions. Such rules and institutions can free us for space and time for reflective judgements where they matter most.*" [John O'Neill, **Ecology, Policy and Politics**, pp. 117–8] It is these *"rules and institutions need themselves to be open to critical and reflective appraisal."* [O'Neill, **The Market**, p. 118]

Economic decisions, in other words, cannot be reduced down to one factor yet Mises argued that anyone *"who wished to make calculations in regard to a complicated process of production will immediately notice whether he has worked more economically than others or not; if he finds, from reference to the exchange values obtaining in the market, that he will not be able to produce profitably, this shows that others understand how to make better use of the higher-order goods in question."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 97–8] However, this only shows whether someone has worked more **profitably** than others, not whether it is more economical. Market power automatically muddles this issue, as does the possibility of reducing the monetary cost of production by recklessly exploiting natural resources and labour, polluting, or otherwise passing costs onto others. Similarly, the issue of wealth inequality is important, for if the production of luxury goods proves more profitable than basic essentials for the poor does this show that producing the former is a better use of resources? And, of course, the key issue of the relative strength of market power between workers and capitalists plays a key role in determining "profitably."

Basing your economic decision making on a single criteria, namely profitability, can, and does, lead to perverse results. Most obviously, the tendency for capitalists to save money by not introducing safety equipment (*"To save a dollar the capitalist build their railroads poorly, and along comes a train, and loads of people are killed. What are their lives to him, if*



deed. Proudhon, for example, opposed communism and state socialism just as much as he opposed capitalism. Third, capitalism does not equal the market. The market predates capitalism and, for some libertarian socialists, will survive it. Even from a Marxist position, a noted in section I.1.1, the defining feature of capitalism is **wage labour**, not the market.

Why some socialists desire to reduce the choices facing humanity to either communism or some form of capitalism is frankly strange, but also understandable because of the potential dehumanising effects of market systems (as shown under capitalism). Why the propertarian right wishes to do so is more clear, as it aims to discredit all forms of socialism by equating them to communism (which, in turn, it equates to central planning and Stalinism).

Yet this is not a valid inference to make. Opposition to capitalism can imply both socialism (distribution according to deed, or selling the product of ones labour) and communism (distribution according to need, or a moneyless economy). The theory is a critique of capitalism, based on an analysis of that system as being rooted in the exploitation of labour (as we discussed in section C.2), i.e., it is marked by workers not being paid the full-value of the goods they create. This analysis, however, is not necessarily the basis of a socialist economy although it **can** be considered this as well. As noted, Proudhon used his critique of capitalism as an exploitative system as the foundation of his proposals for mutual banking and co-operatives. Marx, on the other hand, used a similar analysis as Proudhon's purely as a critique of capitalism while hoping for communism. Robert Owen used it as the basis of his system of labour notes while Kropotkin argued that such a system was just the wages-system under another form and a free society *"having taken possession of all social wealth, having boldly proclaimed the right of all to this wealth ... will be compelled to abandon any system of wages, whether in currency or labour-notes."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 167]

aware of the negative aspect of market forces and suggested various institutional structures, such as the ago-industrial federation, to combat them (so while in favour of competition he was, unlike the individualist anarchists, against the free market). Communist anarchists, unsurprisingly, argue that individualist anarchists tend to stress the positive aspects of competition while ignoring or downplaying its negative sides. While, undoubtedly, capitalism makes the negative side of competition worse than it could be it does not automatically follow that a non-capitalist market would not have similar, if smaller, negative aspects to it.

## I.1.4 If capitalism is exploitative, then isn't socialism as well?

Some libertarian Marxists (as well as Leninists) claim that non-communist forms of socialism are just "self-managed" capitalism. Strangely, propertarians (the so-called "libertarian" right) also say yes to this question, arguing that socialist opposition to exploitation does not imply socialism but what they also call "self-managed" capitalism. Thus some on the left proclaim anything short of communism is a form of capitalism while, on the right, some proclaim that communism is exploitative and only a market system (which they erroneously equate to capitalism) is non-exploitative.

Both are wrong. First, and most obviously, socialism does not equal communism (and vice versa). While there is a tendency on both right and left to equate socialism with communism (particularly Marxism), in reality, as Proudhon once noted, socialism *"was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 177] Only a few of these schools are communist, just as only a few of them are libertarian. Second, not all socialist schools aim to abolish the market and payment by



*by their sacrifice he has saved money?"* [Emma Goldman, **A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 1, p. 157]). Similarly, it is considered a more "efficient" use of resources to condemn workers to deskilling and degrading work than "waste" resources in developing machines to eliminate or reduce it (*"How many machines remain unused solely because they do not return an immediate profit to the capitalist! ... How many discoveries, how many applications of science remain a dead letter solely because they don't bring the capitalist enough!"* [Carlo Cafiero, *"Anarchy and Communism"*, pp. 179–86, **The Raven**, No. 6, p. 182]). Similarly, those investments which have a higher initial cost but which, in the long run, would have, say, a smaller environmental impact would not be selected in a profit-driven system.

This has seriously irrational effects, because the managers of capitalist enterprises are obliged to choose technical means of production which produce the cheapest results. All other considerations are subordinate, in particular the health and welfare of the producers and the effects on the environment. The harmful effects resulting from "rational" capitalist production methods have long been pointed out. For example, speed-ups, pain, stress, accidents, boredom, overwork, long hours and so on all harm the physical and mental health of those involved, while pollution, the destruction of the environment, and the exhaustion of non-renewable resources all have serious effects on both the planet and those who live on it. As green economist E. F. Schumacher argued:

> *"But what does it **mean** when we say that something is uneconomic? . .. [S]omething is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate profit in terms of money. The method of economics does not, and cannot, produce any other meaning ... The judgement of economics ... is an extremely **fragmentary** judgement; out of the large number of aspects which in*

*real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken, economics supplies only one — whether a money profit accrues **to those who undertake it** or not."* [**Small is Beautiful**, pp. 27–8]

Schumacher stressed that *"about the **fragmentary** nature of the judgements of economics there can be no doubt whatever. Even with the narrow compass of the economic calculus, these judgements are necessarily and **methodically** narrow. For one thing, they give vastly more weight to the short than to the long term... [S]econd, they are based on a definition of cost which excludes all 'free goods' ... [such as the] environment, except for those parts that have been privately appropriated. This means that an activity can be economic although it plays hell with the environment, and that a competing activity, if at some cost it protects and conserves the environment, will be uneconomic."* Moreover, *"[d]o not overlook the words 'to those who undertake it.' It is a great error to assume, for instance, that the methodology of economics is normally applied to determine whether an activity carried out by a group within society yields a profit to society as a whole."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 29]

To claim that prices include all these "externalities" is nonsense. If they did, we would not see capital moving to third-world countries with few or no anti-pollution or labour laws. At best, the "cost" of pollution would only be included in a price if the company was sued successfully in court for damages — in other words, once the damage is done. Ultimately, companies have a strong interest in buying inputs with the lowest prices, regardless of **how** they are produced. In fact, the market rewards such behaviour as a company which was socially responsible would be penalised by higher costs, and so market prices. It is reductionist accounting and its accompanying *"ethics of mathematics"* that produces the *"irrationality of rationality"* which plagues capitalism's exclusive reliance on prices (i.e. profits) to measure "efficiency."



*impels Man and human society towards solidarity."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 30]

In conclusion then, communist-anarchists argue that even non-capitalist markets would result in everyone being so busy competing to further their "self-interest" that they would loose sight of what makes life worth living and so harm their **actual** interests. Ultimately, what counts as self-interest is shaped by the surrounding social system. The pressures of competing may easily result in short-term and narrow interests taking precedence over richer, deeper needs and aspirations which a communal system could allow to flourish by providing the social institutions by which individuals can discuss their joint interests, formulate them and act to achieve them. That is, even non-capitalist markets would result in people simply working long and hard to survive on the market rather than **living**. If one paradox of authoritarian socialism is that it makes everyone miserable by forcing them to altruistically look out for the happiness of others, market-based libertarian socialism could produce the potential paradox of making everyone miserable by the market forcing them to pursue a limited notion of self-interest which ensures that they do not have the time or opportunity to really be happy and at one with themselves and others.

In other words, bosses act as they do under capitalism in part because markets force them to. Getting rid of bosses need not eliminate all the economic pressures which influence the bosses' decisions and, in turn, could force groups of workers to act in similar ways. Thus a competitive system would undermine many of the benefits which people sought when they ended capitalism. This is why some socialists inaccurately call socialist schemes of competing co-operatives "self-managed capitalism" or "self-exploitation" — they are simply drawing attention to the negative aspects of markets which getting rid of the boss cannot solve. Significantly, Proudhon was well

coincide. Indeed, rather than respond to individual needs, the market responds to money (more correctly, profit), which by its very nature provides a distorted indication of individual preferences (and does not take into account values which are enjoyed collectively, such as clean air, or **potentially** enjoyed, such as the wilderness a person may never visit but desires to see exist and protected).

This does not mean that social anarchists propose to "ban" the market — far from it. This would be impossible. What we do propose is to convince people that a profit-based market system has distinctly **bad** effects on individuals, society and the planet's ecology, and that we can organise our common activity to replace it with libertarian communism. As Max Stirner argued, competition *"has a continued existence"* because *"all do not attend to **their affair** and come to an **understanding** with each other about it … . Abolishing competition is not equivalent to favouring the guild. The difference is this: In the **guild** baking, etc., is the affair of the guild-brothers; in **competition**, the affair of chance competitors; in the **union**, of those who require baked goods, and therefore my affair, yours, the affair of neither guildic nor the concessionary baker, but the affair of the **united.**"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 275]

Therefore, social anarchists do not appeal purely to altruism in their struggle against the de-humanising effects of the market, but also to to egoism: the simple fact that co-operation and mutual aid is in our best interests as individuals. By co-operating and controlling *"the affairs of the united,"* we can ensure a free society which is worth living in, one in which the individual is not crushed by market forces and has time to fully develop his or her individuality and uniqueness:

> *"Solidarity is therefore the state of being in which Man attains the greatest degree of security and wellbeing; and therefore egoism itself, that is the exclusive consideration of one's own interests,*



Ironically enough, Mises also pointed to the irrational nature of the price mechanism. He stated (correctly) that there are *"extra-economic"* elements which *"monetary calculation cannot embrace"* because of *"its very nature."* He acknowledged that these *"considerations themselves can scarcely be termed irrational"* and, as examples, listed *"[i]n any place where men regard as significant the beauty of a neighbourhood or a building, the health, happiness and contentment of mankind, the honour of individuals or nations."* He also noted that *"they are just as much motive forces of rational conduct as are economic factors"* but they *"do not enter into exchange relationships."* How rational is an economic system which ignores the *"health, happiness and contentment"* of people? Or the beauty of their surroundings? Which, moreover, penalises those who take these factors into consideration? For anarchists, Mises comments indicate well the inverted logic of capitalism. That Mises can support a system which ignores the needs of individuals, their happiness, health, surroundings, environment and so on by *"its very nature"* says a lot. His suggestion that we assign monetary values to such dimensions begs the question and has plausibility only if it assumes what it is supposed to prove. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99–100] Indeed, the person who would put a price on friendship simply would have no friends as they simply do not understand what friendship is and are thereby excluded from much which is best in human life. Likewise for other *"extra-economic"* goods that individual's value, such as beautiful places, happiness, the environment and so on.

So essential information required for sensible decision making would have to be recorded and communicated in a communist society and used to evaluate different options using agreed methods of comparison. This differs drastically from the price mechanism as it recognises that mindless, automatic calculation is impossible in social choices. Such choices have an unavoidable ethical and social dimension simply because they involve other human beings and the environment. As Mises him-

self acknowledged, monetary calculation does not capture such dimensions.

We, therefore, need to employ practical judgement in making choices aided by a full understanding of the **real** social and ecological costs involved using, of course, the appropriate *"aids to the mind."* Given that an anarchist society would be complex and integrated, such aids would be essential but, due to its decentralised nature, it need not embrace the price mechanism. It can evaluate the efficiency of its decisions by looking at the **real** costs involved to society rather than embrace the distorted system of costing explicit in the price mechanism (as Kropotkin once put it, *"if we analyse **price**"* we must *"make a distinction between its different elements"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72]).

In summary, then, Mises considered only central planning as genuine socialism, meaning that a decentralised communism was not addressed. Weighting up the pros and cons of how to use millions of different goods in the millions of potential situations they could be used would be impossible in a centralised system, yet in decentralised communism this is not an issue. Each individual commune and syndicate would be choosing from the few alternatives required to meet their needs. With the needs known, the alternatives can be compared — particularly if agreed criteria (*"aids to the mind"*) are utilised and the appropriate agreed information communicated.

Efficient economic decision making in a moneyless "economy" is possible, assuming that sufficient information is passed between syndicates and communes to evaluate the relative and absolute costs of a good. Thus, decisions can be reached which aimed to reduce the use of goods in short supply or which take large amounts of resources to produce (or which produce large externalities to create). While a **centralised** system would be swamped by the large number of different uses and combinations of goods, a **decentralised** communist system would not be.



inequality drastically, it cannot be assumed that inequalities will not increase over time. This is because inequalities in resources leads to inequalities of power on the market and, assuming self-interest, any trade or contract will benefit the powerful more than the powerless, so re-enforcing and potentially increasing the inequalities and power between the parties. Similarly, while an anarchist society would be created with people driven by a sense of solidarity and desire for equality, markets tend to erode those feelings and syndicates or communes which, thanks to the resources they control (such as rare raw materials or simply the size of their investments reducing competitive pressures) have an advantage on the market may be tempted to use their monopoly power vis-à-vis other groups in society to accrue more income for themselves at the expense of less fortunate syndicates and communes. This could degenerate back into capitalism as any inequalities that exist between co-operatives would be increased by competition, forcing weaker co-operatives to fail and so creating a pool of workers with nothing to sell but their labour. The successful co-operatives could then hire those workers and so re-introduce wage labour. So these possibilities could, over time, lead to a return a post-capitalist market system to capitalism if the inequalities become so great that the new rich become so alienated from the rest of society they recreate wage-labour and, by necessity, a state to enforce a desire for property in land and the means of production against public opinion.

All this ensures that the market cannot really provide the information necessary for rational-decision making in terms of ecological impact as well as human activity and so resources are inefficiently allocated. We all suffer from the consequences of that, with market forces impoverishing our environment and quality of life. Thus are plenty of reasons for concluding that efficiency and the market not only do not necessarily coincide, but, indeed, necessarily do not

and so non-capitalist markets could make us less human and more a robot.

All market decisions are crucially conditioned by the purchasing power of those income groups that can back their demands with money. Not everyone can work (the sick, the very old, children and so forth) and for those who can, personal circumstances may impact on their income. Moreover, production has become so interwoven that it *"is utterly impossible to draw a distinction between the work of each"* and so we should *"put the **needs** above the **works**, and first of all to recognise **the right to live**, and later on **the right to well-being** for all those who took their share in production."* This is particularly the case as *"the needs of the individual, do not always correspond to his **works**"* — for example, *"a man of forty, father of three children, has other needs than a young man of twenty"* and *"the woman who suckles her infant and spends sleepless nights at its bedside, cannot do as much **work** as the man who has slept peacefully."* [Kropotkin, **Conquest of Bread**, p. 170 and p. 171] This was why communist-anarchists like Kropotkin stressed the need not only to abolish wage-labour but also money, the wages system.

So it goes without saying that purchasing power (demand) and need are not related, with people often suffering simply because they do not have the money required to purchase, say, health care, housing or food for themselves or their families. While economic distress may be less in a non-capitalist market system, it still would exist as would the fear of it. The market is a continuous bidding for goods, resources, and services, with those who have the most purchasing power the winners. This means that the market system is the worst one for allocating resources when purchasing power is unequally distributed (this is why orthodox economists make the convenient assumption of a *"given distribution of income"* when they try to show that a capitalist allocation of resources is the best one via *"Pareto optimality"*). While a mutualist system should reduce



Thus, anarchists argue that Mises was wrong. Communism **is** viable, but only if it is **libertarian** communism. Ultimately, though, the real charge is not that socialism is *"impossible"* but rather that it would be inefficient, i.e., it would allocate resources such that too much is used to achieve specified goals and that there would be no way to check that the allocated resources were valued sufficiently to warrant their use in the first place. While some may portray this as a case of planning against markets (no-planning), this is false. Planning occurs in capitalism (as can be seen from any business), it is a question of whether capitalism ensures that more plans can be co-ordinated and needs meet by means of relative prices and profit-loss accounting than by communism (free access and distribution according to need). As such, the question is does the capitalist system adds additional problems to the efficient co-ordination of plans? Libertarian communists argue, yes, it does (as we discuss at length in section I.1.5).

All choices involve lost possibilities, so the efficient use of resources is required to increase the possibilities for creating other goods. At best, all you can say is that by picking options which cost the least a market economy will make more resources available for other activities. Yet this assumption crucially depends equating "efficient" with profitable, a situation which cannot be predicted beforehand and which easily leads to inefficient allocation of resources (particularly if we are looking at meeting human needs). Then there are the costs of using money for if we are talking of opportunity costs, of the freeing up of resources for other uses, then the labour and other resources used to process money related activities should be included. While these activities (banking, advertising, defending property, and so forth) are essential to a capitalist economy, they are not needed and unproductive from the standpoint of producing use values or meeting human need. This would suggest that a libertarian communist economy would have a productive advantage over a capitalist economy as the elimination

of this structural waste intrinsic to capitalism will free up a vast amount of labour and materials for socially useful production. This is not to mention the so-called "costs" which are no such thing, but relate to capitalist property rights. Thus "rent" may be considered a cost under capitalism, but would disappear if those who used a resource controlled it rather than pay a tribute to gain access to it. As Kropotkin argued, *"the capitalist system makes us pay for everything three or four times its labour value"* thanks to rent, profit, interest and the actions of middle men. Such system specific "costs" hide the actual costs (in terms of labour and resource use) by increasing the price compared to if we *"reckon our expenses in labour"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68]

Moreover, somewhat ironically, this "economising" of resources which the market claims to achieve is not to conserve resources for future generations or to ensure environmental stability. Rather, it is to allow **more** goods to be produced in order to accumulate more capital. It could be argued that the market forces producers to minimise costs on the assumption that lower costs will be more likely to result in higher profits. However, this leaves the social impact of such cost-cutting out of the equation. For example, imposing externalities on others does reduce a firm's prices and, as a result, is rewarded by the market however alienating and exhausting work or rising pollution levels does not seem like a wise thing to do. So, yes, it is true that a capitalist firm will seek to minimise costs in order to maximise profits. This, at first glance, could be seen as leading to an efficient use of resources until such time as the results of this become clear. Thus goods could be created which do not last as long as they could, which need constant repairing, etc. So a house produced "efficiently" under capitalism could be a worse place to live simply because costs were reduced by cutting corners (less insulation, thinner walls, less robust materials, etc.). In addition, the collective outcome of all these "efficient" decisions could be socially inefficient as they reduce the



the strange inversion of values in which things (property/money) become more important than people. This can have a de-humanising effect, with people becoming cold-hearted calculators who put profits before people. This can be seen in capitalism, where economic decisions are far more important than ethical ones — particularly as such an inhuman mentality can be rewarded on the market. Merit does not necessarily breed success, and the successful do not necessarily have merit. The truth is that, in the words of Noam Chomsky, *"wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority and willing to abandon principle for material gain, and so on ... Such qualities might be just the valuable ones for a war of all against all."* [**For Reasons of State**, pp. 139–140]

Needless to be said, if the market does reward such people with success it can hardly be considered as a **good** thing. A system which elevates making money to the position of the most important individual activity will obviously result in the degrading of human values and an increase in neurotic and psychotic behaviour. Little wonder, as Alfie Kohn has argued, competition can have serious negative effects on us outside of work, with it damaging both our personal psychology and our interpersonal relationships. Thus competition *"itself is responsible for the development of a lower moral standard"* which places winning at any cost above fairness and justice. Kohn quotes Nathan Ackerman, the father of family therapy, who noted that the *"strife of competition reduces empathic sympathy, distorts communication, impairs the mutuality of support and sharing, and decreases the satisfaction of personal need."* [**No Contest**, p. 163 and pp. 142–3] Thus, the market can impoverish us as individuals, sabotaging self-esteem, promoting conformity, ruining relationships and making us less than what we could be. This is a problem of markets as such, not only capitalist ones

life falling as a higher GDP is created as the result of longer working hours with fewer holidays. Such a regime may, perhaps, be good for material wealth but it is not great for people.

The market can also block the efficient use of resources. For example, for a long time energy efficient light-bulbs were much more expensive than normal ones. Over the long period, however, they used far less energy than normal ones, meaning less need to produce more energy (and so burn coal and oil, for example). However, the high initial price ensured that most people continued to use the less efficient bulbs and so waste resources. Much the same can be said of alternative forms of energy, with investment in (say) wind energy ignored in favour of one-use and polluting energy sources. A purely market system would not allow decisions which benefit the long-term interests of people to be made (for example, by distributing energy-efficient light-bulbs freely or at a reduced cost) as these would harm the profits of those co-operatives which tried to do so.

Also, markets do not reflect the values of things we do not put a price upon (as we argued in section B.5). It cannot protect wilderness, for example, simply because it requires people to turn it into property and sell it as a commodity. If you cannot afford to visit the new commodity, the market turns it into something else, no matter how much you value it. The market also ignores the needs of future generations as they always discount the value of the long term future. A payment to be made 1,000 years from now (a mere speck in geological time) has a market value of virtually zero according to any commonly used discount rate. Even 50 years in the future cannot be adequately considered as competitive pressures force a short term perspective on people harmful to present and future generations, plus the ecology of the planet.

Then there are corrosive effects of the market on human personalities. As we have argued elsewhere (see section B.1.3), competition in a free market creates numerous problems — for example, the creation of an *"ethics of mathematics"* and



quality of life of those subject to them as well as leading to over-investment, over-production, falling profits and economic crisis. As such, it could be argued that Mises' argument exposes more difficulties for capitalism rather than for anarchism.

Finally, it should be noted that most anarchists would question the criteria Hayek and Mises used to judge the relative merits of communism and capitalism. As the former put it, the issue was *"a distribution of income independent of private property in the means of production and a volume of output which was at least approximately the same or even greater than that procured under free competition."* [*"The Nature and History of the Problem"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37] Thus the issue is reduced to that of output (quantity), not issues of freedom (quality). If slavery or Stalinism **had** produced more output than free market capitalism, that would not make either system desirable This was, in fact, a common argument against Stalinism during the 1950s and 1960s when it **did** appear that central planning was producing more goods (and, ironically, by the propertarian right against the welfare state for, it should be remembered, that volume of output, like profitability and so "efficiency", in the market depends on income distribution and a redistribution from rich to poor could easily result in more output becoming profitable). Similarly, that capitalism produces more alcohol and Prozac to meet the higher demand for dulling the minds of those trying to survive under it would **not** be an argument against libertarian communism! As we discuss in section I.4, while anarchists seek to meet material human needs we do not aim, as under capitalism, to sacrifice all other goals to that aim as capitalism does. Thus, to state the obvious, the aim for maximum volume of output only makes sense under capitalism as the maximum of human happiness and liberty may occur with a lower volume of output in a free society. The people of a society without oppression, exploitation and alienation will hardly act in identical ways, nor seek the same volume of output, as those in one, like capitalism, marked by those traits!

Moreover, the volume of output is a somewhat misleading criteria as it totally ignores its distribution. If the bulk of that volume goes to a few, then that is hardly a good use of resources. This is hardly an academic concern as can be seen from the Hayek influenced neo-liberalism of the 1980s onwards. As economist Paul Krugman notes, the value of the output of an average worker *"has risen almost 50 percent since 1973. Yet the growing concentration of income in the hands of a small minority had proceeded so rapidly that we're not sure whether the typical American has gained anything from rising productivity."* This means that wealth have flooded upwards, and *"the lion's share of economic growth in America over the past thirty years has gone to a small, wealthy minority."* [**The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 124 and p. 244]

To conclude. Capitalist "efficiency" is hardly rational and for a fully human and ecological efficiency libertarian communism is required. As Buick and Crump point out, *"socialist society still has to be concerned with using resources efficiently and rationally, but the criteria of 'efficiency' and 'rationality' are not the same as they are under capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137] Under communist-anarchism, the decision-making system used to determine the best use of resources is not more or less "efficient" than market allocation, because it goes beyond the market-based concept of "efficiency." It does not seek to mimic the market but to do what the market fails to do. This is important, because the market is not the rational system its defenders often claim. While reducing all decisions to one common factor is, without a doubt, an easy method of decision making, it also has serious side-effects **because** of its reductionistic basis. The market makes decision making simplistic and generates a host of irrationalities and dehumanising effects as a result. So, to claim that communism will be "more" efficient than capitalism or vice versa misses the point. Libertarian communism will be "efficient" in a



it: *"In what industry, in what line of business, are the true social costs of the activity registered in its accounts? Where is the pricing system that offers the consumer a fair choice between air to breath and motor cars to drive about in?"* [**Contribution to Modern Economics**, p. 10]

While, to be fair, there will be a reduced likelihood for a workplace of self-employed workers to pollute their own neighbourhoods in a free society, the competitive pressures and rewards would still be there and it seems unlikely that they will be ignored, particularly if survival on the market is at stake so communist-anarchists fear that while not having bosses, capitalists and landlords would mitigate some of the irrationalities associated with markets under capitalism, it will not totally remove them. While the market may be free, people would not be.

Even if we assume that self-managed firms resist the temptations and pressures of the market, any market system is also marked by a continuing need to expand production and consumption. In terms of environmental impact, a self-managed firm must still make profits in order to survive and so the economy must grow. As such, every market system will tend to expand into an environment which is of fixed size. As well as placing pressure on the planet's ecology, this need to grow impacts on human activity as it also means that market forces ensure that work continually has to expand. Competition means that we can never take it easy, for as Max Stirner argued, *"[r]estless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm **enjoyment**. We do not get the comfort of our possessions … Hence it is at any rate helpful that we come to an agreement about **human** labours that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 268] Value needs to be created, and that can only be done by labour and so even a non-capitalist market system will see work dominate people's lives. Thus the need to survive on the market can impact on broader (non-monetary) measures of welfare, with quality of

the lack of non-labour income would help reduce the severity of the business cycle, it seems unlikely to eliminate it totally. Equally, many of the problems of market-increased uncertainty and the destabilising aspects of price signals discussed in section I.1.5 are just as applicable to all markets, including post-capitalist ones.

This is related to the issue of the *"tyranny of small decisions"* we highlighted in section B.6. This suggests that the aggregate effect of individual decisions produces social circumstances which are irrational and against the interests of those subject to them. This is the case with markets, where competition results in economic pressures which force its participants to act in certain ways, ways they would prefer not to do but, as isolated individuals or workplaces, end up doing due to market forces. In markets, it is rational for people try to buy cheap and sell dear. Each tries to maximise their income by either minimising their costs or maximising their prices, not because they particularly want to but because they need to as taking into account other priorities is difficult as there is no means of finding them out and deeply inadvisable as it is competitively suicidal as it places burdens on firms which their competitors need not face.

As we noted in section E.3, markets tend to reward those who act in anti-social ways and externalise costs (in terms of pollution and so on). In a market economy, it is impossible to determine whether a low cost reflects actual efficiency or a willingness to externalise, i.e., impose costs on others. Markets rarely internalise external costs. Two economic agents who strike a market-rational bargain between themselves need not consider the consequences of their bargain for other people outside their bargain, nor the consequences for the earth. In reality, then, market exchanges are never bilateral agreements as their effects impact on the wider society (in terms of, say, pollution, inequality and so on). This awkward fact is ignored in the market. As the left-wing economist Joan Robinson put



totally different way and people will act in ways considered "irrational" only under the narrow logic of capitalism.

For another critique of Mises, see Robin Cox's *"The 'Economic Calculation' controversy: unravelling of a myth"* [**Common Voice**, Issue 3]

## I.1.3 What is wrong with markets anyway?

A lot. Markets soon result in what are termed *"market forces,"* impersonal forces which ensure that the people in the economy do what is required of them in order for the economy to function. The market system, in capitalist apologetics, is presented to appear as a regime of freedom where no one forces anyone to do anything, where we "freely" exchange with others as we see fit. However, the facts of the matter are somewhat different, since the market often ensures that people act in ways **opposite** to what they desire or forces them to accept "free agreements" which they may not actually desire. Wage labour is the most obvious example of this, for, as we indicated in section B.4, most people have little option but to agree to work for others.

We must stress here that not all anarchists are opposed to the market. Individualist anarchists favour it while Proudhon wanted to modify it while retaining competition. For many, the market equals capitalism but this is not the case as it ignores the fundamental issue of (economic) class, namely who owns the means of production. Capitalism is unique in that it is based on wage labour, i.e. a market for labour as workers do not own their own means of production and have to sell themselves to those who do. Thus it is entirely possible for a market to exist within a society and for that society **not** to be capitalist. For example, a society of independent artisans and peasants selling their product on the market would not be capitalist as workers would own and control their means of production. Similarly,

Proudhon's competitive system of self-managed co-operatives and mutual banks would be non-capitalist (and socialist) for the same reason. Anarchists object to capitalism due to the quality of the social relationships it generates between people (i.e. it generates authoritarian ones). If these relationships are eliminated then the kinds of ownership which do so are anarchistic. Thus the issue of ownership matters only in-so-far it generates relationships of the desired kind (i.e. those based on liberty, equality and solidarity). To concentrate purely on "markets" or "property" means to ignore social relationships and the key aspect of capitalism, namely wage labour. That right-wingers do this is understandable (to hide the authoritarian core of capitalism) but why (libertarian or other) socialists should do so is less clear.

In this section of the FAQ we discuss anarchist objections to the market **as such** rather than the capitalist market. The workings of the market do have problems with them which are independent of, or made worse by, the existence of wage-labour. It is these problems which make most anarchists hostile to the market and so desire a (libertarian) communist society. So, even if we assume a mutualist (a libertarian market-socialist) system of competing self-managed workplaces, then communist anarchists would argue that market forces would soon result in many irrationalities occurring.

Most obviously, operating in a market means submitting to the profit criterion. This means that however much workers might want to employ social criteria in their decision making, they cannot. To ignore profitability would cause their firm to go bankrupt. Markets, therefore, create conditions that compel producers to decide things which are not be in their, or others, interest, such as introducing deskilling or polluting technology, working longer hours, and so on, in order to survive on the market. For example, a self-managed workplace will be more likely to invest in safe equipment and working practices, this would still be dependent on finding the money to



do so and may still increase the price of their finished product. So we could point to the numerous industrial deaths and accidents which are due to market forces making it unprofitable to introduce adequate safety equipment or working conditions, (conservative estimates for industrial deaths in the USA are between 14,000 and 25,000 per year plus over 2 million disabled), or to increased pollution and stress levels which shorten life spans.

This tendency for self-managed firms to adjust to market forces by increasing hours, working more intensely, allocating resources to accumulating equipment rather than leisure time or consumption can be seen in co-operatives under capitalism. While lacking bosses may reduce this tendency in a post-capitalist economy, it will not eliminate it. This is why many socialists, including anarchists, call the way markets force unwilling members of a co-operatives make such unpleasant decisions a form of "self-exploitation" (although this is somewhat misleading, as there no exploitation in the capitalist sense of owners appropriating unpaid labour). For communist-anarchists, a market system of co-operatives *"has serious limitations"* as *"a collective enterprise is not necessarily a commune — nor is it necessarily communistic in its outlook."* This is because it can end up *"competing with like concerns for resources, customers, privileges, and even profits"* as they *"become a particularistic interest"* and *"are subjected to the same social pressures by the market in which they must function."* This *"tends increasingly to encroach on their higher ethical goals — generally, in the name of 'efficiency', and the need to 'grow' if they are to survive, and the overwhelming temptation to acquire larger earnings."* [Murray Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, pp. 193–4]

Similarly, a market of self-managed firms would still suffer from booms and slumps as the co-operatives response to changes in prices would still result in over-production (see section C.7.2) and over-investment (see section C.7.3). While

than, in a capitalist firm, maximising net profit. This results in various perverse results compared to a capitalist firm. This makes a co-operative-based economy extremely unstable and inefficient, as well as leading to co-operatives firing workers when prices rise as this maximises income per (remaining) worker. Thus a co-operative system ends in *"producing less output and using less labour than its capitalist counterpart."* [Benjamin Ward, *"The Firm in Illyria: Market Syndicalism"*, pp. 566–589, **The American Economic Review**, Vol. 48, No. 4, p. 580]

Of course, it would be churlish to note that, unlike the theory, actual capitalism is marked by extensive unemployment (as noted in section C.1.5, this is not surprising as it is required to secure bosses' power over their wage slaves). It would be equally churlish to note that, to quote one Yugoslav economist, this is *"a theory whose predictions have absolutely nothing to do with the observed facts."* [Branko Horvat, *"The Theory of the Worker-Managed Firm Revisited"*, pp. 9–25, **Journal of Comparative Economics**, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 9] As David Ellerman summarises:

> *"It might be noted parenthetically that there is a whole academic literature on what is called the 'Illyrian firm' ... The main peculiarity of this model is that it assumes the firm would expel members when that would increase the net income of the surviving members. The resulting short-run perversities have endeared the model to capitalist economists. Yet the Illyrian model had been an academic toy in the grand tradition of much of modern economics. The predicted short-run behaviour has not been observed in Yugoslavia or elsewhere, and worker-managed firms such as the Mondragon co-operatives take membership as a short-run fixed factor ... Hence*



wealthy and so *"[l]eaving everything to the market means that the rich may be able to realise even the most frivolous element of their desires, while the poor may not be able even to survive — thus the world spends twenty times more research money on slimming drugs than on malaria, which claims more than a million lives and debilitates millions more in developing countries every year."* [Ha-Joon Chang, **Bad Samaritans**, p. 172 and p. 174]

In other words, markets are always biased in favour of effective demand, i.e. in favour of the demands of people with money, and so can never (except in the imaginary abstractions of neo-classical economics) allocate the necessities of life to those who need them the most. Thus a simple redistribution of wealth (via militant unions or the welfare state, for example) could make previously "bad" investments good simply because the new income allows those who had previously needed, but could not afford, the good or service in question to purchase it. So just because something makes a loss under one distribution of income does not mean that it is an inefficient use of resources in the sense of meeting human needs (and could make a profit under another, more equal, distribution of wealth). So the "efficient" allocation of resources in terms of price (i.e., profit) is often no such thing as the wealthy few skews market decisions in their favour.

It is important to remember that, for the "Austrians", preferences are demonstrated through action in the market and they are not interested in opinions, thus any preference which is not expressed by action is irrelevant to them. So any attempt to collectively prioritise, say, building decent housing for all, provide health care for everyone, abolish poverty, and so forth are all considered "inefficient" uses of resources as those who receive them would not, normally, be able to afford them and, consequently, do not really desire them anyway (as they, needless to say, do not express that desire by market exchanges!). Yet this ignores the awkward fact that in the market, people can only act if they have money to make their preferences known. Thus

those who have a need but no money do not count when determining if the market is efficient or not. There is simply no room for the real people who can be harmed by real markets. As economist Amartya Sen argues, the workings of a "pure" capitalist market, as desired by "Austrians" economists and other propertarians, *"can be problematic since the actual consequences of the operation of these entitlements can, quite possibly, include rather terrible results. It can, in particular, lead to the violation of the substantive freedom of individuals to achieve those things to which they have reason to attach great importance, including escaping avoidable morality, being well nourished and healthy, being able to read, write and count and so on."* In fact, *"even gigantic famines can result without anyone's [right] libertarian rights (including property rights) being violated. The destitutes such as the unemployed or the impoverished may starve precisely because their 'entitlements' ... do not give them enough food."* Similarly, *"deprivation"* such as *"regular undernourishment"*, the *"lack of medical care for curable illnesses"* can *"coexist with all [right] libertarian rights (including rights of property ownership) being fully satisfied."* [**Development as Freedom**, p. 66]

All of which, it must be stressed, is ignored in the "Austrian" case against socialism. Ultimately, if providing food to a rich person's pets makes a profit then it becomes a more economical and efficient use of the resource than providing food to famine victims who cannot purchase food on the market. So it should never be forgotten that the "Austrians" insist that only preferences demonstrated in action are real. So if you cannot act on the market (i.e., buy something) then your need for it is not real. In other words, if a person loses their job and, as a consequence, loses their home then, according to this logic, they do not "need" a home as their "demonstrated preference" (i.e., their actual choices in action) shows that they genuinely value living under a bridge (assuming they gain the bridge owners agreement, of course).



an anarchist society would take an interest in ensuring a fair distribution of work and so would try to arrange work sharing if a given work placement is popular (see section I.4.13 on the question of who will do unpleasant work, and for more on work allocation generally, in an anarchist society).

Of course there may be the danger of a syndicate or guild trying to restrict entry from an ulterior motive, as such the exploitation of monopoly power vis-à-vis other groups in society. However, in an anarchist society individuals would be free to form their own syndicates and this would ensure that such activity is self-defeating. In addition, in a non-individualist anarchist system, syndicates would be part of a confederation (see section I.3.4). It is a responsibility of the inter-syndicate congresses to assure that membership and employment in the syndicates is not restricted in any anti-social way. If an individual or group of individuals felt that they had been unfairly excluded from a syndicate then an investigation into the case would be organised at the congress. In this way any attempts to restrict entry would be reduced (assuming they occurred to begin with). And, of course, individuals are free to form new syndicates or leave the confederation if they so desire.

With the question of entry into syndicates comes the question of whether there would be enough places for those seeking to work (what could be termed "unemployment"). Ultimately, there are always an objective number of places available in a workplace: there is little point having people join a syndicate if there are no machines or materials for them to work on! Would a self-managed economy ensure that there are enough places available for those who seek them?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, neo-classical economics says no and equally unsurprisingly this conclusion is based not on empirical evidence of real co-operatives but rather on an abstract model developed in 1958. The model is based on deducing the implications of assuming that a labour-managed (*"Illyrian"*) firm will seek to maximise net income per worker rather

and the old). As such, mutualism does not produce what most anarchists would consider a decent society, one where people co-operate to make a decent life for all.

What about entry into a syndicate? In the words of Cole, guilds (syndicates) are *"open associations which any man [or woman] may join"* but *"this does not mean, of course, that any person will be able to claim admission, as an absolute right, into the guild of his choice."* This means that there may be training requirements (for example) and obviously *"a man [or woman] clearly cannot get into a Guild unless it needs fresh recruits for its work. [The worker] will have free choice, but only of the available openings."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 75] As David Ellerman notes, it is important to remember that *"the labour market would not exist"* in a self-managed economy as labour would *"always be the residual claimant."* This means that capital would not be hiring labour as under capitalism, rather workers would be seeking out associations to join. *"There would be a job market in the sense of people looking for firms they could join,"* Ellerman continues, *"but it would not be a labour market in the sense of the selling of labour in the employment contract."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

All schools of social anarchism, therefore, are based on the use rights resting in the specific syndicate while ownership would be socialised rather than limited to the syndicate's workers. This would ensure free access to the means of production as new members of a syndicate would have the same rights and power as existing members. If this were not the case, then the new members would be the wage slaves of existing ones and it is **precisely** to avoid this that anarchists argue for socialisation (see section I.3.3). With socialisation, free access is guaranteed and so all workers are in the same position so ensuring self-management and no return to workplace hierarchy.

Obviously, as in any society, an individual may not be able to pursue the work they are most interested in (although given the nature of an anarchist society they would have the free time to pursue it as a hobby). However, we can imagine that



As an aside, this obvious fact shows that the "Austrian" assertion that intervention in the market **always** reduces social utility cannot be supported. The argument that the market maximises utility is based on assuming a given allocation of resources before the process of free exchange begins. If someone does not have sufficient income to, say, buy food or essential medical treatment then this is not reflected in the market. If wealth is redistributed and they then they get access to the goods in question, then (obviously) their utility has increased and it is a moot point whether social utility has decreased as the disutility of the millionaire who was taxed to achieve it cannot be compared to it. Significantly, those "Austrians" who have sought to prove that all intervention in the market reduces social utility have failed. For example, as one dissident "Austrian" economist notes, while Murray Rothbard *"claimed he offered a purely deductive"* argument that state intervention always reduced social utility *"his case [was] logically flawed."* He simply assumed that social utility was reduced although he gave no reason for such an assumption as he admitted that interpersonal comparisons of utility were impossible. For someone *"who asks that his claims be tested only by their logic"*, his ultimate conclusions about state intervention *"do not follow"* and exhibit *"a careless self-contradiction"* [David L. Prychitko, **Markets, Planning and Democracy**, p. 189, p. 111 and p. 110]

In summary, then, in terms of feedback saying that if something made a profit then it was efficiently produced confuses efficiency and need with profitability and effective demand. Something can make a profit by imposing costs via externalities and lowering quality. Equally, a good may not make a profit in spite of there being a need for it simply because people cannot afford to pay for it.

As such, Mises was wrong to assert that *"[b]etween production for profit and production for need, there is no contrast."* [**Socialism**, p. 143] In fact, it seems incredible that anyone claiming to be an economist could make such a comment. As

Proudhon and Marx (like Smith and Ricardo before them) made clear, a commodity in order to be exchanged must first have a use-value (utility) to others. Thus production for profit, by definition, means production for "use" — otherwise exchange would not happen. What socialists were highlighting by contrasting production for profit to need was, firstly, that need comes after profit and so without profit a good will not be produced no matter how many people need it. Secondly, it highlights the fact that during crises capitalism is marked by an over-production of goods reducing profits, so stopping production, while people who need those goods go without them. Thus capitalism is marked by homeless people living next to empty housing and hungry people seeing food exported or destroyed in order to maximise profit. Ultimately, if the capitalist does not make a profit then it is a bad investment — regardless of whether it could be used to meet people's needs and so make their lives better. In other words, Mises ignores the very basis of capitalism (production for profit) and depicts it as production aiming at the direct satisfaction of consumers.

Equally, that something makes a profit does not mean that it is an efficient use of resources. If, for example, that profit is achieved by imposing pollution externalities or by market power then it cannot be said that society as a whole, rather than the capitalists, have benefited. Similarly, non-market based systems can be seen to be more efficient than market based ones in terms of outcome. For example, making health care available to all who need it rather than those who can afford it is economically "inefficient" in "Austrian" eyes but only an ideologue would claim that we should not do so because of this particularly as we can point to the awkward fact that the more privatised health care systems in the USA and Chile are more inefficient than the nationalised systems elsewhere in the world. Administration costs are higher and the societies in question pay far more for an equivalent level of treatment. Of course, it could be argued that the privatised systems are not truly pri-



since workers are not hired for wages but, in effect, become partners in the firm. This means that the workers control both the product of their labour (so that the value-added that they produce is not appropriated by a privileged elite) and the work process itself (and so they no longer sell their liberty to others). However, such a limited form of co-operation is rejected by most anarchists. Non-mutualist anarchists argue that this, at best, is but a step in the right direction and the ultimate aim is distribution according to need.

Production for use rather than profit/money is the key concept that distinguishes collectivist and communist forms of anarchism from the competitive mutualism advocated by Proudhon. This is for two reasons. First, because of the harmful effects of markets we indicated in section I.1.3 could make co-operatives become, in effect, "collective capitalists" and compete against each other in the market as ferociously as actual capitalists. As Kropotkin put it, while co-operation had *"at its origin ... an essentially mutual aid character"*, it *"is often described as 'joint-stock individualism'"* and *"such as it is now, it undoubtedly tends to breed a co-operative egotism, not only towards the community at large, but also among the co-operators themselves."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 214] While he was discussing co-operatives under capitalism, his worries are equally applicable to a mutualist system of competing syndicates. This would also lead to a situation where market forces ensured that the workers involved made irrational decisions (from both a social and individual point of view) in order to survive in the market. For mutualists, this *"irrationality of rationality"* is the price to be paid to ensure workers receive the full product of their labour and, moreover, any attempt to overcome this problem holds numerous dangers to freedom. Other social anarchists disagree. They think co-operation between workplaces can increase, not reduce, freedom. Second, as discussed in section I.1.4, distribution according to work does not take into account the different needs of the workers (nor non-workers like the ill, the young

While having a common basis in co-operative workplaces, different forms of anarchism see them work in different ways. Under mutualism, workers organise themselves into syndicates and share in its gains and losses. This means that in *"the labour-managed firm there is no profit, only income to be divided among members. Without employees the labour-managed firm does not have a wage bill, and labour costs are not counted among the expenses to the subtracted from profit, as they are in the capitalist firm."* The *"labour-managed firm does not hire labour. It is a collective of workers that hires capital and necessary materials."* [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, pp. 41–2] In this way, Proudhon and his followers argued, exploitation would end and workers would receive the full-product of their labour. This, it should be noted, does not mean that workers consume all the proceeds of sales in personal consumption (i.e., no investment). It means that labour **controls** what to do with the sales income, i.e., how much to invest and how much to allocate to consumption:

> *"If Labour appropriated the whole product, that would include appropriating the liabilities for the property used up in the production process in addition to appropriating the produced outputs. Present Labour would have to pay input suppliers (e.g., past labour) to satisfy those liabilities."* [Ellerman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

So under mutualism, surpluses (profits) would be either equally divided between all members of the co-operative or divided unequally on the basis of the type of work done, with the percentages allotted to each type being decided by democratic vote, on the principle of one worker, one vote. Worker co-operatives of this type do have the virtue of preventing the exploitation and oppression of labour by capital,



vate but the awkward fact remains — the more market based system is worse, in terms of coverage of the population, cost for treatment, bureaucracy and health outcomes per pound spent.

In addition, in a highly unequal society costs are externalised to those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The consequences are harmful, as suggested by the newspeak used to disguise this reality. For example, there is what is called "increasing flexibility of the labour market." "Flexibility" sounds great: rigid structures are unappealing and hardly suitable for human growth. In reality, as Noam Chomsky points out *"[f]lexibility means insecurity. It means you go to bed at night and don't know if you have a job tomorrow morning. That's called flexibility of the labour market, and any economist can explain that's a good thing for the economy, where by 'the economy' now we understand profit-making. We don't mean by 'the economy' the way people live. That's good for the economy, and temporary jobs increase flexibility. Low wages also increase job insecurity. They keep inflation low. That's good for people who have money, say, bondholders. So these all contribute to what's called a 'healthy economy,' meaning one with very high profits. Profits are doing fine. Corporate profits are zooming. But for most of the population, very grim circumstances. And grim circumstances, without much prospect of a future, may lead to constructive social action, but where that's lacking they express themselves in violence."* [**Keeping the Rabble in Line**, pp. 283–4] So it simply cannot be assumed that what is good for the economy (profits) equates to what to good for people (at least the working class).

Thus the "Austrians" prizes profitability above all and this assumption is at the root of the "Calculation Argument" against socialism, but this only makes sense only insofar as efficiency is confused with profit. The market will invest in coal if profits are higher and, in so doing, contribute to global warming. It will deny medical care to the sick (no profits and so it is inefficient) while contributing to, say, a housing bubble

because it makes short-term profits by providing loans to people who really cannot afford it. It will support all kinds of economic activity, regardless of the wider impact, and so "efficiency" (i.e., profits) can, and does, contradict both wisdom and ethics and so, ultimately, an efficient allocation of resources to meet people's needs.

Lastly, our critique has so far ignored the periodic crises that hit capitalist economies which produce massive unemployment and social disruption — crises that are due to subjective and objective pressures on the operation of the price mechanism (see section C.7 for details). In the upswing, when expectations are buoyant, firms will invest and produce a mutually reinforcing expansion. However, the net effect of such decisions eventually leads to over-investment, excess capacity and over-production — mal-investment and the waste of the embodied resources. This leads to lower than expected profits, expectations change for the worse and the boom turns into bust, capital equipment is scrapped, workers are unemployed and resources are either wasted or left idle.

In a crisis we see the contradiction between use value and exchange value come to a head. Workers are no less productive than when the crisis started, the goods and services they create are no less needed than before. The means of production are just productive as they were. Both are just as capable as before of affording for everyone a decent standard of living. Even though people are homeless, housing stands empty. Even though people need goods, production is stopped. Even though people want jobs, workplaces are closed. Yet, according to the logic of *"exact"* "economic calculation", production is now "inefficient" and should be closed-down, workers made unemployed and expected to find work by forcing down the wages of those lucky enough to remain employed in the hope that the owners of the means of life will find it profitable to exploit them as much as before (for when hard times arrive it is never long until somebody suggests that the return of prosper-



> *different, and if today the two are often confused, it is only because of economic and political privilege."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 41–2]

Given that power remains in the hands of the workplace assembly, it is clear that the organisation required for every collective endeavour cannot be equated with government. Also, never forget that administrative staff are elected by and accountable to the rest of an association. If, for example, it turned out that a certain type of delegated decision-making activity was being abused, it could be revoked by the whole workforce. Because of this grassroots control, there is every reason to think that crucial types of decision-making activity which could become a source of power (and so with the potential for seriously affecting all workers' lives) would not be delegated but would remain with the workers' assemblies. For example, powers that are now exercised in an authoritarian manner by managers under capitalism, such as those of hiring and firing, introducing new production methods or technologies, changing product lines, relocating production facilities, determining the nature, pace and rhythm of productive activity and so on would remain in the hands of the associated producers and **not** be delegated to anyone.

New syndicates will be created upon the initiative of individuals within communities. These may be the initiative of workers in an existing syndicate who desire to expand production, or members of the local community who see that the current syndicates are not providing adequately in a specific area of life. Either way, the syndicate will be a voluntary association for producing useful goods or services and would spring up and disappear as required. Therefore, an anarchist society would see syndicates developing spontaneously as individuals freely associate to meet their needs, with both local and confederal initiatives taking place.

*will be in the Guilds technicians occupying special positions by virtue of their knowledge, and there will be administrators possessing special authority by virtue both of skill and ability and of personal qualifications."* [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 50–51]

The fact that some decision-making has been delegated in this manner sometimes leads people to ask whether a syndicate would not just be another form of hierarchy. The answer is that it would not be hierarchical because the workers' assemblies and their councils, open to all workers, would decide what types of decision-making to delegate, thus ensuring that ultimate power rests at the base. Moreover, **power** would not be delegated. Malatesta clearly indicates the difference between administrative decisions and policy decisions:

*"Of course in every large collective undertaking, a division of labour, technical management, administration, etc. is necessary. But authoritarians clumsily play on words to produce a* ***raison d'être*** *for government out of the very real need for the organisation of work. Government, it is well to repeat, is the concourse of individuals who have had, or seized, the right and the means to make laws and to oblige people to obey; the administrator, the engineer, etc., instead are people who are appointed or assume the responsibility to carry out a particular job and so on. Government means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few; administration means the delegation of work, that is tasks given and received, free exchange of services based on free agreement … Let one not confuse the function of government with that of an administration, for they are essentially*



ity requires sacrifices at the bottom of the heap and, needless to say, the "Austrian" economists are usually the first to do so).

This suggests that the efficient allocation of resources becomes meaningless if its reality is a cycle where consumers go without essential goods due to scarcity and high prices followed by businesses going bust because of over-production and low prices. This process ruins large numbers of people's lives, not to mention wasting vast stocks of productive equipment and goods. There are always people who need the over-produced goods and so the market adds to uncertainty as there is a difference between the over-production of goods and the over-production of commodities. If more goods were produced in a communist society this may signify a waste of resources but it would not, as under capitalism, produce a crisis situation as well!

So in a real capitalist economy, there are numerous reasons for apparently rational investment decisions going wrong. Not that these investments produce goods which people do not need, simply that *"exact"* "economic calculation" indicates that they are not making a profit and so are an "inefficient" use of resources. However, it is question begging in the extreme to argue that if (thanks to a recession) workers can no longer buy food then is it an "efficient" allocation of resources that they starve. Similarly, during the Great Depression, the American government (under the New Deal) hired about 60% of the unemployed in public works and conservation projects. These saw a billion trees planted, the whooping crane saved, the modernisation of rural America, and the building of (among others) the Cathedral of Learning in Pittsburgh, the Montana state capitol, New York's Lincoln Tunnel and Triborough Bridge complex, the Tennessee Valley Authority as well as building or renovating 2,500 hospitals, 45,000 schools, 13,000 parks and playgrounds, 7,800 bridges, 700,000 miles of roads, 1,000 airfields as well as employing 50,000 teachers and rebuilding the country's entire rural school system. Can all these schemes really

be considered a waste of resources simply because they would never have made a capitalist a profit?

Of course, our discussion is affected by the fact that "actually existing" capitalism has various forms of state-intervention. Some of these "socialise" costs and risks, such as publicly funded creation of an infrastructure and Research and Development (R&D). Given that much R&D is conducted via state funding (via universities, military procurements, and so on) and (of course!) the profits of such research are then privatised, question arises would the initial research have gone ahead if the costs had not been "socialised"? Would Mises' *"exact"* calculation have resulted in, say, the internet being developed? If, as seems likely, not, does not mean our current use of the World Wide Web is an inefficient use of resources? Then there are the numerous state interventions which exist to ensure that certain activities become "efficient" (i.e., profitable) such as specifying and defending intellectual property rights, the limited liability of corporations and enforcing capitalist property rights (in land, for example). While we take this activity for granted when evaluating capitalism, they are serious imperfections in the market and so what counts as an "efficient" use of resources. Other state interventions aim to reduce uncertainty and stabilise the market, such as welfare maintaining aggregate demand.

Removing these "imperfections" in the market would substantially affect the persuasiveness of Mises' case. *"What data we do have,"* notes Doug Henwood, *"don't lend any support to the notion that the nineteenth century was more 'stable' than the twentieth ... the price level bounced all over the place, with periods of inflation alternating with periods of deflation, and GDP growth in the last three decades ... was similarly volatile. The busts were savage, resulting in massive bank failures and very lean times for workers and farmers."* [**After the New Economy**, p. 242] Looking at business cycle data for America, what becomes clear is that some of those regular nineteenth century



*owned firm."* [**The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 43] Anarchists, unsurprisingly, reject the Leninist idea that state property means the end of capitalism as simplistic and confused. Ownership is a juridical relationship. The **real** issue is one of management. Do the users of a resource manage it? If so, then we have a real (i.e. libertarian) socialist society. If not, we have some form of class society (for example, in the Soviet Union the state replaced the capitalist class but workers still had no official control over their labour or the product of that labour).

Workplace self-management does not mean, as some apologists of capitalism suggest, that knowledge and skill will be ignored and **all** decisions made by everyone. This is an obvious fallacy, since engineers, for example, have a greater understanding of their work than non-engineers and under workers' self-management will control it directly:

> *"we must understand clearly wherein this Guild democracy consists, and especially how it bears on relations between different classes of workers included in a single Guild. For since a Guild includes **all** the workers by hand and brain engaged in a common service, it is clear that there will be among its members very wide divergences of function, of technical skill, and of administrative authority. Neither the Guild as a whole nor the Guild factory can determine all issues by the expedient of the mass vote, nor can Guild democracy mean that, on all questions, each member is to count as one and none more than one. A mass vote on a matter of technique understood only by a few experts would be a manifest absurdity, and, even if the element of technique is left out of account, a factory administered by constant mass votes would be neither efficient nor at all a pleasant place to work in. There*

term **Mutualisme** from the workers in Lyon in the early 1840s and their ideas of co-operative credit, exchange and production influenced him as surely as he influenced them. In America, as Chomsky notes, *"[i]f we go back to the labour activism from the early days of the industrial revolution, to the working class press in 1850s, and so on, it's got a real anarchist strain to it. They never heard of European anarchism ... It was spontaneous. They took for granted wage labour is little different from slavery, that workers should own the mills"* [**Anarchism Interview**] As we noted in section F.8.6, this was a commonplace response for working class people facing the rise of capitalism.

In many ways a syndicate is similar to a co-operative under capitalism. Indeed, Proudhon pointed to such experiments as examples of what he desired, with *"co-operative associations"* being a key part of his *"general liquidation"* of capitalist society. [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 203] Bakunin, likewise, argued that anarchists are *"convinced that the co-operative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future, in every branch of labour and science."* [**Basic Bakunin**, p. 153] Therefore, even from the limited examples of co-operatives functioning in the capitalist market, the essential features of a libertarian socialist economy can be seen. The basic economic element, the workplace, will be a free association of individuals who will organise their joint work as equals. To quote Bakunin again, *"[o]nly associated labour, that is, labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining ... civilised society."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 341]

***Co-operation*** in this context means that the policy decisions related to their association will be based on the principle of "one member, one vote," with administrative staff elected and held accountable to the workplace as a whole. In the words of economist David Ellerman: *"Every enterprise should be legally reconstructured as a partnership of all who work in the enterprise. Every enterprise should be a democratic worker-*



slumps were extremely long: the Panic of 1873, for example, was followed by a recession that lasted 5 1/2 years. The New York Stock Exchange closed for ten days and 89 of the country's 364 railroads went bankrupt. A total of 18,000 businesses failed between 1873 and 1875. Unemployment reached 14% by 1876, during a time which became known as the Long Depression. Construction work lagged, wages were cut, real estate values fell and corporate profits vanished.

Given this, given the tendency of capitalism to crisis and to ignore real needs in favour of effective demand, it is far better to be roughly right than precisely wrong. In other words, the economic calculation that Mises celebrates regularly leads to situations where people suffer because it precisely shows that workplaces should shut because, although nothing had changed in their productivity and the need of their products, they can no longer make a profit. Saying, in the middle of a crisis, that people should be without work, be homeless and go hungry because economic calculation proves they have no need for employment, homes and food shows the irrationality of glorifying "economic calculation" as the be all and end all of resource allocation.

In summary, then, not only is libertarian communism possible, capitalism itself makes economic calculation problematic and resource allocation inefficient. Given the systematic uncertainty which market dynamics imply and the tendencies to crisis inherent in the system, "economic calculation" ensures that resources are wasted. Using the profit criteria as the measure of "efficiency" is also problematic as it ensures that real needs are ignored and places society in frequent situations (crises) where "economic calculation" ensures that industries close, so ensuring that goods and services people need are no longer produced. As Proudhon put it, under capitalism there is *"a miserable oscillation between usury and bankruptcy."* [**Proudhon's Solution of the Social Problem**, p. 63] For anarchists, these drawbacks to capitalist allocation are obvious. Equally obvious

is the reason why Mises failed to discuss them: ultimately, like neo-classical economics, the "Austrian" school seeks to eulogise capitalism rather than to understand it.



It must be noted that this libertarian goal of abolishing the hierarchical capitalist workplace and ending wage labour by associating and democratising industry is as old as anarchism itself. Thus we find Proudhon arguing in 1840 that the aim was a society of *"possessors without masters"* (rather than wage-labourers and tenants *"controlled by proprietors"*) with *"leaders, instructors, superintendents"* and so forth being *"chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves."* [**What is Property?**, p. 167 and p. 137]

*"Mutuality, reciprocity exists,"* Proudhon argued, *"when all the workers in an industry, instead of working for an* ***entrepreneur*** *who pays them and keeps their products, work for one another and thus collaborate in the making of a common product whose profits they share amongst themselves. Extend the principle of reciprocity as uniting the work of every group, to the Workers' Societies as units, and you have created a form of civilisation which from all points of view — political, economic and aesthetic — is radically different from all earlier civilisations."* In summary: *"All associated and all free"*. [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, pp. 29–30 and p. 30]

Nor was this idea invented by Proudhon and other anarchists. Rather, it was first raised by workers themselves and subsequently taken up by the likes of Proudhon and Bakunin. So working class people came up with this fundamental libertarian socialist idea by themselves. The idea that wage labour would be replaced by associated labour was raised in many different countries in the 19th century. In France, it was during the wave of strikes and protests unleashed by the 1830 revolution. That year saw Parisian printers, for example, producing a newspaper (**L'Artisan: Journal de la classes ouvriere**) which suggested that the only way to stop being exploited by a master was for workers to form co-operatives. During the strikes of 1833, this was echoed by other skilled workers and so co-operatives were seen by many workers as a method of emancipation from wage labour. Proudhon even picked up the

managed productive enterprise whose assets are controlled by its workers. It is a useful generic term to describe the situation aimed at by anarchists where *"associations of men and women who ... work on the land, in the factories, in the mines, and so on, [are] themselves the managers of production."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 78]

This means that where labour is collective, *"the ownership of production should also be collective." "Each workshop, each factory,"* correctly suggested James Guillaume, *"will organise itself into an association of workers who will be free to administer production and organise their work as they think best, provided that the rights of each worker are safeguarded and the principles of equality and justice are observed."* This applies to the land as well, for anarchism aims to answer *"the question of how best to work the land and what form of possession is best."* It does not matter whether peasants *"keep their plots of land and continue to cultivate it with the help of their families"* or whether they *"take collective possession of the vast tracts of land and work them in common"* as *"the main purpose of the Revolution"* has been achieved, namely that *"the land is now the property of those who cultivate it, and the peasants no longer work for the profit of an idle exploiter who lives by their sweat."* Any *"former hired hands"* will become *"partners and share ... the products which their common labour extracts from the land"* as *"the Revolution will have abolished agricultural wage slavery and peonage and the agricultural proletariat will consist only of free workers living in peace and plenty."* As with industrial workplaces, the *"internal organisation ... need not necessarily be identical; organisational forms and procedures will vary greatly according to the preferences of the associated workers."* The *"administration of the community"* could be *"entrusted either to an individual or to a commission of many members,"* for example, but would always be *"elected by all the members."* [*"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 363, p. 359, p. 360 and p. 361]



# I.2 Is this a blueprint for an anarchist society?

No, far from it. There can be no such thing as a "blueprint" for a free society. *"Anarchism"*, as Rocker correctly stressed, *"is no patent solution for all human problems, no Utopia of a perfect social order, as it has so often been called, since on principle it rejects all absolute schemes and concepts. It does not believe in any absolute truth, or in definite final goals for human development, but in an unlimited perfectibility of social arrangements and human living conditions, which are always straining after higher forms of expression, and to which for this reason one can assign no definite terminus nor set any fixed goal."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 15]

All we can do here is indicate those general features that we believe a free society **must** have in order to qualify as truly libertarian. For example, a society based on hierarchical management in the workplace (like capitalism) would not be libertarian and would soon see private or public states developing to protect the power of those at the top hierarchical positions. Beyond such general considerations, however, the specifics of how to structure a non-hierarchical society must remain open for discussion and experimentation:

> *"Anarchism, meaning Liberty, is compatible with the most diverse economic [and social] conditions, on the premise that these cannot imply, as under capitalist monopoly, the negation of liberty."* [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 95]

So, our comments should not be regarded as a detailed plan but rather a series of suggestions based on what anarchists have traditionally advocated as an alternative to capitalism combined with what has been tried in various social revolutions. Anarchists have always been reticent about spelling out their vision of the future in too much detail for it would be contrary to anarchist principles to be dogmatic about the precise forms the new society must take. Free people will create their own alternative institutions in response to conditions specific to their area as well as their needs, desires and hopes and it would be presumptuous of us to attempt to set forth universal policies in advance. As Kropotkin argued, once expropriation of social wealth by the masses has been achieved *"then, after a period of groping, there will necessarily arise a new system of organising production and exchange ... and that system will be a lot more attuned to popular aspirations and the requirements of co-existence and mutual relations than any theory, however splendid, devised by the thinking and imagination of reformers"*. This, however, did not stop him *"predicting right now that"* in some areas influenced by anarchists *"the foundations of the new organisation will be the free federation of producers' groups and the free federation of Communes and groups in independent Communes."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 232]

This is because what we think now will influence the future just as real experience will influence and change how we think. Given the libertarian critique of the state and capitalism, certain kinds of social organisation are implied. Thus, our recognition that wage-labour creates authoritarian social relationships and exploitation suggests a workplace in a free society can only be based on associated and co-operative labour (i.e., self-management). Similarly, given that the state is a centralised body which delegates power upwards it is not hard to imagine that a free society would have communal institutions which were federal and organised from the bottom-up.



workers' self-management, co-operation and so on we discuss here and in section I.4. These texts include **Syndicalism** by Tom Brown, **The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism** by G.P. Maximoff, **Guild Socialism Restated** and **Self-Government in Industry** by G.D.H. Cole, **After the Revolution** by Diego Abad de Santillan, **Anarchist Economics** and **Principles of Libertarian Economy** by Abraham Guillen, **Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society** by Cornelius Castoriadis among others. A short summary of Spanish Anarchist visions of the free society can be found in chapter 3 of Robert Alexander's **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War** (vol. 1). Some anarchists support what is called *"Participatory Economics"* (**Parecon**, for short) and **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics** and **Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century** by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel are worth reading as they contain good introductions to that project.

Fictional accounts include William Morris' **News from Nowhere**, the excellent **The Dispossessed** by Ursula Le Guin, **Women on the Edge of Time** by Marge Piercy and **The Last Capitalist** by Steve Cullen. Iain M. Banks Culture novels are about an anarcho-communist society, but as they are so technologically advanced they can only give an insight into the aims of libertarian socialism and the mentality of people living in freedom (**The State of the Art** and **The Player of Games** contrast the Culture with hierarchical societies, the Earth in 1977 in the case of the former).

## I.3.1 What is a *"syndicate"*?

As we will use the term, a *"syndicate"* (also called a *"producer co-operative"*, or *"co-operative"*, for short, sometimes a *"collective"*, *"producers' commune"*, *"association of producers"*, *"guild factory"* or *"guild workplace"*) is a democratically self-

*as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.*

*"In a society developed on these lines ... voluntary associations .. . would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent — for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.*

*"Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary — as is seen in organic life at large — harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the State."* [**Anarchism**, p. 284]

If this type of system sounds "utopian" it should be kept in mind that it was actually implemented and worked quite well in the collectivist economy organised during the Spanish Revolution of 1936, despite the enormous obstacles presented by an ongoing civil war as well as the relentless (and eventually successful) efforts of Republicans, Stalinists and Fascists to crush it (see section I.8 for an introduction).

As well as this (and other) examples of ***"anarchy in action"*** there have been other libertarian socialist economic systems described in writing. All share the common features of



Moreover, given the ways in which our own unfree society has shaped our ways of thinking, it is probably impossible for us to imagine what new forms will arise once humanity's ingenuity and creativity is unleashed by the removal of its present authoritarian fetters. Thus any attempts to paint a detailed picture of the future will be doomed to failure. Ultimately, anarchists think that *"the new society should be organised with the direct participation of all concerned, from the periphery to the centre, freely and spontaneously, at the prompting of the sentiment of solidarity and under pressure of the natural needs of society."* [E. Malatesta and A. Hamon, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 20]

Nevertheless, anarchists have been willing to specify some broad principles indicating the general framework within which they expect the institutions of the new society to grow. It is important to emphasise that these principles are not the arbitrary creations of intellectuals in ivory towers. Rather, they are based on the actual political, social and economic structures that have arisen **spontaneously** whenever working class people have attempted to throw off their chains during eras of heightened revolutionary activity, such as the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, and the Hungarian uprising of 1956, France in 1968, the Argentinean revolt against neo-liberalism in 2001, to name just a few. It is clear, from these examples, that federations of self-managed workers' councils and community assemblies appear repeatedly in such popular revolts as people attempt to manage their own destinies directly, both economically and socially. While their names and specific organisational structures differ, these can be considered basic libertarian socialist forms, since they have appeared during all revolutionary periods. Ultimately, such organisations are the only alternatives to political, social and economic authority — unless we make our own decisions ourselves, someone else will.

So, when reading these sections, please remember that this is just an attempt to sketch the outline of a possible future. It is in no way an attempt to determine **exactly** what a free society would be like, for such a free society will be the result of the actions of all of society, not just anarchists. As Malatesta argued:

> *"it is a question of freedom for everybody, freedom for each individual so long as he [or she] respects the equal freedom of others."*
>
> *"None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom, coupled by experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there is no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 49]

And, of course, real life has a habit of over-turning even the most realistic sounding theories, ideas and ideologies. Marxism, Leninism, Monetarism, laissez-faire capitalism (among others) have proven time and time again that ideology applied to real life has effects not predicted by the theory before hand (although in all four cases, their negative effects where predicted by others; in the case of Marxism and Leninism by anarchists). Anarchists are aware of this, which is why we reject ideology in favour of theory and why we are hesitant to create blue-prints for the future. History has repeatedly proven Proudhon right when he stated that *"every society declines the moment it falls into the hands of the ideologists."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 115]

Only life, as Bakunin stressed, can create and so life must inform theory — and so if the theory is producing adverse results it is better to revise the theory than deny reality or justify



source is controlled by those who use it. It is a decentralised, participatory, self-managed, organisation whose members can secede at any time and in which all power and initiative arises from and flows back to the grassroots level. Such a society combines free association, federalism and self-management with communalised ownership. Free labour is its basis and socialisation exists to complement and protect it. Such a society-wide economic federation of this sort is **not** the same thing as a centralised state agency, as in the concept of nationalised or state-owned industry.

The exact dynamics of a socialised self-managed system varies between anarchist schools. Most obviously, as discussed in section I.3.6, while individualists view competition between workplaces as unproblematic and mutualists see its negative aspects but consider it necessary, collectivists and communists oppose it and argue that a free society can do without it. Moreover, socialisation should not be confused with forced collectivisation — individuals and groups will be free **not** to join a syndicate and to experiment in different forms of economy (see section I.3.7). Lastly, anarchists argue that such a system would be applicable to all economies, regardless of size and development, and aim for an economy based on appropriately sized technology (Marxist assertions **not** withstanding — see section I.3.8).

Regardless of the kind of anarchy desired, anarchists all agree on the importance of decentralisation, free agreement and free association. Kropotkin's summary of what anarchy would look like gives an excellent feel of what sort of society anarchists desire:

> *"harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption,*

> *possession. The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency. Similarly will the railroad brotherhoods run the railroads, and so on. Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit.*" [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 217]

So the solution proposed by social anarchists is **society-wide** ownership of the means of production and distribution, with each workplace run co-operatively by its members. However, no workplace exists in isolation and would seek to associate with others to ensure it gets the raw materials it needs for production and to see what it produces goes to those who need it. These links would be based on the anarchist principles of free agreement and voluntary federation (see section I.3.4). For social anarchists, this would be supplemented by confederal bodies or co-ordinating councils at two levels: first, between all firms in a particular industry; and second, between all industries (including agriculture) throughout the society (section I.3.5). Such federations may, depending on the type of anarchism in question, also include people's financial institutions.

While, for some anarcho-syndicalists, this structure is seen as enough, most communist-anarchists consider that the economic federation should be held accountable to society as a whole (i.e. the economy must be communalised). This is because not everyone in society is a worker (e.g. the young, the old and infirm) nor will everyone belong to a syndicate (e.g. the self-employed), but as they also have to live with the results of economic decisions, they should have a say in what happens. In other words, in communist-anarchism, workers make the day-to-day decisions concerning their work and workplaces, while the social criteria behind these decisions are made by everyone. As anarchist society is based on free access and a re-



the evil effects it creates on real people. Thus this section of the FAQ is not a blue print, rather it is a series of suggestions (suggestions drawn, we stress, from actual experiences of working class revolt and organisation). These suggestions may be right or wrong and informed by Malatesta's comments that:

> *"We do not boast that we possess absolute truth, on the contrary, we believe that* ***social truth*** *is not a fixed quantity, good for all times, universally applicable or determinable in advance, but that instead, once freedom has been secured, mankind will go forward discovering and acting gradually with the least number of upheavals and with a minimum of friction. Thus our solutions always leave the door open to different and, one hopes, better solutions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.21]

It is for this reason that anarchists, to quote Bakunin, think that the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] Social problems will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. This applies to a social revolution — it will only liberate the working class if working class people make it themselves, using their own organisations and power. Indeed, it is the course of struggling for social change, to correct social problems, by, say, strikes, occupations, demonstrations and other forms of direct action, that people can transform their assumptions about what is possible, necessary and desirable. The necessity of organising their struggles and their actions ensures the development of assemblies and other organs of popular power in order to manage their activity. These create, potentially, an alternative means by which society can be organised. As Kropotkin argued, *"[a]ny strike trains the participants for a common management of affairs."* [quoted by Car-

oline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 233] The ability of people to manage their own lives, and so society, becomes increasingly apparent and the existence of hierarchical authority, the state, the boss or a ruling class, becomes clearly undesirable and unnecessary. Thus the framework of the free society will be created by the very process of class struggle, as working class people create the organisations required to fight for improvements and change within capitalism (see section I.2.3).

Thus, the **actual** framework of an anarchist society and how it develops and shapes itself is dependent on the needs and desires of those who live in such a society or are trying to create one. This is why anarchists stress the need for mass assemblies in both the community and workplace and their federation from the bottom up to manage common affairs. Anarchy can only be created by the active participation of the mass of people. In the words of Malatesta, an anarchist society would be based on *"decisions taken at popular assemblies and carried out by groups and individuals who have volunteered or are duly delegated."* The *"success of the revolution"* depends on *"a large number of individuals with initiative and the ability to tackle practical tasks: by accustoming the masses not to leave the common cause in the hands of a few, and to delegate, when delegation is necessary, only for specific missions and for limited duration."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 129] This self-management would be the basis on which an anarchist society would change and develop, with the new society created by those who live within it. Thus Bakunin:

> *"revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172]



The key principles of libertarian socialism are decentralisation, self-management, socialisation, voluntary association, and free federation. These principles determine the form and function of both the economic and political systems. In this section we will consider just the economic system. Bakunin gives an excellent overview of such an economy when he wrote that in a free society the *"land belongs to only those who cultivate it with their own hands; to the agricultural communes. The capital and all the tools of production belong to the workers; to the workers' associations."* These associations are often called *"co-operatives"* and *"syndicates"* (see section I.3.1). This feeds into an essential economic concept for libertarian socialists is ***"workers' self-management"*** This refers to those who do the work managing it, where the land and workplaces are *"owned and operated by the workers themselves: by their freely organised federations of industrial and agricultural workers"* (see section I.3.2). For most anarchists, *"socialisation"* is the necessary foundation for a free society, as only this ensures universal self-management by allowing free access to the means of production (see section I.3.3). Thus an anarchist economy would be based on *"the land, tools of production and all other capital"* being *"converted into collective property of the whole of society and utilised only by the workers, i.e., by their agricultural and industrial associations."* [**Bakunin on Anarchy**, p. 247, p. 400 and p. 427] As Berkman summarised:

> *"The revolution abolishes private ownership of the means of production, distribution, and with it goes capitalistic business. Personal possession remains only in the things you use. Thus, your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people. Land, machinery, and all other public utilities will be collective property, neither to be bought nor sold. Actual use will be considered the only title [in communist anarchism] — not to ownership but to*

> *which are rooted all social ethics, all ideas of social justice.*" [**Nationalism and Culture**, pp. 147–8]

The aim of any anarchist society would be to maximise freedom and so creative work:

> *"If it is correct, as I believe it is, that a fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work or creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effects of coercive institutions, then of course it will follow that a decent society should maximise the possibilities for this fundamental human characteristic to be realised. Now, a federated, decentralised system of free associations incorporating economic as well as social institutions would be what I refer to as anarcho-syndicalism. And it seems to me that it is the appropriate form of social organisation for an advanced technological society, in which human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in a machine."* [Noam Chomsky, **Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media**, p. 31]

So, as one might expect, since the essence of anarchism is opposition to hierarchical authority, anarchists totally oppose the way the current economy is organised. This is because authority in the economic sphere is embodied in centralised, hierarchical workplaces that give an elite class (capitalists) dictatorial control over privately owned means of production, turning the majority of the population into order takers (i.e. wage slaves). In contrast, the libertarian-socialist economy will be based on decentralised, egalitarian workplaces in which workers democratically self-manage their productive activity in **socially** owned means of production.



And, we must not forget that while we may be able to roughly guess the way an anarchist society could start initially, we cannot pretend to predict how it will develop in the long term. A social revolution is just the beginning of a process of social transformation. Unfortunately, we have to start where we are now, not where we hope to end up! Therefore our discussion will, by necessity, reflect the current society as this is the society we will be transforming. While, for some, this outlook may not be of a sufficient qualitative break with the world we now inhabit, it is essential. We need to offer and discuss suggestions for action in the **here and now**, not for some future pie in the sky world which can only possibly exist years, even decades, **after** a successful revolution.

For example, the ultimate goal of anarchism, we stress, is **not** the self-management of existing workplaces or industries within the same industrial structure produced by capitalism. However, a revolution will undoubtedly see the occupation and placing under self-management much of existing industry and we start our discussion assuming a similar set-up as exists today. This does not mean that an anarchist society will continue to be like this, we simply present the initial stages using examples we are all familiar with. It is simply the first stage of transforming industry into something more ecologically safe, socially integrated and individually and collectively empowering for people.

Some people **seriously** seem to think that after a social revolution working people will continue using the same technology, in the same old workplaces, in the same old ways and not change a single thing (except, perhaps, electing their managers). They simply transfer their own lack of imagination onto the rest of humanity. For anarchists, it is *"certain, however, that, when they [the workers] find themselves their own masters, they will modify the old system to suit their convenience in a variety of ways ... as common sense is likely to suggest to free men [and women]."* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 23]

So we have little doubt that working people will quickly transform their work, workplaces and society into one suitable for human beings, rejecting the legacy of capitalism and create a society we simply cannot predict. The occupying of workplaces is, we stress, simply the first stage of the process of transforming them and the rest of society. These words of the strikers just before the 1919 Seattle General Strike expresses this perspective well:

> *"Labour will not only SHUT DOWN the industries, but Labour will REOPEN, under the management of the appropriate trades, such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues, Labour may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities,*
>
> *"UNDER ITS OWN MANAGEMENT.*
>
> *"And that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads — NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!"*
> [quoted by Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 110]

People's lives in a post-revolutionary society will not centre around fixed jobs and workplaces as they do now. Productive activity will go on, but not in the alienated way it does today. Similarly, in their communities people will apply their imaginations, skills and hopes to transform them into better places to live (the beautification of the commune, as the CNT put it). The first stage, of course, will be to take over their existing communities and place them under community control. Therefore, it is essential to remember that our discussion can only provide an indication on how an anarchist society will operate in the months and years after a successful revolution, an anarchist society still marked by the legacy of capitalism. However, it would be a great mistake to think that anarchists do not seek to transform all aspects of society to eliminate that legacy and create a society fit for unique individuals to live in. As an



being passed onto society. As Karl Polanyi argued, capitalism *"means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of the economy being being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 57] Given the negative effects of such an arrangement, little wonder that anarchism seeks to reverse it.

Also, by discussing the economy first we are not implying that dealing with economic domination or exploitation is more important than dealing with other aspects of the total system of domination, e.g. social hierarchies, patriarchal values, racism, etc. We follow this order of exposition because of the need to present one thing at a time, but it would have been equally easy to start with the social and political structure of anarchy. However, Rudolf Rocker is correct to argue that an economic transformation in the economy is an essential aspect of a social revolution:

> *"[A] social development in this direction [i.e. a stateless society] was not possible without a fundamental revolution in existing economic arrangements; for tyranny and exploitation grow on the same tree and are inseparably bound together. The freedom of the individual is secure only when it rests on the economic and social well-being of all ... The personality of the individual stands the higher, the more deeply it is rooted in the community, from which arise the richest sources of its moral strength. Only in freedom does there arise in man the consciousness of responsibility for his acts and regard for the rights of others; only in freedom can there unfold in its full strength that most precious of social instinct: man's sympathy for the joys and sorrows of his fellow men and the resultant impulse toward mutual aid and in*

*piness."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 260–1]). *"Nothing is more contrary to the real spirit of Anarchy than uniformity and intolerance,"* argued Kropotkin. *"Freedom of development implies difference of development, hence difference of ideas and actions."* Experience, then, is *"the best teacher, and the necessary experience can only be gained by entire freedom of action."* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change"*, pp. 67–86, **SubStance**, Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 81] There may, of course, be other economic practices but these may not be libertarian. In Malatesta's words:

> *"Admitted the basic principle of anarchism — which is that no-one should wish or have the opportunity to reduce others to a state of subjection and oblige them to work for him — it is clear that all, and only, those ways of life which respect freedom, and recognise that each individual has an equal right to the means of production and to the full enjoyment of the product of his own labour, have anything in common with anarchism."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 33]

In addition, it should be kept in mind that in practice it is impossible to separate the economic realm from the social and political realms, as there are numerous interconnections between them: anarchist thinkers like Bakunin argued that the "political" institutions of a free society would be based upon workplace associations while Kropotkin placed the commune at the heart of his vision of a communist-anarchist economy **and** society. Thus the division between social and economic forms is not clear cut in anarchist theory — as it should be as society is not, and cannot be, considered as separate from or inferior to the economy. An anarchist society will try to integrate the social and economic, embedding the latter in the former in order to stop any harmful externalities associated economic activity



anarchist society develops it will, we stress, transform society in ways we cannot guess at now, based on the talents, hopes, dreams and imaginations of those living in it.

Lastly, it could be argued that we spend too much time discussing the *"form"* (i.e. the types of organisation and how they make decisions) rather than the *"content"* of an anarchist society (the nature of the decisions reached). Moreover, the implication of this distinction also extends to the organisations created in the class struggle that would, in all likelihood, become the framework of a free society. However, form is as, perhaps more, important than content. This is because *"form"* and *"content"* are inter-related — a libertarian, participatory *"form"* of organisation allows the *"content"* of a decision, society or struggle to change. Self-management has an educational effect on those involved, as they are made aware of different ideas, think about them and decide between them (and, of course, formulate and present their own ones). Thus the nature of these decisions can and will evolve. Thus form has a decisive impact on *"content"* and so we make no apologies for discussing the form of a free society. As Murray Bookchin argued:

> *"To assume that the forms of freedom can be treated merely as forms would be as absurd as to assume that legal concepts can be treated merely as questions of jurisprudence. The form and content of freedom, like law and society, are mutually determined. By the same token, there are forms of organisation that promote and forms that vitiate the goal of freedom … To one degree or another, these forms either alter the individual who uses them or inhibit his [or her] further development."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 89]

And the **content** of decisions are determined by the individuals involved. Thus participatory, decentralised, self-managed

organisations are essential for the development of the content of decisions because they develop the individuals who make them.

### I.2.1 Why discuss what an anarchist society would be like at all?

Partly, in order to indicate why people should become anarchists. Most people do not like making jumps in the dark, so an indication of what anarchists think a desirable society could look like may help those people who are attracted to anarchism, inspiring them to become committed to its practical realisation. Partly, it's a case of learning from past mistakes. There have been numerous anarchistic social experiments on varying scales, and its useful to understand what happened, what worked and what did not. In that way, hopefully, we will not make the same mistakes twice.

However, the most important reason for discussing what an anarchist society would look like is to ensure that the creation of such a society is the action of as many people as possible. As Errico Malatesta indicated in the middle of the Italian revolutionary *"Two Red Years"* (see section A.5.5), *"either we all apply our minds to thinking about social reorganisation, and right away, at the very same moment that the old structures are being swept away, and we shall have a more humane and more just society, open to future advances, or we shall leave such matters to the 'leaders' and we shall have a new government."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 69]

Hence the importance of discussing what the future will be like in the here and now. The more people who have a fairly clear idea of what a free society would look like the easier it will be to create that society and ensure that no important matters are left to others to decide for us. The example of the Spanish Revolution comes to mind. For many years before 1936, the



# I.3 What could the economic structure of anarchy look like?

Here we will examine possible frameworks of a libertarian socialist economy. We stress that it is **frameworks** rather than framework because it is likely that any anarchist society will see a diverse number of economic systems co-existing in different areas, depending on what people in those areas want. *"In each locality,"* argued Diego Abad de Santillan, *"the degree of communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on the conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy. Therefore there must be free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation."* As such, anarchism *"can be realised in a multiformity of economic arrangements, individual and collective. Proudhon advocated mutualism; Bakunin, collectivism; Kropotkin, communism. Malatesta has conceived the possibility of mixed agreements, especially during the first period."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 97 and p. 96]

Here, we will highlight and discuss the four major schools of anarchist economic thought: Individualist anarchism, mutualism, collectivism and communism. It is up to the reader to evaluate which school best maximises individual liberty and the good life (as individualist anarchist Joseph LaBadie wisely said, *"Anarchism will not dictate to them any explicit rules as to what they must do, but that it opens to them the opportunities of putting into practice their own ideas of enhancing their own hap-*

we cannot predict, but their fundamentals of instant recall, delegation over representation, decision making from the bottom up, and so on will remain.

So, while anarchists see *"the future in the present"* as the initial framework of a free society, we recognise that such a society will evolve and change. However, the fundamental principles of a free society will not change and so it is useful to present a summary of how such a society could work, based on these principles.



C.N.T. and F.A.I. put out publications discussing what an anarchist society would look like (for example, **After the Revolution** by Diego Abel de Santillan and **Libertarian Communism** by Isaac Puente), the end product of libertarians organising and educating in Spain for almost seventy years before the revolution. When it finally occurred, the millions of people who participated already shared a similar vision and started to build a society based on it, thus learning firsthand where their books were wrong and which areas of life they did not adequately cover.

So, this discussion of what an anarchist society might look like is not a drawing up of blueprints, nor is it an attempt to force the future into the shapes created in past revolts. It is purely and simply an attempt to start people discussing what a free society would be like and to learn from previous experiments. However, as anarchists recognise the importance of building the new world in the shell of the old, our ideas of what a free society would be like can feed into how we organise and struggle today. And vice versa; for how we organise and struggle today will have an impact on the future.

As Malatesta pointed out, such discussions are necessary and essential, for it is *"absurd to believe that, once government has been destroyed and the capitalists expropriated, 'things will look after themselves' without the intervention of those who already have an idea on what has to be done and who immediately set about doing it"* for *"social life, as the life of individuals, does not permit of interruption."* He stressed that to *"neglect all the problems of reconstruction or to pre-arrange complete and uniform plans are both errors, excesses which, by different routes, would led to our defeat as anarchists and to the victory of new or old authoritarian regime. The truth lies in the middle."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

Moreover, the importance of discussing the future can help indicate whether our activities are actually creating a better world. After all, if Karl Marx had been more willing to dis-

cuss his vision of a socialist society then the Stalinists would have found it much harder to claim that their hellish system was, in fact, socialism. Given that anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin gave a board outline of their vision of a free society it would have been impossible for anarchism to be twisted as Marxism was. Most anarchists would agree with Chomsky's evaluation of the issue:

> *"A movement of the left should distinguish with clarity between its long-range revolutionary aims and certain more immediate effects it can hope to achieve …*
>
> *"But in the long run, a movement of the left has no chance of success, and deserves none, unless it develops an understanding of contemporary society and a vision of a future social order that is persuasive to a large majority of the population. Its goals and organisational forms must take shape through their active participation in political struggle [in its widest sense] and social reconstruction. A genuine radical culture can be created only through the spiritual transformation of great masses of people the essential feature of any social revolution that is to extend the possibilities for human creativity and freedom .. . The cultural and intellectual level of any serious radical movement will have to be far higher than in the past … It will not be able to satisfy itself with a litany of forms of oppression and injustice. It will need to provide compelling answers to the question of how these evils can be overcome by revolution or large-scale reform. To accomplish this aim, the left will have to achieve and maintain a position of honesty and commitment to libertarian values."* [**Radical Priorities**, pp. 189–90]



> *ation from below upward, not by the orders of any authority, even an elected one, and not by the dictates of any scientific theory, but as the natural development of all the varied demands put forth by life itself.*
>
> *"Therefore no scholar can teach the people or even define for himself how they will and must live on the morrow of the social revolution. That will be determined first by the situation of each people, and secondly by the desires that manifest themselves and operate most strongly within them."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 198–9]

So while it will be reasonable to conclude that, for example, the federation of strike/factory assemblies and their councils/committees will be the framework by which production will initially be organised, this framework will mutate to take into account changing production and social needs. The actual structures created will, by necessity, be transformed as industry is transformed from below upwards to meet the real needs of society and producers as both the structure and nature of work and industry developed under capitalism bears the marks of its economic class, hierarchies and power (*"a radical social ecology not only raises traditional issues such as the reunion of agriculture with industry, but also questions the very structure of industry itself."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 408]). Therefore, under workers' self-management industry, work and the whole structure and organisation of production will be transformed in ways we can only guess at today. We can point the general direction (i.e. self-managed, ecologically balanced, decentralised, federal, empowering, creative and so on) but that is all. Similarly, as cities and towns are transformed into ecologically integrated communes, the initial community assemblies and their federations will transform along with the transformation of our surroundings. What they will evolve into

*struggle and begins its social construction, will no longer surrender to anyone the initiative in creative work. The working class will then direct itself by its own thought; it will create its society according to its own plans.*" [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 240–1] All anarchists can do is help this process by being part of it, arguing our case and winning people over to anarchist ideas (see section J.3 for more details). Thus the process of struggle and debate will, hopefully, turn a struggle **against** capitalism and statism into one **for** anarchism. In other words, anarchists seek to preserve and extend the anarchistic elements that exist in every struggle and to help them become consciously libertarian by discussion and debate as members of those struggles.

Lastly, we must stress that it is only the **initial** framework of a free society which is created in the class struggle. As an anarchist society develops, it will start to change and develop in ways we cannot predict. The forms in which people express their freedom and their control over their own lives will, by necessity, change as these requirements and needs change. As Bakunin argued:

> *"Even the most rational and profound science cannot divine the form social life will take in the future. It can only determine the* ***negative*** *conditions, which follow logically from a rigorous critique of existing society. Thus, by means of such a critique, social and economic science rejected hereditary individual property and, consequently, took the abstract and, so to speak,* ***negative*** *position of collective property as a necessary condition of the future social order. In the same way, it rejected the very idea of the state or statism, meaning government of society from above downward ... Therefore, it took the opposite, or negative, position: anarchy, meaning the free and independent organisation of all the units and parts of the community and their voluntary feder-*



We hope that this section of the FAQ, in its own small way, will encourage as many people as possible to discuss what a libertarian society would be like and use that discussion to bring it closer.

## I.2.2 Will it be possible to go straight to an anarchist society from capitalism?

Possibly, it depends what is meant by an anarchist society.

If it is meant a fully classless society (what some people, inaccurately, would call a "utopia") then the answer is a clear *"no, that would be impossible."* Anarchists are well aware that *"class difference do not vanish at the stroke of a pen whether that pen belongs to the theoreticians or to the pen-pushers who set out laws or decrees. Only action, that is to say direct action (not through government) expropriation by the proletarians, directed against the privileged class, can wipe out class difference."* [Luigi Fabbri, *"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 30]

As we discussed in section H.2.5, few anarchists consider it likely that a perfectly functioning libertarian communist society would be the immediate effect of a social revolution. For anarchists a social revolution is a **process** and not an event (although, of course, a process marked by such events as general strikes, uprisings, insurrections and so on). As Kropotkin argued:

> *"It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 72]

His famous work **The Conquest of Bread** aimed, to use his words, at *"prov[ing] that communism — at least partial — has*

*more chance of being established than collectivism, especially in communes taking the lead"* and tried *"to indicate how, during a revolutionary period, a large city — if its inhabitants have accepted the idea — could organise itself on the lines of free communism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 298] The revolution, in other words, would progress towards communism after the initial revolt:

> *"we know that an **uprising** can overthrow and change a government in one day, while a **revolution** needs three or four years of revolutionary convulsion to arrive at tangible results ... if we should expect the revolution, from its **earliest** insurrections, to have a communist character, we would have to relinquish the possibility of a revolution, since in that case there would be need of a strong majority to agree on carrying through a change in the direction of communism."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 282–3]

In addition, different areas will develop in different speeds and in different ways, depending on the influences dominant in the area. *"Side by side with the revolutionised communes,"* argued Kropotkin, other areas *"would remain in an expectant attitude, and would go on living on the Individualist system ... revolution would break out everywhere, but revolution under different aspects; in one country State Socialism, in another Federation; everywhere more or less Socialism, not conforming to any particular rule."* Thus *"the Revolution will take a different character in each of the different European nations; the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 81–2 and p. 81]

Kropotkin was also aware that a revolution would face many problems, including the disruption of economic activity, civil war and isolation. He argued that it was *"certain that the*



power and confidence and experience needed to change society for the better and, hopefully, create a new society in place of the current one.

Needless to say, a revolutionary movement will never, at its start, be purely anarchist:

> *"All of the workers' and peasants' movements which have taken place .. . have been movements within the limits of the capitalist regime, and have been more of less tinged with anarchism. This is perfectly natural and understandable. The working class do not act within a world of wishes, but in the real world where they are daily subjected to the physical and psychological blows of hostile forces ... the workers continually feel the influence of all the real conditions of the capitalist regime and of intermediate groups ... Consequently it is natural that the struggle which they undertake inevitably carries the stamp of various conditions and characteristics of contemporary society. The struggle can never be born in the finished and perfected anarchist form which would correspond to all the requirements of the ideas ... When the popular masses engage in a struggle of large dimensions, they inevitably start by committing errors, they allow contradictions and deviations, and only through the process of this struggle do they direct their efforts in the direction of the ideal for which they are struggling."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 239–40]

The role of anarchists is *"to help the masses to take the right road in the struggle and in the construction of the new society"* and *"support their first constructive efforts, assist them intellectually."* However, the working class *"once it has mastered the*

***actual*** framework of a free society will be the product of ***actual*** struggles. This means that the form of the free society will be shaped by the process of social change and the organs it creates. This is an important point and worth repeating.

So, as well as changing themselves while they change the world, a people in struggle also create the means by which they can manage society. By having to organise and manage their struggles, they become accustomed to self-management and self-activity and create the possibility of a free society and the organisations which will exist within it. Anarchy is not a jump into the dark but rather a natural progression of the struggle for freedom in an unfree society. The contours of a free society will be shaped by the process of creating it and, therefore, will not be an artificial construction imposed on society. Rather, it will be created from below up by society itself as working class people start to break free of hierarchy. The class struggle thus transforms those involved as well as society **and** creates the organisational structure and people required for a libertarian society.

This clearly suggests that the **means** anarchists support are important as they are have a direct impact on the ends they create. In other words, means influence ends and so our means must reflect the ends we seek and empower those who use them. As the present state of affairs is based on the oppression, exploitation and alienation of the working class, any tactics used in the pursuit of a free society must be based on resisting and destroying those evils. This is why anarchists stress tactics and organisations which increase the power, confidence, autonomy, initiative, participation and self-activity of oppressed people. As we indicate in section J (*"What Do Anarchists Do?"*) this means supporting direct action, solidarity and self-managed organisations built and run from the bottom-up. Only by fighting our own battles, relying on ourselves and our own abilities and power, in organisations we create and run ourselves, can we gain the



*coming Revolution ... will burst upon us in the middle of a great industrial crisis ... There are millions of unemployed workers in Europe at this moment. It will be worse when Revolution has burst upon us ... The number of the out-of-works will be doubled as soon as barricades are erected in Europe and the United States ... we know that in time of Revolution exchange and industry suffer most from the general upheaval ... A Revolution in Europe means, then, the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops."* He stressed that there would be *"the complete disorganisation"* of the capitalist economy and that during a revolution *"[i]nternational commerce will come to a standstill"* and *"the circulation of commodities and of provisions will be paralysed."* This would, of course, have an impact on the development of a revolution and so the *"circumstances will dictate the measures."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 69–70, p. 191 and p. 79]

Thus we have anarcho-communism being introduced *"during a revolutionary period"* rather than instantly and the possibility that it will be *"partial"* in many, if not all areas, depending on the *"circumstances"* encountered. Therefore the (Marxist inspired) claim that anarchists think a fully communist society is possible overnight is simply false — we recognise that a social revolution takes time to develop after it starts. As Malatesta put it, *"after the revolution, that is after the defeat of the existing powers and the overwhelming victory of the forces of insurrection"* then *"gradualism really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country ... and so on."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 173] In other words, *"each community will decide for itself during the transition period the method they deem best for the distribution of the products of associated labour."* [James Guillaume, *"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 362]

However, if by "anarchist society" it is meant a society that has abolished the state and started the process of transforming society from below then anarchists argue that such a society is not only possible after a successful revolution, it is essential. Thus the anarchist social revolution would be political (abolition of the state), economic (abolition of capitalism) and social (abolition of hierarchical social relationships). Or, more positively, the introduction of self-management into every aspect of life. In other words, *"political transformation"* and *"economic transformation"* must be *"accomplished together and simultaneously."* [Bakunin, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 106] This transformation would be based upon the organisations created by working class people in their struggle against capitalism and the state (see next section). Thus the framework of a free society would be created by the struggle for freedom itself, by the class struggle **within** but **against** hierarchical society. This revolution would come ***"from below"*** and would expropriate capital as well as smash the state (see section H.2.4). Such a society, as Bakunin argued, will not be "perfect" by any means:

> "I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this ... organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda ... , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State ... will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.
>
> "With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life ... will revert to the communes. The development of each



> ... *It is impossible to legislate for the future. All we can do is vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it.*" [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 101–2] These essential tendencies were discovered, in practice, by the needs of the class struggle. The necessity of practising mutual aid and solidarity to survive under capitalism (as in any other hostile environment) makes working people and other oppressed groups organise together to fight their oppressors and exploiters. Thus the co-operation necessary for a libertarian socialist society, like its organisational framework, would be generated by the need to resist oppression and exploitation under capitalism. The process of resistance produces organisation on a wider and wider scale which, in turn, can become the framework of a free society as the needs of the struggle promote libertarian forms of organisation such as decision making from the bottom up, autonomy, federalism, mandated delegates subject to instant recall and so on.
>
> For example, a strikers' assembly would be the basic decision-making forum in a struggle for improved wages and working conditions. It would create a strike committee to implement its decisions and send delegates to spread the strike. These delegates inspire other strikes, requiring a new organisation to co-ordinate the struggle. This results in delegates from all the strikes meeting and forming a federation (a workers' council). The strikers decide to occupy the workplace and the strike assemblies take over the means of production. The strike committees become the basis for factory committees which could administer the workplaces, based on workers' self-management via workplace assemblies (the former strikers' assemblies). The federation of strikers' delegates becomes the local communal council, replacing the existing state with a self-managed federation of workers' associations. In this way, the class struggle creates the framework of a free society.
>
> This, obviously, means that any suggestions of how an anarchist society would look like are based on the fact that the

*speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution"* and that *"the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 261, p. 200, p. 203, p. 206, p. 204 and p. 206]

Similarly, as we noted in section H.2.6 we discover him arguing in **Mutual Aid** that strikes and labour unions were an expression of mutual aid in capitalist society. Elsewhere, Kropotkin argued that *"labour combinations"* like the *"Sections"* of French revolution were one of the *"main popular anarchist currents"* in history, expressing the *"same popular resistance to the growing power of the few."* [**Anarchism**, p. 159] For Kropotkin, like Bakunin, libertarian labour unions were *"natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future social order."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 81]

As can be seen, the major anarchist thinkers pointed to forms of organisation autonomously created and managed by the working class as the framework of an anarchist society. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin pointed to militant, direct action based labour unions while Proudhon pointed towards workers' experiments in co-operative production and mutual credit. Later anarchists followed them. The anarcho-syndicalists, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, pointed to the developing labour movement as the framework of an anarchist society, as providing the basis for the free federation of workers' associations which would constitute the commune. Others, such as the Russians Maximov, Arshinov, Voline and Makhno, saw the spontaneously created workers' councils (soviets) of 1905 and 1917 as the basis of a free society, as another example of Bakunin's federation of workers' associations.

Thus, for all anarchists, the structural framework of an anarchist society was created by the class struggle, by the needs of working class people to resist oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. As Kropotkin stressed, *"[d]uring a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruins of the old forms*



> commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation." [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 207]

How far such a new social organisation will meet the all the ideals and hopes of communist-anarchists will vary according to objective circumstances and the influence of libertarian theory. As people start to liberate themselves they will under go an ethical and psychological transformation as they act to the end specific hierarchical social structures and relationships. It does not imply that people need to be "perfect" nor that a perfect anarchist society will come about "overnight. Rather, it means that while an anarchist society (i.e., one without a state or private property) would be created by revolution, it will be one initially marked by the society it came from and would require a period of self-activity by which individuals reshape and change themselves as they are reshaping and changing the world about them. Thus Malatesta:

> *"And even after a successful insurrection, could we overnight realise all desires and pass from a governmental and capitalist hell to a libertarian-communist heaven which is the complete freedom of man within the wished-for community of interests with all men?*
>
> *"These are illusions which can take root among authoritarians who look upon the masses as the raw material which those who have power can, by decrees, supported by bullets and handcuffs, mould to their will. But these illusions have not taken among anarchists. We need the people's consensus, and therefore we must persuade by means of propaganda and example ... to win over to our ideas an ever greater number of people."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 82–3]

So, clearly, the idea of a "one-day revolution" is one rejected as a harmful fallacy by anarchists. We are aware that revolutions are a **process** and not an event (or series of events). However, one thing that anarchists do agree on is that it is essential for both the state and capitalism to be undermined as quickly as possible. It is true that, in the course of social revolution, we anarchists may not be able to stop a new state being created or the old one from surviving. It all depends on the balance of support for anarchist ideas in the population and how willing people are to introduce them. There is no doubt, though, that for a social revolt to be fully anarchist, the state and capitalism must be destroyed and new forms of oppression and exploitation not put in their place. How quickly after such a destruction we move to a fully communist-anarchist society is a moot point, dependent on the conditions the revolution is facing and the ideas and wants of the people making it.

So the degree which a society which has abolished the state can progress towards free communism depends on objective conditions and what a free people want. Bakunin and other collectivists doubted the possibility of introducing a communistic system instantly after a revolution. For Kropotkin and many other anarcho-communists, communistic anarchy can, and must, be introduced as far as possible and as soon as possible in order to ensure a successful revolution. We should mention here that some anarchists, like the individualists and mutualists, do not support the idea of revolution and instead see anarchist alternatives growing within capitalism and slowly replacing it.

In other words anarchists agree that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, for to assume so would be to imagine that anarchists could enforce their ideas on a pliable population. Libertarian socialism can only be created from below, by people who want it and understand it, organising and liberating themselves. *"Communist organisations,"* argued Kropotkin, *"must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the con-*



> *communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–2]

Like Bakunin, Kropotkin stressed that revolution transformed those taking part in it. As he noted in his classic account of the French Revolution, *"by degrees, the revolutionary education of the people was being accomplished by the revolution itself."* Part of this process involved creating new organisations which allowed the mass of people to take part in the decision making of the revolution. He pointed to *"the popular Commune,"* arguing that *"the Revolution began by creating the Commune ... and through this institution it gained ... immense power."* He stressed that it was *"by means of the 'districts' [of the Communes] that ... the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government."* Such a system did not imply isolation, for while *"the districts strove to maintain their own independence"* they also *"sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union."* The Commune *"was thus made **from below upward**, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative."* Thus the process of class struggle, of the needs of the fighting against the existing system, generated the framework of an anarchist society for *"the districts of Paris laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation."* Little wonder he argued that *"the principles of anarchism ... already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical*

*over the great departments of industry, which are their natural inheritance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 98–9]

This linking of the present and the future through the self-activity and self-organisation of working class people is also found in Bakunin. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin stressed **revolutionary** activity and so he saw the militant labour movement, and the revolution itself, as providing the basic structure of a free society. As he put it, *"the organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 255]

The needs of the class struggle would create the framework of a new society, a federation of workers councils, as *"strikes indicate a certain collective strength already, a certain understanding among the workers ... each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 149–50] This pre-revolutionary development would be accelerated by the revolution itself:

> *"the revolution must set out from the first to radically and totally destroy the State ... The natural and necessary consequence of this destruction will be ... [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood... confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use ... the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... [will] constitute the Commune . .. [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ... delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations,*



*structive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."* [**Anarchism**, p. 140] The results of the Russian Revolution should have cleared away long ago any contrary illusions about how to create "socialist" societies. The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made by people in liberating themselves and transforming society are always minor compared to the results of creating authorities, who eliminate such "ideological errors" by destroying the freedom to make mistakes (and so freedom as such). Freedom is the only real basis on which socialism can be built (*"Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 72]). Therefore, most anarchists would agree with Malatesta:

> *"To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 36]

This means that while the conditions necessary of a free society would be created in a broad way by a social revolution, it would be utopian to imagine everything will be perfect immediately. Few anarchists have argued that such a jump would be possible — rather they have argued that revolutions create the conditions for the evolution towards an anarchist society by abolishing state and capitalism. *"Besides,"* argued Alexander Berkman, *"you must not confuse the social revolution with anarchy. Revolution, in some of its stages, is a violent upheaval; anarchy is a social condition of freedom and peace. The revolution is*

*the **means** of bringing anarchy about but it is not anarchy itself. It is to pave the road to anarchy, to establish conditions which will make a life of liberty possible."* However, *"to achieve its purpose the revolution must be imbued with and directed by the anarchist spirit and ideas. The end shapes the means ... the social revolution must be anarchist in method as in aim."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 231]

This means that while acknowledging the possibility of a transitional **society**, anarchists reject the notion of a transitional **state** as confused in the extreme (and, as can be seen from the experience of Marxism, dangerous as well). An anarchist society can only be achieved by anarchist means. Hence French Syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier's comments:

> *"Nobody believes or expects that the coming revolution ... will realise unadulterated anarchist-communism... it will erupt, no doubt, before the work of anarchist education has been completed ... [and as] a result ... , while we do preach perfect communism, it is not in the certainty or expectation of [libertarian] communism's being the social form of the future: it is in order to further men's [and women's] education ... so that, by the time of the day of conflagration comes, they will have attained maximum emancipation. But must the transitional state to be endured necessarily or inevitability be the collectivist [i.e. state socialist/capitalist] jail? Might it not consist of libertarian organisation confined to the needs of production and consumption alone, with all political institutions having been done away with?"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 55]

One thing **is** certain: an anarchist social revolution or mass movement will need to defend itself against attempts by statists and capitalists to defeat it. Every popular movement, revolt, or



as important, where such a society would spring from (as we proved in section H.1.4 Lenin's assertion that anarchists *"have absolutely no clear idea of **what** the proletariat will put in its [the states] place"* is simply false). It would, therefore, be useful to give a quick summary of anarchist views on this subject.

Proudhon, for example, looked to the self-activity of French workers, artisans and peasants and used that as the basis of his ideas on anarchism. While seeing such activity as essentially reformist in nature, like subsequent revolutionary anarchists he saw the germs of anarchy *"generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them"* as *"it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 399 and p. 398] Workers should follow the example of those already creating co-operatives:

> *"Do not the workmen's unions at this moment serve as the cradle for the social revolution ... ? Are they not always the open school, both theoretical and practical, where the workman learns the science of the production and distribution of wealth, where he studies, without masters and without books, by his own experience solely, the laws of ... industrial organisation ... ?"* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 78]

Attempts to form workers associations, therefore, *"should be judged, not by the more or less successful results which they obtain, but only according to their silent tendency to assert and establish the social republic."* The *"importance of their work lies, not in their petty union interests, but in their denial of the rule of capitalists, money lenders and governments."* They *"should take*

revolution has had to face a backlash from the supporters of the status quo. An anarchist revolution or mass movement will face (and indeed has faced) such counter-revolutionary movements. However, this does not mean that the destruction of the state and capitalism need be put off until after the forces of reaction are defeated. For anarchists, a social revolution and free society can only be defended by anti-statist means (for more discussion of this important subject see section J.7.6).

So, given an anarchist revolution which destroys the state, the type and nature of the economic system created by it will depend on local circumstances and the level of awareness in society. The individualists are correct in the sense that what we do now will determine how the future develops. Obviously, any "transition period" starts in the **here and now,** as this helps determine the future. Thus, while social anarchists usually reject the idea that capitalism can be reformed away, we agree with the individualist and mutualist anarchists that it is essential for anarchists to be active today in constructing the ideas, ideals and new liberatory institutions of the future society within the current one. The notion of waiting for the "glorious day" of total revolution is not one held by anarchists — just like the notion that we expect a perfect communist-anarchist society to emerge the day after a successful revolution. Neither position reflects anarchist ideas on social change.

## I.2.3 How is the framework of an anarchist society created?

Anarchists do not abstractly compare a free society with the current one. Rather, we see an **organic** connection between what is and what could be. In other words, anarchists see the initial framework of an anarchist society as being created under statism and capitalism when working class people organise themselves to resist hierarchy. As Kropotkin argued:



*"As early as the 1860's and 1870's,"* Paul Avrich also noted, *"the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society."* [**The Russian Anarchists**, p. 73]

In this sense, anarchy is not some distant goal but rather an aspect of the current struggles against domination, oppression and exploitation (i.e. the class struggle, to use an all-embracing term, although we must stress that anarchists use this term to cover all struggles against domination). *"Anarchism,"* argued Kropotkin, *"is not a mere insight into a remote future. Already now, whatever the sphere of action of the individual, he [or she] can act, either in accordance with anarchist principles or on an opposite line."* It was *"born among the people — in the struggles of real life"* and *"owes its origin to the constructive, creative activity of the people."* [**Anarchism**, p. 75, p. 150 and p. 149] Thus, *"Anarchism is not ... a theory of the future to be realised by divine inspiration. It is a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating new conditions."* It *"stands for the spirit of revolt"* and so *"[d]irect action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, of direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 63 and p. 66]

Anarchism draws upon the autonomous self-activity and spontaneity of working class people in struggle to inform both its political theory and its vision of a free society. The struggle against hierarchy teaches us not only how to be anarchists but also gives us a glimpse of what an anarchist society would be like, what its initial framework could be and the experience of managing our own activities which is required for such a society to function successfully.

Therefore, as is clear, anarchists have long had a clear vision of what an anarchist society would look like and, equally

> *"To make a revolution it is not ... enough that there should be ... [popular] risings ... It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [that make up society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200]

Anarchists have seen these new institutions as being linked with the need of working class people to resist the evils of hierarchy, capitalism and statism, as being the product of the class struggle and attempts by working class people to resist authority, oppression and exploitation. Thus the struggle of working class people to protect and enhance their liberty under hierarchical society will be the basis for a society **without** hierarchy. This basic insight allowed anarchists like Bakunin and Proudhon to predict future developments in the class struggle such as workers' councils (such as those which developed during the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions). As Oskar Anweiler notes in his definitive work on the Russian Soviets (Workers' Councils):

> *"Proudhon's views are often directly associated with the Russian councils ... Bakunin ..., much more than Proudhon, linked anarchist principles directly to revolutionary action, thus arriving at remarkable insights into the revolutionary process that contribute to an understanding of later events in Russia ...*
>
> *"In 1863 Proudhon declared ... 'All my economic ideas as developed over twenty-five years can be summed up in the words: agricultural-industrial federation. All my political ideas boil down to a similar formula: political federation or decentralisation.' ... Proudhon's conception of a self-governing state [sic!] founded on producers' corporations [i.e. federations of co-operatives], is certainly related to the idea of 'a democracy of producers' which emerged in the factory soviets. To this extent Proudhon can be regarded as an ideological precursor of the councils ...*
>
> *"Bakunin ... suggested the formation of revolutionary committees with representatives from the barricades, the streets, and the city districts, who would be given binding mandates, held accountable to the masses, and subject to recall. These revolutionary deputies were to form the 'federation of the barricades,' organising a revolutionary commune to immediately unite with other centres of rebellion ...*
>
> *"Bakunin proposed the formation of revolutionary committees to elect communal councils, and a pyramidal organisation of society 'through free federation from the bottom upward, the association of workers in industry and agriculture — first in the communities, then through federation of communities into districts, districts into nations, and nations into international brotherhood.' These proposals are indeed strikingly similar to the structure of the subsequent Russian system of councils ...*
>
> *"Bakunin's ideas about spontaneous development of the revolution and the masses' capacity for elementary organisation undoubtedly were echoed in part by the subsequent soviet movement... Because Bakunin ... was always very close to the reality of social struggle, he was able to foresee concrete aspects of the revolution. The council movement during the Russian Revolution, though not a result of Bakunin's theories, often corresponded in form and progress to his revolutionary concepts and predictions."* [**The Soviets**, pp. 8–11]

**row**, pp. 157–8] He based this vision on a detailed analysis of current economic statistics and trends.

Kropotkin did not see such an anarchist economy as being based around the small community, taking the basic unit of a free society as one *"large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources — it may be a nation, or rather a region — produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce."* Such a region would *"find the best means of combining agriculture with manufacture — the work in the field with a decentralised industry."* Moreover, he recognised that the *"geographical distribution of industries in a given country depends ... to a great extent upon a complexus of natural conditions; it is obvious that there are spots which are best suited for the development of certain industries ... The[se] industries always find some advantages in being grouped, to some extent, according to the natural features of separate regions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26, p. 27 and pp. 154–5]

Kropotkin stressed that agriculture *"cannot develop without the aid of machinery and the use of a perfect machinery cannot be generalised without industrial surroundings ... The village smith would not do."* He supported the integration of agriculture and industry, with *"the factory and workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens"* in which a *"variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community"* to ensure *"the greatest sum total of well-being."* He thought that *"large establishments"* would still exist, but these would be *"better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature."* He stressed that it *"would be a great mistake to imagine industry ought to return to its hand-work stage in order to be combined with agriculture. Whenever a saving of human labour can be obtained by means of a machine, the machine is welcome and will be resorted to; and there is hardly one single branch of industry into which machinery work could not be introduced with great advantage, at least at some of the stages of the manufacture."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 156, p. 197, p. 18, pp. 154–5 and pp. 151–2]



> *we will continue to treat the Illyrian model with its much-deserved neglect."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 150]

The experience of self-managed collectives during the Spanish Revolution also confirms this, with collectives sharing work equitably in order to avoid laying people off during the harsh economic conditions caused by the Civil War (for example, one collective *"adopted a three-day workweek, dividing available work among all those who had worked at the plant — thereby avoiding unemployment — and continued to pay everyone his or her basic salary"* [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 101]).

We need, therefore, to *"appeal to empirical reality and common sense"* when evaluating the claim of neo-classical economics on the issue of co-operatives. The *"empirical evidence supports"* the argument that this model is flawed. There *"has been no tendency for workers to lay off co-workers when times are good, neither in Mondragon nor in Yugoslavia. Even in bad times, layoffs are rare."* Unsurprisingly, *"in the short run, a worker-managed firm responds in the same fashion as a capitalist firm"* and workers are added to the collective to meet increases in demand. [David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, p. 91, p. 92 and p. 93] A conclusion shared by economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson:

> *"Much of the evidence we do have about the behaviour of real-world worker co-operatives is that they respond to changes in market prices in a similar manner to the capitalist firm ... Accordingly, the basic assumptions in the model are questioned by the evidence."* [**Economics and Utopia**, pp. 223–4]

So, as Branko Horvat observes, in spite of the neo-classical analysis producing specific predictions the *"mere fact that nothing of the kind has ever been observed in real-world economies*

*leaves them undisturbed."* At most they would say that a *"self-managed firm may not behave as the theory predicts, but this is because it behaves irrationally. If something is wrong, it is not the theory but the reality."* Interestingly, though, if you assume that capitalist firms *"maximise the rate of profit, profit per unit invested"* rather than total profit then neo-classical theory *"generates equally absurd results."* That is why the distinction between short and long runs was invented, so that in the short run the amount of capital is fixed. If this is applied to a co-operative, so that *"in the short run, the work force is fixed"* then the alleged problems with labour-managed workplaces disappear. Needless to say, a real co-operative acts on the assumption that the work force is fixed and as *"the workers are no longer hired"* this means that the worker-managers *"do not fire their colleagues when business is slack; they reduce work time or work for inventories. When the demand temporarily increases, they work overtime or contract outside work."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 11–13]

In summary, the neo-classical theory of the labour-managed firm has as much relation to a real co-operative as neo-classical economics generally does to capitalism. Significantly, "Austrian" economists generally accept the neo-classical theory of co-operatives (in part, undoubtedly, as it confirms their dislike of all forms of socialism). Even one as sympathetic to self-management as David L. Prychitko accepts it, simply criticising because it *"reduces the firm to a short-run objective function"* and *"as long as market **entry** is allowed, the labour-managed market sheds any possible instability problem."* [**Markets, Planning and Democracy**, p. 81] While correct, this criticism totally misses the point. Yes, in the long run other co-operatives would be set up and this would increase supply of goods, increase employment and so forth, yet this should not blind us to the limitations of the assumptions which drives the neo-classical theory.

To sum up, syndicates are voluntary associations of workers who manage their workplace and their own work. Within



and her labour is *"bereft of liberty, leisure and intelligence."* Under anarchism, *"the free productive associations"* would become *"their own masters and the owners of the necessary capital"* and *"amalgamate among themselves"* and *"sooner or later"* will *"expand beyond national frontiers"* and *"form one vast economic federation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 81–3]

Nor can such a vision be attributed to Kropotkin. While, of course, supporting decentralisation of power and decision making as did Proudhon and Bakunin, he did not reject the necessity of federations to co-ordinate activity. As he put it, the *"commune of tomorrow will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes"*/ For anarchists the commune *"no longer means a territorial agglomeration; it is rather a generic name, a synonym for the grouping of equals which knows neither frontiers nor walls ... Each group in the Commune will necessarily be drawn towards similar groups in other communes; they will come together and the links that federate them will be as solid as those that attach them to their fellow citizens."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83 and p. 88] Nor did he reject industry or machinery, stating he *"understood the poetry of machinery"* and that while in *"our present factories, machinery work is killing for the worker"* this was *"a matter of bad organisation, and has nothing to do with the machine itself."* [**Memiors of a Revolutionist**, p. 111]

Kropotkin's vision was one of federations of decentralised communities in which production would be based on the *"scattering of industries over the country — so as to bring the factory amidst the fields ... agriculture ... combined with industry ... to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work."* He considered this as *"surely the next step to be made, as soon as a reorganisation of our present conditions is possible"* and *"is imposed by the very necessity of **producing for the producers themselves.**"* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomor-**

> *Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large enterprises had introduced into society. For example, Proudhon strenuously opposed the degrading character of … work which required an individual to repeat one minor function continuously. But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result, according to Proudhon, from the introduction of strong workers' associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 156]

Moreover, Proudhon did not see an anarchist society as one of isolated communities or workplaces. Like other anarchists, as we discussed in section I.3.4, Proudhon saw a free society's productive activity centred around federations of syndicates.

This vision of a federation of workplaces can also be found in Bakunin's writings: *"The future organisation of society must proceed from the bottom up only, through free association or federations of the workers, into their associations to begin with, then into communes, regions, nations and, finally, into a great international and universal federation."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 176] Like Proudhon, Bakunin also explicitly rejected the idea of seeking small-scale production, arguing that *"if [the workers] tried to divide among themselves the capital that exists, they would … reduce to a large decree its productive power."* Therefore the need was for *"the collective property of capital"* to ensure *"the emancipation* ***of labour and of the workers.****"* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 91] Bakunin, again like Proudhon, considered that *"[i]ntelligent free labour will necessarily be associated labour"* as under capitalism the worker *"works for others"*



the syndicate, the decisions which affect how the workplace develops and changes are in the hands of those who work there. In addition, it means that each section of the workforce manages its own activity and sections and that all workers placed in administration tasks (i.e. *"management"*) are subject to election and recall by those who are affected by their decisions. The workers' self-management is discussed in the next section.

Finally, two things. First, as noted in section G.1.3 a few individualist anarchists, although not all, were not opposed to (non-exploitative) wage labour and so did not place co-operatives at the centre of their ideas. This position is very much a minority in the anarchist tradition as it is not consistent with libertarian principles nor likely to end the exploitation of labour (see section G.4.1), so making most anarchists think such individualism is inconsistent anarchism (see section G.4.2). Secondly, it is important to note that individuals who do not wish to join syndicates will be able to work for themselves. There is no *"forced collectivisation"* under **any** form of libertarian socialism, because coercing people is incompatible with the basic principles of anarchism. Those who wish to be self-employed will have free access to the productive assets they need, provided that they neither attempt to monopolise more of those assets than they and their families can use by themselves nor attempt to employ others for wages (see section I.3.7).

## I.3.2 What is workers' self-management?

Quite simply, workers' self-management (sometimes called *"workers' control"*) means that all workers affected by a decision have an equal voice in making it, on the principle of "one worker, one vote." Thus *"revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 63] That is, workers *"ought to be the real managers of industries."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Fac-**

**tories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 157] This is essential to ensure *"a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and their brains to those who choose to employ them .. . but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest possible well-being for all, while full, free scope will be left for every individual initiative."* [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin: Selections from his Writings**, pp. 113–4] As Chomsky put it:

> *"Compassion, solidarity, friendship are also human needs. They are driving needs, no less than the desire to increase one's share of commodities or to improve working conditions. Beyond this, I do not doubt that it is a fundamental human need to take an active part in the democratic control of social institutions. If this is so, then the demand for industrial democracy should become a central goal of any revitalised left with a working-class base."* [**Radical Priorities**, p. 191]

As noted earlier, however, we need to be careful when using the term *"workers' control,"* as others use it and give it an entirely different meaning from the one intended by anarchists. Like the terms *"anarchist"* and *"libertarian,"* it has been co-opted by others to describe less than libertarian schemes.

The first to do so were the Leninists, starting with Lenin, who have used the term "workers' control" to describe a situation were workers have a limited supervision over either the capitalists or the appointed managers of the so-called workers' state. These do not equate to what anarchists aim for and, moreover, such limited experiments have not lasted long (see section H.3.14). More recently, "workers' control" have been used by capitalists to describe schemes in which



makes a similar assertion about Proudhon wanting a federation of *"tiny economic units"*. [**The Paris Commune**, p. 75]

While it may be better to cover this issue in section H.2, we discuss it here simply because it relates directly to what an anarchist society could look like and so it allows us to that more fully.

So what do anarchists make of the assertion that we aim for *"small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production"*? Simply put, we think it is nonsense (as would be quickly obvious from reading anarchist theory). Indeed, it is hard to know where this particular anarchist "vision" comes from. As Luigi Fabbri noted, in his reply to an identical assertion by the leading Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin, *"[i]t would be interesting to learn in what anarchist book, pamphlet or programme such an 'ideal' is set out, or even such a hard and fast rule!"* [*"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 21]

If we look at, say, Proudhon, we soon see no such argument for *"small scale"* production. For Proudhon, *"[l]arge industry ... come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the [workers] association."* [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 156] In fact, The Frenchman **explicitly** rejected the position Stack inflicts on him by arguing that it *"would be to retrograde"* and *"impossible"* to wish *"the division of labour, with machinery and manufactures, to be abandoned, and each family to return to the system of primitive indivision, — that is, to **each one by himself, each one for himself**, in the most literal meaning of the words."* [**System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 206] As historian K. Steven Vincent correctly summarises:

> *"On this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that, contrary to the general image given in the secondary literature, Proudhon was not hostile to large industry.*

natural in a free society, for different people have different ideas and ideals. Nor does such independent producers imply a contradiction with libertarian socialism, for *"[w]hat we concerned with is the destruction of the titles of proprietors who exploit the labour of others and, above all, of expropriating them in fact in order to put ... all the means of production at the disposal of those who do the work."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103] Such freedom to work independently or associate as desired does **not** imply any support for private property (as discussed in section I.6.2). Thus any individual in a libertarian socialist economy *"always has the liberty to isolate himself and work alone, without being considered a bad citizen or a suspect."* [Proudhon, quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 145]

In summary, in a free society people need not join syndicates nor does a co-operative need to confederate with others. Given we have discussed the issue of freedom of economic arrangements at length in section G.2.1 we will leave this discussion here.

## I.3.8 Do anarchists seek *"small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production"*?

No. The idea that anarchism aims for small, self-sufficient, communes is a Leninist slander. They misrepresent anarchist ideas on this matter, suggesting that anarchists seriously want society based on *"small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production."* In particular, they point to Kropotkin, arguing that he *"looked backwards for change"* and *"witnessed such communities among Siberian peasants and watchmakers in the Swiss mountains."* [Pat Stack, *"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246] Another Leninist, Donny Gluckstein,



workers' have more say in how their workplaces are run while maintaining wage slavery (i.e. capitalist ownership, power and ultimate control). So, in the hands of capitalists, "workers' control" is now referred to by such terms as "participation", "co-determination", "consensus", "empowerment", "Japanese-style management," etc. *"For those whose function it is solve the new problems of boredom and alienation in the workplace in advanced industrial capitalism, workers' control is seen as a hopeful solution"*, Sam Dolgoff noted, *"a solution in which workers are given a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice at best secondary in the control of conditions of the workplace. Workers' control, in a limited form sanctioned by the capitalists, is held to be the answer to the growing non-economic demands of the workers."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 81]

The new managerial fad of "quality circles" — meetings where workers are encouraged to contribute their ideas on how to improve the company's product and increase the efficiency with which it is made — is an example of "workers' control" as conceived by capitalists. However, when it comes to questions such as what products to make, where to make them, and (especially) how revenues from sales should be divided, capitalists and managers do not ask for or listen to workers' "input." So much for "democratisation," "empowerment," and "participation"! In reality, capitalistic "workers control" is merely an another insidious attempt to make workers more willing and "co-operative" partners in their own exploitation. Needless to say, such schemes are phoney as they never place **real** power in the hands of workers. In the end, the owners and their managers have the final say (and so hierarchy remains) and, of course, profits are still extracted from the workforce.

Hence anarchists prefer the term ***workers' self-management***, a concept which refers to the exercise of workers' power through collectivisation and federation. It means *"a transition*

*from private to collective ownership"* which, in turn, *"call[s] for new relationships among the members of the working community."* [Abel Paz, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 55] Self-management in this sense *"is not a new form of mediation between the workers and their capitalist bosses, but instead refers to the very process by which the workers themselves* ***overthrow*** *their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace. Self-management means the organisation of all workers ... into a workers' council or factory committee (or agricultural syndicate), which makes all the decisions formerly made by the owners and managers."* [Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] Self-management means the end of hierarchy and authoritarian social relationships in workplace and their replacement by free agreement, collective decision-making, direct democracy, social equality and libertarian social relationships.

As anarchists use the term, workers' self-management means collective worker ownership, control and direction of all aspects of production, distribution and investment. This is achieved through participatory-democratic workers' assemblies, councils and federations, in both agriculture and industry. These bodies would perform all the functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, managers, executives and financiers where these activities actually relate to productive activity rather than the needs to maximise minority profits and power (in which case they would disappear along with hierarchical management). These workplace assemblies will be complemented by people's financial institutions or federations of syndicates which perform all functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, executives, and financiers in terms of allocating investment funds or resources.

Workers' self-management is based around general meetings of the whole workforce, held regularly in every industrial or agricultural syndicate. These are the source of and final authority over decisions affecting policy within the workplace



*and not in coercing others to follow any one's dictation."* [**A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 2, p. 324]

Therefore, the decision to join a syndicate will be a free one, with the potential for living outside it guaranteed for non-exploitative and non-oppressive individuals and groups. Malatesta stressed this when he argued that in an anarchist revolution *"what has to be destroyed at once ... is* ***capitalistic property,*** *that is, the fact that a few control the natural wealth and the instruments of production and can thus oblige others to work for them"* but one must have a *"right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on the condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* [**Errico Malatesta: Life and Ideas**, p. 102] In other words, different forms of social life will be experimented with, depending on what people desire.

Of course some people ask how anarchists can reconcile individual freedom with expropriation of capital. All we can say is that these critics subscribe to the idea that one should not interfere with the "individual freedom" of those in positions of authority to oppress others, and that this premise turns the concept of individual freedom on its head, making oppression a "right" and the denial of freedom a form of it!

However, it is a valid question to ask if anarchism would result in self-employed people being forced into syndicates as the result of a popular movement. The answer is no. This is because the destruction of title deeds would not harm the independent worker, whose real title is possession and the work done. What anarchists want to eliminate is not possession but capitalist ***property***. Thus such workers *"may prefer to work alone in his own small shop"* rather than join an association or a federation. [James Guillaume, *"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 362]

This means that independent producers will still exist within an anarchist society, and some workplaces — perhaps whole areas — will not be part of a confederation. This is

those who lose by competition should be altruistic and let competition ruin their lives.

Moreover, given the experience of the neo-liberal period from the 1980s onwards (with rising inequality marked by falling growth, lower wage growth, rising unemployment and increased economic instability) the impact of increased competition and inequality harms the vast majority. It is doubtful that people aware of these tendencies (and that, as we argued in section F.3, *"free exchange"* in an unequal society tends to **increase**, not decrease, inequality) would create such a regime.

Unsurprisingly, examples of anarchism in action show that there is working together to reduce the dangers of isolation and competition. One thing to remember is that anarchy will not be created "overnight" and so potential problems will be worked out over time. Underlying all these kinds of objections is the assumption that co-operation will **not** be more beneficial to all involved than competition. However, in terms of quality of life, co-operation will soon be seen to be the better system, even by the most highly paid workers. There is far more to life than the size of one's pay packet, and anarchism exists in order to ensure that life is far more than the weekly grind of boring work and the few hours of hectic consumption in which people attempt to fill the "spiritual hole" created by a way of life which places profits above people.

## I.3.7 What about people who do not want to join a syndicate?

In this case, they are free to work alone, by their own labour. Anarchists have no desire to force people to join a syndicate. Emma Goldman spoke for all anarchists when she stated that *"[w]e believe in every person living his own life in his own way*



as well as relations with other syndicates. These meeting elect workplace councils whose job is to implement the decisions of these assemblies and to make the day to day administration decisions that will crop up. These councils are directly accountable to the workforce and its members subject to re-election and instant recall. It is also likely that membership of these councils will be rotated between all members of the syndicate to ensure that no one monopolises an administrative position. In addition, smaller councils and assemblies would be organised for divisions, units and work teams as circumstances dictate.

In this way, workers would manage their own collective affairs together, as free and equal individuals. They would associate together to co-operate without subjecting themselves to an authority over themselves. Their collective decisions would remain under their control and power. This means that self-management creates *"an organisation so constituted that by affording everyone the fullest enjoyment of his [or her] liberty, it does not permit anyone to rise above the others nor dominate them in any way but through the natural influence of the intellectual and moral qualities which he [or she] possesses,* ***without this influence ever being imposed as a right and without leaning upon any political institution whatever.****"* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 271] Only by convincing your fellow associates of the soundness of your ideas can those ideas become the agreed plan of the syndicate. No one is in a position to impose their ideas simply because of the post they hold or the work they do.

Most anarchists think that it is likely that purely administrative tasks and decisions would be delegated to elected individuals in this way, freeing workers and assemblies to concentrate on important activities and decisions rather than being bogged down in trivial details. As Bakunin put it:

> *"Is not administrative work just as necessary to production as is manual labour — if not more so? Of course, production would be badly crippled, if not altogether suspended, without efficient and intelligent management. But from the standpoint of elementary justice and even efficiency, the management of production need not be exclusively monopolised by one or several individuals. And managers are not at all entitled to more pay. The co-operative workers associations have demonstrated that the workers themselves, choosing administrators from their own ranks, receiving the same pay, can efficiency control and operate industry. The monopoly of administration, far from promoting the efficiency of production, on the contrary only enhances the power and privileges of the owners and their managers."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 424]

What is important is that what is considered as important or trivial, policy or administration rests with the people affected by the decisions and subject to their continual approval. Anarchists do not make a fetish of direct democracy and recognise that there is more important things in life than meetings and voting! While workers' assemblies play the key role in self-management, it is not the focal point of **all** decisions. Rather it is the place where all the important policy decisions are made, administrative decisions are ratified or rejected and what counts as a major decision determined. Needless to say, what is considered as important issues will be decided upon by the workers themselves in their assemblies.

Unsurprisingly, anarchists argue that, as well as being more free, workers self-management is more efficient and productive than the hierarchical capitalist firm (efficiency here means accomplishing goals without wasting valued assets). Capitalist firms fail to tap humanity's vast reservoir of practical knowl-



universal, meaning that everyone would be interested in maximising his or her liberty, and so would be unlikely to allow inequalities to develop which threatened that liberty. It would be in the interests of communes and syndicates which to share with others instead of charging high prices for them as they may find themselves boycotted by others, and so denied the advantages of social co-operation. Moreover, they may be subject to such activities themselves and so it would wise for them to remember to *"treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances."* As anarchism will never come about unless people desire it and start to organise their own lives, it is clear that an anarchist society would be inhabited by individuals who followed that ethical principle.

So it is doubtful that people inspired by anarchist ideas would start to charge each other high prices, particularly since the syndicates and community assemblies are likely to vote for a wide basis of surplus distribution, precisely to avoid this problem and to ensure that production will be for use rather than profit. In addition, as other communities and syndicates would likely boycott any syndicate or commune that was acting in non-co-operative ways, it is likely that social pressure would soon result in those willing to exploit others rethinking their position. Co-operation does not imply a willingness to tolerate those who desire to take advantage of you. In other words, neither mutual aid nor anarchist theory implies people are naive indiscriminate altruists but rather people who, while willing to work with others co-operatively, will act to stop others taking advantage of them. Mutual aid, in other words is based on reciprocal relationships. If someone or a syndicate does not co-operate but rather seeks to take advantage of others, then the others are well within their rights to boycott them and otherwise protest against them. A free society is based on **all** people pursuing their self-interest, not just the few. This suggests that anarchists reject the assumption that

Secondly, having no means of unearned income (such as rent, interest and intellectual property rights), anarchism will reduce income differentials substantially.

Thirdly, management positions would be rotated, ensuring that everyone gets experience of the work, thus reducing the artificial scarcity created by the division of labour. Also, education would be extensive, ensuring that engineers, doctors, and other skilled workers would do the work because they **enjoyed** doing it and not for financial reward.

Fourthly, we should like to point out that people work for many reasons, not just for high wages. Feelings of solidarity, empathy, friendship with their fellow workers would also help reduce competition between syndicates.

Of course, the "competition" objection assumes that syndicates and members of syndicates will place financial considerations above all else. This is not the case, and few individuals are the economic robots assumed in capitalist dogma. Indeed, the evidence from co-operatives refutes such claims (ignoring, for the moment, the vast evidence of our own senses and experiences with real people rather than the insane *"economic man"* of capitalist economic ideology). As noted in section I.3.1 neo-classical economic theory, deducing from its basic assumptions, argues that members of co-operatives will aim to maximise profit per worker and so, perversely, fire their members during good times. Reality contradicts these claims. In other words, the underlying assumption that people are economic robots cannot be maintained — there is extensive evidence pointing to the fact that different forms of social organisation produce different considerations which motivate people accordingly.

So, while recognising that competition could exist, anarchists think there are plenty of reasons not to worry about massive economic inequality being created, which in turn would re-create the state. The apologists for capitalism who put forward this argument forget that the pursuit of self-interest is



edge, indeed they block it as any application of that knowledge is used to enrich the owners rather than those who generate and use it. Thus the hierarchical firm disenfranchises employees and reduces them to the level of order-takers with an obvious loss of information, knowledge and insight (as discussed in section I.1.1). With self-management, that vast source of knowledge and creativity can be expressed. Thus, self-management and worker ownership *"should also reap other rewards through the greater motivation and productivity of the workers."* [David Ellerman, **The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 139]

This explains why some firms try to simulate workers' control (by profit-sharing or "participation" schemes). For, as market socialist David Schweickart notes, *"the empirical evidence is overwhelming"* and supports those who argue for workers' participation. The *"evidence is strong that both worker participation in management and profit sharing tend to enhance productivity and that worker-run enterprises often are more productive than their capitalist counterparts."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 100] In fact, 94% of 226 studies into this issue showed a positive impact, with 60% being statistically significant, and so the empirical evidence is *"generally supportive of a positive link between profit sharing and productivity."* This applies to co-operatives as well. [Martin L. Weitzman and Douglas L. Kruse, *"Profit Sharing and Productivity"*, pp. 95–140, **Paying for Productivity**, Alan S. Blinder (ed.), p. 137, p. 139 and pp. 131–2] Another study concludes that the *"available evidence is strongly suggestive that for employee ownership ... to have a strong impact on performance, it needs to be accompanied by provisions for worker participation in decision making."* In addition, *"narrow differences in wages and status"*, as anarchists have long argued, *"increase productivity"*. [David I. Levine and Laura D'Andrea Tyson, *"Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment"*, pp. 183–237, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210 and p. 211]

This should be unsurprising, for as Geoffrey M. Hodgson notes, the neo-classical model of co-operatives *"wrongly*

*assume[s] that social relations and technology are separable … Yet we have much evidence . .. to support the contention that participation and co-operation can increase technological efficiency. Production involves people — their ideas and aspirations — and not simply machines operating under the laws of physics. It seems that, in their search for pretty diagrams and tractable mathematical models, mainstream economists often forget this."* [**Economics and Utopia**, p. 223]

Therefore anarchists have strong evidence to support Herbert Read's comment that libertarian socialism would *"provide a standard of living far higher than that realised under any previous form of social organisation."* [**Anarchy and Order**, p. 49] It confirms Cole's comment that the *"key to real efficiency is self-government; and any system that is not based upon self-government is not only servile, but also inefficient. Just as the labour of the wage-slave is better than the labour of the chattel-slave, so … will the labour of the free man [and woman] be better than either."* [**Self-Government in Industry**, p. 157] Yet it is important to remember, as important as this evidence is, real social change comes not from "efficiency" concerns but from ideals and principles. While anarchists are confident that workers' self-management will be more efficient and productive than capitalism, this is a welcome side-effect of the deeper goal of increasing freedom. The evidence confirms that freedom is the best solution for social problems but if, for example, slavery or wage-labour proved to be more productive than free, associated, labour it does not make them more desirable!

A self-managed workplace, like a self-managed society in general, does not mean that specialised knowledge (where it is meaningful) will be neglected or not taken into account. Quite the opposite. Specialists (i.e. workers who are interested in a given area of work and gain an extensive understanding of it) are part of the assembly of the workplace, just like other workers. They can and have to be listened to, like anyone else, and



the highest paid and lowest paid worker was 4 to 1. This was only increased when they had to compete with large capitalist companies, and even then the new ratio of 9 to 1 is **far** smaller than those in capitalist companies (in America the ratio is 200 to 1 and beyond!). Thus, even under capitalism, *"[t]here is evidence that the methods of distribution chosen by worker-controlled or self-managed firms are more egalitarian than distribution according to market precepts."* [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, p. 45] Given that market precepts fail to take into account power differences, this is unsurprising. Thus we can predict that a fully self-managed economy would be just, if not, more egalitarian as differences in power would be eliminated, as would unemployment (James K. Galbraith, in his book **Created Unequal**, has presented extensive evidence that unemployment increases inequality, as would be expected).

It is a common myth that managers, executives and so on are paid so highly because of their unique abilities. Actually, they are so highly paid because they are bureaucrats in command of large hierarchical institutions. It is the hierarchical nature of the capitalist firm that ensures inequality, **not** exceptional skills. Even enthusiastic supporters of capitalism provide evidence to support this claim. In the 1940s Peter Drucker, a supporter of capitalism, brushed away the claim that corporate organisation brings managers with exceptional ability to the top when he noted that *"[n]o institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organised in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership of average human beings."* For Drucker, *"the things that really count are not the individual members but the relations of command and responsibility among them."* [**Concept of the Corporation**, p. 35 and p. 34] Little has changed, beyond the power of PR to personalise the bureaucratic structures of corporations.

of non-authoritarian methods of child-rearing and education (see section J.6) are particularly important because, as we suggested in section B.1.5, secondary drives such as greed and the desire the exercise power over others are products of authoritarian upbringing based on punishments and fear. Only if the prevalence of such drives is reduced among the general population can we be sure that an anarchist revolution will not degenerate into some new form of domination and exploitation.

However, there are other reasons why economic inequality — say, in differences of income levels or working conditions, which may arise from competition for "better" workers — would be far less severe under any form of anarchist society than it is under capitalism.

Firstly, the syndicates would be democratically managed. This would result in much smaller wage differentials, because there is no board of wealthy directors setting wage levels for their own gain. So without hierarchies in the workplace no one would be in a position to monopolise the work of others and grow rich as a result:

> *"Poverty is the symptom: slavery the disease. The extremes of riches and destitution follow inevitably upon the extremes of license and bondage. The many are not enslaved because they are poor, they are poor because they are enslaved. Yet Socialists have all too often fixed their eyes upon the material misery of the poor without realising that it rests upon the spiritual degradation of the slave."* [G.D.H. Cole, **Self-Government in Industry**, p. 41]

Empirical evidence supports anarchist claims as co-operatives have a far more egalitarian wage structure than capitalist firms. This can be seen from the experience of the Mondragon co-operatives, where the wage difference between



their expert advice included in the decision making process. Anarchists do not reject the idea of expertise nor the rational authority associated with it. As we indicated in section B.1, anarchists recognise the difference between being ***an*** authority (i.e. having knowledge of a given subject) and being ***in*** authority (i.e. having power over someone else). as discussed in section H.4, we reject the latter and respect the former.

Such specialisation does not imply the end of self-management, but rather the opposite. *"The greatest intelligence,"* Bakunin argued, *"would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results, for science as well as industry, the necessity of the division and association of labour."* [**God and the State**, p. 33] Thus specialised knowledge is part of the associated workers and not placed above them in positions of power. The other workers in a syndicate can compliment the knowledge of the specialists with the knowledge of the work process they have gained by working and so enrich the decision. Knowledge is distributed throughout society and only a society of free individuals associated as equals and managing their own activity can ensure that it is applied effectively (part of the inefficiency of capitalism results from the barriers to knowledge and information flow created by its hierarchical workplace).

A workplace assembly is perfectly able to listen to an engineer, for example, who suggests various ways of reaching various goals (i.e. if you want X, you would have to do A or B. If you do A, then C, D and E is required. If B is decided upon, then F, G, H and I are entailed). But it is the assembly, **not** the engineer, that decides what goals and methods to be implemented. As Cornelius Castoriadis put it: *"We are not saying: people will have to decide **what** to do, and then technicians will tell them **how** to do it. We say: after listening to technicians, people will decide what to do **and** how to do it. For the **how** is not neutral — and the **what** is not disembodied. What and how are neither **identical**, nor **external** to each other. A 'neutral' technique is, of*

*course, an illusion. A conveyor belt is linked to a type of product **and** a type of producer — and vice versa."* [**Social and Political Writings**, vol. 3, p. 265]

However, we must stress that while an anarchist society would "inherit" a diverse level of expertise and specialisation from class society, it would not take this as unchangeable. Anarchists argue for ***"all-round"*** (or integral) education as a means of ensuring that everyone has a basic knowledge or understanding of science, engineering and other specialised tasks. As Bakunin argued, *"in the interests of both labour and science … there should no longer be either workers or scholars but only human beings."* Education must *"prepare every child of each sex for the life of thought as well as for the life of labour."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 116 and p. 119] This does not imply the end of all specialisation (individuals will, of course, express their individuality and know more about certain subjects than others) but it does imply the end of the artificial specialisation developed under capitalism which tries to deskill and disempower the wage worker by concentrating knowledge into hands of management.

And, just to state the obvious, self-management does not imply that the mass of workers decide on the application of specialised tasks. Self-management implies the autonomy of those who do the work as well as collective decision making on collective issues. For example, in a self-managed hospital the cleaning staff would not have a say in the doctors' treatment of patients just as the doctors would not tell the cleaners how to do their work (of course, it is likely that an anarchist society will **not** have people whose work is simply to clean and nothing else, we just use this as an example people will understand). All members of a syndicate would have a say in what happens in the workplace as it affects them collectively, but individual workers and groups of workers would manage their own activity within that collective.



after capitalism has been replaced by self-management, when differences in skill, etc., leads to some people exploiting their position and getting more wages, better hours and conditions, and so forth. This problem existed in the industrial collectives in the Spanish Revolution. As Kropotkin pointed out, *"[b]ut, when all is said and done, some inequalities, some inevitable injustice, undoubtedly will remain. There are individuals in our societies whom no great crisis can lift out of the deep mire of egoism in which they are sunk. The question, however, is not whether there will be injustices or no, but rather how to limit the number of them."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 94]

In other words, these problems will exist, but there are a number of things that anarchists can do to minimise their impact. There will be a *"gestation period"* before the birth of an anarchist society, in which social struggle, new forms of education and child-rearing, and other methods of consciousness-raising increase the number of anarchists and decrease the number of authoritarians.

The most important element in this gestation period is social struggle. Such self-activity will have a major impact on those involved in it (see section J.2). By direct action and solidarity, those involved develop bounds of friendship and support with others, develop new forms of ethics and new ideas and ideal. This radicalisation process will help to ensure that any differences in education and skill do not develop into differences in power in an anarchist society by making people less likely to exploit their advantages nor, more importantly, for others to tolerate them doing so!

In addition, education within the anarchist movement should aim, among other things, to give its members familiarity with technological skills so that they are not dependent on "experts" and can thus increase the pool of skilled workers who will be happy working in conditions of liberty and equality. This will ensure that differentials between workers can be minimised. In the long run, however, popularisation

Now to the "competition" objection, which we'll begin to answer by noting that it ignores a few key points.

Firstly, the assumption that a libertarian society would "become capitalist" in the absence of a **state** is obviously false. If competition did occur between collectives and did lead to massive wealth inequalities, then the newly rich would have to create a state to protect their private property against the dispossessed. So inequality, not equality, leads to the creation of states. It is no co-incidence that the anarchic communities that existed for millennia were also egalitarian.

Secondly, as noted in section A.2.5, anarchists do not consider *"equal"* to mean *"identical."* Therefore, to claim that wage differences mean the end of anarchism makes sense only if one thinks that *"equality"* means everyone getting **exactly** equal shares. As anarchists do not hold such an idea, wage differences in an otherwise anarchistically organised syndicate do not indicate a lack of equality. How the syndicate is **run** is of far more importance, because the most pernicious type of inequality from the anarchist standpoint is inequality of **power,** i.e. unequal influence on political and economic decision making.

Under capitalism, wealth inequality translates into such an inequality of power, and vice versa, because wealth can buy private property (and state protection of it), which gives owners authority over that property and those hired to produce with it; but under libertarian socialism, minor or even moderate differences in income among otherwise equal workers would not lead to this kind of power inequality, because self-management and socialisation severs the link between wealth and power. Moreover, when labour becomes free in a society of rebels (and, surely, an anarchist society could be nothing but) few would tolerate relatively minor income inequalities becoming a source of power.

Thirdly, anarchists do not pretend that an anarchist society will be perfect. Hence there may be periods, particularly just



Needless to say, self-management abolishes the division of labour inherent in capitalism between order takers and order givers. It integrates (to use Kropotkin's words) brain work and manual work by ensuring that those who do the work also manage it and that a workplace is managed by those who use it. Such an integration of labour will, undoubtedly, have a massive impact in terms of productivity, innovation and efficiency. As Kropotkin argued, the capitalist firm has a negative impact on those subject to its hierarchical and alienating structures:

> *"The worker whose task has been specialised by the permanent division of labour has lost the intellectual interest in his [or her] labour, and it is especially so in the great industries; he has lost his inventive powers. Formerly, he [or she] invented very much ... But since the great factory has been enthroned, the worker, depressed by the monotony of his [or her] work, invents no more."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 171]

Must all the skills, experience and intelligence that very one has be swept away or crushed by hierarchy? Or could it not become a new fertile source of progress under a better organisation of production? Self-management would ensure that the independence, initiative and inventiveness of workers (which disappears under wage slavery) comes to the fore and is applied. Combined with the principles of *"all-round"* (or integral) education (see section J.5.13) who can deny that working people could transform the current economic system to ensure *"well-being for all"*? And we must stress that by *"well-being"* we mean well-being in terms of meaningful, productive activity in humane surroundings and using appropriate technology, in terms of goods of utility and beauty to help create strong, healthy bodies and in terms of surroundings which are inspiring to live in and ecologically integrated.

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that self-management and the *"erasing [of] the present distinction between the brain workers and manual worker"* would see *"social benefits"* arising from *"the concordance of interest and harmony so much wanted in our times of social struggles"* and *"the fullness of life which would result for each separate individual, if he [or she] were enabled to enjoy the use of both ... mental and bodily powers."* This is in addition to the *"increase of wealth which would result from having ... educated and well-trained producers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 180]

Let us not forget that today workers **do** manage their own working time to a considerable extent. The capitalist may buy a hour of a workers' time but they have to ensure that the worker follows their orders during that time. Workers resist this imposition and this results in considerable shop-floor conflict. Frederick Taylor, for example, introduced his system of *"scientific management"* in part to try and stop workers managing their own working activity. As David Noble notes, workers *"paced themselves for many reason: to keep time for themselves, to avoid exhaustion, to exercise authority over their work, to avoid killing so-called gravy piece-rate jobs by overproducing and risking a pay cut, to stretch out available work for fear of layoffs, to exercise their creativity, and, last but not least, to express their solidarity and their hostility to management."* These were *"[c]oupled with collective co-operation with their fellows on the floor"* and *"labour-prescribed norms of behaviour"* to achieve *"shop floor control over production."* [**Forces of Production**, p. 33] This is why *working to rule"* is such an efficient weapon in the class struggle (see section H.4.4) In other words, workers naturally tend towards self-management anyway and it is this natural movement towards liberty during work hours which is combated by bosses (who wins, of course, depends on objective and subjective pressures which swing the balance of power towards labour or capital).

Self-management will built upon this already existing unofficial workers control over production and, of course, our



chist principles is centralised power, oppression, and exploitation, all of which flow from large inequalities of income and private property. This is the source of anarchist concern about equality — concern that is not based on some sort of *"politics of envy."* Anarchists oppose inequality because it soon leads to the few oppressing the many (a relationship which distorts the individuality and liberty of all involved as well as the health and very lives of the oppressed).

Anarchists desire to create a society in which such relationships are impossible, believing that the most effective way to do this is by empowering all, by creating an egoistic concern for liberty and equality among the oppressed, and by developing social organisations which encourage self-management. As for individuals' trying to improve their lot, anarchists maintain that co-operation is the best means to do so, **not** competition. And there is substantial evidence to support this claim (see, for example, Alfie Kohn's **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and Robert Axelrod's **The Evolution of Co-operation** present abundant evidence that co-operation is in our long term interests and provides better results than short term competition). This suggests that, as Kropotkin argued, mutual aid, not mutual struggle, will be in an individual's self-interest and so competition in a free, sane society would be minimised and reduced to sports and other individual pastimes. As Stirner argued, co-operation is just as egoistic as competition (a fact sometimes lost on many due to the obvious ethical superiority of co-operation):

> *"But should competition some day disappear, because concerted effort will have been acknowledged as more beneficial than isolation, then will not every single individual inside the associations be equally egoistic and out for his own interests?"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 22]

he *"will extend his aid to those who will aid him, and then selfishness will no more be a curse but a blessing."* [*"Talking about Anarchy"*, **Black Flag**, no. 228, p. 28] Thus anarchists see co-operation and mutual aid as an expression of "self-interest", in that working with people as equals is in our joint benefit. In the words of John O'Neill:

> *"[F]or it is the institutions themselves that define what counts as one's interests. In particular, the market encourages egoism, not primarily because it encourages an individual to be 'self-interested' — it would be unrealistic not to expect individuals to act for the greater part in a 'self-interested' manner — but rather because it defines an individual's interests in a particularly narrow fashion, most notably in terms of possession of certain material goods. In consequence, where market mechanism enter a particular sphere of life, the pursuit of goods outside this narrow range of market goods is institutionally defined as an act of altruism."* [**The Market**, p. 158]

As such, anarchists would suggest that we should not confuse competition with self-interest and that a co-operative society would tend to promote institutions and customs which would ensure that people recognised that co-operation between equals maximises individual freedom and self-interest far more than individualistic pursuit to material wealth at the expense of all other goals. Ultimately, what use would it be to gain the world and loose what makes life worth living?

Of course, such a society would not be based on exactly equal shares of everything. Rather, it would mean equal opportunity and free, or equal, access to resources (for example, that only ill people use medical resources is unproblematic for egalitarians!). So a society with unequal distributions of resources is not automatically a non-anarchist one. What **is** against anar-



knowledge of the working process which actually doing it creates. The conflict over who controls the shop floor — either those who do the work or those who give the orders — not only shows that self-management is **possible** but also show how it can come about as it brings to the fore the awkward fact that while the bosses need us, we do not need them!

## I.3.3 What does socialisation mean?

A key aspect of anarchism is the socialisation of the means of life. This means that the land, housing, workplaces and so forth become common property, usable by all who need them. Thus Emma Goldman's summary:

> *"That each and every individual is and ought to be free to own himself and to enjoy the full fruit of his labour; that man is absolved from all allegiance to the kings of authority and capital; that he has, by the very fact of his being, free access to the land and all means of production, and entire liberty of disposing of the fruits of his efforts; that each and every individual has the unquestionable right of free and voluntary association with other equally sovereign individuals for economic, political, social, and other purposes, and that to achieve this end man must emancipate himself from the sacredness of property, the respect for man-made law, the fear of the Church, the cowardice of public opinion, the stupid arrogance of national, racial, religious, and sex superiority, and from the narrow puritanical conception of human life."* [**A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 2, pp. 450–1]

This is required because private ownership of collectively used "property" (such as workplaces and land) results in a situ-

ation where the many have to sell their labour (i.e., liberty) to the few who own it. This creates hierarchical and authoritarian social relationships as well as economic classes. For anarchists, society cannot be divided into *"a possessing and a non-possessing"* class system as this is *"a condition of social injustice"* as well as making the state *"indispensable to the possessing minority for the protection of its privileges."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 11] In other words, *"as long as land and capital are unappropriated, the workers are free, and that, when these have a master, the workers also are slaves."* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 21]

While there is a tendency by state socialists and the right to equate socialisation with nationalisation, there are key differences which the different names signify. Nationalisation, in practice and usually in theory, means that the means of life become state property. This means that rather than those who need and use a specific part of the co-operative commonwealth deciding what to do with it, the government does. As we discussed in section B.3.5 this would just be state capitalism, with the state replacing the current capitalist and landlords.

As Emma Goldman argued, there is a clear difference between socialisation and nationalisation. *"The first requirement of Communism,"* she argued, *"is the socialisation of the land and of the machinery of production and distribution. Socialised land and machinery belong to the people, to be settled upon and used by individuals and groups according to their needs."* Nationalisation, on the other hand, means that a resource *"belongs to the state; that is, the government has control of it and may dispose of it according to its wishes and views."* She stressed that *"when a thing is socialised, every individual has free access to it and may use it without interference from anyone."* When the state owned property, *"[s]uch a state of affairs may be called state capitalism, but it would be fantastic to consider it in any sense communistic."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 406–7]



## I.3.6 What about competition between syndicates?

This is a common question, particularly from defenders of capitalism. They argue that syndicates will not co-operate together unless forced to do so, and will compete against each other for raw materials, skilled workers, and so on. The result of this process, it is claimed, will be rich and poor syndicates, inequality within society and within the workplace, and (possibly) a class of unemployed workers from unsuccessful syndicates who are hired by successful ones. In other words, they argue that libertarian socialism will need to become authoritarian to prevent competition, and that if it does not do so it will become capitalist very quickly.

For individualist anarchists and mutualists, competition is not viewed as a problem. They think that competition, based around co-operatives and mutual banks, would minimise economic inequality, as the new economic structure based around free credit and co-operation would eliminate non-labour (i.e. unearned) income such as profit, interest and rent and give workers enough bargaining power to eliminate exploitation. For these anarchists it is a case of capitalism perverting competition and so are not against competition itself. Other anarchists think that whatever gains might accrue from competition (assuming there are, in fact, any) would be more than offset by its negative effects, which are outlined in section I.1.3. It is to these anarchists that the question is usually asked.

Before continuing, we would like to point out that individuals trying to improve their lot in life is not against anarchist principles. How could it be? *"Selfish is not a crime,"* John Most and Emma Goldman noted, *"it only becomes a crime when conditions are such as to give an individual the opportunity to satisfy his selfishness to the detriment of others. In an anarchistic society everyone will seek to satisfy his ego"* but in order to do so

work. However, this problem affects capitalist firms as well; and since syndicates are based on bottom-up decision making, its clear that, unlike a centralised capitalist corporation, administration would be smaller. In fact, it is likely that a fixed administration staff for the confederation would not exist in the first place! At the regular congresses, a particular syndicate may be selected to do the confederation's information processing, with this job being rotated regularly around different syndicates. In this way, a specific administrative body and equipment can be avoided and the task of collating information placed directly in the hands of ordinary workers. Further, it prevents the development of a bureaucratic elite by ensuring that **all** participants are versed in information-processing procedures.

Lastly, what information would be collected? That depends on the context. Individual syndicates would record inputs and outputs, producing summary sheets of information. For example, total energy input, in kilowatts and by type, raw material inputs, labour hours spent, orders received, orders accepted, output, and so forth. This information can be processed into energy use and labour time per product (for example), in order to give an idea of how efficient production is and how it is changing over time. For confederations, the output of individual syndicates can be aggregated and local and other averages can be calculated. In addition, changes in demand can be identified by this aggregation process and used to identify when investment will be needed or plants closed down. In this way the chronic slumps and booms of capitalism can be avoided without creating a system which is even more centralised than capitalism.



Socialisation aims at replacing property rights by use rights. The key to understanding socialisation is to remember that it is about **free access**. In other words, that every one has the same rights to the means of life as everyone else, that no one is exploited or oppressed by those who own the means of life. In the words of Herbert Read:

> *"The essential principle of anarchism is that mankind has reached a stage of development at which it is possible to abolish the old relationship of master-man (capitalist-proletarian) and substitute a relationship of egalitarian co-operation. This principle is based, not only on ethical ground, but also on economic grounds."* [**Anarchy and Order**, p. 92]

This implies two things. Firstly, that the means of life are common property, without an owning class. Secondly, there is free association between equals within any association and so industrial democracy (or self-management).

This has been an anarchist position as long as anarchism has been called anarchism. Thus we find Proudhon arguing in 1840 that *"the land is indispensable to our existence"* and *"consequently a common thing, consequently insusceptible of appropriation"* and that *"all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor."* This means *"the farmer does not appropriate the field which he sows"* and *"all capital ... being the result of collective labour"* is *"collective property."* Without this there is inequality and a restriction of freedom as *"the working-man holds his labour by the condescension and necessities of the master and proprietor."* The *"civilised labourer who bakes a loaf that he may eat a slice of bread . .. is not free. His employer ... is his enemy."* In fact, *"neither a commercial, nor an industrial, nor an agricultural association can be conceived of in the absence of equality."* The aim was a society of *"possessors*

*without masters"* rather than wage-labourers and tenants *"controlled by proprietors."* Within any economic association there would be democracy, with *"leaders, instructors, superintendents"* and so forth being *"chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves, and must fulfil the conditions of eligibility. It is the same with all public functions, whether of administration or instruction."* [**What is Property?**, p. 107, p. 130, p. 153, p. 128, p. 142, p. 227, p. 167 and p. 137]

This meant *"democratically organised workers associations"* and *"[u]nder the law of association, transmission of wealth does not apply to the instruments of labour, so cannot become a cause of inequality."* [Proudhon, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1., p. 62] Thus workplaces *"are the common and undivided property of all those who take part therein"* rather than *"companies of stockholders who plunder the bodies and souls of the wage workers."* This meant free access, with *"every individual employed in the association"* having *"an undivided share in the property of the company"* and has *"a right to fill any position"* as *"all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members."* Each member *"shall participate in the gains and in the losses of the company, in proportion to his [or her] services."* [Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 219 and p. 222] Proudhon's idea of free credit from a People's Bank, it should be noted, is another example of free access, of socialisation. Needless to say, anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin based their arguments for socialisation on this vision of self-managed workplaces and free access to the means of life. For Bakunin, for example, *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, on other words, by the agricultural and industrial associations."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174]

So the means of production are socialised in the mutualism, collectivism and communism and all rest on the same principle of equal access. So when someone joins an existing workers as-



> *are controlled by the plant in which they work and the locality in which they live ... they would have no decision-making powers. The adoption, modification or rejection of their plans would rest entirely with ... [those] involved."* [**Post Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 180]

Therefore, confederations would not be in positions of power over the individual syndicates. No attempt is made to determine which plants produce which steel for which customers in which manner. Thus, the confederations of syndicates ensure a decentralised, spontaneous economic order without the negative side-effects of capitalism (namely power concentrations within firms and in the market, periodic crises, etc.).

As one can imagine, an essential feature of these confederations will be the collection and processing of information in order to determine how an industry is developing. This does not imply bureaucracy or centralised control at the top. Taking the issue of centralisation first, the confederation is run by delegate assemblies, meaning that any officers elected at a congress only implement the decisions made by the delegates of the relevant syndicates. It is in the congresses and plenums of the confederation that new investment decisions, for example, are made. The key point to remember is that the confederation exists purely to co-ordinate joint activity and share information, it does not take an interest in how a workplace is run or what orders from consumers it fills. (Of course, if a given workplace introduces policies which other syndicates disapprove of, it can be expelled). As the delegates to these congresses and plenums are mandated and their decisions subject to rejection and modification by each productive unit, the confederation is not centralised.

As far as bureaucracy goes, the collecting and processing of information does necessitate an administrative staff to do the

in another (or the same) branch of industry, they have the same rights as the members of their new syndicate. In other words, by being part of the confederation, a worker ensures that s/he has the same rights and an equal say in whatever workplace is joined. This is essential to ensure that a co-operative society remains co-operative, as the system is based on the principle of *"one person, one vote"* by all those involved the work process. If specific syndicates **are** restricting access and so producing wage-labour, monopolising resources and so charging monopoly prices, the federation would be forum to publicly shame such syndicates and organise boycotts of them. Such anti-social activity is unlikely to be tolerated by a free people seeking to protect that freedom.

However, it could again be argued that these confederations are still centralised and that workers would still be following orders coming from above. This is incorrect, for any decisions concerning an industry or plant are under the direct control of those involved. For example, the steel industry confederation may decide to rationalise itself at one of its congresses. Murray Bookchin sketches the response to this situation as follows:

> *"[L]et us suppose that a board of highly qualified technicians is established [by this congress] to propose changes in the steel industry. This board ... advances proposals to rationalise the industry by closing down some plants and expanding the operation of others ... Is this a 'centralised' body or not? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, only in the sense that the board is dealing with problems that concern the country as a whole; no, because it can make no decision that **must** be executed for the country as a whole. The board's plan must be examined by all the workers in the plants [that are affected] ... The board itself has no power to enforce 'decisions'; it merely makes recommendations. Additionally, its personnel*



sociation they become full members of the co-operative, with the same rights and duties as existing members. In other words, they participate in the decisions on a basis of one person, one vote. How the products of that association are distributed vary in different types of anarchism, but the associations that create them are rooted in the free association of equals. In contrast, a capitalist society places the owner in the dominant position and new members of the workforce are employees and so subordinate members of an organisation which they have no say in (see section B.1).

Socialisation would mean that workplaces would become *"little republics of workingmen."* [Proudhon, quoted by Dorothy W. Douglas, *"Proudhon: A Prophet of 1848: Part II"*, pp. 35–59, **The American Journal of Sociology**, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 45] As economist David Ellerman explains, the democratic workplace *"is a social community, a community of work rather than a community residence. It is a republic, or **res publica** of the workplace. The ultimate governance rights are assigned as personal rights ... to the people who work in the firm ... This analysis shows how a firm can be socialised and yet remain 'private' in the sense of not being government-owned."* As noted in section I.3.1, this means the end of the labour market as there would be free access to workplaces and so workers would not be wage-labourers employed by bosses. Instead, there would be a people seeking associations to join and associations seeking new associates to work with. *"Instead of abolishing the employment relation,"* Ellerman argues, *"state socialism nationalised it ... Only the democratic firm — where the workers are jointly self-employed — is a genuine alternatives to private or public employment."* [**The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 76 and p. 209]

So libertarian socialism is based on decentralised decision making within the framework of socially-owned but independently-run and worker-self-managed syndicates. The importance of socialisation should not be downplayed. This

is because the self-management of work is not sufficient in and of itself to ensure an anarchist society. Under feudalism, the peasants managed their own labour but such a regime was hardly libertarian for, at a minimum, the peasants paid the landlord rent. An industrial equivalent can be imagined, where workers hire workplaces and land from capitalists and landlords. As left-wing economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson suggests:

> *"Assume that the workers are self-employed but do not own all the means of production. In this case there still may be powerful owners of factories, offices and machines ... the owners of the means of production would still receive an income, emanating from that ownership. In bargaining with these owners, the workers would be required to concede the claim of these owners to an income, as they would be unable to produce without making use of the means of production owned by others. Hence the workers would still be deprived of ... 'surplus value'. Profits would still derive from ownership of the means of production."* [**Economics and Utopia**, p. 168]

This would not be (libertarian) socialism (as workers would still be exploited) nor would it be capitalism (as there is no wage labour as such, although there would be a proletariat). Thus genuine anarchism requires socialisation of the means of life, which ensures free access (no usury). In other words, self-management (while an essential part of anarchism) is not sufficient to make a society anarchistic. Without socialism (free access to the means of life) it would be yet another class system and rooted in exploitation. To eliminate all exploitation, social anarchists propose that productive assets such as workplaces and land be owned by society as a whole and run by syndicates and self-employed individuals. Thus Kropotkin: *"Free workers,*



> *trade union organisations, in accordance with the council for the economy. They would become normalised, the working day would become more equal or what comes to the same thing, the differences between workers of different activities would end ...*
>
> *"Socialisation is — and let its detractors hear it — the genuine authentic organisation of the economy. Undoubtedly the economy has to be organised; but not according to the old methods, which are precisely those which we are destroying, but in accordance with new norms which will make our people become an example to the world proletariat."* [**Solidaridad Obrera**, 30 April 1937, p. l2]

Workers' self-management does not automatically mean that all forms of economic domination and exploitation would be eliminated. After all, in a market economy firms can accrue super-profits simply because of their size or control over a specific technology or resource. Hence Proudhon's suggestion that *"advocates of mutualism"* would *"regulate the market"* to ensure *"an honest breakdown of cost prices"*, fix *"after amicable discussion of a* ***maximum*** *and* ***minimum*** *profit margin"* and *"the organising of regulating societies."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 70] It seems likely that the agro-industrial federation would be the body which ensures that. Similarly, the federation would be the means by which to air, and deal with, suggestions that syndicates are monopolising their resources, i.e., treating them as private property rather than socialised possessions. Thus the federation would unite workers *"to guarantee the mutual use of the tools of production"* which are, *"by a reciprocal contract"*, the *"collective property of the whole."* [James Guillaume, *"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 376]

The inter-industry confederations help ensure that when the members of a syndicate change work to another syndicate

*the confederal council of production and distribution, applying for whatever they may need and [giving] any available surplus stocks.*" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 107] This clearly followed Kropotkin's comments that the *"socialising of production, consumption, and exchange"* would be based on workplaces *"belong[ing] to federated Communes."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 136]

The legacy of capitalism, with its rich and poor areas, its rich and poor workplaces, will be a problem any revolution will face. The inequalities produced by centuries of class society will take time to change. This is one of the tasks of the confederation, to ensure the socialisation of both production and consumption so that people are not penalised for the accidents of history and that each commune can develop itself to an adequate level. In the words of the CNT during the Spanish Revolution:

> *"Many arguments are used against the idea of socialisation; one of these — the most delightful — says that by socialising an industry we simply take it over and run it with the consequence that we have flourishing industries where the workers are privileged, and unfortunate industries where the workers get less benefits but have to work harder than workers elsewhere ... There are differences between the workers in prosperous industries and those which barely survive... Such anomalies, which we don't deny exist, are attributed to the attempts at socialisation. We firmly assert that the opposite is true; such anomalies are the logical result of the absence of socialisation.*
>
> *"The socialisation which we propose will resolve these problems which are used to attack it. Were Catalan industry socialised, everything would be organically linked — industry, agriculture, and the*



*on free land, with free machinery, and freely using all the powers given to man by science.*" [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 102]

This vision of socialisation, of free access, also applies to housing. Proudhon, for example, suggested that payments of rent in housing under capitalism would be *"carried over to the account of the purchase of the property"* and once paid for the house *"shall pass under the control of the town administration ... in the name of all the tenants, and shall guarantee them all a domicile, in perpetuity, at the cost of the building."* Rented farm land would be the same and would, once paid for, *"revert immediately to the town, which shall take the place of the former proprietor."* Provision *"shall be made for the supervision of the towns, for the installation of cultivators, and for the fixing of the boundaries of possessions."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 194 and p. 199] Kropotkin had a similar end in mind, namely *"the abolition of rent"*, but by different means, namely by *"the expropriation of houses"* during a social revolution. This would be *"the communalising of houses and the right of each family to a decent dwelling."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 91 and p. 95]

It is important to note here that while anarchists tend to stress communes (see section I.5) this does **not** imply communal living in the sense of one-big family. As Kropotkin, for example, was at pains to stress such continual communal living is *"repugnant to millions of human beings. The most reserved man [and woman] certainly feels the necessity of meeting his [or her] fellows for the pursue of common work ... But it is not so for the hours of leisure, reserved for rest and intimacy."* Communal living in the sense of a human bee-hive *"can please some, and even all at a certain period of their life, but the great mass prefers family life (family life of the future, be it understood). They prefer isolated apartments."* A community living together under one roof *"would be hateful, were it the general rule. Isolation, alternating with time spent in society, is the normal desire of human nature."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 123–4] Thus the aim is *"Communism, but not the monastic or barrack-room Communism formerly advo-*

*cated [by state socialists], but the free Communism which places the products reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his [or her] own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7] Needless to say, each household, like each workplace, would be under the control of its users and socialisation exists to ensure that remains the case (i.e., that people cannot become tenants/subjects of landlords).

See section I.6 for a discussion of how socialisation and free access could work.

Beyond this basic vision of self-management and socialisation, the schools of anarchism vary. Mutualism eliminates wage labour and unites workers with the means of production they use. Such a system is socialist as it is based on self-management and workers' control/ownership of the means of production. However, other social anarchists argue that such a system is little more than "petit-bourgeois co-operativism" in which the worker-owners of the co-operatives compete in the marketplace with other co-operatives for customers, profits, raw materials, etc. — a situation that could result in many of the same problems that arise under capitalism or even a return to capitalism (see section I.1.3). Some Mutualists recognise this danger. Proudhon, as discussed in section I.3.5, advocated an agro-industrial federation to combat the effects of market forces in generating inequality and wage labour. In addition, supporters of mutualism can point to the fact that existing co-operatives rarely fire their members and are far more egalitarian in nature than corresponding capitalist firms. This they argue will ensure that mutualism will remain socialist, with easy credit available to those who are made unemployed to start their own co-operatives again.

In contrast, within anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-communism society as a whole owns the means of life, which allows for the elimination of both competition for survival and the tendency for workers to develop a proprietary interest



income from agricultural produce be paid into a central fund which would be used to make equalisation payments to compensate farmers with less favourably situated or less fertile land. As he put it, economic rent *"in agriculture has no other cause than the inequality in the quality of land ... if anyone has a claim on account of this inequality ... [it is] the other land workers who hold inferior land. That is why in our scheme for liquidation [of capitalism] we stipulated that every variety of cultivation should pay a proportional contribution, destined to accomplish a balancing of returns among farm workers and an assurance of products."* In addition, *"all the towns of the Republic shall come to an understanding for equalising among them the quality of tracts of land, as well as accidents of culture."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 209 and p. 200]

By federating together, workers can ensure that *"the earth will ... be an economic domain available to everyone, the riches of which will be enjoyed by all human beings."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 93] Local deficiencies of raw materials, in the quality of land, and, therefore, supplies would be compensated from outside, by the socialisation of production and consumption. This would allow all of humanity to share and benefit from economic activity, so ensuring that well-being for all is possible.

Federation would eliminate the possibility of rich and poor collectives and syndicates co-existing side by side. As Kropotkin argued, *"[c]ommon possession of the necessities for production implies the common enjoyment of the fruits of common production ... when everybody, contributing for the common well-being to the full extent of his [or her] capacities, shall enjoy also from the common stock of society to the fullest possible extent of his [or her] needs."* [**Anarchism**, p. 59] Hence we find the CNT arguing in its 1936 resolution on libertarian communism that *"[a]s far as the interchange of produce between communes is concerned, the communal councils are to liase with the regional federations of communes and with*

> *was decided by a few higher bureaucratic committees without consulting the rank and file members of the union. Here libertarian democracy was practised. As in the C.N.T. there was a reciprocal double structure; from the grass roots at the base … upwards, and in the other direction a reciprocal influence from the federation of these same local units at all levels downwards, from the source back to the source."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 105]

The exact nature of any confederal responsibilities will vary, although we *"prefer decentralised management; but ultimately, in practical and technical problems, we defer to free experience."* [Luigi Fabbri, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24] The specific form of organisation will obviously vary as required from industry to industry, area to area, but the underlying ideas of self-management and free association will be the same. Moreover, the *"essential thing … is that its [the confederation or guild] function should be kept down to the minimum possible for each industry."* [Cole, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61]

Another important role for inter-syndicate federations is to even-out inequalities. After all, each area will not be identical in terms of natural resources, quality of land, situation, accessibility, and so on. Simply put, social anarchists *"believe that because of natural differences in fertility, health and location of the soil it would be impossible to ensure that every individual enjoyed equal working conditions."* Under such circumstances, it would be *"impossible to achieve a state of equality from the beginning"* and so *"justice and equity are, for natural reasons, impossible to achieve … and that freedom would thus also be unachievable."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 16 and p. 21]

This was recognised by Proudhon, who saw the need for economic federation due to differences in raw materials, quality of land and so on, and as such argued that a portion of



the enterprises in which they work. As Kropotkin argued, *"[t]here is no reason why the factory … should not belong to the community … It is evident that now, under the capitalist system, the factory is the curse of the village, as it comes to overwork children and to make paupers of its male inhabitants; and it is quite natural that it should be opposed by all means by the workers … But under a more rational social organisation, the factory would find no such obstacles; it would be a boon to the village."* Needless to say, such a workplace would be based on workers' self-management, as *"the workers … ought to be the real managers of industries."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 152 and p. 157] This *"socially organised industrial production"* (to use Kropotkin's term) would ensure a decent standard of living without the problems associated with a market, even a non-capitalist one.

In other words, the economy is communalised, with land and the means of production being turned into common "property". The community determines the social and ecological framework for production while the workforce makes the day-to-day decisions about what to produce and how to do it. This is because a system based purely on workplace assemblies effectively disenfranchises those individuals who do not work but live with the effects of production (e.g., ecological disruption). In Murray Bookchin's words, the aim would be to advance *"a holistic approach to an ecologically oriented economy"* with key policy decisions *"made by citizens in face-to-face assemblies — as **citizens**, not simply as workers, farmers, or professionals … As citizens, they would function in such assemblies by their highest level — their **human** level — rather than as socially ghettoised beings. They would express their general human interests, not their particular status interests."* These communalised economies would join with others *"into a regional confederal system. Land, factories, and workshops would be controlled by the popular assemblies of free communities, not by a nation-state or by worker-producers*

*who might very well develop a proprietary interest in them.*" [**Remaking Society**, p. 194]

An important difference between workplace and community assemblies is that the former can be narrow in focus while the latter can give a hearing to solutions that bring out the common ground of people as people rather than as workers in a specific workplace or industry. This would be in the context of communal participation, through face-to-face voting of the whole community in local neighbourhood and confederal assemblies, which will be linked together through voluntary federations. It does **not** mean that the state owns the means of production, as under Marxism-Leninism or social democracy, because there is no state under libertarian socialism (for more on community assemblies, see section I.5).

This means that when a workplace is communalised workers' self-management is placed within the broader context of the community, becoming an aspect of community control. This does not mean that workers' do not control what they do or how they do it. Rather, it means that the framework within which they make their decisions is determined by the community. For example, the local community may decide that production should maximise recycling and minimise pollution, and workers informed of this decision make investment and production decisions accordingly. In addition, consumer groups and co-operatives may be given a voice in the confederal congresses of syndicates or even in the individual workplaces (although it would be up to local communities to decide whether this would be practical or not). In these ways, consumers could have a say in the administration of production and the type and quality of the product, adding their voice and interests in the creation as well as the consumption of a product.

Given the general principle of social ownership and the absence of a state, there is considerable leeway regarding the specific forms that collectivisation might take — for example, in re-



ety would see numerous small-scale, local activities which would ensure creativity, diversity, and flexibility. Only after these activities had spread across society would confederal co-ordination become necessary. So while production will be based on autonomous networking, the investment response to consumer actions would, to some degree, be co-ordinated by a confederation of syndicates in that branch of production. By such means, the confederation can ensure that resources are not wasted by individual syndicates over-producing goods or over-investing in response to changes in production. By communicating across workplaces, people can overcome the barriers to co-ordinating their plans which one finds in market systems (see section C.7.2) and so avoid the economic and social disruptions associated with them.

Thus, major investment decisions would be made at congresses and plenums of the industry's syndicates, by a process of horizontal, negotiated co-ordination. Major investment decisions are co-ordinated at an appropriate level, with each unit in the confederation being autonomous, deciding what to do with its own productive capacity in order to meet social demand. Thus we have self-governing production units co-ordinated by confederations (horizontal negotiation), which ensures local initiative (a vital source of flexibility, creativity, and diversity) and a rational response to changes in social demand. As links between syndicates are non-hierarchical, each syndicate remains self-governing. This ensures decentralisation of power and direct control, initiative, and experimentation by those involved in doing the work.

It should be noted that during the Spanish Revolution successfully federated in different ways. Gaston Leval noted that these forms of confederation did not harm the libertarian nature of self-management:

> *"Everything was controlled by the syndicates. But it must not therefore be assumed that everything*

operatives under capitalism have shown, support networks are essential for co-operatives to survive. It is no co-incidence that the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque region of Spain has a credit union and mutual support networks between its co-operatives and is by far the most successful co-operative system in the world. The *"agro-industrial federation"* exists precisely for these reasons.

Under collectivist and communist anarchism, the federations would have addition tasks. There are two key roles. Firstly, the sharing and co-ordination of information produced by the syndicates and, secondly, determining the response to the changes in production and consumption indicated by this information.

Confederations (negotiated-co-ordination bodies) would be responsible for clearly defined branches of production, and in general, production units would operate in only one branch of production. These confederations would have direct links to other confederations and the relevant communal confederations, which supply the syndicates with guidelines for decision making (see section I.4.4) and ensure that common problems can be highlighted and discussed. These confederations exist to ensure that information is spread between workplaces and to ensure that the industry responds to changes in social demand. In other words, these confederations exist to co-ordinate major new investment decisions (i.e. if demand exceeds supply) and to determine how to respond if there is excess capacity (i.e. if supply exceeds demand).

It should be pointed out that these confederated investment decisions will exist along with the investments associated with the creation of new syndicates, plus internal syndicate investment decisions. We are not suggesting that **every** investment decision is to be made by the confederations. (This would be particularly impossible for **new** industries, for which a confederation would not exist!) Therefore, in addition to co-ordinated production units, an anarchist society would have confederations to co-ordinate investment decisions and to co-ordinate production.



gard to methods of distribution, the use or non-use of money, etc. — as can be seen by the different systems worked out in various areas of Spain during the Revolution of 1936–39. Nevertheless, freedom is undermined when some communities are poor while others are wealthy. Therefore the method of surplus distribution must insure that all communities have an adequate share of pooled revenues and resources held at higher levels of confederation as well as guaranteed minimum levels of public services and provisions to meet basic human needs. That is why anarchists have supported the need for syndicates and communities to federate (see next section)

Finally, one key area of disagreement between anarchist schools is how far socialisation should go. Mutualists think that it should only include the means of production while communist-anarchists argue that socialisation, to be consistent, must embrace what is produced as well as what produced it. Collectivist-anarchists tend to agree with mutualists on this, although many think that, over time, the economy would evolve into communism as the legacies of capitalism and scarcity are overcome. Proudhon spoke for the mutualists:

> *"This, then, is the first point settled: property in product, if we grant so much, does not carry with it property in the means of production; that seems to me to need no further demonstration ... all ... are proprietors of their products — not one is proprietor of the means of production. The right to product is exclusive — **jus in re**; the right to means is common — **jus ad rem**."* [**What is Property?**, pp. 120–1]

For libertarian communists, socialisation should be extended to the products of labour as well. This means that as well as having free access to the means of production, people would also have free access to the goods and services produced by them. Again, this does not imply people having

to share the possessions they use. Rather it means that instead of having to buy the goods in question they are distributed freely, according to need. To maintain socialisation of the means of product but not in goods means basing society *"on two absolutely opposed principles, two principles that contradict one another continually."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 163] The need is to go beyond the abolition of wage labour into the abolition of money (the wages system). This is because any attempt at measuring a person's contribution to society will be flawed and, more importantly, people *"differ from one another by the amount of their **needs**. There is the young unmarried woman and the mother of a family of five or six children. For the employer of our days there is no consideration of the needs of"* each and *"the labour cheque ... acts in the same way."* [Kropotkin, **Act For Yourselves**, pp. 108–9]

Regardless of precisely which mode of distribution specific individuals, workplaces, communes or areas picks, socialisation would be underlying all. Free access to the means of production will ensure free individuals, including the freedom to experiment with different anarchistic economic systems.

## I.3.4 What relations would exist between individual syndicates?

Just as individuals associate together to work on and overcome common problems, so would syndicates. Few, if any, workplaces are totally independent of others. They require raw materials as inputs and consumers for their products. Therefore there will be links between different syndicates. These links are twofold: firstly, free agreements between individual syndicates; secondly, confederations of syndicates (within branches of industry and regionally).

Combined with this desire for free co-operation is a desire to end centralised systems. The opposition to centralisation is



Confederations would exist for specific reasons. Mutualists, as can be seen from Proudhon, are aware of the dangers associated with even a self-managed, socialistic market and create support structures to defend workers' self-management. Moreover, it is likely that industrial syndicates would be linked to mutual banks (a credit syndicate). Such syndicates would exist to provide interest-free credit for self-management, new syndicate expansion and so on. And if the experience of capitalism is anything to go by, mutual banks will also reduce the business cycle as *"[c]ountries like Japan and Germany that are usually classifies as bank-centred — because banks provide more outside finance than markets, and because more firms have long-term relationships with their banks — show greater growth in and stability of investment over time than the market-centred ones, like the US and Britain ... Further, studies comparing German and Japanese firms with tight bank ties to those without them also show that firms with bank ties exhibit greater stability in investment over the business cycle."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 174–5]

One argument against co-operatives is that they do not allow the diversification of risk (all the worker's eggs are on one basket). Ignoring the obvious point that most workers today do not have shares and are dependent on their job to survive, this objection can be addressed by means of *"the **horizontal association** or grouping of enterprises to pool their business risk. The Mondragon co-operatives are associated together in a number of regional groups that pool their profits in varying degrees. Instead of a worker diversifying his or her capital in six companies, six companies partially pool their profits in a group or federation and accomplish the same risk-reduction purpose without transferable equity capital."* Thus *"risk-pooling in federations of co-operatives"* ensure that *"transferable equity capital is not necessary to obtain risk diversification in the flow of annual worker income."* [David Ellerman, **The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 104] Moreover, as the example of many isolated co-

through their power to elect mandated and recallable delegates to meetings of higher confederal units. It would be fair to make the assumption that the "higher" up the federation a decision is made, the more general it will be. Due to the complexity of life it would be difficult for federations which cover wide areas to plan large-scale projects in any detail and so would be, in practice, more forums for agreeing guidelines and priorities than planning actual specific projects or economies. As Russian anarcho-syndicalist G.P. Maximov put it, the aim *"was to co-ordinate all activity, all local interest, to create a centre but not a centre of decrees and ordinances but a centre of regulation, of guidance — and only through such a centre to organise the industrial life of the country."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **For Workers' Power**, p. 330]

So this is a decentralised system, as the workers' assemblies and councils at the base having the final say on **all** policy decisions, being able to revoke policies made by those with delegated decision-making power and to recall those who made them:

> *"When it comes to the material and technical method of production, anarchists have no preconceived solutions or absolute prescriptions, and bow to what experience and conditions in a free society recommend and prescribe. What matters is that, whatever the type of production adopted, it should be the free choice of the producers themselves, and cannot possibly be imposed, any more than any form is possible of exploitations of another's labour... Anarchists do not* ***a priori*** *exclude any practical solution and likewise concede that there may be a number of different solutions at different times."* [Luigi Fabbri, *"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 22]



often framed in a distinctly false manner. This can be seen when Alex Nove, a leading market socialist, argued that *"there are horizontal links (market), there are vertical links (hierarchy). What other dimension is there?"* [**The Economics of Feasible Socialism**, p. 226] In other words, to oppose central planning means to embrace the market. This is not true: horizontal links need not be market based any more than vertical links need be hierarchical. An anarchist society must be based essentially on horizontal links between individuals and associations, freely co-operating together as they (not a central body) sees fit. This co-operation will be source of many links in an anarchist economy. When a group of individuals or associations meet together and discuss common interests and make common decisions they will be bound by their own decisions. This is radically different from a central body giving out orders because those affected will determine the content of these decisions. In other words, instead of decisions being handed down from the top, they will be created from the bottom up.

Let us consider free agreement. Anarchists recognise the importance of letting people organise their own lives. This means that they reject central planning and instead urge direct links between workers' associations. In the words of Kropotkin, *"[f]ree workers would require a free organisation, and this cannot have any other basis than free agreement and free co-operation, without sacrificing the autonomy of the individual."* Those directly involved in production (and in consumption) know their needs far better than any bureaucrat. Thus voluntary agreement is the basis of a free economy, such agreements being *"entered by free consent, as a free choice between different courses equally open to each of the agreeing parties."* [**Anarchism**, p. 52 and p. 69] Without the concentration of wealth and power associated with capitalism, free agreement will become real and no longer a mask for hierarchy.

The anarchist economy *"starts from below, not from above. Like an organism, this free society grows into being from the simple unit up to the complex structure. The need for ... the individual struggle for life"* is *"sufficient to set the whole complex social machinery in motion. Society is the result of the individual struggle for existence; it is not, as many suppose, opposed to it."* So anarchists think that *"[i]n the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters!] to produce ... all that was necessary for life, driven by no other force than his [or her] desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and co-operates and enters into agreements with others because by so doing it extends its own possibilities."* This suggests a decentralised economy — even more decentralised than capitalism (which is decentralised only in capitalist mythology, as shown by big business and transnational corporations, for example) — one *"growing ever more closely bound together and interwoven by free and mutual agreements."* [George Barrett, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 18]

An anarchist economy would be based on spontaneous order as workers practised mutual aid and free association. For communist anarchists, this would take the form of *"free exchange without the medium of money and without profit, on the basis of requirement and the supply at hand."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 217] *"Anarchists"*, summarised Rocker, *"desire a federation of free communities which shall be bound to one another by their common economic and social interest and shall arrange their affairs by mutual agreement and free contract."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 1] An example of one such agreement would be orders for products and services:

> *"This factory of ours is, then, to the fullest extent consistent with the character of its service, a self-governing unit, managing its own productive operations, and free to experiment to the heart's content in new methods, to develop new styles and*



a certain type) and a regional one (i.e. a federation of all syndicates within a given economic area). Thus there would be a federation for each industry and a federation of all syndicates in a geographical area. Both would operate at different levels, meaning there would be confederations for both industrial and inter-industrial associations at the local and regional levels and beyond. The basic aim of this inter-industry and cross-industry networking is to ensure that the relevant information is spread across the various parts of the economy so that each can effectively co-ordinate its plans with the others in a way which minimises ecological and social harm. Thus there would be a railway workers confederation to manage the rail network but the local, regional and national depots and stations would send a delegate to meet regularly with the other syndicates in the same geographical area to discuss general economic issues.

However, it is essential to remember that each syndicate within the confederation is autonomous. The confederations seek to co-ordinate activities of joint interest (in particular investment decisions for new plant and the rationalisation of existing plant in light of reduced demand). They do not determine what work a syndicate does or how they do it:

> *"With the factory thus largely conducting its own concerns, the duties of the larger Guild organisations [i.e. confederations] would be mainly those of co-ordination, or regulation, and of representing the Guild in its external relations. They would, where it was necessary, co-ordinate the production of various factories, so as to make supply coincide with demand... they would organise research ... This large Guild organisation... must be based directly on the various factories included in the Guild."* [Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 59–60]

So it is important to note that the lowest units of confederation — the workers' assemblies — will control the higher levels,

*three words: **Agro-industrial federation**"* This was required because *"[h]owever impeccable in its basic logic the federal principle may be ... it will not survive if economic factors tend persistently to dissolve it. In other words, political right requires to be buttressed by economic right"*. A free society could not survive if *"capital and commerce"* existed, as it would be *"divided into two classes — one of landlords, capitalists, and entrepreneurs, the other of wage-earning proletarians, one rich, the other poor."* Thus *"in an economic context, confederation may be intended to provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry ... The purpose of such specific federal arrangements is to protect the citizens ... from capitalist and financial exploitation, both from within and from the outside; in their aggregate they form ... an **agro-industrial federation**"* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 74, p. 67 and p. 70]

While capitalism results in *"interest on capital"* and *"wage-labour or economic servitude, in short inequality of condition"*, the *"agro-industrial federation ... will tend to foster increasing equality ... through mutualism in credit and insurance ... guaranteeing the right to work and to education, and an organisation of work which allows each labourer to become a skilled worker and an artist, each wage-earner to become his own master."* The *"industrial federation"* will apply *"on the largest scale"* the *"principles of mutualism"* and *"economic solidarity"*. As *"industries are sisters"*, they *"are parts of the same body"* and *"one cannot suffer without the others sharing in its suffering. They should therefore federate ... in order to guarantee the conditions of common prosperity, upon which no one has an exclusive claim."* Thus mutualism sees *"all industries guaranteeing one another mutually"* as well as *"organising all public services in an economical fashion and in hands other than the state's."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 70, p. 71, p. 72 and p. 70]

Later anarchists took up, built upon and clarified these ideas of economic federation. There are two basic kinds of confederation: an industrial one (i.e., a federation of all workplaces of



> *products... This autonomy of the factory is the safeguard... against the dead level of mediocrity, the more than adequate substitute for the variety which the competitive motive was once supposed to stimulate, the guarantee of liveliness, and of individual work and workmanship."* [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 59]

This means that free agreement will ensure that customers would be able to choose their own suppliers, meaning that production units would know whether they were producing what their customers wanted, when they wanted it (i.e., whether they were meeting individual and social needs). If they were not, customers would go elsewhere, to other production units within the same branch of production. We should stress that in addition to this negative check (i.e. "exit" by consumers) it is likely, via consumer groups and co-operatives as well as communes, that workplaces will be subject to positive checks on what they produced. Consumer groups, by formulating and communicating needs to producer groups, will have a key role in ensuring the quality of production and goods and that it satisfies their needs (see section I.4.7 for more details of this).

These direct horizontal links between syndicates are essential to ensure that goods are produced which meet the needs of those who requested them. Without specific syndicates requesting specific goods at specific times to meet specific requirements, an economy will not meet people's needs. A central plan, for example, which states that 1 million tonnes of steel or 25 million shirts need to be produced in a year says nothing about what specifically needs to be produced and when, which depends on how it will be used and the needs of those using it. As Malatesta argued, *"it would be an absurd waste of energy to produce blindly for all possible needs, rather than calculating the actual needs and organising to satisfy them with as little effort as possible ... the solution*

*lies in accord between people and in the agreements … that will come about"* between them. [**At the Café**, pp. 62–3] Hence the pressing need for the classic anarchist ideas on free association, free agreement and mutual aid! These direct links between producer and consumer can communicate the information required to produce the right thing at the right time! As Kropotkin argued (based on his firsthand experience of state capitalism in Russia under Lenin):

> *"production and exchange represent an undertaking so complicated that the plans of the state socialists … would prove to be absolutely ineffective as soon as they were applied to life. No government would be able to organise production if the workers themselves through their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee. It is certainly impossible to foresee everything. Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can co-operate in the development of a new social system and find the best solutions for the thousands of local needs."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 76–77]

This brings us to the second form of relationships between syndicates, namely confederations of syndicates in the same industry or geographical area. It should be noted that inter-workplace federations are not limited to collectivist, syndicalist and communist anarchists. The idea of federations of syndicates goes back to Proudhon's agro-industrial federation, first raised during the 1848 revolution and named as such in his 1863 book, **The Principle of Federation**. The French mutualist suggested an *"agro-industrial federation"* as the structural support organisation for his system of self-managed co-operatives. These confederations of syndicates,



delegates, the workers' assemblies at the base would be the source of, and final "authority" (so to speak) over, policy for all higher levels of confederal co-ordination of the economy. Delegates will be ordinary workers rather than paid full-time representatives or union leaders, and they will return to their usual jobs as soon as the mandate for which they have been elected has been carried out. In this way, decision-making power remains with the workers' councils and does not become concentrated at the top of a bureaucratic hierarchy in an elite class of professional administrators or union leaders. What these confederations could do is discussed in the next section.

In summary, a free society *"is freely organised, from the bottom to top, staring from individuals that unite in associations which slowly grow bit by bit into ever more complex federations of associations"*. [Malatesta, **At the Cafe**, p. 65]

## I.3.5 What would confederations of syndicates do?

Voluntary confederation among syndicates is considered necessary by social anarchists for numerous reasons but mostly in order to decide on the policies governing relations between syndicates and to co-ordinate their activities. This could vary from agreeing technical standards, to producing guidelines and policies on specific issues, to agreeing major investment decisions or prioritising certain large-scale economic projects or areas of research. In addition, they would be the means by which disputes could be solved and any tendencies back towards capitalism or some other class society identified and acted upon.

This can be seen from Proudhon, who was the first to suggest the need for such federations. *"All my economic ideas developed over the last twenty-five years,"* he stated, *"can be defined in*

ing allocated tasks by some central body and expected to fulfil them (a task which, ignoring the real issues of bureaucracy and freedom, would be difficult to implement in any large and complex economy). Rather, workplaces would have the power to select tasks submitted to them by other associations (economic and communal) and control how the work required to achieve them was done. In this type of economic system, workers' assemblies and councils would be the focal point, formulating policies for their individual workplaces and deliberating on industry-wide or economy-wide issues through general meetings of the whole workforce in which everyone would participate in decision making. Voting in the councils would be direct, whereas in larger confederal bodies, voting would be carried out by temporary, unpaid, mandated, and instantly recallable delegates, who would resume their status as ordinary workers as soon as their mandate had been carried out.

**Mandated** here means that the delegates from workers' assemblies and councils to meetings of higher confederal bodies would be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the workers who elected them on how to deal with any issue. They would be delegates, not representatives, and so would attend any confederal meeting with specific instructions on how to vote on a particular issue. **Recallable** means that if they do not vote according to that mandate they will be replaced and the results of the vote nullified. The delegates, in other words, would be given imperative mandates (binding instructions) that committed them to a framework of policies within which they would have to act, and they could be recalled and their decisions revoked at any time for failing to carry out the mandates they were given (this support for mandated delegates has existed in anarchist theory since at least 1848, when Proudhon argued that it was *"a consequence of universal suffrage"* to ensure that *"the people ... do not ... abjure their sovereignty."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63]). Because of this right of mandating and recalling their



are necessary to aid communication between workplaces. No syndicate exists in isolation, and so there is a real need for a means by which syndicates can meet together to discuss common interests and act on them. Thus confederations are complementary to free agreement and also reflect anarchist ideas of free association and decentralised organisation as well as concern for practical needs:

> *"Anarchists are strenuously opposed to the authoritarian, centralist spirit ... So they picture a future social life in the basis of federalism, from the individual to the municipality, to the commune, to the region, to the nation, to the international, on the basis of solidarity and free agreement. And it is natural that this ideal should be reflected also in the organisation of production, giving preference as far as possible, to a decentralised sort of organisation; but this does not take the form of an absolute rule to be applied in every instance. A libertarian order would be in itself ... rule out the possibility of imposing such a unilateral solution."* [Luigi Fabbri, *"Anarchy and 'Scientific Communism"*, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 23]

A confederation of syndicates (called a *"guild"* by some libertarian socialists, or *"industrial union"* by others) works on two levels: within an industry and across industries. The basic operating principle of these confederations is the same as that of the syndicate itself — voluntary co-operation between equals in order to meet common needs. In other words, each syndicate in the confederation is linked by horizontal agreements with the others, and none owe any obligations to a separate entity above the group (see section A.2.11 for more on the nature of anarchist confederation). As Herbert Read summarised:

> *"The general principle is clear: each industry forms itself into a federation of self-governing collectives; the control of each industry is wholly in the hands of the workers in that industry, and these collectives administer the whole economic life of the country."* [**Anarchy and Order**, p. 49]

Kropotkin's comments on federalism between communes indicate this (a syndicate can be considered as a producers' commune). *"The Commune of tomorrow,"* he argued *"will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as other communes."* So federalism need not conflict with autonomy, as each member would have extensive freedom of action within its boundaries and so each *"Commune will be absolutely free to adopt all the institutions it wishes and to make all the reforms and revolutions it finds necessary."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83] Moreover, these federations would be diverse and functional. Economic federation would a produce a complex internetworking between associations and federations:

> *"Our needs are in fact so various, and they emerge with such rapidity, that soon a single federation will not be sufficient to satisfy them all. The Commune will then feel the need to contract other alliances, to enter into other federations. Belonging to one group for the acquisition of food supplies, it will have to join a second group to obtain other goods, such as metals, and then a third and a fourth group for textiles and works of art."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87]

Therefore, a confederation of syndicates would be adaptive to its members needs. As Tom Brown argued, the *"syndicalist mode of organisation is extremely elastic, therein is its chief strength, and the regional confederations can be formed, modified, added to or reformed according to local conditions and changing circumstances."* [**Syndicalism**, p. 58]



As would be imagined, these confederations are voluntary associations and *"[j]ust as factory autonomy is vital in order to keep the Guild system alive and vigorous, the existence of varying democratic types of factories in independence of the National Guilds may also be a means of valuable experiment and fruitful initiative of individual minds. In insistently refusing to carry their theory to its last 'logical' conclusion, the Guildsmen [and anarchists] are true to their love of freedom and varied social enterprise."* [G.D.H. Cole, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] This, it must be stressed does not mean centralised control from the top:

> *"But when we say that ownership of the tools of production, including the factory itself, should revert to the corporation [i.e. confederation] we do not mean that the workers in the individual workshops will be ruled by any kind of industrial government having power to do what it pleases with the tools of production. No, the workers in the various factories have not the slightest intention of handing over their hard-won control ... to a superior power ... What they will do is ... to guarantee reciprocal use of their tools of production and accord their fellow workers in other factories the right to share their facilities, receiving in exchange the same right to share the facilities of the fellow workers with whom they have contracted the pact of solidarity."* [James Guillaume, *"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 363–364]

So collectivist and communist anarchism, like mutualism, is rooted in self-management in the workplace. This implies the ability of workers to pick the kinds of productive tasks they want to do. It would not be the case of workplaces simply be-

It should not be forgotten that communism has two conditions, distribution according to need **and** production according to ability. If the latter condition is not met, if someone does not contribute to the goods available in the libertarian communist society, then the former condition is not likely to be tolerated and they would be asked to leave so reducing demand for goods. The freedom to associate means being free **not** to associate. Thus a free communist society would see goods being supplied as well as demanded. As Malatesta argued:

> *"Basic to the anarchist system, before communism or any other forms of social conviviality is the principle of the free compact; the rule of integral communism — 'from each according to his [or her] ability, to each according to his [or her] need' — applies only to those who accept it, including naturally the conditions which make it practicable."* [quoted by Camillo Berneri, *"The Problem of Work"*, pp. 59–82, **Why Work?**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 74]

So, as Malatesta suggested, it should be noted that communist-anarchists are well aware that it is likely that free access to all goods and services cannot be done immediately (see section H.2.5 for details). As Alexander Berkman summarised, *"when the social revolution attains the stage where it can produce sufficient for all, then is adopted the Anarchist principle of 'to each according to his [or her] needs' ... But until it is reached, the system of equal sharing . .. is imperative as the only just method. It goes without saying, of course, that special consideration must be given to the sick and the old, to children, and to women during and after pregnancy."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 216] Another possibility was suggested by James Guillaume who argued that as long as a product was *"in short supply it will to a certain extent have to be rationed. And the easiest way to do this would be to **sell** these scare products"*



Clearly Kropotkin was **not** opposed to large-scale industry for *"if we analyse the modern industries, we soon discover that for some of them the co-operation of hundred, even thousands, of workers gathered at the same spot is really necessary. The great iron works and mining enterprises decidedly belong to that category; oceanic steamers cannot be built in village factories."* However, he stressed that this objective necessity was not the case in many other industries and centralised production existed in these purely to allow capitalists *"to hold command of the market"* and *"to suit the temporary interests of the few — by no means those of the nation."* Kropotkin made a clear division between economic tendencies which existed to aid the capitalist to dominate the market and enhance their profits and power and those which indicated a different kind of future. Once we consider the *"moral and physical advantages which man would derive from dividing his work between field and the workshop"* we must automatically evaluate the structure of modern industry with the criteria of what is best for the worker (and society and the environment) rather than what was best for capitalist profits and power. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153, p. 147 and p. 153]

Clearly, Leninist summaries of Kropotkin's ideas on this subject are nonsense. Rather than seeing "small-scale" production as the basis of his vision of a free society, he saw production as being geared around the economic unit of a nation or region: *"Each region will become its own producer and its own consumer of manufactured goods ... [and] its own producer and consumer of agricultural produce."* Industry would come to the village *"not in its present shape of a capitalist factory"* but *"in the shape of a socially organised industrial production, with the full aid of machinery and technical knowledge."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 40 and p. 151]

Industry would be decentralised and integrated with agriculture and based around communes, but these communes would be part of a federation and so production would be based around meeting the needs of these federations. A system

of rational decentralisation would be the basis of Kropotkin's communist-anarchism, with productive activity and a free society's workplaces geared to the appropriate level. For those forms of industry which would be best organised on a large-scale would continue to be so organised, but for those whose current (i.e., capitalist) structure had no objective need to be centralised would be broken up to allow the transformation of work for the benefit of both workers and society. Thus we would see a system of workplaces geared to local and district needs complementing larger factories which would meet regional and wider needs.

Anarchism rejects the idea of small-scale production and isolated communes and, as we discussed in section H.2.3, it does **not** look backwards for its ideal. The same applies to other forms of libertarian socialism with, for example, G.D.H. Cole arguing that we *"cannot go back to 'town economy', a general regime of handicraft and master-craftmanship, tiny-scale production. We can neither pull up our railways, fill our mines, and dismantle our factories nor conduct our large-scale enterprises under a system developed to fit the needs of a local market and a narrowly-restricted production."* The aim is *"to reintroduce into industry the communal spirit, by re-fashioning industrialism in such a way as to set the communal motives free to co-operate."* [**Guild Socialism Reststed**, pp. 45–6 and p. 46]

The obvious implication of Leninist comments arguments against anarchist ideas on industrial transformation after a revolution is that they think that a socialist society will basically be the same as capitalism, using the technology, industry and industrial structure developed under class society without change (as noted in section H.3.12, Lenin did suggest that was the case). Needless to say, capitalist industry, as Kropotkin was aware, has not developed neutrally nor purely because of technical needs. Rather it has been distorted by the twin requirements to maintain capitalist profits and power. One of the first tasks of a social revolution will be to transform



happy by consuming more commodities. But, as Erich Fromm pointed out, this cannot work for long and only leads to even more insecurity (and so even more consumption):

> *"**If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I?** Nobody but a defeated, deflated, pathetic testimony to a wrong way of living. Because I **can** lose what I have, I am necessarily constantly worried that I **shall** lose what I have."* [**To Have Or To Be**, p. 111]

Such insecurity easily makes consumerism seem a "natural" way of life and so make communism seem impossible. However, rampant consumerism is far more a product of lack of meaningful freedom within an alienated society than a "natural law" of human existence. In a society that encouraged and protected individuality by non-hierarchical social relationships and organisations, individuals would have a strong sense of self and so be less inclined to mindlessly consume. As Fromm put it: *"If **I am what I am** and not what I have, nobody can deprive me of or threaten my security and my sense of identity. My centre is within myself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112] Such self-centred individuals do not have to consume endlessly to build a sense of security or happiness within themselves.

In other words, the well-developed individuality that an anarchist society would develop would have less need to consume than the average person in a capitalist one. This is not to suggest that life will be bare and without luxuries in an anarchist society, far from it. A society based on the free expression of individuality could be nothing but rich in wealth and diverse in goods and experiences. What we are arguing here is that an anarchist-communist society would not have to fear rampant consumerism making demand outstrip supply constantly and always precisely because freedom will result in a non-alienated society of well developed individuals.

leads to a weakening of individuality as well as a lose of self-identity and sense of community. Both these senses are a deep human need and consumerism is often a means by which people overcome their alienation from their selves and others (religion, ideology and drugs are other means of escape). Therefore the consumption within capitalism reflects **its** values, not some abstract "human nature." As such, because a firm or industry is making a profit satisfying "needs" within capitalism, it does not follow that people in a free society would have similar wants (i.e., "demand" often does not exist independently of the surrounding society). As Bob Black argues:

> *"what we want, what we are capable of wanting is relative to the forms of social organisation. People 'want' fast food because they have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn't taste much better anyway, because the nuclear family (for the dwindling minority who have even that to go home to) is too small and too stressed to sustain much festivity in cooking and eating — and so forth. It is only people who can't get what they want who resign themselves to want more of what they can get. Since we cannot be friends and lovers, we wail for more candy."* [**Friendly Fire"**, p. 57]

Therefore, most anarchists think that consumerism is a product of a hierarchical society within which people are alienated from themselves and the means by which they can make themselves **really** happy (i.e. meaningful relationships, liberty, self-managed productive activity, and so on). Consumerism is a means of filling the spiritual hole capitalism creates within us by denying our freedom and violating equality. This means that capitalism produces individuals who define themselves by what they have, not who they are. This leads to consumption for the sake of consumption, as people try to make themselves



the industrial structure, not keep it as it is. You cannot use capitalist means for socialist ends. So while we will "inherent" an industrial structure from capitalism it would be the greatest possible error to leave it unchanged and an even worse one to accelerate the processes by which capitalists maintain and increase their power (i.e. centralisation and concentration) in the name of "socialism."

We are sorry to have laboured this point, but this issue is one which arises with depressing frequency in Marxist accounts of anarchism. It is best that we indicate that those who make the claim that anarchists seek *"small scale"* production geared for *"small autonomous communities"* simply show their ignorance. In actually, anarchists see production as being geared to whatever makes most social, economic and ecological sense. Some production and workplaces will be geared to the local commune, some will be geared to the district federation, some to the regional federation, and so on. It is for this reason anarchists support the federation of workers' associations as the means of combining local autonomy with the needs for co-ordination and joint activity. To claim otherwise is simply to misrepresent anarchist theory.

Finally, it must be psychologically significant that Leninists continually go on about anarchists advocating "small" and "tiny" workplaces. Apparently size **does** matter and Leninists think their productive units are much, much bigger than anarchist ones. As has been proven, anarchists advocate **appropriately sized** workplaces and are not hung-up about their size. Why Leninists are could be a fruitful area of research…

# I.4 How could an anarchist economy function?

This is an important question facing all opponents of a given system — what will you replace it with? We can say, of course, that it is pointless to make blueprints of how a future anarchist society will work as the future will be created by everyone, not just the few anarchists and libertarian socialists who write books and FAQs. This is very true, we cannot predict what a free society will actually be like or develop and we have no intention to do so here. However, this reply (whatever its other merits) ignores a key point, people need to have some idea of what anarchism aims for before they decide to spend their lives trying to create it.

So, how would an anarchist system function? That depends on the economic ideas people have. A mutualist economy will function differently than a communist one, for example, but they will have similar features. As Rudolf Rocker put it:

> *"Common to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of development of a free humanity. In this sense Mutualism, Collectivism and Communism are not to be regarded as closed systems permitting no further development, but merely as economic assumptions as to the means of safeguarding a free community. There will even probably be in society of the future different forms of economic co-operation operating side by side, since any social*



Part of the problem is that capitalist economics has invented a fictional type of person, **Homo Economicus,** whose wants are limitless: an individual who always wants more and so whose needs could only satisfied if resources were limitless too. Needless to say, such an individual has never existed. In reality, wants are not limitless — people have diverse tastes and rarely want everything available nor want more of a good than that which satisfies their need.

Communist Anarchists also argue that we cannot judge people's buying habits under capitalism with their actions in a free society. After all, advertising does not exist to meet people's needs but rather to create needs by making people insecure about themselves. Simply put, advertising does not amplify existing needs or sell the goods and services that people already want. Advertising would not need to stoop to the level of manipulative adverts that create false personalities for products and provide solutions for problems that the advertisers themselves create if this were the case. Crude it may be, but advertising is based on the creation of insecurities, preying on fears and obscuring rational thought. In an alienated society in which people are subject to hierarchical controls, feelings of insecurity and lack of control and influence would be natural. It is these fears that advertising multiples — if you cannot have real freedom, then at least you can buy something new. Advertising is the key means of making people unhappy with what they have and who they are. It is naive to claim that advertising has no effect on the psyche of the receiver or that the market merely responds to the populace and makes no attempt to shape their thoughts. If advertising did not work, firms would not spend so much money on it! Advertising creates insecurities about such matter-of-course things and so generates irrational urges to buy which would not exist in a libertarian communist society.

However, there is a deeper point to be made here about consumerism. Capitalism is based on hierarchy, not liberty. This

Communist-anarchists recognise that production, like consumption, must be based on freedom. However, it has been argued that free access would lead to waste as people take more than they would if they had to pay for it. This objection is not as serious as it first appears. There are plenty of examples within current society to indicate that free access will not lead to abuses. Let us take a few examples. In public libraries people are free to sit and read books all day but few, if any, actually do so. Neither do people always take the maximum number of books out at a time. No, they use the library as they need to and feel no need to maximise their use of the institution. Some people never use the library, although it is free. In the case of water supplies, it is clear that people do not leave taps on all day because water is often supplied freely or for a fixed charge. Similarly with pavements, people do not walk everywhere because to do so is free. In such cases individuals use the resource as and when they need to. Equally, vegetarians do not start eating meat when they visit their friend's parties just because the buffet is free.

We can expect similar results as other resources become freely available. In effect, this argument makes as much sense as arguing that individuals will travel to stops **beyond** their destination if public transport is based on a fixed charge! Obviously only an idiot would travel further than required in order to get "value for money." However, for many the world seems to be made up of such fools. Perhaps it would be advisable for such critics to hand out political leaflets in the street. Even though the leaflets are free, crowds rarely form around the person handing them out demanding as many copies of the leaflet as possible. Rather, those interested in what the leaflets have to say take them, the rest ignore them. If free access automatically resulted in people taking more than they need then critics of free communism would be puzzled by the lack of demand for what they were handing out!



> *progress must be associated with that free experiment and practical testing out for which in a society of free communities there will be afforded every opportunity.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 9]

So given the common ideals and aims of anarchists, it is unsurprising that the economic systems we suggest has common features such as workers' self-management, federation, free agreement and so on (as discussed in last section). For all anarchists, *"[t]he task for a modern industrial society is to achieve what is now technically realisable, namely, a society which is really based on free voluntary participation of people who produce and create, live their lives freely within institutions they control, and with limited hierarchical structures, possibly none at all."* [Noam Chomsky, quoted by Albert and Hahnel, **Looking Forward**, p. 62]

This achieved by means of *"voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities"* and this *"**is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful.**"* [Oscar Wilde, **The Soul of Man Under Socialism**, p. 1183] For example, the machine *"will supersede hand-work in the manufacture of plain goods. But at the same time, hand-work very probably will extend its domain in the artistic finishing of many things which are made entirely in the factory."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workplaces Tomorrow**, p. 152] Murray Bookchin, decades later, argued for the same idea: *"the machine will remove the toil from the productive process, leaving its artistic completion to man."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 134]

The aim would be to maximise the time available for individuals to express and development their individuality, including in production. As Stirner put it, the *"organisation of labour touches only such labours as others can do for us… the rest remain egoistic, because no one can in your stead elaborate your musical compositions, carry out your projects of painting, etc.; nobody*

*can replace Raphael's labours. The latter are labours of a unique person, which only he is competent to achieve."* Criticising the authoritarian socialists of his time, Stirner went on to ask *"for whom is time to be gained [by association]? For what does man require more time than is necessary to refresh his wearied powers of labour? Here Communism is silent."* He then answers his own question by arguing it is gained for the individual *"[t]o take comfort in himself as unique, after he has done his part as man!"* [Max Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 268 and p. 269] Which is exactly what libertarian communists argue:

> *"[We] recognise that man [sic!] has other needs besides food, and as the strength of Anarchy lies precisely in that it understands **all** human faculties and **all** passions, and ignores none, we shall ... contrive to satisfy all his intellectual and artistic needs ... the man [or woman] who will have done the four or five hours of ... work that are necessary for his existence, will have before him five or six hours which his will seek to employ according to tastes ...*
>
> *"He will discharge his task in the field, the factory, and so on, which he owes to society as his contribution to the general production. And he will employ the second half of his day, his week, or his year, to satisfy his artistic or scientific needs, or his hobbies."* [Kropotkin, **Conquest of Bread**, pp. 110–1]

Thus, while **authoritarian** Communism ignores the unique individual (and that was the only kind of Communism existing when Stirner wrote his classic book) **libertarian** communists agree with Stirner and are not silent. Like him, they consider the whole point of organising labour is to provide the means of providing the individual with the time and resources required to express their individuality. In other words, to pursue *"labours of a unique person."* Thus all anarchists base



those producing have needs and those receiving have abilities. The needs of both consumer **and** producer have to be taken into account, and this suggests that those producing have to feel the need to do so. This means that if no syndicate or individual desires to produce a specific order then this order can be classed as an "unreasonable" demand — "unreasonable" in this context meaning that no one freely agrees to produce it. Of course, individuals may agree to barter services in order to get what they want produced if they **really** want something but such acts in no way undermines a communist society.

This also applies to the demand for goods which are scare and, as a result, require substantial labour and resources to produce. In such circumstances, the producers (either as a specific syndicate or in their confederations) would refuse to supply such a "need" or communes and their confederations would suggest that this would be waste of resources. Ultimately, a free society would seek to avoid the irrationalities of capitalism where the drive for profits results in production for the sake of production and consumption for the sake of consumption and the many work longer and harder to meet the demands of a (wealthy) few. A free people would evaluate the pros and cons of any activity before doing it. As Malatesta put it:

> *"[A] communist society ... is not, obviously, about an absolute right to satisfy **all** of one's needs, because needs are infinite ... so their satisfaction is always limited by productive capacity; nor would it be useful or just that the community in order to satisfy excessive needs, otherwise called caprices, of a few individuals, should undertake work, out of proportion to the utility being produced ... What we would like is for everybody to live in the best possible way: so that everybody with a minimum amount of effort will obtain maximum satisfaction."* [**At the Café**, pp. 60–1]

relative changes in supply and demand which reflect actual needs of society and not bank balances. The investment response to changes in supply and demand will be discussed in section I.4.8 while section I.4.13 will discuss the allocation of work tasks.

## I.4.6 Surely anarchist-communism would just lead to demand exceeding supply?

While non-communist forms of anarchism relate consumption to work done, so automatically relating demand to production, this is not the case in communist-anarchism. In that system, distribution is according to need, not deed. Given this, it is a common objection that libertarian communism would lead to people wasting resources by taking more than they need.

Kropotkin, for example, stated that *"free communism ... places the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7] But, some argue, what if an individual says they "need" a luxury house or a personal yacht? Simply put, workers may not "need" to produce it. As Tom Brown put it, *"such things are the product of social labour ... Under syndicalism ... it is improbable that any greedy, selfish person would be able to kid a shipyard full of workers to build him a ship all for his own hoggish self. There would be steam luxury yachts, but they would be enjoyed in common."* [**Syndicalism**, p. 51]

Therefore, communist-anarchists are not blind to the fact that free access to products is based upon the actual work of real individuals — "society" provides nothing, individuals working together do. This is reflected in the classic statement of communism: *"From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs."* This must be considered as a whole as



their arguments for a free society on how it will benefit actual individuals, rather than abstracts or amorphous collectives (such as "society"). Hence chapter 9 of **The Conquest of Bread**, *"The Need for Luxury"* and, for that matter, chapter 10, *"Agreeable Work."*

In other words, anarchists desire to organise voluntary workers associations which will try to ensure a minimisation of mindless labour in order to maximise the time available for creative activity both inside and outside "work." This is to be achieved by free co-operation between equals, which is seen as being based on self-interest. After all, while capitalist ideology may proclaim that competition is an expression of self-interest it, in fact, results in the majority of people sacrificing themselves for the benefits of the few who own and control society. The time you sell to a boss in return for them ordering you about and keeping the product of your labour is time you never get back. Anarchists aim to end a system which crushes individuality and create one in which solidarity and co-operation allow us time to enjoy life and to gain the benefits of our labour ourselves. Mutual Aid, in other words, results in a better life than mutual struggle and so *"the **association for struggle** will be a much more effective support for civilisation, progress, and evolution than is the **struggle for existence** with its savage daily competitions."* [Luigi Geallani, **The End of Anarchism**, p. 26]

In the place of the rat race of capitalism, economic activity in an anarchist society would be one of the means to humanise and individualise ourselves and society, to move from **surviving** to **living.** Productive activity should become a means of self-expression, of joy, of art, rather than something we have to do to survive. Ultimately, "work" should become more akin to play or a hobby than the current alienated activity. The priorities of life should be towards individual self-fulfilment and humanising society rather than *"running society as an adjunct to the market,"* to use Polanyi's expression, and turning our-

selves into commodities on the labour market. Thus anarchists agree with John Stuart Mill:

> *"I confess I am not charmed with an ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress."* [**Collected Works**, vol. III, p. 754]

The aim of anarchism is far more than the end of inequality. Hence Proudhon's comment that socialism's *"underlying dogma"* is that the *"objective of socialism is the emancipation of the proletariat and the eradication of poverty."* This emancipation would be achieved by ending *"wage slavery"* via *"democratically organised workers' associations."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 57 and p. 62] Or, to use Kropotkin's expression, *"well-being for all"* — physical, mental, emotional and ethical! Indeed, by concentrating on just poverty and ignoring the emancipation of the proletariat, the real aims of socialism are obscured:

> *"The 'right to well-being' means the possibility of living like human beings, and of bringing up children to be members of a society better than ours, whilst the 'right to work' only means the right to be a wage-slave, a drudge, ruled over and exploited by the middle class of the future. The right to well-being is the Social Revolution, the right to work means nothing but the Treadmill of Commercialism. It is high time for the worker to assert his right to the common inheritance, and to enter into possession of it."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44]



be continued in an anarchist society. However, production will be *"variations on a theme"* in order to ensure consumer choice and to allow the producers to know what features consumers prefer. It would be impossible to sit down beforehand and make a list of what features a good should have — that assumes perfect knowledge and that technology is fairly constant. Both these assumptions are of limited use in real life. Therefore, cooperatives would produce goods with different features and production would change to meet the demand these differences suggest (for example, factory A produces a new CD player, and consumption patterns indicate that this is popular and so the rest of the factories convert). This is in addition to R&D experiments and test populations. In this way consumer choice would be maintained, and enhanced as people would be able to influence the decisions of the syndicates as producers (in some cases) and through syndicate/commune dialogue.

Finally, it would be churlish, but essential, to note that capitalism only equates supply and demand in the fantasy world of neo-classical economics. Any **real** capitalist economy, as we discussed in section I.1.5 is marked by uncertainty and a tendency to over-produce in the response to the higher profits caused by previously under-producing goods, with resulting periods of crisis in which falling effective demand sees a corresponding fall in supply. Not to the mention the awkward fact that real needs (demand) are not met simply because people are too poor to pay for the goods (i.e., no effective demand). As such, to suggest that only non-market systems have a problem ensuring demand and supply meet is mistaken.

To conclude, anarchists do not ignore *"supply and demand."* Instead, they recognise the limitations of the capitalist version of this truism and point out that capitalism is based on **effective** demand which has no necessary basis with efficient use of resources. Instead of the market, social anarchists advocate a system based on horizontal links between producers which effectively communicates information across society about the

them to produce as well as the social cost of the resources they need to produce it. In this way a network of horizontal relations spread across society, with co-ordination achieved by equality of association and not the hierarchy of the corporate structure.

While anarchists are aware of the *"isolation paradox"* (see section B.6) this does not mean that they think the commune should make decisions **for** people on what they were to consume. That would be a prison. No, all anarchists agree that is up to the individual to determine their own needs and for the collectives they join to determine social requirements like parks, infrastructure improvements and so on. However, social anarchists think that it would be beneficial to discuss the framework around which these decisions would be made. This would mean, for example, that communes would agree to produce eco-friendly products, reduce waste and generally make decisions enriched by social interaction. Individuals would still decide which sort goods they desire, based on what the collectives produce but these goods would be based on a socially agreed agenda. In this way waste, pollution and other *"externalities"* of atomised consumption could be reduced. For example, while it is rational for individuals to drive a car to work, collectively this results in massive **irrationality** (for example, traffic jams, pollution, illness, unpleasant social infrastructures). A sane society would discuss the problems associated with car use and would agree to produce a fully integrated public transport network which would reduce pollution, stress, illness, and so on.

Therefore, while anarchists recognise individual tastes and desires, they are also aware of the social impact of them and so try to create a social environment where individuals can enrich their personal decisions with the input of other people's ideas.

On a related subject, it is obvious that different syndicates would produce slightly different goods, so ensuring that people have a choice. It is doubtful that the current waste implied in multiple products from different companies (sometimes the same multi-national corporation!) all doing the same job would



So, while refusing to define exactly how an anarchist system will work, we will explore the implications of how the anarchist principles and ideals outlined above could be put into practice. Bear in mind that this is just a possible framework for a system which has few historical examples to draw upon. This means that we can only indicate the general outlines of what an anarchist society could be like. Those seeking blue-prints and exactness should look elsewhere. In all likelihood, the framework we present will be modified and changed (even ignored) in light of the real experiences and problems people will face when creating a new society.

We should point out that there may be a tendency for some to compare this framework with the **theory** of capitalism (i.e. perfectly functioning "free" markets or quasi-perfect ones) as opposed to its reality. A perfectly working capitalist system only exists in text books and in the heads of ideologues who take the theory as reality. No system is perfect, particularly capitalism, and to compare "perfect" text-book capitalism with any real system is a pointless task. As we discussed in depth in section C, capitalist economics does not even describe the reality of capitalism so why think it would enlighten discussion of post-capitalist systems? What hope does it have of understanding post-capitalist systems which reject its proprietary despotism and inequalities? As anarchists aim for a qualitative change in our economic relationships, we can safely say that its economic dynamics will reflect the specific forms it will develop rather than those produced by a class-ridden hierarchical system like capitalism and the a-historic individualistic abstractions invented to defend it!

So any attempt to apply the notions developed from theorising about (or, more correctly, justifying and rationalising) capitalism to anarchism will fail to capture the dynamics of a non-capitalist system. John Crump stressed this point in his discussion of Japanese anarchism between the World Wars:

*"When considering the feasibility of the social system advocated by the pure anarchists, we need to be clear about the criteria against which it should be measured. It would, for example, be unreasonable to demand that it be assessed against such yardsticks of a capitalist economy as annual rate of growth, balance of trade and so forth … evaluating anarchist communism by means of the criteria which have been devised to measure capitalism's performance does not make sense … capitalism would be … baffled if it were demanded that it assess its operations against the performance indicators to which pure anarchists attached most importance, such as personal liberty, communal solidarity and the individual's unconditional right to free consumption. Faced with such demands, capitalism would either admit that these were not yardsticks against which it could sensibly measure itself or it would have to resort to the type of grotesque ideological subterfuges which it often employs, such as identifying human liberty with the market and therefore with wage slavery … The pure anarchists' confidence in the alternative society they advocated derived not from an expectation that it would* ***quantitatively*** *outperform capitalism in terms of GNP, productivity or similar capitalist criteria. On the contrary, their enthusiasm for anarchist communism flowed from their understanding that it would be* ***qualitatively*** *different from capitalism. Of course, this is not to say that the pure anarchists were indifferent to questions of production and distribution … they certainly believed that anarchist communism would provide economic well-being for all. But neither were they prepared to give priority to narrowly conceived*



dicate federations have regular meetings and the question of the changes in the copper situation present themselves and they must consider how to response to these changes. Part of this is to determine whether this change is likely to be short term or long term. A short term change (say caused by a mine accident, for example) would not need new investments to be planned. However, long term changes (say the new requests are due to a new product being created by another syndicate or an existing mine becoming exhausted) may need co-ordinated investment (we can expect syndicates to make their own plans in light of changes, for example, by investing in new machinery to produce copper more efficiently or to increase production). If the expected changes of these plans approximately equal the predicted long term changes, then the federation need not act. However, if they do then investment in new copper mines or large scale new investment across the industry may be required. The federation would propose such plans.

Needless to say, the future can be guessed, it cannot be accurately predicted. Thus there may be over-investment in certain industries as expected changes do not materialise. However, unlike capitalism, this would not result in an economic crisis (with over-investment within capitalism, workplaces close due to lack of profits, regardless of social need). All that would happen is that some of the goods produced would not be used, some labour and resources would be wasted and the syndicates would rationalise production, close down relatively inefficient plant and concentrate production in the more efficient ones. The sweeping economic crises of capitalism would be a thing of the past.

In summary, each syndicate receives its own orders and supplies and sends its own produce out to specific consumers. Similarly, communal distribution centres would order required goods from syndicates it determines. In this way consumers can change to syndicates which respond to their needs and so production units are aware of what it is socially useful for

a source of copper unexpectedly fails or that the demand for copper increases. What would happen?

First, the initial difference would be a diminishing of stocks of copper which each syndicate maintains to take into account unexpected changes in requests. This would help buffer out short lived, changes in supply or requests. Second, naturally, there is an increase in demand for copper for those syndicates which are producing it. This immediately increases the **scarcity index** of those firms and their product. For example, the index may rise from 95% (indicating a slight over-production in respect to current demand) to 115% (indicating that the demand for copper has risen in respect to the current level of production). This change in the **scarcity index** (combined with difficulties in finding copper producing syndicates which will accept their orders) enters into the decision making algorithms of other syndicates. This, in turn, results in changes in their plans. For example, the syndicates can seek out other suppliers who have a lower scarcity index or substitutes for copper may be used as they have become a more efficient resource to use.

In this way, requests for copper products fall and soon only reflect those requests that really need copper (i.e., do not have realistic substitutes available for it). This would result in the demand falling with respect to the current supply (as indicated by requests from other syndicates and to maintain buffer stock levels). Thus a general message has been sent across the economy that copper has become (relatively) scare and syndicate plans have changed in light of this information. No central planner made these decisions nor was money required to facilitate them. We have a decentralised, non-market system based on the free exchange of products between self-governing associations.

Looking at the wider picture, the question of how to response to this change in supply/requests for copper presents itself. The copper syndicate federation and cross-industry syn-



> *economic expansion, to neglect individual liberty and communal solidarity, as capitalism regularly does.*" [**Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, pp. 191–3]

Finally, anarchists are well aware that transforming how an economy works does not happen overnight. As discussed in section I.2.2, we have long rejected the idea of instantaneous social transformation and argued that revolution will take time to develop and change the legacy of centuries of class and hierarchical society. This transformation and the resulting changes in people and surroundings can only be achieved by the full participation of all in overcoming the (many) problems a free society will face and the new ways of relating to each other liberation implies. A free people will find their own practical solutions to their problems, for *"there will be all sorts of practical difficulties to overcome, but the [libertarian socialist] system is simplicity itself compared with the monster of centralised State control, which sets such an inhuman distance between the worker and the administrator that there is room for a thousand difficulties to intervene."* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, p. 49] Thus, for anarchists, the *"enthusiasm generated by the revolution, the energies liberated, and the inventiveness stimulated by it must be given full freedom and scope to find creative channels."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 223] As such, the ideas within this section of our FAQ are merely suggestions, possibilities.

## I.4.1 What is the point of economic activity in anarchy?

The basic point of economic activity is an anarchist society is to ensure, to use Kropotkin's expression, ***"well-being for all"***. Rather than toil to make the rich richer, people in a free

society would work together to *"ensure to society as a whole its life and further development."* Such an economy would be based upon *"giving society the greatest amount of useful products with the least waste of human energy"*, to meet *"the needs of mankind"*. [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 43, p. 144 and p. 175] Needless to say, today we must also add: with the least disruption of nature.

In terms of needs, it should be stressed that these are not limited to just material goods (important as they may be, particularly to those currently living in poverty). Needs also extend to having meaningful work which you control, pleasant and ecologically viable surroundings, the ability to express oneself freely within and outwith work, and a host of other things associated with the quality of life rather than merely survival. Anarchism seeks to transform economic activity rather than merely liberate it by self-management (important as that is).

Therefore, for anarchists, *"[r]eal wealth consists of things of utility and beauty, in things that help create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in."* Anarchism's *"goal is the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual"* and this *"is only possible in a state of society where man [sec!] is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work. One whom making a table, the building of a house, or the tilling of the soil is what the painting is to the artist and the discovery to the scientist — the result of inspiration, of intense longing, and deep interest in work as a creative force."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 67 and p. 68]

So the point of economic activity in an anarchist society is to produce as and when required and not, as under capitalism, to organise production for the sake of production in order to make profits for the few. Production, to use Kropotkin's words, is to become *"the mere servant of consumption; it must mould itself on the wants of the consumer, not dictate to him [or her] conditions."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 57] This should **not** be taken to imply that anarchism seeks production for the sake of pro-



*growth of the world's economy"* between 1945 and 1972. US President Nixon dismantled these buffer zone programmes, resulting in *"violent commodity price fluctuations"* which had serious negative economic effects. [**Controversies in Post-Keynesian Economics**, p. 114 and p. 115] Again, an anarchist society is likely to utilise this sort of buffer system to iron out short-term changes in supply and demand. By reducing short-term fluctuations of the supply of commodities, bad investment decisions would be reduced as syndicates would not be mislead, as is the case under capitalism, by market prices being too high or too low at the time when the decisions where being made (as discussed in section I.1.5 such disequilibrium prices convey misinformation which causes very substantial economic distortions).

This, combined with cost-benefit analysis described in section I.4.4, would allow information about changes within a moneyless economy to rapidly spread throughout the whole system and influence all decision makers without the great majority knowing anything about the original causes of these changes. This would allow a syndicate to ascertain which good used up least resources and therefore left the most over for other uses (i.e., relative costs or scarcity) as well as giving them information on what resources were used to create it (i.e., the absolute costs involved) The relevant information is communicated to all involved, without having to be ordered by an "all-knowing" central body as in a Leninist centrally planned economy. As argued in section I.1.2, anarchists have long realised that no centralised body could possibly be able to possess all the information dispersed throughout the economy to organise production and if such a body attempted to do so, the resulting bureaucracy would effectively reduce and impoverish the amount of information available to decision makers and so cause shortages and inefficiencies.

To get an idea how this system could work, let us take the example of a change in the copper industry. Let us assume that

finished goods "on the shelf" which can be used to meet unexpected increases in demand. Communal stores, hospitals and so on would have their stores of supplies in case of unexpected disruptions in supply.

This is a common practice even in capitalism, with differences between actual demand and expected demand being absorbed by unintended stock changes. Firms today also have spare capacity in order to meet such upsurges in demand. Such policies of maintaining stocks and spare capacity will continue to the case under anarchism. It is assumed that syndicates and their confederations will wish to adjust capacity if they are aware of the need to do so. Hence, price changes in response to changes in demand would not be necessary to provide the information that such adjustments are required. This is because a *"change in demand first becomes apparent as a change in the quantity being sold at existing prices [or being consumed in a moneyless system] and is therefore reflected in changes in stocks or orders. Such changes are perfectly good indicators or signals that an imbalance between demand and current output has developed. If a change in demand for its products proved to be permanent, a production unit would find its stocks being run down and its order book lengthening, or its stocks increasing and orders falling ... Price changes in response to changes in demand are therefore not necessary for the purpose of providing information about the need to adjust capacity."* [Pat Devine, **Democracy and Economic Planning**, p. 242]

So syndicates, communes and their confederations will create buffer stocks of goods to handle unforeseen changes in demand and supply. This sort of inventory has also been used by capitalist countries like the USA to prevent changes in market conditions for agricultural products and other strategic raw materials producing wild spot-price movements and inflation. Post-Keynesian economist Paul Davidson argued that the stability of commodity prices this produced *"was an essential aspect of the unprecedented prosperous economic*



duction in order to meet all the needs of all. Far from it, as such a regime would, to quote Malatesta, involve *"employing **all** of one's strength in producing things, because taken literally, this would mean working until one is exhausted, which would mean that by maximising the satisfaction of human needs we destroy humanity."* In other words, a free society would take into account the wants of the producers (and the planet we live on) when meeting the wants of consumers. Thus, there would be a balance sought. *"What we would like,"* continued Malatesta, *"is for everybody to live in the best possible way: so that everybody with a minimum amount of effort will obtain maximum satisfaction."* [**At the Café**, p. 61]

So while the basic aim of economic activity in an anarchist society is, obviously, producing wealth — i.e., satisfying individual needs — without enriching capitalists or other parasites in the process, it is far more than that. Yes, an anarchist society will aim to create society in which everyone will have a standard of living suitable for a fully human life. Yes, it will aim to eliminate poverty, inequality, individual want and social waste and squalor, but it aims for far more than that. It aims to create free individuals who express their individuality within and outwith "work." After all, what is the most important thing that comes out of a workplace? Pro-capitalists may say profits, others the finished commodity or good. In fact, the most important thing that comes out of a workplace is the **worker.** What happens to us in the workplace will have an impact on all aspects of our life and so cannot be ignored.

To value "efficiency" above all else, as capitalism says it does (it, in fact, values **profits** above all else and hinders developments like workers' control which increase efficiency but harm power and profits), is to deny our own humanity and individuality. Without an appreciation for grace and beauty there is no pleasure in creating things and no pleasure in having them. Our lives are made drearier rather than richer by "progress." How can a person take pride in their work when

skill and care are considered luxuries (if not harmful to "efficiency" and, under capitalism, the profits and power of the capitalist and manager)? We are not machines. We have a need for craftspersonship and anarchism recognises this and takes it into account in its vision of a free society. This means that, in an anarchist society, economic activity is the process by which we produce what is useful but, in addition, is also beautiful (to use Oscar Wilde's words) in a way that empowers the individual. We anarchists charge capitalism with wasting human energy and time due to its irrational nature and workings, energy that could be spent creating what is beautiful (both in terms of individualities and products of labour). Under capitalism we are *"toiling to live, that we may live to toil."* [William Morris, **Useful Work Versus Useless Toil**, p. 37]

In addition, we must stress that the aim of economic activity within an anarchist society is **not** to create equality of outcome — i.e. everyone getting exactly the same goods. As we noted in section A.2.5, such a "vision" of "equality" attributed to socialists by pro-capitalists indicates more the poverty of imagination and ethics of the critics of socialism than a true account of socialist ideas. Anarchists, like other genuine socialists, support **social** equality in order to maximise freedom, including the freedom to choose between options to satisfy ones needs. To treat people equally, as equals, means to respect their desires and interests, to acknowledge their right to equal liberty. To make people consume the same as everyone else does not respect the equality of all to develop ones abilities as one sees fit. Socialism means equality of opportunity to satisfy desires and interests, not the imposition of an abstract minimum (or maximum) on unique individuals. To treat unique individuals equally means to acknowledge that uniqueness, not to deny it.

Thus the **real** aim of economic activity within an anarchy is to ensure *"that every human being should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity."* [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 295] And you cannot



sumers, information which the market often hides (or actively blocks) or distorts due to inequalities in resources (i.e. need does not count in the market, *"effective demand"* does and this skews the market in favour of the wealthy). This information network has partly been discussed in the last section where a method of comparison between different materials, techniques and resources based upon use value was discussed. In addition, the need to indicate the current fluctuations in stocks, production and consumption has also to be factored in when making decisions.

To indicate the relative changes in scarcity of a given good it will be necessary to calculate what could be termed its *"scarcity index."* This would inform potential users of this good whether its demand is outstripping its supply so that they may effectively adjust their decisions in light of the decisions of others. This index could be, for example, a percentage figure which indicates the relation of orders placed for a good to the amount actually produced. For example, a good which has a demand higher than its supply would have an index value of 101% or higher. This value would inform potential users to start looking for substitutes for it or to economise on its use. Such a scarcity figure would exist for each syndicate as well as (possibly) a generalised figure for the industry as a whole on a regional, "national", etc. level.

In this way, a specific good could be seen to be in high demand and so only those producers who **really** required it would place orders for it (so ensuring effective use of resources). Needless to say, stock levels and other basic bookkeeping techniques would be utilised in order to ensure a suitable buffer level of a specific good existed. This may result in some excess supply of goods being produced and used as stock to handle unexpected changes in the aggregate demand for a good. Such a buffer system would work on an individual workplace level and at a communal level. Syndicates would obviously have their inventories, stores of raw materials and

*easy to see that some man in a street that grew hungry would soon draw a list of the loaves that were needed, and take it to the bakery where the strikers were in possession? Is there any difficulty in supposing that the necessary amount would then be baked according to this list? By this time the bakers would know what carts and delivery vans were needed to send the bread out to the people, and if they let the carters and vanmen know of this, would these not do their utmost to supply the vehicles ... If ... [the bakers needed] more benches [to make bread] ... the carpenters would supply them [and so on] ... So the endless continuity goes on — a well-balanced interdependence of parts guaranteed, because* ***need*** *is the motive force behind it all .. . In the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters] to produce bread, machinery, and all that is necessary for life, driven by no other force than his desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and co-operates and enters into agreements with other because by so doing it extends its own possibilities. There is no centralised State exploiting or dictating, but the complete structure is supported because each part is dependent on the whole ... It will be a society responsive to the wants of the people; it will supply their everyday needs as quickly as it will respond to their highest aspirations. Its changing forms will be the passing expressions of humanity."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 17–19]

To make productive decisions we need to know what others need and information in order to evaluate the alternative options available to us to satisfy that need. Therefore, it is a question of distributing information between producers and con-



develop your humanity if you cannot express yourself freely. Needless to say, to treat unique people "equally" (i.e. identically) is simply evil. You cannot, say, have a 70 year old woman do the same work in order to receive the same income as a 20 year old man. No, anarchists do not subscribe to such "equality," which is a product of the *"ethics of mathematics"* of capitalism and **not** of anarchist ideals. Such a scheme is alien to a free society. The equality anarchists desire is a social equality, based on control over the decisions that affect you. The aim of anarchist economic activity, therefore, is to provide the goods required for *"equal freedom for all, an equality of conditions such as to allow everyone to do as they wish."* [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 49] Thus anarchists *"demand not natural but social equality of individuals as the condition for justice and the foundations of morality."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 249]

Under capitalism, instead of humans controlling production, production controls them. Anarchists want to change this and desire to create an economic network which will allow the maximisation of an individual's free time in order for them to express and develop their individuality (while creating what is beautiful). So instead of aiming just to produce because the economy will collapse if we did not, anarchists want to ensure that we produce what is useful in a manner which liberates the individual and empowers them in all aspects of their lives.

This desire means that anarchists reject the capitalist definition of "efficiency." Anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they argue that *"since people are conscious agents whose characteristics and therefore preferences develop over time, to access long-term efficiency we must access the impact of economic institutions on people's development."* Capitalism, as we have explained before, is highly inefficient in this light due to the effects of hierarchy and the resulting marginalisation and disempowerment of the majority of society. As Albert and Hahnel go on to note, *"self-management, solidarity, and variety are*

*all legitimate valuative criteria for judging economic institutions … Asking whether particular institutions help people attain self-management, variety, and solidarity is sensible."* [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 9]

In other words, anarchists think that any economic activity in a free society is to do useful things in such a way that gives those doing it as much pleasure as possible. The point of such activity is to express the individuality of those doing it, and for that to happen they must control the work process itself. Only by self-management can work become a means of empowering the individual and developing his or her powers.

In a nutshell, to use the words of William Morris, useful work will replace useless toil in an anarchist society.

## I.4.2 Why do anarchists desire to abolish work?

Anarchists desire to see humanity liberate itself from work. This may come as a shock for many people and will do much to "prove" that anarchism is essentially utopian. However, we think that such an abolition is not only necessary, it is possible. This is because work as we know it today is one of the major dangers to freedom we face.

If by freedom we mean self-government, then it is clear that being subjected to hierarchy in the workplace subverts our abilities to think and judge for ourselves. Like any skill, critical analysis and independent thought have to be practised continually in order to remain at their full potential. So a workplace environment with power structures undermines these abilities. This was recognised by Adam Smith who argued that the *"understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments."* That being so, *"the man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or nearly the same, has no*



tween individuals and groups need not be hierarchical. What is implied in this comment is that there is just two ways to relate to others — either by prostitution (purely by cash) or by hierarchy (the way of the state, the army or capitalist workplace). But people relate to each other in other ways, such as friendship, love, solidarity, mutual aid and so on. Thus you can help or associate with others without having to be ordered to do so or by being paid cash to do so — we do so all the time. You can work together because by so doing you benefit yourself and the other person. This is the **real** communist way, that of mutual aid and free agreement.

So Schweickart is ignoring the vast majority of relations in any society. For example, love/attraction is a horizontal link between two autonomous individuals and profit considerations do not enter into the relationship. Thus anarchists argue that Schweickart's argument is flawed as it fails to recognise that resource usage and production techniques can be organised in terms of human need and free agreement between economic actors, without profits or central command. This system does not mean that we all have to love each other (an impossible wish). Rather, it means that we recognise that by voluntarily co-operating as equals we ensure that we remain free individuals and that we can gain the advantages of sharing resources and work (for example, a reduced working day and week, self-managed work in safe and hygienic working conditions and a free selection of the product of a whole society). In other words, a self-interest which exceeds the narrow and impoverished egotism of capitalist society.

Thus free agreement and horizontal links are not limited to market transactions — they develop for numerous reasons and anarchists recognise this. As George Barrett argued:

> *"Let us imagine now that the great revolt of the workers has taken place, that their direct action has made them masters of the situation. It is not*

where there is demand for it). At the very least, the *"the law of supply and demand"* is not the "most efficient" means of distribution in an unequal society as decisions are skewed in favour of the rich.

As far as *"supply and demand"* in terms of allocating scare resources is concerned, anarchists are well aware of the need to create and distribute necessary goods to those who require them. The question is, in an anarchist society, how do you know that valuable labour and materials are not being wasted? How do people judge which tools are most appropriate? How do they decide among different materials if they all meet the technical specifications? How important are some goods than others? How important is cellophane compared to vacuum-cleaner bags and so which one should be produced?

It is answers like this that the supporters of the market claim that their system answers. For individualist and mutualist anarchists, their non-capitalist market would indicate such information by differences between market price and cost price and individuals and co-operatives would react accordingly. For communist and collectivist anarchists, who reject even non-capitalist markets, the answer is less simple. As discussed in section I.1.3, these anarchists argue that although the market does answer such questions it does so in irrational and dehumanising ways (while this is particularly the case under capitalism, it cannot be assumed this will disappear in a post-capitalist market). The question is: can collectivist and communist anarchism answer such questions? Yes, they reply.

So collectivist and communist anarchists reject the market. This rejection often implies, to some, central planning. As the market socialist David Schweickart puts it, *"[i]f profit considerations do not dictate resource usage and production techniques, then central direction must do so. If profit is not the goal of a productive organisation, then physical output (use values) must be."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 86] However, Schweickart is wrong. Horizontal links need not be market based and co-operation be-



*occasion to extend his understanding ... and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be ... But in every improved and civilised society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes pains to prevent it."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 18]

Smith's argument (usually ignored by those who claim to follow his ideas) is backed up by extensive evidence. Different types of authority structures and different technologies have different effects on those who work within them. Carole Pateman notes that the evidence suggests that *"[o]nly certain work situations were found to be conducive to the development of the psychological characteristics"* suitable for freedom, such as *"the feelings of personal confidence and efficacy that underlay the sense of political efficacy."* [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 51] She quotes one expert who argues that within capitalist companies based upon a highly rationalised work environment and extensive division of labour, the worker has no control over the pace or technique of his work, no room to exercise skill or leadership and so they *"have practically no opportunity to solve problems and contribute their own ideas."* The worker, according to a psychological study, is *"resigned to his lot ... more dependent than independent ... he lacks confidence in himself ... he is humble ... the most prevalent feeling states ... seem to be fear and anxiety."* [quoted by Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 51 and p. 52]

The evidence Pateman summarises shows that an individual's *"attitudes will depend to a large degree on the authority structure of his [or her] work environment"*, with workplaces which are more autocratic and with a higher division of labour being worse for an individual's sense of self-esteem, feelings of self-worth and autonomy. In workplaces where *"the worker has a high degree of personal control over his [or her] work ... and a very large degree of freedom from external control"* or is based on the *"collective responsibility of a crew of employees"* who *"had*

*control over the pace and method of getting the work done, and the work crews were largely internally self-disciplining"* a different social character is seen. [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 52–3] This was characterised by *"a strong sense of individualism and autonomy, and a solid acceptance of citizenship in the large society"* and *"a highly developed feeling of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth and is therefore ready to participate in the social and political institutions of the community."* Thus the *"nature of a man's work affects his social character and personality"* and that an *"industrial environment tends to breed a distinct social type."* [R. Blauner, quoted by Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52]

Thus, to quote Bob Black (who notes that Smith's comments against the division of labour are his *"critique of work"*), the capitalist workplace turns us into *"stultified submissives"* and places us *"under the sort of surveillance that ensures servility."* For this reason anarchists desire, to use Bob Black's phrase, *"the abolition of work."* [**The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 26, p. 22 and p. 19]

Work, in this context, does not mean any form of productive activity. Far from it. Work (in the sense of doing necessary things or productive activity) will always be with us. There is no getting away from it; crops need to be grown, schools built, homes fixed, and so on. No, work in this context means any form of labour in which the worker does not control his or her own activity. In other words, **wage labour** in all its many forms.

A society based upon hierarchical relations in production will result in a society within which the typical worker uses few of their abilities, exercise little or no control over their work because they are governed by a boss during working hours. This has been proved to lower the individual's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, as would be expected in any social relationship that denied self-government. Capitalism is marked by an extreme division of labour, particularly between mental and physical labour. It reduces the worker to a mere ma-



and wage labour — soon shows that the claims that prices accurately reflect costs is simply not accurate. However, it may be such that objective circumstances preclude the immediate introduction of libertarian communism (as discussed in section I.2.2, many communist anarchists consider this likely). As such, there could be a transitional period in which elements of mutualism, collectivism and communism co-exist within a specific economy. It can easily be seen how a mutualist economy (the usual initial product of a social revolution) could evolve into a collectivist and then communist one. The market generated prices could initially be complemented by the non-market information decided upon (for objective costs and the scarcity index) and, overtime, replaced by this data as the main decision making criteria by syndicates and communes.

One final point on this subject. What methods are used, which criteria picked, which information is communicated and how it is processed, will be the decision of a free people. This section was merely a suggestion of one possibility of how a libertarian communist economy could make informed decisions about production. It is not meant as a blue-print nor is it set-in-stone.

## I.4.5 What about *"supply and demand"*?

Anarchists do not ignore the facts of life, namely that at a given moment there is so much a certain good produced and so much of it is desired to be consumed or used. Neither do we deny that different individuals have different interests and tastes. However, this is not what is usually meant by *"supply and demand."* Often in general economic debate, this formula is given a certain mythical quality which ignores its underlying realities as well as some unwholesome implications of the theory (for example, as discussed in section C.1.5 the market can very efficiently create famines by exporting food to areas

sources and human labour. Any agreed values for the Cost-Benefit analysis for inputs can be incorporated in the information associated with the outputs. As such, a communist society would seek to base decisions on more than one criteria, whether it is profits or (say) labour. The reasons for this should be obvious, as one criteria rarely allows sensible decisions. Of course, to some degree people already do this under capitalism but market forces and inequality limit this ability (people will tend to buy cheaper products if they need to make ends meet) while both the price mechanism and the self-interest of companies ensure information about costs are hidden (for example, few companies publically acknowledge their externalities and most spend vast sums on advertising to greenwash their products).

In order to process the information on costs communicated in a libertarian communist economy accounting tools can be created (such as a spreadsheet or computer programme). These could take the decided factors as inputs and returns a cost benefit analysis of the choices available. So while these algorithmic procedures and guidelines can, and indeed should be, able to be calculated by hand, it is likely that computers will be extensively used to take input data and process it into a suitable format. Indeed, many capitalist companies have software which records raw material inputs and finished product into databases and spreadsheets. Such software could be the basis of a libertarian communist decision making algorithm. Of course, currently such data is submerged beneath money and does not take into account externalities and the nature of the work involved (as would be the case in an anarchist society). However, this does not limit their potential or deny that communist use of such software can be used to inform decisions.

Therefore, the claim that communism cannot evaluate different production methods due to lack of prices is inaccurate. Indeed, a look at the actual capitalist market — marked as it is by differences in bargaining and market power, externalities



chine operator, following the orders of his or her boss. Therefore, a libertarian that does not support economic liberty (i.e. self-management) is no libertarian at all.

Capitalism bases its rationale for itself on consumption and this results in a viewpoint which minimises the importance of the time we spend in productive activity. Anarchists consider that it is essential for individual's to use and develop their unique attributes and capacities in all walks of life, to maximise their powers. Therefore, the idea that "work" should be ignored in favour of consumption is totally mad. Productive activity is an important way of developing our inner-powers and express ourselves; in other words, be creative. Capitalism's emphasis on consumption shows the poverty of that system. As Alexander Berkman argued:

> *"We do not live by bread alone. True, existence is not possible without opportunity to satisfy our physical needs. But the gratification of these by no means constitutes all of life. Our present system of disinheriting millions, made the belly the centre of the universe, so to speak. But in a sensible society ... [t]he feelings of human sympathy, of justice and right would have a chance to develop, to be satisfied, to broaden and grow."* [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 152–3]

Therefore, capitalism is based on a constant process of alienated consumption, as workers try to find the happiness associated within productive, creative, self-managed activity in a place it does not exist — on the shop shelves. This can partly explain the rise of both mindless consumerism and the continuation of religions, as individuals try to find meaning for their lives and happiness, a meaning and happiness frustrated in wage labour and other hierarchies.

Capitalism's impoverishment of the individual's spirit is hardly surprising. As William Godwin argued, *"[t]he spirit of*

*oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 131] Any system based on hierarchical relationships in work will result in a deadening of the individual and in a willingness to defer to economic masters. Which is why Anarchists desire to change this and create a society based upon freedom in all aspects of life. Hence anarchists desire to abolish work, simply because it restricts the liberty and distorts the individuality of those who have to do it. To quote Emma Goldman:

> *"Anarchism aims to strip labour of its deadening, dulling aspect, of its gloom and compulsion. It aims to make work an instrument of joy, of strength, of colour, of real harmony, so that the poorest sort of a man should find in work both recreation and hope."* [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 61]

Anarchists do not think that by getting rid of work we will not have to produce necessary goods. Far from it. An anarchist society *"doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a ludic revolution ... a collective adventure in generalised joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive."* The aim is *"to abolish work and replace it, insofar as it serves useful purposes, with a multitude of new kinds of free activities. To abolish work requires going at it from two directions, quantitative and qualitative."* In terms of the first, *"we need to cut down massively the amount of working being done"* (luckily, *"most work is useless or worse and we should simply get rid of it"*). For the second, *"we have to take what useful work remains and transform it into a pleasing variety of game-like and craft-like pastimes, indistinguishable from other pleasurable pastimes, except that the happen to yield useful end-products."* [Bob Black, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17 and p. 28]



ments) for major investment decisions, thus bringing together supply and demand and allowing the plans of the various units to be co-ordinated. By this process of co-operation, production units can reduce duplicating effort and so reduce the waste associated with over-investment (and so the irrationalities of booms and slumps associated with the price mechanism, which does not provide sufficient information to allow workplaces to efficiently co-ordinate their plans).

When evaluating production methods we need to take into account as many social and ecological costs as possible and these have to be evaluated. Which costs will be taken into account, of course, be decided by those involved, as will how important they are relative to each other (i.e. how they are weighted). What factors to take into account and how to weigh them in the decision making process will be evaluated and reviewed regularly so to ensure that it reflects real costs and social concerns. As communist-anarchists consider it important to encourage all to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, it would be the role of communal confederations to determine the relative points value of given inputs and outputs. In this way, **all** individuals in a community determine how their society develops, so ensuring that economic activity is responsible to social needs and takes into account the desires of everyone affected by production. In this way consumption and production can be harmonised with the needs of individuals as members of society and the environment they live in. The industrial confederations would seek to ensure that this information is recorded and communicated and (perhaps) formulating industry-wide averages to aid decision-making by allowing syndicates and communes to compare specific goods points to the typical value.

So which factors are to be used to inform decision-making would be agreed and the information communicated between workplaces and communes so that consumers of goods can evaluate their costs in terms of ecological impact, use of re-

required in order to allow the syndicate to determine if they desire to produce the good and to enable them to prioritise the orders they receive. In this way, resource use can be guided by social considerations and "unreasonable" requests ignored (for example, if an individual states they "need" a ship-builders syndicate to build a ship for their personal use, the ship-builders may not "need" to build it and instead build ships for communal use, freely available for all to use in turn — see section I.4.6). However, in almost all cases of individual consumption, no such information will be needed as communal stores would order consumer goods in bulk as they do now. Hence the economy would be a vast network of co-operating individuals and workplaces and the dispersed knowledge which exists within any society can be put to good effect (**better** effect than under capitalism because it does not hide social and ecological costs in the way market prices do and co-operation will eliminate the business cycle and its resulting social problems).

Therefore, production units in a social anarchist society, by virtue of their autonomy within association, are aware of what is socially useful for them to produce and, by virtue of their links with communes, also aware of the social (human and ecological) cost of the resources they need to produce it. They can combine this knowledge, reflecting overall social priorities, with their local knowledge of the detailed circumstances of their workplaces and communities to decide how they can best use their productive capacity. In this way the division of knowledge within society can be used by the syndicates effectively as well as overcoming the restrictions within knowledge communication imposed by the price mechanism (see section I.1.2) and workplaces hierarchies within capitalism (see section I.1.1).

Moreover, production units, by their association within confederations ensure that there is effective communication between them. This results in a process of negotiated co-ordination between equals (i.e. horizontal links and agree-



This means that in an anarchist society every effort would be made to reduce boring, unpleasant activity to a minimum and ensure that whatever productive activity is required to be done is as pleasant as possible and based upon voluntary labour. However, it is important to remember Cornelius Castoriadis point: *"Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be the fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to ... transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more 'free' time to individuals — which might well be* ***empty*** *time — so that they may fill it at will with 'poetry' or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to find expression in creative activity."* Essentially, the *"problem is to put poetry into work."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 107]

This is why anarchists desire to abolish "work" (i.e., productive activity not under control of the people doing it), to ensure that whatever productive economic activity is required to be done is managed by those who do it. In this way it can be liberated, transformed, and so become a means of self-realisation and not a form of self-negation. In other words, anarchists want to abolish work because *"[l]ife, the art of living, has become a dull formula, flat and inert."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 166] Anarchists want to bring the spontaneity and joy of life back into productive activity and save humanity from the dead hand of capital. Anarchists consider economic activity as an expression of the human spirit, an expression of the innate human need to express ourselves and to create. Capitalism distorts these needs and makes economic activity a deadening experience by the division of labour and hierarchy. We think that *"industry is not an end in itself, but should only be a means to ensure to man his material subsistence and to make accessible to him the blessings of a higher intellectual culture. Where industry is everything and man is nothing begins the realm of a ruthless economic despotism whose workings are*

*no less disastrous than those of any political despotism. The two mutually augment one another, and they are fed from the same source."* [Rudolph Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 2]

One last point on the abolition of work. May 1st — International Workers' Day — was, as we discussed in section A.5.2, created to commemorate the Chicago Anarchist Martyrs. Anarchists then, as now, think that it should be celebrated by strike action and mass demonstrations. In other words, for anarchists, International Workers' Day should be a non-work day! That sums up the anarchist position to work nicely — that the celebration of workers' day should be based on the rejection of work.

The collection of articles in **Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society** (edited by Vernon Richards) is a useful starting place for libertarian socialist perspectives on work.

## I.4.3 How do anarchists intend to abolish work?

Basically by workers' self-management of production and common ownership of the means of production. It is hardly in the interests of those who do the actual "work" to have bad working conditions, boring, repetitive labour, and so on. Therefore, a key aspect of the liberation from work is to create a self-managed society, *"a society in which everyone has equal means to develop and that all are or can be at the same time intellectual and manual workers, and the only differences remaining between men [and women] are those which stem from the natural diversity of aptitudes, and that all jobs, all functions, give an equal right to the enjoyment of social possibilities."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 42]

Essential to this task is decentralisation and the use of appropriate technology. Decentralisation is important to ensure that those who do work can determine how to liberate it. A de-



over one which is much more abundant. Thus, while the cost-benefit points system would show absolute costs (number of hours work required, energy use, pollution, etc.) this would be complemented by information about how scare a specific good is and the desirability of the work required to produce it.

Therefore, a communist-anarchist society would be based around a network of syndicates who communicate information between each other. Instead of the price being communicated between workplaces as in capitalism, actual physical data will be sent (the cost). This data is a summary of these (negative) use values of the good (for example resources, labour time and energy used to produce it, pollution details) as well as relative scarcity. With this information a cost-benefit analysis will be conducted to determine which good will be best to use in a given situation based upon mutually agreed common values. These will be used to inform the decision on which goods to use, with how well goods meet the requirements of production (the positive use-value) being compared to their impact in terms of labour, resource use, pollution and so forth (the negative use-values) along with their relative availability.

The data for a given workplace could be compared to the industry as a whole (as confederations of syndicates would gather and produce such information — see section I.3.5) in order to determine whether a specific workplace will efficiently produce the required goods (this system has the additional advantage of indicating which workplaces require investment to bring them in line, or improve upon, the industrial average in terms of working conditions, hours worked and so on). In addition, common rules of thumb would possibly be agreed, such as agreements not to use scarce materials unless there is no alternative (either ones that use a lot of labour, energy and time to produce or those whose demand is currently exceeding supply capacity).

Similarly, when ordering goods, the syndicate, commune or individual involved will have to inform the syndicate why it is

The argument is that consumption would suffer as resources (human and material) would be diverted from more "efficient" productive activities and so reduce, over all, our economic well-being. What this argument ignores is that consumption does not exist in isolation from the rest of the economy. What we want to consume is conditioned, in part, by the sort of person we are and that is influenced by the kind of work we do, the kinds of social relationships we have, whether we are happy with our work and life, and so on. If our work is alienating and of low quality, then so will our consumption decisions. If our work is subject to hierarchical control and servile in nature then we cannot expect our consumption decisions to be totally rational — indeed they may become an attempt to find happiness via shopping, a self-defeating activity as consumption cannot solve a problem created in production. Thus rampant consumerism may be the result of capitalist "efficiency" and so the objection against socially aware production is question begging.

Of course, as well as absolute scarcity, prices under capitalism also reflect relative scarcity (while in the long term, market prices tend towards their production price plus a mark-up based on the degree of monopoly in a market, in the short term prices can change as a result of changes in supply and demand). How a communist society could take into account such short term changes and communicate them through out the economy is discussed in section I.4.5. Moreover, it is likely that they will factor in the desirability of the work performed to indicate the potential waste in human time involved in production (see section I.4.13 for a discussion of how this could be done). The logic behind this is simple, a resource which people **like** to produce will be a better use of the scare resource of an individual's time than one people hate producing. Another key factor in making sensible decisions would be the relative scarcity of a good. After all, it would make little sense when making a decision to use a good which is in short supply



centralised system will ensure that ordinary people can identify areas for technological innovation and so understand the need to get rid of certain kinds of work. Unless ordinary people understand and control the introduction of technology, then they will never be fully aware of the benefits of technology and resist advances which may be in their best interests to introduce. This is the full meaning of appropriate technology, namely the use of technology which those most affected feel to be best in a given situation. Such technology may or may not be technologically "advanced" but it will be of the kind which ordinary people can understand and, most importantly, control.

The potential for rational use of technology can be seen from capitalism. Under capitalism, technology is used to increase profits, to expand the economy, not to liberate **all** individuals from useless toil (it does, of course, liberate a few from such "activity"). As economist Juliet B. Schor points out, productivity *"measures the goods and services that result from each hour worked. When productivity rises, a worker can either produce the current output in less time, or remain at work the same number of hours and produce more."* With rising productivity, we are presented with the possibility of more free time. For example, since 1948 the level of productivity of the American worker *"has more than doubled. In other words, we could now produce our 1948 standard of living ... . in less than half the time it took that year. We could actually have chosen the four-hour day. Or a working year of six months."* [**The Overworked American**, p. 2]

And, remember, these figures include production in many areas of the economy that would not exist in a free society — state and capitalist bureaucracy, weapons production for the military, property defence, the finance sector, and so on. As Alexander Berkman argued, millions are *"engaged in trade, ... advertisers, and various other middlemen of the present system"* along with the armed forces and *"the great numbers employed in*

*unnecessary and harmful occupations, such as building warships, the manufacture of ammunition and other military equipment"* would be *"released for useful work by a revolution."* [**What is Anarchism**, pp. 224–5] So the working week will be reduced simply because more people will be available for doing essential work. Moreover, goods will be built to last and so much production will become sensible and not governed by an insane desire to maximise profits at the expense of everything else. In addition, this is not taking into account the impact of a more just distribution of consumption in terms of living standards and production, meaning that a standard of living produced by working half the time would be far higher than that implied by Schor's 1948 baseline (not to mention the advances in technology since then either!). In short, do not take the 1948 date as implying a literal return to that period!

Moreover, a lower working week would see productivity rising. *"Thus,"* as one economist summarises, *"when the hours of labour were reduced, the better-rested workers were often able to produce as much or more in the shorter hours than they had previously in longer hours."* Yet *"competition between employers would make it unlikely that a working day of optimal length would be established"* under capitalism. In addition, *"more disposable time might better contribute to people's well-being — that is, to things such as trust, health, learning, family life, self-reliance and citizenship"*. While this may reduce such conventional economic measures as GDP, the fact is that such measures are flawed. After all, *"an increase in GDP could represent a diminution of free time accompanied by an increased output of goods and services whose sole utility was either facilitating labour-market participation or repairing some of the social damage that resulted from the stress of overwork or neglect of non-market activity."* [Tom Walker, *"Why Economists dislike a Lump of Labor"*, pp. 279–91, **Review of Social Economy**, vol. 65, No. 3, p. 286, pp. 287–8 and p. 288]



> *ground supervising tunnel traffic ... Similarly the social choice between silk and rayon is not one that can be made simply on the different costs of production, or the difference in quality between the fibres themselves: there also remains, to be integrated in the decision, the question as to difference in working-pleasure between tending silkworms and assisting in rayon production. What the product contributes to the labourer is just as important as what the worker contributes to the product. A well-managed society might alter the process of motor car assemblage, at some loss of speed and cheapness, in order to produce a more interesting routine for the worker: similarly, it would either go to the expense of equipping dry-process cement making plants with dust removers — or replace the product itself with a less noxious substitute. When none of these alternatives was available, it would drastically reduce the demand itself to the lowest possible level."* [**The Future of Technics and Civilisation**, pp. 160–1]

Obviously, today, we would include ecological issues as well as human ones. Any decision making process which disregards the quality of work or the effect on the human and natural environment is a deranged one. However, this is how capitalism operates, with the market rewarding capitalists and managers who introduce de-humanising and ecologically harmful practices. Indeed, so biased against labour and the environment is capitalism that many economists and pro-capitalists argue that reducing "efficiency" by such social concerns (as expressed by the passing laws related to labour rights and environmental protection) is actually **harmful** to an economy, which is a total reversal of common sense and human feelings (after all, surely the economy should satisfy human needs and not sacrifice those needs to the economy?).

> *various relevant considerations could be used … The points attributed to these considerations would be subjective, in the sense that this would depend on a deliberate social decision rather than some objective standard, but this is the case even under capitalism when a monetary value has to be attributed to some such 'cost' or 'benefit' .. . In the sense that one of the aims of socialism is precisely to rescue humankind from the capitalist fixation with production time/ money, cost-benefit analyses, as a means of taking into account other factors, could therefore be said to be more appropriate for use in socialism than under capitalism. Using points systems to attribute relative importance in this way … [is] simply to employ a technique to facilitate decision-making in particular concrete cases."* [Adam Buick and John Crump, **State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management**, pp. 138–139]

This points system would be the means by which producers and consumers would be able to determine whether the use of a particular good is efficient or not. Unlike prices, this cost-benefit analysis system would ensure that production and consumption reflects social and ecological costs, awareness and priorities. Moreover, this analysis would be a **guide** to decision making and not a replacement of human decision making and evaluation. As Lewis Mumford argued:

> *"it is plain that in the decision as to whether to build a bridge or a tunnel there is a human question that should outweigh the question of cheapness or mechanical feasibility: namely the number of lives that will be lost in the actual building or the advisability of condemning a certain number of men [and women] to spend their entire working days under-*



All this suggests the level of production for useful goods with a four-hour working day would be much higher than the 1948 level or, of course, the working day could be made even shorter. As such, we can easily combine a decent standard of living with a significant reduction of the necessary working time required to produce it. Once we realise that much work under capitalism exists to manage aspects of the profit system or are produced as a result of that system and the damage it does, we can see how a self-managed society can give us more time for ourselves in addition to producing useful goods (rather than working long and hard to produce surplus value for the few).

However, anarchists do not see it as simply a case of reducing the hours of work will keeping the remaining work as it. That would be silly. We aim to transform what useful productive activity is left. When self-management becomes universal we will see the end of division of labour as mental and physical work becomes unified and those who do the work also manage it. This will allow *"the free exercise of **all** the faculties of man"* both inside and outside "work." [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 148] The aim of such a development would be to turn productive activity, as far as possible, into an enjoyable experience. In the words of Murray Bookchin it is the **quality** and **nature** of the work process that counts:

> *"If workers' councils and workers' management of production do not transform the work into a joyful activity, free time into a marvellous experience, and the workplace into a community, then they remain merely formal structures, in fact, **class** structures. They perpetuate the limitations of the proletariat as a product of bourgeois social conditions. Indeed, no movement that raises the demand for workers' councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries to promote sweeping transformations in the*

*environment of the work place."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 88]

Work will become, primarily, the expression of a person's pleasure in what they are doing and become like an art — an expression of their creativity and individuality. Work as an art will become expressed in the workplace as well as the work process, with workplaces transformed and integrated into the local community and environment (see section I.4.15). This will obviously apply to work conducted in the home as well, otherwise the *"revolution, intoxicated with the beautiful words, Liberty, Equality, Solidarity, would not be a revolution if it maintained slavery at home. Half [of] humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128]

In other words, anarchists desire *"to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work — the production of use-values — with the best of play ... its freedom and its fun, its voluntariness and its intrinsic gratification"*. In short, the transformation of production (creating *"what seems needful""*) into "***productive play***". [Bob Black, *"Smokestack Lightning"*, **Friendly Fire**, p. 48 and p. 49]

Workers' self-management of production (see section I.3.2) would be the means of achieving this. Only those subject to a specific mode of working can be in a position to transform it and their workplace into something fit for free individuals to create in. Only those who know a workplace which would only exist in a hierarchical system like capitalism can be in a position to decommission it safely and quickly. The very basis of free association will ensure the abolition of work, as individuals will apply for "work" they enjoy doing and so would be interested in reducing "work" they did not want to do to a minimum. Therefore, an anarchist society would abolish work by ensuring that those who do it actually control it. *"Personal initiative will be encouraged and every tendency to uniformity and*



well to ensure that supply meets demand. This does not imply a Stalinist-like command economy, but simple book keeping for *"each Bank of Exchange makes sure in advance that these products are in demand [in order to risk] nothing by immediately issuing payment vouchers to the producers."* [*"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 366 and p. 367] The workers syndicates would still determine what orders to produce and each commune would be free to choose its suppliers.

As will be discussed in more depth later (see section I.4.8) information about consumption patterns will be recorded and used by workers to inform their production and investment decisions. In addition, we can imagine that production syndicates would encourage communes as well as consumer groups and co-operatives to participate in making these decisions. This would ensure that produced goods reflect consumer needs. Moreover, as conditions permit, the exchange functions of the communal "banks" would (in all likelihood) be gradually replaced by the distribution of goods in accordance with the needs of the consumers. In other words, most supporters of collectivist anarchism see it as a temporary measure before anarcho-communism could develop.

Communist anarchism would be similar to collectivism, i.e. a system of confederations of collectives, communes and distribution centres (Communal stores). However, in an anarcho-communist system, prices are not used. How will economic decision making be done? One possible solution is as follows:

> *"As to decisions involving choices of a general nature, such as what forms of energy to use, which of two or more materials to employ to produce a particular good, whether to build a new factory, there is a . .. technique ... that could be [used] ... 'cost-benefit analysis' . .. [I]n socialism a points scheme for attributing relative importance to the*

what to produce, when to do it, and how to do it. In this way workers retain control of the product of their labour. It is the social context of these decisions and what criteria workers use to make their decisions that differ between anarchist schools of thought.

Although collectivism promotes the greatest autonomy for worker associations, it should not be confused with a market economy as advocated by supporters of mutualism or Individualist anarchism. The goods produced by the collectivised factories and workshops are exchanged not according to highest price that can be wrung from consumers, but according to their actual production costs. The determination of these honest prices would be made by a *"Bank of Exchange"* in each community (obviously an idea borrowed from Proudhon). These Banks would represent the various producer confederations and consumer/citizen groups in the community and would seek to negotiate these "honest" prices (which would, in all likelihood, include "hidden" costs like pollution). These agreements would be subject to ratification by the assemblies of those involved.

As James Guillaume put it *"the value of the commodities having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional co-operative federations and the various communes, who will also furnish statistics to the Banks of Exchange. The Bank of Exchange will remit to the producers negotiable vouchers representing the value of their products; these vouchers will be accepted throughout the territory included in the federation of communes."* These vouchers would be related to hours worked, for example, and when used as a guide for investment decisions could be supplemented with cost-benefit analysis of the kind possibly used in a communist-anarchist society (see below). Although this scheme bears a strong resemblance to Proudhonian *"People's Banks,"* it should be noted that the Banks of Exchange, along with a *"Communal Statistical Commission,"* are intended to have a planning function as



*centralisation combated."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 42]

All this does not imply that anarchists think that individuals will not seek to "specialise" in one form of productive activity rather than another. Far from it, people in a free society will pick activities which interest them as the main focal point of their means of self-expression (after all, not everyone enjoys the same games and pastimes so why expect the same of productive play?). *"It is evident,"* noted Kropotkin, *"that all men and women cannot equally enjoy the pursuit of scientific work. The variety of inclinations is such that some will find more pleasure in science, some others in art, and others again in some of the numberless branches of the production of wealth."* This "division of work" is commonplace in humanity this natural desire to do what interests you and what you are good at will be encouraged in an anarchist society. As Kropotkin argued, anarchists *"fully recognise the necessity of specialisation of knowledge, but we maintain that specialisation must follow general education, and that general education must be given in science and handicraft alike. To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities ... we advocate the* ***education integrale*** *[integral education], or complete education, which means the disappearance of that pernicious division."* Anarchists are, needless to say, aware that training and study are required to qualify you to so some tasks and a free society would ensure that individuals would achieve the necessary recognised levels before undertaking them (by means of, say, professional bodies who organise a certification process). Kropotkin was aware, however, that both individuals and society would benefit from a diversity of activities and a strong general knowledge: *"But whatever the occupations preferred by everyone, everyone will be the more useful in his [or her] branch if he [or she] is in possession of a serious scientific knowledge. And, whosoever he might be ... he would be the gainer if he spent a part of his life in the workshop or the farm (the*

*workshop **and** the farm), if he were in contact with humanity in its daily work, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he himself discharges his duties as an unprivileged producer of wealth."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 186, p. 172 and p. 186]

However, while specialisation would continue, the permanent division of individuals into manual or brain workers would be eliminated. Individuals will manage all aspects of the "work" required (for example, engineers will also take part in self-managing their workplaces), a variety of activities would be encouraged and the strict division of labour of capitalism will be abolished. In other words, anarchists want to replace the division of labour by the division of work. We must stress that we are not playing with words here. John Crump presents a good summary of the ideas of the Japanese anarchist Hatta Shuzo on this difference:

> *"[We must] recognise the distinction which Hatta made between the 'division of labour' ... and the 'division of work' ... while Hatta believed that the division of labour ... was the cause of class divisions and exploitation, he did not see anything sinister in the division of work ... On the contrary, Hatta believed that the division of work was a benign and unavoidable feature of any productive process: 'it goes without saying that within society, whatever the kind of production, there has to be a division of work.' ... [For] the dangers [of division of labour] to which Hatta [like other anarchists like Proudhon and Kropotkin] drew attention did not arise from a situation where, at any one time, different people were engaged in different productive activities ... What did spell danger, however, was when, either individually or collectively, people permanently divided along occupational lines ... and gave rise to*



*form of distribution the producers should accept in their different groups — whether the communist solution, or labour checks, or equal salaries, or any other method"* while considering a given solution best in their opinion. [**Anarchism**, p. 166] Free experimentation is a key aspect of anarchism.

While certain anarchists have certain preferences on the social system they want to live in and so argue for that, they are aware that objective circumstances and social desires will determine what is introduced during a revolution (for example, while Kropotkin was a communist-anarchist and considered it essential that a revolution proceed towards communism as quickly as possible, he was aware that it was unlikely it would be introduced fully immediately — see section I.2.2 for details). However, we will outline some possible means of economic decision making criteria as this question is an important one and so we will indicate what possible solutions exist in different forms of anarchism.

In a mutualist or collectivist system, the answer is easy. Prices will exist and be used as a means of making decisions (although, as Malatesta suggested, such non-communist anarchies would *"seek a way to ensure that money truly represents the useful work performed by its possessors"* rather than, as today, *"the means for living on the labour of others"* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 101 and p. 100]). Mutualism will be more market orientated than collectivism, with collectivism being based on confederations of collectives to respond to changes in demand (i.e. to determine investment decisions and ensure that supply is kept in line with demand). Mutualism, with its system of market based distribution around a network of co-operatives and mutual banks, does not really need a further discussion as its basic operations are the same as in any non-capitalist market system. Collectivism and communism will have to be discussed in more detail. However, all systems are based on workers' self-management and so the individuals directly affected make the decisions concerning

> *the disastrous consequences . ... [of] the degrading of labour to a mechanical function; the lack of responsibility for, understanding of, or interest in other branches of production; and the need for a superior administrative organ to co-ordinate the various branches of production."* [**Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, pp. 146–7]

As Kropotkin argued:

> *"while a **temporary** division of functions remains the surest guarantee of success in each separate undertaking, the **permanent** division is doomed to disappear, and to be substituted by a variety of pursuits — intellectual, industrial, and agricultural — corresponding to the different capacities of the individual, as well as to the variety of capacities within every human aggregate."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

As an aside, supporters of capitalism argue that **integrated** labour must be more inefficient than **divided** labour as capitalist firms have not introduced it. This is false for numerous reasons.

Firstly, we have to put out the inhuman logic of the assertion. After all, few would argue in favour of slavery if it were, in fact, **more** productive than wage labour but such is the logical conclusion of this argument. If someone did argue that the only reason slavery was not the dominant mode of labour simply because it was inefficient we would consider them as less than human. Simply put, it is a sick ideology which happily sacrifices individuals for the sake of slightly more products. Sadly, that is what many defenders of capitalism do, ultimately, argue for.

Secondly, capitalist firms are not neutral structures but rather a system of hierarchies, with entrenched interests and



long as they are not invasive about it the fact is that any economy is based on interactions between individuals. The law of "supply and demand" easily, and often, makes a mockery of the ideas that individuals can work as long as they like — usually they end up working as long as required by market forces (i.e. the actions of other individuals, but turned into a force outwith their control, see section I.1.3). This means that individuals do not work as long as they like, but as long as they have to in order to survive. Knowing that "market forces" is the cause of long hours of work hardly makes them any nicer.

And it seems strange to the communist-anarchist that certain free agreements made between equals can be considered authoritarian while others are not. The individualist-anarchist argument that social co-operation to reduce labour is "authoritarian" while agreements between individuals on the market are not seems illogical to social anarchists. They cannot see how it is better for individuals to be pressured into working longer than they desire by "invisible hands" than to come to an arrangement with others to manage their own affairs to maximise their free time.

Therefore, free agreement between free and equal individuals is considered the key to abolishing work, based upon decentralisation of power and the use of appropriate technology.

## I.4.4 What economic decision making criteria could be used in anarchy?

Firstly, it should be noted that anarchists do not have any set idea about the answer to this question. Most anarchists are communists, desiring to see the end of money, but that does not mean they want to impose communism onto people. Far from it, communism can only be truly libertarian if it is organised from the bottom up. So, anarchists would agree with Kropotkin that it is a case of not *"determining in advance what*

needs. Managers will only introduce a work technique that maintains their power (and so their profits). As we argue in section J.5.12, while experiments in workers' participation see a rise in efficiency and productivity, managers stop them simply because they recognise that workers' control undercuts their power by empowering workers who then can fight for a greater slice of the value they produce (not to mention come to the conclusion that while the boss needs them to work, they don't need to boss to manage them!). So the lack of integrated labour under capitalism simply means that it does not empower management nor secure their profits and power, **not** that it is less efficient.

Thirdly, the attempts by managers and bosses to introduce "flexibility" by eliminating unions suggests that integration **is** more efficient. After all, one of the major complains directed towards union contracts are that they explicitly documented what workers could and could not do (for example, union members would refuse to do work which was outside their agreed job descriptions). This is usually classed as an example of the evil of regulations. However, if we look at it from the viewpoint of contract and division of labour, it exposes the inefficiency and inflexibility of both as a means of co-operation. After all, what is this refusal actually mean? It means that the worker refuses to do work that is not specified in his or her contract! Their job description indicates what they have been contracted to do and anything else has not been agreed upon in advance. The contract specifies a clear, specified and agreed division of labour in a workplace between worker and boss.

While being a wonderful example of a well-designed contract, managers discovered that they could not operate their workplaces because of them. Rather, they needed a general "do what you are told" contract (which of course is hardly an example of contract reducing authority) and such a contract **integrates** numerous work tasks into one. The managers diatribe against union contracts suggests that production needs some



Therefore, we can imagine a social anarchist society being based on two basic arrangements — firstly, an agreed minimum working week of, say, 16 hours, in a syndicate of your choice, plus any amount of hours doing "work" which you feel like doing — for example, art, scientific experimentation, DIY, playing music, composing, gardening and so on. How that minimum working week was actually organised would vary between workplace and commune, with work times, flexi-time, job rotation and so on determined by each syndicate (for example, one syndicate may work 8 hours a day for 2 days, another 4 hours a day for 4 days, one may use flexi-time, another more rigid starting and stopping times). Needless to say, in response to consumption patterns, syndicates will have to expand or reduce production and will have to attract volunteers to do the necessary work as would syndicates whose work was considered dangerous or unwanted. In such circumstances, volunteers could arrange doing a few hours of such activity for more free time or it could be agreed that one hour of such unwanted positions equals more hours in a more desired one (see section I.4.13 for more on this). Needless to say, the aim of technological progress would be to eliminate unpleasant and unwanted tasks and to reduce the basic working week more and more until the very concept of necessary "work" and free time enjoyments is abolished. Anarchists are convinced that the decentralisation of power within a free society would unleash a wealth of innovation and ensure that unpleasant tasks are minimised and fairly shared while required productive activity is made as pleasant and enjoyable as possible.

It could be said that this sort of agreement is a restriction of liberty because it is "man-made" (as opposed to the "natural law" of "supply and demand"). This is a common defence of the non-capitalist market by individualist anarchists against anarcho-communism, for example. However, while in theory individualist-anarchists can claim that in their vision of society, they don't care when, where, or how a person earns a living, as

ing times, require notice if individuals want to change "jobs" and so on within and between syndicates. Any joint effort requires some degree of co-operation and agreement. Moreover, between syndicates, an agreement would be reached (in all likelihood) that determined the minimum working hours required by all members of society able to work. As Kropotkin argued, an communist anarchist society would be based upon the such a minimum-hour *"contract"* between its members:

> *"We undertake to give you the use of our houses, stores, streets, means of transport, schools, museums, etc., on condition that, from twenty to forty-five or fifty years of age, you consecrate four or five hours a day to some work recognised as necessary to existence. Choose yourself the producing group which you wish to join, or organise a new group, provided that it will undertake to produce necessaries. And as for the remainder of your time, combine together with whomsoever you like, for recreation, art, or science, according to the bent of your taste … Twelve or fifteen hundred hours of work a year … is all we ask of you. For that amount of work we guarantee to you the free use of all that these groups produce, or will produce."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 153–4]

With such work *"necessary to existence"* being recognised by individuals and expressed by demand for labour from productive syndicates. It is, of course, up to the individual to decide which work he or she desires to perform from the positions available in the various associations in existence. A union card could be the means by which work hours would be recorded and access to the common wealth of society ensured. And, of course, individuals and groups are free to work alone and exchange the produce of their labour with others, including the confederated syndicates, if they so desired. An anarchist society will be as flexible as possible.



form of integrated labour to actually work (as well as showing the hypocrisy of the labour contract under capitalism as labour "flexibility" simply means labour "commodification" — a machine does not question what its used for, the ideal under capitalism is a similar unquestioning nature for labour). The union job description indicates that production needs the integration of labour while demanding a division of work. As Cornelius Castoriadis argued:

> *"Modern production has destroyed many traditional professional qualifications. It has created automatic or semi-automatic machines. It has thereby itself demolished its own traditional framework for the industrial division of labour. It has given birth to a universal worker who is capable, after a relatively short apprenticeship, of using most machines. Once one gets beyond its class aspects, the 'posting' of workers to particular jobs in a big modern factory corresponds less and less to a genuine division of* ***labour*** *and more and more to a simple division of tasks. Workers are not allocated to given areas of the productive process and then riveted to them because their 'occupational skills' invariably correspond to the 'skills required' by management. They are placed there … just because a particular vacancy happened to exist."* [**Political and Economic Writings**, vol. 2, p. 117]

By replacing the division of labour with the division of work, a free society will ensure that productive activity can be transformed into an enjoyable task (or series of tasks). By integrating labour, all the capacities of the producer can be expressed so eliminating a major source of alienation and unhappiness in society. *"The main subject of social economy,"* argued Kropotkin, is *"the* ***economy*** *of energy required for the*

*satisfaction of* ***human needs.*** *"* These needs obviously expressed both the needs of the producers for empowering and interesting work and their need for a healthy and balanced environment. Thus Kropotkin discussed the *"advantages"* which could be *"derive[d] from a combination of industrial pursuits with intensive agriculture, and of brain work with manual work."* The *"greatest sum total of well-being can be obtained when a variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community; and that man [and woman] shows his best when he is in a position to apply his usually-varied capacities to several pursuits in the farm, the workshop, the factory, the study or the studio, instead of being riveted for life to one of these pursuits only."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 17–8] This means that *"[u]nder socialism, factories would have no reason to accept the artificially rigid division of labour now prevailing. There will be every reason to encourage a rotation of workers* ***between shops and departments*** *and between production and office areas."* The *"residues of capitalism's division of labour gradually will have to be eliminated"* as *"socialist society cannot survive unless it demolishes this division."* [Castoriadis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 117]

Anarchists think that a decentralised social system will allow "work" to be abolished and economic activity humanised and made a means to an end (namely producing useful things and liberated individuals). This would be achieved by, as Rudolf Rocker puts it, the *"alliance of free groups of men and women based on co-operative labour and a planned administration of things in the interest of the community."* However, as things are produced by people, it could be suggested that this implies a *"planned administration of people"* (although few who suggest this danger apply it to capitalist firms which are like mini-centrally planned states). This objection is false simply because anarchism aims *"to reconstruct the economic life of the peoples from the ground up and build it up anew in the spirit of Socialism"* and, moreover, *"only the producers themselves are fitted for this task, since they are the only value-creating element in society out of which a new future can arise."* Such a reconstructed economic life would be based on anarchist principles, that is *"based on the principles of federalism, a free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination of every member above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 72, p. 62 and p. 60]



In other words, those who produce also administer and so govern themselves in free association (and it should be pointed out that any group of individuals in association will make "plans" and "plan", the important question is who does the planning and who does the work. Only in anarchy are both functions united into the same people). The *"planned administration of things"* would be done by the producers **themselves,** in their independent groupings. This would likely take the form (as we indicated in section I.3) of confederations of syndicates who communicate information between themselves and respond to changes in the production and distribution of products by increasing or decreasing the required means of production in a co-operative (i.e. *"planned"*) fashion. No "central planning" or "central planners" governing the economy, just workers co-operating together as equals (as Kropotkin argued, free socialism *"must result from thousands of separate local actions, all directed towards the same aim. It cannot be dictated by a central body: it must result from the numberless local needs and wants."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 54]).

Now, any form of association requires agreement. Therefore, even a society based on the communist-anarchist maxim *"from each according to their ability, to each according to their need"* will need to make agreements in order to ensure co-operative ventures succeed. In other words, members of a co-operative commonwealth would have to make and keep to their agreements between themselves. This means that the members of a syndicate would agree joint starting and finish-

doing any activity. So anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they say that:

> *"In a society that makes every effort to depreciate the esteem that derives from anything other than conspicuous consumption, it is not surprising that great income differentials are seen as necessary to induce effort. But to assume that only conspicuous consumption can motivate people because under capitalism we have strained to make it so is unwarranted. There is plenty of evidence that people can be moved to great sacrifices for reasons other than a desire for personal wealth .. . there is good reason to believe that for nonpathological people wealth is generally coveted only as a* ***means*** *of attaining other ends such as economic security, comfort, social esteem, respect, status, or power."* [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 52]

We should note here that the education syndicates would obviously take into account the trends in "work" placement requirements when deciding upon the structure of their classes. In this way, education would respond to the needs of society as well as the needs of the individual (as would any productive syndicate).

## I.4.14 What about the person who will not work?

Anarchism is based on voluntary labour. If people do not desire to work then they cannot (must not) be forced to by means of physical coercion. This makes some wonder what happens if someone refuses to work in a libertarian society.

In terms of a mutualist or collectivist anarchy, this question is easy to answer for goods are distributed according to work



but as production grows then *"it will not be necessary to ration consumption. The practice of selling, which was adopted as a sort of deterrent to immoderate consumption, will be abolished"* and goods *"will be distribute[d] ... in accordance with the needs of the consumers."* [*"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 368] Other possibilities may include communes deciding that certain scare goods are only available to those who do the unpleasant work (such as collecting the rubbish) or that people have equal access but the actual goods are shared and used for short periods of time (as is currently the case with public libraries). As Situationist Ken Knabb suggests after usefully discussing *"just some of the possibilities"*: *"Experimenting with different methods, people will find out for themselves what forms of ownership, exchange and reckoning are necessary."* [**Public Secrets**, p. 73]

Whether or not full communism **can** be introduced instantly is a moot point amongst collectivist and communist anarchists, although most would like to see society develop towards a communist goal eventually. Of course, for people used to capitalism this may sound totally utopian. Possibly it is. However, as Oscar Wilde said, a map of the world without Utopia on it is not worth having. One thing is sure, if the developments we have outlined above fail to appear and attempts at communism fail due to waste and demand exceeding supply then a free society would make the necessary decisions and introduce some means of limiting supply (such as, for example, labour notes, equal wages, and so on). Rest assured, though, *"the difficulty will be solved and obstacles in the shape of making necessary changes in the detailed working of the system of production and its relation to consumption, will vanish before the ingenuity of the myriad minds vitally concerned in overcoming them."* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 21]

## I.4.7 What will stop producers ignoring consumers?

It is often claimed that without a market producers would ignore the needs of consumers. Without the threat (and fear) of unemployment and destitution and the promise of higher profits, producers would turn out shoddy goods. The holders of this argument point to the example of the Soviet Union which was notorious for terrible goods and a lack of consumer commodities.

Capitalism, in comparison to the old Soviet block, does, to some degree, make the producers accountable to the consumers. If the producer ignores the desires of the consumer then they will loose business to those who do not and be forced, perhaps, out of business (large companies, of course, due to their resources can hold out far longer than smaller ones). Thus we have the carrot (profits) and the stick (fear of poverty) — although, of course, the carrot can be used as a stick against the consumer (no profit, no sale, no matter how much the consumer may need it). Ignoring the obvious objection to this analogy (namely we are human beings, **not** donkeys!) it does have contain an important point. What will ensure that consumer needs are meet in an anarchist society?

In an Individualist or Mutualist anarchist system, as it is based on a market, producers would be subject to market forces and so have to meet consumers needs. Collectivist-anarchism meets consumer needs in a similar way, as producers would be accountable to consumers by the process of buying and selling between co-operatives. As James Guillaume put it, the workers associations would *"deposit their unconsumed commodities in the facilities provided by the [communal] Bank of Exchange ... The Bank of Exchange would remit to the producers negotiable **vouchers** representing the value of their products"* (this value *"having been established in advance by a contractual agreement*



geting the amounts available, a free society can ensure that individual desires for specific kinds of work can be matched with the requirements of society for useful production.

And we must point out (just to make sure we are not misunderstood) that there will be no group of "planners" deciding which applications for resources get accepted. Instead, individuals and associations would apply to different production units for resources, whose workers in turn decide whether to produce the goods requested. If it is within the syndicate's agreed budget then it is likely that they will produce the required materials. In this way, a communist-anarchist society will ensure the maximum amount of economic freedom to start new syndicates and join existing ones plus ensure that social production does not suffer in the process.

Of course, no system is perfect — we are sure that not everyone will be able to do the work they enjoy the most (this is also the case under capitalism, we may add). In an anarchist society every method of ensuring that individuals pursue the work they are interested in would be investigated. If a possible solution can be found, we are sure that it will. What a free society would make sure of was that neither the capitalist market redeveloped (which ensures that the majority are marginalised into wage slavery) or a state socialist *"labour army"* type allocation process developed (which would ensure that free socialism did not remain free or socialist for long).

In this manner, anarchism will be able to ensure the principle of voluntary labour and free association as well as making sure that unpleasant and unwanted "work" is done. Moreover, most anarchists are sure that in a free society such requirements to encourage people to volunteer for unpleasant work will disappear over time as feelings of mutual aid and solidarity become more and more common place. Indeed, it is likely that people will gain respect for doing jobs that others might find unpleasant and so it might become "glamorous" to do such activity. Showing off to friends can be a powerful stimulus in

keeping would be minimised or even got eliminated as society developed freely. Until such time as it can be automated away, a free society will have to encourage people to volunteer for "work" placements they do not particularly want to do by these and other methods.

It will be clear what is considered unpleasant work in any society — few people (if any) will volunteer to do it. As in any advanced society, communities and syndicates who required extra help would inform others of their need by the various form of media that existed. In addition, it would be likely that each community would have a *"division of activity"* syndicate whose work would be to distribute information about these posts and to which members of a community would go to discover what placements existed for the line of "work" they were interested in. So we have a means by which syndicates and communes can ask for new associates and the means by which individuals can discover these placements. Obviously, some tasks will still require qualifications and that will be taken into account when syndicates and communes "advertise" for help.

And it is important to remember that the means of production required by new syndicates do not fall from the sky. Other members of society will have to work to produce the required goods. Therefore it is likely that the syndicates and communes would agree that only a certain (maximum) percentage of production would be allocated to start-up syndicates (as opposed to increasing the resources of existing confederations). Such a figure would obviously be revised periodically in order to take into account changing circumstances. Members of the community who decide to form syndicates for new productive tasks or syndicates which do the same work but are independent of existing confederations would have to get the agreement of other workers to supply them with the necessary means of production (just as today they have to get the agreement of a bank to receive the necessary credit to start a new business). By bud-



*between the regional co-operative federations and the various communes"*). ["*On Building the New Social Order*", pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 366] If the goods are not in demand then the producer associations would not be able to sell the product of their labour to the Bank of Exchange (or directly to other syndicates or communes) and so they would adjust their output accordingly. Of course, there are problems with these systems due to their basis in the market (as discussed in section I.1.3), although these problems were recognised by Proudhon who argued for an agro-industrial federation to protect self-management from the negative effects of market forces (as noted in section I.3.5).

While mutualist and collectivist anarchists can argue that producers would respond to consumer needs otherwise they would not get an income, communist-anarchists (as they seek a moneyless society) cannot argue their system would reward producers in this way. So what mechanism exists to ensure that *"the wants of all"* are, in fact, met? How does anarcho-communism ensure that production becomes *"the mere servant of consumption"* and *"mould itself on the wants of the consumer, not dictate to him conditions"*? [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 57] Libertarian communists argue that in a **free** communist society consumers' needs would be met. This is because of the decentralised and federal nature of such a society.

So what is the mechanism which makes producers accountable to consumers in a libertarian communist society? Firstly, communes would practice their power of ***"exit"*** in the distributive network. If a syndicate was producing sub-standard goods or refusing to change their output in the face of changing consumer needs, then the communal stores would turn to those syndicates which **were** producing the goods desired. The original syndicates would then be producing for their own stocks, a pointless task and one few, if any, would do. After all, people generally desire their work to have meaning, to be useful. To just work, producing something no-one wanted would be such

a demoralising task that few, if any, sane people would do it (under capitalism people put up with spirit destroying work as some income is better than none, such an "incentive" would not exist in a free society).

As can be seen, ***"exit"*** would still exist in libertarian communism. However, it could be argued that unresponsive or inefficient syndicates would still exist, exploiting the rest of society by producing rubbish (or goods which are of less than average quality) and consuming the products of other people's labour, confident that without the fear of poverty and unemployment they can continue to do this indefinitely. Without the market, it is argued, some form of bureaucracy would be required (or develop) which would have the power to punish such syndicates. Thus the state would continue in "libertarian" communism, with the "higher" bodies using coercion against the lower ones to ensure they meet consumer needs or produced enough.

While, at first glance, this appears to be a possible problem on closer inspection it is flawed. This is because anarchism is based not only on ***"exit"*** but also ***"voice"***. Unlike capitalism, libertarian communism is based on association and communication. Each syndicate and commune is in free agreement and confederation with all the others. Thus, is a specific syndicate was producing bad goods or not pulling its weight, then those in contact with them would soon realise this. First, those unhappy with a syndicate's work would appeal to them directly to get their act together. If this did not work, then they would notify their disapproval by refusing to associate with them in the future (i.e. they would use their power of ***"exit"*** as well as refusing to provide the syndicate with any goods **it** requires). They would also let society as a whole know (via the media) as well as contacting consumer groups and co-operatives and the relevant producer and communal confederations which they and the other syndicate are members of, who would, in turn, inform their members of the problems (the relevant confed-



A communist-anarchist society's solution would be similar to the collectivist one. There would still be basic agreements between its members for work done and so for work placements with excess supply of workers the amount of hours necessary to meet the agreed minimum would correspondingly increase. For example, an industry with 100% excess supply of volunteers would see its minimum requirement increase from (say) 20 hours a week to 30 hours. An industry with less applicants than required would see the number of required hours decrease, plus increases in holiday time and so on. As G.D.H. Cole argued in respect of this point:

> *"Let us first by the fullest application of machinery and scientific methods eliminate or reduce ... 'dirty work' that admit to such treatment. This has never been tried ... under capitalism ... It is cheaper to exploit and ruin human beings ... Secondly, let us see what forms of 'dirty work' we can do without ... [and] if any form of work is not only unpleasant but degrading, we will do without it, whatever the cost. No human being ought to be allowed or compelled to do work that degrades. Thirdly, for what dull or unpleasant work remains, let us offer whatever special conditions are required to attract the necessary workers, not in higher pay, but in shorter hours, holidays extending over six months in the year, conditions attractive enough to men who have other uses for their time or attention to being the requisite number to undertake it voluntarily."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 76]

By these methods a balance between industrial sectors would be achieved as individuals would balance their desire for interesting work with their desires for free time. Over time, by using the power of appropriate technology, even such time

ular tasks could balance each other out. Or such tasks could be rotated randomly by lottery. The possibilities are many and, undoubtedly, a free people will try many different ones in different areas.

Another possible solution could be to follow the ideas of Josiah Warren and take into account the undesirability of the work when considering the level of labour notes received or communal hours worked. In other words, in a collectivist society the individuals who do unpleasant work may be "rewarded" (along with social esteem) with a slightly higher pay — the number of labour notes, for example, for such work would be a multiple of the standard amount, the actual figure being related to how much supply exceeds demand (in a communist society, a similar solution could be possible, with the number of necessary hours required by an individual being reduced by an amount that corresponds to the undesirability of the work involved). The actual levels of "reward" would be determined by agreements between the syndicates. For example, if a given type of work has 50% more people wanting to do it than actually required, then the labour value for one hours work in this industry would correspondingly be less than one hour. If fewer people applied than required, then the labour value would increase, as would holiday time, etc. For "work" placements in which supply exceeded demand, it would be easy to arrange a work share scheme to ensure that most people get a chance to do that kind of work (along with such methods as increasing the value of an hour's labour, reducing holiday allocations and such like).

In this way, "supply and demand" for workers would soon approximate each other. In addition, a collectivist society would be better placed than the current system to ensure work-sharing and other methods to spread unpleasant and pleasant tasks equally around society due to its organs of self-management and the rising social awareness via participation and debate within those organs.



erations could include local and regional communal confederations, the general cross-industry confederation, its own industrial/communal confederation and the confederation of the syndicate not pulling its weight). In today's society, a similar process of "word of mouth" warnings and recommendations goes on, along with consumer groups and media. Our suggestions here are an extension of this common practice (that this process exists suggests that the price mechanism does not, in fact, provide consumers with all the relevant information they need to make decisions, but this is an aside).

If the syndicate in question, after a certain number of complaints had been lodged against it, still did not change its ways, then it would suffer non-violent direct action. This would involve the boycotting of the syndicate and (perhaps) its local commune (such as denying it products and investment), so resulting in the syndicate being excluded from the benefits of association. The syndicate would face the fact that no one else wanted to associate with it and suffer a drop in the goods coming its way, including consumption products for its members. In effect, a similar process would occur to that of a firm under capitalism that looses its customers and so its income. However, we doubt that a free society would subject any person to the evils of destitution or starvation (as capitalism does). Rather, a bare minimum of goods required for survival would still be available.

In the unlikely event this general boycott did not result in a change of heart, then two options are left available. These are either the break-up of the syndicate and the finding of its members new work places or the giving/selling of the syndicate to its current users (i.e. to exclude them from the society they obviously do not want to be part off). The decision of which option to go for would depend on the importance of the workplace in question and the desires of the syndicates' members. If the syndicate refused to disband, then option two would be the most logical choice (unless the syndicate controlled a scare

resource). The second option would, perhaps, be best as this would drive home the benefits of association as the expelled syndicate would have to survive on its own, subject to survival by selling the product of its labour and would soon return to the fold.

Kropotkin argued in these terms over 100 years ago:

> *"When a railway company, federated with other companies, fails to fulfil its engagements, when its trains are late and goods lie neglected at the stations, the other companies threaten to cancel the contract, and that threat usually suffices.*
>
> *"It is generally believed ... that commerce only keeps to its engagements from fear of lawsuits. Nothing of the sort; nine times in ten the trader who has not kept his word will not appear before a judge ... the sole fact of having driven a creditor to bring a lawsuit suffices for the vast majority of merchants to refuse for good to have any dealings with a man who has compelled one of them to go to law.*
>
> *"This being so, why should means that are used today among ... traders in the trade, and railway companies in the organisation of transport, not be made use of in a society based on voluntary work?"* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 153]

Thus, to ensure producer accountability of production to consumption, no bureaucratic body is required in libertarian communism (or any other form of anarchism). Rather, communication and direct action by those affected by unresponsive producers would be an effective and efficient means of ensuring the accountability of production to consumption.



In terms of unpleasant tasks for other people (for example, collecting and processing a community's rubbish) then individuals would form co-operatives which would have to find their place on the market and this would ensure that such work was done as they would contract with others to provide the appropriate services. However, this could lead to some people doing unpleasant work all the time and so is hardly a solution. As in capitalism, we may see some people doing terrible work because it is better than no work at all. This is a solution few anarchists would support.

In a collectivist or communist anarchist society, such an outcome would be avoided as far as possible. Noam Chomsky points to two possible alternatives, one *"in which the undesired work, after the best efforts to make it meaningful, is shared"* and another one *"where the undesired work receives high extra pay, so that individuals voluntarily choose to do it."* Such schemes are *"consistent with ... anarchist principles"* unlike the current situation where *"the undesired work is given to wage-slaves."* [**Radical Priorities**, p. 220] Another way, somewhat complementary to these two, would be to take a leaf from *"peasant attitudes toward labour"* and their *"most striking feature"*, the extent *"to which any kind of communal toil, however onerous, can be transformed by the workers themselves into festive occasions that serve to reinforce community ties."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 342]

It would be easy to imagine a free community sharing such tasks as fairly as possible between a community's members by, for example, allocating a few days a month to all fit members of a community to do work which no one volunteers to do. This would soon ensure that it would be done, particularly if it were part of a festival or before a party. In this way, every one shares in the unpleasant as well as pleasant tasks (and, of course, minimises the time any one individual has to spend on it). Or, for tasks which are very popular, individuals would also have to do unpleasant tasks as well. In this way, popular and unpop-

Moreover, most anarchists would think that the argument that there would be a flood of workers taking up "easy" work placements is abstract and ignores the dynamics of a real society. While many individuals would try to create new productive syndicates in order to express themselves in innovative work outwith the existing research and development going on within existing syndicates, the idea that the majority of individuals would leave their current work at a drop of a hat is crazy. A workplace is a community and part of a community and people would value the links they have with their fellow workers. As such they would be aware of the impacts of their decisions on both themselves and society as a whole. So, while we would expect a turnover of workers between syndicates, the mass transfers claimed in this argument are unlikely. Most workers who did want to try their hand at new work would apply for work places at syndicates that required new people, not create their own ones. Because of this, work transfers would be moderate and easily handled.

However, the possibility of mass desertions does exist and so must be addressed. So how would a libertarian socialist society deal with a majority of its workers deciding to all do interesting work, leaving the boring and/or dangerous work undone? It, of course, depends on the type of anarchism in question and each offers alternative ways to ensure that individual preferences for certain types of work matches the requirements of social demand for labour.

Under individualist anarchism and mutualism, those who desired a certain form of work done would reach an agreement with workers or a co-operative and pay them to do the work in question. Within a co-operative, as Proudhon argued, a person's *"education, instruction, and apprenticeship should ... be so directed that, while permitting him to do his share of unpleasant and disagreeable tasks, they may also give variety of work and knowledge, and may assure him ... an encyclopaedic attitude and a sufficient income."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 222]



## I.4.8 What about investment decisions?

Obviously, a given society needs to take into account changes in consumption and so invest in new means of production. An anarchist society is no different. As Guild Socialist G.D.H Cole points out, *"it is essential at all times, and in accordance with considerations which vary from time to time, for a community to preserve a balance between production for ultimate use and production for use in further production. And this balance is a matter which ought to be determined by and on behalf of the whole community."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 144]

How this balance is determined varies according to the school of anarchist thought considered. All agree, however, that such an important task should be under effective community control.

The mutualists see the solution to the problems of investment as creating a system of mutual banks, which reduce interest rates to zero. This would be achieved *"[b]y the organisation of credit, on the principle of reciprocity or mutualism ... In such an organisation credit is raised to the dignity of a social function, managed by the community; and, as society never speculates upon its members, it will lend its credit ... at the actual cost of transaction."* [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his "*Bank of the People*"**, p. 36] Loans would be allocated to projects which the mutual banks considered likely to succeed and repay the original loan. In this way, the increase in the money supply implied by these acts of credit providing does not generate inflation for money is **not** created wantonly but rather is aimed at projects which are considered likely to **increase** the supply of goods and services in the economy (see section G.3.6). Another key source of investment would be internal funds (i.e., retained savings) as is the case with co-operatives today: *"Worker-managers finance their new investments partly out of internal funds and partly from external loans ... Entrepreneurial activity*

*of worker-managers ... generates profits and losses, i.e., higher or lower income per worker."* [Branko Horvat, *"The Theory of the Worker-Managed Firm Revisited"*, pp. 9–25, **Journal of Comparative Economics**, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 21] As discussed in section I.1.1, eliminating the stock market will not harm investment (almost all investment funds are from other sources) and will remove an important negative influence in economic activity.

Collectivist and communist anarchists recognise that credit is based on human activity, which is represented as money. As Cole pointed out, the *"understanding of this point [on investment] depends on a clear appreciation of the fact that all real additions to capital take the form of directing a part of the productive power of labour and using certain materials not for the manufacture of products and the rendering of services incidental to such manufacture for purposes of purposes of further production."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 143] So collectivist and communist anarchists agree with their Mutualist cousins when they state that *"[a]ll credit presupposes labour, and, if labour were to cease, credit would be impossible"* and that the *"legitimate source of credit"* was *"the labouring classes"* who *"ought to control it"* and for *"whose benefit [it should] be used"*. [Dana, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Therefore, in collectivism, investment funds would exist for syndicates, communes and their in community (*"People's"*) banks. These would be used to store depreciation funds and as well as other funds agreed to by the syndicates for investment projects (for example, confederations of syndicates may agree to allocate a certain percentage of their labour notes to a common account in order to have the necessary funds available for major investment projects). Similarly, individual syndicates and communes would also create a store of funds for their own investment projects. Moreover, the confederations of syndicates to which these *"People's Banks"* would be linked would also have a defined role in investment decisions to ensure that production meets demand by being



would be done depends on the kind of libertarian community you are a member of.

Obviously, few would argue against the idea that individuals will voluntarily work at things they enjoyed doing. However there are some jobs that few, if any, would enjoy (for example, collecting rubbish, processing sewage, dangerous work, etc.). So how would an anarchist society deal with it?

It is obvious that not all "jobs" are equal in interest or enjoyment. It is sometimes argued that people would start to join or form syndicates which are involved in more fun activities. By this process excess workers would be found in the more enjoyable "jobs" while the boring and dangerous ones would suffer from a scarcity of willing workers. Hence, so the argument goes, a socialist society would have to force people to do certain jobs and that requires a state. Obviously, this argument ignores the fact that under capitalism usually it is the boring, dangerous work which is the least well paid with the worse working conditions. In addition, this argument ignores the fact that under workers self-management boring, dangerous work would be minimised and transformed as much as possible. Only under capitalist hierarchy are people in no position to improve the quality of their work and working environment. As George Barrett argued:

> *"Now things are so strangely organised at present that it is just the dirty and disagreeable work that men will do cheaply, and consequently there is no great rush to invent machines to take their place. In a free society, on the other hand, it is clear that the disagreeable work will be one of the first things that machinery will be called upon to eliminate. It is quite fair to argue, therefore, that the disagreeable work will, to a large extent, disappear in a state of anarchism."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, p. 361]

*merely by virtue of the fact that they are using them. Such resources belong to the user as long as they are being used."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 116] As the would-be capitalist is not actually using the machines they have created, they would be in constant worry that their wage-slaves would simply expropriate them — with the full backing of the local commune and its federations.

So, to conclude, this question involves some strange logic (and many question begging assumptions) and ultimately fails in its attempt to prove libertarian socialism must *"forbid capitalistic acts between individuals."* In addition, Nozick cannot support the creation of private property out of communal property in the first place. It also undermines capitalism because that system must forbid socialistic acts by and between individuals. Thus Nozick's society would forbid squatting unused property or trespassing on private property as well as, say, the formation of unions against the wishes of the property owner (who is sovereign over their property and those who use it) or the use of workplace resources to meet the needs of the producer rather than the owner. As such, Nozick exposes how capitalism's hierarchical nature means that capitalist society *"forbids socialist acts between consenting adults."*

## I.4.13 Who will do the dirty or unpleasant work?

This problem affects every society, including capitalism of course. Under capitalism, this problem is "solved" by ensuring that such jobs are done by those at the bottom of the social pile. In other words, it does not really solve the problem at all — it just ensures that some people are subject to this work the bulk of their working lives. Most anarchists reject this flawed solution in favour of something better, one that shares the good with the bad and so ensure everyone's life is better. How this



the forum which decides which investment plans should be given funding (this, we stress, is hardly "central planning" as capitalist firms also plan future investments to meet expected demand). In this, collectivist anarchism is like mutualism and so we would also expect interest-free credit being arranged to facilitate investment.

In a communist-anarchist society, things would be slightly different as this would not have the labour notes used in mutualism and collectivism. This means that the productive syndicates would agree that a certain part of their total output and activity will be directed to investment projects. In effect, each syndicate is able to draw upon the resources approved of by the co-operative commonwealth in the form of an agreed claim on the labour power of society (investment *"is essentially an allocation of material and labour, and fundamentally, an allocation of human productive power."* [Cole, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 144–5]). In this way, mutual aid ensures a suitable pool of resources for the future from which all benefit.

It should be remembered that savings are not required before credit can be issued. Under capitalism, for example, banks regularly issue credit in excess of their actual reserves of cash (if they did not then, one, they would not be very good capitalists and, two, the economy would grind to a halt). Nor does the interest rate reflect a preference for future goods (as discussed in section C.2.6 interest rates reflect market power, the degree of monopoly in the credit industry, the social and class position of individuals and a host of other factors). Moreover, a developed economy replaces a process in time with a process in space. In peasant and tribal societies, individuals usually did have to spend time and energy making their own tools (the hunter had to stop hunting in order to create a new improved bow or spear). However, with a reasonably developed division of work then different people produce the tools others use and can do so at the same time as the others produce. If workers producing investment goods had to wait until sufficient sav-

ings had been gathered before starting work then it is doubtful that any developed economy could function. Thus the notion that "investment" needs saving is somewhat inappropriate, as different workplaces produce consumption goods and others produce investment goods. The issue becomes one of ensuring that enough people and resources go towards both activities.

How would this work? Obviously investment decisions have implications for society as a whole. The implementation of these decisions require the use of **existing** capacity and so must be the responsibility of the appropriate level of the confederation in question. Investment decisions taken at levels above the production unit become effective in the form of demand for the current output of the syndicates which have the capacity to produce the goods required. This would require each syndicate to *"prepare a budget, showing its estimate of requirements both of goods or services for immediate use, and of extensions and improvements."* [Cole, **Op. Cit.**, p. 145] These budgets and investment projects would be discussed at the appropriate level of the confederation (in this, communist-anarchism would be similar to collectivist anarchism).

The confederation of syndicates/communes would be the ideal forum to discuss (communicate) the various investment plans required — and to allocate scarce resources between different ends. This would involve, possibly, dividing investment into two groups — necessary and optional — and using statistical techniques to consider the impact of an investment decision (for example, the use of input-output tables could be used to see if a given investment decision in, say, the steel industry would require investment in energy production). In this way social needs **and** social costs would be taken into account and ensure that investment decisions are not taken in isolation from one another, so causing bottle-necks and insufficient production due to lack of inputs from other industries.



***servitude."*** [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 68–9]

Lastly, we must also note that Nozick also ignored the fact that acquisition **must** come before transfer, meaning that before "consenting" capitalist acts occur, individual ones must precede it. As argued in section B.3.4, Nozick provided no convincing arguments why natural resources held in common can be appropriated by individuals. This means that his defence of transferring absolute capitalist property rights in goods is without foundations. Moreover, his argument in favour of such appropriations ignore that liberties are very definitely restricted by private property (and it should be keep in mind that the destruction of commonly held resources, such as village commons, was imposed by the state — see section F.8.3). As pointed out in section F.2, right-wing "libertarians" would better be termed *"Propertarians"* (why is liberty according a primary importance when arguing against socialism but not when private property restricts liberty?). As Cheyney C. Ryan points out, Nozick *"invoke[s] personal liberty as the decisive ground for rejecting patterned principles of justice [such as socialism] and restrictions on the ownership of capital ... [b]ut where the rights of private property admittedly restrict the liberties of the average person, he seems perfectly happy to* ***trade off*** *such liberties against material gain for society as a whole."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 339] This can be seen by his lack of comment on how capitalism forbids socialist acts between consenting adults, not to mention quite a few numerous capitalist acts for good measure.

Thus Nozick's acquisition of resources is based on the would-be capitalist stealing communally owned resources and barring others from using them. This obviously would restrict the liberty of those who currently used them and so be hotly opposed by members of a community. As Murray Bookchin noted, a free society is based on *"the practice of* ***usufruct****, the freedom of individuals in a community to appropriate resources*

*means of production"* when that *"private property"* is limited to what a self-employed worker uses rather than capitalistic property (see section G.2.1). Nozick, in other words, confused pre-capitalist forms of production with capitalist ones (see section G.1.2). Thus possession of the means of production by people outside of the free commune is perfectly acceptable to social anarchists (see section I.6.2).

Thus an anarchist society would have a flexible approach to Nozick's (flawed) argument. Individuals, in their free time, could *"exchange"* their time and possessions as they saw fit. These are **not** *"capitalist acts"* regardless of Nozick's claims. However, the moment an individual employs wage labour then, by this act, they have broken their agreements with their fellows and, therefore, no longer part of *"socialist society."* This would involve them no longer having access to the benefits of communal life and to communal possessions. They have, in effect, placed themselves outside of their community and must fair for themselves. After all, if they desire to create *"private property"* (in the capitalist sense) then they have no right of access to communal possessions without paying for that right. For those who become wage slaves, a socialist society would, probably, be less strict. As Bakunin argued:

> *"Since the freedom of every individual is inalienable, society shall never allow any individual whatsoever legally to alienate his [or her] freedom or engage upon any contract with another on any footing but the utmost equality and reciprocity. It shall not, however, have the power to disbar a man or woman so devoid of any sense of personal dignity as to contract a relationship of voluntary servitude with another individual, but it will consider them as living off private charity and therefore unfit to enjoy political rights* ***throughout the duration of that***



Necessary investments are those which have been agreed upon by the appropriate confederation. It means that resources and productive capacity are prioritised towards them, as indicated in the agreed investment project. It will not be required to determine precisely **which** syndicates will provide the necessary goods for a given investment project, just that it has priority over other requests. Under capitalism, when a bank gives a company credit, it rarely asks exactly which companies will be contracted with when the money is spent but, rather, it gives the company the power to command the labour of other workers by supplying them with credit/money. Similarly in an anarcho-communist society, except that the other workers have agreed to supply their labour for the project in question by designating it a ***"necessary investment"***. This means when a request arrives at a syndicate for a ***"necessary investment"*** a syndicate must try and meet it (i.e. it must place the request into its production schedule before *"optional"* requests, assuming that it has the capacity to meet it). A list of necessary investment projects, including what they require and if they have been ordered, will be available to all syndicates to ensure such a request is a real one.

Optional investment is simply investment projects which have not been agreed to by a confederation. This means that when a syndicate or commune places orders with a syndicate they may not be met or take longer to arrive. The project may go ahead, but it depends on whether the syndicate or commune can find workers willing to do that work. This would be applicable for small scale investment decisions or those which other communes/syndicates do not think of as essential.

This we have two inter-related investment strategies. A communist-anarchist society would prioritise certain forms of investment by the use of ***"necessary"*** and ***"optional"*** investment projects. This socialisation of investment will allow a free society to ensure that social needs are meet while maintaining a decentralised and dynamic economy. Major projects

to meet social needs will be organised effectively, but with diversity for minor projects. The tasks of ensuring investment production, making orders for specific goods and so forth, would be as decentralised as other aspects of a free economy and so anarchism *"proposes ... [t]hat usufruct of instruments of production — land included — should be free to all workers, or groups of workers"*, that *"workers should group themselves, and arrange their work as their reason and inclination prompt"* and that *"the necessary connections between the various industries ... should be managed on the same voluntary principle."* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 21]

As for when investment is needed, it is clear that this will be based on the changes in demand for goods in both collectivist and communist anarchism. As Guilliaume put it: *"By means of statistics gathered from all the communes in a region, it will be possible to scientifically balance production and consumption. In line with these statistics, it will also be possible to add more help in industries where production is insufficient and reduce the number of men where there is a surplus of production."* [*"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 370] Obviously, investment in branches of production with a high demand would be essential and this would be easily seen from the statistics generated by the collectives and communes. Tom Brown made this obvious point:

> *"Goods, as now, will be produced in greater variety, for workers like producing different kinds, and new models, of goods. Now if some goods are unpopular, they will be left on the shelves ... Of other goods more popular, the shops will be emptied. Surely it is obvious that the [shop] assistant will decrease his order of the unpopular line and increase his order of the popular."* [**Syndicalism**, p. 55]

As a rule of thumb, syndicates that produce investment goods would be inclined to supply other syndicates who are



Moreover, it must be stressed that as well as banning capitalist acts between consenting adults, capitalism involves the continual banning of socialist acts between consenting adults. For example, if workers agree to form a union, then the boss can fire them. If they decide to control their own work, the boss can fire them for not obeying orders. Thus capitalism forbids such elemental freedoms as association and speech — at least for the majority, for the wage slaves. Why would people seek such "freedom" in a free society?

Of course, Nozick's reply to this point would be that the individual's involved have "consented" to these rules when they signed their contract. Yet the same can be said of an anarchist society — it is freely joined and freely left. To join a communist-anarchist society it would simply be a case of agreeing to "exchange" the product of ones labour freely with the other members of that society and not to create oppressive or exploitation social relationships within it. If this is "authoritarian" then so is capitalism — and we must stress that at least anarchist associations are based on self-management and so the individuals involved have an equal say in the obligations they live under.

Notice also that Nozick confused exchange with capitalism (*"I offer you a lecture once a week in exchange for other things"*). This is a telling mistake by someone who claims to be an expert on capitalism, because the defining feature of capitalism is not exchange (which obviously took place long before capitalism existed) but labour contracts involving wage labour. Nozick's example is merely a direct labour contract between the producer and the consumer. It does not involve wage labour, what makes capitalism capitalism. It is only this latter type of transaction that libertarian socialism prevents — and not by "forbidding" it but simply by refusing to maintain the conditions necessary for it to occur, i.e. protection of capitalist property.

In addition, we must note that Nozick also confused *"private property in the means of production"* with capitalism. Liberation socialism can be easily compatible with *"private property in the*

helped create in that commune then they would have full use of the resources of that commune and could use their possessions as they saw fit (even *"melt them down"* to create a new machine, or whatever). If they used those goods to create an enterprise to employ (i.e., exploit and oppress) others then they have, in effect, announced their withdrawal from civilised society and, as a result, would be denied the benefits of co-operation. They would, in effect, place themselves in the same situation as someone who does not wish to join a syndicate (see section I.3.7). If an individual did desire to use resources to employ wage labour then they would have effectively removed themselves from *"socialist society"* and so that society would bar them from using **its** resources (i.e. they would have to buy access to all the resources they currently took for granted).

Would this be a restriction of freedom? While it may be considered so by the impoverished definitions of capitalism, it is not. In fact, it mirrors the situation within capitalism as what possessions someone holds are **not** his or her property (in the capitalist sense) any more than a company car is currently the property of the employee under capitalism. While the employee can use the car outside of work, they lack the "freedom" to sell it or melt it down and turn it into machines. Such lack of **absolute** "ownership" in a free society does not reduce liberty any more than in this case.

This point highlights another flaw in Nozick's argument. If his argument were true, then it applies equally to capitalist society. For 40 hours plus a week, workers are employed by a boss. In that time they are given resources to use and they are most definitely **not** allowed to melt down these resources to create a machine or use the resources they have been given access to further their own plans. This can apply equally to rented accommodation as well, for example when landlords ban working from home or selling off the furniture that is provided. Thus, ironically, *"capitalist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults"* — and does so all the time.



experiencing excess demand before others, all other things being equal. Because of such guidelines and communication between producers, investment would go to those industries that actually required them. In other words, customer choice (as indicated by individuals choosing between the output of different syndicates) would generate information that is relevant to investment decisions.

As production would be decentralised as far as it is sensible and rational to do so, each locality/region would be able to understand its own requirements and apply them as it sees fit. This means that large-scale planning would not be conducted (assuming that it could work in practice, of course) simply because it would not be needed. This, combined with an extensive communications network, would ensure that investment not only did not duplicate unused plant within the economy but that investments take into account the specific problems and opportunities each locality has. Of course, collectives would experiment with new lines and technology as well as existing lines and so invest in new technologies and products. As occurs under capitalism, extensive consumer testing would occur before dedicating major investment decisions to new products.

In addition, investment decisions would also require information which showed the different outcomes of different options. By this we simply mean an analysis of how different investment projects relate to each other in terms of inputs and outputs, compared to the existing techniques. This would be in the form of cost-benefit analysis (as outlined in section I.4.4) and would show when it would make economic, social and ecological sense to switch industrial techniques to more efficient and/or more empowering and/or more ecologically sound methods. Such an evaluation would indicate levels of inputs and compare them to the likely outputs. For example, if a new production technique reduced the number of hours worked in total (comparing the hours worked to produce the machinery with that reduced in using it) as well as reducing waste prod-

ucts for a similar output, then such a technique would be implemented.

Similarly with communities. A commune will obviously have to decide upon and plan civic investment (e.g. new parks, housing and so forth). They will also have the deciding say in industrial developments in their area as it would be unfair for syndicate to just decide to build a cement factory next to a housing co-operative if they did not want it. There is a case for arguing that the local commune will decide on investment decisions for syndicates in its area (for example, a syndicate may produce X plans which will be discussed in the local commune and one plan finalised from the debate). Regional decisions (for example, a new hospital) could be decided at the appropriate level, with information fed from the health syndicate and consumer co-operatives. The actual location for investment decisions will be worked out by those involved. However, local syndicates must be the focal point for developing new products and investment plans in order to encourage innovation.

Therefore, under anarchism no capital market is required to determine whether investment is required and what form it would take. The work that apologists for capitalism claim currently is done by the stock market can be replaced by co-operation and communication between workplaces in a decentralised, confederated network. The relative needs of different consumers of a product can be evaluated by the producers and an informed decision reached on where it would best be used. Without private property, housing, schools, hospitals, workplaces and so on will no longer be cramped into the smallest space possible. Instead, they will be built within a "green" environment. This means that human constructions will be placed within a natural setting and no longer stand apart from nature. In this way human life can be enriched and the evils of cramping as many humans and things into a small a space as is "economical" can be overcome.



as to ensure that the rate of exploitation would be zero. Little wonder that, when faced with a self-employed, artisan workforce, capitalists have continually turned to the state to create the "correct" market forces. So without statism to back up various class-based monopolies of capitalist privilege, capitalism would not have become dominant.

It should also be noted that Nozick makes a serious error in his case. He assumes that the "use rights" associated with an anarchist (i.e. socialist) society are identical to the "property rights" of a capitalist one. This is **not** the case, and so his argument is weakened and loses its force. Simply put, there is no such thing as an absolute or *"natural"* law of property. As John Stuart Mill pointed out, *"powers of exclusive use and control are very various, and differ greatly in different countries and in different states of society."* Therefore, Nozick slips an ideological ringer into his example by erroneously interpreting socialism (or any other society for that matter) as specifying a distribution of capitalist property rights along with the wealth. As Mill argued: *"One of the mistakes oftenest committed, and which are the sources of the greatest practical errors in human affairs, is that of supposing that the same name always stands for the same aggregation of ideas. No word has been subject of more of this kind of misunderstanding that the word property."* [*"Chapters on Socialism,"* **Principles of Political Economy**, p. 432]

In other words, Nozick assumes that in **all** societies capitalist property rights are distributed along with consumption **and** production goods. As Cheyney C. Ryan comments *"[d]ifferent conceptions of justice differ not only in how they would apportion society's holdings but in what rights individuals have over their holdings once they have been apportioned."* [*"Property Rights and Individual Liberty"*, pp. 323–43, **Reading Nozick**, Jeffrey Paul (Ed.), p. 331] This means that when goods are distributed in a libertarian socialist society the people who receive or take them have specific (use) rights to them. As long as an individual remained a member of a commune and abided by the rules they

wages as to reduce his profits to near zero. Moreover, he would have to face workers whose neighbours would be encouraging them to form a union and strike for even **better** conditions and pay, including workers' control and so on. Such a militant workforce would be the last thing a capitalist would desire. In addition, we would imagine they would also refuse to work for someone unless they also got the capital they used at the end of their contract (i.e. a system of "hire-purchase" on the means of production used). In other words, by removing the statist supports of capitalism, would-be capitalists would find it hard to "compete" with the co-operative sector and would not be in a position to exploit others' labour.

With a system of communal production (in social anarchism) and mutual banks (in individualist anarchism), **usury** — i.e. charging a use-fee for a monopolised item, of which patents are an instance — would no longer be possible and the inventor would be like any other worker, exchanging the product of his or her labour. As Benjamin Tucker argued, *"the patent monopoly ... consists in protecting inventors and authors against competition for a period of time long enough for them to extort from the people a reward enormously in excess of the labour measure of their services — in other words, in giving certain people a right of property for a term of years in laws and facts of nature, and the power to extract tribute from others for the use of this natural wealth, which should be open to all. The abolition of this monopoly would fill its beneficiaries with a wholesome fear of competition which should cause them to be satisfied with pay for their services equal to that which other labourers get for theirs, and secure it by placing their products and works on the market at the outset at prices so low that their lines of business would be no more tempting to competitors than any other lines."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 150–1]

So, if someone has labour to sell then they deserve a free society to do it in — as Tucker once pointed out. Such an environment would make the numbers seeking employment so low



Only by taking investment decisions away from "experts" and placing it in the hands of ordinary people will current generations be able to invest according to their, and future generations', benefit. It is hardly in our best interests to have a system whose aim is to make the wealthy even wealthier and on whose whims are dependent the lives of millions of people.

## I.4.9 Should technological advance be seen as anti-anarchistic?

Not necessarily. This is because technology can allow us to "do more with less," technological progress can improve standards of living for all people, and technologies can be used to increase personal freedom: medical technology, for instance, can free people from the scourges of pain, illness, and a "naturally" short life span; technology can be used to free labour from mundane chores associated with production; advanced communications technology can enhance our ability to freely associate. The list is endless. So the vast majority of anarchists agree with Kropotkin's comment that the *"development of [the industrial] technique at last gives man [sic!] the opportunity to free himself from slavish toil."* [**Ethics**, p. 2]

For example, increased productivity under capitalism usually leads to further exploitation and domination, displaced workers, economic crisis, etc. However, it does not have to so in an anarchist world. By way of example, consider a commune in which 5 people desire to be bakers (or 5 people are needed to work the communal bakery) and 20 hours of production per person, per week is spent on baking bread. Now, what happens if the introduction of automation, **as desired, planned and organised by the workers themselves**, reduces the amount of labour required for bread production to 15 person-hours per week? Clearly, no one stands to lose — even if someone's work is "displaced" that person will continue to receive the

same access to the means of life as before — and they might even gain. This last is due to the fact that 5 person-hours have been freed up from the task of bread production, and those person-hours may now be used elsewhere or converted to leisure, either way increasing each person's standard of living.

Obviously, this happy outcome derives not only from the technology used, but also (and critically) from its use in an equitable economic and social system: in the end, there is no reason why the use of technology cannot be used to empower people and increase their freedom!

Of course technology can be used for oppressive ends. Human knowledge, like all things, can be used to increase freedom or to decrease it, to promote inequality or reduce it, to aid the worker or to subjugate them, and so on. Technology, as we argued in section D.10, cannot be considered in isolation from the society it is created and used in. Most anarchists are aware that, to quote expert David Noble, *"Capital invested in machines that would re-enforce the system of domination [within the capitalist workplace], and this decision to invest, which might in the long run render the chosen technology economical, was not itself an economical decision but a political one, with cultural sanction."* [**Progress Without People**, p. 6] In a hierarchical society, technology will be introduced that serves the interests of the powerful and helps marginalise and disempower the majority (*"technology is political,"* to use Noble's expression). It does not evolve in isolation from human beings and the social relationships and power structures between them.

It is for these reasons that anarchists have held a wide range of opinions concerning the relationship between human knowledge and anarchism. Some, such as Peter Kropotkin, were themselves scientists and saw great potential for the use of advanced technology to expand human freedom. Others have held technology at arm's length, concerned about its oppressive uses, and a few have rejected science and technology completely. All of these are, of course, possible anarchist



*body, having a right to the means of production and being free to work on his own or as an equal with others in the large organisations of production would want to be exploited by a small employer"*. [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 102–103] So where would the capitalist wannabe find people to work for him? As Kropotkin argued:

> *"Everywhere you will find that the wealth of the wealthy springs from the poverty of the poor. That is why an anarchist society need not fear the advent of a [millionaire] who would settle in its midst. If every member of the community knows that after a few hours of productive toil he [or she] will have a right to all the pleasures that civilisation procures, and to those deeper sources of enjoyment which art and science offer to all who seek them, he [or she] will not sell his strength ... No one will volunteer to work for the enrichment of your [millionaire]."* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 61]

However, let us suppose there is a self-employed inventor, Ferguson, who comes up with a new innovation without the help of the socialised sector. Would anarchists steal his idea? Not at all. The syndicates, which by hypothesis have been organised by people who believe in giving producers the full value of their product, would pay Ferguson an equitable amount for his idea, which would then become common across society. However, if he refused to sell his invention and instead tried to claim a patent monopoly on it in order to gather a group of wage slaves to exploit, no one would agree to work for him unless they got the full control over both the product of their labour and the labour process itself. And, assuming that he did find someone willing to work for him (and so be governed by him), the would-be capitalist would have to provide such excellent conditions and pay such good

*"forbid"* owning slaves (and, as noted in section F.2.2, Nozick did support voluntary slave contracts).

So anarchists think Nozick's vision of unfreedom developing from freedom is unlikely. As anarcho-syndicalist Jeff Stein points out *"the only reason workers want to be employed by capitalists is because they have no other means for making a living, no access to the means of production other than by selling themselves. For a capitalist sector to exist there must be some form of private ownership of productive resources, and a scarcity of alternatives. The workers must be in a condition of economic desperation for them to be willing to give up an equal voice in the management of their daily affairs and accept a boss."* [*"Market Anarchism? Caveat Emptor!"*, **Libertarian Labour Review**, no. 13]

In an anarchist society, there is no need for anyone to *"forbid"* capitalist acts. All people have to do is **refrain** from helping would-be capitalists set up monopolies of productive assets. This is because, as we have noted in section B.3.2, capitalism cannot exist without some form of state to protect such monopolies. In a libertarian-socialist society, of course, there would be no state to begin with, and so there would be no question of it "refraining" people from doing anything, including protecting would-be capitalists' monopolies of the means of production. In other words, would-be capitalists would face stiff competition for workers in an anarchist society. This is because self-managed workplaces would be able to offer workers more benefits (such as self-government, better working conditions, etc.) than the would-be capitalist ones. The would-be capitalists would have to offer not only excellent wages and conditions but also, in all likelihood, workers' control and hire-purchase on capital used. The chances of making a profit once the various monopolies associated with capitalism are abolished are slim.

Thus the would-be capitalist would *"not [be] able to obtain assistance or people to exploit"* and *"would find none because no-*



positions. But most anarchists support Kropotkin's viewpoint, but with a healthy dose of practical Luddism when viewing how technology is (ab)used in capitalism (*"The worker will only respect machinery **in the day** when it becomes his friend, shortening his work, rather than as **today,** his enemy, taking away jobs, killing workers."* [Emile Pouget quoted by David Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]). Vernon Richards stated the obvious:

> *"We maintain that the term 'productivity' has meaning, or is socially important, only when all production serves a public need ...*
>
> *"Productivity has meaning if it results both in a raising of living standards and an increase of leisure for all.*
>
> *"'Productivity' in the society we live in, because it is not a means to a social end, but is the means whereby industrialists hope to make greater profits for themselves and their shareholders, should be resolutely resisted by the working people, for it brings them neither greater leisure nor liberation from wage-slavery. Indeed for many it means unemployment ...*
>
> *"The attempts by managers and the technocrats to streamline industry are resisted intuitively by most work people even if they haven't two political ideas in their heads to knock together, not because they are resistant to change **per se** but because they cannot see that 'change' will do them any good. And of course they are right! Such an attitude is nevertheless a negative one, and the task of anarchist propagandists should be to make them aware of this and point to the only alternative, which, in broad terms, is that the producers of wealth must control it for the benefit of all."* [**Why Work?**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 206]

This means that in an anarchist society, technology would have to be transformed and/or developed which empowered those who used it, so reducing any oppressive aspects associated with it. As Kropotkin argued, we are (potentially) in a good position, because *"[f]or the first time in the history of civilisation, mankind has reached a point where the means of satisfying its needs are in excess of the needs themselves. To impose, therefore, as hitherto been done, the curse of misery and degradation upon vast divisions of mankind, in order to secure well-being and further development for the few, is needed no more: well-being can be secured for all, without placing on anyone the burden of oppressive, degrading toil and humanity can at last build its entire social life on the basis of justice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 2] The question is, for most anarchists, how can we humanise and modify this technology and make it socially and individually liberatory, rather than destroying it (where applicable, of course, certain forms of technology and industry will be eliminated due to their inherently destructive nature).

For Kropotkin, like most anarchists, the way to humanise technology and industry was for *"the workers [to] lay hands on factories, houses and banks"* and so *"present production would be completely revolutionised by this simple fact."* This would be the start of a process which would **integrate** industry and agriculture, as it was *"essential that work-shops, foundries and factories develop within the reach of the fields."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 190] Such a process would obviously involve the transformation of both the structure and technology of capitalism rather than its simple and unthinking application. As discussed in section A.3.9, while a few anarchists do seek to eliminate all forms of technology, most would agree with Bakunin when he argued that *"to destroy ... all the instruments of labour ... would be to condemn all humanity — which is infinity too numerous today to exist ... on the simple gifts of nature ... — to ... death by starvation."* His solution to the question of technology was, like Kropotkin's, to place it at the service of those who use it, to



*most of history, capitalism ... never emerged."* [**Possibilities**, p. 92]

Thus while the idea that people will happily become wage slaves may be somewhat common place today (particularly with supporters of capitalism) the evidence of history is that people, given a choice, will prefer self-employment and **resist** wage labour (often to the death). As E. P. Thompson noted, for workers at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, the *"gap in status between a 'servant,' a hired wage-labourer subject to the orders and discipline of the master, and an artisan, who might 'come and go' as he pleased, was wide enough for men to shed blood rather than allow themselves to be pushed from one side to the other. And, in the value system of the community, those who resisted degradation were in the right."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 599] Over one hundred years later, the rural working class of Aragon showed the same dislike of wage slavery. After Communist troops destroyed their self-managed collectives, the *"[d]ispossessed peasants, intransigent collectivists, refused to work in a system of private property, and were even less willing to rent out their labour."* [Jose Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 258] The rural economy collapsed as the former collectivists refused to be the servants of the few.

People who have tasted freedom are unlikely to go back to oppression. Therefore, any perception that people will become wage-slaves through choice in a free society is based on the assumption what people accept through necessity under capitalism will pass over, without change, into a free one. This assumption is unfounded and anarchists expect that once people struggle for freedom and taste the pleasures of freedom they will not freely accept a degradation back to having a master — and as history shows, we have some evidence to support our argument. It seems a strangely debased perspective on freedom to ponder whether people will be "free" to alienate their freedom — it is a bit like proclaiming it a restriction of freedom to

Firstly, while markets and exchange have existed for thousands of years capitalism has not. Wage-labour is a relatively recent development and has been the dominant mode of production for, at best, a couple of hundred years. Secondly, few people (when given the choice) have freely become wage-slaves. Just as the children of slaves often viewed slavery as the "natural" order, so do current workers. Yet, as with chattel slavery, substantial state coercion was required to achieve such a "natural" system.

As discussed in section F.8, actually existing capitalism was **not** created by Nozick's process — it required substantial state intervention to separate workers from the means of production they used and to ensure, eventually, that the situation in which they sold their liberty to the property owner was considered "natural." Without that coercion, people do **not** seek to sell their liberty to others. Murray Bookchin summarised the historical record by noting that in *"every precapitalist society, countervailing forces .. . existed to restrict the market economy. No less significantly, many precapitalist societies raised what they thought were insuperable obstacles to the penetration of the State into social life."* He pointed to *"the power of village communities to resist the invasion of trade and despotic political forms into society's abiding communal substrate."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, pp. 207–8] Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber notes that in the ancient Mediterranean world *"[w]hile one does periodically run into evidence of arrangements which to the modern eye look like wage-labour contracts, on closer examination they almost always actually turn out to be contracts to rent slaves … Free men and women thus avoided anything remotely like wage-labour, seeing it as a matter, effectively, of slavery, renting themselves out."* This means that wage labour *"(as opposed to, say, receiving fees for professional services) involves a degree of subordination: a labourer has to be to some degree at the command of his or her employer. This is exactly why, through most of history, free men and women tended to avoid wage-labour, and why, for*



create *"the intimate and complete union of capital and labour"* so that it would *"not … remain concentrated in the hands of a separate, exploiting class."* Only this could *"smash the tyranny of capital."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 90–1] So most anarchists seek to transform rather then eliminate technology and to do that we need to be in possession of the means of production before we can decide what to keep, what to change and what to throw away as inhuman. In other words, it is not enough to get rid of the boss, although this is a necessary first step!

Anarchists of all types recognise the importance of critically evaluating technology, industry and so on. The first step of any revolution will be the seizing of the means of production. The second **immediate** step will be the start of their radical transformation by those who use them and are affected by them (i.e. communities, those who use the products they produce and so on). Few, if any, anarchists seek to maintain the current industrial set-up or apply, unchanged, capitalist technology. We doubt that many of the workers who use that technology and work in industry will leave either unchanged. Rather, they will seek to liberate the technology they use from the influences of capitalism, just as they liberated themselves.

This will, of course, involve the shutting down (perhaps instantly or over a period of time) of many branches of industry and the abandonment of such technology which cannot be transformed into something more suitable for use by free individuals. And, of course, many workplaces will be transformed to produce new goods required to meet the needs of the revolutionary people or close due to necessity as a social revolution will disrupt the market for their goods — such as producers of luxury export goods or suppliers of repressive equipment for state security forces. Altogether, a social revolution implies the transformation of technology and industry, just as it implies the transformation of society.

This process of transforming work can be seen from the Spanish Revolution. Immediately after taking over the means

of production, the Spanish workers started to transform it. They eliminated unsafe and unhygienic working conditions and workplaces and created new workplaces based on safe and hygienic working conditions. Working practices were transformed as those who did the work (and so understood it) managed it. Many workplaces were transformed to create products required by the war effort (such as weapons, ammunition, tanks and so on) and to produce consumer goods to meet the needs of the local population as the normal sources of such goods, as Kropotkin predicted, were unavailable due to economic disruption and isolation. Needless to say, these were only the beginnings of the process but they clearly point the way any libertarian social revolution would progress, namely the total transformation of work, industry and technology. Technological change would develop along new lines, ones which will take into account human and ecological needs rather the power and profits of a minority.

Explicit in anarchism is the believe that capitalist and statist methods cannot be used for socialist and libertarian ends. In our struggle for workers' and community self-management is the awareness that workplaces are not merely sites of production — they are also sites of **re**production, the reproduction of certain social relationships based on specific relations of authority between those who give orders and those who take them. The battle to democratise the workplace, to place the collective initiative of the direct producers at the centre of any productive activity, is clearly a battle to transform the workplace, the nature of work and, by necessity, technology as well. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"revolution is more than a mere change of the prevailing political system. It implies the awakening of human intelligence, the increasing of the inventive spirit tenfold, a hundredfold; it is the dawn of a new science ... It is a revolution in the minds of men, as*



For these reasons, social anarchists are confident that the elimination of the profit motive within the context of self-management will not harm productivity and creativity, but rather **enhance** them (within an authoritarian system in which workers enhance the power and income of bureaucrats, we can expect different results). With the control of their own work and workplaces ensured, all working people can express their abilities to the full. This will see an explosion of creativity and initiative, not a reduction.

## I.4.12 Won't there be a tendency for capitalist enterprise to reappear?

This is a common right-wing "libertarian" objection. Robert Nozick, for example, imagined the following scenario:

> *"small factories would spring up in a socialist society, unless forbidden. I melt some of my personal possessions and build a machine out of the material. I offer you and others a philosophy lecture once a week in exchange for yet other things, and so on ... some persons might even want to leave their jobs in socialist industry and work full time in this private sector ... [This is] how private property even in means of production would occur in a socialist society ... [and so] the socialist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults."* [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, pp. 162–3]

There are numerous flawed assumptions in this argument and we will discuss them here. The key flaws are the confusion of exchange with capitalism and the typically impoverished propertarian vision that freedom is, essentially, the freedom to sell your liberty, to become a wage slave and so unfree. Looking at history, we can say that both these assumptions are wrong.

Kohn argues that the idea that humans will only work for profit or rewards *"can be fairly described as dehumanising"* if *"the capacity for responsible action, the natural love of learning, and the desire to do good work are already part of who we are."* Also, it is *"a way of trying to control people"* and so to *"anyone who is troubled by a model of human relationships founded principally on the idea of one person controlling another must ponder whether rewards are as innocuous as they are sometimes made out to be"*. So *"there is no getting around the fact that 'the basic purpose of merit pay is manipulative.' One observer more bluntly characterises incentives as 'demeaning' since the message they really convey is, 'Please big daddy boss and you will receive the rewards that the boss deems appropriate.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

Given that much work is controlled by others and can be a hateful experience under capitalism does not mean that it has to be that way. Clearly, even under wage slavery most workers can and do find work interesting and seek to do it well — not because of possible rewards or punishment but because we seek meaning in our activities and try and do them well. Given that research shows that reward orientated work structures harm productivity and excellence, social anarchists have more than just hope to base their ideas. Such research confirms Kropotkin's comments:

> *"Wage-work is serf-work; it cannot, it must not, produce all it could produce. And it is high time to disbelieve the legend which presents wagedom as the best incentive to productive work. If industry nowadays brings in a hundred times more than it did in the days of our grandfathers, it is due to the sudden awakening of physical and chemical sciences towards the end of the [18$^{th}$] century; not to the capitalist organisation of wagedom, but* ***in spite*** *of that organisation."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 150]



> *deep, and deeper still, than in their institutions ... the sole fact of having laid hands on middle-class property will imply the necessity of completely reorganising the whole of economic life in the workplaces, the dockyards, the factories."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 192]

And some think that industry and technology will remain unchanged by such a process and that workers will continue doing the same sort of work, in the same way, using the same methods!

For Kropotkin *"all production has taken a wrong direction, as it is not carried on with a view to securing well-being for all"* under capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101] Well-being for all obviously includes those who do the producing and so covers the structure of industry and the technological processes used. Similarly, well-being also includes a person's environment and surroundings and so technology and industry must be evaluated on an ecological basis. Technological progress in an anarchist society, needless to say, will have to take into account these factors as well as others people think are relevant, otherwise the ideal of *"well-being for all"* is rejected (see section I.4.15 for a discussion of what the workplace of the future could look like).

So, technology always partakes of and expresses the basic values of the social system in which it is embedded. If you have a system (capitalism) that alienates everything, it will naturally produce alienated forms of technology and it will orient those technologies so as to reinforce itself. Capitalists will select technology which re-enforces their power and profits and skew technological change in that direction rather than in those which empower individuals and make the workplace more egalitarian.

All this suggests that technological progress is not neutral but dependent on who makes the decisions. As David Noble ar-

gues, *"[t]echnological determinism, the view that machines make history rather than people, is not correct … If social changes now upon us seem necessary, it is because they follow not from any disembodied technological logic, but form a social logic."* Technology conforms to *"the interests of power"* but as *"technological process is a social process"* then *"it is, like all social processes, marked by conflict and struggle, and the outcome, therefore, is always ultimately indeterminate."* Viewing technological development *"as a social process rather than as an autonomous, transcendent, and deterministic force can be liberating … because it opens up a realm of freedom too long denied. It restores people once again to their proper role as subjects of the story, rather than mere pawns of technology … And technological development itself, now seen as a social construct, becomes a new variable rather than a first cause, consisting of a range of possibilities and promising a multiplicity of futures."* [**Forces of Production**, pp. 324–5]

This does not mean that we have to reject all technology and industry because it has been shaped by, or developed within, class society. Certain technologies are, of course, so insanely dangerous that they will no doubt be brought to a prompt halt in any sane society. Similarly, certain forms of technology and industrial process will be impossible to transform as they are inherently designed for oppressive ends. Many other industries which produce absurd, obsolete or superfluous commodities will, of course, cease automatically with the disappearance of their commercial or social rationales. But many technologies, however they may presently be misused, have few if any inherent drawbacks. They could be easily adapted to other uses. When people free themselves from domination, they will have no trouble rejecting those technologies that are harmful while adapting others to beneficial uses.

Change society and the technology introduced and utilised will likewise change. By viewing technological progress as a new variable, dependent on those who make the decisions



We are *"beings who possess natural curiosity about ourselves and our environment, who search for and overcome challenges, who try and master skills and attain competence, and who seek new levels of complexity in what we learn and do … in general we act on the environment as much as we are acted on by it, and we do not do so simply in order to receive a reward."* [**Punished by Rewards**, p. 24 and p. 25]

Kohn presents extensive evidence to back upon his case that rewards harm activity and individuals. We cannot do justice to it here so we will present a few examples. One study with college students showed that those paid to work on a puzzle *"spent less time on it than those who hadn't been paid"* when they were given a choice of whether to work on it or not. *"It appeared that working for a reward made people less interested in the task."* Another study with children showed that *"extrinsic rewards reduce intrinsic motivation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 70 and p. 71] Scores of other studies confirmed this. This is because a reward is effectively saying that a given activity is not worth doing for its own sake — and why would anyone wish to do something they have to be bribed to do?

In the workplace, a similar process goes on. Kohn presents extensive evidence to show that extrinsic motivation also fails even there. Indeed, he argues that *"economists have it wrong if they think of work as a 'disutility' — something unpleasant we must do in order to be able to buy what we need, merely a means to an end."* Kohn stresses that *"to assume that money is what drives people is to adopt an impoverished understanding of human motivation."* Moreover, *"the risk of **any** incentive or pay-for-performance system is that it will make people less interested in their work and therefore less likely to approach it with enthusiasm and a commitment to excellence. Furthermore, **the more closely we tie compensation (or other rewards) to performance, the most damage we do.**"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 131, p. 134 and p. 140]

whose identity is formed in relation to how they contribute to group efforts generally possess greater self-confidence and higher self-esteem.

Thirdly, competition undermines human relationships. Humans are social beings; we best express our humanness in interaction with others. By creating winners and losers, competition is destructive to human unity and prevents close social feeling.

Social Anarchists have long argued these points. In the competitive mode, people work at cross purposes, or purely for (material) personal gain. This leads to an impoverishment of society as well as hierarchy, with a lack of communal relations that result in an impoverishment of all the individuals involved (mentally, spiritually, ethically and, ultimately, materially). This not only leads to a weakening of individuality and social disruption, but also to economic inefficiency as energy is wasted in class conflict and invested in building bigger and better cages to protect the haves from the have-nots. Instead of creating useful things, human activity is spent in useless toil reproducing an injustice and authoritarian system.

All in all, the results of competition (as documented by a host of scientific disciplines) show its poverty as well as indicating that co-operation is the means by which the fittest survive.

Moreover, the notion that material rewards result in better work is simply not true. Basing itself on simple behaviourist psychology, such arguments fail to meet the test of long-term success (and, in fact, can be counter-productive). Indeed, it means treating human beings as little better that pets or other animals (Kohn argues that it is *"not an accident that the theory behind 'Do this and you'll get that' derives from work with other species, or that behaviour management is frequently described in words better suited to animals."*) In other words, it *"is by its very nature dehumanising."* Rather than simply being motivated by outside stimuli like mindless robots, people are not passive.



and the type of society they live in, allows us to see that technological development is not inherently anti-anarchist. A non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological society will develop non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological technology just as capitalism has developed technology which facilitates exploitation, oppression and environmental destruction. Thus an anarchist questions technology: The best technology? Best for whom? Best for what? Best according to what criteria, what visions, according to whose criteria and whose visions?

Needless to say, different communities and different regions would choose different priorities and different lifestyles. As the CNT's Zaragoza resolution on libertarian communism made clear, *"those communes which reject industrialisation ... may agree upon a different model of co-existence."* Using the example of *"naturists and nudists,"* it argued that they *"will be entitled to an autonomous administration released from the general commitments"* agreed by the communes and their federations and *"their delegates to congresses of the ... Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will be empowered to enter into economic contacts with other agricultural and industrial Communes."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 106]

For most anarchists, though, technological advancement is important in a free society in order to maximise the free time available for everyone and replace mindless toil with meaningful work. The means of doing so is the use of **appropriate** technology (and **not** the worship of technology as such). Only by critically evaluating technology and introducing such forms which empower, are understandable and are controllable by individuals and communities as well as minimising ecological distribution can this be achieved. Only this critical approach to technology can do justice to the power of the human mind and reflect the creative powers which developed the technology in the first place. Unquestioning acceptance of

technological progress is just as bad as being unquestioningly anti-technology.

## I.4.10 What would be the advantage of a wide basis of surplus distribution?

We noted earlier (in section I.3.1) that competition between syndicates could lead to *"co-operative egotism"* (to use Kropotkin's term) and that to eliminate this problem, the basis of collectivisation needs to be widened so that production is based on need and, as a result, surpluses are distributed society-wide. The advantage of a wide surplus distribution is that it allows all to have a decent life and stop market forces making people work harder and longer to survive in the economy (see section I.1.3). The consolidation of syndicates that would otherwise compete will, it is hoped, lead to a more efficient allocation of resources and technical improvements so allowing the transformation of work and reduction of the time we need to spend in production. We will back up this claim with illustrations from the Spanish Revolution as well as from today's system.

Collectivisation in Catalonia embraced not only major industries like municipal transportation and utilities, but smaller establishments as well: small factories, artisan workshops, service and repair shops, etc. Augustin Souchy describes the process as follows:

> *"The artisans and small workshop owners, together with their employees and apprentices, often joined the union of their trade. By consolidating their efforts and pooling their resources on a fraternal basis, the shops were able to undertake very big projects and provide services on a much wider scale ... The collectivisation of the hairdressing shops provides an*



*in an article entitled 'The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism', [Robert] Trivers refined the concepts Kropotkin advanced and explained how co-operation and, more importantly, a system of reciprocity (called 'reciprocal altruism' by Trivers) could have evolved."* [*"'Any Animal Whatever': Darwinian Building Blocks of Morality in Monkeys and Apes"*, pp. 1–29, **Journal of Consciousness Studies**, Vol. 7, No. 1–2, p. 4]

So modern research has reinforced Kropotkin's argument. This applies to both human and non-human animals. For the former, the evidence is strong that we have intrinsic abilities and needs to co-operate as well as an intrinsic senses of fairness and ethics. This suggests that co-operation is part of "human nature" and so studies which show that such behaviour is more productive than competition should come as no surprise — and the evidence is impressive. As noted, Alfie Kohn is also the author of **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and he spent seven years reviewing more than 400 research studies dealing with competition and co-operation. According to Kohn, there are three principle consequences of competition:

Firstly, it has a negative effect on productivity and excellence. This is due to increased anxiety, inefficiency (as compared to co-operative sharing of resources and knowledge), and the undermining of inner motivation. Competition shifts the focus to victory over others, and away from intrinsic motivators such as curiosity, interest, excellence, and social interaction. Studies show that co-operative behaviour, by contrast, consistently produces good performance — a finding which holds true under a wide range of subject variables. Interestingly, the positive benefits of co-operation become more significant as tasks become more complex, or where greater creativity and problem-solving ability is required.

Secondly, competition lowers self-esteem and hampers the development of sound, self-directed individuals. A strong sense of self is difficult to attain when self-evaluation is dependent on seeing how we measure up to others. On the other hand, those

action, leading to the capacity of hominids to develop culture. This is even sinking into capitalism, with industrial psychology now promoting "worker participation" and team functioning because it is decisively more productive than hierarchical management. More importantly, the evidence shows that co-operative workplaces are more productive than those organised on other principles. All other things equal, producers' co-operatives will be more efficient than capitalist or state enterprises, on average. Co-operatives can often achieve higher productivity even when their equipment and conditions are worse. Furthermore, the better the organisation approximates the co-operative ideal, the better the productivity.

All this is unsurprising to social anarchists (and it should make individualist anarchists reconsider their position). Peter Kropotkin argued that, *"[i]f we ... ask Nature: 'Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?' we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organisation."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 24]

It should be noted that, as one biologist points out, *"Kropotkin's ideas, though unorthodox, were scientifically respectable, and indeed the contention that mutual aid can be a means of increasing fitness had become a standard part of modern sociobiology."* [Douglas H. Boucher, *"The Idea of Mutualism, Past and Future"*, pp. 1–28, **The Biology of Mutualism: Biology and Evolution**, Douglas H. Boucher (ed.), p. 17] Frans de Waal (a leading primatologist) and Jessica C. Flack argue that Kropotkin is part of a wider tradition *"in which the view has been that animals assist each other precisely because by doing so they achieve long term, collective benefits of greater value than the short term benefits derived from straightforward competition."* They summarise that the *"basic tenet of [Kropotkin's] ideas was on the mark. Almost seventy years later,*



> *excellent example of how the transition of a small-scale manufacturing and service industry from capitalism to socialism was achieved ...*
>
> *"Before July 19th, 1936 [the date of the Revolution], there were 1,100 hairdressing parlours in Barcelona, most of them owned by poor wretches living from hand to mouth. The shops were often dirty and ill-maintained. The 5,000 hairdressing assistants were among the most poorly paid workers ... Both owners and assistants therefore voluntarily decided to socialise all their shops.*
>
> *"How was this done? All the shops simply joined the union. At a general meeting they decided to shut down all the unprofitable shops. The 1,100 shops were reduced to 235 establishments, a saving of 135,000 pesetas per month in rent, lighting, and taxes. The remaining 235 shops were modernised and elegantly outfitted. From the money saved, wages were increased by 40%. Everyone having the right to work and everyone received the same wages. The former owners were not adversely affected by socialisation. They were employed at a steady income. All worked together under equal conditions and equal pay. The distinction between employers and employees was obliterated and they were transformed into a working community of equals — socialism from the bottom up."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), pp. 93–94]

The collectives, as well as improving working conditions, also ensured access to other goods and services which market forces had previously denied working class people. Across Republican Spain collectives in towns and villages organised health care. For example, in the village of Magdalena de Pulpis

housing *"was free and completely socialised, as was medical care … Medicines, supplies, transfer to hospitals in Barcelona or Castellon, surgery, services of specialists — all was paid for by the collective."* This was also done for education, with collectives forming and running schools, colleges and universities. For example, Regional Peasant Federation of Levant saw each collective organise *"one or two free schools for the children"* and *"almost wiped out illiteracy"* (over 70% of rural Spain was literate before the Civil War). It also organised a *"University of Moncada"* which *"gave courses in animal husbandry, poultry raising. animal breeding, agriculture, tree science, etc."* [Gaston Leval, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156 and p. 125]

These examples, social anarchists argue, show that co-operation ensures that resources are efficiently allocated and waste is minimised by cutting down needless competition. It also ensures that necessary goods and services which meet vital areas for human well-being and development are available for all rather than the few. Rather than reduce choice, such co-operation increased it by making such things available to all (and as consumers have choices in which syndicate to consume from as well as having direct communication between consumer co-operatives and productive units, there is little danger that rationalisation in production will hurt the interests of the consumer).

Another way in which wide distribution of surplus can be advantageous is in Research and Development (R&D). By creating a fund for research and development which is independent of the fortunes of individual syndicates, society as a whole can be improved by access to useful new technologies and processes. Therefore, in a libertarian socialist society, people (both within the workplace and in communities) are likely to decide to allocate significant amounts of resources for basic research from the available social output. This is because the results of this research would be freely available to all and so would aid everyone in the long term. In addition, because workers di-



Secondly, we cannot hope to deal fully with the harmful effects of competition and the profit motive. For more information, we recommend Alfie Kohn's **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and **Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes**. He documents the extensive evidence accumulated that disproves the "common sense" of capitalism that competition and profits are the best way to organise a society.

According to Kohn, a growing body of psychological research suggests that rewards can lower performance levels, especially when the performance involves creativity. His books summarise the related series of studies shows which show that intrinsic interest in a task — the sense that something is worth doing for its own sake — typically declines when someone is rewarded for doing it. Much of the research on creativity and motivation has been performed by Theresa Amabile, associate professor of psychology at Brandeis University and she has found consistently that those were promised rewards did the least creative work. Thus *"rewards killed creativity, and this was true regardless of the type of task, the type of reward, the timing of the reward or the age of the people involved."* [**Punished by Rewards**, p. 45] Such research casts doubt on the claim that financial reward is the only effective way — or even the best way — to motivate people. They challenge the behaviourist assumption that any activity is more likely to occur or be better in terms of outcome if it is rewarded.

These findings re-enforce the findings of other scientific fields. Biology, social psychology, ethnology and anthropology all present evidence that support co-operation as the natural basis for human interaction. For example, ethnological studies indicate that virtually all indigenous cultures operate on the basis of highly co-operative relationships and anthropologists have presented evidence to show that the predominant force driving early human evolution was co-operative social inter-

So we can generalise from our experiences of different kinds of capitalism. If you want to live in a society of well-educated people, working today as equals in pleasant surroundings with more than ample leisure time to pursue their own projects and activities, then a wide sharing of the social surplus is required. Otherwise, you could live in a society where people work long and hard to survive on the market, without the time or opportunity for education and leisure, and be bossed about for most of their waking hours to enrich the wealthy few so that they can live a life of leisure (which, in turn, will inspire you to be work harder in spite of the fact that such high inequality produces low social mobility). The first society, according to some, would be one of self-sacrificing altruism and "collectivism" while the latter is, apparently, one based on "individualism" and self-interest…

## I.4.11 If socialism eliminates the profit motive, won't performance suffer?

Firstly, just to be totally clear, by the profit motive we mean money profit. As anarchists consider co-operation to be in our self-interest — i.e. we will "profit" from it in the widest sense possible — we are **not** dismissing the fact people usually act to improve their own situation. However, money profit is a **very** narrow form of "self-interest," indeed so narrow as to be positively harmful to the individual in many ways (in terms of personal development, interpersonal relationships, economic and social well-being, and so on). In other words, do not take our discussion here on the "profit motive" to imply a denial of self-interest, quite the reverse. Anarchists simply reject the *"narrow concept of life which consist[s] in thinking that **profits** are the only leading motive of human society."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 25]



rectly control their workplace and the local community effectively "owns" it, all affected would have an interest in exploring research which would reduce labour, pollution, waste and so on or increase output with little or no social impact.

It should also be mentioned here that research would be pursued more and more as people take an increased interest in both their own work and education. As people become liberated from the grind of everyday life, they will explore possibilities as their interests take them and so research will take place on many levels within society — in the workplace, in the community, in education and so on.

This means that research and innovation would be in the direct interests of everyone involved and that all would have the means to do it. Under capitalism, this is not the case. Most research is conducted in order to get an edge in the market by increasing productivity or expanding production into new (previously unwanted) areas. Any increased productivity often leads to unemployment, deskilling and other negative effects for those involved. Libertarian socialism will not face this problem. Moreover, it should be stressed that basic research is not something which free-market capitalism does well. As Doug Henwood notes, basic science research *"is heavily funded by the public sector and non-profit institutions like universities."* The internet and computer, for example, were both projects for the Pentagon and *"the government picked up the basic R&D tab for decades, when neither Wall Street nor private industry showed any interest. In fact, capital only became interested when the start-up costs had all been borne by the public sector and there were finally profits to be made … good American individualists don't like to talk about the public sector, since their hero is the plucky entrepreneur."* [**After the New Economy**, p. 196 and p. 6] The rise of such systems across the world indicates that basic research often needs public support in order to be done. Even such a leading neo-classical economist as Kenneth Arrow had to admit in the 1960s that market forces are insufficient:

> *"basic research, the output of which is only used as an informational input into other inventive activities, is especially unlikely to be rewarded. In fact, it is likely to be of commercial value to the firm undertaking it only if other firms are prevented from using the information. But such restriction reduces the efficiency of inventive activity in general, and will therefore reduce its quantity also."* [quoted by David Schweickart, **Against capitalism**, p. 132]

Nothing has changed since. Would modern society have produced so many innovations if it had not been for the Pentagon system, the space race and so on? Take the Internet, for example — it is unlikely that this would have got off the ground if it had not been for public funding. Needless to say, of course, much of this technology has been developed for evil reasons and purposes and would be in need of drastic change (or, in many some, abolition) before it could be used in a libertarian society. However, the fact remains that it is unlikely that a pure market based system could have generated most of the technology we take for granted. As Noam Chomsky argues:

> *"[Alan] Greenspan [then head of the US Federal Reserve] gave a talk to newspaper editors in the US. He spoke passionately about the miracles of the market, the wonders brought by consumer choice, and so on. He also gave examples: the Internet, computers, information processing, lasers, satellites, transistors. It's an interesting list: these are textbook examples of creativity and production in the public sector. In the case of the Internet, for 30 years it was designed, developed and funded primarily in the public sector, mostly the Pentagon, then the National Science Foundation — that's most of the hardware, the software, new ideas, technology, and so on. In just the*



> *with the highest daily cost, highest technology-intensiveness, and greatest number of employees per bed."* [**Everything for Sale**, pp. 155–6]

In 1993, the US paid 13.4% of its GDP towards health care, compared to 10% for Canada, 8.6% for Sweden and Germany, 6.6% for Britain and 6.8% for Japan. Only 40% of the US population was covered by public health care and over 35 million people, 14% of the population, went without health insurance for all of 1991, and about twice that many were uninsured for some period during the year. In terms of health indicators, the US people are not getting value for money. Life expectancy is higher in Canada, Sweden, Germany, Japan and Britain. The USA has the highest levels of infant mortality and is last in basic health indicators as well as having fewer doctors per 1,000 people than the OECD average. All in all, the US system is miles begin the universal systems of other countries.

Of course, it will be argued that the USA is not a pure "free market" and so comparisons are pointless. However, it seems strange that the more competitive system, the more privatised system, is less efficient and less fair than the universal systems. It also seems strange that defenders of competition happily use examples from "actually existing" capitalism to illustrate their politics but reject negative examples as being a product of an "impure" system. They want to have their cake and eat it to.

Significantly, we should note that the use of surplus for communal services (such as hospitals and education) can be seen from the Spanish Revolution. Many collectives funded new hospitals and colleges for their members, providing hundreds of thousands with services they could never have afforded by their own labour. This is a classic example of co-operation helping the co-operators achieve far more than they could by their own isolated activities. This libertarian health system was run and how other public services would be organised in a free society are discussed in section I.5.12.

*"The American health-care system is a tangle of inequity and inefficiency — and getting worse as private-market forces seek to rationalise it. A shift to a universal system of health coverage would cut this Gordian knot at a stroke. It would not only deliver the explicitly medical aspects of health more efficiently and fairly, but, by socialising costs of poor health, it would also create a powerful financial incentive for society as a whole to stress primary prevention. .. every nation with a universal system spends less of its GDP on health care than the United States ... And nearly every other nation with a universal system has longer life spans from birth (though roughly equivalent life spans from adulthood) ... most nations with universal systems also have greater patient satisfaction.*

*"The reasons ... should be obvious. By their nature, universal systems spend less money on wasteful overhead, and more on primary prevention. Health-insurance overhead in the United States alone consumes about 1 percent of the GDP, compared to 0.1 percent in Canada. Though medical inflation is a problem everywhere, the universal systems have had far lower rates of cost inflation ... In the years between 1980 and 1987, total health costs in the United States increased by 2.4 times the rate of GDP growth. In nations with universal systems, they increased far more slowly. The figures for Sweden, France, West Germany, and Britain were 1.2, 1.6, 1.8, and 1.7 percent, respectively ...*

*"Remarkably enough, the United States spends most money on health care, but has the fewest beds per thousand in population, the lowest admission rate, and the lowest occupancy rate — coupled*



*last couple of years it has been handed over to people like Bill Gates ... In the case of the Internet, consumer choice was close to zero, and during the crucial development stages that same was true of computers, information processing, and all the rest ...*

*"In fact, of all the examples that Greenspan gives, the only one that maybe rises above the level of a joke is transistors, and they are an interesting case. Transistors, in fact, were developed in a private laboratory — Bell Telephone Laboratories of AT&T — which also made major contributions to solar cells, radio astronomy, information theory, and lots of other important things. But what is the role of markets and consumer choice in that? Well, again, it turns out, zero. AT&T was a government supported monopoly, so there was no consumer choice, and as a monopoly they could charge high prices: in effect a tax on the public which they could use for institutions like Bell Laboratories ... So again, it's publicly subsidised. As if to demonstrate the point, as soon as the industry was deregulated, Bell Labs went out of existence, because the public wasn't paying for it any more ... But that's only the beginning of the story. True, Bell invented transistors, but they used wartime technology, which, again, was publicly subsidised and state-initiated. Furthermore, there was nobody to buy transistors at that time, because they were very expensive to produce. So, for ten years the government was the major procurer ... Government procurement provided entrepreneurial initiatives and guided the development of the technology, which could then be disseminated to industry."* [**Rogue States**, pp. 192–3]

The free market can also have a negative impact on innovation. This is because, in order to please shareholders with higher share prices, companies may reduce funds available for real investment as well as R&D which would also depress growth and employment in the long term. What shareholders might condemn as "uneconomic" (investment projects and R&D) can, and does, make society as a whole better off. However, these gains are over the long term and, within capitalism, it is short-term gains which count. Higher share prices in the here and now are essential in order to survive and so see the long-run.

A socialised economy with a wide-scale sharing of surpluses and resources could easily allocate resources for R&D, long term investment, innovation and so on. Via the use of mutual banks or confederations of syndicates and communes, resources could be allocated which take into account the importance of long-term priorities, as well as social costs, which are not taken into account (indeed, are beneficial to ignore) under capitalism. Rather than penalise long term investment and research and development, a socialised economy would ensure that adequate resources are available, something which would benefit everyone in society in some way.

If we look at vocational training and education, a wide basis of surplus distribution would aid this no end. Under free market capitalism, vocational training suffers for profit seeking firms will not incur costs that will be enjoyed by others. This means that firms will be reluctant to spend money on training if they fear that the trained workers will soon be poached by other firms which can offer more money because they had not incurred the cost of providing training. As a result few firms will provide the required training as they could not be sure that the trained workers will not leave for their competitors (and, of course, a trained work force also, due to their skill, have more workplace power and are less replaceable). So as well as technological developments, a wide basis of surplus distribu-



Significantly, though, non-privatised system of health care are more efficient. Competition as well as denying people treatment also leads to inefficiencies as prices are inflated to pay for advertising, competition related administration costs, paying dividends to share-holders and so on. This drives up the cost for those lucky enough to be covered, not to mention the stress produced by the constant fear of losing insurance or being denying payment due to the insurance company deciding against the patient and their doctor. For example, in 1993, Canada's health plans devoted 0.9% of spending to overhead, compared to U.S. figures of 3.2% for Medicare and 12% for private insurers. In addition, when Canada adopted its publicly financed system in 1971, it and the U.S. both spent just over 7% of GDP on health care. By 1990, the U.S. was up to 12.3%, verses Canada's 9%. Since then costs have continued to rise and rise, making health-care reform of key interest to the public who are suffering under it (assuming they are lucky enough to have private insurance, of course).

The madness of private health-care shows the benefits of a society-wide distribution of surpluses. Competition harms health-care provision and, as a result, people. According to Alfie Kohn:

> *"More hospitals and clinics are being run by for-profit corporations; many institutions, forced to battle for 'customers,' seem to value a skilled director of marketing more highly than a skilled caregiver. As in any other economic sector, the race for profits translates into pressure to reduce costs, and the easiest way to do it here is to cut back on services to unprofitable patients, that is, those who are more sick than rich ... The result: hospital costs are actually* ***higher*** *in areas where there is more competition for patients."* [**No Contest**, p. 240]

American Liberal Robert Kuttner concurs:

ers' self-management) but rather to indicate that privatising resources does not benefit the majority of people in a given society.

It should also be noted that more unequal societies are bad for almost everyone within them. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their book **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better** show that almost every modern social and environmental problem (including ill-health, lack of community life, violence, drugs, obesity, mental illness, long working hours, big prison populations) is more likely to occur in an unequal society than a more equal one. Based on thirty years of research, it shows that inequality, as anarchists have long argued, is bad for us. As such, socialisation of wealth would benefit us all.

Lastly, there is the issue of those who cannot work and the general provision of public goods. With a wide distribution to surplus, communal hospitals, schools, universities and so on can be created. The simple fact is that any society has members who cannot (indeed, should not) work unless they want to, such as the young, the old and the sick. In an Individualist Anarchist society, there is no real provision for these individuals unless someone (a family member, friend or charity) provides them with the money required for hospital fees and so on. For most anarchists, such a situation seems far too much like the system we are currently fighting against to be appealing. As such, social anarchists argue that everyone deserves an education, health care and so on as a right and so be able live a fully human life as a right, rather than a privilege to be paid for. A communal basis for distribution would ensure that every member of the commune can receive such things automatically, as and when required. The removal of the worry that, for example, privatised health care produces can be seen as a benefit of socialisation which cannot be reflected in, say, GDP or similar economic measures (not to mention the ethical statement it makes).



tion would help improve the skills and knowledge of the members of a community. As Keynesian economist Michael Stewart points out, *"[t]here are both theoretical and empirical reasons to suppose that market forces under-provide research and development expenditures, as well as both education and training."* [**Keynes in the 1990s**, p. 77]

By socialising training via confederations of workplaces, syndicates could increase productivity via increasing the skill levels of their members. Higher skill levels will also tend to increase innovation and enjoyment at "work" when combined with workers' self-management. This is because an educated workforce in control of their own time will be unlikely to tolerate mundane, boring, machine-like work and seek ways to eliminate it, improve the working environment and increase productivity to give them more free time.

In addition to work conducted by syndicates, education establishments, communes and so on, it would be essential to provide resources for individuals and small groups to pursue "pet projects." Of course, syndicates and confederations will have their own research institutions but the innovatory role of the interested "amateur" cannot be over-rated. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"What is needed to promote the spirit of innovation is … the awakening of thought, the boldness of conception, which our entire education causes to languish; it is the spreading of a scientific education, which would increase the numbers of inquirers a hundred-fold; it is faith that humanity is going to take a step forward, because it is enthusiasm, the hope of doing good, that has inspired all the great inventors. The Social Revolution alone can give this impulse to thought, this boldness, this knowledge, this conviction of working for all.*

> *"Then we shall have vast institutes ... immense industrial laboratories open to all inquirers, where men will be able to work out their dreams, after having acquitted themselves of their duty towards society; ... where they will make their experiments; where they will find other comrades, experts in other branches of industry, likewise coming to study some difficult problem, and therefore able to help and enlighten each other — the encounter of their ideas and experiences causing the longed-for solution to be found."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 117]

The example of free software (operating systems, programming languages, specific packages and code) today show the potential this. Thus socialisation would aid innovation and scientific development by providing the necessary resources (including free time) for such work. Moreover, it would also provide the community spirit required to push the boundaries of science forward. As John O'Neil argues:

> *"There is, in a competitive market economy, a disincentive to communicate information. The market encourages secrecy, which is inimical to openness in science. It presupposes a view of property in which the owner has rights to exclude others. In the sphere of science, such rights of exclusion place limits on the communication of information and theories which are incompatible with the growth of knowledge ... science tends to grow when communication is open... [In addition a] necessary condition for the acceptability of a theory or experimental result is that it pass the public, critical scrutiny of competent scientific judges. A private theory or result is one that is shielded from the criteria of scientific acceptability."* [**The Market**, p. 153]



Today inventors often *"carefully hide their inventions from each other, as they are hampered by patents and Capitalism — that bane of present society, that stumbling-block in the path of intellectual and moral progress."* In a free society, socialisation would ensure that inventors will be able to build upon the knowledge of everyone, including past generations. Rather than hide knowledge from others, in case they get a competitive advantage, knowledge would be shared, enriching all involved as well as the rest of society. Thus the *"spreading of a scientific education, which would increase the number of inquirers"*, *"faith that humanity is going to take a step forward"* and the *"enthusiasm, the hope of doing good, that has inspired all the great inventors"* will be maximised and innovation increased. [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 117 and pp. 116–7]

Social anarchists would also suggest that socialisation would produce more benefits by looking at existing societies. The evidence from the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and China shows that privatisations of nationalised industries associated with neo-liberalism failed in its stated aims of cheaper and better services while more than succeeding in their unstated aim of redistributing wealth upwards (for details see **In Government we Trust: Market Failure and the delusions of privatisation** by Warrick Funnell, Robert Jupe and Jane Andrew). The examples of railway and utility privatisation, the energy crisis in California (with companies like Enron reaping huge speculative profits while consumers faced blackouts) and the Sydney water treatment scandal in Australia are sadly all too typical. Ironically, in the UK after 30 years of Thatcherite policies (first under the Tories and then New Labour) the readers of the right-wing press who supported it are subjected to article after article complaining about *"Rip off Britain"* and yet more increases in the prices charged for privatised utilities, services and goods. This, it must be stressed, if not to suggest that anarchists aim for nationalisation (we do not, we aim for socialisation and work-

norities would be essential to point out and protest as if such dangers appeared to be developing.

As such, it should be noted that anarchists recognise that the practice of self-assumed political obligation implied in free association also implies the right to practice dissent and disobedience as well. As Carole Pateman notes:

> *"Even if it is impossible to be unjust to myself, I do not vote for myself alone, but along with everyone else. Questions about injustice are always appropriate in political life, for there is no guarantee that participatory voting will actually result in decisions in accord with the principles of political morality."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 160]

If an individual or group of individuals feel that a specific decision threatens their freedom (which is the basic principle of political morality in an anarchist society) they can (and must) act to defend that freedom:

> *"The political practice of participatory voting rests in a collective self-consciousness about the meaning and implication of citizenship. The members of the political association understand that to vote is simultaneously to commit oneself, to commit one's fellow citizens, and also to commit oneself to them in a mutual undertaking ... a refusal to vote on a particular occasion indicates that the refusers believe ... [that] the proposal ... infringes the principle of political morality on which the political association is based ... A refusal to vote [or the use of direct action] could be seen as an appeal to the 'sense of justice' of their fellow citizens."* [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161]

As they no longer consent to the decisions made by their community they can appeal to the "sense of justice" of their



done and so if people do not work then they are left dependent on the charity of those who do (exceptions for the young, old and ill would apply, of course).

So this question is directed towards communist-anarchists, with many people arguing that communism is impossible because people simply would not work unless they get paid. This ignores the many people who do volunteer work (often in addition to their "real jobs"). It also ignores those who spend their time contributing to projects they are interested in (such as fan journals) which would be considered work in other contexts. A classic example of this is the internet, particularly webpages like Wikipedia and software projects like php. Then there is the activity of the pro-capitalists themselves, often fanatical anti-communists (which they almost always equate to Stalinism), who spend their free time working on wikipedia, newsgroups, webpages and journals explaining how communism could not work because people would never voluntarily contribute to society! It is one of the great ironies of life that those who hate communism the most often, by their actions, prove its viability.

So, communist-anarchists argue, in a society based on self-managed work in pleasant surroundings and a reduction of the working week to a minimum, there would be few people who refuse to do any kind of productive activity. The question arises of what to do with those (a small minority, to be sure) who refuse to work.

On this question there is some disagreement. Some anarchists argue that the lazy should not be deprived of the means of life. Social pressure, they argue, would ensure those who take from, but do not contribute, to the community to listen to their conscience and start producing for the community that supports them. If this did not happen, then the person who refused to contribute would be asked to leave (freedom of association means the freedom **not** to associate). As Kropotkin argued;

> *"First of all, is it not evident that if a society, founded on the principle of free work, were really menaced by loafers, it could protect itself without the authoritarian organisation we have nowadays, and without having recourse to wagedom [i.e., payment by deeds]?*
>
> *"Let us take a group of volunteers, combining for some particular enterprise. Having its success at heart, they all work with a will, save one of the associates, who is frequently absent from his post ... some day the comrade who imperils their enterprise will be told: 'Friend, we should like to work with you; but as you are often absent from your post, and you do your work negligently, we must part. Go and find other comrades who will put up with your indifference!'*
>
> *"This is so natural that it is practised everywhere, even nowadays, in all industries ... [I]f [a worker] does his work badly, if he hinders his comrades by his laziness or other defects, if he is quarrelsome, there is an end of it; he is compelled to leave the workshop.*
>
> *"Authoritarians pretend that it is the almighty employer and his overseers who maintain regularity and quality of work in factories. In reality ... it is the factory itself, the workmen [and women] who see to the good quality of the work."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 152–3]

Most anarchists agree with Camillo Berneri when he argued that anarchism should be based upon *"no compulsion to work, but no duty towards those who do not want to work."* [*"The Problem of Work"*, pp. 59–82, **Why Work?**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 74] This means that an anarchist society will not con-



rights over the resources they need to propagate their ideas and practice their protest.

In the real world, the best example would be the **Mujeres Libres** in the Spanish anarchist movement during the 1930s (see Martha A. Ackelsberg's classic **Free Women Of Spain: Anarchism And The Struggle For The Emancipation Of Women** for more on this important movement). This organisation arose in response to the fact that many male anarchists, while expressing a theoretical commitment to sexual equality, were as sexist as the system they were fighting against and so they subconsciously reflected the oppressive public opinion of what a woman's position should be. Unsurprisingly, many anarchist women were (rightly) angry at this and their marginalised status within a libertarian movement that ostensibly sought to abolish all forms of domination and hierarchy. In response, and often in the face of the hostility or indifference of their male comrades, they organised themselves to change this situation, to combat and transform public opinion both within and outwith the anarchist movement. Their activities meet with some success before, like the rest of the libertarian revolution, it was crushed by Franco's victory in the civil war.

We can, therefore, suggest that a free society is unlikely to see public opinion becoming authoritarian. This is because, as the example of the **Mujeres Libres** shows, members of that society would organise to combat such developments and use various means to raise the problem to public awareness and to combat it. Once a free society has been gained, the task of anarchists would be to ensure it remained free and that would mean keeping a constant watch on possible sources of authority, including those associated with organisations developing informal bureaucracies and public opinion. While a free society would place numerous safeguards against such developments, no system would be perfect and so the actions of dissident mi-

*"simply because hitherto this power has not been humanised itself; it has not been humanised because the social life of which it is ever the faithful expression is based ... in the worship of divinity, not on respect for humanity; in authority, not on liberty; on privilege, not on equality; in the exploitation, not on the brotherhood, of men; on iniquity and falsehood, not on justice and truth. Consequently its real action, always in contradiction of the humanitarian theories which it professes, has constantly exercised a disastrous and depraving influence."* [**God and the State**, p. 43f] In other words, *"if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society."* [Emma Goldman, **Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 44] In an anarchist society a conscious effort will be made to dissolve the institutional and traditional sources of the authoritarian/submissive type of personality, and thus to free "public opinion" of its current potential for intolerance.

This is not to suggest that such a society of free individuals will not become stuck in routine and, over time, become oppressive to minorities who question certain aspects of public opinion or how it works. Public opinion and social organisations can evolve over generations in ways which no one expects. The best know, albeit fictional, example is in Ursula Le Guin's classic science-fiction book **The Dispossessed** where the anarchist society of Anarres has developed something of a weak informal bureaucracy due to the routine of everyday life and the unconscious pressures of public opinion. When the protagonist, Shevek, and his friends try to point this out and do something about (including Shevek leaving Anarres for the capitalist world of Urras), most on the planet are extremely hostile to this activity (precisely because it is going against the normal routine). Significantly, though, a large minority end up supporting their activities, activities which can occur precisely **because** the society is still fundamentally communist-anarchist and so the dissenters have a rich libertarian tradition and sensibility to base their direct action on as well having use-



tinue to feed, clothe, house someone who can produce but refuses to. Anarchists have had enough of the wealthy under capitalism consuming but not producing and do not see why they should support a new group of parasites after the revolution.

Obviously, there is a difference between not wanting to work and being unable to work. The sick, children, the old, pregnant women and so on will be looked after in libertarian communism. As child rearing would be considered "work" along with other more obviously economic tasks, mothers and fathers will not have to leave their children unattended and work to make ends meet. Instead, consideration will be given to the needs of both parents and children as well as the creation of community nurseries and child care centres.

We have to stress here that an anarchist society will not deny anyone the means of life. This would violate the voluntary labour which is at the heart of all schools of anarchism. Unlike capitalism, the means of life will not be monopolised by any group — including the commune. This means that someone who does not wish to join a commune or who does not pull their weight within a commune and are expelled or choose to leave will have access to the means of making a living.

We stated that we stress this fact as many supporters of capitalism seem to be unable to understand this point (or prefer to ignore it and so misrepresent the anarchist position). In an anarchist society, no one will be forced to join a commune simply because they do not have access to the means of production and/or land required to work alone. Unlike capitalism, where access to these essentials of life is dependent on buying access to them from the capitalist class (and so, effectively, denied to the vast majority), an anarchist society will ensure that all have access and have a real choice between living in a commune and working independently. This access is based on the fundamental difference between possession and property — the commune possesses as much land as it needs, as do non-members. The resources used by them are subject to the usual

possession rationale — they possess it only as long as they use it and cannot bar others using it if they do not (i.e., it is not property).

Thus an anarchist commune remains a voluntary association and ensures the end of all forms of domination. The member of the commune has the choice of working as part of a community, giving according to their abilities and taking according to their needs (or some other means of organising production and consumption such as equal income or receiving labour notes, and so on), or working independently and so free of communal benefits as well as any commitments (bar those associated with using communal resources such as roads and so on).

So, in most, if not all, anarchist communities, individuals have two options, either they can join a commune and work together as equals, or they can work as an individual or independent co-operative and exchange the product of their labour with others. If an individual joins a commune and does not carry their weight, even after their fellow workers ask them to, then that person will possibly be expelled and given enough land, tools or means of production to work alone. Of course, if a person is depressed, run down or otherwise finding it hard to join in communal responsibilities then their friends and fellow workers would do everything in their power to help and be flexible in their approach to the problem. What method a community would use would depend on what people in that community thought was best.

However, most social anarchists think that the problem of people trying not to work would be a very minor one in a free society. This is because productive activity is part of human life and an essential way to express oneself. With work being voluntary and self-managed, it will become like current day hobbies and many people work harder at their hobbies than they do at "real" work (this FAQ can be considered as an example of this!). How long this takes to organise fully is, of course,



extension of anarchist principles into all spheres of life, both private and public. It does not mean the subordination of the private by the public, or vice versa.

As an example, we can point to inter-personal relationships. Anarchists are opposed to the patriarchy implicit (and, in the past, explicit) in marriage and suggest free love as an alternative. As discussed in section H.4.2 , free love means that both people in a relationship have equal decision making power rather than, as in marriage, the woman becoming the property of the husband. Thus, self-management in this context does not mean the end of interpersonal relationships by the imposition of the commune onto all spheres of life but, obviously, the creation of interpersonal relationships based on equality and liberty.

So it is highly unlikely that the *"tyranny of the majority"* will exert itself where most rightly fear it — in their homes, how they act with friends, their personal space, how they act, and so on. As long as individual freedom and rights are protected, it is of little concern what people get up to (included the rights of children, who are also individuals and **not** the property of their parents). Direct democracy in anarchist theory is purely concerned with common resources, their use and management. It is highly unlikely that a free society would debate issues of personal behaviour or morality and instead would leave them to those directly affected by them — as it should be, as we all need personal space and experimentation to find the way of life that best suits us.

Today an authoritarian worldview, characterised by an inability to think beyond the categories of domination and submission, is imparted by conditioning in the family, schools, religious institutions, clubs, fraternities, the army, etc., and produces a type of personality that is intolerant of any individual or group perceived as threatening to the perpetuation of that worldview and its corresponding institutions and values. Thus, as Bakunin argued, *"public opinion"* is potentially intolerant

individuals, who would thus recognise and act to protect the uniqueness and freedom of others. Unless people are indoctrinated by religion or some other form of ideology, they can be tolerant of others and their individuality. If this is not the case now, then it has more to do with the existence of authoritarian social relationships — relationships that will be dismantled under libertarian socialism — and the type of person they create rather than some innate human flaw.

Thus there will be vast areas of life in a libertarian socialist community which are none of other people's business. Anarchists have always stressed the importance of personal space and "private" areas. Indeed, for Kropotkin, the failure of many "utopian" communities directly flowed from a lack of these and *"the desire to manage the community after the model of a family, to make it 'the great family.' They lived all in the same house and were thus forced to continuously meet the same 'brethren and sisters.' It is already difficult often for two real brothers to live together in the same house, and family life is not always harmonious; so it was a fundamental error to impose on all the 'great family' instead of trying, on the contrary, to guarantee as much freedom and home life to each individual."* In an anarchist society, continual agreement on all issues is not desired. The members of a free society *"need only agree as to some advantageous method of common work, and are free otherwise to live in their own way."* [**Small Communal Experiments and Why they Fail**, pp. 8–9 and p. 22]

Which brings us to another key point. When anarchists talk of democratising or communalising the household or any other association, we do not mean that it should be stripped of its private status and become open to regulation by general voting in a single, universal public sphere. Rather, we mean that households and other relationships should take in libertarian characteristics and be consistent with the liberty of all its members. Thus a society based on self-management does not imply the destruction of private spheres of activity — it implies the



unknown but one of the most important tasks of a free society will be to ensure work is transformed and the burden of what remains is shared in order to reduce toil to a minimum.

It is the nature of employment under capitalism, the hierarchical nature of its workplace, that makes it "work" instead of pleasure. Work need not be a part of the day that we wish would end. It is **not** work that people hate. Rather it is **over**-work, in unpleasant circumstances and under the control of others that people hate. Reduce the hours of labour, improve the working conditions and place the work under self-management and work will stop being a hated thing. All these will help ensure that only an idiot would desire to work alone for, as Malatesta argued, the *"individual who wished to supply his own material needs by working alone would be the slave of his labours."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 15]

So, enlightened self-interest would secure the voluntary labour and egalitarian distribution anarchists favour in the vast majority of the population. The parasitism associated with capitalism would be a thing of the past. Thus the problem of the "lazy" person fails to understand the nature of humanity nor the revolutionising effects of freedom on the nature and content of work.

## I.4.15 What will the workplace of tomorrow look like?

Given the anarchist desire to liberate the artist in all of us, we can easily imagine that a free society would totally transform the working environment. No longer would workers be indifferent to their workplaces, but they would express themselves in transforming them into pleasant places, integrated into both the life of the local community and into the local environment. After all, *"no movement that raises the demand for workers' councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries*

*to promote sweeping transformations in the environment of the work place.*" [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 88]

A glimpse of the future workplace can been seen from the actual class struggle. In the 40 day sit-down strike at Fisher Body plant #1 in Flint, Michigan in 1936, *"there was a community of two thousand strikers ... Committees organised recreation, information, classes, a postal service, sanitation ... There were classes in parliamentary procedure, public speaking, history of the labour movement. Graduate students at the University of Michigan gave courses in journalism and creative writing."* [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 391] In the same year, during the Spanish Revolution, collectivised workplaces also created libraries and education facilities as well as funding schools, health care and other social necessities (a practice, we must note, that had started before the revolution when anarchist unions had funded schools, social centres, libraries and so on).

The future workplace would be expanded to include education and classes in individual development. This follows Proudhon's suggestion made during the 1848 revolution that we should *"[o]rganise association, and by the same token, every workshop becoming a school, every worker becomes a master, every student an apprentice."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 62–3] This means that in a free society *"Workers' associations have a very important role to play ... Linked to the system of public education, they will become both centres of production and centres and for education ... The working masses will be in daily contact with the youthful army of agricultural and industrial workers. Labour and study, which have for so long and so foolishly been kept apart, will finally emerge side by side in their natural state of union. Instead of being confined to narrow, specialised fields, vocational education will include a variety of different types of work which, taken as a whole, will insure*



jection fails to take note of the vast difference between direct and representative forms of democracy.

In the current system, as we pointed out in section B.5, voters are mere passive spectators of occasional, staged, and highly rehearsed debates among candidates pre-selected by the corporate elite, who pay for campaign expenses. The public is expected to choose simply on the basis of political ads and news sound bites. Once the choice is made, cumbersome and ineffective recall procedures insure that elected representatives can act more or less as they (or rather, their wealthy sponsors) please. The function, then, of the electorate in bourgeois "representative government" is ratification of "choices" that have been **already made for them**! This is also the case in referendum, where the people *"are not to **propose** the questions: the government is to do that. Only to questions **proposed** by the government, the people may answer **Yes** or **No**, like a child in the catechism. The people will not even have a chance to make amendments."* [Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 148]

By contrast, in a libertarian society decisions are made following public discussion in community assemblies open to all. After decisions have been reached, outvoted minorities — even minorities of one — still have ample opportunity to present reasoned and persuasive counter-arguments to try to change the decision. This process of debate, disagreement, challenge, and counter-challenge, which goes on even after the defeated minority has temporarily acquiesced in the decision of the majority, is virtually absent in the representative system, where *"tyranny of the majority"* is truly a problem. In addition, minorities can secede from an association if the decision reached by it are truly offensive to them.

And let us not forget that in all likelihood, issues of personal conduct or activity will not be discussed in the neighbourhood assemblies. Why? Because we are talking about a society in which most people consider themselves to be unique, free

*uniformity and sameness that harass the individual the most."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 116] Hence Malatesta's comment that anarchists *"have the special mission of being vigilant custodians of freedom, against all aspirants to power and against the possible tyranny of the majority."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 161]

However, rather than draw elitist conclusions from this fact of life under capitalism and urge forms of government and organisation which restrict popular participation (and promote rule, and tyranny, by the few) — as classical liberals do — libertarians argue that only a process of self-liberation through struggle and participation can break up the mass into free, self-managing individuals (as discussed in section H.2.11 attempts by Leninists to portray anarchists as elitists are both hypocritical and false). Moreover, we also argue that participation and self-management is the only way that majorities can come to see the point of minority ideas and for seeing the importance of protecting minority freedoms. This means that any attempt to restrict participation in the name of minority rights actually enforces the herd mentality, undermining minority and individual freedom rather than protecting it. As Carole Pateman argues:

> *"the evidence supports the arguments ... that we do learn to participate by participating and that feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that experience of a participatory authority structure might also be effective in diminishing tendencies towards non-democratic attitudes in the individual."* [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 105]

So while there is cause for concern (and anarchists are at the forefront in expressing it), the *"tyranny of the majority"* ob-



*that each student becomes an all-round worker."* [Proudhon, **Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 87]

This would allow work to become part of a wider community, drawing in people from different areas to share their knowledge and learn new insights and ideas. In addition, children would have part of their school studies with workplaces, getting them aware of the practicalities of many different forms of work and so allowing them to make informed decisions in what sort of activity they would be interested in pursuing when they were older.

Obviously, a workplace managed by its workers would also take care to make the working environment as pleasant as possible. No more "sick building syndrome" or unhealthy and stressful work areas for *"can we doubt that work will become a pleasure and a relaxation in a society of equals, in which 'hands' will not be compelled to sell themselves to toil, and to accept work under any conditions Repugnant tasks will disappear, because it is evident that these unhealthy conditions are harmful to society as a whole. Slaves can submit to them, but free men [and women] will create new conditions, and their work will be pleasant and infinitely more productive."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 123] Workplaces would be designed to maximise space and allow individual expression within them. We can imagine such places surrounded by gardens and allotments which were tended by workers themselves, giving a pleasant surrounding to the workplace. There would, in effect, be a break down of the city/rural divide — workplaces would be placed next to fields and integrated into the surroundings:

> *"Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and*

> *factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men [and women] ... factories and workshops which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes, and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity which best suits their inclinations.*" [Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 197]

This vision of rural and urban integration is just part of the future anarchists see for the workplace. As Kropotkin argued, *"[w]e proclaim **integration**... a society of integrated, combined labour. A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources — it may be a nation, or rather a region — produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

The future workplace would be an expression of the desires of those who worked there. It would be based around a pleasant working environment, within gardens and with extensive library, resources for education classes and other leisure activities. All this, and more, will be possible in a society based upon self-realisation and self-expression and one in which individuality is not crushed by authority and capitalism. To quote Kropotkin, the future workplace would be *"airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 197] For, obviously, *"if most of the workshops we know are foul and unhealthy, it is because the workers are of*



few — particularly as its proponents (such as the propertarian right and other defenders of capitalism) have no problem with the autocratic rule of property owners over their wage-slaves!

However, as noted, the objection to majority rule **does** contain a valid point and one which anarchists have addressed — namely, what about minority freedom within a self-managed society? So this is a danger, one raised by people who are most definitely **not** seeking minority rule. For example, someone who was sympathetic to anarchism, George Orwell, suggested:

> *"the totalitarian tendency ... is explicit in the anarchist ... vision of Society. In a Society in which there is no law, and in theory no compulsion, the only arbiter of behaviour is public opinion. But pubic opinion, because of the tremendous urge to conformity in gregarious animals, is less tolerant than any system of law. When human beings are governed by 'thou shalt not', the individual can practise a certain amount of eccentricity: when they are supposedly governed by 'love' or 'reason', he is under continuous pressure to make him behave and think in exactly the same way as everyone else."* [**Inside the Whale and Other Essays**, p. 132]

There is, of course, this danger in **any** society, be its decision making structure direct (anarchy) or indirect (by some form of government). However, this does not really address the issue to point out this obvious fact. Anarchists are at the forefront in expressing concern about it, recognising that the majority is often a threat to freedom by its fear of change (see, for example, Emma Goldman's classic essay *"Minorities versus Majorities"*). We are well aware that the mass, as long as the individuals within it do not free themselves, can be a dead-weight on others, resisting change and enforcing conformity. As Goldman argued, *"even more than constituted authority, it is social*

For these reasons, a libertarian-socialist society would not have a state. Structurally, it would be based on egalitarian and decentralised institutions, the direct opposite of the hierarchical and centralised state. Functionally, it would be based on mass participation of all to ensure they manage their own affairs rather than, as in a state, exclusion of the many to ensure the rule of an elite. The communes and confederations of a libertarian system are not just states with new names but rather the forums by which free people manage their own affairs rather than being ruled by a state and its politicians and bureaucrats.

This is why Proudhon argued that *"under the democratic constitution .. . the political and the economic are ... one and the same system ... based upon a single principle, mutuality ... and form this vast humanitarian organism of which nothing previously could give the idea . .. [I]s this not the system of the old society turned upside down"*? [**Anarchism**, vol. 1, Robert Graham (ed.), pp. 74–5]

## I.5.6 Won't there be a danger of a *"tyranny of the majority"* under libertarian socialism?

While the *"tyranny of the majority"* objection does contain an important point, it is often raised for self-serving reasons. This is because those who have historically raised the issue (for example, and as discussed in section B.2.5, creators of the 1789 American constitution like Hamilton and Madison) saw the minority to be protected as the rich. In other words, the objection is not opposed to majority tyranny as such (they have no objections when the majority support their right to their riches and powers) but rather attempts of the majority to change their society to a fairer and freer one. Such concerns can easily be dismissed as an ingenious argument in favour of rule by the



*no account in the organisation of factories"*. [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 121]

*"So in brief,"* argued William Morris, *"our buildings will be beautiful with their own beauty of simplicity as workshops"* and *"besides the mere workshops, our factory will have other buildings which may carry ornament further than that, for it will need dinning-hall, library, school, places for study of different kinds, and other such structures."* [**A Factory as It Might Be**, p. 9] This is possible and is only held back by capitalism which denounces such visions of freedom as "uneconomic." Yet such claims ignore the distribution of income in class society:

> *"Impossible I hear an anti-Socialist say. My friend, please to remember that most factories sustain today large and handsome gardens, and not seldom parks ... **only** the said gardens, etc. are twenty miles away from the factory, **out of the smoke,** and are kept up for **one member of the factory only,** the sleeping partner to wit."* [Morris, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 7–8]

Pleasant working conditions based upon the self-management of work can produce a workplace within which economic "efficiency" can be achieved without disrupting and destroying individuality and the environment (also see section I.4.9 for a fuller discussion of anarchism and technology).

## I.4.16 Won't a libertarian communist society be inefficient?

It is often argued that anarcho-communism and other forms of non-market libertarian-socialism would promote inefficiency and unproductive work. The basis of this argument is that without market forces to discipline workers and the profit motive to reward them, workers would have no

incentive to work in a way which minimises time or resources. The net effect of this would be inefficient use of recourses, particularly an individual's time.

This is a valid point in some ways; for example, a society can (potentially) benefit from increasing productivity as the less time and resources it takes to produce a certain good, the more of both it gains for other activities (although, of course, in a class society the benefits of increased productivity generally accrue to, first and foremost, those at the top and, for the rest, the "other activities" mean more work). Indeed, for an individual, a decent society depends on people having time available for them to do what they want, to develop themselves in whatever way they want, to enjoy themselves. In addition, doing more with less can have a positive environment impact as well. It is for these reasons that an anarchist society would be interested in promoting efficiency and productiveness during production.

A free society will undoubtedly create new criteria for what counts as an efficient use of resources and time. What passes for "efficient" use capitalism often means what is efficient in increasing the power and profits of the few, without regard to the wasteful use of individual time, energy and potential as well as environmental and social costs. Such a narrow criteria for decision making or evaluating efficient production will not exist in an anarchist society (see our discussion of the irrational nature of the price mechanism in section I.1.2, for example). When we use the term efficiency we mean the dictionary definition of efficiency (i.e. reducing waste, maximising use of resources) rather than what the capitalist market distorts this into (i.e. what creates most profits for the boss).

While capitalism has turned improvements in productivity as a means of increasing work, enriching the few and generally proletarianising the working class, a free society would take a different approach to the problem. As argued in section I.4.3, a communist-anarchist society would be based upon the prin-



institutions, such as a capitalist company, are far more statist than self-managed ones).

So, far from being new states by which one section of a community (historically, almost always a wealthy elite) imposes its ethical standards on another, the anarchist commune is just a public forum. In this forum, issues of community interest (for example, management of the commons, control of communalised economic activity, and so forth) are discussed and policy agreed upon. In addition, interests beyond a local area are also discussed and delegates for confederal conferences are mandated with the wishes of the community. Hence, administration of things replaces government of people, with the community of communities existing to ensure that the interests of all are managed by all and that liberty, justice and equality for all are more than just ideals. Moreover, a free society would be one without professional bodies of armed people (i.e., there would be no armed forces or police). It would not have the means of enforcing the decisions of conferences and communes which reflected the interests of a few (would-be politicians or bureaucrats) rather than popular opinion.

Of course, it could be argued that popular opinion can be as oppressive as any state, a possibility anarchists are aware of and take steps to combat. Remember, the communities and confederations of a free society would be made up of free people. They would **not** be too concerned with the personal behaviour of others unless it impacted on their own lives. As such, they would not be seeking to restrict the liberty of those who live with them. A community, therefore, is unlikely to make decisions like, for example, outlawing homosexuality or censoring the press. This is not to say that there is no danger of majorities abusing minorities. As we discuss in the next section, anarchists suggest means of reducing it, even eliminating it. Suffice to say, a free society would seek to encourage diversity and so leave minorities free to live their own lives (assuming they are not oppressing or exploiting others, of course).

Anarchists argue that individuals and the institutions they create cannot be considered in isolation. Authoritarian institutions will create individuals who have a servile nature, who cannot govern themselves. We, therefore, consider it common sense that individuals, in order to be free, **must** have take part in determining the general agreements they make with their neighbours which give form to their communities. Otherwise, a free society could not exist and individuals would be subject to rules others make **for** them (following orders is hardly libertarian). Somewhat ironically, those who stress "individualism" and denounce communes as new "states" advocate a social system which produces extremely hierarchical social relationships based on the authority of the property owner. In other words, abstract individualism produces authoritarian (i.e., state-like) social relationships (see section F.1). Therefore, anarchists recognise the social nature of humanity and the fact any society based on an abstract individualism (like capitalism) will be marked by authority, injustice and inequality, **not** freedom. As Bookchin pointed out: *"To speak of 'The Individual' apart from its social roots is as meaningless as to speak of a society that contains no people or institutions."* [**Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left**, p. 154]

Society cannot be avoided and *"[u]nless everyone is to be psychologically homogeneous and society's interests so uniform in character that dissent is simply meaningless, there must be room for conflicting proposals, discussion, rational explication and majority decisions — in short, democracy."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] Those who reject democracy in the name of liberty (such as many supporters of capitalism claim to do) usually also see the need for laws and hierarchical authority (particularly in the workplace). This is unsurprising, as such authority is the only means left by which collective activity can be co-ordinated if self-management is rejected (which is ironic as the resulting



ciple of *"**for some much per day** (in money today, in labour tomorrow) **you are entitled to satisfy — luxury excepted — this or the other of your wants**."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Small Communal Experiments and why the fail**, p. 8] Building upon this, we can imagine a situation where the average output for a given industry in a given amount of time is used to encourage efficiency and productivity. If a given syndicate can produce this average output with at least average quality in less time than the agreed average/minimum (and without causing ecological or social externalities, of course) then the members of that syndicate can and should have that time off.

This would be a powerful incentive to innovate, improve productivity, introduce new machinery and processes as well as work efficiently without reintroducing the profit motive and material inequality. With the possibility of having more time available for themselves and their own projects, people involved in productive activities would have a strong interest in being efficient. Of course, if the work in question is something they enjoy then any increases in efficiency would **enhance** what makes their work enjoyable and not eliminate it.

Rewarding efficiency with free time would also be an important means to ensure efficient use of resources as well as a means of reducing time spent in productive activity which was considered as boring or otherwise undesirable. The incentive of getting unpleasant tasks over with as quickly as possible would ensure that the tasks were done efficiently and that innovation was directed towards them. Moreover, when it came to major investment decisions, a syndicate would be more likely to get others to agree to its plans if the syndicate had a reputation of excellence. This, again, would encourage efficiency as people would know that they could gain resources for their communities and workplaces (i.e. themselves) more easily if their work is efficient and reliable. This would be a key means of encouraging efficient and effective use of resources.

Similarly, an inefficient or wasteful syndicate would have negative reactions from their fellow workers. As we argued in section I.4.7, a libertarian communist economy would be based on free association. If a syndicate or community got a reputation for being inefficient with resources then others would not associate with them (i.e. they would not supply them with materials, or place them at the end of the queue when deciding which production requests to supply, and so on). As with a syndicate which produced shoddy goods, the inefficient syndicate would also face the judgement of its peers. This will produce an environment which will encourage efficient use of resources and time.

All these factors, the possibility of increased free time, the respect and resources gained for an efficient and excellent work and the possibility of a lack of co-operation with others for inefficient use of resources, would ensure that an anarchist-communist or anarchist-collectivist society would have no need to fear inefficiency. Indeed, by placing the benefits of increased efficiency into the hands of those who do the work, efficiency will no doubt increase.

With self-management, we can soon see time and resources being used efficiently and productively simply because those doing the work would have a direct and real interest in it. Rather than alienate their liberty, as under capitalism, they would apply their creativity and minds to transforming their productive activity in such a way as to make it enjoyable and not a waste of their time.

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that modern knowledge could be applied to a society in which people, *"with the work of their own hands and intelligence, and by the aid of the machinery already invented and to be invented, should themselves create all imaginable riches. Technics and science will not be lagging behind if production takes such a direction. Guided by observation, analysis and experiment, they will answer all possible demands. They will reduce the time required for producing wealth to any*



**Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 162] In this way, individual liberty can be protected in a communal system and society enriched by opposition, confrontation and dissent. Without self-management and minority dissent, society would become an ideological cemetery which would stifle ideas and individuals as these thrive on discussion (*"those who will be able to create in their mutual relations a movement and a life based on the principles of free understanding ... will understand that **variety, conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death**"* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 143]). So a society based on voluntary agreements and self-management would, out of interpersonal empathy and self-interest, create a society that encouraged individuality and respect for minorities.

Therefore, a commune's participatory nature is the opposite of statism. April Carter agrees, stating that *"commitment to direct democracy or anarchy in the socio-political sphere is incompatible with political authority"* and that the *"only authority that can exist in a direct democracy is the collective 'authority' vested in the body politic ... it is doubtful if authority can be created by a group of equals who reach decisions be a process of mutual persuasion."* [**Authority and Democracy**, p. 69 and p. 380] Which echoes, we must note, Proudhon's comment that *"the true meaning of the word 'democracy'"* was the *"dismissal of government."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 42] Bakunin argued that when the *"whole people govern"* then *"there will be no one to be governed. It means that there will be no government, no State."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 287] Malatesta, decades later, made the same point: *"government by everybody is no longer government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 38] And, of course, Kropotkin argued that by means of the directly democratic sections of the French Revolution the masses *"practic[ed] what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government"* and expressed *"the principles of anarchism."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200 and p. 204]

In a system of federated participatory communities there is no ruling elite, and thus no hierarchy, because power is retained by the lowest-level units of confederation through their use of direct democracy and mandated, rotating, and recallable delegates to confederal bodies. This eliminates the problem in "representative" democratic systems of the delegation of power leading to the elected officials becoming isolated from and beyond the control of the mass of people who elected them. An anarchist society would make decisions by *"means of congresses, composed of delegates, who discuss among themselves, and submit **proposals**, not **laws**, to their constituents"* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 135] So it is based on **self**-government, **not** representative government (and its inevitable bureaucracy). As Proudhon put it, *"the federal system is the contrary of hierarchy or administrative and governmental centralisation"* and so *"a confederation is not exactly a state ... What is called federal authority ... is no longer a government; it is an agency created ... for the joint execution of certain functions"*. [**The Principle of Federation**, pp. 40–1]

Perhaps it will be objected that communal decision making is just a form of "statism" based on direct, as opposed to representative, democracy — "statist" because the individual is still be subject to the rules of the majority and so is not free. This objection, however, confuses statism with free agreement (i.e. cooperation). Since participatory communities, like productive syndicates, are voluntary associations, the decisions they make are based on self-assumed obligations (see section A.2.11), and dissenters can leave the association if they so desire. Thus communes are no more "statist" than the act of promising and keeping your word.

In addition, in a free society, dissent and direct action can be used by minorities to press their case (or defend their freedom) as well as debate. As Carole Pateman argues, *"[p]olitical disobedience is merely one possible expression of the active citizenship on which a self-managing democracy is based."* [**The**



*desired amount, so as to leave to everyone as much leisure as he or she may ask for ... they guarantee ... the happiness that can be found in the full and varied exercise of the different capacities of the human being, in work that need not be overwork."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, pp. 198–9]

# I.5 What could the social structure of anarchy look like?

The social and political structure of anarchy is similar to that of its economic structure, i.e., it is based on a voluntary federation of decentralised, directly democratic community assemblies (communes). In these grassroots political units and their confederations, the concept of ***"self-management"*** becomes that of ***"self-government"***, a form of municipal organisation in which people take back control of their living places from the bureaucratic state and the capitalist class whose interests it serves. Bakunin's comments are very applicable here:

> *"[A] truly popular organisation begins from below, from the association, from the commune. Thus starting out with the organisation of the lowest nucleus and proceeding upward, federalism becomes a political institution of socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 273–4]

*"A new economic phase demands a new political phase,"* argued Kropotkin, *"A revolution as profound as that dreamed of by the socialists cannot accept the mould of an out-dated political life. A new society based on equality of condition, on the collective possession of the instruments of work, cannot tolerate for a week ... the representative system ... if we want the social revolution, we must seek a form of political organisation that will correspond to*



*— belongs to them entirely ... ?"* [**Anarchism**, vol. 1, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 75]

In other words, it **is** possible. It **has** worked. With the massive improvements in communication technology it is even more viable than before. Whether or not we reach such a self-managed society depends on whether we desire to be free or not.

## I.5.5 Aren't participatory communities and confederations just new states?

No. As we have seen in section B.2, a state can be defined both by its structure and its function. As far as structure is concerned, a state involves the politico-military and economic domination of a certain geographical territory by a ruling elite, based on the delegation of power into the hands of the few, resulting in hierarchy (centralised authority). As such, it would be a massive theoretical error to confuse any form of social organisation with the specific form which is the state.

As we have discussed in section H.3.7, the state has evolved its specific characteristics as a result of its function as an instrument of class rule. If a social organisation does not have these characteristics then it is not a state. Thus, for anarchists, *"the essence of the state"* is *"centralised power **or to put it another way the coercive authority** of which the state enjoys the monopoly, in that organisation of violence know as 'government'; in the hierarchical despotism, juridical, police and military despotism that imposes laws on everyone."* [Luigi Fabbri, *"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 24–5] This is why Malatesta stressed that the state *"means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few."* [**Anarchy**, p. 41] If a social organisation is **not** centralised and top-down then it is not a state.

*all the partially collectivised villages, in the 400 Collectives in Aragon, in the 900 in the Levante region, in the 300 in the Castilian region, to mention only the large groupings ... the population was called together weekly, fortnightly or monthly and kept fully informed of everything concerning the commonweal.*

*"This writer was present at a number of these assemblies in Aragon, where the reports on the various questions making up the agenda allowed the inhabitants to know, to so understand, and to feel so mentally integrated in society, to so participate in the management of public affairs, in the responsibilities, that the recriminations, the tensions which always occur when the power of decision is entrusted to a few individuals, be they democratically elected without the possibility of objecting, did not happen there. The assemblies were public, the objections, the proposals publicly discussed, everybody being free, as in the syndical assemblies, to participate in the discussions, to criticise, propose, etc. Democracy extended to the whole of social life."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 205–7]

These collectives organised federations embracing thousands of communes and workplaces, whole branches of industry, hundreds of thousands of people and whole regions of Spain. As such, it was a striking confirmation of Proudhon's argument that under federalism *"the sovereignty of the contracting parties ... serves as a positive guarantee of the liberty of ... communes and individuals. So, no longer do we have the abstraction of people's sovereignty ... but an effective sovereignty of the labouring masses."* The *"labouring masses are actually, positively and effectively sovereign: how could they not be when the economic organism — labour, capital, property and assets*



*the new method of economic organisation ... The future belongs to the free groupings of interests and not to governmental centralisation; it belongs to freedom and not to authority."* [**Words of a Rebel**, pp. 143–4]

Thus the social structure of an anarchist society will be the opposite of the current system. Instead of being centralised and top-down as in the state, it will be decentralised and organised from the bottom up. As Kropotkin argued, *"socialism must become **more popular**, more communalistic, and less dependent upon indirect government through elected representatives. It must become more **self-governing.**"* [**Anarchism**, p. 185] In this, Kropotkin (like Bakunin) followed Proudhon who argued that *"[u]nless democracy is a fraud, and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his [or her] industry, each municipal, district or provincial council within its own territory, is the only natural and legitimate representative of the Sovereign, and that therefore each locality should act directly and by itself in administering the interests which it includes, and should exercise full sovereignty in relation to them."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 276] While anarchists have various different conceptions of how this communal system would be constituted (as we will see), they is total agreement on these basic visions and principles.

The aim is *"to found an order of things wherein the principle of the sovereignty of the people, of man and of the citizen, would be implemented to the letter"* and *"where every member"* of a society *"retaining his independence and continuing to act as sovereign, would be self-governing"* and any social organisation *"would concern itself solely with collective matters; where as a consequence, there would be certain common matters but no centralisation."* This means that the *"federative, mutualist republican sentiment"* (as summarised these days by the expression self-management) will *"bring about the victory of Worker Democracy right around the world."* [Proudhon, **Anarchism**, vol. 1, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 74 and p. 77]

This empowerment of ordinary citizens through decentralisation and direct democracy will eliminate the alienation and apathy that are now rampant and (as always happens when people are free) unleash a flood of innovation in dealing with the social breakdown now afflicting our world. The gigantic metropolis with its hierarchical and impersonal administration, its atomised and isolated "residents," will be transformed into a network of humanly scaled participatory communities, each with its own unique character and forms of self-government, which will be co-operatively linked through federation with other communities, from the municipal through the bio-regional to the global level.

This means that the social perspective of libertarian socialism is as distinctive as its economic vision. While mainstream socialism is marked by support for centralised states, anarchists stay true to socialism as equality and argue that means decentralisation. Thus socialism *"wears two distinct faces. When it is said that a man is a Socialist, it is implies that he regards the monopoly of private property in the means of production as the cause of the existing unequal distribution of wealth and its attendant ills ... Socialists are divided into the centralising and decentralising parties, the party of the State and the party of the federatic commune."* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 37] Only such a federal, bottom-up, system can ensure people can manage their own fates and ensure genuine freedom and equality through mass participation and self-management.

Of course, it can (and has) been argued that people are just not interested in "politics." Further, some claim that this disinterest is why governments exist — people delegate their responsibilities and power to others because they have better things to do.

Such an argument, however, is flawed on empirical grounds. As we indicated in section B.2.6, centralisation of power in both the French and American revolutions occurred **because** the



*in view of the social inequalities precious time was lost in interminable wrangles ...*

*"Normally those periodic meetings would not last more than a few hours. They dealt with concrete, precise subjects concretely and precisely. And all who had something to say could express themselves. The Comite presented the new problems that had arisen since the previous assembly, the results obtained by the application of such and such a resolution . .. relations with other syndicates, production returns from the various workshops or factories. All this was the subject of reports and discussion. Then the assembly would nominate the commissions, the members of these commissions discussed between themselves what solutions to adopt, if there was disagreement, a majority report and a minority report would be prepared.*

*"This took place in **all** the syndicates **throughout Spain**, in **all** trades and **all** industries, in assemblies which, in Barcelona, from the very beginnings of our movement brought together hundreds or thousands of workers depending on the strength of the organisations. So much so that the awareness of the duties, responsibilities of each spread all the time to a determining and decisive degree ...*

*"The practice of this democracy also extended to the agricultural regions ... the decision to nominate a local management Comite for the villages was taken by general meetings of the inhabitants of villages, how the delegates in the different essential tasks which demanded an indispensable co-ordination of activities were proposed and elected by the whole assembled population. But it is worth adding and underlining that in all the collectivised villages and*

> *"Each section also had its own various administrative committees, whose members were also recruited from the general assembly."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 319]

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that these "sections" showed *"the principles of anarchism ... had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution"* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 204]

Communal self-government was also practised, and on a far wider scale, in revolutionary Spain where workers and peasants formed communes and federations of communes (see section I.8 for fuller details). Gaston Leval summarised the experience:

> *"There was, in the organisation set in motion by the Spanish Revolution and by the libertarian movement, which was its mainspring, a structuring from the bottom to the top, which corresponds to a real federation and true democracy ... the controlling and co-ordinating Comites, clearly indispensable, do not go outside the organisation that has chosen them, they remain in their midst, always controllable by and accessible to the members. If any individuals contradict by their actions their mandates, it is possible to call them to order, to reprimand them, to replace them. It is only by and in such a system that the 'majority lays down the law.'*
>
> *"The syndical assemblies were the expression and the practice of libertarian democracy, a democracy having nothing in common with the democracy of Athens where the citizens discussed and disputed for days on end on the Agora; where factions, clan rivalries, ambitions, personalities conflicted, where,*



wealthy few thought that working class people were taking **too much** interest in politics and social issues, not the reverse (*"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more..."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]). Simply put, the state is centralised to facilitate **minority rule** by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance — rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is reflected in the structure of the state (see section H.3.7).

Even if we ignore the historical evidence on this issue, anarchists do not draw this conclusion from the current apathy that surrounds us. In fact, we argue that this apathy is not the cause of government but its result. Government is an inherently hierarchical system in which ordinary people are deliberately marginalised. The powerlessness people feel due to the workings of the system ensure that they are apathetic about it, thus guaranteeing that wealthy and powerful elites govern society without hindrance from the oppressed and exploited majority.

Moreover, government usually sticks its nose into areas that most people have no real interest in. Some things, as in the regulation of industry or workers' safety and rights, a free society could leave to those affected to make their own decisions (we doubt that workers would subject themselves to unsafe working conditions, for example). In others, such as the question of personal morality and acts, a free people would have no interest in (unless it harmed others, of course). This, again, would reduce the number of issues that would be

discussed in a free commune. Also, via decentralisation, a free people would be mainly discussing local issues, so reducing the complexity of many questions and solutions. Wider issues would, of course, be discussed but these would be on specific issues and so more focused in their nature than those raised in the legislative bodies of the state. So, a combination of centralisation and an irrational desire to discuss every and all questions also helps make "politics" seem boring and irrelevant.

As noted above, this result is not an accident and the marginalisation of "ordinary" people is actually celebrated in bourgeois "democratic" theory. As Noam Chomsky notes:

> *"Twentieth century democratic theorists advise that 'The public must be put in its place,' so that the 'responsible men' may 'live free of the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd,' 'ignorant and meddlesome outsiders' whose 'function' is to be 'interested spectators of action,' not participants, lending their weight periodically to one or another of the leadership class (elections), then returning to their private concerns. (Walter Lippman). The great mass of the population, 'ignorant and mentally deficient,' must be kept in their place for the common good, fed with 'necessary illusion' and 'emotionally potent oversimplifications' (Wilson's Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Reinhold Niebuhr). Their 'conservative' counterparts are only more extreme in their adulation of the Wise Men who are the rightful rulers — in the service of the rich and powerful, a minor footnote regularly forgotten."* [**Year 501**, p. 18]

This marginalisation of the public from political life ensures that the wealthy can be *"left alone"* to use their power as they



*ordinated by the **Commune** … and often, in fact, by the assemblies themselves, or sections as they were called, which established their own interconnections without recourse to the **Commune.**"* [*"Transition to the Ecological Society"*, pp. 92–105, **Society and Nature**, no. 3, p. 96]

Here is his account of how communal self-government worked in practice:

> *"What, then, were these little-know forty-eight sections of Paris … How were they organised? And how did they function?*
>
> *"Ideologically, the **sectionnaires** (as their members were called) believed primarily in sovereignty of the people. This concept of popular sovereignty, as Albert Soboul observes, was for them 'not an abstraction, but the concrete reality of the people united in sectional assemblies and exercising all their rights.' It was in their eyes an inalienable right, or, as the section de la Cite declared in November 1792, 'every man who assumes to have sovereignty will be regarded as a tyrant, usurper of public liberty and worthy of death.'*
>
> *"Sovereignty, in effect, was to be enjoyed by **all** citizens, not pre-empted by 'representatives' … The radical democrats of 1793 thus assumed that every adult was, to one degree or another, competent to participate in management public affairs. Thus, each section … was structured around a **face-to-face democracy**: basically a general assembly of the people that formed the most important deliberative body of a section, and served as the incarnation of popular power in a given part of the city … each elected six deputies to the Commune, presumably for the purpose merely of co-ordinating all the sections in the city of Paris.*

By reducing conferences to functional bodies based on concrete issues, the problems of endless discussions can be reduced, if not totally eliminated. In addition, as functional groups would exist outside of these communal confederations (for example, industrial collectives would organise conferences about their industry with invited participants from consumer groups), there would be a limited agenda in most communal get-togethers.

In other words, communal assemblies and conferences will have specific, well defined agendas, and so there is little danger of "politics" (for want of a better word!) taking up everyone's time. Hence, far from discussing abstract laws and pointless motions on everything under the sun and on which no one actually knows much about, the issues discussed in these conferences will be on specific issues which are important to those involved. In addition, the standard procedure may be to elect a sub-group to investigate an issue and report back at a later stage with recommendations. The conference can change, accept, or reject any proposals. As Kropotkin argued, anarchy would be based on *"free agreement, by exchange of letters and proposals, and by congresses at which delegates met to discuss well specified points, and to come to an agreement about them, but not to make laws. After the congress was over, the delegates [would return] ... not with a law, but with the draft of a contract to be accepted or rejected."* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 131]

Is this system fantasy? Given that such a system has existed and worked at various times, we can safely argue that it is not. Obviously we cannot cover **every** example, so we point to just two — revolutionary Paris and Spain.

As Murray Bookchin points out, Paris *"in the late eighteenth century was, by the standards of that time, one of the largest and economically most complex cities in Europe: its population approximated a million people ... Yet in 1793, at the height of the French Revolution, the city was managed* ***institutionally*** *almost entirely by [48] citizen assemblies... and its affairs were co-*



see fit. In other words, such marginalisation is a necessary part of a fully functioning capitalist society and so libertarian social structures have to be discouraged. Or as Chomsky put it, the *"rabble must be instructed in the values of subordination and a narrow quest for personal gain within the parameters set by the institutions of the masters; meaningful democracy, with popular association and action, is a threat to be overcome."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 18] This philosophy can be seen in the statement of a US Banker in Venezuela under the murderous Jimenez dictatorship:

> *"You have the freedom here to do whatever you want to do with your money, and to me, that is worth all the political freedom in the world."* [quoted by Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99]

Deterring libertarian alternatives to statism is a common feature of our current system. By marginalising and disempowering people, the ability of individuals to manage their own social activities is undermined and weakened. They develop a "fear of freedom" and embrace authoritarian institutions and "strong leaders", which in turn reinforces their marginalisation.

This consequence is hardly surprising. Anarchists maintain that the desire to participate and the ability to participate are in a symbiotic relationship: participation builds on itself. By creating the social structures that allow participation, participation will increase. As people increasingly take control of their lives, so their ability to do so also increases. The challenge of having to take responsibility for decisions that make a difference is at the same time an opportunity for personal development. To begin to feel power, having previously felt powerless, to win access to the resources required for effective participation and learn how to use them, is a liberating experience. Once people become active subjects, making things happen in one aspect of their lives, they are less likely to remain passive objects, allowing things to happen to them, in other aspects.

All in all, "politics" is far too important an subject to leave to politicians, the wealthy and bureaucrats. After all, it is (or, at least, it should be) what affects, your friends, community, and, ultimately, the planet you live on. Such issues cannot be left to anyone but you.

Hence a meaningful communal life based on self-empowered individuals is a distinct possibility (indeed, it has repeatedly appeared throughout history). It is the hierarchical structures in statism and capitalism, marginalising and disempowering the majority, which is at the root of the current wide scale apathy in the face of increasing social and ecological disruption. Libertarian socialists therefore call for a radically new form of political system to replace the centralised nation-state, a form that would be based around confederations of self-governing communities: *"**Society is a society of societies; a league of leagues of leagues; a commonwealth of commonwealths of commonwealths; a republic of republics of republics.** Only there is freedom and order, only there is spirit, a spirit which is self-sufficiency and community, unity and independence."* [Gustav Landauer, **For Socialism**, pp. 125–126]

To create such a system would require dismantling the nation-state and reconstituting relations between communities on the basis of self-determination and free and equal confederation from below. In the following subsections we will examine in more detail why this new system is needed and what it might look like. As we have stressed repeatedly, these are just suggestions of possible anarchist solutions to social organisation. Most anarchists recognise that anarchist communities will co-exist with non-anarchist ones after the destruction of the existing state. As we are anarchists we are discussing anarchist visions. We will leave it up to non-anarchists to paint their own pictures of a possible future.



> *ers' gatherings (convened, for instance, to decide on a strike) there have never been 'too many' speeches. The two or three fundamental opinions having been voiced, and various arguments exchanged, a decision is soon reached.*
>
> *"The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely with the weight of their content. Russian leaders sometimes talk on for four hours at Party Congresses without saying anything ... For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies, see Trotsky's account of the Petrograd soviet of 1905 — or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, pp. 144–5]

As we shall see below, this was definitely the case during the Spanish Revolution as well.

Thirdly, as these assemblies and congresses are concerned purely with joint activity and co-ordination. Different associations and syndicates have a functional need for co-operation and so would meet more regularly and take action on practical activity which affects a specific section of a community or group of communities. Not every issue that a member of a community is interested in is necessarily best discussed at a meeting of all members of a community or at a confederal conference. As Herbert Read suggested, anarchism *"proposes to liquidate the bureaucracy first by federal devolution"* and so *"hands over to the syndicates all ... administrative functions"* related to such things as *"transport, and distribution, health and education."* [**Anarchy and Order**, p. 101] Such issues will be mainly discussed in the syndicates involved and so community discussion would be focused on important issues and themes of general policy rather than the specific and detailed laws discussed and implemented by politicians who know nothing about the issues or industries at hand.

that they will be occurring all the time or that anarchists desire to make meetings the focal point of individual life. Far from it!

Thus communal assemblies may occur, say, once a week, or fortnightly or monthly in order to discuss truly important issues. There would be no real desire to meet continuously to discuss every issue under the sun and few people would tolerate this occurring. This would mean that such meetings would current regularly and when important issues needed to be discussed, **not** continuously (although, if required, continuous assembly or daily meetings may have to be organised in emergency situations but this would be rare). Nor is it expected that everyone will attend every meeting for *"[w]hat is decisive, here, is the principle itself: the freedom of the individual to participate, not the compulsive need to do so."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 435] This suggests that meetings will be attended by those with a specific interest in an issue being discussed and so would be focused as a result.

Secondly, it is extremely doubtful that a free people would desire waste vast amounts of time at such meetings. While important and essential, communal and confederal meetings would be functional in the extreme and not forums for hot air. It would be the case that those involved in such meetings would quickly make their feelings known to time wasters and those who like the sound of their own voices. Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

> *"It might be claimed that the problem of numbers remains and that people never would be able to express themselves in a reasonable amount of time. This is not a valid argument. There would rarely be an assembly over twenty people where everyone would want to speak, for the very good reason that when there is something to be decided upon there are not an infinite number of options or an infinite number of arguments. In unhampered rank-and-file work-*



## I.5.1 What are participatory communities?

A key concept in anarchist thought is that of the participatory community. Traditionally, these participatory communities are called **communes** in anarchist theory (*"The basic social and economic cell of the anarchist society is the free, independent commune"* [A. Grachev, quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 64]).

The reason for the use of the term commune is due to anarchism's roots in France where it refers to the lowest level of administrative division in the Republic. In France, a commune can be a city of 2 million inhabitants (hence the Paris Commune of 1871); a town of 10,000; or just a 10-person hamlet. It appeared in the 12$^{th}$ century from Medieval Latin **communia**, which means a gathering of people sharing a common life (from Latin **communis**, things held in common). Proudhon used the term to describe the social units of a non-statist society and subsequent anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin followed his lead. As the term "commune", since the 1960s, often refers to "intentional communities" where people drop out of society and form their own counter-cultural groups and living spaces we have, in order to avoid confusion, decided to use "participatory community" as well (anarchists have also used other terms, including *"free municipality"*).

These community organisations are seen as the way people participate in the decisions that affect them and their neighbourhoods, regions and, ultimately, planet. These are the means for transforming our social environment from one disfigured by economic and political power and its needs to one fit for human beings to life and flourish in. The creation of a network of participatory communities ("communes") based on self-government through direct, face-to-face democracy in grassroots neighbourhood assemblies is the means to that end. As we argued in section I.2.3 such assemblies will be born in social struggle and so reflect the needs of the struggle and

those within it so our comments here must be considered as generalisations of the salient features of such communities and **not** blue-prints.

Within anarchist thought, there are two main conceptions of the free commune. One vision is based on workplace delegates, the other on neighbourhood assemblies. We will sketch each in turn.

The first type of participatory community (in which *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... will constitute the commune"*) is most associated with Bakunin. He argued that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170 and p. 206] This vision was stressed by later anarchist thinkers. For example, Spanish anarchist Issac Puente thought that in towns and cities *"the part of the free municipality is played by local federation ... Ultimate sovereignty in the local federation of industrial unions lies with the general assembly of all local producers."* [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 27] The Russian anarchist G. P. Maximoff saw the *"communal confederation"* as being *"constituted by thousands of freely acting labour organisations."* [**The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 43]

This vision of the commune was created during many later revolutions (such as in Russia in 1905 and 1917 as well as Hungary in 1956). Being based on workplaces, this form of commune has the advantage of being based on groups of people who are naturally associated during most of the day (Bakunin considered workplace bodies as *"the natural organisation of the masses"* as they were *"based on the various types of work"* which *"define their actual day-to-day life"* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139]). This would facilitate the organisation of assemblies, discussion on social, economic and political issues and the mandating and recalling of delegates. Moreover, it combines politi-



*the centre to circumference by means of enforced unity and concentration"* and the way of the future, by federalism *"starting with the free individual, the free association and the autonomous commune, from low to high and from circumference to centre, by means of free federation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 88] In other words, *"the organisation of society from the bottom up."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 131] This suggests that a free society will have little to fear in way of its delegates turning into politicians or bureaucrats as it includes the necessary safeguards (election, mandates, recall, decentralisation, federalism, etc.) which will reduce such developments to a small, and so manageable, level (if not eliminate it totally).

## I.5.4 How will anything ever be decided by all these meetings?

Anarchists have little doubt that the confederal structure will be an efficient means of decision making and will not be bogged down in endless meetings. We have various reasons for thinking this. After all, as Murray Bookchin once noted, *"[h]istory does provide us with a number of working examples of forms that are largely libertarian. It also provides us with examples of confederations and leagues that made the co-ordination of self-governing communities feasible without impinging on their autonomy and freedom."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 436]

Firstly, we doubt that a free society will spend all its time in assemblies or organising confederal conferences. Certain questions are more important than others and few anarchists desire to spend all their time in meetings. The aim of a free society is to allow individuals to express their desires and wants freely — they cannot do that if they are continually at meetings (or preparing for them). So while communal and confederal assemblies will play an important role in a free society, do not think

Moreover, confederation is required to maximise self-management and reduce the possibility that delegates will become isolated from the people who mandated them. As Rocker explained:

> *"In a smaller community, it is far easier for individuals to observe the political scene and become acquainted with the issues which have to be resolved. This is quite impossible for a representative in a centralised government. Neither the single citizen nor his [or her] representative is completely or even approximately to supervise the huge clockwork of the central state machine. The deputy is forced daily to make decisions about things of which he [or she] has no personal knowledge and for the appraisal of which he must therefore depend on others [i.e. bureaucrats and lobbyists]. That such a system necessarily leads to serious errors and mistakes is self-evident. And since the citizen for the same reason is not able to inspect and criticise the conduct of his representative, the class of professional politicians is given added opportunity to fish in troubled waters."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 17–18]

These principles, it must be stressed, have worked well on a mass scale For example, this is how anarcho-syndicalist unions operate and, as was the case with the CNT in Spain in the 1930s, worked well with over one million members. There were also successfully applied during the Spanish Revolution and the federations of collectives produced by it.

So the way communes and confederations are organised protect society and the individual against the dangers of centralisation, from the turning of delegates into representatives and bureaucrats. As Bakunin stressed, there are two ways of organising society, *"as it is today, from high to low and from*



cal and economic power in one organisation, so ensuring that the working class actually manages society.

Other anarchists counterpoise neighbourhood assemblies to workers' councils. These assemblies will be general meetings open to all citizens in every neighbourhood, town, and village, and will be the source of public policy for all levels of confederal co-ordination. Such "town meetings" will bring people directly into the political process and give them an equal voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Such anarchists point to the experience of the French Revolution of 1789 and the *"sections"* of the Paris Commune as the key example of *"a people governing itself directly — when possible — without intermediaries, without masters."* It is argued, based on this experience, that *"the principles of anarchism ... dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 210 and p. 204] Anarchists also point to the clubs created during the 1848 Revolution in France and in the Paris Commune of 1871 not to mention the community assemblies created in Argentina during the revolt against neo-liberalism at the start of the 21st century.

Critics of workers' councils point out that not all people work in traditional workplaces (many are parents who look after children, for example). By basing the commune around the workplace, such people are automatically excluded. Moreover, in most modern cities many people do not live near where they work. It would mean that local affairs could not be effectively discussed in a system of workers' councils as many who take part in the debate are unaffected by the decisions reached. In addition, some anarchists argue that workplace based systems automatically generate "special interests" and so exclude community issues. Only community assemblies can *"transcend the traditional special interests of work, workplace, status, and property relations, and create a **general** interest based on shared com-*

*munity problems."* [Murray Bookchin, **From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 254]

However, such communities assemblies can only be valid if they can be organised rapidly in order to make decisions and to mandate and recall delegates. In the capitalist city, many people work far from where they live and so such meetings have to be called for after work or at weekends (thus the key need is to reduce the working day/week and to communalise industry). For this reason, many anarchists continue to support the workers' council vision of the commune, complemented by community assemblies for those who live in an area but do not work in a traditional workplace (e.g. parents bringing up small children, the old, the sick and so on). It should be noted that this is something which the supporters of workers' councils **have** noticed and some argue for councils which are delegates from both the inhabitants **and** the enterprises of an area.

These positions are not hard and fast divisions, far from it. Puente, for example, thought that in the countryside the dominant commune would be *"all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in an assembly (council) with full powers to administer local affairs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Kropotkin supported the soviets of the Russian Revolution, arguing that the *"idea of soviets ... of councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts."* [**Anarchism**, p. 254]

Which method, workers' councils or community assemblies, will be used in a given community will depend on local conditions, needs and aspirations and it is useless to draw hard and fast rules. It is likely that some sort of combination of the two approaches will be used, with workers' councils being complemented by community assemblies until such time as a reduced working week and decentralisation of urban centres make purely community assemblies the more realistic



*community since they will have the chance to weigh the advantages accruing from them without being forced to adopt them if they are not convinced of their usefulness. The result is that progressive communities serve the others as models, a result justified by the natural evolution of things."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, pp. 16–7] The contrast with centralisation of the state could not be more clear. Rocker continued:

> *"In a strongly centralised state, the situation is entirely reversed and the best system of representation can do nothing to change that. The representatives of a certain district may have the overwhelming majority of a certain district on his [or her] side, but in the legislative assembly of the central state, he [or she] will remain in the minority, for it lies in the nature of things that in such a body not the intellectually most active but the most backward districts represent the majority. Since the individual district has indeed the right to give expression of its opinion, but can effect no changes without the consent of the central government, the most progressive districts will be condemned to stagnate while the most backward districts will set the norm."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 17]

Little wonder anarchists have always stressed what Kropotkin termed *"local action"* and considered the libertarian social revolution as *"proceed[ing] by proclaiming independent Communes which Communes will endeavour to accomplish the economic transformation within ... their respective surroundings."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act For Yourselves**, p. 43] Thus the advanced communities will inspire the rest to follow them by showing them a practical example of what is possible. Only decentralisation and confederation can promote the freedom and resulting social experimentation which will ensure social progress and make society a good place to live.

extremely unlikely to turn into representatives or bureaucrats as they would be under the strict control of the organisations that elected them to such posts. As Kropotkin argued, the general assembly of the community *"in permanence — the forum always open — is the only way .. . to assure an honest and intelligent administration"* as it is based upon *"**distrust of all executive powers.**"* [**The Great French Revolution**, Vol. 1, p. 211]

The current means of co-ordinating wide scale activity — centralism via the state — is a threat to freedom as, to quote Proudhon, *"the citizen divests himself of sovereignty, the town and the Department and province above it, absorbed by central authority, are no longer anything but agencies under direct ministerial control." "The Consequences"* he continued, *"soon make themselves felt: the citizen and the town are deprived of all dignity, the state's depredations multiply, and the burden on the taxpayer increases in proportion. It is no longer the government that is made for the people; it is the people who are made for the government. Power invades everything, dominates everything, absorbs everything."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 59] In such a regime, the generation of a specific caste of politicians and bureaucrats is inevitable.

Moreover, *"[t]he principle of political centralism is openly opposed to all laws of social progress and of natural evolution. It lies in the nature of things that every cultural advance is first achieved within a small group and only gradually finds adoption by society as a whole. Therefore, political decentralisation is the best guaranty for the unrestricted possibilities of new experiments. For such an environment each community is given the opportunity to carry through the things which it is capable of accomplishing itself without imposing them on others. Practical experimentation is the parent of ever development in society. So long as each distinct is capable of effecting the changes within its own sphere which its citizens deem necessary, the example of each becomes a fructifying influence on the other parts of the*



option. It is likely that in a fully libertarian society, community assemblies will be the dominant communal organisation but in the period immediately after a revolution this may not be immediately possible. Objective conditions, rather than predictions, will be the deciding factor. Under capitalism, anarchists pursue both forms of organisation, arguing for community **and** industrial unionism in the class struggle (see sections J.5.1 and J.5.2).

Regardless of the exact make up of the commune, it has certain key features. It would be free a association, based upon the self-assumed obligation of those who join them. In free association, participation is essential simply because it is the **only** means by which individuals can collectively govern themselves (and unless they govern themselves, someone else will). *"As a unique individual,"* Stirner argued, *"you can assert yourself alone in association, because the association does not own you, because you are one who owns it or who turns it to your own advantage."* The rules governing the association are determined by the associated and can be changed by them (and so a vast improvement over "love it or leave") as are the policies the association follows. Thus, the association *"does not impose itself as a spiritual power superior to my spirit. I have no wish to become a slave to my maxims, but would rather subject them to my ongoing criticism."* [Max Stirner, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 17]

Thus participatory communities are freely joined and self-managed by their members with no division between order givers and order takers as exists within the state. Rather the associated govern themselves and while the assembled people collectively decide the rules governing their association, and are bound by them as individuals, they are also superior to them in the sense that these rules can always be modified or repealed (see section A.2.11 for more details). As can be seen, a participatory commune is new form of social life, radically different from the state as it is decentralised, self-governing

and based upon individual autonomy and free agreement. Thus Kropotkin:

> *"The representative system was organised by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them. For the new economic phase that is about to begin we must seek a new form of political organisation, based on a principle quite different from that of representation. The logic of events imposes it."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 125]

This *"new form of political organisation has to be worked out the moment that socialistic principles shall enter our life. And it is self-evident that this new form will have to be* ***more popular, more decentralised, and nearer to the folk-mote self-government*** *than representative government can ever be."* Kropotkin, like all anarchists, considered the idea that socialism could be created by taking over the current state or creating a new one as doomed to failure. Instead, he recognised that socialism would only be built using new organisations that reflect the spirit of socialism (such as freedom, self-government and so on). He, like Proudhon and Bakunin before him, therefore argued that *"**[t]his was the form that the social revolution must take** — the independent commune... [whose] inhabitants have decided that they **will** communalise the consumption of commodities, their exchange and their production."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 184 and p. 163]

In a nutshell, a participatory community is a free association, based upon the mass assembly of people who live in a common area, the means by which they make the decisions that affect them, their communities, bio-regions and the planet. Their essential task is to provide a forum for raising public issues and deciding upon them. Moreover, these assemblies will be a key way of generating a community (and commu-



*membership for each branch of the Commune's revolutionary administration."* [Bakunin, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 155] Thus would no longer be a body of people, a government, separate from the delegates of the people. This, it should be noted, echoed Proudhon's comments from 1848:

> *"It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power ... Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]

Due to mandating and recall, any delegate who starts to abuse their position or even vote in ways opposed to by the communal assembly would quickly be recalled and replaced. As such a person may be an elected delegate of the community but that does not mean that they have power or authority (i.e., they are **not** a representative but rather a delegate). Essentially they are an agent of the local community who is controlled by, and accountable to, that community. Clearly, such people are unlike politicians. They do not, and cannot, make policy decisions on behalf of (i.e., govern) those who elected them — they are not given power to make decisions for people. In addition, people in specific organisations or with specific tasks will be rotated frequently to prevent a professionalisation of politics and the problem of politicians being largely on their own once elected. And, of course, they will continue to work and live with those who elected them and receive no special privileges due to their election (in terms of more income, better housing, and so on). This means that such delegates would be

cracy with power over the rest of society. As such, some critics of social anarchism suggest that a system of communes and confederations would simply be a breeding ground for politicians and bureaucrats. This is obviously the case with the state and many generalise from this experience for **all** forms of social organisation, including the anarchist commune.

While recognising that this **is** a danger, anarchists are sure that such developments are unlikely in an anarchy. This is because, based on our analysis and critique of the state, we have long argued for various institutional arrangements which reduce the danger of such things developing. These include electing delegates rather than representatives, giving these delegates a binding mandate and subjecting them to instant recall by their electors. They would **not**, in general, be paid and so, in other words, delegates are expected, as far as possible, to remain in their current communities and conduct their communal tasks after their usual work. For the few exceptions to this that may occur, delegates would receive the average pay of their commune, in mutualism and collectivism or, in communism, no special access to communal resources. Moreover, it seems likely that regular rotation of delegates would be utilised and, perhaps, random selection as happens in jury duty today in many countries. Lastly, communes could leave any confederation if its structure was becoming obviously misshapen and bureaucratic.

By these methods, delegates to communal bodies would remain under the control of their electors and not, as in the state, become their masters. Moreover, anarchists have stressed that any communal body must be a working organisation. This will reduce bureaucratic tendencies as implementing tasks will be done by elected delegates rather than faceless (and usually unelected) bureaucrats. This means, as Bakunin put it in 1868, that *"the Communal Council"* (made up of delegates *"with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times"*) would create *"separate executive committees from among its*



nity spirit) and building and enriching social relationships between individuals and, equally important, of developing and enriching individuals by the very process of participation in communal affairs. By discussing, thinking and listening to others, individuals develop their own abilities and powers while at the same time managing their own affairs, so ensuring that no one else does (i.e. they govern themselves and are no longer governed from above by others). As Kropotkin argued, self-management has an educational effect on those who practice it:

> *"The 'permanence' of the general assemblies of the sections — that is, the possibility of calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the general assembly... will educate every citizen politically... The section in permanence — the forum always open — is the only way ... to assure an honest and intelligent administration."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 210–1]

As well as integrating the social life of a community and encouraging the political and social development of its members, these free communes will also be integrated into the local ecology. Humanity would life in harmony with nature as well as with itself — as discussed in section E.2, these would be **eco**-communities part of their local eco-systems with a balanced mix of agriculture and industry (as described by Kropotkin in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops**). Thus a free commune would aim to integrate the individual into social and communal life, rural and urban life into a balanced whole and human life into the wider ecology. In this way the free commune would make human habitation fully ecological, ending the sharp and needless (and dehumanising and de-individualising) division of human life

from the rest of the planet. The commune will be a key means of the expressing diversity within humanity and the planet as well as improving the quality of life in society:

> *"The Commune ... will be entirely devoted to improving the communal life of the locality. Making their requests to the appropriate Syndicates, Builders', Public Health, Transport or Power, the inhabitants of each Commune will be able to gain all reasonable living amenities, town planning, parks, play-grounds, trees in the street, clinics, museums and art galleries. Giving, like the medieval city assembly, an opportunity for any interested person to take part in, and influence, his town's affairs and appearance, the Commune will be a very different body from the borough council ...*
>
> *"In ancient and medieval times cities and villages expressed the different characters of different localities and their inhabitants. In redstone, Portland or granite, in plaster or brick, in pitch of roof, arrangements of related buildings or patterns of slate and thatch each locality added to the interests of travellers ... each expressed itself in castle, home or cathedral.*
>
> *"How different is the dull, drab, or flashy ostentatious monotony of modern England. Each town is the same. The same Woolworth's, Odeon Cinemas, and multiple shops, the same 'council houses' or 'semi-detached villas' ... North, South, East or West, what's the difference, where is the change?*
>
> *"With the Commune the ugliness and monotony of present town and country life will be swept away, and each locality and region, each person will be able to express the joy of living, by living together."* [Tom Brown, **Syndicalism**, p. 59]



to manage, so implying that another level of confederation is required. This would, undoubtedly, be the base for determining the scale and level of confederation, ensuring that any confederal assembly can actually manage its activities and remain under the control of lower levels.

Finally, confederations are required to ensure solidarity can be expressed in the unlikely situation of local oppression. After all, history is full of local communities which have been oppressive to minorities within them (most obviously, the American South) and so confederation is required so that members of any such minority can appeal for help and mutual aid to end its domination. Equally, though, confederation is needed to ensure that local communes can experiment and try out new ideas without having to wait until the majority agree to it as would be required in a centralised system.

Thus confederations of communes are required to co-ordinate joint activity and discuss common issues and interests. It is also required to protect individual, community and social freedom as well as allowing social experimentation and protecting the distinctiveness, dignity, freedom and self-management of communities and so society as a whole. Thus *"socialism is federalist"* and *"true federalism, the political organisation of socialism, will be attained only when these popular grass-roots institutions [namely,* "communes, industrial and agricultural associations"*] are organised in progressive stages from the bottom up."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 402]

## I.5.3 Would confederations produce bureaucrats and politicians?

Of course, **any** organisation holds the danger that the few who have been given tasks to perform could misuse their position for personal benefit or, over time, evolve into a bureau-

such things as geographically concentrated mineral deposits, climate dependent crops, and production facilities that are most efficient when concentrated in one area will unite communities confederally on the basis of common material needs as well as values.

This means that the scale and level of the confederations created by the communes will be varied and extensive. It would be hard to generalise about them, particularly as different confederations will exist for different tasks and interests. Moreover, any system of communes would start off based on the existing villages, towns and cities of capitalism. That is unavoidable and will, of course, help determine the initial scale and level of confederations.

In urban areas, the town or city would have to be broken down into confederations and these confederations would constitute the town or city assembly of delegates. Given a huge city like London, New York or Mexico City it would be impossible to organise in any other way. Smaller towns would probably be able to have simpler confederations. We must stress that few, if any, anarchists consider it desirable to have huge cities in a free society and one of the major tasks of social transformation will be to break the metropolis into smaller units, integrated with the local environment. However, a social revolution will take place in these vast metropolises and so we have to take them into account in our discussion.

In summary, the size and scale of confederations will depend on practical considerations, based on what people found were optimal sizes for their neighbourhood assemblies and the needs of co-operation between them, towns, cities, regions and so on. We cannot, and have no wish, to predict the development of a free society. Therefore the scale and levels of confederation will be decided by those actually creating an anarchist world although it is almost certain that levels of confederation would be dependent on the number of delegates required. After a certain number, the confederation assembly may became difficult



The size of the neighbourhood assemblies will vary, but it will probably fluctuate around some ideal size, discoverable in practice, that will provide a viable scale of face-to-face interaction and allow for both a variety of personal contacts. This suggests that any town or city would itself be a confederation of assemblies — as was, of course, practised very effectively in Paris during the Great French Revolution.

Such assemblies would meet regularly, at the very least monthly (probably more often, particularly during periods which require fast and frequent decision making, like a revolution) and deal with a variety of issues. In the words of the CNT's resolution on libertarian communism:

> *"the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits ... [A] commune without any voluntary restrictions will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate ... the commune is to be autonomous and confederated with the other communes ... the commune will have the duty to concern itself with whatever may be of interest to the individual.*
>
> *"It will have to oversee organising, running and beautification of the settlement. It will see that its inhabitants are housed and that items and products be made available to them by the producers' unions or associations.*
>
> *"Similarly, it is to concern itself with hygiene, the keeping of communal statistics and with collective requirements such as education, health services and*

*with the maintenance and improvement of local means of communication.*

*"It will orchestrate relations with other communes and will take care to stimulate all artistic and cultural pursuits.*

*"So that this mission may be properly fulfilled, a communal council is to be appointed ... None of these posts will carry any executive or bureaucratic powers ... [its members] will perform their role as producers coming together in session at the close of the day's work to discuss the detailed items which may not require the endorsement of communal assemblies.*

*"Assemblies are to be summoned as often as required by communal interests, upon the request of the communal council or according to the wishes of the inhabitants of each commune ... The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 106–7]

Thus the communal assembly discusses that which affects the community and those within it. As these local community associations will be members of larger communal bodies, the communal assembly will also discuss issues which affect wider areas, as indicated, and mandate their delegates to discuss them at confederation assemblies. This system, we must note, was applied with great success during numerous revolutions (see section J.5.4) and so cannot be dismissed as wishful thinking.

However, of course, the actual framework of a free society will be worked out in practice. As Bakunin correctly argued, society *"can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion [than what came before], but not from top to bottom and according to an ideal plan"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 205]



erations would be needed on a wide scale, starting with towns and cities and then moving onto regional and other levels. No village, town or city could be self-sufficient nor would desire to be — communication and links with other places are part and parcel of life and anarchists have no desire to retreat back into an isolated form of localism:

> *"No community can hope to achieve economic autarchy, nor should it try to do so. Economically, the wide range of resources that are needed to make many of our widely used goods preclude self-enclosed insularity and parochialism. Far from being a liability, this interdependence among communities and regions can well be regarded as an asset — culturally as well as politically ... Divested of the cultural cross-fertilisation that is often a product of economic intercourse, the municipality tends to shrink into itself and disappear into its own civic privatism. Shared needs and resources imply the existence of sharing and, with sharing, communication, rejuvenation by new ideas, and a wider social horizon that yields a wider sensibility to new experiences."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 237]

Combined with this consideration, we must also raise the issue of economies of scale. A given level of confederation may be required to make certain social and economic services efficient (we are thinking of economies of scale for such social needs as universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions). While every commune may have a doctor, nursery, local communal stores and small-scale workplaces, not all can have a university, hospital, factories and so forth. These would be organised on a wider level, so necessitating the appropriate confederation to exist to manage them. Ties between bio-regions or larger territories based on the distribution of

What does seem likely is that confederations of communes will be required. We turn to this in the next section.

## I.5.2 Why are confederations of participatory communities needed?

Since not all issues are local, the community assemblies will also elect mandated and recallable delegates to the larger-scale units of self-government in order to address issues affecting urban districts, the city or town as a whole, the county, the bio-region, and ultimately the entire planet. Thus the assemblies will confederate at several levels in order to develop and co-ordinate common policies to deal with common problems. In the words of the CNT's resolution on libertarian communism:

> *"The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems ... Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes.*
>
> *"If, say, roads have to be built to link villages of a county or any matter arises to do with transportation and exchange of produce between agricultural and industrial counties, then naturally every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say.*
>
> *"On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements which will represent the sovereign will of all the region's inhabitants. So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation.*



Thus the people will have the final word on policy, which is the essence of self-government, and each citizen will have his or her turn to participate in the co-ordination of public affairs. In other words, self-government will be the people themselves organised in their community assemblies and their confederal co-ordinating councils, with any delegates limited to implementing policy formulated by the people. Such policies will still be subject to approval by the neighbourhood and community assemblies through their right to recall their delegates and revoke their decisions. Needless to say, the higher the confederation the less often it would meet and the less it would have to consider in terms of issues to decide. On such a level, only the most general issues and decisions could be reached (in effect, only guidelines which the member confederations would apply as they saw fit).

In such a system there will, undoubtedly, be the need for certain individuals to be allocated certain tasks to do. We stress the word "tasks" because their work is essentially administrative in nature, without power. For example, an individual or a group of individuals may be elected to look into alternative power supplies for a community and report back on what they discover. They cannot impose their decision **onto** the community as they do not have the power to do so. They simply present their findings to the body which had mandated them. These findings are **not** a law which the electors are required to follow, but a series of suggestions and information from which the assembled people chose what they think is best. Or, to use another example, someone may be elected to overlook the installation of a selected power supply but the decision on what power supply to use and which specific project to implement has been decided upon by the whole community. Similarly with any delegate elected to a confederal council.

The scales and levels of confederation can only be worked out in practice. In general, it would be safe to say that confed-

> *"Similarly, discussion of all problems of a national nature shall follow a like pattern ... "* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 107]

In other words, the commune *"cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes."* [Kropotkin, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259]

Federalism is applicable at all levels of society. As Kropotkin pointed out, anarchists *"understand that if no central government was needed to rule the independent communes, if national government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central* ***municipal*** *government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the commune."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 163–164] Thus the whole of society would be a free federation, from the local community right up to the global level. And this free federation would be based squarely on the autonomy and self-government of local groups. With federalism, co-operation replaces coercion.

This need for co-operation does not imply a centralised body. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, where you forsake autonomy **within** the organisation). In a **centralised** system, we must stress, **power** rests at the top and the role of those below is simply to obey (it matters not if those with the power are elected or not, the principle is the same). In a **federal** system, power is **not** delegated into the hands of a few (obviously a "federal" government or state is a centralised system). Decisions in a federal system are made at the base of the organisation and flow upwards so ensuring that power remains decentralised



in the hands of all. Working together to solve common problems and organise common efforts to reach common goals is not centralisation and those who confuse the two make a serious error — they fail to understand the different relations of authority each generates and confuse obedience with co-operation.

As in the economic federation of syndicates, the lower levels will control the higher, thus eliminating the current preemptive powers of centralised government hierarchies. Delegates to higher-level co-ordinating councils or conferences will be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the assemblies they come from on how to deal with any issues. These instructions will be binding, committing delegates to a framework of policies within which they must act and providing for their recall and the nullification of their decisions if they fail to carry out their mandates. Delegates may be selected by election and/or sortition (i.e. random selection by lot, as for jury duty currently). As Murray Bookchin argued:

> *"A confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policy making and the co-ordination and execution of adopted policies. Policy making is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and co-ordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighbourhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations, the flow of power from the bottom up diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 253]

## I.6.1 How can property *"owned by everyone in the world"* be used?

First, we need to point out the fallacy normally lying behind this objection. It is assumed that because everyone owns something, then everyone has to be consulted in what it is used for. This, however, applies the logic of private property to non-capitalist social forms. While it is true that everyone owns collective "property" in an anarchist society, it does not mean that everyone **uses** it. Carlo Cafiero, one of the founders of communist-anarchism, stated the obvious:

> *"The common wealth being scattered right across the planet, while belonging by right to the whole of humanity, those who happen to be within reach of that wealth and in a position to make use of it will utilise it in common. The folk from a given country will use the land, the machines, the workshops, the houses, etc., of that country and they will all make common use of them. As part of humanity, they will exercise here, in fact and directly, their rights over a portion of mankind's wealth. But should an inhabitant of Peking visit this country, he [or she] would enjoy the same rights as the rest: in common with the others, he would enjoy all the wealth of the country, just as he [or she] would have in Peking."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 250]

Anarchists, therefore, think that those who **use** a part of society's wealth have the most say in what happens to it (e.g., workers control the means of production they use and the work they do when using it). This does not mean that those using it can do what they like to it. Users would be subject to recall by local communities if they are abusing their position (for example, if a workplace were polluting the environment, then the



fellow citizens by direct action and indicate that a given decision may have impacts which the majority were not aware. Hence direct action and dissent is a key aspect of an anarchist society and help ensure against the tyranny of the majority. Anarchism rejects the *"love it or leave it"* attitude that marks an authoritarian organisation.

This vision of self-assumed obligation, with its basis in individual liberty, indicates the basic flaw of Joseph Schumpeter's argument against democracy as anything bar a political method of arriving at decisions (in his case who will be the leaders of a society). Schumpeter proposed *"A Mental Experiment"* of imagining a country which, using a democratic process, *"reached the decision to persecute religious dissent"* (such as Jews and witches). He argued that we should not approve of these practices just because they have been decided upon by a majority or using a democratic method and, therefore, democracy cannot be an end in itself. [**Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy**, pp. 240–3]

However, such systematic persecution would conflict with the rules of procedure required if a country's or community's political method is to be called "democratic." This is because, in order to be democratic, the minority must be in a position for its ideas to become the majority's via argument and that requires freedom of speech, discussion and association. A country or community in which the majority persecutes or represses a minority automatically ensures that the minority can never be in a position to become the majority (as the minority is barred by force from becoming so) or convince the majority of the errors of its way (even if it cannot become the majority physically, it can become so morally by convincing the majority to change its position). Schumpeter's example utterly violates democratic principles and so cannot be squared with the it (Rousseau's somewhat opaque distinction between *"the General Will"* and majority rule sought to express this). Thus majority tyranny is an outrage against both democratic

theory **and** individual liberty (unsurprisingly, as the former has its roots in the latter).

This argument applies with even more force to a self-managed community too and so any system in which the majority tyrannises over a minority is, by definition, **not** self-managed as one part of the community is excluded from convincing the other (*"the enslavement of part of a nation denies the federal principal itself."* [Proudhon, **The Principle of Federation**, p. 42f]). Thus individual freedom and minority rights are essential to self-management. As Proudhon argued, *"a new spirit has dawned on the world. Freedom has opposed itself to the State, and since the idea of freedom has become universal people have realised that it is not a concern of the individual merely, but rather that it must exist in the group also."* [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 28] Unsurprisingly, then, the *"freedom of the collectivity to crush the individual is not, however, true Liberty in the eyes of Anarchists. It is one of those shams, which the Revolution is to destroy."* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 25]

It should be stressed, however, that most anarchists do not think that the way to guard against possible tyranny by the majority is to resort to decision-making by consensus (where no action can be taken until every person in the group agrees) or a property system (based in contracts). Both consensus (see section A.2.12) and contracts (see section A.2.14) soon result in authoritarian social relationships developing in the name of "liberty." Rather, we seek new forms of free agreement to replace contract and new forms of decision making which do not replace the possible tyranny of the majority with the real tyranny of a minority.

Then there is freedom of association. As Malatesta argued, *"for if it is unjust that the majority should oppress the minority, the contrary would be quite as unjust; and if the minority has a right to rebel, the majority has a right to defend itself ... it is true that this solution is not completely satisfactory. The individ-*



elite or pro-worker land-reform in a democracy or a popular social revolution.

To conclude. The "tragedy of the commons" argument is conceptually flawed and empirically wrong (unsurprising, given that no actual empirical evidence was presented to support the argument). Sadly, this has not stopped Hardin, or those inspired by his arguments, from suggesting policies based on a somewhat dubious understanding of history and humanity. Perhaps this is not that surprising, given that Hardin's assumptions (which drive his conclusions) are based not on actual people nor historical evidence but rather by fundamental components of capitalist economic theory. While under capitalism, and the short-termism imposed by market forces, you could easily imagine that a desire for profit would outweigh a person's interest in the long-term survival of their community, such a perspective is relatively recent in human history.

In fact, communal ownership produces a strong incentive to protect such resources for people are aware that their offspring will need them and so be inclined to look after them. By having more resources available, they would be able to resist the pressures of short-termism and so resist maximising current production without regard for the future. Capitalist owners have the opposite incentive for, as argued in section E.3, unless they maximise short-term profits then they will not be around in the long-term (so if wood means more profits than centuries-old forests then the trees will be chopped down). By combining common ownership with decentralised and federated communal self-management, anarchism will be more than able to manage resources effectively, avoiding the pitfalls of both privatisation and nationalisation.

*law imposed capitalist definitions to exclusive property in land."* [Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 134 and p. 163] As Cox suggested, many tenants were *"denied [their] remedy at law for the illegal abuses of the more powerful landowners"* and *"[s]ponsored by wealthy landowners, the land reform was frequently no more than a sophisticated land-grab."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58 and p. 59] Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger (and proto-anarchist), was only expressing a widespread popular sentiment when he complained that *"in Parishes where Commons lie the rich Norman Freeholders, or the new (more covetous) Gentry overstock the Commons with sheep and cattle, so that the inferior Tenants and poor labourers can hardly keep a cow but half starve her."* [quoted by Maurice Dobb, **Studies in the Development of Capitalism**, p. 173] The working class is only "left alone" to starve.

As discussed in section F.8, the enclosures were part of a wider state-imposition of capitalism onto society. Of course, enclosure was often justified by supporters of capitalism by the increased productivity which, they claim, resulted from it (in effect, repeating Locke's earlier, and flawed, argument — see section B.3.4). There are three objections to this. First, it cannot be assumed that increased productivity could not be achieved by keeping the commons and by the commoners applying the improved techniques and technologies that contributed to any post-enclosure increased productivity. Second, it ignores the key issue of liberty and replaces it with property (increases in wealth being considered more important than reducing the freedom of the working class). Third, and more importantly, this paternalistic rationale for coercion and state action does not fit well with such apologist's opposition to (certain forms of) state intervention today (such as taxation or popular land reform). If the "ends justify the means" (which is what their arguments boil down to) when applied to the rural working class, then they have little basis for opposing taxation of the wealthy



*uals put out of the association would be deprived of many social advantages, which an isolated person or group must do without, because they can only be procured by the co-operation of a great number of human beings. But what would you have? These malcontents cannot fairly demand that the wishes of many others should be sacrificed for their sakes."* [**A Talk about Anarchist-Communism**, p. 29] In other words, freedom of association means the freedom **not** to associate and so communities can expel individuals or groups of individuals who constantly hinder community decisions — assuming they do not leave voluntarily and seek a community more in tune with their needs. This a very important freedom for both the majority and the minority, and must be defended.

So while minorities have significant rights in a free society, so does the majority. We can imagine that there will be ethical reasons why participants will not act in ways to oppose joint activity — as they took part in the decision making process they would be considered childish if they reject the final decision because it did not go in their favour. Moreover, they would also have to face the reaction of those who also took part in the decision making process. It would be likely that those who ignored such decisions (or actively hindered them) would soon face non-violent direct action in the form of non-co-operation, shunning, boycotting and so on. Anarchists think that such occurrences would be rare.

As an isolated life is impossible, the need for communal associations is essential. It is only by living together in a supportive community can individuality be encouraged and developed along with individual freedom. However, anarchists are aware that not everyone is a social animal and that there are times that people like to withdraw into their own personal space. Thus our support for free association and federalism along with solidarity, community and self-management. Most anarchists have recognised that majority decision making, though not perfect, is the best way to reach decisions in a political system

based on maximising individual and so social freedom. Self-management in grassroots confederal assemblies and workers' councils ensures that decision making is "horizontal" in nature (i.e. between **equals**) and not hierarchical (i.e. governmental, between order giver and order taker). In other words, anarchists support self-management because it ensures liberty — **not** because we subscribe to the flawed assumption that the majority is always right.

## I.5.7 What if I don't want to join a commune?

As would be expected, no one would be **forced** to join a commune nor take part in its assemblies. To suggest otherwise would be contrary to anarchist principles. Thus a commune would be a free society, in which individual liberty would be respected and encouraged.

However, what about individuals who live within the boundaries of a commune but decide not to join? For example, a local neighbourhood may include households that desire to associate and a few that do not (this is actually happened during the Spanish Revolution). What happens to the minority of dissenters?

Obviously individuals can leave to find communities more in line with their own concepts of right and wrong if they cannot convince their neighbours of the validity of their ideas. And, equally obviously, not everyone will want to leave an area they like. So we must discuss what happens to those who decide to not to find a more suitable neighbourhood. Are the communal decisions binding on non-members? Obviously not. If an individual or family desire **not** to join a commune (for whatever reason), their freedoms must be respected. However, this also means that they cannot benefit from communal activity and resources (such a free parks, hospitals, and so forth)



fusion" in political debate, like the continued use of Hardin's original and flawed *"Tragedy of the Commons"*, is due to the utility of the theory for the rich and powerful, who have a vested interest in undermining pre-capitalist social forms and stealing communal resources. Most examples used to justify the *"tragedy of the commons"* are **false** examples, based on situations in which the underlying social context is assumed to be radically different from that involved in using true commons.

In reality, the *"tragedy of the commons"* comes about only after wealth and private property, backed by the state, starts to eat into and destroy communal life. This is well indicated by the fact that commons existed for thousands of years and only disappeared after the rise of capitalism — and the powerful central state it requires — had eroded communal values and traditions. Without the influence of wealth concentrations and the state, people get together and come to agreements over how to use communal resources and have been doing so for millennia. That was how the commons were successfully managed before the wealthy sought to increase their holdings and deny the poor access to land in order to make them fully dependent on the power and whims of the owning class.

Thus, as Kropotkin stressed, the state *"systematically weeded out all institutions in which the mutual-aid tendency had formerly found its expression. The village communities were bereft of their folkmotes, their courts and independent administration; their lands were confiscated."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 182] The possibilities of free discussion and agreement were destroyed in the name of "absolute" property rights and the power and authority which goes with them. Both political influence and market forces were, and are, dominated by wealth: *"There were two occasions that dictated absolute precision: a trial at law and a process of enclosure. And both occasions favoured those with power and purses against the little users."* Popular assertion meant little when the state enforces property rights in the interests of the wealthy. Ultimately, *"Parliament and*

*plies its existence as an institution."* It is precisely these kinds of human institutions which neo-classical economics ignores and so *"the so-called 'tragedy of the commons' is more accurately considered 'the tragedy of a methodological individualism'"*. As many critics note, there are numerous *"conceptual errors"* contained in the article and these *"have been repeated systematically by economists."* In summary, *"the so-called tragedy of the commons has nothing to do with common property, but with unrestricted and unregulated access."* [F. Aguilera-Klink, *"Some Notes on the Misuse of Classic Writings in Economics on the Subject of Common Property"*, pp. 221–8, **Ecological Economics**, No. 9, p. 223, p. 221, p. 224 and p. 226]

Much the same can be said against those who argue that the experience of the Stalinism in the Eastern Block and elsewhere shows that public property leads to pollution and destruction of natural resources. Such arguments also show a lack of awareness of what common property actually is (it is no co-incidence that the propertarian-right use such an argument). This is because the resources in question, as we discussed in section B.3.5, were **not** owned or managed in common — the fact that these countries were dictatorships excluded popular control of resources. Thus Stalinism does not, in fact, show the dangers of having commons or public ownership. Rather it shows the danger of not subjecting those who manage a resource to public control (and it is no co-incidence that the USA is far more polluted than Western Europe — in the USA, like in the USSR, the controllers of resources are not subject to popular control and so pass pollution on to the public). Stalinism shows the danger of state owned resource use (nationalisation) rather than commonly owned resource use (socialisation), particularly when the state in question is not under even the limited control of its subjects implied in representative democracy.

This confusion of public and state owned resources has, of course, been used to justify the stealing of communal property by the rich and the state. The continued acceptance of this "con-



and have to pay for their use. As long as they do not exploit or oppress others, an anarchist community would respect their decision (as discussed in section G.2.1, for example).

Many who oppose anarchist self-management in the name of freedom often do so because they desire to oppress and exploit others. In other words, they oppose participatory communities because they (rightly) fear that this would restrict their ability to grow rich off the labour of others (this type of opposition can be seen from history, when rich elites, in the name of liberty, have replaced democratic forms of social decision making with representative or authoritarian ones — see section B.2.5).

It goes without saying that the minority, as in any society, will exist within the ethical norms of the surrounding society and they will be have to adhere to them in the same sense that they have to adhere to not murdering people (few sane people would say that forcing people not to commit murder is a restriction of their liberty). Therefore, while allowing the maximum of individual freedom of dissent, an anarchist community would still have to apply its ethical standards to those beyond that community. Individuals would not be allowed to murder, harm or enslave others and claim that they are allowed to do so because they are not part of the local community (see section I.5.8 on crime in an anarchist society).

Similarly, individuals would not be allowed to develop private property (as opposed to possession) simply because they wanted to. This rejection of private property would not be a restriction on liberty simply because stopping the development of authority hardly counts as an authoritarian act (for an analogy, supporters of capitalism do not think that banning theft is a restriction of liberty and because this view is — currently — accepted by the majority it is enforced on the minority). Regardless of what defenders of capitalism claim, "voluntary bilateral exchanges" affect third parties and can harm others indirectly. This can easily be seen from examples like concentra-

tions of wealth which have effects across society or the ecological impacts of consumption and production. This means that an anarchist society would be aware that inequality, and so statism, could develop again and take precautions against it. As Malatesta put it, some *"seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas."* [**Anarchy**, p. 43]

The suggestion that denying property ownership is a restriction in freedom is wrong, as it is the would-be capitalist who is trying to ban freedom for others on their property. Members of a free society would simply refuse to recognise the claims of private property — they would simply ignore the would-be capitalist's pretensions and "keep out" signs. Without a state, or hired thugs, to back up their claims, they would just end up looking silly.

This means that Anarchists do not support the liberty of being a boss (anarchists will happily work **with** someone but not **for** someone). Of course, those who desire to create private property against the wishes of others expect those others to respect **their** wishes. So, when would-be propertarians happily fence off their "property" and exclude others from it, could not these others remember these words from Woody Guthrie's **This Land is Your Land**, and act accordingly?

***"As I went rumbling that dusty highway***
***I saw a sign that said private property***
***But on the other side it didn't say nothing***
***This land was made for you and me"*** While happy to exclude people from "their" property, such owners seem more than happy to use the resources held in common by others. They are the ultimate "free riders," desiring the benefits of society but rejecting the responsibilities that go with it. In the end, such "individualists" usually end up supporting the state



world, small farmers (and others) have created their own institutions and rules for preserving resources and ensuring that their community has the resources it needed to survive. Hardin, in other words, ignored what actually happens in a real commons, namely communal control and self-regulation by the communities involved who develop the appropriate communal institutions to do so.

Surely, the very obvious fact that humans have lived in societies with commons for centuries and did not overuse them disproves Hardin's most fundamental assumptions. *"If we misunderstand the true nature of the commons,"* argues scientist Susan Jane Buck Cox *"we also misunderstand the implications of the demise of the traditional, commons system. Perhaps what existed in fact was not a 'tragedy of the commons' but rather a triumph: that for hundreds of years — and perhaps thousands, although written records do not exist to prove the longer era — land was managed successfully by communities."* This suggests that it is a case of *"the myth of the tragedy of the commons"*, rooted in an argument which is *"historically false"* as the *"commons were carefully and painstakingly regulated."* She points to a wider issue, namely whether *"our perceptions of the nature of humankind are awry"* for *"it seems quite likely if 'economic man' had been managing the commons that tragedy really would have occurred,"* so *"perhaps someone else was running the common."* [*"No Tragedy on the Commons"*, pp. 49–61, **Environmental Ethics**, vol. 7, p. 60, p. 53, p. 56 and p. 61]

One economist has noted that the "tragedy of the commons" only makes sense once the assumption of neo-classical economics are taken for granted. If we assume atomised individuals accessing unmanaged lands then Hardin's conclusions automatically flow. However, *"if the property were **really** common, this would imply the necessary existence of institutional agreements ... between the co-owners to establish the rules for decisions governing the management of the resource. To put it more clearly, for common property to be truly common property im-*

*veloped a rich variety of institutions and community sanctions which have effected restraints and stints upon use . .. As the old ... institutions lapsed, so they fed into a vacuum in which political influence, market forces, and popular assertion contested with each other without common rules."* [**Customs in Common**, p. 108fn and p. 107] Colin Ward points to a more recent example, that of Spain after the victory of Franco:

> *"The water history of Spain demonstrates that the tragedy of the commons is not the one identified by Garrett Hardin. Communal control developed an elaborate and sophisticated system of fair shares for all. The private property recommended by Hardin resulted in the selfish individualism that he thought was inevitable with common access, or in the lofty indifference of the big landowners."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 27]

So, for a while, Hardin's essay *"was taken to provide an argument for the privatisation of the commons. It is now a well-developed point that Hardin's argument is not a tragedy of common ownership at all ... Hardin's argument is a problem not of common ownership, but of open access in a context of private ownership of particular assets."* [John O'Neill, **Markets, Deliberation and Environment**, p. 54] Significantly, Hardin later admitted his mistake and noted that *"it is clear to me that the title of my original contribution should have been **The Tragedy of the** Unmanaged **Commons** ... I can understand how I might have misled others."* [quoted by O'Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 199] But, of course, by then the damage had been done.

There is something quite arrogant about Hardin's assertions, as he basically assumed that peasant farmers are unable to recognise certain disaster and change their behaviour accordingly. This, apparently, is where enlightened elites (governmental and economic) step in. However, in the real



(an institution they claim to hate) precisely because it is the only means by which private property and their "freedom" to exercise authority can be defended.

This does not mean denying the freedom to live your life as you see fit, using the resources you need to do so. It simply means not being able to proclaim ownership over more than you could reasonably use. In other words, *"occupancy and use"* would be the limits of possession — and so property would become *"that control of a thing by a person which will receive either social sanction, or else unanimous individual sanction, when the laws of social expediency shall have been fully discovered."* [Benjamin Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 131] As we discuss in section I.6.2, this perspective on use rights is shared by both individualist and social anarchists.

Therefore anarchists support the maximum of experiments while ensuring that the social conditions that allow this experimentation are protected against concentrations of wealth and power. As Malatesta put it: *"Anarchism involves all and only those forms of life that respect liberty and recognise that every person has an equal right to enjoy the good things of nature and the products of their own activity."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 14]

So, as a way to eliminate the problem of minorities seeking power and property for themselves, an anarchist revolution places social wealth (starting with the land) in the hands of all and promises to protect only those uses of it which are considered just by society as a whole. In other words, by recognising that "property" is a product of society, an anarchist society will ensure than an individual's "property" is protected by his or her fellows when it is based purely upon actual occupancy and use. Thus attempts to transform minority dissent into, say, property rights would be fought by simply ignoring the "keep out" signs of property owned, but not used, by an individual or group. Therefore, individuals are free not to associate, but their claims of "ownership" will be based around

**use** rights, not property rights. Without a state to back up and protect property "rights," we see that all rights are, in the end, what society considers to be fair (the difference between law and social custom is discussed in section I.7.3). What the state does is to impose "rights" which do not have such a basis (i.e. those that protect the property of the elite) or "rights" which have been corrupted by wealth and would have been changed because of this corruption had society been free to manage its own affairs.

In summary, individuals will be free not to join a participatory community, and hence free to place themselves outside its decisions and activities on most issues that do not apply to the fundamental ethical standards of a society. Hence individuals who desire to live outside of anarchist communities would be free to live as they see fit but would not be able to commit murder, rape, create private property or other activities that harmed individuals. It should be noted, moreover, that this does not mean that their possessions will be taken from them by "society" or that "society" will tell them what to do with them. Freedom, in a complex world, means that such individuals will not be in a position to turn their possessions into **property** and thus recreate capitalism (for the distinction between *"property"* and *"possessions,"* see section B.3.1). This will not be done by "anarchist police" or by "banning" voluntary agreements, but purely by recognising that "property" is a social creation and by creating a social system that will encourage individuals to stand up for their rights and co-operate with each other to protect their freedom against those seeking to reduce others to the conditions of servants working their property for them.



> *ism, there is no common property. (Public property is a form of private property, property owned by the government as a corporate person.) Capitalism recognises only private property and free-for-all property. Nobody is responsible for free-for-all property until someone claims it as his own. He then has a right to do as he pleases with it, a right that is uniquely capitalist. Unlike common or personal property, capitalist property is not valued for itself or for its utility. It is valued for the revenue it produces for its owner. If the capitalist owner can maximise his revenue by liquidating it, he has the right to do that."* [**Apostles of Greed**, pp. 58–59]

Therefore, as Colin Ward argues, *"[l]ocal, popular, control is the surest way of avoiding the tragedy of the commons."* [**Reflected in Water**, p. 20] Given that a social anarchist society is a communal, decentralised one, it will have little to fear from irrational overuse or abuse of communally owned and used resources.

So, the **real** problem is that a lot of economists and sociologists conflate Hardin's scenario, in which **unmanaged** resources are free for all, with the situation that prevailed in the use of commons which were communally **managed** resources in village and tribal communities. Historian E.P. Thompson, for example, noted that Hardin was *"historically uninformed"* when he assumed that commons were pastures open to all. The commons, in reality, **were** managed by common agreements between those who used them. In an extensive investigation on this subject, Thompson showed that the *"argument [is] that since resources held in common are not owned and protected by anyone, there is an inexorable economic logic that dooms them to over-exploitation ... Despite its common sense air, what it overlooks is that commoners themselves were not without common sense. Over time and over space the users of commons have de-*

His article was used to justify both nationalisation and privatisation of communal resources (the former often a precursor for the latter). As state ownership fell out of favour, the lesson of this experiment in logic was as uniform as it was simple: only privatisation of common resources could ensure their efficient use and stop them being overused and destroyed. Coming as it before the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1970s, Hardin's essay was much referenced by those seeking to privatise nationalised industries and eliminate communal institutions in tribal societies in the Third World. That these resulted in wealth being concentrated in a few hands should come as no surprise.

Needless to say, there are numerous problems with Hardin's analysis. Most fundamentally, it was a pure thought experiment and, as such, was not informed by historical or current practice. In other words, it did not reflect the reality of the commons as a social institution. The so-called *"Tragedy of the Commons"* was no such thing. It is actually an imposition of the *"tragedy of the free-for-all"* to communally owned resources (in this case, land). In reality, commons were **never** *"free for all"* resources and while the latter may be see overuse and destruction the former managed to survive thousands of years. So, unfortunately for the supporters of private property who so regularly invoke the *"Tragedy of the Commons"*, they simply show their ignorance of what true commons are. As socialist Allan Engler points out:

> *"Supporters of capitalism cite what they call the tragedy of the commons to explain the wanton plundering of forests, fish and waterways, but common property is not the problem. When property was held in common by tribes, clans and villages, people took no more than their share and respected the rights of others. They cared for common property and when necessary acted together to protect it against those who would damage it. Under capital-*



## I.5.8 What about crime?

For anarchists, "crime" can best be described as anti-social acts, or behaviour which harms someone else or which invades their personal space. Anarchists, in other words, *"believe that to act criminally means to violate the liberty of others"* and so criminals in a free society would be *"those who would encroach on personal integrity, liberty and the well being of others."* [Malatesta, **At the Café**, p. 100 and p. 132]

This definition of crime is similar, of course, to that used in capitalist society but libertarians note that the state defines as "crime" many things which a sane society would not (such as, say, consensual acts of adults in private or expropriation of private property). Similarly, a free society would consider as anti-social many acts which the state defends under capitalism (such as the appropriation of resources or exploitation of others labour). This is to be expected, as social customs evolve and reflect the socio-economic basis of a given society. Hence Malatesta:

> *"Naturally the crimes we are talking about are anti-social acts, that is those which offend human feelings and which infringe the right of others to equality in freedom, and not the many actions which the penal code punishes simply because they offend against the privileges of the dominant classes."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 105–6]

Anarchists argue that the root cause for crime is not some perversity of human nature or "original sin" but is due to the type of society by which people are moulded. For example, anarchists point out that by eliminating private property, crime could be reduced significantly, since most crime today is currently motivated by evils stemming from private property

such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and alienation. Moreover, by adopting anarchist methods of non-authoritarian child rearing and education, most of the remaining crimes could also be eliminated, because they are largely due to the anti-social, perverse, and cruel "secondary drives" that develop because of authoritarian child-rearing practices (see section J.6). However, as long as the few *"violates the equal freedom of others ... we must defend ourselves."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106]

First, it cannot be said that governments are required to protect people from crime and criminals. Rather, as Alexander Berkman argued, *"[d]oes not government itself create and uphold conditions which make for crime? Does not the invasion and violence upon which all governments rest cultivate the spirit of intolerance and persecution, of hatred and more violence?"* Crime, then, *"is the result of economic conditions, of social inequality, of wrongs and evils of which government and monopoly are parents. Government and law can only punish the criminal. They neither cure nor prevent crime. The only real cure for crime is to abolish its causes, and the government can never do because it is there to preserve those very causes."* This suggests that crimes *"resulting form government, from its oppression and injustice, from inequality and poverty, will disappear under Anarchy. These constitute by far the greatest percentage of crime."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 151] Nor should we forget that today we are subject to rule by the anti-social, for the *"owners and rulers"* are *"criminals"* who are *"powerful and have organised their dominance on a stable basis"* (*"Who is more of a thief than the owners who get wealthy stealing the produce of the workers' labour?"*). [Malatesta, **At the Café**, p. 100 and p. 130]

"Crime", therefore, cannot be divorced from the society within which it occurs. Society, in Emma Goldman's words, gets the criminals it deserves. For example, anarchists do not think it unusual nor unexpected that crime exploded under the pro-free market capitalist regimes of Thatcher and Reagan.



# I.6 What about the *"Tragedy of the Commons"*?

The term *"Tragedy of the Commons"* is a phrase which is used to describe why, according to some, commonly owned resources will be destructively overused. The term was first coined by Garret Hardin in December 1968. [*"The Tragedy of the Commons"*, **Science**, Vol. 162, No. 3859, pp. 1243–1248] It quickly became popular with those arguing against any form of collective ownership or socialism and would be the basis for many arguments for privatisation.

Unsurprisingly, given its popularity with defenders of capitalism and neo-classical economists, Hardin's argument was a pure thought experiment with absolutely no empirical evidence to support it. He suggested a scenario in which commonly owned pasture was open to all local herdsmen to feed their cattle on. Completing this assumption with the standard ones of neo-classical economics, with Hardin arguing that each herdsman would try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons to maximise their income. This would result in overgrazing and environmental destruction as the cost of each feeding addition animals is shouldered by all who use the commons while the benefits accrue to the individual herdsman. However, what is individually rational becomes collectively irrational when each herdsman, acting in isolation, does the same thing. The net result of the individual's actions is the ending of the livelihood of **every** herdsman as the land becomes overused.

Thus, as would be expected, public services would be organised by the public, organised in their syndicates and communes. They would be based on workers' self-management of their daily work and of the system as a whole. Non-workers who took part in the system (patients, students, etc.) would not be ignored and would also play a role in providing essential feedback to assure quality control of services and to ensure that it is responsive to users needs. The resources required to maintain and expand the system would be provided by the communes, syndicates and their federations. For the first time, public services would truly be public and not a statist system imposed upon the public from above nor a system by which the few fleece the many by exploiting natural monopolies for their own interests.

So Public Services in a free society will be organised by those who do the work and under the effective control of those who use them. This vision of public services being run by workers' associations would be raised as a valid libertarian reform under capitalism (not to mention raising the demand to turn firms into co-operatives when they are bailed out during an economic crisis). Equally, rather than nationalisation or privatisation, public utilities could be organised as a consumer co-operative (i.e., owned by those who use it) while the day-to-day running could be in the hands of a producer co-operative.



Crime, the most obvious symptom of social crisis, took 30 years to double in Britain (from 1 million incidents in 1950 to 2.2 million in 1979). However, between 1979 and 1992 the crime rate more than doubled, exceeding the 5 million mark in 1992. These 13 years were marked by a government firmly committed to the "free market" and "individual responsibility." It was entirely predictable that the social disruption, atomisation of individuals, and increased poverty caused by freeing capitalism from social controls would rip society apart and increase criminal activity. Also unsurprisingly (from an anarchist viewpoint), under these pro-market governments we also saw a reduction in civil liberties, increased state centralisation, and the destruction of local government. As Malatesta put it, the classical liberalism which these governments represented could have had no other effect, for *"the government's powers of repression must perforce increase as free competition results in more discord and inequality."* [**Anarchy**, p. 47]

Hence the apparent paradox of governments with flowing rhetoric about "individual rights," the "free market" and "getting the state off our backs" increasing state power and reducing rights while holding office during a crime explosion is no paradox at all. *"The conjuncture of the rhetoric of individual freedom and a vast increase in state power,"* argues Carole Pateman, *"is not unexpected at a time when the influence of contract doctrine is extending into the last, most intimate nooks and crannies of social life. Taken to a conclusion, contract undermines the conditions of its own existence. Hobbes showed long ago that contract — all the way down — requires absolutism and the sword to keep war at bay."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 232]

Capitalism, and the contract theory on which it is built, will inevitably rip apart society. It is based upon a vision of humanity as isolated individuals with no connection other than that of money. Such a vision cannot help but institutionalise anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued *"it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience*

*— be it only at the stage of an instinct — of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man [and woman] from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his [or her] own."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 16] The social atomisation required and created by capitalism destroys the basic bonds of society — namely human solidarity — and hierarchy crushes the individuality required to understand that we share a common humanity with others and so understand **why** we must be ethical and respect others rights. Significantly, as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett note in **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better**, more unequal societies have more crime and bigger prison populations (equality, as well as reducing crime, consistently deliver other advantages for people).

We are not saying, however, that anarchists reject the concept of individual responsibility. While recognising that rape, for example, is the result of a social system which represses sexuality and is based on patriarchy (i.e. rape has more to do with power than sex), anarchists do not "sit back" and say "it's society's fault." Individuals have to take responsibility for their own actions and recognise that consequences of those actions. Part of the current problem with "law codes" is that individuals have been deprived of the responsibility for developing their own ethical code, and so are less likely to develop "civilised" social standards (see section I.7.3).

Therefore, while anarchists reject the ideas of law and a specialised justice system, they are not blind to the fact that antisocial action may not totally disappear in a free society. Nor are they blind to the fact that, regardless of our hopes about a free society reducing crime, we will not create it over-night (*"all the bad passions ... will not disappear at a stroke. There will still be for a long time those who will feel tempted to impose their*



based on volunteers from the interested parties such as the relevant syndicates, professional associations, consumer groups and so on. For example, for communal education a commission or working group would include delegates from the teachers union, from parent associations, from student unions and so on. The running of such a system would be, like any other industry, by those who work in it. Functional self-management would be the rule, with doctors managing their work, nurses theirs and so on, while the general running of, say, a hospital would be based on a general assembly of all workers there who would elect and mandate the administration staff and decide the policy the hospital would follow. Other interested parties would have a say, including patients in the health system and students in the education system. As Malatesta argued *"the carrying out and the normal functioning of public services vital to our daily lives would be more reliable if carried out ... by the workers themselves who, by direct election or through agreements made with others, have chosen to do that kind of work and carry it out under the direct control of all the interested parties."* [**Anarchy**, p. 41]

Needless to say, any system of public services would not be imposed on those who did not desire it. They would be organised for and by members of the communes and so individuals who were not part of one would have to pay to gain access to communal resources. However, it is unlikely that an anarchist society would be as barbaric as a capitalist one and refuse entry to people who were ill and could not pay, nor turn away emergencies because they did not have enough money. And just as other workers need not join a syndicate or commune, so doctors, teachers and so on could practice their trade outside the communal system as either individual artisans or as part of a co-operative. However, given the availability of free medical services it is doubtful they would grow rich doing so. Medicine, teaching and so on would revert back to what usually motivates people to initially take these up professions — the desire to help others and make a positive impact in society.

*for example, every collective in the Levant Federation had its own school."* [Gaston Leval, quoted by Sam Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 168] These schools aimed, to quote the CNT's resolution on Libertarian Communism, to *"help mould men with minds of their own — and let it be clear that when we use the word 'men' we use it in the generic sense — to which end it will be necessary for the teacher to cultivate every one of the child's faculties so that the child may develop every one of its capacities to the full."* [quoted by Jose Periats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 70] The principles of libertarian education, of encouraging freedom instead of authority in the school, was applied on vast scale (see section J.5.13 for more details on Modern Schools and libertarian education).

This educational revolution was not confined to collectives or children. For example, the **Federacion Regional de Campesinos de Levante** formed institutes in each of its five provinces. The first was set up in October 1937 in an old convent with 100 students. The Federation also set up two universities in Valencia and Madrid which taught a wide variety of agricultural subjects and combined learning with practical experience in an experimental form attached to each university. The Aragon collectives formed a similar specialised school in Binefar. The CNT was heavily involved in transforming education in Catalonia. In addition, the local federation of the CNT in Barcelona established a school to train women workers to replace male ones being taken into the army. The school was run by the anarcha-feminist group the **Mujeres Libres**. [Robert Alexander, **Op. Cit.**, p. 406, p. 670 and pp. 665–8 and p. 670]

Ultimately, the public services that exist in a social anarchist society will be dependent on what members of that society desire. If, for example, a commune or federation of communes desires a system of communal health-care or schools then they will allocate resources to implement it. They will allocate the task of creating such a system to, say, a special commission



*will on others with violence, who will wish to exploit favourable circumstances to create privileges for themselves"* [Malatesta, **At the Café**, p. 131]). Therefore, some sort of justice system would still be necessary to deal with the remaining crimes and to adjudicate disputes between people.

This does not, it must be stressed, signify some sort of contradiction within anarchism. Anarchists have never advocated the kind of "freedom" which assumes that people can do what they want. When people object to anarchy, they often ask about those who would steal, murder, rape and so forth and seem to assume that such people would be free to act as they like. This is, needless to say, an utter misunderstanding of both our ideas and freedom in general. Simply put, if people impose themselves by force on others then *"they will be the government"* and *"we will oppose them with force"* for *"if today we want to make a revolution against the government, it is not in order to submit ourselves supinely to new oppressors."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] This applies to defending a free society against organised counter-revolution and against those within it conducting anti-social ("criminal") activities. The principle is the same, it is just the scale which is different.

It should be remembered that just because the state monopolises or organises a (public) service, it does not mean that the abolition of the state means the abolition of what useful things it provided. For example, many states own and run the train network but the abolition of the state does not mean that there will no longer be any trains! In a free society management of the railways would be done by the rail workers themselves, in association with the community. The same applies to anti-social behaviour and so we find Kropotkin, for example, pointing to how *"voluntary associations"* would *"substitute themselves for the State in all its functions,"* including *"mutual protection"* and *"defence of the territory."* [**Anarchism**, p. 284]

This applies to what is termed justice, namely the resolution of disputes and anti-social acts ("crime"). Anarchists argue that

*"people would not allow their wellbeing and their freedom to be attacked with impunity, and if the necessity arose, they would take measures to defend themselves against the anti-social activities of a few. But to do so, what purpose is served by people whose profession is the making of laws; while other people spend their lives seeking out and inventing law-breakers?"* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 43–4] This means that in a free society the resolution of anti-social behaviour would rest in the hands of all, **not** in a specialised body separate from and above the masses. As Proudhon put it, an anarchy would see the *"police, judiciary, administration, everywhere committed to the hands of the workers"* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 281] And so:

> *"Let each household, each factory, each association, each municipality, each district, attend to its own police, and administer carefully its own affairs, and the nation will be policed and administered. What need have we to be watched and ruled, and to pay, year in and year out, ... millions? Let us abolish prefects, commissioners, and policemen too."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273]

Precisely how this will work will be determined by free people based on the circumstances they face. All we can do is sketch out likely possibilities and make suggestions.

In terms of resolving disputes between people, it is likely that some form of arbitration system would develop. The parties involved could agree to hand their case to a third party (for example, a communal jury or mutually agreed individual or individuals). There is the possibility that the parties cannot agree (or if the victim were dead), then the issue could be raised at a communal assembly and a "court" appointed to look into the issue. These "courts" would be independent from the commune, their independence strengthened by popular election instead of executive appointment of judges, by protecting the jury system by random selection of citizens, and so *"all disputes ... will*



*hospitals with all new facilities."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), pp. 99–100]

People were no longer required to pay for medical services. Each collective, if it could afford it, would pay a contribution to its health centre. Building and facilities were improved and modern equipment introduced. Like other self-managed industries, the health service was run at all levels by general assemblies of workers who elected delegates and hospital administration.

We can expect a similar process to occur in the future anarchist society. It would be based on self-management, of course, with close links to the local commune and federations of communes. Each hospital or health centre would be autonomous but linked in a federation with the others, allowing resources to be shared as and when required while allowing the health service to adjust to local needs and requirements as quickly as possible. Workers in the health industry will organise their workplaces, federate together to share resources and information, to formulate plans and improve the quality of service to the public in a system of generalised self-management and socialisation. The communes and their federations, the syndicates and federations of syndicates will provide resources and effectively own the health system, ensuring access for all.

Similar systems would operate in other public services. For example, in education we expect the members of communes to organise a system of free schools. This can be seen from the Spanish revolution. Indeed, the Spanish anarchists organised Modern Schools before the outbreak of the revolution, with 50 to 100 schools in various parts funded by local anarchist groups and CNT unions. During the revolution everywhere across Spain, syndicates, collectives and federations of collectives formed and founded schools. Indeed, education *"advanced at an unprecedented pace. Most of the partly or wholly socialised collectives and municipalities built at least one school. By 1938,*

*"The Health Workers' Union was founded in September, 1936. In line with the tendency to unite all the different classifications, trades, and services serving a given industry, **all** health workers, from porters to doctors and administrators, were organised into one big union of health workers …*

*"Our comrades laid the foundations of a new health service … The new medical service embraced all of Catalonia. It constituted a great apparatus whose parts were distributed according to different needs, all in accord with an overall plan. Catalonia was divided into nine zones . .. In turn, all the surrounding villages and towns were served from these centres.*

*"Distributed throughout Catalonia were twenty-seven towns with a total of thirty-six health centres conducting services so thoroughly that every village, every hamlet, every isolated peasant in the mountains, every woman, every child, anywhere, received adequate, up-to-date medical care. In each of the nine zones there was a central syndicate and a Control Committee located in Barcelona. Every department was autonomous within its own sphere. But this autonomy was not synonymous with isolation. The Central Committee in Barcelona, chosen by all the sections, met once a week with one delegate from each section to deal with common problems and to implement the general plan …*

*"The people immediately benefited from the projects of the health syndicate. The syndicate managed all hospitals and clinics. Six hospitals were opened in Barcelona … Eight new sanatoriums were installed in converted luxurious homes ideally situated amidst mountains and pine forests. It was no easy task to convert these homes into efficient*



*be submitted to juries which will judge not only the facts but the law, the justice of the law [or social custom], its applicability to the given circumstances, and the penalty or damage to be inflicted because of its infraction".* [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 160] For Tucker, the jury was a *"splendid institution, the principal safeguard against oppression."* [**Liberty**, vol. 1, no. 16, p. 1]

As Malatesta suggested, *"when differences were to arise between men [sic!], would not arbitration voluntarily accepted, or pressure of public opinion, be perhaps more likely to establish where the right lies than through an irresponsible magistrate which has the right to adjudicate on everything and everybody and is inevitably incompetent and therefore unjust?"* [**Anarchy**, p. 45] It is in the arbitration system and communal assemblies that what constitutes anti-social behaviour will be discussed and agreed.

In terms of anti-social events when they happen, *"when there remains a residue of criminals, the collective directly concerned should think of placing them in a position where they can do no harm, without delegating to anyone the specific function of persecuting criminals"* [Malatesta, **At the Café**, p. 101] In the case of a "police force", this would not exist either as a public or private specialised body or company. If a local community did consider that public safety required a body of people who could be called upon for help, we imagine that a new system would be created. Such a system would *"not be entrusted to, as it is today, to a special, official body: all able-bodied inhabitants will be called upon to take turns in the security measures instituted by the commune."* [James Guillaume, *"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 371]

This system could be based around a voluntary militia, in which all members of the community could serve if they so desired. Those who served would not constitute a professional body; instead the service would be made up of local people who would join for short periods of time and be replaced if

they abused their position. Hence the likelihood that a communal militia would become corrupted by power, like the current police force or a private security firm exercising a policing function, would be vastly reduced. Moreover, by accustoming a population to intervene in anti-social as part of the militia, they would be empowered to do so when not an active part of it, so reducing the need for its services even more. In this way *"we will defend ourselves ... without delegating to anyone the special function of the defence of society"* and this is *"the only effective method"* of stopping and reducing anti-social activity. [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132]

Such a body would not have a monopoly on protecting others, but would simply be on call if required. It would no more be a monopoly of defence (i.e. a "police force") than the current fire service is a monopoly. Individuals are not banned from putting out fires today because the fire service exists, similarly individuals will be free to help stop anti-social crime by themselves, or in association with others, in an anarchist society.

Of course there are anti-social acts which occur without witnesses and so the "guilty" party cannot be readily identified. If such acts did occur we can imagine an anarchist community taking two courses of action. The injured party may look into the facts themselves or appoint an agent to do so or, more likely, an ad hoc group would be elected at a community assembly to investigate specific crimes of this sort (subject to control and recall by the community). Once the investigating body thought it had enough evidence it would inform the community as well as the affected parties and then organise a court. Of course, a free society will produce different solutions to such problems, solutions no-one has considered yet and so these suggestions are just that, suggestions.

As is often stated, prevention is better than cure. This is as true of crime as of disease and so crime is best fought by rooting out its **causes** as opposed to punishing those who act in response to these causes. As Emma Goldman argued, crime



So the Spanish Revolution indicates how an anarchist health service would operate. In rural areas local doctors would usually join the village collective and provided their services like any other worker. Where local doctors were not available, *"arrangements were made by the collectives for treatment of their members by hospitals in nearby localities. In a few cases, collectives themselves build hospitals; in many they acquired equipment and other things needed by their local physicians."* For example, the Monzon comercal (district) federation of collectives in Aragon established maintained a hospital in Binefar, the **Casa de Salud Durruti**. By April 1937 it had 40 beds, in sections which included general medicine, prophylaxis and gynaecology. It saw about 25 outpatients a day and was open to anyone in the 32 villages of the comarca. [Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 331 and pp. 366–7]

In the Levante, the CNT built upon its existing **Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de Levante** (a health service institution founded by the union as a kind of mutual benefit society which had numerous doctors and specialists). During the revolution, the Mutua had 50 doctors and was available to all affiliated workers and their families. The socialisation of the health care took on a slightly different form in Catalonia but on the same libertarian principles. Gaston Leval provided us with an excellent summary:

> *"The socialisation of health services was one of the greatest achievements of the revolution. To appreciate the efforts of our comrades it must be borne in mind that they rehabilitated the health service in all of Catalonia in so short a time after July 19$^{th}$. The revolution could count on the co-operation of a number of dedicated doctors whose ambition was not to accumulate wealth but to serve the afflicted and the underprivileged.*

*with the workmen's associations."* This was due to both their nature and libertarian values as the *"direct, sovereign initiative of localities, in arranging for public works that belong to them, is a consequence of the democratic principle and the free contract: their subordination to the State is ... a return to feudalism."* Workers' self-management of such public workers is, again, a matter of libertarian principles for *"it becomes necessary for the workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* Railways should be given *"to responsible companies, not of capitalists, but of WORKMEN."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 276, p. 277 and p. 151]

This was applied during the Spanish Revolution. Gaston Leval discussed *"Achievements in the Public Sector"* in his classic account of the collectives. Syndicates organised water, gas and electricity utilities in Catalonia, while the trams and railways were run more efficiently and cheaper than under capitalist management. All across Spain, the workers in the health service re-organised their industry on libertarian lines and in association with the collectives, communes and the unions of the CNT. As Leval summarised:

> *"For the socialisation of medicine was not just an initiative of militant libertarian doctors. Wherever we were able to make s study of villages and small towns transformed by the Revolution, medicine and existing hospitals had been municipalised, expanded, placed under the aegis of the Collective. When there were none, they were improvised. The socialisation of medicine was becoming everyone's concern, for the benefit of all. It constituted one of the most remarkable achievements of the Spanish Revolution."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 278]



*"is naught but misdirected energy. So long as every institution of today, economic, political, social, moral conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels; so long as most people are out of place doing things they hate to do, living a life they loathe to live, crime will be inevitable, and all the laws on the statues can only increase, but never do away with, crime"* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 71] Erich Fromm, decades later, made the same point:

> *"It would seem that the amount of destructiveness to be found in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is curtailed. By this we do not refer to individual frustrations of this or that instinctive desire but to the thwarting of the whole of life, the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man's sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Life has an inner dynamism of its own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived .. . the drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually interdependent factors but are in a reversed interdependence. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive towards destruction; the more life is realised, the less is the strength of destructiveness.* ***Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life.*** *Those individual and social conditions that make for suppression of life produce the passion for destruction that forms, so to speak, the reservoir from which particular hostile tendencies — either against others or against oneself — are nourished."* [**The Fear of Freedom**, p. 158]

Therefore, by reorganising society so that it empowers everyone and actively encourages the use of all our intellectual, emotional and sensuous abilities, crime would soon cease to be the huge problem that it is now. As for the anti-social behaviour or clashes between individuals that might still exist in

such a society, it would be dealt with in a system based on respect for the individual and a recognition of the social roots of the problem. Restraint would be kept to a minimum. Anarchists think that public opinion and social pressure would be the main means of preventing anti-social acts in an anarchist society, with such actions as boycotting and ostracising used as powerful sanctions to convince those attempting them of the errors of their way. Extensive non-co-operation by neighbours, friends and work mates would be the best means of stopping acts which harmed others. Thus Malatesta:

> *"In order for crime to be treated rationally, in order to seek for its causes and really do everything possible to eliminate it, it is necessary for this task to be entrusted to those who are exposed to and suffer the consequences of crime, in other words the whole public, and not those to whom the existence of crime is a source of power and earnings."* [**At the Café**, p. 135]

An anarchist system of justice, we should note, would have a lot to learn from aboriginal societies simply because they are examples of social order without the state. Indeed many of the ideas we consider as essential to justice today can be found in such societies. As Kropotkin argued, *"when we imagine that we have made great advances in introducing, for instance, the jury, all we have done is to return to the institutions of the so-called 'barbarians' after having changed it to the advantage of the ruling classes."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 18] Like aboriginal justice (as documented by Rupert Ross in **Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice**) anarchists contend that justice be achieved by the teaching and healing of all involved. Public condemnation of the wrongdoing would be a key aspect of this process, but the wrong doer would remain part of the community and so see the effects of their actions on



likelihood of accidents or illness. They review contracts regularly and drop sick people for the slightest reason (understandably, given that they make profits by minimising pay-outs for treatment). Hardly a vision to inspire a free society or one compatible with equality and mutual respect.

Therefore, most anarchists are in favour of a socialised and universal health-care system for both ethical and efficiency reasons (see section I.4.10). Needless to say, an anarchist system of socialised health care would differ in many ways to the current systems of universal health-care provided by the state (which, while called socialised medicine by its enemies is better described as nationalised medicine — although it should be stressed that this is better than the privatised system). Such a system of socialised health-care will be built from the bottom-up and based around the local commune. In a social anarchist society, *"medical services .. . will be free of charge to all inhabitants of the commune. The doctors will not be like capitalists, trying to extract the greatest profit from their unfortunate patients. They will be employed by the commune and expected to treat all who need their services."* Moreover, prevention will play an important part, as *"medical treatment is only the **curative** side of the science of health care; it is not enough to treat the sick, it is also necessary to prevent disease. That is the true function of hygiene."* [James Guillaume, *"On Building the New Social Order"*, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 371] The same would go for other public services and works.

While rejecting privatisation, anarchists also reject nationalisation in favour of socialisation and worker's self-management. In this we follow Proudhon, who argued that there was a series of industries and services which were *"public works"* which he thought best handled by communes and their federations. Thus *"the control undertaking such works will belong to the municipalities, and to districts within their jurisdiction"* while *"the control of carrying them out will rest*

tions otherwise have always been myths). This applies to both internal and external attempts to re-introduce authority.

## I.5.12 Would an anarchist society provide health care and other public services?

It depends on the type of anarchist society you are talking about. Different anarchists propose different solutions.

In an individualist-mutualist society, for example, health care and other public services would be provided by individuals or co-operatives on a pay-for-use basis. It would be likely that individuals or co-operatives/associations would subscribe to various insurance providers or enter into direct contracts with health care providers. Thus the system would be similar to privatised health care but without the profit margins as competition, it is hoped, would drive prices down to cost.

Other anarchists reject such a system. They are favour of socialising health care and other public services. They argue that a privatised system would only be able to meet the requirements of those who can afford to pay for it and so would be unjust and unfair. In addition, such systems would have higher overheads (the need to pay share-holders and the high wages of upper management, most obviously, and not to mention paying for propaganda against "socialised" medicine) as well as charge more (privatised public utilities under capitalism have tended to charge consumers more, unsurprisingly as by their very nature they are natural monopolies).

Looking at health care, for example, the need for medical attention is not dependent on income and so a civilised society would recognise this fact. Under capitalism, profit-maximising medical insurance sets premiums according to the risks of the insured getting ill or injured, with the riskiest and most ill not being able to find insurance at any price. Private insurers shun entire industries as too dangerous for their profits due to the



others in terms of grief and pain caused. It would be likely that wrong doers would be expected to try to make amends for their act by community service or helping victims and their families.

So, from a practical viewpoint, almost all anarchists oppose prisons on both practical grounds and ethical grounds. Prisons have numerous negative affects on society as well as often re-enforcing criminal (i.e. anti-social) behaviour. Anarchists use the all-to-accurate description of prisons as *"Universities of Crime"* wherein the first-time criminal learns new techniques and have adapt to the prevailing ethical standards within them. Hence, prisons would have the effect of increasing the criminal tendencies of those sent there and so prove to be counter-productive. In addition, prisons do not affect the social conditions which promote many forms of crime. Simply put, prison *"does not improve the prisoner ... it does not prevent him from committing more crimes. It does not then achieve any of the ends it has set itself"* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 228] Moreover, they are a failure in terms of their impact on those subject to them: *"We know what prisons mean — they mean broken down body and spirit, degradation, consumption, insanity"*. [Voltairine de Cleyre, quoted by Paul Avrich, **An American Anarchist**, p. 146] The Makhnovists took the usual anarchist position on prisons:

> *"Prisons are the symbol of the servitude of the people, they are always built only to subjugate the people, the workers and peasants ... Free people have no use for prisons. Wherever prisons exist, the people are not free ... In keeping with this attitude, [the Makhnovists] demolished prisons wherever they went."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153]

With the exception of Benjamin Tucker, no major anarchist writer supported the institution. Few anarchists think that private prisons (like private policemen) are compatible with their

notions of freedom. However, all anarchists are against the current "justice" system which seems to them to be organised around **revenge** and punishing effects and not fixing causes.

However, there are psychopaths and other people in any society who are too dangerous to be allowed to walk freely. Restraint in this case would be the only option and such people may have to be isolated from others for their own, and others, safety. Perhaps mental hospitals would be used, or an area quarantined for their use created (perhaps an island, for example). However, such cases (we hope) would be rare and *"should be cared for according to the most humane methods of treating the mentally afflicted."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, **The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, p. 160]

The one thing that needs to be avoided is the creation of a professional and specialised "justice" system as this would be a key means by which the state could reconstitute itself. As Malatesta explained, *"the major damage caused by crime is not so much the single and transitory instance of the violation of the rights of a few individuals, but the danger that it will serve as an opportunity and pretext for the constitution of an authority that, with the outward appearance of defending society will subdue and oppress it."* In other words, it *"would truly be a great piece of foolishness to protect oneself from a few violent people, a few idlers and some degenerates, by opening a school for idleness and violence"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101 and p. 132] The libertarian perspective on crime does not rest on an idealised vision of people. *"We do not believe"*, as Malatesta suggested, *"in the infallibility, nor even the general goodness of the masses"*, rather *"we believe even less in the infallibility and goodness of those who seize power and legislate"* and so we must *"avoid the creation of bodies specialising in police work"*. [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 109 and p. 108] As George Barrett argued:

> *"All that we can say is that ... disputes are very much better settled without the interference of authority. If*



such a community. Capitalism and ethical behaviour are mutually exclusive concepts; anarchism encourages and rewards ethical behaviour. Needless to say, as we discussed in section I.5.8, anarchists are aware that a free society would need to defend itself against whatever anti-social behaviour remains in a free and equal society and seeking to impose your will on others defines unethical and anti-social!

Therefore, as can be seen, anarchists argue that a free society would not have to fear would-be thugs, "charismatic" leaders or the unethical. An anarchist society would be based on the co-operation of free individuals. It is unlikely that they would tolerate bad behaviour and would use their own direct action as well as social and economic organisations to combat it. Moreover, the nature of free co-operation would reward ethical behaviour as those who practice it would have it reciprocated by their fellows. and, if worse came to worse, they would defend their liberty!

One last point. Some people seem to think that anarchism is about the powerful being appealed to **not** to oppress and dominate others. Far from it. Anarchism is about the oppressed and exploited refusing to let others dominate them. It is **not** an appeal to the "better side" of the boss or would-be boss; it is about the solidarity and direct action of those subject to a boss **getting rid of the boss** — whether the boss agrees to it or not! Once this is clearly understood the idea that an anarchist society is vulnerable to the power-hungry is clearly nonsense — anarchy is based on resisting power and so is, by its very nature, more resistant to would-be rulers than a hierarchical one.

So, to summarise, anarchists are well aware that an anarchist society will have to defend itself from both inside and outside attempts to re-impose capitalism and the state. Indeed, every revolutionary anarchist has argued that a revolution will have to defend itself (as proven in section H.2.1, Marxist asser-

It is one of the most disturbing aspects of living in a world where the rush to acquire wealth is the single most important aspect of living is what happens to people who follow an ethical path in life. Under capitalism, the ethical generally do not succeed as well as those who stab their fellows in the back, those who cut corners, indulge in sharp business practises, drive competitors into the ground and live their lives with an eye on the bottom line but they do survive. Loyalty to a firm or a group, bending over backwards to provide a service, giving a helping hand to somebody in need, placing friendship above money, count for nothing when the bills come in. People who act ethically in a capitalist society are usually punished and penalised for their ethical and principled behaviour. Indeed, the capitalist market rewards unethical behaviour as it generally reduces costs and so gives those who do it a competitive edge.

It is different in a free society. Anarchism is based on equal access to power and wealth. Everybody in an anarchist society irrespective of what they do, or who they are or what type of work they perform is entitled to share in society's wealth. Whether a community survives or prospers depends on the combined efforts of the people in that community. Ethical behaviour would become the norm in an anarchist community; those people who act ethically would be rewarded by the standing they achieve in the community and by others being more than happy to work with and aid them. People who cut corners, try to exercise power over others, refuse to co-operate as equals or otherwise act in an unethical manner would lose their standing. Their neighbours and work mates would refuse to co-operate with them (or reduce co-operation to a minimum) and take other forms of non-violent direct action to point out that certain forms of activity was inappropriate. They would discuss the issue with the unethical person and try to convince them of the errors of their way. In a society where the necessities are guaranteed, people would tend to act ethically because ethical behaviour raises an individuals profile and standing within



> *the two [parties] were reasonable, they would probably mutually agree to allow their dispute to be settled by some mutual friend whose judgement they could trust. But if instead of taking this sane course they decide to set up a fixed authority, disaster will be the inevitable result. In the first place, this authority will have to be given power wherewith to enforce its judgement in such matters. What will then take place? The answer is quite simple. Feeling it is a superior force, it will naturally in each case take to itself the best of what is disputed, and allot the rest to its friends.*
>
> *"What a strange question is this. It supposes that two people who meet on terms of equality and disagree could not be reasonable or just. But, on the other hand, it supposes that a third party, starting with an unfair advantage, and backed up by violence, will be the incarnation of justice itself. Common-sense should certainly warn us against such a supposition, and if we are lacking in this commodity, then we may learn the lesson by turning to the facts of life. There we see everywhere Authority standing by, and in the name of justice and fair play using its organised violence in order to take the lion's share of the world's wealth for the governmental class."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, pp. 349–50]

So instead of prisons and a legal code based on the concept of punishment and revenge, anarchists support the use of public opinion and pressure to stop anti-social acts and the need to therapeutically rehabilitate those who commit them. Rather than a parasitic legal system which creates and defends inequality and privilege, anarchists agree with Kropotkin: *"Liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the most effective barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instinct of certain*

*among us".* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 218] *"We want justice, not rigid, but elastic"*, argued Tucker, *"we want justice, not stern, but tempered with mercy, with eyes sharp enough to detect causes, conditions, and circumstances; we want justice, not superficial, but profound."* The current system of rigid law imposed by the state and implemented by a judge was false and *"no such justice is wanted in any civilised community."* [**Op. Cit.**, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 4]

In summary, then, anarchists have spent considerable time discussing the issue. Somewhat ironically, given that many think the issue of crime is the weakest point of the anarchist case, the outlines of a solution to this problem are well established in anarchist theory, both in terms of what **not** to do and in terms of combating both crime and its causes. Anarchy is based on people being free but freedom does **not** mean the "freedom" to violate the equal freedom of others. That is oppression, that is exploitation, that is the embryo of the state and capitalism.

We can recommend the section *"Crime and Punishment"* by Malatesta (**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**) as well as Kropotkin's essays *"Law and Authority"* and *"Prisons and their moral influence on prisoners"* (both within the **Anarchism** collection). Emma Goldman's *"Prisons: A social crime and Failure"* (**Red Emma Speaks**), de Cleyre's *"Crime and Punishment"* (**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**) and Colin Ward's *"How Deviant Dare you get?"* (**Anarchy in Action**) are also worth reading. A useful collection of writings on this issue are found in **Under the Yoke of the State: Selected Anarchist Responses to Prisons and Crime** (edited by the Dawn Collective).



many Hitler was met with little or no opposition, in Italy and Spain the fascists had to fight long and hard to gain power. The anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organisations fought the fascists tooth and nail, with some success before betrayal by the Republicans and Marxists. From this historical experience anarchists argue that an anarchist society would quickly and easily defeat would-be thugs as people would be used to practising direct action and self-management and would have no desire to stop. A free people would quickly organise itself in self-managed militias for self-defence (just as they would during a social revolution to defend it — section J.7.6).

As for self-management resulting in "charismatic" leaders, well the logic is astounding. As if hierarchical structures are **not** based on leadership structures and do not require a charismatic leader! Such an argument is inherently self-contradictory — as well as ignoring the nature of modern society and its leadership structures. Rather than mass assemblies being dominated by leaders, it is the case that hierarchical structures are the natural breeding ground for dictators. All the great dictators the world have seen have come to the forefront in **hierarchical** organisations, **not** libertarian structured ones. Hitler, for example, did not come to power via self-management. Rather he used a highly centralised and hierarchically organised party to take control of a centralised, hierarchical state. The very disempowerment of the population in capitalist society results in them looking to leaders to act for them and so *"charismatic"* leaders are a natural result. An anarchist society, by empowering all, would make it more difficult, not less, for a would-be leader to gain power — few people, if any, would be willing to sacrifice and negate themselves for the benefit of another.

Our discussion on the power hungry obviously relates to the more general the question of whether ethical behaviour be rewarded in an anarchist society. In other words, could an anarchist society be stable or would the unethical take over?

*dividuals or groups affected, and that the **maintenance** of a state of Anarchy in this manner would be far easier than the gaining of a state of Anarchy by the same methods and in the face of hitherto unshaken opposition ... They have it in their power to apply a prompt check by boycotting such a person and refusing to help him with their labour or to willing supply him with any articles in their possession. They have it in their power to use force against him. They have these powers individually as well as collectively. Being either past rebels who have been inspired with the spirit of liberty, or else habituated to enjoy freedom from their infancy, they are hardly to rest passive in view of what they feel to be wrong."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 87–8]

Thus a free society would use direct action to resist the would-be ruler just as it had used direct action to free itself from existing rulers. It would be organised in a way which would facilitate this direct action as it would be based on networks of solidarity and mutual aid. An injury to one is an injury to all and a would-be ruler would face a whole liberated society acting against him or her. Faced with the direct action of the population (which would express itself in non-cooperation, strikes, demonstrations, occupations, insurrections and so on) a would-be power seeker would find it difficult to impose themselves. Unlike those accustomed to rulership in existing society, an anarchist people would be a society of rebels and so difficult to dominate and conquer: *"In the future society, Anarchy will be defence, the prevention of the re-establishment of any authority, any power, any State."* [Carlo Cafiero, *"Anarchy and Communism"*, pp. 179–86, **The Raven**, No. 6, p. 180]

Anarchists point to the example of the rise of Fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany. In areas with strong anarchist movements the fascists were resisted most strongly. While in Ger-



## I.5.9 What about Freedom of Speech under Anarchism?

Free speech in an anarchist society would be far greater than under capitalism. This is obvious, anarchists argue, because we *"fight against oppression and tyranny for a future in which they will be neither masters nor slaves, neither rich nor poor, neither oppressors nor oppressed ... the freedom of each is rooted in the freedom of all, and that in this universal freedom is the guarantee of liberty, self-development, autonomy, and free speech for each and everyone."* [Emma Goldman, **A Documentary History of the American Years**, p. 104] As such, libertarian socialism would be marked by extensive freedom of speech but also freedom of the press, of the media and so forth.

Some, however, express the idea that **all** forms of socialism would endanger freedom of speech, press, and so forth. The usual formulation of this argument is in relation to state socialism and goes as follows: if the state (or "society") owned all the means of communication, then only the views which the government supported would get access to the media.

This is an important point and it needs to be addressed. However, before doing so, we should point out that under capitalism the major media are effectively controlled by the wealthy. As we argued in section D.3, the media are **not** the independent defenders of freedom that they like to portray themselves as. This is hardly surprising, since newspapers, television companies, and so forth are capitalist enterprises owned by the wealthy and with managing directors and editors who are also wealthy individuals with a vested interest in the status quo. Hence there are institutional factors which ensure that the "free press" reflects the interests of capitalist elites.

However, in democratic capitalist states there is little overt censorship. Radical and independent publishers can still print

their papers and books without state intervention (although market forces ensure that this activity can be difficult and financially unrewarding). Under socialism, it is argued, because "society" owns the means of communication and production, this liberty will not exist. Instead, as can be seen from all examples of "actually existing socialism," such liberty is crushed in favour of the ruling elites' point of view.

As anarchism rejects the state, we can say that this danger does not exist under libertarian socialism. However, since social anarchists argue for the communalisation of production, could not restrictions on free speech still exist? We argue no, for three reasons.

Firstly, publishing houses, radio stations, and so on will be run by their workers directly. They will be supplied by other syndicates, with whom they will make agreements, and **not** by "central planning" officials (who would not exist). In other words, there is no bureaucracy of officials allocating (and so controlling) resources and so the means of communication. Hence, anarchist self-management will ensure that there is a wide range of opinions in different magazines and papers. There would be community papers, radio stations, etc., and obviously they would play an increased role in a free society. But they would not be the only media. Associations, political parties, industrial syndicates, and so on would have their own media and/or would have access to the resources run by communication workers syndicates, so ensuring that a wide range of opinions can be expressed.

Secondly, the "ultimate" power in a free society will be the individuals of which it is composed. This power will be expressed in communal and workplace assemblies that can recall delegates and revoke their decisions. It is doubtful that these assemblies would tolerate a set of would-be bureaucrats determining what they can or cannot read, see, or hear.

Thirdly, individuals in a free society would be interested in hearing different viewpoints and discussing them. This is the



> *arms and from the blood of the people's veins … The liberation of the people leads to the savagery of those who live from its enslavement."* [**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 85]

So anarchists are not impressed with the argument that anarchy would be unable to stop thugs seizing power. It ignores the fact that we live in a society where the power-hungry already rule. As an argument against anarchism it fails and is, in fact, an argument against hierarchical societies.

Moreover, it also ignores fact that people in an anarchist society would have gained their freedom by overthrowing every existing and would-be thug who had, or desired, power over others. They would have defended that freedom against those who desired to re-impose it. They would have organised themselves to manage their own affairs and, therefore, to abolish all hierarchical power. And we are to believe that these people, after struggling to become free, would quietly let a new set of thugs impose themselves? As Kropotkin argued:

> *"The only way in which a state of Anarchy can be obtained is for each man [or woman] who is oppressed to act as if he [or she] were at liberty, in defiance of all authority to the contrary … In practical fact, territorial extension is necessary to ensure permanency to any given individual revolution. In speaking of the Revolution, we signify the aggregate of so many successful individual and group revolts as will enable every person within the revolutionised territory to act in perfect freedom … without having to constantly dread the prevention or the vengeance of an opposing power upholding the former system … Under these circumstance it is obvious that any visible reprisal could and would be met by a resumption of the same revolutionary action on the part of the in-*

## I.5.11 How will an anarchist society defend itself against the power hungry?

A common objection to anarchism is that a libertarian society will be vulnerable to be taken over by thugs or those who seek power. A similar argument is that a group without a leadership structure becomes open to charismatic leaders so anarchy would just lead to tyranny.

For anarchists, such arguments are strange. Society already **is** run by thugs and/or the off-spring of thugs. Kings were originally just successful thugs who imposed their domination over a specific territorial area. The modern state has evolved from the structure created to impose this domination. Similarly with property, with most legal titles to land being traced back to its violent seizure by thugs who then passed it on to their children who then sold it or gave it to their offspring. The origins of the current system in violence can be seen by the continued use of violence by the state and capitalists to enforce and protect their domination over society. When push comes to shove, the dominant class will happily re-discover their thug past and employ extreme violence to maintain their privileges. The descent of large parts of Europe into Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, or Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973 indicates how far they will go. As Peter Arshinov argued (in a slightly different context):

> *"Statists fear free people. They claim that without authority people will lose the anchor of sociability, will dissipate themselves, and will return to savagery. This is obviously rubbish. It is taken seriously by idlers, lovers of authority and of the labour of others, or by blind thinkers of bourgeois society. The liberation of the people in reality leads to the degeneration and return to savagery, not of the people, but of those who, thanks to power and privilege, live from the labour of the people's*



natural side-effect of critical thought (which self-management would encourage), and so they would have a vested interest in defending the widest possible access to different forms of media for different views. Having no vested interests to defend, a free society would hardly encourage or tolerate the censorship associated with the capitalist media (*"I listen to criticism because I am **greedy.** I listen to criticism because I am **selfish.** I would not deny myself another's insights"* [For Ourselves, **The Right to be Greedy**, Thesis 113]).

Therefore, anarchism will **increase** freedom of speech in many important ways, particularly in the workplace (where it is currently denied under capitalism). This will be a natural result of a society based on maximising freedom and the desire to enjoy life: *"We claim the right of discussing ... whatever subject interests us. If free speech and free press mean anything, they mean freedom of discussion."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 203]

We would also like to point out that during both the Spanish and Russian revolutions, freedom of speech was protected within anarchist areas. For example, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine *"fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the Press, and of political association. In all the cities and towns occupied ... Complete freedom of speech, Press, assembly, and association of any kind and for everyone was immediately proclaimed."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153] This is confirmed by Michael Malet: *"One of the most remarkable achievements of the Makhnovists was to preserve a freedom of speech more extensive than any of their opponents."* [**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 175] In revolutionary Spain republicans, liberals, communists, Trotskyites and many different anarchist groups all had freedom to express their views. *"On my first visit to Spain in September 1936,"* Emma Goldman reported *"nothing surprised me so much as the amount of political freedom I found everywhere. True, it did not extend to Fascists"* but *"everyone of the anti-Fascist front enjoyed political freedom which hardly ex-*

*isted in any of the so-called European democracies."* As for the few restrictions that were in place, remember that there was a war on so it was *"childish to expect the CNT-FAI to include Fascists and other forces engaged in their destruction in the extension of complete political freedom."* [**Vision on Fire**, p.147 and p. 228] The freedom of speech in anarchist areas is confirmed in a host of other eye-witnesses, including George Orwell in **Homage to Catalonia** (in fact, it was the rise of the pro-capitalist republicans and communists that introduced censorship). Both movements were fighting a life-and-death struggle against communist, fascist and pro-capitalist armies and so this defence of freedom of expression, given the circumstances, is particularly noteworthy.

Freedom of speech, like freedom of association, applies to all groups (including, of course, religious ones). The only exception would be, as Goldman noted, for organisations which are actively fighting to enslave a free society. In other words, during a social revolution it is unlikely that freedom of speech and organisation would apply to those supporting the counter-revolutionary forces. As the threat of violence by these forces decreases, so the freedom of their supporters would increase.

It is in this context we must discuss what some could point to as an example of anarchists denying freedom of speech and association, namely the burning of churches during the Spanish Revolution. In fact, some would use this as evidence of anarchist intolerance of religion and to those who disagree with them. Anarchists reject such charges.

As is well known, after the successful defeat of the fascist-military coup in mid-July 1936, Catholic Churches were burned and members of the Catholic Church were killed. However, these acts were **not** acts against freedom of religion or speech. Rather they are popular acts against both the oppressive and reactionary role of the Catholic Church in Spanish society as well as its active support for fascism throughout the 1920s and



improving products and services, ensuring that syndicates produce what is required by consumers. Environment groups would exist to watch production and make sure that it is not creating damaging side effects and informing both syndicates and communes of their findings. Feminist, homosexual, bisexual and anti-racist groups would exist to put their ideas across, highlighting areas in which social hierarchies and prejudice still existed. All across society, people would be associating together to express themselves and convince others of their ideas on all kinds of issues.

This applies to professional groupings who would seek to ensure that those work tasks that require qualifications to do (medicine and such like) have recognised standards and certificates. In this way, others in society would know whether a fellow worker is a recognised expert in their field and has the appropriate qualifications to do the work required or give advice. While a free society would break down the line between intellectual and manual work, ensure the end of the division of labour, the fact remains that people will wish to be happy that the doctor or nurse they are visiting knows what they are doing. This is where professional groupings would come into play, organising training and certification based on mutually agreed standards and qualifications. This would not stop others seeking to practice such tasks, of course, but it will mean that few, if any, would frequent someone without the recognised professional standards.

Hence in a anarchist society, free association would take on a stronger and more positive role than under capitalism. In this way, social life would take on many dimensions, and the individual would have the choice of thousands of societies to join to meet his or her interests or create new ones with other like-minded people. Anarchists would be the last to deny that there is more to life than work!

to have a truly free and fulfilling life. Therefore an anarchist society will see the development of numerous voluntary associations and groups to express these interests. For example, there would be consumer groups, musical groups, scientific associations, art associations, clubs, housing co-operatives and associations, craft and hobby guilds, fan clubs, animal rights associations, groups based around gender, sexuality, creed and colour and so forth. Associations will be created for all human interests and activities. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"He who wishes for a grand piano will enter the association of musical instrument makers. And by giving the association part of his half-days' leisure, he will soon possess the piano of his dreams. If he is fond of astronomical studies he will join the association of astronomers ... and he will have the telescope he desires by taking his share of the associated work ... In short, the five or seven hours a day which each will have at his disposal, after having consecrated several hours to the production of necessities, would amply suffice to satisfy all longings for luxury, however varied. Thousands of associations would undertake to supply them."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 120]

We can imagine, therefore, an anarchist society being based around associations and interest groups on every subject which fires the imagination of individuals and for which individuals want to meet in order to express and further their interests. Housing associations, for example, would exist to allow inhabitants to manage their local areas, design and maintain their homes and local parks and gardens. Vegetarian groups would produce information on issues they consider important, trying to convince others of the errors of eating meat. Consumer groups would be in dialogue with syndicates about



1930s, including Franco's coup. As historian Paul Preston summarises:

> *"religion was an issue which could be used to mobilise mass peasant support behind the interests of the oligarchy. Having lost the political hegemony in April 1931, the ruling classes clung all the more to the Church as one of the key redoubts of their social and economic dominance. Equally, the Church hierarchy, as a major landowner, had a somewhat similar view of the value of an alliance with the new political formation being created to defend oligarchical agrarian interests. Not surprisingly, throughout the Republic, the clergy used both pulpit and confessional to defend the existing socio-economic order and to make electoral propaganda for the successive political organisations of the Right."* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, pp. 42–3]

The Catholic Church *"was the bulwark of the country's conservative forces"* and no more than 15 days after the announcement of the Republic in 1931, the Primate of Spain *"issued a pastoral denouncing the new government's intention to establish freedom of worship and to separate Church and state. The cardinal urged Catholics to vote in future elections against an administration which in his view wanted to destroy religion."* [Antony Beevor, **The Battle for Spain**, p. 91 and p. 25] This opposition to the Republic and support for right-wing, near-fascist parties such as the CEDA, continued throughout the 1930s and climaxed with the Church's backing of Franco's coup.

Nor should it be forgotten that the *"Catholic press applauded the Nazi destruction of the German Socialist and Communist movements. Nazism was much admired on the Spanish Right because of its emphasis on authority, the fatherland and hierarchy — all three of which were central preoccupations of CEDA."*

It also *"urged its readers to follow the example of Italy and Germany and organise against the dragon of revolution"* while the Nazis *"signed a concordat with the Vatican"*. The CEDA would *"proceed to the establishment of an authoritarian regime of semi-fascist character along Austrian lines"*. So awareness of what had happened in Italy and Germany (with Church support) was keen in anarchist and other left-wing circles, particularly as the *"Spanish Right had not hidden its sympathy for the achievements of Hitler and Mussolini. The CEDA had many of the trappings of a fascist organisation"* and its leader *"had declared his determination to establish a corporative state in Spain."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 69, p. 72, p. 120 and p. 121] As one Catholic writer, Francois Mauriac, put it *"Christianity and fascism have become intermingled, and [many] cannot hate one without hating the other."* [quoted Antony Beevor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 270]

Given all this, the attacks on the Catholic Church really comes as no surprise. If, after an attempted fascist coup, people burned down the offices of the fascist and pro-fascist parties few people would be surprised. Why should a pro-fascist church be considered immune to such popular anger? As George Orwell pointed out:

*"No one can blame [someone] for being angry when churches are burned and priests murdered or driven into exile. But I think it is a pity that he has not looked more deeply into the reasons why these things happen."* [**Orwell in Spain**, p. 314]

Unsurprisingly, then, those priests who had not supported the right, those who had treated the working class the same as the rich, were spared. In the Basque Country, where the church supported the Republic, not a single church was burnt. Nor were synagogues or Protestant church targeted. In Barcelona *"the Quakers established canteens which were staffed by refugee women."* [Gabriel Jackson, **The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–1939**, p. 446]



When the soviets were formed in Petrograd and other Russian cities in 1917 the initiative had come (unlike in 1905) from political parties and these ensured that they had representatives from political parties within their executive committees (as distinct from elected delegates who happened to be members of a political party). This was how, for example, *"high party leaders became voting delegates"* in the soviets, by being *"selected by the leadership of each political organisation, and not by the soviet assembly itself."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 31] Thus the Makhnovists were rejecting the means by which many soviet members were not directly elected by actual workers.

In addition, the Makhnovists were following the Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists who argued for *"effective soviets organised on collective lines with the direct delegation of workers and peasants .. . and not political chatterboxes gaining entry through party lists and turning the soviets into talking-shops"*. [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, Paul Avrich (ed.), p. 118] This use of party lists meant that soviet delegates could be anyone. For example, the leading left-wing Menshevik Martov recounted that in early 1920 a chemical factory *"put up Lenin against me as a candidate [to the Moscow soviet]. I received seventy-six votes he — eight (in an open vote)."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 202] How would either of these two intellectuals actually know and reflect the concerns and interests of the workers they would be "delegates" of? If the soviets were meant to be the delegates of working people, then why should non-working class members of political parties be elected as mandated and recallable delegates to a soviet from a workplace they have never visited except, perhaps, to gather votes?

This applies, needless to say, to other areas of life. Anarchists do not think that social life can be reduced to political and economic associations alone. Individuals have many different interests and desires which they must express in order

> *one day the Bolshevik idea succeeds among the workers, the Revolutionary Military Council ... will necessarily be replaced by another organisation, 'more revolutionary' and more Bolshevik."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 103–4]

As such, the Makhnovists supported the right of working-class self-determination, as expressed by one delegate to a conference in February 1919:

> *"No party has a right to usurp governmental power into its hands ... We want life, all problems, to be decided locally, not by order from any authority above; and all peasants and workers should decide their own fate, while those elected should only carry out the toilers' wish."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

It should be mentioned that a myth has sprung up fostered by some Leninists that parties were banned from election to these bodies (for example, see Jason Yanowitz's terrible *"On the Makhno Myth"* [**International Socialist Review**, no. 53]). These claims flow from basic ignorance of how the soviets were organised during the revolution combined with a misunderstanding of this Makhnovist proclamation from January 1920:

> *"Only workers participating in work vital to the people's economy should be elected to these soviets. The representatives of political organisations have no place in the soviets of workers and peasants given that their participation in a soviet could turn it into a soviet of party political deputies, thereby leading the soviet order to perdition."* [quoted by Alexandre Skirda, **Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack**, p. 164]



It should also be stressed that the repression in the fascist zone was much worse than that in the Republican one. Of a ecclesiastical community of 115,000, 6,845 were killed (*"the vast majority during the summer of 1936"*). This is in stark contrast to right-wing claims at the time. It should be mentioned that in the province of Seville, the fascist repression killed 8,000 during 1936 alone. In Cordoba, 10,000 were killed during the war — a tenth of the population. Once an area was captured by nationalist forces, after the initial killing of captured troops, union and party leaders, a *"second and more intense wave of slaughter would begin"* (*"in fact anyone who was even suspected of having voted for the Popular Front was in danger"*). This was organised by *"local committees, usually consisting of leading right-wingers, such as the major landowner, the local Civil Guard commander, a Falangist and quite often the priest"*. This was *"clearly not just a question of revenge, they were also motivated by the idea of establishing a reign of terror"*. This did not, of course, hinder *"the unqualified backing of the Vatican and the Spanish Church for General Franco"* while *"the Catholic press abroad sprang to the support of the nationalist rising"*. Obviously killing (many, many more) left-wingers in the name of god is of no concern to the Catholic hierarchy nor did it stop *"the Church's official support for Franco"*. [Beevor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 92, p. 101, p. 99, p. 104, p. 250, p. 269 and p. 270]

Under Franco, everyone had to *"submit themselves to the authority of the Church as well as to their temporal masters. Franco had been extremely generous in restoring all the Church's privileges and wealth, as well as its power in education, but in return he expected the priesthood to act virtually as another arm of the state."* In other words, *"Nationalist Spain was little more than an open prison for all those who did not sympathise with the regime"* and the *"population was encouraged to accuse people as part of its patriotic duty. Concierges and caretakers became police spies ... and priests noted those who did not turn up to mass."* [Beevor,

**Op. Cit.**, p. 452, p. 453 and p. 454] All with the firm support of the Catholic Church.

Rather than an attempt to repress religion as such, the attacks on the Catholic Church in republican areas it was a product of popular hostility to a corrupt institution, one which was deeply reactionary, pro-fascist and a major landowner in its own right. This means that an awareness of the nature and role of the Church *"does not leave much doubt as to why practically all the churches in Catalonia and eastern Aragon were burnt at the outbreak of war."* The anti-clerical movement was a *"popular movement and a native Spanish movement. It has its roots not in Marx or Bakunin, but in the condition of the Spanish people themselves."* [Orwell, **Op. Cit.**, p. 300 and p. 315] While under Franco *"the relentless purging of 'reds and atheists' was to continue for years"* in the Republican areas *"the worse of the violence was mainly a sudden and quickly spent reaction of suppressed fear, exacerbated by desires of revenge for the past."* [Beevor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

So the burning of churches in Spain had very little to do with anarchist atheism and much, much more to do with the Catholic Church's social role in Spain, its reactionary position, its hatred of the unions and social protest and the fact it supported the fascist coup. It does not imply an opposition to freedom of speech by libertarian socialists but was rather an expression of popular opposition to a ruling class and pro-fascist organisation.

One last point to make on this issue. Given the actual role of the Church during this period and its wholehearted support for fascism in the 1920s onwards, it seems strange that the Catholic church has declared the murdered priests in Spain to be martyrs, part of a planned religious persecution. This is not true, if they were martyrs then they were martyrs to their pro-fascist politics and not their faith (*"The political role of the Church was ignored when the religious victims were made into martyrs"*). Significantly, the Catholic Church *"said nothing when the nation-*



*the freedom of the masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them. What we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal, official."* [quoted by Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 51] It is only when representative government replaces self-management that political debate results in "elected dictatorship" and centralisation of power into the hands of one party which claims to speak for the whole of society, as if the latter had one mind.

This freedom of political association has existed in every anarchist revolution. During the Russian Revolution, the Makhnovists organised soviets and regional congresses at every opportunity and these saw delegates elected who were members of different political parties. For example, members of the socialist Left-SR party were active in the Makhnovist movement and attended soviet congresses (for example, the resolution of the February 1919 congress *"was written by the anarchists, left Socialist Revolutionaries, and the chairman."* [Michael Palij, **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921**, p. 155]). The Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet created at the Aleksandrovsk congress in late 1919 had three Communists elected to it while there were 18 delegates from workers at that congress, six being Mensheviks and the remaining 12 included Communists [Micheal Malet, **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 111 and p. 124] In the words of the Makhnovist reply to Bolshevik attempt to ban one of their congresses:

> *"The Revolutionary Military Council ... holds itself above the pressure and influence of all parties and only recognises the people who elected it. Its duty is to accomplish what the people have instructed it to do, and to create no obstacles to any left socialist party in the propagation of ideas. Consequently, if*

*cipals, without supplanting them or acting in their place.*

*"The same might be said of all decisions reached in the union: all are restricted to a definite and specific act, whereas in democracy, election implies that the elected candidate has been issued by his [or her] elector with a carte blanche empowering him [or her] to decide and do as he [or she] pleases, in and on everything, without even the hindrance of the quite possibly contrary views of his [or her] principals, whose opposition, in any case, no matter how pronounced, is of no consequence until such time as the elected candidate's mandate has run its course.*

*"So there cannot be any possible parallels, let alone confusion, between trade union activity and participation in the disappointing chores of politics."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 67–68]

In other words, when individuals are elected to administrative posts they are elected to carry out their mandate, **not** to carry out their party's programme. Of course, if the individuals in question had convinced their fellow workers and citizens that their programme was correct, then this mandate and the programme would be identical. However this is unlikely in practice. We would imagine that the decisions of collectives and communes would reflect the complex social interactions and diverse political opinions their members and of the various groupings within the association.

Anarchism will likely contain many different political groupings and ideas. The relative influence of these within collectives and communes would reflect the strength of their arguments and the relevance of their ideas, as would be expected in a free society. As Bakunin argued: *"The abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we vindicate*



*alists shot sixteen of the Basque clergy, including the arch-priest of Mondragon"* (the nationalists also killed some twenty Protestant ministers). In 2003 when John Paul II beatified a teacher killed in July 1936 he *"still made no mention of the Basque priests killed by the nationalists."* [Beevor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 270, p. 92 and p. 527] Clearly a priest being murdered by fascists backed by the Vatican is ineligible for sainthood.

Given the actual role of the Catholic Church during this period it is surprising the Catholic hierarchy would seek to bring attention to it. Perhaps it is confidant that the media will not mention these awkward facts, although this context explains the deaths and church-burning in 1936. As we noted in section A.2.18, it appears that killing working class people is not worthy of comment but assassinating members of the ruling elite (and its servants) is. So the fact that the burning of churches and killing of clergy is well known but the pro-fascist activities of the church (a product of both its reactionary politics and position in the ruling elite) which provoked it is not should come as no surprise.

In summary, then, a free society would have substantial freedom of speech along with other fundamental freedoms (including freedom of worship and of association). Such freedoms would be respected, supported and encouraged for all shades of political opinion, from the left through to the right. The only exception would be if an organisation were **actively** supporting those seeking to impose their rule on a free people and in such cases some restrictions may be decided upon (their nature would depend on the state of the struggle, with them decreasing as the danger decreased).

To those who claim that refusing freedom of speech to counter-revolutionaries equates to statism or implies a contradiction in libertarian ideas, anarchists would reply that such arguments are flawed. In terms of the former, it is equating state imposed censorship with the active disobedience of a free people. Rather than the government imposing a ban, members

of a free society would simply discuss the issue at hand and, if considered appropriate, actively and collectively boycott those supporting attempts to enslave them. Without electricity, paper, distribution networks and so on, reactionaries would find it hard to publish or broadcast. As for the latter, there is no contradiction as it is hardly contradictory to support and encourage freedom while, at the same time, resisting attempts to enslave you! As such, this suggestion makes the same logical error Engels made in his diatribe against anarchism, namely considering it "authoritarian" to destroy authority (see section H.4.7). Similarly, it is hardly authoritarian to resist those seeking to impose their authority on you or their supporters! This perspective seems to assume that the true "libertarian" approach is to let others impose their rule on you as stopping them is "authoritarian"! A truly strange way of understanding our ideas…

To conclude, based upon both theory and practice, we can say that anarchism will not endanger freedom of expression. Indeed, by breaking up the capitalist oligopoly which currently exists and introducing workers' self-management of the media, a far wider range of opinions will become available in a free society. Rather than reflect the interests of a wealthy elite, the media would reflect the interests of society as a whole and the individuals and groups within it.

## I.5.10 What about political parties, interest groups and professional bodies?

Political parties and other interest groups will exist in an anarchist society as long as people feel the need to join them. They will not be banned in any way, and their members will have the same rights as everyone else. Individuals who are members of political parties or associations can take part in



communal and other assemblies and try to convince others of the soundness of their ideas.

However, there is a key difference between such activity and politics under a capitalist democracy. This is because the elections to positions of responsibility in an anarchist society will not be based on party tickets nor will it involve the delegation of power. Emile Pouget's description of the difference between the syndicalist union and political elections drives this difference home:

> *"The constituent part of the trade union is the individual. Except that the union member is spared the depressing phenomenon manifest in democratic circles where, thanks to the veneration of universal suffrage, the trend is towards the crushing and diminution of the human personality. In a democratic setting, the elector can avail of his [or her] will only in order to perform an act of abdication: his role is to 'award' his 'vote' to the candidate whom he [or she] wishes to have as his [or her] 'representative.'*
>
> *"Affiliation to the trade union has no such implication … In joining the union, the worker merely enters into a contract — which he may at any time abjure — with comrades who are his equals in will and potential … In the union, say, should it come to the appointment of a trade union council to take charge of administrative matters, such 'selection' is not to be compared with 'election': the form of voting customarily employed in such circumstances is merely a means whereby the labour can be divided and is not accompanied by any delegation of authority. The strictly prescribed duties of the trade union council are merely administrative. The council performs the task entrusted to it, without ever overruling its prin-*

revolution. Far from it. While they embodied such key libertarian principles as workers' self-management, they were fundamentally a product of both anarchist ideas **and** the specific situation in which they were created. Rather than seek a market system of producer co-operatives, the CNT was committed to the full socialisation of the economy and the creation of libertarian communism. The collectives were, as a result, seen as development towards that goal rather than as an end in themselves. Moreover, as historian Ronald Fraser notes, it *"was doubtful that the CNT had seriously envisaged collectivisation of industry ... before this time."* [**The Blood of Spain**, p. 212] CNT policy was opposed to the collectivisation decree of the Catalonian government, for example, which formalised (and controlled) the spontaneous gains of the revolution as expressed by the collectives.

Therefore, the collectives were (initially) a form of *"self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates."* In other words, the revolution saw the abolition of wage-labour but not of the wages system. Thus capitalism was replaced by mutualism, not the socialism desired by most anarchists (namely libertarian communism). As economic and political development are closely related, the fact that the CNT did not carry out the **political** aspect of the revolution meant that the revolution in the economy was doomed to failure. As Leval stressed, in *"the industrial collectives, especially in the large towns, matters proceeded differently as a consequence of contradictory factors and of opposition created by the co-existence of social currents emanating from different social classes."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 227–8 and p. 227]

That the initial forms of the revolution were not as expected should, perhaps, be unsurprising. After all, no social transformation ever exactly matches the hopes of those who had advo-



local community could act to stop or, if need be, close down the workplace). Thus use rights (or usufruct) replace property rights in a free society, combined with a strong dose of *"think globally, act locally."*

It is no coincidence that societies that are stateless are also without private property. As Murray Bookchin pointed out *"an individual appropriation of goods, a personal claim to tools, land, and other resources ... is fairly common in organic [i.e. aboriginal] societies ... By the same token, co-operative work and the sharing of resources on a scale that could be called communistic is also fairly common ... But primary to both of these seemingly contrasting relationships is the practice of **usufruct.**"* Such stateless societies are based upon *"the principle of **usufruct**, the freedom of individuals in a community to appropriate resources merely by the virtue of the fact they are using them ... Such resources belong to the user as long as they are being used. Function, in effect, replaces our hallowed concept of possession."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 116] The future stateless society anarchists hope for would also be based upon such a principle.

In effect, critics of social anarchism confuse property with possession and think that abolishing property automatically abolishes possession and use rights. However, as argued in section B.3, property and possession are distinctly different. In the words of Charlotte Wilson:

> *"**Property** is the **domination** of an individual, or a coalition of individuals, over things; it is not the claim of any person or persons to the use of things — this is, usufruct, a very different matter. Property means the monopoly of wealth, the right to prevent others using it, whether the owner needs it or not. Usufruct implies the claim to the use of such wealth as supplies the users needs. If any individual shuts of a portion of it (which he is not using, and does not need for his own use) from his fellows, he is defraud-*

*ing the whole community."* [**Anarchist Essays**, p. 40]

Thus an anarchist society has a simple and effective means of deciding how communally owned resources are used, one based on possession and usufruct. The key thing to remember, as discussed in section I.3.3, is that socialisation means that **access** is free: users of a resource are not subjected to hierarchical social relationships in order to use it. Socialisation does not mean that people can, say, wander into someone's workplace and simply take away a machine or computer. Rather, it means that when someone joins a workplace they are sharing in the use of a common resource and do so as a free and equal associate rather than as an obedient wage-slave. If a resource is not being used, then they have free access to use it. If it is being used then it will be managed by those who use it, with access granted in agreed ways which ensure egalitarian, and so free, relationships and outcomes.

As for deciding what a given area of commons is used for, that falls to the local communities who live next to them. If, for example, a local self-managed factory wants to expand and eat into the commons, then the local community who uses (and so controls) the local commons would discuss it and come to an agreement concerning it. If a minority **really** objects, they can use direct action to put their point across. But anarchists argue that rational debate among equals will not result in too much of that. Or suppose an individual wanted to set up an allotment in a given area, which had not been allocated as a park. Then he or she would notify the community assembly by appropriate means (e.g. on a notice board or newspaper), and if no one objected at the next assembly or in a set time-span, the allotment would go ahead, as no one else desired to use the resource in question.

Other communities would be confederated with this one, and joint activity would also be discussed by debate, with a



ministrative staff who were mandated to implement the decisions of the assembly and who had to report back, and were accountable, to that assembly. For example, in Castellon de la Plana *"[e]very month the technical and administrative council presented the general assembly of the Syndicate with a report which was examined and discussed if necessary, and finally introduced when this majority thought it of use. Thus all the activities were known and controlled by all the workers. We find here a practical example of libertarian democracy."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 303] Power rested at the base of the collective, with *"all important decisions [being] taken by the general assemblies of the workers"* which *"were widely attended and regularly held ... if an administrator did something which the general assembly had not authorised, he was likely to be deposed at the next meeting."* An example of this process can be seen from the Casa Rivieria company. After the defeat of the army coup *"a control committee (Comite de Control) was named by the Barcelona Metal Workers' Union to take over temporary control of the enterprises ... A few weeks after July 19th, there was the first general assembly of the firm's workers ... It elected an enterprise committee (Comite de Empresa) to take control of the firm on a more permanent basis... . Each of the four sections of the firm — the three factories and the office staff — held their own general assemblies at least once a week. There they discussed matters ranging from the most important affairs to the most trivial."* [Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 469 and p. 532]

In summary, the collectives in Spain were marked by workplace self-management. They successfully implemented the long-standing libertarian goal of turning industry from an autocracy to a democracy, of replacing wage-labour with free-labour based on the association of equals (see section I.3.1). However, it would be a mistake to assume (as many do, particularly Marxists) that the CNT and FAI considered the creation of self-managed collectives as the end of the

*on a day-to-day basis."* [**Free Women of Spain**, p. 100]

The collectives were based on workers' democratic self-management of their workplaces, using productive assets that were under the custodianship of the entire working community and administered through federations of workers' associations:

> *"The collectives organised during the Spanish Civil War were workers' economic associations without private property. The fact that collective plants were managed by those who worked in them did not mean that these establishments became their private property. The collective had no right to sell or rent all or any part of the collectivised factory or workshop. The rightful custodian was the CNT, the National Confederation of Workers Associations. But not even the CNT had the right to do as it pleased. Everything had to be decided and ratified by the workers themselves through conferences and congresses."* [Augustin Souchy, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 67]

In Catalonia *"every factory elected its administrative committee composed of its most capable workers. Depending on the size of the factory, the function of these committees included inner plant organisation, statistics, finance, correspondence, and relations with other factories and with the community ... Several months after collectivisation the textile industry of Barcelona was in far better shape than under capitalist management. Here was yet another example to show that grass roots socialism from below does not destroy initiative. Greed is not the only motivation in human relations."* [Souchy, **Op. Cit.**, p 95]

Thus the individual collective was based on a mass assembly of those who worked there. This assembly nominated ad-



community (like an individual) being free **not** to associate if they so desire. Other communities could and would object to ecologically and individually destructive practices. The interrelationships of both ecosystems and freedom is well known, and its doubtful that free individuals would sit back and let some amongst them destroy **their** planet.

Therefore, those who use something control it. This means that "users groups" would be created to manage resources used by more than one person. For workplaces this would (essentially) be those who worked there (with, possibly, the input of consumer groups and co-operatives). Housing associations made up of tenants would manage housing and repairs. Resources that are used by associations within society, such as communally owned schools, workshops, computer networks, and so forth, would be managed on a day-to-day basis by those who use them. User groups would decide access rules (for example, time-tables and booking rules) and how they are used, making repairs and improvements. Such groups would be accountable to their local community. Hence, if that community thought that any activities by a group within it was destroying communal resources or restricting access to them, the matter would be discussed at the relevant assembly. In this way, interested parties manage their own activities and the resources they use (and so would be very likely to have an interest in ensuring their proper and effective use), but without private property and its resulting hierarchies and restrictions on freedom.

Lastly, let us examine clashes of use rights, i.e. cases where two or more people, communes or syndicates desire to use the same resource. In general, such problems can be resolved by discussion and decision making by those involved. This process would be roughly as follows: if the contesting parties are reasonable, they would probably mutually agree to allow their dispute to be settled by some mutual friend whose judgement they could trust, or they would place it in the hands of a jury, ran-

domly selected from the community or communities in question. This would take place only if they could not come to an agreement between themselves to share the resource in question.

On thing is certain, however, such disputes are much better settled without the interference of authority or the re-creation of private property. If those involved do not take the sane course described above and instead decide to set up an authority, disaster will be the inevitable result. In the first place, this authority will have to be given power to enforce its judgement in such matters. If this happens, the new authority will undoubtedly keep for itself the best of what is disputed (as payment for services rendered, of course!). If private property were re-introduced, such authoritarian bodies would develop sooner, rather than later, with two new classes of oppressors being created — the property owners and the enforcers of "justice." Ultimately, it is strange to think that two parties who meet on terms of equality and disagree could not be reasonable or just, and that a third party with power backed up by violence will be the incarnation of justice itself. Common sense should warn us against such an illusion and, if common sense is lacking, then history shows that using authority or property to solve disputes is not wise!

And, we should note, it is equally as fallacious, as Leninists suggest, that only centralisation can ensure common access and common use. Centralisation, by removing control from the users into a body claiming to represent "society", replaces the dangers of abuse by a small group of workers with the dangers of abuse by a bureaucracy invested with power and authority over **all**. If members of a commune or syndicate can abuse their position and restrict access for their own benefit, so can the individuals who make up the bureaucracy gathered round a centralised body (whether that body is, in theory, accountable by election or not). Indeed, it is far more likely to occur as the experience of Leninism shows beyond doubt. Thus



*with a sustained revolutionary **elan** should initially be sought in the very nature of the anarchist conception of society and of how to achieve revolution."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 78 and p. 65]

It was the revolutionary nature of the CNT that created a militant membership who were willing and able to use direct action to defend their liberty. Unlike the Marxist led German workers, organised in a centralised fashion and trained in the obedience required by hierarchy, who did nothing to stop Hitler, the Spanish working class (like their comrades in anarchist unions in Italy) took to the streets to stop fascism.

The revolution in Spain did not "just happen"; it was the result of nearly seventy years of persistent anarchist agitation and revolutionary struggle, including a long series of strikes, protests, boycotts, uprisings and other forms of direct action that prepared the peasants and workers organise popular resistance to the attempted fascist coup in July 1936 and to take control of society when they had defeated it in the streets.

## I.8.3 How were Spanish industrial collectives organised?

Martha A. Ackelsberg gives us an excellent short summary of how the industrial collectives where organised:

> *"Pre-existing structures of worker organisation made possible a workers' take-over of much of the industrial economy, especially in Catalonia ... Factory committees formed to direct production and co-ordinate with other units within the same industry. Union organisations co-ordinated both the production and distribution of manufactured goods across industries and regions ... In most collectivised industries, general assemblies of workers decided policy, while elected committees managed affairs*

the revolution). Thus the process of self-managed struggle and direct action prepared people for the necessities of the social revolution and the an anarchist society — it built, as Bakunin argued, the seeds of the future in the present.

In other words, *"the route to radicalisation ... came from direct involvement in struggle and in the design of alternative social institutions."* Every strike and action empowered those involved and created a viable alternative to the existing system. For example, while the strikes and food protests in Barcelona at the end of the First World War *"did not topple the government, patterns of organisation established then provided models for the anarchist movement for years to follow."* [Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, *"Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women"*, pp. 151–176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, p. 164] The same could be said of every strike, which confirmed Bakunin's and Kropotkin's stress on the strike as not only creating class consciousness and confidence but also the structures necessary to not only fight capitalism, but to replace it.

In summary, then, anarchism gained mass support by anarchists participating in mass struggles and movements, showing that its ideas and ideals were applicable to working class experiences. In fact, to even wonder why anarchism gained support in Spain is, to some degree, to implicitly assume, with Marxists of various shades, that only state socialism reflects the needs of working class people. Discussing the question why the social democratic or Communist movements did not replace anarchism in Spain, historian J. Romero Maura correctly pointed out that this *"is based on the false assumption that the anarcho-syndicalist conception of the workers' struggle in pre-revolutionary society was completely at odds with what the **real** social process signified (hence the constant reference to 'religious' 'messianic' models as explanations)."* After discussing and refuting five common suggestions for the success of anarchism in Spain, he concluded that the *"explanation of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism's success in organising a mass movement*



**decentralisation** is the key to common ownership and access, **not** centralisation.

Communal ownership needs communal structures in order to function. Use rights, and discussion among equals, replace property rights in a free society. Freedom cannot survive if it is caged behind laws enforced by public or private states.

## I.6.2 Doesn't communal ownership involve restricting individual liberty?

This point is expressed in many different forms. John Henry MacKay (an individualist anarchist) put the point as follows:

> *"'Would you [the social anarchist], in the system of society which you call 'free Communism' prevent individuals from exchanging their labour among themselves by means of their own medium of exchange? And further: Would you prevent them from occupying land for the purpose of personal use?' ... [The] question was not to be escaped. If he answered 'Yes!' he admitted that society had the right of control over the individual and threw overboard the autonomy of the individual which he had always zealously defended; if on the other hand he answered 'No!' he admitted the right of private property which he had just denied so emphatically."* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 31]

However, anarchist theory has a simple and clear answer to this question. To see what this answer is, it simply a case of remembering that use rights replace property rights in an anarchist society. In other words, individuals can exchange their labour as they see fit and occupy land for their own use. This in no way contradicts the abolition of private property, because occupancy and use is directly opposed to private property (see

section B.3). Socialisation is rooted in this concept of *"occupancy and use"* and this means that in a free communist society individuals can occupy and use whatever land and such tools and equipment as they need — they do not have to join the free communist society (see section I.5.7). If they do not, however, they cannot place claims on the benefits others receive from co-operation and communal life.

This can be seen from Charlotte Wilson's discussions on anarchism written a few years before MacKay published his *"inescapable"* question. She asks the question: *"Does Anarchism ... then ... acknowledge ... no personal property?"* She answers by noting that *"every man [or woman] is free to take what he [or she] requires"* and so *"it is hardly conceivable that personal necessaries and conveniences will not be appropriated"* by individual's for their personal consumption and use. For *"[w]hen property is protected by no legal enactments, backed by armed force, and is unable to buy personal service, its resuscitation on such a scale as to be dangerous to society is little to be dreaded. The amount appropriated by each individual .. . must be left to his [or her] own conscience, and the pressure exercised upon him [or her] by the moral sense and distinct interests of his [or her] neighbours."* This system of *"usufruct"* would also apply to the *"instruments of production — land included"*, being *"free to all workers, or groups of workers"* for *"as long as long and capital are unappropriated, the workers are free, and that, when these have a master, the workers also are slaves."* [**Anarchist Essays**, p. 24 and p. 21] This is because, as with all forms of anarchism, communist-anarchism bases itself on the distinction between property and possession.

In other words, **possession** replaces private property in a free society. This applies to those who decide to join a free communist society and those who desire to remain outside. This is clear from the works of many leading theorists of free communism (as indicated in section G.2.1), none of whom thought the occupying of land for personal use (or a house or the means of



and decision making from the bottom up (*"The CNT tradition was to discuss and examine everything"*, as one militant put it). In addition, the CNT created a viable and practical example of an alternative method by which society could be organised. A method which was based on the ability of ordinary people to direct society themselves and which showed in practice that special ruling authorities are undesirable and unnecessary. This produced a revolutionary working class the likes of which the world has rarely seen. As Jose Peirats pointed out, *"above the union level, the CNT was an eminently political organisation ..., a social and revolutionary organisation for agitation and insurrection."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 239] The CNT was organised in such a way as to encourage solidarity and class consciousness. Its organisation was based on the **sindicato unico** (one union) which united all workers of the same workplace in the same union. Instead of organising by trade, and so dividing the workers into numerous different unions, the CNT united all workers in a workplace into the same organisation, all trades, skilled and unskilled, were in a single organisation and so solidarity was increased and encouraged as well as increasing their fighting power by eliminating divisions within the workforce. All the unions in an area were linked together into a local federation, the local federations into a regional federation and so on. As J. Romero Maura argued, the *"territorial basis of organisation linkage brought all the workers from one area together and fomented working-class solidarity over and above corporate [industry or trade] solidarity."* [**Op. Cit.**p. 75]

Thus the structure of the CNT encouraged class solidarity and consciousness. In addition, being based on direct action and self-management, the union ensured that working people became accustomed to managing their own struggles and acting for themselves, directly. This prepared them to manage their own personal and collective interests in a free society (as seen by the success of the self-managed collectives created in

*the vast majority worked in agriculture, agricultural workers' unions came to be identified with the community as a whole ... anarchism ... show[ed] that the demands of agricultural workers and proletarians could be combined with community support to create an insurrectionary situation ... It would be a mistake ... to argue that 'village anarchism' in Andalusia was distinct from militant unionism, or that the movement was a surrogate religion."* [**Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868–1903**, p. 211, p. 207 and pp. 204–5]

The Spanish anarchists, before and after the CNT was formed, fought in and out of the factory for economic, social and political issues. This refusal of the anarchists to ignore any aspect of life ensured that they found many willing to hear their message, a message based around the ideas of individual liberty. Such a message could do nothing but radicalise workers for *"the demands of the CNT went much further than those of any social democrat: with its emphasis on true equality,* ***autogestion*** *[self-management] and working class dignity, anarchosyndicalism made demands the capitalist system could not possibly grant to the workers."* [J. Romero Maura, *"The Spanish case"*, pp. 60–83, **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 79]

Strikes, due to the lack of strike funds, depended on mutual aid to be won, which fostered a strong sense of solidarity and class consciousness in the CNT membership. Strikes did not just involve workers. For example, workers in Jerez responded to bosses importing workers from Malaga *"with a weapon of their own — a boycott of those using strike-breakers. The most notable boycotts were against landowners near Jerez who also had commercial establishments in the city. The workers and their wives refused to buy there, and the women stationed themselves nearby to discourage other shoppers."* [Mintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

The structure and tactics of the CNT encouraged the politicisation, initiative and organisational skills of its members. It was a federal, decentralised body, based on direct discussion



production) entailed the *"right of private property."* For example, looking at land we find both Kropotkin and Proudhon arguing along the same lines. For the former: *"Who, then, can appropriate for himself the tiniest plot of ground ... without committing a flagrant injustice?"* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 90] For the latter: *"The land cannot be appropriated"*. Neither denied that individuals could **use** the land or other resources, simply that it could not be turned into private property. Thus Proudhon: *"Every occupant is, then, necessarily a possessor or usufructuary, — a function that excludes proprietorship."* [**What is Property?**, p. 103 and p. 98] Obviously John Henry MacKay, unlike Kropotkin, had not read his Proudhon! As Wilson argued:

> *"Proudhon's famous dictum, 'Property is theft', is the key to the equally famous enigma ... 'From each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs'. When the workers clearly understand that in taking possession of railways and ships, mines and fields, farm buildings and factories, raw material and machinery, and all else they need for their labour, they are claiming the right to use freely for the benefit of society, what social labour has created, or utilised in the past, and that, in return for their work, they have a just right to take from the finished product whatever they personally require."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 20–1]

This can be seen from libertarian communist William Morris and his account of Proudhon. Morris classed the French anarchist as *"the most noteworthy figure"* of a group of *"Socialist thinkers who serve as a kind of link between the Utopians and the school of ... scientific Socialists."* As far as his critique of property went, Morris argued that in **What is Property?** Proudhon's *"position is that of a Communist pure and simple."* [**Political Writings**, p. 569 and p. 570]

Unsurprisingly, then, we find Kropotkin arguing that *"[a]ll things belong to all, and provided that men and women contribute their share of labour for the production of necessary objects, they are entitled to their share of all that is produced by the community at large."* He went on to state that *"free Communism ... places the products reaped or manufactured in common at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he [or she] pleases in his [or her] own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution,**, p. 6 and p. 7] This obviously implies a situation of *"occupancy and use"* (with those who are actually using a resource controlling it).

This support for possession does not, of course, imply any contradiction with communism as MacKay suggested. The aim of communism is to place the fruits of society at the disposal of society, to be used and consumed as the members of that society desire. As such, individuals are **not** stopped from taking and using the goods produced and, obviously, this automatically means "excluding" others from using and consuming them. This in no way implies the recreation of private property in any meaningful sense. Significantly, this perspective has been pretty commonplace in human society and numerous authors have pointed out *"how many languages lack any verb for unilateral ownership."* [David Graeber, **Possibilities**, p. 23]

For example, a group of friends go on a picnic and share the food stuffs they bring. If someone takes an apple from the common bounty and eats it, then obviously it is no longer available for others to eat. However, this does not change the common ownership of foodstuffs the picnic is based on. Similarly, in a communist society people would still have their own homes and, of course, would have the right to restrict entry to just those whom they have invited. People would not come in from the street and take up residence in the main bedroom on the dubious rationale that it is not being used as the inhabitant is watching TV in the lounge, is on holiday or visiting friends.



of around one million and the anarchist press covered all of Spain. In Barcelona the CNT published a daily, **Solidaridad Obrera** (Worker Solidarity), with a circulation of 30,000. The FAI's magazine **Tierra y Libertad** (Land and Liberty) had a circulation of 20,000. In Gijon there was **Vida Obrera** (Working Life), in Seville **El Productor** (The Producer) and in Saragossa **Accion y Cultura** (Action and Culture), each with a large circulation. There were many more.

As well as leading struggles, organising unions, and producing books, papers and periodicals, the anarchists also organised libertarian schools, cultural centres, co-operatives, anarchist groups (the FAI), youth groups (the Libertarian Youth) and women's organisations (the Free Women movement). They applied their ideas in all walks of life and so ensured that ordinary people saw that anarchism was practical and relevant to them.

This was the great strength of the Spanish Anarchist movement. It was a movement *"that, in addition to possessing a revolutionary ideology [sic], was also capable of mobilising action around objectives firmly rooted in the life and conditions of the working class ... It was this ability periodically to identify and express widely felt needs and feelings that, together with its presence at community level, formed the basis of the strength of radical anarchism, and enabled it to build a mass base of support."* [Nick Rider, *"The practice of direct action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931"*, pp. 79–105, **For Anarchism**, David Goodway (Ed.), p. 99]

Historian Temma Kaplan stressed this in her work on the Andalusian anarchists. She argued that the anarchists were *"rooted in"* social life and created *"a movement firmly based in working-class culture."* They *"formed trade unions, affinity groups such as housewives' sections, and broad cultural associations such as workers' circles, where the anarchist press was read and discussed."* Their *"great strength ... lay in the merger of communal and militant trade union traditions. In towns where*

The Spanish Revolution also shows the importance of anarchist education and media. In a country with a very high illiteracy rate, huge quantities of literature on social revolution were disseminated and read out at meetings for those who could not read. Anarchist ideas were widely discussed: *"There were tens of thousands of books, pamphlets and tracts, vast and daring cultural and popular educational experiments (the Ferrer schools) that reached into almost every village and hamlet throughout Spain."* [Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 27] The discussion of political, economic and social ideas was continuous, and *"the centro [local union hall] became the gathering place to discuss social issues and to dream and plan for the future. Those who aspired to learn to read and write would sit around … studying."* [Mintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 160] One anarchist militant described it as follows:

> *"With what joy the orators were received whenever a meeting was held . .. We spoke that night about everything: of the ruling inequality of the regime and of how one had a right to a life without selfishness, hatred, without wars and suffering. We were called on another occasion and a crowd gathered larger than the first time. That's how the pueblo started to evolve, fighting the present regime to win something by which they could sustain themselves, and dreaming of the day when it would be possible to create that society some depict in books, others by word of mouth. Avid for learning, they read everything, debated, discussed, and chatted about the different modes of perfect social existence."* [Perez Cordon, quoted by Mintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 158]

Newspapers and periodicals were extremely important. By 1919, more than 50 towns in Andalusia had their own libertarian newspapers. By 1934 the CNT had a membership



Thus communism is based on the obvious fact that individuals will "appropriate" (use) the products of society to satisfy their own needs (assuming they can find someone who needs to produce it). What it does, though, is to deprive individuals of the ability to turn possession into private property and, as a result, subjugate others to their will by means of wage labour or landlordism.

In other words, possession (personal "property") is not transformed into social property. Hence the communist support for individuals **not** joining the commune, working their land or tools and living by their own hands. Being based on **possession**, this is utterly compatible with communist principles and the abolition of private property. This is because people are **using** the resources in question and for that simple reason are exercising the same rights as the rest of communist society. Thus the case of the non-member of free communism is clear — they would also have access to what they possessed and used such as the land, housing and means of production. The difference is that the non-communists would have to barter with the rest of society for goods rather than take what they need from the communal stores.

To re-iterate, the resources non-communists use do **not** become private property because they are being used and they revert back into common ownership once they are no longer occupied and used. In other words, **possession** replaces **property.** Thus communist-anarchists agree with Individualist Anarchist John Beverley Robinson when he wrote:

> *"There are two kinds of land ownership, proprietorship or property, by which the owner is absolute lord of the land to use it or hold it out of use, as it may please him; and possession, by which he is secure in the tenure of land which he uses and occupies, but has no claim on it at all if he ceases to use it. For the secure possession of his crops or buildings or other*

*products, he needs nothing but the possession of the land he uses."* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 273]

This system, we must note, was used in the rural collectives during the Spanish Revolution, with people free to remain outside the collective working only as much land and equipment as they could *"occupy and use"* by their own labour. Similarly, the individuals within the collective worked in common and took what they needed from the communal stores (see section I.8).

MacKay's comments raise another interesting point. Given that Individualist Anarchists oppose the current system of private property in land, **their** system entails that *"society ha[s] the right of control over the individual."* If we look at the *"occupancy and use"* land system favoured by the likes of Tucker, we discover that it is based on restricting property in land (and so the owners of land). As discussed in section G.1.2, the likes of Tucker looked forward to a time when public opinion (i.e., society) would limit the amount of land which individuals could acquire and so, from MacKay's perspective, controlling their actions and violating their autonomy. Which, we must say, is not surprising as individualism requires the supremacy of the rest of society over the individual in terms of rules relating to the ownership and use of possessions (or "property") — as the Individualist Anarchists themselves implicitly acknowledge.

MacKay goes on to state that *"every serious man must declare himself: for Socialism, and thereby for force and against liberty, or for Anarchism, and thereby for liberty and against force."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32] Which, we must note, is a strange statement for, as indicated in section G.1, individualist anarchists like Benjamin Tucker considered themselves socialists and opposed capitalist private property (while, confusingly, many of them calling their system of possession "property").

However, MacKay's statement begs the question: does private property support liberty? He does not address or even ac-



*intervene in the CNT from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants ... the decisions which determined the course taken by the CNT were taken under constant pressure from these militants."* Jose Campos noted that FAI militants *"tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occasions ... if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other FAI members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the **faista** in open assembly."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists**, p. 62]

This explains the success of anarchism in the CNT. Anarchist ideas, principles and tactics, submitted to the union assemblies, proved to be good ideas and were not thrown out. The structure of the organisation, in other words, decisively influenced the **content** of the decisions reached as ideas, tactics, union policy and so on were discussed by the membership and those which best applied to the members' lives were accepted and implemented. The CNT assemblies showed the validity of Bakunin's arguments for self-managed unions as a means of ensuring workers' control of their own destinies and organisations. As he put it, the union *"sections could defend their rights and their autonomy [against union bureaucracy] in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings ... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda were amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 247] The CNT was built on such *"popular assemblies,"* with the same radicalising effect. It showed, in practice, that bosses (capitalist as well as union ones) were not needed — workers can manage their own affairs directly. As a school for anarchism it could not be bettered as it showed that anarchist principles were not utopian. The CNT, by being based on workers' self-management of the class struggle, prepared its members for self-management of the revolution and the new society.

visited villages and peasants and landless agricultural workers came to industrial cities, like Barcelona, looking for work.

Therefore, from the start anarchism in Spain was associated with the labour movement (as Bakunin desired) and so anarchists had a practical area to apply their ideas and spread the anarchist message. By applying their principles in everyday life, the anarchists in Spain ensured that anarchist ideas became commonplace and accepted in a large section of the population.

This acceptance of anarchism cannot be separated from the structure and tactics of the CNT and its fore-runners. The practice of direct action and solidarity encouraged workers to rely on themselves, to identify and solve their own problems. The decentralised structure of the anarchist unions had an educational effect of their members. By discussing issues, struggles, tactics, ideals and politics in their union assemblies, the members of the union educated themselves and, by the process of self-management in the struggle, prepared themselves for a free society. The very organisational structure of the CNT ensured the dominance of anarchist ideas and the political evolution of the union membership. As one CNT militant from Casas Viejas put it, new members *"asked for too much, because they lacked education. They thought they could reach the sky without a ladder ... they were beginning to learn ... There was good faith but lack of education. For that reason we would submit ideas to the assembly, and the bad ideas would be thrown out."* [quoted by Jerome R. Mintz, **The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 27]

It was by working in the union meetings that anarchists influenced their fellow workers. The idea that the anarchists, through the FAI, controlled the CNT is a myth. Not all anarchists in the CNT were members of the FAI, for example. Almost all FAI members were also rank-and-file members of the CNT who took part in union meetings as equals. Anarchists were not members of the FAI indicate this. Jose Borras Casacarosa confirmed that *"[o]ne has to recognise that the FAI did not*



knowledge the fact that private property will inevitably lead to the owners of such property gaining control over the individuals who use, but do not own, it and so denying them liberty (see section B.4). As Proudhon argued:

> *"The purchaser draws boundaries, fences himself in, and says, 'This is mine; each one by himself, each one for himself.' Here, then, is a piece of land upon which, henceforth, no one has right to step, save the proprietor and his friends; which can benefit nobody, save the proprietor and his servants. Let these multiply, and soon the people .. . will have nowhere to rest, no place of shelter, no ground to till. They will die of hunger at the proprietor's door, on the edge of that property which was their birth-right; and the proprietor, watching them die, will exclaim, 'So perish idlers and vagrants.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 118]

Of course, as Proudhon suggested, the non-owner can gain access to the property by becoming a servant, by selling their liberty to the owner and agreeing to submit to the owner's authority. Little wonder that he argued that the *"second effect of property is despotism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259] As discussed in section G.4.1, this points to a massive contradiction in any form of individualist anarchism which defends private property which goes beyond possession and generates wage-labour. This is because both the state and the property owner **both** assume sole authority over a given area and all within it. Little wonder Emile Pouget, echoing Proudhon, argued that:

> *"Property and authority are merely differing manifestations and expressions of one and the same 'principle' which boils down to the enforcement and enshrinement of the servitude of man. Consequently, the only difference between them is one of vantage*

*point: viewed from one angle, slavery appears as a **property crime**, whereas, viewed from a different angle, it constitutes an **authority crime.**"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 66]

So the issue changes if someone claims more resources than they can use as individuals or as a co-operative group. If they are attempting to restrict access to others of resources they are not using then the others are entitled to simply ignore the pretensions of the would-be monopoliser. Without a state to enforce capitalist property rights, attempts to recreate private property will flounder in the laughter of their neighbours as these free people defend their liberty by ignoring the would-be capitalist's attempts to subjugate the labour of others for their own benefit by monopolising the means of life. Unsurprisingly, MacKay does not address the fact that private property requires extensive force (i.e. a state) to protect it against those who use it or could use it but do not own it.

So MacKay ignores two important aspects of private property. Firstly, that private property is based upon force, which must be used to ensure the owner's right to exclude others (the main reason for the existence of the state). And secondly, he ignores the anti-libertarian nature of "property" when it creates wage labour — the other side of "private property" — in which the liberty of employees is obviously restricted by the owners whose property they are hired to use. Unlike in a free communist society, in which members of a commune have equal rights, power and say within a self-managed association, under "private property" the owner of the property governs those who use it. When the owner and the user is identical, this is not a problem (i.e. when possession replaces property) but once possession becomes property then despotism, as Proudhon noted, is created. As Charlotte Wilson put it:

*"Property — not the claim to use, but to a right to prevent others from using — enables individuals who*



tries and cannot be dismissed as a product of industrial backwardness. The main strength lay of the anarchist movement was in urban areas and, unsurprisingly, the social revolution took place in both the most heavily industrialised areas as well as on the land.

## I.8.2 How were the anarchists able to obtain mass popular support in Spain?

Revolutionary anarchism was introduced in Spain in 1868 by Giuseppi Fanelli, an associate of Michael Bakunin, and found fertile soil among both the workers and the peasants. Those historians who gleefully note that Bakunin sent someone who did not speak Spanish to spread his message in Spain forget how close the Latin languages are to each other. Fanelli was more than able to be understood by his Spanish and Catalan speaking hosts who, it should be noted, were already familiar with Proudhon's ideas.

The key reason why Bakunin's ideas gained such ready support in Spain was that they reflected ideas that they had already developed themselves. The peasants supported anarchism because of the rural tradition of Iberian collectivism which had existed for generations. The urban workers supported it because its ideas of direct action, solidarity and free federation of unions corresponded to their needs in their struggle against capitalism and the state. Neither needed to be told that capitalism was oppressive and exploitative or that the state existed to defend this class system. In addition, many Spanish workers were well aware of the dangers of centralisation and the republican tradition in Spain was very much influenced by federalist ideas (coming, in part, from Proudhon's work as popularised by Pi y Margall, soon to become the President of the first Republic). The movement spread back and forth between countryside and cities as urban based union organisers and anarchist militants

Fraser, **The Blood of Spain**, p. 38] In Catalonia alone, 200,000 workers were employed in the textile industry and 70,000 in metal-working and machinery manufacturing. This was very different than the situation in Russia at the end of World War I, where the urban working class made up only 10% of the population.

Capitalist social relations had also penetrated the rural economy by the 1930s with agriculture oriented to the world market and approximately 90% of farm land in the hands of the bourgeoisie. [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37] So by 1936 agriculture was predominately capitalist, with Spanish agribusiness employing large numbers of labourers who either did not own enough land to support themselves or where landless. The labour movement in the Spanish countryside in the 1930s was precisely based on this large population of rural wage-earners (the socialist UGT land workers union had 451,000 members in 1933, 40% of its total membership, for example). In Russia at the time of the revolution of 1917, agriculture mostly consisted of small farms on which peasant families worked mainly for their own subsistence, bartering or selling their surplus.

Therefore the Spanish Revolution cannot be dismissed as a product a of pre-industrial society. The urban collectivisations occurred predominately in the most heavily industrialised part of Spain and indicate that anarchist ideas are applicable to modern societies Indeed, comforting Marxist myths aside, the CNT organised most of the unionised urban working class and, internally, agricultural workers were a minority of its membership (by 1936, the CNT was making inroads in Madrid, previously a socialist stronghold while the UGT main area of growth in the 1930s was with, ironically, rural workers). The revolution in Spain was the work (mostly) of rural and urban wage labourers (joined with poor peasants) fighting a well developed capitalist system.

In summary, then, the anarchist revolution in Spain has many lessons for revolutionaries in developed capitalist coun-



> *have appropriated the means of production, to hold in subjection all those who possess nothing ... and who must work that they may live. No work is possible without land, materials, and tools or machinery; thus the masters of those things are the masters also of the destitute workers, and can live in idleness upon their labour... We look for th[e] socialisation of wealth, not to restraints imposed by authority upon property, but to the removal, by direct personal action of the people themselves, of the restraints which secure property against the claims of popular justice. For authority and property are both manifestations of the egoistical spirit of domination".* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 57–8]

Therefore, it seems that in the name of "liberty" John Henry MacKay and a host of other "individualists" end up supporting authority and (effectively) some kind of state. This is hardly surprising as private property is the opposite of personal possession, not its base. In summary, then, far from communal property restricting individual liberty (or even personal use of resources) it is in fact its only defence. That is why all anarchists would agree with Emma Goldman that *"it is our endeavour to abolish private property, State ... we aim to free men from tyrants and government."* [**A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 1, p. 181]

# I.7 Won't Libertarian Socialism destroy individuality?

No. Libertarian socialism only suppresses individuality for those who are so shallow that they cannot separate their identity from what they own. However, be that as it may, this is an important objection to any form of socialism and, given the example of "socialist" Russia, needs to be discussed more.

The basic assumption behind this question is that capitalism encourages individuality, but this assumption can be faulted on many levels. As Kropotkin noted, *"individual freedom [has] remained, both in theory and in practice, more illusory than real"* and that the *"want of development of the personality (leading to herd-psychology) and the lack of individual creative power and initiative are certainly one of the chief defects of our time. Economical individualism has not kept its promise: it did not result in any striking development of individuality."* [**Ethics**, p. 27 and p. 28] In effect, modern capitalism has reduced individuality to a parody of what it could and should be (see section I.7.4). Little wonder Emma Goldman argued that:

> *"The oft repeated slogan of our time is ... that ours is an era of individualism ... Only those who do not probe beneath the surface might be led to entertain this view. Have not the few accumulated the wealth of the world? Are they not the masters, the absolute kings of the situation? Their success, however, is due not to individualism, but the inertia, the cravenness,*



than the usual 600, all painted in the black-and-red colours of the CNT-FAI, were operating in Barcelona. [Antony Beevor, **The Spanish Civil War**, pp. 91–2]

About 75% of Spanish industry was concentrated in Catalonia, the stronghold of the anarchist labour movement, and widespread collectivisation of factories took place there. As Sam Dolgoff rightly observed, this *"refutes decisively the allegation that anarchist organisational principles are not applicable to industrial areas, and if at all, only in primitive agrarian societies or in isolated experimental communities."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, pp. 7–8] According to Augustin Souchy:

> *"It is no simple matter to collectivise and place on firm foundations an industry employing almost a quarter of a million textile workers in scores of factories scattered in numerous cities. But the Barcelona syndicalist textile union accomplished this feat in a short time. It was a tremendously significant experiment. The dictatorship of the bosses was toppled, and wages, working conditions and production were determined by the workers and their elected delegates. All functionaries had to carry out the instructions of the membership and report back directly to the men on the job and union meetings. The collectivisation of the textile industry shatters once and for all the legend that the workers are incapable of administrating a great and complex corporation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 94]

Moreover, Spain in the 1930s was **not** a backward, peasant country, as is sometimes supposed. Between 1910 and 1930, the industrial working class more than doubled to over 2,500,000. This represented just over 26% of the working population (compared to 16% twenty years previously). In 1930, only 45% of the working population were engaged in agriculture. [Ronald

was in Barcelona during the May Days of 1937). This classic account is contained along with other works by Orwell about the conflict in the anthology **Orwell in Spain**. Murray Bookchin's **The Spanish Anarchists** is a useful history, but ends just as the revolution breaks out and so needs to be completed by his **To Remember Spain** and the essay *"Looking Back at Spain"*. Stuart Christie's **We, The Anarchists!** is an important history on the Iberian Anarchist Federation.

## I.8.1 Is the Spanish Revolution inapplicable as a model for modern societies?

Quite the reverse. More urban workers took part in the revolution than in the countryside. So while it is true that collectivisation was extensive in rural areas, the revolution also made its mark in urban areas and in industry.

In total, the *"regions most affected"* by collectivisation *"were Catalonia and Aragón, where about 70 per cent of the workforce was involved. The total for the whole of Republican territory was nearly 800,000 on the land and a little more than a million in industry. In Barcelona workers' committees took over all the services, the oil monopoly, the shipping companies, heavy engineering firms such as Volcano, the Ford motor company, chemical companies, the textile industry and a host of smaller enterprises ... Services such as water, gas and electricity were working under new management within hours of the storming of the Atarazanas barracks ... a conversion of appropriate factories to war production meant that metallurgical concerns had started to produce armed cars by 22 July ... The industrial workers of Catalonia were the most skilled in Spain ... One of the most impressive feats of those early days was the resurrection of the public transport system at a time when the streets were still littered and barricaded."* Five days after the fighting had stopped, 700 tramcars rather



> *the utter submission of the mass. The latter wants but to be dominated, to be led, to be coerced. As to individualism, at no time in human history did it have less chance of expression, less opportunity to assert itself in a normal, healthy manner."* [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, pp. 70–1]

So we see a system which is apparently based on "egotism" and "individualism" but whose members are free be standardised individuals, who hardly express their individuality at all. Far from increasing individuality, capitalism standardises it and so restricts it — that it survives at all is more an expression of the strength of humanity than any benefits of the capitalist system. This impoverishment of individuality is hardly surprising in a society based on hierarchical institutions which are designed to assure obedience and subordination. Given this, it comes as no surprise to find libertarian communists like Kropotkin suggesting that *"as for knowing what will be the essence of **individual** development, I do not think it **could** be along individualist lines. Individual — yes, without doubt, but individ**ualist** — I have my doubts. That would mean: **narrow egoism** — regressive evolution and even that would be limited to a certain number."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context"*, pp. 259–283, **International Review of Social History**, No. 40, p. 268]

So, can we say that libertarian socialism will **increase** individuality or is this conformity and lack of "individualism" a constant feature of the human race? In order to make some sort of statement on this, we have to look at non-hierarchical societies and organisations. We will discuss tribal cultures as an example of non-hierarchical societies in section I.7.1. Here, however, we indicate how anarchist organisations will protect and increase an individual's sense of self.

Anarchist organisations and tactics are designed to promote individuality. They are decentralised, participatory organisations and so they give those involved the "social space" required to express themselves and develop their abilities and potential in ways restricted under capitalism. As Gaston Leval noted in his book on the anarchist collectives during the Spanish Revolution, *"so far as collective life is concerned, the freedom of each is the right to participate spontaneously with one's thought, one's will, one's initiative to the full extent of one's capacities. A negative liberty is not liberty; it is nothingness."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 346]

By being able to take part in and manage the decision making processes which directly affect you, your ability to think for yourself is increased and so you are constantly developing your abilities and personality. The spontaneous activity described by Leval has important psychological impacts. Thus Erich Fromm: *"In all spontaneous activity, the individual embraces the world. Not only does his [sic] individual self remain intact; it becomes stronger and more solidified.* ***For the self is as strong as it is active.****"* [**Escape from Freedom**, p. 225]

Therefore, individuality does not atrophy within an anarchist organisation as it does under capitalism. It will become stronger as people participate and act within the social organisation. In other words, individuality requires community. As German philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer once observed, *"individuality is impaired when each man decides to fend for himself ... The absolutely isolated individual has always been an illusion. The most esteemed personal qualities, such as independence, will to freedom, sympathy, and the sense of justice, are social as well as individual virtues. The fully developed individual is the consummation of a fully developed society."* [**The Eclipse of Reason**, p. 135]

The sovereign, self-sufficient individual is as much a product of a healthy community as it is from individual self-



143] The question is whether the revolution creates a system of institutions which will allow those involved to discuss the problems they face, change the decisions reached and correct any mistakes they make. In this, the Spanish Revolution clearly succeeded, creating organisations based on the initiative, autonomy and power of working class people.

For more information about the social revolution, Sam Dolgoff's anthology **The Anarchist Collectives** is an excellent starting place. Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution** is another essential text. Jose Peirats' **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** and his three volume quasi-official history **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution** are key works. Vernon Richards' **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** is an excellent critical anarchist work on the revolution and the role of the anarchists. **Spain 1936–1939: Social Revolution and Counter-Revolution** (edited by Vernon Richards) is a useful collection of articles from the time. Abel Paz's **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution** is a classic biography of Spanish anarchism's most famous militant (this is an expanded version of his earlier **Durruti: The People Armed**). Emma Goldman's opinions on the Spanish Revolution are collected in **Vision on Fire**.

Robert Alexander's **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War** is a good general overview of the anarchist's role in the revolution and civil war, as is Burnett Bolloten's **The Spanish Civil War**. Daniel Guérin's anthology **No Gods, No Masters** as two sections on the Spanish Revolution, one specifically on the collectives. Noam Chomsky's excellent essay *"Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship"* indicates how liberal books on the Spanish Civil War can be misleading, unfair and essentially ideological in nature (this classic essay can be found in **Chomsky on Anarchism**, **The Chomsky Reader**, and **American Power and the New Mandarins**). George Orwell's **Homage to Catalonia** cannot be bettered as an introduction to the subject (Orwell was in the POUM militia at the Aragón Front and

Moreover, the transformation of society that occurred during the revolution extended to all areas of life and work. For example, the revolution saw *"the creation of a health workers' union, a true experiment in socialised medicine. They provided medical assistance and opened hospitals and clinics."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 192] We discuss this example in some detail in section I.5.12 and so will not do so here. We simply stress that this section of the FAQ is just an introduction to what happened and does not (indeed, cannot) discuss all aspects of the revolution. We just present an overview, bringing out the libertarian aspects of the revolution, the ways workers' self-management was organised, how the collectives organised and what they did.

Needless to say, many mistakes were made during the revolution. We point out and discuss some of them in what follows. Moreover, much of what happened did not correspond exactly with what many people consider as the essential steps in a communist (libertarian or otherwise) revolution. Nor, it must be stressed, did much of it reflect the pre-revolution stated aims of the CNT itself. Economically, for example, the collectives themselves were an unexpected development, one which was based on libertarian principles but also reflected the reality of the situation the CNT militants found themselves in. Much the same can be said of the fact that few collectives reached beyond mutualism or collectivism in spite of the CNT seeking a libertarian communist economy. Politically, the fear of a fascist victory made many anarchists accept collaboration with the state as a lesser evil. However, to dismiss the Spanish Revolution because it did not meet the ideals laid out by a handful of revolutionaries beforehand would be sectarian and elitist nonsense. No working class revolution is pure, no mass struggle is without its contradictions, no attempt to change society is perfect. *"It is only those who do nothing who make no mistakes,"* as Kropotkin so correctly pointed out. [**Anarchism**, p.



realisation and the fulfilment of desire. There is a tendency for **community** to enrich and develop **individuality**, with this tendency being seen throughout human history. This suggests that the abstract individualism of capitalism is more the exception than the rule in social life. In other words, history indicates that by working together with others as equals individuality is strengthened far more than in the so-called "individualism" associated with capitalism. Hence the need, as Murray Bookchin put it, to *"arrest the ravaging and simplification of the human spirit, of human personality, of human community, of humanity's idea of the good."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 409]

Communal support for individuality is hardly surprising as individuality is a product of the interaction between **social** forces and individual attributes. The more an individual cuts themselves off from social life, the more likely their individuality will suffer. This can be seen from the 1980's when neo-liberal governments supporting the individualism associated with free market capitalism were elected in both Britain and the USA. The promotion of market forces lead to social atomisation, social disruption and a more centralised state. As this swept across society, the resulting disruption of social life ensured that many individuals became impoverished ethically and culturally as society became increasingly privatised. Two decades later, David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative party, complained of a broken society in Britain while, of course, skilfully avoiding discussing the neo-liberal reforms imposed by his predecessor Thatcher which made it so.

In other words, many of the characteristics which we associate with a developed individuality (namely ability to think, to act, to hold your own opinions and standards and so forth) are (essentially) **social** skills and are encouraged by a well developed community. Remove that social background and these valued aspects of individuality are undermined by lack of use, fear of authority, atomisation and limited

social interaction. Taking the case of workplaces, for example, surely it is an obvious truism that a hierarchical working environment will marginalise the individual and ensure that they cannot express their opinions, exercise their thinking capacities to the full or manage their own activity. This will have in impact in all aspects of an individual's life.

Hierarchy in all its forms produces oppression and a crushing of individuality (see section B.1). In such a system, as left-wing classical liberal John Stuart Mill argued, the *"business"* side of group activities would be *"properly carried out"* but at the expense of the individuals involved. Anarchists agree with Mill when he called it *"benevolent dictatorship"* and asked *"what sort of human beings can be formed under such a regimen? What development can either their thinking or their active faculties attain under it? ... Their moral capacities are equally stunted. Wherever the sphere of action of human beings is artificially circumscribed, their sentiments are narrowed and dwarfed."* [**Representative Government**, pp. 203–4] Like anarchists, he extended his critique of political organisations into all forms of associations and stated that if *"mankind is to continue to improve"* then in the end one form of association will predominate, *"not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in the management, but the association of labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves."* [**The Principles of Political Economy**, p. 147]

Hence, anarchism will protect and develop individuality by creating the means by which all individuals can participate in the decisions that affect them, in all aspects of their lives. Anarchism is built upon the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. Authoritarian organisations will create a servile personality, one that feels safest conforming to authority and what



> *"Industry is in the hands of the workers and all the production centres conspicuously fly the red and black flags as well as inscriptions announcing that they have really become collectives. The revolution seems to be universal. Changes are also evident in social relations. The former barriers which used to separate men and woman arbitrarily have been destroyed. In the cafes and other public places there is a mingling of the sexes which would have been completely unimaginable before. The revolution has introduced a fraternal character to social relations which has deepened with practice and show clearly that the old world is dead."* [**Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 243]

The social transformation empowered individuals and these, in turn, transformed society. Anarchist militant Enriqueta Rovira presents a vivid picture of the self-liberation the revolution generated:

> *"The atmosphere then, the feelings were very special. It was beautiful. A feeling of — how shall I say it — of power, not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of things being under **our** control, of under anyone's. Of **possibility**. We **had** everything. We had Barcelona: It was ours. You'd walk out in the streets, and they were ours — here, CNT; there, **comite** this or that. It was totally different. Full of possibility. A feeling that we could, together, really **do** something. That we could make things different."* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, *"Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women"*, pp. 151–176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 164–5]

Some so-called historians and "objective investigators" have slandered it and lied about (when not ignoring) the role anarchists played in it. Communist histories are particularly unreliable (to use a polite word for their activities) but it seems that almost **every** political perspective has done this (including liberal, so-called right-wing "libertarian", Stalinist, Trotskyist, Marxist, and so on). So any attempt to investigate what actually occurred in Spain and the anarchists' role in it is subject to a great deal of difficulty. Moreover, the positive role that Anarchists played in the revolution and the positive results of our ideas when applied in practice are also downplayed, if not ignored. Indeed, the misrepresentations of the Spanish Anarchist movement are downright amazing (see Jerome R. Mintz's wonderful book **The Anarchists of Casa Viejas** and J. Romero Maura's article *"The Spanish case"* [**Anarchism Today**, J. Joll and D. Apter (eds.)] for a refutation of many of the standard assertions and distortions about the Spanish anarchist movement by historians). The myths generated by Marxists of various shades are, perhaps needless to say, the most extensive (see the appendix on *"Marxists and Spanish Anarchism"* for a reply to some of the more common ones).

All we can do here is present a summary of the social revolution that took place and attempt to explode a few of the myths that have been created around the work of the CNT and FAI during those years. We must stress that this can be nothing but a short introduction to the Spanish Revolution. We concentrate on the economic and political aspects of the revolution as we cannot cover everything. However, we must mention the social transformations that occurred all across non-fascist Spain. The revolution saw the traditional social relationships between men and women, adults and children, individual and individual transformed, revolutionised in a libertarian way. CNT militant Abel Paz gave a good idea of what happened:



is considered normal. A libertarian organisation, one that is based upon participation and self-management will encourage a strong personality, one that knows its own mind, thinks for itself and feels confident in its own powers.

Therefore, as Bakunin argued, liberty *"is not a fact springing from isolation but from reciprocal action, a fact not of exclusion, but, on the contrary, of social interaction — for freedom of every individual is simply the reflection of his humanity or his human right in the consciousness of all free men, his brothers, his equals."* Freedom *"is something very positive, very complex, and above all eminently social, since it can be realised only by society and only under conditions of strict equality and solidarity."* Hierarchical power, by necessity, kills individual freedom as it is *"characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the minds and hearts of men"* and *"power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 266, p. 268, p. 269 and p. 249]

A libertarian re-organisation of society will be based upon, and encourage, a self-empowerment and self-liberation of the individual and by participation within self-managed organisations individuals will educate themselves for the responsibilities and joys of freedom. As Carole Pateman points out, *"participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so."* [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, pp. 42–43] This, of course, implies a mutually interactive transformation of individuals, their social relationships and organisations (in the words of Spanish anarchist Garcia Oliver: *"Who hasn't been changed by the revolution? It wouldn't be worth making it just to continue being the same."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 498]).

Such a re-organisation (as we will see in section J.2) is based upon the tactic of **direct action.** This tactic also encourages individuality by encouraging the individual to fight for them-

selves, by their own self-activity, that which they consider to be wrong. As Voltairine de Cleyre put it:

> *"Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist ...*
>
> *"Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.*
>
> *"Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and want straight to the other persons involved to settle it .. . was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts ...*
>
> *"These actions ... are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation."* [**The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader**, pp. 47–8]

Therefore, anarchist tactics base themselves upon self-assertion and this can only develop individuality. Self-activity can only occur when there is a independent, free-thinking self. As self-management is based upon the principle of direct action (*"all co-operative experiments are essentially direct action"*) we can suggest that individuality will have little to fear from an anarchist society. Indeed, anarchists strongly stress the importance of individuality within a society. To quote communist-anarchist J. Burns-Gibson:

> *"[T]o destroy individuality is to destroy society. For society is only realised and alive in the individual members. Society has no motive that does not issue*



> *democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganisation of social life. They replaced the war between men, 'survival of the fittest,' by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity ...*
>
> *"This experience, in which about eight million people directly or indirectly participated, opened a new way of life to those who sought an alternative to anti-social capitalism on the one hand, and totalitarian state bogus socialism on the other."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 6–7]

Thus about eight million people directly or indirectly participated in the libertarian based new economy during the short time it was able to survive the military assaults of the fascists and the attacks and sabotage of the Communists and Republican state. This in itself suggests that libertarian socialist ideas are of a practical nature.

Lest the reader think that Leval and Bookchin are exaggerating the accomplishments and ignoring the failures of the Spanish collectives, in the following subsections we will present specific details and answer some objections often raised by misinformed critics. We will try to present an objective analysis of the revolution, its many successes, its strong and weak points, the mistakes made and possible lessons to be drawn from the experience, both from the successes and the failures. However, this will hardly do justice to the collectivisation as it *"assumed an infinite diversity of forms from village to village, and even in the different firms collectivised in the cities ... there was an element of improvisation and of the exceptional wartime conditions experienced by the country (i.e., the war against fascism) and the arrangements had their flaws as well as their good points."* [Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 223]

This libertarian influenced revolution has (generally) been ignored by historians, or its existence mentioned in passing.

*but their opponents who have turned their backs to the facts or have shamelessly concealed them."* [*"Introductory Essay,"* **The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), p. xxxix]

Anarchist and CNT activist Gaston Leval comments that in those areas which defeated the fascist uprising on the 19th of July 1936 a profound social revolution took place based, mostly, on anarchist ideas:

> *"In Spain, during almost three years, despite a civil war that took a million lives, despite the opposition of the political parties ... this idea of libertarian communism was put into effect. Very quickly more than 60% of the land was collectively cultivated by the peasants themselves, without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganised and administered production, distribution, and public services without capitalists, high-salaried managers, or the authority of the state.*
>
> *"Even more: the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism, 'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.' They co-ordinated their efforts through free association in whole regions, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and bettered public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian*



> *from its individual members, no end that does not centre in them, no mind that is not theirs. 'Spirit of the age,' 'public opinion,' 'commonweal or good,' and like phrases have no meaning if they are thought of as features of something that hovers or floats between man and woman. They name what resides in and proceeds from individuals. Individuality and community, therefore, are equally constitutive of our idea of human life."* [quoted by William R. McKercher, **Freedom and Authority**, p. 31]

Little wonder, then, that anarchism *"recognises and values individuality which means character, conduct and the springs of conduct, free initiative, creativeness, spontaneity, autonomy."* [J. Burns-Gibson, quoted by McKercher, **Op. Cit.**, p. 31f] As Kropotkin put it, anarchism *"seeks the most complete development of individuality combined with the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects ... ever changing, ever modified"*. [**Anarchism**, p. 123]

For anarchists real liberty requires social equality. For *"[i]f individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas most be so organised that they can participate in decision making."* [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43] Hence individuality will be protected, encouraged and developed in an anarchist society far more than in a class ridden, hierarchical society like capitalism. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"[Libertarian] Communism is the best basis for individual development and freedom; not that individualism which drives men to the war of each against all ... but that which represents the full expansion of man's [and woman's] faculties, the superior development of what is original in him [or her], the greatest fruitfulness of intelligence, feeling and will."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141]

It is because wonders are so enriching to life, and none is more wonderful than individuality, that anarchists oppose capitalism in the name of socialism — libertarian socialism, the free association of free individuals.

## I.7.1 Do tribal cultures indicate that communalism defends individuality?

Yes. In many tribal cultures (or aboriginal cultures), we find a strong respect for individuality. As anthropologist Paul Radin pointed out, *"respect for the individual, irrespective of age or sex"* was one of *"the outstanding features of aboriginal civilisation"* as well as *"the amazing degree of social and political integration achieved by them"* and *"a concept of personal security."* [quoted by Murray Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, p. 48] Murray Bookchin commented on Radin's statement:

> *"respect for the individual, which Radin lists first as an aboriginal attribute, deserves to be emphasised, today, in an era that rejects the collective as destructive of individuality on the one hand, and yet, in an orgy of pure egotism, has actually destroyed all the ego boundaries of free-floating, isolated, and atomised individuals on the other. A strong collectivity may be even more supportive of the individual as close studies of certain aboriginal societies reveal, than a 'free market' society with its emphasis on an egoistic, but impoverished, self."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48]

This individualisation associated with tribal cultures was also noted by historian Howard Zinn. He quotes fellow historian Gary Nash describing Iroquois culture (which appears typical of most Native American tribes):



# I.8 Does revolutionary Spain show that libertarian socialism can work in practice?

Yes. Revolutionary Spain *"shows you what human beings are like when they are trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine."* [George Orwell, **Orwell in Spain**, p. 254] At the heart of the transformation were the CNT (the National Confederation of Labour, an anarcho-syndicalist union) and the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation). As Murray Bookchin put it:

> *"In Spain, millions of people took large segments of the economy into their own hands, collectivised them, administered them, even abolished money and lived by communistic principles of work and distribution — all of this in the midst of a terrible civil war, yet without producing the chaos or even the serious dislocations that were and still are predicted by authoritarian 'radicals.' Indeed, in many collectivised areas, the efficiency with which an enterprise worked by far exceeded that of a comparable one in nationalised or private sectors. This 'green shoot' of revolutionary reality has more meaning for us than the most persuasive theoretical arguments to the contrary. On this score it is not the anarchists who are the 'unrealistic day-dreamers,'*

> *petition acts to extinguish the Promethean fire of rebellion.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 130]

In section I.4.11 we noted that when an artistic task is turned into a contest, children's work reveal significantly less spontaneity and creativity. In other words, competition reduces creativity and so individuality because creativity is "*anti-conformist at its core: it is nothing if not a process of idiosyncratic thinking and risk-taking. Competition inhibits this process.*" Competition, therefore, will result in a narrowing of our lives, a failing to experience new challenges in favour of trying to win and be "successful." It turns *"life into a series of contests [and] turns us into cautious, obedient people. We do not sparkle as individuals* ***or*** *embrace collective action when we are in a race."* [Kohn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130 and p. 131]

So, far from defending individuality, capitalism places a lot of barriers (both physical and mental) in the path of individuals who are trying to express their freedom. Anarchism exists precisely because capitalism has not created the free society it supporters claimed it would.



> *"No laws and ordinances, sheriffs and constables, judges and juries, or courts or jails — the apparatus of authority in European societies — were to be found in the north-east woodlands prior to European arrival. Yet boundaries of acceptable behaviour were firmly set. Though priding themselves on the autonomous individual, the Iroquois maintained a strict sense of right and wrong."* [quoted by Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 21]

This respect for individuality existed in a society based on communistic principles. As Zinn notes, in the Iroquois *"land was owned in common and worked in common. Hunting was done together, and the catch was divided among the members of the village. Houses were considered common property and were shared by several families. The concept of private ownership of land and homes was foreign to the Iroquois."* In this communal society women *"were important and respected"* and families were matrilineal. Power was shared between the sexes (unlike the European idea of male domination). Similarly, children "*while taught the cultural heritage of their people and solidarity with the tribe, were also taught to be independent, not to submit to overbearing authority. They were taught equality of status and the sharing of possessions.*" As Zinn stresses, Native American tribes *"paid careful attention to the development of personality, intensity of will, independence and flexibility, passion and potency, to their partnership with one another and with nature."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and pp. 21–2]

Thus tribal societies indicate that community defends individuality, with communal living actually encouraging a strong sense of individuality. This is to be expected, as equality is the only condition in which individuals can be free and so in a position to develop their personality to its full. Furthermore, this communal living took place within an anarchist environment:

> *"The foundation principle of Indian government had always been the rejection of government. The freedom of the individual was regarded by practically all Indians north of Mexico as a canon infinitely more precious than the individual's duty to his [or her] community or nation. This anarchistic attitude ruled all behaviour, beginning with the smallest social unity, the family. The Indian parent was constitutionally reluctant to discipline his [or her] children. Their every exhibition of self-will was accepted as a favourable indication of the development of maturing character..."* [Van Every, quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136]

In addition, Native American tribes also indicate that communal living and high standards of living can and do go together. For example, during the 1870s in the Cherokee Nation *"land was held collectively and life was contented and prosperous"* with the US Department of the Interior recognising that it was *"a miracle of progress, with successful production by people living in considerable comfort, a level of education 'equal to that furnished by an ordinary college in the States,' flourishing industry and commerce, an effective constitutional government, a high level of literacy, and a state of 'civilisation and enlightenment' comparable to anything known: 'What required five hundred years for the Britons to accomplish in this direction they have accomplished in one hundred years,' the Department declared in wonder."* [Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 231]

Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts visited in 1883 and described what he found in glowing terms: *"There was not a pauper in that nation, and the nation did not owe a dollar. It built its own capitol ... and it built its schools and its hospitals."* No family lacked a home. In spite of this (or, perhaps, more correctly, because of this), Dawes recommended that the society must be destroyed: *"They have got as far as they can go, because*



a system apparently based upon "egotism" and "individualism" ends up weakening individuality.

As regards the fourth point, the effects of competition on individuality are equally as destructive. Indeed, a *"culture dedicated to creating standardised, specialised, predictable human components could find no better way of grinding them out than by making every possible aspect of life a matter of competition. 'Winning out' in this respect does not make rugged individualists. It shapes conformist robots."* [George Leonard, quoted by Alfie Kohn, **No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, p. 129] Why is this?

Competition is based upon outdoing others and this can only occur if you are doing the same thing they are. However, individuality is the most unique thing there is and *"unique characteristics by definition cannot be ranked and participating in the process of ranking demands essential conformity."* The extensive research into the effects of competition suggests that it in fact *"encourages rank conformity"* as well as undermining the *"substantial and authentic kind of individualism"* associated by such free thinkers as Thoreau. [Alfie Kohn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130 and p. 129] As well as impoverishing individuality by encouraging conformity, competition also makes us less free thinking and rebellious:

> *"Attitude towards authorities and general conduct do count in the kinds of competitions that take place in the office or classroom. If I want to get the highest grades in class, I will not be likely to challenge the teacher's version of whatever topic is being covered. After a while, I may cease to think critically altogether ... If people tend to 'go along to get along,' there is even more incentive to go along when the goal is to be number one. In the office or factory where co-workers are rivals, beating out the next person for a promotion means pleasing the boss. Com-*

I.7). The last two points are worth discussing more thoroughly, and we will do so here.

Taking the third point first, when this kind of "greed" becomes the guiding aspect of an individual's life (and the society they live in) they usually end up sacrificing their own ego to it. Instead of the individual dominating their "greed," "greed" dominates them and so they end up being possessed by one aspect of themselves. This "selfishness" hides the poverty of the ego who practices it. As libertarian Marxist psychiatrist Erich Fromm argued:

> *"Selfishness if not identical with self-love but with its very opposite. Selfishness is one kind of greediness. Like all greediness, it contains an insatiability, as a consequence of which there is never any real satisfaction. Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction ... this type of person is basically not fond of himself, but deeply dislikes himself.*
>
> *"The puzzle in this seeming contradiction is easy to solve. Selfishness is rooted in this very lack of fondness for oneself ... He does not have the inner security which can exist only on the basis of genuine fondness and affirmation."* [**The Fear of Freedom**, pp. 99–100]

In other words, the "selfish" person allows their greed to dominate their ego and they sacrifice their personality feeding this new God. This was clearly seen by Max Stirner who denounced this as a *"one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism"* which leads the ego being *"ruled by a passion to which he brings the rest as sacrifices"* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 76]. Like all *"spooks,"* capitalism results in the self-negation of the individual and so the impoverishment of individuality. Little wonder, then, that



*they own their land in common ... there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbours. There is no selfishness, which is the bottom of civilisation. Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress."* [quoted by Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231–2] The introduction of capitalism — as usual by state action — resulted in poverty and destitution, again showing the link between capitalism and high living standards is not clear cut, regardless of claims otherwise.

Undoubtedly, having access to the means of life ensured that members of such cultures did not have to place themselves in situations which could produce a servile character structure. As they did not have to follow the orders of a boss they did not have to learn to obey others and so could develop their own abilities to govern themselves. This self-government allowed the development of a custom in such tribes called *"the principle of non-interference"* in anthropology. This is the principle of defending someone's right to express the opposing view and it is a pervasive principle in the tribal world, and it is so much so as to be safely called a universal.

The principle of non-interference is a powerful principle that extends from the personal to the political, and into every facet of daily life (significantly, tribal groups *"respect the personality of their children, much as they do that of the adults in their communities."* [Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 115]). Most people today, used as they are to hierarchy everywhere, are aghast when they realise the extent to which it is practised, but it has proven itself to be an integral part of living anarchy. It means that people simply do not limit the activities of others, period (unless that behaviour is threatening the survival of the tribe). This in effect makes absolute tolerance a custom (the difference between law and custom is important to point out: Law is dead, and Custom lives — see section I.7.3). This is not to idealise such communities as they are must be considered

imperfect anarchist societies in many ways (mostly obviously in that many eventually evolved into hierarchical systems so suggesting that informal hierarchies, undoubtedly a product of religion and other factors, existed).

As people accustomed to authority we have so much baggage that relates to "interfering" with the lives of others that merely visualising the situation that would eliminate this daily pastime for many is impossible. But think about it. First of all, in a society where people do not interfere with each other's behaviour, people tend to feel trusted and empowered by this simple social fact. Their self-esteem is already higher because they are trusted with the responsibility for making learned and aware choices. This is not fiction; individual responsibility is a key aspect of social responsibility.

Therefore, given the strength of individuality documented in tribes with no private property, no state and little or no other hierarchical structures within them, can we not conclude that anarchism will defend individuality and even develop it in ways blocked by capitalism? At the very least we can say "possibly", and that is enough to allow us to question that dogma that capitalism is the only system based on respect for the individual.

## I.7.2 Do anarchists worship the past or the "noble savage"?

No. However, this is a common attack on socialists by supporters of capitalism and on anarchists by Marxists. Both claim that anarchism is "backward looking", opposed to "progress" and desire a society based on inappropriate ideas of freedom. In particular, ideological capitalists maintain that all forms of socialism base themselves on the ideal of the "noble savage" (see, for example, free market capitalist guru Frederick von Hayek's work **Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism**).



We have discussed point one on many occasions (see, for example, section B.4). As Emma Goldman put it, under capitalism, the individual *"must sell his [or her] labour"* and so their *"inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master."* This, naturally, represses individual initiative and the skills needed to know and express ones own mind. This *"condemns millions of people to be mere nonentities, living corpses without originality or power of initiative ... who pile up mountains of wealth for others and pay for it with a grey, dull and wretched existence for themselves." "There can be no freedom in the large sense of the word,"* Goldman stressed, *"so long as mercenary and commercial considerations play an important part in the determination of personal conduct."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 50] Hence Bookchin:

> *"With the hollowing out of community by the market system ... we witness the concomitant hollowing out of personality itself. Just as the spiritual and institutional ties that linked human beings together into vibrant social relations are eroded by the mass market, so the sinews that make for subjectivity, character and self-definition are divested of form and meaning. The isolated, seemingly autonomous ego of 'modernity' turns out to be the mere husk of a once fairly rounded individual whose very completeness as an ego was possible because he or she was rooted in a fairly rounded and complete community."* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 211]

As regards point one, given the social relationships it is based on, capitalism cannot foster individuality but only harm it. As Kropotkin argued, *"obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities ... lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind."* [**Anarchism**, p. 285] As far as point two goes, we have discussed it above and will not repeat ourselves (see section

market — firstly, to protect wealth from the increasingly dispossessed and secondly, to try to hold society together as capitalism destroys the social fabric which makes a society worth living in.

For more on this issue, Kropotkin's classic essay *"Law and Authority"* cannot be bettered (contained in **Anarchism** and **Words of a Rebel**).

## I.7.4 Does capitalism protect individuality?

Given that many people claim that **any** form of socialism will destroy liberty (and so individuality) it is worthwhile to consider whether capitalism actually does protect individuality. The answer must be no. Capitalism creates a standardisation which helps to distort individuality and the fact that individuality does exist under capitalism says more about the human spirit than capitalist social relationships.

So, why does a system apparently based on the idea of individual profit result in such a deadening of the individual? There are four main reasons:

> 1) capitalism produces a hierarchical system which crushes self-government in many areas of life;
>
> 2) there is the lack of community which does not provide the necessary supports for the encouragement of individuality;
>
> 3) there is the psychological impact of "individual profit" when it becomes identified purely with monetary gain (as in capitalism);
>
> 4) the effects of competition in creating conformity and mindless obedience to authority.



Anarchists are well aware of the limitations of the "primitive communist" societies they have used as examples of anarchistic tendencies within history or society. They are also aware of the problems associated with using **any** historical period as an example of "anarchism in action." Take for example the "free cities" of Medieval Europe, which was used by Kropotkin as an example of the potential of decentralised, confederated communes. He was sometimes accused of being a *"Medievalist"* (as was William Morris) while all he was doing was indicating that capitalism need not equal progress and that alternative social systems have existed which have encouraged freedom in ways capitalism restricts.

In a similar way, Marxists often accuse Proudhon of being "petty-bourgeois" and looking backward to a pre-industrial society of artisans and peasants. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Proudhon lived in a France which was predominantly pre-industrial and based on peasant and artisan production. He, therefore, based his socialist ideas on the needs of working people as they required them at the time. When Proudhon did look at large-scale production (such as railways, factories and so on) he proposed co-operative associations to run them. These associations would maintain the dignity of the worker by maintaining the essential feature of artisan and peasant life, namely the control of work and product by the labourer. Thus he used "the past" (artisan production) to inform his analysis of current events (industrialisation) to create a solution to the social problem which built upon and extended a freedom crushed by capitalism (namely workers' self-management in production). Rather than being backward looking and worshipping a past which was disappearing, Proudhon analysed the present **and** past, drew any positive features he could from both and applied them to the present and the future (see also section I.3.8). Unlike Marx, who argued that industrialisation (i.e. proletarianisation) was the pre-conditions of socialism, Proudhon wanted justice and freedom for working class

people during his lifetime, not some (unspecified) time in the future after capitalism had fully developed.

Again it is hardly surprising to find that many supporters of capitalism ignore the insights that can be gained by studying tribal cultures and the questions they raise about capitalism and freedom. Instead, they duck the issues raised and accuse socialists of idealising the "noble savage." As indicated, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, this claim has been directed towards Rousseau (often considered the father of socialist and anarchist idealisation of the "noble savage") even though he explicitly asked *"must societies be totally abolished? Must **meum** and **tuum** be annihilated, and must we return again to the forests to live among bears? This is a deduction in the manner of my adversaries, which I would as soon anticipate as let them have the shame of drawing."* Similarly, Rousseau is often thought of idealising "natural man" but he actually wrote that *"men in a state of nature, having no moral relations or determinate obligations one with another, could not be either good or bad, virtuous or vicious."* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 112 and p. 64] Rousseau failed to understand that his adversaries, both then and now, seem to know no shame and will happy suggest that he advocated the exact opposite of what he actually wrote. Anarchists are also subject to this (particularly by Marxists), particularly when we look through history, draw libertarian currents from it and are then denounced as backward looking utopians.

What libertarian socialists point out from this analysis of history is that the atomised individual associated with capitalist society is not "natural" and that capitalist social relationships help to weaken individuality. All the many attacks on libertarian socialist analysis of past societies are a product of capitalists attempts to deny history and state that "Progress" reaches its final resting place in capitalism. As David Watson argues:



In other words, the law has *"has used Man's social feelings to get passed not only moral precepts which were acceptable to Man, but also orders which were useful only to the minority of exploiters against whom he would have rebelled."* [Kropotkin quoted by Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 24–5]

Therefore anarchists argue that state institutions are not only unneeded to create an ethical society (i.e. one based on respecting individuality) but actively undermines such a society. That the economically and politically powerful assert that a state is a necessary condition for a free society and individual space is hardly surprising for, as Malatesta put it, a ruling elite *"cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness ... it cannot impose acceptances of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 24] Thus laws *"exist to keep up the machinery of government which serves to secure to capital the exploitation and monopoly of wealth produced"* and *"to facilitate the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist."* And people *"who long for freedom begin the attempt to obtain it by entreating their masters to be kind enough to protect them by modifying the laws which these masters themselves have created!"* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200 and p. 210]

Therefore, its important to remember why the state exists and so whatever actions and rights it promotes for the individual it exists to protect the powerful against the powerless. Any human rights recognised by the state are a product of social struggle and exist because of pass victories in the class war and not due to the kindness of ruling elites. In addition, capitalism itself undermines the ethical foundations of any society by encouraging people to grow accustomed to deceiving their fellows and treating them as a competitor, against whom every means of action is justified. Hence capitalism undermines the basic social context and customs within which individuals develop and need to become fully human and free. Little wonder that a strong state has always been required to introduce a free

what the state and its laws have done is to *"fix, or rather to crystallise in a permanent form, such customs as already were in existence"* and adding to them *"some new rules — rules of inequality and servile submission of the masses in the interest of the armed rich and the warlike minorities."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 48–9] Unsurprisingly, then, the state perverts social customs for its own, and the interests of the economically and socially powerful:

> *"as society became more and more divided into two hostile classes, one seeking to establish its domination, the other struggling to escape, the strife began. Now the conqueror was in a hurry to secure the results of his actions in a permanent form, he tried to place them beyond question, to make them holy and venerable by every means in his power. Law made its appearance under the sanction of the priest, and the warriors club was placed at its service. Its office was to render immutable such customs as were to the advantage of the dominant minority ... If law, however, presented nothing but a collection of prescriptions serviceable to rulers, it would find some difficulty in insuring acceptance and obedience. Well, the legislators confounded in one code the two currents of custom ... , the maxims which represent principles of morality and social union wrought out as a result of life in common, and the mandates which are meant to ensure external existence to inequality. Customs, absolutely essential to the very being of society, are, in the code, cleverly intermingled with usages imposed by the ruling caste, and both claim equal respect from the crowd ... Such was the law; and it has maintained its two-fold character to this day."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 205]



> *"When we consider people living under some of the harshest, most commanding conditions on earth, who can nevertheless do what they like when the notion occurs to them, we should be able to witness the contemporary doubt about civilisation's superiority without growing indignant. Primitivism, after all, reflects not only a glimpse of life before the rise of the state, but also a legitimate response to real conditions of life under civilisation ... Most people do not live in aboriginal societies, and most tribal peoples themselves now face wholly new contexts which will have to be confronted in new ways if they are to survive as peoples. But their lifeways, their histories, remind us that* ***other modes of being are possible.*** *Reaffirmation of our primal past offers insight into our history — not the only possible insight, to be sure, but one important, legitimate entry point for a reasoned discussion about (and an impassioned reaction to) this world we must leave behind."* [**Beyond Bookchin**, p. 240]

This essential investigation of history and modern society to see what other ways of living have and do exist is essential. It is too easy to forget that what exists under modern capitalism has not always existed (as neo-classical economics does with its atomistic and ahistoric analysis, for example). It is also useful to remember what many people now consider as "normal" was not always the case. As we discussed in section F.8.6, the first generation of industrial wage slaves **hated** the system, considering it both tyranny and unnatural. Studying history, previous cultures and the process of hierarchical society and the resistance of the oppressed to it can enrich our analysis and activity in the here and now and help us to envision an anarchist society, the problems it could face and possible solutions to them.

If the challenge for anarchists is to smash power-relations and domination, it would make sense to get to the root of the problem. Hierarchy, slavery, coercion, patriarchy, and so on far outdate capitalism and it is hardly enough to just analyse the economic system of capitalism, which is merely the current and most insidious form of hierarchical civilisation. Similarly, without looking to cultures and communities that functioned quite well before the rise of the state, hierarchies and classes, anarchists do not really have much solid ground to prove to people that anarchy is desirable or possible. For this reason, historical analysis and the celebration of the positive aspects of tribal and other societies is essential.

Moreover, as George Orwell pointed out, attacks that reject this critical analysis as worshipping the "noble savage" miss the point:

> *"In the first place he [the defender of modern life] will tell you that it is impossible to 'go back' ... and will then accuse you of being a medievalist and begin to descant upon the horrors of the Middle Ages .. . As a matter of fact, most attacks upon the Middle Ages and the past generally by apologists of modernity are beside the point, because their essential trick is to project a modern man, with his squeamishness and his high standard of comfort, into an age when such things were unheard of. But notice that in any case this is not an answer. For dislike of the mechanised future does not imply the smallest reverence for any period of the past ... When one pictures it merely as an objective; there is no need to pretend that it has ever existed in space and time."* [**The Road to Wigan Pier**, p. 183]

We should also note that such attacks on anarchist investigations of past cultures assumes that these cultures have **no**



gested, are *"the last to underrate the part which the self-assertion of the individual has played in the evolution of mankind."* However, this *"has often been, and continually is, something quite different from, and far larger and deeper than, the petty, unintelligent narrow-mindedness which, with a large class of writers goes for 'individualism' and 'self-assertion.'"* There are *"two classes of revolted individuals"*, those who rise up and aim to *"purify the old institutions [of mutual aid], or to work out a higher form of commonwealth, based on the same Mutual Aid principles"* and those who sought to *"break down the protective institutions of mutual support, with no other intention but to increase their own wealth and their own powers."* [**Mutual Aid**, pp. 18–9] We aim to support and encourage the former.

However, while recognising the potential tyranny of custom anarchists stress that, firstly, this is a natural part of human society and, secondly, it palls into insignificance compared to the actual tyranny of the state and the laws it imposes on society in the interests of the few. Facts which, needless to say, ruling elites are at pains to hide. As Kropotkin explained *"all our religious, historical, juridical, and social education is imbued with the idea that human beings, if left to themselves, would revert to savagery; that without authority men would eat one another; for nothing, they say, can be expected from the 'multitude' but brutishness and the warring of each against all. Men would perish if above them soared not the elect ... These saviours prevent, we are told, the battle of all against all."* This, he argued, was nonsense as *"a **scientific** study of societies and institutions brings us to quite different views. It proves that usages and customs created by mankind for the sake of mutual aid, mutual defence, and peace in general, were precisely elaborated by the 'nameless multitude.' And it was these customs that enabled man to survive in his struggle for existence in the midst of extremely hard natural conditions."* The notion that the state was merely the instrument of the people is hardly supported by history nor current practice, for

Individual rights, for anarchists, are best protected in a social environment based on the self-respect and sympathy. Custom, because it is based on the outcome of numerous individual actions and thought reflects (and so encourages the development of) individual ethical standards and so a generalised respect for others. Thus, *"under anarchism all rules and laws will be little more than suggestions for the guidance of juries which will judge not only the facts but the law, the justice of the law, its applicability to the given circumstances, and the penalty or damage to be inflicted because if its infraction .. . under Anarchism the law will be so flexible that it will shape itself to every emergency and need no alteration. And it will be regarded as **just** in proportion to its flexibility, instead of as now in proportion to its rigidity."* [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 160–1] Tucker, like other individualist Anarchists, believed that the role of juries had been very substantial in the English common-law tradition and that they had been gradually emasculated by the state. This system of juries, based on common-law/custom could be the means of ensuring justice in a free society.

Tolerance of other individuals depends far more on the attitudes of the society in question that on its system of laws. In other words, even if the law does respect individual rights, if others in society disapprove of an action then they can and will act to stop it (or restrict individual rights). All that the law can do is try to prevent this occurring but given the power of social custom this is often limited in scope and has to wait until people recognise the need for change. Needless to say, governments can, and have, been far more at the forefront of denying and ignoring individual rights and so appealing to it for justice is, to say the least, problematic!

As such, anarchists are well aware that social custom can be oppressive and, as discussed in section I.5.6, argue for direct action by oppressed minorities to combat any tendency towards "dictatorship by the majority". Anarchists, as Kropotkin suggood aspects at all and so indicates a sort of intellectual "all or nothing" approach to modern life. The idea that past (and current) civilisations may have got **some** things right and others wrong and should be investigated is rejected for a totally uncritical "love it or leave" approach to modern society. Of course, the well known "free market" capitalist love of 19th century capitalist life and values (specifically the grim reality of Victorian Britain or Gilded Age America) warrants no such claims of "past worship" by the supporters of the system.

Therefore attacks on anarchists as supporters of the "noble savage" ideal indicate more about the opponents of anarchism and their fear of looking at the implications of the system they support than about anarchist theory.

## I.7.3 Is the law required to protect individual rights?

No, far from it. It is obvious that, as Kropotkin put it, *"[n]o society is possible without certain principles of morality generally recognised. If everyone grew accustomed to deceiving his fellow-men; if we never could rely on each other's promise and words; if everyone treated his fellow as an enemy, against whom every means of warfare is justified — no society could exist."* [**Anarchism**, p. 73] However, this does not mean that a legal system (with its resultant bureaucracy, vested interests and inhumanity) is the best way to protect individual rights within a society.

What anarchists propose instead of the current legal system (or an alternative law system based on religious or "natural" laws) is **custom** — namely the development of living "rules of thumb" which express what a society considers as right at any given moment. However, the question arises, if an agreed set of principles are used to determine the just outcome, in what way would this differ from laws?

The difference is that the "order of custom" would prevail rather than the "rule of law". **Custom** is a body of living institutions that enjoys the support of the body politic, whereas **law** is a codified (read dead) body of institutions that separates social control from moral force. This, as anyone observing modern Western society can testify, alienates everyone. A **just outcome** is the predictable, but not necessarily the inevitable, outcome of interpersonal conflict because in an anarchistic society people are trusted to do it themselves. Anarchists think people have to grow up in a social environment free from the confusions generated by a fundamental discrepancy between morality, and social control, to fully appreciate the implications. However, the essential ingredient is the investment of trust, by the community, in people to come up with **functional solutions** to interpersonal conflict. This stands in sharp contrast with the present situation of people being infantilised by the state through a constant bombardment of fixed social structures removing all possibility of people developing their own unique solutions.

Therefore, anarchist recognise that social custom changes with society. What was once considered "normal" or "natural" may become to be seen as oppressive and hateful. This is because the *"conception of good or evil varies according to the degree of intelligence or of knowledge acquired. There is nothing unchangeable about it."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 92] Only by removing the dead hand of the past can society's ethical base develop and grow with the individuals that make it up (see section A.2.19 for a discussion of anarchist ethics).

We should also like to point out here that laws (or *"The Law"*) also restrict the development of an individual's sense of ethics or morality. This is because it relieves them of the responsibility of determining if something is right or wrong. All they need to know is whether it is legal. The morality of the action is irrelevant. This "nationalisation" of ethics is very handy for the would be capitalist, governor or other exploiter.



In addition, capitalism also restricts the development of an individual's ethics because it creates the environment where these ethics can be bought. To quote Shakespeare's **Richard III**:

> *"Second Murderer: Some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.*
>
> *First Murderer: Remember our reward, when the deed's done.*
>
> *Second Murderer: Zounds! He dies. I had forgot the reward.*
>
> *First Murderer: Where's thy conscience now?*
>
> *Second Murderer: O, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse."*

Therefore, as far as *"The Law"* defending individual rights, it creates the necessary conditions (such as the depersonalisation of ethics, the existence of concentrations wealth, and so on) for undermining individual ethical behaviour, and so respect for other individual's rights. As English libertarian socialist Edward Carpenter put it, *"I think we may fairly make the following general statement, viz., that legal ownership is essentially a negative and anti-social thing, and that unless qualified or antidoted by human relationship, it is pretty certain to be positively **harmful.** In fact, when a man's chief plea is 'The law allows it,' you may be pretty sure he is up to some mischief!"* The state forces an individual into a relationship with a governing body. This means, as anarchist J. B. Smith put it, *"taking away from the individual his [or her] direct interest in life and in his surroundings ... blunting his [or her] moral sense ... teaching that he [or she] must never rely on himself [or herself] ... [but] upon a small part of men who are elected to do everything ... [which] destroys to a large extent his [or her] perception of right and wrong."* [quoted by William R. McKercher, **Freedom and Authority**, p. 48 and p. 67f]

## I.8.12 Was the decision to collaborate imposed on the CNT's membership?

A few words have to be said about the development of the CNT and FAI after the 19th of July, 1936. It is clear that both changed in nature and were the not same organisations as they were **before** that date. Both organisations became more centralised and bureaucratic, with the membership excluded from many major decisions. As Peirats suggested:

> *"In the CNT and among militant anarchists there had been a tradition of the most scrupulous respect for the deliberations and decisions of the assemblies, the grassroots of the federalist organisation. Those who held administrative office had been merely the mandatories of those decisions. The regular motions adopted by the National congresses spelled out to the Confederation and its representative committees ineluctable obligations of a basic and general nature incumbent upon very affiliated member regardless of locality or region. And the forming of such general motions was the direct responsibility of all of the unions by means of motions adopted at their respective general assemblies. Similarly, the Regional or Local Congresses would establish the guidelines of requirement and problems that obtained only at regional or local levels. In both instances, sovereignty resided always with the assemblies of workers whether in their unions or in their groups.*
>
> *"This sense of rigorous, everyday federalist procedure was abruptly amended from the very outset of the revolutionary phase… This amendment of the norms of the organisation was explained away by reference to the exceptional turn of events, which required a*



cated it and the people had more pressing matters to attend to such as re-starting production and fighting Franco. So it is utterly understandable that the collectives only embodied some and not all aspects of aims of the CNT and FAI! Moreover, social change does not produce instant perfect transformations and the workers *"had to build new circuits of consumption and distribution, new types of social relations between the proletariat and the peasantry, and new modes of production."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 451] That process was started, even if it were initially incomplete. That a wider goal was envisioned by these organisations can be seen from the fact that union activists sought to extend the degree of socialisation. So, and again in line with libertarian theory, the collectives also expressed a desire to co-operate within and across industries (see section I.3.5). These attempts at federation and co-ordination will be discussed in next section, along with some of the conclusions that can be drawn from these experiments. For, as would be expected, this attempt to introduce libertarian socialism had its drawbacks as well as successes.

## I.8.4 How were the Spanish industrial collectives co-ordinated?

The methods of co-operation tried by the collectives varied considerably. Initially, there were very few attempts to co-ordinate economic activities beyond the workplace. This is hardly surprising, given that the overwhelming need was to restart production, convert a civilian economy to a wartime one and to ensure that the civilian population and militias were supplied with necessary goods. This lead to a situation of anarchist mutualism developing, with many collectives selling the product of their own labour on the market.

This lead to some economic problems as there existed no framework of institutions between collectives to ensure effi-

cient co-ordination of activity and so lead to pointless competition between collectives (which led to even more problems). As there were initially no confederations of collectives nor mutual/communal banks this lead to the continuation of any inequalities that initially existed between collectives (due to the fact that workers took over rich and poor capitalist firms) and it made the many ad hoc attempts at mutual aid between collectives difficult and often of an ad hoc nature.

Given that the CNT programme of libertarian communism recognised that a fully co-operative society must be based upon production for use, CNT militants fought against this system of mutualism and for inter-workplace co-ordination. They managed to convince their fellow workers of the difficulties of mutualism by free debate and discussion within their unions and collectives. Given this the degree of socialisation varied over time (as would be expected). Initially, after the defeat of Franco's forces, there was little formal co-ordination and organisation. The most important thing was to get production started again. However, the needs of co-ordination soon became obvious (as predicted in anarchist theory and the programme of the CNT). Gaston Leval gives the example of Hospitalet del Llobregat with regards to this process:

> *"Local industries went through stages almost universally adopted in that revolution ... [I]n the first instance,* ***comites*** *nominated by the workers employed in them [were organised]. Production and sales continued in each one. But very soon it was clear that this situation gave rise to competition between the factories ... creating rivalries which were incompatible with the socialist and libertarian outlook. So the CNT launched the watchword: 'All industries must be ramified in the Syndicates, completely socialised, and the regime of solidarity*



the Russian Revolution proved beyond doubt, in a conflict between workers' power and party power Leninists will suppress the former to ensure the latter.

To paraphrase Stack, the most important lesson from both the Russian and Spanish revolutions is that whatever ideals and gut instincts individual Leninists may have, Leninism, both in word and deed, fails to provide a roadworthy vehicle for human liberation. Only Anarchism, which sees the centrality of the working class self-management of the class struggle and revolution, is capable of ensuring the creation of a real, free, socialist society.

Lastly, it could be argued that our critique of the standard Leninist attack on Spanish anarchism is similar to that presented by Leninists to justify Bolshevik authoritarianism during the Russian Revolution. After all, Leninists like Stack point to the objective circumstances facing Lenin's regime — its isolation, civil war and economic problems — as explaining its repressive actions. Yet any similarity is superficial as the defeat of the Revolution in Spain was due to anarchists **not** applying our ideas whole, while, in Russia, it was due to the Bolsheviks **applying** their ideology. The difficulties that faced the Russian Revolution pushed the Bolsheviks further down the road they where already travelling down (not to mention that Bolshevik ideology significantly contributed to making many of these problem worse). As we discuss in section H.6, the notion that "objective circumstances" explains Bolshevik tyranny is simply unconvincing, particularly given the role Bolshevik ideology played in this process.

So, to conclude, rather than show the failure of anarchism, the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicates the failure of anarchists to apply their ideas in practice. Faced with extremely difficult circumstances, they compromised their ideas in the name of anti-fascist unity. Their compromises **confirmed** rather than refuted anarchist theory as they led to the defeat of both the revolution **and** the civil war.

> *party, is capable of leading the working class to victory.*" [**Op. Cit.**]

As a useful antidote to these claims, we need simply quote Trotsky on what the Spanish anarchists should have done. In his words: *"Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship* ***for themselves*** *they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship."* Hardly an example of "workers' power"! Or, as he put it earlier in the same year, a *"revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* Ultimately, it was the case that the failure of the Spanish Revolution confirmed for Trotsky the truism that the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party … is an objective necessity … The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces* ***its own dictatorship*** *surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution."* Rather than seeing, as anarchist do, workers' councils as being key, Trotsky considered the party, in fact the *"dictatorship of a party"*, as being the decisive factor. [our emphasis, **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37**, p. 514, p. 488 and pp. 513–4] At best, such organs would be used to achieve party power and would simply be a fig-leaf for its rule (see section H.3.8).

Clearly, the leading Marxist at the time was not arguing for the *"centrality of the working class under the leadership of a political party."* He was arguing for the dictatorship of a "revolutionary" party ***over*** the working class. Rather than the working class being "central" to the running of a revolutionary regime, Trotsky saw the party taking that position. What sort of *"victory"* is possible when the party has dictatorial power over the working class and the *"sovereign ruler"* of society? Simply the kind of "victory" that leads to Stalinism. Rather than seeing working class organisations as the means by which working people run society, Leninists see them purely in instrumental terms — the means by which the party can seize power. As



> *which we have always advocated be established once and for all.'*
>
> *"The idea won support immediately."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 291–2]

Another example was the woodworkers' union which had a massive debate on socialisation and decided to do so (the shopworkers' union had a similar debate, but the majority of workers rejected socialisation). According to Ronald Fraser a *"union delegate would go round the small shops, point out to the workers that the conditions were unhealthy and dangerous, that the revolution was changing all this, and secure their agreement to close down and move to the union-built Double-X and the 33 EU."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222]

A plenum of syndicates met in December of 1936 and formulated norms for socialisation in which the inefficiency of the capitalist industrial system was analysed. The report of the plenum stated:

> *"The major defect of most small manufacturing shops is fragmentation and lack of technical/commercial preparation. This prevents their modernisation and consolidation into better and more efficient units of production, with better facilities and co-ordination … For us, socialisation must correct these deficiencies and systems of organisation in every industry … To socialise an industry, we must consolidate the different units of each branch of industry in accordance with a general and organic plan which will avoid competition and other difficulties impeding the good and efficient organisation of production and distribution."* [quoted by Souchy, **Anarchist Collectives**, p. 83]

As Souchy pointed out, this document is very important in the evolution of collectivisation, because it indicates a re-

alisation that *"workers must take into account that partial collectivisation will in time degenerate into a kind of bourgeois co-operativism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83] Thus many collectives did not compete with each other for profits, as surpluses were pooled and distributed on a wider basis than the individual collective.

This process went on in many different unions and collectives and, unsurprisingly, the forms of co-ordination agreed to lead to different forms of organisation in different areas and industries, as would be expected in a free society. However, the two most important forms can be termed syndicalisation and confederationalism (we will ignore the forms created by the collectivisation decree as these were not created by the workers themselves).

***Syndicalisation*** (our term) meant that the CNT's industrial union ran the whole industry. This solution was tried by the woodworkers' union after extensive debate. One section of the union, *"dominated by the FAI, maintained that anarchist self-management meant that the workers should set up and operate autonomous centres of production so as to avoid the threat of bureaucratisation."* However, those in favour of syndicalisation won the day and production was organised in the hands of the union, with administration posts and delegate meetings elected by the rank and file. However, the *"major failure ... (and which supported the original anarchist objection) was that the union became like a large firm"* and its *"structure grew increasingly rigid."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222] According to one militant, *"From the outside it began to look like an American or German trust"* and the workers found it difficult to secure any changes and *"felt they weren't particularly involved in decision making."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222 and p. 223] However, this did not stop workers re-electing almost all posts at the first Annual General Assembly.

In the end, the major difference between the union-run industry and a capitalist firm organisationally appeared to be that workers could vote for (and recall) the industry management



The FoD were an anarchist grouping within the CNT and FAI which, like a large minority of others, strongly and consistently opposed the policy of anti-fascist unity. Rather than signify a *"conscious break"* with anarchism, it signified a conscious **return** to it. This can be clearly seen when we compare their arguments to those of Bakunin. As noted by Stack, the FoD argued for *"juntas"* in the overthrow of capitalism and to defend against counter-revolution. Yet this was **exactly** what revolutionary anarchists have argued for since Bakunin (see section H.2.1 for details). The continuity of the ideas of the FoD with the pre-Civil War politics of the CNT and the ideas of revolutionary anarchism are clear. As such, the FoD were simply arguing for a return to the traditional positions of anarchism and cannot be considered to have broken with it. If Stack or Morrow knew anything about anarchism, then they would have known this.

As such, the failure of the Spanish anarchists was not the *"stark choice"* between *"workers' power"* and *"capitalist power"* but rather the making of the wrong choice in the real dilemma of introducing anarchism (which would, by definition, be based on workers' power, organisation and self-management) or collaborating with other anti-fascist groups in the struggle against the greater enemy of Franco (i.e. fascist reaction). That Stack does not see this suggests that he simply has no appreciation of the dynamics of the Spanish Revolution and prefers abstract sloganeering to a serious analysis of the problems facing it. He ends by summarising:

> *"The most important lesson ... is that whatever ideals and gut instincts individual anarchists may have, anarchism, both in word and deed, fails to provide a roadworthy vehicle for human liberation. Only Marxism, which sees the centrality of the working class under the leadership of a political*

To use the Catalan CNT to generalise about anarchism is false as it, firstly, requires a dismissal of the objective circumstances the decision was made in and, secondly, it means ignoring anarchist theory and history. It also gives the impression that anarchism as a revolutionary theory must be evaluated purely from one event in its history. The experiences of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the USI and UAI in the factory occupations of 1920 and fighting fascism in Italy, the insurrections of the CNT during the 1930s, the Council of Aragón created by the CNT in the Spanish Revolution and so on, are all ignored. Hardly convincing, although handy for Marxists. As is clear from, for example, the experiences of the Makhnovists and the Council of Aragón, that anarchism has been applied successfully on a large scale, both politically and economically, in revolutionary situations.

Equally flawed are any attempts to suggest that those anarchists who remained true to libertarian theory somehow, by so doing, rejected it and moved towards Marxism. This is usually done to the anarchist group the **Friends of Durruti** (FoD). In the words of Pat Stack:

> *"Interestingly the one Spanish anarchist group that developed the most sophisticated critique of all this was the Friends of Durutti [sic!]. As [Trotskyist] Felix Morrow points out, 'They represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism, and the necessary state measures of repression against the counter-revolution.' The failure of the Spanish anarchists to understand exactly that these were the stark choices, workers' power, or capitalist power followed by reaction."* [**Op. Cit.**]

That Stack could not bother to spell Durruti's name correctly shows how seriously we should take this analysis.



at relatively regular General Assembly meetings. While a vast improvement on capitalism, it is hardly the best example of participatory self-management in action. However, it must be stressed that the economic problems caused by the Civil War and Stalinist led counter-revolution obviously would have had an effect on the internal structure of any industry and so we cannot say that the form of organisation created was totally responsible for any marginalisation that took place.

The other important form of co-operation was what we will term ***confederalisation***. This system was based on horizontal links between workplaces (via the CNT union) and allowed a maximum of self-management **and** mutual aid. This form of co-operation was practised by the Badalona textile industry (and had been defeated in the woodworkers' union). It was based upon each workplace being run by its elected management, selling its own production, getting its own orders and receiving the proceeds. However, *"everything each mill did was reported to the union which charted progress and kept statistics. If the union felt that a particular factory was not acting in the best interests of the collectivised industry as a whole, the enterprise was informed and asked to change course."* This system ensured that the *"dangers of the big 'union trust' as of the atomised collective were avoided."* [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 229] According to one militant, the union *"acted more as a socialist control of collectivised industry than as a direct hierarchised executive."* The federation of collectives created *"the first social security system in Spain"* (which included retirement pay, free medicines, sick and maternity pay) and a compensation fund was organised *"to permit the economically weaker collectives to pay their workers, the amount each collective contributed being in direct proportion to the number of workers employed."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 229]

As can be seen, the industrial collectives co-ordinated their activity in many ways, with varying degrees of success. As would be expected, mistakes were made and different solu-

tions found as an anarchist society can hardly be produced "overnight" (as discussed in section H.2.5, anarchists have always been aware that social transformation takes time). So it is hardly surprising that the workers of the CNT faced numerous problems and had to develop their self-management experiment as objective conditions allowed them to. Unfortunately, thanks to fascist aggression and Communist Party and Republican back-stabbing, the experiment did not last long enough to fully answer all the questions we have about the viability of the solutions tried. Given time, however, we are sure they would have solved the problems they faced for the social experimentation which was conducted was not only highly successful but also rich in promise.

## I.8.5 How were the Spanish agricultural co-operatives organised and co-ordinated?

Jose Peirats described collectivisation among the peasantry as follows:

> *"The expropriated lands were turned over to the peasant syndicates, and it was these syndicates that organised the first collectives. Generally the holdings of small property owners were respected, always on the condition that only they or their families would work the land, without employing wage labour. In areas like Catalonia, where the tradition of petty peasant ownership prevailed, the land holdings were scattered. There were no great estates. Many of these peasants, together with the CNT, organised collectives, pooling their land, animals, tools, chickens, grain, fertiliser, and even their harvested crops.*



Libertarian Communism is obvious. The formation of the Regional Defence Council was an affirmation of commitment to the principles of libertarian communism. This principled stand for revolutionary social and economic change stands at odds with the claims that the Spanish Civil War indicates the failure of anarchism. After all, in Aragón the CNT **did** act in accordance with anarchist theory as well as in its own history and politics. It created a federation of workers' associations as argued by Bakunin. To contrast Catalonia and Aragón shows the weakness of Stack's argument. The same organisation, with the same politics, yet different results. How can anarchist ideas be blamed for what happened in Catalonia when they had been applied in Aragón? Such a position could not be logically argued and, unsurprisingly, Aragón usually fails to get mentioned by Marxists when discussing Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War.

Therefore, the activities of the CNT during the Civil War cannot be used to discredit anarchism although it can be used to show that anarchists, like everyone else, can and do make wrong decisions in difficult circumstances. That Marxists always point to this event in anarchist history is unsurprising, for it **was** a terrible mistake. Yet how could anarchism have "failed" during the Spanish Revolution when it was ignored in Catalonia (for fear of fascism) and applied in Aragón? How can it be argued that anarchist politics were to blame when those very same politics had formed the Council of Aragón? It cannot. Simply put, the Spanish Civil War showed the failure of certain anarchists to apply their ideas in a difficult situation rather than the failure of anarchism. As Emma Goldman argued, the *"contention that there is something wrong with Anarchism ... because the leading comrades in Spain failed Anarchism seems to be very faulty reasoning ... the failure of one or several individuals can never take away from the depth and truth of an ideal."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 299]

was proved right, as was anarchist theory from Bakunin onwards. As Vernon Richards argued, *"there can be no excuse"* for the CNT's decision, as *"they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 41–2] It seems difficult to blame anarchist theory for the decisions of the CNT when that theory argues the opposite position. That enemies of anarchism quote Garcia Oliver's words from 1937 to draw conclusions about anarchist theory says more about their politics than about anarchism!

Moreover, while the experience of Spain confirms anarchist theory **negatively**, it also confirms it **positively** by the creation of the Regional Defence Council of Aragón. The Council of Aragón was created by a meeting of delegates from CNT unions, village collectives and militia columns to protect the new society based on libertarian communism the people of Aragón were building. The meeting also decided to press for the setting up of a National Defence Committee which would link together a series of regional bodies that were organised on principles similar to the one now established in Aragón. Durruti stressed that the collectives *"had to build their own means of self-defence and not rely on the libertarian columns which would leave Aragón as the war evolved. They needed to co-ordinate themselves, although he also warned themselves an anti-fascist political front like the type existing in other parts of Spain. They needn't make the same error as their compatriots elsewhere ... The popular assembly must be sovereign."* After a CNT regional assembly militants decided to *"form the Aragón Defence Council and the Aragón Federation of Collectives."* [Paz, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 540–1] This exposes as false the claim that anarchism failed during the Spanish Civil War. In Aragón, the CNT **did** follow the ideas of anarchism, abolishing both the state and capitalism. If they had did this in Catalonia, the outcome of the Civil War may have been different.

The continuity of what happened in Aragón with the ideas of anarchism and the CNT's 1936 Zaragoza Resolution on



> *"Privately owned farms located in the midst of collectives interfered with efficient cultivation by splitting up the collectives into disconnected parcels. To induce owners to move, they were given more or even better land located on the perimeter of the collective.*
>
> *"The collectivist who had nothing to contribute to the collective was admitted with the same rights and the same duties as the others. In some collectives, those joining had to contribute their money (Girondella in Catalonia, Lagunarrotta in Aragón, and Cervera del Maestra in Valencia)."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 112]

Dolgoff observed that *"supreme power was vested in, and actually exercised by, the membership in general assemblies, and all power derived from, and flowed back to, the grass roots organisations of the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p 119fn] Peirats also noted that the collectives were *"fiercely democratic"* as regards decision-making. For example, in Ademuz *"assemblies were held every Saturday"* while in Alcolea de Cinca *"they were held whenever necessary."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 146] Eyewitness Gaston Leval summarised this explosion in self-management as follows:

> *"Regular general membership meetings were convoked weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly ... and these meetings were completely free of the tensions and recriminations which inevitably emerge when the power of decisions is vested in a few individuals — even if democratically elected. The Assemblies were open for everyone to participate in the proceedings. Democracy embraced all social life. In most cases, even the 'individualists' who were not members of the collective could participate in the discussions,*

*and they were listened to by the collectivists.*" [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p 119fn]

Work was *"usually done in groups on a co-operative basis. In smaller collectives, all workers gathered to discuss the work needed to be done and how to allocate it. In larger collectives, representatives of each work group would gather at regular intervals. General assemblies of the collective met on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis, and took up issues ranging from hours and wages to the distribution of food and clothing.*" [Martha A. Ackelsberg in **Free Women of Spain**, p. 106] It was in these face-to-face assemblies that decisions upon the distribution of resources were decided both within and outwith the collective. Here, when considering the importance of mutual aid, appeals were made to an individual's sense of empathy. As one activist remembered:

> *"There were, of course, those who didn't want to share and who said that each collective should take care of itself. But they were usually convinced in the assemblies. We would try to speak to them in terms they understood. We'd ask, 'Did you think it was fair when the* ***cacique*** *[local boss] let people starve if there wasn't enough work?' and they said, 'Of course not.' They would eventually come around. Don't forget, there were three hundred thousand collectivists [in Aragón], but only ten thousand of us had been members of the CNT. We had a lot of educating to do.*" [quoted by Ackelsberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107]

In addition, regional federations of collectives were formed in many areas of Spain (for example, in Aragón and the Levant). The federations were created at congresses to which the collectives in an area sent delegates. These congresses agreed a



and, second, that the struggle could be waged by authoritarian structures or a state. He explicitly attacked the mentality and logic of those who argued *"Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done"*:

> *"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of transforming society into a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of defeating the enemy so long as the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, in witnessing the arrival of material, moral and intellectual well-being for all! They sought to consolidate the Commune first of all while postponing the social revolution for later on, while the only effective way of proceeding was* ***to consolidate the Commune by the social revolution****!"* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 97]

Kropotkin's argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated (as Abel Paz suggested, the workers of Spain *"had to build a new world to secure and defend their victory."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 451]). Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT's actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies:

> *"Paris ... sent her devoted sons to the Hotel-de-Ville [town hall]. Indeed, immobilised there by fetters of red tape, forced to discuss when action was needed, and losing the sensitivity that comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre — the people — they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 97–8]

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. Kropotkin

**did** occur, when the state had recovered enough to start it. Similarly, with the fear of a blockade by foreign governments. This happened away, confirming the analysis of activists like Durruti.

Organising a full and proper delegate meeting in the first days of the revolution would have allowed all arguments and suggestions to be discussed by the whole membership of the CNT and, perhaps, a different decision may have been reached on the subject of collaboration. After all, many CNT members were applying anarchist politics by fighting fascism via a revolutionary war. This can be seen by the rank and file of the CNT and FAI ignoring the decision to "postpone" the revolution in favour of an anti-fascist war. All across Republican Spain, workers and peasants started to expropriate capital and the land, placing it under workers' self-management. They did so on their own initiative. It is also possible, as discussed in the next section, that anti-fascist unity would have prevailed and so the some decision would have been reached.

Be that as it may, by thinking they could postpone the revolution until after the war, the CNT leadership made two mistakes. Firstly, they should have known that their members would hardly miss this opportunity to implement libertarian ideas so making their decision redundant (and a statist backlash inevitable). Secondly, they abandoned their anarchist ideas, failing to understand that the struggle against fascism would never be effective without the active participation of the working class. Such participation could never be achieved by placing the war before the revolution and by working in top-down, statist structures or within a state.

Indeed, the mistake made by the CNT, while understandable, cannot be justified given that their consequences had been predicted by numerous anarchists beforehand, including Kropotkin. Decades earlier in an essay on the Paris Commune, the Russian anarchist refuted the two assumptions of the CNT leadership — first, of placing the war before the revolution



series of general rules about how the federation would operate and what commitments the affiliated collectives would have to each other. The congress elected an administration council, which took responsibility for implementing agreed policy. The Levant Federation was organised as follows:

> *"The 900 Collectives were brought together in 54 cantonal federations which grouped themselves and at the same time subdivided into five provincial federations which at the top level ended in the Regional* ***Comite*** *... [This] was nominated directly by the annual congresses answerable to them and to the hundreds of peasant delegates chosen by their comrades ... . It was also on their initiative that the Levante Federation was divided into 26 general sections in accordance with specialisations in work and other activities. Those 26 sections constituted a whole which embraced probably for the first time in history outside the State and governmental structures, the whole of social life."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 154]

The Aragón Federation statues were agreed at its founding congress in mid-February 1937 by 500 delegates. These stated that there would be *"as many county federations"* as deemed *"necessary for the proper running of the collectives"* and the Federation would *"hold its ordinary congress at intervals of six months, in addition to whatever extraordinary ones ... deemed appropriate."* New collectives could join after *"consent in general assembly of the inhabitants of the collective"*. The federation aimed to *"coordinate the economic potential of the region and ... be geared towards solidarity in accordance with the norms of autonomy and federalism."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 240]

These federations had many tasks. They ensured the distribution of surplus produce to the front line and to the cities,

cutting out middlemen and ensuring the end of exploitation. They also arranged for exchanges between collectives to take place. In addition, the federations allowed the individual collectives to pool resources together in order to improve the infrastructure of the area (building roads, canals, hospitals and so on) and invest in means of production which no one collective could afford. In this way individual collectives pooled their resources, increased and improved the means of production ad the social and economic infrastructure of their regions. All this, combined with an increase of consumption in the villages and towns as well as the feeding of militia men and women fighting the fascists at the front.

Rural collectivisations allowed the potential creative energy that existed among the rural workers and peasants to be unleashed, an energy that had been wasted under private property. The popular assemblies allowed community problems and improvements to be identified and solved directly, drawing upon the ideas and experiences of everyone and enriched by discussion and debate. To quote one participant: *"We were always prepared to adapt our ideas in every area of collective life if things did not work. That was the advantage of our collectives over state-created ones like those in Russia. We were free. Each village could do as it pleased. There was local stimulus, local initiative."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 357] As we discuss in the the next section, this enabled rural Spain to be transformed from one marked by poverty and fear into one of increased well-being and hope.

## I.8.6 What did the agricultural collectives accomplish?

Most basically, self-management in collectives combined with co-operation in rural federations allowed an improvement in quality of rural life. From a purely economic



> *what was called the 'Federation of Barricades.' Militants, standing resolutely behind these barricades, represented them in the Revolutionary Committees."* [Paz, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 450–1]

Later, a delegate meeting from the various workplaces (whether previously unionised or not) would have to had been arranged to organise, to re-quote Bakunin, *"the federal Alliance of all working men's associations"* which would *"constitute the Commune"* and complement the *"federation of the barricades."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170] In more modern terminology, a federation of workers' councils combined with a federation of workers' militias and community assemblies. Without this, the revolution was doomed as was the war against Franco. A minority of anarchists **did** see this genuinely libertarian solution at the time, but sadly they were a minority. For example, the members of the **Nosotros** Group, which included Durruti, thought *"it was necessary to transcend the alliance between the CNT and the political parties and create an authentic revolutionary organisation. That organisation would rest directly on Barcelona's and Catalonia's unions and Revolutionary Committees. Together, those groups would form a Regional Assembly, which would be the revolution's executive body."* [Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 471] Such a development, applying the basic ideas of anarchism (and as expounded in the CNT's May resolution on Libertarian Communism), was not an impossibility. After all, as we will see, the CNT-FAI organised along those lines in Aragón.

Concern that Catalonia would be isolated from the rest of the Republic was foremost in the minds of many in the CNT and FAI. The fear that if libertarian communism was implemented then a civil war within the anti-fascist forces would occur (so aiding Franco) was a real one. Unfortunately, the conclusion draw from that fear, namely to win the war against Franco before talking about the revolution, was the wrong one. After all, a civil war within the Republican side

The role of anarchists, therefore, was that of *"inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority"* and *"to support, to incite and encourage the development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do."* This would involve *"seeking to destroy bourgeois institutions through the creation of revolutionary organisms."* [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44, p. 46 and p. 193] In other words, to encourage, the kind of federation of communities and workplaces Bakunin and Kropotkin had called for.

Indeed, such an organisation already existing in embryo in the CNT's **barrios** defence committees which had led and co-ordinated the struggle against the military coup throughout Barcelona. *"The Neighbourhood Committees, which had diverse names but all shared a libertarian outlook, federated and created a revolutionary Local Co-ordination Committee."* They *"became Revolutionary Committees and formed what was called the 'Federation of Barricades.' It was the Committees that held power in Barcelona that evening."* [Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 470 and p. 445] Rather than collaborate with political parties and the UGT at the top, in the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias, the CNT should have developed these organs of community self-organisation:

> *"Power lay in the street on July 20, represented by the people in arms ... Life took on a new momentum and it both destroyed and created as the people worked to resolve practical necessities born from a collective life that lived — and wanted to continue living — in the street ... The street and the people in arms were the living force of the revolution ... The Defence Committees, now transformed into Revolutionary Committees, back up this force. They organised*



viewpoint, production increased and as historian Benjamin Martin summarises: *"Though it is impossible to generalise about the rural land take-overs, there is little doubt that the quality of life for most peasants who participated in co-operatives and collectives notably improved."* [**The Agony of Modernisation**, p. 394] Another historian, Antony Beevor, notes that *"[i]n terms of production and improved standards for the peasants, the self-managed collectives appear to have been successful. They also seem to have encouraged harmonious community relations."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 95]

More importantly, however, this improvement in the quality of life included an increase in freedom as well as in consumption. To re-quote the member of the Beceite collective in Aragón: *"it was marvellous .. . to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 288] As Beevor suggests, *"self-managed collectives were much happier when no better off than before. What mattered was that the labourers ran their own collectives — a distinct contrast to the disasters of state collectivisation in the Soviet Union."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 95] Here are a few examples provided by Jose Peirats:

> *"In Montblanc the collective dug up the old useless vines and planted new vineyards. The land, improved by modern cultivation with tractors, yielded much bigger and better crops ... Many Aragón collectives built new roads and repaired old ones, installed modern flour mills, and processed agricultural and animal waste into useful industrial products. Many of these improvements were first initiated by the collectives. Some villages, like Calanda, built parks and baths. Almost all collectives*

*established libraries, schools, and cultural centres."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 116]

Gaston Leval pointed out that *"the Peasant Federation of Levant ... produced more than half of the total orange crop in Spain: almost four million kilos (1 kilo equals about 2 and one-fourth pounds). It then transported and sold through its own commercial organisation (no middlemen) more than 70% of the crop. (The Federation's commercial organisation included its own warehouses, trucks, and boats. Early in 1938 the export section established its own agencies in France: Marseilles, Perpignan, Bordeaux, Cherbourg, and Paris.) Out of a total of 47,000 hectares in all Spain devoted to rice production, the collective in the Province of Valencia cultivated 30,000 hectares."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 124] To quote Peirats again:

> *"Preoccupation with cultural and pedagogical innovations was an event without precedent in rural Spain. The Amposta collectivists organised classes for semi-literates, kindergartens, and even a school of arts and professions. The Seros schools were free to all neighbours, collectivists or not. Grau installed a school named after its most illustrious citizen, Joaquin Costa. The Calanda collective (pop. only 4,500) schooled 1,233 children. The best students were sent to the Lyceum in Caspe, with all expenses paid by the collective. The Alcoriza (pop. 4,000) school was attended by 600 children. Many of the schools were installed in abandoned convents. In Granadella (pop. 2,000), classes were conducted in the abandoned barracks of the Civil Guards. Graus organised a print library and a school of arts and professions, attended by 60 pupils. The same building housed a school of fine arts and high grade museum. In some villages a cinema was installed*



*declared libertarian communism."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 238]

It seems that the CNT leadership's loyalty to *"its ideals and its purely anarchist nature"* which necessitated *"not attack[ing] the forms of the State"* was a very recent development!

As can be seen, the rationales later developed to justify the betrayal of anarchist ideas and the revolutionary workers of Spain have no real relationship to anarchist theory. They were created to justify a non-anarchist approach to the struggle against fascism, an approach based on ignoring struggle from below and instead forging alliances with parties and unions at the top. This had been not always been the case. Throughout the 1930s the UGT and Socialist Party had rejected the CNT's repeated calls for a revolutionary alliance from below in favour of a top-down *"Workers' Alliance"* which, they believed, would be the only way which would allow them to control the labour movement. The CNT, rightly, rejected such a position in favour of an alliance from the bottom up yet, in July 1936, the need for unity was obvious and the UGT was not changing its position. So while in Barcelona the state has been destroyed in all but name, *"in Madrid, thanks to the Socialist Party, bourgeois structures were left intact and even fortified: a semi-dead state received a new lease of life and no dual power was created to neutralise it."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 462]

Rather than trying to cement a unity with other organisations at the top level in July 1936, the leadership of the CNT should have applied their anarchist ideas by inciting the oppressed to enlarge and consolidate their gains (which they did anyway). This would have liberated all the potential energy within the country (and elsewhere), energy that clearly existed as can be seen from the spontaneous collectivisations that occurred after the fateful Plenum of July 20th and the creation of volunteer workers' militia columns sent to liberate those parts of Spain which had fallen to Franco.

*struction"* will include the *"dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood"* as well as the *"confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use"*. The state would be replaced by *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations"* which *"will constitute the Commune."* These communes, in turn, would *"constitute the federation of insurgent associations ... and organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1] For Kropotkin, the *"Commune ... must break the State and replace it by the Federation."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83]

Thus anarchism has always been clear on what to do with the state, and it is obviously not what the CNT did to it! The CNT ignored these recommendations and so given that it did **not** destroy the state, nor create a federation of workers' councils, then how can anarchist theory be blamed? It seems strange to point to the failure of anarchists to apply their politics as an example of the failure of those politics, yet this is what the likes of Stack are doing.

Nor had the CNT always taken this perspective. Before the start of the Civil War, the CNT had organised numerous insurrections against the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers *"seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared* ***communismo liberatario.***" In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again *"seiz[ed] town halls"* and the town was *"swept by street fighting."* The revolt in January 1933 began with *"assaults by Anarchist action groups ... on Barcelona's military barracks ... Serious fighting occurred in working-class* ***barrios*** *and the outlying areas of Barcelona ... Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several* ***pueblos*** *in Valencia province, and in Andalusia."* In December 1933, the workers *"reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting ... many villages*



> *for the first time. The Penalba cinema was installed in a church. Viladecana built an experimental agricultural laboratory.* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 116]

Peirats summed up the accomplishments of the agricultural collectives as follows:

> *"In distribution the collectives' co-operatives eliminated middlemen, small merchants, wholesalers, and profiteers, thus greatly reducing consumer prices. The collectives eliminated most of the parasitic elements from rural life, and would have wiped them out altogether if they were not protected by corrupt officials and by the political parties. Non-collectivised areas benefited indirectly from the lower prices as well as from free services often rendered by the collectives (laundries, cinemas, schools, barber and beauty parlours, etc.)."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 114]

Leval emphasised the following achievements (among others):

> *"In the agrarian collectives solidarity was practised to the greatest degree. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favoured by nature. In Castile special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy. Had the political compromise not impeded open socialisation, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalised ... A conquest of*

*enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half of the agrarian collectives, the women received the same wages as men; in the rest the women received less, apparently on the principle that they rarely live alone … In all the agrarian collectives of Aragón, Catalonia, Levant, Castile, Andalusia, and Estremadura, the workers formed groups to divide the labour or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work groups met with the collective's delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organisation arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative … In addition … the collective as a whole met in weekly, bi-weekly or monthly assembly … The assembly reviewed the activities of the councillors it named, and discussed special cases and unforeseen problems. All inhabitants — men and women, producers and non-producers — took part in the discussion and decisions … In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock raising: the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaptation of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 166–167]

Collectivisation, as Graham Kelsey notes, *"allowed a rationalisation of village societies and a more efficient use of the economic resources available. Instead of carpenters and bricklayers remaining idle because no wealthy landowner had any use for their services they were put to work constructing agricultural facilities and providing the villages with the kind of social amenities which until then they had scarcely been able to imagine."*



(a society based on self-managed free associations organised and run from the bottom up) is an *"anarchist dictatorship"* and **less** democratic than the capitalist Republic he had been fighting against between 1931 and 1936! Moreover, libertarian communism **inspired** the revolution and so to reject it in favour of capitalist democracy to stop *"the strangulation of the revolution"* makes no sense.

Clearly, these oft quoted words of Garcia Oliver cannot be taken at face value. Made in 1937, they present an attempt to misuse anarchist ideals to defend the anti-anarchist activities of the CNT leadership rather than a meaningful explanation of the decisions made on the 20th of July, 1936. It is safe to take his words with a large pinch of salt. To rely upon them for an analysis of the actions of the Spanish Anarchists or the failings of anarchism suggests an extremely superficial perspective. This is particularly the case when we look at both the history of the CNT and anarchist theory.

This can clearly been seen from the report made by the CNT to the **International Workers Association** to justify the decision to forget anarchist theory and collaborate with bourgeois parties and join the government. The report states that *"the CNT, loyal to its ideals and its purely anarchist nature, did not attack the forms of the State, nor try publicly to penetrate or dominate it … none of the political or juridical institutions were abolished."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156] In other words, according to this report, "anarchist" ideals do not, in fact, mean the destruction of the state, but rather the **ignoring** of the state. That this is nonsense, concocted to justify the CNT leaderships' betrayal of its ideals, is clear. To prove this we just need to look at Bakunin and Kropotkin and look at the activities of the CNT **before** the start of the war.

According to anarchist ideas, to quote Bakunin, *"the revolution must set out from the first to radically and totally destroy the State"* and that the *"natural and necessary consequence of this de-*

CNT's actions. Moreover, the decision made then clearly stated that Libertarian Communism would be back on the agenda once Franco was defeated. Oliver's comments were applicable **after** Franco was defeated just as much as on July 20th, 1936.

Similarly, Libertarian Communism is based on self-management, by its nature opposed to dictatorship. According to the CNT's resolution at its congress in Zaragoza in May, 1936, *"the foundation of this administration will be the Commune"* which is *"autonomous"* and *"federated at regional and national levels."* The commune *"will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms [that] may be agreed by majority vote after free debate."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 106] It stressed the free nature of society aimed at by the CNT:

> *"The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems ... Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes ... every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say ... On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements ... So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation."* [quoted by Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107]

Hardly a picture of *"anarchist dictatorship"*! Indeed, it is far more democratic than the capitalist state Oliver described as *"democracy."* So Oliver's arguments from 1937 are totally contradictory. After all, he is arguing that libertarian communism



[**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 169] Martha A. Ackelsberg sums up the experience well:

> *"The achievements of these collectives were extensive. In many areas they maintained, if not increased, agricultural production [not forgetting that many young men were at the front line], often introducing new patterns of cultivation and fertilisation ... collectivists built chicken coups, barns, and other facilities for the care and feeding of the community's animals. Federations of collectives co-ordinated the construction of roads, schools, bridges, canals and dams. Some of these remain to this day as lasting contributions of the collectives to the infrastructure of rural Spain. The collectivists also arranged for the transfer of surplus produce from wealthier collectives to those experiencing shortages, either directly from village to village or through mechanisms set up by regional committees."* [**The Free Women of Spain**, pp. 106–7]

As well as this inter-collective solidarity, the rural collectives also supplied food to the front-line troops:

> *"The collectives voluntarily contributed enormous stocks of provisions and other supplies to the fighting troops. Utiel sent 1,490 litres of oil and 300 bushels of potatoes to the Madrid front (in addition to huge stocks of beans, rice, buckwheat, etc.). Porales de Tujana sent great quantities of bread, oil, flour, and potatoes to the front, and eggs, meat, and milk to the military hospital.*
>
> *"The efforts of the collectives take on added significance when we take into account that their*

> *youngest and most vigorous workers were fighting in the trenches. 200 members of the little collective of Vilaboi were at the front; from Viledecans, 60; Amposta, 300; and Calande, 500."* [Jose Peirats, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 120]

Therefore, as well as significant economic achievements, the collectives ensured social and political ones too. Solidarity was practised and previously marginalised people took direct and full management of the affairs of their communities, transforming them to meet their own needs and desires.

## I.8.7 Were the rural collectives created by force?

No, they were not. The myth that the rural collectives were created by "terror," organised and carried out by the anarchist militia, was started by the Stalinists of the Spanish Communist Party. More recently, certain right-wing "libertarians" have warmed up and repeated these Stalinist fabrications. Anarchists have been disproving these allegations since 1936 and it is worthwhile to do so again here. As Vernon Richards noted: *"However discredited Stalinism may appear to be today the fact remains that the Stalinist lies and interpretation of the Spanish Civil War still prevail, presumably because it suits the political prejudices of those historians who are currently interpreting it."* [*"Introduction"*, Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 11] Here we shall present evidence to refute claims that the rural collectives were created by force.

Firstly, we should point out that rural collectives were created in many different areas of Spain, such as the Levant (900 collectives), Castile (300) and Estremadera (30), where the anarchist militia did not exist. In Catalonia, for example, the CNT militia passed through many villages on its way to Aragón



> *and its leaders had certainly not foreseen this situation; if they had, they would have given appropriate guidance to the workers when they called off the General Strike and ordered a return to work. What happened next was the result of the workers' spontaneous decision to take matters into their own hands.*
>
> *"Finding the factories deserted, and no instructions from their unions, they resolved to operate the machines themselves."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, pp. 54–5]

The rank and file of the CNT, on their own initiative, took advantage of the collapse of state power to transform the economy and social life of Catalonia. Paz stressed that *"no orders were given for expropriation or collectivisation — which proved that the union, which represented the will of their members until July 18th, had now been overtaken by events"* and the *"union leaders of the CNT committees were confronted with a revolution that they had not foreseen ... the workers and peasants had bypassed their leaders and taken collective action."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 40 and p. 56] As historian Ronald summarises the *"revolutionary initiative had sprung not from the CNT's leading committees — how could it when the libertarian revolution had been officially 'postponed'? — but from individual CNT unions impelled by the most advanced syndicalist militants."* So while the Catalan CNT *"had 'put off' libertarian revolution ... daily, the revolution in Barcelona was taking root in CNT collectives and union-run industries."* [**Blood of Spain**, p. 139 and p. 179]

As the revolution had not yet begun and the CNT Plenum had decided **not** to call for its start, it is difficult to see how *"libertarian communism"* (i.e. the revolution) could *"lead to the strangulation of the revolution"* (i.e. libertarian communism). In other words, this particular rationale put forward by Garcia Oliver could not reflect the real thoughts of those present at the CNT plenum and so, obviously, was a later justification for the

trot out a quote made over a year later. They argue that it exposes the bankruptcy of anarchist theory. So convinced of this, they rarely bother discussing the problems facing the CNT after the defeat of the military coup nor do they compare these quotes to the anarchist theory they claim inspired them.

There are good reasons for this. Firstly, if they presented the objective circumstances the CNT found itself it then their readers may see that the decision, while wrong, is understandable and had nothing to do with anarchist theory. Secondly, by comparing this quote to anarchist theory their readers would soon see how at odds they are with each other. Indeed, Garcia Oliver invoked anarchism to justify conclusions that were the exact **opposite** to what that theory actually recommends!

So what can be made of Garcia Oliver's argument? As Abel Paz noted *"[i]t is clear that the explanations given ... were designed for their political effect, hiding the atmosphere in which these decisions were taken. These declarations were made a year later when the CNT were already far removed from their original positions It is also the period when they had become involved in the policy of collaboration which led to them taking part in the Central Government. But in a certain way they shed light on the unknown factors which weighted so heavily on these who took part in the historic Plenum."* [**Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 215]

For example, when the decision was made, the revolution had not started yet. The street fighting had just ended and the Plenum decided *"not to speak about Libertarian Communism as long as part of Spain was in the hands of the fascists."* [Mariano R. Vesquez, quoted by Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214] The revolution took place **from below** in the days following the decision, independently of the wishes of the Plenum. In the words of Abel Paz:

> *"When the workers reached their workplaces ... they found them deserted ... The major centres of production had been abandoned by their owners ... The CNT*



and only around 40 collectives were created unlike the 450 in Aragón. In other words, the rural collectivisation process occurred independently of the existence of anarchist troops, with the majority of the 1,700 rural collectives created in areas without a predominance of anarchist militias.

One historian, Ronald Fraser, seems to imply that collectives were imposed upon the Aragón population. As he put it, the *"collectivisation, carried out under the general cover, if not necessarily the direct agency, of CNT militia columns, represented a revolutionary minority's attempt to control not only production but consumption for egalitarian purposes and the needs of the war."* Notice that he does not suggest that the anarchist militia actually **imposed** the collectives, a claim for which there is little or no evidence. Moreover, Fraser presents a somewhat contradictory narrative to the facts he presents. On the one hand, he suggests that *"[o]bligatory collectivisation was justified, in some libertarians' eyes, by a reasoning closer to war communism than to libertarian communism."* On the other hand, he presents extensive evidence that the collectives did not have a 100% membership rate. How can collectivisation be obligatory if people remain outside the collectives? Similarly, he talks of how **some** CNT militia leaders justified *"[f]orced collectivisation"* in terms of the war effort while acknowledging the official CNT policy of opposing forced collectivisation, an opposition expressed in practice as only around 20 (i.e., 5%) of the collectives were total. [**Blood of Spain**, p. 370, p. 349 and p. 366] This is shown in his own book as collectivists interviewed continually note that people remained outside their collectives!

Thus Fraser's attempts to paint the Aragón collectives as a form of *"war communism"* imposed upon the population by the CNT and obligatory for all fails to co-incidence with the evidence he presents.

Fraser states that *"[t]here was no need to dragoon them [the peasants] at pistol point [into collectives]: the coercive climate,*

*in which 'fascists' were being shot, was sufficient. 'Spontaneous' and 'forced' collectives existed, as did willing and unwilling collectivists within them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 349] Therefore, his implied suggestion that the Aragón collectives were imposed upon the rural population is based upon the insight that there was a *"coercive climate"* in Aragón at the time. Of course a civil war against fascism would produce a *"coercive climate"* particularly near the front line. However, the CNT can hardly be blamed for that. As historian Gabriel Jackson summarised, while such executions took place the CNT did not conduct a general wave of terror:

> *"the anarchists made a constant effort to separate active political enemies from those who were simply bourgeois by birth or ideology or economic function. Anarchist political committees wanted to know what the accused monarchists or conservatives had done, not simply what they thought or how they voted ... There is no inherent contradiction involved in recognising both that the revolution included some violence and that its social and economic results ... were approved of by the majority of peasants in an area."* [quoted in Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 146]

This was a life and death struggle against fascism, in which the fascists were systematically murdering vast numbers of anarchists, socialists and republicans in the areas under their control. It is hardly surprising that some anarchist troops took the law into their own hands and murdered some of those who supported and would help the fascists. Given what was going on in fascist Spain, and the experience of fascism in Germany and Italy, the CNT militia knew exactly what would happen to them and their friends and family if they lost.

The question does arise, however, of whether the climate was made so coercive by the war and the nearness of the



To understand why the CNT and FAI made the decisions it did, it is necessary to do what Stack fails to do, namely to provide some context. The decision to ignore anarchist theory, ignore the state rather than smashing it and work with other anti-fascist organisations was made immediately after the army had been defeated on the streets of Barcelona on the 20th of July, 1936. As we indicated in the last section, the decision of the CNT to collaborate with the state was driven by the fear of isolation. The possibility that by declaring libertarian communism it would have had to fight the Republican government and foreign interventions **as well as** the military coup influenced the decision reached by the militants of Catalan anarchism. They concluded that pursuing implementing anarchism in the situation they faced would only aid Franco and result in a quick defeat.

As such, the **real** choice facing the CNT was not *"between leaving the state intact ... or building a workers' government in Catalonia which could act as a focal point for the defeat of Franco"* but rather something drastically different: Either work with other anti-fascists against Franco so ensuring unity against the common enemy and pursue anarchism after victory **or** immediately implement libertarian communism and possibly face a conflict on two fronts, against Franco **and** the Republic (and, possibly, imperialist intervention against the social revolution). This situation made the CNT-FAI decided to collaborate with other anti-fascist groups in the Catalan **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**. To downplay these objective factors and the dilemma they provoked and instead simply blame the decision on anarchist politics is a joke.

Similarly, the Garcia Oliver quote provided by Stack dated from July 1937. They were made as justifications of CNT-FAI actions and were designed for political effect. As such, they simply cannot be taken at face value for these two reasons. It is significant, though, that rather than discuss the actual problems facing the CNT Marxists like Stack prefer to ritualistically

> *Libertarian Communism, which meant anarchist dictatorship, and democracy, which meant collaboration.' The choice was between leaving the state intact and paving the way for Franco's victory or building a workers' government in Catalonia which could act as a focal point for the defeat of Franco and the creation of the structures of a new workers' state. In choosing the former the anarchists were refusing to distinguish between a capitalist state and a workers' state ... The movement that started by refusing to build a workers' state ended up by recognising a capitalist one and betraying the revolution in the process."* [Pat Stack, *"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

There are four key flaws in this kind of argument. First, there is the actual objective situation in which the decision to collaborate was made in. Strangely, for all his talk of anarchists ignoring *"material conditions"* when we discuss the Russian revolution, Stack fails to mention any when he discusses Spain. As such, his critique is pure idealism, without any attempt to ground it in the objective circumstances facing the CNT and FAI. Second, the quote provided as the only evidence for Stack's analysis dates from a year **after** the decision was made. Rather than reflect the actual concerns of the CNT and FAI at the time, they reflect the attempts of the leaders of an organisation which had significantly departed from its libertarian principles to justify their actions. While this obviously suits Stack's idealist analysis of events, its use is flawed for that reason. Thirdly, clearly the decision of the CNT and FAI **ignored** anarchist theory. As such, it seems ironic to blame anarchism when anarchists ignores its recommendations, yet this is what Stack does. Lastly, there is the counter-example of Aragón, which clearly refutes Stack's case.



anarchist militia that individual choice was impossible. The facts speak for themselves. At its peak, rural collectivisation in Aragón embraced around 70% of the population in the area saved from fascism. Around 30% of the population felt safe enough not to join a collective, a sizeable percentage. If the collectives had been created by anarchist terror or force, we would expect a figure of 100% membership. This was not the case, indicating the basically voluntary nature of the experiment (we should point out that other figures suggest a lower number of collectivists which makes the forced collectivisation argument even less likely). Historian Antony Beevor (while noting that there *"had undoubtedly been pressure, and no doubt force was used on some occasions in the fervour after the rising"*) just stated the obvious when he wrote that *"the very fact that every village was a mixture of collectivists and individualists shows that peasants had not been forced into communal farming at the point of a gun."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 206] In addition, if the CNT militia had forced peasants into collectives we would expect the membership of the collectives to peak almost overnight, not grow slowly over time:

> *"At the regional congress of collectives, held at Caspe in mid-February 1937, nearly 80 000 collectivists were represented from 'almost all the villages of the region.' This, however, was but a beginning. By the end of April the number of collectivists had risen to 140,000; by the end of the first week of May to 180,000; and by the end of June to 300,000."* [Graham Kelsey, *"Anarchism in Aragón,"* pp. 60–82, **Spain in Conflict 1931–1939**, Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), p. 61]

If the collectives had been created by force, then their membership would have been 300,000 in February, 1937, not increasing steadily to reach that number four months later. Neither

can it be claimed that the increase was due to new villages being collectivised, as almost all villages had sent delegates in February. This indicates that many peasants joined the collectives because of the advantages associated with common labour, the increased resources it placed at their hands and the fact that the surplus wealth which had in the previous system been monopolised by the few was used instead to raise the standard of living of the entire community.

The voluntary nature of the collectives is again emphasised by the number of collectives which allowed people to remain outside. There *"were few villages which were completely collectivised."* [Beevor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94] One eye-witness in Aragón, an anarchist schoolteacher, noted that the forcing of smallholders into a collective *"wasn't a widespread problem, because there weren't more than twenty or so villages where collectivisation was total and no one was allowed to remain outside."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 366] Instead of forcing the minority in a village to agree with the wishes of the majority, the vast majority (95%) of Aragón collectives stuck to their libertarian principles and allowed those who did not wish to join to remain outside.

So, only around 20 were *"total"* collectives (out of 450) and around 30% of the population felt safe enough **not** to join. In other words, in the vast majority of collectives those joining could see that those who did not were safe. These figures indicate of the basically spontaneous and voluntary nature of the movement as do the composition of the new municipal councils created after July 19th. As Graham Kesley notes: *"What is immediately noticeable from the results is that although the region has often been branded as one controlled by anarchists to the total exclusion of all other forces, the CNT was far from enjoying the degree of absolute domination often implied and inferred."* [**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 198]

In his account of the rural revolution, Burnett Bolloten noted that it *"embraced more than 70 percent of the population"*



Indeed, as we argue in the next section, attempts by the CNT leadership to justify the decision in terms of anarchist principles are not convincing and cannot be done without making a mockery of anarchism.

## I.8.11 Was the decision to collaborate a product of anarchist theory?

Marxist critics of Anarchism point to CNT's decision to collaborate with the bourgeois state against Franco as the key proof that libertarian socialism is flawed. Such a claim, anarchists reply, is false for rather than being the product of anarchist ideology, the decision was made in light of the immediate danger of fascism and the situation in other parts of the country. The fact is that the circumstances in which the decision to collaborate was made are rarely mentioned by Marxists. To quote a sadly typical Marxist diatribe:

> *"This question of state power, and which class holds it, was to prove crucial for revolutionaries during the Spanish Civil War and in particular during the revolutionary upheavals in Catalonia. Here anarchism faced its greatest test and greatest opportunity, yet it failed the former and therefore missed the latter.*
>
> *"When the government in the region under the leadership of Companys admitted its impotence and offered to dissolve, effectively handing power to the revolutionary forces, the anarchists turned them down. CNT leader and FAI ... militant Garcia Oliver explained, 'The CNT and the FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, renouncing revolutionary totalitarianism which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship. We had to choose, between*

> *the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute."* [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 193-4f]

This desire to push the revolution further was not limited to Durruti, as can be seen from this communication from the Catalan CNT leadership in August 1936. It also expresses the fears driving the decisions which had been made:

> *"Reports have also been received from other regions. There has been some talk about the impatience of some comrades who wish to go further than crushing fascism, but for the moment the situation in Spain as a whole is extremely delicate. In revolutionary terms, Catalonia is an oasis within Spain.*
>
> *"Obviously no one can foresee the changes which may follow the civil war and the conquest of that part of Spain which is still under the control of mutinous reactionaries."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 151–2]

Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. The biggest of these mistakes was forgetting basic anarchist ideas and an anarchist approach to the problems facing the Spanish people. If these ideas had been applied in Spain, the outcome of the Civil War and Revolution could have been different.

In summary, while the decision to collaborate is one that can be understood (due to the circumstances under which it was made), it cannot be justified in terms of anarchist theory.



in liberated Aragón and that *"many of the 450 collectives of the region were largely voluntary"* although *"it must be emphasised that this singular development was in some measure due to the presence of militiamen from the neighbouring region of Catalonia, the immense majority of whom were members of the CNT and FAI."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 74] This, it should be noted, was not denied by anarchists. As Gaston Leval pointed out, *"it is true that the presence of these forces ... favoured indirectly these constructive achievements by preventing active resistance by the supporters of the bourgeois republic and of fascism."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 90]

So the presence of the militia changed the balance of class forces in Aragón by destroying the capitalist state (i.e. the local bosses — caciques — could not get state aid to protect their property) and many landless workers took over the land. The presence of the militia ensured that land could be taken over by destroying the capitalist "monopoly of force" that existed before the revolution (the power of which will be highlighted below) and so the CNT militia allowed the possibility of experimentation by the Aragónese population. This class war in the countryside is reflected by Bolloten: *"If the individual farmer viewed with dismay the swift and widespread collectivisation of agriculture, the farm workers of the Anarchosyndicalist CNT and the Socialist UGT saw it as the commencement of a new era."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63] Both were mass organisations and supported collectivisation.

Therefore, anarchist militias allowed the rural working class to abolish the artificial scarcity of land created by private property (and enforced by the state). The rural bosses obviously viewed with horror the possibility that they could not exploit day workers' labour (as Bolloten pointed out *"the collective system of agriculture threaten[ed] to drain the rural labour market of wage workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62]). Little wonder the richer peasants and landowners hated the collectives. A

report on the district of Valderrobes which indicates popular support for the collectives:

> *"Collectivisation was nevertheless opposed by opponents on the right and adversaries on the left. If the eternally idle who have been expropriated had been asked what they thought of collectivisation, some would have replied that it was robbery and others a dictatorship. But, for the elderly, the day workers, the tenant farmers and small proprietors who had always been under the thumb of the big landowners and heartless usurers, it appeared as salvation."* [quoted by Bolloten, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

However, many historians ignore the differences in class that existed in the countryside and explain the rise in collectives in Aragón (and ignore those elsewhere) as the result of the CNT militia. For example, Fraser:

> *"Very rapidly collectives ... began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the CNT leadership — no more than had the [industrial] collectives in Barcelona. Here, as there, the initiative came from CNT militants; here, as there, the 'climate' for social revolution in the rearguard was created by CNT armed strength: the anarcho-syndicalists' domination of the streets of Barcelona was re-enacted in Aragón as the CNT militia columns, manned mainly by Catalan anarcho-syndicalist workers, poured in. Where a nucleus of anarcho-syndicalists existed in a village, it seized the moment to carry out the long-awaited revolution and collectivised spontaneously. Where there was none, villagers could find themselves under considerable pressure from the militias to collectivise."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 347]



*ago. Instead it compromised and dallied. Even now at this moment, there are men in this Government who want to go easy on the rebels. You can never tell, you know — he laughed — the present Government might yet need these rebellious forces to crush the workers' movement ...*

*"We know what we want. To us it means nothing that there is a Soviet Union somewhere in the world, for the sake of whose peace and tranquillity the workers of Germany and China were sacrificed to Fascist barbarians by Stalin. We want revolution here in Spain, right now, not maybe after the next European war. We are giving Hitler and Mussolini far more worry to-day with our revolution than the whole Red Army of Russia. We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class on how to deal with fascism.*

*"I do not expect any help for a libertarian revolution from any Government in the world. Maybe the conflicting interests of the various imperialisms might have some influence in our struggle. That is quite possible ... But we expect no help, not even from our own Government, in the last analysis."*

*"You will be sitting on a pile of ruins if you are victorious,"* said [the journalist] van Paasen.

Durruti answered: *"We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For, you must not forget, we can also build. It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers, can build others to take their place. And better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit*

*propping up the power of the people, weapons would not come to Catalonia, nor would we be granted the foreign currency to obtain them from abroad, nor would we be supplied with the raw materials for our industry. And since losing the war meant losing everything and returning to a state like that prevailed in the Spain of Ferdinand VII, and in the conviction that the drive given by us and our people could not vanish completely from the new economic life, we quit the Militias Committee to join the Generalidad government."* [quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

It was decided to collaborate and reject the basic ideas of anarchism until the war was over. A terrible mistake, but one which can be understood given the circumstances in which it was made. This is not, we stress, to justify the decision but rather to explain it and place it in context. Ultimately, the **experience** of the Civil War saw a blockade of Republic by both "democratic" and fascist governments, the starving of the militias and self-managed collectives of resources and credit as well as a war on two fronts when the State felt strong enough to try and crush the CNT and the semi-revolution its members had started. Most CNT members did not think that when faced with the danger of fascism, the liberals, the right-wing socialists and communists would prefer to undermine the anti-fascist struggle by attacking the CNT. They were wrong and, in this, history proved Durruti totally correct:

*"For us it is a matter of crushing Fascism once and for all. Yes, and in spite of the Government.*

*"No government in the world fights Fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to Fascism to maintain itself. The liberal government of Spain could have rendered the fascist elements powerless long*



Fraser implies that the revolution was mostly imported into Aragón from Catalonia. However, as he himself notes, the CNT column leaders (except Durruti) *"opposed"* the creation of the Council of Aragón (a confederation for the collectives). Hardly an example of Catalan CNT imposed social revolution! Moreover, the Aragón CNT was a widespread and popular organisation, suggesting that the idea that the collectives were imported into the region by the Catalan CNT is simply **false**. Fraser states that in *"some [of the Aragónese villages] there was a flourishing CNT, in others the UGT was strongest, and in only too many there was no unionisation at all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 350 and p. 348] The question arises of how extensive was that strength. The evidence shows that the rural CNT in Aragón was extensive, strong and growing, so making the suggestion of imposed collectives a false one. In fact, by the 1930s the *"authentic peasant base of the CNT ... lay in Aragón."* CNT growth in Zaragoza *"provided a springboard for a highly effective libertarian agitation in lower Aragón, particularly among the impoverished labourers and debt-ridden peasantry of the dry steppes region."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 203]

Graham Kelsey, in his social history of the CNT in Aragón between 1930 and 1937, provides more evidence on this matter. He points out that as well as the *"spread of libertarian groups and the increasing consciousness among CNT members of libertarian theories ... contribu[ting] to the growth of the anarchosyndicalist movement in Aragón"* the existence of *"agrarian unrest"* also played an important role in that growth. This all lead to the *"revitalisation of the CNT network in Aragón"*. So by 1936, the CNT had built upon the *"foundations laid in 1933"* and *"had finally succeeded in translating the very great strength of the urban trade-union organisation in Zaragoza into a regional network of considerable extent."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 80–81, p. 82 and p. 134]

Kelsey notes the long history of anarchism in Aragón, dating back to the late 1860s. However, before the 1910s there had

been little gains in rural Aragón by the CNT due to the power of local bosses (called **caciques**):

> *"Local landowners and small industrialists, the **caciques** of provincial Aragón, made every effort to enforce the closure of these first rural anarchosyndicalist cells [created after 1915]. By the time of the first rural congress of the Aragónese CNT confederation in the summer of 1923, much of the progress achieved through the organisation's considerable propaganda efforts had been countered by repression elsewhere."* [*"Anarchism in Aragón"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62]

A CNT activist indicated the power of these bosses and how difficult it was to be a union member in Aragón:

> *"Repression is not the same in the large cities as it is in the villages where everyone knows everybody else and where the Civil Guards are immediately notified of a comrade's slightest movement. Neither friends nor relatives are spared. All those who do not serve the state's repressive forces unconditionally are pursued, persecuted and on occasions beaten up."* [quoted by Kelsey, **Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

However, while there were some successes in organising rural unions, even in 1931 *"propaganda campaigns which led to the establishment of scores of village trade-union cells, were followed by a counter-offensive from village **caciques** which forced them to close."* [**Op. Cit.** p. 67] Even in the face of this repression the CNT grew and *"from the end of 1932"* there was *"a successful expansion of the anarchosyndicalist movement into several parts of the region where previously it had never penetrated."* [Kesley, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the**



> *solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism (or of the people), they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become, part of the bourgeois state ... Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, the Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*
>
> *"But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism, was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory into practice by organisational decree ... [the] spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direct of its own."* [**We, the Anarchists!**, p. 99]

Given that the pro-fascist army still controlled a third or more of Spain (including Aragón) and that the CNT was not the dominant force in the centre and north of Spain, it was decided that a war on three fronts would only aid Franco. Moreover, it was a distinct possibility that by introducing libertarian communism in Catalonia, Aragón and elsewhere, the workers' militias and self-managed industries would have been starved of weapons, resources and credit. That isolation was a real problem can be seen from Abad de Santillán's later comments on why the CNT joined the government:

> *"The Militias Committee guaranteed the supremacy of the people in arms ... but we were told and it was repeated to us endlessly that as long as we persisted in retaining it, that is, as long as we persisted in*

Moreover, as Gaston Leval later argued, given that the *"general preoccupation"* of the majority of the population was *"to defeat the fascists ... the anarchists would, if they came out against the state, provoke the antagonism ... of the majority of the people, who would accuse them of collaborating with Franco."* Implementing an anarchist revolution would, in all likelihood, also result in *"the instant closing of the frontier and the blockade by sea by both fascists and the democratic countries. The supply of arms would be completely cut off, and the anarchists would rightly be held responsible for the disastrous consequences."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 52 and p. 53]

While the supporters of Lenin and Trotsky will constantly point out the objective circumstances in which their heroes made their decisions during the Russian Revolution, they rarely mention those facing the anarchists in Spain on the 20th of July, 1936. It seems hypocritical to point to the Russian Civil War as the explanation of all of the Bolsheviks' crimes against the working class (indeed, humanity) while remaining silent on the forces facing the CNT-FAI at the start of the Spanish Civil War. The fact that **if** the CNT had decided to implement libertarian communism in Catalonia they would have to face the fascists (commanding the bulk of the Spanish army), the Republican government (commanding the rest) **plus** those sections in Catalonia which supported the republic is rarely mentioned. Moreover, when the decision to collaborate was made it was **immediately after the defeat of the army uprising in Barcelona** — the situation in the rest of the country was uncertain and when the social revolution was in its early days. Stuart Christie indicates the dilemma facing the leadership of the CNT at the time:

> *"The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJL in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the*



**State**, p. 185] This growth was built upon in 1936, with increased rural activism which had slowly eroded the power of the **caciques** (which in part explains their support for the fascist coup). After the election of the Popular Front, years of anarchist propaganda and organisation paid off with *"dramatic growth in rural anarcho-syndicalist support"* in the six weeks after the general election. This *"was emphasised"* in the Aragón CNT's April congress's agenda and it was decided to direct *"attention to rural problems"* while the agreed programme was *"exactly what was to happen four months later in liberated Aragón."* In its aftermath, a series of intensive propaganda campaigns was organised through each of the provinces of the regional confederation. Many meetings were held in villages which had never before heard anarcho-syndicalist propaganda. This was very successful and by the beginning of June, 1936, the number of Aragón unions had topped 400, compared to only 278 one month earlier. [Kesley, *"Anarchism in Aragón"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 75–76]

This increase in union membership reflected increased social struggle by the Aragónese working population and their attempts to improve their standard of living, which was very low for most of the population. A journalist from the conservative Catholic **Heraldo de Aragón** visited lower Aragón in the summer of 1935 and noted *"[t]he hunger in many homes, where the men are not working, is beginning to encourage the youth to subscribe to misleading teachings."* [quoted by Kesley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 74] Little wonder, then, the growth in CNT membership and social struggle Kesley indicates:

> *"Evidence of a different kind was also available that militant trade unionism in Aragón was on the increase. In the five months between mid-February and mid-July 1936 the province of Zaragoza experienced over seventy strikes, more than had previously been recorded in any entire year, and*

> *things were clearly no different in the other two provinces . .. the great majority of these strikes were occurring in provincial towns and villages. Strikes racked the provinces and in at least three instances were actually transformed into general strikes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 76]

So in the spring and summer of 1936 there was a massive growth in CNT membership which reflected the growing militant struggle by the urban and rural population of Aragón. Years of propaganda and organising had ensured this growth in libertarian influence, a growth which was reflected in the creation of collectives in liberated Aragón during the revolution. Therefore, the construction of a collectivised society was founded directly upon the emergence, during the five years of the Second Republic, of a mass trade-union movement infused by anarchist principles. These collectives were constructed in accordance with the programme agreed at the Aragón CNT conference of April 1936 which reflected the wishes of the rural membership of the unions within Aragón (and due to the rapid growth of the CNT afterwards obviously reflected popular feelings in the area):

*"libertarian dominance in post-insurrection Aragón itself reflected the predominance that anarchists had secured before the war; by the summer of 1936 the CNT had succeeded in establishing throughout Aragón a mass trade-union movement of strictly libertarian orientation, upon which widespread and well-supported network the extensive collective experiment was to be founded."* [Kesley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61]

Additional evidence that supports a high level of CNT support in rural Aragón can be provided by the fact that it was Aragón that was the centre of the December 1933 insurrection organised by the CNT. As Bookchin noted, *"only Aragón rose on any significant scale, particularly Saragossa ... many of the villages declared libertarian communism and perhaps the heav-*



port made by the CNT to the **International Workers Association** made clear:

> *"Levante was defenceless and uncertain ... We were in a minority in Madrid. The situation in Andalusia was unknown ... There was no information from the North, and we assumed the rest of Spain was in the hands of the fascists. The enemy was in Aragón, at the gates of Catalonia. The nervousness of foreign consular officials led to the presence of a great number of war ships around our ports."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 180]

Anarchist historian Jose Peirats noted that according to the report *"the CNT was in absolute control of Catalonia in July 19, 1936, but its strength was less in Levante and still less in central Spain where the central government and the traditional parties were dominant. In the north of Spain the situation was confused. The CNT could have mounted an insurrection on its own 'with probable success' but such a take-over would have led to a struggle on three fronts: against the fascists, the government and foreign capitalism. In view of the difficulty of such an undertaking, collaboration with other antifascist groups was the only alternative."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 179] In the words of the CNT report itself:

> *"The CNT showed a conscientious scrupulousness in the face of a difficult alternative: to destroy completely the State in Catalonia, to declare war against the Rebels [i.e. the fascists], the government, foreign capitalism, and thus assuming complete control of Catalan society; or collaborating in the responsibilities of government with the other antifascist fractions."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156]

been defeated. In other words, to collaborate with other anti-fascist parties and unions in a common front against fascism. This decision, initially, involved the CNT agreeing to join a *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* proposed by the leader of the Catalan government, Louis Companys. This committee was made up of representatives of various anti-fascist parties and groups. From this it was only a matter of time until the CNT joined an official government as no other means of co-ordinating activities existed (see section I.8.13).

The question must arise, **why** did the CNT decide to collaborate with the state, forsake its principles and, in its own way, contribute to the counter-revolution and the loosing of the war. This is an important question. Indeed, it is one Marxists always throw up in arguments with anarchists or in anti-anarchist diatribes. Does the failure of the CNT to implement anarchism after July 19th mean that anarchist politics are flawed? Or, rather, does the experience of the CNT and FAI during the Spanish revolution indicate a failure of **anarchists** rather than of **anarchism,** a mistake made under difficult objective circumstances and one which anarchists have learnt from? Needless to say, anarchists argue that the latter is correct. In other words, as Vernon Richards argued, *"the basis of [this] criticism is not that anarchist ideas were proved to be unworkable by the Spanish experience, but that the Spanish anarchists and syndicalists failed to put their theories to the test, adopting instead the tactics of the enemy."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 14]

So, why **did** the CNT collaborate with the state during the Spanish Civil War? Simply put, rather than being the fault of anarchist theory (as Marxists like to claim), its roots can be discovered in the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20th. The objective conditions facing the leading militants of the CNT and FAI influenced the decisions they took, decisions which they later justified by **mis**-using anarchist theory.

What was the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20th? Simply put, it was an unknown situation, as the re-



*iest fighting took place between the vineyard workers in Rioja and the authorities".* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 238] It is unlikely for the CNT to organise an insurrection in an area within which it had little support or influence. According to Kesley, *"it was precisely those areas which had most important in December 1933"* which were in 1936 *"seeking to create a new pattern of economic and social organisation, to form the basis of libertarian Aragón."* [**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 161]

So the majority of collectives in Aragón were the product of CNT (and UGT) influenced workers taking the opportunity to create a new form of social life, a form marked by its voluntary and directly democratic nature. For from being unknown in rural Aragón, the CNT was well established and growing at a fast rate: *"Spreading out from its urban base ... the CNT, first in 1933 and then more extensively in 1936, succeeded in converting an essentially urban organisation into a truly regional confederation."* [Kesley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184]

The evidence suggests that historians like Fraser are wrong to imply that the Aragón collectives were created by the CNT militia and enforced upon a unwilling population. The Aragón collectives were the natural result of years of anarchist activity within rural Aragón and directly related to the massive growth in the CNT between 1930 and 1936. Thus Kesley is correct to state that libertarian communism and agrarian collectivisation *"were not economic terms or social principles enforced upon a hostile population by special teams of urban anarchosyndicalists."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 161] This is not to suggest that there were **no** examples of people joining collectives involuntarily because of the *"coercive climate"* of the front line nor that there were villages which did not have a CNT union within them before the war and so created a collective because of the existence of the CNT militia. It is to suggest that these can be considered as exceptions to the rule.

Moreover, the way the CNT handled such a situation is noteworthy. Fraser indicates such a situation in the village of Alloza. In the autumn of 1936, representatives of the CNT district committee had come to suggest that the villagers collectivise (we would like to stress here that the CNT militia which had passed through the village had made no attempt to create a collective there). A village assembly was called and the CNT members explained their ideas and suggested how to organise the collective. However, who would join and how the villagers would organise the collective was left totally up to them (the CNT representatives *"stressed that no one was to be maltreated"*). Within the collective, self-management was the rule and one member recalled that *"[o]nce the work groups were established on a friendly basis and worked their own lands, everyone got on well enough." "There was no need for coercion, no need for discipline and punishment ... A collective wasn't a bad idea at all."* [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 360] This collective, like the vast majority, was voluntary and democratic: *"I couldn't oblige him to join; we weren't living under a dictatorship."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 362] In other words, **no** force was used to create the collective and the collective was organised by local people directly.

Of course, as with any public good (to use economic jargon), all members of the community had to pay for the war effort and feed the militia. As Kelsey notes, *"[t]he military insurrection had come at a critical moment in the agricultural calendar. Throughout lower Aragón there were fields of grain ready for harvesting ... At the assembly in Albalate de Cinca the opening clause of the agreed programme had required everyone in the district, independent farmers and collectivists alike, to contribute equally to the war effort, thereby emphasising one of the most important considerations in the period immediately following the rebellion."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 164] In addition, the collectives controlled the price of crops in order to ensure that speculation and inflation were controlled. However, these policies as with



So, regardless of how good a social system is, objective facts will overcome that experiment. Saturnino Carod (a leader of a CNT Militia column at the Aragón Front) summed up the successes of the revolution as well as its objective limitations:

> *"Always expecting to be stabbed in the back, always knowing that if we created problems, only the enemy across the lines would stand to gain. It was a tragedy for the anarcho-syndicalist movement; but it was a tragedy for something greater — the Spanish people. For it can never be forgotten that it was the working class and peasantry which, by demonstrating their ability to run industry and agriculture collectively, allowed the republic to continue the struggle for thirty-two months. It was they who created a war industry, who kept agricultural production increasing, who formed militias and later joined the army. Without their creative endeavour, the republic could not have fought the war ..."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 394]

So, regardless of its benefits, regardless of its increase in liberty and equality, the revolution was defeated. This should not blind us to its achievements or the potential it expressed. Rather, it should be used both as a source of inspiration and lessons.

## I.8.10 Why did the CNT collaborate with the state?

As is well know, in September 1936 the CNT joined the Catalan government, followed by the central government in November. This flowed from the decision made on July 21st to not speak of Libertarian Communism until after Franco had

intervention" was strangely ignored when their citizens aided Franco) it is amazing the revolution lasted as long as it did.

This does not excuse the actions of the anarchists themselves. As is well known, the CNT co-operated with the other anti-fascist parties and trade unions on the Republican side ultimately leading to anarchists joining the government (see next section). This co-operation helped ensure the defeat of the revolution. While much of the blame can be placed at the door of the would-be "leaders" (who like most leaders started to think themselves irreplaceable), it must be stated that the rank-and-file of the movement did little to stop them. Most of the militant anarchists were at the front-line (and so excluded from union and collective meetings) and so could not influence their fellow workers (it is no surprise that the radical *"Friends of Durruti"* anarchist group were mostly ex-militia men). However, it seems that the mirage of anti-fascist unity proved too much for the majority of CNT members (see section I.8.12).

A few anarchists still maintain that the Spanish anarchist movement had no choice and that collaboration (while having unfortunate effects) was the only choice available. This view was defended by Sam Dolgoff and finds some support in the writings of Gaston Leval, August Souchy and other participants in the revolution. However, most anarchists today oppose collaboration and think it was a terrible mistake (at the time, this position was held by the majority of non-Spanish anarchists plus a large minority of the Spanish movement, becoming a majority as the implications of collaboration became clear). This viewpoint finds its best expression in Vernon Richard's **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** and, in part, in such works as **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** by Jose Peirats, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI** by Juan Gomaz Casas and **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution** by Abel Paz as well as in a host of pamphlets and articles written by anarchists ever since.



the equal duties of individualists and collectivists in the war effort were enforced upon the collectives by the war.

Lastly, in support of the popular nature of the rural collectives, we will indicate the effects of the suppression of the collectives in August 1937 by the Communists, namely the collapse of the rural economy. This sheds considerable light on the question of popular attitudes.

In October 1937, the Communist-controlled Regional Delegation of Agrarian Reform acknowledged that *"in the majority of villages agricultural work was paralysed causing great harm to our agrarian economy."* This is confirmed by Jose Silva, a Communist Party member and general secretary of the Institute of Agrarian Reform, who commented that after Lister had attacked Aragón, *"labour in the fields was suspended almost entirely, and a quarter of the land had not been prepared at the time for sowing."* At a meeting of the agrarian commission of the Aragónese Communist Party (October 9th, 1937), Silva emphasised *"the little incentive to work of the entire peasant population"* and that the situation brought about by the dissolution of the collectives was *"grave and critical."* [quoted by Bolloten, **Op. Cit.**, p. 530] Jose Peirats explained the reasons for this economic collapse as a result of popular boycott:

> *"When it came time to prepare for the next harvest, smallholders could not by themselves work the property on which they had been installed [by the communists]. Dispossessed peasants, intransigent collectivists, refused to work in a system of private property, and were even less willing to rent out their labour."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 258]

If the collectives were unpopular, created by anarchist force, then why did the economy collapse after the suppression? If Lister had overturned a totalitarian anarchist regime, why did

the peasants not reap the benefit of their toil? Could it be because the collectives were essentially a spontaneous Aragónese development and supported by most of the population there? This analysis is supported by historian Yaacov Oved:

> *"Those who were responsible for this policy [of attacking the Aragón collectives], were convinced that the farmers would greet it joyfully because they had been coerced into joining the collectives. But they were proven wrong. Except for the rich estate owners who were glad to get their land back, most of the members of the agricultural collectives objected and lacking all motivation they were reluctant to resume the same effort in the agricultural work. This phenomenon was so widespread that the authorities and the communist minister of agriculture were forced to retreat from their hostile policy."* [**"Communismo Libertario" and Communalism in the Spanish Collectivisations (1936–1939)**, pp. 53–4]

Even in the face of Communist repression, most of the collectives kept going. This, if nothing else, proves that the collectives were popular institutions. *"Through the widespread reluctance of collectivists to co-operate with the new policy,"* Oved argues, *"it became evident that most members had voluntarily joined the collectives and as soon as the policy was changed a new wave of collectives was established. However, the wheel could not be turned back. An atmosphere of distrust prevailed between the collectives and the authorities and every initiative was curtailed"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54]

Jose Peirats summed up the situation after the communist attack on the collectives and the legalisation of the collectives as follows:

> *"It is very possible that this second phase of collectivisation better reflects the sincere convictions of manifest itself in a socialised society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 347]



Therefore the actual experiences of self-management in Spain supports the points made in section I.4.11. Freed from hierarchy, individuals will creatively interact with the world to improve their circumstances. For the human mind is an active agent and unless crushed by authority it can no more stop thinking and acting than the Earth can stop revolving round the Sun. In addition, the Collectives indicate that self-management allows ideas to be enriched by discussion.

The experience of self-management proved Bakunin's point that society is collectively more intelligent than even the most intelligent individual simply because of the wealth of viewpoints, experience and thoughts contained there. Capitalism impoverishes individuals and society by its artificial boundaries and authority structures.

## I.8.9 Why, if it was so good, did it not survive?

Just because something is good does not mean that it will survive. For example, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the Nazis failed but that does not mean that the uprising was a bad cause or that the Nazi regime was correct, far from it. Similarly, while the experiments in workers' self-management and free communes undertaken across Republican Spain is one of the most important social experiments in a free society ever undertaken, this cannot change the fact that Franco's forces and the Communists had access to more and better weapons.

Faced with the aggression and terrorism of Franco, and behind him the military might of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the treachery of the Communists, and the aloofness of the Western "democratic" states (whose policy of "non-

The substantial evidence available, of which these examples are but a small number, proves that the membership of the collectives showed a keen awareness of the importance of investment and innovation in order to increase production, to make work both lighter and more interesting **and** that the collectives allowed that awareness to be expressed freely. The collectives indicate that, given the chance, everyone will take an interest in their own affairs and express a desire to use their minds to improve their lives and surroundings. In fact, capitalism distorts what innovation exists under hierarchy by channelling it purely into how to save money and maximise investor profit, ignoring other, more important, issues. As Gaston Leval suggested, self-management encouraged innovation:

> *"The theoreticians and partisans of the liberal economy affirm that competition stimulates initiative and, consequently, the creative spirit and invention without which it remains dormant. Numerous observations made by the writer in the Collectives, factories and socialised workshops permit him to take quite the opposite view. For in a Collective, in a grouping where each individual is stimulated by the wish to be of service to his fellow beings, research, the desire for technical perfection and so on are also stimulated. But they also have as a consequence that other individuals join those who were first to get together. Furthermore, when, in present society, an individualist inventor discovers something, it is used only by the capitalist or the individual employing him, whereas in the case of an inventor living in a community not only is his discovery taken up and developed by others, but is immediately applied for the common good. I am convinced that this superiority would very soon*



> *the members. They had undergone a severe test and those who had withstood it were proven collectivists. Yet it would be facile to label as anti-collectivists those who abandoned the collectives in this second phase. Fear, official coercion and insecurity weighed heavily in the decisions of much of the Aragónese peasantry."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258]

While the collectives had existed, there was a 20% increase in production (and this is compared to the pre-war harvest which had been *"a good crop"* [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**p. 370]). After the destruction of the collectives, the economy collapsed. Hardly the result that would be expected if the collectives were forced upon an unwilling peasantry (the forced collectivisation by Stalin in Russia resulted in a famine). Only the victory of fascism made it possible to restore the so-called "natural order" of capitalist property in the Spanish countryside. The same landowners who welcomed the Communist repression of the collectives also, we are sure, welcomed the fascists who ensured a lasting victory of property over liberty.

So, overall, the evidence suggests that the Aragón collectives, like their counterparts in the Levante, Catalonia and so on, were **popular** organisations, created by and for the rural population and, essentially, an expression of a spontaneous and popular social revolution. Claims that the anarchist militia created them by force of arms are **false.** While acts of violence **did** occur and some acts of coercion **did** take place (against CNT policy, we may add) these were the exceptions to the rule. Bolloten's summary best fits the facts:

> *"But in spite of the cleavages between doctrine and practice that plagued the Spanish Anarchists whenever they collided with the realities of power, it cannot be overemphasised that notwithstanding the many instances of coercion and violence, the revolution of July 1936 distinguished itself from all others*

*by the generally spontaneous and far-reaching character of its collectivist movement and by its promise of moral and spiritual renewal. Nothing like this spontaneous movement had ever occurred before."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

## I.8.8 But did the Spanish collectives innovate?

Yes. In contradiction to the old capitalist claim that no one will innovate unless private property exists, the workers and peasants exhibited much more incentive and creativity under libertarian socialism than they had under the private enterprise system. This is apparent from Gaston Leval's description of the results of collectivisation in Cargagente in the southern part of the province of Valencia:

> *"The climate of the region is particularly suited for the cultivation of oranges ... All of the socialised land, without exception, is cultivated with infinite care. The orchards are thoroughly weeded. To assure that the trees will get all the nourishment needed, the peasants are incessantly cleaning the soil. 'Before,' they told me with pride, 'all this belonged to the rich and was worked by miserably paid labourers. The land was neglected and the owners had to buy immense quantities of chemical fertilisers, although they could have gotten much better yields by cleaning the soil ...' With pride, they showed me trees that had been grafted to produce better fruit.*
>
> *"In many places I observed plants growing in the shade of the orange trees. 'What is this?,' I asked. I learned that the Levant peasants (famous for their ingenuity) have abundantly planted potatoes among the orange groves. The peasants demonstrate more intelligence than all the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Agriculture combined. They do more than just plant potatoes. Throughout the whole region of the Levant, wherever the soil is suitable, they grow crops. They take advantage of the four month [fallow period] in the rice fields. Had the Minister of Agriculture followed the example of these peasants throughout the Republican zone, the bread shortage problem would have been overcome in a few months."* [**Anarchist Collectives**, p. 153]

This is just one from a multitude of examples presented in the accounts of both the industrial and rural collectives. We have already noted some examples of the improvements in efficiency realised by collectivisation during the Spanish Revolution (section I.4.10). Another example was the baking industry. Souchy reported that, *"[a]s in the rest of Spain, Barcelona's bread and cakes were baked mostly at night in hundreds of small bakeries. Most of them were in damp, gloomy cellars infested with roaches and rodents. All these bakeries were shut down. More and better bread and cake were baked in new bakeries equipped with new modern ovens and other equipment."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 82] In Granollers, the syndicate *"was at all times a prime-mover. All kinds of initiatives tending to improve the operation and structure of the local economy could be attributed to it."* The collectivised hairdressing, shoe-making, wood-working and engineering industries were all improved, with small, unhealthy and inefficient workplaces closed and replaced by larger, more pleasant and efficient establishments. *"Socialisation went hand in hand with rationalisation."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 287] For more see sectionI.8.6 as well as section C.2.8 (in which we present more examples when refuting the charge that workers' control would stifle innovation).

self-managed organisations which can replace the current hierarchical ones (see section I.2.3). For example, for Kropotkin, unions were *"natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future order."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 81] In other words, direct action helps create the new world in the shell of the old:

> *"direct action not only empowered those who participated in it, it also had effects on others ... [it includes] exemplary action that attracted adherents by the power of the positive example it set. Contemporary examples ... include food or day-care co-ops, collectively run businesses, sweat equity housing programmes, women's self-help health collectives, urban squats or women's peace camps [as well as traditional examples as industrial unions, social centres, etc.]. While such activities empower those who engage in them, they also demonstrate to others that non-hierarchical forms of organisation can and do exist — and that they can function effectively."* [Ackelsberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

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



> *greater agility of decisions and resolutions, which is to say a necessary departure from the circuitous procedures of federalist practice which operated from the bottom upwards."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 213]

In other words, the CNT had become increasingly hierarchical, with the higher committees becoming transformed into executive bodies rather than administrative ones as *"it is safe to assert that the significant resolutions in the organisation were adopted by the committees, very rarely by the mass constituency. Certainly, circumstances required quick decisions from the organisation, and it was necessary to take precautions to prevent damaging leaks. These necessities tempted the committees to abandon the federalist procedures of the organisation."* [Jose Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 188]

Ironically, rather than the *"anarchist leaders"* of the CNT failing to *"seize power"* as Trotsky and his followers lament (see last section), they did — **in their own organisations.** Such a development proved to be a disaster and re-enforced the anarchist critique against hierarchical and centralised organisations. The CNT higher committees became isolated from the membership, pursued their own policies and compromised and paralysed the creative work being done by the rank and file — as predicted in anarchist theory. However, be that as it may, as we will indicate below, it would be false to assert that these higher committees simply imposed the decision to collaborate on their memberships (as, for example, Vernon Richards seems to imply in his **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**). While it **is** true that the committees presented many decisions as a **fait accompli** the rank-and-file of the CNT and FAI did not simply follow orders nor ratify all of the decisions blindly.

In any revolutionary situation decisions have to be made quickly and sometimes without consulting the base of the organisation. However, such decisions must be accountable to

the membership who must discuss and ratify them (this was the policy within the CNT militias, for example). The experience of the CNT and FAI in countless strikes, insurrections and campaigns had proven the decentralised, federal structure was more than capable of pursuing the class war — revolution is no exception as it is the class war in its most concentrated form. In other words, the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI were more than adequate for a revolutionary situation.

The centralising tendencies, therefore, cannot be blamed on the exceptional circumstances of the war. Rather, it was the policy of collaboration which explains them. Unlike the numerous strikes and revolts that occurred before July 19th, 1936, the CNT higher committees had started to work within the state structure. This, by its very nature, must generate hierarchical and centralising tendencies as those involved must adapt to the states basic structure and form. The violations of CNT policy flowed from the initial decision to compromise in the name of *"anti-fascist unity"* and a vicious circle developed — each compromise pushed the CNT leadership further into the arms of the state, which increased hierarchical tendencies, which in turn isolated these higher committees from the membership, which in turn encouraged a conciliatory policy by those committees.

This centralising and hierarchical tendency did not mean that the higher committees of the CNT simply imposed their will on the rest of the organisation. It is very clear that the decision to collaborate had, initially, the passive support of the majority of the CNT and FAI (probably because they thought the war would be over after a few weeks or months). As visiting French anarchist Sebastian Faure noted, while *"effective participation in central authority has had the approval of the majority within the unions and in the groups affiliated to the FAI, that decision has in many places encountered the opposition of a fairly substantial minority. Thus there has been no unanimity."* [quoted



and oppression — such as initiative, solidarity, imagination, self-confidence and a sense of individual and collective power, that what you do matters and that you with others like you **can** change the world. Direct action is the means by which people can liberate themselves and educate themselves in the ways of and skills required for self-management and liberty:

> *"Direct action meant that the goal of ... these activities was to provide ways for people to get in touch with their own powers and capacities, to take back the power of naming themselves and their lives ... we learn to think and act for ourselves by joining together in organisations in which our experience, our perception, and our activity can guide and make the change. Knowledge does not precede experience, it flows from it ... People learn to be free only by exercising freedom. [As one Spanish Anarchist put it] 'We are not going to find ourselves . .. with people ready-made for the future ... Without continued exercise of their faculties, there will be no free people ... The external revolution and the internal revolution presuppose one another, and they must be simultaneous in order to be successful.'"* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 54–5]

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

In addition, direct action creates the need for new forms of social organisation. These new forms of organisation will be informed and shaped by the process of self-liberation, so be more anarchistic and based upon self-management. Direct action, as well as liberating individuals, can also create the free,

*social life that the centralised, over-bearing bureaucracies have usurped from the people ... we not only gain a sense that we can control the course of social events again; we recover a new sense of selfhood and personality without which a truly free society, based in self-activity and self-management, is utterly impossible."* [Murray Bookchin, **Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 47]

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

> *"man has as much liberty as he is willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social and moral. But defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man. Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free independent spirits, for men who are men, and who have a bone in their back which you cannot pass your hand through."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 75–6]

In addition, because direct action is based around individuals solving their own problems, by their own action, it awakens those aspects of individuals crushed by hierarchy



by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 183] In the words of Peirats:

> *"Were all of the militants of the same mind? ... Excepting some vocal minorities which expressed their protests in their press organs and through committees, gatherings, plenums and assemblies, the dismal truth is that the bulk of the membership was in thrall to a certain fatalism which was itself a direct consequence of the tragic realities of the war."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181]

And:

> *"We have already seen how, on the economic plane, militant anarchism forged ahead, undaunted, with its work of transforming the economy. It is not to be doubted — for to do so would have been to display ignorance of the psychology of the libertarian rank and file of the CNT — that a muffled contest, occasionally erupting at plenums and assemblies and manifest in some press organs broke out as soon as the backsliding began. In this connection, the body of opinion hostile to any possible deviation in tactics and principles was able to count throughout upon spirited champions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

Thus, within the libertarian movement, there was a substantial minority who opposed the policy of collaboration and made their opinions known in various publications and meetings. While many (if not most) revolutionary anarchists volunteered for the militias and so were not active in their unions as before, there were various groups (such as Catalan Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti, other FAI groups, and so on) which were opposed to collaboration and argued their case openly in the streets, collectives, organisational meetings and

so on. Moreover, outside the libertarian movement the two tiny Trotskyist groups also argued against collaboration, as did sections of the POUM. Therefore it is impossible to state that the CNT membership were unaware of the arguments against the dominant policy. Also the Catalan CNT's higher committees, for example, after the May Days of 1937 could not get union assemblies or plenums to expel the Friends of Durruti nor to get them to withhold financial support for the Libertarian Youth, who opposed collaboration vigorously in their publications, nor get them to call upon various groups of workers to stop distributing opposition publications in the public transit system or with the daily milk. [Abe Bluestein, *"Translator's Note"*, Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 10]

This suggests that in spite of centralising tendencies, the higher committees of the CNT were still subject to some degree of popular influence and control and should not be seen as having dictatorial powers over the organisation. While many decisions **were** presented as **fait accompli** to the union plenums (often called by the committees at short notice), in violation of past CNT procedures, the plenums could not be railroaded into ratifying **any** decision the committees wanted. The objective circumstances associated with the war against Franco and fascism convinced most CNT members and libertarian activists that working with other parties and unions within the state was the only feasible option. Also to do otherwise, they thought, was to weaken the war effort by provoking another Civil War in the anti-Franco camp. While such a policy did not work (when it was strong enough the Republican state did start a civil war against the CNT which gutted the struggle against fascism) it cannot be argued that it was imposed upon the membership nor that they did not hear opposing positions. Sadly, the call for anti-fascist unity dominated the minds of the libertarian movement.



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

As direct action is the expression of liberty, the powers that be are vitally concerned only when the oppressed use direct action to win its demands, for it is a method which is not easy or cheap to combat. Any hierarchical system is placed into danger when those at the bottom start to act for themselves and, historically, people have invariably gained more by acting directly than could have been won by playing ring around the rosy with indirect means. Direct action tore the chains of open slavery from humanity. Over the centuries it has established individual rights and modified the life and death power of the master class. Direct action won political liberties such as the vote and free speech. Used fully, used wisely and well, direct action can forever end injustice and the mastery of humans by other humans.

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

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

Simply because it is effective and it has a radicalising impact on those who practice it. As it is based on people acting for themselves, it shatters the dependency and marginalisation created by hierarchy. This is key:

*"What is even more important about direct action is that it forms a decisive step toward recovering the personal power over*

> *"These actions are generally not due to any one's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practisers of it."* [**The Voltairine De Cleyre Reader**, pp. 47–8]

So direct action means acting for yourself against injustice and oppression. It can, sometimes, involve putting pressure on politicians or companies, for example, to ensure a change in an oppressive law or destructive practices. However, such appeals are direct action simply because they do not assume that the parties in question we will act for us — indeed the assumption is that change only occurs when we act to create it. Regardless of what it is, *"if such actions are to have the desired empowerment effect, they must be largely self-generated, rather than being devised and directed from above"* and be *"ways in which people could take control of their lives"* so that it *"empowered those who participated in it."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 55]

So, in a nutshell, direct action is any form of activity which people themselves decide upon and organise themselves which is based on their own collective strength and does not involve getting intermediates to act for them. As such direct action is a natural expression of liberty, of self-government, for direct action *"against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 76–7] It is clear that by acting for yourself you are expressing the ability to govern yourself. Thus it is a means by which people can take control of their own lives. It is a means of self-empowerment and self-liberation.



In the early stages, the majority of rank-and-file militants believed that the war would be over in a matter of weeks. After all, a few days had been sufficient to rout the army in Barcelona and other industrial centres. This inclined them to, firstly, tolerate (indeed, support) the collaboration of the CNT with the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* and, secondly, to start expropriating capitalism in the belief that the revolution would soon be back on track (the opportunity to start introducing anarchist ideas was simply too good to waste, regardless of the wishes of the CNT leadership). They believed that the revolution and libertarian communism, as debated and adopted by the CNT's Zaragoza Congress of May that year, was an inseparable aspect of the struggle against fascism and proceeded appropriately. The ignoring of the state, rather than its destruction, was seen as a short-term compromise, soon to be corrected. Sadly, there were wrong — collaboration had a logic all its own, one which got worse as the war dragged on (and soon it was too late).

Which, we must note indicates the superficial nature of most Marxist attacks on anarchism using the CNT as the key evidence. After all, it was the anarchists and anarchist influenced members of the CNT who organised the collectives, militias and started the transformation of Spanish society. They did so inspired by anarchism and in an anarchist way. To praise their actions, while attacking "anarchism", shows a lack of logic. Indeed, these actions have more in common with anarchist ideas than the actions and rationales of the CNT leadership. Thus, to attack "anarchism" by pointing to the anti-anarchist actions of a few leaders while ignoring the anarchist actions of the majority is flawed.

Therefore, to summarise, it is clear that while the internal structure of the CNT was undermined and authoritarian tendencies increased by its collaboration with the state, the CNT was not transformed into a mere appendage to the higher committees of the organisation. The union plenums could and did

reject the calls made by the leadership of the CNT. Support for "anti-fascist unity" was widespread among the CNT membership (in spite of the activities and arguments of large minority of anarchists) and was reflected in the policy of collaboration pursued by the organisation. While the CNT higher committees were transformed into a bureaucratic leadership, increasingly isolated from the rank and file, it cannot be argued that their power was absolute nor totally at odds with the wishes of the membership. Ironically, but unsurprisingly, the divergences from the CNT's previous libertarian organisational principles confirmed anarchist theory, becoming a drag on the revolution and a factor in its defeat.

As we argued in section I.8.11, the initial compromise with the state, the initial betrayal of anarchist theory and CNT policy, contained all the rest. Moreover, rather than refute anarchism, the experience of the CNT after it had rejected anarchist theory confirmed it — centralised, hierarchical organisations hindered and ultimately destroyed the revolution. The experience of the CNT and FAI suggests that those, like Leninists, who argue for **more** centralisation and for "democratic" hierarchical structures have refused to understand, let alone learn from, history. The increased centralisation within the CNT aided and empowered the leadership (a minority) and disempowered the membership (the majority). Rather than federalism hindering the revolution, it, as always, was centralism which did so.

Therefore, in spite of a sizeable minority of anarchists **within** the CNT and FAI arguing against the dominant policy of "anti-fascist unity" and political collaboration, this policy was basically agreed to by the CNT membership and was not imposed upon them. The membership of the CNT could, and did, reject suggestions of the leadership and so, in spite of the centralisation of power that occurred in the CNT due to the policy of collaboration, it cannot be argued that this



ple to make a change by their own efforts. Thus Voltairine De Cleyre's excellent statement on this topic:

> *"Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Some thirty years ago I recall that the Salvation Army was vigorously practicing direct action in the maintenance of the freedom of its members to speak, assemble, and pray. Over and over they were arrested, fined, and imprisoned; but they kept right on singing, praying, and marching, till they finally compelled their persecutors to let them alone. The Industrial Workers [of the World] are now conducting the same fight, and have, in a number of cases, compelled the officials to let them alone by the same direct tactics.*
>
> *"Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.*
>
> *"Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter.*

# J.2 What is direct action?

Direct action, to use Rudolf Rocker's words, is *"every method of immediate warfare by the workers [or other sections of society] against their economic and political oppressors. Among these the outstanding are: the strike, in all its graduations from the simple wage struggle to the general strike; the boycott; sabotage in all its countless forms; anti-militarist propaganda, and in particularly critical cases ... armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 78]

Not that anarchists think that direct action is only applicable within the workplace. Far from it. Direct action must occur everywhere! So, in non-workplace situations, direct action includes rent strikes, consumer boycotts, occupations (which, of course, can include sit-down strikes by workers), eco-tage, individual and collective non-payment of taxes, blocking roads and holding up construction work of an anti-social nature and so forth. Also direct action, in a workplace setting, includes strikes and protests on social issues, not directly related to working conditions and pay. Such activity aims to ensure the *"protection of the community against the most pernicious outgrowths of the present system. The social strike seeks to force upon the employers a responsibility to the public. Primarily it has in view the protection of the customers, of whom the workers themselves [and their families] constitute the great majority"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86]

Basically, direct action means that instead of getting someone else to act for you (e.g. a politician), you act for yourself. Its essential feature is an organised protest by ordinary people



policy was alien to the wishes of the rank-and-file however lamentable the results of that position were.

## I.8.13 What political lessons were learned from the revolution?

The most important political lesson learned from the Spanish Revolution is that a revolution cannot compromise with existing power structures. In this, it just confirmed anarchist theory and the basic libertarian position that a social revolution will only succeed if it follows an anarchist path and does not seek to compromise in the name of fighting a "greater evil." As Kropotkin put it, a *"revolution that stops half-way is sure to be soon defeated."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 553]

On the 20th of July, after the fascist coup had been defeated in Barcelona, the CNT sent a delegation of its members to meet the leader of the Catalan Government. A plenum of CNT union shop stewards, in the light of the fascist coup, agreed that libertarian communism would be postpone until Franco had been defeated (the rank and file ignored them and collectivised their workplaces). They organised a delegation to visit the Catalan president to discuss the situation:

> *"The delegation ... was intransigent ... Either Companys [the Catalan president] must accept the creation of a Central Committee [of Anti-Fascist Militias] as the ruling organisation or the CNT would* ***consult the rank and file and expose the real situation to the workers.*** *Companys backed down."* [our emphasis, Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 216]

The CNT committee members used their new-found influence in the eyes of Spain to unite with the leaders of other or-

ganisations/parties but not the rank and file. This process lead to the creation of the **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**, in which political parties as well as labour unions were represented. This committee was not made up of mandated delegates from workplaces, communities or barricades, but of representatives of existing organisations, nominated by committees. Instead of a genuine confederal body (made up of mandated delegates from workplace, militia and neighbourhood assemblies) the CNT created a body which was not accountable to, nor could reflect the ideas of, working class people expressed in their assemblies. The state and government was not abolished by self-management, only ignored. This was a mistake and many soon came *"to realise that once they went into the so-called united-front, they could do nothing else but go further. In other words, the one mistake, the one wrong step inevitably led to others as it always does. I am more than ever convinced that if the comrades had remained firm on their own grounds they would have remained stronger than they are now. But I repeat, once they had made common cause for the period of the anti-Fascist war, they were driven by the logic of events to go further."* [Emma Goldman, **Vision on Fire**, pp. 100–1]

The most obvious problem, of course, was that collaboration with the state ensured that a federation of workers' associations could not be created to co-ordinate the struggle against fascism and the social revolution. As Stuart Christie argues: *"By imposing their leadership from above, these partisan committees suffocated the mushrooming popular autonomous revolutionary centres — the grass-roots factory and local revolutionary committees — and prevented them from proving themselves as an efficient and viable means of co-ordinating communications, defence and provisioning. They also prevented the Local Revolutionary committees from integrating with each other to form a regional, provincial and national federal network which would facilitate the revolutionary task of social and economic reconstruction."* [**We, the Anarchists!**, pp. 99–100] Without such a



> fare struggle … [can ensure that the] future penetrates the present; it recasts the way people 'organise' and the goals for which they strive." [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 153–4]

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

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

be intimate, not merely issue-orientated. People would get to **know** each other, to **confront** each other; they would **explore** each other with a view of achieving the most complete, unalienated relationships. Women would discuss sexism, as well as their welfare allotments, child-rearing as well as harassment by landlords, their dreams and hopes as human beings as well as the cost of living.

"From this intimacy there would grow, hopefully, a supportive system of kinship, mutual aid, sympathy and solidarity in daily life. The women might collaborate to establish a rotating system of baby sitters and child-care attendants, the co-operative buying of good food at greatly reduced prices, the common cooking and partaking of meals, the mutual learning of survival skills and the new social ideas, the fostering of creative talents, and many other shared experiences. Every aspect of life that could be explored and changed would be one part of the kind of relationships ...

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

"What I have said on this issue could be applied to every issue — unemployment, bad housing, racism, work conditions — in which an insidious assimilation of bourgeois modes of functioning is masked as 'realism' and 'actuality.' The new order of relationships that could be developed from a wel-



federation, it was only a matter of time before the CNT joined the bourgeois government.

Rather than being *"a regime of **dual power**"* and the *"most important"* of the *"new organs of power"* as many Trotskyists, following Felix Morrow, maintain, the **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias** created on July 20th, 1936, was, in fact, an organ of class collaboration and a handicap to the revolution. [**Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 85 and p. 83] Stuart Christie was correct to call it an *"artificial and hybrid creation,"* a *"compromise, an artificial political solution, an officially sanctioned appendage of the Generalidad government"* which *"drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until then its principal enemy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] Only a true federation of delegates from the fields, factories and workplaces could have been the framework of a true organisation of (to use Bakunin's expression) *"the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 197–8]

Therefore, the CNT forgot a basic principle of anarchism, namely *"the destruction ... of the States."* Instead, like the Paris Commune, the CNT thought that *"in order to combat ... reaction, they had to organise themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism."* The real basis of the revolution, the basic principle of anarchism, was that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 198, p. 202 and p. 204] By not doing this, by working in a top-down compromise body rather than creating a federation of workers' councils, the CNT leadership could not help eventually sacrificing the revolution in favour of the war.

Of course, if a full plenum of CNT unions and **barrios** defence committees, with delegates invited from UGT and unor-

ganised workplaces, had taken place there is no guarantee that the decision reached would have been in line with anarchist theory. The feelings for antifascist unity were strong. However, the decision would have been fully discussed by the rank and file of the union, under the influence of the revolutionary anarchists who were later to join the militias and leave for the front. It is likely, given the wave of collectivisation and what happened in Aragón, that the decision would have been different and the first step would have made to turn this plenum into the basis of a free federation of workers associations — i.e. the framework of a self-managed society — which could have smashed the state and ensured no other appeared to take its place.

So the basic idea of anarchism, the need to create a federation of workers councils, was ignored. In the name of "antifascist" unity, the CNT worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff *"both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 40] Without creating a means to organise the *"social power"* of the working class, the CNT was defenceless against these parties once the state had re-organised itself.

To justify their collaboration, the leaders of the CNT-FAI argued that not to do so would have lead to a civil war within the civil war, so allowing Franco easy victory. In practice, while paying lip service to the revolution, the Communists and republicans attacked the collectives, murdered anarchists, restricted supplies to collectivised industries (even **war** industries) and disbanded the anarchist militias after refusing to give them weapons and ammunition (preferring to arm the Civil Guard in the rearguard in order to crush the CNT and the revolution). By collaborating, a civil war was not avoided.



area together and fomented **class** solidarity over and before industry-loyalties and interests. This can also be seen from the experiences of the syndicalist unions in Italy and France as well. The structure of such local federations also situates the workplace in the community where it really belongs.

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

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

> "Assume there is a struggle by welfare mothers to increase their allotments … Without losing sight of the concrete issues that initially motivated the struggle, revolutionaries would try to catalyse an order of relationships between the mothers entirely different from [existing ones] … They would try to foster a deep sense of community, a rounded human relationship that would transform the very subjectivity of the people involved … Personal relationships would

> *of a strike, it will try to make good its losses by continuing ... and increasing production [elsewhere] ... In that way the company ... breaks the strike."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, pp. 199–200]

By organising all workers in one union (after all they all have the same boss) it increases the power of each trade considerably. It may be easy for a boss to replace a few workers, but a whole workforce would be far more difficult. By organising all workers in the same industry, the power of each workplace is correspondingly increased. Extending this example to outside the workplace, its clear that by mutual support between different groups increases the chances of each group winning its fight. As the I.W.W. put it: ***"An injury to one is an injury to all."*** By generalising struggles, by practising mutual aid we can ensure that when we are fighting for our rights and against injustice we will not be isolated and alone. If we don't support each other, groups will be picked off one by one. and if we go into struggle, there will be no one there to support us and we are more likely to be defeated.

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

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



One occurred anyway, with the working class as its victims, as soon as the state felt strong enough.

Garcia Oliver (the first ever, and hopefully last, "anarchist" minister of justice) stated in 1937 that collaboration was necessary and that the CNT had *"renounc[ed] revolutionary totalitarianism, which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by anarchist and Confederal [CNT] dictatorship. We had confidence in the word and in the person of a Catalan democrat"* Companys (who had in the past jailed anarchists). [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 34] Which means that only by working with the state, politicians and capitalists can an anarchist revolution be truly libertarian! Furthermore:

> *"This argument contains ... two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties — that is politicians — honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations ...*
>
> *"All the initiative ... was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties*

*meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters."* [Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42]

The dilemma of *"anarchist dictatorship"* or *"collaboration"* raised in 1937 was fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, and other organisations under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union, workplace, community and militia assemblies, as should be the case! "Collaboration" yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in an anarchist manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a boss or politician. In his history of the FAI, Juan Gomaz Casas (an active FAI member in 1936) made this clear:

*"How else could libertarian communism be brought about? It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the unanimous masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as their political organisations in the district and communities."* [**Anarchist Organisation: the History of the FAI**, p. 188f]



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Instead of this "collaboration" from the bottom up, by means of a federation of workers' associations, community assemblies and militia columns as argued for by anarchists from Bakunin onwards, the CNT and FAI committees favoured "collaboration" from the top down. The leaders ignored the state and co-operated with other trade unions officials as well as political parties in the **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**. In other words, they ignored their political ideas in favour of a united front against what they considered the greater evil, namely fascism. This inevitably lead the way to counter-revolution, the destruction of the militias and collectives, as they was no means by which these groups could co-ordinate their activities independently of the state. The continued existence of the state ensured that economic confederalism between collectives (i.e. extending the revolution under the direction of the syndicates) could not develop naturally nor be developed far enough in all places. Due to the political compromises of the CNT the tendencies to co-ordination and mutual aid could not develop freely (see next section).

It is clear that the defeat in Spain was due to a failure not of anarchist theory and tactics but a failure of anarchists to **apply** their theory and tactics. Instead of destroying the state, the CNT-FAI ignored it. For a revolution to be successful it needs to create organisations which can effectively replace the state and the market; that is, to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision-making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going down this route can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed.

In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions may be, as Engels suggested, "authoritarian" by their very nature, but only in respect to institutions, structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. As discussed in section H.7.4, it is not "authoritarian"

to destroy authority and not tyrannical to dethrone tyrants! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed. That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision-making on social and economic issues. In fact, a revolution is the most **libertarian** thing ever.

As the **Friends of Durruti** argued a *"revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers' organisations."* [*"The Friends of Durruti accuse"*, **Class War on the Home Front**, Wildcat Group (ed.), p. 34] Only this, the creation of viable anarchist social organisations, can ensure that the state and capitalism can be destroyed and replaced with a just system based on liberty, equality and solidarity. Just as Bakunin, Kropotkin and a host of other anarchist thinkers had argued decades previously (see section H.1.4). Thus the most important lesson gained from the Spanish Revolution is simply the correctness of anarchist theory on the need to organise the social and economic power of the working class by a free federation of workers associations to destroy the state. Without this, no revolution can be lasting. As Gomez Casas correctly argued, *"if instead of condemning that experience [of collaboration], the movement continues to look for excuses for it, the same course will be repeated in the future ... exceptional circumstances will again put ... anarchism on [its] knees before the State."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251]

The second important lesson is on the nature of anti-fascism. The CNT leadership, along with many (if not most) of the rank-and-file, were totally blinded by the question of anti-fascist unity, leading them to support a "democratic" state against a "fascist" one. While the basis of a new world was being created around them by the working class, inspiring the fight against fascism, the CNT leaders collaborated with the system that spawns fascism. While the anti-fascist feelings of the CNT leadership were sincere, the same cannot be said of their "allies" (who seemed happier attacking the gains of the semi-revolution than fighting fascism). As the Friends of



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

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

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

In addition, many "single-issue" campaigns desire to be "apolitical", concentrating purely on the one issue which unites the campaign and so refuse to analyse or discuss wider issues and the root causes of the issue in question (almost always, the system we live under). This means that they end up accepting the system which causes the problems they are fighting against. At best, any changes achieved by the campaign must be acceptable to the establishment or be so watered down in content that no practical long-term good is done. This can be seen from the green movement, where groups like **Greenpeace** and **Friends of the Earth** accept the status quo as a given and limit themselves to working within it. This often leads to them tailoring their "solutions" to be "practical" within a fundamentally anti-ecological political and economic system, so slowing down (at best) ecological disruption.

abolish those parts of the state not geared purely to defending property). To think otherwise is to infantilise us, to consider us less fully human than other people and reproduce the classic capitalist vision of working class people as means of production, to be used, abused, and discarded as required. Such thinking lays the basis for paternalistic interventions in our lives by the state, ensuring our continued dependence and inequality — and the continued existence of capitalism and the state. Ultimately, there are two options:

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

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



Durruti make clear: *"Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] To be opposed to fascism is not enough, you also have to be anti-capitalist. As Durruti stressed, *"[n]o government in the world fights fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to fascism to maintain itself."* [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 193f] In Spain, anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As the Scottish Anarchist Ethel McDonald argued at the time: *"Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name … Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed."* [**Workers Free Press**, October 1937]

Thirdly, the argument of the CNT that Libertarian Communism had to wait until after the war was a false one. Fascism can only be defeated by ending the system that spawned it (i.e. capitalism). In addition, in terms of morale and inspiration, the struggle against fascism could only be effective if it were also a struggle **for** something better — namely a free society. To fight fascism for a capitalist democracy which had repressed the working class would hardly inspire those at the front. Similarly, the only hope for workers' self-management was to push the revolution as far as possible, i.e. to introduce libertarian communism while fighting fascism. The idea of waiting for libertarian communism ultimately meant sacrificing it for the war effort. This would, by necessity, mean the end of the revolutionary spirit and hope which could inspire and sustain the war effort. Why would people fight for a return to the status quo? A status quo that they had rebelled against before the start of the civil war and which had provoked the fascist coup in the first place.

Fourthly, the role of anarchists in a social revolution is to always encourage organisation *"from below"* (to use one of Bakunin's favourite expressions), revolutionary organisations which can effectively smash the state. Bakunin himself

argued (see section I.8.11) in favour of workers' councils, complemented by community assemblies (the federation of the barricades) and a self-managed militia. This model is still applicable today and was successfully applied in Aragón by the CNT.

Therefore, the political lessons gained from the experience of the CNT come as no surprise. They simply repeat long standing positions within anarchist theory. As anarchists have argued since Bakunin, no revolution is possible unless the state is smashed, capital expropriated and a free federation of workers' associations created as the framework of libertarian socialism. Rather than refuting anarchism, the experience of the Spanish Revolution confirms it.

## I.8.14 What economic lessons were learned from the revolution?

The most important economic lesson from the revolution is the fact that working class people took over the management of industry and did an amazing job of keeping (and improving!) production in the face of the direst circumstances (a factor often overlooked by the opponents of anarchism and the revolution). Not only did workers create a war industry from almost nothing in Catalonia, they also improved working conditions and innovated with new techniques and processes. The Spanish Revolution shows that self-management is possible and that the constructive powers of people inspired by an ideal can transform society.

Self-management allowed a massive increase in innovation and new ideas. The Spanish Revolution is clear proof of the anarchist case against hierarchy and validates Isaac Puente words that in *"a free collective each benefits from accumulated knowledge and specialised experiences of all, and vice versa. There is a reciprocal relationship wherein information is in con-*



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

However, no matter what, anarchists *"will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to keep advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government."* Therefore, it is *"not true to say"* that anarchists *"are systematically opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from government and employers, who only give in through fear, and because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81 and p. 83]

Only working class people, by our own actions and organisations, getting the state and capital out of the way can produce an improvement in our lives, indeed it is the only thing that will lead to **real** changes for the better. Encouraging people to rely on themselves instead of the state or capital can lead to self-sufficient, independent, and, hopefully, more rebellious people. Working class people, despite having fewer options in a number of areas in our lives, due both to hierarchy and restrictive laws, still are capable of making choices about our actions, organising our own lives and are responsible for the consequences of our decisions. We are also more than able to determine what is and is not a good reform to existing institutions and do not need politicians informing us what is in our best interests (particularly when it is the right seeking to

*forms for its expression in life, instead of those established by the State.*

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

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

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

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

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



*tinuous circulation."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 32] The workers, freed from economic autocracy, started to transform their workplaces and how the produced goods.

From the point of view of individual freedom, it is clear that self-management allowed previously marginalised people to take an active part in the decisions that affected them. Egalitarian organisations provided the framework for a massive increase in participation and individual self-government, which expressed itself in the extensive innovations carried out by the Collectives. The Collectives indicate, in Stirner's words, that *"[o]nly in the union can you assert yourself as unique, because the union does not possess you, but you possess it or make it of use to you."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 312] A fact Emma Goldman confirmed from her visits to collectives and discussions with their members:

> *"I was especially impressed with the replies to my questions as to what actually had the workers gained by the collectivisation ... the answer always was, first, greater freedom. And only secondly, more wages and less time of work. In two years in Russia [1920–21] I never heard any workers express this idea of greater freedom."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 62]

As predicted in anarchist theory, and borne out by actual experience, there exists large untapped reserves of energy and initiative in the ordinary person which self-management can call forth. The collectives proved Kropotkin's argument that cooperative work is more productive and that if the economists wish to prove *"their thesis in favour of* ***private property*** *against all other forms of* ***possession****, should not the economists demonstrate that under the form of communal property land never produces such rich harvests as when the possession is private. But this they could not prove; in fact, it is the contrary that has been observed."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 146]

Beyond this five important lessons can be derived from the actual experience of a libertarian socialist economy:

Firstly, that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, but is a product of many different influences as well as the objective conditions. In this the anarchist collectives confirmed the ideas of anarchist thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin (see section I.2.2). The collectives although, as mentioned in section I.8.3, based on key libertarian principles they were a somewhat unexpected development. They reflected objective circumstances facing the revolution as well as libertarian theory and, with regards the latter, were somewhat limited. However, they were organisations created from below by the revolution and so capable of development and progress.

The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made in the process of liberation by people themselves are always minor compared to the results of a self-proclaimed vanguard creating institutions **for** people. The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of this, with the Catalan state's *"collectivisation decree"* causing more harm than good (as intended, it controlled and so limited the economic transformation of the economy). Luckily, the Spanish anarchists recognised the importance of having the freedom to make mistakes, as can be seen by the many different forms of collectives and federations tried. The actual process in Spain towards industrial co-ordination and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved — as would be expected in a true social revolution. As Bakunin argued, the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] The problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly — and this implies anarchism, not centralisation or state



> *to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 81]

Therefore, reforms gained by direct action are of a different quality and nature than those passed by reformist politicians — these latter will only serve the interests of the ruling class as they do not threaten their privileges while the former have the potential for real change.

This is not to say that Anarchists oppose **all** state-based reforms nor that we join with the right in seeking to destroy them (or, for that matter, with "left" politicians in seeking to "reform" them, i.e., reduce them). Without a popular social movement creating alternatives to state welfare, so-called "reform" by the state almost always means attacks on the most vulnerable elements in society in the interests of capital. As anarchists are against both state and capitalism, we can oppose such reforms without contradiction while, at the same time, arguing that welfare for the rich should be abolished long before welfare for the many is even thought about. See section J.5.15 for more discussion on the welfare state and anarchist perspectives on it.

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

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

ments, softening and weakening them over time. The AFL-CIO labour unions in the USA, like the ones in Western Europe, killed the labour movement by narrowing and channelling labour activity and taking power from the workers themselves, where it belongs, and placing it the hands of a bureaucracy. The British Labour Party, after over 100 years of reformist practice, has done little more than manage capitalism, seen most of its reforms undermined by right-wing governments (and by the following Labour governments!) and the creation of a leadership of the party (in the shape of New Labour) which was in most ways as right-wing as the Conservative Party (if not more so, as shown once they were in power). Bakunin would not have been surprised.

Also, it is funny to hear left-wing "revolutionaries" and "radicals" put forward the reformist line that the capitalist state can help working people (indeed be used to abolish itself!). Despite the fact that leftists blame the state and capitalism for most of the problems we face, they usually turn to the **capitalist** state to remedy the situation, not by leaving people alone, but by becoming more involved in people's lives. They support government housing, government jobs, welfare, government-funded and regulated child care, government-funded drug "treatment," and other government-centred programmes and activities. If a capitalist (and racist/sexist/authoritarian) government is the problem, how can it be depended upon to change things to the benefit of working class people or other oppressed sections of the population? Surely any reforms passed by the state will not solve the problem? As Malatesta suggested:

> *"Governments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self-preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough*



control/ownership. The experience of the collectives in Spain supports.

Secondly, the importance of decentralisation of management. As discussed in section I.8.4, different areas and industries tried different forms of federation. The woodworkers' union experience indicates that a collectivised industry can became centralised, with even a democratically elected administration leading to rank-and-file workers becoming marginalised which could soon result in apathy developing within it. This was predicted by Kropotkin and other anarchist theorists (and by many anarchists in Spain at the time). While undoubtedly better than capitalist hierarchy, such democratically run industries are only close approximations to anarchist ideas of self-management. Importantly, however, the collectivisation experiments also indicate that co-operation need not imply centralisation (as can be seen from the Badelona collectives).

Thirdly, the importance of building links of solidarity between workplaces as soon as possible. While the importance of starting production after the fascist uprising made attempts at co-ordination seem of secondary importance to the collectives, the competition that initially occurred between workplaces helped the state to undermine self-management (for example, the state *"was actively using its control of finances to contain and stifle radical change"* [Graham Kesley, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 172]). As there was no People's Bank or federal body to co-ordinate credit and production, state control of credit and the gold reserves made it easier for the Republican state to undermine the revolution by controlling the collectives and (effectively) nationalising them in time (Durruti and a few others planned to seize the gold reserves but were advised not to by Abad de Santillán).

This attack on the revolution started when the Catalan State issued a decree legalising (and so controlling) the collectives

in October 1936 (the infamous *"Collectivisation Decree"*). The counter-revolution also withheld funds for collectivised industries, even war industries, until they agreed to come under state control. The industrial organisation created by this decree was a compromise between anarchist ideas and those of other parties (particularly the communists) and in the words of Gaston Leval, *"the decree had the baneful effect of preventing the workers' syndicates from extending their gains. It set back the revolution in industry."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 54]

And lastly, that an economic revolution can only succeed if the existing state is destroyed. As Kropotkin argued, *"a new form of economic organisation will necessarily require a new form of political structure."* [**Anarchism**, p. 181] Capitalism needs the state, socialism needs anarchy. Without the new political structure, the new economic organisation cannot develop to its full potential. Due to the failure to consolidate the revolution **politically**, it was lost **economically**. The decree *"legalising"* collectivisation *"distorted everything right from the start."* [Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227] This helped undermine the revolution by ensuring that the mutualism of the collectives did not develop freely into libertarian communism (*"The collectives lost the economic freedom they had won at the beginning"* due to the decree, as one participant put it). Collectives, of course, tried to ignore the state. As an eyewitness pointed out, the CNT's *"policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 230 and p. 213] Indeed, leading anarchists like Abad de Santillán opposed it:

> *"I was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature ... when I became councillor, I had no intention of taking into account or carrying out the decree: I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they best saw fit, according to their own inspiration."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212fn]



*the role of the landlord, together with all the dependency and resentment that it engenders."* [**Housing: An Anarchist Approach**, p. 184] This feature of reformism was skilfully used by the right-wing to undermine publicly supported housing and other aspects of the welfare state. The reformist social-democrats reaped what they had sown.

Reformism often amounts to little more than an altruistic contempt for the masses, who are considered as little more than victims who need to be provided for by state. The idea that we may have our own visions of what we want is ignored and replaced by the vision of the reformists who enact legislation **for** us and make "reforms" from the top-down. Little wonder such reforms can be counter-productive — they cannot grasp the complexity of life and the needs of those subject to them. Reformists effectively say, *"don't do anything, we'll do it for you."* You can see why anarchists would loathe this sentiment; anarchists are the consummate do-it-yourselfers, and there's nothing reformists hate more than people who can take care of themselves, who will not let them "help" them.

Reformists may mean well, but they do not grasp the larger picture — by focusing exclusively on narrow aspects of a problem, they choose to believe that is the whole problem. In this wilfully narrow examination of pressing social ills, reformists are, more often than not, counter-productive. The disaster of the urban rebuilding projects in the United States (and similar projects in Britain which moved inter-city working class communities into edge of town developments during the 1950s and 1960s) are an example of reformism at work: upset at the growing slums, reformists supported projects that destroyed the ghettos and built brand-new housing for working class people to live in. They looked nice (initially), but they did nothing to address the problem of poverty and indeed created more problems by breaking up communities and neighbourhoods.

Logically, it makes no sense. Why dance around a problem when you can attack it directly? Reformists dilute social move-

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

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

Reformists also tend to objectify the people whom they are "helping": they envision them as helpless, formless masses who need the wisdom and guidance of the "best and the brightest" to lead them to the Promised Land. Reformists mean well, but this is altruism borne of ignorance, which is destructive over the long run. Freedom cannot be given and so any attempt to impose reforms from above cannot help but ensure that people are treated as children, incapable of making their own decisions and, ultimately, dependent on bureaucrats to govern them. This can be seen from public housing. As Colin Ward argues, the *"whole tragedy of publicly provided non-profit housing for rent and the evolution of this form of tenure in Britain is that the local authorities have simply taken over, though less flexibly,*



However, with the revolution lost politically, the CNT was soon forced to compromise and support the decree (the CNT did propose more libertarian forms of co-ordination between workplaces but these were undermined by the state). A lack of effective mutual aid organisations allowed the state to gain power over the collectives and so undermine and destroy self-management. Working class control over the economy (important as it is) does not automatically destroy the state. In other words, the economic aspects of the revolution cannot be considered in isolation from its political ones.

Yet these points do not diminish the successes of the Spanish revolution. As Gaston Leval argued, *"in spite of these shortcomings"* caused lack of complete socialisation *"the important fact is that the factories went on working, the workshops and works produced without the owners, capitalists, shareholders and without high management executives."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 228] Beyond doubt, these months of economic liberty in Spain show not only that libertarian socialism **works** and that working class people can manage and run society but also that we can improve the quality of life and increase freedom. Given the time and breathing space, the experiment would undoubtedly have ironed out its problems. Even in the very difficult environment of a civil war (and with resistance of almost all other parties and unions) the workers and peasants of Spain showed that a better society is possible. They gave a concrete example of what was previously just a vision, a world which was more humane, more free, more equitable and more civilised than that run by capitalists, managers, politicians and bureaucrats.

# Section J — What do anarchists do?

> *has the abrogation of government as its mission."* [Proudhon, **No Gods, No Master**, vol. 1, p. 52]

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

> *"If you should carry out [the reformers'] ideas in your personal life, you would not have a rotten tooth that aches pulled out all at once. You would have it pulled out a little to-day, some more next week, for several months or years, and by then you would be ready to pull it out altogether, so it should not hurt so much. That is the logic of the reformer. Don't be 'too hasty,' don't pull a bad tooth out all at once."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 64]

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

> *"Suppose a pipe burst in your house. You can put a bucket under the break to catch the escaping water. You can keep on putting buckets there, but as long as you do not mend the broken pipe, the leakage will continue, no matter how much you may swear about it ... until you repair the broken social pipe."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 67–8]

What reformism fails to do is fix the underlying root causes of the real problems society faces. Therefore, reformists try to

## J.1.3 Why are anarchists against reformism?

Firstly, it must be pointed out that the struggle for reforms within capitalism is **not** the same as reformism. Reformism is the idea that reforms within capitalism are enough in themselves and attempts to change the system are impossible (and not desirable). As such all anarchists are against this form of reformism — we think that the system can be (and should be) changed and until that happens any reforms, no matter how essential, will not get to the root of social problems.

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

> *"But experience testifies and philosophy demonstrates, contrary to that prejudice, that any revolution, to be effective, must be spontaneous and emanate, not from the heads of the authorities but from the bowels of the people: that government is reactionary rather than revolutionary: that it could not have any expertise in revolutions, given that society, to which that secret is alone revealed, does not show itself through legislative decree but rather through the spontaneity of its manifestations: that, ultimately, the only connection between government and labour is that labour, in organising itself,*



This section discusses what anarchists get up to. There is little point thinking about the world unless you also want to change it for the better. And by trying to change it, you change yourself and others, making radical change more of a possibility. Therefore anarchists give their whole-hearted support to attempts by ordinary people to improve their lives by their own actions. We urge *"**emancipation through practical action**"* recognising that the *"collective experience"* gained in *"the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses"* will transform how they see the world and the world itself. [Bakunin, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 103] Ultimately, *"[t]he true man does not lie in the future, an object of longing, but lies, existent and real, in the present."* [Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 327]

Anarchism is more than just a critique of statism and capitalism or a vision of a freer, better way of life. It is first and foremost a movement, the movement of working class people attempting to change the world. Therefore the kind of activity we discuss in this section of the FAQ forms the bridge between capitalism and anarchy. By self-activity and direct action, people can change both themselves and their surroundings. They develop within themselves the mental, ethical and spiritual qualities which can make an anarchist society a viable option. As Noam Chomsky argues:

> *"Only through their own struggle for liberation will ordinary people come to comprehend their true nature, suppressed and distorted within institutional structures designed to assure obedience and subordination. Only in this way will people develop more humane ethical standards, 'a new sense of right', 'the consciousness of their strength and their importance as a social factor in the life of their time' and their capacity to realise the strivings of their 'inmost nature.' Such direct engagement in the work of social reconstruction is a prerequisite for coming to perceive*

> *this 'inmost nature' and is the indispensable foundations upon which it can flourish"* [*"preface"*, Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. iii]

In other words, anarchism is not primarily a vision of a better future, but the actual social movement which is fighting within the current unjust and unfree society for that better future and to improve things in the here and now. Without standing up for yourself and what you believe is right, nothing will change. Thus anarchy can be found *"wherever free thought breaks loose from the chains of dogma; wherever the spirit of inquiry rejects the old formulas, wherver the human will asserts itself through independent actions; wherever honest people, rebelling against all enforced discipline, join freely together in order to educate themselves, and to reclaim, without any master, their share of life, and the complete satisfaction of their needs."* [Elisée Reclus, quoted by John P. Clark and Camille Martin (ed.), **Anarchy, Geography, Modernity**, p. 62]

For anarchists, the future is **already appearing in the present** and is expressed by the creativity of working class self-activity. Anarchy is not some-day-to-be-achieved utopia, it is a living reality whose growth only needs to be freed from constraint. As such anarchist activity is about discovering and aiding emerging trends of mutual aid which work against capitalist domination, so the Anarchist *"studies society and tries to discover its **tendencies**, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his [or her] ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 47] Indeed, as we discussed in section I.2.3, the future structures of a free society are created in the struggles against oppression today.

The kinds of activity outlined in this section are a general overview of anarchist work. It is by no means exclusive — we are sure to have left something out. However, the key aspect of **real** anarchist activity is ***direct action*** — self-activity, self-



panaceas, the festering problems remain untreated, dooming reform to eventual costly, inevitable failure — measured in human lives, no less. Like a quack that treats the symptoms of a disease without getting rid of what causes it, all the reformist can promise is short-term improvements for a condition that never goes away and may ultimately kill the sufferer. The anarchist, like a real doctor, investigates the causes of the illness and treats them while fighting the symptoms.

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

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

> *"the subject is not whether we accomplish Anarchism today, tomorrow or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards Anarchism today, tomorrow and always."* [**Towards Anarchism**, p. 75]

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

*pursuit that might drag on for centuries before there was a majority in favour of the yearned-for reform.*

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

*"But, whatever the improvement won, it must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation. So . .. the fine distinction between 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' evaporates and one is led to the conclusion that the only really reformist workers are the revolutionary syndicalists."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 71–3]

Pouget was referring to revolutionary unions but his argument can be generalised to all social movements.

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

For example, a reformist sees poverty and looks at ways to lessen the destructive and debilitating effects of it: this produced things like the minimum wage, affirmative action, the projects in the USA and similar reforms in other countries. An anarchist looks at poverty and says, "what causes this?" and attacks that source of poverty, rather than the symptoms. While reformists may succeed in the short run with their institutional



help, self-liberation and solidarity (*"We wish,"* as French syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier wrote, *"that the emancipation of the people might be the work of the people themselves."* [quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, p. 18]). Such activity may be done by individuals (for example, propaganda work), but usually anarchists emphasise collective activity. This is because most of our problems are of a social nature, meaning that their solutions can only be worked on collectively. Individual solutions to social problems are doomed to failure, at best slowing down what they are opposed to (most obviously, ethical consumerism as discussed in section E.5). In addition, collective action gets us used to working together, promoting the experience of self-management and building organisations that will allow us to actively manage our own affairs. Also, and we would like to emphasise this, it can be **fun** to get together with other people and work with them, it can be fulfilling and empowering.

Anarchists do not ask those in power to give up that power. No, we promote forms of activity and organisation by which all the oppressed can liberate themselves by their own hands. In other words, we do not think that those in power will altruistically renounce that power or their privileges. Instead, the oppressed must take the power **back** into their own hands by their own actions. We must free ourselves, no one else can do it for use.

Here we will discuss anarchist ideas on struggle, what anarchists actually (and, almost as importantly, do not) do in the here and now and the sort of alternatives anarchists try to build within statism and capitalism in order to destroy them. As well as a struggle against oppression, anarchist activity is also struggle for freedom. As well as fighting against material poverty, anarchists combat spiritual poverty. By resisting hierarchy we emphasis the importance of **living** and of **life as art.** By proclaiming ***"Neither Master nor Slave"*** we urge an ethical transformation, a transformation that will help create the possibility

of a truly free society. This point was stressed by Emma Goldman after she saw the defeat of the Russian Revolution by a combination of Leninist politics and capitalist armed intervention:

> *"revolution is in vain unless inspired by its ultimate ideal. Revolutionary methods must be in tune with revolutionary aims ... In short, the ethical values which the revolution is to establish must be initiated with the revolutionary activities ... The latter can only serve as a real and dependable bridge to the better life if built of the same material as the life to be achieved."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 404]

In other words, anarchist activity is more than creating libertarian alternatives and resisting hierarchy, it is about building the new world in the shell of the old not only with regards to organisations and self-activity, but also within the individual. It is about transforming yourself while transforming the world (both processes obviously interacting and supporting each other) for while *"we associate ourselves with others in working for ... social revolution, which for us means the destruction of all monopoly and all government, and the direct seizure by the workers of the means of production"* we do not forget that *"the first aim of Anarchism is to assert and make good the dignity of the individual human being."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 43 and p. 51]

By direct action, self-management and self-activity we can make the words first heard in Paris, 1968 a living reality:

**"All power to the imagination!"** Words, we are sure, previous generations of anarchists would have whole-heartedly agreed with. There is a power in humans, a creative power, a power to alter *what is* into *what should be*. Anarchists try to create alternatives that will allow that power to be expressed, the power of imagination.



*have dubbed them 'the advocates of all or nothing' and they have falsely represented them as supposed adversaries of improvements achievable right now.*

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

*"What appears to afford some credence to such chicanery is the fact that the unions, cured by the cruel lessons of experience from all hope in government intervention, are justifiably mistrustful of it. They know that the State, whose function is to act as capital's gendarme, is, by its very nature, inclined to tip the scales in favour of the employer side. So, whenever a reform is brought about by legal avenues, they do not fall upon it with the relish of a frog devouring the red rag that conceals the hook, they greet it with all due caution, especially as this reform is made effective only if the workers are organised to insist forcefully upon its implementation.*

*"The trade unions are even more wary of gifts from the government because they have often found these to be poison gifts ... Wanting real improvements ... instead of waiting until the government is generous enough to bestow them, they wrest them in open battle, through direct action.*

*"If, as sometimes is the case, the improvement they seek is subject to the law, the trade unions strive to obtain it through outside pressure brought to bear upon the authorities and not by trying to return specially mandated deputies to Parliament, a puerile*

societal problems. Reformists seek to ameliorate the symptoms of societal problems, while anarchists focus on the causes.

This does not mean, however, that we ignore struggles for reforms in the here and now. The claim that anarchists are against such improvements are often put forth by opponents of anarchism in an effort to paint us as irrelevant extremists with no practical outlet for our ideas beyond abstract calls for revolution. This is not true. Libertarians are well aware that we can act to make our lives better while, at the same time, seeking to remove the root causes of the problems we face. (see, for example, Emma Goldman's account of her recognition of how false it was deny the need for short-term reforms in favour of revolution. [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 52]). In the words of the revolutionary syndicalist Emile Pouget:

> *"Trade union endeavour has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital.*
>
> *"At present, trade union action is designed to win partial and gradual improvements which, far from constituting a goal, can only be considered as a means of stepping up demands and wresting further improvements from capitalism ...*
>
> *"This question of partial improvements served as the pretext for attempts to sow discord in the trades associations. Politicians ... have tried to ... stir up ill-feeling and to split the unions into two camps, by categorising workers as reformists and as revolutionaries. The better to discredit the latter, they*



Such a social movement will change how we act as individuals, with anarchists seeking to apply our principles in our daily lives as much as our daily struggles. This means that libertarians must change how we relate to our comrades and fellow workers by applying our egalitarian ideals everywhere. Part of the task of anarchists is to challenge social hierarchies everywhere, including in the home. As Durruti put it:

> *"When will you stop thinking like the bourgeoisie, that women are men's servants? It's enough that society is divided into classes. We're not going to make even more classes by creating differences between men and women in our own homes!"* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 341]

So we have a interactive process of struggle and transformation of both society and the individuals within it. In the sections that follow we will discuss the forms of self-activity and self-organisation which anarchists think will stimulate and develop the imagination of those oppressed by hierarchy, build anarchy in action and help create a free society.

# J.1 Are anarchists involved in social struggles?

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

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

However, there is another reason why anarchists are involved in social struggle — namely the fact that we are part of the oppressed and, like other oppressed people, fight for our



rent system and lay the foundations of something better. Revolutionary tendencies and movements, in other words, must create the organisations that contain, in embryo, the society of the future (see section H.1.6). These organisations, in turn, further the progress of radical change by providing social spaces for the transformation of individuals (via the use of direct action, practising self-management and solidarity, and so on). Therefore, social struggle aids the creation of a free society by accustoming people to govern themselves within self-managed organisations and empowering the (officially) disempowered via the use of direct action and mutual aid.

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

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

## J.1.2 Are anarchists against reforms?

No, we are not. While most anarchists are against reformism (namely the notion that we can somehow reform capitalism and the state away) we are most definitely in favour of reforms (i.e. improvements in the here and now). Anarchists are radicals; as such, we seek the root causes of

*then comes self-management of work and society"* [Alfredo Bonnano, *"Self-Management"*, pp. 35–37, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 48, p. 35]). So self-activity is a key factor in self-liberation, self-education and the creating of anarchists. In a nutshell, people learn in struggle:

> *"In our opinion all action which is directed toward the destruction of economic and political oppression, which serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people; which gives them an awareness of their individual rights and their power, and persuades them themselves to act on their own behalf… brings us closer to our ends and is therefore a good thing. On the other hand all activity which tends to preserve the present state of affairs, that tends to sacrifice man against his will for the triumph of a principle, is bad because it is a denial of our ends.* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69]

A confident working class is an essential factor in making successful and libertarian improvements within the current system and, ultimately, in making a revolution. Without that self-confidence people tend to just follow "leaders" and we end up changing rulers rather than changing society. So part of our job as anarchists is to encourage people to fight for whatever small reforms are possible at present, to improve our/their conditions, to give people confidence in their ability to start taking control of their lives, and to point out that there is a limit to whatever (sometimes temporary) gains capitalism will or can concede. Hence the need for a revolutionary change.

Only this can ensure that anarchist ideas are the most popular ones for if we think a movement is, all things considered, a positive or progressive one then we should not abstain but should seek to popularise anarchist ideas and strategies within it. In this way we create ***"schools of anarchy"*** within the cur-



freedom and to make our life better in the here and now. It is not in some distant tomorrow that we want to see the end of oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. It is today, in our own life, that the anarchist wants to win our freedom, or at the very least, to improve our situation, reduce oppression, domination and exploitation as well as increasing individual liberty for *"every blow given to the institutions of private property and to the government, every exaltation of the conscience of man, disruption of the present conditions, every lie unmasked, every part of human activity taken away from the control of the authorities, every augmentation of the spirit of solidarity and initiative is a step towards Anarchism."* [Errico Malatesta, **Towards Anarchism**, p. 75] We are aware that we often fail to do so, but the very process of struggle can help create a more libertarian aspect to society:

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

> *oppressed sections of society] must benefit by the fact that workers [and other oppressed people] unite and struggle for their interests.*" [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

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

As we will see in section J.2 anarchists encourage direct action within social struggles as well as arguing for anarchist ideas and theories. However, what is important to note here is that social struggle is a sign that people are thinking and acting for themselves and working together to change things. Howard Zinn is completely correct:

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



> *government is the power with which people show themselves capable of opposing it.*" [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 196]

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

In addition, social struggle helps break people from their hierarchical conditioning. Anarchists view people not as fixed objects to be classified and labelled, but as human beings engaged in making their own lives. We live, love, think, feel, hope, dream, and can change ourselves, our environment and social relationships. Social struggle is the way this is done collectively. Such struggle promotes attributes within people which are crushed by hierarchy (attributes such as imagination, organisational skills, self-assertion, self-management, critical thought, self-confidence and so on) as people come up against practical problems in their struggles and have to solve them themselves. This builds self-confidence and an awareness of individual and collective power. By seeing that their boss, the state and so on are against them they begin to realise that they live in a class ridden, hierarchical society that depends upon their submission to work. As such, social struggle is a politicising experience.

Struggle allows those involved to develop their abilities for self-rule through practice and so begins the process by which individuals assert their ability to control their own lives and to participate in social life directly. These are all key elements of anarchism and are required for an anarchist society to work (*"Self-management of the struggle comes first,*

and state. It is what happens when one group of people have hierarchical power over another: where there is oppression, there is resistance and where there is resistance to authority you will see anarchy in action. For this reason anarchists are in favour of, and are involved within, social struggles. Ultimately they are a sign of individuals asserting their autonomy and disgust at an unfair system. As Howard Zinn stresses:

> *"Both the source and the solution of our civil liberties problems are in the situations of every day: where we live, where we work, where we go to school, where we spend most of our hours. Our actual freedom is not determined by the Constitution or by [the Supreme] Court, but by the power the policeman has over us in the street or that of the local judge behind him; by the authority of our employers [if we are working]; by the power of teachers, principals, university president, and boards of trustees if we are students; by the welfare bureaucracy if we are poor [or unemployed]; by prison guards if we are in jail; by landlords if we are tenants; by the medical profession or hospital administration if we are physically or mentally ill.*
>
> *"Freedom and justice are local things, at hand, immediate. They are determined by power and money, whose authority over our daily lives is much less ambiguous than decisions of the Supreme Court. Whatever claim we ... can make to liberty on the national level ... on the local level we live at different times in different feudal fiefdoms where our subordination is clear."* [**Failure to Quit**, pp. 53–4]

These realities of wealth and power will remain unshaken unless counter-forces appear on the very ground our liberty is restricted — on the street, in workplaces, at home, at school, in hospitals and so on. For the *"only limit to the oppression of*



> *thieves are running the country. That's our problem."* [**Failure to Quit**, p. 45]

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

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

Before discussing issues related to social struggle, it is important to point out here that anarchists are interested in struggles against all forms of oppression and do not limit ourselves to purely economic issues. The hierarchical and exploitative nature of the capitalist economy is only part of the story — other forms of oppression are needed in order to keep it going (not to mention those associated with the state) and have resulted from its workings (in addition to those inherited from previous hierarchical and class systems). Domination, exploitation, hierarchy and oppression do not remain in the workplace. They infest our homes, our friendships and our communities. They need to be fought everywhere, not just in work.

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

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

> *"The class struggle does not centre around material exploitation alone but also around spiritual exploitation. In addition, entirely new issues emerge: coercive attitudes, the quality of work, ecology (or stated in more general terms, psychological and environmental oppression) ... Terms like 'classes' and 'class struggle,' conceived of almost entirely as economic categories and relations, are too one-sided to express the **universalisation** of the struggle. Use these limited expressions if you like (the target is still a ruling class and a class society), but this terminology, with its traditional connotations, does not reflect the sweep and the multi-dimensional nature of the struggle ... [and] fail to encompass the cultural and spiritual revolt that is taking place along with the economic struggle."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 151–2]



For anarchists, exploitation and class rule are just part of a wider system of domination and hierarchy. Material gains, therefore, can never completely make-up for oppressive social relationships. As the anarchist character created by anarchist science-fiction writer Ursula Le Guin put it, capitalists *"think if people have enough things they will be content to live in prison."* [**The Dispossessed**, p. 120] Anarchists disagree — and the experience of social revolt in the "affluent" 1960s proves their case.

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

## J.1.1 Why are social struggles important?

Social struggle is an expression of the class struggle, namely the struggle of working class people **against** their exploitation, oppression and alienation and **for** their liberty from capitalist

So, as can be seen, the "synthesis" tendency aims to unite all anarchists (be they individualist, mutualist, syndicalist or communist) into one common federation. Thus the "synthesis" viewpoint is "inclusive" and obviously has affinities with the *"anarchism without adjectives"* approach favoured by many anarchists (see section A.3.8). However, in practice many "synthesis" organisations are more restrictive (for example, they could aim to unite all **social** anarchists) and so there can be a difference between the general idea of the synthesis and how it is concretely applied.

The basic idea behind the synthesis is that the anarchist movement (in most countries, at most times, including France in the 1920s and Russia during the revolution and at this time) is divided into three main tendencies: communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and individualist anarchism. This division can cause severe damage to the movement simply because of the many (and often redundant) arguments and diatribes on why "my anarchism is best" can get in the way of working in common in order to fight our common enemies (state, capitalism and authority). The "synthesis" federations are defined by agreeing what is the common denominator of the various tendencies within anarchism and agreeing a minimum programme based on this for the federation. This would allow a *"certain ideological and tactical unity among organisations"* within the "synthesis" federation. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35] Moreover, as well as saving time and energy for more important tasks, there are technical and efficiency reasons for unifying into one organisation, namely allowing the movement to have access to more resources and being able to co-ordinate them so as to maximise their use and impact.

The "synthesis" federation, like all anarchist groups, aims to spread anarchist ideas within society as a whole. They believe that their role is to *"assist the masses only when they need such assistance ... the anarchists are part of the membership in the economic and social mass organisations [such as trade unions]. They*



*world."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886**, p. 256 and pp. 216–217]

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

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

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

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

For anarchists, the general nature of the state and its role within society is to ensure *"the preservation of the economic 'status quo,' the protection of the economic privileges of the ruling class, whose agent and **gendarme** it is"*. [Luigi Galleani, **The End of Anarchism?**, p. 28] As such, the state and capital restricts and controls the outcome of political action of the so-called sovereign people as expressed by voting.

Taking capital to begin with, if we assume that a relatively reformist government were elected it would soon find itself

facing various economic pressures. Either capital would disinvest, so forcing the government to back down in the face of economic collapse, or the government in question would control capital leaving the country and so would soon be isolated from new investment and its currency would become worthless. Either is an effective weapon to control democratically elected governments as before ensure that the economy would be severely damaged and the promised "reforms" would be dead letters. Far fetched? No, not really. As discussed in section D.2.1 such pressures were inflicted on the 1974 Labour Government in Britain and we see the threat reported everyday when the media reports on what *"the markets"* think of government policies or when loans are given only guarantee that the country is structurally adjusted in-line with corporate interests and bourgeous economic dogma.

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

> *"Such a bureaucracy consists of armed forces, police forces, and a civil service. These are largely autonomous bodies. Theoretically they are subordinate to a democratically elected Parliament, but the Army, Navy, and Air Forces are controlled by specially trained officers who from their schooldays onwards are brought up in a narrow caste tradition, and who always, in dealing with Parliament, can dominate that body by their superior technical knowledge, professional secrecy, and strategic bluff.*



the article in Faure's **Encyclopedie Anarchiste** on the very same topic. Its roots lie in the Russian revolution and the **Nabat** federation created in the Ukraine during 1918 whose aim was *"organising all of the life forces of anarchism; bringing together through a common endeavour all anarchists seriously desiring of playing an active part in the social revolution which is defined as a process (of greater or lesser duration) giving rise to a new form of social existence for the organised masses."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 117]

The "synthesis" organisation is based on uniting all kinds of anarchists in one federation as there is, to use the words of the **Nabat**, *"validity in all anarchist schools of thought. We must consider all diverse tendencies and accept them."* The synthesis organisation attempts to get different kinds of anarchists *"joined together on a number of basic positions and with the awareness of the need for planned, organised collective effort on the basis of federation."* [quoted in *"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, pp. 32–6, **Constructive Anarchism**, G. P. Maximoff (ed.), p. 32] These basic positions would be based on a synthesis of the viewpoints of the members of the organisation, but each tendency would be free to agree their own ideas due to the federal nature of the organisation.

An example of this synthesis approach is provided by the differing assertions that anarchism is a theory of classes (as stated by the Platform, among others), that anarchism is a humanitarian ideal for all people and that anarchism is purely about individuals (and so essentially individualist and having nothing to do with humanity or with a class). The synthesis of these positions would be to *"state that anarchism contains class elements as well as humanism and individualist principles ... Its class element is above all its means of fighting for liberation; its humanitarian character is its ethical aspect, the foundation of society; its individualism is the goal of humanity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

that no federation will be a totally "pure" expression of each tendency. "Synthesis" groups merge into "class struggle" ones, Platformist groups do not subscribe totally to the Platform and so on. We isolate each tendency to show its essential features. In real life few, if any, federations will exactly fit the types we highlight. It would be more precise to speak of organisations which are descended from a given tendency, for example the French **Anarchist Federation** is mostly influenced by the synthesis tradition but it is not, strictly speaking, 100% synthesis. Lastly, we must also note that the term "class struggle" anarchist group in no way implies that "synthesis" and "Platformist" groups do not support the class struggle or take part in it, they most definitely do — it is simply a technical term to differentiate between types of organisation!

It must be stressed anarchists do not reduce the complex issue of political organisation and ideas into **one** organisation but instead recognise that different threads within anarchism will express themselves in different political organisations (and even within the same organisation). A diversity of anarchist groups and federations is a good sign and expresses the diversity of political and individual thought to be expected in a movement aiming for a society based upon freedom. All we aim to do is to paint a broad picture of the similarities and differences between the various perspectives on organising in the movement and indicate the role these federations play in libertarian theory, namely of an aid in the struggle, not a new leadership seeking power.

## J.3.2 What are "synthesis" federations?

The "synthesis" federation acquired its name from the work of Voline (a Russian exile) and leading French anarchist Sebastien Faure in the 1920s. Voline published in 1924 a paper calling for *"the anarchist synthesis"* and was also the author of



> *As for the bureaucracy proper, the Civil Service, anyone who has had any experience of its inner workings knows the extent to which it controls the Cabinet, and through the Cabinet, Parliament itself. We are really ruled by a secret shadow cabinet ... All these worthy servants of the State are completely out of touch with the normal life of the nation."* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, p. 100]

As an aside, it should be noted that while *"in a society of rich and poor nothing is more necessary"* than a bureaucracy as it is *"necessary to protect an unfair distribution of property"* it would be wrong to think that it does not have its own class interests: *"Even if you abolish all other classes and distinctions and retain a bureaucracy you are still far from the classless society, for the bureaucracy is itself the nucleus of a class whose interests are totally opposed to the people it supposedly serves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99 and p. 100]

In addition to the official bureaucracies and their power, there is also the network of behind the scenes agencies which are its arm. This can be termed *"the permanent government"* and *"the secret state"*, respectively. The latter, in Britain, is *"the security services, MI5, Special Branch and the secret intelligence service, MI6."* Other states have their equivalents (the FBI, CIA, and so on in the USA). By the former, it is meant *"the secret state plus the Cabinet Office and upper echelons of Home and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence ... and the so-called 'Permanent Secretaries Club,' the network of very senior civil servants — the 'Mandarins.'"* In short, the upper-echelons of the bureaucracy and state apparatus. Add to this *"its satellites"*, including M.P.s (particularly right-wing ones), *"agents of influence"* in the media, former security services personnel, think tanks and opinion forming bodies, front companies of the security services, and so on.

[Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay, **Smear! Wilson and the Secret State**, pp. X-XI]

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

An example of this "secret state" at work can be seen in the campaign against Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister of Britain in the 1970s, which resulted in his resignation (as documented by Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay). Left-wing Labour M.P. Tony Benn was subjected to intense pressure by "his" Whitehall advisers during the same period:

> *"In early 1975, the campaign against Benn by the media was joined by the secret state. The timing is interesting. In January, his Permanent Secretary had 'declared war' and the following month began the most extraordinary campaign of harassment any major British politician has experienced. While this is not provable by any means, it does look as though there is a clear causal connection between withdrawal of Prime Ministerial support, the open hostility from the Whitehall mandarins and the onset of covert operations."* [Dorril and Ramsay, **Op. Cit.**, p. 279]

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



> *between those who believe it is useful to unite in co-operating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

To aid in this process of propaganda, agitation, political discussion and development, anarchists organise federations of affinity groups. These take three main forms,

**"synthesis"** federations (see section J.3.2), ***"Platformist"*** federations (see section J.3.3 while section J.3.4 has criticism of this tendency) and ***"class struggle"*** groups (see section J.3.5). All the various types of federation are based on groups of anarchists organising themselves in a libertarian fashion. This is because anarchists try to live by the values of the future to the extent that this is possible under capitalism and try to develop organisations based upon mutual aid, in which control would be exercised from below upward, not downward from above. We must also note here that these types of federation are not mutually exclusive. Synthesis type federations often have "class struggle" and "Platformist" groups within them (although, as will become clear, Platformist federations do not have synthesis groups within them) and most countries have different federations representing the different perspectives within the movement. Moreover, it should also be noted

the same area, with overlapping members). Moreover, as well as these more "political" activities, the "affinity group" also stresses the *"importance of education and the need to live by Anarchist precepts — the need ... to create a counter-society that could provide the space for people to begin to remake themselves."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 180] In other words, "affinity groups" aim to be the *"living germs"* of the new society in **all** aspects, not purely in a structurally way.

So affinity groups are self-managed, autonomous groupings of anarchists who unite and work on specific activities and interests. This means that *"[i]n an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 102] Such groups are a key way for anarchists to co-ordinate their activity and spread their message of individual freedom and voluntary co-operation. However, the description of what an "affinity group" is does not explain **why** anarchists organise in that way. Essentially, these affinity groups are the means by which anarchists actually intervene in social movements and struggles in order to win people to the anarchist idea and so help transform them from struggles **against** injustice into struggles **for** a free society. We will discuss the role these groups play in anarchist theory in section J.3.6.

These basic affinity groups are not seen as being enough in themselves. Most anarchists see the need for local groups to work together with others in a confederation. Such co-operation aims to pull resources and expand the options for the individuals and groups who are part of the federation. As with the basic affinity group, the anarchist federation is a self-managed organisation:

> *"Full autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord*



> *"congressional committees ... began investigations of the FBI and CIA.*
>
> *"The CIA inquiry disclosed that the CIA had gone beyond its original mission of gathering intelligence and was conducting secret operations of all kinds ... [for example] the CIA — with the collusion of a secret Committee of Forty headed by Henry Kissinger — had worked to 'destabilize' the [democratically elected, left-wing] Chilean government ...*
>
> *"The investigation of the FBI disclosed many years of illegal actions to disrupt and destroy radical groups and left-wing groups of all kinds. The FBI had sent forged letters, engaged in burglaries ... opened mail illegally, and in the case of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, seems to have conspired in murder ...*
>
> *"The investigations themselves revealed the limits of government willingness to probe into such activities ... [and they] submitted its findings on the CIA to the CIA to see if there was material the Agency wanted omitted."* [**A People's History of the United States**, pp. 542–3]

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

Therefore we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react in different ways to the same economic and

institutional influences and interests. Its no coincidence that left-wing, reformist parties have introduced right-wing, pro-capitalist ("Thatcherite/Reaganite") policies similiar to those right-wing, explicitly pro-capitalist parties have. This is to be expected as the basic function of any political system is to manage the existing state and economic structures and a society's power relationships. It is **not** to alter them radically, The great illusion of politics is the notion that politicians have the power to make whatever changes they like. Looking at the international picture, the question obviously arises as to what real control do the politicians have over the international economy and its institutions or the pattern of world trade and investment. These institutions have great power and, moreover, have a driving force (the profit motive) which is essentially out of control (as can be seen by the regular financial crises during the neo-liberal era).

This can be seen most dramatically in the military coup in Chile against the democratically re-elected (left-wing) Allende government by the military, aided by the CIA, US based corporations and the US government to make it harder for the Allende regime. The coup resulted in thousands murdered and years of terror and dictatorship, but the danger of a pro-labour government was ended and the business environment was made healthy for profits (see section C.11). An extreme example, we know, but an important one for any believer in freedom or the idea that the state machine is somehow neutral and can be captured and used by left-wing parties — particularly as the fate of Chile has been suffered by many other reformist governments across the world.

Of course there have been examples of quite extensive reforms which did benefit working class people in major countries. The New Deal in the USA and the 1945–51 Labour Governments spring to mind. Surely these indicate that our claims are false? Simply put, no, they do not. Reforms can be won from the state when the dangers of not giving in outweigh any weak-



*to overthrow. If a movement sought to achieve a world united by solidarity and mutual aid, it had to be guided by these precepts; if it sought to achieve a decentralised, stateless, non-authoritarian society, it had to be structured in accordance with these goals.*" [Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 180]

The aim of an anarchist organisation is to promote a sense of community, of confidence in ones own abilities, to enable all to be involved in the identification, initiation and management of group needs, decisions and activities. They must ensure that individuals are in a position (both physically, as part of a group, and mentally, as an individual) to manage their own lives and take direct action in the pursuit of individual and communal needs and desires. Anarchist organisation is about empowering all, to develop "integral" or whole individuals and a community that encourages individuality (not abstract "individualism") and solidarity. It is about collective decision making from the bottom up, that empowers those at the "base" of the structure and only delegates the work of co-ordinating and implementing the members decisions (and not the power of making decisions for people). In this way the initiative and power of the few (government) is replaced by the initiative and empowerment of all (anarchy). Affinity groups exist to achieve these aims and are structured to encourage them.

The local affinity group is the means by which anarchists co-ordinate their activities in a community, workplace, social movement and so on. Within these groups, anarchists discuss their ideas, politics and hopes, what they plan to do, organise propaganda work, discuss how they are going to work within wider organisations like unions, how their strategies fit into their long term plans and goals and so on. It is the basic way that anarchists work out their ideas, pull their resources and get their message across to others. There can be affinity groups for different interests and activities (for example a workplace affinity group, a community affinity group, an anarcha-feminist affinity group, etc., could all exist within

*nothing in the process, and the more the idea is propagated the more it acquires in power and effectiveness."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46] The right idea at the right time, one that reflects the needs of individuals and of required social change, can have a transforming effect on society. That is why organisations that anarchists create to spread their message are so important and why we devote a whole section to them.

## J.3.1 What are affinity groups?

Affinity groups are the basic organisation which anarchists create to spread the anarchist idea. The term *"affinity group"* comes from the Spanish F.A.I. (**Iberian Anarchist Federation**) and refers to the organisational form devised in their struggles for freedom (from *"grupo de afinidad"*). At its most basic, it is a (usually small) group of anarchists who work together to spread their ideas to the wider public, using propaganda, initiating or working with campaigns and spreading their ideas **within** popular organisations (such as unions) and communities. It aims not to be a "leadership" but to give a lead, to act as a catalyst within popular movements. Unsurprisingly it reflects basic anarchist ideas:

> *"Autonomous, communal and directly democratic, the group combines revolutionary theory with revolutionary lifestyle in its everyday behaviour. It creates a free space in which revolutionaries can remake themselves individually, and also as social beings."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 144]

The reason for this is simple, for a *"movement that sought to promote a liberatory revolution had to develop liberatory and revolutionary forms. This meant ... that it had to mirror the free society it was trying to achieve, not the repressive one it was trying*



ening of ruling class power implied in the reforms. In the face of economic crisis and working class protest, the ruling elite often tolerates changes it would otherwise fight tooth-and-nail in other circumstances. Reforms will be allowed if they can be used to save the capitalist system and the state from its own excesses and even improve their operation or if not bending will mean being broke in the storm of social protest. After all, the possibility of getting rid of the reforms when they are no longer required will always exist as long as class society remains.

This can be seen from the reformist governments of 1930s USA and 1940s UK. Both faced substantial economic problems and both were under pressure from below, by waves of militant working class struggle which could have developed beyond mere reformism. The waves of sit-down strikes in the 1930s ensured the passing of pro-union laws which allowed workers to organise without fear of being fired. This measure also partly integrated the unions into the capitalist-state machine by making them responsible for controlling "unofficial" workplace action (and so ensuring profits). The nationalisation of roughly 20% of the UK economy during the Labour administration of 1945 (the most unprofitable sections of it as well) was also the direct result of ruling class fear. As Conservative M.P. Quintin Hogg acknowledged in the House of Commons on the 17th February 1943: *"If you do not give the people reform they are going to give you revolution"*. Memories of the near revolutions across Europe after the First World War were obviously in many minds, on both sides. Not that nationalisation was particularly feared as "socialism." Indeed it was argued that it was the best means of improving the performance of the British economy. As anarchists at the time noted *"the real opinions of capitalists can be seen from Stock Exchange conditions and statements of industrialists than the Tory Front bench"* and from these it be seen *"that the owning class is not at all displeased with the record and tendency of the Labour Party."* [**Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 9]

History confirms Proudhon's argument that the state *"can only turn into something and do the work of the revolution insofar as it will be so invited, provoked or compelled by some power outside of itself that seizes the initiative and sets things rolling,"* namely by *"a body representative of the proletariat be formed in Paris ... in opposition to the bourgeoisie's representation."* [**Le Représentant du Peuple**, 5th May 1848] So, if extensive reforms have implemented by the state, just remember what they were in response to militant pressure from below and that we could have got so much more. In general, things have little changed since this anarchist argument against electioneering was put forward in the 1880s:

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

As any worker will tell you, just because there are laws on such things as health and safety, union organising, working hours or whatever, it does not mean that bosses will pay any attention to them. While firing people for joining a union is



This is why anarchists stress federalist organisation. It ensures that co-ordination flows from below and there is no institutionalised leadership. By organising in a way that reflects the kind of society we want, we train ourselves in the skills and decision making processes required to make a free and classless society work. Means and ends are united and this ensures that the means used will result in the desired ends. Simply put, libertarian means must be used if you want libertarian ends (see section H.1.6 for further discussion).

In the sections that follow, we discuss the nature and role of anarchist organisation. Anarchists would agree with Situationist Guy Debord that a *"revolutionary organisation must always remember that its objective is not getting people to listen to speeches by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves."* We organise their groups accordingly. In section J.3.1 we discuss the basic building block of specifically anarchist organisations, the ***"affinity group."*** Sections J.3.2, J.3.3, J.3.4 and J.3.5, we discuss the main types of federations of ***affinity groups*** anarchist create to help spread our message and influence. Then section J.3.6 highlights the role these organisations play in our struggles to create an anarchist society. In section J.3.7, we analyse Bakunin's unfortunate expression *"Invisible Dictatorship"* in order to show how many Marxists distort Bakunin's ideas on this matter. Finally, in sections J.3.8 and J.3.9 we discuss anarcho-syndicalism and other anarchists attitudes to it.

Anarchist organisations, therefore, aim to enrich social struggle by their ideas and suggestions but also, far more importantly, enrich the libertarian idea by practical experience and activity. In other words, a two way process by which life informs theory and theory aids life. The means by which this social dynamic is created and developed is the underlying aim of anarchist organisation and is reflected in its theoretical role. The power of ideas cannot be under estimated, for *"if you have an idea you can communicate it to a million people and lose*

finally, democracy within the ruling party itself (see section H.6).

From an anarchist (i.e. materialist) point of view, this was highly predictable — after all, *"facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower whose root lies in the material conditions of existence."* [Bakunin, **God and the State**, p. 9] So it is unsurprising that hierarchical parties helped to maintain a hierarchical society. In the words of the famous Sonvillier Circular: *"How could one want an egalitarian and free society to issue from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."* [quoted in **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 45]

We must stress here that anarchists are **not** opposed to organisation and are **not** opposed to organisations of anarchists (i.e. **political** organisations, although anarchists generally reject the term "party" due to its statist and hierarchical associations). Murray Bookchin made it clear when he wrote that the *"real question at issue here is not organisation versus non-organisation, but rather what **kind** of organisation"* Anarchist organisations are *"organic developments from below ... They are social movements, combing a creative revolutionary lifestyle with a creative revolutionary theory . .. As much as is humanly possibly, they try to reflect the liberated society they seek to achieve"* and *"co-ordination between groups ... discipline, planning, and unity in action ... achieved **voluntarily**, by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 138–9]

Ultimately, centralised organisations are undemocratic and, equally as important, **ineffective.** Hierarchical organisations kill people's enthusiasm and creativity, where plans and ideas are not adopted because they are the best but simply because they are what a handful of leaders **think** are best for everyone else. Really effective organisations are those which make decisions based frank and open co-operation and debate, where dissent is **not** stifled and ideas are adopted because of their merit and not imposed from the top-down by a few party leaders.



illegal in America, it does not stop bosses doing so. Similarly, many would be surprised to discover that the 8 hour working day was legally created in many US states by the 1870s but workers had to strike for it in 1886 as it as not enforced. Ultimately, political action is dependent on direct action to be enforced where it counts (in the workplace and streets). And if only direct action can enforce a political decision once it is made, then it can do so beforehand so showing the limitations in waiting for politicians to act.

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

> *"all the historical evidence suggests that parties are more a drag than an impetus to radical change. One obvious problem is that parties can be voted out. All the policy changes they brought in can simply be reversed later.*
>
> *"More important, though, is the pacifying influence of the radical party itself. On a number of occasions, radical parties have been elected to power as a result of popular upsurges. Time after time, the 'radical' parties have become chains to hold back the process of radical change."* [*"Democracy without Elections"*, pp. 123–36, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 124]

This can easily be seen from the history of various left-wing parties. Labour or socialist parties, elected in periods of social turbulence, have often acted to reassure the ruling elite

by dampening popular action that could have threatened capitalist interests. For example, the first action undertaken by the Popular Front elected in France in 1936 was to put an end to strikes and occupations and generally to cool popular militancy, which was the Front's strongest ally in coming to power. The Labour government elected in Britain in 1945 got by with as few reforms as it could, refusing to consider changing basic social structures and simply replaced wage-labour to a boss with wage-labour to the state via nationalisation of certain industries. It did, however, manage to find time within the first days of taking office to send troops in to break a dockers' strike (this was no isolated event: Labour has used troops to break strikes far more often than the Conservatives have).

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

Under such pressure, the tendency of politicians to break campaign promises has become legendary. Generally, such promise breaking is blamed on bad character, leading to periodic "throw-the-bastards-out" fervour — after which a new set of representatives is elected, who also mysteriously turn out to be bastards! In reality it is the system itself that produces "bastards," the sell-outs and shady dealing we have come to expect from politicians. In light of modern "democracy", it is amazing that anyone takes the system seriously enough to



Anarchist organisations exist to allow this development and expression of individual initiatives. This empowering of the individual is an important aspect of creating viable solidarity for sheep cannot express solidarity, they only follow the shepherd. Therefore, *"to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of co-operation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 95]

As such, anarchist organisations reflect the sort of society anarchists desire. We reject as ridiculous the claim of Leninists that the form of organisation we build is irrelevant and therefore we must create highly centralised parties which aim to become the leadership of the working class. No matter how "democratic" such organisations are, they just reflect the capitalist division of labour between brain and manual work and the Liberal ideology of surrendering our ability to govern ourselves to an elected elite. In other words, they just mirror the very society we are opposed to and so will soon produce the very problems **within** so-called anti-capitalist organisations which originally motivated us to oppose capitalism in the first place (see section H.5). Given this, anarchists regard *"the Marxist party as another statist form that, if it succeeded in 'seizing power,' would preserve the power of one human being over another, the authority of the leader over the led. The Marxist party … was a mirror image of the very society it professed to oppose, an invasion of the camp of revolutionaries by bourgeois values, methods, and structures."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 179–80] As can be seen from the history of the Russian Revolution, this was the case with the Bolsheviks soon taking the lead in undermining workers' self-management, soviet democracy and,

and manage their own lives directly. Only by organising in this way can we create a new world, a world worthy of human beings and unique individuals.

Anarchist organisation in all its forms reflects our desire to *"build the new world in the shell of the old"* and to empower the individual. We reject the notion that it does not really matter how we organise to change society. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. We are all the products of the influences and social relationships in our lives, this is a basic idea of (philosophical) materialism. Thus the way our organisations are structured has an impact on us. If the organisation is centralised and hierarchical (no matter how "democratically" controlled officials or leaders are) then those subject to it will, as in any hierarchical organisation, see their abilities to manage their own lives, their creative thought and imagination eroded under the constant stream of orders from above. This in turn justifies the pretensions to power of those at the top, as the capacity of self-management of the rank and file is weakened by authoritarian social relationships. This means anarchist organisations are structured so that they allow everyone the maximum potential to participate. Such participation is the key for a free organisation. As Malatesta argued:

> *"The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity .. . if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals. And it is in the organism of every individual that all thoughts and human actions inevitably have their origin, and from being individual they become collective thoughts and acts when they are or become accepted by many individuals. Social action, therefore, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiative, but is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society."* [**Anarchy**, p. 36]



vote at all. In fact, voter turnout in the US and other nations where "democracy" is practiced in this fashion is typically low. Nevertheless, some voters continue to participate, pinning their hopes on new parties or trying to reform a major party. For anarchists this activity is pointless as it does not get at the root of the problem, it is the system which shapes politicians and parties in its own image and marginalises and alienates people due to its hierarchical and centralised nature. No amount of party politics can change that.

However, we should make it clear that most anarchists recognise there is a difference between voting for a government and voting in a referendum. Here we are discussing the former, electioneering, as a means of social change. Referenda are closer to anarchist ideas of direct democracy and are, while flawed, far better than electing a politician to office once every four years or so. In addition, Anarchists are not necessarily against **all** involvement in electoral politics. Some advocate voting when the possible outcome of an election could be disastrous (for example, if a fascist or quasi-fascist party looks likely to win the election). Some Social Ecologists, following Murray Bookchin's arguments, support actual standing in elections and think anarchists by taking part in local elections can use them to create self-governing community assemblies. However, few anarchists support such means to create community assemblies (see section J.5.14 for a discussion on this).

The problem of elections in a statist system, even on a local scale, means that the vast majority of anarchists reject voting as a means of change. Instead we wholeheartedly support direct action as the means of getting improvements in the here and now as well as the means of creating an alternative to the current system.

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

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

> *"State propaganda insists that the reason why at least 40 percent of the voting public don't vote at all is because they have no feelings one way or the other. They say the same thing in the USA, where some 85 percent of the population are apparently 'apolitical' since they don't bother registering a vote. Rejection of the political system is inadmissible as far as the state is concerned ... Of course the one thing that does happen when you vote is that someone else has endorsed an unfair political system ... A vote for any party or any individual is always a vote for the political system. You can interpret your vote in whichever way you like but it remains an endorsement of the apparatus ... If there was any possibility that the apparatus could effect a change in the system then they would dismantle it immediately. In other words the political system is an integral state institution, designed and refined to perpetuate its own existence. Ruling authority fixes the agenda by which the public are allowed 'to enter the political arena' and that's the fix they've settled on."* [**Some Recent Attacks**, p. 87]

We are taught from an early age that voting in elections is right and a duty. In US schools, for example, children elect class presidents and other officers. Often mini-general elections are held to "educate" children in "democracy." Periodically, election coverage monopolises the media. We are made



# J.3 What kinds of organisation do anarchists build?

Anarchists are well aware of the importance of building organisations. Organisations allow those within them to multiply their strength and activity, becoming the means by which an individual can see their ideas, hopes and dreams realised. This is as true for getting the anarchist message across as for building a home, running a hospital or creating some useful product. Anarchists support two types of organisation — organisations of anarchists and popular organisations which are not made up exclusively of anarchists such as industrial unions, co-operatives and community assemblies.

Here we will discuss the kinds, nature and role of the first type of organisation, namely explicitly anarchist organisations. In addition, we discuss anarcho-syndicalism, a revolutionary unionism which aims to create an anarchist society by anarchist tactics, as well as why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists. The second type of organisations, popular ones, are discussed in section J.5. Both forms of organisation, however, share the anarchist commitment to confederalism, decentralisation, self-management and decision making from the bottom up. In such organisations the membership plays the decisive role in running them and ensuring that power remains in their hands. They express the anarchist vision of the power and creative efficacy people have when they are self-reliant, when they act for themselves

In addition, so-called "economic" struggles do not occur in a vacuum. They take place in a social and political context and so, necessarily, there can exist an separation of political and economic struggles only in the mind. Strikers or eco-warriors, for example, face the power of the state enforcing laws which protect the power of employers and polluters. This necessarily has a "political" impact on those involved in struggle. By channelling any "political" conclusions drawn by those involved in struggle into electoral politics, this development of political ideas and discussion will be distorted into discussions of what is possible in the current system, and so the radical impact of direct action and social struggle is weakened. Given this, is it surprising that anarchists argue that the people *"must organise their powers apart from and against the State."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 376]

To conclude, anarchists are only "apolitical" about bourgeois elections and the dubious liberty and benefits associated with picking who will rule us and maintain capitalism for the next four or five years as well as the usefulness of socialists participating in them. We feel that our predictions have been confirmed time and time again. Anarchists reject electioneering not because they are "apolitical" but because they do not desire to see politics remain a thing purely for politicians and bureucrats. Political issues are far too important to leave to such people. Anarchists desire to see political discussion and change develop from the bottom up, this is hardly "apolitical" — in fact with our desire to see ordinary people directly discuss the issues that affect them, act to change things by their own action and draw their own conclusions from their own activity anarchists are very "political." The process of individual and social liberation is the most political activity we can think of!



to feel guilty about shirking our "civic responsibility" if we do not vote. Countries that have no elections, or only rigged elections, are regarded as failures. As a result, elections have become a quasi-religious ritual. Yet, in reality, *"elections in practice have served well to maintain dominant power structures such as private property, the military, male domination, and economic inequality. None of these has been seriously threatened through voting. It is from the point of view of radical critics that elections are most limiting."* [*"Democracy without Elections"*, pp. 123–36, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 124]

Elections serve the interests of state power in other ways. First, voting helps to legitimate government; hence suffrage has often been expanded at times when there was little popular demand for it but when mass support of government was crucial, as during a war or revolution. Second, it comes to be seen as the only legitimate form of political participation, thus making it likely that any revolts by oppressed or marginalised groups will be viewed by the general public as illegitimate. It helps focus attention away from direct action and building new social structures back into institutions which the ruling class can easily control. The general election during the May '68 revolt in France, for example, helped diffuse the revolutionary situation, as did the elections during the Argentine revolt against neo-liberalism in the early 2000s.

So by turning political participation into the "safe" activities of campaigning and voting, elections have reduced the risk of more radical direct action as well as building a false sense of power and sovereignty among the general population. Voting disempowers the grassroots by diverting energy from grassroots action. After all, the goal of electoral politics is to elect a representative who will act **for** us. Therefore, instead of taking direct action to solve problems ourselves, action becomes indirect, though the government. This is an insidiously easy trap to fall into, as we have been conditioned in hierarchical

society from day one into attitudes of passivity and obedience, which gives most of us a deep-seated tendency to leave important matters to the "experts" and "authorities." Kropotkin described well the net effect:

> *"Vote! Greater men that you will tell you the moment when the self-annihilation of capital has been accomplished. They will then expropriate the few usurpers left ... and you will be freed without having taken any more trouble than that of writing on a bit of paper the name of the man whom the heads of your faction of the party told you to vote for!"* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context"*, pp. 259–283, **International Review of Social History**, No. 40, pp. 265–6]

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

Ironically, voting has legitimated the growth of state power to such an extent that the state is now beyond any real popular control by the form of participation that made that growth possible. Nevertheless, the idea that electoral participation means popular control of government is so deeply implanted in peo-



*itself will pose"* political and philosophical questions in their own organisations and so the political struggle (in the widest scene) will come from the class struggle, for *"[w]ho can entertain any doubt that out of this ever-growing organisation of the militant solidarity of the proletariat against bourgeois exploitation there will issue forth the political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie?"* Anarchists simply think that the *"policy of the proletariat"* should be *"the destruction of the State"* rather than working within it and we argue for a union of political ideas and social organisation and activity. This is essential for promoting radical politics as it *"digs a chasm between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and places the proletariat outside the activity and political conniving of all parties within the State ... in placing itself outside all bourgeois politics, the proletariat necessarily turns against it."* So, by *"placing the proletariat outside the politics in the State and of the bourgeois world, [the working class movement] thereby constructed a new world, the world of the united proletarians of all lands."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 302 p. 276, p. 303 and p. 305]

History supports Bakunin's arguments, as it indicates that any attempt at taking social and economic issues into political parties has resulting in wasted energy and their watering down into, at best, reformism and, at worse, the simple ignoring of them by politicians once in office (see section J.2.6). Only by rejecting the artificial divisions of capitalist society can we remain true to our ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity. Every example of radicals using electioneering has resulted in them being changed by the system instead of them changing it. They have become dominated by capitalist ideas and activity (what is usually termed "realistic" and "practical") and by working within capitalist institutions they have, to use Bakunin's words, *"filled in at a single stroke the abyss ... between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie"* that economic and social struggle creates and, worse, *"have tied the proletariat to the bourgeois towline."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 290]

*their analysis of bureaucratic state capitalism helped to make considerable inroads into prevailing Labourist and state socialist assumptions that the existing state could be captured by electoral means and used as an agent of through-going social reform.*" [**British Syndicalism, 1900–1914**, pp. 21–2 and p. 204]

Thus anarchism is not indifferent to or ignores political struggles and issues. Rather, it fights for political change and reforms as it fights for economic ones — by direct action and solidarity. If anarchists *"reject any participation in the works of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and most hopeless form of the political struggle."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 76] Anarchists reject the idea that political and economic struggles can be divided. Such an argument just reproduces the artificially created division of labour between mental and physical activity of capitalism within working class organisations and within anti-capitalist movements. We say that we should not separate out politics into some form of specialised activity that only certain people (i.e. our "representatives") can do. Instead, anarchists argue that political struggles, ideas and debates must be brought into the **social** and **economic** organisations of our class where they must be debated freely by all members as they see fit and that political and economic struggle and change must go hand in hand. Rather than being something other people discuss on behalf of working class people, anarchists, argue that politics must no longer be in the hands of so-called experts (i.e. politicians) but instead lie in the hands of those directly affected by it. Also, in this way the social struggle encourages the political development of its members by the process of participation and self-management.

In other words, political issues must be raised in economic and social organisations and discussed there, where working class people have real power. As Bakunin put it, *"the proletariat*



ple's psyches that even the most overtly sceptical radical often cannot fully free themselves from it.

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

All this does not mean, obviously, that anarchists prefer dictatorship or an "enlightened" monarchy. Far from it, democratising state power can be an important step towards abolishing it. All anarchists agree with Bakunin when he argued that *"the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better that even the most enlightened monarchy."* [quoted by Daniel Guerin, **Anarchism**, p. 20] It simply means that anarchists refuse to join in with the farce of electioneering, particularly when there are more effective means available for changing things for the better. Anarchists reject the idea that our problems can be solved by the very institutions that cause them in the first place!

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

There is no doubt that voting can lead to changes in policies, which can be a good thing as far as it goes. However, such policies are formulated and implemented within the authoritarian framework of the hierarchical capitalist state — a framework which itself is never open to challenge by voting. On the contrary, voting legitimates the state framework ensuring that social change will be (at best) mild, gradual, and reformist rather

than rapid and radical. Indeed, the "democratic" process has resulted in all successful political parties becoming committed to "more of the same" or tinkering with the details at best (which is usually the limits of any policy changes). This seems unlikely to change.

Given the need for radical systemic changes as soon as possible due to the exponentially accelerating crises of modern civilisation, working for gradual reforms within the electoral system must be seen as a potentially deadly tactical error. Electioneering has always been the death of radicalism. Political parties are only radical when they do not stand a chance of election. However, many social activists continue to try to use elections, so participating in the system which disempowers the majority and so helps create the social problems they are protesting against. It should be a widely recognised truism in radical circles that elections empower the politicians and not the voters. Thus elections focus attention to a few leaders, urging them to act **for** rather than acting for ourselves (see section H.1.5). If genuine social change needs mass participation then, by definition, using elections will undermine that. This applies to within the party as well, for working "within the system" disempowers grassroots activists, as can be seen by the Green party in Germany during the early eighties. The coalitions into which the Greens entered with Social Democrats in the German legislature often had the effect of strengthening the status quo by co-opting those whose energies might otherwise have gone into more radical and effective forms of activism. Principles were ignored in favour of having some influence, so producing watered-down legislation which tinkered with the system rather than transforming it.

As discussed in section H.3.9, the state is more complicated than the simple organ of the economically dominant class pictured by Marxists. There are continual struggles both inside and outside the state bureaucracies, struggles that influence policies and empower different groups of people. This can pro-



> *our organisations. With our papers. Without intermediaries, delegates or representatives. No. We will not go to the Town Hall, to the Provincial Capitol, to Parliament."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 173]

Indeed, Rudolf Rocker makes the point very clear. *"It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism,"* he wrote, *"that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities entirely to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which distinguishes the Anarcho-Syndicalist from the modern labour parties, both in principle and tactics, but the form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view ... their efforts are also directed, even today, at restricting the activities of the state ... The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism towards the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes towards the system of capitalist exploitation"* and *"pursue the same tactics in their fight against ... the state."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 73–4]

As historian Bob Holton suggests, the notion that syndicalism is apolitical *"is certainly a deeply embedded article of faith among those marxists who have taken Lenin's strictures against syndicalism at face value. Yet it bears little relation to the actual nature of revolutionary industrial movements ... Nor did syndicalists neglect politics and the state. Revolutionary industrial movements were on the contrary highly 'political' in that they sought to understand, challenge and destroy the structure of capitalist power in society, They quite clearly perceived the oppressive role of the state whose periodic intervention in industrial unrest could hardly have been missed."* For example, the *"vigorous campaign against the 'servile state' certainly disproves the notion that syndicalists ignored the role of the state in society. On the contrary,*

*inseparable, and each is the condition of the other."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 11]

Such a unification must take place on the social and economic field, not the political, as that is where the working class is strongest. So anarchists are well aware of the need to fight for political issues and reforms, and so are *"not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle … must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic [and social] power which the working class has at its command are the most effective. The most trivial wage-fight shows clearly that, whenever the employers find themselves in difficulties, the state steps in with the police, and even in some cases with the militia, to protect the threatened interests of the possessing classes. It would, therefore, be absurd for them to overlook the importance of the political struggle. Every event that affects the life of the community is of a political nature. In this sense every important economic action … is also a political action and, moreover, one of incomparably greater importance than any parliamentary proceeding."* In other words, *"just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country. Both in the struggle for his daily bread and for every kind of propaganda looking towards his social liberation he needs political rights and liberties, and he must fight for these himself with all his strength whenever the attempt is made to wrest them from him."* So the *"focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic [and social] fighting organisations of the workers."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77, p. 74 and p. 77] Hence the comments in the CNT's newspaper **Solidaridad Obrera**:

> *"Does anyone not know that we want to participate in public life? Does anyone not know that we have always done so? Yes, we want to participate. With*



duce clashes with the ruling elite, while the need of the state to defend the system **as a whole** causes conflict with the interests of sections of the capitalist class. Due to this, many radical parties believe that the state is neutral and so it makes sense to work within it — for example, to obtain labour, consumer, and environmental protection laws. However, this reasoning ignores the fact that the organisational structure of the state is not neutral. To quote Brian Martin:

> *"The basic anarchist insight is that the structure of the state, as a centralised administrative apparatus, is inherently flawed from the point of view of human freedom and equality. Even though the state can be used occasionally for valuable ends, as a means the state is flawed and impossible to reform. The non-reformable aspects of the state include, centrally, its monopoly over 'legitimate' violence and its consequent power to coerce for the purpose of war, internal control, taxation and the protection of property and bureaucratic privilege.*
>
> *"The problem with voting is that the basic premises of the state are never considered open for debate, much less challenge. The state's monopoly over the use of violence for war is never at issue. Neither is the state's use of violence against revolt from within. The state's right to extract economic resources from the population is never questioned. Neither is the state's guarantee of either private property (under capitalism) or bureaucratic prerogative (under state socialism) — or both."* [*"Democracy without Elections"*, pp. 123–36, **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 127]

It may be argued that if a new political group is radical enough it will be able to use state power for good purposes.

While we discuss this in more detail in section J.2.6, let us consider a specific case, that of the Greens as many of them believe that the best way to achieve their aims is to work within the current political system.

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

As we argued in the previous section, radical parties are under pressure from economic and state bureaucracies that ensure that even a sincere radical party would be powerless to introduce significant reforms. The only real response to the problems of representative democracy is to urge people not to vote. Such anti-election campaigns can be a valuable way of making others aware of the limitations of the current system, which is a necessary condition for their seriously considering the anarchist alternative of using direct action and build alter-



*the 40 per cent. abstentions are anarchists, but we would surely be justified in drawing the conclusion that among the 40 per cent. there are a sizeable minority who have lost faith in political parties and were looking for other instruments, other values.*" [**The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 141] Nor, needless to say, are anarchists indifferent to struggles for political reforms and the need to stop the state pursuing authoritarian policies, imperialist adventures and such like.

Thus the charge anarchists are apolitical or indifferent to politics (even capitalist politics) is a myth. Rather, *"we are not concerned with choosing between governments but with creating the situation where government can no longer operate, because only then will we organise locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to satisfy real needs and common aspirations."* For *"so long as we have capitalism and government, the job of anarchists is to fight both, and at the same time encourage people to take what steps they can to run their own lives."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176–87, **The Raven**, No. 14, p. 179]

Part of this process will be the discussion of political, social and economic issues in whatever self-managed organisations people create in their communities and workplaces (as Bakunin argued) and the use of these organisations to fight for (political, social and economic) improvements and reforms in the here and now using direct action and solidarity. This means, as Rudolf Rocker pointed out, anarchists desire a unification of political and economic struggles as the two as inseparable:

> *"Within the socialist movement itself the Anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are*

bourgeois politics. We do not reject "political action" in the sense of direct action to effect political changes and reforms. As two American syndicalists argued, libertarians use *"the term 'political action' ... in its ordinary and correct sense. Parliamentary action resulting from the exercise of the franchise is political action. Parliamentary action caused by the influence of direct action tactics ... is not political action. It is simply a registration of direct action."* They also noted that syndicalists *"have proven time and again that they can solve the many so-called political questions by direct action."* [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 19f and p. 23]

So, anarchists reject capitalist politics (i.e. electioneering), but we do not ignore politics, wider political discussion or political struggles. Anarchists have always recognised the importance of political debate and ideas in social movements. Bakunin asked should a workers organisation *"cease to concern itself with political and philosophical questions? Would [it] ... ignore progress in the world of thought as well as the events which accompany or arise from the political struggle in and between states, concerning itself only with the economic problem?"* He rejected such a position: *"We hasten to say that it is absolutely impossible to ignore political and philosophical questions. An exclusive pre-occupation with economic questions would be fatal for the proletariat. Doubtless the defence and organisation of its economic interests ... must be the principle task of the proletariat. But is impossible for the workers to stop there without renouncing their humanity and depriving themselves of the intellectual and moral power which is so necessary for the conquest of their economic rights."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 301]

Nor do anarchists ignore elections. As Vernon Richards suggested, anarchists *"cannot be uninterested in ... election results, whatever their view about the demerits of the contending Parties. The fact that the anarchist movement has campaigned to persuade people not to use their vote is proof of our commitment and interest. If there is, say, a 60 per cent. poll we will not assume that*



native social and economic organisations. The implications of abstentionism are discussed in the next section.

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

At its most basic, anarchists support abstentionism because *"participation in elections means the transfer of one's will and decisions to another, which is contrary to the fundamental principles of anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Vision on Fire**, p. 89] For, as Proudhon stressed, in a statist democracy, the people *"is limited to choosing, every three or four years, its chiefs and its imposters."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 152]

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

Anarchists are aware that elections serve to legitimate government. We have always warned that since the state is an integral part of the system that perpetuates poverty, inequality, racism, imperialism, sexism, environmental destruction, and war, we should not expect to solve any of these problems by

changing a few nominal state leaders every four or five years. Therefore anarchists (usually) advocate abstentionism at election time as a means of exposing the farce of "democracy", the disempowering nature of elections and the real role of the state.

For anarchists, then, when you vote, you are choosing between rulers. Instead of urging people to vote we raise the option of choosing to rule yourself, to organise freely with others — in your workplace, in your community, everywhere — as equals. The option of something you cannot vote for, a new society. Instead of waiting for others to make some changes for you, anarchists urge that you do it yourself. In this way, you cannot but build an alternative to the state which can reduce its power now and, in the long run, replace it. This is the core of the anarchist support for abstentionism.

In addition, beyond this basic anarchist rejection of elections from an anti-statist position, anarchists also support abstentionism as it allows us to put across our ideas at election time. It is a fact that at such times people are often more interested in politics than usual. So, by arguing for abstentionism we can get our ideas across about the nature of the current system, how elected politicians do not control the state bureaucracy, now the state acts to protect capitalism and so on. In addition, it allows us to present the ideas of direct action and encourage those disillusioned with political parties and the current system to become anarchists by presenting a viable alternative to the farce of politics. For, after all, a sizeable percentage of non-voters and voters are disillusioned with the current set-up. Many who vote do so simply against the other candidate, seeking the least-worse option. Many who do not vote do so for essentially political reasons, such as being fed up with the political system, failing to see any major differences between the parties, or recognition that the candidates were not interested in people like them. These non-voters are often disproportionately left-leaning, compared with those who did



itics and actually agreed with the Marxists that political indifference only led to capitalist control of the labour movement:

> *"[some of] the workers in Germany ... [were organised in] a kind of federation of small associations ... 'Self-help' ... was its slogan, in the sense that labouring people were persistently advised not to anticipate either deliverance or help from the state and the government, but only from their own efforts. This advice would have been excellent had it not been accompanied by the false assurance that liberation for the labouring people is possible under* ***current conditions of social organisation*** *... Under this delusion ... the workers subject to [this] influence were supposed to disengage themselves systematically from all political and social concerns and questions about the state, property, and so forth ... [This] completely subordinated the proletariat to the bourgeoisie which exploits it and for which it was to remain an obedient and mindless tool."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 174]

In addition, Bakunin argued that the labour movement (and so the anarchist movement) would have to take into account political ideas and struggles but to do so in a working class way:

> *"The International does not reject politics of a general kind; it will be compelled to intervene in politics so long as it is forced to struggle against the bourgeoisie. It rejects only bourgeois politics."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 313]

To state the obvious, anarchists only reject working class *"political action"* if you equate (as did the early Marxists) "political action" with electioneering, standing candidates for Parliament, local town councils and so on — what Bakunin termed

*retard our movement and make it a stepping stone for political climbers.*" [Emma Goldman, **Vision on Fire**, p. 92]

In short, what happens in our communities, workplaces and environment is too important to be left to politicians — or the ruling elite who control governments. Anarchists need to persuade *"as many people as possible that their freedom ... depends not on the right to vote or securing a majority of votes ... but on evolving new forms of political and social organisation which aim at the direct participation of the people, with the consequent weakening of the power, as well as of the social role, of government in the life of the community."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176–87, **The Raven**, No. 14, pp. 177–8] We discuss what new forms of economic and social organisations that this could involve in section J.5.

## J.2.10 Does rejecting electioneering mean that anarchists are apolitical?

No. Far from it. The "apolitical" nature of anarchism is Marxist nonsense. As it desires to fundamentally change society, anarchism can be nothing but political. However, anarchism does reject (as we have seen) "normal" political activity as ineffectual and corrupting. However, many (particularly Marxists) imply this rejection of the con of capitalist politics means that anarchists concentrate on purely "economic" issues like wages, working conditions and so forth. By so doing, Marxists claim that anarchists leave the political agenda to be dominated by capitalist ideology, with disastrous results for the working class.

This view, however, is **utterly** wrong. Indeed, Bakunin explicitly rejected the idea that working people could ignore pol-



vote. So, anarchist abstentionism is a means of turning this negative reaction to an unjust system into positive activity.

So, anarchist opposition to electioneering has deep political implications which Luigi Galleani addressed when he wrote:

> *"The anarchists' electoral abstentionism implies not only a conception that is opposed to the principle of representation (which is totally rejected by anarchism), it implies above all an absolute lack of confidence in the State ... Furthermore, anarchist abstentionism has consequences which are much less superficial than the inert apathy ascribed to it by the sneering careerists of 'scientific socialism' [i.e. Marxism]. It strips the State of the constitutional fraud with which it presents itself to the gullible as the true representative of the whole nation, and, in so doing, exposes its essential character as representative, procurer and policeman of the ruling classes.*
>
> *"Distrust of reforms, of public power and of delegated authority, can lead to direct action [in the class struggle] ... It can determine the revolutionary character of this ... action; and, accordingly, anarchists regard it as the best available means for preparing the masses to manage their own personal and collective interests; and, besides, anarchists feel that even now the working people are fully capable of handling their own political and administrative interests."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 13–14]

Therefore abstentionism stresses the importance of self-activity and self-libertarian as well as having an important educational effect in highlighting that the state is not neutral but serves to protect class rule and that meaningful change only comes from below, by direct action. For the dominant ideas within any class society reflect the opinions of the ruling

elite of that society and so any campaign at election times which argues for abstentionism and indicates why voting is a farce will obviously challenge them. In other words, abstentionism combined with direct action and the building of libertarian alternatives is a very effective means of changing people's ideas and encouraging a process of self-education and, ultimately, self-liberation.

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

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

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

While these are important arguments in favour of radicals using elections, they ultimately fail to take into account the nature of the state and the corrupting effect it has on radicals. This reformist idea has met a nasty end. If history is anything to go by, the net effect of radicals using elections is that by the time they are elected to office the radicals will happily do what they claimed the right-wing would have done. In 1899, for example, the Australian Labor Party was formed to represent the working class in parliament. By 1904 it had formed the first Labor government in the world. Its leader declared that "socialism is out of the question, and will be for many years to come" and that the party "stands for the maintenance of the present system of society." [quoted by Robert Michels, **Political Parties**, p. 370] Within a few years, the Labor Party was in power in Australia, and was busy introducing measures to help capitalism and the ruling class.



for their own needs without having to rely on capitalists or governments. In the words of a C.N.T. militant:

> *"We must create that part of libertarian communism which can be created within bourgeois society and do so precisely to combat that society with our own special weapons."* [quoted by Kelsey, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

So, far from doing nothing, by not voting the anarchist actively encourages alternatives. As the British anarchist John Turner argued, we *"have a line to work upon, to teach the people self-reliance, to urge them to take part in non-political [i.e. non-electoral] movements directly started by themselves for themselves ... as soon as people learn to rely upon themselves they will act for themselves ... We teach the people to place their faith in themselves, we go on the lines of self-help. We teach them to form their own committees of management, to repudiate their masters, to despise the laws of the country."* [quoted by John Quail, **The Slow Burning Fuse**, p. 87] In this way we encourage self-activity, self-organisation and self-help — the opposite of apathy and doing nothing.

Ultimately, what the state and capital gives, they can also take away. What we build by our own self-activity can last as long as we want it to and act to protect it:

> *"The future belongs to those who continue daringly, consistently, to fight power and governmental authority. The future belongs to us and to our social philosophy. For it is the only social ideal that teaches independent thinking and direct participation of the workers in their economic struggle. For it is only through the organised economic strength of the masses that they can and will do away with the capitalist system and all the wrongs and injustices it contains. Any diversion from this stand will only*

anarchosyndicalist, anarchists *"do not ask for any concessions from the government. Our mission and our duty is to impose from the streets that which ministers and deputies are incapable of realising in parliament."* [quoted by Graham Kelsey, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 79] This was seen after the Popular Front was elected February 1936 and the Spanish landless workers, sick and tired of waiting for the politicians to act, started to occupy the land. The government *"resorted to the time-tested procedure of expelling the peasants with the Civil Guard."* The peasants responded with a *"dramatic rebellion"* which forced the politicians to *"legalise the occupied farms. This proved once again that the only effective reforms are those imposed by force from below. Indeed, direct action was infinitely more successful than all the parliamentary debates that took place between 1931 and 1933 about whether to institute the approved Agrarian Reform law."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 391]

The second strategy of building alternatives flows naturally from the first. Any form of campaign requires organisation and by organising in an anarchist manner we build organisations that *"bear in them the living seed of the new society which is replace the old world."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 255] In organising strikes in the workplace and community we can create a network of activists and union members who can encourage a spirit of revolt against authority. By creating assemblies where we live and work we can create an effective countering power to the state and capital. Such a union, as the anarchists in Spain and Italy proved, can be the focal point for recreating self-managed schools, social centres and so on. In this way the local community can ensure that it has sufficient independent, self-managed resources available to educate its members. Also, combined with credit unions (or mutual banks), cooperative workplaces and stores, a self-managed infrastructure could be created which would ensure that people can directly provide



ple, the Socialist Alexandre Millerand joined the French Government. Nothing changed. During industrial disputes strikers *"appealed to Millerand for help, confident that, with him in the government, the state would be on their side. Much of this confidence was dispelled within a few years. The government did little more for workers than its predecessors had done; soldiers and police were still sent in to repress serious strikes."* [Peter N. Stearns, **Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labour**, p. 16] Aristide Briand, another socialist politician was the Minister of the Interior in 1910 and *"broke a general strike of railwaymen by use of the most draconian methods. Having declared a military emergency he threatened all strikers with court martial."* [Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France** p. 36] These events occurred, it should be noted, during the period when social democratic parties were self-proclaimed revolutionaries and arguing against anarcho-syndicalism by using the argument that working people needed their own representatives in office to stop troops being used against them during strikes!

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

Many blame the individuals elected to office for these betrayals, arguing that we need to elect **better** politicians, select **better** leaders. For anarchists nothing could be more wrong as its the means used, not the individuals involved, which is the problem. Writing of his personal experience as a member of Parliament, Proudhon recounted that *"[a]s soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of the current events ... One must have lived in that iso-*

*lator which is called a National Assembly to realise how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it."* There was *"ignorance of daily facts"* and *"fear of the people"* (*"the sickness of all those who belong to authority"*) for *"the people, for those in power, are the enemy."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 111] Ultimately, as syndicalist Emile Pouget argued, this fate was inevitable as any socialist politician *"could not break the mould; he is only a cog in the machine of oppression and whether he wishes it or not he must, as minister, participate in the job of crushing the proletariat."* [quoted by Jennings, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36]

These days, few enter Parliament as radicals like Proudhon. The notion of using elections for radical change is rare. Such a development in itself shows the correctness of the anarchist critique of electioneering. At its most basic, electioneering results in the party using it becoming more moderate and reformist — it becomes the victim of its own success. In order to gain votes, the party must appear "moderate" and "practical" and that means working within the system:

> *"Participation in the politics of the bourgeois States has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but thanks to this method, Socialism has almost been completely crushed and condemned to insignificance … Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist Labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity, and, worse of all, the impulse to self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54]

This corruption does not happen overnight. Alexander Berkman indicated how it slowly developed:



tax happily let the councils controlled by them introduce the tax and arrest non-payers).

The aim would be to spread struggles and involve as many people as possible, for it is *"merely stupid for a group of workers — even for the workers organised as a national group — to invite the making of a distinction between themselves and the community. The real protagonists in this struggle are the community and the State — the community as an organic and inclusive body and the State as the representatives of a tyrannical minority … The General Strike of the future must be organised as a strike of the community against the State. The result of that strike will not be in doubt."* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, p. 52]

Such a counter-power would focus the attention of those in power far more than a ballot in a few years time (particularly as the state bureaucracy is not subject to even that weak form of accountability). As Noam Chomsky argues, *"[w]ithin the constraints of existing state institutions, policies will be determined by people representing centres of concentrated power in the private economy, people who, in their institutional roles, will not be swayed by moral appeals but by the costs consequent upon the decisions they make — not because they are 'bad people,' but because that is what the institutional roles demands."* He continues: *"Those who own and manage the society want a disciplined, apathetic and submissive public that will not challenge their privilege and the orderly world in which it thrives. The ordinary citizen need not grant them this gift. Enhancing the Crisis of Democracy by organisation and political engagement is itself a threat to power, a reason to undertake it quite apart from its crucial importance in itself as an essential step towards social change."* [**Turning the Tide**, pp. 251–2]

In this way, by encouraging social protest, any government would think twice before pursuing authoritarian, destructive and unpopular policies. In the final analysis, governments can and will ignore the talk of opposition politicians, but they cannot ignore social action for very long. In the words of a Spanish

*tion must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 398 and p. 397]

We do this by organising what Bakunin called *"antipolitical social power of the working classes."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 263] This activity which bases itself on the two broad strategies of encouraging direct action and building alternatives where we live and work.

Taking the first strategy, anarchists say that by using direct action we can force politicians to respect the wishes of the people. For example, if a government or boss tries to limit free speech, then anarchists would try to encourage a free speech fight to break the laws in question until such time as they are revoked. If a government or landlord refuses to limit rent increases or improve safety requirements for accommodation, anarchists would organise squats and rent strikes. In the case of environmental destruction, anarchists would support and encourage attempts at halting the damage by mass trespassing on sites, blocking the routes of developments, organising strikes and so on. If a boss refuses to introduce an 8 hour day, then workers should form a union and go on strike or simply stop working after 8 hours. Unlike laws, the boss cannot ignore direct action. Similarly, strikes combined with social protest would be effective means of stopping authoritarian laws being passed. For example, anti-union laws would be best fought by strike action and community boycotts (and given the utterly ineffectual defence pursued by pro-labour parties using political action to stop anti-union laws who can seriously say that the anarchist way would be any worse?). Collective non-payment of taxes would ensure the end of unpopular government decisions. The example of the poll tax rebellion in the UK in the late in 1980s shows the power of such direct action. The government could happily handle hours of speeches by opposition politicians but they could not ignore social protest (and we must add that the Labour Party which claimed to oppose the



*"In former days the Socialists ... claimed that they meant to use politics only for the purpose of propaganda ... and took part in elections on order to have an opportunity to advocate Socialism*

*"It may seem a harmless thing but it proved the undoing of Socialism. Because nothing is truer than the means you use to attain your object soon themselves become your object ... Little by little they changed their attitude. Instead of electioneering being merely an educational method, it gradually became their only method to secure political office, to get elected to legislative bodies and other government positions. The change naturally led the Socialists to tone down their revolutionary ardour; it compelled them to soften their criticism of capitalism and government in order to avoid persecution and secure more votes ... they have ceased to be revolutionists; they have become reformers who want to change things by law ... And everywhere, without exception, they have followed the same course, everywhere they have forsworn their ideals, have duped the masses ... There is a deeper reason for this constant and regular betrayal [than individual scoundrels being elected] ... no man turns scoundrel or traitor overnight.*

*"It is **power** which corrupts ... The filth and contamination of politics everywhere proves that. Moreover, even with the best intentions Socialists in legislative bodies or in governments find themselves entirely powerless to accomplishing anything of a socialistic nature .. . The demoralisation and vitiation take place little by little, so gradually that one hardly notices it himself ... [The elected Socialist] finds himself in a strange and unfriendly atmosphere ... and he must participate in the business that is being trans-*

*acted. Most of that business … has no bearing whatever on the things the Socialist believes in, no connection with the interests of the working class voters who elected him … when a bill of some bearing upon labour … comes up … he is ignored or laughed at for his impractical ideas on the matter …*

*"Our Socialist perceives that he is regarded as a laughing stock [by the other politicians] … and finds more and more difficulty in securing the floor… he knows that neither by his talk nor by his vote can he influence the proceedings … His speeches don't even reach the public … He appeals to the voters to elect more comrades. .. Years pass … [and a] number … are elected. Each of them goes through the same experience … [and] quickly come to the conclusion . .. [that they] must show that they are practical men … that they are doing something for their constituency … In this manner the situation compels them to take a 'practical' part in the proceedings, to 'talk business,' to fall in line with the matters actually dealt with in the legislative body … Spending years in that atmosphere, enjoying good jobs and pay, the elected Socialists have themselves become part and parcel of the political machinery … With growing success in elections and securing political power they turn more and more conservative and content with existing conditions. Removal from the life and suffering of the working class, living in the atmosphere of the bourgeoisie … they have become what they call 'practical' … Power and position have gradually stifled their conscience and they have not the strength and honesty to swim against the current … They have become the strongest bulwark of capitalism."* [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 92–8]



alternatives in our communities and workplaces. That is in itself enough to prove that electioneering, far from eliminating apathy, in fact helps to create it.

So, because of this, anarchists argue that the only way to not waste your vote is to spoil it! We are the only political movement which argues that nothing will change unless you act for yourself, take back the power and fight the system **directly.** Only direct action breaks down apathy and gets results. It is the first steps towards real freedom, towards a free and just society. Unsurprisingly, then, anarchists are the first to point out that not voting is not enough: we need to actively struggle for an alternative to both voting **and** the current system. Just as the right to vote was won after a long series of struggles, so the creation of a free, decentralised, self-managed, libertarian socialist society will be the product of social struggle.

Anarchists are the last people to deny the importance of political liberties or the importance in wining the right to vote. The question we must ask is whether it is a more a fitting tribute to the millions of people who used direct action, fought and suffered for the right to vote to use that victory to endorse a deeply unfair and undemocratic system or to use other means (indeed the means they used to win the vote) to create a system based upon true popular self-government? If we are true to our (and their) desire for a real, meaningful democracy, we would have to reject political action in favour of direct action.

This obviously gives an idea of what anarchists do instead of voting, we agitate, organise and educate. Or, to quote Proudhon, the *"problem before the labouring classes … consists not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, — that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the state and subjugate them."* For, *"to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combina-*

*"If the anarchist movement has a role to play in practical politics it is surely that of suggesting to, and persuading, as many people as possible that their freedom from the Hitlers, Francos and the rest, depends not on the right to vote or securing a majority of votes 'for the candidate of ones choice,' but on evolving new forms of political and social organisation which aim at the direct participation of the people, with the consequent weakening of the power, as well of the social role, of government in the life of the community."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176–87, **The Raven**, no. 14, pp. 177–8]

We discuss what this could involve in the next section.

## J.2.9 What do anarchists do instead of voting?

While anarchists reject electioneering and voting, it does not mean that we are politically apathetic. Indeed, part of the reason why anarchists reject voting is because we think that voting is not part of the solution, it is part of the problem. This is because it endorses an unjust and unfree political system and makes us look to others to fight our battles for us. It **blocks** constructive self-activity and direct action. It **stops** the building of alternatives in our communities and workplaces. Voting breeds apathy and apathy is our worse enemy.

Given that we have had universal suffrage for some time in the West and we have seen the rise of Labour and Radical parties aiming to use that system to effect change in a socialistic direction, it seems strange that we are probably further away from socialism than when they started. The simple fact is that these parties have spent so much time trying to win elections that they have stopped even thinking about creating socialist



So the *"political power which they had wanted to conquer had gradually conquered their Socialism until there was scarcely anything left of it."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

Not that these arguments are the result of hindsight, we must add. Bakunin was arguing in the early 1870s that the *"inevitable result [of using elections] will be that workers' deputies, transferred to a purely bourgeois environment, and into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois political ideas ... will become middle class in their outlook, perhaps even more so than the bourgeois themselves."* As long as universal suffrage *"is exercised in a society where the people, the mass of workers, are* ***economically*** *dominated by a minority holding exclusive possession the property and capital of the country"* elections *"can only be illusory, anti-democratic in their results."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 216 and p. 213] This meant that *"the election to the German parliament of one or two workers ... from the Social Democratic Party"* was *"not dangerous"* and, in fact, was *"highly useful to the German state as a lightning-rod, or a safety-valve."* Unlike the *"political and social theory"* of the anarchists, which *"leads them directly and inexorably to a complete break with all governments and all forms of bourgeois politics, leaving no alternative but social revolution,"* Marxism, he argued, *"inexorably enmeshes and entangles its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodation with governments and the various bourgeois political parties — that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction."* [Bakunin, **Statism and Anarchy**, p. 193 and pp. 179–80] In the case of the German Social Democrats, this became obvious in 1914, when they supported their state in the First World war, and after 1918, when they crushed the German Revolution.

So history proved Bakunin's prediction correct (as it did with his prediction that Marxism would result in elite rule). Simply put, for anarchists, the net effect of socialists using bourgeois elections would be to put them (and the movements they represent) into the quagmire of bourgeois politics and

influences. In other words, the parties involved will be shaped by the environment they are working within and not vice versa.

History is littered with examples of radical parties becoming a part of the system. From Marxian Social Democracy at the turn of the 19th century to the German Green Party in the 1980s, we have seen radical parties, initially proclaiming the need for direct action and extra-parliamentary activity denouncing these activities once in power. From only using parliament as a means of spreading their message, the parties involved end up considering votes as more important than the message. Janet Biehl sums up the effects on the German Green Party of trying to combine radical electioneering with direct action:

> *"the German Greens, once a flagship for the Green movement worldwide, should now be considered stink normal, as their **de facto** boss himself declares. Now a repository of careerists, the Greens stand out only for the rapidity with which the old cadre of careerism, party politics, and business-as-usual once again played itself out in their saga of compromise and betrayal of principle. Under the superficial veil of their old values — a very thin veil indeed, now — they can seek positions and make compromises to their heart's content ... They have become 'practical,' 'realistic' and 'power-orientated.' This former New Left ages badly, not only in Germany but everywhere else. But then, it happened with the S.P.D. [The German Social Democratic Party] in August 1914, then why not with Die Grunen in 1991? So it did."* [*"Party or Movement?"*, **Greenline**, no. 89, p. 14]

This, sadly, is the end result of all such attempts. Ultimately, supporters of using political action can only appeal to the good



This is important to remember. The central fallacy in this kind of argument is the underlying assumption that "the left" will **not** implement the same kind of policies as the right. History does not support such a perspective and it is a weak hope to place a political strategy on. As such, when people worry that a right-wing government will come into power and seek to abolish previous social gains (such as abortion rights, welfare programmes, union rights, and so forth) they seem to forget that so-called left-wing administrations have also undermined such reforms. In response to queries by the left on how anarchists would seek to defend such reforms if their abstentionism aided the victory of the right, anarchists reply by asking the left how they seek to defend such reforms when their "left-wing" government starts to attack them.

Ultimately, voting for other politicians will make little difference. The reality is that politicians are puppets. As we argued in section J.2.2, real power in the state does not lie with politicians, but instead within the state bureaucracy and big business. Faced with these powers, we have seen left-wing governments from Spain to New Zealand introduce right-wing policies. So even if we elected a radical party, they would be powerless to change anything important and soon be forced to attack us in the interests of capitalism. Politicians come and go, but the state bureaucracy and big business remain forever! Simply put, we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react that differently to the same economic and political pressures and influences.

Therefore we cannot rely on voting for the lesser evil to safe us from the possible dangers of a right-wing election victory. All we can hope for is that no matter who gets in, the population will resist the government because it knows and can use its real power: **direct action**. For the *"only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 196] Hence Vernon Richards:

movement based upon direct action and solidarity will always think twice before proposing cuts or introducing authoritarian laws. Howard Zinn expressed it well:

> *"I think a way to behave is to think not in terms of representative government, not in terms of voting, not in terms of electoral politics, but thinking in terms of organising social movements, organising in the workplace, organising in the neighborhood, organising collectives that can become strong enough to eventually take over — first to become strong enough to resist what has been done to them by authority, and second, later, to become strong enough to actually take over the institutions ... the crucial question is not who is in office, but what kind of social movement do you have. Because we have seen historically that if you have a powerful social movement, it doesn't matter who is in office. Whoever is in office, they could be Republican or Democrat, if you have a powerful social movement, the person in office will have to yield, will have to in some ways respect the power of social movements ... voting is not crucial, and organising is the important thing."* [**An Interview with Howard Zinn on Anarchism: Rebels Against Tyranny**]

Of course, all the parties claim that they are better than the others and this is the logic of this question — namely, we must vote for the lesser evil as the right-wing in office will be terrible. But what this forgets is that the lesser evil is still an evil. What happens is that instead of the greater evil attacking us, we get the lesser evil doing what the right-wing was going to do. Let us not forget it was the "lesser evil" of the Democrats (in the USA) and Labour (in the UK) who first introduced, in the 1970s, the monetarist and other policies that Reagan and Thatcher made their own in the 1980s.



intentions and character of their candidates. Anarchists, however, present an analysis of state structures and other influences that will determine how the character of the successful candidates will change. In other words, in contrast to Marxists and other radicals, anarchists present a materialist, scientific analysis of the dynamics of electioneering and its effects on radicals. Like most forms of idealism, the arguments of Marxists and other radicals flounder on the rocks of reality.

However, many radicals refuse to learn this lesson of history and keep trying to create a new party which will not repeat the saga of compromise and betrayal which all other radical parties have suffered. And they say that anarchists are utopian! *"You cannot dive into a swamp and remain clean."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] Such is the result of rejecting (or "supplementing" with electioneering) direct action as the means to change things, for any social movement *"to ever surrender their commitment to direct action for 'working within the system' is to destroy their personality as socially innovative movements. It is to dissolve back into the hopeless morass of 'mass organisations' that seek respectability rather than change."* [Murray Bookchin, **Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 47]

Moreover, the use of electioneering has a centralising effect on the movements that use it. Political actions become considered as parliamentary activities made **for** the population by their representatives, with the 'rank and file' left with no other role than that of passive support. Only the leaders are actively involved and the main emphasis falls upon them and it soon becomes taken for granted that they should determine policy. Conferences become little more than rallies with politicians freely admitting that they will ignore any conference decisions as and when required. Not to mention the all-too-common sight of politicians turning round and doing the exact opposite of what they promised. In the end, party conferences become simply like parliamentary elections, with party members supporting this leader against another.

Soon the party reflects the division between manual and mental labour so necessary for the capitalist system. Instead of working class self-activity and self-determination, there is a substitution of a non-working class leadership acting **for** people. This replaces self-management in social struggle and within the party itself. Electoralism strengthens the leaders dominance over the party and the party over the people it claims to represent. The real causes and solutions to the problems we face are mystified by the leadership and rarely discussed in order to concentrate on the popular issues that will get them elected. Ultimately, radicals *"instead of weakening the false and enslaving belief in law and government ... actually work to **strengthen** the people's faith in forcible authority and government."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100] Which has always proved deadly to encouraging a spirit of revolt, self-management and self-help — the very keys to creating change in a society. Thus this 1870 resolution of the Spanish section of the First International seems to have been proven to be correct:

> *"Any participation of the working class in the middle class political government would merely consolidate the present state of affairs and necessarily paralyse the socialist revolutionary action of the proletariat. The Federation [of unions] is the true representative of labour, and should work outside the political system."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 169]

Instead of trying to gain control of the state, for whatever reasons, anarchists try to promote a culture of resistance within society that makes the state subject to pressure from outside (see section J.2.9). And, we feel, history has proven us right time and time again.



cially to change things, to resist oppression and exploitation. In such circumstances, the effect of an electoral strike would be fundamentally different than an apathy induced lack of voting. *"If the anarchists"*, Vernon Richards argued, *"could persuade half the electorate to abstain from voting this would, from an electoral point of view, contribute to the victory of the Right. But it would be a hollow victory, for what government could rule when half the electorate by not voting had expressed its lack of confidence in all governments?"* The party in office would have to rule over a country in which a sizeable minority, even a majority, had rejected government as such. This would mean that the politicians *"would be subjected to real pressures from people who believed in their own power"* and acted accordingly. So anarchists call on people **not** to vote, but instead organise themselves and be conscious of their own power. Only this *"can command the respect of governments, can curb the power of government as millions of crosses on bits of paper never will."* [**The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 142]

For, as Emma Goldman pointed out, *"if the Anarchists were strong enough to swing the elections to the Left, they must also have been strong enough to rally the workers to a general strike, or even a series of strikes ... In the last analysis, the capitalist class knows too well that officials, whether they belong to the Right or the Left, can be bought. Or they are of no consequence to their pledge."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 90] The mass of the population, however, cannot be bought off and if they are willing and able to resist then they can become a power second to none. Only by organising, fighting back and practicing solidarity where we live and work can we **really** change things. That is where **our** power lies, that is where we can create a **real** alternative. By creating a network of self-managed, pro-active community and workplace organisations we can impose by direct action that which politicians can never give us from Parliament. Only such a movement can stop the attacks upon us by whoever gets into office. A government (left or right) which faces a mass

## J.2.7 Surely we should vote for reformist parties in order to expose them?

Some Leninist socialists (like the British **Socialist Workers Party** and its offshoots) argue that we should urge people to vote for Labour and other social democratic parties. In this they follow Lenin's 1920 argument against the anti-Parliamentarian left that revolutionaries *"help"* elect such parties as many workers still follow their lead so that they will be *"convinced by their own experience that we are right,"* that such parties *"are absolutely good for nothing, that they are petty-bourgeois and treacherous by nature, and that their bankruptcy is inevitable."* If we *"want the **masses** to follow us"*, we need to *"support"* such parties *"in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man."* In this way, by experiencing the reformists in official, *"the majority will soon become disappointed in their leaders and will begin to support communism."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 603, p. 605 and p. 602]

This tactic is suggested for two reasons. The first is that revolutionaries will be able to reach more people by being seen to support popular, trade union based, parties. If they do not, then they are in danger of alienating sizeable sections of the working class by arguing that such parties will be no better than explicitly pro-capitalist ones. The second, and the more important one, is that by electing reformist parties into office the experience of living under such a government will shatter whatever illusions its supporters had in them. The reformist parties will be given the test of experience and when they betray their supporters to protect the status quo it will radicalise those who voted for them, who will then seek out **real** socialist parties (namely the likes of the SWP and ISO).

Libertarians reject these arguments for three reasons.

Firstly, it is deeply dishonest as it hides the true thoughts of those who support the tactic. To tell the truth is a revolutionary



them by urging people to vote for them. By arguing for abstentionism we can help to theoretically arm the people who will come into conflict with these parties once they are in office. By arguing that all governments will be forced to attack us (due to the pressure from capital and state) and that we have to rely on our own organisations and power to defend ourselves, we can promote working class self-confidence in its own abilities, and encourage the rejection of capitalism, the state and hierarchical leadership as well as the use of direct action.

Finally, we must add, it is not required for radicals to associate themselves with the farce of parliamentary propaganda in order to win people over to our ideas. Non-anarchists will see us use **direct action,** see us **act,** see the anarchistic alternatives we create and see our propaganda. Non-anarchists can be reached quite well without taking part in, or associating ourselves with, parliamentary action.

## J.2.8 Will abstentionism lead to the right winning elections?

Possibly. However anarchists don't just say "don't vote", we say "organise" as well. Apathy is something anarchists have no interest in encouraging.

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

That is why anarchist abstentionism always stresses the need for direct action and organising economically and so-

act. Radicals should not follow the capitalist media by telling half-truths, distorting the facts, hiding what they believe or supporting a party they are opposed to. If this means being less popular in the short run, then so be it. Attacking nationalism, capitalism, religion, or a host of other things can alienate people but few revolutionaries would be so opportunistic as to hold their tongues on these. In the long run being honest about your ideas is the best way of producing a movement which aims to get rid of a corrupt social system. Starting such a movement with half-truths is doomed to failure.

Secondly, anarchists reject the basis of this argument. The logic underlying it is that by being disillusioned by their reformist leaders and party, voters will look for **new,** "better" leaders and parties. However, this fails to go to the root of the problem, namely the dependence on leaders which hierarchical society creates within people. Anarchists do not want people to follow the "best" leadership, they want them to govern themselves, to be **self**-active, manage their own affairs and not follow **any** would-be leaders. If you seriously think that the liberation of the oppressed is the task of the oppressed themselves (as Leninists claim to do) then you **must** reject this tactic in favour of ones that promote working class self-activity.

The third reason we reject this tactic is that it has been proven to fail time and time again. What most of its supporters seem to fail to notice is that voters have indeed put reformist parties into office many times. Lenin suggested this tactic in 1920 and there has been no general radicalisation of the voting population by this method, nor even in reformist party militants in spite of the many Labour Party governments in Britain which all attacked the working class. Moreover, the disillusionment associated with the experience of reformist parties often expresses itself as a demoralisation with socialism **as such**, rather than with the reformist's watered down version of it. If Lenin's position could be persuasive to some in 1920 when



it was untried, the experience of subsequent decades should show its weakness.

This failure, for anarchists, is not surprising, considering the reasons why we reject this tactic. Given that this tactic does not attack hierarchy or dependence on leaders, does not attack the ideology and process of voting, it will obviously fail to present a real alternative to the voting population (who will turn to other alternatives available at election time and not embrace direct action). Also the sight of a so-called "socialist" or "radical" government managing capitalism, imposing cuts, breaking strikes and generally attacking its supporters will damage the credibility of any form of socialism and discredit all socialist and radical ideas in the eyes of the population. If the experience of the Labour Government in Britain during the 1970s and New Labour after 1997 are anything to go by, it may result in the rise of the far-right who will capitalise on this disillusionment.

By refusing to argue that no government is "on our side," radicals who urge us to vote reformist "without illusions" help to disarm theoretically the people who listen to them. Working class people, surprised, confused and disorientated by the constant "betrayals" of left-wing parties may turn to right wing parties (who can be elected) to stop the attacks rather than turn to direct action as the radical minority within the working class did not attack voting as part of the problem. How many times must we elect the same party, go through the same process, the same betrayals before we realise this tactic does not work? Moreover, if it **is** a case of having to experience something before people reject it, few state socialists take this argument to its logical conclusion. We rarely hear them argue we must experience the hell of fascism or Stalinism or the nightmare of free market capitalism in order to ensure working class people "see through" them.

Anarchists, in contrast, say that we can argue against reformist politics without having to associate ourselves with

*bourgeois economy, the syndicalist unions tended to become the organisational counterparts of the very centralised apparatus they professed to oppose. By pleading the need to deal effectively with the tightly knit bourgeoisie and state machinery, reformist leaders in syndicalist unions often had little difficulty in shifting organisational control from the bottom to the top.*" [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 123]

In addition, as the syndicalist unions grow in size and influence their initial radicalism is usually watered-down. This is because, *"since the unions must remain open to all those who desire to win from the masters better conditions of life, whatever their opinions may be ..., they are naturally led to moderate their aspirations, first so that they should not frighten away those they wish to have with them, and because, in proportion as numbers increase, those with ideas who have initiated the movement remain buried in a majority that is only occupied with the petty interests of the moment."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchism and Syndicalism**, p. 150] Which, ironically given that increased self-management is seen as a way of reducing tendencies towards bureaucracy, means that syndicalist unions have a tendency towards reformism simply because the majority of their members will be non-revolutionary if the union grows in size in non-revolutionary times (as can be seen from the development of the Swedish syndicalist union the SAC).

So, if the union's militant strategy succeeds in winning reforms, more and more workers will join it. This influx of non-libertarians must, in a self-managed organisation, exert a de-radicalising influence on the unions politics and activities in non-revolutionary times. The syndicalist would argue that the process of struggling for reforms combined with the educational effects of participation and self-management will reduce this influence and, of course, they are right. However, non-syndicalist anarchists would counter this by arguing that the libertarian influences generated by struggle and participation would be strengthened by the work of anarchist groups and,



*act and build as part of the whole. An immense field of action is opened to them for ideological [sic!], social and creative activity without assuming a position of superiority over the masses. Above all they must fulfil their ideological and ethical influence in a free and natural manner ... [they] offer ideological assistance, but not in the role of leaders.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] This, as we shall see in section J.3.6, is the common anarchist position as regards the role of an anarchist group.

The great strength of "synthesis" federations, obviously, is that they allow a wide and diverse range of viewpoints to be expressed within the organisation which can allow the development of political ideas and theories by constant discussion and debate. They allow the maximum amount of resources to be made available to individuals and groups within the organisation by increasing the number of members. This is why we find the original promoters of the "synthesis" arguing that *"that first step toward achieving unity in the anarchist movement which can lead to serious organisation is collective ideological work on a series of important problems that seek the clearest possible collective solution,"* discussing *"concrete questions"* rather than *"philosophical problems and abstract dissertations"* and *"suggest that there be a publication for discussion in every country where the problems in our ideology [sic!] and tactics can be fully discussed, regardless of how 'acute' or even 'taboo' it may be. The need for such a printed organ, as well as oral discussion, seems to us to be a 'must' because it is the practical way to try to achieve 'ideological unity', 'tactical unity', and possibly organisation ... A full and tolerant discussion of our problems ... will create a basis for understanding, not only among anarchists, but among different conceptions of anarchism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

The "synthesis" idea for anarchist organisation was taken up by those who opposed the Platform (see next section). For both Faure and Voline, the basic idea was the same, namely that the various tendencies in anarchism must co-operate and work in the same organisation. However, there are differences

between Voline's and Faure's points of view. The latter saw these various tendencies as a wealth in themselves and advocated that each tendency would gain from working together in a common organisation. From Voline's point of view, the emergence of these various tendencies was historically needed to discover the in-depth implications of anarchism in various settings (such as the economical, the social and individual life). However, it was the time to go back to anarchism as a whole, an anarchism considerably empowered by what each tendency could give it, and in which tendencies as such should dissolve. Moreover, these tendencies co-existed in every anarchist at various levels, so all anarchists should aggregate in an organisation where these tendencies would disappear (both individually and organisationally, i.e. there would not be an "anarcho-syndicalist" specific tendency inside the organisation, and so forth).

The "synthesis" federation would be based on complete autonomy (within the basic principles of the Federation and Congress decisions, of course) for groups and individuals, so allowing all the different trends to work together and express their differences in a common front. The various groups would be organised in a federal structure, combining to share resources in the struggle against state, capitalism and other forms of oppression. This federal structure is organised at the local level through a "local union" (i.e. the groups in a town or city), at the regional level (i.e. all groups in, say, Strathclyde are members of the same regional union) up to the "national" level (i.e. all groups in Scotland, say) and beyond.

As every group in the federation is autonomous, it can discuss, plan and initiate an action (such as campaign for a reform, against a social evil, and so on) without having to wait for others in the federation (or have to wait for instructions). This means that the local groups can respond quickly to issues and developments. This does not mean that each group works in isolation. These initiatives may gain federal support if local



> *ties which come from being in this position, push the militant towards bureaucracy. Conscious of this risk, we do not wish to run it. Our role is to analyse from the bottom the different dangers which can beset a union organisation like ours. No militant should prolong his job in committees, beyond the time allotted to him. No permanent and indispensable people."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 183]

However, structure is rarely enough in itself to undermine the bureaucratic tendencies created by the role of unions in the capitalist economy. While such libertarian structures can slow down the tendency towards bureaucracy, non-syndicalist anarchists argue that they cannot stop it. They point to the example of the French CGT which had become reformist by 1914 (the majority of other syndicalist unions were crushed by fascism or communism before they had a chance to develop fully). Even the Spanish CNT (by far the most successful anarcho-syndicalist union) suffered from the problem of reformism, causing the anarchists in the union to organise the FAI in 1927 to combat it (which it did, very successfully). According to Jose Peirats, the *"participation of the anarchist group in the mass movement CNT helped to ensure that CNT's revolutionary nature."* This indicates the validity of Malatesta's arguments concerning the need for anarchists to remain distinct of the unions organisationally while working within them — just as Peirat's comment that *"[b]linkered by participation in union committees, the FAI became incapable of a wider vision"* indicates the validity of Malatesta's warnings against anarchists taking positions of responsibility in unions! [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 241 and pp. 239–40]

Moreover, even the structure of syndicalist unions can cause problems: *"In modelling themselves structurally on the*

*in those who manage to improve their conditions, and often end up by creating new privileged classes and serving to support and consolidate the system one would want to destroy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 113–4]

If we look at the **role** of the union within capitalist society we see that in order for it to work, it must offer a reason for the boss to recognise and negotiate with it. This means that the union must be able to offer the boss something in return for any reforms it gets, namely labour discipline. In return for an improvement in wages or conditions, the union must be able to get workers to agree to submit to the contracts the union signs with their boss. In other words, they must be able to control their members — stop them fighting the boss — if they are to have anything with which to bargain with. This results in the union becoming a third force in industry, with interests separate than the workers which it claims to represent. The role of unionism as a seller of labour power means that it often has to make compromises, compromises it has to make its members agree to. This necessities a tendency for power to be taken from the rank and file of the unions and centralised in the hands of officials at the top of the organisation. This ensures that *"the workers organisation becomes what it must perforce be in a capitalist society — a means not of refusing to recognise and overthrowing the bosses, but simply for hedging round and limiting the bosses' power."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 29]

Anarcho-syndicalists are aware of this problem. That is why their unions are decentralised, self-managed and organised from the bottom up in a federal manner. As Durruti argued:

> *"No anarchists in the union committees unless at the ground level. In these committees, in case of conflict with the boss, the militant is forced to compromise to arrive at an agreement. The contracts and activi-*



groups see the need. The federation can adopt an issue if it is raised at a federal conference and other groups agree to co-operate on that issue. Moreover, each group has the freedom **not** to participate on a specific issue while leaving others to do so. Thus groups can concentrate on what they are interested in most.

The programme and policies of the federation would be agreed at regular delegate meetings and congresses. The "synthesis" federation is managed at the federal level by "relations committees" made up of people elected and mandated at the federation congresses. These committees would have a purely administrative role, spreading information, suggestions and proposals coming from groups and individuals within the organisation, looking after the finances of the federation and so on. They do not have any more rights than any other member of the federation (i.e. they could not make a proposal as a committee, just as members of their local group or as individuals). These administrative committees are accountable to the federation and subject to both mandates and recall.

Most national sections of the **International Anarchist Federation** (IFA) are good examples of successful federations which are heavily influenced by "synthesis" ideas (such as the French and Italian federations). Obviously, though, how effective a "synthesis" federation is depends upon how tolerant members are of each other and how seriously they take their responsibilities towards their federations and the agreements they make.

Of course, there are problems with most forms of organisation, and the "synthesis" federation is no exception. While diversity can strengthen an organisation by provoking debate, a too diverse grouping can often make it difficult to get things done. Platformist and other critics of the "synthesis" federation argue that it can be turned into a talking shop and any common programme difficult to agree, never mind apply. For example, how can mutualists and communists agree on the ends, never

mind the means, their organisation supports? One believes in co-operation within a (modified) market system and reforming capitalism away, while the other believes in the abolition of commodity production and money, seeing revolution as the means of so doing. Ultimately, all they could do would be to agree to disagree and thus any joint programmes and activity would be somewhat limited. It could, indeed, be argued that both Voline and Faure forgot essential points, namely what is this common denominator between the different kinds of anarchism, how do we achieve it and what is in it? For without this agreed common position, many synthesist organisations do end up becoming little more than talking shops, escaping from any social or organisational perspective. This seems to have been the fate of many groups in Britain and America during the 1960s and 1970s, for example.

It is this (potential) disunity that lead the authors of the Platform to argue that *"[s]uch an organisation having incorporated heterogeneous theoretical and practical elements, would only be a mechanical assembly of individuals each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement, an assembly which would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality."* [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 12] The Platform suggested *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* as a means of overcoming this problem, but that term provoked massive disagreement in anarchist circles (see section J.3.4). In reply to the Platform, supporters of the "synthesis" counter by pointing to the fact that "Platformist" groups are usually very small, far smaller that "synthesis" federations (for example, compare the size of the **French Anarchist Federation** with, say, the Irish **Workers Solidarity Movement** or the French-language **Alternative Libertaire**). This means, they argue, that the Platform does not, in fact, lead to a more effective organisation, regardless of the claims of its supporters. Moreover, they argue that the requirements for *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* help ensure a small organisation as differ-



Similarly, anarchists like Malatesta also recognised the importance of mass organisations like unions. As he argued, *"to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas ... An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore easily dominated ... But we anarchists do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves** ... we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 90] This can only occur when there are popular organisations, like trade unions, within which people can express themselves, come to common agreements and act. Moreover, these organisations must be autonomous, self-governing, be libertarian in nature **and** be independent of all parties and organisations (including anarchist ones). The similarity with anarcho-syndicalist ideas is striking.

So why, if this is the case, are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists? There are two main reasons for this. First, there is the question of whether unions are, by their nature, revolutionary organisations. Second, whether syndicalist unions are sufficient to create anarchy by themselves. We will discuss each in turn.

As can be seen from any country, the vast majority of unions are deeply reformist and bureaucratic in nature. They are centralised, with power resting at the top in the hands of officials. This suggests that in themselves unions are not revolutionary. As Malatesta argued, this is to be expected for *"all movements founded on material and immediate interests (and a mass working class movement cannot be founded on anything else), if the ferment, the drive and the unremitting efforts of men [and women] of ideas struggling and making sacrifices for an ideal future are lacking, tend to adapt themselves to circumstances, foster a conservative spirit, and fear of change*

## J.3.9 Why are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists?

Before discussing why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists, we must clarify a few points first. Let us be clear, non-syndicalist anarchists usually support the ideas of workplace organisation and struggle, of direct action, of solidarity and so on. Thus most non-syndicalist anarchists do not disagree with anarcho-syndicalists on these issues. Indeed, many even support the creation of syndicalist unions. Thus many anarcho-communists like Alexander Berkman, Errico Malatesta and Emma Goldman supported anarcho-syndicalist organisations and even, like Malatesta, helped form such revolutionary union federations (namely, the FORA in Argentina) and urged anarchists to take a leading role in organising unions. So when we use the term "non-syndicalist anarchist" we are not suggesting that these anarchists reject all aspects of anarcho-syndicalism. Rather, they are critical of certain aspects of anarcho-syndicalist ideas while supporting the rest.

In the past, a few communist-anarchists **did** oppose the struggle for improvements within capitalism as "reformist." However, these were few and far between and with the rise of anarcho-syndicalism in the 1890s, the vast majority of communist-anarchists recognised that only by encouraging the struggle for reforms would people take them seriously as this showed the benefits of anarchist tactics and organisation in practice so ensuring anarchist ideas grow in influence. Thus syndicalism was a healthy response to the rise of "abstract revolutionarism" that infected the anarchist movement during the 1880s, particularly in France and Italy. Thus communist-anarchists agree with syndicalists on the importance of struggling for and winning reforms and improvements within capitalism by direct action and solidarity.



ences would express themselves in splits rather than constructive activity. Needless to say, the discussion continues within the movement on this issue!

What can be said is that this potential problem within "synthesisism" has been the cause of some organisations failing or becoming little more than talking shops, with each group doing its own thing and so making co-ordination pointless as any agreements made would be ignored. Most supporters of the synthesis would argue that this is not what the theory aims for and that the problem lies in misunderstanding it rather than in the theory itself (as can be seen from mainland European, "synthesis" inspired federations can be **very** successful). Non-supporters are more critical, with some supporting the "Platform" as a more effective means of organising to spread anarchist ideas and influence (see the next section). Other social anarchists create the "class struggle" type of federation (this is a common organisational form in Britain, for example) as discussed in section J.3.5.

## J.3.3 What is the "Platform"?

The Platform is a current within anarcho-communism which has specific suggestions on the nature and form which an anarchist federation should take. Its roots lie in the Russian anarchist movement, a section of which, in 1926, published

**"The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists"** when in exile from the Bolshevik dictatorship. The authors of the work included Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov and Ida Mett. At the time it provoked intense debate (and still does in many anarchist circles) between supporters of the Platform (usually called "Platformists") and those who oppose it (which includes other communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and supporters of the "synthesis"). We

will discuss why many anarchists oppose the Platform in the next section. Here we discuss what the Platform argued for.

Like the "synthesis" federation (see last section), the Platform was created in response to the experiences of the Russian Revolution. The authors of the Platform (like Voline and other supporters of the "synthesis") had participated in that Revolution and saw all their work, hopes and dreams fail as the Bolshevik state triumphed and destroyed any chances of socialism by undermining soviet democracy, workers' self-management of production, trade union democracy as well as fundamental individual freedoms and rights (see the section H.6 for details). Moreover, the authors of the Platform had been leading activists in the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine which had successfully resisted both White and Red armies in the name of working class self-determination and anarchism (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism? "). Facing the same problems of the Bolshevik government, the Makhnovists had actively encouraged popular self-management and organisation, freedom of speech and of association, and so on, whereas the Bolsheviks had not. Thus they were aware that anarchist ideas not only worked in practice, but that the claims of Leninists who maintained that Bolshevism (and the policies it introduced at the time) was the only "practical" response to the problems facing a revolution were false.

They wrote the pamphlet in order to examine why the anarchist movement had failed to build on its successes in gaining influence within the working class. As can be seen from libertarian participation in the factory committee movement, where workers organised self-management in their workplaces and anarchist ideas had proven to be both popular and practical. While repression by the Bolsheviks did play a part in this failure, it did not explain everything. Also important, in the eyes of the Platform authors, was the lack of anarchist organisation **before** the revolution:



*philosophies is that it represents the revolutionary philosophy of labour conceived and born in the actual struggle and experience of workers themselves — not in universities, colleges, libraries, or in the brain of some scientists.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88–9] This applies equally to Bakunin and the first International).

Given this, we must also point out here that while syndicalism has anarchist roots, not all syndicalists are anarchists. A few Marxists have been syndicalists, particularly in the USA where the followers of Daniel De Leon supported Industrial Unionism and helped form the **Industrial Workers of the World**. The Irish socialist James Connelly was also a Marxist-syndicalist, as was Big Bill Haywood who was a leader of the IWW and a leading member of the US Socialist Party. Marxist-syndicalists are generally in favour of more centralisation within syndicalist unions (the IWW was by far the most centralised syndicalist union) and often argue that a political party is required to complement the work of the union. Needless to say, anarcho-syndicalists disagree, arguing that centralisation kills the spirit of revolt and weakens a unions real strength and that political parties are both ineffective when compared to militant unionism and a constant source of corruption. [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 55–60] So not all syndicalists are anarchists, leading those anarchists who are syndicalists often use the term "anarcho-syndicalism" to indicate that they are both anarchists and syndicalists as well as to stress the libertarian roots and syndicalism. In addition, not all anarchists are syndicalists. We discuss the reasons for this in the next section.

For more information on anarcho-syndicalist ideas, Rudolf Rocker's **Anarcho-Syndicalism** is still the classic introduction to the subject. The collection of articles by British syndicalist Tom Brown entitled **Syndicalism** is also worth reading. Daniel Guerin's **No Gods, No Masters** contains articles by leading French syndicalist thinkers.

the basis of a syndicalist union movement or a successful revolution. Moreover, most anarcho-syndicalists recognise that it is unlikely that every worker, nor even the majority, will be in syndicalist unions before a revolutionary period starts. This means **new** organisations, created spontaneously by workers in struggle, would have to be the framework of social struggle and the post-capitalist society rather than the syndicalist union as such. All the syndicalist union can do is provide a practical example of how to organise in a libertarian way within capitalism and statism and support spontaneously created organisations.

It should be noted that while the term "syndicalism" dates from the 1890s in France, the ideas associated with these names have a longer history. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas have developed independently in many different countries and times. Indeed, anyone familiar with Bakunin's work will quickly see that much of his ideas prefigure what was latter to become known by these terms. Similarly, we find that the American **International Working People's Association** organised by anarchists in the 1880s *"anticipated by some twenty years the doctrine of anarcho-syndicalism"* and *"[m]ore than merely resembling the 'Chicago Idea' [of the **IWPA**], the IWW's principles of industrial unionism resulted from the conscious efforts of anarchists ... who continued to affirm ... the principles which the Chicago anarchists gave their lives defending."* [Salvatore Salerno, **Red November, Black November**, p. 51 and p. 79] See section H.2.8 for a discussion of why Marxist claims that syndicalism and anarchism are unrelated are obviously false.

(We must stress that we are **not** arguing that Bakunin "invented" syndicalism. Far from it. Rather, we are arguing that Bakunin expressed ideas already developed in working class circles and became, if you like, the "spokesperson" for these libertarian tendencies in the labour movement as well as helping to clarifying these ideas in many ways. As Emma Goldman argued, the *"feature which distinguishes Syndicalism from most*



> *"It is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, and in spite of the facing up to the social revolution, and finally the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for anarchist communism, the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything, and has appeared, very often, in the history of working class struggles as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor."* [**Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 11]

This weakness in the movement derived, they argued, from a number of causes, the main one being *"the absence of organisational principles and practices"* within the anarchist movement. This resulted in an anarchist movement *"represented by several local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them."* This explained the *"contradiction between the positive and incontestable substance of libertarian ideas, and the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11] For anyone familiar with the anarchist movement in many countries, these words will still strike home. Thus the Platform still appears to many anarchists a relevant and important document, even if they are not Platformists.

The author's of the Platform proposed a solution to this problem, namely the creation of a new type of anarchist organisation. This organisation would be based upon communist-anarchist ideas exclusively, while recognising syndicalism as a principal method of struggle. Like most anarchists, the Platform placed class and class struggle as the centre of their analysis, recognising that the *"social and political regime of all states is above all the product of class struggle ... The slightest change in the course of the battle of classes, in the relative locations of*

*the forces of the class struggle, produces continuous modifications in the fabric and structure of society.*" Again, like most anarchists, the Platform aimed to *"transform the present bourgeois capitalist society into a society which assures the workers the products of the labours, their liberty, independence, and social and political equality"*, one based on a *"workers organisations of production and consumption, united federatively and self-administering."* The *"birth, the blossoming, and the realisation of anarchist ideas have their roots in the life and the struggle of the working masses and are inseparable bound to their fate."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14, p. 15, p. 19 and p. 15] Again, most anarchists (particularly social anarchists) would agree — anarchist ideas will (and have) wither when isolated from working class life since only working class people, the vast majority, can create a free society and anarchist ideas are expressions of working class experience (remove the experience and the ideas do not develop as they should).

In order to create such a free society it is necessary, argue the Platformists, *"to work in two directions: on the one hand towards the selection and grouping of revolutionary worker and peasant forces on a libertarian communist theoretical basis (a specifically libertarian communist organisation); on the other hand, towards regrouping revolutionary workers and peasants on an economic base of production and consumption (revolutionary workers and peasants organised around production [i.e. syndicalism]; workers and free peasants co-operatives)."* Again, most anarchists would agree with this along with the argument that *"anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution ... The leading position of anarchist ideas in the revolution suggests an orientation of events after anarchist theory. However, this theoretical driving force should not be confused with the political leadership of the statist parties which leads finally to State Power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 21]

This *"leadership of ideas"* (as it has come to be known) would aim at developing and co-ordinating libertarian feelings



archist forms of organisation and struggle. Moreover, they argue that those who reject syndicalism *"because it believes in a permanent organisation of workers"* and urge *"workers to organise 'spontaneously' at the very moment of revolution"* promote a *"con-trick, designed to leave 'the revolutionary movement,' so called, in the hands of an educated class ... [or] so-called 'revolutionary party' ... [which] means that the workers are only expected to come in the fray when there's any fighting to be done, and in normal times leave theorising to the specialists or students."* [Albert Meltzer, **Anarchism: Arguments for and Against**, pp. 82–3] A self-managed society can only be created by self-managed means, and as only the practice of self-management can ensure its success, the need for libertarian popular organisations is essential. Syndicalism is seen as the key way working people can prepare themselves for revolution and learn to direct their own lives. In this way syndicalism creates a true politics of the people, one that does not create a parasitic class of politicians and bureaucrats (*"We wish to emancipate ourselves, to free ourselves"*, Pelloutier wrote, *"but we do not wish to carry out a revolution, to risk our skin, to put Pierre the socialist in the place of Paul the radical"* [quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, p. 17]).

This does not mean that syndicalists do not support organisations spontaneously created by workers' in struggle (such as workers' councils, factory committees and so on). Far from it. Syndicalists have played important roles in these kinds of organisation (as can be seen from the Russian Revolution, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920, the British Shop Steward movement and so on). This is because syndicalism acts as a catalyst to militant labour struggles and serves to counteract class-collaborationist tendencies by union bureaucrats and "socialist" politicians. Part of this activity must involve encouraging self-managed organisations where none exist and so syndicalists support and encourage all such spontaneous movements, hoping that they turn into

**"boring from within."** The former approach involves creating new, syndicalist, unions, in opposition to the existing trade unions. This approach was historically and is currently the favoured way of building syndicalist unions (American, Italian, Spanish, Swedish and numerous other syndicalists built their own union federations in the heyday of syndicalism between 1900 and 1920). "Boring from within" simply means working within the existing trade unions in order to reform them and make them syndicalist. This approach was favoured by French and British syndicalists, plus a few American ones. However, these two approaches are not totally in opposition. Many of the dual unions were created by syndicalists who had first worked within the existing trade unions. Once they got sick of the bureaucratic union machinery and of trying to reform it, they split from the reformist unions and formed new, revolutionary, ones. Similarly, dual unionists will happily support trade unionists in struggle and often be "two carders" (i.e. members of both the trade union and the syndicalist one). See section J.5.3 for more on anarchist perspectives on existing trades unions.

Syndicalists no matter what tactics they prefer, favour autonomous workplace organisations, controlled from below. Both tend to favour syndicalists forming networks of militants to spread anarchist/syndicalist ideas within the workplace. Indeed, such a network (usually called *"Industrial Networks"* — see section J.5.4 for more details) would be an initial stage and essential means for creating syndicalist unions. These groups would encourage syndicalist tactics and rank and file organisation during struggles and so create the potential for building syndicalist unions as libertarian ideas spread and are seen to work.

Syndicalists think that such an organisation is essential for the successful creation of an anarchist society as it builds the new world in the shell of the old, making a sizeable majority of the population aware of anarchism and the benefits of an-



already existing within social struggle. *"Although the masses,"* explained the Platform, *"express themselves profoundly in social movements in terms of anarchist tendencies and tenets, these ... do however remain dispersed, being uncoordinated, and consequently do not lead to the .. . preserving [of] the anarchist orientation of the social revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] The Platform argued that a specific anarchist organisation was required to ensure that the libertarian tendencies initially expressed in any social revolution or movement (for example, free federation, self-management in mass assemblies, mandating of delegates, decentralisation, etc.) do not get undermined by statists and authoritarians who have their own agendas. This would be done by actively working in mass organisation and winning people to libertarian ideas and practices by argument (see section J.3.6).

However, these principles do not, in themselves, determine a Platformist organisation. After all, most anarcho-syndicalists and non-Platformist communist-anarchists would agree with these positions. The main point which distinguishes the Platform is its position on how an anarchist organisation should be structured and work. This is sketched in the *"Organisational Section,"* the shortest and most contentious part of the whole work. They called this the **General Union of Anarchists** and where they introduced the concepts of

**"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"** and ***"Collective Responsibility,"*** concepts which are unique to the Platform. Even today within the anarchist movement these are contentious ideas so it is worth exploring them in a little more detail.

By *"Theoretical Unity"* the Platform meant any anarchist organisation must come to an agreement on the theory upon which it is based. In other words, that members of the organisation must agree on a certain number of basic points, such as class struggle, social revolution and libertarian communism, and so on. An organisation in which half the members thought

that union struggles were important and the other half that they were a waste of time would not be effective as the membership would spend all their time arguing with themselves. While most Platformists admit that everyone will not agree on everything, they think it is important to reach as much agreement as possible, and to translate this into action. Once a theoretical position is reached, the members have to argue it in public (even if they initially opposed it within the organisation but they do have the right to get the decision of the organisation changed by internal discussion). Which brings us to *"Tactical Unity"* by which the Platform meant that the members of an organisation should struggle together **as an organised force** rather than as individuals. Once a strategy has been agreed by the Union, all members would work towards ensuring its success (even if they initially opposed it). In this way resources and time are concentrated in a common direction, towards an agreed objective.

Thus *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* means an anarchist organisation that agrees specific ideas and the means of applying them. The Platform's basic assumption is that there is a link between coherency and efficiency. By increasing the coherency of the organisation by making collective decisions and applying them, the Platform argues that this will increase the influence of anarchist ideas. Without this, they argue, more organised groups (such as Leninist ones) would be in a better position to have their arguments heard and listened to than anarchists would. Anarchists cannot be complacent, and rely on the hope that the obvious strength and rightness of our ideas will shine through and win the day. As history shows, this rarely happens and when it does, the authoritarians are usually in positions of power to crush the emerging anarchist influence (this was the case in Russia, for example). Platformists argue that the world we live in is the product of struggles between competing ideas of how society should be organised and if the anarchist voice



Thus, as can be seen, syndicalism differs from trade unionism in its structure, its methods and its aims. Its structure, method and aims are distinctly anarchist. Little wonder leading syndicalist theorist Fernand Pelloutier argued that the trade union, *"governing itself along anarchic lines,"* must become *"a practical schooling in anarchism."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 55 and p. 57] In addition, most anarcho-syndicalists support community organisations and struggle alongside the more traditional industry based approach usually associated within syndicalism. While we have concentrated on the industrial side here (simply because this is a key aspect of syndicalism) we must stress that syndicalism can and does lend itself to community struggles. It is a myth that anarcho-syndicalism ignores community struggles and organisation, as can be seen from the history of the Spanish CNT for example (see section J.5.1).

It must be stressed that a syndicalist union is open to all workers regardless of their political opinions (or lack of them). The union exists to defend workers' interests as workers and is organised in an anarchist manner to ensure that their interests are fully expressed. This means that an syndicalist organisation is different from an organisation of syndicalists. What makes the union syndicalist is its structure, aims and methods. Obviously things can change (that is true of any organisation which has a democratic structure) but that is a test revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalists welcome and do not shirk from. As the union is self-managed from below up, its militancy and political content is determined by its membership. As Pouget put it, the union *"offers employers a degree of resistance in geometric proportion with the resistance put up by its members."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 71] That is why syndicalists ensure that power rests in the members of the union.

Syndicalists have two main approaches to building revolutionary unions –

**"dual unionism"** and

> *"Syndicalism goes further: it aims to liberate labour from every institution that has not for its object the free development of production for the benefit of all humanity. In short, the ultimate purpose of Syndicalism is to reconstruct society from its present centralised, authoritative and brutal state to one based upon the free, federated grouping of the workers along lines of economic and social liberty.*
>
> *"With this object in view, Syndicalism works in two directions: first, by undermining the existing institutions; secondly, by developing and educating the workers and cultivating their spirit of solidarity, to prepare them for a full, free life, when capitalism shall have been abolished.*
>
> *"Syndicalism is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 91]

Which, in turn, explains why syndicalist unions are structured in such an obviously libertarian way. It reflects the importance of empowering every worker by creating a union which is decentralised and self-managed, a union which every member plays a key role in determining its policy and activities. Participation ensures that the union becomes a *"school for the will"* (to use Pouget's expression) and allows working people to learn how to govern themselves and so do without the state. After the revolution, the union can easily be transformed into the body by which production is organised. The aim of the union is workers' self-management of production and distribution after the revolution, a self-management which the union is based upon in the here and now. The syndicalist union is seen as *"the germ of the Socialist economy of the future, the elementary school of Socialism in general"* and we need to *"plant these germs while there is yet time and bring them to the strongest possible development, so as to make the task of the coming social revolution easier and to insure its permanence."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]



is weak, quiet and disorganised it will not be heard and other arguments, other perspectives, will win the day.

Which brings us to *"Collective Responsibility,"* which the Platform defines as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* In short, that each member should support the decisions made by the organisation and that each member should take part in the process of collective decision making process. Without this, argue Platformists, any decisions made will be paper ones as individuals and groups would ignore the agreements made by the federation (the Platform calls this *"the tactic of irresponsible individualism"*). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32] With *"Collective Responsibility,"* the strength of all the individuals that make up the group is magnified and collectively applied.

The last principle in the *"Organisational Section"* of the Platform is *"Federalism,"* which it defined as *"the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards a common objective"* and which *"reconciles the independence and initiative of individuals and the organisation with service to the common cause."* However, the Platform argued that this principle has been *"deformed"* within the movement to mean the *"right"* to *"manifest one's 'ego,' without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation"* one is a member of. In order to overcome this problem, they stress that *"the federalist type of anarchist organisation, while recognising each member's rights to independence, free opinion, individual liberty and initiative, requires each member to undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33 and pp. 33–4]

As part of their solution to the problem of anarchist organisation, the Platform suggested that each group would have *"its secretariat, executing and guiding theoretically the political and technical work of the organisation."* Moreover, the Platform

urged the creation of an *"**executive committee of the Union**"* which would *"be in charge"* of *"the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted; the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical lines of the Union; the monitoring of the general state of the movement; the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the Union; and with other organisation."* The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the executive committee are fixed by the congress of the Union. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34]

This suggestion, unsurprisingly, meet with strong disapproval by most anarchists, as we will see in the next section, who argued that this would turn the anarchist movement into a centralised, hierarchical party similar to the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, supporters of the Platform reject this argument and point out that the Platform itself is not written in stone and needs to be discussed fully and modified as required. In fact, few, if any, Platformist groups, do have this *"secretariat"* structure (it could, in fact, be argued that there are no actual "Platformist" groups, rather groups influenced by the Platform, namely on the issues of *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* and *"Collective Responsibility"*).

Similarly, most modern day Platformists reject the idea of gathering all anarchists into one organisation. The original Platform seemed to imply that the **General Union** would be an umbrella organisation, made up of different groups and individuals. Most Platformists would argue that not only will there never be one organisation which encompasses everyone, they do not think it necessary. Instead they envisage the existence of a number of organisations, each internally unified, each co-operating with each other where possible, a much more amorphous and fluid entity than a **General Union of Anarchists**.

As well as the original Platform, most Platformists place the **Manifesto of Libertarian Communism** by Georges



in political, economic and social conditions and institutions. Moreover, it is political in the narrower sense of being aware of political issues and aiming for political reforms along with economic ones. It is only "apolitical" when it comes to supporting political parties and using bourgeois political institutions, a position which is "political" in the wider sense of course! This is obviously identical to the usual anarchist position (see section J.2.10).

Which indicates an importance difference between syndicalism and trade unionism. Syndicalism aims at changing society rather than just working within it. Thus syndicalism is revolutionary while trade unionism is reformist. For syndicalists the union *"has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital."* Thus syndicalism aims to win reforms by direct action and by this struggle bring the possibilities of a revolution, via the general strike, closer. Indeed any *"desired improvement is to be wrested directly from the capitalist"* and *"must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation."* [Emile Pouget, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 71 and p. 73] Thus Emma Goldman:

> *"Of course Syndicalism, like the old trade unions, fights for immediate gains, but it is not stupid enough to pretend that labour can expect humane conditions from inhumane economic arrangements in society. Thus it merely wrests from the enemy what it can force him to yield; on the whole, however, Syndicalism aims at, and concentrates its energies upon, the complete overthrow of the wage system.*

*task of labour unaided by middle class intellectuals or by politicians and aimed to establish a genuinely working class socialism and culture, free of all bourgeois taints. For the syndicalists, the workers were to be everything, the rest, nothing."* [Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 38]

Therefore syndicalism is *"consciously anti-parliamentary and anti-political. It focuses not only on the realities of power but also on the key problem of achieving its disintegration. Real power in syndicalist doctrine is economic power. The way to dissolve economic power is to make every worker powerful, thereby eliminating power as a social privilege. Syndicalism thus ruptures all the ties between the workers and the state. It opposes political action, political parties, and any participant in political elections. Indeed it refuses to operate in the framework of the established order and the state.* It *"turns to direct action — strikes, sabotage, obstruction, and above all, the revolutionary general strike. Direct action not only perpetuates the militancy of the workers and keeps alive the spirit of revolt, but awakens in them a greater sense of individual initiative. By continual pressure, direct action tests the strength of the capitalist system at all times and presumably in its most important arena — the factory, where ruled and ruler seem to confront each other most directly."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 121]

This does not mean that syndicalism is "apolitical" in the sense of ignoring totally all political issues. This is a Marxist myth. Syndicalists follow other anarchists by being opposed to all forms of authoritarian/capitalist politics but do take a keen interest in "political" questions as they relate to the interests of working people. Thus they do not "ignore" the state, or the role of the state. Indeed, syndicalists (like all libertarians) are well aware that the state exists to protect capitalist property and power and that we need to combat it as well as fight for economic improvements. In short, syndicalism is deeply political in the widest sense of the word, aiming for a radical change



Fontenis and **Towards a Fresh Revolution** by the *"Friends of Durruti"* as landmark texts in the Platformist tradition. A few anarcho-syndicalists question this last claim, arguing that the *"Friends of Durruti"* manifesto has strong similarities with the CNT's pre-1936 position on revolution and thus is an anarcho-syndicalist document, going back to the position the CNT ignored after July 19th, 1936. Alexandre Skirda's book **Facing the Enemy** contains the key documents on the original Platformists (including the original draft Platform, supplementary documents clarifying issues and polemics against critiques). There are numerous Platformist and Platformist influenced organisations in the world today, such as the Irish **Workers Solidarity Movement** and Italian **Federation of Anarchist Communists**.

In the next section we discuss the objections that most anarchists have towards the Platform.

## J.3.4 Why do many anarchists oppose the "Platform"?

When the "Platform" was published it provoked a massive amount of debate and comment, the majority of it critical. Most of famous anarchists rejected the Platform. Indeed, only Nestor Makhno (who co-authored the work) supported its proposals, with (among others) Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Voline, G.P. Maximoff, Luigi Fabbri, Camilo Berneri and Errico Malatesta rejecting its suggestions on how anarchists should organise. Some argued that the Platform was trying to *"Bolshevise"* anarchism (*""They are only one step away from bolshevism."* [*"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, pp. 32–6, **Constructive Anarchism**, G.P. Maximoff (ed.), pp. 36]). Others, such as Malatesta, suggested that the authors were too impressed by the apparent "success" of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Since then,

it has continued to provoke a lot of debate in anarchist circles. So why do so many anarchists oppose the Platform?

While many of the anti-Platformists made points about most parts of the Platform (both Maximoff and Voline pointed out that while the Platform denied the need of a *"Transitional Period"* in theory, it accepted it in practice, for example) the main bone of contention was found in the *"Organisational Section"* with its call for *"Tactical and Theoretical Unity," "Collective Responsibility"* and group and executive *"secretariats"* guiding the organisation. Here most anarchists found ideas they considered incompatible with libertarian ideas. We will concentrate on this issue as it is usually considered as the most important.

Today, in some quarters of the libertarian movement, the Platformists are often dismissed as "would-be leaders." Yet this was not where Malatesta and other critics of the Platform took issue. Malatesta and Maximoff both argued that, to use Maximoff's words, anarchists should *"go into the masses... , work[ing] with them, struggle for their soul, and attempt to win it **ideologically** [sic!] and give it guidance."* So the question was *"not the rejection of **leadership,** but making certain it is **free** and **natural.**"* [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19] Moreover, as Maximoff noted, the "synthesis" anarchists came to the same conclusion. Thus all sides of the debate accepted that anarchists should take the lead. The question, as Malatesta and the others saw it, was not whether to lead, but rather **how** you should lead — a fairly important distinction.

Malatesta posed two alternatives, either you *"provide leadership by advice and example leaving people themselves to ... adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others"* or you can *"direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government."* He asked the Platformists: *"In which manner do you wish to direct?"* While he thought, from his knowledge of Makhno and his work, that the answer would be the first option, he was *"as-*



porting a specific anarchist organisation to complement the work of the revolutionary unions. Revolutionary syndicalism, in contrast, argues that the syndicalist unions are sufficient in themselves to create libertarian socialism and rejects anarchist groups along with political parties. However, the dividing line can be unclear and, just to complicate things even more, **some** syndicalists support political parties and are not anarchists (there have been a few Marxist syndicalists, for example) but we will ignore these in our discussion. We will use the term syndicalism to describe what each branch has in common.

The syndicalist union is a self-managed industrial union (see section J.5.2) which is committed to **direct action** and refuses links with political parties, even labour or "socialist" ones. A key idea of syndicalism is that of union autonomy — the idea that the workers' organisation is capable of changing society by its own efforts, that it must control its own fate and not be controlled by any party or other outside group (including anarchist federations). This is sometimes termed

**"workerism"** (from the French

**"ouverierisme"**), i.e. workers' control of the class struggle and their own organisations. Rather than being a cross-class organisation like the political party, the union is a **class** organisation and is so uniquely capable of representing working class aspirations, interests and hopes. *"The **syndicat**,"* Emile Pouget wrote, *"groups together those who work against those who live by human exploitation: it brings together interests and not opinions."* [quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, pp. 30–1] There is, then, *"no place in it for anybody who was not a worker. Professional middle class intellectuals who provided both the leadership and the ideas of the socialist political movement, were therefore at a discount. As a consequence the syndicalist movement was, and saw itself as, a purely working class form of socialism."* Syndicalism *"appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the first movement which took seriously"* the argument *"that the emancipation of the working class must be the*

> *state oppression. Its goal is the reorganisation of social life on the basis of free communism through the collective revolutionary action of the working classes themselves. It takes the view that only the economic organisations of the proletariat are appropriate for the realisation of this task and turns therefore to the workers in their capacity as producers and generators of social value, in opposition to the modern political labour parties, which for constructive economic purpose do not come into consideration."* [quoted by Wayne Thorpe, **"The Workers Themselves"**, p. 322]

The word *"syndicalism"* is an English rendering of the French for *"revolutionary trade unionism"* (*"syndicalisme revolutionarie"*). In the 1890s many anarchists in France started to work within the trade union movement, radicalising it from within. As the ideas of autonomy, direct action, the general strike and political independence of unions which where associated with the French **Confederation Generale du Travail** (CGT, or General Confederation of Labour) spread across the world (partly through anarchist contacts, partly through word of mouth by non-anarchists who were impressed by the militancy of the CGT), the word "syndicalism" was used to describe movements inspired by the example of the CGT. Thus "syndicalism," "revolutionary syndicalism" and "anarcho-syndicalism" all basically mean "revolutionary unionism" (the term "industrial unionism" used by the IWW essentially means the same thing).

The main difference is between revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism, with anarcho-syndicalism arguing that revolutionary syndicalism concentrates too much on the workplace and, obviously, stressing the anarchist roots and nature of syndicalism more than the former. In addition, anarcho-syndicalism is often considered compatible with sup-



*sailed by doubt that [Makhno] would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme for the revolution."* This was because of the *"Executive Committee"* in the Platform which would *"give ideological and organisational direction to the association."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 108 and p. 110]

Maximoff made the same point, arguing that the Platform implied that anarchists in the unions are responsible to the anarchist federation, **not** to the union assemblies that elected them. As he put it, according to the Platform anarchists *"are to join the Trades Unions with ready-made recipes and are to carry out their plans, if necessary, against the will of the Unions themselves."* This was just one example of a general problem, namely that the Platform *"places its Party on the same height as the Bolsheviks do, i.e., it places the interests of the Party above the interests of the masses since the Party has the monopoly of understanding these interests."* [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19 and p. 18] This flowed from the Platform arguing that anarchists must *"enter into revolutionary trade unions as an organised force, responsible to accomplish work in the union before the general anarchist organisation and orientated by the latter."* However, Maximoff's argument may be considered harsh as the Platform also argued that anarchism *"aspires neither to political power nor dictatorship"* and so they would hardly be urging the opposite principles within the trade union movement. [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 25 and p. 21] If we take the Platform's comments within a context informed by the *"leadership of ideas"* concept (see section J.3.6) then what they meant was simply that the anarchist group would convince the union members of the validity of their ideas by argument which was something Maximoff did not disagree with. In short, the disagreement becomes one of unclear (or bad) use of language by the Platform's authors.

Despite many efforts and many letters on the subject (in particular between Malatesta and Makhno) the question of "leadership" could not be clarified to either side's satisfaction, in part because there was an additional issue in dispute. This was the related issue of organisational principles (which in themselves make up the defining part of the original Platform). Malatesta argued that this did not conform with anarchist methods and principles, and so could not *"help bring about the triumph of anarchism."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 97] This was because of two main reasons, the first being the issue of the Platform's "secretariats" and "executive committee" and the issue of "Collective Responsibility." We will take each in turn.

With an structure based round "secretariats" and "executive committees" the *"will of the [General] Union [of Anarchists] can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the* ***Executive Committee*** *and decide on all important issues. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups ... So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by a majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority."* This, Malatesta argued, *"comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism"* and so non-anarchist in nature. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

As long as a Platformist federation is based on *"secretariats"* and *"executive committees"* directing the activity and development of the organisation, this critique is valid. In such a system, as these bodies control the organisation and members are expected to follow their decisions (due to *"theoretical and tactical unity"* and *"collective responsibility"*) they are, in effect, the government of the association. While this government may be elected and accountable, it is still a government simply because these bodies have executive power. As Maximoff argued, individual initiative in the Platform *"has a special*



sistent in some ways, as would be expected from a theorist breaking new ground, and this applies to his ideas on how anarchist groups should work within and the role they should play in popular movements. Most of his ideas are valid, once we place them into context, some are not. Anarchists embrace the valid ones and voice their opposition to the others.

In summary, any apparent contradiction between the "public" and "private" Bakunin disappears once we place his comments into context within both the letters he wrote and his overall political theory. As Brian Morris argues, those who argue that Bakunin was in favour of despotism only come to *"these conclusions by an incredible distortion of the substance of what Bakunin was trying to convey in his letters to Richard and Nechaev"* and *"[o]nly the most jaundiced scholar, or one blinded by extreme antipathy towards Bakunin or anarchism, could interpret these words as indicating that Bakunin conception of a secret society implied a revolutionary dictatorship in the Jacobin sense, still less a 'despotism'"* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 144 and p. 149]

## J.3.8 What is anarcho-syndicalism?

Anarcho-syndicalism (as mentioned in section A.3.2) is a form of anarchism which applies itself (primarily) to creating industrial unions organised in an anarchist manner, using anarchist tactics (such as direct action) to create a free society. To quote *"The Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism"* of the **International Workers Association**:

> *"Revolutionary Syndicalism is that movement of the working classes founded on the basis of class war, which strives for the union of manual and intellectual workers in economic fighting organisations, in order to prepare for and realise in practice their liberation from the yoke of wage-slavery and*

where despotic monarchies, with little or no civil rights. As he argued, *"nothing but a secret society would want to take this [arousing a revolution] on, for the interests of the government and of the government classes would be bitterly opposed to it."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 188] For survival, Bakunin considered secrecy an essential. As Juan Gomez Casas noted: *"In view of the difficulties of that period, Bakunin believed that secret groups of convinced and absolutely trustworthy men were safer and more effective. They would be able to place themselves at the head of developments at critical moments, but only to inspire and to clarify the issues."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] Even Marxists, faced with dictatorial states, have organised in secret and as George R. Esenwein points out, the *"claim that Bakunin's organisation scheme was not the product of a 'hard-headed realism' cannot be supported in the light of the experiences of the Spanish Alliancists. It is beyond doubt that their adherence to Bakunin's program greatly contributed to the FRE's [Spanish section of the First International] ability to flourish during the early part of the 1870s and to survive the harsh circumstances of repression in the period 1874–1881."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224f] So Bakunin's personal experiences in Tsarist Russia and other illiberal states shaped his ideas on how revolutionaries should organise (and let us not forget that he had been imprisoned in the Peter and Paul prison for his activities).

This is not to suggest that all of Bakunin's ideas on the role and nature of anarchist groups are accepted by anarchists today. Most anarchists would reject Bakunin's arguments for secrecy, for example (particularly as secrecy cannot help but generate an atmosphere of deceit and, potentially, manipulation). Anarchists remember that anarchism did not spring fully formed and complete from Bakunin's (or any other individual's) head. Rather it was developed over time and by many individuals, inspired by many different experiences and movements. As such, anarchists recognise that Bakunin was incon-



*character ... Each organisation (i.e. association of members with the right to individual initiative) has its secretariat which ... **directs** the ideological, political and technical activities of the organisation ... In what, then, consists the self-reliant activities of the rank-and-file members? Apparently in one thing: initiative to obey the secretariat and carry out its directives."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 18] This seems to be the logical conclusion of the structure suggested by the Platform. *"The spirit,"* argued Malatesta, *"the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 98]

Malatesta, in contrast, argued that an anarchist organisation must be based on the *"[f]ull autonomy, full independence and therefore the full responsibility of individuals and groups"* with all organisational work done *"freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed."* The individual members of such an organisation *"express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others."* Moreover, the administrative bodies such organisations nominate would *"have no executive powers, have no directive powers"* leaving it up to the groups and their federal meetings to decide their own fates. The congresses of such organisations would be *"free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others ... and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101, p. 102 and p. 101] Such an organisation does not exclude collective decisions and self-assumed obligations, rather it is based upon them.

Most groups inspired by the Platform, however, seem to reject this aspect of its organisational suggestions. Instead of "secretariats" and "executive committees" they have regular conferences and meetings to reach collective decisions on issues and practice unity that way. Thus the **really** important issue is of *"theoretical and tactical unity"* and *"collective responsibility,"* rather than ithe structure suggested by the Platform.

Indeed, this issue was the main topic in Makhno's letter to Malatesta, for example, and so we would be justified in saying that this is the key issue dividing "Platformists" from other anarchists.

So in what way did Malatesta disagree with this concept? As we mentioned in the last section, the Platform defined the idea of "Collective Responsibility" as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* To which Malatesta replied:

> *"But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual member and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And, on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99]

In other words, the term *"collective responsibility"* (if taken literally) implies a highly inefficient and somewhat authoritarian mode of organisation. Before any action could be undertaken, the organisation would have to be consulted and this would crush individual, group and local initiative. The



The evidence suggests that the Alliance *"was not a compulsory or authoritarian body."* In Spain, it *"acted independently and was prompted by purely local situations. The copious correspondence between Bakunin and his friends ... was at all times motivated by the idea of offering advice, persuading, and clarifying. It was never written in a spirit of command, because that was not his style, nor would it have been accepted as such by his associates."* Moreover, there *"is no trace or shadow or hierarchical organisation in a letter from Bakunin to Mora ... On the contrary, Bakunin advises 'direct' relations between Spanish and Italian Comrades."* The Spanish comrades also wrote a pamphlet which *"ridiculed the fable of orders from abroad."* [Casa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25 and p. 40] This is confirmed by George R. Esenwein who argues that *"[w]hile it is true that Bakunin's direct intervention during the early days of the International's development in Spain had assured the pre-dominance of his influence in the various federations and sections"* of the organisation, *"it cannot be said that he manipulated it or otherwise used the Spanish Alliance as a tool for his own subversive designs."* Thus, *"though the Alliance did exist in Spain, the society did not bear any resemblance to the nefarious organisation that the Marxists depicted."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain**, p. 42] Indeed, as Max Nettlau points out, those Spaniards who did break with the Alliance were persuaded of its *"hierarchical organisation ... not by their own direct observation, but by what they had been told about the conduct of the organisation"* in other countries. [quoted by Casa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 39–40]. In addition, if Bakunin **did** run the Alliance under his own personal dictatorship we would expect it to change or dissolve upon his death. However, *"the Spanish Alliance survived Bakunin, who died in 1876, yet with few exceptions it continued to function in much the same way it had during Bakunin's lifetime."* [Esenwein, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

Moving on to the second issue, the question of why Bakunin favoured secret organisation. At the time many states

*members sat and passively listened to speakers talking down to them from their pedestal was discarded.*

*"It was established that all meetings be conducted by informal round-table conversational discussions in which everybody felt free to participate: not to be talked **at**, but to exchange views."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 405–6]

Moreover, we find Bakunin being out-voted within the Alliance, hardly what we would expect if they **were** top-down dictatorships run by him as Marxists claim. The historian T.R. Ravindranathan indicates that after the Alliance was founded *"Bakunin wanted the Alliance to become a branch of the International [Worker's Association] and at the same time preserve it as a secret society. The Italian and some French members wanted the Alliance to be totally independent of the IWA and objected to Bakunin's secrecy. Bakunin's view prevailed on the first question as he succeeded in convincing the majority of the harmful effects of a rivalry between the Alliance and the International. On the question of secrecy, he gave way to his opponents."* [**Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 83]

Moreover, if Bakunin **did** seek to create a centralised, hierarchical organisation, as Marxists claim, he did not do a good job. We find him complaining that the Madrid Alliance was breaking up (*"The news of the dissolution of the Alliance in Spain saddened Bakunin. he intensified his letter-writing to Alliance members whom he trusted ... He tried to get the Spaniards to reverse their decision"* [Juan Gomez Casa, **Anarchist Organisation**, pp. 37–8]). While the "Bakuninist" Spanish and Swiss sections of the IWMA sent delegates to its infamous Hague congress, the "Bakuninist" Italian section did not. Of course, Marxists could argue that these facts show Bakunin's cunning nature, but the more obvious explanation is that Bakunin did not create a hierarchical organisation with himself at the top.



organisation would respond slowly to developing situations, if at all, and this response would not be informed by first hand knowledge and experience. Moreover, this form of organisation implies a surrendering of individual judgement, as members would have to *"submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, 101] In the end, all a member could do would be to leave the organisation if they disagree with a tactic or position and could not bring themselves to further it by their actions.

This structure also suggests that the Platform's commitment to federalism is in words only. As most anarchists critical of the Platform argued, while its authors affirm federalist principles they, in fact, *"outline a perfectly centralised organisation with an Executive Committee that has responsibility to give ideological and organisational direction to the different anarchist organisations, which in turn will direct the professional organisations of the workers."* [*"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 35–6]

Thus it is likely that "Collective Responsibility" taken to its logical conclusion would actually **hinder** anarchist work by being too bureaucratic and slow. However, let us assume that by applying collective responsibility as well as tactical and theoretical unity, anarchist resources and time will be more efficiently utilised. What is the point of being "efficient" if the collective decision reached is wrong or is inapplicable to many areas? Rather than local groups applying their knowledge of local conditions and developing theories and policies that reflect these conditions (and co-operating from the bottom up), they may be forced to apply inappropriate policies due to the "Unity" of the Platformist organisation. It is true that Makhno argued that the *"activities of local organisations can be adapted, as far as possible, to suit local conditions"* but only if they are *"consonant with the pattern of the overall organisational practice of the Union of anarchists covering the whole country."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 62] Which still begs

the question on the nature of the Platform's unity (however, it does suggest that the Platform's position may be less extreme than might be implied by the text, as we will discuss). That is why anarchists have traditionally supported federalism and free agreement within their organisations, to take into account the real needs of localities.

If we do not take the Platform's definition of "Collective Responsibility" literally or to its logical extreme (as Makhno's comments suggest) then the differences between Platformists and non-Platformists may not be that far. As Malatesta pointed out in his reply to Makhno's letter:

> *"I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and co-operates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to co-ordinate his [or her] actions with those of his [or her] fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others ... and respect the agreements that have been made ... [Moreover] I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.*
>
> *"Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts ... to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 107–8]

This, indeed, seems to be the way that most Platformist organisations do operate. They have agreed broad theoretical and tactical positions on various subjects (such as, for example, the nature of trade unions and how anarchists relate to them) while leaving it to local groups to act within these guidelines. Moreover, the local groups do not have to report to the organisa-



hierarchy first, we can do no better than quote Richard B. Saltman's summary of the internal organisation of these groups:

> *"The association's 'single will,' Bakunin wrote, would be determined by 'laws' that every member 'helped to create,' or at a minimum 'equally approved' by 'mutual agreement.' This 'definite set of rules' was to be 'frequently renewed' in plenary sessions wherein each member had the 'duty to try and make his view prevail,' but then he must accept fully the decision of the majority. Thus the revolutionary association's 'rigorously conceived and prescribed plan,' implemented under the 'strictest discipline,' was in reality to be 'nothing more or less than the expression and direct outcome of the reciprocal commitment contracted by each of the members towards the others.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115]

While many anarchists would not totally agree with this set-up (although we think that most supporters of the "Platform" would) all would agree that it is **not** hierarchical. If anything, it appears quite democratic in nature. Moreover, comments in Bakunin's letters to other Alliance members support the argument that his revolutionary associations were more democratic in nature than Marxists suggest. In a letter to a Spanish comrade we find him suggesting that *"all [Alliance] groups... should... from now on accept new members not by majority vote, but unanimously."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 386] In a letter to Italian members of the IWMA he argued that in Geneva the Alliance did not resort to *"secret plots and intrigues."* Rather:

> *"Everything was done in broad daylight, openly, for everyone to see .. . The Alliance had regular weekly open meetings and everyone was urged to participate in the discussions ... The old procedure where*

*from the bottom upwards ... The [revolutionary] organisation ... [must] not in any circumstances ... ever be their master ... What is to be the chief aim and pursue of this organisation?* ***To help the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and fullest human freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination ... that is without any sort of government control.*** [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191]

This analysis can be seen from Bakunin's discussion on union bureaucracy and how anarchists should combat it. Taking the Geneva section of the IWMA, Bakunin notes that the construction workers' section *"simply left all decision-making to their committees ... In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership."* To combat this bureaucracy, the union *"sections could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies ... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed."* Given that Bakunin considered *"the federative Alliance of all the workers' associations"* would *"constitute the Commune"* by means of delegates with *"always responsible, and revocable mandates"*, we can easily see that the role of the anarchist federation would be to intervene in general assemblies of these associations and ensure, through debate, that the most progressive opinion prevailed. [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 246, p. 247 and p. 153]

Having shown that the role of Bakunin's revolutionary organisations is drastically different than that suggested by the selective quotations of Marxists, we need to address two more issues. One, the so-called hierarchical nature of Bakunin's organisations and, two, their secret nature. Taking the issue of



tion before embarking on an activity. In other words, most Platformist groups do not take the Platform literally and so many differences are, to a large degree, a question of wording. As two supporters of the Platform note:

> *"The Platform doesn't go into detail about how collective responsibility works in practice. There are issues it leaves untouched such as the question of people who oppose the majority view. We would argue that obviously people who oppose the view of the majority have a right to express their own views, however in doing so they must make clear that they don't represent the view of the organisation. If a group of people within the organisation oppose the majority decision they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole. Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthens both the individual and the group to which she or he belongs."* [Aileen O'Carroll and Alan MacSimoin, *"The Platform"*, pp. 29–31, **Red and Black Revolution**, no. 4, p. 30]

While many anarchists are critical of Platformist groups for being too centralised for their liking, it is the case that the Platform has influenced many anarchist organisations, even non-Platformist ones (this can be seen in the "class struggle" groups discussed in the next section). This influence has been both ways, with the criticism the original Platform was subjected to having had an effect on how Platformist groups have developed. This, of course, does not imply that there is little or no difference between Platformists and other anarchists. Platformist groups tend to stress "collective responsibility" and "theoretical and tactical unity" more than others, which has caused

problems when Platformists have worked within "synthesis" organisations (as was the case in France, for example, which resulted in much bad-feeling between Platformists and others).

**Constructive Anarchism** by the leading Russian anarcho-syndicalist G.P. Maximoff gathers all the relevant documents in one place. As well as Maximoff's critique of the Platform, it includes the "synthesis" reply, Malatesta's review and subssequent exchange of letters between him and Makhno. **The Anarchist Revolution** also contains Malatesta's article and the exchange of letters between him and Makhno.

## J.3.5 Are there other kinds of anarchist federation?

Yes. Another type of anarchist federation is what we term the

*"class struggle"* group. Many local anarchist groups in Britain, for example, organise in this fashion. They use the term "class struggle" to indicate that their anarchism is based on collective working class resistance as opposed to reforming capitalism via lifestyle changes and the support of, say, co-operatives (many "class struggle" anarchists do these things, of course, but they are aware that they cannot create an anarchist society by so doing). We follow this use of the term here. And just to stress the point again, our use of "class struggle" to describe this type of anarchist group does not imply that "synthesis" or "Platformist" do not support the class struggle. They do!

This kind of group is half-way between the "synthesis" and the "Platform." The "class struggle" group agrees with the "synthesis" in so far as it is important to have a diverse viewpoints within a federation and that it would be a mistake to try to impose a common-line on different groups in different circumstances as the Platform does. However, like the



Bakunin was, in fact, trying to express how anarchists could *"naturally influence"* the masses and their revolution:

> *"We are the most pronounced enemies of every sort of* ***official power*** *... We are the enemies of any sort of publicly declared dictatorship, we are social revolutionary anarchists ... if we are anarchists, by what right do we want to influence the people, and what methods will we use? Denouncing all power, with what sort of power, or rather by what sort of force, shall we direct a people's revolution?* ***By a force that is invisible ... that is not imposed on anyone ... [and] deprived of all official rights and significance.****"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 191–2]

Continually opposing *"official"* power, authority and influence, Bakunin used the term *"invisible, collective dictatorship"* to describe the *"natural influence"* of organised anarchists on mass movements. Rather than express a desire to become a dictator, it in fact expresses the awareness that there is an "uneven" political development within the working class, an unevenness that can only be undermined by discussion within the mass assemblies of popular organisations. Any attempt to by-pass this "unevenness" by seizing or being elected to positions of power (i.e. by *"official influence"*) would be doomed to failure and result in dictatorship by a party — *"triumph of the Jacobins or the Blanquists [or the Bolsheviks, we must add] would be the death of the Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 169]

So rather than seek power, the anarchists would seek **influence** based on the soundness of their ideas, what anarchists today term the *"leadership of ideas"* in other words. Thus the anarchist federation *"unleashes their [the peoples] will and gives wider opportunity for their self-determination and their social-economic organisation, which should be created by them alone*

***earnestly*** *and* ***with full understanding of the cause*** *for the nine-tenths remaining outside its organisation nevertheless to be influenced invisibly by it."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139] So, as can be seen, the terms *"invisible"* and *"collective"* dictatorship used by Bakunin in his letters is strongly related to the term *"natural influence"* used in his public works and seems to be used simply to indicate the effects of an organised political group on the masses. To see this, it is worthwhile to quote Bakunin at length about the nature of this *"invisible"* influence:

> *"It may be objected that this ... influence on the popular masses suggests the establishment of a system of authority and a new government ... Such a belief would be a serious blunder. The organised effect of the International on the masses ... is nothing but the entirely natural organisation — neither official nor clothed in any authority or political force whatsoever — of the effect of a rather numerous group of individuals who are inspired by the same thought and headed toward the same goal, first of all on the opinion of the masses and only then, by the intermediary of this opinion (restated by the International's propaganda), on their will and their deeds. But the governments ... impose themselves violently on the masses, who are forced to obey them and to execute their decrees ... The International's influence will never be anything but one of opinion and the International will never be anything but the organisation of the natural effect of individuals on the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 139–40]

Therefore, from both the fuller context provided by the works and letters selectively quoted by Marxists **and** his other writings, we find that rather than being a secret authoritarian,



"Platform," the class struggle group recognises that there is little point in creating a forced union between totally different strands of anarchism. Thus the "class struggle" group rejects the idea that individualist or mutualist anarchists should be part of the same organisation as anarchist communists or syndicalists or that anarcho-pacifists should join forces with non-pacifists. Thus the "class struggle" group acknowledges that an organisation which contains viewpoints which are dramatically opposed can lead to pointless debates and paralysis of action due to the impossibilities of overcoming those differences.

Instead, the "class struggle" group agrees a common set of ***"aims and principles"*** which are the basic terms of agreement within the federation. If an individual or group does not agree with this statement then they cannot join. If they are members and try to change this statement and cannot get the others to agree its modification, then they are morally bound to leave the organisation. In other words, there is a framework within which individuals and groups apply their own ideas and their interpretation of agreed policies. It means that individuals in a group and the groups within a federation have something to base their local activity on, something which has been agreed collectively. There would be a common thread to activities and a guide to action (particularly in situations were a group or federation meeting cannot be called). In this way individual initiative and co-operation can be reconciled, without hindering either. In addition, the ***"aims and principles"*** shows potential members where the anarchist group was coming from.

In this way the "class struggle" group solves one of the key problems with the "synthesis" grouping, namely that any such basic statement of political ideas would be hard to agree and be so watered down as to be almost useless (for example, a federation combining individualist and communist anarchists would find it impossible to agree on such things as the necessity for revolution, communal ownership, and so on). By clearly stating

its ideas, the "class struggle" group ensures a common basis for activity and discussion.

Such a federation, like all anarchist groups, would be based upon regular assemblies locally and in frequent regional, national, etc., conferences to continually re-evaluate policies, tactics, strategies and goals. In addition, such meetings prevent power from collecting in the higher administration committees created to co-ordinate activity. The regular conferences aim to create federation policies on specific topics and agree common strategies. Such policies, once agreed, are morally binding on the membership, who can review and revise them as required at a later stage but cannot take action which would hinder their application (they do not have to apply them, if they consider them as a big mistake).

For example, minorities in such a federation can pursue their own policies as long as they clearly state that theirs is a minority position and does not contradict the federation's aims and principles. In this way the anarchist federation combines united action and dissent, for no general policy will be applicable in all circumstances and it is better for minorities to ignore policies which they know will make even greater problems in their area. As long as their actions and policies do not contradict the federation's basic political ideas, then diversity is an essential means for ensuring that the best tactic and ideas are be identified.

## J.3.6 What role do these groups play in anarchist theory?

The aim of anarchist groups and federations is to spread libertarian ideas within society and within social movements. They aim to convince people of the validity of anarchist ideas and analysis, of the need for a libertarian transformation of society and of themselves by working with others as equals. Such



arguing that it *"will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 387] This term was also used in his public writings, with Bakunin arguing that the *"very freedom of every individual results from th[e] great number of material, intellectual, and moral influences which every individual around him and which society ... continually exercise on him"* and that *"everything alive ... intervene[s] ... in the life of others ... [so] we hardly wish to abolish the effect of any individual's or any group of individuals' natural influence upon the masses."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140 and p. 141]

Thus *"natural influence"* simply means the effect of communicating which others, discussing your ideas with them and winning them over to your position, nothing more. This is hardly authoritarian, and so Bakunin contrasts this *"natural"* influence with *"official"* influence, which replaced the process of mutual interaction between equals with a fixed hierarchy of command and thereby induced the *"transformation of natural influence, and, as such, the perfectly legitimate influence over man, into a right."* [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 46]

As an example of this difference, consider the case of a union militant (as will become clear, this is the sort of example Bakunin had in mind). As long as they are part of the rank-and-file, arguing their case at union meetings or being delegated to carry out the decisions of these assemblies then their influence is *"natural."* However, if this militant is elected into a position with executive power in the union (i.e. becomes a full-time union official, for example, rather than a shop-steward) then their influence becomes *"official"* and so, potentially, corrupting for both the militant and the rank-and-file who are subject to the rule of the official.

Indeed, this notion of *"natural"* influence was also termed *"invisible"* by Bakunin: *"It is only necessary that one worker in ten join the [International Working-Men's] Association*

> *"These [revolutionary] groups would not seek anything for themselves, neither privilege nor honour nor power ... [but] would be in a position to direct popular movements ... and lead the people towards the most complete realisation of the social-economic ideal and the organisation of the fullest popular freedom. This is what I call* ***the collective dictatorship*** *of a secret organisation.*
>
> *"The dictatorship ... does not reward any of the members that comprise the groups, or the groups themselves, with any profit or honour or official power. It does not threaten the freedom of the people, because, lacking any official character, it does not take the place of State control over the people, and because its whole aim ... consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people.*
>
> *"This sort of dictatorship is not in the least contrary to the free development and the self-development of the people, nor its organisation from the bottom upward ... for it influences the people exclusively through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power, ... and ... try ... to direct the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people towards ... the organisation of popular liberty ... This secret dictatorship would in the first place, and at the present time, carry out a broadly based popular propaganda . .. and by the power of this propaganda and also by* ***organisation among the people themselves*** *join together separate popular forces into a mighty strength capable of demolishing the State."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 193–4]

The key aspect of this is the notion of *"natural"* influence. In a letter to a Spanish member of the Alliance we find Bakunin



groups are convinced that (to use Murray Bookchin's words) *"anarcho-communism cannot remain a mere mood or tendency, wafting in the air like a cultural ambience. It must be organised — indeed* ***well-organised*** *— if it is effectively articulate and spread this new sensibility; it must have a coherent theory and extensive literature; it must be capable of duelling with the authoritarian movements that try to denature the intuitive libertarian impulses of our time and channel social unrest into hierarchical forms of organisation."* [*"Looking Back at Spain,"* pp. 53–96, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), **The Radical Papers**, p. 90]

These groups and federations play a key role in anarchist theory. This is because anarchists are well aware that there are different levels of knowledge and consciousness in society. While people learn through struggle and their own experiences, different people develop at different speeds, that each individual is unique and is subject to different influences. As one pamphlet by the British **Anarchist Federation** puts it, the *"experiences of working class life constantly lead to the development of ideas and actions which question the established order ... At the same time, different sections of the working class reach different degrees of consciousness."* [**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation**, p. 13] This can easily be seen from any group of individuals of the same class or even community. Some are anarchists, others Marxists, some social democrats/labourites, others conservatives, others liberals, most "apolitical," some support trade unions, others are against and so on.

Because we are aware that we are one tendency among many, anarchists organise as anarchists to influence social struggle. Only when anarchists ideas are accepted by the vast majority will an anarchist society be possible. We wish, in other words, to win the most widespread understanding and influence for anarchist ideas and methods in the working class and in society, primarily because we believe that these alone will ensure a successful revolutionary transformation of society. Hence Malatesta:

> *"anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will be useful if won in that way ... we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and coordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system ... We must work with ... [all the] masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 109]

Anarchist organisation exists to help the process by which people come to anarchist conclusions. It aims to make explicit the feelings and thoughts that people have (such as, wage slavery is hell, that the state exists to oppress people and so on) by exposing as wrong common justifications for existing society and social relationships by a process of debate and providing a vision of something better. In other words, anarchist organisations seek to explain and clarify what is happening in society and show why anarchism is the only real solution to social problems. As part of this, we also have combat wrong ideas such as Liberalism, Social Democracy, Leninism, right-wing popularism and so on, indicating why these proposed solutions are false. In addition, an anarchist organisation must also be a 'collective memory' for the oppressed, keeping alive and developing the traditions of the labour and radical movements as well as anarchism so that new generations of libertar-



Earlier in the letter he argued that anarchists must be *"like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest... steer[ing] it [the revolution] not by any open power but by the collective dictatorship of all the allies — a dictatorship without insignia, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power."* Explicitly opposing *"Committees of Public Safety and official, overt dictatorship"* he explains his idea of a revolution based on *"workers hav[ing] joined into associations ... armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, the federative commune."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181, p. 180 and p. 179] Hardly what would be expected from a would-be dictator. As Sam Dolgoff suggested:

> *"an organisation exercising no overt authority, without a state, without official status, without the machinery of institutionalised power to enforce its policies, cannot be defined as a dictatorship ... Moreover, if it is borne in mind that this passage is part of a letter repudiating in the strongest terms the State and the authoritarian statism of the 'Robespierres, the Dantons, and the Saint-Justs of the revolution,' it is reasonable to conclude that Bakunin used the word 'dictatorship' to denote preponderant influence or guidance exercised largely by example ... In line with this conclusion, Bakunin used the words 'invisible' and 'collective' to denote the underground movement exerting this influence in an organised manner."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 182]

This analysis is confirmed by other passages from Bakunin's letters. In a letter to the Nihilist Sergi Nechaev (within which Bakunin indicates exactly how far apart politically they were — which is important as, from Marx onwards, many of Bakunin's opponents quote Nechaev's pamphlets as if they were "Bakuninist," when in fact they were not) we find him arguing that:

*the apex of power"*: *"It is necessary that in the midst of popular anarchy, which will constitute the very life and energy of the revolution, unity of thought and revolutionary action should find an organ. This organ must be the secret and world-wide association of the international brethren."* [Derek Howl, *"The legacy of Hal Draper"*, pp. 137–49, **International Socialist**, no. 52, p. 147]

However, in the sentence **immediately before** those quoted, Bakunin stated that *"[t]his organisation rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control."* Strange that this part of the document was not quoted! Nor is Bakunin quoted when he wrote, in the same document, that *"[w]e are the natural enemies of those revolutionaries — future dictators, regimentors and custodians of revolution — who ... [want] to create new revolutionary States just as centralist and despotic as those we already know."* Not mentioned either is Bakunin's opinion that the *"revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations ... [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172, p. 169 and p. 172] Selective quoting is only convincing to those ignorant of the subject.

Similarly, when we look at the situations where Bakunin uses the terms *"invisible"* or *"collective"* dictatorship (usually in letters to comrades) we find the same thing — the explicit denial **in these same letters** that Bakunin thought the revolutionary association should take governmental power. For example, in a letter to Albert Richard (a fellow member of the *"Alliance of Social Democracy"*) Bakunin stated that *"[t]here is only one power and one dictatorship whose organisation is salutary and feasible: it is that collective, invisible dictatorship of those who are allied in the name of our principle."* He then immediately adds that *"this dictatorship will be all the more salutary and effective for not being dressed up in any official power or extrinsic character."*



ians have a body of experience to build upon and use in their struggles.

Anarchist organisations see themselves in the role of aiders, **not** leaders. As Voline argued, the minority which is politically aware *"should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances, .. . [they] should freely participate in the common work, **as true collaborators, not as dictators.** It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves ... without dominating, subjugating, or oppressing anyone ... Accordingly to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves, who, by means of the various class organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, et cetera, federated ... should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the Revolution ... As for the 'elite' [i.e. the politically aware], their role, according to the libertarians, is to **help** the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give them necessary advice, impel them to take initiative, provide them with an example, and support them in their action — **but not to direct them governmentally.**"* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 177–8]

This role is usually called providing a ***"leadership of ideas"***. Anarchists stress the difference of this concept with authoritarian notions of "leadership" such as Leninist ones. While both anarchist and Leninist organisations exist to overcome the problem of "uneven development" within the working class, the aims, role and structure of these groups could not be more different (as discussed in section H.5, anarchists reject the assumptions and practice of vanguardism as incompatible with genuine socialism).

Anarchist groups are needed for, no matter how much people change through struggle, it is not enough in itself (if it were, we would be living in an anarchist society now!). So anarchists stress, as well as self-organisation, self-liberation and self-education through struggle developing libertarian socialist thought, the need for anarchist groups to work within pop-

ular organisations and in the mass of the population in general. These groups would play an important role in helping to clarify the ideas of those in struggle and undermining the internal and external barriers against these ideas.

The first of these are what Emma Goldman termed the *"internal tyrants,"* the *"ethical and social conventions"* of existing, hierarchical society which accustom people to authoritarian social relationships, injustice, lack of freedom and so on. [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 164–5] External barriers are what Chomsky terms *"the Manufacture of Consent,"* the process by which the population at large are influenced to accept the status quo and the dominant elites viewpoint via the education system and media. It is this "manufacture of consent" which helps explain why, relatively speaking, there are so few anarchists even though we argue that anarchism is the natural product of working class life. While, objectively, the experiences of life drives working class people to resist domination and oppression, they enter that struggle with a history behind them, a history of education in capitalist schools, of consuming capitalist media, and so on.

This means that while social struggle is radicalising, it also has to combat years of pro-state and pro-capitalist influences. So even if an anarchist consciousness springs from the real conditions of working class life, because we live in a class society there are numerous counter-tendencies that **inhibit** the development of that consciousness (such as religion, current morality, the media, pro-business and pro-state propaganda, state and business repression and so on). This explains the differences in political opinion within the working class, as people develop at different speeds and are subject to different influences and experiences. However, the numerous internal and external barriers to the development of anarchist opinions created our *"internal tyrants"* and by the process of *"manufacturing consent"* can be, and are, weaken by rational discussion as well as social struggle and self-activity. Indeed, until such time



For both these reasons, this section, while initially appearing somewhat redundant and of interest only to academics, is of a far wider interest.

Anarchists have two responses to claims that Bakunin (and, by implication, all anarchists) seek an *"invisible"* dictatorship and so are not true libertarians. Firstly, and this is the point we will concentrate upon in this section, Bakunin's expression is taken out of context and when placed within context it takes on a radically different meaning than that implied by critics of anarchism. Secondly, even **if** the expression means what the critics claim it does, it does not refute anarchism as a political theory. This is because anarchists are **not** Bakuninists (or Proudhonists or Kropotkinites or any other person-ist). We recognise other anarchists for what they are, human beings who said lots of important and useful things but, like any other human being, made mistakes and often do not live up to all of their ideas. For anarchists, it is a question of extracting the useful parts from their works and rejecting the useless (as well as the downright nonsense!). Just because Bakunin said something, it does not make it right! This common-sense approach to politics seems to be lost on Marxists. Indeed, if we take the logic of these Marxists to its conclusion, we must reject everything Rousseau wrote (he was sexist), Marx and Engels (their comments against Slavs spring to mind, along with numerous other racist comments) and so on. But, of course, this never happens to non-anarchist thinkers when Marxists write their articles and books.

However, to return to our main argument, that of the importance of context. Significantly, whenever Bakunin uses the term "invisible" or "collective" dictatorship he also explicitly states his opposition to government power and **in particular** the idea that anarchists should seize it. For example, a Leninist quotes the following passage from *"a Bakuninist document"* to show *"the dictatorial ambitions of Bakunin"* and that the *"principle of anti-democracy was to leave Bakunin unchallenged at*

ideas on social revolution in section J.7, we must note here that the role of the anarchist organisation does not change. As Bookchin argued, anarchists *"seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies"* and other organisations created by people in struggle *"to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management**, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140] In this way, by encouraging self-management in struggle, anarchist lay the foundations of a self-managed society.

## J.3.7 Doesn't Bakunin's *"Invisible Dictatorship"* prove that anarchists are secret authoritarians?

No. While Bakunin did use the term *"invisible dictatorship"*, it does not prove that Bakunin or anarchists are secret authoritarians. The claim otherwise, often made by Leninists and other Marxists, expresses a distinct, even wilful, misunderstanding of Bakunin's ideas on the role revolutionaries should play in popular movements.

Marxists quote Bakunin's terms *"invisible dictatorship"* and *"collective dictatorship"* out of context, using it to "prove" that anarchists are secret authoritarians, seeking dictatorship over the masses. More widely, the question of Bakunin and his "invisible dictatorship" finds its way into sympathetic accounts of anarchist ideas. For example, Peter Marshall writes that it is *"not difficult to conclude that Bakunin's invisible dictatorship would be even more tyrannical than a ... Marxist one"* and that it expressed a *"profound authoritarian and dissimulating streak in his life and work."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 287] So, the question of setting the record straight about this aspect of Bakunin's theory is of more importance than just correcting a few Leninists. In addition, to do so will help clarify the concept of *"leadership of ideas"* we discussed in the last section.



as we have *"learned to defy them all [the internal tyrants], to stand firmly on [our] own ground and to insist upon [our] own unrestricted freedom"* we can never be free or successfully combat the "manufacture of consent." [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140] And this is where the anarchist group can play a part, for there is an important role to be played by those who have been through this process already, namely to aid those going through it.

Of course the activity of an anarchist group does not occur in a vacuum. In periods of low class struggle, where there is little collective action, anarchist ideas will seem utopian and so dismissed by most. In these situations, only a few will become anarchists simply because the experiences of working people do not bred confidence that an alternative to the current system is possible. In addition, if anarchist groups are small, many who are looking for an alternative may join other groups which are more visible and express a libertarian sounding rhetoric (such as Leninist groups, who often talk about workers' control, workers' councils and so on while meaning something distinctly different from what anarchists mean by these terms). However, as the class struggle increases and people become more inclined to take collective action, they can become empowered and radicalised by their own activity and be more open to anarchist ideas and the possibility of changing society. In these situations, anarchist groups grow and the influence in anarchist ideas increases. This explains why anarchist ideas are not as widespread as they could be. It also indicates another important role for the anarchist group, namely to provide an environment and space where those drawn to anarchist ideas can meet and share experiences and ideas during periods of reaction.

The role of the anarchist group, therefore, is **not** to import a foreign ideology into the working class, but rather to help develop and clarify the ideas of those working class people who are moving towards anarchism and so aid those undergoing that development. They would aid this development by provid-

ing propaganda which exposes the current social system (and the rationales for it) as bankrupt as well as encouraging resistance to oppression and exploitation. The former, for Bakunin, allowed the *"bringing [of] a more just general expression, a new and more congenial form to the existent instincts of the proletariat ... [which] can sometimes facilitate and precipitate development ... [and] give them an awareness of what they have, of what they feel, of what they already instinctively desire, but never can it give to them what they don't have."* The latter *"is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda"* and *"awake[s] in the masses all the social-revolutionary instincts which reside deeply in the heart of every worker"* so allowing instinct to become transformed into *"reflected socialist thought."* [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 107, p. 108 and p. 141]

To quote the UK **Anarchist Federation**, again *"the [libertarian] organisation is not just a propaganda group: above all it must actively work in all the grassroots organisations of the working class such as rank and file [trade union] groups, tenants associations, squatters and unemployed groups as well as women's, black and gay groups."* It *"respects the independence of working class movements and (unlike] others) does not try to subordinate them to the revolutionary organisation. This does not mean that it does not seek to spread its ideas in these movements."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 15 and p. 16] Such an organisation is not vanguardist in the Leninist sense as it recognises that socialist politics derive from working class experience, rather than bourgeois intellectuals (as Lenin and Karl Kautsky argued), and that it does not aim to dominate popular movements but rather work within them as equals.

So while we recognise that "advanced" sections do exist within the working class and that anarchists are one such section, we also recognise that **central** characteristic of anarchism is that its politics are derived from the concrete experience of



> *passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others — even by those allegedly acting on their behalf."* [Maurice Brinton, **For Workers' Power**, p. 154]

Part of this "meaningful action" involves encouraging people to ***"act for yourselves"*** (to use Kropotkin's words). As we noted in section A.2.7, anarchism is based on **self**-liberation and self-activity is key aspect of this. Hence Malatesta's argument:

> *"Our task is that of 'pushing' the people to demand and to seize all the freedom they can and to make themselves responsible for providing their own needs without waiting for orders from any kind of authority. Our task is that of demonstrating the uselessness and harmfulness of government, provoking and encouraging by propaganda and action, all kinds of individual and collective activities.*
>
> *"It is in fact a question of education for freedom, of making people who are accustomed to obedience and passivity consciously aware of their real power and capabilities. One must encourage people to do things for themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 178–9]

This "pushing" people to "do it themselves" is another key role for any anarchist organisation. The encouragement of direct action is just as important as anarchist propaganda and popular participation within social struggle and popular organisations.

As such social struggle developments, the possibility of revolution becomes closer and closer. While we discuss anarchists

and the revolution will falter. For this reason, anarchists *"differ from the Bolshevik type of party in their belief that genuine revolutionaries must function **within the framework of the forms created by the revolution,** not within forms created by the party."* This means that *"an organisation is needed to propagate ideas systematically — and not ideas alone, but **ideas which promote the concept of self-management.**"* In other words, there *"is a need for a revolutionary organisation — but its function must always be kept clearly in mind. Its first task is propaganda ... In a revolutionary situation, the revolutionary organisation presents the most advanced demands: it is prepared at every turn of events to formulate — in the most concrete fashion — the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 140] What it does **not** do is to supplant those organs or decision-making process by creating institutionalised, hierarchical leadership structures.

Equally as important as **how** anarchists intervene in social struggles and popular organisations and the organisation of those struggles and organisations, there is the question of the nature of that intervention. We would like to quote the following by the British libertarian socialist group **Solidarity** as it sums up the underlying nature of anarchist action and the importance of a libertarian perspective on social struggle and change and how politically aware minorities work within them:

> *"**Meaningful action,** for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the egalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. **Sterile and harmful action** is whatever reinforces the*



fighting capitalism and statism directly — that is, from the realities of working class life. This means that anarchists must also learn from working class people in struggle. If we recognise that anarchist ideas are the product of working class experience and self-activity and that these constantly change and develop in light of new experiences and struggles then anarchist theory **must be open to change by learning from non-anarchists.** Not to recognise this fact is to open the door to vanguardism and dogma. Because of this fact, anarchists argue that the relationship between anarchists and non-anarchists must be an egalitarian one, based on mutual interaction and the recognition that no one is infallible or have all the answers — including anarchists! With this in mind, while we recognise the presence of "advanced" groups within the working class (which obviously reflects the uneven development within it), anarchists aim to minimise such unevenness by the way anarchist organisations intervene in social struggle, intervention based on involving **all** in the decision making process (as we discuss below).

Thus the general aim of anarchist groups is to spread ideas — such as general anarchist analysis of society and current events, libertarian forms of organisation, direct action and solidarity and so forth — and win people over to anarchism (i.e. to "make" anarchists). This involves both propaganda and participating as equals in social struggle and popular organisation. Anarchists do not think that changing leaders is a solution to the problem of (bad) leadership. Rather, it is a question of making leaders redundant by empowering all. As Malatesta argued, we *"do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves.**"* Thus anarchists *"advocate and practise direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and individual initiative; they should make special efforts to help members [of popular organisations] learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to dispense with leaders and full-time func-*

*tionaries."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 90 and p. 125]

This means that anarchists reject the idea that anarchist groups and federations must become the "leaders" of organisations. Rather, we desire anarchist ideas to be commonplace in society and in popular organisations, so that leadership by people from positions of power is replaced by the *"natural influence"* (to use Bakunin's term) of activists within the rank and file on the decisions made **by** the rank and file. While we will discuss Bakunin's ideas in more detail in section J.3.7, the concept of *"natural influence"* can be gathered from this comment of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

> *"There is not a single militant who as a 'FAIista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the FAI or not."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

This shows the nature of the "leadership of ideas." Rather than be elected to a position of power or responsibility, the anarchist presents their ideas at mass meetings and argues his or her case. This means obviously implies a two-way learning process, as the anarchist learns from the experiences of others and the others come in contact with anarchist ideas. Moreover, it is an egalitarian relationship, based upon discussion between equals rather than urging people to place someone into power above them. It ensures that everyone in the organisation participants in making, understands and agrees with the decisions reached. This obviously helps the political development of all



involved (including, we must stress, the anarchists). As Durruti argued: *"the man [or woman] who alienates his will, can never be free to express himself and follow his own ideas at a union meeting if he feel dominated by the feeblest orator ... As long as a man doesn't think for himself and doesn't assume his own responsibilities, there will be no complete liberation of human beings."* [quoted by Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184]

Because of our support for the "leadership of ideas", anarchists think that all popular organisations must be open, fully self-managed and free from authoritarianism. Only in this way can ideas and discussion play an important role in the life of the organisation. Since anarchists *"do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force"* and *"want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90] Bakunin's words with regards the first International Workers Association indicate this clearly:

> *"It must be a people's movement, organised from the bottom up by the free, spontaneous action of the masses. There must be no secret governmentalism, the masses must be informed of everything ... All the affairs of the International must be thoroughly and openly discussed without evasions and circumlocutions."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 408]

Given this, anarchists reject the idea of turning the organs created in the class struggle and revolutionary process into hierarchical structures. By turning them from organs of self-management into organs for nominating "leaders," the constructive tasks and political development of the revolution will be aborted before they really begin. The active participation of all will become reduced to the picking of new masters

for *"the government can do nothing for you. But you can do everything for yourselves."* [*"Aux Pariotes"*, **La Représantant du Peuple**, No. 33] This was echoed by Bakunin (see section H.2.8) while for revolutionary syndicalists the aim was *"to constitute within the bourgeois State a veritable socialist (economic and anarchic) State."* [Fernand Pelloutier, quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France**, p. 22] By so doing we help create the environment within which individuals can manage their own affairs and develop their abilities to do so. In other words, we create ***"schools of anarchism"*** which lay the foundations for a better society as well as promoting and supporting social struggle against the current system. Make no mistake, the alternatives we discuss in this section are not an alternative to direct action and the need for social struggle — they are an expression of social struggle and a form of direct action. They are the framework by which social struggle can build and strengthen the anarchist tendencies within capitalist society which will ultimately replace it.

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

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

It is this organic evolution that anarchists promote when they create libertarian alternatives within capitalist society. These alternatives (be they workplace or community unions,



without this work, the de-radicalising influences would outweigh the libertarian ones. In addition, the success of a syndicalist union must be partly determined by the general level of class struggle. In periods of great struggle, the membership will be more radical than in quiet periods and it is quiet periods which cause the most difficulties for syndicalist unions. With a moderate membership the revolutionary aims and tactics of the union will also become moderate. As one academic writer on French syndicalism put it, syndicalism *"was always based on workers acting in the economic arena to better their conditions, build class consciousness, and prepare for revolution. The need to survive and build a working-class movement had always forced syndicalists to adapt themselves to the exigencies of the moment."* [Barbara Mitchell, *"French Syndicalism: An Experiment in Practical Anarchism"*, pp. 25–41, **Revolutionary Syndicalism**, Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds.), p. 25]

As can be seen from the history of many syndicalist unions (and, obviously, mainstream unions too) this seems to be the case — the libertarian tendencies are outweighed by the de-radicalising ones. This can also be seen from the issue of collective bargaining:

> *"The problem of collective bargaining foreshadowed the difficulty of maintaining syndicalist principles in developed capitalist societies. Many organisations within the international syndicalist movement initially repudiated collective agreements with employers on the grounds that by a collaborative sharing of responsibility for work discipline, such agreements would expand bureaucratisation within the unions, undermine revolutionary spirit, and restrict the freedom of action that workers were always to maintain against the class enemy. From an early date, however, sometimes after a period of suspicion and resistance, many workers gave up this position. In the*

*early decades of the century it became clear that to maintain or gain a mass membership, syndicalist unions had to accept collective bargaining.*" [Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

Thus, for most anarchists, *"the Trade Unions are, by their very nature reformist and never revolutionary. The revolutionary spirit must be introduced, developed and maintained by the constant actions of revolutionaries who work from within their ranks as well as from outside, but it cannot be the normal, natural definition of the Trade Unions function."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 117]

This does not mean that anarchists should not work within labour organisations. Nor does it mean rejecting anarcho-syndicalist unions as an anarchist tactic. Far from it. Rather it is a case of recognising these organisations for what they are, reformist organisations which are not an end in themselves but one (albeit, important) means of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism. Neither does it mean that anarchists should not try to make labour organisations as anarchistic as possible or have anarchist objectives. Working within the labour movement (at the rank and file level, of course) is essential to gain influence for anarchist ideas, just as is working with unorganised workers. But this does not mean that the unions are revolutionary by their very nature, as syndicalism implies. As history shows, and as syndicalists themselves are aware, the vast majority of unions are reformist. Non-syndicalist anarchists argue there is a reason for that and syndicalist unions are not immune to these tendencies just because they call themselves revolutionary. Due to these tendencies, non-syndicalist anarchists stress the need to organise as anarchists first and foremost in order to influence the class struggle and encourage the creation of autonomous workplace and community organisations to fight



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

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

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

This idea (to quote the IWW) of *"building a new world in the shell of the old"* is a long standing one in anarchism. Proudhon during the 1848 revolution *"propose[d] that a provisional committee be set up"* in Paris and *"liaise with similar committees"* elsewhere in France. This would be *"a body representative of the proletariat ..., a state within the state, in opposition to the bourgeois representatives."* He proclaimed to working class people that *"a new society be founded in the heart of the old society"*

*their effective control of the national territory and of security policy"*. In other words, if the Mexican government wants investment from Chase, it would have to crush the Zapatistas. This information was relatively ineffective when just confined to print but when it was uploaded to the Internet, it suddenly reached a very large number of people. These people in turn co-ordinated protests against the U.S and Mexican governments and especially Chase Manhattan. Chase was eventually forced to attempt to distance itself from the Roett memo that it commissioned. Since then net-activism has grown.

Ronfeldt's research and opinion should be flattering for the Left. He is basically arguing that the efforts of activists on computers not only has been very effective (or at least has that potential), but more importantly, argues that the only way to counter this work is to follow the lead of social activists. Activists should understand the important implications of Ronfeldt's work: government elites are not only watching these actions (big surprise) but are also attempting to work against them. Thus Netwars and copyleft are good examples of anarchistic trends within society, using communications technology as a means of co-ordinating activity across the world in a libertarian fashion for libertarian goals.



that struggle. Rather than fuse the anarchist and working class movement, non-syndicalist anarchists stress the importance of anarchists organising as anarchists to influence the working class movement.

All this does not mean that purely anarchist organisations or individual anarchists cannot become reformist. Of course they can (just look at the Spanish FAI which along with the CNT co-operated with the state during the Spanish Revolution). However, unlike syndicalist unions, the anarchist organisation is not pushed towards reformism due to its role within society. That is an important difference — the institutional factors are not present for the anarchist federation as they are for the syndicalist union federation.

The second reason why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists is the question of whether syndicalist unions are sufficient in themselves to create anarchy. Pierre Monatte, a French syndicalist, argued that *"Syndicalism, as the [CGT's] Congress of Amiens proclaimed in 1906, is sufficient unto itself"* as *"the working class, having at last attained majority, means to be self-sufficient and to rely on no-one else for its emancipation."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 219]

This idea of self-sufficiency means that the anarchist and the syndicalist movement must be fused into one, with syndicalism taking the role of both anarchist group and labour union. Thus a key difference between anarcho-syndicalists and other anarchists is over the question of the need for a specifically anarchist organisation. While most anarchists are sympathetic to anarcho-syndicalism, few totally subscribe to anarcho-syndicalist ideas in their pure form. This is because, in its pure form, syndicalism rejects the idea of anarchist groups and instead considers the union as **the** focal point of social struggle and anarchist activism. However, an anarcho-syndicalist may support a specific anarchist federation to work within the union and outside.

So anarchists critical of anarcho-syndicalism are also active in the labour movement, working with the rank and file while keeping their own identity as anarchists and organising as anarchists. Thus Malatesta: *"In the past I deplored that the comrades isolated themselves from the working-class movement. Today I deplore that many of us, falling into the contrary extreme, let themselves be swallowed up in the same movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 225] In the eyes of other anarchists anarcho-syndicalism in its "pure" (revolutionary syndicalist) form makes the error of confusing the anarchist and union movement and so ensures that the resulting movement can do neither work well: *"Every fusion or confusion between the anarchist movement and the trade union movement ends, either in rendering the later unable to carry out its specific task or by weakening, distorting, or extinguishing the anarchist spirit."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 123]

Most anarchists agree with Malatesta when he argued that *"anarchists must not want the Trade Unions to be anarchist, but they must act within their ranks in favour of anarchist aims, as individuals, as groups and as federations of groups... [I]n the situation as it is, and recognising that the social development of one's workmates is what it is, the anarchist groups should not expect the workers' organisation to act as if they were anarchist, but should make every effort to induce them to approximate as much as possible to the anarchist method."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 124–5] Given that it appears to be the case that labour unions **are** by nature reformist, they cannot be expected to be enough in themselves when creating a free society. Hence the need for anarchists to organise **as anarchists** as well as alongside their fellow workers as workers in order to spread anarchist ideas on tactics and aims. This activity within existing unions does not necessarily mean attempting to "reform" the union in a libertarian manner (although some anarchists would support this approach). Rather it means working with the rank and file of the unions and trying to create autonomous workplace organisations, in-



spondent Joel Simon wrote an article about Ronfeldt's opinions on the influence of netwars on the political situation in Mexico after the Zapatista uprising. According to Simon, Ronfeldt holds that the work of social activists on the Internet has had a large influence — helping to co-ordinate the large demonstrations in Mexico City in support of the Zapatistas and the proliferation of EZLN communiqués across the world via computer networks. These actions, Ronfeldt argues, have allowed a network of groups that oppose the Mexican Government to muster an international response, often within hours of actions by it. In effect, this has forced the Mexican government to maintain the facade of negotiations with the EZLN and has on many occasions, actually stopped the army from just going in to Chiapas and brutally massacring the Zapatistas.

Given that Ronfeldt was an employee of the Rand Corporation his comments indicate that the U.S. government and its military and intelligence wings are very interested in what the Left is doing on the Internet. Given that they would not be interested in this if it were not effective, we can say that this use of the "Information Super-Highway" is a positive example of the use of technology in ways un-planned of by those who initially developed it (let us not forget that the Internet was originally funded by the U.S. government and military). While the internet is being hyped as the next big marketplace, it is being subverted by activists — an example of anarchistic trends within society worrying the powers that be.

A good example of this powerful tool is the incredible speed and range at which information travels the Internet about events concerning Mexico and the Zapatistas. When Alexander Cockburn wrote an article exposing a Chase Manhattan Bank memo about Chiapas and the Zapatistas in **Counterpunch**, only a small number of people read it because it is only a newsletter with a limited readership. The memo, written by Riordan Roett, argued that *"the [Mexican] government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate*

most popular web-server, is another freeware product and is acknowledged as the best available. The same can be said of other key web-technologies (most obviously PHP) and projects (Wikipedia springs to mind, although that project while based on co-operative and free activity is owned by a few people who have ultimate control). While non-anarchists may be surprised, anarchists are not. Mutual aid and co-operation are beneficial in the evolution of life, why not in the evolution of software? For anarchists, this "gift economy" at the heart of the communications revolution is an important development. It shows both the superiority of common development as well as the walls built against innovation and decent products by property systems. We hope that such an economy will spread increasingly into the "real" world.

Another example of co-operation being aided by new technologies is Netwar. This refers to the use of the Internet by autonomous groups and social movements to co-ordinate action to influence and change society and fight government or business policy. This use of the Internet has steadily grown over the years, with a Rand corporation researcher, David Ronfeldt, arguing that this has become an important and powerful force (Rand is, and has been since its creation in 1948, a private appendage of the military industrial complex). In other words, activism and activists' power and influence has been fuelled by the advent of the information revolution. Through computer and communication networks, especially via the Internet, grassroots campaigns have flourished, and the most importantly, government elites have taken notice.

Ronfeldt specialises in issues of national security, especially in the areas of Latin American and the impact of new informational technologies. Ronfeldt and another colleague coined the term

**"netwar"** in a Rand document entitled *"Cyberwar is Coming!"*. Ronfeldt's work became a source of discussion on the Internet in mid-March 1995 when Pacific News Service corre-



dependent of the trade union bureaucracy and organised in a libertarian way.

This involves creating anarchist organisations separate from but which (in part) work within the labour movement for anarchist ends. Let us not forget that the syndicalist organisation is the union, it organises all workers regardless of their politics. A "union" which just let anarchists join would not be a union, it would be an anarchist group organised in the workplace. As anarcho-syndicalists themselves are aware, an anarcho-syndicalist union is not the same as a union of anarcho-syndicalists. How can we expect an organisation made up of non-anarchists be totally anarchist? Due to this, tendencies always appeared within syndicalist unions that were reformist and because of this most anarchists, including many anarcho-syndicalists we must note, argue that there is a need for anarchists to work within the rank and file of the unions to spread their anarchist ideals and aims, and this implies anarchist organisations separate from the labour movement, even if that movement is based on syndicalist unions.

As Bakunin argued, the anarchist organisation *"is the necessary complement to the International [i.e. the union federation]. But the International and the Alliance [the anarchist federation], while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses ... regardless of nationality or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body: the Alliance, on the other hand, tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction."* This did not mean that the Alliance was imposing a foreign theory onto the members of the unions, because the *"programs of one and the other ... differ only in the degree of their revolutionary development ... The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 157] Nor did it imply that anarchists think that unions and other forms of popular organisations should be controlled by anarchists. Far

from it! Anarchists are the strongest supporters of the autonomy of all popular organisations. As we indicated in section J.3.6, anarchists desire to influence popular organisations by the strength of our ideas within the rank and file and **not** by imposing our ideas on them.

In addition to these major points of disagreement, there are minor ones as well. For example, many anarchists dislike the emphasis syndicalists place on the workplace and see *"in syndicalism a shift in focus from the commune to the trade union, from all of the oppressed to the industrial proletariat alone, from the streets to the factories, and, in emphasis at least, from insurrection to the general strike."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] However, most anarcho-syndicalists are well aware that life exists outside the workplace and so this disagreement is largely one of emphasis. Similarly, many anarchists disagreed with the early syndicalist argument that a general strike was enough to create a revolution. They argued, with Malatesta in the forefront, that while a general strike would be *"an excellent means for starting the social revolution"* it would be wrong to think that it made *"armed insurrection unnecessary"* since the *"first to die of hunger during a general strike would not be the bourgeois, who dispose of all the stores, but the workers."* In order for this **not** to occur, the workers would need to *"take over production"* which are protected by the police and armed forces and this meant *"insurrection."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 223–4] Again, however, most modern syndicalists accept this to be the case and see the *"expropriatory general strike,"* in the words of French syndicalist Pierre Besnard, as *"clearly **insurrectional.**"* [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 288] We mention this purely to counter Leninist claims that syndicalists subscribe to the same ones they did in the 1890s.

Despite our criticisms we should recognise that the difference between anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are slight and (often) just a case of emphasis. Most anarchists support



cheap machines. The existence of a "gift" economy among these amateurs and hobbyists was a necessary precondition for the development of PCs. Without this free sharing of information and knowledge, the development of computers would have been hindered and so socialistic relations between developers and within the working environment created the necessary conditions for the computer revolution. If this community had been marked by commercial relations, the chances are the necessary breakthroughs and knowledge would have remained monopolised by a few companies or individuals, so hindering the industry as a whole.

Encouragingly, this socialistic "gift economy" is still at the heart of computer/software development and the Internet. For example, the **Free Software Foundation** has developed the **General Public Licence** (GPL). GPL, also know as

**"copyleft"**, uses copyright to ensure that software remains free. Copyleft ensures that a piece of software is made available to everyone to use and modify as they desire. The only restriction is that any used or modified copyleft material must remain under copyleft, ensuring that others have the same rights as you did when you used the original code. It creates a commons which anyone may add to, but no one may subtract from. Placing software under GPL means that every contributor is assured that she, and all other uses, will be able to run, modify and redistribute the code indefinitely. Unlike commercial software, copyleft code ensures an increasing knowledge base from which individuals can draw from and, equally as important, contribute to. In this way everyone benefits as code can be improved by everyone, unlike commercial code.

Many will think that this essentially anarchistic system would be a failure. In fact, code developed in this way is far more reliable and sturdy than commercial software. Linux, for example, is a far superior operating system than DOS precisely **because** it draws on the collective experience, skill and knowledge of thousands of developers. Apache, the

technology today is often used to validate the faith in free market capitalism but that requires a monumental failure of historical memory as not just the Internet but also the computer represents a spectacular success of public investment. As late as the 1970s and early 1980s, according to Kenneth Flamm's **Creating the Computer**, the federal government was paying for 40 percent of all computer-related research and 60 to 75 percent of basic research. Even such modern-seeming gadgets as video terminals, the light pen, the drawing tablet, and the mouse evolved from Pentagon-sponsored research in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Even software was not without state influence, with databases having their root in US Air Force and Atomic Energy Commission projects, artificial intelligence in military contracts back in the 1950s and airline reservation systems in 1950s air-defence systems. More than half of IBM's Research and Development budget came from government contracts in the 1950s and 1960s.

The motivation was national security, but the result has been the creation of comparative advantage in information technology for the United States that private firms have happily exploited and extended. When the returns were uncertain and difficult to capture, private firms were unwilling to invest, and government played the decisive role. And not for want of trying, for key players in the military first tried to convince businesses and investment bankers that a new and potentially profitable business opportunity was presenting itself, but they did not succeed and it was only when the market expanded and the returns were more definite that the government receded. While the risks and development costs were socialised, the gains were privatised. All of which make claims that the market would have done it anyway highly unlikely.

Looking beyond state aid to the computer industry we discover a *"do-it-yourself"* (and so self-managed) culture which was essential to its development. The first personal computer, for example, was invented by amateurs who wanted their own



anarcho-syndicalist unions where they exist and often take a key role in creating and organising them. Similarly, many self-proclaimed anarcho-syndicalists also support specific organisations of anarchists to work within and outwith the syndicalist union. Syndicalist unions, where they exist, are far more progressive than any other union. Not only are they democratic unions and create an atmosphere where anarchist ideas are listened to with respect but they also organise and fight in a way that breaks down the divisions into leaders and led, doers and watchers. On its own this is very good but not good enough. For non-syndicalist anarchists, the missing element is an organisation winning support for anarchist ideas and tactics both within revolutionary unions and everywhere else working class people come together.

For a further information on the anarchist criticism of syndicalism, we can suggest no better source than the writings of Errico Malatesta. The books **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas** and **The Anarchist Revolution** contain Malatesta's viewpoints on anarchism, syndicalism and how anarchists should work within the labour movement. **The Anarchist Reader** contains the famous debate between the syndicalist Pierre Monatte and Malatesta at the International Anarchist conference in Amsterdam in 1907.

# J.4 What trends in society aid anarchist activity?

In this section we will examine some modern trends which we regard as being potential openings for anarchists to organise and which point in an anarchist direction. These trends are of a general nature, partly as a product of social struggle, partly as a response to economic and social crisis, partly involving people's attitudes to big government and big business, partly in relation to the communications revolution we are currently living through, and so on.

Of course, looking at modern society we see multiple influences, changes which have certain positive aspects in some directions but negative ones in others. For example, the business-inspired attempts to decentralise or reduce (certain) functions of governments should in the abstract be welcomed by anarchists for they lead to the reduction of government. In practice such a conclusion is deeply suspect simply because these developments are being pursued to increase the power and influence of capital as well as to increase wage-labour to, and exploitation by, the economic master class and to undermine working class power and autonomy. As such, there are as anti-libertarian as the status quo (as Proudhon stressed, anarchism is *"the denial of Government and of Property."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 100]). Similarly, increases in self-employment can be seen, in the abstract, as reducing wage slavery. However, if, in practice, this increase is due to corporations encouraging "independent" contractors in order to cut wages and worsen working conditions, increase



centralised regulatory agency, yet it still manages to function effectively. Moreover, the net is also an effective way of anarchists and other radicals to communicate their ideas to others, share knowledge, work on common projects and co-ordinate activities and social struggle. By using the Internet, radicals can make their ideas accessible to people who otherwise would not come across anarchist ideas. In addition, and far more important than anarchists putting their ideas across, the fact is that the net allows everyone with access to express themselves freely, to communicate with others and get access (by visiting webpages and joining mailing lists and newsgroups) and give access (by creating webpages and joining in with on-line arguments) to new ideas and viewpoints. This is very anarchistic as it allows people to express themselves and start to consider new ideas, ideas which may change how they think and act.

Obviously we are aware that the vast majority of people in the world do not have access to telephones, never mind computers, but computer access is increasing in many countries, making it available, via work, libraries, schools, universities, and so on to more and more working class people.

Of course there is no denying that the implications of improved communications and information technology are ambiguous, implying Big Brother as well the ability of progressive and radical movements to organise. However, the point is only that the information revolution in combination with the other social developments **could** (but will not **necessarily**) contribute to a social paradigm shift. Obviously such a shift will not happen automatically. Indeed, it will not happen at all unless there is strong resistance to governmental and corporate attempts to limit public access to information, technology (e.g. encryption programs), censor peoples' communications and use of electronic media and track them on-line.

This use of the Internet and computers to spread the anarchist message is ironic. The rapid improvement in price-performance ratios of computers, software, and other

that so many see big business for what it is. You simply cannot fool all the people all of the time!

However, these feelings can easily be turned into cynicism as well as a hopelessness that things can change for the better and that you cannot help change society. Or, even worse, they can be twisted into support for right, authoritarian, populism. The job for anarchists is to combat this and help point the healthy distrust people have for government and business towards a real solution to society's problems, namely a decentralised, self-managed anarchist society.

## J.4.7 What about the communications revolution?

Another important factor working in favour of anarchists is the existence of a sophisticated global communications network and a high degree of education and literacy among the populations of the core industrialised nations. Together these two developments make possible nearly instantaneous sharing and public dissemination of information by members of various progressive and radical movements all over the globe — a phenomenon that tends to reduce the effectiveness of repression by central authorities. The electronic-media and personal-computer revolutions also make it more difficult for elitist groups to maintain their previous monopolies of knowledge. Copy-left software and text, user-generated and shared content, file-sharing, all show that information, and its users, reaches its full potential when it is free. In short, the advent of the Information Age is potentially extremely subversive.

The very existence of the Internet provides anarchists with a powerful argument that decentralised structures can function effectively in a highly complex world. For the net has no centralised headquarters and is not subject to regulation by any



job insecurity and undermine paying for health and other employee packages then it is hardly a positive sign. Obviously increases in self-employment would be different if it were the result of an increase in the number of co-operatives, for example.

Thus few anarchists celebrate many apparently "libertarian" developments as they are not the product of social movements and activism, but are the product of elite lobbying for private profit and power. Decreasing the power of the state in (certain) areas while leaving (or increasing) the power of capital is a retrograde step in most, if not all, ways. Needless to say, this "rolling back" of the state does not bring into question its role as defender of property and the interests of the capitalist class — nor could it, as it is the ruling class who introduces and supports these developments.

In this section, we aim to discuss tendencies from **below**, not above — tendencies which can truly "roll back" the state rather than reduce its functions purely to that of the armed thug of property. The tendencies we discuss here are not the be all nor end all of anarchist activism or tendencies. We discuss many of the more traditionally anarchist "openings" in section J.5 (such as industrial and community unionism, mutual credit, co-operatives, modern schools and so on) and so will not do so here. However, it is important to stress here that such "traditional" openings are not being downplayed — indeed, much of what we discuss here can only become fully libertarian in combination with these more "traditional" forms of

**"anarchy in action."**

For a lengthy discussion of anarchistic trends in society, we recommend Colin Ward's classic book **Anarchy in Action**. Ward covers many areas in which anarchistic tendencies have been expressed, far more than we can cover here. The libertarian tendencies in society are many. No single work could hope to do them justice.

## J.4.1 Why is social struggle a good sign?

Simply because it shows that people are unhappy with the existing society and, more importantly, are trying to change at least some part of it. It suggests that certain parts of the population have reflected on their situation and, potentially at least, seen that **by their own actions** they can influence and change it for the better.

Given that the ruling minority draws its strength by the acceptance and acquiescence of the majority, the fact that a part of that majority no longer accepts and acquiesces is a positive sign. After all, if the majority did not accept the status quo and acted to change it, the class and state system could not survive. Any hierarchical society survives because those at the bottom follow the orders of those above it. Social struggle suggests that some people are considering their own interests, thinking for themselves and saying "no" and this, by its very nature, is an important, indeed, the most important, tendency towards anarchism. It suggests that people are rejecting the old ideas which hold the system up, acting upon this rejection and creating new ways of doing thinks.

*"Our social institutions,"* argued Alexander Berkman, *"are founded on certain ideas; as long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built upon them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present-day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. xii]

Social struggle is the most obvious sign of this change of perspective, this change in ideas, this progress towards freedom.

Social struggle is expressed by direct action. We have discussed both social struggle (section J.1) and direct action (sec-



As Noam Chomsky points out, while there is a *"leave it alone"* and *"do your own thing"* current within society, it in fact *"tells you that the propaganda system is working full-time, because there is no such ideology in the US. Business, for example, doesn't believe it. It has always insisted upon a powerful interventionist state to support its interests — still does and always has — back to the origins of American society. There's nothing individualistic about corporations. Those are big conglomerate institutions, essentially totalitarian in character, but hardly individualistic. Within them you're a cog in a big machine. There are few institutions in human society that have such strict hierarchy and top-down control as a business organisation. Nothing there about 'Don't tread on me.' You're being tread on all the time. The point of the ideology is to try to get other people, outside of the sectors of co-ordinated power, to fail to associate and enter into decision-making in the political arena themselves. The point is to atomise everyone else while leaving powerful sectors integrated and highly organised and of course dominating resources."* He goes on to note that there is *"a streak of independence and individuality in American culture which I think is a very good thing. This 'Don't tread on me' feeling is in many respects a healthy one. It's healthy up to the point where it atomises and keeps you from working together with other people. So it's got its healthy side and its negative side. It's the negative side that's emphasised naturally in the propaganda and indoctrination."* [**Keeping the Rabble in Line**, pp. 279–80]

As opinion polls show, most people direct their dislike and distrust of institutions equally to Big Business, which shows that people are not stupid. Unfortunately, as Goebbels was well aware, tell a lie often enough and people start to believe it. Given the funds available to big business, its influence in the media, its backing of "think-tanks," the use of Public Relations companies, the support of economic "science," its extensive advertising and so on, it says a lot for the common sense of people

**genuinely** anti-authoritarian (nor could it ever be), as a social system based on liberty must entail.

When a right-wing politician, economist or business "leader" argues that the government is too big, they are rarely thinking of the same government functions you are. You may be thinking of subsidies for tobacco farmers or defence firms; they are thinking about pollution controls. You may be thinking of reforming welfare for the better; their idea is to dismantle the welfare state (for working class people). Moreover, with their support for "family values", "wholesome" television, bans on abortion and so on, their victory would see an increased level of government intrusion in many personal spheres as well as increased state support for the power of the boss over the worker and the landlord over the tenant.

If you look at what the Right has done and is doing, rather than what it is saying, you quickly see the ridiculous of claims of right-wing "libertarianism" (as well as who is really in charge). Obstructing pollution and health regulations; defunding product safety laws; opening national parks to logging and mining, or closing them entirely; reducing taxes for the rich; eliminating the capital gains tax; allowing companies to fire striking workers; making it easier for big telecommunications companies to dominate the media; limiting companies' liability for unsafe products — the objective here is obviously to help big business and the wealthy do what they want without government interference, helping the rich get richer and increasing "freedom" for private power combined with a state whose sole role is to protect that "liberty."

Such right-wing tendencies do not have anarchistic elements. The "anti-government" propaganda of big business is hardly anarchistic. What anarchists try to do is point out the hypocritical and contradictory nature of such rhetoric. The arguments against big government are equally applicable to business. **If** people are capable of making their own decisions, then why should this capability be denied in the workplace?



tion J.2) before and some readers may wonder why we are covering this again here. We do so as we are discussing what trends in society help anarchist activity, it would be wrong **not** to highlight social struggle and direct action here. This is because these factors are key tendencies towards anarchism as social struggle is the means by which people create the new world in the shell of the old, transforming themselves and society.

So social struggle is a good sign as it suggests that people are thinking for themselves, considering their own interests and working together collectively to change things for the better. As the French syndicalist Emile Pouget argued:

> *"Direct action ... means that the working class, forever bridling at the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its methodology ... Direct Action thus implies that the working class subscribes to notions of freedom and autonomy instead of genuflecting before the principle of authority. Now, it is thanks to this authority principle, the pivot of the modern world — democracy being its latest incarnation — that the human being, tied down by a thousand ropes, moral as well as material, is bereft of any opportunity to display will and initiative."* [**Direct Action**, p. 1]

Social struggle means that people come into opposition with the boss and other authorities such as the state and the dominant morality. This challenge to existing authorities generates two related processes: the tendency of those involved to begin taking over the direction of their own activities and the development of solidarity with each other. Firstly, in the course of a struggle, such as a strike, occupation, boycott, and so on, the ordinary life of people, in which they act under

the constant direction of the bosses or state, ceases, and they have to think, act and co-ordinate their actions for themselves. This reinforces the expression towards autonomy that the initial refusal that lead to the struggle indicates. Secondly, in the process of struggle those involved learn the importance of solidarity, of working with others in a similar situation, in order to win. This means the building of links of support, of common interests, of organisation. The practical need for solidarity to help win the struggle is the basis for the solidarity required for a free society to be viable.

Therefore the real issue in social struggle is that it is an attempt by people to wrestle at least part of the power over their own lives away from the managers, state officials and so on who currently have it and exercise it themselves. This is, by its very nature, anarchistic and libertarian. Thus we find politicians and, of course, managers and property owners, often denouncing strikes and other forms of direct action. This is logical. As direct action challenges the real power-holders in society and because, if carried to its logical conclusion, it would remove them, social struggle and direct action can be considered in essence a revolutionary process.

Moreover, the very act of using direct action suggests a transformation within the people using it. *"Direct action's very powers to fertilise,"* argued Pouget, *"reside in such exercises in imbuing the individual with a sense of his own worth and in extolling such worth. It marshals human resourcefulness, tempers characters and focuses energies. It teaches self-confidence! And self-reliance! And self-mastery! And shifting for oneself!"* Moreover, *"direct action has an unmatched educational value: It teaches people to reflect, to make decisions and to act. It is characterised by a culture of autonomy, an exaltation of individuality and is a fillip to initiative, to which it is the leaven. And this superabundance of vitality and burgeoning of 'self' in no way conflicts with the economic fellowship that binds the workers one with another and far from being at odds*



itarian implications. Rather we are aware that the class struggle, the subjective pressure on capitalism, is not independent of the conditions within which it takes place (and helps to create, we must add). Subjective revolt is always present under capitalism and, in the case of the 1970s, played a role in creating crisis. Faced with an economic crisis we are indicating what we can do in response to it and how it could, potentially, generate libertarian tendencies within society. Economic crisis could, in other words, provoke social struggle, collective action and generate anarchic tendencies in society. Equally, it could cause apathy, rejection of collective struggle and, perhaps, the embracing of **false** "solutions" such as right-wing populism, Leninism, or Fascism. We cannot predict how the future will develop, but it is true that if we do nothing then, obviously, libertarian tendencies will not grow and develop.

## J.4.6 What are implications of anti-government and anti-big business feelings?

Public opinion polls show increasing feelings of disappointment and lack of confidence in governments and big business.

Some of the feelings of disappointment with government can be blamed on the anti-big-government rhetoric of conservatives and right-wing populists. Of course the Right would never dream of **really** dismantling the state, as is evident from the fact that government was as bureaucratic and expensive under "conservative" administrations. So this "decentralist" element of right-wing rhetoric is a con (and quickly jettisoned as required by the capitalist class). The "anti-Government" rhetoric is combined with the pro-business, pro-private tyranny, racist, anti-feminist, and homophobic hogwash disseminated by right-wing radio and TV propagandists and the business-backed media which shows that capitalism is not

replace capitalism (wage slavery) and show that anarchism is a practical alternative to the chaos and authoritarianism of capitalism, even if these examples are initially fragmentally and limited in nature.

However, these developments should **not** be taken in isolation of collective struggle in the workplace or community. It is in the class struggle that the real potential for anarchy is created. The work of such organisations as **Food Not Bombs!** and the creation of local currencies and co-operatives are supplementary to the important task of creating workplace and community organisations that can create effective resistance to both state and capitalists, resistance that can overthrow both (see sections J.5.2 and J.5.1 respectively). *"Volunteer and service credit systems and alternative currencies by themselves may not be enough to replace the corporate capitalist system. Nevertheless, they can help build the economic strength of local currencies, empower local residents, and mitigate some of the consequences of poverty and unemployment ... By the time a majority [of a community are involved it] will be well on its way to becoming a living embodiment of many anarchist ideals."* [Lindenfield, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28] And such a community would be a great aid in any strike or other social struggle which is going on!

The general economic crisis which we are facing has implications for social struggle and anarchist activism. It could be the basic of libertarian alternatives in our workplaces and communities, alternatives based on direct action, solidarity and self-management. These alternatives could include workplace and community unionism, co-operatives, mutual banks and other forms of anarchistic resistance to capitalism and the state.

Finally, we must stress that we are **not** arguing that working class people need an economic crisis to force them into struggle. Such "objectivism" (i.e. the placing of tendencies towards socialism in the development of capitalism, of objective factors, rather than in the class struggle, i.e. subjective factors) is best left to orthodox Marxists and Leninists as it has author-



*with their common interests, it reconciles and bolsters these: the individual's independence and activity can only erupt into splendour and intensity by sending its roots deep into the fertile soil of common agreement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 2 and p. 5]

Social struggle is the beginning of a transformation of the people involved and their relationships to each other. While its external expression lies in contesting the power of existing authorities, its inner expression is the transformation of people from passive and isolated competitors into empowered, self-directing, self-governing co-operators. Moreover, this process widens considerably what people think is "possible." Through struggle, by collective action, the fact people **can** change things is driven home, that **they** have the power to govern themselves and the society they live in. Thus struggle can change people's conception of "what is possible" and encourage them to try and create a better world. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"since the times of the [first] International Working Men's Association, the anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of labour against capital and its protector — the State.*
>
> *"Such a struggle ... permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements ..., while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by capitalism and the State ... , and wakes up his [or her] thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Anarchism**, p. 171]

In other words, social struggle has a **radicalising** and **politicising** effect, an effect which brings into a new light existing society and the possibilities of a better world (direct action, in Pouget's words, *"develops the feeling for human*

*personality as well as the spirit of initiative ... it shakes people out of their torpor and steers them to consciousness.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 5]). The practical need to unite and resist the boss also helps break down divisions within the working class. Those in struggle start to realise that they need each other to give them the power necessary to get improvements, to change things. Thus solidarity spreads and overcomes divisions between black and white, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, trades, industries, nationalities and so on. The real need for solidarity to win the fight helps to undermine artificial divisions and show that there are only two groups in society, the oppressed and the oppressors. Moreover, struggle as well as transforming those involved is also the basis for transforming society as a whole simply because, as well as producing transformed individuals, it also produces new forms of organisation, organisations created to co-ordinate their struggle and which can, potentially at least, become the framework of a libertarian socialist society (see section I.2.3).

Thus anarchists argue that social struggle opens the eyes of those involved to self-esteem and a sense of their own strength, and the groupings it forms at its prompting are living, vibrant associations where libertarian principles usually come to the fore. We find almost all struggles developing new forms of organisation, forms which are often based on direct democracy, federalism and decentralisation. If we look at every major revolution, we find people creating mass organisations such as workers' councils, factory committees, neighbourhood assemblies and so on as a means of taking back the power to govern their own lives, communities and workplaces. In this way social struggle and direct action lay the foundations for the future. By actively taking part in social life, people are drawn into creating new forms of organisation, new ways of doing things. In this way they educate themselves in participation, in self-government, in initiative and in asserting themselves.



to capitalist firms, so eliminating the profits of capitalists by allowing workers to exchange the product of their labour with other workers. Moreover, *"local exchange systems strength local communities by increasing their self-reliance, empowering community members, and helping to protect them from the excesses of the global market."* [Frank Lindenfield, *"Economics for Anarchists,"* **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 24] In this way self-managing communes could be created, communes that replace hierarchical, top-down, government with collective decision making of community affairs based on directly democratic community assemblies. These self-governing communities and economies could federate together to co-operate on a wider scale and so create a counter-power to that of state and capitalism.

This confederal system of self-managing communities could also protect jobs as the *"globalisation of capital threatens local industries. A way has to be found to keep capital at home and so preserve the jobs and the communities that depend upon them. Protectionism is both undesirable and unworkable. But worker-ownership or workers' co-operatives are alternatives."* [Gambone, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 12–13] Local communities could provide the necessary support structures which could protect co-operatives from the corrupting effects of working in the capitalist market (see section J.5.11). They could also demand that rather than nationalise or bailout failing companies (or, for that matter, privatise state services or public works), they should be turned over (as Proudhon constantly argued) to workers co-operatives by aiding *"the **Labour Unions** to enter into a temporary possession of the industrial concerns"*, anarchists would provide *"an effective means to check the State Nationalisation"* in the period before a social revolution when *"State phases which we are traversing now seems to be unavoidable."* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change"*, pp. 67–86, **SubStance**, Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 77] In this way, economic liberty (self-management) could

It also involves the homeless in helping themselves. It serves free food in public places to expose the plight of the homeless, the callousness of the system and our capacity to solve social problems through our own actions without government or capitalism. The constant harassment of FNB by the police, middle classes and the government illustrates their callousness to the plight of the poor and the failure of their institutions to build a society which cares for people more than money and property (and the police and prisons to protect them). The fact is that in the US many working and unemployed people have no **feeling** that they are entitled to basic human needs such as medicine, clothes, shelter, and food. FNB encourages poor people to make these demands, provides a space in which these demands can be voiced, and helps to breakdown the wall between hungry and not-hungry. The repression directed towards FNB by local police forces and governments also demonstrates the effectiveness of their activity and the possibility that it may radicalise those who get involved with the organisation. Charity is obviously one thing, mutual aid is something else. FNB is a politicised movement from below, based on solidarity, **not** charity as, in Kropotkin's words, charity *"bears a character of inspiration from above, and, accordingly, implies a certain superiority of the giver upon the receiver."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 222]

The last example of how economic stagnation can generate libertarian tendencies can be seen from the fact that, *"[h]istorically, at times of severe inflation or capital shortages, communities have been forced to rely on their own resources. During the Great Depression, many cities printed their own currency; this works to the extent that a community is able to maintain a viable internal economy which provides the necessities of life, independent of transactions with the outside."* [Benello, **Op. Cit.**, p. 150]

These local currencies could be the basis of a mutual bank (see section J.5.5), providing interest-free loans to workers to form co-operatives and so build libertarian alternatives



They begin to realise that the only alternative to management by others is self-management and organise to achieve it.

Given that remaking society has to begin at the bottom, this finds its expression in direct action, individuals taking the initiative and using the power they have just generated by collective action and organisation to change things by their own efforts. Social struggle is therefore a two way transformation — the external transformation of society by the creation of new organisations and the changing of the power relations within it and the internal transformation of those who take part in the struggle. This is key:

> *"Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off ... and immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the causes of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activism and they will in the end understand that to make their victory secure and definitive, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of the moral elevation and emancipation of the workers must benefit by the fact that workers unite and struggle for their interests."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

Hence Nestor Makhno's comment that *"[i]n fact, it is only through that struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you reach an understanding of anarchism."* [**The Struggle**

**Against the State and other Essays**, p. 71] The creation of an anarchist society is a **process** and social struggle is the key anarchistic tendency within society which anarchists look for, encourage and support. Its radicalising and transforming nature is the key to the growth of anarchist ideas, the creation of libertarian structures and alternatives within capitalism (structures which may, one day, replace it) and the creation of anarchists and those sympathetic to anarchist ideas. Its importance cannot be underestimated!

## J.4.2 Won't social struggle do more harm than good?

It is often argued that social struggle, resisting the powerful and the wealthy, will just do more harm than good. Employers often use this approach in anti-union propaganda, for example, arguing that creating a union will force the company to close and move to less "militant" areas.

There is some truth in this. Yes, social struggle can lead to bosses moving to more compliant workforces — but this also happens in periods lacking social struggle too! If we look at the down-sizing mania that gripped the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s, we see companies firing tens of thousands of people during a period when unions were weak, workers scared about losing their jobs and class struggle basically becoming mostly informal, atomised and "underground." Moreover, this argument actually indicates the need for anarchism. It is a damning indictment of any social system that it requires people to kow-tow to their masters otherwise they will suffer economic hardship. It boils down to the argument *"do what you are told, otherwise you will regret it."* Any system based on that maxim is an affront to human dignity!

It would, in a similar fashion, be easy to "prove" that slave rebellions are against the long term interests of the slaves. Af-



problems of working class people can only be solved by ourselves, by our own actions and organisations. The 1930s in the USA is a classic example of this process, with very militant struggles taking place in very difficult situations (see Howard Zinn's **A People's History of the United States** or Jeremy Brecher's **Strike!** for details).

In other words, the "economic structural crisis" gives radicals a lot potential to get their message across, even if the overall environment may make success seem difficult at times!

As well as encouraging workplace organisation due to the intensification of exploitation and authority provoked by the economic stagnant/depression, the "economic structural crisis" can encourage other forms of libertarian alternatives. For example, the *"economic structural crisis"* has resulted in the erosion of the welfare state (at least for the working class, for the elite state aid is never far away). This development has potential libertarian possibilities. *"The decline of the state,"* argues L. Gambone, *"makes necessary a revitalisation of the notions of direct action and mutual aid. Without Mama State to do it for us, we must create our own social services through mutual aid societies."* [**Syndicalism in Myth and Reality**, p. 12] As we argue in more depth in section J.5.16, such a movement of mutual aid has a long history in the working class and, as it is under our control, it cannot be withdrawn from us to enrich and empower the ruling class as state run systems have been. Thus the decline of state run social services could, potentially, see the rise of a network of self-managed, working class alternatives (equally, of course, it could see the end of all services to the weakest sections of our society — which possibility comes about depends on what we do in the here and now. See section J.5.15 for an anarchist analysis of the welfare state).

**Food Not Bombs!** (FNB) is an excellent example of practical libertarian alternatives being generated by the economic crisis we are facing. FNB is a community-based group which helps the homeless through the direct action of its members.

as its only credible one. Thus the ongoing structural crisis of the global capitalist economy, combined with the other developments springing from what Takis Fotopoulos calls (in his book **Towards an Inclusive Democracy**) a *"multidimensional crisis"* (which includes economic, political, social, ecological and ideological aspects), could (potentially) lead to a new **international** anti-authoritarian alliance linking together the new (and not so new) social movements in the West (feminism, the Green movement, rank-and-file labour militancy, etc.) with non-authoritarian liberation movements in the Third World and new movements in formerly Stalinist countries. However, this is only likely to happen if anarchists take the lead in promoting alternatives and working with the mass of the population. Ways in which anarchist can do this are discussed in some detail in section J.5.

Thus the *"economic structural crisis"* can aid social struggle by placing the contrast of *"what is"* with what *"could be"* in a clear light. Any crisis brings forth the contradictions in capitalism, between the production of use values (things people need) and of exchange value (capitalist profits), between capitalism's claims of being based on liberty and the authoritarianism associated with wage labour (*"The general evidence of repression poses an ancient contradiction for capitalism: while it claims to promote human freedom, it profits concretely from the denial of freedom, most especially freedom for the workers employed by capitalist enterprise."* [William Greider, **One World, Ready or Not**, p. 388]) and so on. It shakes to the bone popular faith in capitalism's ability to "deliver the goods" and gets more and more people thinking about alternatives to a system that places profit above and before people and planet. The crisis also, by its very nature, encourages workers and other oppressed sections of the population to resist and fight back, which in turn generates collective organisation (such as unions or workplace-based assemblies and councils), solidarity and direct action — in other words, collective self-help and the awareness that the



ter all, by rebelling the slaves will face the anger of their masters. Only by submitting without question can they avoid this fate and, perhaps, be rewarded by better conditions. Of course, the evil of slavery would continue but by submitting to it they can ensure their life can become better. Needless to say, any thinking and feeling person would quickly dismiss this reasoning as missing the point and being little more than apologetics for an evil social system that treated human beings as things. The same can be said for the argument that social struggles within capitalism do more harm than good. It betrays a slave mentality unfitting for human beings (although fitting for those who desire to live of the backs of workers or desire to serve those who do).

Moreover, this kind of argument ignores a few key points.

Firstly, by resistance the conditions of the oppressed can be maintained or even improved. If the boss knows that their decisions will be resisted they may be less inclined to impose speed-ups, longer hours and so on. If, on the other hand, they know that their employees will agree to anything then there is every reason to expect them to impose all kinds of oppressions, just as a state will impose draconian laws if it knows that it can get away with it. History is full of examples of non-resistance producing greater evils in the long term and of resistance producing numerous important reforms and improvements (such as higher wages, shorter hours, the right to vote for working class people and women, freedom of speech, the end of slavery, trade union rights and so on).

So social struggle has been proven time and time again to gain successful reforms. For example, before the 8 hour day movement of 1886 in America most companies argued they could not introduce that reform without doing bust. However, after displaying a militant mood and conducting an extensive strike campaign, hundreds of thousands of workers discovered that their bosses had been lying and they got shorter hours. Indeed, the history of the labour movement shows what bosses

say they can afford and the reforms workers can get via struggle are somewhat at odds. Given the asymmetry of information between workers and bosses, this is unsurprising as workers can only guess at what is available and bosses like to keep their actual finances hidden. Even the threat of labour struggle can be enough to gain improvements. For example, Henry Ford's $5 day is often used as an example of capitalism rewarding good workers. However, this substantial pay increase was largely motivated by the unionisation drive by the **Industrial Workers of the World** among Ford workers in the summer of 1913. [Harry Braverman, **Labour and Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 144] More recently, it was the mass non-payment campaign against the poll-tax in Britain during the late 1980s and early 1990s which helped ensure its defeat. In the 1990s, France also saw the usefulness of direct action. Two successive prime ministers (Edouard Balladur and Alain Juppe) tried to impose large scale neo-liberal "reform" programmes that swiftly provoked mass demonstrations and general strikes amongst students, workers, farmers and others. Confronted by crippling disruptions, both governments gave in.

Secondly, and in some ways more importantly, the radicalising effect of social struggle can open new doors for those involved, liberate their minds, empower them and create the potential for deep social change. Without resistance to existing forms of authority a free society cannot be created as people adjust themselves to authoritarian structures and accept "what is" as the only possibility. By resisting, people transform and empower themselves as well as transforming society. New possibilities can be seen (possibilities before dismissed as "utopian") and, via the organisation and action required to win reforms, the framework for these possibilities (i.e. of a new, libertarian, society) created. The transforming and empowering effect of social struggle is expressed well by the Nick DiGaetano, a one-time Wobbly who had joined during the 1912 Lawrence strike and then became a UAW-CIO shop floor militant:



## J.4.5 Why is this *"economic structural crisis"* important to social struggle?

The

**"economic structural crisis"** we out-lined in the last section has certain implications for anarchists and social struggle. Essentially, as C. George Benello argued, *"[i]f economic conditions worsen ... then we are likely to find an openness to alternatives which have not been thought of since the depression of the 1930s ... It is important to plan for a possible economic crisis, since it is not only practical, but also can serve as a method of mobilising a community in creative ways."* [**From the Ground Up**, p. 149]

In the face of economic stagnation and depression, attempts to generate more profits (i.e., increase exploitation) by increasing the authority of the boss grow. In addition, more people find it harder to make ends meet, running up debts to survive, face homelessness if they are made unemployed, and so on. This makes exploitation ever more visible and tend to push oppressed strata together in movements that seek to mitigate, and even remove, their oppression. As the capitalist era has worn on, these strata have become increasingly able to rebel and gain substantial political and economic improvements, which have, in addition, lead to an increasing willingness to do so because of rising expectations (about what is possible) and frustration (about what actually is). It is true that libertarians, the left and labour have suffered setbacks since the 1970s, but with increasing misery of the working class due to neo-liberal policies (and the *"economic structural crisis"* they create), it is only a matter of time before there is a resurgence of radicalism.

Anarchists will be in the forefront of this resurgence. For, with the discrediting and eventual fall of authoritarian state capitalism ("Communism") in Eastern Europe, the anti-authoritarian faction of the left will increasingly be seen

combined with increased international competition, ensured the rise of finance capital which in return ensured the current stagnationist tendencies in the economy (tendencies made worse by the rise of the Asian Tiger economies in the 1980s).

From the contradictions between finance capital and the real economy, between capitalists' need for profit and human needs, between over-capacity and demand, and others, there has emerged what appears to be a long-term trend toward **permanent** stagnation of the capitalist economy with what growth spurts which do exist being fuelled by speculative bubbles as well as its benefits being monopolised by the few (so refuting the notion of "trickle down" economics). This trend has been apparent for several decades, as evidenced by the continuous upward adjustment of the rate of unemployment officially considered to be "normal" or "acceptable" during those decades, and by other symptoms as well such as falling growth, lower rates of profit and so on.

This stagnation has became even more obvious by the development of deep crisis in many countries at the end of the 2000s. This caused central banks to intervene in order to try and revive the real economies that have suffered under their rentier inspired policies since the 1970s. Such action may just ensure continued stagnation and reflated bubbles rather than a real-up turn. One thing is true, however, and that is the working class will pay the price of any "solution" — unless they organise and get rid of capitalism and the state. Ultimately, capitalism need profits to survive and such profits came from the fact that workers do not have economic liberty. Thus any "solution" within a capitalist framework means the increased oppression and exploitation of working class people.



> *"the workers of my generation from the early days up to now [1958] had what you might call a labour insurrection in changing from a plain, humble, submissive creature into a man. The union made a man out of him ... I am not talking about the benefits ... I am talking about the working conditions and how they affected the men in the plant ... Before they were submissive. Today they are men."* [quoted by David Brody, *"Workplace Contractualism in comparative perspective"*, pp. 176–205, Helson Lichtenstein and Howell John Harris (eds.), **Industrial Democracy in America**, p. 204]

Other labour historians note the same radicalising process elsewhere (modern day activists could give more examples!):

> *"The contest [over wages and conditions] so pervaded social life that the ideology of acquisitive individualism, which explained and justified a society regulated by market mechanisms and propelled by the accumulation of capital, was challenged by an ideology of mutualism, rooted in working-class bondings and struggles ... Contests over pennies on or off existing piece rates had ignited controversies over the nature and purpose of the American republic itself."* [David Montgomery, **The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 171]

This radicalising effect is far more dangerous to authoritarian structures than better pay, more liberal laws and so on as they need submissiveness to work. Little wonder that direct action is usually denounced as pointless or harmful by those in power or their spokespersons for direct action will, taken to its logical conclusion, put them out of a job! Struggle, therefore,

holds the possibility of a free society as well as of improvements in the here and now. It also changes the perspectives of those involved, creating new ideas and values to replace the ones of capitalism.

Thirdly, it ignores the fact that such arguments do not imply the end of social struggle and working class resistance and organisation, but rather its **extension.** If, for example, your boss argues that they will move to Mexico if you do not "shut up and put up" then the obvious solution is to make sure the workers in Mexico are also organised! Bakunin argued this basic point over one hundred years ago, and it is still true: *"in the long run the relatively tolerable position of workers in one country can be maintained only on condition that it be more or less the same in other countries."* The *"conditions of labour cannot get worse or better in any particular industry without immediately affecting the workers in other industries, and that workers of all trades are inter-linked with real and indissoluble ties of solidarity."* Ultimately, *"in those countries the workers work longer hours for less pay; and the employers there can sell their products cheaper, successfully competing against conditions where workers working less earn more, and thus force the employers in the latter countries to cut wages and increase the hours of their workers."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 306–7] Bakunin's solution was to organise internationally, to stop this undercutting of conditions by solidarity between workers. As history shows, his argument was correct. Thus it is **not** social struggle or militancy which perhaps could have negative results, just **isolated** militancy, struggle which ignores the ties of solidarity required to win, extend and keep reforms and improvements. In other words, our resistance must be as transnational as capitalism is.

The idea that social struggle and working class organisation are harmful was expressed constantly in the 1970s and 80s. With the post-war Keynesian consensus crumbling, the "New Right" argued that trade unions (and strikes) hampered growth and that wealth redistribution (i.e. welfare schemes



cost price rather than that of Western firms. With the decrease in profits, the capital that flowed into the region flowed back out, thus creating a crisis (and proving, incidentally, that free markets are destabilising and do not secure the best of all possible outcomes). Thus, the rentier regime, after weakening the Western economies, helped destabilise the Eastern ones too.

So, in the short-run, many large corporations and financial companies solved their profit problems by expanding production into "underdeveloped" countries so as to take advantage of the cheap labour there (and the state repression which ensured that cheapness) along with weaker environmental laws and lower taxes. Yet gradually they are running out of third-world populations to exploit. For the very process of "development" stimulated by the presence of Transnational Corporations in third-world nations increases competition and so, potentially, over-investment and, even more importantly, produces resistance in the form of unions, rebellions and so on, which tend to exert a downward pressure on the level of exploitation and profits.

This process reflects, in many ways, the rise of finance capital in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, existing industrialised nations experienced increased competition from Japan and Germany. As these nations re-industrialised, they placed increased pressure on the USA and other nations, reducing the global "degree of monopoly" and forcing them to compete with lower cost producers. In addition, full employment produced increasing resistance on the shop floor and in society as a whole (see section C.7.1), squeezing profits even more. Thus a combination of class struggle and global over-capacity resulted in the 1970s crisis. With the inability of the real economy, especially the manufacturing sector, to provide an adequate return, capital shifted into finance. In effect, it ran away from the success of working people asserting their rights at the point of production and elsewhere. This,

ing. An important aspect of this crisis is the tendency for productive capacity to outstrip effective demand, which arises in large part from the imbalance between capitalists' need for a high rate of profit and their simultaneous need to ensure that workers have enough wealth and income so that they can keep buying the products on which those profits depend. Inequality has been increasing particularly in neo-liberal countries like the UK and USA, which means that the economy faces as realisation crisis (see section C.7), a crisis which was avoided in the short-term by deepening debt for working people (debt levels more than doubled between the 1950s to the 1990s, from 25% to over 60%). In 2007, the chickens came hole to roost with a global credit crunch much worse than the previous finance crises of the neo-liberal era.

Over-investment has been magnified due to the East-Asian Tigers and China which, thanks to their intervention in the market (and repressive regimes against labour), ensured they were a more profitable place to invest than elsewhere. Capital flooded into the area, ensuring a relative over-investment was inevitable. As we argued in section C.7.2, crisis is possible simply due to the lack of information provided by the price mechanism — economic agents can react in such a way that the collective result of individually rational decisions is irrational. Thus the desire to reap profits in the Tiger economies resulted in a squeeze in profits as the aggregate investment decisions resulted in over-investment, and so over-production and falling profits.

In effect, the South East Asian economies suffered from the "fallacy of composition." When you are the first Asian export-driven economy, you are competing with high-cost Western producers and so your cheap workers, low taxes and lax environmental laws allow you to under-cut your competitors and make profits. However, as more tigers joined into the market, they end up competing against **each other** and so their profit margins would decrease towards their actual



which returned some of the surplus value workers produced back into our own hands) hindered "wealth creation" (i.e. economic growth). Do not struggle over income, they argued, let the market decide and everyone will be better off.

This argument was dressed up in populist clothes. Thus we find the right-wing guru F.A. von Hayek arguing that, in the case of Britain, the *"legalised powers of the unions have become the biggest obstacle to raising the standards of the working class as a whole. They are the chief cause of the unnecessarily big differences between the best- and worse-paid workers."* He maintained that *"the elite of the British working class ... derive their relative advantages by keeping workers who are* ***worse off*** *from improving their position."* Moreover, he *"predict[ed] that the average worker's income would rise fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, and where the exploitation of workers by monopolistic trade union organisations of specialised workers are effectively outlawed."* [**1980s Unemployment and the Unions**, p. 107, p. 108 and p. 110]

Now, if von Hayek's claims were true we could expect that in the aftermath of Thatcher government's trade union reforms we would have seen: a rise in economic growth (usually considered as **the** means to improve living standards for workers by the right); that this growth would be more equally distributed; a decrease in the differences between high and low paid workers; a reduction in the percentage of low paid workers as they improved their positions when freed from union *"exploitation"*; and that wages rise fastest in countries with the highest wage flexibility. Unfortunately for von Hayek, the actual trajectory of the British economy exposed his claims as nonsense.

Looking at each of his claims in turn we discover that rather than "exploit" other workers, trade unions are an essential means to shift income from capital to labour (which is why capital fights labour organisers tooth and nail). And, equally important, labour militancy aids **all** workers by providing a floor under which wages cannot drop (non-unionised firms

have to offer similar programs to prevent unionisation and be able to hire workers) and by maintaining aggregate demand. This positive role of unions in aiding **all** workers can be seen by comparing Britain before and after Thatcher's von Hayek inspired trade union and labour market reforms.

There has been a steady fall in growth in the UK since the trade union "reforms". In the "bad old days" of the 1970s, with its strikes and "militant unions" growth was 2.4% in Britain. It fell to 2% in the 1980s and fell again to 1.2% in the 1990s. A similar pattern of slowing growth as wage flexibility and market reform has increased can be seen in the US economy (it was 4.4% in the 1960s, 3.2% in the 1970s, 2.8% in the 1980s and 1.9% in the first half of the 1990s). [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 236] Given that the free-market right proclaims higher economic growth is the only way to make workers better off, growth rates have steadily fallen internationally since the domination of their ideology. Thus growth of output per head in the USA, Europe, Japan and the OECD countries between 1979 to 1990 was lower than in 1973–9, and 1990–2004 lower still. The deregulation, privatisation, anti-union laws and other neo-liberal policies have *"failed to bring an increase in the growth rate."* [Andrew Glyn, **Capitalism Unleashed**, p. 131] What growth spurts there have been were associated with speculative bubbles (in the American economy, dot.com stocks in the late 1990s and housing in the 2000s) which burst with disastrous consequences.

So the rate of "wealth creation" (economic growth) has steadily fallen as unions were "reformed" in line with von Hayek's ideology (and lower growth means that the living standards of the working class as a whole do not rise as fast as they did under the "exploitation" of the "monopolistic" trade unions).

If we look at the differences between the highest and lowest paid workers, we find that rather than decrease, they have in fact shown *"a dramatic widening out of the distribution with the*



*to the stable financial order — so nations were effectively blocked from measures that might reduce permanent unemployment or ameliorate the decline in wages ... The reality of slow growth, in turn, drove the governments into their deepening indebtedness, since the disappointing growth inevitably undermined tax revenues while it expanded the public welfare costs. The rentier regime repeatedly instructed governments to reform their spending priorities — that is, withdraw benefits from dependent citizens."* [Greider, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 297–8]

Of course, industrial capital **also** hates labour, so there is a basis of an alliance between the two sides of capital, even if they do disagree over the specifics of the economic policies implemented. Given that a key aspect of the neo-liberal reforms was the transformation of the labour market from a post-war sellers' market to a nineteenth century buyers' market with its related effects on workplace discipline, wage claims and proneness to strike, industrial capital could not but be happy even if its members quibbled over details. Doug Henwood correctly argues that *"Liberals and populists often search for potential allies among industrialists, reasoning that even if financial interests suffer in a boom, firms that trade in real, rather than fictitious, products would thrive when growth is strong. In general, industrialists are less sympathetic to these arguments. Employers in any industry like slack in the labour market; it makes for a pliant workforce, one unlikely to make demands or resist speedups."* In addition, *"many non-financial corporations have heavy financial interests."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123 and p. 135]

Thus the general stagnation afflicting much of the world, a stagnation which regularly develop into open crisis as the needs of finance undermine the real economy which, ultimately, it is dependent upon. The contradiction between short term profits and long term survival inherent in capitalism strikes again.

Crisis, as we have noted above, has appeared in areas previously considered as strong economies and it has been spread-

cessfully even if *"the US financial system performs dismally at its advertised task, that of efficiently directing society's savings towards their optimal investment pursuits. The system is stupefyingly expensive, gives terrible signals for the allocation of capital, and has surprisingly little to do with real investment."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 3] As most investment comes from internal funds, the rise in the rentiers share of the surplus has meant less investment and so the stagnation of the economy. The weakening economy has increased financial strength, which in turn leads to a weakening in the real economy. A vicious circle, and one reflected in the slowing of economic growth over the last 30 years.

The increasing dominance of finance capital has, in effect, created a market for government policies. As finance capital has become increasingly global in nature governments must secure, protect and expand the field of profit-making for financial capital and transnational corporations, otherwise they will be punished by dis-investment by global markets (i.e. finance capital). These policies have been at the expense of the underlying economy in general, and of the working class in particular:

> *"Rentier power was directed at labour, both organised and unorganised ranks of wage earners, because it regarded rising wages as a principal threat to the stable order. For obvious reasons, this goal was never stated very clearly, but financial markets understood the centrality of the struggle: protecting the value of their capital required the suppression of labour incomes."* [William Greider, **One World, Ready or Not**, p. 302]

For example, *"the practical effect of finance capital's hegemony was to lock the advanced economies and their governments in a malignant spiral, restricting them to bad choices. Like bondholders in general, the new governing consensus explicitly assumed that faster economic growth was dangerous — threatening*



*best-workers doing much better"* since Thatcher was elected in 1979 [Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (eds.), **Paying for Inequality**, p. 100] This is important, as average figures can hide how badly those in the bottom (80%!) are doing. In an unequal society, the gains of growth are monopolised by the few and we would expect rising inequality over time alongside average growth. In America inequality has dramatically increased since the 1970s, with income and wealth growth in the 1980s going predominately to the top 20% (and, in fact, mostly to the top 1% of the population). The bottom 80% of the population saw their wealth grow by 1.2% and their income by 23.7% in the 1980s, while for the top 20% the respective figures were 98.2% and 66.3% (the figures for the top 1% were 61.6% and 38.9%, respectively). [Edward N. Wolff, *"How the Pie is Sliced"*, **The American Prospect**, no. 22, Summer 1995] There has been a *"fanning out of the pay distribution"* with the gap between the top 10% of wage-earners increasing compared to those in the middle and bottom 10%. Significantly, in the neo-liberal countries the rise in inequality is *"considerably higher"* than in European ones. In America, for example, *"real wages at the top grew by 27.2% between 1979 and 2003 as compared to 10.2% in the middle"* while real wages for the bottom 10% *"did not grow at all between 1979 and 2003."* In fact, most of the gains in the top 10% *"occurred amongst the top 5%, and two-thirds of it within the top 1%."* Unsurprising, the neo-liberal countries of the UK, USA and New Zealand saw the largest increases in inequality. [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 116–8 and p. 168]

Given that inequality has increased, the condition of the average worker must have suffered. For example, Ian Gilmore states that *"[i]n the 1980s, for the first time for fifty years … the poorer half of the population saw its share of total national income shirk."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, p. 113] According to Noam Chomsky, *"[d]uring the Thatcher decade, the income share of the bottom half of the population fell from one-third to one-fourth"* and the between 1979 and 1992, the share of total in-

come of the top 20% grew from 35% to 40% while that of the bottom 20% fell from 10% to 5%. In addition, the number of UK employees with weekly pay below the Council of Europe's *"decency threshold"* increased from 28.3% in 1979 to 37% in 1994. [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 144 and p. 145] Moreover, *"[b]ack in the early 1960s, the heaviest concentration of incomes fell at 80–90 per cent of the mean .. . But by the early 1990s there had been a dramatic change, with the peak of the distribution falling at just 40–50 per cent of the mean. One-quarter of the population had incomes below half the average by the early 1990s as against 7 per cent in 1977 and 11 per cent in 1961."* [Elliot and Atkinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235] *"Overall,"* notes Takis Fotopoulos, *"average incomes increased by 36 per cent during this period [1979-1991/2], but 70 per cent of the population had a below average increase in their income."* [**Towards an Inclusive Democracy**, p. 113]

The reason for this rising inequality is not difficult to determine. When workers organise and strike, they can keep more of what they produce in their own hands. The benefits of productivity growth, therefore, can be spread. With unions weakened, such gains will accumulate in fewer hands and flood upwards. This is precisely what happened. Before (approximately) 1980 and the neo-liberal assault on unions, productivity and wages rose hand-in-hand in America, afterward productivity continued to rise while wages flattened. In fact, the value of the output of an average worker *"has risen almost 50 percent since 1973. Yet the growing concentration of income in the hands of a small minority had proceeded so rapidly that we're not sure whether the typical American has gained* ***anything*** *from rising productivity."* Rather than "trickle down" *"the lion's share of economic growth in America over the past thirty years has gone to a small, wealthy minority."* In short: *"The big winners ... have been members of a very narrow elite: the top 1 percent or less of the population."* [Paul Krugman, **The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 124, p. 244 and p. 8]



producing regular and deepening crisis. This is despite (or, more likely, **because of**) the free market reforms imposed and the deregulation of finance capital (we say "because of" simply because neo-classical economics argue that pro-market reforms would increase growth and improve the economy, but as we noted in section C.1 such economics has little basis in reality and so their recommendations are hardly going to produce positive results). Of course as the ruling class have been doing well this underlying slowdown has been ignored and obviously claims of crisis are only raised when economic distress reach the elite.

Crisis (particularly financial crisis) has become increasingly visible, reflecting the underlying weakness of the global economy (rising inequality, lack of investment in producing real goods in favour of speculation in finance, etc.). This underlying weakness has been hidden by the speculator performance of the world's stock markets, which, ironically enough, has helped create that weakness to begin with! As one expert on Wall Street argues, *"Bond markets ... hate economic strength ... Stocks generally behave badly just as the real economy is at its strongest ... Stocks thrive on a cool economy, and wither in a hot one."* In other words, real economic weakness is reflected in financial strength. Unsurprisingly, then, *"[w]hat might be called the rentier share of the corporate surplus — dividends plus interest as a percentage of pre-tax profits and interest — has risen sharply, from 20–30% in the 1950s to 60% in the 1990s."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 124 and p. 73]

This helps explain the stagnation which has afflicted the economies of the west. The rich have been placing more of their ever-expanding wealth in stocks, allowing this market to rise in the face of general economic torpor. Rather than being used for investment, surplus is being funnelled into the finance market (retained earnings in the US have decreased as interest and dividend payments have increased [Brenner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]). However, such markets do concentrate wealth very suc-

countries were Asian, including Japan and Taiwan. All the Asian countries struggling just a few years later qualified as "free." Yet, as mentioned in section C.10.1, such claims were manifestly false: *"it was not **laissez-faire** policies that induced their spectacular growth. As a number of studies have shown, the expansion of the Asian Tigers was based on massive state intervention that boosted their export sectors, by public policies involving not only heavy protectionism but even deliberate distortion of market prices to stimulate investment and trade."* [Fotopoulos, **Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Moreover, for a long period these countries also banned unions and protest, but then for the right "free markets" always seem compatible with lack of freedom for workers to organise.

Needless to say, **after** the crisis of the late 1990s, the free-marketeers discovered the statism that had always been there and danced happily on the grave of what used to be called *"the Asian miracle"*. It was perverse to see the supporters of "free-market" capitalism concluding that history was rendering its verdict on the Asian model of capitalism while placing into the Memory Hole the awkward fact that until the crisis they themselves had taken great pains to deny that such a model existed! Such hypocrisy is not only truly sickening, it also undermines their own case for the wonders of "the market." For until the crisis appeared, the world's investors — which is to say "the market" — saw nothing but golden opportunities ahead for these "free" economies. They showed their faith by shoving billions into Asian equity markets, while foreign banks contentedly handed out billions in loans. If Asia's problems were systemic and the result of these countries' statist policies, then investors' failure to recognise this earlier is a blow against the market, not for it.

So, as can be seen, the global economy has been marked by an increasing stagnation, the slowing down of growth, weak (and jobless) recoveries, speculative bubbles driving what growth there is and increasing financial instability



Looking at America, after the Second World War the real income of the typical family ("exploited" by "monopolistic" trade unions) grew by 2.7% per year, with *"incomes all through the income distribution grew at about the same rate."* Since 1980 (i.e., after working people were freed from the tyranny of unions), *"medium family income has risen only about 0.7 percent a year"* Median household income *"grew modestly"* from 1973 to 2005, the total gain was about 16%. Yet this *"modest gain"* may *"overstate"* how well American families were doing, as it *was achieved in part through longer working hours.* For example, *"a gain in family income that occurs because a spouse goes to work isn't the same thing as a wage increase. In particular it may carry hidden costs that offset some of the gains in money."* This stagnation is, of course, being denied by the right. Yet, as Krugman memorably puts it: *"Modern economists debate whether American median income has risen or fallen since the early 1970s. What's really telling is the fact that we're even having this debate."* So while the average values may have went up, because of *"rising inequality, good performance in overall numbers like GDP hasn't translated into gains for ordinary workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 55, pp. 126–7, p. 124 and p. 201]

Luckily for American capitalism a poll in 2000 found that 39% of Americans believe they are either in the wealthiest 1% or will be there *"soon"*! [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 179] In fact, as we discussed in section B.7.2, social mobility has **fallen** under neo-liberalism — perhaps unsurprisingly as it is easier to climb a hill than a mountain. This is just as important as the explosion in inequality as the "free-market" right argue that dynamic social mobility makes up for wealth and income inequality. As Krugman notes, Americans *"may believe that anyone can succeed through hard work and determination, but the facts say otherwise."* In reality, mobility is *"highest in the Scandinavian countries, and most results suggest that mobility is lower in the United States than it is in France, Canada, and maybe even in Britain.*

*Not only don't Americans have equal opportunity, opportunity is less equal here than elsewhere in the West."* Without the blinkers of free market capitalist ideology this should be unsurprising: *"A society with highly unequal results is, more or less inevitably, a society with highly unequal opportunity, too."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 247 and p. 249]

Looking at the claim that trade union members gained their *"relative advantage by keeping workers who are **worse off** from improving their position"* it would be fair to ask whether the percentage of workers in low-paid jobs decreased in Britain after the trade union reforms. In fact, the percentage of workers below the Low Pay Unit's definition of low pay (namely two-thirds of men's median earnings) **increased** — from 16.8% in 1984 to 26.2% in 1991 for men, 44.8% to 44.9% for women. For manual workers it rose by 15% to 38.4%, and for women by 7.7% to 80.7% (for non-manual workers the figures were 5.4% rise to 13.7% for men and a 0.5% rise to 36.6%). [Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (eds.), **Op. Cit.**, p.102] If unions **were** gaining at the expense of the worse off, you would expect a **decrease** in the number in low pay, **not** an increase. An OECD study concluded that *"[t]ypically, countries with high rates of collective bargaining and trade unionisation tend to have low incidence of low paid employment."* [**OECD Employment Outlook**, 1996, p. 94] Within America, we also discover that higher union density is associated with fewer workers earning around the minimum wage and that "right-to-work" states (i.e., those that pass anti-union laws) *"tend to have lower wages, lower standard of living, and more workers earning around the minimum wage."* It is hard not to conclude that states *"passed laws aimed at making unionisation more difficult would imply that they sought to maintain the monopoly power of employers at the expense of workers."* [Oren M. Levin-Waldman, *"The Minimum Wage and Regional Wage Structure: Implications for Income Distribution"*, pp. 635–57, **Journal of Economic Issues**, Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, p. 639 and p. 655]



considered a "Golden Age" and so is presented as such by the media. As economist Paul Krugman summarises, in America while the bulk of the population are working longer and harder to make ends meet *"the really big gains went to the really, really rich."* In fact, *"only the top 1 percent has done better since the 1970s than it did in the generation after World War II. Once you get way up the scale, however, the gains have been spectacular — the top tenth of a percent saw its income rise fivefold, and the top .01 percent of American is seven times richer than they were in 1973."* Significantly, *the top 0.1% of Americans, a class with a minimum income of about $1.3 million and an average of about $3.5 million, receives more than 7 percent of all income — up from just 2.2 percent in 1979."* [**The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 129 and p. 259]

So it is for this reason that it may be wrong to term this slow rot a "crisis" as it is hardly one for the ruling elite as their share in social wealth, power and income has steadily increased over this period. However, for the majority it is undoubtedly a crisis (the term *"silent depression"* has been accurately used to describe this). Unsurprisingly, when the chickens came home to roost under the Bush Junta and the elite faced economic collapse, the state bailed them out.

The only countries which saw substantial and dynamic growth after 1973 where those which used state intervention to violate the eternal "laws" of neo-classical economics, namely the South East Asian countries (in this they followed the example of Japan which had used state intervention to grow at massive rates after the war). Of course, before the economic crisis of 1997, capitalist ideologues argued that these countries were classic examples of "free market" economies. Right-wing icon F.A von Hayek asserted that *"South Korea and other newcomers"* had *"discovered the benefits of free markets."* [**1980s Unemployment and the Unions**, p. 113] In 1995, the **Heritage Foundation** (a right-wing think-tank) released its index of economic freedom. Four of the top seven

This crisis is not confined to the economy. It extends into the ecological and the social, with the quality of life and well-being decreasing as GDP grows (as we noted in section C.10, economic factors cannot, and do not, indicate human happiness). However, here we discuss economic factors. This does not imply that the social and ecological crises are unimportant or are reducible to the economy. Far from it. We concentrate on the economic factor simply because this is the factor usually stressed by the establishment and it is useful to indicate the divergence of reality and hype we are currently being subjected to.

Ironically enough, as Marxist Robert Brenner points out, *"as the neo-classical medicine has been administered in even stronger doses, the economy has performed steadily less well. The 1970s were worse than the 1960s, the 1980s worse than the 1970s, and the 1990s have been worse than the 1980s."* [*"The Economics of Global Turbulence"*, **New Left Review**, no. 229, p. 236] This is ironic because during the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s the right argued that too much equality and democracy harmed the economy, and so us all worse-of in the long run (due to lower growth, sluggish investment and so on). However, after decades of pro-capitalist governments, rising inequality, increased freedom for capital and its owners and managers, the weakening of trade unions and so on, economic growth has become worse!

If we look at the USA in the 1990s (usually presented as an economy that "got it right") we find that the *"cyclical upturn of the 1990s has, in terms of the main macro-economic indicators of growth — output, investment, productivity, and real compensation — has been even less dynamic than its relatively weak predecessors of the 1980s and the 1970s (not to mention those of the 1950s and 1960s)."* [Brenner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 5] Of course, the economy is presented as a success — inequality is growing, the rich are getting richer and wealth is concentrating into fewer and fewer hands and so for the rich and finance capital, it can be



As far as von Hayek's prediction on wage flexibility leading to the *"average worker's income"* rising fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, it has been proved totally wrong. Between 1967 and 1971, real wages grew (on average) by 2.95% per year in the UK (nominal wages grew by 8.94%) [P. Armstrong, A. Glyn and J. Harrison, **Capitalism Since World War II**, p. 272]. In comparison, real household disposable income grew by just 0.5 percent between June 2006 and 2007. Average weekly earnings rose 2.9% between April 2006 and 2007 while inflation rose by 3.6% (Retail Prices Index) and 2.8% (Consumer Prices Index). [Elliot and Atkinson, **The Gods That Failed**, p. 163] This is part of a general pattern, with UK Real Wages per employee being an average 3.17% per year between 1960 and 1974, falling to 1.8% between 1980 and 1999. In America, the equivalent figures are 2.37% and 1.02%. [Eckhard Hein and Thorsten Schulten, **Unemployment, Wages and Collective Bargaining in the European Union**, p. 9] Looking at the wider picture, during the early 1970s when strikes and union membership increased, *"real wage increases rose steadily to reach over 4% per year"* in the West. However, after von Hayek's anti-union views were imposed, *"real wages have grown very slowly."* In anti-union America, the median wage was $13.62 in 2003 compared to $12.36 in 1979 (reckoned in 2003 prices). In Europe and Japan *"average wages have done only a little better, having grown around 1% per year."* [Glyn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 5 and p. 116] It gets worse as these are average figures. Given that inequality soared during this period the limited gains of the neo-liberal era were not distributed as evenly as before (in the UK, for example, wage growth was concentrated at the top end of society. [Elliot and Atkinson, **Fantasy Island**, p. 99]).

Nor can it be said that breaking the unions and lower real wages translated into lower unemployment in the UK as the average unemployment rate between 1996 and 1997 was 7.1% compared to 4.5% between 1975 and 1979 (the year Thatcher

took power). The average between 1960 and 1974 was 1.87% compared to 8.7% over the whole Thatcherite period of 1980 to 1999. Perhaps this is not too surprising, given that (capitalist economic theology aside) unemployment *"systematically weakens the bargaining power of trade unions."* In short: *"Neither on the theoretical nor empirical level can a strictly inverse relation between the real wage rate and the level of unemployment be derived."* [Hein and Schulten, **Op. Cit.**, p. 9, p. 3 and p. 2] As we discussed in section C.1.5 this should come as no surprise to anyone with awareness of the real nature of unemployment and the labour market. So unemployment did not fall after the trade union reforms, quite the reverse: *"By the time Blair came to power [in 1997], unemployment in Britain was falling, although it still remained higher than it had been when the [last Labour Government of] Callaghan left office in May 1979."* [Elliot and Atkinson, **Age of Insecurity**, p. 258] To be fair, von Hayek did argue that falls in unemployment would be *"a slow process"* but nearly 20 years of far higher unemployment is moving backwards!

So we have a stark contrast between the assertions of the right and the reality their ideology helped create. The reason for this difference is not hard to discover. As economist Paul Krugman correctly argues unions *"raise average wages for their membership; they also, indirectly and to a lesser extent, raise wages for similar workers ... as nonunionised employers try to diminish the appeal of union drives to their workers . .. unions tend to narrow income gaps among blue-collar workers, by negotiating bigger wage increases for their worse-paid members ... And nonunion employers, seeking to forestall union organisers, tend to echo this effect."* He argues that *"if there's a single reason blue-collar workers did so much better in the fifties than they had in the twenties, it was the rise of unions"* and that unions *"were once an important factor limiting income inequality, both because of their direct effect in raising their members' wages and because the union pattern of wage settlements ... was ... reflected*



production process. The pursuit of ever greater profits is not compatible with social justice and responsibility.

For these reasons, the peace and social justice movements are fundamentally linked through their shared need for a worker-controlled economy. Moreover, extreme poverty makes military service one of the few legal options open for many individuals to improve their social situation. These considerations illustrate further links between the peace and social justice movements — and between those movements and anarchism, which is the conceptual "glue" that can potentially unite all the new social movement in a single anti-authoritarian coalition.

## J.4.4 What is the *"economic structural crisis"*?

There is an ongoing structural crisis in the global capitalist economy. Compared to the post-war "Golden Age" of 1950 to 1973, the period from 1974 has seen a continual worsening in economic performance in the West and for Japan. For example, growth is lower, unemployment is far higher, labour productivity lower as is investment. Average rates of unemployment in the major industrialised countries have risen sharply since 1973, especially after 1979. Unemployment *"in the advanced capitalist countries ... increased by 56 per cent between 1973 and 1980 (from an average 3.4 per cent to 5.3 per cent of the labour force) and by another 50 per cent since then (from 5.3 per cent of the labour force in 1980 to 8.0 per cent in 1994)."* Job insecurity has increased with, for example, the USA, having the worse job insecurity since the depression of the 1930s. [Takis Fotopoulos, **Towards and Inclusive Democracy**, p. 35 and p. 141] In addition, the world economy have become far less stable with regular financial crises sweeping the world of de-regulated capitalism every few years or so.

In short, social injustice is inherent in the exploitative functions of the state, which are made possible by the authoritarian form of state institutions. Similarly, the authoritarian structure of capitalist companies gives rise to social injustice due to exploitation producing massive income differentials and wealth disparity between owners/management and labour. Hence the success of the social justice movement, like that of the feminist, ecology, and peace movements, depends on dismantling hierarchies. This means not only that these movements all imply anarchism but that they are related in such a way that it is impossible to conceive one of them achieving its goals in isolation from any of the others. To take just one example, let us consider the relationship between social justice and peace, which can be seen by examining a specific social justice issue: labour rights.

The production of advanced weapons systems is highly profitable for capitalists, which is why more technologically complex and precise weapons keep getting built with government help (with the public paying the tab by way of taxes). Now, we may reasonably argue that it is a fundamental human right to be able to choose freely whether or not one will personally contribute to the production of technologies that could lead to the extinction of the human race. Yet because of the authoritarian form of the capitalist corporation, rank-and-file workers have virtually no say in whether the companies for which they work will produce such technologies. (To the objection that workers can always quit if they don't like company policy, the reply is that they may not be able to find other work and therefore that the choice is not genuinely free). Hence the only way that ordinary workers can obtain the right to be consulted on life-or-death company policies is to control the production process themselves, through self-management as production for need and use will never come from the employer. The owners of production in a capitalist society will never begin to take social priorities into account in the



*in the labour market as a whole."* With the smashing of the unions came rising inequality, with the *"sharpest increases in wage inequality in the Western world have taken place in the United States and in Britain, both of which experience sharp declines in union membership."* Unions restrict inequality because *"they act as a countervailing force to management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51, p. 49, p. 149 and p. 263]

So under the neo-liberal regime instigated by Thatcher and Reagan the power, influence and size of the unions were reduced considerably and real wage growth fell considerably — which is the **exact** opposite of von Hayek's predictions. Flexible wages and weaker unions have harmed the position of **all** workers (Proudhon: *"Contrary to all expectation! It takes an economist not to expect these things"* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 203]). So comparing the claims of von Hayek to what actually happened after trade union "reform" and the reduction of class struggle suggests that claims that social struggle is self-defeating are false (and self-serving, considering it is usually bosses, employer supported parties and economists who make these claims). A **lack** of social struggle has been correlated with low economic growth and often stagnant (even declining) wages. So while social struggle **may** make capital flee and other problems, lack of it is no guarantee of prosperity (quite the reverse, if the last quarter of the 20$^{th}$ century is anything to go by). Indeed, a lack of social struggle will make bosses be more likely to cut wages, worsen working conditions and so on — after all, they feel they can get away with it! Which brings home the fact that to make reforms last it is necessary to destroy capitalism.

Of course, no one can **know** that struggle will make things better. It is a guess; no one can predict the future. Not all struggles are successful and many can be very difficult. If the *"military is a role model for the business world"* (in the words of an ex-CEO of Hill & Knowlton Public Relations), and it is, then **any** struggle against it and other concentrations of power may,

and often is, difficult and dangerous at times. [quoted by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton in **Toxic Sludge Is Good For You!**, p. 47] But, as Zapata once said, *"better to die on your feet than live on your knees!"* All we can say is that social struggle can and does improve things and, in terms of its successes and transforming effect on those involved, well worth the potential difficulties it can create. Moreover, without struggle there is little chance of creating a free society, dependent as it is on individuals who refuse to bow to authority and have the ability and desire to govern themselves. In addition, social struggle is always essential, not only to **win** improvements, but to **keep** them as well. In order to fully secure improvements you have to abolish capitalism and the state. Not to do so means that any reforms can and will be taken away (and if social struggle does not exist, they will be taken away sooner rather than later). Ultimately, most anarchists would argue that social struggle is not an option — we either do it or we put up with the all the petty (and not so petty) impositions of authority. If we do not say "no" then the powers that be will walk all over us.

As the history of neo-liberalism shows, a lack of social struggle is fully compatible with worsening conditions. Ultimately, if you want to be treated as a human being you have to stand up for your dignity — and that means thinking and rebelling. As Bakunin argued in **God and the State**, human freedom and development is based on these. Without rebellion, without social struggle, humanity would stagnate beneath authority forever and never be in a position to be free. So anarchists agree wholeheartedly with the Abolitionist Frederick Douglass:

> *"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder*



*tem."* While the later development of these initiatives did not have the radicalising effects that Benello hoped for, they did *"represent a local initiative that does not depend on the federal government for action. Thus it is a step toward local empowerment … Steps that increase local autonomy change the power relations between the centre and its colonies … The nuclear free zone movement has a thrust which is clearly congruent with anarchist ideas … The same motives which go into the declaration of a nuclear free zone would dictate that in other areas where the state and the corporate systems services are dysfunctional and involve excessive costs, they should be dispensed with."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137 and pp. 140–1]

The social justice movement is composed of people seeking fair and compassionate solutions to problems such as poverty, unemployment, economic exploitation, discrimination, poor housing, lack of health insurance, wealth and income inequalities, and the like. In the aftermath of decades of especially single-minded pursuit of this priority by neo-liberal administrations, the United States, for example, is reaping the grim harvest: wages stagnate, personal debt soars, homelessness stalks the streets; social welfare budgets are slashed to the bone while poverty, unemployment, and underemployment grow; sweatshops mushrooming in the large cities; millions of Americans without any health insurance while others face rocketing costs; obscene wealth inequalities and falling social mobility; and so on. Britain under the neo-liberal policies of Thatcher, Major and Blair experienced a social deterioration similar to that in the US.

It is not difficult to show that the major problems concerning the social justice movement can all be traced back to the hierarchy and domination. For, given the purpose of hierarchy, the highest priority of the elites who control the state is necessarily to maintain their own power and privileges, regardless of the suffering involved for subordinate classes.

*today because prevailing nuclear policies can be considered as an ultimate stage in the divergence between the interests of governments and their peoples . .. the implications when revealed serve to raise fundamental questions regarding the advisability of entrusting governments with questions of life and death ... There is thus a pressing impetus to re-think the role, scale, and structure of national governments."* Moreover, *"[s]o long as profits are tied to defence production, speaking truth to the elites involved is not likely to get very far"* as *"it is only within the boundaries of the profit system that the corporate elites would have any space to move."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 138 and p. 34] Thus the peace movement implicitly contains a libertarian critique of both forms of the power system — the political and economical.

In addition, certain of the practical aspects of the peace movement also suggest anarchistic elements. The use of non-violent direct action to protest against the war machine can only be viewed as a positive development by anarchists. Not only does it use effective, anarchistic methods of struggle it also radicalises those involved, making them more receptive to anarchist ideas and analysis.

If we look at the implications of *"nuclear free zones"* we can detect anarchistic tendencies within them. A nuclear free zone involves a town or region declaring an end of its association with the nuclear military industrial complex. They prohibit the research, production, transportation and deployment of nuclear weapons as well as renouncing the right to be defended by nuclear power. This movement was popular in the 1980s, with many areas in Europe and the Pacific Basin declaring that they were nuclear free zones. As Benello pointed out, *"[t]he development of campaigns for nuclear free zones suggests a strategy which can educate and radicalise local communities. Indeed, by extending the logic of the nuclear free zone idea, we can begin to flesh out a libertarian municipalist perspective which can help move our communities several steps towards autonomy from both the central government and the existing corporate sys-*



*and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.*

*"This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what a people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."* [**The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass**, vol. 2, p. 437]

Of course, being utterly wrong has not dented von Hayek's reputation with the right nor stopped him being quoted in arguments in favour of flexibility and free market reforms (what can we expect? The right still quote Milton Friedman whose track-record was equally impressive). Still, why let the actual development of the economies influenced by von Hayek's ideology get in the way? Perhaps it is fortunate that he once argued that economic theories can *"never be verified or falsified by reference to facts. All that we can and must verify is the presence of our assumptions in the particular case."* [**Individualism and Economic Order**, p. 73] With such a position all is saved — the obvious problem is that capitalism is still not pure enough and the "reforms" must not only continue but be made deeper... As Kropotkin stressed, *"economists who continue to consider economic forces alone ... without taking into account **the ideology of the State**, or the forces that each State necessarily places at the service of the rich ... remain completely outside the realities of the economic and social world."* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *"Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change"*, pp. 67–86, **Sub-Stance**, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 72–3]

And, needless to say, while three decades of successful capitalist class war goes without mention in polite circles, documenting its results gets you denounced as advocating "class war"! It is more than pass the time when working class people should make that a reality — particularly given the results of not doing so.

## J.4.3 Are the new social movements a positive development for anarchists?

When assessing the revolutionary potential of our own era, we must note again that modern civilisation is under constant pressure from the potential catastrophes of social breakdown, ecological destruction, and proliferating weapons of mass destruction. These crises have drawn attention as never before to the inherently counter-evolutionary nature of the authoritarian paradigm, making more and more people aware that the human race is headed for extinction if it persists in outmoded forms of thought and behaviour. This awareness produces a favourable climate for the reception of new ideas, and thus an opening for radical educational efforts aimed at creating the mass transformation of consciousness which must take place alongside the creation of new liberatory institutions.

This receptiveness to new ideas has led to a number of new social movements in recent years. From the point of view of anarchism, the four most important of these are perhaps the feminist, ecology, peace, and social justice movements. Each of these movements contain a great deal of anarchist content, particularly insofar as they imply the need for decentralisation and direct democracy. Since we have already commented on the anarchist aspects of the ecology and feminist movements, here we will limit our remarks to the peace and social justice movements.



It is clear to many members of the peace movement that international disarmament, like the liberation of women, saving the planet's ecosystem, and preventing social breakdown, can never be attained without a shift of mass consciousness involving widespread rejection of hierarchy, which is based on the authoritarian principles of domination and exploitation. As C. George Bennello argued: *"Since peace involves the positive process of replacing violence by other means of settling conflict ... it can be argued that some sort of institutional change is necessary. For if insurgency is satisfied with specific reform goals, and does not seek to transform the institutional structure of society by getting at its centralised make-up, the war system will probably not go away. This is really what we should mean by decentralising: making institutions serve human ends again by getting humans to be responsible at every level within them."* [**From the Ground Up**, p. 31]

When pursued along gender, class, racial, ethnic, or national lines, domination and exploitation are the primary causes of resentment, hatred, anger, and hostility, which often explode into individual or organised violence. Given this, both domestic and international peace depend on decentralisation, i.e. dismantling hierarchies, thus replacing domination and exploitation by the anarchist principles of co-operation and mutual aid.

Direct democracy is the other side of decentralisation. In order for an organisation to spread power horizontally rather than concentrating it at the apex of a hierarchy, all of its members have to have an equal voice in making the decisions that affect them. Hence decentralisation implies self-management. So, anarchists argue, the peace movement implies anarchism because world peace is impossible without both decentralisation and direct democracy (*"a federated people would be a people organised for peace; what would they do with armies?"* [Proudhon, **Du Principe Fédératif**, pp. 320–1]). As Benello correctly argued, the *"anarchist perspective has an unparalleled relevance*

*workplaces"*, capitalism *"may be systematically biased against participatory workplaces"* and as *"a result the economy can be trapped in a socially suboptimal position."* Capital market issues, amongst others, help explain this as such firms *"face higher transaction costs for raising equity and loans."* [David I. Levine and Laura D'Andrea Tyson, *"Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment"*, pp. 183–237, **Paying for Productivity**, Alan S. Blinder (ed.), pp. 235–6 and p. 221]

Tom Cahill outlines the investment problem when he writes that the *"financial problem"* is a major reason why co-operatives failed in the past, for *"basically the unusual structure and aims of co-operatives have always caused problems for the dominant sources of capital. In general, the finance environment has been hostile to the emergence of the co-operative spirit."* He also notes that they were *"unable to devise structuring to **maintain a boundary** between those who work and those who own or control ... It is understood that when outside investors were allowed to have power within the co-op structure, co-ops lost their distinctive qualities."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 238–239] So even **if** co-operative do attract investors, the cost of so doing may be to transform the co-operatives into capitalist firms. So while all investors experience risk, this *"is even more acute"* in co-operatives *"because investors must simultaneously cede control **and** risk their entire wealth. Under an unlimited liability rule, investors will rationally demand some control over the firm's operations to protect their wealth. Since [co-operatives] cannot cede control without violating one of the organisation's defining tenets, investors will demand an investment premium, a premium not required from equity investments."* [Everett and Minkler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] Needless to say, such a premium is a strain on a co-operative and makes it harder to survive simply because it has higher costs for debt repayment. If such external investment is not forthcoming, then the co-operative is dependent on retained earnings and its members' savings which, unsurprisingly, are often insufficient.



co-operatives, mutual banks, and so on) are marked by certain common features such as being self-managed, being based upon equality, decentralised and working with other groups and associations within a confederal network based upon mutual aid and solidarity. In other words, they are **anarchist** in both spirit and structure and so create a practical bridge between now and the future free society.

Anarchists consider the building of alternatives as a key aspect of their activity under capitalism. This is because they, like all forms of direct action, are ***"schools of anarchy"*** and also because they make the transition to a free society easier. *"Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests,"* in Malatesta's words, *"the workers develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 95] By creating viable examples of

**"anarchy in action"** we can show that our ideas are practical and convince people that they are not utopian. Therefore this section of the FAQ will indicate the alternatives anarchists support and **why** we support them.

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

well when he argued that working class people had *"to form their own organisations for a direct struggle against capitalism"* and to *"take possession of the necessaries for production, and to control production."* [**Memiors of a Revolutionist**, p. 359] As historian J. Romero Maura correctly summarised, the *"anarchist revolution, when it came, would be essentially brought about by the working class. Revolutionaries needed to gather great strength and must beware of underestimating the strength of reaction"* and so anarchists *"logically decided that revolutionaries had better organise along the lines of labour organisations."* [*"The Spanish case"*, pp. 60–83, **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 66]

As will quickly become obvious in this discussion (as if it had not been so before!) anarchists are firm supporters of ***"self-help,"*** an expression that has been sadly corrupted (like freedom) by the right in recent times. Like freedom, self-help should be saved from the clutches of the right who have no real claim to that expression. Indeed, anarchism was created from and based itself upon working class self-help — for what other interpretation can be gathered from Proudhon's 1848 statement that *"the proletariat must emancipate itself"*? [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 125] So Anarchists have great faith in the abilities of working class people to work out for themselves what their problems are and act to solve them.

Anarchist support and promotion of alternatives is a **key** aspect of this process of self-liberation, and so a key aspect of anarchism. While strikes, boycotts, and other forms of high profile direct action may be more "sexy" than the long and hard task of creating and building social alternatives, these are the nuts and bolts of creating a new world as well as the infrastructure which supports the other activities. These alternatives involve both combative organisations (such as community and workplace unions) as well as more defensive and supportive ones (such as co-operatives and mutual banks). Both have their



> *ment."* [Michael J. Everett and Alanson P. Minkler, *"Evolution and organisational choice in nineteenth-century Britain"*, pp. 51–62, **Cambridge Journal of Economics** vol. 17, No. 1, p. 53]

As an obvious example there are the difficulties co-operatives can face in finding access to credit facilities required by them from capitalist banks and investors. As Tom Cahill notes, co-operatives in the nineteenth century *"had the specific problem of … **giving credit"*** while ***"competition with price cutting capitalist** firms . .. highlighting the inadequate reservoirs of the under-financed co-ops."* [*"Co-operatives and Anarchism: A contemporary Perspective"*, pp 235–58, **For Anarchism**, Paul Goodway (ed.), p. 239] This points to a general issue, namely that there are often difficulties for co-operatives in raising money:

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

In addition, the *"return on capital is limited"* in co-operatives. [Tom Cahill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 247] This means that investors are less-likely to invest in co-operatives, and so co-operatives will tend to suffer from a lack of investment. So despite *"the potential efficiency of such [self-managed]*

**Economic Enterprises**, U. Pagano and R. E. Rowthorn (eds.), p. 100] This is ignored by the likes of Nozick in favour of thought-experiments rooted in the dubious assumptions of bourgeois economics. He implicitly assumed that because most firms are hierarchical today then they must be more efficient. In short, Nozick abused economic selection arguments by simply assuming, without evidence, that the dominant form of organisation is, *ipso facto*, more efficient. In reality, this is not the case.

The question now becomes one of explaining why, if co-operation is more efficient than wage-slavery, does economic liberty not displace capitalism? The awkward fact is that individual efficiency is not the key to survival as such an argument *"ignores the important point that the selection of the 'fitter' in evolution is not simply relative to the less successful but is dependent upon the general circumstances and environment in which selection takes place."* Moreover, an organism survives because it birth rate exceeds its death rate. If more capitalist firms secure funding from capitalist banks then, obviously, it is more likely for them to secure dominance in the economy simply because there are more of them rather than because they are more efficient. As such, large numbers do not imply greater efficiency as the *"rapid flow of new entrants of hierarchical form"* may *"swamp the less hierarchical firms even if other selection processes are working in favour of the latter."* [Hodgson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100 and p. 103] Thus:

> *"The degree of fitness of any organism can only be meaningfully considered in relation to its environment ... the market may help to select firms that are fit for the market, but these surviving firms needn't be the most 'efficient' in some absolute sense. In fact, the specification of 'the market' as a selection process is incomplete because the market is only one institution of many needed to specify an environ-*



part to play in the class struggle, although the combative ones are the most important in creating the spirit of revolt and the possibility of creating an anarchist society.

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

Lastly, we should note we do not list all the forms of organisation anarchists create. For example, we have ignored solidarity groups (for workers on strike or in defence of struggles in other countries) and organisations which are created to campaign against or for certain issues or reforms. Anarchists are in favour of such organisations and work within them to

spread anarchist ideas, tactics and organisational forms. However, these interest groups (while very useful) do not provide a framework for lasting change as do the ones we highlight below (see section J.1.4 for more details on anarchist opinions on such "single issue" campaigns). We have also ignored what have been called *"intentional communities."* This is when a group of individuals squat or buy land and other resources within capitalism and create their own anarchist commune in it. Most anarchists reject this idea as capitalism and the state must be fought, not ignored. In addition, due to their small size, they are rarely viable experiments in communal living and nearly always fail after a short time (for a good summary of Kropotkin's attitude to such communities, which can be taken as typical, see Graham Purchase's **Evolution & Revolution** [pp. 122–125]). Dropping out will not stop capitalism and the state and while such communities may try to ignore the system, they will find that the system will not ignore them — they will come under competitive and ecological pressures from capitalism whether they like it or not assuming they avoid direct political interference.

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

## J.5.1 What is community unionism?

Community unionism is our term for the process of creating participatory communities (called "communes" in classical anarchism) within the current society in order to transform it.



> *have the means, they lack the incentive, because enterprise growth would bring in new workers with whom the increased proceeds would have to be shared. Co-operatives, even when prosperous, do not spontaneously grow. But if this is so, then each new co-operative venture (in a capitalist society) requires a new wealthy radical or a new group of affluent radical workers willing to experiment. Because such people doubtless are in short supply, it follows that the absence of a large and growing co-operative movement proves nothing about the viability of worker self-management, nor about the preferences of workers."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 239]

This means that in, say, a mutualist economy there would be more firms of a smaller size supplying a given market compared to capitalism. So a free economy, with the appropriate institutional framework, need not worry about unemployment for while individual co-operatives may not expand as fast as capitalist firms, more co-operatives would be set up (see section I.3.1 for why the neo-classical analysis of co-operatives which Nozick implicitly invokes is false). In short, the environment within which a specific workplace operates is just as important as its efficiency.

This is important, as the empirical evidence is strong that self-management **is** more efficient than wage-slavery. As economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson summarises, support for *"the proposition that participatory and co-operatives firms enjoy greater productivity and longevity comes from a large amount of ... case study and econometric evidence"* and *"the weight of testimony"* is *"in favour or [indicates] a positive correlation between participation and productivity."* [*"Organizational Form and Economic Evolution: A critique of the Williamsonian hypothesis"*, pp. 98–115, **Democracy and Efficiency in**

operatives will never arrest the growth of capitalism or transcend the narrow horizons of the capitalist economy.

## J.5.11 If workers really want self-management then why are there so few co-operatives?

Supporters of capitalism suggest that producer co-operatives would spring up spontaneously if workers really wanted them. To quote leading propertarian Robert Nozick, under capitalism *"it is open to any wealthy radical or group of workers to buy an existing factory or establish a new one, and to ... institute worker-controlled, democratically-run firms."* If *"they are superior, by market standards, to their more orthodox competitors"* then *"there should be little difficulty in establishing successful factories of this sort."* Thus there is *"a means of realising the worker-control scheme that can be brought about by the voluntary actions of people in a free [sic!] society."* [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, pp. 250–2] So if such co-operatives were really economically viable and desired by workers, they would spread until eventually they undermined capitalism. Propertarians conclude that since this is not happening, it must be because workers' self-management is either economically inefficient or is not really attractive to workers, or both.

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

> *"A worker-managed firm lacks an expansionary dynamic. When a capitalist enterprise is successful, the owner can increase her profits by reproducing her organisation on a larger scale. She lacks neither the means nor the motivation to expand. Not so with a worker-managed firm. Even if the workers*



Basically, a community union is the creation of interested members of a community who decide to form an organisation to fight against injustice and improvements locally. It is a forum by which inhabitants can raise issues that affect themselves and others and provide a means of solving these problems. As such, it is a means of directly involving local people in the life of their own communities and collectively solving the problems facing them as both individuals and as part of a wider society. In this way, local people take part in deciding what effects them and their community and create a self-managed "dual power" to the local and national state. They also, by taking part in self-managed community assemblies, develop their ability to participate and manage their own affairs, so showing that the state is unnecessary and harmful to their interests. Politics, therefore, is not separated into a specialised activity that only certain people do (i.e. politicians). Instead, it becomes communalised and part of everyday life and in the hands of all.

As would be imagined, like the participatory communities that would exist in an anarchist society (see section I.5), the community union would be based upon a mass assembly of its members. Here would be discussed the issues that effect the membership and how to solve them. Thus issues like rent increases, school closures, rising cost of living, taxation, cuts and state-imposed "reforms" to the nature and quality of public services, utilities and resources, repressive laws and so on could be debated and action taken to combat them. Like the communes of a future anarchy, these community unions would be confederated with other unions in different areas in order to co-ordinate joint activity and solve common problems. These confederations would be based upon self-management, mandated and recallable delegates and the creation of administrative action committees to see that the memberships decisions are carried out.

The community union could also raise funds for strikes and other social protests, organise pickets, boycotts and generally

aid others in struggle. By organising their own forms of direct action (such as tax and rent strikes, environmental protests and so on) they can weaken the state while building an self-managed infrastructure of co-operatives to replace the useful functions the state or capitalist firms currently provide. So, in addition to organising resistance to the state and capitalist firms, these community unions could play an important role in creating an alternative economy within capitalism. For example, such unions could have a mutual bank or credit union associated with them which could allow funds to be gathered for the creation of self-managed co-operatives and social services and centres. In this way a communalised co-operative sector could develop, along with a communal confederation of community unions and their co-operative banks.

Such community unions have been formed in many different countries in recent years to fight against numerous attacks on the working class. In the late 1980s and early 1990s groups were created in neighbourhoods across Britain to organise non-payment of the Conservative government's Community Charge (popularly known as the poll tax, this tax was independent on income and was based on the electoral register). Federations of these groups were created to co-ordinate the struggle and pull resources and, in the end, ensured that the government withdrew the hated tax and helped push Thatcher out of government. In Ireland, similar groups were formed to defeat the privatisation of the water industry by a similar non-payment campaign in the mid-1990s.

However, few of these groups have been taken as part of a wider strategy to empower the local community but the few that have indicate the potential of such a strategy. This potential can be seen from two examples of libertarian community organising in Europe, one in Italy and another in Spain, while the neighbourhood assemblies in Argentina show that such



and that by so doing we can reap the individual and social benefits of working together as equals.

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

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

So while co-operatives are an important aspect of anarchist ideas and practice, they are not the be all or end all of our activity. Without a wider social movement which creates all (or at least most) of the future society in the shell of the old, co-

firms have to be justified to a workforce whose members experience the relationship between management incomes and their own directly and who, no doubt, are predisposed to see their elected managers as being workers like themselves and accountable to them. Such an egalitarian atmosphere will have a positive impact on production and efficiency as workers will see that the value they create is not being accumulated by others but distributed according to work actually done (and not control over power). In the Mondragon co-operatives, for example, the maximum pay differential is 9 to 1 (increased from 3 to 1 after much debate in a response to outside pressures from capitalist firms hiring away workers) while (in the USA) the average CEO is paid well over 100 times the average worker (up from 41 times in 1960).

Therefore, we see that co-operatives prove the advantages of (and the inter-relationship between) key anarchist principles such as liberty, equality, solidarity and self-management. Their application, whether all together or in part, has a positive impact on efficiency and work — and, as we will discuss in section J.5.12, the capitalist market actively **blocks** the spread of these more egalitarian and efficient productive techniques instead of encouraging them. Even by its own standards, capitalism stands condemned — it does not encourage the efficient use of resources and actively places barriers in their development.

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



popular self-government can and does develop spontaneously in struggle.

In Southern Italy, anarchists organised a very successful **Municipal Federation of the Base** (FMB) in Spezzano Albanese. This organisation, in the words of one activist, is *"an alternative to the power of the town hall"* and provides a *"glimpse of what a future libertarian society could be."* Its aim is *"the bringing together of all interests within the district. In intervening at a municipal level, we become involved not only in the world of work but also the life of the community ... the FMB make counter proposals [to Town Hall decisions], which aren't presented to the Council but proposed for discussion in the area to raise people's level of consciousness. Whether they like it or not the Town Hall is obliged to take account of these proposals."* In addition, the FMB also supports co-operatives within it, so creating a communalised, self-managed economic sector within capitalism. Such a development helps to reduce the problems facing isolated co-operatives in a capitalist economy — see section J.5.11 — and was actively done in order to *"seek to bring together all the currents, all the problems and contradictions, to seek solutions"* to such problems facing co-operatives. [*"Community Organising in Southern Italy"*, pp. 16–19, **Black Flag**, no. 210, p. 17 and p. 18]

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

won their struggle. However, the assembly continued after the strike and *"managed to link together twelve different organisations within the local area that are all interested in fighting ... various aspects"* of capitalism including health, taxation, economic, ecological and cultural issues. Moreover, the struggle *"created a structure which was very different from the kind of structure of political parties, where the decisions are made at the top and they filter down. What we managed to do in Puerto Real was make decisions at the base and take them upwards."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to direct democracy and community control**, p. 6]

More recently, the December 2001 revolt against neo-liberalism in Argentina saw hundreds of neighbourhood assemblies created across the country. These quickly federated into *inter-barrial* assemblies to co-ordinate struggles. The assemblies occupied buildings, created communal projects like popular kitchens, community centres, day-care centres and built links with occupied workplaces. As one participant put it: *"The initial vocabulary was simply: Let's do things for ourselves, and do them right. Let's decide for ourselves. Let's decide democratically, and if we do, then let's explicitly agree that we're all equals here, that there are no bosses ... We lead ourselves. We lead together. We lead and decide amongst ourselves ... no one invented it ... It just happened. We met one another on the corner and decided, enough! ... Let's invent new organisational forms and reinvent society."* Another notes that this was people who *"begin to solve problems themselves, without turning to the institutions that caused the problems in the first place."* The neighbourhood assemblies ended a system in which *"we elected people to make our decisions for us ... now we will make our own decisions."* While the *"anarchist movement has been talking about these ideas for years"* the movement took them up *"from necessity."* [Marina Sitrin (ed.), **Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina**, p. 41 and pp. 38–9]



[*"Is Inequality Harmful for Growth?"*, **American Economic Review** no. 84, pp. 600–21] Numerous other studies have also confirmed their findings (the negative impacts on inequality on all aspects of life are summarised by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better**). Real life yet again disproves the assumptions of capitalism: inequality harms us all, even the capitalist economy which produces it.

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

As would be imagined, co-operative workplaces tend to be more egalitarian than capitalist ones. This is because in capitalist firms, the incomes of top management must be justified (in practice) to a small number of individuals (namely, those shareholders with sizeable stock in the firm), who are usually quite wealthy and so not only have little to lose in granting huge salaries but are also predisposed to see top managers as being very much like themselves and so are entitled to comparable incomes (and let us not forget that *"corporate boards, largely selected by the CEO, hire compensation experts, almost always chosen by the CEO, to determine how much the CEO is worth."* [Paul Krugman, **The Conscience of a Liberal**, p. 144]). In contrast, the incomes of management in worker controlled

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

Thirdly, there are the benefits associated with increased equality. Studies prove that business performance deteriorates when pay differentials become excessive. In a study of over 100 businesses (producing everything from kitchen appliances to truck axles), researchers found that the greater the wage gap between managers and workers, the lower their product's quality. [Douglas Cowherd and David Levine, *"Product Quality and Pay Equity,"* **Administrative Science Quarterly**, No. 37, pp. 302–30] Businesses with the greatest inequality were plagued with a high employee turnover rate. Study author David Levine said: *"These organisations weren't able to sustain a workplace of people with shared goals."* [quoted by John Byrne, *"How high can CEO pay go?"* **Business Week**, April 22, 1996] The negative effects of income inequality can also be seen on a national level as well. Economists Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini conducted a thorough statistical analysis of historical inequality and growth, and found that nations with more equal incomes generally experience faster productive growth.



The idea of community organising has long existed within anarchism. Kropotkin pointed to the directly democratic assemblies of Paris during the French Revolution> These were *"constituted as so many mediums of popular administration, it remained of the people, and this is what made the revolutionary power of these organisations."* This ensured that the local revolutionary councils *"which sprang from the popular movement was not separated from the people."* In this popular self-organisation *"the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was described later on as Direct Self-Government."* These assemblies federated to co-ordinate joint activity but it was based on their permanence: *"that is, the possibility of calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the general assembly."* In short, *"the Commune of Paris was not to be a governed State, but a people governing itself directly — when possible — without intermediaries, without masters"* and so *"the principles of anarchism … had their origin, not in theoretic speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution."* This *"laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation"* and Kropotkin predicted that *"the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day."* [**Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 201, p. 203, pp. 210–1, p. 210, p. 204 and p. 206]

In Chile during 1925 *"a grass roots movement of great significance emerged,"* the tenant leagues (*ligas do arrendatarios*). The movement pledged to pay half their rent beginning the 1st of February, 1925, at huge public rallies (it should also be noted that *"Anarchist labour unionists had formed previous ligas do arrendatarios in 1907 and 1914."*). The tenants leagues were organised by ward and federated into a city-wide council. It was a vast organisation, with 12,000 tenants in just one ward of Santiago alone. The movement also *"press[ed] for a law which would legally recognise the lower rents they had begun paying .. . the leagues voted to declare a general strike … should a rent law*

*not be passed."* The government gave in, although the landlords tried to get around it and, in response, on April 8th *"the anarchists in Santiago led a general strike in support of the universal rent reduction of 50 percent."* Official figures showed that rents *"fell sharply during 1915, due in part to the rent strikes"* and for the anarchists *"the tenant league movement had been the first step toward a new social order in Chile."* [Peter DeShazo, **Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile 1902–1927**, p. 223, p. 327, p. 223, p. 225 and p. 226] As one Anarchist newspaper put it:

> *"This movement since its first moments had been essentially revolutionary. The tactics of direct action were preached by libertarians with highly successful results, because they managed to instil in the working classes the idea that if landlords would not accept the 50 percent lowering of rents, they should pay nothing at all. In libertarian terms, this is the same as taking possession of common property. It completes the first stage of what will become a social revolution."* [quoted by DeShazo, **Op. Cit.**, p. 226]

A similar concern for community organising and struggle was expressed in Spain. While the collectives during the revolution are well known, the CNT had long organised in the community and around non-workplace issues. As well as neighbourhood based defence committees to organise and co-ordinate struggles and insurrections, the CNT organised various community based struggles. The most famous example of this must be the rent strikes during the early 1930s in Barcelona. In 1931, the CNT's Construction Union organised a **"Economic Defence Commission"** to organise against high rents and lack of affordable housing. Its basic demand was for a 40% rent decrease but it also addressed unemployment



> mid finds no place in the decision-making leadership hierarchy of the institution. Frequently it is devoted to making the institution work in spite of the formal leadership structure, or alternatively to sabotaging the ostensible function of the institution, because it is none of their choosing. The other is that they would rather not be there anyway: they are there through economic necessity rather than through identification with a common task which throws up its own shifting and functional leadership.
>
> "Perhaps the greatest crime of the industrial system is the way it systematically thwarts the investing genius of the majority of its workers." [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 41]

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

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

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

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

> "You can be **in** authority, or you can be **an** authority, or you can **have** authority. The first derives from your rank in some chain of command, the second derives special knowledge, and the third from special wisdom. But knowledge and wisdom are not distributed in order of rank, and they are no one person's monopoly in any undertaking. The fantastic inefficiency of any hierarchical organisation — any factory, office, university, warehouse or hospital — is the outcome of two almost invariable characteristics. One is that the knowledge and wisdom of the people at the bottom of the pyra-



and the cost of food. The campaign was launched by a mass meeting on May 1st, 1931. A series of meetings were held in the various working class neighbourhoods of Barcelona and in surrounding suburbs. This culminated in a mass meeting held at the Palace of Fine Arts on July 5th which raised a series of demands for the movement. By July, 45,000 people were taking part in the rent strike and this rose to over 100,000 by August. As well as refusing to pay rent, families were placed back into their homes from which they had been evicted. The movement spread to a number of the outlying towns which set up their own Economic Defence Commissions. The local groups co-ordinated actions their actions out of CNT union halls or local libertarian community centres. The movement faced increased state repression but in many parts of Barcelona landlords had been forced to come to terms with their tenants, agreeing to reduced rents rather than facing the prospect of having no income for an extended period or the landlord simply agreed to forget the unpaid rents from the period of the rent strike. [Nick Rider, *"The Practice of Direct Action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931"*, **For Anarchism**, David Goodway (ed.), pp. 79–105] As Abel Paz summarised:

> *"Unemployed workers did not receive or ask for state aid … The workers' first response to the economic crisis was the rent, gas, and electricity strike in mid-1933, which the CNT and FAI's Economic Defence Committee had been laying the foundations for since 1931. Likewise, house, street, and neighbourhood groups began to turn out en masse to stop evictions and other coercive acts ordered by the landlords (always with police support). The people were constantly mobilised. Women and youngsters were particularly active; it was they who challenged the police and stopped the endless*

*evictions.*" [**Durrutu in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 308]

In Gijon, the CNT *"reinforced its populist image by ... its direct consumer campaigns. Some of these were organised through the federation's Anti-Unemployment Committee, which sponsored numerous rallies and marches in favour of 'bread and work.' While they focused on the issue of jobs, they also addressed more general concerns about the cost of living for poor families. In a May 1933 rally, for example, demonstrators asked that families of unemployed workers not be evicted from their homes, even if they fell behind on the rent."* The *"organisers made the connections between home and work and tried to draw the entire family into the struggle."* However, the CNT's *"most concerted attempt to bring in the larger community was the formation of a new syndicate, in the spring of 1932, for the Defence of Public Interests (SDIP). In contrast to a conventional union, which comprised groups of workers, the SDIP was organised through neighbourhood committees. Its specific purpose was to enforce a generous renters' rights law of December 1931 that had not been vigorously implemented. Following anarchosyndicalist strategy, the SDIP utilised various forms of direct action, from rent strikes, to mass demonstrations, to the reversal of evictions."* This last action involved the local SDIP group going to a home, breaking the judge's official eviction seal and carrying the furniture back in from the street. They left their own sign: *"**opened by order** of the CNT."* The CNT's direct action strategies *"helped keep political discourse in the street, and encouraged people to pursue the same extra-legal channels of activism that they had developed under the monarchy."* [Pamela Beth Radcliff, **From mobilization to civil war**, pp. 287–288 and p. 289]

In these ways, grassroots movements from below were created, with direct democracy and participation becoming an inherent part of a local political culture of resistance, with people deciding things for themselves directly and without hier-



Anarchists support all kinds of co-operatives: housing, food, consumer, credit and workplace ones. All forms of co-operation are useful as they accustom their members to work together for their common benefit as well as ensuring extensive experience in managing their own affairs. As such, all forms of co-operatives are (to some degree) useful examples of self-management and anarchy in action. Here we will concentrate on producer co-operatives as only these can **replace** the capitalist mode of production. They are examples of a new mode of production, one based upon associated, not wage, labour. As long as wage-labour exists within industry and agriculture then capitalism remains and no amount of other kinds of co-operatives will end it. If wage slavery exists, then so will exploitation and oppression and anarchy will remain but a hope.

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

Workplace co-operatives also present evidence of the viability of an anarchist economy. It is well established that co-operatives are usually more productive and efficient than their capitalist equivalents. This indicates that hierarchical workplaces are **not** required in order to produce useful goods and indeed can be harmful. It also indicates that the capitalist market does not actually allocate resources efficiently nor has any tendency to do so.

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

It is important to remember that mutual money has no **intrinsic** value, since they cannot be redeemed (at the mutual bank) in gold or anything else. All they are promises of future labour. They are a mere medium for the facilitation of exchange used to facilitate the increase production of goods and services (as discussed in section G.3.6, it is this increase which ensures that mutual credit is not inflationary). This also ensures enough work for all and, ultimately, the end of exploitation as working people can buy their own means of production and so end wage-labour by self-employment and co-operation.

For more information on how mutual banking is seen to work see the collection of Proudhon's works collected in **Proudhon's Solution to the Social Problem**. William B. Greene's **Mutual Baking** and Benjamin Tucker's **Instead of a Book** should also be consulted.

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

Support for co-operatives is a common feature in anarchist writings. In fact, support for democratic workplaces is as old as use of the term anarchist to describe our ideas. So why do anarchists support co-operatives? It is because they are the only way to guarantee freedom in production and so *"the co-operative system ... carries within it the germ of the future economic order."* [Bakunin, **The Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 385]



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

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

> *"Libertarian Communism is a society organised without the state and without private ownership. And there is no need to invent anything or conjure up some new organisation for the purpose. The centres about which life in the future will be organised are already with us in the society of today: the free union and the free municipality [or Commune].*
>
> *"**The union**: in it combine spontaneously the workers from factories and all places of collective exploitation.*
>
> *"And **the free municipality**: an assembly ... where, again in spontaneity, inhabitants ... combine together, and which points the way to the solution of problems in social life ...*

> *"Both kinds of organisation, run on federal and democratic principles, will be sovereign in their decision making, without being beholden to any higher body, their only obligation being to federate one with another as dictated by the economic requirement for liaison and communications bodies organised in industrial federations.*
>
> *"The* ***union and the free municipality*** *will assume the collective or common ownership of everything which is under private ownership at present [but collectively used] and will regulate production and consumption (in a word, the economy) in each locality.*

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

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



will be returned to the system. This provision insures that the clearinghouse is able to balance its books and gives members confidence that mutual money is sound.

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

This example illustrates one way in which people without property are able to obtain credit in the new system. Another way — for those who cannot find (or perhaps do not wish to ask) someone with property to co-sign for them — is to make a down payment and then use the property which is to be purchased on credit as security, as in the current method of obtaining a home or other loan. With mutual credit, however, this form of financing can be used to purchase anything, including the means of production and other equipment required for workers to work for themselves instead of a boss.

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

It is easy to see why other subscriber-members, who have also obtained mutual credit and are therefore in debt to the clearinghouse, would be willing to accept such notes in return for their goods and services. They need to collect mutual currency to repay their debts. Why would someone who is not in debt for mutual currency be willing to accept it as money?

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

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

To put this point slightly differently, A's mutual credit can be thought of as a lien against goods or services which she will create in the future. As security of this guarantee, she agrees that if she is unable for some reason to fulfil her obligation, the land she has pledged will be sold to other members. In this way, a value sufficient to cancel her debt (and probably then some)



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

Simply because it is effective in resisting capitalist exploitation and winning reforms, ending capitalist oppression and expresses our ideas on how industry will be organised in an anarchist society. For workers *"have the most enormous power in their hands, and, if they once become thoroughly conscious of it and used it, nothing could withstand them; they would only have to stop labour, regard the product of labour as theirs, and enjoy it. This is the sense of the labour disturbances which show themselves here and there."* [Max Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 116] Industrial unionism is simply libertarian workplace organisation and is the best way of organising and exercising this power.

Before discussing why anarchists support industrial unionism, we must point out that the type of unionism anarchists support has very little in common with that associated with reformist unions like the TUC in Britain or the AFL-CIO in the USA (see next section). In such unions, as Alexander Berkman pointed out, the *"rank and file have little say. They have delegated their power to leaders, and these have become the boss ... Once you do that, the power you have delegated will be used against you and your interests every time."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 205] Reformist unions, even if they do organise by industry rather than by trade or craft, are top-heavy and bureaucratic. Thus they are organised in the same manner as capitalist firms or the state — and like both of these, the officials at the top have different interests than those at the bottom. Little wonder anarchists oppose such forms of unionism as being counter to the interests of their members. The long history of union officials betraying their members is proof enough of this.

Anarchists propose a different kind of workplace organisation, one that is organised in a different manner than the

mainstream unions. We will call this new kind of organisation ***"industrial unionism"*** (although perhaps industrial syndicalism, or just syndicalism, might be a better name for it). Some anarchists (particularly communist-anarchists) reject calling these workplace organisations "unions" and instead prefer such terms as workplace resistance groups, workplace assemblies and workers councils. No matter what they are called, all class struggle anarchists support the same organisational structure we are going to outline. It is purely for convenience that we term this industrial unionism.

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

It is organised by the guiding principle that workers should directly control their own organisations and struggles. It is based upon workplace assemblies because workers have *"tremendous power"* as the *"creator of all wealth"* but *"the strength of the worker is not in the union meeting-hall; it is in the shop and factory, in the mill and mine. It is* ***there*** *that he [or she] must organise; there, on the job."* It is there that workers *"decide the matters at issue and carry their decisions out through the shop committees"* (whose members are *"under the direction and supervision of the workers"* and can be *"recalled at will"*). These committees are *"associated locally, regionally and nationally"* to produce *"a power tremendous in its scope and potentialities."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 205–6] This confederation is usually organised on two directions, between different workplaces in



ingness of members to incur such a commitment could be described as a service to the community as others are free to use the units so created to trade themselves. Indeed, the number of units in existence exactly matches the amount of real wealth being exchanged. The system only works if members are willing to spend. It runs on trust and builds up trust as the system is used.

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

## J.5.9 How does mutual credit work?

Let us consider an example of how business would be transacted using mutual credit within capitalism. There are two possibilities, depending on whether the mutual credit is based upon whether the creditor can provide collateral or not. We will take the case with collateral first.

Suppose that A, an organic farmer, pledges as collateral a certain plot of land that she owns and on which she wishes to build a house. The land is valued at, say, £40,000 in the capitalist market and by pledging the land, A is able to open a credit account at the clearinghouse for, say, £30,000 in mutual money. She does so knowing that there are many other members of the system who are carpenters, electricians, plumbers, hardware suppliers, and so on who are willing to accept mutual pounds in payment for their products or services.

house to the accounts of other members, who have agreed to receive mutual money in payment for all debts or work done.

The opening of this sort of account is, of course, the same as taking out a "loan" in the sense that a commercial bank "lends" by extending credit to a borrower in return for a signed note pledging a certain amount of property as security. The crucial difference is that the clearinghouse does not purport to be "lending" a sum of money that it **already has,** as is fraudulently claimed by commercial banks. Instead it honestly admits that it is creating new money in the form of credit. New accounts can also be opened simply by telling the clearinghouse that one wants an account and then arranging with other people who already have balances to transfer mutual money into one's account in exchange for goods or services.

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

Unlike the first system described, members do not have to present property as collateral. Members of a LETS scheme can go into "debt" without it, although "debt" is the wrong word as members are not so much going into debt as committing themselves to do some work within the system in the future and by so doing they are creating spending power. The will-



the same industry as well as between different workplaces in the same locality.

So industrial unionism is different from ordinary trade unionism (usually called business unionism by anarchists and syndicalists as it treats the union's job purely as the seller of its members' labour power). It is based on unions managed directly by the rank and file membership rather than by elected officials and bureaucrats. The industrial union is not based on where the worker lives (as is the case with many trade unions). Instead, the union is based and run from the workplace. It is there that union meetings are held, where workers are exploited and oppressed and where their economic power lies. Industrial unionism is based on local branch autonomy, with each branch managing its own affairs. No union officials have the power to declare strikes "unofficial" as every strike is decided upon by the membership is automatically "official" simply because the branch decided it in a mass meeting.

Power in such an organisation would be decentralised into the hands of the membership, as expressed in local workplace assemblies. To co-ordinate strikes and other forms of action, these autonomous branches are part of a federal structure. The mass meeting in the workplace mandates delegates to express the wishes of the membership at "labour councils" and "industrial federations." The labour council (*"Brouse du Travail"*, in French) is the federation of all workplace branches of all industries in a geographical area (say, for example, in a city or region) and it has the tasks of, among other things, education, propaganda and the promotion of solidarity between the different workplaces in its area. Due to the fact it combines all workers into one organisation, regardless of industry or union, the labour council plays a key role in increasing **class** consciousness and solidarity. The industrial federation organises all workplaces in the same industry so ensuring that workers in one part of the country or world are not producing goods so that the bosses *"can supply the market and lose nothing by*

*the strike"*. So these federations are *"organised not by craft or trade but by industries, so that the whole industry — and if necessary the whole working class — could strike as one man."* If that were done *"would any strike be lost?"* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 82] In practice, of course, the activities of these dual federations would overlap: labour councils would support an industry wide strike or action while industrial unions would support action conducted by its member unions called by labour councils.

However, industrial unionism should **not** be confused with a closed shop situation where workers are forced to join a union when they become a wage slave in a workplace. While anarchists do desire to see all workers unite in one organisation, it is vitally important that workers can leave a union and join another. The closed shop only empowers union bureaucrats and gives them even more power to control (and/or ignore) their members. As anarchist unionism has no bureaucrats, there is no need for the closed shop and its voluntary nature is essential in order to ensure that a union be subject to "exit" as well as "voice" for it to be responsive to its members wishes. As Albert Meltzer argued, the closed shop means that *"the [trade union] leadership becomes all-powerful since once it exerts its right to expel a member, that person is not only out of the union, but out of a job."* Anarcho-syndicalism, therefore, *"rejects the closed shop and relies on voluntary membership, and so avoids any leadership or bureaucracy."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 56] Without voluntary membership even the most libertarian union may become bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of its members and the class struggle (also see Tom Wetzel's excellent article *"The Origins of the Union Shop"*, [**Ideas & Action** no. 11]). Needless to say, if the union membership refuses to work with non-union members then that is a different situation. Then this is an issue of free association (as free association clearly implies the right **not** to associate). This issue rarely arises and most syndicalist unions operate in



as more and more people help each other without the medium of exchange. In other words, mutualism will help the gift economy that exists within capitalism to grow and develop.

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

One scenario for an updated system of mutual banking would be for a community to begin issuing an alternative currency accepted as money by all individuals within it. Let us call this currency-issuing association a "mutual barter clearinghouse," or just "clearinghouse" for short.

The clearinghouse would have a twofold mandate: first, to extend credit at cost to members; second, to manage the circulation of credit-money within the system, charging only a small service fee (one percent or less) sufficient to cover its costs of operation, including labour costs involved in issuing credit and keeping track of transactions, insuring itself against losses from uncollectable debts, and so forth. Some current experiments in community money use labour time worked as their basis (thus notes would be marked one-hour) while others have notes tied to the value of the state currency (thus, say, a Scottish town would issue pounds assumed to be the same as a British pound note).

The clearinghouse would be organised and function as follows. People could join the clearinghouse by pledging a certain amount of property (including savings) as collateral. On the basis of this pledge, an account would be opened for the new member and credited with a sum of mutual pounds equivalent to some fraction of the assessed value of the property pledged. The new member would agree to repay this amount plus the service fee into their account by a certain date. The mutual pounds could then be transferred through the clearing-

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

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

Mutual banking can be a way of building upon and strengthening the anarchistic social relations within capitalism. For even under capitalism and statism, there exists extensive mutual aid and, indeed, anarchistic and communistic ways of living. For example, communistic arrangements exist within families, between friends and lovers and within anarchist organisations. Mutual credit could be a means of creating a bridge between this alternative (gift) "economy" and capitalism. The mutualist alternative economy would help strength communities and bonds of trust between individuals, and this would increase the scope of the communistic sector



workplaces with other unions (the excepts arise, as happened frequently in Spanish labour history with the Marxist UGT, when the other union scabs when workers are on strike).

In industrial unionism, the membership, assembled in their place of work, are the ones to decide when to strike, when to pay strike pay, what tactics to use, what demands to make, what issues to fight over and whether an action is "official" or "unofficial". In this way the rank and file is in control of their union and, by confederating with other assemblies, they co-ordinate their forces with their fellow workers. As syndicalist activist Tom Brown made clear:

> *"The basis of the Syndicate is the mass meeting of workers assembled at their place of work ... The meeting elects its factory committee and delegates. The factory Syndicate is federated to all other such committees in the locality ... In the other direction, the factory, let us say engineering factory, is affiliated to the District Federation of Engineers. In turn the District Federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Engineers ... Then, each industrial federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Labour ... how the members of such committees are elected is most important. They are, first of all, not representatives like Members of Parliament who air their own views; they are delegates who carry the message of the workers who elect them. They do not tell the workers what the 'official' policy is; the workers tell them.*
>
> *"Delegates are subject to instant recall by the persons who elected them. None may sit for longer than two successive years, and four years must elapse before his [or her] next nomination. Very few will receive wages as delegates, and then only the district rate of wages for the industry ...*

> *"It will be seen that in the Syndicate the members control the organisation — not the bureaucrats controlling the members. In a trade union the higher up the pyramid a man is the more power he wields; in a Syndicate the higher he is the less power he has.*
>
> *"The factory Syndicate has full autonomy over its own affairs."* [**Syndicalism**, pp. 35–36]

Such federalism exists to co-ordinate struggle, to ensure that solidarity becomes more than a word written on banners. We are sure that many radicals will argue that such decentralised, confederal organisations would produce confusion and disunity. However, anarchists maintain that the statist, centralised form of organisation of the trades unions would produce indifference instead of involvement, heartlessness instead of solidarity, uniformity instead of unity, and elites instead of equality. The centralised form of organisation has been tried and tried again — it has always failed. This is why the industrial union rejects centralisation, for it *"takes control too far away from the place of struggle to be effective on the workers' side."* [Brown, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34] Centralisation leads to disempowerment, which in turn leads to indifference, **not** solidarity. Rudolf Rocker reminds us of the evil effects of centralism when he wrote:

> *"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany,*



and could *"hardly oppose the creation of co-operatives associations"* now as *we find them necessary in many respects,"* argued that Proudhon's hope for gradual change by means of mutual banking and the higher efficiency of workers' co-operatives were unlikely to be realised. This was because such claims *"do not take into account the vast advantage that the bourgeoisie enjoys against the proletariat through its monopoly on wealth, science, and secular custom, as well as through the approval — overt or covert but always active — of States and through the whole organisation of modern society. The fight is too unequal for success reasonably to be expected."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 153 and p. 152] Thus capitalism *"does not fear the competition of workers' associations — neither consumers', producers', nor mutual credit associations — for the simple reason that workers' organisations, left to their own resources, will never be able to accumulate sufficiently strong aggregations of capital capable of waging an effective struggle against bourgeois capital."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 293]

So, for most anarchists, it is only in combination with other forms of working class self-activity and self-management that mutualist institutions could play an important role in the class struggle. In other words, few anarchists think that mutualist credit or co-operatives are enough in themselves to end capitalism. Revolutionary action is also required — such as the expropriation of capital by workers associations.

This does not mean anarchists reject co-operation under capitalism. By creating a network of mutual banks to aid in creating co-operatives, union organising drives, supporting strikes (either directly by gifts/loans or funding consumer co-operatives which could supply food and other essentials free or at a reduced cost), mutualism can be used as a means of helping build libertarian alternatives within the capitalist system. Such alternatives, while making life better under the current system, also play a role in overcoming that system by aiding those in struggle. Thus Bakunin:

social power in order to be both useful and effective. In short, assuming that Individualist Anarchists do manage to organise a mutual banking scheme it cannot be assumed that as long as firms use wage-labour that any spurt in economic activity will have a long term effect of eliminating exploitation. What is more likely is that an economic crisis would develop as lowering unemployment results in a profits squeeze (as occurred in, say, the 1970s). Without a transformation in the relations of production, the net effect would be the usual capitalist business cycle.

For the former, for mutualists like Proudhon, mutual credit **was** seen as a means of transforming the relations of production (as discussed in section G.4.1, unlike Proudhon, Tucker did not oppose wage-labour and just sought to make it non-exploitative). For Proudhon, mutual credit was seen as the means by which co-operatives could be created to end wage-labour. The organisation of labour would combine with the organisation of credit to end capitalism as workers would fund co-operative firms and their higher efficiency would soon drive capitalist firms out of business. Thus *"the Exchange Bank is the organisation of labour's greatest asset"* as it allowed *"the new form of society to be defined and created among the workers."* [Proudhon, **Correspondance**, vol. 2, pp. 307–8] *"To organise credit and circulation is to increase production,"* Proudhon stressed, *"to determine the new shapes of industrial society."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 6, p. 372] So, overtime, co-operative credit would produce co-operative production while associated labour would increase the funds available to associated credit. For Proudhon the *"organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same"* and by recognising this the workers *"would soon have wrested alienated capital back again, through their organisation and competition."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 59–60]

Bakunin, while he was *"convinced that the co-operative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future"*



> *every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 61]

Centralised unions ensure that it is the highest level of union officialdom which decides when workers are allowed to strike. Instead of those affected acting, *"the dispute must be reported to the district office of the union (and in some cases to an area office) then to head office, then back again ... The worker is not allowed any direct approach to, or control of the problem."* [Brown, **Op. Cit.**, p. 34] The end result is that *"through the innate conservatism of officialdom"* officials in centralised unions *"ordinarily use their great powers to prevent strikes or to drive their unions' members back to work after they have struck in concert with other workers."* The notion that a centralised organisation will be more radical *"has not developed in practice"* and the key problem *"is due not to the autonomy of the unions, but to the lack of it."* [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 38] So the industrial union *"is based on the principles of Federalism, on free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination ... above everything else"* and so rejects centralism as an *"artifical*

*organisation from above downwards which turns over the affairs of everybody in a lump to a small minority"* and is *"always attended by barren official routine"* as well as *"lifeless discipline and bureaucratic ossification."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 60]

This implies that as well as being decentralised and organised from the bottom up, the industrial union differs from the normal trade union by having no full-time officials. All union business is conducted by elected fellow workers who do their union activities after work or, if it has to be done during work hours, they get the wages they lost while on union business. In this way no bureaucracy of well paid officials is created and all union militants remain in direct contact with their fellow workers. Given that it is **their** wages, working conditions and so on that are effected by their union activity they have a real interest in making the union an effective organisation and ensuring that it reflects the interests of the rank and file. In addition, all part-time union "officials" are elected, mandated and recallable delegates. If the fellow worker who is elected to the local labour council or other union committee is not reflecting the opinions of those who mandated him or her then the union assembly can countermand their decision, recall them and replace them with someone who **will** reflect these decisions. In short, *"the Syndicalist stands firmly by these things — mass meetings, delegates not bosses, the right of recall ... Syndicalism is organised from the bottom upwards ... all power comes from below and is controlled from below. This is a revolutionary principle."* [Brown, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

As can be seen, industrial unionism reflects anarchist ideas of organisation — it is organised from the bottom up, it is decentralised and based upon federation and it is directly managed by its members in mass assemblies. It is anarchism applied to industry and the needs of the class struggle. By supporting such forms of organisations, anarchists are not only seeing *"anarchy in action"*, they are forming effective tools which can win the



by an elite. As can be seen from the use of pension funds to buy out firms, increase the size of transnationals and downsize the workforce, such "stakeholding" amounts to sacrificing both the present and the future while others benefit.

The real enemies are **not** working people who take part in such pension schemes. It is the people in power, those who manage the pension schemes and companies, who are trying to squeeze every last penny out of working people to finance higher profits and stock prices — which the unemployment and impoverishment of workers on a world-wide scale aids. They control the governments of the world. They are making the "rules" of the current system. Hence the importance of limiting the money they have available, of creating community-based credit unions and mutual risk insurance co-operatives to increase our control over our money which can be used to empower ourselves, aid our struggles and create our own alternatives (see section B.3.2 for more anarchist views on mutual credit and its uses). Money, representing as it does the power of capital and the authority of the boss, is not "neutral" and control over it plays a role in the class struggle. We ignore such issues at our own peril.

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

The short answer is no, they do not. While the Individualist and Mutualist Anarchists do think that mutual banking is the only sure way of abolishing capitalism, most anarchists do not see it as an end in itself. Few think that capitalism can be reformed away in the manner assumed by Proudhon or Tucker.

In terms of the latter, increased access to credit does not address the relations of production and market power which exist within the economy and so any move for financial transformation has to be part of a broader attack on all forms of capitalist

ing people are controlling more and more of the money supply and using it in ways that will stop capital from using it to oppress and exploit them.

An example of why this can be important can be seen from the existing workers' pension fund system which is invested in the stock market in the hope that workers will receive an adequate pension in their old age. However, the only people actually winning are bankers and big companies. Unsurprisingly, the managers of these pension fund companies are investing in those firms with the highest returns, which are usually those who are downsizing or extracting most surplus value from their workforce (which in turn forces other companies to follow the same strategies to get access to the available funds in order to survive). Basically, if your money is used to downsize your fellow workers or increase the power of capital, then you are not only helping to make things harder for others like you, you are also helping making things worse for yourself. No person is an island, and increasing the clout of capital over the working class is going to affect you directly or indirectly. As such, the whole scheme is counter-productive as it effectively means workers have to experience insecurity, fear of downsizing and stagnating wages during their working lives in order to have slightly more money when they retire (assuming that they are fortunate enough to retire when the stock market is doing well rather than during one of its regular periods of financial instability, of course).

This highlights one of the tricks the capitalists are using against us, namely to get us to buy into the system through our fear of old age. Whether it is going into lifelong debt to buy a home or putting our money in the stock market, we are being encouraged to buy into the system which exploits us and so put its interests above our own. This makes us more easily controlled. We need to get away from living in fear and stop allowing ourselves to be deceived into behaving like "stakeholders" in a Plutocratic system where most shares really are held



class war. By organising in this manner, workers are building the framework of a co-operative society within capitalism:

> *"the syndicate ... has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers within existing society and the preparing for and the practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life ... It has, therefore, a double purpose: 1. As the fighting organisation of the workers against their employers to enforce the demands of the workers for the safeguarding of their standard of living; 2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when a revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 56–7]

So *"[a]t the same time that syndicalism exerts this unrelenting pressure on capitalism, it tries to build the new social order within the old. The unions and the 'labour councils' are not merely means of struggle and instruments of social revolution; they are also the very structure around which to build a free society. The workers are to be educated in the job of destroying the old propertied order and in the task of reconstructing a stateless, libertarian society. The two go together."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 121] The industrial union is seen as prefiguring the future society, a society which (like the union) is decentralised and self-managed in all aspects.

Given the fact that workers wages have been stagnating (or, at best, falling behind productivity increases) across the world as the trade unions have been weakened and marginalised (partly because of their own tactics, structure and politics) it is clear that there exists a great need for working people

to organise to defend themselves. The centralised, top-down trade unions we are accustomed to have proved themselves incapable of effective struggle (and, indeed, the number of times they have sabotaged such struggle are countless — a result not of "bad" leaders but of the way these unions organise and their role within capitalism). Hence anarchists support industrial unionism as an effective alternative to the malaise of official trade unionism. How anarchists aim to encourage such new forms of workplace organisation and struggle will be discussed in the section J.5.4.

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

Spontaneously created organisations of workers in struggle play an important role in both communist-anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist theory. Since both advocate that it is the workers, using their own organisations who will control their



communities that need it most (why else would a large company invest in a community unless the money it takes out of the area handsomely exceeds that put it?). It is the means by which capitalists can buy the liberty of working people and get them to produce a surplus for them (wealth is, after all, *"a power invested in certain individuals by the institutions of society, to compel others to labour for their benefit."* [William Godwin, **The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin**, p. 130]). From this consideration alone, working class control of credit and money is an important part of the class struggle as having access to alternative sources of credit can increase working class options and power.

As we discussed in section B.3.2, credit is also an important form of social control — people who have to pay their mortgage or visa bill are more pliable, less likely to strike or make other forms of political trouble. Credit also expands the consumption of the masses in the face of stagnant or falling wages so blunting the impact of increasing exploitation. Moreover, as an added bonus, there is a profit to be made as the *"rich need a place to earn interest on their surplus funds, and the rest of the population makes a juicy lending target."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 65]

Little wonder that the state (and the capitalists who run it) is so concerned to keep control of money in its own hands or the hands of its agents. With an increase in mutual credit, interest rates would drop, wealth would stay more in working class communities, and the social power of working people would increase (for people would be more likely to struggle for higher wages and better conditions — as the fear of debt repayments would be less). By the creation of community-based credit unions that do not put their money into "Capital Markets" or into capitalist Banks working class people can control their own credit, their own retirement funds, and find ways of using money as a means of undermining capitalist power and supporting social struggle and change. In this way work-

## J.5.6 Why are mutual credit schemes important?

Mutual credit schemes are important because they are a way to improve working class life under capitalism and ensure that what money we do have is used to benefit ourselves rather than the elite. By organising credit, we retain control over it and so rather than being used to invest in capitalist schemes it can be used for socialist alternatives.

For example, rather than allow the poorest to be at the mercy of loan sharks a community, by organising credit, can ensure its members receive cheap credit. Rather than give capitalist banks bundles of cash to invest in capitalist firms seeking to extract profits from a locality, it can be used to fund a co-operative instead. Rather than invest pension schemes into the stock market and so help undermine workers pay and living standards by increasing rentier power, it can be used to invest in schemes to improve the community and its economy. In short, rather than bolster capitalist power and so control, mutual credit aims to undermine the power of capitalist banks and finance by placing as much money as much possible in working class hands.

This point is important, as the banking system is often considered "neutral" (particularly in capitalist economics). However, as Malatesta correctly argued, it would be *"a mistake to believe ... that the banks are, or are in the main, a means to facilitate exchange; they are a means to speculate on exchange and currencies, to invest capital and to make it produce interest, and to fulfil other typically capitalist operations."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 100] Within capitalism, money is still to a large degree a commodity which is more than a convenient measure of work done in the production of goods and services. It can and does go anywhere in the world where it can get the best return for its owners, and so it tends to drain out of those



own struggles (and, eventually, their own revolution) in their own interests, not a vanguard party of elite political theorists, this is unsurprising. It matters little if the specific organisations are revolutionary industrial unions, factory committees, workers councils, or other labour formations. The important thing is that they are created and run by workers themselves. Meanwhile, anarchists are industrial guerrillas waging class war at the point of production in order to win improvements in the here and now and strengthen tendencies towards anarchism by showing that direct action and libertarian organisation is effective and can win partial expropriations of capitalist and state power. So while there are slight differences in terminology and practice, all anarchists would support the ideas of industrial organisation and struggle we have outlined above.

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

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

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

So, what do anarchists think of the trade unions?

For the most part, one could call the typical anarchist opinion toward them as one of "hostile support." It is hostile insofar as anarchists are well aware of how bureaucratic these unions are and how they continually betray their members. Given that they are usually little more than "business" organisations, trying to sell their members labour-power for the best deal possible, it is unsurprising that they are bureaucratic and that the interests of the bureaucracy are at odds with those of its membership. However, our attitude is "supportive" in that even the worse trade union represents an attempt at working class solidarity and self-help, even if the organisation is now far removed from the initial protests and ideas that set the union up. For a worker to join a trade union means recognising, to some degree, that he or she has different interests from their boss (*"If the interests of labour and capital are the same, why the union?"* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 76]).

There is no way to explain the survival of unions other than the fact that there are different class interests and workers have understood that to promote their own interests they have to organise collectively. No amount of conservatism, bureaucracy or backwardness within the unions can obliterate this. The very existence of trade unions testifies to the existence of some level of basic class consciousness and the recognition that workers and capitalists do not have the same interests. Claims by trade union officials that the interests of workers and bosses are the same theoretically disarms both the union and its members and so weakens their struggles (after all, if bosses and workers have similar interests then any conflict is bad and the decisions of the boss must be in workers' interests!). That kind of nonsense is best left to the apologists of capitalism (see section F.3.2).

It is no surprise, then, the *"extreme opposition to the existing political and economic power"* to unions as they *"not only suspected every labour organisation of aiming to improve the condition of its members within the limits of the wage system,*



of reforming capitalism into a society of confederated, self-governing communities. Such *"Equitable Labour Exchanges"* were *"founded at London and Birmingham in 1832"* with *"Labour notes and the exchange of small products."* [E. P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 870] Apparently independently of these attempts in Britain at what would later be called mutualism, Proudhon arrived at the same ideas decades later in France: *"The People's Bank quite simply embodies the financial and economic aspects of the principle of modern democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the People, and of the republican motto, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.'"* [**Selected Writings of P-J Proudhon**, p. 75] Similarly, in the USA (partly as a result of Joshua Warren's activities, who got the idea from Robert Owen) there was extensive discussion on labour notes, exchanges and free credit as a means of protecting workers from the evils of capitalism and ensuring their independence and freedom from wage slavery. When Proudhon's works appeared in North America, the basic arguments were well known and they were quickly adopted by radicals there.

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

end of wage slavery could occur as workers would work for themselves by either purchasing the necessary tools required for their work or by buying the capitalists out.

Mutual credit, in short, is a form of credit co-operation, in which individuals pull their resources together in order to benefit themselves as individuals and as part of a community. It has the following key aspects:

- **Co-operation**: No-one owns the network. It is controlled by its members democratically.
- **Non-exploitative**: No interest is charged on account balances or credit. At most administrative costs are charged, a result of it being commonly owned and managed.
- **Consent**: Nothing happens without it, there is no compulsion to trade.
- **Labour-Notes**: They use their own type of money as a means of aiding "honest exchange."

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

These ideas have had a long history within the socialist movement, originating in Britain in the early 19th century when Robert Owen and other Socialists raised the idea of labour notes and labour-exchanges as both a means of improving working class conditions within capitalism and



*but they also looked upon the trade union as the deeply enemy of wage-slavery — and they were right. Every labour organisation of sincere character must needs wage war upon the existing economic conditions, since the continuation of the same is synonymous with the exploitation and enslavement of labour."* [Max Baginski, *"Aim and Tactics of the Trade-Union Movement"*, pp. 297–306, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, Peter Glassgold (ed.), pp. 302–3] Thus anarchist viewpoints on this issue reflect the contradictory nature of trade unions — on the one hand they are products of workers' struggle, but on the other they are bureaucratic, unresponsive, centralised and their full-time officials have no real interest in fighting against wage labour as it would put them out of a job. Indeed, the very nature of trade unionism ensures that the interests of the union (i.e. the full-time officials) come into conflict with the people they claim to represent.

This can best be seen from the disgraceful activities of the TGWU with respect to the Liverpool dockers in Britain. The union officials (and the TUC itself) refused to support their members after they had been sacked in 1995 for refusing to cross a picket line. The dockers organised their own struggle, contacting dockers' unions across the world and organised global solidarity actions. Moreover, a network of support groups sprung up across Britain to gather funds for their struggle (and, we are proud to note, anarchists have played their role in supporting the strikers). Many trade unionists could tell similar stories of betrayal by "their" union.

This occurs because trade unions, in order to get recognition from a company, must be able to promise industrial peace. They need to enforce the contracts they sign with the bosses, even if this goes against the will of its members. Thus trade unions become a third force in industry, somewhere between management and the workers and pursuing its own interests. This need to enforce contracts soon ensures that the union becomes top-down and centralised — otherwise its members

would violate the unions agreements. They have to be able to control their members — which usually means stopping them fighting the boss — if they are to have anything to bargain with at the negotiation table. This may sound odd, but the point is that the union official has to sell the employer labour discipline and freedom from unofficial strikes as part of its side of the bargain otherwise the employer will ignore them.

The nature of trade unionism, then, is to take power away from out of local members and centralise it into the hands of officials at the top of the organisation. Thus union officials sell out their members because of the role trade unions play within society, not because they are nasty individuals (although some are). They behave as they do because they have too much power and, being full-time and highly paid, are unaccountable, in any real way, to their members. Power — and wealth — corrupts, no matter who you are (see *Chapter XI* of Alexander Berkman's **What is Anarchism?** for an excellent introduction to anarchist viewpoints on trade unions).

While, in normal times, most workers will not really question the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, this changes when workers face some threat. Then they are brought face to face with the fact that the trade union has interests separate from theirs. Hence we see trade unions agreeing to wage cuts, redundancies and so on — after all, the full-time trade union official's job is not on the line! But, of course, while such a policy is in the short term interests of the officials, in the longer term it goes against their interests — who wants to join a union which rolls over and presents no effective resistance to employers? Little wonder Michael Moore had a chapter entitled *"Why are Union Leaders So F#!@ing Stupid?"* in his book **Downsize This!** — essential reading on how moronic trade union bureaucrats can actually be. Sadly trade union bureaucracy seems to afflict all who enter it with short-sightedness — although the chickens do, finally, come home to roost, as the bureaucrats of the AFL, TUC and other trade unions are finding out in this



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

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

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

**LETS**.

Mutualism is the name for the ideas associated with Proudhon and his **Bank of the People**. Essentially, it is a confederation of credit unions in which working class people pool their funds and savings so allowing credit to be supplied at cost (no interest), so increasing the options available to them. LETS stands for **Local Exchange Trading Schemes** and is a similar idea in many ways (see **Bringing the Economy Home from the Market** by Ross V.G. Dobson on LETS). From its start in Canada, LETS has spread across the world and there are now hundreds of schemes involving hundreds of thousands of people.

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

*racy, but to show it up as irrelevant to the working class.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

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

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

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



era of global capital and falling membership. So while the activities of trade union leaders may seem crazy and short-sighted, these activities are forced upon them by their position and role within society — which explains why they are so commonplace and why even radical leaders end up doing exactly the same thing in time.

However, few anarchists would call upon members of a trade union to tear-up their membership cards. While some anarchists have nothing but contempt (and rightly so) for trade unions (and so do not work within them — but will support trade union members in struggle), the majority of anarchists take a more pragmatic viewpoint. If no alternative syndicalist union exists, anarchists will work within the existing unions (perhaps becoming shop-stewards — few anarchists would agree to be elected to positions above this in any trade union, particularly if the post were full-time), spreading the anarchist message and trying to create a libertarian undercurrent which would hopefully blossom into a more anarchistic labour movement. So most anarchists "support" the trade unions only until we have created a viable libertarian alternative. Thus we will become trade union members while trying to spread anarchist ideas within and outwith them. This means that anarchists are flexible in terms of our activity in the unions. For example, many IWW members were "two-carders" which meant they were also in the local AFL branch in their place of work and turned to the IWW when the AFL hierarchy refused to back strikes or other forms of direct action.

Anarchist activity within trade unions reflects our ideas on hierarchy and its corrupting effects. We reject the response of left-wing social democrats, Stalinists and mainstream Trotskyists to the problem of trade union betrayal, which is to try and elect 'better' officials. They see the problem primarily in terms of the individuals who hold the posts so ignoring the fact that individuals are shaped by the environment they live in and the role they play in society. Thus even the most left-wing and pro-

gressive individual will become a bureaucrat if they are placed within a bureaucracy.

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

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



reject this as utopian, viewing the trade union bureaucracy as unreformable as the state's (and it is likely that rather than change the trade union, "boring from within" would change the syndicalists by watering down their ideas). Moreover, opponents of "rank and file" groups argue that they direct time and energy **away** from practical and constructive activity and instead waste them *"[b]y constantly arguing for changes to the union structure ... the need for the leadership to be more accountable, etc., [and so] they not only [offer] false hope but [channel] energy and discontent away from the real problem — the social democratic nature of reformist trade unions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11]

Supporters of the "rank and file" approach fear that the Industrial Networks will isolate anarchists from the mass of trade union members by creating tiny "pure" syndicalist groups. Such a claim is rejected by supporters of Industrial Networks who argue that rather than being isolated from the majority of trade unionists they would be in contact with them where it counts, in the workplace and in struggle rather than in trade union meetings which many workers do not even attend:

> *"We have no intention of isolating ourselves from the many workers who make up the rest of the rank and file membership of the unions. We recognise that a large proportion of trade union members are only nominally so as the main activity of social democratic unions is outside the workplace ...* ***We aim to unite and not divide workers****.*
>
> *"It has been argued that social democratic unions will not tolerate this kind of activity, and that we would be all expelled and thus isolated. So be it. We, however, don't think that this will happen until ... workplace militants had found a voice independent of the trade unions and so they become less useful to us anyway. Our aim is not to support social democ-*

archist ideas to their fellow workers (see next section). Hence Malatesta:

> *"The anarchists within the unions should strive to ensure that they remain open to all workers of whatever opinion or party on the sole condition that there is solidarity in the struggle against the bosses. They should oppose the corporatist spirit and any attempt to monopolise labour or organisation. They should prevent the Unions from becoming the tools of the politicians for electoral or other authoritarian ends; they should preach and practice direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and free initiative. They should strive to help members learn how to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to do without leaders and permanent officials.*
>
> *"They must, in short, remain anarchists, remain always in close touch with anarchists and remember that the workers' organisation is not the end but just one of the means, however important, of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 26–7]

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



ing from our present reality toward out ultimate goals. The role of the anarchist group or syndicalist union would be to call workplace assemblies and their federation into councils, argue for direct workers control of struggle by these mass assemblies, promote direct action and solidarity, put across anarchist ideas and politics and keep things on the boil, so to speak. When one has only a handful of anarchists and syndicalists in a workplace or scattered across several workplaces there is a clear need for developing ways for these fellow workers to effectively act in union, rather than be isolated and relegated to more general agitation. A handful of anarchists cannot meaningfully call a general strike but we can agitate around specific industrial issues and organise our fellow workers to do something about them. Through such campaigns we demonstrate the advantages of rank-and-file unionism and direct action, show our fellow workers that our ideas are not mere abstract theory but can be implemented here and now, attract new members and supporters, and further develop our capacity to develop revolutionary unions in our workplaces. Thus the creation of Industrial Networks and the calling for workplace assemblies is a recognition of where we are now — with anarchist ideas very much in the minority. Calling for workers assemblies is not an anarchist tactic per se, we must add, but a working class one developed and used plenty of times by workers in struggle (indeed, it was how the current trade unions were created). It also puts the onus on the reformists unions by appealing directly to their members as workers and exposing their bureaucrat organisations and reformist politics by creating an effective alternative to them.

A few anarchists reject the idea of Industrial Networks and instead support the idea of ***"rank and file"*** groups which aim to put pressure on the current trade unions to become more militant and democratic. Some even think that such groups can be used to reform the trade-unions into libertarian, revolutionary organisations — called *"boring from within"* — but most

gles can ensure the process of working class self-liberation and the creation of new, more libertarian, forms of workplace organisation.

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

## J.5.4 What are industrial networks?

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

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



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

Traditionally, many syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists advocated the ***One Big Union*** strategy, the aim of which was to organise all workers into one organisation representing the whole working class. Today, however, most anarcho-syndicalists, like other revolutionary anarchists, advocate workers assemblies for decision making during struggles which are open to all workers (union members or not) as they recognise that they face dual unionism (which means there are more than one union within a given workplace or country). This was the case, historically, in all countries with a large syndicalist union movement there were also socialist unions. Therefore most anarcho-syndicalists do not expect to ever get a majority of the working class into a revolutionary union before a revolutionary situation develops. In addition, revolutionary unions do not simply appear, they develop from previous struggles and require a lot of work and experience of which the Industrial Networks are but one aspect. The most significant revolutionary unions (such as the IWW, USI and CNT) were originally formed by unions and union militants with substantial experience of struggle behind them, some of whom were part of existing trade union bodies.

Thus industrial networks are intended to deal with the actual situation that confronts us, and provide a strategy for mov-

*"His natural functions were left alone during the diaper period. But when he began to crawl and perform on the floor, words like **naughty** and **dirty** began to float about the house, and a grim beginning was made in teaching him to be clean.*

*"Before this, his hand had been taken away every time it touched his genitals; and he soon came to associate the genital prohibition with the acquired disgust about faeces. Thus, years later, when he became a travelling salesman, his story repertoire consisted of a balanced number of sex and toilet jokes.*

*"Much of his training was conditioned by relatives and neighbours. Mother and father were most anxious to be correct — to do the proper thing — so that when relatives or next-door neighbours came, John had to show himself as a well-trained child. He had to say **Thank you** when Auntie gave him a piece of chocolate; and he had to be most careful about his table manners; and especially, he had to refrain from speaking when adults were speaking …*

*"All his curiosity about the origins of life were met with clumsy lies, lies so effective that his curiosity about life and birth disappeared. The lies about life became combined with fears when at the age of five his mother found him having genital play with his sister of four and the girl next door. The severe spanking that followed (Father added to it when he came home from work) forever conveyed to John the lesson that sex is filthy and sinful, something one must not even think of."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96–7]

Of course, parents' ways of imparting negative messages about sex are not necessarily this severe, especially in our allegedly enlightened age. However, it is not necessary for a



All of which suggests that Nozick's assertion that *"don't say that its against the class interest of investors to support the growth of some enterprise that if successful would end or diminish the investment system. Investors are not so altruistic. They act in personal and not their class interests"* is false. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 252–3] Nozick is correct, to a degree, but he forgets that class interest is a fusion of individual interests. Given a choice between returns from investments in capitalist firms because a management elite has similar interests in maximising unpaid labour and workers in a co-operative which controls any surplus, the investor will select the former. Moreover, lack of control by investors plays its role as they cannot simply replace the management in a co-operative — that power lies in the hands of the workforce. The higher premiums required by investors to forsake such privileges place a burden on the co-operative, so reducing their likelihood of getting funds in the first place or surviving and, needless to say, increasing the risk that investors face. Thus the personal and class interest of investors merge, with the personal desire to make money ensuring that the class position of the individual is secured. This does not reflect the productivity or efficiency of the investment — quite the reverse! — it reflects the social function of wage labour in maximising profits and returns on capital (see next section for more on this). In other words, the personal interests of investors will generally support their class interests (unsurprisingly, as class interests are not independent of personal interests and will tend to reflect them!).

There are other structural problems as well. Co-operatives face the negative externalities generated by the capitalist economy they operate within. For one thing, since their pay levels are set by members' democratic vote, co-operatives tend to be more egalitarian in their income structure. This means that in a capitalist environment, co-operatives are in constant danger of having their most skilled members hired away by capitalist firms who can, due to their resources, out-bid the co-operative.

While this may result in exploitation of the worker, the capitalist firm has the resources to pay higher wages and so it makes sense for them to leave (*"As to the employer who pays an engineer twenty times more than a labourer, it is simply due to personal interest; if the engineer can economise $4000 a year on the cost of production; the employer pays him $800 ... He parts with an extra $40 when he expects to gain $400 by it; and this is the essence of the Capitalist system."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 165]). However, in a co-operative system there would not be the inequalities of economic wealth (created by capitalist firms and finance structures) which allows such poaching to happen.

There are cultural issues as well. As Jon Elster points out, it is a *"truism, but an important one, that workers' preferences are to a large extent shaped by their economic environment. Specifically, there is a tendency to adaptive preference formation, by which the actual mode of economic organisation comes to be perceived as superior to all others."* [*"From Here to There"*, pp. 93–111, **Socialism**, Paul, Miller Jr., Paul, and Greenberg (eds.), p. 110] In other words, people view "what is" as given and feel no urge to change to "what could be." In the context of creating alternatives within capitalism, this can have serious effects on the spread of alternatives and indicates the importance of anarchists encouraging the spirit of revolt to break down this mental apathy.

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



undoubtedly produced untold numbers of neurotics and psychopaths.

Neill summed up the libertarian attitude toward the care of infants as follows: *"**Self-regulation means the right of a baby to live freely without outside authority in things psychic and somatic**. It means that the baby feeds when it is hungry; that it becomes clean in habits only when it wants to; that it is never stormed at nor spanked; that it is always loved and protected."* Obviously self-regulation does not mean leaving the baby alone when it heads toward a cliff or starts playing with an electrical socket. Libertarians do not advocate a lack of common sense. We recognise that adults must override an infant's will when it is a question of protecting their physical safety: *"Only a fool in charge of young children would allow unbarred bedroom windows or an unprotected fire in the nursery. Yet, too often, young enthusiasts for self-regulation come to my school as visitors, and exclaim at our lack of freedom in locking poison in a lab closet, or our prohibition about playing on the fire escape. The whole freedom movement is marred and despised because so many advocates of freedom have not got their feet on the ground."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105 and p. 106]

Nevertheless, the libertarian position does not imply that a child should be **punished** for getting into a dangerous situation. Nor is the best thing to do in such a case to shout in alarm (unless that is the only way to warn the child before it is too late), but simply to remove the danger without any fuss: *"Unless a child is mentally defective, he will soon discover what interests him. Left free from excited cries and angry voices, he will be unbelievably sensible in his dealing with material of all kinds."* [Neil, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] Provided, of course, that he or she has been allowed self-regulation from the beginning, and thus has not developed any irrational, secondary drives.

The way to raise a free child becomes clear when one considers how an **un**free child is raised. Thus imagine the typical infant whose upbringing A.S. Neill described:

[**Children of the Future**, p. 99] It is important for the father to establish orgonotic contact as well.

Reich amaintained that the practice of bottle feeding is harmful, particularly if it completely replaces breast feeding from the day of birth, because it eliminates one of the most important forms of establishing physical and emotional contact between mother and child. This lack of contact can then contribute in later life to *"oral"* forms of neurotic character structure or traits (see Chapter 9 of Alexander Lowen's **Physical Dynamics of Character Structure**). Another harmful practice in infant care is the compulsive-neurotic method of feeding children on schedule, invented by Pirquet in Vienna, which was devastatingly wrong and harmful to countless children. Frustration of oral needs through this practice (which is fortunately less in vogue now than it was fifty years ago), is guaranteed to produce neurotic armouring in infants. As Reich put it: *"As long as parents, doctors, and educators approach infants with false, unbending behaviour, inflexible opinions, condescension, and officiousness, instead of with orgonotic contact, infants will continue to be quiet, withdrawn, apathetic, 'autistic,' 'peculiar,' and, later, 'little wild animals,' whom the cultivated feel they have to 'tame.'"* [**Op. Cit.** p. 124]

Another harmful practice is allowing the baby to "cry itself out." Thus: *"Parking a baby in a baby carriage in the garden, perhaps for hours at a time, is a dangerous practice. No one can know what agonising feelings of fear and loneliness a baby can experience on waking up suddenly to find himself alone in a strange place. Those who have heard a baby's screams on such occasions have some idea of the cruelty of this stupid custom."* [Neill, **Summerhill**, p. 336] Indeed, in **The Physical Dynamics of Character Structure**, Alexander Lowen has traced specific neuroses, particularly depression, to this practice. Hospitals also have been guilty of psychologically damaging sick infants by isolating them from their mothers, a practice that has



based on "one share, one vote" and so have more in common with capitalist firms than co-operatives.

Finally, there is the question of history, of path dependency. Path dependency is the term used to describe when the set of decisions one faces for any given circumstance is limited by the decisions made in the past, even though past circumstances may no longer be relevant. This is often associated with the economics of technological change in a society which depends quantitatively and/or qualitatively on its own past (the most noted example this is the QWERTY keyboard, which would not be in use today except that it happened to be chosen in the nineteenth century). Evolutionary systems are path dependent, with historical events pushing development in specific directions. Thus, if there were barriers against or encouragement for certain forms of organisational structure in the past then the legacy of this will continue to dominate due to the weight of history rather than automatically being replaced by new, more efficient, forms.

This can be seen from co-operatives, as *"labour managed firms were originally at a substantial disadvantage compared to their capitalist counterparts"* as the law *"imposed additional risks and costs"* on them while *"early financial instruments were ill-suited to the establishment and continuation of worker co-operatives. The subsequent coevolution of firms and supporting institutions involved a path-dependent process where labour-managed firms were at a continual disadvantage, even after many of the earlier impediments were removed."* [Hodgson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103] *"Historically,"* argue Everett and Minkler *"both company and co-operative law were incompatible with democratic decision-making by workers."* The law ensured that the *"burden was more costly"* to labour-managed firms and these *"obstacles led to an environment dominated by investor-controlled firms (capitalist firms) in which informal constraints (behaviours and routines) emerged to reinforce the existing institutions. A path-dependent process incorporating these*

*informal constraints continued to exclude [their] widespread formation."* When the formal constraints which prevented the formation of co-operatives were finally removed, the *"informal constraints"* produced as a result of these *"continued to prevent the widespread formation"* of co-operatives. So the lack of co-operatives *"can thus be explained quite independently of any of the usual efficiency criteria."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58 and p. 60] Nor should we forget that the early industrial system was influenced by the state, particularly by rewarding war related contracts to hierarchical firms modelled on the military and that the state rewarded contracts to run various state services and industries to capitalist firms rather than, as Proudhon urged, to workers associations.

However, *"there are several good reasons why more efficient firms need not always be selected in a competitive and 'evolutionary' process."* [Hodgson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] So it is not efficiency as such which explains the domination of capitalist firms for *"empirical studies suggest that co-operatives are at least as productive as their capitalist counterparts,"* with many having *"an excellent record, superior to conventionally organised firms over a long period."* [Jon Elster, **Op. Cit.**, p. 96] So all things being equal, co-operatives are more efficient than their capitalist counterparts — but when co-operatives compete in a capitalist economy, all things are **not** equal. As David Schweickart argues:

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



that from the beginning they can prevent (or at least decrease) them from forming in their children. Finally, Reich cautioned that it is crucial to avoid any mixing of concepts: *"One cannot mix a bit of self-regulation with a bit of moral demand. Either we trust nature as basically decent and self-regulatory or we do not, and then there is only one way, that of training by compulsion. It is essential to grasp the fact that the two ways of upbringing do not go together."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46]

## J.6.2. What are some examples of libertarian child-rearing methods?

According to Reich, the problems of parenting a free child actually begin before conception, with the need for a prospective mother to free herself as much as possible from chronic muscular tensions. It has been found in many studies that not only the physical health of the mother can influence the foetus. Various psychological stresses influence the chemical and hormonal environment, affecting the foetus.

Immediately after birth it is important for the mother to establish contact with her child. This means, basically, constant loving attention to the baby, expressed by plenty of holding, cuddling, playing, etc., and especially by breast feeding. By such *"orgonotic"* contact (to use Reich's term), the mother is able to establish the initial emotional bonding with the new born, and a non-verbal understanding of the child's needs. This is only possible, however, if she is in touch with her own emotional and cognitive internal processes: *"**Orgonotic contact is the most essential experiential and emotional element in the interrelationship between mother and child,** particularly prenatally and during the first days and weeks of life. The future fate of the child depends on it. It seems to be the core of the new-born infant's emotional development."*

According to Neill, children who are given freedom from birth and not forced to conform to parental expectations spontaneously learn how to keep themselves clean and develop social qualities like courtesy, common sense, an interest in learning, respect for the rights of others, and so forth. However, once the child has been armoured through authoritarian methods intended to **force** it to develop such qualities, it becomes out of touch with its living core and therefore no longer able to develop self-regulation. In this stage it becomes harder and harder for the pro-social emotions to shape the developing mode of life of the new member of society. At that point, when the secondary drives develop, parental authoritarianism becomes a **necessity.**

This oppression produces an inability to tolerate freedom. The vast majority of people develop this **automatically** from the way they are raised and is what makes the whole subject of bringing up children of crucial importance to anarchists. Reich concluded that if parents do not suppress nature in the first place, then no anti-social drives will be created and no authoritarianism will be required to suppress them: *"**What you so desperately and vainly try to achieve by way of compulsion and admonition is there in the new-born infant ready to live and function. Let it grow as nature requires, and change our institutions accordingly**."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 47] So in order to raise psychologically healthy children, parents need to acquire self-knowledge, particularly of how internal conflicts develop in family relationships, and to free themselves as much as possible from neurotic forms of behaviour. The difficulty of parents acquiring such self-knowledge and sufficiently deconditioning themselves is obviously another obstacle to raising self-regulated children.

However, the greatest obstacle is the fact that twisting mechanisms set in so very early in life, i.e. soon after birth. Hence it is important for parents to obtain a thorough knowledge of what rigid suppressions are and how they function, so



It is illuminating, though, to consider why Nozick ignored the substantial empirical evidence that participation **is** more efficient than hierarchy and, as a result, why *"market criteria"* does not result in the more productive and efficient co-operative production displacing the authoritarian workplace. Far better, it must be supposed, to just assume that the dominant form of workplace is more "efficient" and implicitly invoke a quasi-Darwinian individualistic selection mechanism in an ahistorical and institution-less framework. So people like Nozick who suggest that because worker co-operatives are few in number that this means they are forced out by competition because they are inefficient miss the point. A key reason for this lack of co-operative firms, argues Hodgson, *"is that competitive selection depends on the economic context, and while the institutional context of a capitalist system may be more conducive for the capitalist firm, a different context may favour the co-operative firm."* [**Economics and Utopia**, p. 288]

As discussed in section I.3.5, Proudhon was well aware that for mutualism to prosper and survive an appropriate institutional framework was required (the *"agro-industrial federation"* and mutual banking). So an organisation's survival also depends on the co-evolution of supporting informal constraints. If a co-operative is isolated within a capitalist economy, without co-operative institutions around it, it comes as no great surprise to discover that they find it difficult to survive never mind displace its (usually larger and well-established) capitalist competitors.

Yet in spite of these structural problems and the impact of previous state interventions, co-operatives do exist under capitalism but just because they can survive in such a harsh environment it does not automatically mean that they shall **replace** that economy. Co-operatives face pressures to adjust to the dominant mode of production. The presence of wage labour and investment capital in the wider economy will tempt successful co-operatives to hire workers or issue shares to attract

new investment. In so doing, however, they may end up losing their identities as co-operatives by diluting ownership (and so re-introducing exploitation by having to pay non-workers interest) or by making the co-operative someone's boss (which creates *"a new class of workers who exploit and profit from the labour of their employees. And all this fosters a bourgeois mentality."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 399]).

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

So both theory and history suggests that isolated co-operatives will more likely adapt to capitalist realities than remain completely true to their co-operative promise. For most anarchists, therefore, co-operatives can reach their full potential only as part of a social movement aiming to change society. Only as part of a wider movement of community and workplace unionism, with mutualist banks to provide long terms financial support and commitment, can co-operatives be communalised into a network of solidarity and support that will reduce the problems of isolation and adaptation. Hence Bakunin:



blunted, making us more likely tp express such secondary, anti-social, drives. So, ironically, these secondary drives result from the **suppression of the primary drives** and the sensations of pleasure associated with them. These secondary drives develop because the only emotional expressions that can get through a person's defences are distorted, harsh, and/or mechanical. In other words, compulsive morality (i.e. acting according to externally imposed rules) becomes necessary to control the secondary drives **which compulsion itself creates.** By such processes, authoritarian child-rearing becomes self-justifying:

> *"Psychoanalysts have failed to distinguish between primary natural and secondary perverse, cruel drives, and they are continuously killing nature in the new-born while they try to extinguish the 'brutish little animal.' They are completely ignorant of the fact that it is* ***exactly this killing of the natural principle which creates the secondary perverse and cruel nature,*** *human nature so called, and that these artificial cultural creations in turn make compulsive moralism and brutal laws necessary."* [Reich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17–18]

Moralism, however, can never get at the root of the problem of secondary drives, but in fact only increases the pressure of crime and guilt. The real solution is to let children develop what Reich calls **natural self-regulation.** This can be done only by not subjecting them to punishment, coercion, threats, moralistic lectures and admonitions, withdrawal of love, etc. in an attempt to inhibit their spontaneous expression of natural life-impulses. The systematic development of the emphatic tendencies of the young infant is the best way to "socialise" and restrict activities that are harmful to the others. As A.S. Neill pointed out *"self-regulation implies a belief in the goodness of human nature; a belief that there is not, and never was, original sin."* [**Summerhill**, p. 103]

> *"Small children go through a phase of development characterised by vigorous activity of the voice musculature. The joy the infant derives from loud noises (crying, shrieking, and forming a variety of sounds) is regarded by many parents as pathological aggressiveness. The children are accordingly admonished not to scream, to be 'still,' etc. The impulses of the voice apparatus are inhibited, its musculature becomes chronically contracted, and the child becomes quiet, 'well-brought-up,' and withdrawn. The effect of such mistreatment is soon manifested in eating disturbances, general apathy, pallor of the face, etc. Speech disturbances and retardation of speech development are presumably caused in this manner. In the adult we see the effects of such mistreatment in the form of spasms of the throat. The automatic constrictions of the glottis and the deep throat musculature, with subsequent inhibition of the aggressive impulses of the head and neck, seems to be particularly characteristic."* [**Children of the Future**, p. 128]

*"Clinical experience has taught us,"* Reich concluded, *"that small children must be allowed to 'shout themselves out' when the shouting is inspired by pleasure. This might be disagreeable to some parents, but questions of education must be decided* ***exclusively in the interests of the child,*** *not in those of the adults."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 128]

Besides deadening life energy in the body, such stifling also inhibits the anxiety generated by the presence of anti-social, cruel, and perverse impulses within the psyche — for example, destructiveness, sadism, greed, power hunger, brutality, etc. (impulses referred to by Reich as *"secondary"* drives). In other words, this reduces our ability to empathise with others and so the internal ethical guidelines we all develop are



> *"We want co-operation too ... But at the same time, we know that it prosper, developing itself fully and freely, embracing all human industry, only when it is based on equality, when all capital and every instrument of labour, including the soil, belong to the people by right of collective property ... Once this is acknowledged we hardly oppose the creation of co-operative associations; we find them necessary in many respects ... they accustom the workers to organise, pursue, and manage their interests themselves, without interference either by bourgeois capital or by bourgeois control ... [they must be] founded on the principle of solidarity and collectivity rather than on bourgeois exclusivity, then society will pass from its present situation to one of equality and justice without too many great upheavals."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 153]

Until then, co-operatives will exist within capitalism but not replace it by market forces — only a **social** movement and collective action can fully secure their full development. This means that while anarchists support, create and encourage co-operatives within capitalism, we understand *"the impossibility of putting into practice the co-operative system under the existing conditions of the predominance of bourgeois capital in the process of production and distribution of wealth."* Because of this, most anarchists stress the need for more combative organisations such as industrial and community unions and other bodies *"formed,"* to use Bakunin's words, *"for the organisation of toilers against the privileged world"* in order to help bring about a free society. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 385]

Finally, we must note an irony with Nozick's argument, namely the notion that capitalism (his *"free society"*) allows a *"voluntary"* path to economic liberty. The irony is two-fold. First, the creation of capitalism was the result of state action

(see section F.8). While working class people are expected to play by the rules decreed by capitalism, capitalists have never felt the urge to do so. It is this state coercion which helped create the path-dependency which stops *"the market"* selecting more efficient and productive ways of production. Secondly, Nozick's own theory of (property) rights denies that stolen wealth can be legitimately transferred. In other words, expecting workers to meekly accept previous coercion by seeking investors to fund their attempts at economic liberty, as Nozick did, is implicitly accepting that theft is property. While such intellectual incoherence is to be expected from defenders of capitalism, it does mean that propertarians really have no ground to oppose working class people following the advice of libertarians and expropriating their workplaces. In other words, transforming the environment and breaking the path-dependency which stops economic liberty from flowering to its full potential.

## J.5.12 If self-management were more efficient then surely the market would force capitalists to introduce it?

Some supporters of capitalism argue that if self-management really were more efficient than hierarchy, then capitalists would be forced to introduce it by the market. As propertarian Robert Nozick argued, if workers' control meant that *"the productivity of the workers in a factory* ***rises*** *... then the individual owners pursuing profits will reorganise the productive process. If the productivity of workers* ***remains the same*** *... then in the process of competing for labourers firms will alter their internal work organisation."* This meant that *"individual owners pursuing profits ... will reorganise the productive process."* [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, p. 248] As



hope to prepare the psychological foundation for a social paradigm shift, from authoritarian to libertarian institutions and values. And indeed, a gradual cultural evolution toward increasing freedom does seem to exist. For example, as A.S. Neill suggested there is *"a slow trend to freedom, sexual and otherwise. In my boyhood, a woman went bathing wearing stockings and a long dress. Today, women show legs and bodies. Children are getting more freedom with every generation. Today, only a few lunatics put cayenne pepper on a baby's thumb to stop sucking. Today, only a few countries beat their children in school."* [**Summerhill**, p. 115]

Most anarchists believe that we must practice what we preach and so the anarchist revolution begins at home. As anarchists raise their own children in capitalist society and/or are involved in the raising and education of the children of other parents, we can practice in part libertarian principles even before the revolution. As such, we think it is important to discuss libertarian child rearing.

## J.6.1 What are the main obstacles to raising free children?

The biggest obstacle is the training and character of most parents, physicians, and educators. Individuals within a hierarchical society create psychological walls/defences around themselves and these will obviously have an effect both on the mental and physical state of the individual and so their capacity for living a free life and experiencing pleasure. Such parents then try (often unconsciously) to stifle the life-energy in children. There are, for example, the child's natural vocal expressions (shouting, screaming, bellowing, crying, etc.) and natural body motility. As Reich noted:

Moreover, the role of parental example is very important to raising free children. Children often learn by mimicking their parents — children do what their parents do, not as they say. If their mother and father lie to each other, scream, fight and so on, then the child will probably do so as well. Children's behaviour does not come out thin air, they are a product of the environment they are brought up in. Children can only be encouraged by example, not by threats and commands. So how parents act can be an obstacle to the development of a free child. Parents must do more than just **say** the right things, but also act as anarchists in order to produce free children.

The sad fact is that most modern people have lost the ability to raise free children, and regaining this ability will be a long process of trial and error as well as **parent** education in which it is to be hoped that each succeeding generation will learn from the failures and successes of their predecessors and so improve. In the best-case scenario, over the course of a few generations the number of progressive parents will continue to grow and raise ever freer children, who in turn will become even more progressive parents themselves, thus gradually changing mass psychology in a libertarian direction. Such changes **can** come about very fast, as can be seen from various communes all over the world where society is organised according to libertarian principles. As Reich put it:

> *"We have learned that instead of a jump into the realm of the Children of the Future, we can hope for no more than a steady advance, in which the healthy new overlaps the sick old structure, with the new slowly outgrowing the old."* [**Children of the Future**, pp. 38–39]

By means of freedom-based child rearing and education, along with other methods of consciousness raising, as well as encouraging resistance to the existing social order anarchists



this has not happened then self-management cannot be more efficient.

While such a notion seems plausible in theory, in practice it is flawed as *"there is a vast quantity of empirical evidence demonstrating that participatory workplaces tend to be places of higher morale and greater productivity than authoritarian workplaces."* [David Schweickart , **Against Capitalism**, p. 228] So Nozick's thought experiment is contradicted by reality. Capitalism places innumerable barriers to the spread of worker empowering structures within production, in spite (perhaps, as we will see, **because**) of their (well-documented) higher efficiency and productivity. This can be seen from the fact that while the increased efficiency associated with workers' participation and self-management has attracted the attention of many capitalist firms, the few experiments conducted have failed to spread even though they were extremely successful. This is due to the nature of capitalist production and the social relationships it produces.

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

It is unsurprising that such attempts to reduce workers to order-takers fail. Workers' experiences and help are required to

ensure production actually happens at all. When workers carry out their orders strictly and faithfully (i.e. when they "work to rule") production stops. So most capitalists are aware of the need to get workers to "co-operate" within the workplace to some degree. A few capitalist companies have gone further. Seeing the advantages of fully exploiting (and we do mean exploiting) the experience, skills, abilities and thoughts of their employers which the traditional authoritarian capitalist workplace denies them, some have introduced various schemes to "enrich" and "enlarge" work, increase "co-operation" between workers and their bosses, to encourage workers to "participate" in their own exploitation by introducing *"a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice — at best secondary — in the control of conditions of the workplace."* [Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 81] The management and owners still have the power and still reap unpaid labour from the productive activity of the workforce.

David Noble provides a good summary of the problems associated with experiments in workers' self-management within capitalist firms:

> *"Participation in such programs can indeed be a liberating and exhilarating experience, awakening people to their own untapped potential and also to the real possibilities of collective worker control of production. As one manager described the former pilots [workers in a General Electric program]: 'These people will never be the same again. They have seen that things can be different.' But the excitement and enthusiasm engendered by such programs, as well as the heightened sense of commitment to a common purpose, can easily be used against the interests of the work force. First, that purpose is not really 'common' but is still determined by management alone, which continues to decide what will be*



*not only the right but also the duty to watch over them."* Hence child rearing should be **part** of society, a communal process by which children learn what it means to be an individual by being respected as one by others: *"real freedom — that is, the full awareness and the realisation thereof in every individual, preeminently based upon a feeling of one's dignity and upon the genuine respect for someone else's freedom and dignity, i.e. upon justice — such freedom can develop in children only through the rational development of their minds, character and will."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 327]

We wish to re-iterate again that a great deal of work remains to be done in this field. Therefore our comments should be regarded merely as tentative bases for further reflection and research by those involved with raising and educating children. There is, and cannot be, any "rule book" for raising free children, because to follow an inflexible rule book is to ignore the fact that each child and their environment is unique and therefore demands unique responses from their parents. Hence the principles of libertarian child rearing to which we will refer should not be thought of as rules, but rather, as experimental hypotheses to be tested by parents within their own situation by applying their intelligence and deriving their own individual conclusions.

Bringing up children must be like education, and based on similar principles, namely *"upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community, which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 139] Indeed, child rearing and education **cannot** be separated as life itself is an education and so must share the same principles and be viewed as a process of *"development and exploration, rather than as one of repressing a child's instincts and inculcating obedience and discipline."* [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 166]

tors striving to develop libertarian methods of child rearing (although he did not use the term "libertarian").

In this and the following sections we will summarise Reich's main ideas as well as those of other libertarian psychologists and educators who have been influenced by him, such as A.S. Neill and Alexander Lowen. We will examine the theoretical principles involved in raising free children and will illustrate their practical application with concrete examples. Finally, we will examine the anarchist approach to the problems of adolescence.

Such an approach to child rearing is based upon the insight that children *"do not constitute anyone's property: they are neither the property of the parents nor even of society. They belong only to their own future freedom."* [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 327] As such, what happens to a child when they are growing up **shapes** the person they become and the society they live in. The key question for people interested in freedom is whether *"the child [is] to be considered as an individuality, or as an object to be moulded according to the whims and fancies of those about it?"* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] Libertarian child rearing is the means by which the individuality of the child is respected and developed.

This is in stark contrast to standard capitalist claim that children are the **property** of their parents. If we accept that children **are** the property of their parents then we are implicitly stating that a child's formative years are spent in slavery, hardly a relationship which will promote the individuality and freedom of the child or the wider society. Little wonder that most anarchists reject such assertions. Instead we argue that the *"rights of the parents shall be confined to loving their children and exercising over them ... authority [that] does not run counter to their morality, their mental development, or their future freedom."* Being someone's property (i.e. slave) runs counter to all these and *"it follows that society, the whole future of which depends upon adequate education and upbringing of children ... has*



*produced, when, and where. Participation in production does not include participation in decisions on investment, which remains the prerogative of ownership. Thus participation is, in reality, just a variation of business as usual — taking orders — but one which encourages obedience in the name of co-operation.*

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

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

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

Capitalist introduced and supported "workers' control" is very like the situation when a worker receives stock in the company they work for. If it goes a little way toward redressing the gap between the value produced by that person's labour and

the wage they receive for it, that in itself cannot be a totally bad thing (although this does not address the issue of workplace hierarchy and its social relations). The real downside of this is the "carrot on a stick" enticement to work harder — if you work extra hard for the company, your stock will be worth more. Obviously, though, the bosses get rich off you, so the more you work, the richer they get, the more you are getting ripped off. It is a choice that anarchists feel many workers cannot afford to make — they need or at least want the money — but we believe that it does not work as workers simply end up working harder, for less. After all, stocks do not represent all profits (large amounts of which end up in the hands of top management) nor are they divided just among those who labour. Moreover, workers may be less inclined to take direct action, for fear that they will damage the value of "their" company's stock, and so they may find themselves putting up with longer, more intense work in worse conditions.

Be that as it may, the results of such capitalist experiments in "workers' control" are interesting and show **why** self-management will not spread by market forces. According to one expert: *"There is scarcely a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced or ...productivity increases occur from a genuine increase in worker's decision-making power. Findings of such consistency ... are rare in social research."* [Paul B. Lumberg, quoted by Herbert Gintis, *"The nature of Labour Exchange and the Theory of Capitalist Production"*, **Radical Political Economy**, vol. 1, Samuel Bowles and Richard Edwards (eds.), p. 252] In spite of these findings, a *"shift toward participatory relationships is scarcely apparent in capitalist production"* and this is *"not compatible with the neo-classical assertion as to the efficiency of the internal organisation of capitalist production."* [Gintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252] Economist William Lazonick indicates the reason when he writes that *"[m]any attempts at job enrichment and job enlargement in the first half of the 1970s resulted in the*



# J.6 What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?

Anarchists have long been aware of the importance of child rearing and education. We are aware that child rearing should aim to develop *"a well-rounded individuality"* and not *"a patient work slave, professional automaton, tax-paying citizen, or righteous moralist."* In this section of the FAQ we will discuss anarchist approaches to child rearing bearing in mind *"that it is through the channel of the child that the development of the mature man [or woman] must go, and that the present ideas of ... educating or training ... are such as to stifle the natural growth of the child."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 131 and p. 130]

If one accepts the thesis that the authoritarian family is the breeding ground for both individual psychological problems and political reaction, it follows that anarchists should try to develop ways of raising children that will not psychologically cripple them but instead enable them to accept freedom and responsibility while developing natural self-regulation. We will refer to children raised in such a way as ***"free children."***

Work in this field is still in its infancy (no pun intended). Wilhelm Reich was the main pioneer in this field (an excellent, short introduction to his ideas can be found in Maurice Brinton's **The Irrational in Politics**). In **Children of the Future**, Reich made numerous suggestions, based on his research and clinical experience, for parents, psychologists, and educa-

[**Social Policy**, p. 17] As anarchists are both anti-state and anti-capitalist, swapping private power for the state power is, at best, a step sideways. Usually, it is worse for capitalist companies are accountable only to their owners and the profit criteria. This means, as Chomsky suggests, *"protecting the state sector today is a step towards abolishing the state because it maintains a public arena in which people can participate and organise, and affect policy, and so on, though in limited ways. If that's removed, we'd go back to a ... private dictatorship, but that's hardly a step towards liberation."* [ **Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 213] Instead anarchists try to create **real** alternatives to hierarchy, be it state or capitalist, in the here and now which reflect our ideas of a free and just society. For, when it boils down to it, freedom cannot be given, only taken and this process of **self**-liberation is reflected in the alternatives we build to help win the class war.

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



*supply of more and better effort by workers. Yet many 'successful' experiments were cut short when the workers whose work had been enriched and enlarged began questioning traditional management prerogatives inherent in the existing hierarchical structure of the enterprise."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 282]

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

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

Simply put, managers and capitalists can see that workers' control experiments expose the awkward fact that they are

not needed, that their role is not related to organising production but exploiting workers. They have no urge to introduce reforms which will ultimately make themselves redundant. Moreover, most enjoy the power that comes with their position and have no desire to see it ended. This also places a large barrier in the way of workers' control. Interestingly, this same mentality explains why capitalists often support fascist regimes: *"The anarchist Luigi Fabbri termed fascism a **preventative counter-revolution**; but in his essay he makes the important point that the employers, particularly in agriculture, were not so much moved by fear of a general revolution as by the erosion of their own authority and property rights which had already taken place locally: 'The bosses felt they were no longer bosses.'"* [Adrian Lyttelton, *"Italian Fascism"*, pp. 81–114, **Fascism: a Reader's Guide**, p. 91]

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

This has not happened for three reasons.

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



[**Wall Street**, p. 305] In addition, the private pension fund market is dominated by a handful of companies.

Even if commission costs were lowered (by regulation), the impressive returns on capital seen between 1982 and 1995 (when the real annual return on investment averaged 12.7 percent) are likely not to be sustained. These average returns coincided with boom years in Chile, complemented by government's high borrowing costs. Because of the debt crisis of the 1980s, Latin governments were paying double-digit real interest rates on their bonds — the main investment vehicle of social security funds. In effect, government was subsidising the "private" system by paying astronomical rates on government bonds. Another failing of the system is that only a little over half of Chilean workers make regular social security contributions. While many believe that a private system would reduce evasion because workers have a greater incentive to contribute to their own personal retirement accounts, 43.4 percent of those affiliated with the new system in June of 1995 did not contribute regularly. [Stephen J. Kay, *"The Chile Con: Privatizing Social Security in South America,"* **The American Prospect** no. 33, pp. 48–52] All in all, privatisation seems to be beneficial only to middle-men and capitalists, if Chile is anything to go by. As Henwood argues, while the *"infusion of money"* resulting from privatising social security *"has done wonders for the Chilean stock market" "projections are that as many as half of future retirees will draw a poverty-level pension."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 304–5]

Suffice to say, all you really need to know about privatisation of pensions and healthcare in Chile is that the military dictatorship which imposed it excluded the military from its dubious benefits. Such altruism is truly touching.

So, anarchists reject private welfare as a con (and an even bigger one than state welfare). As Colin Ward suggests, it *"is the question of how we get back on the mutual aid road **instead of** commercial health insurance and private pension schemes."*

to quickly discuss privatised welfare and why anarchists reject this option even more than state welfare.

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

Looking at Chile, hyped by those who desire to privatise Social Security, we find similar disappointing results (well, disappointing for the working class at least, as we will see). Seemingly, Chile's private system has achieved impressive average returns on investment. However, once commissions are factored in, the real return for individual workers is considerably lower. For example, although the average rate of return on funds from 1982 through 1986 was 15.9 percent, the real return after commissions was a mere 0.3 percent! Between 1991 and 1995, the pre-commission return was 12.9 percent, but with commissions it fell to 2.1 percent. According to Doug Henwood, the *"competing mutual funds have vast sales forces, and the portfolio managers all have their vast fees. All in all, administrative costs ... are almost 30% of revenues, compared to well under 1% for the U.S. Social Security system."*



— including their share of revenues and their ability to extract more unpaid labour during the working day. While in the short run workers' control may lead to higher productivity (and so may be toyed with), in the long run, it leads to difficulties for capitalists to maximise their profits:

> *"given that profits depend on the integrity of the labour exchange, a strongly centralised structure of control not only serves the interests of the employer, but dictates a minute division of labour irrespective of considerations of productivity. For this reason, the evidence for the superior productivity of 'workers control' represents the most dramatic of anomalies to the neo-classical theory of the firm: worker control increases the effective amount of work elicited from each worker and improves the co-ordination of work activities, while increasing the solidarity and delegitimising the hierarchical structure of ultimate authority at its root; hence it threatens to increase the power of workers in the struggle over the share of total value."* [Gintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 264]

A workplace which had extensive workers participation would hardly see the workers agreeing to reduce their skill levels, take a pay cut or increase their pace of work simply to enhance the profits of capitalists. Simply put, profit maximisation is not equivalent to efficiency. Getting workers to work longer, more intensely or in more unpleasant conditions can increase profits but it does not yield more output for the **same** inputs. Workers' control would curtail capitalist means of enhancing profits by changing the quality and quantity of work. It is **this** requirement which also aids in understanding why capitalists will not support workers' control — even though it is more efficient, it reduces capitalist power in production. Moreover, demands to change the nature of workers' inputs

into the production process in order to maximise profits for capitalists would provoke a struggle over the intensity of work, working hours, and over the share of value added going to workers, management and owners and so destroy the benefits of participation.

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

The second reason is related to the first. It too is based on the power structure within the company but the power is related to control over the surplus produced by the workers rather than the ability to control how much surplus is produced in the first place (i.e. power over workers). Hierarchical management is the way to ensure that profits are channelled into the hands of a few. By centralising power, the surplus value produced by workers can be distributed in a way which benefits those at the top (i.e. management and capitalists). This explains the strange paradox of workers' control experiments being successful but being cancelled by management. This is easily explained once the hierarchical nature of capitalist production (i.e. of wage labour) is acknowledged. Workers' control, by placing (some) power in the hands of workers, undermines the authority of management and, ultimately, their power to control the surplus produced by workers and allocate it as they see fit. Thus, while workers' control does reduce costs, increase efficiency and productivity (i.e. maximise the difference between prices and costs) it (potentially) reduces the power of management and owners to allocate that surplus as they see fit. Indeed, it can be argued that hierarchical control of production exists solely to provide for the accumulation of capital in a few hands, **not** for efficiency or productivity (see Stephan A. Margin, *"What do Bosses do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 178–248).

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



a centralised one — which, due to its lack of local input and participation will more likely **encourage** parochialism and indifference than a wider vision and solidarity. If you have no real say in what affects you, why should you be concerned with what affects others? This is unsurprising, for what else is global action other than the product of thousands of local actions? Solidarity within our class is the flower that grows from the soil of our local self-activity, direct action and self-organisation. Unless we act and organise locally, any wider organisation and action will be hollow. Thus **local** organisation and empowerment is essential to create and maintain wider organisations and mutual aid.

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

All this means that anarchists reject the phoney choice between private and state capitalism we are usually offered. We reject both privatisation **and** nationalisation, both right and left wings (of capitalism). Neither state nor private health care are user-controlled — one is subject to the requirements of politics and the other places profits before people. As we have discussed the welfare state in the last section, it is worthwhile

Dolgoff, like all anarchists, urged workers to *"finance the establishment of independent co-operative societies of all types, which will respond adequately to their needs"* and that such a movement *"could constitute a realistic alternative to the horrendous abuses of the 'establishment' at a fraction of the cost."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74 and pp. 74–75] In this way a network of self-managed, communal, welfare associations and co-operatives could be built — paid for, run by and run for working class people. Such a system *"would not ... become a plaything of central government financial policy."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16] Such a network could be initially build upon, and be an aspect of, the struggles of both workers in and claimants, patients, tenants, and other users of the current welfare state. So a *"multiplicity of mutual aid organisations among claimants, patients, victims, represents the most potent lever for change in transforming the welfare state into a genuine welfare society, in turning community care into a caring community."* [Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 125]

The creation of such a co-operative, community-based, welfare system will not occur over night, nor will it be easy. But it **is** possible, as history shows. It will, of course, have its problems, but as Colin Ward notes, *"the standard argument against a localist and decentralised point of view, is that of universalism: an equal service to all citizens, which it is thought that central control achieves. The short answer to this is that it doesn't!"* [Colin Ward, **Social Policy**, p. 16] He notes that richer areas generally get a better service from the welfare state than poorer ones, thus violating the claims of equal service. A centralised system (be it state or private) will most likely allocate resources which reflect the interests and (lack of) knowledge of bureaucrats and experts, **not** on where they are best used or the needs of the users.

Anarchists are sure that a **confederal** network of mutual aid organisations and co-operatives, based upon local input and control, can overcome problems of localism far better than



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

*"It is a common confusion, especially on the part of those trained in or unduly influenced by formal economics (liberal and Marxist alike), that capitalism is a system of profit-motivated, efficient production. This is not true, nor has it ever been. If the drive to maximise profits, through private ownership and control over the process of production, has served historically as the primary means of capitalist development, it has never been the end of that development. The goal has always been domination (and the power and privileges that go with it) and the preservation of domination. There is little historical evidence to support the view that, in the final analysis, capitalists play by the rules of the economic game imagined by theorists. There is ample evidence to suggest, on the other hand, that when the goals of profit-making and efficient production fail to coincide with the requirements of continued dominance, capital will resort to more ancient means: legal, political, and, if need be, military. Always, behind all the careful accounting, lies the threat of force. This system of domination has been legitimated in the past by the ideological invention that private ownership of the means of production and the pursuit*

> *of profit via production are always ultimately beneficial to society. Capitalism delivers the goods, it is argued, better, more cheaply, and in larger quantity, and in so doing, fosters economic growth … The story of the Pilot Program — and it is but one among thousands like it in U.S. industry — raises troublesome questions about the adequacy of this mythology as a description of reality.*" [**Forces of Production**, pp. 321–2]

Hierarchical organisation (domination) is essential to ensure that profits are controlled by a few and can, therefore, be allocated by them in such a way to ensure their power and privileges. By undermining such authority, workers' control also undermines that power to maximise profits in a certain direction even though it increases "profits" (the difference between prices and costs) in the abstract. As workers' control starts to extend (or management sees its potential to spread) into wider areas such as investment decisions, how to allocate the surplus (i.e. profits) between wages, investment, dividends, management pay and so on, then they will seek to end the project in order to ensure their power over both the workers and the surplus they, the workers, produce (this is, of course, related to the issue of lack of control by investors in co-operatives raised in the last section).

As such, the opposition by managers to workers' control will be reflected by those who actually own the company who obviously would not support a regime which will not ensure the maximum return on their investment. This would be endangered by workers' control, even though it is more efficient and productive, as control over the surplus rests with the workers and not a management elite with similar interests and aims as the owners — an egalitarian workplace would produce an egalitarian distribution of surplus, in other words (as proven by the experience of workers' co-operatives). In the words of



*mutual aid. The list is endless: friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous federated enterprises like the trade union movement and the Co-operative movement.*" [Ward, **Social Policy**, pp. 10–1] The historian E.P. Thompson confirmed this picture of a wide network of working class self-help organisations. *"Small tradesmen, artisans, labourers"* he summarised, *"all sought to insure themselves against sickness, unemployment, or funeral expenses through membership of … friendly societies."* These were *"authentic evidence of independent working-class culture and institutions … out of which … trade unions grew, and in which trade union officers were trained."* Friendly societies *"did not 'proceed from' an idea: both the ideas and institutions arose from a certain common experience … In the simple cellular structure of the friendly society, with its workaday ethos of mutual aid, we see many features which were reproduced in more sophisticated and complex form in trade unions, co-operatives, Hampden clubs, Political Unions, and Chartist lodges … Every kind of witness in the first half of the nineteenth century — clergymen, factory inspectors, Radical publicists — remarked upon the extent of mutual aid in the poorest districts. In times of emergency, unemployment, strikes, sickness, childbirth, then it was the poor who 'helped every one his neighbour.'"* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 458, pp. 460–1 and p. 462] Sam Dolgoff gave an excellent summary of similar self-help activities by the American working class:

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

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

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

We cannot be expected to provide an extensive list of working class collective self-help and social welfare activity here, all we can do is present an overview of collective welfare in action (for a discussion of working class self-help and co-operation through the centuries we can suggest no better source than Kropotkin's **Mutual Aid**). In the case of Britain, we find that the *"newly created working class built up from nothing a vast network of social and economic initiatives based on self-help and*



one participant of the GE workers' control project: *"If we're all one, for manufacturing reasons, we must share in the fruits equitably, just like a co-op business."* [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 295] Such a possibility is one few owners would agree to.

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

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

orders, capitalist firms have consistently chosen (and probably preferred) the latter option (as occurred in the 1970s).

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

The failure of moves towards democratic workplaces within capitalism are an example of that system in conflict with itself — pursuing its objectives by methods which constantly defeat those same objectives. As Paul Carden argued, the *"capitalist system can only maintain itself by trying to reduce workers into mere order-takers ... At the same time the system can only function as long as this reduction is never achieved ... [for] the system would soon grind to a halt ... [However] capitalism constantly has to **limit** this **participation** (if it didn't the workers would soon start deciding themselves and would show in practice now superfluous the ruling class really is)."* [**Modern Capitalism and Revolution**, pp. 45–46] Thus "workers' control" within a capitalist firm is a contradictory thing — too little power and it is meaningless, too much and workplace authority structures and capitalist share of, and control over, value added can be harmed. Attempts to make oppressed, exploited and alienated workers work if they were neither oppressed, exploited nor alienated will always fail.

For a firm to establish committed and participatory relations internally, it must have external supports — particularly with providers of finance (which is why co-operatives benefit from credit unions and co-operating together). The price



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

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

There are, as Colin Ward stresses, *"in fact several quite separate traditions of social welfare: the product of totally different attitudes to social needs ... One of these traditions is that of a service given grudgingly and punitively by authority, another is the expression of social responsibility, or of mutual aid and self-help. One is embodied in **institutions**, the other in **associations**."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 112] Anarchists, needless to say, favour the latter. Unfortunately, this *"great tradition of working class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state ... The contribution that the recipients had to make to all this theoretical bounty was ignored as a mere embarrassment — apart, of course, for paying for it ... The socialist ideal was rewritten as a world in which everyone was entitled to everything, but where nobody except the providers had any actual say about anything. We have been learning for years, in the anti-welfare backlash, what a vulnerable utopia that was."* This self-managed working class self-help was the *"welfare road we failed to take."* [Ward, **Social Policy: an anarchist response**, p. 11–2 and p. 9]

Anarchists would argue that self-help is the natural side effect of freedom. There is no possibility of radical social change unless people are free to decide for themselves what their prob-

than nationalise or privatise railways, they should be handed over workers' co-operatives to run. The same with welfare services and such like: *"the abolition of the State is the last term of a series, which consists of an incessant diminution, by political and administrative simplification the number of public functionaries and to put into the care of responsible workers societies the works and services confided to the state."* [Proudhon, **Carnets**, vol. 3, p. 293]

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

There are two traditions of welfare within society, one of *"fraternal and autonomous associations springing from below, the other that of authoritarian institutions directed from above."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] While sometimes anarchists are forced to defend the latter against the greater evil of "free market" capitalism, we never forget the importance of creating and strengthening the former. As Chomsky suggests, libertarians have to *"defend some state institutions from the attack against them [by private power], while trying at the same time to pry them open to meaningful public participation — and ultimately, to dismantle them in a much more free society, if the appropriate circumstances can be achieved."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 194] A point we will discuss more in the next section when we highlight the historical examples of self-managed communal welfare and self-help organisations.



mechanism proves self-defeating to create such supports and that is why we see "participation" more fully developed within Japanese and German firms (although it is still along way from fully democratic workplaces), who have strong, long term relationships with local banks and the state which provides them with the support required for such activities. As William Lazonick notes, Japanese industry had benefited from the state ensuring *"access to inexpensive long-term finance, the sine qua non of innovating investment strategies"* along with a host of other supports, such as protecting Japanese industry within their home markets so they could *"develop and utilise their productive resources to the point where they could attain competitive advantage in international competition."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 305] The German state provides its industry with much of the same support.

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

Such schemes, as noted above, are just forms of self-exploitation, getting workers to help their robbers and so **not** a development anarchists seek to encourage. We have discussed this here just to be clear that, firstly, such forms of structural reforms are **not** self-management, as managers and owners still have the real power, and, secondly, even

if such forms are somewhat liberatory and more efficient, market forces will not select them precisely **because** the latter is dependent on the former. Thirdly, they would still be organised for exploitation as workers would not be controlling all the goods they produced. As with an existing capitalist firm, part of their product would be used to pay interest, rent and profit. For anarchists *"self-management is not a new form of mediation between workers and their bosses ... [it] refers to the very process by which the workers themselves* ***overthrow*** *their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace."* [Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] Hence our support for co-operatives, unions and other self-managed structures created and organised from below by and for working class people by their own collective action.

## J.5.13 What are Modern Schools?

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



*administration."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.** p. 10]). Little wonder we have seen elements of the welfare state used as a weapon in the class war **against** those in struggle (for example, in Britain during the miners strike in 1980s the Conservative Government made it illegal to claim benefits while on strike, so reducing the funds available to workers in struggle and helping bosses force strikers back to work faster).

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

In this, we follow the suggestion made by Proudhon that rather than *"fatten certain contractors,"* libertarians should be aiming to create *"a new kind of property"* by *"granting the privilege of running"* public utilities, industries and services, *"under fixed conditions, to responsible companies, not of capitalists, but of workmen."* Municipalities would take the initiative in setting up public works but actual control would rest with workers' co-operatives for *"it becomes necessary for the workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 151 and p. 276–7] Thus, for example, rather

*with what we would describe as **needs**, influence the shaping of policies."* So *"as long as we have capitalism and government the job of anarchists is to fight both, and at the same time encourage people to take what steps they can to run their own lives."* [*"Anarchists and Voting"*, pp. 176–87, **The Raven**, No. 14, p. 179]

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

Invariably, this support for the state is a move away from working class people, from trusting and empowering them to sort out their own problems. Indeed, the left seem to forget that the state exists to defend the collective interests of the ruling class and so could hardly be considered a neutral body. And, worst of all, they have presented the right with the opportunity of stating that freedom from the state means the same thing as the freedom of the market (so ignoring the awkward fact that capitalism is based upon domination — wage labour — and needs many repressive measures in order to exist and survive). Anarchists are of the opinion that changing the boss for the state (or vice versa) is only a step sideways, **not** forward! After all, it is **not** working people who control how the welfare state is run, it is politicians, "experts", bureaucrats and managers who do so (*"Welfare is administered by a top-heavy governmental machine which ensures that when economies in public expenditure are imposed by its political masters, they are made in reducing the service to the public, not by reducing the cost of*



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

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

With the growth of industrialism in the 19th century state schools triumphed, not through a desire to reform but as an economic necessity. Industry did not want free thinking individuals, it wanted workers, instruments of labour, and it wanted them punctual, obedient, passive and willing to accept their disadvantaged position. According to Nigel Thrift, many employers and social reformers became convinced that the earliest generations of workers were almost impossible to discipline (i.e. to get accustomed to wage labour and workplace authority). They looked to children, hoping that *"the elementary school could be used to break the labouring classes into those habits of*

*work discipline now necessary for factory production ... Putting little children to work at school for very long hours at very dull subjects was seen as a positive virtue, for it made them habituated, not to say naturalised, to labour and fatigue."* [quoted by Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 61]

Thus supporters of Modern Schools recognise that the role of education is an important one in maintaining hierarchical society — for government and other forms of hierarchy (such as wage labour) must always depend on the opinion of the governed. Francisco Ferrer (the most famous libertarian educator) argued that:

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

Little wonder, then, that Emma Goldman argued that *"modern methods of education"* have *"little regard for personal liberty and originality of thought. Uniformity and imitation is [its] motto."* The school *"is for the child what the prison is for the convict and the barracks for the solder — a place where everything is being used to break the will of the child, and then to pound, knead, and shape it into a being utterly foreign to itself."* Hence the importance of Modern Schools. It is a means of spreading libertarian education within a hierarchical society and undercut one of the key supports for that society — the education system. Instead of hierarchical education, Modern schools exist to *"develop the individual through knowledge and the free play of characteristic traits, so that [the child] may become a social being, because he had learned to know himself, to know his relation to his fellow[s]."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 141–2, p. 140



For example, with regards to municipal housing, anarchists will be the first to agree that it is paternalistic, bureaucratic and hardly a wonderful living experience. However, in stark contrast with the right who desire to privatise such estates, anarchists think that *"tenants control"* is the best solution as it gives us the benefits of individual ownership **along with** community (and so without the negative points of property, such as social atomisation). The demand for *"tenant control"* must come from below, by the *"collective resistance"* of the tenants themselves, perhaps as a result of struggles against *"continuous rent increases"* leading to *"the demand ... for a change in the status of the tenant."* Such a *"tenant take-over of the municipal estate is one of those sensible ideas which is dormant because our approach to municipal affairs is still stuck in the grooves of nineteenth century paternalism."* [Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73]

And it is here that we find the ultimate irony of the right-wing, "free market" attempts to abolish the welfare state — neoliberalism wants to end welfare **from above,** by means of the state (which is the instigator of this individualistic "reform"). It does not seek the end of dependency by self-liberation, but the shifting of dependency from state to charity and the market. In contrast, anarchists desire to abolish welfare from **below**. This the libertarian attitude to those government policies which actually do help people. While anarchists would *"hesitate to condemn those measures taken by governments which obviously benefited the people, unless we saw the immediate possibility of people carrying them out for themselves. This would not inhibit us from declaring at the same time that what initiatives governments take would be more successfully taken by the people themselves if they put their minds to the same problems ... to build up a hospital service or a transport system, for instance, from local needs into a national organisation, by agreement and consent at all levels is surely more economical as well as efficient than one which is conceived at top level [by the state] ... where Treasury, political and other pressures, not necessarily connected*

it is **this**, the potential benefits welfare can have for working people, that is the **real** cause for the current capitalist attacks upon it. As Noam Chomsky summarises:

> *"State authority is now under severe attack in the more democratic societies, but not because it conflicts with the libertarian vision. Rather the opposite: because it offers (weak) protection to some aspects of that vision. Governments have a fatal flaw: unlike the private tyrannies, the institutions of state power and authority offer to the public an opportunity to play some role, however limited, in managing their own affairs."* [**Chomsky on Anarchism**, p. 193]

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

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



and p. 145] It would be an education for freedom, not for subservience:

> *"Should the notion of freedom but awaken in man, free men dream only of freeing themselves now and for all time: but instead, all we do is churn out learned men who adapt in the most refined manner to every circumstance and fall to the level of slavish, submissive souls. For the most part, what are our fine gentlemen brimful of intellect and culture? Sneering slavers and slaves themselves."* [Max Stirner, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 12]

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

> *"The underlying principle of the Modern School is this: education is a process of drawing out, not driving in; it aims at the possibility that the child should be left free to develop spontaneously, directing his own efforts and choosing the branches of knowledge which he desires to study ... the teacher ... should be a sensitive instrument responding to the needs of the child ... a channel through which the child may attain so much of the ordered knowledge of the world as he shows himself ready to receive and assimilate."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146]

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

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

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

> *"I want to form a school of emancipation, concerned with banning from the mind whatever divides people, the false concepts of property, country and family so as to attain the liberty and well-being which all desire. I will teach only simple truth. I will not ram dogma into their heads. I will not conceal one iota of fact. I will teach not what to think but how to think."* [Ferrer, quoted by Harper, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 99–100]

The Modern School has no rewards or punishments, exams or mark — the everyday tortures of conventional schooling. And because practical knowledge is more useful than theory,



*and hierarchical institutions whose ultimate function is to perpetuate social inequality and to brainwash the young into the acceptance of their particular slot in the organised system."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83 and p. 81] The role of state education as a means of systematically indoctrinating the working class is reflected in William Lazonick words:

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

Lazonick, as did Pateman, indicates the contradictory nature of welfare provisions within capitalism. On the one hand, they are introduced to help control the working class (and to improve long term economic development). On the other hand, these provisions can be used by working class people as weapons against capitalism and give themselves more options than "work or starve" (the fact that the attacks on welfare in the UK during the 1990s — called, ironically enough, **welfare to work** — involves losing benefits if you refuse a job is not a surprising development). Thus we find that welfare acts as a kind of floor under wages. In the US, the two have followed a common trajectory (rising together and falling together). And

*do anything to challenge patriarchal power relations."* [**The Disorder of Women**, p. 195 and p. 200]

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

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

> *"The municipal tenant is trapped in a syndrome of dependence and resentment, which is an accurate reflection of his housing situation. People care about what is theirs, what they can modify, alter, adapt to changing needs and improve themselves. They must have a direct responsibility for it ... The tenant take-over of the municipal estate is one of those obviously sensible ideas which is dormant because our approach to municipal affairs is still stuck in the groves of nineteenth-century paternalism."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 73]

Looking at state supported education, Ward argues that the *"universal education system turns out to be yet another way in which the poor subsidise the rich."* Which is the least of its problems, for *"it is in the **nature** of public authorities to run coercive*



lessons were often held in factories, museums or the countryside. The school was also used by parents, and Ferrer planned a Popular University.

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

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

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

However, for most anarchists, Modern Schools are not enough in themselves to produce a libertarian society. They agree with Bakunin:

> *"For individuals to be moralised and become fully human ... three things are necessary: a hygienic birth, all-round education, accompanied by an upbringing based on respect for labour, reason, equality, and freedom and a social environment wherein each human individual will enjoy full freedom and really by, **de jure** and **de facto**, the equal of every other.*
>
> *"Does this environment exist? No. Then it must be established... [otherwise] in the existing social environment ... on leaving [libertarian] schools they [the student] would enter a society governed by totally opposite principles, and, because society is always stronger than individuals, it would prevail over them ... [and] demoralise them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p, 174]

Because of this, Modern Schools must be part of a mass working class revolutionary movement which aims to build as many aspects of the new world as possible in the old one before, ultimately, replacing it. Otherwise they are just useful as social experiments and their impact on society marginal. Thus, for anarchists, this process of education is **part of** the class struggle, not in place of it and so *"the workers [must] do everything possible to obtain all the education they can in the material circumstances in which they currently find themselves ... [while] concentrat[ing] their efforts on the great question of their economic emancipation, the mother of all other emancipations."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

Before finishing, we must stress that hierarchical education (like the media), cannot remove the effects of actual life and activity in shaping/changing people and their ideas, opinions and attitudes. While education is an essential part of maintaining the status quo and accustoming people to accept hierarchy, the state and wage slavery, it cannot stop individuals from learn-



of libertarian principles as the reverse happening. In terms of reducing human suffering, though, most anarchists would oppose the latter and be in favour of the former while aiming to create a third (self-managed) alternative.

Fourthly, we must note that while most anarchists **are** in favour of collective self-help and welfare, we are opposed to the state. Part of the alternatives anarchists try and create are self-managed and community welfare projects (see next section). Moreover, in the past, anarchists and syndicalists were at the forefront in opposing state welfare schemes. This was because they were introduced **not** by socialists but by liberals and other supporters of capitalism to undercut support for radical alternatives and to aid long term economic development by creating the educated and healthy population required to use advanced technology and fight wars. Thus we find that:

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

Anarchists view the welfare state much as some feminists do. While they note, to quote Carole Pateman, the *"patriarchal structure of the welfare state"* they are also aware that it has *"also brought challenges to patriarchal power and helped provide a basis for women's autonomous citizenship."* She goes on to note that *"for women to look at the welfare state is merely to exchange dependence on individual men for dependence on the state. The power and capriciousness of husbands is replaced by the arbitrariness, bureaucracy and power of the state, the very state that has upheld patriarchal power."* This *"will not in itself*

and protection and indirect support via laws that protect property and so on). And, for all their talk of increasing individual choice, the right-wing remain silent about the lack of choice and individual freedom during working hours within capitalism.

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

Thirdly, anarchists are just as opposed to capitalism as they are the state. This means that privatising state functions is no more libertarian than nationalising them. In fact, less so as such a process **reduces** the limited public say state control implies in favour of more private tyranny and wage-labour. As such, attempts to erode the welfare state without other, pro-working class, social reforms violates the anti-capitalist part of anarchism. Similarly, the introduction of a state supported welfare system rather than a for-profit capitalist run system (as in America) would hardly be considered any more a violation



ing from their experiences, ignoring their sense of right and wrong, recognising the injustices of the current system and the ideas that it is based upon. This means that even the best state (or private) education system will still produce rebels — for the **experience** of wage slavery and state oppression (and, most importantly, **struggle**) is shattering to the **ideology** spoon-fed children during their "education" and reinforced by the media.

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

## J.5.14 What is Libertarian Municipalism?

As we noted in section J.2, most anarchists reject participating in electoral politics. A notable exception was Murray Bookchin who not only proposed voting but also a non-parliamentary electoral strategy for anarchists. He repeated this proposal in many of his later works, such as **From Urbanisation to Cities**, and has made it — at least in the USA — one of the many alternatives anarchists are involved in.

According to Bookchin, *"the proletariat, as do all oppressed sectors of society, comes to life when it sheds its industrial habits in the free and spontaneous activity of* ***communising,*** *or taking*

*part in the political life of the community.*" In other words, Bookchin thought that democratisation of local communities may be as strategically important, or perhaps more important, to anarchists than workplace struggles. Since local politics is humanly scaled, Bookchin argued that it can be participatory rather than parliamentary. Or, as he put it, the *"anarchic ideal of decentralised, stateless, collectively managed, and directly democratic communities — of confederated municipalities or 'communes' — speaks almost intuitively, and in the best works of Proudhon and Kropotkin, consciously, to the transforming role of libertarian municipalism as the framework of a liberatory society." "Theses on Libertarian Municipalism"*, pp. 9–22, **The Anarchist Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.),p. 10] He also pointed out that, historically, the city has been the principle countervailing force to imperial and national states, haunting them as a potential challenge to centralised power and continuing to do so today, as can be seen in the conflicts between national government and municipalities in many countries.

Despite the libertarian potential of urban politics, "urbanisation" — the growth of the modern megalopolis as a vast wasteland of suburbs, shopping malls, industrial parks, and slums that foster political apathy and isolation in realms of alienated production and private consumption — is antithetical to the continued existence of those aspects of the city that might serve as the framework for a libertarian municipalism: *"When urbanisation will have effaced city life so completely that the city no longer has its own identity, culture, and spaces for consociation, the bases for democracy — in whatever way the word in defined — will have disappeared and the question of revolutionary forms will be a shadow game of abstractions."* Despite this danger Bookchin argued that a libertarian politics of local government is still possible, provided anarchists get our act together: *"The Commune still lies buried in the city council; the sections still lie buried in the neighbourhood; the*



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

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

The period of neo-liberalism since the 1980s has seen a rollback of the state within society by the right-wing in the name of "freedom," "individual responsibility" and "efficiency." The position of anarchists to this process is mixed. On the one hand, we are all in favour of reducing the size of the state and increasing individual responsibility and freedom but, on the other, we are well aware that this rollback is part of an attack on the working class and tends to increase the power of the capitalists over us as the state's (direct) influence is reduced. Thus anarchists appear to be on the horns of a dilemma — or, at least, apparently.

So what attitude **do** anarchists take to the welfare state and attacks on it?

First we must note that this attack on "welfare" is somewhat selective. While using the rhetoric of "self-reliance" and "individualism," the practitioners of these "tough love" programmes have made sure that the major corporations continue to get state hand-outs and aid while attacking social welfare. In other words, the current attack on the welfare state is an attempt to impose market discipline on the working class while increasing state protection for the ruling class. Therefore, most anarchists have no problem defending social welfare programmes as these can be considered as only fair considering the aid the capitalist class has always received from the state (both direct subsidies

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

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

So, while Libertarian Muncipalism **does** raise many important issues and correctly stresses the importance of community



*town meeting still lies buried in the township; confederal forms of municipal association still lie buried in regional networks of towns and cities."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 16 and p. 21]

What would anarchists do electorally at the local level? Bookchin proposed that libertarians stand in local elections in order to change city and town charters to make them participatory: *"An organic politics based on such radical participatory forms of civic association does not exclude the right of anarchists to alter city and town charters such that they validate the existence of directly democratic institutions. And if this kind of activity brings anarchists into city councils, there is no reason why such a politics should be construed as parliamentary, particularly if it is confined to the civic level and is consciously posed against the state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21]

In short, Libertarian Muncipalism *"depends upon libertarian leftists running candidates at the local level, calling for the division of municipalities into wards, where popular assemblies can be created that bring people into full and direct participation in political life ... municipalities would [then] confederate into a dual power to oppose the nation-state and ultimately dispense with it and with the economic forces that underpin statism as such."* [**Democracy and Nature** no. 9, p. 158] This would be part of a social wide transformation, whose *"[m]inimal steps ... include initiating Left Green municipalist movements that propose neighbourhood and town assemblies — even if they have only moral functions at first — and electing town and city councillors that advance the cause of these assemblies and other popular institutions. These minimal steps can lead step-by-step to the formation of confederal bodies ... Civic banks to fund municipal enterprises and land purchases; the fostering of new ecologically-orientated enterprises that are owned by the community."* Thus Bookchin saw Libertarian Muncipalism as a process by which the state can be undermined by using elections as the means of creating popular assemblies. Part of this would be the *"municipalisation of property"* which would *"bring the economy **as a***

***whole*** *into the orbit of the public sphere, where economic policy could be formulated by the* ***entire*** *community."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 266 and p. 235]

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

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

Secondly, Bookchin and other Libertarian Muncipalists are correct to argue that anarchists should work in their local communities. Many anarchists are doing just that and are being very successful as well. However, most anarchists reject the idea of a *"confederal muncipalist movement run[ning] candidates for municipal councils with demands for the institution of public assemblies"* as viable means of *"struggle toward creating new civic institutions out of old ones (or replacing the old ones altogether)."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 229 and p. 267]

The most serious objection to this has to do with whether politics in most cities has already become too centralised, bureaucratic, inhumanly scaled, and dominated by capitalist interests to have any possibility of being taken over by anarchists running on platforms of participatory democratisation. Merely to pose the question seems enough to answer it. There is no such possibility in the vast majority of cities, and hence it would be a waste of time and energy for anarchists to support libertarian municipalist candidates in local elections — time and energy that could be more profitably spent in direct action. If the central governments are too bureaucratic and unresponsive to be used by Libertarian Municipalists, the same can be said of local ones too — particularly as the local state has become increasingly controlled by the central authorities (in the UK, for example, the Conservative government of the 1980s successfully centralised power away from local councils to undercut their ability to resist the imposition of its neo-liberal policies).

The counter-argument to this is that even if there is no chance of such candidates being elected, their standing for elections would serve a valuable educational function. The answer to this is: perhaps, but would it be more valuable than direct action? Would its educational value, if any, outweigh the disadvantages of electioneering discussed in section J.2? Given the ability of major media to marginalise alternative candidates, we doubt that such campaigns would have enough educational value to outweigh these disadvantages. Moreover, being an anarchist does not make one immune to the corrupting effects of electioneering. History is littered with radical, politically aware movements using elections and ending up becoming part of the system they aimed to transform. Most anarchists doubt that Libertarian Muncipalism will be any different — after all, it is the circumstances the parties find themselves in which are decisive, not the theory they hold. Why would libertarians be immune to this but not Marxists or Greens?

Lastly, most anarchists question the whole process on which Libertarian Muncipalism bases itself on. The idea of

Anarchists, therefore, organise to influence social struggle in a libertarian manner and our role in any social revolution is to combat authoritarian tendencies and parties while encouraging working class self-organisation, self-activity and self-management (how we organise to achieve this is described in section J.3). Only by the spreading of libertarian ideas and values within society, encouraging libertarian forms of social organisation (i.e., self-management, decentralisation, federalism, etc.) and continually warning against centralising power into a few hands can a revolution become more than a change of masters.

## J.7.6 How could an anarchist revolution defend itself?

To some, particularly Marxists, this section may seem in contradiction with anarchist ideas. As we discussed in section H.2.1, Marxists tend to assume, incorrectly, that anarchists are either against defending a revolution or see no need to. However, as will become very clear, nothing could be further from the truth. Anarchists have always argued for defending a revolution — by force, if necessary. Anarchists argue that Marx (and Marxists) confuse self-defence by *"the people armed"* with the state, a confusion which has horrific implications (as the history of the Russian Revolution shows).

So how would an anarchist revolution (and by implication, society) defend itself? Firstly, we should note that it will **not** defend itself by creating a centralised body, a new state. If it did this then the revolution will have failed and a new class society would have been created (a society based on state bureaucrats and oppressed workers as in the Soviet Union). Thus we reject the Marxist notion of a so-called "workers" or "revolutionary" state as confused in the extreme (as should be obvious from our analysis in section H). Rather, we seek libertarian means to



child to be spanked or even scolded or lectured in order to acquire a sex-negative attitude. Children are very intuitive and will receive the message "sex is bad" from subtle parental cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, embarrassed silence, avoidance of certain topics, etc. Mere "toleration" of sexual curiosity and play is far different in its psychological effects from positive affirmation.

Along the same lines, to prevent the formation of sex-negative attitudes means that nakedness should never be discouraged: *"The baby should see its parents naked from the beginning. However, the child should be told when he is ready to understand that some people don't like to see children naked and that, in the presence of such people, he should wear clothes."* Neill maintains that not only should parents never spank or punish a child for genital play, but that spanking and other forms of punishment should never be used in **any** circumstances, because they instil fear, turning children into cowards and often leading to phobias. *"Fear must be entirely eliminated — fear of adults, fear of punishment, fear of disapproval, fear of God. Only hate can flourish in an atmosphere of fear."* Punishment also turns children into sadists: *"The cruelty of many children springs from the cruelty that has been practised on them by adults. You cannot be beaten without wishing to beat someone else."* (*"Every beating makes a child sadistic in desire or practice."* [Neil **Op. Cit.**, p. 229, p. 124, p. 269 and p. 271] This is obviously an important consideration to anarchists, as sadistic drives provide the psychological ground for militarism, war, police brutality, and so on. Such drives are undoubtedly also part of the desire to exercise hierarchical authority, with its possibilities for using negative sanctions against subordinates as an outlet for sadistic impulses.

Child beating is particularly cowardly because it is a way for adults to vent their hatred, frustration, and sadism on those who are unable to defend themselves. Such cruelty is, of course, always rationalised with excuse like "it hurts me more than it

does you," etc., or explained in moral terms, like "I don't want my boy to be soft" or "I want him to prepare him for a harsh world" or "I spank my children because my parents spanked me, and it did me a hell of a lot of good." But despite such rationalisations, the fact remains that punishment is always an act of hate. To this hate the child responds in kind by hating the parents, followed by fantasy, guilt, and repression. For example, the child may fantasise the father's death, which immediately causes guilt, and so is repressed. Often the hatred induced by punishment emerges in fantasies that are seemingly remote from the parents, such as stories of giant killing — always popular with children because the giant represents the father. Obviously, the sense of guilt produced by such fantasies is very advantageous to organised religions that promise redemption from "sin." It is surely no coincidence that such religions are enthusiastic promoters of the sex-negative morality and disciplinarian child rearing practices that keep supplying them with recruits.

What is worse, however, is that punishment actually **creates** "problem children." This is so because the parent arouses more and more hatred (and diminishing trust in other human beings) in the child with each spanking, which is expressed in still worse behaviour, calling for more spankings, and so on, in a vicious circle. In contrast, the *"self-regulated child does not need any punishment,"* Neill argued, *"and he does not go through this hate cycle. He is never punished and he does not need to behave badly. He has no use for lying and for breaking things. His body has never been called filthy or wicked. He has not needed to rebel against authority or to fear his parents. Tantrums he will usually have, but they will be short-lived and not tend toward neurosis."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 166]

We could cite many further examples of how libertarian principles of child-rearing can be applied in practice, but we must limit ourselves to these few. The basic principles can be summed up as follows: Get rid of authority, moralising, and



ing of self-management with bureaucracy and the creation of a new, exploitative and oppressive class of officials and party hacks. Only when power rests in the hands of everyone can a social revolution exist and a free society created. If this is not done, if the state replaces the self-managed associations of a free people, all that happens is the replacement of one class system by another. This is because the state is an instrument of minority rule — it can never become an instrument of majority empowerment as its centralised, hierarchical and authoritarian nature excludes such a possibility (see section H.3.7 for more discussion on this issue).

Therefore an important role of anarchists is to undermine hierarchical organisation by creating self-managed ones, by keeping the management and direction of a struggle or revolution in the hands of those actually conducting it. It is **their** revolution, **not** a party's and so they should control and manage it. They are the ones who have to live with the consequences of it. As Bakunin argued, social revolution *"should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] *"The revolution is safe, it grows and becomes strong,"* correctly argued Alexander Berkman, *"as long as the masses feel that they are direct participants in it, that they are fashioning their own lives, that **they** are making the revolution, that they **are** the revolution. But the moment that their activities are usurped by a political party or are centred in some special organisation, revolutionary effort becomes limited to a comparatively small circle from which the large masses are practically excluded. The natural result is that popular enthusiasm is dampened, interest gradually weakens, initiative languishes, creativeness wanes, and the revolution becomes the monopoly of a clique which presently turns dictator."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 213] The history of every revolution proves this point, we feel, and so the role of anarchists is clear — to keep a revolution revolutionary by encouraging libertarian ideas, organisation, tactics and activity.

Equally as important, *"is that the people, all people, should lose their sheep-like instincts and habits with which their minds have been inculcated by an age-long slavery, and that they should learn to think and act freely. It is to this great task of spiritual liberation that anarchists must especially devote their attention."* Unless people think and act for themselves, no social revolution is possible and anarchy will remain just an opposition tendency within authoritarian societies. Practically, this means the encouragement of self-management and direct action. Anarchists thus *"push the people to expropriate the bosses and put all goods in common and organise their daily lives themselves, through freely constituted associations, without waiting for orders from outside and refusing to nominate or recognise any government or constituted body in whatever guise ... even in a provisional capacity, which ascribes to itself the right to lay down the law and impose with force its will on others."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 160–1 and p. 197] This is because, to quote Bakunin, anarchists do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237]

The history of every revolution confirms Kropotkin (who echoed Proudhon) that *"revolutionary government"* is a contradiction in terms. Government bodies mean *"the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives [are] also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could have no other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters."* [Richards, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 42–3] Such a centralisation of power means the suppression of local initiatives, the replac-



the desire to "improve" and "civilise" children. Allow them to be themselves, without pushing them around, bribing, threatening, admonishing, lecturing, or otherwise forcing them to do anything. Refrain from action unless the child, by expressing their "freedom" restricts the freedom of others and **explain** what is wrong about such actions and never mechanically punish.

This is, of course, a radical philosophy, which few parents are willing to follow. It is quite amazing how people who call themselves libertarians in political and economic matters draw the line when it comes to their behaviour within the family — as if such behaviour had no wider social consequences!

## J.6.3 If children have nothing to fear, how can they be good?

Obedience that is based on fear of punishment, this-worldly or other-worldly, is not really goodness, it is merely cowardice. True morality (i.e. respect for others and one-self) comes from inner conviction based on experience, it cannot be imposed from without by fear. Nor can it be inspired by hope of reward, such as praise or the promise of heaven, which is simply bribery. If children are given as much freedom as possible from the day of birth, if parents respect them as individuals and give a positive example as well as not being forced to conform to parental expectations, they will spontaneously learn the basic principles of social behaviour, such as cleanliness, courtesy, and so forth. But they must be allowed to develop them **at their own speed,** at the natural stage of their growth, not when parents think they should develop them. What is "natural" timing must be discovered by observation, not by defining it a priori based on one's own expectations.

Can a child really be taught to keep themselves clean without being punished for getting dirty? According to many psy-

chologists, it is not only possible but **vitally important** for the child's mental health to do so, since punishment will give the child a fixed and repressed interest in their bodily functions. As Reich and Lowen have shown various forms of compulsive and obsessive neuroses can be traced back to the punishments used in toilet training. As Neill observed: *"When the mother says **naughty** or **dirty** or even **tut tut**, the element of right and wrong arises. The question becomes a **moral** one — when it should remain a **physical** one."* He suggested that the **wrong** way to deal with a child who likes to play with faeces is to tell him he is being dirty. The right way *"is to allow him to live out his interest in excrement by providing him with mud or clay. In this way, he will sublimate his interest without repression. He will live through his interest; and in doing so, kill it."* [**Summerhill**, p. 174]

Similarly, sceptics will probably question how children can be induced to eat a healthy diet without threats of punishment. The answer can be discovered by a simple experiment: set out on the table all kinds of foods, from sweets and ice cream to whole wheat bread, lettuce, sprouts, and so on, and allow the child complete freedom to choose what is desired or to eat nothing at all if he or she is not hungry. Parents will find that the average child will begin choosing a balanced diet after about a week, after the desire for prohibited or restricted foods has been satisfied. This is an example of what can be called "trusting nature." That the question of how to "train" a child to eat properly should even be an issue says volumes about how little the concept of freedom for children is accepted or even understood, in our society. Unfortunately, the concept of "training" still holds the field in this and most other areas.

The disciplinarian argument that that children must be **forced** to respect possessions is also defective, because it always requires some sacrifice of a child's play life (and childhood should be devoted to play, not to "preparing for adulthood," because playing is what children spontaneously



aged workplace occupations and federations of factory committees (see Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for a good introduction to this movement and Bolshevik hostility to it). Similarly, they supported the soviets (councils elected by workers in their workplaces) but opposed their transformation from revolutionary bodies into state organs (and so little more than organs of the Communist Party, rubber-stamping the decisions of the party leadership). The anarchists tried to *"work for their conversion from centres of authority and decrees into non-authoritarian centres, regulating and keeping things in order but not suppressing the freedom and independence of local workers' organisations. They must become centres which link together these autonomous organisations."* [G. P. Maksimov, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 105]

Therefore, the role of anarchists, as Murray Bookchin put it, is to *"**preserve and extend the anarchic phase that opens all the great social revolutions**"* by working *"**within the framework of the forms created by the revolution,** not within the forms created by the party. What this means is that their commitment is to the revolutionary organs of self-management … to the **social** forms, not the **political** forms."* Revolutionary anarchists *"seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies or soviets to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management,** not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party,"* to organise to *"propagate ideas systematically … **ideas which promote the concept of self-management**."* The revolutionary organisation *"presents the most advanced demands"* and *"formulate[s] — in the most concrete fashion — the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 139–140]

*very process in which man acquires power over his own life and in which he not only 'discovers' himself, but, more meaningfully, formulates his selfhood in all its social dimensions."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 104]

## J.7.5 What is the role of anarchists in a social revolution?

All the great social revolutions have been spontaneous. Indeed, it is cliché that the revolutionaries are usually the most surprised when a revolution breaks out. Nor do anarchists assume that a revolution will initially be totally libertarian in nature. All we assume is that there will be libertarian tendencies which anarchists work within to try and strengthen. Therefore the role of anarchists and anarchist organisations is to push a revolution towards a social revolution by encouraging the tendencies we discussed in the last section and by arguing for anarchist ideas and solutions. In the words of Vernon Richards:

> *"We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44]

For anarchists, our role in a social revolution is clear — we try to spread anarchist ideas and encourage autonomous organisation and activity by the oppressed. For example, during the Russian Revolution anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists played a key role in the factory committee movement for workers' self-management. They combated Bolshevik attempts to substitute state control for workers' self-management and encour-



do). The libertarian view is that a child should arrive at a sense of value out of his or her own free choice. This means not scolding or punishing them for breaking or damaging things. As they grow out of the stage of preadolescent indifference to possessions, they learn to respect it naturally.

"But shouldn't a child at least be punished for stealing?" it will be asked. Once again, the answer lies in the idea of trusting nature. The concept of "mine" and "yours" is adult, and children naturally develop it as they become mature, but not before. This means that normal children will "steal" — though that is not how they regard it. They are simply trying to satisfy their acquisitive impulses; or, if they are with friends, their desire for adventure. In a society so thoroughly steeping in the idea of respect for property as ours, it is no doubt difficult for parents to resist societal pressure to punish children for "stealing." The reward for such trust, however, will be a child who grows into a healthy adolescent who respects the possessions of others, not out of a cowardly fear of punishment but from his or her own self-nature.

Most parents believe that, besides taking care of their child's physical needs, the teaching of ethical/moral values is their main responsibility and that without such teaching the child will grow up to be a "little wild animal" who acts on every whim, with no consideration for others. This idea arises mainly from the fact that most people in our society believe, at least passively, that human beings are naturally bad and that unless they are "trained" to be good they will be lazy, mean, violent, or even murderous. This, of course, is essentially the idea of "original sin" and because of its widespread acceptance, nearly all adults believe that it is their job to "improve" children. Yet according to libertarian psychologists there is no original sin. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that there is "original virtue." Wilhelm Reich found that externally imposed, compulsive morality actually **causes** immoral behaviour by creating cruel and perverse

*"secondary drives."* Neill put it this way: *"I find that when I smash the moral instruction a bad boy has received, he becomes a good boy."* [, p. 250]

Unconscious acceptance of some form of the idea of original sin is the main recruiting tool of organised religions, as people who believe they are born "sinners" feel a strong sense of guilt and need for redemption. Parents to should eliminate any need for redemption, by telling the child that he is born good, not born bad. This will help keep them from falling under the influence of life-denying religions, which are inimical to the growth of a healthy character structure. Citing ethnological studies, Reich argued the following:

> *"Among those primitive peoples who lead satisfactory, unimpaired sexual lives, there is no sexual crime, no sexual perversion, no sexual brutality between man and woman; rape is unthinkable because it is unnecessary in their society. Their sexual activity flows in normal, well-ordered channels which would fill any cleric with indignation and fear ... They love the human body and take pleasure in their sexuality. They do not understand why young men and women should not enjoy their sexuality. But when their lives are invaded by the ascetic, hypocritical morass and by the Church, which bring them 'culture' along with exploitation, alcohol, and syphilis, they begin to suffer the same wretchedness as ourselves. They begin to lead 'moral' lives, i.e. to suppress their sexuality, and from then on they decline more and more into a state of sexual distress, which is the result of sexual suppression. At the same time, they become sexually dangerous; murders of spouses, sexual diseases, and crimes of all sorts start to appear."* [**Children of the Future**, p. 193]



will many aspects of personal life and personal relationships. We cannot say in which way, bar there will be a general libertarian movement in all aspects of life as women resist and overcome sexism, gays resist and end homophobia, the young will expect to be treated as individuals, not property, and so on.

Society will become more diverse, open, free and libertarian in nature. And, hopefully, it and the struggle that creates it will be **fun** — anarchism is about making life worth living and so any struggle must reflect that. The use of fun in the struggle is important. There is no incongruity in conducting serious business and having fun. We are sure this will piss off the "serious" Left no end. The aim of revolution is to emancipate **individuals** not abstractions like "the proletariat," "society," "history" and so on. Having fun is part and parcel of that liberation. As Emma Goldman argued (and was paraphrased in the 1970s to *"If I cannot dance, it is not my revolution!"*), anarchism stands for *"release and freedom from conventions and prejudice"* and so she could *"not believe"* that it *"should demand the denial of life and joy"* (*"If it meant that, I did not want it"*): *"I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 56] As Bookchin suggested: *"Can we resolve the anarchic, intoxicating phase that opens all the great revolutions of history merely into an expression of class interest and the opportunity to redistribute social wealth?"* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189f]

Therefore a social revolution involves a transformation of society from the bottom up by the creative action of working class people. This transformation would be conducted through self-managed organisations which will be the basis for abolishing hierarchy, state and capitalism: *"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. **A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration** ... If we define 'power' as the power of man over man, power can only be destroyed by the*

> *block, the neighbourhood or the district — the revolutionary sections to come — will stand on a higher social level than all the present-day committees, syndicates, parties and clubs adorned by the most resounding 'revolutionary' titles. They will be the living nuclei of utopia in the decomposing body of bourgeois society ... The specific gravity of society ... must be shifted to its base — the armed people in permanent assembly."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 104–5]

Such organisations are required because *"[f]reedom has its forms ... a liberatory revolution always poses the question of what social forms will replace existing ones. At one point or another, a revolutionary people must deal with how it will manage the land and the factories from which it requires the means of life. It must deal with the manner in which it will arrive at decisions that affect the community as a whole. Thus if revolutionary thought is to be taken at all seriously, it must speak directly to the problems and forms of social management."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] If this is not done, capitalism and the state will not be destroyed and the social revolution will fail. Only by destroying hierarchical power, by abolishing state and capitalism by self-managed organisations, can individuals free themselves and society.

As well as these economic and political changes, there would be other changes as well — far too many to chronicle here. For example: *"We will see to it that all empty and underoccupied houses are used so that no one will be without a roof over his [or her] head. We will hasten to abolish banks and title deeds and all that represents and guarantees the power of the State and capitalist privilege. And we will try to reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 165] Similarly, free associations will spring up on a whole range of issues, interests and needs. Social life will become transformed, as



Such crimes in our society would be greatly reduced if libertarian child rearing practices were widely followed. These are obviously important considerations for anarchists, who are frequently asked to explain how crime can be prevented in an anarchist society. The answer is that if people are not suppressed during childhood there will be far less anti-social behaviour, because the secondary-drive structure that leads to it will not be created in the first place. In other words, the solution to the so-called crime problem is not more police, more laws, or a return to the disciplinarianism of "traditional family values," as conservatives claim, but depends mainly on **getting rid** of such values.

There are other problems as well with the moralism taught by organised religions. One danger is making the child a hater: *"If a child is taught that certain things are sinful, his love of life must be changed to hate. When children are free, they never think of another child as being a sinner."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] From the idea that certain people are sinners, it is a short step to the idea that certain classes or races of people are more "sinful" than others, leading to prejudice, discrimination, and persecution of minorities as an outlet for repressed anger and sadistic drives — drives that are created in the first place by moralistic training during early childhood. Once again, the relevance for anarchism is obvious.

A further danger of religious instruction is the development of a fear of life: *"Religion to a child most always means only fear. God is a mighty man with holes in his eyelids: He can see you wherever you are. To a child, this often means that God can see what is being done under the bedclothes. And to introduce fear into a child's life is the worst of all crimes. Forever the child says nay to life; forever he is an inferior; forever a coward."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 246] People who have been threatened with fear of an afterlife in hell can never be entirely free of neurotic anxiety about security in **this** life. In turn, such people become easy targets of ruling-class propaganda that plays upon their material

and emotional insecurity, e.g. the rationalisation of imperialist wars, the Military-Industrial Complex, increased state powers, and so on as necessary to "preserve jobs", for security against external threats and so forth.

## J.6.3 But how will a free child ever learn unselfishness?

Another common objection to self-regulation is that children can only be taught to be **"unselfish"** through punishment and admonition. Again, however, such a view comes from a distrust of nature and is part of the common attitude that nature is mere "raw material" to be shaped by human beings according to their own wishes. The libertarian attitude is that empathy for others develops at the proper time:

> *"To ask a child to be unselfish is wrong. Every child is an egoist and the world belongs to him. When he has an apple, his one wish is to eat that apple. The chief result of mother's encouraging him to share it with his little brother is to make him hate the little brother. Altruism comes later — comes naturally — **if the child is not taught to be unselfish.** It probably never comes at all if the child has been forced to be unselfish. By suppressing the child's selfishness, the mother is fixing that selfishness forever."* [Neill, **Summerhill**, pp. 250–251]

Unfulfilled wishes live on in the unconscious so children who are pressured too hard — "taught" — to be unselfish will, while conforming outwardly with parental demands, unconsciously repress part of their real, selfish wishes, and these repressed infantile desires will make the person selfish (and possibly neurotic) throughout life. Moreover, telling children that what they want to do is "wrong" or "bad" is



> *and provinces in the name of the same principles and to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction … it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution … There can no longer be any successful revolution unless the political revolution is transformed into social revolution … Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations … organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–2]

Thus we have a dual framework of revolution, the federation of self-managed workplace and community assemblies based on mandated and recallable delegates. *"Through its class organisations,"* Makhno argued, *"the people yearned to lay the foundations of a new, free society intended, as it develops without interference, to eliminate from the body of society all the parasites and all the power exercised by some over others, these being deemed by the toilers to be stupid and harmful."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79] These organisations, as we stressed in section I.2.3, are the products of the social struggle and revolution themselves:

> *"Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must **be** the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as **modes of struggle** against existing society … The future assemblies of people in the*

tive to capitalist production. We propose self-governing communes to organise social life instead of the state. *"One only destroys, and effectively and permanently,"* argued Malatesta, *"that which one replaces by something else; and to put off to a later date the solution of problems which present themselves with the urgency of necessity, would be to give time to the institutions one is intending to abolish to recover from the shock and reassert themselves, perhaps under other names, but certainly with the same structure."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 159] This was the failure of the Spanish Revolution, which ignored the state rather than abolish it via new, self-managed organisations (see section I.8.13). It must be stressed that this was not due to anarchist theory (see section I.8.11).

Hence a social revolution would see the *"[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members, guided by science and experience, and free from any kind of imposition which does not spring from natural needs, to which everyone, convinced by a feeling of overriding necessity, voluntarily submits."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184] A revolution organises itself from the bottom up, in a self-managed way. As Bakunin summarised:

> *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... will constitute the Commune ... The Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates ... all provinces, communes and associations ...* ***reorganising*** *on revolutionary lines ... [would send] their representatives to an agreed meeting place ... vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes*



equivalent to teaching them to hate themselves, and it is a well-known principle of psychology that people who do not love themselves cannot love others. Thus moral instruction, although it aims to develop altruism and love for others, is actually self-defeating, having just the opposite result. Moreover, such attempts to produce "unselfish" children (and so adults) actually works **against** developing the individuality of the child and they developing their own abilities (in particular their ability of critical thought). As Erich Fromm put it:

> *"Not to be selfish implies not to do what one wishes, to give up one's own wishes for the sake of those in authority ... Aside from its obvious implication, it means 'don't love yourself,' 'don't be yourself', but submit yourself to something more important than yourself, to an outside power or its internalisation, 'duty.' 'Don't be selfish' becomes one of the most powerful ideological tools in suppressing spontaneity and the free development of personality. Under the pressure of this slogan one is asked for every sacrifice and for complete submission: only those acts are 'unselfish' which do not serve the individual but somebody or something outside himself."* [**Man for Himself**, p. 127]

While such "unselfishness" is ideal for creating "model citizens" and willing wage slaves, it is not conducive for creating anarchists or even developing individuality. Little wonder Bakunin celebrated the urge to rebel and saw it as the key to human progress! Fromm goes on to note that selfishness and self-love, *"far from being identical, are actually opposites"* and that *"selfish persons are incapable of loving others . .. [or] loving themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 131] Individuals who do not love themselves, and so others, will be more willing to submit themselves to hierarchy than those who do love themselves and are

concerned for their own, and others, welfare. Thus the contradictory nature of capitalism, with its contradictory appeals to selfish and unselfish behaviour, can be understood as being based upon lack of self-love, a lack which is promoted in childhood and one which libertarians should be aware of and combat.

Indeed, much of the urge to "teach children unselfishness" is actually an expression of adults' will to power. Whenever parents feel the urge to impose directives on their children, they would be wise to ask themselves whether the impulse comes from their own power drive or their own selfishness. For, since our culture strongly conditions us to seek power over others, what could be more convenient than having a small, weak person at hand who cannot resist one's will to power? Instead of issuing directives, libertarians believe in letting social behaviour develop naturally, which it will do after other people's opinions becomes important **to the child.** As Neill pointed out:

> *"Everyone seeks the good opinion of his neighbours. Unless other forces push him into unsocial behaviour, a child will naturally want to do that which will cause him to be well-regarded, but this desire to please others develops at a certain stage in his growth. The attempt by parents and teachers to artificially accelerate this stage does the child irreparable damage."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 256]

Therefore, parents should allow children to be "selfish" and "ungiving", free to follow their own childish interests throughout their childhood. Every interpersonal conflict of interest should be grounds for a lesson in dignity on one side and consideration on the other. Only by this process can a child develop their individuality. By so doing they will come to recognise the individuality of others and this is the first



*the basic structure of the new society in all its aspects: administrative, economic and political."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durrutu in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 312]

Such a destruction of the state does not involve violence against individuals, but rather the end of hierarchical organisations, positions and institutions. It would involve, for example, the disbanding of the police, army, navy, state officialdom, etc. It would mean the transformation of police stations, military bases, the offices used by the bureaucracy into something more useful (or, as in the case of prisons, their destruction). Town halls would be occupied and used by community and industrial groups, for example. Offices of the mayor could be turned into crèches. Police stations, if they have not been destroyed, could be turned into storage centres for goods (William Morris, in his utopian novel **News from Nowhere**, imagined the Houses of Parliament being turned into a manure storage facility). And so on. Those who used to work in such occupations would be asked to pursue a more fruitful way of life or leave the community. In this manner, all harmful and useless institutions would be destroyed or transformed into something of benefit to society.

In addition, as well as the transformation/destruction of the buildings associated with the old state, the decision making process for the community previously usurped by the state would come back into the hands of the people. Alternative, self-managed organisations would be created in every community to manage community affairs. From these community assemblies, confederations would spring up to co-ordinate joint activities and interests. These neighbourhood assemblies and confederations would be means by which power would be dissolved in society and government finally eliminated in favour of freedom (both individual and collective).

Ultimately, anarchism means creating positive alternatives to those existing institutions which provide some useful function. For example, we propose self-management as an alterna-

*and be prepared to exercise this basic right by expropriating the landowners, the industrialists and financiers, and putting all social wealth at the disposal of the people."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 167]

However, the economic transformation is but part of the picture. As Kropotkin argued, *"throughout history we see that each change in the economic relations of a community is accompanied by a corresponding change in what may be called political organisation ... Thus, too, it will be with Socialism. If it contemplates a new departure in economics it **must** be prepared for a new departure in what is called political organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 39] Thus the anarchist social revolution also aims to abolish the state and create a confederation of self-governing communes to ensure its final elimination. This destruction of the state is essential as *"those workers who want to free themselves, or even only to effectively improve their conditions, will be forced to defend themselves from the government ... which by legalising the right to property and protecting it with brute force, constitutes a barrier to human progress, which must be beaten down ... if one does not wish to remain indefinitely under present conditions or even worse."* Therefore, *"[f]rom the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 195]

Thus a social revolution will have to destroy the state bureaucracy and its forces of violence and coercion (the police, armed forces, intelligence agencies, and so on). If this is not done then the state will come back and crush the revolution. As the CNT newspaper put it in the 1930s, the *"first step in the social revolution is to take control of Town Hall and proclaim the free commune. Once this occurs, self-management spreads to all areas of life and the people exercise their sovereign executive power through the popular assembly."* This free commune *"is the basic unit of libertarian communism ... and, federated, it provides*



step in developing ethical concepts (which rest upon mutual respect for others and their individuality).

## J.6.4 Isn't "libertarian child-rearing" just another name for spoiling the child?

No. This objection confuses the distinction between freedom and license. To raise a child in freedom does not mean letting him or her walk all over you or others; it does not mean never saying "no." It is true that free children are not subjected to punishment, irrational authority, or moralistic admonitions, but they are not "free" to violate the rights of others. As Neill put it: *"in the disciplined home, the children have **no** rights. In the spoiled home, they have **all** the rights. The proper home is one in which children and adults have equal rights."* Or again: *"To let a child have his own way, or do what he wants to **at another's expense,** is bad for the child. It creates a spoiled child, and the spoiled child is a bad citizen."* [**Summerhill**, p. 107 and 167]

There will inevitably be conflicts of will between parents and children, and the healthy way to resolve them is discussion and coming to an agreement. The unhealthy ways are either to resort to authoritarian discipline or to spoil the child by allowing them to have all the social rights. Libertarian psychologists argue that no harm is done to children by insisting on one's individual rights, but that the harm comes from moralism, i.e. when one introduces the concepts of right and wrong or words like "naughty," "bad," or "dirty," which produce guilt.

Therefore it should not be thought that free children are free to "do as they please." Freedom means doing what one likes so long as it does not infringe on the freedom of others. Thus there is a big difference between compelling a child to stop throwing stones at others and compelling him or her to learn geometry. Throwing stones infringes on others' rights, but learning geometry involves only the child. The same goes for forcing children

to eat with a fork instead of their fingers; to say "please" and "thank you"; to tidy up their rooms, and so on. Bad manners and untidiness may be annoying to adults, but they are not a violation of adults' rights. One could, of course, define an adult "right" to be free of annoyance from **anything** one's child does, but this would simply be a license for authoritarianism, emptying the concept of children's rights of all content.

As mentioned, giving children freedom does not mean allowing them to endanger themselves physically. For example, a sick child should not be asked to decide whether he wants to go outdoors or take his prescribed medicine, nor a run-down and overtired child whether she wants to go to bed. But the imposition of such forms of necessary authority is compatible with the idea that children should be given as much responsibility as they can handle at their particular age. Only in this way can they develop self-assurance. And, again, it is important for parents to examine their own motives when deciding how much responsibility to give their child. Parents who insist on choosing their children's clothes for them, for example, are generally worried that the child might select clothes that would reflect badly on their parents' social standing.

As for those who equate "discipline" in the home with "obedience," the latter is usually required of a child to satisfy the adults' desire for power. Self-regulation means that there are no power games being played with children, no loud voice saying "You'll do it because I say so, or else!" But, although this irrational, power-seeking kind of authority is absent in the libertarian home, there still remains what can be called a kind of "authority," namely adult protection, care, and responsibility, as well as the insistence on one's own rights. As Neill observed: *"Such authority sometimes demands obedience but at other times gives obedience. Thus I can say to my daughter, 'You can't bring that mud and water into our parlour.' That's no more than her saying to me, 'Get out of my room, Daddy. I don't want you here now,' a wish that I, of course, obey without a word."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.



> *between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country, the utilisation for the benefit of everyone of all natural resources of the different regions [and so on] ... And in every problem [anarchists] should prefer the solutions which not only are economically superior but which satisfy the need for justice and freedom and leave the way open for future improvements, which other solutions might not."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 173]

No central government could organise such a transformation. No centralised body could comprehend the changes required and decide between the possibilities available to those involved. Hence the very complexity of life, and the needs of social living, will push a social revolution towards anarchism. *"Unavoidably,"* argued Kropotkin, *"the Anarchist system of organisation — free local action and free grouping — will come into play."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Unless the economy is transformed from the bottom up by those who work within it, socialism is impossible. If it is re-organised from the top-down by a centralised body all that will be achieved is state capitalism and rule by bureaucrats instead of capitalists. Without local action and free agreement between local groups to co-ordinate activity, a revolution would be dead in the water and fit only to produce a new bureaucratic class structure, as the experience of the Russian Revolution proves (see section H.6).

Therefore, the key economic aspect of a social revolution is the end of capitalist oppression by the direct action of the workers themselves and their re-organisation of their work and the economy by their own actions, organisations and initiative from the bottom-up:

> *"To destroy radically this oppression without any danger of it re-emerging, all people must be convinced of their right to the means of production,*

1910 *"the weapon of the future will be the general strike"* and its it not clear that *"it must be the strike which will **stay in** the factory, not **go out**? which will guard the machines and allow no scab to touch them? which will organise, not to inflict deprivation on itself, but on the enemy? which will take over industry and operate it for the workers, not for franchise holder, stockholders, and officeholders?"* [*"A Study of the General Strike in Philadelphia"*, pp. 307–14, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, Peter Glassgold (ed.), p. 311] Individual self-managed workplaces would then federate on a local and industrial basis into workers' councils to co-ordinate joint activity, discuss common interests and issues as well as ensuring common ownership and universalising self-management: *"We must push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 165]

In this way capitalism is replaced by new economic system based the end of hierarchy, on self-managed work. These workplace assemblies and local, regional, etc., federations would start to organise production to meet human needs rather than capitalist profit. While most anarchists would like to see the introduction of communistic relations begin as quickly as possible in such an economy, most are realistic enough to recognise that tendencies towards libertarian communism will be depend on local conditions. As Malatesta argued:

> *"It is then that graduation really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority,*



156]. So there will still be "discipline" in the libertarian home, but it will be of the kind that protects the individual rights of each family member.

Raising children in freedom also does not imply giving them a lot of toys, money, and so on. Reich's followers have argued that children should not be given everything they ask for and that it is better to give them too little than too much. Under constant bombardment by commercial advertising campaigns, parents today generally tend to give their children far too much, with the result that the children stop appreciating gifts and rarely value any of their possessions. This same applies to money, which, if given in excess, can be detrimental to children's' creativity and play life. If children are not given too many toys, they will derive creative joy out of making their own toys out of whatever free materials are at hand — a joy of which they are robbed by overindulgence. Psychologists point out that parents who give too many presents are often trying to compensate for giving too little love.

There is less danger in rewarding children than there is in punishing them, but rewards can still undermine a child's morale. This is because, firstly, rewards are superfluous and in fact often **decrease** motivation and creativity, as several psychological studies have shown (see section I.4.11). Creative people work for the pleasure of creating; monetary interests are not central (or necessary) to the creative process. Secondly, rewards send the wrong message, namely, that doing the deed for which the reward is offered is not worth doing for its own sake and the pleasure associated with productive, creative activity. Thirdly, rewards tend to reinforce the worst aspects of the competitive system, leading to the attitude that money is the only thing which can motivate people to do the work that needs doing in society.

These are just a few of the considerations that enter into the distinction between spoiling children and raising them in freedom. In reality, it is the punishment and fear of a disci-

plinarian home that **spoils** children in the most literal sense, by destroying their childhood happiness and creating warped personalities. As adults, the victims of disciplinarianism will generally be burdened with one or more anti-social secondary drives such as sadism, destructive urges, greed, sexual perversions, etc., as well as repressed rage and fear. The presence of such impulses just below the surface of consciousness causes anxiety, which is automatically defended against by psychological walls which leave the person stiff, frustrated, bitter and burdened with feelings of inner emptiness. In such a condition people easily fall victim to the capitalist gospel of superconsumption, which promises that money will enable them to fill the inner void by purchasing commodities — a promise that, of course, is hollow.

The neurotically enclosed person also tends to look for scapegoats on whom to blame his or her frustration and anxiety and against whom repressed rage can be vented. Reactionary politicians know very well how to direct such impulses against minorities or "hostile nations" with propaganda designed to serve the interests of the ruling elite. Most importantly, however, the respect for authority combined with sadistic impulses which is acquired from a disciplinarian upbringing typically produces a submissive/authoritarian personality — a man or woman who blindly follows the orders of "superiors" while at the same time desiring to exercise authority on "subordinates," whether in the family, the state bureaucracy, or the company. Ervin Staub's **Roots of Evil** includes interviews of imprisoned SS men, who, in the course of extensive interviews (meant to determine how ostensibly "normal" people could perform acts of untold ruthlessness and violence) revealed that they overwhelmingly came from authoritarian, disciplinarian homes.

In this way, the "traditional" (e.g., authoritarian, disciplinarian, patriarchal) family is the necessary foundation for author-



Secondly, *"there **must** be a rapid modification of outgrown economical and political institutions, an overthrow of the injustices accumulated by centuries past, a displacement of wealth and political power."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25] This aspect is the key one. Without the abolition of the state and capitalism, no real revolution has taken place. As Bakunin argued, *"the program of social revolution"* is *"the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes through the equalisation of economic conditions, and the abolition of their last buttress, the state."* That is, *"the total and definitive liberation of the proletariat from economic exploitation and state oppression."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 48–9]

We should stress here that, regardless of what Marxists may say, anarchists see the destruction of capitalism occurring **at the same time as** the destruction of the state. We do not aim to abolish the state first, then capitalism as Engels asserted we did (see section H.2.4). This perspective of a simultaneous political and economic revolution is clearly seen when Bakunin wrote that a city in revolt would *"naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour and every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers,** they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers,** the federative commune"* All *"the revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary services and arrangements for production and exchange ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 179]

As can be seen, an essential part of a social revolution is the *"expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 198] This would be done by workers occupying their workplaces and placing them under workers' self-management. As Voltairine de Cleyre argued in

*to formulate this approach as best they can."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 85]

In addition, we must stress that we are discussing an **anarchist** social revolution in this section. As we noted in section I.2.2, anarchists recognise that any revolution will take on different forms in different areas and develop in different ways and at different speeds. We leave it up to others to describe their vision of revolution (for Marxists, the creation of a "workers' state" and the seizure of power by the "proletarian" vanguard or party, and so on).

So what would a libertarian revolution involve?

Firstly, a revolution *"is not the work of one day. It means a whole period, mostly lasting for several years, during which the country is in a state of effervescence; when thousands of formerly indifferent spectators take a lively part in public affairs."* It *"criticises and repudiates the institutions which are a hindrance to free development . .. it boldly enters upon problems which formerly seemed insoluble."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 25–6] Thus, it would be a **process** in which revolutionary attitudes, ideas, actions and organisations spread in society until the existing system is overthrown and a new one takes its place. It does not come overnight. Rather it is an accumulative development, marked by specific events of course, but fundamentally it goes on in the fabric of society.

So the **real** Russian revolution occurred during the period between the 1917 February and October insurrections when workers took over their workplaces, peasants seized their land, new forms of social life (soviets, factory committees, co-operatives, etc.) were formed and people lost their previous submissive attitudes to authority by using direct action to change their lives for the better (see section A.5.4). Similarly, the Spanish Revolution occurred after the 19th of July, 1936, when workers again took over their workplaces, peasants formed collectives and militias were organised to fight fascism (see section A.5.6)



itarian civilisation, reproducing it and its attendant social evils from generation to generation.

## J.6.5 What is the anarchist position on teenage sexual liberation?

One of the biggest problems of adolescence is sexual suppression by parents and society in general. The teenage years are the time when sexual energy is at its height. Why, then, the absurd demand that teenagers "wait until marriage," or at least until leaving home, before becoming sexually active? Why are there laws in "advanced" countries like the United States that allow a 19-year-old "boy" who makes love with his 17-year-old girlfriend, with her full consent, to be **arrested** by the girl's parents (!) for "statutory rape"?

To answer such questions, let us recall that the ruling class is not interested in encouraging mass tendencies toward liberty, independence and pleasure not derived from commodities but instead supports whatever contributes to mass submissiveness, docility, dependence, helplessness, and respect for authority — traits that perpetuate the hierarchies on which ruling-class power and privileges depend.

As sex is one of the most intense forms of pleasure and one of the most prominent contributors for intimacy and bonding with people emotionally, repression of sexuality is the most powerful means of psychologically crippling people and giving them a submissive/authoritarian character structure (as well as alienating people from each other). As Reich observed, such a character is composed of a mixture of *"sexual impotence, helplessness, a need for attachments, a nostalgia for a leader, fear of authority, timidity, and mysticism"* and *"people structured in this manner are incapable of democracy. All attempts to build up or maintain genuine democratically directed organisations come to grief when they encounter these character structures.*

*They form the psychological soil of the masses in which dictatorial strivings and bureaucratic tendencies of democratically elected leaders can develop."* Sexual suppression *"produces the authority-fearing, life-fearing vassal, and thus constantly creates new possibilities whereby a handful of men in power can rule the masses."* [**The Sexual Revolution**, p. 82]

No doubt most members of the ruling elite are not fully conscious that their own power and privileges depend on the mass perpetuation of sex-negative attitudes. Nevertheless, they unconsciously sense it. Sexual freedom is the most basic and powerful kind, and every conservative or reactionary instinctively shudders at the thought of the "social chaos" it would unleash — that is, the rebellious, authority-defying type of character it would nourish. This is why "family values," and "religion" (i.e. discipline and compulsive sexual morality) are the mainstays of the conservative/reactionary agenda. Thus it is crucially important for anarchists to address every aspect of sexual suppression in society. This means affirming the right of adolescents to an unrestricted sex life.

There are numerous arguments for teenage sexual liberation. For example, many teen suicides could be prevented by removing the restrictions on adolescent sexuality. This becomes clear from ethnological studies of sexually unrepressive tribal peoples:

> *"All reports, whether by missionaries or scholars, with or without the proper indignation about the 'moral depravity' of 'savages,' state that the puberty rites of adolescents lead them immediately into a sexual life; that some of these primitive societies lay great emphasis on sexual pleasure; that the puberty rite is an important social event; that some primitive peoples not only do not hinder the sexual life of adolescents but encourage it is every way, as, for instance, by arranging for community houses in*



pect (based on previous revolutions) to see occur in a future social revolution. We are not predicting the future. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"A question which we are often asked is: 'How will you organise the future society on Anarchist principles?' If the question were put to . . . someone who fancies that a group of men [or women] is able to organise society as they like, it would seem natural. But in the ears of an Anarchist, it sounds very strangely, and the only answer we can give to it is: 'We cannot organise you. It will depend upon **you** what sort of organisation you choose.'"* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 32]

And organise themselves they have. In every social revolution, the oppressed have created many different self-managed organisations. These bodies include the directly democratic neighbourhood Sections of the Great French Revolution, the neighbourhood clubs of the 1848 French Revolution and the Paris Commune, the workers councils and factory committees of the Russian and German revolutions, the industrial and rural collectives of the Spanish Revolution, the workers councils of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, assemblies and action committees of the 1968 revolt in France, the neighbourhood assemblies and occupied workplaces of the 2001 revolt in Argentina, and so on. These bodies were hardly uniform in structure and some were more anarchistic than others, but the tendency towards self-management and federation existed in them all. This tendency towards anarchistic solutions and organisation is not unsurprising, for, as Nestor Makhno argued, *"[i]n carrying through the revolution, under the impulsion of the anarchism that is innate in them, the masses of humanity search for free associations. Free assemblies always command their sympathy. The revolutionary anarchist must help them*

*direct and conscious action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them in their own interest as well as the public's; Revolution is the destruction of all of coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence; Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people; Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to coordinate the desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts — and lasts so long as freedom lasts."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 153]

This, of course, presents a somewhat wide vision of the revolutionary process. We will need to give some more concrete examples of what a social revolution would involve. However, before so doing, we stress that these are purely examples drawn from previous revolutions and are not written in stone. Every revolution creates its own forms of organisation and struggle. The next one will be no different. As we argued in section I.2, an anarchist revolution will create its own forms of freedom, forms which will share features with organisations generated in previous revolutions, but which are unique to this one. Thus the Paris Commune of 1871 had mandated and recallable delegates as did the Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917, but the first was based on geographical delegation and the later on workplaces. All we do here is give a rough overview of what we ex-



*which the adolescents settle at the start of puberty in order to be able to enjoy sexual intercourse. Even in those primitive societies in which the institution of strict monogamous marriage exists, adolescents are given complete freedom to enjoy sexual intercourse from the beginning of puberty to marriage. None of these reports contains any indication of sexual misery or suicide by adolescents suffering from unrequited love (although the latter does of course occur). The contradiction between sexual maturity and the absence of genital sexual gratification is non-existent."* [Reich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

Teenage sexual repression is also closely connected with crime. If there are teenagers in a neighbourhood who have no place to pursue intimate sexual relationships, they will do it in dark corners, in cars or vans, etc., always on the alert and anxious lest someone discover them. Under such conditions, full gratification is impossible, leading to a build-up of tension and frustration. Thus they feel unsatisfied, disturb each other, become jealous and angry, get into fights, turn to drugs as a substitute for a satisfying sex life, vandalise property to let off "steam" (repressed rage), or even murder someone. As Reich noted, *"juvenile delinquency is the visible expression of the subterranean sexual crisis in the lives of children and adolescents. And it may be predicted that no society will ever succeed in solving this problem, the problem of juvenile psychopathology, unless that society can muster the courage and acquire the knowledge to regulate the sexual life of its children and adolescents in a sex-affirmative manner."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271]

For these reasons, it is clear that a solution to the "gang problem" also depends on adolescent sexual liberation. We are not suggesting, of course, that gangs themselves suppress sexual activity. Indeed, one of their main attractions to teens is undoubtedly the hope of more opportunities for sex as a

gang member. However, gangs' typical obsessiveness with the promiscuous, pornographic, sadistic, and other "dark" aspects of sex shows that by the time children reach gang age they have already developed unhealthy secondary drives due to the generally sex-negative and repressive environment in which they have grown up. The expression of such drives is **not** what anarchists mean by "sexual freedom." Rather, anarchist proposals for teenage liberation are based on the premise that a libertarian childhood is the necessary condition for a **healthy** sexual freedom in adolescence.

Applying these insights to our own society, it is clear that teenagers should have ample access to a private room where they can be undisturbed with their sexual partners. Parents should also encourage the knowledge and use of contraceptives and safe sex in general as well as respect for the other person involved in the relationship. This does not mean encouraging promiscuity or sex for the sake of it. Rather, it means encouraging teenagers to know their own minds and desires, refusing to be pressured by anyone into anything. As can be seen from experience of this anarchist activist during the 1930s:

> *"One time, a companero from the Juventudes [libertarian youth organisation] came over to me and said, 'You, who say you're so liberated. You're not so liberated.' (I'm telling you this so you'll see the mentality of these men.) 'Because if I ask you to give me a kiss, you wouldn't.*
>
> *"I just stood there staring at him, and thinking to myself, 'How do I get out of this one?" And then I said to him, 'Listen, when I want to go to bed with a guy, I'm the one that has to choose him. I don't go to bed with just anyone. You don't interest me as a man. I don't feel anything for you… Why should you want me to 'liberate myself,' as you put it, by going to bed with you? That's no liberation for me. That's just*



erty out of existence. If things got that far, the government would suspend the legal rights, elections and round up influential subversives. The question is, what do anarchists do in response to these actions? If anarchists are in the majority or near it, then defensive violence would likely succeed. For example, *"the people armed"* crushed the fascist coup of July 19th, 1936 in Spain and resulted in one of the most important experiments in anarchism the world has ever seen (see section A.5.6). This should be contrasted with the aftermath of the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 and the fascist terror which crushed the labour movement (see section A.5.5). In other words, you cannot just ignore the state even if the majority are acting, you need to abolish it and organise self-defence against attempts to re-impose it or capitalism.

We discuss the question of self-defence and the protection of the revolution in section J.7.6.

## J.7.4 What would a social revolution involve?

Social revolution necessitates putting anarchist ideas into daily practice. Therefore it implies that direct action, solidarity and self-management become increasingly the dominant form of living in a society. It implies the transformation of society from top to bottom. We can do no better than quote Errico Malatesta on what revolution means:

> *"The Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their*

*work should be considered the work itself that you have to do. The fighting bit of the revolution is merely the rolling up of your sleeves."* The task of the revolution is the *"destruction of the existing conditions"* and *"**conditions** are not destroyed [by] breaking and smashing things. You can't destroy wage slavery by wrecking the machinery in the mills and factories ... You won't destroy government by setting fire to the White House."* To think of revolution *"in terms of violence and destruction is to misinterpret and falsify the whole idea of it. In practical application such a conception is bound to lead to disastrous results."* For what is there to destroy? *"The wealth of the rich? Nay, that is something we want the whole of society to enjoy."* The means of production are to be made *"useful to the entire people"* and *"serve the needs of all."* Thus the aim of revolution is *"to **take over** things for the general benefit, not to destroy them. It is to reorganise conditions for public welfare ... to reconstruct and rebuild."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 183–4]

Thus when anarchists like Bakunin speak of revolution as "destruction" they mean that the idea of authority and obedience must be destroyed, along with the institutions that are based on such ideas. We do not mean, as can be clearly seen, the destruction of people or wealth. Nor do we imply the glorification of violence — quite the reserve, as anarchists seek to limit violence to that required for self-defence against oppression and authority.

Therefore a social revolution **may** involve some violence. It may also mean no violence at all. It depends on the revolution and how widely anarchist ideas are spread. One thing is sure, for anarchists social revolution is **not** synonymous violence. Indeed, violence usually occurs when the ruling class resists the action of the oppressed — that is, when those in authority act to protect their social position.

The wealthy and their state will do anything in their power to prevent having a large enough percentage of anarchists in the population to simply "ignore" the government and prop-



> *making love simply for the sake of making love.' 'No,' I said to him, 'love is something that has to be like eating: if you're hungry, you eat, and if you want to go to bed with a guy, then... Besides, I'm going to tell you something else ... Your mouth doesn't appeal to me... And I don't like to make love with a guy without kissing him.'*
>
> *"He was left speechless! But I did it with a dual purpose in mind... because I wanted to show him that that's not the way to educate companeros... That's what the struggle of women was like in Spain — even with men from our own group — and I'm not even talking about what it was like with other guys."* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 116–7]

So respecting yourself and others, it must be stressed, is essential. As Maurice Brinton pointed out, attempts at sexual liberation will encounter two kinds of responses from established society — direct opposition and attempts at recuperation. The second response takes the form of *"first alienating and reifying sexuality, and then of frenetically exploiting this empty shell for commercial ends. As modern youth breaks out of the dual stranglehold of repressive traditional morality and of the authoritarian patriarchal family it encounters a projected image of free sexuality which is in fact a manipulatory distortion of it."* This can be seen from the use of sex in advertising to the successful development of sex into a major consumer industry. However, such a development is the opposite of the healthy sexuality desired by anarchists. This is because *"sex is presented as something to be consumed. But the sexual instinct differs from certain other instincts"* as it can be satisfied only by *"another human being, capable of thinking, acting, suffering. The alienation of sexuality under the conditions of modern capitalism is very much part of the general alienating process, in which people are converted*

*into objects (in this case, objects of sexual consumption) and relationships are drained of human content. Undiscriminating, compulsive sexual activity, is not sexual freedom — although it may sometimes be a preparation for it (which repressive morality can never be). The illusion that alienated sex is sexual freedom constitutes yet another obstacle on the road to total emancipation. Sexual freedom implies a realisation and understanding of the autonomy of others."* [*"The Irrational in Politics"*, pp. 257–92, **For Workers' Power**, p. 277]

Therefore, anarchists see teenage sexual liberation as a means of developing free individuals **as well as** reducing the evil effects of sexual repression (which, we must note, also helps dehumanise individuals by encouraging the objectification of others, and in a patriarchal society particularly of women).

## J.6.6 But isn't this concern with sexual liberation just a distraction from revolution?

It would be insulting to teenagers to suggest that sexual freedom is, or should be, their **only** concern. Many teens have a well-developed social conscience and are keenly interested in problems of economic exploitation, poverty, social breakdown, environmental degradation, and the like. The same can be said of people of any age!

It is essential for anarchists to guard against the attitude typically found in Marxist-Leninist parties that spontaneous discussions about sexual problems are a "diversion from the class struggle." Such an attitude is economistic (not to mention covertly ascetic), because it is based on the premise that economic class must be the focus of all revolutionary efforts toward social change. No doubt transforming the economy is important, but without mass sexual liberation no working



revolution is essentially non-violent, with any violence being defensive in nature. As Malatesta stressed, *"Anarchists are opposed to violence"* and it *"is justifiable only when it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 53]

Of course, many revolutions are marked by violence. It has two sources. First, and most obviously, the violent resistance of those protecting their power and wealth against those seeking liberty. Unsurprisingly, this violence is usually downplayed in history books and the media. Second, acts of revenge resulting from the the domination and repression of the system the revolution seeks to end. Such violence is not desired nor the aim of anarchism nor of the revolution. As Berkman argued:

> *"We know that revolution begins with street disturbances and outbreaks; it is the initial phase which involves force and violence. But that is merely the spectacular prologue of the real revolution. The age long misery and indignity suffered by the masses burst into disorder and tumult, the humiliation and injustice meekly borne for decades find vents in acts of fury and destruction. That is inevitable, and it is solely the master class which is responsible for this preliminary character of revolution. For it is even more true socially than individually that 'whoever sows the wind will reap the whirlwind'; the greater the oppression and wretchedness to which the masses had been made to submit, the fiercer will rage the social storm. All history proves it, but the lords of life have never harkened to its warning voice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195]

*"Most people have very confused notions about revolution,"* Berkman suggested. *"To them it means just fighting, smashing things, destroying. It is the same as if rolling up your sleeves for*

of violence at all. In Italy, a year later, the occupations of the factories and land started. As Malatesta pointed out, *"in **Umanita Nova** [the daily anarchist newspaper] we ... said that if the movement spread to all sectors of industry, that is workers and peasants followed the example of the metallurgists, of getting rid of the bosses and taking over the means of production, the revolution would succeed without shedding a single drop of blood."* Thus the *"occupation of the factories and the land suited perfectly our programme of action."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 135] Sadly the workers followed their socialist trade union leaders and stopped the occupations rather than spreading them.

These events indicate the strength of ordinary people and the relative weakness of government and capitalism — they only work when they can force people to respect them. After all, a government is *"only a handful of men"* and is strong *"when the people are with it. Then they supply the government with money, with an army and navy, obey it, and enable it to function."* Remove that support and *"no government can accomplish anything."* The same can be said of capitalists, whose wealth *"would do them no good but for the willingness of the people to work for them and pay tribute to them."* Both would *"find out that all their boasted power and strength disappear when the people refuse to acknowledge them as masters, refuse to let them lord it over them."* In contrast, *"the people's power"* is *"**actual**: it cannot be taken away ... It cannot be taken away because it does not consist of possessions but in ability. It is the ability to create, to produce."* To achieve a free society we need to *"be conscious of its tremendous power."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 84, p. 86, p. 87 and p. 83]

Therefore the notion that a social revolution is necessarily violent is a false one. For anarchists, social revolution is essentially an act of self-liberation (of both the individuals involved and society as a whole). It has nothing to do with violence, quite the reverse, as anarchists see it as the means to end the rule and use of violence in society. Anarchists hope that any



class revolution be complete as there will not be enough people around with the character structures necessary to create a **lasting** self-managed society and economy (i.e., people who are capable of accepting freedom with responsibility). Instead, the attempt to force the creation of such a system without preparing the necessary psychological soil for its growth will lead to a reversion to some new form of hierarchy and exploitation. Equally, society would be "free" in name only if repressive social morals existed and people were not able to express themselves as they so desire.

Moreover, for many people breaking free from the sexual suppression that threatens to cripple them psychologically is a major issue in their lives. For this reason, few of them are likely to be attracted to the anarchist "freedom" movement if its exponents limit themselves to dry discussions of surplus value, alienated labour, and so forth. Instead, addressing sexual questions and problems must be integrated into a multi-faceted attack on the total system of domination. People should feel confident that anarchists are on the side of sexual pleasure and are not revolutionary ascetics demanding self-denial for the "sake of the revolution." Rather, it should be stressed that the capacity for full sexual enjoyment is the an essential part of the revolution. Indeed, *"incessant questioning and challenge to authority on the subject of sex and of the compulsive family can only complement the questioning and challenge to authority in other areas (for instance on the subject of who is to dominate the work process — or the purpose of work itself). Both challenges stress the autonomy of individuals and their domination over important aspects of their lives. Both expose the alienated concepts which pass for rationality and which govern so much of our thinking and behaviour. The task of the conscious revolutionary is to make both challenges explicit, to point out their deeply subversive content, and to explain their inter-relation."* [Maurice Brinton, *"The Irrational in Politics"*, pp. 257–92, **For Workers' Power**, p. 278]

We noted previously that in pre-patriarchal society, which rests on a communistic/communal social order, children have complete sexual freedom and that the idea of childhood asceticism develops as such societies turn toward patriarchy in the economic and social structure (see section B.1.5). This sea-change in social attitudes toward sexuality allows the authority-oriented character structure to develop instead of the formerly non-authoritarian ones. Ethnological research has shown that in pre-patriarchal societies the general nature of work life in the community corresponds with the free development of children and adolescents — that is, there are no rules coercing children and adolescents into specific forms of sexual life, and this creates the psychological basis for voluntary integration into the community and voluntary discipline in all forms of collective activity. This supports the premise that widespread sex-positive attitudes are a necessary condition of a viable libertarian socialism.

Psychology also clearly shows that every impediment to free expression of children by parents, teachers, or administrative authorities must be stopped. As anarchists, our preferred way of doing so is by direct action. Thus we should encourage all to feel that they have every chance of building their own personal lives. This will certainly not be an obstacle to or a distraction from their involvement in the anarchist movement. On the contrary, if they can gradually solve the problems facing their private lives, they will work on other social projects with greatly increased pleasure and concentration.

Besides engaging in direct action, anarchists can also support legal protection free expression and sexuality (repeal of the insane statutory rape laws and equal rights for gays, for example), just as they support legislation that protects workers' right to strike, family leave, and so forth. However, as Reich observed, *"under no circumstances will the new order of sexual life be established by the decree of a central authority."* [**The Sexual Revolution**, p. 279] That was a Leninist illusion. Rather, it will



> *mulated on earth, all primary materials, all the instruments of labour, all the means of labour … Thus capital cannot and must not be destroyed. It must be preserved .. . there is but a single solution — **the intimate and complete union of capital and labour** … the workers must obtain not individual but **collective** property in capital … the collective property of capital … [is] the absolutely necessary conditions of the emancipation **of labour and of the workers.**"* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 90–1]

The essentially non-violent nature of anarchist ideas of social revolution can be seen from the Seattle General Strike of 1919. Here is a quote from the Mayor of Seattle (we do not think we need to say that he was not on the side of the strikers):

> *"The so-called sympathetic Seattle strike was an attempted revolution. That there was no violence does not alter the fact … The intent, openly and covertly announced, was for the overthrow of the industrial system; here first, then everywhere … True, there were no flashing guns, no bombs, no killings. Revolution, I repeat, doesn't need violence. The general strike, as practised in Seattle, is of itself the weapon of revolution, all the more dangerous because quiet. To succeed, it must suspend everything; stop the entire life stream of a community . .. That is to say, it puts the government out of operation. And that is all there is to revolt — no matter how achieved."* [quoted by Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, pp. 370–1]

If the strikers had occupied their workplaces and local communities had created popular assemblies then the attempted revolution would have become an actual one without any use

hierarchical behaviour capitalism generates within those who live in it. Capitalism is, as Malatesta noted, based on competition — and this includes **within** the working class. However,

*co-operation* is stimulated within our class by our struggles to survive in and resist the system. This tendency for co-operation generated by struggle against capitalism also produces the habits required for a free society — by struggling to change the world (even a small part of it), people also change themselves. Direct action produces empowered and self-reliant people who can manage their own affairs themselves. It is on the liberating effects of struggle, the tendencies towards individual and collective self-management and direct action it generates, the needs and feelings for solidarity and creative solutions to pressing problems it produces that anarchists base their positive answer on whether social revolution is possible. History has shown that we are right. It will do so again.

## J.7.3 Doesn't revolution mean violence?

While many try and paint revolutions (and anarchists) as being violent by their very nature, the social revolution desired by anarchists is essentially non-violent. This is because, to quote Bakunin, *"[i]n order to launch a radical revolution, it is … necessary to attack positions and things and to destroy property and the State, but there will be no need to destroy men and to condemn ourselves to the inevitable reaction which is unfailingly produced in every society by the slaughter of men."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 168–9] Equally, to destroy the institution of private property there is no need to destroy the actual useful things monopolised by the few:

> *"How to smash the tyranny of capital? Destroy capital? But that would be to destroy all the riches accu-*



be established from the bottom up, by the gradual process of ever more widespread dissemination of knowledge about the adverse personal and social effects of sexual repression, and the benefits of libertarian child-rearing and educational methods.

A society in which people are capable of sexual happiness will be one where they prefer to *"make love, not war,"* and so will provide the best guarantee for the general security. Then the anarchist project of restructuring the economic and political systems will proceed spontaneously, based on a spirit of joy rather than hatred and revenge. Only then can it be defended against reactionary threats, because the majority will be on the side of freedom and capable of using it responsibly, rather than unconsciously longing for an authoritarian father-figure to tell them what to do.

Therefore, concern and action upon sexual liberation, libertarian child rearing and libertarian education are **key** parts of social struggle and change. In no way can they be considered as "distractions" from "important" political and economic issues as some "serious" revolutionaries like to claim. As Martha A. Ackelsberg notes in relation to the practical work done by the ***Mujeres Libres*** group during the Spanish Revolution:

> *"Respecting children and educating them well was vitally important to the process of revolutionary change. Ignorance made people particularly vulnerable to oppression and suffering. More importantly, education prepared people for social life. Authoritarian schools (or families), based upon fear, prepared people to be submissive to an authoritarian government [or within a capitalist workplace]. Different schools and families would be necessary to prepare people to live in a society without domination."* [**Free Women of Spain**, p. 133]

The personal **is** political and there is little point in producing a free economy if the people in it are not free to

lead a full and pleasurable life! As such, the issue of sexual freedom is as important as economic and social freedom for anarchists. This can be seen when Emma Goldman recounted meeting Kropotkin who praised a paper she was involved with but proclaimed *"it would do more if it would not waste so much space discussing sex."* She disagreed and a heated argument ensured about *"the place of the sex problem in anarchist propaganda."* Finally, she remarked *"All right, dear comrade, when I have reached your age, the sex question may no longer be of importance to me. But it is now, and it is a tremendous factor for thousands, millions even, of young people."* This, Goldman recalled, made Kropotkin stop short with *"an amused smile lighting up his kindly face. 'Fancy, I didn't think of that,' he replied. 'Perhaps you are right, after all.' He beamed affectionately upon me, with a humorous twinkle in his eye."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 1, p. 253]



> *Thus much must be said with fervent emphasis:* ***to continue to judge the behaviour of a people during and after a revolution by the same standards one judged them by beforehand is completely myopic****.*
>
> *"I wish to argue that the capacity of a revolution to produce far-reaching ideological and moral changes in a people stems primarily from the opportunity it affords ordinary, indeed oppressed, people to exercise popular self-management — to enter directly, rapidly, and exhilaratingly into control over most aspects of their social and personal lives. To the extent that an insurrectionary people takes over the reins of power from the formerly hallowed elites who oppressed them and begins to restructure society along radically populist lines, individuals grow aware of latent powers within themselves that nourish their previously suppressed creativity, sense of self-worth, and solidarity. They learn that society is neither immutable nor sanctified, as inflexible custom had previously taught them; rather, it is malleable and subject, within certain limits, to change according to human will and desire."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 6–7]

In short, *"it is only through th[e] struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you will reach an understanding of anarchism."* [Nestor Makhno, **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 71]

So, social revolutions are possible. Anarchists anticipate successful revolts within certain circumstance. People who are in the habit of taking orders from bosses are not capable of creating a new society. Tendencies towards freedom, self-management, co-operation and solidarity are not simply an act of ethical will which overcomes the competitive and

is accelerated. It is worth quoting Murray Bookchin at length on this subject:

> *"Revolutions are profoundly educational processes, indeed veritable cauldrons in which all kinds of conflicting ideas and tendencies are sifted out in the minds of a revolutionary people …*
>
> *"Individuals who enter into a revolutionary process are by no means the same after the revolution as they were before it began. Those who encounter a modicum of success in revolutionary times learn more within a span of a few weeks or months than they might have learned over their lifetime in non-revolutionary times. Conventional ideas fall away with extraordinary rapidity; values and prejudices that were centuries in the making disappear almost overnight. Strikingly innovative ideas are quickly adopted, tested, and, where necessary, discarded. Even newer ideas, often flagrantly radical in character, are adopted with an elan that frightens ruling elites — however radical the latter may profess to be — and they soon become deeply rooted in the popular consciousness. Authorities hallowed by age-old tradition are suddenly divested of their prestige, legitimacy, and power to govern …*
>
> *"So tumultuous socially and psychologically are revolutions in general that they constitute a standing challenge to ideologues, including sociobiologists, who assert that human behaviour is fixed and human nature predetermined. Revolutionary changes reveal a remarkable flexibility in 'human nature,' yet few psychologists have elected to study the social and psychological tumult of revolution as well as the institutional changes it so often produces.*



# J.7 What do anarchists mean by social revolution?

In anarchist theory, ***social revolution*** means far more than just revolution. For anarchists, a true revolution is far more than just a change in the political makeup, structure or form of a society. It must transform all aspects of a society — political, economic, social, interpersonal relationships, and so on — and the individuals who comprise it. Indeed, these two transformations go hand in hand, complementing each other and supporting each other. People, while transforming society, transform themselves. As Alexander Berkman put it:

> *"there are revolutions and revolutions. Some revolutions change only the governmental form by putting a new set of rulers in place of the old. These are political revolutions, and as such they are often meet with little resistance. But a revolution that aims to abolish the entire system of wage slavery must also do away with the power of one class to oppress another. That is, it is not any more a mere change of rulers, of government, not a political revolution, but one that seeks to alter the whole character of society. That would be a* ***social*** *revolution."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 176]

It means two related things. First, it means transforming all parts of society and not just tinkering with certain aspects of the current system. Where political revolution means, in

essence, changing bosses, social revolution means changing society, a transformation in the way society is organised and run. Social revolution, in other words, does not aim to change one form of subjection for another, but to do away with everything that can enslave and oppress the individual. Second, it means bringing about this fundamental change **directly** by the mass of people in society, rather than relying on political means of achieving this end, in the style of Marxist-Leninists and other authoritarian socialists. For anarchists, such an approach is a political revolution only and doomed to failure. The *"actual, positive work of the social revolution must ... be carried out by the toilers themselves, by the labouring people"* as *"the worse victims of present institutions, it is to their own interest to abolish them."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189 and p. 187]

That is not to say that an anarchist social revolution is not political in content — far from it; it should be obvious to anyone familiar with anarchist theory that there are political theories and goals at work within anarchism. With an analysis of the state which proclaims it to be an instrument of minority class rule, designed to exclude participation by the many, it should be obvious that we aim to abolish it. What we **are** saying, however, is that anarchists do not seek to seize power and attempt, through control of law enforcement and the military (in the style of governments) to bring change about from the top-down. Rather, we seek to bring change upward from below, and in so doing, make such a revolution inevitable and not contingent on the machinations of a political vanguard (unsurprisingly, as we noted in section H.3.3, Lenin dismissed talk of change exclusively from below as anarchist and saw the need for change from above by government). As Durruti argued: *"We never believed that the revolution consisted of the seizure of power by a minority which would impose a dictatorship on the people ... We want a revolution by and for the people. Without this no revolution is possible. It would be a Coup d'Etat, nothing more."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, pp. 135–7]



In this situation, fear becomes the underlying emotion behind the conservatism, conformity, and mental inertia of the majority, who in that state become vulnerable to the self-serving propaganda of authoritarian elites alleging the necessity of the state, strong leaders, militarism, "law and order," capitalists, rulers, etc. The simultaneous transformation of institutions and individual psychology becomes even more difficult to imagine.

Serious as these obstacles may be, they do not warrant despair. To see why, let us note first that "paradigm shifts" in science have not generally derived from new developments in one field alone but from a convergence of cumulative developments in several different fields at once. For example, the Einsteinian revolution which resulted in the overthrow of the Newtonian paradigm was due to simultaneous progress in mathematics, physics, astronomy and other sciences that all influenced, reacted on, and cross-fertilised each other (see Thomas Kuhn's **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**). Similarly, if there is going to be a "paradigm shift" in the social realm, i.e. from hierarchical to non-hierarchical institutions, it is likely to emerge from the convergence of a number of different socio-economic and political developments at the same time. In a hierarchical society, the oppression authority produces also generates resistance, and so hope. The *"instinct for freedom"* cannot be repressed forever.

That is why anarchists stress the importance of direct action (section J.2) and self-help (section J.5). By the very process of struggle, by practising self-management, direct action and solidarity, people create the necessary "paradigm shift" in both themselves and society as a whole. Thus the struggle against authority is the school of anarchy — it encourages libertarian tendencies in society and the transformation of individuals into anarchists (*"Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 59]). In a revolutionary situation, this process

consider it the only real means of creating a free society — a society in which the far greater, and permanent, violence which keeps the majority of humanity in servitude can be ended once and for all.

## J.7.2 Is social revolution possible?

One objection to the possibility of social revolution is based on what we might call "the paradox of social change." This argument goes as follows: authoritarian institutions reward and select people with an authoritarian type of personality for the most influential positions in society; such types of people have both (a) an interest in perpetuating authoritarian institutions (from which they benefit) and (b) the power to perpetuate them; hence they create a self-sustaining and tightly closed system which is virtually impervious to the influence of non-authoritarian types. Therefore, institutional change presupposes individual change, which presupposes institutional change, and so on. Unless it can be shown, then, that institutions and human psychology can both be changed **at the same time**, hope for a genuine social revolution (instead of just another rotation of elites) appears to be unrealistic.

Connected with this problem is the fact that the psychological root of the hierarchical society is addiction to power — over other people, over nature, over the body and human emotions — and that this addiction is highly contagious. That is, as soon as any group of people anywhere in the world becomes addicted to power, those within range of their aggression also feel compelled to embrace the structures of power, including centralised control over the use of deadly force, in order to protect themselves from their neighbours. Once these structures of power are adopted, authoritarian institutions become self-perpetuating.



For anarchists, a social revolution is a movement from below, of the oppressed and exploited struggling for their own freedom. Moreover, such a revolution does not appear as if by magic. Rather, it is the case that revolutions *"are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals nor even by the most powerful associations. They come independently of all will and all conspiracies, and are always brought on by the natural force of circumstance."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 323] Revolutions break-out when the conditions are ripe and cannot be artificially produced (by, say, a union leadership proclaiming out of the blue such-and-such a day for a general strike). However, the actions of individuals and associations can make revolution more likely by their propaganda, struggles and organising so that when the circumstances change, people are able and willing to act in a revolutionary manner (by, say, spontaneously going on strike and their unions expanding the struggle into a general strike). This means that there is no mechanical, objective, process at work but rather something which we can influence but not command. Revolutions are a product of social evolution and of the social struggle which is an inevitable part of it:

> *"the oppressed masses ... have never completely resigned themselves to oppression and poverty, and who today more than ever show themselves thirsting for justice, freedom and wellbeing, are beginning to understand that they will not be able to achieve their emancipation except by union and solidarity with all the oppressed, with the exploited everywhere in the world. And they also understand that the indispensable condition for their emancipation which cannot be neglected is the possession of the means of production, of the land and of the instruments of labour."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 33]

Thus any social revolution proceeds from the daily struggles of working class people (just as anarchism does). It is not an event, rather it is a **process** — a process which is occurring at this moment. So a social revolution is not something in the future which we wait for but an process which is occurring in the here and now which we influence along side other tendencies as well as objective factors. This means that *"evolution and revolution are not two separate and different things. Still less are they opposites ... Revolution is merely the boiling point of evolution."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 179] This means how we act **now** matters as we shape the future by our struggles today. As German Anarchist Gustav Landauer put it:

> *"The State is not something that can be destroyed by a revolution, but it is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 421]

This does not mean that anarchists do not recognise that a revolution will be marked by, say, specific events (such as a general strike, wide scale occupations of land, housing, workplaces, actual insurrections and so on). Of course not. It means that we place these events in a process, within social movements recognising that they do not occur in isolation from history nor the evolution of ideas and movements within society.

Berkman echoed this point when he argued that while *"a social revolution is one that entirely changes the foundation of society, its political, economic and social character"* such a change *"must **first** take place in the ideas and opinions of the people, in the minds of men [and women]."* This means that *"the social revolution must be prepared. Prepared in these sense of furthering evolutionary process, of enlightening the people about the evils of present-day society and convincing them of the desirability and*



> *of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship."* [*"Anarchism and Sovietism"*, pp. 53–74, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 73]

It should also be noted that those who proclaim that a revolution is inherently authoritarian like, say, Engels (see section H.4.7) are confused. They fail to see that it is hardly "authoritarian" to stop someone ruling you! It is an act of liberation to free oneself from those oppressing you. Malatesta comments reflect well the position of revolutionary anarchists with regards to the use of force:

> *"We neither seek to impose anything by force nor do we wish to submit to a violent imposition.*
>
> *"We intend to use force against government, because it is by force that we are kept in subjection by government.*
>
> *"We intend to expropriate the owners of property because it is by force that they withhold the raw materials and wealth, which is the fruit of human labour, and use it to oblige others to work in their interest.*
>
> *"We shall resist with force whoever would wish by force, to retain or regain the means to impose his will and exploit the labour of others .. .*
>
> *"With the exception of these cases, in which the use of violence is justified as a defence against force, we are always against violence, and for self-determination."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 56]

This is the reason why most anarchists are revolutionaries. They do not think it against the principles of anarchism and

direct action and so those anarchists who reject revolution will not avoid state violence directed against them unless they renounce **all** forms of resistance to state and capitalist authority. So when it comes to effective action by the subjects of an authority, the relevant question quickly becomes how much does our freedom depend on us **not** exercising it?

Nor do revolutionary anarchists think that revolution is in contradiction to the principles of anarchism. As Malatesta put it, *"[f]or two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged, in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 54] Under any hierarchical system, those in authority do not leave those subject to them in peace. The boss does not treat his/her workers as equals, working together by free agreement without differences in power. Rather, the boss orders the worker about and uses the threat of sanctions to get compliance. Similarly with the state. Under these conditions, revolution cannot be authoritarian — for it is not authoritarian to destroy authority! To quote Rudolf Rocker:

> *"We … know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done — let us be clear on this — without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act*



*possibility, of the justice and practicability of a social life based on liberty."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 180–1] Such preparation would be the result of social struggle in the here and now, social struggle based on direct action, solidarity and self-managed organisations. While Berkman concentrated on the labour movement, his comments are applicable to all social movements:

> *"In the daily struggle of the proletariat such an organisation [a syndicalist union] would be able to achieve victories about which the conservative union, as at present built, cannot even dream … Such a union would soon become something more than a mere defender and protector of the worker. It would gain a vital realisation of the meaning of unity and consequent power, of labour solidarity. The factory and shop would serve as a training camp to develop the worker's understanding of his [or her] proper role in life, to cultivate his [or her] self-reliance and independence, teach him [or her] mutual help and co-operation, and make him [or her] conscious of his [or her] responsibility. He [or she] will learn to decide and act on his [or her] own judgement, not leaving it to leaders or politicians to attend to his [or her] affairs and look out for his [or her] welfare … He [or she] will grow to understand that present economic and social arrangements are wrong and criminal, and he [or she] will determine to change them. The shop committee and union will become the field of preparation for a new economic system, for a new social life."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 206–7]

In other words, the struggle against authority, exploitation, oppression and domination in the here and now is the start of the social revolution. It is this daily struggle, Bakunin stressed, which creates free people and the organisations it generates

*"bear ... the living seed of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* Therefore (libertarian) socialism will be attained only *"through the development and organisation of the non-political or anti-political social power of the working classes in city and country."* [**Bakunin On Anarchism**, p. 255 and p. 263] Such social power is expressed in economic and community organisations such as self-managed unions and workplace/community assemblies (see section J.5) and these form the organisational framework of a free society (see section I.2.3).

Anarchists try and follow the example of our Spanish comrades in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. who, when *"faced with the conventional opposition between reformism and revolution, they appear, in effect, to have put forward a third alternative, seeking to obtain immediate practical improvements through the actual development, in practice, of autonomous, libertarian forms of self-organisation."* [Nick Rider, *"The Practice of Direct Action: The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931"*, pp. 79–105, **For Anarchism**, David Goodway (ed.), p. 99] While doing this, anarchists must also *"beware of ourselves becoming less anarchist because the masses are not ready for anarchy."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 162]

So revolution and anarchism is the product of struggle, a social process in which anarchist ideas spread and develop. *"This does not mean,"* argued Malatesta, *"that to achieve anarchy we must wait till* ***everyone*** *becomes an anarchist. On the contrary ... under present conditions only a small minority, favoured by specific circumstances, can manage to conceive what anarchy is. It would be wishful thinking to hope for a general conversion before a change actually took place in the kind of environment in which authoritarianism and privilege now flourish. It is precisely for this reason that [we] ... need to organise for the bringing about of anarchy, or at any rate that degree of anarchy which could become gradually feasible, as soon as a sufficient amount of free-*



noring the means by which anarchists ideas and attitudes will grow within existing society. Thus Alexander Berkman was right when he wrote:

> *"That is why it is no prophecy to foresee that some day it must come to decisive struggle between the masters of life and the dispossessed masses.*
>
> *"As a matter if fact, that struggle is going on all the time.*
>
> *"There is a continuous warfare between capital and labour. That warfare generally proceeds within so-called legal forms. But even these erupt now and then in violence, as during strikes and lockouts, because the armed fist of government is always at the service of the masters, and that fist gets into action the moment capital feels its profits threatened: then it drops the mask of 'mutual interests' and 'partnership' with labour and resorts to the final argument of every master, to coercion and force.*
>
> *"It is therefore certain that government and capital will not allow themselves to be quietly abolished if they can help it; nor will they miraculously 'disappear' of themselves, as some people pretend to believe. It will require a revolution to get rid of them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 174]

However, all anarchists are agreed that any revolution should be as non-violent as possible. Violence is the tool of oppression and, for anarchists, violence is only legitimate as a means of self-defence against authority. Therefore revolutionary anarchists do not seek "violent revolution" — they are just aware that when people refuse to kow-tow to authority then that authority will use violence against them. This use of violence has been directed against non-violent forms of

*power having given up its mastery voluntarily. In every instance it required the use of force, or at least the threat of it.*" [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 174] Even the end of State capitalism ("Communism") in Eastern Europe did not contradict this argument. Without the mass action of the population, the regime would have continued. Faced with a massive popular revolt, the Commissars realised that it was better to renounce (some) power than have it all taken from them (and they were right, as this allowed many of them to become part of the new, private capitalist, ruling class). Thus mass rebellion, the start of any true revolution, was required.

The argument that the state is too powerful to be defeated has been proven wrong time and time again. Every revolution has defeated a military machine which previously had been proclaimed to be unbeatable (most obviously, the people armed in Spain defeated the military in two-thirds of the country). Ultimately, the power of the state rests on its troops following orders. If those troops rebel, then the state is powerless. That is why anarchists have always produced anti-militarist propaganda urging troops to join strikers and other people in revolt. Revolutionary anarchists argue that any state can be defeated, if the circumstances are right and the work of anarchists is to encourage those circumstances.

In addition, revolutionary anarchists argue that even if anarchists did not support revolutionary change, this would not stop such events happening. Revolutions are the product of developments in human society and occur whether we desire them or not. They start with small rebellions, small acts of refusal by individuals, groups, workplaces and communities, then grow. These acts of rebellion are inevitable in any hierarchical society, as is their spreading wider and wider. Revolutionary anarchists argue that anarchists must, by the nature of our politics and our desire for freedom, support such acts of rebellion and, ultimately, social revolution. Not to do so means ignoring people in struggle against our common enemy and ig-



*dom has been won and a nucleus of anarchists somewhere exists that is both numerically strong enough and able to be self-sufficient and to spread its influence locally.*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 83–4]

Thus anarchists influence social struggle, the revolutionary process, by encouraging anarchistic tendencies within those who are not yet anarchists but are instinctively acting in a libertarian manner. Anarchists spread our message to those in struggle and support libertarian tendencies in it as far as we can. In this way, more and more people will become anarchists and anarchy will become increasingly possible (we discuss the role of anarchists in a social revolution in section J.7.4). For anarchists, a social revolution is the end product of years of struggle. It is marked by the transformation of a given society, the breaking down of all forms of oppression and the creation of new ways of living, new forms of self-managed organisation, a new attitude to life itself. Moreover, we do not wait for the future to introduce such transformations in our daily life. Rather, we try and create as many anarchistic tendencies in today's society as possible in the firm belief that in so doing we are pushing the creation of a free society nearer.

So anarchists, including revolutionary ones, try to make the world today more libertarian and so bring us closer to freedom. Few anarchists think of anarchy as something in (or for) the distant future, rather it is something we try and create in the here and now by living and struggling in a libertarian manner. Once enough people do this, then a more extensive change towards anarchy (i.e. a revolution) is possible.

## J.7.1 Why are most anarchists revolutionaries?

While most anarchists do believe that a social revolution is required to create a free society, some reject the idea. This is

because they think that revolutions are by their very nature coercive and so are against anarchist principles. In the words of Proudhon (in reply to Marx):

> *"Perhaps you still hold the opinion that no reform is possible without a helping* ***coup de main,*** *without what used to be called a revolution but which is quite simply a jolt. I confess that my most recent studies have led me to abandon this view, which I understand and would willingly discuss, since for a long time I held it myself. I do not think that this is what we need in order to succeed, and consequently we must not suggest* ***revolutionary*** *action as the means of social reform because this supposed means would simply be an appeal to force and to arbitrariness. In brief, it would be a contradiction."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 151]

Also they point to the fact that the state is far better armed than the general population, better trained and (as history proves) more than willing to slaughter as many people as required to restore "order." In face of this power, they argue, revolution is doomed to failure.

Those opposed to revolution come from all tendencies of the movement. Traditionally, Individualist anarchists are usually against the idea of revolution, as was Proudhon. However, with the failure of the Russian Revolution and the defeat of the CNT-FAI in Spain, some social anarchists have rethought support for revolution. Rather than seeing revolution as the key way of creating a free society they consider it doomed to failure as the state is too strong a force to be overcome by insurrection. Instead of revolution, such anarchists support the creation of alternatives, such as co-operatives, mutual banks and so on, which will help transform capitalism into libertarian socialism by *"burn[ing] Property little by little"* via *"some system of economics"* which will *"put back into society ... the wealth which has been taken out of society by another system of economics."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 151] Such alternative building, combined with pressurising the state to, say, use co-operatives to run public services and industries as well as civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes, is seen as the best way to creating anarchy. This may take time, they argue, but such gradual change will be more successful in the long run.

Most revolutionary anarchists agree on the importance of building libertarian alternatives in the here and now. They would agree with Bakunin when he argued that such organisations as libertarian unions, co-operatives and so on are essential *"so that when the Revolution, brought about by the natural force of circumstances, breaks out, there will be a real force at hand which knows what to do and by virtue thereof is capable of taking the Revolution into its own hands and imparting to it a direction salutary for the people: a serious, international organisation of worker's organisations of all countries, capable of replacing the departing political world of the States and the bourgeoisie."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 323] Thus, for most anarchists, the difference of evolution and revolution is one of little import — anarchists should support libertarian tendencies within society as they support revolutionary situations when they occur.

However, revolutionary anarchists argue that, ultimately, capitalism cannot be reformed away nor will the state wither away under the onslaught of libertarian institutions and attitudes. Neither mutual banking (see section J.5.7) nor co-operatives (see section J.5.11) can out-compete capitalist institutions. This means that these alternatives, will important, are insufficient to the task of creating a free society. This suggests that while libertarian tendencies within capitalism may make life better under that system, they cannot get rid of it. This requires a social revolution, they argue. Such anarchists agree with Alexander Berkman that there *"is no record of any government or authority, of any group or class in*

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defend a libertarian revolution. What would these libertarian means be?

In short, this would involve the *"creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution."* The creation of a free militia would be part of the general social transformation as the *"most powerful means for defending the revolution remains always that of taking away from the bourgeois the economic means on which their power rests, and of arming everybody (until such time as one will have managed to persuade everybody to throw away their arms as useless and dangerous toys), and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 166 and p. 173] As Bakunin stressed:

> *"let us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune ... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution, together with propaganda, the weapon of revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends in all countries against enemies in all countries."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 178–9]

So anarchists have always seen the necessity to defend a revolution. There is no theoretical contradiction implied by this for while anarchism *"is opposed to any interference with your liberty"* and *"against all invasion and violence"*, it recognises that when *"any one attacks **you**, then it is **he** who is invading you, he who is employing violence against you. You have a right to defend yourself. More than that, it is your duty, as an anarchist to protect your liberty, to resist coercion and compulsion ... In other words, the social revolution will attack no one, but it will defend itself against invasion from any quarter."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 231] These militias, in other words, do not seek to impose a revolution, for you cannot impose freedom or force people to be free against their will: *"The power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrifices."* [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44]

Such activity, Berkman stressed, *"must be in consonance with th[e] spirit [of anarchism]. Self-defence excludes all acts of coercion, of persecution or revenge. It is concerned only with repelling attack and depriving the enemy of opportunity to invade you."* Any defence would be based on *"the strength of the revolution ... First and foremost, in the support of the people ... If they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their welfare, then in that very sentiment you have the greatest strength of the revolution .. . Let them believe in the revolution, and they will defend it to the death."* Thus the *"armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 231–2] Malatesta stressed that a government is not required to defend freedom:

> *"But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people*



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*"Soviets as Agents of Democratisation"*, in **Revolution in Russia: reassessments of 1917**, Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, Baruch



> *to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear."* [**Anarchy**, p. 42]

As can be seen, anarchist theory has always addressed the necessity of defending a social revolution and proposed a solution — the voluntary, self-managed militia organised by the free communes and federations of workers' associations. The militias would be unified and co-ordinated by federations of communes while delegates from each militia unit would co-ordinate the actual fighting. In times of peace the militia members would be living and working among the rest of the populace, and, thus, they would tend to have the same outlook and interests as their fellows. Moreover, in the case of foreign intervention, the importance of international solidarity is important (*"a social revolution cannot be a revolution in one nation alone. It is by nature an international revolution."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 49]). Thus any foreign intervention would face the problems of solidarity actions and revolts on its own doorstep and not dare send its troops abroad for long, if at all. Ultimately, the only way to support a revolution is to make your own.

Within the revolutionary area, it is the actions of liberated people than will defend it. Firstly, the population would be armed and so counter-revolutionaries would face stiff oppo-

sition to their attempts to recreate authority. Secondly, they would face liberated individuals who would reject and resist their attempts Thus, as we discuss in section I.5.11, any authoritarian would face the direct action of a free people, of free individuals, who would refuse to co-operate with the would-be authorities and join in solidarity with their friends and fellow workers to resist them. The only way a counter-revolution could spread internally is if the mass of the population had become alienated from the revolution and this is impossible in an anarchist revolution as power remains in their hands. A free society need not fear internal counter-revolutionaries gaining support.

History, as well as theory, points to such libertarian forms of self-defence. In all the major revolutions which anarchists took part in they formed militias to defend freedom. For example, anarchists in many Russian cities formed *"Black Guards"* to defend their expropriated houses and revolutionary freedoms. In the Ukraine, Nestor Makhno helped organise a peasant-worker army to defend the social revolution against authoritarians of right and left. In the Spanish Revolution, the CNT organised militias to free those parts of Spain under fascist rule after the military coup in 1936.

These anarchist militias were as self-managed as possible, with any "officers" elected and accountable to the troops and having the same pay and living conditions as them. Nor did they impose their ideas on others. When a militia liberated a village, town or city they called upon the population to organise their own affairs, as they saw fit. All the militia did was present suggestions and ideas to the population. For example, when the Makhnovists passed through a district they would put on posters announcing:

> *"The freedom of the workers and the peasants is their own, and not subject to any restriction. It is up to the workers and peasants to act, to organise them-*



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> *selves, to agree among themselves in all aspects of their lives, as they themselves see fit and desire ... The Makhnovists can do no more than give aid and counsel ... In no circumstances can they, nor do they wish to, govern."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 473]

Needless to say, the Makhnovists counselled the workers and peasants *"to set up free peasants' and workers' councils"* as well as to expropriate the land and means of production. They argued that *"[f]reedom of speech, of the press and of assembly is the right of every toiler and any gesture contrary to that freedom constitutes an act of counter-revolution."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 157–8] The Makhnovists also organised regional congresses of peasants and workers to discuss revolutionary and social issues. The army's declared principles were voluntary enlistment, the election of officers and self-discipline according to the rules adopted by each unit themselves. Remarkably effective, the Makhnovists were the force that defeated Denikin's army and helped defeat Wrangel. After the Whites were defeated, the Bolsheviks turned against the Makhnovists and betrayed them. However, while they existed the Makhnovists defended the freedom of the working class to organise themselves against both right and left statists (see Voline's **The Unknown Revolution**, Peter Arshinov's **History of the Makhnovist Movement** or Alexandre Skirda's **Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack** for more information).

A similar situation developed in Spain. After defeating the fascist military coup on 19th of July, 1936, the anarchists organised self-managed militias to liberate those parts of Spain under Franco. These groups were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

> *"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the*

> *individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one* ***centuria,*** *which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty* ***centurias*** *make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the* ***centurias*** *have their say … although every column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 256–7]

Like the Makhnovists, the anarchist militias in Spain were not only fighting against reaction, they were fighting for a better world. As Durruti argued: *"Our comrades on the front know for whom and for what they fight. They feel themselves revolutionaries and they fight, not in defence of more or less promised new laws, but for the conquest of the world, of the factories, the workshops, the means of transportation, their bread and the new culture."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248] When they liberated towns and villages, the militia columns urged workers and peasants to collectivise the land and means of production, to re-organise life in a libertarian fashion. All across anti-Fascist Spain workers and peasants did exactly that. The militias only defended the workers' and peasants' freedom to organise their own lives as they saw fit and did not force them to create collectives or dictate their form.

In this, the CNT was not only following the suggestions of the likes of Bakunin and Malatesta, it was implementing its own stated policies. Thus before the revolution we find leading FAI member D. A. Santillan arguing that the *"local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat"* in the *"cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution."* These Local Councils would be a federation of workplace councils and would



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be members of the Regional Council of the Economy which, like the Local Council, would be *"constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 80 and pp. 82–83] Thus defence of a free society is based on the federation of workers' councils and so directly controlled by the revolutionary population. This can also be seen in the Spanish CNT's 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism in the section entitled ***"Defence of the Revolution"***:

> *"We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution ... So ... the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion ... or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution ... The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without ... Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence ... the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence... .*
>
> *"1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.*
>
> *"2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective*

*government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world's exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]

Which was precisely what the CNT did do in July 1936 when faced with the fascist coup. Unfortunately, like the Makhnovists, the CNT militias were betrayed by their so-called allies on the left. The anarchist troops were not given enough arms and were left on the front to rot in inaction. The "unified" command by the Republican State preferred not to arm libertarian troops as they would use these arms to defend themselves and their fellow workers against the Republican and Communist led counter-revolution. Ultimately, the *"people in arms"* won the revolution and the *"People's Army"* which replaced it lost the war (see Jose Peirats' **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, Abel Paz's **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, Vernon Richard's **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** or Noam Chomsky's **Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship**).

While the cynic may point out that, in the end, these revolutions and militias were defeated, it does not mean that their struggle was in vain or a future revolution will not succeed. That would be like arguing in 1940 that democracy is inferior to fascism because most democratic states had been (temporarily) defeated by the Axis powers. It does not mean that these methods will fail in the future or that we should embrace apparently more "successful" approaches which end in the creation of a society the total opposite of what we desire (means determine ends, after all, and statist means will create statist ends and apparent "successes" — like Bolshevism — are the greatest of failures in terms of our ideas and ideals). All we are doing



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here is pointing how anarchists have defended revolutions in the past and that these methods were successful for a long time in face of tremendous opposition forces.

Thus, in practice, anarchists have followed libertarian theory and created self-managed forms of self-defence against attempts to re-enslave a free people. In the end, an anarchist revolution can be defended only by applying its ideas as widely as possible. Its defence rests in those who make it. If the revolution is an expression of their needs, desires and hopes then it will be defended with the full passion of a free people. Such a revolution **may** be defeated by superior force, who can tell? But the possibility is that it will not and that is what makes it worth trying. To not act because of the possibility of failure is to live half a life.

Anarchism calls upon everyone to live the kind of life they deserve as unique individuals and desire as human beings. Individually we can make a difference, together we can change the world.

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The bibliography is split into four sections: Anthologies of Anarchist authors; books by anarchists and other libertarians; books about anarchism, anarchists and anarchist history by non-libertarians; and books by non-anarchists/libertarians.

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*passes entirely, like the revenue, to the proprietor".* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 195, p. 248, p. 253] Would this *"misery"* happen if workers managed their own work? Of course not.

Marx ignored this, proclaiming that there is *"no individual exchange without the antagonism of classes."* Yet a system of worker-managed workplaces exchanging the product of their labour with peasant farmers would not be marked by classes for these *"relations are not relations between individual and individual, but between worker and capitalist, between farmer and landlord, etc."* Marx ignores the nature of Proudhon's ideas, favouring the assertion he *"borrows from economists the necessity of eternal relations"* and forgets that economic relations *"are **historical and transitory products**."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 144, p. 159, p. 178 and p. 166] Strangely, Marx forgot to quote Proudhon arguing that the *"present form"* of how labour was organised *"is inadequate and transitory"* and that *"the radical vice of political economy, consists, in general terms, in affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition, — namely, the division of society into patricians and proletarians".* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170 and p. 174]

So McNally, like Marx, distorts Proudhon's position. While many later anarchists — the communist-anarchists — rejected Proudhon's market socialism in favour of libertarian communism, the notion that his *"opposition to capitalism was largely backward-looking in character"* and that *"small, private property the basis of his utopia"* is just nonsense. To quote Proudhon from 1841: *"We must apply on a large scale the principle of collective production"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140] As K. Steven Vincent correctly summarises:

> *"On this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that, contrary to the general image given on the secondary literature, Proudhon was not hostile to large industry. Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large enterprises had introduced into society. For ex-*



*"Towards a revolutionary socialist party"*, contained inTony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman and Leon Trotsky,**Party and Class**, Bookmarks, London, 1996.

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**Wall Street: Class Racket**, available at http://www.panix.com/~dhenwood/WS_Brecht.html



*political economy as the depository of the secret thoughts of humanity"* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 128]

It worthwhile noting that the **System of Economic Contradictions** Proudhon was discussing was not some new utopian scheme, as Marx implied, but rather capitalism: *"We will reserve this subject [the future organisation of labour] for the time when, the theory of economic contradictions being finished, we shall have found in their general equation the programme of association, which we shall then publish in contrast with the practice and conceptions of our predecessors"*. This analysis was essential in order to base ideas of social transformation on current tendencies. So rather than abstractly contrast a *"utopia"* to capitalism, Proudhon stressed the need to first analyse and understand the current system and so *"to unfold the system of economical contradictions is to lay the foundations of universal association."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 311 and p. 132]

While Marx asserted that Proudhon wished *"to take us back to the journeymen or, at most, to the master craftsman of the Middle Ages"* there is nothing in his work to support such claims. Unsurprisingly, then, rather than provide a quote from Proudhon confirming this aspiration Marx makes many an assertion such as that individual exchange *"is consistent only with the small-scale industry of past centuries .. . or else with large-scale industry and all its train of misery and anarchy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 190, p. 138] Yet this forgets that under capitalism, workers do not own or control their work but in a mutualist society they would do both. As Proudhon argued, *"the pace of mechanical progress"* under capitalism has *"no other effect"* than to *"make the chains of serfdom heavier, render life more and more expensive, and deepen the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers."* This was because people *"work under a master"* and so *"[u]nder the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective,*

Compare this to Proudhon's position expounded with similar words in **System of Economic Contradictions**:

> *"M. de Sismondi, like all men of patriarchal ideas, would like the division of labour, with machinery and manufactures, to be abandoned, and each family to return to the system of primitive indivision,* ***— that is, to each one by himself, each one for himself****, in the most literal meaning of the words. That would be to retrograde; it is impossible."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 194]

As we will show, this was not an isolated statement: Proudhon consistently supported not only large-scale industry but also socialised ownership. Indeed, the Frenchman was critical of those socialists (whom he rightly labelled "utopian") who replaced analysis of capitalism and its tendencies with visions of an ideal system:

> *"It is important, then, that we should resume the study of economic facts and practices, discover their meaning, and formulate their philosophy. Until this is done, no knowledge of social progress can be acquired, no reform attempted. The error of socialism has consisted hitherto in perpetuating religious reverie by launching forward into a fantastic future instead of seizing the reality which is crushing it; as the wrong of the economists has been in regarding every accomplished fact as an injunction against any proposal of reform.*
>
> *"For my own part, such is not my conception of economic science, the true social science. Instead of offering* ***a priori*** *arguments as solutions of the formidable problems of the organisation of labour and the distribution of wealth, I shall interrogate*



Herbert, Auberon, *"Essay X: The Principles Of Voluntaryism And Free Life"*, **The Right And Wrong Of Compulsion By The State, And Other Essays**, available at: http://oll.libertyfund.org/Texts/LFBooks/Herbert0120/CompulsionByState/HTMLs/0146_Pt11_Principles.html

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ISG, **Discussion Document of Ex-SWP Comrades**, available at: http://www.angelfire.com/journal/iso/isg.html



## 4. Why are McNally's comments on Proudhon a distortion of his ideas?

McNally does attempt to provide some evidence for his remarks. He turns to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *"widely proclaimed 'the father of anarchism.'"* As he correctly notes, Proudhon was a *"printer by vocation"* and *"strongly opposed the emergence of capitalism in France."* However, McNally claims that Proudhon's *"opposition to capitalism was largely backward-looking in character"* as he *"did not look forward to a new society founded upon communal property which would utilise the greatest inventions of the industrial revolution. Instead, Proudhon considered small, private property the basis of his utopia. His was a doctrine designed not for the emerging working class, but for the disappearing petit bourgeoisie of craftsmen, small traders and rich peasants."* Unfortunately McNally has got his facts wrong.

To be fair to McNally, he is simply repeating what Marxists have been asserting about Proudhon since Marx wrote **The Poverty of Philosophy**. In that work, Marx claimed to be replying to Proudhon's **System of Economic Contradictions** but, in reality, the bulk of the work is inaccurate diatribe and its few valid points are swamped by selective quoting, false attribution and the repeation of points Proudhon made but in such a way as to suggest he argued the opposite. This last method of distortion can be seen when Marx implies that Proudhon wished to return to a pre-industrial economy based on small-scale private property:

> *"Those who, like Sismondi, wish to return to the correct proportions of production, while preserving the present basis of society, are reactionary, since, to be consistent, they must also wish to bring back all the other conditions of industry of former times."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 137]

Finally, we turn to the claim that anarchism *"glorified ... racism"*. While it is undoubtedly true that both Proudhon and Bakunin made a few racist comments, it does not follow that anarchism as a political theory is racist. Few would suggest that because Marx and Engels made racist comments that this makes Marxism inherently racist (see section 6 for a few examples of racist comments by the founders of Marxism). The same with anarchism — particularly given that both Proudhon and Bakunin made anti-racist statements in their writings. Thus we find Proudhon arguing in 1851 that in an anarchist society there will *"no longer be nationality, no longer fatherland, in the political sense of the words: they will mean only places of birth. Whatever a man's race or colour, he is really a native of the universe; he has citizen's rights everywhere."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 567] Bakunin echoed this in 1867, arguing that *"all collective and individual morality rests essentially upon* ***respect for humanity****"* and this meant *"the recognition of human right and human dignity in every man, of whatever race, colour, degree of intellectual development, or even morality."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 146] That these comments, and others like them, are the ones consistent with Anarchist principles is obvious.

So a few anti-Semitic and anti-German remarks, made in passing, does not equate to people who *"glorified ... racism"* nor a theory which is inherently racist. Rather, it means someone who expressed personal bigotries which failed to live up to their stated ideals. Yet rather than admit the obvious, McNally exaggerates Proudhon's and Bakunin's flaws while remaining silent on similar ones in Marx and Engels as well as the lack of them in the likes of Kropotkin, Malatesta, Rocker, Goldman, and so on. Ultimately, the weakness of McNally's position can be seen from the very large Jewish anarchist movement in both Europe and America which placed Proudhon and Bakunin in their pantheon of influences.



**Lenin vs. the SWP: Bureaucratic Centralism Or Democratic Centralism?**, available at: http://www.angelfire.com/journal/iso/swp.html

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> *upon the equalisation of man and women in point of political, economic, and social rights."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 343]

It should be redundant to note that Bakunin's position was shared by the likes of Kropotkin, Malatesta, Berkman, Chomsky and Ward but, clearly, it is not — and best not ponder where such noted anarchists as Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre and Louise Michel *"glorified ... the patriarchal family"*! Andr' L'o, a feminist libertarian and future Communard, pointed out the obvious contradiction in Proudhon's position in 1869 which these anarchists also saw:

> *"These so-called lovers of liberty, if they are unable to take part in the direction of the state, at least they will be able to have a little monarchy for their personal use, each in his own home ... Order in the family without hierarchy seems impossible to them — well then, what about in the state?"* [quoted by Carolyn J. Eichner, *"'Vive La Commune!' Feminism, Socialism, and Revolutionary Revival in the Aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune"*, **Journal of Women's History**, vol. 15, No. 2, p. 75]

These anarchists, and many others, extended anarchist ideas to the one area of life where Proudhon excluded liberty: the family. Unsurprisingly, both during and after his lifetime, anarchists subjected it to an immanent critique (i.e., using Proudhon's own concepts against his own position) and so while repulsive, Proudhon's anti-feminism should not be used for a blanket rejection of all his ideas given the otherwise appealing nature of his vision of a federated self-managed society — nor anarchism **as such**. So to state, as McNally does, that "anarchism" glorifies the patriarchal family simply staggers belief. Only someone ignorant of both logic and anarchist theory could make such an assertion.

Clearly neither Proudhon nor Bakunin *"glorified"* individual property. Hence Daniel Gu'rin's summary:

> *"Proudhon and Bakunin were 'collectivists,' which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property ... At the Bale congress [of the First International] in 1869, Bakunin ... all[ied] himself with the statist Marxists ... to ensure the triumph of the principle of collective property."* [*"From Proudhon to Bakunin"*, **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 32]

Thirdly, while it is true that Proudhon **did** glorify the patriarchal family, the same cannot be said of Bakunin. Unlike Proudhon, he argued that *"[e]qual rights must belong to both men and women,"* that women must *"become independent and free to forge their own way of life"* and that *"[o]nly when private property and the State will have been abolished will the authoritarian juridical family disappear."* He opposed the *"absolute domination of the man"* in marriage, urged *"the full sexual freedom of women"* and argued that the cause of women's liberation was *"indissolubly tied to the common cause of all the exploited workers — men and women."* An anarchist society's organisations would be populated by people elected *"by the universal suffrage of both sexes"* and so it would be based on ***"[e]qual political, social, and economic rights, as well as equal obligations, for women."*** [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 396–7, p. 78 and p. 93] In short:

> *"Abolition of the patriarchal family law, based exclusively upon the right to inherit property and also*



**Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes**, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1993.

Kollontai, Alexandra, **The Workers Opposition**, Solidarity, London, date unknown.

**Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai**, Allison and Busby, London, 1977.

Kowalski, Ronald I., **The Bolshevik Party in Conflict: the left communist opposition of 1918**, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1990.

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**The Lenin Anthology**, Robert C. Tucker (ed.), W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1975.

**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, Sutton Publishing Ltd,Stroud, 1997.

**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, Lawrence & Wishart,London, 1947.

**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970.



> *the weapon of revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends in all countries against enemies in all countries."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 178–9]

Given how often Bakunin stressed the need for union struggles and collective labour property, it is easy to conclude that McNally did no research into anarchism before writing about it. So we discover him arguing that *"resistance funds and trade unions"* are *"the only efficacious weapons"* the workers have against the bourgeoisie and this needed *"the organisation of the international strength of the workers of all countries."* This movement aimed for a society *"based on equality"* where *"all capital and every instrument of labour, including the soil, belong to the people, by right of collective property."* States *"must be abolished, for their only mission is to protect individual property, that is, to protect the exploitation by some privileged minority, of the collective labour of the masses of the people"* and a *"just human society"* must be created, one *"free of political domination and economic exploitation, founded only on collective labour which is guaranteed by collective property."* He repeatedly proclaimed his support for *"the great principle of **collective property**"* and argued that *"the collective property of capital"* was one of *"the absolutely necessary conditions for the emancipation **of labour and of the workers**"*. [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 153, p. 196 and p. 85] The social revolution would see *"the passing of all the land, capital and means of production into the hands of the international federation of free workers' associations."* Land *"belongs to those who have cultivated it with their own hands — to the rural communes"* while *"capital and all tools of labour belong to the city workers — to the workers' associations."* Anarchism would be *"nothing else but a free federation of workers — agricultural workers as well as factory workers and associations of craftsmen."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 344 and p. 410]

labour is its economic basis. However, it is still significant that Proudhon's analysis initially provoked such praise by Marx — an analysis which McNally obviously does not understand.

Moving on from Proudhon, we discover Bakunin also opposing individual property and arguing that *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of society and by utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174] With regards to peasants and artisans Bakunin also desired **voluntary** collectivisation. *"In a free community,"* he argued, *"collectivism can only come about through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below."* Rather than being a defender of "individual property" as McNally implies, Bakunin was a clear and consistent supporter of **collective** property (as organised in workers' associations and communes) and supported peasant and artisan property only in the sense of being against forced collectivisation as this would result in *"propelling [the peasants] into the camp of reaction."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 200 and p. 197] Expropriation of capital was considered a key aspect of social revolution:

> *"let us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune ... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution, together with propaganda,*



**Six Thesis on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**,contained in **The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, pp. 42–45.

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Mandel, David, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: from the July days 1917 to July 1918**, MacMillan, London, 1984.

Marglin, Steven, *"What do Bosses Do?"*, **Review of Radical Political Economy**, Vol. 6, No.2, New York, 1974.

Marshall, Alfred, **Principles of Economics: An Introductory Volume**, 9th Edition (in 2 volumes), MacMillian, London, 1961.

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Marx, Karl, **Capital: A Critique of Political Economy**, vol. 1, Penguin Books, London, 1976.

**Capital: A Critique of Political Economy**, vol. 3, Penguin Books, London, 1981.

**Theories of Surplus Value**, vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971.

**A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy**, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, **Selected Works**, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975.

**The Marx-Engels Reader**, Second Edition,Robert C. Tucker (ed.), W.W. Norton & Co, London & New York, 1978.

**The socialist revolution**, F. Teplov and V. Davydov (eds.)Progess, Moscow, 1978.



*"wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital ... into mere instruments of free and associated labour."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 47, p. 49 and pp. 290–1] This echoes Proudhon's position that property *"changed its nature"* when it *"the usufructuary converted his right to personally use the thing into the right to use it by his neighbour's labour"*. Thus support for *"individual property"* is not confined to Proudhon and, as noted, he desired to turn capital over to associated labour as well and this association he considered *"the annihilation of property"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155 and p. 148] It should also be stressed, as we note in section A.5.1, the followers of Proudhon played a key role in the Paris Commune and its attempts to create co-operatives reflected his ideas. Moreover, initially Marx had nothing but praise for Proudhon's critique of property contained in his classic work **What is Property?**:

> *"Proudhon makes a critical investigation — the first resolute, ruthless, and at the same time scientific investigation — of the basis of political economy,* ***private property****. This is the great scientific advance he made, an advance which revolutionises political economy and for the first time makes a real science of political economy possible. Proudhon's treatise* ***Qu'est-ce que la propri't'?*** *is as important for modern political economy as Siey\EAs' work* ***Qu'est-ce que le tiers 'tat?*** *for modern politics."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 4, p. 32]

As Rocker argued, Marx changed his tune to *"conceal from everyone just what he owed to Proudhon and any means to that end was admissible."* [**Marx and Anarchism**] This can be seen from the comments we quote above which clearly show a Proudhonian influence in their recognition that possession replaces property in a socialist society and that associated

This aspect of his ideas is continual throughout his political works and played a central role in his social theory. Thus to say that Proudhon *"glorified"* individual property distorts his position. As he argued in 1848:

> *"under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is **social** ownership … We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations … We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 377–8]

As the experience of workers under Lenin indicates (see section H.3.13), collective ownership by the state does **not** end wage labour, exploitation and oppression and so Proudhon's arguments in favour of socialisation and possession and against capitalist **and** state ownership were proven right. As the forced collectivisation of the peasantry under Stalin shows, Proudhon's respect for artisan/peasant possessions was a very sensible and humane position to take. Unless McNally supports the forced collectivisation of peasants and artisans, Proudhon's solution is the only position a socialist can take.

We doubt that McNally wants to socialise **all** *"property"* (including individual possessions and such like). We are sure that he, like Marx and Engels, wants to retain individual possessions in a socialist society. Thus they stated that the *"distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property"* and that *"Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."* Later Marx argued that the Paris Commune



**Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy**,Lewis S. Feuer (ed.), Fontana/Collins, Aylesbury, 1984.

*"Manifesto of the Communist Party"*, **Selected Works**, pp. 31–63.

**Fictitious Splits In The International**,available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864iwma/1872-e.htm

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*"The Financial Instability Hypothesis"* in **Post-Keynesian Economic Theory**, pp. 24–55, Arestis, Philip and Skouras, Thanos (eds.), Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex, 1985.

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Montgomery, David, **Beyond Equality: Labour and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872**, Vintage Books, New York, 1967.



not completely without merit as it gave its holder a measure of autonomy and protection against the state and other social forces. It was precisely this autonomy which he wished all to share rather than under capitalism where workers *"sold their arms and parted with their liberty"* to the capitalist or landlord. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212] However, recognising this — and the dangers of state socialism — hardly equates to glorification of private property.

It is true that Proudhon did oppose the forced socialisation of artisan workplaces and peasant land. He considered having control over the means of production, housing, etc. by those who use it as a key means of maintaining freedom and independence. Thus we find him arguing in 1851 that *"it is evident that if the peasants think well to associate, they will associate"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 584] However, the issue was different for modern industry:

> *"In such cases, it is one of two things; either the worker, necessarily a piece-worker, will be simply the employee of the proprietor-capitalist-entrepreneur; or he will participate in the chances of loss or gain of the establishment, he will have a voice in the council, in a word, he will become an associate.*
>
> *"In the first case the worker is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience and poverty. In the second case he resumes his dignity as a man and citizen, he may aspire to comfort, he forms a part of the producing organisation, of which he was before but the slave; as, in the town, he forms a part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 583]

Thus capitalism had to be replaced with associations *"due to the immorality, tyranny and theft suffered"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 584]

*entire abolition.*" However, just as he was against capitalism, Proudhon was also against state socialism: *"Either competition, — that is, monopoly and what follows; or exploitation by the State, — that is, dearness of labour and continuous impoverishment; or else, in short, a solution based upon equality, — in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 87, p. 133, p. 91 and p. 202]

He was well aware that replacing private property by state property would not liberate the working class for what he termed *"Community"* (usually, if not accurately, translated as "communism"), would enserf the worker to the state. Instead, Proudhon wanted to abolish property and replace it with possession. As he put it in 1840's **What is Property?**, while property had to be *"collective and undivided"* its use could be divided by means of *"possession"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137] Thus workers would control the means of production they used as well as the goods they created:

> *"property in product ... does not carry with it property in the means of production; that seems to me to need no further demonstration. There is no difference between the soldier who possesses his arms, the mason who possesses the materials committed to his care, the fisherman who possesses the water, the hunter who possesses the fields and forests, and the cultivator who possesses the lands: all, if you say so, are proprietors of their products — not one is proprietor of the means of production. The right to product is exclusive ... the right to means is common".* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112]

As we discuss in the section 4, Proudhon repeatedly noted his position and refuted those who claimed he supported individual property. He also recognised that private property was



**The Fall of the House of Labour: The Workplace, the state, and American labour activism, 1865–1925**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

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Ormerod, Paul, **The Death of Economics**, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1994.

Orwell, George, **Homage to Catalonia**, Penguin, London, 1989.

**The Road to Wigan Pier**, Penguin, London, 1954.

**Nineteen Eighty-Four**, Penguin, Middlesex, 1982.

**Orwell in Spain**, Penguin Books, London, 2001.

**Inside the Whale and Other Essays**, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1986.

Pagano, U. and Rowthorn, R. E. (eds.), **Democracy and Efficiency in Economic Enterprises**, Routledge, London, 1996.



*"It is by '93 and all of its discord that we are being ruled ... The democrats of '93, conjuring up a republic with their high school memories [of Ancient Rome], after devouring one another, set the revolution back by half a century ... The democrats of 1848, building the republic on their parliamentary memories, have also set the revolution back by half a century ... they are only imitators; they thought themselves statesmen because they were following the old models!*

*"So what is this queer preoccupation which, in time of revolution, bedazzles the most steadfast minds, and, when their burning aspirations carry them forward into the future, has them constantly harking back the past? How does it come about that the People, just when it is making the break with established institutions, takes another plunge and gets further immersed in tradition? Society does not repeat itself: but one would have thought it was walking backwards ... Could it not turn its gaze in the direction in which it is going?*

*"[...]*

*"In order to organise the future, a general rule confirmed by experience, the reformers always start out with their gaze fixed upon the past. Hence the contradiction forever discovered in their actions: hence also the immeasurable danger of revolutions."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 308]

Secondly, it is not true that Proudhon or Bakunin *"glorified"* individual property. Proudhon, as is well know, argued that *"property is theft"* and that *"property is despotism."* He was well aware of the negative side effects of individual property and sought to end it: *"instead of inferring ... that property should be shared by all, I demand, in the name of general security, its*

non-working class influences. This can be seen from McNally's position on anarchism.

Thus, rather than representing *"the anguished cry of the small property owner against the inevitable advance of capitalism"* anarchism is rather the cry of the oppressed against capitalism and the desire to create a free society in the here and now and not some time in the future once "the proletariat" was the majority of the working classes. To quote German Anarchist Gustav Landauer:

> *"Karl Marx and his successors thought they could make no worse accusation against the greatest of all socialists, Proudhon, than to call him a petit-bourgeois and petit-peasant socialist, which was neither incorrect nor insulting, since Proudhon showed splendidly to the people of his nation and his time, predominately small farmers and craftsmen, how they could achieve socialism immediately without waiting for the tidy process of big capitalism."* [**For Socialism**, p. 61]

As noted in the previous section, Proudhon's theory reflected both artisan/peasant interests and those of wage workers — as would be expected from a socialist aiming to transform his society to a free one. The disastrous results of Bolshevik rule in Russia should indicate the dangers of ignoring the vast bulk of a nation (i.e. the peasants) when trying to create a revolutionary change in society. McNally confuses a desire to achieve socialism **now** with backward looking opposition to capitalism. Proudhon looked at the current state of society, not backwards, as McNally suggests. Indeed, he lambasted those radicals during the 1848 who sought to repeat the glories of the Great French Revolution rather than look to the future:



Palley, Thomas I., **Plenty of Nothing: The Downsizing of the American Dreamand the case for Structural Keynesian**, Princeton UniversityPress, Princeton, 1998.

Paul, Ellen Frankel. Miller, Jr., Fred D. Paul, Jeffrey and Greenberg, Dan (eds.), **Socialism**, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

Perrin, David A., **The Socialist Party of Great Britain: Politics, Economics and Britain's Oldest Socialist Party**, Bridge Books, Wrexham, 2000.

Petras, James and Leiva, Fernando Ignacio, **Democracy and Poverty in Chile: The Limits to Electoral Politics**, Westview Press, Boulder, 1994.

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Pirani, Simon, **The Russian revolution in retreat, 1920–24: Soviet workers and the new Communist elite**, Routledge, New York, 2008

Phillips, Kevin, **The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath**, Random House, New York, 1990.

Polanyi, Karl, **The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time**, Beacon Press, Boston, 1957.

Popper, Karl, **Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge**, Basic, New York, 1965.

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Rabinowitch, Alexander, **Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising**, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.

**The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd**, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1976.

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*"Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule: New Data form the Archives of the Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories"*, **Politics and Society under the Bolsheviks**, Dermott, Kevin and Morison, John (eds.), Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999.

Rabinowitch, Alexander and Janet with Kristof, Ladis K.D. (eds.), **Revolution and politics in Russia: essays in memory of B.I. Nicolaevsky**, Indiana University Press for the International Affairs Center, Bloomington/London, 1973.

Radcliff, Pamela Beth, **From mobilization to civil war: the politics of polarizationin the Spanish city of Gijon, 1900–1937**, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996.

Radin, Paul, **The World of Primitive Man**, Grove Press, New York, 1960.

Radek, Karl, **The Kronstadt Uprising** available at, https://www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1921/04/kronstadt.htm

Raleigh, Donald J., **Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society,and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1921**,Princeton University Press, Woodstock, 2002.

Rand, Ayn, **Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, New American Library, New York, 1966.



tion. Needless to say, McNally's claim that anarchism is the politics of the *"small property owner"* would be even harder to justify if he mentioned Kropotkin's **communist** anarchism. However, like Proudhon's and Bakunin's support for collective ownership by workers associations it goes unmentioned — for obvious reasons.

## 3. Does anarchism *"glorify values from the past"*?

McNally asserts, regardless of the facts, that anarchism *"represented the anguished cry of the small property owner against the inevitable advance of capitalism. For that reason, it glorified values from the past: individual property, the patriarchal family, racism."* The reality is very different. We will take each issue in turn.

First, we should note that unlike Marx, anarchists did not think that capitalism was inevitable or an essential phase society had to go through before we could reach a free society. Neither Proudhon nor Bakunin shared Marx's viewpoint that socialism (and the struggle for socialism) had to be postponed until capitalism had developed sufficiently so that the *"centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation [sic!] of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 929] As McNally states, socialism was once the *"banner under which millions of working people resisted the horrors of the factory system and demanded a new society of equality, justice, freedom and prosperity."* Unfortunately, the Marxist tradition viewed such horrors as essential, unavoidable and inevitable and any form of working class struggle — such as the Luddites — which resisted the development of capitalism was denounced. So much for Marxism being in favour of working class *"self-emancipation"* — if working class resistance to oppression and exploitation which does not fit into its scheme for "working class self-emancipation" then it is the product of ignorance or

calist position (see section 9 for a discussion of McNally's false counterpoising of anarchism and syndicalism) as the *"organisation of the trade sections and their representation by the Chambers of Labour . .. bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 255] Moreover, as we show in the next section, like Proudhon, Bakunin argued that an anarchist society would be based on *"the collective ownership of producers' associations, freely organised and federated in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of these communes."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 197] As Kropotkin summarised:

> *"the chief aim of Anarchism is to awaken those constructive powers of the labouring masses ... since the times of the International Working Men\92s Association, the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers\92 organisations which carry on the* ***direct*** *struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, — the State*
>
> *"Such a struggle ... better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, p. 189]

And McNally asserts that *"the liberty defended by the anarchists was not the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society"*! Only someone ignorant of anarchist theory or with a desire to deceive could make such an asser-



**The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z**, Harry Binswanger (ed.), Meridian, New York, 1986.

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Rosenberg, William G., *"Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power*, pp. 98–131, **The Workers Revolution in Russia: the view from below**, D. Kaiser (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.



from Proudhon's reformist anarchism to the revolutionary anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin. While there is a similar commitment to a decentralised, federal socialism *"from below"* rooted in social and economic self-management, the means are different: revolution is embraced, along with labour unions and direct action. Where Proudhon differs from later anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and Goldman is that this working class self-activity is reformist in nature, that is seeking alternatives to capitalism which can reform it away rather than alternatives that can fight and destroy it. However, this embrace of social revolution and class struggle by anarchists like Bakunin rests on the same principle of working class self-emancipation.

Hence we find Bakunin arguing that *"revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses"* and so socialism can be achieved *"by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses"* who must *"organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interest, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the* ***ignorant masses*** *by some superior intellects."* Social change would be achieved only by *"the complete solidarity of individuals, sections and federations in the economic struggle of the workers of all countries against their exploiters."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237, pp. 197–8 and p. 177] Unlike Proudhon, he saw the means for achieving the social revolution in the labour movement as trade unions (organised from the bottom up, of course) were *"the natural organisation of the masses"* as *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses"* was the means by which workers could emancipate itself ***"through practical action."*** Thus the key to working-class self-liberation was ***"trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds"*** [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139 and p. 103] In short, what became known as a syndi-

ing wage slavery (i.e. the proletariat) and **not** exclusively in the *"small property owner"* (i.e., artisans and peasants).

So regardless of McNally's claims, Proudhon was not fixated upon *"small property"*. As we discuss in section 4, Proudhon's recognition of differences in the working class was reflected in his position on property. His proposals for a libertarian society included social ownership, workers' self-management of large scale workplaces as well as artisan and peasant production and **explicitly** and **repeatedly** argued for *"the complete emancipation of the worker … the abolition of the wage worker."* [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222] Rather than being backward looking and aiming exclusively at the artisan/peasant, Proudhon's ideas looked to the present and the future by looking at both the artisan/peasant **and** proletariat (i.e. to the **whole** of the working class in France at the time). As Daniel Gu'rin summarised:

> *"Proudhon really moved with the times and realised that it is impossible to turn back the clock. He was realistic enough to understand that 'small industry is as stupid as petty culture" … With regard to large-scale modern industry requiring a large workforce, he was resolutely collectivist: 'In future, large-scale industry and wide culture must be the fruit of association.' 'We have no choice in the matter,' he concluded, and waxed indignant that anyone had dared to suggest that he was opposed to technical progress … Property must be abolished … The means of production and exchange must be controlled neither by capitalist companies nor by the State … they must be managed by associations of workers"* [**Anarchism**, p. 45]

The notion that anarchism is the politics of the *"small property owner"* is even harder to maintain when we move



*"Workers' Control on the Railroads and Some Suggestions Concerning Social Aspects of Labour Politics in the Russian Revolution"*, pp. D1181-D1219, **The Journal of Modern History**, vol. 49, no. 2.

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*"Society Without A State"*, pp. 191–207, **Anarchism: Nomos XIX**, J. Roland Pennock and John

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*"Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life"*, Rowbotham, Sheila and Weeks, Jeffrey, **Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis**, Pluto Press, London 1977.

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*"clubs ... assemblies, popular societies"* would ensure *"the organisation of universal suffrage in all its forms, of the very structure of Democracy itself."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 321, p. 407 and p. 461] As Daniel Gu'rin summarised, *"in the midst of the 1848 Revolution,"* Proudhon *"sketched out a minimum libertarian program: progressive reduction in the power of the State, parallel development of the power of the people from below, through what he called clubs"* which today we *"would call councils."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 152–3]

Clearly, even if he (wrongly) rejected trade unionism Proudhon **did** support, to quote McNally, the *"the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society."* Indeed, as one historian notes, there was *"close similarity between the associational ideal of Proudhon ... and the program of the Lyon Mutualists"* and that there was *"a remarkable convergence [between these ideas], and it is likely that Proudhon was able to articulate his positive program more coherently because of the example of the silk workers of Lyon. The socialist ideal that he championed was already being realised, to a certain extent, by such workers."* [Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 164] Proudhon simply rejected revolution, trade unions or state-backed reforms as the means of achieving socialism and instead argued for a reformist strategy based primarily on the creation of co-operative workplaces and banks. He linked his politics to workers self-activity and argued that *"the proof"* of his mutualist ideas was shown in the *"current practice, revolutionary practice"* of *"those labour associations ... which have spontaneously ... been formed in Paris and Lyon"* during the 1848 revolution which show that the *"organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same."* If all workers *"organise themselves along similar lines, it is obvious that, as masters of labour, constantly generating fresh capital through work, they would soon have wrested alienated capital back again, through their organisation and competition."* This would apply to *"small-scale"* as well as *"large-scale property and large industries"*. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 374–5] Thus Proudhon places his ideas firmly in the actions of working people resist-

*times more precious than wealth — liberty."* [Proudhon, **System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 150] However, this did not mean that he was rejected the idea that the working class (in its three sections of wage-workers, artisan and peasants) would liberate itself. While fundamentally a reformist, Proudhon recognised that self-liberation was only genuine form of liberation and so had *"always thought that the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government."* [**Property is Theft!**, 306] Given this, it is unsurprising that Proudhon saw social change as coming from *"below"* by the collective action of the working class:

> *"If you possess social science, you know that the problem of association consists in organising ... the producers, and by this organisation subjecting capital and subordinating power. Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege ... to conduct the war to a successful conclusion ... it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 225]

During the 1848 revolution he urged *"a provisional committee be set up to orchestrate exchange, credit and commerce between workers"* which would *"liaise with similar committees set up in the main cities of France"* and *"under the aegis of these committees, a body representative of the proletariat be formed in Paris ... in opposition to the bourgeoisie's representation."* This ensured that *"a new society be founded in the heart of the old society"*. He later stressed the *"organisation of popular societies was the pivot of democracy, the cornerstone of republican order"* and these



St. Clair, David, **The Motorization of American Cities**, Praeger, New York, 1986.

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*nineteenth century France seems to have emerged from the co-operation of skilled, urbanised artisanal workers with less highly skilled and less urbanised industrial workers."* [Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 282–3]

The fruits of this union included the Paris Commune, an event in which the followers of Proudhon played an important role and which both McNally and Marx praise (see section 12 for more discussion on this).

In short, Marx's earlier summation of Proudhon was correct — his ideas reflected the ideas and interests of the French working class. Proudhon addressed himself to both the peasant/artisan and the proletariat. This is to be expected from a **libertarian** form of socialism as, at the time of his writing, the majority of working people **were** peasants and artisans and, as noted above, this predominance of artisan/peasant workers in the French economy lasted well after his (and Marx's) death. Not to take into account the artisan/peasant would have meant the dictatorship of a minority of working people over the rest of them (as we discuss in section H.1.1 this was also a key reason for Bakunin's rejection of Marx's *"dictatorship of the proletariat"*). Given that in chapter 4 of his pamphlet McNally states that Marxism aims for a *"democratic and collective society ... based upon the fullest possible political democracy"* his attack on Proudhon's concern for the artisan and peasant is doubly strange. Either you support the *"fullest possible political democracy"* and so your theory must take into account artisans and peasants or you restrict political democracy and replace it with rule by the few.

Unsurprisingly, then, Proudhon argued in 1841 that he *"preach[ed] emancipation to the proletarians; association to the workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 157] However, as McNally notes, he *"oppose[d] trade unions."* and did not see them as the means of achieving this for it was *"not by such methods that the workingmen will attain to wealth and — what is a thousand*

*and necessary at that moment. Proudhon was not a Utopian and a prophet; not a Fourier and not a Marx. He was a man of action and realisation."* [**For Socialism**, p. 108] Historian K. Steven Vincent makes the same point, arguing that Proudhon's *"social theories may not be reduced to a socialism for only the peasant class, nor was it a socialism only for the petite bourgeois; it was a socialism of and for French workers. And in the mid-nineteenth century … most French workers were still artisans… French labour ideology largely resulted from the real social experiences and aspirations of skilled workers … Proudhon's thought was rooted in the same fundamental reality, and therefore understandably shared many of the same hopes and ideals."* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, pp. 5–6] It is no coincidence, therefore, that when he was elected to the French Parliament in 1848 most of the votes cast for him were from *"working class districts of Paris — a fact which stands in contrast to the claims of some Marxists, who have said he was representative only of the petite bourgeoisie."* [Robert L. Hoffman, **Revolutionary Justice**, p. 136]

Proudhon's position was a distinctly sensible and radical position to take:

> *"While Marx was correct in predicting the eventual predominance of the industrial proletariat vis-\E0-vis skilled workers, such predominance was neither obvious nor a foregone conclusion in France during the nineteenth century. The absolute number of small industries even increased during most of the century…*
>
> *"Nor does Marx seem to have been correct concerning the revolutionary nature of the industrial proletariat. It has become a clich' of French labour history that during the nineteenth century artisans were much oftener radical than industrial workers. Some of the most militant action of workers in late*



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> **Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890–1928**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017.

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> *"Not only does Proudhon write in the interest of the proletarians he is himself a proletarian, an **ouvrier** [worker]. His work [**What is Property?**] is a scientific manifesto of the French proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 4, p. 41]

The change in perspective is unsurprising given that Marx thought his own ideology was that of the proletariat (whether the proletariat knew it or not) and, given his disagreements with Proudhon, the Frenchman had to represent some other class. However, if we reject the assumption that classes only have one theory associated with them, then the weakness of the Marxist assertion becomes clear — particularly given that today there are no mass Marxist parties in spite of the fact that now, unlike in Marx's day, the proletariat is the majority of the working class in most of the world's countries.

It is important to remember that at the end of the 1840s over 80% of the population of France and Germany were peasants or artisans — what Marxists term the "petit-bourgeois". As Marx and Engels admitted in **The Communist Manifesto**, in *"countries like France"* the peasants *"constitute far more than half of the population."* This remained the case well after Proudhon's death in 1865, with Marx commenting in the early 1870s that *"the peasant ... forms a more of less considerable majority ... in the countries of the West European continent."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 493 and p. 543] As Proudhon himself noted in 1851, in *"a population of 36 millions, there are 24 millions occupied with agriculture"* and of the remaining 12 million there where only 6 million *"composing in part the wage-working class"* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 558]

This social context is important and it is difficult to understand the positions thinkers took unless it taken into account. In the words of anarchist Gustav Landauer, Proudhon's socialism *"of the years 1848 to 1851 was the socialism of the French people in the years 1848 to 1851. It was the socialism that was possible*

Leninism but also that many of the ideas Marxists consider as their own were first argued by Proudhon and Bakunin.

In short, we will show why *"Anarchism is often considered to represent current of radical thought that is truly democratic and libertarian"* by contrasting what McNally asserts about it and what anarchist thinkers actually advocated. This will, unfortunately, produce a reply longer than the initial claims but this is unavoidable. We need to provide extensive quotes and arguments simply in order to show the weakness of McNally's assertions and to indicate where his own tradition advocated notions he — inaccurately — attacks anarchism for.

## 2. Is anarchism the politics of the *"small property owner"*?

McNally does start out by acknowledging that *"anarchism developed in opposition to the growth of capitalist society. What's more, anarchist hostility to capitalism centred on defence of the liberty of the individual."* However, he then distorts this actual historical development by arguing that *"the liberty defended by the anarchists was not the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society. Rather, anarchism defended the freedom of the small property owner — the shopkeeper, artisan and tradesman — against the encroachments of large-scale capitalist enterprise."*

Such a statement is, to say the least, a total distortion of the facts of the situation. Nor is it original. McNally is simply repeating Marx's assertions against Proudhon who, Marx claimed, *"wants to soar as the man of science above the bourgeois and the proletarians"* but *"is merely the petty bourgeois, continually tossed back and forth between capital and labour, political economy and communism."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 178] It should be noted that Marx had not always thought this of the Frenchman:



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**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–27)**, Pathfinder, New York, 1980.

**On Lenin: Notes towards a Biography**, George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., London, 1971.



are best known for. To quote such words from, say, private letters and ignore the books and articles which reflect a thinker's ideas best and which influenced others presents a false picture, particularly if the context within which the letters were written are unmentioned. So it would be a distortion of the ideas of Marx and Engels to quote the numerous anti-Semitic insults against specific individuals from their private letters. As would be expected, they were men of their age and expressed themselves in ways which today are, rightly, considered unacceptable (for those interested in such matters, Peter Fryer's essay *"Engels: A Man of his Time"* should be consulted [John Lea and Geoff Pilling (eds.), **The condition of Britain: Essays on Frederick Engels**]). However, their few **public** racist comments could be considered worthy of note — although, if so, then they should, like those of Proudhon and Bakunin, be placed in the context of their other ideas and the culture they lived in rather than being used as an excuse to ignore their contributions to socialism. Sadly, McNally — like many Marxists — fails to do this, preferring dismissive finger-pointing instead.

Lastly, McNally ignores the anti-democratic, authoritarian and elitist aspects of his own political tradition. Given that leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev publicly advocated party dictatorship and one-man management of production, it is a distortion to ignore this when discussing *"Socialism from Below"*. Simply put, while anarchists have consistently advocated communal and industrial self-management since 1840 to today, the Marxist tradition has not.

McNally's pamphlet, as will become clear, does not present anything new. It simply repeats what is sadly all-to-often the received wisdom about anarchists and anarchism in Marxist circles. As such, it is worth the time and effort to reply to. Not only will it show the limitations of the Marxist position on anarchism, it will also afford us the opportunity to show that not only is anarchism a more genuine *"Socialism from Below"* than

him to renounce *"this gender aristocracy that would bind us to the old regime"* and *"speak out against man's exploitation of woman."*: *"Do not describe yourself as an anarchist, or be an anarchist through and through"* [*"On Being Human"*, pp. 68–71, **Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas**, Vol. 1, Robert Graham (ed.), p. 71] Later anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin likewise applied anarchist principles consistently on this issue, a fact McNally cannot bring himself to admit.

Second, McNally lamely notes that *"[w]hile later anarchists may have abandoned some of the excesses of their founding fathers their philosophy remains hostile to ideas of mass democracy and workers' power."* Thus, we have the acknowledgement that not all anarchists share the same ideas and that anarchist theory has developed since 1876 (the year of Bakunin's death). This is to be expected as anarchists are not Proudhonists or Bakuninists — we do not name ourselves after one person, rather we take what is useful from libertarian writers and ignore the rubbish. Malatesta's words are applicable here: *"We follow ideas and not men, and rebel against this habit of embodying a principle in a man."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 199] However, this is beside the point as McNally's account of the ideas of Proudhon and Bakunin is simply false — indeed, so false as to make you wonder if he is simply incompetent as a scholar or seeks to present a patchwork of lies as fact and "theory."

Third, McNally's approach rests on selective quoting, lack of context and an unwillingness to research the assertions he is making. This is important as we are discussing thinkers who wrote over a period of many decades and whose works and letters reflected the highs and lows of a person's life as well as the social movement they were part of. This means that in the depths of personal crisis or the repression of popular movements even the most consistent thinker can write passages which are in contradiction to the thrust of the works they



*"Lessons of October"*, pp. 113–177, **The Essential Trotsky**, Unwin Books, London, 1963.

**Leon Trotsky on China**, Monad Press, New York, 2002

**In Defense of Marxism**, Pathfinder, New York, 1995.

**Platform of the Opposition**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1927-plo/ch01.htm

**The Lessons of October**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1924-les.htm

**How Did Stalin Defeat the Opposition?**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1935-sta.htm

**Work, Discipline, Order**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1918-mil/ch05.htm

**More Equality!** available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1919-mil/ch12.htm

**The Revolution Betrayed**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1936-rev/index.htm

**The Class Nature of the Soviet State**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/sovstate.htm

**The Path of the Red Army**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1918-mil/ch02.htm

**The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism**, contained in **Their Morals and Ours**, pp. 53–66, Pathfinder, New York, 1973.

**The Makhno Movement**, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1919-mil/ch49.htm

**Stalinism and Bolshevism**, available at:http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1937/1937-sta.htm

Turner, Adai, **Just Capital: The Liberal Economy**, Pan Books, London, 2002.

Utton, M. A., **The Political Economy of Big Business**, Martin Robinson, Oxford, 1982.

van der Linden, Marcel, **Western Marxism and the Soviet Union : a survey of critical theories and debates since 1917**Brill, Leiden, 2007

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Walford, George, **George Walford on Anarcho-Capitalism**, available at http://flag.blackened.net/liberty/walford-on-anarcap.html

Wallerstein, Immanuel, **Geopolitics and Geoculture**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

**The Capitalist World System** (vol. 1),

Walras, L, **Elements of Pure Political Economy**, Allen and Unwin, London, 1954.

Ward, Benjamin, **What's Wrong with Economics?**, Basic Books, New York, 1972

Ware, Norman, **The Industrial Worker 1840–1860: The Reaction of American IndustrialSociety to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution**, Elephant Paperbacks, Chicago, 1924.

Watson, Andrew, **From Red to Green: Green Politics and environmentalism cannot save the environment. A socialist politics can**,Privately Published, 1990.



*developed theories that were elitist and authoritarian to the core."* We will discover the truth of this assertion later.

First we must note that McNally uses the typical Marxist approach to attacking anarchism — namely to attack anarchists rather than anarchism as such. British Anarchist Albert Meltzer summarised the flaws in this perspective well:

> *"Marxist-Leninists, faced with Anarchism, find that by its nature it undermines all the suppositions basic to Marxism. Marxism was held out to be the basic working class philosophy (a belief which has utterly ruined the working class movement everywhere). It holds that the industrial proletariat cannot owe its emancipation to anyone but themselves alone. It is hard to go back on that and say that the working class is not yet ready to dispense with authority placed over it ... Marxism normally tries to refrain from criticising anarchism as such — unless driven to doing so, when it exposes its own authoritarianism .. . and concentrates its attacks not on Anarchism, but on Anarchists."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and Against**, p. 62]

So when reading this or any critique of anarchism always remember that few people are completely consistent libertarians and determine whether the words written reflect a flaw in anarchism **as such** or whether they reflect a personal flaw of the thinker in question. Once this common-sense position is taken it quickly becomes clear that anything valid in McNally's critique highlights the flaws of individuals who did not consistently rise to the levels implied by their ideas. This, most obviously, is the case with Proudhon's sexism which is in contradiction with his support for liberty, equality and federalism. Unsurprisingly, his contemporary Joseph D'jacque wrote a critique of Proudhon's sexist views in 1857, urging

*to try and defend a common political vision — such as socialism from below or libertarian socialism — as a point of reference"* rather than fixate over labels like "Marxism" or "anarchism." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 347] As we noted in our critique of his pamphlet, the term *"socialism from below"* has a distinctly anarchist feel to it, a feel distinctly at odds with Leninist ideology and practice. Moreover, as shown below, Lenin explicitly denounced *"from below"* as an anarchist idea — and his practice once in power showed that *"from above"* is part and parcel of Leninism in action. Sadly, most Leninists are unaware of this.

Finally, many Marxists reject Leninism: some for the original ideas of Marxism, such as the **Socialist Party of Great Britain** and its sister parties and some, like the council communists, for extension of them in the direction of revolutionary anarchist conclusions. As such, this critique should not be taken for a blanket rejection of all Marxists but rather a specific form of it, namely Leninism. Nor should it be taken for a blanket rejection of everything Marx or Marxists have argued. There any many forms of anarchism and many forms of Marxism, some of which are closer than others.

Many of the issues discussed in this appendix are also explored in section H of the FAQ and that should also be consulted.

## 1. Introduction

McNally begins by noting that *"Anarchism is often considered to represent [a] current of radical thought that is truly democratic and libertarian. It is hailed in some quarters as the only true political philosophy [of] freedom."* Needless to say, he thinks that the *"reality is quite different"* and argues that *"[f]rom its inception anarchism has been a profoundly anti-democratic doctrine. Indeed the two most important founders of anarchism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin,*



Weisbrot, Mark, **Globalisation for Whom?**, available at: http://www.cepr.net/Globalization.html

Weisbrot, Mark, Baker, Dean, Kraev, Egor and Chen, Judy,**The Scorecard on Globalization 1980–2000: Twenty Years of Diminished Progress**,available at: http://www.cepr.net/publications/globalization_2001_07_11.htm

Weisbrot, Mark, Baker, Dean, Naiman, Robert and Neta, Gila, **Growth May Be Good for the Poor — But are IMF and World Bank Policies Good for Growth?** available at: http://www.cepr.net/publications/econ_growth_2001_05.htm

Weisbrot, Mark and Rosnick, David, **Another Lost Decade?: Latin America's Growth Failure Continues into the 21st Century**, available at: http://www.cepr.net/publications/latin_america_2003_11.htm

Wilkinson, Richard and Pickett, Kate, **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better**, Allen Lane, London, 2009.

Williams, Gwyn A., **Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, factory councils and the origins of Italian Communism, 1911–1921**, Pluto Press, London, 1975.

**Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution**, Edward Arnold, London, 1981.

Wilson, H., **The Labour Government 1964–1970**, London, 1971.

Wilkinson, Richard and Pickett, Kate, **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal SocietiesAlmost Always Do Better**, Allen Lane, London,2009.

Winn, Peter (ed.), **Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973–2002**, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2004.

Wolff, Edward N., **Top Heavy: A Study of Increasing Inequality in America**, Twentieth Century Fund, 1995

Wolff, Jonathan, **Robert Nozick: Property, Justice and the Minimal State**, Polity Press, Oxford, 1991.

Wray, L. Randall, **Money and Credit in Capitalist Economies: the endogenousmoney approach**, Aldershot, Elgar, 1990.

Zinoviev, Grigorii, **History of the Bolshevik Party: A Popular Outline**, New Park Publications, London, 1973.



critique of anarchism. In an end-note in a book written in 2006 he described this welcome rethink:

> *"I dissent from Draper's one-sided critique of anarchism ... Draper is not fair to some of the currents within social anarchism. I also reject my own restatement of Draper's interpretation in the first edition of my booklet* ***Socialism from Below****"* [**Another World Is Possible: Globalization & Anti-Capitalism**, p. 393]

While it seems unlikely this was in response to reading our critique, it does show that it was correct. Unfortunately it took McNally over 20 years to acknowledge that his essay from 1984 gave a distinctly distorted account of anarchism (a distortion originally circulated in Marxist circles in the 1960s with Draper's pamphlet). Perhaps significantly, McNally no longer seems to be associated with the sister organisations of the British **Socialist Workers Party** (a group whose distortions of anarchism are many and infamous). Sadly, the damage has been done and his and Draper's flawed account of anarchism (and Marxism) has become all-too-commonplace within radical circles — even in libertarian circles, some take these assertions on Proudhon and Bakunin at face value and do not seek to verify the claims made. This is unfortunate for, as we will see, while sometimes correct (for example, Proudhon's disgusting anti-feminism) most of the claims are false or, at best, half-truths turned into full-lies by ignoring context or other relevant facts.

We hope that this reply will ensure today's radicals will gain a fuller understanding of the ideas — and limitations! — of Proudhon and Bakunin and, more importantly, how they influenced subsequent anarchists and the development of libertarian ideas. It will also allow an informed discussion between Marxists and Anarchists on their areas of agreement and disagreement. McNally now argues that *"it may be more helpful*

## Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet *"Socialism from Below"*

In chapter three of his pamphlet *Socialism from Below*, David McNally decides to expose (what he calls) *"The Myth Of Anarchist Libertarianism."* In reality, his account is so distorted and, indeed, dishonest that all it proves is that Marxists will go to extreme lengths to attack anarchist ideas. As Brain Morris points out, defending the Leninist tradition and ideology *"implies .. . a compulsive need to rubbish anarchism."* [**Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 128] McNally's pamphlet is a classic example of this. As we will prove, his "case" is a mishmash of illogical assertions, lies and, when facts do appear, their use is almost always a means of painting a false picture of reality.

It must be stressed that there is nothing new or original in McNally's pamphlet. It is simply an unthinking repetition of previous Marxists attacks on anarchism, starting with Marx's dishonest diatribe against Proudhon **The Poverty of Philosophy**, and is mostly based on Hal Draper's **The Two Souls of Socialism** (McNally states he *"should also record here a debt of inspriation of [this] now-out-of-print pamphlet by Draper"*). While McNally's errors are commonplace within what passes for Marxist scholarship, this does not excuse his repeating of them without first checking their accuracy (or, more correctly, their inaccuracy). If more Marxists took the time to validate their prejudices and assumptions against what Proudhon, Bakunin and other anarchists wrote then it would be possible to have a real discussion on what **genuine** socialism (one, as Proudhon and Bakunin stressed long before Marxists appropriated the term, *"from below"*) entails.

It must be noted that since this appendix was first written in 2000, David McNally has distanced himself from his pamphlet's



# Supplementary Material

These appendices contain material which build upon the main text but which are not essential to it. Some reflect the origins of *An Anarchist FAQ* as a rebuttal of claims that "anarcho"-capitalism is a form of anarchism (section F). Others, material which was originally to be included in section H but which space precluded or replies to Marxist articles on anarchism. The latter aimed to refute articles as they appeared, but there is only so many times the same nonsense can be addressed.



# Appendix: Anarchism and Marxism

This appendix exists to refute some of the many anti-anarchist diatribes produced by Marxists. While we have covered why anarchists oppose Marxism in section H, we thought it would be useful to reply to Marxist webpages and books whose content is not explicitly covered in that section. In this way we hope to indicate that Marxism is a flawed theory, flawed even to the extent of not being able to present a honest critique of anarchism. This consistent attempt to smear anarchism and distort its history and ideas is no co-incidence — rather it is required in order to present Marxism as the only viable form of socialism and, more importantly, to hide the fact that much of the populist Marxist rhetoric was, in fact, said by anarchists first and latter stolen by Marxists to hide the authoritarian basis of their politics.

One last point. We are aware that we repeat many of our arguments in these appendices. That, unfortunately, is avoidable for two reasons. Firstly, Marxists usually repeat the same false assertions against anarchism and so we have to answer them each time they appear. Marxists seem to subscribe to the point of view that repeating an error often enough makes it true. Secondly, we have tried to make each appendix as self-contained as possible and that meant repeating certain material and arguments to achieve this. We hope the reader understands.

the pamphlet McNally shamefully rips quotes from. The dishonesty is clear.

Given McNally's assertions about anarchism opposing collective property and being undemocratic, it is useful to also quote Woodcock's words on what anarchism is based on and what it logically implies. He stresses that *"few anarchists contend that absolute individual freedom is possible, or, indeed, desirable ... man is a social being, depending for his well-being on working and living together in society ... The freedom anarchists seek, then, is a reciprocal freedom, a freedom of men and women recognising each other's rights, a freedom based on justice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] Therefore:

> *"Anarchism ... is based on the concepts of freedom and justice, justice being that reciprocity of freedom without which no real individual freedom is possible. The social principles that follow from these concepts are mutual aid, or co-operation, and communism, or common ownership of the means of production ... In the anarchist view these principles are expressed concretely in the administration of economic and functional affairs by voluntary associations of the workers for the purpose of running the factories and the farms and providing the necessary social services such as posts, drainage, roads, etc. Each industry would be administered by its own workers who are the most competent people for that purpose ... who, having expert knowledge of their professions, are obviously better fitted to do this than politicians chosen according to the methods of parliamentary democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

The means used to create such a society would be *"prosecuting the economic struggle ... an organisation on an economic basis which will embrace all the workers, according to their industries and workplaces . .. The syndicate [union], organised and*



> *ample, Proudhon strenuously opposed the degrading character of ... work which required an individual to repeat one minor function continuously. But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result, according to Proudhon, from the introduction of strong workers' associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis."* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 156]

So if you look at Proudhon's writings rather than what Marx and Engels **claimed** he wrote, it will soon be discovered that Proudhon in fact **favoured** collective ownership and for workers' associations to manage the means of production. Thus we find Proudhon arguing in 1840 that *"the land is indispensable to our existence, — consequently a common thing"* and *"all accumulated capital being social property"* so *"no one can be its exclusive proprietor"*. Property becomes *"collective and undivided"* and managers *"must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 105, p. 118, p. 137 and p. 119] Interestingly, Marx himself noted how the Frenchman in this work, **What is Property?**, *"abolishes property in order to abolish poverty. Proudhon did even more. He proved in detail **how** the movement of capital produces poverty"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 4, p. 35]

Property would be owned collectively and so access would be free — as we discuss in section I.3.3 there would be no more bosses and wage-workers but simply associates. However, unlike under Marxism, there would be no central planning and the associates would decide what to produce. So *"the use of*

*[workplaces], like that of the land, may be divided, but which as property remains* ***undivided****."* This *"non-appropriation of the instruments of production"* would be *"a destruction of property."* Ten years later, in 1851, he argued that *"[e]very industry, operation or enterprise which by its nature requires the employment of a large number of workers of different specialities, is destined to become a society or company of workers."* Thus *"every individual employed in the association ... has an undivided share in the property of the company"* as well as *"the right to fill any position"* for *"all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members."* This means that *"the collective force, which is a product of the community, ceases to be a source of profit to a small number of managers and speculators: it becomes the property of all the workers."* Thus there would be a new form of economic organisation based on *"the co-operation of all who take part in the collective work"* with *"equal conditions for all members* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153, p. 149, p. 583, pp. 585–6]

Public utilities would be under the *"initiative of communes and departments"* with *"workers companies ... carrying the works out."* This decentralisation, this *"direct, sovereign initiative of localities, in arranging for public works that belong to them, is a consequence of the democratic principle and the free contract."* Land and housing would see rental payments being *"carried over to the account of the purchase"* of the resource used and once the property *"has been entirely paid for, it shall revert immediately to the commune."* In the case of housing, such payments would result in *"a proportional undivided share in the house [the tenant] lives in, and in all buildings erected for rental, and serving as a habitation for citizens."* The land and housing would become socialised as the property *"thus paid for shall pass under the control of the communal administration"* and for *"repairs, management, and upkeep of buildings, as well as for new constructions, the communes shall deal with bricklayers companies or building workers associations."* In short: *"Capitalist and landlord exploitation stopped everywhere,*



> *cieties are by definition class societies), is relative to the security of that society. The ruling class give just so much political freedom as it is worthwhile and possible to give to keep the people out of mischief ... Political freedom, at its best, can only be limited, as it maintains the power of property, which, by conferring the right of exploitation, limits the freedom of the exploited, who are the majority of the population ...*
>
> *"Political freedom is thus, in fact, an ingenious delusion, by which the governing classes give the people the comforting belief that they themselves have made the chains that bind them and that for this reason the chains are necessary and good. It gives men certain liberties that the ruling classes find it wise to concede as a cheap way of buying security, but its very retention of a political system, which means government, which means coercion, must in the end destroy political freedom itself.*
>
> *"Anarchists do not advocate political freedom. What they advocate is freedom from politics, freedom from the institution of government, freedom from coercion, freedom from the law's interference in the lives of individual men and women, freedom from economic domination and inequality ... Only a society based on control from above has need of coercion. A society based on co-operation can do without oppression and restriction because it is based on the voluntary agreement between its members."* [**Op. Cit.** pp. 105–8]

Ultimately, if you define political freedom as the freedom to elect a government then, obviously, anarchists do not aim for it because we aim to end all governments! As is clear from

**not** that the majority is always right but rather that a ruling minority cannot be trusted to not abuse its position and power. This is why Woodcock states *"Anarchists seek neither the good of a minority, nor the good of the majority, but the good of all."* He also notes that in so-called democracies it is usually the handful of people who make up the "democratically elected" government who make the decisions and so it is *"not even of the majority [who rule] but of the privileged few who forms its ruling class"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20] This awareness informs his comments on political freedom which McNally shamefully ignores:

> *"Political freedom the right to vote, trial by jury, freedom of speech and press — does not constitute real freedom. Indeed it masks the unfree nature of the society from which it springs. The right to vote means the right to choose whether one will have a brewer or a lawyer for a master. It does not mean the right to do without a master. Trial by jury means the right to be judged by a handful of petty tradesmen, in accordance with the laws of a society based on property and class ... Political freedom in a class society is virtually meaningless ... it is strictly limited in the interests of the controlling class, and its availability is in relation to the class and economic position of the man concerned ... Democratic freedoms, then, are relative to wealth. But this is not the full measure of the relationship. In reality the rich enjoy a far greater freedom than that ... In a class society the ruling class are always free owing to their control of the means of production, of the money that in an acquisitive society is the way to all enjoyment. The ruled are not free because lack of control of production, and the benefits of money, liberal education, etc., proceeding there from ... Moreover, political freedom in a class society (and all political so-*



*wage labour abolished, equal and just exchange guaranteed."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 594–5, p. 576, p. 578, p. 576 and p. 596]

Proudhon termed this vision of a self-managed economy *"an industrial democracy"* or *"the industrial republic"* and argued that *"Workers' Associations are the locus of a new principle and model of production that must replace present-day corporations"*. When *"in an industry, all the workers, instead of working for an owner who pays them and keeps their product, work for one another and thereby contribute to a common product from which they share the profit"* then, when you *"extend the principle of mutuality that unites the workers of each group to all the Workers' Associations as a unit, and you will have created a form of civilisation that, from all points of view — political, economic, aesthetic — differs completely from previous civilisations"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 610 and p. 616] Compare this, the anarchist position, on industrial democracy with Lenin's who, in 1921 went so far as to suggest, somewhat disingenuously given the reality of party dictatorship at the time, that *"Democracy is a category proper only to the political sphere"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 26]

As can be seen, rather than base his *"utopia"* on *"small, private property"* Proudhon based it on the actual state of the French economy — one marked by both artisan and large-scale production. The latter he desired to see transformed from the individual property of the few (capitalists) into the collective property of workers' associations and placed under workers' self-management. The former, as it did not involve wage-labour, was non-capitalist and was compatible with a system of undivided (collective) ownership and divided use (possession). While Proudhon's vision may be considered as (in part or in whole) undesirable, contradictory and unstable, it is **not** *"backward-looking in character"* nor based on *"small, private property"*. That Proudhon himself publicly rejected the assertion he stood for private ownership is of note:

*"You have me saying, and I really do not know where you could have found this, that **ownership of the instruments of labour must forever stay vested in the individual and remain unorganised**. These words are set in italics, as if you had lifted them from somewhere in my books. And then, on the back of this alleged quotation, you set about answering me that society, or the State that stands for it, has the right to **buy back** all property assets ... But it does not follow at all from my speaking on the basis of socialism in order to reject the buy back of such assets as nonsensical, illegitimate and poisonous that I want to see individual ownership and non-organisation of the instruments of labour endure for all eternity. I have never penned nor uttered any such thing: and have argued the opposite a hundred times over. I make no distinction ... between real ownership and phoney ownership ... I deny all kinds of proprietary domain. I deny it, precisely because I believe in an order wherein the instruments of labour will cease to be appropriated and instead become shared; where the whole earth will be depersonalised ..."*

*"There is a more straightforward, more effective and infinitely less onerous and less risky way of transferring ownership, of achieving Liberty, Equality and Fraternity ...*

*"Capital having been divested of its power of usury, economic solidarity is gradually created, and with it, an equality of wealth.*

*"Next comes the spontaneous, popular formation of groups, workshops or workers\92 associations;*



The first part (*"Even were democracy possible, the anarchist would still not support it"*) appears in chapter 3 on page 20 while the second (*"Anarchists do not advocate political freedom. What they advocate is freedom from politics"*) comes from chapter 15, page 108. In other words, McNally skips most of the pamphlet and ignores such trivial discussions as anarchist support for organisation and so collective decision making, the links between anarchism and syndicalism (including a chapter explaining syndicalist ideas), revolutionary anarchist support for collective property in the means of production and products (libertarian communism) as well as what was meant by *"political freedom"* and *"democracy"*.

It is useful, then, to present what Woodcock **actually** argued in order to understand what anarchism stands for. First, it should be stressed that Woodcock is very specific about what he meant by democracy: *"for democracy puts forward the will of the majority as the supreme law, and declares that society must be governed, and the individual, whether he agrees or not, be coerced by that will."* Thus he is not discussing democratic decision making within free associations but rather the majority passing laws which all must obey. As indicated above, this is not an unproblematic situation. Woodcock indicates this by noting the *"laws against bigamy, abortion, homosexual practices, transvestism, and other [so-called] sexual deviations, as well as the semi-official persecution of the unmarried mother and the bastard child, protect the institution of the family"*. Thus *"laws protecting the state [or the wishes of the majority] find their way into every sphere of life, and involve the prohibition of activities that, at first consideration, would appear to have no bearing on the social structure."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 107]

So it is essential to remember that democracy and freedom need not go hand-in-hand — majorities can, and do, restrict the freedom of individuals in repressive and unjust ways. So while democracy is a necessary condition for freedom it is not sufficient for, ultimately, the defining feature of democracy is

progress. That he forgets these basic facts of life indicates the depths to which Marxists will sink to distort the truth about anarchism.

Not that those in the Bolshevik tradition have any problem with individuals ignoring the democratic decisions of collective groups. The Bolsheviks were very happy to let individuals ignore and revoke the democratic decisions of collective groups — **as long as the individuals in question were the leaders of the Bolshevik Party**. As the examples we provide later (in section 8) indicate, leading lights in the Leninist tradition happily placed the rights of the party before the rights of working people to decide their own fate. Thus McNally comments are strange in the extreme. Both anarchists and Leninists share a belief that individuals can and should have the right to ignore decisions made by groups. However, Leninists seem to think only the government and leadership of the Party should have that right while anarchists think **all** should. Unlike the egalitarian support for freedom and dissent for all anarchists favour, Leninists have an elitist support for the right of those in power to ignore the wishes of those they govern. Thus the history of Marxists parties in power expose McNally as a hypocrite and as we argue in section 14, Leninist ideology provides the rationale for such action. Thus his attempt to portray anarchism as "anti-democratic" is somewhat ironic.

McNally states that anarchists *"oppose even the most democratic forms of collective organisation of social life. As the Canadian anarchist writer George Woodcock explains: 'Even were democracy possible, the anarchist would still not support it ... Anarchists do not advocate political freedom. What they advocate is freedom from politics ...' That is to say, anarchists reject any decision-making process in which the majority of people democratically determine the policies they will support."*

It is perhaps understandable that McNally fails to provide a reference for Woodcock's quote given that the two parts come from different chapters of the pamphlet **Anarchy or Chaos**.



> *"Finally, the last to be conjured and formed is the over-arching group, comprising the nation in its entirety, what you term the State because you invest it in a representative body outside of society, but which, to me, is no longer the State."* [**Property is Theft!**, pp. 498–500]

Clearly McNally distorts Proudhon's ideas on the question of property. That he may have been aware of the actual facts in shown by his qualification that Proudhon's critique of capitalism was *"largely backward-looking in character."* The utility of which qualification is clear — it allows him to ignore the substantial evidence against his assertion by muttering that he never said that Proudhon was **always** *"backward-looking"*...

McNally goes too far when he asserts that Proudhon *"so feared the organised power of the developing working class that he went so far as to oppose trade unions and support police strike-breaking."* There is, of course, a deep irony in McNally attacking Proudhon on this matter given that the Bolshevik regime he supports and considers as a *"workers' state"* repeatedly used not only its political police (the infamous Cheka) but also the Red Army to break strikes (see section H.6.3). This was done to secure Bolshevik power **over** the working class (see section 8).

It must also be stressed that while Proudhon did oppose trade unions (as we noted in section 2 he argued the working class would be better served using other means to liberate itself) it was not the case he supported police strike-breaking. As the editor of a collection of Marx's works had to admit that *"[t]o give Proudhon his due, he was not so much justifying the actions of the French authorities as exposing the \91contradictions' he saw as an inevitable evil of the present social order"* [quoted by Iain McKay, *"Introduction"*, **Property is Theft!**, p. 65] As Proudhon himself put it:

> *"workers' strikes are ILLEGAL. And it is not only the penal code which says this, but the economic sys-*

> *tem, the necessity of the established order. As long as labour is not sovereign, it must be a slave; society is possible only on this condition. That each worker individually should have the free disposition of his person and his arms may be tolerated; but that the workers should undertake, by combinations, to do violence to monopoly society cannot permit. Authority, in shooting down the miners, found itself in the position of Brutus placed between his paternal love and his consular duties: he had to sacrifice either his children or the republic. The alternative was horrible, I admit; but such is the spirit and letter of the social compact, such is the tenor of the charter ... the police function, instituted for the defence of the proletariat, is directed entirely against the proletariat."* [**Property is Theft!**, pp. 221–2]

The key words here are *"[a]s long as labour is not sovereign"* and, unsurprisingly, when Marx quoted this passage in **Poverty of Philosophy** he omitted it, so changing Proudhon's meaning completely. So while Proudhon opposed trade unions in favour of other forms of working class self-organisation (co-operatives) it does not follow that he supported the breaking of strikes when he reported when it happened. Rather he was noting that such things were inevitable under capitalism and that this system had to be replaced by one based on workers' self-management of production.

It is significant that the French syndicalists whom McNally is so keen to praise and differentiate from *"classical anarchists"* considered Proudhon (like Bakunin) one of their influences. Similarly, the French trade unionists who joined with their British counterparts to create the International Working Men's Association were followers of the French anarchist. Both groups of trade unionists saw the state repress their



So, yes, anarchists do support individual freedom to resist even democratically made decisions simply because democracy **has to be** based on individual liberty. Without the right of dissent, democracy becomes a joke and little more than a numerical justification for tyranny (usually of the few who make up the so-called "democratically elected" government). Thus McNally's latter claim that the *"challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence, its passionate concern with human freedom"* seems farcical — after all, he has just admitted that Marxism aims to eliminate individual freedom in favour of *"collective groups"* (i.e. the government). Unless of course he means freedom for the abstraction "humanity" rather than concrete freedom of the individual to govern themselves as individuals and as part of freely joined self-managed associations? For those who really seek to restore to socialism its passionate concern for freedom the way it clear — anarchism. Hence Murray Bookchin's comments:

> *"Here is the nub of the problem [with] ... Marxism ... its perspectives are orientated not towards concrete, existential freedom, but towards an abstract freedom — freedom for 'Society', for the 'Proletariat', for **categories** rather than for people."* [**Post Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 148]

Anarchism, on the other hand, favours freedom for people and that implies two things — individual freedom and self-management (direct democracy) in free associations. Any form of "democracy" not based on individual freedom would be so contradictory as to be useless as a means to human freedom (and vice versa, any form of "individual freedom" — such a liberalism — which denies self-management would be little more than a justification for minority rule and a denial of human freedom). Ultimately, McNally's attack on anarchism fails simply because the majority is not always right and dissent a key to

*ing completely beyond the limits of party legality"* and the threat of resigning gave him *"greater freedom to develop his offensive along internal lines."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 3, p. 131] Perhaps McNally is of the opinion that a private individual should not ignore the democratically made decisions of collective bodies — unless the individual in question is Lenin!

We are sure that McNally would reject the notion that Liebknecht and Lenin were wrong — in **these** cases the rights of minorities (even of one) take precedence over the *"democratic decisions of collectives."* This is because the majority is not always right and it is only through the dissent of individuals and minorities that the opinion of the majority can be moved towards the right one. Thus his comments are fallacious.

Progress is determined by those who dissent and rebel against the status quo and the decisions of the majority. That is why anarchists support the right of dissent in self-managed groups — in fact, dissent, refusal, revolt by individuals and minorities is a key aspect of self-management. Given that Leninists do not support self-management (rather they, at best, support the Lockean notion of electing a government as being "democracy") it is hardly surprising they, like Locke, view dissent as a danger and something to denounce. Anarchists, on the other hand, recognising that self-management's (i.e. direct democracy's) rationale and base is in individual freedom, recognise and support the rights of individuals to rebel against what they consider as unjust impositions (hence our recognition of the possibility of "the tyranny of the majority" — see section I.5.6). As history shows, the anarchist position is the correct one — without rebellion, numerous minorities would never have improved their position. Indeed, McNally's comments is just a reflection of the standard capitalist diatribe against strikers and protestors — they do not need to protest, for they live in a "democracy."



strikes so this would be a strange paradox indeed if McNally's account of Proudhon's position on police strike-breaking were correct. As it is not, there is no paradox.

McNally correctly states that Proudhon *"oppose[d] trade unions"* but rather than it being because he *"feared the organised power of the developing working class"* it was for the **opposite** reason: *"As things are at present, which do you think will win [in a strike]? ... [the bosses as] the match is clearly unequal"*. At best strikes would *"lead to a general price increase"*. [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 182 and p. 181] Worse, as well as distorting Proudhon's position McNally fails to mention that Proudhon opposition to trade unions and strikes as counter-productive was **not** shared by subsequent anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Goldman, and so on (see section 9). Why should Proudhon (the odd man out in anarchist theory with regards to this issue) be taken as defining that theory? Such an argument is simply dishonest and presents a false picture of the facts.

Next McNally states that Proudhon *"violently opposed democracy"* and presents a series of non-referenced quotes to prove his case. Such a technique is useful for McNally as it allows him quote Proudhon without regard to when and where Proudhon made these comments and so their context. It also makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to discover both. This is a deeply problematic technique, particularly given the seriousness of the charges being made. However, the reasons why he pursued this approach become understandable when the statements **are** tracked down as it becomes clear that McNally is quoting Proudhon completely out of context and so twisting his words into the opposite of what he meant.

He suggests that Proudhon's *"notes for an ideal society involved the suppression of elections, of a free press, and of public meetings of more than 20 people."* The word *"notes"* gives the game way, as he is not referring to any work produced

in Proudhon's lifetime but rather his notebooks which were published a hundred years after his death, in the 1960s, and unknown until then. Private notebooks are hardly the best source for determining a person's ideas as they are the means by which a thinker explores ideas, some of which he may later conclude are deeply flawed. Moreover, as we note in section 6, neither Proudhon nor Bakunin were not anarchists throughout their lives nor consistently libertarian when they were. Nor was anarchism born complete and ready made in 1840 when Proudhon proclaimed himself an anarchist in **What is Property?**. He developed his libertarian ideas over time and, unsurprisingly, we would discover passages in his published works at odds with his subsequent, better developed, ideas. This applies even more to his private notebooks in which we would expect ideas to be sketched which he later rejected — perhaps sketching ideas he disagreed with precisely to clarify his thoughts.

While difficult to be completely sure, it seems likely that McNally is selectively referring Proudhon's Notebooks from 1845 when he was clarifying his ideas on the idea of universal association. As one historian notes, Proudhon did envision some kind of national council at this time and the passages on how it would be selected *"are not consistent. In some sections he suggested that the leaders of the association were to be chosen by the members, presumably by election .. . In yet other passages, Proudhon rather immodestly pictured himself in the director's role. One must be extremely cautious not to draw too many implications from these infrequent references to the council and its method of selection. Proudhon did not ... have any designs for a small dictatorial elite"* as this would *"fly in the face of his sincere concern for individual liberty"*. So it is to his published works we must turn to see how the conclusions of these private notes and speculations. Interestingly, in a book published in 1843 Proudhon *"referred to the important role that government was to perform"* but in the introduction to a later edition he in-



If we take McNally's comments seriously then we must conclude that those members of the German Social Democratic Party who opposed their party's role in supporting the First World War were acting inappropriately. Rather than express their opposition to the war and act to stop it, according to McNally's "logic", they should have remained in their party (after all, **leaving** the party meant ignoring the democratic decision of a collective group), accepted the democratic decision of the collective and supported the Imperialist slaughter in the name of party democracy. Indeed, the minority of anti-war Social-Democratic representatives in the German Parliament did precisely that, refusing to vote against war credits in 1914 in the name of party discipline (presumably because, as good Marxists, they thought only *"anarchists defend the 'liberty' of the private individual against the democratically made decisions of collective groups"*, to use McNally's words). It took until 1915 for Karl Liebknecht to do the right thing. If quoting Trotsky is not too out of place: *"Do not fear to remain in a minority — even a minority of one, like Liebknecht's one against a hundred and ten"*. [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 293] Common sense as well as political principle indicates that Liebknecht's (belated) defence of socialist internationalism against the democratically made decision of the Social-Democratic representatives (and wider party) was right — and his principled dissent helped turn the tide against the jingoism of the majority.

Another obvious example is provided by Lenin who, just before the party's seizure of power in 1917, was so frustrated with the conservativism of his own party's central committee that he, *"by way of protest resigns from the Central Committee"* after his *"furious criticism"* had no effect. Rather than abide by the rules of his own party and the majority of its governing body *"by announcing his resignation ... Lenin obviously wanted to make it possible to free himself in case of need from internal discipline of the Central Committee"*. This meant the *"withdraw-*

*of every member above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions."* [Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 60] Unsurprisingly, then, we discover that the most militant British union was that of the miners which had, due to syndicalist influence, a decentralised, federal structure based on autonomous branches. And, as Rocker notes, while the German unions made no attempt to resist the Nazi seizure of power, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT rose in insurrection and stopped Franco across two-thirds of Spain in 1936.

Simply put, Marxism (as McNally presents it here) flies in the face of how societies change and develop. New ideas start with individuals and minorities and spread by argument and by force of example. McNally is urging the end of the free expression of individuality. For example, who would seriously defend a society that "democratically" decided that, say, homosexuals should not be allowed the freedom to associate? Or that inter-racial marriage was against "Natural Law"? Or that trade unions and strikes should be outlawed as the acts of "selfish" minorities? Or that socialists were dangerous subversives and should be banned? He would, we hope (like all sane people), recognise the rights of individuals to rebel against the majority when the majority violate the spirit of association, the spirit of freedom and equality which should give democracy its rationale. However, if he did then he would have to also admit the correctness of the anarchist position.

So McNally fails to understand the rationale for democratic decision making — it is not based on the idea that the majority is always right but that individual freedom requires democracy to express and defend itself. By placing the collective above the individual, McNally undermines democracy and replaces it with little more than tyranny by the majority — or, more likely, those who claim to represent the majority. It also, ironically, places him on the wrong side within his own political tradition.



dicated that *"he had changed his mind on this issue on the role of government"* and *"he insisted that reform should not — could not — come 'from above'; rather it could only 'from below, from the spontaneity of the masses, and not from the initiative of the government' ... this change had already occurred by 1846"* when he was *"vehemently attacking other socialists such as Blanc for trumpeting reform initiated 'from above'"*. [Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146 and pp. 143–4]

The same applies to when McNally suggested that Proudhon *"looked forward to a 'general inquisition' and the condemnation of 'several million people' to forced labour"*. With no means to see whether this is selective quoting or not, McNally disarms his readers. However, we must note a certain irony here as he does not, of course, mention that Marx and Engels advocated *"industrial armies, especially for agriculture"* to ensure the *"[e]qual liability of all to labour"* in the **Communist Manifesto**. [**Selected Writings**, p. 53] Nor does McNally mention the Bolshevik's introduction of the *"militarisation of labour"* in 1919 and 1920 with Trotsky its leading advocate. The *"very principle of compulsory labour service is for the Communist quite unquestionable .. . The only solution of economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power ... and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation."* The *"introduction of compulsory labour service is unthinkable without the application ... of the methods of militarisation of labour"*. This is the *"State compulsion without which the replacement of capitalist economy by the Socialist will for ever remain an empty sound."* The *"Labour State considers itself empowered to send every worker to the place his work is necessary"* and had *"the right to lay its hand upon the worker who refuses to execute his labour duty"*. This *"presents the inevitable method of organisation and disciplining of labour-power during the period of transition from capitalism to Socialism."* [Trotsky, **Terrorism and Commu-**

**nism**, p. 135, p. 137, p. 141, p. 142 and p. 143] As can be seen Trotsky did not, as McNally would wish to suggest, think this was a result of the Civil War but rather a matter of principle.

McNally also fails to note that in December 1917 the Bolshevik regime created the Cheka, a political police force, to repress opposition to it from both the left and right as well as from reactionary forces and workers . At its worse, it even utilised torture and the shooting of unarmed prisoners. However, its main task was repression of opposition organisations — including other socialists (the anarchists were its first victims in early 1918) — and breaking strikes and other forms of labour protest in association with the Red Army.

If Proudhon's one-off, never repeated, scribbles in a private notebook mean anarchism is *"elitist and authoritarian to the core"* and *"hostile to ideas of mass democracy and workers' power"* what does it mean for Bolshevism which actually **created** a regime based on party dictatorship, political police and the militarisation of labour which its leading thinkers defended and justified at length in books and articles written to influence the international workers' movement? McNally, of course, does not mention these awkward facts so does not raise, never mind answer, the question.

However, reading the context of quotes McNally provides which **can** be tracked down, it is difficult to take his summary seriously. We turn to this now and will show that his readers would be justified in questioning his claims on Proudhon. Simply put, once the context of the quotes he provides is understood then it becomes clear McNally is quoting selectively in order to attribute ideas to Proudhon he did not, in fact, hold. The dishonesty is shocking.

This can be seen when McNally presents another unattributed quote: *"The masses, he wrote are 'only savages ... whom it is our duty to civilise, and without making them our sovereign.'"* Let us provide both the source and the context McNally is keen to avoid. First, the quote is from



Can it be considered "democratic" to favour *"collective groups"* which ensure the marginalisation of minorities who wish to govern themselves?

This applies with equal force to the labour movement. In terms of strike action, which *"collective groups"* get to decide? Is it a sub-unit of a union branch (for example, IT staff within a University facing a restructuring), the branch (in which the IT staff may be a minority), the region or the national union. The strike decision would impact on all these levels but McNally's position gives no guidance for what is the correct level. Is it "democratic" if the sub-unit of the branch has to face redundancies because the majority of the branch does not support strike action? Is it "democratic" if the local branch cannot strike because the majority of the national union considers it harmful to the union as a whole?

This is no academic discussion as the answer has a significant impact on the evolution of the labour movement. In the Marxist-influenced German unions, the prejudice for centralisation meant that the whole union (in practice, a few leaders at the top) was considered the key collective group and so *"every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions"* which lead to *"inertia of the apparatus of the organisation [and] renders a quick attack quite impossible"*. The unions were *"condemned ... to stagnation"* and the structure *"kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members."* This *"turned over the affairs of everybody in a lump to a small minority"* and resulted in *"barren official routine"* which *"crushed individual conviction, kills all personal initiative by lifeless discipline and bureaucratic ossification and permits no independent action."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 61 and p. 60]

The anarchist position is clear — the appropriate group makes the decision. Thus federalism allows *"free combination from below upward, putting the right of self-determination*

*in accord with the principles of political morality."*
[**Op. Cit.**, p. 160]

Thus, for anarchists, a democracy which does not involve individual rights to dissent, to disagree and to practice civil disobedience would violate freedom and equality, the very values McNally claims to be at the heart of Marxism. He is essentially arguing that the minority becomes the slave of the majority — with no right of dissent when the majority is wrong or being unjust and restricting the freedom democracy is meant to be based upon, reflect and defend. In effect, he wishes the minority to be subordinate, not equal, to the majority. Anarchists, in contrast, because we support self-management also recognise the importance of dissent and individuality — in essence, because we are in favour of self-management ("democracy" does not do the concept justice) we also favour the individual freedom that is its rationale. We support the liberty of private individuals because we believe in self-management ("democracy") so passionately.

Then there is the question of **which** *"collective groups"* make the democratic decision. This is a key issue for anyone concerned about freedom for its answer determines what kind of democracy we are talking about — a meaningful one which empowers all or a formal one which restricts what democracy is meant to be about?

For example, during debates on Scottish Independence some commentators suggest that limiting the vote on whether Scotland should withdraw from the UK to just those who lived there was "undemocratic" as the consequences impacted on those who lived in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, expanding the vote would have meant that the democratic decision of those in Scotland — a small minority of the total population of the UK — would have been irrelevant to the final decision. This can be generalised to all nation states which contain distinct cultural or ethic groupings within it.



a letter written by Proudhon on the 11th of December 1852 and it is quoted by J. Hampden Jackson who also helpfully presents the context which McNally strips, namely a few days after the plebiscite which saw an overwhelming majority of French men vote to end the Second Republic, create the Second Empire and convert the President into an Emperor. This was exactly one year on from the President's military coup which saw him impose a new constitution and extend his tenure by ten years, an act again endorsed by a vast majority in a plebiscite. As Hampden notes: *"The people of France had spoken. It remained for Proudhon to point the moral"*. [**Marx, Proudhon and European Socialism**, p. 103]

This is the context for this quote — a cry of despair at a people which so willingly voted to destroy a republic and their own freedom. These two plebiscites in favour of Louis-Napoleon's coup and autocratic rule resulted in *"Proudhon's faith in the people"* falling *"to its lowest level"* and *"no epithet was too severe for the classes in whom he had seen the great hope of humanity."* [George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 184] This becomes obvious when you read the full context of the words McNally quotes:

> *"You still worship the people ... you should absolutely demolish this false religion. It is necessary to serve freedom and morals for themselves ... without scorning the people, which is only uncivilised [**sauvage**] and that we have to civilise, do not make it your sovereign. I saw, on December 7th, 1851, when paving stones of the boulevard were still red with blood, these honest people rush to small theatres, content, merry, without regret nor remorse. That once I had surprised it, for five years, in red-handed indifference, immorality, imperialist plot, ingratitude for its initiators! Ah! admittedly, it did not mislead me; but cowardice, even when*

> *predicted, is always hideous to see. I will strike these people, I warn you, until I made them embarrassed of the alleged dogma of its sovereignty; because it is not enough for us to re-examine the incompetents of '48, we must re-examine their idol …"* [**Correspondance de P-J Proudhon**, vol. V, p. 111]

Is McNally really suggesting that Proudhon's position was incorrect and that he should have proclaimed popular support of the military coup and its repression of those defending the Republic as an example of civilised behaviour and the people's sovereignty? As Proudhon lamented, *"the truth"* was that *"**the people have the government which it prefers, and the bourgeoisie the government that it deserves**"* and *"Napoleon III is the legitimate, authentic expression of the middle-class and proletarian masses. If it is not precisely the product of the national **will**, it is undoubtedly that of the national **permission**."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110] McNally for all his talk of democracy does not tackle — does not even raise! — the question of what happens if the majority make authoritarian and repressive decisions, as it did in December 1851 and 1852. If, as the Republicans of Proudhon's time argued, the voice of the people is the voice of God did that make Louis-Napoleon's Presidency, coup and then Empire all legitimate? Proudhon argued no and, moreover, placed the underlying principle of democracy — freedom — above its expression within the (bourgeois) state. His writings explored how to secure mass participation in social life while minimising the possibility of tyranny. Thus the *"federative system puts a stop to the agitation of the masses, to all the ambitions and incitements of demagogy"* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 708]

By stripping away the context, McNally turns his lament for the destruction of political freedom into a demand for it. The dishonesty is striking. It also raises some problems for McNally's stated political position of being in favour of *"democ-*



always right. Secondly, simply because progress is guaranteed by individual liberty — by **dissent.** That is what McNally is attacking here — the right of individuals and groups to dissent, to express themselves and live their own lives. As we argue in section A.2.11, most anarchists are in favour of direct democracy in free associations. However, we agree with Carole Pateman when she argues:

> *"The essence of liberal social contract theory is that individuals ought to promise to, or enter an agreement to, obey representatives, to whom they have alienated their right to make political decisions … Promising … is an expression of individual freedom and equality, yet commits individuals for the future. Promising also implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation, and of evaluating and changing their own actions and relationships; promises may sometimes justifiably be broken. However, to promise to obey is to deny or limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities. To promise to obey is to state that, in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 19]

She indicates an obvious truth which McNally ignores:

> *"Even if it is impossible to be unjust to myself, I do not vote for myself alone, but along with everyone else. Questions about injustice are always appropriate in political life, for there is no guarantee that participatory voting will actually result in decisions*

civil rights activism, feminism and gay rights — started out as minorities (and sometimes remained so!) but managed, by direct action and protest (i.e., ignoring the wishes of the majority) to change perspectives and make society more freedom and just (see Kropotkin's essay *"Revolutionary Minorities"* in **Words of a Rebel** for further discussion). Malatesta put it well:

> *"We do not recognise the right of the majority to impose the law on the minority, even if the will of the majority in somewhat complicated issues could really be ascertained. The fact of having the majority on one's side does not in any way prove that one must be right. Indeed, humanity has always advanced through the initiative and efforts of individuals and minorities ... [W]e are even more opposed to domination of the majority by a minority. It would be absurd to maintain that one is right because one is in a minority ... [I]t is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each individual so long as he does not violate the equal freedom of others ... it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 72]

So, yes, anarchists **do** defend the liberty of individuals to rebel against the decisions of collective groups (we should point out that Marxists usually use such expressions as a euphemism for the state, but here we will take it at face value). This is for two very good reasons. Firstly, the majority is not



*racy"* — if anarchists are to be denounced because they *"reject any decision-making process in which the majority of people democratically determine the policies they will support"* then McNally is in a bind. The French people democratically determined to create an Empire and destroy what was left of their Republic. Presumably it would be *"elitism"* for him, like Proudhon, to denounce the decision and despair at those who made it? As we discuss in section 7, the anarchist position on democracy is driven precisely by the obvious fact that majorities can be wrong and oppressive. This does not imply *"elitism"*, quite the reverse.

We should also note that Marx dismissed the peasants as *"a class of barbarians standing half outside of society"* [**Capital**, vol. 3, p. 949] *"In countries like France"* the peasants *"constitute far more than half of the population"* but, he argued, they *"cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power"*. Thus *"the Bonaparte who dispersed [the National Assembly in 1851] is the chosen of peasantry."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 493, p. 608 and pp. 607–8] Marx does not ponder the implications of these comments nor what they mean for democracy and the so-called *"dictatorship of the proletariat"*.

The second quote McNally provides as evidence for his case is *"All this democracy disgusts me"*. Again, no reference is provided for obvious reasons for when it is tracked down it becomes clear that McNally is again quoting the Frenchman completely out-of-context in order to attribute to him ideas he did not hold, indeed was arguing against. This sentence comes from a private letter written in 1861 bemoaning how others on the left were attacking him as *"a false **democrat**, a false friend of progress, a false republican"* due to his critical position on Polish independence. Unlike most of the rest of the left (including Bakunin, it should be noted), Proudhon opposed the creation of a Polish state as it would be run by the *"nobility*

*[**nobiliarie**], [and so] catholic, aristocratic, [and] divided into castes"*. In other words, **not** a democracy. He then proclaims: *"All this democracy disgusts me"*. [**Correspondance de Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, vol. XI, p. 196–7] Once this context is provided, it becomes clear that using his justly famous talent for irony against those on the left who violate their own stated democratic principles by supporting the creation of a feudal regime — if **this** is democracy, Proudhon was saying, then it disgusts him (*"All this [so-called] democracy disgusts me"*). By quoting out-of-context McNally turns a letter by Proudhon in which he wished the left would be **consistently** in favour of democracy into an anti-democratic rant. His dishonesty is clear.

This, it must be noted, is also relevant to McNally's politics. While proclaiming that Leninism is the only consistently democratic socialist theory and that to *"talk of a workers' state is necessarily to talk of workers' power and workers' democracy"*, he makes an exception to the party dictatorship ruled by Lenin and Trotsky from 1918 to 1923. Then it becomes the case that socialism no longer *"depends upon the existence of democratic organisation that can control society from below"* nor *"presupposes that workers are running the state."* If, in 1861, Proudhon expressed his frustration at those on the left who made exceptions to democracy for illogical reasons (the creation of a feudal Poland) what would have been his views of socialists who made exceptions for the Bolshevik regime?

Even without the context for the quotes McNally presents, anyone with a basic grasp of anarchist ideas would know that he fails to quote the many statements Proudhon made in favour of democracy. Why should the apparently anti-democratic quotes represent anarchism and not the pro-democratic ones? Which ones are more in line with anarchist theory and practice? Surely the pro-democratic ones. Hence we find Proudhon arguing that *"[i]n democratising us, revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy"* and that his



cians wish to go further and impose yet more legislation which would outlaw strikes unless a majority of trade union members take part in the ballot as well as the majority voting for strike action (rather than just the majority of those voting in the ballot) — in the interests of "democracy", of course, as it would stop "unrepresentative" minorities disrupting the (non-union) majority.

Needless to say, this is a condition they never suggest for the electing of politicians for good reason: "democratic" government usually means government by those elected by a minority of a population. For example, in the 2012 London Mayor election the successful candidate received just over 50% of a 38% turn-out, meaning that the successful candidate represented a mere 20% of the city's population. It should also be stressed that this minority of voters did not actually make decisions — that rested in the hands of one person, the mayor. In other words, power over a city of ten million rested in the hands a person elected by 20% of those eligible to vote. The same can be said of U.S. elections, particularly Presidential ones. So democracy can easily mean government by the largest minority although, in practice, it means government of the few elected by the largest minority of the minority who bother to vote. None of which is very democratic and confirms Proudhon's critique that *"nothing resembles a monarchy more than a **r'publique unitaire***". [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 211]

So invoking "democracy" is problematic, given its wide number of uses. At its most basic, the majority can be wrong (as can be seen from the numerous crooks, incompetents, authoritarians and demagogues who have managed to win the popular vote). The aim, of course, is to change the views of the majority but that cannot be done by simply obeying its unjust opinions but rather challenging them by direct action — or *"ignoring"* them to use McNally's term. As we note in section H.2.11, all progressive movements — whether trade unionism,

*its passionate concern with human freedom"*). This is because collectives can make bad decisions, the majority can — and does — act oppressively towards the minority. For example, the United States has seen numerous votes on the issue of homosexual rights which saw the majority of voters or their representatives reject equality. That the majority are against equality for gays does not make it right — anymore than previous majorities against equality for women and blacks were right. If a majority vote for a right-wing party which promises to make strikes illegal would McNally accept that decision and urge trade unionists to obey the democratic decisions of the collectivity? Would a referendum result make it any more just and worthy of respect? What if the majority vote to ban the teaching of evolution in all schools? And, finally, what if the majority vote in favour of authoritarian regimes? This is no idle question, it happened in, for example, France in 1851 and 1852 (much to Proudhon's disgust).

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the right often invoke the *"silent majority"* against the progressive minorities seeking change. The term was popularised (though not first used) by U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1969 when he asked for the support of *"the great silent majority of my fellow Americans"*, those who felt threatened by attacks on "traditional values" during the 1960s — the civil rights, women's and peace movements as well as student rebellions, the counter-culture, wildcat strikes, and so on. Nixon, it should be noted, won a landslide victory in the 1972 Presidential election and took 49 of 50 states. The Thatcher government, likewise, invoked its democratic credentials (in spite of never receiving an actual majority of support) when launching state repression against strikes (particularly the 1984–85 miners' strike) and imposing the most draconian anti-union laws in the Western World. Their trade union "reforms" included forcing a paper ballot of members before taking strike action, so replacing the mass union meeting with the atomised democracy of the bourgeois state. Many Tory politi-



People's Bank *"embodies the financial and economic aspects of modern democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the People, and of the republican motto,* ***Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.****"* We have already mentioned Proudhon's support for workers' self-management of production and his People's Bank was also democratic in nature: *"A committee of thirty representatives shall be set up to see to the management of the Bank ... They will be chosen by the General Meeting ... [which] shall consist of not more than one thousand nominees of the general body of associates and subscribers .. . elected according to industrial categories and in proportion to the number of subscribers and representatives there are in each category."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 63, p. 75 and p. 79] Thus, instead of bourgeois democracy Proudhon proposes industrial and communal democracy:

> *"every industry needs ... leaders, instructors, superintendents, etc. ... they must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves, and must fulfil the conditions of eligibility. It is the same with all public functions, whether of administration or instruction."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 118]
>
> *"In order that association may be real, he who participates in it must do so ... as an active factor; he must have a deliberative voice in the council ... everything regarding him, in short, should be regulated in accordance with equality. But these conditions are precisely those of the organisation of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 2156]
>
> *"In the republic, everyone reigns and governs ... Representatives are plenipotentiaries with the imperative mandate and are recallable at will ... Here is the republic! Here is the People's sovereignty!* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 279]

*"At present we are a quasi-democratic Republic: all the citizens are permitted, every third or fourth year, to elect, first, the Legislative Power, second, the Executive Power. The duration of this participation in the Government for the popular collectivity is brief; forty-eight hours at the most for each election. For this reason the correlative of the Government remains nearly the same as before, almost the whole Country. The President and the Representatives, once elected, are the masters; all the rest obey. They are* ***subjects****, to be* ***governed*** *. .."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 573]

*"In place of laws, we will put contracts [i.e. free agreement]. — No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each commune or corporation [i.e., self-managed industry], makes its own laws."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 591]

*"Unless democracy is a fraud, and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his industry, each municipal, district or provincial council within its own territory, is the only natural and legitimate representative of the Sovereign, and that therefore each locality should act directly and by itself in administering the interests which it includes, and should exercise full sovereignty in relation to them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 595]

*"Workers' Associations are the locus of a new principle and model of production that must replace present-day corporations ... The principle that prevailed there, in place of that of employers and employees ... is participation, that is, the MUTUALITY of services supplementing the force of division and the force of collectivity.*



and workplaces. This meant, as discussed in section 4, he argued for a decentralised, federal bottom-up system of communal and workplace associations based on elected, mandated and recallable delegates:

> *"we are all voters; we can choose the most worthy ... we can follow them step-by-step in their legislative acts and their votes; we will make them transmit our arguments and our documents; we will suggest our will to them, and when we are discontented, we will recall and dismiss them.*
>
> *"The choice of talents, the imperative mandate ... and permanent revocability are the most immediate and incontestable consequences of the electoral principle. It is the inevitable program of all democracy.* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 273]

As we noted in section 5, Bakunin had identical ideas on the need for a decentralised, federal, bottom-up social organisation based on elected, mandated and recallable delegates. Rather than express *"hostility to democratic and collectivist practices"*, anarchists have always sought to discover which social forms allow **genuine** democratic and collectivist practices to flourish — a "democracy" which reduces the masses to simply picking their masters every few years while workers were employed by bosses would not promote libertarian values. Hence the support for workers' self-management of production by democratic associations, communal self-government and social-economic federalism even the casual reader would find in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin but which McNally fails to mention.

Anarchists are well aware that support for democratic collectives in the workplace and community is a necessary but not sufficient condition for individual freedom (to quote McNally, the *"challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence,*

First, however, we need to ask an obvious question: what does "democracy" mean? Or, more correctly, what kind of democracy are we talking about? If quoting Lenin is not **too** out of place, in a section of his pamphlet **The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky** in section entitled *"How Kautsky Turned Marx Into A Common Liberal"*, Lenin stated it was *"natural for a liberal to speak of 'democracy' in general; but a Marxist will never forget to ask: 'for what class?'"* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 465] So the question is not whether anarchists support "democracy" or not but what **kind** of democracy and for whom. For if McNally is right (and he is) and there are two kinds of socialism (one "from above" and one "from below") then there are multiple kinds of democracy: centralised and decentralised; unitarian and federal, top-down and bottom-up; bourgeois and workers. That is why Proudhon talked of the workers democracy (*"D'mocratie ouvri\E8re"*) in his last work, contrasting it to the democracy (the left-Jacobin bourgeois-republican democracy which included the state socialists), but the elements of which he had been expounding upon since the 1840s.

A close reading of Proudhon shows that his main opposition to "democracy" was that it was, paradoxically, not democratic enough as it referred to the Jacobin notion that the whole nation as one body should elect a government. In such a regime *"**the People reigns and does not govern**, which is to deny the Revolution."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 267] He sought a social organisation in which people had meaningful control over their own lives — as individuals **and** as groups, collectives. This was not possible under a centralised democracy and so *"universal suffrage provides us, ... in an embryonic state, with the complete system of future society. If it is reduced to the people nominating a few hundred deputies who have no initiative ... social sovereignty becomes a mere fiction and the Revolution is strangled at birth."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 123] Nor was it possible as long as workers did not control their work



*"There is mutuality, in fact, when in an industry, all the workers, instead of working for an owner who pays them and keeps their product, work for one another ... extend the principle of mutuality that unites the workers of each group to all the Workers' Associations as a unit, and you will have created a form of civilisation that, from all points of view — political, economic, aesthetic — differs completely from previous civilisations ..."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 616]

*"groups that comprise the confederation... would be ... self-governing, self-judging and self-administering in complete sovereignty... universal suffrage form its basis"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 716]

*"under the democratic constitution, insofar we can judge from its most salient ideas and most authentic aspirations, the political and the economic are one and the same, a sole and single system based upon a single principle, mutuality ... no longer do we have the abstraction of people's sovereignty as in the '93 [French] Constitution and the others that followed it, and in Rousseau's **Social Contract**. Instead it becomes an effective sovereignty of the labouring masses ... the labouring masses are actually, positively and effectively sovereign: how could they not be when the economic organism — labour, capital, property and assets — belongs to them entirely"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 760–1]

*"If political right is inherent in man and citizen, consequently if suffrage ought to be direct, the same right is inherent as well, so much the more so, for each corporation [i.e. self-managed industry], for each commune or city, and the suffrage in each of these groups, ought to be equally direct."* [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 219]

So, clearly, McNally is hardly presenting a fair summary of either Proudhon's private notebooks, letters or his published works. This can be seen from his justly famous manifesto issued during the 1848 revolution which presents a better notion of his *"ideal society"*. It advocated *"democratically organised workers' associations"* along with *"universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate"* otherwise *"the people, in electing representatives, does not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty!"* This *"is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy"*. He also demanded: *"Freedom of association"*, *"Freedom of assembly"* and *"Freedom of the press"*. [**Property is Theft!**, p. 377 and p. 379]

Do all these quotes suggest a man who *"violently opposed democracy"*? Of course not. Proudhon opposed certain types of democracy (centralised, hierarchical, top-down, statist democracy) and was in favour of another kind (decentralised, federal, bottom-up, libertarian democracy). So when looking at quotes by Proudhon ripped from their context it is important to ask whether he is attacking the centralised, hierarchical democracy of the state or the decentralised, participatory democracy of federated self-managed workplaces and communes? By taking of "democracy" in the abstract and not indicating that there are different forms of it (reflecting different class interests), McNally is confusing the issue. He fails to inform his readers that while Proudhon repeatedly attacked the former he advocated the latter. To use terms McNally should be familiar with, Proudhon attacked bourgeois democracy in favour of working-class democracy rooted in mandates, recall, decentralisation and federalism — what would be better termed "self-management" but which Proudhon came to call *"labour democracy"* which would be *"the IDEA of the new Democracy."* In the state, *"universal suffrage is the strangulation of the public conscience, the suicide of popular sovereignty, the apostasy of the Revolution"* and to *"make the*



> *"Originating in the revolt of small property owners against the centralising and collectivising trends in capitalist development (the tendency to concentrate production in fewer and fewer large workplaces), anarchism has always been rooted in a hostility to democratic and collectivist practices. The early anarchists feared the organised power of the modern working class. To this day, most anarchists defend the 'liberty' of the private individual against the democratically made decisions of collective groups."*

As indicated in section 3, the notion that anarchists are against large-scale industry or collective property is simply an invention. Both Proudhon and Bakunin, for example, argued for collective management and ownership of the means of production by the workers themselves. Indeed, workers' self-management of production and collective ownership were raised in the very first anarchist book, Proudhon's **What is Property?** and both have remained an key aspect of anarchism ever since. Proudhon put it well: *"Large industry and high culture come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the association."* [quoted by [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 156] So workers' associations running workplaces is at the heart of anarchism, an easy fact to discover if you bother to read Proudhon and Bakunin — as is the fact that Bakunin supported revolutionary trade unionism as the means of producing a social revolution (see section 9). So much for *"fear[ing] the organised power of the modern working class"*!

So the premise of his assertion is factually incorrect. What of the conclusion, the idea that anarchists support the liberty to ignore *"the democratically made decisions of collective groups"*? Here McNally takes a grain of truth to create a lie.

but Bakunin's (and Kropotkin's, Goldman's, Malatesta's, etc.) support for women's liberty and equality is not? Why proclaim Bakunin *"shared most of Proudhon's views"* when anyone who did the most basic research would quickly conclude that in these two issues (and others!) Bakunin rightly rejected the positions McNally raises with regards to Frenchman's ideas? Worse, many of the positions McNally attacks Proudhon for are simply inaccurate — he simply did not hold the ideas McNally so confidently asserts he did.

Moreover, as Daniel Gu'rin notes *"[m]any of these masters were not anarchists throughout their lives and their complete works include passages which have nothing to do with anarchism."* Bakunin, for example, was only an anarchist from around 1864 to his death in 1876 while *"in the second part of his career Proudhon's thinking took a conservative turn"*. [**Anarchism**, p. 6] As such, the positions McNally, rightly, attacks (once his errors are corrected!) are clearly *"quirks of personality"* rather than somehow *"rooted in the very nature of anarchist doctrine."* This can be seen from the awkward fact that no later anarchists advocated them. Not to mention the awkward fact that Marx and Engels shared similar views as those McNally attacks Proudhon and Bakunin for having (even if, in reality, they did not hold the positions McNally claims they did).

These examples in themselves prove the weakness of McNally's claims and the low levels of scholarship which lay behind them. Indeed, it is amazing that the SWP/ISO printed this diatribe — it obviously shows their contempt for facts, history and the intelligence of their desired audience.

## 7. Are anarchists against democracy?

McNally asserts the following:



*vote for all intelligent, moral, democratic, it is necessary... to make the citizens vote by categories of functions, in accordance with the principle of the collective force"*. This federative democracy would be applied in the community (communes) and industry (*"the agricultural-industrial federation"*), indeed all areas including the military where it was necessary to *"abolish military conscription, organise a citizens' army"* based on *"the right of the citizens to appoint the hierarchy of their military chiefs, the simple soldiers and national guards appointing the lower ranks of officers, the officers appointing their superiors."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 724–5, pp. 676–7, p. 711, p. 407 and p. 443]

As can be seen, Proudhon's position on democracy is not quite what McNally suggests. Under a centralised social system it simply meant the people *"is confined to choosing its bosses and its charlatans every three or four years."* The issue for Proudhon was to create a system which allowed the people to govern itself and not hand power over to a few leaders — particularly when the majority often pass that power to demagogues like Louis-Napoleon. It was the case *"that the only way to organise democratic government is to abolish government"* for the State *"is the external constitution of the social power... the people does not govern itself ... We affirm ... that the people, that society, that the mass, can and ought to govern itself by itself ... We deny government and the State, because we affirm that which the founders of States have never believed in, the personality and autonomy of the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 437, p. 485 and pp. 482–483]

Thus McNally presents a distorted picture of Proudhon's ideas and thus leads the reader to conclusions about anarchism violently at odds with its real nature. It is somewhat ironic that McNally attacks Proudhon for being anti-democratic. After all, as we indicate in section 8 below, the Leninist tradition in which he places himself has a distinct contempt for democracy and, in practice, destroyed it in favour of party dictatorship.

There is an addition irony. McNally praises the Paris Commune and states that *"to secure their rule, the Parisian workers took a series of popular democratic measures. They suppressed the standing army and replaced it with a popular militia; they established the right of the people to recall and replace their elected representatives"* and *"universal male suffrage"*. He does not mention that, as can be seen, all these were advocated by Proudhon nor that his followers played a key role in the 1871 revolt. Clearly it is simply **not** the case that Marx's *"work signalled an entirely new direction in socialist thought and socialist politics"* if he *"insisted"* that *"the abolition of the standing army"*, *"universal suffrage"* and *"the right to recall representatives"* were *"all essential elements of any workers' state."* Proudhon advocated all these over a decade before his followers made Marx belatedly see their benefit in 1871. Where Proudhon differed from Marx was his awareness that a federated society organised from the bottom-up was no state and to confuse the two opened the door to centralisation and the creation of a new class system — as happened in Russia under the Bolsheviks.

After distorting Proudhon's ideas on democracy and his desired society, McNally moves onto more secure ground, namely his sexism. He **is** correct to note that Proudhon *"denounced women's liberation"* and so right to quote Lichtheim that Proudhon had *"a firmly patriarchal view of family life"* and *"regarded women as inferior beings."* However, while correct to attack the Frenchman for this, it is incorrect to extend this to a rejection of anarchism **as such** — particularly given the obvious contradiction of this position with the rest of his ideas. As noted in section 3, other anarchists rejected these reactionary ideas and consistently applied libertarian principles to within the family.

Lastly, McNally states that Proudhon *"was a rabid racist reserving his greatest hatred for Jews, whose 'extermination' he advocated. He opposed emancipation for the American blacks and backed the cause of the southern slave owners during the American Civil War."* To support his claims, he quotes George



also failed to comment on the Paris Commune being elected by **male** universal suffrage, thinking nothing of the exclusion of half the population while proclaiming its democratic nature). Strangely, most Marxists (rightly) condemning Proudhon for his bigotries are silent about this — as silent as they are on the awkward facts that Proudhon did not actually support the Southern States in the American Civil War and that a one-off, never repeated, comment made in a private notebook simply cannot be taken as expressing his political ideas (see section 4 for details).

The fact is, once we correct McNally's errors, we discover that the vast majority of Proudhon's and Bakunin's positions are **not** *"backward-looking and narrow-minded"*, quite the reverse. Where a position **is** so (Proudhon's position to trade unions and feminism being the most obvious examples) then we quickly discover that subsequent anarchists publicly rejected it. Most of the position's McNally paints as *"anarchist doctrine"* were not actually held by either Proudhon or Bakunin (such as, opposition to industry and collectively-owned and managed property). Rather than take examples which are common to most anarchist theorists — and so actually reflective of *"anarchist doctrine"* — McNally takes only a few positions held by one, at most two, major anarchist thinkers. Worse, these positions are tangential to the core of their ideas and, indeed, directly opposed to them (such as infrequently expressed bigotries against specific peoples being in obvious conflict to their other, more common, support for racial equality). From this minority of examples McNally generalises a theory — and so violates the basic principles of the scientific method!

So McNally's position leaves something to be desired. Why is Proudhon's opposition to trade unions and strikes is an example *"anarchist doctrine"* while Bakunin's (and Kropotkin's, Malatesta's, Berkman's, Goldman's, etc.) support for both is not? Why is Proudhon's sexism *"anarchist doctrine"*

peoples. This was recognised by leading Marxist Karl Kautsky who, rightly, denounced him for advocating that *"they had to be exterminated"* [quoted 90] Regardless of what drove these rants, as Rosdolsky rightly states *"it no way nullifies the fact that they made entire peoples the object of this hatred and proclaimed a 'war of annihilation' against them."* [87]

Ignoring the genocidal ethnic cleansing proclaimed against the Slavs (bar Poles) and other *"nonhistoric"* people, Engels wrote of the war which *"broke out over Texas"* between Mexico and the USA and how it was good that *"that magnificent California was snatched from the lazy Mexicans, who did not know what to do with it"* by *"the energetic Yankees."* [quoted, 159] He failed to mention that the revolt of 1836 over Texas which was the root of the 1846 war was conducted by *"**planters, owners of Negro slaves**, and their main reason for revolting was that **slavery had been abolished in Mexico in 1829**."* [160] In fact in 1845 a majority of voters in the Republic of Texas approved a proposed constitution that specifically endorsed slavery and the slave trade and was later accepted by the U.S. Congress. Unlike Engels, Northern abolitionists attacked this war as an attempt by slave-owners to strengthen the grip of slavery and ensure their influence in the federal government and publicly declared their wish for the defeat of the American forces. Henry David Thoreau was jailed for his refusal to pay taxes to support the war, penning his famous essay **Civil Disobedience**. [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, pp. 155–7] Rosdolsky rightly comments on how *"inappropriate, in fact perverse, was Engels' illustration."* [160]

So we find distinct parallels between McNally's attacks on Proudhon and the many racist and anti-Semitic remarks by Marx and Engels (as listed by Peter Fryer in his *"Engels: A Man of his Time"* [John Lea and Geoff Pilling (eds.), **The condition of Britain: Essays on Frederick Engels**]) as well as their siding with slave states against abolitionist ones. Nor did Marx, it must be noted, denounce Proudhon's racism or sexism (he



Lichtheim (whom he considers as having *"written quite accurately"*) stating that Proudhon expressed *"tolerance for slavery (he publicly sided with the South during the American civil war)"* and *"he believed in inherent inequalities among the races"*. It will come as no surprise that this is either completely false or not entirely true.

Let us take the question of Proudhon's anti-Semitism. It is true that Proudhon made the occasional anti-Semitic remark in his writings but as Robert Graham correctly summarises *"anti-semitism formed no part of Proudhon's revolutionary programme."* [*"Introduction"*, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxvi] In terms of the claim that he advocated the *"extermination"* of the Jews what McNally does not mention is that this comes from a single entry in his private Notebooks and was unknown until a hundred years after his death. The intellectual dishonesty of this should be clear and, unsurprisingly, he does not prove that this was anything more than a passing rant nor that Proudhon held this view before 1847 or after, either publicly or privately. In terms of the former, it is the case that Proudhon's anti-Semitism is limited to a few passing Jewish stereotypes (which, sadly, reflected French culture at the time) in a few of his minor articles and books. A reader consulting his most important works would not come across a single anti-Semitic remark and many proclamations in favour of racial equality.

This does not mean that this private remark should not be condemned — it should — but it does not follow that we reject everything wrote before or after it. That this was a one-off rant suggests that when it was written something caused Proudhon's (culturally reflective, but still inexcusable) anti-Semitic feelings to intensify so resulting in this rant. Significantly, Proudhon's beloved mother died that very month (December 1847) which suggests that it reflected an outlet for the deep despair he must have been feeling. Given that he never expressed this view before 1847 nor afterwards it should

be considered as a quickly forgotten aberration produced by the pressures of a family crisis rather than something indicative of his politics.

So quoting a single rant from his private notebook presents a false impression of Proudhon's ideas on race. To imply that a never repeated comment made in a private notebook and completely unknown until over a century later was part of his public work or a central aspect of Proudhon's ideas presents a completely false impression of both them and their influence — particularly given his discussion of race in **The Federative Principle**, to which we now turn.

McNally and Lichtheim proclaim that Proudhon *"publicly"* expressed *"tolerance for slavery"*, *"opposed emancipation for the American blacks and backed the cause of the southern slave owners"* because he was a racist. This is not the case, as can be seen from the extended discussion on slavery in the only major work written during the American Civil War, **The Federative Principle**. First, though, it must be stressed that the American Civil War had very little to do with slavery and far more to do with conflicts within the US ruling class. As Howard Zinn noted, the war *"was not over slavery as a moral institution ... It was not a clash of peoples ... but of elites. The northern elite wanted economic expansion — free land, free labour, a free [national] market, a high protective tariff for manufacturers, a bank of the United States. The slave interests opposed all that"* [**A People's History of the United States**, pp. 188–9] Slavery was never the driver for the war, regardless of how this has retroactively become the main cause (because this fits into the self-image and rhetoric of America far better than the grim reality). Indeed, abolition of slavery was raised as a war aim only in 1862 as a way of boosting the North's chances of winning.

Proudhon recognised this obvious fact, arguing consistently applying the federal principle would mean *"progressively raising the Black peoples' condition to the level of the Whites."* However, the North *"cares no more than the South about a*



that *"Jews are known to be cheated cheats everywhere"* and, according to Marx, they had put themselves *"at the **head of the counter-revolution**"* and so the revolution had *"to throw them back into their ghetto"*. [quoted 192, 203,196] Marx's paper *"did not dissociate itself from the anti-Semitic 'popular opinion'"* and its articles resulted in some of its backers who were Jewish demanding the return of their money as it preached *"religious hatred."* [201, 191]

Yet the despicable attitude expressed against Jews in **Neue Rheinische Zeitung** is the least of the issues of concern here given the opinions expressed over Slavs by the founders of Marxism. Thus we find Engels asserting that the Slavs have been *"forced to attain the first stage of civilisation only by means of a foreign yoke, are not viable and will never be able to achieve any kind of independence"* and that the conquered should be grateful to the Germans for *"having given themselves the trouble of civilising the stubborn Czechs and Slovenes, and introducing among them trade, industry, a tolerable degree of agriculture, and culture!"* [**Marx-Engels Collected Works**, vol. 8, p 238] Worse, Engels proclaimed that *"one day we shall **take a bloody revenge on the Slavs** for this cowardly and base betrayal of the revolution"* and *"hatred of the Russians was, and still is, the first revolutionary passion of the Germans"*. The revolution could only be secured *"against these Slavs peoples by the most decisive acts of terrorism"* and *"**a war of annihilation and ruthless terrorism**, not in the interests of Germany but in the interests of the revolution!"* There would be *"a **bloody revenge in the Slav barbarians**"* and a war which will *"**annihilate all these small pig-headed nations even to their very names**"* and *"will not only cause reactionary classes and dynasties **to disappear from the face of the earth, but also entire reactionary peoples.** And that too is an advance."* [quoted, 85, 86]

In short, Engels advocated ethnic cleansing in the name of the revolution against those whom he considered *"nonhistoric"*

*have wiped America off the map of nations".* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 167] Engels, unsurprisingly, after the American Civil War added a note suggesting that this obvious tolerance of slavery was only valid in 1847. A few years later, in the early 1850s, Marx argued that slavery in Jamaica had been marked by *"freshly imported BARBARIANS"* in contrast to the United States where *"the present generation of Negroes"* was *"a native product, more or less Yankeefied"* and *"hence capable of being emancipated."* {**Op. Cit.**, vol. 39, p. 346] The many comments by Marx and Engels on the progressive role of imperialism in replacing traditional societies by capitalist social relationships are also relevant in this context as are the many racists comments on Slavs and other peoples (including Jews). In other words, Proudhon and Bakunin were not the only major socialist thinkers to express racist views and if they are to be dismissed as a result then why not Marx and Engels as well?

We will draw upon Roman Rosdolsky's important work *"Engels and the \91Nonhistoric' Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848."* (**Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory**, No. 18/19) to sketch the bigotries of Marx and Engels (unless otherwise indicated all quotes in this section come from Rosdolsky's work). As will be seen, on almost every issue McNally raises against Proudhon and Bakunin we find similar comments by Marx and Engels.

Unsurprisingly, given the times, Marx and Engels made numerous anti-Semitic remarks both in private and public. During the 1848 revolution, the paper Marx edited (**Neue Rheinische Zeitung**) published the reports of M\FCller-Tellering who expressed *"an all too maniacal hatred"* of Jews. Engels wrote *"very unpleasant passages on the (Polish) Jews"* [193, 116], describing them as *"the very incarnation of haggling, avarice and sordidness"* and *"the meanest of all races"* with *"its lust for profit."* The Austrian Jews had ***"exploited the revolution** and are now being punished for it"* while *"anyone who knows how powerful"* they were. He generalised by suggesting



*true emancipation, which renders the difficulty insoluble even by war and threatens to destroy the confederation."* Rather than express *"tolerance"* for slavery he wrote *"the enslaving of one part of the nation is the very negation of the federative principle."* [**Property is Theft!**, pp. 698-9f] Both sides were *"fighting only over the type of servitude"* and so both must *"be declared equally guilty blasphemers and betrayers of the federative principle and banned from all nations."* The union could only be saved if the North *"grants the blacks their civil rights"* and pursues radical economic reform by *"providing possessions for the wage-workers and organising, alongside political guarantees, a system of economic guarantees."* This last was key, for the slaves had *"acquired the right of use and habitation on American soil."* Justice demanded that both the freed slaves and wage workers must be given means of production (land, tools, workplaces) and other economic guarantees as *"the conversion of black slaves to the proletariat"* would mean that *"black servitude will only change its form"* rather than ended. Both *"slavery and the proletariat are incompatible with republican values."* [quoted by Iain McKay, *"Neither Washington nor Richmond: Proudhon on Racism & the Civil War"*, **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, no. 60, pp. 25–6]

Proudhon stressed *"with regard to **black workers**, that physiologists and ethnographers recognise them as part of the same species as whites; that religion declares them, along with the whites, the children of God and the church, redeemed by the blood of the same Christ and therefore spiritual brothers; that psychology sees no difference between the constitution of the Negro conscience and that of the white, no more than between the comprehension of one and the other."* This meant that blacks should be *"as free as the whites by nature and human dignity."* Therefore *"the principle of equality before the law must have as corollaries: 1) the principle of equality of races, 2) the principle of equal conditions and 3) the principle of increasingly similar, although never completely equal, fortunes."* This meant that

*"[i]n a federal republic, the proletariat and slavery both seem unacceptable; the tendency must be to abolish them both"*. So, Proudhon argued, *"grant equal political rights to both the emancipated blacks and those kept in servitude until now"* and proclaim them *"fellow citizens and equals"*. *"The federative principle,"* he summarised, *"here appears closely related to that of the social equality of races and the equilibrium of fortunes. The political problem, the economic problem and the problem of races are one and the same problem, and the same theory and jurisprudence can resolve that problem."* [quoted by McKay, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

As can be seen, McNally and Lichtheim completely distort Proudhon's actual position. A more accurate account of this is given by academic Ralph Nelson:

> *"But it would be naive to think that it is just the peculiar institution of slavery that Proudhon detests. He finds in the North also the principle of inequality and class distinction. If he is critical of both sides in the war, it is because the federative principle is incompatible with inequality, whether the agrarian variety of master and slave or the modern version of capital and labour ...*
>
> *"Proudhon didn't really believe that the Union side would emancipate the Negro, but would fix on deportation as the solution to the problem. The union could be saved only by the liberation of the Negroes, granting them full citizenship, and by a determination to stop the growth of the proletariat. For what is gained for the former slaves, if emancipation means that they will become members of the proletariat? He notes that the situation in Russia after the emancipation of the serfs (1861) is analogous. Liberated serfs without land would be helpless. Economic guarantees must be developed alongside*



is not. Proudhon, to raise another obvious example, did not share Bakunin's interest in secret societies (nor did Kropotkin, Goldman, etc.). What does this tell us about *"the very nature of anarchist doctrine"*? Could Bakunin's position not be better explained by him being imprisoned in a Tsarist dungeon? Could it be that rather than attack anarchism, McNally simply attacks the failings of individual anarchists?

Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin and other revolutionary anarchists supported both unions and strikes and, as Kropotkin summarised, anarchists *"do not seek to constitute, and invite the working men not to constitute, political parties in the parliaments. Accordingly, since the foundation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864–1866, they have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation"*. How can Proudhon's position represent *"the very nature of anarchist doctrine"* when he was the only one to hold it? Similarly, Kropotkin simply (and rightly) dismissed Proudhon's position on women's equality as one *"which most modern writers will, of course, not agree."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, p. 165 and p. 218] If McNally is right then we can only conclude that only Proudhon amongst all anarchist thinkers understood what anarchism stood for. That is, needless to say, unlikely and so we can only conclude that Proudhon's sexism and opposition to strikes were *"quirks of personality"* which later anarchists rejected in favour of a more consistent libertarian position (in the case of Proudhon's anti-feminism) or as inadequate (in the case of Proudhon's reformism). Neither, in short, is inherent to anarchist theory and it would be silly to suggest they were.

It should also be noted that Marx and Engels took positions which modern readers would consider strange at best. In the case of slavery, Marx suggested in his polemic against Proudhon that if you *"[c]ause slavery to disappear and you will*

In summary, McNally's comments are a distortion of Bakunin's ideas and activities. He misrepresents one aspect of Bakunin's ideas while ignoring those aspects which support working class self-organisation and self-management. Ironically, he ignores the awkward fact that Bakunin's and Lenin's ideas on how revolutionaries should organise were similar (as to be expected given similar circumstances) but with the key difference that Lenin, unlike Bakunin, sought state power for the professional revolutionaries (see section H.3.11).

## 6. Are these *"quirks of personality"* or *"rooted in the very nature of anarchist doctrine"*?

After chronicling the failings of, and distorting the facts about, two individuals, McNally tries to generalise. *"These characteristics of Bakunin and Proudhon,"* he argues, *"were not mere quirks of personality. Their elitism, authoritarianism and support for backward-looking and narrow-minded causes are rooted in the very nature of anarchist doctrine."* Thus McNally claims that these failings of Proudhon and Bakunin are not personal failings but rather political. They, he suggests, represent the reactionary core of anarchist politics but makes no attempt to show that this is the case. Worse, many of his claims about *"anarchist doctrine"* are simply untrue and, once corrected, leave little left other than *"quirks of personality"*.

Take, for example, Proudhon's position on the American Civil War. Let us assume that McNally's assertion is correct (as shown in section 4 it is not) and he supported the South. Bakunin *"supported the Union in the struggle between the states"*. [Paul Avrich, **Anarchist Portraits**, p. 20] What does this mean for *"anarchist doctrine"*? Which of the two represented the "real" anarchist position? So the question remains why Proudhon's refusal to support either side during the American Civil War (his actual position) is an example of *"anarchist doctrine"* while Bakunin's support of the North



> *political ones. The corollaries of equality before the law are racial equality, equality of condition, and an approach toward equality of fortunes."* [*"The Federal Idea in French Political Thought"*, **Publius**, vol. 5, No. 3, p. 41]

There is an obvious flaw in his position, namely that *"Proudhon suggests that nothing will have been gained if the blacks were freed only to become wage earners, as if the condition of the wage-earner were not closer to the realisation of personal autonomy than the condition of a well-treated slave."* [Nelson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43] Yet his fears should not be ignored as the Southern states *"enacted 'black codes' which made the freed slaves like serfs"* after the end of the Civil War. [Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 199] As one Black newspaper put it: *"The slaves were made serfs and chained to the soil ... Such was the boasted freedom acquired by the coloured man at the hands of the Yankees."* [quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 196–7] However, these reservations about Proudhon's arguments — which did contain relevant concerns — do not make McNally's comments any more accurate. That he repeats someone else's mistakes do not matter as he should have taken the time to verify the claims by consulting Proudhon's own works — particularly given the serious nature of the assertions being made.

As can be seen, the notion that Proudhon was *"a rabid racist"* cannot be supported. While he undoubted made the occasion racist remark (usually anti-Jewish), this was not reflected in his political ideas. Similarly, if, as Lichtheim suggests *"dislike of Germans, Italians, Poles"* is considered important, then why are similar dislikes of other nationalities by Marx and Engels not worthy of note? Neither was free from anti-Semitic and other racist comments but anarchists consider these as relatively unimportant as they are understandable given the culture they lived in. In other words, Proudhon, Marx and Engels were people of their times and

so it is unsurprising that certain of their opinions shock and disgust us. The question is, are these views at the core of their politics or do they reflect personal bigotries in contradiction with them? In all three cases, the answer is obvious and so such attacks on Proudhon fail to convince — particularly if they are generalised to all anarchists, as if Proudhon's opposition to strikes or his sexism were remotely applicable to the likes of Bakunin, Kropotkin or Goldman!

Also, it is somewhat ironic that McNally mentions Proudhon's alleged "support" for the South as the Leninist tradition he places his own politics is renown for supporting various dictatorships during wars. For example, during the Vietnam war the various Leninist groups called for victory to North Vietnam, a Stalinist dictatorship while during both Gulf Wars they called for victory to Iraq, another dictatorship. In other words, they "tolerated" and "supported" anti-working class regimes, dictatorships and repression of democracy. They stress that they do not politically support these regimes, rather they wish these states to win in order to defeat the greater evil of imperialism. In practice, of course, such a division is hard to defend — for a state to win a war it must repress its own working class and so, in calling for a victory for a dictatorship, they must support the repression and actions that state requires to win the war (as an explosion of resistance, class struggle and revolt in the "lesser imperialist power" will undermine its war machine and so lead to its defeat). The notion that such calls do not mean support for the regime is false and so McNally's comments against Proudhon as well as being inaccurate also smack of hypocrisy — his political tradition has sided with repressive dictatorships during wars in the name of wider political aims and theory. In contrast, anarchists have consistently raised the idea of

**"No war but the class war"** in such conflicts (see section A.3.4). Proudhon's position of refusal to side with either the North or the South during the American Civil War is related to the revolutionary anarchist position.



to; The Spanish section of the Alliance *"survived Bakunin ... yet with few exceptions it continued to function in much the same way as it had done during Bakunin's lifetime."* [George R. Esenwein, **Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain**, p. 43] Hardly what you would expect if Lichtheim's comments were accurate.

The evidence suggests that the Alliance *"was not a compulsory or authoritarian body."* In Spain, it *"acted independently and was prompted by purely local situations. The copious correspondence between Bakunin and his friends ... was at all times motivated by the idea of offering advice, persuading, and clarifying. It was never written in a spirit of command, because that was not his style, nor would it have been accepted as such by his associates."* Moreover, there *"is no trace or shadow or hierarchical organisation in a letter from Bakunin to [Spanish anarchist] Mora ... On the contrary, Bakunin advises 'direct' relations between Spanish and Italian Comrades."* The Spanish comrades also wrote a pamphlet which *"ridiculed the fable of orders from abroad."* [Juan Gomez Casa, **Anarchist Organisation**, p. 25 and p. 40] This is confirmed by George R. Esenwein, who argues that *"[w]hile it is true that Bakunin's direct intervention during the early days of the International's development in Spain had assured the pre-dominance of his influence in the various federations and sections"* of the organisation, *"it cannot be said that he manipulated it or otherwise used the Spanish Alliance as a tool for his own subversive designs."* Thus, *"though the Alliance did exist in Spain, the society did not bear any resemblance to the nefarious organisation that the Marxists depicted."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42] Indeed, as Max Nettlau points out, those Spaniards who did break with the Alliance were persuaded of its *"hierarchical organisation ... not by their own direct observation, but by what they had been told [by Marxists] about the conduct of the organisation"* in other countries. [quoted by Casa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 39–40]

conditions of Tsarism. Worse, in 1920 these principles were agreed by the Communist International, including the necessity of both legal and illegal structures within the party for *"the Communist parties must learn to combine legal and illegal activity in a planned way. However, the legal work must be placed under the actual control of the illegal party at all times."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 198–9] Anarchists have, since Bakunin's death, rejected his ideas that anarchists should organise in a centralised fashion (see section J.3).

Therefore, McNally has a problem. On the one hand, he denounces Bakunin's ideas of a centralised, secret top-down organisation of revolutionaries. On the other, the party structure that Lenin recommends is also a tightly disciplined, centralised, top-down structure with a membership limited to those who are willing to be professional revolutionaries. So if he attacks Bakunin, he must also attack Lenin, not to do so is hypocrisy. And, unlike Bakunin, Lenin wished his party to seize state power — which then used it to build a system in its own image (see section H.5.9).

At this point it will be objected that Lenin's party was more democratic and he allowed people to disagree with him. Yet Lichtheim's summation leaves a lot to be desired. To point to just three examples: the historian T.R. Ravindranathan indicates that *"Bakunin wanted the Alliance to become a branch of the International [Working Men's Association] and at the same time preserve it as a secret society. The Italian and some French members wanted the Alliance to be totally independent of the IWA and objected to Bakunin's secrecy. Bakunin's view prevailed on the first question as he succeeded in convincing the majority of the harmful effects of a rivalry between the Alliance and the International. On the question of secrecy, he gave way to his opponents"*. [**Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 83]; while other Bakunin influenced sent delegates to the Hague Congress of the First International in 1872, the Italian sections decided not



To conclude, with the exception of his sexism McNally's account of Proudhon's ideas is either completely false (on small-scale property, democracy, racial equality) or, at best, half-truths turned into full-lies (his anti-Semitism and position of strikes). The scale of the distortion is simply staggering, suggesting he never consulted a single book by Proudhon. In terms of Proudhon's sexism and anti-Semitism, dismissing a theory based on the personal failings of those who advocate it only convinces the superficial. Proudhon rejected many of the assumptions of his times, yet he did not rise above all of them. As George Lichtheim suggests (in a passage McNally could not bring himself to quote), *"[i]n all these respects Proudhon simply reflected the milieu from which he had sprung. His mental crudities were commonplace and not peculiar to him. Half peasant, half townsman, he was the embodiment of the average French workingman of his day"*. [**The Origins of Socialism**, p. 87] Subsequent anarchists (including Bakunin) overcame the limitations of Proudhon **the man** by using Proudhon **the theorist**. McNally, by personalising the matter, seeks to deny the significant contributions Proudhon made to socialism (as can be seen by the Paris Commune). If he were more confident in his own political tradition he would not have to do this as Leninism should be able to convince by presenting an accurate account of the ideas of others and showing their weaknesses. That McNally did not do this for Proudhon shows that, for all his flaws, his argument that socialism needs to be decentralised, federal and self-managed still rings true. The failure of the Bolshevik regime confirms this.

## 5. Why are McNally's comments on Bakunin a distortion of his ideas?

McNally then moves on to Bakunin whom he states *"shared most of Proudhon's views."* The truth is somewhat different. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin supported trade unions and strikes,

equality for women and revolution as well as being far more explicit in support for the collectivisation of property.

This can be seen from Bakunin's last book in which he argued that the International Working Men's Association *"has shown the proletariat the objective it must achieve and at the same time has indicated to it the ways and means of organising a popular force"*, namely *"a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces and nations"* organised *"from below upwards"*. Socialism would be created *"only through concerted action by the proletariat of all countries, whose organisation first on an economic basis is precisely the object of the International"*, by means of *"factory, artisan, and agrarian sections"*. A *"federal organisation, from below upwards, of workers' associations, groups, communes, districts, and, ultimately, regions and nations"* was needed *"for real as opposed to fictitious freedom"*. This *"popular federation"* would be *"based on emancipated labour and collective property"* as the *"mode of future production"* would be *"producers' cooperatives"* and *"all forms of land and capital must become collective property"*. He also *"demand[ed], along with liberty, the equality of rights and obligations for men and women."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 32, p. 33, p. 49, p. 51, p. 13, p. 22, p. 201 and p. 219]

So Bakunin disagreed with Proudhon on many subjects. He did share Proudhon's support for industrial self-management, self-organisation in workers' associations, his hatred of capitalism and his vision of a decentralised, libertarian, federal, "from below" socialist society. It is true that, as McNally notes, *"Bakunin shared [Proudhon's] anti-semitism"* but he fails to mention Marx and Engels' many racist remarks against Slavs and other peoples. Also it is not true that Bakunin *"was a Great Russian chauvinist convinced that the Russians were ordained to lead humanity into [the] anarchist utopia."* Rather, Bakunin (being Russian) hoped Russia would have a libertarian revolution, but he also hoped the same for France, Spain, Italy and all countries in Europe (indeed, the world). He opposed



> *"Jesuitical control ... are totally excluded from all three tiers of the secret organisation ... The strength of the whole society, as well as the morality, loyalty, energy and dedication of each member, is based exclusively and totally on the shared truth, sincerity and trust, and on the open fraternal control of all over each one."* [quoted by Confino, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 264–6]

As can be seen, while there is much in Bakunin's ideas that few anarchists would agree with today, it cannot be said that it was *"dictatorial"* as McNally and Lichtheim wish to suggest. Ironically, as we note in section H.2.14, there are distinct similarities to Lenin's (and Marx's during the 1848 revolution) ideas on how revolutionaries should organise. Thus we find Lenin arguing in **What is to be Done?** for *"a powerful and strictly secret organisation, which concentrates in its hands all the threads of secret activities, an organisation which of necessity must be a centralised organisation"* because the revolutionary movement would *"benefit by the fact that a 'dozen' experienced revolutionaries, no less professionally trained than the police, will centralise all the secret side of the work — prepare leaflets, work out approximate plans and appoint bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution, etc."* Under Tsarism, the *"only serious organisational principle the active workers of our movement can accept is strict secrecy, strict selection of members, and the training of professional revolutionaries."* [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 158, p. 149 and p. 162]

The parallels with Bakunin's system are clear and are predominately the result of the identical political conditions both revolutionaries experienced. While anarchists are happy to indicate and oppose the non-libertarian aspects of Bakunin's ideas, it is hard for the likes of the McNally to attack Bakunin while embracing Lenin's ideas on the party, justifying their more "undemocratic" aspects as a result of the objective

*unconditionally, except in such cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them... In such a case members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee's orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting ... If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it... Any member or any group is subject to judgement by the general meeting ... No new Brother can be accepted without the consent of all or at the very least three-quarters of all the members...*

*"The Committee divides the members ... among the Regions and constitutes Regional groups of leaderships from them ... Regional leadership is charged with organising the second tier of the society — the **Regional Fraternity**, on the basis of the same programme, the same rules, and the same revolutionary plan ... Each Regional Committee will set up **District** Committees from members of the **Regional Fraternity** ... District Committees can, if necessary and only with the consent of the Regional Committee, set up a third tier of the organisation — **District Fraternity** with a programme and regulations as near as possible to the general programme and regulations of the People's Fraternity. The programme and regulations of the District Fraternity will not come into force until they are discussed and passed by the general meeting of the Regional Fraternity and have been confirmed by the Regional Committee...*



the Russian Empire and he wished *"the destruction of the Empire of All the Russias"* and supported national liberation struggles of nationalities oppressed by Russia (and any other imperialist nation). [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 162] Unlike Proudhon, he supported Polish National liberation although he recognised that *"its leading parties, which are still drawn primarily from the gentry. have been unable to renounce their state-centred program"* and hoped that the national movement would embrace economic change and seek the *"liberation and renewal of their homeland in social revolution"*. [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 40]

McNally moves on to *"Bakunin's organisational methods"*, stating that they *"were overwhelmingly elitist and authoritarian."* This assertion completely misunderstands Bakunin's ideas on how revolutionaries should organise and influence working class organisations as well as the revolutionary process. Before turning to these, we must discuss Bakunin's views on social organisation as these indicate what his *"utopia"* (to use McNally's word) would be like and place his ideas on how anarchists should organise into context. If this is not done then Bakunin cannot be understood nor how later anarchists revised his ideas.

We must start by pointing out that Bakunin's viewpoints on the organisational methods of mass working class organisations and those of political groupings were somewhat different. As we show in section 9, Bakunin had what would now be termed a syndicalist position on the labour movement and so he rejected organising political parties and electioneering (*"political action"*) in favour of *"the development and organisation\85 of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses as much in the towns as in the countryside."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 197–8] This was reflected in his ideas on social revolution as expressed in 1868:

> *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations\85 will constitute the Commune … by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates\85 vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates … all provinces, communes and associations\85 [would send] their representatives to an agreed meeting place … vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces\85 to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction\85 it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution … Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations … organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 170–2]

How is this federation of workers councils based on elected, mandated and recallable delegates organised from the bottom-up *"elitist and authoritarian"*? Compare this to McNally's own words on the soviets of the Russian Revolution:

> *"The Russian revolution was based upon a wholly new kind of social organisation, the workers' council or soviet. These councils, based on elected delegates from the workplace and the neighbourhoods, became the new decision-making bodies of Russia. They were organs of direct democracy whose delegates, like those of the Paris Commune, could be recalled by the electors. The soviets represented a new*



He discusses the *"principles and mutual conditions"* for a *"new society"* of revolutionaries in Russia (noting that this was an *"outline of a plan"* which *"must be developed, supplemented, and sometimes altered according to circumstances"*):

> *"Equality among all members and the unconditional and absolute solidarity — one for all and all for one — with the obligation for each and everyone to help each other, support and save each other… Complete frankness among members and proscription of any Jesuitical methods in their relationships … When a member has to say anything against another member, this must be done at a general meeting and in his presence.* ***General fraternal control*** *of each other … Everyone's personal intelligence vanished like a river in the sea in the collective intelligence and all members obey unconditionally the decisions of the latter.*
>
> *"All members are equal; they know all their comrades and discuss and decide with them all the most important and essential questions bearing on the programme of the society and the progress of the cause. The decision of the general meeting is absolute law… The society chooses an Executive Committee from among their number consisting of three or five members who should organise the branches of the society and manage its activities in all the regions of the [Russian] Empire on the basis of the programme and general plan of action adopted by the decision of the society as a whole… This Committee is elected for an indefinite term. If the society … the People's Fraternity is satisfied with the actions of the Committee, it will be left as such; and while it remains a Committee each member … and each regional group have to obey it*

were monarchies and did not have basic civil liberties. Bakunin had been imprisoned by the Tsar for his activities during the 1848 revolution and so had personal experience of the fate of revolutionaries who were caught by these regimes. As Murray Bookchin argues, *"Bakunin's emphasis on conspiracy and secrecy can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy were matters of sheer survival."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 24] McNally ignores the historical context — and the awkward fact that Marxists have also favoured secret groupings in the face of similar regimes.

Second, it should be noted that in 1865–6 Bakunin was just becoming an anarchist and this period *"represents the transition from the revolutionary nationalism of his middle-years to the revolutionary anarchism of his last period."* The *"rituals"* of the International Brotherhood were not reflected in later organisations because, as Bakunin admitted to a recruit, *"they aren't necessary. We invented that for the Italians"*. In other words, they reflected the revolutionary traditions of the democratic conspiracies of that country rather than his own ideas, something confirmed by James Guillaume, his associate in the Alliance of Social Democracy, who recounted this, Bakunin's group in the First International, *"had little resemblance to 'the classic type of secret society where one had to obey orders coming from above.' Bakunin's organisation was nothing more than a 'free association of men who were uniting for collective action, without formalities, without ceremonies or mysterious rites.'"* As for the Brotherhood, *"the constitution thus laid down was to be regarded as provisional; for when the Brotherhood attained a membership of seventy, a constituent assembly was to be convened which would determine the definite rules and programme of the organisation."* [E.H. Carr, **Michael Bakunin**, p. 320, p. 316, p. 357 and p. 315]

Third, this summary is simply inaccurate. To show this, we shall quote from Bakunin's letter to the Russian Nihilist Sergy Nechayev in which he explains the differences in their ideas.



> *form of mass democracy. It was for this reason that Lenin and Trotsky made the demand for 'All power to the soviets!' the central slogan of the Russian revolution."*

As noted in section 4, Proudhon had already raised the idea of recallable delegates in the 1848 revolution and it was his followers who applied them in 1871. Given McNally's praise of the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets, it seems strange that Bakunin's comments with regards to revolutionary social organisation with its obvious parallels to both should not be mentioned. Perhaps because to do so would totally undermine his case? Thus rather than being *"overwhelmingly elitist and authoritarian"* Bakunin's ideas on a future society have marked similarities to the actual structures created by working people in struggle and are marked by libertarian and self-managed visions and concepts — as anyone familiar with Bakunin's work would know.

The key difference between Bakunin and Lenin is that for the former turning the soviets into a state (even a so-called "workers' state") as desired by the latter would mean that power moved from the bottom to the top, empowering the few at the expense of the many. Given that Lenin's aim was the creation of a Bolshevik government it comes as no surprise that this *"central slogan"* of the revolution was quickly violated (see section H.1.7). As Bakunin once put it, there is the *"Republic-State"* and there is *"the system of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, i.e. the system of* ***Anarchism****. This is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the* ***State*** *and establishment of the economic, entirely free organisation of the people — organisation from bottom to top by means of federation."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 314] The difference is fundamental and not simply a question of words (see section H.2.1).

The question now arises of how Bakunin thought revolutionaries should influence both working class struggle and revolution. While not completely libertarian, Bakunin's ideas on this issue are different than McNally's summary would suggest.

The aim of the political grouping was to exercise a *"natural influence"* on the members of unions and associations, seeking to convince them of the validity of anarchist ideas. The political group did not aim to seize political power (unlike Marxists) and so it *"rule[d] out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control."* All it could do was to *"assist the birth of the revolution by sowing ideas corresponding to the instincts of the masses"* and act *"as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the popular instinct."* It *"help[s] the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and the fullest freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172 and p. 191] The *"sole aim of a secret society must be, not the creation of an artificial power outside the people, but the rousing, uniting and organising of the spontaneous power of the people"*. It *"does not foist upon the people any new regulations, orders, styles of life, but merely unleashes its will and gives wide scope to its self-determination and social organisation, which must be created by itself from below and not above. The organisation must accept in all sincerity the idea that it is a servant and a helper, but never a commander, of the people, never under any pretext its manager, not even under the pretext of the people's welfare."* The secret society *"acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power"* and so this *"does not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character. It is not placed above the people like state power because its whole aim, defined by its programme, consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people."* [quoted by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, p. 250, pp. 258–9 and p. 261]



As we discuss in more detail in section J.3.7, the key to understanding the role of Bakunin's secret societies is to recognise that rather than seek to be elected into positions of power, they would work within popular organisations at the base and argue their ideas and win others over to them (i.e., their *"natural personal influence"*). This is why Bakunin considered such organisations as being no danger to popular liberty — by not having power they could not force their ideas onto others, unlike a new state regime. All this is ignored by McNally.

McNally then quotes *"one historian"* on Bakunin. It should be noted that not even providing a name makes evaluating the accuracy of the historian's work impossible and so leaves the reader in the dark as to whether the historian does provide a valid account of Bakunin's ideas. However, after investigation the historian in question is George Lichtheim whom McNally feels provides *"the most reliable guides to early socialist thought"* presumably because his account chimes with all the standard Marxist prejudices, assumptions and errors about anarchism (significantly McNally ignores Lichtheim's statement that Bakunin's supported *"anti-authoritarian collectivism"*). A socialist, Lichtheim opposed Marxist-Leninism while presenting a sceptical but superficial account of anarchism. This can be seen from the words McNally quotes:

> *"The International Brotherhood he founded in Naples in 1865–66 was as conspiratorial and dictatorial as he could make it, for Bakunin's libertarianism stopped short of the notion of permitting anyone to contradict him. The Brotherhood was conceived on the Masonic model, with elaborate rituals, a hierarchy, and a self-appointed directory consisting of Bakunin and a few associates."* [**A Short History of Socialism**, p. 126]

First, it should be noted that Bakunin considered secret societies as necessary because, at the time, most countries

*Revolution.*" For the toiler, the Russian Revolution *"can mean nothing ... unless it sets the land fee and joins to the dethroned Tsar his partner, the dethroned land-owner, the capitalist."* [*"The Truth About the Bolsheviki"*, **Writings of Emma Goldman**, p. 163 and p. 165]

So when Victor Serge, like McNally, stated that by concluding the *"self-evident truth"* that *"the Russian Revolution cannot confine itself to changing the political order"* in 1917 but that it had to take in *"a social character"* by expropriating capital and land he was unknowingly *"on the line"* advocated by Lenin we must remember that this was not *"the line"* pioneered by Trotsky but rather the one raised by Kropotkin and other anarchists during the 1905 revolution (and rejected at the time by all Marxists) **and** that this had been argued for since the late 1860s by Bakunin and other libertarians. [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 60]

This confusion associated with Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism was also present in Lenin. Given that anarchism is apparently associated with the petty-bourgeois we find a strange contradiction in Lenin's work. On the one hand Lenin argued that Russia *"despite the more petty-bourgeois composition of her population as compared with the other European countries"* anarchist influence was *"negligible during the two revolutions (of 1905 and 1917)"*. The lack of influence in Russia, he claimed, was due to Bolshevism having *"waged a most ruthless and uncompromising struggle against opportunism"* for anarchism was *"a penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement."* On the other he admitted that, in the developed capitalist nations, syndicalism was *"a profoundly proletarian and mass movement"* and that it is *"the duty of all Communists to do everything to help all proletarian mass elements to abandon anarchism ... the measure in which genuinely Communist parties succeed in winning mass proletarian elements ... away from anarchism, is a criterion of the success of those Parties."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 31, p. 32, p. 200 and p. 201]



*governed by the workers themselves ... [also] contain[s] the germ of the functional organisation upon which the new society can be built after the revolution.".* Anarchists wish *"that the people themselves take their destiny into their own hands and carry through the social revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 89]

All of which, to state the obvious, is at odds with McNally's claims about anarchism.

To summarise: Anarchists are not opposed to people in free associations democratically determining the policies they will support (see sections I.3.1 and I.5.1 for more details on this). The minority can then decide to abide by the decision, protest against it or, if all else fails, to leave the association if they cannot tolerate the decisions being made. What we **do** oppose is the assumption that the majority is always right and that (non-repressive or non-oppressive) minorities should submit to the decisions of the majority no matter how wrong they are. We feel that history is on our side on this one — it is only by the freedom to dissent, by the direct action of minorities to defend and extent their freedoms that society progresses. We also feel that theory is on our side — majority rule without individual and minority rights is a violation of the principle of freedom and equality which democracy is said to be built on. Democracy should be an expression of individual liberty but in McNally's hands it is turned into bourgeois liberalism. Little wonder Marxism has continually failed to produce a free society. It has no conception of the relationship of individual freedom to democracy and vice versa.

Finally, we must point out a slight irony in McNally's claim, namely that Marxists usually claim that they seek a society similar to that anarchists seek but have different means to achieve it. In the words of Marx:

> *"What all socialists understand by anarchy is this: once the aim of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, has been attained, the power of*

> *the State ... disappears, and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 76]

Or, as the **Communist Manifesto** put it, *"the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all"* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 491] So, Marxists and anarchists seek the same society, one of individual freedom which means that McNally's comments about anarchism also apply (once the state "withers away", which it never will) to Marxism. But, of course, McNally fails to mention this aspect of Marxism and its conflict with anarchism — but, then, he fails to discuss what anarchism actually stands for nor does he present an accurate account of its views of democracy and democratic decision making.

## 8. Are Leninists in favour of democracy?

McNally's attack on anarchism for being anti-democratic, authoritarian and elitist is somewhat ironic given that the Leninist tradition he places himself in **did** destroy democracy during the Russian Revolution — whether in the soviet, the workplace, the union or the military — and replaced it with party dictatorship. This means that his attack on anarchism can be turned back on his own politics, with much more justification and evidence.

We need to understand the importance of comparing the rhetoric of Bolshevism to its reality as we can have repeated pronouncements about "democracy" made while, at the same time, the necessity of party dictatorship is both being practised **and** advocated. Thus Lenin repeatedly contrasted the higher form of democracy expressed by the soviets to bourgeois democracy. In his in 1918 polemic against leading Social-Democrat Karl Kautsky who was accusing the Bolshe-



> *row, after the Constitution has been proclaimed, to return to the factories the same slaves as you have been before, then you will have been betrayed ...*
>
> *"Don't expect anything from would-be saviours. But in every factory, every building yard, every workshop, and every mine,* ***establish yourselves the order of things which, by common accord, you will find proper to establish****. But remember this: Don't allow others to interfere! It is* ***your*** *affair, and* ***you*** *have to settle it.*
>
> "***Accomplish yourselves a revolution in the organisation of labour as you have accomplished it in the general administration of the Russian State.***
>
> *"Don't trust those who will tell you: 'Not yet! It is too soon!' No, it is not too soon; it is just the time for it."* [*"The Revolution in Russia"*, **Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 456–7]

As with the Paris Commune and the soviets, yet another key aspect of McNally's Marxism was first advocated by anarchists. As Emma Goldman noted in 1918, the Bolsheviks where *"adopting Anarchist Revolutionary tactics"* and, unlike in 1905, in 1917 they *"no longer believe"* that *"the industrialisation of Russia and the historic mission of the bourgeoisie as a necessary evolutionary process before the Russian masses could come into their own"* and now accepted *"the point of view held by the Anarchists since Bakunin; namely, that once the masses become conscious of their economic power, they make their own history"* and so revolution *"means a fundamental social and economic change, something which has its roots in the needs and hopes of the people and which must not end until the disinherited of the earth come into their own. In a word, the Russian people saw in the overthrow of the autocracy the* ***beginning*** *and not the* ***finale*** *of the*

*nify no other thing but to win this freedom only, leaving for the first days at least economic and social relations in the same old state, — that is, leaving the proprietors and capitalists with their insolent wealth, and the workers with their poverty."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 294] This meant that anarchists aimed to ensure any revolution was *"simultaneously universal, social, philosophical, economic and political revolution"*. The *"revolution as we understand it will … set about the … complete destruction of the State … The natural and necessary upshot of that destruction"* will include the *"[d]issolution of the army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and clergy"* and *"[a]ll productive capital and instruments of labour … be[ing] confiscated for the benefit of toilers associations, which will have to put them to use in collective production"* as well as the *"[s]eizure of all Church and State properties."* The *"federated Alliance of all labour associations … will constitute the Commune."* The people *"must make the revolution everywhere, and … ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations … organised from the bottom up."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1 pp. 152–6] This was echoed by Kropotkin in 1905:

> *"The Russian people — the working men — having compelled the autocrat to abdicate his despotic power, must compel him now to give body to his abdication by sending away the troops upon which rest his power and the power of bureaucracy, the power of unbridled capitalism.*
>
> *"The people must arm itself; otherwise the Tsar, the bureaucrats and the capitalists will crush it down … the Russian working men must not forget **their own demands**. To guarantee the individual against police arbitrariness is necessary for all. But he who works and produces riches with his own hands requires something else… . If you are compelled tomor-*



viks of being undemocratic, Lenin argued that the *"only view that corresponds to Marxism"* was expounded by Plekhanov (the father of Russian Marxism) at the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903, namely *"in the revolution the proletariat would, if necessary, disenfranchise the capitalists and **disperse any parliament** that was found to be counter-revolutionary."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 280] Which raises the obvious question, found to be counter-revolutionary by whom? The proletariat? No, according to Plekhanov it was **the party**:

> *"Every democratic principle must be considered not by itself, abstractly, but in relation to … the success of the revolution [as this] is the highest law. And if the success of the revolution demands a temporary limitation on the working of this or that democratic principle, then it would be criminal to refrain from such a limitation . .. the principle of universal suffrage must be considered from the point of view of what I have designated the fundamental principle of democracy. It is hypothetically possible that we might … speak out against universal suffrage … If in a burst of revolutionary enthusiasm the people chose a very fine parliament then we would be bound to make it a **long parliament**; and if the elections turned out unsuccessfully, then we would have to try to disperse it.* [quoted by Samuel H. Baron, **Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism**, p. 242]

As we will discover, the dispersing of elected bodies by the party was not limited to bourgeois Parliaments: soviets were also subject to this policy. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that before seizing power Lenin had repeatedly equated the power of the Bolsheviks with that of the proletariat. Thus *"Bolshevik power"* was *"one and the same thing"* as *"proletarian*

*revolutionary power"* and so the Second All-Russian Congress *"gave a majority to the Bolshevik Party and put it in power."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 413 and p. 419] While problematic (it substitutes the party for the class), it could be argued that as the party was supported by the majority of workers (but not peasants) then the Bolshevik government was democratic. Which is true, in the limited bourgeois sense. The question is what would happen if the workers turned against the party — would it give up its power as required by a movement committed to democracy? Unfortunately for McNally, the answer was: no.

Before discussing this, we must present some context and discuss the Bolshevik regime from the democratic perspective of one-person, one-vote. **Before** seizing power, Lenin protested that the Bolsheviks *"must pass a resolution demanding **equal** suffrage (both in the Soviets and at trade union congresses), branding the slightest departure from equality as a **fraud** ... We cannot tolerate a **fraud** of democracy if we call ourselves 'democrats'. We are not democrats but unprincipled people if we tolerate this!!"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 25, p. 304] After winning around 25% of the votes in the elections to the Constituent Assembly he was happy with a Soviet Constitution which saw the All-Russian Congress of Soviets being composed of representatives of urban soviets (one delegate for 25,000 voters) and of representatives of the rural congresses of soviets (one delegate for 125,000 inhabitants). In other words, a worker's vote was 5 times more important than a peasant's vote. That this ensured a Bolshevik majority in the Third and Fourth All-Russian Congresses may explain this embrace of **unequal** suffrage in 1918 after the votes in the Constituent Assembly had been counted.

Given that the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly in spite of it being elected by universal suffrage (i.e., by democracy) McNally would, undoubtedly, argue — as Lenin did — that soviet democracy was much superior. Ignoring the awkward issue of unequal suffrage between workers



*of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society"* [**The Russian Anarchists**, p. 73] Therefore it is not surprising that Proudhon and Bakunin predicted aspects of the Paris Commune — they were expressing the politics of the future. As is clear from their writings, which still remain fresh today.

This is reflected in another comment by McNally, who writes that *"all major trends in Russian socialism had believed that a bourgeois democratic revolution — a revolution against Czarism and for the establishment not of socialism but merely of liberal capitalism — would have to precede a workers' revolution in Russia. In 1906, Leon Trotsky developed a dissenting view. Only the working class of Russia, Trotsky argued, would be willing and able to carry through the fight for democratic reforms and for a democratic republic. But why, he asked, should the workers be expected to stop at that point? Why should they not extend the fight for democratic rights into a struggle for workers' control and socialist democracy?"* In reality, the idea that working people should extend a revolution from political to economic goals was raised by both Proudhon and Bakunin long before Trotsky and, moreover, was advocated by Kropotkin the year before Trotsky introduced it into Marxism.

Thus Proudhon argued that the 1848 revolution *"had been made 'without an idea' and that it had unfortunately satisfied itself with the proclamation of purely political palliatives"* and *"he did not believe that such political reforms would solve the social problem."* [K. Steven Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 169] Bakunin took up, as with so many other things, Proudhon's argument and, as we discuss in section H.1.1, a key part of Bakunin's critique of Marxism was precisely that it looked to political change before social and economic transformation, the latter coming as a result of "political action" allowed by the previous political revolution. Thus *"[t]o win political freedom first can sig-*

*delegates."* In addition, *"a local grouping which allows the workers in the same area to liaise on a day to day basis"* and *"a linking up of the various localities, fields, regions, etc."* (i.e. international trade or industrial union federations) would ensure that *"labour organises for present and future by doing away with wage slavery."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 184] Such a vision of workers' councils and associated labour has obvious similarities with the spontaneously created soviets of the 1905 Russian Revolution. These, too, were based on assembled councils of workers' delegates. Of course they were differences but the basic idea and vision are identical.

Therefore to claim that anarchism represents the past presents Marxists with a few problems given the nature of the Paris Commune and its obvious libertarian nature. If it is claimed that the Parisian artisans defended *"not their present, but their future interests"* and so *"desert[ed] their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat"* (the class they are being *"tranfer[ed]"* into by the rise of capitalism) then, clearly, anarchist ideas are *"future,"* proletarian, ideas as it is that class interest artisans serve *"[i]f by chance they are revolutionary."* [Marx and Engels, *"The Communist Manifesto"*, **The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 482]

Whichever way you look at it, McNally's claims on the class nature of anarchism do not stand up to close analysis. Proudhon addressed both artisan/peasant and wage-worker in his works. He addressed both the current and the future working class. Bakunin did likewise. Moreover, both were part of the workers movement. Proudhon was working class, the son of an artisan and peasant who was a printer by trade, and took part in the debates and polemics of the French socialist movement as well as the 1848 Revolution. Bakunin joined the First International, taking an active part in its debates and championing the syndicalist ideas which had evolved from Proudhon's mutualism in France, Belgium, Spain and Italy. As Paul Avrich suggests, as *"early as the 1860's and 1870's, the followers*



and peasants, the fact is that the Bolsheviks also disbanded soviets which elected non-Bolshevik majorities. Martov, the leader of the left-Mensheviks, recounted in June 1918 how in those *"places where we were in the majority, the soviets will be liquidated"*. When *"workers demanded new elections"* the demands were *"stubbornly resisted"* and the issue *"escalated to workers' strikes and the suppression of workers' demonstrations by armed forces"*. If the protests succeeded, then elections resulted in *"a majority to the Mensheviks and SRs"* and in those cases Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Councils ensured *"the soviets were disbanded by armed force or the opposition delegates were **expelled** as 'counter-revolutionaries' from the soviets"* (although *"Bolshevik investigators themselves could not succeed in implicating even one Menshevik in the conspiracy trials"*). The disbanding of soviets was *"applied to the **uzed** congresses of peasant soviets."* [*"Iulii Martov's Letter to A.N. Stein"*, pp. 78–82, **The Structure of Soviet History**, Ronald Grigor Suny (ed.), p. 78] Martov gave amongst many the example of Tula and a leading Bolshevik there informed his Party's Central Committee in early 1918 about the means being used there:

> *"After the transfer of power to the soviet, a rapid about-face began in the mood of the workers. The Bolshevik deputies began to be recalled one after another, and soon the general situation took on a rather unhappy appearance. Despite the fact that there was a schism among the SRs, and the Left SRs were with us, our situation became shakier with each passing day. We were forced to block new elections to the soviet and even not to recognise them where they had taken place not in our favour."* [quoted by Scott Smith, *"The Socialists-Revolutionaries and the Dilemma of Civil War"*, pp.

83–104, **The Bolsheviks In Russian Society**, Vladimir N. Brovkin (ed.), p. 87]

*"The sum of this evidence from around the country,"* summarises one historian, *"makes clear that the majority of Russian workers were hostile to the Bolsheviks by the spring of 1918 ... the Bolsheviks simply dissolved opposition-controlled soviets, disregarded workers' opinions, and cracked down brutally on such manifestations of discontent as strikes."* [Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94] This meant disbanding soviets which were elected with the wrong majority and so in response to the *"great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections"* during the spring and summer of 1918 *"Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections."* For example, in the city of Izhevsk in *"the May election [to the soviet] the Mensheviks and SRs won a majority"* and the following month *"these two parties also won a majority of the executive committee of the soviet. At this point, the local Bolshevik leadership refused to give up power"* and by the use of the military *"abrogated the results of the May and June elections and arrested the SR and Menshevik members of the soviet and its executive committee."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 23–4]

As we summarise in section H.6.1, the Bolsheviks applied many tactics to secure their power: soviet elections were delayed, the soviets themselves were packed with their representatives to secure their majority (so making direct election from the workplace irrelevant) and, when all else failed, the soviets themselves were simply, as noted, disbanded. This applied at the national level as well, and *"electoral fraud gave the Bolsheviks a huge majority of congress delegates"* for the fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress in July 1918. The *"number of legitimately elected Left SR delegates was roughly equal to that of the Bolsheviks."* The Left-SRs expected a majority but did not include *"roughly 399 Bolsheviks delegates whose right to be seated was challenged by the Left SR minority in the congress's*



tive — which sees the artisan, peasant and proletariat forming a common class of working people — the development of the Paris Commune is no surprise. It is the work of people seeking to end wage labour and the threat of wage labour **now** rather than sometime in the future once capitalism has fully developed. Thus McNally's (and Marx's) support for the Commune makes a mockery of his attacks on anarchism as the theory of the artisans and peasants for it was the artisans who created the first model of their *"proletarian"* state and applied what they say they consider the foundations of *"proletarian"* democracy — electing mandated and recallable delegates. That the "petty-bourgeois" Proudhon advocated this 23 years before Marx did is, of course, left unsaid.

As indicated, McNally's arguments do not hold water. Ironically, if anarchism was the death-cry of the artisan and peasant then it is strange, to say the least, that this theory so influenced the Paris Commune which McNally praises so much. We therefore suggest that rather than being a backward-looking cry of despair for those disappearing under the wheels of rising capitalism, anarchism was in fact a theory developed from the struggles and self-activity of those currently suffering capitalist and state oppression — namely the artisans, peasants **and** industrial proletariat (i.e. the working class as a whole). In other words, it is a philosophy and theory for the future, not of the past. This can be seen from the libertarian aspects of the Paris Commune, aspects Marx immediately tried to appropriate for his own theories (which, unfortunately, were swamped by the authoritarian elements that existed already).

In addition the *"old rubbish"* the Parisian workers supported was very much ahead of its time. In 1869 the delegate of the Parisian Construction Workers' Trade Union argued that *"[a]ssociation of the different corporations [labour unions] on the basis of town or country . .. leads to the commune of the future ... Government is replaced by the assembled councils of the trade bodies, and by a committee of their respective*

statement that the future proletarian state, like the Paris Commune, would abolish the distinction between executive and administrative powers mean he honoured it. Immediately after the October Revolution the Bolsheviks established an executive power **above** the soviets, namely the Council of People's Commissars. Those who quote Lenin's **The State and Revolution** as proof of his democratic nature usually fail to mention this little fact. In practice that work was little more than an election manifesto to be broken as required, as we shown in section H.1.7)

In fact, the Paris Commune was primarily the work of artisans (the bulk of the Parisian workers at the time). This is reflected in Marx's comments in 1866 that the French workers were *"corrupted"* by Proudhon's *"sham criticism and sham opposition to the Utopians (he himself is only a petty-bourgeois utopian ...)"*, *"particularly those of Paris, who as workers in luxury trades are strongly attached, without knowing it [!], to the old rubbish."* The *"Parisian gentlemen had their heads full of the emptiest Proudhonist phrases"* and so *"Proudhon did enormous mischief."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism**, pp. 45–6] Five years later, these workers (still obviously influenced by *"the old rubbish"* and their heads still full of *"Proudhonist phrases"*) created *"the political form"* of *"the economic emancipation of labour."* This is not explained by Marxists, who also do not trouble themselves to explain how can the Paris Commune be the *"Dictatorship of the Proletariat"* when 35 members of the Commune's council were artisans and only 4 or 5 were industrial workers (i.e. proletarians).

Can the fact that Proudhon-influenced artisans were, according to McNally and Marx, social strata of the past, were backward looking, etc. be reconciled with the claim that the Paris Commune was the political form of proletarian emancipation? No, not from a Marxist class analysis. Hence Marxists ignoring the real nature of the Parisian working class when discussing the commune. However, from an anarchist perspec-



*credentials commission."* Without these dubious delegates, the Left SRs and SR Maximalists would have outnumbered the Bolsheviks by around 30 delegates. This ensured *"the Bolshevik's successful fabrication of a large majority in the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, p. 396, p. 288, p. 442 and p. 308]

This was reflected in Lenin's 1917 argument that the *"Bolsheviks have no right to await the Congress of Soviets. They ought to seize the power **right now**"* [quoted by Trotsky, **The History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, pp. 132–2] The important thing was party power and the soviets were seen as only a means to that end and so perhaps their fate once the Bolsheviks had reached their goal is unsurprising. Hence we see Lenin, in his polemic against Kautsky, pointing with no apparent concerns to the fact that *"97 per cent of the total number of delegates [to the Sixth All-Russian Soviet Congress] were Bolsheviks"* as an example of his party's popular support! [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 303] It should be noted that the delegates to the congress were elected not by workers and peasants but rather by the appropriate soviet body below it. In other words, Bolshevik gerrymandered and packed soviets elected Bolsheviks to the national congress.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the reality of their regime, Bolshevik rhetoric started to change. By the end of 1918 the necessity of party dictatorship started to appear in party material and, as Victor Serge noted in the 1930s, *"the degeneration of Bolshevism"* was apparent by that time *"since at the start of 1919 I was horrified to read an article by Zinoviev ... on the monopoly of the party in power"*. [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 188] It must be stressed that Serge's horror was well hidden and, as noted in section H.1.2 he joined the Bolsheviks and publicly defended this monopoly of power as a necessity of revolution. Lenin admitted the reality in 1919:

> *"When we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party and … . a united Socialist front is proposed, we say, 'Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position …'"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 29, p. 535]

Not only did the Bolsheviks not shift from that position, they recommended this position to the world revolutionary movement at the Second Congress of the Second International in 1920. In the words of Zinoviev:

> *"Today, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class … the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, pp. 151–2]

*"We must have a state organisation"* he argued, *"and only the party can direct it, because a state political organisation is one that encompasses the best working-class elements of the entire country."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154] Elsewhere that year he argued that *"soviet rule in Russia could not have been maintained for three years — not even three weeks — without the iron dictatorship of the Communist Party. Any class conscious worker must understand that the dictatorship of the working class can be achieved only by the dictatorship of its vanguard, i.e., by the Communist*



*or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism"*, rather than *"by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal"* organised *"solely from the bottom upwards."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 199, p. 202 and p. 206] Building on Bakunin's comments, Kropotkin argued that while *"proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle"* but *"they stopped mid-course"* and gave *"themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils."* Thus the Paris Commune did not *"break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the Communes."* Kropotkin continually stressed that the revolutionaries were isolated from the masses and shut-up in the town hall which lead to disaster as the Commune council became *"immobilised … by red tape"* and lost *"the sensitivity that comes from continued contact with the masses … Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre — the people — they themselves paralysed the popular initiative."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 97, p. 93 and p. 97]

So the Commune applied aspects of anarchism but not all. However, the main thrust of the revolt was federalist in nature — something Marxists tend to forget to mention. Anarchists argued that the Commune should have rejected the Municipal Council and instead organised a workers' council. Anarchist ideas, then, as can be seen from the Paris Commune and the soviets were the ideas **of the future** — and of working class self-liberation and self-organisation. And ones that Marx and his followers paid lip service to.

(We say lip service for Marx's praise for the Commune did not stop him recommending the labour movement to stand candidates in national elections nor did Lenin quoting Marx's

*by the very fact that in the crisis the Paris workers adopted it almost automatically, under the pressure of circumstance, rather than as the result of theory, as being the form most suitable to express working class aspirations."* [**Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 212–3]

Little wonder few Marxists (like Marx himself) directly quote from the Commune's declaration. It would be difficult to attack anarchism (as "petty-bourgeois") while proclaiming the Paris Commune as the first example of *"the dictatorship of the Proletariat."* The decentralised, federalist nature of the Commune cannot be squared with the usual Marxist instance on centralisation and the claim that federalism *"as a principle follows logically from the petty-bourgeois views of anarchism. Marx was a centralist"* and to *"confuse Marx's views ... with Proudhon's federalism is positively monstrous!"* While there may be *"not a trace of federalism"* in Marx's *"observations on the experience of the Commune"*, the Commune **itself** was distinctly federalist in its aspirations. If Marx *"upheld democratic centralism, the republic — one and indivisible"* the same cannot be said of the Communards themselves. [Lenin, *"The State and Revolution"*, **The Lenin Anthology**, p. 348, p. 347 and p. 361] As Paul Avrich noted, the *"influence of Proudhon — unquestionably greater than that of Marx — was reflected in the title of 'Federals' by which the Communards were known."* [**Anarchist Portraits**, p. 232]

This is not to suggest that the Commune was a perfect example of anarchism in action — far from it. As we indicate in section A.5.1, while it wished federalism outside of Paris it was not federalist within its boundaries. If, as Marx put it, *"the Paris Commune took the management of the revolution in its own hands"* then its structure simply was not up to its tasks. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 636] As Bakunin put it, while the Commune was *"a bold and outspoken negation of the State"*, the Communards had set up *"a revolutionary government"* within Paris and so organised *"themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting*



*Party ... All questions of economic reconstruction, military organisation, education, food supply — all these questions, on which the fate of the proletarian revolution depends absolutely, are decided in Russia before all other matters and mostly in the framework of the party organisations ... Control by the party over soviet organs, over the trade unions, is the single durable guarantee that any measures taken will serve not special interests, but the interests of the entire proletariat."* [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, pp. 239–40] In short: *"The chief conclusion of the proletarian revolution is the need for an iron, organised and monolithic Party."* [Zinoviev, quoted by Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution**, p. 144] Lenin dismissed the notion that workers could govern themselves:

> *"In the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers ... What happens is that the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat ... the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transition from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, pp. 20–1]

This, of course, did not stop the Bolsheviks also claiming their regime was far more democratic than any other. In 1920, Zinoviev as head of the Communist International wrote a letter to the **Industrial Workers of the World**, a revolutionary labour union, which stated that the *"Russian Soviet Republic ... is the most highly centralised government that exists. It is also the most democratic government in history. For all the organs of government are in constant touch with the working masses, and constantly sensitive to their will."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 928] Lenin, in his diatribe against Left-Wing Communism made a similar claim and proclaimed the soviets *"**democratic** institutions, the like of which even the best democratic republics of the bourgeois have never known"* while also suggesting that it was *"ridiculously absurd, and stupid"* to make *"a contrast, **in general**, between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders."* He also pointed to *"non-Party workers' and peasants' conferences"* as means by which the party secured its rule and so the Bolsheviks would have to *"support, develop and extend"* non-Party conferences *"to be able to observe the temper of the masses, come closer to them, meet their requirements, promote the best among them to state posts"*. [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 573] Yet **if** the soviets were so democratic, then why were the non-Party Congresses needed at all? Perhaps because *"the dictatorship of the leaders"* is **not** the same as *"dictatorship of the masses"* and so the Soviets were irrelevant due to the party dictatorship?

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the fate of the soviets in 1918, the Bolsheviks disbanded these "non-Party" conferences because *"[d]uring the disturbances"* of late 1920, *"they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies."* Their frequency was decreased and they *"were discontinued soon afterward."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 203] Lenin summarised the reasons for this policy:



Proudhon's support for large-scale industry and workers associations (section 4) as expressed, for example, in his 1863 call for an *"agricultural-industrial federation"* or his 1846 comment that *"to unfold the system of economic contradictions is to lay the foundations of universal association"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 712 and p. 179] As he put it in 1848:

> *"under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is **social** ownership ... We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers\92 associations ... We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 777–8]

Given that Marx described the Commune as *"essentially a working-class government"*, *"the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour"* and *"will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society"*, it is strange that McNally terms Proudhon's and Bakunin's ideas as those of the past. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 634–5 and p. 652] It seems the height of hypocrisy for McNally to attack Proudhon while praising the Paris Commune.

So the awkward fact is that anarchists had been advocating these forms since Proudhon in the 1840s and they were developed by Bakunin in the 1860s. Nothing similar can be found in Marx until the Commune which suggests, as Anarchist K.J. Kenafick stated, *"that the programme [the Commune] set out is ... the system of Federalism, which Bakunin had been advocating for years, and which had first been enunciated by Proudhon. The Proudhonists ... exercised considerable influence in the Commune. This 'political form' was therefore not 'at last' discovered; it had been discovered years ago; and now it was proven to be correct*

that the Commune *"was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms"* and was *"a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time"*. The delegates would *"revocable and bound by the **mandat imperatif** (formal instructions) of his constituents"* [**The Marx-Engels Readers**, p. 632 and p. 633] As well as arguing that *"federalism is the political form of humanity"*, Proudhon also argued that the *"legislative power is not distinguished from the executive power."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 678 and p. 674] As he put it in 1848:

> *"It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power ... Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate [**mandat imp'ratif**]. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 378–9]

This applies to the economic goals of the Commune, with Marx suggesting that it *"wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour"* and *"this is Communism"*. Engels, twenty years later, painted a picture of Proudhon being opposed to association (except for large-scale industry) and stated that *"to combine all these associations in one great union"* was *"the direct opposite of the Proudhon doctrine"* and so *"the Commune was the grave of the Proudhon school of socialism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 635 and p. 626] Yet they must have been aware of



> *"Non-Party conferences are not a fetish. They are valuable if they help us to come closer to the impassive masses — the millions of working people still outside politics. They are harmful if they provide a platform for the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries masquerading as 'non-party' men. They are helping the mutinies, and the whiteguards. The place for Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, avowed or in non-party guise, is not at a non-Party conference but in prison ... We can and must find other methods of testing the mood of the masses and coming closer to them. We suggest that those who want to play the parliamentary, constituent assembly and non-Party conference game, should go abroad ... "* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 362]

In other words, the conferences were used by the proletariat to express its opinions and these were found to be lacking in the eyes of its vanguard. Like soviet democracy, they threatened the rule of the party and as Lenin suggested in 1920 *"[w]hoever brings about even the slightest weakening of the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship) is actually aiding the bourgeoisie against the proletariat."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 570] So any conflict between the vanguard and the proletariat would, by this logic, necessitates the victory of the former over the latter — in the latter's interests, of course. As Trotsky put it in 1921:

> *"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is*

> *necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 209]

So, politically, the Bolsheviks systematically disbanded democratic institutions — whether bourgeois (the Constituent Assembly) or proletarian (the soviets and non-Party Conferences). They proclaimed to the world the necessity of party dictatorship and how mass working class organisations could not exercise the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat. In March 1923 the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in a statement issued to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Party, summarised the lessons gained from the Russian revolution: *"the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat."* Vacillations, of course, are expressed by workers' democracy. Little wonder the statement rejects it: *"The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party."* [*"To the Workers of the USSR"* in G. Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party**, p. 213 and p. 214]

Bolshevik authoritarianism, needless to say, was not limited to the political regime. In the workplace, they replaced workers' economic democracy with *"one-man management"* selected from above, by the state. These *"individual executives"* would have *"dictatorial powers (or 'unlimited' powers)"* as there was *"absolutely **no** contradiction in principle between Soviet (**that is**, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals."* The applied also at the national level



> *"Political unity, as Paris wants it, is the voluntary association of all local initiatives, the spontaneous and free concourse of all individual energies in view of a common goal: the well-being, the freedom and the security of all.*
>
> *"The communal revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, begins a new era of experimental, positive, scientific politics.*
>
> *"It is the end of the old governmental and clerical world, of militarism and bureaucracy, of exploitation, speculation, monopolies and privileges to which the proletariat owe their servitude and the Fatherland its misfortunes and disasters."* [*"Declaration to the French People"*, pp. 789–791, **Property is Theft!**, pp. 789–790]

The links with Proudhon's ideas cannot be clearer. Little wonder, then, that during the Commune anarchist James Guillaume stated that *"the Paris Revolution is federalist … in the sense given it years ago by the great socialist, Proudhon."* It is *"above all the negation of the nation and the State."* [contained in **The Paris Commune of 1871: The View From the Left**, Eugene Schulkind (ed.), p. 191] Bakunin, for his part, rightly argued that its *"general effect was so striking that the Marxists themselves, who saw their ideas upset by the uprising, found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it. They went further, and proclaimed that its programme and purpose where their own, in face of the simplest logic … This was a truly farcical change of costume, but they were bound to make it, for fear of being overtaken and left behind in the wave of feeling which the rising produced throughout the world."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 261]

To see why, we need simply to compare Marx's reporting of the Commune with Proudhon's words. Marx stated, correctly,

*"The only limit to the autonomy of the Commune should be the equal right to autonomy for all communes adhering to the contract, whose association shall insure French unity ... The choice by election or competition of magistrates and communal functionaries of all orders, as well as the permanent right of control and revocation.*

*"The absolute guarantee of individual freedom and freedom of conscience.*

*"The permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas, the free defence of their interests ...*

*"The organisation of urban defence and the National Guard, which elects its chiefs and alone watches over the maintenance of order in the city . ..*

*"Paris wants nothing else as a local guarantee, on condition, of course, of finding in the great central administration — the delegation of federated Communes — the realisation and the practice of the same principles. But as an element of its autonomy, and profiting by its freedom of action, within its borders it reserves to itself the right to operate the administrative and economic reforms called for by the populace as it wills; to create the institutions needed to develop and spread instruction, production, exchange and credit; to universalise power and property in keeping with the needs of the moment, the wishes of those concerned and the facts furnished by experience.*

*"Unity, as it has been imposed on us until today by the Empire, the monarchy or parliamentarism is nothing but unintelligent, arbitrary or onerous centralisation.*



for *"our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare **no effort** in copying it and not to shrink from adopting **dictatorial** methods to hasten the copying of it."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 267, p. 268 and p. 340] He suggested dictatorial power was universal fact of all revolutions:

> *"in the history of revolutionary movements the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes has been shown by the irrefutable experience of history."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

It is churlish, but essential, to note that previous revolutionary movements had transformed one form of class society into another and so we must note, as well as refuting McNally's claim that Leninism is a democratic tradition, Lenin's comments display a distinct confusion over the nature of a **social** revolution (rather than a political one). Yes, **previous** revolutions may have utilised the dictatorship of individuals but these revolutions have been revolutions from one class system to another. The "revolutionary" classes in question were **minority** classes and so elite rule would not in any way undermine their class nature. Not so with a **socialist** revolution which must be based on mass participation (in every aspect of society, economic, political, social) if it is too achieve its goals — namely a classless society. Little wonder, with such theoretical confusion, that the Russian revolution ended in Stalinism — the means used determined the ends. Unsurprisingly enough, the Bolshevik imposition of one-management simply transformed private-capitalism into state-capitalism, that is one form of class society into another (see section H.3.13). After the end of the Civil War Lenin summarised his position: *"Industry is indispensable, democracy is not. Industrial democracy breeds some utterly false ideas."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 27]

This system of state-appointed "one-man" managers armed with *"dictatorial"* powers was not considered as opposed to socialism, as McNally implies. Lenin stressed in 1919 that the *"organisation of the communist activity of the proletariat and the entire policy of the Communists have new acquired a final, lasting form."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30, p. 144] Moreover, after the end of the civil war he combated the idea of workers' control as (rightly!) a syndicalist and anarchist deviation within the party at odds with Marxism:

> *"Syndicalism hands over to the mass of non-Party workers ... the management of their industries ... thereby making the Party superfluous... Why have a Party, if industrial management is to be appointed ... by trade unions nine-tenths of whose members are non-Party workers?"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 50]

He went so far as to admit that he thought *"the syndicalist deviation"* (i.e., giving the proletariat economic democracy, the power to elect their own workplace managers and economic conferences) *"leads to the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86] This was a theme to which he repeatedly returned:

> *"Does every worker know how to run the state? ... this is not true . .. If we say that it is not the Party but the trade unions that put up the candidates and administrate, it may sound very democratic ... It will be fatal for the dictatorship of the proletariat ... To govern you need an army of steeled revolutionary Communists. We have it, and it is called the Party. All this syndicalist nonsense about mandatory nominations of producers must go into the wastepaper basket. To proceed on those lines would mean thrusting the Party aside and making the dictatorship of*



## 12. Why is Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism contradictory?

Another ironic aspect of McNally's pamphlet is its demonisation of anarchism combined with praise for the Paris Commune and the Russian Soviets. This is because key aspects of both revolutionary forms were predicted by Proudhon and Bakunin. For example, McNally's and Marx's praise for revocable mandates in the Commune was advocated by Proudhon in 1840s (see section 4). Bakunin also advocated this in the late 1860s along with a federation of delegates from workplaces which showed a marked similarity with the Russian soviets (see section 5).

Indeed, the Paris Commune (in both its economic and political aspects) showed a clear inspiration from Proudhon's works. In the words of George Woodcock, there are *"demands in the Commune's Manifesto to the French People of the 19th April, 1871, that might have been written by Proudhon himself."* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, p. 276] K. Steven Vincent also points out that the declaration *"is strongly federalist in tone, and it has a marked proudhonian flavour."* [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 232] Moreover, the desire to replace wage labour with associated labour by the creation of co-operatives expressed during the Commune clearly showed the influence of Proudhon. Marx mentions a *"rough sketch of national organisation which the Commune had no time to develop"* but does not quote from it. [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 633] This is perhaps unsurprising as the Commune's declaration clearly shows its anarchist roots and tendencies:

> *"The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all localities in France and assuring to each one its full rights, and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and abilities as man, citizen and producer.*

*ary class"* and this *"portion of the bourgeois ideologists"* have *"raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."* In addition, the Communists are *"the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties"* and *"they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement"*. [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 481 and p. 484] This, needless to say, places *"bourgeois ideologists"* and party leaders (like Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky) in a privileged position within the party, labour movement and society as a whole. Had not Marx and Engels argued in **The Holy Family** that the *"question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment **considers** as its aim. The question is **what the proletariat is**, and what, consequent on that **being**, it will be compelled to do."* [quoted by Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 280] As Murray Bookchin argued:

> *"These lines and others like them in Marx's writings were to provide the rationale for asserting the authority of Marxist parties and their armed detachments over and even against the proletariat. Claiming a deeper and more informed comprehension of the situation than 'even the whole of the proletariat at the given moment,' Marxist parties went on to dissolve such revolutionary forms of proletarian organisation as factory committees and ultimately to totally regiment the proletariat according to lines established by the party leadership."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 289]

Unlike Lenin and Trotsky, Marx and Engels rarely drew the obvious conclusions from their arguments (although their contempt for working class socialist thinkers — like Proudhon — was legendary) but the elitism was there. It is to Bakunin's merit that he recognised the danger long before the likes of Lenin and Trotsky (see section 15) made it explicit.



> *the proletariat in Russia impossible."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 61–2]

In short, the economic relations favoured by the Bolsheviks were identical to that of capitalism except that the boss was replaced by a state-appointed bureaucrat, private-capitalism by state-capitalism (an awkward fact McNally cannot bring himself to mention, never mind admit to). *"In the shops where one-man management (Lenin's own preference) replaced collegial management,"* notes Diane Koenker, *"workers faced the same kinds of authoritarian management they thought existed only under capitalism."* The *"overall management of industry in 1921 was no more democratic than it had been in 1914; indeed, it was much more highly centralised, hierarchical, and bureaucratic."* [**Labour Relations in Socialist Russia**, p. 177 and p. 190]

Needless to say, the Bolsheviks also combated independent trade unions with the same methods. As one historian summarises, *"Soviets and trade unions with non-Bolshevik majorities, and there was a definite revival in the electoral fortunes of the opposition in the spring of 1918, were dispersed"* and by the *"beginning of 1920 non-Bolshevik controlled trade union organisations no longer existed at the national level"*. [Jonathan Aves, *"The Demise of Non-Bolshevik Trade Unionism in Moscow: 1920–21"*, pp. 101–33, **Revolutionary Russia**, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 101–2 and p. 103] By the end of 1920, the Bolsheviks had broken the both Menshevik-influenced printers and anarchist-influenced bakers union, with the offices of the former *"occupied by soldiers. Eleven members of the [union] board where arrested along with twenty-nine members of the Council of Representatives, factory committees and ordinary unionists . .. five were also members of the Moscow soviet. After being held without trial most were sentenced to terms between six months and two years in prison. The disbandment was approved by the plenum of the Moscow trade union council"* which *"also voted to disband the bakers' section.*

*The leading anarchist members of the section ... and ... an SR Maximalist ... and two other members ... were barred from office and arrested to stand trial."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, pp. 68–9] In May 1921, to present another example, the All-Russian Congress of the Metalworkers' Union met and the *"Central Committee of the [Communist] Party handed down to the Party faction in the union a list of recommended candidates for **union** (sic!) leadership. The metalworkers' delegates voted down the list, as did the Party faction in the union ... The Central Committee of the Party disregarded every one of the votes and appointed a Metalworkers' Committee of its own. So much for 'elected and revocable delegates.' Elected by the union rank and file and revocable by the Party leadership!"* [M. Brinton, *"The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control"*, **For Workers' Power,** , p. 375] The same year also saw the Bolshevik disperse provincial trade unions conferences in Vologda and Vitebsk *"because they had anti-communist majorities."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176]

A similar onslaught by the party against democracy also occurred in the armed forces. Trotsky simply abolished the soldier's committees and elected officers in early 1918, stating that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* This destruction of military democracy was compared to the concurrent push by the Bolsheviks to introduce "one-man" management in production, as workplace democracy *"is not the last word in the economic constructive work of the proletariat"*. The *"next step must consist in self-limitation of the collegiate principle"* and its replacement by *"[p]olitical collegiate control by the Soviets"*, i.e. the state control Lenin had repeatedly advocated in 1917. Moreover *"for executive functions we must appoint technical specialists."* He ironically called this the working class *"throwing off the one-man management principles of its masters of yesterday"* and failed to recognise it was imposing the one-man management principles of new masters. As with Lenin, the destruction of workers' power at the point of



itself on the party as well — more so as they are bourgeois intellectuals in the first place.

While anarchists are aware of the need for groups of like minded individuals to influence the class struggle and spread anarchist ideas, we reject the idea that such ideas have to be "injected" into the working class from outside. Rather, as we argued in section J.3, anarchist ideas are developed within the class struggle by working people themselves. Anarchist groups exist because we are aware that there is an uneven development of ideas within our class and to aid the spreading of libertarian ideas it is useful for those with those ideas to work together. However, being aware that our ideas are the product of working class life and struggle we are also aware that we have to learn from that struggle. It is because of this that anarchists stress self-management of working class struggle and organisation from below (anarchists are, to use Bakunin's words, *"convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237]). Only when this happens can new ways of life be created and truly develop freely. It also explains anarchist opposition to political groups seizing power — that will only result in old dogmas crushing the initiative of people in struggle and the new forms of life they create. That is why anarchists stress the importance of revolutionaries using *"natural influence"* (i.e. arguing their ideas in popular organisations and convincing by reason) — doing so allows new developments and ideas to be expressed and enriched by existing ones and vice versa.

One last point. It could be argued that similar comments to Lenin's arguments can be found in Marx and Engels and so Marxism **as such** rather than just Leninism does not believe in proletarian self-emancipation. After all, had not **The Manifesto of the Communist Party** proclaimed that *"a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolution-*

rather than the semi-state promised in such works as **The State and Revolution** (a work whose promises, as we note in section H.1.7, were forsaken completely within six months of the Bolshevik seizure of power). This was required to ensure that the party could *"combat"* spontaneous movements in the working class which questioned the privileged position of the party — both ideologically (in terms of its advanced ideas) and politically (its holding of power). This privileged position for the party engenders a perspective which can (and did) justify party dictatorship **over** the proletariat. Given Lenin's position that the working class cannot formulate its own "ideology" by its own efforts, of its incapacity to move beyond *"trade union consciousness"* independently of the party, the clear implication is that the party could in no way be bound by the predominant views of the working class as these are, **by definition** non-socialist, bourgeois even. As the party embodies *"socialist consciousness"* (and this arises outside the working class and its struggles) then opposition of the working class to the party signifies a failure of the class to resist alien influences, a failure that the party must fight to ensure that this failure does not spread to the revolution itself — the proletariat, in short, must be repressed in its own interests by the "proletarian" dictatorship.

Therefore McNally's comments that Leninism is a valid expression of Marx's idea of proletarian self-emancipation is false. In reality, Lenin rejected the idea that working class people can emancipate themselves and, therefore, any claim that this tradition stands for proletarian self-emancipation is false. Rather Leninism, for all its rhetoric, has no vision of working class self-activity leading to self-liberation — it denies it can happen and that is why it stresses the role of the party and its need to take centralised power into its own hands. Of course, it never entered Lenin's mind that if bourgeois ideology imposes itself onto the working class it also imposes



production was of little concern for what mattered was that *"with power in our hands, we, the representatives of the working class"* would introduce socialism. [*"Work, Discipline, and Order to save the Socialist Soviet Republic"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. 1, p. 47, p. 37 and p. 38]

Thus the Bolshevik tradition clearly placed the power of the party above the ability of working people to elect their own representatives, managers and officer. And McNally claims that his tradition aims at *"workers' power"* and a *"direct and active democracy"*!

Of course McNally tries to blame the destruction of democracy in Russia on the Civil War: *"By 1920, the very face of Russia had changed. Workers' democracy, in the meaningful sense of the term, had disappeared — as had most of the working class through death or retreat to the countryside."* This meant the rise of Stalinism for *"[a]s workers' democracy disintegrated, a new bureaucracy rose to power."* However, this is hard to accept, given that the undermining of democracy began **before** the civil war started and continued **after** it had finished (for example, the onslaught on soviet democracy and attempts to impose one-man management in the workplace and armed forces predate the start of the civil war at the end of May 1918). Moreover, as we indicate in section 13, the Bolshevik state was marked by bureaucracy from the start.

Both these developments did not occur by accident, they were due to the nature of Bolshevik ideology and the kind of centralised structures it favoured. Trotsky is typical. In April 1918 he argued that once elected the government was to be given total power to make decisions and appoint people as required as it is *"better able to judge in the matter than"* the masses. The sovereign people were expected to simply obey their public servants until such time as they *"dismiss that government and appoint another."* Trotsky raised the question of whether it was possible for the government to act *"against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"* And answered no! Yet it is

obvious that Trotsky's claim that *"there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members"* is just nonsense. [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 113] The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying their membership. Needless to say, the subsequent history Lenin's government showed that there can be *"antagonism"* between rulers and ruled and that appointments are always a key way to further elite interests. Needless to say, the notion that the party leaders are *"better able to judge in the matter than"* has its roots in Lenin's vanguardism, as discussed in section 11.

McNally's claim that the working class had been destroyed by the civil war is equally flawed and cannot explain the fact that attempts by working class people to express themselves were systematically undermined by the Bolshevik party. Nor does the notion of a *"disappeared"* working class make much sense when *"in the early part of 1921, a spontaneous strike movement ... took place in the industrial centres of European Russia"* and strikes involving around 43 000 per year took place between 1921 and 1925. [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 188 and p. 88] As we show in section H.6.3, while the number of workers **did** decrease from 1918 to 1921, there remained substantial numbers who were able to and did take collective action before, during and after the civil war. So rather than there being objective reasons for the lack of democracy under Lenin we can suggest **political** reasons — the awareness that, given the choice, the Russian working class would have preferred someone else in power. Indeed, McNally's argument can be traced back to Lenin who formulated it *"to justify a political clampdown"* in the face of rising working class protest rather than its lack: *"As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin ... began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated ... workers had become 'declassed.'"* However, there *"is little evidence to suggest that the*



confuses the rule of the party with the rule of the class: *"We cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 307 and p. 306]

Thus *"subordination"* is **not** to the working class itself (i.e. direct democracy or self-management). Rather it is the *"subordination"* of the majority to the minority, of the working class to "its" representatives. Thus we have a vision of a "socialist" society in which the majority have not revolutionised themselves and are subordinated to "their" party. Such a subordination, however, ensures that a socialist consciousness **cannot** develop as only the **process** of self-management generates the abilities required for self-management (*"Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 59]). Lenin saw the revolution as the means by which the mass of the people will recognise that the vanguard party represents their interests and so vote it into power. However, as *"there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement"* any clash between the party and masses simply mean that the latter are wrong and *"the armed vanguard"* needs *"to **combat spontaneity**"* — literally, as we showed in section H.6.3. As Lenin admitted in 1920:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

As we indicate in section H.3.8, this perspective meant that Leninist theorists ended up arguing for a state separate from the working class (a *"state in the proper sense of the word"*)

As we discuss in section H.5, this is a deeply anti-socialist position which, due to its privileging of the party, creates the theoretical justification for the anti-democratic actions of the Bolsheviks we sketched in section 8. This perspective states that the party has a better understanding of what the interests of the people are than the people themselves. If they reject the party then it means that they simply do not understand their own class interests and so they have become *"declassed"*, to use Lenin's term. The party, due to it being the repository of what socialism is, then has the right — the duty — to ignore the masses for to do otherwise *"means strengthening bourgeois ideology"*. That this is self-serving circular logic is an understatement but it is self-serving circular logic which, in revolutionary Russia, destroyed socialism in favour of state-capitalism and party dictatorship.

For this notion of working class passivity is not confined to the "early" Lenin of **What is to Be Done?** infamy (not that there is any evidence that Lenin later repudiated the ideas expressed there — see section H.5.4). It can be found in his apparently more "libertarian" work **The State and Revolution** which argues that *"we do not indulge in 'dreams' of dispensing **at once** . .. with all subordination; these anarchist dreams ... are totally alien to Marxism ... we want the socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and 'managers'"* Nowhere is the notion that working class people, during the process of mass struggle, direct action and revolution, **revolutionises themselves** (see sections A.2.7 and J.7.2, for example). Instead, we find a vision of people as they are under capitalism (*"human nature as it is now"*) and no vision of self-emancipation of the working class and the resulting changes that implies for those who are transforming society by their own action. Perhaps it will be argued that Lenin sees *"subordination"* as being *"to the armed vanguard of all the exploited ... i.e., to the proletariat"* and so there is no contradiction. However, this is not the case as he



*demands that workers made at the end of 1920 ... represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18, p. 90 and p. 91]

Also, we must point out a certain duplicity in McNally's comments that Stalinism can be explained purely by the terrible civil war Russia experienced. After all, Lenin himself before seizing power mocked those who opposed revolution because *"the situation is exceptionally complicated"* and argued that *"the development of the revolution itself **always** creates an **exceptionally** complicated situation"* and that it was an *"incredibly complicated and painful process."* In fact, it was *"the most intense, furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has taken place without civil war. And only a 'man in a muffler' can think that civil war is conceivable without an 'exceptionally complicated situation.'" "If the situation were not exceptionally complicated there would be no revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, pp. 118–9] Thus McNally's assertion that for *"the germ cell of socialism to grow [in Russia], it required several essential ingredients. One was peace. The new workers' state could not establish a thriving democracy so long as it was forced to raise an army and wage war to defend itself"* is simply incredible. It also raises an important question with regards Leninist ideas: if Bolshevik politics and its organisational form cannot survive during a period of disruption and complicated circumstances (i.e., a revolution) then it is clearly a theory to be avoided at all costs.

The leading Bolsheviks all argued that the specific problems their latter day followers blame for their authoritarianism were natural results of any revolution and, consequently, unavoidable. In addition, there is a slight irony in this standard but flawed excuse for Bolshevik authoritarianism as Leninists like to suggest that anarchists do not recognise the possibility of counter-revolution and so reject the idea of defending a revolution. As we discuss in section H.2.1, this is simply untrue — the anarchist rejection of "the dictatorship of the

proletariat" has nothing to do with defending revolution. As Bakunin stressed, *"the sole means of opposing the reactionary forces of the state"* was the *"organising of the revolutionary force of the people."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 156] So given that Leninists mock anarchists for their supposed naivety over the dangers of counter-revolution, it seems ironic that McNally uses what he is supposed to consider an inevitable aspect of revolution to explain (excuse would be the better word) the degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution. Long after 1917, Lenin repeated his earlier comments by stating *"history teaches us that no big question has ever been settled and no revolution accomplished without a series of wars."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 31, p. 494] He was adamant that *"were it not for this iron rule of the workers, of this workers' vanguard, we should not have been able to hold out for two months, let alone two years"*. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30, p. 498]

Simply put, if counter-revolution is considered inevitable by your ideology then explaining Bolshevik authoritarianism by it is unconvincing — particularly if that authoritarianism started **before** the start of the civil war at the end of May 1918 and continued **after** its end. So *"the effective conclusion of the Civil War at the beginning of 1920 was followed by a more determined and comprehensive attempt to apply these so-called War Communism policies rather than their relaxation"* and so the *"apogee of the War Communism economy occurred after the Civil War was effectively over."* With the fighting over Lenin *"forcefully raised the introduction of one-man management . .. Often commissars fresh from the Red Army were drafted into management positions in the factories."* By the autumn of 1920, one-man management was in 82% of surveyed workplaces. This *"intensification of War Communism labour policies would not have been a significant development if they had continued to be applied in the same haphazard manner as in 1919, but in early 1920 the Communist Party leadership was no longer distracted by the Civil War from concentrating its thoughts and efforts on the formula-*



*and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals ... the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia."* This meant that *"Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness ... could only be brought to them [the workers] from without."* Speaking on behalf of workers, he asked that the *"intellectuals must talk to us, and tell us more about what we do not know and what we can never learn from our factory and 'economic' experience, that is, you must give us political knowledge."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 74–5 and p. 108]

Thus, rather than believe in working class self-emancipation, Lenin thought the opposite. Without the radical bourgeois to provide the working class with "socialist" ideas, a socialist movement, let along society, was impossible. Hardly what you would consider self-emancipation. As Lenin put it:

> *"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement,* ***the only choice is****: either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course ... Hence, to belittle socialist ideology* ***in any way,*** *to* ***deviate from it in the slightest degree*** *means strengthening bourgeois ideology. There is a lot of talk about spontaneity, but the* ***spontaneous*** *development of the labour movement leads to its becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology ... Hence our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to* ***combat spontaneity,*** *to* ***divert*** *the labour movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving to go under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 82–3]

Bakunin argued that workers' can only free themselves by a *"single path, that of* ***emancipation through practical action****"* namely *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses"* by *"****trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds****"*. The *"collective experience"* workers gain in the *"collective struggle of the workers against the bosses"* will ensure they *"will necessarily come to realise that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the henchmen of reaction and [their] own dearest human concerns. Having reached this point, [the worker] will recognise [themselves] to be a revolutionary socialist."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 92 and p. 103]

In contrast Marx placed his hopes for working class self-emancipation on a political party which would conquer "political power." As history soon proved, Marx was mistaken on two levels. First, as Bakunin predicted, political action by socialist parties resulted in the political system changing the party rather than vice versa, that it *"inexorably enmeshes its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodations with governments and the various bourgeois political parties — that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 180] Second, "political power" can only be seized by a minority (i.e. the party, **not** the class it claims to represent) and if the few have the power, the rest are no longer free (i.e. they no longer govern themselves). That the many elect the few who issue them orders does **not** signify emancipation!

However, this is beside the point. McNally proudly places his ideas in the Leninist tradition. It is thus somewhat ironic that McNally claims that Marxism is based on self-emancipation of the working class while claiming Leninism as a form of Marxism as Lenin explicitly stated the opposite, namely that the working class **could not** liberate itself by its own actions. In his 1902 book **What is to be Done?** Lenin argued that *"the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness … The theory of socialism [i.e. Marxism] … grew out of the philosophic, historical*



*tion and implementation of its labour policies."* While the *" experience of the Civil War was one factor predisposing communists towards applying military methods"* to the economy in early 1920, *"ideological considerations were also important."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 2, p. 17, p. 15, p. 30, p. 17 and p. 11] Unsurprisingly, then, the defeat of Wrangel in November 1920 saw no changes in Bolshevik policy nor the Bolshevik use of coercion against workers and peasants calling and protesting for the re-introduction of freedom and democracy.

So there is a continuity between Bolshevik policies before, during and after the civil war which McNally does not mention. Take one-man management, for example. This was advocated by Lenin **before** the civil war started and when he looked back at this time from April 1920, he reiterated his position (*"Dictatorial powers and one-man management are not contradictory to socialist democracy"*) while also stressing that this was not forced upon the Bolsheviks by civil war. It was time to build socialism and the *"whole attention of the Communist Party and the Soviet government is centred on peaceful economic development, on problems of the dictatorship and of one-man management". "When we tackled them for the first time in 1918, there was no civil war and no experience to speak of"* and so it was *"not only experience"* of civil war, argued Lenin *"but something more profound … that has induced us now, as it did two years ago, to concentrate all our attention on labour discipline."* Lenin stressed that we *"need more discipline, more individual authority and more dictatorship"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 30, p. 503, p. 504 and p. 514]

The same can be said of the arguments for party dictatorship, which were raised at the Second Congress of the Communist International and aimed to influence the revolutionary movement across the globe. Trotsky wrote his infamous **Terrorism and Communism** as part of this debate between socialists and, to quote syndicalist-turned-Bolshevik Alfred Rosmer, it *"dealt with the theoretical and practical problems posed by*

*the revolution, the civil war and the building of the new society"* and it *"formed a sort of introduction and commentary on the* ***Theses*** *prepared for the Congress."* As we show in section 15, this work acknowledged that party dictatorship was a necessity of a successful revolution, the need for one-man management as well as the militarisation of labour (needless to say, we also show how — McNally's claims notwithstanding — Trotsky did not reject these positions in the 1920s and 1930s). In addition, the congress took place in July 1920 when the civil war appeared to have been won, with Rosmer recalling that when he had arrived in *"June 1920"* in Russia *"the civil war was virtually at an end"* for *"[a]fter the triple blow struck at the interventionist forces, after the destruction of Kolchak, Yudenich and Denikin, the counter-revolution was defeated."* [**Lenin's Moscow**, p. 58, p. 65, p. 128 and p. 101]

To stress the point, Lenin, Zinoviev and Trotsky were all clearly arguing for party power, **not** workers' power, and that party dictatorship is inevitable in **every** revolution. This position was **not** put in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution but rather were expressed in universal terms and unsurprisingly, then *"[f]rom the first days of Bolshevik power there was only a weak correlation between the extent of 'peace' and the mildness or severity of Bolshevik rule, between the intensity of the war and the intensity of proto-war communist measures ... Considered in ideological terms there was little to distinguish the 'breathing space' (April-May 1918) from the war communism that followed."* Unsurprisingly, then, *"the breathing space of the first months of 1920 after the victories over Kolchak and Denikin ... saw their intensification and the militarisation of labour"* and, in fact, *"no serious attempt was made to review the aptness of war communist policies."* Ideology *"constantly impinged on the choices made at various points of the civil war ... Bolshevik authoritarianism cannot be ascribed simply to the Tsarist legacy or to adverse circumstances."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 24, p. 27 and p. 30]



> *sition which will be the masterpiece of creation, and you alone can accomplish it."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, p. 64]

As we indicated in section 2, Proudhon stressed that the working class had to free itself by its own means and its own organisations for, as indicated in section 10, the state was a capitalist institution which could not be captured by the masses. So while Proudhon placed his hopes in reformist tendencies (such as workers' co-operatives and mutual banks) he clearly believed in working class self-emancipation, even stating in 1848 that *"the proletariat must emancipate itself"* for *"the revolutionary power ... is not in the National Assembly: it is in you. The people alone, acting upon themselves without intermediary, can achieve the economic Revolution begun in February. The people alone can save civilisation and advance humanity!"* [**Property is Theft!**, 306 and p. 366]

Marx's use of the famous expression — *"the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself"* — dates from 1865, 17 years after Proudhon's comment that *"the proletariat must emancipate itself."* Moreover, as Libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick pointed out, Marx was not even the first person to use the expression *"the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself"* as Flora Tristan used it in 1843. [**Marx and Keynes**, p. 333] Thus a case could be made that Marx was, in fact, the **third** *"major socialist thinker to make the principle of self-emancipation — the principle that socialism could only be brought into being by the self-mobilisation and self-organisation of the working class — a fundamental aspect of the socialist project."*

Similarly, Bakunin continually quoted Marx's (and so Tristan's) words from the Preamble to the General Rules of the First International: *"That the emancipation of the workers must be accomplished by the workers themselves."* Far more than Marx,

As Bakunin predicted, using bourgeois institutions will corrupt "revolutionary" and radical parties and tie the working class to the current system. Lenin's analysis of anarchist influence as being the off-spring of opportunist tendencies in mainstream parties may be right, but if so it is a natural development as the tactics supported by Marxists from Marx onwards inevitably lead to opportunist tendencies developing. What Lenin could not comprehend was that opportunism was the symptom and electioneering was the disease — using the same means (electioneering) with different parties/individuals ("Communists" instead of "Social Democrats") and thinking that opportunism would not return was idealistic nonsense.

Sadly for his readers, McNally did not discuss any of this and preferred to present an inaccurate account of the syndicalist position on political struggles. Perhaps this is understandable, for an accurate account would mention the debates of the First International and have to draw the obvious conclusion: Bakunin — and the syndicalists — were right.

## 11. Why is McNally's claim that Leninism supports working class self-emancipation wrong?

McNally claims that Marx *"was the first major socialist thinker to make the principle of self-emancipation — the principle that socialism could only be brought into being by the self-mobilisation and self-organisation of the working class — a fundamental aspect of the socialist project."* This is not entirely true as *"Proudhon insisted that the revolution could only come from below, through the action of the workers themselves."* [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 157] In his words:

> *"Workers, labourers, men of the people, whoever you may be, the initiative of reform is yours. It is you who will accomplish that synthesis of social compo-*



As we discuss in section H.6.2, Bolshevik ideology and the decisions it inspired helped make the difficult circumstances the revolution was facing worse. Their centralised vision of socialism could not help but produce economic mismanagement as well as a new class of bureaucrats. The inherent tendencies of Bolshevism were revealed by the civil war, a war which only accelerated the development of what was implicit (and, often, not so implicit) in Bolshevik ideology and its vision of socialism, the state and the role of the party. Therefore, in practice, Leninism has proven to be profoundly anti-democratic. In terms of McNally's argument, to not discuss in detail Bolshevik authoritarianism and blame it on the impact of the civil war is dishonest, particularly given the awkward fact that their anti-democratic activities started **before** its beginning at the end of May 1918.

Bolshevik authoritarianism had two main causes.

First, the obvious change in its social position — it became part of the state and, as a result, viewed society — and the working class — from above, as rulers. So as Marxism is *"centralist"* and aims for *"conscious, democratic, proletarian centralism"* it will inevitably lead to a new class system being created. [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 348] This is not necessarily because Leninists seek dictatorship for themselves (although they do aim for party power — see section H.3.11) but rather it is because of the nature of the state machine. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

> *"Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines. Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of*

*a nationalised economy, a 'workers' republic' might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin's more favourite terms) of unparalleled oppression …*

*"Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a 'proletariat organised as a ruling class.' If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally co-ordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty … [I]f the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish — and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established — well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society."* [*"The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems"*, pp. 14–17, **Black Flag**, no. 226, pp. 16–7]

As we discuss in section H.3.9, anarchists argue that the state cannot be considered as simply an instrument of economic class but, rather, has interests of its own. As such, concentrations of political power will produce a new class system and become independent of the masses of people and even of economically dominant classes like capitalists. This is why anarchists stress direct democracy (self-management) in



the net result of the Marxists use of electioneering ("political action") was the de-radicalising of their movement and theory and its becoming yet another barrier to working class self-liberation. Rather than syndicalism not giving *"real direction to attempts by workers to change society"* it was Marxism in the shape of Social Democracy which did that. Indeed, at the turn of twentieth century more and more radicals turned to Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism as the means of by-passing the dead-weight of Social Democracy (i.e. orthodox Marxism), its reformism, its opportunism and its bureaucracy.

This was recognised by Lenin, if in his own way. Anarchism, he suggested, *"was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 32] His claim that anarchist and syndicalist support in the working class is the result of the opportunist nature of the Social Democratic Parties has an element of truth. Obviously militants sick to death of the reformist, corrupt and bureaucratic "working class" parties will seek a revolutionary alternative and find libertarian socialism. However, Lenin seeks to explain the symptoms (opportunism) and not the disease itself (Parliamentarianism) . Nowhere does he see the rise of "opportunist" tendencies in the Marxist parties as the result of the tactics and organisational struggles they used. Indeed, Lenin desired the new Communist Parties to practice electioneering ("political action"). Anarchists rather point out that given the nature of the means, the ends surely follow. Working in a bourgeois environment (Parliament) will result in bourgeoisifying and de-radicalising the party. Working in a centralised environment will empower the leaders of the party over the members and lead to bureaucratic tendencies. In short, the means urged inevitably produced a *"from above"* mentality and the descent into reformism — a descent Lenin only noticed with the outbreak of war in 1914 and the siding of German Social Democracy with its state in the imperialist slaughter.

*again at the precise spot where its predecessor ended."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 49, p. 238]

McNally, like most Leninists, is keen to distance Marx and Engels from Social Democracy and so does not note their repeated comments — both before **and** after the Paris Commune that socialism **could** come about peacefully by utilising elections (see section H.3.10). Engels in 1847, for example, argued that the *"first, fundamental condition for the introduction of community of property is the political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution"* and so the revolution's had to *"inaugurate a **democratic constitution** and thereby ... the political rule of the proletariat"* as in *"America, where a democratic constitution has been introduced"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 102, p. 350 and p. 356] In contrast, Proudhon had concluded the year before that the state could **not** be captured and reformed and socialism could only be created by proletarian self-organisation:

> *"Thus power [i.e. the state] ... finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat ... The problem before the labouring classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly — that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them. Every proposition of reform which does not satisfy this condition is simply one scourge more ... which threatens the proletariat."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 226]

The syndicalists, like Bakunin, argued the same — although, unlike the Frenchman, saw the trade union movement as the means of social transformation. It is almost redundant to note that history has proven the validity of anarchist anti-electioneering ideas. For example, as we argue in section J.2.6,



free federations of free associations. It is the only way to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people and is not turned into an alien power above them. Thus Marxist support for statist forms of organisation will inevitably undermine the liberatory nature of the revolution. As we note in section 14, that is anarchists have long argued for the need for social transformation *"from below"*.

Second, as indicated in section H.5, their idea of the party being the "vanguard" of the working class, combined with its desire for centralised power, makes the dictatorship of the party **over** the proletariat inevitable. Lenin's belief that working class people could not liberate themselves explains his continual emphasis on **representative** democracy and centralism as well as the Bolshevik's easy slide into both practicing and advocating party dictatorship — simply put, the party must have power **over** the working class as that class could not be trusted to make the right decisions (i.e. know what its "real" interests were). At best they would be allowed to vote for the government, but even this right could be removed if they voted for the wrong people as shown above. For Leninists, revolutionary consciousness is not generated by working class self-activity in the class struggle, but is embodied in the party (*"Since there can there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement **the only choice is**: either bourgeois or socialist ideology"* [Lenin, **The Essential Works of Lenin**, 82]). The conclusions of this position are obvious: the important issues facing the working class are to be determined not by the workers ourselves, but by the leadership of the party, who are the (self-appointed) *"vanguard of the proletariat"*.

The nature of the relationship between the party and the working class is clear. We remain incapable of achieving revolutionary consciousness and have to be led by the vanguard — using state coercion, if need be. As Lenin argued:

> *"it must he made clear that democracy under the Soviet system does not contradict dictatorship … Unity of will must not be a catchword, a symbol. We demand it in practice. This is how unity of will was expressed during the [civil] war — anybody who placed his own interests (or the interests of his village or group) above the common interests, was branded as a self-seeker and was shot; this was justified by the moral consciousness of the working class that it must achieve victory. We spoke about these shootings openly; we said that we made no secret of coercion, because we realised that we could not emerge from the old society without resorting to compulsion as far as the backward section of the proletariat was concerned …"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30 pp. 509–10]

This raises numerous questions, the most obvious is **who** (which individual or group) decides which is and is not in the common interests? Another is, what is to stop this pivileged person or group placing **their** interests above *"the common interests"* and repressing those who object in the name of those very same *"common interests"*? Moreover, as **everyone** is — by definition! — *"backward"* in comparison to the vanguard in its own eyes, Lenin's position ensures that *"compulsion"* can be used by the party against **all** who it considers an danger to its power — including the proletariat it claims to be the ruling class. Hence the destruction of soviet, workplace, union and armed forces democracy and, of course, the creation of bodies of armed men (such as the political police, the Cheka) separate from the people (i.e., a state in the normal sense of the word — see section H.3.8).

In short, the notion that dictatorship does not contradict democracy is simply nonsense — self-serving nonsense, of course — and which could have no other impact than a



Rocker's last point is important, given that McNally seeks to appropriate the idea of *"from below"* for Marxism. He is well aware of the results of socialist electioneering, reporting how by the start of the 20th century *"most European socialists… came to the view that socialism would be achieved gradually, through the slow transformation of capitalism into a kind of welfare capitalism under which workers would prosper"* and *"[g]one was Marx's notion that socialism could only come into being through a revolutionary transformation of society from below. In its place developed the view that capitalism would slowly grow over into socialism."* However, he significantly fails to note that these parties considered themselves as Marxist and had been following the strategy Marx and Engels had advocated.

It would have been informative to his readership if McNally had found time to discuss this awkward fact. One of the key differences between Marx and Bakunin in the First International was over *"political action"*: the forming of political parties and standing in elections. Bakunin argued that *"it is usually enough for these men of the people to enter government for them to become members of the bourgeoisie in their turn, sometimes scorning the people from whom they came more than do the natural-born members of the bourgeoisie."* The need was *"**the organisation of the might of the workers**, the unification of the proletariat of the entire world"* by *"eliminat[ing] from its program all bourgeois political schemes"* in favour of *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trades unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds**."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 51, p. 93, p. 99 and p. 103] Marx and Engels, in contrast, favoured *"political action"* and completely failed, unlike Bakunin, to recognise the dangers of reformism in the tactic. Indeed, in 1891 Engels proudly announced that the Brussels Congress of the Second International *"proved a brilliant success for us … And, best of all, the anarchists have been shown the door, just as they were at the Hague Congress. The new, incomparably larger and avowedly Marxist International is beginning*

*themselves"* in order to *"counterbalance the military and other forces"* which *"held them under the yoke."* The trade unions distributed arms and in each syndicate *"a group for defence was formed"* which entered *"into relation with like groups in the same district, and with distant centres"* by means of an *"organisation of defence, with a Trade Union and Federal basis."* These *"Syndicalist battalions were not a force external to the people. They were the people themselves"* who *"had the common-sense to arm themselves in order to protect their conquered liberty."* [Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, **How We Shall Bring About the Revolution**, pp. 79–83, p. 94, pp. 128–9, p. 69 and pp. 155–7]

As we argued in section J.2.10, anarchist support for direct action and opposition to taking part in elections does not mean we are "apolitical" or reject political action. Anarchists have always been clear — we reject "political action" which is bourgeois in nature in favour of "political action" based on the organisations, action and solidarity of working class people. This is because electioneering corrupts those who take part, watering down their radical ideas and making them part of the system they were meant to change. As Rocker summarised:

> *"Participation in the politics of the bourgeois States has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but thanks to this method, Socialism has almost been completely crushed and condemned to insignificance … Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist Labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity, and, worse of all, the impulse to self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54]



negative one of socialism. What would stop, say, a Stalin proclaiming that his regime was simply using coercion against the backward sections of the masses in the common interest and that those who objected were placing their own interests above it? It is the crudest form of idealism to hope that the socialist principles of the ruling elite will overcome the pressures of their position in the social hierarchy and, unsurprisingly, it did not happen.

*"If we perish"*, Lenin said privately to Trotsky in 1921, *"it is all the more important to preserve our ideological line and give a lesson to our continuators. This should never be forgotten, even in hopeless circumstances"*. [quoted by Brinton, *"The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control"*, **For Workers' Power**, p. 372] Hence the comments made by Zinoviev at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Trotsky in **Terrorism and Communism** and Lenin in innumerable speeches and articles. Sadly for McNally's case, the lesson that the Bolsheviks wanted to give to the world revolutionary movement was not the importance of freedom and democracy but rather that party dictatorship and one-man management were necessary to achieve a successful revolution and that an economic regime which was obvious **state-capitalism** was socialism. Little wonder Leninists had so much difficulty in recognising Stalinism was a new class system — to do so would have been to raise awkward questions about the similar — if less brutal — regime under Lenin and Trotsky.

To conclude, both anarchism and Leninism have a critical position on democracy. Lenin argued that *"formal democracy must be subordinate to the revolutionary interest"* and in a sense he was right. [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 86] As we indicated in section 7, anarchists argue that minorities should ignore (or rebel against) the majority if it is oppressing the minority — for progress to be achieved the *"revolutionary interest"* (freedom) must come first. Only in this way can the liberatory promise of democracy can be secured in the face of any

potential dictatorship of the majority. The Leninist position is that a minority can ignore the majority only if it is the party leadership for it is they, the vanguard, who determine what the *"revolutionary interest"* is and, as a result, Leninism — for all its rhetoric — is fundamentally an anti-democratic ideology simply because this justifies party dictatorship as **everyone** is "backward" compared to the vanguard. McNally distorts the anarchist position while proclaiming the democratic credentials of Leninism. The facts are otherwise.

## 9. Why is McNally wrong on the relation of syndicalism to anarchism?

After slandering anarchism, McNally turns towards another form of libertarian socialism, namely syndicalism. It is worth quoting him in full as his comments are truly ridiculous:

> *"There is ... another trend which is sometimes associated with anarchism. This is syndicalism. The syndicalist outlook does believe in collective working class action to change society. Syndicalists look to trade union action — such as general strikes — to overthrow capitalism. Although some syndicalist viewpoints share a superficial similarity with anarchism — particularly with its hostility to politics and political action — syndicalism is not truly a form of anarchism. By accepting the need for mass, collective action and decision-making, syndicalism is much superior to classical anarchism."*

The weakness of McNally's position can be seen from comparing his summary of syndicalism's key ideas with *"classical anarchism"*, namely Bakunin's revolutionary anarchism. This passage by Bakunin expresses almost all the ideas McNally ascribes to syndicalism:



> *perceived the oppressive role of the state whose periodic intervention in industrial unrest could hardly have been missed."* [Bob Holton, **British Syndicalism: 1900–1914**, pp. 21–2]

This awareness that the state could not be ignored but had to be fought is reflected in the 1909 French syndicalist novel *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* which discussed how the Chamber of Deputies was *"invaded from all sides"* by the crowd during the revolution, which *"threatened with death any deputies who should dare sit again."* The *"General Strikers were on watch"* and *"in order to guard against any aggressive action by the fallen power, or any effort to re-establish Parliamentarianism, a certain number of their comrades should remain permanently at the Palais Bourdon"* and *"oppose by force any counter-revolutionary measures."* Guards were also used in *"the Police Offices, the Government Offices, the Elys'e, etc."* after *"having taken them by assault."* The town hall *"was not neglected"* and *"was occupied"* in a similar fashion. Thus there was a *"definite intention of disorganising the State, of dismantling and thoroughly disabling it"* to ensure it was *"impossible for the Government to recover itself, or rally around any point whatever."* Thus the general strike *"very soon changed into an insurrectional strike"* and *\93the General Strikers occupied the centres of Government action, and expelled the representative of the State.* The state would be replaced by *Bourses du Travail* (local federation of unions) and the Trades Unions Congress, with the latter being formed by delegates *"from all parts of France"* and *"from all trades, from all professions"* and *"having to decide upon points previously discussed by the comrades who had sent them."* The similarities to soviets — and Bakunin's ideas (see section 5) — are clear. Nor did they ignore the need to defend a revolution and like revolutionary anarchists (see section H.2.1) argued for the unions to form *"bands"* to *"watch over the security of the committees"* and *"sought to arm*

> *masses and on the utilisation of their economic and social power. Their method is that of direct action in both the economic and the political struggles of the time. That is the only method which has been able to achieve anything at all in every decisive moment in history."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 73–78]

Rocker's work, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, was written in 1938 and is considered the standard introduction to that theory. McNally wrote his pamphlet in the 1980s and did not bother to consult the classic introduction to the ideas he claims to be refuting. That in itself indicates the worth of his pamphlet and any claims it has for being remotely accurate with respect to anarchism and syndicalism.

Syndicalists, then, **do** reject working class *"political action"* only if you think "political action" means simply bourgeois politics — that is, electioneering, standing candidates for Parliament, local town councils and so on. It does not reject "political action" in the sense of direct action to effect political changes and reforms. As syndicalists Ford and Foster argued, syndicalists use *"the term 'political action' ... in its ordinary and correct sense. Parliamentary action resulting from the exercise of the franchise is political action. Parliamentary action caused by the influence of direct action tactics ... is not political action. It is simply a registration of direct action."* They also note that syndicalists *"have proven time and again that they can solve the many so-called political questions by direct action."* [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 19f and p. 23] A historian of the British syndicalist movement reiterates this point:

> *"Nor did syndicalists neglect politics and the state. Revolutionary industrial movements were on the contrary highly 'political' in that they sought to understand, challenge and destroy the structure of capitalist power in society. They quite clearly*



> *"Toilers count no longer on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and paralyse your growing strength by being duped into alliances with bourgeois Radicalism ... Abstain from all participation in bourgeois Radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The bases of this organisation ... are the workshops and the federation of workshops ... instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation, not only national, but international ... when the hour of revolution sounds, you will proclaim the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society, anarchy, that is to say the true, frank people's revolution."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 120–1]

Bakunin, therefore, stressed trade union action, arguing as *"strikes spread from one place to another, they come close to turning into a general strike. And with the ideas of emancipation that now hold sway over the proletariat, a general strike can result only in a great cataclysm which forces society to shed its old skin."* He raised the possibility that this could *"arrive before the proletariat is sufficiently organised"* and dismissed it the *"necessities of the struggle impel the workers to support one another"* and the *"more active the struggle becomes ... the stronger and more extensive this federation of proletarians must become."* Thus strikes *"indicate a certain collective strength already"* and *"each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 149–50]

For Bakunin, like the later syndicalists, *"the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association"* and once *"every occupation ... is represented within the International [Working-Men's Association], its organisation, the organisation of the masses of the people*

*will be complete."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] Thus *"unions create that conscious power without which no victory is possible"* while strikes *"create, organise, and form a workers' army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 379 and pp. 384–5] The *"organisation of the trade sections and their representation by the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 255]

And yet McNally proclaims that Bakunin *"shared most of Proudhon's views"* and so, by implication, *"so feared the organised power of the developing working class that he went so far as to oppose trade unions"*! Rather than be against the *"freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society"*, Bakunin repeatedly argued that *"the new social order"* would be attained *"through the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and villages."* This would see *"capital and all tools of labour belong to the city workers — to the workers associations. The whole organisation of the future should be nothing but a free federation of workers — agricultural workers as well as factory workers and associations of craftsmen."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 300 an p. 410] This position was common to all revolutionary anarchists (see sections H.2.2 and H.2.7).

What is ridiculous about McNally's comments is that all historians who take the time to read Bakunin's works note the obvious links between his ideas and syndicalism. Let us present a few examples here (many writers also point to syndicalist aspects in Proudhon's ideas as well but we will concentrate on Bakunin). Thus we discover Caroline Cahm pointing out *"the basic syndicalist ideas of Bakunin"* and that he *"argued that trade union organisation and activity in the International [Working Men's Association] were important in the building of*



*exploitation... [and so] Anarcho-Syndicalists pursue the same tactics in their fight against that political power which finds its expression in the state...*

*"For just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country... It is, therefore, utterly absurd to assert that the Anarcho-Syndicalists take no interest in the political struggles of the time... But the point of attack in the political struggle lies, not in the legislative bodies, but in the people... If they, nevertheless, reject any participation in the work of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and the most hopeless form of the political struggle...*

*"But, most important of all, practical experience has shown that the participation of the workers in parliamentary activity cripples their power of resistance and dooms to futility their warfare against the existing system...*

*"Anarcho-Syndicalists, then, are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle, too, must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic power which the working class has at its command are the most effective...*

*"The focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic fighting organisations of the workers. It as the recognition of this which impelled the Anarcho-Syndicalists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the*

syndicalism in section H.2.8. However, the inaccuracy of McNally's statement should be clear as we have shown that according to him *"syndicalism"* (i.e. Bakunin's ideas) is *"much superior to classical anarchism"* (i.e. Bakunin's ideas)! How spurious his argument actually is can be seen from his comments about syndicalism and its relation to anarchism.

## 10. Do syndicalists reject working class political action?

McNally, after getting the relationship between *"classical anarchism"* and syndicalism completely wrong (see last section), moves on to an equally flawed argument against syndicalism. He states that *"by rejecting the idea of working class political action, syndicalism has never been able to give real direction to attempts by workers to change society."* However, syndicalists (like all anarchists) are clear what kind of politics they reject — bourgeois politics (i.e. the running of candidates in elections). It is worth quoting Rudolf Rocker at length on McNally's claim:

> *"It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which distinguishes the Anarcho-Syndicalists from the modern labour parties, both in principle and in tactics, but the form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view…*
>
> *"The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism toward the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes toward the system of capitalist*



*working-class power in the struggle against capital … He also declared that trade union based organisation of the International would not only guide the revolution but also provide the basis for the organisation of the society of the future."* Indeed, he *"believed that trade unions had an essential part to play in the developing of revolutionary capacities of the workers as well as building up the organisation of the masses for revolution."* [**Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 219, p. 215 and p. 216] George R. Esenwein noted that syndicalism *"had deep roots in the Spanish libertarian tradition. It can be traced to Bakunin's revolutionary collectivism"* and the class struggle was *"central to Bakunin's theory."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain**, p. 209 and p. 20] The syndicalists *"viewed themselves as the descendants of the federalist wing of the First International, personified above else by Mikhail Bakunin."* [Wayne Thorpe, **"The Workers Themselves"**, pp. xiii-xiv] *"Hardly any of these ideas [associated with syndicalism] are new"*, stated Bertrand Russell *"almost all are derived from the Bakunist [sic!] section of the old International"* and this was *"often recognised by Syndicalists themselves."* [**Roads to Freedom**, p. 52] J. Romero Maura correctly summarised that for the *"Bakuninists"* in the First International, the *"anarchist revolution, when it came, would be essentially brought about by the working class. Revolutionaries needed to gather great strength and must beware of underestimating the strength of reaction"* and so they *"logically decided that revolutionaries had better organise along the lines of labour organisations."* [*"The Spanish case"*, pp. 60–83, **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 66]

We could go on but as leading syndicalist activist and thinker Rudolf Rocker summarised:

> *"Modern Anarcho-syndicalism is a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which*

> *were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54]

Perhaps, in the face of such evidence (and the writings of Bakunin himself!), Marxists like McNally could claim that the sources we quote are either anarchists or "sympathetic" to anarchism. To counter this we will quote Marx and Engels. According to Marx, Bakunin's theory consisted of urging the working class to *"only organise themselves by trades-unions"* and *"not occupy itself with **politics.**"* Engels asserted that in the *"Bakuninist programme a general strike is the lever employed by which the social revolution is started"* and that they admitted *"this required a well-formed organisation of the working class"*. [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48, p. 132 and p. 133] Ignoring the misrepresentations of Marx and Engels about the theories of their enemies, we can state that they got the basic point of Bakunin's ideas — the centrality of trade union organisation and struggle as well as the use of strikes as the means of starting a social revolution.

(As an aside, ironically enough, Engels distorted diatribe against Bakunin and the general strike was later used against more radical Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg — usually claimed by Leninists as part of their tradition — by the reformists in Social Democratic Parties. For orthodox Marxists, the mass strike was linked to anarchism and Engels had proven that only political action — i.e. electioneering — could lead to working class emancipation. This appeal to authority lead Luxemburg to the innovative tactic of suggesting Engels was correct against the anarchist **general** strike but not against her **mass** strike! That this involved distorting the anarchist position — as Engels had done — should go without saying — see section H.3.5.)

It should be stressed that Bakunin's position on revolutionary class struggle waged by workers' organisations became



the basis of revolutionary anarchism. Thus we find, for example, Emma Goldman arguing that in the First International *"Bakunin and the Latin workers"* forged ahead *"along industrial and Syndicalist lines"* and so syndicalism *"is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism"* and *"[l]ike Anarchism, Syndicalism prepares the workers along direct economic lines, as conscious factors in the great struggles of to-day, as well as conscious factors in the task of reconstructing society."* The *"most powerful weapon"* for liberation was *"the conscious, intelligent, organised, economic protest of the masses through direct action and the general strike."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 89, p. 91 and p. 60] Kropotkin summarised the libertarian perspective well in 1907:

> *"Workmen's organisations are the real force capable of accomplishing the social revolution — after the awakening of the proletariat has been accomplished, first by individual action, then by collective action, by strikes and revolts extending more and more; and where workmen's organisations have not allowed themselves to be dominated by the gentlemen who advocate 'the conquest of political power', but have continued to walk hand in hand with anarchists — as they have done in Spain — they have obtained, on the one hand, immediate results (an eight-hour day in certain trades in Catalonia), and on the other have made good propaganda for the social revolution — the one to come, not from the efforts of those highly-placed gentlemen, but from below, from workmen's organisations."* [*"Anarchists and Trade Unions"*, **Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 391–2]

We will leave the matter here and point interested readers to our extended discussion of the links between anarchism and

the SWP/ISO and a host of other Leninist groups still argue that Lenin's brutally undemocratic state capitalist tyranny was some kind of "workers' state" McNally's comments seem deeply ironic. As such, Trotsky's defence of Stalinism as a *"degenerated workers' state"* is not as surprising nor as puzzling as McNally tries to claim. If, as he argues, *"[t]o talk of a workers' state is necessarily to talk of workers' power and workers' democracy"* then Lenin's regime had ceased to be a "workers' state" (if such a thing could exist) by the spring of 1918 at the latest. For anarchists (and libertarian Marxists) the similarities are all too clear between the regime under Lenin and that under Stalin. That McNally cannot see the obvious similarities suggests a lack of objectivity and a weak commitment to the principles of *"socialism from below"*

He sums up his account of the post-Second War World Trotskyists by arguing that *"the movement Trotsky had created fell victim to the ideology of socialism from above."* Unfortunately for his claims, this is not the case. As proven above, Trotsky had consistently argued for the dictatorship of the party between 1920 and 1940 and so Trotskyism had always been based on *"the ideology of socialism from above."* Trotsky had argued for party dictatorship simply because democratic mass organisations would allow the working class to express their *"wavering"* and *"vacillations."* Given that, according to those who follow Bolshevik ideas, the working class is meant to run the so-called "workers' state" Trotsky's arguments are extremely significant. He explicitly acknowledged that under Bolshevism the working class does **not** actually manage their own fates but rather the vanguard party does. This is cannot be anything **but** *"socialism from above."* If, as McNally argues, Trotsky's *"fatal error"* in not recognising that Stalinism was state capitalism came from *"violating the principles of socialism from below,"* then this *"fatal error"* is at the heart of the Leninist tradition.

As such, the roots of Trotsky's *"fatal error"* can be traced further back than the rise of Stalin. Its real roots lie with the



Thus, in the most capitalist nations, ones with a more widespread and developed proletariat, the anarchist and syndicalist movements were more firmly developed and had closer connections with the masses than in Russia. Moreover, these movements were also quite revolutionary as well and should be won to Bolshevism. But anarchism is the politics of the petit-bourgeois and so should have been far smaller in Western countries than in Russia due to the larger numbers of artisans and peasants in the latter. The opposite was the case, thus suggesting that Lenin's analysis is wrong.

We can point to another explanation of these facts. Rather than the Bolsheviks *"struggle against opportunism"* being the reason why anarchism was *"negligible"* in 1917–18 in Russia (it was not, in fact) but had mass appeal in Western Europe perhaps it was the fact that anarchism was a product of working class struggle in advanced capitalist countries while Bolshevism was a product of **bourgeois** struggle (for Parliament, a liberal republic, etc.) in Tsarist Russia? Similarly, perhaps the reason why Bolshevism did not develop the same opportunist tendencies as in other Social-Democratic movements was because it did not work in an environment which encouraged them. After all, unlike the German Social Democrats, the Bolsheviks were illegal for long periods of time and worked in an absolutist monarchy. The influences that corrupted the German Social Democrats were not at work in the Tsarist regime simply because there was no genuine Parliamentarianism for the party to get corrupted by. Thus, Bolshevism, perhaps at best, was applicable to Tsarist conditions and anarchism to Western ones.

However, contrary to Lenin, Russian anarchism was far from *"negligible"* during 1917–18 and was growing in influence within the Russian working class which was the real reason why the Bolsheviks suppressed them **before** the start of the civil war. As Emma Goldman noted, a claim such as Lenin's *"does not tally with the incessant persecution of Anarchists*

*which began in [April] 1918, when Leon Trotsky liquidated the Anarchist headquarters in Moscow with machine guns. At that time the process of elimination of the Anarchists began."* [*Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Writings of Emma Goldman**, p. 265] This fact of anarchist influence during the revolution does not contradict our earlier analysis. This is because the Russian anarchists, rather than appealing to the petit-bourgeois, were influencing exactly the same workers, sailors and soldiers the Bolsheviks were. Indeed, the Bolsheviks often had to radicalise their activities and rhetoric to counter anarchist influence. As Alexander Rabinowitch in his study of the July uprising of 1917 notes:

> *"At the rank-and-file level, particularly within the [Petrograd] garrison and at the Kronstadt naval base, there was in fact very little to distinguish Bolshevik from Anarchist ... The Anarchist-Communists and the Bolsheviks competed for the support of the same uneducated, depressed and dissatisfied elements of the population, and the fact is that in the summer of 1917, the Anarchist-Communists, with the support they enjoyed in a few important factories and regiments, possessed an undeniable capacity to influence the course of events. Indeed, the Anarchist appeal was great enough in some factories and military units to influence the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves."* [**Prelude to Revolution**, p. 64]

This is hardly what would be expected if anarchism was "petit-bourgeois" as Marxists assert.

It could, in fact, be argued that the Bolsheviks gained the support of so many workers during the summer of 1917 **because they sounded and acted like anarchists** and **not** like Marxists and lost it, by the summer of 1918, because, once



repressing peasants and striking and protesting workers long before the start of the Russian Civil War in late May 1918. In short, the Bolsheviks had introduced much of which McNally denounces as "Stalinism" before the war he uses to excuse them for all responsibility for its rise. As Maurice Brinton rightly states:

> *"there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism ... The more one unearths about this period the more difficult it becomes to define — or even to see — the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period [between 1917 and 1921]"* [*"The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control"*, **For Workers' Power**, p. 376]

To draw a sharp distinction between Stalinism and Bolshevism is difficult, if not impossible, to make based on McNally's own criteria. That Stalinism was more brutal, more unequal, more despotic is true but that does not change the similarities in social relationships between the two — both were dictatorial state capitalist regimes. That the repression did not extend to within the Bolshevik party is a weak hook to hang a theory on.

During his analysis of the failure of orthodox Trotskyism, McNally states that after the second world war *"the Trotskyist movement greeted"* the various new Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere *"as workers' states"* in spite of being *"brutally undemocratic state capitalist tyrannies."* Given that

running society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, **not** in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design.

For this reason anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the agent of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished. If these organs of workers' self-management are co-opted into a state structure (as happened in Russia) then their power will be handed over to the **real** power in any state — the government (in this case, the Council of People's Commissars). They will quickly become mere rubberstamps of the organisation which holds the reigns of power, the vanguard party and its central committee.

McNally rewrites history by arguing that it was *"Stalin's counter-revolution"* which saw *"communist militants ... executed, peasants slaughtered, the last vestiges of democracy eliminated."* The SWP/ISO usually date this "counter-revolution" to 1928 (the defeat of the Left Opposition and the first Five Year Plan). However, long before this date there was no *"vestiges"* of meaningful democracy left — as Trotsky himself made clear in his comments in favour of party dictatorship between 1920 and 1923. Indeed, Trotsky had supported the repression of the Kronstadt revolt which had called for soviet democracy. McNally ignores this and instead argues that Trotsky *"acknowledged that the soviets had been destroyed, that union democracy had disappeared, that the Bolshevik party had been stripped of its revolutionary character"* under Stalinism. Yet, as we discusse in section H.6, the Bolsheviks had already destroyed soviet democracy, undermined union democracy and repressed all revolutionary elements outside of the party, argued for the introduction of state capitalism and the appointment of "one-man management" as well as



in power, they reverted to acting like Marxists and their centralised policies were simply not solving the problems facing the revolution. At the time many considered the Bolsheviks as anarchists and one fellow Marxist (an ex-Bolshevik turned Menshevik) thought Lenin had *"made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years — the throne of Bakunin!"* [quoted by Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40] As Alexander Berkman argued, the *"Anarchist mottoes proclaimed by the Bolsheviks did not fail to bring results. The masses relied to their flag."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 120] Indeed, as we note in section H.5.12, the Bolshevik party in the summer of 1917 was far from the disciplined vanguard party of Leninist myth and far more like a federation of local groups which could — and did — ignore the party's central committee and its conservatism. It was in 1918, faced with the realities of holding state power in the face of popular discontent and counter-revolution that Lenin's long desired model of a centralised, top-down, disciplined party came to be — a development which contributed to the degeneration of the regime away from socialism and towards state capitalism.

Moreover, this stealing of anarchist slogans and tactics in 1917 was **forced** upon the Bolsheviks by the working class. On Lenin's own admission, the masses of peasants and workers were *"a hundred times further to the left"* than the Bolsheviks. Trotsky himself notes that the Bolsheviks *"lagged behind the revolutionary dynamic ... The masses at the turning point were a hundred times to the left of the extreme left party."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, Vol. 1, p. 403f] Indeed, one leading Bolshevik stated in June 1917 (in response to a rise in anarchist influence), *"[b]y fencing ourselves off from the Anarchists, we may fence ourselves off from the masses."* [quoted by Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] That, in itself, indicates the weakness of Lenin's class analysis of anarchism.

Rather than the Russian experience refute the claim that anarchism is a working class theory, it reinforces it — the Bol-

sheviks would not have succeeded if they had used traditional Marxist slogans and tactics (as was the fate of the Mensheviks). Instead, much to the dismay of their more orthodox comrades, the Bolsheviks embraced traditional anarchist ideas and tactics and thereby gained increased influence in the working class. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in the name of the soviets, anarchist influence increased as more working people recognised that what the Bolsheviks meant by their slogans was different than what working people thought they meant (see section A.5.4). So the experience of the Russian Revolution re-enforces the fact that Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism fails to convince. Far from proving that libertarian socialism is non-proletarian, that Revolution proved that it was: just as it confirmed the prophetic correctness of the views of the founders of anarchism and, in particular, their critique of Marxism.

To conclude, the usual Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism is somewhat confused. On the one hand, it claims that anarchism is backward looking and the politics of the petit-bourgeois being destroyed by the rise and development of capitalism. On the other hand Marxists point to events and organisations created in working class struggle which were predicted and/or influenced by **anarchist** ideas and ideals, **not** Marxist ones. That indicates better than any other argument that Marxists are wrong about anarchism and their "class analysis" nothing more than distortions and bigotry. Based on the evidence and the contradictions it provokes in Marxist ideology, we have to argue that McNally is simply wrong. Rather than being an ideology of the petit-bourgeois anarchism is, in fact, a political theory of the working class (artisans, peasants and proletariat). Rather than a backward looking theory, anarchism is a theory of the present and future — it has a concrete and radical critique of current society, a vision of the future and a theory how to get there which appeals to working people in struggle. Such is obviously the



mass, democratic organisation could run society during a revolution. The need for party power was raised explicitly to combat the fact that the workers' could change their minds and vote against the vanguard party. As such, the founding fathers of the SWP/ISO political tradition explicitly argued that a workers' state had to reject workers power and democracy in order to ensure the victory of the revolution. Clearly, according to McNally's own argument, his own politics cannot be considered as "socialism from below" as it explicitly argued that a workers' state did not "necessarily" mean workers' power or democracy.

As indicated above, for the period McNally **himself** selects (the 1920s and 1930s), Trotsky consistently argued that the Bolshevik tradition the SWP/ISO places itself was based on the *"Leninist principle"* of party dictatorship. For McNally to talk about Trotsky keeping *"socialism from below"* alive is, therefore, truly amazing. It either indicates a lack of awareness of Trotsky's ideas or a desire to deceive. To be fair to McNally, the notion that Trotsky's Opposition supported genuine workers' democracy seems to be a common fallacy in SWP circles. Thus Chris Harman asserted that the *"alternative to Stalinism"* in the late 1920s was *"returning to genuine workers' democracy and consciously linking the fate of Russia to the fate of the world revolution"* (while allowing *"a limited development of heavy industry"*) and it was the *"historical merit of the Left Opposition"* that *"it framed a policy along these lines."* [Chris Harman, **Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 19] Clearly McNally is not the only Leninist unable — or unwilling — to discover the grim truth about the Left Opposition or, for that matter, the reality of Bolshevik rule.

For anarchists, we stress, the Bolshevik substitution of party power for workers power did not come as a surprise. The state is the delegation of **power** — as such, it means that the idea of a "workers' state" expressing "workers' power" is a logical impossibility (see section H.3.7). If workers **are**

such, it is ironic to read McNally state that *"[t]hroughout the 1920s and until his death .. . Trotsky fought desperately to build a revolutionary socialist movement based on the principles of Marx and Lenin."* Leaving Marx to one side for the moment, McNally's comments are correct simply because in his advocacy of party power and dictatorship (for a *"socialism from above,"* to use McNally's term) Trotsky was indeed following Lenin's principles and Bolshevik orthodoxy. As noted in the last section, Lenin had been arguing from a "socialism" based on *"above"* and *"below"* since at least 1905 (which, to show their Marxist orthodoxy, he linked to Engels and his arguments against Bakunin.) The reality of Bolshevik rule (as indicated in section 8) showed that pressure *"from above"* by a "revolutionary" government easily crushes pressure "from below" in the name, as Trotsky constantly stressed throughout the 1920s and 1930s, of the advanced political ideas of the Bolshevik party leaders. Yet despite Lenin and Trotsky's dismissal of democracy, McNally argues that democracy is the core need of socialism:

> *"A workers' state, according to Marx and Lenin, is a state based upon workers' control of society. It depends upon the existence of democratic organisation that can control society from below. A workers' state presupposes that workers are running the state. To talk of a workers' state is necessarily to talk of workers' power and workers' democracy."*

Which, as far as it goes, is correct (for anarchists, of course, the idea that a state can be run from below is utopian — it is not designed for that and no state has ever been). Sadly for his argument, both Lenin and Trotsky argued against the idea of workers' democracy and, in stark contrast, argued that the dictatorship of the party was essential for a successful revolution. Indeed, they both explicitly argued against the idea that a



conclusion when you read anarchist theory and see how Marxists have appropriated aspects of it which they had previously denounced. Sadly, as we note in section H.3.5, this appropriation has been selective and had not made Leninism any more libertarian, its pre-revolution rhetoric aside.

## 13. If Marxism is *"socialism from below,"* why do anarchists reject it?

McNally claims that Marxism is *"socialism from below."* In his text he indicates support for the Paris Commune and the soviets of the Russian Revolution. He states that the *"democratic and socialist restructuring of society remains ... the most pressing task confronting humanity. And such a reordering of society can only take place on the basis of the principles of socialism from below. Now more than ever, the liberation of humanity depends upon the self-emancipation of the world working class... The challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence, its passionate concern with human freedom."*

So, if this is the case, why the hostility between anarchists and Marxists? Surely it is a question of semantics? No, for while Leninists pay lip-service to such developments of working class self-activity and self-organisation as workers' councils (soviets), factory committees, workers' control, revocable and mandated delegates they do so in order to ensure the election of their party into positions of power (i.e. the government). Rather than see such developments as working people's **direct** management of their own destinies and as a means of creating a self-managed (i.e. free) society as anarchists do, Leninists see them as a means for their party to take over state power. Nor do they see them as a framework by which working class people can take back control of their own lives. Rather, they see them, at best, as typical bourgeois forms — namely the means by which working people can delegate their power to a new group of leaders, i.e. as a means

to elect a socialist government into power. The nature of the regimes they wish to create are centralised in nature, so reducing meaningful democracy to picking a few leaders and, even worse, producing the natural conditions under which a bureaucracy can flourish — both conditions for creating a new ruling elite (the bureaucracy).

This attitude can be seen from Lenin's perspectives on the Russian soviets during the 1905 Russian Revolution. Rather than seeing them as a means of working class self-government, he saw them purely as a means of gaining influence for his party:

> *"the Party ... has never renounced its intention of utilising certain non-party organisations, such as the Soviets of Workers' Deputies ... to extend Social-Democratic influence among the working class and to strengthen the Social-Democratic labour movement ... the incipient revival creates the opportunity to organise or utilise non-party working-class institutions, such as Soviets ... for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 12, pp. 143–4]

Such a perspective indicates well the difference between anarchism and Leninism. Anarchists do not seek power for their own organisations. Rather they see self-managed organisation created by working class people in struggle as a means of eliminating hierarchy within society, of directly involving the mass of people in the decisions that affect them. In other words, as a means of creating the organisations through which people



*very small aristocracy of real or pretended scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be liberated in entirety form the cares of government and included in entirety in the governed herd. A fine liberation!"* The new government would *"begin to look upon the whole workers\92 world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* Rather than securing the freedom of the people *"no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself, and that it can engender only slavery in the people who endure it"*. [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 136, p. 198, p. 13, p. 24, p. 136, p. 137, pp. 178–9, p. 178 and p. 179]

Economically, the workers would remain oppressed and exploited as the Marxists would *"concentrate the reins of government in a strong hand, because the ignorant people require strong supervision. They will create a single state bank, concentrating in their own hands all commercial, industrial, agricultural, and even scientific, production, and will divide the people into two armies, one industrial and one agrarian, under the direct command of state engineers, who will form a new privileged scientific and political class."* The state bureaucracy would become the new ruling class, *"a new bureaucratic aristocracy"* who are *"corrupted by state service"*, and as soon as *"they enter state service ... the iron logic of their position, the force of circumstances inherent in certain hierarchical and profitable relationships, makes itself felt and ... [they] become bureaucrats from head to toe ... The demands of a certain position always prove stronger than sentiments, intentions, or good impulses ... They have to become members of the bureaucratic class ... they become enemies of the people, whether they want to or not"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181 and p. 51]

Clearly the Bolshevik experience confirmed Bakunin's critique of Marxism while the Makhnovist insurrectionary army in the Ukraine confirmed the validity of the anarchist alternative (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?" for details). As

recreate it? Does having the right people in power make *"workers' control of society"* an optional extra for *"socialism from below"*?

McNally then suggests that this breaking with *"the most basic precepts of socialism from below"* by not recognising Stalinist Russia was *"a system of bureaucratic state capitalism in which capital is collectively controlled by the privileged bureaucracy that controls the state"* was *"not readily apparent during Trotsky's lifetime."* Far from it — anarchists had recognised the grim reality of the new Bolshevik state from early 1918 and indicated that it had confirmed the fears raised by Bakunin in his polemics with Marx (see section H.3.13). It is worth indicating these arguments since we did not have to wait until the 1940s before drawing what to the uninitiated was an obvious conclusion — that the Soviet Union was a state capitalist dictatorship run by and for a new ruling minority.

A state, Bakunin argued, *"stands outside the people and above them"* and so was *"the government of society from above downward"* which resulted in the *"actual subordination of the sovereign people to the intellectual minority that governs them."* It was the *"government of the masses from above downwards"* by a minority *"which supposedly understands the real interests of the people better than the people themselves"*. However, *"power corrupts those invested with it just as much as those compelled to submit to it"* and the *"government of the majority by a minority in the name of the presumed stupidity of the one and the presumed intelligence of the other"* would have *"the direct and inevitable result of consolidating the political and economic privileges of the governing minority and the political and economic slavery of the masses"*. Bakunin recognised the elitism inherent in Trotsky's privileging of the party (the vanguard) and argued that while it was claimed *"those elected will be passionately committed as well as learned socialists"* the reality would be that *"the pseudo-popular state will be nothing but the highly despotic government of the masses by a new and*



can change both themselves and the world by their own direct action and the managing of their own struggles, lives, communities and workplaces. Leninists view working class self-organisation as a means of gaining power for their own party (which they identify with the power of the working class — see section H.3.11). Mass organisations, which could be schools for self-management and freedom, are instead subjected to an elitist leadership of intellectual ideologues. The party soon substitutes itself for the mass movement, and the party leadership substitutes itself the party. This is the inevitable result of a vision of socialism rooted in being *"fully and unreservedly in favour of a strong state power and of centralism."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 116]

Lenin's view of the soviets was instrumental: he regarded them merely as a means of getting the workers to support the Bolshevik Party and ensuring his party seized state power. Indeed, he constantly confused soviet power with party power, seeing the former as the means to the latter and the latter as the key to creating socialism (see section H.3.11). Given his vanguardist ideology (see section H.5) this is unsurprising and, indeed, understandable — flawed assumptions will produce incorrect conclusions. What is missing from his vision is the idea of socialism as being based on working class self-activity, self-management, self-government and, ultimately, self-emancipation (section 11 refutes McNally's claims that Leninism is based on working class self-emanicipation). *"Lenin"* as one historian concluded, *"believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the 'proletarian' character of state power."* [A. S. Smith, **Red Petrograd**, pp. 261–2] Worse, the 'proletarian' character of the state was determined by the party in government and, as we indicated in section 8, the party determined what was and was not "proletarian" so allowing — indeed, justifying — party dictatorship. This gap in his politics, this confusion of party with class, helped undermine

the revolution and create the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Little wonder that by the end of 1918, the Bolsheviks ruled the newly established soviet state entirely alone and had turned the soviets into docile instruments of their party apparatus rather than forms of working class self-government. Perhaps needless to say, this reality came to be reflected in Bolshevik ideology and the assertion that a socialist revolution required a party dictatorship was embedded into it at this time — where it remained (Trotsky, for example, arguing this position throughout the 1920s and 1930s, as shown in section 15).

So despite its radical language, Leninism is totally opposed to the nature of revolt and rebellion. It seeks to undermine what makes these activities and the organisations they create potentially revolutionary (their tendencies towards self-management, decentralisation, solidarity, direct action, free activity and co-operation) by using them to build the party and, ultimately, a centralised, hierarchical state structure on the corpse of these once revolutionary forms of working class self-organisation and self-activity. This applies both to the social organisations of the working class **and** to their economic ones as Leninists view nationalisation (i.e., state ownership and control) as the basis of socialism rather than, as anarchists do, socialisation and workers self-management of production. The Leninist position can only produce a new ruling class (the bureaucracy) in a new class system (state capitalism). As Kropotkin predicted:

> *"The state organisation, having always been ... the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the state all the main sources of economical life — the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on — as also the management of all the main branches of*



*points in common"*. The outlook of the Trotskyist majority *"was not very different from that of the Stalinist bureaucracy; they were slightly more polite and human, that was all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 218 and p. 263] This is unsurprising given, as indicated, the same Bolshevik political legacy and same class position (Trotskyists were labelled *"the bureaucracy in exile"*). It may have been that if the Trotskyists had won the inter-bureaucracy struggle in the mid-1920s then the Soviet Union would have avoided the horrors of Stalinism but it would have remained a state capitalist party dictatorship and, as such, a class system in which the few exploit, oppress and repress the many. That this few would have exploited the many less ruthlessly and aimed to impose similar regimes internationally rather than concentrating on building *"socialism in one country"* does not mean much.

Needless to say, Goldman had no difficulty in recognising that Bolshevik Russia was *"State Capitalism"* in the early 1920s (i.e., when Trotsky was still part of the ruling class). [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 247] McNally argues that *"[b]y making the nature of property ownership the criterion of workers' state"* rather than *"workers' power and workers' democracy"* Trotsky had *"committed an error that was seriously to disorient the Trotskyist movement in later years. For, unwittingly, Trotsky had broken from the most basic precepts of socialism from below."* Yet what alternative did he have? After all, both workers' democracy and power had been eliminated when he held power alongside Lenin and he did not consider the first — bar for a short period in 1936 — as important enough to advocate and equated the second with party rule. So if McNally's criteria is taken seriously then we must conclude that the Bolshevik regime had not been a "workers' state" since mid-1918 nor did Trotsky aim for one during the 1920s and 1930s. Which raises the awkward question of why McNally thinks he had not broken *"from the most basic precepts of socialism from below"* by defending Lenin's party dictatorship and Trotsky's attempts to

> *national socialism … Stalin undertook to reshape the entire nature and direction of Russian society … the elimination of all dissent; the liquidation of all forms of democracy and of genuine working class organisation … "*

Given that the identification of socialism with the party's *"monopoly of power"* as well as removal of *"the commitment to workers' democracy"* occurred under Lenin and that Trotsky's defended this, the question arises was there any fundamental difference between Leninism and Stalinism? As Victor Serge admitted, *"a good many Oppositionists rallied to the [Stalinist] 'general line' and renounced their errors since, as they put it, 'After all, it is our programme that is being applied'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 252] Hence Emma Goldman:

> *"In point of truth I see no marked difference between the two protagonists of the benevolent system of the dictatorship except that Leon Trotsky is no longer in power to enforce its blessings, and Josef Stalin is … Stalin did not come down as a gift from heaven to the hapless Russian people. He is merely continuing the Bolshevik traditions, even if in a more relentless manner … I admit, the dictatorship under Stalin's rule has become monstrous. That does not, however, lessen the guilt of Leon Trotsky as one of the actors in the revolutionary drama"* [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Writings of Emma Goldman**, pp. 251–2]

Ante Ciliga saw the similarities first-hand while in prison in the Soviet Union, noting that the Trotskyists *"who were in prison for anti-Stalinism could find nothing better to do than to indulge in Stalinism themselves [in their political groups] while in prison. This absurdity was only apparent; it merely served to prove that between Trotskyism and Stalinism there were many*



> *industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands (education, state-supported religions, defence of the territory, etc.), would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism. True progress lies in the direction of decentralisation, both* ***territorial*** *and* ***functional****, in the development of the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound, in lieu of the present hierarchy from the centre to the periphery."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 164–5]

While Leninists point to Lenin's **The State and Revolution** as proof of Leninism's "socialism from below" credentials, anarchists note that, firstly, its promises were either not applied or quickly abandoned and, secondly, its vision of socialism is impoverished. As we discuss the first objection in section H.1.7, we will note here that Lenin's work postulated a centralised proletarian state rooted in representative rather than delegate institutions as well as a "socialism" modelled on capitalist institutions which the workers were expected to "control" rather than self-management of production. Thus Lenin's pointing to the postal service, in which workers are usually employed by the State under capitalism, as *"an example of the socialist economic system"* and argued that we needed to *"organise the whole economy on the lines of the postal service"* simply transferred economic power to the state bureaucracy. [**Collected Works**, vol. 25 pp. 426–7] Anarchists, in contrast, argue that working class bodies like trade unions must take into their *"hands the management of production"* and co-operatives *"for production and for distribution, both in industry and agriculture"* were expressing aspects of *"communist society"* for *"Socialist forms of life could find a much easier realisation"* by means of these bodies *"than by*

*a State organisation".* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 22–23] As Maurice Brinton documents in great detail in his classic **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, the Leninist vision of socialism was never based on workers management of the economy (see section H.3.14). Politically, the Bolsheviks placed an executive power (their own) over the soviets and so centralised power into the hands of a few party leaders.

So as well as differences in the **political** nature of a socialist society, the role of organisations created in, by and for the class struggle and the nature of socialist organisation, anarchists and Marxists disagree with the **economic** nature of the future society. McNally claims that in Russia *"[c]ontrol of the factories was taken over by the workers"* but this is a total distortion of what actually happened. Throughout 1917, it was the workers themselves, **not** the Bolshevik Party, which raised the issue of workers' self-management and control. As S.A. Smith puts it, the *"factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154] Given that the defining aspect of capitalism is wage labour, the Russian workers' raised a clearly socialist demand that entailed its abolition. It was the Bolshevik party, we must note, who failed to raise above a *"trade union conscious"* in this and so many other cases and, worse, they hindered the movement of workers trying to control, and then manage, the factories they worked in. As Maurice Brinton correctly argued, *"it is ridiculous to claim — as so many do today — that in 1917 the Bolsheviks really stood for the full, total and direct control by working people of the factories, mines, building sites or other enterprises in which they worked, i.e. that they stood for workers' self-management."* [*"The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control"*, **For Workers' Power**, p. 328] Rather, Lenin identified *"workers' control"* as something totally different:



*is Menshevism,' was the Trotskyists' final verdict."* This was because it had been *"condemned formerly by Lenin, by Trotsky"* as well as by other Opposition Groups. [Ante Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 280] As Left Oppositionist Victor Serge pointed out *"the greatest reach of boldness of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party was to demand the restoration of inner-Party democracy, and it never dared dispute the theory of single-party government — by this time, it was too late."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 181] Sadly, like Trotsky's **The Revolution Betrayed**, Serge's later **Memoirs** paint a different picture by asserting one of its *"great fundamental ideas"* was *"working-class democracy"*! [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 252]

As can be seen, McNally does not present a remotely accurate account of Trotsky's ideas during the 1920s and 1930s. All of which makes McNally's comments deeply ironic. He argues that *"Stalin had returned to an ideology resembling authoritarian pre-Marxian socialism. Gone was socialism's democratic essence. Stalin's 'Marxism' was a variant of socialism from above"* Clearly, Trotsky's Marxism was also a variant of *"socialism from above"* and without *"socialism's democratic essence"* (unless you think that party dictatorship can somehow be reconciled with democracy or expresses one of the *"basic elements of socialism from below"*). For Trotsky, as for Stalin, the dictatorship of the party was a fundamental principle of Bolshevism and one which was above democracy (which, by its very nature, expresses the *"vacillation of the masses"*). Compare McNally's words on Stalinism to Trotsky's position:

> *""For [Stalin's] group, 'socialism' lost all foundation in organs of workers' democracy, soviets ... They came increasingly to identify socialism with a bureaucratic monopoly of power which allowed no place for organs of mass democracy ... Gone was the commitment to workers' democracy and inter-*

the revolution and saw the need for party power over workers' freedom:

> *"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves … if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself."* [*"The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism"*, pp. 53–66, **Their Morals and Ours**, p. 59]

Needless to say, **by definition** everyone is *"backward"* when compared to the *"vanguard of the proletariat."* Moreover, as it is this *"vanguard"* which is *"armed with the resources of the state"* and **not** the proletariat as a whole we are left with one obvious conclusion, namely party dictatorship rather than working class freedom. This is because such a position means denying exactly what workers' democracy is meant to be all about — namely that working people can recall and replace their delegates when those delegates do not follow the wishes and mandates of the electors. If the governors determine what is and what is not in the "real" interests of the masses and "overcome" (i.e. repress) the governed, then we have dictatorship, not democracy.

Trotsky was hardly alone in his views given that they were Bolshevik orthodoxy. Amazingly enough, even in the Russian prison camps in the late 1920s and early 1930s, *"almost all the Trotskyists continued to consider that 'freedom of party' would be 'the end of the revolution.' 'Freedom to choose one's party — that*



> *"When we say: 'workers' control', always **juxtaposing** this slogan to dictatorship of the proletariat, always putting it **immediately after** the latter, we thereby explain what kind of state we mean … if we are speaking of a proletarian state, that is, of the proletarian dictatorship, then workers' control can become the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious **accounting** of the production and distribution of goods."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 26, p. 105]

By this Lenin meant the "power" to oversee the books, to check the implementation of decisions made by others, rather than fundamental decision making by the workers themselves. As he argued, when *"the proletariat is victorious it will do the following, it will set economists, engineers, agronomists, and so forth, to work **under the control** of the workers' organisations on drawing up a 'plan', on verifying it, on devising labour-saving methods of centralisation, on devising the simplest, cheapest, most convenient and universal measures and methods of control. For this we shall pay the economists, statisticians and technicians good money … but we shall not give them anything to eat if they do not perform this work conscientiously and entirely **in the interests of the working people**."* *"The important thing,"* he stressed *"will not be even the confiscation of the capitalists' property, but country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists and their possible supporters … by the workers' control of the **workers' state**."* The economy would be state-run based on the structures inherited from capitalism: *"**Compulsory syndication**, i.e., compulsory amalgamation in associations under state control — this is what capitalism has prepared the way for"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 118, pp. 107–8 and p. 108] Thus others — a few planners at the top of a centralised state — would determine the plans, not the workers themselves, and primarily the "control" would be exercised over the

capitalists whom Lenin thought should remain in position for an indefinite period after the revolution. Rather than workers' managing their own workplaces and economy Leninism meant *"the organisation of really democratic control, i.e., control from 'below', control by the workers and the poor peasants* ***over*** *the capitalists"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, p.353] Unsurprisingly, then, in 1922, he even suggested granting legislative power to the State Planning Commission to ensure its decisions *"could not be rejected by ordinary procedure in Soviet bodies, but would need a special procedure to be reconsidered"* as it was *"a body of experienced people, experts, representatives of science and technology"* and so was *"actually in a better position to form a correct judgment of affairs"*. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 36, p. 598]

So Lenin's commitment to workers' control was limited and as Maurice Brinton correctly summarised:

> *"Nowhere in Lenin's writings is workers' control ever equated with fundamental decision-taking (i.e. with the* ***initiation*** *of decisions) relating to production … He envisioned a period during which, in a workers state, the bourgeois would still retain the formal ownership and effective management of most of the productive apparatus … capitalists would be coerced into co-operation. 'Workers' control' was seen as the instrument of this coercion."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 314–5]

Thus the capitalists would remain and wage slavery would continue but workers could "control" those who had the real power and gave the orders (the capitalists were later replaced by "one-man management" by state bureaucrats but the lack of effective power remained — see section H.3.14). In other words, no vision of workers' self-management in production (and so real socialism) and the reduction of "socialism" to a warmed up variation of state capitalism with (in theory, but not in practice) a dash of liberal democracy in the form of "control" of



mer shows lack of sufficient class awareness and so the latter needs, as in Kronstadt, to use state power to secure its ruling position. This is implicit in the following strange comment:

> *"It is true that some of them [the critics of Bolshevism] recognise the revolution and the dictatorship — in words. But this does not help matters. They wish for a revolution which will not lead to dictatorship or for a dictatorship which will get along without the use of force. Of course, this would be a very 'pleasant' dictatorship. It requires, however, a few trifles: an equal and, moreover, an extremely high, development of the toiling masses. But in such conditions the dictatorship would in general be unnecessary. Some Anarchists, who are really liberal pedagogues, hope that in a hundred or a thousand years the toilers will have attained so high a level of development that coercion will prove unnecessary. Naturally, if capitalism could lead to such a development, there would be no reason for overthrowing capitalism. There would be no need either for violent revolution or for the dictatorship which is an inevitable consequence of revolutionary victory"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 92–3]

Given that the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" is meant to be the means by which the proletariat coerce the former ruling elite, it is strange to read Trotsky argue that coercion becomes unnecessary if the toiling masses have a high level of political development. Why would the ruling elite stop their attempts at counter-revolution in those circumstances? That seems unlikely so we can only conclude that the coercion (like the dictatorship) is directed against the *"toiling masses"* by the ruling party. This is confirmed the following year (1939) when Trotsky repeats the same dictatorial ideas of 1921 by indicating — yet again — that he viewed democracy as a threat to

> *the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 513–4]

Which was, let us not forget, his argument in 1920. Such remarkable consistency on this point over a 17 year period and one which cannot be overlooked if you seek to present an accurate account of Trotsky's ideas during this period. Significantly, this was the year after his apparent (and much belated) embrace of soviet democracy for the USSR in **The Revolution Betrayed** and so that work must be considered as a temporary aberration, quickly rejected. His advice on what to do during the Spanish Revolution followed this pattern: *"Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship* ***for themselves*** *they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship."* [our emphasis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 514] So much for workers' power!

The following year saw Trotsky produce an article defending the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt which proclaimed that a *"revolution is 'made' directly by a* ***minority****. The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality, on the part of the majority. The shift in different stages of the revolution, like the transition from revolution to counterrevolution, is directly determined by changing political relations between the minority and the majority, between the vanguard and the class."* [*"Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 85] Given that Kronstadt had rebelled against the Bolshevik dictatorship for soviet democracy, Trotsky's argument suggests that for him the rule of the party (the *"minority ... the vanguard"*) is more important than soviet democracy (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" for more details of this key event in the history of the Russian Revolution). In other words, if the majority come to reject the minority then the for-



those with the real power by those under them in the hierarchy. This is to be expected because, as S.A. Smith correctly argues, Lenin's proposals were *"thoroughly statist and centralist in character"* and that he used *"the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154] As can be seen from McNally's pamphlet, Leninists still follow this tradition and hide the grim reality that their tradition advocates an economic regime drastically different from the workers' self-management their words imply to most readers. Using the same slogans as others ("workers' control" or "socialism from below", for example) but meaning something radically different by it can only bred confusion.

Given Lenin's lack of concern about the revolutionising of the relations of production (a lack not shared by the Russian workers, we must stress) it is hardly surprising that Lenin considered the first task of the Bolshevik revolution was to build state capitalism. *"State capitalism,"* he wrote, *"is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 259] The aim was to ensure that *"****[a]ll*** *citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state"* and the *"whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, pp. 473–4] For Lenin, the *"domination of the proletariat consists in the fact that the landowners and capitalists have been deprived of their property ... The victorious proletariat has abolished property ... and therein lies its domination as a class. The prime thing is the question of property."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30, p. 456] Hence his support for centralisation and *"one-man management"* — if the issue is property then working class power **in production** cannot be considered as a necessary condition for socialism. Little wonder Soviet Russia never progressed beyond state capitalism — it could not as the fundamental aspect of capitalism, wage labour, was never replaced by workers' self-management of production. Lenin, in

short, was firmly in the same tradition as those *"certain utopians"* whose call that *"the Government seize trade, industry and agriculture, to add them to its attributes and to make the French nation a nation of wage-workers"* Proudhon rejected during the 1848 revolution as *"expropriation by the State"* was *"still wage-labour."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 22 and p. 377]

Writing in May 1917, Lenin took the viewpoint that state capitalism *"is a complete **material** preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism"* and so socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly."* It is *"merely state-capitalist monopoly **which is made to serve the interests of the whole people** and has to that extent **ceased** to be capitalist monopoly."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, p. 359 and p. 358] Rather than seeing *"workers' control"* as workers managing production directly by means of their own class organisations, he always saw it in terms of workers' *"controlling"* those who did within institutions inherited from capitalism. It simply meant *"the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious **accounting** of the production and distribution of goods."* He clarified what he meant, arguing for *"country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists"* who would still manage production. Significantly, he considered that *"as much as nine-tenths of the **socialist** apparatus"* required for this *"country-wide **book-keeping,** country-wide **accounting** of the production and distribution of goods"* would be achieved by nationalising the *"big banks,"* which *"**are** the 'state apparatus' which we **need** to bring about socialism"* (indeed, this was considered *"something in the nature of the **skeleton** of socialist society"*). This structure would be taken intact from capitalism for *"the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connection with the banks and [business] syndicates … this apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 105, p. 107, p. 106 and pp. 105–6] He had no real notion of workers' self-management of production nor of the impossibilities of



*of the masses and their heterogeneity."* Only with *"support of the vanguard by the class"* can there be the *"conquest of power"* and it was in *"this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the *"vanguard"* which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power … is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* Note, the party is *"the sovereign ruler of society,"* **not** the working class. Nor can it be said that he was not clear who held power in his system: state power is required to **govern the masses,** who cannot exercise power themselves as *"[t]hose who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Writings 1936–37**, p. 490, p. 488 and p. 495] Later that same year he repeated this position clearly and unambiguously:

> *"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history … The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution .. . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among*

been *"genuine"* as the Workers' Group, unlike Trotsky, **did** call for a multi-party workers' democracy — and paid the price. Indeed, the *"New Course Resolution"* even went so far as to say that *"it is obvious that there can be no toleration of the formation of groupings whose ideological content is directed against the party as a whole and against the dictatorship of the proletariat, as for instance the Workers' Truth and Workers' Group."* [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923–25)**, p. 408]

It would be remiss to not note how limited Trotsky's position was: being limited to the Soviet Union it does not automatically negate his arguments previously made to the international socialist movement. Moreover, given the revisionism of the origins of the Bolshevik dictatorship it is legitimate to ponder how honest Trotsky's statement is. He stated that if *"'the Soviet bureaucracy is overthrown by a revolutionary party having all the attributes of the old Bolshevism"* then it *"would begin with the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the Soviets"* and it *"would be able to, and would have to, restore freedom of Soviet parties."* Yet it was precisely the Bolsheviks who decreed that other parties within the Soviets were not genuine Soviet parties after all and repressed them. What guarantee exists that once the Bolsheviks had been revived (i.e., his faction took over) they did not conclude, as before, the necessity of party dictatorship? None. After all, did he not suggest that the *"dictatorship of the Bolshevik party proved one of the most powerful instruments of progress in history"*? [**The Revolution Betrayed**, pp. 238–9 and p. 104]

This limited support for Soviet Democracy was short-lived. Writing in 1937, ten years after the Platform was published and a year after **The Revolution Betrayed**, Trotsky was reiterating the privileged position of the party. In his essay *"Bolshevism and Stalinism"* he argued quite explicitly that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard"* and that *"the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level*



combining the centralised state capitalist system with its big banks, monopolies, big business with genuine rank and file control, never mind self-management.

As discussed in section H.6.2, this was what the Bolsheviks **did** do, using the institutions inherited from Tsarism as framework for "socialism". They believed that this economic structure would be made to serve the many rather than the few by a change in the political regime for *"given a really revolutionary-democratic state, state-monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism!"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, pp. 357–8] Yet a centralised state (never mind party dictatorship!) is hardly *"a really revolutionary-democratic"* anything other than in Bolshevik rhetoric. Surely, then, such an centralised economic structure would simply become a step, and more than a step, towards rule by the bureaucracy? And, sadly, that was the case so confirming anarchist warnings that state socialism would produce a new class system with the bureaucracy replacing the capitalist elite.

Yet even this is too generous, given the two obvious flaws in Lenin's position. First, in-so-far-as a social organisation **is** *"revolutionary-democratic"* then it is **not** a state and, as Lenin's regime showed, any new state will not remain so for long. Second, Lenin seems to have forgotten the Marxist theory of base and superstructure. The base is the economic forces and relations of production while the superstructure is the culture, institutions and state. In Marxist theory, while some mutual influences are sometimes admitted, the base determines the superstructure. Given this, surely an economic structure created under a class system would be far more likely to produce an undemocratic superstructure (state) than the opposite? Surely a centralised economic structure would produce concentrations of economic and bureaucratic power and so it would be far more consistent for a Marxist to suggest a centralised economic base (and *"state-monopoly*

*capitalism"* can be nothing less) would produce an equally centralised political superstructure (state)? And so it came to be — *"state-monopoly capitalism"* inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards a new class system (state-capitalism) rather than a classless one (socialism). Although, to be fair to Lenin, Marx and Engels were equally untroubled by this danger and did not draw this obvious conclusion. Anarchists were not so naive. As Alexander Berkman correctly argued:

> *"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated … Most people are still in the thraldom of the Marxian dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 229]

The Leninist "vision" of the future socialist economy is one of a highly centralised organisation, modelled on capitalism, in which, at best, workers can supervise the decisions made by others and "control" those in power. It is a vision of a more democratic corporate structure, with the workers replacing the shareholders. In practice, it would be a new bureaucracy exploiting and oppressing those who do the actual work — as in private capitalism — simply because capitalist economic structures are designed to empower the few over the many. Like the



> *appearance for reality. The prohibition of opposition parties was a temporary measure dictated by conditions of civil war, blockade, intervention and famine. The ruling party, representing in that period a genuine organisation of the proletarian vanguard, was living a full-blooded inner life. A struggle of groups and factions to a certain degree replaced the struggle of parties. At present, when socialism has conquered 'finally and irrevocably,' the formation of factions is punished with concentration camp or firing squad. The prohibition of other parties, from being a temporary evil, has been erected into a principle."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251]

In reality, the necessity of a party dictatorship was embraced by leading Bolsheviks like Trotsky and proclaimed to the world Socialist movement. The prohibition of opposition parties was not lamented at the time but rather raised to a principle (a Leninist principle, no less!) and implemented after victory in the civil war was secure. Factions were banned — with Trotsky's wholehearted support — precisely because, as he later noted, they had replaced the struggle of parties. Nor was Trotsky bothered by state repression of opposition when he was in charge. For example a series of (unofficial) strikes broke out in July and August 1923 in Moscow and Petrograd and this *"gave a new lease of life to the Mensheviks"* and so *"the GPU carried out a massive round up of Mensheviks, and as many as one thousand were arrested in Moscow alone."* [Tony Cliff, **Trotsky**, vol. 3, p. 25] When it was the turn of the ex-Bolsheviks in the Workers' Group, Trotsky *"was not at all eager to defend"* them and *"did not protest when their adherents were thrown into prison. Nor was he at all eager to support their demand for soviet democracy in that extreme form"*. [Isaac Deutscher, **The Prophet Unarmed**, pp. 108–9] It should be noted that rather than *"extreme"* a better word would have

he *"had prevailed on him to include in"* this book *"a declaration of freedom for all parties accepting the Soviet system."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 348]).

The evidence suggests the latter, that it was a temporary aberration — particularly given the misleading account of the rise of the Bolshevik dictatorship. Thus we find Trotsky suggesting that it was 1924–26 that saw *"the complete suppression of party and Soviet democracy"* when, as noted above, he was publicly acknowledging the reality of party dictatorship in 1920. He also forgot the ideas of his own Opposition from 1927 and in 1936 it was no longer was it a case of the necessity of a single party as *"a class has many 'parts' — some look forward and some back — [and so] one and the same class may create several parties ... An example of only one party corresponding to one class is not to be found in the whole course of political history — provided, of course, you do not take the police appearance for the reality."* That the need for the dictatorship of the vanguard was justified **precisely** in terms of the backwardness of the class and other parties was forgotten. Likewise, the acknowledgement of party dictatorship as a principle of Leninism was overlooked in favour of the suggestion that the civil war resulted in the opposition parties being *"forbidden one after the other"* and while this was *"obviously in conflict with the spirit of Soviet democracy, the leaders of Bolshevism regarded [it] not as a principle, but as an episodic act of self-defence."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34, p. 252 and p. 96] It would be churlish to note that the final abolition of opposition parties — like factions within the ruling party — occurred **after** the end of the civil war.

These awkward facts did not stop Trotsky from suggesting a fundamental difference between the Leninist and Stalinist dictatorships:

> *"To be sure, during the first period of the Soviet era the Bolshevik party also exercised a monopoly. But to identify these two phenomena would be to take*



capitalist state, they cannot be used by the working class to achieve their liberation (they are not created for the mass participation that real socialism requires, quite the reverse in fact). Sadly, Lenin failed to understand this and called the centralised, bureaucratic monstrosity the Bolsheviks created "socialism".

In contrast, anarchists view the socialist economy as being based on workers' self-management of production and the workplace turned into an association of equals. Above the individual workplace, federations of factory committees would co-ordinate activities and ensure wide scale co-operation is achieved. Thus anarchists see a **new** form of economic structure developing, one based on workers' organisations created in the process of struggle **against** capitalism. Rather than embrace bourgeois notions of "democracy" (i.e. the election of leaders into positions of power) like Marxists do, anarchists dissolve hierarchical power by promoting workers' self-management and association. While Marxism ends up as state capitalism pure and simple (as can be seen by the experience of Russia under Lenin and then Stalin) anarchism destroys the fundamental social relation of capitalism — wage labour — via association and workers' self-management of production.

So while both Leninists and anarchists claim to support factory committees and "workers' control" we have decidedly different notions of what we mean by this. The Leninists see them as a means of workers' to supervise (a closer translation of the Russian expression) those who have the real power in the economy and so perpetuate wage slavery with the state replacing the capitalist. Anarchists, in contrast, see them as a means of expressing workers self-organisation, self-management and self-government — as a means of abolishing wage slavery and so capitalism by eliminating hierarchical authority. The difference could not be more striking. Indeed, it would be correct to state that the Leninist tradition is not, in fact, socialist as it identifies socialism as the natural development of capitalism

and **not** as a new form of economy which will develop **away** from capitalism by means of associated labour and workers' self-management of production (see section H.3.12).

So anarchists and Leninism may often use similar words and expressions but they aim for different things. Leninists seek party power over a state capitalist economy and favour centralised political and economic structures. Sadly, they seem unaware that this will simply generate a new ruling class, the bureaucracy as centralised structures mean placing power at the top of society. The new layer of rulers this produces need the means to enforce their decisions and to gather and process the information needed to make their decisions, which is why bureaucracy grows. However, by the nature of bureaucracy the servants of the government quickly become the masters due to their control over information, resources and so on. This is why anarchists advocate federalism, to combat the obvious dangers of centralisation. The Bolshevik regime confirmed the wisdom of the libertarian position as the new state soon saw a new bureaucratic system quickly emerge around it. The size and power of the bureaucracy *"grew by leaps and bounds. Control over the new bureaucracy constantly diminished, partly because no genuine opposition existed. The alienation between 'people' and 'officials,' which the soviet system was supposed to remove, was back again. Beginning in 1918, complaints about 'bureaucratic excesses,' lack of contact with voters, and new proletarian bureaucrats grew louder and louder."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 242] So the rise of a state bureaucracy started immediately with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, particularly as the state's functions grew to include economic as well as political ones. Instead of the state starting to "wither away" it grew:

> *"The old state's political apparatus was 'smashed,' but in its place a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity. After the transfer of government to Moscow in March 1918*



*stratum on whose hands the power is **immediately concentrated**."* This was justification for his denial that there was *"a small group in the Kremlin who exercise oligarchical powers"* (*"No, that is not so"*). [**Writings 1932**, p. 217] Trotsky seemed to have forgotten that the bourgeoisie was a minority class which controlled the economic life of a country. Given this, it is not surprising that it could still rule under dictatorships. The same cannot be said of the working class — particularly if, as under Lenin and Trotsky, its democratic control of work and so the economy was replaced by one-man management. Yet Trotsky had no alternative to make such an obviously wrong assertion — to acknowledge the truth, that socialism needs meaningful workers' social and economic democracy to qualify as genuinely socialist — would have meant raising questions over the nature of the Bolshevik regime between 1918 and 1923 when he was at its commanding heights. Hence clearly incorrect assertions like: *"The dictatorship of a class does not mean by a long shot that its entire mass always participates in the management of the state"* [**Writings 1933–34**, p. 124]

In 1936 Trotsky finally appeared to revise his ideas in **The Revolution Betrayed**, although his revisionism in terms of democracy was combined with revisionism in the events of the Russian Revolution. It would be fair to suggest that McNally's account of Trotsky's ideas may be based on this work for in stark contrast to his early arguments he now stated that *"[b]ureaucratic autocracy must give place to Soviet democracy. A restoration of the right of criticism, and a genuine freedom of elections, are necessary conditions for the further development of the country. This assumes a revival of freedom of Soviet parties, beginning with the party of Bolsheviks"*. [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 273] Given his previous comments on the matter, the reader would be justified in wondering whether, rather than a sincere change of heart, Trotsky's position was a limited and temporary aberration (Anarchist-turned-Bolshevik Victor Serge, who later broke with Trotsky over this issue, stated that

As is well know, the Opposition was crushed and Trotsky forced into exile. This did not lead to a fundamental re-evaluation of the degeneration of the revolution and the need for genuine soviet democracy. A key task was *"[t]o stop the dissolution of the party into the class in the USSR"* and so, perhaps unsurprisingly, Soviet democracy went unmentioned. [**Writings 1930**, p. 148] Repeating previous arguments, Trotsky was fundamentally concerned about the dangers *"if the vanguard is dissolved into the amorphous mass"* for *"the party is not the class, but its vanguard; it cannot pay for its numerical growth by the lowering of its political level"*. There was *"the demand of party democracy"* for the dictatorship of the proletariat *"is inconceivable without a ruling proletarian party"* but nothing on working class freedom or democracy. Perhaps this is unsurprising: *"What we mean by the restoration of party democracy is that the real revolutionary, proletarian core of the party win the right to curb the bureaucracy and to really purge the party"*. In other words, the first act of the successful Opposition would have been the reduction in numbers of those who had some kind of meaningful vote. Rest assured, though, because the new party regime *"means that the party directs the proletarian dictatorship but does not strangle the mass organisations of the toilers"* and the secret ballot is *"one of the most important means to discipline the entire apparatus and subordinate it to the party"*. [**Writings 1930–31**, p. 241, p. 244, p. 247, pp. 255–6, p. 70 and p. 130] Clearly *"socialism's democratic essence"* was, at best, applicable to within the ruling party — or at least what remained of it after the purges.

In 1932, he was arguing that the *"same class can rule with the help of different political systems and methods according to circumstances. So the bourgeoisie on its historical road carried through its rule under absolute monarchy, bonapartism, parliamentary republic and fascist dictatorship ... the Soviet regime means the rule of the proletariat, irrespective of how broad the*



> *it continued to expand ... As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy, and by August 1918 nearly a third of Moscow's working population were employed in offices. The great increase in the number of employees ... took place in early to mid-1918 and, thereafter, despite many campaigns to reduce their number, they remained a steady proportion of the falling population"* [Richard Sakwa, *"The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,"* pp. 429–449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437–8]

While Lenin started to be concerned about the growth of the bureaucracy after 1920 and Trotsky argued that the Stalinist regime rested on this caste, neither had the theoretical framework to understand exactly why and how the centralisation and statist structures they favoured produced the bureaucracy they denounced. By not understanding the need for federalism they ensured that the socialistic tendencies being built by the Russian people were crushed under the weight of the bureaucratic machine which centralisation needs to function. That this bureaucracy soon became the ruling class is as unsurprising as Trotsky's inability to recognise the state capitalist nature of Stalinism (nor his and Lenin's role in producing such a regime in the first place).

Russia, Lenin once said, *"was accustomed to being ruled by 150 000 land owners. Why can 240 000 Bolsheviks not take over the task?"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 21, p. 336] The idea of socialism as working class self-management and self-government was lost on him — and the possibility **real** socialism was soon lost to the Russian working class when the Tsar was replaced by the autocratic the rule of the Bolshevik Party. *"Workers' power"* cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party — as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks (and Social Democrats before them).

Thus Malatesta's comments that the *"important, fundamental dissension"* between anarchists and Marxists is that the latter *"are authoritarians, anarchists are libertarians.* Marxists *"want power ... and once in power wish to impose their programme on the people ... Anarchists instead maintain, that government cannot be other than harmful, and by its very nature it defends either an existing privileged class or creates a new one."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 142] Therefore anarchists seek to influence people by the power of our ideas within popular organisations. We see such organisations as the means by which working people can take control of their own lives and start to create a free, libertarian socialist society — in other words, as we sketch in section I.2.3, the structures of a free society are created in the struggle against hierarchy today and, moreover, people become able to govern themselves by the very process of that struggle. A self-managed society can only be created by self-management, in short, and any tendencies to undermine popular self-management in favour of hierarchical power of a party will subvert a revolution and create an end drastically at odds with the ideals of those who take part in it.

Similarly, anarchists reject the Leninist idea of highly centralised "vanguard" parties. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a party leaves much to be desired:

> *"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class."* [**Carry on Recruiting!**, p. 41]

As we discuss in section H.5.9, such an organisation can **never** create a socialist society. In contrast, anarchists argue



*of man by man"* and that the *"appropriation of surplus value by a workers' state is not, of course, exploitation"* yet makes no call for workers' management of production (unsurprisingly as one-man management had been raised by Lenin in early 1918 and became Bolshevik orthodoxy as Trotsky had explained in 1920). The Platform does acknowledge that *"we have a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions"* and so its *"swollen and privileged administrative apparatus devours a very considerable part of our surplus value"* and *"the growing bourgeoisie, by means of trade and gambling on the abnormal disparity of prices, [also] appropriates a part of the surplus value created by our state industry"*. Thus *"all the data testify that the growth of wages is lagging behind the growth of the productivity of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 347, p. 348 and p. 350] Trotsky appeared to believe that an economic regime marked by one-man management by state-appointed bosses under a party dictatorship would somehow be without exploitation even though someone other than the workers controlled both their labour and how its product (and any surplus) was used — just as in a capitalist workplace. He failed to understand that this exploitation was the inevitable result of the economic regime he considered as "socialist" — namely *"nationalisation of the means of production"* which simply handed the economy to the bureaucracy and created state capitalism (see section H.3.13). This did not abolish *"the exploitation of man by man"* but rather changed the social class which exploited the working class from private capitalists to state bureaucrats — as anarchists had predicted from Proudhon onwards.

Of course **The Platform** did not bother to explain how workers' democracy **could** develop within a party dictatorship nor how soviets could become institutions of power when real power would, obviously, lie with the party. But, then, it did not have to as by *"workers' democracy"* the Platform meant inter-party democracy, as can be seen when it *"affirm[s]"* the *"New Course Resolution"* definition quoted above. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 402]

***certain sense**, made them identical."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 75–6]

The following year saw Trotsky state that *"[w]ith us the dictatorship of the party (quite falsely disputed theoretically by Stalin) is the expression of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat ... The dictatorship of a party is a part of the socialist revolution"*. [**Leon Trotsky on China**, p. 251] 1927 also saw the publication of the **Platform of the Opposition**, in which Trotsky **still** did not question the issue of Party dictatorship. Indeed, it was actually stressed in that document and so while it urged a *"consistent development of a workers' democracy in the party, the trade unions, and the soviets"* and to *"convert the urban soviets into real institutions of proletarian power"* it contradicted itself by, ironically, attacking Stalin for weakening the party's dictatorship. In its words, the *"growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* It stressed that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat demands a single and united proletarian party as the leader of the working masses and the poor peasantry"* and *"[n]obody who sincerely defends the line of Lenin can entertain the idea of 'two parties' or play with the suggestion of a split. Only those who desire to replace Lenin's course with some other can advocate a split or a movement along the two-party road"*. Given this: *"We will fight with all our power against the idea of two parties, because the dictatorship of the proletariat demands as its very core a single proletarian party. It demands a single party."* [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–7)**, p. 384, p. 395, p. 439 and p. 441]

The Platform was as anti-democratic economically as it was politically, asserting that *"nationalisation of the means of production was a decisive step toward the socialist reconstruction of that whole social system which is founded upon the exploitation*



that socialist organisations should reflect as much as possible the future society we are aiming to create (see section H.1.6. To build organisations which are statist/capitalistic in structure cannot do other than reproduce the very problems of statism/capitalism into them and so undermine their liberatory potential. As Murray Bookchin put it:

> *"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events ... In the beginning ... it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines **that reflect the very society it professes to oppose** ... Its membership is schooled in obedience ... The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation ... Its leaders ... lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently . ..*
>
> *"The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns — as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect — in moulding society in its own hierarchical imagine if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the*

> *state. It fosters the bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of 'withering away,' the state controlled by the 'glorious party' preserves the very conditions which 'necessitate' the existence of a state — and a party to 'guard' it."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 123–6]

As we argue in section J.3, anarchists do not reject the need for political organisations (anarchist groups, federations and so on) to work in mass movements and in revolutionary situations. However, we do reject the Leninist idea of a vanguard party as being totally inappropriate for the needs of a social revolution — a revolution that aims to create a free society.

In short, anarchists reject both the means and the ends Leninists aim for and so our disagreements with that tradition is far more than semantics. Simply put, for anarchists Leninism is **not** "socialism from below" but rather a centralised, top-down movement aiming for a centralised, top-down state capitalist system.

This does not mean that all members of Leninist parties do not support workers' self-management in society and production and some genuinely seem to favour workers' democracy and actually do believe in working class self-emancipation, etc. They are simply unaware that the tradition they have joined does not actually share those values (thanks to, it must be stated, works like McNally's). It could, perhaps, be argued that such values can be "added" to the core Leninist ideas. However, such a viewpoint is optimistic in the extreme. Leninist positions on workers' self-management, etc., do not "just happen" nor are they the product of ignorance. Rather they are the natural result of those "core" ideas. To add other values to Leninism would be like adding extensions to a house built on sand — the foundations are unsuitable and any additions



> *because history has not created any other way to determine the correct position ... the party, in the last analysis, is always right".* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 179]

He did acknowledge that *"even the party itself can make occasional mistakes"* but argued that the duty of a party member was to follow its decisions if they could not convince the party that it had made one of these. The links to his arguments from 1920 and 1921 are clear enough, alongside the privileged position this places the party in terms of its right to ignore any democratic decisions of the masses it claimed to be ruling on behalf of. Needless to say, the "New Course Resolution" likewise stated party democracy *"does not ... imply the freedom to form factional groupings".* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 180 and p. 460]

Moving on to Left Opposition proper, we see Trotsky opining in 1926 that the *"dictatorship of the party does not contradict the dictatorship of the class either theoretically or practically; but is the expression of it, if the regime of workers' democracy is constantly developed more and more."* [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–27)**, p. 76] The obvious contradictions and absurdities of this assertion are all too plain. Needless to say, when defending the concept of *"the dictatorship of the party"* he linked it to Lenin (and so to Leninist orthodoxy):

> *"Of course, the foundation of our regime is the dictatorship of a class. But this in turn assumes ... it is class that has come to self-consciousness through its vanguard, which is to say, through the party. Without this, the dictatorship could not exist ... Dictatorship is the most highly concentrated function of a class, and therefore the basic instrument of a dictatorship is a party. In the most fundamental aspects a class realises its dictatorship through a party. That is why Lenin spoke not only of the dictatorship of the class but also the dictatorship of the party and, **in a***

fortunately, yet again, this argument suffers from the flaw that it is false.

Let us start with the so-called *"New Course"* of December 1923, in which Trotsky stated that *"[w]e are the only party in the country and, in the period of the dictatorship, it could not be otherwise"*, the Party was *"obliged to monopolise the direction of political life"* and it was *"incontestable that fractions [within the Party] are a scourge in the present situation"*. Of course, there was talk of *"workers' democracy"* but the *"New Course Resolution"* was clear that that term in fact meant only internal party democracy: *"Workers' democracy means the liberty of frank discussion of the most important questions of party life by all members, and the election of all leading party functionaries and commissions"*. [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923–25)**, p. 87, p. 89 and p. 460]

This applied to the banning of factions **within** the Communist party, with Trotsky keen to stress at the 13th Party Congress in 1924 that *"party democracy in no way implies freedom for factional groupings which are extremely dangerous for the ruling party, since they threaten to split or divide the government and the state apparatus as a whole. I believe this is undisputed and indisputable"*. He linked his position to the 10th Party Congress *"where Valdimir Ilyich [Lenin] personally"* made the same points and re-iterated his position: *"I have never recognised freedom for groupings inside the party, nor do I now recognise it"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170 and p. 171] He declared his faith in the Party:

> *"Comrades, none of us wants to be or can be right against the party. In the last analysis the party is always right, because the party is the only historical instrument that the working class possesses for the solution of its fundamental tasks … I know that no one can be right against the party. It is only possible to be right only with the party and through it*



would soon fall down. This was what happened during the Russian Revolution — movements from below which had a different vision of socialism came to grief on the rocks of Bolshevik power. Simply put, adding self-management to a centralised system and party power is impossible and if we strip Leninism of all its authoritarian notions then we would simply have anarchism.

So as we discuss in section H.3.1, while there appears to be some similarity between the aims of anarchism and Marxism (namely a free classless society of free and equal individuals) on closer look there are significant differences between the two and only anarchism truly represents *"socialism from below"* (as we will see next section, we have been talking about "from below" since the 1840s while Marxist use of the terminology dates from much later). This is no coincidence.. Moreover, as shown in section H.6.2, these differences are important as Bolshevik ideology, once its advocates held power at the top of a centralises state structure and started to apply it, impacted negatively on the Russian revolution and ensured its failure (i.e., it was not creating socialism even if a self-proclaimed "communist" party remained in power at the end of the civil war in 1920). The issue is clear — either you aim for a socialist society and use socialist methods to get there or you do not. Those who do seek **real** socialism (as opposed to warmed up state capitalism) would be advised to recognise this and study closely what Leninists actually mean by the slogans they use rather than taking them at face value.

## 14. Why is McNally's use of the term *"socialism from below"* dishonest?

McNally argues that Marxism can be considered as *"socialism from below."* Indeed, that is the name of his pamphlet. However, his use of the term is somewhat ironic for two reasons. First, because the expression *"from below"* can be found in the

writings of Bakunin and Proudhon, not Marx. Second, because Lenin explicitly attacked the idea of *"from below"* as an anarchist principle.

In terms of the first point, the expression *"from below"* was constantly on the lips of Bakunin and Proudhon. Indeed, it was a defining part of their ideas. Thus we find Proudhon attacking the state socialism of Louis Blanc in 1846 because he *"is never tired of appealing to authority, and socialism loudly declares itself anarchistic; M. Blanc places power above society, and socialism tends to subordinate it to society; M. Blanc makes social life descend from above, and socialism maintains that it springs up and grows from below"* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 205] He reiterated this during the 1848 revolution:

> *"**From above** ... signifies power; **from below** signifies the people. On the one hand we have the actions of government; on the other, the initiative of the masses ... revolution from above is ... inevitably revolution according to the whims of the Prince, the arbitrary judgement of a minister, the fumblings of an Assembly or the violence of a club: it is a revolution of dictatorship and despotism .. . Revolution on the initiative of the masses is a revolution by the concerted action of the citizens, by the experience of the workers, by the progress and diffusion of enlightenment, revolution by the means of liberty ... a revolution from below, from true democracy ... Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Cabet, Louis Blanc, all believers in the organisation of labour by the State, by Capital, by whatever authority, appealed ... to revolution **from above**. Instead of teaching the people how to organise themselves, by calling on their experience and their reasoning, they demanded Power ...*



*power."* [Leonard Schapiro, **The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 294] So even limited industrial democracy was considered too much by Trotsky in 1921. In late March 1921, he re-iterated this position in relation to the crushing of the Kronstadt revolt for soviet democracy by asserting that the *"economic, political, and national independence of Russia is possible only under the dictatorship of the soviets. The backbone of this dictatorship is the Communist Party. There is no other party that can play this part, nor can there be."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 73]

Trotsky repeated this call again in 1922 when he stated plainly that *"we maintain the dictatorship of our party!"* [**The First Five Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 255] Writing in the following year, he argued that *"[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work."* He stressed that *"[o]ur party is the ruling party ... To allow any changes whatever in this field, to allow the idea of a partial ... curtailment of the leading role of our party would mean to bring into question all the achievements of the revolution and its future."* He indicated the fate of those who **did** question this: *"Whoever makes an attempt on the party's leading role will, I hope, be unanimously dumped by all of us on the other side of the barricade."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158 and p. 160] Which, of course, was exactly what the Bolsheviks had done to other socialists (anarchists and others) and working class militants and strikers after they had taken power (see section H.6 for details).

At this point, it will be argued that this was before the rise of Stalinism and his activities in the Left Opposition. As McNally suggests, many argue that these developments saw Trotsky finally rejecting the idea of party dictatorship and re-embracing what McNally terms the *"democratic essence"* of Leninism. Un-

> *Party of Spain."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 174]

This dismissal of working-class democracy was party orthodoxy, as can be seen from the awkward fact that Trotsky continued to argue for party dictatorship after the end of the civil war in November 1920. Thus we discover him in early in 1921 arguing again for Party dictatorship at the Communist Party's Tenth Party Congress. His comments made there against the **Workers' Opposition** within the Communist Party make his position clear:

> *"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]

It should be noted that Trotsky was being too generous to the Workers' Opposition, for *"while demanding more freedom of initiative for the workers"* in economic matters, *"it was quite content to leave untouched the state of affairs in which a few hundred thousand imposed their will on many millions"* and it *"had no wish to disturb the communist party's monopoly of political*



> *"The conclusion is that government can never be revolutionary quite simply because it is government. Society alone, the masses armed with their intelligence, can create revolution; society alone is able to deploy all its spontaneity, to analyse and explain the mystery of its destiny and its origin, to change its faith and its philosophy, because it alone is capable of fighting against its originator and bearing its fruit. Governments are God\92s scourge, established to* ***discipline*** *the world: do you really expect them to destroy themselves, to create freedom, to make revolution?*
>
> *"They cannot act otherwise. All revolutions ... were achieved by the spontaneity of the people: governments have always hindered, always suppressed, always beaten back; they have never created revolution. Their role is not to create change but to control it."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 398–9]

Thus *"experience testifies and philosophy demonstrates ... that any revolution, to be effective, must be spontaneous and emanate, not from the heads of the authorities but from the bowels of the people: that government is reactionary rather than revolutionary: that it could not have any expertise in revolutions, given that society, to which that secret is alone revealed, does not show itself through legislative decree but rather through the spontaneity of its manifestations: that, ultimately, the only connection between government and labour is that labour, in organising itself, has the abrogation of government as its mission".* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1., p. 52] *"The Revolution* ***from above****,"* Proudhon stressed, *"is the intervention of power in everything; it is the absolutist initiative of the State, the pure governmentalism of ... [state-socialist] Louis Blanc. The Revolution* ***from above*** *is the negation of collective activity, of popular spontaneity ... What serious and lasting Revolution was*

*not made **from below**, by the people? How did the Revolution of 1789 come about? How was that of February made? The Revolution **from above** has never been other than the oppression of the wills of those below."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 143]

Proudhon, then, placed his hopes for introducing socialism in alternative institutions created by working class people themselves and *"insisted that the revolution could only come from below, through the action of the workers themselves."* [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 157] Bakunin did likewise, seeing the labour movement as the means of ensuring that an anarchist revolution would come *"from below."* As he put it, *"liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179] Elsewhere he wrote that *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206] As he wrote in 1868:

> *"I hate Communism because it is the negation of liberty and because for me humanity is unthinkable without liberty. I am not a Communist, because Communism concentrates and swallows up in itself for the benefit of the State all the forces of society, because it inevitably leads to the concentration of property in the hands of the State ... I want to see society and collective or social property organised from below upwards, by way of free associations, not from above downwards, by means of any kind of authority whatsoever ... That is the sense in which I am a Collectivist and not a Communist."*



Against those who argued that by *"[d]estroying or driving underground the other parties, you have thereby prevented their political competition with you, and consequently you have deprived yourselves of the possibility of testing your line of action"* Trotsky replied by pointing to the efficiency of Bolshevik repression: *"In a period in which ... the political struggle swiftly passes into a civil war, the ruling party has sufficient material standard by which to test its line of action, without the possible circulation of Menshevik papers. Noske crushes the Communists, but they grow. We have suppressed the Mensheviks and the SRs — and they have disappeared. This criterion is sufficient for us."* From this he concluded that Bolshevism *"expresses the interests of historical development."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 109–110] Needless to say, he did not repeat this "might-makes-right" criteria when the Stalinists made the Trotskyists disappear in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Of course, this was written during the Civil War and may be excused in terms of the circumstances in which it was written. However, this ignores the awkward fact that Trotsky's arguments reflected the theoretical conclusions required to produce what he considered as a **successful** revolution and, as noted in section 8, other leading Bolsheviks had proclaimed to the world this necessity of party dictatorship. Trotsky did not object and universalised the argument when he pondered the important decisions of the revolution and who would make them in his reply to the delegate from the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT:

> *"Who decides this question [and others like it]? We have the Council of People's Commissars but it has to be subject to some supervision. Whose supervision? That of the working class as an amorphous, chaotic mass? No. The Central Committee of the party is convened to discuss ... and to decide ... Who will solve these questions in Spain? The Communist*

> *endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 161–3]

In this, as with party dictatorship, he was simply repeating Bolshevik orthodoxy — Lenin had been arguing for state-appointed one-man management (armed with *"dictatorial"* authority) since the spring of 1918. Ignoring all the euphemisms for party dictatorship (*"the collective will of the workers"*) and obvious questions (like, if this were the case, how Trotsky could argue that it was the proletariat which had *"taken power into its own hands"*?), the fact is that he was simply wrong. It **does** matter if workplaces are run by their workers or not for if they do not then someone else does. Replacing capitalists with state bureaucrats just changes the face of the boss — as anarchists have been arguing since Proudhon. Trotsky did not deny how authoritarian this regime was:

> *"Both economic and political compulsion are only forms of the expression of the dictatorship of the working class in two closely connected regions ... the road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the State ... Just as a lamp, before going out, shoots up in a brilliant flame, so the State, before disappearing, assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the most ruthless form of State, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction ... No organisation except the army has ever controlled man with such severe compulsion as does the State organisation of the working class in the most difficult period of transition. It is just for this reason that we speak of the militarisation of labour.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 169–170]



> [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 67–8]

Anarchists, argued Bakunin, opposed the state because *"all State rule, all governments being by their very nature placed outside the people, must necessarily seek to subject it to customs and purposes entirely foreign to it. We therefore declare ourselves to be foes ... of all State organisations as such, and believe that the people can be happy and free, when, organised from below upwards by means of its own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of any guardians, it will create its own life.*" [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 63] This applied to the so-called "workers' state" because *"every state, even the pseudo-People's State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 338] The revolution would see *"an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments — a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations; and, finally, ... universal human brotherhood triumphing on the ruins of all the states.*" [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 33]

No such idea is present in Marx. Rather, he saw a revolution as consisting of the election of a socialist party into government. At its best, for example when he was reporting on the Paris Commune, this vision had libertarian (*"from below"*) aspects — perhaps unsurprisingly, given its obviously Proudhon-inspired federalism (which Marx could not bring himself to mention). However, at its worse this was not only reformist in the sense of utilising bourgeois elections (see section H.3.10)

but also "from above" in nature. In 1850, for example, he argued that the workers must *"not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority."* This was because *"the path of revolutionary activity"* can *"proceed only from the centre."* This meant that the workers must be opposed to a *"federative republic"* and *"must not allow themselves to be misguided by the democratic talk of freedom for the communities, of self-government, etc."* This centralisation of power was essential to overcome local autonomy, which would allow *"every village, every town and every province"* to put *"a new obstacle in the path"* of the revolution due to *"local and provincial obstinacy."* Decades later, Marx dismissed Bakunin's vision of *"the free organisation of the worker masses from bottom to top"* as *"nonsense."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 509 and p. 547]

As we discuss in section H.3.2, the idea of *"socialism from below"* is a distinctly anarchist notion, one found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin, **not** Marx. It is ironic, given his distorted account of Proudhon and Bakunin, that McNally uses their words to describe Marxism!

Secondly, and far more seriously for McNally, Lenin repeatedly dismissed the idea of *"from below"* as not Marxist. In 1904, during the debate over the party split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Lenin stated that the argument *"[b]ureaucracy **versus** democracy is in fact centralism **versus** autonomism; it is the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of opportunist Social-Democracy. The latter strives to proceed from the bottom upward, and, therefore, wherever possible ... upholds autonomism and 'democracy,' carried (by the overzealous) to the point of anarchism. The former strives to proceed from the top downward."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 396–7] Lenin repeated this argument during the near revolution of 1905, mocking the Mensheviks for only wanting *"pressure from*



> *of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests ... the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, pp. 107–9]

He argued against those who suggested that the dictatorship should be carried out by the whole class: *"It is not easy to understand what actually they imagine when they say this. The dictatorship of the proletariat, in its very essence, signifies the immediate supremacy of the revolutionary vanguard, which relies upon the heavy masses, and, where necessary, obliges the backward tail to dress by the head."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110] This rejection of democracy also applied to workplace democracy:

> *"our Party Congress ... expressed itself in favour of the principle of one-man management in the administration of industry ... It would be the greatest possible mistake ... to consider this decision as a blow to the independence of the working class ... It would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered ... we took our stand, and continue to do so on purely Marxist views of the revolutionary problems and creative duties of the proletariat when it has taken power into its own hands .. . I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most*

*"The exclusive role of the Communist Party under the conditions of a victorious proletarian revolution is quite comprehensible. The question is of the dictatorship of a class. In the composition of that class there enter various elements, heterogeneous moods, different levels of development. Yet the dictatorship pre-supposes unity of will, unity of direction, unity of action. By what other path then can it be attained? The revolutionary supremacy of the proletariat pre-supposes within the proletariat itself the political supremacy of a party, with a clear programme of action and a faultless internal discipline.*

*"The policy of coalitions contradicts internally the regime of the revolutionary dictatorship. We have in view ... a coalition of Communists with other 'Socialist' organisations, representing different stages of backwardness and prejudice-of the labouring masses.*

*"[ ...]*

*"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests*



*below"* which was *"pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government."* Instead, he argued for *"pressure ... from above as well as from below,"* where *"pressure from above"* was *"pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens."* He notes that Engels *"appreciated the importance of action from above"* and that he saw the need for *"the utilisation of the revolutionary governmental power."* Lenin summarised his position (which he considered as being in line with that of orthodox Marxism) by stating: *"Limitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is* ***anarchism.****"* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 8, p. 474, p. 478, p. 480 and p. 481] He returned to this theme, explicitly stating that it was an *"anarchist stand"* to be for *"'action only from below', not 'from below and from above'"*. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 9, p. 77]

How you can have *"socialism from below"* when your *"organisational principle"* is *"from the top downward"* and *"renunciation of pressure also from above is* ***anarchism****"* is not explained by McNally. Moreover, given that McNally states repeatedly the evils of *"from above"* in his pamphlet he gives his account of Marxism a distinctly anarchist feel (while denouncing it in a most deceitful way). Why is this? Perhaps because his readers would recognise that in a conflict between *"pressure from above"* (the armed might of the state) and *"pressure from below"* (the people) it would be the former which would tend to win? And that this was the case in the Russian Revolution, with the Bolshevik state crushing all forms of working class protest? As we discuss in section H.6, the *"the utilisation of the revolutionary governmental power"* simply produced a "dictatorship **over** the proletariat" as Bakunin (see section H.1.1). and other anarchists had long predicted.

In other words, Marxism is based on idea that the government pressuring the citizens is acceptable. As we discuss in the next section, Trotsky recognised this and openly proclaimed the need for party dictatorship to resist the pressures from below (dismissed as *"wavering"* and *"vacillation"* by the back-

ward masses). As we discuss in section H.5, the vanguardism of Leninism privileges the party and its leadership and lays the foundation for "socialism from below." A given ideological premise will led to certain conclusions in practice — conclusions Lenin and Trotsky were not shy in explicitly stating.

Little wonder McNally fails to mention Lenin's support for revolutionary action *"from above"* for in practice Leninism substituted the rule (and then dictatorship) of the party for that of the working class as a whole. Lenin always stressed that the *"Bolsheviks must assume power"* and they *"can and must take state power into their own hands."* He raised the question of *"will the Bolsheviks dare take over full state power alone?"* and answered it: *"I have already had occasion ... to answer this question in the affirmative."* Moreover, *"a political party ... would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the name of party ... if it refused to take power when opportunity offers."* He equated rule by the party with rule by the class, noting that *"proletarian revolutionary power"* and *"Bolshevik power"* are *"now one the same thing"* and indicated that once in power the Bolsheviks *"shall be fully and unreservedly in favour of a strong state power and of centralism."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 26, p. 19, p. 90, p. 179 and p. 116] In this confusion, we must note, Lenin followed Engels who argued that *"each political party sets out to establish its rule in the state, so the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party is striving to establish **its** rule, the rule of the working class."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 372] Such confusion is deadly to a true *"revolution from below"* and justifies the use of repression against the working class based on the advanced ideas of the vanguard party.

McNally, of course, stresses the impact of the civil war on the degeneration of Bolshevism but comments like these were not caused by circumstantial factors as can be seen from Lenin's work **Left-Wing Communism**. In this 1920 tract, written for the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin lambasted those Marxists who argued for



it *"was Trotsky's great virtue to insist against all odds that socialism was rooted in the struggle for human freedom."* By the mid-1920s *"the programme of the Left Opposition"* which Trotsky lead had as one of its *"two central planks"* that *"democracy had to be re-established in the Bolshevik party and in the mass organisations such as the trade unions and the soviets."* In short:

> *""Throughout the 1920s and until his death at the hands of Stalinist agent in 1940, Trotsky fought desperately to build a revolutionary socialist movement based on the principles of Marx and Lenin.""*

There is one slight flaw with this argument, namely that it is not actually true. All through the 1920s and 1930s Trotsky, rather than argue for *"socialism's democratic essence"*, continually argued for party dictatorship. That McNally asserts the exact opposite suggests that the ideas of anarchism are not the only ones he is ignorant of. To prove our case, we simply need to provide a chronological account of Trotsky's actual ideas.

We shall begin in early 1920 when he argued that the *"working class cannot be left wandering round all over Russia. They must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers"* and that *"[d]eserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps"*. [quoted by Maurice Brinton, *"The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control"*, **For Workers' Power**, p. 61] Is *"human freedom"* (to use McNally's words) compatible with Trotsky's suggestions? This was no isolated comment and in July of that year we discover him arguing that:

> *"In the hands of the party is concentrated the general control ... it has the final word in all fundamental questions ... the last word belongs to the Central Committee of the party ... Such a regime is possible only in the presence of the unquestioned authority of the party, and the faultlessness of its discipline ...*

> *"The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators — a new class born mainly form the womb of the so-called intelligentsia ... We do not mean to say ... that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from centralisation. It cannot be otherwise."* [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 123–4]

Thus McNally's use of the term *"from below"* is dishonest on two levels. Firstly, it is of anarchist origin and, secondly, it was repudiated by Lenin himself (who urged revolution *"from below"* and *"from above"*, thus laying the groundwork for a new class system based around the Party). It goes without saying that either McNally is ignorant of his subject (and if so, why write a pamphlet on it?) or he knew these facts and decided to suppress them. Either way it shows the bankruptcy of Marxism — it uses libertarian rhetoric for non-libertarian ends while distorting the real source of those ideas. That Lenin dismissed this rhetoric and the ideas behind them as *"anarchist"* says it all. McNally's (and the SWP/ISO's) use of this rhetoric and imagery is therefore deeply dishonest.

## 15. Did Trotsky keep alive Leninism's *"democratic essence"*?

McNally argues that *"[d]uring the terrible decades of the 1920s and 1940s ... the lone voice of Leon Trotsky kept alive some of the basic elements of socialism from below"* and suggests



direct working class power against the idea of party rule (i.e. the various council communists around Europe) and argued that *"the Communists' correct understanding of his tasks"* lies in *"correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully assume power, when it will be able — during and after the seizure of power — to win adequate support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian working masses, and when it is able thereafter to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule by educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the working people."* Note, the vanguard (the party) seizes power, **not** the masses and he stressed that the *"mere presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the party **or** dictatorship of the class: dictatorship (party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (party) of the masses?' — testifies to most incredible and hopelessly muddled thinking"* and *"[t]o go so far ... as to contrast, **in general**, the dictatorship of the masses with a dictatorship of the leaders is ridiculously absurd, and stupid."* [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 575, p. 567 and p. 568] He then explained the nature of Bolshevik rule:

> *"In Russia today, the connection between leaders, party, class and masses ... are concretely as follows: the dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat organised in the Soviets and is guided by the Communist Party ... The Party, which holds annual congresses ..., is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress, while the current work in Moscow has to be carried on by [two] still smaller bodies ... which are elected at the plenary sessions of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee to each bureau. This, it would appear, is a full-fledged 'oligarchy.' No important political or organisational question is decided by*

> *any state institution in our republic [sic!] without the guidance of the Party's Central Committee.*
>
> *"In its work, the Party relies directly on the **trade unions**, which ... have a membership of over four million and are formally **non-Party**. Actually, all the directing bodies of the vast majority of the unions ... are made up of Communists, and carry out of all the directives of the Party. Thus ... we have a formally non-communist .. . very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the **class** and **the masses,** and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the **class dictatorship** of the class is exercised."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 571–2]

This was *"the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed 'from above,' from the standpoint of the practical realisation of the dictatorship"* and so *"all this talk about 'from above' **or** 'from below,' about 'the dictatorship of leaders' **or** 'the dictatorship of the masses,'"* is *"ridiculous and childish nonsense."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 573] The links with his comments from 1904 and 1905 are clear, as clear as his explanation of the lessons he thought that the world communist movement had to learn from the Bolshevik revolution. The notion that Leninism stands for *"socialism from below"* in untenable.

Lenin, of course, did not bother to view "proletarian" state power "from below," from the viewpoint of the proletariat. If he had, perhaps he would have recounted the numerous strikes and protests broken by the Cheka under martial law, the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the imposition of *"one-man management"* onto the workers in production, the turning of the unions into agents of the state/party and the elimination of working class freedom by party power (see section 8). All of which suggests that there **are** fundamental differences, at least for the masses, between *"from above"* and *"from below."*



Anarchists, in contrast, recognise that parties and classes are different and only self-management in popular organisations from below upwards can ensure that a social revolution remains in the hands of all and not a source of power for the few. Thus *"All Power to the Soviets,"* for anarchists, means **exactly** that — not a euphemism for *"All Power to the Party."* As Russian anarchist Voline argued, *"for, the anarchists [in 1917] declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets."* Marxist confusion of the difference between working class power and party power, combined with the nature of centralised power and an ideology which privileges the party over the working class (see section 11) cannot help but lead to the rise of a ruling bureaucracy, pursuing "from above" their own power and privileges. *"**All political power inevitably creates a privileged situation** for the men who exercise it,"* argued Voline. *"Thus is violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle and strikes at the heart of the Social Revolution"* and *"becomes the source of other privileges ... **power is compelled to create a bureaucratic and coercive apparatus** indispensable to all authority ... **Thus it forms a new privileged caste,** at first politically and later economically."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 213 and p. 249]

The concept of revolution *"from above"* is one that inevitably leads to a new form of class rule — rule by bureaucracy. This is not because the Bolsheviks were "bad people" — rather it is to do with the nature of centralised power (which by its very nature can only be exercised by the few) combined with bad politics (the confusion of party power with people power, unthinking prejudices in favour of centralism, ignoring the need for only *"from below"*, etc.). As the Russian anarchist Sergven argued in 1918 while the Bolshevik regime was building state capitalism:

calls to stand firm and crush the counter-revolution. During and after the May Days, the leaders of the CNT asserted that the FoD were Marxists (which was quite ironic as it was the CNT leaders who were acting as Marxists in Spain usually did by joining with bourgeois governments). This was a slander, pure and simple.

The best source to refute claims that the FoD were Marxists (or becoming Marxist) or that they were influenced by, or moved towards, the Bolshevik-Leninists is Agustin Guillamon's book **The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937–1939**. Guillamon is a Marxist (of the "left-communist" kind) and no anarchist (indeed he states that the *"Spanish Revolution was the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat."* [p. 108]). That indicates that his account can be considered objective and not anarchist wishful thinking. Here we use his work to refute the claims that the FoD were Marxists. Section 9 discusses their links (or lack of them) with the Spanish Trotskyists.

So were the FoD Marxists? Guillamon makes it clear — no, they were not. In his words, *"[t]here is nothing in the Group's theoretical tenets, much less in the columns of **El Amigo del Pueblo** [their newspaper], or in their various manifestos and handbills to merit the description 'marxist' being applied to the Group [by the CNT leadership]. They were simply an opposition to the CNT's leadership's collaborationist policy, making their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology."* [p. 61] He stresses this in his conclusion:

> *"The Friends of Durruti was an affinity group, like many another existing in anarcho-syndicalist quarters. It was not influenced to any extent by the Trotskyists, nor by the POUM. Its ideology and watchwords were quintessentially in the CNT idiom: it cannot be said that they displayed a marxist ideology at any time ... They were against*



idea of a "workers' state" and so with the ideas of Marx and Engels. As Bakunin argued against Marx (and anarchists have repeated since) the state is, by its nature, a centralised and top-down machine. By creating a "revolutionary" government, power is automatically transferred from the working class into the hands of a few people at the top. As they have the real, **de facto**, power in the state, it is inevitable that they will implement "socialism from above" as that is how the state is structured. As Bakunin argued, all states *"are in essence only machines governing the masses from above"* by a *"privileged minority, allegedly knowing the genuine interests of the people better than the people themselves."* The idea of a state being run "from below" makes as much sense as "dry rain." Little wonder Bakunin argued for a *"federal organisation, from the bottom upward, of workers' associations, groups, city and village communes, and finally of regions and peoples"* as *"the sole condition of a real and not fictitious liberty."* In other words: *"Where all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 211, p. 210 and p. 223] Only this, the destruction of every state and its replacement by a free federation of workers' councils, can ensure a real *"socialism from below"*.

Therefore, rather than signifying the working class running society directly, the "workers' state" actually signifies the opposite — namely, that the working class has delegated that power and responsibility to **others**, namely the government. As Leninism supports the idea of a "workers' state" then it is inevitably and logically tied to the idea of "socialism from below." Given that Lenin himself argued that "only from below" was an anarchist principle, we can easily see what the *"fatal error"* of Trotsky **actually** was. By rejecting anarchism he automatically rejected **real** *"socialism from below."*

Sadly for McNally, Trotsky did not, as he asserts, embrace the *"democratic essence"* of Leninism in the 1920s or 30s. Rather, as is clear from Trotsky's writings, he embraced party dictator-

ship (i.e. *"socialism from above"*) and considered this as quite compatible (indeed, an essential aspect) of his Leninist ideology. That McNally fails to indicate this and, indeed, asserts the exact opposite of the facts shows that it is not only anarchism he is ignorant about.

## Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

In this appendix of our FAQ we discuss and reply to various analyses of Spanish anarchism put forward by Marxists, particularly Marxist-Leninists of various shades. The history and politics of Spanish Anarchism is not well known in many circles, particularly Marxist ones, and the various misrepresentations and distortions that Marxists have spread about that history and politics are many. This appendix is an attempt to put the record straight with regards the Spanish Anarchist movement and point out the errors associated with the standard Marxist accounts of that movement, its politics and its history.

Hopefully this appendix will go some way towards making Marxists (and others) investigate the actual facts of anarchism and Spanish anarchist history rather than depending on inaccurate secondary material (usually written by their comrades). As such, it is a supplement to section I.8 and provides some background information on the Social Revolution of 1936.

Part of this essay is based on the article *"Trotskyist Lies on Anarchism"* which appeared in **Black Flag** issue no. 211 and Tom Wetzel's article **Workers' Power and the Spanish Revolution**.

### 1. Were the Spanish Anarchists *"Primitive Rebels"*?

The thesis that the Spanish Anarchists were *"primitive rebels,"* with a primitive understanding of the nature of revolution is a common one amongst Marxists. One of the main



to become a government should be supported by socialists, including Trotskyists. Moreover, the UGT and PSOE had worked with the quasi-fascist Primo do Rivera dictatorship during the 1920s. The hypocrisy is clear. So much for the CNT standing *"to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."*

His comments that *"the anarchists ... work[ed] trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection"* is just plain silly. It was **not** anarchists who ran the trains, it was railway workers — under martial law — some of whom were in the CNT and some of whom were anarchists but, in fact, were mostly in the UGT and some of whom were state socialists of various kinds. Moreover, as noted above the Moorish troops under Franco arrived **by sea** and not by train. And, of course, no mention of the fact that the CNT-FAI in the strategically key port of Gijon was denied arms by the Socialists and Communists, which allowed the Moorish troops to disembark without real resistance.

Morrow has a lot to answer for.

### 7. Were the Friends of Durruti Marxists?

It is sometimes claimed that the **Friends of Durruti** Group which formed during the Spanish Revolution were Marxists or represented a "break" with anarchism and a move towards Marxism. Both these assertions are false. We discuss whether the Friends of Durruti (FoD) represented a "break" with anarchism in the following section. Here we indicate that claims of the FoD being Marxists are false.

The Friends of Durruti were formed, in March 1937, by anarchist militants who had refused to submit to Communist-controlled "militarisation" of the workers' militias. During the Maydays — the government attack against the revolution two months later — the Friends of Durruti were notable for their

was badly organised, they failed to co-operate or even communicate with CNT when aid was offered, they relied upon the enemies of the CNT in Catalonia and refused arms to the CNT in both Madrid and Asturias (so allowing the government force, the main force of which landed by sea, easy access to Asturias). All in all, even if the minority of railway workers in the CNT had joined the strike it would have, in all probability, resulted in the same outcome.

Unfortunately, Morrow's assertions have become commonplace in the ranks of the Left and have become even more distorted in the hands of his Trotskyist readers. For example, we find Nick Wrack arguing that the *"Socialist Party called a general strike and there were insurrectionary movements in Asturias and Catalonia, In Madrid and Catalonia the anarchist CNT stood to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."* He continues, *"[i]n Asturias the anarchist militants participated under the pressure of the masses and because of the traditions of unity in that area. However, because of their abstentionist stupidity, the anarchists elsewhere continued to work, even working trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection."* [*"Marxism, Anarchism and the State"*, pp. 31–7, **Militant International Review**, no. 46, p. 34]

Its hard to work out where to start in this travesty of history. We will start with the simple errors. The CNT **did** take part in the struggle in Madrid. As Paul Preston notes, in Madrid the *"Socialists and Anarchists went on strike"* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 174] In Catalonia, as indicated above, the "insurrectionary movement" in Catalonia was organised and lead by Catalan Fascists, who shot upon CNT members when they tried to open their union halls and who arrested CNT and FAI militants the night before the uprising. Moreover, the people organising the revolt had been repressing the CNT for months previously. Obviously attempts by Catalan Fascists



sources for this kind of argument is Eric Hobsbawm's **Primitive Rebels**, who was a member of the British Communist Party at the time. While the obvious Stalinist nature of the author may be thought enough to alert the intelligent of its political biases, its basic thesis is repeated by many Marxists.

Before discussing Hobsbawm in more detail, it would be useful to refute some of the more silly things so-called serious historians have asserted about Spanish Anarchism. Indeed, it would be hard to find another social or political movement which has been more misrepresented or its ideas and activities so distorted by historians whose attitudes seem more supported by ideological conviction rather than history or investigation of social life.

One of the most common descriptions of Spanish anarchism is that it was *"religious"* or *"millenarium"* in nature. Hobsbawm himself accepts this conceptualisation, along with historians and commentators like Gerald Brenan and Franz Brokenau (who, in fact, did state *"Anarchism **is** a religious movement"*). Such use of religion was largely due to the influence of Juan Diaz del Moral, a lawyer and historian who was also a landowner. As Jerome R. Mintz points out, *"according to Diaz del Moral, the moral and passionate obreros conscientes [conscious workers — i.e. workers who considered themselves to be anarchists] absorbed in their pamphlets and newspapers were akin to frenzied believers in a new religion."* [**The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 5f] However, such a perspective was formed by his class position and privileges which could not help but reflect them:

> *"Diaz del Moral ascribed to the campesinos [of Andalusia] racial and cultural stereotypes that were common saws of his class. The sole cause for the waves of rural unrest, Diaz del Moral asserted, could be found in the psychology of the campesinos … He believed that the Andalusian field workers had*

> *inherited a Moorish tendency toward ecstasy and millenarianism that accounted for their attraction to anarchist teaching. Diaz del Moral was mystified by expressions of animosity directed toward him, but the workers considered him to be a senorito, a landowner who does not labour ... Although he was both scholarly and sympathetic, Diaz del Moral could not comprehend the hunger and the desperation of the campesinos around him ... To Diaz del Moral, campesino ignorance, passion, ecstasy, illusion, and depression, not having a legitimate basis in reality, could be found only in the roots of their racial heritage."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 5–6]

Hence the *"religious"* nature of anarchism — it was one of the ways an uncomprehending member of the middle-class could explain working class discontent and rebellion. Unfortunately, this "explanation" has become common place in history books (partly reflected academics class interest too and lack of understanding of working class interests, needs and hopes).

As Mintz argues, *"at first glance the religious model seems to make anarchism easier to understand, particularly in the absence of detailed observation and intimate contact. The model was, however, also used to serve the political ends of anarchism's opponents. Here the use of the terms 'religious' and 'millenarium' stamp anarchist goals as unrealistic and unattainable. Anarchism is thus dismissed as a viable solution to social ills."* He continues by arguing that the *"oversimplifications posited became serious distortions of anarchist belief and practice"* (as we shall see). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 5 and p. 6]

Temma Kaplan's critique of the *"religious"* view is also worth mentioning. She argues that *"the millenarium theory is too mechanistic to explain the complex pattern of Andalusian anarchist activity. The millenarian argument, in portraying the Andalusian anarchists as fundamentally religious, overlooks*



*did not believe it possible to mobilise the workers, few of whom had revolutionary aspirations."* [**The Anarchists of Casa Viejas**, p. 178] Outside of Catalonia, the majority of the railway workers belonged to the UGT [Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 90f] Asturias (the only area where major troop transportation was needed) does not border Catalonia — apparently the army managed to cross Spain on a rail network manned by a minority of its workers.

However, these points are of little import when compared to the fact that Asturias the main government attack was, as we mentioned above, from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops. Troops from Morocco who land by sea do not need trains. Indeed, The ports of Aviles and Gijon were the principle military bases for launching the repression against the uprising.

The real failure of the Asturias revolt did not lie with the CNT, it lay (unsurprisingly enough) with the Socialists and Communists. Despite CNT pleas the Socialists refused arms, Gjon fell after a bloody struggle and became the main base for the crushing of the entire region (*"Arriving at the ports of Aviles and Gijon on October 8, these troops were able to overcome the resistance of the local fishermen and stevedores. The revolutionary committees here were Anarchist dominated. Though they had joined the rising and accepted the slogan UHP [Unity, Proletarian Brothers], the Socialists and Communists of Oviedo clearly distrusted them and had refused arms to their delegate the day before."* [Gabriel Jackson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]).

This Socialist and Communist sabotage of Anarchist resistance was repeated in the Civil War, less than two years later.

As can be seen, Morrow's account of the October Insurrection of 1934 leaves a lot to be desired. The claim that the CNT was responsible for its failure cannot withstand a close examination of the events. Indeed, by providing the facts which Morrow does not provide we can safely say that the failure of the revolt across Spain rested squarely with the PSOE and UGT. It

> *to cede its traditional hegemony, the PSOE rendered the Alianze obrera necessarily ineffective …*
>
> *"Thus, there was little genuine unity on the Spanish Left. Moreover, the strike was very poorly planned. Differences within the PSOE meant that there was no agreement even as to the programme of the strike. For the … leftists, it represented the initiation of a full-scale Socialist revolution; for … the centrists in the party, the aim of the strike was to force Alcala-Zamora to reconsider and invite the Socialists back into a coalition government with the Republicans."* [**Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain 1879–1936** pp. 144–5]

Significantly, Heywood argues that *"[o]ne thing, however, did emerge from the October strike. The example of Asturias provided a pointed lesson for the Left: crucially, the key to the relative success of the insurrection there was the participation of the CNT in an effective Alianza obrera. Without the CNT, the Asturian rising would have been as short-lived and as easily defeated as those in Madrid and Barcelona."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 145]

Having discussed both Madrid and Barcelona above, we leave it to the reader to conclude whether Morrow's comments are correct or whether a more likely alternative explanation for the revolt's failure is possible.

However, even assuming Morrow's claims that the failure of the CNT rail workers' union to continue striking in the face of a completely farcical "revolt" played a key role in its defeat were true, it does not explain many facts. Firstly, the government had declared martial law — placing the railway workers in a dangerous position. Secondly, as Jerome R. Mintz points out, railway workers *"were represented by two competing unions — the Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario of the UGT … and the CNT-affiliated FNIFF … The UGT … controlled the large majority of the workers. [In 1933] Trifon Gomez, secretary of the UGT union, their clear comprehension of the social sources of their oppression."* She concludes that *"the degree of organisation, not the religiosity of workers and the community, accounts for mass mobilisations carried on by the Andalusian anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century."* She also notes that the *"[i]n a secular age, the taint of religion is the taint of irrationality."* [**Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868–1903**, pp. 210–12 and p. 211] Thus, the Andalusian anarchists had a clear idea who their enemies were, namely the ruling class of the region. She also points out that, for all their revolutionary elan, the anarchists developed a rational strategy of revolution, channelling their energies into organising a trade union movement that could be used as a vehicle for social and economic change. Moreover, as well as a clear idea of how to change society they had a clear vision of what sort of society they desired — one built around collective ownership and federations of workers' associations and communes.

Therefore the idea that anarchism can be explained in *"religious"* terms is fundamentally flawed. It basically assumes that the Spanish workers were fundamentally irrational, unable to comprehend the sources of their unhappiness nor able to define their own political goals and tactics and instead looked to naive theories which reinforced their irrationalities. In actuality, like most people, they were sensible, intelligent human beings who believed in a better life and were willing to apply their ideas in their everyday life. That historians apply patronising attitudes towards them says more about the historians than the campesinos.

This uncomprehending attitude to historians can be seen from some of the more strange assertions they make against the Spanish Anarchists. Gerald Brenan, Eric Hobsbawm and Raymond Carr, for example, all maintained that there was a connection between anarchist strikes and sexual practices. Carr's description gives a flavour:

> *"Austere puritans, they sought to impose vegetarianism, sexual abstinence, and atheism on one of the most backward peasantries of Europe … Thus strikes were moments of exaltation as well as demands for better conditions; spontaneous and often disconnected they would bring, not only the abolition of piece-work, but 'the day,' so near at hand that sexual intercourse and alcohol were abandoned by enthusiasts till it should dawn."* [**Spain: 1808–1975**, p. 444]

Mintz, an American anthropologist who actually stayed with the campesino's for a number of years after 1965, actually asked them about such claims. As he put it, the *"level-headed anarchists were astonished by such descriptions of supposed Spanish puritanism by over-enthusiastic historians."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 6] As one anarchist put it, *"[o]f course, without any work the husband couldn't provide any food at dinnertime, and so they were angry at each other, and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. In that sense, yes, there were no sexual relations."* [quoted, **Op. Cit.**, p. 7]

Mintz traces the citations which allowed the historians to arrive at such ridiculous views to a French social historian, Angel Maraud, who observed that during the general strike of 1902 in Moron, marriages were postponed to after the promised division of the lands. As Mintz points out, *"as a Frenchman, Maraud undoubtedly assumed that everyone knew a formal wedding ceremony did not necessarily govern the sexual relations of courting couples."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 6f]

As for abstinence and puritanism, nothing could be further from the truth. As Mintz argues, the anarchists considered alcoholism as being *"responsible for much of the social malaise among many workers … Excessive drinking robbed the worker of his senses and deprived his family of food. Anarchist newspapers and pamphlets hammered out the evil of this vice."* However,



> *"Army reinforcements were soon being rushed toward the region … Eduardo Lopez Ochoa … head[ed] the main relief column … he began to make his way eastward [from Galicia] with a modest force of some 360 troops in trucks, half of whom had to be detached on the way to hold the route open. Meanwhile … in the main Asturian coastal city of Gijon . .. reinforcements first arrived by sea on the seventh, followed by larger units from the Moroccan Protectorate on the tenth."* [**Spain's First Democracy**, p. 219]

No mention of trains in these accounts, so indicating that Morrow's assertions are false. The main attack on Asturias, and so the transportation of troops and goods, was by ***sea***, not by trains.

In addition, these historians point to other reasons for the defeat of the revolt — the amazingly bad organisation of it by the Socialist Party. Raymond Carr sums up the overwhelming opinion of the historians when he says that *"[a]s a national movement the revolution was a fiasco."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 633] Hugh Thomas states that the revolt in Catalonia was *"crushed nearly as quickly as the general strike had been in Madrid."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 136] Brenan correctly argues that *"[f]rom the moment that Barcelona capitulated and the rising in Madrid fizzled out, the miners were of course doomed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 286] The failure of both these revolts was directly attributable to the policies and actions of the Socialists who controlled the *"Workers' Alliances"* in both areas. Hence historian Paul Heywood:

> *"[A]n important factor which contributed to the strikes' collapse and made the state's task easier was the underlying attitude of the Socialists. For all the talk of united action by the Left, the Socialists still wished to dominate any combined moves. Unwilling*

refused to provide the anarchists of these ports with weapons to resist the troop landings). Hence his claim seems somewhat at odds with the actual events of the October uprising.

Moreover, he seems alone in this claim. No other historian (for example, Hugh Thomas in **The Spanish Civil War**, Raymond Carr in **Spain: 1808–1975**, Paul Preston in **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, Gabriel Jackson, **The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931–1939**) makes this claim. But, of course, these are not Trotskyists and so can be ignored. However, for objective readers such an omission might be significant.

Indeed, when these other historians **do** discuss the crushing of the Asturias they all stress the fact that the troops came from the sea. For example, Paul Preston notes that *"[w]ith CEDA approval, Franco ... insisted on the use of troops from Africa ... they shipped Moorish mercenaries to Asturias."* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 177] Gabriel Jackson argues that the government *"feared to send in the regular Army because of the strong possibility that the Spanish conscripts would refuse to fire on the revolutionaries — or even desert to them. The War Minister ... , acting on the advice of Generals Franco and Goded, sent in contingents of the Morrish **regulares** and of the Foreign Legions."* These troops arrived *"at the ports of Aviles and Gijon."* [**The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931–1939**, p. 157]

Richard A. H. Robinson argues that it *"was soon decided that the [Asturias] rebellion could only be crushed by experienced, professional troops. The other areas of Spain could not be denuded of their garrisons in case there were other revolutionary outbreaks. Franco therefore called upon Colonel Yague to lead a force of Moorish regulars to help re-conquer the province from the rebels."* [**The Origins of Franco's Spain**, pp. 190–1] Stanley G. Payne gives a more detailed account of the state's attack:



*"[p]roscriptions were not of a puritanical order"* (and so there was no desire to "impose" such things on people) and quotes an anarchist who stated that *"coffee and tobacco were not prohibited, but one was advised against using them. Men were warned against going to a brothel. It was not a matter of morality but of hygiene."* As for vegetarianism, it *"attracted few adherents, even among the **obreros conscientes**."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 86–7 and p. 88]

Moreover, academic mockery of anarchist attempts to combat alcoholism (and **not** alcohol as such) forgets the social context. Being academics they may not have experienced wage labour directly and so do not realise the misery it can cause. People turn to drink simply because their jobs are so bad and seek escape from the drudgery of their everyday lives. As Bakunin argued, *"confined in their life like a prisoner in his prison, without horizon, without outlet ... the people would have the singularly narrow souls and blunted instincts of the bourgeois if they did not feel a desire to escape; but of escape there are but three methods — two chimerical and a third real. The first two are the dram-shop and the church, debauchery of the body or debauchery of the mind; the third is social revolution."* [**God and the State**, p. 16] So to combat alcoholism was particularly important as many workers turned to alcohol as a means of escaping the misery of life under capitalism. Thus Bookchin:

> *"[T]o abstain from smoking, to live by high moral standards, and to especially adjure the consumption of alcohol was very important at the time. Spain was going through her own belated industrial revolution during the period of anarchist ascendancy with all its demoralising features. The collapse of morale among the proletariat, with rampant drunkenness, venereal disease, and the collapse of sanitary facilities, was the foremost problem which Spanish revolutionaries had to deal with ... On this score, the Spanish anarchists were eminently successful.*

> *Few CNT workers, much less a committed anarchist, would have dared show up drunk at meetings or misbehave overtly with their comrades. If one considers the terrible working and living conditions of the period, alcoholism was not as serious a problem in Spain as it was in England during the industrial revolution."* [*"Introductory Essay"*, **The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), pp. xix-xxf]

Mintz sums up by stating *"[c]ontrary to exaggerated accounts of anarchist zeal, most thoughtful **obreros conscientes** believed in moderation, not abstinence."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88] Unfortunately Mintz's work, the product of years of living with and talking to the people actually involved in the movement, does not seem to have made much impact on the historians. Unsurprising, really, as history is rarely about the actions, ideas and hopes of working people.

As can be seen, historians seem to delight in misrepresenting the ideas and actions of the Spanish Anarchists. Sometimes, as just seen, the distortions are quite serious, extremely misleading and ensure that anarchism cannot be understood or viewed as a serious political theory (we can understand why Marxists historians would seek this). Sometimes they can be subtle as when Ronald Fraser states that at the CNT's Saragossa congress in 1936 *"the proposal to create a libertarian militia to crush a military uprising was rejected almost scornfully, in the name of traditional anti-militarism."* [**Blood of Spain**, p. 101] Hugh Thomas makes the same claim, stating at *"there was no sign that anyone [at the congress] realised that there was a danger of fascism; and no agreement, in consequence, on the arming of militias, much less the organisation of a revolutionary army as suggested by Juan Garcia Oliver."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 181]

However, what Fraser and Thomas omit to tell the reader is that this motion *"was defeated by one favouring the idea of*



fascist Catalan Nationalists who arrested and shot at CNT militants. In Madrid, the CNT backed the strike and was ignored by the Socialists. The revolt itself was badly organised and quickly repressed (thanks, in part, to the actions of the Socialists themselves). Little wonder Peirats asks:

> *"Although it seems absurd, one constantly has to ask whether the Socialists meant to start a true revolution [in October 1934] in Spain. If the answer is affirmative, the questions keep coming: Why did they not make the action a national one? Why did they try to do it without the powerful national CNT? Is a peaceful general strike revolutionary? Was what happened in Asturias expected, or were orders exceeded? Did they mean only to scare the Radical-CEDA government with their action?"* [**The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, pp 95–6]

The only real centre of resistance was in Asturias (on the Spanish north coast). Here, the CNT had joined the Socialists and Communists in a "Workers Alliance". But, against the alliance's terms, the Socialists alone gave the order for the uprising — and the Socialist-controlled Provincial Committee starved the CNT of arms. This despite the CNT having over 22 000 affiliates in the area (to the UGT's 40 000). We discuss the activities of the CNT during the revolt in Asturias later (in section 20) and so will do so here.

Morrow states that the *"backbone of the struggle was broken ... when the refusal of the CNT railroad workers to strike enabled the government to transport goods and troops."* [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30] Yet in Asturias (the only area where major troop transportation was needed) the main government attack was from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops — against the port and CNT stronghold (15 000 affiliates) of Gijon (and, we must stress, the Socialists and Communists

> *already been poisoned by the failure of the Socialist Youth and the UGT to keep the CNT adequately informed of their plans or confer with Anarchosyndicalist delegates. Despite heavy fighting in Madrid, the CNT and FAI were obliged to function largely on their own. When, at length, a UGT delegate informed the revolutionary committee that Largo Caballero was not interested in common action with the CNT, the committee disbanded."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 246]

Bookchin correctly states that *"Abad de Santillan was to observe with ample justification that Socialist attempts to blame the failure of the October Insurrection on Anarchist abstention was a shabby falsehood"* and quotes Santillan:

> *"Can there be talk of abstention of the CNT and censure of it by those who go on strike without warning our organisation about it, who refuse to meet with the delegates of the National Committee [of the CNT], who consent to let the Lerrous-Gil Robles Government take possession of the arms deposits and let them go unused before handing them over to the Confederation and the FAI?"* [**Ibid.**]

Historian Paul Preston confirms that in Madrid *"Socialists and Anarchists went on strike ..."* and that *"the Socialists actually rejected the participation of Anarchist and Trotskyist groups who offered to help make a revolutionary coup in Madrid."* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 174] Moreover, *"when delegates travelled secretly to Madrid to try to co-ordinate support for the revolutionary Asturian miners, they were rebuffed by the UGT leadership."* [Graham Kelsey, **Anarchism in Aragon**, p. 73]

Therefore, in two of the three centres of the revolt, the uprising was badly organised. In Catalonia, the revolt was led by



*guerrilla warfare."* [Peter Marshal, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 460] The Saragossa resolution itself stated that a *"permanent army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution ... The armed people will be the best guarantee against all attempts to restore the destroyed regime by interior or exterior forces ... Each Commune should have its arms and elements of defence."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 64]

Fraser's and Hugh's omission is extremely serious — it gives a radically false impression of anarchist politics. Their comments could led a reader to think that anarchists, as Marxists claim, do not believe in defending a revolution. As can be seen from the actual resolutions of the Saragossa conference, this is not the case. Indeed, given that the congress was explicitly discussing, along with many other issues, the question of *"defence of the revolution"* their omission seriously distorts the CNT's position and anarchist theory. As seen, the congress supported the need to arm the people and to keep those arms under the control of the communes (as well as the role of *"Confederal Defence Forces"* and the efficient organisation of forces on a national level). Given that Thomas quotes extensively from the Saragossa resolution on libertarian communism we can only surmise that he forgot to read the section entitled ***"Defence of the Revolution."***

Hugh and Thomas omissions, however, ensure that anarchism is presented as an utopian and naive theory, unaware of the problems facing society. In reality, the opposite is the case — the Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need to arm the people and resist counter-revolution and fascism by force. Regardless of Thomas' claims, it is clear that the CNT and FAI realised the danger of fascism existed and passed appropriate resolutions outlining how to organise an effective means of self-defence (indeed, as early as February 14 of that year, the CNT had issued a prophetic manifesto warning that right-wing elements were ready to provoke a military coup [Murray

Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 273]). To state otherwise, while quoting from the document that discusses the issue, must be considered a deliberate lie.

However, to return to our main point — Eric Hobsbawm's thesis that the Spanish anarchists were an example of *"pre-political"* groups — the *"primitive rebels"* of his title.

Essentially, Hobsbawm describes the Spanish Anarchists — particularly the Andalusian anarchists — as modern-day secular mystics who, like the millenarians of the Middle Ages, were guided by the irrational belief that it was possible to will profound social change. The actions of the Spanish anarchist movement, therefore, can be explained in terms of millenarian behaviour — the belief that it was able to jump start to utopia via an act of will.

The Spanish farm and industrial workers, it is argued, were unable to grasp the complexities of the economic and political structures that dominated their lives and so were attracted to anarchism. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism is marked by *"theoretical primitivism"* and a primitive understanding of revolution and this explained why anarchism was popular with Spanish workers, particularly farm workers. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism told the workers that by spontaneously rising up together they could overthrow the forces of repression and create the new millennium.

Obviously, we cannot refute Hobsbawm's claims of anarchism's *"theoretical primitivism"* in this appendix, the reader is invited to consult the main FAQ. Moreover, we cannot stress more that Hobsbawm's assertion that anarchists believe in spontaneous, overnight uprisings is false. Rather, we see revolution as a **process** in which day-to-day struggle and organisation play a key role — it is not seen as occurring independently of the on-going class struggle or social evolution. While we discuss in depth the nature of an anarchist social revolution in section J.7, we can present a few quotes by Bakunin to refute Hobsbawm's claim:



[Peirats, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 98] However, the complexity of the actual situation does not bother the reader of Morrow's work as it is not reported. Little wonder, as Peirats argues, the *"absurd contention according to which the confederal proletariat of Catalonia betrayed their brethren in Asturias melts away in the face of a truthful narration of the facts."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 86]

In summary, therefore, Morrow expected the membership of the Catalan CNT and FAI to join in a struggle started and directed by Catalan fascists, whose leaders in the government were arresting and shooting their members, censoring their press, closing their union offices and refusing them a role in the revolt as self-organised forces. We think that sums up the validity of Trotskyism as a revolutionary theory quite well.

In Madrid, the revolt was slightly less farcical. Here the CNT joined the general strike. However, the UGT gave the government 24 hours notice of the general strike, allowing the state to round up the Socialist "leaders," seize arm depots and repress the insurrection before it got started [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]. As Bookchin argues, the *"massive strike in Madrid, which was supported by the entire left, foundered for want of arms and a revolutionary sense of direction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 245] He continues:

> *"As usual, the Socialists emerged as unreliable allies of the Anarchists. A revolutionary committee, established by the CNT and FAI to co-ordinate their own operations, was denied direly needed weapons by the UGT. The arms, as it turned out, had been conveniently intercepted by government troops. But even if they had been available, it is almost certain that the Socialists would not have shared them with the Anarchists. Indeed, relationships between the two major sectors of the labour movement had*

**Obrera**, the police then tried to break up the CNT's regional plenum that was then in session, but fortunately it was meeting on different premises and so they failed. [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 85–6]

Juan Gomez Casas argues that:

> *"The situation [in October 1934] was especially difficult in Catalonia. The Workers' Alliance ... declared a general strike. Luis Companys, president of the Catalan Parliament, proclaimed the Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic ... But at the same time, militants of the CNT and the FAI were arrested ... **Solidaridad Obrera** was censored. The Catalan libertarians understood that the Catalan nationalists had two objectives in mind: to oppose the central government and to destroy the CNT. Jose Dencas, Counsellor of Defence, issued a strict order: 'Watch out for the FAI' ... Luis Companys broadcast a message on October 5 to all 'citizens regardless of ideology.' However, many anarchosyndicalist militants were held by his deputy, Dencas, in the underground cells of police headquarters."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 151–2]

Hence the paradoxical situation in which the anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and FAI members found themselves in during this time. The uprising was organised by Catalan fascists who continued to direct their blows against the CNT. As Abel Paz argues, *"[f]or the rank and file Catalan worker ... the insurgents ... were actually orienting their action in order to destroy the CNT. After that, how could they collaborate with the reactionary movement which was directing its blows against the working class? Here was the paradox of the Catalan uprising of October 6, 1934."* [**Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 158]

In other words, during the Catalan revolt, *"the CNT had a difficult time because the insurgents were its worst enemies."*



> *"Revolutions are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals. They come about through the force of circumstances and are independent of any deliberate ill or conspiracy."* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 139]
>
> *"It is impossible to rouse people by artificial means. Popular revolutions are born by the actual force of events ... It is impossible to bring about such a revolution artificially. It is not even possible to speed it up at all significantly ... There are some periods in history when revolutions are quite simply impossible; there are other periods when they are inevitable."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 183]

As Brian Morris correctly argues, *"Bakunin denies that a social revolution could be made by the will of individuals, independent of social and economic circumstances. He was much less a voluntarist than his Marxist critics make out ... he was ... aware that the social revolution would be a long process that may take many years for its realisation."* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, pp. 138–9] To aid the process of social revolution, Bakunin supported the need for *"pioneering groups or associations of advanced workers who were willing to initiate this great movement of self-emancipation."* However, more is needed — namely popular working class organisations — *"what is the organisation of the masses? ... It is the organisation by professions and trades ... The organisation of the trade sections ... bear in themselves the living seed of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 252 and p. 255]

Therefore, Bakunin saw revolution as a process which starts with day-to-day struggle and creation of labour unions to organise that struggle. As he put it himself:

> *"What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an* ***essentially economic*** *character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the* ***association of the working masses*** *... It will [also] propagandise its principles ... Lastly, the International will expand and organise across frontiers of all countries, so that when the revolution — brought about by the force of circumstances — breaks out, the International will be a real force and will know what it has to do. Then it will be able to take the revolution into its own hands and give it a direction that will benefit the people: an earnest international organisation of workers' associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 109–10]

However, while quoting Bakunin refutes part of his thesis, Hobsbawm does base his case on some actual events of Spanish Anarchist history. Therefore we need to look at these cases and show how he gets these wrong. Without an empirical basis, his case obviously falls even without quotes by Bakunin. Luckily the important examples he uses have been analysed by people without the ideological blinkers inherent in Leninism.

While we shall concentrate on just two cases — Casa Viejas in 1933 and the Jerez rising of 1892 — a few general points should be mentioned. As Jerome Mintz notes, Hobsbawms' *"account is based primarily on a preconceived evolutionary model of political development rather than on data gathered in field research. The model scales labour movements in accord with their progress toward mass parties and central authority. In short, he*



> *6th issue of* ***Solidaridad Obrera*** *... When the woodworkers began to open their offices, they were attacked by the police, and a furious gunfight ensured. The official radio ... reported ... that the fight had already began against the FAI fascists ... In the afternoon large numbers of police and* ***escamots*** *turned out to attack and shut down the editorial offices of* ***Solidaridad Obrera****."* [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 98–9]

In other words, the first shots fired in the Catalan revolt were against the CNT by those in revolt against the central government!

Why were the first shots of the revolt directed at the members of the CNT? Simply because they were trying to take part in the revolt in an organised and coherent manner as urged by the CNT's Regional Committee itself. In spite of the mass arrests of anarchists and CNT militants the night before by the Catalan rebels, the CNT's Catalan Regional Committee issued a clandestine leaflet that stated that the CNT *"must enter the battle in a manner consistent with its revolutionary anarchist principles ... The revolt which broke out this morning must acquire the characteristics of a popular act through the actions of the proletariat ... We demand the right to intervene in this struggle and we will take this."* A leaflet had to be issued as **Solidaridad Obrera** was several hours late in appearing due censorship by the Catalan state. The workers had tried to open their union halls (all CNT union buildings had been closed by the Catalan government since the CNT revolt of December 1933) because the CNT's leaflet had called for the *"[i]mmediate opening of our union buildings and the concentration of the workers on those premises."* [quoted by Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 85] The participation of the CNT in the revolt as an organised force was something the Catalan rebels refused to allow and so they fired on workers trying to open their union buildings. Indeed, after shutting down **Solidaridad**

***libres*** *[boss created anti-CNT yellow unions] of a dozen years before — with a violent antagonism to the Anarcho-Syndicalists. It had a small military organisation, the* ***escamots****, who wore green uniforms. It represented Catalan Nationalism in its most intransigent form: it was in fact Catalan Fascism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 282] Gabriel Jackson calls Estat Catala a *"quasi-fascist movement within the younger ranks of the Esquerra."* [**The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931–1939**, p. 150] Ronald Fraser terms it *"the extreme nationalist and proto-fascist"* wing of the party. [**Blood of Spain**, p. 535] Hugh Thomas notes *"the fascist colouring of Dencas ideas."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 135]

In other words, Morrow attacks the CNT for not participating in a revolt organised and led by Catalan Fascists (or, at best, near fascists)!

Secondly, far from being apologetics, the repression the CNT was suffering from Dencas police forces was very real and was occurring right up to the moment of the revolt. In the words of historian Paul Preston:

> *"[T]he Anarchists bitterly resented the way in which the Generalitat had followed a repressive policy against them in the previous months. This had been the work of the Generalitat's counsellor for public order, Josep Dencas, leader of the quasi-fascist, ultra-nationalist party Estat Catala."* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 176]

This is confirmed by anarchist accounts of the rising. As Peirats points out:

> *"On the eve of the rebellion the Catalan police jailed as many anarchists as they could put their hands on … The union offices had been shut for some time. The press censor had completely blacked out the October*



*explains how anarchosyndicalists were presumed to act rather than what actually took place, and the uprising at Casa Viejas was used to prove an already established point of view. Unfortunately, his evolutionary model misled him on virtually every point."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271] We should also note his "model" is essentially Marxist ideology — namely, Marx's assertion that his aim for mass political parties expressed the interests of the working class and all other visions were the products of sectarians. Mintz also points out that Hobsbawm does not live up to his own model:

> *"While Hobsbawm's theoretical model is evolutionary, in his own treatment anarchism is often regarded as unchanging from one decade to the other. In his text, attitudes and beliefs of 1903–5, 1918–20, 1933, and 1936 are lumped together or considered interchangeable. Of course during these decades the anarchosyndicalists had developed their programs and the individuals involved had become more experienced."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271f]

Hobsbawm believed that Casas Viejas was the classic *"anarchist"* uprising — *"utopian, millenarian, apocalyptic, as all witnesses agree it to have been."* [**Primitive Rebels**, p. 90] As Mintz states, *"the facts prove otherwise. Casas Viejas rose not in a frenzy of blind millenarianism but in response to a call for a nationwide revolutionary strike. The insurrection of January 1933 was hatched by faistas [members of the FAI] in Barcelona and was to be fought primarily there and in other urban centres. The uprisings in the countryside would be diversionary and designed to keep the civil guard from shifting reinforcements. The faista plot was then fed by intensive newspaper propaganda, by travelling orators, and by actions undertaken by the [CNT] defence committees. Representatives of the defence committees from Casas Viejas and Medina had received instructions at a regional meeting held*

*days before. On January 11, the anarchosyndicalists of Casas Viejas believed that they were joining their companeros who had already been at the barricades since January 8."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 272]

Hobsbawm argued that the uprising occurred in accordance with an established economic pattern:

> *"Economic conditions naturally determined the timing and periodicity of the revolutionary outbreaks — for instance, social movements tended to reach a peak intensity during the worse months of the year — January to March, when farm labourers have least work (the march on Jerez in 1892 and the rising of Casas Viejas in 1933 both occurred early in January), March-July, when the proceeding harvest has been exhausted and times are lean."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

Mintz states the obvious:

> *"In reality, most agricultural strikes took place in May and June, the period of the harvest and the only time of the year when the campesinos had any leverage against the landowners. The uprising at Casas Viejas occurred in January precisely because it was **not** an agricultural strike. The timing of the insurrection, hurriedly called to coincide with a planned railway strike that would make it difficult for the government to shift its forces, was determined by strategic rather than economic considerations."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273]

As for the revolt itself, Hobsbawm asserts that:

> *"Secure from the outside world, [the men] put up the red and black flag of anarchy and set about dividing the land. They made no attempt to spread the movement or kill anyone."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 274]



for revolutionary change). This was the viewpoint of the CNT, for example. Thus, the CNT, in effect, was to be used as cannon-fodder to help produce another government that would attack the CNT.

As we discussed in the last section, the UGT backed "Workers Alliances" were little better. To repeat our comments again, the Socialist Party (PSOE) saw the alliances as a means of dominating the workers movement in areas where the UGT was weak. The Socialist "Liaison Committee", for instance, set up to prepare for insurrection, only allowed regional branches to take part in the alliances if they could guarantee Party control (see last section). Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, *"in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the **Alianza Obrera.**"* [**Spain: 1808–1975**, pp. 634-5f] Only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members — the Socialist Union of Catalonia — left in protest over PSOE domination.

During October the only real centre of resistance was in Asturias (on the Spanish north coast). However, before discussing that area, we must mention Madrid and Barcelona. According to Morrow, Catalonia *"should have been the fortress of the uprising"* and that *"[t]erribly discredited for their refusal to join the October revolt, the anarchists sought to apologise by pointing to the repression they were undergoing at the time from Companys."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30 and p. 32] Morrow fails, however and yet again, to mention a few important facts.

Firstly, the uprising in Catalonia was pushed for and lead by Estat Catala which had *"temporary ascendancy over the other groups in the Esquerra"* (the Catalan Nationalist Party which was the Catalan government). *"Companys felt obliged to yield to Dencas' [the leader of Estat Catala] demand that Catalonia should take this opportunity for breaking with Madrid."* [Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, pp. 282–3] Estat Catala *"was a Youth movement ... and composed mostly of workmen and adventurers — men drawn from the same soil as the **sindicatos***

## 6. Was the October 1934 revolt sabotaged by the CNT?

Again, following Morrow, Marxists have often alleged that the Socialist and Workers Alliance strike wave, of October 1934, was sabotaged by the CNT. To understand this allegation, you have to understand the background to October 1934, and the split in the workers' movement between the CNT and the UGT (unions controlled by the reformist Socialist Party, the PSOE).

Socialist conversion to "revolution" occurred only after the elections of November 1933. In the face of massive and bloody repression (see last section), the CNT-FAI had agitated for a mass abstention at the polling booth. Faced with this campaign, the republicans and socialists lost and all the laws they had passed against the CNT were used against themselves. When cabinet seats were offered to the non-republican (fascist or quasi-fascist) right, in October 1934, the PSOE/UGT called for a general strike. If the CNT, nationally, failed to take part in this — a mistake recognised by many anarchist writers — this was not (as reading Morrow suggests) because the CNT thought *"all governments were equally bad"* [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29], but because of well-founded, as it turned out, mistrust of Socialist aims.

A CNT call, on the 13th of February 1934, for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, had met with no reply. As Peirats argues, *"[t]hat the absence of the CNT did not bother them [the UGT and Socialist Party] is clear from their silence in regards to the [CNT's] National Plenary's request."* [Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 96] Rhetoric aside, the Socialist Party's main aim in October seems to have been to force new elections, so they could again form a (mildly reformist) coalition with the Republicans (their programme for the revolt was written by right-wing socialist Indalecio Prieto and seemed more like an election manifesto prepared by the Liberal Republicans than a program



Which, as Mintz clearly shows, was nonsense:

> *"As is already evident, rather than securing themselves from the rest of world, the uprising at Casas Viejas was a pathetic attempt to join in an ill-fated national insurrection. With regard to his second point, there was neither the time nor the opportunity to 'set about dividing the land.' The men were scattered in various locations guarding roads and paths leading to the town. There were no meetings or discussions during this brief period of control. Only a few hours separated the shooting at the barracks and the entrance of the small [government] rescue force from Alcala. Contrary to Hobsbawm's description of peaceful enterprise, at the outset the anarchists surrounding the barracks had fired on the civil guards, mortally wounding two men."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 274]

As can be seen, Hobsbawm was totally wrong about the uprising itself and so it cannot be used as evidence for his thesis. On other, less key issues, he was equally wrong. Mintz gives an excellent summary:

> *"Since kinship is a key feature in 'primitive' societies, according to Hobsbawm, it was a major factor in the leadership of the sindicato [union] in Casas Viejas.*
>
> *"There is no evidence that kinship had anything to do with leadership in the anarchist movement in Casa Viejas or anywhere else. The reverse would be closer to the truth. Since the anarchists expressed belief in universal brotherhood, kinship ties were often undermined. In times of strike or in carrying out any decision of the collective membership, obreros conscientes sometimes had to act counter to their kin-*

*ship demands in order to keep faith with the movement and with their companeros.*

*"Hobsbawm's specific examples are unfortunately based in part on errors of fact…*

*"Hobsbawm's model [also] requires a charismatic leader. Accordingly, the inspired leader of the uprising is said to be 'old Curro Cruz ('Six Fingers') who issued the call for revolution … '*

*[…]*

*"This celebration of Seisdedo's role ['Six Fingers'], however, ignores the unanimous view of townspeople of every class and political persuasion, who assert that the old man was apolitical and had nothing to do with the uprising … every observer and participant in the uprising agrees that Seisdedos was not the leader and was never anything other than a virtuous charcoal burner with but a slight interest in anarchosyndicalism.*

*[…]*

*"Should the role of charismatic leader be given to someone else in the town? This was not a case of mistaken identity. No single person in Casas Viejas could lay clam to dominating the hearts and minds of the men…The sindicato was governed by a junta. Among the cast of characters there is no sign of charismatic leadership …"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 274–6]

Mintz sums up by stating *"Hobsbawm's adherence to a model, and the accumulation of misinformation, led him away from the essential conflicts underlying the tragedy and from the reality of the people who participated in it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 276]

The Jerez uprising of 1892 also fails to provide Hobsbawm with any empirical evidence to support his claims. Indeed, as



tion of working class organs of self-management such as workers' councils (soviets). This was the experience of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias and of the Asturias revolt — in spite of massive revolutionary upheaval such councils based on delegates from workplace and community assembles were **not** formed.

Secondly, the CNT policy of "Unity, yes, but by the rank-and-file" was a valid method of "from the bottom up solidarity." This can be seen from just two examples — Aragon in 1934 and Madrid in 1936. In Aragon, there was a *"general strike that had totally paralysed the Aragonese capital throughout April 1935, ending … on 10 May… the Zaragoza general strike had been a powerful advertisement of the value of a united working-class front … [However,] no formal agreement … had been reached in Zaragoza. The pact there has been created on a purely circumstantial basis with a unity of trade-union action achieved in quite specific circumstances and generated to a considerable extent by the workers themselves."* [Graham Kelsey, **Anarchism in Aragon**, p. 72] In Madrid, April 1936 (in the words of Morrow himself) *"the CNT declared a general strike in Madrid … The UGT had not been asked to join the strike, and at first had denounced it … But the workers came out of all the shops and factories and public services … because they wanted to fight, and only the anarchists were calling them to struggle."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 41]

Thus Morrow's comments against the CNT refusing to join the Workers' Alliance do not provide the reader with the historical context required to make an informed judgement of the CNT's decision. Moreover, they seem hypocritical as the CNT's reasons for refusing to join is similar to Morrow's own arguments against the Workers' Alliance. In addition, the CNT's practical counter-proposal of solidarity from below had more revolutionary potential as it was far more likely to promote rank-and-file unity plus the creation of self-managed organisations such as workers' councils. The Workers' Alliance system would have hindered such developments.

Alliance called a general strike in March 1934 the day **after** the CNT's — hardly an example of workers' unity. [Norman Jones, *"Regionalism and Revolution in Catalonia"*, **Revolution and War in Spain**, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 102]

Thus, the reasons why the CNT did not join in the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" are clear. As well as the natural distrust towards organisations that had repressed them and provided scabs to break their strikes just one year previously, there were political reasons for opposing such an alliance. Rather than being a force to ensure revolutionary organisations springing from the workplace, the "Workers' Alliance" was little more than pacts between the bureaucrats of the UGT and various Marxist Parties. This was Morrow's own argument, which also provided the explanation why such an alliance would weaken any real revolutionary movement. To requote Morrow, *"[w]ithout developing soviets — workers' councils — it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 89]

That is exactly what happened in July, 1936, when the CNT did forsake its anarchist politics and joined in a "Workers' Alliance" type organisation with other anti-fascist parties and unions to set up the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* (see section 20). Thus Morrow himself provides the explanation of the CNT's **political** rationale for being wary of the UGT's *"Workers' Alliance"* while, of course, refusing to provide the historical context the decision was made.

However, while the CNT's refusal to join the "Workers' Alliance" outside of Asturias may have been principled (and sensible), it may be argued that they were the only organisation with revolutionary potential (indeed, this would be the only argument Trotskyists could put forward to explain their hypocrisy). Such an argument would be false for two reason.

Firstly, such Alliances may have potentially created a revolutionary situation but they would have hindered the forma-



in Casas Viejas, the evidence actually works against him. The actual events of the uprising are as follows. Just before midnight of 8th January 1892, several hundred workers entered the town of Jerez crying *"Long live the revolution! Long live Anarchy!"* Armed with only rocks, sticks, scythes and other farm equipment, they marched toward the city jail with the evident intention of releasing its prisoners — who included many political prisoners, victims of the government's recent anti-anarchist campaign. A few people were killed and the uprising dispersed by a regiment of mounted troops.

Hobsbawm claims this revolt as evidence for his *"primitive rebels"* thesis. As historian George R. Esenwein argues:

> *"[T]he Jerez incident cannot be explained in terms of this model. What the millenarian view fails to do in this instance is to credit the workers with the ability to define their own political goals. This is not to deny that there were millenarian aspects of the rising, for the mob action of the workers on the night of 8 January indicates a degree of irrationalism that is consistent with millenarian behaviour. But .. . the agitators seem to have had a clear motive in mind when they rose: they sought to release their comrades from the local jail and thereby demonstrate their defiance of the government's incessant persecution of the International [Workers' Association] movement. However clumsily and crudely they expressed their grievance, the workers were patently aiming to achieve this objective and not to overthrow the local government in order to inaugurate the birth of a libertarian society."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain: 1868–1898**, p. 184]

Similarly, many Marxists (and liberal historians) point to the *"cycle of insurrections"* that occurred during the 1930s. They

usually portray these revolts as isolated insurrections organised by the FAI who appeared in villages and proclaimed libertarian communism. The picture is one of disorganisation, millenarianism and a believe in spontaneous revolution inspired by a few militants and their daring actions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The *"cycle of insurrections"* was far more complex that this, as Juan Gomez Casas makes clear:

> *"Between 1932 and 1934 ... the Spanish anarchists tried to destroy the existing social order through a series of increasingly violent strikes and insurrections, which were at first spontaneous, later co-ordinated."* [**Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 135]

Stuart Christie stresses this point when he wrote *"[i]t has been widely assumed that the cycle of insurrections which began in ... January 1933 were organised and instigated by the FAI ... In fact the rising had nothing to do with the FAI. It began as an entirely spontaneous local affair directed against a local employer, but quickly mushroomed into a popular movement which threatened to engulf the whole of Catalonia and the rest of Spain ... [CNT militant] Arturo Parera later confirmed that the FAI had not participated in the aborted movement 'as an organisation.'"* [**We, the Anarchists**, p. 66] While the initial revolts, such as those of the miners of Alto Llobregat in January 1932, were spontaneous acts which caught the CNT and FAI by surprise, the following insurrections became increasingly organised and co-ordinated by those organisations. The January 1933 revolt, as noted above, was based around a planned strike by the CNT railway workers union. The revolt of December 1933 was organised by a National Revolutionary Committee. Both revolts aimed at uprisings all across Spain, based on the existing organisations of the CNT — the unions and their "Defence committees". Such a degree of planning belies any claims that Spanish



*nating the workers movement in areas where the PSOE and UGT were relatively weak."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154] The Socialist Party only allowed regional branches of the Alianza Obrera to be formed only if they could guarantee Party control would never be lost. [Adrian Schubert *"The Epic Failure: The Asturian Revolution of October 1934"*, in **Revolution and War in Spain**, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 127] Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, *"in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the **Alianza Obrera**"* [**Spain: 1808–1975**, pp. 634-5f] And only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members — the Catalan **Socialist Union** — left in protest over PSOE domination. [Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 157] In Madrid, the Alianza was *"dominated by the Socialists, who imposed their own policy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154] Indeed, as Jose Peirats notes, in Asturias where the CNT had joined the Alliance, *"despite the provisions of the terms of the alliance to which the CNT had subscribed, the order for the uprising was issued by the socialists. In Oviedo a specifically socialist, revolutionary committee was secretly at work in Oviedo, which contained no CNT representatives."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 78] Largo Caballero's desire for trade union unity in 1936 was from a similar mould — *"[t]he clear implication was that proletarian unification meant Socialist takeover."* Little wonder Preston states that *"[i]f the use that he [Caballero] made of the Alianza Obreras in 1934 had revealed anything, it was that the domination of the working class movement by the UGT meant far more to Largo Caballero than any future prospect of revolution."* [Preston, **Op. Cit.**, p. 270]

As can be seen, the CNT's position seemed a sensible one given the nature and activities of the "Workers' Alliance" in practice. Also it seems strange that, if unity was the UGT's aims, that a CNT call, made by the national plenary in February 1934, for information and for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, met with no reply. [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, p. 75] In addition, the Catalan Workers'

*instrument"* is identical to Durruti's and other anarchist's arguments against taking part in the "Workers' Alliances" created by the UGT and the creation of genuine alliances from the bottom-up. Thus Morrow faults the CNT for trying to force the UGT to form a **real** workers' alliance by not taking part in what Morrow himself admits were *"little more than liaison committees between the leadership"*! Also, Morrow argues that *"[w]ithout developing soviets — workers' councils — it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie"* and he asks *"[h]ow could party agreements be the substitute for the necessary vast network of workers' councils?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 89 and p. 114] Which was, of course, the CNT-FAI's argument. It seems strange that Morrow faults the CNT for trying to create real workers' councils, the *"indispensable instrument"* of the revolution, by not taking part in a *"party agreements"* urged by the UGT which would undermine real attempts at rank-and-file unity from below.

Of course, Morrow's statement that *"labour parties and unions"* should be represented by delegates as well as *"the shop and street"* contradicts claims it would be democratic. After all, that it would mean that some workers would have multiple votes (one from their shop, their union and their party). Moreover, it would mean that parties would have an influence greater than their actual support in the working class — something a minuscule group like the Spanish Trotskyists would obviously favour as would the bureaucrats of the Socialist and Communist Parties. Little wonder the anarchists urged a workers' alliance made up of actual workers rather than an organisation which would allow bureaucrats, politicians and sects more influence than they actually had or deserved.

In addition, the "Workers' Alliances" were not seen by the UGT and Socialist Party as an organisation of equals. Rather, in words of historian Paul Preston, *"from the first it seemed that the Socialists saw the Alianza Obrera was a possible means of domi-*



Anarchists were *"primitive rebels"* or did not understand the complexities of modern society or what was required to change it.

Ultimately, Hobsbawm's thesis and its underlying model represents Marxist arrogance and sectarianism. His model assumes the validity of the Marxist claim that true working class movements are based on mass political parties based on hierarchical, centralised, leadership and those who reject this model and political action (electioneering) are sects and sectarians. It was for this reason that Marx, faced with the increased influence of Bakunin, overturned the First International's original basis of free discussion with his own concept of what a real workers' movement should be.

Originally, because the various sections of the International worked under different circumstances and had attained different degrees of development, the theoretical ideals which reflected the real movement would also diverge. The International, therefore, was open to all socialist and working class tendencies. The general policies of the International would be, by necessity, based on conference decisions that reflected the free political development that flowed from local needs. These decisions would be determined by free discussion within and between sections of all economic, social and political ideas. Marx, however, replaced this policy with a common program of *"political action"* (i.e. electioneering) by mass political parties via the fixed Hague conference of 1872. Rather than having this position agreed by the normal exchange of ideas and theoretical discussion in the sections guided by the needs of the practical struggle, Marx imposed what **he** considered as the future of the workers movement onto the International — and denounced those who disagreed with him as sectarians. The notion that what Marx considered as necessary might be another sectarian position imposed on the workers' movement did not enter his head nor that of his followers — as can be

seen, Hobsbawm (mis)interpreted anarchism and its history thanks to this Marxist model and vision.

However, once we look at the anarchist movement without the blinkers created by Marxism, we see that rather than being a movement of *"primitive rebels"* Spanish Anarchism was a movement of working class people using valid tactics to meet their own social, economic and political goals — tactics and goals which evolved to meet changing circumstances. Seeing the rise of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as the political expression of the class struggle, guided by the needs of the practical struggle they faced naturally follows when we recognise the Marxist model for what it is — just one possible interpretation of the future of the workers' movement rather than **the** future of that movement. Moreover, as the history of Social Democracy indicates, the predictions of Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International were proved correct. Therefore, rather than being *"primitive rebels"* or sectarian politics forced upon the working class, anarchism reflected the politics required to built a **revolutionary** workers' movement rather than a reformist mass party.

## 2. How accurate is Felix Morrow's book on the Spanish Revolution?

It is fair to say that most Marxists in Britain base their criticisms of the Spanish Anarchism, particularly the revolution of 1936, on the work of Trotskyist Felix Morrow. Morrow's book **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, first published in 1938, actually is not that bad — for some kinds of information. However, it is basically written as Trotskyist propaganda. All too often Morrow is inaccurate, and over-eager to bend reality to fit the party line. This is particularly the case when discussing the actions and ideas of the CNT and FAI and when discussing the activities of his fellow Trotskyists in Spain, the Bolshevik-Leninists. We discuss the first set of inaccuracies



based on these arguments. It stated that in order *"to make the social revolution an effective reality, the social and political system regulating the life of the country has to be utterly destroyed"* and that the *"new revolutionary order will be determined by the free choice of the working class."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Only such an alliance, from the bottom up and based on workers' self-management could be a revolutionary one. Indeed, any pact not based on this but rather conducted between organisations would be a pact the CNT and the bureaucracy of the UGT — and remove any possibility of creating genuine bodies of working class self-management (as the history of the Civil War proved). Indeed, Morrow seems to agree:

> *"The broad character of the proletarian insurrection was explained by the Communist Left (Trotskyist). It devoted itself to efforts to build the indispensable instrument of the insurrection: workers' councils constituted by delegates representing all the labour parties and unions, the shops and streets; to be created in every locality and joined together nationally ... Unfortunately, the socialists failed to understand the profound need of these Workers' Alliances. The bureaucratic traditions were not to be so easily overcome ... the socialist leaders thought that the Workers' Alliances meant they would have merely to share leadership with the Communist Left and other dissident communist groups ... actually in most cases they [Workers' Alliances] were merely 'top' committees, without elected or lower-rank delegates, that is, little more than liaison committees between the leadership of the organisations involved."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 27–8]

As can be seen, this closely follows Durruti's arguments. Bar the reference of *"labour parties,"* Morrow's *"indispensable*

> *ers' committee chosen in the shops, the factories, the mines and the villages. We must reject any agreement on a national level, between National Committees, but rather favour an alliance carried out at the base by the workers themselves. Then and only then, can the revolutionary drive come to life, develop and take root."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 154]

In the Central Region, Orobon Fernandez argued along similar lines in Madrid's **La Tierra**:

> *"Revolutionary proletarian democracy is direct management of society by the workers, a certain bulwark against party dictatorships and a guarantee of the development of the revolution's forces and undertakings... what matters must is that general guidelines are laid down so that these may serve as a platform of the alliance and furnish a combative and constructive norm for the united forces ... [These include:] acceptance of revolutionary proletarian democracy, which is to say, the will of the majority of the proletariat, as the common denominator and determining factor of the new order of things... immediate socialisation of the means of production, transportation, exchange, accommodation and finance ... federated according to their area of interest and confederated at national level, the municipal and industrial organisations will maintain the principle of unity in the economic structure."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 74–5]

The May 1936 Saragossa congress of the CNT passed a resolution concerning revolutionary alliances which was obviously



in the following sections, here we mention the second, Morrow's comments on the Spanish Trotskyists.

The Bolshevik-Leninists, for example, an obscure sect who perhaps numbered 20 members at most, are, according to Morrow, transformed into the only ones who could save the Spanish Revolution — because they alone were members of the Fourth International, Morrow's own organisation. As he put it:

> *"Only the small forces of the Bolshevik-Leninists... clearly pointed the road for the workers."* [Felix Morrow, **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 191]
>
> *"Could that party [the party needed to lead the revolution] be any but a party standing on the platform of the Fourth International?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

And so on. As we will make clear in the following discussion, Morrow was as wrong about this as he was about anarchism.

The POUM — a more significant Marxist party in Spain, though still tiny compared to the anarchists — is also written up as far more important than it was, and slagged off for failing to lead the masses to victory (or listening to the Bolshevik-Leninists). The Fourth Internationalists *"offered the POUM the rarest and most precious form of aid: a consistent Marxist analysis"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] (never mind Spanish workers needing guns and solidarity!). But when such a programme — prepared in advance — was offered to the POUM by the Fourth International representative — only two hours after arriving in Spain, and a quarter of an hour after meeting the POUM [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] — the POUM were not interested. The POUM have been both attacked (and claimed as their own) by Trotskyists ever since.

It is Morrow's attacks on anarchism, though, that have most readily entered leftist folklore — even among Marxists who reject Leninism. Some of Morrow's criticisms are fair enough — but these were voiced by anarchists long before Morrow put pen to paper. Morrow, in fact, quotes and accepts the analyses of anarchists like Camillo Berneri (*"Berneri had been right"* etc. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153]), and praises anarchists like Durruti (*"the greatest military figure produced by the war"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224]) — then sticks the boot into anarchism. Indeed, Durruti's analysis is praised but he is transformed into *"no theoretician, but an activist leader of masses... his words express the revolutionary outlook of the class-conscious workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 250] Of course, his words, activity and *"outlook"* (i.e. political analysis) did not spring out of thin air but rather, to state the obvious, were informed by and reflected his anarchist politics, history, activity and vision (which in turn reflected his experiences and needs as a member of the working class). Morrow obviously wanted to have his cake and eat it.

Typically for today's left, perhaps, the most quoted sections of Morrow's book are the most inaccurate. In the next eight sections we discuss some of the most inaccurate claims. After that we point out that Morrow's analysis of the militias is deeply ironic given Trotsky's actions as leader of the Red Army. Then we discuss some of Morrow's inaccurate assertions about anarchism in general.

Of course, some of the errors we highlight in Morrow's work are the product of the conditions in which it was written — thousands of miles from Spain in America, dependent on papers produced by Spanish Marxists, Anarchists and others. We cannot blame him for such mistakes (although we can blame the Trotskyist publisher who reprints his account without indicating his factual errors and the Marxist writers who repeat his claims without checking their accuracy). We **do,** however, blame Morrow for his errors and misrepresentations of the activities and politics of the Spanish Anarchists and anarchism



they had been at receiving end of extensive socialist scabbing and state repression.

Moreover, as well as the recent history of socialist repression and scabbing, there was also the experience of a similar alliance between the CNT and UGT that had occurred in 1917. The first test of the alliance came with a miners strike in Andalusia, and a *"CNT proposal for a joint general strike, to be initiated by UGT miners and railway workers, had been rejected by the Madrid Socialists ... the miners, after striking for four months, returned to work in defeat."* Little wonder that *"the pact was in shreds. It was to be eliminated completely when a general strike broke out in Barcelona over the arrests of the CNT leaders and the assassination of Layret. Once again the CNT called upon the UGT for support. Not only was aid refused but it was denied with an arrogance that clearly indicated the Socialists had lost all interest in future collaboration... The strike in Catalonia collapsed and, with it, any prospect of collaboration between the two unions for years to come."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 175–6]

Of course, such historical context would confuse readers with facts and so goes unmentioned by Morrow.

In addition, there was another reason for opposing the "workers' alliances" — particularly an alliance between the UGT and CNT. Given the history of UGT and CNT pacts plus the actions of the UGT and socialists in the previous government it was completely sensible and politically principled. This reason was political and flowed from the CNT's libertarian vision. As Durruti argued in 1934:

> *"The alliance, to be revolutionary, must be genuinely working class. It must be the result of an agreement between the workers' organisation, and those alone. No party, however, socialist it may be, can belong to a workers' alliance, which should be built from its foundations, in the enterprises where the workers struggle. Its representative bodies must be the work-*

— he presents it as general repression rather than a massacre resulting from repressing a CNT revolt.

He even quotes a Stalinist paper stating that 9 000 political prisoners were in jail in June 1933. Morrow states that they were *"mostly workers."* [p. 23] Yes, they were mostly workers, CNT members in fact — *"[i]n mid-April [1933]. .. the CNT launched a massive campaign to release imprisoned CNT-FAI militants whose numbers had now soared to about 9 000."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 231–2]

Moreover, during and after CNT insurrections in Catalonia in 1932, and the much wider insurrections of January 1933 (9 000 CNT members jailed) and December 1933 (16 000 jailed) Socialist solidarity was nil. Indeed, the 1932 and January 1933 revolts had been repressed by the government which the Socialist Party was a member of.

In other words, and to state the obvious, the socialists had been part of a government which repressed CNT revolts and syndicates, imprisoned and killed their members, passed laws to restrict their ability to strike and use direct action and provided scabs during strikes. Little wonder that Peirats states *"[i]t was difficult for the CNT and the FAI to get used to the idea of an alliance with their Socialist oppressors."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 94]

It is **only** in this context can we understand the events of 1934 and the refusal of the CNT to run into the UGT's alliance. Morrow, needless to say, does not present this essential context and so the reader cannot understand why the CNT acted as it did in response to Socialist appeals for "unity." Instead, Morrow implies that CNT-FAI opposition to "workers alliances" were due to them believing *"all governments were equally bad."* [p. 29] Perhaps if Morrow had presented an honest account of the repression the republican-socialist government had inflicted on the CNT then the reader could make an informed judgement on why anarchist opposition to the socialist proposals existed. Rather than being sectarian or against labour unity,



in general. These errors derive from his politics and inability to understand anarchism or provide an honest account of it.

By the end of our discussion we hope to show why anarchists argue that Morrow's book is deeply flawed and its objectively skewed by the authors politics and so cannot be taken at face value. Morrow's book may bring comfort to those Marxists who look for ready-made answers and are prepared to accept the works of hacks at face-value. Those who want to learn from the past — instead of re-writing it — will have to look elsewhere.

## 3. Did a *"highly centralised"* FAI control the CNT?

According to Morrow, *"Spanish Anarchism had in the FAI a highly centralised party apparatus through which it maintained control of the CNT"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

In reality, the FAI — the Iberian Anarchist Federation — was founded, in 1927, as a confederation of regional federations (including the Portuguese Anarchist Union). These regional federations, in turn, co-ordinated local and district federations of highly autonomous anarchist affinity groups. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

> *"Like the CNT, the FAI was structured along confederal lines: the affinity groups were linked together in a Local Federation and the Local Federation in District and Regional Federations. A Local Federation was administered by an ongoing secretariat, usually of three persons, and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. This body comprised a sort of local executive committee. To allow for a full expression of rank-and-file views, the Local Federation was obliged to convene assemblies of all the* ***faistas*** *in its area. The District and Regional Federations, in*

*turn, were simply the Local federation writ large, replicating the structure of the lower body. All the Local Districts and Regional Federations were linked together by a Peninsular Committee whose tasks, at least theoretically, were administrative… [A FAI secretary] admits that the FAI 'exhibited a tendency towards centralism' … Yet it must also be emphasised that the affinity groups were far more independent than any comparable bodies in the Socialist Party, much less the Communist… the FAI was not an internally repressive organisation … Almost as a matter of second nature, dissidents were permitted a considerable amount of freedom in voicing and publishing material against the leadership and established policies."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 197–8]

And:

*"Most writers on the Spanish labour movement seem to concur in the view that, with the departure of the moderates, the CNT was to fall under the complete domination of the FAI … But is this appraisal correct? The FAI … was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks… They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies — a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.*

*"The FAI, moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed 'line' like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no of-*



government repressed the CNT with violence as well as using the law to undermine CNT activities and strikes.

Morrow fails to discuss this history of violence against the CNT. He mentions in passing that the republican-socialist coalition government *"[i]n crushing the CNT, the troops broadened the repression to the whole working class."* He states that *"[u]nder the cover of putting down an anarchist putsch in January 1933, the Civil Guard 'mopped up' various groups of trouble makers. And encounter with peasants at Casas Viejas, early in January 1933, became a* ***cause celebre*** *which shook the government to its foundations."* However, his account of the Casas Viejas massacre is totally inaccurate. He states that *"the little village …, after two years of patient waiting for the Institute of Agrarian Reform to divide the neighbouring Duke's estate, the peasants had moved in and begun to till the soil for themselves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22]

Nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, we must note that the land workers (who were not, in the main, peasants) were members of the CNT. Secondly, as we pointed in section 1, the uprising had nothing to do with land reform. The CNT members did not *"till the soil"*, rather they rose in insurrection as part of a planned CNT-FAI uprising based on an expected rail workers strike (the *"anarchist putsch"* Morrow mentions). The workers were too busy fighting the Civil and Assault Guards to till anything. He is correct in terms of the repression, of course, but his account of the events leading up to it is not only wrong, it is misleading (indeed, it appears to be an invention based on Trotskyist ideology rather than having any basis in reality). Rather than being part of a *"broadened… repression [against] the whole working class,"* it was actually part of the *"putting down"* of the anarchist revolt. CNT members were killed — along with a dozen politically neutral workers who were selected at random and murdered. Thus Morrow downplays the role of the Socialists in repressing the CNT and FAI

*in forming a common front to break the strike and weaken CNT influence.*

*"The Ministry of Labour declared the strike illegal and the Ministry of the Interior called out the Civil Guard to intimidate the strikers ... Shedding all pretence of labour solidarity, the UGT provided the **Compania Telefonica** with scabs while **El Socialista**, the Socialist Party organ, accused the CNT of being run by **pistoleros.** Those tactics were successful in Madrid, where the defeated strikers were obliged to enrol in the UGT to retain their jobs. So far as the Socialists were concerned, the CNT's appeals for solidarity had fallen on deaf ears...*

*"In Seville, however, the strike began to take on very serious dimensions... on July 20, a general strike broke out in Seville and serious fighting erupted in the streets. This strike ... stemmed from the walkout of the telephone workers ... pitched battles took place in the countryside around the city between the Civil Guard and the agricultural workers. Maura, as minister of interior, decided to crush the 'insurrection' ruthlessly. Martial law was declared and the CNT's headquarters was reduced to shambles by artillery fire. After nine days, during which heavily armed police detachments patrolled the streets, the Seville general strike came to an end. The struggle in the Andalusian capital left 40 dead and some 200 wounded."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 221–2]

Elsewhere, *"[d]uring a Barcelona building strike CNT workers barricaded themselves in and said they would only surrender to regular troops. The army arrived and then machine-gunned them as soon as they surrendered."* [Antony Beevor, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 33] In other words, the republican-socialist



*ficial program by which all **faistas** could mechanically guide their actions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224]

So, while the FAI may have had centralising tendencies, a *"highly centralised"* political party it was not. Further, many anarcho-syndicalists and affinity groups were not in the FAI (though most seem to have supported it), and many FAI members put loyalty to the CNT (the anarcho-syndicalist union confederation) first. For instance, according to the minutes of the FAI national plenum of January-February 1936:

*"The Regional Committee [of Aragon, Rioja, and Navarra] is completely neglected by the majority of the militants because they are absorbed in the larger activities of the CNT"*

And:

*"One of the reasons for the poor condition of the FAI was the fact that almost all the comrades were active in the defence groups of the CNT"* (report from the Regional Federation of the North).

These are internal documents and so unlikely to be lies. [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: the History of the FAI**, p. 165 and p. 168]

Anarchists were obviously the main influence in the CNT. Indeed, the CNT was anarcho-syndicalist long before the FAI was founded — from its creation in 1910 the CNT had been anarcho-syndicalist and remained so for 17 years before the FAI existed. However, Morrow was not the only person to assert *"FAI control"* of the CNT. In fact, the claim of *"FAI control"* was an invention of a reformist minority within the organisation — people like Angel Pestana, ex-CNT National Secretary, who wanted to turn the CNT into a politically *"neutral"* union movement. Pestana later showed what he

meant by forming the Syndicalist Party and standing for Parliament (the Cortes). Obviously, in the struggle against the reformists, anarcho-syndicalists — inside the FAI or not — voted for people they trusted to run CNT committees. The reformists (called **Treinistas**) lost, split from the CNT (taking about 10% of the membership with them), and the myth of *"FAI dictatorship"* was born. Rather than accept that the membership no longer supported them, the **Treinistas** consoled themselves with tales that a minority, the FAI, had taken control of the CNT.

In fact, due to its decentralised and federal structure, the FAI could not have had the sort of dominance over the CNT that is often attributed to it. At union congresses, where policies and the program for the movement were argued out:

> *"[D]elegates, whether or not they were members of the FAI, were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 121]

The union committees were typically rotated out of office frequently and committeemen continued to work as wage-earners. In a movement so closely based on the shop floor, the FAI could not maintain influence for long if they ignored the concerns and opinions of co-workers. Moreover, only a minority of the anarcho-syndicalist activists in the CNT belonged to the FAI and, as Juan Gomez Casas points out in his history of the FAI, FAI militants frequently had a prior loyalty to the CNT. Thus his summation seems correct:



this, he implies, lead to the defeat of the October 1934 uprising (see next section for a discussion of this rebellion).

However, Morrow fails to provide any relevant historical background to understand the CNT's decision. Moreover, their reasons **why** they did not join have a striking similarity to Morrow's own arguments against the "Workers' Alliance" (which may explain why Morrow does not mention them). In effect, the CNT is dammed for having policies similar to Morrow's but having principles enough to stick to them.

First, we must discuss the history of UGT and CNT relationships in order to understand the context within which the anarchists made their decision. Unless we do this, Morrow's claims may seem more reasonable than they actually are. Once we have done this we will discuss the politics of that decision.

From 1931 (the birth of the Second Spanish Republic) to 1933 the Socialists, in coalition with Republicans, had attacked the CNT (a repeat, in many ways, of the UGT's collaboration with the quasi-fascist Primo de Rivera dictatorship of 1923–30). Laws were passed, with Socialist help, making lightening strikes illegal and state arbitration compulsory. Anarchist-organised strikes were violently repressed, and the UGT provided scabs — as against the CNT Telephone Company strike of 1931. This strike gives in indication of the role of the socialists during its time as part of the government (Socialist Largo Caballero was the Minister of Labour, for example):

> *"The UGT ... had its own bone to pick with the CNT. The telephone syndicate, which the CNT had established in 1918, was a constant challenge to the Socialists' grip on the Madrid labour movement. Like the construction workers' syndicate, it was a CNT enclave in a solidly UGT centre. Accordingly, the government and the Socialist Party found no difficulty*

As can be seen, Morrow's comment presents radically false image of what happened during this period. Rather than resort to *"fraction work"* to *"recapture"* the CNT, the policies of the CNT in 1919 and 1922 were identical. Moreover, the decision to disaffiliate from the Comintern was made by a confederal meeting of mandated delegates representing the rank-and-file as was the original. The anarchists did not "capture" the CNT, rather they continued to influence the membership of the organisation as they had always done. Lastly, the concept of "capture" displays no real understanding of how the CNT worked — each syndicate was autonomous and self-managed. There was no real officialdom to take over, just administrative posts which were unpaid and conducted after working hours. To "capture" the CNT was impossible as each syndicate would ignore any unrepresentative minority which tried to do so.

However, Morrow's comments allow us to indicate some of the key differences between anarchists and Leninists — the CNT rejected the Comintern because it violated its principles of self-management, union autonomy and equality and built party domination of the union movement in its place.

## 5. Why did the CNT not join the Workers' Alliance?

Morrow in his discussion of the struggles of the 1930s implies that the CNT was at fault in not joining the Socialist UGT's *"Workers' Alliance"* (**Alianza Obrera**). These were first put forward by the Marxist-Leninists of the BOC (Workers and Peasants Bloc — later to form the POUM) after their attempts to turn the CNT into a Bolshevik vanguard failed [Paul Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 154]. Socialist Party and UGT interest began only after their election defeat in 1933. By 1934, however, there existed quite a few alliances, including one in Asturias in which the CNT participated. Nationally, however, the CNT refused to join with the UGT and



> *"As a minority organisation, the FAI could not possibly have had the kind of control attributed to it ... in 1931 ... there were fifty CNT members for each member of a FAI group. The FAI was strongly federalist, with its groups at the base freely associated. It could not dominate an organisation like the CNT, which had fifty times as many members and was also opposed to hierarchy and centralism. We know that FAI militants were also CNT militants, and frequently they were loyal first to the CNT. Their influence was limited to the base of the organisation through participation in the plenums of militants or unions meetings."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133]

He sums up by arguing:

> *"The myth of the FAI as conqueror and ruler of the CNT was created basically by the **Treinistas**"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134]

Therefore, Morrow is re-cycling an argument which was produced by the reformist wing of the CNT after it had lost influence in the union rank-and-file. Perhaps he judges the FAI by his own standards? After all, the aim of Leninists is for the vanguard party to control the labour unions in their countries. Anarchists reject such a vision and believe in union autonomy — influence of political parties and groups should only exist in as much as they influence the rank-and-file who control the union. Rather than aim to control the CNT, the FAI worked to influence its membership. In the words of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

> *"There is not a single militant who as a 'FAIista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union*

> *and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who us exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the FAI or not."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

In other words, the FAI *"controlled"* the CNT only to the extent it influenced the membership — who, in fact, controlled the organisation. We must also note that Ascaso's comment echoes Bakunin's that the *"purpose of the Alliance [i.e. anarchist federation] is to promote the Revolution ... it will combat all ambition to dominate the revolutionary movement of the people, either by cliques or individuals. The Alliance will promote the Revolution only through the NATURAL BUT NEVER OFFICIAL INFLUENCE of all members of the Alliance."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 387]

Regardless of Morrow's claims, the FAI was a federation of autonomous affinity groups in which, as one member put it, *"[e]ach FAI group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding ... they had no ... opportunity or jurisdiction ... to foist a party line upon the grass-roots."* [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 28] There was co-ordination in a federal structure, of course, but that did not create a *"highly centralised"* party-like organisation. Morrow judged the FAI according to his own standards, squeezing it into his ideological vision of the world rather than reporting the reality of the situation (see Stuart Christie's work for a more detailed refutation of the usual Marxist and Liberal inventions of the activities and nature of the FAI).

In addition, Morrow's picture of the FAI implicitly paints the CNT as a mere "transmission belt" for that organisation (and so a re-production of the Bolshevik position on the relationship of the labour unions and the revolutionary party).



became as untenable as continued CNT association with the Bolshevik regime and their controlled Internationals:

> *"Due to the ongoing repression borne by the CNT, its flirtation with Communism lasted longer than would otherwise have been the case. Angel Pestana, its only delegate to attend the second Comintern Congress in Moscow, in the summer of 1920, could not have been more disappointed by his experience. Arrested and held in Italy for two months on his return journey and then imprisoned in Barcelona for 15 more months, he was prevented for a long time from sharing his conclusions with his comrades but his stay in prison was largely used to prepare his report on Communism. In June 1922, at long last, Pestana was able to put forward his views in a national gathering at Zaragoza, where, by an overwhelming majority ... the CNT duly broke its links with the Comintern. It was ludicrous to expect that a federalist mass organization of this stamp would be prepared to subordinate its initiatives to a small [Spanish Communist Party] that itself was blindly following Moscow's dictates. Furthermore, Anarcho-Syndicalists were by then aware of the bitter attacks levelled against the Bolsheviks by leading European Anarchists and the growing frustration of many Leftists with the authoritarian and repressive character of the Soviet state. The brief romance with the Comintern of the CNT, the largest working-class force in Spain, thus ended."* [Francisco J. Romero Salvado, *"The Comintern Fiasco in Spain: The Borodin Mission and the Birth of the Spanish Communist Party"*, pp. 153–177, **Revolutionary Russia**, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 166]

> *speaking for all of them when he proclaimed at Zaragoza that the CNT's split from the Profintern resulted from the fact that 'a chasm separates us from Russia, both in ideology and in tactics'."* [Garner, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 325–6]

Therefore, rather than the anarchists conducting *"fraction work"* to *"recapture"* the CNT, the facts are the pro-Bolshevik National Committee of 1921 came about due to the extreme repression the CNT was suffering at the time. Militants were being assassinated in the streets, including committee members. In this context it is easy to see how an unrepresentative minority could temporarily gain influence in the National Committee. Moreover, it was CNT plenary session which revoked the organisations provisional affiliation to the Comintern — that is, a regular meeting of mandated and accountable delegates. In other words, by the membership itself who had been informed of what had actually been happening under the Bolsheviks. In addition, it was this plenum which agreed affiliation to the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** founded in Berlin during 1922 by syndicalists and anarchists horrified by the Bolshevik dictatorship, having seen it at first hand.

Thus the decision of the CNT in 1922 (and the process by which this decision was made) follow exactly the decisions and processes of 1919. That congress agreed to provisionally affiliate to the Comintern until such time as a real workers' International inspired by the ideas of Bakunin was created. The only difference was that this International was formed in Germany, not Spain. Given this, it is impossible to argue that the anarchists *"recaptured"* the CNT. The few pro-Bolsheviks in the CNT simply benefited from the impact of State repression against the union as well as the lack of reliable information on the Bolshevik regime from trusted (i.e., non-bourgeois) sources. Once both of these were reduced, their position



Such a picture, however, ignores the CNT's character as a non-hierarchical, democratic (self-managed) mass movement which had many tendencies within it. It also fails to understand the way anarchists seek to influence mass organisations — not by assuming positions of power but by convincing their fellow workers' of the validity of their ideas in policy making mass assemblies (see section J.3.6 for more details).

In other words, Morrow's claims are simply false and express a total lack of understanding of the nature of the CNT, the FAI and their relationship.

## 4. What is the history of the CNT and the Communist International?

Morrow states that the *"tide of the October Revolution had, for a short time, overtaken the CNT. It had sent a delegate to the Comintern [Communist International] Congress in 1921. The anarchists had then resorted to organised fraction work and recaptured it."* He links this to the FAI by stating *"[t]henceforward ... the FAI ... maintained control of the CNT."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100] Given that the FAI was formed in 1927 and the CNT disassociated itself with the Comintern in 1922, five years before the FAI was created, *"thenceforward"* does not do the FAI's ability to control the CNT before it was created justice!

Partly it is the inability of the Communist Party and its Trotskyist off-shoots to dominate the CNT which explains Morrow's comments. Seeing anarchism as *"petty bourgeois"* it is hard to combine this with the obvious truth that a mass, revolutionary, workers' union could be so heavily influenced by anarchism rather than Marxism. Hence the need for FAI (or anarchist) "control" of the CNT. It allows Trotskyists ignore dangerous ideological questions. As J. Romero Maura notes, the question why anarchism influenced the CNT *"in fact raises the problem why the reformist social democratic, or alternatively the communist conceptions, did not impose themselves on the CNT*

*as they managed to in most of the rest of Europe. This question … is based on the false assumption that the anarcho-syndicalist conception of the workers' struggle in pre-revolutionary society was completely at odds with what the **real** social process signified (hence the constant reference to religious', 'messianic', models as explanations).*" He argues that the *"explanation of Spanish anarcho-syndicalist success in organising a mass movement with a sustained revolutionary **elan** should initially be sought in the very nature of the anarchist concept of society and of how to achieve revolution."* [J. Romero Maura, *"The Spanish Case"*, in **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 78 and p. 65] Once we do that, we can see the weakness of Morrow's (and others) *"Myth of the FAI"* — having dismissed the obvious reason for anarchist influence, namely its practicality and valid politics, there can only be "control by the FAI."

However, the question of affiliation of the CNT to the Comintern is worth discussing as it indicates the differences between anarchists and Leninists. As will be seen, the truth of this matter is somewhat different to Morrow's claims and indicates well his distorted vision.

Firstly to correct a factual error. The CNT in fact sent two delegations to the Comintern. At its 1919 national congress, the CNT discussed the Russian Revolution and accepted a proposition that stated it *"declares itself a staunch defender of the principles upheld by Bakunin in the First International. It declares further that it affiliates provisionally to the Third International on account of its predominantly revolutionary character, pending the holding of the International Congress in Spain, which must establish the foundations which are to govern the true workers' International."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 220–1] It went on to re-state its long-standing anarchist aims:

> *"Bearing in mind that the tendency that has the greatest force at the heart of the workers' organisations of all countries is that which leads to the*



*begin the scenes."* That was how the resolution that *"[i]n forthcoming world congresses of the Third International, the national trade union organisations affiliated to it are to be represented by delegates from each country's Communist Party"* was adopted. He also noted that *"[o]bjections to this decision were quite simply ignored."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 224]

Many of the syndicalist delegates to this *"pantomime"* congress later meet in Berlin and founded the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** based on union autonomy, self-management and federalism. Unsurprisingly, once Pestana and Leval reported back to their organisation, the CNT rejected the Bolshevik Myth and re-affirmed the libertarian principles it had proclaimed at its 1919 congress. At a plenum of the CNT in 1922, the organisation withdrew its provisional affiliation and voted to join the syndicalist International formed in Berlin. As one historian summarises:

> *"The CNT withdrew from the Profintern because, in line with revolutionary syndicalist doctrine, the vast majority of its members opposed party political influence in the unions. The weakness of the communist-syndicalist position was amply demonstrated when a lull in the repression carried out against the CNT in early 1922 led to the release of the detained militants; as a result they were abruptly removed from their positions and their policy towards Moscow overturned … Furthermore, the CNT was not alone: the other founder members of the [syndicalist] IWMA had rejected the Profintern for the same reasons. Although anarchists were influential in some, but by no means all, of the IWMA's member organisations, these were not anarchist but revolutionary syndicalist. [Leading CNT militant Salvador] Segui could have been*

*tional completely subordinated trade unions to the Communist Party.*" [Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 38] This completely violated the CNT principle of unions being controlled by their members (via self-management from the bottom up). Secondly, the congresses' methodology in its debates and decision-making were alien to the CNT tradition. In that organisation self-management was its pride and glory and its gatherings and congresses reflected this. Pestana could not fathom the fierce struggle surrounding the make-up of the chairmanship of the Comintern congress:

> *"Pestana says that he was particularly intrigued by the struggle for the chairmanship. He soon realised that the chair* ***was*** *the congress, and that the Congress was a farce. The chairman made the rules, presided over deliberations, modified proposals at will, changed the agenda, and presented proposals of his own. For a start, the way the chair handled the gavel was very inequitable. For example, Zinoviev gave a speech which lasted one and one-half hours, although each speaker was supposedly limited to ten minutes. Pestana tried to rebut the speech, but was cut off by the chairman, watch in hand. Pestana himself was rebutted by Trotsky who spoke for three-quarters of an hour, and when Pestana wanted to answer Trotsky's attack on him, the chairman declared the debate over.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 37–8]

In addition, *"[i]n theory, every delegate was free to table a motion, but the chair itself selected the ones that were 'interesting.' Proportional voting [by delegation or delegate] had been provided for, but was not implemented. The Russian Communist Party ensured that it enjoyed a comfortable majority.*" Peirats continues by noting that *"[t]o top it all, certain important decisions were not even made in the congress hall, but were made*



> *complete, total and absolute liberation of humanity morally, economically and politically, and considering that this objective cannot be achieved until the land and the instruments of production and exchange are socialised, and the tyrannical power of the state disappears, [we] propose to the congress, that in agreement with the essence of the proposals of the workers' International, [it] declares that the ultimate goal of the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo in Spain is libertarian communism.*" [quoted by Jason Garner, *"Separated by an 'Ideological Chasm': The Spanish National Labour Confederation and Bolshevik Internationalism, 1917–1922"*, pp. 293–326, **Contemporary European History**, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 303]

So while the CNT voted to provisionally affiliate with the Communist International, it also reiterated its libertarian politics — a politics fundamentally at odds with the Bolshevik ideology. This position is not surprising, given the lack of concrete information of what was happening in Russia under the Bolsheviks, lack of awareness of what the Bolsheviks actually stood for and libertarian support for the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and bourgeois Provisional government in 1917. Hence the need for the CNT to send a delegation to Russia in order to investigate at first hand the new regime and what it actually stood for.

In June 1920, Angel Pestana arrived in Moscow and represented the CNT at the Second Congress of the Communist International. He was arrested when he arrived back in Spain and so could not give his eye-witness account of the strangulation of the revolution and the deeply dishonest manipulation of the congress by the Communist Party. A later delegation arrived in April 1921, headed by Andres Nin and Joaquin Maurin professing to represent the CNT. Actually, Nin and Mau-

rin represented virtually no one but the Lerida local federation (their stronghold). Their actions and clams were disavowed by a plenum of the CNT the following August.

How did Nin and Maurin manage to get into a position to be sent to Russia? Simply because of the repression the CNT was under at the time. This was the period when Catalan bosses hired gun men to assassinate CNT militants and members and the police exercised the notorious practice known as **ley de fugas** (shot while trying to escape). In such a situation, the normal workings of the CNT came under must stress and *"with the best known libertarian militants imprisoned, deported, exiled, if not murdered outright, Nin and his group managed to hoist themselves on to the National Committee ... Pestana's report not being available, it was decided that a further delegation should be sent ... in response to Moscow's invitation to the CNT to take part in the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions."* [Ignaio de Llorens, **The CNT and the Russian Revolution**, p. 8] Juan Gomez Casas confirms this account:

> *"At a plenum held in Lerida in 1921, while the CNT was in disarray [due to repression] in Catalonia, a group of Bolsheviks was designated to represent the Spanish CNT in Russia ... The restoration of constitutional guarantees by the Spanish government in April 1922, permitted the anarcho-syndicalists to meet in Saragossa in June 11 ... [where they] confirmed the withdrawal of the CNT from the Third International and the entrance on principle into the new [revolutionary syndicalist] International Working Men's Association."* [**Anarchist Organisation: History of the FAI**, p. 61]

We should note that along with pro-Bolshevik Nin and Maurin was anarchist Gaston Leval. Leval quickly got in touch with Russian and other anarchists, helping some imprisoned Russia anarchists get deported after bringing news of their hunger strike to the assembled international delegates. By embarrassing Lenin and Trotsky, Leval helped save his comrades from the prison camp and so saved their lives.

By the time Leval arrived back in Spain, Pestana's account of his experiences had been published — along with accounts of the Bolshevik repression of workers, the Kronstadt revolt, the anarchist movement and other socialist parties. These accounts made it clear that the Russian Revolution had become dominated by the Communist Party and the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* little more that dictatorship by the central committee of that party. Indeed, leading Bolshevik Grigory Zinoviev had openly admitted this at the Comintern's Second Congress in 1920:

> *"[t]oday, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class ... [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 928 and pp. 151–2]

Unsurprisingly, then, Pestana report was negative in terms of both the new regime and on whether the CNT should remain affiliated. [*"Report on the action taken by the delegate Angel Pestana at the second congress of the third international which was presented by him to the* ***Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo****"*, **Revolutionary Russia**, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 39–103]

Moreover, the way the two internationals operated violated basic libertarian principles. Firstly, the *"Red Labour Interna-*

ers' would seize the means of production. Which means, contra Morrow, Bakunin was aware that in order for workers' to take over their workplaces the state had to be destroyed as it was by means of the state that capitalist property rights are enforced.

And, just to stress the obvious, you cannot *"turn your backs on the state"* while dissolving the state bureaucracy, the army, police and so on. This is clear for Bakunin. He argued that *"[l]iberty can only be created by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* And the nature of this workers' organisation? Workers' councils — the *"proletariat ... must enter the International [Workers' Association] en masse, form[ing] factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179 and p. 49]

Similarly, we discover Kropotkin arguing that *"expropriation"* would occur at the same time as *"the capitalists' power to resist [had] been smashed"* and that *"the authorities"* will be *"overthrown."* He also recognised the need for self-defence, arguing that the revolution must *"withstand both the attempts to form a government that would seek to strangle it and any onslaughts which may emanate from without."* He argued the Commune *"must smash the State and replace it with the Federation and it will act accordingly."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 232–3 and p. 259]

You cannot do all this by *"turning your backs"* on the state. To smash the state you need to face it and fight it — there is no other way.

Elsewhere he argued that the commune of the future would base itself on *"the principles of anarchist communism"*, meaning they would have *"entirely abolished property, government, and the state."* They will *"proclaim and establish their independence by direct socialist revolutionary action, abolishing private property"* when *"governments are swept away by the people ... the insurgent people will not wait until some new government decrees, in its marvellous wisdom, a few economic reforms."* Rather,



> *the abandonment of revolutionary objectives and of anarchism's fundamental and quintessential ideological principles, which the CNT-FAI leaders had thrown over in favour of anti-fascist unity and the need to adapt to circumstances."* [p. 107]

In other words, they wanted to return the CNT *"to its class struggle roots."* [**Ibid.**] Indeed, Balius (a leading member of the group and writer of its 1938 pamphlet **Towards a Fresh Revolution**) was moved to challenge the charges of "marxist" levelled at him:

> *"I will not repay defamatory comment in kind. But what I cannot keep mum about is that a legend of marxism has been woven about my person and I should like the record put straight ... It grieves me that at the present time there is somebody who dares call me a Marxist when I could refute with unanswerable arguments those who hang such an unjustified label on me. As one who attends our union assemblies and specific gatherings, I might speak of the loss of class sensibility which I have observed on a number of occasions. I have heard it said that we should be making politics — in as many words, comrades — in an abstract sense, and virtually no one protested. And I, who have been aghast at countless such instances, am dubbed a marxist just because I feel, myself to be a one hundred percent revolutionary ... On returning from exile in France in the days of Primo de Rivera ... I have been a defender of the CNT and the FAI ever since. In spite of my paralysis, I have done time in prison and been taken in manacles to Madrid for my fervent and steadfast championship of our organisations and for fighting those who once were friends of mine Is that not enough? ...*

> *So where is this marxism of mine? Is it because my roots are not in the factory? ... The time has come to clarify my position. It is not good enough to say that the matter has already been agreed. The truth must shine through. As far as I am concerned, I call upon all the comrades who have used the press to hang this label upon me to spell out what makes me a marxist."* [**El Amigo del Pueblo**, no. 4, p. 3]

As can be seen, the FoD were not Marxists. Two more questions arise. Were they a "break" with anarchism (i.e. moving towards Marxism) and were they influenced by the Spanish Trotskyists. We turn to these questions in the next two sections.

## 8. Did the Friends of Durruti *"break with"* anarchism?

Morrow claims that the Friends of Durruti (FoD) *"represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 247] The truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Before discussing his assertion in more detail a few comments are required. Typically, in Morrow's topsy-turvy world, all anarchists like the Friends of Durruti (Morrow also includes the Libertarian Youth, the *"politically awakened"* CNT rank and file, local FAI groups, etc.) who remained true to anarchism and stuck to their guns (often literally) — represented a break with anarchism and a move towards Marxism, the revolutionary vanguard party (no doubt part of the 4th International), and a fight for the "workers state." Those anarchists, on the other hand, who compromised for "anti-fascist unity" (but mainly to try and get weapons to fight Franco) are the real anarchists



curred to justify CNT participation in the state). In other words, Morrow's *"second fundamental tenet"* does not exist in anarchist theory. To prove this, we will quote Bakunin and a few other famous anarchists as well as giving an overview of some of the insurrections organised by the CNT before 1936. We start with Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta.

Given that Bakunin thought that it was the *"power of the State"* which *"sustains the privileged classes"* against the *"legitimate indignation of the masses of the people"* it is hard to know what Morrow is talking about. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 196] Given this perspective, it naturally follows that to abolish capitalism, to allow the seizure of factories by the workers, the state had to be abolished (or *"destroyed"*). Equally clear is that the *"natural and necessary consequence of this destruction will be ... [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood... confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use ... the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... will constitute the Commune."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings** p. 253 and p. 170]

Thus, the state has to be abolished in order to ensure that workers' can take over the means of production, so abolishing capitalism. This is the **direct opposite** of Morrow's claim that *"[s]ince Bakunin"* anarchism had *"call[ed] upon the workers to turn their backs to the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power."* While control of the economy by workers is an important, indeed a key, aspect of a social revolution it is not a sufficient one for anarchists. It must be combined with the destruction of the state (as Bakunin argued, *"[n]o revolution could succeed ... today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141]). As the power of the state *"sustains"* the capitalists it clearly follows that the capitalist only has his property because the state protects his property claims — without the state, work-

## 14. What is wrong with Morrow's *"fundamental tenet"* of anarchism?

According to Morrow the *"second fundamental tenet in anarchist teaching"* is, apparently, the following:

> *"Since Bakunin, the anarchists had accused Marxists of over-estimating the importance of state power, and had characterised this as merely the reflection of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals' preoccupation with lucrative administrative posts. Anarchism calls upon workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power. The ultimate sources of power (property relations) being secured, the state power will collapse, never to be replaced."*

He then sums up by stating the Spanish anarchists *"thus failed to understand that it was only the collapse of state power ... which had enabled them to seize the factories."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

It would be interesting to discover in what work of Bakunin, or any anarchist, such a position could be found. Morrow gives us no references to help us in our quest — hardly surprising as no anarchist (Spanish or otherwise) ever argued this point before July 1936. However, in September 1936, we discover the CNT arguing that the *"withering away of the State is socialism's ultimate objective. Facts have demonstrated that in practice it is achieved by liquidation of the bourgeois State, brought to a state of asphyxiation by economic expropriation."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 261] This, we must note, was the same month the CNT decided to join the Catalan Government! So much for the state having withered away.

However, will soon be made clear, such comments were a revision of anarchist theory brought about by the apparent victory of the CNT on July 19th, 1936 (just as other revisions occ-



because *"class collaboration ... lies concealed in the heart of anarchist philosophy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

Morrow, of course, would have had a fit if anarchists pointed to the example of the Social Democrat's who crushed the German Revolution or Stalin's Russia as examples that "rule by an elite lies concealed in the heart of Marxist philosophy." It does not spring into Morrow's mind that those anarchists he praises are the ones who show the revolutionary heart of anarchism. This can best be seen from his comments on the Friends of Durruti, who we argue were not evolving towards "Marxism" but rather were trying to push the CNT and FAI back to its pre-Civil War politics and strategy. Moreover, as we argue in section 12, anarchism has always argued for self-managed working class organisations to carry out and defend a revolution. The FoD were simply following in the tradition founded by Bakunin.

In other words, we will show that they did not *"break with"* anarchism — rather they refused to compromise their anarchism in the face of "comrades" who thought winning the war meant entering the government. This is clear from their leaflets, paper and manifesto. Moreover, as will become obvious, their "break" with anarchism actually just restates pre-war CNT policy and organisation.

For example, their leaflets, in April 1937, called for the unions and municipalities to *"replace the state"* and for no retreat:

> *"We have the organs that must supplant a State in ruins. The Trade Unions and Municipalities must take charge of economic and social life."* [quoted by Agustin Guillamon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 38]

This clearly is within the CNT and anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Their manifesto, in 1938, repeated this call (*"the state cannot be retained in the face of the unions"*), and made three

demands as part of their programme. It is worth quoting these at length:

> *"I — Establishment of a Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council.*
>
> *"This body will be organised as follows: members of the revolutionary Junta will be elected by democratic vote in the union organisations. Account is to be taken of the number of comrades away at the front … The Junta will steer clear of economic affairs, which are the exclusive preserve of the unions.*
>
> *"The functions of the revolutionary Junta are as follows:*
>
> *"Posts to come up regularly for re-allocation so as to prevent anyone growing attached to them. And the trade union assemblies will exercise control over the Junta's activities.*
>
> *"II — All economic power to the syndicates.*
>
> *"Since July the unions have supplied evidence of the great capacity for constructive labour… It will be the unions that structure the proletarian economy.*
>
> *"An Economic Council may also be set up, taking into consideration the natures of the Industrial Unions and Industrial federations, to improve on the co-ordination of economic activities.*
>
> *"III — Free municipality.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *"The Municipality shall take charge of those functions of society that fall outside the preserve of the unions. And since the society we are going to build shall be composed exclusively of producers, it will be*



an executive power **over** the soviets (although, of course, in theory accountable to their national congress). In **The State and Revolution** Lenin praised Marx's comment that the Paris Commune was both administrative **and** executive. The "workers' state" created by Lenin did not follow that model (as Russian anarcho-syndicalists argued in August 1918, *"the Soviet of People's Commissars [i]s an organ which does not stem from the soviet structure but only interferes with its work"* [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118]).

Thus the Bolshevik state was not based around soviet self-management **nor** the fusion of executive and administrative in their hands but rather the use of the soviets to elect a government (a separate executive) which had the real power. The issue is quite simple — either *"All power to the Soviets"* means just that or it means *"All power to the government elected by the Soviets"*. The two are not the same as the first, for the obvious reason that in the second the soviets become simply ratification machines for the government and not organs in which the working masses can run their own affairs. We must also point out that the other promises made in Lenin's book went the same way as his support for the combining administration and executive tasks in the Paris Commune — and, we stress, all **before** the Civil War started in May 1918 (the usual Trotskyist defence of such betrayals is blame the Civil War which is hard to do as it had not started yet).

So it is unsurprising that Morrow does not explain why anarchists reject the "dictatorship of the proletariat" — to do so would be to show that Trotskyism is not the revolutionary movement for workers' liberty it likes to claim it is. Moreover, it would involve giving an objective account of anarchist theory and admitting that the CNT did not follow its teachings.

> *the Executive Committee passed into the hands of the Council of People's Commissars, and finally, the power of the Council of People's Commissars passed into the hands of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 152]

Little wonder, then, these CNT aphorisms:

> *"power corrupts both those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised; those who think they can conquer the State in order to destroy it are unaware that the State overcomes all its conquerors... dictatorship of the proletariat is dictatorship without the proletariat and against them."* [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 456]

That, in a nut shell, why anarchists consider the workers' state as no real change from the bourgeois state. Rather than creating a system in which working class people directly manage their own affairs, the workers' state, like any other state, involves the delegation of that power into the hands of a few. Given that state institutions generate specific social relations, specific relations of authority (namely those order giver and order taker) they cannot help becoming separated from society, becoming a new class based on the state's bureaucratic machine. Any state structure (particularly a highly centralised one, as desired by Leninists) has a certain independence from society and so serves the interests of those within the State institutions rather than the people as a whole.

Perhaps a Leninist will point to **The State and Revolution** as evidence that Lenin desired a state based round the soviets — workers' council — and so our comments are unjustified. However, as Marx said, judge people by what they do, not what they say. The first act of the October Revolution was to form



> *the unions, no less, that will provide sustenance for the municipalities...*
>
> *"The Municipalities will be organised at the level of local, comarcal and peninsula federations. Unions and municipalities will maintain liaison at local, comarcal and national levels."* [**Towards a Fresh Revolution**, pp. 24–5]

This programme basically mimics the pre-war CNT policy and organisation and so cannot be considered as a *"break"* with anarchist or CNT politics or tradition.

Firstly, we should note that the *"municipality"* was a common CNT expression to describe a *"commune"* which was considered as *"all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in assembly (council) with full powers to administer and order local affairs, primarily production and distribution."* In the cities and town the equivalent organisation was *"the union"* which *"brings individuals together, grouping them according to the nature of their work ... First, it groups the workers of a factory, workshop or firm together, this being the smallest cell enjoying autonomy with regard to whatever concerns it alone ... The local unions federate with one another, forming a local federation, composed of the committee elected by the unions, and of the general assembly that, in the last analysis, holds supreme sovereignty."* [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 25 and p. 24]

In addition, the *"national federations [of unions] will hold as common property the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops"* and the *"free municipality will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 29 and p. 26] Thus Puente's classic pre-war pamphlet is almost identical to points two and three of the FoD Programme.

Moreover, the *"Economic Council"* urged by the FoD in point two of their programme is obviously inspired by the work of Abad Diego de Santillan, particularly his book **After**

**the Revolution** (**El Organismo Economico de la Revolucion**). Discussing the role of the *"Federal Council of Economy"*, de Santillan says that it *"receives its orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions of the regional and national assemblies."* [p. 86] Just as the CNT Congresses were the supreme policy-making body in the CNT itself, they envisioned a similar body emanating from the rank-and-file assemblies to make the guiding decisions for a socialised economy.

This leaves point one of their programme, the call for a *"Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council."* It is here that Morrow and a host of other Marxists claim the FoD broke with anarchism towards Marxism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Firstly, anarchists have long supported the idea of workers' councils (or soviets) as an expression of working class power to control their own lives (and so society) — indeed, far longer than Marxists. Thus we find Bakunin arguing that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* Anarchists *"attain this goal ... by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 198] These councils of workers' delegates (workers' councils) would be the basis of the commune and defence of the revolution:

> *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... constitute the Commune .... Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades... [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction*



system of popular assemblies and their means of defence would not be a state in the anarchist sense of the word.

As we argued in section 12, the Trotskyist vision of revolution, while seeming in some ways similar to that of anarchists, differ on this question. For Trotskyists, the **party** takes power, **not** the mass of the population directly. Only if you view "proletarian" seizure of power in terms of electing a political party to government could you see the elimination of functional democracy in the armed forces and the workplaces as no threat to working class power. Given Trotsky's actual elimination of democracy in the Red Army and Navy plus his comments on one-man management (and their justifications — see sections 11 and 17) it is clear that Trotskyists consider the workers' state in terms of party government, **not** self-management, **not** functional direct democracy.

Yes, the Trotskyists do claim that it is the workers, via their soviets, who will elect the government and hold it accountable but such a position fails to realise that a social revolution can only be created from below, by the direct action of the mass of the population. By delegating power into the hands of a few, the revolution is distorted. The initiative and power no longer rests in the hands of the mass of the population and so they can no longer take part in the constructive work of the revolution **and so it will not reflect their interests and needs.** As power flows from the top-down, bureaucratic distortions are inevitable.

Moreover, the government will inevitably clash with its subjects and Trotskyist theory provides the justification for the government imposing its wishes and negating workers' democracy (see section 12 for evidence for this claim). Moreover, in the centralised state desired by Trotskyists democratic accountability will inevitably suffer as power flows to the top:

> *"The power of the local soviets passed into the hands of the [National] Executive Committee, the power of*

> *plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one' party's leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator's will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses."* [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38–9]

Maurice Brinton sums up the issue well when he argued that *"workers' power" "cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party — as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks ... What 'taking power' really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society — and organises to this end."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiv]

The question is, therefore, one of **who** "seizes power" — will it be the mass of the population or will it be a party claiming to represent the mass of the population. The difference is vital — and anyone who confuses the issue (like Lenin) does so either out of stupidity or vested interests.

If it **is** the mass of people then they have to express themselves and their power (i.e. the power to manage their own affairs). That requires that individuals — no matter where they are, be it in the workplace, community or on the front line — are part of self-managed organisations. Only by self-management in functional groups can working class people be said to controlling their own lives and determining their own fate. Such a



> *... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 170–1]

This perspective can be seen in the words of the German anarcho-syndicalist H. Ruediger (member of the IWA's secretariat in 1937) when he argued that for anarchists *"social reorganisation, like the defence of the revolution, should be concentrated in the hands of **working class organisations** — whether labour unions or new organs of spontaneous creation, such as free councils, etc., which, as an expression of the will of the workers themselves, from **below up**, should construct the revolutionary social community."* [quoted in **The May Days in Barcelona**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 71]

Camillo Berneri sums up the anarchist perspective clearly when he wrote:

> *"The Marxists ... foresee the natural disappearance of theState as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration — corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national — freely constituted outside and in opposi-*

*tion to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrational centralisation."* [*"Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism"*, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 52]

In other words, anarchists **do** support democratic organs of power when they are **directly** democratic (i.e. self-managed). *"The basic idea of Anarchism is simple,"* argued Voline, *"no party ... placed above or outside the labouring masses ... ever succeeds in emancipating them ... Effective emancipation can only be achieved by the **direct, widespread, and independent action of those concerned, of the workers themselves**, grouped, not under the banner of a political party ... but in their own class organisations (productive workers' unions, factory committees, co-operatives, et cetra) on the basis of concrete action and self-government."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p, 197]

Anarchists oppose **representative** organs of power as these are governments and so based on minority power and subject to bureaucratic deformations which ensure **un**-accountablity from below. Anarchists argue *"that, by its very nature, political power could not be exercised except by a very restricted group of men at the centre. Therefore this power — the **real** power — could not belong to the soviets. It would actually be in the hands of the party."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 213]

Thus Morrow's argument is flawed on the basic point that he does not understand anarchist theory or the nature of an anarchist revolution (also see section 12).

Secondly, and more importantly given the Spanish context, the FoD's vision has a marked similarity to pre-Civil War CNT organisation, policy and vision. This means that the idea of a National Defence Council was not the radical break with the CNT that some claim. Before the civil war the CNT had long has its defence groups, federated at regional and national level. Historian Jerome Mintz provides a good summary:



the hands of a few, of a government, of an "executive" committee. Unlike Lenin, who stressed the "bodies of armed men" aspect of the state, anarchists consider the real question as one of who will tell these "bodies of armed men" what to do. Will it be the people as a whole (as expressed through their self-managed organisations) or will be it a government (perhaps elected by representative organisations)?

If it **was** simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument:

*"But perhaps the truth is simply this: ... [some] take the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.*

*"Thus constructed, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.*

*"But the real supporters of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' do not take that line, as they are making quite*

uct of anarchist theory, as Morrow states, this came about by **ignoring** that theory (see section 20).

This can be seen from the false alternative used to justify the CNT's and FAI's actions — namely, *"either libertarian communism, which means anarchist dictatorship, or democracy, which means collaboration."* The creation of libertarian communism is done **from below** by those subject to capitalist and statist hierarchy overthrowing those with power over them by smashing the state machine and replacing it with self-managed organisations as well as expropriating capital and placing it under workers' self-management. As Murray Bookchin argues:

> *"Underlying all [the] errors [of the CNT], at least in theoretical terms, was the CNT-FAI's absurd notion that if it assumed power in the areas it controlled, it was establishing a 'State.' As long as the institutions of power consisted of armed workers and peasants as distinguished from a professional bureaucracy, police force, army, and cabal of politicians and judges, they were no[t] a State ... These institutions, in fact comprised a revolutionary people in arms ... not a professional apparatus that could be regarded as a State in any meaningful sense of the term... That the 'taking of power' by an armed people in militias, libertarian unions and federations, peasant communes and industrial collectives could be viewed as an 'anarchist dictatorship' reveals the incredible confusion that filled the minds of the 'influential militants.'"* [*"Looking Back at Spain,"* pp. 53–96, **The Radical Papers**, pp. 86–7]

This perspective explains why anarchists do not see any fundamental difference between a so-called "workers' state" and the existing state. For anarchists, the state is based fundamentally on hierarchical power — the delegation of power into



> *"The policies and actions of the CNT were conducted primarily by administrative juntas, beginning with the sindicato, whose junta consisted of a president, secretary, treasurer, and council members. At each step in the confederation, a representative [sic! — delegate] was sent to participate at the next organisational level — from sindicato to the district to the regional confederation, then to the national confederation. In addition to the juntas, however, there were two major committee systems established as adjuncts to the juntas that had developed some autonomy: the **comites pro presos**, or committees for political prisoners, which worked for the release of prisoners and raised money for the relief of their families; and the **comites de defensa**, or defence committees, whose task was to stockpile weapons for the coming battle and to organise the shock troops who would bear the brunt of the fighting."* [**The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 141]

Thus we see that the CNT had its *"juntas"* (which means council or committee and so does not imply any authoritarianism) as well as *"defence committees"* which were elected by democratic vote in the union organisations decades before the FoD existed. The Defence Committees (or councils) were a CNT insurgent agency in existence well before July 1936 and had, in fact, played a key role in many insurrections and strikes, including the events of July 1936. In other words, the *"break"* with anarchism Morrow presents was, in fact, an exact reproduction of the way the CNT had traditionally operated and acted — it is the same program of a *"workers defence council"* and *"union management of the economy"* that the CNT had advocated prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The only *"break"* that **did** occur post 19th of July was that of the CNT and FAI ignoring its politics and history in favour of "anti-fascist unity" and a UGT

"Workers' Alliance" with all anti-fascist unions and parties (see section 20).

Moreover, the CNT insurrection of December 1933 had been co-ordinated by a National Revolutionary Committee [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 235]. D.A. Santillan argued that the *"local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat"* in the *"cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 80] During the war itself a CNT national plenum of regions, in September 1936, called for a National Defence Council, with majority union representation and based on Regional Defence Councils. The Defence Council of Aragon, set up soon after, was based on these ideas. The need for co-ordinated revolutionary defence and attack is just common sense — and had been reflected in CNT theory, policy and structure for decades.

An understanding of the basic ideas of anarchist theory on revolution combined with the awareness of the CNT's juntas (administrative councils or committees) had *"defence committees"* associated with them makes it extremely clear that rather than being a *"conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism"* the FoD's programme was, in fact, a conscious **return** to the anti-statism of traditional anarchism and the revolutionary program and vision of the pre-Civil War CNT.

This is confirmed if we look at the activities of the CNT in Aragon where they formed the *"Defence Council of Aragon"* in September 1936. In the words of historian Antony Beevor, *"[i]n late September delegates from the Aragonese collectives attended a conference at Bujaraloz, near where Durruti's column was based. They decided to establish a Defence Council of Aragon, and elected as president Joaquin Ascaso."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96] In February 1937, the first congress of the regional federation of collectives was held at Caspe to co-ordinate the activities of the collectives — an obvious example of a regional economic council desired by the FoD. Morrow does mention the Council



An anarchist approach in the aftermath of the fascist uprising would have meant replacing the Generalitat with a federal assembly of delegates from workplace and local community assemblies (a Defence Council, to use a CNT expression). Only popular assemblies (not political parties) would be represented (parties would have an influence only in proportion to their influence in the basic assemblies). All the CNT would have had do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates to create the framework of this system. This, we must stress, was **not** done. We will discuss why in section 20 and so will refrain from doing so here. However, **because** the CNT in effect "postponed" the political aspects of the social revolution (namely, to quote Kropotkin, to *"smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of Communes]"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259]) the natural result would be exactly as Morrow explains:

> *"But isn't it a far cry from the failure to create the organs to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to the acceptance of the role of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie? Not at all ... Without developing soviets — workers' councils — it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88–9]

As Kropotkin predicted, *"there can be no half-way house: either the Commune is to be absolutely free to endow itself with whatever institutions it wishes and introduce all reforms and revolutions it may deem necessary, or else it will remain ... a mere subsidiary of the State, chained in its every movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259] Without an alternative means of co-ordinating the struggle, the CNT would, as Morrow argued, have little choice but to collaborate with the state. However, rather than being a prod-

> *disaster in the end, was their failure to recognise the distinction between a workers' and a bourgeois state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

Needless to say, Morrow does not bother to explain **why** anarchists consider the bourgeois and workers' state to be similar. If he did then perhaps his readers would agree with the anarchists on this matter. However, before discussing that we have to address a misrepresentation of Morrow's. Rather than the expression of anarchist politics, the actions of the CNT were in direct opposition to them. As we showed in the section 12, anarchists see a social revolution in terms of creating federations of workers associations (i.e. workers' councils). It was this vision that had created the structure of the CNT (as Bakunin had argued, *"the organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 255]).

Thus, the social revolution would see the workers' organisation (be they labour unions or spontaneously created organs) *"tak[ing] the revolution into its own hands ... an earnest international organisation of workers' associations ... [would] replac[e] this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 110] This is **precisely** what the CNT did not do — rather it decided against following anarchist theory and instead decided to co-operate with other parties and unions in the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* (at least temporarily until the CNT stronghold in Saragossa was liberated by CNT militias). In effect, it created a UGT-like "Alliance" with other anti-fascist parties and unions and rejected its pre-war policy of "unity from below." The CNT and FAI leadership decided not to talk of libertarian communism but only of the fight against fascism. A greater mistake they could not have made.



of Aragon — *"the anarchist-controlled Council for the Defence of Aragon"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 111] — however, he strangely fails to relate this fact to anarchist politics. After all, in Aragon the CNT-FAI remained true to anarchism, created a defence council and a federation of collectives. If Morrow had discussed the events in Aragon he would have had to draw the conclusion that the FoD were not a *"conscious break with the traditional anti-statism of anarchism"* but rather were an expression of it.

This can be seen from the comments made after the end of the war by the Franco-Spanish Group of **The Friends of Durruti**. They clearly argued for a return to the principles of anarchism and the pre-war CNT. They argued not only for workers' self-organisation and self-management as the basis of the revolution but also to the pre-war CNT idea of a workers' alliance from the bottom up rather than a UGT-style one at the top (see section 5). In their words:

> *"A revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers' organisations as was the case in July, 1936, when the CNT-FAI were masters ... We incline to the view that it is necessary to form a Revolutionary Alliance; a Workers' Front; where no one would be allowed to enter and take their place except on a revolutionary basis ... "* [*"The Friends of Durruti Accuse"*, **Class War on the Home Front**, Wildcat Group (ed.), p. 34]

As can be seen, rather than a "revolutionary government" the FoD were consistently arguing for a federation of workers' associations as the basis of the revolution. In this they were loyally following Bakunin's basic arguments and the ideas of anarchism. Rather than the FoD breaking with anarchism, it is clear that it was the leading committees of the CNT and FAI which actually broke with the politics of anarchism and the tactics, ideas and ideals of the CNT.

Lastly there are the words of Jaime Balius, one of the FoD's main activists, who states in 1976 that:

> *"We did not support the formation of Soviets; there were no grounds in Spain for calling for such. We stood for 'all power to the trade unions'. In no way were we politically orientated ... Ours was solely an attempt to save the revolution; at the historical level it can be compared to Kronstadt because if there the sailors and workers called for 'all power to the Soviets', we were calling for all power to the unions."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 381]

*"Political"* here meaning "state-political" — a common anarchist use of the word. According to Fraser, the *"proposed revolutionary junta was to be composed of combatants from the barricades."* [**Ibid.**] This echoes Bakunin's comment that the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 170–1]

As can be seen, rather than calling for power to a party or looking to form a government (i.e. being *"politically orientated"*) the FoD were calling for *"all power to the unions."* This meant, in the context of the CNT, all power to the union assemblies in the workplace. Decision making would flow from the bottom upwards rather than being delegated to a "revolutionary" government as in Trotskyism. To stress the point, the FoD did not represent a *"break"* with anarchism or the CNT tradition. To claim otherwise means to misunderstand anarchist politics and CNT history.

Our analysis, we must note, also makes a mockery of Guillamon's claim that because the FoD thought that libertarian communism had to be *"impose[d]"* and *"defended by*



*should be left to strictly administrative bodies subject to rotation, recall, limitations of tenure ... Accordingly, the melding of policy formation with administration placed the institutional emphasis of classical [Marxist] socialism on centralised bodies, indeed, by an ironical twist of historical events, bestowing the privilege of formulating policy on the 'higher bodies' of socialist hierarchies and their execution precisely on the more popular 'revolutionary committees' below."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, pp. 215–6]

## 13. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist "workers' state"?

Morrow asserts two *"fundamental"* tenets of *"anarchism"* in his book [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 101–2]. Unfortunately for him, his claims are somewhat at odds with reality. Anarchism, as we will prove in section 14, does not hold one of the positions Morrow states it does. The first *"tenet"* of anarchism he fails to discuss at all and so the reader cannot understand **why** anarchists think as they do. We discuss this *"tenet"* here.

The first tenet is that anarchism *"has consistently refused to recognise the distinction between a bourgeois and a workers' state. Even in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, anarchism denounced the Soviet Union as an exploiters' regime."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101] It is due to this, he argues, the CNT co-operated with the bourgeois state:

> *"The false anarchist teachings on the nature of the state ... should logically have led them [the CNT] to refuse governmental participation in any event ... the anarchists were in the intolerable position of objecting to the necessary administrative co-ordination and centralisation of the work they had already begun. Their anti-statism 'as such' had to be thrown off. What **did** remain, to wreck*

It was for this reason that he argued the anarchists do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237] The history of the Russian Revolution proved him right. Hence anarchist support for popular assemblies and federations of workers' councils as the framework of the social revolution rather than as a means to elect a "revolutionary" government.

One last point. We must point out that Morrow's follows Lenin in favouring executive committees associated with workers' councils. In this he actually ignores Marx's (and Lenin's, in **State and Revolution**) comments that the Paris Commune was *"to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 287] The existence of executive committees was coded into the Soviet Union's 1918 Constitution. This suggests two things. Firstly, Leninism and Trotskyism differ on fundamental points with Marx and so the claim that Leninism equals Marxism is difficult to support (the existence of libertarian Marxists like Anton Pannekoek and other council communists also disprove such claims). Secondly, it indicates that Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** were ignored once the Bolsheviks took power so indicating that use of that work to prove the democratic nature of Bolshevism is flawed).

Moreover, Marx's support of the fusion of executive and legislative powers is not as revolutionary as some imagine. For anarchists, as Bookchin argues, *"[i]n point of fact, the consolidation of 'executive and legislative' functions in a single body was regressive. It simply identified the process of policy-making, a function that rightly should belong to the people in assembly, with the technical execution of these policies, a function that*



*force of arms"* their position represented an *"evolution within anarchist thought processes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 95] As has been made clear above, from Bakunin onwards revolutionary anarchism has been aware of the need for an insurrection to create an anarchist society by destroying both the state and capitalism (i.e. to *"impose"* a free society upon those who wish hierarchy to continue and are in a position of power) and for that revolution to be defended against attempts to defeat it. Similarly, his claim that the FoD's *"revolutionary junta"* was the equivalent of what *"others call the vanguard or the revolutionary party"* cannot be defended given our discussion above — it is clear that the junta was not seen as a form of delegated power by rather as a means of defending the revolution like the CNT's defence committees and under the direct control of the union assemblies.

It may be argued that the FoD did not actually mean this sort of structure. Indeed, their manifesto states that they are *"introducing a slight variation in anarchism into our program. The establishment of a Revolutionary Junta."* Surely this implies that they saw themselves as having moved away from anarchism and CNT policy? As can be seen from Balius' comments during and after the revolution, the FoD were arguing for *"all power to the unions"* and stating that *"apolitical anarchism had failed."* However, *"apolitical"* anarchism came about post-July 19th when the CNT-FAI (ignoring anarchist theory and CNT policy and history) **ignored** the state machine rather than destroying it and supplanting it with libertarian organs of self-management. The social revolution that spontaneously occurred after July 19th was essentially economic and social (i.e. *"apolitical"*) and not *"anti-political"* (i.e. the destruction of the state machine). Such a revolution would soon come to grief on the shores of the (revitalised) state machine — as the FoD correctly argued had happened.

To state that they had introduced a variation into their anarchism makes sense post-July 1936. The *"apolitical"* line of

the CNT-FAI had obviously failed and a new departure was required. While it is clear that the FoD's "new" position was nothing of the kind, it was elemental anarchist principles, it was "new" in respect to the policy the CNT ("anarchism") had conducted during the Civil War — a policy they justified by selective use of anarchist theory and principles. In the face of this, the FoD could claim they were presenting a new variation in spite of its obvious similarities to pre-war CNT policies and anarchist theory. Thus the claim that the FoD saw their ideas as some sort of departure from traditional anarchism cannot be maintained, given the obvious links this "new" idea had with the past policies and structure of the CNT. As Guillamon makes it clear, the FoD made *"their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology"* and *"[a]t all times the Group articulated an anarcho-syndicalist ideology, although it also voiced radical criticism of the CNT and FAI leadership. But it is a huge leap from that to claiming that the Group espoused marxist positions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61 and p. 95]

One last comment. Morrow states that the *"CNT leadership ... expelled the Friends of Durruti"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 189] This is not true. The CNT leadership did **try** to expel the FoD. However, as Balius points out, the *"higher committees order[ed] our expulsion, but this was rejected by the rank and file in the trade union assemblies and at a plenum of FAI groups held in the Casa CNT-FAI."* [quoted by Agustin Guillamon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73] Thus the CNT leadership could never get their desire ratified by any assembly of unions or FAI groups. Unfortunately, Morrow gets his facts wrong (and also presents a somewhat false impression of the relationship of the CNT leadership and the rank and file).

## 9. Were the Friends of Durruti influenced by Trotskyists?

Morrow implies that the Bolshevik-Leninists *"established close contacts with the anarchist workers, especially the 'Friends*



chronicled Trotsky's elimination of democracy and equality in the Red Army (see section 11). A similar fate befell the factory committees (see section 17) and soviet democracy (as noted above). The logic of Bolshevism is such that at no point did Lenin describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers' control as a defeat (indeed, as far as workers' control went Lenin quickly moved to a position favouring one-man management). We discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in section H.6 and so will not do so here.

All in all, while Morrow's rhetoric on the nature of the social revolution may sound anarchist, there are important differences between the two visions. While Trotskyists support workers' councils on purely instrumentalist grounds as the best means of gaining support for their party's assumption of governmental power, anarchists see workers' councils as the means by which people can revolutionise society and themselves by practising self-management in all aspects of their lives. The difference is important and its ramifications signify why the Russian Revolution became the "dictatorship **over** the proletariat" Bakunin predicted. His words still ring true:

> *"[b]y popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people... [That is,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of* ***former*** *workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178]

workers' councils. He clearly is aware that the party is the **essential** organ of proletarian rule from a Leninist perspective — without the dictatorship of the party, Trotsky argues, the soviets fall back into the mud. Trotsky, indeed, stressed this need for the dictatorship of the party rather than of the proletariat in a letter written in 1937:

> *"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution .. . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [Trotsky, **Writings 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]

The net result of Bolshevik politics in Russia was that Lenin and Trotsky undermined the self-management of working class bodies during the Russian Revolution and **before** the Civil War started in May 1918. We have already



*of Durruti'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] The truth, as usual, is somewhat different.

To prove this we must again turn to Guillamon's work in which he dedicates a chapter to this issue. He brings this chapter by stating:

> *"It requires only a cursory perusal of **El Amigo del Pueblo** or Balius's statements to establish that the Friends of Durruti were never marxists, nor influenced at all by the Trotskyists or the Bolshevik-Leninist Section. But there is a school of historians determined to maintain the opposite and hence the necessity for this chapter."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 94]

He stresses that the FoD *"were not in any way **beholden** to Spanish Trotskyism is transparent from several documents"* and notes that while the POUM and Trotskyists displayed *"an interest"* in *"bringing the Friends of Durruti under their influence"* this was *"something in which they never succeeded."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96 and p. 110]

Pre-May, 1937, Balius himself states that the FoD *"had no contact with the POUM, nor with the Trotskyists."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 104] Post-May, this had not changed as witness E. Wolf letter to Trotsky in July 1937 which stated that it *"will be impossible to achieve any collaboration with them ... Neither the POUMists nor the Friends would agree to the meeting [to discuss joint action]."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 97–8]

In other words, the Friends of Durruti did not establish *"close contacts"* with the Bolshevik-Leninists after the May Days of 1937. While the Bolshevik-Leninists may have wished for such contacts, the FoD did not (they probably remembered their fellow anarchists and workers imprisoned and murdered when Trotsky was in power in Russia). They were, of course, contacts of a limited kind but no influence or significant co-operation. Little wonder Balius stated in 1946 that the

*"alleged influence of the POUM or the Trotskyists upon us is untrue."* [quoted, **Op. Cit.**, p. 104]

It is hardly surprising that the FoD were not influenced by Trotskyism. After all, they were well aware of the policies Trotsky introduced when he was in power. Moreover, the program of the Bolshevik-Leninists was similar in rhetoric to the anarchist vision — they differed on the question of whether they actually **meant** *"all power to the working class"* or not (see section 12 and 13). And, of course, the Trotskyists activities during the May Days amounted to little more that demanding that the workers' do what they were already doing (as can be seen from the leaflet they produced — as George Orwell noted, *"it merely demanded what was happening already"* [**Homage to Catalonia**, p. 221]). As usual, the "vanguard of the proletariat" were trying to catch up with the proletariat.

In theory and practice the FoD were miles ahead of the Bolshevik-Leninists — as to be expected, as the FoD were anarchists.

## 10. What does the Friends of Durruti's programme tell us about Trotskyism?

Morrow states that the FoD's *"slogans included the essential points of a revolutionary program: all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133] It is useful to compare Leninism to these points to see if that provides a revolutionary program.

Firstly, as we argue in more detail in section 11, Trotsky abolished the democratic organs of the Red Army. Lenin's rule also saw the elimination of the factory committee movement and its replacement with one-man management appointed from above (see section 17 and Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details). Both these events occurred before the start of the Russian Civil War in



This is hardly surprising, as this was what the likes of Lenin and Trotsky **had** been arguing. As well as the quotes we have provided above, we may add Trotsky's comment that the *"fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party."* [**Lessons of October**, p. 118] And the resolution of the Second World Congress of the Communist International which stated that *"[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle ... is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised and operated except through a political party."* [cited by Duncan Hallas, **The Comintern**, p. 35] In addition, we may quote Lenin's opinion that:

> *"The very presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties... "*

And:

> *"To go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid."* [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, pp. 25–6 and p. 27]

As Lenin and Trotsky constantly argued, proletarian dictatorship was impossible without the political party of the workers (whatever its name). Indeed, to even discuss any difference between the dictatorship of the class and that of the party just indicated a confused mind. Hence Morrow's comments are incredulous, particularly as he himself stresses that the soviet form is useful purely as a means of gaining support for the revolutionary party which would take over the executive of the

*"mud"* via the *"passing moods"* caused by the *"insufficient cultural level of the masses"*). In other words, the soviet form may be the *"most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses"* (to use Morrow's words) but only **before** they become transformed into state organs.

Secondly, *"revolutionary coercion"* against *"wavering"* elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed *"unstable"* and become subject to *"revolutionary"* coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Trotskyist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing representatives they hold in that ideology.

Morrow argues that *"[o]ne must never forget ... that soviets **do not begin** as organs of state power"* rather they start as *"organs defending the workers' daily interests"* and include *"powerful strike committees."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 136] That is true, initially workers' councils are expressions of working class power and are organs of working class self-management and self-activity. They are subject to direct control from below and unite from the bottom up. However, once they are turned into *"organs of state power"* their role (to re-quote the Soviet constitution of 1918) becomes that of *"carry[ing] out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power."* Soviet power is replaced by party power and they become a shell of their former selves — essentially rubber-stamps for the decisions of the party central committee.

Ironically, Morrow quotes the main theoretician of the Spanish Socialist Party as stating *"the organ of the proletarian dictatorship will be the Socialist Party"* and states that they *"were saying precisely what the anarchist leaders had been accusing both communists and revolutionary socialists of meaning by the proletarian dictatorship."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99 and p. 100]



May 1918. Moreover, neither Lenin nor Trotsky considered workers' self-management of production as a key aspects of socialism. On this level, Leninism in power did not constitute a *"revolutionary program."*

Secondly, Leninism does **not** call for *"all power to the working class"* or even *"workers' power"* to manage their own affairs. To quote Trotsky, in an article written in 1937, *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard."* The working classes' role is one of supporting the party:

> *"Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power. In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism"*, **Writings 1936–7**, p. 426

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the *"vanguard"* which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 424] So much for "workers' power" — unless you equate that with the "power" to give your power, your control over your own affairs, to a minority who claim to represent you. Indeed, Trotsky even attacks the idea that workers' can achieve power directly via organs of self-management like workers' councils (or soviets):

> *"Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 430]

In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat is, in fact, expressed by *"the party dictatorship."* In this Trotsky follows Lenin who asserted that:

> *"The very presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties... "* [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, pp. 25–6]

As has been made clear above, the FoD being anarchists aimed for a society of generalised self-management, a system in which working people directly controlled their own affairs and so society. As these words by Lenin and Trotsky indicate they did not aim for such a society, a society based on *"all power to the working class."* Rather, they aimed for a society in which the workers would delegate their power into the hands of a few, the revolutionary party, who would exercise power **on their behalf.** The FoD meant exactly what they said when they argued for *"all power to the working class"* — they did not mean this as a euphemism for party rule. In this they followed Bakunin:

> *"[T]he federated Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune ... there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade ... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times... An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set ... [and] to reorganise along revolutionary lines ... and*



It is hard to combine these facts and Lenin's and Trotsky's comments with the claim that the "workers' state" is an instrument of class rule — after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises — who decides what a *"wavering"* or *"unstable"* element is? Given their comments on the role of the party and the need for the party to assume power, it will mean in practice whoever rejects the government's decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets who reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin's comment is simply a justification for state repression of its enemies (including elements within or even the whole working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons (we will ignore the question of the interests of the bureaucratic machine which will inevitably surround a centralised body — see section H.3.9 for further discussion).

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top-down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we stress, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 — they are to *"carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power"*). Any independence on their part would be considered *"wavering"* or an expression of *"unstable"* natures and so subject to *"revolutionary coercion"*. In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level — vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government to ensure that the soviets do not go back into the

*"socialist consciousness"* and, according to Lenin in **What is to be Done?**, workers, by their own efforts, can only achieve a *"trade union"* consciousness and, indeed, *"there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of workers in the process of their struggle"* and so ***"the only choice is**: either bourgeois or socialist ideology"* (the later being developed not by workers but by the *"bourgeois intelligentsia"*). [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82 and p. 74] To weaken or question the party means to weaken or question the socialist nature of the revolution and so weaken the *"dictatorship of the proletariat."* Thus we have the paradoxical situation of the "proletarian dictatorship" repressing workers, eliminating democracy and maintaining itself against the *"passing moods"* of the workers (which means rejecting what democracy is all about). Hence Lenin's comment at a conference of the Cheka (his political police) in 1920:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants of workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution** (a failure shared by Morrow and later Trotskyists — see section H.1.7).



> *to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of those deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . .. Thus it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the ... Revolution, founded upon ... the ruins of States, will emerge triumphant...*
>
> *"Since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere, and since the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations ... being organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation ..."* [**No God, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 155–6]

And:

> *"Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so-called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution s sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 160]

As can be seen, Bakunin's vision is precisely, to use Morrow' words, *"all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power."* Thus the Friends of Durruti's program is not a *"break"* with anarchism (as we discussed in more detail in section 8) but rather in the tradition started by Bakunin — in

other words, an anarchist program. It is Leninism, as can be seen, which rejects this *"revolutionary program"* in favour of all power to the representatives of the working class (i.e. party) which it confuses with the working class as a whole.

Given that Morrow asserts that *"all power to the working class"* was an *"essential"* point of *"a revolutionary program"* we can only conclude that Trotskyism does not provide a revolutionary program — rather it provides a program based, at best, on representative government in which the workers' delegate their power to a minority or, at worse, on party dictatorship **over** the working class (the experience of Bolshevik Russia would suggest the former quickly becomes the latter, and is justified by Bolshevik ideology).

By his own arguments, here as in so many other cases, Morrow indicates that Trotskyism is not a revolutionary movement or theory.

## 11. Why is Morrow's comments against the militarisation of the Militias ironic?

Morrow denounces the Stalinist militarisation of the militias (their *"campaign for wiping out the internal democratic life of the militias"*) as follows:

> *"The Stalinists early sought to set an 'example' by handing their militias over to government control, helping to institute the salute, supremacy of officers behind the lines, etc...*
>
> *"The example was wasted on the CNT masses ... The POUM reprinted for distribution in the militias the original Red Army Manual of Trotsky, providing for a democratic internal regime and political life in the army."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 126]

Morrow states that he supported the *"democratic election of soldiers' committees in each unit, centralised in a national elec-*



ing class people can govern themselves directly — quite the reverse.

The danger of such an approach is obvious. The government will soon become isolated from the mass of the population and, due to the centralised nature of the state, difficult to hold accountable. Moreover, given the dominant role of the party in the new state and the perspective that it is the workers' vanguard, it becomes increasingly likely that it will place its power before that of those it claims to represent.

Certainly Trotsky's role in the Russian revolution tells us that the power of the party was more important to him than democratic control by workers through mass bodies. When the workers and sailors of the Kronstadt navy base rebelled in 1921, in solidarity with striking workers in Petrograd, they were demanding freedom of the press for socialist and anarchist groups and new elections to the soviets. But the reaction of the Bolshevik leadership was to crush the Kronstadt dissent in blood. Trotsky's attitude towards workers democracy was clearly expressed at the time:

> *"They [the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers' Opposition] have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker's democracy!"*

He spoke of the *"revolutionary historic birthright of the Party"* and that it *"is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

This perspective naturally follows from Trotsky's vanguardist politics. For Leninists, the party is the bearer of

*seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets."* The Soviet Congress just provided *"the legal cover"* for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [**The Lessons of October**, p. 134, p. 158 and p. 161]

We are not denying that Trotskyists do aim to gain a majority within working class conferences. That is clear. Anarchists also seek to gain the support of the mass of the population. It is what they do next that counts. Trotskyists seek to create a government above these organisations and dominate the executive committees that requires. Thus power in society shifts to the top, to the leaders of the centralised party in charge of the centralised state. The workers' become mere electors rather than actual controllers of the revolution. Anarchists, in contrast, seek to dissolve power back into the hands of society and empower the individual by giving them a direct say in the revolution through their workplace, community and militia assemblies and their councils and conferences.

Trotskyists, therefore, advocate workers councils because they see them as **the** means the vanguard party can take power. Rather than seeing socialism or "workers' power" as a society in which everyone would directly control their own affairs, Trotskyists see it in terms of working class people delegating their power into the hands of a government. Needless to say, the two things are not identical and, in practice, the government soon turns from being the people's servant into its master.

It is clear that Morrow always discusses workers councils in terms of the strategy and program of the party, not the value that workers councils have as organs of direct workers control of society. He clearly advocates workers councils because he sees them as the best way for the vanguard party to rally workers around its leadership and organise the seizure of state power. At no time does he see then as means by which work-



*tion of soldiers' delegates to a national council."* Moreover, he attacks the POUM leadership because it *"**forbade** election of soldiers' committees"* and argued that the *"simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army."* Thus the POUM ensured its *"ten thousand militiamen were controlled bureaucratically by officials appointed by the Central Committee of the party, election of soldiers' committees being expressly forbidden."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 127, p. 128 and pp. 136–7]

Again, Morrow is correct. A revolutionary working class militia **does** require self-management, the election of delegates, soldiers' councils and so on. Bakunin, for example, argued that the fighters on the barricades would take a role in determining the development of the revolution as the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades ... composed of one or two delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* This would complement *"the federative Alliance of all working men's [and women's] associations ... which will constitute the Commune."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1] That is **exactly** why the CNT militia organised in this fashion (and, we must note, they were only applying the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI — i.e. anarchism — to the militias). The militia columns were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

> *"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one centuria, which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty centurias make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the centurias have their say... although every*

> *column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 256–7]

In other words, Morrow is arguing for an **anarchist** solution to the problem of defending the revolution and organising those who were fighting fascism. We say anarchist for good reason. What is ironic about Morrow's comments and description of *"workers' control of the army"* is that these features were **exactly** those eliminated by Trotsky when he created the Red Army in 1918! Indeed, Trotsky acted in **exactly** the same way as Morrow attacks the Stalinists for acting (and they used many of the same arguments as Trotsky did to justify it).

As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

> *"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 37]

He notes that *"[f]or years, Trotskyist literature has denounced these reactionary facets of the Red Army as examples of what happened to it 'under Stalinism.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37f] This claim was, amazingly enough, also made by Trotsky himself. In 1935 he re-wrote history by arguing that *"[i]n the fire of the cruel struggle [of the Civil War], there could not be even a question of a privileged position for officers: the very word was scrubbed out of the vocabulary."* Only *"after the victories had attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 430]



In this he followed comments made when he was in power. In 1920 he argued that *"[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only be means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party ... [that] the Soviets ... [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class these is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109] Any claims that Trotsky's infamously authoritarian (indeed dictatorial) politics were a temporary aberration caused by the necessities of the Russian Civil War are refuted by these quotes — 17 years later he was still arguing the same point.

He had the same vision of party dictatorship being the basis of a revolution in 1924. Commenting on the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917, he states that *"whole of ... Conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? ... Lenin's position was this: ... the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets."* Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. Moreover, he states that *"to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us."* He continued by noting that it was *"one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the*

— rather it is the minority in the executive committee who have been delegated power. Rather than govern themselves and society directly, workers are turned into voters implementing the decisions their leaders have made on their behalf. If revolutionary bodies like workers' councils **did** create a "workers' state" (as Morrow recommends) then their power would be transferred and centralised into the hands of a so-called "revolutionary" government. In this, Morrow follows his guru Trotsky:

> *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspirations of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.*
>
> *"In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* [Trotsky, *"Stalinism and Bolshevism,"* **Writings 1936–37**, p. 426]

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole "seizing power", it is the **vanguard** which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power … is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 424] He mocks the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations:

> *"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and*



*been won and the passage made to a peaceful situation"* did *"the military apparatus"* try to *"become the most influential and privileged part of the whole bureaucratic apparatus"* with *"the Stalinist bureaucracy … gradually over the succeeding ten to twelve years"* ensuring for them *"a superior position"* and giving them *"ranks and decorations."* [*"How Did Stalin Defeat the Opposition?,"* **Writings, 1935–36**, pp. 175–6]

In fact, *"ranks and decorations"* and *"superior"* positions were introduced by Trotsky **before** the outbreak of the Civil War in May 1918. Having been responsible for such developments you would think he would remember them!

On March 28th, 1918, Trotsky gave a report to the Moscow City Conference of the Communist Party. In this report he stated that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree"* and that the Bolsheviks *"fac[ed] the task of creating a regular Army."* Why the change? Simply because the Bolshevik Party held power (*"political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited"*). [*"Work, Discipline, Order"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, pp. 46–7] Of course, power was actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

> *"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [*"Work, Discipline, Order,"* **Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 47]

Of course, most workers' are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky's own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Elected officials do not necessary reflect the interests of those who elected them. That is why anarchists have always supported **delegation** rather than representation combined with decentralisation, strict accountability and the power of instant recall. In a highly centralised system (as created by the Bolsheviks and as exists in most social democratic trade unions) the ability to recall an administration is difficult as it requires the agreement of **all** the people. Thus there are quite a few grounds for fearing the appointment of commanders by the government — no matter which party makes it up.

If, as Morrow argues, the *"simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army"* then Trotsky's regime in the Red Army ensured the defeat of proletarian control of that organisation. The question Morrow raises of who would control the army, the working class or the bourgeois failed to realise the real question — who was to control the army, the working class, the bourgeois or the state bureaucracy. Trotsky ensured that it would be the latter — indeed, the repression of strikes and other working class protest by the Red Army and Cheka under Lenin and Trotsky shows that this was the case (see section H.6.3).

Hence Morrow's own arguments indicate the anti-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism — unless, of course, we decide to look only at what people say and not what they do.

Of course some Trotskyists know what Trotsky actually did when he held power and try and present apologetics for his obvious destruction of soldiers' democracy. One argues that the *"Red Army, more than any other institution of the civil war years, embodied the contradiction between the political consciousness*



> *in short, must be shifted to its base — the armed people in permanent assembly."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 167–9]

Thus the anarchist social revolution sees workers' councils as organs of working class self-management, the means by which they control their own lives and create a new society based on their needs, visions, dreams and hopes. They are not seen as means by which others, the revolutionary party, seized power **on behalf** of the people as Trotskyists do.

Harsh words? No, as can be seen from Morrow who is quite clear on the role of working class organisation — it is seen purely as the means by which the party can take power. As he argues, there is *"no magic in the soviet form: it is merely the most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses.. . It would provide the arena in which the revolutionary party can win the support of the working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 136]

He states that initially the *"reformist majority in the executive committee would decline the assumption of state power. But the workers could still find in the soviets their natural organs of struggle until the genuinely revolutionary elements in the various parties banded together to win a revolutionary majority in the congress and establish a workers' state."* In other words, the *"workers' state, the dictatorship of the proletariat ... can only be brought into existence by the direct, **political** intervention of the masses, through the factory and village councils (soviets) at that point where a majority in the soviets is wielded by the workers' party or parties which are determined to overthrow the bourgeois state. Such was the basic theoretical contribution of Lenin."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100 and p. 113]

From an anarchist perspective, this indicates well the fundamental difference between anarchism and Trotskyism. For anarchists, the existence of an *"executive committee"* indicates that the workers' council do not, in fact, have power in society

**and Revolution**, is the "Marxist" solution as well (in fact, as we will soon see, Lenin played lip service to this and instead saw the solution as government by his party rather than the masses as a whole).

Thus, Morrow's vision of what was required for a successful revolution parallels that of anarchism. We shall now discuss where and how they differ.

The essential difference between the anarchist and Trotskyist vision of workers' councils as the basis of a revolution is what role these councils should play. For anarchists, these federations of self-managed assemblies is the actual framework of the revolution (and the free society it is trying to create). As Murray Bookchin puts it:

> *"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal.* ***A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration*** *... Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must* ***be*** *the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as* ***modes of struggle*** *against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions... The factory committees .. . must be managed directly by workers' assemblies in the factories... neighbourhood committees, councils and boards must be rooted completely in the neighbourhood assemble. They must be answerable at every point to the assembly, they and their work must be under continual review by the assembly; and finally, their members must be subject to immediate recall by the assembly. The specific gravity of society,*



*and circumstantial coercion. On the one hand the creation of a Red Army was a retreat: it was a conscripted not a voluntary army; officers were appointed not elected ... But the Red Army was also filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October"*, **International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3–82, p. 46]

This argument is somewhat weak for two reasons.

Firstly, the regressive features of the Red Army appeared **before** the start of the Civil War. It was a political decision to organise in this way, a decision **not justified at the time in terms of circumstantial necessity**. Indeed, far from it (like most of the other Bolshevik policies of the period). Rather it was justified under the rather dubious rationale that workers did not need to fear the actions of a workers' state. Circumstances were not mentioned at all nor was the move considered as a retreat or as a defeat. It was not even considered as a matter of principle.

This perspective was reiterated by Trotsky after the end of the Civil War. Writing in 1922, he argued that:

> *"There was and could be no question of controlling troops by means of elected committees and commanders who were subordinate to these committees and might be replaced at any moment ... [The old army] had carried out a social revolution within itself, casting aside the commanders from the landlord and bourgeois classes and establishing organs of revolutionary self-government, in the shape of the Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies. These organisational and political measures were correct and necessary from the standpoint of breaking up the old army. But a new army capable of fighting could certainly not grow directly out of them ... The attempt made to apply our old organisational methods to the building of a Red Army threatened to undermine it from*

> *the very outset … the system of election could in no way secure competent, suitable and authoritative commanders for the revolutionary army. The Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class. Commanders were selected and tested by the organs of the Soviet power and the Communist Party. Election of commanders by the units themselves — which were politically ill-educated, being composed of recently mobilised young peasants — would inevitably have been transformed into a game of chance, and would often, in fact, have created favourable circumstances for the machinations of various intriguers and adventurers. Similarly, the revolutionary army, as an army for action and not as an arena of propaganda, was incompatible with a regime of elected committees, which in fact could not but destroy all centralised control."* [*"The Path of the Red Army"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, pp. 7–8]

If a *"circumstantial"* factor exists in this rationale, it is the claim that the soldiers were *"politically ill-educated."* However, **every** mass movement or revolution **starts** with those involved being *"politically ill-educated."* The very process of struggle educates them politically. A key part of this radicalisation is practising self-management and self-organisation — in other words, in participating in the decision making process of the struggle, by discussing ideas and actions, by hearing other viewpoints, electing and mandating delegates. To remove this ensures that those involved **remain** *"politically ill-educated"* and, ultimately, incapable of self-government. It also contains the rationale for continuing party dictatorship:

> *"If some people … have assumed the right to violate everybody's freedom on the pretext of preparing the*



Some anarchists like Bakunin and the anarcho-syndicalists and collectivists saw these organisations being based primarily on libertarian labour unions complemented by whatever organisations were created in the process of revolution (*"The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself" — "The Sonvillier Circular"* echoing Bakunin, quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Others like Kropotkin and anarcho-communists saw it as a free federation of organisations created by the process of revolution itself. While anarchists did not present a blueprint of what would occur after the revolution (and rightly so) they did provide a general outline in terms of a decentralised, free federation of self-managed workers' associations as well as linking these future forms of working class self-government with the forms generated in the current class struggle in the here and now.

Similarly, Lenin's other assertion that anarchists do not study *"the **concrete** lessons of previous proletarian revolutions"* [**Ibid.**] is equally baseless, as any one reading, say, Kropotkin's work would soon realise (for example, **The Great French Revolution**, **Modern Science and Anarchy** or his pamphlet *"Revolutionary Government"*). Starting with Bakunin, anarchists analysed the experiences of the Paris Commune and the class struggle itself to generalise political conclusions from them (for example, the vision of a free society as a federation of workers' associations is clearly a product of analysing the class struggle and looking at the failures of the Commune). Given that Lenin states in the same work that *"anarchists had tried to claim the Paris Commune as their 'own'"* [p. 350] suggests that anarchists **had** studied the Paris Commune and he was aware of that fact. Of course, Lenin states that we had *"failed to give … a true solution"* to its lessons — given that the solution anarchists proposed was a federation of workers councils to smash the state and defend the revolution his comments seem strange as this, according to **The State**

*writing mandates."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 111] Obviously the importance of militia self-management was as lost on him as it was on Lenin and Trotsky — under Marx's state would its defenders just be cannon-fodder, obeying their government and officers without the ability to help determine the revolution they were fighting for? Apparently so. Moreover, Marx quotes Bakunin's support for *"responsible and recallable delegates, vested with their imperative mandates"* without commenting on the fact Bakunin **predicts** those features of the Paris Commune Marx praised in his **Civil War in France** by a number of years. Looks like Morrow is not the first Marxist to appropriate anarchist ideas without crediting their source.

As can be seen, Morrow's suggestion on how to push the Spanish Revolution forward just repeats the ideas of anarchism. Any one familiar with anarchist theory would not be surprised by this as they would know that we have seen a free federation of workplace and communal associations as the basis of a revolution and, therefore, a free society since the time of Proudhon. Thus Morrow's "Trotskyist" vision of a federation of workers' council actually reproduces basic anarchist ideas, ideas which pre-date Lenin's support for soviets as the basis of his "workers' state" by over half a century (we will indicate the fundamental difference between the anarchist vision and the Trotskyist in due course).

As an aside, and as we noted in section H.1.4, these quotes by Bakunin and Kropotkin make a mockery of Lenin's assertion that anarchists do not analysis *"**what** to put in the place of what has been destroyed [i.e. the old state machine] and **how**"* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 362] Anarchists have always suggested a clear answer to what we should *"replace"* the state with — namely free federations of working class organisations created in the struggle against capital and state. To state otherwise is to either be ignorant of anarchist theory or seek to deceive.



> *triumph of freedom, they will always find that the people are not yet sufficiently mature, that the dangers of reaction are ever-present, that the education of the people has not yet been completed. And with these excuses they will seek to perpetuate their own power."* [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 52]

As can be seen from their arguments for party dictatorship, this was a conclusion which Lenin, Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks **did** draw (see, for example, section 12).

In addition, Trotsky's rationale refutes any claim that Bolshevism is somehow "fundamentally" democratic. The ramifications of it were felt everywhere in the soviet system as the Bolsheviks ignored the "wrong" democratic decisions made by the working masses and replaced their democratic organisations with appointees from above. Indeed, Trotsky admits that the *"Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class."* [*"The Path of the Red Army"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, p. 8] Which means, to state the obvious, appointment from above, the dismantling of self-government, and so on are *"in accordance with the principles"* of Trotskyism. These comments were not made in the heat of the civil war, but afterward during peacetime. Notice Trotsky admits that a *"social revolution"* had swept through the Tsarist army. His actions, he also admits, reversed that revolution and replaced its organs of *"self-government"* with ones identical to the old regime. When that happens it is usually called by its true name, namely **counter**-revolution.

For a Trotskyist, therefore, to present themselves as a supporter of self-managed militias is the height of hypocrisy. The Stalinists repeated the same arguments used by Trotsky and acted in exactly the same way in their campaign against the CNT and POUM militias. Certain acts have certain ramifications, no matter who does them or under what government. In

other words, abolishing democracy in the army will generate autocratic tendencies which will undermine socialistic ones **no matter who does it.** The same means cannot be used to serve different ends as there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the results obtained — that is why the bourgeoisie do not encourage democracy in the army or the workplace! Just as the capitalist workplace is organised to produce proletarians and capital along with cloth and steel, the capitalist army is organised to protect and reinforce minority power. The army and the capitalist workplace are not simply means or neutral instruments. Rather they are social structures which generate, reinforce and **protect** specific social relations. This is what the Russian masses instinctively realised and conducted a social-revolution in both the army and workplace to **transform** these structures into ones which would enhance rather than crush freedom and working class autonomy. The Bolsheviks reversed these movements in favour of structures which reproduced capitalist social relationships **and justified it in terms of "socialism."** Unfortunately, capitalist means and organisations would only generate capitalist ends.

It was for these reasons that the CNT and its militias were organised from the bottom up in a self-managed way. It was the only way **socialists** and a socialist society could be created — that is why anarchists are anarchists, we recognise that a socialist (i.e. libertarian) society cannot be created by authoritarian organisations. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued *"[h]ow could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed to be used for that



> *same privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in **their** unions, **their** federations, completely outside the State? ... independent Communes for the **territorial** groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings **by functions** — the two interwoven and providing support to each to meet the needs of society — ... groupings **by personal affinities** ... allow the satisfaction of all social needs: consumption, production and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence"* [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, pp. 164–5]
>
> *"the complete independence of the Communes, the Federation of free communes and the social revolution in the communes, that is to say the formation of associated productive groups in place of the state organisation."* [quoted by Camillo Berneri, *"Peter Kropotkin: His Federalist Ideas"*, pp. 268–282, **The Raven**, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 275]

Bakunin also mentions that those defending the revolution would have a say in the revolutionary structure — the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Council composed of ... delegates from each barricade . .. vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 171] This obviously parallels the democratic nature of the CNT militias.

Interestingly enough, Marx commented that *"odd barricades, these barricades of the Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist organisation], where instead of fighting they spend their time*

it was Lenin and Trotsky who helped undermine the Russian workers' factory committees, militia committees and so on in favour of party rule. We will discuss each of these ironies in turn.

Firstly, as noted, such Morrow's stated position is exactly what Bakunin and the anarchist movement had been arguing since the 1860s. To quote Bakunin:

> *"the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... constitute the Commune ... all provinces, communes and associations . .. by first* ***reorganising*** *on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation... "* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170–2]
>
> *"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206]

Here is Kropotkin presenting the same vision:

> *"what means can the State provide to abolish this [class] monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? ... what advantages could the State provide for abolishing these*



purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to stop it and enforce minority rule!).

As such, Kropotkin was right to argue that it was *"a tragic error"* to think that *"the old organisation, slowly developed in the course of history to crush freedom, to crush the individual, to establish oppression on a legal basis, to create monopolists, to lead minds astray by accustoming them to servitude — will lend itself perfectly to new functions: that it will become the instrument, the framework, to germinate a new life, to establish freedom and equality on economic foundations, to eradicate monopolies, to awaken society and march to the conquest of a future of freedom and equality!"* [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 275]

In addition, to abolish democracy on the pretext that people are not ready for it ensures that it will never exist. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that *"[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Secondly, how can a *"socialist consciousness"* be encouraged, or continue to exist, without socialist institutions to express it? Such a position is idealistic nonsense, expressing the wishful notion that the social relationships people experiences does not impact on those involved. In effect, Rees is arguing that as long as the leaders have the "right ideas" it does not matter how an organisation is structured. However, how people develop, the ideas they have in their heads, are influenced by the relations they create with each other — autocratic organisations do not encourage self-management or socialism, they produce bureaucrats and subjects.

An autocratic organisation **cannot** encourage a socialist consciousness by its institutional life, only in spite of it. For example, the capitalist workplace encourages a spirit of revolt and solidarity in those subject to its hierarchical management and this is expressed in direct action — by **resisting** the authority of the boss. It only generates a socialist perspective via resistance to it. Similarly with the Red Army. Education pro-

grams to encourage reading and writing does not generate socialists, it generates soldiers who are literate. If these soldiers do not have the institutional means to manage their own affairs, a forum to discuss political and social issues, then they remain order takers and any socialist conscious will wither and die.

The Red Army was based on the fallacy that the structure of an organisation is unimportant and it is the politics of those in charge that matter (Marxists make a similar claim for the state, so we should not be too surprised). However, it is no coincidence that bourgeois structures are always hierarchical — self-management is a politically educational experience which erodes the power of those in charge and transforms those who do it. It is to stop this development, to protect the power of the ruling few, that the bourgeois always turn to centralised, hierarchical structures — they reinforce elite rule. You cannot use the same form of organisation and expect different results — they are designed that way for a reason! To twitter on about the Red Army being *"filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness"* while justifying the elimination of the only means by which that consciousness could survive, prosper and grow indicates a complete lack of socialist politics and any understanding of materialist philosophy.

Moreover, one of the basic principles of the anarchist militia was equality between all members. Delegates received the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes as the rest of the unit. Not so in the Red Army. Trotsky thought, when he was in charge of it, that inequality was *"in some cases ... quite explicable and unavoidable"* and that *"[e]very Red Army warrior fully accepts that the commander of his unit should enjoy certain privileges as regards lodging, means of transport and even uniform."* [*"More Equality!"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol II, p. 116]

Of course, Trotsky would think that, being the head commander of the Army. Unfortunately, because soldier



tion of power provided the rationale for destroying functional democracy in the grass-roots — and without healthy roots, any plant will wither and die. Little wonder, then, that the Bolshevik experiment proved such a disaster — yes, the civil war did not help but the logic of Bolshevism has started to undermine working class self-management **before** is started.

Thus Trotsky's argument that the democratic nature of a workers' army or militia is irrelevant because a "workers' state" exists is flawed on many different levels. And the experience of Trotsky in power indicates well the poverty of Trotskyism and Morrow's criticism of the CNT — his suggestion for a self-managed militia is pure anarchism with nothing to do with Leninism and the experience of Bolshevism in power.

## 12. What is ironic about Morrow's vision of revolution?

Equally ironic as Morrow's comments concerning democratic militias (see last section) is his argument that the revolution needed to *"give the factory committees, militia committees, peasant committees, a democratic character, by having them elected by all workers in each unit; to bring together these elected delegates in village, city, regional councils ... [and] a national congress."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Such a position is correct, such developments were required to ensure the success of the revolution. However, it is somewhat ironic that a Trotskyist would present them as somehow being opposed to anarchism when, in fact, they are pure anarchism. Indeed, anarchists were arguing in favour of workers' councils more than five decades before Lenin discovered the importance of the Russian Soviets in 1917. Moreover, as we will indicate, what is even more ironic is the fact that Trotskyism does not actually see these organs as an expression of working class self-management and power but rather as a means of the party to take power. In addition, we must also note that

*the Red Army"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, p. 8] After all, Lenin argued for an economy system built from above via the appointment of managers before the start of the Civil War. The Red Army was created from above via the appointment of officers before the start of the Civil War. Things had certainly changed since Lenin had argued in **The State and Revolution** that *"[a]ll officials, without exception, [would be] elected and subject to recall* ***at any time.*** *"* This would *"serve as the bridge between capitalism and socialism."* [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 302] One major difference, given Trotsky's rationales, seems to be that the Bolsheviks were now in power and so election and recall without exception could be forgotten and replaced by appointment.

In summary, Trotsky's argument against functional democracy in the Red Army could, and was, used to justify the suppression of any democratic decision or organisation of the working class the Bolshevik government disapproved of. He used the same argument, for example, to justify the undermining of the Factory Committee movement and the struggle for workers' control in favour of one-man management — the form of management in the workplace was irrelevant as the workers' were now citizens of a workers' state and under a workers' government (see section 17). Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic for long (and to remain the sovereign power in society, any state will have to eliminate it or, at the very least, bring it under central control — as institutionalised in the USSR constitution of 1918).

Instead of seeing socialism as a product of free association, of working class self-organisation from the bottom up by self-managed organisations, Trotsky saw it as a centralised, top-down system. Of course, being a democrat of sorts he saw the Bolshevik Government as being elected by the mass of the population (or, more correctly, he saw it being elected by the national congress of soviets). However, his vision of centralisa-



democracy had been abolished by decree, we have no idea whether the rank and file of the Red Army agreed with him. For Trotsky, privilege *"is, in itself, in certain cases, inevitable"* but *"**[o]stentatious indulgence** in privilege is not just evil, it is a crime."* Hence his desire for *"more"* equality rather than equality — to aim for *"eliminating the most abnormal [!] phenomena, softening [!] the inequality that exists"* rather than abolish it as they did in the CNT militias. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 117 and p. 119]

But, of course, such inequalities that existed in the Red Army are to be expected in an autocratically run organisation. The inequality inherent in hierarchy, the inequality in power between the order giver and order taker, will, sooner or later, be reflected in material inequality. As happened in the Red Army (and all across the "workers' state"). All Trotsky wanted was for those in power to be respectable in their privilege rather than showing it off. The anarchist militias did not have this problem because being libertarian, delegates were subject to recall and power rested with the rank and file, **not** an elected government.

As another irony of history, Morrow quotes a Bolshevik-Leninist leaflet (which *"points the road"*) as demanding *"[e]qual pay for officers and soldiers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191] Obviously these good Trotskyists had no idea what their hero actually wrote on this subject or did when in power. We have to wonder how long their egalitarian demands would have survived once they had acquired power — if the experience of Trotsky in power is anything to go by, not very long.

Trotsky did not consider how the abolition of democracy and its replacement with an autocratic system would effect the morale or consciousness of the soldiers subject to it. He argued that in the Red Army *"the* ***best*** *soldier does not mean at all the* ***most submissive and uncomplaining.*** *"* Rather, *"the best soldier will nearly always be sharper, more observant and critical than the others… by his critical comments, based on facts*

*accessible to all, he will pretty often undermine the prestige of the commanders and commissars in the eyes of the mass of the soldiers."* However, not having a democratic army the soldiers could hardly express their opinion other than rebellion or by indiscipline. Trotsky, however, adds a comment that makes his praise of critical soldiers seem less than sincere. He states that *"counter-revolutionary elements, agents of the enemy, make conscious and skilful use of the circumstances I have mentioned [presumably excessive privilege rather than critical soldiers, but who can tell] in order to stir up discontent and intensify antagonism between rank and file and the commanding personnel."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 118] The question, of course, arises of who can tell the difference between a critical soldier and a *"counter-revolutionary element"*? Without a democratic organisation, soldier are dependent (as in any other hierarchy) on the power of the commanders, commissars and, in the Red Army, the Bolshevik Secret Police (the Cheka). In other words, members of the very class of autocrats their comments are directed against.

Without democratic organisation, the Red Army could never be a means for creating a socialist society, only a means of reproducing autocratic organisation. The influence of the autocratic organisation created by Trotsky had a massive impact on the development of the Soviet State. According to Trotsky himself:

> *"The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 90]



Obviously Trotsky had forgotten who created the regime in the Red Army in the first place! He also seems to have forgotten that after militarising the Red Army, he turned his power to militarising workers (starting with the railway workers). He also forgets that Lenin had been arguing that workers' must *"**unquestioningly obey the single will** of the leaders of labour"* from April 1918 along with granting *"individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)"* and that *"the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers"* was, in fact, *"in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government"* simply because *"the history of revolutionary movements"* had *"shown"* that *"the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes."* He notes that *"[u]ndoubtably, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy."* [*"The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government"*, **Collected Works**, vol. 27, pp. 267–9]

In other words, Lenin urged the creation of, and implemented, **bourgeois** forms of workplace management based on the appointment of managers from above. To indicate that this was not in contradiction with Soviet principles, he points to the example of **bourgeois** revolutions! As if bourgeois methods do not reflect bourgeois interests and goals. In addition, these *"dictators"* were given the same autocratic powers Trotsky claimed the demobilisation of the Red Army four years later had *"persistently introduced everywhere."* Yes, *"on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country"* but the process had started immediately after the October Revolution and was urged and organised by Lenin and Trotsky before the Civil War had started.

Lenin's support for appointment of (*"dictatorial"*) managers from above makes Trotsky's 1922 comment that the *"Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class"* take on a new light. [*"The Path of*

of the bourgeoisie (i.e. the existing system and its off-shoots such as fascism). This allowed the CNT and FAI leaders to argue that they were following anarchist theory by not destroying the state completely in July 1936. Of course, such a position cannot be used to discredit anarchism simply because such a revision meant that it can never be libertarian to abolish government and the state. In other words, the use made of anarchist theory by the leaders of the CNT and FAI in this case presents nothing else than a betrayal of that theory rather than its legitimate use.

Also, and more importantly, while anarchist theory was corrupted to justify working with other parties and unions in a democratic state, **Marxist** theory was used to justify the brutal one-party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, first under Lenin and the Stalin. That, we feel, sums up the difference between anarchism and Leninism quite well.

## Reply to errors and distortions in Phil Mitchinson's *Marxism and direct action*

Phil Mitchinson essay **Marxism and direct action** attempts to provide a "Marxist" (i.e. Leninist/Trotskyist) critique of the current "Direct Action" based groups which came to notice at various demonstrations across the world — most famously in Seattle, November 1999. He, correctly, links these groups and currents with anarchism. However, his "critique" is nothing but a self-contradictory collection of false assertions, lies and nonsense, as we shall prove (indeed, his "critique" seems more the product of envy at anarchist influence in these movements than the product of scholarship or objectivity). That is why we have decided to reply to his article — it gives us an ideal possibility to indicate the depths to which some Marxists will swoop to distort anarchist politics and movements.



they *"will take possession on the spot and establish their rights by utilising it without delay. They will organise themselves in the workshops to continue the work, but what they will produce will be what is wanted by the masses, not what gives the highest profit to employers... they will organise themselves to turn to immediate use the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the middle class."* [*"The Commune of Paris"*, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, pp. 127–9] Note that Kropotkin explicitly states that only **after** *"governments are swept away"* would the *"insurgent people . .. organise themselves in the workshops."*

As Malatesta noted, the anarchist principles formulated in 1872 at the Congress of St Imier (under the influence of Bakunin, obviously) stated that *"[d]estruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat"* who must *"establish solidarity in revolutionary action outside the framework of bourgeois politics."* He adds, *"[n]eedless to say, for the delegates of St. Imier as for us and for all anarchists, the abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 157–8]

Malatesta himself always stressed that revolution required *"the insurrectionary act which sweeps away the material obstacles, the armed forces of the government."* He argued that *"[o]nce the government has been overthrown ... it will be the task of the people ... to provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and to prepare for the future by destroying privileges and harmful institutions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163 and p. 161] In other words, the revolution needs to smash the state and at the same time abolish capitalism by expropriation by the workers.

Thus anarchism is clear on that you need to destroy the state in order to expropriate capital. Morrow's assertions on this are clearly false. Rather than urging *"workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real*

*source of power"* anarchism calls upon workers to *"overthrow," "smash," "sweep away," "destroy", "dissolve"* the state and its bureaucratic machinery via an *"insurrectionary act"* and expropriate capital **at the same time** — in other words, a popular uprising probably combined with a general strike (*"an excellent means for starting the social revolution,"* in Malatesta's words, but not in itself enough to make *"armed insurrection unnecessary"* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 224–5]).

That, in itself, indicates that Morrow's *"fundamental tenet"* of anarchism does not, in fact, actually exist. In addition, if we look at the history of the CNT during the 1930s we discover that the union organised numerous insurrections which did not, in fact, involve workers *"turning their backs on the state"* but rather attacking the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers *"seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared **communismo liberatario.**"* In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again *"seiz[ed] town halls"* and the town *"swept by street fighting."* The revolt in January 1933 began with *"assaults by Anarchist action groups ... on Barcelona's military barracks ... Serious fighting occurred in working-class **barrios** and the outlying areas of Barcelona ... Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several **pueblos** in Valencia province, and in Andalusia."* In Casas Viejas, as we discussed in section 1, the CNT members surrounded and attacked the barracks of the Civil Guard. In December 1933, the workers *"reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting ... many villages declared libertarian communism."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 238]

Moreover, *"[w]herever possible ... insurrections had carried out industrial and agrarian take-overs and established committees for workers' and peasant's control, libertarian systems of logistics and distribution — in short, a miniature society 'organised on the lines set down by Kropotkin.'"* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 239]



> *"Paris sent her devoted sons to the town hall. There, shelved in the midst of files of old papers, obliged to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to act among the people, obliged to discuss when it was needful to act, to compromise when no compromise was the best policy, and, finally, losing the inspiration which only comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Being paralysed by their separation from the people — the revolutionary centre of light and heat — they themselves paralysed the popular initiative."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 127]

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. As anarchist turned Minister admitted after the war, *"[w]e were in the government, but the streets were slipping away from us. We had lost the workers' trust and the movement's unity had been whittled away."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 274] The actions of the CNT-FAI higher committees and Ministers helped paralyse and defeat the May Days revolt of 1937. The CNT committees and leaders become increasingly isolated from the people, they compromised again and again and, ultimately, became an impotent force. Kropotkin was proved correct. Which means that far from refuting anarchist politics or analysis, the experience of the CNT-FAI in the Spanish Revolution

**confirms** it.

In summary, therefore, the Spanish Revolution of 1936 indicates the failure of anarchists rather than the failure of anarchism.

One last point, it could be argued that anarchist theory allowed the leadership of the CNT and FAI to paint their collaboration with the state as a libertarian policy. That is, of course, correct. Anarchism is against the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" just as much as it is against the actual dictatorship

had lambasted those who had argued *"Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done."* His comments are worth quoting at length:

> *"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of forming a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of conquering the foe while the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, by seeing that it will bring material, moral and intellectual well-being to everybody! They tried to consolidate the Commune first and defer the social revolution until afterward, whereas the only way to go about it was* ***to consolidate the Commune by means of the social revolution****.*
>
> *"The same thing happened with regard to the principle of government. By proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle, which was the breakdown of the state.. .*
>
> *"And yet, if we admit that a central government to regulate the relations of communes between themselves is quite needless, why should we admit its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups which make up each commune? ... There is no more reason for a government inside the commune than for a government outside."* [*"The Commune of Paris"*, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, pp. 126–7]

Kropotkin's argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated. Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT's actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies. In his words:



Now, does all that really sound like workers turning their backs on the state and only seizing control of their factories?

Perhaps it will be argued that Morrow is referring to **after** the insurrection (although he clearly is not). What about the defence of the revolution? Anarchists have always been clear on this too — the revolution would be defended by the people in arms. We have discussed this issue above (in sections 1 and 8 in particular) so we do not need to discuss it in much detail here. We will just provide another quote by Bakunin (although written in 1865, Bakunin made the same points over and over again until his death in 1876):

> *"While it [the revolution] will be carried out locally everywhere, the revolution will of necessity take a federalist format. Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines ... In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt ... and to federate with them for common defence."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 142]

This was essentially the position agreed by the CNT in May 1936:

> *"The armed people will be the best guarantee against all attempts to restore the destroyed regime by interior or exterior forces ... Each Commune should have its arms and elements of defence."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 64]

Like the CNT with its *"Defence Committees"* the defence of the revolution would rest with the commune and its federation. Thus Morrow's *"fundamental tenet"* of anarchism does not exist. We have **never** urged the ignoring of the state nor the idea that seizing economic power will eliminate political power by itself. Nor is anarchism against the defence of a revolution. The position of the CNT in May 1936 was identical to that of Bakunin in 1865. The question is, of course, how do you organise a revolution and its defence — is it by the whole people or is it by a party representing that people. Anarchists argue for the former, Trotskyists the latter. Needless to say, a state structure (i.e. a centralised, hierarchical structure based on the delegation of power) is required only when a revolution is seen as rule by a party — little wonder anarchists reject the concept of a "workers' state" as a contradiction in terms.

The question of July 1936 however rears its head. If anarchism **does** stand for insurrection, workers councils and so on, then why did the CNT ignore the state? Surely that suggests anarchism is, as Morrow claims, flawed? No, it does not — as we argue in some detail in section 20 this confuses mistakes by **anarchists** with errors in anarchist theory. The CNT-FAI did not pursue anarchist theory and so July 1936 does not invalidate anarchism. As Bakunin argued, *"[n]o revolution could succeed … unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] The revolution of July 1936 was a social revolution (it expropriated capital and revolutionised social relationships across society) but it was not a political revolution — in other words, it did not destroy the state. The CNT refused to do this because of the danger of fascism and fear of isolation (see section 20). Little wonder the social revolution was defeated — the CNT did not apply basic anarchist theory. To dismiss anarchist ideas because they were not applied seems somewhat strange.

To finish this section we must indicate that Morrow's statement concerning anarchists "turning our backs" to the state



mittee of Anti-Fascist Militias" was the second mistake as at no time could it be considered as the embryo of a new workers' power. It was, rather, an organisation like the pre-war UGT "Workers' Alliances" — an attempt to create links between the top-level of other unions and parties. Such an organisation, as the CNT recognised before the war (see section 5), could not be a means of creating a revolutionary federation of workers' associations and communes and, in fact, a hindrance to such a development, if not its chief impediment.

Given that the CNT had rejected the call for revolution in favour of anti-fascist unit on July 20th, such a development does not reflect the CNT's pre-war program. Rather it was a reversion to Felix Morrow's Trotskyist position of joining the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" in spite of its non-revolutionary nature (see section 5).

The CNT did not carry out its program (and so apply anarchist politics) and so did not replace the Generalitat (Catalan State) with a Defence Council in which only union/workplace assemblies (not political parties) were represented. To start the process of creating libertarian communism all the CNT would have had do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates. It could also have invited the various neighbourhood and village defence committees that had either sprung up spontaneously or were already organised before the war as part of the CNT. Unlike the other revolts it took part in the 1930s, the CNT did not apply anarchist politics. However, to judge anarchism by this single failure means to ignore the whole history of anarchism and its successful applications elsewhere, including by the CNT and FAI during numerous revolts in Spain during the 1930s and in Aragon in 1936.

Ironically enough, Kropotkin had attacked the official CNT line of not mentioning Libertarian Communism *"until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels."* In analysing the Paris Commune Kropotkin

the Makhnovists, the revolts in Spain between 1932 and 1934 as well as the Council of Aragon show beyond doubt that this is the case. Rather than act as anarchists in July 1936, the militants of the Catalan CNT and FAI ignored their basic ideas (not lightly, we stress, but in response to real dangers). They later justified their decisions by putting their options in a Marxist light — "either we impose libertarian communism, and so become an anarchist dictatorship, or we collaborate with the democratic government." As Vernon Richards makes clear:

> *"Such alternatives are contrary to the most elementary principles of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. In the first place, an 'anarchist dictatorship' is a contradiction in terms (in the same way as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is), for the moment anarchists impose their social ideas on the people by force, they cease being anarchists ... the arms of the CNT-FAI held could be no use for imposing libertarian communism ... The power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrificed. We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority... the role of anarchists [is] to support, to incite and encourage the development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 43–6]

Their compromise in the name of anti-fascist unity contained the rest of their mistakes. Joining the "Central Com-



and concentrating on property actually contradicts both Engels and Lenin.

As Lenin notes in **The State and Revolution**, *"Marx agreed with Proudhon on the necessity of 'smashing' the present state machine... [there is] similarity between Marxism and anarchism (Proudhon and Bakunin) ... on this point"* and that anarchists advocate *"the destruction of the state machine."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 310 and p. 358] You can hardly smash the state or destroy the state machine by "turning your back" to it. Similarly, Engels argued (although distorting his thought somewhat) that Bakunin saw *"the **state** as the main evil to be abolished ... [and] maintains that it is the **state** which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital **only by the grace of the state** ... [Hence] it is above all the state which must be done away with ... organise, and when ALL workers are won over ... abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 728–9] You cannot *"abolish"* and *"replace"* the state by ignoring it ("turning your back to it"). We must also stress that Engels comments disprove Lenin's assertion that anarchists *"have absolutely no clear idea of **what** the proletariat will put in its [the states] place."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 358] We have always been clear, namely a federation of workers' associations (this was the organisation of the First International). In other, more modern, words, a system of workers' councils — a position Marxists only embraced six decades later when Lenin advocated them as the basis of his "workers' state."

Thus Morrow's comments against anarchism are in contradiction to usual Marxist claims against anarchism (namely, that we seek to smash the state but do not understand that the workers' state is necessary to abolish capitalism). Indeed, Engels attributed the opposite idea to Bakunin that Morrow implies anarchists think with regards to property — namely the idea that the capitalist has his property because of the state. Morrow's *"fundamental tenet"* of anarchism not only does not exist in an-

archist theory, it does not even exist in the Marxist critique of that theory! It is impressive enough to assign a false doctrine to your enemies, it takes real ability to make a claim which contradicts your own theory's assertions!

## 15. Did Spanish Anarchism aim for the creation of *"collectives"* before the revolution?

The formation of the worker-managed enterprises called *"collectives"* in the Spanish revolution of 1936 has sometimes led people (particularly Marxists) to misconceptions about anarcho-syndicalist and communist-anarchist theory. These comments by a Marxist-Leninist are typical:

> *"Spanish anarchists believed that a system of autonomous collectives, with the weakest possible connections between them, was the alternative to capitalism and also to the Marxist view of society running the entire economy as one whole."*

And:

> *"The anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there, and not by the working class as a whole."* [Joseph Green, *"Reply to the Open Letter of the Black Autonomy Collective"*, **Communist Voice**, no. 10]

This assertion is sometimes voiced by Libertarian Marxists of the council communist tendency (who should know better):

> *"At the time of the Civil War, a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land, etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these archism was not something which could be transformed from theory to practice by organisational decree…*
>
> *"What the CNT-FAI leadership had failed to take on board was the fact that the spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direction of its own. On their own initiative, without any intervention by the leadership of the unions or political parties, the rank and file militants of the CNT, representing the dominant force within the Barcelona working class, together with other union militants had, with the collapse of State power, … been welded … into genuinely popular non-partisan revolutionary committees … in their respective neighbourhoods. They were the natural organisms of the revolution itself and direct expression of popular power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99]

In other words, the bulk of the CNT-FAI membership acted in an anarchist way while the higher committees compromised their politics and achievements in the name of anti-fascist unity. In this the membership followed years of anarchist practice and theory. It was fear of fascism which made many of the leading militants of the CNT abandon anarchist politics and instead embrace "anti-fascist unity" and compromise with the bourgeois republic. To claim that July 1936 indicated the failure of anarchism means to ignore the constructive work of millions of CNT members in their workplaces, communities and militias and instead concentrate on a few militants who made the terrible mistake of ignoring their political ideas in an extremely difficult situation. As we said above, this may explain the decision but it does not justify it.

Therefore, it is clear that the experiences of the CNT and FAI in 1936 indicate a failure of anarchists to apply their politics rather than the failure of those politics. The examples of

Most of the CNT militants at the July 20th meeting saw the compromise as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). As the official account states, *"[t]he situation was considered and it was unanimously decided not to mention Libertarian Communism until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels."* [quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] However, the membership of the CNT decided **themselves** to start the social revolution (*"very rapidly collectives ... began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the CNT leadership ... the initiative came from CNT militants"* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 349]). The social revolution began anyway, from below, but without the key political aspect (abolition of the state) and so was fatally compromised from the beginning.

As Stuart Christie argues:

> *"The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJL in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism ... they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become part of the bourgeois state ... Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*
>
> *"But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism was not theirs to make. An-*



> *'collectives' should be linked with each other on a 'federal' basis — that is, without any superior central authority.*
>
> *"This basic idea had been propagated by anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years. When the Civil War began, peasants and working class people in those parts of the country which had not immediately fallen under fascist control seized the opportunity to turn anarchist ideal into reality."* [*"Anarchism and the Spanish 'Revolution'"*, **Subversion**, no. 18]

Trotskyist Felix Morrow also presents a similar analysis when he states that the POUM *"recorded the tendency of CNT unions to treat collectivised property as their own. It never attacked the anarcho-syndicalist theories which created the tendency."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 104]

However, the truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Firstly, as will soon become clear, CNT policy and anarchist theory was **not** in favour of workers' owning their individual workplaces. Instead both argued for **socialisation** of the means of life by a system of federations of workers' assemblies. Individual workplaces would be managed by their workers but they would not exist in isolation or independently of the others — they would be members of various federations (minimally an industrial one and one which united all workplaces regardless of industry in a geographical area). These would facilitate co-ordination and co-operation between self-managed workplaces. The workplace would, indeed, be autonomous but such autonomy did not negate the need for federal organs of co-ordination nor did federation negate that autonomy (as we will discuss later in section 18, autonomy means the ability to make agreements with others and so joining a federation is an expression of autonomy and not necessarily its abandonment, it depends on the nature of the federation).

Secondly, rather than being the product of *"more than 50 years"* of anarchist propaganda or of *"anarcho-syndicalist theories"*, the *"collectives"* instituted during the Civil War were seen by the CNT as merely a temporary stop-gap. They had not been advocated in the CNT's pre-Civil War program, but came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry out its libertarian communist program, which would have required setting up workers congresses and federal councils to establish co-ordination and aid the planning of common activities between the self-managed workplaces. In other words, the idea of self-managed workplaces was seen as one step in a process of socialisation, the basic building block of a federal structure of workers' councils. They were **not** seen as an end in themselves no matter how important they were as the base of a socialised economy.

Thus the CNT had never proposed that factories or other facilities would be owned by the people who happened to work there. The CNT's program called for the construction of *"libertarian communism."* This was the CNT's agreed goal, recognising it must be freely created from below. In addition, the Spanish Anarchists argued for *"free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation,"* recognising that *"[i]n each locality the degree of [libertarian] communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy."* [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 97] In other words, the CNT recognised that libertarian communism would not be created overnight and different areas will develop at different speeds and in different directions depending on the material circumstances they faced and what their population desired.

However, libertarian communism was the CNTs declared goal. This meant that the CNT aimed for a situation where the economy as a whole would be socialised and **not** an mutualist economy consisting independent co-operatives owned and



Most of the CNT militants there saw it as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). Companys' (the head of the Catalan government) had proposed the creation of a body containing representatives of all anti-fascist parties and unions called the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias,"* sponsored by his government. The CNT meeting agreed to this proposal, though only on condition that the CNT be given the majority on it. A sizeable minority of delegates were apparently disgusted by this decision. The delegation from Bajo Llobregat County (an industrial area south of Barcelona) walked out saying they would never go along with government collaboration.

Therefore, the decision to postpone the revolution and so to ignore the state rather than smashing was a product of isolation and the fear of a fascist victory. However, while "isolation" may explain the Catalan militants' fears and so decisions, it does not justify their decision. If the CNT of Catalonia had given Companys the boot and set up a federation of workplace and community assemblies in Catalonia, uniting the rank-and-file of the other unions with the CNT, this would have strengthened the resolve of workers in other parts of Spain, and it might have also inspired workers in nearby countries to move in a similar direction.

Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. On the contrary, in following the course of action advised by leaders like Horacio Prieto and Abad Diego de Santillan, the CNT only weakened the revolution and helped to discredit libertarian socialism. After all, as Bakunin and Kropotkin continually stressed, revolutions break out in specific areas and then spread outward — isolation is a feature of revolution which can only be overcome by action, by showing a practical example which others can follow.

social revolution. So, in the name of "anti-fascist" unity, the CNT worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff *"both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 40]

Rather than eliminate a civil war developing within the civil war, the policy of the CNT just postponed it — until such time as the state was stronger than the working class. The Republican government was quite happy to attack the gains of the revolution, physically attacking rural and urban collectives, union halls, assassinating CNT and FAI members of so on. The difference was the CNT's act only postponed such conflict until the balance of power had shifted back towards the status quo.

Moreover, the fact that the bourgeois republic was fighting fascism could have meant that it would have tolerated the CNT social revolution rather than fight it (and so weakening its own fight against Franco). However, such an argument remains moot.

It is clear that anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As a Scottish anarchist in Barcelona during the revolution argued, *"Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name ... Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed."* [Ethal McDonald, **Workers Free Press**, Oct. 1937] This was also argued by the **Friends of Durruti** who stated that *"[d]emocracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism."* [*"The Friends of Durruti accuse"*, **Class War on the Home Front**, Wildcat Group (ed.), p. 30]

The majority at the July 20–21 conferences went along with proposal of postponing the social revolution, of starting the work of creating libertarian communism, and smashing the state and replacing it with a federation of workers' assemblies.



controlled by their workers (with the producers operating totally independently of each other on the basis of market exchange). Instead, workers would manage their workplace directly, but would not own it — rather ownership would rest with society as a whole but the day-to-day management of the means of production would be delegated to those who did the actual work. Councils of workers' delegates, mandated by and accountable to workplace assemblies, would be created to coordinate activity at all levels of the economy.

A few quotes will be needed to show that this was, in fact, the position of the Spanish Anarchists. According to Issac Puente, the *"national federations will hold as common property all the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops."* The village commune *"will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations."* [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 29 and p. 26] In D. A. de Santillan's vision, libertarian communism would see workers' councils overseeing 18 industrial sectors. There would also be *"councils of the economy"* for local, regional and national levels (ultimately, international as well). [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 50–1 and pp. 80–7] These councils would be *"constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies"* and *"receives [their] orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions"* of their appropriate *"assemblies."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83 and p. 86]

The CNT's national conference in Saragossa during May 1936 stressed this vision. Its resolution declared that the revolution would abolish *"private property, the State, the principle of authority, and ... classes."* It argued that *"the economic plan of organisation, throughout national production, will adjust to the strictest principles of social economy, directly administered by the producers through their various organs of production, designated in general assemblies of the various organisations, and always controlled by them."* In urban areas, *"the workshop or factory council"* would make *"pacts with other labour centres"* via

*"Councils of Statistics and Production"* which are the *"organ of relations of Union to Union (association of producers)"*, in other words, workers' councils. These would *"federate among themselves, forming a network of constant and close relations among all the producers of the Iberian Confederation."* In rural areas, *"the producers of the Commune"* would create a *"Council of Cultivation"* which would *"establish the same network of relations as the Workshop, Factory Councils and those of Production and Statistics, complementing the free federation represented by the Commune."*

The resolution argues that *"[b]oth the Associations of industrial producers and Associations of agricultural producers will federate nationally"* and *"Communes will federate on a county and regional basis ... Together these Communes will constitute an Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes."* Being anarchists, the CNT stressed that *"[n]one of these organs will have executive or bureaucratic character"* and their members *"will carry out their mission as producers, meeting after the work day to discuss questions of details which don't require the decision of the communal assemblies."* The assemblies themselves *"will meet as often as needed by the interests of the Commune... When problems are dealt with which affect a country or province, it must be the Federations which deliberate, and in the meetings and assemblies all Communities will be represented and the delegates will bring points of view previously agreed upon"* by the Commune assembly. [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 59, p. 60 and p. 62]

Joan Ferrer, a bookkeeper who was the secretary of the CNT commercial workers union in Barcelona, explained this vision:

> *"It was our idea in the CNT that everything should start from the worker, not — as with the Communists — that everything should be run by the state. To this end we wanted to set up industrial federations — tex-*



The CNT had never considered a "strategy" of collaboration with the Popular Front prior to July of '36. In the months leading up to the July explosion, the CNT had consistently criticised the Popular Front strategy as a fake unity of leaders over the workers, a strategy that would subordinate the working class to capitalist legality. However, in July of '36, the CNT conferences in Catalonia had not seen clearly that their "temporary" participation in the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee would drag them inexorably into a practice of collaboration with the Popular Front. As Christie argues, *"the Militias Committee was a compromise, an artificial political solution ... It ... drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until them its principle enemy, and led to the steady erosion of anarchist influence and credibility."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105]

Secondly, the fear of fascism played a key role. After all, this was 1936. The CNT and FAI had seen their comrades in Italy and Germany being crushed by fascist dictatorships, sent to concentration camps and so on. In Spain, Franco's forces were slaughtering union and political militants and members by the tens of thousands (soon to reach hundreds of thousands by the end of the war and beyond). The insurrection had not been initiated by the people themselves (as had the previous revolts in the 1930s) and this also had a psychological impact on the decision making process. The anarchists were, therefore, in a position of being caught between two evils — fascism and the bourgeois state, elements of which had fought with them on the streets. To pursue anarchist politics at such a time, it was argued, could have resulted in the CNT fighting on two fronts — against the fascists and also against the Republican government. Such a situation would have been unbearable and so it was better to accept collaboration than aid Fascism by dividing the forces of the anti-fascist camp.

However, such a perspective failed to appreciate the depth of hatred the politicians and bourgeois had for the CNT. Indeed, by their actions it would appear they preferred fascism to the

*workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 42]

In addition, in failing to take the initiative to unite the working class independently of the Republican state at the crucial moment, in July of '36, the CNT of Catalonia was in effect abandoning the only feasible alternative to the Popular Front strategy. Without a libertarian system of popular self-management, the CNT and FAI had no alternative but to join the bourgeois state. For a revolution to be successful, as Bakunin and Kropotkin argued, it needs to create libertarian organisations (such as workers' associations, free communes and their federations) which can effectively replace the state and the market, that is to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed. If this is not done and the state is ignored rather than smashed, it continue and get stronger as it will be the only medium that exists for wide scale decision making. This will result in revolutionaries having to work within it, trying to influence it since no other means exist to reach collective decisions.

The failure to smash the state, this first betrayal of anarchist principles, led to all the rest, and so the defeat of the revolution. Not destroying the state meant that the revolution could never be fully successful economically as politics and economics are bound together so closely. Only under the political conditions of anarchism can its economic conditions flourish and vice versa.



*tiles, metal-working, department stores, etc. — which would be represented on an overall Economics Council which would direct the economy. Everything, including economic planning, would thus remain in the hands of the workers."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 180]

However, social revolution is a dynamic process and things rarely develop exactly as predicted or hoped in pre-revolutionary times. The "collectives" in Spain are an example of this. Although the regional union conferences in Catalonia had put off overthrowing the government in July of 1936, workers began taking over the management of industries as soon as the street-fighting had died down. The initiative for this did not come from the higher bodies — the regional and national committees — but from the rank-and-file activists in the local unions. In some cases this happened because the top management of the enterprise had fled and it was necessary for the workers to take over if production was to continue. But in many cases the local union militants decided to take advantage of the situation to end wage labour by creating self-managed workplaces.

As to be expected of a real movement, mistakes were made by those involved and the development of the movement reflected the real problems the workers faced and their general level of consciousness and what they wanted. This is natural and to denounce such developments in favour of ideal solutions means to misunderstand the dynamic of a revolutionary situation. In the words of Malatesta:

*"To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective*

> *circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 36]

This was the situation in revolutionary Spain. Moreover, the situation was complicated by the continued existence of the bourgeois state. As Gaston Leval, in his justly famous study of the collectives, states *"it was not ... true socialisation, but ... a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227–8] Leval in fact terms it *"a form of workers neo-capitalism"* but such a description is inaccurate (and unfortunate) simply because wage labour had been abolished and so it was not a form of capitalism — rather it was a form of mutualism, of workers' co-operatives exchanging the product of their labour on the market.

However, Leval basic argument was correct — due to the fact the political aspect of the revolution (the abolition of the state) had been "postponed" until after the defeat of fascism, the economic aspects of the revolution would also remain incomplete. The unions that had seized workplaces were confronted with a dilemma. They had control of their individual workplaces, but the original libertarian plan for economic co-ordination was precluded by the continued existence of the State. It was in this context of a partial revolution, under attack by the counter-revolution, that the idea of "collectives" was first put forward to solve some of the problems facing the workers and their self-managed workplaces. Unfortunately, this very "solution" caused problems of its own. For example, Gaston Leval indicates that the collectivisation decree of October 1936 *"legalising collectivisation"*, *"distorted everything right from the start"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 227] and did not allow the



areas as Castille and Asturias. To combat fascism required the combined forces of all parties and unions and by collaborating with a UGT-like "Anti-Fascist Alliance" in Catalonia, it was believed that such alliances could be formed elsewhere, with equality for the CNT ensured by the Catalan CNT's decision of equal representation for minority organisations in the Catalan Anti-Fascist Committee. This would, hopefully, also ensure aid to CNT militias via the government's vast gold reserves and stop foreign intervention by Britain and other countries to protect their interests if libertarian communism was declared.

However, as Vernon Richards argues:

> *"This argument contains ... two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties — that is politicians — honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations...*
>
> *"All the initiative ... was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed*

What this means is that a non-hierarchical society must be imposed by the working class against the opposition of those who would lose power. In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "authoritarian" to destroy authority, in other words! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed (indeed, they are acts of liberation in which the oppressed end their oppression by their own direct action). That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision making about social and economic issues.

So the dilemma of "anarchist dictatorship" or "collaboration" was a false one and fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, etc. under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union, workplace, community, militia (and so on) assemblies, as should be the case! "Collaboration" yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in a libertarian manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a capitalist, boss or politician.

Instead of this "collaboration" from the bottom up, the CNT and FAI committees favoured "collaboration" from the top down. In this they followed the example of the UGT and its "Workers' Alliances" rather than their own activities previous to the military revolt. Why? Why did the CNT and FAI in Catalonia reject their previous political perspective and reject the basis ideas of anarchism? As shown above, the CNT and FAI has successfully applied their ideas in many insurrections before hand. Why the change of direction? There were two main reasons.

Firstly, while a majority in Catalonia and certain other parts of Spain, the CNT and FAI were a minority in such



collectives to develop beyond a mutualist condition into full libertarian communism. It basically legalised the existing situation while hindering its development towards libertarian communism by undermining union control.

This dilemma of self-managed individual workplaces and lack of federations to co-ordinate them was debated at a CNT union plenary in September of 1936. The idea of converting the worker-managed workplaces into co-operatives, operating in a market economy, had never been advocated by the Spanish anarchists before the Civil War, but was now seen by some as a temporary stop-gap that would solve the immediate question of what to do with the workplaces that had been seized by the workers. It was at this meeting that the term "collective" was first adopted to describe this solution. This concept of "collectivisation" was suggested by Joan Fabregas, a Catalan nationalist of middle class origin who had joined the CNT after July of 1936. As one CNT militant recalled:

> *"Up to that moment, I had never heard of collectivisation as a solution for industry — the department stores were being run by the union. What the new system meant was that each collectivised firm would retain its individual character, but with the ultimate objective of federating all enterprises within the same industry."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 212]

However, a number of unions went beyond "collectivisation" and took over all the facilities in their industries, eliminating competition between separate firms. The many small barber and beauty shops in Barcelona were shut down and replaced with large neighbourhood haircutting centres, run through the assemblies of the CNT barbers' union. The CNT bakers union did something similar. The CNT Wood Industry Union shut down the many small cabinet-making

shops, where conditions were often dangerous and unhealthy. They were replaced with two large factories, which included new facilities for the benefit of the workforce, such as a large swimming pool.

The union ran the entire industry, from the felling of timber in the Val d'Aran to the furniture showrooms in Barcelona. The railway, maritime shipping and water, gas and electric industry unions also pursued this strategy of industrial unification, as did the textile union in the industrial town of Badalona, outside Barcelona. This was considered to be a step in the direction of eventual socialisation.

At the Catalan union plenary of September, 1936, *"the bigger, more powerful unions, like the woodworkers, the transport workers, the public entertainment union, all of which had already socialised [i.e. unified their industries under union management], wanted to extend their solution to the rest of industry. The smaller, weaker unions wanted to form co-operatives..."* [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212]

The collectives came out of this conflict and discussion as a sort of "middle ground" — however, it should be stressed that it did not stop many unions from ignoring the Catalan's governments' attempt to legalise (and so control) the collectives (the so-called *"collectivisation"* decree) as far as they could. As Albert Perez-Baro, a Catalan Civil Servant noted, *"the CNT ... pursued its own, unilateral objectives which were different. Syndical collectivisation or syndicalised collectives, I would call those objectives; that's to say, collectives run by their respective unions ... The CNT's policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212–3] Indeed, Abad de Santillan stated later that he *"was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature ... When I became [economics] councillor [of the Generalitat for the CNT], I had no intention of taking into account of carrying out the decree; I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they saw fit, according to their own aspiration."* [quoted, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212f]



sectors of society — bosses, judges, politicians, etc. — who will oppose social re-organisation on a libertarian basis. As Malatesta once argued, some people *"seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!"* [**Anarchy**, p. 41] It is doubtful he would have predicted that certain anarchists would be included in such believers!

Neither anarchism nor the CNT program called for suppressing other viewpoints. The various viewpoints that existed among the workforce and population would be reflected in the deliberations and debates of the workplace and community assemblies as well as in the various local and regional congresses and conference and on their co-ordinating Councils. The various political groups would be free to organise, publish their periodicals and seek influence in the various self-managed assemblies and structures that existed. The CNT would be dominant because it had overwhelming support among the workers of Catalonia (and would have remained dominant as long as that continued).

What is essential to a state is that its authority and armed power be top-down, separate and distinct from the population. Otherwise it could not function to protect the power of a boss class. When a population in society directly and democratically controls the armed force (in fact, effectively **is** the armed force as in the case of the CNT militias), directly manages its own fairs in decentralised, federal organisations based on self-management from the bottom upwards and manages the economy, this is not a "state" in the historical sense. Thus the CNT would not in any real sense had "seized power" in Catalonia, rather it would have allowed the mass of people, previously disempowered by the state, to take control of their own lives — both individually and collectively — by smashing the state and replacing it by a free federation of workers' associations.

radicals had been corrupted by the experience of government collaboration.

Garcia Oliver's position in July of 1936 had been entirely different. He had been one of the militants to argue in favour of overthrowing the Companys government in Catalonia in the crucial union assemblies of July 20–21. As Juan Gomez Casas argues:

> *"The position supported by Juan Garcia Oliver [in July of '36] has been described as 'anarchist dictatorship' Actually, though, Oliver was advocating application of the goals of the Saragossa Congress in Barcelona and Catalonia at a time in history when, in his opinion, libertarian communism was a real possibility. It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of [state] power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the popular masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as in their political organisations."* [**Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 188f]

Those libertarians who defended government participation in Spain argued that a non-hierarchical re-organisation of society in Catalonia in July of '36 could only have been imposed by force, against the opposition of the parties and sectors of society that have a vested interest in existing inequalities. They argued that this would have been a "dictatorship," no better than the alternative of government collaboration.

If this argument were valid, then it logically means that anarchism itself would be impossible, for there will always be



Therefore, when Leninist Joseph Green argues the initial collectivisation of workplaces *"was the masses starting to take things into their own hands, and they showed that they could continue production in their workplaces ... The taking over of the individual workplaces and communities is one step in a revolutionary process. But there is yet more that must be done — the workplaces and communities must be integrated into an overall economy"* he is just showing his ignorance. The CNT, despite Green's assertions to the contrary, were well aware that the initial collectivisations were just one step in the revolution and were acting appropriately. It takes some gall (or extreme ignorance) to claim that CNT theory, policy and actions were, in fact, the exact opposite of what they were. Similarly, when he argues *"[h]ow did the anarchists relate the various workplace collectives to each other in Barcelona? ... they made use of a patchwork system including a Central Labour Bank, an Economic Council, credit ..."* he strangely fails to mention the socialisation attempts made by many CNT industrial unions during the revolution, attempts which reflected pre-war CNT policy. But such facts would get in the way of a political diatribe and so are ignored. [Green, **Op. Cit.**]

Green continues his inaccurate diatribe by arguing that:

> *"The problem is that, saddled with their false theory, they could not understand the real nature of the economic steps taken in the collectives, and thus they could not deal with the economic relations that arose among the collectives."* [**Op. Cit.**]

However, the only thing false about this is the false assertions concerning anarchist theory. As is crystal clear from our comments above, the Spanish anarchists (like all anarchists) were well aware of the need for economic relations between collectives (self-managed workplaces) before the revolution and acted to create them during it. These were the industrial

federations and federations of rural communities/collectives predicted in anarchist and CNT theory and actually created, in part at least, during the revolution itself.

Thus Green's "critique" of anarchism is, in fact, **exactly** what anarchist theory actually argues and what the Spanish anarchists themselves argued and tried to implement in all industries. Of course, there are fundamental differences between the anarchist vision of socialisation and the Leninist vision of Nationalisation but this does not mean that anarchism is blind to the necessity of integrating workplaces and communities into a coherent system of federations of workers' councils (as proven above). However, such federation has two sources — it is either imposed from above or agreed to from below. Anarchists choose the former as the latter negates any claim that a revolution is a popular, mass movement from below (and, incidentally, the Leninist claim that the "workers' state" is simply a tool of the workers to defeat capitalist oppression).

The actual process in Spain towards industrial federations and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved — as would be expected in a true social revolution. For example, the department stores were collectivised and an attempt to federate the stores failed. The works councils opposed it, considering the enterprises as their own and were unwilling to join a federation — the general assemblies of the collectives agreed. Joan Ferrer, the secretary of the CNT commercial union, considered it natural as *"[o]nly a few months before, the traditional relationship between employer and worker had been overthrown. Now the workers were being asked to make a new leap — to the concept of collective ownership. It was asking a lot to expect the latter to happen overnight."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 220]

However, before Leninists like Green rush in and assert that this proves that *"anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there"* we should point out two things. Firstly,



ory (as Marxists claim), the example of July 1936 in Catalonia is an aberration. Anarchist politics had been confirmed as a valid revolutionary theory many times before and, indeed, shown themselves as the only one to ensure a free society. However, why did this aberration occur?

Most opponents of anarchism provide a rather (in)famous quote from FAI militant Juan Garcia Oliver, describing the crucial decision made in Catalonia in July of '36 to co-operate with Companys' government to explain the failure of the CNT to "seize power":

> *"The CNT and FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, eschewing revolutionary totalitarianism ... by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 105]

In this statement Garcia Oliver describes the capitalist state as *"democracy"* and refers to the alternative of the directly democratic CNT unions taking power as "totalitarianism" and "dictatorship." Marxists tend to think this statement tells us something about the CNT's original program in the period leading up to the crisis of July 1936. As proven above, any such assertion would be false (see also section 8). In fact this statement was made in December of 1937, many months after Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT activists had embarked upon collaboration in the government ministries and Republican army command. The quote is taken from a report by the CNT leadership, presented by Garcia Oliver and Mariano Vazquez (CNT National Secretary in 1937) at the congress of the International Workers Association (IWA). The CNT was aware that government participation was in violation of the principles of the IWA and the report was intended to provide a rationalisation. That report is an indication of just how far Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT

those tests. Defeat came about by the actions of the Marxists (in the case of Asturias and Italy) or by superior force (as in the 1932 and 1933 Spanish insurrections and the Ukraine) **not** because of anarchist theory or activities. At no time did they collaborate with the bourgeois state or compromise their politics. By concentrating on July 1936, Marxists effectively distort the history of anarchism — a bit like arguing the actions of the Social Democratic Party in crushing the German discredits Marxism while ignoring the actions and politics of the council communists during it or the Russian Revolution.

But the question remains, why did the CNT and FAI make such a mess (politically at least) of the Spanish Revolution of 1936? However, even this question is unfair as the example of the Aragon Defence Council and Federation of Collectives indicate that anarchists **did** apply their ideas successfully in certain areas during that revolution.

Morrow is aware of that example, as he argues that the *"Catalonian [i.e. CNT] militia marched into Aragon as an army of social liberation . .. Arriving in a village, the militia committees sponsor the election of a village anti-fascist committee ... [which] organises production on a new basis"* and *"[e]very village wrested from the fascists was transformed into a forest of revolution."* Its *"municipal councils were elected directly by the communities. The Council of Aragon was at first largely anarchist."* He notes that *"[l]ibertarian principles were attempted in the field of money and wages"* yet he fails to mention the obvious application of libertarian principles in the field of **politics** with the state abolished and replaced by a federation of workers' associations. To do so would be to invalidate his basic thesis against anarchism and so it goes unmentioned, hoping the reader will not notice this confirmation of anarchist **politics** in practice. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53, p. 204 and p. 205]

So, from the experience of the Ukraine, the previous revolts in 1932, 1933 and 1934 and the example of the Council of Aragon it appears clear that rather than exposing anarchist the-



it was the "ordinary anarchists" who were trying to organise socialisation (i.e. CNT members and militants). Secondly, the Russian Revolution also saw workers taking over their workplaces and treating them as their own property. Leninists like Green would have a fit if we took these examples to "prove" that Leninism *"led to the ordinary Bolshevik worker considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there"* (which was what the Mensheviks **did** argue in 1917 when Martov *"blamed the Bolsheviks for creating the local, particularistic attitudes prevailing among the masses."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 72]). In other words, such events are a natural part of the process of a revolution and are to be expected regardless of the dominant theory in that revolution.

To summarise.

The Spanish revolution does confirm anarchist theory and in no way contradicts it. While many of the aspects of the collectives were in accord with pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory, other aspects of them were in contradiction to them. This was seen by the militants of the CNT and FAI who worked to transform these spontaneously created organs of economic self-management into parts of a socialised economy as required for libertarian communism. Such a transformation flowed from below and was not imposed from above, as would be expected in a libertarian social revolution.

As can be seen, the standard Marxist account of the collectives and its relationship to anarchist theory and CNT policy is simply wrong.

## 16. How does the development of the collectives indicate the differences between Bolshevism and anarchism?

As argued in the last section, the collectives formed during the Spanish Revolution reflected certain aspects of anarchist theory but not others. They were a compromise solution

brought upon by the development of the revolution and did not, as such, reflect CNT or anarchist theory or vision bar being self-managed by their workers. The militants of the CNT and FAI tried to convince their members to federate together and truly socialise the economy, with various degrees of success. A similar process occurred during the Russian Revolution of 1917. There workers created factory committees which tried to introduce workers' self-management of production. The differences in outcome in these two experiences and the actions of the Bolsheviks and anarchists indicate well the fundamental differences between the two philosophies. In this section we discuss the contrasting solutions pursued by the CNT and the Bolsheviks in their respective revolutions.

The simple fact is that revolutions are complex and dynamic processes which involve many contradictory developments. The question is how do you push them forward — either from below or from above. Both the Spanish and the Russian revolution were marked by "localism" — when the workers in a factory consider it their own property and ignore wider issues and organisation.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks "solved" the problem of localism by eliminating workers' self-management in favour of one-man management appointed from above. Attempts by the workers and factory committees themselves to combat localism were stopped by the Bolshevik dominated trade unions which *"prevented the convocation of a planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees"* in November 1917 when *"called upon"* by the Bolsheviks *"to render a special serve to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees."* [I. Deutscher, quoted by Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 19] Instead, the Bolsheviks built from the top-down their system of *"unified administration"* based on converting the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] The CNT, in comparison, tried



> *and industrial workers in various communities established direct control over the local economy and structured their committees along libertarian lines, these achievements were due to Anarchist precedents and long years of propaganda and education."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 250–1]

Unlike their Socialist and Communist allies, the anarchists in Asturias took the Alianza's slogan *"Unity, Proletarian Brothers"* seriously. A key factor in the defeat of the uprising (beyond its isolation due to socialist incompetence elsewhere — see section 6) was the fact that *"[s]o far as the Aviles and Gijon Anarchists were concerned ... their Socialist and Communist 'brothers' were to honour the slogan only in the breach. When Anarchist delegates from the seaports arrived in Oviedo on October 7, pleading for arms to resist the imminent landings of government troops, their requests were totally ignored by Socialists and Communists who, as [historian Gabriel] Jackson notes, 'clearly mistrusted them.' The Oviedo Committee was to pay a bitter price for its refusal. The next day, when Anarchist resistance, hampered by the pitiful supply of weapons, failed to prevent the government from landing its troops, the way into Asturias lay open. The two seaports became the principal military bases for launching the savage repression of the Asturian insurrection that occupied so much of October and claimed thousands of lives."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

Therefore, to state as Morrow does that before July 1936, *"anarchism had never been tested on a grand scale"* and now *"leading great masses, it was to have a definite test"* is simply wrong. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101] Anarchism had had numerous definite tests before involving *"great masses,"* both in Spain and elsewhere. The revolts of the 1930s, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 (see section A.5.5) and in numerous other revolutionary and near revolutionary situations anarchism had been tested **and had passed**

> *Sama without a safe-conduct pass, or walk through the streets without passwords. All of this was ridiculously useless, because the government troops were far away and the Sama bourgeoisie disarmed and neutralised … The workers of Sama who did not adhere to the Marxist religion preferred to go to La Felguera, where at least they could breathe. Side by side there were two concepts of socialism: the authoritarian and the libertarian; on each bank of the Nalon, two populations of brothers began a new life: with dictatorship in Sama; with liberty in La Felguera."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 249–50]

Bookchin notes that *"[i]n contrast to the severely delimited Marxist committee in Sama, La Felguera workers met in popular assembly, where they socialised the industrial city's economy. The population was divided into wards, each of which elected delegates to supply and distribution committees… The La Felguera commune … proved to be so successful, indeed so admirable, that surrounding communities invited the La Felguera Anarchists to advice them on reorganising their own social order. Rarely were comparable institutions created by the Socialists and, where they did emerge, it was on the insistence of the rank-and-file workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 250]

In other words, the Asturias uprising saw anarchists yet again applying their ideas with great success in a revolutionary situation. As Bookchin argues:

> *"Almost alone, the Anarchists were to create viable revolutionary institutions structured around workers' control of industry and peasants' control of land. That these institutions were to be duplicated by Socialist workers and peasants was due in small measure to Anarchist example rather than Socialist precept. To the degree that the Asturian miners*



to solve the problem of localism by a process of discussion and debate from below. Both were aware of the fact the revolution was progressing in ways different from their desired goal but their solution reflected their different politics — libertarian in the case of the CNT, authoritarian in the case of Bolshevism.

Therefore, the actual economic aspects of the Spanish revolution reflected the various degrees of political development in each workplace and industry. Some industries socialised according to the CNT's pre-war vision of libertarian communism, others remained at the level of self-managed workplaces in spite of the theories of the union and anarchists. This was the case with other aspects of the collectives. As Vernon Richards points out, *"[i]n some factories … the profits or income were shared out among the workers … As a result, wages fluctuated in different factories and even within the same industry .. . But fortunately … the injustice of this form of collectivisation was recognised and combated by the CNT syndicates from the beginning."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 106–7]

Thus the collectives, rather than expressing the economic vision of communist-anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism, came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry out its libertarian communist program, which would have required setting up workers congresses and co-ordinating councils to establish common ownership and society wide self-management. To assert that the collectives were an exact reflection of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory is, therefore, incorrect. Rather, they reflected certain aspects of that theory (such as workers' self-management in the workplace) while others (industrial federations to co-ordinate economic activity, for example) were only partially meet. This, we must stress, is to be expected as a revolution is a **process** and not an event. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accom-*

*plish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 72]

Thus the divergence of the actual revolution from the program of the CNT was to be expected and so did not represent a failure or a feature of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory as Morrow and other Marxists assert. Rather, it expresses the nature of a social revolution, a movement from below which, by its very nature, reflects real needs and problems and subject to change via discussion and debate. Bakunin's comments stress this aspect of the revolution:

> *"I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this ... organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda .. . , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State .. . will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.*
>
> *"With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life ... will revert to the communes. The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation ..."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 207]

To **impose** an "ideal" solution would destroy a revolution — the actions and decisions (**including what others may consider mistakes**) of a free people are infinitely more productive and useful than the decisions and decrees of the best central committee. Moreover, a centralised system by necessity is an



claims that in Asturias *"the Workers' Alliances were most nearly like soviets, and had been functioning for a year under socialist and Communist Left leadership"* are false. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 31] The claims that the Asturias uprising had established soviets was simply Communist and government propaganda.

In fact, the Socialists *"generally functioned through tightly knit committees, commonly highly centralised and with strong bureaucratic proclivities. In Asturias, the UGT tried to perpetuate this form wherever possible ... But the mountainous terrain of Asturias made such committees difficult to co-ordinate, so that each one became an isolated miniature central committee of its own, often retaining its traditional authoritarian character."* The anarchists, on the other hand, *"favoured looser structures, often quasi-councils composed of factory workers and assemblies composed of peasants. The ambience of these fairly decentralised structures, their improvisatory character and libertarian spirit, fostered an almost festive atmosphere in Anarchist-held areas."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 249] Bookchin quotes an account which compares anarchist La Felguera with Marxist Sama, towns of equal size and separated only by the Nalon river:

> *"[The October Insurrection] triumphed immediately in the metallurgical and in the mining town... . Sama was organised along military lines. Dictatorship of the proletariat, red army, Central Committee, discipline. authority ... La Felguera opted for **communismo libertario**: the people in arms, liberty to come and go, respect for the technicians of the Duro-Felguera metallurgical plant, public deliberations of all issues, abolition of money, the rational distribution of food and clothing. Enthusiasm and gaiety in La Felguera; the sullenness of the barracks in Sama. The bridges [of Sama] were held by a corp of guards complete with officers and all. No one could enter or leave*

chist movement attacking town halls, army barracks and other sources of state authority and urging the troops to revolt and side with the masses (the anarchists paid a lot of attention to this issue — like the French syndicalists they produced anti-militarist propaganda arguing that soldiers should side with their class and refuse orders to fire on strikers and to join popular revolts). The revolts also saw workers taking over their workplaces and the land, trying to abolish capitalism while trying to abolish the state. In summary, they were **insurrections** which combined political goals (the abolition of the state) and social ones (expropriation of capital and the creation of self-managed workplaces and communes).

The events in Asturias in October 1934 gives a more detailed account of nature of these insurrections. The anarchist role in this revolt has not been as widely known as it should be and this is an ideal opportunity to discuss it. Combined with the other insurrections of the 1930s it clearly indicates that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary theory.

While the CNT was the minority union in Asturias, it had a considerable influence of its own (the CNT had over 22 000 affiliates in the area and the UGT had 40 000). The CNT had some miners in their union (the majority were in the UGT) but most of their membership was above ground, particularly in the towns of Aviles and Gijon. The regional federation of the CNT had joined the Socialist Party dominated "Alianza Obrera," unlike the other regional federations of the CNT.

When the revolt started, the workers organised attacks on barracks, town halls and other sources of state authority (just as the CNT revolts of 1932 and 1933 had). Bookchin indicates that *"[s]tructurely, the insurrection was managed by hundreds of small revolutionary committees whose delegates were drawn from unions, parties, the FAI and even anti-Stalinist Communist groups. Rarely, if at all, were there large councils (or 'soviets') composed of delegates from factories."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 249] This, incidentally, indicates that Morrow's



imposed system (as it excludes by its very nature the participation of the mass of the people in determining their own fate). As Bakunin argued, *"Collectivism could be imposed only on slaves, and this kind of collectivism would then be the negation of humanity. In a free community, collectivism can come about only through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 200] Thus socialisation must proceed from below, reflecting the real development and desires of those involved. To "speed-up" the process via centralisation can only result in replacing socialisation with nationalisation and the elimination of workers' self-management with hierarchical management. Workers' again would be reduced to the level of order-takers, with control over their workplaces resting not in their hands but in those of the state.

Lenin argued that *"Communism requires and presupposes the greatest possible centralisation of large-scale production throughout the country. The all-Russian centre, therefore, should definitely be given the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given branch of industry. The regional centres define their functions depending on local conditions of life, etc., in accordance with the general production directions and decisions of the centre."* He continued by explicitly arguing that *"[t]o deprive the all-Russia centre of the right to direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry . .. would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 292]

We expect that Morrow would subscribe to this "solution" to the problems of a social revolution generates. However, such a system has its own problems.

First is the basic fallacy that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin's power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its own interests. Not that it suddenly arose

with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, *"in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies"* and he points to the *"not untypical example of a small condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People's Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People's Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property (and compared to an individual workplace, the state's power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger).

Secondly, to eliminate the dangers of workers' self-management generating "propertarian" notions, the workers' have to have their control over their workplace reduced, if not eliminated. This, by necessity, generates **bourgeois** social relationships and, equally, appointment of managers from above (which the Bolsheviks did embrace). Indeed, by 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had *"pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea"* and even claimed that at that stage *"there were no disputes in connection with the question"* of one-man management. [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] While the first claim is true (Lenin argued for one-man management appointed from above **before** the start of the Civil War in May 1918) the latter one is **not** true (excluding anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, there were also the dissent Left-Communists in the Bolshevik party itself).

Thirdly, a centralised body effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers — power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. This can be seen from the example of Lenin's Russia. The



> *"The Makhnovist insurrectionary army was organised according to three fundamental principles: voluntary enlistment, the electoral principle, and self-discipline.*
>
> *"**Voluntary enlistment** meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.*
>
> *"**The electoral principle** meant that the commanders of all units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other positions in the army, were either elected or accepted by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.*
>
> *"**Self-discipline** meant that all the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units; once approved, they were rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96]

Thus the Makhnovists indicate the validity of anarchist theory. They organised the self-defence of their region, refused to form of a "revolutionary" government and so the life of the region, its social and revolutionary development followed the path of self-activity of the working people who did not allow any authorities to tell them what to do. They respected freedom of association, speech, press and so on while actively encouraging workers' and peasants' self-management and self-organisation.

Moving to the Spanish movement, the various revolts and uprisings organised by the CNT and FAI that occurred before 1936 were marked by a similar revolutionary developments as the Makhnovists. We discuss the actual events of the revolts in 1932 and 1933 in more detail in section 14 and so will not repeat ourselves here. However, all were marked by the anar-

*themselves?"* and *"[w]hose interests should the revolution defend: those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* Makhno himself stated that he *"consider[ed] it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call conferences on their own account, to discuss their affairs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 103 and p. 129] These actions by the Bolsheviks should make the reader ponder if the elimination of workers' democracy during the civil war can fully be explained by the objective conditions facing Lenin's government or whether Leninist ideology played an important role in it. As Arshinov argues, *"[w]hoever studies the Russian Revolution should learn it [Trotsky's order no. 1824] by heart."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123] Obviously the Bolsheviks considered that soviet system was threatened if soviet conferences were called and the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was undermined if the proletariat took part in such events.

In addition, the Makhnovists *"full applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power."* Indeed, the *"only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153 and p. 154]

The army itself, in stark contrast to the Red Army, was fundamentally democratic (although, of course, the horrific nature of the civil war did result in a few deviations from the ideal — however, compared to the regime imposed on the Red Army by Trotsky, the Makhnovists were much more democratic movement). Arshinov proves a good summary:



central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre. In other words the government's attempts to centralise actually led to localism (as well as economic mismanagement)! Perhaps this was what Green means when he argues for a *"new centralism"* which would be *"compatible with and requiring the initiative of the workers at the base"* [Green **Op. Cit.**]— that is, the initiative of the workers to ignore the central bodies and keep the economy going **in spite** of the *"new centralism"*?

The simple fact is, a socialist society **must** be created from below, by the working class itself. If the workers do not know how to create the necessary conditions for a socialist organisation of labour, no one else can do it for them or compel them to do it. If the state is used to combat "localism" and such things then it obviously cannot be in the hands of the workers' themselves. Socialism can only be created by workers' own actions and organisations otherwise it will not be set up at all — something else will be, namely state capitalism.

Thus, a close look at Lenin's "solution" indicates that Trotskyist claim that their state is the *"tool of the majority in their fight against exploitation by the few"* (to use Joseph Green's words) is refuted by their assertion that this state will also bring the economy under centralised control and by the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves.

Why is this? Simply because **if** the mass of collectives are not interested in equality and mutual aid in society as a whole then how can the government actually be the "tool" of the majority when it imposes such "mutual aid" and "equality" upon the collectives? In other words, the interests of the government replace those of the majority. After all, if workers **did** favour mutual aid and equality then they would federate themselves to achieve it. (which the collectives were actually doing all across Spain, we must note). If they do not do this then how

can the "workers' state" be said to be simply their tool when it has to **impose** the appropriate economic structure upon them? The government is elected by the whole people, so it will be claimed, and so must be their tool. This is obviously flawed — *"if,"* argued Malatesta, *"you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?"* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 53]

What does all this mean? Simply that Trotskyists recognise, implicitly at least, that the workers' state is not, in fact, the simple tool of the workers. Rather, it is the means by which "socialism" will be imposed upon the workers by the party. If workers do not practice mutual aid and federation in their day-to-day running of their lives, then how can the state impose it if it is simply their tool? It suggests what is desired *"by all of the working people as a whole"* (nearly always a euphemism for the party in Trotskyist ideology) is different that what they actually want (as expressed by their actions). In other words, a conflict exists between the workers' and the so-called "workers' state" — in Russia, the party imposed **its** concept of the interests of the working class, even against the working class itself.

Rather than indicate some kind of failure of anarchist theory, the experience of workers' self-management in both Spain and Russia indicate the authoritarian core of Trotskyist ideology. If workers do not practice mutual aid or federation then a state claiming to represent them, to be simply their tool, cannot force them to do so without exposing itself as being an alien body with power **over** the workers.

For these reasons Bakunin was correct to argue that anarchists have *"no faith except in freedom. Both [Marxists and*



*point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

They also organised free agricultural communes which *"[a]dmittedly .. . were not numerous, and included only a minority of the population .. . But what was most precious was that these communes were formed by the poor peasants themselves. The Makhnovists never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87] Makhno played an important role in abolishing the holdings of the landed gentry. The local soviet and their district and regional congresses equalised the use of the land between all sections of the peasant community. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 53–4]

Moreover, the Makhnovists took the time and energy to involve the whole population in discussing the development of the revolution, the activities of the army and social policy. They organised numerous conferences of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates to discuss political and social issues. They organised a regional congress of peasants and workers when they had liberated Aleksandrovsk. When the Makhnovists tried to convene the third regional congress of peasants, workers and insurgents in April 1919 and an extraordinary congress of several regions in June 1919 (including Red Army soldiers) the Bolsheviks viewed them as counter-revolutionary, tried to ban them and declared their organisers and delegates outside the law. For example, Trotsky issued order 1824 which stated the June 1919 congress was forbidden, that to inform the population of it was an act of high treason and all delegates should be arrested immediately as were all the spreading the call. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 98–105 and p. 122–31]

The Makhnovists replied by holding the conferences anyway and asking *"[c]an there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are*

of the CNT in Spain in the 1930s. These examples will indicate that rather than signifying the failure of anarchism, the actions of the CNT during the Civil War indicate the failure of anarchists to apply anarchist theory and so signifies a betrayal of anarchism. In other words, that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary politics.

If we look at the Russian Revolution, we see anarchist theory gain its most wide scale influence in those parts of the Ukraine protected by the Makhnovist army. The Makhnovists fought against White (pro-Tsarist), Red and Ukrainian Nationalists in favour of a system of *"free soviets"* in which the *"working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which are to carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves. that is to say, **administrative**, not ruling councils."* As for the economy, the *"land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised."* [*"Some Makhnovist Proclamations"*, contained in Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 273]

To ensure this end, the Makhnovists refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated the city the Makhnovists *"immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference ... it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations ... The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm ... Railroad workers took the first step ... They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region ... From this*



*anarchists], equally supporters of science which is to destroy superstition and replace belief, differ in the former wishing to impose it, and the latter striving to propagate it; so human groups, convinced of its truth, may organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interests, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the **ignorant masses** by some superior intellects."* Anarchists, he continues, *"think that there is much more practical and intellectual common sense in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the mass of the people than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and teachers of mankind who, after so many fruitless attempts to make humanity happy, still aspire to add their own efforts."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 198]

In summary, the problem of "localism" and any other problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a "revolutionary" party or government. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141]

Thus the actual experience of the collectives and their development, rather than refuting anarchism, indicates well that it is the only real form of socialism. Attempts to nationalise the means of production inevitably disempower workers and eliminate meaningful workers' self-management or control. It does not eliminate wage labour but rather changes the name of the boss. Socialism can only be built from below. If it is not, as the Russian experience indicated, then state capitalism will be the inevitable outcome.

## 17. Why is Morrow's support for *"proletarian methods of production"* ironic?

Morrow states *"[i]n the midst of civil war the factory committees are demonstrating the superiority of proletarian methods of production."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53] This is ironic as the Bolsheviks in power fought against the factory committees and their attempts to introduce the kind of workers' self-management Morrow praises in Spain (see Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details). Moreover, rather than seeing workers' self-management as *"proletarian methods of production"* Lenin and Trotsky thought that how a workplace was managed was irrelevant under socialism. Trotsky argued that *"[i]t would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers [a euphemism for the Party — M.B.] and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered."* Indeed, *"I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [quoted by Maurice Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66 and pp. 66–7]

In other words, Trotsky both in theory and in practice opposed *"proletarian methods of production"* — and if the regime introduced by Trotsky and Lenin in Russia was **not** based on *"proletarian methods of production"* then what methods was it based on? One-man management with *"the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers"* by the government and *"the people **unquestioningly obey[ing] the single will** of the leaders of labour."* [*"The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government"*, Collected Works, vol. 27, pp. 267–9] In other words,



However, as we argued in section 12, the Trotskyist "definition" of "workers' power" and "proletarian dictatorship" is, in fact, party power, party dictatorship and party sovereignty — **not** working class self-management. Indeed, in a letter written in 1937, Trotsky clarified what he meant: *"Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship **for themselves** they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship."* [our emphasis, **Writings 1936–7**, p. 514]

Hence the usual Trotskyist lament concerning the CNT is that the anarchist leaders did not seize power themselves and create the so-called *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* (i.e. the dictatorship of those claiming to represent the proletariat). A strange definition of *"workers' power,"* we must admit. The "leaders" of the CNT and FAI quite rightly rejected such a position — unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time, as we will see.

Trotsky states that the *"leaders of the CNT ... explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of 'exceptional circumstances' ... Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance.' Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for 'exceptional circumstances.'"* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 423–4]

Trotsky is, for once, correct. We will ignore the obvious fact that his own (and every other Leninist) account of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism is a variation of the *"exceptional circumstances"* excuse and turn to his essential point. In order to evaluate anarchism and the actions of the CNT we have to evaluate **all** the revolutionary situations it found itself in, **not** just July, 1936 in Catalonia. This is something Trotsky and his followers seldom do — for reasons that will become clear.

Obviously space considerations does not allow us to discuss every revolutionary situation anarchism faced. We will, therefore, concentrate on the Russian Revolution and the activities

Bolsheviks did to combat sexism, *"[a]mong the methods of influence was mobilising the local population around social measures promulgated throughout the country. The banner of the struggle was not autonomy, but class-wide effort."* Two points, Mujeres Libres was a nation wide organisation which aimed to end sexism by collective action inside and outside the anarchist movement by organising women to achieve their own liberation (see Martha Ackelsberg's , **Free Women of Spain** for more details). Thus its aims and mode of struggle **was** *"class-wide"* — as anyone familiar with that organisation and its activities would know. Secondly, why is equality between men and women important? Because inequality reduces the freedom of women to control their own lives, in a word, it hinders they **autonomy.** Any campaign against sexism is based on the banner of autonomy — that Green decides to forget this suggests a lot about his politics.

Thus Green gets it wrong again and again. Such is the quality of most Leninist accounts of the Spanish revolution.

## 20. Does the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicate the failure of anarchism or the failure of anarchists?

Marxists usually point to the events in Catalonia after July 19th, 1936, as evidence that anarchism is a flawed theory. They bemoan the fact that, when given the chance, the anarchists did not *"seize power"* and create a *"dictatorship of the proletariat."* To re-quote Trotsky:

> *"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* ["Stalinism and Bolshevism,"**Writings 1936–7**, p. 424]



the usual **bourgeois** methods of production with the workers' doing what the boss tells them. As discussed in section H.3.14, at no time did the Bolsheviks support the kind of workers' self-management introduced by the anarchist influenced workers of Spain — indeed they hindered it and replaced it with one-man management at the first opportunity (see Maurice Brinton's classic **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for further details).

To point out the obvious, bourgeois methods of production means bourgeois social relations and relations of production. In other words, Morrow comments allows us to see that Lenin and Trotsky's regime was not proletarian at the point of production. How ironic. And if it was not proletarian at the point of production (i.e. at the source of **economic** power) how could it remain proletarian at the political level? Unsurprisingly, it did not — party power soon replaced workers' power and the state bureaucracy replaced the party.

Yet again Morrow's book exposes the anti-revolutionary politics of Trotskyism by allowing anarchists to show the divergence between the rhetoric of that movement and what it did when it was in power. Morrow, faced with a workers' movement influenced by anarchism, inadvertently indicates the poverty of Trotskyism when he praises the accomplishments of that movement. The reality of Leninism in power was that it eliminated the very things Morrow praises — such as *"proletarian methods of production,"* democratic militias, workers' councils and so on. Needless to say, the irony of Morrow's work is lost on most of the Trotskyists who read it.

## 18. Were the federations of collectives an *"abandonment"* of anarchist ideas?

From our discussion in section 15, it is clear that anarchism does not deny the need for co-ordination and joint activity, for federations of self-managed workplaces, industries and rural

collectives at all levels of society. Far from it. As proven in sections 12 and 15, such federations are a basic idea of anarchism. In anarchy co-ordination flows **from below** and not imposed by a few from above. Unfortunately Marxists cannot tell the difference between solidarity from below and unity imposed from above. Morrow, for example, argues that *"the anarchist majority in the Council of Aragon led in practice to the abandonment of the anarchist theory of the autonomy of economic administration. The Council acted as a centralising agency."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 205–6]

Of course it does nothing of the kind. Yes, anarchists are in favour of autonomy — including the autonomy of economic administration. We are also in favour of federalism to co-ordinate join activity and promote co-operation on a wide-scale (what Morrow would, inaccuracy, call "centralism" or "centralisation"). Rather than seeing such agreements of joint activity as the "abandonment" of autonomy, we see it as an **expression** of that autonomy. It would be a strange form of "freedom" that suggested making arrangements and agreements with others meant a restriction of your liberty. For example, no one would argue that to arrange to meet your friend at a certain place and time meant the elimination of your autonomy even though it obviously reduces your "liberty" to be somewhere else at the same time.

Similarly, when an individual joins a group and takes part in its collective decisions and abides by their decisions, this does not represent the abandonment of their autonomy. Rather, it is an expression of their freedom. If we took Morrow's comment seriously then anarchists would be against all forms of organisation and association as they would mean the *"abandonment of autonomy"* (of course some Marxists **do** make that claim, but such a position indicates an essentially **negative** viewpoint of liberty, a position they normally reject). In reality, of course, anarchists are aware that freedom is impossible outside of association. Within an association absolute "autonomy" cannot



*in the 1870s, separate from the original First International and the Marxists. It had flopped so badly that the anarchists never tried to resuscitate it and seem to prefer to forget about it. Given anarchist localism, it is not surprising that this International doesn't even seem to be been missed by current-day anarchists."* [**Op. Cit.**]

Actually, the anarchist International came out of the First International and was made up of the libertarian wing of that association. Moreover, in 1936 the CNT was a member of the International Workers' Association founded in 1922 in Berlin. The IWA was small, but this was due to state and Fascist repression. For example, the German FAUD, the Italian USI and the FORA in Argentina had all been destroyed by fascist governments. However, those sections which did exist (such as the Swedish SAC and French CGTSR) **did** send aid to Spain and spread CNT and FAI news and appeals (as did anarchist groups across the world). The IWA still exists today, with sections in over a dozen countries (including the CNT in Spain). In addition, the International Anarchist Federation also exists, having done so for a number of decades, and also has sections in numerous countries. In other words, Green either knows nothing about anarchist history and theory or he does and is lying.

He attacks the lack of CNT support for Moroccan independence during the war and states *"[t]hey just didn't seem that concerned with the issue during the Civil War."* Actually, many anarchists **did** raise this important issue. Just one example, Camillo Berneri argued that *"we must intensify our propaganda in favour of Morocco autonomy."* [*"What can we do?"*, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 51] Thus to state *"the anarchists ... didn't seem that concerned"* is simply false. Many anarchists were and publicly argued for it. Trapped as a minority force in the government, the CNT could not push through this position.

Green also points out that inequality existed between men and woman. He even quotes the anarchist women's organisation Mujeres Libres to prove his point. He then notes what the

*riety of characters and differing degrees of intensity among different peoples.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 231] Also, as noted above, we are well aware that a revolution is a **process** (*"By revolution we do not mean just the insurrectionary act"* [Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 156]) which will take some time to fully develop once the state has been destroyed and capital expropriated. Green's assertion that the Spanish Revolution refutes anarchist theory is clearly a false one.

Green argues that a *"vast organisational task faces the oppressed masses who are rising up to eliminate the old exploiting system, but anarchist theory just brushes aside this problem — co-ordination between collective would supposedly be easily accomplished by 'mutual aid' or 'voluntary co-operation' or, if absolutely need be, by the weakest possible federation."* [**Op. Cit.**] As can be seen from our discussion, such a claim is a false one. Anarchists are well aware of difficulties involved in a revolution. That is why we stress that revolution must come from below, by the actions of the oppressed themselves — it is far too complex to left to a few party leaders to decree the abolition of capitalism. Moreover, as proven above anarchist theory and practice is well aware of the need for organisation, co-operation and co-ordination. We obviously do not *"brush it aside."* This can be seen from Green's reference to *"the weakest possible federation."* This obviously is a cover just in case the reader is familiar with anarchist theory and history and knows that anarchists support the federation of workers' associations and communes as the organisational framework of a revolution and of the free society.

This distorted vision of anarchism even extents to other aspects of the revolution. Green decides to attack the relative lack of international links the Spanish anarchist movement had in 1936. He blames this on anarchist theory and states *"again the localist anarchist outlook would go against such preparations. True, the anarchists had had their own International association*



exist, but such "autonomy" would restrict freedom to such a degree that it would be so self-defeating as to make a mockery of the concept of autonomy and no sane person would seek it.

Of course anarchists are aware that even the best association could turn into a bureaucracy that **does** restrict freedom. Any organisation could transform from being an expression of liberty into a bureaucratic structure which restricts liberty because power concentrates at the top, into the hands of an elite. That is why we propose specific forms of organisation, ones based on self-management, decentralisation and federalism which promote decision-making from the bottom-up and ensure that the organisation remains in the hands of its members and its policies are agreements between them rather than ones imposed upon them. For this reason the basic building block of the federation is the autonomous group assembly. It is this body which decides on its own issues and mandates delegates to reach agreements within the federal structure, leaving to itself the power to countermand the agreements its delegates make. In this way autonomy is combined with co-ordination in an organisation that is structured to accurately reflect the needs and interests of its members by leaving power in their hands. In the words of Murray Bookchin, anarchists *"do not deny the need for co-ordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But [we] believe that co-ordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved* ***voluntarily,*** *by means of self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 215]

Therefore, anarchist support for *"the autonomy of economic administration"* does not imply the lack of co-operation and co-ordination, of joint agreements and federal structures which may, to the uninformed like Morrow, seem to imply the *"abandonment"* of autonomy. As Kropotkin argued, the commune *"cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above*

*it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259] This vision was stressed in the CNT's Saragossa resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that the *"the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 106] Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory.

The reason for this is simple. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, we must stress). That is why anarchists have always stressed the importance of the **nature** of the associations people join **as well as** their voluntary nature — as Kropotkin argued, the *"communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself ... They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it."* [*"The Commune of Paris"*, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 132] Moreover, within the federal structures anarchists envision, the actual day-to-day running of the association would be autonomous. There would be little or no need for the federation to interfere with the mundane decisions a group has to make day in, day out. As the Saragossa resolution makes clear:

> *"[The] commune ... will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate ... The inhabitants of a commune*



ation cannot be evaluated using Green's source. Thus Green uses data which is, frankly, a joke to dismiss anarchism. This says a lot about the quality of his critique.

As far as the Castille federation goes, Robert Alexander notes *"[a]nother feature of the work of regional federation was that of aiding the less fortunate collectives. Thus, within a year, it spent 2 000 000 pesetas on providing chemical fertilisers and machines to poorer collectives, the money from this being provided by the sale of products of the wealthier ones."* [**The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 438] He also quotes an article from an anarchist paper which states *"there does not yet exist sufficient solidarity"* between rich and poor collectives and that notes *"the difficulties which the State has put in the way of the development of the collectives."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 439] Thus the CNT was open about the difficulties it was experiencing in the collectives and the problems facing it.

Secondly, the collectives may have been in existence for about one year before the Stalinists attacked but their federations had not. The Castille federation was born in April, 1937 (the general secretary stated in July of that year *"[w]e have fought terrible battles with the Communists"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 446]). The Aragon federation was created in February 1937 (the Council of Aragon was created in October 1936) and the Communists under Lister attacked in August 1937. The Levante federation was formed a few weeks after the start of the war and the attacks against them started in March 1937. The longest period of free development, therefore, was only **seven** months and not a year. Thus the federations of collectives — the means seen by anarchist theory to co-ordinate economic and social activities and promote equality — existed for only a few months before they were physically attacked by the state. Green expects miracles if he thinks history can be nullified in half a year.

Thirdly, anarchists do not think communist-anarchism, in all its many aspects, is possible overnight. Anarchists are well aware, to quote Kropotkin, the *"revolution may assume a va-*

> *are to debate among themselves their internal problems .. . Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes ... every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say ... On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements ... So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 106–7]

Since the Council of Aragon and the Federation of Collectives were based on a federal structure, regular meetings of mandated delegates and decision-making from the bottom up, it would be wrong to call them a *"centralising agency"* or an *"abandonment"* of the principle of *"autonomy."* Rather, they were expressions of that autonomy based around a **federal** and not centralised organisation. The autonomy of the collective, of its mass assembly, was not restricted by the federation nor did the federation interfere with the day to day running of the collectives which made it up. The structure was a federation of autonomous collectives. The role of the Council was to co-ordinate the decisions of the federation delegate meetings — in other words, purely administrative implementation of collective agreements. To confuse this with centralisation is a mistake common to Marxists, but it is still a confusion.

To summarise, what Morrow claims is an *"abandonment"* of anarchism is, in fact, an expression of anarchist ideas. The Council of Aragon and the Aragon Federation of Collectives were following the CNT's vision of libertarian communism and



of the need for self-managed communities to federate. Indeed, the federation of collectives fits **exactly** pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory (see sections 15 and 18 for details). To re-quote a Spanish Anarchist pamphlet, the village commune *"will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations."* [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 26] Thus what Green asserts the CNT and FAI did not see the need of, they in fact **did** see the need for and argued for their creation before the Civil War and actually created during it! Green's comments indicate a certain amount of "doublethink" — he maintains that the anarchists rejected federations while acknowledging they did federate.

However, historical differences are the product of **centuries** and so it will take some time to overcome them, particularly when such changes are not imposed by a central government. In addition, the collectives were not allowed to operate freely and were soon being hindered (if not physically attacked) by the state within a year. Green dismisses this recognition of reality by arguing *"one could argue that the collectives didn't have much time to develop, being in existence for only two and a half years at most, with the anarchists only having one year of reasonably unhindered work, but one could certainly not argue that this experience confirmed anarchist theory."* However, his argument is deeply flawed for many reasons.

Firstly, we have to point out that Green quotes Miller who is using data from collectives in Castille. Green, however, was apparently discussing the collectives of Aragon and the Levante and their respective federations (as was Miller). To state the obvious, it is hard to evaluate the activities of the Aragon or Levante federation using data from collectives in the Castille federation. Moreover, in order to evaluate the redistributive activities of the federations you need to look at the differentials before and after the federation was created. The data Miller uses does not do that and so the lack of success of the feder-

not abandoning it, as Morrow claims. As anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchism would know.

## 19. Did the experience of the rural collectives refute anarchism?

Some Leninists attack the rural collectives on similar lines as they attack the urban ones (as being independent identities and without co-ordination — see section 15 for details). They argue that *"anarchist theory"* resulted in them considering themselves as being independent bodies and so they ignored wider social issues and organisation. This meant that anarchist goals could not be achieved:

> *"Let's evaluate the Spanish collectives according to one of the basic goals set by the anarchists themselves. This was to ensure equality among the toilers. They believed that the autonomous collectives would rapidly equalise conditions among themselves through 'mutual aid' and solidarity. This did not happen ... conditions varied greatly among the Spanish collectives, with peasants at some agricultural collectives making three times that of peasants at other collectives."* [Joseph Green, **Op. Cit.**]

Of course, Green fails to mention that in the presumably *"centralised"* system created by the Bolsheviks, the official rationing system had a differentiation of **eight to one** under the class ration of May 1918. By 1921, this, apparently, had fallen to around four to one (which is still higher than the rural collectives) but, in fact, remained at eight to one due to workers in selected defence-industry factories getting the naval ration which was approximately double that of the top civilian workers' ration. [Mary McAuley, **Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd 1917–1922**, pp. 292–3] This, we note, ignores the various privileges associated with state office and Communist Party membership which would increase differentials even more (and such inequality extended into other fields, Lenin for example warned in 1921 against *"giving non-Party workers a false sense of having some increase in their rights"* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 325]). The various resolutions made by workers for equality in rations were ignored by the government (all this long before, to use Green's words *"their party degenerated into Stalinist revisionism"*).

So, if equality is important, then the decentralised rural collectives were far more successful in achieving it than the "centralised" system under Lenin (as to be expected, as the rank-and-file were in control, not a few at the top).

Needless to the collectives could not unify history instantly. Some towns and workplaces started off on a more favourable position than others. Green quotes an academic (David Miller) on this:

> *"Such variations no doubt reflected historical inequalities of wealth, but at the same time the redistributive impact of the [anarchist] federation had clearly been slight."*

Note that Green implicitly acknowledges that the collectives **did** form a federation. This makes a mockery of his claims that earlier claims that the anarchists *"believed that the village communities would enter the realm of a future liberated society if only they became autonomous collectives. They didn't see the collectives as only one step, and they didn't see the need for the collectives to be integrated into a broader social control of all production."* [**Op. Cit.**] As proven above, such assertions are either the product of ignorance or a conscious lie. We quoted numerous Spanish anarchist documents that stated the exact opposite to Green's assertions. The Spanish anarchists were well aware

Which is not true, as RTS and other anarchists do seek influence with the organised workers (and the unorganised ones, and the unemployed, etc.). They have invited rank-and-file trade union activists to their demonstrations to speak, trade unionists are members of anarchist organisations, etc. Anarchists are at the forefront of supporting strikers, particularly when their union betrays their struggle and does not support them. For example, during the Liverpool dockers strike RTS and the dockers formed a common front, organised common demonstrations and so on. The trade unions did nothing to support the dockers, RTS and other anarchist groups did. That in itself indicates the weakness of Mitchinson's claims. It would also be useful to point out that Trotskyists have little support amongst organised workers as well.

Moreover, anarchists do not seek to become part of the trade union bureaucracy and so their influence cannot be easily gauged.

After asserting these dubious "facts" about anarchist influence, he continues:

> *"Some radicalised youth however are attracted to their 'direct action' stance. There is a vacuum left by the absence of a mass Labour youth organisation which, fighting for a socialist programme, could attract these young workers and students. With no lead being given by the tops of the unions, and Labour in government attacking young people, that vacuum can be temporarily and partly filled by groups like Reclaim the Streets."*

Needless to say, Mitchinson does not pose the question **why** the Labour government is attacking *"young people"* (and numerous other sections of the working class). Why has the Labour Party, a mass workers party which uses elections to gain reforms, been attacking (as it has always done, we must



## 1. How does Mitchinson impoverish the politics of the direct action groups?

He begins by noting that the *"recent anti-capitalist demonstrations have brought together many different groups protesting against the destruction of the environment, racism, the exploitation of the third world, and also many ordinary young people protesting at the state of things in general. They have certainly shattered the myth that everyone is happy and that the capitalist system is accepted as the only possible form of society."* Of course, this is correct. What he fails to mention is that these demonstrations and groups managed to do this **without** the "guidance" of any Leninist party — indeed, the vanguard parties are noticeable by their absence and their frantic efforts to catch up with these movements. This, of course, is not the first time this has happened. Looking at every revolution we discover the "revolutionary" parties either playing no role in their early stages or a distinctly counter-productive role.

He states that *"[a]ll around us we see the misery this system causes. Famine, war, unemployment, homelessness and despair, these are the violent acts that the system perpetrates against millions every day."* However, as much as these aspects of capitalism are terrible, the anti-capitalist revolt expressed by many within the direct action groups is much wider than this (standard) leftist list. The movements, or at least parts of them, have a much more radical critique of the evils of capitalism — one that bases it self on abolishing alienation, domination, wage slavery, oppression, exploitation, the spiritual as well as material poverty of everyday life, by means of self-management, autonomy, self-organisation and direct action. They raise the possibility of playful, meaningful, empowering and productive self-activity to replace *"tedious, over-tiring jobs"* as well as the vision of a libertarian communist (i.e. moneyless, stateless) society. Mitchinson's account of the movements he is trying to critique is as poverty stricken intellectually as the capitalist sys-

tem these movements are challenging. Leninists like Mitchinson, instead of a swallowing a dose of humility and learning from the very different ways this new wave of protest is being framed, are trying to squeeze the protest into their own particular one-dimensional model of revolution. Being unable to understand the movements he is referring to, he pushes their vision into the narrow confines of his ideology and distorts it.

He goes on to state that *"[w]itnessing and experiencing this destruction and chaos, young people everywhere are driven to protest."* Of course, anyone who is part of these movements will tell you that a wide cross-section of age groups are involved, not just *"young people."* However, Mitchinson's comments on age are not surprising — ever since Lenin, Bolshevik inspired Marxists have attributed other, more radical, political theories, analyses and visions to the alleged youth of those who hold these opinions (in spite of the facts). In other words, these ideas, they claim, are the produce of immaturity, inexperience and youth and will, hopefully, be grown out of. Just as many parents mutter to themselves that their anarchist (or socialist, homosexual, whatever) children will "grow out of it", Lenin and his followers like Mitchinson consider themselves as the wiser, older relations (perhaps a friendly Uncle or a Big Brother?) of these "young" rebels and hope they will "grow out of" their infantile politics.

The word patronising does not do Mitchinson justice!

## 2. Does anarchism *"juxtapose"* theory and action?

Now Mitchinson launches into his first strawman of his essay. He asserts:

> *"However, the idea of getting involved in a political organisation is a turn off for many, who understandably want to do something, and do something now. In reality, the attempt to juxtapose organisa-*



silent, because obviously they have reformist ideas because the organisations and activities they are part of are reformist through and through. The tactics (using elections) and organisational structure (centralisation of power) bred such ideas — as Bakunin and other anarchists predicted. Mitchinson's politics cannot explain why this occurs, which explains why Lenin was so surprised when German Social Democracy supported its ruling class during the First World War.

## 18. How do anarchists struggle for reforms under capitalism?

Mitchinson continues his distortion of anarchism by arguing:

> *"Marxists fight for every reform, whilst at the same time explaining that while capitalism continues none of these advances are safe. Only socialism can really solve the problems of society."*

As noted above, anarchists also fight for every reform possible — but by direct action, by the strength of working people in their *"natural organisations"* and *"social power"* (to use Bakunin's words). We also argue that reforms are always in danger — that is why we need to have strong, direct action based organisations and self-reliance. If we leave it to leaders to protect (never mind **win** reforms) we would not have them for long. Given that Labour governments have whittled previous reforms just as much as Conservative ones, anarchists feel our strategy is the relevant one.

Mitchinson continues:

> *"Our modern day anarchists, Reclaim the Streets and others, have no support in Britain amongst the organised workers."*

*absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of current events ... One must have lived in that isolator which is called the National Assembly to realise how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it ... fear of the people is the sickness of all those who belong to authority; the people, for those in power, are the enemy."* [Proudhon, quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 244]

Similarly, the practical experiences of a socialist elected into Parliament would be easy to predict — they would be swamped by bourgeois politics, issues and activities. Anarchism gained such socialists elected to parliament as Johann Most and Ferdinand Nieuwenhuis who soon released the correctness of the anarchist analysis. Thus actual experience confirmed the soundness of anarchist politics. Mitchinson, on the other hand, has to deny history — indeed, he fails to mention the history of Social Democracy at all in his article.

Thus the claim that we should use *"every field open to us"* is idealistic nonsense, at total odds with any claim to use scientific techniques of analysis (i.e. to being a scientific socialist) or a supporter of materialist philosophy. It means the rejection of historical analysis and the embrace of ahistoric wishful thinking.

Moreover, why do the workers need to *"transform"* their own organisations in the first place? Perhaps because they are bureaucratic organisations in which power is centralised at the top, in a few hands? Why did this happen, if fighting for reforms by any suitable means (including electioneering) was their rationale? Perhaps because the wrong people are in positions of power? But why are they the wrong people? Because they are right-wing, have reformist ideas, etc. Why do they have reformist ideas? Here Mitchinson must fall



*tion, discussion, and debate with 'direct action' is pure sophistry."*

We are not aware of any anarchist or direct action group which does not discuss and debate their actions, the rationale of their actions and the aims of their actions. These demonstrations that *"young people"* apparently turn up at are, in fact, organised by groups who have meetings, discuss their ideas, their objectives, their politics, and so on. That much should be obvious. In reality, it is Mitchinson who expresses *"pure sophistry,"* not the *"many"* who he claims act without thinking. And, of course, he fails to mention the two days of meetings, discussion and debate which took place the Saturday/Sunday before the May Day actions in London. To mention the May Day 2000 conference would confuse the reader with facts and so goes unmentioned.

He then asserts that the *"ideas of Marxism are not the subject of academic study, they are precisely a guide to action."* Of course, we have to point out here that the Marxist Parties Mitchinson urges us to build did not take part in organising the actions he praises (a few members of these parties did come along, on some of them, to sell papers, of course, but this is hardly a "vanguard" role). In general, the vanguard parties were noticeable by their absence or, **at best**, their lack of numbers and involvement. If we judge people by what they do, rather than what they say (as Marx urged), then we must draw the conclusion that the Marxism of Mitchinson is a guide to inaction rather than action.

Mitchinson continues by stating Marxists *"are all in favour of action, but it must be clearly thought out, with definite aims and objectives if it is to succeed. Otherwise we end up with directionless action."* It would be impolite to point out that no anarchist or member of a direct action organisation would disagree with this statement. Every anti-capitalist demonstration has had a definite aim and objective, was clearly thought out

and organised. It did not "just happen." Mitchinson presents us with a strawman so fragile that even a breeze of reality would make it disintegrate.

The question is, of course, what kind of organisation do we create, how do we determine our aims and objectives. That is the key question, one that Mitchinson hides behind the strawman of organisation versus non-organisation, planned action versus *"directionless action."* To state it bluntly, the question is actually one of do we organise in an authoritarian manner or a libertarian manner, not whether or not we organise. Mitchinson may not see the difference (in which case he thinks all organisation is "authoritarian") but for anarchists and members of direct action groups the difference is vital.

He goes on to state:

> *"Furthermore without political organisation who decides what action is to be taken, when and where? There can be no greater direct action than the seizing of control over our own lives by the vast majority of society. In that act lies the essence of revolution. Not just an aimless 'direct action' but mass, democratic and conscious action, the struggle not just against capitalism, but for a new form of society, socialism."*

Again Mitchinson presents us with the strawman of *"conscious"* action verses *"aimless"* action. As noted above, the anti-capitalist demonstrations **were** organised — non-hierarchical groups decided collectively what action was to be organised, when and where. The real question is not organisation versus non-organisation but rather authoritarian versus libertarian organisation. Either decision making from the bottom up or decision making from the top-down. As for there bring *"no greater direct action"* than revolution, well, anarchists have been saying that for over one hundred years — we don't need a Marxist to tell us our own ideas!



Thus we do not think that political action (electioneering) equates to reforms nor even is the best means of winning reforms in the first place. Anarchists argue that by direct action we can win reforms.

Mitchinson continues his diatribe:

> *"Of course not, we must advocate the struggle for every gain no matter how minor, and use any and every field open to us. Only the dilettante can reject better wages or a health care system. Precisely through these struggles, and the struggles to transform the workers organisations the unions and the parties, we learn and become more powerful and bring closer the day when it will be possible to transform society for good."*

As noted, anarchists do not reject reforms. Only a dilettante misrepresents the position of his enemies. And, as can be seen from the above quotes by Bakunin and Kropotkin, anarchists agree with Mitchinson's comments. Anarchists agree on the need to win reforms by direct action, which necessitates the creation of new forms of working class organisation based on firm libertarian principles and tactics — organisations like workers' councils, factory committees, community assemblies and so on.

However, when looking at the fields of struggle open to us, we evaluate them based on a materialist basis — looking at the implications of the tactics in theory and how they **actually worked out in practice.** Mitchinson obviously refuses to do this. Anarchists, on the other hand, base their politics on such an evaluation. For example, Bakunin would have been aware of Proudhon's experiences in the French National Assembly during the 1848 revolution:

> *"As soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was*

> *"Until then should workers refrain from political activity? Should they reject all reforms that might improve their existence? Nothing would please Blair or the bosses more."*

It is ironic that Mitchinson mentions Blair. He is, after all, the leader of the Labour Party — as mass workers party formed from the trade unions to use political action to gain reforms within capitalism. The current state of Labour indicates well the comment that *"in proportion as the socialists become a power in the present bourgeois society and State, their socialism must die out."* [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 189] It is as if the history of Social Democracy (or even the German Greens) does not exist for Mitchinson — he points to Blair to refute anarchist analysis that Parliamentary politics corrupts the parties that use it! How strange, to ignore the results of socialists actually using *"political activity"* (and we must stress that anarchists traditionally use the term *"political action"* to refer to electioneering, i.e. bourgeois politics, only). Obviously reality is something which can be ignored when creating a political theory.

Needless to say, as noted above, anarchists do not *"reject all reforms."* We have quoted Bakunin, now we quote Kropotkin — *"the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the* ***direct*** *struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, the State."* He continued by arguing that such struggle, *"better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 82–3]



## 3. How does Mitchinson distort the London May Day demo?

He then gets to the crux of the issue — *"So, what comes next?"* He goes on to assert:

> *"The organisers of the demo tell us this was not a protest in order to secure changes, reforms apparently are a waste of time. No, simply by participating in what they call the 'carnival' we become better people, and eventually more and more people will participate, until a critical mass is reached and we all ignore capitalism, don't pay our bills, until they go away. What an infantile flight of fancy!"*

Yes, indeed, what an infantile flight of fancy! However, the flight is purely Mitchinson's. No one in RTS (or any other anarchist) makes such a claim. Yes, RTS urged people to take part in a carnival — as they argue, *"[m]any of the great moments of revolutionary history were carnivalesque ... But we are not waiting for these moments of carnivalesque revolution, we are trying to merge them into every moment of everyday life. We cannot live on one-off days, a letting of stream, safety values for society enabling life to return to normal the next day or for hierarchical domination to return, as did in so many historical revolutions. Revolution is not an act but a process and carnival can prepare us for this process."* [**Maybe**, p. 9] Thus *"carnival"* is **not** seen as an end to itself (as Mitchinson asserts) but rather an aid to the creation of a revolutionary movement. Mitchinson confuses a celebration of May Day with an insurrection! In the words of **Maybe**:

> *"And although Mayday is just one day, it seeks to incite continuous creativity and action towards a radical remaking of everyday life. Steeped in a history of*

*daily struggle, of 'day in day out' organising for social change, but pulsating with the celebration of renewal and fresh hope that returns with the coming of summer. Mayday will always be a pivotal moment."* [**Maybe**, p. 5]

**Maybe** is clear — we need to organise the daily struggle and enjoy ourselves while we are at it. Mitchinson' distortion of that message is pitiful.

### 4. Do anarchists really think *"the bosses will do nothing to defend their system"*?

He continues:

> *"The genuine intentions of those protesting is not open to question. However, the way to hell is paved with many such good intentions. Are we really to believe that whilst we all 'place ourselves outside of capitalism', the bosses will do nothing to defend their system? This ostrich like tactic of burying our heads in the sand until they go away is not serious. Nor is it action. In reality, it is irresponsible, indirect inaction."*

The comment about *"indirect inaction"* is somewhat funny coming from a political tendency which did not produce a movement of the importance of Seattle 1999 and is now trying to recruit from it. But it would be interesting to discover in which anarchist work comes the notion that we do not think the bosses will not defend their system. Yes, Lenin did claim that anarchists would *"lay down their arms"* after a revolution, but as Murray Bookchin notes, anarchists are *"not so naive as to believe anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist's views. Nor did the anarchists ... believe that*



the First International which supported Bakunin's ideas. In the words of an anarchist member of the Jura Federation writing in 1875:

> *"Instead of begging the State for a law compelling employers to make them work only so many hours, the trade associations **directly impose** this reform on the employers; in this way, instead of a legal text which remains a dead letter, a real economic change is effected **by the direct initiative of the workers** ... if the workers devoted all their activity and energy to the organisation of their trades into societies of resistance, trade federations, local and regional, if, by meetings, lectures, study circles, papers and pamphlets, they kept up a permanent socialist and revolutionary agitation; if by linking practice to theory, they **realised directly**, without any bourgeois and governmental intervention, all immediately possible reforms, reforms advantageous not to a few workers but to the labouring mass — certainly then the cause of labour would be better served than ... legal agitation."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 226]

So much for Bakunin or the libertarian wing of the First International being against reforms or the struggle for reforms. Anarchists have not changed their minds on this issue.

### 17. Why do anarchists reject political activity?

After spreading falsehoods against Bakunin, Mitchinson states that:

> *"Marxism fights for the conquest of political power by the working class and the building of a socialist society, under which the state will wither away.*

*become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 108]

What is not true, however, is that claim that Bakunin thought that *"the fight for reforms [w]as a betrayal of the revolution."* Bakunin was a firm believer in the importance of struggles for reforms, but struggles of a specific kind — namely struggles to win reforms which are based on the **direct action** by workers themselves:

> "What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an **essentially economic** character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the **association of the working masses** ... It will [also] propagandise its principles ... [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]
>
> "And indeed, as soon as a worker believes that the economic state of affairs can be radically transformed in the near future, he begins to fight, in association with his comrades, for the reduction of his working hours and for an increase in his salary... through practice and action ... the progressive expansion and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies: the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeois, and the nobility; and the State, which exists only to safeguard all the privileges of those classes." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 103]

This argument for reforms by direct action and workers' associations was a basic point of agreement in those sections of



*the abolition of the state involved 'laying down arms' immediately after the revolution..."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213] Bakunin, for example, thought the *"Commune would be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades"* and that *"the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170 and p. 171]

Moreover, RTS actions have continually came into conflict with the state and its forces of defence. Mitchinson seems to think that the participants of RTS and its demonstrations are incapable of actually understanding and learning from their experiences — they have seen and felt the capitalist system defending itself. Anyone on the J18, N30, A16 or M1 demos or just watching them on TV would have seen the capitalist system defending itself with vigour — and the protestors **fighting back.** Rather than acknowledge the obvious, Mitchinson asserts nonsense. The only person burying their head in the sand is Mitchinson if he ignores the experiences of his own senses (and the basic principles of materialism) in favour of an ideological diatribe with no basis in reality.

What **is** *"irresponsible"* is misrepresenting the viewpoints of your enemies and expecting them not to point our your errors.

## 5. How does Mitchinson misrepresent anarchist organisation?

Mitchinson now moves onto the real enemy, anarchism. He asserts that:

> *"Anarchist organisations have always hidden behind a facade of 'self-organisation'. They claim to have no leaders, no policy etc. Yet who decides?"*

Yes, anarchist groups claim to have no leaders but they do not claim to be without policies. Anyone with any comprehension of anarchist theory and history would know this (just one example, Bakunin argued that we needed to establish *"a genuine workers' program — the policy of the International [Workers Association]"* [*"The Policy of the International"*, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 100]).

Mitchinson asks the question, if we do not have leaders, *"who decides?"* That in itself exposes the authoritarian nature of his politics and the Bolshevik style party. He obviously cannot comprehend that, without leaders deciding things for us, we manage our own affairs — we decide the policy of our organisations collectively, by the direct democracy of the membership. Forgetting his early comment of that there is *"no greater direct action than the seizing of control over our own lives by the vast majority of society,"* he now asks how the vast majority of society can seize control over our own lives without leaders to tell us what to do!

Anarchists reject the idea of leaders — instead we argue for the

**"leadership of ideas."** As we discuss this concept in section J.3.6 and so will not do so here. However, the key concept is that anarchists seek to spread their ideas by discussing their politics **as equals** in popular organisations and convincing the mass assemblies of these bodies by argument. Rather than using these bodies to be elected to positions of power (i.e. leadership as it is traditionally understood) anarchists consider it essential that power remains in the hands of the base of an organisation and argue that the policies of the organisation be decided by the member directly in assemblies and co-ordinated



*the only form of workers' grouping which permits the direct struggle to be maintained against capital without falling into parliamentarism."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 269]

So much for anarchism being against trade unions (as Mitchinson implies). As for mass workers parties, well, history proved Bakunin right — such parties became corrupted, bureaucratic and reformist. For Mitchinson the last 130 years have not existed.

He goes on to argue that *"Bakunin and co. denounced participation in parliament, or the fight for reforms as a betrayal of the revolution, they 'rejected all political action not having as its immediate and direct objective the triumph of the workers over capitalism, and as a consequence, the abolition of the state.'"*

We must first note that the Bakunin quote presented does not support Mitchinson's assertions — unless you think that reforms can only be won via participation in parliament (something anarchists reject). The reason **why** Bakunin rejected *"all political action"* (i.e. bourgeois politics — electioneering in other words) is not explained. We will now do so.

Bakunin did denounce participation in parliament. History proved him right. Participation in parliament ensured the corruption of the Social Democratic Parties, the Greens and a host of other radical and socialist organisations. Mitchinson seems to have forgotten the fights against reformism that continually occurred in the Social Democratic Parties at end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries, a fight which ended with the defeat of the revolutionary wing and the decision to support the nation state in the first world war. The actual experience of using parliament confirmed Bakunin's prediction that when *"the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will*

be reformed in a more democratic fashion (indeed, Mitchinson calls for the unions to be *"transformed"* in his essay). Needless to say, the bourgeois comments are "correct" in the sense that the trade unions do have a bureaucracy — their reasons for stating that truth serve their interests and their solutions aid those interests and not those of the members of the unions. Could a Trotskyist say that it was a *"bourgeois slander"* if the capitalist press point to the bureaucratic nature of the unions when their own papers do the same?

While it may be in the interests of the ruling elite and its apologists to scream about *"bourgeois slanders"*, it hinders the process of working class self-emancipation to do so. As intended, in all likelihood.

## 16. Did anarchists reject *"the need for organisation in the shape of trade unions"*?

Mitchinson now decides to "expose" anarchism:

> *"In its early days, this modern anarchism found a certain support amongst the workers. However, through the course of struggle workers learned the need for organisation in the shape of the trade unions, and also for political organisation which led to the building of the mass workers parties."*

To see the total nonsense of this claim we need only to turn to Marx. In his words, Bakunin thought that the *"working class ... must only organise themselves by trades-unions."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48] Bakunin himself argued *"the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139] Kropotkin argued that the *"union [**syndicat**] is absolutely necessary. It is*



by conferences of mandated, recallable delegates (see section A.2.9 for more discussion).

This is to be expected, of course, as anarchists believe that a free society can only be created by organisations which reflect the principles of that society. Hence we see policies being made by those affected by them and oppose attempts to turn self-managed organisations into little more than vehicles to elect "leaders." A free society is a self-managed one and can only be created by self-management in the class struggle or revolutionary process. All that revolutionaries should do is try and influence the decisions these organisations make by discussing our ideas with their membership — simply as any other member could in the mass assemblies the organisation is built upon. Any attempt by revolutionaries to seize power upon behalf of these organisations means destroying their revolutionary potential and the revolution itself by replacing the participation of all with the power of a few (the party).

Thus anarchist theory and practice is very clear on the question *"who decides"* — it is those who are affected by the question via group assemblies and conferences of mandated, recallable delegates. Rather than have *"no policy,"* policy in an anarchist organisation is decided directly by the membership. Without *"leaders"* — without power delegated into the hands of a few — who else **could** make the decisions and policy? That Mitchinson cannot comprehend this implies that he cannot envision a society without a few telling the many what to do.

He continues:

> *"If there was no leadership and no policy then there could be no action of any kind. The recent demonstrations have been highly organised and co-ordinated on an international scale. Good, so it should be. However, without organisation and democracy no-one, except a clique at the top, has any say in why, where*

*and when. Such a movement will never bring international capital trembling to its knees."*

Firstly, we must point out that these demonstrations which have spread like wild-fire across the world have, most definitely, made international capital nervous. Secondly, we must point out that no Leninist vanguards were involved in organising them (a few members turned up to sell papers later, once their significance had registered with the party leadership). Thirdly, we must point out that no Leninist vanguard has made *"international capital"* tremble in the knees for quite a few decades — since 1917, only Stalinist vanguards have had any effect (and, of course, *"international capital"* soon realised they could work with the Bolsheviks and other "Communist" leaders as one ruling elite with another). It seems somewhat ironic that a Leninist, whose movement was noticeable in its absence, mocks the first movement to scare the ruling class for nearly 30 years.

Secondly, we must note that the policy decided upon by the multitude of groups across the world was decided upon by the members of those groups. They practised organisation and **direct** democracy to make their policy decisions and implement them. Given that Mitchinson wonders how people can make decisions without leaders, his comments about rule by *"a clique at the top"* are somewhat ironic. As the history of the Russian Revolution indicates, a highly centralised state system (which mimics the highly centralised party) soon results in rule by the top party officials, not by the mass of people.

Mitchinson again decides to flog his fallacy of organisation versus non-organisation:

*"One of the best known anarchist groups in Britain, Reclaim the Streets, save the game away in their spoof Mayday publication, 'Maybe'. Incidentally, who wrote these articles, who decided what went in*



*Bolshevism"* is an important one. Trotskyists often point out that anarchist and libertarian Marxist critiques of Bolshevism sound similar to bourgeois ones and that anarchist accounts of Bolshevik crimes against the revolution and working class give ammunition to the defenders of the status quo. However, this seems more like an attempt to stop critical analysis of the Russian Revolution than a serious political position. Yes, the bourgeois do argue that Stalinism was inherent in Bolshevism — however they do so to discredit all forms of socialism and radical social change. Anarchists, on the other hand, analyse the revolution, see how the Bolsheviks acted and draw conclusions from the facts in order to push forward revolutionary thought, tactics and ideas. Just because the conclusions are similar does not mean that they are invalid — to label criticism of Bolshevism as *"bourgeois slander"* is nothing less than attempt to put people off investigating the Russian Revolution.

There is are course essential differences between the *"bourgeois slanders"* against the Bolsheviks and the anarchist critique. The bourgeois slander is based on an opposition to the revolution **as such** while the anarchist critique affirms it. The bourgeois slanders are not the result of the experiences of the working masses and revolutionaries subject to the Bolshevik regime as the anarchist is. Similarly, the bourgeois slanders ignore the nature of capitalist society while the anarchist critique points out that the degeneration of the Bolshevik state and party were a result of it not breaking with bourgeois ideas and organisational structures. Ultimately, it is **not** a case of *"bourgeois slanders"* but rather an honest evaluation of the events of the Russian Revolution from a working class perspective.

To use an analogy, it is common place for the bourgeois press and ideologists to attack trade unions as being bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of their members. It is also common place for members of those same trade unions to think exactly the same. Indeed, it is a common refrain of Trotskyists that the trade unions **are** bureaucratic and need to

*the whole, the behaviour of Makhno's army cannot be compared with that of the other armies which were operating in Russian during the events 1917–21 ... It is undeniable that, of all these armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard the civil population in general and the Jewish population in particular ... The proportion of **justified** complaints against the Makhnovist army, in comparison with the others, is negligible... Do not speak of pogroms alleged to have been organised by Makhno himself. That is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist Army ... **[n]ot once** have I been able to prove the existence of a Makhnovist unit at the place a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 699]

Given that the Red Army agreed to two pacts with the Makhnovists, we can only surmise, if Trotsky thought he was telling the truth, that Trotsky was a hypocrite. However, Trotsky was either consciously lying or in error — unfortunately the Trotskyist publishers of his words did not bother to note that his assertion was false. We are sorry for this slight digression, but many Trotskyists take Trotsky's words at face value and repeat his slander — unless we indicate their false nature they may not take our argument seriously.

Mitchinson continues by stating:

> *"The position of anarchism only serves to endorse the bourgeois slander that Stalinism was inherent in Bolshevism."*

This appeal against slander is ironic from someone who writes an article full of it. But, of course, it is **bourgeois** slander that he objects too — Trotskyist slander (and falsification) is fine.

The question of whether it is a *"bourgeois slander"* to argue (with supporting evidence) that *"Stalinism was inherent in*



> *and what didn't, who edited it, where did the money come from? Our intention here is not to accuse them of dodgy financing — simply to point out that this 'no leaders' stuff is a self-organised myth."*

It states who put together **MayDay** on page 5 of the paper. It was *"an organic group of 'guerrilla gardeners'"* — in other words, members of **Reclaim the Streets** who desired to produce the paper for that event. These people would have joined the group producing it via the weekly RTS open meetings and would have been held accountable to that same open meeting. No great mystery there — if you have even the slightest vision of how a non-hierarchical organisation works. Rather than being a *"myth"*, RTS shows that we do not need to follow leaders — instead we can manage our own organisations directly and freely participate in projects organised via the main open meeting. Writing articles, editing, and so on are not the work of *"leaders"* — rather they are simply tasks that need doing. They do not imply a leadership role — if they did then every hack journalist is a *"leader."*

He continues to attack what he cannot understand:

> "On page 20 they announce 'Reclaim the streets is non-hierarchical, spontaneous and self-organised. We have no leaders, no committee, no board of directors, no spokes people. There is no centralised unit for decision making, strategic planning and production of ideology. There is no membership and no formalised commitment. There is no master plan and no pre-defined agenda.'
>
> "There are two problems here. Firstly who is 'we', who made the above statement, and who decided it. Secondly, if it were true, it would not be something of which to be proud. Whether you like it or not, there is no way the capitalist system will ever

be overthrown by such a haphazard and slipshod method."

Taking the first issue, *"who is 'we,' who made the above statement, and who decided it."* Why, it is the membership of RTS — decided via their weekly open meeting (as mentioned on that page). That Mitchinson cannot comprehend this says a lot about his politics and vision. He cannot comprehend self-management, direct democracy. He seems not to be able to understand that groups can make decisions collectively, without having to elect leaders to make any decisions for them.

Taking the second issue, it is clear that Mitchinson fails to understand the role of RTS (and other anarchist groups). Anarchists do not try to overthrow capitalism **on behalf of others** — they urge them to overthrow it themselves, by their own direct action. The aim of groups like RTS is to encourage people to take direct action, to fight the powers that be and, in the process, create their own organs of self-management and resistance. Such a process of working class self-activity and self-organisation in struggle is the starting process of every revolution. People in struggle create their own organisations — such as soviets (workers' councils), factory committees, community assemblies — through which they start to manage their own affairs and, hopefully, overthrow the state and abolish capitalism. It is not the task of RTS to overthrow capitalism, it is the task of the whole population.

Moreover, many anarchists do see the need for a specific anarchist organisation — three national federations exist in the UK, for example. RTS does not need to organise in this fashion simply because such groups **already** exist. It is not its role — its role is a means to encourage self-activity and direct action as well as raising libertarian ideas in a popular manner. For more "serious" political organisation, people can and do turn to other anarchist groups and federations.



> *We could mention articles and proclamations by Makhno and the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents denouncing anti-Semitism. We could tell of spontaneous acts by Makhno himself and other insurgents against the slightest manifestation of the anti-Semitic spirit on the part of a few isolated and misguided unfortunates in the army and the population... One of the reasons for the execution of Grigoriev by the Makhnovists was his anti-Semitism and the immense pogrom he organised at Elizabethgrad... We could cite a whole series of similar facts, but we do not find it necessary ... and will content ourselves with mentioning briefly the following essential facts:*
>
> *"1. A fairly important part in the Makhnovist movement was played by revolutionists of Jewish origin.*
>
> *"2. Several members of the Education and Propaganda Commission were Jewish.*
>
> *"3. Besides many Jewish combatants in various units of the army, there was a battery composed entirely of Jewish artillery men and a Jewish infantry unit.*
>
> *"4. Jewish colonies in the Ukraine furnished many volunteers to the Insurrectionary Army.*
>
> *"5. In general the Jewish population ... took an active part in all the activities of the movement. The Jewish agricultural colonies ... participated in the regional assemblies of workers, peasants and partisans; they sent their delegates to the regional Revolutionary Military Council..."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 967–8]

Voline also quotes the eminent Jewish writer and historian M. Tcherikover about the question of the Makhnovists and anti-Semitism. The Jewish historian states *"with certainty that, on*

not as destructive as the Russian one. Hope is not much of a basis to build a "scientific" socialism — but then again, neither is "fate" much of a basis to explain the degeneration of the Russian Revolution but that is what Trotskyists do argue.

We discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in the appendix on " What happened during the Russian Revolution?" of the FAQ and will not do so here. However, we can point out the experience of the anarchist Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution. Facing exactly the same objective conditions they encouraged soviet democracy, held regular congresses of workers and peasants (the Bolsheviks tried to ban two of them), defended freedom of the press and of association and so on. If objective conditions determined Bolshevik policies, why did they not also determine the policies of the Makhnovists? This practical example indicates that the usual Trotskyist explanation of the degeneration of the Revolution is false.

Perhaps it is because of this, that it showed an alternative to Bolshevik politics existed and worked, that Trotskyists slander it? Trotsky himself asserted that the Makhnovists were simply *"kulaks"* on horseback and that Makhno's *"followers ... [expressed] a militant anti-Semitism."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80] We discuss the Makhnovist movement in the appendix on "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?" of the FAQ and there we refute claims that the Makhnovist movement was a kulak (rich peasant) one. However, the charge of *"militant anti-Semitism"* is a serious one and so we will expose its falsehood here and well as in section 9 of the specified appendix.

The best source to refute claims of anti-Semitism is to quote the work of the Jewish anarchist Voline. He summarises the extensive evidence against such claims:

> *"We could cover dozens of pages with extensive and irrefutable proofs of the falseness of these assertions.*



The street carnival principle of RTS is precisely the type of organising anarchists excel at — namely fun organising that catches the fun and excitement of popular direct action and, most importantly, **gets people out on the streets** — something Marxists have failed to do very well (if at all). It's a small step from organising a street carnival to further, "more serious" organising. Anarchist revolution is about bringing joy back into human lives, not endless (and often dishonest) polemics on the ideas of long dead philosophers. Rather, it is about creating a philosophy which, while inspired by past thinkers, is not subservient to them and aims to base itself on **current** struggles and needs rather than past ones. It is also about building a new political culture, one that is popular, active, street-based (versus ivory-tower elitist), and above all, fun. Only this way can we catch the imagination of everyday people and move them from resigned apathy to active resistance. The Marxists have tried their approach, and it has been a resounding failure — everyday people consider Marxism at best irrelevant, and at worst, inhuman and lifeless. Fortunately, anarchists are not following the Marxist model of organising, having learned from history

Thus Mitchinson fails to understand the role of RTS or its position in the UK anarchist movement.

He then asserts:

> *"There is no theory, no coherent analysis of society, no alternative programme. To brag of a lack of direction, a lack of purpose and a lack of coherence, in the face of such a highly organised and brutal enemy as international capital, is surely the height of irresponsibility."*

Firstly, anyone reading **Maybe** or other RTS publications will quickly see there is theory, coherent analysis and an alternative vision. As Mitchinson has obviously read **Maybe** we

can only assume his claim is a conscious lie. Secondly, RTS in the quoted passage clearly do **not** *"brag of a lack of direction, a lack of purpose and a lack of coherence."* They do state there is no *"centralised unit for decision-making"* — which is true, they have a **decentralised** unit for decision-making (direct democracy in open meetings). There is *"no master-plan,"* etc. as any plans are decided upon by these open meetings. There is no pre-defined agenda because, as a democratic organisation, it is up to the open meeting to define their own agenda.

It is only Mitchinson's **assumption** that only centralised parties, with leaders making the decisions, can have *"direction," "purpose"* and *"coherence."* As can be seen **by their actions** that RTS **does** have direction, purpose and coherence. Needless to say, while other anarchists may be critical about RTS and its actions, we do not deny that it has been an effective organisation, involving a great many people in its actions who would probably not be involved in political activities. Rather than being *"irresponsible,"* RTS shows the validity of libertarian organisation and its effectiveness. No Marxist Party has remotely approached RTS's successes in terms of involving people in political actions. This is hardly a surprise.

## 6. How does Mitchinson define anarchism wrongly?

Mitchinson states:

> *"In reality the leaders of these movements are not devoid of ideology, they are anarchists. Anarchism is not simply a term of abuse, it comes from the Greek word 'anarchos' meaning 'without government'. To anarchists the state — the institutions of government, the army, police, courts etc. — is the root cause of all that is wrong in the world. It must be destroyed and*



elimination of soldiers democracy, the militarisation of labour, etc.) played a key role in the rise of the bureaucracy and Stalin.

Ultimately, every explanation of the degeneration of the Russian revolution by Trotskyists ends up as an appeal to *"exception circumstances"* — they blame the rise of Stalinism on the Civil War, to the *"exceptional circumstances"* created by that war. This can be faulted for two reasons.

Firstly, as Trotsky himself argued (with respect to the Spanish Anarchists) *"did not the leaders of German social democracy invoke, in their time, the same excuse? Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance.' … we do severely blame the anarchist theory, which seemed wholly suitable for times of peace, but had to be dropped rapidly as soon as the 'exceptional circumstance' of the … revolution had begun."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] Needless to say, he did not apply his critique to his own politics, which were also a form of the *"exceptional circumstances"* excuse. Given how quickly Bolshevik "principles" (as expressed in **The State and Revolution**) were dropped, we can only assume that Bolshevik ideas are also suitable purely for *"times of peace"* as well.

Secondly, this "explanation" basically argues that, **if** the bourgeois did not defend their power in 1917, then Leninism would have worked out fine. As Mitchinson himself noted above, belief that the bourgeois will just go away without a fight is *"an infantile flight of fancy."* As Lenin argued, *"revolution …, in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances"* and *"[r]evolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 80 and p. 81]

If the Civil War did solely produce the degeneration of the Russian Revolution then all we can hope for is that in the next social revolution, the civil war Lenin argued was inevitable is

at no stage did he describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers' control in such language. In other words, Bolshevik politics did play a role, a key role, in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and to deny it is to deny reality. In the words of Maurice Brinton:

> *"[I]n relation to industrial policy there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practice of Stalinism. We know that many on the revolutionary left will find this statement hard to swallow. We are convinced however that any honest reading of the facts cannot but lead to this conclusion. The more one unearths about this period [1917–21], the more difficult it becomes to define — or even see — the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined.' Bolshevik ideology and practice were* ***themselves*** *important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 84]

We should also point out that far from *"Leon Trotsky and Marxism"* explaining the degeneration of the Russian revolution, Trotsky could not understand that a *"totalitarian dictatorship"* could be an expression of a new minority class and presented a decidedly false analysis of the Soviet Union as a *"degenerated workers' state."* That analysis led numerous Trotskyists to support these dictatorships and oppose workers' revolts against them. In addition, Trotsky's own reservations were only really voiced after he had lost power. Moreover, he never acknowledged how his own policies (such as the



> *replaced not with any new form of government, but the immediate introduction of a stateless society."*

Firstly, *"anarchos"* actually means *"without authority,"* or *"contrary to authority"* (as Kropotkin put it). It does **not** mean "without government" as such (although it commonly is used that way). This means that anarchism does **not** consider the state as *"the root of all that is wrong with the world"* — we consider it, like capitalism (wage slavery), patriarchy, hierarchy in general, etc., as a symptom of a deeper problem, namely authority (or, more precisely, authoritarian social relations, hierarchical power — of which class power is a subset). Therefore anarchist theory is concerned with more than just the state — it is against capitalism just as much as it is against the state, for example.

Thus, to state the obvious, as anyone familiar with anarchist theory could tell you, anarchists do not think that *"the state"* is the root of all that is wrong in the world. Marxists have asserted this for years — unfortunately for them, repetition does not make something true! Rather, anarchists see the state as **one** of the causes of evil in the world and the main protector of all the rest. We also stress that in order to combat all the evils, we need to destroy the state so that we are in a position to abolish the other evils by being in control of our own lives. For example, in order to abolish capitalism — i.e. for workers' to seize the means of life — the state, which protects property rights, must be destroyed. Without doing so, the police and army will come and take back that which the workers' have taken. However, we do not claim that the state causes all of our problems — we do claim that getting rid of the state is an essential act, on which many others are dependent.

As Brian Morris argues:

> *"Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount*

> *of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined, and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists… as well as the character of anarchist movements… it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state."* [*"Anthropology and Anarchism,"* **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p, p. 40]

As can be seen, Mitchinson repeats into the usual Marxist straw man.

## 7. Does anarchism reject fighting for reforms?

After asserting the usual Marxist falsehoods about anarchism, he moves on:

> *"This opposition to the state and authority leads to a rejection of participation in any form of parliamentary activity, belonging to a political party or fighting for any reforms, that is political change through the state."*

Again Mitchinson smuggles in a falsehood into his "analysis." Anarchists do not reject *"fighting for any reforms"* — far from it. We do reject parliamentary activity, that is true, but we think that reforms can and must be won. We see such reforms coming via the direct action of those who desire them — for example, by workers striking for better working conditions, more wages and so. Anyone with even a passing awareness of



centralised power and who equates party rule with class rule (like Lenin and Trotsky), will act in ways (and create structures) totally different from someone who believes in decentralisation and federalism. In other words, **political ideas do matter** in society. Nor do anarchists leave our analysis at this obvious fact — as noted, we also argue that the types of organisation people create and work in shapes the way they think and act. This is because specific kinds of organisation have specific authority relations and so generate specific social relationships. These obviously affect those subject to them — a centralised, hierarchical system will create authoritarian social relationships which shape those within it in totally different ways than a decentralised, egalitarian system. That Mitchinson denies this obvious fact suggests he knows nothing of materialist philosophy.

Moreover, anarchists are aware of the problems facing the revolution. After all, anarchists were involved in that revolution and wrote some of the best works on that revolution (for example, Voline's **The Unknown Revolution**, Arshinov's **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** and Maximov's **The Guillotine at Work**). However, they point to the obvious fact that the politics of the Bolsheviks played a key role in how the revolution developed. While the terrible objective conditions may have shaped certain aspects of the actions of the Bolsheviks it cannot be denied that the impulse for them were rooted in Bolshevik theory. After all, anarchist theory could not justify the suppression of the functional democracy associated with the factory committees or the soldiers election of officers in the Red Army. Bolshevik theory could, and did.

Indeed, Trotsky was still claiming in 1937 that the *"Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] In other words, the Bolshevik policies implemented during the Civil War were the correct, Marxist, ones. Also, although Lenin described the NEP (New Economic Policy) of 1921 as a 'defeat',

control over their own lives, from those who seek to replace it with minority rule.

## 15. What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?

Mitchinson argues that:

> *"Anarchists see in the degeneration of the Soviet Union into a totalitarian dictatorship proof that Bakunin was right. In reality, only Leon Trotsky and Marxism have been able to explain the causes of that degeneration, finding its roots not in men's heads or personalities, but in the real life conditions of civil war, armies of foreign intervention, and the defeat of revolution in Europe."*

Needless to say, anarchism explains the causes of the degeneration in a far more rich way than Mitchinson claims. The underlying assumption of his "critique" of anarchism is that the **politics** of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution — it was a product purely of objective forces. He also subscribes to the contradictory idea that Bolshevik politics were essential for the success of that revolution. The facts of the matter is that people are faced with choices, choices that arise from the objective conditions that they face. What decisions they make will be influenced by the ideas they hold — they will **not** occur automatically, as if people were on autopilot — and their ideas are shaped by the social relationships they experience. Thus, someone placed into a position of power over others will act in certain ways, have a certain world view, which would be alien to someone subject to egalitarian social relations.

So, obviously the *"ideas in people's heads"* matter, particularly during a revolution. Someone in favour of centralisation,



anarchist thought would know this. Indeed, that is what direct action means — it was coined by French anarcho-syndicalists to describe the struggle for reforms within capitalism!

As for rejecting parliamentary activity, yes, anarchists do reject this form of "action." However, we do so for reasons Mitchinson fails to mention. Section J.2 of the FAQ discusses the reasons why anarchists support direct action and oppose electioneering as a means of both reform and for revolution.

Similarly, anarchists reject political parties but we do not reject political organisations — i.e. specific anarchist groups. The difference is that political parties are generally organised in a hierarchical fashion and anarchist federations are not — we try and create the new world when we organise rather than reproducing the traits of the current, bourgeois, one.

Needless to say, Mitchinson seeks to recruit the people he is slandering and so holds out an olive-branch by stating that *"[o]f course, Marxism is opposed to the brutal domination of the capitalist state too. Marx saw a future society without a state but instead 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' That is a self-governing people. The question however is how can this be achieved?"*

Yes, as Bakunin argued, Marxists do not reject our programme out of hand. They claim to also seek a free society and so Mitchinson is correct — the question is how can this be achieved. Anarchists argue that a self-governing people can only be achieved by self-governing means — *"Bakunin ... advocated socialist (i.e., libertarian) means in order to achieve a socialist (i.e., libertarian) society."* [Arthur Lehning, *"Introduction"*, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 27] Thus means and ends must be consistent — revolutionary movements must be organised in a way that reflects the society we want to create. Thus a self-governing society can only be created by self-governing organisations and a self-governing movement. If the revolutionary movement reflect bourgeois

society — for example, is hierarchical — then it cannot create a free society. That is the rationale for the way anarchist groups organise, including RTS. Marxists, as we will see, disagree and consider how a revolutionary movement organises itself as irrelevant.

Also, we must note that earlier Mitchinson denied that a self-governing organisation could exist when he was discussing RTS. He asserted that *"[i]f there was no leadership and no policy then there could be no action of any kind."* Now he claims that it is possible, but only **after** the revolution. We will note the obvious contradiction — how do people become capable of self-government post-revolution if they do not practice it pre-revolution and, obviously, during the revolution?

## 8. Does anarchism see the state as the root of all problems?

Mitchinson moves on to assert that:

> *"Since anarchism sees in the state the root of all problems, it therefore believes these problems will be resolved by the destruction of the state."*

As noted above, anarchists do **not** see in the state the root of all problems. We do urge the destruction of the state but that is because the state is the protector of existing society and in order to transform that society we need get rid of it. Kropotkin, for example, was well aware of *"the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 83] Rather than seeing the State as the root of all evil, anarchists are well aware that evil is caused by many things — particularly capitalism — and that the state, as well as causing its own evils, supports and protects others. Thus anarchists are aware that the state is a tool for minority rule and only one source of evil.



> *nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship.*
>
> *"The fact that a large number of socialist parties have rallied to the idea of councils, which is the proper mark of libertarian socialist and revolutionary syndicalists, is a confession, recognition that the tack they have taken up until now has been the product of a falsification, a distortion, and that with the councils the labour movement must create for itself a single organ capable of carrying into effect the unmitigated socialism that the conscious proletariat longs for. On the other hand, it ought not to be forgotten that this abrupt conversion runs the risk of introducing many alien features into the councils concept, features, that is, with no relation to the original tasks of socialism, and which have to be eliminated because they pose a threat to the further development of the councils. These alien elements are able only to conceive things from the dictatorial viewpoint. It must be our task to face up to this risk and warn our class comrades against experiments which cannot bring the dawn of social emancipation any nearer — which indeed, to the contrary, positively postpone it.*
>
> *"Consequently, our advice is as follows: Everything for the councils or soviets! No power above them! A slogan which at the same time will be that of the social revolutionary."* [**Anarchism and Sovietism**]

Or, as the Bakunin influenced Jura Federation of the First International put it in 1874, *"the dictatorship that we want is one which the insurgent masses exercise directly, without intermediary of any committee or government."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 631] In other words, a situation in which the working masses defend their freedom, their

the *"conquest of power"* **not** in terms of *"putting a new class in power"* but, in fact, the **representatives** of that class, the vanguard party, into power. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that organs of working class self-management are the means of creating and defending a **social** revolution as it is the only means that the mass of people can actually run their own lives and any power over and above these organs means dictatorship **over** the working class, a new form of state and class power.

As Rudolf Rocker argues:

> *"Let no one object that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' cannot be compared to run of the mill dictatorship because it is the dictatorship of a class. Dictatorship of a class cannot exist as such, for it ends up, in the last analysis, as being the dictatorship of a given party which arrogates to itself the right to speak for that class. Thus, the liberal bourgeoisie, in their fight against despotism, used to speak in the name of the 'people'...*
>
> *"We already know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done — let us be clear on this — without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has*



Mitchinson, after misrepresenting anarchist thought, states:

> *"Marxism, meanwhile, sees the division of society into classes, a minority who own the means of producing wealth, and the majority of us whose labour is the source of that wealth, as the crux of the matter. It is this class division of society which gives rise to the state — because the minority need a special force to maintain their rule over the majority — which has evolved over thousands of years into the complicated structures we see today."*

Anarchists would agree, as far as this goes. Bakunin argued that the State *"is authority, domination, and forced, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses."* He saw the social revolution as destroying capitalism and the state at the same time, that is *"to overturn the State's domination, and that of the privileged classes whom it solely represents."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140] The idea that the state is a means to ensure class rule is one anarchists, as can be seen, would agree with.

However, anarchists do not reduce their understanding of the state to this simplistic Marxist analysis. While being well aware that the state is the means of ensuring the domination of an economic elite, anarchists recognise that the state machine also has interests of its own. The state, for anarchists, is the delegation of power into the hands of a few. This creates, by its very nature, a privileged position for those at the top of the hierarchy:

> *"A government, that is a group of people entrusted with making the laws and empowered to use the collective force to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the peo-*

> *ple. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 34]

Thus, while it is true that the state (particularly under capitalism) acts as the agent of the capitalist class, it does not mean that it does not have interests of its own. The State has developed as a means of imposing minority rule — that much anarchists and Marxists can agree upon. To do so it has developed certain features, notably delegation of power into the hands of a few. This feature of the state is a product of its function. However, function and feature are inseparable — retain the feature and the function will be re-established. In other words, maintain the state and minority rule will be re-established.

The simplistic class analysis of the state has always caused Marxists problems, particularly Trotskyists who used it to deny the obvious class nature of Stalinist Russia. Rather than see the USSR as a class society in which the State bureaucracy exploited and oppressed the working class for its own benefits, Trotskyists argued it was an autocratic, privileged bureaucracy in a classless society. As anarchist Camillo Berneri argued:

> *"In history there is no absurdity. An autocratic bureaucracy is a class, therefore it is not absurd that it should exist in a society where classes remain — the bureaucratic class and the proletarian class. If the USSR was a 'classless' society, it would also be a society without a bureaucratic autocracy, which is the natural fruit of the permanent existence of the State."* [*"The State and Classes"*, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no, 4, p. 49]



> minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will.
>
> "So ... it always comes down to the same dismal result: government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people." [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178]

Thus anarchists reject the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat for two reasons. Firstly, because it excluded the bulk of the working masses when it was first used by Marx and Engels. Secondly, because in practice it would mean the dictatorship of the party **over** the proletariat. Needless to say, Mitchinson does not mention these points.

Mitchinson argues that *"[a]lthough this sounds radical enough it nonetheless amounts to a recipe for inaction and disaster."* And quotes Trotsky to explain why:

> *"To renounce the conquest of power is voluntarily to leave the power with those who wield it, the exploiters. The essence of every revolution consisted and consists in putting a new class in power, thus enabling it to realise its own programme in life. It is impossible to wage war and to reject victory. It is impossible to lead the masses towards insurrection without preparing for the conquest of power."*

For anarchists the question immediately is, *"power to who"*? As is clear from the writings of Lenin and Trotsky they see

To understand this passage it is necessary to place it in historical context. In 1872, the proletariat was a **minority** class within all nations **bar** the UK. In almost all nations, the majority of the working class were either artisans or peasants (hence the reference to *"the masses"*). To urge that the proletariat seize power meant to advocate the class rule of a **minority** of the working masses. Minority rule could be nothing else but the dictatorship of a minority over the majority (a dictatorship in the usual sense of the word), and dictatorships always become exploitative of the general population.

Thus Mitchinson's "analysis" is ahistoric and, fundamentally, unscientific and a mockery of materialism.

Moreover, anarchists like Bakunin also made clear that the Marxist notion of *"proletarian dictatorship"* did not even mean that the proletariat **as a whole** would exercise power. In his words:

> "What does it mean, 'the proletariat raised to a governing class?' Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 million be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one would be ruled. Then there will be no government, there will be no state; but if there is a state, there will also be those who are ruled, there will be slaves.
>
> "In the Marxists' theory this dilemma is resolved in a simple fashion. By popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage — the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school — is a lie behind which the despotism of a ruling



The weakness (or incompleteness) of the Marxist understanding of the state can best be seen by Trotsky's and his followers lack of understanding of Stalinism. As the state owned all the land and means of production, there could be no classes and so the Soviet Union must be a classless society. However, the obvious privileges of the bureaucracy could not be denied (as Trotsky was once a leading bureaucrat, he saw and experienced them at first hand). But as the state bureaucracy could not be a class and have class interests (by definition), Trotsky could not see the wood for the trees. The actual practice of Leninism in power is enough to expose its own theoretical weaknesses.

## 9. Why is Mitchinson wrong about the *"Abolishion [i.e. Abolition] of the state"*?

Mitchinson moves on to argue that the *"modern capitalist state can wear many guises, monarchy, republic, dictatorship, but in the end its purpose remains the same, to maintain the minority rule of the capitalist class. Marxism's goal therefore is not simply to abolish the state, but to put an end to class society."* Needless to say, that is also anarchism's goal. As Bakunin argued, *"political transformation .. . [and] economic transformation ... must be accomplished together and simultaneously."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 106] So, as can be seen, anarchism's goal is not simply abolishing the state, but to put an end to class society. That anarchists have always argued the state and capitalism must be destroyed at the same time is easily discovered from reading their works.

Continuing this theme he argues that the state *"was born with the split of society into classes to defend private property. So long as there are classes there will be a state. So, how can class society be ended? Not by its denial, but only by the victory of one of the contending classes. Triumph for capitalism spells ruin for millions."*

Of course, we could point out here that many anthropologists disagree with the claim that the state is a product of class society. As Michael Taylor summarises, the *"evidence does not give this proposition a great deal of support. Much of the evidence which has been offered in support of it shows only that the primary states, not long after their emergence, were economically stratified. But this is of course consistent also with the simultaneous rise ... of political and economic stratification, or with the **prior** development of the state — i.e. of **political** stratification — and the creation of economic stratification by the ruling class."* [**Community, Anarchy and Liberty**, p. 132]

Also, of course, as should be obvious from what we have said previously, anarchists do not think class society can be ended by "denial." As is clear from even a quick reading of any anarchist thinker, anarchists seek to end class society as well as the state. However, we reject as simplistic the Marxist notion that the state exists purely to defend classes. The state has certain properties **because it is a state** and one of these is that it creates a bureaucratic class around it due to its centralised, hierarchical nature. Within capitalism, the state bureaucracy is part of the ruling class and (generally) under the control of the capitalist class. However, to generalise from this specific case is wrong as the state bureaucracy is a class in itself — and so trying to abolish classes without abolishing the state is doomed to failure.

## 10. Why is Mitchinson's comment that we face either *"socialism or barbarism"* actually undermine his case?

Mitchinson continues:

> *"As Marx once explained the choice before us is not socialism or the status quo, but socialism or barbarism."*



> *ipation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders."* [*"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 27]

Mitchinson moves on to the usual Marxist slander that as *"a modern philosophy anarchism developed in the 19th century alongside the explosive growth of capitalism and its state machine. It represented a rebellion by a section of the petty bourgeoisie at the loss of their position in society, driven to the wall by the growth of monopoly."* We have refuted this assertion in another appendix (Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet "Socialism from Below") and so will not do so here.

## 14. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist notion of *"conquest of power"*?

Mitchinson now decides to quote some anarchists to back up his spurious argument:

> *"Their case was argued by Mikhail Bakunin and his supporters in the First International. At an anarchist conference in 1872 they argued 'The aspirations of the proletariat can have no other aim than the creation of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation based on work and equality and wholly independent of any political government, and such an organisation can only come into being through the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself...no political organisation can be anything but the organisation of rule in the interests of a class and to the detriment of the masses...the proletariat, should it seize power, would become a ruling, and exploiting, class...'"*

that party had become a bureaucratic nightmare, murdering millions and sending hundreds of thousands to forced labour camps, Trotsky still argued that the *"working class"* was still the *"ruling class."* Not only that, his political perspective allowed him to justify the suppression of workers' democracy in the name of the *"rule"* of the workers. For this reason, anarchists feel that the real utopians are the Leninists who believe that party rule equals class rule and that centralised, hierarchical power in the hands of the few will not become a new form of class rule. History, we think, supports our politics on this issue (as in so many others).

Mitchinson argues that *"Anarchism's utopian calls to abolish the state overnight demonstrates neither the understanding of what the state is, nor the programme of action necessary to achieve the goal it sets itself."* However, as made clear, it is Marxism which is utopian, believing that rule by a party equals rule by a class and that a state machine can be utilised by the majority of the population. As Kropotkin argued, Anarchists *"maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 170]

Luigi Fabbri sums up the difference well:

> *"The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists ... as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active partic-*



We should point out that it Rosa Luxemburg who is usually associated with this quote. She made her famous comment during the First World War. The start of this war saw the Marxist German Social Democratic Party (and a host of others) vote for war credits in Parliament. This party was a mass workers' party which aimed to used every means, including elections, to gain reforms for the working class. The net end result of this strategy was the voting for war credits and the support of their state and ruling class in the war — that is, the betrayal of the fundamental principles of socialism.

This event did not happen out of the blue. It was the end result of years of working within the bourgeois political system, of using elections (*"political activity"*) as a means of struggle. The Social Democratic Parties had already been plagued with reformist elements for years. These elements, again, did not come from nowhere but were rather the response to what the party was actually doing. They desired to reform the party to bring its rhetoric in-line with its practice. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the *"distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action."* [C. Schorske, **German Social Democracy**, p. 38] The debacle of 1914 was a logical result of the means chosen, the evidence was already there for all to see (except, apparently, Lenin who praised the *"fundamentals of parliamentary tactics"* of the German and International Social Democracy and how they were *"at the same time implacable on questions of principle and always directed to the accomplishment of the final aim"* in his obituary of August Bebel in 1913! [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 248])

Needless to say, this result had been predicted by Bakunin over 40 years previously. And Mitchinson wants us to repeat this strategy? As Marx said, history repeats itself — first it is tragedy, second time it is farce.

## 11. Why is Mitchinson wrong to assert anarchists do not believe in defending a revolution?

Mitchinson argues that the *"victory of the working class can only mean the destruction of the capitalist state. Will the capitalists take defeat like sporting ladies and gentlemen, retiring quietly to the pavilion? No, all history suggests that they would not. The workers would need to create a new state, for the first time to defend the rule of the majority over the minority."*

Yes, indeed, all history **does** show that a ruling class will not retire quietly and a revolution will need to defend itself. If anarchists **did** believe that they would retire peacefully then Marxists would be correct to attack us. However, Marxist assertions are false. Indeed, they must think anarchists are morons if they genuinely do think we do not believe in defending a revolution. A few quotes should suffice to expose these Marxist claims as lies:

> *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades... [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1]
>
> *"[L]et us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revo-*



workers experienced during the working day and within society was identical. The state bureaucrat replaced the capitalist.

As for politics, the Bolshevik revolution replaced government with government. Initially, it was an elected government and so it had the typical social relationships of representative government. Later, it became a one party dictatorship — a situation that did not change under Stalin. Thus the social relationships there, again, did not change. The Bolshevik Party became the head of the government. That is all. This event also saw the reconstruction of Soviet Society in the interest of a privileged minority — it is well known that the Communists gave themselves the best rations, best premises and so on.

Thus the Bolshevik revolution did **not** change the social relations people faced and so Trotsky's comments are wishful thinking. The *"interests of the masses"* could not, and were not, defended by the Bolshevik revolution as it did not change the relations of authority in a society — the social relationships people experienced remain unchanged. Perhaps that is why Lenin argued that the proletarian nature of the Russian regime was ensured by the nature of the ruling party? There could be no other basis for saying the Bolshevik state was a workers' state. After all, nationalised property without workers' self-management **does not change social relationships** it just changes who is telling the workers what to do.

The important point to note is that Trotsky argued that the proletariat could be a ruling class when it had **no** political influence, never mind democracy, when subject to a one-party state and bureaucratic dictatorship and when the social relations of the society were obviously capitalistic. No wonder he found it impossible to recognise that dictatorship by the party did not equal dictatorship by the proletariat.

Therefore, the claim that Trotskyists see the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* as *"the rule of one class over another"* is, as can be seen, a joke. Rather they see it as the rule of the party over the rest of society, **including** the working class. Even when

*not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class."* [**The Class Nature of the Soviet State**]

Just to stress the point, according to Trotsky, under Stalinism **the proletariat was the ruling class** and that Stalin's dictatorship eliminated what remained (and it was not much) of working class political influence in order *"to guard its social conquests"*! What social conquests could remain if the proletariat was under the heel of a totalitarian dictatorship? Just one, state ownership of property — precisely the means by which the (state) bureaucracy enforced its control over production and so the source of its economic power (and privileges). To state the obvious, if the working class does not **control** the property it is claimed to own then someone else does. The economic relationship thus generated is a hierarchical one, in which the working class is an oppressed class. Thus Trotsky identified the source of the bureaucracy's economic power with "socialism" — no wonder his analysis of Stalinism (and vision of socialism) proved so disastrous.

Trotsky argues that the *"liberal-anarchist thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an upheaval of social relations in the interests of the masses, whereas Stalin's Thermidorian upheaval accompanies the reconstruction of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] However, social relations are just that, **social** and so between individuals and classes — ownership of property cannot tell the whole story. What social relations did Bolshevism bring about?

As far as the wage labour social relationship goes (and do not forget that is the defining feature of capitalism), the Bolsheviks opposed workers' self-management in favour of, first, *"control"* over the capitalists and then one-man management. No change in social relationships there. Property relations did change in the sense that the state became the owner of capital rather than individual capitalists, but the **social** relationship



> *lutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 178–9]

Bakunin was well aware that revolution implied "civil war" — i.e. attempts by the ruling class to maintain its power (see, for example, his *"Letters to a Frenchman"* in **Bakunin on Anarchism**). As can be seen, Bakunin was well aware of the needs to defend a revolution after destroying the state and abolishing capitalism. Similarly we discover Malatesta arguing that we should *"[a]rm all the population,"* and the *"creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 170 and p. 166] In Malatesta's words:

> *"But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies*

> *composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear... [Some people] seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!"* [**Anarchy**, pp. 40–1]

Not only do we have this theoretical position, we can also point to concrete historical examples — the Makhnovist movement in the Russian Revolution and the CNT militias during the Spanish Revolution, among others — that prove that anarchists do recognise the need and importance of defending a successful revolution.

Therefore, statements asserting that anarchists are against defending a revolution are either spreading a conscious lie or a product of deep ignorance.

Thus the question is **not** one of defending or not defending a revolution. The question is **how** do we defend it (and, another key question, what **kind** of revolution do we aim for). Marxists urge us to *"create a new state, for the first time to defend the rule of the majority over the minority."* Anarchists reply that every state is based on the delegation of power into the hands of a minority and so cannot be used to defend the rule of the majority over the minority. Rather, it would be the rule of those who claim to represent the majority. The confusion between people power and party power is at the root of why Leninism is not revolutionary.

Mitchinson then quotes Lenin and Trotsky to defend his assertion:

> *"The proletariat needs the state only temporarily. We do not at all disagree with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily*



proletariat have a say then the dictatorship of the proletariat could be in danger.

Thus, for Trotsky, the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* is independent of allowing the proletariat to manage their own affairs directly. However, without the means of manage their own affairs directly, control their own lives, the proletariat are placed into the position of passive electors, who vote for parties who rule for and over them, in their own name. Moreover, they face the constant danger of the *"vanguard"* nullifying even these decisions as *"temporary vacillations."* A fine liberation indeed.

Also, as libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton argues, none of the Bolshevik leaders *"saw the proletarian nature of the Russian regime as primarily and crucially dependent on the exercise of workers' power at the point of production (i.e. workers' management of production). It should have been obvious to them as Marxists that if the working class did not hold economic power, its 'political' power would at best be insecure and would in fact degenerate."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42]

With direct working class sovereignty eroded by the Bolsheviks in the name of indirect, i.e. party, sovereignty it is hardly surprising that the dictatorship of the proletariat becomes the dictatorship **over** the proletariat as Bakunin predicted. With the elimination of functional democracy and self-management, indirect democracy would not be able to survive for long in the face of centralised, top-down decision making by the ruling party.

So hopeless was Trotsky's understanding of socialism and the nature of a working class social revolution that he even considered the Stalinist dictatorship to be an expression of the *"dictatorship of the proletariat."* He argued that the *"bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with **its own** methods. The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are*

> *and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [**Work, Discipline, Order**]

He made the same comments with regard the factory committees:

> *"It would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers [a euphemism for the Party — M.B.] and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered."* [quoted by Maurice Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66]

This point is reiterated in his essay, *"Bolshevism and Stalinism"* (written in 1937) when he argued that:

> *"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

And, obviously, without party dictatorship the soviets would return to the *"mud."* In other words, the soviets are only important to attain party rule and if the two come into conflict then Trotskyism provides the rule of the party with an ideological justification to eliminate soviet democracy. Lenin's and Trotsky's politics allowed them to argue that if you let the



> *make use of the instruments resources and methods of state power against the exploiters."* [Lenin]
>
> *"Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state. Marxists are statist only to the extent that one cannot achieve the liquidation of the state simply by ignoring it."* [Trotsky]

Of course, quoting Lenin or Trotsky when they make a false assertion does not turn lies into truth. As proven above, anarchists are well aware of the necessity of overthrowing the state by revolution **and** defending that revolution against attempts to defeat it. To state otherwise is to misrepresent anarchist theory on this subject. Moreover, despite Trotsky's claims, anarchists are aware that you do not destroy something by ignoring it. The real question is thus **not** whether to defend a revolution or whether to shatter the state machine. The questions are, **how** do you shatter the state, what do you replace existing society with and how do you defend a revolution. To state otherwise is to build a strawman — unfortunately much of Lenin's "masterpiece" **The State and Revolution** is based on destroying this self-created strawman.

## 12. Would the "workers' state" really be different, as Mitchinson claims?

Mitchinson argues that from *"the very beginning this would be like no previous state machine. From day one it would be in effect a semi-state."* The question is, for anarchists, whether this "semi-state" is marked by the delegation of power into the hands of a government. If so, then the "semi-state" is no such thing — it is a state like any other and so an instrument of minority rule. Yes, this minority may state it represents the majority but in practice it can only represent itself and claim that is what the majority desires.

Hence, for anarchists, *"the essence of the state ... [is] centralised power* ***or to put it another way the coercive authority*** *of which the state enjoys the monopoly, in that organisation of violence know as 'government'; in the hierarchical despotism, juridical, police and military despotism that imposes laws on everyone."* [Luigi Fabbri, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 24–5] The so-called "semi-state" is nothing of the kind — it is a centralised power in which a few govern the many. Therefore, the "workers' state" would be "workers" in name only.

Mitchinson continues:

> *"The task of all previous revolutions was to seize state power. From the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 Marx and Engels concluded that it would not be possible for the workers to simply use the old state apparatus, they would instead have to replace it with an entirely new one, to serve the interests of the majority and lay the basis for a socialist society."*

Needless to say, he forgets the **key** question — **who** is to seize power. Is it the majority, directly, or a minority (the leaders of a party) who claim to represent the majority. Leninists are clear, it is to be the party, not the working class as a whole. They confuse party power with class power. In the words of Lenin:

> *"The very presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the Party* ***or*** *dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders* ***or*** *dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties... "*

And:



their sovereignty. Little wonder Trotsky abolished independent unions, decreed the end of soldier committees and urged one-man management and the militarisation of labour when in power. Such working class organs do conflict with the sovereign rule of the party and so have to be abolished.

After being in power four years, Trotsky was arguing that the *"Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

This position follows naturally from Trotsky's comments that the party *"crystallises"* the *"aspirations"* of the masses. If the masses reject the party then, obviously, their *"cultural level"* has fallen and so the party has the right, nay the duty, to impose its dictatorship over them. Similarly, the destruction of organs of working class self-management can be justified because the vanguard has taken power — which is **exactly** what Trotsky argued.

With regards to the Red Army and its elected officers, he stated in March 1918 that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree"* because the Bolshevik Party held power or, as he put it, *"political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited."* Of course, power was actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

> *"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union*

> are administered according to laws made by administrators and this is government, it is the State, and inevitably it turns out to be tyrannical.
>
> "It is not a question of the good intentions or the good will of this or that man, but of the inevitability of the situation, and of the tendencies which man generally develops in given circumstances." [**Life and Ideas**, p. 145]

Moreover, it is debatable whether Trotskyists really desire the rule of one class over another in the sense of working class over capitalist class. To quote Trotsky:

> "the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspirations of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.
>
> "In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard." [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the "vanguard" which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**Ibid.**] That is, of course, true — they are still organs of working class self-management (such as factory committees, workers councils, trade unions, soldier committees) through which working people can still exercise



> *"To go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid."* [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, pp. 25–6 and p. 27]

However, what is **truly** stupid is confusing the rule by a minority with that of the majority managing their own affairs. The two things are different, they generate different social relationships and to confuse the two is to lay the ground work for the rule by a bureaucratic elite, a dictatorship of state officials **over** the working class.

Now we come to the usual Leninist claims about Bolshevik theory:

> *"To ensure that the workers maintain control over this state, Lenin argued for the election of all officials who should be held accountable and subject to recall, and paid no more than the wage of a skilled worker. All bureaucratic tasks should be rotated. There should be no special armed force standing apart from the people, and we would add, all political parties except fascists should be allowed to organise."*

This is what Lenin, essentially, said he desired in **The State and Revolution** (Mitchinson misses out one key aspect, to which we will return later). Anarchists reply in three ways.

Firstly, we note that *"much that passes for 'Marxism' in **State and Revolution** is pure anarchism — for example, the substitution of revolutionary militias for professional armed bodies and the substitution of organs of self-management for parliamentary bodies. What is authentically Marxist in Lenin's pamphlet is the demand for 'strict centralism,' the acceptance of a 'new' bureaucracy, and the identification of soviets with a state."* [Murray

Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213] As an example, let us look at the recall of "officials" (inspired by the Paris Commune). We find this in Bakunin's and Proudhon's work **before** it was applied by the Communards and praised by Marx. Bakunin in 1868 argued for a *"Revolutionary Communal Council"* composed of *"delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1] Proudhon's election manifesto of 1848 argued for *"universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63] As can be seen, Lenin's recommendations were first proposed by anarchists.

Thus the positive aspects of Lenin's work are libertarian in nature, **not** Marxist as such. Indeed given how much time is spent on the Paris Commune (an essentially libertarian revolt obviously inspired by Proudhon's ideas) his work is more libertarian than Marxist, as Bookchin makes clear. It is the non-libertarian aspects which helped to undermine the anarchist elements of the work.

Secondly, Lenin does not mention, never mind discuss, the role of the Bolshevik Party would have in the new "semi-state." Indeed, the party is mentioned only in passing. That in itself indicates the weakness of using **The State and Revolution** as a guide book to Leninist theory or practice. Given the importance of the role of the party in Lenin's previous and latter works, it suggests that to quote **The State and Revolution** as proof of Leninism's democratic heart leaves much to be desired. And even **The State and Revolution**, in its one serious reference to the Party, is ambiguous in the extreme:



power, ignored it totally. Such is the nature of the state — as Kropotkin and all other anarchists have argued, there can be no such thing as a "revolutionary government." Conflict will inevitably arise between the party which aims to control the revolution and the actions of the masses themselves. To resolve the conflict the state must eliminate the organs of workers self-activity which the revolution creates otherwise the party cannot impose its decisions — and this is what the Bolshevik state did, aided of course by the horrors of the civil war.

To state the obvious, to quote theory and not relate it to the practice of those who claim to follow that theory is a joke. It is little more than sophistry. If you look at the actions of the Bolsheviks before and after the Russian Revolution you cannot help draw the conclusion that Lenin's **State and Revolution** has nothing to do with Bolshevik policy and presents a false image of what Trotskyists desire.

## 13. Is the Marxist "worker's state" really the rule of one class over another?

Mitchinson argues that the *"task of this state would be to develop the economy to eradicate want. Less need, means less need to govern society, less need for a state. Class society and the state will begin to wither away as the government of people, the rule of one class over another, is replaced by the administration of things, the planned use of resources to meet society's needs."*

As Malatesta makes clear, this is pure sophistry:

> "Whoever has power over things has power over men; whoever governs production also governs the producers; who determines consumption is master over the consumer.
>
> "This is the question; either things are administered on the basis of free agreement of the interested parties, and this is anarchy; or they

Moreover, Mitchinson fails to mention Lenin's argument that, like the Paris Commune, the workers' state would be based on a fusion of executive and administrative functions in the hands of the workers' delegates. This is hardly surprising, as Lenin created an executive body (the Council of People's Commissars) immediately after the October Revolution. This division of executive and administrative powers was written into the Soviet Constitution. So much for **The State and Revolution** — its promises did not last a night.

Thus, his claims that the "semi-state" would not be like any other state are contradicted by the actual experience of Bolshevism in power. For anarchists, this comes as no surprise as they are well aware that the state machine does not (indeed, **cannot**) represent the interests of the working classes due to its centralised, hierarchical and elitist nature — all it can do is represent the interests of the party in power, its own bureaucratic needs and privileges and slowly, but surely, remove itself from popular control. Hence the movement away from popular control — it is the nature of centralised power to remove itself from control from below, control by the masses, particularly when all other focal points of working class self-management have been abolished as being no longer required as we have a "semi-state."

Mitchinson seems to want us to look purely at Bolshevik theory and not its practice. It is exactly what supporters of capitalism desire us to do — in theory, capitalism is based on free agreement and free exchange between autonomous individuals but in practice it is a system of inequality which violates the autonomy of individuals and makes a mockery of free agreement.

In a way, **The State and Revolution** laid out the foundations and sketched out the essential features of an alternative to Bolshevik power — as noted, that system would be essentially libertarian. Only the pro-Leninist tradition has used Lenin's work, almost to quiet their conscience, because Lenin, once in



> *"By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and* ***of leading the whole people*** *to Socialism, of directing and organising the new order, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie."* [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 288]

Is it the vanguard **or** the proletariat which is *"capable of assuming power"*? The answer is important as a **social** revolution requires the fullest participation of the formerly oppressed masses in the management of their own affairs. In the context of the rest of **The State and Revolution** it could be argued it is the proletariat. However, this cannot be squared with Lenin's (or Trotsky's) post-October arguments and practices or the resolution of the Second World Congress of the Communist International which stated that *"[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle ... is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised and operated except through a political party."* [cited by Duncan Hallas, **The Comintern**, p. 35] It is obvious that if the party rules, the working class does not. A socialist society cannot be built without the participation, self-activity and self-management of the working class. Thus the question of **who** makes decisions and **how** they do so is essential — if it is not the masses then the slide into bureaucracy is inevitable.

Thus to quote **The State and Revolution** proves nothing for anarchists — it does not discuss the key question of the party and so fails to present a clear picture of Leninist politics and their immediate aims. As soon becomes clear if you look at Leninism in power — i.e. what it actually did when it had the chance, to which we now turn.

Thirdly, we point to what he actually **did** in power. In this we follow Marx, who argued that we should judge people by

what they do rather than what they say. We will concentrate on the pre-Civil War (October 1917 to May 1918) period to indicate that this breaking of promises started **before** the horrors of Civil War can be claimed to have forced these decisions onto the Bolsheviks.

Before the out-break of Civil War, the Bolsheviks had replaced election of *"all officials"* by appointment from above in many areas of life — for example, they abolished the election of officers in the Red Army and replaced workers' self-management in production with one-man management, both forms of democracy being substituted by appointed from above. In addition, by the end of April, 1918, Lenin **himself** was arguing *"[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected* ***or appointed*** *by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."* [**Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 44 — our emphasis] Moreover, the Soviet Constitution stated that *"[e]very commissar [of the Council of People's Commissars — i.e. the Soviet government] has a collegium (committee) of which he is the president, and the members of which are appointed by the Council of People's Commissars."* Appointment was the rule at the very heights of the state. The *"election of all officers"* (*"without exception"* [Lenin, **The State and Revolution**, p. 302]) had ended by month six of the revolution even in Lenin's own writings — and **before** the start of the Civil War.

Lenin also argued in mid-April 1918 that the *"socialist character of Soviet, i.e.* ***proletarian****, democracy"* lies, in part, in *"the people themselves determin[ing] the order and time of elections."* [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, pp. 36–7] Given that *"the government [had] continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918"* because it *"feared that the opposition parties would show gains"* Lenin's comments seem hypocritical in the extreme. [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22]



Moreover, the Bolsheviks did not stay true to Lenin's claim in **The State and Revolution** that *"since the majority of the people* ***itself*** *suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' is* ***no longer necessary***" as so *"in place of a* ***special*** *repressive force, the whole population itself came on the scene."* In this way the *"state machine"* would be *"the armed masses of workers who become transformed into a universal people's militia."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 301, p. 320 and p. 347] Instead they created a political police force (the Cheka) and a standing army (in which elections were a set aside by decree). These were special, professional, armed forces standing apart from the people and unaccountable to them. Indeed, they were used to repress strikes and working class unrest. So much for Mitchinson's claim that *"there should be no special armed force standing apart from the people"* — it did not last three months (the Cheka was founded two months into the revolution, the Red Army was created in early 1918 and elections set aside by March of that year).

Lastly, the Bolsheviks banned newspapers from the start — including other socialist papers. In addition, they did not allow other political tendencies to organise freely. The repression started **before** the Civil War with the attack, by the Cheka, in April 1918 on the anarchist movements in Petrograd and Moscow. While repression obviously existed during the Civil War, it is significant that it, in fact, started **before** it began. During the Civil War, the Bolsheviks repressed all political parties, including the Mensheviks even though they *"consistently pursued a policy of peaceable opposition to the Bolshevik regime, a policy conducted by strictly legitimate means"* and *"[i]ndividual Mensheviks who joined organisations aiming at the overthrow of the Soviet Government were expelled from the Menshevik Party."* [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, pp. 318–9 and p. 332] In fact, repression **increased** after the end of the Civil War — a strange fact if it was that war which necessitated repression in the first place.

*express the leadership's organised distrust of the members, a distrust manifesting itself in vigilant control from above over the Party."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xi] Thus the centre controls the membership, not vice versa.

In **What is to be Done?** Lenin discussed *"the confusion of ideas concerning the meaning of democracy."* He dismisses the idea of self-management as *"Primitive Democracy."* He uses the example of the early British unions, where workers *"thought that it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the vote of all the members, but all the official duties were fulfilled by all the members in turn."* He considered *"such a conception of democracy"* as *"absurd"* and saw it as historical necessity that it was replaced by *"representative institutions"* and *"full-time officials"*. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 162–3] In other words, the Leninist tradition rejects self-management in favour of hierarchical structures in which power is centralised in the hands of *"full-time officials"* and *"representative institutions."*

In contrast, Bakunin argued that trade unions which ended *"primitive democracy"* and replaced it with representative institutions became bureaucratic and *"simply left all decision-making to their committees . .. In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership."* The membership become subject to *"the arbitrary power"* of the committees and *"ruled by oligarchs."* In other words, bureaucracy set in and democracy **as such** was eliminated and while *"very good for the committees ... [it was] not at all favourable for the social, intellectual, and moral progress of the collective power"* of the workers' movement. [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 246–7] Who was correct can quickly be seen from the radical and pro-active nature of the British trade union leadership.



note) its support? If its because the leaders are "right-wing" then why have the membership supported them? Why have the "right-wing" gained such influence? Also, why is there no *"mass Labour youth organisation"*? And why should *"young people"* join an organisation which is part of the party which is attacking them? And why are the *"tops of the unions"* not giving a *"lead"*? Perhaps because its not in their interests to do so? Because they hate direct action and radical workers as much as the bosses?

Mitchinson's "analysis" is question begging in the extreme. He continues:

> *"What action do they propose though? In their press statement (2/5/00) they explain, 'We were not protesting. Under the shadow of an irrelevant parliament we were planting the seeds of a society where ordinary people are in control of their land, their resources, their food and their decision making. The garden symbolised an urge to be self-reliant rather than dependent on capitalism.'"*

Firstly, we should point out that having access to land **is** a key way for workers to be independent of capitalism. Perhaps Mitchinson forgets Marx's discussion of the colonies in chapter 33 of **Capital**? In it Marx discusses how access to land allowed immigrants to America and Australia to reject wage labour (i.e. capitalism) by providing them with the means to survive without selling themselves on the labour market to survive. The state had to be used to enforce the laws of supply and demand by restricting access to the land. Or, perhaps, he had forgotten Marx's discussion in chapter 27 of **Capital** of the role of enclosures in creating a dispossessed mass of people who were forced, by necessity, to become the first generation of wage slaves? Either way, access to the land **was** (and still is, in many countries) a means of being independent of capitalism — and one which the state acts to destroy.

Secondly, the garden was a **symbol** of a communist society, not an expression of the type of society RTS and other anarchists desire. So, as a **symbol** of a anti-capitalist vision, the garden is a good one given the history of state violence used to separate working people from the land and propel them into the labour market. However, it is only a **symbol** and not, obviously, to be taken as an example of the future society RTS or other anarchists desire. Only someone lacking in imagination could confuse a symbol with a vision — as the press release states it *"celebrated the possibility of a world that encourages co-operation and sharing rather than one which rewards greed, individualism and competition."*

Thirdly, as their press release states, *"Guerrilla Gardening is not a protest; by its very nature it is a creative peaceful celebration of the growing global anticapitalist movement."* Mitchinson attacks the action for being something it was never intended to be.

He "analyses" the RTS press release:

> *"The fact that parliament appears powerless to prevent job losses or the destruction of the environment, only demonstrates that it serves the interests of capitalism."*

Very true, as Kropotkin argued the *"State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletariat must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 27] He argues elsewhere that *"small groups of men [and women] were imbued with the ... spirit of revolt. They also rebelled — sometimes with the hope of partial success; for example winning a strike and of obtaining bread for their children ... Without the menace contained in such revolts, no serious concession has ever been wrung by the people from governing classes."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 103]



> *less of nationality and national boundaries or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body; the Alliance ... tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction. The programs of one and the other, without being opposed, differ in the degree of their revolutionary development. The International contains in germ, but only in germ, the whole program of the Alliance. The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 157]

However, anarchists also argue that the revolutionary organisation must also reflect the type of society we want. Hence an anarchist federation must be self-organised from below, rejecting hierarchy and embracing self-management. For anarchists an organisation is not democratic because it debates, as the SWP claims. It is democratic only if the membership actually decides the policy of the organisation. That the SWP fail to mention this is significant and places doubt on whether their organisation is democratic in fact (as we indicate in section 22, the SWP may debate but it is not democratic). The reason why democracy in the SWP may not be all that it should be can be found in their comment that:

> *"It is also centralised, as it arrives at decisions which everyone acts on."*

However, this is not centralisation. Centralisation is when the centre decides everything and the membership follow those orders. That the membership may be in a position to elect those at the centre does not change the fact that the membership is simply expected to follow orders. It is the organisational principle of the army or police, not of a free society. That this is the principle of Leninism can be seen from Trotsky's comment that the *"statues [of the party] should*

a whole. Such a party is democratic because its members constantly debate what is happening in today's struggles and the lessons that can be applied from past ones."

That, in itself, is something most anarchists would agree with. That is why they build specific anarchist organisations which discuss and debate politics, current struggles, past struggles and revolutions and so on. In Britain there are three national anarchist federations (the Anarchist Federation, the Solidarity Federation and the Class War Federation) as well as numerous local groups and regional federations. The aim of these organisations is to try and influence the class struggle towards anarchist ideas (and, equally important, **learn** from that struggle as well — the *"program of the Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group], expanded to keep pace with developing situations."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 406]). The need for a specific political organisation is one most anarchists would agree with.

Thus few anarchists are believers in spontaneous revolution and see the need for anarchists to organise **as anarchists** to spread anarchist ideas and push the struggle towards anarchist ends (smashing the state and capitalism and the creation of a free federation of workers' councils and communes) via anarchist tactics (direct action, solidarity, general strikes, insurrection and encouraging working class self-organisation and self-management). Hence the need for specific anarchist organisations:

> *"The Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group] is the necessary complement to the International [the revolutionary workers' movement]. But the International and the Alliance, while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses ... regard-*



Mitchinson seems to agree:

> *"However, under pressure from below it is possible to introduce reforms through parliament that are in the interests of ordinary people."*

Thus reforms **are** possible, but only if we rely on ourselves, organise pressure from below and use direct action to force parliament to act (if that is required). Which is what anarchists have always argued. Without anti-parliamentary action, parliament will ignore the population. That is what anarchists have always argued — we have to reply on our own organisations, solidarity and direct action to change things for the better. Faced with such a movement, parliament would introduce reforms regardless of who was a member of it. Without such a movement, you end up with Tony Blair. Thus Mitchinson is confused — by his own logic, the anarchists are correct, we have to work outside parliament and electioneering in order to be effective.

He continues:

> *"It is no use declaring parliament to be irrelevant, and turning your back on it when the majority do not agree, and still look to government to make their lives better. This is the mirror image of the sects attitude to the Labour Party. Any and every avenue which can be used to improve our lives must be used."*

How do you change the opinion of the majority? By changing your position to match theirs? Of course not. You change their position by argument and proving that direct action is more effective in making their lives better than looking to government. Mitchinson would have a fit if someone argued *"it is no use declaring capitalism to be wrong and fighting against it when the majority do not agree and still look to it to make their*

*lives better."* If the majority do not agree with you, then you try and change their opinion — you do not accept that opinion and hope it goes away by itself!

Mitchinson seems to be following Lenin when he argued *"[y]ou must not sink to the level of the masses ... You must tell them the bitter truth. You are duty bound to call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices what they are — prejudices. But at the same time you must* ***soberly*** *follow the* ***actual*** *state of the class-consciousness ... of* ***all*** *the toiling masses."* [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, p. 41] Obviously, you cannot tell workers the bitter truth and at the same time follow their prejudices. In practice, if you follow their prejudices you cannot help but encourage faith in parliament, social democratic parties, leaders and so on. Progress is achieved by discussing issues with people, not ducking the question of political issues in favour of saying what the majority want to hear (which is what the capitalist media and education system encourage them to believe in the first place). As a means of encouraging revolutionary thought it is doomed to failure.

Also, just to stress the point, any and every avenue which can be used to improve our lives must be used but only if it actually is revolutionary and does not place obstacles in the process of social change. Parliamentary action has been proven time and time again to be a false way for radical change — it only ends up turning radicals into supporters of the status quo. It makes as much sense as arguing that any and every avenue must be used to cure a disease, including those which give you a new disease in its place.

## 19. How does Mitchinson distorts the use of the term *"Self-reliance"*?

Mitchinson argues that:



> *single path, that of* ***emancipation through practical action*** *... It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means* ***trade-unions, organisation*** *... To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses ... As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle, ... Socialism replaces religion in his mind... through practice and collective experience ... the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies ... The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily ... recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 102–3]

Therefore anarchists are well aware of the importance of struggle and propaganda in winning people to anarchist ideas. No anarchist has ever argued otherwise.

## 11. Why do anarchists oppose the Leninist "revolutionary party"?

The SWP argue that:

> "So there is always a battle of ideas within the working class. That is why political organisation is crucial. Socialists seek to build a revolutionary party not only to try to spread the lessons from one struggle to another.
>
> "They also want to organise those people who most clearly reject capitalism into a force that can fight for their ideas inside the working class as

*They feel powerless, as an individual, against the boss.*

*"That is why workers can accept the bosses' view of the world. At the same time constant attacks on workers' conditions create a need for workers to unite and fight back together.*

*"These two pressures mean workers' ideas are uneven. Some see through the bosses' lies. Others can be largely taken in. Most part accept and part reject capitalist ideas. The overall consciousness of the working class is always shifting. People become involved in struggles which lead them to break with pro-capitalist ideas."*

That is very true and anarchists are well aware of it. That is why anarchists organise groups, produce propaganda, argue their ideas with others and encourage direct action and solidarity. We do so because we are aware that the ideas within society are mixed and that struggle leads people to break with pro-capitalist ideas. To quote Bakunin:

*"the germs of [socialist thought] ... [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct ... What impedes the swifter development of this salutary though among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? ... they are insufficient ... [and] who will conduct this propaganda? ... [The] workers' world ... is left with but a*



*"In any case this 'self-reliance' is no alternative. Self-reliance won't get electricity into your house, educate your children or treat you when you are ill."*

No anarchist and no one in RTS ever claimed it would. We use the term *"self-reliance"* in a totally different way — as anyone familiar with anarchist or RTS theory would know. We use it to describe individuals who think for themselves, question authority, act for themselves and do not follow leaders. No anarchist uses the term to describe some sort of peasant life-style. But then why let facts get in the way of a nice diatribe?

He continues:

*"We have the resources to cater for all of society's needs, the only problem is that we do not own them."*

Actually, the **real** problem is that we do not **control** them. The examples of Nationalised industries and the Soviet Union should make this clear. In theory, they were both owned by their populations but, in practice, they were effectively owned by those who managed them — state bureaucrats and managers. They were not used to cater for our needs, but rather the needs of those who controlled them. For this reason anarchists argue that common ownership without workers' self-management in the workplace and community would be little more than state capitalism (wage labour would still exist, but the state would replace the boss).

He continues with his distortion of the concept of *"self-reliance"*:

*"Individualism (self-reliance) cannot be an alternative to socialism, where all the resources of society are at all of our disposal, and equally we all contribute what we can to society."*

Firstly, anarchists are socialists and mostly seek a (libertarian) communist society where the resources of the world are at our disposal.

Secondly, self-reliance has little to do with *"individualism"* — it has a lot to do with **individuality,** however. The difference is important.

Thirdly, in a part of the press release strangely unquoted by Mitchinson, RTS argue that their action *"celebrated the possibility of a world that encourages co-operation and sharing rather than one which rewards greed, individualism and competition."* RTS are well aware that self-reliance does not equal individualism and they are very clear that oppose individualism and desire co-operation. Given that Mitchinson quotes from their press release, he must know this and yet he asserts the opposite.

Mitchinson seems to equate self-reliance with *"individualism"* and so, presumably, capitalism. However, capitalists do not want self-reliant workers, they want order takers, people who will not question their authority. As David Noble points out, after an experiment in workers' control General Electric replaces it with a the regime that was *"designed to 'break' the pilots of their new found 'habits' of self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-respect."* [**Forces of Production**, p. 307]

Capitalists know the danger of self-reliant people. Self-reliant people question authority, think for themselves, do not follow leaders and bring these abilities into any groups they join. Thus self-reliance is not purely an individual thing, it also refers to groups **and** classes. Anarchists desire to see a self-reliant working class — a class which makes its own decisions and does not follow leaders. Thus, for anarchists, self-reliance refers to **both** individuals and groups (just as self-management and self-liberation does). Needless to say, for those in authority or those seeking authority self-reliance is an evil thing which must be combated. Hence Mitchinson's



movement had eroded their members initiative, self-reliance and spirit of revolt to such a degree that they could no longer act without their leaders instructions? It may be argued that with **better** leaders the German workers would have stopped the Nazis, but such a plea fails to understand **why** better leaders did not exist in the first place. A centralised movement inevitably produces bureaucracy and a tendency for leaders to become conservative and compromised.

All in all, rather than refute anarchism the experience of the Spanish Revolution **confirms** it. The state needs to be destroyed, **not** ignored or collaborated with, and replaced by a federation of workers' councils organised from the bottom-up. By failing to do this, the CNT did ensure the defeat of the revolution but it hardly indicates a failure of anarchism. Rather it indicates a failure of anarchists who made the wrong decision in extremely difficult circumstances.

Obviously it is impossible to discuss the question of the C.N.T. during the Spanish Revolution in depth here. We address the issue of Marxist interpretations of Spanish Anarchist history in the appendix *"Marxism and Spanish Anarchism."* Section 20 of that appendix discusses the C.N.T.'s decision to collaborate with the Republican State against Franco as well as its implications for anarchism.

## 10. Do anarchists ignore the fact that ideas change through struggle?

The SWP try and generalise from these experiences:

> *"In different ways, the lessons of Russia and Spain are the same. The organisational questions thrown up in particular struggles are critical when it comes to the working class challenging capitalism.*
>
> *"Workers face conflicting pressures. On the one hand, they are forced to compete in the labour market.*

the "leaders," to the "workers' party" who will govern on their behalf. The "leaders" of the CNT quite rightly rejected such this position — unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time and decided to ignore their politics in favour of collaborating with other anti-fascist unions and parties against Franco.

Simply put, either the workers' have the power or the leaders do. To confuse the rule of the party with workers' self-management of society lays the basis for party dictatorship (as happened in Russia). Sadly, the SWP do exactly this and fail to learn the lessons of the Russian Revolution.

Therefore, the SWP's argument against anarchism is logically flawed. Yes, the CNT did not take state power. However, neither did it destroy the state, as anarchist theory argues. Rather it ignored the state and this was its undoing. Thus the SWP attacks anarchism for anarchists failing to act in an anarchist manner! How strange.

One last point. The events of the Spanish Revolution are important in another way for evaluating anarchism and Marxism. Faced with the military coup, the Spanish government did nothing, even refusing to distribute arms to the workers. The workers, however, took the initiative, seized arms by direct action and took to the streets to confront the army. Indeed, the dynamic response of the CNT members to Franco's coup compared to the inaction of the Marxist inspired German workers movement faced with Hitler's taking of power presents us with another example of the benefits of federalism against centralism, of anarchism against Marxism. The federal structure of the CNT had accustomed its members to act for themselves, to show initiative and act without waiting for orders from the centre. The centralised German system did the opposite.

The SWP will argue, of course, that the workers were mislead by their leaders ("who were only Marxists in name only"). The question then becomes: why did they not act for themselves? Perhaps because the centralised German workers'



diatribe — it is the cry of the would-be leader who is afraid his followers will not respect his authority.

## 20. Is anarchism an example of *"Philosophical idealism"*?

He turns to the May Day demonstration:

> *"Guerrilla gardening and its related varieties that have sprung up in various places, is nothing more than an offshoot of the old utopian idea of changing society by example."*

Actually, it was a specific demonstration to encourage people to get involved in collective action, to have a good time and challenge authority and the status quo. It was an attempt to change society by example only in the sense that it would encourage others to act, to challenge the status quo and get involved in collective action. If Mitchinson was consistent he would have to oppose **every** demonstration that occurred before the final insurrection that created the "workers' state" — a demonstration is, by its very nature, an example to others of what is possible, an example of our collective strength and our desire for change. You may be critical of the nature of the guerrilla gardening action (and many anarchists are), but you cannot misrepresent its nature as Mitchinson does and be expected to be taken seriously.

He continues:

> *"The roots of this scheme lie in idealist philosophy. Philosophical idealism refers to the notion that people's actions are a consequence of their thoughts, that ideas and not our conditions of life determine our outlook. When, through a long process of accumulation, we change people's minds, then they will live differently, capitalism will simply*

> *be redundant. The capitalist class themselves will presumably sit idly by and watch their system fall apart."*

Given that the "anti-capitalist" demonstrations have meet extensive state violence, it is clear that those involved are well aware that capitalist class will not just watch its power disappear.

Also, calling RTS's action *"idealist philosophy"* is quite ironic for someone who seems intent in ignoring the history of Social Democracy and dismisses attempts to analyse the Bolsheviks in power as *"bourgeois slanders."* However, Mitchinson in his diatribe forgets one of the basic arguments of materialism — namely that ideas themselves are part of the material world and so influence society and how it develops. He rejects the notion that peoples thoughts and ideas determine their actions. He obviously thinks that people operate on auto-pilot, not thinking about their actions. However, in reality, what people do is dependent on their thoughts — they think about their actions and what motivates them influences their activity. If thoughts did not determine people's actions then Mitchinson would not have spent so much time writing this article!

Thus Mitchinson is well aware of the importance of ideas in social change, at least implicitly. Indeed, he argues for the need for a *"mass Labour youth organisation which, fighting for a socialist programme, could attract these young workers and students."* To state the obvious, a socialist programme is a means to *"change people's minds"* and present the possibility of creating a new society. Does he seriously think a socialist revolution is possible without changing people's minds, getting them to desire a socialist society?

Moreover, if he had read Bakunin he would be aware that anarchists consider the class struggle as the way to change people's ideas. As Bakunin argued:



vol. 1, p. 259] In other words, the state does not disappear, it is destroyed and replaced with a new, libertarian, form of social structure. Thus the SWP misrepresents anarchist theory.

Thirdly, yes, the Catalan government did offer to stand aside for the C.N.T. and the C.N.T. rejected the offer. Why? The SWP claim that *"the C.N.T. believed that any form of state was wrong"* and that is why it did not take power. That is true, but what the SWP fail to mention is more important. The C.N.T. refused to implement libertarian communism after the defeat of the army uprising in July 1936 simply because it did not want to be isolated nor have to fight the republican government as well as the fascists (needless to say, such a decision, while understandable, was wrong). But such historical information would confuse the reader with facts and make their case against anarchism less clear-cut.

Ironically the SWP's attack on the CNT indicates well the authoritarian basis of its politics and its support of soviets simply as a means for the party leaders to take power. After all, they obviously consider it a mistake for the *"leaders of the CNT"* to refuse power. Trotsky made the same point, arguing that:

> *"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Yet the SWP say they, and their political tradition, are for *"workers' power"* yet, in practice, they clearly mean that power will be seized, held and exercised by the workers' leaders. A strange definition of "workers' power," we must admit but one that indicates well the differences between anarchists and Marxists. The former aim for a society based on workers' self-management. The latter desire a society in which workers' delegate their power to control society (i.e. their own lives) to

It is hard to know where to start with this distortion of history.

Firstly, we have to point out that the C.N.T. did lead a workers' uprising in 1936 but in was in response to a military coup and occurred all across Spain. The army was not *"fighting against Franco's fascist forces"* but rather had been the means by which Franco had tried to impose his version of fascism. Indeed, as the SWP know fine well, one of the first acts the CNT did in the Spanish Revolution was to organise workers' militias to go fight the army in those parts of Spain in which the unions (particularly the CNT which lead the fighting) did not defeat it by street fighting. Thus the C.N.T. faced the might of the Spanish army rising in a fascist coup. That, as we shall see, influenced its decisions.

By not mentioning (indeed, lying about) the actual conditions the CNT faced in July 1936, the SWP ensure the reader cannot understand what happened and why the CNT made the decisions it did. Instead the reader is encouraged to think it was purely a result of anarchist theory. Needless to say, the SWP have a fit when it is suggested the actions of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War were simply the result of Leninist ideology and unaffected by the circumstances they were made in. The logic is simple: the mistakes of Marxists are **never** their fault, **never** derive from Marxist politics and are always attributable to circumstances (regardless of the facts); the mistakes of anarchists, however, **always** derive from their politics and can never be explained by circumstances (regardless of counter-examples and those circumstances). Once this is understood, the reason why the SWP distorted the history of the Spanish Revolution becomes clear.

Secondly, anarchism does not think that the *"capitalist state machine"* will *"simply disappear."* Rather, anarchists think that (to quote Kropotkin) the revolution *"must smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of workers' associations and communes] and it will act accordingly."* [**No Gods, No Masters**,



> *"the germs of [socialist thought] ... [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct ... What impedes the swifter development of this salutary though among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? ... they are insufficient ... [and] who will conduct this propaganda? ... [The] workers' world ... is left with but a single path, that of* ***emancipation through practical action*** *... It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means* ***trade-unions***, ***organisation*** *... To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses ... As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle, ... Socialism replaces religion in his mind... through practice and collective experience ... the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies ... The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily ... recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 102–3]

Thus anarchists are aware that experience determines thought but we are also aware that thought is essential for action. We recognise the importance of ideas in the class strug-

gle but we also realise that the ideas people have change as a result of that struggle. To state otherwise is to misrepresent anarchist thought.

## 21. How is Mitchinson's critique self-contradictory?

He continues his distortion:

> *"Whilst believing in a revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism, anarchists argue that it must be replaced by…nothing."*

This is ironic for quite a few reasons. Firstly, above Mitchinson claimed that anarchists did not aim to overthrow capitalism, just the state. Now he is claiming we **do** believe in overthrowing capitalism. Secondly, he quoted Trotsky saying that anarchists just ignore the state. Now Mitchinson states we aim to overthrow the capitalism via revolutionary struggle. How do you overthrow something via revolutionary struggle by ignoring it? His critique is not even internally consistent.

Moreover, he is well aware what anarchists want to replace capitalism with, after all he quotes an anarchist conference which stated that they aimed for *"the creation of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation based on work and equality"*! Bakunin was always arguing that the International Workers Association should become *"an earnest organisation of workers associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 110] In other words, the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association of workers, first in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206] Even Engels acknowledged that the anarchists aimed



that it is not, in fact, "anti-capitalist" but rather in favour of state capitalism and any appropriation of popular slogans was always under the firm understanding that the Bolshevik interpretation of these ideas is what will be introduced.

Therefore the SWP's attempt to re-write Russian History. The actual events of the Russian Revolution indicate well the authoritarian and state-capitalist nature of Leninist politics.

## 9. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Spanish Revolution?

The SWP, after re-writing Russian history, move onto Spanish history:

> *"It did not happen in Spain in 1936. The C.N.T., a trade union heavily influenced by anarchist ideas, led a workers' uprising in the city of Barcelona that year. Workers' councils effectively ran the city.*
>
> *"But the capitalist state machine did not simply disappear. The government and its army, which was fighting against Franco's fascist forces, remained, although it had no authority in Barcelona.*
>
> *"The government even offered to hand power over to the leaders of the C.N.T. But the C.N.T. believed that any form of state was wrong. It turned down the possibility of forming a workers' state, which could have broken the fascists' coup and the capitalist state.*
>
> *"Worse, it accepted positions in a government that was dominated by pro-capitalist forces.*
>
> *"That government crushed workers' power in Barcelona, and in doing so fatally undermined the fight against fascism."*

*dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)"* and that *"the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers"* was, in fact, *"in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government"* simply because *"the history of revolutionary movements"* had *"shown"* that *"the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes."* He notes that *"[u]ndoubtably, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy."* [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 34 and p. 32]

He confused state capitalism with socialism. *"State capitalism,"* he wrote, *"is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 259] He argued that socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly* ***made to benefit the whole people****; by this token it* ***ceases*** *to be capitalist monopoly."* [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 37]

As Peter Arshinov argued, a *"fundamental fact"* of the Bolshevik revolution was *"that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of 'working classes' — producers managed by authority from above."* He stressed that Bolshevik political and economic ideas may have *"remov[ed] the workers from the hands of individual capitalists"* but they *"delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital … Wage labour has remained what it was before, expect that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State… . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."* [**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 35 and p. 71] Therefore, looking at Bolshevism in power and in theory it is clear



to *"dispose all the authorities, abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Anyone with even a basic knowledge of anarchist theory would know this. And given that Mitchinson stated that *"Marx saw a future society without a state"* as well and that he quotes Trotsky as arguing *"Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state"* we can only assume that Marxists also aim at replacing it, eventually, when the state *"withers away,"* with *"nothing."*

This sentence, more than any other, shows the level which some Marxists will sink to when discussing anarchism. It shows that the standard Marxist critique of anarchism is little more than an inconsistent collection of lies, distortion and misrepresentation. Mitchinson not only contradicts his ideological gurus, he even contradicts himself! That is truly impressive.

## 22. How did Trotsky make the trains run on time?

Mitchinson asks:

> *"Yet with no central apparatus, no organisation, how would the trains run on time, how could organ transplants be organised, how could the world's resources be channelled into permanently overcoming famine."*

Firstly, we must note the usual fallacy — being opposed to a *"central apparatus"* does not imply *"no organisation."* Instead of centralised organisation, anarchists propose **federal** organisations in which co-ordination is achieved by collective decision making from the bottom up. In other words, rather than delegate power into the hands of *"leaders"*, an anarchist organisation leaves power at the bottom and co-ordination results from

collective agreements that reflect the needs of those directly affected by them. Thus a federal organisation co-ordinates activities but in a bottom-up fashion rather than top-down, as in a centralised body.

Secondly, needless to say, anarchists are quite clear on who would make the trains run on time — the railway workers. Anarchists are firm supporters of workers' self-management. Anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchist theory would know that. Moreover, the experience of workers' self-management of the railways by the anarchist union the CNT during the Spanish Revolution indicates that such anarchism can, and does, ensure that the trains run on time In contrast, the experience of Russia — when the Bolsheviks did create a *"central apparatus"* — proved a total failure. It is quite appropriate that Mitchinson uses the *"trains running on time"* example, after all it is what apologists for Italian fascism praised Mussolini for! This is because Trotsky (when he ran the railways) did so in a way that Mussolini would have been proud of — he subjected the railway workers to military discipline:

> *"Due to the Civil War — and to other factors less often mentioned, such as the attitude of the railway workers to the 'new' regime — the Russian railways had virtually ceased to function. Trotsky, Commissar for Transport, was granted wide emergency powers [in August 1920] to try out his theories of 'militarisation of labour.' He started out placing the railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops under martial law. When the railwaymen's trade union objected, he summarily ousted its leaders and,* ***with the full support and endorsement of the Party leadership,*** *'appointed others willing to do his bidding. He repeated the procedure in other unions of transport workers.'"* [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 67]



Bolshevik practice and Bolshevik ideology as well as how both differed from popular activity and ideas.

Hence the comments by Russian Anarchist Peter Arshinov:

> *"Another no less important peculiarity is that [the] October [revolution of 1917] has two meanings — that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party [the Marxist-Communists] that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses."* [**The Two Octobers**]

The members of the "anti-capitalist" movements should bear that in mind when the SWP uses the same rhetoric as they do. Appearances are always deceptive when it comes to Leninists. The history of the Russian Revolution indicates that while Leninists like the SWP can use the same words as popular movements, their interpretation of them can differ drastically.

Take, for example, the expression "anti-capitalist." The SWP will claim that they, too, are "anti-capitalist" but, in fact, they are only opposed to "free market" capitalism and actually support state capitalism. Lenin, for example, argued that workers' must *"**unquestioningly obey the single will** of the leaders of labour"* in April 1918 along with granting *"individual executives*

**grad**, p. 154] Given that the defining aspect of capitalism is wage labour, the Russian workers' raised a clearly socialist demand that entailed its abolition. It was the Bolshevik party, we must note, who failed to raise above a *"trade union conscious"* in this and so many other cases.

Therefore, rather than being at the forefront of struggle and ideas, the Bolsheviks were, in fact, busy trying to catch up. History has repeated itself in the anti-capitalist demonstrations We should point out that anarchists have supported the idea of workers' self-management of production since 1840 and, unsurprisingly enough, were extremely active in the factory committee movement in 1917.

The second lesson to be gained from the Russian Revolution is that while the Bolsheviks happily (and opportunistically) took over popular slogans and introduced them into their rhetoric, they rarely meant the same thing to the Bolsheviks as they did to the masses. For example, as noted above, the Bolsheviks took up the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* but rather than mean that the Soviets would manage society directly they actually meant the Soviets would delegate their power to a Bolshevik government which would govern society in their name. Similarly with the term *"workers' control of production."* As S.A. Smith correctly notes, Lenin used *"the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees."* In fact Lenin's *"proposals ... [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154] Once in power, the Bolsheviks systematically undermined the popular meaning of workers' control and replaced it with their own, statist conception. This ultimately resulted in the introduction of *"one-man management"* (with the manager appointed from above by the state). This process is documented in Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, who also indicates the clear links between



He ruled the *"central apparatus"* he created, called the Tsektran, *"along strict military and bureaucratic lines."* [**Ibid.**] The trains did start moving again, of course. The question is — do workers manage their own activity or does some other group. Trotsky and Lenin in power decided for the latter — and built the *"centralised apparatus"* required to ensure that result. Needless to say, Trotsky did not justify his militarisation of work in terms of necessary evils resulting from appalling objective conditions. Rather he saw it as a matter of *"principle"*:

> "The working class cannot be left wandering all over Russia. They must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers."
>
> "The very principle of compulsory labour is for the Communist quite unquestionable ... the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power ... and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation."
>
> "The introduction of compulsory labour service is unthinkable without the application ... of the methods of militarisation of labour." [quoted by M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61 and p. 66]

Why *"principle"*? Perhaps because Marx and Engels had stated in **The Communist Manifesto** that one of the measures required during the revolution was the *"[e]stablishment of industrial armies"*? [**Selected Writings**, p. 53]

Moreover, the experience of *"central apparatus"* in Bolshevik Russia helped create famine — the vast bureaucracy spawned by the "workers' state" could not handle the information a centralised distribution system required. Food rotted

in trains waiting for bureaucrats to *"channel"* resources (and, needless to say, the bureaucrats never went hungry).

## 23. Can centralised planning meet the needs of the whole of society?

Our Marxist friend then quotes **Maybe**:

> *"The radical social movements that are increasingly coming together don't want to seize power but to dissolve it. They are dreaming up many autonomous alternative forms of social organisation, forms that are directly linked to the specific needs of locality. What might be an alternative to capitalism for people living currently in a housing estate in Croydon is completely different to what might be suitable for the inhabitants of the slums of Delhi."*

He comments on these very sensible words:

> *"It cannot be of no concern to us what form a new society will take in different countries or even different regions. The economic power we have created over centuries can and must be used in a planned, rational way to eradicate hunger, disease and illiteracy. It must be used in the interests of the whole of society."*

Obviously, the needs of actual people, what sort of society they want, is irrelevant to Marxism. Also ignored is the fact that different cultures will have different visions of what a free society will be like. Thus, for Mitchinson, everyone, everywhere, will be subject to the same form of society — *"in the interests of society."* However, as Bakunin argued, the state *"is an arbitrary creature in whose breast all the positive, living, individual or local interests of the people clash, destroy and absorb*



> "The idea of soviets ... councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it is necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the real production of national wealth by their own efforts.
>
> "But as long as the country is governed by a party dictatorship, the workers' and peasants' councils evidently lose their entire significance. They are reduced to the passive rule formerly played by the 'States General,' when they were convoked by the king and had to combat an all-powerful royal council." [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 254–5]

In other words, the workers' councils took power in name only. Real power rested with the central government and the workers' councils become little more than a means to elect the government. Rather than manage society directly, the soviets simply became a transmission belt for the decrees and orders of the Bolshevik party. Hardly a system to inspire anyone.

However, the history of the Russian Revolution has two important lessons for members of the various anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist groups. Firstly, as we noted in section 1, is usually miles behind the class struggle and the ideas developed in it. As another example, we can point to the movement for workers' control and self-management that developed around the factory committees during the summer of 1917. It was the workers themselves, **not** the Bolshevik Party, which raised the issue of workers' self-management and control during the Russian Revolution. As historian S.A. Smith correctly summarises, the *"factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up."* [**Red Petro-**

*… [that] the Soviets … [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class these is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109]

In 1937 he continued this theme by arguing that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard."* Thus, rather than the working class as a whole *"seizing power"*, it is the *"vanguard"* which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power … is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* He mocked the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations:

> *"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

As can be seen, over a 17 year period Trotsky argued that it was the party which ruled, not the councils. The workers' councils became little more than rubber-stamps for the Bolshevik government (and not even that, as the central government only submitted a fraction of its decrees to the Central Executive of the national soviet, and that soviet was not even in permanent session). As Russian Anarchist Voline made clear *"for, the anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 213] In the words of Kropotkin:



*each other into the abstraction known as the common interest, the* ***public good*** *or the* ***public welfare****, and where all real wills are dissolved into the other abstraction that bears the name of* ***the will of the people.*** *It follows that this alleged will of the people is never anything but the sacrifice and dissolution of all the real wants of the population, just as this so-called public good is nothing but the sacrifice of their interests."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 265–6]

The different needs of different areas and regions must be the starting point of any social reconstruction, the basis on which we create specific programmes to improve our societies, eco-systems and world. If we do not recognise the diversity inherent in a world of billions of people, millions of eco-systems, thousands of cultures, hundreds of regions then we cannot use the resources of society to improve our lives. Instead we would have uniform plan imposed on everything which, by its very nature, cannot take into accounts the real needs of those who make up *"the whole of society."* In other words, the resources of the world must not be used by an abstraction claiming to act *"in the interests of society"* but rather by the people who actually make up society themselves — if we do that we ensure that their interests are meet directly as they manage their own affairs and that their use reflects the specific requirements of specific people and eco-systems and not some abstraction called *"the interests of society"* which, by its centralised nature, would sacrifice those interests.

Of course, it seems somewhat strange that Mitchinson thinks that people in, say, New Delhi or Croyden, will not seek to eradicate hunger, disease and illiteracy as they see fit, co-operating with others as and when they need to and creating the federative organisations required to do so. The need to share experiences and resources does not conflict with the different areas experimenting in different ways, expressing themselves in ways which suit their particular needs and difficulties. As any ecologist could tell you, different

eco-systems need different forms of care. The same with communities — Mitchinson would drown local needs in the name of an artificial construct.

He continues:

> *"That can only be achieved by the democratic planning of society where the power at our fingertips could be used with due respect for the future of the planet, the conservation of it's resources, our own working conditions, and living standards. Whether we like it or not, growing a few carrots on empty plots of land will not eradicate hunger and famine."*

How can *"democratic planning"* of the whole *"of society"* take into account the needs of specific localities, eco-systems, communities? It cannot. Respect for the future of our planet means respecting the fundamental law of nature — namely that conformity is death. Diversity is the law of life — which means that a future socialist society must be libertarian, organised from the bottom up, based on local self-management and a respect for diversity. Such a federal structures does not preclude co-ordinated activity (or the creation of democratic **plans**) — the reverse in fact, as federalism exists to allow co-ordination — but instead of being imposed by a few *"leaders"* as in a centralised system, it is the product of local needs and so reflective of the needs of real people and eco-systems.

As for his comment about *"due respect of the future of the planet"* is obviously inspired by *"the youth"* being concerned about ecological issues. However, Leninism's desire for centralised states and planning excludes an ecological perspective by definition. As Bakunin argued:

> *"What man, what group of individuals, no matter how great their genius, would dare to think themselves able to embrace and understand the plethora*



## 8. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Russian Revolution?

Their history lesson continues:

> *"This happened in Russia in October 1917 in a revolution led by the Bolshevik Party."*

In reality, this did not happen. In October 1917, the Bolshevik Party took power in the name of the workers' councils, the councils themselves did not take power. This is confirmed by Trotsky, who notes that the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917 *"was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? ... Lenin's position was this: ... the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets."* Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. Moreover, he states that *"to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us."* He continued by noting that it was *"one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets."* The Soviet Congress just provided *"the legal cover"* for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [**The Lessons of October**]

In 1920, he argued that *"[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only be means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party*

*will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade ... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155]). In addition, the similarities with the Commune's political ideas and Proudhon's are clear, as are the similarities between the Russian Soviets and Bakunin's views on revolution.

So, as well as predicting the degeneration of social democracy and the Russian revolution, anarchists have also predicted such key aspects of revolutionary situations as organising on the basis of workplace and having delegates mandated and subject to instant recall. Such predictions flow from taking part in social movements and analysing their tendencies. Moreover, a revolution is the resisting of current authorities and an act of self-liberation and so its parallels with anarchism are clear. As such the class struggle, revolutionary movements and revolutions have a libertarian basis and tendencies and, therefore, it is unsurprising that anarchist ideas have spontaneously developed in them. Thus we have a two way interaction between ideas and action. Anarchist ideas have been produced spontaneously by the class struggle due to its inherent nature as a force confronting authority and its need for self-activity and self-organisation. Anarchism has learned from that struggle and influenced it by its generalisations of previous experiences and its basis in opposing hierarchy. Anarchist predictions, therefore, come as no surprise.

Therefore, Marxists have not only been behind the class struggle itself, they have also been behind anarchism in terms of practical ideas on a social revolution and how to organise to transform society. While anarchist ideas have been confirmed by the class struggle, Marxist ones have had to be revised to bring them closer to the actual state of the struggle and to the theoretical ideas of anarchism. And the SWP have the cheek to present these ideas as if their tradition had thought of them!

Little wonder the SWP fail to present an honest account of anarchism.



> *of interests, attitudes and activities so various in every country, every province, locality and profession."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]

Diversity is the basis of any eco-system. Centralism cannot, as Bakunin makes clear, embrace it.

Needless to say, Mitchinson's comments about carrots is pure stupidity and an insult to the intelligence of his audience.

## 24. Is technology neutral?

Mitchinson goes on:

> *"We have the power to do just that, but only if we combine new technology, industry and the talents and active participation of millions."*

Needless to say, he fails to indicate how the millions **can** participate in a *"centralised apparatus"* beyond electing their *"leaders."* Which indicates the fallacy of Marxism — it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — that precludes that participation.

In addition, he fails to note that technology and industry have been developed by capitalists to enhance their own power. As we argued in section D.10, technology cannot be viewed in isolation from the class struggle. This means that industry and technology was not developed to allow the active participation of millions. The first act of any revolution will be seizing of the means of life — including industry and technology — by those who use it and, from that moment on, their radical transformation into **appropriate** technology and industry, based on the needs of the workers, the community and the planet. Mitchinson obvious shares the common Marxist failing of believing technology and industry is neutral. In this he follows Lenin. As S.A. Smith correctly summarises:

> *"Lenin believed that socialism could be built only on the basis of large-scale industry as developed by capitalism, with its specific types of productivity and social organisation of labour. Thus for him, capitalist methods of labour-discipline or one-man management were not necessarily incompatible with socialism. Indeed, he went so far as to consider them to be inherently progressive, failing to recognise that such methods undermined workers' initiative at the point of production. This was because Lenin believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed, ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the 'proletarian' character of state power... There is no doubt that Lenin did conceive proletarian power in terms of the central state and lacked a conception of localising such power at the point of production."* [**Red Petrograd**, pp. 261–2]

The Russian workers, unsurprisingly, had a different perspective:

> *"Implicit in the movement for workers' control was a belief that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In their battle to democratise the factory, in their emphasis on the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation, the factory committees had become aware — in a partial and groping way, to be sure — that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute ... inscribed within their practice was a distinctive vision of socialism, central to which was workplace democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 261]



As can be seen, long before Lenin's turn towards the soviets as a means of the Bolsheviks taking power, **anarchists**, not Marxists, had argued that we must counterpose the council of workers' delegates (by trade in the case of the Jura federation, by workplace in the case of the later anarcho-syndicalist unions, anarchist theory and the soviets). Anarchists clearly saw that, to quote Bakunin, *"[n]o revolution could succeed ... today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141] Unlike Marx, who clearly saw a political revolution (the conquest of state power) coming **before** the economic transformation of society (*"The political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes and therefore of class-rule."* [Marx, **Op. Cit.**, p. 290]). This is why anarchists saw the social revolution in terms of economic and social organisation and action as its first steps were to eliminate both capitalism and the state.

Rees, in other words, is simply stating anarchist theory as if Marxists have been arguing the same thing since 1871!

Moreover, anarchists predicted other ideas that Marx took from the experience of the Paris Commune. Marx praised the fact that each delegate to the Commune was *"at any time revocable and bound by the* ***mandat imperatif*** *(formal instructions) of his constituents ... [and so] strictly responsible agents."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 288] Anarchists had held this position a number of years **before** the Commune introduced it. Proudhon was arguing in 1848 for *"universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63] We find Bakunin arguing exactly the same. For example, in 1868 he wrote that the *"Revolutionary Communal Council*

*"The following measures strike us as essential to the welfare of the revolution, every bit as much as armed struggle against its enemies:*

*"The insurgents must confiscate social capital, landed estates, mines, housing, religious and public buildings, instruments of labour, raw materials, gems and precious stones and manufactured products:*

*"All political, administrative and judicial authorities are to be abolished.*

*"... What should the organisational measures of the revolution be?*

"Immediate and spontaneous establishment of trade bodies: provisional assumption by those of ... social capital ...: local federation of a trades bodies and labour organisation:

"Establishment of neighbourhood groups and federations of same ...

*[...]*

*"[T]he federation of all the revolutionary forces of the insurgent Communes ... Federation of Communes and organisation of the masses, with an eye to the revolution's enduring until such time as all reactionary activity has been completely eradicated.*

*[...]*

*"Once trade bodies have been have been established, the next step is to organise local life. The organ of this life is to be the federation of trades bodies and it is this local federation which is to constitute the future Commune."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 246–7]



The movement for workers' control was undermined and finally replaced by one-man management by the kind of *"central apparatus"* Mitchinson urges us to build (see M. Brinton's classic work **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for more details). Those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it.

He goes on:

> *"The economic power we have created can be compared to the destructive force of lightning, untamed and anarchic under the market, yet organised into cables and wires electricity transforms our lives. Industry is not the enemy, nor are machines. The state is, but it is a symptom not the disease. It is capitalism and its ownership of the economy, its stewardship of society that we have to replace."*

However, unlike electricity, *"economic power"* requires people to operate it. The question is not whether *"machines"* are the enemy (often they are, as machines are used by capitalists to weaken the power of workers and control them). The question is whether the future society we aim at is one based on workers' and community self-management or whether it is based on an authoritarian system of delegated power. It is clear that Marxists like Mitchinson desire the latter — indeed, as is clear from his diatribe, he cannot comprehend an alternative to hierarchical organisation.

Given that one of the things capitalism and the state have in common is a hierarchical, top-down structure, it is clear that any revolutionary movement must fight both — at the same time.

## 25. Do anarchists ignore the *"strength of the working class"*?

Mitchinson argues that:

> *"The task of our time is to combine the strength and experience of the working class and its mighty organisations with the power and energy of the youth internationally, on the basis of a clear understanding of what capitalism is, what the state is, and a programme for changing society. That requires a combination of theory and action. In that combination lies the strength of Marxism."*

The first question is surely **what** *"mighty organisations"* of the working class is he talking about. Is it the Labour Party? Or is it the trade unions? Probably the latter — if so, the question is how effective have these *"mighty organisations"* been recently? The answer must, surely, be "not very." Why is that? In union there is strength, as anarchists have long been aware. Why has this strength been so lacking? Simply because the unions are centralised, bureaucratic and run from the top down. They have placed numerous barriers in front of their members when they have taken militant action. That is why anarchists urge workers to form rank-and-file controlled organisations to manage their own struggles and take back the power they have delegated to their so-called leaders. Only in this way, by building truly revolutionary organisations like workers' councils (soviets), factory committees, community assemblies and so on can they really create a *"mighty"* force. In other words, anarchists are well aware of the strength of working class people and their power to change society — indeed, as proven above, anarchism is based on that awareness and organise appropriately!

The second question is surely to ask whether Mitchinson is aware that **Reclaim the Streets** have been building links with rank and file trade union militants for years — long before Mitchinson decided to enlighten them with *"the strength of Marxism."* In other words, *"the strength of Marxism"* seems to rest in telling radical working class people to do what they have already doing! Such strength is truly amazing and must



The Paris Commune, as Marx himself argued, was *"formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town."* [*"The Civil War in France"*, **Selected Works**, p. 287] As Marx made clear, it was definitely **not** based on delegates from workplaces and so could **not** unify political and economic power. Indeed, to state that the Paris Commune was a soviet is simply a joke, as is the claim that Marxists supported soviets as revolutionary organs to smash and replace the state from 1871. In fact Marxists did not subscribe to this *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* until 1917 when Lenin argued that the Soviets would be the best means of ensuring a Bolshevik government.

Indeed the **only** political movement which took the position Rees falsely ascribes to Marxism was anarchism. This can be clearly seen from Bakunin's works, a few representative quotes we have provided above. Moreover, Bakunin's position dates, we must stress, from **before** the Paris Commune. This position has been argued by revolutionary anarchists ever since — decades before Marxists did.

Similarly, Rees argues that *"the socialist revolution must counterpose the soviet to parliament ... because it needs an organ which combines economic power — the power to strike and take control of the workplaces — with an insurrectionary bid for political power, breaking the old state."* [**Ibid.**] However, he is just repeating anarchist arguments made decades before Lenin's temporary conversion to the soviets. In the words of the anarchist Jura Federation (written in 1880):

> *"The bourgeoisie's power over the popular masses springs from economic privileges, political domination and the enshrining of such privileges in the laws. So we must strike at the wellsprings of bourgeois power, as well as its various manifestations.*

> *delegates … vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates… all provinces, communes and associations … by first reorganising on revolutionary lines … [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces … [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction … [and for] self-defence … [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations … organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation…"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–2]

And:

> *"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206]

Thus it is somewhat ironic to have Leninists present basic anarchist ideas as if they had thought of them first!

Then again, the ability of the Marxists to steal anarchist ideas and claim them as their own is well know. They even rewrite history to do so. For example, the SWP's John Rees in the essay *"In Defence of October"* argues that *"since Marx's writings on the Paris Commune"* a *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* was *"that the soviet is a superior form of democracy because it unifies political and economic power."* [**International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 25] Nothing could be further from the truth, as Marx's writings on the Paris Commune prove.



explain the prominent role Leninists have had in the numerous anti-capitalist demonstrations and organisations recently.

Needless to say, **anarchism** provides *"a clear understanding of what capitalism is, what the state is, and a programme for changing society. That requires a combination of theory and action."* This has been proven above when we corrected Mitchinson's numerous errors regarding anarchist theory. Moreover, as far as combining theory and action goes, it is clear that **anarchism** has been doing that of late, **not** Marxism. While anarchists have been at the forefront of the anti-capitalist demonstrations, working with others as equals, Marxists have been noticeable by their absence. Combining theory and practice, non-hierarchically organised direct action closed down the WTO and presented a clear message to the oppressed around the world — **resistance is fertile.** What have Marxists achieved? Apparently producing articles such as these, distorting the politics and activities of those who actually **are** changing the world rather than just interpreting it. That they cannot produce an honest critique of anarchism indicates the uselessness of their politics.

## 26. What does Mitchinson's article tell about the nature of Trotskyism?

He finishes his diatribe as follows:

> *"If you want to fight against capitalism, do so fully armed with a socialist programme and perspective. Join with us in the struggle for the socialist transformation of the planet."*

It is clear that to be *"fully armed with a socialist programme"* means to critique that which you know nothing about, spread slanders and lie about what your opponents actually think. There **is** much to be critical of in the recent anti-capitalist

demonstrations and the various groups that have helped organise and take part in them. Anarchists have been the first to point these out. However, we have a lot to learn from them as well — they are struggling against capitalism and, as Kropotkin argues, *"Anarchism ... originated in everyday struggles"* and *"the Anarchist movement was renewed each time it received an impression from some great practical lesson: it derived its origin from the teachings of life itself."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 58 and p. 57]

Thus we must critique these movements honestly and as equals — Mitchinson, as can be seen, does neither. He slanders those involved and dismisses out of hand their experiences and the reasons that have brought them to struggle in a specific way against the dominant society. In this he follows Lenin, who argued in **Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder** that western revolutionaries ignore their own experiences in their own — and similar — countries and instead follow the "lessons" of experiences gained in a near pre-capitalist, absolutist state. The stupidity of such an approach is clear.

Mitchinson presents those in struggle with the ultimatum "subscribe to our platform or be denounced." Little wonder that Leninists are non-existent in the groups that have taken part and organised the anti-capitalist demonstrations — not willing to learn from those involved in the class struggle, all they can do is act as petty sectarians. Sectarians expect working class people to relate to their predetermined political positions, whereas revolutionaries apply our politics to the conditions we face as members of the working class. For Leninists revolutionary consciousness is not generated by working class self-activity, but is embodied in the party. The important issues facing the working class — and how to fight — are to be determined not by the workers ourselves, but by the leadership of the party, who are the "vanguard of the working class". Hence Mitchinson's dismissal (in a particularly dishonest manner, we must stress) of those involved in struggle and their experiences.



> *and many other great struggles. Socialists argue that these democratic workers' organisations need to take power from the capitalists and break up their state."*

Anarchists agree. Indeed, they argued that workers' organisations should *"break up"* and replace the state long before Lenin discovered this in 1917. For example, Bakunin argued in the late 1860s that the International Workers' Association, an *"international organisation of workers' associations from all countries"*, would *"be able to take the revolution into its own hands"* and be *"capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie."* The *"natural organisation of the masses"* was *"organisation by trade association,"* in other words, by unions, *"from the bottom up."* The means of creating socialism would be *"**emancipation through practical action** ... workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trades unions**, **organisation**"* The very process of struggle would create the framework of a new society, a federation of workers' councils, as *"strikes indicate a certain collective strength already, a certain understanding among the workers ... each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups."* He stresses the International was a product of the class war as it *"has not created the war between the exploiter and the exploited; rather, the requirements of that war have created the International."* Thus the seeds of the future society are created by the class struggle, by the needs of workers to organise themselves to resist the boss and the state. [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 110, p. 139, p. 103 and p. 150]

He stressed that the revolution would be based on federations of workers' associations, in other words, workers' councils:

> *"the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... [will] constitute the Commune ... [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ...*

> *that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration-corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national-freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrational centralisation."* [*"Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism"*, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 52]

So, anarchists agree, in *"big workers' struggles"* organisation is essential and can form an alternative to the capitalist state. However, such a framework only becomes an "authority" when power is transferred from the base into the hands of an executive committee at the top. Strike and community assemblies, by being organs of self-management, are not an "authority" in the same sense that the state is or the boss is. Rather, they are the means by which people can manage their own struggles (and so affairs) directly, to govern themselves and so do without the need for hierarchical authority.

The SWP, in other words, confuse two very different things.

### 7. What is ironic about the SWP's comment that workers' councils must *"break up"* the capitalist state?

After misunderstanding basic concepts, the SWP treat us to a history lesson:

> *"Such councils were a feature of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German Revolution after the First World War, the Spanish Revolution of 1936,*



True "revolution" obviously lies in the unchanging ideas generated at the start of the twentieth century in a monarchy developing towards capitalism, **not** in the experiences and desires of living people fighting for freedom in the here and now. Yes, these ideas and movements can be confused and unclear — but they are living and subject to change by the influence of revolutionaries who act in a libertarian manner (i.e. as equals, willing to learn as well as teach).

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci once wrote that *"to tell the truth is a communist and revolutionary act."* However, even he did not apply this when discussing anarchism and the activities of anarchists (see Gwyn Williams' **Proletarian Order**, pp. 193–4). Be that as it may, Gramsci's point is correct. Telling the truth is a revolutionary act. If we judge Mitchinson's article by this standard then we can only conclude that neither he nor the politics he defends are revolutionary or communist.

Thus we find his ending comment truly a *"flight of fancy"* — after reading our comments above, we hope you agree with us. If you seek a **true** socialist transformation of this planet rather than its degeneration into centralised state capitalism, discover more about anarchism.

## Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's *"Marxism and Anarchism"*

In issue no. 1714 of *Socialist Worker* (dated 16th September 2000) the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) decided to expose anarchism in an article entitled *"Marxism and Anarchism."* However, their article is little more than a series of errors and distortions. We shall indicate how the SWP lies about anarchist ideas and discuss the **real** differences between anarchism and Marxism. Moreover, we will indicate that the bulk of the SWP's article just recycles common Leninist slanders about anarchism, slanders that have been refuted many times over.

## 1. What does the anti-globalisation movement tell us about the effectiveness of the "vanguard" parties like the SWP?

The inspiration for their diatribe is clear — they are worried about anarchist influence in the various anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements and demonstrations which are currently occurring across the world. As they put it:

> *"The great revolt against capitalism in Seattle last year, and similar demonstrations since, have attracted diverse groups of protesters. Anarchists, amongst others, have taken part in all of those protests."*

Yes, indeed, anarchists have been involved in these demonstrations from the start, unlike "vanguard" parties like the SWP who only became aware of the significance of these movements once they exploded in the streets. That in itself should tell us something about the effectiveness of the Bolshevik inspired politics the SWP raise as an alternative to anarchism. Rather than being at the vanguard of these demonstrations and movements, parties like the SWP have been, post-Seattle, busy trying to catch up with them. Nor is this the only time this has happened.

In Russia, in February 1917, for example, the Bolshevik party opposed the actions that produced the revolution which overthrew the Tsar. After weeks of strikes with police attacks on factories, the most oppressed part of the working class, the women textile workers, took the initiative. Demands for bread and attacks on bakeries were superseded by a massive demonstration of women workers on International Women's Day. The women had ignored a local Bolshevik directive to wait until May Day! The early slogan of *"Bread!"* was quickly followed by *"Down with the autocracy! Down with the war!"* By February 24th, half of Petrograd was on strike. The workers



> *struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.*
>
> *"Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and ... if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle."* [*"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 27]

Thus the difference between anarchists and Leninists is not whether the organisations workers' create in struggle will be the framework of a free society (or the basis of the Commune). Indeed, anarchists have been arguing this for longer than Marxists have. The difference is whether these organisations remain self-managed or whether they become part of a centralised state. In the words of Camillo Berneri:

> *"The Marxists ... foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines*

*workers' areas from the police and army, and so on."*

To state the obvious, transportation and food distribution are not *"state functions."* They are economic functions. Similarly, defence is not a *"state function"* as such — after all, individuals can and do defend themselves against aggression, strikers organise themselves to defend themselves against cops and hired strike breakers, and so on. This means that defence can be organised in a **libertarian** fashion, directly by those involved and based on self-managed workers' militias and federations of free communes. It need not be the work of a state nor need it be organised in a statist (i.e. hierarchical) fashion like, for example, the current bourgeois state and military or the Bolshevik Red Army (where the election of officers, soldiers' councils and self-governing assemblies were abolished by Trotsky in favour of officers appointed from above). So "defence" is **not** a state function.

What is a *"state function"* is imposing the will of a minority — the government, the boss, the bureaucrat — onto the population via professional bodies such as the police and military. This is what the Bolshevik state did, with workers' councils turned into state bodies executing the decrees of the government and using a specialised and hierarchical army and police force to do so. The difference is important. Luigi Fabbri sums up it well:

*"The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists ... as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to*



did go to their factories, not to work, but to hold meetings, pass resolutions and then go out to demonstrate. The Vyborg committee of the Bolsheviks opposed the strikes. Luckily for the Russian workers, and unfortunately for the Tsar, the Bolsheviks were ignored. If they had followed the Bolsheviks, the February Revolution would not have occurred!

The backward nature of the Bolshevik style of party can also be seen from events 12 years earlier. In 1905, workers spontaneously organised councils of workers' delegates ("soviets" in Russian). The soviets were based on workplaces electing recallable delegates to co-ordinate strikes and were created by the Russian workers themselves, independently of political parties.

Far from being at the vanguard of these developments the Bolsheviks were, in fact, deeply hostile to them. The Bolshevik Central Committee members in Petersburg were uneasy at the thought of a *"non-Party"* mass organisation existing side by side with their party. Instead of seeing the Soviet as a form of workers' self-organisation and self-activity (and so a key area for area for activity), they regarded it with hostility. They saw it as a rival to the party.

The St. Petersburg Bolsheviks organised a campaign against the Soviet due to its *"non-Party"* nature. They presented an ultimatum to the Soviet that it must place itself under the leadership of their party. On 24 October they had moved a resolution along the same lines in meetings at the various factories, demanding that the Soviet accept the Social Democratic programme and tactics and demanding that it must define its political stance.

The Bolshevik Central Committee then published a resolution, that was binding upon all Bolsheviks throughout Russia, insisting that the soviets must accept the party programme. Agitation against the soviet continued. On 29 October, the Bolshevik's Nevsky district committee declared inadmissible for

Social Democrats to participate in any kind of *"workers' parliament"* like the Soviet.

The Bolshevik argument was that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies should not have existed as a political organisation and that the social democrats must withdraw from it, since its existence acted negatively upon the development of the social democratic movement. The Soviet of Delegates could remain as a trade union organisation, or not at all. Indeed, the Bolsheviks presented the Soviet with an ultimatum: either accept the programme of the Bolsheviks or else disband! The Bolshevik leaders justified their hostility to the Soviet on the grounds that it represented *"the subordination of consciousness to spontaneity"* — in this they followed Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?**. When they moved their ultimatum in the Soviet it was turned down and the Bolshevik delegates, led by the Central Committee members, walked out. The other delegates merely shrugged their shoulders and proceeded to the next point on the agenda.

If workers had followed the Bolsheviks the 1905 revolution would not have occurred and the first major experience of workers' councils would never have happened. Rather than being in favour of working class self-management and power, the Bolsheviks saw revolution in terms of party power. This confusion remained during and after 1917 when the Bolsheviks finally supported the soviets (although purely as a means of ensuring a Bolshevik government).

Similarly, during the British Poll Tax rebellion of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the SWP dismissed the community based mass non-payment campaign. Instead they argued for workers to push their trade unions leadership to call strikes to overthrow the tax. Indeed, the even argued that there was a *"danger that community politics divert people from the means to won, from the need to mobilise working class activity on a collective basis"* by which they meant trade union basis. They argued that the state machine would *"wear down*



resist authority and create a structure — a strike assembly and picket line — which allows the formally subordinated workers to manage their own affairs directly and without bosses? Is it *"authoritarian"* to combat the authority of the boss, to proclaim your freedom and exercise it? Of course not. The SWP are playing with words.

Needless to say, it is a large jump from the "authority" of a strikers' assembly to that of a highly centralised "workers' state" but that, of course, is what the SWP wish the reader to do. Comparing a strikers' assembly and picket line — which is a form of self-managed association — with a state cannot be done. It fails to recognise the fundamental difference. In the strikers' assembly and picket line the strikers themselves decide policy and do not delegate power away. In a state, power is delegated into the hands of a few who then use that power as they see fit. This by necessity disempowers those at the base, who are turned into mere electors and order takers. Such a situation can only spell death of a social revolution, which requires the active participation of all if it is to succeed. It also exposes the central fallacy of Marxism, namely that it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — that precludes that participation.

## 6. Why are the SWP's examples of *"state functions"* wrong?

The SWP continue their diatribe against anarchism:

> *"Big workers' struggles throw up an alternative form of authority to the capitalist state. Militant mass strikes throw up workers' councils. These are democratic bodies, like strike committees. But they take on organising 'state functions' — transport, food distribution, defence of picket lines and*

*most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon-authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror its arms inspire in the reactionaries."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 733]

However, such an analysis is without a class basis and so will, by necessity, mislead the writer and the reader. Engels argues that revolution is the imposition by *"one part of the population"* on another. Very true — but Engels fails to indicate the nature of class society and, therefore, of a social revolution. In a class society *"one part of the population"* constantly *"imposes its will upon the other part"* all the time. In other words, the ruling class imposes its will on the working class everyday in work by the hierarchical structure of the workplace and in society by the state. Discussing the *"population"* as if it was not divided by classes, and so subject to specific forms of authoritarian social relationships, is liberal nonsense. Once we recognise that the *"population"* in question is divided into classes we can easily see the fallacy of Engels argument. In a social revolution, the act of revolution is the overthrow of the power and authority of an oppressing and exploiting class by those subject to that oppression and exploitation. In other words, it is an act of liberation in which the hierarchical power of the few over the many is eliminated and replaced by the freedom of the many to control their own lives. It is hardly authoritarian to destroy authority! Thus a social revolution is, fundamentally, an act of liberation for the oppressed who act in their own interests to end the system in which *"one part of population imposes its will upon the other"* everyday.

This applies equally to the SWP's example of a picket line. Is a picket line really authoritarian because it tries to impose its will on the boss, police or scabs? Rather, is it not defending the workers' freedom against the authoritarian power of the boss and their lackeys (the police and scabs)? Is it *"authoritarian"* to



*community resistance if it cannot tap the strength of the working class."* Of course it goes without saying that the aim of the community-based non-payment campaign was working class activity on a collective basis. This explains the creation of anti-poll tax unions, organising demonstrations, occupations of sheriff officers/bailiffs offices and council buildings, the attempts to resist warrant sales by direct action, the attempts to create links with rank-and-file trade unionists and so on. Indeed, the SWP's strategy meant mobilising **fewer** people in collective struggle as trade union members were a minority of those affected by the tax as well as automatically excluding those workers **not** in unions, people who were unemployed, housewives, students and so on. Little wonder the SWP failed to make much of an impact in the campaign.

However, once non-payment began in earnest and showed hundreds of thousands involved and refusing to pay, overnight the SWP became passionate believers in the collective class power of community based non-payment. They argued, in direct contradiction to their earlier analysis, that the state was *"shaken by the continuing huge scale of non-payment."* [quoted by Trotwatch, **Carry on Recruiting**, pp. 29–31]

The SWP proved to be totally unresponsive to new forms of struggle and organisation produced by working class people when resisting the government. In this they followed the Bolshevik tradition closely — the Bolsheviks initially ignored the soviets created during the 1905 Russian Revolution and then asked them to disband. They only recognised their importance in 1917, 12 years after that revolution was defeated and the soviets had re-appeared.

Therefore, the fact that the self-proclaimed "vanguard of the proletarian" is actually miles behind the struggle comes as no surprise. Nor are their slanders against those, like anarchists, who are at the front of the struggle unsurprising. They produced similar articles during the poll tax rebellion as well, to counter anarchist influence by smearing our ideas.

## 2. What does the SWP miss out in its definition of anarchism?

The SWP continue:

> *"Anarchism is generally taken to mean a rejection of all authority."*

One question immediately arises. What do anarchists mean by the term *"authority"*? Without knowing that, it will be difficult to evaluate the SWP's arguments.

Kropotkin provides the answer. He argued that *"the origin of the anarchist inception of society ... [lies in] the criticism ... of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society; and ... the analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the progressive movements of mankind."* He stresses that anarchism *"refuses all hierarchical organisation."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 158 and p. 137]

Thus anarchism rejects authority in the sense, to use Malatesta's words, of *"the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands a few."* [**Anarchy**, p. 40] Once this is clearly understood, it will quickly been seen that the SWP create a straw man to defeat in argument.

Moreover, by concentrating on what anarchism is **against** the SWP can ignore what anarchism is **for**. This is important as to discuss the positive ideas of anarchism would mean having to discuss anarchists ideas on organisation, why we oppose centralisation, favour federalism as a means of co-ordinating decisions, why we propose self-management in place of government, and so on. To do this would mean accurately presenting libertarian theory rather than a just series of slanders, which, of course, the SWP would hate to do.

So what is anarchism for?

Anarchism derives from the Greek for **"without authority"** or



*circumscribed, very short-sighted, and its limited perception cannot, therefore, penetrate the depth and encompass the whole complex range of popular life."* However, it is a falsehood to state that he denies the need for co-ordination of struggles and federal organisation from the bottom up in that or any other work. As he puts it, the revolution must *"foster the self-organisation of the masses into autonomous bodies, federated from the bottom upwards."* With regards to the peasants, he thinks they will *"come to an understanding, and form some kind of organisation ... to further their mutual interests ... the necessity to defend their homes, their families, and their own lives against unforeseen attack ... will undoubtedly soon compel them to contract new and mutually suitable arrangements."* The peasants would be *"freely organised from the bottom up."* [*"Letters to a Frenchman"*, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 196, p. 206 and p. 207] In this he repeated his earlier arguments concerning social revolution — claims Engels was well aware of, just as he was well aware of the statements by Bakunin in his *"Letters to a Frenchman."* In other words, Engels deliberately lied about Bakunin's political ideas. It appears that the SWP is simply following the Marxist tradition in their article.

## 5. Why does the SWP's *"picket line is 'authoritarian'"* argument totally miss the point?

They continue by arguing:

> *"Not all authority is bad. A picket line is 'authoritarian.' It tries to impose the will of the striking workers on the boss, the police and on any workers who may be conned into scabbing on the strike."*

What should strike the reader about this example is its total lack of class analysis. In this the SWP follow Engels. In his essay **On Authority**, Engels argues that a *"revolution is certainly the*

> *operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiative."* [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 86–7]

Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory and principles. Rather, we see such co-operation and co-ordination, generated from below upwards, as an essential means of exercising and protecting freedom.

The SWP's comment against anarchism is a typical Marxist position. The assumption seems to be that "centralisation" or "centralism" equals co-ordination and, because we reject centralisation, anarchists must reject co-ordination, planning and agreements. However, in actuality, anarchists have always stressed the need for federalism to co-ordinate joint activities, stressing that decision-making and organisation must flow from below upwards so that the mass of the population can manage their own affairs directly (i.e. practice self-management and so anarchy). Unfortunately, Marxists fail to acknowledge this, instead asserting we are against co-operation, co-ordination and making agreements. The SWP's arguments are an example of this, making spurious arguments about the need for making agreements.

In this the SWP are following in a long-line of Marxist inventions. For example, Engels asserted in his infamous diatribe *"The Bakuninists at work"* that Bakunin *"[a]s early as September 1870 (in his **Lettres a un francais** [Letters to a Frenchman]) ... had declared that the only way to drive the Prussians out of France by a revolutionary struggle was to do away with all forms of centralised leadership and leave each town, each village, each parish to wage war on its own."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 141]

In fact, the truth is totally different. Bakunin does, of course, reject *"centralised leadership"* as it would be *"necessarily very*



**"without rulers"** and this informs anarchist theory and visions of a better world. This means that anarchism is against the *"domination of man by man"* (and woman by woman, woman by man, and so on). However, *"[a]s knowledge has penetrated the governed masses ... the people have revolted against the form of authority then felt most intolerable. This spirit of revolt in the individual and the masses, is the natural and necessary fruit of the spirit of domination; the vindication of human dignity, and the saviour of social life."* Thus *"freedom is the necessary preliminary to any true and equal human association."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 54 and p. 40] In other words, anarchist comes from the struggle of the oppressed against their rulers and is an expression of individual and social freedom. Anarchism was born from the class struggle.

This means, positively, that anarchists stress the need for ***self-government*** (often called ***self-management***) of both individuals and groups. Self-management within free associations and decision making from the bottom-up is the only way domination can be eliminated. This is because, by making our own decisions ourselves, we automatically end the division of society into governors and governed (i.e. end hierarchy). In other words, those affected by a decision make that decision. Anarchism clearly means support for freedom and equality and so all forms of hierarchical organisation (such as the state and the capitalist workplace) and authoritarian social relationship (such as sexism, racism, homophobia and wage labour) must be abolished. This means that anarchist organisations must be self-managed, decentralised and based on federalism. Only this form of organisation can end the division of society into rulers and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and create a society of free and equal individuals.

This is why anarchists stress such things as decision making by mass assemblies and the co-ordination of decisions by mandated and recallable delegates. The federal structure which

unites these basic assemblies would allow local affairs to be decided upon locally and directly, with wider issues discussed and decided upon at their appropriate level and by all involved. This would allow those affected by a decision to have a say in it, so allowing them to manage their own affairs directly and without hierarchy. This, in turn, would encourage the self-reliance, self-confidence and initiative of those involved. As a necessary complement of our opposition to authority is support for

**"direct action."** This means that people, rather than looking to leaders or politicians to act for them, look to themselves and the own individual and collective strength to solve their own problems. This also encourages self-liberation, self-reliance and self-confidence as the prevailing culture would be *"if we want something sorted out, we have to do it ourselves"* — in other words, a *"do it yourself"* mentality.

Therefore, the **positive** side of anarchism (which naturally flows from its opposition to authority) results in a political theory which argues that people must control their own struggles, organisations and affairs directly. This means we support mass assemblies and their federation via councils of mandated delegates subject to recall if they break their mandates (i.e. they act as they see fit, i.e. as politicians or bureaucrats, and not as the people who elected them desire). This way people directly govern themselves and control their own lives. It means we oppose the state and support free federations of self-governing associations and communes. It means we oppose capitalism and support workers' self-management. It means we reject hierarchy, centralism and authoritarian structures and argue for self-managed organisations, built from the bottom up and always accountable to the base. It means we consider the direct control of struggles and movements by those involved as not only essential in the here and now but also essential training for living in a free, libertarian socialist society (for example, workers direct and total control of their strikes and unions trains them to control their workplaces and communities during and after the



> *"But arguing with someone to join a struggle, and trying to put forward tactics and ideas that can take it forward are attempts to lead.*
>
> *"It is no good people coming together in a struggle, discussing what to do and then doing just what they feel like as if no discussion had taken place. We always need to take the best ideas and act on them in a united way."*

Placing ideas before a group of people is a "lead" but it is not centralisation. Moreover, anarchists are not against making agreements! Far from it. The aim of federal organisation is to make agreements, to co-ordinate struggles and activities. This does not mean ignoring agreements. As Kropotkin argued, the commune *"cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259] This vision was stressed in the C.N.T.'s resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that *"the foundation of this administration will be the Commune. These Communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels for the purpose of achieving goals of a general nature. The right of autonomy is not to preclude the duty of implementation of agreements regarding collective benefits."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 68] In the words of Malatesta:

> *"But an organisation, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to co-ordinate one's own activities with those of others; thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders one powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting ... it is by co-*

should be welcomed. Unfortunately the rest of the discussion on this issue falls back into the usual swamp of slander.

They argue that *"[e]very struggle, from a local campaign against housing privatisation to a mass strike of millions of workers, raises the need for organisation. People come together and need mechanisms for deciding what to do and how to do it."* They continue by arguing that *"Anarchism says that organisation has nothing to do with centralisation. For anarchism, any form of centralisation is a type of authority, which is oppressive."*

This is true, anarchists do argue that centralisation places power at the centre, so disempowering the people at the base of an organisation. In order to co-ordinate activity anarchists propose federal structures, made up on mandated delegates from autonomous assemblies. In this way, co-ordination is achieved while ensuring that power remains at the bottom of the organisation, in the hands of those actually fighting or doing the work. Federalism does not deny the need to make agreements and to co-ordinate decisions. Far from it — it was put forward by anarchists precisely to ensure co-ordination of joint activity and to make agreements in such a way as to involve those subject to those decisions in the process of making them. Federalism **involves** people in managing their own affairs and so they develop their initiative, self-reliance, judgement and spirit of revolt so that they can **act** intelligently, quickly and autonomously during a crisis or revolutionary moment and show solidarity as and when required instead of waiting for commands from above as occurs with centralised movements. In other words, federalism is the means to combine participation and co-ordination and to create an organisation run from the bottom up rather than the top-down. As can be seen, anarchists do not oppose co-ordination and co-operation, making agreements and implementing them together.

After mentioning centralisation, the SWP make a massive jump of logic and assert:



revolution). It means we oppose hierarchy in all its forms and support free association of equals. In other words, anarchism can generally be taken to mean support for self-government or self-management.

By discussing only the negative side of anarchism, by missing out what kinds of authority anarchists oppose, the SWP ensure that these aspects of our ideas are not mentioned in their article. For good reason as it puts Marxism in a bad light.

## 3. Why does mentioning the history of anarchism weaken the SWP's argument?

The SWP correctly argue that we *"live in a world of bullying line managers, petty school rules, oppressive police, and governments that serve the rich and powerful."* However, they trivialise anarchism (and the natural feelings that result from such domination) by stating *"[e]veryone who hates that has, at least at times, felt a streak of 'anarchist' revolt against authority."* Thus anarchism is presented as an emotional response rather than as valid, coherent intellectual opposition to the state, wage labour, inequality and hierarchical authority in general. But, of course, anarchism is more than this, as the SWP acknowledge:

> *"Anarchism, however, is more than a personal reaction against the tyrannies of capitalism. It is a set of political beliefs which have been held up as an alternative to the revolutionary socialist ideas of Karl Marx. Anarchist ideas have, on occasion, had a mass influence on movements against capitalism."*

Given that the *"revolutionary socialist ideas"* of Marx have been proven wrong on numerous occasions while Bakunin's predictions were proven right, anarchists humbly suggest that anarchism is a valid alternative to Marxism. For example, Bakunin correctly predicted that when *"the workers ... send*

*common workers … to Legislative Assemblies … The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois … For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 108] The history of the Marxist Social Democratic Parties across the world proved him right.

Similarly, Bakunin predicted that Marx's *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would become the *"dictatorship over the proletariat."* The experience of the Russian Revolution proved him correct — once the Bolshevik party had become the government power became centralised at the top, the workers' soviets quickly became a cog in the state machinery rubber-stamping the decrees of the Bolshevik government, workers' control of production by factory committees was replaced by state appointed managers and so on. The "socialist" state quickly became a bureaucratic monster without real control from below (indeed, the Bolsheviks actually disbanded soviets when opposition parties won a majority in them at the start of 1918). The start of the Civil War in May 1918 just made things worse.

The SWP continue by arguing:

> *"Socialists and anarchists share a hatred of capitalism. They have often fought alongside each other in major battles against the capitalist system. They struggled together in the Europe-wide mass strikes at the end of the First World War and the inspiring Spanish Revolution in 1936, as well as in countless smaller battles today."*

Which is true. They also fail to mention that the mass-strikes at the end of the First World War were defeated by the actions of the Social-Democratic Parties and trade unions. These parties were self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxist



organisations, utilising (as Marx had argued) the ballot box and centralised organisations. Unsurprisingly, given the tactics and structure, reformism and bureaucracy had developed within them. When workers took strike action, even occupying their factories in Italy, the bureaucracy of the Social Democratic Parties and trade unions acted to undermine the struggle, isolating workers and supporting capitalism. Indeed, the German Social Democratic Party (which was, pre-1914, considered the jewel in the crown of Marxism and the best means to refute the anarchist critique of Marxist tactics) actually organised an alliance with the right-wing para-military Freikorps to violently suppress the revolution. The Marxist movement had degenerated into bourgeois parties, as Bakunin predicted.

It is also strange that the SWP mention the *"inspiring Spanish Revolution in 1936"* as this revolution was mainly anarchist in its *"inspiring"* features. Workers took over workplaces and the land, organising them under workers' self-management. Direct democracy was practised by hundreds of thousands of workers in line with the organisational structures of the anarchist union the C.N.T. In contrast, the Russian Revolution saw power become centralised into the hands of the Bolshevik party leadership and workers' self-management of production was eliminated in favour of one-man management imposed from above (see M. Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details).

## 4. How is the SWP wrong about centralisation?

The SWP continue by arguing that *"there are differences between revolutionary socialism and anarchism. Both understand the need for organisation but disagree over what form that organisation takes."* This is a vast step forward in the usual Marxist slander that anarchists reject the need for organisation and so

throwing capitalism. As examples go, the SWP is clearly clutching at straws.

Moreover, as we argued in the last section, revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, Rocker, etc., all placed a great deal of time and energy in trying to work within and influence workers' struggles and the labour movement in the here and now. They did not think that workers struggles would necessarily "spontaneously" break capitalism. While recognising, as we indicated in section 10, that the class struggle changed the ideas of those involved, they recognised the need for anarchist groups, papers, pamphlets to influence the class struggle in a libertarian way and towards a revolution. They were well aware that "spontaneous" uprisings occurred but were not enough in themselves — anarchists would need to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle, particularly when "uprisings" were not occurring and the daily struggle between governed and governor, exploited and exploiter was taking less spectacular forms (hence anarchist support and involvement in the labour movement and unions like the C.N.T.).

The SWP then move onto an even greater factual error. They claim that the *"biggest anarchist groups today, the 'autonomists' in Europe, treat workers who have not fully broken with capitalist ideas as an enemy rather than a potential ally."* Unfortunately for them, the "autonomists" are not generally anarchists (the name should have given the SWP some clue, as anarchists are quite proud of their name and generally use it, or libertarian, to describe themselves). Rather the "autonomists" are non-Leninist Marxists whose ideas (and name) originally came from the Marxist left in Italy during the 1960s. It is also probable that the various European anarchist federations (such as the French and Italian) and anarcho-syndicalist unions are bigger than the autonomists. However, without any examples of the groups meant it is hard to evaluate the



Ironically, the SWP always bemoan trade union bureaucracies betraying workers in struggle yet promote an organisational structure that ensures that power flows to the centre and into the hands of bureaucrats.

At best, Leninism reduces "democracy" to mean that the majority designates its rulers, copied from the model of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. In practice it is drained of any real meaning and quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The base does not run the organisation just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government. That the central committee is designated by a "democratically elected" congress makes no difference once it is elected, it is de facto and de jure the absolute ruler of the organisation. It has complete (statutory) control over the body of the Party (and can dissolve the base organisations, kick out militants, etc.).

Therefore it is ironic that the SWP promote themselves as supporters of democracy as it is anarchists who support the *"primitive democracy"* (self-management) contemptuously dismissed by Lenin. With their calls for centralisation, it is clear that SWP still follow Lenin, wishing to place decision-making at the centre of the organisation, in the hands of leaders, in the same way the police, army and bureaucratic trade unions do. Anarchists reject this vision as non-socialist and instead argue for the fullest participation in decision making by those subject to those decisions. Only in this way can government — inequality in power — be eliminated from society.

Just to stress the point, anarchists are not opposed to people making decisions and everyone who took part in making the decision acting on them. Such a system is not "centralised," however, when the decisions flow from the bottom-up and are made by mandated delegates, accountable to the people who

mandated them. It is centralised when it is decided upon by the leadership and imposed upon the membership. Thus the issue is not whether we organise or not organise, nor whether we co-ordinate joint activity or not, it is a question of how we organise and co-ordinate — from the bottom up or from the top down. As Bakunin argued:

> *"Discipline, mutual trust as well as unity are all excellent qualities when properly understood and practised, but disastrous when abused ... [one use of the word] discipline almost always signifies despotism on the one hand and blind automatic submission to authority on the other.. .*
>
> *"Hostile as I am to [this,] the authoritarian conception of discipline, I nevertheless recognise that a certain kind of discipline, not automatic but voluntary and intelligently understood is, and will ever be, necessary whenever a greater number of individuals undertake any kind of collective work or action. Under these circumstances, discipline is simply the voluntary and considered co-ordination of all individual efforts for a common purpose. At the moment of revolution, in the midst of the struggle, there is a natural division of functions according to the aptitude of each, assessed and judged by the collective whole...*
>
> *"In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all ... this is the only true discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom. This is not the kind of discipline preached by the State ... which wants the old, routine-like, automatic blind discipline. Passive discipline is the foundation*



*and support them in their action — **but not to direct them governmentally**."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 177–8]

Sadly, Leninists like the SWP confuse giving a led with taking power themselves. They seek to take over positions of responsibility in a movement and turn them into positions of power which they can use to tell the others what to do. Instead of being the servants of the organisation, they become its masters. For this reason anarchist organisations try to influence movements from below, in the mass assemblies which make it up, rather than seek power.

## 24. Do anarchists blame workers *"for being insufficiently revolutionary"*?

After creating a straw man about anarchist theory, they draw some thoughts from it:

> *"When struggles have not spontaneously broken capitalism, anarchists have tended to end up blaming workers for being insufficiently revolutionary. So 19th century French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon started off talking of his 'love of the people' but ended up saying he 'despised' humanity because they had not overthrown capitalism."*

Strange that they picked Proudhon as he was not a revolutionary anarchist. Rather he favoured the reform of capitalism via mutual credit and workers' co-operatives and rejected the idea of "uprisings" and/or revolution (spontaneous or not). Anyone with even a limited knowledge of Proudhon's work would know this. In addition, Proudhon's last book (**The Political Capacity of the Working Classes**), finished on his death bed, was an attempt to influence the workers' movement towards his ideas of mutualism and federalism. Hardly to be expected from someone who "despised" humanity for not over-

It is for this reason anarchists form groups and federations, to influence workers today rather than waiting for a *"spontaneous uprising"* to occur. Moreover, it is quite ironic that the SWP say that anarchists wait for upsurges before declaring themselves to the masses. After all, that is what the SWP do. They turn up at picket lines and try and sell their paper and party to the strikers. Obviously, if anarchist do this, it is bad, if the SWP do it, then it is *"revolutionary."*

Therefore, rather than believing in or waiting for *"spontaneous upsurges"* anarchists, like the SWP, spread their message, try and convince people to become revolutionaries. That is why there are numerous anarchist federations across the world, involved in numerous struggles and working class organisations, with magazines, papers and leaflets being produced and distributed. Anarchists stress the importance of winning people over to anarchist ideas and of giving a *"lead"* in struggle rather than as a *"leadership"* (which implies a hierarchical relationship between the mass of people and a group of leaders). To state otherwise, to argue we wait for spontaneous uprisings, is simply a lie.

Anarchist organisations see themselves in the role of aiders, not leaders. As Voline argued, the politically aware minority *"should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances, ... [they] should freely participate in the common work,* ***as true collaborators, not as dictators****. It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves... without dominating, subjugating, or oppressing anyone... Accordingly to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves, who, by means of the various class organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, et cetera, federated... should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the Revolution... As for the 'elite' [i.e. the politically aware], their role, according to the libertarians, is to* ***help*** *the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give them necessary advice, impel them to take initiative, provide them with an example,*



*of every despotism."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 414–5]

Therefore, anarchists see the need to make agreements, to stick by them and to show discipline but we argue that this must be to the agreements we helped to make and subject to our judgement. We reject "centralisation" as it confuses the necessity of agreement with hierarchical power, of solidarity and agreement from below with unity imposed from above as well as the need for discipline with following orders.

## 12. Why do the SWP make a polemical fetish of *"unity"* and *"democracy"* to the expense of common sense and freedom?

The SWP argue that *"unity"* is essential:

> *"Without unity around decisions there would be no democracy — minorities would simply ignore majority decisions."*

Anarchists are in favour of free agreement and so argue that minorities should, in general, go along with the majority decisions of the groups and federations they are members of. That is, after all, the point behind federalism — to co-ordinate activity. Minorities can, after all, leave an association. As Malatesta argued, *"anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need adapt to the wishes of the many."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 100] The Spanish C.N.T. argued in its vision of Libertarian Communism that:

> *"Communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels for the pur-*

> *pose of achieving goals of a general nature. ... communes ... will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms [that] may be majority vote after free debate... The inhabitants of a Commune are to debate their internal problems ... among themselves. Whenever problems affecting an entire comarca [district] or province are involved, it must be the Federations [of communes] who deliberate and at every reunion or assembly these may hold all of the Communes are to be represented and their delegates will relay the viewpoints previously approved in their respective Communes ... On matters of a regional nature, it will be up to the Regional Federation to put agreements into practice and these agreements will represent the sovereign will of all the region's inhabitants. So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the Commune, to the Federation and right on up finally to the Confederation."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 68–9]

Therefore, as a general rule-of-thumb, anarchists have little problem with the minority accepting the decisions of the majority after a process of free debate and discussion. As we argue in section A.2.11, such collective decision making is compatible with anarchist principles — indeed, is based on them. By governing ourselves directly, we exclude others governing us. However, we do not make a fetish of this, recognising that, in certain circumstances, the minority must and should ignore majority decisions. For example, if the majority of an organisation decide on a policy which the minority thinks is disastrous then why should they follow the majority? In 1914, the representatives of the German Social Democratic Party voted for war credits. The anti-war minority of that group went along with the majority in the name of *"democracy," "unity"* and *"dis-*



> *materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 109]

Therefore, as can be seen, the SWP's assertions are totally at odds with the actual ideas of anarchists, as would be known by anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchist theory. After all, if spontaneous uprisings were sufficient in themselves we would be living in an anarchist society. As Bakunin argued *"if instinct alone had been sufficient for the liberation of peoples, they would have long since freed themselves."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 254] This explains why anarchists organise **as anarchists** in groups and federations to influence the class struggle. We are aware of the need for revolutionaries to organise to influence the class struggle, spread anarchist ideas and tactics and present the case for revolutionary change. An anarchist society will not come about by accident, it must be consciously desired and created by the mass of the population. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"Communist organisations ... must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 140]

So, clearly, anarchists see the importance of working class organisation and struggle in the here and now. Anarchists are active in industrial disputes and (as the SWP note) the anti-globalisation movement and were heavily involved in the anti-poll-tax and anti-Criminal Justice Act struggles in the UK, for example. The role of anarchists is not to wait for *"upsurges"* but rather to encourage them by spreading our ideas and encouraging workers to organise and fight their bosses and the state.

*only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 254–5]

All anarchists have stressed the importance of working in and outside the labour movement to gain influence for anarchist ideas of direct action, solidarity, self-management and federalism in the here and now, rather than waiting for a *"spontaneous uprising"* to occur. As Kropotkin argued, *"Revolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda with Labour Unions had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist [or libertarian] ... section of the International Working Men's Association."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 119] Malatesta makes the same point:

> *"anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideas. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way.*
>
> *"Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps unorganisable, masses to awaken a spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and*



*cipline"*. Would the SWP argue that they were right to do so? Similarly, if a majority of a community decided, say, that homosexuals were to be arrested, would the SWP argue that minorities must not ignore that decision? We hope not.

In general, anarchists would argue that a minority should ignore the majority when their decisions violate the fundamental ideas which the organisation or association are built on. In other words, if the majority violates the ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity then the minority can and should reject the decisions of the majority. So, a decision of the majority that violates the liberty of a non-oppressive minority — say, restricting their freedom of association — then minorities can and should ignore the decisions and practice civil disobedience to change that decision. Similarly, if a decision violates the solidarity and the feelings of equality which should inform decisions, then, again, the minority should reject the decision. We cannot accept majority decisions without question simply because the majority can be wrong. Unless the minority can judge the decisions of the majority and can reject them then they are slaves of the majority and the equality essential for a socialist society is eliminated in favour of mere obedience.

However, if the actions of the majority are simply considered to be disastrous but breaking the agreement would weaken the actions of the majority, then solidarity should be the overwhelming consideration. As Malatesta argued, *"[t]here are matters over which it is worth accepting the will of the majority because the damage caused by a split would be greater than that caused by error; there are circumstances in which discipline becomes a duty because to fail in it would be to fail in the solidarity between the oppressed and would mean betrayal in face of the enemy ... What is essential is that individuals should develop a sense of organisation and solidarity, and the conviction that fraternal co-operation is necessary to fight oppression and to achieve a society in which everyone will*

*be able to enjoy his [or her] own life.*" [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 132–3]

He stresses the point:

> *"But such an adaptation [of the minority to the decisions of the majority] on the one hand by one group must be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm...*
>
> *"So ... anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern in human society in general ... how is it possible ... to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 100–1]

Therefore, while accepting majority decision making as a key aspect of a revolutionary movement and a free society, anarchists do not make a fetish of it. We recognise that we must use our own judgement in evaluating each decision reached simply because the majority is not always right. We must balance the need for solidarity in the common struggle and needs of common life with critical analysis and judgement.

Needless to say, our arguments apply with even more force to the decisions of the **representatives** of the majority, who are in practice a very small minority. Leninists usually try and confuse these two distinct forms of decision making. When groups like the SWP discuss majority decision making they almost always mean the decisions of those elected by the majority — the central committee or the government — rather than the majority of the masses or an organisation.

So, in practice the SWP argue that the majority of an organisation cannot be consulted on every issue and so what they ac-



*on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139] He stressed the importance of anarchists being involved in unions as well as union struggle for reforms by direct action:

> *"What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an essentially economic character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the association of the working masses ... It will [also] propagandise its principles ...*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

Indeed, he saw the labour movement as the means to create a socialist society:

> *"The masses are a force, or at least the essential elements of a force. What do they lack? They lack two things which up till now constituted the power of all government: organisation and knowledge.*
>
> *"The organisation of the International [Workers' Association], having for its objective not the creation of new despotisms but the uprooting of all domination, will take on an essentially different character from the organisation of the State... But what is the organisation of the masses? ... It is the organisation by professions and trades ...*
>
> *"The organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not*

ning debates with their fellow workers in union assemblies. They did not seek power but rather influence for their ideas. To claim otherwise, to claim that anarchists reject open debate with their fellow workers is false. Instead of seeking to power — and so limiting debates to during elections — anarchists argue that people must control their own organisations (and so the revolution) directly and all the time. This means, as can be seen, we encourage open debate and discussion far more than those, like the SWP, who seek centralised political power for themselves. In such a system, the only people who debate regularly are the members of the government — everyone else is just a voter and an order taker.

## 23. Do anarchists wait for *"spontaneous upsurges by workers"*?

After lying about the F.A.I., they move on to lying about anarchist theory:

> *"Anarchists instead look to spontaneous upsurges by workers. In the struggle anarchists will declare themselves and urge the workers on. They hope this will lead to the toppling of capitalism. History is full of mass struggles which have been able to win significant gains, but which have not had a clear leadership that can carry the struggle over to victory against capitalism."*

Nothing could be further from the truth. Their own article exposes their lies. They mention the C.N.T., which was organised in an anarchist way and in which anarchists were heavily involved. Anarchists from Bakunin onward have all argued in favour of organising as anarchists as well as organising workers and fighting for reforms in the here and now. For Bakunin, *"the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based*



tually mean is that the decisions of the central committee (or government) should be followed at all times. In other words, the decisions of a minority (the leaders) should be obeyed by the majority. A minority owns and controls the "revolutionary" organisation and "democracy" is quickly turned into its opposite. Very "democratic."

As we shall indicate in the next two sections, the SWP do not, in fact, actually follow their own arguments. They are quite happy for minorities to ignore majority decisions — as long as the minority in question is the leadership of their own parties. As we argue in section 14, such activities flow naturally from the vanguardist politics of Leninism and should not come as a surprise.

## 13. How does the Battle of Prague expose the SWP as hypocrites?

To evaluate the sincerity of the SWP's proclaimed commitment to *"democracy"* and *"centralism"* we just have to look at the actions of their contingent at the demonstration against the WTO and IMF in Prague on September 26th, 2000.

Let us recall that on September 16th, the SWP had argued as follows:

> *"It is no good people coming together in a struggle, discussing what to do and then doing just what they feel like as if no discussion had taken place."*

They stressed that importance of *"centralisation"* which they defined as *"arriv[ing] at decisions which everyone acts on. Without unity around decisions there would be no democracy — minorities would simply ignore majority decisions."*

In practice, the International Socialist (IS) section of the Prague demonstration (the SWP and its sister parties) totally ignored their own arguments. Instead of ending up in the Pink

sector (for which they had put themselves down) they somehow ended up behind *"Ya Basta"* in the yellow sector. As they were at the front of the march this should have been impossible. It turns out they deliberately entered the wrong sector because they refused to accept the agreed plan to split the march in three.

The protests had been co-ordinated by INPEG. INPEG was established as a democratic implement of communication and co-ordination among individuals and groups which want to protest against the annual summit of IMF in Prague on September 2000. It included a variety groups — for instance reformists (e.g. NESEHNUTI), anarchists (e.g. CSAF or Solidarity) and Leninists (i.e. Socialist Solidarity, sister organisation of the British SWP). The IS group had argued at INPEG committee meetings earlier in the year for a single march on the centre (which of course could not have shut the conference down). They failed to win this argument and so had betrayed the rest of the protesters on the day by simply marching directly onto the bridge themselves (in the yellow sector) instead of continuing into the Pink sector as they were supposed to.

Why did the SWP do what they did? Presumably they put themselves down for the Pink section because it was at the front of the march and so offered the best media coverage for their placards and banners. Similarly, they joined the Yellow Section because it was marching directly to the conference centre and not, like Pink, going round to the rear and so, again, offered the best media coverage. In other words, they *"did their own thing"*, ignored the agreements they made and weakened the protests simply to look the dominant group in the press. Ironically, the Czech media made sure that the Leninist parties got onto their front pages simply because many of them chose to march in Prague with red flags emblazoned with hammer and sickles. Flags associated with the Soviet occupation and the old regime are hardly "popular" and so useful to smear the protests.



> *it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I.**, p. 121]

As can be seen, open debate with their fellow workers in the union assemblies. In this they followed Bakunin's arguments that anarchist organisation *"rules out any idea of dictatorship and of a controlling and directive power"* and it *"will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance."* This influence would be exerted in the union assemblies, as the union members *"could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed..."* This would ensure that the assemblies had *"real autonomy"* and actually were the real power in the organisation. Any committees would be made up of *"delegates who conscientiously fulfilled all their obligations to their respective sections as stipulated in the statues," "reporting regularly to the membership the proposals made and how they voted"* and *"asking for further instructions (plus instant recall of unsatisfactory delegates)"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 154, p. 387 and p. 247]

The anarchist revolution would be organised in an identical fashion, and, in Bakunin's words, *"must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations ... [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172]

As can be seen, the F.A.I. (like all anarchists) influenced the class struggle and revolution via their natural influence in win-

bers of the F.A.I. indicate this. Jose Borras Casacarosa notes that *"[o]ne has to recognise that the F.A.I. did not intervene in the C.N.T. from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants ... the decisions which determined the course taken by the C.N.T. were taken under constant pressure from these militants."* Jose Campos notes that F.A.I. militants *"tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occassions .. . if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other F.A.I. members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the faista in open assembly."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] As Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. in his own right) put it:

> *"There is not a single militant who as a 'F.A.I.ista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who us exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the F.A.I. or not."* [cited by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

This meant that it was at union meetings and congresses where policies and the program for the movement were argued out:

> *"[D]elegates, whether or not they were members of the F.A.I., were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members,*



The decision of the SWP to ignore the agreed plan was applauded by other Leninists. According to the post-Prague issue of the Communist Party of Great Britain's paper **Weekly Worker**:

> *"Farcically, the organisers had decided to split the march into three, each with its own route and composition — blue (anarchist), pink (trade unions and left organisations) and yellow (NGOs and Jubilee 2000). Ostensibly, this started as a tactic designed to facilitate forming a human chain around the conference centre, although by the day of the action this aim had, apparently, been abandoned. Whether these truly stupid arrangements had been accepted beforehand by all on the INPEG (Initiative Against Economic Globalisation) remains hazy, given the paucity of information about the debates and differences on this self-appointed body."*

The splitting of the march into three, as a matter of fact, was a great success. It allowed the demonstrators to encircle the conference centre. The marches splitting off from the back working beautifully, catching the police and media by surprise who were clustered at the front of the march (indeed, the police later admitted that they had been caught off guard by the splitting of the march). From the splitting points to the centre the marches were unaccompanied by both police and media. A clear victory. Indeed, what would have been *"truly stupid"* was doing what the police had expected (and SWP wanted) — to have one big march.

How was the demonstration's organised? According to eyewitness Katharine Viner (writing in **The Guardian** on Friday September 29, 2000):

> *"In the run-up to Tuesday's demonstration I attended the convergence centre, where 'spokes*

*council' meetings took place, and found the sense of community and organisation there astonishing and moving. Every 'affinity group' — NGO or group of friends — sent a spokesperson to meetings to make decisions and work out strategy. It sounds impossible to contain, and it was laborious, but it worked and consensus was found. It felt like proper democracy in a way that the ballot box does not."*

Julie Light, of **Corporate Watch**, indicates the same process at work in her account entitled **Spirits, Tensions Run High in Prague** (dated September 25, 2000):

*"the activist coalition called the Initiative Against Economic Globalisation (INPEG) is training hundreds of people in civil disobedience at the Convergence Centre. The Centre, a converted warehouse space located under Prague's Libensky Bridge, serves as an information and strategy clearinghouse for the protesters. A 'spokes council' made up of representatives of dozens of groups makes decisions by consensus for this international ad-hoc coalition that has never worked together before. They have an elaborate system of hand signals to indicate their views as they discuss the details of the protests. Given the logistical obstacles, things seem to be running remarkably smoothly."*

Obviously *"proper democracy"* and a council of group spokespeople discussing the protests were not good enough for the SWP and other Leninist groups. Nor, of course, making an agreement and sticking to it.

The **Weekly Worker** complements the SWP's decision:

*"Come the march itself, the damage was partially repaired by the decision of a majority of the 'pink'*



Therefore, the claim that the F.A.I. was a centralised organisation is simply false. Rather it was a federation of autonomous groups, as can be seen (see also section 3 of the appendix on *"Marxists and Spanish Anarchism"* for more discussion on this topic).

Was the F.A.I. a *"secret"* organisation? When it was founded in 1927, Spain was under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and so it was illegal and secret by necessity. As Stuart Christie correctly notes, *"[a]s an organisation publicly committed to the overthrow of the dictatorship, the F.A.I. functioned, from 1927 to 1931, as an illegal rather than a secret organisation. From the birth of the Republic in 1931 onwards, the F.A.I. was simply an organisation which, until 1937, refused to register as an organisation as required by Republican Law."* [**We, the Anarchists!**, p. 24] Thus it was illegal rather than secret. As one anarchist militant asked, *"[i]f it was secret, how come I was able to attend F.A.I. meetings without ever having joined or paid dues to the 'specific' organisation?"* [Francesco Carrasquer, quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

Moreover, given the periods of repression suffered by the Spanish libertarian movement throughout its history (including being banned and forced underground) being an illegal organisation made perfect sense. The anarchist movement was made illegal a number of times. Nor did the repression end during the Republic of 1931–6. This means that for the F.A.I. to be illegal was a sensible thing to do, particularly after failed revolutionary attempts resulted in massive arrests and the closing of union halls. Again, the SWP ignore historical context and so mislead the reader.

Did the F.A.I. ignore *"open debate and common struggle."* No, of course not. The members of the F.A.I. were also members of the C.N.T. The C.N.T. was based around mass assemblies in which all members could speak. It was here that members of the F.A.I. took part in forming C.N.T. policy along with other C.N.T. members. Anarchists in the C.N.T. who were not mem-

*the movement as a whole."* [**We, the Anarchists!**, p. 28]

He stresses its decentralised nature:

> *"Above all, it was not a representative body and involved **no** delegation of power either within the affinity groups or in the regional or national administrative bodies to empower those bodies to make decisions on behalf of the collectivity. Drawing on many years of revolutionary experience the F.A.I. was firmly rooted in federal principles and structured in such a way that its co-ordinating function did not deprive its constituent members of their autonomous power... . In situations where it was necessary for delegates to take decisions, e.g. at plenary meetings during times of crisis or clandestinity, those decisions were required to be ratified by the whole membership who, in effect, constituted the administration... The groups in a city or town constituted a Local Federation while the rural groups, combined, formed a District Federation. These were administered by a secretariat and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. The Local and District Federations were obliged to convene regular assemblies of all groups in its area... Local and District Federations constituted a Regional Federation. These, in turn, were co-ordinated by a Peninsular Committee. None of these committees, local, district, regional or national, could be described as having a bureaucratic apparatus. Nor did they wield executive power of any description. Their function was purely administrative."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 29–30]



> *contingent (with the SWP and its international sections to the fore) to simply veer off the agreed route. This pink section then partially merged with the yellow to advance on the conference."*

We must point out that the International Socialists appear to have lied about the numbers they were bringing to Prague. The day before the demonstration they claimed they said they would contribute 2,500 to the Pink section — since then their own press has reported 1,000 in their delegation (**Socialist Worker** no. 1716 stated that the *"day began when over 1,000 marched from the Florenc bus station ...led by supporters of Socialist Worker and its sister papers elsewhere in Europe"*). This would have left the Pink block seriously under strength even if they had not unilaterally left their block.

Their defection from the agreed plan had very serious repercussions on the day — one gate in the Pink sector was never covered. In the Blue sector, where the anarchists were concentrated, this meant that at the height of a battle with hundreds of riot police, a water cannon and two Armoured Personnel Carriers they were forced to send 300 people on a 2 km hike to attempt to close this gate. Shortly after they left a police charge broke the Blue Block lines leading to arrests and injuries.

Thus, by ignoring the plan and doing their own thing, they not only made a mockery of their own arguments and the decision making process of the demonstration, weakened the protest and placed others in danger.

And the net effect of their defection? As the **Weekly Worker** pathetically comments:

> *"Of course, it was blocked by ranks of riot police ..."*

As the bridge was a very narrow front this resulted in a huge amount of people stuck behind *"Ya Basta!"* with nothing to do except sit around. So the "International Socialists" and

other Leninists who undertook the act of sabotage with them were stuck doing nothing behind *"Ya Basta"* at the bottom of the bridge (as would be expected — indeed, this exposes another failing of centralism, its inability to know local circumstances, adapt to them and plan taking them into account). The tiny number of anarchists who marched around to cover their gate on the other hand, took the police by surprise and broke through to the conference centre until driven back by hundreds of riot police. Worse, there were some problems in the "Yellow Block" as the Leninists were pushing from behind and it took some serious explaining to get them to understand that they should stop it because otherwise people in the front line could be crushed to death. Moreover, they demanded to be allowed up alongside *"Ya Basta"* at the front, next to the riot cops, but when *"Ya Basta"* did pull out and invited the SWP to take their place in the front they refused to do so.

Moreover, the actual result of the SWP's disgraceful actions in Prague also indicates the weakness of centralism. Having centrally decided to have one big march (regardless of what the others thought or the majority wished or agreed to) the decision was made with clearly no idea of the local geography otherwise they would have known that the front at the bridge would have been small. The net result of the "efficient" centralisation of the SWP? A mass of protestors stuck doing nothing due to a lack of understanding of local geography and the plan to blockade the conference seriously weakened. A federal organisation, on the other hand, would have had information from the local activists who would have been organising the protests and made their plans accordingly.

Therefore, to summarise. Ten days after denouncing anarchism for refusing to accept majority decisions and for being against "centralisation" (i.e. making and keeping agreements), the SWP ignore majority decisions, break agreements and do their own thing. Not only that, they weaken the demonstration and place their fellow protestors in difficulties simply so they



> *membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks... They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies-a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.*
>
> *"The F.A.I., moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed 'line' like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no official program by which all faistas could mechanically guide their actions."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 224]

Stuart Christie argues that the decentralised nature of the F.A.I. helped it survive the frequent repression directed against it and the C.N.T:

> *"The basic units of the F.A.I. were ... small autonomous affinity groups of anarchist militants. This cohesive quasi-cellular form of association had evolved, gradually, over the period of time it takes for relationships to be established and for mutual trust to grow. The affinity groups consisted, usually, of between three and 10 members bound by ties of friendship, and who shared well defined aims and agreed methods of struggle. Once such a group had come into existence it could, if it so wished, solicit affiliation to the F.A.I... The affinity groups were also highly resistant to police infiltration. Even if filtration did occur, or police agents did manage to set up their own 'affinity' groups it would not have been a particularly efficient means of intelligence gathering; the atomic structure of the F.A.I. meant there was no central body to provide an overview of*

> *"The anarchist organisation inside the Spanish C.N.T., the F.A.I., was centralised and secret. A revolutionary party thrives on open debate and common struggle with wider groups of workers."*

We discuss this Marxist myth in more detail in section 3 of the appendix on *"Marxists and Spanish Anarchism"*. However a few points are worth making. The F.A.I., regardless of what the SWP assert, was not centralised. It was a federation of autonomous affinity groups. As one member put it:

> *"It was never its aim to act as a leadership or anything of the sort — to begin with they had no slogans, nor was any line laid down, let alone any adherence to any hierarchical structure ... This is what outside historians ought to grasp once and for all: that neither Durruti, nor Ascaso, nor Garcia Oliver — to name only the great C.N.T. spokesmen — issued any watchwords to the 'masses,' let alone delivered any operational plan or conspiratorial scheme to the bulk of the C.N.T. membership."*

He stresses that:

> *"Each F.A.I. group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding ... they had no ... opportunity or jurisdiction ... to foist a party line upon the grass-roots."* [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 25 and p. 28]

Murray Bookchin paints a similar picture:

> *"The F.A.I... . was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no*



could do nothing someplace else as, unsurprisingly enough, their way was blocked by riot cops. An amazing example of "democratic centralism" in practice and sure to inspire us all to follow the path of Marxism-Leninism!

The hypocrisy of their actions and arguments are clear. The question now arises, what do anarchists think of their action. As we argued in the last section, while anarchists favour direct democracy (self-management) when making decisions we also accept that minorities can and should ignore a majority decision if that decision is considered to be truly disastrous. However, any such decision must be made based on evaluating the damage caused by so making it and whether it would be a violation of solidarity to do so. This is what the SWP clearly failed to do. Their decision not only made a mockery of their own argument, it failed to take into account **solidarity** with the rest of the demonstration.

From an anarchist perspective, therefore, the SWP's decision and actions cannot be justified. They violated the basic principles of a revolutionary movement, the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. They ignored the liberty of others by violating their agreements with them, they violated their equality by acting as if the other groups ideas and decisions did not matter and they violated solidarity by ignoring the needs of the common struggle and so placing their fellow demonstrators in danger. While anarchists **do** respect the rights of minorities to act as they see fit, we also recognise the importance of solidarity with our fellow workers and protestors. The SWP by failing to consider the needs of the common struggle sabotaged the demonstration and should be condemned not only as hypocrites but also as elitists — the party is not subject to the same rules as other demonstrators, whose wishes are irrelevant when they conflict with the party. The implications for the SWP's proclaimed support for democracy is clear.

So it appears that minorities **can** and **should** ignore agreements — as long as the minority in question are the leaders of

the SWP and its sister parties. They have exposed themselves as being hypocrites. Like their heroes, Lenin and Trotsky, they will ignore democratic decisions when it suits them (see next section). This is sickening for numerous reasons — it placed the rest of the demonstrators in danger, it weakened the demonstration itself and it shows that the SWP say one thing and do the exact opposite. They, and the political tradition they are part of, clearly are not to be trusted. The bulk of the membership went along with this betrayal like sheep. Hardly a good example of revolutionary consciousness. In fact it shows that the "revolutionary" discipline of the SWP **is** like that of the cops or army) and that SWP's centralised system **is** based on typically bourgeois notions. In other words, the organisational structure desired by the SWP does not encourage the autonomy, initiative or critical thinking of its members (as anarchists have long argued).

Prague shows that their arguments for "centralisation" as necessary for "democracy" are hypocrisy and amount to little more than a call for domination by the SWP's leadership over the anti-capitalist movement — a call hidden begin the rhetoric of "democracy." As can be seen, in practice the SWP happily ignores democracy when it suits them. The party always comes first, regardless of what the people it claims to represent actually want. In this they follow the actions of the Bolsheviks in power (see next section). Little wonder Marxism-Leninism is dying — the difference between what they claim and what they do is becoming increasingly well know.

## 14. Is the Leninist tradition actually as democratic as the SWP like to claim?

While the SWP attack anarchism for being undemocratic for being against "centralism" the truth is that the Leninist tradition is fundamentally undemocratic. Those, like the SWP, who are part of the Bolshevik tradition have no problem with



*sal human brotherhood triumphing on the ruins of all the states."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 33]

As can be seen, instead of seeking state power, as Lenin's party desired, Bakunin's would seek *"natural influence"* rather than *"official influence."* As we argued in section J.3.7, this meant influencing the class struggle and revolution within the mass assemblies of workers' associations and communes and in their federations. Rather than seek state power and official leadership positions, as the Leninist party does, Bakunin's organisation rejected the taking of hierarchical positions in favour of working at the base of the organisation and providing a *"leadership of ideas"* rather than of people (see section J.3.6). While Bakunin's organisational structures are flawed from a libertarian perspective (although more democratic than Marxists claim) the way it works within popular organisations **is** libertarian and in stark contrast with the Leninist position which sees these bodies as stepping stones for party power.

Therefore, Bakunin rejected key Leninist ideas and so cannot be considered as a forefather of Bolshevism in spite of similar organisational suggestions. The similarity in structure is due to a similarity in political conditions in Russia and **not** similarities in political ideas. If we look at Bakunin's ideas on social revolution and the workers' movement we see a fully libertarian perspective — of a movement from the bottom-up, based on the principles of direct action, self-management and federalism. Anarchists since his death have applied **these** ideas to the specific anarchist organisation as well, rejecting the non-libertarian elements of Bakunin's ideas which the SWP correctly (if somewhat hypocritically and dishonestly) denounce.

## 22. Was the F.A.I. a *"centralised and secret"* organisation that shunned *"open debate and common struggle"*?

They move onto Spanish Anarchism:

velopment of socialist consciousness within the working class, not inject that consciousness into a mass who cannot develop it by their own efforts. The difference is important as Lenin's theory justified the substitution of party power for workers power, the elimination of democracy and the domination of the party over the class it claimed to represent. Bakunin, recognising that socialist ideas are *"instinctive"* in the working class due to their position in society and their everyday experiences, could not do this as the organisation existed to clarify these tendencies, not create them in the first place and inject them into the masses.

Lastly, the role the organisation plays in the workers' movement and revolution are distinctly different. As Bakunin constantly stressed, the secret organisation must never take state power. As he put it, the *"main purpose and task of the organisation"* would be to *"help the people to achieve self-determination."* It would *"not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character"* and *"not placed above the people like state power."* Its programme *"consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people"* and its influence is *"not contrary to the free development and self-determination of the people, or its organisation from below according to its own customs and instincts because it acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power."* Thus the revolutionary group would be the *"helper"* of the masses, with an *"organisation within the people itself."* [quoted by Michael Confino, **Op. Cit.**, p. 259, p. 261, p. 256 and p. 261] The revolution itself would see *"an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments — a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations; and, finally, ... univer-*



minorities ignoring majority decisions — as long as the minority in question is the leadership of the vanguard party. We discussed the example of the *"battle of Prague"* in the last section, now we turn to Bolshevism in power during the Russian Revolution.

For example, the Bolsheviks usually overthrew the results of provincial soviet elections that went against them [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp 22–24]. It was in the spring of 1918 that the Bolsheviks showed how little they really supported the soviets. As discontent grew soviet after soviet fell to Menshevik-SR blocs. To stay in power they had to destroy the soviets and they did. Opposition victories were followed by disbanding of the soviets and often martial law. [Vladimir Brovkin, *"The Menshevik's Political Comeback: The elections to the provincial soviets in spring 1918"*, **Russian Review** no. 42 (1983), pp. 1–50]

In addition, the Bolsheviks abolished by decree soldiers' councils and the election of officers in the Red Army in favour of officers appointed from above (see section 11 of the appendix *"Marxism and Spanish Anarchism"* for details). They replaced self-managed factory committees with appointed, autocratic managers (see M. Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** or section 17 of the appendix *"Marxism and Spanish Anarchism"* for details). All this before the start of the Russian Civil War. Similarly, Lenin and Trotsky happily replaced the democratically elected leaders of trade unions with their followers when it suited them.

As Trotsky argued in 1921, you cannot place *"the workers' right to elect representatives above the party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!"* He continued by stating the *"Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted

by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

Of course, such a position follows naturally from Lenin's theory from **What is to be Done?** that *"the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness … The theory of socialism [i.e. Marxism], however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals … the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia."* This meant that *"Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness … could only be brought to them from without."* [**Essential Lenin**, pp. 74–5]

For Leninists, if the workers' act in ways opposed to by the party, then the party has the right to ignore, even repress, the workers — they simply do not (indeed, cannot) understand what is required of them. They cannot reach *"socialist consciousness"* by their own efforts — indeed, their opinions can be dismissed as *"there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement* ***the only choice is****: either bourgeois or socialist ideology … to belittle socialist ideology* ***in any way****, to* ***deviate from it in the slightest degree*** *means strengthening bourgeois ideology … the* ***spontaneous*** *development of the labour movement leads to it becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 82] Given that the socialist ideology cannot be communicated without the vanguard party, this means that the **party** can ignore the wishes of the masses simply because such wishes **must be** influenced by "bourgeois" ideology. Thus Leninism contains within itself the justification for eliminating democracy within the revolution. From Lenin's arguments to Bolshevik actions during the revolution and Trotsky's assertions in 1921 is only a matter of time — and **power**.



were not socialists so that in *"critical moments [they will] … follow the International's lead."* However, this influence was **not** to inject socialist ideas into the working class but rather to aid their development by the *"propagation of its [the International] ideas and .. .. the organisation of its members' natural effect on the masses."* As can be seen, Bakunin's ideas on this subject differ considerably from Lenin's. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139 and p. 140]

Unsurprisingly, the programme of the revolutionary organisation had to reflect the instincts and needs of the working population and must never be imposed on them. As he argued, the working masses were *"not a blank page on which any secret society can write whatever it wishes … It has worked out, partly consciously, probably three-quarters unconsciously, its own programme which the secret society must get to know or guess and to which it must adapt itself."* He stresses that once the state *"is destroyed … the people will rise … for* ***their own*** *[ideal]"* and anyone *"who tries to foist* ***his own*** *programme on the people will be left holding the baby."* [quoted in **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, Michael Confino (ed.), p. 252, p. 254 and p. 256] As he stresses, libertarian socialist ideas come from the masses and not from outside them:

> *"In opposition to … oppressive statist orientations … an entirely new orientation finally arose from the depths of the proletariat itself … It proceeds directly to the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes … and the abolition of their last buttress, the state.*
>
> *"That is the program of social revolution."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 48–9]

Therefore, for Bakunin, the revolutionary organisation did not play the same role as for Lenin. It existed to aid the de-

ground as a political exile and an escapee from Tsarist Russia. Hence his arguments and support for secret organisation — his experiences, like Lenin's, pushed him in that direction. Moreover, we should also remember that Russia was not the only country which the anarchist and labour movements were repressed during this time. In France, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, the International was made illegal. The Spanish section of the International had been proscribed in 1872 and the central and regional authorities repressed it systematically from the summer of 1873, forcing the organisation to remain underground between 1874 and 1881. As can be seen, the SWP forget the historical context when attacking Bakunin's secrecy.

Thirdly, Bakunin did not, like Lenin, think that *"socialist consciousness"* had to be introduced into the working class. He argued that due to the *"economic struggle of labour and capital"* a worker who joined the International Workers' Association *"would inevitably discover, through the very force of circumstances and through the develop of this struggle, the political, socialist, and philosophical principles of the International."* He thought that working class people were ***"socialists without knowing it"*** as *"their most basic instinct and their social situation makes them ... earnestly and truly socialist ... They are socialist because of all the conditions of their material existence and all the needs of their being... The workers lack neither the potential for socialist aspirations nor their actuality; they lack socialist thought."* Thus the *"germs"* of *"socialist thought"* are to *"be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants."* The method? The class struggle itself — *"the International relies on the collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 100 and pp. 101–3]

Bakunin did not deny the importance of those who already are socialists to organise themselves and *"influence"* those who



In other words, the SWP's *"Battle of Ideas"* becomes, once the vanguard is in power, just a battle:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants of workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution**, as do the SWP in their article.

It is hard to combine these facts and the SWP's comments with the claim that the "workers' state" is an instrument of class rule — after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises — who decides what a *"wavering"* or *"unstable"* element is? Given their comments on the role of the party and the need for the party to assume power, it will mean in practice whoever rejects the government's decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets which reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin's comment is simply a justification for state repression

of its enemies (including elements within, or even the whole of, the working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons.

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top-down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we note, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 — they are to *"carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power"*). Any independence on their part would be considered *"wavering"* or an expression of *"unstable"* natures and so subject to *"revolutionary coercion"*. In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level — vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government if its dislikes the *"passing moods"* expressed by them). As can be seen above, the Bolsheviks did disband soviets when they considered the wrong (i.e. *"wavering"* or *"unstable"*) elements had been elected to them and so a highly centralised state system cannot be responsive to real control from below.

Secondly, *"revolutionary coercion"* against *"wavering"* elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed *"unstable"* and become subject to *"revolutionary"* coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Leninist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing the government they hold in that ideology. The Leninist conception of workers' councils is purely instrumental. In 1907, Lenin argued that:



*time involved in 'Leninist' organisations will have come across workers who agree with Marxist politics but refuse to join the party because they believe it to be undemocratic and authoritarian. Many draw the conclusion that Leninism itself is at fault, as every organisation that proclaims itself Leninist appears to follow the same pattern."* [**Lenin vs. the SWP: Bureaucratic Centralism Or Democratic Centralism?**] This is a common refrain with Leninists — when reality says one thing and the theory another, it must be reality that is at fault. Yes, every Leninist organisation may be bureaucratic and authoritarian but it is not the theory's fault that those who apply it are not capable of actually doing it. Such an application of scientific principles by the followers of *"scientific socialism"* is worthy of note — obviously the usual scientific method of generalising from facts to produce a theory is inapplicable when evaluating "scientific socialism" itself.

One last point. While some may argue that the obvious parallels between Bakunin's ideas and Lenin's should embarrass anarchists, most anarchists disagree. This is for four reasons.

Firstly, anarchists are **not** *"Bakuninists"* or followers of *"Bakuninism."* This means that we do not blindly follow the ideas of individuals, rather we take what we find useful and reject the flawed and non-libertarian aspects of their ideas. Therefore, if we think Bakunin's specific ideas on how revolutionaries should organise are flawed and not libertarian then we reject them while keeping the bulk of Bakunin's useful and libertarian ideas as inspiration. We do not slavishly follow individuals or their ideas but apply critical judgement and embrace what we find useful and reject what we consider nonsense.

Secondly, anarchism did not spring fully formed out of Bakunin's (or Proudhon's or Kropotkin's or whoever's) mind. We expect individuals to make mistakes, not to be totally consistent, not totally break with their background. Bakunin clearly did not manage to break completely with his back-

from the party membership. [**Op. Cit.**] As can be seen, the SWP have little grounds on which to attack Bakunin given this damning account of its internal workings.

Other dissidents argue the same point. In 1991 members in Southampton SWP asked *"When was the last time a motion or slate to conference was opposed?"* and pointed out:

> *"The CC usually stays the same or changes by one member. Most of the changes to its composition are made between Conferences. None of the CC's numerous decisions made over the preceding year are challenged or brought to account. Even the Pre-Conference bulletins contain little disagreements."*

They stress that:

*"There is real debate within the SWP, but the framework for discussion is set by the Central Committee. The agenda's national events ... are set by the CC or its appointees and are never challenged ... Members can only express their views through Conference and Council to the whole party indirectly."* [quoted by Trotwatch, **Carry On Recruiting!**, p. 39 and pp. 40–1]

Therefore, the SWP does not really have a leg to stand on. While Bakunin's ideas on organisation are far from perfect, the actual practice of the SWP places their comments in context. They attack Bakunin while acting in similar ways while claiming they do not. Anarchists do not hold up Bakunin's ideas on how anarchists should organise themselves as examples to be followed nor as particularly democratic (in contrast to his ideas on how the labour movement and revolution should be organised, which we **do** recommend) — as the SWP know. However, the SWP claim they are a revolutionary party and yet their organisational practices are deeply anti-democratic with a veneer of (bourgeois) democracy. The hypocrisy is clear.

Ironically, the ISG dissidents who attack the SWP for being *"bureaucratic centralist"* note that *"[a]nybody who has spent*



> *"the Party ... has never renounced its intention of utilising certain non-party organisations, such as the Soviets of Workers' Deputies ... to extend Social-Democratic influence among the working class and to strengthen the Social-Democratic labour movement ... the incipient revival creates the opportunity to organise or utilise non-party working-class institutions, such as Soviets ... for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 209–10]

As can be seen from the experiences of Russia under Lenin, this perspective did not fundamentally change — given a conflict between the councils and the party, the party always came first and soviets simply superfluous.

## 15. Why is the SWP's support for centralisation anti-socialist?

The SWP continue:

> *"Centralism is needed above all because the capitalist state is centralised. The police, media moguls, employers, the state bureaucracy and governments act in a concerted way to protect the system."*

Very true. However, the SWP fail to analyse ***why*** the state is centralised. Simply put, the state is centralised to **facilitate minority rule** by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is

to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance — rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is transformed into the structure of the state and capitalist company. The SWP assume that centralisation is simply a tool without content. Rather, it is a tool that has been fashioned to do a specific job, namely to exclude the bulk of the population from the decision making process. It is designed that way and can have no other result. For that reason anarchists reject centralisation. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued: *"How could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61]

Thus Rudolf Rocker:

> *"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as*



> *out on the basis of 'slates' so that it is virtually impossible for members to vote against the slate proposed by the leadership. Any members who have doubts or disagreements are written off as 'burnt out' and, depending on their reaction to this, may be marginalised within the party and even expelled.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *"The outcome is a party whose conferences have no democratic function, but serve only to orientate party activists to carry out perspectives drawn up before the delegates even set out from their branches. At every level of the party, strategy and tactics are presented from the top down, as pre-digested instructions for action. At every level, the comrades 'below' are seen only as a passive mass to be shifted into action, rather than as a source of new initiatives."* [ISG, **Discussion Document of Ex-SWP Comrades**]

They argue that a *"democratic"* party would involve the *"[r]egular election of all party full-timers, branch and district leadership, conference delegates, etc. with the right of recall,"* which means that in the SWP appointment of full-timers, leaders and so on is the norm. They argue for the *"right of branches to propose motions to the party conference"* and for the *"right for members to communicate horizontally in the party, to produce and distribute their own documents."* They stress the need for *"an independent Control Commission to review all disciplinary cases (independent of the leadership bodies that exercise discipline), and the right of any disciplined comrades to appeal directly to party conference."* They argue that in a democratic party *"no section of the party would have a monopoly of information"* which indicates that the SWP's leadership is essentially secretive, withholding information

top-down structure with a membership limited to those who are willing to be professional revolutionaries. They obviously want to have their cake and eat it too. Unfortunately for them, they cannot. If they attack Bakunin, they must attack Lenin, not to do so is hypocrisy.

The simple fact is that the parallels between Bakunin's and Lenin's organisational ideas cannot be understood without recognising that both revolutionaries were operating in an autocratic state under conditions of complete illegality, with a highly organised political police trying to infiltrate and destroy any attempt to change the regime. Once this is recognised, the SWP's comments can be seen to be hypocritical in the extreme. Nor can their feeble attempt to use Bakunin to generalise about all anarchist organisations be taken seriously as Bakunin's organisations were not *"major"* nor were his ideas on secret organisation and organising followed after his death. They were a product of Bakunin's experiences in Tsarist Russian and not generic to anarchism (as the SWP know fine well).

Moreover, many people leave the SWP due to its undemocratic, authoritarian and bureaucratic nature. The comments by one group of ex-SWP dissidents indicate the hypocrisy of the SWP's attack on Bakunin:

> *"The SWP is not democratic centralist but bureaucratic centralist. The leadership's control of the party is unchecked by the members. New perspectives are initiated exclusively by the central committee (CC), who then implement their perspective against all party opposition, implicit or explicit, legitimate or otherwise.*
>
> *"Once a new perspective is declared, a new cadre is selected from the top down. The CC select the organisers, who select the district and branch committees — any elections that take place are carried*



> *patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54]

Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed to be used for that purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to stop it and enforce minority rule!).

The implication of the SWP's argument is that centralisation is required for co-ordinated activity. Anarchists disagree. Yes, there is a need for co-ordination and joint activity, but that must be created from below, in new ways that reflect the goals we are aiming for. During the Spanish Revolution anarchists organised militias to fight the fascists. One was lead by anarchist militant Durruti. His military adviser, P'rez Farras, a professional soldier, was concerned about the application of libertarian principles to military organisation. Durruti replied:

> *"I have already said and I repeat; during all my life, I have acted as an anarchist. The fact of having been given political responsibility for a human collective cannot change my convictions. It is under these conditions that I agreed to play the role given to me by the Central Committee of the Militias.*
>
> *"I thought — and what has happened confirms my belief — that a workingmen's militia cannot be led according to the same rules as an army. I think that*

*discipline, co-ordination and the fulfilment of a plan are indispensable. But this idea can no longer be understood in the terms of the world we have just destroyed. We have new ideas. We think that solidarity among men must awaken personal responsibility, which knows how to accept discipline as an autonomous act.*

*"Necessity imposes a war on us, a struggle that differs from many of those that we have carried on before. But the goal of our struggle is always the triumph of the revolution. This means not only victory over the enemy, but also a radical change in man. For this change to occur, man must learn to live in freedom and develop in himself his potentialities as a responsible individual. The worker in the factory, using his tools and directing production, is bringing about a change in himself. The fighter, like the worker, uses his gun as a tool and his acts must lead to the same goals as those of the worker.*

*"In the struggle he cannot act like a soldier under orders but like a man who is conscious of what he is doing. I know it is not easy to get such a result, but what one cannot get by reason, one can never get through force. If our revolutionary army must be maintained through fear, we will have changed nothing but the colour of fear. It is only by freeing itself from fear that a free society can be built."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 224]

Durruti's words effectively refute the SWP's flawed argument. We need to organise, co-ordinate, co-operate our activities but we cannot do so in bourgeois ways. We need to discover new ways, based on libertarian ideas and not capitalist ones like centralisation.



*"The whole matter of posting of Party workers is in the hands of the Central Committee. Its decisions are binding for everyone."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 55–6]

This perspective was echoed in the forerunner of the SWP, the **International Socialists**. In September 1968, the Political Committee of International Socialism submitted the *"Perspectives for I.S."* Point 4 said:

*"Branches must accept directives from the Centre, unless they fundamentally disagree with them, in which case they should try to accord with them, while demanding an open debate on the matter."* [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55f]

The parallels with Bakunin's ideas are clear (see last section). However, it is to Bakunin's credit that he argued that while *"each regional group have to obey it [the central committee] unconditionally"* he recognised that there existed *"cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them."* when this happened, *"members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee's orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting ... If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it."* Thus, rather than the unquestioning obedience of the Bolshevik party, who have to obey, then complain, the members of Bakunin's group did not negate their judgement and could refuse to carry out orders.

Therefore, the SWP have a problem. On the one hand, they denounce Bakunin's ideas of a centralised, secret top-down organisation of revolutionaries. On the other, the party structure that Lenin recommends is also a tightly disciplined, centralised,

And:

> *"The only serious organisational principle the active workers of our movement can accept is **strict secrecy, strict selection of members**, and the training of professional revolutionaries. If we possessed these qualities, something even more than 'democratism' would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries. And this is absolutely essential for us, because in Russia it is useless thinking that democratic control can substitute for it."* [our emphasis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 162]

Thus we have Lenin advocating *"strict secrecy, strict selection of members"* as well as a centralised party which will *"appoint bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution."* The parallels with Bakunin's system are clear and are predominately the result of the identical political conditions both revolutionaries experienced. While anarchists are happy to indicate and oppose the non-libertarian aspects of Bakunin's ideas, it is hard for the likes of the SWP to attack Bakunin while embracing Lenin's ideas on the party, justifying their more "un-democratic" aspects as a result of the objective conditions of Tsarism.

Similar top-down perspectives can be seen from Bolshevism in Power. The 1918 constitution of the Soviet Union argued that local soviets were to *"carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power."* In 1919, the Bolshevik's Eighth Party Congress strengthened party discipline. As Maurice Brinton notes, the *"Congress ruled that each decision must above all be fulfilled. Only after this is an appeal to the corresponding Party organ permissible."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 55] He quotes the resolution:



Indeed, this conflict between the Leninist support for traditional forms of organisational structure and the new forms produced by workers in struggle came into conflict during the Russian Revolution. One such area of conflict was the factory committee movement and its attempts at workers' self-management of production. As historian A.S. Smith summarises:

> "Implicit in the movement for workers' control was a belief that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In their battle to democratise the factory, in their emphasis on the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation, the factory committees had become aware — in a partial and groping way, to be sure — that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute ... inscribed within their practice was a distinctive vision of socialism, central to which was workplace democracy.
>
> "Lenin believed that socialism could be built only on the basis of large-scale industry as developed by capitalism, with its specific types of productivity and social organisation of labour. Thus for him, capitalist methods of labour-discipline or one-man management were not necessarily incompatible with socialism. Indeed, he went so far as to consider them to be inherently progressive, failing to recognise that such methods undermined workers' initiative at the point of production. This was because Lenin believed that

> the transition to socialism was guaranteed, ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the 'proletarian' character of state power… There is no doubt that Lenin did conceive proletarian power in terms of the central state and lacked a conception of localising such power at the point of production." [**Red Petrograd**, pp. 261–2]

The outcome of this struggle was the victory of the Bolshevik vision (as it had state power to enforce it) and the imposition of apparently "efficient" capitalist methods of organisation. However, the net effect of using (or, more correctly, imposing) capitalist organisations was, unsurprisingly, the reintroduction of capitalist social relations. Little wonder the Russian Revolution quickly became just another form of capitalism —

**state** capitalism where the state appointed manager replaced the boss and the workers' position remained identical. Lenin's attempts to centralise production simply replaced workers' power at the point of production with that of state bureaucrats.

We must point out the central fallacy of the SWP's argument. Essentially they are arguing you need to fight fire with fire. They argue that the capitalist class is centralised and so, in order to defeat them, so must we. Unfortunately for the SWP, you do not put a fire out with fire, you put fire out with water. Therefore, to defeat centralised system you need decentralised social organisation. Such decentralisation is required to include the bulk of the population in the revolutionary struggle and does not imply isolation. A decentralised movement does not preclude co-ordination or co-operation but that co-ordination must come from below, based on federal structures, and not imposed from above.

So a key difference between anarchism and Marxism on how the movement against capitalism should organise in the



*"The active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer; on the contrary, it will benefit by the fact that a 'dozen' experienced revolutionaries, no less professionally trained than the police, will centralise all the secret side of the work — prepare leaflets, work out approximate plans and* ***appoint bodies of leaders*** *for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution, etc. [our emphasis] (I know that exception will be taken to my 'undemocratic' views, but I shall reply to this altogether unintelligent objection later on.) The centralisation of the most secret functions in an organisation of revolutionaries will not diminish, but rather increase the extent and the quality of the activity of a large number of other organisations that are intended for wide membership and which, therefore, can be as loose and as public as possible, such as trade unions; workers' circles for self-education and the reading illegal literature, and socialist and also democratic, circles for* ***all other sections of the population****, etc., etc. We must have* ***as large a number as possible*** *of such organisations having the widest possible variety of functions, but it would be absurd and dangerous* ***to confuse them with the organisation of revolutionaries****, to erase the line of demarcation between them, to make still more the masses' already incredibly hazy appreciation of the fact that in order to 'serve' the mass movement we must have people who will devote themselves exclusively to Social-Democratic activities, and that such people must* ***train*** *themselves patiently and steadfastly to be professional revolutionaries."* [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 149]

example, indicates how most anarchist organisations work in practice — namely, a decentralised federation of autonomous groups (see section 22).

Moreover, as we will indicate in the next section, the SWP have little reason to attack Bakunin's ideas. This is because Lenin had similar (although not identical) ones on the question of organising revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia and because the SWP are renown for their leadership being secretive, centralised, bureaucratic and top-down.

In summary, anarchists agree with the SWP that Bakunin's ideas are not to be recommended while pointing out that the likes of the SWP fail to provide an accurate account of their internal workings (i.e. they were more democratic than the SWP suggest), the role Bakunin saw for them in the labour movement and revolution or the historical context in which they were shaped. Moreover, we also argue that their comments against Bakunin, ironically, apply with equal force to their own party which is renown, like all Bolshevik-style parties, as being undemocratic, top-down and authoritarian. We turn to this issue in the next section.

## 21. Why is the SWP's attack on Bakunin's organisation ironic?

That the SWP attack Bakunin's organisational schema (see last section) is somewhat ironic. After all, the Bolshevik party system had many of the features of Bakunin's organisational plan. If Bakunin, quite rightly, should be attacked for certain aspects of these ideas, then so must Bolshevik parties like the SWP.

For example, Lenin argued in favour of centralisation and secrecy in his work **What is to be Done?**. In this work he argued as follows:



here and now. Anarchists argue that it should prefigure the society we desire — namely it should be self-managed, decentralised, built and organised from the bottom-up in a federal structure. This perspective can be seen from the justly famous Sonvillier Circular:

> *"The future society should be nothing but a universalisation of the organisation which the International will establish for itself. We must therefore take care to bring this organisation as near as possible to our ideal ... How could one expect an egalitarian and free society to grow out of an authoritarian organisation? That is impossible. The International, embryo of the future human society, must be, from now on, the faithful image of our principles of liberty and federation."* [quoted by Marx, **Fictitious Splits in the International**]

Of course, Marx replied to this argument and, in so doing, misrepresented the anarchist position. He argued that the Paris Communards *"would not have failed if they had understood that the Commune was 'the embryo of the future human society' and had cast away all discipline and all arms — that is, the things which must disappear when there are no more wars!"* [**Ibid.**] Needless to say this is simply a slander on the anarchist position. Anarchists, as the Circular makes clear, recognise that we cannot totally reflect the future and so the current movement can only be *"as near as possible to our ideal."* Thus we have to do things, such as fighting the bosses, rising in insurrection, smashing the state or defending a revolution, which we would not have to do in a socialist society but that does not imply we should not try and organise in a socialist way in the here and now. Such common sense, unfortunately, is lacking in Marx who instead decided to utter nonsense for a cheap polemical point.

Therefore, if we want a revolution which is more than just a change in who the boss is, we must create new forms of organisation and struggle which do not reproduce the traits of the world we are fighting. To put out the fire of class society, we need the water of a classless society and so we should organise in a libertarian way, building the new world in the shell of the old.

## 16. Why is the SWP wrong about the A16 Washington D.C. demo?

As an example of why Marxism is better than anarchism they give an example:

> *"Protesters put up several roadblocks during the major anti-capitalist demonstration in Washington in April of this year. The police tried to clear them. The question arose of what the protesters should do.*
>
> *"Some wanted to try to maintain the roadblocks. Others thought the best tactic was to reorganise the protests into one demonstration. Instead of coming to a clear decision and acting on it, the key organiser of the whole event told people at each roadblock to do what they thought was right.*
>
> *"The resulting confusion weakened all the protests."*

Firstly, we must point out that this argument is somewhat ironic coming from a party that ignored the agreed plan during the Prague anti-WTO demonstration and did *"what they thought was right"* (see section 13). Indeed, the various anti-capitalist demonstrations have been extremely effective and have been organised in an **anarchist** manner thus refuting the SWP.

Secondly, unfortunately for the SWP, they have the facts all wrong. The World Bank/IMF complex in Washington DC



> *"Jesuitical control ... are totally excluded from all three tiers of the secret organisation ... The strength of the whole society, as well as the morality, loyalty, energy and dedication of each member, is based exclusively and totally on the shared truth, sincerity and trust, and on the open fraternal control of all over each one."* [cited by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, pp. 264–6]

As can be seen, while there is much in Bakunin's ideas that few anarchists would agree to, it cannot be said that it was **not** under the *"democratic control of its members."* The system of committees is hardly libertarian but neither is it the top-down dictatorship the SWP argue it was. For example, the central committee was chosen by the *"general meeting"* of the members, which also decided upon the *"programme of the society and the progress of the cause."* Its *"decision"* was *"absolute law"* and the central committee could be replaced by it. Moreover, the membership could ignore the decisions of the central committee if it *"contradict[ed] either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them."* Each tier of the organisation had the same *"programme and regulations."* Anarchists today would agree that Bakunin's plan was extremely flawed. The appointment of committees from above is hardly libertarian, even given that each tier had the same *"regulations"* and so general meetings of each Fraternity, for example. However, the SWP's summary of Bakunin's ideas, as can be seen, is flawed.

Given that no other anarchist group or federation operated in this way, it is hard to generalise from Bakunin's flawed ideas on organisation to a conclusion about anarchism. But, of course, this is what the SWP do — and such a generalisation is simply a lie. The example of the F.A.I., the SWP's other

*"Any member or any group is subject to judgement by the general meeting ...*

*"No new Brother can be accepted without the consent of all or at the very least three-quarters of all the members...*

*"The Committee divides the members ... among the Regions and constitutes Regional groups of leaderships from them ... Regional leadership is charged with organising the second tier of the society — the **Regional Fraternity**, on the basis of the same programme, the same rules, and the same revolutionary plan...*

*"All members of the **Regional Fraternity** know each other, but do not know of the existence of the **People's Fraternity.** They only know that there exists a **Central Committee** which hands down to them their orders for execution through **Regional Committee** which has been set up by it, i.e. by the **Central Committee** ...*

*"Each Regional Committee will set up **District** Committees from members of the **Regional Fraternity** and will appoint and replace them... .*

*"District Committees can, if necessary and only with the consent of the Regional Committee, set up a third tier of the organisation — **District Fraternity** with a programme and regulations as near as possible to the general programme and regulations of the People's Fraternity. The programme and regulations of the District Fraternity will not come into force until they are discussed and passed by the general meeting of the Regional Fraternity and have been confirmed by the Regional Committee...*



was extremely difficult to blockade. The police blocked over 50 blocks on the day of the demonstration to travel. DC has very wide streets. Many World Bank and IMF Delegates spent the night in those buildings, or came in early in the morning long before sunrise. This calls into question whether a blockade was the best strategy considering the logistic details involved (the Blockade strategy was abandoned for the Republican and Democratic Party Conference demonstrations). In addition to the blockades, there was an officially permitted rally blocks away from the action.

The tactical process worked in practice like this. While there was an original plan agreed to by consensus at the beginning of the blockades by all affinity groups, with groups picking which intersection to occupy and which tactics to use, there was a great deal of flexibility as well. There were several flying columns that moved from intersection to intersection reinforcing barricades and increasing numbers where it looked like police might charge. The largest of these was the Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc (*"the Black Bloc"*) made up mostly of class-struggle anarchists but included a number of other left libertarians (such as council communists and autonomists). The RACB officially maintained its autonomy within the demonstration and worked with others when and where it could. The affinity groups of the RACB would come to quick decisions on what to do. Often, they would quickly respond to the situation; usually their appearance was enough for the cops to fall back after a few tense moments.

By early afternoon, the various affinity groups manning the blockades were informed that the blockades had failed, and enough delegates had made it inside that the meeting was continuing inside with only a short delay. So the question came of what to do next? There were varying opinions. Some affinity groups favoured maintaining their blockades symbolically as an act of defiance and hoping to slow the dispersion of World Bank/IMF representatives as they left the

meeting. Others wished to have a victory march around the area. Others wanted to join the rally. Some wanted to march on the World Bank and try for an occupation. There was no consensus. After much discussion between the affinity groups, a decision was reached.

The RACB was divided between two choices — either join with the rally or march on the Bank. There was a lot of negotiation back and forth between affinity groups. A compromise was reached. The RACB would move to each blockade in order and provide cover for those locked down to unlock and safely merge with the growing march so that attempts could be made the next day do blockade. The march continued to swell as it made its way along the route, eventually merging with the crowd at the permitted demonstration.

A decision was made. Perhaps it wasn't the most militant. Perhaps it did not foresee that the next day would lack the numbers to even attempt a successful blockade. But arrests on the demonstration were kept to a minimum, a large show of strength was put on and strong feelings of solidarity and camaraderie grew. The cops could only control a few square blocks, the rest of the city was ours. And it was a decision that everyone had a part in making, and one that everyone could live with. It's called self-management, perhaps it isn't always the fastest method of making decisions, but it is the best one if you desire freedom.

Of course, the last thing the SWP would want to admit is that anarchists led the victory march around Washington D.C. without a permit, without marshals, without many arrests and a minimal amount of violence! Of all the recent demonstrations in the U.S. the black bloc was the largest and most well received at Washington. Moreover, that demonstration showed that decentralised, federal organisation worked in practice. Each affinity group participated in the decision making process and an agreement reached between all involved. Centralisation was not required, no centre imposed the



*members obey unconditionally the decisions of the latter.*

*"All members are equal; they know all their comrades and discuss and decide with them all the most important and essential questions bearing on the programme of the society and the progress of the cause. The decision of the general meeting is absolute law…*

*"The society chooses an Executive Committee from among their number consisting of three or five members who should organise the branches of the society and manage its activities in all the regions of the [Russian] Empire on the basis of the programme and general plan of action adopted by the decision of the society as a whole…*

*"This Committee is elected for an indefinite term. If the society … the People's Fraternity is satisfied with the actions of the Committee, it will be left as such; and while it remains a Committee each member . .. and each regional group have to obey it unconditionally, except in such cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all … have participated equally in the discussion of them…*

*"In such a case members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee's orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting … If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it…*

after escaping from Siberia to the West. In addition, given that the countries in which anarchists were operating at the time were not democracies, in the main, a secret organisation would have been considered essential. As Murray Bookchin argues, *"Bakunin's emphasis on conspiracy and secrecy can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy were matters of sheer survival."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 24] The SWP ignore the historical context.

Thirdly, the reality of Bakunin's organisation is slightly different from the SWP's claims. We have discussed this issue in great detail in section J.3.7 of the FAQ. However, it is useful to indicate the type of organisation Bakunin thought was necessary to aid the revolution. If we do, it soon becomes clear that the SWP's claim that it was *"not under the democratic control of its members"* is not true. To do so we shall quote from his letter to the Russian Nihilist Sergy Nechayev in which he explains the differences in their ideas. He discusses the *"principles and mutual conditions"* for a *"new society"* of revolutionaries in Russia (noting that this was an *"outline of a plan"* which *"must be developed, supplemented, and sometimes altered according to circumstances"*):

> *"Equality among all members and the unconditional and absolute solidarity — one for all and all for one — with the obligation for each and everyone to help each other, support and save each other...*
>
> *"Complete frankness among members and proscription of any Jesuitical methods in their relationships ... When a member has to say anything against another member, this must be done at a general meeting and in his presence.* ***General fraternal control*** *of each other ...*
>
> *"Everyone's personal intelligence vanished like a river in the sea in the collective intelligence and all*



decision. Rather than weaken the protests, decentralisation strengthened it by involving all in the decision making process. Little wonder the SWP re-wrote history.

## 17. Why does the SWP's Washington example refute the SWP's own argument and not anarchism?

However, let us assume that the SWP's fictional account of the A16 demonstration (see last section) was, in fact, true. What does it actually mean? We must point out its interesting logic. They argue that the protests had a *"key organiser"* which means they were centralised. They argue that the protestors looked to that person for direction. Unfortunately that person could not come to a *"clear decision"* and instead handed back decision making to each roadblock. In other words, centralisation failed, not federalism. Moreover, the state would have had a simple means to destroy the demonstration — arrest the *"key organiser."* In a centralised system, without a centre, the whole structure collapses — without someone giving orders, nothing is done.

In a federal structure each roadblock would have sent a delegate to a council to co-ordinate struggle (which, we stress, was what actually did happen). To quote Bakunin, *"there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade ... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 155] In the SWP's version of history, the blockades did not do this and so, unsurprisingly, without organisation, there was confusion. As an argument against anarchism it is useless. So the SWP's fictional example is an argument against centralisation — of placing decision-making power at the centre. In their story, faced with the task of co-ordinating actions which they had no knowledge of, the *"key*

*organiser"* could not act and by not having a federal structure, the roadblocks were weakened due to lack of co-ordination. In reality, a federal structure existed within the demonstration, each roadblock and affinity group could take effective action instantly to counter the police, without waiting for instructions from the centre, as well as communicate what has happening to other roadblocks and come to common agreements on what action to take. The Washington demonstration — like the other anti-capitalist demonstrations — showed the effectiveness of anarchist principles, of decentralisation and federalism from the bottom up.

So the SWP's analysis of the Washington demonstration is faulty on two levels. Firstly, their account is not accurate. The demonstration was organised in a decentralised manner and worked extremely well. Secondly, even if their account was not fiction, it proves the failure of centralisation, not federalism.

They draw a lesson from their fictional account:

> *"The police, needless to say, did not 'decentralise' their decision making. They co-ordinated across the city to break the protests."*

Such an analogy indicates the bourgeois and authoritarian nature of the SWP's politics. They do not understand that the capitalist state and workplace is centralised for a reason. It is to concentrate power into the hands of a few, with the many reduced to mere order takers. It is the means by which bourgeois rule is enforced

Moreover, they seem to be arguing that if we followed the example of the bourgeois state, of the organisational structure of the police or the army, then we would be as "effective" as they are. They are, in effect, arguing that the anti-capitalist movement should reproduce the regulated docility of the police force into its ranks, reproduce the domination of a few bosses at the top over a mass of unquestioning automations at the bottom. As Murray Bookchin argued, the Leninist *"has always had*



Communist Party rank and file in the 1920s. Therefore, to claim that anarchists have some sort of monopoly of secret organising is simply a lie — Marxists, like anarchists, have sometimes organised in secret when they have been forced to by state repression or likelihood of state repression. It is not a principle but, rather, sometimes a necessity. As anyone with even a basic grasp of anarchist history would know.

Similarly for the SWP's claims that *"all the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised."* Such a claim is also a lie, as we shall prove in the sections 20 and 22.

## 20. Why is the SWP wrong about Bakunin's organisation?

As an example of a *"major anarchist organisation"* the SWP point to Bakunin and the organisations he created:

> *"The 19th century theorist of anarchism Mikhail Bakunin's organisation had a hierarchy of committees, with half a dozen people at the top, which were not under the democratic control of its members."*

Firstly, we have to wonder why anyone would have wanted to join Bakunin's group if they had no say in the organisation. Also, given that communication in the 19th century was extremely slow, such an organisation would have spent most of its time waiting for instructions from above. Why would anyone want to join such a group? Simple logic undermines the SWP's argument.

Secondly, we should also point out that the Bolshevik party itself was a secret organisation for most of its life in Tsarist Russia. Bakunin, an exile from that society, would have been aware, like the Bolsheviks, of the necessity of secret organising. Moreover, having spent a number of years imprisoned by the Tsar, Bakunin would not have desired to end up **back** in prison

*a grudging admiration and respect for that most inhuman of all hierarchical institutions, the military."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 254f] The SWP prove him right.

## 18. Why is a "revolutionary party" a contradiction in terms?

They continue by arguing that *"Anarchists say a revolutionary party is at best unnecessary and at worst another form of authoritarianism. But they cannot avoid the problems that a revolutionary party addresses."* In reality, while anarchists reject the "revolutionary" party, they do not reject the need for an anarchist federation to spread anarchist ideas, convince others of our ideas and to give a lead during struggles. We reject the Bolshevik style "revolutionary party" simply because it is organised in a centralised, bourgeois, fashion and so produces all the problems of capitalist society within so-called revolutionary organisations. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a party leaves much to be desired:

> *"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class."* [**Carry on Recruiting!**, p. 41]

Such an organisation can never create a socialist society. In contrast, anarchists argue that socialist organisations should reflect as much as possible the future society we are aiming to create. To build organisations which are statist/capitalistic in structure cannot do other than reproduce the very problems of capitalism/statism into them and so undermine their liberatory potential. As Murray Bookchin puts it:



## 19. Do anarchists operate *"in secret"*?

They continue:

> *"All the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised but have operated in secret."*

It is just as well they say *"all the major anarchist organisations,"* it allows them to ignore counter-examples. We can point to hundreds of anarchist organisations that are/were not secret. For example, the Italian Anarchist Union (IAU) was a non-secret organisation. Given that the IAU had around 20 000 members in 1920, we wonder by what criteria the SWP excludes it from being a *"major anarchist organisation"*? After all, estimates of the membership of the F.A.I. (one of the SWP's two *"major"* anarchist organisations) vary from around 6 000 to around 30 000. Bakunin's "Alliance" (the other SWP example) amounted to, at most, under 100. In terms of size, the IAU was equal to the F.A.I. and outnumbered the "Alliance" considerably. Why was the UAI not a *"major anarchist organisation"*?

Another, more up to date, example is the French Anarchist Federation which organises today. It as a weekly paper and groups all across France as well as in Belgium. That is not secret and is one of the largest anarchist organisations existing today (and so, by anyone's standards *"a major anarchist organisation"*). We wonder why the SWP excludes it? Simply because they know their generalisation is false?

Therefore, as can be seen, the SWP's claim is simply a lie. Few anarchist organisations have been secret. Those that have been secret have done so when conditions demanded it (for example, during periods of repression and when operating in countries with authoritarian governments). Just as Marxist organisations have done. For example, the Bolsheviks were secret for great periods of time under Tsarism and, ironically enough, the Trotskyist-Zinovievist **United Opposition** had to resort to secret and conspiratorial organisation to reach the Russian

*"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events ... In the beginning ... it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines* ***that reflect the very society it professes to oppose*** *... Its membership is schooled in obedience ... The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation ... Its leaders ... lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently.. .*

*"The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns-as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect-in moulding society in its own hierarchical imagine if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of 'withering away,' the state controlled by the 'glorious party' preserves the very conditions which 'necessitate' the existence of a state — and a party to 'guard' it.*



*"On the other hand, this kind of party is extremely vulnerable in periods of repression. The bourgeoisie has only to grab its leadership to destroy virtually the entire movement. With its leaders in prison or in hiding, the party becomes paralysed; the obedient membership had no one to obey and tends to flounder ...*

*"[T]he Bolshevik leadership was ordinarily extremely conservative, a trait that Lenin had to fight throughout 1917 — first in his efforts to reorient the Central Committee against the provisional government (the famous conflict over the 'April Theses'), later in driving the Central Committee toward insurrection in October. In both cases he threatened to resign from the Central Committee and bring his views to 'the lower ranks of the party.'"*
[**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 194–9]

Thus the example of the "successful" Russian Revolution indicates the weakness of Leninism — Lenin had to fight the party machine he helped create in order to get it do anything revolutionary. Hardly a good example of a "revolutionary" party.

But, then again, the SWP know that anarchists do not reject the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle. As they argue, *"Anarchism's attempts to deal with them have been far less effective and less democratic."* The question is not of one of **whether** revolutionaries should organise together but **how** they do this. And as we shall see in the next four sections, the SWP's examples of revolutionary anarchist organisations are either unique and so cannot be generalised from (Bakunin's ideas on revolutionary organisation), or false (the F.A.I. was **not** organised in the way the SWP claim). Indeed, the simple fact is that the SWP **ignore** the usual ways anarchists organise as anarchists and yet try and draw conclusions about anarchism from their faulty examples.

so violated the principles their party was meant to be based on. As the revolution progressed, so did the dual nature of the Bolshevik party (i.e. its practical divergence from "democratic centralism" in order to be effective and attempts to force it back into that schema which handicapped the revolution). However, during 1917, "democratic centralism" was ignored in order to ensure the the Bolsheviks played any role at all in the revolution. As one historian of the party makes clear, in 1917 and until the outbreak of the Civil War, the party operated in ways that few modern "vanguard" parties would tolerate:

> "The committees were a law unto themselves when it came to accepting orders from above. Democratic centralism, as vague a principle of internal administration as there ever has been, was commonly held at least to enjoin lower executive bodies that they should obey the behests of all higher bodies in the organisational hierarchy. But town committees in practice had the devil's own job in imposing firm leadership … Insubordination was the rule of the day whenever lower party bodies thought questions of importance were at stake.
>
> "Suburb committees too faced difficulties in imposing discipline. Many a party cell saw fit to thumb its nose at higher authority and to pursue policies which it felt to be more suited to local circumstances or more desirable in general. No great secret was made of this. In fact, it was openly admitted that hardly a party committee existed which did not encounter problems in enforcing its will even upon individual activists." [Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution 1917–1923**, pp. 51–2]



accuracy of the SWP's claims as regards their size or opinions. Suffice it to say, the leading theorists of "autonomism" such as Toni Negri and Harry Cleaver do not express the opinions the SWP claim "autonomists" have.

## 25. Why does the history of centralised parties refute the SWP's arguments?

The SWP admit that their analysis leaves much to be desired by mentioning that *"[m]any anarchists understand the way that capitalism works and organise to change the world."* In other words, if an anarchist points out the flaws in their argument or a reader knows an anarchist who does not match the SWP's distorted picture, then the SWP can say that they are part of the *"many."* Extremely handy, if dishonest, comment to make.

The SWP continue by arguing that our *"rejection of centralisation means that at critical moments their intervention in the struggle is fatally flawed."* This is ironic. Given that their example of the benefits of centralisation showed the flaws in that method of organising, their conclusion seems without basis. Moreover, as argued above, centralisation is the key means by which minorities govern majorities. It is a tool used to impose minority rule and is not designed for other uses. But, then again, the SWP do aim for minority rule — the rule of the *"revolutionary"* party over the masses. As they argue:

> *"The working class needs what anarchism rejects — a clear and determined revolutionary party which can lead the working class as a whole, and is not afraid to overthrow capitalism and set up a workers' state."*

Yes, indeed. The examples of the current anti-capitalist movement, the poll tax revolt and the 1917 February Russian revolution indicate well that a revolutionary party works. If such a party had led the working class in each of these events,

they would not have occurred. The workers would have done nothing, as the Bolsheviks desired. People would have paid their poll tax waiting for the trade union bureaucrats to act. The anti-globalisation demonstrations would not have happened as the "vanguard" party did not recognise their importance.

The Russian Revolution quickly resulted in the marginalisation of the workers' councils by the centralised, *"clear and determined"* Bolsheviks who turned them into rubber stamps of their government, it suggests that the politics of the SWP leave much to be desired. Given that the one "success" of Leninist politics — the Russian Revolution of October 1917 — created state capitalism, with workers' soviets and factory committees undermined in favour of party power (**before**, we must stress, the start of the civil war — what most Leninists blame the rise of Stalinism on) we may suggest that **anarchist** ideas have been proven correct again and again. After all, the validity of a theory surely lies in its ability to **explain** and **predict** events. Anarchists, for example, predicted both the degeneration of both Social Democracy and the Russian revolution, the two main examples of Marxism in action, and presented coherent reasons **why** this would happen. Marxists have had to generate theories to explain these events **after** they have occurred, theories which conveniently ignore the role of Marxist politics in historical events.

This, we suggest, provides the explanation of why they have spent so much time re-writing history and smearing anarchism. Not being able to discuss our ideas honesty — for that would expose the authoritarian ideas of Bolshevism and its role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution — the SWP invent a straw man they call anarchism and beat him to death. Unfortunately for them, anarchists are still around and can expose their lies for what they are.



commands and express their autonomy), with much internal dissent and infighting and no discipline beyond what was created by common loyalty. The "democratic centralist" party, as desired by Lenin, was only created in the course of the Civil War and the tightening of the party dictatorship. In other words, the party became more like a "democratic centralist" one as the revolution degenerated. As such, the various followers of Lenin (Stalinists, Trotskyists and their multitude of offshoots) subscribe to a myth, which probably explains their lack of success in reproducing a similar organisation since. So assuming that the Bolsheviks did play an important role in the Russian revolution, it was because it was **not** the centralised, disciplined Bolshevik party of Leninist myth. Indeed, when the party **did** operate in a vanguardist manner, failure was soon to follow.

This claim can be proven by looking at the history of the 1917 revolution. The February revolution started with a spontaneous protests and strikes. As Murray Bookchin notes, *"the Petrograd organisation of the Bolsheviks opposed the calling of strikes precisely on the eve of the revolution which was destined to overthrow the Tsar. Fortunately, the workers ignored the Bolshevik 'directives' and went on strike anyway. In the events which followed, no one was more surprised by the revolution than the 'revolutionary' parties, including the Bolsheviks."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 194] Trotsky quotes one of the Bolshevik leaders at the time:

> *"Absolutely no guiding initiative from the party centres was felt ... the Petrograd Committee had been arrested and the representative of the Central Committee ... was unable to give any directives for the coming day."* [quoted by Trotsky, **History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 147]

Not the best of starts. Of course rank and file Bolsheviks took part in the demonstrations, street fights and strikes and

not. As noted, the Bolsheviks were initially opposed the soviets and systematically worked to undermine them. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky at that time was a Menshevik, not a Bolshevik. After all, how could the most revolutionary party that ever existed have messed up so badly? How could democratic centralism faired so badly in practice? Best, then, to suggest that it did not and give the Bolsheviks a role better suited to the rhetoric of Bolshevism than its reality.

Trotsky was no different. He, needless to say, denied the obvious implications of these events in 1905. While admitting that the Bolsheviks *"adjusted themselves more slowly to the sweep of the movement"* and that the Mensheviks *"were preponderant in the Soviet,"* he tries to save vanguardism by asserting that *"the general direction of the Soviet's policy proceeded in the main along Bolshevik lines."* So, in spite of the lack of Bolshevik influence, in spite of the slowness in adjusting to the revolution, Bolshevism was, in fact, the leading set of ideas in the revolution! Ironically, a few pages later, he mocks the claims of Stalinists that Stalin had *"isolated the Mensheviks from the masses"* by noting that the *"figures hardly bear [the claims] out."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112 and p. 117] Shame he did not apply this criteria to his own claims.

Of course, every party makes mistakes. The question is, how did the *"most revolutionary party of all time"* fare in 1917. Surely that revolution proves the validity of vanguardism and "democratic centralism"? After all, there was a successful revolution, the Bolshevik party did seize power. However, the apparent success of 1917 was not due to the application of "democratic centralism," quite the reverse. While the myth of 1917 is that a highly efficient, democratic centralist vanguard party ensured the overthrow of the Provisional Government in November 1917 in favour of the Soviets (or so it seemed at the time) the facts are somewhat different. Rather, the Bolshevik party throughout 1917 was a fairly loose collection of local organisations (each more than willing to ignore central



# Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's *"Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism"*

On the Trotskyist "New Youth" webpage there is an article entitled "Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism" by John Fisher. This article contains numerous distortions of anarchist ideas and positions. Indeed, he makes so many basic errors that only two possible explanations are possible: either he knows nothing about anarchism or he does and is consciously lying.

We will compare his assertions to what anarchist theory actually argues in order to show that this is the case.

## 1. Why should *"the so-called Anarchistic youth of today"* be concerned that Trotskyists consider them allies?

Fisher starts his diatribe against anarchism with some thoughts on the radical youth active in the anti-globalisation demonstrations and movements:

> *"The so-called Anarchistic youth of today, year 2001, for the most part simply use the term 'Anarchist' as an indication of not wanting to go along with the 'system' in not wanting to assimilate, which is a giant leap forward on their part considering all their lives they've constantly been bombarded with the huge American Corporate propaganda machine. For this achievement, they are already more our ally than our enemy."*

It makes you wonder how Fisher knows this. Has there been a poll of "anarchistic youth" recently? It would be interesting to discover the empirical basis for this statement. Given the

quality of the rest of the article, we can hazard a guess and say that these particular facts are just assertions and express wishful thinking rather than any sort of reality.

Needless to say, these *"anarchistic youth"* had better watch out. We all know what happens to the *"ally"* of the vanguard party once that party takes power. Anarchists remember the fate of our comrades when Lenin and Trotsky ruled the "proletarian" state.

The Russian anarchists were at the forefront of the struggle between the February and October revolutions in 1917. As socialist historian Samuel Farber notes, the anarchists *"had actually been an unnamed coalition partner of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 126] The anarchists were the "allies" of the Bolsheviks before they took power as both shared the goals of abolishing the provisional government and for a social revolution which would end capitalism.

This changed once the Bolsheviks had taken power. On the night of April 11th, 1918, the Cheka surrounded 26 Anarchist clubs in Moscow, in the insuring fighting Anarchists suffered 40 casualties and 500 were taken prisoner. The Petrograd anarchists protested this attack:

> *"The Bolsheviks have lost their senses. They have betrayed the proletariat and attacked the anarchists. They have joined ... the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. They have declared war on revolutionary anarchism... . We regarded you [Bolsheviks] as our revolutionary brothers. But you have proved to be traitors. You are Cains — you have killed your brothers ... There can be no peace with the traitors to the working class. The executioners of the revolution wish to become the executioners of anarchism."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 113]



*gent of Bolshevik workingmen as well ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelash."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 106] More than that, *"[t]he party's Central Committee published the resolution on October 27, thereby making it the binding directive for all other Bolshevik organisations."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 77] It was only the return of Lenin which stopped the Bolshevik's open attacks against the Soviet (also see section 8 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?").

The rationale for these attacks is significant. The St. Petersburg Bolsheviks were convinced that *"only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent."* [quoted by Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77] In other words, the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers! The implications of this perspective came clear in 1918, when the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and disbanded soviets to remain in power (see section 6). That the Bolshevik's position flowed naturally from Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?** is clear. Thus the underlying logic of Lenin's vanguardism ensured that the Bolsheviks played a negative role with regards the soviets which, combined with "democratic centralism" ensured that it was spread far and wide. Only by ignoring their own party's principles and staying in the Soviet did rank and file Bolsheviks play a positive role in the revolution. This divergence of top and bottom would be repeated in 1917.

Given this, perhaps it is unsurprising that Leninists started to rewrite the history of the 1905 revolution. Victor Serge, a "Left Oppositionist" and anti-Stalinist asserted in the late 1920s that in 1905 the Petrograd Soviet was *"led by Trotsky and inspired by the Bolsheviks."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 36]. While the former claim is correct, the latter is

*for turning the revolution into a bureaucratic counter-revolution — in both cases because of the party's very nature, structure and ideology."* Indeed, *"[f]rom April to October, Lenin had to fight a constant battle to keep the Party leadership in tune with the masses."* [**Obsolete Communism**, p. 183 and p. 187] It was only by continually violating its own *"nature, structure and ideology"* that the Bolshevik party played an important role in the revolution. Whenever the principles of *"democratic centralism"* were applied, the Bolshevik party played the role the Cohen-Bendit brothers subscribed to it (and once in power, the party's negative features came to the fore).

Even Leninists acknowledge that, to quote Tony Cliff, throughout the history of Bolshevism, *"a certain conservatism arose."* Indeed, *"[a]t practically all sharp turning points, Lenin had to rely on the lower strata of the party machine against the higher, or on the rank and file against the machine as a whole."* [**Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 135] This fact, incidentally, refutes the basic assumptions of Lenin's party schema, namely that the broad party membership, like the working class, was subject to bourgeois influences so necessitating central leadership and control from above.

Looking at both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, we are struck by how often this *"conservatism"* arose and how often the higher bodies were behind the spontaneous actions of the masses and the party membership. Looking at the 1905 revolution, we discover a classic example of the inefficiency of "democratic centralism." Facing in 1905 the rise of the soviets, councils of workers' delegates elected to co-ordinate strikes and other forms of struggle, the Bolsheviks did not know what to do. *"The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks,"* noted Trotsky, *"was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses, and could find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social-Democratic program or disband. The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contin-*



Fifteen days later similar raids were carried out in Petrograd. This repression, we must note, took place months before the outbreak of the Russian Civil War (in late May 1918). In May of that year, leading anarchist periodicals (including **Burevestnik**, **Anarkhia** and **Golos Truda**) were closed down by the government. The repression continued during the war and afterwards. Many imprisoned anarchists were deported from the "workers' state" in 1921 after they went on hunger strike and their plight was raised by libertarian delegates to the founding congress of the Red International of Labour Unions held that year.

Unsurprisingly, the Bolsheviks denied they held anarchists. French anarchist Gaston Leval accounted how Lenin had *"reiterated the charges made by Dzerzhinsky [founder of the Bolsheviks secret police, the Cheka] ... Those in prison were not true anarchists nor idealists — just bandits abusing our good intentions."* Leval, having gathered the facts, indicated this was not true, making Lenin backtrack. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 213]

Unsurprisingly, when the libertarian delegates to the congress reported back on conditions in Russia to their unions, they withdrew from the Trade-Union International.

In the Ukraine, the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement also became an "ally" with the Bolsheviks in the common struggle against the counter-revolutionary White armies. The Bolsheviks betrayed their allies each time they formed an alliance.

The first alliance was in March 1919 during the struggle against Denikin, In May of that year, two Cheka agents sent to assassinate Makhno (the main leader of the movement) were caught and executed. The following month Trotsky, the commander of the Red Army, outlawed the Makhnovists and Communist troops attacked their headquarters at Gulyai-Polye.

Denikin's massive attack on Moscow in September 1919 saw the shaky alliance resumed in the face of a greater threat.

Once Denikin had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ordered the Makhnovists to the Polish front. This was obviously designed to draw them away from their home territory, so leaving it defenceless against Bolshevik rule. The Makhnovists refused and Trotsky, again, outlawed and attacked them.

Hostilities were again broken off when the White General Wrangel launched a major offensive in the summer of 1920. Again the Bolsheviks signed a pact with Makhno. This promised amnesty for all anarchists in Bolshevik prisons, freedom for anarchist propaganda, free participation to the Soviets and *"in the region where the Makhnovist Army is operating, the population of workers and peasants will create its own institutions of economic and political self-management."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 177–9] Once Wrangel had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ripped up the agreement and turned their forces, once again, against their "ally" and finally drove them out of the Soviet Union in 1921.

These events should be remembered when the authoritarian left argue that we aim for the same thing and are allies.

## 2. What else do people learn about when they discover anarchism is not *"utter rebellion"*?

Fisher continues:

> *"In some cases, 'Anarchist' youth begin to try to learn about what Anarchism truly is instead of seeing it merely as utter rebellion. They learn Anarchism is a form of Socialism, they learn they have much in common with Marxists, they learn the state must be smashed, they learn the state is a tool of suppression used by one class against another."*



> *party that knows what it wants."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

To anarchist ears, such claims seem out of place. After all, did the Russian Revolution actually result in socialism or even a viable form of soviet democracy? Far from it. Unless you picture revolution as simply the changing of the party in power, you have to acknowledge that while the Bolshevik party **did** take power in Russian in November 1917, the net effect of this was **not** the stated goals that justified that action. Thus, if we take the term *"effective"* to mean "an efficient means to achieve the desired goals" then vanguardism has not been proven to be effective, quite the reverse (assuming that your desired goal is a socialist society, rather than party power). Needless to say, Trotsky blames the failure of the Russian Revolution on *"objective"* factors rather than Bolshevik policies and practice, an argument we address in detail in "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" and will not do so here.

So while Leninists make great claims for the effectiveness of their chosen kind of party, the hard facts of history are against their positive evaluation of vanguard parties. Ironically, even the Russian Revolution disproves the claims of Leninists. The fact is that the Bolshevik party in 1917 was very far from the *"democratic centralist"* organisation which supporters of *"vanguardism"* like to claim it is. As such, its success in 1917 lies more in its divergence from the principles of *"democratic centralism"* than in their application. The subsequent degeneration of the revolution and the party is marked by the increasing **application** of those principles in the life of the party.

Thus, to refute the claims of the *"effectiveness"* and *"efficiency"* of vanguardism, we need to look at its one and only success, namely the Russian Revolution. As the Cohen-Bendit brothers argue, *"far from leading the Russian Revolution forwards, the Bolsheviks were responsible for holding back the struggle of the masses between February and October 1917, and later*

the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement which applied basic libertarian principles in the same difficult circumstances of the Russian Civil War (see "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?" on this important movement).

## 1 Can you give a short summary of what happened in 1917?

## 2 How did the Bolsheviks gain mass support?

## 3 Surely the Russian Revolution proves that vanguard parties work?

No, far from it. Looking at the history of vanguardism we are struck by its failures, not its successes. Indeed, the proponents of *"democratic centralism"* can point to only one apparent success of their model, namely the Russian Revolution. However, we are warned by Leninists that failure to use the vanguard party will inevitably condemn future revolutions to failure:

> *"The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard... Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power .. . The Soviets are the only organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be given this form only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally, Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a*



They learn much more than this. They learn, for example, about the history of Marxism and how anarchism differs from it.

They learn, for example, about the history of Marxist Social Democracy. Many forget that Social Democracy was the first major Marxist movement. It was formed initially in Germany in 1875 when the followers of Lassalle and Marx united to form the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). This party followed Marx and Engels recommendations that workers should form a distinct political party and conquer political power. It rejected the anarchist argument that workers should *"abstain from politics"* (i.e. elections) and instead, to use an expression from Marx's preamble of the French Workers' Party, turn the franchise *"from a means of deception ... into an instrument of emancipation."* [**Marx and Engels Reader**, p. 566]

Rather than confirm Marx's politics, Social Democracy confirmed Bakunin's. It quickly degenerated into reformism. As Bakunin predicted, when *"the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 108]

Form the early 1890s, Social Democracy was racked by arguments between reformists (the "revisionist" wing) and revolutionaries. The former wanted to adapt the party and its rhetoric to what it was doing. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the *"distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action."* [C. Schorske, **German Social Democracy**, p. 38]

In 1914, the majority of social democrats in Germany and across the world supported their state in the imperialist slaugh-

ter of the First World. This disgraceful end would not have surprised Bakunin.

Anarchists also learn about the Russian Revolution. They learn how Lenin and Trotsky eliminated democracy in the armed forces, in the workplace and in the soviets.

They learn, for example, that the Bolsheviks had disbanded soviets which had been elected with non-Bolshevik majorities in the spring and summer of 1918. [Samuel Farber, ***Op. Cit.***, p. 24]

They learn that at the end of March, 1918, Trotsky reported to the Communist Party that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree"* in the Red Army. [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, pp. 37–8]

They learn that Lenin opposed workers' management of production. Before the October Revolution he saw "workers' control" purely in terms of the *"universal, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 52] He did not see it in terms of workers' management of production itself (i.e. the abolition of wage labour) via federations of factory committees. Anarchists and the workers' factory committees did. *"On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38]

Lenin himself quickly supported *"one-man management"* invested with *"dictatorial powers"* after *"control over the capitalists"* failed. By 1920, Trotsky was advocating the *"militarisation of labour"* and implemented his ideas on the railway workers.



sheviks as the paradigm of revolution while washing their hands of the results of that revolution. By arguing that the Bolsheviks were *"making a virtue of necessity,"* (to use the expression of Leninist Donny Gluckstein [**The Tragedy of Bukharin**, p. 41]), they are automatically absolved of proving their arguments about the "democratic" essence of Bolshevism in power. Which is useful as, logically, no such evidence could exist and, in fact, there is a whole host of evidence pointing the other way which can, by happy co-incidence, be ignored. Indeed, from this perspective there is no point even discussing the revolution at all, beyond praising the activities and ideology of the Bolsheviks while sadly noting that "fate" (to quote Leninist Tony Cliff) ensured that they could not fulfil their promises. Which, of course, almost Leninist accounts **do** boil down to. Thus, for the modern Leninist, the Bolsheviks cannot be judged on what they did nor what they said while doing it (or even after). They can only be praised for what they said and did **before** they seized power.

However, anarchists have a problem with this position. It smacks more of religion than theory. Karl Marx was right to argue that you cannot judge people by what they say, only by what they do. It is in this revolutionary spirit that this section of the FAQ analyses the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik role within it. We need to analyse what they did when they held power as well as the election manifesto. As we will indicate in this section, neither was particularly appealing.

Finally, we should note that Leninists today have various arguments to justify what the Bolsheviks did once in power. We discuss these in the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?". We also discuss in the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?" the ideological roots of the counter-revolutionary role of the Bolsheviks during the revolution. That the politics of the Bolsheviks played its role in the failure of the revolution can be seen from the example of

social dynamics (and struggles) of the period under Lenin and Trotsky. This means we have to utilise the sources which **do,** namely those historians who do not identify with the Bolshevik regime. And, of course, any analysis (or defence) of the Bolshevik regime will have to account for critical accounts, either by refuting them or by showing their limitations. As will become obvious in our discussion, the reason why latter day Bolsheviks talk about the class dynamics post-October in the most superficial way is that it would be hard, even impossible, to maintain that Lenin's regime was remotely socialist or based on working class power. Simply put, from early 1918 (at the latest) conflict between the Bolsheviks and the Russian working masses was a constant feature of the regime. It is only when that conflict reached massive proportions that Leninists do not (i.e. cannot) ignore it. In such cases, as the Kronstadt rebellion proves, history is distorted in order to defend the Bolshevik state (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" for details).

The fact that Leninists try to discredit anarchists by saying that we sound like the right is sad. In effect, it **blocks** any real discussion of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism (as intended, probably). This ensures that Leninism remains above critique and so no lessons can be learnt from the Russian experience. After all, if the Bolsheviks had no choice then what lessons **are** there to learn? None. And if we are to learn no lessons (bar, obviously, mimic the Bolsheviks) we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes — mistakes that are partly explained by the objective circumstances at the time and partly by Bolshevik politics. But given that most of the circumstances the Bolsheviks faced, such as civil war and isolation, are likely to reappear in any future revolution, modern-day Leninists are simply ensuring that Karl Marx was right — history repeats itself, first time as tragedy, second time as farce.

Such a position is, of course, wonderful for the pro-Leninist. It allows them to quote Lenin and Trotsky and use the Bol-



They learn that Leninism is just another form of capitalism (state capitalism). As Lenin put it, socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly* ***made to benefit the whole people****; by this token it* ***ceases*** *to be capitalist monopoly."* [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 37]

They learn that Lenin and Trotsky argued for party dictatorship and centralised, top-down rule (see section 4).

They also learn that this should not come as a surprise. Anarchism argues that the state is a tool to allow minorities to rule and has been designed to ensure minority power. They learn that it cannot, by its very nature, be a tool for liberation — no matter who is in charge of it.

## 3. What do anarchists think will *"replace the smashed state machine"*?

Fisher now makes a common Marxist assertion. He states:

> *"But what they do not learn, and never will from an Anarchist perspective is what is to replace the smashed state machine?"*

In reality, if you read anarchist thinkers you will soon discover what anarchists think will "replace" the state: namely the various working class organisations created by the class struggle and revolution. In the words of Kropotkin, the *"elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 175] He stressed that *"[to] make a revolution it is not ... enough that there should be ... [popular] risings ... It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [that make up society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200]

Thus the framework of a free society would be created by the process of the revolution itself. As such, as Kropotkin put it, *"[d]uring a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruins of the old forms ... It is impossible to legislate for the future. All we can do is vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 101–2] So while the specific forms these organisations would take cannot be predicted, their general nature can be.

So what is the general nature of these new organisations? Anarchists have consistently argued that the state would be replaced by a free federation of workers' associations and communes, self-managed and organised from the bottom-up. In Malatesta's words, anarchy is the *"free organisation from below upwards, from the simple to the complex, through free agreement and the federation of associations of production and consumption."* In particular, he argued anarchists aim to *"push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community"* while the peasants *"should take over the land and produced usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 147 and p. 165]

This vision of revolution followed Bakunin's:

> *"the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... [will] constitute the Commune ... [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ... delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines .... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always*



of the revolution does not in any way discredit these facts. How these facts are used is what counts. The right uses the facts to discredit socialism and the revolution. Anarchists use them to argue for libertarian socialism and support the revolution while opposing the Bolshevik ideology and practice which distorted it. Similarly, unlike the right we take into account the factors which Leninists urge us to use to excuse Bolshevik authoritarianism (such as civil war, economic collapse and so on). We are simply not convinced by Leninist arguments.

Needless to say, few Leninists apply their logic to Stalinism. To attack Stalinism by describing the facts of the regime would make one sound like the "right-wing." Does that mean socialists should defend one of the most horrific dictatorships that ever existed? If so, how does that sound to non-socialists? Surely they would conclude that socialism **is** about Stalinism, dictatorship, terror and so on? If not, why not? If "sounding like the right" makes criticism of Lenin's regime anti-revolutionary, then why does this not apply to Stalinism? Simply because Lenin and Trotsky were not at the head of the dictatorship as they were in the early 1920s? Does the individuals who are in charge override the social relations of a society? Does dictatorship and one-man management become less so when Lenin rules? The apologists for Lenin and Trotsky point to the necessity created by the civil war and isolation within international capitalism for their authoritarian policies (while ignoring the fact they started **before** the civil war, continued after it **and were justified at the time** in terms of Bolshevik ideology). Stalin could make the same claim.

Other objections may be raised. It may be claimed that we quote "bourgeois" (or even worse, **Menshevik**) sources and so our account is flawed. In reply, we have to state that you cannot judge a regime based purely on what it says about itself. As such, critical accounts are required to paint a full picture of events. Moreover, it is a sad fact that few, if any, Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution actually discuss the class and

these factors did have an effect in the outcome of the Russian Revolution, the seeds for bureaucracy existed from the first moment of the Bolshevik insurrection. These seeds where from three sources: Bolshevik politics, the nature of the state and the post-October economic arrangements favoured and implemented by the ruling party.

As we will indicate, these three factors caused the new "workers' state" to degenerate long before the out break of the Civil war in May of 1918. This means that the revolution was **not** defeated primarily because of isolation or the effects of the civil war. The Bolsheviks had already seriously undermined it from within **long before** the effects of isolation or civil war had a chance to take hold. The civil war which started in the summer of 1918 did take its toll in what revolutionary gains survived, not least because it allowed the Bolsheviks to portray themselves and their policies as the lessor of two evils. However, Lenin's regime was already defending (state) capitalism against genuine socialist tendencies before the outbreak of civil war. The suppression of Kronstadt in March 1921 was simply the logical end result of a process that had started in the spring of 1918, at the latest. As such, isolation and civil war are hardly good excuses — particularly as anarchists had predicted they would affect every revolution decades previously and Leninists are meant to realise that civil war and revolution are inevitable. Also, it must be stressed that Bolshevik rule was opposed by the working class, who took collective action to resist it and the Bolsheviks justified their policies in ideological terms and **not** in terms of measures required by difficult circumstances (see the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?").

One last thing. We are sure, in chronicling the "excesses" of the Bolshevik regime, that some Leninists will say "they sound exactly like the right-wing." Presumably, if we said that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West we would also "sound like the right-wing." That the right-wing also points to certain **facts**



> *belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation..."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–2]

Similarly, Proudhon argued federations of workers associations and communes to replace the state. While seeing such activity as essentially reformist in nature, he saw the germs of anarchy as being the result of *"generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them"* as *"it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 399 and p. 398] What, decades later, Proudhon called an *"agro-industrial federation"* in his **Principle of Federation**.

Kropotkin, unsurprisingly enough, had similar ideas. He saw the revolution as the *"expropriation of the whole of social wealth"* by the workers, who *"will organise the workshops so that they continue production"* once *"the governments are swept out by the people."* The *"coming social revolution"* would see *"the complete abolition of States, and reorganisation from the simple to the complex through the free federation of the popular forces of producers and consumers,"* the *"federation of workers' corporations and groups of consumers."* The *"Commune will know that it must break the State and replace it by the Federation"* (which is *"freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes"*). [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 99, p. 91, p. 92 and p. 83]

Thus *"independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions [i.e. workplace associations] for the organisation of men [and women] in accordance with their different functions, gave a* ***concrete*** *conception of society regen-*

*erated by a social revolution."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 79]

In his classic history of the French Revolution he pointed to *"the popular Commune"* as an example of the *"something new"* required to turn an uprising into a revolution. He argued that *"the Revolution began by creating the Commune ... and through this institution it gained ... immense power."* He stressed that it was *"by means of the 'districts' [of the Communes] that ... the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government."* Such a system did not imply isolation, for while *"the districts strove to maintain their own independence"* they also *"sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union."* The Commune *"was thus made **from below upward**, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200 and p. 203]

During the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, Kropotkin expressed his support for the soviets created by the workers in struggle. He argued that anarchists should *"enter the Soviets, but certainly only as far as the Soviets are organs of the struggle against the bourgeoisie and the state, and not organs of authority."* [quoted by Graham Purchase, **Evolution and Revolution**, p. 30] After the 1917 revolution, he re-iterated this point, arguing that *"idea of soviets ... of councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 254]

Therefore, Fisher's comments are totally untrue. Anarchists have been pretty clear on this issue from Proudhon onwards (see section I.2.3 for a further discussion of this issue).



the party dictatorship he created and, moreover, rationalising the utter lack of working class freedom and power under it. We will try to indicate the falseness of such claims. As will become clear from this section, the following summation of an anonymous revolutionary is totally correct:

> ***"Every notion about revolution inherited from Bolshevism is false."***

In this, they were simply repeating the conclusions of anarchists. As Kropotkin stressed in 1920:

> *"It seems to me that this attempt to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralised state, under the iron law of the dictatorship of one party, has ended in a terrible fiasco. Russia teaches us how not to impose communism."* [Peter Kropotkin, quoted by Guerin, **Anarchism**, p. 106]

Ultimately, the experience of Bolshevism was a disaster. And as the Makhnovists in the Ukraine proved, Bolshevik ideology and practice was **not** the only option available (see the appendix on "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"). There **were** alternatives, but Bolshevik ideology simply excluded using them (we will discuss some possibilities in this various sub-sections below). In other words, Bolshevik ideology is simply not suitable for a real revolutionary movement and the problems it will face. In fact, its ideology and practice ensures that any such problems will be magnified and made worse, as the Russian revolution proves.

Sadly many socialists cannot bring themselves to acknowledge this. While recognising the evils of the Stalinist bureaucracy, these socialists deny that this degeneration of Bolshevism was inevitable and was caused by outside factors (namely the Russian Civil War or isolation). While not denying that

alities of "workers' power" under the Bolsheviks or the actual performance and fate of such working class institutions as soviets, factory committees and co-operatives. What is written is often little more than vague generalities that aim to justify authoritarian Bolshevik policies which either explicitly aimed to undermine such bodies or, at best, resulted in their marginalisation when implemented.

This section of the FAQ aims to make known the *"unknown revolution"* that continued under the Bolsheviks and, equally important, the Bolshevik response to it. As part of this process we need to address some of the key events of that period, such as the role of foreign intervention and the impact of the civil war. However, we do not go into these issues in depth here and instead cover them in depth in the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?". This is because most Leninists excuse Bolshevik authoritarianism on the impact of the civil war, regardless of the facts of the matter. As we discuss in the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", the ideology of Bolshevism played its role as well — something that modern day Leninists strenuously deny (again, regardless of the obvious). As we indicate in this section, the idea that Bolshevism came into conflict with the *"unknown revolution"* is simply not viable. Bolshevik ideology and practice made it inevitable that this conflict erupted, as it did **before** the start of the civil war (also see section 3 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?").

Ultimately, the reason why Leninist ideas still have influence on the socialist movement is due to the apparent success of the Russian Revolution. Many Leninist groups, mainly Trotskyists and derivatives of Trotskyism, point to "Red October" and the creation of the first ever workers state as concrete examples of the validity of their ideas. They point to Lenin's **State and Revolution** as proving the "democratic" (even "libertarian") nature of Leninism while, at the same time, supporting



## 4. What did Trotsky and Lenin think must replace the bourgeois state?

Fisher continues his inaccurate attack:

> "What we as Marxists explain is what must replace the smashed bourgeois state machine.
>
> "Engels explains that the state is a 'special coercive force'. So what must come after the bourgeoisie is overthrown to keep it down? As Lenin explains in the State and Revolution: the bourgeois state 'must be replaced by a "special coercive force" for the suppression of the bourgeois by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat)' (pg 397 vol. 25 collected works) that is workers' democracy."

There are numerous issues here. Firstly, of course, is the question of how to define the state. Fisher implicitly assumes that anarchists and Marxists share the same definition of what marks a "state." Secondly, there is the question of whether quoting Lenin's **State and Revolution** without relating it to Bolshevik practice is very convincing. Thirdly, there is the question of the defence of the revolution. We will discuss the second question here, the first in the next section and the third in section 6.

There is a well-known difference between Lenin's work **The State and Revolution** and actual Bolshevik practice. In the former, Lenin promised the widest democracy, although he also argued that *"[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions."* [*"The State and Revolution"*, **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 306] Clearly, he saw "democracy" in the normal, bourgeois, sense of electing a government who will make the decisions for the electors. Indeed, the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* is described as *"the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed*

*as the ruling class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 337] This *"vanguard"* is the party:

> *"By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and* ***of leading the whole people*** *to Socialism, of directing and organising the new order, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 288]

So the vanguard of the oppressed would become the *"ruling class"*, **not** the oppressed. This means that *"workers' democracy"* is simply reduced to meaning the majority designates its rulers but does not rule itself. As such, the "workers' state" is just the same as any other state (see next section).

Thus, before taking power Lenin argued for party power, not workers' power. The workers can elect representatives who govern on their behalf, but they do not actually manage society themselves. This is the key contradiction for Bolshevism — it confuses workers' power with party power.

Post-October, the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky changed. If their works are consulted, it is soon discovered what they thought should "replace" the bourgeois state: party dictatorship.

In the words of Lenin (from 1920):

> *"In the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers ... What happens is that the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 21, p. 20]



*words in passing ... [Yet] it is precisely these hidden facts which are important, and which throw a true light on the events under consideration and on the period."* This section of the FAQ will try and present this *"unknown revolution,"* those movements *"which fought the Bolshevik power in the name of true liberty and of the principles of the Social Revolution which that power had scoffed at and trampled underfoot."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 19 and p. 437] Voline gives the Kronstadt rebellion (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?") and the Makhnovist movement (see the appendix on "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?") pride of place in his account. Here we discuss other movements and the Bolshevik response to them.

Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution, to a surprising extent, fall into the official form of history — a concern more with political leaders than with the actions of the masses. Indeed, the popular aspects of the revolution are often distorted to accord with a predetermined social framework of Leninism. Thus the role of the masses is stressed during the period before the Bolshevik seizure of power. Here the typical Leninist would agree, to a large extend, with summarised history of 1917 we present in section 1. They would undoubtedly disagree with the downplaying of the role of the Bolshevik party (although as we discuss in section 2, that party was far from the ideal model of the vanguard party of Leninist theory and modern Leninist practice). However, the role of the masses in the revolution would be praised, as would the Bolsheviks for supporting it.

The real difference arises once the Bolsheviks seize power in November 1917 (October, according to the Old Style calendar then used). After that, the masses simply disappear and into the void steps the leadership of the Bolshevik party. For Leninism, the *"unknown revolution"* simply stops. The sad fact is that very little is known about the dynamics of the revolution at the grassroots, particularly after October. Incredible as it may sound, very few Leninists are that interested in the re-

Stalinism is pretty narrow. The closer to orthodox Trotskyism you get, the more Stalinist it appears. As Victor Serge noted of Trotsky's "Fourth International" in the 1930s, *"in the hearts of the persecuted I encountered the same attitudes as in their persecutors [the Stalinists] ... Trotskyism was displaying symptoms of an outlook in harmony with the very Stalinism against which it had taken its stand ... any person in the circles of the 'Fourth International' who went so far as to object to [Trotsky's] propositions was promptly expelled and denounced in the same language that the bureaucracy had] employed against us in the Soviet Union."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 349] As we discuss in section 3 of the appendix on "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?", perhaps this is unsurprising given how much politically Trotsky's "Left Opposition" had shared with Stalinism.

Other Trotskyist parties have avoided the worse excesses of orthodox Trotskyism. Parties associated with the **International Socialists**, for example portray themselves as defending what they like to term *"socialism from below"* and the democratic promise of Bolshevik as expressed during 1917 and in the early months of Bolshevik rule. While anarchists are somewhat sceptical that Leninism can be called *"socialism from below"* (see section H.3.3), we need to address the claim that the period between February 1917 to the start of the Russian civil war at the end of May 1918 shows the real nature of Bolshevism. In order to do that we need to discuss what the Russian anarchist Voline called *"The Unknown Revolution."*

So what is the *"Unknown Revolution"*? Voline, an active participant in 1917 Russian Revolution, used that expression as the title of his classic account of the Russian revolution. He used it to refer to the rarely acknowledged independent, creative actions of the revolutionary people themselves. As Voline argued, *"it is not known how to study a revolution"* and most historians *"mistrust and ignore those developments which occur silently in the depths of the revolution ... at best, they accord them a few*



He stressed that this was an inevitable aspect of revolution, applicable in all countries:

> *"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 21]

Trotsky agreed with this lesson and argued it to the end of his life:

> *"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution .. . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be*

> *replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [**Writings 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]

Lenin and Trotsky are clearly explaining the need for party dictatorship over the working class. This was seen as a **general** lesson of the Russian Revolution. How many Marxists "explain" this to anarchists?

Clearly, then, Fisher is not being totally honest when he argues that Trotskyism is based on "workers' democracy." Lenin, for example, argued that *"Marxism teaches — and this tenet has not only been formally endorsed by the whole of the Communist International in the decisions of the second Congress ... . but has also been confirmed in practice by our revolution — that only the political party of the working class, i.e. the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 246]

Lenin is, of course, rejecting what democracy is all about, namely the right and duty of representative bodies to carry out the wishes of the electors (i.e. their "vacillations"). Instead of workers' democracy, he is clearly arguing for the right of the party to ignore it and impose its own wishes on the working class.

Trotsky argued along the same lines (again in 1921):

> *"They [the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers' Opposition] have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not*



sion that it was *"[h]igh time the truth about the Bolsheviki were told. The whited sepulchre must unmasked, the clay feet of the fetish beguiling the international proletariat to fatal will o' wisps exposed. The Bolshevik myth must be destroyed."* By so doing, he aimed to help the global revolutionary movement learn from the experience of the Russian revolution. Given that *"[t]o millions of the disinherited and enslaved it became a new religion, the beacon of social salvation"* it was an *"imperative to unmask the great delusion, which otherwise might lead the Western workers to the same abyss as their brothers in Russia."* Bolshevism had *"failed, utterly and absolutely"* and so it was *"incumbent upon those who have seen though the myth to expose its true nature ... Bolshevism is of the past. The future belongs to man and his liberty."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 318 and p. 342]

Subsequent events proved Berkman correct. Socialism became linked to Soviet Russia and as it fell into Stalinism, the effect was to discredit socialism, even radical change as such, in the eyes of millions. And quite rightly too, given the horrors of Stalinism. If more radicals had had the foresight of Berkman and the other anarchists, this association of socialism and revolution with tyranny would have been combated and an alternative, libertarian, form of socialism would have risen to take the challenge of combating capitalism in the name of a **genuine** socialism, rooted in the ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity.

However, in spite of the horrors of Stalinism many people seeking a radical change in society are drawn to Leninism. This is partly to do with the fact that in many countries Leninist parties have a organised presence and many radicalised people come across them first. It is also partly to do with the fact that many forms of Leninism denounce Stalinism for what it was and raise the possibility of the "genuine" Leninism of the Bolshevik party under Lenin and Trotsky. This current of Leninism is usually called "Trotskyism" and has many offshoots. For some of these parties, the differences between Trotskyism and

ment and point to libertarian ideas for anyone who wants to change the world.

## What happened during the Russian Revolution?

This appendix of the FAQ is not a full history of the Russian Revolution. The scope of such a work would simply be too large. Instead, this section will concentrate on certain key issues which matter in evaluating whether the Bolshevik revolution and regime were genuinely socialist or not. This is not all. Some Leninists acknowledge that that Bolshevik policies had little to do with socialism as such were the best that were available at the time. As such, this section will look at possible alternatives to Bolshevik policies and see whether they were, in fact, inevitable.

So for those seeking a comprehensive history of the revolution will have to look elsewhere. Here, we concentrate on those issues which matter when evaluating the socialist content of the revolution and of Bolshevism. In other words, the development of working class self-activity and self-organisation, workers' resistance to their bosses (whether capitalist or "red"), the activity of opposition groups and parties and the fate of working class organisations like trade unions, factory committees and soviets. Moreover, the role of the ruling party and its ideals also need to be indicated and evaluated somewhat (see "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?" for a fuller discussion of the role of Bolshevik ideology in the defeat of the revolution).

This means that this section is about two things, what Alexander Berkman termed ***"the Bolshevik Myth"*** and what Voline called ***"the Unknown Revolution"*** (these being the titles of their respective books on the revolution). After his experiences in Bolshevik Russia, Berkman came to the conclu-



> *entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker's democracy!"*

He spoke of the *"revolutionary historic birthright of the Party"* and that it *"is obliged to maintain its dictatorship .... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

Needless to say, they did not explain how these lessons and arguments are compatible with Lenin's **State and Revolution** where he had argued that *"[a]ll officials, without exception,"* must be *"elected and subject to recall **at any time.**"* [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 302] If they **are** subject to election and recall at any time, then they will reflect the *"passing moods"* (the *"vacillations"*) of the workers' democracy. Therefore, to combat this, soviet democracy must be replaced by party dictatorship and neither Lenin nor Trotsky were shy in both applying and arguing this position.

It is a shame, then, for Fisher's argument that both Lenin and Trotsky also explained why party dictatorship was more important than workers' democracy. It is doubly harmful for his argument as both argued that this "lesson" was of a **general** nature and applicable for all revolutions.

It is also a shame for Fisher's argument that the Leninists, once in power, overthrew every soviet that was elected with a non-Bolshevik majority (see section 6 of the appendix on "What happened during the Russian Revolution?"). They also repressed those who demanded real workers' democracy (as, for example, in Kronstadt in 1921 — see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" — or during the numerous strikes under Lenin's rule — see sections 3 and 5 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?").

Clearly, Fisher's account of Trotskyism, like his account of anarchism, leaves a lot to be desired.

### 5. Is the "proletarian 'state'" really a new kind of state?

Fisher, after keeping his readers ignorant of Lenin and Trotsky **real** position on workers' democracy, argues that:

> *"The proletariat 'state' is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word, Lenin explains, because it is no longer the minority suppressing the majority, but the vast majority suppressing a tiny minority! The Proletariat suppressing the Bourgeoisie."*

If it is not a state *"in the proper sense of the word"* then why use the term state at all? Marxists argue because its function remains the same — namely the suppression of one class by another. However, every state that has ever existed has been the organ by which a **minority** ruling class suppresses the majority. As such, the Marxist definition is a-historic in the extreme and extracts a metaphysical essence of the state rather than producing a definition based on empirical evidence.

In order to show the fallacy of Fisher's argument, it is necessary to explain what anarchists think the state is.

The assumption underlying Fisher's argument is that anarchists and Marxists share identical definitions of what a state is. This is not true. Marxists, as Fisher notes, think of a state as simply as an instrument of class rule and so concentrate solely on this function. Anarchists disagree. While we agree that the main function of the state is to defend class society, we also stress the structure of the state has evolved to ensure that role. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

> *"[S]ocial institutions ... do not arise arbitrarily, but are called into being by special needs to serve*



# Appendix — The Russian Revolution

This appendix of the FAQ exists to discuss in depth the Russian revolution and the impact that Leninist ideology and practice had on its outcome. Given that the only reason why Leninism is taken seriously in some parts of the revolutionary movement is the Russian Revolution, it is useful to expose what Alexander Berkman called "the Bolshevik Myth." This means discussing certain aspects of the revolution and indicating exactly how Leninism helped destroy any libertarian potential it had. It also means analysing common, modern-day, Leninist excuses for the actions of the Bolsheviks to see if they hold water. It also means analysing in depth specific events of the revolution (such as the Kronstadt uprising of March 1921 and the libertarian influenced Makhnovist movement) to see if there was an alternative to Leninism at the time. Luckily, the answer is yes.

As will become clear from this appendix, Bolshevik actions and ideology had a decisive impact on the development and degeneration of the Revolution. With its centralised, top-down statist political vision, its (openly) state capitalist economic vision and its aim for party power, Leninism had pushed the revolution in an authoritarian direction before the Russian Civil War started (the most common Leninist explanation of what went wrong). Leninism, ironically enough, proved the anarchist critique of Marxism to be correct. Anarchists are confident that in depth analysis of the Russian Revolution will confirm the limitations of Bolshevism as a revolutionary move-

Clearly, rather than being *"the most crushing answer to anarchism,"* the fate of the Albanian revolution rather shows how inaccurate Grant's argument is. Anarchists do not hold the position he states we do, as we have proven. Anarchists were not surprised by the fate of the Albanian revolution as the Albanian workers were not fighting **for** an anarchist society but rather were protesting **against** the existing system. The role of anarchists in such a struggle would have been to convince those involved to smash the existing state and create a new society based on federations of workers' associations. That this was not done suggests that anarchist ideas were not the dominant ones in the revolt and, therefore, it is hardly surprising that the revolution failed.



> *definite purposes ... The newly arisen possessing classes had need of a political instrument of power to maintain their economic and social privileges over the masses of their own people ... Thus arose the appropriate social conditions for the evolution of the modern state, as the organ of political power of privileged castes and classes for the forcible subjugation and oppression of the non-possessing classes ... Its external forms have altered in the course of its historical development, but its functions have always been the same ... And just as the functions of the bodily organs of ... animals cannot be arbitrarily altered, so that, for example, one cannot at will hear with his eyes and see with his ears, so also one cannot at pleasure transform an organ of social oppression into an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. The state can only be what it is: the defender of mass-exploitation and social privileges, and creator of privileged classes."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 20]

This means that the structure of the state has evolved to ensure its function. Organ and role are interwoven. Keep one and the other will develop. And what is the structure (or organ) of the state? For anarchists, the state means *"the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs ... are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who ...are vested with the powers to make the laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force."* In summary, it *"means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few."* [**Anarchy**, p. 13 and p. 40]

This structure has not evolved by chance. It is required by its function as the defender of minority class power. As Kropotkin stressed, the bourgeois needed the state:

> *"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more..."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

This means that to use the structure of the state (i.e. centralised, hierarchical power in the hands of a few) would soon mean the creation of a new minority class of rulers as the state *"could not survive without creating about it a new privileged class."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 35]

Therefore, for a given social organisation to be a state it must be based on delegated **power.** A state is marked by the centralisation of power into a few hands at the top of the structure, in other words, it is hierarchical in nature. This is, of course, essential for a minority class to remain control over it. Thus a social system which places power at the base, into the hands of the masses, is not a state as anarchists understand it. As Bakunin argued, *"[w]here all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 223] Therefore, real workers democracy — i.e. self-management — existed, then the state would no longer exist.

The question now arises, does the Marxist "workers' state" meet this definition? As indicated in section 4, the answer is a clear yes. In **The State and Revolution**, Lenin argued that the workers' state would be based on representative democracy. This meant, according to Bakunin, that political power would be *"exercised by proxy, which means entrusting it to a*



Thus only by arguing for anarchist ideas can anarchy come about. It will not come about by accident. Hence Malatesta's argument that anarchists *"must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement ... [W]e must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised .... masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers... And then, in the revolution, we must take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage the workers to take possession of the means of production ... and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of ... products . .. and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public. We must ... promote action by the workers' associations, the co-operatives, the voluntary groups — to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 109–110]

A key process of this is to argue that workers' organisations become the framework of the new world and smash the state. As Murray Bookchin argues, anarchists *"seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies [and other organisations created by people in struggle] ... to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management**, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 217] For more discussion of this issue, see section J.7.5 (What is the role of anarchists in a social revolution?).

*in June were united by instinct, not ideas … This was the principal cause of their defeat."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 104]

Given that *"instinct as a weapon is not sufficient to safeguard the proletariat against the reactionary machinations of the privileged classes,"* instinct *"left to itself, and inasmuch as it has not been transformed into consciously reflected, clearly determined thought, lends itself easily to falsification, distortion and deceit."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 215] Therefore, the *"goal, then, is to make the worker fully aware of what he [or she] wants, to unjam within him [or her] a steam of thought corresponding to his [or her] instinct."* This is done by *"a single path, that of* ***emancipation through practical action****,"* by *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses,"* of *"collective struggle of the workers against the bosses."* This would be complemented by socialist organisations *"propagandis[ing] its principles."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 102, p. 103 and p. 109]

Hence the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists:

> *"The Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group] is the necessary complement to the International [the revolutionary workers' movement]. But the International and the Alliance, while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses … regardless of nationality and national boundaries or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body; the Alliance … tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction. The programs of one and the other, without being opposed, differ in the degree of their revolutionary development. The International contains in germ, but only in germ, the whole program of the Alliance. The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 157]



*group of men elected to represent and govern them, which in turn will unfailingly return them to all the deceit and subservience of representative or bourgeois rule."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 255]

Rather than "the vast majority suppressing a tiny minority" we have a tiny minority, elected by the majority, suppressing those who disagree with what the government decrees, including those within the class which the state claims to represent. In the words of Lenin:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

And who exercises this *"revolutionary coercion"*? The majority? No, the vanguard. As Lenin argued, *"the correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks"* lies in *"correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers."* He stressed that *"to go so far … as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid."* [**Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, p. 35, p. 27]

In other words, for Lenin, if the leaders exercised their dictatorship, then so did the masses. Such a position is pure and utter nonsense. If the party leaders govern, then the masses do

not. And so the "workers' state" is a state in the normal sense of the word, with the *"minority suppressing the majority."* This was made clear by Trotsky in 1939:

> *"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves."* [**The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59]

Thus the party (a minority) holds power and uses that power against the masses themselves. Little wonder, given that, once in power, the Bolsheviks quickly forgot their arguments in favour of representative democracy and argued for party dictatorship (see section 4).

Such a transformation of representative democracy into minority class rule was predicted by anarchists:

> *"[I]t is not true that once the social conditions are changed the nature and role of government would change. Organ and function are inseparable terms. Take away from an organ its function and either the organ dies or the function is re-established ... A government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put into a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 33–4]



> *entering Tirana ... But here the importance of leadership becomes clear. Lacking a revolutionary leadership with the perspective of taking power and transforming society, the insurrectionists failed to take Tirana."*

Needless to say, the argument for *"a revolutionary leadership"* with *"the perspective of taking power"* is hard to combine with his later argument that *"the Russian workers, basing themselves on their own strength and organisation, [must] take power into their own hands."* As Grant has argued throughout this excerpt, the idea that the workers should take power themselves is utopian as a Bolshevik style leadership is required to seize power. As Trotsky and Lenin made clear, the working class as a whole cannot exercise the "proletariat dictatorship" — only party dictatorship can ensure the transition from capitalism to communism. In summary, Grant is simply using the old Bolshevik technique of confusing the party with the proletariat.

However, this is besides the point. Grant asserts that anarchists think a revolution can occur spontaneously, without the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists and argue their politics. Needless to say, anarchists do not hold such a position and never have. If we did then anarchists would not write books, pamphlets and leaflets, they would not produce papers and take part in struggles and they would not organise anarchist groups and federations. As we do all that, clearly we do not think that an anarchist society will come about without us trying to create it. As such, Grant's comments misrepresent the anarchist position.

This can be seen from Bakunin, who argued that the 1848 revolutions failed *"for a quite a simple reason: it was rich in instinct and in negative theoretical ideas ... but it was still totally devoid of the positive and practical ideas which would have been necessary to build a new system ... on the ruins of the bourgeois world. The workers who fought for the emancipation of the people*

*"[b]ecause the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship."* [**Writings 1936–7**, p. 514]

The *"anarchist leaders"* quite rightly rejected this position, but they also rejected the anarchist one as well. Let us not forget that the anarchist position is the destruction of the state by means of federations of workers associations (see section 3). The CNT refused to do this. Which, of course, means that Grant is attacking anarchist theory in spite of the fact that the CNT **ignored** that theory!

As we have discussed this issue in depth elsewhere (namely sections I.8.10, I.8.11 and section 20 of the appendix *"Marxists and Spanish Anarchism"*) we will leave our discussion of the Spanish Revolution to this short summary.

## 12. Does anarchism believe in spontaneous revolution?

Grant now asserts another erroneous position to anarchism, namely the believe that anarchists believe in spontaneous revolution. He presents the case of the Albanian revolution:

> *"However, the most crushing answer to anarchism is the fate of the Albanian revolution. The Albanian masses, as the result of the nightmare brought about by the collapse of so-called market reform … rose up in a spontaneous insurrection. With no organisation, no leadership, and no conscious plan, they stormed the barracks with their bare hands. The army fraternised … opened the gates of the barracks and distributed arms. Revolutionary committees were established, especially in the South, and the armed militias spread the revolt from one town to the next. The forces of reaction sent by Berisha were routed by the armed people. There was nothing to stop them from*



Which, of course, is what happened in Russia. As we indicated in section 4, both Lenin and Trotsky defended the imposition of party rule, its need to be beyond public control, by the necessities generated by the revolution (the "vacillations" within the masses meant that democracy, public control, had to be eliminated in favour of party dictatorship).

Therefore, from an anarchist perspective, the so-called "workers' state" is still a state in "the proper sense of the word" as it is based on centralised, top-down power. It is based on the tiny minority (the party leaders) governing everyone else and suppressing anyone who disagreed with them — the vast majority.

If the vast majority did have real power then the state would not exist. As the "proletarian" state is based on delegated power, it is still a state and, as such, an instrument of minority class rule. In this case, the minority is the party leaders who will use their new powers to consolidate their position over the masses (while claiming that their rule equals that of the masses).

## 6. Do anarchists *"hope the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution"*?

Fisher continues his inventions:

> *"Instead of organising an instrument for the coercion of the bourgeois by the proletariat, the Anarchists wish to simply abolish the state overnight and hope that the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution, an absurd and unrealistic idea."*

Yes, it would be, if anarchists actually believed that. Sadly for Fisher, we do not and have stated so on many, many, many occasions. Indeed, to make an assertion like this is to show either a total ignorance of anarchist theory or a desire to deceive.

So do anarchists *"hope that the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution"*? Of course not. We have long

argued that a revolution would need to defend itself. In the words of Malatesta:

> *"But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear... [Some people] seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the freedom of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!"* [**Anarchy**, pp. 40–1]

Elsewhere he argued that a revolution would *"reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted. And all this, and whatever else would be required to satisfy public needs and the development of the revolution would be the task of ... al kinds of committees, local, inter-communal, regional and national congresses which would attend to the co-ordination of social activity ... The creation of voluntary militia ... to deal with any armed attacks by the forces*



> *refused to take power, and the opportunity was lost."*

Needless to say, this summary leaves much to be desired.

Firstly, there are the factual errors. The offer to the CNT from Companys occurred on July 20th, immediately after the uprising had been defeated in Barcelona. The situation in the rest of Catalonia, never mind Spain, was unknown. This fact is essential to understanding the decisions made by the CNT. Faced with a military coup across the whole of Spain intent on introducing fascism, the outcome of which was unknown, the CNT in Barcelona was in a difficult situation. If it tried to implement libertarian communism then it would have had to fight both the fascist army and the Republican state. Faced with this possibility, the CNT leaders decided to ignore their politics and collaborate with other anti-fascists within the bourgeois state. Needless to say, to fail to indicate the rationale for the CNT's decision and the circumstances it was made in means to misinform the reader. This does not mean the CNT's decision was correct, it is just to indicate the extremely difficult circumstances in which it was made.

Secondly, Grant lets the cat out of the bag by admitted that he sees the Spanish Revolution in terms of the anarchist *"leaders"* taking power. In this he followed Trotsky, who had argued that:

> *"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**"Stalinism and Bolshevism"**]

Clearly, rather than the masses taking power, Trotskyism sees the party (the leaders) having the real power in society. Trotsky stressed this fact elsewhere when he argued that

class and urge them to take and exercise power directly, without governments and without hierarchy. We seek to win people over to our ideas and, as such, we work with others as equals using debate and discussion to influence the class struggle (see section J.3.6 for fuller details and a discussion of how this differs from the Trotskyist position).

Therefore, Grant's whole argument is flawed. Anarchists do not reject "leadership," they reject hierarchical leadership. We clearly see the need to organise politically to influence the class struggle but do so as equals, by the strength of our ideas. We do not seek to create or seize positions of "leadership" (i.e. power) but rather seek to ensure that the masses manage their own affairs and are influenced by political tendencies only in-so-far as they can convinced of the validity of the politics and ideas of those tendencies.

## 11. Does the Spanish Revolution show anarchism is flawed?

As usual, Grant brings up the question of the Spanish Revolution:

> *"The anarchist workers of the CNT played a heroic role in the struggle against fascism. In July 1936, they rose up and stormed the barracks armed with just sticks and knives and a few old hunting rifles, and beat the fascists. They set up soviets and established a workers' militia and workers' control in the factories. The CNT and the POUM (a centrist party led by ex-Trotskyists) were the only power in Barcelona. Soon the whole of Catalonia was in the hands of the workers. The bourgeois President of Catalonia, LLuis Companys, actually invited the CNT to take power! But the anarchist leaders*



*of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution."* [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 165–6]

He was not alone in this position. Every revolutionary anarchist argued along these lines. Bakunin, for example, clearly saw the need to defend a revolution:

> *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades... [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1]

And:

> *"[L]et us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 178–9]

He stressed the need to organise and co-ordinate the defence of the revolution by armed workers:

> *"Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines ... In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt ... and to federate with them for common defence."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 142]

Similarly, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist CNT union recognised the need for defending a revolution in its 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism:

> *"We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution ... So ... the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion ... or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution...*
>
> *"The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without...*
>
> *"Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence ... the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence... .*
>
> *"1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible*



and power of bureaucratic leaderships. However, this "lead" is based on the influence of our ideas and, as such, is a non-hierarchical relationship between anarchist activists and other workers. Thus Grant's argument is a straw man.

Finally, his comment that *"whole history of the international workers' movement shows the absolute need for a revolutionary party"* is simply false. Every example of a "revolutionary party" has been a failure. They have never created a socialist society which, let us not forget, was their aim. The first "revolutionary" party was Social Democracy. That quickly became reformist and, in Germany, crushed the revolution that broke out there after the end of the First World War.

The Bolshevik party was no better. It soon transformed itself for being the masses servant to being its master (see section 4). It justified its repression against the working class in terms of its "vanguard" position. When it degenerated into Stalinism, Communist Parties across the world followed it — no matter how insane its policies became.

This is unsurprising. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a "revolutionary" party leaves much to be desired:

> *"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class."* [**Carry on Recruiting!**, p. 41]

Therefore, while anarchists stress the need to organise as anarchists (i.e. into political associations) they reject the need for a "revolutionary party" in the Marxist or Leninist mold. Rather than seeking power on behalf of the masses, anarchist groups work within the mass organisations of the working

*native in the form of a revolutionary policy, and therefore also a revolutionary tendency."*

As Malatesta argued, we *"do not want to* ***emancipate*** *the people; we want the people to* ***emancipate themselves.*** *"* Thus anarchists *"advocate and practise direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and individual initiative; they should make special efforts to help members [of popular organisations] learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to dispense with leaders and full-time functionaries."* However, *"[w]e must not wait to achieve anarchy, in the meantime limiting ourselves to simple propaganda ... We must seek to get all people ... to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms that it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them: and in always propagating all aspects of our programme, and always struggling for its complete realisation, we must push people to want always more and to increase its pressures, until it has reached complete emancipation."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 90, p. 125 and p. 189]

He, like all anarchists, stressed there were different kinds of "leadership":

> *"It is possible to direct ["lead"] through advice and example, leaving the people — provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves — to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 108]

Unsurprisingly, anarchists favour the first way of "leading" people and utterly reject the second.

Clearly, then, anarchists do not reject being "leaders" in the sense of arguing our ideas and combating the influence



> *for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.*
>
> *"2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world's exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]

If it was simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument. Rather the question is one of power — will power be centralised, held by a handful of leaders and exercised from the top downwards or will it be decentralised and society run from the bottom-up by working people themselves?

Fisher distorts the real issue and instead invents a straw man which has no bearing at all on the real anarchist position (for further discussion, see sections H.2.1 and J.7.6).

## 7. Are Anarchists simply *"potential Marxists"*?

After creating the straw man argument that anarchists have not thought about counter-revolution, Fisher asserts:

> *"The majority of our 'Anarchist' friends never thought about this little loop hole, and as for the rest of them they shrug it off, or say something to the effect of the armed proletariat themselves will stop capitalist reaction, which, an armed proletariat*

> *in reality, is a proletarian 'state'! In conclusion our 'Anarchists' are simply potential Marxists who need access to genuinely revolutionary ideas."*

Of course, anarchists have thought about this and have came up with, as Fisher puts it, *"the armed proletariat."* Indeed, anarchists have held this position since the days of Bakunin, as we proved in the last section.

Moreover, from an anarchist perspective, an "armed proletariat" is not a "state" as there is not minority of rulers telling the proletariat what to do (see section 5). The "proletariat" state of Lenin was a real state simply because it was the Bolshevik party leaders who were telling the armed forces of the state what to do and who to repress (including striking workers, anarchists and rebelling peasants). These forces, we must note, were organised from the top-down, with the government appointing officers. It was an "armed proletariat" only in the same sense that the bourgeois army is an "armed proletariat" (i.e. working class people made by the rank and file, fought the battles and followed the orders decided upon by a handful of people at the top).

So, if defence of a revolution by the armed proletariat makes you a Marxist then Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, Makhno and Durruti were all "Marxists"! As is every revolutionary anarchist. Needless to say, this is impossible and, as such, Fisher's "little loop hole" in anarchism does not exist.

Clearly, Fisher has no understanding of anarchist thought and prefers invention rather than research.

Our Trotskyist then states that:

> *"It is our job, as Marxists to explain these ideas to them!"*

In other words, the Marxist job is to explain anarchist ideas to anarchists and call them Marxism. How impressive!



*all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 246] To combat this bureaucracy, *"the construction workers ... sections could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed..."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 247]

This did not mean the end of organisations and committees, but rather a change in power. Any committees would be made up of *"delegates who conscientiously fulfilled all their obligations to their respective sections as stipulated in the statues," "reporting regularly to the membership the proposals made and how they voted"* and *"asking for further instructions (plus instant recall of unsatisfactory delegates)."* [**Ibid.**] Power would be in the hands of the rank and file, not the committees.

It is in this context that anarchists try and give a lead. Anarchist organisation *"rules out any idea of dictatorship and of a controlling and directive power"* and it *"will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154 and p. 387] This influence would be exerted in the basic assemblies of the organisation, which would retain the power to decide their own fates: *"In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 415]

Only in this way can the bad effects of having institutionalised "leadership" positions be avoided. Instead of ignoring "bad" leadership, anarchists encourage workers to rely on their own initiative and power. They do not "refuse" to combat bureaucratic leaderships, rather they combat them from below by ensuring that workers manage their own affairs directly. As such, anarchists are well aware of the need *"to pose an alter-*

*and purpose of this organisation"* is to *"help the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 191]

Therefore, to claim that anarchists deny the need for political organisation and "leaders" is a misrepresentation. As we argue in more depth in section J.3, this is not the case. However, we must stress that anarchists do not seek positions of power ("leadership") in organisations. Rather, they aim to influence by the power of our ideas, *"through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 193] This is because "leadership" positions in hierarchical organisations are a source of corruption, which is the second major fallacy in Grant's argument.

While acknowledging that the existing leadership of working class organisations and unions are *"bureaucratic and class collaborationist,"* he does not indicate why this is so. He argued that we need a "new" leadership, with the correct ideas, to replace the current ones. However, the *"policy of class collaboration"* within these leaderships did not develop by chance. Rather they are a product of both the tactics (such as electioneering, in the case of political parties) and structures used in these organisations.

Looking at structures, we can clearly see that hierarchy is key. By having leadership positions separate from the mass of workers (i.e. having hierarchical structures), an inevitable division develops between the leaders and the rank and file. The "leaders" are insulated from the life, interests and needs of the membership. Their views adjust to their position, not vice versa, and so "leadership" becomes institutionalised and quickly becomes bureaucratic. As Bakunin argued, the only way to avoid bureaucracy is to empower the rank and file.

Taking the Geneva section of the IWMA, Bakunin noted that the construction workers' section *"simply left all decision-making to their committees ... In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of*



## 8. Is Marxism scientific?

Fisher finishes by arguing that:

> *"As Lenin states, 'the ideas of Marx are all powerful, because they are true'! We have the science of dialectics on our side, not idealism, mysticism or theology. Our philosophy is solid as a rock."*

Firstly, dialectics is not a science. Secondly, quoting Lenin on the wonders of Marxism is like quoting the Pope on the joys of Catholicism. Thirdly, the only rocks around are in the heads of Trotskyists if they really think this nonsense about anarchism.

Simply put, a science involves investigating the facts of what is being investigated and generating theories based on those facts. Clearly, our Trotskyist has not bothered to discover the facts about anarchism. He has made numerous assertions about anarchism which are contradicted by the works of anarchism. He has, as such, ignored the fundamental nature of science and has, instead, embraced the approach of the fiction writer.

As such, if Fisher's article is an example of the "science" of Marxism then we can safely state that Marxism is not a science. Rather it is based on invention and slander.

## 9. What does the Russian Revolution tell us about Trotskyism?

Our Trotskyist decides to quote another Trotskyist, Ted Grant, on the dangers of anarchism:

> *"However, the setting up of soviets and strike committees — important as it is — does not solve the fundamental problem facing the Russian workers. In and of themselves, soviets solve nothing. What is*

*decisive is the party that leads them. In February 1917, the workers and soldiers set up soviets — a step of enormous importance to the revolution. But in the hands of the Mensheviks and SRs they were reduced to impotence.. . In Germany in November 1918, the soviets were in the hands of the Social Democratic leaders who betrayed the revolution and handed power back to the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the soviets soon dissolved, and were merely transient phenomena. The same would have happened in Russia, if it had not been for the Bolshevik Party and the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky."*

Grant is, of course, just paraphrasing Trotsky in his analysis. Moreover, like Trotsky's, his comments indicate the fundamentally dictatorial nature of Trotskyism.

Simply put, if the "leadership" of the party is the key to soviet power, then if the workers' reject that leadership via soviet elections then the Trotskyist is on the horns of a dilemma. Without party "leadership" then the soviets will be "reduced to impotence" and be "merely transient phenomena." To maintain this party "leadership" (and ensure the soviet power) then the democratic nature of the soviets must be undermined. Therefore the Trotskyist is in the ironic situation of thinking that soviet democracy will undermine soviet power.

This dilemma was solved, in practice, by Trotsky during the Russian Revolution — he simply placed party "leadership" above soviet democracy. In other words, he maintained soviet power by turning the soviets into "nothing." He argued this position numerous times in his life, when he was in power and after he had been expelled from Russia by Stalin.

In 1920, we find Trotsky's thoughts on this subject in his infamous work **Terrorism and Communism**. In this work he defended the fact of Communist Party dictatorship:



*chism is an expression of impotence, which can offer no way out. Of course, the reason why some honest workers and young people turn towards anarchism is because of their revulsion against Stalinism and the bureaucratic and class collaborationist policies of the existing leaderships, both on the political and trade union field. This is understandable, but profoundly mistaken. The answer to a bad leadership is not no leadership, but to create a leadership that is worthy of the workers' cause. To refuse to do this, to abstain from the political struggle ... amounts to handing over the workers to the existing leaders without a struggle. In order to combat the policy of class collaboration, it is necessary to pose an alternative in the form of a revolutionary policy, and therefore also a revolutionary tendency."*

There are so many fallacies in this argument it is hard to know where to start.

Firstly, we should note that anarchists do not deny the need for "leaders" nor for the need for revolutionaries to organise together to influence the class struggle. To claim so indicates a failure to present the anarchist case honestly.

In the words of Kropotkin:

*"The idea of anarchist communism, today represented by ... minorities, but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist groups ... will take strength from the support they find among the people."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 75]

Bakunin considered it essential that revolutionaries organise and influence the masses. As he put it, *"the chief aim*

> *"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."*

Needless to say, this is incredulous. How can the replacement of soviet power by party power mean the "supremacy of labour"? It means the supremacy of the Bolshevik party, not "labour." The transformation of the soviets from genuine democratic organs of working class self-government ("shapeless parliaments of labour") into an instrument of Bolshevik party rule ("the apparatus of the supremacy of labour") cannot be seen as a victory of democracy, quite the reverse. The dictatorship of the Bolshevik party marginalised the soviets just as much as the events of the German Revolution. The only difference is that under the Bolsheviks they maintained a symbolic existence.

Therefore, rather than the "leadership" of the Bolshevik party ensuring soviet rule it meant, in practice, party dictator-



dictatorship), as seems likely. What Trotsky is arguing is that to allow workers to vote for their representatives would *"only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship"*!

This argument was made (in 1938) as a **general point** and is **not** phrased in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution in 1921. In other words Trotsky is clearly arguing for the dictatorship of the party and contrasting it to soviet democracy. As he put it elsewhere, the *"revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution."* [**Writings 1936–7**, pp. 513–4] So much for "All Power to the Soviets" or "workers' power"!

Clearly, Grant's and Trotsky's arguments contain a deeply undemocratic core. The logic of their position — namely that party rule is essential to ensure soviet rule — in practice means that soviet rule is replaced by party dictatorship. To include the masses into the decision making process by soviet democracy means loosening the tight political control of the party on the soviets and allowing the possibility that opposition forces may win in the soviets. However, if that happens then it means the end of soviet power as that is only possible by means of party "leadership." This, in turn, necessitates party dictatorship to maintain "soviet power", as Trotsky and Lenin admitted and implemented.

Simply put, Grant's argument shows the dangers of Trotskyism, not of anarchism.

## 10. Do anarchists reject "leadership"?

Grant continues by asserting the need for leaders:

> *"Some say that such a party is not necessary, that the workers do not need a party, that it leads to bureaucracy, and so on. That is a fatal error. The whole history of the international workers' movement shows the absolute need for a revolutionary party. Anar-*

ship. The soviets played no role in the decision making process as power rested firmly in the hands of the party.

This position was repeated in 1937, in his essay *"Bolshevism and Stalinism."* There he argued that a *"revolutionary party, even having seized power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* He stressed that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard"* and that *"[t]hose who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Therefore, we have the same position. Without party dictatorship, the soviets would fall back into the *"mud of reformism."* He argued that the *"fact that this party subordinates the Soviets politically to its leaders has in itself abolished the Soviet system no more than the domination of the conservative majority has abolished the British parliamentary system."* [**Op. Cit.**] This analogy is flawed for two reasons.

Firstly, the parliamentary system is based on a division between executive and legislative functions. Lenin argued that the soviet system would, like the Paris Commune, abolish this division and so ensure *"the conversion of the representative institutions from mere 'talking shops' into working bodies."* [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 304] If the decisions being made by the Soviets have been decided upon by the leaders of the Bolshevik party then the soviets represent those leaders, not the people who elected them. As in the bourgeois system, the representatives of the people govern them rather than express the wishes of the majority. As such, the idea that the Soviets are organs of working class self-government **has** been abolished. Instead, they are mere "talking shops" with power resting in the hands of the party leadership.

Secondly, when elections take place parliamentary system it is generally recognised that the majority of representatives



can become the government. The system is therefore based on the assumption that the government is accountable to parliament, not parliament to the government. This means that the "domination" of the majority within Parliament is an expression of parliamentary democracy. The majority party does not maintain that only its existence in power ensures that parliamentary democracy can continue, therefore necessitating the suppression of elections. However, that is the position of Trotsky (and of Lenin) and, let us not forget, the actual actions of the Bolsheviks.

That this is the logical conclusion of Trotsky's position can be seen when he discusses the Kronstadt rebellion of March 1921 (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"). In 1938, he argued that the *"Kronstadt slogan"* was *"soviets without Communists."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 90] This, of course, is factually incorrect. The Kronstadt slogan was *"all power to the soviets but not to the parties"* (or *"free soviets"*). From this incorrect assertion, Trotsky argued as follows:

> *"to free the soviets from the leadership [!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants. The Kronstadt uprising thus had a counterrevolutionary character."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Interesting logic. Let us assume that the result of free elections would have been the end of Bolshevik "leadership" (i.e.

*under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship.*

*"The fact that a large number of socialist parties have rallied to the idea of councils, which is the proper mark of libertarian socialist and revolutionary syndicalists, is a confession, recognition that the tack they have taken up until now has been the product of a falsification, a distortion, and that with the councils the labour movement must create for itself a single organ capable of carrying into effect the unmitigated socialism that the conscious proletariat longs for. On the other hand, it ought not to be forgotten that this abrupt conversion runs the risk of introducing many alien features into the councils concept, features, that is, with no relation to the original tasks of socialism, and which have to be eliminated because they pose a threat to the further development of the councils. These alien elements are able only to conceive things from the dictatorial viewpoint. It must be our task to face up to this risk and warn our class comrades against experiments which cannot bring the dawn of social emancipation any nearer — which indeed, to the contrary, positively postpone it.*

*"Consequently, our advice is as follows: Everything for the councils or soviets! No power above them! A slogan which at the same time will be that of the social revolutionary."* [**Anarchism and Sovietism**]

The validity of this argument can be seen, for example, from the expulsion of opposition parties from the soviets in June and



So while Lenin's ideal model of a disciplined, centralised and top-down party had been expounded since 1902, the operation of the party never matched his desire. As Service notes, *"a disciplined hierarchy of command stretching down from the regional committees to party cells"* had *"never existed in Bolshevik history."* In the heady days of the revolution, when the party was flooded by new members, the party ignored what was meant to be its guiding principles. As Service constantly stresses, Bolshevik party life in 1917 was the exact opposite of that usually considered (by both opponents and supporters of Bolshevism) as it normal mode of operation. *"Anarchist attitudes to higher authority,"* he argues, *"were the rule of the day"* and *"no Bolshevik leader in his right mind could have contemplated a regular insistence upon rigid standards of hierarchical control and discipline unless he had abandoned all hope of establishing a mass socialist party."* This meant that *"in the Russia of 1917 it was the easiest thing in the world for lower party bodies to rebut the demands and pleas by higher authority."* He stresses that *"[s]uburb and town committees ... often refused to go along with official policies ... they also ... sometimes took it into their heads to engage in active obstruction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 80, p. 62 p. 56 and p. 60]

This worked both ways, of course. Town committees did *"snub their nose at lower-echelon viewpoints in the time before the next election. Try as hard as they might, suburb committees and ordinary cells could meanwhile do little to rectify matters beyond telling their own representative on their town committee to speak on their behalf. Or, if this too failed, they could resort to disruptive tactics by criticising it in public and refusing it all collaboration."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 52–3] Even by early 1918, the Bolshevik party bore little resemblance to the "democratic centralist" model desires by Lenin:

*"The image of a disciplined hierarchy of party committees was therefore but a thin, artificial veneer*

> *which was used by Bolshevik leaders to cover up the cracked surface of the real picture underneath. Cells and suburb committees saw no reason to kow-tow to town committees; nor did town committees feel under compulsion to show any greater respect to their provincial and regional committees then before."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

It is this insubordination, this local autonomy and action in spite of central orders which explains the success of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Rather than a highly centralised and disciplined body of "professional" revolutionaries, the party in 1917 saw a *"significant change ... within the membership of the party at local level ... From the time of the February revolution requirements for party membership had been all but suspended, and now Bolshevik ranks swelled with impetuous recruits who knew next to nothing about Marxism and who were united by little more than overwhelming impatience for revolutionary action."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Prelude to Revolution**, p. 41]

This mass of new members (many of whom were peasants who had just recently joined the industrial workforce) had a radicalising effect on the party's policies and structures. As even Leninist commentators argue, it was this influx of members who allowed Lenin to gain support for his radical revision of party aims in April. However, in spite of this radicalisation of the party base, the party machine still was at odds with the desires of the party. As Trotsky acknowledged, the situation *"called for resolute confrontation of the sluggish Party machine with masses and ideas in motion."* He stressed that *"the masses were incomparably more revolutionary than the Party, which in turn was more revolutionary than its committeemen."* Ironically, given the role Trotsky usually gave the party, he admits that *"[w]ithout Lenin, no one had known what to make of the unprecedented situation."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 301, p. 305 and p. 297]



tion. For this reason, anarcho-syndicalists resolved, in August 1918, that they *"were for the soviets but categorically against the Soviet of People's Commissars as an organ which does not stem from the soviet structure but only interferes with its work."* Thus they were *"for the establishment of **free soviets** of workers' and peasants' representatives, and the abolition of the Soviet of People's Commissars as an organisation inimical to the interests of the working class."* [contained in Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118 and p. 117] This resolution was driven by the experience of the Bolshevik dominated "soviet" regime.

It is also worth quoting Rudolf Rocker at length on this issue:

> *"Let no one object that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' cannot be compared to run of the mill dictatorship because it is the dictatorship of a class. Dictatorship of a class cannot exist as such, for it ends up, in the last analysis, as being the dictatorship of a given party which arrogates to itself the right to speak for that class. Thus, the liberal bourgeoisie, in their fight against despotism, used to speak in the name of the 'people'...*
>
> *"We already know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done — let us be clear on this — without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people*

as that class's self-proclaimed vanguard, had decided what was in its best interests. As we discussed in section H.5, such a autocratic perspective is at the heart of vanguardism. If you aim for party power, it comes as no surprise that the organs used to achieve it will wither under it. Just as muscles only remain strong if you use them, so soviets can only work if it is used to run society, not nominate the handful of party leaders who do. As Kropotkin argued in 1920:

> "The idea of soviets ... of councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts.
>
> "But as long as the country is governed by a party dictatorship, the workers' and peasants' councils evidently lose their entire significance. They are reduced to ... [a] passive role ... A council of workers ceases to be free and of any use when liberty of the press no longer exists ... [and they] lose their significance when the elections are not preceded by a free electoral campaign, and when the elections are conducted under pressure of a party dictatorship ... It means the death-knell of the new system." [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 254–5]

Clearly, the fate of the soviets after October shows the dangers of Bolshevism to popular self-management and autonomy. We should be try and learn the lessons from the experience rather than, as pro-Bolsheviks do, rationalise and justify the usurpation of power by the party. The most obvious lesson to learn is to oppose the creation of any power **above** the soviets. This was not lost on Russian anarchists active in the revolu-



Which is significant in itself. The Bolshevik party is usually claimed as being the most "revolutionary" that ever existed, yet here is Trotsky admitting that its leading members did not have a clue what to do. He even argued that *"[e]very time the Bolshevik leaders had to act without Lenin they fell into error, usually inclining to the Right."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 299] This negative opinion of the Bolsheviks applied even to the *"left Bolsheviks, especially the workers"* whom we are informed *"tried with all their force to break through this quarantine"* created by the Bolshevik leaders policy *"of waiting, of accommodation, and of actual retreat before the Compromisers"* after the February revolution and before the arrival of Lenin. Trotsky argues that *"they did not know how to refute the premise about the bourgeois character of the revolution and the danger of an isolation of the proletariat. They submitted, gritting their teeth, to the directions of their leaders."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 273] It seems strange, to say the least, that without one person the whole of the party was reduced to such a level given that the aim of the "revolutionary" party was to develop the political awareness of its members.

Lenin's arrival, according to Trotsky, allowed the influence of the more radical rank and file to defeat the conservatism of the party machine. By the end of April, Lenin had managed to win over the majority of the party leadership to his position. However, as Trotsky argues, this *"April conflict between Lenin and the general staff of the party was not the only one of its kind. Throughout the whole history of Bolshevism ... all the leaders of the party at all the most important moments stood to the **right** of Lenin."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 305] As such, if "democratic centralism" had worked as intended, the whole party would have been arguing for incorrect positions the bulk of its existence (assuming, of course, that Lenin was correct most of the time).

For Trotsky, *"Lenin exerted influence not so much as an individual but because he embodied the influence of the class on the Party and of the Party on its machine."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 299] Yet,

this was the machine which Lenin had forged, which embodied his vision of how a "revolutionary" party should operate and was headed by him. In other words, to argue that the party machine was behind the party membership and the membership behind the class shows the bankruptcy of Lenin's organisational scheme. This *"backwardness,"* moreover, indicates an independence of the party bureaucracy from the membership and the membership from the masses. As Lenin's constantly repeated aim was for the party to seize power (based on the dubious assumption that class power would only be expressed, indeed was identical to, party power) this independence held serious dangers, dangers which became apparent once this goal was achieved.

Trotsky asks the question *"by what miracle did Lenin manage in a few short weeks to turn the Party's course into a new channel?"* Significantly, he answers as follows: *"Lenin's personal attributes and the objective situation."* [**Ibid.**] No mention is made of the democratic features of the party organisation, which suggests that without Lenin the rank and file party members would not have been able to shift the weight of the party machine in their favour. Trotsky seems close to admitting this:

> *"As often happens, a sharp cleavage developed between the classes in motion and the interests of the party machines. Even the Bolshevik Party cadres, who enjoyed the benefit of exceptional revolutionary training, were definitely inclined to disregard the masses and to identify their own special interests and the interests of the machine on the very day after the monarchy was overthrown."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 298]

Thus the party machine, which embodied the principles of "democratic centralism" proved less than able to the task as-



would have won soviet elections easily. They did not and so free soviet elections were not held.

This fact also explains the fate of the so-called *"non party"* conferences favoured by the Bolsheviks in late 1920. In spite of praising the soviets as *"more democratic"* than anything in the *"best democratic republics of the bourgeois world,"* Lenin also argued that non-Party conferences were also required *"to be able to watch the mood of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their demands."* [**Left-Wing Communism**, p. 33 and p. 32] If the soviets were as democratic as Lenin claimed, then the Bolsheviks would have no need of "non-party" conferences. Significantly, the Bolsheviks "responded" to these conferences and "their demands" by disbanding them. This was because *"[d]uring the disturbances"* of late 1920, *"they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies."* Their frequency was decreased and they "were discontinued soon afterward." [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 203] In other words, they meet the same fate as the soviets in the spring and summer of 1918.

Perhaps we should not be too surprised by these developments. After all, as we discuss in section 8 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", the Bolsheviks had long had a distinctly undemocratic political ideology. Their support for democratic norms were less than consistent. The one thing they **were** consistent was their hypocrisy. Thus democratic decisions were to be binding on their opponents (even if that majority had to be manipulated into being) but not upon them. Before the revolution Lenin had openly espoused a double standard of discipline. *"We will not permit,"* he argued, *"the idea of unity to tie a noose around our necks, and we shall under no circumstances permit the Mensheviks to lead us by the rope."* [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, p. 17] Once in power, their political perspectives had little trouble ignoring the will of the working class when it classed with what they,

Bolsheviks, in the face of such *"undivided loyalty"*, had to suppress opposition parties and impose a party dictatorship!

Simply put, **if** the Bolsheviks did have the support Rees states they did then they had no need to repress soviet democracy and opposition parties. Such *"fierce"* loyalty would not have been amenable to opposition arguments. Strange, then, that the Bolsheviks continually explained working class unrest in terms of the influence of Mensheviks, Left SRs and so on during the civil war. Moreover, Rees contradicts himself by arguing that if the Kronstadt revolt had succeeded, then it would have resulted in *"the fall of the Bolsheviks."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63] Now, given that the Kronstadt revolt called for free soviet elections (and **not** *"soviets without parties"* as Rees asserts), why did the Bolsheviks not agree to them (at least in the cities)? If, as Rees argues, the Reds had the fierce loyalty of the city workers, then why did the Bolsheviks not introduce soviet democracy in the cities after the end of the Civil War? Simply because they knew that such "loyalty" did not, in fact, exist. Zinoviev, for example, declared that the Bolsheviks' support had been reduced to 1 per cent in early 1920. [Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 188]

So much for working class "loyalty" to the Bolsheviks. And, needless to say, Rees' comments totally ignore the election results **before** the start of the civil war which prompted the Bolsheviks to pack or disband soviets. As Bertrand Russell summarised from his experiences in Lenin's Russia during the civil war (in 1920): *"No conceivable system of free elections would give majorities to the Communists, either in the town or country."* [**The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism**, pp. 40–1] Thus we have a major contradiction in the pro-Leninist argument. On the one hand, they stress that the workers supported the Bolsheviks wholeheartedly during the civil war. On the other, they argue that party dictatorship had to be imposed. If the Bolsheviks had the support they claimed they had, then they



signed it in practice. Without Lenin, it is doubtful that the party membership would have over come the party machine:

> *"Lenin was strong not only because he understood the laws of the class struggle but also because his ear was faultlessly attuned to the stirrings of the masses in motion. He represented not so much the Party machine as the vanguard of the proletariat. He was definitely convinced that thousands from among those workers who had borne the brunt of supporting the underground Party would now support him. The masses at the moment were more revolutionary than the Party, and the Party more revolutionary than its machine. As early as March the actual attitude of the workers and soldiers had in many cases become stormily apparent, and it was widely at variance with the instructions issued by all the parties, including the Bolsheviks."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 299]

Little wonder the local party groupings ignored the party machine, practising autonomy and initiative in the face of a party machine inclined to conservatism, inertia, bureaucracy and remoteness. This conflict between the party machine and the principles it was based on and the needs of the revolution and party membership was expressed continually throughout 1917:

> *"In short, the success of the revolution called for action against the 'highest circles of the party,' who, from February to October, utterly failed to play the revolutionary role they ought to have taken in theory. The masses themselves made the revolution, with or even against the party — this much at least was clear to Trotsky the historian. But far from*

> *drawing the correct conclusion, Trotsky the theorist continued to argue that the masses are incapable of making a revolution without a leader.*" [Daniel & Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Op. Cit.**, p. 188]

Looking at the development of the revolution from April onwards, we are struck by the sluggishness of the party hierarchy. At every revolutionary upsurge, the party simply was not to the task of responding to the needs of masses and the local party groupings closest to them. The can be seen in June, July and October itself. At each turn, the rank and file groupings or Lenin had to constantly violate the principles of their own party in order to be effective. The remoteness and conservatism of the party even under Lenin can be constantly seen.

For example, when discussing the cancellation by the central committee of a demonstration planned for June 10th by the Petrograd Bolsheviks, the unresponsiveness of the party hierarchy can be seen. The *"speeches by Lenin and Zinoviev [justifying their actions] by no means satisfied the Petersburg Committee. If anything, it appears that their explanations served to strengthen the feeling that at best the party leadership had acted irresponsibly and incompetently and was seriously out of touch with reality."* Indeed, many *"blamed the Central Committee for taking so long to respond to Military Organisation appeals for a demonstration."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88 and p. 92]

During the discussions in late June, 1917, on whether to take direct action against the Provisional Government there was a *"wide gulf"* between lower organs evaluations of the current situation and that of the Central Committee. [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] Indeed, among the delegates from the Bolshevik military groups, only Lashevich (an old Bolshevik) spoke in favour of the Central Committee position and he noted that *"[f]requently it is impossible to make out where the Bolshevik ends and the Anarchist begins."* [quoted by Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129]



phrase a new meaning. Similarly, Cliff's claim that the *"civil war undermined the operation of the local soviets"* also seems lacking based on this new research. [**Lenin: Revolution Besieged**, vol. 3, p. 163, p. 167 and p. 150]

However, the Bolshevik assault on the soviets started during the spring of 1918 (i.e. in March, April and May). That is **before** the Czech rising and the onset of full scale civil war which occurred in late May (see section 3 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" on Bolshevik repression before the Czech revolt). Nor is it true that the Mensheviks rejected constitutional methods. Though they wished to see a re-convocation of the Constituent Assembly they believed that the only way to do this was by winning a majority of the soviets (see section 23). Clearly, attempts to blame the Civil War for the elimination of soviet power and democracy seems woefully weak given the actions of the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1918. And, equally clearly, the reduction of local soviet influence cannot be fully understood without factoring in the Bolshevik prejudice in favour of centralisation (as codified in the Soviet Constitution of 1918) along with this direct repression.

The simple fact is that the soviets were marginalised and undermined after the October Revolution simply because they **did** reflect the wishes of the working class, in spite of their defects (defects the Bolsheviks exploited to consolidate their power). The problem was that the workers no longer supported Lenin. Few Leninists would support such an obvious conclusion. For example, John Rees states that *"[i]n the cities the Reds enjoyed the fierce and virtually undivided loyalty of the masses throughout the civil war period."* [*"In Defence of October"*, pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 47] Which, of course, explains the vast number of strikes and protests directed against the Bolshevik regime and the workers' resolutions calling its end! It also explains why the

cure" workers' democracy than to destroy it by gerrymandering soviets, disbanding them and expelling opposition parties from them. All peaceful attempts to replace them had been destroyed. The soviet CEC was marginalised and without any real power. Opposition parties had been repressed, usually on little or no evidence. The power of the soviets had been replaced by a soviet power in less than a year. However, this was simply the culmination of a process which had started when the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917. Simply put, the Bolsheviks had always aimed for "all power to the party via the soviets" and once this had been achieved, the soviets could be dispensed with. Maurice Brinton simply stated the obvious when he wrote that *"when institutions such as the soviets could no longer be influenced by ordinary workers, the regime could no longer be called a soviet regime."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiii] By this obvious criteria, the Bolshevik regime was no longer soviet by the spring of 1918, i.e. before the outbreak of civil war. While opposition groups were not finally driven out of the soviets until 1923 (i.e. three years **after** the end of the civil war) their presence *"does not indicate the existence of a multi-party system since they in no way threatened the dominating role of the Bolsheviks, and they had not done so from mid-1918."* [Richard Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 168]

Tony Cliff, leader of the British Leninist party the SWP, justified the repression of the Mensheviks and SRs on the grounds that they were not prepared to accept the Soviet system and rejected the role of *"constitutional opposition."* He tries to move forward the repression until after the outbreak of full civil war by stating that *"[d]espite their strong opposition to the government, for some time, i.e. until after the armed uprising of the Czechoslovakian Legion [in late May, 1918] — the Mensheviks were not much hampered in their propaganda work."* If having papers banned every now and then, members arrested and soviets being disbanded as soon as they get a Menshevik majority is *"not much hampered"* then Cliff does seem to be giving that



In the July days, the breach between the local party groups and the central committee increased. As we noted in the section 1, this spontaneous uprising was opposed to by the Bolshevik leadership, in spite of the leading role of their own militants (along with anarchists) in fermenting it. While calling on their own militants to restrain the masses, the party leadership was ignored by the rank and file membership who played an active role in the event. Sickened by being asked to play the role of *"fireman,"* the party militants rejected party discipline in order to maintain their credibility with the working class. Rank and file activists, pointing to the snowballing of the movement, showed clear dissatisfaction with the Central Committee. One argued that it *"was not aware of the latest developments when it made its decision to oppose the movement into the streets."* Ultimately, the Central Committee appeal *"for restraining the masses ... was removed from ... **Pravda** ... and so the party's indecision was reflected by a large blank space on page one."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 150, p. 159 and P. 175] Ultimately, the indecisive nature of the leadership can be explained by the fact it did not think it could seize state power for itself. As Trotsky noted, *"the state of popular consciousness ... made impossible the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in July."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 81]

The indecision of the party hierarchy did have an effect, of course. While the anarchists at Kronstadt looked at the demonstration as the start of an uprising, the Bolsheviks there were *"wavering indecisively in the middle"* between them and the Left-Social Revolutionaries who saw it as a means of applying pressure on the government. This was because they were *"hamstrung by the indecision of the party Central Committee."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] Little wonder so many Bolshevik party organisations developed and protected their own autonomy and ability to act!

Significantly, one of the main Bolshevik groupings which helped organise and support the July uprising, the Military Or-

ganisation, started their own paper after the Central Committee had decreed after the failed revolt that neither it, nor the Petersburg Committee, should be allowed to have one. It *"angrily insisted on what it considered its just prerogatives"* and in *"no uncertain terms it affirmed its right to publish an independent newspaper and formally protested what is referred to as 'a system of persecution and repression of an extremely peculiar character which had begun with the election of the new Central Committee.'"* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 227] The Central Committee backed down, undoubtedly due to the fact it could not enforce its decision.

As the Cohn-Bendit brothers argue, *"five months after the Revolution and three months before the October uprising, the masses were still governing themselves, and the Bolshevik vanguard simply had to toe the line."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 186] Within that vanguard, the central committee proved to be out of touch with the rank and file, who ignored it rather than break with their fellow workers.

Even by October, the party machine still lagged behind the needs of the revolution. In fact, Lenin could only impose his view by going over the head of the Central Committee. According to Trotsky's account, *"this time he [wa]s not satisfied with furious criticism"* of the *"ruinous Fabianism of the Petrograd leadership"* and *"by way of protest he resign[ed] from the Central Committee."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 131] Trotsky quotes Lenin as follows:

> *"I am compelled to request permission to withdraw from the Central Committee, which I hereby do, and leave myself freedom of agitation in the lower ranks of the party and at the party congress."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 131]

Thus the October revolution was precipitated by a blatant violation of the principles Lenin spent his life advocating. Indeed, if someone else other than Lenin had done this we are



nation of Mirbach and the events which followed were soon labelled by the Bolsheviks an *"uprising"* against "soviet power" (see section 23 for more details). Lenin *"decided that the killing of Mirbach provided a fortuitous opportunity to put an end to the growing Left SR threat."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 427] After this, the LSRs followed the Mensheviks and Right SRs and were expelled from the soviets. This in spite of the fact that the rank and file knew nothing of the plans of the central committees and that their soviet delegates had been elected by the masses. The Bolsheviks had finally eliminated the last of their more left-wing opponents (the anarchists had been dealt with the in April, see section 24 for details).

As discussed in section 21, the Committees of Poor Peasants were only supported by the Bolsheviks. Indeed, the Left SRs opposed then as being utterly counter-productive and an example of Bolshevik ignorance of village life. Consequently, we can say that the "delegates" from the committees were Bolsheviks or at least Bolshevik supporters. Significantly, by early 1919 Lenin admitted the Committees were failures and ordered them disbanded. The new policy reflected Left SR arguments against the Committees. It is hard not to concur with Vladimir Brovkin that by *"establishing the committees of the poor to replace the [rural] soviets ... the Bolsheviks were trying to create some institutional leverage of their own in the countryside for use against the SRs. In this light, the Bolshevik measures against the Menshevik-led city soviets ... and against SR-led village soviets may be seen as a two-pronged attempt to stem the tide that threatened to leave them in the minority at the Fifth Congress of Soviets."* [**The Mensheviks after October**, p. 226]

Thus, by July 1918, the Bolsheviks had effectively secured a monopoly of political power in Russia. When the Bolsheviks (rightly, if hypocritically) disbanded the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, they had claimed that the soviets (rightly) represented a superior form of democracy. Once they started losing soviet elections, they could find no better way to "se-

> *Peasants.' This blatant gerrymandering ensured a Bolshevik majority at the Fifth Congress of Soviets."*
> [**The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 176]

Historian Alexander Rabinowitch confirms this gerrymandering. As he put it, by the summer of 1918 *"popular disenchantment with Bolshevik rule was already well advanced, not only in rural but also in urban Russia"* and the *"primary beneficiaries of this nationwide grass-roots shift in public opinion were the Left SRs. During the second half of June 1918, it was an open question which of the two parties would have a majority at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets ... On the evening of 4 July, virtually from the moment the Fifth Congress of Soviets opened in Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, it was clear to the Left SRs that the Bolsheviks had effectively 'fabricated' a sizeable majority in the congress and consequently, that there was no hope whatever of utilising it to force a fundamental change in the government's pro-German, anti-peasant policies."* While he acknowledges that an *"exact breakdown of properly elected delegates may be impossible to ascertain"* it was possible (*"based on substantial but incomplete archival evidence"*) to conclude that *"it is quite clear that the Bolshevik majority was artificially inflated and highly suspect."* He quotes the report of one leading LSR, based on data from LSR members of the congress's Credentials Committee, saying that the Bolsheviks *"conjured up"* 299 voting delegates. *"The Bible tells us,"* noted the report's author, *"that God created the heavens and the earth from nothing ... In the twentieth century the Bolsheviks are capable of no lesser miracles: out of nothing, they create legitimate credentials."* [*"Maria Spiridonova's 'Last Testament'"*, **The Russian Review**, pp. 424–46, vol. 54, July 1995, p. 426]

This gerrymandering played a key role in the subsequent events. *"Deprived of their democratic majority,"* Swain notes, *"the Left SRs resorted to terror and assassinated the German ambassador Mirbach."* [Swain, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176] The LSR assassi-



sure that Lenin, and his numerous followers, would have dismissed it as the action of a *"petty-bourgeois intellectual"* who cannot handle party *"discipline."* This is itself is significant, as is the fact that he decided to appeal to the *"lower ranks"* of the party. Simply put, rather than being "democratic" the party machine effectively blocked communication and control from the bottom-up. Looking at the more radical party membership, he *"could only impose his view by going over the head of his Central Committee."* [Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] He made sure to send his letter of protest to *"the Petrograd and Moscow committees"* and also made sure that *"copies fell into the hands of the more reliable party workers of the district locals."* By early October (and *"over the heads of the Central Committee"*) he wrote *"directly to the Petrograd and Moscow committees"* calling for insurrection. He also *"appealed to a Petrograd party conference to speak a firm word in favour of insurrection."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 131 and p. 132]

In October, Lenin had to fight what he called *"a wavering"* in the *"upper circles of the party"* which lead to a *"sort of dread of the struggle for power, an inclination to replace this struggle with resolutions protests, and conferences."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132] For Trotsky, this represented *"almost a direct pitting of the party against the Central Committee,"* required because *"it was a question of the fate of the revolution"* and so *"all other considerations fell away."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 132–3] On October 8th, when Lenin addressed the Bolshevik delegates of the forthcoming Northern Congress of Soviets on this subject, he did so *"personally"* as there *"was no party decision"* and the *"higher institutions of the party had not yet expressed themselves."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 133] Ultimately, the Central Committee came round to Lenin's position but they did so under pressure of means at odds with the principles of the party.

This divergence between the imagine and reality of the Bolsheviks explains their success. If the party had applied or had remained true to the principles of "democratic centralism"

it is doubtful that it would have played an important role in the movement. As Alexander Rabinowitch argues, Bolshevik organisational unity and discipline is *"vastly exaggerated"* and, in fact, Bolshevik success in 1917 was down to *"the party's internally relatively democratic, tolerant, and decentralised structure and method of operation, as well as its essentially open and mass character — in striking contrast to the traditional Leninist model."* In 1917, he goes on, *"subordinate party bodies with the Petersburg Committee and the Military Organisation were permitted considerable independence and initiative ... Most importantly, these lower bodies were able to tailor their tactics and appeals to suit their own particular constituencies amid rapidly changing conditions. Vast numbers of new members were recruited into the party ... The newcomers included tens of thousands of workers and soldiers ... who knew little, if anything, about Marxism and cared nothing about party discipline."* For example, while the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* was *"officially withdrawn by the Sixth [Party] Congress in late July, this change did not take hold at the local level."* [**The Bolsheviks Come to Power**, p. 311, p. 312 and p. 313]

It is no exaggeration to argue that if any member of a current vanguard party acted as the Bolshevik rank and file did in 1917, they would quickly be expelled (this probably explains why no such party has been remotely successful since). However, this ferment from below was quickly undermined within the party with the start of the Civil War. It is from this period when "democratic centralism" was actually applied within the party and clarified as an organisational principle:

> *"It was quite a turnabout since the anarchic days before the Civil War. The Central Committee had always advocated the virtues of obedience and co-operation; but the rank-and-filers of 1917 had cared little about such entreaties as they did about appeals made by other higher authorities. The wartime emer-*



commissar for justice in the only coalition soviet government) of the only biography of LSR leader (and long standing revolutionary who suffered torture and imprisonment in her fight against Tsarism) Maria Spiridonova states that *"[b]etween 900 and 100 delegates were present. Officially the LSR numbered 40 percent of the delegates. They own opinion was that their number were even higher. The Bolsheviks strove to keep their majority by all the means in their power."* He quotes Spiridonova's address to the Congress: *"You may have a majority in this congress, but you do have not a majority in the country."* [I. Steinberg, **Spiridonova**, p. 209]

Historian Geoffrey Swain indicates that the LSRs had a point:

> *"Up to the very last minute the Left SRs had been confident that, as the voice of Russia's peasant masses, they would receive a majority when the Fifth Congress of Soviets assembled ... which would enable them to deprive Lenin of power and launch a revolutionary war against Germany. Between April and the end of June 1918 membership of their party had almost doubled, from 60,000 to 100,000, and to prevent them securing a majority at the congress Lenin was forced to rely on dubious procedures: he allowed so-called committees of poor peasants to be represented at the congress. Thus as late as 3 July 1918 returns suggested a majority for the Left SRs, but a Congress of Committees of Poor Peasants held in Petrograd the same day 'redressed the balance in favour of the Bolsheviks,' to quote the* ***Guardian****'s Philips-Price, by deciding it had the right to represent the all those districts where local soviets had not been 'cleansed of kulak elements and had not delivered the amount of food laid down in the requisitioning lists of the Committees of Poor*

own candidate. This ensured the bakers' demands were met. [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, pp. 88–9]

Unsurprisingly, *"there is a mass of evidence to support the Menshevik accusations of electoral malpractice"* during elections in May 1920. And in spite of Menshevik *"declaration of support for the Soviet regime against the Poles"* the party was *"still subject to harassment."* [Skawa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178]

This gerrymandering was not limited to just local soviets. The Bolsheviks used it at the fifth soviet congress as well.

First, it should be noted that in the run up to the congress, *"on 14 June 1918, they expelled Martov and his five Mensheviks-together with the Socialist Revolutionaries from the Central Executive Committee, closed down their newspapers .. and drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains."* [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 181] The rationale for this action was the claim that the Mensheviks had taken part in anti-soviet rebellions (as we discuss in section 23, this was not true). The action was opposed by the Left SRs, who correctly questioned the legality of the Bolshevik expulsion of opposition groupings. They *"branded the proposed expulsion bill illegal, since the Mensheviks and SRs had been sent to the CEC by the Congress of Soviets, and only the next congress had the right to withdraw their representation. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks had no right to pose as defenders of the soviets against the alleged SR counter-revolution when they themselves has been disbanding the peasants' soviets and creating the committees of the poor to replace them."* [Brovkin, **The Mensheviks After October**, p. 231] When the vote was taken, only the Bolsheviks supported it. Their votes were sufficient to pass it.

Given that the Mensheviks had been winning soviet elections across Russia, it is clear that this action was driven far more by political needs than the truth. This resulted in the Left Social Revolutionaries (LSRs) as the only significant party left in the run up to the fifth Congress. The LSR author (and ex-



> *gency now supplied an opportunity to expatiate on this theme at will."* [Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

Service stresses that *"it appears quite remarkable how quickly the Bolsheviks, who for years had talked idly about a strict hierarchy of command inside the party, at last began to put ideas into practice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96]

In other words, the conversion of the Bolshevik party into a fully fledged *"democratic centralist"* party occurred during the degeneration of the Revolution. This was both a consequence of the rising authoritarianism within the party and society as well as one of its causes. As such, it is quite ironic that the model used by modern day followers of Lenin is that of the party during the decline of the revolution, not its peak. This is not surprising. Once in power, the Bolshevik party imposed a state capitalist regime onto the Russian people. Can it be surprising that the party structure which it developed to aid this process was also based on bourgeois attitudes and organisation? Simply put, the party model advocated by Lenin may not have been very effective during a revolution but it was exceedingly effective at prompting hierarchy and authority in the post-revolutionary regime. It simply replaced the old ruling elite with another, made up of members of the radical intelligentsia and odd ex-worker or ex-peasant.

This was due to the hierarchical and top-down nature of the party Lenin had created. While the party base was largely working class, the leadership was not. Full-time revolutionaries, they were either middle-class intellectuals or (occasionally) ex-workers and (even rarer) ex-peasants who had left their class to become part of the party machine. Even the delegates at the party congresses did not truly reflect class basis of the party membership. For example, the number of delegates was still dominated by white-collar or others (59.1% to 40.9%) at the sixth party congress at the end of July 1917. [Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 160] So while the party gathered more

working class members in 1917, it cannot be said that this was reflected in the party leadership which remained dominated by non-working class elements. Rather than being a genuine working class organisation, the Bolshevik party was a hierarchical group headed by non-working class elements whose working class base could not effectively control them even during the revolution in 1917. It was only effective because these newly joined and radicalised working class members ignored their own party structure and its defining ideology.

After the revolution, the Bolsheviks saw their membership start to decrease. Significantly, *"the decline in numbers which occurred from early 1918 onwards"* started happening *"contrary to what is usually assumed, some months before the Central Committee's decree in midsummer that the party should be purged of its 'undesirable' elements."* These lost members reflected two things. Firstly, the general decline in the size of the industrial working class. This meant that the radicalised new elements from the countryside which had flocked to the Bolsheviks in 1917 returned home. Secondly, the lost of popular support the Bolsheviks were facing due to the realities of their regime. This can be seen from the fact that while the Bolsheviks were losing members, the Left SRS almost doubled in size to 100,000 (the Mensheviks claimed to have a similar number). Rather than non-proletarians leaving, *"[i]t is more probable by far that it was industrial workers who were leaving in droves. After all, it would have been strange if the growing unpopularity of Sovnarkom in factory milieu had been confined exclusively to non-Bolsheviks."* Unsurprisingly, given its position in power, *"[a]s the proportion of working-class members declined, so that of entrants from the middle-class rose; the steady drift towards a party in which industrial workers no longer numerically predominated was under way."* By late 1918 membership started to increase again but *"[m]ost newcomers were not of working-class origin … the proportion of Bolsheviks of working-class origin fell from 57 per cent at the year's beginning to 48 per cent at the end."* It should



*wanted to discuss the issue."* The chairman *"refus[ed] to include it in the agenda because of lack of supporting material"* and such information be submitted to the presidium of the soviet. The majority (i.e. the Bolsheviks) *"supported their chairman"* and the facts were *"submitted … to the presidium, where they apparently remained."* It should be noted that the *"same fate befell attempts to challenge the arrests of Moscow anarchists by the government on 12 April."* The chairman's *"handling of the anarchist matter ended its serious discussion in the VTsIK."* [Charles Duval, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 13–14] Given that the VTsIK was **meant** to be the highest soviet body between congresses, the lack of concern for Bolshevik repression against soviets and opposition groups clearly shows the Bolshevik contempt for soviet democracy.

Needless to say, this destruction of soviet democracy continued during the civil war. For example, the Bolsheviks simply rejected the voice of people and would refuse to accept an election result. Emma Goldman attended an election meeting of bakers in Moscow in March, 1920. *"It was,"* she said, *"the most exciting gathering I had witnessed in Russia."* However the *"chosen representative, an Anarchist, had been refused his mandate by the Soviet authorities. It was the third time the workers gathered to re-elect their delegate … and every time they elected the same man. The Communist candidate opposing him was Semashko, the Commissar of the Department of Health … [who] raved against the workers for choosing a non-Communist, called anathema upon their heads, and threatened them with the Tcheka and the curtailment of their rations. But he had no effect on the audience except to emphasise their opposition to him, and to arouse antagonism against the party he represented. The workers' choice was repudiated by the authorities by the authorities and later even arrested and imprisoned."* After a hunger strike, they were released. In spite of chekists with loaded guns attending union meetings, the bakers *"would not be intimidated"* and threatened a strike unless they were permitted to elect their

*the Dilemma of Civil War"*, **The Bolsheviks in Russian Society**, pp. 83–104, Vladimir N. Brovkin (Ed.), pp. 85–86] This forum, like all forms of working class protest, was crushed by the Bolshevik state. By the time the elections were held, in June 1918, the civil war had started (undoubtedly favouring the Bolsheviks) and the Bolsheviks had secured their majority by packing the soviet with non-workplace "representatives."

In Tula, again in the spring of 1918, local Bolsheviks reported to the Bolshevik Central Committee that the *"Bolshevik deputies began to be recalled one after another ... our situation became shakier with passing day. We were forced to block new elections to the soviet and even not to recognise them where they had taken place not in our favour."* In the end, the local party leader was forced to abolish the city soviet and to vest power in the Provincial Executive Committee. This refused to convene a plenum of the city soviet for more than two months, knowing that newly elected delegates were non-Bolshevik. [Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87]

In Yaroslavl', the newly elected soviet convened on April 9th, 1918, and when it elected a Menshevik chairman, *"the Bolshevik delegation walked out and declared the soviet dissolved. In response, workers in the city went out on strike, which the Bolsheviks answered by arresting the strike committee and threatening to dismiss the strikers and replace them with unemployed workers."* This failed and the Bolsheviks were forced to hold new elections, which they lost. Then *"the Bolsheviks dissolved this soviet as well and places the city under martial law."* A similar event occurred in Riazan' (again in April) and, again, the Bolsheviks *"promptly dissolved the soviet and declared a dictatorship under a Military-Revolutionary Committee."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88–9]

The opposition parties raised such issues at the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK), to little avail. On the 11th of April, one *"protested that non-Bolshevik controlled soviets were being dispersed by armed force, and*



be noted that it was not specified how many were classed as having working-class origin were still employed in working-class jobs. [Robert Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70, pp. 70–1 and p. 90] A new ruling elite was thus born, thanks to the way vanguard parties are structured and the application of vanguardist principles which had previously been ignored.

In summary, the experience of the Russian Revolution does not, in fact, show the validity of the "vanguard" model. The Bolshevik party in 1917 played a leading role in the revolution only insofar as its members violated its own organisational principles (Lenin included). Faced with a real revolution and an influx of more radical new members, the party had to practice anarchist ideas of autonomy, local initiative and the ignoring of central orders which had no bearing to reality on the ground. When the party did try to apply the top-down and hierarchical principles of "democratic centralism" it failed to adjust to the needs of the moment. Moreover, when these principles were finally applied they helped ensure the degeneration of the revolution. As we discussed in section H.5, this was to be expected.

## 4 Was Lenin's "State and Revolution" applied after October?

In a nutshell, no. In fact the opposite was the case. Post-October, the Bolsheviks not only failed to introduce the ideas of Lenin's **State and Revolution**, they in fact introduced the exact opposite. As one historian puts it:

> *"To consider 'State and Revolution' as the basic statement of Lenin's political philosophy — which non-Communists as well as Communists usually do — is a serious error. Its argument for a utopian anarchism never actually became official policy. The Leninism of 1917 ... came to grief in a few short years; it was the revived Leninism of 1902 which*

> *prevailed as the basis for the political development of the USSR."* [Robert V. Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, pp. 51–2]

Daniels is being far too lenient with the Bolsheviks. It was not, in fact, *"a few short years"* before the promises of 1917 were forgotten. In some cases, it was a few short hours. In others, a few short months. However, in a sense Daniels is right. It did take until 1921 before all hope for saving the Russian Revolution finally ended. With the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion, the true nature of the regime became obvious to all with eyes to see. Moreover, the banning of factions within the party at the same time did mark a return to the pattern of *"What is to be Done?"* rather than the more fluid practice Bolshevism exhibited in, say, 1917 (see section 3). However, as we discuss in the appendix "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?", the various Bolshevik oppositions were, in their own way, just as authoritarian as the mainstream of the party.

In order to show that this is the case, we need to summarise the main ideas contained in Lenin's work. Moreover, we need to indicate what the Bolsheviks did, in fact, do. Finally, we need to see if the various rationales justifying these actions hold water.

So what did Lenin argue for in **State and Revolution**? Writing in the mid-1930s, anarchist Camillo Berneri summarised the main ideas of that work as follows:

> *"The Leninist programme of 1917 included these points: the discontinuance of the police and standing army, abolition of the professional bureaucracy, elections for all public positions and offices, revocability of all officials, equality of bureaucratic wages with workers' wages, the maximum of democracy, peaceful competition among the parties within the soviets, abolition of the death penalty."* [*"The*



*wave of anti-Bolshevik uprisings."* In fact, *"in all provincial capitals of European Russia where elections were held on which there are data, the Mensheviks and the SRs won majorities on the city soviets in the spring of 1918."* Brovkin stresses that the *"process of the Menshevik-SR electoral victories threatened Bolshevik power. That is why in the course of the spring and summer of 1918, the soviet assemblies were disbanded in most cities and villages. To stay in power, the Bolsheviks had to destroy the soviets… These steps generated a far-reaching transformation in the soviet system, which remained 'soviet' in name only."* Brovkin presents accounts from numerous towns and cities. As an example, he discusses Tver' where the *"escalation of political tensions followed the already familiar pattern"* as the *"victory of the opposition at the polls"* in April 1918 *"brought about an intensification of the Bolshevik repression. Strikes, protests, and marches in Tver' lead to the imposition of martial law."* [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46, p. 47, p. 48 and p. 11] Thus Bolshevik armed force not only overthrew the election results, it also suppressed working class protest against such actions. (Brovkin's book **The Mensheviks after October** contains the same information as his article).

This Bolshevik attack on the soviets usually started with attempts to stop new elections. For example, after a demonstration in Petrograd in favour of the Constituent Assembly was repressed by the Bolsheviks in mid-January 1918, calls for new elections to the soviet occurred in many factories. *"Despite the efforts of the Bolsheviks and the Factory Committees they controlled, the movement for new elections to the soviet spread to more than twenty factories by early February and resulted in the election of fifty delegates: thirty-six SRs, seven Mensheviks and seven non-party."* However, the Bolsheviks *"unwillingness to recognise the elections and to seat new delegates pushed a group of Socialists to … lay plans for an alternative workers' forum … what was later to become the Assembly of Workers' Plenipotentiaries."* [Scott Smith, *"The Social-Revolutionaries and*

For example, the Mensheviks *"made something of a comeback about Saratov workers in the spring of 1918, for which the Bolsheviks expelled them from the soviet."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 187] Izhevsk, a town of 100,000 with an armaments industry which was the main suppliers of rifles to the Tzar's Army, experienced a swing to the left by the time of the October revolution. The Bolsheviks and SR-Maximalists became the majority and with a vote 92 to 58 for the soviet to assume power. After a revolt by SR-Maximalist Red Guards against the Bolshevik plans for a centralised Red Army in April, 1918, the Bolsheviks became the sole power. However, in the May elections the Mensheviks and [right] SRs *"experienced a dramatic revival"* and for *"the first time since September 1917, these two parties constituted a majority in the Soviet by winning seventy of 135 seats."* The Bolsheviks *"simply refused to acquiesce to the popular mandate of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries."* In June, the Bolshevik leadership *"appealed to the Karzan' Soviet ... for assistance."* The troops sent along with the Bolshevik dominated Red Guards *"abrogated the results of the May and June elections"* and imprisoned the SR and Menshevik soviet delegates. The summer of 1918 also saw victories for the SRs and Mensheviks in the soviet elections in Votkinsk, a steel town near Izhevsk. *"As in Izhevsk the Bolsheviks voided the elections."* [Stephan M. Merk, *"The 'Class-Tragedy' of Izhevsk: Working Class Opposition to Bolshevism in 1918"*, pp. 176–90, **Russian History**, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 181 and p. 186]

However, the most in depth account of this destruction of soviet is found in the research of Vladimir Brovkin. According to him, there *"are three factors"* which emerge from the soviet election results in the spring of 1918. These are, firstly, *"the impressive success of the Menshevik-SR opposition"* in those elections in all regions in European Russia. The second *"is the Bolshevik practice of outright disbandment of the Menshevik-SR-controlled soviets. The third is the subsequent*



*Abolition and Extinction of the State,"* **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 50]

As he noted, *"[n]ot a single one of the points of this programme has been achieved."* This was, of course, under Stalinism and most Leninists will concur with Berneri. However what Leninists tend not to mention is that in the 7 month period from November 1917 to May 1918 none of these points was achieved. So, as an example of what Bolshevism "really" stands for it seems strange to harp on about a work which was never implemented when the its author was in a position to do so (i.e. before the onslaught of a civil war Lenin thought was inevitable anyway!).

To see that Berneri's summary is correct, we need to quote Lenin directly. Obviously the work is a wide ranging defence of Lenin's interpretation of Marxist theory on the state. As it is an attempt to overturn decades of Marxist orthodoxy, much of the work is quotes from Marx and Engels and Lenin's attempts to enlist them for his case (we discuss this issue in section H.3.10). Equally, we need to discount the numerous straw men arguments about anarchism Lenin inflicts on his reader (see sections H.1.3, H.1.4 and H.1.5 for the truth about his claims). Here we simply list the key points as regards Lenin's arguments about his "workers' state" and how the workers would maintain control of it:

1) Using the Paris Commune as a prototype, Lenin argued for the abolition of *"parliamentarianism"* by turning *"representative institutions from mere 'talking shops' into working bodies."* This would be done by removing *"the division of labour between the legislative and the executive."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 304 and p. 306]

2) *"All officials, without exception, to be elected and subject to recall* ***at any time****"* and so *"directly responsible to their constituents." "Democracy means equality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 302, p. 306 and p. 346]

3) The *"immediate introduction of control and superintendence by **all,** so that **all** shall become 'bureaucrats' for a time and so that, therefore, **no one** can become a 'bureaucrat'."* Proletarian democracy would *"take immediate steps to cut bureaucracy down to the roots ... to the complete abolition of bureaucracy"* as the *"**essence** of bureaucracy"* is officials becoming transformed *"into privileged persons divorced from the masses and **superior to** the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 355 and p. 360]

4) There should be no *"special bodies of armed men"* standing apart from the people *"since the majority of the people itself suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' is no longer necessary."* Using the example of the Paris Commune, Lenin suggested this meant *"abolition of the standing army."* Instead there would be the *"armed masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 275, p. 301 and p. 339]

5) The new (workers) state would be *"the organisation of violence for the suppression of ... the exploiting class, i.e. the bourgeoisie. The toilers need a state only to overcome the resistance of the exploiters"* who are *"an insignificant minority,"* that is *"the landlords and the capitalists."* This would see *"an immense expansion of democracy ... for the poor, democracy for the people"* while, simultaneously, imposing *"a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists... their resistance must be broken by force: it is clear that where is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 287 and pp. 337–8]

This would be implemented after the current, bourgeois, state had been smashed. This would be the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* and be *"the introduction of complete democracy for the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 355] However, the key practical ideas on what the new "semi-state" would be are contained in these five points. He generalised these points, considering them valid not only for Russia in 1917 but in all countries. In this his followers agree. Lenin's work is considered valid for today, in advanced countries as it was in revolutionary Russia.



A similar situation existed in Moscow. For example, the largest single union in the soviet in 1920 was that of soviet employees with 140 deputies (9% of the total), followed by the metal workers with 121 (8%). In total, the bureaucracies of the four biggest trade unions had 29.5% of delegates in the Moscow soviet. This packing of the soviet by the trade union bureaucracy existed in 1918 as well, ensuring the Bolsheviks were insulated from popular opposition and the recall of workplace delegates by their electors. Another form of gerrymandering was uniting areas of Bolshevik strength *"for electoral purposes with places where they were weak, such as the creation of a single constituency out of the Moscow food administration (MPO) and the Cheka in February 1920."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 179 and p. 178]

However, this activity was mild compared to the Bolshevik response to soviet elections which did not go their way. According to one historian, by the spring of 1918 *"Menshevik newspapers and activists in the trade unions, the Soviets, and the factories had made a considerable impact on a working class which was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or prevent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities."* [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 179] This is confirmed by other sources. *"By the middle of 1918,"* notes Leonard Schapiro, *"the Mensheviks could claim with some justification that large numbers of the industrial working class were now behind them, and that for the systematic dispersal and packing of the soviets, and the mass arrests at workers' meetings and congresses, their party could eventually have won power by its policy of constitutional opposition. In the elections to the soviets which were taking place in the spring of 1918 throughout Russia, arrests, military dispersal, even shootings followed whenever Mensheviks succeeded in winning majorities or a substantial representation."* [**The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 191]

The effects of this can be seen in Petrograd soviet elections of June 1918. In these the Bolsheviks *"lost the absolute majority in the soviet they had previously enjoyed"* but remained its largest party. However, the results of these elections were irrelevant. This was because *"under regulations prepared by the Bolsheviks and adopted by the 'old' Petrograd soviet, more than half of the projected 700-plus deputies in the 'new' soviet were to be elected by the Bolshevik-dominated district soviets, trade unions, factory committees, Red Army and naval units, and district worker conferences: thus, the Bolsheviks were assured of a solid majority even before factory voting began."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 45] To be specific, the number of delegates elected directly from the workplace made up a mere third of the new soviet (i.e. only 260 of the 700 plus deputies in the new soviet were elected directly from the factories): *"It was this arbitrary 'stacking' of the new soviet, much more than election of 'dead souls' from shut-down factories, unfair campaign practices, falsification of the vote, or direct repression, that gave the Bolsheviks an unfair advantage in the contest."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Petrograd First City District Soviet during the Civil War**, p. 140]

In other words, the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and packed soviets to remain in power, so distorting the soviet structure to ensure Bolshevik dominance. This practice seems to have been commonplace. In Saratov, as in Petrograd, *"the Bolsheviks, fearing that they would lose elections, changed the electoral rules ... in addition to the delegates elected directly at the factories, the trade unions — but only those in favour of soviet power, in other words supporters of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs — were given representation. Similarly, the political parties supporting Soviet power automatically received twenty-five seats in the soviets. Needless to say, these rules heavily favoured the ruling parties"* as the Mensheviks and SRs *"were regarded by the Bolsheviks as being against Soviet power."* [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]



Three things strike anarchist readers of Lenin's work. Firstly, as we noted in section H.1.7, much of it is pure anarchism. Bakunin had raised the vision of a system of workers' councils as the framework of a free socialist society in the 1860s and 1870s. Moreover, he had also argued for the election of mandated and recallable delegates as well as for using a popular militia to defend the revolution (see section H.2.1). What is not anarchist is the call for centralisation, equating the council system with a state and the toleration of a "new" officialdom. Secondly, the almost utter non-mention of the role of the party in the book is deeply significant. Given the emphasis that Lenin had always placed on the party, it's absence is worrying. Particularly (as we indicate in section 5) he had been calling for the party to seize power all through 1917. When he does mention the party he does so in an ambiguous way which suggests that it, not the class, would be in power. As subsequent events show, this was indeed what happened in practice. And, finally, the anarchist reader is struck by the fact that every one of these key ideas were not implemented under Lenin. In fact, the opposite was done. This can be seen from looking at each point in turn.

The first point as the creation of "working bodies", the combining of legislative and executive bodies. The first body to be created by the Bolshevik revolution was the "Council of People's Commissars" (CPC) This was a government separate from and above the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the soviets congress. It was an executive body elected by the soviet congress, but the soviets themselves were not turned into "working bodies." Thus the promises of Lenin's **State and Revolution** did not last the night.

As indicated in section 5, the Bolsheviks clearly knew that the Soviets had alienated their power to this body. However, it could be argued that Lenin's promises were kept as this body simply gave itself legislative powers four days later. Sadly, this is not the case. In the Paris Commune the delegates of the peo-

ple took executive power into their own hands. Lenin reversed this. His executive took legislative power from the hands of the people's delegates. In the former case, power was decentralised into the hands of the population. In the latter case, it was centralised into the hands of a few. This concentration of power into executive committees occurred at all levels of the soviet hierarchy (see section 6 for full details). Simply put, legislative and executive power was taken **from** the soviets assemblies and handed to Bolshevik dominated executive committees.

What of the next principle, namely the election and recall of all officials? This lasted slightly longer, namely around 5 months. By March of 1918, the Bolsheviks started a systematic campaign against the elective principle in the workplace, in the military and even in the soviets. In the workplace, Lenin was arguing for appointed one-man managers *"vested with dictatorial powers"* by April 1918 (see section 10). In the military, Trotsky simply decreed the end of elected officers in favour of appointed officers (see section 14). And as far as the soviets go, the Bolsheviks were refusing to hold elections because they *"feared that the opposition parties would show gains."* When elections were held, *"Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results"* in provincial towns. Moreover, the Bolsheviks *"pack[ed] local soviets"* with representatives of organisations they controlled *"once they could not longer count on an electoral majority."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22, p. 24 and p. 33] This gerrymandering was even practised at the all-Russian soviet congress (see section 6 for full details of this Bolshevik onslaught against the soviets). So much for competition among the parties within the soviets! And as far as the right of recall went, the Bolsheviks only supported this when the workers were recalling the opponents of the Bolsheviks, not when the workers were recalling them.

In summary, in under six months the Bolsheviks had replaced election of *"all officials"* by appointment from above in many areas of life. Democracy had simply being substituted by



**view**, vol. 42, pp. 1–50, p. 18] The fate of the Yaroslavl soviet will be discussed shorted. As Geoffrey Swain summaries, Menshevik and SR *"successes in recalling Bolshevik delegates from the soviets had forced the Bolsheviks increasingly to delay by-elections."* [**The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 91]

As well as postponing elections and recall, the Bolsheviks also quickly turned to gerrymandering the soviets to ensure the stability of their majority in the soviets. In this they made use of certain institutional problems the soviets had had from the start. On the day which the Petrograd soviet was formed in 1917, the Bolshevik Shlyapnikov *"proposed that each socialist party should have the right to two seats in the provisional executive committee of the soviet."* This was *"designed, initially, to give the Bolsheviks a decent showing, for they were only a small minority of the initiating group."* It was agreed. However, the *"result was that members of a dozen different parties and organisations (trades unions, co-operative movements, etc.) entered the executive committee. They called themselves 'representatives' (of their organisations) and, by virtue of this, they speedily eliminated from their discussions the committee members chosen by the general assembly although they were the true founders of the Soviet."* This meant, for example, Bolshevik co-founders of the soviet made way for such people as Kamenev and Stalin. Thus the make-up of the soviet executive committee was decided upon by *"the leadership of each organisation, its executive officers, and not with the [soviet] assembly. The assembly had lost its right to control."* Thus, for example, the Bolshevik central committee member Yoffe became the presidium of the soviet of district committees without being elected by anyone represented at those soviets. *"After October, the Bolsheviks were more systematic in their use of these methods, but there was a difference: there were now no truly free elections that might have put a brake to a procedure that could only benefit the Bolshevik party."* [Marc Ferro, **October 1917**, p. 191 and p. 195]

become rubber-stamps for the Communist government, with the Soviet Constitution of 1918 codifying the centralisation of power and top-down decision making. Local soviets were expected to *"carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power"* (i.e. to carry out the commands of the central government).

This was not all. While having popular support in October 1917, the realities of "Leninism in power" soon saw a backlash develop. The Bolsheviks started to loose popular support to opposition groups like the Mensheviks and SRs (left and right). This growing opposition was reflected in two ways. Firstly, a rise in working class protests in the form of strikes and independent organisations. Secondly, there was a rise in votes for the opposition parties in soviet elections. Faced with this, the Bolsheviks responded in three ways, delaying elections. gerrymandering or force. We will discuss each in turn.

Lenin argued in mid-April 1918 that the *"socialist character of Soviet, i.e.* ***proletarian****, democracy"* lies, in part, in because *"the people themselves determine the order and time of elections."* [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, pp. 36–7] However, the reality in the grassroots was somewhat different. There *"the government [was] continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918"* because it *"feared that the opposition parties would show gains. This fear was well founded since in the period immediately preceding 25 January, in those Petrograd factories where the workers had decided to hold new elections, the Mensheviks, SRs, and non-affiliated candidates had won about half the seats."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22] In Yaroslavl, the *more the Bolsheviks tried to postpone the elections, the more the idea of holding new elections became an issue itself."* When the Bolsheviks gave in and held elections in early April, the Mensheviks won 47 of the 98 seats, the Bolsheviks 38 and the SRs 13. [*"The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918"*, **The Russian Re-**



appointed from above (see section 4 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"for the deeply undemocratic reasoning used to justify this top-down and autocratic system of so-called democracy). The idea that different parties could compete for votes in the soviets (or elsewhere) was similarly curtailed and finally abolished.

Then there was the elimination of bureaucracy. As we show in section 7 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", a new bureaucratic and centralised system quickly emerged. Rather than immediately cutting the size and power of the bureaucracy, it steadily grew. It soon became the real power in the state (and, ultimately, in the 1920s became the social base for the rise of Stalin). Moreover, with the concentration of power in the hands of the Bolshevik government, the *"essence"* of bureaucracy remained as the party leaders became *"privileged persons divorced from the masses and* ***superior to*** *the masses."* They were, for example, more than happy to justify their suppression of military democracy in terms of them knowing better than the general population what was best for them (see section 4 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?" for details).

Then there is the fourth point, namely the elimination of the standing army, the suppression of *"special bodies of armed men"* by the *"armed masses."* This promise did not last two months. On the 20th of December, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars decreed the formation of a political (secret) police force, the *"Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution."* This was more commonly known by the Russian initials of the first two terms of its official name: The Cheka. Significantly, its founding decree stated it was to *"watch the press, saboteurs, strikers, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the Right."* [contained in Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 133]

While it was initially a small organisation, as 1918 progressed it grew in size and activity. By April 1918, it was being used to break the anarchist movement across Russia (see section 23 for details). The Cheka soon became a key instrument of Bolshevik rule, with the full support of the likes of Lenin and Trotsky. The Cheka was most definitely a *"special body of armed men"* and not the same as the *"armed workers."* In other words, Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** did not last two months and in under six months the Bolshevik state had a mighty group of *"armed men"* to impose its will.

This is not all. The Bolsheviks also conducted a sweeping transformation of the military within the first six months of taking power. During 1917, the soldiers and sailors (encouraged by the Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries) had formed their own committees and elected officers. In March 1918, Trotsky simply abolished all this by decree and replaced it with appointed officers (usually ex-Tsarist ones). In this way, the Red Army was turned from a workers' militia (i.e. an armed people) into a *"special body"* separate from the general population (see section 15 for further discussion on this subject).

So instead of eliminating a *"special force"* above the people, the Bolsheviks did the opposite by creating a political police force (the Cheka) and a standing army (in which elections were a set aside by decree). These were special, professional, armed forces standing apart from the people and unaccountable to them. Indeed, they were used to repress strikes and working class unrest, a topic we now turn to.

Then there is the idea of that Lenin's "workers' state" would simple be an instrument of violence directed at the exploiters. This was not how it turned out in practice. As the Bolsheviks lost popular support, they turned the violence of the "worker's state" against the workers (and, of course, the peasants). As noted above, when the Bolsheviks lost soviet elections they used force to disband them (see section 6 for further details). Faced with strikes and working class protest during this pe-



*95) had come out in favour of a revolutionary war, although the soviets in the two capitals voted ... to accept a separate peace."* [Geoffrey Swain, **The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 128] This survey was ignored by the Bolshevik Central Committee which voted 4 against, 4 abstain and 5 for it. This took Russia out of the Great War but handed over massive areas to imperialist Germany. The controversial treaty was ratified at the Fourth Soviet Congress, unsurprisingly as the Bolshevik majority simply followed the orders of their Central Committee. It would be pointless to go over the arguments of the rights and wrongs of the decision here, the point is that the 13 members of the Bolshevik Central Committee decided the future faith of Russia in this vote. The soviets were simply ignored in spite of the fact it was possible to consult them fully. Clearly, "soviet power" meant little more than window-dressing for Bolshevik power.

Thus, at the top summits of the state, the soviets had been marginalised by the Bolsheviks from day one. Far from having "all power" their CEC had given that to a Bolshevik government. Rather than exercise real power, it's basic aim was to control those who did exercise it. And the Bolsheviks successfully acted to undermine even this function.

If this was happening at the top, what was the situation at the grassroots? Here, too, oligarchic tendencies in the soviets increased post-October, with *"[e]ffective power in the local soviets relentlessly gravitated to the executive committees, and especially their presidia. Plenary sessions became increasingly symbolic and ineffectual."* The party was *"successful in gaining control of soviet executives in the cities and at **uezd** and **guberniya** levels. These executive bodies were usually able to control soviet congresses, though the party often disbanded congresses that opposed major aspects of current policies."* Local soviets *"had little input into the formation of national policy" and "[e]ven at higher levels, institutional power shifted away from the soviets."* [C. Sirianni, **Op. Cit.**, p. 204 and p. 203] The soviets quickly had

Bolsheviks were able *"to increase the power of the presidium, postpone regular sessions, and present VTsIK with policies which had already been implemented by the Sovnarkon. Even in the presidium itself very few people determined policy."* [Charles Duval, **Op. Cit.**, p.7, p. 8 and p. 18]

So, from the very outset, the VTsIK was overshadowed by the "Council of People's Commissars" (CPC). In the first year, only 68 of 480 decrees issued by the CPC were actually submitted to the Soviet Central Executive Committee, and even fewer were actually drafted by it. The VTsIK functions *"were never clearly delineated, even in the constitution, despite vigorous attempts by the Left SRs ... that Lenin never saw this highest soviet organ as the genuine equal of his cabin and that the Bolsheviks deliberated obstructed efforts at clarification is [a] convincing"* conclusion to draw. It should be stressed that this process started before the outbreak of civil war in late May, 1918. After that the All-Russian Congress of soviets, which convened every three months or so during the first year of the revolution, met annually thereafter. Its elected VTsIK *"also began to meet less frequently, and at the height of the civil war in late 1918 and throughout 1919, it never once met in full session."* [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy**, pp. 203–4]

The marginalisation of the soviets can be seen from the decision on whether to continue the war against Germany. As Cornelius Castoriadis notes, under Lenin *"[c]ollectively, the only real instance of power is the Party, and very soon, only the summits of the Party. Immediately after the seizure of power the soviets as institutions are reduced to the status of pure window-dressing (we need only look at the fact that, already at the beginning of 1918 in the discussions leading up to the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, their role was absolutely nil)."* [**The role of Bolshevik Ideology in the birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 97] In fact, on the 26th of February, 1918, the Soviet Executive *"began a survey of 200 local soviets; by 10 March 1918 a majority (105–*



riod, the Bolsheviks responded with state violence (see section 5 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" for details). We will discuss the implications of this for Lenin's theory below. So, as regards the claim that the new ("workers") state would repress only the exploiters, the truth was that it was used to repress whoever opposed Bolshevik power, including workers and peasants.

As can be seen, after the first six months of Bolshevik rule not a single measure advocated by Lenin in **State and Revolution** existed in "revolutionary" Russia. Some of the promises were broken in quiet quickly (overnight, in one case). Most took longer. For example, the democratisation of the armed forces had been decreed in late December 1917. However, this was simply acknowledging the existing revolutionary gains of the military personnel. Similarly, the Bolsheviks passed a decree on workers' control which, again, simply acknowledged the actual gains by the grassroots (and, in fact, limited them for further development — see section 9). This cannot be taken as evidence of the democratic nature of Bolshevism as most governments faced with a revolutionary movement will acknowledge and "legalise" the facts on the ground (until such time as they can neutralise or destroy them). For example, the Provisional Government created after the February Revolution also legalised the revolutionary gains of the workers (for example, legalising the soviets, factory committees, unions, strikes and so forth). The real question is whether Bolshevism continued to encourage these revolutionary gains once it had consolidated its power. Which they did not. Indeed, it can be argued that the Bolsheviks simply managed to do what the Provisional Government it replaced had failed to do, namely destroy the various organs of popular self-management created by the revolutionary masses. So the significant fact is not that the Bolsheviks recognised the gains of the masses but that their toleration of the application of what their followers say were their real principles did not last long and was quickly ended. Moreover, when

the leading Bolsheviks looked back at this abolition they did not consider it in any way in contradiction to the principles of "communism" (see section 14).

We have stressed this period for a reason. This was the period **before** the out-break of major Civil War and thus the policies applied show the actual nature of Bolshevism, it's essence if you like. This is a significant date as most Leninists blame the failure of Lenin to live up to his promises on this even. In reality, the civil war was **not** the reason for these betrayals — simply because it had not started yet (see section 16 on when the civil war started and its impact). Each of the promises were broken in turn months before the civil war happened. *"All Power to the Soviets"* became, very quickly, *"All Power to the Bolsheviks."* In the words of historian Marc Ferro:

> *"In a way,* ***The State and Revolution*** *even laid the foundations and sketched out the essential features of an alternative to Bolshevik power, and only the pro-Leninist tradition has used it, almost to quieten its conscience, because Lenin, once in power, ignored its conclusions. The Bolsheviks, far from causing the state to wither away, found endless reasons for justifying its enforcement."* [**October 1917**, pp. 213–4]

Where does that leave Lenin's **State and Revolution**? Well, modern-day Leninists still urge us to read it, considering it his greatest work and the best introduction to what Leninism really stands for. For example, we find Leninist Tony Cliff calling that book *"Lenin's real testament"* while, at the same time, acknowledging that its *"message ... which was the guide for the first victorious proletarian revolution, was violated again and again during the civil war."* Not a very good *"guide"* or that convincing a *"message"* if it was not applicable in the very circumstances it was designed to be applied in (a bit like saying you have an excellent umbrella but it only works



*abolition: with its 'idle, long-winded talk and its incapacity for productive work' the VTsIK merely held up the work of government, he claimed. And he may have had a point: during the period of 1917 to 1918, the Sovnarkom issued 474 decrees, the VTsIK a mere 62."* [Israel Getzler, **Soviets as Agents of Democratisation**, p. 27]

This process was not an accident. Far from it. In fact, the Bolshevik chairman Sverdlov knew exactly what he was doing. This included modifying the way the CEC worked:

> *"The structure of VTsIK itself began to change under Sverdlov. He began to use the presidium to circumvent the general meeting, which contained eloquent minority spokesmen ... Sverdlov's used of the presidium marked a decisive change in the status of that body within the soviet hierarchy. In mid-1917 ... [the] plenum had directed all activities and ratified bureau decisions which had a 'particularly important social-political character.' The bureau ... served as the executive organ of the VTsIK plenum ... Only in extraordinary cases when the bureau could no be convened for technical reason could the presidium make decisions. Even then such actions remained subject to review by the plenum."* [Charles Duval, *"Yakov M. Sverdlov and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK)"*, pp. 3–22, **Soviet Studies**, vol. XXXI, no. 1, January 1979, pp. 6–7]

Under the Bolsheviks, the presidium was converted *"into the* ***de facto*** *centre of power within VTsIK."* It *"began to award representations to groups and factions which supported the government. With the VTsIK becoming ever more unwieldy in size by the day, the presidium began to expand its activities."* The presidium was used *"to circumvent general meetings."* Thus the

tive powers into one body, they had this in mind! But then, as we discussed in section 4, that work was never applied in practice so we should not be too surprised by this turn of events. One thing is sure, four days after the "soviet" revolution the soviets had been replaced as the effective power in society by a handful of Bolshevik leaders. So the Bolsheviks immediately created a power **above** the soviets in the form of the CPC. Lenin's argument in **The State and Revolution** that, like the Paris Commune, the workers' state would be based on a fusion of executive and administrative functions in the hands of the workers' delegates did not last one night. In reality, the Bolshevik party was the **real** power in "soviet" Russia.

Given that the All-Russian central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK) was dominated by Bolsheviks, it comes as no surprise to discover it was used to augment this centralisation of power into the hands of the party. The VTsIK (*"charged by the October revolution with controlling the government,"* the Sovnarkom) was *"used not to control but rather extend the authority and centralising fiat of the government. That was the work of Iakov Sverdlov, the VTsIK chairman, who — in close collaboration with Lenin as chairman of the Sovnarkom — ensured that the government decrees and ordinances were by the VTsIK and that they were thus endowed with Soviet legitimacy when they were sent to provincial soviet executive committees for transmission to all local soviets … To achieve that, Sverdlov had to reduce the 'Soviet Parliament' to nothing more than an 'administrative branch' (as Sukhanov put it) of the Sovnarkom. Using his position as the VTsIK chairman and his tight control over its praesidium and the large, disciplined and compliant Bolshevik majority in the plenary assembly, Sverdlov isolated the opposition and rendered it impotent. So successful was he that, by early December 1917, Sukhanov had already written off the VTsIK as 'a sorry parody of a revolutionary parliament,' while for the Bolshevik, Martin Latsis-Zurabs, the VTsIL was not even a good rubberstamp. Latsis campaigned vigorously in March and April 1918 for the VTsIK's*



when it is not raining). Moreover, Cliff is factually incorrect. The Bolsheviks *"violated"* that *"guide"* before the civil war started (i.e. when *"the victories of the Czechoslovak troops over the Red Army in June 1918, that threatened the greatest danger to the Soviet republic,"* to quote Cliff). Similarly, much of the economic policies implemented by the Bolsheviks had their roots in that book and the other writings by Lenin from 1917 (see section 5 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"). [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 161 and p. 18]

Given this, what use is Lenin's **State and Revolution**? If this really was the *"guide"* it is claimed to be, the fact that it proved totally impractical suggests it should simply be ignored. Simply put, if the side effects of a revolution (such as civil war) require it to be ripped up then modern Leninists should come clean and admit that revolution and workers' democracy simply do not go together. This was, after all, the conclusion of Lenin and Trotsky (see section H.3.8). As such, they should not recommend Lenin's work as an example of what Bolshevism aims for. If, however, the basic idea of workers' democracy and freedom are valid and considered the only way of achieving socialism then we need to wonder **why** the Bolsheviks did not apply them when they had the chance, particularly when the Makhnovists in the Ukraine did. Such an investigation would only end up by concluding the validity of anarchism, **not** Leninism.

This can be seen from the trajectory of Bolshevik ideology post-October. Simply put, it was not bothered by the breaking of the promises of **State and Revolution** and 1917 in general. As such, Cliff is just wrong to assert that while the message of **State and Revolution** was *"violated again and again"* it *"was also invoked again and again against bureaucratic degeneration."* [Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161] Far from it. Lenin's **State and Revolution** was rarely invoked against degeneration by the mainstream Bolshevik leadership. Indeed, they happily sup-

ported party dictatorship and one-man management. Ironically for Cliff, it **was** famously invoked against the state capitalist policies being implemented in early 1918. This was done by the "Left Communists" around Bukharin in their defence of workers' self-management against Lenin's policy! Lenin told them to reread it (along with his other 1917 works) to see that "state capitalism" was his aim all along! Not only that, he quoted from **State and Revolution**. He argued that *"accounting and control"* was required *"for the proper functioning of the first stage of communist society." "And this control,"* he continued, *"must be established not only over 'the insignificant capitalist minority, over the gentry ... ', but also over the workers who 'have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism ... '"* He ended by saying it was *"significant that Bukharin did **not** emphasise **this**."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, pp. 353–4] Needless to say, the Leninists who urge us to read Lenin's work do not emphasis that either.

As the Bolsheviks lost more and more support, the number of workers *"thoroughly corrupted by capitalism"* increased. How to identify them was easy: they did not support the party. As historian Richard summarises, a *"lack of identification with the Bolshevik party was treated as the absence of political consciousness altogether."* [**Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94] This is the logical conclusion of vanguardism, of course (see section H.5.3). However, to acknowledge that state violence was also required to "control" the working class totally undermines the argument of **State and Revolution**.

This is easy to see and to prove theoretically. For example, by 1920, Lenin was more than happy to admit that the "workers' state" used violence against the masses. At a conference of his political police, the Cheka, Lenin argued as follows:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary*



The very first act of the Bolshevik revolution was for the Second Congress of Soviets to alienate its power and hand it over to the "Council of People's Commissars." This was the new government and was totally Bolshevik in make-up (the Left SRs later joined it, although the Bolsheviks always maintained control). Thus the first act of the revolution was the creation of a power **above** the soviets. Although derived from the soviet congress, it was not identical to it. Thus the Bolshevik "workers' state" or "semi-state" started to have the same characteristics as the normal state (see section H.3.7 for a discussion of what marks a state).

The subsequent marginalisation of the soviets in the "soviet" state occurred from top to bottom should not, therefore be considered an accident or a surprise. The Bolshevik desire for party power within a highly centralised state could have no other effect. At the top, the Central Executive Committee (CEC or VTsIK) was quickly marginalised from power. This body was meant to be the highest organ of soviet power but, in practice, it was sidelined by the Bolshevik government. This can be seen when, just four days after seizing power, the Bolshevik Council of People's Commissars (CPC or Sovnarkom) *"unilaterally arrogated to itself legislative power simply by promulgating a decree to this effect. This was, effectively, a Bolshevik **coup d'etat** that made clear the government's (and party's) pre-eminence over the soviets and their executive organ. Increasingly, the Bolsheviks relied upon the appointment from above of commissars with plenipotentiary powers, and they split up and reconstituted fractious Soviets and intimidated political opponents."* [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253] Strange actions for a party proclaiming it was acting to ensure "All power to the soviets" (as we discussed in the last section, this was always considered by Lenin as little more than a slogan to hide the fact that the party would be in power).

It is doubtful that when readers of Lenin's **State and Revolution** read his argument for combining legislative and execu-

support for soviet power then they would have tried to organise genuine soviet elections. This was possible even during the civil war as the example of the Makhnovists showed.

So, in a nutshell, the Bolsheviks did not fundamentally support the goal of soviet power. Rather, they aimed to create a "soviet power," a Bolshevik power above the soviets which derived its legitimacy from them. However, if the soviets conflicted with that power, it were the soviets which were repudiated **not** party power. Thus the result of Bolshevik ideology was the marginalisation of the soviets and their replacement by Bolshevik dictatorship. This process started before the civil war and can be traced to the nature of the state as well as the underlying assumptions of Bolshevik ideology (see "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?").

## 6 What happened to the soviets after October?

As indicated in the last question, the last thing which the Bolsheviks wanted was ***"all power to the soviets."*** Rather they wanted the soviets to hand over that power to a Bolshevik government. As the people in liberal capitalist politics, the soviets were "sovereign" in name only. They were expected to delegate power to a government. Like the "sovereign people" of bourgeois republics, the soviets were much praised but in practice ignored by those with real power.

In such a situation, we would expect the soviets to play no meaningful role in the new "workers' state." Under such a centralised system, we would expect the soviets to become little more than a fig-leaf for party power. Unsurprisingly, this is **exactly** what they did become. As we discuss in section 7 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", anarchists are not surprised by this as the centralisation so beloved by Marxists is designed to empower the few at the centre and marginalise the many at the circumference.



> *coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

This was simply summarising Bolshevik practice from the start. However, in **State and Revolution** Lenin had argued for imposing *"a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists."* In 1917 he was *"clear that where is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 337–8] So if violence is directed against the working class then, obviously, there can be *"no freedom, no democracy"* for that class. And who identifies who the *"wavering and unstable"* elements are? Only the party. Thus any expression of workers' democracy which conflicts with the party is a candidate for *"revolutionary coercion."* So it probably just as well that the Bolsheviks had eliminated military democracy in March, 1918.

Trotsky expands on the obvious autocratic implications of this in 1921 when he attacked the Workers' Opposition's ideas on economic democracy:

> *"The Party ... is ... duty bound to retain its dictatorship, regardless of the temporary vacillations of the amorphous masses, regardless of the temporary vacillations even of the working class. This awareness is essential for cohesion; without it the Party is in danger of perishing ... At any given moment, the dictatorship does not rest on the formal principle of workers' democracy ... if we look upon workers' democracy as something unconditional ... then ... every plant should elect its own administrative organs and so on ... From a formal point of view this is the clearest link with workers' democracy. But we are against it. Why? ... Because, in the first place, we want to retain the dictatorship of the Party, and, in the second*

> *place, because we think that the [democratic] way of managing important and essential plants is bound to be incompetent and prove a failure from an economic point of view …"* [quoted by Jay B. Sorenson, **The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism**, p. 165]

Thus the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik regime confirmed anarchist theory and predictions about state socialism. In the words of Luigi Fabbri:

> "It is fairly certain that between the capitalist regime and the socialist there will be an intervening period of struggle, during which proletariat revolutionary workers will have to work to uproot the remnants of bourgeois society … But if the object of this struggle and this organisation is to free the proletariat from exploitation and state rule, then the role of guide, tutor or director cannot be entrusted to a new state, which would have an interest in pointing the revolution in a completely opposite direction…
>
> "The outcome would be that a new government — battening on the revolution and acting throughout the more or less extended period of its 'provisional' powers — would lay down the bureaucratic, military and economic foundations of a new and lasting state organisation, around which a compact network of interests and privileges would, naturally, be woven. Thus in a short space of time what one would have would not be the state abolished, but a state stronger and more energetic than its predecessor and which would come to exercise those functions proper to it — the ones Marx recognised as being such — 'keeping



*power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic."* How can that be when the workers do not run society nor have a say in who rules them? When Karl Kautsky raised this issue, Lenin replied by saying he *"fails to see the **class** nature of the state apparatus, of the machinery of state … The Soviet government is the **first** in the world … to **enlist** the people, specifically the **exploited** people in the work of administration."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 247 and p. 248]

However, the key issue is not whether workers take part in the state machinery but whether they determine the policies that are being implemented, i.e. whether the masses are running their own lives. After all, as Ante Ciliga pointed out, the Stalinist GPU (secret police) *"liked to boast of the working class origin of its henchmen."* One of his fellow prisoners retorted to such claims by pointing out they were *"wrong to believe that in the days the Tsar the gaolers were recruited from among the dukes and the executioners from among the princes!"* [**The Russian Engima**, pp. 255–6] Simply put, just because the state administration is made up of bureaucrats who were originally working class does not mean that the working class, as a class, manages society.

In December of that year Lenin went one further and noted that at the Sixth Soviet Congress *"the Bolsheviks had 97 per cent"* of delegates, i.e. "practically all representatives of the workers and peasants of the whole of Russia." This was proof of *"how stupid and ridiculous is the bourgeois fairy-tale about the Bolsheviks only having minority support."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 355–6] Given that the workers and peasants had no real choice in who to vote for, can this result be surprising? Of course not. While the Bolsheviks **had** mass support a year previously, pointing to election results under a dictatorship where all other parties and groups are subject to state repression is hardly convincing evidence for current support. Needless to say, Stalin (like a host of other dictators) made similar claims on similarly dubious election results. If the Bolsheviks were sincere in their

*by the counter-revolution."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 69] Serge, like most Bolsheviks, embraced this perspective wholeheartedly. For example, when the Bolsheviks published Bakunin's "confession" to the Tsar in 1921 (in an attempt to discredit anarchism) *"Serge seized on Bakunin's passage concerning the need for dictatorial rule in Russia, suggesting that 'already in 1848 Bakunin had presaged Bolshevism.'"* [Lawrence D. Orton, *"introduction,"* **The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin**, p. 21] At the time Bakunin wrote his "confession" he was not an anarchist. At the time Serge wrote his comments, he was a leading Bolshevik and reflecting mainstream Bolshevik ideology.

Indeed, so important was it considered by them, the Bolsheviks revised their theory of the state to include this particular lesson of their revolution (see section H.3.8 for details). As noted in section H.1.2, all the leading Bolsheviks were talking about the *"dictatorship of the party"* and continued to do so until their deaths. Such a position, incidentally, is hard to square with support for soviet power in any meaningful term (although it is easy to square with an instrumentalist position on workers' councils as a means to party power). It was only in the mid-30s that Serge started to revise his position for this position (Trotsky still subscribed to it). By the early 1940s, he wrote that *"[a]gainst the Party the anarchists were right when they inscribed on their black banners, 'There is no worse poison than power' — meaning absolute power. From now on the psychosis of power was to captive the great majority of the leadership, especially at the lower levels."* [Serge, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Nor can the effects of the civil war explain this shift. As we discuss in the next section, the Bolshevik assault on the soviets and their power started in the spring of 1918, months before the start of large scale civil war. And it should be stressed that the Bolsheviks were not at all bothered by the creation of party dictatorship over the soviets. Indeed, in spite of ruling over a one party state Lenin was arguing in November 1918 that *"Soviet*



the great majority of producers under the yoke of a numerically small exploiting minority.'

"This is the lesson that the history of all revolutions teaches us, from the most ancient down to the most recent; and it is confirmed ... by the day-to-day developments of the Russian revolution ...

"Certainly, [state violence] starts out being used against the old power ... But as the new power goes on consolidating its position ... ever more frequently and ever more severely, the mailed fist of dictatorship is turned against the proletariat itself in whose name that dictatorship was set up and is operated! ... the actions of the present Russian government [of Lenin and Trotsky] have shown that in real terms (and it could not be otherwise) the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' means police, military, political and economic dictatorship exercised over the broad mass of the proletariat in city and country by the few leaders of the political party.

"The violence of the state always ends up being used AGAINST ITS SUBJECTS, of whom the vast majority are always proletarians ... The new government will be able to expropriate the old ruling class in whole or in part, but only so as to establish a new ruling class that will hold the greater part of the proletariat in subjection.

"That will come to pass if those who make up the government and the bureaucratic, military and police minority that upholds it end up becoming the real owners of wealth when the property of everyone is made over exclusively to the state. In the first place, the failure of the revolution will be self evident. In the second, in spite of the illusions

that many people create, the conditions of the proletariat will always be those of a subject class." [*"Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism"*, in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 26–31]

The standard response by most modern Leninists to arguments like this about Bolshevism is simply to downplay the authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks by stressing the effects of the civil war on shaping their ideology and actions. However, this fails to address the key issue of why the reality of Bolshevism (even before the civil war) was so different to the rhetoric. Anarchists, as we discuss in "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", can point to certain aspects of Bolshevik ideology and the social structures its favoured which can explain it. The problems facing the revolution simply brought to the fore the limitations and dangers inherent in Leninism and, moreover, shaping them in distinctive ways. We draw the conclusion that a future revolution, as it will face similar problems, would be wise to avoid applying Leninist ideology and the authoritarian practices it allows and, indeed, promotes by its support of centralisation, confusion of party power with class power, vanguardism and equation of state capitalism with socialism. Leninists, in contrast, can only stress the fact that the revolution was occurring in difficult circumstances and hope that "fate" is more kind to them next time — as if a revolution, as Lenin himself noted in 1917, would not occur during nor create "difficult" circumstances! Equally, they can draw no lessons (bar repeat what the Bolsheviks did in 1917 and hope for better objective circumstances!) from the Russian experience simply because they are blind to the limitations of their politics. They are thus doomed to repeat history rather than make it.

So where does this analysis of Lenin's **State and Revolution** and the realities of Bolshevik power get us? The conclu-



*the help of the 'power of the soviets' — in which the Bolsheviks monopolised most of the posts — they effectively attained a total power and could proclaim their dictatorship throughout the revolutionary territory … All was reduced to a single centre, from where all instructions emanated concerning the way of life, of thought, of action of the working masses."* [Peter Arshinov, **The Two Octobers**]

Isolated from the masses, holding power on their behalf, the Bolshevik party could not help being influenced by the realities of their position in society and the social relationships produced by statist forms. Far from being the servants of the people, they become upon the seizing of power their masters. As we argue in section 7 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", the experience of Bolshevism in power confirmed anarchist fears that the so-called "workers' state" would quickly become a danger to the revolution, corrupting those who held power and generating a bureaucracy around the new state bodies which came into conflict with both the ruling party and the masses. Placed above the people, isolated from them by centralisation of power, the Bolsheviks pre-revolutionary aim for party power unsurprising became in practice party dictatorship.

In less than a year, by July 1918, the soviet regime was a **de facto** party dictatorship. The theoretical revisions soon followed. Lenin, for example, was proclaiming in early December 1918 that while legalising the Mensheviks the Bolsheviks would *"reserve state power for ourselves, **and for ourselves alone.**"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 213] Victor Serge records how when he arrived in Russia in the following month he discovered *"a colourless article"* signed by Zinoviev on *"The Monopoly of Power"* which said *"Our Party rules alone … it will not allow anyone … The false democratic liberties demanded*

*"our present slogan is: No Compromise, i.e. for a homogeneous Bolshevik government."* [quoted by Daniels, **Conscience of the Revolution**, p. 65]

In other words, "soviet power" exists when the soviets hand power over the someone else (namely the Bolshevik leaders)! The difference is important, *"for the Anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 213]

Which means that while anarchists and Leninists both use the expression *"All Power to the Soviets"* it does not mean they mean exactly the same thing by it. In practice the Bolshevik vision simply replaced the power of the soviets with a "soviet power" above them:

> *"The success of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution — that is to say, the fact that they found themselves in power and from there subordinated the whole Revolution to their Party is explained by their ability to substitute the idea of a Soviet power for the social revolution and the social emancipation of the masses. A priori, these two ideas appear as non-contradictory for it was possible to understand Soviet power as the power of the soviets, and this facilitated the substitution of the idea of Soviet power for that of the Revolution. Nevertheless, in their realisation and consequences these ideas were in violent contraction to each other. The conception of Soviet Power incarnated in the Bolshevik state, was transformed into an entirely traditional bourgeois power concentrated in a handful of individuals who subjected to their authority all that was fundamental and most powerful in the life of the people — in this particular case, the social revolution. Therefore, with*



sions of dissent Marxist Samuel Farber seem appropriate here. As he puts it, *"the very fact that a Sovnarkom had been created as a separate body from the CEC [Central Executive Committee] of the soviets clearly indicates that, Lenin's **State and Revolution** notwithstanding, the separation of at least the top bodies of the executive and the legislative wings of the government remained in effect in the new Soviet system."* This suggests *"that **State and Revolution** did not play a decisive role as a source of policy guidelines for 'Leninism in power.'"* After all, *"immediately after the Revolution the Bolsheviks established an executive power … as a clearly separate body from the leading body of the legislature… Therefore, some sections of the contemporary Left appear to have greatly overestimated the importance that **State and Revolution** had for Lenin's government. I would suggest that this document … can be better understood as a distant, although doubtless sincere [!], socio-political vision … as opposed to its having been a programmatic political statement, let alone a guide to action, for the period immediately after the successful seizure of power."* [Farber, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 20–1 and p. 38]

That is **one** way of looking at it. Another would be to draw the conclusion that a *"distant … socio-political vision"* drawn up to sound like a *"guide to action"* which was then immediately ignored is, at worse, little more than a deception, or, at best, a theoretical justification for seizing power in the face of orthodox Marxist dogma. Whatever the rationale for Lenin writing his book, one thing is true — it was never implemented. Strange, then, that Leninists today urge use to read it to see what "Lenin really wanted." Particularly given that so few of its promises were actually implemented (those that were just recognised the facts on the ground) and **all** of were no longer applied in less than six months after the seize of power.

The best that can be said is that Lenin did want this vision to be applied but the realities of revolutionary Russia, the objective problems facing the revolution, made its application impossible. This is the standard Leninist account of the revo-

lution. They seem unconcerned that they have just admitted that Lenin's ideas were utterly impractical for the real problems that any revolution is most likely to face. This was the conclusion Lenin himself drew, as did the rest of the Bolshevik leadership. This can be seen from the actual practice of "Leninism in power" and the arguments it used. And yet, for some reason, Lenin's book is still recommended by modern Leninists!

## 5 Did the Bolsheviks really aim for Soviet power?

It seems a truism for modern day Leninists that the Bolsheviks stood for "soviet power." For example, they like to note that the Bolsheviks used the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* in 1917 as evidence. However, for the Bolsheviks this slogan had a radically different meaning to what many people would consider it to mean.

As we discuss in section 25, it was the anarchists (and those close to them, like the SR-Maximalists) who first raised the idea of soviets as the means by which the masses could run society. This was during the 1905 revolution. At that time, neither the Mensheviks nor the Bolsheviks viewed the soviets as the possible framework of a socialist society. This was still the case in 1917, until Lenin returned to Russia and convinced the Bolshevik Party that the time was right to raise the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets."*

However, as well as this, Lenin also advocated a somewhat different vision of what a Bolshevik revolution would result in. Thus we find Lenin in 1917 continually repeating the basic idea: *"The Bolsheviks must assume power."* The Bolsheviks *"can and **must** take state power into their own hands."* He raised the question of *"will the Bolsheviks dare take over full state power alone?"* and answered it: *"I have already had occasion ... to answer this question in the affirmative."* Moreover, *"a political party ... would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the*



*the danger of breaking the teeth of the party wheel."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 264]

Thus the soviets existed to allow the party to influence the workers. What of the workers running society directly? What if the workers reject the decisions of the party? After all, **before** the revolution Lenin *"more than once repeated that the masses are far to the left of the party, just as the party is to the left of the Central Committee."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 258] What happens when the workers refuse to be set in motion by the party but instead set themselves in motion and reject the Bolsheviks? What then for the soviets? Looking at the logic of Trotsky's instrumentalist perspective, in such a case we would predict that the soviets would have to be tamed (by whatever means possible) in favour of party power (the real goal). And this is what did happen. The fate of the soviets after October prove that the Bolsheviks did not, in fact, seek soviet power without doubt (see next section). And as we discuss in section 4 of the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", the peculiar Bolshevik definition of "soviet power" allowed them to justify the elimination of from the bottom-up grassroots democracy in the military and in the workplace with top-down appointments.

Thus we have a distinctly strange meaning by the expression *"All Power to the Soviets."* In practice, it meant that the soviets alienate its power to a Bolshevik government. This is what the Bolsheviks considered as "soviet power," namely party power, pure and simple. As the Central Committee argued in November 1917, *"it is impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets ... handed power over to this government."* [contained in Robert v. Daniels (ed.), **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, pp. 128–9] Lenin was clear, arguing mere days after the October Revolution that

*obvious mistake,"* he argued, *"to identify the strength of the Bolshevik party with the strength of the soviets led by it. The latter was much greater than the former. However, without the former it would have been mere impotence."* He then quotes numerous Bolshevik delegates arguing that the masses would follow the soviet, not the party. Hence the importance of seizing power in the name of the soviets, regardless of the fact it was the Bolshevik party who would in practice hold *"all power."* Trotsky quotes Lenin are asking *"Who is to seize power?" "That is now of no importance,"* argued Lenin. *"Let the Military Revolutionary Committee take it, or 'some other institution,' which will declare that it will surrender the power only to the genuine representatives of the interests of the people."* Trotsky notes that *"some other institution"* was a *"conspirative designation for the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks."* And who turned out to be the *"genuine representatives of the interests of the people"*? By amazing co-incidence the Bolsheviks, the members of whose Central Committee formed the first "soviet" government. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 3, p. 265, p. 259, p. 262, p. 263 and p. 267]

As we discuss in section H.3.11, Trotsky was simply repeating the same instrumentalist arguments he had made earlier. Clearly, the support for the soviets was purely instrumental, simply a means of securing party power. For Bolshevism, the party was the key institution of proletarian revolution:

> *"The party set the soviets in motion, the soviets set in motion the workers, soldiers, and to some extent the peasantry ... If you represent this conducting apparatus as a system of cog-wheels — a comparison which Lenin had recourse at another period on another theme — you may say that the impatient attempt to connect the party wheel directly with the gigantic wheel of the masses — omitting the medium-sized wheel of the soviets — would have given rise to*



*name of party ... if it refused to take power when opportunity offers."* [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p 328, p. 329 and p. 352]

He equated party power with popular power: *"the power of the Bolsheviks — that is, the power of the proletariat."* Moreover, he argued that Russia *"was ruled by 130,000 landowners ... and they tell us that Russia will not be able to be governed by the 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party — governing in the interest of the poor and against the rich."* He stresses that the Bolsheviks *"are not Utopians. We know that just any labourer or any cook would be incapable of taking over immediately the administration of the State."* Therefore they *"demand that the teaching should be conducted by the class-consciousness workers and soldiers, that this should be started immediately."* Until then, the *"conscious workers must be in control."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?** p. 102, pp. 61–62, p. 66 and p. 68]

As such, given this clear and unambiguous position throughout 1917 by Lenin, it seems incredulous, to say the least, for Leninist Tony Cliff to assert that *"[t]o start with Lenin spoke of the **proletariat,** the **class** — not the Bolshevik Party — assuming state power."* [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 161] Surely the title of one of Lenin's most famous pre-October essays, usually translated as *"Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?"*, should have given the game away? As would, surely, quoting numerous calls by Lenin for the Bolsheviks to seize power? Apparently not.

This means, of course, Lenin is admitting that the working class in Russia would **not** have power under the Bolsheviks. Rather than "the poor" governing society directly, we would have **the Bolsheviks** governing in their interests. Thus, rather than soviet power as such, the Bolsheviks aimed for "party power through the soviets" — a radically different position. And as we discuss in the next section, when soviet power clashed with party power the former was always sacrificed to ensure the latter. As we indicate in section H.1.2, this support for party power before the revolution was soon transformed

into a defence for party dictatorship after the Bolsheviks had seized power. However, we should not forget, to quote one historian, that the Bolshevik leaders *"anticipated a 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' and that concept was a good deal closer to a party dictatorship in Lenin's 1917 usage than revisionist scholars sometimes suggest."* [Sheila Fitzpatrick, *"The Legacy of the Civil War,"* pp. 385–398, **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 388]

While modern-day Leninists tend to stress the assumption of power by the soviets as the goal of the Bolshevik revolution, the Bolsheviks themselves were more honest about it. For example, Trotsky quotes Lenin at the first soviet congress stating that it was *"not true to say that no party exists which is ready to assume power; such a party exists: this is our party."* Moreover, *"[o]ur party is ready to assume power."* As the Second Congress approached, Lenin *"rebuked those who connected the uprising with the Second Congress of the Soviets."* He protested against Trotsky's argument that they needed a Bolshevik majority at the Second Congress, arguing (according to Trotsky) that *"[w]e have to win power and not tie ourselves to the Congress. It was ridiculous and absurd to warn the enemy about the date of the rising ... First the party must seize power, arms in hand, and then we could talk about the Congress."* [**On Lenin**, p. 71, p. 85]

Trotsky argued that *"the party could not seize power by itself, independently of the Soviets and behind its back. This would have been a mistake ... [as the] soldiers knew their delegates in the Soviet; it was through the Soviet that they knew the party. If the uprising had taken place behind the back of the Soviet, independently of it, without its authority ... there might have been a dangerous confusion among the troops."* Significantly, Trotsky made no mention of the proletariat. Finally, Lenin came over to Trotsky's position, saying *"Oh, all right, one can proceed in this fashion as well, provided we seize power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86 and p. 89]



Trotsky made similar arguments in his **History of the Russian Revolution** and his article **Lessons of October**. Discussing the July Days of 1917, for example, Trotsky discusses whether (to quote the title of the relevant chapter) *"Could the Bolsheviks have seized the Power in July?"* and noted, in passing, the army *"was far from ready to raise an insurrection in order to give the power to the Bolshevik Party."* As far as the workers were concerned, although *"inclining toward the Bolsheviks in its overwhelming majority, had still not broken the umbilical cord attaching it to the Compromisers"* and so the Bolsheviks could not have *"seized the helm in July."* He then lists other parts of the country where the soviets were ready to take power. He states that in *"a majority of provinces and county seats, the situation was incomparably less favourable"* simply because the Bolsheviks were not as well supported. Later he notes that *"[m]any of the provincial soviets had already, before the July days, become organs of power."* Thus Trotsky was only interested in whether the workers could have put the Bolsheviks in power or not rather than were the soviets able to take power themselves. Party power was the decisive criteria. [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 78, p. 77, p. 78, p. 81 and p. 281]

This can be seen from the October insurrection. Trotsky again admits that the *"Bolsheviks could have seized power in Petrograd at the beginning of July"* but *"they could not have held it."* However, by September the Bolsheviks had gained majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. The second Congress of Soviets was approaching. The time was considered appropriate to think of insurrection. By in whose name and for what end? Trotsky makes it clear. *"A revolutionary party is interested in legal coverings,"* he argued and so the party could use the defending the second Congress of Soviets as the means to justify its seizure of power. He raises the question: *"Would it not have been simpler ... to summon the insurrection directly in the name of the party?"* and answers it in the negative. *"It would be an*

and pp. 205–6] In short, the *"local land forces of the Kronstadt garrison … fell in and joined the seamen."* [D. Fedotoff-White, **The Growth of the Red Army**, p. 154]

That is a lot of activity for "passive" people. In short: *"But if the sailors took the lead, the Kronstadt garrison … the Red Army troops who manned the surrounding forts and batteries … soon fell into line; and the townspeople too, always susceptible to the influence of the seamen, with whom their occupations brought them into close contact, offered their active support"* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 159]

As can be seen, the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution not only reflected the demands of proletarians in Petrograd, it gained the support of proletarians in Kronstadt in the fleet, the army and the civilian workforce. More, the Kronstadt demands found support in urban areas. For example, *"Workers [in Moscow] applauded pro-Kronshtadt speakers at mass meetings, but at no point during the Kronshtadt events did this sympathy translate into action, however limited. On 25 March workers at the Bromlei factory, who passed a resolution supporting Kronshtadt, were punished with arrests, and the mass sacking and selective re-employment of the entire workforce, which in turn triggered some solidarity strikes in nearby factories. But that was all."* [Simon Pirani, *"The Moscow Workers' Movement in 1921 and the Role of Non-Partyism"*, pp. 143–160, **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 56, No. 1, p. 149] At least two other revolts **did** raise demands similar to those raised by Kronstadt and both were by urban workers.

The first revolt started in Saratov when the authorities cut the already meagre rations at the beginning of March. The strike saw metallurgical plants and other large factories send representatives to the railroad shops and *"the initiative … came from the skilled stratum that the Communists normally deemed the most conscious."* Strikers gatherings alarmed the local authorities, which *"agreed to permit the setting up of a commission that would re-examine the activities of all*



July 1918. This act exposes the hollowness of Bolshevik claims of their soviet system presented a form of "higher" democracy. If the Bolshevik soviet system was, as they claimed, based on instant recall then why did they, for example, have to expel the Mensheviks and Right SRs from the soviet CEC in the first place? Why did the electors not simply recall them? It was two weeks after the Czech revolt before the Bolsheviks acted, surely enough time for voters to act? Perhaps this did not happen because the CEC was not, in fact, subject to instant recall at all? Being nominated at the quarterly soviet congress, they were effectively isolated from popular control. It also means that the Bolshevik government was even more insulated from popular control and accountability. To "recall" it, electors would have to either wait for the next national soviet congress or somehow convince the CEC to call an emergency one. As an example of workers' running society, the Bolshevik system leaves much to be desired.

Another obvious lesson to learn was the use of appointments to the soviets and their executives from other organisations. As seen above, the Bolsheviks used the "representation" of other bodies they control (such as trade unions) to pack soviet assemblies in their favour. Similarly, allowing political parties to nominate representatives in soviet executives also marginalised the soviet assemblies and those delegates actually elected in the workplaces.

This was obvious to the Russian anarchists, who argued *"for effective soviets organised on collective lines with the direct delegation of workers and peasants from every factory, workshop, village, etc., and not political chatterboxes gaining entry through party lists and turning the soviets into talking shops."* [contained in Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118] The Makhnovists, likewise, argued that *"[o]nly labourers who are contributing work necessary to the social economy should participate in the soviets. Representatives of political organisations have no place in worker-peasant soviets, since their*

*participation in a workers' soviet will transform the latter into deputies of the party and can lead to the downfall of the soviet system."* [contained in Peter Arshinov's **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 266] As we discuss in section 15 of the appendix on "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?", Leninists sometimes distort this into a claim that the Makhnovists opposed members of political standing for election.

This use of party lists meant that soviet delegates could be anyone. For example, the leading left-wing Menshevik Martov recounts that in early 1920 Bolsheviks in a chemical factory *"put up Lenin against me as a candidate [to the Moscow soviet]. I received seventy-six votes he-eight (in an open vote)."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 202] How would either of these two intellectuals actually know and reflect the concerns and interests of the workers they would be "delegates" of? If the soviets were meant to be the delegates of working people, then why should non-working class members of political parties be elected to a soviet?

However, in spite of these problems, the Russian soviets were a key means of ensuring working class participation in the revolution. As recognised by all the socialist oppositions to the Bolsheviks, from the anarchists to the Mensheviks. As one historian put it:

> *"Small wonder that the principal political demand of Mensheviks, Left SRs, SR Maximalists, Kronstadt sailors and of many oppositionists ... has been for freely elected soviets which would this be restored to their original role as agents of democratisation."* [Israel Getzler, **Soviets as Agents of Democratisation**, p. 30]

The sad fate of the soviets after the Bolshevik seizure of power simply confirms the opinion of the left Menshevik Mar-



over 30% of Kronstadt's total population, it hardly points to a "passive" attitude on behalf of the civilians and soldiers.

Second, the conference of delegates had a *"membership that fluctuated between which two and three hundred sailors, soldiers, and working men."* This body remained in existence during the whole revolt as the equivalent of the 1917 soviet and, like that soviet, had delegates from Kronstadt's *"factories and military units."* It was, in effect, a *"prototype of the 'free soviets' for which the insurgents had risen in revolt."* In addition, a new Trade Union Council was created, free from Communist domination. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 159 and p. 157] Elections were held for the Council of Trade Unions on the 7th and 8th of March and this was a *"Council committee consisting of representatives from all trade unions"* while the Conference of Delegates *"had been elected by Kronstadt's body politic at their places of work, in army units, factories, workshops and Soviet institutions."* The revolutionary troikas (the equivalent of the commissions of the Executive Committee of the Soviet in 1917) were also *"elected by the base organisations."* Likewise, *"the secretariats of the trade unions and the newly founded Council of Trade Unions were both elected by the entire membership of trade unions."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 238–9 and p. 240]

Third, the declarations by sailors, soldiers and workers printed in ***Izvestiia*** which expressed their support for the revolt and those which announced they had left the Communist Party also present evidence which clearly contests Wright's *"incontestable facts."* One declaration of the *"soldiers of the Red Army from the fort Krasnoarmeietz"* stated they were *"body and soul with the Revolutionary Committee."* [quoted by Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 500] Likewise, given that the Red Army troops manned the main bastion and the outlying forts and gun emplacements at Kronstadt and that the Bolshevik troops had to take these forts by force, we can safely argue that the Red Army soldiers did not play a "passive" role during the rebellion. [Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 54

*peasantry. This must be stressed. The Baltic sailors of 1921 were, it is true, closely linked with the peasantry. But neither more nor less than had been the sailors of 1917."* To ignore the peasantry in a country in which the vast majority were peasants would have been insane (as the Bolsheviks proved) and so a *"workers and peasants' regime that did not wish to base itself exclusively on lies and terror, had to take account of the peasantry."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 150 and p. 151]

Given this, it comes as no surprise to discover Rees rather lamely admitting in passing that *"no other peasant insurrection reproduced the Kronstadters demands."* Perhaps that explains why he failed to mention any of the demands raised either in the strikes or by Kronstadt for to do so would have shown that clearly **proletarian** strikes, resolutions and activists all produced demands similar or identical to the Kronstadt demands. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]

Similarly, the working class nature of the resolution can be seen from who agreed to it. The resolution passed by the sailors on the battleships was ratified by a mass meeting and then a delegate meeting of workers, soldiers and sailors. In other words, by workers **and** peasants. Yet J.G. Wright, following his guru Trotsky without question (and using him as the sole reference for his "facts"), stated that *"the incontestable facts"* were the *"sailors composed the bulk of the insurgent forces"* and *"the garrison and the civil population remained passive."* This, apparently, is evidence that *"underlying the mutiny was the expression of the petty bourgeois reaction against the difficulties and privations imposed by the conditions of the proletarian revolution. Nobody can deny this class character of the two camps."* [*"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] Let us contest these *"incontestable facts"* (i.e. assertions by Trotsky).

First, the meeting of 1st March in Anchor Square involved *"some fifteen to sixteen thousand sailors, soldiers and civilians."* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 215] As this represented



tov who had *"rubbed it in to the Bolsheviks ... at the first All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions [in January 1918], that they who were now extolling the Soviets as the 'highest forms of the socialist development of the proletariat,' had shown little love of them in 1905 or in 1917 after the July days; they loved Soviets only when they were 'in the hands of the Bolshevik party.'"* [Getzler, **Martov**, p. 174] As the next few months showed, once the soviets left those hands, then the soviets themselves were destroyed. The civil war did not start this process, it just gave the latter-day supporters of Bolshevism something to use to justify these actions.

> *"People often believe that Kronstadt forced the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) — a profound error. The Kronstadt resolution pronounced in favour of the defence of the workers, not only against the bureaucratic capitalism of the State, but also against the restoration of private capitalism. This restoration was demanded — in opposition to Kronstadt — by the social democrats, who combined it with a regime of political democracy. And it was Lenin and Trotsky who to a great extent realised it (but without political democracy) in the form of the NEP. The Kronstadt resolution declared for the opposite since it declared itself against the employment of wage labour in agriculture and small industry. This resolution, and the movement underlying, sought for a revolutionary alliance of the proletarian and peasant workers with the poorest sections of the country labourers, in order that the revolution might develop towards socialism. The NEP, on the other hand, was a union of bureaucrats with the upper layers of the village against the proletariat; it was the alliance of State capitalism and private capitalism against socialism. The NEP is as much opposed to the Kronstadt demands as, for example, the revolutionary socialist programme of the vanguard of the European workers for the abolition of the Versailles system, is opposed to the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles achieved by Hitler."* [*"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 334–5]

Point 11 did, as Ida Mett noted, *"reflected the demands of the peasants to whom the Kronstadt sailors had remained linked — as had, as a matter of fact, the whole of the Russian proletariat ... In their great majority, the Russian workers came directly from the*

Given that the Russian urban working class were also calling for free trade (and often without the political, anti-capitalist, riders Kronstadt added) it seems dishonest to claim that the sailors purely expressed the interests of the peasantry. Perhaps this explains why point 11 becomes summarised as *"restoration of free trade"* by most Trotskyists. [*"Editorial Preface"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 6] Yet, by focusing on the *"free trade"* issue, Leninists distort the real reasons for the revolt as the Kronstadt rebellion did not call for "free trade" as Trotskyists argue but rather something far more important:

> *"In the Kronstadt Isvestia of March 14th we find a characteristic passage on this subject. The rebels proclaimed that 'Kronstadt is not asking for freedom of trade but for genuine power to the Soviets.' The Petrograd strikers were also demanding the reopening of the markets and the abolition of the road blocks set up by the militia. But they too were stating that freedom of trade by itself would not solve their problems."* [Ida Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77]

Thus we have the Petrograd (and other) workers calling for free trade (and so, presumably, expressing their economic interests) while the Kronstadt sailors were demanding first and foremost soviet power. Their programme called for the *"granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil, and of the right to own cattle, provided they look after them themselves and do not employ hired labour."* This was point 11 of the 15 demands, which showed the importance it ranked in their eyes. This would have been the basis of exchange between town and village, but exchange between worker and peasant and not between worker and kulak. This indicates a level of political awareness, an awareness of the fact that wage labour is the essence of capitalism. Thus Ante Ciliga:



**7 How did the factory committee movement develop?**

**8 What was the Bolshevik position on "workers' control" in 1917?**

**9 What happened to the factory committees after October?**

**10 What were the Bolshevik economic policies in 1918?**

**11 Did Bolshevik economic policies work?**

**12 Was there an alternative to Lenin's "state capitalism" and "war communism"?**

**13 Did the Bolsheviks allow independent trade unions?**

**14 Was the Red Army really a revolutionary army?**

**15 Was the Red Army "filled with socialist consciousness"?**

**16 How did the civil war start and develop?**

**17 Was the civil war between just Reds and Whites?**

**18 How extensive was imperialist intervention?**

**19 Did the end of the civil war change Bolshevik policies?**

**20 Can the Red Terror and the Cheka be justified?**

**21 Did Bolshevik peasant policies work?**

**22 Was there an alternative to grain requisition?**

**23 Was the repression of the socialist opposition justified?**

**24 What did the anarchists do during the revolution?**



**25 Did the Russian revolution refute anarchism?**

## What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?

*and glory of the Russian Revolution,"* its sailors were renowned for their revolutionary ideas and activities and had turned the naval base and city into a de facto soviet republic soon after the February revolution. However, in 1921 Red Kronstadt had turned against the Communist dictatorship and raised the slogan of the 1917 revolution *"All Power to the Soviets"*, to which it added *"and not to parties."* The rebels called this revolt the *"Third Revolution"* and saw it as completing the work began in the first two Russian Revolutions in 1917 by instituting a true toilers republic based on freely elected, self-managed, soviets. As the Russian Anarchist Voline put it, while *" Kronstadt fell and State Socialism triumphed"* it *"exposed ... the real character of the Communist dictatorship"* and *"[i]n the complex and shadowy labyrinth which opens out to the masses in revolt, Kronstadt is a bright beacon that lights up the right road."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 537–8]

Given this, it is important to know and understand this revolt, what it says of Bolshevik ideology and practice and to refute the many slanders Leninists have hurled against it. These issues are addressed in the various sections below. First, though, it is necessary to summarise the events of the revolt itself.

Kronstadt was (and is) a naval fortress on an island in the Gulf of Finland. Traditionally, it has served as the base of the Russian Baltic Fleet and to guard the approaches to the city of St. Petersburg (which during the first world war was re-named Petrograd, then later Leningrad, and is now St. Petersburg again) thirty kilometres away. As noted, the Kronstadt sailors had been in the vanguard of the revolutionary events of 1905 and 1917 and far-left influence was high: Left-SRs, Maximalist-SRs, Bolsheviks and anarchists all had significant influence (in roughly that order, as discussed in section 9 below, Kronstadt was never a Bolshevik stronghold in 1917). The inhabitants of Kronstadt had been early supporters and practitioners of soviet democracy, forming a free commune in



demand raised) but *"[b]y the same token, the sailors' inspection tour of Petrograd's factories may account for their inclusion of the workingmen's chief demands — the abolition of road-blocks, of privileged rations, and of armed factory squads — in their program."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 74–5] Simply put, the Kronstadt resolution *"merely reiterated long standing workers' demands."* [V. Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 395]

Ignoring all this, Rees informs his readers that Kronstadt revolt *"[a]lthough it was preceded by a wave of serious but quickly resolved strikes, the motivation of the Kronstadt rebellion was much closer to that of the peasantry than it was to dissatisfaction among what remained of the urban working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, 61] In reality, Ida Mett had been correct to argue that the *"Kronstadt revolution had the merit of stating things openly and clearly. But it was breaking no new ground. Its main ideas were being discussed everywhere. For having, in one way or another, put forward precisely such ideas, workers and peasants were already filling the prisons and the recently set up concentration camps."* Nor can it be claimed that these workers were non-proletarians (as if class is determined by thought rather than social position). Rather than being those workers with the closest relations with the countryside who were protesting, the opposite was the case. By 1921 *"[a]ll who had relatives in the country had rejoined them. The authentic proletariat remained till the end, having the most slender connections with the countryside."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 149 and p. 145] Indeed, *"an analysis of the industrial unrest in 1921 shows that long-standing workers were prominent in protest"* and the *"strongest reason for accepting the idea that it was established workers who were behind the* ***volynka*** *[i.e. the strike wave] is the form and course of protest. Traditions of protest reaching back through the spring of 1918 to 1917 and beyond were an important factor in the organisation of the* ***volynka.*** *... There was also a degree of organisation ... which belies the impression of a spontaneous outburst."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 91 and p. 126]

*of movement, and so on."* Two key demands raised in these strikes dated back to at least 1920, namely *"for free trade and an end to privilege"*, while in March 1919, *"the Rechkin coach-building plant demanded equal rations for all **workers**"* and that one of the *"most characteristic demands of the striking workers at that time were for the free bringing-in of food."* [Mary McAuley, **Bread and Justice**, p. 299 and p. 302] The following proclamation appeared on the walls:

> *"A complete change is necessary in the policies of the Government ... First of all, the workers and peasants need freedom. They don't want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviki; they want to control their own destinies. We demand the liberation of all arrested Socialists and non-partisan workingmen; abolition of martial law; freedom of speech, press, and assembly for all who labor; free election of shop and factory committees, of labor union and Soviet representatives."* [quoted by Alexander Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 292]

As can be seen, these reflect points 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13 of the revolt. As Paul Avrich summarises, the Kronstadt demands *"echoed the discontents not only of the Baltic Fleet but of the mass of Russians in towns and villages throughout the country. Themselves of plebeian stock, the sailors wanted relief for their peasant and worker kinfolk. Indeed, of the resolution's 15 points, only one — the abolition of the political departments in the fleet — applied specifically to their own situation. The remainder ... was a broadside aimed at the policies of War Communism, the justification of which, in the eyes of the sailors and of the population at large, had long since vanished."* He argues that many of the sailors had returned home on leave to see the plight of the villagers with their own eyes played a part in framing the resolution (particularly of point 11, the **only** peasant specific



1917 which was independent of the Provisional Government. In the words of Israel Getzler, an expert on Kronstadt, *"it was in its commune-like self-government that Red Kronstadt really came into its own, realising the radical, democratic and egalitarian aspirations of its garrison and working people, their insatiable appetite for social recognition, political activity and public debate, their pent up yearning for education, integration and community. Almost overnight, the ship's crews, the naval and military units and the workers created and practised a direct democracy of base assemblies and committees."* In the centre of the fortress an enormous public square served as a popular forum holding as many as 30,000 people. The Kronstadters *"proved convincingly the capacity of ordinary people to use their 'heads, too' in governing themselves, and managing Russia's largest naval base and fortress."* [**Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 248 and p. 250]

The Russian Civil War had ended in Western Russia in November 1920 with the defeat of General Wrangel in the Crimea. All across Russia popular protests were erupting in the countryside and in the towns and cities. Peasant uprisings were occurring against the Communist Party policy of grain requisitioning (a policy the Bolsheviks and their supporters argue had been thrust upon them by the circumstances but which involved extensive, barbaric and counter-productive repression). In urban areas, a wave of spontaneous strikes occurred in protest against the militarisation of labour, lack of food, Bolshevik dictatorship and a host of other issues. So, *"[b]y the beginning of 1921 a revolutionary situation with workers in the vanguard had emerged in Soviet Russia"* with *"the simultaneous outbreak of strikes in Petrograd and Moscow and in other industrial regions." "General strikes, or very widespread unrest"* took place in all bar one major industrial region and strikes were combined with *"factory occupations, 'Italian strikes', demonstrations, mass meetings, the beating up of communists and so on."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against**

**Lenin**, p. 3, p. 109, and p. 112] The rebel workers and peasants raised both economic and political demands.

In late February a general strike broke out in Petrograd along which immediately saw Bolshevik repression against it. On February 26th, in response to these events, the crews of the battleships ***Petropavlovsk*** and ***Sevastopol*** held an emergency meeting and agreed to send a delegation to the city to investigate and report back on events. On their turn two days later, the delegates informed their fellow sailors of the strikes and the government repression directed against them at another mass meeting on the ***Petropavlovsk*** which then approved a resolution which raised 15 demands which were primarily political (including free elections to the soviets, freedom of speech, press, assembly and organisation to workers, peasants, anarchists and left-socialists) along with a few economic ones (equal rations for all workers, the end of roadblock detachments restricting travel and the ability of workers to bring food into the city as well as *"full freedom of action"* for all peasants and artisans who did not hire labour) — see section 3 for full details. These demands, it must be stressed, reflected those many of those first raised by the striking Petrograd workers.

Unknown to the sailors, the Bolshevik leader in Petrograd (Zinoviev) sent a telegram to Lenin at 11pm that day: *"Kronstadt: The two biggest ships,* ***Sevastopol'*** *and* ***Petropavlovsk****, have adopted SR/Black Hundreds' resolutions and presented an ultimatum to be answered in 24 hours. Among the workers in Petrograd the disposition is as before unsteady. Large plants do not work. We expect that the SRs are going to speed up events"* (SR stood for "Social Revolutionaries", a party with a traditional peasant base and whose right-wing had fought against the Bolsheviks in the name of the Constituent Assembly and were complicit with White reactionary forces while the "Black Hundreds" were a reactionary, indeed proto-fascist, force dating back to before the revolution which attacked Jews, labour mili-



peasants. These express the demands of most, if not all, Marxist parties (including the Bolsheviks in 1917) before they take power. They simply repeat the demands of the revolutionary period of 1917 and reflected the Soviet Constitution.

So did the demands represent the interests of the (non-kulak) peasantry? To determine whether this is the case, we must see whether the demands reflected those of industrial workers or not. If the demands do, in fact, match those of striking workers and other proletarian elements then we can easily dismiss this claim as it is impossible to say that they simply reflected the needs of peasants (of course, Trotskyists will argue that these proletarians were also *"backward"* but, in effect, they are arguing that any worker who did not quietly follow Bolshevik orders was *"backward"* — hardly a sound definition of the term).

We can quickly note that the demands echoed those raised during the Moscow and Petrograd strikes that preceded the Kronstadt revolt. For example, Paul Avrich records that the demands raised in the February strikes included *"removal of roadblocks, permission to make foraging trips into the countryside and to trade freely with the villagers, [and] elimination of privileged rations for special categories of working men."* The workers also *"wanted the special guards of armed Bolsheviks, who carried out a purely police function, withdrawn from the factories"* and raised *"pleas for the restoration of political and civil rights."* One manifesto which appeared (unsigned but bore signs of Menshevik origin) argued that *"the workers and peasants need freedom. They do not want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviks. They want to control their own destinies."* It urged the strikers to demand the liberation of all arrested socialists and non-party workers, abolition of martial law, freedom of speech, press and assembly for all who labour, free elections of factory committees, trade unions, and soviets. [Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 42–3] According to one Bolshevik Commissar) the *"basic demands are everywhere the same: free trade, free labour, freedom*

> *the old sharp division into kulaks and cropless peasants has disappeared. Everything has become more equable, the peasantry in general has acquired the status of the middle peasant.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 216]

Official Bolshevik figures later estimated that the percentage of peasants owning more than ten hectares had fallen from 3.7% in 1917 to 0.5% in 1920 and so the number of well-off peasants had *"become quite negligible"* as *"the circumstances of peasants had levelled out"* [Alexander Skirda, **Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack**, pp. 173–4] So, as Ida Mett argued, *"[i]n their resolution, the Kronstadt sailors were taking up once again one of the big demands of October. They were supporting those peasant claims demanding the land and the right to own cattle for those peasants who did not exploit the labour of others. In 1921, moreover, there was another aspect to this particular demand. It was an attempt to solve the food question, which was becoming desperate. Under the system of forced requisition, the population of the towns was literally dying of hunger. Why, incidentally, should the satisfaction of these demands be deemed 'tactically correct' when advocated by Lenin, in March 1921, and 'counter-revolutionary' when put forward by the peasants themselves a few weeks earlier?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 151]

Secondly, the Kronstadt revolt started after the sailors at Kronstadt sent delegates to investigate the plight of striking workers in Petrograd. Their actions were inspired by solidarity for these workers and civilians. This clearly shows that Trotsky's assertion that the revolt *"reflected the hostility of the backward peasantry toward the worker, the self-importance of the soldier or sailor in relation to 'civilian' Petrograd"* to be utter and total nonsense.

Rather than being *"deeply reactionary,"* the ideas that motivated the revolt clearly were not. They called for soviet democracy, free speech, assembly and organisation for workers and



tants, radicals and so on). [quoted by Vladimir N. Brovkin, **Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War**, p. 394]

A mass meeting of fifteen to sixteen thousand people was held in Anchor Square on March 1st and what has become known as the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution was passed with only two Bolshevik officials voting against it. At this meeting it was decided to send another delegation to Petrograd to explain to the strikers and the city garrison the demands of Kronstadt and to request that non-partisan delegates be sent by the Petrograd workers to Kronstadt to learn first-hand what was happening there. This delegation of thirty members was arrested by the Bolshevik government.

As the term of office of the Kronstadt soviet was about to expire, the mass meeting also decided to call a Conference of Delegates for March 2nd to discuss the manner in which the new soviet elections would be held (Kronstadt had not had a freely elected soviet since the Bolsheviks *"dissolving [of] the Kronstadt Soviet and establishing a puppet committee in its place"* in July 1918 [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, p. 302]). This conference consisted of two delegates from the ship's crews, army units, the docks, workshops, trade unions and Soviet institutions. This meeting of 303 delegates endorsed the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution and elected a five-person Provisional Revolutionary Committee (this was enlarged to 15 members two days later by another conference of delegates). This committee was charged with organising the defence of Kronstadt, a move decided upon in part by the threats of the Bolshevik officials there and the rumour that the Bolsheviks had dispatched forces to attack the meeting.

The Communist Government issued an ultimatum on March 2nd which built upon Zinoviev's telegram of the 28th and asserted that the revolt had *"expected by, and undoubtedly been prepared by, French counterintelligence"* and that the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution was a *"SR-Black Hundred resolution"*. The Bolsheviks claimed that the revolt had been organised

by an ex-Tsarist officers led by *"former general Kozlovsky and three of his officers"* and so *"[b]ehind the SRs again stands a tsarist general."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 65–6] This was the official line throughout the revolt and any awkward facts (such as Kozlovsky, ironically, being placed in the fortress as a military specialist by Trotsky) ignored.

Basing himself on documents from the Soviet Archives, historian Israel Getzler states that *"[b]y 5 March, if not earlier, the Soviet leaders had decided to crush Kronstadt. Thus, in a cable to … [a] member of the Council of Labour and Defence, on that day, Trotsky insisted that 'only the seizure of Kronstadt will put an end to the political crisis in Petrograd.' On the same day, acting as chairman of the RVSR [the Revolutionary Military Council of the Army and Navy], he ordered the reformation and mobilisation of the Seventh Army 'to suppress the uprising in Kronstadt,' and appointed General Mikhail Tukhachevskii as its commander changed with suppressing the uprising in Kronstadt 'in the shortest possible time.'"* [*"The Communist Leaders' Role in the Kronstadt Tragedy of 1921 in the Light of Recently Published Archival Documents"*, **Revolutionary Russia**, pp. 24–44, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 32]

As the Bolshevik regime sought to mobilise forces to crush the rebels, Kronstadt started to re-organise itself from the bottom up. The trade union committees were re-elected and a Council of Trade Unions formed. The Conference of Delegates met to discuss issues relating to the interests of Kronstadt and the struggle against the Bolshevik government. Around 300 Communists were arrested and treated humanely in prison while many more (at least 780) left the party, expressing support for the revolt and its aim of *"all power to the soviets and not to parties"*, in protest of the actions the party was taking against Kronstadt or its general role in the revolution). Significantly, up to one-third of the delegates elected to Kronstadt's rebel conference of March 2nd were Communist Party members. [Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 184–7 and p.



*ger to a revolution rather than its support."* They were *"material suitable for a rebellion **a la** Bakunin."* [quoted by Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 253] Four years later, it was the Bolsheviks denouncing them for being non-proletarian — this time they were peasants.

How true are such claims? Even the most superficial analysis of the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution (see last section) and the events leading up to the revolt itself can allow the reader to dismiss Trotsky's assertions.

First, according to the definition of *"kulak"* proved by the Trotskyists themselves, we discover that kulak refers to *"well-to-do peasants who owned land and hired poor peasants to work it."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146] Point 11 of the Kronstadt demands explicitly states their opposition to rural wage labour. How could Kronstadt represent *"the kulak"* when it called for the abolition of hired labour on the land? If it did, then so did the Bolshevik's own land decree of 26 October 1917 which proclaimed that the *"right to use the land shall be accorded to all citizens of the Russian state … desiring to cultivate it by their own labour, with the help of their families, or in partnership, but only as long as they are able to cultivate it. The employment of hired labour is not permitted."* [*"Decree on the Land"*, Robert V. Daniels (ed.), **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 122] Moreover, Trotsky seems to have forgotten that the land decree was inspired by peasant rebellion and this revolutionary movement had transformed the countryside as Lenin admitted in 1921:

> *"There are far more middle peasants now than before, the antagonisms have been smoothed out, the land has been distributed for use far more equally, the kulak's position has been undermined and he has been in considerable measure expropriated … statistics show quite definitely that there has been a levelling out, an equalisation, in the village, that is,*

tics of the revolt were not dissimilar to those of libertarian socialists and, as we show in section 9, identical to the dominant ideas of Kronstadt in 1917. Yet, according to Trotskyists, these demands and politics represent the interests of the peasantry and it was these which motivated them. For anarchists, it is an expression of the interests of all working people (proletarian, peasant and artisan) against all those who would exploit and govern them (be it private capitalists or state bureaucrats). We discuss this issue in the next section.

## 4 Did the Kronstadt rebellion reflect *"the exasperation of the peasantry"*?

The notion that the Kronstadt rebellion reflected the needs and interests of the peasantry a common argument of Trotskyists. As a typical example, we see John Rees — who needless to say does not provide a summary of revolt's 15 point programme — assert that the *"sailors represented the exasperated of the peasantry with the War Communism regime"*. [*"In Defence of October"*, pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 63] In this he simply repeats Trotsky's comments that the ideas of the rebellion *"were deeply reactionary"* and *"reflected the hostility of the backward peasantry toward the worker, the self-importance of the soldier or sailor in relation to 'civilian' Petrograd, the hatred of the petty bourgeois for revolutionary discipline."* The revolt *"represented the tendencies of the land-owning peasant, the small speculator, the kulak."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80 and p. 81]

Before discussing these claims, we must note that the Kronstadt sailors had been smeared before by those less revolutionary than themselves. The ex-Bolshevik turned Menshevik Vladimir Voitinsky, for example, who had visited the base in May 1917 later remembered them as being *"degraded and demoralised"* and *"lack[ing] proletarian class-consciousness. It has the psychology of a* ***Lumpenproletariat****, a stratum that is a dan-*



*81] While "[t]here can be no doubt that the [arrested] Kronstadt Communists were frightened and expected to be treated in the same way as their own Cheka treated its prisoners ... The fact is no Communists were shot, none were court-martialled, and the Provisional Revolutionary Committee showed no vindictiveness."* [George Katkov, *"The Kronstadt Rising,"*, **St. Anthony's Papers**, No. 6, p. 44]

The Kronstadt revolt was a non-violent one, but from the start the attitude of the authorities was not one of serious negotiation but rather one of delivering an ultimatum on March 5th: either come to your senses and surrender or suffer the consequences. A leaflet issued by the Petrograd Defence Committee threatened that they would shoot the rebels *"like partridges"* while any of their families in Petrograd were taken hostage. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 144–6] While there was at least three to four weeks before the ice was due to melt after the March 2nd Conference of Delegates meeting which marked the real start of the revolt, the Bolsheviks started military operations at 6.45pm on March 7th.

There were possible means for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. On March 5th, two days before the bombardment of Kronstadt began, anarchists led by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman offered themselves as intermediates to facilitate negotiations between the rebels and the government (anarchist influence had been strong in Kronstadt in 1917). [Emma Goldman, **Living My Life**, vol. 2, pp. 882–3] This was ignored by the Bolsheviks. Years later, the Bolshevik Victor Serge (and eye-witness to the events) acknowledged that *"[e]ven when the fighting had started, it would have been easy to avoid the worst: it was only necessary to accept the mediation offered by the anarchists (notably Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman) who had contact with the insurgents. For reasons of prestige and through an excess of authoritarianism, the Central Committee refused this course."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 164] Trotsky, it should be noted, in 1937 proclaimed that

the *"anarchist and Menshevik elements ... did their best to lead things to an uprising. They succeeded. So nothing remained but armed struggle."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 82] Sadly, he never explained how this was achieved — particularly given that many of the leading Mensheviks were already in prison before Kronstadt rebelled and soon joined by others.

Another possible solution, namely the Petrograd Soviet suggestion of March 6th that a delegation of party and non-party members of the Soviet visit Kronstadt was not pursued by the government. The rebels, unsurprisingly enough, had reservations about the **real** status of the non-party delegates and made the very reasonable request that the elections to the delegation take place within factories with observers from Kronstadt present. Nothing came of this (unsurprisingly, as such a delegation would have reported the truth that Kronstadt was a popular revolt of working people so exposing Bolshevik lies and making the planned armed attack more difficult). A delegation *"sent by Kronstadt to explain the issues to the Petrograd Soviet and people was in the prisons of the Cheka"* and so *"right from the first moment, at a time when it was easy to mitigate the conflict, the Bolshevik leaders had no intention of using anything but forcible methods."* [Victor Serge, **Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 127] As Alexander Berkman noted, the Communist government would *"make no concessions to the proletariat, while at the same time they were offering to compromise with the capitalists of Europe and America."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **The Russian Tragedy**, p. 62]

The Communist government started to attack Kronstadt on March 7th and the first assault was a failure: *"After the Gulf had swallowed its first victims, some of the Red soldiers, including a body of Peterhof **kursanty**, began to defect to the insurgents. Others refused to advance, in spite of threats from the machine gunners at the rear who had orders to shoot any wavers. The commissar of the northern group reported that his troops wanted to send a delegation to Kronstadt to find out the insur-*



raised the slogan "Soviets without Communists" or "Soviets without Bolsheviks". Thus we find Trotsky stating that the *"Kronstadt slogan"* was *"soviets without Communists."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 90] Yet, as Paul Avrich notes in his essential work on the rebellion, *"'Soviets without Communists' was not, as is often maintained by both Soviet and non-Soviet writers, a Kronstadt slogan."* Nor did they agitate under the banner "soviets without parties", instead they argued for *"all power to the soviets and not to parties."* Political parties were not to be excluded from the soviets, simply stopped from dominating them and substituting themselves for them. The Kronstadt programme *"did allow a place for the Bolsheviks in the soviets, alongside the other left-wing organisations ... Communists ... participated in strength in the elected conference of delegates, which was the closest thing Kronstadt ever had to the free soviets of its dreams."* [**Kronstadt 1921**, p. 181] Indeed, *"the proportion of Communists among the delegates finally elected to the delegates' meeting was about one third."* [George Katkov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

As can be seen, while the 15 demands are the essence of the revolt, looking at ***Izvestiia*** confirms its revolutionary nature. The rebels of 1921, as in 1917, looked forward to a system of free soviets in which working people could transform their society into one based on free associations which would encourage individual freedom and be based on working class power. They looked to a combination of renewed and democratic soviets and unions to transform Russian society into a **real** socialist system rather than the system of state capitalism the Bolsheviks had imposed.

Clearly, Kronstadt's political programme was deeply socialist in nature. It opposed the new wage slavery of the workers to the state and argued for free associations of free producers. It was based on the key slogan of 1917, *"All power to the soviets"* but built upon it by adding the rider *"but not to parties."* The sailors had learned the lesson of the October revolution, namely that if a party held power the soviets did not. The poli-

*working class, with the help of renovated unions."* These should *"become real representatives of the interests of the people."* The current unions did *"nothing"* to promote *"economic activity of a co-operative nature"* or the *"cultural education"* of their members due centralised system imposed by the Communist regime. This would change with *"true union activity by the working class."* A strong syndicalist perspective can be seen here, urging self-managed unions to be at the forefront of transforming the economy into a free association of producers. They opposed any "socialist" system in which the peasant *"has been transformed into a serf"*, the worker *"a simple wage-worker in the State factories"* and those who protest are *"thrown into the jails of the Cheka."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 510 and p. 512]

The rebels wrote in ***Izvestiia*** that soviet power cannot exist while a political party dominated the soviets, rightly noting that Russia was just *"State Socialism with Soviets of functionaries who vote docilely what the authorities and their infallible commissars dictate to them."* Without real working class power, without *"the will of the worker"* expressed in their free soviets, corruption had become rampant (*"Communists ... live in ease and the commissars get fat."*). Rather than a *"time of free labour in the fields, factories and workshops,"* where *"power"* was in *"the hands of the workers,"* the *"Communists have brought in the rule of the commissars, with all the despotism of personal power."* Against this travesty of socialism, the paper proclaimed that *"Revolutionary Kronstadt ... fights for the true Soviet Republic of the workers in which the producer himself will be owner of the products of his labour and can dispose of them as he wishes"*. This would create *"a life animated by free labour and the free development of the individual"* which could only be based on *"All power to the Soviets and not to the parties"* and *"the power of the free soviets."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 519, p. 518, p. 511, p. 518 and p. 519]

Finally, we must note that many — with pro-Bolsheviks at the forefront — have proclaimed that the Kronstadt revolt



*gents' demands."* The revolt was isolated and received no external support. The Petrograd workers were under martial law and could little or no action to support Kronstadt (assuming they refused to believe the Bolshevik lies about the uprising). The attacks continued, with Trotsky at one stage sanctioning the use of chemical warfare against the rebels [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 153–4, p. 146 and pp. 211–2] However, this poison gas attack was not needed in the end for Kronstadt was taken by the Red Army on March 17th — yet even in the final assault occurred the Bolsheviks had to force their troops to fight, for on the night of 16–17 March *"the extraordinary **troika** of Aleksei Nikolaev had arrested over 100 so-called instigators, 74 of whom he had publicly shot."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35] The Red Army troops has also seen their ranks swell with Communist Party members — many from the Tenth Party Congress — who were happy to shoot any who hesitated or expressed sympathy for the rebels while behind them were machine guns ready to open fire at the slightest sign of dissent or retreat. Once the Bolshevik forces finally entered the city of Kronstadt *"the attacking troops took revenge for their fallen comrades in an orgy of bloodletting."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 211] Eight thousand sailors, soldiers and civilians escaped over the ice to Finland. The crews of the ***Petropavlovsk*** and ***Sevastopol*** fought to the bitter end, as did the cadets of the mechanics school, the torpedo detachment and the communications unit.

The next day, as an irony of history, the Bolsheviks celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Paris Commune:

> *"On March 17th the Communist Government completed its 'victory' over the Kronstadt proletariat and on the 18th of March it commemorated the martyrs of the Paris Commune. It was apparent to all who were mute witnesses to the outrage committed by the Bolsheviki that the crime against Kronstadt was far more enormous than the slaughter of the Commu-*

*nards in 1871, for it was done in the name of the Social Revolution, in the name of the Socialist Republic."* [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 199]

The repression did not end there. According to Serge, the *"defeated sailors belonged body and soul to the Revolution; they had voiced the suffering and the will of the Russian people"* yet *"[h]undreds of prisoners were taken away to Petrograd; months later they were still being shot in small batches, a senseless and criminal agony"* (particularly as they were *"prisoners of war ... and the Government had for a long time promised an amnesty to its opponents on condition that they offered their support"*). *"This protracted massacre was either supervised or permitted by Dzerzhinsky"* (the head of the Cheka). The *"responsibilities of the Bolshevik Central Committee had been simply enormous"* and *"the subsequent repression ... needlessly barbarous."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 131 and p. 348]

There are no reliable figures of casualties on either side. According to official Soviet figures, around 700 were killed and 2,500 wounded or shell-shocked on the government side. Others suggest over 10,000 killed, wounded or missing as a result of storming Kronstadt. One report puts the rebel deaths at 600 and more than 1,000 wounded. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 211] There are also no reliable figures on how many rebels were later shot by the Cheka or sent to prison camps. The figures that exist are fragmentary. For example, *"4,836 Kronstadt sailors were arrested and deported to the Crimea and the Caucasus. But when Lenin learned of this on the 19 April, he expressed 'great misgivings regarding the location of these sailors' [in these areas]. As a result these ... were eventually ... sent to forced labour camps in the Archangelsk, Vologda and Murmansk regions."* The families of the rebels were also deported, with one Bolshevik official *"pointed at Siberia as 'undoubtedly the only suitable region' for*



March 2nd and enlarged it (again by election) on March 4th as well as *"decid[ing] that all workers, without exception, should be armed and put in charge of guarding the interior of the city"* and to organise re-elections for *"the administrative commissions of all the unions and also of the Council of Unions"* (which could *"become the principle organ of the workers"*). [***Izvestiia*** quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 494]

In the article *"The Goals for Which We Fight,"* ***Izvestiia*** argued that *"[w]ith the aid of state unions"* the Communists have *"chained the workers to the machines, and transformed work into a new slavery instead of making it pleasant."* To the *"protests of the peasants, which have gone so far as spontaneous revolts, to the demands of the workers, compelled by the very conditions of their life to resort to strikes, they reply with mass shootings and a ferocity that the Tsarist generals might have envied."* An *"inevitable third revolution"* was coming, shown by *"increasing"* workers' strikes, which will be *"achieved by the labouring masses themselves."* This would be based on *"freely elected soviets"* and the reorganisation of *"the state unions into free associations of workers, peasants and intellectuals."* Thus ***Izvestiia*** saw clearly the real nature of nationalisation. Rather than being the basis of socialism, it simply produced more wage-labour this time to the state: *"From a slave of the capitalist the worker was transformed into a slave of state enterprises"*. [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 507–8 and p. 518] They clearly saw the need to replace wage slavery to the state (via nationalised property) with free associations of free workers and peasants. Such a transformation would come from the collective direct action and self-activity of working people, as expressed in the strikes which had so recently swept across the country.

This transformation from the bottom up was stressed elsewhere. The unions, ***Izvestiia*** argued, would *"fulfil the great and urgent task of educating the masses for an economic and cultural renovation of the country ... The Soviet Socialist Republic cannot be strong unless its administration be exercised by the*

65 and p. 98] As can be seen, it was nothing of the kind. In the words of Paul Avrich, *"[i]n effect, the* **Petropavlovsk** *resolution was an appeal to the Soviet government to live up to its own constitution, a bold statement of those very rights and freedom which Lenin himself had professed in 1917. In spirit, it was a throwback to October, evoking the old Leninist watchword of 'All power to the soviets.'"* [**Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 75–6] These demands, then, were *"impregnated with the spirit of October; and no calumny in the world can cast a doubt on the intimate connection existing between this resolution and the sentiments which guided the expropriations of 1917."* [Anton Ciliga, *"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 333]

If the ideas of the Kronstadt revolt are reactionary, then so is the slogan *"all power to the soviets."* Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the programme and the initial Bolshevik response, *"Soviet historians had no choice but to claim that the resolution which was published was an amended version of a 'Black Hundreds' resolution (a copy of which could not be found in 1931 [or later]) and to invent a second meeting of the ships' companies at which the resolution was re-written."* [George Katkov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 23]

While these fifteen demands are central to the revolt, looking at the paper produced during it helps us understand the nature of these demands and place them in a fuller political context. *"The pages of* **Izvestiia***"*, as Voline argued, *"give abundant proof of th[e] general enthusiasm, which re-appeared once the masses felt they had regained, in the free Soviets, the true road to emancipation and the hope of achieving the real revolution."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 495] For example, food rations were equalised, except for the sick and to children, who received a larger one. Left-wing political parties were legalised. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee was elected by a *"Conference of Delegates"* made up of over two hundred delegates from military units and workplaces. This body elected the Provisional Revolutionary Committee on



*these people."* [Gelzter, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 35–6 and p. 37] Many other rebels were executed:

> *"[One] 20 April report on 'The Results of the Reprisals Against the Mutineers in the Period of 20 March to 15 April' contains the following data: out of 3,000 active participants in the mutiny, 40 per cent (1,200) were sentenced to death, 25 per cent to five years of forced labour, and 35 per cent were released. [It] complained that in carrying out their work, the* ***troika*** *had had to rely exclusively on information provided by the Special Section of the* ***Vecheka*** *: 'neither commissars nor local Communists provided any material'.*
>
> *"The statistical communique of the Special Section of the Extraordinary* ***Troikas*** *of 1 May has the following data: 6,528 were arrested, of whom 2,168 had been shot, 1,955 had been sentenced to forced labour (of whom 1,486 received a five year sentence), and 1,272 were released. In a statistical review of the mutiny made in 1935–36, the figure of those arrested is given as 10,026, but the review also says, 'It has not been possible to establish accurately the number of the repressed'."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36]

After the revolt had been put down, the Bolshevik government reorganised the fortress. While it had attacked the revolt in the name of defending "Soviet Power" Kronstadt's newly appointed military commander *"abolish[ed] the [Kronstadt] soviet altogether"* and ran the fortress *"with the assistance of a revolutionary troika"* (i.e. an appointed three man committee). [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 244] Kronstadt's newspaper was renamed ***Krasnyi Kronshtadt*** (from ***Izvestiia***) and stated in an editorial that the *"fundamental features"* of Kronstadt's restored *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* during its *"ini-*

*tial phases"* were *"[r]estrictions on political liberty, terror, military centralism and discipline and the direction of all means and resources towards the creation of an offensive and defensive state apparatus."* [quoted by Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] The victors quickly started to eliminate all traces of the revolt. Anchor square became Revolutionary Square and the rebel battleships ***Petropavlovsk*** and ***Sevastopol*** were renamed the ***Marat*** and the ***Paris Commune***, respectively.

In terms of wider changes, the revolt and the mass strike waves saw the Bolshevik dictatorship change some of its policies during the revolt and after it had been crushed. While none of the political demands were granted, the economic ones were to a certain degree by means of the New Economic Policy (or NEP). That Lenin did this does not stop Leninists then or now denouncing these economic demands as expressing the Kronstadt's revolt's allegedly counter-revolutionary "petty-bourgeois" nature.

That, in summary, was the Kronstadt revolt. Obviously we cannot cover all the details and we recommend readers to consult the books and articles we list at the end of this section for fuller accounts of the events. Now we must analyse the revolt and indicate why it is so important in evaluating Bolshevism in both practice and as an ideology.

In the sections which follow, we indicate why the revolt is so important (section 1) and place it in historical context (section 2). We then present and discuss the Kronstadt demands, indicating their sources in working class rebellion and radicalism (see sections <verbatim>3/<verbatim> and 4). We indicate the lies the Bolsheviks said about the rebellion at the time (section 5), whether it was, in fact, a White plot (section 6) and indicate the revolts real relationship to the Whites (section 7). We also disprove Trotskyist assertions that the sailors in 1921 were different from those in 1917 (section 8) or that their political perspectives had fundamentally changed (section 9). We indicate that state coercion and repression explains why the



> *the propagation of its ideas, or receive State subsidies to this end. In the place of the political sections various cultural groups should be set up, deriving resources from the State.*
>
> *8. The immediate abolition of the militia detachments set up between towns and countryside.*
>
> *9. The equalisation of rations for all workers, except those engaged in dangerous or unhealthy jobs.*
>
> *10. The abolition of Party combat detachments in all military groups. The abolition of Party guards in factories and enterprises. If guards are required, they should be nominated, taking into account the views of the workers.*
>
> *11. The granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil, and of the right to own cattle, provided they look after them themselves and do not employ hired labour.*
>
> *12. We request that all military units and officer trainee groups associate themselves with this resolution.*
>
> *13. We demand that the Press give proper publicity to this resolution.*
>
> *14. We demand the institution of mobile workers' control groups.*
>
> *15. We demand that handicraft production be authorised provided it does not utilise wage labour."* [quoted by Ida Mett, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 147–8]

This is the programme described by the Soviet government as a *"SR-Black Hundreds resolution"*! This is the programme which Trotsky maintains was drawn up by *"a handful of reactionary peasants and soldiers."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p.

*petty bourgeoisie. They themselves did not clearly understand that their fathers and brothers needed first of all was free trade."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 148 and p. 91–2]

So we have an uprising which demanded free trade and did not demand it. It was similar to the NEP but the NEP would not have satisfied it. It produced a platform of political and economic demands but did not, apparently, have a *"conscious program."* The contradictions abound. Why these contradictions exist will become clear after we — like all the libertarian books and pamphlets on the rebellion — list the 15 demands:

> *"1. Immediate new elections to the Soviets. The present Soviets no longer express the wishes of the workers and peasants. The new elections should be by secret ballot, and should be preceded by free electoral propaganda.*
>
> *2. Freedom of speech and of the press for workers and peasants, for the Anarchists, and for the Left Socialist parties.*
>
> *3. The right of assembly, and freedom for trade union and peasant organisations.*
>
> *4. The organisation, at the latest on 10th March 1921, of a Conference of non-Party workers, soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and the Petrograd District.*
>
> *5. The liberation of all political prisoners of the Socialist parties, and of all imprisoned workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors belonging to working class and peasant organisations.*
>
> *6. The election of a commission to look into the dossiers of all those detained in prisons and concentration camps.*
>
> *7. The abolition of all political sections in the armed forces. No political party should have privileges for*



Kronstadt revolt did not spread to the Petrograd workers (section 10). Then we discuss the possibility of White intervention during and after the revolt (section 11). We follow this with a discussion of Leninist arguments that the country was too exhausted to allow soviet democracy (section 12) or that soviet democracy would have resulted in the defeat of the revolution (section 13).We will also show the depths to which more recent supporters of Leninism will sink to defend their heroes (section 14). Lastly, we discuss what the Kronstadt revolt tells us about Leninism (section 15).

As we will prove, Kronstadt was a popular uprising from below by many of the same sailors, soldiers and workers who made the 1917 October revolution, seeking to restore the liberties and rights they had seized and practiced then. While, undoubtedly, the Bolshevik repression of the revolt **can** be justified in terms of defending the state power of the Bolsheviks over the Russian working class, it **cannot** be defended as socialist. Indeed, it indicates that Bolshevism is a flawed political theory which cannot create a socialist society but only a state capitalist regime based on party dictatorship. This is what Kronstadt shows above all else: given a choice between workers' power and party power, Bolshevism will destroy the former to ensure the latter. In this, Kronstadt is no isolated event (see section H.6 for more details).

There are many essential resources on the revolt available. The best in depth studies are by historians Paul Avrich (**Kronstadt 1921**) and Israel Getzler (**Kronstadt 1917–1921**). Anarchist works include Ida Mett's **The Kronstadt Uprising** (included in the anthology **Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution** as **The Kronstadt Commune**), Alexander Berkman's **The Kronstadt Rebellion** (included in the collection of Berkman's pamphlets entitled **The Russian Tragedy**), Voline's **The Unknown Revolution** has a good chapter on Kronstadt (and quotes extensively from the Kronstadters' paper ***Izvestiia***) while

Anton Ciliga's **Kronstadt Revolt** is also a good introduction to the issues relating to the uprising from a libertarian socialist perspective. Eye-witness accounts include chapters in Berkman's **The Bolshevik Myth** as well as Emma Goldman's **My Disillusionment in Russia** and Chapter LII of her autobiography **Living My Life**. Daniel Guerin's anthology **No Gods, No Masters** has an excellent section on the rebellion which includes a lengthy extract from Goldman's **Living my Life** as well as extracts from the Kronstadters' paper.

For the Leninist account, the anthology **Kronstadt** contains Lenin and Trotsky's articles on the revolt plus supplementary essays trying to refute the anarchist analysis of the revolt. This work is recommended for those seeking the official Trotskyist version of events as it contains all the relevant documents by the Bolshevik leaders as well the articles relating to the debate on Kronstadt which arose in the late 1930s. Victor Serge, an individualist-anarchist turned Bolshevik, was another eye-witness to the Kronstadt revolt and his **Memoirs of a Revolutionary** is worth consulting to discover why he supported what the Bolsheviks did, albeit reluctantly (in private at least). Finally, it must be noted that Emma Goldman's **Trotsky Protests too Much** is a lively reply to Trotsky's, Serge's and Wright's (one of Trotsky's American followers) attempts to defend the Bolshevik repression of the revolt.

## 1 Why is the Kronstadt rebellion important?

The Kronstadt rebellion is important because, as Voline put it, it was *"the first entirely independent attempt of the people to liberate itself from all yokes and achieve the Social Revolution, an attempt made directly, resolutely, and boldly by the working masses themselves without political shepherds, without leaders or tutors. It was the first step towards the third and social revolution."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 537–8] Moreover, the



They saw the revolution had failed and sought ways to save it, as can be seen when ***Izvestiia*** (the paper produced during the rebellion by the Provisional Revolutionary Committee) argued that in Kronstadt *"there have been laid the foundations of the Third Revolution, which will break the last chains of the workers and lay open the new highway to socialist construction."* [quoted by Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 508]

## 3 What was the Kronstadt Programme?

It is rare for a Trotskyist to actually list the demands of the Kronstadt revolt in their entirety. A more-or-less (often less) accurate summary of certain points is the best the reader can expect. For example, the standard Trotskyist book on the rebellion could spare no space in its 150 pages for the resolution although a very short summary is provided in its *"Editorial Preface"*:

> *"The resolution demanded free elections in the soviets with the participation of anarchists and Left SRs, legalisation of the socialist parties and the anarchists, abolition of the Political Departments [in the fleet] and the Special Purpose Detachments, removal of the* ***zagraditelnye ottyady*** *[Armed troops used to prevent unauthorised trade], restoration of free trade, and the freeing of political prisoners."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 5–6]

It also asserts in its *"Glossary"* that sailors' *"demanded political and economic changes, many of which were soon realised with the adoption of the NEP"*. Which contradicts Trotsky who claimed that it was an *"illusion"* to think *"it would have been sufficient to inform the sailors of the NEP decrees to pacify them"* and that the *"insurgents did not have a conscious program, and they could not have had one because of the very nature of the*

Lenin and Trotsky it is unlikely Mr. Wright would have such difficulty in recognising them for what there were. Historian V. Brovkin states the obvious: *"To anyone who had lived through the events of February 1917, this chain of events appeared strikingly similar. It looked as if a popular insurrection had begun."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 393] Indeed, this was a key concern of the Bolshevik authorities as they sought, unfortunately successfully, to end the possibility of it repeating the events of four years before.

Unsurprisingly, the crew of the battleships ***Petropavlovsk*** and ***Sevastopol*** decided to act once *"the news of strikes, lockouts, mass arrests and martial law"* in Petrograd reached them. They *"held a joint emergency meeting in the face of protests and threats of their commissars"* and *"elected a fact-finding delegation of thirty-two sailors which, on 27 February, proceeded to Petrograd and made the round of the factories… They found the workers whom they addressed and questioned too frightened to speak up in the presence of the hosts of Communist factory guards, trade union officials, party committee men and Cheka-ists."* [Gelzter, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 212] The delegation returned the next day to Kronstadt and reported its findings to a general meeting of the ship's crews and adopted the resolutions which were to be the basis of the revolt (see next section). The Kronstadt rebellion had started.

It was these labour protests and their repression which started the events in Kronstadt. While many sailors had undoubtedly read or listened to the complaints of their relatives in the villages and had protested on their behalf to the Soviet authorities, it took the Petrograd strikes to be the catalyst for the revolt (after years of increasingly autocratic and bureaucratic Bolshevik rule) Moreover, they had other political reasons for protesting against the policies of the government: navy democracy had been abolished, the soviets had been turned into fig-leaves of party dictatorship, workers were back to being wages-slaves of new, State-appointed, bosses.



Bolshevik response to the revolt *"sounded the death knell Bolshevism with its Party dictatorship, mad centralization, Tcheka terrorism and bureaucratic castes. It struck into the very heart of Communist autocracy. At the same time it shocked the intelligent and honest minds of Europe and America into a critical examination of Bolshevik theories and practices. It exploded the Bolshevik myth of the Communist State being the 'Workers' and Peasants' Government'. It proved that the Communist Party dictatorship and the Russian Revolution are opposites, contradictory and mutually exclusive. It demonstrated that the Bolshevik regime is unmitigated tyranny and reaction, and that the Communist State is itself the most potent and dangerous counter-revolution."* [Alexander Berkman, *"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **The Russian Tragedy**, p. 91]

The Kronstadt sailors, solders and workers in 1917 had been the one of the first groups to support the slogan *"All power to the Soviets"* as well as one of the first towns to put it into practice. The focal point of the 1921 revolt — the sailors of the warships ***Petropavlovsk*** and ***Sevastopol*** — had, in 1917, been well-known revolutionaries who had actively supported attempts to create a soviet system. They had been considered, until those fateful days in 1921, the pride and glory of the revolution, considered by all — including the Bolsheviks themselves — to be thoroughly revolutionary in spirit and action. They were the staunchest supporters of the Soviet system but, as the revolt showed, they were opposed to the dictatorship of any political party.

The Kronstadt revolt was a popular movement from below aiming at restoring soviet democracy, to create a genuine soviet power in the sense of soviets themselves running society rather than being a fig leaf for party rule. As Alexander Berkman notes, the *"spirit of the Conference [of delegates which elected the Provisional Revolutionary Committee] was thoroughly Sovietist: Kronstadt demanded Soviets free from interference by any political party; it wanted non-partisan*

*Soviets that should truly reflect the needs and express the will of the workers and peasants. The attitude of the delegates was antagonistic to the arbitrary rule of bureaucratic commissars, but friendly to the Communist Party as such. They were staunch adherents of the Soviet **system** and they were earnestly seeking to find, by means friendly and peaceful, a solution of the pressing problems"* facing the revolution. [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 67] The attitude of the Bolsheviks indicated that, for them, soviet power was only useful in so far as it ensured their party's power and if the two came into conflict then the latter must survive over the corpse of the former:

> *"But the 'triumph' of the Bolsheviks over Kronstadt held within itself the defeat of Bolshevism. It exposes the true character of the Communist dictatorship. The Communists proved themselves willing to sacrifice Communism, to make almost any compromise with international capitalism, yet refused the just demands of their own people — demands that voiced the October slogans of the Bolsheviks themselves: Soviets elected by direct and secret ballot, according to the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic; and freedom of speech and press for the revolutionary parties."* [Berkman, *"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Occurring as it did after the end of the civil war, Kronstadt played a key role in opening the eyes of anarchists like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman to the real role of Bolshevism in the revolution. Until then, they (like many others) supported the Bolsheviks, rationalising their dictatorship as a temporary measure necessitated by the civil war. Kronstadt smashed that illusion, *"broke the last thread that held me to the Bolsheviki. The wanton slaughter they had instigated spoke more*



*pedestrians were stopped and their documents checked … the curfew [was] strictly enforced,"* while the Petrograd Cheka made widespread arrests. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 46–7]

The Bolsheviks also stepped up their propaganda drive. The strikers were warned not to play into the hands of the counter-revolution. As well as their normal press, popular party members were sent to agitate in the streets, factories and barracks. They also made a series of concessions such as providing extra rations. On March 1st the Petrograd soviet announced the withdrawal of all road-blocks and demobilised the Red Army soldiers assigned to labour duties in Petrograd. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 48–9] This, ironically, was one of the "counterrevolutionary" demands raised by Kronstadt which, according to Trotskyists, showed the "peasant" nature of the sailor's revolt.

Thus a combination of force, propaganda and concessions was used to defeat the strike (which had quickly reached a near general strike level). As Paul Arvich notes, *"there is no denying that the application of military force and the widespread arrests, not to speak of the tireless propaganda waged by the authorities had been indispensable in restoring order. Particularly impressive in this regard was the discipline shown by the local party organisation. Setting aside their internal disputes, the Petrograd Bolsheviks swiftly closed ranks and proceeded to carry out the unpleasant task of repression with efficiency and dispatch."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

This indicates the immediate context of the Kronstadt rebellion. Yet Trotskyist J. G. Wright wonders whether the Kronstadt's paper *"lied when in the very first issue … it carried a sensational headline: 'General Insurrection in Petrograd'"* and states that people *"spread . .. lies about the insurrection in Petrograd."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 109] Yes, of course a near general strike, accompanied by mass meetings and demonstrations which was being repressed by force and martial law is an everyday occurrence and has nothing in common with an insurrection! If such events occurred in a state not headed by

*the Trubotchny mill. It means deprivation of rations — actual starvation ... Strikers' proclamations have appeared on the streets today ... Some of the circulars protest against the suppression of factory meetings ... Many arrests are taking place. Groups of strikers surrounded by Tchekists, on their way to prison, are a common sight. Much indignation in the city. I hear that several unions have been liquidated and their active members turned over to the Tcheka. But proclamations continue to appear."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, pp. 291–3]

A three-man Defence Committee was formed and Zinoviev *"proclaimed martial law"* on February 24th. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39] A state of siege was imposed, along with a curfew of 11pm and the banning of all meetings and gatherings (indoor and out) unless approved of by the Defence Committee and *"[a]ll infringements would be dealt with according to military law."* [quoted by Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 147] The workers *"were ordered to return to the shops on pain of being deprived of their rations. This entirely failed of any effect, whereupon a number of unions were liquidated, their officials and the more recalcitrant strikers placed in prison ... by armed Chekists and soldiers ... The strike kept spreading, all extreme measures notwithstanding. Arrests followed upon arrests ... The workers were determined, but it was apparent that they would soon be starved into submission ... All avenues of approach to the industrial districts of the city were cut off by massed troops ... the odds between the dictatorship and the workers were too uneven to permit the strikers to hold out much longer. "* [Emma Goldman, **Living My Life**, vol. 2, p. 875] As part of this process of repression, the Bolshevik government had to rely on the ***kursanty*** (Communist officer cadets) as the local garrisons had been caught up the general ferment and could not be relied upon to carry out the government's orders. *"Overnight Petrograd became an armed camp. In every quarter*



*eloquently against them than aught else. Whatever the pretences of the past, the Bolsheviki now proved themselves the most pernicious enemies of the Revolution. I would have nothing further to do with them."* [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 200]

Therefore Kronstadt is important in evaluating the honesty of Leninist claims to be in favour of soviet democracy and power. The civil war was effectively over, yet the regime showed no signs of changing and, as before, the Bolsheviks were repressing strikes and protests in the name of *"the political power of the proletariat"* (see section H.6.3 for an account of labour struggles and their repression under Lenin from early 1918 onwards). In the countryside, they continued their futile and counterproductive policies against the peasants (ignoring the facts that their government was meant to be at the head of a workers **and** peasants' state and that peasants made up the vast majority of the population). They proclaimed themselves to be defending "soviet power" while also placing the necessity of party dictatorship into the heart of their ideology and practice. In short, it goes to the heart of what socialism is as Maurice Brinton suggests:

*"Attitudes to the Kronstadt events, expressed ... after the event often provide deep insight into the political thinking of contemporary revolutionaries. They may in fact provide a deeper insight into their conscious or unconscious aims than many a learned discussion about economics, or philosophy, or about other episodes of revolutionary history.*

*"It is a question of one's basic attitude as to what socialism is all about. What are epitomised in the Kronstadt events are some of the most difficult problems of revolutionary strategy and revolutionary ethics: the problems of ends and means, of the relations between Party and masses, in fact of whether a Party*

*is necessary at all. Can the working class by itself only develop a trade union consciousness [as Lenin claimed]. Should it even be allowed, at all times, to go that far?*

*"Or can the working class develop a deeper consciousness and understanding of its interests than can any organization allegedly acting on its behalf? When the Stalinists or Trotskyists speak of Kronstadt as 'an essential action against the class enemy', when more 'sophisticated' revolutionaries refer to it as a 'tragic necessity', one is entitled to pause for a moment. One is entitled to ask how seriously they accept Marx's dictum that 'the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Do they take this seriously or do they pay mere lip-service to the words? Do they identify socialism with the autonomy (organizational and ideological) of the working class? Or do they see themselves, with their wisdom as to the 'historical interests' of others, and with their judgments as to what should be 'permitted', as the leadership around which the future elite will crystallise and develop? One is entitled not only to ask ... but also to suggest the answer!"* [*"Preface to Ida Mett's 'The Kronstadt Commune'"*, **Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution**, pp. 137–8]

The events at Kronstadt cannot be looked at in isolation, but rather as part of a general struggle of the Russian working people against "their" government. Indeed, as we indicate in the next section, this repression **after** the end of the Civil War followed the same pattern as that started **before** it. Just as the Bolsheviks had repressed soviet democracy in Kronstadt in 1921 in favour of party dictatorship, they had done so regularly elsewhere from early 1918. Investigating the Kronstadt revolt



*Assembly of Plenipotentiaries."* [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 393] Alexander Berkman noted in his diary the events unfolding before his eyes:

*"Several factories have been closed for lack of fuel, and the employees put on half rations. They called a meeting to consult about the situation, but the authorities did not permit it to take place.*

*"The Trubotchny millworkers have gone on strike. In the distribution of winter clothing, they complain, the Communists received undue advantage over the non-partisans. The Government refuses to consider the grievances till the men return to work.*

*"Crowds of strikers gathered in the street near the mills, and soldiers were sent to disperse them. They were **kursanti**, Communist youths of the military academy. There was no violence.*

*"Now the strikers have been joined by the men from the Admiralty shops and Galernaya docks. There is much resentment against the arrogant attitude of the Government. A street demonstration was attempted, but mounted troops suppressed it ... The strike situation is growing more serious. The Patronny mills, the Baltiysky and Laferm factories have suspended operations. The authorities have ordered the strikers to resume work. Martial law in the city. The special Committee of Defense (**Komitet Oboroni**) is vested with exceptional powers, Zinoviev at its head.*

*"At the Soviet session last evening a military member of the Defense Committee denounced the strikers as traitors to the Revolution ... and demanded drastic measures against them. The Soviet passed a resolution locking out the men of*

der Berkman summarised, *"showed no intention of loosening the yoke. The same policies continued, with labour militarisation still further enslaving the people, embittering them with added oppression and tyranny, and in consequence paralysing every possibility of industrial revival."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] As in early 1920, the Bolsheviks took success in the Civil War as meaning success of their policies and sought to continue and widen their application — workers' opposition was taken as being an example of the "declassing" of the working class and so ignored (given the party reflected their "real" interests, this was a logical position to take if its circular nature is ignored).

Finally, in the middle of February, 1921, *"a rash of spontaneous factory meetings"* began in Moscow. Workers called for the immediate scrapping of War Communism. These meetings were *"succeeded by strikes and demonstrations."* Workers took to the streets demanding *"free trade"*, higher rations and *"the abolition of grain requisitions."* Some demanded the restoration of political rights and civil liberties. Troops had to be called in to restore order. Then a far more serious wave of strikes and protests swept Petrograd. The Kronstadt revolt was sparked off by these protests. Like Moscow, these *"street demonstrations were heralded by a rash of protest meetings in Petrograd's numerous but depleted factories and shops."* Like Moscow, speakers *"called for an end to grain requisitioning, the removal of roadblocks, the abolition of privileged rations, and permission to barter personal possessions for food."* On the 24th of February, the day after a workplace meeting, the Trubochny factory workforce downed tools and walked out. Workers from nearby factories joined in. The crowd of 2,000 was dispersed by armed military cadets. The next day, the Trubochny workers again took to the streets and visited other workplaces, bringing them out on strike too. [Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 35–6 and pp. 37–8] The strikers started to organise themselves: *"As in 1918, workers from various plants elected delegates to the Petrograd*



forces revolutionaries into a critical examination of Bolshevik ideology and practice, it forces them to consider what their socialism stands for — as we argue in section 15, the logic of Bolshevik rationales for crushing Kronstadt simply mean that modern day Leninists will, if in the same position, destroy soviet democracy to defend "soviet power" (i.e. the power of their party). In short, Kronstadt was the clash between the reality of Leninism and its rhetoric. Yet while it raises many important issues as regards Bolshevism, it is wider than that. *"The Kronstadt experience,"* as Berkman argues, *"proves once more that government, the State — whatever its name or form — is ever the mortal enemy of liberty and popular self-determination. The state has no soul, no principles. It has but one aim — to secure power and hold it, at any cost. That is the political lesson of Kronstadt."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89]

As noted, the Leninist justifications for their power and actions at Kronstadt have direct implications for current activity and future revolutions. Not least, because the Russian Revolution as a whole confirmed anarchist analysis and predictions with regards to State Socialism. Echoing the warnings of the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin, Russian anarchists in 1917 predicted that *"if the 'transfer of power to the soviets' comes in fact to signify the seizure of political authority by a new political party with the aim of guiding reconstruction from above, 'from the centre'"* then *"there is no doubt that this 'new power' can in no way satisfy even the most immediate needs and demands of the people, much less begin the task of 'socialist reconstruction' . .. Then, after a more or less prolonged interruption, the struggle will inevitably be renewed. Then will begin a third and last stage of the Great Revolution. There will begin a struggle between the living forces arising from the creative impulse of the popular masses on the spot, on the one hand, namely the local workers' and peasants' organisations acting directly ... and the centralist Social Democratic [i.e., Marxist] power defending its existence, on the other; a struggle between authority and freedom."* [quoted by

Paul Avrich, **Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 94] Thus Kronstadt is a symbol of the fact that state power cannot be utilised by the working class and always becomes a force for minority rule (in this case of former workers and revolutionaries, as Bakunin predicted — see section H.1.1).

There is another reason why the study of Kronstadt is important. Since the suppression of the revolt, Leninist and Trotskyist groups have continually **justified** the acts of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, they have followed Lenin and Trotsky in slandering the revolt and, indeed, have continually lied about it. When Trotskyist John Wright states — in the ironically entitled *"The Truth About Kronstadt"* — that the supporters of Kronstadt have *"distort[ed] historical facts, monstrously exaggerat[ed] every subsidiary issue or question ... and throw[n] a veil ... over the **real** program and aims of the mutiny"* he is, in fact, describing his and his fellow Trotskyists. [*"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 102] As we will prove, anarchist accounts have been validated by later research while Trotskyist assertions have been exploded time and time again.

Similarly, when Trotsky argues that anarchists like Goldman and Berkman *"do not have the slightest understanding of the criteria and methods of scientific research"* and just *"quote the proclamations of the insurgents like pious preachers quoting Holy Scriptures"* he is, in fact, just describing himself and his followers (as we shall see, the latter just repeat his and Lenin's assertions regardless of how silly or refuted they are). Ironically, he states that *"Marx has said that it is impossible to judge either parties or peoples by what they say about themselves"* while he himself justifies his actions by his claim that he and Lenin represented the "proletarian" revolution and the real class interests of workers. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88] In reality, Kronstadt shows what the Bolsheviks said about their regime was the opposite of what it really was as show by its actions: *"How pathetic that he does not realise how much this applies to*



> *"the Bolshevik government evidently understood the slogan 'power to the soviets' in a peculiar way. It applied it in reverse. Instead of giving assistance to the working masses and permitting them to conquer and enlarge their own autonomous activity, it began by taking all 'power' from them and treating them like subjects. It bent the factories to its will and liberated the workers from the right to make their own decisions; it took arbitrary and coercive measures, without even asking the advice of the workers' concerned; it ignored the demands emanating from the workers' organisations. And, in particular, it increasingly curbed, under various pretexts, the freedom of action of the Soviets and of other workers' organisations, everywhere imposing its will arbitrarily and even by violence."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 459–60]

From before the start of Civil War, the Russian people had been slowly but surely eliminated from any meaningful say in the progress of the revolution. The Bolsheviks undermined (when not abolishing) workers' democracy, freedom and rights in workplaces, soviets, unions, the army and the navy. Unsurprisingly, the lack of any real control from below heightened the corrupting effects of power. Inequality, privilege and abuses were everywhere in the ruling party and bureaucracy (*"Within the party, favouritism and corruption were rife. The Astoria Hotel, where many high officials lived, was the scene of debauchery, while ordinary citizens went without the bare necessities."* [Paul Avrich, *"Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group"*, **The Russian Review**, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 7]).

With the end of the Civil War in November 1920, many expected a change of policy. However, months passed and the same policies were followed. *"The Communist State,"* as Alexan-

*expedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* Soldiers, he disingenuously suggested, did not have to fear this system of top-down appointment as *"political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited"* (i.e. in the hands of the Bolshevik party). There could *"be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the* ***appointment*** *of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [*"Work, Discipline, Order"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. 1, p. 47] Of course, as any worker in struggle can tell you, they almost always come into conflict with the union's bureaucracy (as Trotskyists themselves often point out).

In the Navy, a similar process occurred — much to the disgust and opposition of the sailors. As Paul Avrich notes, *"Bolshevik efforts to liquidate the ship committees and impose the authority of the centrally appointed commissars aroused a storm of protest in the Baltic Fleet. For the sailors, whose aversion to external authority was proverbial, any attempt to restore discipline meant a betrayal of the freedoms for which they had struggles in 1917."* [**Kronstadt 1921**, p. 66] This process *"began in earnest on 14 May 1918 with the* ***appointment*** *of Ivan Flerovsky as general commissar of the Baltic Fleet and chairman of its Council of Commissars, a body which replaced the disbanded elective Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet. Flerovsky promptly appointed bridge commissars to whom all ships' committees were subordinated … Naval democracy was finally destroyed on 18 January 1919 when Trotsky . .. decreed the abolition of all ships' committees, the appointment of commissars to all ships, and the setting up of revolutionary tribunals to maintain discipline, a function previously vested in elected 'comradely courts.'"* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 191]

Thus Voline:



*him!"* [Emma Goldman, *"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Writings of Emma Goldman**, p. 257]

Then there is the bad faith of most Trotskyist accounts (Victor Serge's belated account in his **Memoirs of a Revolutionary** is noteworthy in being an exception to this). What becomes clear from our discussion is the way Trotskyists have selectively quoted the academic accounts to fit their ideological account of the uprising. Likewise, they regularly change the demands of the revolt — often simply inventing demands (like "Soviets without Bolsheviks") — and ignore the ideological context (so ignoring how party dictatorship was a core Leninist principle before, during and after the rebellion). The reason for this should be obvious — the supporters of Bolshevism cannot help lie about the Kronstadt revolt as it so clearly exposes the **real** nature of Bolshevik ideology and the regime it created. Hence the repetition of the slanders, inventions and self-serving justifications the Bolsheviks made at the time, with varying degrees of sophistication (the most superficially convincing usually utilise Serge's defence of the Bolsheviks' actions).

These defences of the Bolshevism are a classic expression of Leninist double-think (the ability to know two contradictory facts and maintain both are true). Yet this can be explained for once it is understood that *"workers' power"* and *"soviet power"* actually mean **party power** then the contradictions disappear. Party power had to be maintained at all costs, including the destruction of those who desired real soviet and workers' power (and so soviet democracy). It is, surely, an utter absurdity to claim that a state apparatus which divests the workers of any control over society — or even itself — can be regarded as a "workers' state"? Apparently not.

So, for example, Trotsky argued that in 1921 *"the proletariat had to hold political power in its hands"* yet later Trotskyists argue that the proletariat was too exhausted, atomised and decimated to do so. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 81] Simi-

larly, the Trotskyist Pierre Frank states that for the Bolsheviks, *"the dilemma was posed in these terms: either keep the workers' state under their leadership, or see the counterrevolution begin, in one or other political disguise, ending in a counterrevolutionary reign of terror that would leave not the slightest room for democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 15] Of course the fact that there was *"not the slightest room for democracy"* under Lenin is not mentioned, nor is the fact that the *"dictatorship of the party"* had been a fundamental aspect of Bolshevik ideology since early 1919 and practice since mid-1918 (by the latest). Nor does Frank consider it important to note that a *"counterrevolutionary reign of terror"* did develop under Stalin from the counterrevolutionary terror, repression and dictatorship practised in 1921 (and before) by Lenin and Trotsky — but, then, he also fails to mention that Trotsky's Left Opposition was only in favour of democracy within the party. (see section 3 of the appendix *"Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?"*)

A more trivial example can be seen with the dismissal of Kronstadt's economic demands as being impossible to agree to, as they reflected the "peasant counter-revolution" while the Bolsheviks in Petrograd announced the withdrawal of all road-blocks and demobilised the Red Army soldiers assigned to labour duties in Petrograd on 1st March and introduced the New Economic Policy afterwards. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 48–9] Likewise, Leninist Chris Harman argued against the Stalinists that *"people who seriously believe that workers at the height of revolution need a police guard to stop them handing their factories over to capitalists certainly have no real faith in the possibilities of a socialist future."* [**Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 144] Yet this did not stop him asserting that *"Kronstadt in 1921 was not Kronstadt of 1917. The class composition of its sailors had changed. The best socialist elements had long ago gone off to fight in the army in the front line. They were replaced in the main by peasants whose devotion to the revolution was that of their class. This was reflected in the*



**Op. Cit.**, pp. 9–10] Famine was a constant problem as a result, made even worse by the Bolshevik centralised economic structures whose *"inefficiency ... saw [the seized food] products lying at side stations and rotting away."* [Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 96] The lack of food — and Bolshevik policies which exacerbated the problem — was a common theme in workers' strikes and protests, including those in Petrograd which directly inspired the Kronstadt revolt.

Thus the ruling party had in practice eliminated the political and economic power of the working class and, moreover, embedded this into its ideology. This was not seen as a temporary policy imposed upon the Bolsheviks by the war but rather, as can be seen, as an expression of principle and justified as such. Indeed, much of Bolshevik practice could be easily related to the demands of the **Communist Manifesto**, including its calls *"to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State,"* for the *"[c]entralisation of credit"* and *"the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State"*, the *"[e]xtension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State"* and the *"[e]stablishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture"*. Likewise, its suggestion that *"Communists ... theoretically ... have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement"* contains within it the Bolshevik rationale for its rule over the proletariat in its higher interests (as defined, of course, by the Communist leaders). [**Marx-Engels Collected Works**, vol. 6, p. 504, p. 505 and p. 498]

All this required loyal troops and unsurprisingly the Bolsheviks quickly worked to recreate special bodies of armed men standing apart from the people (see section H.1.7). A political police force, the Cheka, was created in December 1917 while in the Red Army and Navy, anti-democratic principles were imposed. At the end of March, 1918, Trotsky proclaimed that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically in-*

This vision of strict centralisation and top-down economic structures built upon Bolshevik ideology and policies of the first months after the October revolution. The attempts at workers' self-management organised by the factory committees was opposed in favour of a centralised state capitalist system, with Lenin arguing for appointed managers with *"dictatorial"* powers (see Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for full details). These policies ensured that *"with unshakeable firmness [the Bolsheviks] wrested the factories from the workers (Communist and non-party) wrenched from them from their essential conquest, the one weapon they could use to take another step towards their emancipation, towards socialism. The Russian proletariat became once more the wage-earning manpower in other people's factories. Of socialism there remained in Russia no more than the word."* [Anton Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 286] With workers reduced to wage-workers as before the revolution, it comes as no surprise that labour protests and strikes — and their repression by the State — were a recurring feature of the Bolshevik regime before, during and after the civil war (see section H.6.3 for examples). Strikers faced the denial of rations, lock-outs, selective rehiring, and imprisonment at best, death at worse, at the hands of the troops and Cheka (the secret police) of the "workers' state." Ironically, those *"who had seized power in 1917 in the name of the politically conscious proletariat were in fact weeding out all these conscious workers."* [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 298]

In the countryside, grain requisitioning resulted in peasant uprisings as food was taken from the peasants by force. While the armed detachments were *"instructed to leave the peasants enough for their personal needs, it was common for the requisitioning squads to take at gun-point grain intended for personal consumption or set aside for the next sowing."* The villagers predictably used evasive tactics and cut back on the amount of land they tilled as well as practising open resistance. [Avrich,



*demands of the uprising: Soviets without Bolsheviks and a free market in agriculture. The Bolshevik leaders could not accede to such demands. It would have meant liquidation of the socialist aims of the revolution without struggle."* [Chris Harman, *"How the Revolution was Lost,"* Binns, Cliff and Harman, **Russia from Workers' State to State Capitalism**, p. 20] Yet as we discuss in this appendix, the ship crews were remarkably consistent over the period in question and, as such, his claims are as factual as his account of their demands — the Kronstadt rebels **never** raised the call for Soviets with Bolsheviks (they called for soviet democracy) and the Bolsheviks **did**, in the shape of the New Economic Policy announced just after the revolt was crushed *"accede"* to the demand for a free market in agriculture (although, it must be stressed, this allowed wage-labour which the rebels, as socialists, explicitly rejected). Nor should we forget that this Kronstadt demand — like so many others — simply repeated those of *"the [striking] workers [in Petrograd who] wanted the special squads of armed Bolsheviks, who carried out a purely police function, withdrawn from the factories."* [Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42]

Leninists generally argue that the suppression of the rebellion was essential to defend the "gains of the revolution." These are usually left unspecified, for good reason. What exactly were these gains? Not soviet democracy, freedom of speech, assembly and press, trade union freedom and workers' control for the Kronstadters were crushed for demanding these. No, apparently the "gains" of the revolution were a Bolshevik government and state ownership and control of property. Never mind the obvious fact this was a state-capitalist dictatorship with an already strong and privileged bureaucratic machine: that Lenin and Trotsky were in power is enough for their followers to justify the repression of Kronstadt and subscribe to the notion of a "workers' state" which excludes workers from power. As such, the Kronstadters and Petrograd strikers *"struggled for the socialism which the bureaucracy were already in the process of*

*liquidating. That is the fundamental point of the whole problem."* [Anton Ciliga, *"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **The Raven**, No. 8, p. 334]

Thus the double-think of Bolshevism is clearly seen from the Kronstadt events. The Bolsheviks and their supporters argue that Kronstadt was suppressed to defend soviet power yet argue that the Kronstadt demand for free soviet elections was *"counter-revolutionary"*, *"backward"*, *"petty-bourgeois"* and so on. How soviet power could mean anything without free elections is never explained. Similarly, they argue that it was necessary to defend the "workers state" by slaughtering those who called for workers to have some kind of say in how that state operated. It appears that the role of workers in a workers' state was simply that of following orders without question. This explains why Trotsky was able to argue in the 1930s that the Russian working class was still the ruling class under Stalin: *"So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class."* [*"The Class Nature of the Soviet State"*, **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933–34**, p. 125] To be fair to Trotsky, the workers were in the same position in the social hierarchy and had the same say under Stalin as they had when he ruled the roost (i.e., less than in most democratic capitalist states) and he considered them to the ruling class then.

How can the Bolshevik repression be justified in terms of defending workers power when the workers were powerless? How can it be defended in terms of soviet power when the soviets were rubber stamps of a party dictatorship? Simply put, the logic of the Bolsheviks and their latter-day apologists and supporters is the same character as that of the U.S. Officer during the Vietnam War who explained that in order to save the village, they had to destroy it.

One last point, while the Kronstadt revolt is a key event in the Russian Revolution, one that signified its end, we must not forget that it is just one in a long series of Bolshevik attacks on the working class. As we indicate in the next section,



*under Socialism there will not exist the apparatus of compulsion itself, namely, the State: for it will have melted away entirely into a producing and consuming commune. None the less, the road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the State … Just as a lamp, before going out, shoots up in a brilliant flame, so the State, before disappearing, assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the most ruthless form of State, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction … No organisation except the army has ever controlled man with such severe compulsion as does the State organisation of the working class in the most difficult period of transition. It is just for this reason that we speak of the militarisation of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 169–70]

*"It would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers [i.e., the party], and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered … I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 162–3]

power over the working class now that the *"internal civil war is coming to an end"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 132] These authoritarian policies included:

> *"The very principle of compulsory labour service is for the Communist quite unquestionable.... But hitherto it has always remained a mere principle. Its application has always had an accidental, impartial, episodic character. Only now, when along the whole line we have reached the question of the economic rebirth of the country, have problems of compulsory labour service arisen before us in the most concrete way possible. The only solution of economic difficulties that is correct from the point of view both of principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power ... and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation, and utilisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 135]
>
> *"The introduction of compulsory labour service is unthinkable without the application, to a greater or less degree, of the methods of militarisation of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137]
>
> *"Why do we speak of militarisation? Of course, this is only an analogy — but an analogy very rich in content. No social organisation except the army has ever considered itself justified in subordinating citizens to itself in such a measure, and to control them by its will on all sides to such a degree, as the State of the proletarian dictatorship considers itself justified in doing, and does."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141]
>
> *"Both economic and political compulsion are only forms of the expression of the dictatorship of the working class in two closely connected regions ...*



the Bolshevik state had proven itself to be anti-revolutionary continually since October 1917. Yet Kronstadt is important simply because it so clearly pitted soviet democracy against "soviet power" and occurred **after** the end of the civil war. As it brought the Russian Revolution to an end and all the conditions for Stalinism were prepared by its defeat and the repression of the mass strike wave which produced it, it deserves to be remembered, analysed and discussed by all revolutionaries who seek to learn from, rather than repeat, history.

## 2 What was the context of the Kronstadt revolt?

The Kronstadt revolt cannot be understood in isolation. Indeed, to do so misses the real reason why Kronstadt is so important. The actions of the Bolsheviks in 1921 and their ideological justifications for their actions (justifications, of course, when they got beyond lying about the revolt — see section 5) merely reproduced in concentrated form what had been occurring ever since they had seized power in 1917.

Therefore it is necessary to present a short summary of Bolshevik activities before the events of Kronstadt (see section H.6 for fuller details). In addition, we have to sketch the developing social stratification under Lenin and the events immediate before the revolt which sparked it off (namely the strike wave across Russia which reached Petrograd in late February 1921). Once this has been done, we will soon see that Kronstadt was not an isolated event but rather an act of solidarity with the oppressed workers of Russia and an attempt to save the Russian Revolution from Communist dictatorship and its bureaucracy.

Alexander Berkman provides an excellent overview of what had happened in Russia after the October Revolution:

> *"The elective system was abolished, first in the army and navy, then in the industries. The Soviets of peasants and workers were castrated and turned*

> *into obedient Communist Committees, with the dreaded sword of the Cheka [political para-military police] ever hanging over them. The labour unions governmentalised, their proper activities suppressed, they were turned into mere transmitters of the orders of the State. Universal military service, coupled with the death penalty for conscientious objectors; enforced labour, with a vast officialdom for the apprehension and punishment of 'deserters'; agrarian and industrial conscription of the peasantry; military Communism in the cities and the system of requisitioning in the country ... ; the suppression of workers' protests by the military; the crushing of peasant dissatisfaction with an iron hand..."* [*"The Russian Tragedy"*, **The Russian Tragedy**, p. 27]

Here we will simply indicate that the Bolsheviks had systematically undermined the effective power of the soviets. Both locally and nationally, post-October power was centralised into the hands of the soviet executives rather than the general assemblies. At the top, power was concentrated even further with the creation of a Bolshevik government **above** the Central Executive Council elected by the (then) quarterly soviet congress. This is not all. Faced with growing opposition to their policies, the Bolsheviks responded in two ways. Either the soviet was packaged and gerrymandered to make the workplace soviet elections irrelevant (as in, say, Petrograd) or they simply disbanded any soviet elected with a non-Bolshevik majority (as in **all** provincial soviets for which records exist). So Bolshevik opposition to the soviet democracy demanded by the Kronstadt revolt had a long pedigree. It had started a few months after the Bolsheviks seizure of power in the name of the soviets, during the spring of 1918 (i.e. in March, April and May) and so **before** the Czech rising and the onset of full scale civil war which occurred in late May. Given this, any attempt



> *backward tail to dress by the head"*. [**Communism and Terrorism**, pp. 109–10]

At the Second Congress of the Communist International in the summer of 1920 the assembled revolutionaries heard leading Bolshevik Zinoviev proclaim that *"[t]oday, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class"* This meant that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, pp. 151–2] Unsurprisingly, then, the Kronstadt demand for soviet democracy was rejected by the party for it was incompatible with the party dictatorship predicated by the party ideology. This, of course, did not stop Trotsky proclaiming that Kronstadt had to be crushed as *"the proletariat had to hold political power in its hands with redoubled energy"*. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 81–2]

Economically, the Bolshevik regime imposed a policy later called *"War Communism"* although, as Victor Serge later noted, *"any one who, like myself, went so far as to consider it purely temporary was looked upon with disdain"*. [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 115] This regime was marked by extreme hierarchical and dictatorial practices, although it was building upon tendencies well in place before the civil war started (for example, the one-man management advocated by Lenin in April 1918 — see section H.3.14). The leading lights of the Communist Party were expressing themselves on the nature of the "socialist" regime they desired with Trotsky, for example, implementing — and ideologically justifying — the *"militarisation of labour"* and a corresponding empowerment of the state's

a **de facto** party dictatorship since it had packed the Fifth All-Russian Congress of soviets in July 1918, the Bolsheviks soon sought to incorporate its practice into its ideology. Thus, we find Victor Serge in the 1930s noting that *"at the start of 1919 I was horrified to read an article by Zinoviev ... on the monopoly of the party in power."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 188] Serge, however, kept his horror well-hidden as he was soon publically seeking to convince anarchists in France and elsewhere of the necessity of this monopoly (see section H.1.2) while Lenin proclaimed in July 1919 that *"it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and shall not shift from this position because it is the party that has won, in the course of decades, the position of vanguard of the entire factory and industrial proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 29, p. 535] This orthodoxy was proclaimed by Trotsky the following year:

> *"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class... . The dictatorship of the proletariat, in its very essence, signifies the immediate supremacy of the revolutionary vanguard, which relies upon the heavy masses, and, where necessary, obliges the*



to blame the Civil War for the elimination of soviet power and democracy seems woefully weak. Likewise, the reduction of soviet influence cannot be fully understood without factoring in the Bolshevik prejudice in favour of centralisation and party power which could not help but ensure the marginalisation of the soviets as did its vanguardism (see section H.5).

It must be remembered that the Bolshevik aim was always party power and their turn to the soviets in 1917 was made precisely because this was considered the most likely means to achieve this long-standing aim (see section H.3.11). To be fair, many workers accepted the idea of "workers' government" and a "workers' state," assuming the new power was their own and, of course, initially the Bolsheviks did have popular support (at least in the main urban areas, they could count on passive support due to the Bolshevik appropriation of the SR's land reform policy). Yet, this soon changed — which, incidentally, answers Brian Bambery's rhetorical question of *"why would the most militant working class in the world, within which there was a powerful cocktail of revolutionary ideas, and which had already made two revolutions (in 1905 and in February 1917), allow a handful of people to seize power behind its back in October 1917?"* [*"Leninism in the 21st Century"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 248, January 2001] Once the Russian workers realised that a handful of people **had** seized power they **did** protest the usurpation of their power and rights by the Bolsheviks — and the Bolsheviks repressed them. With the start of the Civil War, the Bolsheviks played their trump card — essentially, "Us or the Whites" — and this helped ensure their power as the workers had few choices but to agree. This, however, did not stop mass resistance and strikes breaking out periodically during the civil war when workers and peasants could no longer put up with Bolshevik policies or the effects of the war (see section 5 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"). Given this, it comes as no real surprise that while the Bolsheviks repeatedly repressed opposition parties

and groups during the civil war, these were finally eliminated (along with factions within the Communist Party itself) only **after** its end: with the Whites gone, the opposition were rising in influence again within dissident workers and the "White card" could no longer be played to get them to begrudgingly support the Bolsheviks as during the war. *"Paradoxical as it may sound,"* Alexander Berkman noted, *"the Communist dictatorship had no better ally, in the sense of strengthening and prolonging its life, than the reactionary forces which fought against it."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 340]

Moreover, the reality of the new regime confirmed that the "new" centralised structures preferred by the Bolsheviks soon produced the same alienation as previous states along with a bureaucracy which, rather than start to decline, immediately *"grew by leaps and bounds. Control over the new bureaucracy constantly diminished, partly because no genuine opposition existed. The alienation between 'people' and 'officials,' which the soviet system was supposed to remove, was back again. Beginning in 1918, complaints about 'bureaucratic excesses,' lack of contact with voters, and new proletarian bureaucrats grew louder and louder."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 242] Thus the early months of "soviet rule" saw *"the widespread view that trade unions, factory committees, and soviets ... were no longer representative, democratically run working-class institutions; instead they had been transformed into arbitrary, bureaucratic government agencies. There was ample reason for this concern."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, p. 224] In Moscow, in August 1918, state officials represented 30 per cent of the workforce there and by 1920 the general number of office workers *"still represented about a third of those employed in the city"* (200,000 in November, 1920, rising to 228,000 in July, 1921 and, by October 1922, to 243,000). Thus *"red tape and vast administrative offices typified Soviet reality"* as the Bolsheviks *"rapidly created their own [state] apparatus to wage the political and economic offensive against the bourgeoisie and*



*capitalism. As the functions of the state expanded, so did the bureaucracy"* and so *"following the revolution the process of institutional proliferation reached unprecedented heights ... a mass of economic organisations [were] created or expanded."* Worse, the *"prevalence of bureaucracy, of committees and commissions ... permitted, and indeed encouraged, endless permutations of corrupt practices. These raged from the style of living of communist functionaries to bribe-taking by officials. With the power of allocation of scare resources, such as housing, there was an inordinate potential for corruption."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, pp. 190–3]

Emma Goldman recounted from experience *"how paralysing was the effect of the bureaucratic red tape which delayed and often frustrated the most earnest and energetic efforts ... Materials were very scarce and it was most difficult to procure them owing to the unbelievably centralised Bolshevik methods. Thus to get a pound of nails one had to file applications in about ten or fifteen bureaus; to secure some bed linen or ordinary dishes one wasted days."* Thus *"the newly fledged officialdom was as hard to cope with as the old bureaucracy"* while the *"bureaucratic officials seemed to take particular delight in countermanding each other's orders."* In short, *"the terrorism practiced by the Bolsheviki against every revolutionary criticism ... the new Communist bureaucracy and inefficiency, and the hopelessness of the whole situation ... was a crushing indictment against the Bolsheviki, their theories and methods."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 40, p. 45, p. 46 and p. 92] Thus, as anarchists had long warned, a new class — the state and party bureaucracy — had been created within the new regime, living like other ruling classes on the labour of others.

The dynamics of the class struggle under the Bolshevik regime, that is the conflict between the workers and "their" state, played its part in the evolution of Bolshevik ideology. Having lost popular support, the Bolshevik used their control of the state and its forces of coercion to remain in power. Being

*will of the workers, they then began stubbornly to build a state socialism with slaves, instead of building a society based on free labour … the Bolsheviks established the nationalisation of works and factories. From a slave of the capitalist the worker was transformed into a slave of state enterprises. Soon this no longer sufficed, and they planned the application of the Taylor system.*

*"The whole mass of the peasants were declared enemies of the people and identified with the 'kulaks.' Very enterprisingly the Communists then set about ruining the peasants and substituting Soviet exploitation, that is to say, establishing the estates of the new agrarian profiteer, the State. That is what the peasants have obtained from the Socialism of the Bolsheviks, instead of free labour on the liberated land for which they had hoped. In exchange for bread and livestock, almost entirely requisitioned, they obtained the raids of the Cheka and mass shootings. A fine system of exchange in a workers' state — lead and bayonets for bread!*

*"The life of the citizen became monotonous and banal to the point of death, regulated according to the rules of the authorities. Instead of a life animated by free labour and the free development of the individual, an unprecedented and incredible slavery was born. All independent thought, all just criticism of the acts of the criminal rulers became crimes, punished by prison and often by death. Indeed, the death penalty, that disgrace to humanity, was extended in the 'socialist fatherland.'*

*"Such is the beautiful kingdom of socialism to which the dictatorship of the Communist party has brought us. We have received State Socialism with*



*economic organs and the Cheka"* but *"the assemblies held at factories to elect delegates to the commission bitterly denounced the Communists"* and elected 270 members (less than 10 were Communists). This commission *"believed a **political** solution offered the best answer to putting an end to workers' economic distress … the workers' delegates … demanded the freeing of political prisoners, new elections to the soviets and to all labour organisations, independent unions, and freedom of speech, the press, and assembly."* These were identical to the demands raised in Kronstadt at the same time. The Bolsheviks *"resolved to shut down the commission before it could issue a public statement calling for free elections and independent labour organisations"* and *"set up a Provincial Revolutionary Committee (**gubrevkom**), which introduced martial law both in the city and the garrison. It arrested the ringleaders of the workers' movement"* and *"the police crackdown depressed the workers' movement and activities of the rival socialist parties"*. The Cheka *"sentenced 219 people to death and others to various prison terms. It also expanded its network of informants"* while the *"next month the Cheka shot another 62 individuals and sentenced 205 more to jail.* The local party reported to Moscow that the *"all but general strike was liquidated after tremendous efforts of the entire party and Soviet apparatus."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, pp. 387–9]

Another revolt took place in Ekaterinoslavl (in the Ukraine) in May 1921 which the local communists called a *"little Kronstadt."* It started in the railway workshops and became *"quickly politicised,"* with the strike committee raising a *"series of political ultimatums that were very similar in content to the demands of the Kronstadt rebels."* The strike *"spread to the other workshops. The very close similarity of the demands of the Ekaterinoslavl workers to those of the Kronstadt rebels is evidence of their consciousness of being part of a wider movement but even more impressive is the speed and effectiveness with which the strike spread."* On June 1st the main large Ekaterinoslavl fac-

tories joined the strike. The strike was spread via the use of trains and telegraph and soon an area up to fifty miles around the town was affected. The local Communist Party leader was instructed *"to put down the rebellion without mercy ... Use Budennyi's cavalry."* The strike was finally ended by the use of the Cheka, using mass arrests and shootings, with 15 workers immediately shot and their bodies dumped in the River Dnepr. After a trial of 20 strike leaders, the communists held a series of meetings amongst the workers at which they *"spoke at length about the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt and the treatment meted out to the rebels"* and *"warned the workers of the consequences of further protest."* After a guarantee of immunity, a debate was held with Cheka agents hidden in the crowds *"to note the names of those workers who supported anti-Soviet speeches"* but the response to one such speech *"was so overwhelming they could do very little."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, pp. 171–4]

Thus the claim that the Kronstadt resolution purely reflected the interests of the peasantry is refuted. The Kronstadters (like the Petrograd and other workers) raised economic and political demands in 1921 just as they had four years earlier when they overthrew the Tsar. Which, again, refutes the logic of defenders of Bolshevism. For example, Wright excelled himself when he argued the following:

> *"The supposition that the soldiers and sailors could venture upon an insurrection under an abstract political slogan of 'free soviets' is absurd in itself. It is doubly absurd in the view of the fact [!] that the rest of the Kronstadt garrison consisted of backward and passive people who could not be used in the civil war. These people could have been moved to an insurrection only by profound economic needs and interests. These were the needs and interests of the fathers and brothers of these sailors and soldiers, that*



production. Little wonder he states that the *"political group closest to the rebels in temperament and outlook were the SR Maximalists"* and *"[o]n nearly every important point the Kronstadt program, as set forth in the rebel* **Izvestiia***, coincided with that of the Maximalists."* [Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–2]

This can be quickly seen from reading both the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution and the Kronstadt newspaper ***Izvestiia*** (see **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 183–204). The political continuity is striking between 1917 and 1921, as can be seen from the article *"So-Called Socialism"* published in its last issue on March 16th:

> *"In making the October Revolution, the sailors and Red soldiers, the workers and peasants, spilled their blood for the power of the Soviets, for the building of a workers' republic.*
>
> *"The Communist Party paid close attention to the aspirations of the masses. Having inscribed on its banners attractive slogans which aroused the enthusiasm of the workers, it swept them into the struggle and promised them that it would lead them into the beautiful kingdom of socialism which only the Bolsheviks knew how to build ... It seemed as if the time of free labour in the fields, factories and workshops had come. It seemed as if power were going to pass into the hands of the workers ... Then, feeling themselves strong enough, the Communists progressively eliminated from power first the socialists of other tendencies, then they pushed workers and peasants out of many state posts, while continuing to govern in their name.*
>
> *"In this way the Communists have brought in the rule of the commissars, with all the despotism of personal power. Against all reason and contrary to the*

*ements most closely linked to the Bolsheviks"* among the anarchists, but such an analysis cannot be taken seriously considering the influence of the anarchists in Kronstadt. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] For example, a member of the Petrograd Committee and the Helsingfors party organisation in 1917 recalled that the Anarchist-Communists had great influence in Kronstadt. Moreover, according to historian Alexander Rabinowitch, they had an *"undeniable capacity to influence the course of events"* and he speaks of *"the influential Anarcho-Syndicalist Communists [of Kronstadt] under Iarchuk."* Indeed, anarchists *"played a significant role in starting the July uprising"* in 1917. [**Prelude to Revolution**, p. 62, p. 63, p. 187 and p. 138] This confirms Paul Avrich's comments that the *"influence of the anarchists ... had always been strong within the fleet"* and *"the spirit of anarchism"* had been *"powerful in Kronstadt in 1917"* (it *"had by no means dissipated"* in 1921). [Arvich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 168 and p. 169]

A similar analysis of the Maximalists would produce the same results for Trotsky's claims. Paul Avrich provides a useful summary of their politics. He notes the Maximalists occupied *"a place in the revolutionary spectrum between the Left SR's and the anarchists while sharing elements of both."* They *"preached a doctrine of total revolution"* and called for a *"'toilers' soviet republic' founded on freely elected soviets, with a minimum of central state authority. Politically, this was identical with the objective of the Kronstadters [in 1921], and 'Power to the soviets but not the parties' had originally been a Maximalist rallying-cry."* Economically, the parallels *"are no less striking."* They denounced grain requisitioning and demanded that *"all the land be turned over to the peasants."* For industry they rejected the Bolshevik theory and practice of *"workers' control"* over bourgeois administrators in favour of the *"social organisation of production and its systematic direction by representatives of the toiling people."* Opposed to nationalisation and centralised state management, they argued for socialisation and workers' self-management of



> *is, of peasants as traders in food products and raw materials. In other words the mutiny was the expression of the petty bourgeoisie's reaction against the difficulties and privations imposed by the proletarian revolution. Nobody can deny this class character of the two camps."* [*"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 111–2]

Of course, no worker or peasant could possibly reach beyond a trade union consciousness by their own efforts, as Lenin so thoughtfully argued in **What is to be Done?** (see section H.5). Neither could the experience of two revolutions have an impact on anyone, nor the extensive political agitation and propaganda of years of struggle. Indeed, the sailors were so backward that they had no *"profound economic needs and interests"* of their own but rather fought for *"the needs and interests of the fathers and brothers"*! Yet, according to Trotsky, *"[t]hey themselves did not clearly understand that what their fathers and brothers needed first of all was free trade."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 92] And these were the sailors the Bolsheviks desired to operate some of the most advanced warships in the world?

Sadly for Wright's assertions history has proven him wrong time and time again. Working people have constantly raised political demands which were far in advance of those of the "professional" revolutionaries (a certain German and the Paris Commune springs to mind, never mind a certain Russian and the soviets). The fact that the Kronstadt sailors not only *"venture[d] upon an insurrection under an abstract political slogan of 'free soviets'"* but actually **created** one (the conference of delegates) goes unmentioned. Likewise, it is forgotten that the motivation for the resolution was solidarity with the strikes in Petrograd and so it also, naturally enough, included the dissatisfaction of both the workers and the peasants. For the Kronstadters, it was a case of the needs of **all** the toilers and so their

resolution reflected the needs and demands of both. That two other worker revolts — waged by that proletarian weapon, the strike — also raised similar demands shows the baselessness of Wright's assertions.

Thus claims that the Kronstadt demands reflected peasant needs is mistaken. In fact, they reflected the needs of the whole working population, including the urban working class who raised these demands continually throughout the Civil War period during their strikes. Simply put, the policies of the Bolsheviks as regards food did not work and were, in fact, counter-productive — as many of the Russian proletariat recognised.

So to claim that Kronstadt solely reflected the plight or interests of the peasantry is nonsense, whether that claim was made in 1938, 1991 or now. Yet there is an irony in such assertions for, after all, the very demands which Trotskyists claims show the revolt's peasant nature — point 8 (withdrawn of roadblocks) and point 11 (free action for peasants who do not use wage-labour) — were quickly agreed to by the Bolshevik authorities. During the revolt Zinoviev announced various *"concessions to the workers' most pressing demands"* which included that *"plans were afoot to abandon the forcible seizure of grain from the peasants in favour of a tax in kind ... which would at least partially restore freedom of trade between town and country"* plus *"the withdrawal of all roadblocks from the whole of the Petrograd province."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 49] Surely, then, it was the Bolsheviks who represented the most "backward" elements of the peasantry? Moreover, given that the New Economic Policy (NEP) allowed wage labour does this not mean the Bolsheviks represented the interests of the kulak?

## 5 What lies did the Bolsheviks spread about Kronstadt?

From the start, the Bolsheviks lied about the uprising. Indeed, Kronstadt provides a classic example of how Lenin and



programme of socialisation but it is hardly an expression of representatives of *"the city petty bourgeoisie."* Let us quote one:

> *"I am an anarchist because contemporary society is divided into two opposing classes: the impoverished and dispossessed workers and peasants ... and the rich men, kings and presidents ...*
>
> *"I am an anarchist because I scorn and detest all authority, since all authority is founded on injustice, exploitation and compulsion over the human personality. Authority dehumanises the individual and makes him a slave.*
>
> *"I am an opponent of private property when it is held by individual capitalist parasites, for private property is theft ...*
>
> *"I am an anarchist because I believe only in the creative powers and independence of a united proletariat and not of the leaders of political parties of various kinds.*
>
> *"I am an anarchist because I believe that the present struggle between the classes will end only when the toiling masses, organised as a class, gain their true interests and conquer, by means of a violent social revolution, all the riches of the earth ... having abolished all institutions of government and authority, the oppressed class must proclaim a society of free producers ... The popular masses themselves will conduct their affairs on equal and communal lines in free communities."* [N. Petrov, quoted by Paul Avrich, **Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 35–6]

Very "petty bourgeois"! Of course Trotsky could argue that this represented the minority of *"real revolutionaries,"* the *"el-*

Anchor square to pass the ***Petropavlovsk*** resolution — just as happened before in 1917. And as in 1917, they elected a Conference of Delegates to manage the affairs of the Kronstadt. In other words, the sailors re-introduced exactly the same political forms they practised in 1917.

These facts suggest that any claims that the majority of sailors, soldiers and workers in Kronstadt had changed politically are unfounded. This, ironically enough, is confirmed by Trotsky.

Trotsky's memory (which, after all, seems to be the basis of most of his and his followers' arguments) did play tricks on him. He states that there *"were no Mensheviks at all in Kronstadt."* As for the anarchists, *"most"* of them *"represented the city petty bourgeoisie and stood at a lower level than the SRs."* The Left SRs *"based themselves on the peasant part of the fleet and of the shore garrison."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] So we have Trotsky arguing that the majority of the *"pride and glory"* of the revolution in 1917 voted for groups of a *"lower level"* than the Bolsheviks (and quite a few for a party, the Mensheviks, Trotsky said did not exist there).

Looking at the politics of these groups, we discover some strange inconsistencies which undermine the validity of Trotsky's claims. For example, in the beginning of 1918, *"the working population of Kronstadt, after debating the subject at many meetings, decided to proceed to socialise dwelling places ... A final monster meeting definitely instructed several members of the Soviet — Left Social-Revolutionaries and Anarcho-Syndicalists — to raise the question at the next [soviet] plenary session."* While the Bolshevik delegates tried to postpone the decision (arguing in the soviet that the decision was too important and should be decided by the central government) the *"Left Social-Revolutionaries, Maximalists and Anarcho-Syndicalists asked for an immediate discussion and carried the vote."* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 460–1] This fits in exactly with the communist-anarchist



Trotsky used slander against their political opponents. Both attempted to paint the revolt as being organised and lead by the Whites. As Paul Avrich notes, *"every effort was made to discredit the rebels"* and that the *"chief object of Bolshevik propaganda was to show that the revolt was not a spontaneous outbreak of mass protest but a new counterrevolutionary conspiracy, following the pattern established during the Civil War. According to the Soviet press, the sailors, influenced by Mensheviks and SR's in their ranks, had shamelessly cast their lot with the 'White Guards,' led by a former tsarist general named Kozlovsky ... This, in turn, was said to be part of a carefully laid plot hatched in Paris by Russian emigres in league with French counterintelligence."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88 and p. 95]

Lenin, for example, argued in a report to the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party on March 8th that *"White Guard generals were very active over there. There is ample proof of this"* and that it was *"the work of Social Revolutionaries and White Guard emigres."* The first government statement on the Kronstadt events was entitled *"The Revolt of Ex-General Kozlovsky and the Warship Petropavlovsk"* and stated that the revolt was *"expected by, and undoubtedly prepared by, French counterintelligence"* and that on the morning of March 2 *"the group around ex-General Kozlovsky ... had openly appeared on the scene ... [he] and three of his officers ... have openly assumed the role of insurgents. Under their direction ... a number of ... responsible individuals, have been arrested... Behind the SRs again stands a tsarist general."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 44 and pp. 65–6]

The reality was different and the Bolsheviks knew it. Victor Serge, a French illegalist-anarchist turned Bolshevik, later recounted how he was first told that *"Kronstadt is in the hands of the Whites"* and that *"[s]mall posters stuck on the walls in the still empty streets proclaimed that the counter-revolutionary General Kozlovsky had seized Kronstadt through conspiracy and treason."* However, the *"truth seeped through little by little, past the*

*smokescreen put out by the Press, which was positively berserk with lies"* (indeed, it *"lied systematically"*). He found out that the Bolshevik's official line was *"an atrocious lie"* and that *"the sailors had mutinied, it was a naval revolt led by the Soviet."* However, the *"worse of it all was that we were paralysed by the official falsehoods. It had never happened before that our Party should lie to us like this. 'It's necessary for the benefit of the public,' said some ... the strike [in Petrograd] was now practically general"* This confirms the obvious: if the Bolshevik leaders had considered the revolt to be counter-revolutionary (passing a *"SR-Black Hundreds"* resolution as Zinoviev informed Lenin on the 28th of February) then why were Kalinin and Kuzmin sent to Kronstadt the next day to parley with the sailors? Is it really conceivable that leading Bolsheviks could safely undertake an official visit to the headquarters of a counter-revolution? Serge suggested that it *"was probably Kalinin who, on his return to Petrograd, invented 'the White General Kozlovsky'"* for he had attended the initial mass meeting at Kronstadt and *"whose brutal bungling provoked the rebellion"* by *"treat[ing] them as rogues and traitors merely out for themselves, and threatened them with merciless reprisals."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, pp. 124–6 and p. 127]

Thus the claim that the Kronstadt rebellion was the work of Whites and led by a Tsarist General was a lie — a lie deliberately and consciously spread. This was concocted to weaken support for the rebellion in Petrograd and in the Red Army, to help isolate it. Lenin admitted as much on the 15th of March when he stated at the Tenth Party Conference that in Kronstadt *"they do not want either the whiteguards or our government"*. This did not, of course, stop him proclaiming earlier at this conference that the revolt was *"bound up initially with the whiteguards"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 228 and p. 185]

If you agree with Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci that *"to tell the truth is a communist and revolutionary act"* then it is clear that the Bolsheviks in 1921 (and for a long time previ-



egates (7 percent), 15 Anarchists (5 percent) and 6 Mensheviks (2 percent). The soviet elected a Left SR as its chairman and in March it elected its three delegates to the Fourth Congress of Soviets, with the Bolshevik delegate receiving the lowest vote (behind a Maximalist and an anarchist with 124, 95 and 79 votes respectively). By the April 1918 elections, as in most of Russia, the Bolsheviks found their support had decreased. Only 53 Bolsheviks were elected (29 per cent) as compared to 41 SR Maximalists (22 percent), 39 Left SRs (21 percent), 14 Menshevik Internationalists (8 percent), 10 Anarchists (5 percent) and 24 non-party delegates (13 percent). Indeed, Bolshevik influence at Kronstadt was so weak that on April 18th, the Kronstadt soviet denounced the Bolsheviks attack against the anarchists in Moscow, April 12th by a vote of 81 to 57. The *"Bolshevisation"* of Kronstadt *"and the destruction of its multi-party democracy was not due to internal developments and local Bolshevik strength, but decreed from outside and imposed by force."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 134, pp. 182–4 and p. 186]

Thus the dominant political perspective in 1917 was one of *"sovietism"* — namely, all power to the soviets and not to parties. This was the main demand of the 1921 uprising. Politically, Kronstadt had not changed: *"What is impressive is that Kronstadt seems to have changed so little throughout the period from 1905 to 1921. Moreover, the argument of ideological degeneration was used against the sailors as early as the mutiny of October 1918, when it was quite implausible"*. [Nicolas Walter, **The Anarchist Past and Other Essays**, p. 138]

In addition to the soviet, there was the *"general meetings in Anchor square, which were held nearly every day."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57] The Kronstadt Soviet was itself constantly pressurised by these mass meetings. For example, on 25 May 1917, a large crowd, inspired by Bolshevik and anarchist speakers, marched to the Naval Assembly and forced the leaders of the Soviet to rescind their agreement with the more moderate Petrograd Soviet. In February 1921, the Kronstadt rebels met in

*loyal stronghold of the Bolshevik regime".* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 179] This confirms Trotsky's recollections from 1938 that *"the Bolsheviks constituted less than one-half of the Kronstadt Soviet. The majority consisted of SRs and anarchists."* [*"Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 86] Indeed, in 1917 Trotsky even stated that the Kronstadters *"are anarchists."* [quoted by Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 98]

Kronstadt was in favour of soviet power and, unsurprisingly, supported those parties which claimed to support that goal, which explains its initial support for the Bolshevik regime. Yet internally, the political climate in Kronstadt was *"very close to the politics of the Socialist Revolutionary Maximalists, a left-wing split-off from the SR Party, politically located somewhere between the Left SRs and the Anarchists."* [Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 194] In Kronstadt this group was led by Anatolii Lamanov and *"it rejected party factionalism"* and *"stood for pure sovietism"*. They sought an immediate agrarian and urban social revolution, calling for the *"socialisation of power, of the land and of the factories"* to be organised by a federation of soviets based on direct elections and instant recall, as a first step towards socialism. [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] The similarities with anarchism are clear.

At the time of the October revolution, the Kronstadt soviet did not have a Bolshevik majority. The soviet elections in August saw the Bolsheviks receive 96 seats, as did the Non-Party grouping, the Left-SRs receiving 73, the Menshevik Internationalists 13 and anarchists 7. Kronstadt's delegates to the third All-Russian Congress of Soviets were a Left-SR (157 votes), a SR-Maximalist (147 votes) and a Bolshevik (109 votes). It was only in the January elections in 1918 that the Bolsheviks improved their position, gaining 139 deputies compared to their previous 96. In spite of securing their highest ever vote during the era of multi-party soviets the Bolsheviks only gained 46 percent of seats in the soviet. Also elected at this time were 64 SRs (21 percent), 56 Maximalists (19 percent), 21 non-party del-



ously) were not communist or revolutionary (and as the subsequent Leninist accounts of Kronstadt show, Bolshevism is still neither). [quoted by Gwyn A. Williams, **Proletarian Order**, p. 193] In stark contrast to the Bolsheviks, the Kronstadt paper ***Izvestiia*** published Bolshevik leaflets, paper articles and radio broadcasts so that the inhabitants of the island could see exactly what lies the Bolsheviks were telling about them.

So by the 1950s even Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky's somewhat uncritical biographer, had to admit that the Bolsheviks *"denounced the men of Kronstadt as counter-revolutionary mutineers, led by a White general. The denunciation appears to have been groundless."* [**The Prophet Armed**, p. 511] Yet this did not stop the Trotskyist editors of **Kronstadt** showing the same contempt for their readers as the Bolsheviks showed for the truth. They include an *"Introduction"* to their work by Pierre Frank in which he argues that the Bolsheviks merely *"state that [White] generals, counterrevolutionaries, sought to manipulate the insurgents"* and that anarchists *"turn this into a claim that these generals had launched the rebellion and that [quoting Ida Mett] 'Lenin, Trotsky and the whole Party leadership knew quite well that this was no mere "generals' revolt,"'"* . This apparently shows how *"[a]nything having to do with the facts"* gets treated by such authors, who *"merely distort the Bolsheviks' positions."* Somewhat amazingly, Franks states this in the same work that quotes Lenin actually stating on March 8th, 1921, that *"the familiar figures of White Guard generals"* were *"very quickly revealed,"* that *"White generals were very active"* in Kronstadt, that it was *"quite clear that it is the work of Social Revolutionaries and White Guard emigres"* and that Kronstadt was *"bound up initially"* with *"the White Guards."* Lenin is also quoted, on March 9th, arguing that *"the Paris newspapers reported the events two weeks before they actually occurred, and a White general appeared on the scene. That is what actually happened."* Frank makes this claim in spite of the book it appears in including the government statement

entitled *"The Revolt of Ex-General Kozlovsky and the Warship Petropavlovsk"* which states on *"the morning of March 2 the group around ex-General Kozlovsky (chief of artillery) and three of his officers ... have openly assumed the role of insurgents."*. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22, pp. 44–5, p. 48 and p. 66–7]

Nor can it be said that Ida Mett claims that the Lenin and Trotsky had said a general had "launched" the revolt. She quotes Moscow radio as stating that the revolt (*"Just like other White Guard insurrections"*) was in fact *"the mutiny of ex-General Kozlovsky and the crew of the battle ship 'Petropavlovsk'"* and it was *"clear that the Kronstadt revolt is being led from Paris. The French counter espionage is mixed up in the whole affair ... The Socialist Revolutionaries, who have their headquarters in Paris, are preparing the ground for an insurrection against the Soviet power. The ground prepared, their real master, the Tsarist general appeared"*. [quoted by Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] It seems strange that Frank complains that others *"distort"* the Bolsheviks position when, firstly, the person he quotes does not and, secondly, he distorts that persons' actual position. As can be seen, Mett provided evidence for her claim — the quote provided heads the section from which Frank cherry-picks — yet Frank fails to inform his readers of this before quoting her on how *"Lenin, Trotsky and the whole Party leadership knew quite well that this was no mere 'generals' revolt."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

After providing evidence that the Bolsheviks had blamed the revolt on a White conspiracy, she **then** turns to General Kozlovsky whom the Bolsheviks indicated by name as its leader and had outlawed in the proclamation of March 2nd. Who was he and what part did he play? Mett sums up the evidence:

> "He was an artillery general, and had been one of the first to defect to the Bolsheviks. He seemed devoid of any capacity as a leader. At the time of the insurrection he happened to be in command



*lads fresh from the villages and wanting in long experience of industrial life and political activity. It was not completely unknown for Bolshevik spokesmen to come close to admitting this."* [**The Bolshevik Party in Revolution**, p. 44] It was the industrial "raw recruits" who took part in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, helping to raise and formulate demands as well as organising soviets, strikes and demonstrations and raising slogans which were to the left of the Bolsheviks. Does this process somehow grind to a halt when these "raw recruits" oppose the vanguard party? Of course not.

In short, this Trotsky inspired sociology has been debunked — and misses the point. Sadly, we have to address it in order to refute common-place Leninist arguments against Kronstadt and expose how willing they are to selectively quote from the sources they use. As we show in the next section, the political composition of the Kronstadt rebels, like their class composition, was basically unchanged in 1921 when compared to that which pre-dominated in 1917.

## 9 Was Kronstadt different politically in 1921?

As we indicated in the last section, over 90% of the Kronstadt sailors on the two battleships which were the catalyst for the rebellion for whom years of enlistment are known had been there since 1917. However, given that most Leninists mean "support the party" by the term "class consciousness," it is useful to compare the political perspectives of Kronstadt in 1917 to that raised in the 1921 revolt. As will soon become clear, the political ideas expressed in 1921 were essentially similar to those popular in 1917. This similarly also proves the continuity between the Red sailors of 1917 and the rebels of 1921.

Kronstadt in 1917 was **never** dominated by the Bolsheviks, they were always a minority and a *"radical populist coalition of Maximalists and Left SRs held sway, albeit precariously, **within** Kronstadt and its Soviet"* while *"**externally** Kronstadt was a*

*such great numbers during the September 1920 re-registration."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 154–5]

Rees, needless to say, ignores all this and how it shows the political and personnel continuity of the Kronstadt rebellion. Ultimately, though, the assumption that the sailors could not raise revolutionary political demands if they were "raw recruits" only makes sense if we subscribe to Lenin's dictum that the working class, by its own efforts, can only reach a trade union consciousness (i.e. that toiling people cannot liberate themselves). The bulk of the sailors at the start of 1921 had been there since 1917 but even if this were not the case and we assume that a majority of the sailors at Kronstadt were recent recruits, does this invalidate the rebellion? Of course not. After all, the Red sailors of 1917 were once raw recruits. They had become politicised over time by debate, discussion and struggle. So had the workers in Petrograd and elsewhere. Would Leninists have denounced strikers in 1905 or 1917 if it were discovered that most of them were recent peasant arrivals in the city? Of course not — they do so with regards to Kronstadt only because the rebels in question are facing Lenin and Trotsky.

Ironically, the Bolsheviks were simply repeating old Menshevik arguments once raised against them. Between 1910 and 1914, the industrial workforce in Russia grew from 1,793,000 workers to 2,400,000. At the same time, the influence of the Bolsheviks grew at Menshevik expense which the latter considered as *"consequence of the changes that were taking place in the character of urban Russia"* with peasants joining the labour force. [*"Introduction"*, **The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution**, Abraham Archer (ed.), p. 24] The Mensheviks argued that the Bolsheviks gained their influence from such worker-peasant industrial *"raw recruits"* and not from the genuine working class. [Orlando Figes, **A People's Tragedy**, p. 830] As Robert Service noted, *"Menshevik critics were fond of carping that most Bolshevik newcomers were young*



of the artillery at Kronstadt. The communist commander of the fortress had defected. Kozlovsky, according to the rules prevailing in the fortress, had to replace him. He, in fact, refused, claiming that as the fortress was now under the jurisdiction of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, the old rules no longer applied. Kozlovsky remained, it is true, in Kronstadt, but only as an artillery specialist. Moreover, after the fall of Kronstadt, in certain interviews granted to the Finnish press, Kozlovsky accused the sailors of having wasted precious time on issues other than the defence of the fortress. He explained this in terms of their reluctance to resort to bloodshed. Later, other officers of the garrison were also to accuse the sailors of military incompetence, and of complete lack of confidence in their technical advisers. Kozlovsky was the only general to have been present at Kronstadt. This was enough for the Government to make use of his name.

"The men of Kronstadt did, up to a point, make use of the military know how of certain officers in the fortress at the time. Some of these officers may have given the men advice out of sheer hostility to the Bolsheviks. But in their attack on Kronstadt, the Government forces were also making use of ex Tsarist officers. On the one side there were Kozlovsky, Salomianov, and Arkannihov; On the other, ex-Tsarist officers and specialists of the old regime, such as Toukhatchevsky. Kamenev, and Avrov. On neither side were these officers an independent force." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 156–7]

These facts have been well-known since 1921 but they are not good enough for Trotskyists. Wright, for example, would

have none of it and after quoting Alexander Berkman — that there was *"a former general, Kozlovsky, in Kronstadt. It was Trotsky who had placed him there as an Artillery specialist. He played no role whatever in the Kronstadt events."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69] — he goes on to protest that this is not true. As evidence, Wright quotes from an interview by Kozlovsky and states that *"[f]rom the lips of the counterrevolutionary general himself … we get the unambiguous declaration that* ***from the very first day****, he and his colleagues had openly associated themselves with the mutiny, had elaborated the 'best' plans to capture Petrograd … If the plan failed it was only because Kozlovsky and his colleagues were unable to convince the 'political leaders', i.e. his SR allies [!], that the moment was propitious for exposing their true visage and program."* [*"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 119] In other words, because the Provisional Revolutionary Committee **failed** to take the advice of the military specialists it proves that, in fact, they were in league. That is very impressive. We wonder if the Kronstadters **had** taken their advice then this would have proved that they were not, in fact, in league with them after all?

Every non-Leninist account agrees that Kozlovsky played no part in the revolt. Paul Avrich notes that when trouble erupted *"the Bolsheviks at once denounced him as the evil genius of the movement,"* immediately *"outlawed"* him and seized his family as hostages. He confirms that the military specialists *"threw themselves into the task of planning military operations on behalf of the insurrection"* and that Kozlovsky had refused to succeed as the commander of the fortress after the old one had fled to the mainland (as demanded by military rules). He stresses that *"the officers remained in a purely advisory capacity throughout the rebellion. They had no share, as far as one can tell, in initiating or directing the revolt, or in framing its political program, which was alien to their way of thinking."* Their role *"was confined to providing technical advice, just as it*



*areas particularly friendly to the Makhno guerrillas and with less than 2 percent of Bolsheviks in its ranks."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61] In other words, we know the origin of **one** other unit at Kronstadt, not the class *"composition"* of *"some of the other units"* there. Ignoring this, there are a few issues with Rees's use of this fact. First, Rees gained his information on the 160th Rifle Regiment from Fedotoff-White's work but does not think it important to note that he also indicated that Communists numbered less than 2 per cent of metal-workers in Petrograd and only 4 per cent of 2,200 employed in metal works in Moscow. [Fedotoff-White, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132] As such the low figure for Communists in the 160th Rifle Regiment does not tell us much about its class composition. Second, as Fedotoff-White notes, while *"the soldiers were also disaffected and had no love of the Communists and the commissars,"* they were *"unable to formulate their grievances clearly and delineate the issues at stake … They did not have it in them to formulate a plan of action. All that was done at Kronstadt was the work of the bluejackets [the sailors], who were the backbone of the movement."* If, as Rees argues, that new recruits explain the uprising, then how can he explain the differences between the army and navy? He cannot. The difference can be explained only in terms of what Rees is at pains to deny, namely the existence and influence of sailors who had been there since 1917. As Fedotoff-White speculates, *"the younger element among the seamen"* would *"easily [fall] under the spell of the … older men they served with on board ships"* and of the *"large number of old-ex-sea men, employed in the industrial enterprises of Kronstadt."* He notes that *"a good many"* of the rebels *"had had ample experience in organisational and political work since 1917. A number had long-standing associations with Anarchists and the Socialist Revolutionaries of the Left."* Thus the *"survival of the libertarian pattern of 1917 … made it possible for the bluejackets not only to formulate, but carry out a plan of action, no doubt under a certain amount of influence of the Anarchists, and those who had left the party in*

edged that the Kronstadt demands were not reproduced by any peasant insurrection). The political aspects of these ideas reflected the political traditions of Kronstadt, which were not, in the main, Bolshevik. The sailors supported soviet power in 1917, not party power, and they again raised that demand in 1921. In other words, the **political** composition of the garrison was the same as in 1917 (see section 9). Rees is clearly clutching at straws.

The fact that the class composition of the sailors was similar in 1917 and in 1921 **and** that the bulk of the sailors at the heart of the revolt were veterans of 1917, means that Trotskyists can only fall back on their ideological definition of class. This perspective involves defining a specific "proletarian" political position (i.e. the politics of Bolshevism) and arguing that anyone who does not subscribe to that position is "petty-bourgeois" regardless of their actual position in society (i.e. their class position). As Ida Mett suggests, *"[w]hen Trotsky asserts that all those supporting the government were genuinely proletarian and progressive, whereas all others represented the peasant counter-revolution, we have a right to ask of him that he present us with a serious factual analysis in support of his contention."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195]

Given the political aspects of the Kronstadt demands we can safely argue that even if the rebellion had been the work of recent recruits they obviously had been influenced by the veteran sailors who remained. They, like the peasant-workers of 1905 and 1917, would have been able to raise their own political demands and ideas while, at the same time, listening to those among them with more political experience. Unsurprisingly, this is what did happen.

Rees, while studiously ignoring the hard data provided by Gelzter and repeated by Farber, comments that while we did not know the composition of the sailors, we did *"know about the composition of some of the other units based at Kronstadt, like the 2,5000 Ukrainians of the 160th Rifle Regiment, recruited from*



*had been under the Bolsheviks."* The Provisional Revolutionary Committee *"showed its distrust of the specialists by repeatedly rejecting their counsel, however sound and appropriate it might be."* And, of course, *"[f]or all the government's accusations that Kronstadt was a conspiracy of White Guard generals, ex-tsarist officers played a much more prominent role in the attacking force than among the defenders."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99, p. 100, p. 101 and p. 203]

Kozlovsky before the revolt *"had served the Bolsheviks so loyally that on 20 October 1920 the chief commander of the Baltic Fleet … had awarded him a watch 'for courage and feat of arms in the battle against Yudenich'"* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 219] This officially confirmed the award made on the 3rd of December, 1919, by the Petrograd Soviet *"for military feats and energetic activities during the attack of the Yudenich bands on Petrograd."* Indeed, he was one of the first generals who entered into service of the Bolsheviks and the Kronstadt soviet had elected him Chief-of-Staff of the fortress in the wake of the February revolution in 1917. All this did not stop the Bolsheviks claiming on March 3rd, 1921, that Kozlovsky was a *"supporter of Yudenich and Kolchak"*. [quoted by Israel Getzler, *"The Communist Leaders' Role in the Kronstadt Tragedy of 1921 in the Light of Recently Published Archival Documents"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43 and p. 31]

Berkman was clearly correct and Wright, wrong. Kozlovsky took no role in the revolt and the Trotskyists join the Stalinists in the *"historical falsification [which] had singled out [him] as the leader of the rebellion."* What he did do was offer his expertise to the Kronstadt rebels (just as he had to the Bolsheviks) and make plans which were rejected. If associating yourself with an event and making plans which are rejected by those involved equals a role in that event then Trotsky's role in the Spanish revolution equalled that of Durruti's. Likewise, no Trotskyist concludes that if Tsarist Generals providing advice makes something counter-revolutionary, then the Red Army

must also have been. After all, the Bolshevik regime gave command of the assault on Kronstadt to Toukhatchevsky, a professional soldier and former Tsarist officer whose social background would have ensured he would harbour no sympathies — unlike many of the troops he commanded — for the socialist ideas being raised by the rebels and who would not think twice at placing machine-guns behind the Red Army forces to ensure their obedience. Indeed, after crushing Kronstadt he *"turned to his next task — the suppression of the peasant rising in the Tambov and the adjoining provinces"*. [George Katkov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40 and p. 66]

It should be noted that Bolsheviks slandering their opponents was hardly new. For example, Serge, a few pages before his account of the Kronstadt rebellion in his memoirs, mentions *"the strenuous calumnies put out by the Communist Press"* about Nestor Makhno, *"which went so far as to accuse him of signing pacts with the Whites at the very moment when he was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against them"* which suggests that Kronstadt was hardly the first time the Party had lied to them. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 124–6 and p. 122] Sadly, he fails to mention that he himself contributed to the Bolshevik lie machine about Kronstadt by, for example, publically repeating the Soviet regime's falsifications about the rebels in March 1922. [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, pp. 18–9] Nor was this an isolated case — he also repeated the usual Bolshevik slanders against the Makhnovists in 1920 before, in 1938, admitting such claims were *"not true"* [Victor Serge, **Anarchists Never Surrender**, p. 169 and p. 223] Likewise, a revolt in Saratov in May 1918 saw the party depict it *"as the outgrowth of the actions of its **collective** enemies: White Guards, tsarist officer organisations, Black Hundreds, Cossacks, Czechoslovaks, and ... Right SRs and Mensheviks. But the classified report of the Extraordinary Investigative Commission charged with studying the insurrection saw it as a spontaneous, disorganised movement caused by excessive use of force that turned the city's inhabitants against Soviet*



> *only 6.8 per cent had been recruited in the years 1918–21 ... of the approximately 10,000 recruits who were supposed to be trained to replenish the Kronstadt garrison, only a few more than 1,000 had arrived by the end of 1920, and those had been stationed not in Kronstadt, but in Petrograd, where they were supposed to be trained."* [**Before Stalinism**, pp. 192–3]

Yet Rees bemoans Farber for not looking at the Bolshevik membership figures! Yes, assumptions and likely conclusions drawn from assumptions are more important than hard statistical evidence.

After stating *"if, for the sake of argument, we accept Sam Farber's interpretation of the evidence"* (evidence Rees refuses to inform the reader of) Rees then tries to save his case. He states Farber's *"point only has any validity if we take the statistics in isolation. But in reality this change [!] in composition acted on a fleet whose ties with the peasantry had recently been strengthened in other ways. In particular, the Kronstadt sailors had recently been granted leave for the first time since the civil war. Many returned to their villages and came face to face with the condition of the countryside and the trials of the peasantry faced with food detachments."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62] Yet such an argument has **nothing to do with Rees original case.** Let us not forget that he argued that the **class** composition of the garrison had changed, **not** that its **political** composition had changed. Faced with overwhelming evidence against his case, he not only does not inform his readers of it, he changes his original argument. Very impressive.

So, what of this argument? Hardly an impressive one. Let us not forget that the revolt came about in response to the wave of strikes in Petrograd, **not** a peasant revolt. Moreover, the demands of the revolt predominantly reflected worker demands, **not** peasant ones (as noted in section 4, Rees himself acknowl-

It would have been very easy for Rees to inform his readers of the real facts concerning the changing composition of the Kronstadt garrison. He could quoted Getzler's work on this subject. As noted above, Getzler demonstrates that the crew of the battleships ***Petropavlovsk*** and ***Sevastopol***, which formed the core of the rising, were recruited into the navy before 1917, only 6.9% having been recruited between 1918 and 1921. These figures are on the same page as the earlier quotes Rees uses but are ignored by him. Or, then again, he could have reported Samuel Farber's summary of Getzler's (and others) evidence. Rees rather lamely notes that Farber *"does not look at the figures for the composition of the Bolsheviks"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62] Why should he when he has the appropriate figures for the sailors? Here is Farber's account of the facts:

> *"this [Trotsky's class composition] interpretation has failed to meet the historical test of the growing and relatively recent scholarship on the Russian Revolution ... In fact, in 1921, a smaller proportion of Kronstadt sailors were of peasant social origin than was the case of the Red Army troops supporting the government ... recently published data strongly suggest that the class composition of the ships and naval base had probably remained unchanged since before the Civil War. We now know that, given the war-time difficulties of training new people in the technical skills required in Russia's ultra-modern battleships, very few replacements had been sent to Kronstadt to take the place of the dead and injured sailors. Thus, at the end of the Civil War in late 1920, no less than 93.9 per cent of the members of the crews of the* **Petropavlovsk** *and the* **Sevastopol** *... were recruited into the navy before and during the 1917 revolutions. In fact, 59 per cent of these crews joined the navy in the years 1914–16, while*



*power, which lacked a popular mandate."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 54]

Finally, we must note that in the late 1920s the Stalinists tried to link the Trotskyist Opposition to a White General. Thus the *"charge that the Opposition had ties with White Guards was trumpeted"* and, while baseless, *"the objective of further discrediting the Opposition had been accomplished. 'The myth about the "Wrangel officer" is being broadcast through the land, poisoning the minds of a million party members and tens of millions of non party men', reported the Opposition leaders."* [Tony Cliff, **Trotsky**, vol. 3, pp. 256–7]

These days, it is hard to find a Leninist who subscribes to this particular Bolshevik lie about Kronstadt. It has, in the main, been long abandoned by those who follow those who created it despite the fact it was the cornerstone of the official Bolshevik account of the rebellion. As the obvious falseness of the claims became more and more well-known, Trotsky and his followers turned to other ways to slander the uprising. The most famous is the assertion that the *"Kronstadt sailors were quite a different group from the revolutionary heroes of 1917."* [Wright, *"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] We turn to this question in the section 8 and indicate that subsequent research has refuted it (and how Trotskyists have misused this research). The more sophisticated ones utilise a variation on Serge's arguments for why he, in the end, supported the Bolsheviks in 1921 and we discuss this in section 12. However, first we must discuss whether the Kronstadt revolt was, in fact, a White conspiracy (section 6) and its real relationship to the Whites (section 7).

## 6 Was the Kronstadt revolt a White plot?

As discussed in the last section, at the time the Bolsheviks portrayed the Kronstadt revolt as a conspiracy organised by a foreign spies and a former Tsarist General. Lenin, for example,

proclaimed on March 8th that *"White Guard generals were very active"* at Kronstadt. *"There is ample proof of this. A fortnight before the Kronstadt events, the Paris newspapers reported a mutiny at Kronstadt. It is quite clear that it is the work of Social Revolutionaries and White Guard emigres."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 184] Trotsky, on March 16th, made the same point, arguing that *"in a number of foreign newspapers ... news of an uprising in Kronstadt appeared as far back as the middle of February ... How [to] explain this? Very simply ... The Russian counterrevolutionary organisers promised to stage a mutiny at a propitious moment, while the impatient yellow and financial press write about it as an already accomplished fact."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 68]

This appears to be the best, indeed only, "evidence" provided by Lenin and Trotsky as regards the White Guardist nature of the revolt. To see the truth of these claims it is simply a case of looking at how the Bolsheviks reacted to this announcement of an uprising in Kronstadt two weeks before it took place: they did nothing. As the Trotskyist editors of a book justifying the repression note, the *"Red Army command was caught unprepared by the rebellion."* J.G. Wright, in his *"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, similarly noted that the *"Red Army command"* was *"[c]aught off guard by the mutiny."* This in spite of Trotsky stating at the time that on *"basis of the dispatch"* he had *"sent a warning to Petrograd to my naval colleagues."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 6, p. 123 and p. 68] This clearly shows how little weight the newspaper reports were held **before** the rebellion. Of course, **during** and **after** the rebellion was a different matter and they quickly became a focal point for Bolshevik smears.

This is perhaps to be expected for, as proof of a White plot, this evidence is pathetic as can be seen by Lenin himself who noted a *"campaign of lies"* which produced *"a vast number of fabrications in this period"*. [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 269] Likewise, Trotsky admitted that *"the imperialist press ... prints*



Other questions arise from Rees' argument. He uses the figures of Communist Party membership in an attempt to prove that the class composition of Kronstadt had changed, favouring the peasantry over the workers. Yet this is illogical. Kronstadt was primarily a military base and so its "class composition" would be skewed accordingly. Since the Bolshevik military machine was made up mostly of peasants, can we be surprised that the Communist Party in Kronstadt had a higher percentage of peasants than the national average? Significantly, Rees does not ponder the fact that the percentage of workers in the Kronstadt Communist Party was around the national average (indeed, Fedotoff-White notes that it *"compares favourably in that respect with some of the large industrial centres."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 142]).

Also, given that Rees acknowledges that by December 1920 only 1,313 new recruits had arrived in the Baltic Fleet, his pondering of the composition of the Communist organisation at Kronstadt smacks more of desperation than serious analysis. By arguing that we *"do not know how many more new recruits arrived in the three months before Kronstadt erupted,"* Rees fails to see that this shows the irrelevance of his statistical analysis. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61] After all, how many of these *"new recruits"* would been allowed to join the Communist Party in the first place? Given that the Bolshevik membership had halved between August 1920 and March 1921, his analysis is simply pointless, a smokescreen to draw attention away from the weakness of his own case. Moreover, as evidence of **changing** class composition these figures are not very useful. This is because they do not compare the composition of the Kronstadt Bolsheviks in 1917 to those in 1921. Given that the Kronstadt base always had a high percentage of peasants in its ranks, it follows that in 1917 the percentage of Bolsheviks of peasant origin could have been higher than normal as well. If this were the case, then Rees argument falls. Simply put, he is not comparing the appropriate figures.

> *present he felt reassured that 'in Kronstadt the red sailor still predominates.'"* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 207]

Rees handy 'editing' of this quote transforms it from one showing that three months before the rising that Kronstadt had retained its revolutionary spirit to one implying the garrison had indeed been replaced.

Rees also tries to generate *"[f]urther evidence of the changing class composition"* by looking at the *"social background of the Bolsheviks at the base."* What is the basis of Rees *"further evidence"*? Simply that in *"September 1920, six months before the revolt, the Bolsheviks had 4,435 members at Kronstadt. Some 50 per cent of these were peasants, 40 percent workers and 10 percent intellectuals ... Thus the percentage of peasants in the party was considerably higher than nationally ... If we **assume** that the Bolshevik party was more working class in composition than the base as a whole, then it seems **likely** that the peasants had increased their weight in the Kronstadt, as Trotsky suggested."* [our emphasis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] So on the basis of an assumption, it may be *"likely"* that Trotsky was correct: impressive *"evidence"* indeed.

The figures Rees uses are extracted from D. Fedotoff-White's **The Growth of the Red Army**. Significantly, Rees fails to mention that the Kronstadt communists had just undergone a *"re-registration"* which saw about a quarter of the 4,435 members in August 1920 voluntarily resigning. By March 1921, the party had half as many members as in the previous August and during the rebellion 497 members (again, about one-quarter of the total membership) voluntarily resigned, 211 were excluded after the defeat of the rebellion and 137 did not report for re-registration. [Fedotoff-White, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140] It seems strange that the party leadership had not taken the opportunity to purge the Kronstadt party of "excessive" peasant influence in August 1920 when it had the chance.



*... a great number of fictitious reports about Russia"* but also maintained that the reports on Kronstadt were examples of *"forecasts"* of *"attempts at overturns in specific centres of Soviet Russia"* (indeed, the *"journalistic agents of imperialism only 'forecast' that which is entrusted for execution to other agents of this very imperialism."*). [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 50–1]

Yet this same press can be used as evidence for a White conspiracy in Kronstadt? *"In reality,"* as Emma Goldman noted, *"this advance news was like other news from Paris, Riga or Helsingfors, and which rarely, if ever, coincided with anything that had been claimed by the counter-revolutionary agents abroad ... No, the advance news in the Paris Press had no bearing whatever on the Kronstadt rebellion. In point of fact, no one in Petrograd in 1921 believed its connection, not even quite a number of Communists."* [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 262] Ida Mett states the obvious:

> *"The publication of false news about Russia was nothing exceptional. Such news was published before, during, and after the Kronstadt events. It is undeniable that the bourgeoisie throughout the world was hostile to the Russian Revolution and would exaggerate any bad news emanating from that country. The Second Communist Conference of the Baltic Fleet had just voted a resounding resolution, critical of the political leadership of the Fleet. This fact could easily have been exaggerated by the bourgeois press, once again confusing the wishes with reality. To base an accusation on a 'proof' of this kind is inadmissible and immoral."*
>
> *In 1938 Trotsky himself was to drop this accusation. But ... he refers his readers to a study of the Kronstadt rebellion undertaken by an American trotskyist John G Wright ... [who] takes up once*

*again the claim that the revolt must have been planned before-hand … He says: 'the connection between Kronstadt and the counterrevolution can be established not only out of the mouths of the enemies of Bolshevism but also on the basis of irrefutable facts'. What irrefutable facts? Again, quotations from the bourgeois press … giving false news before and during the insurrection."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 196]

The question of **why** the counterrevolutionary plotters would give their enemies advance notice of their plans and so time to take preventive action never cross Leninist minds. How seriously these reports were taken can be seen by how the revolt took all the various Bolshevik hierarchies by surprise. Similarly, at the time **no** evidence was forthcoming that the Whites organised or took part in the revolt. Bukharin in July 1921, for example stated that, as regards Kronstadt, the *"documents which have since been brought to light show clearly that the affair was instigated by purely White Guard centres."* [**In Defence of the Russian Revolution**, Al Richardson (ed.), p. 192] It is redundant to note that said "documents" were not published by the Soviet Government then or since:

*"If, at the time the Bolshevik Government had proofs of these alleged contacts between Kronstadt and the counter-revolutionaries why did it not try the rebels publicly? Why did it not show the working masses of Russia the 'real' reasons for the uprising? If this wasn't done it was because no such proofs existed."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 197]

The first soviet investigation into the revolt came to the conclusion that it was spontaneous. A special plenipotentiary of the Secret-Operation Department of the **Vecheka** was sent by



*of continuity."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 63–4] Frank's selective quoting should be sufficient to dismiss his arguments.

However, an even worse example of Trotskyist betrayal of the truth is provided by the British SWP's John Rees. The evidence Rees musters for the claim that the *"composition"* of the Kronstadt sailors *"had changed"* between 1917 and 1921 is a useful indication of the general Leninist method when it comes to the Russian revolution. Rees argues as follows:

*"In September and October 1920 the writer and Bolshevik party lecturer Ieronymus Yasinksky went to Kronstadt to lecture 400 naval recruits. They were 'straight from the plough'. And he was shocked to find that many, 'including a few party members, were politically illiterate, worlds removed from the highly politicised veteran Kronstadt sailors who had deeply impressed him'. Yasinsky worried that those steeled in the revolutionary fire' would be replaced by 'inexperienced freshly mobilised young sailors'."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61]

This quote is referenced to Israel Getzler's **Kronstadt 1917–1921**. Rees account is a fair version of the first half of Yasinskys' report. However, Getzler continues exactly as reproduced below:

*"Yasinsky was apprehensive about the future when, 'sooner or later, Kronstadt's veteran sailors, who were steeled in revolutionary fire and had acquired a clear revolutionary world-view would be replaced by inexperienced, freshly mobilised young sailors'. Still he comforted himself with the hope that Kronstadt's sailors would gradually infuse them with their 'noble spirit of revolutionary self-dedication' to which Soviet Russia owed so much. As for the*

> 7, the third anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power, they were in the front ranks of the celebrations … No one at the time spoke of any 'class degeneration' at Kronstadt. The allegation that politically retarded **muzhiks** had diluted the revolutionary character of the fleet, it would seem, was largely a device to explain away dissident movements among the sailors, and had been used as such as early as October 1918, following the abortive mutiny at the Petrograd naval station, when the social composition of the fleet could not yet have undergone any sweeping transformation." [**Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 89–92]

As can be seen, Avrich's *"few reservations"* are such as to make clear he does **not** share Trotsky's *"conclusions"* as regards the class make-up of Kronstadt and, indeed, noted the ideological bias in it.

Moreover, Avrich points to earlier revolts which the Bolsheviks had also explained in terms of a diluting of the revolutionary sailors of the Baltic Fleet by peasants. In April 1918 *"the crews of several Baltic vessels passed a strongly worded resolution"* which *"went so far as to call for a general uprising to dislodge the Bolsheviks and install a new regime that would adhere more faithfully to the principles of the revolution."* In October that year, *"a mass meeting at the Petrograd naval base adopted a resolution"* which included the sailors going *"on record against the Bolshevik monopoly of political power. Condemning the suppression of the anarchists and opposition socialists, they called for free elections to the soviets"* and *"denounced the compulsory seizure of gain."* Their demands, as Avrich notes, *"strikingly anticipated the Kronstadt programme of 1921, down to the slogans of 'free soviets' and 'Away with the commissarocracy.'"* He stresses that a *"glance at the behaviour of the Baltic Fleet from 1905 to 1921 reveals many elements*



the presidium of that body to Kronstadt soon after the crushing of the uprising. His mandate was *"to ascertain the role of various parties and groups in the start and development of the uprising and the ties of its organisers and inspirers with counter-revolutionary parties and organisations operating both in and outside Soviet Russia."* He produced a report on the 5th of April, 1921, which expressed his considered opinion that the *"uprising was entirely spontaneous in origin and drew into its maelstrom almost the entire population and the garrison of the fortress … the investigation failed to show the outbreak of the mutiny was preceded by the activity of any counter-revolutionary organisation at work among the fortress's command or that it was the work of the **entente.** The entire course of the movement speaks against that possibility. Had the mutiny been the work of some secret organisation which predated its outbreak, then that organisation would not have planned it for a time when the reserves of fuel and provisions were hardly sufficient for two weeks and when the thawing of the ice was still far off."* He noted that the *"masses"* in Kronstadt *"were fully aware of the spontaneity of their movement."* This conclusion was shared by chairman of the Extraordinary **Troika** of the First and Second Special Section who was given the double assignment of *"the punishment of the mutineers and the unmasking of all the organisations that prepared and led the mutiny."* He reported on April 20th, 1921, that *"in spite of all efforts we have been unable to discover the presence of any organisation and to seize any agents."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, *"The Communist Leaders' Role in the Kronstadt Tragedy of 1921 in the Light of Recently Published Archival Documents"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 25–6]

These conclusions were drawn in spite of the interrogation of prisoners who would have been willing to tell the authorities what they wanted to hear in order to escape execution or imprisonment (unless of course placing the word "proletarian" before interrogation or torture — like state — produces different results?). Still, the Bolsheviks were apparently quite willing

to consider inventing evidence of a conspiracy. Trotsky, for example, raised, on the 24th of March 1921, the possibility of a *"Political Trial of Kronstadters and Makhnovites."* This show trial would be part of the *"struggle"* against *"anarchism (Kronstadt and Makhno)."* This was *"presently an important task"* and so it *"seems ... appropriate to organise trials of Kronstadters ... and of Makhnovites."* The *"effect of the reports and the speeches of the prosecutor etcetera would be far more powerful than the effects of brochures and leaflets about ... anarchism."* [quoted by Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39] While Trotsky's show trial was never staged, the fact that the idea was taken seriously can be seen from the invented summaries of the testimonies of three men considered by the Bolsheviks as ringleaders of the revolt. Perhaps the fact that the three (Kozlovsky, Petrichenko, Putilin) managed to escape to Finland ensured that Trotsky's idea was never carried out. Stalin, of course, utilised the *"powerful"* nature of such trials in the 1930s.

While the Bolsheviks never published any of the documents they at times claimed to have proving the White conspiracy at Kronstadt, decades later historian Paul Avrich **did** discover an unsigned hand written manuscript labelled *"Top Secret"* and entitled *"Memorandum on the Question of Organising an Uprising in Kronstadt."* Trotskyist Pierre Frank considered it *"so convincing"* that he *"reproduced it in its entirety"* to prove a White conspiracy existed behind the Kronstadt revolt. Indeed, he considers it as an *"indisputable"* revelation and that Lenin and Trotsky *"were not mistaken in their analysis of Kronstadt."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 26 and p. 32]

However, reading the document quickly shows that Kronstadt was not a product of a White conspiracy but rather that the White National Centre aimed to try and use a spontaneous *"uprising"* it thought was likely to *"erupt there in the coming spring"* for its own ends. The report notes that *"among the sailors, numerous and unmistakable signs of mass dissatisfaction with the existing order can be noticed."* Indeed, the Memoran-



the sailors ... Indeed, in 1905 and 1917 it was these very youths from the countryside who had given Kronstadt its reputation as a hotbed of revolutionary extremism. And throughout the Civil War the Kronstadters had remained an independent and headstrong lot, difficult to control and far from constant in their support for the government. It was for this reason so many of them ... had found themselves transferred to new posts remote from the centres of Bolshevik powers. Of those who remained, many hankered for the freedoms they had won in 1917 before the new regime began to establish its one-party dictatorship throughout the country.

"Actually, there was little to distinguish the old-timers from the recent recruits in their midst. Both groups were largely of peasant background ... Not unexpectedly, when the rebellion finally erupted, it was the older seamen, veterans of many years of service (dating in some cases before the First World War) who took the lead ... Given their maturity and experience, not to speak of their keen disillusionment as former participants of the revolution, it was only natural that these seasoned bluejackets should be thrust into the forefront of the uprising ... The proximity of Petrograd, moreover, with its intense intellectual and political life, had contributed towards sharpening their political awareness, and a good many had engaged in revolutionary activity during 1917 and after...

"As late as the autumn of 1920, Emma Goldman recalled, the sailors were still held up by the Communists themselves as a glowing example of valour and unflinching courage; on November

[*"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 335] Defending these acts also pays its toll on those who follow this tradition, as we shall see.

Needless to say, such evidence as provided by Avrich and Getzler is rarely mentioned by supporters of Bolshevism. However, rather than ignore these works, the Trotskyists use them in their own way, for their own purposes — indeed, both Paul Avrich's **Kronstadt 1921** and Getzler's **Kronstadt 1917–1921** have been used to support pro-Bolshevist conclusions when, in fact, they do the opposite. The misuse of these references is quite unbelievable and shows the mentality of Trotskyism well.

Pierre Frank, for example argues that Avrich's work has *"conclusions"* which are *"similar to Trotsky's"* and *"confirms the changes in the composition of the Kronstadt garrison that took place during the civil war, although with a few reservations."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25] A quick look at these reservations shows how false Frank is. It is worth quoting Avrich at length to show this:

> "There can be little doubt that during the Civil War years a large turnover had indeed taken place within the Baltic Fleet, and that many of the old-timers had been replaced by conscripts from rural districts who brought with them the deeply felt discontent of the Russian peasantry. By 1921, according to official figures, more than three-quarters of the sailors were of peasant origin, a substantially higher proportion that in 1917 ... Yet this does not necessarily mean that the behavioural patterns of the fleet had undergone any fundamental change. On the contrary, alongside the technical ratings, who were largely drawn from the working class, there had always been a large and unruly peasant element among



dum states that *"one must not forget that even if the French Command and the Russian anti-Bolshevik organisations do not take part in the preparation and direction of the uprising, a revolt in Kronstadt will take place all the same during the coming spring, but after a brief period of success it will be doomed to failure."* [quoted by Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, p. 235 and p. 240] Avrich himself rejected the idea that this Memorandum explains the revolt:

> "Nothing has come to light to show that the Secret Memorandum was ever put into practice or that any links had existed between the emigres and the sailors before the revolt. On the contrary, the rising bore the earmarks of spontaneity ... there was little in the behaviour of the rebels to suggest any careful advance preparation. Had there been a prearranged plan, surely the sailors would have waited a few weeks longer for the ice to melt ... The rebels, moreover, allowed Kalinin [a leading Communist] to return to Petrograd, though he would have made a valuable hostage. Further, no attempt was made to take the offensive . .. Significant too, is the large number of Communists who took part in the movement ...
>
> "The Sailors needed no outside encouragement to raise the banner of insurrection ... Kronstadt was clearly ripe for a rebellion. What set it off were not the machinations of emigre conspirators and foreign intelligence agents but the wave of peasant risings throughout the country and the labour disturbances in neighbouring Petrograd. And as the revolt unfolded, it followed the pattern of earlier outbursts against the central government from 1905 through the Civil War." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 111–2]

He concludes that while the National Centre had *"anticipated"* the revolt and *"laid plans to help organise it,"* they had *"no time to put these plans into effect."* The *"eruption occurred too soon, several weeks before the basic conditions of the plot ... could be fulfilled."* It *"is not true,"* he stresses, *"that the emigres had engineering the rebellion."* The revolt was *"a spontaneous and self-contained movement from beginning to end."* Most obviously, as Avrich notes, an *"underlying assumption of the Memorandum is that the revolt would not occur until after the springtime thaw, when the ice had melted and Kronstadt was immune from an invasion from the mainland."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 126–7 and pp. 106–7]

Voline, then, just stated the obvious when he argued that the revolt *"broke out spontaneously"* for if it *"had been the result of a plan conceived and prepared in advance, it would certainly not have occurred at the beginning of March, the least favourable time. A few weeks later, and Kronstadt, freed of ice, would have become an almost impregnable fortress ... The greatest opportunity of Bolshevik government was precisely the spontaneity of the movement and the absence of any premeditation, of any calculation, in the action of the sailors."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 487] Given that the Memorandum also recognised this need for the ice to thaw and it was the basic assumption behind it, the revolt **was** spontaneous and actually undercut the assumptions behind the Memorandum. Likewise, a prominent right-SR leader and head of the SR Administrative Centre in Finland wrote a letter on the 18th of March that while *"[o]ne usually looks for those responsible [for the failure]; it is difficult to find them in this case, as it is generally difficult to analyse the causes and results of events that are so absolutely spontaneous. The movement began spontaneously, without any organisation and quite unexpectedly. After all, a month later, Kronstadt would have been inaccessible to the Bolsheviks and a hundred times more dangerous to them."* [quoted by Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 25–6]

Moreover, whether the Memorandum played a part in the revolt can be seen from the reactions of the White National



*nothing from them by kindness. They speculate in cloth, coal, and bread. At present in Kronstadt every kind of riffraff has raised its head.'"* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 87–8] As Ida Mett pointed out, *"[w]e should add that before the insurrection these 'stores' were in the hands of communist functionaries and that it was upon these people alone that consent to the proposed 'loan' depended. The rank and file sailor, who took part in the insurrection, had no means open to him whereby he could have opposed the loan, even if he had wanted to."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 193] If Trotsky's words were true, then they were a crushing indictment of the Bolshevik regime and **not** the Kronstadt rebels.

As for Trotsky's claim of a lack of political education and unwillingness for sacrifice, the 15 point resolution voted upon by the sailors exposes this as nonsense and the fact the sailors fought the Red Army to the end indicates that there were prepared to die for their ideals. Similarly, his argument that *"in 1917–18, the Kronstadt sailor stood considerably higher than the average level of the Red Army"* but by 1921 they *"stood ... on a level considerably lower, in general, than the average level of the Red Army"* but, as we indicate in section 9, the political programme of the revolt was fundamentally the same as the dominant ideas within Kronstadt during 1917. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87] More, we should note that the Kronstadt rebels opposed the introduction of wage labour, a basic socialist idea and one raised in 1917 by anarchists and others, while this was missing from the Bolshevik's NEP policies. This shows clear continuity between 1921 and 1917 and, moreover, the mass meeting that agreed the resolution did so unanimously, meaning old and new sailors agreed to it. So much for Trotsky's assertions.

Now we turn to the misuse of these sources to support their case. This indicates well the nature of Bolshevik ethics. *"While the revolutionaries,"* argued Ciliga with regards to the Bolsheviks, *"remaining such only in words, accomplished in fact the task of the reaction and counter-revolution, they were compelled, inevitably, to have recourse to lies, to calumny and falsification."*

*and in the administrative network of the expanding Soviet state, had returned to the Baltic Fleet and to Kronstadt, most by way of remobilisation."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 197–8] Thus the idea that any sailors who had been ordered away did not come back is not a valid one.

Trotsky obviously felt that this argument of changing social composition of the sailors would hold more water than claims White Guards organised it and he continued this theme:

> *"The best, most self-sacrificing sailors were completely withdrawn from Kronstadt and played an important role at the fronts and in the local soviets throughout the country. What was left was the grey mass with big pretensions ('We are from Kronstadt'), but without the political education and unprepared for revolutionary sacrifice. The country was starving. The Kronstadters demanded privileges. The uprising was dictated by a desire to get privileged food rations."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

This was Trotsky's first comment on the uprising for 16 years and, as Ida Mett notes, *"[s]uch a demand was never put forward by the men of Kronstadt"* and so Trotsky *"started his public accusations with a lie."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191] He repeated the claim again, six months later [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 92] Unfortunately for him, the opposite was the case: point 9 of the Kronstadt demands explicitly called for an **end** of privileges by the *"equalisation of rations for all workers."* This was implemented during the uprising.

As an aside, Trotsky later stated that *"[w]hen conditions became very critical in hungry Petrograd, the Political Bureau more than once discussed the possibility of securing an 'internal loan' from Kronstadt, where a quantity of old provisions still remained. But delegates of the Petrograd workers answered: 'You will get*



Centre to the uprising. Firstly, they failed to deliver aid to the rebels nor get French aid to them. Secondly, Professor Grimm, the chief agent of the National Centre in Helsingfors and General Wrangel's official representative in Finland, stated to a colleague after the revolt had been crushed that if a new outbreak should occur then their group must not be caught unawares again. Avrich also notes that the revolt *"caught the emigres off balance"* and that *"[n]othing ... had been done to implement the Secret Memorandum, and the warnings of the author were fully borne out."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212 and p. 123] If Kronstadt was a White conspiracy then how could the organisation of the conspiracy have been caught unawares?

Clearly, the attempts of certain later-day Trotskyists to justify and prove their heroes slanders against Kronstadt are pathetic. No evidence of a White-Guardist plot existed until 1970 when Paul Avrich produced his study of the revolt and the single document in question clearly does not support the claim that the Whites organised the revolt. Rather, the Whites aimed to use a sailors uprising to further their cause, an uprising which they predicted would occur in the spring with or without them. The predicted revolt **did** take place, but earlier than expected and was not a product of a conspiracy. Indeed, the historian who discovered this document explicitly argues that it proves nothing and that the revolt was spontaneous in nature. All it shows is that Whites were better informed of the alienation of the Kronstadt sailors than the Bolshevik state and its military hierarchies.

The claim that Kronstadt was a White plot cannot be defended with anything but assertions. No evidence exists to back up such claims.

## 7 What was the real relationship of Kronstadt to the Whites?

As we indicated in the last section, the Kronstadt revolt was not a White conspiracy. It was a spontaneous popular revolt from below. However, some Trotskyists still try and smear the revolt by arguing that it was, in fact, really or "objectively" pro-White. We turn to this question now.

We must first stress that the Kronstadters' rejected every offer of help from the National Centre and other obviously pro-White group. Historian Israel Getzler stressed that *"the Kronstadters were extremely resentful of all gestures of sympathy and promises of help coming from the White-Guardist emigres."* He quotes a Red Cross visitor who stated that Kronstadt *"will admit no White political party, no politician, with the exception of the Red Cross."* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 235] Avrich notes that the Kronstadter's *"passionately hated"* the Whites and that *"both during and afterwards in exile"* they *"indignantly rejected all government accusations of collaboration with counter-revolutionary groups either at home or abroad."* As the Communists themselves acknowledged, no outside aid ever reached the insurgents. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187, p. 112 and p. 123] In short, there was no relationship between the revolt and the Whites.

It must be noted that the rebels did accept help towards the end of the rebellion from the Russian Red Cross when the food situation had become critical but the fortress fell before any supplies sent. Yet, the Bolsheviks themselves turned to the American Relief Administration and the International Red Cross to fight the famine in the Volga provinces and southern Urals later in 1921 and without whose aid *"millions more would have died."* [S.A. Smith, **Russia in Revolution**, pp. 232–3] This crisis, a direct result of the disastrous Bolsheviks policies as regards the peasantry and food supplies the Kronstadters opposed, also saw the Bolshevik rebuff others of help by



revolutionary" difficult (indeed, impossible) to maintain. Of the around 2,000 members of the Communist Party in Kronstadt, some 500 officially resigned along nearly 300 candidate members. Trotsky later estimated that 30% of the party in Kronstadt took an active part in the revolt while 30% remained neutral. [Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, tp. 183–4] This shows that Trotsky's claims that Kronstadt was denuded of revolutionary elements were false.

J.G. Wright, as noted above, thought that it was *"impossible"* to believe that the sailors of 1917 could leave their comrades to fight the Whites while they stayed at Kronstadt. [*"The Truth About Kronstadt"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 122–3] This may have been a valid argument **if** the Soviet armed forces were democratically run. However, as we indicated in section 2, it was organised in a typically bourgeois fashion. Trotsky had abolished democratic soldiers and sailors councils and the election of officers in favour of appointed officers and hierarchical, top-down, military structures. This meant that the sailors would have stayed in Kronstadt if they had been ordered to — and probably shot if they had not followed those orders. The fact that they had to defend Petrograd combined with the level of technical knowledge and experience required to operate the battleships and defences at Kronstadt would have meant that many of the sailors of 1917 would have been irreplaceable and so had to remain at Kronstadt. This is what, in fact, did happen:

> *"One reason for the remarkable survival in Kronstadt of these veteran sailors, albeit in greatly diminished numbers, was precisely the difficulty of training, in war-time conditions, a new generation competent in the sophisticated technical skills required of Russia's ultra-modern battleships, and, indeed, in the fleet generally."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 208]

We should also note here that *"by the end of 1919 thousands of veteran sailors, who had served on many fronts of the civil war*

*men of local soviets."* Later, realising the stupidity of this claim, he changed it to Kronstadt being *"denuded of all revolutionary forces"* by *"the winter of 1919."* He also acknowledged that *"a certain number of qualified workers and technicians"* remained to *"take care of the machinery"* but these were *"politically unreliable"* as proven by the fact they had not been selected to fight in the civil war. As evidence, he mentions that he had wired a *"request at the end of 1919, or in 1920, to 'send a group of Kronstadt sailors to this or that point'"* and they had answered *"No one left to send."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 87, p. 90 and p. 81] Obviously, the Communist commander at Kronstadt had left his fortress and its ships totally unmanned! Such common sense is sadly lacking from Trotsky and the evidence does not support his claims.

Moreover, does this claim not also apply to the Communist Party membership at Kronstadt? Is Trotsky **really** arguing that the Bolsheviks in Kronstadt after the winter of 1919 were not revolutionary? Given that the bulk of them had joined the party during or after this time, we must obviously conclude that the recruiters let anyone join. Moreover, there had been a *"rigorous local purge"* of the party conducted in the autumn of 1920 by the commander of the Baltic Fleet. [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 211 and p. 205] Must we also conclude that this purge did not have revolutionary politics as a factor when determining whether a party member should be expelled or not?

Trotsky claims too much. There are two possibilities. The first is that the Kronstadt Communist Party was not revolutionary and was made up of politically backward individuals, careerists and so on. If that were the case in Kronstadt then it must also have been the case elsewhere in Russia and this discredits any attempt to argue that the Bolshevik party dictatorship was revolutionary. The second is that it **did** have revolutionary elements. If so, then the fact that hundreds of these members left the party during the revolt and only a minority opposed it makes the claim that the rebellion was "counter-



left dissidents in favour of the right *"who had bitterly fought the October Revolution. They had repeatedly been arrested as counter-revolutionists, but now they were accepted with open arms as the 'Citizens' Committee.' Every facility was given them in their work: a building, telephones, typists, and the right to publish a paper"* This, though, was short-lived and they were soon *"again denounced as counter-revolutionary, and its leaders exiled to distant parts of the country."* [Emma Goldman, **Living My Life**, vol. 2, pp. 900–1]

While there were no direct links between the rebels and the Whites, there is no denying that the latter **were** extremely happy that Kronstadt had revolted. However, it would be weak politics indeed that based itself on the reactions of reactionaries to evaluate social struggles. If we did then we would have to conclude that the Stalinists were right to crush the 1956 Hungarian revolt and the 1968 Prague Spring. Likewise, we would have to conclude that the overthrow of Stalinism in 1989 was nothing more than a counter-revolution rather than a popular revolt against a specific form of capitalism (namely state capitalism) and, indeed, many orthodox Trotskyists took this position. It smacks of the crude Stalinist amalgam which argued that because fascists and Trotskyists criticised Stalin, this showed that they were somehow linked.

Unsurprisingly, the Kronstadters themselves acknowledged that the Whites were happy to support their actions (indeed, **any** actions against the Bolsheviks) and the danger this represented. However, they noted that this joy was for different reasons than theirs:

> "The … Kronstadt sailors and workers have wrested the tiller from the Communists' hands and have taken over the helm … Comrades, keep a close eye upon the vicinity of the tiller: enemies are even now trying to creep closer. A single lapse and they will wrest the tiller from you, and

the soviet ship may go down to the triumphant laughter from tsarist lackeys and henchmen of the bourgeoisie.

"Comrades, right now you are rejoicing in the great, peaceful victory over the Communists' dictatorship. Now, your enemies are celebrating too.

"Your grounds for such joy, and theirs, are quite contradictory.

"You are driven by a burning desire to restore the authentic power of the soviets, by a noble hope of seeing the worker engage in free labour and the peasant enjoy the right to dispose, on his land, of the produce of his labours. **They** dream of bringing back the tsarist knout and the privileges of the generals.

"Your interests are different. They are not fellow travellers with you.

"You needed to get rid of the Communists' power over you in order to set about creative work and peaceable construction. Whereas they want to overthrow that power to make the workers and peasants their slaves again.

"You are in search of freedom. They want to shackle you as it suits them. Be vigilant! Don't let the wolves in sheep's clothing get near the tiller." [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 187–8]

Of course, this is not enough for the followers of Lenin and Trotsky. John Rees, for example, quotes Paul Avrich to support his assertion that the Kronstadt revolt was, in fact, pro-White. He argues as follows:



first British Labour Mission, the Kronstadt sailors presented a large clear-cut contingent, and were then pointed out as among the great heroes who had saved the Revolution from Kerensky, and Petrograd from Yudenich. During the anniversary of October the sailors were again in the front ranks, and their re-enactment of the taking of the Winter Palace was wildly acclaimed by a packed mass.

"Is it possible that the leading members of the party, save Leon Trotsky, were unaware of the corruption and the demoralisation of Kronstadt, claimed by him? I do not think so. Moreover, I doubt whether Trotsky himself held this view of the Kronstadt sailors until March, 1921. His story must, therefore, be an afterthought, or is it a rationalisation to justify the senseless 'liquidation' of Kronstadt?" [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 257–8]

In short, the continuity between the sailors of 1917 and 1921 could be seen from their actions (rising in solidarity with the Petrograd workers) and in their politics (as expressed in their demands and in their paper). The later research has just confirmed what is obvious from an analysis of such facts, namely that the rebels in 1921 were acting in the spirit of their comrades of 1917 and this implies a significant continuity in personnel (which perhaps explains the unwillingness of Leninists to mention that the revolt was in solidarity with the strikers or the demands of the rebels). The empirical evidence available supports the political analysis of the revolt conducted by revolutionaries like Berkman, Voline, Goldman and Ciliga.

So academic research refutes the claims of Trotskyists since Trotsky suggested that Kronstadt had *"been completely emptied of proletarian elements"* as *"[a]ll the sailors"* belonging to the ships' crews *"had become commissars, commanders, chair-*

*the workers in Petrograd that the Kronstadt sailors did in 1921 what they had done in 1917. They immediately made common cause with the workers. The part of the sailors in 1917 was hailed as the red pride and glory of the Revolution. Their identical part in 1921 was denounced to the whole world as counter-revolutionary treason"* by the Bolsheviks. [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.** p. 259] Secondly, their demands were thoroughly in-line with the aspirations and politics of 1917 and clearly showed a socialist awareness and analysis. Thirdly, Emma Goldman spoke to some of those wounded in the attack on Kronstadt. She records how one *"had realised that he had been duped by the cry of 'counter-revolution.' There were no Tsarist generals in Kronstadt, no White Guardists — he found only his own comrades, sailors and soldiers who had heroically fought for the Revolution."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, pp. 199–200] Similarly, Ante Ciliga quoted the testimony regarding Kronstadt of a fellow political prisoner in Soviet Russia: *"'It is a myth that, from the social point of view, Kronstadt of 1921 had a wholly different population from that of 1917,' [a] man from Petrograd, Dv., said to me in prison. In 1921 he was a member of the Communist youth, and was imprisoned in 1932 as a 'decist' (a member of Sapronov's group of 'Democratic Centralists')."* [*"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 335–6] Hence Goldman:

> "Now, I do not presume to argue what the Kronstadt sailors were in 1918 or 1919. I did not reach Russia until January, 1920. From that time on until Kronstadt was 'liquidated' the sailors of the Baltic fleet were held up as the glorious example of valour and unflinching courage. Time on end I was told not only by Anarchists, Mensheviks and social revolutionists, but by many Communists, that the sailors were the very backbone of the Revolution. On the 1st of May, 1920, during the celebration and the other festivities organised for the



> *"Paul Avrich … says there is 'undeniable evidence' that the leadership of the rebellion came to an agreement with the Whites after they had been crushed and that 'one cannot rule out the possibility that this was the continuation of a longstanding relationship.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

What Rees **fails** to mention is that Avrich **immediately** adds *"[y]et a careful search has yielded no evidence to support such a belief"* before stating that *"[n]othing has come to light to show that … any links had existed between the emigres and the sailors before the revolt."* How strange that Rees fails to quote or even mention Avrich's conclusion to his own speculation! As for the post-revolt links between the leadership of the rebellion and the Whites, Avrich correctly argues that *"[n]one of this proves that there were any ties between the [National] Centre and the Revolutionary Committee either before or during the revolt. It would seem, rather, that the mutual experience of bitterness and defeat, and a common determination to overthrow the Soviet regime, led them to join hands in the aftermath."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111 and p. 129] Seeing you friends and fellow toilers murdered by dictators may affect your judgement, unsurprisingly enough.

Let us, however, assume that certain elements in the leadership of the revolt were, in fact, scoundrels. What does this mean when evaluating it?

Firstly, we must point out that this leadership was elected by and under the control of the Conference of Delegates which was, in turn, elected by and under the control of the rank-and-file sailors, soldiers and civilians. This body met regularly during the revolt *"to receive and debate the reports of the Revolutionary Committee and to propose measures and decrees."* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 217] The actions of the leadership were not independent of the mass of the population and so, regardless of their own agendas, had to work under control from

below. In other words, the revolt cannot be reduced to a discussion of whether a few of the leadership were scoundrels or not. Indeed, to do so just reflects the elitism of bourgeois history yet Rees does just that and reduces the Kronstadt revolt and its "ideology" down to just one person (Petrichenko). Perhaps we can evaluate Bolshevism with this method? Or Italian Socialism. After all, influential figures in both these movements ended up making contacts and deals with extremely suspect organisations and acting in ways we (and the movements they sprang from) would oppose. Does that mean we gain an insight into their natures by concentrating on Stalin's or Mussolini's later activities? Or evaluating their revolutionary nature from such individuals? Of course not. Indeed, Rees's article is an attempt to argue that objective circumstances rather than Bolshevism as such lead to Stalinism. Rather than do the same for Kronstadt, he prefers to concentrate on an individual. This indicates a distinctly bourgeois perspective:

> *"What passes as socialist history is often only a mirror image of bourgeois historiography, a percolation into the ranks of the working class movement of typically bourgeois methods of thinking. In the world of this type of 'historian' leaders of genius replace the kings and queens of the bourgeois world … . The masses never appear independently on the historic stage, making their own history. At best they only 'supply the steam', enabling others to drive the locomotive, as Stalin so delicately put it … This tendency to identify working class history with the history of its organisations, institutions and leaders is not only inadequate — it reflects a typically bourgeois vision of mankind, divided in almost pre-ordained manner between* ***the few*** *who will manage and decide, and* ***the many****, the malleable mass, incapable of acting consciously on its own behalf … Most his-*



that the *"disease from which they suffer has been too long neglected."* What is significant about this social-political profile of the *"large majority"* of sailors was that it was **not** written in response of the Kronstadt revolt but that it was formulated well before. As its author put it in the report, *"I stated these views more than a month ago in my memorandum to comrade Krestinskii"* (then secretary of the Communist Party). And the recipient of this March 7th, 1921, report? Leon Trotsky. [quoted by Israel Getzler, *"The Communist Leaders' Role in the Kronstadt Tragedy of 1921 in the Light of Recently Published Archival Documents"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 32–3]

It should also be noted that Stalinist works on the Kronstadt Rebellion tried to prove that the Red Sailors of 1917 had been replaced by 1921. As one historian notes: *"Statistical arguments used by these authors are not convincing. They show that the actual proportion of peasants serving in the Baltic Navy in 1921 was at that time rather smaller than the proportion of peasants in the Red Army in the same year."* [George Katkov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 21] This places Trotsky's assertion that the *"workers who marched over the ice against the fortress represented the proletarian revolution"* while the *"sailors in revolt represented the peasant Thermidor"* in context. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 82] Perhaps, for Trotskyists, this explains the fact that the *"ordinary Red Army soldiers … were reluctant and unreliable fighters against Red Kronstadt, although driven at gunpoint onto the ice and into battle"*? [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 243]

Needless to say, this statistical information was unavailable when libertarians wrote their accounts of the uprising. All they could go on were the facts of the uprising itself and the demands of the rebels. Based on these, it is little wonder that anarchists like Alexander Berkman stressed the continuity between the Red Kronstadters of 1917 and the rebels of 1921. Firstly, the rebels in 1921 took action in ***solidarity*** with the striking workers in Petrograd. In the words of Emma Goldman, it was *"after the report of their Committee of the real state of affairs among*

*only natural that these seasoned bluejackets should be thrust into the forefront of the uprising."* [Avrich, **Krondtadt 1921**, p. 93 and p. 91]

So Getzler was right to conclude that it was *"certainly the case"* that the *"activists of the 1921 uprising had been participants of the 1917 revolutions"* for the *"1,900 veteran sailors of the* **Petropavlovsk** *and the* **Sevastopol** *who spearheaded it. It was certainly true of a majority of the Revolutionary Committee and of the intellectuals ... Likewise, at least three-quarters of the 10,000 to 12,000 sailors — the mainstay of the uprising — were old hands who had served in the navy through war and revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 226] As Paul Avrich notes in a review of Getzler's book:

> *"Getzler draws attention to the continuity in institutions, ideology, and personnel linking 1921 with 1917. In doing so he demolishes the allegation of Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders that the majority of veteran Red sailors had, in the course of the Civil War, been replaced by politically retarded peasant recruits from the Ukraine and Western borderlands, thereby diluting the revolutionary character of the Baltic fleet. He shows, on the contrary, that no significant change had taken place in the fleet's political and social composition, that at least three-quarters of the sailors on active duty in 1921 had been drafted before 1918 and were drawn predominantly from Great Russian areas."* [**Soviet Studies**, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 139–40]

This is not the end of the matter. A report by Vasilii Sevei, Plenipotentiary of the Special Section of the **Vecheka,** dated March 7th, 1921, stated that a *"large majority"* of the sailors of Baltic Fleet *"were and still are professional revolutionaries and could well form the basis for a possible third revolution."* He notes



> *tories of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution rarely amount to more than this."* [Maurice Brinton *"Preface to Ida Mett's 'The Kronstadt Commune'"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 18–9]

Secondly, the question is one of whether workers are in struggle and what they aim for and definitely **not** one of whether some of the "leaders" are fine upstanding citizens. Ironically, Trotsky indicates why. In 1934, he had argued *"[a]nyone who had proposed that we not support the British miners' strike of 1926 or the recent large-scale strikes in the United States with all available means on the ground that the leaders of the strikes were for the most part scoundrels, would have been a traitor to the British and American workers."* [*"No Compromise on the Russian Question"*, **Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement (1934–40)**, p. 539] The same applies to Kronstadt. Even if we assume that some of the leadership or those active in revolt did have links with the National Centre (an assumption we must stress has no evidence to support it), this in no way invalidates the Kronstadt revolt. The movement was not produced by the so-called "leaders" of the revolt but rather came from below and so reflected the demands and politics of those involved. To use an obvious example, if it were proved, as KGB and other soviet sources argued, that some of the leaders of the Hungary uprising of 1956 had CIA links or were CIA agitators, would that make the revolution and its workers' councils somehow invalid? Of course not. If some of the leadership were scoundrels, as Trotsky argued, this does not invalid the revolt itself. Maurice Brinton stated the obvious:

> *"During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 many were the messages of verbal or moral support for the rebels, emanating from the West, piously preaching the virtues of bourgeois democracy or of free enterprise. The objective of those who spoke in these terms*

> *were anything but the institution of a classless society. But their support for the rebels remained purely verbal, particularly when it became clear to them what the real objectives of the revolution were … The backbone of the Hungarian revolution was the network of workers' councils. Their main demands were for workers' management of production and for a government based on the councils. These facts justified the support of revolutionaries throughout the world … The class criterion is the decisive one.*
>
> *"Similar considerations apply to the Kronstadt rebellion. Its core was the revolutionary sailors. Its main objectives were ones with which no real revolutionary could disagree. That others sought to take advantage of the situation is inevitable — and irrelevant."* [*"Preface to Ida Mett's 'The Kronstadt Commune'"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 137]

This is recognised in their own way by the Trotskyists themselves. Trotsky used the strike example against those claiming, correctly, that to unconditionally defend the Soviet Union was to give an endorsement to Stalinism. Hence we see him, immediately after the words quoted above, add: *"Exactly the same thing applies to the USSR!"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 539] Wright echoes this with regards to Kronstadt:

> *"underlying the mutiny was the expression of the petty bourgeois reaction against the difficulties and privations imposed by the conditions of the proletarian revolution. Nobody can deny this class character of the two camps. All other questions are only of secondary importance. That the Bolsheviks may have committed errors of a general or concrete character, cannot alter the fact that they defended the acquisitions of the proletarian revolution against the bourmobilised. Rather, they were not being demobilized rapidly enough."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 509–10]



Another academic, Israel Getzler in his excellent account of Kronstadt during the revolution, also investigated this issue and presented identical conclusions. He demonstrated that of those serving in the Baltic fleet on 1st January 1921 at least 75.5% were drafted before 1918. Over 80% were from Great Russian areas, 10% from the Ukraine and 9% from Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland. He argues that the *"veteran politicised Red sailor still predominated in Kronstadt at the end of 1920"* and presents more *"hard statistical data"* like that just quoted by also investigating the crews of the two main battleships, the ***Petropavlovsk*** and the ***Sevastopol***, showing like Mawdsley that of the 2,028 sailors where years of enlistment are known, only 6.8% were recruited in the years 1918–21 (including three who were conscripted in 1921) and they were the only ones who had not been there during the 1917 revolution. [**Kronstadt 1917–1921**, pp. 207–8]

Historian Fedotoff-White also noted that *"a good many"* of the rebels *"had had ample experience in organisational and political work since 1917. A number had long-standing associations with Anarchists and the Socialist Revolutionaries of the Left"*. The cruiser **Rossiia** joined in the decision to re-elect the Kronstadt Soviet and its *"crew consisted mostly of old seamen."* [**The Growth of the Red Army**, p. 155 and p. 138] Moreover, the majority of the revolutionary committee were veterans of the Kronstadt Soviet and the October revolution. [Ida Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] While obviously not a miniature of the 1917 Baltic Fleet, the available information indicates that by length of service the sailors of Kronstadt in 1921 had been there since 1917 — including the sailors manning the battleships which were *"the powder kegs of the rising."* Moreover, *"[g]iven their maturity and experience, not to speak of their keen disillusionment as former participants in the revolution, it was*

*have been drafted before 1911, 52% from 1911 to 1918 and 24.5% after 1918."* In terms of the two battleships whose sailors played the leading role in 1921 revolt, the Petropavlovsk and the Sevastopol, he shows that *"at the time of the uprising"* of the 2,028 sailors, 20.2% were recruited into the navy before 1914, 59% joined in the years 1914–16, 14% in 1917 and 6.8% in the years 1918–21. So 93.2% of the sailors who launched the revolt in 1921 had been there in 1917. In short, the *"majority of men seem to have been veterans of 1917"*. [*"The Baltic Fleet and the Kronstadt Mutiny"*, pp. 506–521, **Soviet Studies**, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 508–9] Thus:

> *"Although the number of ratings in the Baltic Fleet as a whole rose by 1 December 1920 to 24,914 — still 1,079 below the establishment — the basic composition of the DOT did not change greatly. The important point is that the 10,000 new recruits were trainees, not replacements ... and these men were in training depots in Petrograd, not at Kronstadt; furthermore, as at 1 December only 1,313 of a planned total of 10,384 had arrived. It also seems unlikely that the new volunteers could have been appeared in large numbers by the end of February 1921; those that did were probably in Petrograd and not aboard the ships of the DOT ... [and so] remobilisation, difficulties in finding suitable replacements . .. [meant] that as many as three-quarters of the DOT ratings — the Kronstadt mutineers — had served in the fleet at least since the World War."*
>
> *"By the time of the rising the demobilisation of the older classes had hardly begun ... The composition of the DOT had not fundamentally changed, and anarchistic young peasants did not predominate there. The available data suggest that the main difficulty was not ... that the experienced sailors were being de-*



> *geois (and petty bourgeois) reaction. That is why every critic must himself be examined from the standpoint as to which side of the firing line he finds himself. If he closes his eyes to the social and historical content of the Kronstadt mutiny then he is himself an element of petty bourgeois reaction against the proletarian revolution ... A trade union, say, of agricultural labourers may commit errors in a strike against farmers. We can criticise them but our criticism should be based upon a fundamental solidarity with the worker's trade union and upon our opposition to the exploiters of the workers even if these exploiters happen to be small farmers."* [*"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 112]

This was written in 1938 in apparent ignorance that Emma Goldman had debunked similar assertions over ten years previously:

> *"There is another objection to my criticism on the part of the Communists. Russia is on strike, they say, and it is unethical for a revolutionist to side against the workers when they are striking against their masters. That is pure demagoguery practised by the Bolsheviki to silence criticism.*
>
> *"It is not true that the Russian people are on strike. On the contrary, the truth of the matter is that the Russian people have been* ***locked out*** *and that the Bolshevik State — even as the bourgeois industrial master — uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolsheviki this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan: thus they have succeeded in blinding the masses. Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class,*

*which in Russia is called the Communist Party."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlix]

So there was a few obvious differences which invalidates the Trotskyist analogy as regards both Stalinism and Kronstadt. First, in both cases there are more than two classes involved — along with the peasants and workers, there is the bureaucracy. In Russia in 1921 as in 1934, the state and party bureaucracy was oppressing and exploiting the workers. Trade union bureaucrats, for all their faults, are not at a head of a dictatorship defended by troops and secret police. Second, in 1921 as before, the heads of the bureaucratic class had declared martial law and utilised troops, lock-outs and arrests against the striking workers — a practice continued under Stalin. Trade union bureaucrats are, at best, hesitant to make a strike official and may well sell it out but they rarely call in the armed might of the state against their own members. Third, the regime in Russia in both 1921 and 1934 was a party dictatorship. Strikes are usually run to some degree by the strikers. Fourth, strikes are examples of proletarian direct action which can, and do, get out of control of union structures and bureaucrats. They can be the focal point for creating new forms of working class organisation and power which can end the power of the union bureaucrats and replace it with self-managed strikers assemblies and councils. Both the Bolshevik and Stalinist regimes were organised to repress any attempts at unseating them — indeed, the Kronstadt revolt was precisely such a rank-and-file movement. In short, Russian state was **not** a form of working class self-defence in even the limited form that trade unions are — rather, it was as Emma Goldman noted the organ of a new master class. That neither Trotsky nor Wright could see this obvious fact explains why they sided with the bureaucratic reaction against the proletarian revolution — although as the former was then part of the ruling bureaucracy, this is understandable.



*as Trotsky suggested."* [Rees, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] In short, the revolutionary sailors of 1917 had been replaced by peasant conscripts in 1921. What are we to make of these claims?

First, we must note that this defence is completely irrelevant. If, as the Bolsheviks claimed, the revolt was a White plot or have led to a White counter-revolution then whether the sailors of 1921 had been there in 1917 is beside the point. Even if it were proven categorically that the bulk of the sailors had been revolutionary veterans the Bolsheviks would still have crushed the rebellion and their supporters would still justify this act. At best, this defence amounts to the unstated assumption that the revolutionary sailors of 1917 would have been either completely indifferent to, or supportive of, the Bolshevik repression of the Petrograd strikes in 1921. This, to say the least, seems unlikely but it suggests that for Leninists the highest expression of class consciousness is identical to the lowest once they are in power.

Second, we have to determine what are the facts as regards the social composition and turnover of personnel in Kronstadt. Thanks to research by academics, this can be done and the evidence is clear — the bulk of the sailors in 1921 were veterans from 1917. Given this conclusion, it may come as no surprise to discover that these sources have been misused by Trotskyists and we will, after presenting the evidence, discuss this in order to indicate how far they will abuse the truth.

Academic Evan Mawdsley concludes that *"it seems reasonable to challenge the previous interpretation"* that there had been a *"marked change in the composition of the men in the fleet ... particularly ... at the Kronstadt Naval Base."* From the *"statistical data, it would appear that the situation in the DOT [Active Detachment] was"* that *"the majority of men have been veterans of 1917 ... and available information indicates that as many as three-quarters of the DOT ratings — the Kronstadt mutineers — had served in the fleet at least since the World War."* The data suggests *"for the DOT as a whole on 1 January 1921, 23.5% could*

avoid death has no bearing to that nature of that revolt nor can it be used as "evidence" of a "white conspiracy."

In short, the attempts of Trotskyists to smear the Kronstadt sailors with having White links have no basis. That the Whites celebrated the revolt is as irrelevant as any warm words expressed towards the Hungarian revolution of 1956 by politicians in the West. Likewise, the actions of some rebels **after** the Bolsheviks had crushed the revolt cannot be used to discredit the revolt itself. The real relationship of the revolt to the Whites is clear. It was one of hatred and opposition.

## 8 Did the rebellion involve new sailors?

The most common Trotskyist assertion to justify the repression of the Kronstadt revolt was first raised by Trotsky. It consists of arguing that the sailors in 1921 were different than those in 1917. Trotsky started this line of justification towards the end of the revolt itself when he stated on March 16th that the Baltic Fleet had been *"inevitably thinned out with respect to personnel"* and so a *"great many of the revolutionary sailors"* of 1917 had been *"transferred"* elsewhere. They had been *"replaced in large measure by accidental elements"* and this had *"facilitated"* the work of the *"counterrevolutionary organisers"* who had *"selected"* Kronstadt. In 1937 and 1938, he repeated this claim. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 68–9, p. 79, p. 81 and p. 87]

His followers have repeated his assertions since. Wright suggested that *"the personnel of the fortress could not possibly have remained static throughout the years between 1917 and 1921"* and doubted that the revolutionary sailors of 1917 could have remained behind in the fortress while their comrades fought the Whites. [*"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 122–3] John Rees, continuing this line of rationale, argued that *"the composition of the garrison had changed ... it seems likely that the peasants had increased their weight in the Kronstadt,*



While being more aware of the bureaucratic nature of the Bolshevik regime, John Rees continued this line of attack on Kronstadt:

> *"As it became clear that the revolt was isolated Petrichenko was forced to come to terms with the reality of the balance of class forces. On 13 March Petrichenko wired David Grimm, the chief of the National Centre and General Wrangel's official representative in Finland, for help in gaining food. On 16 March Petrichenko accepted an offer of help from Baron P V Vilkin, an associate of Grimm's whom 'the Bolsheviks rightly called a White agent.' None of the aid reached the garrison before it was crushed, but the tide of events was pushing the sailors into the arms of the Whites, just as the latter had always suspected it would."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

We should note that it was due to the *"food situation in Kronstadt .. . growing desperate"* that Petrichenko contacted Grimm. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121] If the revolt had spread to Petrograd and the striking workers there, such requests would have been unnecessary. However, as historian V. Brovkin notes, the *"key here is that the Communists suppressed the workers uprising in Petrograd in the first days of March. The sailors' uprising in Kronstadt, which was an outgrowth of the uprising in Petrograd, was now cut off from its larger social base and localised on a small island. From this moment on the Kronstadt sailors were on the defensive."* [**Behind the Lines during the Civil War**, pp. 396–7] So, in a sense, Rees is correct to point to *"the reality of the balance of class forces"* but he fails to appreciate that the bureaucratic class has to be factored in. Isolation was a product of the actions and so power of the state bureaucracy and was due to the reality of the balance of coercive forces — the Bolshevik state machine had successfully repressed the Petrograd strikes (see section 10).

So, in his analysis of the *"balance of class forces"*, Rees — like Trotsky and Wright — fails to account for the class which had real power (and the related privileges) in Russia at the time — the state and party bureaucracy. The working class and peasantry were officially powerless and the only influence they exercised in the "workers' and peasants state" was when they rebelled, forcing "their" state to make concessions or to repress them (usually, a combination of both happened). The balance of class forces was between the workers, peasants and ruling bureaucracy. To ignore this class, the ruling class in Russia, means to misunderstand the problems facing the revolution and the Kronstadt revolt itself.

Given that the Bolshevik dictatorship had lied to and suppressed the Petrograd working class, the Kronstadters had few options left as regards aid. Rees's argument smacks of the "logic" of Right as regards the Spanish Civil War, the Cuban revolution and the Sandinistas. Isolated, each of these revolts turned to the Soviet Union for aid thus proving what the Right had always known from the start, namely their objectively Communist nature and their part in the International Communist Conspiracy. Few revolutionaries would evaluate these struggles on such an illogical and narrow basis but Rees wants us to do so with Kronstadt.

Worse, the logic of Rees arguments was used by the Stalinists — yet it is doubtful he would agree with them that the fact the Hungarian revolution of 1956 called on Western aid against the Red Army shows that it was objectively counter-revolutionary and pro-capitalist, just as the Communist Party bureaucrats had argued. The fact that during that revolt many messages of support for the rebels also preached bourgeois values would also, according to Rees's logic, damn that revolt in the eyes of all socialists. Similarly, the fact that the Polish union **Solidarity** got support from the West against the Stalinist regime does not mean that its struggle was counter-revolutionary. So the arguments used by Rees are identical to



those used by Stalinists to support their repression of working class revolt in the Soviet Empire. Indeed, orthodox Trotskyists drew these conclusions and called **Solidarnosc** a company union of the CIA, bankers, the Vatican and Wall Street for capitalist counterrevolution in Poland and considered the fall of the Soviet Union as a defeat for the working class and socialism, in other words, a counterrevolution. As evidence they pointed to the joy and support each generated in Western elite circles — and denounced neo-Trotskyists like Rees' party when they, rightly, argued that these were popular revolts against state-capitalist exploitation.

In reality, of course, the fact that others sought to take advantage of these (and other) situations is inevitable and irrelevant. The important thing is whether working class people were in control of the revolt and what the main objectives of it were. By this class criteria, it is clear that the Kronstadt revolt was a **revolutionary** revolt as, like Hungry 1956, the core of the revolt was working people and their councils. It was they who were in control and called the tune. That Whites tried (unsuccessfully) to take advantage of it is as irrelevant to evaluating the Kronstadt revolt as the fact that Stalinists tried (successfully) to take advantage of the Spanish struggle against Fascism.

Lastly, we must comment upon the fact that members of Kronstadt's Revolutionary Committee took refuge in Finland along with *"[s]ome 8,000 people (some sailors and the most active part of the civilian population)."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 172] This was as the Bolsheviks had predicted on March 5th: *"At the last minute, all those generals, the Kozlovskys, the Bourksers, and all that riff raff, the Petrichenkos, and the Tourins will flee to Finland, to the White guards"*. [quoted by Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 162] However, this does not indicate any "White guardist" connections for where else **could** they go? The fact that active participants in the revolt ended up in the only place they could end up to

logic of its own ideology. The rise of Stalinism was inevitable after the crushing of Kronstadt for there are no benevolent dictatorships, not even socialist ones headed by Trotsky. This is not hindsight — a massive, corrupt bureaucratic machine which had crushed numerous strikes, protests and revolts by the workers and peasants before early 1921 would not have been kept "pure" by a handful of leaders elected by a self-selected party which proclaimed the necessity of its own dictatorship.

## 14 How do modern day Trotskyists misrepresent Kronstadt?

We have discussed how Trotskyists have followed their heroes Lenin and Trotsky in abusing the facts about the Kronstadt sailors and uprising in previous sections. In section 8, we have indicated how they have selectively quoted from academic accounts of the uprising and suppressed evidence which contradicts their claims. In section 7, we have shown how they have selectively quoted from Paul Avrich's book on the revolt to paint a false picture of the connections between the Kronstadt sailors and the Whites. In section 10, we exposed how the repression against the Petrograd strikers was removed from history. Here we summarise some of the other misrepresentations of Trotskyists about the revolt.

We noted in section 3 how Trotskyists fail to quote the Kronstadt demands. They often go one further by inventing them. Thus, for example, John Rees asserts that the Kronstadters were fighting for *"soviets without parties."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63] His fellow-party member Pat Stack goes one further and asserts that the *"central demand of the Kronstadt rising though was 'soviets without Bolsheviks', in other words, the utter destruction of the workers' state."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246, November 2000] Both reference Paul Avrich's book **Kronstadt 1921** in their articles yet this is unambiguous: *"'Soviets without*



> *Soviets of functionaries who vote docilely what the authorities and their infallible commissars dictate to them. The slogan, 'He who does not work shall not eat,' has been modified under this beautiful 'Soviet' regime to 'Everything for the Commissars.' And as for the workers, peasants and intellectual workers, they have just to carry out their tasks in a prison.*
>
> *"This has become insupportable. Revolutionary Kronstadt has been the first to break the chains and bars of the prison. It fights for the true Soviet republic of the workers in which the producer himself will be owner of the products of his labour and can dispose of them as he wishes."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 518–9]

So as can be seen, the Maximalists were in advance of the Bolsheviks too. They argued for soviet power, not party power, as well as workers' self-management to replace the state capitalism of the Bolshevik party dictatorship. The political outlook of the Kronstadt rebels had not changed dramatically. Heavily influenced by anarchist and semi-anarchists in 1917, in 1921 the same political ideas came to the fore again once the sailors, soldiers and civilians had freed themselves from Bolshevik dictatorship and created the Conference of Delegates.

According to the logic of Trotsky's argument, the Kronstadt sailors were revolutionary simply because of the actions of the Bolshevik minority, as a *"revolution is 'made' directly by a **minority.** The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support ... on the part of the majority. The shift in different stages of the revolution ... is directly determined by changing political relations between the minority and the majority, between the vanguard and the class."* It is this reason that necessitates *"the dictatorship of the proletariat"* as the level of the masses cannot be *"equal"* and of *"extremely high development."* Trotsky argued that the *"politi-*

*cal composition of the Kronstadt Soviet reflected the composition of the garrison and the crews.*" [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85, p. 92 and p. 86]

In other words, with the vanguard (the minority of Bolsheviks) gone, the majority of the Kronstadters fell back to their less developed ways. Yet, if the political composition of the revolt reflected the composition of the crews, then Trotsky's argument suggests that this composition was remarkably unchanged for in the early months of 1918 the Bolsheviks saw their vote nearly half between late January and April 1918. Similarly, we find John Rees, in contradiction to his main argument that the sailors were backward new recruits, admitting that the *"ideology of the Kronstadt garrison was one factor"* in the revolt because *"in its heroic days the garrison had an ultra-left air."* [Rees, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] Yet if, as he maintains, the sailors **were** new, how could they had time to be influenced by this ideology, the ideology of sailors he claims were not there? And if the new recruits he claims were there **had** been influenced by the sailors of 1917 then it is hard to maintain that the revolt was alien to the spirit of 1917. By this apparently simple admission of the facts, he seems unaware that he fatally undermines his own case.

All of which raises an interesting question. If revolutions are made by a minority who gain the support of the majority, what happens when the majority reject the vanguard? As we indicate in section 15, Trotsky was not shy in providing the answer — party dictatorship. Such socialism from above, as the Kronstadt sailors recognised, cannot create genuine socialism but only state-capitalism.

To conclude, the evidence shows that the political ideas dominant in Kronstadt had not changed since 1917 — the same libertarian socialist ideas prevailed although now enriched by the experience of the state socialism anarchists had warned of. Indeed, it is the politics expressed in 1921 which clearly confirm the statistical evidence on the length of service of the rebel



opened the door to Stalinism but invited it in and gave it the keys to the house.

Lastly, we should draw some parallels between the fates of the Kronstadt sailors and the Left Opposition. John Rees argues that the Left Opposition had *"the whole vast propaganda machine of the bureaucracy . .. turned against them,"* a machine used by Trotsky and Lenin in 1921 against Kronstadt. Ultimately, the Left Opposition *"were exiled, imprisoned and shot,"* again like the Kronstadters and a host of revolutionaries who defended the revolution but opposed the Bolshevik dictatorship. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68]

A Third Revolution was the only **real** alternative in Bolshevik Russia. Any struggle from below post-1921 would have raised the same problems of soviet democracy and party dictatorship which Kronstadt raised. Given that the **Left Opposition** subscribed to the *"Leninist principle"* of *"the dictatorship of the party,"* it could not appeal to the masses as its members knew that not only would they not vote for it, the masses would hardly have taken to the streets for such a pitiful set of reforms. The arguments raised against Kronstadt that soviet democracy would lead to counter-revolution are equally applicable to movements which appealed, as Rees desires, to the Russian working class post-Kronstadt. Moreover, any mass revolt would have faced the same state machine utilised in 1921 against Petrograd and Kronstadt. Finally, any Leninist external revolution would have imposed party dictatorship and state-capitalism following Bolshevik orthodoxy — along with the associated bureaucracy this hierarchical, centralised regime necessitated.

To conclude, the claim that Kronstadt would inevitably have led to an anti-proletarian dictatorship fails. Yes, it might have but the Bolshevik dictatorship itself was anti-proletarian (it had repressed proletarian protest, organisation, freedom and rights on numerous occasions) and it could never be reformed from within by its social position and the very

reform of the regime by a section of its rulers is not only impossible in the face of the size and power of the bureaucracy but it was also based on maintaining the party dictatorship and one-man management within production. Unlike the Kronstadt Platform, it was doomed to failure from the start. Any group which raised demands for a return to the principles of 1917 were, like the Kronstadt sailors, crushed by forces of the State. In terms of workers' struggles, the bureaucracy had long experience is repressing strikes and so any revolt would have undoubtedly suffered the fate of the Petrograd strikes which had inspired the solidarity of Kronstadt. Finally, the notion that a revolution elsewhere would have revitalised the Soviet regime fails to acknowledge that it would have — if it were Leninist in nature — been based on imposing a party dictatorship and state-capitalism as per the example of Soviet Russia under Lenin and Trotsky. As for a non-Leninist revolution, well, those who defend the Bolshevik repression of Kronstadt are Leninists and so assume that no such thing is possible…

Regardless of the suggested alternative to Kronstadt's Third Revolution, it can only be concluded that it did not exist — the balance of forces at the time, the nature of the regime, the ideology of the ruling elite, all pointed to this during the revolt itself. The unchallenged master of the economy and society, the Bolshevik bureaucracy was the nucleus of a new ruling class — the notion that such a machine could be controlled or appealed to by a few "pure" party members is the infantile delusion. This new bureaucratic class could only be removed by a Third Revolution and while this, possibly, could have resulted in a bourgeois counter-revolution the alternative of maintaining Bolshevik dictatorship would **inevitably** have resulted in Stalinism. When supporters of Bolshevism argue that Kronstadt would have opened the door to counter-revolution, they do not understand that the Bolsheviks **were** the counter-revolution in 1921 and that by suppressing Kronstadt the Bolsheviks not only



sailors we presented in the last section. The revolt of 1921 reflected the politics and aspirations of those active since at least 1917. It was these politics which had made Kronstadt the *"pride and glory"* of the revolution in 1917 and, four years later, made it so dangerous to the Bolsheviks.

## 10 Why did the Petrograd workers not support Kronstadt?

For Trotskyists, the inaction of the Petrograd workers during the revolt is a significant factor in showing its *"backward peasant"* character. Trotsky, for example, argued that from *"the class point of view"* it is *"extremely important to contrast the behaviour of Kronstadt to that of Petrograd in those critical days"* for the *"uprising did not attract the Petrograd workers. It repelled them. The stratification proceeded along class lines. The workers immediately felt that the Kronstadt mutineers stood on the opposite side of the barricades — and they supported the Soviet power. The political isolation of Kronstadt was the cause of its internal uncertainty and its military defeat."* [*"Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt"*, Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 90–1]

First, it should be noted that Trotsky's claims in 1937 are at odds with his opinion during the crisis. In a cable dated March 5th, 1921, to a member of the Council of Labour and Defence Trotsky insisted that *"only the seizure of Kronstadt will put an end to the political crisis in Petrograd."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, *"The Communist Leaders' Role in the Kronstadt Tragedy of 1921 in the Light of Recently Published Archival Documents"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32] Thus, in 1921, Trotsky was well aware of the links between the Kronstadt revolt and the Petrograd strikes, seeing the destruction of the former as a means to defeating the latter. Simply put, the crushing of Kronstadt would give the rebel workers in Petrograd a clear message of what to expect if they persisted in their protests.

Second, Trotsky's later arguments leave a lot to be desired. For example, he fails to note (to use Victor Serge's words that the state and Communist Press *"was positively berserk with lies"* and *"lied systematically"* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, pp. 125–6] The press and radio campaign directed against Kronstadt stated that the revolt had been organised by foreign spies and was led by ex-Tsarist generals. As an example (see section 5 for more details), on 5th March the Petrograd Defence Committee put out a call to the insurgents, inviting them to surrender:

> *"You are being told fairy tales when they tell you that Petrograd is with you or that the Ukraine supports you. These are impertinent lies. The last sailor in Petrograd abandoned you when he learned that you were led by generals like Kozlovsky. Siberia and the Ukraine support the Soviet power. Red Petrograd laughs at the miserable efforts of a handful of White Guards and Socialist Revolutionaries."* [quoted by Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 162]

These lies would, of course, alienate many workers in Petrograd. Two hundred emissaries were sent from Kronstadt to distribute their demands but only a few avoided capture. The Party had brought the full weight of its propaganda machine to bear, lying about the revolt and those taking part in it. The government also placed a *"careful watch"* on the *"trains from Petrograd to mainland points in the direction of Kronstadt to prevent any contact with the insurgents."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140 and p. 141]

However, while lying is a factor in the lack of active support, it is by no means the key one. That factor was state repression. Emma Goldman recalled the situation in Petrograd at the time:

> *"Extraordinary martial law was declared over the entire Petrograd Province, and none but specially*



> *accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history ... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution .. . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [**Writings 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]

We can agree with Trotsky on *"the crushing of Soviet democracy by an all-powerful bureaucracy"* occurred in Russia but not on the date — it happened when Lenin held the reins of power and not after his death. Likewise, we can agree that the *"opposition parties were forbidden one after the other"* is *"obviously in conflict with the spirit of Soviet democracy"* but must reject as revisionism the claim that *"the leaders of Bolshevism regarded [this] not as a principle, but as an episodic act of self-defence."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 278 and p. 96] The Platform of the Opposition — to note just one example — shows that this smacks of the re-writing of history Trotsky correctly accused Stalinism of.

As can be seen, the alternatives suggested by Trotskyists to crushing Kronstadt are the real utopian positions. The self-

same party, all of whom would be bound by party discipline to carry out the orders of the party leadership. Power would rest in the party hierarchy and definitively **not** in the working class, its unions or its soviets (both of which would remain mere fig leafs for party rule). Ultimately, the **only** guarantee that the party dictatorship would govern in the interests of the proletariat would be the good intentions of those who held power in its hierarchy. However, being unaccountable to the masses, such a guarantee would be worthless — as history shows.

It may be objected here that this ignores that Trotsky stated in 1936 that when *"the Soviet bureaucracy is overthrown by a revolutionary party having all the attributes of the old Bolshevism"* then it *"would begin with the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the Soviets. It would be able to, and would have to, restore freedom of Soviet parties."* Yet this ignores his suggestion that a *"restoration of the right of criticism, and a genuine freedom of elections, are necessary conditions for the further development of the country"* and this *"assumes a revival of freedom of Soviet parties, beginning with the party of Bolsheviks"*. [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 252 and p. 289] While in power Trotsky — like every leading Bolshevik — had repeatedly asserted that party dictatorship was not only completely compatible with "Soviet Democracy" but that the latter required the former. So rather than a complete introduction of Soviet democracy in the true meaning of the term, we would see the Trotskyists given freedom first but within the context of their party's dictatorship. They would then decide which other parties counted as "Soviet parties" — we do not have to look at the fate of the Mensheviks under Lenin to see the flaws in such a position. It comes as no surprise to discover Trotsky reiterating the necessity of party dictatorship the year this work was published in English:

> *"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely*



> *authorised officials could leave the city. The Bolshevik press opened a campaign of calumny and vituperation against Kronstadt, proclaiming that the sailors and soldiers had made common cause with the 'tsarist general Kozlovsky,' and declaring the Kronstadt people outlawed."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 2, pp. 878–9]

Given what everyone knew what happened to people outlawed by the Bolsheviks, is it surprising that many workers in Petrograd (even if they knew they were being lied to) did not act? Particularly as the threat could be seen on the streets of Petrograd:

> *"On March 3 the Petrograd Defence Committee, now vested with absolute power throughout the entire province, took stern measures to prevent any further disturbances. The city became a vast garrison, with troops patrolling in every quarter. Notices posted on the walls reminded the citizenry that all gatherings would be dispersed and those who resisted shot on the spot. During the day the streets were nearly deserted, and, with the curfew now set at 9 p.m., night life ceased altogether."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 142]

Berkman, also an eyewitness to the repression like Goldman, stated that:

> "The Petrograd committee of defence, directed by Zinoviev, its chairman, assumed full control of the city and Province of Petrograd. The whole Northern District was put under martial law and all meetings prohibited. Extraordinary precautions were taken to protect the Government institutions and machine guns were placed in the

> Astoria, the hotel occupied by Zinoviev and other high Bolshevik functionaries. The proclamations posted on the street bulletin boards ordered the immediate return of all strikers to the factories, prohibited suspension of work, and warned the people against congregating on the streets. 'In such cases', the order read, 'the soldiery will resort to arms. In case of resistance, shooting on the spot.'
>
> "The committee of defence took up the systematic 'cleaning of the city.' Numerous workers, soldiers and sailors suspected of sympathising with Kronstadt, placed under arrest. All Petrograd sailors and several Army regiments thought to be 'politically untrustworthy' were ordered to distant points, while the families of Kronstadt sailors living in Petrograd were taken into custody **as hostages.**" [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

As we noted in section 2, the events in Kronstadt were in solidarity with the strike wave in Petrograd at the end of February. Then the Bolsheviks had repressed the workers with *"arrests, the use of armed patrols in the streets and in the factories, and the closing and re-registration of an enterprise labour force."* [Mary McAuley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 409] A three-man Defence Committee was formed and Zinoviev *"proclaimed martial law"* on February 24th (this was later *"vested with absolute power throughout the entire province"* on March 3rd). As part of this process, they had to rely on the ***kursanty*** (Communist officer cadets) as the local garrisons had been caught up the general ferment and could not be relied upon to carry out the government's orders: *"Overnight Petrograd became an armed camp. In every quarter pedestrians were stopped and their documents checked . .. the curfew [was] strictly enforced."* The Petrograd Cheka made



alisation and one-man management. In short, it would have also resulted in the political and economic dispossession of the working class by "its" party. As such, a successful revolution in the West would **not** have seen the Russian dictatorship over the proletariat ended but rather reinforced as the non-Russian Leninist parties would have simply repeated the "lessons" learned by the Bolsheviks and communicated internationally:

> *"It was, indeed, between 1917 and 1920 that the Bolshevik party established itself so firmly in power that it no longer could have been dislodged except by force of arms. And it was from the beginning of this period that the uncertainties of its line were ironed out, the ambiguities lifted, and the contradictions resolved. In the new State, the proletariat was to work, to be mobilised, and, should the need arise, to die in defence of the new power. It was to give its most 'conscious' and most 'capable' members to 'its' party, where they would become the leaders of society. It was to be 'active' and it had to 'participate' whenever it was asked to do so, but it was to do so only and exactly to the extent that the Party demanded this of the proletariat. Finally, it was to bow completely to the Party's will on all essential matters."* [Cornelius Castoriadis, **Political and Social Writings**, vol. 3, p. 99]

Simply put, democracy cannot be introduced in the soviets and unions when party dictatorship is considered essential for the "realisation" of the "proletarian" dictatorship and when there can only be **one** party. If "proletarian" dictatorship is impossible without the dictatorship of the party then, clearly, proletarian democracy becomes meaningless. All the workers would be allowed to do would be to vote for members of the

*to all capitalist countries and to be directed from the centre, are determined not only by the needs of communist agitation in those countries, but also by the political needs of Soviet Russia"* in addition to the *"immediate economic needs which determine their policies"*. [*"World Revolution and Communist Tactics"*, **Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism**, p. 144]

Just as the influence of Lenin had been a key factor in the successful the struggle against anti-Parliamentarian tendencies in Communist Parties all across the world, so the example and influence of the Bolsheviks would have made its impact on any foreign revolution. Any successful revolutionaries would have applied such "lessons" of October such as the dictatorship of the proletariat being impossible without the dictatorship of the Communist Party, centralism, nationalisation, one-man management, militarisation of labour and so on. This would have distorted any revolution from the start as well as simply creating a new bureaucratic ruling class as had happened in Russia.

Given how obediently the Communist Parties around the world followed the insane policies of Stalinism, can we doubt this conclusion? After all, even in the 1930s, these positions were still held by Trotskyists across the globe. The first issue of the official American Trotskyist journal, for example made its position clear by seeking to refute the notion that the dictatorship of the party was an alien concept brought into Bolshevism by Stalin! It did so by *"quotations from Lenin, Trotsky and others so as to establish ... the dictatorship of the party is Leninist"* rather than *"a Stalinist innovation"*. [Max Shachtman, *"Dictatorship of Party or Proletariat? Remarks on a Conception of the AWP ... and Others"*, **New International**, July 1934]

Thus the reality was that any Bolshevik-style revolution in Western Europe — and least we forget, Trotskyists are convinced that only a Bolshevik-lead revolution can succeed — would have followed the Bolshevik ideology with regards to the necessity of the dictatorship of the party as well as nation-



widespread arrests. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39, p. 142 and pp. 46–7]

However, part of the Petrograd proletariat continued to strike during the Kronstadt events including the biggest factories of Petrograd: Poutilov, Baltisky, Oboukhov, Nievskaia Manoufactura, etc. However, the Bolsheviks acted quickly to shut down the factories and started the re-registration of the workers. For workers to be locked out of a factory meant to be *"automatically deprived of their rations."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 41] On the day the Bolsheviks attacked Kronstadt (March 7th) the Cheka reported that it was launching *"decisive actions against the workers."* These *"decisive actions"* involved a *"massive purge of Petrograd factories and plants."* At the Arsenal factory, for example, *"the workers organised a mass meeting on 7th March, (the day the bombardment of Kronstadt began). This meeting adopted a resolution of the mutinous sailors! It elected a commission which was to go from factory to factory, agitating for a general strike."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 164] The Cheka confirms this event, reporting to Zinoviev on March 8th that *"[a]t a rally of workers of the Arsenal Plant a resolution was passed to join the Kronstadt uprising. The general meeting had elected a delegation to maintain contact with Kronstadt."* This delegation had already been arrested. This was a common practice and during this period the Cheka concentrated its efforts on the leaders and on disrupting communication: all delegates to other workplaces, all Mensheviks and SRs who could be found, all speakers at rallies were being arrested day after day. Thus the Communists *"suppressed the workers' uprising in Petrograd in the first days of March."* Unlike the Kronstadt sailors, the workers did not have weapons and *"were essentially defenceless vis-a-vis the Cheka."* [V. Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 396]

The state of siege was finally lifted on the 22nd of March, five days after the crushing of Kronstadt. The city had been *"appeased by [economic] concessions and cowed by the presence*

*of troops."* [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200] In these circumstances, is it surprising that the Petrograd workers did not join in the rebellion? So Trotsky is insulting the intelligence of his readers by arguing that the lack of support in Petrograd for Kronstadt reflected *"class lines."* Indeed, by failing to mention (to use Emma Goldman's words) *"the campaign of slander, lies and calumny against the sailors"* conducted by the Soviet Press (which *"fairly oozed poison against the sailors"*) or that *"Petrograd was put under martial law"* Trotsky, quite clearly, *"deliberately falsifies the facts."* [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 264] In short:

> "Here again Trotsky is saying things which are quite untrue. Earlier on we showed how the wave of strikes had started in Petrograd and how Kronstadt had followed suit. It was against the strikers of Petrograd that the Government had to organise a special General Staff: the Committee of Defence. The repression was first directed against the Petrograd workers and against their demonstrations, by the despatch of armed detachments of Koursantys.
>
> "But the workers of Petrograd had no weapons. They could not defend themselves as could the Kronstadt sailors. The military repression directed against Kronstadt certainly intimidated the Petrograd workers. The demarcation did not take place 'along class lines' but according to the respective strengths of the organs of repression. The fact that the workers of Petrograd did not follow those of Kronstadt does not prove that they did not sympathise with them. Nor, at a later date, when the Russian proletariat failed to follow the various 'oppositions' did this prove that they were in agreement with Stalin! In such instances it was a question of the respective strengths of the forces of the workers themselves; it is for this reason that it will be necessary to have a centralised Communist Party, powerful, armed with the means of the proletarian government and determined to conserve power for a certain time, even only as the Party of the revolutionary minority, while waiting for the conditions of the struggle to improve and for the morale of the masses to rise ... there can arise situations where the revolutionary minority of the working class must shoulder the full weight of the struggle and where the dictatorship of the proletariat can only be maintained, provisionally at least, as the dictatorship of the Communist Party."

Events of March 1921 confirmed this position for the party's *"firm decision to retain power by all possible means"* is *"the greatest lesson of the Kronstadt events, the international lesson.* He also referenced *"our discussions with that section of Communists [in Germany] who wished to oppose the Russian dictatorship, the dictatorship of the Communist Party"* — as also discussed by Lenin in **"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder** (see section H.3.3) — on *"the problem of the relationship between the Communist Party and the mass of the proletariat and the form of the dictatorship: dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class"*. [**The Kronstadt Uprising**] Radek was just repeating the Bolshevik position in words with more than usual clarity and *"provisionally"* unsurprisingly came to be measured in decades and was only ended by mass revolt in 1989.

The Bolsheviks had already been manipulating foreign Communist Parties in the interests of their state for a number of years. That is part of the reason why the Council Communists around Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter whom Radek referred to broke with the Third International in 1921. *"We can now see why,"* Pannekoek noted *"the tactics of the Third International, laid down by Congress to apply homogeneously*

> *"Well now we know what we have to look forward to: the dictatorship of the Leadership of the Socialist Party, or of the as yet unborn Communist Party … a revolution made with an authoritarian outlook with dictatorial objectives … through authoritarian imposition from above."* [Errico Malatesta, *"At Last! What is the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'?"*, **Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes**, pp. 208–10]

Kronstadt, likewise, was integrated into this perspective with, for example, leading German Communist Karl Radek writing on 1 April 1921 that he was *"convinced that in the light of the events at Kronstadt, the Communist elements which have so far not understood the role of the Party during the revolution, will at last learn the true value of these explanations, as well as the resolution of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International on the subject of the role of the Party."* For *"the full benefit of this lesson"* is that *"even when that uprising bases itself on working-class discontent"* it must *"be realised that, if the Communist Party can only triumph when it has the support of the mass of workers, there will nevertheless arise situations in the West where it will have to, for a certain period, keep power using solely the forces of the vanguard."* He noted that this was a long standing position by quoting an earlier article of his from 1919:

> *"And the mass … may well hesitate in the days of great difficulties, defeats, and it may even despair of victory and long to capitulate. The proletarian revolution does not bring with it an immediate relief of poverty, and in certain circumstances, it may even temporarily worsen the situation of the proletariat. The adversaries of the proletarian will take advantage of this opportunity to demand the government*



> confronting one another."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 191–2]

Not that this was the first time Trotsky confused force with class. In 1920 he had defended the fact *"of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party"* by arguing that *"it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party"* and that there is *"no substitution at all"* when the *"power of the party"* replaces that of the working class. The rule of the party *"has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109] He continued:

> *"But where is your guarantee, certain wise men ask us, that it is just your party that expresses the interests of historical development? Destroying or driving underground the other parties, you have thereby prevented their political competition with you, and consequently you have deprived yourselves of the possibility of testing your line of action.*
>
> *"This idea is dictated by a purely liberal conception of the course of the revolution. In a period in which all antagonisms assume an open character, and the political struggle swiftly passes into a civil war, the ruling party has sufficient material standard by which to test its line of action, without the possible circulation of Menshevik papers. Noske [in Germany] crushes the Communists, but they grow. We have suppressed the Mensheviks and the S.R.s — and they have disappeared. This criterion is sufficient for us."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 109–10]

An interesting criterion, to say the least. By this logic Hitler expressed the *"interests of historical development"* when

the German Communists and Trotskyists *"disappeared"* by leaps and bounds. Similarly, the Trotskyists in Russia *"disappeared"* under Stalin. Is this a Trotskyist justification of Stalinism? After all, in November 1927, the Left Opposition called for workers to demonstrate in its support during the 10th anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution. The workers did not heed their call, leading neo-Trotskyist Tony Cliff to lament *"the passivity of the mass of the workers, their lack of will to fight for the Opposition"*. This lack of response was critical for the success of Stalinism: *"For the ruling group to win it needed the passivity of the mass of the workers, while the Opposition needed the activity and consciousness of the masses for success."* [**Trotsky**, vol. 3, p. 263] So, if we apply the Leninist arguments against Kronstadt to this then, surely, we must conclude that the fact the workers remained passive shows that the Stalinists represented the "proletarian revolution" while the Trotskyists represented "petty bourgeois reaction"? That the Left Opposition proclaimed its proletarian credentials matters little, as Trotsky reminded us as regards the Kronstadt rebels, *"Marx has said that it is impossible to judge either parties or peoples by what they say about themselves"*. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 88] Likewise, noting the repressive nature of the regime in 1927 to explain this passivity would be acceptable if the repression in Petrograd before, during and after the Kronstadt rebellion was not ignored by the Trotskyists.

Rather than being an irrefutable case against Kronstadt Trotskyists think it is, all that the isolation of Kronstadt proves is the power of the repressive system the rebels and the Russian masses faced.

On this theme, we can see the depths which Trotskyists go to re-write history from Pierre Frank's *"Introduction"* to the work **Kronstadt**. He decides to quote Paul Avrich's work (after, of course, warning the reader that Avrich *"is not a Bolshevik or a Trotskyist"* and his *"political features are blurred"*) and



*Eighth district elected a slate consisting solely of syndicalist and anarchist write-in deputies in place of the single-party ticket. The Revolutionary Governing Council voided the results of the election and a week later the official slate 'won'"*. [Rudolf L. Tokes, **Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic**, p. 38 and pp.151–2] As in Russia, the "wrong" people had been elected to the soviets and so the Communist regime simply nullified workers' democracy.

The same perspective was expressed in other countries. As another example, in Italy the pro-Bolsheviks were also raising the necessity of party dictatorship and were being opposed by the libertarians during the revolutionary crisis in 1920:

> *"Up to now, whenever we said that what the socialists term* ***dictatorship of the proletariat*** *is only, in fact, the dictatorship of some men who, with the assistance of a party, superimpose and impose themselves on the proletariat, they used to treat us as if we were little short of slanderers ... Moscow had become the Mecca of the proletariat; the source of light, and ... peremptory orders as to the ideas that those who, with permission from their betters, wished to call themselves communists ought to profess and the conduct they should observe ... the official Italian Socialist Party daily, up to now the most authorised mouthpiece for the word from Moscow, ...* ***Avanti!*** *of the 26th [September, 1920] ... said:*
>
> *"'In Russia, under the soviet regime, the Party really directs all State policy and all public activities; individuals as well as groups being utterly subordinated to the decisions of the Party, so that* ***the dictatorship of the proletariat is really the dictatorship of the party and, as such of its central committee****.'*

for the idea that an external revolution could have regenerated the Soviet regime. In the words of Ida Mett:

> *"Some claim that the Bolsheviks allowed themselves such actions (as the suppression of Kronstadt) in the hope of a forthcoming world revolution, of which they considered themselves the vanguard. But would not a revolution in another country have been influenced by the spirit of the Russian Revolution? When one considers the enormous moral authority of the Russian Revolution throughout the world one may ask oneself whether the deviations of this Revolution would not eventually have left an imprint on other countries. Many historical facts allow such a judgement. One may recognise the impossibility of genuine socialist construction in a single country, yet have doubts as to whether the bureaucratic deformations of the Bolshevik regime would have been straightened out by the winds coming from revolutions in other countries."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 203]

This is indeed the case — from the start, the Bolsheviks were considered by many socialists across the globe as showing the correct path in terms of revolutionary strategy and actions. This included the dogma on the necessity of party dictatorship which had become Bolshevik orthodoxy by the start of 1919 at the latest (reflecting its practice by mid-1918). Thus we see, for example, during the Hungarian Revolution which had seen libertarians form the first workers' councils in December 1917 by 1919 they *"felt that the powers of the [Communist] Revolutionary Governing Council [of Bela Kun] were excessive … For the syndicalists the legitimate holders of proletarian sovereignty were the workers councils … It was not long before they saw their cherished ideals defeated by the united party's oligarchy. On April 7, 1919, elections were held for the Budapest Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The syndicalist controlled Budapest*



states that Avrich *"done his work conscientiously, without skipping over the facts."* It is a shame that the same cannot be said of Frank who states that Avrich *"discusses the strikes in Petrograd preceding Kronstadt and comes to the following conclusion"*:

> "For many intellectuals and workers, moreover, the Bolsheviks, with all their faults, were still the most effective barrier to a White resurgence and the downfall of the revolution.
>
> "For these reasons, the strikes in Petrograd were fated to lead a brief existence. Indeed, they ended almost as suddenly as they had begun, never having reached the point of armed revolt against the regime." [quoted by Frank, Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 24–25]

It is the *"moreover"* in the first paragraph that gives the game away. Avrich lists a few more reasons than the one given by Frank. Here is what Avrich actually lists as the reasons for the end of the strike wave:

> "after several days of tense excitement, the Petrograd disturbances petered out … The concessions had done their work, for more than anything else it was cold and hunger which had stimulated popular disaffection. Yet there is no denying that the application of military force and the widespread arrests, not to speak of the tireless propaganda waged by the authorities had been indispensable in restoring order. Particularly impressive in this regard was the discipline shown by the local party organisation. Setting aside their internal disputes, the Petrograd Bolsheviks swiftly closed ranks and proceeded to carry out the unpleasant task of repression with efficiency and dispatch …

> "Then, too, the collapse of the movement would not have come so soon but for the utter demoralisation of Petrograd's inhabitants. The workers were simply too exhausted to keep up any sustained political activity . .. What is more, they lacked effective leadership and a coherent program of action. In the past these had been supplied by the radical intelligentsia ... [but they] were themselves in no condition to lend the workers any meaningful support, let alone active guidance ... they now felt too weary and terrorised ... to raise their voices in opposition. With most of their comrades in prison or exile, and some already executed, few of the survivors were willing to risk the same fate, especially when the odds against them were so overwhelming and when the slightest protest might deprive their families of their rations. For many intellectuals and workers, moreover, the Bolsheviks, with all their faults, were still the most effective barrier to a White resurgence and the downfall of the revolution.
>
> "For these reasons, the strikes in Petrograd were fated to lead a brief existence. Indeed, they ended almost as suddenly as they had begun, never having reached the point of armed revolt against the regime." [Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt**, pp. 49–51]

As can be seen, Frank "skips over" most of Avrich's argument and so the basis of his conclusion. Indeed, what Frank calls Avrich's "conclusion" cannot be understood by providing, as Frank does, the **last** reason Avrich gives for it. The dishonesty is clear, if not unexpected nor an isolated case.

John Rees, to provide another example, states that the revolt was *"preceded by a wave of serious but quickly resolved strikes."* No mention that the strikes were *"resolved"* by force nor that



The notion that the bureaucracy could be defeated from within was naive in the extreme. It — like any ruling class — could only be defended from below, by the working class. To fight the bureaucracy, the working class needed freedom: freedom to organise, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, as demanded by the Kronstadt rebels. Limiting these essential liberties to within the party as Trotsky wished would solve little given the size and power of the bureaucracy and the willingness of the ruling elite — as shown in 1921, for example — to repress any workers who exercised those freedoms. It is, therefore, unsurprising to discover Ciliga recounting how in his prison the strongest fraction of the Trotskyists *"hoped for reform from above ... As to making an appeal to the people and the masses ... this [was considered] an extremely dangerous course to follow: the peasants were 'against us'; the workers were undecided, the 'spirit of Kronstadt' pervaded the land and the 'Thermidor front might well include the working class'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212] Victor Serge, likewise, noted how **Left Opposition** *"refused to appeal to workers and intellectuals who were not affiliated to the Party, because it believed that counterrevolutionary attitude, whether conscious or not, were still rife amongst them."* [**The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky**, p. 140] As Trotsky put it: *"We have never had and do not now have the intention of making nonparty people judges of our inner-party conflicts."* [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–27)**, p. 482]This is unsurprising, for it is doubtful such people would have restricted their demands to the limited inner-party reforms urged by the **Left Opposition** nor would they have forgotten Trotsky's policies when he had held power. So what else could it do? Appeal to the workers to fight, to revolt, in the name of... party dictatorship?

In terms of internal reform, this was doomed to failure in advance: the **Left Opposition** received the crop that Lenin and Trotsky sowed the seeds of in 1921. Much the same can be said

control. This can be seen from the banning of factions within the party in early 1921:

> *"In March 1921, in the days of the Kronstadt revolt, which attracted into its ranks no small number of Bolsheviks, the 10th Congress of the party thought it necessary to resort to a prohibition of factions — that is, to transfer the political regime prevailing in the state to the inner life of the ruling party. This forbidding of factions was again regarded as an exceptional measure to be abandoned at the first serious improvement in the situation. At the same time, the Central Committee was extremely cautious in applying the new law, concerning itself most of all lest it lead to a strangling of the inner life of the party."* [Trotsky, **The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 96]

Yet this is, as we discuss in section H.5.3, the inevitable outcome of vanguardism in practice. Trotsky, then, simply opposed the application of repressive methods used on previous dissidents onto himself and those who agreed with him. He seemed genuinely surprised that the party machine would abuse its power in its own interests. Just as those outside the party — whether anarchists, other oppositional socialist groups or strikers — were repressed by the bureaucracy, so the party itself was subject to a similar regime. As Victor Serge noted, in practice the faction ban *"meant the establishment within the Party of a dictatorship of the Old Bolsheviks, and the direction of direction of disciplinary measures, not against the unprincipled careerists and conformist latecomers, but against those sections with a critical outlook."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 135] Originally this repression was mild but, over time, it increased in severity until Communists and even bureaucrats suffered the same fate as those without a party card.



the Kronstadt revolt was not only *"preceded"* by the strikes but was directly inspired by them, was in **solidarity with them** and raised many of the same demands. Similarly, he argues that the Kronstadters' *"insistence that they were fighting for a 'third revolution', freedom of expression and for 'soviets without parties' [although, as Avrich notes, they **never** raised that slogan and so we have to wonder who Rees is quoting here] has convinced many historians that this revolt was fundamentally distinct from the White Rebellions."* But this, apparently, is not the case as *"one must be careful to analyse the difference between the conscious aims of the rebels and the possible outcome of their actions. The Bolshevik regime still rested on the shattered remnants of the working class. The Kronstadt sailors' appeals to the Petrograd workers had met with little or no response."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61 and p. 63]

One has to wonder what planet Rees is on. After all, **if** the Bolsheviks **had** rested on the *"shattered remnants of the working class"* then they would **not** have had to turn Petrograd into an armed camp, repress strikes, impose martial law and arrest militant workers. The Kronstadt sailors' appeals *"met with little or no response"* due to the Bolshevik coercion exercised in those fateful days. To not mention the repression in Petrograd is to deliberately deceive the reader. That the Kronstadt demands would have met with strong response in Petrograd can be seen from the actions of the Bolsheviks (who did not rest upon the workers but rather arrested them). Given that the Kronstadt demands simply reflected those raised by the Petrograd strikers **themselves** we can safely say that Rees is talking nonsense (see section 4). Thus Rees' "class analysis" of the Kronstadt revolt is pathetic and has no bearing to the reality of the situation in Petrograd nor to the history of the revolt itself.

As can be seen, any attempt to use the relative inaction of the Petrograd workers as evidence of the class nature of the revolt has to be based on ignoring all the relevant facts of the situation. This can go so far as to selectively quote from aca-

demic accounts to present a radically different conclusion to that of the misused author's.

## 11 Were the Whites a threat during the Kronstadt revolt?

The lack of foreign intervention during the Kronstadt revolt suggests more than just the fact that the revolt was not a "White conspiracy." It also suggests that the White forces were in no position to take advantage of the rebellion or even support it. This is significant simply because the Bolsheviks and their supporters argue that the revolt had to be repressed simply because the Soviet State was in danger of White or foreign intervention. How much danger was there? According to John Rees, a substantial amount:

> *"The Whites, even though their armies had been beaten in the field, were still not finished — as the emigre response to the Kronstadt rising shows … They had predicted a rising at Kronstadt and the White National Centre abroad raised a total of nearly 1 million French Francs, 2 million Finnish marks, £5000, $25,000 and 900 tons of flour in just two weeks; Indeed, the National Centre was already making plans for the forces of the French navy and those of General Wrangel, who still commanded 70,000 men in Turkey, to land in Kronstadt if the revolt were to succeed."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 63–4]

To back up his argument, Rees references Paul Avrich's book. We, in turn, will consult that work to evaluate his argument.

First, the Kronstadt revolt broke out months after the end of the Civil War in Western Russia. Wrangel had fled from the Crimea in November 1920. The Bolsheviks were so afraid of



> *permitted to the masses themselves who had endured all the hardships of the Civil War?*
>
> *"In his speech to the Tenth Congress — published in the Congress Proceedings — Lenin voiced his regret at having 'permitted' such a discussion. 'We have certainly committed an error,' he said, 'in having authorised this debate. Such a discussion was harmful just before the Spring months that would be loaded with such difficulties.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 143]

Unsurprisingly, the Tenth Congress voted to ban factions within the Party. The elimination of discussion in the working class led to its ban in the party. Having the rank-and-file of the Party discuss issues would give false hopes to the working class as a whole who may attempt to influence policy by joining the party (and, of course, vote for the wrong people or policies). Equally unsurprising, we discover the Platform stating that *"the dying out of inner-party democracy leads to a dying out of workers' democracy in general — in the trade unions, and in all other nonparty mass organisations."* [*"Platform of the Joint Opposition"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 395] Ignoring the awkward fact that Kronstadt was crushed precisely for demanding this, as noted the opposite causation is correct: the dying out of workers' democracy in general leads to a dying out of inner-party democracy. Power monopolised by a single party means that all dissatisfaction becomes channelled through it — this cannot help but generate factions within the party as disagreements and interests need to be expressed somewhere. As the party dictatorship replaces the working masses, eliminating workers democracy by the dictatorship of a single party, democracy in that party must wither for if workers can join that party and influence its policies then the same problems that arose in the soviets and unions appear in the party. This necessitates a corresponding centralisation in power within the party as occurred in the soviets and unions, all to the detriment of rank and file power and

*Leningrad Party Conference produced a majority for Lenin and 'demanded that the adherents of* ***Kommunist*** *cease their separate organisational existence.'"* The paper lasted four issues, with the last having to be published as a private factional paper. The issue had been settled by a high pressure campaign in the Party organisation, backed by a barrage of violent invective in the Party press and in the pronouncements of the Party leaders. The Workers' Opposition three years later also experienced it. At the Tenth Party congress, Kollontai (author of their platform) stated that the circulation of her pamphlet had been deliberately impeded. *"So irregular were some of these that the Moscow Party Committee at one stage voted a resolution* ***publicly*** *censuring the Petrograd organisation 'for not observing the rules of proper controversy.'"* The success of the Leninist faction in getting control of the party machine was such that *"there is serious doubt as to whether they were not achieved by fraud."* [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, pp. 39–40, p. 75 and p. 77] Victor Serge witnessed the rigging of an election to ensure Lenin's victory in the trade union debate. [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 123] Kollontai herself mentions (in early 1921) that comrades *"who dare to disagree with decrees from above are* ***still*** *being persecuted."* [our emphasis, **The Workers' Opposition**, p. 22] As Ida Mett noted:

> *"There is no doubt that the discussion taking place within the [Communist] Party at this time [in early 1921] had profound effects on the masses. It overflowed the narrow limits the Party sought to impose on it. It spread to the working class as a whole, to the solders and to the sailors. Heated local criticism acted as a general catalyst. The proletariat had reasoned quite logically: if discussion and criticism were permitted to Party members, why should they not be*



White invasion that by early 1921 they demobilised half the Red Army (some 2,500,000 men). Second, the Russian emigres *"remained as divided and ineffectual as before, with no prospect of co-operation in sight."* Third, as far as the last of the White Generals goes, Wrangel's forces were in no state to re-invade Russia. His troops were *"dispersed and their moral sagging"* and it would have taken *"months ... merely to mobilise his men and transport them from the Mediterranean to the Baltic."* A second front in the south *"would have meant almost certain disaster."* Indeed, in a call issued by the Petrograd Defence Committee on March 5th, they asked the rebels: *"Haven't you heard what happened to Wrangel's men, who are dying like flies, in their thousands of hunger and disease?"* The call goes on to add *"[t]his is the fate that awaits you, unless you surrender within 24 hours."* [Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, p. 13, p. 219, p. 146 and p. 105]

Clearly, the prospect of a White invasion was slim. This leaves the question of capitalist governments. Avrich has this to say on this:

> *"Apart from their own energetic fund-raising campaign, the emigres sought the assistance of the Entente powers ... the United States government, loath to resume the interventionist policies of the Civil War, turned a deaf ear to all such appeals. The prospects of British aid were even dimmer ... The best hope of foreign support came from France ... the French refused to interfere either politically or militarily in the crisis."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 117–9]

The French government had also *"withdrew its recognition of Wrangel's defunct government"* in November 1920 *"but continued to feed his troops on 'humane grounds,' meanwhile urging him to disband."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] The demobilising of the Red Army confirms that this threat was considered non-existent.

Thus, the claim that foreign intervention was likely seems without basis. Indeed, the Communist radio was arguing that

*"the organisation of disturbances in Kronstadt have the sole purpose of influencing the new American President and changing his policy toward Russia. At the same time the London Conference is holding its sessions, and the spreading of similar rumours must influence also the Turkish delegation and make it more submissive to the demands of the Entente. The rebellion the* **Petropavlovsk** *crew is undoubtedly part of a great conspiracy to create trouble within Soviet Russia and to injure our international position."* [quoted by Berkman, *"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] Lenin himself argued on March 16th that *"the enemies"* around the Bolshevik state were *"no longer able to wage their war of intervention"* and so were launching a press campaign *"with the prime object of disrupting the negotiations for a trade agreement with Britain, and the forthcoming trade agreement with America"* for *"we see that what they fear most, from the practical angle of international capital, is the resumption of proper trade relations. But they will fail in their attempts to disrupt them."* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 270]

Moreover, these governments had to take into account of its own working class. It was doubtful that they would, after years of war, been able to intervene, particularly if there was a clearly socialist revolt coming from below. Their own working class, in such a situation, would have prevented intervention by foreign capitalist states. This was, in fact, acknowledged in Lenin on 5 July 1921: *"we are not entirely isolated, since the whole international bourgeoisie is incapable of waging open war against us just now, because the whole working class, even though the majority is not yet communist, is sufficiently class-conscious to prevent intervention. The bourgeoisie is compelled to reckon with the temper of the masses even though they have not yet entirely sided with communism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 495]

So in spite of massive social unrest and the revolt of a key fortress protecting Petrograd, the Western powers took no action. The Whites were disorganised and could only raise non-military supplies (none of which reached Kronstadt).



*bureaucratic deformations of the system."* [Ciliga, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 103–4]

The bureaucratic machine outnumbered the party — there were over five million state officials in 1921 compared to around 730,000 party members (reduced to 515,000 in January 1922 after a purge). The grim reality was that *"those enjoying dominant positions in the State apparatus ... had been consolidating their power and detaching themselves more and more from the workers. The bureaucracy was already assuming alarming proportions. The State machine was in the hands of a single Party, itself more and more permeated by careerist elements. A non Party worker was worth less, on the scale of everyday life, than an ex bourgeois or nobleman, who had belatedly rallied to the Party. Free criticism no longer existed. Any Party member could denounce as 'counter revolutionary' any worker simply defending his class rights and his dignity as a worker."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140]

Likewise, within the party the higher echelons held power and had been more than willing to use it against internal dissidents long before 1921. As such, it ignored the reality of the Bolshevik party to appeal to the party machine to introduce *"in deeds and not words a democratic regime. Do away with administrative pressure tactics. Stop the persecution and expulsion of those who hold independent opinions about party questions."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 407] It failed to note that these tactics were used by Lenin and Trotsky against Left-wing dissidents within the party after the October revolution.

The Left-Communists in early 1918, for example, were subject to such pressure. They were ousted from leading positions in the Supreme Economic Council in March 1918 and after their views were denounced by Lenin, a *"campaign was whipped up in Leningrad which compelled* ***Kommunist*** *[their paper] to transfer publication to Moscow ... After the appearance of the first issue of the paper a hastily convened*

perspective for *"the argument of freedom to choose one's party"* was *"condemned formerly by Lenin, by Trotsky, and by the **Decemists**. And even then the major part of the **Decemists** and almost all the Trotskyists continued to consider that 'freedom of party' would be 'the end of the revolution'. 'Freedom to choose one's party — that is Menshevism,' was the Trotskyists' final verdict. 'The proletariat is socially homogenous and that is why its interests can only be represented by a single party,' the **Decemist** Davidov wrote. 'And why should not democracy within the party be coupled with its dictatorship outside?' the **Decemist** Nyura Yankovskaya wanted to know."* He concluded the Trotskyists' *"outlook was not that very different from that of the Stalinist bureaucracy; they were slightly more polite and human, that was all."* [**The Russian Enigma**, p. 280 and p. 263] This reflect the flawed class analysis of Leninism:

> *"Trotskyism as well as Stalinism saw ... two social orders: the proletariat versus bourgeoisie, the latter embracing the kulaks and the relics of the former ruling classes ... I had come to the conclusion that three social systems were partaking in the struggle: State capitalism, private capitalism and socialism, and that these three systems represented three classes: the bureaucracy, the bourgeoisie (including the kulaks) and the proletariat. The difference lay in that Stalinists and Trotskyism saw State capitalism as socialism and bureaucracy as proletariat. Trotsky as well as Stalin wished to pass off the State as being the proletariat, the bureaucratic dictatorship over the proletariat as the proletarian dictatorship, the victory of State capitalism over both private capitalism and socialism as a victory of the latter. The difference between Trotsky and Stalin ... [was that] Trotsky perceived and stressed the gaps and*



Could this situation have changed if Kronstadt had spread to the mainland? It is doubtful simply because the Western governments, as Lenin argued, had to take into account the anti-interventionist position of their own working classes. The Whites had no military forces available, as the Bolsheviks themselves admitted. Avrich notes it would have taken months for what was left of these forces to reach Kronstadt by which time soviet democracy would have been consolidated and ready to protect itself.

Even if we assume that Kronstadt had survived until the ice melted while Petrograd remained under Bolshevik dictatorship it, again, is doubtful that it would have been the basis for renewed White attacks. Neither Wrangel's troops nor foreign government forces would have been welcomed by Red Kronstadt. While non-military aid would have been welcome (i.e. food supplies and so on), it is hard to believe that the Conference of Delegates would have allowed troops to arrive or pass them by to attack Petrograd. Simply put, the Kronstadters were fighting for soviet power and were well aware that others may try to support the revolt for their own, anti-revolutionary, reasons (see section 7).

In short, the possibility of foreign intervention was negligible. The arguments of Lenin at the time, plus the demobilisation of the Red Army, all point in that direction. Moreover, the lack of response by Western governments during the revolt indicates that they were unlikely to take advantage of continuing unrest in Kronstadt, Petrograd and other towns and cities. Their working classes, sick of war and class consciousness enough to resist another intervention in Russia, would have been a factor in this apathetic response. Wrangel's troops, as the Bolsheviks were aware, were not a threat.

The only real threat to Bolshevik power was internal — from the workers and peasants the Bolsheviks claimed to be representing. Many of the deserters from the Red Army swelled the ranks of peasant guerrilla forces fighting the repressive and

counter-productive food collection squads. In the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks were fighting the remnants of the Makhnovist army (a fight, incidentally, brought upon the Bolsheviks by themselves as they had betrayed the agreements made with the anarchist forces and attacked them once Wrangel had been defeated). In the towns and cities, the Bolsheviks faced general strikes, protests and mass meetings.

Thus the only danger facing the "soviet power" (i.e. Bolshevik power) was soviet democracy, a danger which had existed since the October revolution. As in 1918, when the Bolsheviks disbanded any soviet elected with non-Bolshevik majorities, they met the danger of soviet democracy with violence. The Bolsheviks were convinced that their own dictatorship was equivalent to the revolution and that their power was identical to that of the working class. They considered themselves to be the embodiment of "soviet power" and it obviously did not bother them that the demand for free soviets can hardly be considered as actions against the power of the soviets.

In such circumstances, the Bolshevik government viewed the Kronstadt revolt **not** as socialists should but rather as a ruling class. It was suppressed for "reasons of state" and not to defend a revolutionary regime (which was, by this stage, revolutionary in name only). This is reflected in Paul Avrich's introduction which ends by suggesting that *"[e]ach side behaved in accordance with its own particular goals and aspirations. To say this is not to deny the necessity of moral judgment. Yet Kronstadt presents a situation in which the historian can sympathise with the rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified in subduing them. To recognise this, indeed, is to grasp the full tragedy of Kronstadt."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 6] As anarchist Nicolas Walter suggests:

> *"But to recognise this is in fact to surrender the possibility of moral judgement and so to abdicate the responsibility of the historian. World history, as*



> letariat demands as its very core a single proletarian party. It demands a single party. It demands a proletarian party — that is, a party whose policy is determined by the interests of the proletariat and carried out by a proletarian nucleus. Correction of the line of our party, improvement of its social composition — that is not the two-party road, but the strengthening and guaranteeing of its unity as a revolutionary party of the proletariat." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 440–1]

We can note, in passing, the interesting notion of party (and so "proletarian" state) policy *"determined by the interests of the proletariat and carried out by a proletarian nucleus"* but which is **not** determined **by** the proletariat itself. Which means that the policy of the "workers' state" must be determined by some other (unspecified) group and not by the workers. What possibility can exist that this other group actually knows what is in the interests of the proletariat? None, of course, as any form of democratic decision can be ignored when those who determine the policy consider the protests of the proletariat to be not *"in the interests of the proletariat"* — hence the pressing need for *"the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* Needless to say, the Platform makes no call for industrial democracy but rather proclaims that the *"appropriation of surplus value by a workers' state is not, of course, exploitation"* while also acknowledging the existence of a *"swollen and privileged administrative apparatus [which] devours a very considerable part of our surplus value"* while *"all the data testify that the growth of wages is lagging behind the growth of the productivity of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 347–50]

As Anton Ciliga recalled when in a Stalinist prison in the early 1930s, the imprisoned Trotskyists retained this

Not that the Left Opposition's political platform could have saved the revolution: it was utopian in that it urged the party and state bureaucracy to reform itself based upon maintaining the Bolshevik party's dictatorship as well as one-man management in the workplace. As such, it did not get at the roots of the problem, namely the state-capitalist nature of the regime and Bolshevik ideology. The theoretical limitations of the "Left Opposition" are discussed in more detail in section 3 of the appendix on "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?", here we will restrict ourselves to looking at **The Platform of the Opposition** written in 1927.

While uttering many warm words about workers', trade union and soviet democracy — for which the Kronstadt sailors and were branded "White Guardists" and "counter-revolutionary" — it also affirmed *"the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* While bemoaning that the *"growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies"* this, it repeats this principle by arguing that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat demands a single and united proletarian party as the leader of the working masses and the poor peasantry."* [*"The Platform of the Opposition"*, **The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)**, p. 395, p. 439 and p. 441] Any split in the party or the formation of two parties represented an enormous danger to the revolution:

> "Nobody who sincerely defends the line of Lenin can entertain the idea of 'two parties' or play with the suggestion of a split. Only those who desire to replace Lenin's course with some other can advocate a split or a movement along the two-party road.
>
> "We will fight with all our power against the idea of two parties, because the dictatorship of the pro-



> *Hegel said, is world judgement; the historian is not just a mechanical recorder of facts, but also part of the human process he is investigating. If we sympathise with the Kronstadt rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified in subduing them — as indeed Victor Serge did — then we can sympathise with any rebels (the Paris Commune, say, or the plots against Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco) and still concede that any government is justified in subduing them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 152]

A socialist regime cannot be defended by proclaiming that they did the same as a capitalist regime would do in similar circumstances. The criteria must be higher as the goals it is meant to embody and pursue are meant to be higher — they are meant to reflect the goal of human liberation. To suggest that it can act the same as a regime dedicated to defending human exploitation and oppression shows a confusion of mind.

The only possible justification for maintaining the party dictatorship was the argument that soviet democracy would have led to the defeat of the Communists at the polls (which would mean admitting that it was a dictatorship **over** the proletariat and had been for some time). This would, it is argued, have resulted in (eventually) a return of the Whites and an anti-working class dictatorship that would have slaughtered the Russian workers and peasants *en masse*. As we note in section 13, this was the position of Victor Serge in his Memoirs and echoed by more sophisticated Leninists ever since. Yet, such a position is self-serving and could have been used by Stalin to justify **his** regime and, unsurprisingly enough, the Hungarian Stalinists argued after crushing the 1956 revolution that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat, if overthrown, cannot be succeeded by any form of government other than fascist counter-revolution."* [quoted by Andy Anderson, **Hungary '56**, p. 101] Moreover, such an argument ignores the awkward

facts that Lenin's regime was by any objective measure an anti-working class dictatorship and that an even worse one did appear which **did** slaughter the Russian workers and peasants *en masse*, namely Stalinism.

Finally, why was the call that *"[b]ureaucratic autocracy must give place to Soviet democracy"* inevitably counter-revolution in 1921 when raised in Kronstadt but revolutionary when (apparently) raised by Trotsky in 1936? [**The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 289] After all, in 1936 Russia was still surrounded by capitalist countries which hated it as well as facing re-armed and belligerent fascist Germany, Italy and Japan rather than states weary and exhausted after the First World War and facing internal revolts of their own. We will discuss this in section 13 and here simply note that, by opposing the Kronstadt revolt, Trotskyists *"weaken their own case, for if the demands for freely elected soviets, for freedom of expression (proletarian democracy) and for workers' management of production were wrong in 1921, why did they become partially correct in 1923? If in 1921 Lenin and Trotsky represented the 'real' interests of the workers (against the actual workers), why couldn't Stalin? Why couldn't Kadar in Hungary in 1956? The Trotskyist school of hagiography has helped to obscure the real lessons of the struggle against the bureaucracy."* [Maurice Brinton, *"Preface to Ida Mett's 'The Kronstadt Commune'"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 130–1]

## 12 Was the country too exhausted to allow soviet democracy?

Trotskyists have, in general, three main lines of attack with regards the Kronstadt revolt. The first was that it was simply a White General revolt (see section 6). The second is that the sailors of 1921 were not those of 1917 (see section 8). The third is that the country was too exhausted for the Bolshevik dictatorship to agree to the revolt's demands and introduce soviet democracy. The working class was decimated and in such cir-



*politburo in which he fired his first broadsides against the 'unhealthy regime' and lack of internal party democracy, supported repressive action against the far left."* Indeed, he *"welcomed an instruction by Dzerzhinskii to party members immediately to report 'any groupings within the party', i.e. the Workers Group and Workers Truth, not only to the C[entral] C[ommittee] but also to the G.P.U., and emphasized that making such reports was 'the elementary duty of every party member'."* [Simon Pirani, **The Russian revolution in retreat, 1920–24**, p. 215] Trotsky was clear that *"it is obvious that there can be no toleration of the formation of groupings [within the party] whose ideological content is directed against the party as a whole and against the dictatorship of the proletariat, as for instance the Workers' Truth and Workers' Group."* [**Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923–25)**, p. 408] By "dictatorship of the proletariat," Trotsky meant the dictatorship of the party as both these opposition groups — unlike the Left Opposition — advocated genuine soviet democracy.

Rees suggests that the Stalinist bureaucracy could betray the revolution without *"an armed counter-revolutionary seizure of power"* and so *"no martial law, no curfew or street battles"* because of *"the atomisation of the working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 69] However, the atomisation was a product of the armed counter-revolutionary activities of Lenin and Trotsky after 1918 which reached their culmination when in 1921 they broke the strikes in Petrograd (and elsewhere) by means of martial law and curfew and crushed the sailor rebellion by battles in the streets of Kronstadt. In 1927–8, the workers had no interest in which branch of the bureaucracy would govern and exploit them and so remained passive. Rees fails to see that there **was** martial law, curfew and street battles but they occurred in 1921, not 1928. The rise of Stalinism was the victory of one side of the new bureaucratic class over another but that class had defeated the working class in March 1921.

> *role in eradicating strikes, making arrests, bringing in its special troops to deal with unrest, and using its intelligence network to monitor the shopfloor and identify activists"* [Andrew Pospielovsky, *"Strikes during the NEP"*, pp. 1–34, **Revolutionary Russia**, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 17–8]

These techniques had all been used and perfected from 1918 onwards. Thus the strike wave of 1923 was repressed by the same methods as those in 1921 with the name of the secret police being the only difference (from Cheka to GPU):

> *"Trade unions, reluctant to disturb the industrial revival, refused to press claims. Finally, 'wild' strikes broke out in many factories, spread, and were accompanied by violent explosions of discontent ... The threat of a general strike was in the air, and the movement seemed on the point of turning into a political revolt. Not since the Kronstadt rising had there been so much tension in the working class and so much alarm in ruling circle ... the remnants of the anti-Bolshevik parties ... [were] thoroughly suppressed [and] had been inactive ... the G.P.U arrested [the Workers' Group] ... where there is much inflammable material a few sparks may produce a conflagration. The party leaders sought to stamp out the sparks. They determined to suppress the Workers' Group and the Workers' Truth ... Trotsky ... had no sympathy with the crude and anarchic tub-thumping. Nor was he inclined to countenance industrial unrest"*. [Isaac Deutscher, **The Prophet Unarmed**, pp. 88–9]

The *"leaders of the 1923 opposition did ... nothing to protest at the repression of dissidents ... Trotsky, in the very letters to the*



cumstances, it is argued, objective conditions meant that soviet democracy was impossible and so the Bolsheviks had to maintain their dictatorship at all costs to defend what was left of the revolution. Leninist Pat Stack of the British SWP is typical of this approach:

> *"Because anarchists dismiss the importance of material reality, events such as the 1921 Kronstadt rising against the Bolshevik government in Russia can become a rallying cry. The revolutionary Victor Serge was not uncritical of the Bolshevik handling of the rising, but he poured scorn on anarchist claims for it when he wrote, 'The third revolution it was called by certain anarchists whose heads were stuffed by infantile delusions.'*
>
> *"This third revolution, it was argued, would follow the first one in February 1917 and the second in October. The second had swept away the attempts to create capitalist power, had given land to the peasants and had extracted Russia from the horrible imperialist carnage of the First World War. The revolution had introduced a huge literacy programme, granted women abortion rights, introduced divorce and accepted the rights of the various Russian republics to self-determination. It had done so, however, against a background of a bloody and horrendous civil war where the old order tried to regain power. Sixteen imperialist powers sent armies against the regime, and trade embargoes were enforced.*
>
> *"The reality of such actions caused huge suffering throughout Russia. The regime was deprived of raw materials and fuel, transportation networks were destroyed, and the cities began running out of food. By 1919 the regime only had 10 percent of the fuel that*

*was available in 1917, and the production of iron ore in the same year stood at 1.6 percent of that in 1914. By 1921 Petrograd had lost 57 percent of its population and Moscow 44.5 percent. Workers were either dead, on the frontline of the civil war, or were fleeing the starvation of the city. The force that had made the revolution possible was being decimated .. .*

*"The choice facing the regime in Russia was either to crush the uprising and save the revolution, or surrender to the rising and allow the forces of reaction to march in on their back. There was no material basis for a third way. A destroyed economy and infrastructure, a population faced with starvation and bloody war, and a hostile outside world were not circumstances in which the revolution could move forward. Great efforts would have to be made to solve these problems. There were no overnight solutions and preserving the revolutionary regime was crucial. Ultimately real solutions could only be found if the revolution were to spread internationally, but in the meantime to have any chance of success the regime had to survive. Only the right and the imperialist powers would have benefited from its destruction."* [*"Anarchy in the UK?"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

As we discuss in the next section, Victor Serge's own mind was stuffed by infantile delusions on the nature of the regime he was part of and the possibility of a benevolent dictatorship. Here, we address the suggestion that objective circumstances meant that genuine socialist solutions to the problems facing the Russian Revolution were impossible.

The first thing to note is how disingenuous Stack is being. *"World history"*, as Marx himself noted, *"would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances"* [Marx, **Marx-Engels Collected**



and so on). Indeed, both "gains" were the basis for the Stalinist bureaucracy's power.

Unfortunately for the **Left Opposition**, the bureaucracy had gained experience in repressing working class struggles since early 1918 — most obviously in breaking the wave of strikes in 1921 and crushing the Kronstadt rebellion itself. As such, it is incredulous to suggest as Rees does that *"the regime was left stranded, the well-head of renewal and thorough reform — the activity of the workers — had dried to a trickle ... To appeal outside the machine, as the Workers' Opposition had wanted, was impossible. This is the tragedy of Lenin's last fight and of the Left Opposition. They knew the problem but the means at their disposal was not equal to the task. Hence the paucity of the measures they advocated: self reform of the bureaucracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68] The "well-head" of workers' struggle did not dry-up by some natural process — it was deliberately blocked by the Bolshevik regime itself:

*"After the launch of the NEP, the state's strategy in dealing with strikes in the nationalised sector remained fairly uniform throughout the 1920s. Its priority was to compel workers to return to their jobs as quickly as possible for which the full forces of management, Party, unions, and state would be mobilised as required ... the Bolshevik leadership ... feared a repeat of the escalation and politicisation of worker discontent that had marked the end of War Communism ... Hence the general strategy employed by the state when faced by a strike was to attempt to pacify the bulk of striking workers, while seeking to 'isolate' or eliminate instigators and organisers. In cases where these measures failed ... a re-registration of the workforce, closure of the factory, or mass dismissals would be announced ... From the start, the CheKa/OGPU played a leading*

> *"Let us consider, finally, one last accusation which is commonly circulated: that action such as that at Kronstadt could have **indirectly** let loose the forces of the counter-revolution. It is **possible** indeed that even by placing itself on a footing of workers' democracy the revolution might have been overthrown; but what is **certain** is that it has perished, and that it has perished on account of the policy of its leaders. The repression of Kronstadt, the suppression of the democracy of workers and soviets by the Russian Communist party, the elimination of the proletariat from the management of industry, and the introduction of the NEP, already signified the death of the Revolution."* [*"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 335]

No revolution is guaranteed to succeed. The same with Kronstadt's *"Third Revolution."* Its call for soviet democracy may have led to a return of the Whites, that is possible just as it was possible in 1917. One thing is sure, by maintaining the Bolshevik dictatorship the Russian Revolution **was** crushed and (Stalinist) counter-revolution ensued. As such, we must always remember what the alternatives were: *"Were there not real dangers in the democratic way? Was there no reason to fear reformist influences in the soviets, if democracy had been given free rein? We accept that this was a real danger. But it was no more of a danger than what inevitably followed the uncontrolled dictatorship of a single party"*. [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 204]

After all, the most obvious objection is what gains, exactly? The only gains that remained were Bolshevik party power and nationalised industry — both of which excluded the real gains of the Russian Revolution from a socialist perspective (namely soviet power, the right to independent unions and to strike, freedom of assembly, association and speech for working people, the beginnings of workers' self-management of production



**Works**, vol. 44. p. 136] Revolutions have a habit of breaking out when circumstances are hardly ideal — the Paris Commune springs to mind — but that is not reason to oppose them. Indeed, Stack's fellow party member provides this very quote by Marx against those who dismiss the Bolshevik revolution as a complete delusion due to the backwardness of the country, arguing that *"[t]he unavoidable conclusion is that all the talk about 'premature' revolution … is an **excuse** born of expediency, not a serious argument against revolutionary socialism."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 9–10] The **real** question is whether revolutionaries, when faced with a popular revolt for socialism, should side with the rebels or a bureaucratic, state-capitalist party dictatorship.

The second thing to note is that Anarchists, regardless of Stack's assertions, were and are well aware of the problems facing the revolution. Alexander Berkman (who was in Petrograd at the time) pointed out the *"[l]ong years of war, revolution, and civil struggle"* which *"had bled Russia to exhaustion and brought her people to the brink of despair."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] Like every worker, peasant, sailor and soldier in Russia, anarchists knew (and know) that reconstruction would not take place "overnight." The Kronstadters' recognised this in the first issue of their newspaper **Izvestiia**:

> *"Comrades and citizens, our country is passing through a tough time. For three years now, famine, cold and economic chaos have trapped us in a vice-like grip. The Communist Party which governs the country has drifted away from the masses and proved itself powerless to rescue them from a state of general ruination … All workers, sailors and Red soldiers today can clearly see that only concentrated efforts, only the concentrated determination of the people can afford the country bread, wood and coal, can clothe and shoe the people and rescue the*

*Republic from the impasse in which it finds itself."*
[quoted in **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 183]

The Kronstadt ***Izvestiia*** of March 8 wrote that it was *"here in Kronstadt that the foundation stone was laid of the Third Revolution that will smash the last shackles on the toiler and open up before him the broad new avenue to socialist construction."* It stressed that the *"new revolution will rouse the toiling masses of the Orient and Occident. For it will offer the example of fresh socialist construction as opposed to mechanical, governmental 'Communist' construction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 194] Clearly, the Kronstadt rebels knew that construction would take time and were arguing that the only means of rebuilding the country in a socialist direction was via the participation of what of left of the working class and peasantry in free class organisations like freely elected soviets and unions. Rather than wasting resources — both human and material — on repressing their strikes and revolts, Kronstadt's success would have seen these used for reconstruction.

So, for example, the partial freeing of the economy from the Bolshevik bureaucracy expressed by the New Economic Policy (NEP) saw factory output rise by over 40% between 1920 and 1921 and by a further 30% between 1921 and 1922 while agriculture *"too made remarkable strides forward."* [Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution**, p. 160] Victor Serge recalled how the NEP *"was, in the space of a few months, already giving marvellous results. From one week to the next, the famine and the speculation were diminishing perceptibly. Restaurants were opening again"*. [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 147] Would workers' freedom and democracy not have had at least a similar result and have the benefit of not enriching a new boss class?

The experience of the revolt provides evidence that this analysis was far from utopian. A Finish reporter in Kronstadt was struck by the *"enthusiasm"* of its inhabitants, by their



hope was that the revolution could survive until it spread internationally. As John Rees put it: *"But ultimately, without a revival of struggle in Russia or successful revolution elsewhere, the [Left] Opposition was doomed to failure. That, however, could not be known in advance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 69] This is echoed in different ways by other Leninists — the Bolsheviks had to crush Kronstadt to secure the revolution until it could spread to other countries, particularly advanced industrial nations. The isolation of the revolution ensured the victory of the bureaucracy and Stalin.

Let us accept Serge's argument and those who, like Rees, echo it. This means that the only alternative to the *"Third Revolution"* would have been self-reform of the party dictatorship and, therefore, of the soviet state. Such an attempt was made after 1923 by the **Left Opposition** headed by Trotsky. Given the logic of such arguments, this is the only option left for Leninists. How viable was this alternative? Could the soviet dictatorship reform itself? Was soviet democracy more of a danger than the uncontrolled dictatorship of a party within a state marked by already serious levels of corruption, bureaucracy and despotism? History provides the answer with the rise of Stalin.

However, given how widespread this infantile delusion is within the Leninists, more needs to be said. From a libertarian perspective, there are three main problems with this argument. First, it ignores the reality of the Bolshevik regime. Second, it ignores the politics of the Left Opposition. Third, it ignores how Bolshevik ideology would have impacted on any other revolution. We will discuss each in turn after making an obvious point — libertarian socialists who defend the Kronstadt revolt and oppose the actions of the Bolsheviks are not foolish enough to argue that Kronstadt's *"Third Revolution"* would have definitely succeeded as every revolution is a gamble and may fail. Ante Ciliga put it well:

were stuffed with infantile illusions. However, the country was exhausted, and production practically at a standstill; there was no reserves of any kind, not even reserves of stamina in the hearts of the masses. The working-class **elite** that had been moulded in the struggle against the old regime was literally decimated. The Party, swollen by the influx of power-seekers, inspired little confidence … Soviet democracy lacked leadership, institutions and inspiration; at its back there were only masses of starving and desperate men.

"The popular counter-revolution translated the demand for freely-elected soviets into one for 'Soviets without Communists.' If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the emigres, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian … In these circumstances it was the Party's duty to make concessions, recognising that the economic regime was intolerable, but not to abdicate power." [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, pp. 128–9]

Serge is at least being honest here and not suggesting that it was a White Guard plot or a product of backward peasant recruits. Still, he supported the Bolsheviks, considering them as the only possible means of defending the revolution. Some of the more sophisticated modern day Leninists follow this line of reasoning and quote Trotsky somewhat out of context to proclaim that crushing the revolt was *"a tragic necessity"*. [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 98] They want us to believe that the Bolsheviks were defending the remaining gains of the revolution and ensuring that no counter-revolution took place indirectly by allowing the Russian workers soviet democracy. The



renewed sense of purpose and mission. Avrich argues that for a *"fleeting interval Kronstadt was shaken out if its listlessness and despair."* [**Kronstadt 1921**, p. 159] The sailors, soldiers and civilians sent their delegates to delegates, started to re-organise their trade unions and so on. Freedom and soviet democracy was allowing the masses to start to rebuild their society and they took the opportunity. This suggests that a similar policy implemented by the workers who had just organised general strikes, demonstrations and protest meetings all across Russia's industrial centres was neither impossible nor doomed to failure.

Indeed, this wave of strikes refutes Stack's claim that *"[w]orkers were either dead, on the frontline of the civil war, or were fleeing the starvation of the city. The force that had made the revolution possible was being decimated."* Clearly, a sizeable percentage of the workers were still working: approximately one-third of factory workers were still in Petrograd (the overall decrease of urban working people throughout Russia exceeded 50 percent [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]). So, yes, the size of the working class in 1921 **was** smaller in 1921 than it was in 1917 but the figures for May 1918 and 1920 were nearly identical. In 1920, the number of factory workers in Petrograd was 148,289 (which was 34% of the population and 36% of the number of workers in 1910). [Mary McAuley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 398] In January 1917, the number was 351,010 and in April 1918, it was 148,710. [S.A. Smith, **Red Petrograd**, p. 245] Thus factory worker numbers were about 40% of the pre-Civil War number and remained so throughout the Civil War. Does soviet democracy become invalid once a certain number of workers is reached? So we should remember that a proletarian core remained in every industrial town or city in Russia and, more importantly, this work force was capable of collective action and decision making in the face of state repression under Lenin from 1918 onwards (see section H.6.3). By the start of 1921, another strike wave surfaced and became near general

strikes in many cities, including Petrograd and Moscow (see section 2). If the workers could organise strikes (and near general strikes at that), protest meetings and committees to co-ordinate their struggles, what could stop them starting to manage their own destinies and begin to rebuild an economy suffering under the counter-productive policies of a party dictatorship?

So, in stark contrast to Stack's claims, all across Russia in February 1921 the Russian working class were going on strike, organising meetings and demonstrations. In other words, **taking collective action** based on demands collectively agreed in workplace meetings. One factory would send delegates to others, urging them to join the movement which soon became a general strike in Petrograd and Moscow. In Kronstadt, workers, soldiers and sailors went the next step and organised a delegate conference. In other places they tried to do so, with various degrees of success. During the strikes in Petrograd *"workers from various plants elected delegates to the Petrograd Assembly of Plenipotentiaries"* which raised demands later championed in Kronstadt. Its activities and other attempts to organise collectively were obviously hindered by the fact the Cheka arrested *"all delegates to other enterprises"* the strikers sent. Brovkin states that following the example of Petrograd, *"workers in some cities set up assemblies of plenipotentiaries"* as well. In Saratov *"such a council grew out of a strike co-ordination committee."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 393, p. 396 and p. 398]

Any claim that the Russian working class had no capacity for collective action seems invalidated by such events. If anything was going to shatter what was left of working class collective power it would have been the Bolshevik repression of these strikes which, by its very nature, atomised and individualised the masses in order to break the collective action being practised. Martial law, the use of armed patrols on the streets and in the factories, the closing and re-registration of an enterprise labour force were all designed to break the strike and



social reconstruction will not reflect the interests of the ruling bureaucracy. To suggest so, as Stack does, means ignoring the class reality of the situation in favour of wishful thinking over the possibility of benevolent dictatorship. It means ignoring that by crushing Kronstadt, the Bolsheviks not only crushed the Third Revolution but also paved the way for Stalinism.

Ultimately, Stack's arguments fail to convince. As noted, his ideological gurus clearly argued that revolution without civil war and economic exhaustion was impossible. Sadly, the means to mitigate the problems of Civil War and economic crisis (namely workers' self-management and control) inevitably came into conflict with party power and a vision of socialism premised on the efficiency of centralisation and could not be encouraged. If Bolshevism cannot meet the inevitable problems of revolution and maintain the principles it pays lip-service to (i.e. soviet democracy and workers' control) then it clearly does not work and should be avoided. This argument, in short, represents the bankruptcy of Bolshevik ideology rather than a serious argument against the Kronstadt revolt.

## 13 Was there a real alternative to Kronstadt's *"Third Revolution"*?

Another Trotskyist argument against Kronstadt and in favour of Bolshevik repression is related to the country was exhausted argument we discussed in the last section. It finds its clearest expression in Victor Serge's argument:

> "After many hesitations, and with unutterable anguish, my Communist friends and I finally declared ourselves on the side of the Party. This is why. Kronstadt had right on its side. Kronstadt was the beginning of a fresh, liberating revolution for popular democracy: 'The Third Revolution!' it was called by certain anarchists whose heads

*muddle and paralysis ... However, since the Bolshevik mind had already ordained other solutions, it was a vision confined to the realms of pure theory.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 147–8] Serge at the time, however, did not seem to support the one part of the party, the Workers' Opposition, which did raise this idea — albeit within the context of a party dictatorship (see section 2 of the appendix on "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?"). Trotsky dismissed this suggestion precisely because of the threat this posed to the party's position: *"we are against it. Why ? ... Because, in the first place, we want to retain the dictatorship of the Party, and, in the second place, because we think that the [democratic] way of managing important and essential plants is bound to be incompetent and prove a failure from an economic point of view."* [quoted by James Bunyan, **The Origin of Forced Labor in the Soviet State, 1917–1921**, p. 252]

So, as far as *"material reality"* goes, it is clear that it is Stack who ignores it, not anarchists nor the Kronstadt rebels. Both recognised that the country was in dire straits and that a huge effort was required for reconstruction. The material basis at the time offered two possibilities for reconstruction — either from above or from below. Such a reconstruction could **only** be socialist in nature if it involved the direct participation of the working masses in determining what was needed and how to do it. In other words, the process had to start **from below** and no central committee utilising a fraction of the creative powers of the country could achieve it. Such a bureaucratic, top-down re-construction would rebuild the society in a way which benefited a few. Which, of course, was what happened.

What is surprising is that any self-proclaimed socialist could think otherwise. In a country with no workers' democracy, where the masses do not have even limited control over those in power, where all power and rights are held by the administration, where workers can do nothing on their own initiative, it is naive in the extreme to believe that any



atomise the workforce — these actions would not have been needed if the Russian working class was, as Stack claims, non-existent, atomised and incapable of collective action and decision making.

The fact that these strikes did not last longer of course suggests that the strikers could not sustain this activity indefinitely. However, this was more a product of state repression and the rations being withheld by the authorities to break the strike than any objectively predetermined impossibility of collective decision making. The workers may have been too exhausted to wage indefinite general strikes against a repressive state but that does not imply they could not practice collective decision making if that regime was replaced by a genuine soviet democracy. Likewise, the poor state of the Russian economy cannot be understood without reference to the negative impact of Bolshevik economic policies which made a bad situation far worse — both in terms of limiting economic activity and initiative as well as the powerful bureaucracy it had created. As Emma Goldman suggested:

> *"In the economic field this transformation must be in the hands of the industrial masses: the latter have the choice between an industrial State and anarcho-syndicalism. In the case of the former the menace to the constructive development of the new social structure would be as great as from the political State. It would become a dead weight upon the growth of the new forms of life ... It is only when the libertarian spirit permeates the economic organizations of the workers that the manifold creative energies of the people can manifest themselves and the revolution be safeguarded and defended. Only free initiative and popular participation in the affairs of the revolution can prevent the terrible blunders committed in Russia. For instance, with*

*fuel only a hundred versts [about sixty-six miles] from Petrograd there would have been no necessity for that city to suffer from cold had the workers' economic organizations of Petrograd been free to exercise their initiative for the common good. The peasants of the Ukraina would not have been hampered in the cultivation of their land had they had access to the farm implements stacked up in the warehouses of Kharkov and other industrial centres awaiting orders from Moscow for their distribution. These are characteristic examples of Bolshevik governmentalism and centralisation, which should serve as a warning to the workers of Europe and America of the destructive effects of Statism."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 253]

The fact, of course, is that the majority of what remained of the working class would not have voted Communist in free soviet elections. Thus political considerations have to be factored in when evaluating Stack's arguments. Likewise, he makes no mention of the Bolshevik orthodoxy on the necessity of party dictatorship nor makes any comments on the Bolshevik embrace of centralised economic and political structures and their obvious negative impact on the situation. Rather all the blame for the terrible economic situation he describes is laid purely at the feet of the counter-revolution — a position which, at best, is a half-truth and deliberately obscures the failure of Bolshevik policies. Nor was it believed at the time, for as Berkman summarised *"the workers of Petrograd … charged that, aside from other causes, Bolshevik centralisation, bureaucracy, and autocratic attitude toward the peasants and workers were directly responsible for much of the misery and suffering of the people."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] As such, it takes an impressive amount of gall to argue that we must support the repressive actions of a party dictatorship because the nation is



and co-operatives. Indeed, the logic of his argument would mean rejecting the idea of socialist revolution **as such** as the problems he lists will affect **every** revolution and had affected the Russian Revolution from the start. So while the problems facing the Russian working class were difficult in the extreme in 1921, we should not forget that many of which were due to the results of Bolshevik economic policies which compounded economic chaos via centralisation as well as the inevitable results of monopolising political power which meant the crushing of all independent working class organisation and initiative. They could **never** be solved by someone else bar the thousands of workers taking strike action all across Russia at the time: *"And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most heavily industrialised cities?"* [Ida Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 202]

The problem after October 1917 was that when the proletariat **did** organise itself, it was repressed as counterrevolutionary by the Bolsheviks. The reconstruction from below, the organisation of the proletariat, automatically came into conflict with party power. The workers and peasants could not act because soviet and trade union democracy would have ended Bolshevik dictatorship — little wonder the country was *"exhausted"* as all the means of addressing the situation were systematically smashed by the ruling elite.

Indeed, Serge himself admitted as much when he noted that *"[t]hrough its intolerance and its arrogation of an absolute monopoly of power and initiative in all fields, the Bolshevik regime was floundering in its own toils, spreading a sort of general paralysis throughout the country … By freeing the State-strangled cooperatives, and inviting various associations to take over the management of different branches of economic activity, an enormous degree of recovery could have been achieved straightaway … [this] would have caused less inconvenience than did our stringently bureaucratic centralisation, with its*

*could move forward"* then it also applied in 1918 — in 1917, in fact — as well as in 1921. If so, then this means admitting that soviet democracy is impossible during a revolution, marked as it will always be by exceptionally difficult circumstances. Which, of course, means to defend party power and not soviet power and promote the dictatorship of the party over the working class, positions Leninists deny holding. Of course, as noted in section H.6, the Bolsheviks **in practice** were making soviet democracy impossible by suppressing soviets that elected the wrong people while the Bolshevik policies aiming to address these problems — which in 1917 Lenin had proclaimed could only be solved by revolution and placing the Bolsheviks into power — made the problems worse by their centralised and top-down nature. To suggest that the Bolsheviks had to remain in power because the country was exhausted in part as a result of their policies is hard to take seriously.

So anarchists had predicted the problems facing the Russian Revolution decades previously and, given the lack of success of Bolshevik attempts to solve these problems via centralism, had also predicted the only way to solve them. Far from ignoring *"material reality"* anarchists have long been aware of the difficulties a revolution would face and had organised our politics around them. In contrast, Stack is arguing that these inevitable effects of a revolution create *"circumstances"* in which the revolution cannot *"move forward"*. If this is so, then revolution is an impossibility as it will always face economic disruption and isolation at some stage in its development, for a longer or shorter period. If we base our politics on the "best-case scenario" then they will soon be proven to be lacking.

Ultimately, Stack's arguments (and those like it) are the ones which ignore *"material reality"* by arguing that Lenin's state was a *"revolutionary regime"* and reconstruction could be anything but to the advantage of the bureaucracy without the active participation of what was left of the working class and the independence of their class organisations — unions, soviets



exhausted when it is the case that *"the dictatorship had paralysed the initiative of both the city proletariat and the peasantry."* [Goldman, *"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 263]

Incredibly, Stack fails to even mention the power and privileges of the bureaucracy at the time. Officials got the best food, housing and so on. The lack of effective control or influence from below ensured that corruption was widespread. One of the leaders of the Workers' Opposition gives us an insight of the situation which existed at the start of 1921:

> "The rank and file worker is observant. He sees that so far ... the betterment of the workers' lot has occupied the last place in our policy ... We all know that the housing problem cannot be solved in a few months, even years, and that due to our poverty, its solution is faced with serious difficulties. But the facts of ever-growing inequality between the privileged groups of the population in Soviet Russia and the rank and file workers, 'the frame-work of the dictatorship', breed and nourish the dissatisfaction.
>
> "The rank and file worker sees how the Soviet official and the practical man lives and how he lives ... [It will be objected that] 'We could not attend to that; pray, there was the military front.' And yet whenever it was necessary to make repairs to any of the houses occupied by the Soviet institutions, they were able to find both the materials and the labour." [Alexandra Kollontai, **The Workers' Opposition**, p. 10]

A few months earlier, the Communist Yoffe wrote to Trotsky expressing the same concerns. *"There is enormous inequality,"* he wrote, *"and one's material position largely depends on*

*one's post in the party; you'll agree that this is a dangerous situation."* [quoted by Orlando Figes, **A People's Tragedy**, p. 695] Indeed, part of the factors resulting in Kronstadt was *"the privileges and abuses of commissars, senior party functionaries and trade union officials who received special rations, allocations and housing and … quite openly enjoying the good life."* [Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 210] As one historian summarised:

> *"Between the Eighth Congress (March 1919) and the Tenth, the party grew from 310,000 to 730,000 … Worker members comprised 41 per cent of the membership, as opposed to 60 per cent in 1917, but most of these were workers by social origin who no longer worked on the factory floor, having been promoted to positions in the state administration, economic organs, or the Red Army. The rest of the membership was more or less equally divided between peasants (most soldiers) and white-collar employees (most of whom worked in the state apparatuses. On the eve of the Tenth Party Congress, L.B. Krasin declared: 'The source of the woes and unpleasantness that we are currently experiencing is the fact that the Communist Party consists of 10% convinced idealists, and 90% hangers-on without consciences, who have joined the party in order to get a position.' Krasin articulated a growing sense that the party had been hijacked by careerists; and if the purge of 1921 is any guide, he was right … many rank-and-file party members began vociferously to attack the privileges enjoyed by 'those at the top'. In June 1920 Preobrazhenskii reported to the Central Committee that the 'majority of rank-and-file members' supported slogans such as 'Down with the privileged caste of the communist elite!' … in September 1920 … a commission was set up to in-*



1918 Russia was living through an almost total economic collapse, with a general scarcity of all resources and mass unemployment. According to Tony Cliff (the leader of the SWP) in the spring of 1918 Russia's *"[w]ar-damaged industry continued to run down. 'The bony hand of hunger' … gripped the whole population … One of the causes of the famine was the breakdown of transport … Industry was in a state of complete collapse. Not only was there no food to feed the factory workers; there was no raw materials or fuel for industry. The oilfields of the Baku, Grozny and Emba regions came to a standstill. The situation was the same in the coalfields. The production of raw materials was in no better a state … The collapse of industry meant unemployment for the workers."* [**Lenin**, vol. 3, pp. 67–9] The industrial workforce dropped to 40% of its 1917 levels. The similarities to Stack's description of the situation in early 1921 is striking.

The fact is that Lenin and Trotsky had argued that revolution inevitably meant civil war, economic crisis and so exceptional and difficult circumstances. They did not, for that reason, suggest that revolution was impossible. Thus, for example, Lenin in 1917 mocked those who argued that revolution was out of the question because *"the circumstances are exceptionally complicated."* He noted that **any** revolution, *"in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances"* and that it was *"the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances. If there were no exceptionally complicated circumstances there would be no revolution."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 26, pp. 118–9]

Does this mean that, for Leninists, soviet democracy was impossible in early 1918? After all, then the Russian Revolution also faced a *"destroyed economy and infrastructure, a population faced with starvation and bloody war, and a hostile outside world."* If these *"were not circumstances in which the revolution*

*most from the general upheaval … A Revolution in Europe means, then, the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops."* He stressed that there would be *"the complete disorganisation"* of the capitalist economy and that during a revolution *"[i]nternational commerce will come to a standstill"* and *"the circulation of commodities and of provisions will be paralysed."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 69–70 and p. 191]

Elsewhere, Kropotkin argued that a revolution would *"mean the stoppage of hundreds of manufactures and workshops, and the impossibility of reopening them. Thousands of workmen will find no employment … The present want of employment and misery will be increased tenfold."* He stressed that *"the reconstruction of Society in accordance with more equitable principles **will** necessitate a disturbed period"* and argued that any revolution will be isolated to begin with and so (with regards to the UK) *"the imports of foreign corn will decrease"* as will *"exports of manufactured wares."* A revolution, he argued, *"is not the work of one day. It means a whole period, mostly lasting for several years, during which the country is in a state of effervescence."* To overcome these problems he stressed the importance of reconstruction from the bottom up, organised directly by working people, with local action being the basis of wider reconstruction. The *"immense problem — the re-organisation of production, redistribution of wealth and exchange, according to new principles — cannot be solved by … any kind of government. It must be a natural growth resulting from the combined efforts of all interested in it, freed from the bonds of the present institutions. It must grow naturally, proceeding from the simplest up to complex federations; and it cannot be something schemed by a few men and ordered from above. In this last shape it surely would have no chance of living at all."* [**Act for Yourselves**, pp. 71–2, p. 67, pp, 72–3, pp. 25–6 and p. 26]

The Russian revolution confirmed all this. It had faced economic crisis all through 1917 and 1918. Indeed, by the spring of



> *vestigate 'Kremlin privileges.' Its recommendations were never implemented … [Even party members showed] exasperation at red tape and careerism [as well as] disaffection at the arbitrary transfers of cadres and the substitution of political departments, such as Trotsky had created in the Red Army, for party committees … it was clear that proletarians promoted into positions of authority often behaved little differently from those officials who had moved seamlessly from positions in tsarist ministries or zemstvos into commissariats or soviets."* [S.A. Smith, **Russia in Revolution**, pp. 212–3]

As such, to talk about anarchists dismissing the importance of material reality and a *"revolutionary regime"* while ignoring the inequalities in power and wealth, and the bureaucratisation and despotism which were their root, is definitely a case of the pot calling the kettle black! It means joining Lenin in having *"no inkling that the state itself could become an instrument of exploitation and showed little understanding of how the Bolsheviks could themselves be 'captured' by the apparatus which they notionally controlled."* [S.A. Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 216]

The question for anarchists, as for the Kronstadt rebels, was what the necessary pre-conditions for the needed reconstruction were. Could Russia be re-built in a socialist way while being subject to a dictatorship which crushed every sign of working class protest and collective action? It is an infantile delusion to think that such a regime could achieve this and it ill-suits a self-proclaimed socialist to suggest that a benevolent dictatorship is possible, particularly one who claims to believe in "socialism from below." Surely the first step, as Kronstadt shows, would have to be the re-introduction of workers' democracy and power for only this would give allow expression to the creative powers of the masses and interest them in the recon-

struction of the country. Continuing party dictatorship would **never** do this:

> *"by its very essence a dictatorship destroys the creative capacities of a people… The revolutionary conquest could only be deepened through a genuine participation of the masses. Any attempt to substitute an 'elite' for those masses could only be profoundly reactionary.*
>
> *"In 1921 the Russian Revolution stood at the cross roads. The democratic or the dictatorial way, that was the question. By lumping together bourgeois and proletarian democracy the Bolsheviks were in fact condemning both. They sought to build socialism from above, through skilful manoeuvres of the Revolutionary General Staff. While waiting for a world revolution that was not round the corner, they built a state capitalist society, where the working class no longer had the right to make the decisions most intimately concerning it."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 204–5]

Under the harsh material conditions facing Russia at the time, it goes without saying that the bureaucracy would utilise its position to gather the best resources around it. Stack fails to mention this and instead talks about the necessity of defending a "workers' state" in which workers had no power and where bureaucratic abuses were rampant. If anyone is denying reality, it is him. Thus Ciliga:

> *"The Soviet Government and the higher circles in the Communist Party applied their own solution [to the problems facing the revolution] of* ***increasing the power of the bureaucracy****. The attribution of powers to the 'Executive Committees' which had hitherto*



> *been vested in the soviets, the replacement of the dictatorship of the class by the dictatorship of the party, the shift of authority even within the party from its members to its cadres, the replacement of the double power of the bureaucracy and the workers in the factory by the sole power of the former — to do all this was to 'save the Revolution!' … The Bureaucracy prevented the bourgeois restoration … by eliminating the proletarian character of the revolution."* [*"The Kronstadt Revolt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 331]

Perhaps, in light of this, it is significant that, in his list of revolutionary gains from October 1917, Stack fails to mention what anarchists would consider the most important, namely workers' power, freedom, democracy and rights. But, then again, the Bolsheviks did not rate these gains highly either and were more than willing to sacrifice them to ensure their most important gain, state power. So when Stack argues that it was necessary to crush Kronstadt to *"save the revolution"* and *"preserv[e] the revolutionary regime"* we feel entitled to ask what was there left to save and preserve? The dictatorship and decrees of "Communist" leaders? In other words, party power. Yes, by suppressing Kronstadt Lenin and Trotsky saved the revolution: saved it for Stalin. This is hardly something to be proud of.

Ironically, given Stack's assertions that anarchists ignore *"material reality"*, anarchists had long predicted that a revolution would be marked by economic disruption. Kropotkin, for example, argued that it was *"certain that the coming Revolution … will burst upon us in the middle of a great industrial crisis … There are millions of unemployed workers in Europe at this moment. It will be worse when Revolution has burst upon us … The number of the out-of-works will be doubled as soon as barricades are erected in Europe and the United States … we know that in time of Revolution exchange and industry suffer*

All of which must be deeply embarrassing to Leninists. After all, here is Lenin arguing that the factors Leninists list as being responsible for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution were inevitable side effects of **any** revolution and, moreover, the revolution was more sound than ever! Of course, Lenin did not ponder how *"Soviet rule"* was compatible with party dictatorship, but then neither did Trotsky.

Nor was this perspective limited to Lenin. The inevitability of economic collapse being associated with a revolution was not lost on Trotsky either. For example, in **Terrorism and Communism** he argued that *"[a]ll periods of transition have been characterised by ... tragic features"* of an *"economic depression"* such as exhaustion, poverty and hunger. Every class society *"is violently swept off [the arena] by an intense struggle, which immediately brings to its participants even greater privations and sufferings than those against which they rose."* He gave the example of the French Revolution *"which attained its titanic dimensions under the pressure of the masses exhausted with suffering, itself deepened and rendered more acute their misfortunes for a prolonged period and to an extraordinary extent."* He rhetorically asked: *"Can it be otherwise?"* So *"revolutions which drag into their whirlpool millions of workers"* automatically affect the *"economic life of the country."* By *"[d]ragging the mass of the people away from labour, drawing them for a prolonged period into the struggle, thereby destroying their connection with production, the revolution in all these ways strikes deadly blows at economic life, and inevitably lowers the standard which it found at its birth."* This affects the socialist revolution as the *"more perfect the revolution, the greater are the masses it draws in; and the longer it is prolonged, the greater is the destruction it achieves in the apparatus of production, and the more terrible inroads does it make upon public resources. From this there follows merely the conclusion which did not require proof — that a civil war is harmful to economic life."* Given these inevitable circumstances, he justified Bolshevik policies as being the *"only solution ... that*



*Communists' was not, as is often maintained by both Soviet and non-Soviet writers, a Kronstadt slogan."* Nor did they agitate under the banner *"soviets without parties."* They argued for *"all power to the soviets and not to parties."* Political parties were not to be excluded from the soviets, simply stopped from dominating them and substituting themselves for them. As Avrich notes, the Kronstadt programme *"did allow a place for the Bolsheviks in the soviets, alongside the other left-wing organisations ... Communists ... participated in strength in the elected conference of delegate, which was the closest thing Kronstadt ever had to the free soviets of its dreams."* The index for Avrich's work handily includes this page in it, under the helpful entry *"soviets: 'without Communists.'"* [**Kronstadt 1921**, p. 181 and p. 269]

The central demand of the uprising was simply soviet democracy and a return to the principles that the workers and peasants had been fighting the whites for. In other words, both Leninists have misrepresented the Kronstadt revolt's demands and so misrepresented its aims while, at the same time, claiming to have read a work which debunks their own claim.

Rees goes one step further and tries to blame the Bolshevik massacre on the sailors themselves. He argues *"in Petrograd Zinoviev had already essentially withdrawn the most detested aspects of War Communism in response to the strikes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63] Needless to say, Zinoviev did not withdraw the **political** aspects of War Communism, just some of the **economic** ones and, as the Kronstadt revolt was mainly **political**, these concessions were not enough — indeed, the repression directed against workers' rights and opposition socialist and anarchist groups **increased**. As such, Zinoviev confirmed what Kuzmin had warned the Conference of Delegates on 2nd March in Kronstadt, namely *"that the Communists would on no account surrender power or share it with another political party or group."* [George Katkov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30] Rees then states the Kron-

stadters *"response [to these concessions] was contained in their **What We Are Fighting For**"* and quotes it as follows:

> *"there is no middle ground in the struggle against the Communists … They give the appearance of making concessions: in Petrograd province road-block detachments have been removed and 10 million roubles have been allotted for the purchase of foodstuffs… But one must not be deceived … No there can be no middle ground. Victory or death!"* [quoted by Rees, **Op. Cit.**, p. 63]

What Rees fails to inform the reader is that this was written on March 8th, while the Bolsheviks had started military operations on the previous evening. Moreover, the fact the *"response"* stated *"[w]ithout a single shot, without a drop of blood, the first step has been taken [of the "Third Revolution"]. The toilers do not need blood. They will shed it only at a moment of self-defence"* is not mentioned. [quoted by Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 243] In other words, the Kronstadt sailors reaffirmed their commitment to non-violent revolt. Any violence on their part was in self-defence against Bolshevik actions. Not that you would know that from Rees' work. Indeed, as another one of his sources indicates, the rebels *"had refrained from taking any communist lives. The Soviet Government, on the other hand, as early as March 3, already had executed forty-five seamen at Oranienbaum — a quite heavy proportion of the total personnel of the men at the Naval Aviation Detachment. These men had voted for the Kronstadt resolution, but did not take arms against the government. This mass execution was merely a prelude to those that took place after the defeat of the mutineers."* These executions at Oranienbaum, it should be noted, exceeded the total of 36 seamen who had paid with their lives for the two large rebellions of the 1905 revolution at Kronstadt and Sveaborg. [D. Fedotoff-White, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156]



*"blockaded again the misery of the German masses would have been even more dreadful,"* dismissing this argument:

> *"A revolution … can be made only if it does not worsen the workers' conditions 'too much.' Is it permissible, in a communist party, to speak in a tone like this, I ask? This is the language of counter-revolution. The standard of living in Russia is undoubtedly lower than in Germany, and when we established the dictatorship, this led to the workers beginning to go more hungry and to their conditions becoming even worse. The workers' victory cannot be achieved without sacrificing, without a temporary deterioration of their conditions… If the German workers now want to work for the revolution, they must make sacrifices and not be afraid to do so … The labour aristocracy, which is afraid of sacrifices, afraid of 'too great' impoverishment during the revolutionary struggle, cannot belong to the party. Otherwise the dictatorship is impossible, especially in western European countries."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, pp. 382–3]

In 1921 he repeated this, arguing that *"every revolution entails enormous sacrifice on the part of the class making it… The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has entailed for the ruling class — the proletariat — sacrifices, want and privation unprecedented in history, and the case will, in all probability, be the same in every other country."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 488]

So Lenin is on record as saying these "objective factors" will always be the circumstances facing a socialist revolution. Indeed, in November 1922 he stated that rather than having undermined the revolution, *"Soviet rule in Russia is celebrating its fifth anniversary. It is now sounder than ever."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 33, p. 417]

*will understand that every civil war brings fresh disasters."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 463] The similarities to Kropotkin's arguments made three decades previously are clear (see section 1 for details).

Indeed, he mocked those who would argue that revolution could occur without *"exceptional circumstances"*:

> *"A revolutionary would not 'agree' to a proletarian revolution only 'on the condition' that it proceeds easily and smoothly, that there is, from the outset, combined action on the part of proletarians of different countries, that there are guarantees against defeats, that the road of the revolution is broad, free and straight, that it will not be necessary during the march to victory to sustain the heaviest casualties, to 'bide one's time in a besieged fortress,' or to make one's way along extremely narrow, impassable, winding and dangerous mountain tracks. Such a person is no revolutionary."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 28, p. 68]

Thus industrial collapse and terrible difficulties would face any revolution. As Lenin noted, *"in revolutionary epochs the class struggle has always, inevitably, and in every country, assumed the form of* ***civil war,*** *and civil war is inconceivable without the severest destruction, terror and the restriction of formal democracy in the interests of this war."* Moreover, *"[w]e know that fierce resistance to the socialist revolution on the part of the bourgeoisie is inevitable in all countries, and that this resistance will* ***grow*** *with the growth of the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 69 and p. 71] To blame the inevitable problems of a revolution for the failings of Bolshevism suggests that Bolshevism is simply not suitable for revolutionary situations.

At the 1920 Comintern Congress Lenin lambasted a German socialist who argued against revolution because *"Germany was so weakened by the War"* that if it had been



Ted Grant, of the UK's **Socialist Appeal** re-writes history significantly in his work **Russia: From revolution to counter-revolution**. He asserts, without providing any references or evidence, that the *"first lie"* of anti-Bolshevik writers on the subject *"is to identify the Kronstadt mutineers of 1921 with the heroic Red sailors of 1917."* Yet this book appeared in 1997, long after the academic research we quote in section 8 **proven** that over 90% of the sailors on the two battleships which started the revolt had been recruited before and during the 1917 revolution and at least three-quarters of the sailors were old hands who had served in the navy through war and revolution. So was the majority of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. Grant also asserts that the sailors in 1917 and 1921 *"had nothing in common"* because those *"of 1917 were workers and Bolsheviks"*, so ignoring the substantial evidence which had appeared decades before which — as we summarised in section 9 — showed that the Bolsheviks were a minority in Kronstadt during 1917 and that the demands raised in the revolt in 1921 matched the politics dominant in 1917. For good measure, he proclaims *"[t]hat there were actual counter-revolutionary elements among the sailors was shown by the slogan 'Soviets without Bolsheviks'"* without apparently aware that this was never raised in Kronstadt.

Grant claims that *"almost the entire Kronstadt garrison volunteered to fight in the ranks of the Red Army during the civil war."* Are we to believe that the Bolshevik commanders left Kronstadt (and so Petrograd) defenceless during the Civil War? Or drafted the skilled and trained (and so difficult to replace) sailors away from their ships, so leaving them unusable? Of course not. Common sense refutes Grant's argument even if you were unaware, as he was, of the statistical evidence that on 1st January, 1921, at least 75.5% of the Baltic Fleet was likely to have been drafted before 1918 and over 80% were from Great Russian areas and some 10% from the Ukraine. [Gelzter, **Kronstadt 1917–1921**, p. 208] Not to be outdone, Grant then

states that the *"Kronstadt garrison of 1921 was composed mainly of raw peasant levies from the Black Sea Fleet. A cursory glance at the surnames of the mutineers immediately shows that they were almost all Ukrainians."* According to Paul Avrich, *"[s]ome three or four hundred names appear in the journal of the rebel movement ... So far as one can judge from these surnames alone ... Great Russians are in the overwhelming majority."* Of the 15 person Provisional Revolutionary Committee, *"three ... bore patently Ukrainian names and two others... Germanic names."* Of the three Ukrainians, two were sailors who *"had fought on the barricades in 1917."* [Paul Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 92–3 and p. 91] He also suggests that *"[i]t is interesting to note that members of the Workers' Opposition, a semi-anarcho-syndicalist tendency present at the Congress, also joined the attacking forces. This nails yet another lie, which attempts to establish a clumsy amalgam between Kronstadt — anarchism — Workers' Opposition \96 three things that have absolutely nothing in common."* Ignoring the awkward fact that only Trotsky's biography Isaac Deutscher claimed Kronstadt was led by anarchists, we can simply note that it was the leadership of the Bolsheviks who sought to link the Workers' Opposition with Kronstadt at the time:

> *"But I ask: Why is Shlyapnikov not prosecuted for making such statements? Are we seriously discussing discipline and unity in an organised Party, or are we at a meeting of the Kronstadt type? For his is a Kronstadt, anarchist type of statement, to which the response is a gun."* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 206]

Alexander Shlyapnikov was a leader of the Workers' Opposition so, as Nicolas Walter noted in 1971, *"[a]ttempts to assimilate Kronstadt to the Workers' Opposition, which were made by the Leninists at the time as part of the amalgam technique*



> *"We must be perfectly clear in our minds about the new disasters that civil war brings for every country. The more cultured a country is the more serious will be these disasters. Let us picture to ourselves a country possessing machinery and railways in which civil war is raging, and this civil war cuts off communication between the various parts of the country. Picture to yourselves the condition of regions which for decades have been accustomed to living by the interchange of manufactured goods and you will understand that every civil war brings forth disasters."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 463]

As we discuss in section 4, the economic state of Germany immediately after the end of the war suggests that Lenin had a point: the German economy was in a serious state of devastation, a state equal to that of Russia during the equivalent period of its revolution. If economic conditions made party dictatorship inevitable in Bolshevik Russia (as pro-Leninists argue) it would mean that soviet democracy and revolution cannot go together.

Lenin, unlike many of his latter day followers, did not consider these grim objective conditions as making revolution impossible. Rather, for him, there was *"no other way out of this war"* which is causing the problems *"except revolution, except civil war ... a war which always accompanies not only great revolutions but every serious revolution in history."* He continued by arguing that we *"must be perfectly clear in our minds about the new disasters that civil war brings for every country. The more cultured a country is the more serious will be these disasters. Let us picture to ourselves a country possessing machinery and railways in which civil war is raging, and this civil war cuts communication between the various parts of the country. Picture to yourselves the condition of regions which for decades have been accustomed to living by interchange of manufactured goods and you*

*landowners and capitalists putting up a furious resistance."* He reiterated this point, acknowledging that the *"country is poor, the country is poverty-stricken, and it is impossible just now to satisfy all demands; that is why it is so difficult to build the new edifice in the midst of disruption. But those who believe that socialism can be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistake: it will be everywhere built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine. That is how it must be."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 520 and p. 517]

As regards civil war, he noted that *"not one of the great revolutions of history has take place"* without one and *"without which not a single serious Marxist has conceived the transition from capitalism to socialism."* Moreover, *"there can be no civil war — the inevitable condition and concomitant of socialist revolution — without disruption."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 496 and p. 497] He considered this disruption as being applicable to advanced capitalist nations as well:

> *"In Germany, state capitalism prevails, and therefore the revolution in Germany will be a hundred times more devastating and ruinous than in a petty-bourgeois country — there, too, there will be gigantic difficulties and tremendous chaos and imbalance."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 28, p. 298]

Lenin reiterated this point again and again. He argued that *"we see famine not only in Russia, but in the most cultured, advanced countries, like Germany ... it is spread over a longer period than in Russia, but it is famine nevertheless, still more severe and painful than here."* In fact, *"today even the richest countries are experiencing unprecedented food shortages and that the overwhelming majority of the working masses are suffering incredible torture."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 460 and p. 461] And from June, 1918:



*of propaganda and which have been made by libertarian Marxists since then as part of a similar technique in reverse, break on the decisive fact that the Workers' Opposition ... always retained as its fundamental principle the Communist monopoly of power — the structure of the Bolshevik regime was to be changed, but not its basis as a party dictatorship; the fundamental principle of the Kronstadt programme, on the other hand, was precisely the removal of that dictatorship. The essential difference, however, was not in words but in deeds: when it came to a practical choice between Communism and communism, the Workers' Opposition gladly turned their guns on Kronstadt."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

And **Grant** talks about the *"[m]any falsifications... written about this event,"* that it *"has been virtually turned into a myth"* and that *"these allegations bear no relation to the truth."* Truly amazing — although, to be fair, he **may** have been genuinely ignorant of the research on the subject but his readers would surely have expected him to do **some** investigation of the facts before so confidently accusing others of falsification and myth-making. The best that can be said is that he made no attempt to suggest he had read Paul Avrich's and Israel Gelzter's essential books on the subject while making his assertions.

Another SWP member, Abbie Bakan, asserts that *"more than three quarters of the sailors"* at Kronstadt *"were recent recruits of peasant origin"* but refuses to provide a source for this claim. [*"A Tragic Necessity"*, **Socialist Worker Review**, no. 136] As noted above, such a claim is false. The likely source for the assertion is Paul Avrich, who noted that more than three-quarters of the sailors were of peasant origin but Avrich does **not** say they were all recent recruits. While stating that there could be *"little doubt"* that the Civil War produced a *"high turnover"* and that *"many"* old-timers had been replaced by conscripts from rural areas, he does not indicate that all the sailors from peasant backgrounds were new recruits. He also notes that *"there had always been a large and unruly peasant element among the sailors."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 89–90] It should

be noted that Bakan seems ignorant of the research by Evan Mawdsley and Israel Gelzter which show beyond doubt that most of the sailors had been there in 1917. Like Grant, Bakan seems unwilling to research the subject being discussed — unlike Grant, Bakan **is** an academic.

She asserts that anti-Semitism *"was vicious and rampant"* yet fails to provide **any** official Kronstadt proclamations expressing this perspective. Rather, we are to generalise from the memoirs of **one** sailor who was not even based in Kronstadt and the anti-Semitic remark of Vershinin, a member of the Revolutionary Committee, which was reported by Bolshevik sources. The source for these claims is Paul Avrich's book but, as Nicolas Walter points out, *"he offers very little evidence for this. He quotes some hair-raising passages from the manuscript memoirs of a sailor who was serving in Petrograd, and refers to the sailor's claim that his views were widely shared by his colleagues in the fleet ... That isn't much of an argument, and the only other piece of evidence — the Bolshevik story that one of the first Kronstadt rebels they caught shouted to his captors to 'join us and beat the Jews' — is derisory. In view of the powerful tradition of antisemitism in Russia ... the remarkable thing is that there seems to have been virtually no breath of antisemitism during the Kronstadt rising."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 147–8] Nor should we forget that the opinions of the single sailor whose testimony is verifiable (who, let us stress, was not even in Kronstadt) were irrelevant to the Bolsheviks when they drafted him in the first place. More importantly, this *"vicious and rampant"* anti-Semitism failed to be expressed in the demands raised nor the Kronstadt rebels' newspaper or their radio broadcasts. Needless to say, the Bolsheviks failed to mention it at the time.

Yes, it is true that as Bakan (echoing Avrich) noted that the *"worse venom of the Kronstadt rebels was levelled against Trotsky and Zinoviev"* but it was **not** because, as Bakan asserts, they were *"treated as Jewish scapegoats."* Their ethnic background was not mentioned by the Kronstadt sailors and



inevitable consequence. As such, we must note that Trotsky's followers do not apply this critique to their own politics, which are also a form of the *"exceptional circumstances"* excuse. Given how quickly Bolshevik "principles" (as expressed in **The State and Revolution**) were dropped, we can only assume that Bolshevik ideas are also suitable purely for *"times of peace"* as well.

But, then, Trotsky was not above using such arguments himself (making later-day Trotskyists at least ideologically consistent in their hypocrisy). In the same essay, for example, he justifies the prohibition of other Soviet parties in terms of a *"measure of defence of the dictatorship in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies on all sides."* In other words, an appeal to the exceptional circumstances facing the Bolsheviks! Perhaps unsurprisingly, his followers have tended to stress this (contradictory) aspect of his argument rather than his comments that those *"who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat. The Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 426 and p. 430] Which, of course, suggests that the prohibition of other parties had little impact on levels of soviet "democracy" allowed under the Bolsheviks.

This dismissal of the *"exceptional circumstances"* argument did not originate with Trotsky. Lenin repeatedly stressed that any revolution would face civil war and economic disruption. In early January, 1918, he was pointing to *"the incredibly complications of war and economic ruin"* in Russia and noting that *"the fact that Soviet power has been established ... is why civil war has acquired predominance in Russia at the present time."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 26, p. 453 and p. 459] A few months later he states quite clearly that *"it will never be possible to build socialism at a time when everything is running smoothly and tranquilly; it will never be possible to realise socialism without the*

> *"The leaders of the Spanish Federation of Labour (CNT) … became, in the critical hour, bourgeois ministers. They explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of 'exceptional circumstances.' But did not the leaders of the German social democracy invoke, in their time, the same excuse? Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance.' Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for 'exceptional circumstances' … We have not the slightest intention of blaming the anarchists for not having liquidated the state with the mere stroke of a pen. A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society. But all the more severely do we blame the anarchist theory, which seemed to be wholly suitable for times of peace, but which had to be dropped rapidly as soon as the 'exceptional circumstances' of the… revolution had begun. In the old days there were certain generals — and probably are now — who considered that the most harmful thing for an army was war. Little better are those revolutionaries who complain that revolution destroys their doctrine."* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism,"* **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37**, pp. 423–4]

Thus to argue that the *"exceptional circumstances"* caused by the civil war are the only root cause of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution is a damning indictment of Bolshevism: Lenin did not argue in **State and Revolution** that the application of soviet democracy was dependent only in *"times of peace."* Rather, he stressed that they were for the *"exceptional circumstance"* of revolution and the civil war he considered its



they were strong **political** reasons for attacking them. As Paul Avrich wrote, *"Trotsky in particular was the living symbol of War Communism, of everything the sailors had rebelled against. His name was associated with centralisation and militarisation, with iron discipline and regimentation."* As for Zinoviev, he had *"incurred the sailors' loathing as the party boss who had suppressed the striking workers and who had stooped to taking their own families as hostages."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 178 and p. 176] Good reasons to attack them and nothing to do with them being Jewish. Needless to say, Bakan seems selective in her concern over anti-Semitism and makes no mention of Emma Goldman's comment:

> *"To be sure, the former commissar assures us that 'the peasants reconciled themselves to the requisition as a temporary evil,' and that 'the peasants approved of the Bolsheviki, but became increasingly hostile to the "Communists".' But these contentions are mere fiction .. . In point of historic truth, the peasants hated the regime almost from the start, certainly from the moment when Lenin's slogan, 'Rob the robbers,' was turned into 'Rob the peasants for the glory of the Communist Dictatorship.' That is why they were in constant ferment against the Bolshevik Dictatorship. A case in point was the uprising of the Karelian Peasants drowned in blood by the Tsarist General Slastchev-Krimsky … [who] had fought against the Revolution from its very beginning and had led some of the Wrangel forces in the Crimea. He was guilty of fiendish barbarities to war prisoners and infamous as a maker of pogroms. Now Slastchev-Krimsky recanted and he returned to 'his Fatherland.' This arch-counter revolutionist and Jew-baiter, together with several Tsarist generals and White Guardists, was received*

> *by the Bolsheviki with military honours. No doubt it was just retribution that the anti-Semite had to salute the Jew, Trotsky, his military superior. But to the Revolution and the Russian people the triumphal return of the imperialist was an outrage."* [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 259–60]

Bakan states that the *"demands of the Kronstadt sailors reflected the ideas of the most backward section of the peasantry."* As can be seen from section 3, such a comment cannot be matched with the actual demands raised (demands, of course, which are not provided). So which ideas reflected the *"most backward section of the peasantry"*? Free elections to the Soviets, freedom of speech and of the press for workers and peasants, right of assembly, freedom for trade union and peasant organisations, a conference of workers, soldiers and sailors, liberation of all political, worker and peasant prisoners, equalisation of rations, freedom for peasants as long as they do not employ hired labour, and so on? All these could, indeed should, be included in most socialist parties programmes and were, in fact, key elements of Bolshevik rhetoric in 1917 and reflected key aspects of the Soviet Constitution. Moreover, these *"backward"* peasants send a radio message marking International Woman's Day, hoping that women would *"soon accomplish"* their *"liberation from every form of violence and oppression."* [quoted by Alexander Berkman, *"The Kronstadt Rebellion,"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85] How *"backward"* can you get!

Bakan pathetically acknowledges that their demands included *"calls for greater freedoms"* yet looks at the *"main economic target"* (not mentioning they were points 8 and 11 of the 15 demands, the bulk of the rest are political). These, apparently, were aimed at *"the programme of forced requisitioning of peasant produce and the roadblock detachments that halted the black market in grain."* Given that she admits that the Bolshevik leadership was *"already discussing"* the end of



Fourth, there is the example of the Makhnovist movement. Operating in the same "objective circumstances," facing the same "objective factors," the Makhnovists did **not** implement the same policies as the Bolsheviks. As we discussed in the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?", rather than undermine soviet, soldier and workplace democracy and replace all with party dictatorship, the Makhnovists applied these as fully as they could. Now, if "objective factors" explain the actions of the Bolsheviks, then why did the Makhnovists not pursue identical policies? Why did the Makhnovists not raise the necessity of party dictatorship to an ideological truism?

In summary, regardless of Trotskyist assertions, anarchists do not ignore the objective factors facing the Bolsheviks during the revolution. As indicated, we predicted the problems they faced and developed our ideas to counter them. As the example of the Makhnovists showed, our ideas were more than adequate for the task — unlike those of the Bolsheviks.

## 2 Can "objective factors" really explain the failure of Bolshevism?

As noted in the previous section Leninists falsely argue that anarchists downplay (at best) or ignore (at worse) the "objective factors" facing the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution. However, there is more to it than that. Leninists also claim to be revolutionaries, they claim to know that revolutions will face problems, that civil war is inevitable and so forth. It therefore strikes anarchists as being somewhat hypocritical for Leninists to blame these very same "objective" but allegedly inevitable factors for the failure of Bolshevism in Russia.

Ironically enough, Lenin and Trotsky agree with these anarchist arguments. Looking at Trotsky, he dismissed the CNT's leaderships' arguments in favour of collaborating with the bourgeois state as follows:

Rather, the process had began before the civil war started and, equally significantly, continued after its end in November 1920.

Third, in terms of the economic and social backwardness of Russia, the similar (if not worse) backwardness of Germany in 1847 did not stop Marx arguing that socialist central planning was viable — indeed, in the **Philosophy of Philosophy** he berated Ricardian Socialist John Bray for suggesting using labour-notes *"for a period of transition"* to communism while in the **Communist Manifesto** he asserted that *"the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution."* [**Marx-Engels Collected Works**, vo. 6, p. 142 and p. 519] Moreover, the notion that Russia was only ready for a **bourgeois** revolution was held by the Mensheviks (reflecting the mainstream position of Marxist social-democracy) and accordingly denounced by Leninists, then and now. So being predominantly a peasant society with little, if any, large-scale industy did not stop Marx issuing a very public call for communist revolution in Germany in 1847 (indeed, this was the social situation across whole of Continental Europe during Marx's lifetime and for **many** decades afterwards).

Nor does the then backwardness of Russia hinder the adoption of various aspects of Bolshevism — such as vanguardism, the necessity of party dictatorship, the centralised structure of socialism, one-man management, etc. — by Marxists in the West after 1917, indeed until now. As such, "backwardness" is a selective excuse — not least because few Leninists would agree that vanguardism was a product of Tsarist Russia and so applicable only there and then. In short, if Leninists took the issue of "backwardness" seriously then they would question **all** aspects of their ideology and hopefully — like the German Council Communists — recognise that Leninism is permeated with the social conditions of a semi-feudal regime and has little to offer modern revolutionaries (or revolutionaries active in the advanced capitalist nations of post-war Europe).



these features (due to their lack of success) it must be the case that the likes of Lenin, Zinoviev and Trotsky also *"reflected the ideas of the most backward section of the peasantry"*. Moreover, the demand to end the roadblocks was also raised by the Petrograd and Moscow workers during their strikes, as were most of the other demands raised by Kronstadt. [Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] The *"most backward section of the peasantry"* was getting around in those days, appearing as they were in the highest echelons of the Bolshevik party bureaucracy and the factories of Petrograd and other major cities!

In reality, of course, the opposition to the forced requisitioning of food and the roadblocks between town and countryside was a combination of ethical and practical considerations — not least, being counterproductive. As the striking workers show, you did not have to be a peasant to see this. Victor Serge, for example, recollected he would *"have died without the sordid manipulations of the black market."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 79] He was a government official, think how much worse it would have been for an ordinary worker. These policies harmed everyone, including industrial workers — little wonder they struck for their end and little wonder the sailors expressed solidarity with them and included it in their demands. Therefore, **nothing** can be drawn from these demands about the class nature of the revolt.

In an interesting example of double-think, Bakan then states that the sailors *"called for the abolition of Bolshevik authority in the army, factories and mills."* What the resolution demanded was, in fact, *"the abolition Party combat detachments in all military groups"* as well as *"Party guards in factories and enterprises"* (point 10). In other words, to end the intimidation of workers and soldiers by armed communist units in their amidst. Needless to say, we discover Leninists denounce this when Stalinists do it, arguing that *"people who seriously believe that workers at the height of revolution need a police guard to stop them handing their factories over to capitalists certainly*

*have no real faith in the possibilities of a socialist future."* [Chris Harman, **Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 144]

Likewise, when Bakan states that *"the real character of the rebellion"* can be seen from the opening declaration that *"the present soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants"* she could not have made a truer comment. The Kronstadt rebellion was a revolt for soviet democracy and against party dictatorship — so soviet democracy would only have led to *"abolition of Bolshevik authority"* if the existing soviets, as the resolution argued, did not express the will of their electors. Ignoring the reality of the situation in terms of lack of genuine soviet democracy under the Bolshevik dictatorship, she asserts that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee was *"non-elected"* and so contradicts every historian who acknowledges it was elected by the Conference of Delegates on March 2nd and expanded by the next conference a few days later. She even considers the fact the delegate meeting's *"denial of party members' usual role in chairing the proceedings"* as one of many *"irregularities"* while, of course, the **real** irregularity was the fact that **one** party (the government party) had such a *"usual role"* in the first place! Moreover, given that that Petrograd soviet meeting to discuss the revolt had Cheka guards (Lenin's political police) on it, her notion that sailors guarded the Conference of Delegates meeting (a meeting held in opposition to the ruling party) was *"irregular"* seems ironic.

Lastly, the issue of the Memorandum of the White National Centre is raised and used as evidence that *"Lenin's suspicion of an international conspiracy linked up with the Kronstadt events has been vindicated."* Needless to say, she fails to mention that the historian who discovered the document rejected the notion that it proved that Kronstadt was linked to such a conspiracy (see section 6 for a full discussion). Much is made of the claim that *"[t]wo weeks after the Kronstadt rebellion the ice was due to melt"* and that *"[h]olding out until the ice melted was identified*



foster it) in order to overcome them. As such, when Leninists argue that these inevitable "objective factors" caused the degeneration of Bolshevism, anarchists simply reply that if it cannot handle the inevitable then Bolshevism should be avoided: just as we would avoid a submarine which worked perfectly well until it was placed in the sea.

Moreover, what is to be made of this Leninist argument against anarchism? In fact, given the logic of their claims we have to draw the conclusion that the Leninists seem to think a revolution **could** happen **without** civil war and economic disruption. As such it suggests that the Leninists have the "utopian" politics in this matter. After all, if they argue that civil war is inevitable then how can they blame the degeneration of the revolution on it? Simply put, if Bolshevism cannot handle the inevitable it should be avoided at all costs.

Ironically, as indicated in the next section, we can find ample arguments to refute the Trotskyist case against the anarchist analysis in the works of leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin. Indeed, their arguments provide a striking confirmation of the anarchist position as they, like Kropotkin, stress that difficult "objective factors" will face **every** revolution. This means to use these factors to justify Bolshevik authoritarianism simply results in proving that Bolshevism is simply non-viable or that a liberatory social revolution is, in fact, impossible (and, as a consequence, genuine socialism).

There are, of course, other reasons why the Leninist critique of the anarchist position is false. In terms of theory, the Leninist position is the crudest form of economic determinism. As we discuss in section 7, ideas **do** matter and, as Marx himself stressed, can play a key in how a social process develops. In terms of the empirical evidence against the Trotskyist explanation, as we indicate in section 3, soviet democracy and workers' power in the workplace was **not** undermined by the civil war.

*bourgeois governments."* In addition, he thought it important not to suppress *"small scale industries"* as they would be essential when *"a country in revolution is attacked by foreign governments, when it is blockaded and deprived of imports, when its large-scale industries threaten to break down or the railways do break down."* Rather than assume the problem away, it was essential that to counteract isolation workers must understand *"that their cause is international"* and that *"the organisation of labour"* must develop *"beyond national boundaries."* However, *"the probability is not to be discounted that the revolution may break out in one country sooner than in another"* and *"in such a case it would become imperative ... not to wait for possible aid from outside, but immediately to exert all her energies to help herself supply the most essential needs of her people by her own efforts."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 215, p. 223 p. 228, p. 229 and p. 227]

Emma Goldman, likewise, noted that it was *"a tragic fact that all revolutions have sprung from the loins of war. Instead of translating the revolution into social gains the people have usually been forced to defend themselves against warring parties." "It seems,"* she noted, *"nothing great is born without pain and travail"* as well as *"the imperative necessity of defending the Revolution."* However, in spite of these inevitable difficulties she pointed to how the Spanish anarchists *"have shown the first example in history* ***how Revolutions should be made****"* by *"the constructive work"* of *"socialising of the land, the organisation of the industries."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 218, p. 222 and pp. 55–56]

These opinions were, as can be seen, to be expected from revolutionary anarchists schooled in the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Clearly, then, far from ignoring the "objective factors" facing the Bolsheviks, anarchists have based their politics around them. We have always argued that a social revolution would face isolation, economic disruption and civil war and have, for this reason, stressed the importance of mass participation (and the appropriate **federalist** structures required to



*as critical in the memorandum,"* but this is not true. The Memorandum in fact, as Paul Avrich notes, *"assumes that the rising will occur after the ice has melted."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 237fn] No other interpretation can be gathered from the document.

To conclude, these writings shows how deeply the supporters of Leninism will sink to when attempting to discuss the Kronstadt rebellion. Sadly, as we have indicated many, many times, these are not isolated occurrences. Long refuted claims are repeated by those who seem to think doing research on a subject before writing about it is as counter-revolutionary as accurately reflecting the facts and arguments in any book they do deem fit to consult.

## 15 What does Kronstadt tell us about Bolshevism?

The rationales used by Lenin, Trotsky and their followers are significant aids to getting to the core of the Bolshevik Myth. These rationales and the various bad faith activities (selective quoting, invention, cherry-picking, deliberately ignoring relevant facts, etc.) utilised to create them allow us to understand the limitations of Bolshevik ideology and how it contributed to the degeneration of the revolution. However, the Kronstadt revolt should not be viewed in isolation — it was the climax of a process which had started as soon as the Bolsheviks had seized power in 1917. As Nicolas Walter suggests:

> *"Each side in every conflict, after all, behaves in accordance with its own particular goals and aspirations. It is action, more than anything else, which reveals the true nature of human beings. This in fact is the basis for our total condemnation of the Bolsheviks. We are not concerned with the possibility that the success of Kronstadt might have led to chaos, civil war, or counter-revolution, but with the certainty that the failure of Kronstadt did*

*lead to dictatorship, purges, and counter-revolution. The suppression of real communists calling for real soviet power by people who described themselves as the Communist Party and the Soviet Government destroyed the Bolsheviks' credentials and should have destroyed their credibility. Kronstadt was not an isolated phenomenon ... The importance of Kronstadt is not that it was a 'betrayal of the revolution', a sudden disease which afflicted Russia in 1921, but that it was indeed a 'tragic necessity', a symptom of the underlying chronic illness of authoritarian socialism — the fact that it is objectively, practically, essentially counter-revolutionary."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 152–3]

Moreover, it shows the links between Leninism and Stalinism. Thus the Stalinist officially approved history of the Russian Communist Party repeats the same myths as the Trotskyists do — *"Whiteguards, in complicity with Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and representatives of foreign states, assumed the lead of the mutiny"*, the rebels *"raised the cry: 'Soviets without Communists!'* while *"counter-revolutionaries tried to exploit the discontent of the petty bourgeois masses in order to overthrow the power of the Soviets under a pseudo-Soviet slogan"* for *"[n]early all the old sailors who had taken part in the October Revolution were at the front, heroically fighting in the ranks of the Red Army"* and replaced by *"new men, who had not been schooled in the revolution"* who *"were a perfectly raw peasant mass who gave expression to the peasantry's discontent"*. [C.P.S.U. (B), **History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)**, p. 250] To be fair to the Trotskyists, they do not claim the Mensheviks were involved and so can at least claim to be less dishonest that the Stalinists — faint praise indeed.



*far more powerful, intellectually and physically, middle-classes, which have at their service all the potent machinery of the modern State."* Thus *"each time that such a period of accelerated evolution and reconstruction on a grand scale begins, civil war is liable to break out on a small or large scale."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, p. 561, p. 121 and pp. 495–6]

It must, therefore, be stressed that the very "objective factors" supporters of Bolshevism use to justify the actions of Lenin and Trotsky were correctly predicted by anarchists decades before hand. Indeed, rather than ignore them anarchists like Kropotkin based their political and social ideas on these difficulties. As such, it seems ironic for Leninists to attack anarchists for allegedly ignoring these factors. It is even more ironic as these very same Leninists are meant to know that **any** revolution will involve these exact same "objective factors," something that Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks eventually acknowledged (see the next section).

Therefore, as noted above, when anarchists like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman arrived in Russia they were aware of the problems it, like any revolution, would face. Their critique of Bolshevism was not based on decrying what they considered as inevitable, but rather the (counter-productive) Bolshevik response. Unsurprisingly, this extremely realistic perspective can be found in their later works. Berkman, for example, stressed that *"when the social revolution had become thoroughly organised and production is functioning normally there will be enough for everybody. But in the first stages of the revolution, during the process of re-construction, we must take care to supply the people the best we can, and equally, which means rationing."* This was because the *"first effect of the revolution is reduced production."* This would be initially due to the general strike which is its *"starting point."* However, *"[w]hen the social revolution begins in any land, its foreign commerce stops: the importation of raw materials and finished products is suspended. The country may even be blockaded by the*

*dustry"* a revolution *"where the people lay hands upon property will inevitably paralyse exchange and production … This point cannot be too much insisted upon; the reorganisation of industry on a new basis … cannot be accomplished in a few days."* Indeed, he considered it essential to *"show how tremendous this problem is."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 72–3]

He pointed to the experience of the French Revolution as evidence for this, as it showed, *"[o]ne of the great difficulties in every Revolution is the feeding of the large towns."* This was because the *"large towns of modern times are centres of various industries that are developed chiefly for the sake of the rich or for the export trade"* and these *"two branches fail whenever any crisis occurs, and the question then arises of how these great urban agglomerations are to be fed."* This crisis, rather than making revolution impossible, spurred the creation of what Kropotkin terms *"the communist movement"* in which *"the Parisian proletariat had already formed a conception of its class interests and had found men to express them well."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. II, p. 457 and p. 504]

As for self-defence, he reproached the authors of classic syndicalist utopia **How we shall bring about the Revolution** for *"considerably attenuat[ing] the resistance that the Social Revolution will probably meet with on its way."* He stressed that the *"check of the attempt at Revolution in Russia [in 1905] has shown us all the danger that may follow from an illusion of this kind."* Elsewhere he argued that *"[i]f armed brigands attack a people, is not that same people, armed with good weapons, the surest rampart to oppose to the foreign aggressor?"* He recognised that *"a society in which the workers would have a dominant voice"* would require a revolution to create, *"a revolution far more profound than any of the revolutions which history had on record."* In such a rebellion, however, *"the workers would have against them, not the rotten generation of aristocrats against whom the French peasants and republicans had to fight in the [eighteenth] century — and even that fight was a desperate one — but the*



The various arguments used to justify the Bolshevik dictatorship crushing the rebellion are, in the main, weak or factually incorrect as we have indicated above. There is only one which had any real traction and it gets to the heart of the problem as it exposes the counter-revolutionary nature of Bolshevism from a socialist perspective. It was expressed by Trotsky in 1938:

> *"the Kronstadt uprising was nothing but an armed reaction of the petty bourgeoisie against the hardships of social revolution and the severity of the proletarian dictatorship.*
>
> *"That was exactly the significance of the Kronstadt slogan, 'Soviets without Communists,' which was immediately seized upon, not only by the SRs but by the bourgeois liberals as well. As a rather far-sighted representative of capital, Professor Miliukov understood that to free the soviets from the leadership of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants. The Kronstadt uprising thus had a counterrevolutionary character."* [Lenin and Trotsky, *"Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt"*, **Kronstadt**, p. 90]

Interesting logic. Let us assume that the result of free elections would have been the end of Bolshevik *"leadership"* (i.e.

dictatorship), as seems likely. What Trotsky is arguing is that to allow workers to vote for their representatives would *"only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship"*. This argument was made (in 1938) as a **general point** and is **not** phrased in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution in 1921. In other words Trotsky is clearly arguing for the dictatorship of the party and contrasting it to soviet democracy. So much for *"All Power to the Soviets"* or *"workers' power"* — Trotsky is unambiguously calling for party power and, ultimately, party dictatorship. As he put it around the same time as the Kronstadt rebellion:

> *"The Workers' Opposition came out with dangerous slogans, in that they have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' rights to elect representatives for workers' organizations above the Party, as though the Party had no right to assert its dictatorship even in cases when that dictatorship clashes temporarily with the passing mood of the workers' democracy ... It is essential that we should become aware of the revolutionary-historical birthright of the Party, which is in duty bound to retain its dictatorship, regardless of the temporary vacillations of the amorphous masses, regardless of the temporary vacillations even of the working class ... At any given moment, the dictatorship does not rest upon the formal principle of workers' democracy ... over and above the formal aspect [of workers' democracy] is the Party dictatorship which safeguards the basic interests of the working class even when the moods of that class are temporarily vacillating."* [quoted by Bunyan, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 251–2]

It should — but unfortunately probably will not — cause Trotskyists some concern that in 1957, after crushing the pre-



> *days will at once come to a stop, and millions and millions of 'unemployed' will join the ranks of those who are already unemployed now.*
>
> *"More than that ... The very first advance towards a Socialist society will imply a thorough reorganisation of industry as **to what we have to produce.** Socialism implies ... a transformation of industry so that it may be adapted to the needs of the customer, not those of the profit-maker. Many a branch of industry must disappear, or limits its production; many a new one must develop. We are now producing a great deal for export. But the export trade will be the first to be reduced as soon as attempts at Social Revolution are made anywhere in Europe ... All that **can** be, and **will** be reorganised in time — not by the State, of course (why, then, not say by Providence?), but by the workers themselves. But, in the meantime, the worker ... cannot wait for the gradual reorganisation of industry ... The great problem of how to supply the wants of millions will thus start up at once in all its immensity. And the necessity of finding an **immediate solution** for it is the reason we consider that a step in the direction of [libertarian] Communism will be imposed on the revolted society — not in the future, but as soon as it applies its crowbar to the first stones of the capitalist edifice."* [**Act for Yourselves**, pp. 57–9]

This perspective was at the core of Kropotkin's politics — he was an anarchist not because he thought the revolution would be easy but because he recognised it would be difficult. His classic work **The Conquest of Bread** was based on this clear understanding of the nature of a social revolution and the objective problems it will face. As he put it, while a *"political revolution can be accomplished without shaking the foundations of in-*

*ations, communes and provinces ... to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction"* and *"for the purpose of self-defence."* [**Micheal Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 171]

It would, of course, be strange if this necessity for defence and reconstruction would have little impact on the economic conditions in the revolutionised society. The expropriation of the means of production and the land by a free federation of workers' associations would have an impact on the economy. Kropotkin built upon Bakunin's arguments, stressing that a **social** revolution would, by necessity, involve major difficulties and harsh objective circumstances. It is worth quoting one of his many discussions of this at length:

> *"Suppose we have entered a revolutionary period, with or without civil war — it does not matter, — a period when old institutions are falling into ruins and new ones are growing in their place. The movement may be limited to one State, or spread over the world, — it will have nevertheless the same consequence: an immediate slackening of individual enterprise all over Europe. Capital will conceal itself, and hundreds of capitalists will prefer to abandon their undertakings and go to watering-places rather than abandon their unfixed capital in industrial production. And we know how a restriction of production in any one branch of industry affects many others, and these in turn spread wider and wider the area of depression.*
>
> *"Already, at this moment, millions of those who have created all riches suffer from want of what must be considered **necessaries** for the life of a civilised man... Let the slightest commotion be felt in the industrial world, and it will take the shape of a general stoppage of work. Let the first attempt at expropriation be made, and the capitalist production of our*



vious year's workers' revolution, the Hungarian Stalinists argued along **exactly** the same lines as Trotsky had after the Bolsheviks had crushed Kronstadt: *"the regime is aware that the people do not always know what is good for them. It is therefore the duty of the leadership to act, not according to the **will** of the people, but according to what the leadership knows to be in the best **interests** of the people."* [quoted by Andy Anderson, **Hungary '56**, p. 101]

Along with Trotsky, Lenin made the same point at the same Congress in March 1921 by arguing that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of that class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts (by imperialism in some countries) that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard that has absorbed the revolutionary energy of the class. The whole is like an arrangement of cogwheels. Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and of the essentials of transition from capitalism to communism."* So in *"the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers ... the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21 and p. 20] Yet what happens if there is a clash between the vanguard and the class? Lenin had explained the grim reality the previous year at a conference of the Cheka:

> *"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the*

> *wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves.*" [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 42, p. 170]

It must be remembered that Lenin, according to Trotsky, had privately confessed the following in early 1921: *"If we perish, it is all the more important to preserve our ideological line and give a lesson to our continuators. This should never be forgotten, even in hopeless circumstances"*. [quoted by Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 79] Trotsky repeated this lesson then as well as nearly 20 years later:

> *"But the masses are by no means identical: there are revolutionary masses, there are passive masses, there are reactionary masses. The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralized organization of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves. To invest the mass with traits of sanctity and to reduce one's program to amorphous 'democracy', is to dissolve oneself in the class as it is, to turn from a vanguard into a rearguard, and by this very thing, to renounce revolutionary tasks. On the other hand, if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the class is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself. All this is elementary; all this has been demonstrated by the experience of Russia, and confirmed by the experience of Spain."* [*"The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism"*, **Their Morals and Ours**, p. 59]

Yet, by definition, everyone is "backward" compared to the vanguard. Lenin and Trotsky are clearly arguing that the work-



lution. Indeed, the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin predicted that a revolution would face the very "objective factors" which Leninists use to justify and rationalise Bolshevik actions.

As such, to claim that anarchists ignore the "objective factors" facing the Bolsheviks is simply a joke: how can anarchists be considered to ignore what we consider to be the inevitable results of a revolution? Moreover, these Bolshevik assertions ignore the fact that the anarchists who wrote extensively about their experiences in Russia never failed to note that difficult objective factors facing it. Alexander Berkman in **The Bolshevik Myth** paints a clear picture of the problems facing the revolution, as does Emma Goldman in **My Disillusionment in Russia**. This is not to mention anarchists like Voline, Arshinov and Maximoff who took part in the Revolution, experiencing the "objective factors" first hand (and in the case of Voline and Arshinov, participating in the Makhnovist movement which, facing the same — if not worse — factors, managed **not** to act as the Bolsheviks did).

However, as the claim that anarchists ignore the "objective circumstances" facing the Bolsheviks is relatively common, it is important to refute it once and for all — even if it means repeating some of arguments made in section H.6.1.

Anarchists take it for granted that, to quote Bakunin, revolutions *"are not child's play"* and that they mean *"war, and that implies the destruction of men and things."* The *"Social Revolution must put an end to the old system of organisation based upon violence, giving full liberty to the masses, groups, communes, and associations, and likewise to individuals themselves, and destroying once and for all the historic cause of all violences, the power and existence of the State."* This meant a revolution would be *"spontaneous, chaotic, and ruthless, always presupposes a vast destruction of property."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 372, p. 373, p. 380] He took it for granted that counter-revolution would exist, arguing that it was necessary to *"constitute the federation of insurgent associ-*

*so forth."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. II, p. 460]

So based on an analysis of the State which recognised that it had its own vested interests (as outlined in section B.2), anarchists correctly predicted the *"new form of wage-labour which would arise if the State took possession of the means of production and exchange ... New powers, industrial powers, added to those which it [already] possesses ... would create a new, formidable instrument of tyranny."* [Kropotkin, **Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 170] Trotsky's post-hoc analysis sought to explain something unanticipated in his own ideology and from which it had to be excused all responsibility, regardless of the facts and logic.

Given that Bolshevik ideology favoured adding more and more functions to the ("workers") state, extending its reach into economic matters, it comes as no surprise that its bureaucracy likewise grew — at least to non-Trotskyists. As such, rather than express the *"most simplistic kind of philosophical idealism"*, the anarchist critique is rooted in a clear materialist analysis of the effects of certain organisational structures and why these develop. Insofar as ideas played a role in the fate of Russian Revolution, they are reflected in Bolshevik preferences for centralised structures and the social relationships these produced when they were built — as we discuss elsewhere (see section H.6.2 and its related appendix, "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"). Rather than Trotsky's attempts to understand a degeneration he failed to recognise until 1923, anarchists saw the signs when they first arose precisely due to our theory (indeed, Trotsky's ability to recognise and explain Stalinism could only be hindered by him being one of the main architects of the degeneration).

Second, according to anarchist theory, the "objective factors" facing the Bolsheviks are to be expected in **any** revo-



ing class, as a class, is incapable of making a revolution or managing society itself — hence the party must step in on its behalf and, if necessary, ignore the wishes of the very people the party claims to represent. This requires a state in the normal sense of the word, an instrument of minority rule based on special bodies of armed people separate from the people itself — the Red Army and Cheka used to crush the Petrograd strikes and Kronstadt revolt of 1921. To recall Lenin's words from 1917:

> *"And the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of suppressing the oppressors, cannot result merely in an expansion of democracy.* ***Simultaneously*** *with an immense expansion of democracy, which* ***for the first time*** *becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the money-bags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must suppress them in order to free humanity from wage slavery, their resistance must be crushed by force; it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence."* [*"The State and Revolution"*, **Collected Works**, vol. 25, pp. 466–7]

As the dissident (working class) Communist Gavriii Miasnokov argued in 1921 against Lenin's defence of the regime and its authoritarianism:

> *"The trouble is that, while you raise your hand against the capitalist, you deal a blow to the worker. You know very well that for such words as I am now uttering hundreds, perhaps thousands, of workers are languishing in prison. That I myself remain at*

> *liberty is only because I am a veteran Communist, have suffered for my beliefs, and am known among the mass of workers. Were it not for this, were I just an ordinary mechanic from the same factory, where would I be now? In a Cheka prison or, more likely, made to 'escape,' just as I made Mikhail Romanov 'escape.' Once more I say: You raise your hand against the bourgeoisie, but it is I who am spitting blood, and it is we, the workers, whose jaws are being cracked."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, *"Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group"*, **The Russian Review**, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 11]

So, if this vanguard is suppressing the proletariat itself, crushing its resistance by force, then by Lenin's own logic *"where there is suppression and where there is violence"* then for the working class *"there is no freedom and no democracy"*. And, indeed, this was in fact the situation post-October. Likewise, in 1905, Lenin had argued (and used Engels as an authority) that *"the principle, 'only from below' is an **anarchist** principle."* For Lenin, Marxists must be in favour of *"From above as well as from below"* and *"renunciation of pressure also from above is **anarchism**"* as *"[p]ressure from below is pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government. Pressure from above is pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 8, p. 477, p. 474, p. 481 and p. 474] Yet, as Kronstadt shows, *"pressure from above"* has an advantage over *"pressure from below"* as it has the full power of the state apparatus to use against the citizens. In other words, the seeds for degeneration of the revolution and the repression of Kronstadt lie at the heart of the Bolshevik ideology — and in Marxism itself:

> *"The workers ... must not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within*



cultural level these have ruling bureaucracies (and had them for many decades, indeed since before the First World War). Similarly, all States have bureaucracies regardless of their cultural level. Indeed, Marx himself noted the bureaucratic machine which existed in France and the role it played in society since the 1800s (see section H.3.9). Even Trotsky had to admit that the Bolshevik Party itself — like all Social Democratic Parties across the globle — had a bureaucracy before the revolution (see section H.5.12), something which internal critics of every Leninist party which exists today echo, including those in the most advanced nations with a high cultural level (see section H.5.11). The list goes on.

Do anarchists argue that "ideas" produce these bureucracies? No, far from it — specific forms of social structure generate them. Thus hierarchical and centralised structures will inevitably generate bureaucracies — a theory generated from a careful analysis of countless organisations, including the State and mainstream trade unions. Nor do these structures just appear, but rather reflect specific class interests and needs — minority classes cannot favour social structures which include the masses. Thus *"the ideal of the **Jacobin State** .. . had been designed from the viewpoint of the bourgeois, in direct opposition to the egalitarian and communist tendencies of the people which had arisen during the Revolution"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 366] Likewise, previous revolutions saw a similar process, as Kropotkin noted:

> *"It is often thought that it would be easy for a revolution to economise in the administration by reducing the number of officials. This was certainly not the case during the Revolution of 1789–1793, which with each year extended the functions of the State, over instruction, judges paid by the State, the administration paid out of the taxes, an immense army, and*

*"other considerations, of a different, 'theoretical' nature, are to be found in their works."* [Pierre Frank, *"Introduction,"* Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 22] Thus:

> *"Bureaucratic conceptions beget bureaucracy just as opium begets sleep by virtue of its sleep-inducing properties. Trotsky was wrong to explain the proliferation and rise of the bureaucracy on the basis of the country's backwardness, low cultural level, and the isolation of the revolution. No, what gave rise to a social phenomenon like Stalinism was a conception or idea ... it is ideas, or deviations from them, that determine the character of revolutions. The most simplistic kind of philosophical idealism has laid low historical materialism."* [Frank, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 22–3]

Many other Trotskyists take a similar position (although most would include the impact of the Civil War on the rise of Bolshevik authoritarianism and the bureaucracy). Duncan Hallas, for example, argues that the account of the Bolshevik counter-revolution given in the Cohn-Bendit brothers' **Obsolete Communism** is marked by a *"complete omission of any consideration of the circumstances in which [Bolshevik decisions] took place. The ravages of war and civil war, the ruin of Russian industry, the actual disintegration of the Russian working class: all of this, apparently, has no bearing on the outcome."* [**Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party**, p. 41]

So, it is argued, by ignoring the problems facing the Bolsheviks and concentrating on their **ideas**, anarchists fail to understand **why** the Bolsheviks acted as they did. Unsurprisingly anarchists are not impressed with this argument. This is for numerous reasons.

First, and most obvious, the rise of bureaucracies is hardly limited to Bolshevik Russia. As Trotskyists themselves note as regards the trade unions and social democratic parties, although they exist in advanced capitalist countries with a high



> *this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority. They must not allow themselves to be misguided by the democratic talk of freedom for the communities, of self-government, etc... . it must under no circumstances be permitted that every village, every town and every province should put a new obstacle in the path of revolutionary activity, which can proceed with full force only from the centre ... As in France in 1793 so today in Germany, it is the task of the really revolutionary party to carry through the strictest centralisation."* [Marx, **Marx-Engels Collected Works**, vol. 10, p. 285]

Such a perspective cannot help having disastrous consequences for a revolution as this centralisation of power would soon undermine the democracy it claimed to embody. The Russian Revolution showed that Bakunin had been right to argue against Marx that the "workers' state" would not remain controlled by the workers for long and would soon became a dictatorship **over** the proletariat by an elite which claimed to know the interests of the working class better than they did themselves. The logic of the centralisation favoured by Marxism clearly implies that when the party suppressed Kronstadt, when it disbanded non-Bolshevik soviets in early 1918 and robbed the workers and soviets of their power, the Bolsheviks were acting in the best interests of masses. The notion that Leninism is a revolutionary theory is invalidated by these arguments and practices they reflected. Rather than aim for a society based on workers' power, they aim for a "workers' state" in which workers **delegate** their power to the leaders of the party who then use that very same power to retain its social position in the face of popular dissent (the localities placing new obstacles in the way of the centralised state authority). Such an approach is doomed to failure — it

cannot produce a socialist society as such a society (as Bakunin stressed) can only be built from below by the working class itself. As Vernon Richards argues:

> *"The distinction between the libertarian and authoritarian revolutionary movements in their struggle to establish the free society, is the means which each proposes should be used to this end. The libertarian maintains that the initiative must come from below, that the free society must be the result of the will to freedom of a large section of the population. The authoritarian ... believes that the will to freedom can only emerge once the existing economic and political system has be replaced by a dictatorship of the proletariat [i.e., the dictatorship of the party] which, as the awareness and sense of responsibility of the people grows, will wither away and the free society emerge.*
>
> *"There can be no common ground between such approaches. For the authoritarian argues that the libertarian approach is noble but 'utopian' and doomed to failure from the start, while the libertarian argues on the evidence of history, that the authoritarian* ***methods*** *will simply replace one coercive state by another, equally despotic and remote from the people, and which will no more 'wither away' than its capitalist predecessor."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 206]

Thus the reality of the Bolshevik regime confirmed Bakunin's prediction that Marxism meant *"the highly despotic government of the masses by a new and very small aristocracy of real or pretended scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be liberated from the cares of government and included in entirety in the governed herd."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp.



mean one thing, namely if "difficult circumstances" occur again (and they will) we can expect the same outcome.

Worse, perhaps a future revolution will be less destructive, less isolated, less resisted than the Russian (although, as we note below in section 2, leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin argued that this would **not** be the case). That **is** a possibility. However, should we embrace an ideology whose argument is based on the hope that fate will be kinder to them this time? Particularly when, even assuming these better "objective circumstances," while we may manage to avoid the horrors of Stalinism we would not avoid the recreation of a some kind of new class system as such an outcome is inherent in state-socialism?

So while it cannot be denied that objective factors influenced how certain Bolshevik policies were shaped and applied, the inspiration of those policies came from Bolshevik ideology. An acorn will grow and develop depending on the climate and location it finds itself in, but regardless of the "objective factors" it will still grow into an oak tree, however stunted. Similarly with the Russian revolution. While the circumstances it faced influenced its growth, Bolshevik ideology could not help but produce an authoritarian regime with no relationship with **real** socialism.

## 1 Do anarchists ignore the objective factors facing the Russian revolution?

It is often asserted by Leninists that anarchists simply ignore the "objective factors" facing the Bolsheviks when we discuss the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. According to this argument, anarchists present a basically idealistic analysis of the failure of Bolshevism, one not rooted in the material conditions (civil war, economic chaos, etc.) facing Lenin and Trotsky. As one Trotskyist puts it, anarchists *"do not make the slightest attempt at a serious analysis of the situation"* and so

rienced by the Russian one. However, it might and we need to base our politics on the worse case possibility. That said, we argue that Bolshevik policies made things worse — by centralising economic and political power, they automatically hindered the participation of working class people in the revolution, smothering any creative self-activity under the deadweight of state officialdom. As a libertarian revolution would be based on maximising working class self-activity (at all levels, locally and upwards) we would argue that it would be better placed to respond to even the terrible conditions facing the Russian Revolution.

Third, it must be stressed that we are discussing these factors individually simply because it is easier to do so. It reality, they all interacted. Civil war undoubtedly meant economic disruption, economic disruption meant unemployment and that affected the working class via fewer goods available, fewer goods made it harder to exchange with the peasants for food, necessitating forced requisition by the regime, for example. So just because we separate the specific issues for discussion purposes, it should not be taken to imply that we are not aware of their combined impact. Likewise, recognising the impact of certain developments does not mean the responses to them are above criticism nor made the situation worse. Thus in our example above key links in that chain could have been broken by different policies.

To conclude: while mechanically invoking "objective factors" may be sufficient for the followers of Bolshevism, it cannot be sufficient for anyone who wants to learn from history, tather than repeat it. For, ultimately, if difficult times back in 1918–21 justified suppressing working class political and economic freedom and self-management, imprisoning and shooting anarchists and other socialists, implementing and glorifying party dictatorship, what might we expect during difficult times in the future? Simply put, if your defence of the Bolsheviks rests simply on "difficult circumstances" then it can only



178–9] True, while modern day Leninists follow Trotsky's arguments they rarely acknowledge where they logically led or that their heroes explicitly acknowledged this conclusion and justified it. They do not state this position as honestly as did Lenin and Trotsky — although we do see echoes of it in their attempts to justify the repression of Kronstadt — as can be seen when Chris Bambery of the British SWP argues that *"in Lenin's concept of the party, democracy is balanced by centralism"* for the *"working class is fragmented. There are always those who wish to fight, those who will scab and those in between. Even in the soviets those divisions will be apparent. Revolutionary organisation does not aspire to represent the working class as a whole. It bases itself on those workers who want to challenge capitalism, and seeks to organise those to win the majority of workers to the need to take power."* [*"Leninism in the 21st century"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 248]

Anarchists, as discussed in section J.3.6, recognise that the truth of this description of the working class but we draw radically different conclusions in terms of the relationship of socialists to that class and its divisions. We also argue that the Leninist assumptions lead to anti-socialist conclusions (see section H.5) and this can be seen from how Bambery's comments have **exactly** the same basis of Trotsky's defence of the need of party dictatorship and why Kronstadt was counterrevolutionary. Bambery notes that even *"in the soviets"* there will be *"divisions"* and so we have the basic assumption which, combined with centralisation, vanguardism and other aspects of Bolshevism, leads to events like Kronstadt and the destruction of soviet power by party power. The arguments for centralisation mean, in practice, the concentration of power in the centre, in the hands of a few party leaders, as the working masses cannot be trusted to make the correct ("revolutionary") decisions. This centralised power is then used to impose the will of the leaders, who use state power against the against whoever protests against the dictatorship of the party, including the very class

they claim to represent. Thus the transformation of the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* into the dictatorship **over** the proletariat under the Bolsheviks came as no surprise to anarchists.

Of course, it will be replied that the Bolshevik dictatorship used its power to crush the resistance of the bosses (and *"backward workers"* — that is, any workers who disagreed with the vanguard). Sadly, this is not the case. Lenin's argument is flawed as it confuses the defence of the revolution with the defence of the party in power. These are two totally different things. The *"revolutionary coercion"* Lenin speaks of is, apparently, directed against one part of the working class. However, this will also intimidate the rest (just as bourgeois repression not only intimidates those who strike but those who may think of striking). As a policy, it can have but one effect — to eliminate **all** workers' power and freedom. It is the violence of an oppressive minority against the oppressed majority, not vice versa. Ending free speech harmed working class people. Eliminating soviet democracy and union independence did not affect the bourgeoisie — neither did the militarisation of labour and the repression of strikes. Unsurprisingly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants of workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Ironically, the same Bolshevik ideology which proclaimed this dictatorship over the proletariat a "proletarian" regime deemed the proletariat itself to be "petty-bourgeois" in order to justify this repression.

This can be seen all through the history of Bolshevism. Bambery states (correctly) that *"Lenin and the Bolsheviks initially opposed"* the spontaneously formed soviets of 1905 but then, incredulously, assigns this opposition to the assertion that their



the Bolshevik regime to realistic criteria, namely whether it was encouraging or undermining socialist tendencies. *"Not that I expected to find Russia a proletarian Eldorado,"* Alexander Berkman recalled. *"By no means. I knew the great travail of a revolutionary period, how stupendous the difficulties to be overcome."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, 328–9] Emma Goldman likewise summed up this position well:

> *"Both these criticisms would be justified had I come to Russia expecting to find Anarchism realised, or if I were to maintain that revolutions can be made peacefully … I do not therefore expect Anarchism to follow in the immediate footsteps of centuries of despotism and submission. And I certainly did not expect to see it ushered in by the Marxian theory.*
>
> *"I did, however, hope to find in Russia at least the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought. Not the fate of the individual was my main concern as a revolutionist. I should have been content if the Russian workers and peasants as a whole had derived essential social betterment as a result of the Bolshevik régime.*
>
> *"Two years of earnest study, investigation, and research convinced me that the great benefits brought to the Russian people by Bolshevism exist only on paper, painted in glowing colours to the masses of Europe and America by efficient Bolshevik propaganda. As advertising wizards the Bolsheviki excel anything the world had ever known before. But in reality the Russian people have gained nothing from the Bolshevik experiment."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlvii-xlviii]

Second, we must stress that libertarians do not think any future revolution will suffer as terrible conditions as that expe-

anarchists like Kropotkin had long indicated that a revolution would suffer such events and argued for strategies and structures which would mitigate their impact by encouraging mass participation and local initiative. More, as discussed in section 2 the Bolsheviks themselves, with Lenin at their head, argued at the time that such factors would affect every revolution. In section 3, we build on this by arguing that any defence of Bolshevism based on blaming the impact of the civil war is both factually and logically flawed, not least because as we discussed in section H.2.1, Leninists like to claim that they are "realistic" (unlike the "utopian" anarchists) and recognise the need for a "workers' state" because civil war is inevitable in a revolution. As far as economic disruption goes, as we discuss in section 4 this explanation of Bolshevik authoritarianism is unconvincing as **every** revolution — indeed, every revolutionary situation — has faced and will face this problem. Then section 5 analyses the common Leninist argument that the revolution failed because the Russian working class became "atomised" or "declassed," showing that the Russian working class was more than capable of collective action throughout the 1918 to 1921 period (and beyond). The problem for the Leninists, which explains why they are disinclined to discuss it, is that it was directed **against** the Bolshevik party. As section 6 shows, the Bolshevik leaders at the time did not explain their actions in terms of the *"objective factors"* they faced. Then section 7 discusses the ideological utility that stressing "objective factors" has for Leninist ideology (namely, it shifts perspectives away from the Bolshevik vision of socialism) while section 8 highlights how Leninists also stress the importance of the very ideology they seek to discount.

Three final points.

First, anarchists do not criticise the Bolshevik regime because it was not perfect. Anarchists, as indicated in section H.2.5, have never thought there could be an "over-night" revolution which would usher in an ideal and so we subject



*"model of revolution was still shaped by that of the greatest previous revolution in France in 1789."* [**Op. Cit.**] In reality, it was because they considered, in the words of a leading Bolshevik, that *"only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent."* [quoted by Oskar Anweilier, **The Soviets**, p. 77] The soviet, in other words, could not represent the interests of the working class because it was elected by them! The Bolsheviks saw the soviets as a rival to their party and demanded it either accept their political programme or simply become a trade-union like organisation. They feared that it pushed aside the party committee and thus led to the subordination of consciousness to spontaneity, following Lenin in **What is to be Done?** when he had argued that the *"**spontaneous** development of the labour movement leads to it being subordinated to bourgeois ideology."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82]

This perspective is at the root of all Bolshevik justifications for party power after the October revolution. With the perception that spontaneous developments inevitably leads to bourgeois domination, any attempt to revoke Bolshevik delegates and elect others to soviets **must** represent counter-revolutionary tendencies. As the working class is divided and subject to *"vacillations"* due to *"wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves,"* working class people simply cannot manage society themselves. Hence *"the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* [Trotsky, *"The Platform of the Opposition"*, **The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)**, p. 395] And, equally logically, to events like Kronstadt. Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

> *"To manage the work of others — this is the beginning and the end of the whole cycle of exploitation. The 'need' for a specific social category to manage the work of others in production (and the activity of others in politics and in society), the 'need' for a separate business management and for a Party to rule the State — this is what Bolshevism proclaimed as soon as it seized power, and this is what it zealously laboured to impose. We know that it achieved its ends. Insofar as ideas play a role in the development of history — and, **in the final analysis**, they play an enormous role — the Bolshevik ideology (and with it, the Marxist ideology lying behind it) was a decisive factor in the birth of the Russian bureaucracy."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 3, p. 104]

Moreover, the logic of the Bolshevik argument is flawed:

> *"Besides, if one wants a government which has to educate the masses and put them on the road to anarchy, one must also indicate what will be the background, and the way of forming this government.*
>
> *"Will it be the dictatorship of the best people? But who are the best? And who will recognise these qualities in them? ... by whom and with what criterion will the choice be made to put the social forces at the[ir] disposal ... ? Will it be instead a government elected by universal suffrage, and thus the more or less sincere expression of the wishes of the majority? But if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy,*



with the "wrong" (i.e. non-Bolshevik) majorities, eliminated independent trade unions, and so on.

Many Leninists know nothing of this. Their parties simply do not present their members with the full facts of when Lenin and Trotsky were in power, nor do they encourage an atmosphere of independent analysis and investigation to discover these themselves. Others do know and either ignore than when discussing the revolution or attempt to justify these actions. When anarchists discuss why the Russian Revolution failed, these Leninists have basically one reply. They argue that anarchists never seem to consider the objective forces at play during the Russian revolution, namely the civil war, the legacy of World War One, the international armies of counter-revolution and economic disruption. These "objective factors" meant that the revolution was, basically, suffocated and were the overriding cause for the rise of authoritarianism and the crushing of socialism.

Thus, as one British Leninist puts it, the *"degree to which workers can 'make their own history' depends on the weight of objective factors bearing down on them ... To decide in any given circumstance the weight of the subjective and objective factors demands a concrete analysis of the balance of forces."* The conditions in Russia meant that the *"subjective factor"* of Bolshevik ideology *"was reduced to a choice between capitulation to the Whites or defending the revolution with whatever means were at hand. Within these limits Bolshevik policy was decisive. But it could not wish away the limits and start with a clean sheet. It is a tribute to the power of the Bolsheviks' politics and organisation that they took the measures necessary and withstood the siege for so long."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 30]

For anarchists and other libertarian socialists, such "objective factors" do not explain why the Russian Revolution failed. This is because almost all revolutions will face the same, or similar, problems. As we indicate in section 1 of this appendix,

be applied with radically different outcomes (see the appendix on "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?").

Before continuing, we must note that our division of the discussion into objective and subjective factors is, of course, artifical and purely presentational. It is impossible to discuss everything at once and, moreover, this reflects pro-Bolshevik accounts of the regime which focus primarily on "objective factors" and rarely address ideological and structural influences (beyond lamenting that their often all-too-idealised version of Bolshevik ideology had to be undermined to secure the survival of the revolution). So it must be noted that anarchists stress the interplay between the "objective factors" and the subjective ones such as party ideology. Faced with difficult circumstances, people and parties react in different ways. If they did not then it would imply what people think has no impact at all on their actions, that the politics of the Bolsheviks played no role in their decisions — which raises the interesting contradiction of why Leninists stress the power and importance of having the correct (their!) ideology. Unsurprisingly, this position simply cannot be maintained. As section H indicates, Leninist ideology itself played a key role in the rise of Stalinism.

Leninists, of course, try to distance themselves from Stalinism, correctly arguing that it was a brutal and undemocratic system (although some did, and do, defend it against attacks from the right). The problem is that it was when Lenin and Trotsky were at the head of the so-called "workers' state" rather than when Stalin occupied that position that the regime broke strikes, repressed protests, shot strikers, banned left papers along with radical organisations and party factions, sent workers and revolutionaries to prison, advocated and introduced one-man management and piece-work in the workplace, eliminated democracy in the military, packed soviets to secure party power and shut down soviets elected



> *of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?"* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 53–4]

Hence the need for federalism, workers' democracy and socio-economic self-management, for the demands of the Kronstadt revolt. As Malatesta put it: *"Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 59] The *"epic of Kronstadt"* proves *"**conclusively** that what belongs really to **the workers and peasants** can be **neither governmental nor statist**, and what is **governmental and statist** can belong **neither to the workers nor the peasants.**"* [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 503] Kronstadt, in the words of Alexander Berkman, *"proves once more that government, the State — whatever its name or form — is ever the mortal enemy of liberty and self-determination. The state has no soul, no principles. It has but one aim — to secure power and hold it, at any cost. That is the political lesson of Kronstadt."* [*"The Kronstadt Rebellion"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89]

Anarchists are well aware that differences in political perspective exist within the working class. We are also aware of the importance of revolutionaries organising together to influence the class struggle, raising the need for revolution and the creation of working class organisations which can smash and replace the state with a system of self-managed communes and workers' councils. We are well aware that revolutions take time to develop, that (libertarian) socialism cannot be created overnight, that revolutions need defending a revolution, that expropriating the power and wealth of the ruling class is just the first stage of a social revolution. Our opposition to Bolshevism is based on **how** a revolution does all this — we reject the Bolshevik conclusion for centralised power (i.e. into the hands of a few party leaders) as doomed to failure. Rather, we agree with Bakunin who argued that revolutionary groups must *"not*

*seek anything for themselves, neither privilege nor honour nor power"* and reject *"any idea of dictatorship and custodial control."* The *"revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations … organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations … [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172]

Anarchists seek to influence working people directly, via their natural influence in working class organisations like workers' councils, unions and so on. Only by discussion, debate and self-activity can the political perspectives develop and change. This is impossible in a centralised system based on party dictatorship for debate and discussion are pointless if they have no effect on the process of the revolution nor if working people cannot elect, mandate and recall their own delegates. Nor can self-activity be developed if the government uses *"revolutionary coercion"* against *"waving or unstable elements"* (i.e. those who do not unquestioningly follow the orders of the government). Such a regime would hinder the popular initiative required to solve the many problems a social revolution inevitable experiences — with, as Bolshevik Russia showed, terrible consequences for building genuine — self-managed — socialism.

In other words, the fact Bolshevism uses to justify its support for party power is, in fact, the strongest argument against it. By concentrating power in the hands of a few, the political development of the bulk of the population is hindered. No longer in control of their fate, of **their** revolution, they will become pray to counter-revolutionary tendencies. Nor was the libertarian approach impossible to implement during a revolution or civil war. Anarchists applied their ideas very successfully in the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine — as we discuss in more detail in the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist



> *swer that, you've got to look at the historical facts: I don't think it was true. In fact, I think the incipient socialist structures in Russia were dismantled **before** the really dire conditions arose … reading their own writings, my feeling is that Lenin and Trotsky knew what they were doing, it was conscious and understandable."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 226]

As we discussed in section H.6, Chomsky's feeling is more than supported by the historical record. The elimination of meaningful working class freedom and self-management began from the creation of the new regime after the October Revolution and was firmly in place before the start of the civil war at the end of May, 1918. The civil war simply accelerated processes which had already began, strengthened policies that had already been applied. Indeed, it could be argued that rather than impose alien policies onto Bolshevism, the civil war simply brought the hidden (and not-so-hidden) state capitalist and authoritarian politics of Leninism (and mainstream Marxism) to the fore.

Which is why analysing the failure of the revolution is important. If the various arguments presented by Leninists on why Bolshevism failed (and, consequently, why Stalinism developed) can be refuted, then we are left with the key issues of revolutionary politics — whether Bolshevik politics had a decisive negative impact on the development of the Russian Revolution and, if so, whether there was an alternative to those politics. As regards the first issue, as we discussed in section H.6.2, anarchists argue that this was the case: Bolshevik ideology itself played a key role in the degeneration of the revolution (also see the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"). And as regards the second, anarchists can point to the example of the Makhnovist movement active in Ukraine during the same revolution, which proves that alternative policies were possible and could

Given that Leninists claim that the Russian revolution was a success (at least initially) and so proves the validity of their ideology, anarchists have a special duty to analyse and understand what went wrong. Simply put, if the Russian Revolution was a success, Leninism does not need failures!

This appendix aims to discuss these pro-Bolshevik explanations for the failure of Bolshevism in more detail than in section H.6.1, indicating why anarchists are not convinced by Leninist accounts of why Bolshevism created a new class system rather than socialism. This subject is no mere historical discussion. Unless we learn the lessons of history, we will be doomed to repeat them. More, given the fact that many people who become interested in socialist ideas will come across the remnants of Leninist parties it is important that libertarians explain clearly and convincingly why the Russian Revolution failed and the role of Bolshevik ideology in that process. We need to account why a popular revolution became a state capitalist party dictatorship. As Noam Chomsky put it:

> *"In the stages leading up to the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, there **were** incipient socialist institutions developing in Russia — workers' councils, collectives, things like that. And they survived to an extent once the Bolsheviks took over — but not for very long; Lenin and Trotsky pretty much eliminated them as they consolidated their power. I mean, you can argue about the **justification** for eliminating them, but the fact is that the socialist initiatives were pretty quickly eliminated.*
>
> *"Now, people who want to justify it say, 'The Bolsheviks had to do it' — that's the standard justification: Lenin and Trotsky had to do it, because of the contingencies of the civil war, for survival, there wouldn't have been food otherwise, this and that. Well, obviously the question is, was that true. To an-*



movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?", within the areas they protected, the Makhnovists refused to dictate to the workers and peasants what to do and instead encouraged free soviets and workers' control. In contrast, the Bolsheviks tried to **ban** congresses of workers', peasants' and soldiers' delegates called by the Makhnovists. This should make the reader ponder if the elimination of workers' democracy during the civil war can be fully explained by the objective conditions facing Lenin's government or whether Leninist ideology played an important role in it.

The terrible objective circumstances facing the revolution obviously played a key role in the degeneration of the revolution. However, this is not the whole story. The **ideas** of the Bolsheviks played a key role as well — not least in often making those terrible objective circumstances worse by policies which centralised decision making and so produced wasteful, inefficient, ever-growing and corrupt bureaucracy. The circumstances the Bolsheviks faced may have shaped certain aspects of their actions, but it cannot be denied that the impulse for these actions were rooted in Bolshevik theory. In regards to this type of analysis, the Trotskyist Pierre Frank argues that anarchists think that bureaucratic conceptions *"beget bureaucracy"* and that *"it is ideas, or deviations from them, that determine the character of revolutions. The most simplistic kind of philosophical idealism has laid low historical materialism."* This means, apparently, that anarchists ignore objective factors in the rise of the bureaucracy such as *"the country's backwardness, low cultural level, and the isolation of the revolution."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 22–3] Yet nothing could be further from the truth — what anarchists argue (like Lenin before the October revolution) is that **every** revolution will suffer from isolation, uneven political development, economic problems and so on (i.e. *"exceptional circumstances,"* see the appendix "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"). The question is

whether your revolution can survive them and whether your political ideas can meet these challenges without producing bureaucratic deformations. As can be seen from the Russian Revolution, Leninism fails that test.

Moreover, Frank is being incredulous. If we take his argument seriously then we have to conclude that Bolshevik ideology played **no** role in how the revolution developed. In other words, he subscribes to the contradictory position that Bolshevik politics were essential to the success of the revolution and yet played no role in its outcome. The facts of the matter is that people are faced with choices, choices that arise from the objective conditions they face. What decisions they make will be influenced by the ideas they hold — they will not occur automatically, as if people were on auto-pilot — and their decisions are also shaped by the social relationships they experience. Thus, someone placed into a position of power over others will act in certain ways, have a certain world view, which would be alien to someone subject to egalitarian social relations. Likewise, someone who favoured working class self-activity and did not view it as "petty-bourgeois" would not, as Zinoviev did in the summer of 1920, issue *"a decree forbidding any kind of commercial transaction. The few small shops still open were closed and their doors sealed. However, the State apparatus was in no position to supply the towns. From this moment on, famine could no longer be attenuated by the initiative of the population. It became extreme."* [Mett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 144]

So, obviously "ideas" matter, particularly during a revolution. Someone in favour of centralisation, nationalisation and who equates party rule with class rule (like Zinoviev, Lenin and Trotsky), will act in ways (and create structures) totally different from someone who believes in decentralisation, federalism and self-management. In other words, political ideas do matter in society. Nor do anarchists leave our analysis at this obvious fact, we also argue that the types of organisation people create and work in shapes the way they think and act. This is because



> *"Professor Harold Laski … expressed the opinion that I ought to take some comfort in the vindication anarchism had received by the Bolsheviki. I agreed, adding that not only their regime, but their stepbrothers as well, the Socialists in power in other countries, had demonstrated the failure of the Marxian State better than any anarchist argument. Living proof was always more convincing than theory. Naturally I did not regret the Socialist failure but I could not rejoice in it in the face of the Russian tragedy."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 2, p. 969]

Alexander Berkman, like Goldman an eye-witness to developments between 1920 and 1922, provides an excellent overview of what had happened in Russia after the October Revolution:

> *"The elective system was abolished, first in the army and navy, then in the industries. The Soviets of peasants and workers were castrated and turned into obedient Communist Committees, with the dreaded sword of the Cheka [political para-military police] ever hanging over them. The labour unions governmentalised, their proper activities suppressed, they were turned into mere transmitters of the orders of the State. Universal military service, coupled with the death penalty for conscientious objectors; enforced labour, with a vast officialdom for the apprehension and punishment of 'deserters'; agrarian and industrial conscription of the peasantry; military Communism in the cities and the system of requisitioning in the country … ; the suppression of workers' protests by the military; the crushing of peasant dissatisfaction with an iron hand …"* [**The Russian Tragedy**, p. 27]

Indeed, it is fair to say that the date choosen indicates much about the individual's or party's other politics. Some argue around 1928, others say around 1924, a few — anarchists and libertarian Marxists — argue from the Bolshevik seizure of power 1917. The reasons for the failure tend to be more readily agreed upon within pro-Bolshevik Marxist circles than the date: isolation, the economic and social costs of civil war, the "backward" nature of Russian society and economy are usually listed as the key factors. As we shall see, these are often referred to as "objective factors" in constrast to the "subjective factors" of Bolshevik ideology, decisions and actions.

Moreover, what the Stalinist regime was is also discussed heatedly in Marxist circles. While anarchists agree with Emma Goldman's summation that it was *"an absolute despotism politically and the crassest form of state capitalism economically"* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 420] so confirming in practice Kropotkin's analysis that *"State Socialism ... is in reality nothing but State capitalism"* [*"Caesarism,"*, **Freedom**, June 1899], mainstream Marxists have had more difficulty agreeing — some (orthodox Trotskyists) claiming it was a *"degenerated workers state,"* others (such as the neo-Trotskyist British SWP) that it was *"state capitalist"* (although, as discussed in section H.3.13, for different reasons than anarchists). Indeed, after describing the various Marxist theories on the Russian regime, one expert concluded that *"it is perfectly clear that Soviet society can hardly be explained in orthodox-Marxian terms at all. If it is accepted that the USSR was not communist in a Marxian sense, the analysis becomes almost impossible"*. [Marcel van der Linden, **Western Marxism and the Soviet Union**, p. 317]

For anarchists, however, the failure of Bolshevism did not come as a surprise. In fact, just as with the reformist fate of the Social Democrats, the failure of the Russian Revolution provided empirical evidence for Bakunin's critique of Marx (section H.1.1). As Emma Goldman recounts in her memoirs:



specific kinds of organisation have specific authority relations and so generate specific social relationships. These obviously affect those subject to them — a centralised, hierarchical system will create authoritarian social relationships which shape those within it in totally different ways than a federal, egalitarian system. That Frank seems to deny this obvious fact suggests he knows nothing of materialist philosophy and subscribes to the distinctly lobotomised (and bourgeois) "historical materialism" of Lenin (see Anton Pannekoek's **Lenin as Philosopher** for details).

All in all, the attitude of Leninists to the Kronstadt event shows quite clearly that, for all their lip-service to history from below, they are just as fixated with leaders as is bourgeois history. As Cornelius Castoriadis argues:

> *"Now, we should point out that it is not workers who write history. It is always the **others**. And these others, whoever they may be, have a historical existence only insofar as the masses are passive, or active simply to support them, and this is precisely what 'the others' will tell us at every opportunity. Most of the time these others will not even possess eyes to see and ears to hear the gestures and utterances that express people's autonomous activity. In the best of instances, they will sing the praises of this activity so long as it **miraculously** coincides with their own line, but they will radically condemn it, and impute to it the basest motives, as soon as it strays therefrom. Thus Trotsky describes in grandiose terms the anonymous workers of Petrograd moving ahead of the Bolshevik party or mobilising themselves during the Civil War, but later on he was to characterise the Kronstadt rebels as 'stool pigeons' and 'hirelings of the French High Command.' They lack the categories of thought — the brain cells, we might dare say —*

> *necessary to understand, or even to record, this activity as it really occurs: to them, an activity that is not instituted, that has neither boss nor program, has no status; it is not even clearly perceivable, except perhaps in the mode of 'disorder' and 'troubles.' The autonomous activity of the masses belongs by definition to what is* ***repressed*** *in history."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

The Trotskyist accounts of the Kronstadt revolt, with their continual attempts to portray it as a White conspiracy, proves this analysis is correct. Instead it was labelled the work of *"backward peasants"* being misled by SRs, a White General and spies — indeed, the possibility that the revolt was a spontaneous mass revolt with political aims was dismissed by one of them as *"absurd"*. [Wright, *"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111] Like the capitalist who considers a strike the work of "outside agitators" and "communists" misleading their workers, the Trotskyists present an analysis of Kronstadt reeking of elitism and ideological incomprehension. Independent self-activity by the working class is dismissed as "backward" and to be corrected by the "proletarian dictatorship" by any means necessary. Clearly Bolshevik ideology played a key role in the rise of Stalinism along with the regime built by Lenin and Trotsky which the Kronstadt sailors rebelled against. As Emma Goldman summarised:

> *"I see no marked difference between the two protagonists of the benevolent system of the dictatorship except that Leon Trotsky is no longer in power to enforce its blessings, and Josef Stalin is. No, I hold no brief for the present ruler of Russia. I must, however, point out that Stalin did not come down as a gift from heaven to the hapless Russian people. He is merely continuing the Bolshevik traditions, even if in a more relentless manner.*



> *can only be created by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 178–9]

The tragedy of Kronstadt is a product of an ideology which did not — could not — understand how its strategy as well as the socio-economic structures it favoured and built created a new class and armed it both ideologically and physically to secure its position in the new social hierarchy. If, as Marx suggested, history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce, the antics of Leninists since 1921 — the lying, the selective quoting, the cherry-picking, the ignoring of awkward facts, the replacing of research by the repeating of orthodoxy, etc. — to justify the repression are definitely farcical. All in all, Kronstadt should be remembered by all genuine socialists for it exposed the reality of the Bolshevik regime like no other event and so marked the definitive end of the Russian Revolution: its demands were the minimum needed to save the revolution from bureaucratic degeneration, party dictatorship and state-capitalism.

## What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?

As is well known, the Russian Revolution failed. Rather than produce socialism, the Bolshevik revolution gave birth to an autocratic party dictatorship presiding over a state capitalist economy. In turn, this regime gave rise to the horrors of Stalinism. While Stalinism was denounced by all genuine socialists, a massive debate has existed within the Marxist movement over when, exactly, the Russian Revolution failed and why it did.

> *Then there will be no government, there will be no state; but if there is a state, there will also be those who are ruled, there will be slaves.*
>
> *"In the Marxists' theory this dilemma is resolved in a simple fashion. By popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage — the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school — is a lie behind which the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will.*
>
> *"So … it always comes down to the same dismal result: government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of* ***former*** *workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people …*
>
> *"They say that this state yoke, this dictatorship, is a necessary transitional device for achieving the total liberation of the people: anarchy, or freedom, is the goal, and the state, or dictatorship, the means. Thus, for the masses to be liberated they must first be enslaved … They claim that only a dictatorship (theirs, of course) can create popular freedom. We reply that no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself, and that it can engender and nurture only slavery in the people who endure it. Liberty*



> *"The process of alienating the Russian masses from the Revolution had begun almost immediately after Lenin and his party had ascended to power. Crass discrimination in rations and housing, suppression of every political right, continued persecution and arrests, early became the order of the day. True, the purges undertaken at that time did not include party members … But all the other political opponents, among them Mensheviki, Social Revolutionists, Anarchists, many of the Liberal intelligentsia and workers as well as peasants, were given short shrift in the cellars of the Cheka, or exiled to slow death in distant parts of Russia and Siberia. In other words, Stalin has not originated the theory or methods that have crushed the Russian Revolution and have forged new chains for the Russian people.*
>
> *"I admit, the dictatorship under Stalin's rule has become monstrous. That does not, however, lessen the guilt of Leon Trotsky as one of the actors in the revolutionary drama of which Kronstadt was one of the bloodiest scenes."* [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 251–2]

Lastly, the supporters of Bolshevism argue that in suppressing the revolt *"the Bolsheviks only did their duty. They defended the conquests of the revolution against the assaults of the counterrevolution."* [Wright, *"The Truth about Kronstadt"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] In other words, we can expect more Kronstadts if these "revolutionaries" gain power — no clearer condemnation of Bolshevism as a socialist current is required. More, that is how Kronstadt is used in Leninist circles to this day, namely to steel the revolutionary cadres for the same task in the future by justifying repression in the past. For no matter how much Leninists may say otherwise, the ease with which the Bolsheviks embraced policies which are alleged to be the antithesis of what

their ideology is claimed to stand for is of note — as is the lack of regret and the willingness of their followers to still justify them. As Samuel Farber reminds us, *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44] It is the practice of Bolshevik — and acts such as the repression of the Kronstadt revolt — which shows that it is fundamentally a "socialism from above" ideology (see section H.3.3) and so to be avoided.

And, we must ask, what, exactly, **were** these "conquests" of the revolution that must be defended? The suppression of strikes, independent political and labour organisations, elimination of freedom of speech, assembly and press and, of course, the elimination of soviet and union democracy in favour of party power? Which, of course, for all Leninists, is the **real** revolutionary conquest and **anyone** who questions that is a counter-revolutionary: *"The sailors had dared to stand by the discontented workers. They had dared to demand that the promise of the Revolution — all Power in the Soviets — should be fulfilled. The political dictatorship had slain the dictatorship of the proletariat. That and that alone was their unforgivable offense against the holy spirit of Bolshevism."* [Emma Goldman, *"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 266]

The issue is simple — either socialism means the self-emancipation of the working class or it does not. Leninist justifications for the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt simply mean that for the followers of Bolshevism, when necessary, the party will paternalistically repress the working class for its own good. The clear implication of this Leninist support of the suppression of Kronstadt is that, for Leninism, it is dangerous to allow working class people to manage society and transform it as they see fit as they will make wrong decisions (like vote for the wrong party or, worse, take the



management of their lives into their own hands). If the party leaders decide a decision by the masses is incorrect, then the masses are overridden (and repressed). So much for *"all power to the soviets"* or *"workers' power."*

Ultimately, Wright's comments (and those like it) show that Bolshevism's commitment to workers' power and democracy is non-existent. What is there left of workers' self-emancipation, power or democracy when the "workers state" represses the workers for trying to practice these essential features of any real form of socialism? How will the State machine required to do this "wither away"? It is the experience of Bolshevism in power that best refutes the Marxist claim that the workers' state "will be democratic and participatory." The suppression of Kronstadt was just one of a series of actions by the Bolsheviks which began **before** the start of the Civil War, with them abolishing soviets which elected non-Bolshevik majorities, abolishing elected officers and soldiers soviets in the Red Army and Navy and replacing workers' self-management of production by state-appointed managers with *"dictatorial"* powers (see section H.6).

As anarchists predicted, the "workers' state" did not, could not, be "participatory" as it was still a state. It spawned a new class system based on the bureaucracy oppressing and exploiting the working classes. Kronstadt is part of the empirical evidence which proves Bakunin's predictions on the authoritarian nature of Marxism (see section H.1.1). This warning by Bakunin was confirmed by the Kronstadt rebellion and the justifications made at the time and afterwards by the supporters of Bolshevism:

> *"What does it mean, 'the proletariat raised to a governing class?' Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 million be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one would be ruled.*

*their elected representatives"*, they also *"set up a Provincial Revolutionary Committee … which introduced martial law both in the city and the garrison. It arrested the ringleaders of the workers' movement …the police crackdown depressed the workers' movement and the activities of the rival socialist parties."* The near general strike was broken by a *"wave of repression"* but *"railroad workers and dockworkers and some printers refused to resume work."*The Cheka sentenced 219 people to death. [Donald J. Raleigh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 379 and pp. 387–9]

A similar *"little Kronstadt"* broke out in the Ukrainian town of Ekaterinoslavl at the end of May. The workers there *"clearly had strong traditions of organisation"* and elected a strike committee of fifteen which *"put out a series of political ultimatums that were very similar in content to the demands of the Kronstadt rebels."* On June 1st, *"by a pre-arranged signal"* workers went on strike throughout the town, with workers joining a meeting of the railway workers. The local Communist Party leader was instructed *"to put down the rebellion without mercy . .. Use Budennyi's [Red] cavalry."* The strikers prepared a train and its driver instructed to spread the strike throughout the network. Telegraph operators were told to send messages throughout the Soviet Republic calling for *"free soviets"* and soon an area up to fifty miles around the town was affected. The Communists used the Cheka to crush the movement, carrying out mass arrests and shooting 15 workers (and dumping their bodies in the River Dnepr). [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–3] It must be noted that the call for *"free soviets"* had previously been raised by the anarchist-influenced Makhnovist movement.

Thus strike action was a constant feature of Bolshevik Russia during the civil war. Rather than being an "atomised" mass, the workers repeatedly organised themselves, made their demands and took collective action to achieve them. In response, the Bolshevik regime used state repression to break this collective activity: martial law, lock-outs, mass arrests, withholding rations and shootings. As such, **if** the rise of Stalinism can, as



*is correct from the point of view both of principle and of practice"* and, moreover, *"dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party.* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 7, p. 135 and p. 109]

While this argument does have its self-serving elements — generalising to all revolutions problems created or made worse by Bolshevik policies, decisions and prejudices — the general point remains valid: revolutions are disruptive.

Another leading Bolshevik, Nikolai Bukharin, wrote his (infamous) **The Economics of the Transition Period** to make theoretical sense of (i.e. rationalise and justify) the party's changing policies and their social consequences since 1918 in terms of the inevitability of bad "objective factors" facing the revolution. While some Leninists like to paint Bukharin's book (like most Bolshevik ideas of the time) as "making a virtue out of necessity," Bukharin (like the rest of the Bolshevik leadership) did not. As one commentator, Stephan F. Cohen, notes, Bukharin *"belive[d] that he was formulating universal laws of proletarian revolution."* [**In Praise of War Communism: Bukharin's The Economics of the Transition Period**, p. 195]

Bukharin listed four *"real costs of revolution,"* namely *"the physical destruction or deterioration of material and living elements of production, the atomisation of these elements and of sectors of the economy, and the need for unproductive consumption (civil war materials, etc.). These costs were interrelated and followed sequentially. Collectively they resulted in '**the curtailment of the process of reproduction**' (and 'negative expanded reproduction') and Bukharin's main conclusion: 'the production "anarchy" … , "the revolutionary disintegration of industry," is an historically inevitable stage which no amount of lamentation will prevent.'"* This was part of a general argument and his *"point was that great revolutions were always accompanied by destructive civil wars … But he was more intent on proving that a proletarian revolution resulted in an even greater temporary fall in*

*production than did its bourgeois counterpart."* To do this he formulated the *"costs of revolution"* as *"a law of revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 195–6 and p. 195]

Cohen notes that while this *"may appear to have been an obvious point, but it apparently came as something of a revelation to many Bolsheviks. It directly opposed the prevailing Social Democratic assumption that the transition to socialism would be relatively painless ... Profound or not, Bolsheviks generally came to accept the 'law' and to regard it as a significant discovery by Bukharin."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 196] To quote Bukharin himself:

> *"during the transition period the labour apparatus of society inevitably disintegrates, that reorganisation presupposes disorganisation, and that there the temporary collapse of productive forces is a law inherent to revolution."* [quoted by Cohen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196]

It would appear that this *"obvious point"* would **still** come *"as something of a revelation to many Bolsheviks"* today! Significantly, of course, Kropotkin had formulated this law decades previously and so the **real** question is how the Bolsheviks sought to cope with this inevitable law is what signifies the difference between anarchism and Leninism. Simply put, Bukharin endorsed the coercive measures of war communism as the means to go forward to socialism. As Cohen summarises, *"force and coercion ... were the means by which equilibrium was to be forged out of disequilibrium."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 198] Given that Bukharin argued that a workers' state, by definition, could not exploit the workers, he — like Lenin and Trotsky — opened up the possibility for rationalising all sorts of abuses as well as condoning numerous evils because they were "progressive."

It should be noted that Lenin showed *"ecstatic praise for the most 'war communist' sections"* of Bukharin's work. *"Almost every passage,"* Cohen notes, *"on the role of the new state, statisation in general, militarisation and mobilisation met with 'very*



*strated through"* their district *"and inspired some brief solidarity strikes."* Over 3000 workers joined the strikes and about 1000 of these joined the flying picket (managers at one print shop locked their workers in to stop them joining the protest). While the party was willing to negotiate economic issues, *"it had no wish to discuss politics with workers"* and so arrested those who initiated the resolution, sacked the rest of the workforce and selectively re-employed them. Two more strikes were conducted *"to defend the political activists in their midst"* and two mass meetings demanded the release of arrested ones. Workers also struck on supply issues in May, July and August. [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 83–4]

In Saratov, the strike started on March 3rd when railroad shop workers did not return to their benches and instead rallied to discuss an anticipated further reduction in food rations. The *"railroad workers debated resolutions recently carried by the Moscow proletariat ... The next day the strike spread to the metallurgical plants and to most other large factories, as Saratov workers elected representatives to an independent commission charged with evaluating the functioning of all economic organs. When it convened, the body called for the re-election of the soviets and immediate release of political prisoners."* During the next two days, *"the assemblies held at factories to elect delegates to the commission bitterly denounced the Communists."* The *"unrest spilled over into Pokrovsk."* The commission of 270 had less than ten Communists and *"demanded the freeing of political prisoners, new elections to the soviets and to all labour organisations, independent unions, and freedom of speech, the press, and assembly."* While the ration cut *"represent[ed] the catalyst, but not the cause, of the labour unrest"* and *"the turmoil touched all strata of the proletariat, male and female alike, the initiative for the disturbances came from the skilled stratum that the Communists normally deemed the most conscious."* The Communists *"resolved to shut down the commission before it could issue a public statement"* and as they *"expected workers to protest the dissolution of*

ets be held. Striking railway workers sent emissaries along the railway to spread the strike and soon strikes were *"also spreading outside Moscow city itself into the surrounding provinces"*. In response, *"Moscow and Moscow province were put under martial law."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130, p. 138 and pp. 139–144] This strike wave started when *"[m]eetings in factories and plants gathered and criticised government policies, beginning with supply and developing into general political criticism."* As was typical, the *"first response of the civil authorities to the disturbances was increased repression"* although as *"the number of striking factories increased some concessions were introduced."* Military units called in against striking workers *"refused to open fire, and they were replaced by the armed communist detachments"* which did. *"That evening mass protest meetings were held ... The following day several factories went on strike"* and troops were *"disarmed and locked in as a precaution"* by the government against possible fraternising. February 23rd saw a 10,000 strong street demonstration and *"Moscow was placed under martial law with a 24-hour watch on factories by the communist detachments and trustworthy army units."* The disturbances were accompanied by factory occupations and on the 1st of March the soviet called on workers *"not to go on strike."* However, *"wide-scale arrests deprived the movement of its leadership."* March 5th saw disturbances at the Bromlei works, *"resulting in the now customary arrest of workers. A general meeting at the plant on 25 March called for new elections to the Moscow Soviet. The management dispersed the meeting but the workers called on other plants to support the calls for new elections. As usual, the ringleaders were arrested."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 242–3, p. 245 and p. 246] As in Petrograd, the mixture of (economic) concessions and coercion eventually broke the will of the strikers.

The events at the Bromlei works were significant in that the March 25th a mass meeting passed an anarchist and Left-SR initiated resolution supporting the Kronstadt rebels. The party *"responded by having them sacked en masse"*. The workers *"demon-*



*good,' often in three languages, ... Most striking, Lenin's greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the chapter on the role of coercion ... at the end [of which] he wrote, 'Now this chapter is superb!'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 202–3] Compare this to Kropotkin's comment that the *"revolutionary tribunal and the guillotine could not make up for the lack of a constructive communist theory."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. II, p. 519]

Ultimately, claims that "objective factors" caused the degeneration of the revolution are mostly attempts to let the Bolsheviks of the hook for Stalinism. This approach was started by Trotsky and has continued to this day. Anarchists, unsurprisingly, do not think much of these explanations: the "objective factors" listed to explain the degeneration of the revolution are simply a list of factors **every** revolution would (and has) faced — as Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky all admitted at the time. Bertrand Russell noted this after his trip to Soviet Russia, that while since October 1917 *"the Soviet Government has been at war with almost all the world, and has at the same time to face civil war at home"* this was *"not to be regarded as accidental, or as a misfortune which could not be foreseen. According to Marxian theory, what has happened was bound to happen."* [**The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism**, p. 103]

So we have the strange paradox of Leninists dismissing or ignoring the arguments of their ideological gurus. For Trotsky, just as for Lenin, it was a truism that revolutionary politics had to handle *"objective factors"* and *"exceptional circumstances"* and both thought they **had** during the Russian revolution in a manner consistent with their ideology: yet for their followers, these explain the failure of Bolshevism. Tony Cliff, one of Trotsky's less orthodox followers, gives us a means of understanding this strange paradox. Discussing the **Platform of the United Opposition** he notes that it *"also suffered from the inheritance of the exceptional conditions of the civil war, when the one-party system was transformed from a necessity into a virtue."* [**Trotsky**, vol. 3, pp. 248–9] Clearly, *"exceptional cir-*

*cumstances"* explain nothing and are simply an excuse for bad politics while *"exceptional conditions"* explain everything and defeat even the best politics!

As such, it seems extremely ironic that Leninists blame the civil war for the failure of the revolution as they continually raise the inevitability of civil war in a revolution to attack anarchism (see section H.2.1 for example). Yet, if civil war and the other factors listed by Leninists (but considered inevitable by Lenin) preclude the implementation of the radical democracy Lenin argued for in 1917 as the means to suppress the resistance of the capitalists then his followers should come clean and say that his book has no bearing on their vision of revolution. Given that the usual argument for the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is that it is required to repress counter-revolution, it seems somewhat ironic that the event it was said to be designed for (i.e. revolution) should be responsible for its degeneration.

As such, anarchists think these sorts of explanations of Bolshevik dictatorship are incredulous. After all, as **revolutionaries** the people who expound these "explanations" are meant to know that civil war, imperialist invasion and blockade, economic disruption, and a host of other *"extremely difficult circumstances"* are part and parcel of a revolution. They seem to be saying, "if only the ruling class had not acted as our political ideology predicts they would then the Bolshevik revolution would have been fine"!

In summary, anarchists are not at all convinced by the claims that *"objective factors"* can explain the failure of the Russian Revolution for, according to Lenin and Trotsky, these factors were to be expected in **any** revolution. That is why they say they want a *"dictatorship of the proletariat,"* to defend against counter-revolution (see section H.3.8 on how, once in power, Lenin and Trotsky revised this position). Now, if Bolshevism cannot handle what it says is inevitable, then it should be avoided. To use an analogy:



rocked by strikes, meetings and demonstrations. In response to the general strike the Bolsheviks replied with a *"military clamp-down, mass arrests and other coercive measures, such as the closure of enterprises, the purging of the workforce and stopping of rations which accompanied them."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113 and p. 120] As Paul Avrich recounts, in Petrograd these *"street demonstrations were heralded by a rash of protest meetings"* in workplaces. On the 24th of February, the day after a workplace meeting, the Trubochny factory workforce downed tools and walked out the factory. Additional workers from nearby factories joined in. The crowd of 2,000 was dispersed by armed military cadets. The next day, the Trubochny workers again took to the streets and visited other workplaces, bringing them out on strike too. In the face of a near general strike, a three-man Defence Committee was formed. Zinoviev *"proclaimed martial law"* and *"[o]vernight Petrograd became an armed camp."* Strikers were locked out and the *"application of military force and the widespread arrests, not to speak of the tireless propaganda waged by the authorities"* was *"indispensable in restoring order"* (as were economic concessions). [**Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 37–8, p. 39, pp. 46–7 and p. 50] Thus *"massive city-wide protest spread through Petrograd … Strikes and demonstrations spread. The regime responded as it had done in the past, with lock-outs, mass arrests, heavy show of force — and concessions."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111] As we discuss in "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?", these strikes produced the Kronstadt revolt while the Bolshevik repression ensured the Petrograd workers did not act with the sailors.

A similar process of workers revolt and state repression occurred in Moscow at the same time. There *"industrial unrest"* also *"turned into open confrontation and protest spilled on to the streets"*, starting with a *"wave of strikes that had its centre in the heart of industrial Moscow."* Meetings were held, followed by demonstrations and strikes which spread to other districts over the next few days. Workers demanded that elections to the sovi-

[Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50–55] Saratov also saw a wave of factory occupations break out in June and mill workers went out in July while in August, strikes and walkouts occurred in its mills and other factories and these *"prompted a spate of arrests and repression."* In September railroad workers went out on strike, with arrests making *"the situation worse, forcing the administration to accept the workers' demands."* [Raleigh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 375]

While strike activity *"was most common in Petrograd, where there had been 2.5 strikers for every workman,"* the figure for Moscow was 1.75 and 1.5 in Kazan. In early March *"a wave of strikes hit the Volga town of Samara"* when a strike by printers in spread to other enterprises. *"Strike action in Moscow did not just include traditionally militant male metal workers."* Textile workers, tram workers and printers all took strike action. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69, p. 72 and pp. 77–8]

The end of the civil war did not see the end of working class protest. Quite the reverse, for *"[b]y the beginning of 1921 a revolutionary situation with workers in the vanguard had emerged in Soviet Russia"* with *"the simultaneous outbreak of strikes in Petrograd and Moscow and in other industrial regions."* In February and March 1921, *"industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent or* ***volynka****. General strikes, or very widespread unrest"* hit all but one of the country's major industrial regions and *"workers protest consisted not just of strikes but also of factory occupations, 'Italian strikes', demonstrations, mass meetings, the beating up of communists and so on."* Faced with this massive strike wave, the Bolsheviks did what many ruling elites do: they called it something else. Rather than admit it was a strike, they *"usually employed the word* ***volynka****, which means only a 'go-slow'"*. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 3, p. 109, p. 112 and pp. 111–2]

In Petrograd in the beginning of February *"strikes were becoming an everyday occurrence"* and by *"the third week of February the situation rapidly deteriorated."* The city was



> **Bolshevik: "*Join with us, we have a great umbrella which will keep us dry.*"**
>
> **Anarchist: "*Last time it was used, it did not work. We all got soaked!*"**
>
> **Bolshevik: "*But what our anarchist friend fails to mention is that it was raining at the time!*"**

Not very convincing! Yet, sadly, this is the logic of the common Leninist justification of Bolshevik authoritarianism during the Russian Revolution.

## 3 Can the civil war explain the failure of Bolshevism?

One of the most common assertions against the anarchist case against Bolshevism is that while we condemn the Bolsheviks, we fail to mention the civil war and the wars of intervention. Indeed, for most Leninists the civil war is usually considered the key event in the development of Stalinism as well as explaining and justifying all anti-socialist acts of the Bolsheviks after they seized power in 1917.

For anarchists, such an argument is flawed on two levels, namely logical and factual. The logical flaw is that Leninist argue that civil war is inevitable after a revolution. They maintain, correctly, that it is unlikely that the ruling class will disappear without a fight. Then they turn round and complain that because the ruling class did what the Marxists predicted they would do the Russian Revolution failed while also (incorrectly) asserting about anarchists do not recognise the need to defend a revolution (see section H.2.1).

So, obviously, this line of defence is nonsense. If civil war is inevitable, then it cannot be used to justify the failure of Bolshevism. Marxists simply want to have their cake and eat it to:

you simply cannot argue that civil war is inevitable and then blame it for the failure of the Russian Revolution.

Also, by stressing civil war and denouncing those who *"forget the years of Civil War"*, Trotsky and his followers end up being *"Apologist[s] for Stalinism"* for the civil war *"was initiated by the international bourgeoisie. And thus the ugly sides of Bolshevism under Lenin, as well as under Stalin, find their chief and final cause in capitalism's enmity to Bolshevism which, if it is a monster, is only a reluctant monster, killing and torturing in mere self-defence.* In short, *"so, if only in a roundabout way, Trotsky's Bolshevism, despite its saturation with hatred for Stalin, leads in the end merely to a defence of Stalinism as the only possible self-defence for Trotsky. This explains the superficiality of the ideological differences between Stalinism and Trotskyism. The impossibility of attacking Stalin without attacking Lenin helps to explain, furthermore, Trotsky's great difficulties as an oppositionist. Trotsky's own past and theories preclude on his part the initiation of a movement to the* ***left*** *of Stalinism and condemned 'Trotskyism' to remain a mere collecting agency for unsuccessful Bolsheviks. As such it could maintain itself outside of Russia because of the ceaseless competitive struggles for power and positions within the so-called 'communist' world-movement. But it could not achieve significance for it had nothing to offer but the replacement of one set of politicians by another. The Trotskyist defence of Russia in the Second World War was consistent with all the previous policies of this, Stalin's most bitter, but also most loyal, opposition."* [Paul Mattick, *"Bolshevism and Stalinism"*, **Anti-Bolshevik Communism**, pp. 68–9]

The other flaw in this defence of Bolshevism is the factual one, namely the awkward fact that Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** the civil war broke out at the end of May, 1918. Simply put, it is difficult to blame a course of actions on an event which had not started yet. Moreover, Bolshevik authoritarianism **increased** after the civil war finished. This, incidentally, caused the few remaining anarchists who supported



*but not restricted to them, became particularly frequent … The assault on non-Bolshevik trade unionism launched at this time was probably associated with the wave of unrest since there was a clear danger that they would provide a focus for opposition."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 95] The *"largest strike in Moscow in the summer of 1920"* was by tram workers over the equalisation of rations. It began on August 12th, when one tram depot went on strike, quickly followed by others while workers *"in other industries joined in to."* The tram workers *"stayed out a further two days before being driven back by arrests and threats of mass sackings."* In the textile manufacturing towns around Moscow *"there were large-scale strikes"* in November 1920, with 1000 workers striking for four days in one district and a strike of 500 mill workers saw 3,000 workers from another mill joining in. [Simon Pirani, **The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24**, p. 32 and p. 43]

Strikes occurred in other places, such as Tula were the workforce *"contained a high proportion of skilled, long-standing, hereditary workers."* An *"all-out strike"* began at the start of June and on 8 June the local newspaper published a declaration from the Tula soviet threatening the strikers with *"the most repressive measures, including the application of the highest measure of punishment"*. The following day the city was declared to be under a *"state of siege"* by the local military authorities. The strikers lost ration cards and by 11 June there was a return to work. Twenty-three workers were sentenced to a forced labour camp until the end of the war. However, the *"combined impact of these measures did not prevent further unrest and the workers put forward new demands."* On 19 June, the soviet approved *"a programme for the suppression of counter-revolution"* and *"the transfer of Tula to the position of an armed camp."* The Tula strike *"highlights the way in which workers, particularly skilled workers who were products of long-standing shop-floor subcultures and hierarchies, retained the capability as well as the will to defend their interests."*

*against absenteeism, as well as food supply difficulties. The Communist Party press carried numerous articles attacking the slogan of 'free labour.'"* Overall, *"the geographical extent of the February-March strike wave is impressive"* and the *"harsh discipline that went with labour militarisation led to an increase in industrial unrest in 1920."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69, p. 74 and p. 80]

The spring of 1920 *"saw discontent on the railways all over the country."* This continued throughout the year. In Petrograd, the Aleksandrovskii locomotive building works *"had seen strikes in 1918 and 1919"* and in August 1920 it again stopped work. Workers had sent three representatives to the works commissar, who had them arrested. Three days later, work stopped and the strikers demanded their release. The authorities placed a guard of 70 sailors outside the enterprise to lock the workers out. The Cheka then arrested the workers' soviet delegates, who were from the SR (Minority) list, along with thirty workers and then the *"opportunity was taken to carry out a general round-up, and arrests were made"* at three other works. After the arrests, *"a meeting was held to elect new soviet delegates but the workers refused to co-operate and a further 150 were arrested and exiled to Murmansk or transferred to other workshops."* The enormous Briansk works *"experienced two major strikes in 1920"*, and second one saw the introduction of martial law on both the works and the settlement it was situated in. In Moscow, a strike in May by printers resulted in their works *"closed and the strikers sent to concentration camps after an attempt to start sympathy action failed."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44, pp. 45–7, pp. 48–9 and p. 59]

In January 1920, a strike followed a mass meeting at a railway repair shop in Moscow. Attempts to spread were foiled by arrests. The workshop was closed, depriving workers of their rations and 103 workers of the 1,600 employed were imprisoned. *"In late March 1920 there were strikes in some factories"* in Moscow and *"[a]t the height of the Polish war the protests and strikes, usually provoked by economic issues*



the regime to some degree to re-evaluate their position. In the words of Alexander Berkman:

> *"I would not concede the appalling truth. Still the hope persisted that the Bolsheviki, though absolutely wrong in principle and practice, yet grimly held on to **some** shreds of the revolutionary banner. 'Allied interference,' 'the blockade and civil war,' 'the necessity of the transitory stage' — thus I sought to placate my outraged conscience .. . At last the fronts were liquidated, civil war ended, and the country at peace. But Communist policies did not change. On the contrary … The party groaned under the unbearable yoke of the Party dictatorship.. .. Then came Kronstadt and its simultaneous echoes throughout the land … Kronstadt was crushed as ruthlessly as Thiers and Gallifet slaughtered the Paris Communards. And with Kronstadt the entire country and its last hope. With it also my faith in the Bolsheviki."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 331]

If Berkman had been in Russia in 1918, he may have realised that Bolshevik tyranny after the end of the civil war which climaxed with the attack on Kronstadt (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?") was not at odds with their pre-civil war activities to maintain their power. The simple fact is that Bolshevik authoritarianism was **not** caused by the pressures of the civil war, rather it started before then. All the civil war did was strengthen certain aspects of Bolshevik ideology and practice which had existed from the start. Needless to say, we cannot cover everything here and will by necessity focus on certain key developments which historian S.A. Smith summarises well:

> *"The Bolsheviks established their power in the localities through soviets, soldiers' committees, fac-*

*tory committees, and Red Guards. Numbering less than 350,000 in October 1917, the party had little option but to allow such independent organisations extensive leeway. Yet the same desperate problems of unemployment and lack of food and fuel that helped turn the workers against the Provisional Government soon began to turn workers against the Bolsheviks. In the first half of 1918, some 100,000 to 150,000 workers across Russia took part in strikes, food riots and other protests, roughly on a par with labour unrest on the eve of the February Revolution. In this context, the Bolsheviks struggled to concentrate authority in the hands of the party and state organs … In spring 1918, worker discontent translated into a renewal of support for the Mensheviks and, to a lesser extent, the SRs, causing the Bolsheviks to cancel soviet elections and close down soviets that proved uncooperative, thus initiating the process whereby soviets and trade unions were turned into adjuncts to a one-party state. When the Whites seized leadership of the anti-Bolshevik movement in the latter months of 1918, however, most workers swung back in support of the government. During the civil war, labour unrest continued … the Bolsheviks generally reacted by rushing in emergency supplies and by arresting the leaders of the protest, who were often Mensheviks or Left SRs … they did not scruple when they deemed it necessary to deploy armed force to suppress strikes, to confiscate ration cards or even to dismiss strikers en masse and then rehire them selectively. The Bolsheviks expected the working class to speak with one voice — in favour of the regime — and when they didn't they, who had once excoriated the Mensheviks for their refusal*



> *"The strikes of 1919 … fill an important gap in the development of the popular movement between October 1917 and February 1921. On the one hand, they should be seen as antecedents of similar strikes in February 1921, which forced the Communists to abandon war communism. In the capitals, workers, just as the Kronstadt sailors had, still wanted fairly elected soviets and not a party dictatorship. On the other hand, the strikes continued the protests that had began in the summer of 1918. The variety of behavioural patterns displayed during the strikes points to a profound continuity…*
>
> *"In all known cases the Bolsheviks' initial response to strikes was to ban public meetings and rallies … In several cities … the authorities confiscated strikers' food rations in order to suppress the strike. In at least five cities … the Bolsheviks occupied the striking plant and dismissed the strikers en masse … In all known cases the Bolsheviks arrested strikers … In Petrograd, Briansk, and Astrakhan' the Bolsheviks executed striking workers."* [*"Workers' Unrest and the Bolshevik Response in 1919"*, **Slavic Review**, vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 370–2]

Nor was this collective struggle stop in 1919 — *"strike action remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920"* and *"in the first six months of 1920 strikes had occurred in seventy-seven per cent of middle-sized and large works."* For the Petrograd province, soviet figures state that in 1919 there were 52 strikes with 65,625 participants and in 1920 73 strikes with 85,645, both high figures as according to one set of figures, which are by no means the lowest, there were 109,100 workers there. Strikes in 1920 *"were frequently a direct protest against the intensification of War Communist labour policies, the militarisation of labour, the implementation of one-man management and the struggle*

p. 254] In the Moscow area, while it is *"impossible to say what proportion of workers were involved in the various disturbances,"* following the lull after the defeat of the workers' conference movement in mid-1918 *"each wave of unrest was more powerful than the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920."* For example, at the end of June 1919, *"a Moscow committee of defence (KOM) was formed to deal with the rising tide of disturbances"* The KOM *"concentrated emergency power in its hands, overriding the Moscow Soviet, and demanding obedience from the population. The disturbances died down under the pressure of repression."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94 and pp. 94–5] In Tula *"after strikes in the spring of 1919"* local Menshevik party activists had been arrested while Petrograd saw *"violent strikes"* at around the same time. [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 19 and p. 23]

Historian Vladimir Brovkin summarises the data he provides in his article *"Workers' Unrest and the Bolshevik Response in 1919"* (reproduced along with data from other years in his book **Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War**) as follows:

> *"Data on one strike in one city may be dismissed as incidental. When, however, evidence is available from various sources on simultaneous independent strikes in different cities and an overall picture begins to emerge ... Workers' unrest took place in Russia's biggest and most important industrial centres: Moscow, Petrograd, Tver', Tula, Briansk, and Sormovo. Strikes affected the largest industries ... Workers' demands reflected their grievances ... The greatest diversity was in workers' explicitly political demands or expression of political opinion ... all workers' resolutions demanded free and fair elections to the soviets ... some workers ... demanded the Constituent Assembly .. .*



> *to accept that a true proletariat existed in Russia, charged the working class with being no more than a mass of uprooted peasants with a thoroughly petty-bourgeois psychology."* [**Revolution and the People in Russia and China**, p. 201]

The most important development during this period was the suppression of soviet democracy and basic working class freedoms. As we discuss in section H.6.1, the Bolsheviks pursued a policy of systematically undermining soviet democracy from the moment they seized power. The first act was the creation of a Bolshevik government **over** the soviets, so marginalising the very organs they claimed ruled in Russia (and directly against the promises made by Lenin in **The State and Revolution** — and not the last, as discussed in section H.1.7). The process was repeated in the local soviets, with the executive committees holding real power while the plenary sessions became increasingly infrequent and of little consequence. Come the spring of 1918, faced with growing working class opposition they started to delay soviet elections. When finally forced to hold elections, the Bolsheviks responded in two ways to maintain their power: either they packed the soviets with representatives of Bolshevik dominated organisation (making elections from the workplace irrelevant or they simply disbanded them by force if they lost (and repressed by force any protests against this). This was the situation at the grassroots, at the summit of the soviet system the Bolsheviks simply marginalised the Central Executive Committee of the soviets: real power was held by the Bolshevik government. They also packed the Fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress held in July 1918, using their control over the credentials committee to increase the number of Bolsheviks by seating delegates from bodies they controlled). The power of the soviets had simply become a fig-leaf for a "soviet power" — the handful of Bolsheviks who made up the government and the party's central committee.

It should be stressed that the Bolshevik assault on the soviets occurred in March, April and May 1918. That is, **before** the Czech uprising and the onset of full-scale civil war. So, to generalise, it cannot be said that it was the Bolshevik party that alone whole-heartedly supported Soviet power: the facts are, in the words of left-Menshevik Julius Martov, the Bolsheviks loved Soviets only when they were *"in the hands of the Bolshevik party."* [quoted by Getzler, **Martov**, p. 174] If the workers voted for others, "soviet power" was openly replaced by party power (the real aim, as discussed in section H.3.11). The Bolsheviks had consolidated their position by early 1918, turning the Soviet State into a de facto one party state by packing, gerrymandering and disbanding soviets **before** the start of the Civil War.

Given this legacy of repression, Leninist Tony Cliff's assertion that it was only *"under the iron pressure of the civil war [that] the Bolshevik leaders were forced to move, as the price of survival, to* ***a one-party system****"* needs serious revising. Similarly, his comment that the *"civil war undermined the operation of the local soviets"* is equally inaccurate, as his is claim that *"for some time — i.e. until the armed uprising of the Czechoslovak Legion — the Mensheviks were not much hampered in their propaganda work."* Simply put, Cliff's statement that *"it was about a year after the October Revolution before an actual monopoly of political power was held by one party"* is false. [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 163, p. 150, p. 167 and p. 172] Such a monopoly existed **before** the start of the civil war, with extensive political repression existing **before** the uprising of the Czechoslovak Legion which began it. There was a **de facto** one-party state by the spring of 1918: it took about a year for this reality to be reflected in Bolshevik ideology and rhetoric.

Other Leninists are just as loose with the facts as Cliff. His fellow British SWP member Chris Harman suggested that the Bolsheviks were really democrats and that *"[u]ntil the Civil War was well under way, this democratic dialectic of party and*



*ers was suddenly surrounded by loyal troops, who fired on the crowd with machine guns and hand grenades, killing 2,000. Another 2,000, taken prisoner, were subsequently executed. In Tula, when strikes at the defence factories stopped production for five days, the government responded by distributing more grain and arresting the strike organisers ... strikes at Putilov again broke out, at first related to the food crisis ... The government treated the strike as an act of counter-revolution and responded with a substantial political purge and re-organisation. An official investigation ... concluded that many shop committees were led by [Left] Social Revolutionaries ... These committees were abolished and management representatives were appointed in their stead."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 109–10] In the Volga region, in March 1919 delegates to a conference of railroad workers *"protested the Cheka's arrest of union members, which the delegates insisted further disrupted transport. It certainly curbed the number of strikes."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 371]

The strikes in Petrograd centred around the Putilov shows the response of the authorities to the "atomised" workers who were taking collective action. In March 1919, *"fifteen factories struck together (roughly 35,000 workers were involved) ... workers at Putilov assembled and sent a delegation to the works committee ... and put forward a number of demands ... On 12 March Putilov stopped work. Its workers called to others to join them, and some of them came out in a demonstration where they were fired upon by Cheka troops. Strikes then broke out at fourteen other enterprises ... On Sunday 16 March an appeal was made to the Putilovtsy to return to normal working the following day or ... the sailors and soldiers would be brought in. After a poor showing on the Monday, the sailor went in, and 120 workers were arrested; the sailors remained until the 21st and by the 22nd normal work had been resumed."* In July strikes broke out again in response to the cancellation of holidays which involved 25,000 workers in 31 strikes. [Mary McAuley, **Bread and Justice**, pp. 251–253 and

> *White dictatorship, most willingly defended the Bolshevik cause. The effect of this dilemma may be seen in the periodic swings in the workers' political temper. When Soviet rule stood in peril, the war simulated a spirit of solidarity and spared the regime the defection of its proletarian base. During lulls in the fighting, strikes and demonstrations broke out."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

This cycle of resistance and repression was widespread. In July 1918, a leading Bolshevik insisted *"that severe measures were needed to deal with strikes"* in Petrograd while in other cities *"harsher forms of repression"* were used. For example, in Tula, in June 1918, the regime declared *"martial law and arrested the protestors. Strikes followed and were suppressed by violence"*. In Sormovo, 5,000 workers went on strike after a Menshevik-SR paper was closed. Violence was *"used to break the strike."* [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105] It should also be noted that at the end of September, there was a revolt by Baltic Fleet sailors demanding (as they did again in 1921) a *"return to government by liberated, democratic soviets — that is, 1917-type soviets."* The Left-SR controlled Kronstadt soviet had been disbanded and replaced by a Bolshevik revolutionary committee in July 1918. [Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, p. 352 and p. 302]

This process of workers protest and state repression continued in 1919 and subsequent years. It followed a cyclical pattern. There was a *"new outbreak of strikes in March 1919 after the collapse of Germany and the Bolshevik re-conquest of the Ukraine. The pattern of repression was also repeated. A strike at a galosh factory in early 1919 was followed by the closing of the factory, the firing of a number of workers, and the supervised re-election of its factory committee. The Soviet garrison at Astrakhan mutinied after its bread ration was cut. A strike among the city's workers followed in support. A meeting of 10,000 Astrakhan work-*



*class could continue. The Bolsheviks held power as the majority party in the Soviets. But other parties continued to exist there too. The Mensheviks continued to operate legally and compete with the Bolsheviks for support until June 1918."* Harman does not specifically indicate when he considered the civil war to have started, but almost always it is said to have began with the revolt of the Czech Legion at the end of May 1918 (a date he seems to agree with, as he writes that the *"Right Social Revolutionaries were instigators of the counter-revolution"*). The Bolsheviks excluded the Right-SRs and Mensheviks from the government on 14 June of that year so *"well under way"* appears to mean around 3 weeks. While opposition parties were sometimes tolerated and allowed to stand for election to soviets after this date, the reality was that the soviets had become little more than a fig-leaf of Bolshevik Party by July 1918 yet Harman proclaims *"[o]f necessity the Soviet State of 1917 had been replaced by the single-party State of 1920 onwards."* [*"How the Revolution was Lost"*, pp. 13–36, Peter Binns, Tony Cliff, Chris Harman, **Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism**, pp. 18–9]

The suppression of Soviet democracy reached it logical conclusion in 1921 when the Kronsdadt soviet, heart of the 1917 revolution, was stormed by Bolshevik forces, the rebels executed, imprisoned or forced into exile. Soviet democracy was not just an issue of debate but one many workers died in fighting for: similar events to those at Kronstadt had occurred three years previously.

Before turning to other Bolshevik attacks on working class power and freedom, we need to address one issue. It will be proclaimed by pro-Bolsheviks that the Mensheviks (and SRs) were *"counter-revolutionaries"* and so Bolshevik actions against them were justified. However, the Bolsheviks started to suppress opposition soviets **before** the civil war broke out, so at the time neither group could be called *"counter-revolutionary"* in any meaningful sense of the word. The Civil War started on the

25th of May and the SRs and Mensheviks were expelled from the Soviets on the 14th of June. The right-SRs **did** support the revolt of the Czech Legion to form what was called the democractic counter-revolution, based on reforming the Constituent Assembly in Samara (the White generals came later, displacing the SRs and fighting for the restoration of the Tsarist regime). The Mensheviks refused to support this strategy and while the Bolsheviks *"offered some formidable fictions to justify the expulsions"* there was *"of course no substance in the charge that the Mensheviks had been mixed in counter-revolutionary activities on the Don, in the Urals, in Siberia, with the Czechoslovaks, or that they had joined the worst Black Hundreds."* The real reason was the political loses in the soviets before the Civil War: the Bolsheviks *"drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 181]

Official Menshevik policy was to utilise soviet democracy to secure a change in government and policy, with any member found to have supported the armed rebellion of the right-SRs was expelled. This included a member of the Menshevik central committee who went *"without its knowledge"* to Samara and was *"expelled from the party"*. Likewise, the Volga Mensheviks were *"sharply reproved by Martov and the Menshevik Central Committee and instructed that neither party organisations nor members could take part in ... such adventures."* [Getzler **Op. Cit.**, p. 185] Such legal opposition did not stop the Bolsheviks repeatedly tolerating and banning the organisation (interestingly, periods of tolerance co-incidenced with the **decline** of the White threat and the corresponding rise of working class protest). In summary, then, the charge that the Mensheviks *"were active supporters of intervention and of counter-revolution"* was *"untrue ... and the Communists, if they ever believed it, never succeeded in establishing it."* [Leonard Schapiro, **The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 193]



pp. 442–3, p. 442 and p. 443] State repression also took place *"[i]n June 1918 [when] workers in Tula protested a cut in rations by boycotting the local soviet. The regime declared martial law and arrested the protestors. Strikes followed and were suppressed by violence. In Sormovo, when a Menshevik-Social Revolutionary newspaper was closed, 5,000 workers went on strike. Again firearms were used to break the strike."* Other techniques were used to break resistance. For example, the regime often threatened rebellious factories with a lock out, which involved numerous layouts, new rules of discipline, purges of workers' organisations and the introduction of piece work. [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 105 and p. 107] As discussed in section H.6.1, similar events happened in other cities with the Bolsheviks disbanding soviets elected with non-Bolshevik majorities all across Russia and suppressing the resulting working class protest.

Rather than the Civil War disrupting the relationship between the vanguard party and the class it claimed to lead, it was in fact the Bolsheviks who did so in face of rising working class dissent and disillusionment in the spring of 1918. In fact, *"[b]y the early summer of 1918"* there were *"widespread anti-Bolshevik protests. Armed clashes occurred in the factory districts of Petrograd and other industrial centres."* and *"after the initial weeks of 'triumph' ... Bolshevik labour relations after October"* changed and *"soon lead to open conflict, repression, and the consolidation of Bolshevik dictatorship over the proletariat in place of proletarian dictatorship itself."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107 and p. 117] Given this, the outbreak of the civil war consolidated workers support for the Bolsheviks and saved it from even more damaging workers' unrest. As Thomas F. Remington puts it:

> *"At various times groups of workers rebelled against Bolshevik rule. But for the most part, forced to choose between 'their' regime and the unknown horrors of a*

of counter-revolution (albeit in the name of the Constituent Assembly rather than White restoration), the Bolsheviks turned on the Conference, both locally and nationally, and arrested its leading activists, so decapitating one of the few independent working class organisations left in Russia. As Rabinowitch argues, *"the Soviet authorities were profoundly worried by the threat posed by the Assembly and fully aware if their growing isolation from workers (their only real social base) ... Petrograd Bolsheviks developed a siege mentality and a corresponding disposition to consider any action — from suppression of the opposition press and manipulation of elections to terror even against workers — to be justified in the struggle to retain power until the start of the imminent world revolution."* [**Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, pp. 43–4]

In Moscow, workers also organised a Conference movement and *"[r]esentment against the Bolsheviks was expressed through strikes and disturbances, which the authorities treated as arising from supply difficulties, from 'lack of consciousness,' and because of the 'criminal demagogy' of certain elements. Lack of support for current Bolshevik practices was treated as the absence of worker consciousness altogether, but the causes of the unrest was more complicated. In 1917 political issues gradually came to be perceived through the lens of party affiliation, but by mid-1918 party consciousness was reversed and a general consciousness of workers' needs restored. By July 1918 the protest movement had lost its momentum in the face of severe repression and was engulfed by the civil war."* In the light of the fate of workers' protest, the May 16th resolution by the Bogatyr' Chemical Plant calling (among other things) for *"freedom of speech and meeting, and an end to the shooting of citizens and workers"* seems to the point. Unsurprisingly, *"[f]aced with political opposition within the soviets and worker dissatisfaction in the factories Bolshevik power increasingly came to reply on the party apparatus itself."* [Richard Sakwa, *"The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,"* pp. 429–449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4,



Attacks on working class freedoms and democracy were not limited to the soviets. Before seizing power, the Bolsheviks had long presented economic visions much at odds with what libertarians consider as fundamentally socialist. Lenin, in April 1918, was arguing for one-man management and *"[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."* His support for a new form of wage slavery involved granting state appointed *"individual executives dictatorial powers (or 'unlimited' powers)."* Large-scale industry (*"the foundation of socialism"*) required *"thousands subordinating their will to the will of one,"* and so the revolution *"demands"* that *"the people **unquestioningly obey the single will** of the leaders of labour."* Lenin's *"superior forms of labour discipline"* were simply hyper-developed capitalist forms. The role of workers in production was the same, but with a novel twist, namely *"unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during the work."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 316, p. 267–9 and p. 271]

This simply replaced private capitalism with **state** capitalism. *"In the shops where one-man management (Lenin's own preference) replaced collegial management,"* notes historian Diane Koenker, *"workers faced the same kinds of authoritarian management they thought existed only under capitalism."* [**Labour Relations in Socialist Russia**, p. 177] If, as many Leninists claim, one-man management was a key factor in the rise of Stalinism and/or *"state-capitalism"* in Russia, then, clearly, Lenin's input into these developments cannot be ignored (see section H.3.13 on the obvious similarities between state socialism and state capitalism). After advocating *"one-man management"* and *"state capitalism"* in early 1918, he remained a firm supporter of both and looking back at this time from April 1920, he reiterated his position (*"Dictatorial powers and one-man management are not contradictory to socialist democracy"*) while also stress-

ing that this was not forced upon the Bolsheviks by civil war. Discussing how, as in April 1918, the civil war was ended and it was time to build socialism he argued that the *"whole attention of the Communist Party and the Soviet government is centred on peaceful economic development, on problems of the dictatorship and of one-man management ... When we tackled them for the first time in 1918, there was no civil war and no experience to speak of."* So it was *"not only experience"* of civil war, argued Lenin *"but something more profound . .. that has induced us now, as it did two years ago, to concentrate all our attention on labour discipline."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 30, p. 503 and p. 504]

In the light of this it is bizarre that some later day Leninists claim that the Bolsheviks only introduced one-man management because of the Civil War. Clearly, this was **not** the case: it was **this** period (before the civil war) that saw Lenin advocate and start to take the control of the economy out of the hands of the workers and place it into the hands of the Bolshevik party and the state bureaucracy. Thus what pro-Leninists like to portray as Stalinist had its roots in Lenin's regime, as can be seen when neo-Trotskyists like the British SWP's Peter Binns argue that Stalinism must be defined as *"state capitalism"* because of the *"exploitation and powerlessness of the Russian working class"*, created when it was *"decreed"* that *"all managers' orders"* were — to quote a 1929 resolution of the Communist Party's Central Committee — to be *"unconditionally binding on his subordinate administrative staff and on all workers"*. [*"The Theory of State Capitalism"*, pp. 73–98, **Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism**, p. 75] Given Lenin's imposition of one-man management in early 1918, why was Bolshevism **not** state-capitalist? Do social relationships change their nature dependent on who imposes them, whether it was Lenin or Stalin?

Needless to say, the Bolshevik undermining of the factory committee movement and, consequently, genuine worker's self-management of production in favour of state capitalism cannot be gone into great depth here (see section H.6.2, for



*justify banning the Extraordinary Assembly."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42] While the Bolsheviks had won around 50% of workplace votes, they had gerrymandered the soviet making the election results irrelevant. Faced with *"demands from below for the immediate re-election"* of the Soviet, before the long-postponed election took place the existing Bolshevik-controlled Soviet confirmed new regulations *"to help offset possible weaknesses"* in their *"electoral strength in factories."* The *"most significant change in the makeup of the new soviet was that numerically decisive representation was given to agencies in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength, among them the Petrograd Trade Union Council, individual trade unions, factory committees in closed enterprises, district soviets, and district non-party workers' conferences."* This ensured that *"[o]nly 260 of roughly 700 deputies in the new soviet were to be elected in factories, which guaranteed a large Bolshevik majority in advance"*. In short, the Bolsheviks *"contrived a majority"* in the new Soviet long before gaining 127 of the 260 factory delegates and even these victories raised *"the nagging question of how many Bolshevik deputies from factories were elected instead of the opposition because of press restrictions, voter intimidation, vote fraud, or the short duration of the campaign."* Overall, then, the Bolshevik election victory *"was highly suspect, even on the shop floor."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, pp. 248–252]

The fact the civil war had just started with the revolt of the Czech Legion at the end of May also undoubtedly aided the Bolsheviks during this election, as did the fact that the Mensheviks and Right-SRs had campaigned on a platform of winning the soviet elections as the means of replacing soviet democracy by the Constituent Assembly: many workers still viewed the soviets are **their** organisations and aimed for a functioning soviet system rather than its end. With their electoral "mandate," secured beforehand, the opposition fatally weakened by its backward-looking perspective and the threat

*ings everywhere were forbidden."* However *"workers were not so readily pacified. In scores of additional factories and shops protests mounted and rapidly spread along the railways."* At the June 26th *"extraordinary session"* of the Conference a general strike was declared for July 2nd. The Bolshevik authorities acted quickly: *"Any sign of sympathy for the strike was declared a criminal act. More arrests were made. In Moscow, Bolsheviks raided the Aleksandrovsk railroad shops, not without bloodshed. Dissidence spread."* On July 1st, *"machine guns were set up at main points throughout the Petrograd and Moscow railroad junctions, and elsewhere in both cities as well. Controls were tightened in factories. Meetings were forcefully dispersed."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 127] Unsurprisingly, *"as a result of extreme government intimidation, the response to the Assembly's strike call on 2 July was negligible."* [Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 42] This repression was not trivial:

> *"Among other things, all newspapers were forced to print on their front pages Petrograd soviet resolutions condemning the Assembly as part of the domestic and foreign counter-revolution. Factories participating in the strike were warned that they would be shut down and individual strikers were threatened with the loss of work — threats that were subsequently made good. Printing plants suspected of opposition sympathies were sealed, the offices of hostile trade unions were raided, martial law declared on rail lines, and armed strike-breaking patrols with authority to take whatever action was necessary to prevent work stoppages were formed and put on 24-hour duty at key points throughout Petrograd."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 45]

Needless to say, *"the Petrograd authorities drew on the dubious mandate provided by the stacked soviet elections to*



more discussion). Suffice to say, the factory committees were deliberately submerged in the trade unions and state control replaced workers' control. This involved practising one-man management and, as Lenin put in at the start of May 1918, *"our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare **no effort** in copying it and not to shrink from adopting **dictatorial** methods to hasten the copying of it."* He stressed that this was no new idea, rather he *"gave it **before** the Bolsheviks seized power."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 27, p. 340 and p. 341]

It will be objected that Lenin advocated *"workers' control."* This is true, but a "workers' control" of a **very** limited nature. As we discuss in section H.3.14, rather than seeing it as workers managing production directly, he always saw it in terms of workers' "controlling" or "supervising" those who did and his views on this matter were **radically** different to those of the factory committees. This is not all, as Lenin always placed his ideas in a statist context — rather than base socialist reconstruction on working class self-organisation from below, the Bolsheviks started *"to build, from the top, its 'unified administration'"* based on central bodies created by the Tsarist government in 1915 and 1916. [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 36] The institutional framework of capitalism would be utilised as the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of "socialist" transformation. Lenin's support for *"one-man management"* must be seen in this context, namely his vision of "socialism."

Bolshevik advocating and implementing of *"one-man management"* was not limited to the workplace. On 30th of March 1918 Trotsky, as Commissar of Military Affairs, set about reorganising the army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire was reintroduced, as was saluting officers, special forms of address, separate living quarters and privileges for officers. Officers were no longer elected. [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 37–8] Trotsky made it clear: *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice,*

*abolished by decree"*. [*"Work, Discipline, Order"*, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, pp. 46–7] The soldiers were given no say in their fate, as per bourgeois armies.

Lenin's proposals also struck at the heart of workers' power in other ways. For example, he argued that *"we must raise the question of piece-work and apply it ... in practice."* [*"The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government"*, **Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 258] As Leninist Tony Cliff (of all people) noted, *"the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th[e] unity [of workers as a class]. Once of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems."* He notes that this was used by the Nazis and the Stalinists *"for the same purpose."* [**State Capitalism in Russia**, pp. 18–9] Obviously piece-work is different when Lenin introduces it!

Finally, there is the question of general political freedom. It was also in this time period that the Bolsheviks first used the secret police (the Cheka, formed in December 1917) against left-wing opposition groups. The anarchists in Moscow were attacked on the night of April 11–12, with armed detachments of the Cheka raiding 26 anarchist centres, killing or wounding 40 and jailing 500. Shortly afterwards the Cheka carried out similar raids in Petrograd and in the provinces. In May **Burevestnik**, **Anarkhiia**, **Golos Truda** and other leading anarchist periodicals closed down. [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, pp. 184–5] It must surely be a coincidence that there had been a *"continued growth of anarchist influence among unskilled workers"* after the October revolution and, equally coincidentally, that *"[b]y the spring of 1918, very little was heard from the anarchists in Petrograd."* [David Mandel, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power**, p. 357]

All this **before** the Trotsky provoked revolt of the Czech legion at the end of May, 1918, and the consequent "democratic counter-revolution" in favour of the Constituent Assembly (which the right-Socialist Revolutionaries led) and long be-



While the Kolpino incident *"was hardly the first of its kind, it triggered a massive wave of indignation ... Work temporarily stopped at a number of plants."* Between Kolpino and early July, more than seventy incidents occurred in Petrograd, including strikes, demonstrations and anti-Bolshevik meetings. Many of these meetings *"were protests against some form of Bolshevik repression: shootings, incidents of 'terroristic activities,' and arrests."* In some forty incidents *"worker's protests focused on these issues, and the data surely understate the actual number by a wide margin. There were as well some eighteen separate strikes or some other work stoppages with an explicitly anti-Bolshevik character."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 123–4] Then, *"[a]t the very end of May and the beginning of June, when a wave of strikes to protest at bread shortages broke out in the Nevskii district, a majority of Assembly delegates ... resolved to call on striking Nevskii district workers to return to work and continue preparation for a general city-wide strike."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] Unfortunately, for the Assembly, postponing the strikes until later, until a "better time", rather than encouraging them gave the authorities time to prepare.

*"At the end of May and beginning of June, a wave of strikes to protest the lack of bread swept Nivskii district factories"* and *"strikes followed by bloody clashes between workers and Soviet authorities had erupted in scattered parts of central Russia."* In Petrograd, things came to a head during and after the soviet elections in June. On June 21, a general meeting of Obukhov workers *"seized control of the plant"* and the next day the assembled workers *"resolved to demand that the EAD should declare political strikes ... to protest the political repression of workers."* Orders were issued by the authorities *"to shut down Obukhov plant"* and *"the neighbourhood surrounding the plant was placed under martial law."* [Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, p. 231 and pp. 246–7] So faced with workers collective action, the *"Bolsheviks responded by 'invading' the whole Nevskii district with troops and shutting down Obukhov completely. Meet-*

*[Extraordinary] Assembly slowed down."* The Assembly's plans for a May Day demonstration to protest the government's policies were cancelled because of workers did not respond to the appeals to demonstrate, in part because of *"Bolshevik threats against 'protesters'"*. This apathy did not last long as events *"served to reinvigorate and temporarily radicalise the Assembly. These developments included yet another drastic drop in food supplies, the shooting of protesting housewives and workers in the Petrograd suburb of Kolpino, the arbitrary arrest and abuse of workers in another Petrograd suburb, Sestroresk, the closure of newspapers and the arrests of individuals who had denounced the Kolpino and Sestroresk events, the intensification of labour unrest and conflict with the authorities in the Obukhov plant and in other Petrograd factories and districts."* [Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, pp. 40–1]

Early May saw *"the shooting of protesting housewives and workers in the suburb of Kolpino"*, the *"arbitrary arrest and abuse of workers"* in Sestroretsk, the *"closure of newspapers and arrests of individuals who protested the Kolpino and Sestroretsk events"* and *"the resumption of labour unrest and conflict with authorities in other Petrograd factories."* This was no isolated event, as *"violent incidents against hungry workers and their family demanding bread occurred with increasing regularity."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Bolsheviks in Power**, pp. 229–30] The shooting at Kolpino *"triggered a massive wave of indignation ... Work temporarily stopped at a number of plants."* In Moscow, Tula, Kolomna, Nizhnii-Novoprod, Rybinsk, Orel, Tver' and elsewhere *"workers gathered to issue new protests."* In Petrograd, *"textile workers went on strike for increased food rations and a wave of demonstrations spread in response to still more Bolshevik arrests."* This movement was the *"first major wave of labour protest"* against the regime, with *"protests against some form of Bolshevik repression"* being common. [William Rosenberg, **Russian Labor and Bolshevik Power**, pp. 123–4]



fore the rise of the White Armies (which replaced the right-SRs as the main threat to "soviet power" by the end of 1918) and Allied intervention. In summary, it was **before** large-scale civil war took place, in an interval of relative peace, that we see the introduction of most of the measures Leninists now try and pretend were necessitated by the Civil War itself. As discussed in sections H.1.7, the promises of 1917 did not last six months.

This factual problem with the "civil war caused Bolshevik authoritarianism" excuse is the best answer to it. If the Bolsheviks pursued authoritarian policies before the civil war started, it is hard to justify their actions in terms of something that had not started yet. This explains why some Leninists have tried to muddy the waters somewhat by obscuring when the civil war started. For example, John Rees states that *"[m]ost historians treat the revolution and the civil war as separate processes"* yet *"[i]n reality they were one."* He presents a catalogue of *"armed resistance to the revolution,"* including such *"precursors of civil war before the revolution"* as the suppression after the July days and the Kornilov revolt in 1917. [John Rees, *"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 31–2]

Ironically, Rees fails to see how this blurring of when the civil war started actually **harms** Leninism. After all, most historians place the start of the civil war when the Czech legion revolted **because** it marked large-scale conflict between armies. It is one thing to say that authoritarianism was caused by war — large-scale conflict — and another to say **any** form of conflict caused it. Simply put, if the Bolshevik state could not handle relatively minor forms of counter-revolution then where does that leave Lenin's **State and Revolution**? It is even worse if "civil war" is pushed back to **before** the actual revolution for then revolution is equated to civil war and so doomed to degeneration before it even starts. So while the period from October to May of 1918 was not trouble free, it was not one where the survival of the new regime looked to be seriously threatened as it was after that, particularly in 1919 and 1920. Thus "civil

war" should be used, as is commonly done, to refer to the period from the Czech revolt (late May 1918) to the final defeat of Wrangel (November 1920).

This means attempts to push the start of the civil war back to October 1917 (or even earlier) simply weakens the Leninist argument. It still leaves the major problem for the "blame it on the civil war" position, namely to explain why the months **before** May of 1918 saw soviets being closed down, the start of the suppression of the factory committees, restrictions on freedom of speech and association, plus the repression of opposition groups (like the anarchists). Either any level of "civil war" makes Lenin's **State and Revolution** redundant or the source of Bolshevik authoritarianism must be found elsewhere. Given that Leninists to this day continue to point to Lenin's work as what they "really" standfor, it seems unlikely that they will take their rationales for the Bolshevik's violating it in practice to their logical position and place that work in the dustbin of history.

That covers the period **before** the start of the civil war. We now turn to the period **after** it finished. Here we find the same problem, namely an **increase** of authoritarianism even after the proclaimed cause for it (civil war) had ended.

The last White General Wrangel evacuated what remained of his forces to Constantinople in November 1920. With this defeat the Russian civil war had come to an end and the Bolsheviks started to demoblise the Red Army (halving its size to around 2,500,000 by the start of 1921). Those familiar with the history of the revolution will realise that it was some 4 months **later** that yet another massive strike wave occurred and the Kronstadt revolt took place (see the appendix "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"), while within the party, the 10th Congress banned factions. The repression of the strikes and Kronstadt revolt effectively destroying hope for mass pressure for change from below and the faction ban within the party closed off the very last "legal" door for those who opposed the



The first wave of outrage and protests occurred after Bolshevik Red Guards opened fire on a demonstration for the Constituent Assembly in early January (killing 21, according to Bolshevik sources). This demonstration *"was notable as the first time workers came out actively against the new regime. More ominously, it was also the first time forces representing soviet power used violence against workers."* [David Mandel, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power**, p. 355] It would not be the last — indeed repression by the "workers' state" of workers became a recurring feature of Bolshevism.

The general workers' opposition saw the growth of the EAD. *"The emergence of the EAD"*, Rabinowitch notes, *"was also stimulated by the widespread view that trade unions, factory committees, and soviets ... were no longer representative, democratically run working-class institutions; instead they had been transformed into arbitrary, bureaucratic government agencies. There was ample reason for this concern."* To counter the EAD, the Bolsheviks organised non-party conferences which, in itself, shows that the soviets had become as distant from the masses as the opposition argued. District soviets *"were deeply concerned about their increasing isolation ... At the end of March ... they resolved to convene successive nonparty workers' conferences ... in part to undercut the EAD by strengthening ties between district soviets and workers."* This was done amidst *"unmistakable signs of the widening rift between Bolshevik-dominated political institutions and ordinary factory workers."* The EAD was an expression of the *"growing disenchantment of Petrograd workers with economic conditions and the evolving structure and operation of Soviet political institutions"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224, p. 232 and p. 231]

It *"appeared that the government was now ready to go to whatever extremes it deemed necessary (including sanctioning the arrest and even shooting of workers) to quell labour unrest. This in turn led to intimidation, apathy, lethargy and passivity of other workers. In these circumstances, growth in support of the*

This struggle of the "workers' state" against the workers started early in 1918. *"By the early summer of 1918,"* records one historian, *"there were widespread anti-Bolshevik protests. Armed clashes occurred in the factory districts of Petrograd and other industrial centres. Under the aegis of the Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives ... a general strike was set for July 2."* [William Rosenberg, **Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 107] According to another historian, economic factors *"were soon to erode the standing of the Bolsheviks among Petrograd workers ... These developments, in turn, led in short order to worker protests, which then precipitated violent repressions against hostile workers. Such treatment further intensified the disenchantment of significant segments of Petrograd labour with Bolshevik-dominated Soviet rule."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 37]

The reasons for these protest movement were both political and economic. The deepening economic crisis combined with protests against Bolshevik authoritarianism to produce a wave of strikes aiming for political change. Feeling that the soviets were distant and unresponsive to their needs (with good reason, given Bolshevik postponement of soviet elections and gerrymandering of the soviets — see section H.6.1), workers turned to direct action and the initially Menshevik inspired *"Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives"* (also known as the *"Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories and Plants"*, EAD) to voice their concerns. At its peak, reports *"estimated that out of 146,000 workers still in Petrograd, as many as 100,000 supported the conference's goals."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 127] The aim of the Conference (as per Menshevik policy) was to reform the existing system from within and, as such, the Conference operated openly: *"for the Soviet authorities in Petrograd, the rise of the Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories and Plants was an ominous portent of worker defection."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37]



regime from the left (although, as discussed in the appendix "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?", given that **all** the main factions did not question the necessity of party dictatorship there was no possibility for real socialist change).

It could be argued that the Bolsheviks were still fighting peasant insurrections and strikes across the country, but this has everything to do with Bolshevik policies and could only be considered "counter-revolutionary" if you think the Bolsheviks had a monopoly of what socialism and revolution meant. In the case of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks started that conflict by betraying them once they had played a key role in defeating Wrangel. As such, any resistance to Bolshevik rule by the working class and peasantry of Russia indicated the lack of democracy within the country rather than some sort of "counter-revolutionary" conflict.

So even the end of the Civil War causes problems for this defence of the Bolsheviks. Simply put, with the defeat of the Whites it would be expected that some return to democratic norms would happen. It did not, in fact the reverse happened. Factions were banned, even the smallest forms of opposition was finally eliminated from both the party and society as a whole. Those opposition groups and parties which had been tolerated during the civil war were finally smashed. Popular revolts for reform, such as the Kronstadt rebellion and the strike wave which inspired it (see `][section 5` below), were put down by force. No form of opposition was tolerated, no freedom allowed. If civil war **was** the cause of Bolshevik authoritarianism, it seems strange that it got worse after it was finished.

This grim reality was what convinced anarchists like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman to finally break with the regime. After rationalising away their doubts with the hope that the end of the civil war would see change, the continuation of repression showed them the error of their ways. As Goldman put it:

> *"We must not fail to consider the Bolsheviki **continue** to employ exactly the same methods today as they did in 'the moments of grim necessity, in 1919, 1920, and 1921.' … The military fronts have long ago been liquidated; internal counter-revolution is suppressed; the old bourgeoisie is eliminated; the 'moments of grim necessity' are past .. . but the Terror, the Tchecka, suppression of free speech and press, and all the other Communist methods of former years still remain in force. Indeed, they are being applied even more brutally and barbarously since the death of Lenin. Is it to 'preserve the remnants of civilisation' or to strengthen the weakening Party dictatorship?"* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, pp. liii-liv]

This, then, is the main factual problem with the "blame the civil war" approach beloved by Leninists to this day: Bolshevik authoritarianism had not began with the start of the civil war, nor did it stop when the civil war ended.

As we discuss in section H.6, the root causes for Bolshevik authoritarianism post-October was Bolshevik ideology combined with state power. After all, how "democratic" is it to give all power to the Bolshevik party central committee? Surely socialism involves more than voting for a new government? Is it not about mass participation, the kind of participation centralised government precludes and Bolshevism vanguardism fears — as discussed in section H.5 — as being inevitably influenced by *"bourgeois ideology"*? In such circumstances, moving from party rule to party dictatorship is not such a leap.

That "civil war" cannot explain what happened can be shown by a counter-example which effectively shows that civil war did not inevitably mean party dictatorship ruling over a state capitalist economy (and protesting workers and



The fact is that working class collective struggle against the new regime — the new boss class — and, consequently, Bolshevik repression, started before the outbreak of the civil war, continued throughout the civil war period and reached a climax in the early months of 1921. Even the repression of the Kronstadt rebellion did not stop it, with strikes continuing into 1923 (and, to a lesser degree, afterward). Indeed, the history of the "workers' state" is a history of the state repressing the revolt of the workers.

Needless to say, it would be impossible to give a full account of working class resistance to Bolshevism. All we can do here is give a flavour of what was happening and the sources for further information (also see section H.6.3). What should be clear from our account is that the idea that the working class in this period was incapable of collective organisation and struggle is false, the idea that Bolshevik "substitutionism" can be explained in such terms is also false. In addition, it will become clear that Bolshevik repression explicitly aimed to break the ability of workers to organise and exercise collective power. As such, it seems hypocritical for modern-day Leninists to blame Bolshevik party dictatorship on the "atomisation" of the working class when Bolshevik rule was dependent on smashing working class collective organisation and resistance. Simply put, to remain in power Bolshevism, from almost the start, had to crush working class power. This is to be expected, given the centralised nature of the state and the class structures and authoritarian social relationships it generates (see section H.3.9) and the assumptions of vanguardism (see section H.5). If you like, October 1917 did not see the end of *"dual power"*: rather the Bolshevik state replaced the bourgeois state and working class power (as expressed in its collective struggle) came into conflict with it. By 1921 these protests and strikes were threatening the very existence of the Bolshevik dictatorship, forcing it to abandon key aspects of its economic policies.

*heavily industrialised cities?"* [**The Kronstadt Uprising**, p. 81]

Similarly, we find Victor Serge arguing that the *"working class often fretted and cursed; sometimes it lent an ear to the Menshevik agitators, as in the great strikes at Petrograd in the spring of 1919. But once the choice was posed as that between the dictatorship of the White Generals and the dictatorship of its own party — and there was not and could not be any other choice — every fit man ... came to stand ... before the windows of the local party offices."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, pp. 365–6] An exhausted and atomised working class capable of *"great strikes"*? That seems unlikely. Significantly, Serge does not mention the Bolshevik acts of repression used against the rebel workers (see below). This omission cannot help distort any conclusions to be drawn from his account.

Which, incidentally, shows that the civil war was not all bad news for the Bolsheviks. Faced with working class protest, they could play the "White card" — unless the workers went back to work, the Whites would win. This explains why the strikes of early 1921 were larger than before and explains why they were so important. As the "White card" could no longer be played, the Bolshevik repression could not be excused in terms of the civil war. Indeed, given working class opposition to the party, it would be fair to say that civil war actually **helped** the Bolsheviks remain in power: without the threat of the Whites, the working class would **not** have tolerated the Bolsheviks longer than the Autumn of 1918. As Emma Goldman recounted, *"Kropotkin emphasised, that the blockade and the continuous attacks on the Revolution by the interventionists had helped to strengthen the power of the Communist regime. Intervention and blockade were bleeding Russia to death, and were preventing the people from understanding the real nature of the Bolshevik regime."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 99]



peasants!). The Makhnovists (an anarchist influenced partisan army) managed to defend the revolution and encourage soviet democracy, freedom of speech, and so on, while doing so (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"). Which, of course, does not really fit in with the Bolsheviks being forced to be anti-democratic due to the pressures of civil war.

So, in summary, civil war and imperialist intervention cannot be blamed for Bolshevik authoritarianism simply because the latter had started before the former existed. Moreover, the example of the Makhnovists suggests that Bolshevik policies during the civil war were also not driven purely by the need for survival. As Kropotkin argued in 1920, *"all foreign armed intervention necessarily strengthens the dictatorial tendencies of the government ... The evils inherent in a party dictatorship have been accentuated by the conditions of war in which this party maintains its power. This state of war has been the pretext for strengthening dictatorial methods which centralise the control of every detail of life in the hands of the government, with the effect of stopping an immense part of the ordinary activity of the country. The evils natural to state communism have been increased ten-fold under the pretext that all our misery is due to foreign intervention."* [**Anarchism**, p. 253]

In other words, while the civil war may have increased Bolshevik authoritarianism, it did not create it.

## 4 Did economic collapse and isolation destroy the revolution?

One of the most common Trotskyist explanations for the failure of the Russian revolution is that the Bolsheviks faced terrible economic conditions, which forced them to be less than democratic. Combined with the failure of the revolution to spread to more advanced countries, party dictatorship, it is argued, was inevitable. In the words of Leninist John Rees:

> *"In a country where the working class was a minority of the population, where industry had been battered by years of war and in conditions of White and imperialist encirclement, the balance gradually titled towards greater coercion. Each step of the way was forced on the Bolsheviks by dire and pressing necessities."* [*"In Defence of October,"* **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 41]

Thus *"economic devastation"* played a key part in the degeneration of the revolution. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 31] Other Leninists have made similar arguments, with Victor Serge noting that the *"decline in production was uninterrupted. It should be noted that this decline had already begun before the revolution. In 1916 the output of agricultural machinery, for example, was down by 80 per cent compared with 1913. The year 1917 had been marked by a particularly general, rapid and serious downturn. The production figures for the principal industries in 1913 and 1918 were, in millions of* ***poods****: coal, from 1,738 to 731 (42 per cent); iron ore, from 57, 887 to 1,686; cast-iron, from 256 to 31.5 (12.3 per cent); steel, from 259 to 24.5; rails, from 39.4 to 1.1. As a percentage of 1913 production, output of linen fell to 75 per cent, of sugar to 24 per cent, and tobacco to 19 per cent."* Moreover, production continued *"to fall until the end of civil war ... For 1920, the following indices are given as a percentage of output in 1913: coal, 27 per cent; cast iron, 2.4 per cent; linen textiles, 38 per cent."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 352 and p. 425]

Likewise Tony Cliff (like Serge, another of Rees's references), who argued that war-damaged industry *"continued to run down"* in the spring of 1918: *"One of the causes of famine was the breakdown of transport . .. Industry was in a state of complete collapse. Not only was there no food to feed the factory workers; there was no raw material or fuel for industry ... The collapse of industry meant unemployment for the workers."* Cliff provides economic indexes. For large scale industry, taking



ject quickly changed. As we noted in section 10 of the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?", John Rees states that Kronstadt was *"preceded by a wave of serious but quickly resolved strikes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61] Needless to say, he does not — no more than Trotsky before him — mention that the strikes were *"resolved"* by *"serious"* state repression as Emma Goldman recalled:

> *Trotsky ... omits the most important reason for the seeming indifference of the workers of Petrograd. It is of importance, therefore, to point out that the campaign of slander, lies and calumny against the sailors began on the 2nd March, 1921. The Soviet Press fairly oozed poison against the sailors. The most despicable charges were hurled against them, and this was kept up until Kronstadt was liquidated on 17th March. In addition, Petrograd was put under martial law. Several factories were shut down ... Under these iron-clad rules it was physically impossible for the workers of Petrograd to ally themselves with Kronstadt, especially as not one word of the manifestoes issued by the sailors in their paper was permitted to penetrate to the workers in Petrograd. In other words, Leon Trotsky deliberately falsifies the facts."* [*"Trotsky Protests Too Much"*, [**Writings of Emma Goldman**, 264]

Nor does Rees explain how *"an atomised, individualised mass"* **could** conduct such *"serious"* strikes, strikes which required martial law to break. Little wonder, then, Rees does not expound on the strikes and what they mean in terms of the revolution and his own argument. Ida Mett long ago stated the obvious about these all-Russia strike waves: *"And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most*

1910 and 1920 while other cities shrunk. [Diane Koenker, *"Urbanisation and Deurbanisation in the Russian Revolution and Civil War,"* pp. 424–450, **The Journal of Modern History**, vol. 57, no. 3, p. 425] Does that mean soviet democracy was possible in those towns but not in Petrograd or Moscow? Or does the fact that the industrial workforce grew by 14.8% between October 1920 and April 1921 mean that the possibility for soviet democracy also grew by a related percentage? [Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 159] In neither case was soviet democracy encouraged, in spite of the reversal of the factor alleged to have undermined it.

Then there is the question of when the reduction of workers makes soviet democracy impossible. After all, between May 1917 and April 1918 the city of Moscow lost 300,000 of its two million inhabitants. Was soviet democracy impossible in April 1918 because of this? During the civil war, Moscow lost another 700,000 by 1920 (which is basically the same amount per year). [Diane Koenker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 424] When did this fall in population mean that soviet democracy was impossible?

Simply put, comparing figures of one year to another simply fails to understand the dynamics at work, such as the impact of *"reasons of state"* and working class resistance to Bolshevik rule. It, in effect, turns attention away from the state of working class autonomy and on to number crunching.

Ultimately, the question of whether the working class was too "atomised" to govern can only be answered by doing something Leninists rarely do: looking at the class struggle in Russia during this period, by looking at the strikes, demonstrations and protests that occurred under Bolshevik rule. Needless to say, certain strike waves just cannot be ignored. The most obvious case is in Petrograd just before the Kronstadt revolt in early 1921. After all, the strikes (and subsequent Bolshevik repression) inspired the sailors to revolt in solidarity with them. Faced with such events, in Leninist circles the scale of the strikes and the Bolshevik repression is understated and the sub-



1913 as the base, 1917 saw production fall to 77%. In 1918, it was at 35% of the 1913 figure, 1919 it was 26% and 1920 was 18%. Productivity per worker also fell, from 85% in 1917, to 44% in 1918, 22% in 1919 and then 26% in 1920. [**Lenin**, vol. 3, pp. 67–9, p. 86 and p. 85]

In such circumstances, it is argued, how can you expect the Bolsheviks to subscribe to democratic and socialist norms? This meant that the success or failure of the revolution depended on whether the revolution spread to more advanced countries. Leninist Duncan Hallas argues that the *"failure of the German Revolution in 1918–19 ... seems, in retrospect, to have been decisive ... for only substantial economic aid from an advanced economy, in practice from a socialist Germany, could have reversed the disintegration of the Russian working class."* [*"Towards a revolutionary socialist party,"* pp. 38–55, **Party and Class**, Alex Callinicos (ed.), p. 44]

Anarchists are not convinced by these arguments. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, we are aware that revolutions are disruptive no matter where they occur and, moreover, Leninists are meant to know this too (see section 1). Simply put, there is a certain incredulous element to these arguments. Lenin himself had argued that *"[e]very revolution ... by its very nature implies a crisis, and a very deep crisis at that, both political and economic. This is irrespective of the crisis brought about by the war."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 30, p. 341] Serge also considered crisis as inevitable, arguing that the *"conquest of production by the proletariat was in itself a stupendous victory, one which saved the revolution's life. Undoubtedly, so thorough a recasting of all the organs of production is impossible without a substantial decline in output; undoubtedly, too, a proletariat cannot labour and fight at the same time."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361] As we discussed in detail in section 2, this was a common Bolshevik position at the time and so it seems strange that — yet again — Leninists blame events

they consider inevitable for the degeneration of the Bolshevik regime.

Secondly, and more importantly, every revolution or revolutionary situation has been accompanied by economic crisis. This means that **if** Bolshevik authoritarianism is blamed on the state of the economy, it is not hard to conclude that **every** Bolshevik-style revolution will suffer the same fate as the Russian one. For example, as we will shortly prove, Germany itself was in a state of serious economic disruption and falling production in 1918 and 1919, a collapse which would have got worse is a Bolshevik-style revolution had occurred there. This suggests that the common Leninist idea that a successful revolution in, say, Germany would have ensured the success of the Russian Revolution is flawed. Looking at Europe during the period immediately after the first world war, we discover great economic hardship. To quote one Trotskyist editor:

> *"In the major imperialist countries of Europe, production still had not recovered from wartime destruction. A limited economic upswing in 1919 and early 1920 enabled many demobilised soldiers to find work, and unemployment fell somewhat. Nonetheless, in 'victorious' France overall production in 1920 was still only two-thirds its pre-war level. In Germany industrial production was little more than half its 1914 level, human consumption of grains was down 44 per cent, and the economy was gripped by spiralling inflation. Average per capita wages in Prague in 1920, adjusted for inflation, were just over one-third of pre-war levels."* [John Riddell, *"Introduction,"* **Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920**, vol. I, p. 17]

Now, if economic collapse was responsible for Bolshevik authoritarianism and the subsequent failure of the revolution,



**People's History of the United States**, p. 378] Yet in the face of this mass unemployment and economic crisis, the workers organised themselves and fought back. Likewise, the reduction in the number of Russian workers did not restrict their ability to make collective decisions and collectively act on them — Bolshevik repression **did.**

Moreover, while Leninists usually point to the fall in population in Petrograd and Moscow during the civil war, concentrating on these cities can be misleading. *"Using the Petrograd figures,"* notes Daniel R. Bower, *"historians have painted a lurid picture of flight from the cities. In 1918 alone the former capital lost 850,000 people and was by itself responsible for one-half of the total urban population decline of the Civil War years. If one sets aside aggregate figures to determine the trend characteristic of most cities, however, the experiences of Petrograd appears exception. Only a handful of cities ... lost half their population between 1917 and 1920, and even Moscow, which declined by over 40 percent, was not typical of most towns in the northern, food-importing areas. A study of all cities ... found that the average decline in the north (167 towns in all, excluding the capital cities) amounted to 24 percent between 1917 and 1920. Among the towns in the food-producing areas in the southern and eastern regions of the Russian Republic (a total of 128), the average decline came to only 14 percent."* [*"'The city in danger': The Civil War and the Russian Urban Population,"* **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 61] Does this mean that the possibility of soviet democracy declined less in these towns? Yet the Bolsheviks applied their dictatorship even there, suggesting that declining urban populations was not the source of their authoritarianism.

Equally, what are we to make of towns and cities which increased their populations? For example, Minsk, Samara, Khar'kov, Tiflis, Baku, Rostov-on-don, Tsaritsyn and Perm all grew in population (often by significant amounts) between

really is, namely evidence of working class autonomy and collective struggle for what it considers **its** interests to be against a new master class. The "declassing" argument is related to the vanguardist position which, in turn, justifies the dictatorship of the party **over** the class (see section H.5.3).

So the "declassing" argument is not some neutral statement based on the fact that the numbers of industrial workers fell between October 1917 and 1921. It was developed as a weapon in the class struggle, to justify Bolshevik repression of collective working class struggle, to justify the continuation of Bolshevik party dictatorship **over** the working class. This in turn explains why working class struggle during this period generally fails to get mentioned by later day Bolsheviks — it simply undermines their justifications for Bolshevik dictatorship. After all, how can they say that the working class could not exercise *"collective power"* when it was conducting mass strikes — collective action — throughout Russia during the period 1918 to 1923?

As such, it is not strange that most Leninist accounts of the revolution post-October rarely, if ever, mention what the working class was actually doing. We do get statistics on the drop of the numbers of industrial workers in the cities (usually Petrograd and Moscow), but any discussion on working class protest and strikes is limited at best, usually ignored. Which shows the bankruptcy of what can be called the "statistical tendency" of analysing the Russian working class. While statistics can tell us how many industrial workers remained in Russia in, say, 1921, they do not provide any idea of their combativeness or their ability to take collective decisions and action. If statistics alone indicated that, then the massive labour struggles in 1930s American would not have taken place. Millions had been made redundant: at the Ford Motor Company, for example, 128,000 workers had been employed in the spring of 1929 and only 37,000 were by August of 1931 (only 29% of the 1929 figure) while, by the end of 1930, almost half of the 280,000 textile mill workers in New England were out of work. [Howard Zinn, **A**



it seems hard to understand why an expansion of the revolution into similarly crisis ridden countries would have had a major impact in the development of the revolution. Since most Leninists agree that a successful German Revolution would have made the difference, we will discuss this in more detail before going onto other revolutions and revolutionary situations.

By 1918, Germany was in a bad state. Victor Serge noted *"the famine and economic collapse which caused the final ruin of the Central Powers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361] The semi-blockade of Germany during the war badly effected the economy, the *"dynamic growth"* of which before the war *"had been largely dependent on the country's involvement in the world market"*. The war *"proved catastrophic to those who had depended on the world market and had been involved in the production of consumer goods . .. Slowly but surely the country slithered into austerity and ultimately economic collapse"* and *"overall food production declined further after poor harvests in 1916 and 1917. Thus grain production, already well below its prewar levels, slumped from 21.8 million to 14.9 million tons in those two years."* [V. R. Berghahn, **Modern Germany**, p. 47, pp. 47–8, p. 50]

The parallels with pre-revolution Russia are striking and it is hardly surprising that revolution did break out in Germany in November 1918. Workers' councils sprang up all across the country, inspired in part by the example of the Russian soviets (and what people **thought** was going on in Russia under the Bolsheviks). A Social-Democratic government was founded, which used the Free Corps (right-wing volunteer troops) to crush the revolution from January 1919 onwards. This meant that Germany in 1919 was marked by extensive civil war and in January 1920 a state of siege was re-introduced across half the country.

This social turmoil was matched by economic turmoil. As in Russia, Germany faced massive economic problems, problems which the revolution inherited. Taking 1928 as the base year,

the index of industrial production in Germany was slightly lower in 1913, namely 98 in 1913 to 100 in 1928 and so Germany effectively lost 15 years of economic activity. In 1917, the index was 63 and by 1918 (the year of the revolution), it was 61 (i.e. industrial production had dropped by nearly 40%). In 1919, it fell again to 37, rising to 54 in 1920 and 65 in 1921. Thus, in 1919, the *"industrial production reached an all-time low"* and it *"took until the late 1920s for [food] production to recover its 1912 level ... In 1921 grain production was still ... some 30 per cent below the 1912 figure."* Coal production was 69.1% of its 1913 level in 1920, falling to 32.8% in 1923. Iron production was 33.1% in 1920 and 25.6% in 1923. Steel production likewise fell to 48.5% in 1920 and fell again to 36% in 1923. [V. R. Berghahn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 258, pp. 67–8, p. 71 and p. 259]

Significantly, one of the first acts of the Bolshevik government towards the new German Social-Democratic government was *"the offer by the Soviet authorities of two trainloads of grain for the hungry German population. It was a symbolical gesture and, in view of desperate shortages in Russia itself, a generous one."* The offer, perhaps unsurprisingly, was rejected in favour of grain from America. [E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 106]

The similarities between Germany and Russia are clear. As noted above, in Russia, the index for large scale industry fell to 77 in 1917 from 100 in 1913, falling again to 35 in 1918, 26 in 1919 and 18 in 1920. [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 86] In other words, a fall of 23% between 1913 and 1917, 54.5% between 1917 and 1918, 25.7% in 1918 and 30.8% in 1919. A similar process occurred in Germany, where the fall in production was 37.7% between 1913 and 1917, 8.2% between 1917 and 1918 and 33.9% between 1918 and 1919 (the year of revolution). While production did rise in 1920 by 45.9%, it was still around 45% less than before the war.

Thus, comparing the two countries we discover a similar picture of economic collapse. In the year the revolution started,



*justify a political clamp-down."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37, p. 80 and p. 18]

Other historians also note this context. For example, while the *"working class had decreased in size and changed in composition, ... the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power ... Lenin's arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 261] In the words of Diane Koenker, *"[i]f Lenin's perceptions of the situation were at all representative, it appears that the Bolshevik party made deurbanisation and declassing the scapegoat for its political difficulties, when the party's own policies and its unwillingness to accept changing proletarian attitudes were also to blame."* Ironically, this was not the first time that the Bolsheviks had blamed its problems on the lack of a "true" proletariat and its replacement by "petty-bourgeois" elements: *"This was the same argument used to explain the Bolsheviks' lack of success in the early months of 1917 — that the cadres of conscious proletarians were diluted by non-proletarian elements."* [*"Urbanisation and Deurbanisation in the Russian Revolution and Civil War,"* pp. 424–450, **The Journal of Modern History**, vol. 57, no. 3, p. 449 and p. 428]

It should be noted that the "declassing" argument does have a superficial validity if you accept the logic of vanguardism. After all, if you accept the premise that the party alone represents socialist consciousness and that the working class, by its own efforts, can only reach a reformist level of political conscious (at best), then any deviation in working class support for the party obviously represents a drop in class consciousness or a "declassing" of the proletariat (see section H.5.1). Thus working class protest against the party can be dismissed as evidence of "declassing" which has to be suppressed rather than what it

*workers were prominent in protest."* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, pp. 90–1]

Lenin's pessimistic analysis of 1921 is in sharp contrast to the optimistic mood of early 1920 in Bolshevik ranks produced by the defeat of the White armies. For example, writing in May 1920, Trotsky seemed oblivious to the atomisation of the Russian working class so much bemoaned later, arguing that *"in spite of political tortures, physical sufferings and horrors, the labouring masses are infinitely distinct from political decomposition, from moral collapse, or from apathy ... Today, in all branches of industry, there is going on an energetic struggle for the establishment of strict labour discipline, and for the increase of the productivity of labour. The party organisations, the trade unions, the factory and workshop administrative committees, rival each one another in this respect, with the undivided support of the working class as a whole."* Indeed, they *"concentrate their attention and will on collective problems"* (*"Thanks to a regime which, though it had inflicted great hardship upon them, has given their life a purpose and a high goal"*!). Needless to say, the party had *"the undivided support of the public opinion of the working class as a whole."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 6]

The turn around in perspective after this period did not happen by accident, independently of the working class resistance to Bolshevik rule. After all, the defeat of the Whites in early of 1920 saw the Bolsheviks take *"victory as a sign of the correctness of its ideological approach and set about the task of reconstruction on the basis of an intensification of War Communism policies with redoubled determination."* This led to *"an increase in industrial unrest in 1920,"* including *"serious strikes."* The resistance was *"becoming increasingly politicised."* Thus, the stage was set for Lenin's turn around and his talk of "declassing." In early 1921 *"Lenin argued that workers, who were no more demoralised than they were in early 1920, had become 'declassed' in order to*



production had fallen by 23% in Russia (from 1913 to 1917) and by 43% in Germany (from 1913 to 1918). Once revolution had effectively started, production fell even more. In Russia, it fell to 65% of its pre-war level in 1918, in Germany it fell to 62% of its pre-war level in 1919. Of course, in Germany revolution did not go as far as in Russia, and so production did rise somewhat in 1920 and afterwards. What is significant is that in 1923, production fell dramatically by 34% (from around 70% of its pre-war level to around 45% of that level). This economic collapse did not deter the Communists from trying to provoke a revolution in Germany that year, so suggesting that economic disruption played no role in their evaluation of the success of a revolution.

This economic chaos in Germany is never mentioned by Leninists when they discuss the "objective factors" facing the Russian Revolution. However, once these facts are taken into account, the superficiality of the typical Leninist explanation for the degeneration of the revolution becomes obvious. The very problems which, it is claimed, forced the Bolsheviks to act as they did were also rampant in Germany. If economic collapse made socialism impossible in Russia, it would surely have had the same effect in Germany? This means, given that the economic collapse in both 1918/19 and 1923 was as bad as that facing Russia in 1918 and that the Bolsheviks had started to undermine soviet and military democracy along with workers' control by spring and summer of that year (see section 3), to blame Bolshevik actions on economic collapse would mean that any German revolution would have been subject to the same authoritarianism **if** the roots of Bolshevik authoritarianism were forced by economic events rather than a product of applying a specific political ideology via state power. Few Leninists draw this obvious conclusion from their own arguments although there is no reason for them not to.

So the German Revolution was facing the same problems the Russian one was. This means that when John Rees argues that giving machinery or goods to the peasants in return for

grain instead of simply seizing it required *"revolution in Germany, or at least the revival of industry"* in Russia, he completely fails to indicate the troubles facing the German revolution (and the role Bolshevik policies and prejudices played in the collapse of industry, as noted in section H.6.2). *"Without a successful German revolution,"* he writes, *"the Bolsheviks were thrown back into a bloody civil war with only limited resources. The revolution was under siege."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 40 and p. 29] Yet given the state of the German economy at the time, it is hard to see how much aid a successful German revolution could have given and so his belief that a successful German Revolution would have mitigated Bolshevik authoritarianism seems exactly that, a belief without any real evidence to support it. As Lenin argued against the Russian left-communists in early 1918:

> *"Yes, we shall see the world revolution, but for the time being it is a very good fairy-tale ... But I ask, is it proper for a serious revolutionary to believe in fairy-tales? ... [I]f you tell the people that civil war will break out in German and also guarantee that instead of a clash with imperialism we shall have a field revolution on a world-wide scale, the people will say you are deceiving them. In doing this you will be overcoming the difficulties with which history has confronted us only in your minds, by your wishes ... You are staking everything on this card! If the revolution breaks out, everything is saved ... But if it does not turn out as we desire, if it does not achieve victory tomorrow — what then? Then the masses will say to you, you acted like gamblers — you staked everything on a fortunate turn of events that did not take place ..."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 102]



This still seems to be the position in pro-Bolshevik accounts of the Revolution and its degeneration. After the Bolshevik seizure of power, the working class as an active agent almost immediately disappears from their accounts and any mention of strikes and protests is short and fleeting, if it exists at all. This is unsurprising, as it does not bode well for maintaining the Bolshevik Myth to admit that workers were resisting the so-called "proletarian dictatorship" from the start. The notion that the working class had "disappeared" fits into this selective blindness well: why discuss the actions of a class which did not exist? Thus we have a logical circle from which reality can be excluded: the working class is "atomised" and so cannot take industrial action, evidence of industrial action need not be looked for nor mentioned because the class is "atomised."

As discussed in section H.6.3, the Russian working class **did** take extensive collective action throughout this period (from the Bolshevik seizure of power to well after the end of the civil war) and faced substantial State repression as a result. Here we provide more evidence of the existence of working class collective struggle throughout the period 1918 to 1923 but before doing so, it is necessary to place Lenin's comments on the "declassing" of the working class in context: rather than being the result of a **lack** of collective industrial direct action and solidarity, Lenin's arguments were the product of its opposite — the **rise** in collective struggle by the Russian working class. As one historian notes, *"[a]s discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin ... began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated ... workers had become 'declassed.'" "Lenin's analysis,"* he continues, *"had a superficial logic but it was based on a false conception of working-class consciousness. There is little evidence to suggest that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920 ... represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917"*. Moreover, *"an analysis of the industrial unrest in 1921 shows that long-standing*

the civil war and the problems it caused for the usurpation of power by the Bolsheviks is unconvincing. Simply put, the Bolsheviks had "substituted" itself for the proletariat from the start, from the day it seized power in the October revolution.

Second, the fact is the Russian working class was far from "atomised." Rather than being incapable of collective action, as Leninists assert, Russia's workers were more than capable of taking collective action throughout the civil war period. The problem for Leninists is, of course, that any such collective action was directed **against** the Bolshevik regime. This caused the party no end of problems for if the working class **was** the ruling class under the Bolsheviks, then who was it striking and protesting against? Emma Goldman explains the issue well:

> *"In my early period the question of strikes had puzzled me a great deal. People had told me that the least attempt of that kind was crushed and the participants sent to prison. I had not believed it, and, as in all similar things, I turned to Zorin [a Bolshevik] for information. 'Strikes under the dictatorship of the proletariat!' he had proclaimed; 'there's no such thing.' He had even upbraided me for crediting such wild and impossible tales. Against whom, indeed, should the workers strike in Soviet Russia, he argued. Against themselves? They were the masters of the country, politically as well as industrially. To be sure, there were some among the toilers who were not yet fully class-conscious and aware of their own true interests. These were sometimes disgruntled, but they were elements incited by ... self-seekers and enemies of the Revolution ... no better than out and out counter-revolutionists, and of course the Soviet authorities had to protect the country against their kind."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 2, pp. 872–3]



It seems ironic that modern-day Leninists subscribe to such *"fairy-tales"* in their attempts to excuse Lenin's regime.

The same can be said of other revolutions as well. The Paris Commune, for example, was born after a four-month-long siege *"had left the capital in a state of economic collapse. The winter had been the severest in living memory. Food and fuel had been the main problems .. . Unemployment was widespread. Thousands of demobilised soldiers wandered loose in Paris and joined in the general hunt for food, shelter and warmth. For most working men the only source of income was the 1.50 francs daily pay of the National Guard, which in effect had become a form of unemployment pay."* The city was *"near starving"* and by March it was *"in a state of economic and political crisis."* [Stewart Edwards, *"Introduction,"* **The Communards of Paris, 1871**, p. 23] Yet this economic collapse and isolation did not stop the commune from introducing and maintaining democratic forms of decision making, both political and economic. A similar process occurred during the French Revolution, where mass participation via the *"sections"* was not hindered by economic collapse. It was finally stopped by state action organised by the Jacobins to destroy popular participation and initiative (see Kropotkin's **The Great French Revolution** for details).

During the Spanish Revolution, *"overall Catalan production fell in the first year of war by 30 per cent, and in the cotton-working sector of the textile industry by twice as much. Overall unemployment (complete and partial) rose by nearly a quarter in the first year, and this despite the military mobilisation decreed in September 1936. The cost of living quadrupled in just over two years; wages ... only doubled."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 234] Markets, both internally and externally, for goods and raw materials were disrupted, not to mention the foreign blockade and the difficulties the war and revolution imposed in trying to buy products from other countries. This came on top of problems caused by the great depression of the 1930s which affected Spain along with most other countries.

Yet, libertarian socialist norms of economic and social decision making continued in spite of economic disruption. Ironically, given the subject of this discussion, it was only once the Stalinist counter-revolution got going were they fatally undermined or destroyed.

Thus economic disruption need not automatically imply authoritarian policies. And just as well, given the fact that revolution and economic disruption seem to go hand in hand.

Looking further afield, even revolutionary situations can be accompanied with economic collapse. For example, the Argentine revolt against neo-liberalism which started in 2001 took place when economy was a mess, with poverty and unemployment at disgusting levels. Four years of recession saw the poverty rate balloon from 31 to 53 percent of the population of 37 million, while unemployment climbed from 14 to 21.4 percent, according to official figures. Yet in the face of such economic problems, working class people acted collectively, forming popular assemblies and taking over workplaces (see **Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina**, edited by Marina Sitrin).

The Great Depression of the 1930s in America saw a much deeper economic contradiction. Indeed, it was as bad as that associated with revolutionary Germany and Russia after the first world war. According to Howard Zinn, after the stock market crash in 1929 *"the economy was stunned, barely moving. Over five thousand banks closed and huge numbers of businesses, unable to get money, closed too. Those that continued laid off employees and cut the wages of those who remained, again and again. Industrial production fell by 50 percent, and by 1933 perhaps 15 million (no one knew exactly) — one-forth or one-third of the labour force — were out of work."* [**A People's History of the United States**, p. 378] Specific industries were badly affected. For example, total GNP fell to 53.6% in 1933 compared to its 1929 value. The production of basic goods fell by much more. Iron and Steel saw a 59.3% decline, machin-



It is these objective factors which explain why the Bolshevik party substituted itself for the Russian working class. *"Under such conditions,"* argues Tony Cliff, *"the class base of the Bolshevik Party disintegrated — not because of some mistakes in the policies of Bolshevism, not because of one or another conception of Bolshevism regarding the role of the party and its relation to the class — but because of mightier historical factors. The working class had become declassed ... Bolshevik 'substitutionism' ... did not jump out of Lenin's head as Minerva out of Zeus's, but was born of the objective conditions of civil war in a peasant country, where a small working class, reduced in weight, became fragmented and dissolved into the peasant masses."* [**Trotsky on Substitutionism**, pp. 62–3] In other words, because the working class was so decimated the replacement of class power by party power and then by that of the bureaucracy (Stalinism) was inevitable.

Before discussing it, we should point out that this argument dates back to Lenin. For example, he argued in 1921 that the proletariat, *"owning to the war and to the desperate poverty and ruin, has become declassed, i.e. dislodged from its class groove, and had ceased to exist as a proletariat ... the proletariat has disappeared."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 33, p. 65] However, unlike his later-day followers, Lenin was sure that while it *"would be absurd and ridiculous to deny that the fact that the proletariat is declassed is a handicap"* it could still *"fulfil its task of wining and holding state power."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 412]

Anarchists do not find these arguments particularly convincing. This is for two reasons.

First, it seems incredulous to blame the civil war for the "substitution" of Bolshevik power for working class power as party power had been Lenin's stated aim in 1917 (and long before) and October saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, **not** the soviets (see section H.3.11). As we saw in section 3, the Bolsheviks started to gerrymander and disband soviets to remain in power **before** the civil war started. As such, to blame

## 5 Was the Russian working class atomised or "declassed"?

A standard Leninist explanation for the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party (and subsequent rise of Stalinism) is based on the "atomisation" or "declassing" of the proletariat. Neo-Trotskyist John Rees summarises this argument as follows:

> *"The civil war had reduced industry to rubble. The working class base of the workers' state, mobilised time and again to defeat the Whites, the rock on which Bolshevik power stood, had disintegrated. The Bolsheviks survived three years of civil war and wars in intervention, but only at the cost of reducing the working class to an atomised, individualised mass, a fraction of its former size, and no longer able to exercise the collective power that it had done in 1917 … The bureaucracy of the workers' state was left suspended in mid-air, its class base eroded and demoralised. Such conditions could not help but have an effect on the machinery of the state and organisation of the Bolshevik Party … The vice-like pressure of the civil war had transformed the state in other ways. The weight of the bureaucracy, of the army, of the Cheka, had grown enormously during the civil war. Without these institutions the October regime would have been swept away in a bloody, reactionary counter-revolution. With them the October revolution had become sclerotic and authoritarian … The power of the bureaucracy, and within the bureaucracy the power of its top layers, grew."* [*"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 65–6]



ery a 61.6% decline and non-ferrous metals and products, a 55.9% decline. Transport was also affected, with transportation equipment declining by 64.2% railroad car production dropping by 73.6% and locomotion production declining by 86.4%. Furniture production saw a decline of 57.9%. The workforce was equally affected, with unemployment reaching 25% in 1933. In Chicago 40% of the workforce was unemployed. Union membership, which had fallen from 5 million in 1920 to 3.4 million in 1929 fell to less than 3 million by 1933. [Lester V. Chandler, **America's Greatest Depression, 1929–1941**, p. 20, p. 23, p. 34, p. 45 and p. 228]

Yet in the face of this economic collapse, no Leninist proclaimed the impossibility socialism. In fact, the reverse was the case. Similar arguments could apply to, say, post-world war two Europe, when economic collapse and war damage did not stop Trotskyists looking forward to, and seeking, revolutions there. Nor did the massive economic collapse that occurred after the fall of Stalinism in Russia in the early 1990s deter Leninist calls for revolution. Indeed, you can rest assured that any drop in economic activity, no matter how large or small, will be accompanied by Leninist articles arguing for the immediate introduction of socialism.

And this was the case in 1917 as well, when economic crisis had been a fact of Russian life throughout the year. Lenin, for example, argued at the end of September that *"[u]navoidable catastrophe is threatening Russia … The danger of a great catastrophe and of famine is imminent … Six months of revolution have elapsed. The catastrophe is even closer. Unemployment has assumed a mass scale. To think that there is a shortage of goods in the country"*. [*"The Threatening Catastrophe and how to Fight It"*, **Collected Works**, vol. 25, p. 327] This did not stop him calling for revolution and seizing power, arguing that only a genuine socialist government — a Bolshevik one, naturally — could implement the policies needed to solve the crisis. Nor did this crisis stop the creation of democratic working class organ-

isations, such as soviets, trade unions and factory committees being formed. It did not stop mass collective action to combat those difficulties. It appears, therefore, that while the economic crisis of 1917 did not stop the development of socialist tendencies to combat it, the seizure of power by a socialist party did.

Given that no Leninist has argued that a revolution could not nor should not take place in Russia in 1917, in Germany after the First World War, in the USA during the darkest months of the Great Depression, nor in Europe after the devastation of the Second World War, the argument that the grim economic conditions facing Bolshevik Russia made socialist democracy impossible seem weak. By arguing that, for example, Germany in 1918 to 1921 could create a viable socialist revolution in economic conditions just as bad as those facing Soviet Russia, the reasons why the Bolsheviks created a party dictatorship must be looked for elsewhere. Moreover, **if** the pro-Bolshevik argument Rees, Cliff and others expound **is** correct, then the German Revolution would have been subject to the same authoritarianism as befell the Bolshevik one simply because it was facing a similar economic crisis.

In short, if these arguments are taken seriously them you would have to conclude that, for Leninists, economic collapse only makes socialism impossible once **they** are in power. Which is hardly convincing, or inspiring.

Finally, the situation is not as bleak as these Leninist argument would suggest. Yes, revolutions and economic disruption do go together but this does not make revolution undesirable or impossible. It means that revolutionaries need to be aware of these predictable — and predicted, at least by anarchists! — developments and be aware of the solutions can only be found in decentralisation, federalism and self-management. As Kropotkin put it:

> *"The first months of emancipation will inevitably increase consumption of goods and production will diminish. And, furthermore, any country achieving social revolution will be surrounded by a ring of neighbours either unfriendly or actually enemies ... The demands upon products will increase while production decreases, and finally famine will come. There is only one way of avoiding it. We should understand that as soon as a revolutionary movement begins in any country the only possible way out will consist in the workingmen [and women] and peasants from the beginning taking the whole national economy into their hands and organising it themselves ... But they will not be convinced of this necessity except when all responsibility for national economy, today in the hands of a multitude of ministers and committees, is presented in a simple form to each village and city, in every factory and shop, as their own affair, and when they understand that they must direct it themselves."* [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, pp. 77–8]

Anarchists have always recognised that a revolution would face problems and difficult "objective factors" and has developed our ideas accordingly. We argue that to blame "objective factors" for the failure of the Russian Revolution simply shows that believing in fairy-tales is sadly far too common on the "serious" Leninist "revolutionary" left. As we discuss in the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", Marxist ideas were important and decisive in developments. In other words, economic disruption need not undermine a revolution if libertarian principles are applied. In Russia, this inevitable economic distruption was made worse by Bolshevik ideology due to the policies it inspired and the centralised structures it created.

Thus Lenin's work is deeply ambiguous. He is confusing popular self-management with a state structure. Anarchists argue that states, by their very nature, are based on concentrated, centralised, alienated power in the hands of a few. Thus Lenin's *"workers' state"* is just the same as any other state, namely rule by a few over the many. This is confirmed when Lenin argues that *"[u]nder socialism,* ***all*** *will take part in the work of government in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing."* In fact, once the *"overwhelming majority"* have *"learned to administer the state* ***themselves****, have taken this business into their own hands ... the need for government begins to disappear. The more complete democracy becomes, the nearer the moment approaches when it becomes unnecessary. The more democratic the 'state' of the armed workers — which is 'no longer a state in the proper sense of the word' — becomes, the more rapidly does* ***the state*** *begin to wither away."* Moreover, *"[u]ntil the 'higher' phase of communism arrives, the Socialists demand the* ***strictest*** *control, by society* ***and by the state,*** *of the amount of labour and of consumption."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361, p. 349 and p. 345]

Clearly, the "proletarian" state is **not** based on direct, mass, participation by the population but, in fact, on giving power to a few representatives. It is **not** identical with *"society,"* i.e. the armed, self-organised people. Rather than look to the popular assemblies of the French revolution, Lenin, like the bourgeoisie, looked to representative structures — structures designed to combat working class power and influence. (at one point Lenin states that *"for a certain time not only bourgeois right, but even the bourgeois state remains under communism, without the bourgeoisie!"* This was because *"bourgeois right in regard to the distribution of articles of* ***consumption*** *inevitably presupposes the existence of the* ***bourgeois state,*** *for right is nothing without an apparatus capable of* ***enforcing*** *the observance of the standards of right."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 346]).



modern-day Leninists argue, be explained by the "atomisation" of the working class during the civil war then the Bolshevik regime and its repression should be credited with ensuring this happened.

Unsurprisingly, as Emma Goldman recounted, *"counter-revolutionists, and bandits in Soviet penal institutions were a negligible minority. The bulk of the prison population consisted of social heretics who were guilty of the cardinal sin against the Communist Church. For no offence was considered more heinous than to entertain political views in opposition to the party, and to voice any protest against the evils and crimes of Bolshevism. I found that by far the greatest number were political prisoners, as well as peasants and workers guilty of demanding better treatment and conditions."* [**Living My Life**, vol. 2, p. 873] Indeed, of the 17,000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40,913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Other rebel toilers were not so lucky:

> *"It is not possible to estimate with any degree of accuracy how many workers were shot by the Cheka during 1918–1921 for participation in labour protest. However, an examination of individual cases suggests that shootings were employed to inspire terror and were not simply used in the occasional extreme case."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

After Kronstadt and the various strike waves and protests of that time, Bolshevik repression of labour unrest continued. The economic crisis of 1921 which accompanied the introduction

of the NEP saw unemployment rise while workplaces *"that had been prominent in unrest were particularly hit by … purges … The effect on the willingness of workers to support opposition parties was predictable."* Yet *"[d]espite the heavy toll of redundancies, the ability to organise strikes did not disappear. Strike statistics for 1921 continue to provide only a very rough indicator of the true scale of industrial unrest and appear not to include the first half of the year."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 182–183] For example, in early March, *"long strikes"* hit the textile towns around Moscow. At the Glukhovskaia mills 5000 workers struck for 5 days, 1000 at a nearby factory for 2 days and 4000 at the Voskresenskaia mills for 6 days. In May, 1921, workers in the city of Moscow reacted to supply problems *"with a wave of strikes. Party officials reckoned that in a 24-day period in May there were stoppages at 66 large enterprises."* These included a sit-down strike at one of Moscow's largest plants, while *"workers at engineering factories in Krasnopresnia followed suit, and Cheka agents reported 'dissent, culminating in strikes and occupation' in Bauman."* August 1922 saw 19,000 workers strike in textile mills in Moscow region for several days. Tram workers also struck that year, while teachers *"organised strikes and mass meetings"*. Workers usually elected delegates to negotiate with their trade unions as well as their bosses as both were Communist Party members. Strike organisers, needless to say, were sacked. [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 82, pp. 111–2 and p. 157]

The spring of 1922 likewise saw Soviet Russia *"hit by a new strike wave"* and the strikes *"continued to reflect enterprise traditions."* That year saw 538 strikes with 197,022 participants recorded. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 183 and p. 184] The following year saw more stoppages and in *"July 1923 more than 100 enterprises employing a total of some 50,000 people were on strike. In August figures totalled some 140 enterprises and 80,00 workers. In September and November the strike wave continued unabated."* As in the civil war, the managers shut down plants, fired the workers and rehired them on an individual basis. In



Combine this with an awareness that bureaucracy must continue to exist in the "proletarian" state then we have the ideological preconditions for dictatorship **over** the proletariat. *"There can be no thought,"* asserted Lenin, *"of destroying officialdom immediately everywhere, completely. That is utopia. But to* ***smash*** *the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will enable all officialdom to be gradually abolished is* ***not*** *utopia."* In other words, Lenin expected *"the gradual 'withering away' of all bureaucracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 306 and p. 307]

Yet why expect a "new" bureaucracy to be as easy to control as the old one? Regular election to posts does not undermine the institutional links, pressures and powers a centralised "officialdom" will generate around itself, even a so-called "proletarian" one. Significantly, Lenin justified this defence of temporary state bureaucracy by the kind of straw man argument against anarchism *"State and Revolution"* is riddled with. *"We are not utopians,"* asserted Lenin, *"we do not indulge in 'dreams' of dispensing* ***at once*** *with all administration, with all subordination: these anarchist dreams … are totally alien to Marxism, and, as a matter of fact, serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until human nature has changed. No, we want the socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and 'managers.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 307] Yet anarchists do not wish to *"dispense"* with *"all administration,"* rather we wish to replace government **by** administration, hierarchical positions (*"subordination"*) with cooperative organisation. Equally, we see the revolution as a process in which *"human nature"* is changed by the struggle itself so that working class people become capable of organising itself and society without bosses, bureaucrats and politicians. If Lenin says that socialism *"cannot dispense"* with the hierarchical structures required by class society why should we expect the same kinds of structures and social relationships to have different ends just because *"red"* managers are in power?

*and objectives which are alien to them."* It was for this reason *"we declare ourselves the enemies of every government and state every state power ... the people can only be happy and free when they create their own life, organising themselves from below upwards."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 136]

The *"workers' state"* proved no exception to that generalisation. The roots of the problem, which expressed itself from the start during the Russian revolution, was the fatal confusion of the state with organs of popular self-management. Lenin argued in *"State and Revolution"* that, on the one hand, *"the armed proletariat itself shall* ***become the government****"* while, on the other, that *"[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions."* If, as Lenin asserts, democracy *"means equality"* he has reintroduced inequality into the "proletarian" state as the representatives have, by definition, more power than those who elected them. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 363, p. 306 and p. 346] Yet, as noted in section H.1.2, representative bodies necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and do not (and cannot) mean that the working class **as a class** can manage society. Moreover, such bodies ensure that popular power can be usurped without difficulty by a minority. After all, a minority already **does** hold power.

True equality implies the abolition of the state and its replacement by a federation of self-managed communes. The state, as anarchists have long stressed, signifies a power **above** society, a concentration of power into a few hands. Lenin, ironically, quotes Engels on the state being marked by *"the establishment of a* ***public power,*** *which is no longer directly identical with the population organising itself as an armed power."* [quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 275] As Lenin supported **representative** structures rather than one based on elected, mandated and recallable **delegates** then he has created a *"public power"* no longer identical with the population.



this way, trouble-makers were dismissed and "order" restored. The *"pattern of workers' action and Bolshevik reaction played itself out frequently in dozens of other strikes. The Bolsheviks acted with the explicit purpose of rooting out the possibility of further protest. They tried to condition workers that labour protest was futile."* The GPU (the renamed Cheka) *"used force to disperse workers demonstrating with the arrested strike leaders."* [Vladimir Brovkin, **Russia After Lenin**, p. 174, pp. 174–5 and p. 175]

In Moscow, *"[b]etween 1921 and 1926, all branches of industry and transport ... experienced wildcat strikes or other spontaneous labour disturbances. Strike waves peaked in the winter of 1920–21 ... and in the summer and fall of 1922 and 1923 ... during July-December 1922, for example, 65 strikes and 209 other industrial disturbances were recorded in Moscow's state enterprises."* Metalworkers were arguably the most active sector at this time while *"a number of large strikes"* took place in the textile industry (where *"strikes were sometimes co-ordinated by spontaneously organised strike committees or 'parallel' factory committees"*). And in spite of repression, *"politicisation continued to characterise many labour struggles"* and, as before, *"spontaneous labour activism hindered not only the party's economic program but also the political and social stabilisation of the factories."* [John B. Hatch, **Labour Conflict in Moscow, 1921–1925**, p. 62, p. 63, p. 65, pp. 66–7 and p. 67]

We even find one of the leading proponents of "atomised" excuse, neo-Trotskyist Tony Cliff, noting against Stalinism that *"in 1922, 192,000 workers went on strike in state-owned enterprises; in 1923 the number was 165,000; in 1924, 43,000; in 1925, 34,000; in 1926, 32,900; in 1927, 20,100; in the first half of 1928, 8,900. In 1922 the number of workers involved in labour conflicts was three and a half million, and in 1923, 1,592,800."* He did not ponder how a class he claimed elsewhere had become atomised, individualised, disintegrated and declassed could take such widescale collective industrial action — nor did he

mention the use of State repression under Lenin against such action, instead falsely asserting that before the rise of Stalinism it *"was taken for granted that strikes were not to be suppressed by the state."* [**State Capitalism in Russia**, p. 28] Ultimately, if these strikes between 1922 and 1924 showed a social basis existed to combat the rising Stalinist bureaucracy, surely the strikes between 1918 and 1921 likewise show a social basis existed to combat the existing Leninist bureaucracy?

As well as repression of strike waves across the country, the end of the civil war also saw the Bolsheviks finally destroy what was left of non-Bolshevik trade unionism. In Moscow, this took place against fierce resistance of the union members. As one historian concludes:

> *"Reflecting on the determined struggle mounted by printers, bakers and chemical workers in Moscow during 1920–1, in spite of appalling economic conditions, being represented by organisations weakened by constant repression ... to retain their independent labour organisations it is difficult not to feel that the social basis for a political alternative existed."* [Jonathan Aves, *"The Demise of Non-Bolshevik Trade Unionism in Moscow: 1920–21"*, pp. 101-33, **Revolutionary Russia**, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 130]

The also Bolsheviks dispersed provincial trade unions conferences in Vologda and Vitebsk in 1921 *"because they had anti-communist majorities."* [Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 176] At the All-Russian Congress of Metalworkers' Union in May, the delegates voted down the party-list of recommended candidates for union leadership. The Central Committee of the Party *"disregarded every one of the votes and appointed a Metalworkers' Committee of its own. So much for 'elected and revocable delegates'. Elected by the union rank and file and revocable by the Party leadership!"* [Brinton, **The**



disempower the many while, at the same time, taking about extending working class "power."

The roots of this confusion can be found at the root of Marxism. As discussed in section H.3.7, Marx and Engels had left a somewhat contradictory inheritance on the nature and role of the state. Unlike anarchists, who clearly argued that only confusion would arise by calling the organs of popular self-management required by a revolution a *"state,"* the founders of Marxism confused two radically different ideas. On the one hand, there is the idea of a radical and participatory democracy (as per the model of the Paris Commune). On the other, there is a centralised body with a government in charge (as per the model of the democratic state). By using the term *"state"* to cover these two radically different concepts, it allowed the Bolsheviks to confuse party power with popular power and, moreover, replace the latter by the former without affecting the so-called "proletarian" nature of the state. The confusion of popular organs of self-management with a state ensured that these organs **were** submerged by state structures and top-down rule.

By confusing the state (delegated power, necessarily concentrated in the hands of a few) with the organs of popular self-management Marxism opened up the possibility of a *"workers' state"* which is simply the rule of a few party leaders over the masses. The *"truth of the matter,"* wrote Emma Goldman, *"is that the Russian people have been **locked out** and that the Bolshevik State — even as the bourgeois industrial master — uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolsheviki this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan ... Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlix] In this, she simply saw in practice that which Bakunin had predicted would happen. For Bakunin, like all anarchists, *"every state power, every government, by its nature and by its position stands outside the people and above them, and must invariably try to subject them to rules*

favoured the former over the latter. As such, we would expect centralised power (i.e. a state) to be the means by which a minority class seized power **over** the masses and never the means by which the majority managed society themselves. It was for this reason that anarchists refuse to confuse a federation of self-managed organisations with a state:

> *"The reader knows by now that the anarchists refused to use the term 'State' even for a transitional situation. The gap between authoritarians and libertarians has not always been very wide on this score. In the First International the collectivists, whose spokesman was Bakunin, allowed the terms 'regenerate State,' 'new and revolutionary State,' or even 'socialist State' to be accepted as synonyms for 'social collective.' The anarchists soon saw, however, that it was rather dangerous for them to use the same word as the authoritarians while giving it a quite different meaning. They felt that a new concept called for a new word and that the use of the old term could be dangerously ambiguous; so they ceased to give the name 'State' to the social collective of the future."* [Daniel Guerin, **Anarchism**, pp. 60–1]

This is no mere semantics. The essence of statism is the removal of powers that should belong to the community as whole (though they may for reasons of efficiency delegate their actual implementation to elected, mandated and recallable committees) into the hands of a tiny minority who claim to act on our behalf and in our interests but who are not under our direct control. In other words it continues the division into rulers and ruled. Any confusion between two such radically different forms of organisation can only have a seriously negative effect on the development of any revolution. At its most basic, it allows those in power to develop structures and practices which



**Bolsheviks and Workers Control**, p. 83] Fear of arrest (and worse!) was widespread and so, for example, a Moscow Metalworkers' Union conference in early February 1921 saw the first speakers calling *"for the personal safety of the delegates to be guaranteed"* before criticisms would be aired. [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 244] Such an atmosphere is hardly supportive for the encouragement of collective organisation!

Other forms of workers' organisation were also destroyed. For example, in his 1920 diatribe against Left-wing Communism, Lenin pointed to *"non-Party workers' and peasants' conferences"* and Soviet Congresses as means by which the party secured its rule. Yet, **if** the congresses of soviets were *"**democratic** institutions, the like of which even the best democratic republics of the bourgeois have never known"*, the Bolsheviks would have no need to *"support, develop and extend"* non-Party conferences *"to be able to observe the temper of the masses, come closer to them, meet their requirements, promote the best among them to state posts"*. [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 573] How the Bolsheviks met *"their requirements"* is extremely significant — they disbanded them, just as they had with soviets with non-Bolshevik majorities in 1918. This was because *"[d]uring the disturbances"* of late 1920, *"they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies."* Their frequency was decreased and they *"were discontinued soon afterward."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 203]

In the soviets themselves, workers turned to non-partyism, with non-party groups winning majorities in soviet delegates from industrial workers' constituencies in many places. This was the case in Moscow, where Bolshevik support among *"industrial workers collapsed"* in favour of non-party people. Due to support among the state bureaucracy and the usual packing of the soviet with representatives from Bolshevik controlled organisations, the party had, in spite of this, a massive majority. Thus the Moscow soviet elections of April-May 1921 *"provided an opportunity to revive working-class participation. The Bolshe-*

*viks turned it down.*" [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 97–100 and p. 23] Indeed, one Moscow Communist leader stated that these soviet elections had seen *"a high level of activity by the masses and a striving to be in power themselves."* [quoted by Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

In short, an *"examination of industrial unrest after the Bolshevik seizure of power ... shows that the Revolution had brought to the surface resilient traditions of organisation in society and had released tremendous forces in favour of greater popular participation ... The survival of the popular movement through the political repression and economic devastation of the Civil War testifies to its strength."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 186] The idea that the Russian working class was incapable of collective struggle is hard to defend given this series of struggles (and state repression). The class struggle in Bolshevik Russia did not stop, it continued except the ruling class had changed. All the popular energy and organisation this expressed, which could have been used to combat the problems facing the revolution and create the foundations of a genuine socialist society, were wasted in fighting the Bolshevik regime. Ultimately, the *"sustained, though ultimately futile, attempts to revive an autonomous workers' movement, especially in mid-1918 and from late 1920, failed owing to repression."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Another historian notes that *"immediately after the civil war"* there was *"a revival of working class collective action that culminated in February-March 1921 in a widespread strike movement and the revolt at the Kronstadt naval base."* As such, the position expounded by Rees and other Leninists *"is so one-sided as to be misleading."* [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 7 and p. 23]

So, looking at the Moscow Tram strike of August 1920 as an example, in addition to economic demands, strikers called for a general meeting of all depots. This was *"significant: here the workers' movement was trying to get on the first rung of the ladder of organisation, and being knocked off by the Bolsheviks."* The party *"responded to the strike in such a way as to under-*



*command of the State engineers who will constitute the new privileged scientific-political class."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 289] As Bolshevism proved, there **was** always an alternative to socialism or a reversion to capitalism, in this case **state** capitalism.

So libertarians have long been aware that actually existing capitalism could be replaced by another form of class society. As the experience of Bolshevik tyranny proves beyond doubt, this perspective is the correct one. And that perspective ensured that during the Russian Revolution the Makhnovists **had** to encourage free soviets and workers' self-management, freedom of speech and organisation in order for the revolution to remain socialist (see the appendix on "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"). In contrast, the Bolsheviks implemented party dictatorship, nationalisation and one-man management while proclaiming this had something to do with socialism. Little wonder Trotsky had such difficulties understanding the obvious truth that Stalinism has **nothing** to do with socialism.

## 2 Why did the Marxist theory of the state undermine working class power?

As discussed in section H.3.7, anarchists and Marxists have fundamentally different definitions of what constitutes a state. These different definitions resulted, in practice, to the Bolsheviks undermining **real** working class power during the Russian Revolution in favour of an abstract "power" which served as little more than a fig-leaf for Bolshevik power.

For anarchists, the state is marked by centralised power in the hands of a few. The state, we argue, is designed to ensure minority rule and, consequently, cannot be used by the majority to manage their own affairs. Every bourgeois revolution, moreover, has been marked by a conflict between centralised power and popular power and, unsurprisingly, the bourgeois

ference to working class self-management. As Samuel Farber notes that *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44] There was no need, for such means had no impact on achieving the ends Bolshevik power had set itself. As we discuss in section 6, such questions of meaningful working class participation in the workplace or the soviets were considered by the likes of Trotsky as fundamentally irrelevant to whether Bolshevik Russia was socialist or whether the working class was the ruling class or not, incredible as it may seem.

So if we accept Marx's basic schema, then we simply have to conclude that what means we use are, ultimately, irrelevant as there is only one outcome. As long as property is nationalised and a non-capitalist party holds state power, then the basic socialist nature of the regime automatically flows. This was, of course, Trotsky's argument with regard to Stalinist Russia and why he defended it against those who recognised that it was a new form of class society. Yet it is precisely the rise of Stalinism out of the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks which exposes the limitations in the Marxist schema of historical development.

Simply put, there is no guarantee that getting rid of capitalism will result in a decent society. As anarchists like Bakunin argued against Marx, it is possible to get rid of capitalism while not creating socialism, if we understand by that term a free, classless society of equals. Rather, a Marxist revolution would *"concentrate all the powers of government in strong hands, because the very fact that the people are ignorant necessitates strong, solicitous care by the government. [It] will create a single State bank, concentrating in its hands all the commercial, industrial, agricultural, and even scientific production; and they will divide the mass of people into two armies — industrial and agricultural armies under the direct*



*mine workers' organisation and consciousness"* and *"throttl[ed] independent action"* by *"repression of the strike by means reminiscent of tsarism."* The Bolshevik's *"dismissive rejection"* of the demand for a city-wide meeting *"spoke volumes about their hostility to the development of the workers' movement, and landed a blow at the type of collective democracy that might have better able to confront supply problems."* This, along with the other strikes that took place, showed that *"the workers' movement in Moscow was, despite its numerical weakness and the burdens of civil war, engaged with political as well as industrial issues … the working class was far from non-existent, and when, in 1921, it began to resuscitate soviet democracy, the party's decision to make the Moscow soviet its 'creature' was not effect but cause."* [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32, p. 33, p. 37 and p. 23]

When such things happen, we can conclude that Bolshevik desire to remain in power had a significant impact on whether workers were able to exercise collective power or not. As Pirani concludes:

> *"one of the most important choices the Bolsheviks made … was to turn their backs on forms of collective, participatory democracy that workers briefly attempted to revive [after the civil war] … [Available evidence] challenges the notion … that political power was forced on the Bolsheviks because the working class was so weakened by the civil war that it was incapable of wielding it. In reality, non-party workers were willing and able to participate in political processes, but in the Moscow soviet and elsewhere, were pushed out of them by the Bolsheviks. The party's vanguardism, i.e. its conviction that it had the right, and the duty, to make political decisions on the workers' behalf, was now reinforced by its control of the state apparatus. The working class was politically expropriated: power was pro-*

*gressively concentrated in the party, specifically in the party elite."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 4]

Given this collective rebellion all across the industrial centres of Russia before, during and after the Civil War, it hard to take seriously claims that Bolshevik authoritarianism was the product of an "atomisation" or "declassing" of the working class or that it had ceased to exist in any meaningful sense. Clearly it existed and was capable of collective action and organisation — until it was repressed by the Bolsheviks and even then it keep returning. This implies that a key factor in rise of Bolshevik authoritarianism was political — the simple fact that the workers would not vote Bolshevik in free soviet and union elections and so they were not allowed to. As one Soviet Historian put it, *"taking the account of the mood of the workers, the demand for free elections to the soviets [raised in early 1921] meant the implementation in practice of the infamous slogan of soviets without communists,"* although there is little evidence that the strikers actually raised that *"infamous"* slogan. [quoted by Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] It must also be noted that Bolshevik orthodoxy at the time stressed, and had done since at least early 1919, the necessity of Party dictatorship **over** the workers (see section H.1.2 for details).

Nor can it be said that this struggle can be blamed on "declassed" elements within the working class itself. In her study of this question, Diane Koenker notes that 90% of the change in the number of workers in Moscow *"is accounted for by men. Working women did not leave the city,"* their numbers dropping from 90,000 in 1918 to 80,000 in 1920. Why these 80,000 women workers should be denied a say in their own revolution is not clear, given the arguments of the pro-Bolshevik left. After all, the same workers remained in roughly the same numbers. Looking at the male worker population, their numbers fell from 215,000 to 124,000 during the same period. However, *"the skilled workers whose class consciousness and revolutionary zeal*



the mindset that whatever they did there was only two possibilities: (their version of) socialism or the restoration of capitalism. However, this is based on a false premise. Is it valid to assume that there is only one possible post-capitalist future, one that, by definition, is classless? If so, then any action or structure could be utilised to fight reaction as after victory there can be only one outcome. However, if there is more that one post-capitalist future then the question of means becomes decisive. If we assume just two possible post-capitalist futures, one based on self-management and without classes and another with economic, social and political power centralised in a few hands, then the means used in a revolution become decisive in determining which possibility will become reality.

If we accept the Marxist theory and assume only one possible post-capitalist system, then all that is required of revolutionary anti-capitalist movements is that they only need to overthrow capitalism and they will wind up where they wish to arrive as there is no other possible outcome. But if the answer no, then in order to wind up where we wish to arrive, we have to not only overthrow capitalism, we have use means that will push us toward the desired future society. As such, **means** become the key and they cannot be ignored or downplayed in favour of the ends — particularly as these ends will never be reached if the appropriate means are not used.

This is no abstract metaphysical or ideological/theoretical point. The impact of this issue can be seen from the practice of Bolshevism in power. For Lenin and Trotsky, **any** and **all** means could and were used in pursuit of their ends. They simply could not see how the means used shaped the ends reached. Ultimately, there was only two possibilities — socialism (by definition classless) or a return to capitalism.

Once we see that because of their flawed perspective on what comes after capitalism we understand why, for the Bolsheviks, the means used and institutions created were meaningless. We can see one of the roots for Bolshevik indif-

*begins an era of social revolution."* [**A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy**, pp. 20–1]

Thus slavery was replaced by feudalism, feudalism with capitalism. For Marx, the *"bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production"* and *"the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] In other words, after capitalism there would be socialism:

> *"The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."* [Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 929]

Socialism replaces capitalism once the "***proletariat seized political power and turns the means of production into state property."*** By so doing, *"it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state."* [Engels, **The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 713]

Most Marxists subscribe to this schema of historical progress. For example, Tony Cliff noted that, *"[f]or Lenin, whose Marxism was never mechanical or fatalistic, the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a* ***transition period*** *meant that there could be* ***two*** *outcomes of this phase: going forward to socialism, or backsliding to capitalism. The policy of the party would tip the balance."* [**Revolution Besieged**, p. 364]

Marxists, like Marx, argue that socialism was the society which would come after capitalism. Thus the Bolsheviks had



*had helped win the October revolution did not entirely disappear, and the women who remained were likely to be family members of these veterans of 1917."* It was *"the loss of young activists rather than all skilled and class conscious urban workers that caused the level of Bolshevik support to decline during the civil war."* Indeed *"the workers who remained in the city were among the most urbanised elements."* In summary, *"the deurbanisation of those years represented a change in quantity but not entirely in quality in the cities. The proletariat declined in the city, but it did not wither away … a core of the city's working class remained."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 440, p. 442, p. 447 and p. 449] As Russian anarchist Ida Mett argued decades before in relation to the strikes in early 1921 that inspired the Kronstadt sailor rebellion:

> *"The population was drifting away from the capital. All who had relatives in the country had rejoined them. The authentic proletariat remained till the end, having the most slender connections with the countryside.*
>
> *"This fact must be emphasised, in order to nail the official lies seeking to attribute the Petrograd strikes that were soon to break out to peasant elements, 'insufficiently steeled in proletarian ideas.' The real situation was the very opposite. A few workers were seeking refuge in the countryside. The bulk remained. There was certainly no exodus of peasants into the starving towns! … It was the famous Petrograd proletariat, the proletariat which had played such a leading role in both previous revolutions, that was finally to resort to the classical weapon of the class struggle: the strike."* [**The Kronstadt Uprising**, p. 36]

In terms of struggle, links between the events in 1917 and those during the civil war also exist. For example Jonathan

Aves writes that there were *"distinct elements of continuity between the industrial unrest in 1920 and 1917. This is not surprising since the form of industrial unrest in 1920, as in the pre-revolutionary period and in 1917, was closely bound up with enterprise traditions and shop-floor sub-cultures. The size of the Russian industrial workforce had declined steeply during the Civil War but where enterprises stayed open ... their traditions of industrial unrest in 1920 shows that such sub-cultures were still capable of providing the leaders and shared values on which resistance to labour policies based on coercion and Communist Party enthusiasm could be organised. As might be anticipated, the leaders of unrest were often to be found amongst the skilled male workers who enjoyed positions of authority in the informal shop-floor hierarchies."* Moreover, *"despite intense repression, small groups of politicised activists were also important in initiating protest and some enterprises developed traditions of opposition to the communists."* Looking at the strike wave of early 1921 in Petrograd, the *"strongest reason for accepting the idea that it was established workers who were behind the **volynka** [i.e. the strike wave] is the form and course of protest. Traditions of protest reaching back through the spring of 1918 to 1917 and beyond were an important factor in the organisation of the **volynka.** ... There was also a degree of organisation ... which belies the impression of a spontaneous outburst."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 39 and p. 126]

Clearly, then, the idea that the Russian working class was atomised or declassed cannot be defended given this series of struggles. As noted, the notion that the workers were "declassed" was used to justify state repression of collective working class struggle and defend the necessity of party dictatorship in face of it. Emma Goldman was right to later note how the *"thought oppressed me that what [the Bolsheviks] called 'defence of the Revolution' was really only the defence of [their] party in power."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 57] The class struggle in Bolshevik Russia did not stop, it con-



Nor can it be a case of keeping Bolshevism while getting rid of some of these positions. Most go to the heart of Bolshevism and could only be eliminated by eliminating what makes Leninism Leninist. Thus some Leninists now pay lip service to workers' control of production and recognise that the Bolsheviks saw the form of property (i.e., whether private or state owned) as being far more important that workers' management of production. Yet revising Bolshevism to take into account this flaw means little unless the others are also revised. Simply put, workers' management of production would have little impact in a highly centralised state ruled over by a equally centralised vanguard party. Self-management in production or society could not co-exist with a state and party power nor with *"centralised"* economic decision making based on nationalised property. In a nutshell, the only way Bolshevism could result in a genuine socialist society is if it stopped being Bolshevik!

## 1 How did the Marxist historical materialism affect Bolshevism?

As is well known, Marx argued that history progressed through distinct stages. After his death, this *"materialist conception of history"* became known as *"historical materialism."* The basic idea of this is that the *"totality of [the] relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness ... At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms — with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then*

do this they are like politicians who, when faced with people questioning the results of their policies, ask them to look at their election manifesto rather than what they have done when in power. As we discuss in section 4 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" Lenin's book was never applied in practice. From the very first day, the Bolsheviks ignored it. After 6 months **none** of its keys ideas had been applied. Indeed, in all cases the exact opposite had been imposed. As such, to blame (say) the civil war for the reality of "Bolshevik in power" (as Leninists do) seems without substance. Simply put, **State and Revolution** is no guide to what Bolshevism "really" stood for. Neither is their position **before** seizing power if the realities of their chosen methods (i.e. seizing state power) quickly changed their perspective, practice **and** ideology (i.e. shaped the desired ends). Assuming of course that most of their post-October policies were radically different from their pre-October ones, which (as we indicate here) they were not.

With that said, what do anarchists consider the key aspects of Bolshevik ideology which helped to ensure the defeat of the Russian Revolution and had, long before the civil war started, had started its degeneration into tyranny? These factors are many and so we will, by necessity, concrete on the key ones. These are believe in centralisation, the confusion of party power with popular power, the Marxist theory of the state, the negative influence of Engels' infamous essay *"On Authority"*, the equation of nationalisation and state capitalism with socialism, the lack of awareness that working class economic power was a key factor in socialism, the notion that "big" was automatically "more efficient," the identification of class consciousness with supporting the party, how the vanguard party organises itself and, lastly, the underlying assumptions that vanguardism is based on.

Each one of these factors had a negative impact on the development of the revolution, combined they were devastating.



tinued except the ruling class had changed from bourgeoisie to Bolshevik dictatorship:

> *"There is another objection to my criticism on the part of the Communists. Russia is on strike, they say, and it is unethical for a revolutionist to side against the workers when they are striking against their masters. That is pure demagoguery practised by the Bolsheviki to silence criticism.*
>
> *"It is not true that the Russian people are on strike. On the contrary, the truth of the matter is that the Russian people have been* ***locked out*** *and that the Bolshevik State — even as the bourgeois industrial master — uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolsheviki this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan: thus they have succeeded in blinding the masses. Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. xlix]

All of which, incidentally, answers Leninist Brian Bambery's rhetorical question: *"why would the most militant working class in the world, within which there was a powerful cocktail of revolutionary ideas, and which had already made two revolutions (in 1905 and in February 1917), allow a handful of people to seize power behind its back in October 1917?"* [*"Leninism in the 21st Century"*, **Socialist Review**, no. 248, January 2001] Once the Russian workers realised that a handful of people **had** seized power they **did** protest the usurpation of their power and rights by the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks repressed them.

Yes, as Lenin argued, *"it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence."* In 1917 he was talking of the *"freedom of the oppressors,*

*the exploiters, the capitalists"* but it equally applies to the working class — if the so-called *"dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class"* is suppressing the working class itself then there can be *"no freedom and no democracy"* for the working class and so it **cannot** be the ruling class. Rather, it is the self-proclaimed *"vanguard"* party which is in fact the ruling class and just like *"under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the minority."* Thus the so-called "workers state" became, as anarchists had long predicted, like any other State, *"a power which arose from society but places itself above it and alienates itself more and more from it"* and *"consists of special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc., at their command"* [*"The State and Revolution,"* **The Lenin Anthology**, p. 373, p. 374, p. 316] As can be seen, the Bolshevik regime was most definitely a State… **in the normal sense of the term.** That it prefixed the word "Red" onto these instruments of minority rule matters little, as can be seen from the repression of labour protest under Lenin from early 1918 onwards.

All in all, these strikes and subsequent repression confirms Bakunin's prescient critique of Marxism (see section H.1.1). Based on the anarchist analysis of the State as *"minority government, from the top downward, of a vast quantity of men,"* he correctly predicted that even the so-called workers' State *"cannot be sure of its own self-preservation without an armed force to defend it against its own* ***internal enemies****, against the discontent of its people."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 265] Yes, of course, workers viewed the Bolshevik regime more favourably than the possibility of a White victory — but that is a very low bar indeed: socialism, surely, should aspire to be somewhat more appealing than the restoration of Tsarism!



an advanced western country would not require the barbaric means used by Stalinism to industrialise Russia.

This section of the FAQ will, therefore, indicate the key areas of Bolshevik ideology which, when applied, will undermine any revolution as they did the Russian. As such, it is all fine and well for Trotskyist Max Shachtman (like so many others) to argue that the Bolsheviks had *"convert[ed] the expediencies and necessities of the civil war period into virtues and principles which had never been part of their original program."* Looking at this *"original program"* we can see elements of what was latter to be applied. Rather than express a divergence it could be argued that it was this that undermined the more democratic aspects of their original program. In other words, perhaps the use of state power and economic nationalisation came into conflict with, and finally destroyed, the original proclaimed socialist principles? And, perhaps, the *"socialist"* vision of Bolshevism was so deeply flawed that even attempting to apply it destroyed the aspirations for liberty, equality and solidarity that inspired it? For, after all, as we indicated in section H.3.1, the anarchist and mainstream Marxist visions of socialism and how to get there **are** different. Can we be surprised if Marxist means cannot achieve anarchist (i.e. authentic socialist) ends? To his credit, Shachtman acknowledges that post-civil war salvation "required full democratic rights" for all workers, and that this was *"precisely what the Bolsheviks … were determined not to permit."* Sadly he failed to wonder **why** the democratic principles of the *"original program"* were only *"honoured in the breach"* and why *"Lenin and Trotsky did not observe them."* The possibility that Bakunin was right and that statism and socialism cannot go together was not raised. [*"Introduction"* to Trotsky's **Terrorism and Communism**, p. xv]

Equally, there is a tendency of pro-Leninists to concentrate on the period between the two revolutions of 1917 when specifying what Bolshevism "really" stood for, particularly Lenin's book State and Revolution. To use an analogy, when Leninists

Revolution, vol. 1, p. 31]). Just as one cannot abolish alienation with alienated means, so we cannot attack Leninist *"means"* also without distinguishing our libertarian *"ends"* from theirs.

This means that both Leninist means and ends are flawed. Both will fail to produce a socialist society. As Kropotkin said at the time, the Bolsheviks *"have shown how the Revolution is **not** to be made."* [quoted by Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 75] If applied today, Leninist ideas will undoubtedly fail from an anarchist point of view while, as under Lenin, "succeeding" from the limited perspective of Bolshevism. Yes, the party may be in power and, yes, capitalist property may be abolished by nationalisation but, no, a socialist society would be no nearer. Rather we would have a new hierarchical and class system rather than the classless and free society which non-anarchist socialists claim to be aiming for.

Let us be perfectly clear. Anarchists are **not** saying that Stalinism will be the inevitable result of any Bolshevik revolution. What we are saying is that some form of class society will result from any such a revolution. The exact form this class system will take will vary depending on the objective circumstances it faces, but no matter the specific form of such a post-revolutionary society it will not be a socialist one. This is because of the ideology of the party in power will shape the revolution in specific ways which, by necessity, form new forms of hierarchical and class exploitation and oppression. The preferred means of Bolshevism (vanguardism, statism, centralisation, nationalisation, and so on) will determine the ends, the ends being not communist anarchism but some kind of bureaucratic state capitalist society labelled *"socialism"* by those in charge. Stalinism, in this perspective, was the result of an interaction of certain ideological goals and positions as well as organisational principles and preferences with structural and circumstantial pressures resulting from the specific conditions prevalent at the time. For example, a Leninist revolution in



Little wonder, then, that the role of the masses in the Russian Revolution after October 1917 is rarely discussed by pro-Bolshevik writers. Indeed, the conclusion to be reached is simply that for the Bolsheviks the role of workers is to support the party, get it into power and then do what it tells them. Unfortunately for the Bolsheviks, the Russian working class refused this position, the same position it held under Tsarism and capitalism. Instead they practised collective struggle in defence of their economic **and** political interests, a struggle which inevitably brought them into conflict both with the "workers' state" and their role in Bolshevik ideology. Faced with this collective action, the Bolshevik leaders (beginning with Lenin) started to talk about the "declassing" of the proletariat to justify their repression of (and power **over**) the working class. Ironically, it was the aim of Bolshevik repression to "atomise" the working class as, fundamentally, their rule depended on it. While Bolshevik repression did, in the end, succeed it cannot be said that the working class in Russia did not resist this usurpation of power by the Bolshevik party. As such, rather than "atomisation" or "declassing" being the cause for Bolshevik power and repression, it was, in fact, one of **results** of them — and helped ensure the rise of Stalin.

## 6 Did the Bolsheviks blame "objective factors" for their actions?

In a word, no. At the time of the revolution and for some period afterwards, the idea that "objective factors" were responsible for their policies was one which few, if any, Bolshevik leaders expressed. As we discussed in section 2, leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin argued that **any** revolution would face civil war and economic crisis. Lenin **did** talk about the *"declassing"* of the proletariat from 1920 onwards, but that did not seem to affect the proletarian and socialist character of his regime (indeed, Lenin's argument was developed in the

context of **increasing** working class collective action, **not** its absence).

This is not to say that the Bolshevik leaders were completely happy with the state of their revolution after the final victory over the White counter-revolution. Lenin, for example, expressed deep concern about the rising bureaucratic deformations he saw in the soviet state (particularly after the end of the civil war). Yet, while concerned about the bureaucracy, he was not concerned about the Party's monopoly of power in spite of the obvious relation between the two (how could a party dictatorship function without a bureaucracy?). Similarly, he tried to combat the bureaucracy by increasing the very structural forms which created it in the first place, namely by increasing centralisation, which in turn increased the bureaucracy and its power. In short, he fought the bureaucracy by "top-down" and, ironically, bureaucratic methods, the only ones left to him. A similar position was held by Trotsky, who was quite explicit in supporting the party dictatorship throughout the 1920s (and, indeed, the 1930s — as discussed in the appendix "Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet *'Socialism from Below'*"). Needless to say, due to the limitations of the ideology, both failed to understand how bureaucracy arises and how it could be effectively fought.

This position started to change, however, as the 1920s drew on and Trotsky was increasingly sidelined from power. Then, faced with the rise of Stalinism, Trotsky had to find a theory which allowed him to explain the degeneration of the revolution and, at the same time, absolve Bolshevik ideology (and his own actions!) from all responsibility for it. He did so by invoking the objective factors facing the revolution. Since then, his various followers have utilised this argument, with various changes in emphasis, to attack Stalinism while defending Bolshevism.



*concepts means to Sink into the depths of utter demoralisation. In that lies the real tragedy of the Bolshevik philosophy as applied to the Russian Revolution. May this lesson not be in vain."* In summary, *"[n]o revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSES to be achieved."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, pp. 260–1]

If this analysis of the anarchists against Bolshevism is true then it follows that the Bolsheviks were not just wrong on one or two issues but their political outlook right down to the core was wrong. Its vision of socialism was flawed, which produced a flawed perspective on the potentially valid means available to achieve it. Leninism, we must never forget, does not aim for the same kind of society anarchism does. As we discussed in section H.3.1, the short, medium and long term goals of both movements are radically different. While both claim to aim for "communism," what is mean by that word is radically different in details if somewhat similar in outline. The anarchist ideal of a classless, stateless and free society is based on a decentralised, participatory and bottom-up premise. The Leninist ideal is the product of a centralised, party ruled and top-down paradigm.

This explains why Leninists advocate a democratic-centralist "Revolutionary Party." It arises from the fact that their programme is the capture of state power in order to abolish the *"anarchy of the market."* Not the abolition of wage labour, but its universalisation under the state as one big boss. Not the destruction of alienated forces (political, social and economic) but rather their capture by the party on behalf of the masses. In other words, this section of the FAQ is based on the fact that Leninists are not (libertarian) communists; they have not broken sufficiently with Second International orthodoxy, with the assumption that socialism is basically state capitalism (*"The idea of the State as Capitalist, to which the Social-Democratic fraction of the great Socialist Party is now trying to reduce Socialism."* [Peter Kropotkin, The Great French

plication ensured that the party could not be done otherwise as the framework of exercising power had been shaped by its successful application (e.g. Bolshevik centralism ensured that all its policies were marked by centralist tendencies, simply because Bolshevik power had become centralised). Soon, the only real instance of power is the Party, and very soon, only the summits of the Party. This cannot help but shape its policies and actions. As Castoriadis argues:

> *"If it is true that people's real social existence determines their consciousness, it is from that moment illusory to expect the Bolshevik party to act in any other fashion than according to its real social position. The real social situation of the Party is that of a directorial organ, and its point of view toward this society henceforth is not necessarily the same as the one this society has toward itself."* [**The role of Bolshevik Ideology in the birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 97]

As such, means and ends are related and cannot be separated. As Emma Goldman argued, there is *"no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical... The great and inspiring aims of the Revolution became so clouded with and obscured by the methods used by the ruling political power that it was hard to distinguish what was temporary means and what final purpose. Psychologically and socially the means necessarily influence and alter the aims. The whole history of man is continuous proof of the maxim that to divest one's methods of ethical*



The problem with this type of argument is that all the major evils usually associated with Stalinism already existed under Lenin and Trotsky. Party dictatorship, one-man management, repression of opposition groups and working class protest, state bureaucracy and so on all existed before Stalin manoeuvred himself into absolute power. Thus, for example, we find Peter Binns of the British SWP lament in 1987 that:

> *"This exploitation and powerlessness of the Russian class [under Mikhail Gorbachev] is nothing new. It came about more than 50 years ago. The final vestiges of workers' rights disappeared in 1929 when it was decreed that all managers' orders were now to be 'unconditionally binding on his subordinate administrative staff and on all workers'. It was at this time that the trade unions ceased to be able to play any function on behalf of workers, in particular over the negotiation of wages. An internal passport system was introduced, and in 1930 all industrial enterprises were forbidden to employ workers who left their former jobs without permission ... As the Russian authorities themselves cynically put it: 'With the entry of the USSR into the period of socialism, the possibility of using coercive measures by corrective labour have immeasurably increased.' ... In fact all efforts to start **any** independent workers' initiatives, let alone workers' councils, are now suppressed and are standardly rewarded with extreme forms of repression."* [*"The Theory of State Capitalism"*, pp. 73–98, **Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism**, p. 75]

Yet this describes the regime under Lenin and Trotsky! As noted in section H.3.14, in early 1918 Lenin advocated *"dictatorial"* one-man management and started to impose it, so ending the experiments in workers' control which had previously

flourished since mid-1917. This was followed a few years later by the *"militarisation of labour"*, likewise championed by Lenin and Trotsky:

> *"The militarisation of labour, rushed through the ninth Party Congress with typical Tammany Hall steam-roller methods, definitely turned every worker into a galley-slave. The substitution of one-man power in the shops and mills in place of co-operative management placed the masses again under the thumb of the very elements they had for three years been taught to hate as the worst menace ... Insult was added to injury by the introduction of the labour book, which virtually stamped everyone a felon, robbed him of the last vestiges of freedom, deprived him of the choice of place and occupation, and fastened him to a given district without the right of straying too far, on pain of severest penalties."* [Emma Goldman, **Living My Life**, vol. 2, p. 780]

As noted in the last section, workers who protested against the imposition of these policies and class relations were likewise rewarded with repression. Indeed, Trotsky wrote a book defending this regime against criticism by leading Marxist Karl Kautsky which included the comment that *"[i]n point of fact, under Socialism there will not exist the apparatus of compulsion itself, namely, the State: for it will have melted away entirely into a producing and consuming commune. None the less, the road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the State. And you and I are just passing through that period. Just as a lamp, before going out, shoots up in a brilliant flame, so the State, before disappearing, assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the most ruthless form of State, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, pp.



a host of other issues are correct and, moreover, essential for the success of a revolution. They just dislike the results when these ideas were applied in practice within the institutional context these ideas promote, subject to the pressures of the objective circumstances they argue **every** revolution will face!

Little wonder anarchists are not convinced by Leninist arguments that their ideology played no role in the rise of Stalinism in Russia. Simply put, if you use certain methods then these will be rooted in the specific vision you are aiming for. If you think socialism is state ownership and centralised planning then you will favour institutions and organisations which facilitate that end. If you want a highly centralised state and consider a state as simply being an *"instrument of class rule"* then you will see little to worry about in the concentration of power into the hands of a few party leaders. However, if you see socialism in terms of working class managing their own affairs then you will view such developments as being fundamentally in opposition to your goals and definitely **not** a means to that end.

So part of the reason why Marxist revolutions yield such anti-working class outcomes is to do with its ideology, methods and goals. It has little to do with the will to power of a few individuals (important a role as that can play, sometimes, in events). In a nutshell, the ideology and vision guiding Leninist parties incorporate hierarchical values and pursue hierarchical aims. Furthermore, the methods and organisations favoured to achieve (their vision of) "socialism" are fundamentally hierarchical, aiming to ensure that power is centralised at the top of pyramidal structures in the hands of the party leaders.

It would be wrong, as Leninists will do, to dismiss this as simply a case of "idealism." After all, we are talking about the ideology of a ruling party. As such, these ideas are more than just ideas: after the seizure of power, they became a part of the real social situation within Russia. Individually, party members assumed leadership posts in all spheres of social life and started to apply their ideology. Then, overtime, the results of this ap-

tralised power and who equates party rule with class rule (like Lenin and Trotsky), will act in ways (and create structures) totally different from someone who believes in decentralisation and federalism. The organisation they create will create specific forms of social relationships which, in turn, will shape the ideas of those subject to them. This means that a centralised, hierarchical system will create authoritarian social relationships and these will shape those within them and the ideas they have in totally different ways than a decentralised, egalitarian system.

Similarly, if Bolshevik policies hastened the alienation of working class people and peasants from the regime which, in turn, resulted in resistance to them then some of the "objective factors" facing Lenin's regime were themselves the products of earlier political decisions. Unwelcome and unforeseen (at least to the Bolshevik leadership) consequences of specific Bolshevik practices and actions, but still flowing from Bolshevik ideology all the same. So, for example, when leading Bolsheviks had preconceived biases against decentralisation, federalism, "petty-bourgeois" peasants, "declassed" workers or "anarcho-syndicalist" tendencies, this would automatically become an ideological determinant to the policies decided upon by the ruling party. While social circumstances may have limited Bolshevik options, these social circumstances were also shaped by the results of Bolshevik ideology and practice and, moreover, possible solutions to social problems were also limited by Bolshevik ideology and practice.

So, **political ideas do matter.** And, ironically, the very Leninists who argue that Bolshevik politics played no role in the degeneration of the revolution accept this. Modern day Leninists, while denying Bolshevik ideology had a negative on the development of the revolution also subscribe to the contradictory idea that Bolshevik politics were essential for its "success"! Indeed, the fact that they **are** Leninists shows this is the case. They obviously think that Leninist ideas on centralisation, the role of the party, the *"workers' state"* and



169–70] As Stalin put in 1930 (apparently, according to Binns, when a new class system had now developed):

> *"We are in favour of the withering away of the state, and at the same time we stand for the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which represents the most powerful and mighty of all forms of the state which have existed up to the present day. The highest development of the power of the state, with the object of preparing the conditions of the withering away of the state: that is the Marxist formula. Is it 'contradictory'? Yes, it is 'contradictory.' But this contradiction is a living thing and wholly reflects the Marxist dialectic."* [quoted by Alfred B. Evans Jr., **Soviet Marxism-Leninism: The Decline of an Ideology**, p. 39]

Thus Stalinism and Bolshevism was based on the same social-relations — and a social system is **not** defined by the individuals in charge and their intentions but rather the relations within its social structures and the power-relations these generate. While it can be argued that Stalinism was worse — that repression was more brutal and privileges were more extreme — this does not change the **class** nature of the regime and the inequalities that these authoritarian social relations created. As Emma Goldman saw at first hand, *"better and more plentiful food was served Party members at the Smolny dining-room and many similar injustices and evils"*, there was a *"special hospital for Communists, with every modern comfort, while other institutions lacked the barest medical and surgical necessities"*, *"housing arrangements disclosed similar favouritism and injustice"* along with general *"inefficiency, mismanagement, and bureaucratic corruption"*. [**Living My Life**, vol. 2, p. 732, p. 754 and p. 900] That the bureaucracy under Stalin gained more wealth and exercised greater power

over its subjects hardly changes the class nature of the regime. Indeed, the greater abuses of Stalinism had their basis in the social relations created under Lenin and Trotsky (and, of course, Stalin who was — least we forget — an *"old Bolshevik"* as well, indeed an older one than Trotsky).

Worse for the advocates of this position, with the exception of the state bureaucracy, none of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders found anything to complain about. Whether it is Lenin or Trotsky, the sad fact of the matter is that a party dictatorship presiding over an essentially state capitalism economy was not considered a bad thing. Indeed, the "gains" of October Trotskyists claim that Stalinism destroyed were, in fact, long dead by 1921. Soviet democracy, working class freedom of speech, association and assembly, workers' self-management in the workplace, trade union freedom, the ability to strike, and a host of other, elementary, working class rights had been eliminated long before the end of the civil war (indeed, often before it started) and *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 44]

Which, of course, causes problems for those who seek to distance Lenin and Trotsky from Stalinism and claim that Bolshevism is fundamentally "democratic" in nature. The knots Leninists get into to do this can be ludicrous. A particularly crazy example can be seen from the UK's Socialist Workers Party. For John Rees, it is a truism that *"it was overwhelmingly the force of circumstance which obliged the Bolsheviks to retreat so far from their own goals. They travelled this route in opposition to their own theory, not because of it — no matter what rhetorical justifications were given at the time."* [*"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 70] So we cannot judge the Bolsheviks on what they did **nor** what they



> *themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period. Now that more facts are available self-mystification on these issues should no longer be possible. Should any who have read these pages remain 'confused' it will be because they want to remain in that state — or because (as the future beneficiaries of a society similar to the Russian one) it is their interest to remain so."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 84]

This is unsurprising. The Leninist idea that politics of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution, that their policies during the revolution were a product purely of objective forces, is unconvincing. The facts of the matter is that people are faced with choices, choices that arise from the objective conditions that they face. What decisions they make will be influenced by the ideas they hold — they will **not** occur automatically, as if people were on auto-pilot — and their ideas are shaped by the social relationships they experience. Thus, someone who favours centralisation and sees nationalisation as the defining characteristic of socialism will make different decisions than someone who favours decentralising power and sees self-management as the key issue. The former will also create **different** forms of social organisation based on their perceptions of what "socialism" is and what is "efficient." Similarly, the different forms of social organisation favoured will also impact on how a revolution develops and the political decisions they make. For example, if you have a vision which favours centralised, hierarchical organisation then those placed into a position of power over others within such structures will act in certain ways, have a certain world view, which would be alien to someone subject to egalitarian social relations.

In summary, the ideas in people's heads matter, including during a revolution. Someone in favour of centralisation, cen-

only **their** version of socialism recognises that the ruling class will **not** disappear after a revolution, that we will face counter-revolution and so we need a state to defend the revolution! As we argued in section H.2.1, this is not the case. Anarchists have long recognised that a revolution will require defending and that it will provoke a serious disruption in the economic life of a country.

Given the somewhat unrealistic tone of these kinds of assertions, it is necessary to look at the ideological underpinnings of Bolshevism and how they played their part in the defeat of the Russian Revolution. This section, therefore, will discuss why such Leninist claims are not true. Simply put, Bolshevik ideology **did** play a role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. This is obvious once we look at most aspects of Bolshevik ideology as well as the means advocated by the Bolsheviks to achieve their goals. Rather than being in opposition to the declared aims of the Bolsheviks, the policies implemented by them during the revolution and civil war had clear relations with their pre-revolution ideas and visions. To quote Maurice Brinton's conclusions after looking at this period:

> *"there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism. We know that many on the revolutionary left will find this statement hard to swallow. We are convinced however that any honest reading of the facts cannot but lead to this conclusion. The more one unearths about this period the more difficult it becomes to define — or even to see — the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. Bolshevik ideology and practice were*



said! This is understandable for, as Rees implicitly admits, the Bolsheviks did **not** blame "objective circumstances" for their decisions. Rather, they viewed them as ideologically correct responses to difficulties they thought **every** revolution would face.

So this sort of position has little substance to it. It is both logically and factually flawed. Logically, it simply makes little sense as anything but an attempt to narrow political discussion and whitewash Bolshevik practice and politics. Given that Leninists constantly quote from Lenin's and Trotsky's post-1918 works, it seems strange that they try to stop others so doing. Strange, but not surprising, given their task is to perpetuate the Bolshevik Myth. Where that leaves revolutionary politics is left unsaid, but it seems to involve worshipping at the shrine of October and treating as a heretic anyone who dares suggest we analysis it in any depth and perhaps learn lessons from it. As discussed in the next section, there is utility in such spurious arguments.

Of course Rees' comments are little more than assertions. Given that he dismisses the idea that we can actually take what any Bolshevik says at face value, we are left with little more than a mind reading operation in trying to find out what the likes of Lenin and Trotsky "really" thought. Perhaps the root explanation of Rees' position is the awkward fact that there are no quotes from any of the leading Bolsheviks which support it? After all, if they were quotes from the hallowed texts expounding the position Rees says the Bolshevik leaders "really" held then he would have provided them. The simple fact is that Lenin and Trotsky, like all the Bolshevik leaders, considered a one-party dictatorship presiding over a state capitalist economy as "socialism" (it also explains Trotsky's difficulty in understanding the obvious class-nature of Stalinism and his ambiguous position in terms of its "achievements"). Can we really dismiss this simply as *"rhetorical justifications"* rather than an expression of *"their own theory"*? Can we really ignore the

awkward fact that they never expressed *"their own theory"* and instead we have to make do with the *"rhetorical justifications"* Rees is at such pains for us to ignore?

Which shows that a major problem in discussing the failure of the Russian Revolution is the attitude of modern day Leninists. Rees presents us with another example when he asserts that *"what is required of historians, particularly Marxists, is to separate phrase from substance."* The Bolsheviks, Rees argues, were *"inclined to make a virtue of necessity, to claim that the harsh measures of the civil war were the epitome of socialism."* Indeed, he states that non-Leninists *"take Lenin or Trotsky's shouts of command in the midst of battle and portray them as considered analyses of events."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46]

Yet this argument is simply incredulous. After all, neither Lenin nor Trotsky could be said to be anything **but** political activists who took the time to consider events and analyse them in detail, however wrongly. Moreover, they defended their arguments in terms of Marxism. Would Rees consider Lenin's **State and Revolution** as an unimportant work? After all, this was produced in the midst of the events of 1917, in often difficult circumstances (such as when hiding from the police). If so, then why not his other, less appealing, political proclamations (never mind actions)? Moreover, looking at just a few of the works produced in this period it is clear that they are anything **but** *"shouts of command in the midst of battle."* Trotsky's **Terrorism and Communism** is a substantial book, for example. It was **not** an ad hoc comment made during a conference or *"in the midst of battle."* Quite the reverse, it was a detailed, substantial and thought-out reply to criticism by the influential German social democrat Karl Kaustky (and, before Lenin, the most respected Marxist thinker in the world). Indeed, Trotsky explicitly asks the question (*"Is there still theoretical necessity to justify revolutionary terrorism?"*) and answers yes, his *"book must serve the ends of an irreconcilable struggle against*



## How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?

It is a truism of Leninism that Stalinism has nothing to do with the ideas of Bolshevism. Moreover, most are at pains to stress that these ideas have no relation to the actual practice of the Bolshevik Party after the October Revolution. To re-quote one Leninist:

> *"it was overwhelmingly the force of circumstance which obliged the Bolsheviks to retreat so far from their own goals. They travelled this route in opposition to their own theory, not because of it — no matter what rhetorical justifications were given at the time."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3–82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 70]

His fellow party member Duncan Hallas argued that it was *"these desperate conditions"* (namely terrible economic situation combined with civil war) which resulted in *"the Bolshevik Party [coming] to substitute its own rule for that of a decimated, exhausted working class"* anarchists disagree. [**Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party**, p. 43]

We have discussed in the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" why the various *"objective factors"* explanations favoured by Leninists to explain the defeat of the Russian Revolution are unconvincing. Ultimately, they rest on the spurious argument that if only what most revolutionaries (including, ironically, Leninists!) consider as inevitable side effects of a revolution did not occur, then Bolshevism would have been fine. It is hard to take seriously the argument that if only the ruling class disappeared without a fight, if the imperialists had not intervened and if the economy was not disrupted then Bolshevism would have resulted in socialism. This is particularly the case as Leninists argue that

for details) It seems ironic, therefore, to blame "objective factors" for the "atomisation" of the working class when, in fact, this was a key aim of Bolshevik repression of labour protest — repression which was easily justified by its ideology.

Ultimately, the degeneration of the Russian Revolution can be traced from when the Bolsheviks seized power **on behalf of** the Russian working class and peasantry and has its roots in Marxist ideology. Most obviously, state implies the delegation of power and initiative into the hands of a few leaders who form the "revolutionary government." Yet the power of any revolution, as Bakunin recognised, derives from the decentralisation of power, from the active participation of the masses in the collective social movement and the direct action it generates. As soon as this power passes out of the hands of the working class, the revolution is doomed: the counter-revolution has begun and it matters little that it is draped in a red flag. Hence anarchist opposition to the state.

Sadly, many socialists have failed to recognise this. Hopefully we have shown that the standard explanations of the failure of the Russian revolution are, at their base, superficial and will only ensure that history will repeat itself. For the idea that Bolshevik policies did not impact on the outcome of the revolution is a false assertion, as the Makhnovists show (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?") and Leninists themselves implicitly admit. Beliefs are utopian if subjective ideas are not grounded in objective reality. Anarchists hold that part of the subjective conditions required before socialism can exist is the existence of free exchange of ideas and working class democracy (i.e. self-management). To believe that revolution is possible without freedom, to believe those in power can, through their good intentions, impose socialism from above, as the Bolsheviks did, is indeed utopian.



*the cowardice, half-measures, and hypocrisy of Kautskianism in all countries.*" [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 9 and p. 10]

This work was circulated at the Second Congress of the Communist International along with Lenin's **'Left-wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, a work still recommended by the likes of SWP in spite of its defence of party dictatorship (see section H.3.3) and so in spite of it being, presumably, *"shouts of command in the midst of battle"* rather than *"considered analyses of events"*. Significantly, Congress attendee anarchist-turned-Bolshevik Alfred Rosmer later opined that both works had *"lost none of their value"* and could *"still be profitably read today.* [**Lenin's Moscow**, p. 69]

Therefore, Rees's comments are hard to take seriously. It is even harder to do so when it becomes clear that Rees does not apply his comments consistently or logically. He does not object to quoting Lenin and Trotsky during this period when they say something he **approves** of, regardless of how badly it reflects their actions. This is hardly convincing, particularly when their "good" quotes are so at odds with their practice and their "bad" quotes so consistent with them: as Marx argued, we should judge people by what they do, **not** by what they say. This seems a basic principle of scientific analysis and it is significant, if not surprising, that Leninists like Rees want to reject it.

Worse, as we note in section H.6.2, Bolshevik ideology played its role in the degeneration of the revolution from the start. Many — but not all — the negative developments within the Revolution were actually consistent with the vision of socialism expounded in 1917. Others were, of course, opposed to the claims made before the seizure of power but were inevitable given these very claims — not least the swift rise of a new bureaucracy (as anarchists had warned about long before October) given Marxist prejudices in favour of centralism and nationalisation. Focusing on "objective circumstances" draws attention away from this negative impact of both the

Bolshevik vision of socialism which guided the policies being implemented and the policies being imposed. The assumption that these policies were not only driven by necessity but also successfully countered this necessity cannot be maintained for the policies imposed not only reflected many of the pre-1918 positions of orthodox Marxism, they had a negative impact in-so-far as they made a bad economic situation worse as well as expanding and empowering an officialdom which soon enough became a new ruling class (for further discussion see the appendix "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?")

Ultimately, the theoretical problem with this position is that it denies the importance of ideas. After all, even if it where true that the **theory** of Bolshevism was different to its practice and the justifications for that practice, it would leave us with the conclusion that this **theory** was not sufficient when faced with the rigours of reality. In other words, that it is impractical — a conclusion that Leninists do not want to draw, hence the stress on "objective factors" to explain its failure.

Similarly, there seems to be an idealist tint to Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution. They seem to portray the Lenin of 1921 as, essentially, the same person as the Lenin of 1917. That seems to violate the basic ideas of materialism. As Herbert Read points out, *"the phrase 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' ... became fatal through the interventions of two political expedients — the identification of the proletariat with the Bolshevik Party, and the use of the State as an instrument of revolution. Expedients and compromises may have been necessary for the defeat of the reactionary forces; but there is no doubt whatsoever that what took place was a progressive brutalisation of Lenin's own mind under the corrupting influence of the exercise of power."* [**A One-Man Manifesto**, p. 51] It seems common sense that if a political strategy exposes its followers to the corrupting effects of power we should factor this into any evaluation of it. Sadly, Leninists fail to do this — even worse, they attempt to



the overwhelming necessity of defend the Bolshevik regime. And while we can understand Trotsky seeking to absolve his conscious on the role **his** decisions, policies and politicis played in creating the regime Stalin so adroitly utilised in his rise to power, it becomes less clear why modern-day socialists would seek to encase themselves in such contradictions.

Such reasoning by Trotsky and Serge show the role of ideology in the outcome of the revolution, so underming their invocation of "objective factors" to explain all. Yet, at the same time, they stress the importance of Leninist ideology in ensuring the "victory" of the revolution. They seek to have it both ways — the application of the crudest form of deterministic materialism on the one side, the glorification of the will of a few leaders on the other. It also exposes the authoritarian core of Leninism which justified the repression of working class revolt. Given this, it is incredulous for Leninists like Chris Harman to suggest that it was the *"decimation of the working class"* which caused (by *"necessity"*) the *"Soviet institutions"* to take *"on a life independently of the class they had arisen from. Those workers and peasants who fought the Civil War could not govern themselves collectively from their places in the factories."* [*"How the revolution was lost"*, pp. 13–36, P. Binns, T. Cliff, C. Harman, **Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism**, p. 18] Given that this *"independent"* life is required to allow the party (requoting Serge) to *"go against the current,"* Harman simply fails to understand the dynamics of the revolution, the actual social position of the vanguard and the resistance of the working class subject to it. Moreover, the reason **why** the *"workers and peasants"* could not govern themselves collectively was because the party had seized power for itself and systematically destroyed soviet, workplace and military democracy to remain there (see section H.6). Then there is the way the Bolsheviks reacted to such collective unrest: they sought to break the workers as a collective force. The use of violence, lockouts and re-registration was typical, as was the arresting of "ringleaders" (see section 5 above

working class so ensuring that Bolshevik dictatorship came into constant conflict with it and its continuing struggle for autonomy. Rather than base itself on the creative powers of the masses, Bolshevism crushed it as a threat to its power and so ensured that the economic and social problems affecting Russia increased.

And need it be pointed out that "low" culture or "backwardness" have been used by numerous imperialist and authoritarian regimes to justify their rule over a given population? It matters little whether the population are of the same nationality as the rulers or from a subjugated people, the arguments and the logic are the same. Whether dressed up in racist or classist clothing, the same elitist pedigree lies behind the pro-Bolshevik argument that democracy would have brought *"chaos"* or *"capitalist restoration."* The implicit assumption that working class people are not fit for self-government is clear from these rationales. Equally obvious is the idea that the party knows better than working class people what is best for them.

Sounding like Bolshevik Henry Kissingers, Leninists argue that Lenin and Trotsky had to enforce their dictatorship **over** the proletariat to stop a *"capitalist restoration"* (Kissinger was the US state's liaison with the Chilean military when it helped their coup in 1973 and infamously stated that the country should not be allowed to turn communist due to the stupidity of its own people). Needless to say, anarchists argue that even if the Bolshevik regime had not already been capitalist (specifically, **state** capitalist) this logic simply represents an elitist position based on *"socialism from above"* (see section H.3.3). Yes, soviet democracy **may** have resulted in the return of (private) capitalism but by maintaining party dictatorship the possibility of socialism was automatically nullified. Simply put, the pro-Leninist argument implies that socialism can be implemented from above as long as the right people with the right ideas are in power. Thus the crudest determinism flips into the most vacuous idealism, with the flipping driven by



whitewash the post-October Lenin (and Trotsky) by excluding the "bad" quotes which reflect their practice, a practice which they are at pains to downplay (or ignore)!

As libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis noted, this pro-Bolshevik response *"teaches us nothing we could extend beyond the confines of the Russian situation in 1920. The sole conclusion to be drawn from this kind of 'analysis' is that revolutionaries should ardently hope that future revolutions break out in more advanced countries, that they should not remain isolated, and that civil wars should not in the least be devastating."* It does not explain *"why it 'degenerated' precisely in such a way that it led to the power of the bureaucracy"*, which is perhaps unsurprising for *"[i]nsofar as ideas play a role in the development of history — and, **in the final analysis**, they play an enormous role — the Bolshevik ideology (and with it, the Marxist ideology lying behind it) was a decisive factor in the birth of the Russian bureaucracy."* [**The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 92 and p. 104]

Then, of course, there is the attitude of the Bolshevik leaders themselves to these so-called *"shouts of command in the midst of battle."* Rather than dismiss them as irrelevant, they continued to subscribe to them years later. For example, Trotsky was still in favour of party dictatorship in the late 1930s (see section H.1.2). Looking at his justly infamous **Terrorism and Communism**, we discover him in the 1930s reiterating his support for his arguments of 1920. His preface to the 1936 French edition sees him state that the book was *"devoted to a clarification of the methods of the proletariat's revolutionary policy in our epoch."* He concluded as follows: *"Victory is conceivable only on the basis of Bolshevik methods, to the defence of which the present work is devoted."* The previous year, in his introduction to the second English edition, he was equally unrepentant. *"The British proletariat,"* he argued, *"will enter upon a period of political crisis and theoretical criticism ... The teachings of Marx and Lenin for the first time will find the masses as their audience. Such*

*being the case, it may be also that the present book will turn out to be not without its use."* He dismissed the *"consoling illusion"* that *"the arguments of this book [were] true for backward Russia"* but *"utterly without application to advanced lands."* The *"wave of Fascist or militarised police dictatorships"* in the 1920s and 1930s was the reason. It seems ironic that Trotsky's self-proclaimed followers are now repeating the arguments of what he termed *"incurable Fabians"*, namely that arguments within it were irrelevant and not applicable in circumstances other than those it was written in. [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. xix, p. xxxv, p. xlvii and p. xxxix]

So rather than distance himself from the authoritarian and state-capitalist policies modern day Leninists claim were thrust upon an unwilling Bolshevik party by "objective factors," Trotsky defended them. This is unsurprising, given that as we noted above in section 2, Trotsky himself argues in that work that these "objective factors" would be faced in **every** revolution. As it was, he argues that it was only the *"slow development of the revolution in the West"* which stopped *"a direct passage from military Communism to a Socialistic system of production."* Rather than admit to *"illusions"* caused by the *"iron necessity"* of winning the civil war, he talks about *"those economic hopes which were bound up with the development of the world revolution."* He even links Bolshevik practice with Stalinism, noting that the *"idea of five-year plans was not only formulated in that period [1918–1920], but in some economic departments it was also technically worked out."* Indeed, in 1920 he noted how the policies he was implementing in practice and defending in theory were *"correct from the point of view both of principle and of practice"*. [**Op. Cit.**, p. xliii and p. 135]

Even his essay outlining what he considers the differences between Stalinism and Bolshevism does not see him fundamentally distancing himself from the positions modern day Leninists like to explain by "objective factors." He stated that the *"Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself."* [*"The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism"*, pp. 53–66, **Their Morals and Ours**, p. 59]



Of course, by definition, **every** group is *"backward"* compared to the vanguard and so Trotsky's and Serge's argument amounts to little more than a justification for party dictatorship **over** the proletariat. Thus the validity of Bakunin's prediction that Marxism's *"sham people's government would be no other than the completely despotic rule of the masses by a new and very small aristocracy of actual or alleged 'scholars.' The people are no 'scholars,' and therefore they are as a whole to be freed from the toils of government, and as a whole they are to make up the herd that is governed. What a splendid freedom!"* {**Micheal Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 269] Is it then that surprising that Bolsheviks revised the Marxist theory of the state to justify elite rule? As discussed in section H.3.8, once in power Lenin and Trotsky saw that the "workers' state" had to be independent of the working class in order to overcome the *"wavering"* and *"vacillation of the masses themselves."*

The reason why such a system would not result in socialism does not take long to discover. For anarchists, freedom is not just a goal, a noble end to be achieved sometime in the distant future, but rather a necessary part of the process of creating socialism. Eliminate freedom (and, as a necessary result, workplace and community self-management, initiative, self-activity) and the end result will be anything **but** socialism. Ultimately, as Malatesta argued, *"the only way that the masses can raise themselves"* is by freedom *"for it is only through freedom that one educates oneself to be free."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53] Ironically, by using state repression to combat *"backward"* elements, the Bolsheviks ensured that they stayed that way and, more importantly, disempowered the **whole**

*those in the factories were precisely the less energetic, less revolutionary sections, along with the petty folk, yesterday's small shopkeepers and artisans, who had come there to find refuge. This proletariat of the reserve often allowed itself to fall under the sway of Menshevik propaganda."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 229] Given that Serge is discussing the period **before** the revolt of Czechoslovak Legion (and so the start of the civil war), a greater indictment of Bolshevism cannot be found. After all, what does "workers' democracy" mean unless the proletariat can vote for its own delegates? Little wonder Daniel Guerin described Serge's book as *"largely a justification of the liquidation of the soviets by Bolshevism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 97] What point is there having genuine soviet elections if the *"less revolutionary sections"* (i.e. Trotsky's *"majority"*) will not vote for the vanguard? And can socialism exist without democracy? Can we expect an unaccountable vanguard to govern in the interests of anyone but its own? Of course not!

Thus we find Serge arguing that the *"party of the proletariat must know, at hours of decision, how to break the resistance of the backward elements among the masses; it must know how to stand firm sometimes against the masses ... it must know how to go against the current, and cause proletarian consciousness to prevail against lack of consciousness and against alien class influences."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 218] Ideas apparently **do** matter after all. Trotsky comments on this theme allows us to draw the obvious conclusions:

> *"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves ... if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is*



*military art and Marxist politics."* What did that involve? Immediately before making that claim he argued that the *"Bolshevik party has shown the entire world how to carry out armed insurrection and the seizure of power. Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* Thus the *"party dictatorship"* is seen as being an example of *"Marxist politics"* being successfully applied and not something to be opposed. Moreover, *"the Bolshevik party was able to carry on its magnificent 'practical' work only because it illuminated all its steps with theory."* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism,"* **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37**, pp. 430–1]

Clearly, rather than denounce the power of the party as being against Bolshevik theory, as Rees claims, for Trotsky it represented its application. While Trotsky excuses some Bolshevik actions (such as the banning of opposition groups) as a product of "objective factors" (such as the civil war), he clearly sees the degeneration of the revolution coming **after** the civil war and its *"correct combination"* of *"Marxist politics"* and *"military art,"* which included *"party dictatorship"* over the soviets.

This lack of distancing is to be expected. After, the idea that "objective factors" caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution was first developed by Trotsky to explain, after his fall from power, the rise of Stalin. While **he** was head of the Soviet state no such "objective" factors seemed to be required to "explain" the party dictatorship over the working class. Indeed, quite the reverse as he argued in 1923: *"If there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158] In this he reflected party orthodoxy, as expressed by Zinoviev to the delegates to the Second Congress of the Communist International who were busy seeking wisdom from **Terrorism and Communism**:

> *"Today, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class … [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, pp. 151–2]

Trotsky in 1920 (and beyond!) was just stating mainstream Bolshevik ideology, echoing a statement made in March 1923 by the Central Committee (of which he and Lenin were members) to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party issued long after the need for *"shouts of command in the midst of battle"*. It sums up the lessons gained from the revolution and states that *"the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat."* Vacillations, of course, are expressed by workers' democracy. Little wonder the statement rejects it: *"The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party."* [*"To the Workers of the USSR"* in G. Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party**, p. 213, p. 214]

So, as with all the leading Bolsheviks, he considered the party dictatorship as an inevitable result of any proletarian revolution. Moreover, he did not question the social relationships within production either. One-man management held no fears for him and he considered the state-capitalist regime under himself and Lenin "socialist" and defended it as such. He



*'made' directly by a* ***minority****,"* he argued that the *"success"* of a revolution is *"possible"* when *"this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality, on the part of the majority."* So what happens if the majority expresses opposition to the party? Unfortunately Trotsky does not raise this question, but he does answer it indirectly by arguing that *"to free the soviets from the leadership [sic!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 85 and p. 90]

Thus to let the working masses (the *"majority"*) have free soviet elections and so reject the vanguard (the *"minority"*) would mean the end of soviet power, allowing the proletariat a say in the progress of the revolution means the end of the *"proletarian dictatorship"*! Which, of course, is interesting logic. The authoritarian core of the Bolshevik vision of revolution is thus exposed — along with the key role of ideology in the outcome of the revolution!

Victor Serge likewise presented an insight into the Bolshevik perspective on the role of ideology in a revolution when he noted that in 1918 *"[a]gitation conducted by the SRs and Mensheviks called demonstrations in the streets and prepared for a general strike. The demands were: free trade, wage increases, payment of wages one, two or three months in advance and 'democracy.' The intention was to incite the working class itself against the revolution."* Which only makes sense once you realise that by *"the revolution"* Serge simply meant *"the Bolsheviks"* and the obvious truth that the working class was **not** managing the revolution at all, was **not,** in any sense, in power. *"The best elements among the workers,"* explains Serge, *"were away fighting;*

This is not the only way in which Leninist defences of Bolshevism undermines itself. In their own way, Leninists admit the key role of ideas indirectly when they cannot avoid mentioning the collective resistance to Bolshevism indicated in section 5 above. In the few cases when the class struggle under the Bolsheviks is not ignored, Leninists often argue that while the working class was capable of collective decision making and action, the nature of such action was suspect. This arguments rests on the premise that the "advanced" workers (i.e. party members) left the workplace for the front or for government posts, leaving the "backward" workers behind. This argument is often used, particularly in regard to the garrison of Kronstadt at the time of their revolt in early 1921 (see section 8 of the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?").

Yet this argument raises more problems that its solves. In **any** revolution the most advanced, the most politically consciousness tend to volunteer to go to the front first and, of course, tend to be elected as delegates to committees of various kinds (local, regional and national; economic, political and social). There is little that can be done about it but if soviet — or socialist — democracy depends on the "advanced" workers being there in order for it to work, then it suggests two things. First, and most obvious, that ideas matter — if not, then the question of advanced and backward workers would be irrelevant. Second, that the commitment to democracy is lacking in those who argue along these lines, for what happens if the "backward" masses reject the "advanced" elements? Given the key role played by the latter then do they have the right, even the duty, to impose their will on the former? And it also begs the question of **who** determines what constitutes "backward" — if it means "does not support the party" then it becomes little more than a rationale for party dictatorship (as it did under Lenin and Trotsky).

Writing in 1938 while he defended the repression of the 1921 Kronstadt revolt, Trotsky argued that a *"revolution is*



was fully supportive of one-man management, going so far as to suggest in 1920 that *"if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, pp. 169–70] Writing in the peace of 1923, he likewise argued that the *"system of actual one-man management must be applied in the organisation of industry from top to bottom. For leading economic organs of industry to really direct industry and to bear responsibility for its fate, it is essential for them to have authority over the selection of functionaries and their transfer and removal."* These economic organs must *"in actual practice have full freedom of selection and appointment."* [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 237]

As can be seen, all of these post-civil war opinions fit in well with his civil war opinions on the matter. Now, it seems strange that rather than present what he "really" thought, Trotsky expounded what presumably was the **opposite** of it. Surely the simplist conclusion to draw is that Trotsky said what he really did think and expressed this in his so-called *"shouts of command"* made during the civil war? Can all these comments be dismissed as *"rhetorical justifications"* and not reflective of Trotsky's real ideas? Ultimately, either you subscribe to the idea that Lenin and Trotsky were able to clearly express their ideas themselves or you subscribe to the notion that they hid their "real" politics and only modern-day Leninists can determine what they, in fact, "really" meant to say and what they "really" stood for. And as for all those "awkward" quotes which express the **opposite** of the divined true faith, well, they can be ignored.

Which is, of course, hardly a convincing position to take, particularly as Lenin and Trotsky were hardly shy in justifying their authoritarian policies and expressing a distinct lack

of concern over the fate of any **meaningful** working class conquest of the revolution like, say, soviet democracy. Indeed, as we note in section 3 of the appendix "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?", the sad fact is that the inter-party conflicts of the 1920s were **not** about workers' democracy at all rather party democracy, as admitted in 1925 by Max Eastman, one of Trotsky's main supporters at the time, who noted that *"this programme of democracy within the party [was] called 'Workers' Democracy' by Lenin"* and that *"Trotsky merely revived this original plea."* [**Since Lenin Died**, p. 35] Ironically, Trotskyists in soviet prisons in the early 1930s *"continued to consider that 'Freedom to choose one's party — that is Menshevism'"* and this was their *"final verdict."* [Ante Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 280] No wonder they seemed surprised to be there!

Ultimately, Trotsky's issue with Stalinism was not based on **real** socialist principles, such as meaningful working class freedoms and power. Rather it was a case of *"the political centre of gravity ha[ving] shifted from the proletarian vanguard to the bureaucracy"* and this caused *"the party"* to change *"its social structure as well as in its ideology."* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism,"* **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37**, p. 422] The party dictatorship had been replaced by the dictatorship of the state bureaucracy, in other words. Once this happened, Trotsky sought to explain it. As analysing the impact of Bolshevik ideology and practice were, by definition, out of the question given his role in formulating and imposing it, that left the various "objective factors" Trotsky turned to in order to explain developments after 1923, to explain Stalinism while keeping true to Bolshevik ideology **and** practice.

This legacy shows itself with those who repeated it afterwards. Trotsky's limited critique explains why, to quote Chris Harman (another member of the British SWP), Trotsky *"continued to his death to harbour the illusion that somehow, despite the lack of workers' democracy, Russia was a 'workers' state.'"* Sim-



their party if ideology is unimportant as decisions are driven by "objective factors"? Yet, ironically, other aspects of their analysis of the Russian Revolution recognises that ideology **does** play an important role.

Indeed, the framework which Leninists use in this discussion shows the importance of Bolshevik ideology and the key role it played in the outcome of the revolution. After all, pro-Bolsheviks argue that the "objective factors" forced the **Bolsheviks** to act as they did. However, the proletariat is meant to be the *"ruling class"* in the *"dictatorship of the proletariat."* As such, to argue that the Bolsheviks were forced to act as they did due to circumstances means to implicitly acknowledge that the party held power in Russia, **not** the working class. That a ruling party could become a party dictatorship is not that unsurprising, nor that **its** vision of what "socialism" was would be given preference over the desires of the working class in whose name it ruled. So these apologetics show the validity of Bakunin's critique of Marxism:

> *"Nor can we comprehend talk of freedom of the proletariat or true deliverance of the masses within the State and by the State. State signifies domination, and all domination implies subjection of the masses, and as a result, their exploitation to the advantage of some governing minority.*
>
> *"Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution is sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 160]

politics behind it head on. Perhaps, if Leninists did do this, they would remain Leninists, but at least then their party members and those who read their publications would have an understanding of what this meant. And they would have to dump Lenin's **State and Revolution** into the same place Lenin himself did when in power — into the rubbish bin — and admit that democracy and Bolshevik revolution do not go together.

Looking at the "subjective factor" and the ideology which drove it means to recognise that it was **not** a case of the Bolshevik regime wanting to introduce communism but, being isolated, ended up imposing state capitalism instead. Rather, these policies were explicitly advocated **from the start**, before the seizure of power in October 1917. So the idea that "objective factors" caused the degeneration of the revolution is valid if and only if the Bolsheviks were implementing socialist policies during the period immediately after the October revolution: that was not the case, Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks explicitly argued for these policies as essential for building socialism (or, at best, the preconditions of socialism) in Russia and Bolshevik practice flowed from this analysis. Unsurprisingly, then, the Bolsheviks happily introduced authoritarian and state capitalist policies **from the start.** Many of the policies denounced as "Stalinist" by Leninists were being advocated and implemented by Lenin in the spring of 1918, i.e. **before** the start of the civil war and the deepening of economic chaos that it produced.

In other words, the usual excuses for Bolshevik tyranny do not hold much water, both factually and logically.

## 8 Do Leninists usually deny the importance of ideology?

In a word, no. Usually Leninists stress the importance of ideology in both social change and revolution — after all, why join



ply put, there had been no workers' democracy under Lenin and Trotsky and he considered that regime a *"workers' state"* so why should this be a key criteria for evaluating Stalinism? The question arises why **Harman** thought that Lenin's Russia was some kind of "workers' state" if workers' democracy is the criteria by which such things are to be judged. But, then again, he thinks Trotsky's **Left Opposition** *"framed a policy along [the] lines"* of *"returning to genuine workers' democracy"*! [**Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 20 and p. 19] This also undermines the SWP's "Stalinism was state-capitalism" position (it must be stressed, as noted in section H.3.13, this is **not** the same as the anarchist analysis, even if the conclusions are the same). As orthodox Trotskyist Ted Grant summarised in 1949:

> *"If Comrade Cliff's thesis is correct, that state capitalism exists in Russia today [under Stalin], then he cannot avoid the conclusion that state capitalism has been in existence since the Russian Revolution and the function of the revolution itself was to introduce this state capitalist system of society. For despite his tortuous efforts to draw a line between the economic basis of Russian society before the year 1928 and after, the economic basis of Russian society has in fact remained unchanged."* [*"Against the Theory of State Capitalism: Reply to Comrade Cliff,"* **The Unbroken Thread**, p. 199]

Indeed! Although Grant was wrong to view Stalin's Russia as a *"degenerated workers' state"* rather that reject Bolshevism for introducing state-capitalism and party dictatorship in Russia, the fact is that in terms of **social relations** he is correct — Russia **was** state-capitalist under Lenin and Trotsky. The awkward fact is that the Russian working class was expropriated both politically and economically in the first few months. A

new State — with its own bureaucracy and armed forces separate from the masses — was emerging by January 1918, with the elimination of democracy within the armed forces and workplaces imposed by March and April of that year. This process was in place before "objective factors" like civil war started or had a significant impact — which undoubtedly explains why the Bolsheviks at the time did **not** justify their policies in those terms, why Lenin in November 1919 stated that the *"organisation of the communist activity of the proletariat and the entire policy of the Communists have now acquired a final, lasting form; I am certain that we are on the right path and that progress along that path is fully ensured."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 30, p. 144]

The major problem for Trotskyists of all kinds is that all the characteristics which they claim differentiate Bolshevism and Stalinism were all applied under Lenin and Trotsky. So, while most neo-Trotskyists like to proclaim that socialism **has** to be politically and economically democratic to qualify as socialist in order to exclude Stalinism from Marxism, the awkward fact is that these same parties also consider Lenin's regime post-1917 as socialist in spite of it being a party dictatorship politically and state-capitalist economically: apparently, socialism need not be democratic after all.

For anarchists, however, the regime confirmed the *"belief that a revolution **à la Bakunin** would have brought more constructive results, if not immediate anarchism ... the Russian Revolution had been **à la Bakunin**, but it had since been transformed **à la Karl Marx**. That seemed to be the real trouble. I had not been naïve enough to expect anarchism to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the old. But I did hope that the masses, who had made the Revolution, would also have the chance to direct its course."* [Emma Goldman, **Living My Life**, vol. 2, p. 826] As Kropotkin summarised, we *"have always pointed out the effects of Marxism in action. Why be surprised now?"* In short, it was the case of *"a small political party which by its false theories, blunders, and inefficiency has demonstrated how revolutions must **not** be*



*moved to dismantle organs of popular control, including factory committees and Soviets, thus proceeding to deter and overcome socialist tendencies."* [**Deterring Democracy**, p. 361] That they **thought** their system of state capitalism was a form of "socialism" is irrelevant — they systematically combated (real) socialist tendencies in favour of state capitalist ones and did so knowingly and deliberately (see sections H.3.1 and H.3.13 on the differences between real socialism and Marxism in its Bolshevik mode and section H.6 on Bolshevik practice itself).

So it is important to stress that even **if** the Russian Revolution had occurred in better circumstances, it is unlikely that Bolshevism would have resulted in socialism rather than state capitalism. Bolshevik principles ensure that any revolution lead by a vanguard party would not have succeeded. This can be seen from the experience of Bolshevism immediately after it seized power, before the start of the civil war and major economic collapse, so their application in even the best of situations would have undermined socialist tendencies in the revolution. Simply put, a statist revolution will have statist, not libertarian, ends.

The focusing on "objective factors" (particularly the civil war) has become the traditional excuse for people with a romantic attachment to Leninism but who are unwilling to critically analyse what the Bolsheviks actually did in power and how it so often reflected their pre-October policies and promises. This excuse is not viable if you seek to build a revolutionary movement today: you need to choose between the real path of Lenin and the real, anarchist, alternative. As Lenin constantly stressed, a revolution will be difficult — fooling ourselves about what will happen now just undermines our chances of success in the future and ensure that history will repeat itself. For the "objective factors" argument is not a defence of Leninism, but rather one that seeks to evade having to make such a defence. Revolutionary politics would be much better served by confronting this history and the

surprisingly, rather than just select policies at random the Bolshevik leadership pursued consistently before, during and after the civil war policies which reflected their ideology. There was a preference for policies which centralised power in the hands of a few (politically **and** economically), that saw socialism as being defined by nationalisation rather than self-management, that considered bigger as inherently better, that stressed that role and power of the vanguard above that of the working class, that saw class consciousness as being determined by how much a worker agreed with the party leadership rather than whether it expressed the actual needs and interests of the class as a whole.

By stressing just one aspect of the matter, the "objective," Leninists ensure that the other, the "subjective," is ignored and so ensure a flawed analysis of the revolution and lessons to be learned from it. Indeed, what could be learned? Only that any future revolution should occur in an advanced capitalist nation, avoid isolation, civil war and so on. Thus Bolshevik ideology can be uncritically embraced for, ultimately, it has never been applied!

Yet Bolshevism itself undermined the socialist potential of the revolution, irrespective of the actual circumstances involved (which, to some degree, will affect **any** revolution). For example, the Bolshevik preference for centralisation and nationalisation would negatively affect a revolution conducted in even the best circumstances, as would the seizure of state power rather than its destruction. Only the elimination of what makes Bolshevism Bolshevik would ensure that a revolution would be successful. So anarchists stress that rather than being forced upon them by "objective factors" many of these policies were, in fact, in line with pre-civil war Bolshevik ideas. The Bolshevik vision of socialism, in other words, ensured that they smothered the (libertarian) socialist tendencies and institutions that existed at the time. As Chomsky summarises, *"Lenin and Trotsky, shortly after seizing state power in 1917,*



*made."* [quoted by Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 36 and p. 98]

So, in summary, the leading Bolsheviks did not view "objective factors" as explaining the failure of the revolution. Indeed, until Trotsky was squeezed out of power they did not think that the revolution **had** failed: party dictatorship and one-man management were considered as expressions of a successful revolution. Trotsky's issue with Stalinism was simply that the bureaucracy had replaced the *"the proletarian vanguard"* (i.e. himself and his followers) as the dominant force in the Soviet State and it had started to use the techniques of political repression developed against opposition parties and groups against him. The idea that "objective factors" caused the failure of the revolution was not used to explain the party dictatorship but rather the usurpation of **its** power by the bureaucracy. Its subsequent use by both orthodox and neo-Trotskyists to rationalise Leninist policies do not address the fundamental issue of **why** the revolution failed as it, as we discuss in the next section, exists to **exclude** the impact of Bolshevik ideology in that process. Ultimately, it is unconvincing when placed in the wider context of Leninist ideology before, during and after the civil war.

## 7 What role does "objective factors" play in Leninist ideology?

As we discuss in the appendix on "How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?", Marxist ideology played a key role in the degeneration of the revolution and in laying the groundwork for the rise of Stalinism. However, this is a conclusion which no Leninist could entertain for a moment and this explains the popularity of "objective factors" within these cirlces — for its role is to obscure this key factor in the failure of the revolution. Kropotkin stated the obvious, namely that the problems were increased but not created by the counter-revolution and other "objective factors":

> *"The evils naturally inherent in party dictatorship have thus been increased by the war conditions under which this party maintained itself. The state of war has been an excuse for strengthening the dictatorial methods of the party, as well as its tendency to centralise every detail of life in the hands of the Government, with the result that immense branches of the usual activities of the nation have been brought to a standstill. The natural evils of State Communism are thus increased tenfold under the excuse that all misfortunes of our life are due to the intervention of foreigners."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, p. 488]

So the stressing of "objective factors" is hardly accidental for it shifts perspectives away from Bolshevik ideology and its flaws. It ensures that any Leninist defence of Bolshevism based purely on stressing "objective factors" results in the conclusion that Bolshevik ideology played **no role** in the decisions made by the party leaders, that they simply operated on autopilot from October 1917 onwards. As Samuel Farber puts it *"determinism's characteristic and systemic failure is to understand that what the masses of people do and think politically is as much part of the process determining the outcome of history as are the objective obstacles that most definitely limit peoples' choices."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 198] This is particularly the case when, as in Bolshevik Russia, "the masses of people" have had their revolution expropriated from them and placed into the hands of a few leaders at the top of a centralised, hierarchical social structure which combines political and economic decision making and power.

For anarchists, "objective factors" and "ideology" are interwoven — ideas reflect the social conditions in which they develop but how people react to events are influenced by the ideas in their heads and these are also influenced by "ideologically



correct" sources from the past. The decisions made by those in power impact on the objective circumstances — making them better or worse depending on their suitability to address the issues. Social structures create specific social relations, and so an ideological prejudice in favour of, say, centralisation results in the building of specific forms of social organisation which, in turn, quickly become objective factors. Similarly, concentrating power into a few hands automatically limits the options and knowledge available to solve the problems, as Malatesta noted long before 1918:

> *"Social action [...] is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society; a resultant which, all other things being equal, is greater or smaller depending on whether individual forces are directed to a common objective or are divided or antagonistic. And if instead, as do the authoritarians, one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government or who by reason of their position can influence the policy of the government. [...] Even if we pursue our hypothesis of the ideal government of the authoritarian socialists, it follows from what we have said that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 38–9]

In short, when a few hold political, economic and social power and are ruling in the name of the working class then the impact of ideology becomes correspondingly concentrated. Un-

cracy. He found one. He *"argued that the low cultural level of the working class prevented mass involvement in management and this led to bureaucratism ... the new state could only reply on a minuscule layer of workers while the rest were backward because of the low cultural level of the country."* However, such an explanation is by no means convincing: *"Such culturalist assertions, which could neither be proved or disproved but which were politically highly effective in explaining the gulf, served to blur the political and structural causes of the problem. The working class was thus held responsible for the failings of the bureaucracy. At the end of the civil war the theme of the backwardness of the proletariat was given greater elaboration in Lenin's theory of the declassing of the proletariat."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 195] Given that the bureaucracy had existed from the start, it is hard to say that a more *"cultured"* working class would have been in a better position to control the officials of a highly centralised state bureaucracy. Given the problems workers in "developed" nations have in controlling their (centralised) union bureaucracies, Lenin's explanation seems simply inadequate and, ultimately, self-serving.

Nor was this centralism particularly efficient. You need only read Goldman's or Berkman's accounts of their time in Bolshevik Russia to see how inefficient and wasteful centralisation and its resultant bureaucracy was in practice (see **My Disillusionment in Russia** and **The Bolshevik Myth**, respectively). This can be traced, in part, to the centralised economic structures favoured by the Bolsheviks. Rejecting the alternative vision of socialism advocated and, in part created, by the factory committees (and supported wholeheartedly by the Russian Anarchists at the time), the Bolsheviks basically took over and used the *"state capitalist"* organs created under Tsarism as the basis of their "socialism" (see section 5). As Lenin promised **before** seizing power:



Can we expect the same types of organs and social relationships to produce different results simply because Lenin is at the head of the state? Of course not.

As the Marxist theory of the state confused party/vanguard power with working class power, we should not be surprised that Lenin's *"State and Revolution"* failed to discuss the practicalities of this essential question in anything but a passing and ambiguous manner. For example, Lenin notes that *"[b]y educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of **leading the whole people** to socialism, of directing and organising the new order."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 288] It is not clear whether it is the vanguard or the proletariat as a whole which assumes power. Later, he states that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat"* was *"the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of crushing the oppressors."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 337] Given that this fits in with subsequent Bolshevik practice, it seems clear that it is the vanguard which assumes power rather than the whole class. The negative effects of this are discussed in section 8.

However, the assumption of power by the party highlights the key problem with the Marxist theory of the state and how it could be used to justify the destruction of popular power. It does not matter in the Marxist schema whether the class or the party is in power, it does not impact on whether the working class is the *"ruling class"* or not. As Lenin put it. *"democracy is **not** identical with the subordination of the minority to the majority. Democracy is a **state** which recognises the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e. an organisation for the systematic use of **violence** by one class against the other, by one section of the population against another."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 332] Thus the majority need not actually *"rule"* (i.e. make the fundamental decisions) for a regime to be considered a *"democracy"* or an instrument of class rule. That power can be delegated to a party leadership (even dictatorship) without harming the *"class*

*nature"* of the state. This results of such a theory can be seen from Bolshevik arguments in favour of party dictatorship during the civil war period (and beyond).

The problem with the centralised, representative structures Lenin favours for the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* is that they are rooted in the inequality of power. They constitute in fact, if not initially in theory, a power **above** society. As Lenin put it, *"the **essence** of bureaucracy"* is *"privileged persons divorced from the masses and **superior to** the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 360] In the words of Malatesta, a *"government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [**Anarchy**, p. 34] As we discussed in appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", Lenin's regime provides more than enough evidence to support such an analysis.

This is the fatal flaw in the Marxist theory of the state. As Bakunin put it, *"the theory of the state"* is *"based on this fiction of pseudo-popular representation — which in actual fact means the government of the masses by an insignificant handful of privileged individuals, elected (or even not elected) by mobs of people rounded up for voting and never knowing what or whom they are voting for — on this imaginary and abstract expression of the imaginary thought and will of the all the people, of which the real, living people do not have the faintest idea."* Thus the state represents *"government of the majority by a minority in the name of the presumed stupidity of the one and the presumed intelligence of the other."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 136–7]

By confusing popular participation with a state, by ignoring the real inequalities of power in any state structure, Marxism



that, *"[f]or the Bolsheviks, bureaucratism signified the escape of this bureaucracy from the will of the party as it took on a life of its own."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 182 and p. 190] This was the key. They did not object the usurpation of power by the party (indeed they placed party dictatorship at the core of their politics and universalised it to a general principle for **all** *"socialist"* revolutions). Nor did they object to the centralisation of power and activity (and so the bureaucratisation of life). They only objected to it when the bureaucracy was not doing what the party wanted it to. Indeed, this was the basic argument of Trotsky against Stalinism (see section 3 of the appendix on "Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?").

Faced with this bureaucracy, the Bolsheviks tried to combat it (unsuccessfully) and explain it. As the failed to achieve the latter, they failed in the former. Given the Bolshevik fixation for all things centralised, they simply added to the problem rather than solve it. Thus we find that *"[o]n the eve of the VIII Party Congress Lenin had argued that centralisation was the only way to combat bureaucratism."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196]

Unsurprisingly, Lenin's "anti-bureaucratic" policies in the last years of his live were *"organisational ones. He purposes the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection to correct bureaucratic deformations in the party and state — and this body falls under Stalin's control and becomes highly bureaucratic in its own right. Lenin then suggests that the size of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection be reduced and that it be merged with the Control Commission. He advocates enlarging the Central Committee. Thus it rolls along; this body to be enlarged, this one to be merged with another, still a third to be modified or abolished. The strange ballet of organisational forms continues up to his very death, as though the problem could be resolved by organisational means."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 205]

Failing to understand the links between centralism and bureaucracy, Lenin had to find another source for the bureau-

By the end of 1920, there were five times more state officials than industrial workers. 5, 880,000 were members of the state bureaucracy. However, the bureaucracy had existed since the start. As noted above, the 231,000 people employed in offices in in Moscow in August 1918 represented 30 per cent of the workforce there. *"By 1920 the general number of office workers … still represented about a third of those employed in the city."* In November, 1920, they were 200 000 office workers in Moscow, compared to 231 000 in August, 1918. By July, 1921 (in spite of a plan to transfer 10,000 away) their numbers had increased to 228,000 and by October 1922, to 243,000. [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 192, p. 191 and p. 193]

This makes perfect sense as *"on coming to power the Bolsheviks smashed the old state but rapidly created their own apparatus to wage the political and economic offensive against the bourgeois and capitalism. As the functions of the state expanded, so did the bureaucracy … following the revolution the process of institutional proliferation reached unprecedented heights."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191] And with bureaucracy came the abuse of it simply because it held **real** power:

> *"The prevalence of bureaucracy, of committees and commissions … permitted, and indeed encouraged, endless permutations of corrupt practices. These raged from the style of living of communist functionaries to bribe-taking by officials. With the power of allocation of scare resources, such as housing, there was an inordinate potential for corruption."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 193]

The growth in **power** of the bureaucracy should not, therefore, come as a major surprise given that had existed from the start in sizeable numbers. However, for the Bolsheviks *"the development of a bureaucracy"* was a puzzle, *"whose emergence and properties mystified them."* However, it should be noted



allowed Lenin and the Bolsheviks to usurp state power, implement party dictatorship **and** continue to talk about the working class being in power. Because of Marxism's metaphysical definition of the state (see section H.3.7), actual working class people's power over their lives is downplayed, if not ignored, in favour party power.

As parties represent classes in this schema, if the party is in power then, by definition, so is the class. This raises the possibility of Lenin asserting the *"working class"* held power even when his party was exercising a dictatorship **over** the working class and violently repressing any protests by it. As one socialist historian puts it, *"while it is true that Lenin recognised the different functions and democratic raison d'etre for both the soviets and his party, in the last analysis it was the party that was more important than the soviets. In other words, the party was the final repository of working-class sovereignty. Thus, Lenin did not seem to have been reflected on or have been particularly perturbed by the decline of the soviets after 1918."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 212] This can be seen from how the Marxist theory of the state was changed **after** the Bolsheviks seized power to bring into line with its new role as the means by which the vanguard ruled society (see section H.3.8).

This confusion between two radically different concepts and their submersion into the term *"state"* had its negative impact from the start. Firstly, the Bolsheviks constantly equated rule by the Bolshevik party (in practice, its central committee) with the working class as a whole. Rather than rule by all the masses, the Bolsheviks substituted rule by a handful of leaders. Thus we find Lenin talking about *"the power of the Bolsheviks — that is, the power of the proletariat"* as if these things were the same. Thus it was a case of *"the Bolsheviks"* having *"to take the whole governmental power into their own hands,"* of *"the complete assumption of power by the Bolsheviks alone,"* rather than the masses. Indeed, Russia had been *"ruled by 130,000 landowners"* and *"yet they tell us that Russia will not be able*

*to be governed by the 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party — governing in the interests of the poor and against the rich."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 102, p. 7 and pp. 61–2]

However, governing in the *"interests"* of the poor is **not** the same as the poor governing themselves. Thus we have the first key substitution that leads to authoritarian rule, namely the substitution of the power of the masses by the power of a few members who make up the government. Such a small body will require a centralised state system and, consequently, we have the creation of a hierarchical body around the new government which, as we discuss in section 7, will become the real master in society.

The preconditions for a new form of class society have been created and, moreover, they are rooted in the basic ideas of Marxism. Society has been split into two bodies, the masses and those who claim to rule in their name. Given this basic inequality in power we would, according to anarchist theory, expect the interests of the masses and the rulers to separate and come into conflict. While the Bolsheviks had the support of the working class (as they did in the first few months of their rule), this does not equal mass participation in running society. Quite the reverse. So while Lenin raised the vision of mass participation in the *"final"* stage of communism, he unfortunately blocked the means to get there.

Simply put, a self-managed society can only be created by self-managed means. To think we can have a *"public power"* separate from the masses which will, slowly, dissolve itself into it is the height of naivety. Unsurprisingly, once in power the Bolsheviks held onto power by all means available, including gerrymandering and disbanding soviets, suppressing peaceful opposition parties and violently repressing the very workers it claimed ruled in *"soviet"* Russia (see section 6 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?"). Significantly, this conflict developed before the start of the



> *cratism' in the bureaucracy. According to the industrial census of 31 August 1918, out of 123,578 workers in Moscow, only 4,191 (3.4 percent) were involved in some sort of public organisation ... Class composition is a dubious criterion of the level of bureaucratism. Working class participation in state structures did not ensure an organisation against bureaucratism, and this was nowhere more true than in the new organisations that regulated the economic life of the country."* [Richard Sakwa, *"The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,"* pp. 429–449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437–8]

The *"bureaucracy grew by leaps and bounds. Control over the new bureaucracy constantly diminished, partly because no genuine opposition existed. The alienation between 'people' and 'officials,' which the soviet system was supposed to remove, was back again. Beginning in 1918, complaints about 'bureaucratic excesses,' lack of contact with voters, and new proletarian bureaucrats grew louder and louder."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 242]

Overtime, this permanent collection of bodies would become the real power in the state, with the party members nominally in charge really under the control of an unelected and uncontrolled officialdom. This was recognised by Lenin in the last years of his life. As he noted in 1922:

> *"Let us look at Moscow ... Who is leading whom? The 4,700 responsible Communists the mass of bureaucrats, or the other way round? I do not believe that you can say that the Communists are leading this mass. To put it honestly, they are not the leaders, but the led."* [quoted by Chris Harman, **Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 13]

ships, produced a dramatic revision on the perspectives of the Bolsheviks. They went from being in favour of party power to being in favour of party dictatorship. They acted to ensure their power by making accountability and recall difficult, if not impossible, and simply ignored any election results which did not favour them.

What of the second prediction of anarchism, namely that centralisation will recreate bureaucracy? That, too, was confirmed. After all, some means were required to gather, collate and provide information by which the central bodies made their decisions. Thus a necessary side-effect of Bolshevik centralism was bureaucracy, which, as is well known, ultimately fused with the party and replaced Leninism with Stalinism. The rise of a state bureaucracy started immediately with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. Instead of the state starting to *"wither away"* from the start it grew:

> *"The old state's political apparatus was 'smashed,' but in its place a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity. After the transfer of government to Moscow in March 1918 it continued to expand ... As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy, and by August 1918 nearly a third of Moscow's working population were employed in offices [147,134 employed in state institutions and 83,886 in local ones. This was 13.7% of the total adult population and 29.6% of the independent population of 846,095]. The great increase in the number of employees ... took place in early to mid-1918 and, thereafter, despite many campaigns to reduce their number, they remained a steady proportion of the falling population ... At first the problem was dismissed by arguments that the impressive participation of the working class in state structures was evidence that there was no 'bureau-*



civil war (see section 3 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" for details). So when popular support was lost, the basic contradictions in the Bolshevik position and theory became clear. Rather than be a *"soviet"* power, the Bolshevik regime was simply rule over the workers in their name, nothing more. And equally unsurprising, the Leninists revised their theory of the state to take into account the realities of state power and the need to justify minority power **over** the masses (see section H.3.8).

Needless to say, even electoral support for the Bolsheviks should not and cannot be equated to working class management of society. Echoing Marx and Engels at their most reductionist (see section H.3.9), Lenin stressed that the state was *"an organ or machine for the subjection of one class by another .. . when the State has become proletarian, when it has become a machine for the domination of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, then we shall fully and unreservedly for a strong government and centralism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 75] The notions that the state could have interests of its own, that it is not simply an instrument of class rule but rather **minority** class rule are nowhere to be found. The implications of this simplistic analysis had severe ramifications for the Russian Revolution and Trotskyist explanations of both Stalinism and its rise.

Which brings us to the second issue. It is clear that by considering the state simply as an instrument of class rule Lenin could downplay, even ignore, such important questions of **how** the working class can *"rule"* society, how it can be a *"ruling"* class. Blinded by the notion that a state could not be anything **but** an instrument of class rule, the Bolsheviks simply were able to justify any limitation of working class democracy and freedom and argue that it had no impact on whether the Bolshevik regime was really a "dictatorship of the proletariat" or not. This can be seen from Lenin's polemic with German Social-Democrat Karl Kautsky, where he glibly stated

that *"[t]he form of government, has absolutely nothing to so with it."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 238]

Yet the idea that there is a difference between **who** rules in a revolutionary situation and **how** they rule is a key one, and one raised by the anarchists against Marxism. After all, if the working class is politically expropriated how can you maintain that a regime is remotely "proletarian"? Ultimately, the working class can only *"rule"* society through its collective participation in decision making (social, economic and "political"). If working class people are not managing their own affairs, if they have delegated that power to a few party leaders then they are **not** a ruling class and could never be. While the bourgeoisie can, and has, ruled economically under an actual dictatorship, the same cannot be said to be the case with the working class. Every class society is marked by a clear division between order takers and order givers. To think that such a division can be implemented in a socialist revolution and for it to remain socialist is pure naivety. As the Bolshevik revolution showed, representative government is the first step in the political expropriation of the working class from control over their fate.

This can best be seen by Trotsky's confused analyses of Stalinism. He simply could not understand the nature of Stalinism with the simplistic analytical tools he inherited from mainstream Marxism and Bolshevism. Thus we find him arguing in 1933 that:

> *"The dictatorship of a class does not mean by a long shot that its entire mass always participates in the management of the state. This we have seen, first of all, in the case of the propertied classes. The nobility ruled through the monarchy before which the noble stood on his knees. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie took on comparatively developed democratic forms only under the conditions of capitalist upswing when the ruling class had noth-*



> *"Once their power is consolidated and 'legalised', the Bolsheviks — who are Social Democrats, that is, men of centralist and authoritarian action — will begin to rearrange the life of the country and of the people by governmental and dictatorial methods, imposed by the centre. The[y] ... will dictate the will of the party to all Russia, and command the whole nation. Your Soviets and your other local organisations will become little by little, simply executive organs of the will of the central government. In the place of healthy, constructive work by the labouring masses, in place of free unification from the bottom, we will see the installation of an authoritarian and statist apparatus which would act from above and set about wiping out everything that stood in its way with an iron hand. The Soviets and other organisations will have to obey and do its will. That will be called 'discipline.'"* [quoted by Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 235]

From top to bottom, the new party in power systematically undermined the influence and power of the soviets they claimed to be ensuring the power of. This process had begun, it should be stressed **before** the start of the civil war in May, 1918. Thus Leninist Tony Cliff is wrong to state that it was *"under the iron pressure of the civil war"* which forced the Bolshevik leaders *"to move, as the price of survival, to a **one-party system.**"* [**Revolution Besieged**, p. 163] From the summer of 1918 (i.e. before the civil war even started), the Bolsheviks had turned from the first of Kropotkin's "revolutionary" governments (representative government) to the other, dictatorship, with sadly predictable results.

So far, the anarchist predictions on the nature of centralised revolutionary governments had been confirmed. Being placed in a new social position and, therefore, different social relation-

*which can only spring from the life of the people... The government becomes a parliament with all the vices of a middle-class parliament. Far from being a 'revolutionary' government it becomes the greatest obstacle to the revolution and at last the people find themselves compelled to put it out of the way, to dismiss those that but yesterday they acclaimed as their children.*

*"But it is not so easy to do so. The new government which has hastened to organise a new administration in order to extend it's domination and make itself obeyed does not understand giving up so easily. Jealous of maintaining it's power, it clings to it with all the energy of an institution which has yet had time to fall into senile decay. It decides to oppose force with force, and there is only one means then to dislodge it, namely, to take up arms, to make another revolution in order to dismiss those in whom the people had placed all their hopes."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 240–2]

By the spring and summer of 1918, the Bolshevik party had consolidated its power. It had created a new state, marked as all states are by the concentration of power in a few hands and bureaucracy. Effective power became concentrated into the hands of the executive committees of the soviets from top to bottom. Faced with rejection at soviet election after soviet election, the Bolsheviks simply disbanded them and gerrymandered the rest. At the summit of the new state, a similar process was at work. The soviets had little real power, which was centralised in Lenin's new government. This is discussed in more detail in section 6 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?". Thus centralisation quickly displaced popular power and participation. As predicted by Russia anarchists in November 1917:



*ing to fear. Before our own eyes, democracy has been supplanted in Germany by Hitler's autocracy, with all the traditional bourgeois parties smashed to smithereens. Today, the German bourgeoisie does not rule directly; politically it is placed under complete subjection to Hitler and his bands. Nevertheless, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie remains inviolate in Germany, because all the conditions of its social hegemony have been preserved and strengthened. By expropriating the bourgeoisie politically, Hitler saved it, even if temporarily, from economic expropriation. The fact that the bourgeoisie was compelled to resort to the fascist regime testifies to the fact that its hegemony was endangered but not at all that it had fallen."* [Trotsky, **The Class Nature Of The Soviet State**]

Yet Trotsky is confusing the matter. He is comparing the actions of class society with those a socialist revolution. While a minority class need not *"participate"* **en mass** the question arises does this apply to the transition from class society to a classless one? Can the working class **really** can be *"expropriated"* politically and still remain *"the ruling class"*? Moreover, Trotsky fails to note that the working class was **economically** and **politically** expropriated under Stalinism as well. This is unsurprising, as both forms of expropriation had occurred when he and Lenin held the reins of state power. Yet Trotsky's confused ramblings do serve a purpose in showing how the Marxist theory of the state can be used to rationalise the replacement of popular power by party power. With such ideological baggage, can it be a surprise that the Bolshevik replacement of workers' power by party power could be a revolutionary goal? Ironically, the Marxist theory of the state as an instrument of class rule helped ensure that the Russian work-

ing class did **not** become the ruling class post-October. Rather, it ensured that the Bolshevik party did.

To conclude, by its reductionist logic, the Marxist theory of the state ensured that the substitution of popular power by party power could go ahead and, moreover, be justified ideologically. The first steps towards party dictatorship can be found in such apparently "libertarian" works as Lenin's *"State and Revolution"* with its emphasis on "representation" and "centralisation." The net effect of this was to centralise power into fewer and fewer hands, replacing the essential constructive working class participation and self-activity required by a social revolution with top-down rule by a few party leaders. Such rule could not avoid becoming bureaucratised and coming into conflict with the real aspirations and interests of those it claimed to represent. In such circumstances, in a conflict between the *"workers' state"* and the actual workers the Marxist theory of the state, combined with the assumptions of vanguardism, made the shift to party dictatorship inevitable. As we discussed in section 3 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?", authoritarian tendencies had surfaced before the civil war began.

The strange paradox of Leninism, namely that the theoretical dictatorship of the proletariat was, in practice, a dictatorship **over** the proletariat comes as no surprise. In spite of Lenin announcing *"all power to the soviets"* he remained committed to a disciplined party wielding centralised power. This regime soon expropriated the soviets while calling the subsequent regime "Soviet." Rather that create the authoritarian tendencies of the Bolshevik state the "objective factors" facing Lenin's regime simply increased their impact. The preconditions for the minority rule which the civil war intensified to extreme levels already existed within Marxist theory. Consequently, a Leninist revolution which avoided the (inevitable) problems facing a revolution would still create some kind of class society simply because it reproduces mi-



[**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 286]

Thus we have the basic argument **why** centralism will result in the continuation of class society. Does the Bolshevik experience contradict this analysis? Essentially, it confirms to Kropotkin's predictions on the uselessness of "revolutionary" government:

> *"Instead of acting for themselves, instead of marching forward, instead of advancing in the direction of the new order of things, the people confiding in their governors, entrusted to them the charge of taking initiative. This was the first consequence of the inevitable result of elections... Shut up in the city hall, charged to proceed after the forms established by the preceding governments, these ardent revolutionists, these reformers found themselves smitten with incapacity and sterility... but it was not the men who were the cause for this failure — it was the system...*
>
> *"The will of the bulk of the nation once expressed, the rest would submit to it with a good grace, but this is not how things are done. The revolution bursts out long before a general understanding has come, and those who have a clear idea of what should be done the next day are only a very small minority. The great mass of the people have as yet only a general idea of the end which they wish realised, without knowing much how to advance towards that end, and without having much confidence in the direction to follow. The practical solution will not be found, will not be made clear until the change will have already begun. It will be the product of the revolution itself, of the people in action, — or else it will be nothing, incapable of finding solutions*

bureaucracies and nationalised property within bourgeois society.

So the danger to liberty of combining political **and** economic power into one set of hands (the state's) is obvious. As Kropotkin argued:

> *"the state was, and continues to be, the chief instrument for permitting the few to monopolise the land, and the capitalists to appropriate for themselves a quite disproportionate share of the yearly accumulated surplus of production. Consequently, while combating the present monopolisation of land, and capitalism altogether, the anarchists combat with the same energy the state, as the main support of that system. Not this or that special form, but the state altogether .. . The state organisation, having always been, both in ancient and modern history ... the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the state all the main sources of economical life — the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on — as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands (education, state-supported religions, defence of the territory, etc.), would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism. True progress lies in the direction of decentralisation, both* ***territorial*** *and* ***functional****, in the development of the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound,* ***in lieu*** *of the present hierarchy from the centre to the periphery."*



nority rule by creating a *"workers' state"* as its first step. Sadly, Marxist theory confuses popular self-government with a state so ensuring the substitution of rule by a few party leaders for the popular participation required to ensure a successful revolution.

## 3 How did Engels' essay *"On Authority"* affect the revolution?

We have discussed Engels' infamous diatribe against anarchism already (see section H.4 and subsequent sections). Here we discuss how its caricature of anarchism helped disarm the Bolsheviks theoretically to the dangers of their own actions, so helping to undermine the socialist potential of the Russian revolution. While the Marxist theory of the state, with its ahistoric and ambiguous use of the word "state" undermined popular autonomy and power in favour of party power, Engels' essay *"On Authority"* helped undermine popular self-management.

Simply put, Engels essay contained the germs from which Lenin and Trotsky's support for one-man management flowed. He provided the Marxist orthodoxy required to undermine real working class power by confusing all forms of organisation with *"authority"* and equating the necessity of self-discipline with *"subordination"* to one will. Engels' infamous essay helped Lenin to destroy self-management in the workplace and replace it with appointed *"one-man management"* armed with *"dictatorial powers."*

For Lenin and Trotsky, familiar with Engels' *"On Authority,"* it was a truism that any form of organisation was based on *"authoritarianism"* and, consequently, it did not really matter **how** that *"authority"* was constituted. Thus Marxism's agnostic attitude to the patterns of domination and subordination within society was used to justify one-man management and party dictatorship. Indeed, *"Soviet socialist democracy and individual management and dictatorship are in no way contradictory . .. the*

*will of a class may sometimes be carried by a dictator, who sometimes does more alone and is frequently more necessary.*" [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 30, p. 476]

Like Engels, Lenin defended the principle of authority. The dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat found its apology in this principle, thoroughly grounded in the practice of bureaucracy and modern factory production. Authority, hierarchy, and the need for submission and domination is inevitable given the current mode of production, they argued. And no foreseeable change in social relations could ever overcome this blunt necessity. As such, it was (fundamentally) irrelevant **how** a workplace is organised as, no matter what, it would be *"authoritarian."* Thus *"one-man management"* would be, basically, the same as worker's self-management via an elected factory committee.

For Engels, any form of joint activity required as its *"first condition"* a *"dominant will that settles all subordinate questions, whether this will is represented by a single delegate or a committee charged with the execution of the resolutions of the majority of persons interested. In either case there is very pronounced authority."* Thus the *"necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that."* Collective life, he stressed, required *"a certain authority, no matter how delegated"* and *"a certain subordination, are things which, independently of all social organisation, are imposed upon us."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 732]

Lenin was aware of these arguments, even quoting from this essay in his **State and Revolution**. Thus he was aware that for Engels, collective decisions meant *"the will of the single individual will always have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way."* Thus there was no difference if *"they are settled by decision of a delegate placed at the head of each branch of labour or, if possible, by a majority vote."* The more advanced the technology, the greater the *"despotism"*: *"The automatic machinery of a big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalist who employ work-*



[**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 204–6]

As the bureaucracy is permanent and controls information and resources, it soon becomes the main source of power in the state. The transformation of the bureaucracy from servant to the master soon results. The "official" government is soon controlled by it, shaping its activities in line with its interests. Being highly centralised, popular control is even more limited than government control — people would simply not know where real power lay, which officials to replace or even what was going on within the distant bureaucracy. Moreover, if the people did manage to replace the correct people, the newcomers would be subject to the same institutional pressures that corrupted the previous members and so the process would start again (assuming their did not come under the immediate influence of those who remained in the bureaucracy). Consequently, a new bureaucratic class develops around the centralised bodies created by the governing party. This body would soon become riddled with personal influences and favours, so ensuring that members could be sheltered from popular control. As Malatesta argued, they *"would use every means available to those in power to have their friends elected as the successors who would then in turn support and protect them. And thus government would be passes to and fro in the same hands, and* ***democracy,*** *which is the alleged government of all, would end up, as usual, in an* ***oligarchy,*** *which is the government of a few, the government of a class."* [**Anarchy**, p. 34]

This state bureaucracy, of course, need not be dictatorial nor the regime it rules/administers be totalitarian (for example, bourgeois states combine bureaucracy with many real and important liberties). However, such a regime is still a class one and socialism would still not exist — as proven by the state

*have for their main cause the change of position and perspective ... if there should be established tomorrow a government . .. made up exclusively of workers, those ... staunch democrats and Socialists, will become determined aristocrats, bold or timid worshippers of the principle of authority, and will also become oppressors and exploiters."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunun**, p. 218]

However, due to the inefficiencies of centralised bodies, this is not the end of the process. Around the new ruling bodies inevitably springs up officialdom. This is because a centralised body does not know what is happening in the grassroots. Therefore it needs a bureaucracy to gather and process that information and to implement its decisions. In the words of Bakunin:

*"where is the head, however brilliant it may be, or if one wishes to speak of a collective dictatorship, were it formed of many hundreds of individuals endowed with superior faculties, where are those brains powerful enough and wide-ranging enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real interests, aspirations, wishes and needs whose sum total constitutes the collective will of a people, and to invent a social organisation can which can satisfy everybody? This organisation will never be anything but a Procrustean bed which the more or less obvious violence of the State will be able to force unhappy society to lie down on... Such a system ... would lead inevitably to the creation of a new State, and consequently to the formation of a governmental aristocracy, that is, an entire class of people, having nothing in common with the mass of people ... [and would] exploit the people and subject them."*



*ers ever have been."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 731] Thus Engels had used the modern factory system of mass production as a direct analogy to argue against the anarchist call for workers' councils and self-management in production, for workers' autonomy and participation. Like Engels, Lenin stressed the necessity of central authority in industry.

It can be argued that it was this moment that ensured the creation of state capitalism under the Bolsheviks. This is the moment in Marxist theory when the turn from economics to technics, from proletarian control to technocracy, from workers' self-management to appointed state management was ensured. Henceforth the end of any critique of alienation in mainstream Marxism was assured. Submission to technique under hierarchical authority effectively prevents active participation in the social production of values. And there was no alternative.

As noted in section 8 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?"). and section H.3.14, during 1917 Lenin did not favour workers' self-management of production. He raised the idea of *"workers' control"* after the workers spontaneously raised the idea and practice themselves during the revolution. Moreover, he interpreted that slogan in his own way, placing it within a statist context and within institutions inherited from capitalism (see section H.3.12). Once in power, it was (unsurprisingly) **his** vision of socialism and workers' control that was implemented, **not** the workers' factory committees. The core of that vision he repeatedly stressed had been raised **before** the October revolution.

This vision can be best seen in **The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, written by Lenin and published on the 25th of April 1918. This occurred before the start of the civil war and, indeed, he starts by arguing that *"[t]hanks to the peace which has been achieved"* the Bolsheviks had *"gained an opportunity to concentrate its efforts for a while on the most important and most difficult aspect of the socialist revolution,*

*namely the task of organisation."* The Bolsheviks, who had *"managed to complete the conquest of power,"* now faced *"the principal task of convincing people"* and doing ***"practical organisational work."*** Only when this was done *"will it be possible to say that Russia* ***has become*** *not only a Soviet, but also a socialist, republic."* [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 2 and p. 8]

Sadly, this *"organisation"* was riddled with authoritarianism and was fundamentally top-down in nature. His "socialist" vision was simply state capitalism (see section 10 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?"). However, what interests us here is that his arguments to justify the "socialist" policies he presented are similar to those put forward by Engels in *"On Authority."* As such, we can only reach the following conclusions. Firstly, that the *"state capitalist"* vision of socialism imposed upon Russia by the Bolsheviks was what they had always intended to introduce. It was their limited support for workers' control in 1917 that was atypical and not part of their tradition, **not** their policies once in power (as modern day Leninists assert). Secondly, that this vision had its roots in classical Marxism, specifically Engels' *"On Authority"* and the identification of socialism with nationalised property (see section H.3.13 for more on this).

That Engels diatribe had a negative impact on the development of the Russian revolution can easily be seen from Lenin's arguments. For example, Lenin argues that the *"tightening of discipline"* and *"harmonious organisation"* calls *"for coercion — coercion precisely in the form of dictatorship."* He did not object to granting *"individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)"* and did not think *"the appointment of individual, dictators with unlimited power"* was incompatible with *"the fundamental principles of the Soviet government."* After all, *"the history of revolutionary movements"* had *"shown"* that *"the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes."* He



*the people' ... must abolish government."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 78]

The Russian Revolution is a striking confirmation of this libertarian analysis. By applying centralism, the Bolsheviks disempowered the masses and concentrated power into the hands of the party leadership. This places power in a distinct social class and subject to the pervasive effects of their concrete social circumstances within their institutional position. As Bakunin predicted with amazing accuracy:

> *"The falsehood of the representative system rests upon the fiction that the executive power and the legislative chamber issuing from popular elections must, or even can for that matter, represent the will of the people ... the instinctive aims of those who govern ... are, because of their exceptional position diametrically opposed to the instinctive popular aspirations. Whatever their democratic sentiments and intentions may be, viewing society from the high position in which they find themselves, they cannot consider this society in any other way but that in which a schoolmaster views the pupils. And there can be no equality between the schoolmaster and the pupils... Whoever says political power says domination. And where domination exists, a more or less considerable section of the population is bound to be dominated by others... those who do the dominating necessarily must repress and consequently oppress those who are subject to the domination ... [This] explains why and how men who were democrats and rebels of the reddest variety when they were a part of the mass of governed people, became exceedingly moderate when they rose to power. Usually these backslidings are attributed to treason. That, however, is an erroneous idea; they*

from its own revolution. Rather than being actively participating in the transformation of society, they were transformed into spectators who simply were expected to implement the decisions made by the Bolsheviks on their behalf. Bolshevik centralisation quickly ensured the disempowerment of working class people. Unsurprisingly enough, given its role in class society and in bourgeois revolutions.

In this section of the FAQ, we will indicate why this process happened, why Bolshevik centralisation undermined the socialist content of the revolution in favour of new forms of oppression and exploitation.

Therefore, anarchists argue, centralism cannot help but generate minority rule, not a classless society. Representative, and so centralised, democracy, argued Malatesta, *"substitutes the will of a few for that of all ... and in the name of a fictitious collective interest, rides roughshod over every real interests, and by means of elections and the vote, disregards the wishes of each and everyone."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 147]

This is rooted in the nature of the system, for democracy does not mean, in practice, *"rule by all the people."* Rather, as Malatesta pointed out, it *"would be closer to the truth to say 'government of the majority of the people."* And even this is false, as *"it is never the case that the representatives of the majority of the people are in the same mind on all questions; it is therefore necessary to have recourse again to the majority system and thus we will get closer still to the truth with 'government of the majority of the elected by the majority of the electors.'"* This, obviously, *"is already beginning to bear a strong resemblance to minority government."* And so, *"it is easy to understand what has already been proven by universal historical experience: even in the most democratic of democracies it is always a small minority that rules and imposes its will and interests by force."* And so centralism turns democracy into little more than picking masters. Therefore, anarchists argue, *"those who really want 'government of*



notes that *"[u]ndoubtably, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 28 and p. 32] It would be churlish to note that previous revolutionary movements had not been **socialist** in nature and did not aim to **abolish** classes. In such cases, the government appointing people with dictatorial powers would not have harmed the nature of the revolution, which was transferring power from one minority class to another.

Lenin mocked the *"exceedingly poor arguments"* of those who objected, saying that they *"demand of us a higher democracy than bourgeois democracy and say: personal dictatorship is absolutely incompatible with your, Bolshevik (i.e. not bourgeois, **but socialist**) Soviet democracy."* As the Bolsheviks were *"not anarchists,"* he admitted the need *"coercion"* in the *"transition from capitalism to socialism,"* its form being determined *"by the degree of development of the given revolutionary class, and also by special circumstances."* In general, he stressed, there was *"absolutely **no** contradiction in principle between Soviet (**that is,** socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 32–3 and p. 33] Which is, of course, sophistry as dictatorship by a few people in some aspects of live will erode democracy in others. For example, being subject to the economic power of the capitalist during work harms the individual and reduces their ability to participate in other aspects of social life. Why should being subject to "red" bosses be any different?

In particular, Lenin argued that *"individual dictatorial power"* was required because *"large-scale machine industry"* (which is the *"foundation of socialism"*) calls for *"absolute and strict **unity of will,** which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people... But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one."* He reiterated that the *"**unquestioning subordination** to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale*

*machine industry."* The people must *"**unquestioningly obey the single will** of the leaders of labour."* And so it was a case (for the workers, at least) of *"[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33, p. 34 and p. 44]

The parallels with Engels' *"On Authority"* could not be clearer, as are the fallacies of Lenin's assertions (see, for example, section H.4.4). Lenin, like Engels, uses the example of modern industry to bolster his arguments. Yet the net effect of Lenin's argument was to eliminate working class economic power at the point of production. Instead of socialist social relationships, Lenin imposed capitalist ones. Indeed, no capitalist would disagree with Lenin's workplace regime — they try to create such a regime by breaking unions and introducing technologies and techniques which allow them to control the workers. Unsurprisingly, Lenin also urged the introduction of two such techniques, namely *"piece-work"* and *"applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 23–4] As Trotskyist Tony Cliff reminds us, *"the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th[e] unity [of workers as a class]. Once of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems."* He notes that these were used by the Nazis and the Stalinists *"for the same purpose."* [**State Capitalism in Russia**, pp. 18–9] Obviously piece-work is different when Lenin introduces it! Similarly, when Trotsky notes that *"[b]lind obedience is not a thing to be proud of in a revolutionary,"* it is somewhat different when Lenin calls upon workers to do so (or, for that matter, Trotsky himself when in power — see section 6 for Trotsky's radically different perspective on blind obedience of the worker to "his" state in 1920!). [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. xlvii]



for this precise reason that **every** ruling class in history has utilised centralisation against the masses. As we indicated in section B.2.5, centralisation has always been the tool of minority classes to disempower the masses. In the American and French revolutions, centralisation of state power was the means used to destroy the revolution, to take it out off the hands of the masses and concentrate it into the hands of a minority. In France:

> *"From the moment the bourgeoisie set themselves against the popular stream they were in need of a weapon that could enable them to resist pressure from the bras nus [working people]; they forced one by strengthening the central power ... [This was] the formation of the state machinery through which the bourgeoisie was going to enslave the proletariat. Here is the centralised state, with its bureaucracy and police ... [it was] a conscious attempt to reduce ... the power of the people."* [Daniel Guerin, **Class Struggle in the First French Republic**, p. 176]

The reason is not hard to understand — mass participation and class society do not go together. Thus, *"the move towards bourgeois dictatorship"* saw *"the strengthening of the central power against the masses."* [Guerin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 177–8] *"To attack the central power,"* argued Kropotkin, *"to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

Can we expect a similar concentration of the central power under the Bolsheviks to have a different impact? And, as discussed in appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" we find a similar marginalisation of the working class

Will it be in a federal (and so bottom-up) way or will it be in a centralised (and so top-down) way?

It goes almost without saying that Bolshevik ideology was centralist in nature. Lenin repeatedly stressed the importance of centralisation, arguing constantly that Marxism was, by its very nature, centralist (and top-down — section H.3.3). Long before the revolution, Lenin had argued that within the party it was a case of *"the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 367] Such visions of centralised organisation were the model for the revolutionary state. In 1917, he repeatedly stressed that after it the Bolsheviks would be totally in favour of *"centralism"* and *"strong state power."* [Lenin, **Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 374] Once in power, they did not disappoint.

Anarchists argue that this prejudice in favour of centralisation and centralism is at odds with Leninist claims to be in favour of mass participation. It is all fine and well for Trotskyist Tony Cliff to quote Lenin arguing that under capitalism the *"talent among the people"* is *"merely suppressed"* and that it *"must be given an opportunity to display itself"* and that this can *"save the cause of socialism,"* it is something else for Lenin (and the Leninist tradition) to favour organisational structures that allow that to happen. Similarly, it is fine to record Lenin asserting that *"living, creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves"* but it is something else to justify the barriers Leninist ideology placed in the way of it by its advocacy of centralism. [quoted by Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 20 and p. 21]

The central contradiction of Leninism is that while it (sometimes) talks about mass participation, it has always prefers an organisational form (centralism) which hinders, and ultimately destroys, the participation that **real** socialism needs.

That centralism works in this way should come as no surprise. After all, it based on centralising power at the top of an organisation and, consequently, into a few hands. It was



The **economic** dominance of the bourgeoisie ensures the political dispossession of the working class. Why expect the introduction of capitalist social relations in production to have different outcomes just because Lenin was the head of the government? In the words of libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton:

> *"We hold that the 'relations of production' — the relations which individuals or groups enter into with one another in the process of producing wealth — are the essential foundations of any society. A certain pattern of relations of production is the common denominator of all class societies. This pattern is one in which the producer does not dominate the means of production but on the contrary both is 'separated from them' and from the products of his own labour. In all class societies the producer is in a position of subordination to those who manage the productive process. Workers' management of production — implying as it does the total domination of the producer over the productive process — is not for us a marginal matter. It is the core of our politics. It is the only means whereby authoritarian (order-giving, order-taking) relations in production can be transcended and a free, communist or anarchist, society introduced.*
>
> *"We also hold that the means of production may change hands (passing for instance from private hands into those of a bureaucracy, collectively owning them) with out this revolutionising the relations of production. Under such circumstances — and whatever the formal status of property — the society is still a class society for production is still managed by an agency other than the producers themselves. Property relations, in other words, do not necessarily reflect the: relations of production.*

*They may serve to mask them — and in fact they often have.*" [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. vii-viii]

The net effect of Lenin's arguments, as anarchist Peter Arshinov noted a few years later, was that the *"fundamental fact"* of the Bolshevik revolution was *"that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of 'working classes' — producers managed by authority from above."* He stressed that Bolshevik political and economic ideas may have *"remov[ed] the workers from the hands of individual capitalists"* but they *"delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital ... Wage labour has remained what it was before, expect that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State... . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."* [**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 35 and p. 71] Moreover, Lenin's position failed to understand that unless workers have power at the point of production, they will soon loose it in society as a whole. Which, of course, they soon did in Bolshevik Russia, even in the limited form of electing a "revolutionary" government.

So while the causes of the failure of the Russian Revolution were many fold, the obvious influence of Engels' *"On Authority"* on the fate of the workers' control movement should be noted. After all, Engels' argument confuses the issues that Bakunin and other anarchists were trying to raise (namely on the nature of the organisations we create and our relationships with others). If, as Engels' argues, all organisation is *"authoritarian,"* then does this mean that there no real difference between organisational structures? Is a dictatorship just the same as a self-managed group, as they are both organisations and so both *"authoritarian"*? If so, surely that means the kinds of or-



In 1937 Trotsky asserted that *"liberal-anarchist thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an upheaval of social relations in the interests of the masses, whereas Stalin's Thermidorian upheaval accompanies the reconstruction of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**] Yet Stalin's *"upheaval"* was built upon the social relations created when Lenin and Trotsky held power. State ownership, one-man management, and so on where originally advocated and implemented by Lenin and Trotsky. The bureaucracy did not have to expropriate the working class economically — "real" Bolshevism had already did so. Nor can it be said that the social relations associated with the political sphere had fundamentally changed under Stalin. He had, after all, inherited the one-party state from Lenin and Trotsky. In a nutshell, Trotsky is talking nonsense.

Simply put, as Trotsky himself indicates, Bolshevik preference for nationalisation helped ensure the creation and subsequent rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Rather than be the product of terrible objective circumstances as his followers suggest, the Bolshevik state capitalist economic system was at the heart of their vision of what socialism was. The civil war simply brought the underlying logic of vision into the fore.

## 7 How did Bolshevik preference for centralism affect the revolution?

The next issue we will discuss is centralisation. Before starting, it is essential that it be stressed that anarchists are **not** against co-ordinated activity and organisation on a large scale. Anarchists stress the need for federalism to meet the need for such work (see section A.2.9, for example). As such, our critique of Bolshevik centralism is **not** a call for "localism" or isolation (as many Leninists assert). Rather, it is a critique of **how** the social co-operation essential for society will be conducted.

*1921 that the game was played and lost, but much earlier, during the period from 1918 to 1920… . [1921 saw] the beginning of the reconstruction of the productive apparatus. This reconstruction effort, however, was already firmly set in the groove of bureaucratic capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 99] In this, they simply followed the economic ideas Lenin had expounded in 1917 and 1918, but in an even more undemocratic way. Modern-day Leninism basically takes the revolutionised Russia of the Bolsheviks and, essentially, imposes upon it a more democratic form of government rather than Lenin's (and then Stalin's). Anarchists, however, still oppose the economy.

Ironically, proof that libertarians are right on this issue can be found in Trotsky's own work. In 1936, he argued that the *"demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**] Needless to say, he failed to note who had abolished the election of commanders in the Red Army in March 1918, namely himself (see section 4). Similarly, he failed to note that the *"masses"* had been *"pushed … from actual participation in the leadership of the country"* well before the end of the civil war and that, at the time, he was not concerned about it. Equally, it would be churlish to note that back in 1920 he thought that *"'Military' qualities … are valued in every sphere. It was in this sense that I said that every class prefers to have in its service those of its members who, other things being equal, have passed through the military school … This experience is a great and valuable experience. And when a former regimental commissary returns to his trade union, he becomes not a bad organiser."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 173]



ganisation we create are irrelevant and what **really** matters is state ownership? Such logic can only lead to the perspective that working class self-management of production is irrelevant to socialism and, unfortunately, the experience of the Russian Revolution tends to suggest that for mainstream Marxism this is the case. The Bolsheviks imposed distinctly authoritarian social structures while arguing that they were creating socialism.

Like Engels, the Bolsheviks defended the principle of authority. The dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat in the workplace (and, indeed, elsewhere) ultimately found its apology in this principle, thoroughly grounded in the practice of bureaucracy and modern factory production. Authority, hierarchy, and the need for submission and domination is inevitable, given the current mode of production, they argued. And, as Engels had stressed, no foreseeable change in social relations could ever overcome this blunt necessity. As such, it was (fundamentally) irrelevant for the leading Bolsheviks **how** a workplace is organised as, no matter what, it would be *"authoritarian."* Thus *"one-man management"* would be, basically, the same as worker's self-management via an elected factory committee. As Trotsky made clear in 1920, for the Bolsheviks the *"dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers [i.e. the party, which Trotsky cheerfully admits is exercising a* ***party*** *dictatorship], and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered."* Thus, it *"would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of the factories."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 162]

By equating *"organisation"* with *"authority"* (i.e. hierarchy) and dismissing the importance of revolutionising the social relationships people create between themselves, Engels opened the way for the Bolsheviks' advocacy of *"one-man management."* His essay is at the root of mainstream

Marxism's agnostic attitude to the patterns of domination and subordination within society and was used to justify one-man management. After all, if Engels was right, then it did not matter **how** the workplace was organised. It would, inherently, be *"authoritarian"* and so what mattered, therefore, was who owned property, **not** how the workplace was run. Perhaps, then, *"On Authority"* was a self-fulfilling prophecy — by seeing any form of organisation and any form of advanced technology as needing hierarchy, discipline and obedience, as being "authoritarian," it ensured that mainstream Marxism became blinded to the key question of **how** society was organised. After all, if *"despotism"* was a fact of life within industry regardless of how the wider society was organised, then it does not matter if *"one-man management"* replaces workers' self-management. Little wonder then that the continued alienation of the worker was widespread long before Stalin took power and, more importantly, before the civil war started.

As such, the dubious inheritance of classical Marxism had started to push the Bolshevik revolution down an authoritarian path and create economic structures and social relationships which were in no way socialist and, moreover, laid the foundations for Stalinism. Even if the civil war had not occurred, capitalist social relationships would have been dominant within "socialist" Russia — with the only difference being that rather than private capitalism it would have been state capitalism. As Lenin admitted, incidentally. It is doubtful that this state capitalism would have been made to serve *"the whole people"* as Lenin naively believed.

In another way Engels identification of organisation with authority affected the outcome of the revolution. As **any** form of organisation involved, for Engels, the domination of individuals and, as such, *"authoritarian"* then the nature of the socialist state was as irrelevant as the way workplaces were run. As both party dictatorship and soviet democracy meant that



> *with the conviction that capitalism was the only effective and rational system of production. Faithful in this respect to Marx, they wanted to abolish private property and market anarchy, but not the type of organisation capitalism had achieved at the point of production. They wanted to modify the* ***economy,*** *not the relations between people at work or the nature of labour itself.*
>
> *"At a deeper level still, their philosophy was to develop the forces of production. Here too they were the faithful inheritors of Marx — or at least one side of Marx, which became the predominant one in his mature writings. The development of the forces of production was, if not the ultimate goal, at any rate the essential means, in the sense that everything else would follow as a by-product and that everything else had to be subordinated to it…*
>
> *"To manage the work of others — this is the beginning and the end of the whole cycle of exploitation. The 'need' for a specific social category to manage the work of others in production (and the activity of others in politics and in society), the 'need' for a separate business management and for a Party to rule the State — this is what Bolshevism proclaimed as soon as it seized power, and this is what it zealously laboured to impose. We know that it achieved its ends. Insofar as ideas play a role in the development of history — and,* ***in the final analysis****, they play an enormous role — the Bolshevik ideology (and with it, the Marxist ideology lying behind it) was a decisive factor in the birth of the Russian bureaucracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 100–4]

Therefore, we *"may therefore conclude that, contrary to the prevailing mythology, it was not in 1927, or in 1923, or even in*

*What is criticisable in bourgeois militarism and in the bourgeois army, Trotsky says in substance, is that they are in the service of the bourgeoisie. Except for that, there is nothing in them to be criticised. The sole difference, he says, lies in this: '**Who is in power**?' Likewise, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not expressed by the 'form in which individual economic enterprises are administered.'*

*"The idea that like means cannot be placed indifferently into the service of different ends; that there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the result obtained; that, especially, neither the army nor the factory are simple 'means' or 'instruments,' but social structures in which are organised two fundamental aspects of human relations (production and violence); that in them can be seen in condensed form the essential expression of the type of social relations that characterise an era — this idea, though perfectly obvious and banal for Marxists, was totally 'forgotten.' It was just a matter of developing production, using proven methods and structures. That among these 'proofs' the principal one was the development of capitalism as a social system and that a factory produces not so much cloth or steel but proletariat and capital were facts that were utterly ignored.*

*"Obviously, behind this 'forgetfulness' is hidden something else. At the time, of course, there was the desperate concern to revive production as soon as possible and to put a collapsing economy back on its feet. This preoccupation, however, does not fatally dictate the choice of 'means.' If it seemed obvious to Bolshevik leaders that the sole effective means were capitalist ones, it was because they were imbued*



the individual was *"dominated"* by collective decisions, so both were *"authoritarian."* As such, the transformation of the soviet state into a party dictatorship did not fundamentally mean a change for the individuals subject to it. Little wonder that no leading Bolshevik called the end of soviet democracy and its replacement by party dictatorship as a "retreat" or even as something to be worried about (indeed, they all argued the opposite, namely that party dictatorship was essential and not an issue to be worried about).

Perhaps this analogy by the SWP's Tony Cliff of the relationship between the party and the working class provides an insight:

> *"In essence the dictatorship of the proletariat **does not** represent a combination of abstract, immutable elements like democracy and centralism, independent of time and space. The actual level of democracy, as well as centralism, depends on three basic factors: 1. the strength of the proletariat; 2. the material and cultural legacy left to it by the old regime; and 3. the strength of capitalist resistance. The level of democracy feasible must be indirect proportion to the first two factors, and in inverse proportion to the third. The captain of an ocean liner can allow football to be played on his vessel; on a tiny raft in a stormy sea the level of tolerance is far lower."* [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 179]

Ignoring the obvious points (such as comparing working class freedom and democracy to a game!), we can see shades of Engels in Cliff's words. Let us not forget that Engels argued that *"a ship on the high seas"* at a *"time of danger"* required *"the necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 732] Here Cliff is placing the party into the Captain's role and the workers as the crew. The Captain, in Engels

argument, exercised *"imperious authority."* In Cliff's, the party decides the freedoms which working class people are allowed to have — and so subjects them to its *"imperious authority."*

Little wonder Bolshevism failed. By this simple analogy Cliff shows the authoritarian essence of Bolshevism and who really has *"all power"* under that system. Like the crew and passengers dominated by the will of the captain, the working class under Leninism will be dominated by the party. It does not bode well that Cliff thinks that democracy can be *"feasible"* in some circumstances, but not others and it is up to those in power (i.e. the party leaders) to determine when it was. In his rush to justify Bolshevik party dictatorship in terms of "objective conditions" he clearly forgot his earlier comments that the *"liberation of the working class can only be achieved through the action of the working class. Hence one can have a revolution with more or less violence, with more or less suppression of civil rights of the bourgeoisie and its hangers-on [a general catch-all category which, if Bolshevik practice is anything to go by, can include rebel workers, indeed the whole working class!], with more or less political freedom, but one* ***cannot*** *gave a revolution, as the history of Russia conclusively demonstratives, without workers' democracy — even if restricted and distorted. Socialist advance must be gauged by workers' freedom, by their power to shape their own destiny ... Without workers' democracy the immediate means leads to a very different end, to an end that is prefigured in these same means."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110] Obviously if Lenin and Trotsky are the captains of the ship of state, such considerations are less important. When it is Lenin wielding *"imperious authority"* then workers' democracy can be forgotten and the regime remain a *"workers' state"*!

By ignoring the key issue Bakunin and other anarchists drew attention to by attacking *"authority"* (and let us not forget that by that they meant hierarchical organisations in which power is concentrated at the top in a few hands — see section H.4), Engels opened up the way of seeing democratic de-



*that point on, nobody could prevent these two powers from merging, could anyone stop the two strata embodying them from merging, nor could the consolidation of an irremovable bureaucracy ruling over all sectors of social life be halted. The process may have been accelerated or magnified by the entry of non-proletarian elements into the Party, as they rushed to jump on the bandwagon. But this was a consequence, and not a cause, of the Party's orientation ...*

*"Who is to manage production ...? ... the correct answer [is] the collective organs of labouring people. What the party leadership wanted, what it had already imposed — and on this point there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky — was a hierarchy directed from above. We know that this was the conception that triumphed. We know, too, where this 'victory' led ...*

*"In all Lenin's speeches and writings of this period, what recurs again and again like an obsession is the idea that Russia ought to learn from the advanced capitalist countries; that there are not a hundred and one different ways of developing production and labour productivity if one wants to emerge from backwardness and chaos; that one must adopt capitalist methods of 'rationalisation' and management as well as capitalist forms of work 'incentives.' All these, for Lenin, are just 'means' that apparently could freely be placed in the service of a radically different historical end, the building of socialism.*

*"Thus Trotsky, when discussing the merits of militarism, came to separate the army itself, its structure and its methods, from the social system it serves.*

For anarchists (and other libertarian socialists) this was and is nonsense. Without workers' self-management in production, socialism cannot exist. To focus attention of whether individuals own property or whether the state does is fundamentally a red-herring. Without workers' self-management of production, private capitalism will simply have been replaced by **state** capitalism. As one anarchist active in the factory committee movement argued in January, 1918, it is *"not the liberation of the proletariat when many individual plunders are changed for one very powerful plunder — the state. The position of the proletariat remains the same."* Therefore, *"[w]e must not forget that the factory committees are the nuclei of the future socialist order"* nor must we forget *"that the state ... will try to maintain its own interests at the expense of the interests of the workers. There is no doubt that we will be witnesses of a great conflict between the state power in the centre and the organisations composed exclusively of workers which are found in the localities."* He was proved right. Instead of centralised the Bolshevik vision of state capitalism, the anarchists argued that factory committees *"be united on the basic of federalism, into industrial federations ... [and] poly-industrial soviets of national economy."* Only in that way could **real** socialism be created. [quoted by Frederick I. Kaplan, **Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labour**, p. 163 and p. 166] (see section 7 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for more on the factory committee movement).

The reason is obvious. It is worth quoting Cornelius Castoriadis at length on why the Bolshevik system was doomed to failure:

> *"So we end up with the uncontested power of managers in the factories, and the Party's exclusive 'control' (in reality, what kind of control was it, anyway?). And there was the uncontested power of the Party over society, without any control. From*



cision as being less than important. This is **not** to suggest that Engels favoured dictatorship. Rather we are suggesting that by confusing two radically different forms of organisation as self-management and hierarchy he blunted latter Marxists to the importance of participation and collective decision making from below. After all, if all organisation is *"authoritarian"* then it matters little, in the end, how it is structured. Dictatorship, representative democracy and self-management were all equally *"authoritarian"* and so the issues raised by anarchism can safely be ignored (namely that electing bosses does not equate to freedom). Thus the Bolshevik willingness to equate their dictatorship with rule by the working class is not such a surprise after all.

To conclude, rather than the anti-authoritarians not knowing *"what they are talking about," "creating nothing but confusion," "betraying the movement of the proletariat"* and *"serv[ing] the reaction,"* it was Engels' essay that aided the Bolshevik counter-revolution and helped, in its own small way, to lay the foundations for Leninist tyranny and state capitalism. [Engels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 733] Ultimately, Engels *"On Authority"* helped give Lenin the ideological premises by which to undermine workers' economic power during the revolution and recreate capitalist social relations and call it "socialism." His ill thought out diatribe had ramifications even he would never have guessed (but were obvious at the time to libertarians). His use of the modern factory system to argue against the anarchist call for workers' councils, federalism and workers' autonomy, for participation, for self-management, became the basis for re-imposing **capitalist** relations of production in revolutionary Russia.

## 4 How did the Bolshevik vision of "democracy" affect the revolution?

As discussed in section H.3.2, Marx and Engels had left their followers which a contradictory legacy as regards *"socialism from below."* On the one hand, their praise for the Paris Commune and its libertarian ideas pointed to a participatory democracy run from below. On the other, Marx's comments during the German Revolution in 1850 that the workers must *"strive for ... the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority"* because *"the path of revolutionary activity"* can "proceed only from the centre" suggests a top-down approach. He stressed that centralisation of power was essential to overcome local autonomy, which would allow *"every village, every town and every province"* to put *"a new obstacle in the path"* the revolution due to *"local and provincial obstinacy."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 509]

Building upon this contradictory legacy, Lenin unambiguously stressed the *"from above"* aspect of it (see section H.3.3 for details). The only real exception to this perspective occurred in 1917, when Lenin was trying to win mass support for his party. However, even this support for democracy from below was always tempered by reminding the reader that the Bolsheviks stood for centralisation and strong government once they were in power (see section 7).

Once in power, the promises of 1917 were quickly forgotten. Unsurprisingly, modern day Leninists argue that this was due to the difficult circumstances facing the Bolsheviks at the time. They argue that the words of 1917 represent the true democratic vision of Bolshevism. Anarchists are not impressed. After all, for an idea to be useful it must be practical — even in "exceptional circumstances." If the Bolshevik vision is not robust enough to handle the problems that have affected every revolution then we have to question the validity of that vision or the strength of commitment its supporters hold it.



> *"The role of the proletariat in the new State was thus quite clear. It was that of enthusiastic and passive citizens. And the role of the proletariat in work and in production was no less clear. On the whole, it was the same as before — under capitalism — except that workers of 'character and capacity' [to quote Trotsky] were to be chosen to replace factory managers who had fled."* [**The Role of the Bureaucracy in the birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 99]

Trotsky's position, it should be noted, remained consistent. In the early 1930s he argued (in respect to Stalin's regime) that *"anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class."* [**The Class Nature of The Soviet State**] Obviously, if the prime issue is property and not who **manages** the means of production (or even *"the state"*) then having functioning factory-committees becomes as irrelevant as having democratic soviets when determining whether the working class is in power or not.

(As an aside, we should not by that surprised that Trotsky could think the workers were the *"ruling class"* in the vast prison-camp which was Stalin's USSR, given that he thought the workers were the *"ruling class"* when he and Lenin headed the Bolshevik party dictatorship! Thus we have the strange division Leninists make between Lenin's dictatorship and Stalin's (and those of Stalin's followers). When Lenin presides over a one-party dictatorship, breaks up strikes, bans political parties, bans Bolshevik factions, and imprisons and shoots political dissidents these are all regrettable but necessary steps in the protection of the "proletarian state." When Stalin does the exact same thing, a few years later, they are all terrible examples of the deformation of this same "proletarian state"!)

they seized power. One can easily find dozens of quotations from Lenin expressing the same idea.

Needless to say, Trotsky's *"collective will of the workers"* was simply a euphemism for the Party, whose dictatorship **over** the workers Trotsky glibly justified:

> *"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party ... [that] the Soviets ... [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

While Trotsky's honesty on this matter is refreshing (unlike his followers today who hypocritically talk about the "leadership" of the Bolshevik party) we can say that this was a **fatal** position to take. Indeed, for Trotsky **any** system (including the militarisation of labour) was acceptable as the key *"differences ... is defined by a fundamental test: who is in power?"* — the capitalist class or the proletariat (i.e. the party) [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–2] Thus working class control over their own affairs was of little importance: *"The worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet State; no, he is subordinated to the Soviet State, under its orders in every direction — for it is **his** State."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 168] This, of course, echoed his own arguments in favour of appointment (see section 4) **and** Lenin's demands for the *"exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals"* in the workplace (see section 3) in early 1918. Cornelius Castoriadis points out the obvious:



Given this, the question becomes which of these two aspects of Marxism was considered its "essence" by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Obviously, it is hard to isolate the real Bolshevik vision of democracy from the influence of "objective factors." However, we can get a taste by looking at how the Bolsheviks acted and argued during the first six months in power. During this period, the problems facing the revolution were hard but not as bad as those facing it after the Czech revolt at the end of May, 1918. Particularly after March, 1918, the Bolsheviks were in a position to start constructive work as in the middle of that month Lenin claimed that the *"Soviet Government has triumphed in the Civil War."* [quoted by Maximoff, **The Guillotine at Work**, p. 53]

So the question as to whether the Bolsheviks were forced into authoritarian and hierarchical methods by the practical necessities of the civil war or whether all this was inherent in Leninism all along, and the natural product of Leninist ideology, can be answered by looking at the record of the Bolsheviks prior to the civil war. From this we can ascertain the effect of the civil war. And the obvious conclusion is that the record of the initial months of Bolshevik rule point to a less than democratic approach which suggests that authoritarian policies were inherent in Leninism and, as such, pointed the revolution into a path were further authoritarian policies were not only easy to implement, but had to be as alternative options had been eliminated by previous policies. Moreover, Bolshevik ideology itself made such policies easy to accept and to justify.

As discussed in section 6 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", it was during this period that the Bolsheviks started to gerrymander soviets and disband any they lost elections to. As we indicate in section 9 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", they undermined the factory committees, stopping them federating and basically handed the factories to the state bureaucracy. Lenin argued for and implemented one-man

management, piecework, Taylorism and other things Stalinism is condemned for (see section 3, for example). In the army, Trotsky disbanded the soldier committees and elected officers by decree.

How Trotsky defended this policy of appointing officers is significant. It mirrors Lenin's argument in favour of appointed one-man management and, as such, reflects the basic Bolshevik vision of democracy. By looking at his argument we can see how the Bolshevik vision of democracy fatality undermined the Russian Revolution and its socialist content. The problems of the civil war simply deepened the abscess in democracy created by Lenin and Trotsky in the spring of 1918.

Trotsky acknowledged that that *"the soldier-workers and soldier-peasants"* needed *"to elect commanders for themselves"* in the Tzarist army *"not [as] military chiefs, but simply [as] representatives who could guard them against attacks of counter-revolutionary classes."* However, in the new Red Army this was not needed as it was the *"workers' and peasants' Soviets, i.e. the same classes which compose the army"* which is building it. He blandly asserted that *"[h]ere no internal struggle is possible."* To illustrate his point he pointed to the trade unions. *"The metal workers,"* he noted, *"elect their committee, and the committee finds a secretary, a clerk, and a number of other persons who are necessary. Does it ever happen that the workers should say: 'Why are our clerks and treasurers appointed, and not elected?' No, no intelligent workers will say so."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 112–3]

Thus in less than six months, Lenin's call in *"State and Revolution"* that *"[a]ll officials, without exception, [would be] elected and subject to recall **at any time**"* was dismissed as the demand that *"no intelligent workers"* would raise! [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 302] But, then again, Trotsky **was** in the process of destroying another apparent *"principle"* of Leninism, namely (to quote, like Lenin, Marx) *"the suppression of the standing army,*



vision of socialism helped undermine the revolution, workers' power and, sadly, build the foundations of Stalinism.

## 6 How did Bolshevik preference for nationalisation affect the revolution?

As noted in the last section, unlike anarchism, for Bolshevism nationalisation, **not** workers' self-management, was the key issue in socialism. As noted in section 3, Lenin had proclaimed the necessity for appointed one-man managers and implementing *"state capitalism"* in April 1918. Neither policy was thought to harm the socialist character of the regime. As Trotsky stressed in 1920, the decision to place a manager at the head of a factory instead of a workers' collective had no political significance:

> *"It would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 162]

Nor was this considered a bad thing or forced upon the Bolsheviks as a result of terrible circumstances. Quite the reverse: *"I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 162–3] As discussed in the previous section, this evaluation fits perfectly into Bolshevik ideology and practice before and after

> *Technicians, 2 from the Association of Agronomists, 2 from the Petrograd Trade Union Council, 1 from each All-Russian Trade Union Federation numbering fewer than 100,000 members (2 for Federations of over this number)... and 5 from the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees! The Factory Committees often under anarcho-syndicalist influence had been well and truly 'cut down to size'."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

As we note in section 10 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", this was a conscious preference on Lenin's part. The factory committees had started to federate, creating their own institutional framework of socialism based on the workers own class organisation. Lenin, as he had explained in 1917, favoured using the institutions created by *"state capitalism"* and simply tacked on a form of *"workers' control"* distinctly at odds with the popular usage of the expression. He **rejected** the suggestions of factory committees themselves. The Supreme Economic Council, established by the Soviet government, soon demonstrated how to really mismanage the economy.

As such, the economic developments proposed by Lenin in early 1918 and onwards were **not** the result of the specific problems facing the Russian revolution. The fact is while the dire problems facing the Russian revolution undoubtedly made many aspects of the Bolshevik system worse, they did not create them. Rather, the centralised, bureaucratic and top-down abuses Leninists like to distance themselves from where, in fact, built into Lenin's socialism from the start. A form of socialism Lenin and his government explicitly favoured and created in opposition to other, authentically proletarian, versions.

The path to state capitalism was the one Lenin wanted to trend. It was not forced upon him or the Bolsheviks. And, by reintroducing wage slavery (this time, to the state) the Bolshevik



*and the substitution for it of the armed people."* [quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 300]

Trotsky continues his argument. The Trade union committee, he asserts, would say *"You yourselves have chosen the committee. If you don't like us, dismiss us, but once you have entrusted us with the direction of the union, then give us the possibility of choosing the clerk or the cashier, since we are better able to judge in the matter than you, and if our way of conducting business is bad, then throw us out and elect another committee."* After this defence of elected dictatorship, he states that the *"Soviet government is the same as the committee of a trade union. It is elected by the workers and peasants, and you can at the All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, at any moment you like, dismiss that government and appoint another."* Until that happens, he was happy to urge blind obedience by the sovereign people to their servants: *"But once you have appointed it, you must give it the right to choose the technical specialists, the clerks, the secretaries in the broad sense of the word, and in military affairs, in particular."* He tried to calm the nerves of those who could see the obvious problems with this argument by asking whether it was *"possible for the Soviet government to appoint military specialists against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 113]

And the answer to that question is, of course, an empathic yes. Even looking at his own analogy, namely that of a trade union committee, it is obvious that an elected body can have interests separate from and in opposition to those who elected it. The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying the membership of the unions. And, of course, the history of the Soviet government under Lenin and Trotsky (never mind Stalin!) shows that just because it was once elected by a majority of the working people does not mean it will act in their best interests.

Trotsky even went one better. *"The army is now only in the process of formation,"* he noted. *"How could the soldiers who have*

*just entered the army choose the chiefs! Have they have any vote to go by? They have none. And therefore elections are impossible."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 113] If only the Tsar had thought of that one! If he had, he would still be in power. And, needless to say, Trotsky did not apply that particular logic to himself. After all, he had no experience of holding governmental office or building an army (or even being in combat). Nor did any of the other Bolshevik leaders. By the logic of his argument, not only should the workers not been allowed to vote for a soviet government, he and his fellow Bolsheviks should not have assumed power in 1917. But, clearly, sauce for the goose is definitely **not** sauce for the gander.

For all his talk that the masses could replace the Bolsheviks at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Trotsky failed to realise that these proposals (and other ones like it) ensured that this was unlikely to happen. Even assuming that the Bolsheviks had not gerrymandered and disbanded soviets, the fact is that the Bolshevik vision of "democracy" effectively hollowed out the grassroots participation required to make democracy at the top anything more than a fig-leaf for party power. He honestly seemed to believe that eliminating mass participation in other areas of society would have no effect on the levels of participation in soviet elections. Would people subjected to one-man management in the workplace and in the army really be truly free and able to vote for parties which had not appointed their bosses? Could workers who were disenfranchised economically and socially remain in political power (assuming you equate voting a handful of leaders into power with *"political power"*)? And does being able to elect a representative every quarter to the All-Russian congress really mean that the working class was really in charge of society? Of course not.

This vision of top-down "democracy" can, of course, be traced back to Marx's arguments of 1850 and Lenin's comments that the *"organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy"* was *"to proceed from the top downward."*



> *placed under trade union control. The story that the Bolsheviks 'patiently' experimented with workers' control, only to find it 'inefficient' and 'chaotic,' is a myth. Their 'patience' did not last more than a few weeks. Not only did Lenin oppose direct workers' control within a matter of weeks ... even union control came to an end shortly after it had been established. By the summer of 1918, almost all of Russian industry had been placed under bourgeois forms of management."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 200–1]

Significantly, even his initial vision of workers' control was hierarchical, centralised and top-down. In the workplace it was to be exercised by factory committees. The *"higher workers' control bodies"* were to be *"composed of representatives of trade unions, factory and office workers' committees, and workers' co-operatives."* The decisions of the lower bodies *"may be revoked only by higher workers' control bodies."* [quoted by Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10] As Maurice Brinton notes:

> *"there [was] ... a firm hierarchy of control organs ... each Committee was to be responsible to a 'Regional Council of Workers' Control', subordinated in turn to an 'All-Russian Council of Workers' Control'. The composition of these higher organs was decided by the Party.*
>
> *"The trade unions were massively represented in the middle and higher strata of this new pyramid of 'institutionalised workers' control.' For instance the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control was to consist of 21 'representatives': 5 from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, 5 from the Executive of the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions, 5 from the Association of Engineers and*

over and used to create socialism (see section H.3.12). Unsurprisingly, when defending Cliff's *"new formulation"* against the *"Left Communists"* in the spring of 1918 he noted that he gave his *"'high' appreciation of state capitalism" "**before** the Bolsheviks seized power."* [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 636]

And, indeed, his praise for state capitalism and its forms of social organisation can be found in his State and Revolution:

> *"the **post-office** [is] an example of the socialist system ... At present ... [it] is organised on the lines of a state **capitalist** monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organisations of a similar type ... the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Overthrow the capitalists ... Our immediate object is to organise the **whole** of national economy on the lines of the postal system ... It is such a state, standing on such an economic basis, that we need."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 307–8]

Given this, Lenin's rejection of the factory committee's model of socialism comes as no surprise (see section 10 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for more details). As we noted in section H.3.14, rather than promote workers' control, Lenin effectively undermined it. Murray Bookchin points out the obvious:

> *"In accepting the concept of worker's control, Lenin's famous decree of November 14, 1917, merely acknowledged an accomplished fact; the Bolsheviks dared not oppose the workers at this early date. But they began to whittle down the power of the factory committees. In January 1918, a scant two months after 'decreeing' workers' control, Lenin began to advocate that the administration of the factories be*



(see sections H.3.2 and H.3.3). By equating centralised, top-down decision making by an elected government with "democracy," the Bolsheviks had the ideological justification to eliminate the functional democracy associated with the factory committees and soldiers committees. In place of workers' and soldiers' direct democracy and self-management, the Bolsheviks appointed managers and officers and justified because a workers' party was in power. After all, had not the masses elected the Bolsheviks into power? This became the means by which **real** democracy was eliminated in area after area of Russian working class life. Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic in any meaningful sense for long. At best, it will be like a bourgeois republic with purely elections where people elect a party to misrepresent them every four or so years while real economic, political and social power rests in the hands of a few. At worse, it would be a dictatorship with "elections" whose results are known before hand.

The Leninist vision of "democracy" is seen purely as a means of placing the party into power. Thus power in society shifts to the top, to the leaders of the centralised party in charge of the centralised state. The workers' become mere electors rather than actual controllers of the revolution and are expected to carry out the orders of the party without comment. In other words, a decidedly bourgeois vision of "democracy." Anarchists, in contrast, seek to dissolve power back into the hands of society and empower the individual by giving them a direct say in the revolution through their workplace and community assemblies and their councils and conferences.

This vision was not a new development. Far from it. While, ironically enough, Lenin's and Trotsky's support for the appointment of officers/managers can be refuted by looking at Lenin's **State and Revolution**, the fact is that the undemocratic perspectives they are based on can be found in Lenin's

**What is to be Done?**. This suggests that his 1917 arguments were the aberration and against the true essence of Leninism, not his and Trotsky's policies once they were in power (as Leninists like to argue).

Forgetting that he had argued against *"primitive democracy"* in What is to Be Done?, Lenin had lambasted the opportunists and "present Kautskyists" for *"repeat[ing] the vulgar bourgeois jeers at 'primitive' democracy."* Now, in 1917, it was a case that *"the transition from capitalism to socialism is* ***impossible*** *without some 'reversion' to 'primitive' democracy (how else can the majority, even the whole population, proceed to discharge state functions?)"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 302] Very true. As Leninism in power showed, the conscious elimination of *"primitive democracy"* in the army and workplace ensured that socialism **was** *"impossible."* And this elimination was not justified in terms of "difficult" circumstances but rather in terms of principle and the inability of working people to manage their own affairs directly.

Particularly ironic, given Trotsky's trade union committee analogy was Lenin's comment that *"Bernstein [the arch revisionist and reformist] combats 'primitive democracy' ... To prove that 'primitive democracy' is worthless, Bernstein refers to the experience of the British trade unions, as interpreted by the Webbs. Seventy years of development ... convinced the trade unions that primitive democracy was useless, and they substituted ordinary democracy, i.e. parliamentarism, combined with bureaucracy, for it."* Lenin replied that because the trade unions operated *"****in absolute capitalist slavery****"* a *"number of concessions to the prevailing evil, violence, falsehood, exclusion of the poor from the affairs of the 'higher' administration 'cannot be avoided.' Under socialism much of the 'primitive' democracy will inevitably be revived, since, for the first time in history of civilised society, the* ***mass*** *of the population will rise to* ***independent*** *participation, not only in voting and elections,* ***but also in the everyday administration of affairs****"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361] Obviously things looked a bit different once he and his fellow Bolshevik leaders



> *blamed them for the effects of circumstances which the workers had no control."* [**Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 106]

All in all, the Bolshevik vision of socialism was a disaster. Centralism was a source of massive economic mismanagement and, moreover, bureaucratisation from the start. As anarchists had long predicted. As we discuss in section 12 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", there was an alternative in the form of the factory committees and the federation. Sadly this was not part of the Bolshevik vision. At best they were tacked onto this vision as a (very) junior partner (as in 1917) or they were quickly marginalised and then dumped when they had outlived their usefulness in securing Bolshevik power (as in 1918).

While some Leninists like to paint the economic policies of the Bolsheviks in power as being different from what they called for in 1917, the truth is radically different. For example, Tony Cliff of the UK's "Socialist Workers Party" asserts, correctly, that in April 1918 the *"defence of state capitalism constituted the essence of his economic policy for this period."* However, he also states that this was *"an entirely new formulation,"* which was not the case in the slightest. [Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69] As Lenin himself acknowledged.

Lenin had always confused state capitalism with socialism. *"State capitalism,"* he wrote, *"is a complete* ***material*** *preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism* ***there are no gaps.****"* He argued that socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly* ***made to benefit the whole people****; by this token it* ***ceases*** *to be capitalist monopoly."* [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 38 and p. 37] This was in May, 1917. A few months latter, he was talking about how the institutions of state capitalism could be taken

*issu[ed] dozens of orders and pass[ed] countless directives with virtually no real knowledge of affairs."* [William G. Rosenberg, **Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 116] The Bolsheviks, as Lenin had promised, built from the top-down their system of *"unified administration"* based on the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] This was very centralised and very inefficient (see section 7 for more discussion).

Moreover, having little real understanding of the circumstances on the ground they could not compare their ideological assumptions and preferences to reality. As an example, the Bolshevik idea that "big" was automatically "more efficient" and "better" had a negative impact on the revolution. In practice, as Thomas F. Remington notes, this simply resulted generated waste:

> *"The waste of scare materials at [the giant] Putilov [plant] was indeed serious, but not only political unrest had caused it. The general shortage of fuel and materials in the city took its greatest toll on the largest enterprises, whose overhead expenditures for heating the plant and firing the furnaces were proportionally greater than those for smaller enterprises. This point — explained by the relative constant proportions among needed inputs to producers at any given point in time — only was recognised latter. Not until 1919 were the regime's leaders prepared to acknowledge that small enterprises, under the conditions of the time, might be more efficient in using resources: and not until 1921 did a few Bolsheviks theorists grasp the economic reasons for this apparent violation of their standing assumption that larger units were inherently more productive. Thus not only were the workers accused of politically motivated resistance, but the regime*



were in power. Then the exclusion of the poor from the affairs of the *"higher"* administration was seen as normal practice, as proven by the practice of the trade unions! And as we note in section H.3.8, this *"exclusion"* was taken as a key lesson of the revolution and built into the Leninist theory of the state.

This development was not unexpected. After all, as we noted in section H.5.5, over a decade before Lenin had been less than enthralled by *"primitive democracy"* and more in agreement with Bernstein than he lets on in **State and Revolution**. In **What is to Be Done?**, he based his argument for centralised, top-down party organisation on the experiences of the labour movement in democratic capitalist regimes. He quotes the same book by the Webb's to defend his position. He notes that *"in the first period of existence in their unions, the British workers thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all members to do all the work of managing the unions."* This involved *"all questions [being] decided by the votes of all the members"* and all *"official duties"* being *"fulfilled by all the members in turn."* He dismisses *"such a conception of democracy"* as *"absurd"* and *"historical experience"* made them *"understand the necessity for representative institutions"* and *"full-time professional officials."* Ironically, Lenin records that in Russia the *"'primitive' conception of democracy"* existed in two groups, the *"masses of the students and workers"* and the *"Economists of the Bernstein persuasion."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 162–3]

Thus Trotsky's autocratic and top-down vision of democracy has its roots within Leninism. Rather than being forced upon the Bolsheviks by difficult circumstances, the eroding of grassroots, functional ("primitive") democracy was at the core of Bolshevism. Lenin's arguments in 1917 were the exception, not his practice after he seized power.

This fundamentally undemocratic perspective can be found today in modern Leninism. As well as defending the Bolshevik dictatorship during the civil war, modern Leninists support the continuation of party dictatorship after its end. In partic-

ular, they support the Bolshevik repression of the Kronstadt rebellion (see appendix "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" for more details). As Trotsky put it in 1937, if the Kronstadt demand for soviet elections had been implemented then *"to free the soviets from the leadership [sic!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves ... Social-Revolutionary-anarchist soviets would serve only as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship [sic!] to capitalist restoration."* He generalised this example, by pointing to the *"experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 90] Modern day Leninists repeat this argument, failing to note that they sound like leftist Henry Kissingers (Kissinger, let us not forget, ensured US aid for Pinochet's coup in Chile and argued that *"I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people"*).

Today we have Leninists combining rhetoric about democratic socialism, with elections and recall, with a mentality which justifies the suppression of working class revolt because they are not prepared to stand by and watch a country go capitalist due to the irresponsibility of its own people. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, previously in 1937 Trotsky expressed his support for the *"objective necessity"* of the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* and, two years later, that the *"vanguard of the proletariat"* must be *"armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself."* (see section H.3.8). If only modern day Leninists were as honest!

So the Bolshevik contempt for working class self-government still exists. While few, however, explicitly proclaim the logic of this position (namely party dictatorship) most defend the Bolsheviks implementing this conclusion in practice. Can we not conclude that, faced with the same



would be immense, thus provoking a large bureaucracy which would be hard to control and soon become the **real** power in the state. A centralised body, therefore, effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers — power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. If that sounds familiar, it should. It is precisely what **did** happen in Lenin's Russia and laid the basis for Stalinism.

Thirdly, to eliminate the dangers of workers' self-management generating "propertarian" notions, the workers' have to have their control over their workplace reduced, if not eliminated. This, by necessity, generates bourgeois social relationships and, equally, appointment of managers from above (which the Bolsheviks did embrace). Indeed, by 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had *"pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea"* and even claimed that at that stage *"there were no disputes in connection with the question"* of one-man management. [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] While the first claim is true (Lenin argued for one-man management appointed from above before the start of the Civil War in May 1918) the latter one is not true (excluding anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and Maximalists, there were also the dissent *"Left Communists"* in the Bolshevik party itself).

Fourthly, centralism was not that efficient. The central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre: *"it seems apparent that many workers themselves ... had now come to believe .. . that confusion and anarchy [sic!]* ***at the top*** *were the major causes of their difficulties, and with some justification. The fact was that Bolshevik administration was chaotic ... Scores of competitive and conflicting Bolshevik and Soviet authorities issued contradictory orders, often brought to factories by armed Chekists. The Supreme Economic Council...*

isation and the elimination of workers' self-management with hierarchical management. Workers' again would be reduced to the level of order-takers, with control over their workplaces resting not in their hands but in those of the state.

Secondly, Trotsky seems to think that workers at the base of society would be so unchanged by a revolution that they would hold their fellow workers ransom. And, moreover, that other workers would let them. That, to say the least, seems a strange perspective. But not as strange as thinking that giving extensive powers to a central body will **not** produce equally selfish behaviour (but on a wider and more dangerous scale). The basic fallacy of Trotsky's argument is that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin's power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its own interests. Not that did not suddenly arise with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, *"in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies"* and he points to the *"not untypical example of a small condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People's Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People's Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 73]

In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property and doing as they please with it. Compared to an individual workplace, the state's power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger and the centralised system would be harder to control. The requirements of gathering and processing the information required for the centre to make intelligent decisions



problems the Bolsheviks faced, these modern day Leninists will implement the same policies? That they will go from party power to party dictatorship, simply because they know better than those who elected them on such matters? That answer seems all too obvious.

As such, the Bolshevik preference for centralised state power and of representative forms of democracy involved the substitution of the party for the class and, consequently, will facilitate the dictatorship **over** the proletariat when faced with the inevitable problems facing any revolution. As Bakunin put it, a *"people's administration, according to [the Marxists], must mean a people's administration by virtue of a small number of representatives chosen by the people ... [I]t is a deception which would conceal the despotism of a governing minority, all the more dangerous because it appears as a sham expression of the people's will ... [T]he vast majority, the great mass of people, would be governed by a privileged minority ... [of]* ***former*** *workers, who would stop being workers the moment they became rulers or representatives, and would then come to regard the whole blue-collared world from governmental heights, and would not represent the people but themselves and their pretensions."* So the Marxist state would be *"the reign of the* ***scientific mind,*** *the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy of real of bogus learning, and the world will be divided into a dominant, science-based minority and a vast, ignorant majority. And then let the ignorant masses beware!"* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 268, pp. 268–9 and p. 266]

In summary, Trotsky's deeply undemocratic justification for appointing officers, like Lenin's similar arguments for appointing managers, express the logic and reality of Bolshevism far better than statements made before the Bolsheviks seized power and never implemented. Sadly, modern Leninists concentrate on the promises of the election manifesto rather than the grim reality of Bolshevik power and its long standing top-

down vision of "democracy." A vision which helped undermine the revolution and ensure its degeneration into a party dictatorship presiding over a state capitalist economy.

## 5 What was the effect of the Bolshevik vision of "socialism"?

As we discussed in section H.3.1, anarchists and most Marxists are divided not only by **means** but also by **ends**. Simply put, libertarians and Leninist do **not** have the same vision of socialism. Given this, anarchists are not surprised at the negative results of the Bolshevik revolution — the use of anti-socialist means to attain anti-socialist ends would obviously have less than desirable results.

The content of the Bolshevik vision of "socialism" is criticised by anarchists on two main counts. Firstly, it is a top-down, centralised vision of "socialism." This can only result in the destruction of working class economic power at the point of production in favour of centralised bureaucratic power. Secondly, for Bolshevism nationalisation, **not** workers' self-management, was the key issue. We will discuss the first issue here and the second in the following section.

The Bolshevik vision of "socialism" was inherently centralised and top-down. This can be seen from the organisational schemas and arguments made by leading Bolsheviks before and immediately after the Revolution. For example, we discover Trotsky arguing in March 1918 that workplaces *"will be subject to policies laid down by the local council of workmen's deputies"* who, in turn, had *"their range of discretion ... limited in turn by regulations made for each class of industry by the boards or bureaux of the central government."* He dismissed Kropotkin's communalist ideas by saying local autonomy was not *"suited to the state of things in modern industrial society"* and *"would result in endless frictions and difficulties."* As the *"coal from the Donets basin goes all over Russia, and is*



*indispensable in all sorts of industries"* you could not allow *"the organised people of that district [to] do what they pleased with the coal mines"* as they *"could hold up all the rest of Russia."* [contained in Al Richardson (ed.), **In Defence of the Russian Revolution**, p. 186]

Lenin repeated this centralised vision in June of that year, arguing that *"Communism requires and presupposes the greatest possible centralisation of large-scale production throughout the country. The all-Russian centre, therefore, should definitely be given the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given branch of industry. The regional centres define their functions depending on local conditions of life, etc., in accordance with the general production directions and decisions of the centre."* He continued by explicitly arguing that *"[t]o deprive the all-Russia centre of the right to direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry ... would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 292]

Thus the Bolshevik economic ideal was centralised and top-down. This is not unsurprising, as Lenin had promised precisely this when the Bolsheviks got into power. As in the Bolshevik party itself, the lower organs were controlled by the higher ones (and as we will discuss, these higher ones were not directly elected by the lower ones). The problems with this vision are many fold.

Firstly, to impose an "ideal" solution would destroy a revolution — the actions and decisions (**including what others may consider mistakes**) of a free people are infinitely more productive and useful than the decisions and decrees of the best central committee. Moreover, a centralised system by necessity is an imposed system (as it excludes by its very nature the participation of the mass of the people in determining their own fate). Thus **real** socialisation must proceed from below, reflecting the real development and desires of those involved. Centralisation can only result in replacing socialisation with national-

*instruction by Dzerzhinskii to party members immediately to report 'any groupings within the party', i.e. the Workers Group and Workers Truth, not only to the CC but also to the GPU, and emphasized that making such reports was 'the elementary duty of every party member'."* [Simon Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 215]

Thus, the Stalinists began by using the very techniques the likes of Trotsky had supported against their opponents years before. For example, the Eighth Party Congress in December 1919 agreed that *"[a]ll decisions of the higher jurisdiction are absolutely binding for the lower."* Moreover, *"[e]ach decision must above all be fulfilled, and only after this is an appeal to the corresponding party organ permissible."* Centralism was reaffirmed: *"The whole matter of assignment of party workers is in the hands of the Central Committee of the party. Its decision is binding for everyone..."* These decisions were used as a weapon against the opposition: *"Translating this principle into practice, the Secretariat under Krestinsky [a Trotsky supporter] began deliberately to transfer party officials for political reasons, to end personal conflicts and curb opposition."* In 1923, the Secretariat *"brought into play its power of transfer, which had already proven to be an effective political weapon against the Ukrainian Leftists and the Workers' Opposition.* [Robert V. Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113 and p. 229]

The party itself had been reorganised, with *"the replacement of local party committees, which were at least democratic in form, by bureaucratically constituted 'political departments.' With the institution of such bodies, all political activity ... was placed under rigid control from above. This innovation was taken from the army; as its origin suggests, it was strictly a military, authoritarian institution, designed for transmitting propaganda downward rather than opinion upward."* [Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 114] Needless to say, it was Trotsky himself who implemented that regime in the army in March 1918 when he abolished the soldier's committees and elected officers, stating that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedi-*



> *"**Forced syndicatisation** — that is, forced fusion into unions [i.e. trusts] under the control of the State — this is what capitalism has prepared for us — this is what the Banker State has realised in Germany — this is what will be completely realisable in Russia by the Soviets, by the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 53]

In practice, Lenin's centralised vision soon proved to be a disaster (see section 11 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for details). It was highly inefficient and simply spawned a vast bureaucracy. There was an alternative, as we discuss in section 12 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", the only reason that industry did not totally collapse in Russia during the early months of the revolution was the activity of the factory committees. However, such activity was not part of the Bolshevik vision of centralised socialism and so the factory committees were **not** encouraged. At the very moment when mass participation and initiative is required (i.e. during a revolution) the Bolsheviks favoured a system which killed it. As Kropotkin argued a few years later:

> *"production and exchange represented an undertaking so complicated that the plans of the state socialists, which lead to a party directorship, would prove to be absolutely ineffective as soon as they were applied to life. No government would be able to organise production if the workers themselves through their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee ... Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can co-operate in the development of a new social system and find*

*the best solutions for the thousands of local needs."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 76–7]

No system is perfect. Any system will take time to develop fully. Of course the factory committees made mistakes and, sometimes, things were pretty chaotic with different factories competing for scarce resources. But that does not prove that factory committees and their federations were not the most efficient way of running things under the circumstances. Unless, of course, you share the Bolsheviks a dogmatic belief that central planning is always more efficient. Moreover, attacks on the factory committees for lack of co-ordination by pro-Leninists seem less than sincere, given the utter lack of encouragement (and, often, actual barriers) the Bolsheviks placed in the way of the creation of federations of factory committees (see section 9 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for further details).

Lastly, Bolshevik centralism (as well as being extremely inefficient) also ensured that the control of production and the subsequent surplus would be in the hands of the state and, so, class society would continue. In Russia, capitalism became state capitalism under Lenin and Trotsky (see sections 5 and 6 for more discussion of this).

So Bolshevik support for centralised power ensured that minority power replaced popular power, which, in turn, necessitated bureaucracy to maintain it. Bolshevism retained statist and capitalist social relations and, as such, could not develop socialist ones which, by their very nature, imply egalitarianism in terms of social influence and power (i.e. the abolition of concentrated power, both economic and political). Ironically, by being centralists, the Bolsheviks systematically eliminated mass participation and ensured the replacement of popular power with party power. This saw the rebirth of non-socialist social relationships within society, so ensuring the defeat of the socialist



*— not only directly through the Comintern and the Communist Parties, which for decades influenced radical workers' struggles, but also in many indirect ways. Moscow's instructions to Communist Parties might or might not be obeyed, but, far beyond the ranks of those parties, Bolshevik ideologies clouded, obstructed and diverted efforts to develop socialist ideas and strategies for working-class movements. Bolshevik ideology packed the powerful punch of association with the first successful workers' revolution: it was the great shadow of 1917, hanging over the twentieth century like the shadow of 1789 hung over the nineteenth century, that gave these ideologies force. Socialism was damaged not only by the choices the Bolsheviks made, but by their sincere insistence that those choices were the continuation of the revolution, and by the powerful influence of their ideology on subsequent movements of social liberation."* [**The Russian Revolution in Retreat**, p. 241]

Finally, the fate of the "Left Opposition" should be noted. As befell the previous oppositions, the party machine was used against it. Indeed, by repeatedly and publicly proclaiming himself the greatest defender of party unity and the strongest opponent of inner-party factions, Trotsky himself supplied his enemies with the best argument in favor of the dissolution of the "Left Opposition". Nor was he willing to call upon any social forces outwith the party to combat the bureaucracy. Indeed, he refused to publicly support the party members who had took part in the workers' strike movement and had been expelled from the party. Worse, *"Trotsky, in the very letters to the politburo in which he fired his first broadsides against the 'unhealthy regime' and lack of internal party democracy, supported repressive action against the far left."* Indeed, he *"welcomed an*

and p. 226] The obvious question is how many Communists and workers killed in the revolt had been at the receiving end of weapons and training supplied to the German army by the Red Army?

To state another obvious point: *"We are now a long way from the insistence of Liebknecht that, for socialists, the main enemy lies in your own country. The activities above need outlining, not refutation. It cannot be claimed that arming capitalist armies, or working with fascists helps raise the consciousness of the working class. What is important is to point out how by 1923, the activities of the supine K.P.D. were tailored to fit the needs of Russia, in this case an alliance with Germany."* [Aberdeen Solidarity, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

Moreover, the **nature** of any such revolution is what counts. The "Left Opposition" would have encouraged revolutions which followed (to re-quote the **Platform of the Opposition**) the *"Leninist principle"* (*"inviolable for every Bolshevik"*) that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* It would have urged centralisation. It would have opposed workers' self-management in favour of nationalisation and one-man management. In other words, the influence of the "Left Opposition" would have been as detrimental to the global workers' movement and other revolutions as Stalin's was (or, for that matter, Lenin's) although, of course, in a different way. Generalising Lenin's state capitalism would not have resulted in socialism, no matter how many revolutions in the west the "Left Opposition" encouraged. Simon Pirani puts it well:

> *"The legacy of the Bolsheviks' actions was not limited to their impact on Soviet history, though. The effect on the political development of the workers' movement internationally was just as important. Authoritarian, vanguardist and statist ways of thinking and assumptions spread out from Moscow*



tendencies and institutions which had started to grow during 1917.

It cannot be said that this centralism was a product of the civil war. As best it could be argued that the civil war extenuated an existing centralist spirit into ultra-centralism, but it did not create it. After all, Lenin was stressing that the Bolsheviks were *"convinced centralists ... by their programme and the tactics of the whole of their party"* in 1917. Ironically, he never realised (nor much cared, after the seizure of power) that this position precluded his call for *"the deepening and extension of democracy in the administration of a State of the of the proletarian type."* [**Can the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 74 and p. 55] Given that centralism exists to ensure minority rule, we should not be to surprised that party power replaced popular participation and self-government quickly after the October Revolution. Which it did. Writing in September 1918, a Russian anarchist portrays the results of Bolshevik ideology in practice:

> *"Within the framework of this dictatorship [of the proletariat] ... we can see that the centralisation of power has begun to crystallise and grow firm, that the apparatus of the state is being consolidated by the ownership of property and even by an anti-socialist morality. Instead of hundreds of thousands of property owners there is now a single owner served by a whole bureaucratic system and a new 'statised' morality.*
>
> *"The proletariat is gradually being enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has risen a new class of administrators — a new class ... Isn't this merely a new class system looming on the revolutionary horizon ...*
>
> *"The resemblance is all too striking ... And if the elements of class inequality are as yet indistinct, it is*

*only a matter of time before privileges will pass to the administrators. We do not mean to say … that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from, centralisation. It cannot be otherwise … we are presently moving not towards socialism but towards state capitalism.*

*"Will state capitalism lead us to the gates of socialism? Of this we see not the slightest evidence … Arrayed against socialism are … thousands of administrators. And if the workers … should become a powerful revolutionary force, then it is hardly necessary to point out that the class of administrators, wielding the state apparatus, will be a far from weak opponent. The single owner and state capitalism form a new dam before the waves of our social revolution…*

*"Is it at all possible to conduct the social revolution through a centralised authority? Not even a Solomon could direct the revolutionary struggle or the economy from one centre …"* [M. Sergven, cited by Paul Avrich, **Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 123–5]

Subsequent developments proved this argument correct. Working class revolts were crushed by the state and a new class society developed. little wonder, then, Alexander Berkman's summary of what he saw first hand in Bolshevik Russia a few years later:

*"Mechanical centralisation, run mad, is paralysing the industrial and economic activities of the country.*



These relations had their impact on the politics of the German Communist Party, specifically its so-called *"Schlageter Line"* of co-operation with nationalist and fascist groups. This policy was first promoted in the Comintern by leading Communist Radek and inspired by Zinoviev. According to Radek, *"national Bolshevism"* was required as the *"strong emphasis on the nation in Germany is a revolutionary act."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Interregnum 1923–1924**, p. 177] During the summer of 1923, joint meetings were held and both communist and fascist speakers urged an alliance with Soviet Russia against the Entente powers. So, for several months, the German Communists worked with the Nazis, going so as far as to stage rallies and share podiums together. The Communist leader Ruth Fischer even argued that *"he who denounces Jewish capital … is already a warrior in the class war, even though he does not know it"* (she latter said her remarks had been distorted). [quoted by Carr, **Op. Cit.**, p. 182f] This continued until *"the Nazis leadership placed a ban on further co-operation."* [Carr, **Op. Cit.**, p. 183] Thus the activities of the German communists were tailored to fit into the needs of Lenin's regime.

How *"internationalist"* was it to arm and train the very forces which had crushed revolutionary workers in Germany between 1919 and 1921? How sensible was it, when pressing for world revolution, to enhance the power of the army which would be used to attack any revolution in Germany? Which, of course, was what happened in 1923, when the army repressed the Comintern inspired revolt in November that year. Trotsky was one of the staunchest in favour of this insurrection, insisting that it be fixed for the 7th of that month, the anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power. The attempted revolt was a dismal failure. Rather than a revolution in Berlin on the 7th of November, there was a diner at the Russian embassy for German officers, industrialists and officials to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian revolution. [Carr, **Op. Cit.**, p. 205

> *the Soviet Ambassador called on Mussolini. At the very same time when the German Communists were planning the overthrow of the State, the Russian government was not only making trade agreements with the German capitalist government, but even making secret arrangements whereby the Germans could evade the military terms of the Treaty of Versailles by establishing arms factories, and training armies on Russian soil. Wherever a clash occurred the claims of Soviet foreign policy prevailed over the needs of the revolutionary class struggle."* [**Neither East Nor West**, p. 63]

It is worth discussing the relations between Lenin's Russia and the German military in more detail. Negotiations between the two states started as early as 1920 and involved an important aide of Trotsky's. The fruit of the German military's negotiations were *"secret military understandings"* and by September 1922 German officers and pilots were training in Russia. An organisation of German military and industrial enterprises in Russia was established and under its auspices shells, tanks and aircraft were manufactured in Russia for the German army (an attempt to produce poison gas failed). [E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 327 and pp. 431–2] In April, 1923, the German High Command ordered 35 million gold marks worth of war material and *"[w]ith this military rapprochement between Germany and Russia went increasing trade between the two countries. After the Treaty of Rapallo, Krassin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Trade warned the German workers (in an interview in 'Rote Fahne') against strikes which could lead to the interruption of deliveries of essential materials to Russia. Already the interests of the Soviet State were above those of the German proletariat."* [Aberdeen Solidarity, **Spartakism to National Bolshevism**, p. 24]



> *Initiative is frowned upon, free effort systematically discouraged. The great masses are deprived of the opportunity to shape the policies of the Revolution, or take part in the administration of the affairs of the country. The government is monopolising every avenue of life; the Revolution is divorced from the people. A bureaucratic machine is created that is appalling in its parasitism, inefficiency and corruption. In Moscow alone this new class of* ***sovburs*** *(Soviet bureaucrats) exceeds, in 1920, the total of office holders throughout the whole of Russia under the Tsar in 1914 .. . The Bolshevik economic policies, effectively aided by this bureaucracy, completely disorganise the already crippled industrial life of the country. Lenin, Zinoviev, and other Communist leaders thunder philippics against the new Soviet bourgeoisie, — and issue ever new decrees that strengthen and augment its numbers and influence."* [**The Russian Tragedy**, p. 26]

Bakunin would not have been remotely surprised. As such, the Bolshevik revolution provided a good example to support Malatesta's argument that *"if ... one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government ... it follows... that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 36–7]

By confusing *"state action"* with collective working class action, the Bolsheviks effectively eliminated the latter in favour of the former. The usurpation of all aspects of life by the centralised bodies created by the Bolsheviks left workers with no choice but to act as isolated individuals. Can it be

surprising, then, that Bolshevik policies aided the atomisation of the working class by replacing collective organisation and action by state bureaucracy? The potential for collective action **was** there. You need only look at the strikes and protests directed **against** the Bolsheviks to see that was the case (see section 5 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" for details). Ironically, Bolshevik policies and ideology ensured that the collective effort and action of workers was directed not at solving the revolution's problems but resisting Bolshevik tyranny.

That centralism concentrates power in a few hands can be seen even in Leninist accounts of the Russian revolution. To take one example, Tony Cliff may assert that the *"mistakes of the masses were themselves creative"* but when push comes to shove, he (like Lenin) simply does not allow the masses to make such mistakes and, consequently, learn from them. Thus he defends Lenin's economic policies of *"state capitalism"* and *"one-man management"* (and in the process misleadingly suggests that these were **new** ideas on Lenin's part, imposed by objective factors, rather than, as Lenin acknowledged, what he had advocated all along — see section 5). Thus we discover that the collapse of industry (which had started in the start of 1917) meant that *"[d]rastic measures had to be taken."* But never fear, *"Lenin was not one to shirk responsibility, however unpleasant the task."* He called for *"state capitalism,"* and there *"were more difficult decisions to be accepted. To save industry from complete collapse, Lenin argued for the need to impose one-man management."* So much for the creative self-activity of the masses, which was quickly dumped — precisely at the time when it was most desperately needed. And it is nice to know that in a workers' state it is not the workers who decide things. Rather it is Lenin (or his modern equivalent, like Cliff) who would have the task of not shirking from the responsibility of deciding which drastic measures are required. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21, p. 71 and p. 73] So much for "workers' power"!



sia to defend the regime against its foreign competitors. As such, the "Left Opposition" were as committed to building "socialism" in the USSR as were the Stalinist promoters of *"socialism in one country."* The difference was that the "Left Opposition" also argued for spreading revolution externally as well. For them, this was the **only** means of assuring the lasting victory of "socialism" (i.e. a nationalised economy) in Russia but they also aimed at building the industrial base in a single country along with this.

Yet this driving necessity to "defend" the conquests of October produced contradictions from the start. Most obviously, this meant — just like the Stalinists later — interfering in Communist Parties of other nations to produce outcomes favourable to the USSR. Thus we find the German Council Communists forming the first "Fourth International" in protest to the Bolshevik domination of the Third International (Comintern) and the imposition of policies (such as parliamentarianism) *"determined not only by the needs of communist agitation in those countries, but also by the political needs of Soviet Russia."* [Anton Pannekoek, *"World Revolution and Communist Tactics: Afterword"*, **Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism**, p. 144]

As well as favouring the right-wing in various national parties (not least, the German and British) the Bolshevik regime signed numerous agreements with capitalist nations. As anarchist Marie-Louise Berneri summarised in the 1940s:

> *"Quite early in its history, the allegedly revolutionary aims of the Comintern stood in contrast to the diplomatic relations of the Soviet Union with other countries."*
>
> *"Thus the Bolsheviks entered into commercial agreements with Mussolini's Fascist Government soon after it assumed power in Italy. On the morning after the murder of the Socialist deputy Matteotti*

real issue — the actual, objective, class relationships under the Bolshevik regime (the state bureaucracy as a class in itself with its own interests — see section H.3.9).

So the limitations in Marxist theory means that issue degenerated to such a degree that it is not recognised that the clash between Stalin and Trotsky boils down to the whether a benevolent dictatorship is possible and whether with the right people in charge state-capitalist social relationships cease being exploitative (Trotsky seems to genuinely believe this while Stalin and his cronies paid lip-service to the notion). That this is debated seriously — then and now — says a lot about the ideological limitations of Bolshevism. As such, not only does the programme of the "Left Opposition" offer no real alternative to Stalinism, it present no alternative economic or political vision which would stop the bureaucratic degeneration that produced Stalin in the first place.

In addition, it should be basic materialism that it is a person's real social position which shape their consciousness. As such, it is illusory to expect the rulers of a party dictatorship, the managers of state-capitalist firms or bureaucrats in a highly centralised apparatus to act in any other fashion than according to their social position — yet Trotsky does so. Apparently being part of the vanguard party — or being part of an immense social institution policed by this small body — negates the objective pressures created by such hierarchies and the authoritarian (and so inevitably exploitative) social relations they produce. As such, he failed to understand the "social forces" at work in Russia for he failed to understand the class nature of the bureaucracy. He failed to understand that the bureaucracy overcame the party because the party itself was — inevitably — corrupted by the social position it held.

Internally, then, the "Left Opposition" was no alternative. As for Harman's assertion that the "Left Opposition" stood for *"internationalism,"* that is less straight forward than he would like to think. As noted, it favoured the industrialisation of Rus-



Ultimately, centralism is designed to exclude the mass participation anarchists have long argued is required by a social revolution. It helped to undermine what Kropotkin considered the key to the success of a social revolution — *"the people becom[ing] masters of their destiny."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133] In his words:

> *"We understand the revolution as a widespread popular movement, during which in every town and village within the region of revolt, the masses will have to take it upon themselves* ***the work of construction upon communistic bases,*** *without awaiting any orders and directions from above ... As to representative government, whether self-appointed or elected ... , we place in it no hopes whatever. We know beforehand that it will be able to do nothing to accomplish the revolution as long as the people themselves do not accomplish the change by working out on the spot the necessary new institutions ... nowhere and never in history do we find that people carried into government by a revolutionary wave, have proved equal to the occasion.*
>
> *"In the task of reconstructing society on new principles, separate men ... are sure to fail. The collective spirit of the masses is necessary for this purpose ... a socialist government ... would be absolutely powerless without the activity of the people themselves, and that, necessarily, they would soon begin to act fatally as a bridle upon the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 188–190]

The Bolshevik revolution and its mania for centralism proved him right. The use of centralisation helped ensure that workers' lost any meaningful say in their revolution and helped alienate them from it. Instead of the mass participation

of all, the Bolsheviks ensured the top-down rule of a few. Unsurprisingly, as mass participation is what centralism was designed to exclude. Wishful thinking on behalf of the Bolshevik leaders (and their later-day followers) could not (and can not) overcome the structural imperatives of centralisation and its role in society. Nor could it stop the creation of a bureaucracy around these new centralised institutions.

## 8 How did the aim for party power undermine the revolution?

As well as a passion for centralisation and state capitalism, Bolshevism had another aim which helped undermine the revolution. This was the goal of party power (see see section 5 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for details). Given this, namely that the Bolsheviks had, from the start, aimed for party power it should not come as too surprising that Bolshevik dictatorship quickly replaced soviet democracy.

Given this obvious fact, it seems strange for modern day Leninists to blame the civil war for the Bolsheviks substituting their rule for the masses. After all, when strange for modern day Leninists to blame the civil war for the Bolsheviks substituting their rule for the masses. After all, when the Bolshevik Party took power in October 1917, it did "substitute" itself for the working class and did so deliberately and knowingly. As we note in section 2, this usurpation of power by a minority was perfectly acceptable within the Marxist theory of the state, a theory which aided this process no end.

Thus the Bolshevik party would be in power, with the *"conscious workers"* ruling over the rest. The question instantly arises of what happens if the masses turn against the party. If the Bolsheviks embody *"the power of the proletariat,"* what happens if the proletariat reject the party? The undermining of soviet power by party power and the destruction of soviet



As an added irony, as we discuss in section H.3.13, Harman's party — the British SWP — argues that the USSR under Stalin was *"state capitalist"* due to *"the international arms competition."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 17] Yet the economic policy of the "Left Opposition" was to industrialise Russia, on increasing accumulation in order to compete militarily with traditional capitalist states, As the 1927 Platform argued, it was a case that the *"present tempo of industrialisation and the tempo indicated for the coming years are obviously inadequate"* and so argued for an acceleration of industrialisation for the *"Soviet Union must not fall further behind the capitalist countries, but in the near future must overtake them."* Thus industrialisation *"must be sufficient to guarantee the defence of the country and in particular an adequate growth of war industries."* [*"The Platform of the Opposition"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 369–70] Why does this not make Trotsky an advocate of state capitalism? All that the Oppositionists could argue is that their industrialisation would have been less brutal, less oppressive and with fewer privileges for the bureaucracy… but a nicer ruling class is still a ruling class.

Given this, it is easy to understand why we will ignore as fundamentally meaningless the pseudo-scientific comments on the relative weight of "social forces" in the rise of the bureaucracy so beloved by certain Trotskyists. This is because, ultimately, it is speculation on what could be the "objective" conditions required for a benevolent (party) dictatorship and state-capitalist economy to exist — a pointless task, for obvious reasons (at least if you are not a Leninist). While popular resistance and protest can make a ruling class less oppressive and exploitative, it is something else completely to suggest that it can stop a ruling class being exploitative and oppressive as such. However, as Trotsky refused to recognise the class nature of the bureaucracy — and the identical social relations that existing under Lenin and which Trotsky did not question — perhaps this is unsurprising after all. Indeed, perhaps all the talk of "social forces" and such like is just an attempt to obscure the

forced the *"drive to accumulate"* which caused the bureaucracy to attack *"the living standards of peasants and workers."* He quotes Stalin: *"to slacken the pace (of industrialisation) would mean to lag behind; and those who lag behind are beaten ... We must make good this lag in ten years. Either we do so or they crush us."* Moreover, the *"environment in which we are placed ... at home and abroad ... compels us to adopt a rapid rate of industrialisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 15–6] Given that this was exactly the same argument as Trotsky in 1927, it seems far from clear that the "Left Opposition" presented any sort of alternative to Stalinism for it, after all, *"took the stand that large-scale new investment was imperative, especially in heavy industry, and that comprehensive planning and new sources of capital accumulation should be employed immediately to effect a high rate of industrial expansion ... They also stressed the necessity of rapidly overtaking the capitalist powers in economic strength, both as a guarantee of military security and as a demonstration of the superiority of the socialist system."* [Robert V. Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, p. 290]

Indeed, the idea of *"primitive socialist accumulation"* was raised by Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, a leading member of "Left Opposition", in 1926. Like capitalist "primitive accumulation" (see section F.8), this argued that the State had to build industry by means of squeezing more surplus from the peasantry. Would the industrialisation advocated by the "Left Opposition" been obtained by any means other than politically enforced exploitation and the repression of first peasant and then, inevitably, proletarian protest? Faced with the same objective pressures and goals, would it have been any different if that faction had become dominant in the party dictatorship? It is doubtful, unless you argue that who is in charge rather than social relationships that determine the socialist nature of a regime. But, then again, that is precisely what Trotskyists like Harman do when they look at Lenin's Russia.



democracy in the spring and summer of 1918 answers that specific question (see section 6 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?"). This should have come as no surprise, given the stated aim (and implementation) of party power plus the Bolshevik identification of party power with workers' power. It is not a great step to party dictatorship **over** the proletariat from these premises (particularly if we include the underlying assumptions of vanguardism — see section H.5.3). A step, we must stress, that the Bolsheviks quickly took when faced with working class rejection in the soviet elections of spring and summer of 1918.

Nor was this destruction of soviet democracy by party power just the result of specific conditions in 1917–8. This perspective had been in Russian Marxist circles well before the revolution. As we discuss in section H.5, vanguardism implies party power (see, as noted, section H.5.3 in particular). The ideas of Lenin's **What is to be Done?** give the ideological justification for party dictatorship over the masses. Once in power, the logic of vanguardism came into its own, allowing the most disgraceful repression of working class freedoms to be justified in terms of "Soviet Power" and other euphemisms for the party.

The identification of workers' power with party power has deeply undemocratic results, as the experience of the Bolshevik proves. However, these results were actually articulated in Russian socialist circles before hand. At the divisive 1903 congress of the Russian Social Democrats, which saw the split into two factions (Bolshevik and Menshevism) Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, argued as follows:

> *"Every particular democratic principle must be considered not in itself, abstractly, ... the success of the revolution is the highest law. And if, for the success of the revolution's success, we need temporarily to restrict the functioning of a particular democratic*

> *principle, then it would be criminal to refrain from imposing that restriction... And we must take the same attitude where the question of the length of parliaments is concerned. If, in an outburst of revolutionary enthusiasm, the people elect a very good parliament ... it would suit us to try and make that a **long Parliament**; but if the elections turned out badly for us, we should have to try and disperse the resulting parliament not after two years but, if possible, after two weeks."* [RSDLP, **Minutes of the Second Congress of the RSDLP**, p. 220]

Another delegate argued that *"[t]here is not a single one among the principles of democracy which we ought not to subordinate **to the interests of our Party** ... we must consider democratic principles exclusively from the standpoint of the most rapid achievement of that aim [i.e. revolution], from the standpoint of the interests of our Party. If any particular demand is against our interests, we must not include it."* To which, Plekhanov replied, *"I fully associate myself with what Comrade Posadovksy has said."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 219 and p. 220] Lenin *"agreed unreservedly with this subordination of democratic principles to party interests."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 211]

Plekhanov at this time was linked with Lenin, although this association lasted less than a year. After that, he became associated with the Mensheviks (before his support for Russia in World War I saw him form his own faction). Needless to say, he was mightily annoyed when Lenin threw his words back in his face in 1918 when the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly. Yet while Plekhanov came to reject this position (perhaps because the elections had not *"turned out badly for"* his liking) it is obvious that the Bolsheviks embraced it and keenly applied it to elections to soviets and unions as well as Parliaments once in power (see section 6 of the appendix



*been adopted in 1921 and 1923."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 224–5] Which is essentially correct: once we understand that the Platform was based on redefining "workers' democracy" to mean "party democracy" within the context of its dictatorship.

Yet we can hardly blame the likes of Harman, as it was Trotsky himself who started the process of revising history to exclude his own role in creating the evils he (sometimes) denounced his opponents within the party for. For example, the 1927 Platform states that *"[n]ever before have the trade unions and the working mass stood so far from the management of socialist industry as now"* and that *"[p]re-revolutionary relations between foremen and workmen are frequently found."* [*"The Platform of the Opposition"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 353–4] Which is hardly surprising, given that Lenin had argued for, and implemented, appointed one-man management armed with "dictatorial powers" from April 1918 onwards (see section H.3.14).

Trotsky himself supported it wholeheartedly. Thus we find him arguing in 1923 that the *"system of actual one-man management must be applied in the organisation of industry from top to bottom. For leading economic organs of industry to really direct industry and to bear responsibility for its fate, it is essential for them to have authority over the selection of functionaries and their transfer and removal."* These economic organs must *"in actual practice have full freedom of selection and appointment."* He also tied payment to performance, arguing that *"the payment of the directors of enterprises must be made to depend on their balance sheets, like wages depend on output."* [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 237] In this, it must be noted, he was repeating arguments made during the civil war (as expressed, in say, **Terrorism and Communism**).

Harman argues that the Stalinist bureaucracy became a ruling class and Russia state-capitalist in 1928 when it implemented the first five year plan. This industrialisation was provoked by military competition with the west, which

> *class played by the proletariat, but on the technical errors made by the Government **qua** employer in the matter of insufficient harmony within the system and inferior quality of production. This criticism did not lead to an appeal to the workers against the Central Committee and against bureaucratic authority; it restricted itself to proposing amendments in a programme of which the essentials were approved. The socialist nature of State industry was taken for granted. They denied the fact that the proletariat was exploited; for 'we were in a period of proletarian dictatorship.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 213]

As Victor Serge noted, *"[f]rom 1928–9 onwards, the Politbureau turned to its own use the great fundamental ideas of the now expelled Opposition (excepting, of course, that of working-class democracy) and implemented them with ruthless violence."* While acknowledging that the Stalinists had applied these ideas in a more extreme form than the Opposition planned, he also acknowledged that *"[b]eginning in those years, a good many Oppositionists rallied to the 'general line' and renounced their errors since, as they put it, 'After all, it is our programme that is being applied.'"* Nor did it help that at *"the end of 1928, Trotsky wrote to [the Opposition] from his exile ... to the effect that, since the Right represented the danger of a slide towards capitalism, we had to support the 'Centre' — Stalin — against it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 252 and p. 253]

However, Serge's comments on *"working-class democracy"* are somewhat incredulous, given (as we noted above) that he knew fine well that the Opposition did not stand for it. His summary of the 1927 Platform was restricted to it aiming *"to restore life to the Soviets ... and above all to revitalise the Party and the trade unions... In conclusion, the Opposition openly demanded a Congress for the reform of the Party, and the implementation of the excellent resolutions on internal democracy that had*



"What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for example). But, at the time, he sided with Lenin against the Mensheviks and it can be argued that the latter applied these teachings of that most respected pre-1914 Russian Marxist thinker.

This undemocratic perspective can also be seen when, in 1905, the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks, like most of the party, opposed the soviets. They argued that *"only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent."* [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 77] Thus the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers!

The Bolsheviks saw the soviets as a rival to their party and demanded it either accept their political program or simply become a trade-union like organisation. They feared that it pushed aside the party committee and thus led to the *"subordination of consciousness to spontaneity"* and under the label *"non-party"* allow *"the rotten goods of bourgeois ideology"* to be introduced among the workers. [quoted by Anweilier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78 and p. 79] In this, the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks were simply following Lenin's **What is to be Done?**, in which Lenin had argued that the *"**spontaneous** development of the labour movement leads to it being subordinated to bourgeois ideology."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82] Lenin in 1905, to his credit, rejected these clear conclusions of his own theory and was more supportive of the soviets than his followers (although *"he sided in principle with those who saw in the soviet the danger of amorphous nonpartisan organisation."* [Anweilier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81]).

This perspective, however, is at the root of all Bolshevik justifications for party power after the October revolution. The logical result of this position can be found in the actions of the Bolsheviks in 1918 and onwards. For the Bolsheviks in power,

the soviets were less than important. The key for them was to maintain Bolshevik party power and if soviet democracy was the price to pay, then they were more than willing to pay it. As such, Bolshevik attitudes in 1905 are significant:

> *"Despite the failure of the Bolshevik assault on the non-partisanship of the [St.] Petersburg Soviet, which may be dismissed as a passing episode ... the attempt ... is of particular significance in understanding the Bolshevik's mentality, political ambitions and* ***modus operandi.*** *First, starting in [St.] Petersburg, the Bolshevik campaign was repeated in a number of provincial soviets such as Kostroma and Tver, and, possibly, Sormovo. Second, the assault reveals that from the outset the Bolsheviks were distrustful of, if not hostile towards the Soviets, to which they had at best an instrumental and always party-minded attitude. Finally, the attempt to bring the [St.] Petersburg Soviet to heel is an early and major example of Bolshevik take-over techniques hitherto practised within the narrow confines of the underground party and now extended to the larger arena of open mass organisations such as soviets, with the ultimate aim of controlling them and turning them into one-party organisations, or, failing that, of destroying them."* [Israel Getzler, *"The Bolshevik Onslaught on the Non-Party 'Political Profile' of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies October-November 1905"*, **Revolutionary History**, pp. 123–146, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 124–5]

The instrumentalist approach of the Bolsheviks post-1917 can be seen from their arguments and attitudes in 1905. On the day the Moscow soviet opened, a congress of the northern



only alternative to Stalinism would be hard to maintain. Like Trotsky, there is a pressing need to avoid looking at the social relations under Lenin in case obvious similarities are noticed to those under Stalin. Thus we find Harman stating in his summary of the rise Stalinism that it was after *"Lenin's illness and subsequent death"* when the *"principles of October were abandoned one by one."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14] Presumably, in that case, the *"principles of October"* included the practice of, and ideological commitment to, party dictatorship, one-man management, banning opposition parties and groups (as well as factions within the Communist Party), censorship, state repression of working class strikes and protests, piece-work, Taylorism, the end of independent trade unions and a host of other crimes against socialism implemented under Lenin and normal practice at the time of his death.

Like Lenin, the "Left Opposition" did **not** question the Bolshevik's monopoly of power and explicitly supported the idea of party dictatorship. This fact helps explains what Harman seems puzzled by, namely that Trotsky *"continued to his death to harbour the illusion that somehow, despite the lack of workers' democracy, Russia was a 'workers' state.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20] Strangely, Harman does not explain why Russia was a *"workers' state"* under Lenin and Trotsky, given its *"lack of workers' democracy."* But illusions are hard to dispel, sometimes.

So, for Trotsky, like the rest of the Communist Party including its "Left Opposition", **genuine** workers' democracy was **not** considered important and, in fact, was applicable only within the party. Thus the capitulation of many of the "Left Opposition" to Stalin once he started a policy of industrialisation comes as less of a surprise than Harman thinks it was. As Ante Ciliga saw first-hand in the prison camps:

> *"the majority of the Opposition were ... looking for a road to reconciliation; whilst criticising the Five Year Plan, they put stress not on the part of exploited*

In summary, Trotsky's "opposition" in no way presented any real alternative to Stalinism. At no time did he question the fundamental social relationships within Soviet society. As the 1927 Platform noted, he saw Stalinism as the victory of the state bureaucracy over the party and **its** dictatorship. Writing ten years after the Platform, Trotsky reiterated this, arguing that the *"bureaucracy won the upper hand. It cowed the revolutionary vanguard, trampled upon Marxism, prostituted the Bolshevik party ... To the extent that the political centre of gravity has shifted from the proletarian vanguard to the bureaucracy, the party has changed its social structure as well as its ideology."* He simply wanted to shift the *"political centre of gravity"* back towards the party, as it had been in the early 1920s when he and Lenin were in power. He in no significant way questioned the nature of the regime or the social relationships it was rooted in (whether political or economic). Indeed, *"[t]hose who counterpose the abstraction of soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism"*, pp. 416–431, **Writings 1936–37**, p. 422 and p. 430]

This explains his continual self-imposed role after his exile of loyal opposition to Stalinism in spite of the violence applied to him and his followers. It also explains the lack of excitement by the Russian working class over the "Left Opposition" for their choice was between two factions within the master class. As Serge acknowledged: *"Outraged by the Opposition, they [the bureaucrats] saw it as treason against them; which in a sense it was, since the Opposition itself belonged to the ruling bureaucracy."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 225]

This may come as a shock to many readers. This is because Trotskyists are notorious for their rewriting of the policies of Trotsky's opposition, as seen by the words of Chris Harman we quoted earlier. Yet this is hardly surprising, as openly saying that benevolent state-capitalist party dictatorship was the



committees of the Social Democratic Party passed a resolution stating that a *"council of workers deputies should be established only in places where the party organisation has no other means of directing the proletariat's revolutionary action ... The soviet of workers deputies must be a technical instrument of the party for the purpose of giving political leadership to the masses through the RSDWP [the Social-Democratic Party]. It is therefore imperative to gain control of the soviet and prevail upon it to recognise the program and political leadership of the RSDWP."* [quoted by Anweilier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

This perspective that the party should be given precedence can be seen in Lenin's comment that while the Bolsheviks should *"go along with the unpoliticalised proletarians, but on no account and at no time should we forget that animosity among the proletariat toward the Social Democrats is a remnant of bourgeois attitudes ... Participation in unaffiliated organisations can be permitted to socialists only as an exception ... only if the independence of the workers party is guaranteed and if within unaffiliated organisations or soviets individual delegates or party groups are subject to unconditional control and guidance by the party executive."* [quoted by Anweilier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] These comments have clear links to Lenin's argument in 1920 that working class protest against the Bolsheviks showed that they had become *"declassed"* (see section 5 of the appendix on "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"). It similarly allows soviets to be disbanded if Bolsheviks are not elected (which they were, see section 6 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?"). It also ensures that Bolshevik representatives to the soviets are not delegates from the workplace, but rather a "transmission belt" (to use a phrase from the 1920s) for the decisions of the party leadership. In a nutshell, Bolshevik soviets would represent the party's central committee, not those who elected them. As Oskar Anweiler summarised:

> *"The 'revolutionary genius' of the people, which Lenin had mentioned and which was present in the soviets, constantly harboured the danger of 'anarcho-syndicalist tendencies' that Lenin fought against all his life. He detected this danger early in the development of the soviets and hoped to subdue it by subordinating the soviets to the party. The drawback of the new 'soviet democracy' hailed by Lenin in 1906 is that he could envisage the soviets only as* ***controlled*** *organisations; for him they were the instruments by which the party controlled the working masses, rather than true forms of a workers democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

As we noted in section H.3.11, Lenin had concluded in 1907 that while the party could *"utilise"* the soviets *"for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement,"* the party *"must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 210] Thus the means by which working class can manage their own affairs would become *"superfluous"* once the party was in power. As Samuel Farber argues, Lenin's position before 1917 was *"clearly implying that the party could normally fulfil its revolutionary role without the existence of broad class organisations ... Consequently, Lenin's and the party's eventual endorsement of the soviets in 1905 seems to have been tactical in character. That is, the Bolshevik support for the soviets did not at the time signify a theoretical and/or principled commitment to these institutions as revolutionary organs to overthrow the old society, let alone as key structural ingredients of the post-revolutionary order. Furthermore, it is again revealing that from 1905 to 1917 the concept of soviets did not play an important role in the thinking of Lenin or of the Bolshevik Party ... [T]hese strategies and*



*opment which were invented by capitalist economy."* Ultimately, it was not self-management that mattered, it was *"the growth of Soviet state industry [which] signifies the growth of socialism itself, a direct strengthening of the power of the proletariat"*. [**The First 5 Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 237 and p. 245]

Unsurprisingly, then, the "Left Opposition" did not even have the merit of the "Left Communists" or "Workers' Opposition" in raising economic reforms. Its Platform simply repeated Bolshevik orthodoxies, arguing that *"nationalisation of the means of production was a decisive step toward the socialist reconstruction of that whole social system which is founded upon the exploitation of man by man"* and that the *"appropriation of surplus value by a workers' state is not, of course, exploitation."* However, it also acknowledged that *"we have a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions"* and a *"swollen and privileged administrative apparatus devours a very considerable part of our surplus value"* while *"all the data testify that the growth of wages is lagging behind the growth of the productivity of labour."* [*"The Platform of the Opposition"*, **The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)**, pp. 347–8, p. 350]

So an economic regime marked by one-man management by state-appointed bosses under a party dictatorship could somehow be without exploitation even though someone other than the workers controlled both their labour and how its product (and any surplus) was used? It is hardly surprising that the new master class sought their own benefit; what is surprising is that the "Left Opposition" could not see the reality of state-capitalism. Rather, it focused its attention on the living standards of the working class and paid no attention to the relations of production in the workplace, raising no proposals nor demands about establishing workers' control of industry. Given its self-proclaimed role as defender of Leninist orthodoxy and its social relations, perhaps this is not so surprising after all.

*fight with all our power against the idea of two parties, because the dictatorship of the proletariat demands as its very core a single proletarian party. It demands a single party."* [*"The Platform of the Opposition"*, **The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)**, p. 395, p. 439 and p. 441]

This conviction was so strong that even after the defeat of the "Left Opposition" it was the case that in the prison camps *"almost all the Trotskyists continued to consider that 'freedom of party' would be 'the end of the revolution.' 'Freedom to choose one's party — that is Menshevism,' was the Trotskyists' final verdict."* [Ante Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 280] Such is the power of ideology.

So *"workers' democracy"* had a very specific meaning to the Communist Party, namely one limited to within the party and **not** a call for **genuine** democracy in the unions or soviets. Such a definition, obviously, in no way undermines the dictatorship of the party — but it does allow the use of quotations by Leninists to bolster a false narrative on the nature of Bolshevism.

Politically, then, the opposition urged the benevolent dictatorship of an internally democratic party. Economically, Trotsky's opposition was far more backward than previous ones. For Trotsky, economic democracy was not an issue and so it played no role in determining the socialist nature of a society. Rather state ownership did. Thus he did not question one-man management in the workplace nor the capitalist social relationships it generated. For Trotsky, it was *"necessary for each state-owned factory, with its technical director and with its commercial director, to be subjected not only to control from the top — by the state organs — but also from below, by the market which will remain the regulator of the state economy for a long time to come."* In spite of the obvious fact that the workers did not control their labour or its product, Trotsky asserted that *"[n]o class exploitation exists here, and consequently neither does capitalism exist."* Moreover, *"socialist industry ... utilises methods of devel-*



*tactics vis-a-vis the soviets ... can be fairly seen as expressing a predisposition favouring the party and downgrading the soviets and other non-party class organisations, at least in relative terms."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 37] Such a perspective on the soviets can be seen once the party was in power when they quickly turned them, without concern, into mere fig-leafs for party power (see section 6 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for more details).

It cannot be mere coincidence that the ideas and rhetoric against the soviets in 1905 should resurface again once the Bolsheviks were in power. For example, in 1905, in St. Petersburg *"the Bolsheviks pressed on"* with their campaign and, *"according to the testimony of Vladimir Voitinskii, then a young Bolshevik agitator, the initial thrust of the Bolshevik 'plan' was to push the SRs [who were in a minority] out of the Soviet, while 'the final blow' would be directed against the Mensheviks. Voitinskii also recalled the heated argument advanced by the popular agitator Nikolai Krylenko ('Abram') for the 'dispersal of the Soviet' should it reject the 'ultimatum' to declare its affiliation with the RSDP."* [Getzler, **Op., Cit.**, pp. 127–8] This mirrored events in 1918. Then *"at the local political level"* Bolshevik majorities were attained (*"by means fair, foul and terrorist"*) *"in the plenary assemblies of the soviets, and with the barring of all those not 'completely dedicated to Soviet power' [i.e. Mensheviks and SRs] from the newly established network of soviet administrative departments and from the soviet militias. Soviets where Bolshevik majorities could not be achieved were simply disbanded."* A similar process occurred at the summit (see section 7). Thus *"the October revolution marked [the soviets] transformation from agents of democratisation into regional and local administrative organs of the centralised, one-party Soviet state."* [Israel Getzler, **Soviets as Agents of Democratisation**, p. 27 and pp. 26–7]

Can such an outcome really have **no** link at all with the Bolshevik position and practice in period before 1917 and, in particular, during the 1905 revolution? Obviously not. As such,

we should not be too surprised or shocked when Lenin replied to a critic who assailed the "dictatorship of one party" in 1919 by clearly and unashamedly stating: *"Yes, the dictatorship of one party! We stand upon it and cannot depart from this ground, since this is the party which in the course of decades has won for itself the position of vanguard of the whole factory and industrial proletariat."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 236] Or when he replied to a critic in 1920 that *"[h]e says we understand by the words dictatorship of proletariat what is actually the dictatorship of its determined and conscious minority. And that is the fact."* This *"minority ... may be called a party,"* Lenin stressed. [quoted by Arthur Ransome, **The Crisis in Russia 1920**, p. 35]

This perspective can be traced back to the underlying ideology expounded by the Bolsheviks before and during 1917. For example, mere days after seizing power in the October Revolution Lenin was stressing that the Bolsheviks' *"present slogan is: No compromise, i.e. for a homogeneous Boshevik government."* He did not hesitate to use the threat to *"appeal to the sailors"* against the other socialist parties, stating *"[i]f you get the majority, take power in the Central Executive Committee and carry one. But we will go to the sailors."* [quoted by Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 26] Clearly soviet power was far from Lenin's mind, rejecting soviet democracy if need be in favour of party power. Strangely, Cliff (a supporter of Lenin) states that Lenin *"did not visualise one-party rule"* and that the *"first decrees and laws issued after the October revolution were full of repetitions of the word 'democracy.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 161 and p. 146] He goes on to quote Lenin stating that *"[a]s a democratic government we cannot ignore the decision of the masses of the people, even though we disagree with it."* Cliff strangely fails to mention that Lenin also applied this not only to the land decree (as Cliff notes) but also to the Constituent Assembly. *"And even if,"* Lenin continued, *"the peasants continue to follow the Socialist Revolutionaries, even if they give this party a majority in the*



*justified historically and politically."* Needless to say, Trotsky did not bother to ask how much democracy (of **any** kind) was possible under a party dictatorship nor how a class could run society or have democratic organisations if subjected to such a dictatorship. For him it was a truism that the *"dictatorship of a party does not contradict the dictatorship of the class either theoretically or practically, but is an expression of it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 76]

This was no temporary aberration. As indicated in section H.3.8, Trotsky repeated this support for party dictatorship ten years later. This was because it was Bolshevik orthodoxy, as indicated in March 1923 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party when it summarised the lessons gained from the Russian revolution, namely that *"the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat."* Vacillations are expressed by workers' democracy and so this was rejected: *"The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party."* (*"To the Workers of the USSR"*, Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party**, p. 213 and p. 214)

Unsurprisingly, this perspective was also raised in the 1927 **Platform of the Opposition**, alongside the same contradictory demands for *"workers' democracy"* and the revitalising of the soviets and trade unions. It made the limited nature of Trotsky's opposition clear, for it attacked Stalin for **weakening** the party's dictatorship. In its words, the *"growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* It repeats this principle by arguing that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat demands a single and united proletarian party as the leader of the working masses and the poor peasantry."* As such, *"[w]e will*

> *directed against the party as a whole and against the dictatorship of the proletariat, as for instance the Workers' Truth and Workers' Group."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 408]

As we show in the next section, these groups actually advocated **genuine** workers' democracy — that is, they opposed the party's monopoly of power and supported multi-party elections. Thus Trotsky's opposition was hardly democratic, defending the practice and concept of *"the dictatorship of the party"* throughout the 1920s and — correctly! — linking it to Lenin and so Leninist orthodoxy:

> *"Of course, the foundation of our regime is the dictatorship of a class. But this in turn ... assumes it is a class that has come to self-consciousness through its vanguard, which is to say, through the party. Without this, the dictatorship could not exist ... Dictatorship is the most highly concentrated function of a class, and therefore the basic instrument of a dictatorship is a party. In the most fundamental aspects a class realises its dictatorship through a party. That is why Lenin spoke not only of the dictatorship of the class but also the dictatorship of the party and, **in a certain sense**, made them identical."* [Trotsky, **The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)**, pp. 75–6]

Trotsky argued that Stalin's policies were, in fact, a ploy to substitute the dictatorship of the party apparatus for the dictatorship of the party. Such a substitution, he argued, had its roots in a *"disproportion"* between the workers and peasants. As long as there was a *"proper 'proportion'"* between the two and *"the advance of democratic methods in the party and working class organisations,"* then *"the identification of the dictatorship of the class with that of the party is fully and completely*



*Constituent Assembly, we shall still say — what of it?"* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 26, pp. 260–1] But the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly after one session. The peasants had voted for the SRs and the Assembly went the same way as Lenin's promises. And if Lenin's promises of 1917 on the Assembly proved to be of little value, then why should his various comments to soviet democracy be considered any different? In a clash between soviet democracy and party power, the Bolsheviks consistently favoured the latter.

Thus Bolshevik ideology had consistently favoured party power and had a long term ideological preference for it. Combine this aim of party power with a vanguardism position (see section H.5) and party dictatorship will soon result. Neil Harding summarises the issue well:

> *"There were a number of very basic axioms that lay at the very heart of the theory and practice of Leninism with regard to the party ... It was the party that disposed of scientific or objective knowledge. Its analysis of the strivings of the proletariat was, therefore, privileged over the proletariat's own class goals and a single discernible class will was, similarly, axiomatic to both Marxism and Leninism. Both maintained that it was the communists who alone articulated these goals and this will — that was the party's principal historical role.*
>
> *"At this point, Leninism (again faithful to the Marxist original) resorted to a little-noticed definitional conjuring trick — one that proved to be of crucial importance for the mesmeric effect of the ideology. The trick was spectacularly simple and audacious — the class was defined as class only to the extent that it conformed to the **party's** account of its objectives, and mobilised itself to fulfil them... . The messy, real proletarians — the aggregation of wage workers with*

> *all their diverse projects and aspirations — were to be judged by their progress towards a properly class existence by the party that had itself devised the criteria for the class existence."* [**Leninism**, pp. 173–4]

This authoritarian position, which allows "socialism" to be imposed by force upon the working class, lies at the core of Leninism. Ironically, while Bolshevism claims to be **the** party of the working class, representing it essentially or exclusively, they do so in the name of possessing a theory that, qua theory, can be the possession of intellectuals and, therefore, has to be "introduced" to the working class from outside (see section H.5.1 for details).

This means that Bolshevism is rooted in the identification of "class consciousness" with supporting the party. Given the underlying premises of vanguardism, unsurprisingly the Bolsheviks took "class consciousness" to mean this. If the workers protested against the policies of the party, this represented a fall in class consciousness and, therefore, working class resistance placed "class" power in danger. If, on the other hand, the workers remained quiet and followed the party's decision then, obviously, they showed high levels of class consciousness. The net effect of this position was, of course, to justify party dictatorship. Which, of course, the Bolsheviks did create **and** justified ideologically.

Thus the Bolshevik aim for party power results in disempowering the working class in practice. Moreover, the assumptions of vanguardism ensure that only the party leadership is able to judge what is and is not in the interests of the working class. Any disagreement by elements of that class or the whole class itself can be dismissed as *"wavering"* and *"vacillation."* While this is perfectly acceptable within the Leninist *"from above"* perspective, from an anarchist *"from below"* perspective it means little more than pseudo-theoretical justification for party dictatorship **over** the proletariat and the ensur-



> *approval was a matter of form, but an omission was noted, The theses made no reference to the formula of 'proletarian democracy' with which the Tenth Congress had tried to assuage the rank and file. Riazanov .. . offered an amendment to fill the breach, in language almost identical with the Tenth Congress resolution: 'The party must observe with special care the normal methods of proletarian democracy, particularly in the trade unions, where most of all the selection of leaders should be done by the organised party masses themselves.' ... The party leadership reacted instantaneously to this miscarriage of their plans for curtailing the idea of union autonomy. Tomksy was summarily ejected from the trade union congress. Lenin put in an appearance together with Bukharin and Stalin to rectify the unionists' action."* [Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

The *"New Course Resolution"* passed in December 1923 stresses this:

> *"Workers' democracy means the liberty of frank discussion of the most important questions of party life by all members, and the election of all leading party functionaries and commissions by those bodies immediately under them. It does not, however, imply the freedom to form factional groupings, which are extremely dangerous for the ruling party, since they always threaten to split or fragment the government and the state apparatus as a whole.*
>
> *"Within a party, which represents a voluntary union of people on the basis of definite ideals and practice, it is obvious that there can be no toleration of the formation of groupings whose ideological content is*

being the true heir of Lenin and so not only did not question Bolshevik orthodoxy but instead championed it in every detail. Hence the limitations of his opposition.

However, confusion creeps into the politics of the "Left Opposition" simply because it used the term *"workers' democracy"* a lot. However, a close reading of Trotsky's argument soon clarifies this issue. Trotsky, following the Communist Party itself and the "Workers' Opposition", had simply redefined what *"workers' democracy"* meant. Rather than mean what you would expect it would mean, the Bolsheviks had changed its meaning to become *"party democracy."* Thus Trotsky could talk about *"party dictatorship"* and *"workers' democracy"* without contradiction. As his supporter Max Eastman noted in the mid-1920s, Trotsky was in favour of the *"programme of democracy within the party — called 'Workers' Democracy' by Lenin."* This *"was not something new or especially devised ... It was part of the essential policy of Lenin for going forward toward the creation of a Communist society — a principle adopted under his leadership at the Tenth Congress of the party, immediately after the cessation of the civil war."* [**Since Lenin Died**, p. 35] In the words of historian Robert V. Daniels:

> *"The Opposition's political ideal was summed up in the slogan 'workers' democracy,' which referred particularly to two documents [from 1921 and 1923] ... Both these statements concerned the need to combat 'bureaucratism' and implement party democracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 300]

That this was the case can be seen from the Fourth All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in 1921:

> *"At the meeting of delegates who were party members, Tomsky submitted for routine approval a set of theses on the tasks of trade unions. The*



ing that a socialist society will **never** be created. Ultimately, socialism without freedom is meaningless — as the Bolshevik regime proved time and time again.

As such, to claim that the Bolsheviks did not aim to "substitute" party power for working class power seems inconsistent with both Bolshevik theory and practice. Lenin had been aiming for party power from the start, identifying it with working class power. As the party was the vanguard of the proletariat, it was duty bound to seize power and govern on behalf of the masses and, moreover, take any actions necessary to maintain the revolution — even if these actions violated the basic principles required to have any form of meaningful workers' democracy and freedom. Thus the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* had long become equated with party power and, once in power, it was only a matter of time before it became the *"dictatorship of the party."* And once this did occur, none of the leading Bolsheviks questioned it. The implications of these Bolshevik perspectives came clear after 1917, when the Bolsheviks raised the need for party dictatorship to an ideological truism.

Thus it seems strange to hear some Leninists complain that the rise of Stalinism can be explained by the rising "independence" of the state machine from the class (i.e. party) it claimed to in service of. Needless to say, few Leninists ponder the links between the rising *"independence"* of the state machine from the proletariat (by which most, in fact, mean the *"vanguard"* of the proletariat, the party) and Bolshevik ideology. As noted in section H.3.8, a key development in Bolshevik theory on the state was the perceived need for the vanguard to ignore the wishes of the class it claimed to represent and lead. For example, Victor Serge (writing in the 1920s) considered it a truism that the *"party of the proletariat must know, at hours of decision, how to break the resistance of the backward elements among the masses; it must know how to stand firm sometimes against the masses ... it must know how to go against the current, and cause proletarian consciousness to prevail against lack of consciousness*

*and against alien class influences."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 218]

The problem with this is that, by definition, **everyone** is backward in comparison to the vanguard party. Moreover, in Bolshevik ideology it is the party which determines what is and is not *"proletarian consciousness."* Thus we have the party ideologue presenting self-justifications for party power **over** the working class. Now, is the vanguard is to be able to ignore the masses then it must have power **over** them. Moreover, to be independent of the masses the machine it relies on to implement its power must also, by definition, be independent of the masses. Can we be surprised, therefore, with the rise of the "independent" state bureaucracy in such circumstances? If the state machine is to be independent of the masses then why should we expect it not to become independent of the vanguard? Surely it must be the case that we would be far more surprised if the state machine did **not** become "independent" of the ruling party?

Nor can it be said that the Bolsheviks learned from the experience of the Russian Revolution. This can be seen from Trotsky's 1937 comments that the *"proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from the insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity."* Thus *"state power"* is required **not** to defend the revolution against reaction but from the working class itself, who do not have a high enough *"cultural level"* to govern themselves. At best, their role is that of a passive supporter, for "[w]ithout the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power." While soviets *"are the only organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class"* it does not mean that they are organs of self-management. No, a *"revolutionary content can be given ... only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the*



*sky, collectivization and the five year plan,"* **Socialism, Economics and Development**, p. 100]

In April 1923, he stressed that *"[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158] He was true to his word. In *"The New Course"* (generally accepted as being the first public expression of his opposition to the developing Stalinist regime), he stated that *"[w]e are the only party in the country, and in the period of the dictatorship it could not be otherwise."* Moreover, it was *"incontestable that factions [within the party] are a scourge in the present situation"* and so the party *"does not want factions and will not tolerate them."* [**The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1923–25)**, p. 78, p. 80 and p. 86] In May 1924, he even went so far as to proclaim that:

> *"Comrades, none of us wants to be or can be right against the party. In the last analysis, the party is always right, because the party is the sole historical instrument that the working class possesses for the solution of its fundamental tasks. I have already said that nothing would be simpler than to say before the party that all these criticisms, all these declarations, warnings, and protests — all were mistaken from beginning to end. I cannot say so, however, comrades, because I do not think it. I know that no one can be right against the party. It is only possible to be right with the party and through it since history has not created any other way to determine the correct position."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.161]

So his opposition was a loyal one, initially accepting defeats and following party discipline. In fact, he made a great deal of

> *and 'What is the proletariat supposed to do during the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' other than work and follow the orders of 'its' party?')."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 98]

While the "Left Communists" and "Workers' Opposition" had challenged Lenin's state capitalist economic policies while upholding the Bolshevik monopoly of power (implicitly or explicitly), Trotsky did not even manage that. His opposition was firmly limited to internal reforms to the party which he hoped would result in wider participation in the soviets and trade unions. Just as he did not bother to explain why continuing party dictatorship would reinvigorate the soviets or unions, he did not explain how benevolent dictatorship was possible nor why an economic regime marked by wage-labour (employed by the state rather than capitalists) would not be exploitative. Instead, these positions were simply asserted — for they were, after all, Leninist orthodoxy and had been for some time.

Politically, Trotsky was unashamedly in favour of party dictatorship. Indeed, his basic opposition to Stalinism was because he considered it as the end of that dictatorship by the rule of the bureaucracy. His comments against the "Workers' Opposition" at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 set the tone:

> *"The 'workers opposition' puts forward dangerous slogans which fetishise the principles of democracy. Elections from within the working class were put above the party, as if the party had no right to defend its dictatorship even when this dictatorship was temporarily at odds with the passing feelings of workers' democracy ... It is essential to have a sense of — so to speak — the revolutionary-historical primacy of the party, which is obliged to hold on to its dictatorship, despite the temporary waverings of the masses ... even of the workers."* [quoted by Alec Nove, *"Trot-*



*negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally, Spain)."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Sadly, Trotsky failed to explicitly address the question of what happens when the *"masses"* stop having *"confidence in the vanguard"* and decides to support some other group. After all, if a *"revolutionary content"* can only be given by *"the party"* then if the masses reject the party then the soviets can no only be revolutionary. To save the revolution, it would be necessary to destroy the democracy and power of the soviets. Which is **exactly** what the Bolsheviks did do in 1918. By equating popular power with party power Bolshevism not only opens the door to party dictatorship, it invites it in, gives it some coffee and asks it to make itself a home! Nor can it be said that Trotsky ever appreciated Kropotkin's *"general observation"* that *"those who preach dictatorship do not in general perceive that in sustaining their prejudice they only prepare the way for those who later on will cut their throats."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 244]

In summary, it cannot be a coincidence that once in power the Bolsheviks acted in ways which had clear links to the political ideology it had been advocating before hand. As such, the Bolshevik aim for party power helped undermine the real power of working class people during the Russian revolution. Rooted in a deeply anti-democratic political tradition, it was ideologically predisposed to substitute party power for soviet power and, finally, to create — and justify — the dictatorship **over** the proletariat. The civil war may have shaped certain aspects of these authoritarian tendencies but it did not create them.

## Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?

As well as the obvious failure of the Russian Revolution (see section H.6), the limitations in Bolshevism can be seen by the various oppositions to the mainstream of that party. That Bolshevik politics are not a suitable instrument for working class self-liberation is expressed in the limited way opposition groups questioned Bolshevik orthodoxy — even in the case of the opposition to the rising Stalinist bureaucracy.

All were based on standard vanguardist positions, as discussed in section H.5, such as a privileged position for the party, reflected in the aim for party power and, inevitably, the Bolshevik monopoly of power. This meant their opposition was focused on seeking reforms in areas which did not question the role and position of the party (such as economic policy) or sought to strengthen it (against the bureaucracy). This does not mean that the various oppositions did not have valid points, just that they shared the key assumptions of Bolshevism which undermined the Russian revolution either by their application or their use to justify specific (usually highly authoritarian) practice.

We will not cover all the various oppositions with the Bolshevik party here (Robert V. Daniels' **The Conscience of the Revolution** discusses all of them in some detail, as does Leonard Schapiro's **The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**). We will concentrate on the "Left Communists" of 1918 (in section 1), the "Workers' Opposition" of 1920–1 (in section 2) and the Trotsky-led "Left Opposition" of 1923–7 (in section 3) . Each opposition is a pale reflection of the one before it and each had clear limitations in their ideas which fatally undermined any liberatory potential they had. Indeed, by the time of the "Left Opposition" we are reduced to simply the more radical faction of the state and party bureaucracy



position disappeared for decades (for a refutation of similar claims about Trotsky's opposition to Stalinism which extends into the 1930s, see section 15 of the appendix "Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet 'Socialism from Below'").

It is indeed the case that since 1919 Trotsky, like Lenin, had been wholeheartedly in favour of the party dictatorship and had opposed all oppositions which raised the need for economic reforms which would increase workers' control. This did not change in the 1920s but by 1923 even he could not fail to see that something was going wrong. Unsurprisingly, given its blindness to the substantial evidence of degeneration that had grown every greater since 1917, his opposition was by far the weakest politically as it questioned far fewer things. As Cornelius Castoriadis points out:

> *"From the beginning of 1918 until the banning of factions in March 1921, tendencies within the Bolshevik party were formed that, with farsightedness and sometimes an astonishing clarity, expressed opposition to the Party's bureaucratic line and to its very rapid bureaucratisation. These were the 'Left Communists' (at the beginning of 1918), then the 'Democratic Centralist' tendency (1919), and finally the 'Workers' Opposition' (1920–21)... these oppositions were defeated one by one ... The very feeble echoes of their critique of the bureaucracy that can be found later in the (Trotskyist) 'Left Opposition' after 1923 do not have the same signification. Trotsky was opposed to the* ***bad policies*** *of the bureaucracy and to the excesses of its power. He never put into question its essential nature. Until practically the end of his life, he never brought up the questions raised by the various oppositions of the period from 1918 to 1921 (in essence: 'Who manages production?'*

munist cells within the trade unions as well as within a typically Marxist centralised economic structure.

## 3 What about Trotsky's "Left Opposition" in the 1920s?

We now turn to what is probably the most famous opposition, namely Trotsky's "Left Opposition" of 1923–7, for it spawned numerous Trotskyist sects across the globe as well as the second "Fourth International" (the first had been formed in 1922 by council communists from Germany, Holland and Britain, amongst others). Chris Harman (of the UK's SWP) can be considered typical, arguing that *"there was always an alternative to Stalinism. It meant, in the late 1920s, returning to genuine workers' democracy and consciously linking the fate of Russia to the fate of world revolution."* He asserts that the *"historical merit of the "Left Opposition"* was that it *"did link the question of the expansion of industry with that of working-class democracy and internationalism."* [**Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 19] Other Leninists make similar claims. Victor Serge, a member of the "Left Opposition" in Russia and then Trotskyist in exile, stated that its programme was *"the reform of the Soviet State by a return to working-class democracy."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 256]

Unfortunately, such claims are not true. As Serge himself noted elsewhere, Trotsky may have *"ever since 1923 [been] for the renovation of the party through inner party democracy and the struggle against bureaucracy"* but *"the greatest reach of boldness of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party was to demand the restoration of inner-Party democracy, and it never dared dispute the theory of single-party government — by this time, it was too late."* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 201 and p. 181] Here we show that this was, indeed, the case and will concentrate on the 1923 to 1927 period, before it was crushed and all op-



fighting the dominant faction with the aim of securing a benevolent state capitalist dictatorship.

As noted, certain elements of these oppositions were undoubtedly correct. So, for example, the (correct) arguments of the "Left Communists" against Lenin's policy of *"one-man management"* were echoed by the "Democratic Centralists" at the Ninth Party Congress (an opposition we do not cover here). One member of this grouping (which included such former "Left Communists" as Osinsky) argued against Lenin's position in favour of appointed managers inside and outside the party as follows:

> *"The Central Committee finds that the [local] party committee is a bourgeois prejudice, is conservatism bordering on the province of treason, and that the new form is the replacement of party committees by political departments, the heads of which by themselves replace the elected committees ... You transform the members of the party into an obedient gramophone, with leaders who order: go and agitate; but they haven't the right to elect their own committee, their own organs.*
>
> *"I then put the question to comrade Lenin: Who will appoint the Central Committee? You see, there can be individual authority here as well. Here also a single commander can be appointed."* [Sapronov, quoted by Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 114]

Obviously a man ahead of his time. As Stalin proved, if *"one-man management"* was such a good idea then why should it not be practised in the Council of People's Commissars?

So these oppositions did identify real problems and many of their policies had elements of real solutions within them. Yet, as discussed in section H.3.5, placing certain libertarian ideas

within an overall centralised vision or system will not undermine its wider authoritarian nature. Most obviously, the Bolshevik preference (at least before embracing party dictatorship after 1917) for centralised "democracy" effectively hollowed out the real democracy at the base which makes it more than just picking masters and created the structures and social relationships which made further degeneration inevitable — the very problems the oppositions themselves raised but whose real roots evaded them.

Here we indicate the positive ideas of the various oppositions but also indicate their limitations, which flow from the fact these are **Bolshevik** oppositions and so shared a similar set of prejudices and vision of (centralised) socialism.

Finally, to contrast these fake "oppositions" with a genuine opposition, we will discuss (in section 4) the "Workers' Group" which was expelled from the Communist Party of 1922–3 and repressed under Lenin and Trotsky. This grouping stood for traditional socialist values, including many of the principles the Bolshevik party claimed to support before it seized power (such as workers' democracy) and some it did not (such as workers' self-management of production). We do so to indicate the limited nature of the previous oppositions and how the repression of a **genuine** dissident working class group within the Communist Party shows how deeply unlibertarian and so anti-socialist the real Bolshevik tradition is.

## 1 Were the "Left Communists" of 1918 an alternative?

The first opposition of note in the party to the Leninist mainstream was that of the "Left Communists" in early 1918. This was clustered around the Bolshevik leader Bukharin and was focused around opposition to the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Germany and Lenin's advocacy of *"state capitalism"* as the means of both building socialism and getting Russia out of its



*and transfer, directed primarily at the adherents of the Workers' Opposition. (Of the 37 Workers' Opposition delegates to the Tenth Congress whom Lenin consulted when he was persuading Shlyapnikov and Kutuzov to enter the Central Committee, only four managed to return as voting delegates to the next congress.)"* A similar process was at work in the trade unions. For example, *"[w]hen the metalworkers' union held its congress in May 1921, the Central Committee of the party handed it a list of recommended candidates for the union leadership. The metalworkers' delegates voted down the party-backed list, but this gesture proved futile: the party leadership boldly appointed their own men to the union offices."* This was *"a show of political force"* as the union was a centre of the "Workers' Opposition". [Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161 and p. 157]

This repression was practised under Lenin and Trotsky, using techniques which were later used by the Stalinists against Trotsky and his followers. Lenin himself was not above seeking to remove his opponents from the central committee by undemocratic methods. At the Tenth Party Congress he had persuaded Shlyapnikov to be elected to the Central Committee in an attempt to undermine the opposition. A mere *"five months later, Lenin was demanding his expulsion for a few sharp words of criticism of the bureaucracy, uttered at a private meeting of a local party cell. If he was looking for a pretext, he could scarcely have picked a weaker one."* [Schapiro, **Op. Cit.**, p. 327] Lenin failed by only one vote short of the necessary two thirds majority of the Committee.

In summary, the "Workers' Opposition" vision was limited. Politically, it merely wanted democracy within the party and did not question the party's monopoly of power. As such, it definitely did not deserve the labels *"anarchist"* and *"syndicalist"* which its opponents labelled it. As far as its economic policy goes, it, too, was limited. Its demands for economic democracy were circumscribed by placing it under the control of the com-

reforms rooted in the assumption of Bolshevik party domination. Such a policy would be too contradictory to be applied: either the economic reforms would remain a dead letter under party control or the economic reforms would provoke demands for political change. This last possibility may explain Lenin's vitriolic attacks on the "Workers' Opposition."

This opposition, like the "Left Communists" of 1918, was ultimately defeated by organisational pressures within the party and state. Victor Serge *"was horrified to see the voting rigged for Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority'"* in late 1920. [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 123] Kollantai complained that while officially one and a half million copies of the "Workers' Opposition" manifesto were published, in fact only 1500 were *"and that with difficulty."* [quoted by Schaprio, **Op. Cit.**, p. 291] This applied even more after the banning of factions, when the party machine used state power to break up the base of the opposition in the trade unions as well as its influence in the party:

> *"Victimisation of supporters of the "Workers' Opposition" began immediately after the Tenth Party Congress. 'The struggle,' as Shlyapnikov later recounted, 'took place not along ideological lines but by means ... of edging out from appointments, of systematic transfers from one district to another, and even expulsion from the party.' ... the attack was levelled not for heretical opinions, but for criticism of any kind of party shortcomings. 'Every member of the party who spoke in defence of the resolution on workers' democracy [in the party] was declared a supporter of the Workers' Opposition and guilty of disintegrating the party,' and was accordingly victimised."* [Schapiro, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 325–6]

Thus *"the party Secretariat was perfecting its technique of dealing with recalcitrant individuals by the power of removal*



economic problems. Here we focus of the latter issue, namely their critique of Lenin's economic policies and its limitations. In addition, we will discuss the flaws in their political ideas.

The first issue of their theoretical journal **Kommunist** was published in April 1918 and it argued vigorously against Lenin's advocacy of *"one-man management"* and *"state capitalism"* as necessary and immediate steps for the new regime. It warned of *"bureaucratic centralisation, the rule of various commissars, the loss of independence for local Soviets and in practice the rejection of the type of state-commune administered from below"* if Lenin's policies were continued to be followed. The second issue saw an article by Osinsky which correctly predicted that *"for the construction of the proletarian society by the class creativity of the workers themselves, not by the Ukases of the captains of industry ... If the proletariat itself does not know how to create the necessary prerequisites for the socialist organisation of labour, no one can do this for it and no one can compel it to do this. The stick, if raised against the workers, will find itself in the hands of a social force which is either under the influence of another social class or is in the hands of the soviet power; but the soviet power will then be forced to seek support against the proletariat from another class (e.g. the peasantry) and by this it will destroy itself as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Socialism and socialist organisation will be set up by the proletariat itself, or they will not be set up at all: something else will be set up — state capitalism."* [quoted by Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 39]

Lenin reacted sharply, heaping insult upon insult on the "Left Communists" and arguing against their ideas. Rather than see self-management (or even workers' control) as the key, he argued forcefully that *"**economically**, state capitalism is immeasurably superior to our present economic system."* He linked this with his previous writings, correctly noting his *"'high' appreciation of state capitalism"* had been given *"**before** the Bolsheviks seized power"* in, amongst other works, his **State and**

**Revolution** and so it was *"significant that [his opponents] did **not** emphasise **this**"*. For Lenin, *"Socialism is inconceivable without large scale capitalist engineering"* and *"without planned state organisation, which keeps tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a unified standard in production and distribution."* Thus *"our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare **no effort** in copying it and not shrink from adopting **dictatorial** methods to hasten the copying of it."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 339, p. 341, p. 354, p. 339 and p. 340]

For Lenin, as long as a workers' party held **political** power, the working class need not fear *"state capitalism"* and the lack of economic power at the point of production. Ignoring the awkward fact that it was the Bolsheviks rather than the proletariat who held political power, Lenin failed to realise that without economic power working class political power would be fatally undermined. Unfortunately, Lenin's arguments carried the day (see section H.3.14) and, in practice, the net effect was simply to hand over the economy to the state bureaucracy and create the social relationships which Stalinism thrived upon. As such, the merit of the "Left Communists" can be seen.

However, the "Left Communists", while correct on socialism needing workers' economic self-management, were limited in other ways. The major problems were three-fold.

Firstly, by basing themselves on Bolshevik orthodoxy they allowed Lenin to dominate the debate. This meant that their more "libertarian" reading of Lenin's work could be nullified by Lenin himself pointing to the authoritarian and state capitalist aspects of those very same works. Which is ironic, as today most Leninists tend to point to these very same democratic sounding aspects of Lenin's ideas while downplaying the more blatant anti-socialist ones. Given that Lenin had dismissed such approaches himself during the debate against the "Left Communists" in 1918, it seems dishonest for his latter day followers to do this.



according to Trotsky, *"it is all the more important to preserve our ideological line and give a lesson to our continuators. This should **never** be forgotten, even in **hopeless** circumstances."* [quoted by Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 147] Thus the opposition to even limited economic democracy was the lesson — along with party dictatorship — he wished his followers to learn:

> *"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transition from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 21]

In short, the proletariat having **economic** power would undermine "the dictatorship of the proletariat":

> *"To govern you need an army of steeled revolutionary Communists. We have it, and it is called the Party. All this syndicalist nonsense about mandatory nominations of producers must go into the wastepaper basket. To proceed on those lines would mean thrusting the Party aside and making the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia impossible."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 21]

In summary, like the "Left Communists", the "Workers' Opposition" presented a platform of economic and internal party

sky recognised this contradiction at the Tenth Congress when attacking the "Workers' Opposition": *"Formally speaking this [the creation of factory committees] is indeed the clearest line of workers' democracy. But we are against it. Why? For a basic reason, to preserve the party's dictatorship, and for subordinate reasons: management would be inefficient."* [quoted by Alec Nove, *"Trotsky, collectivization and the five year plan,"* **Socialism, Economics and Development**, p. 100] In terms of his *"subordinate"* reason, it should suffice to note the waste and inefficency in the economy which occurred after he and Lenin imposed *"one-man management"* and the *"militarisation of labour"* (see section H.6.2).

It should be stressed that this opposition and the debate it provoked occurred after the end of the Civil War. The Whites under Wrangel had been defeated in November 1920 and the Russian revolution was no longer in immediate danger. As such, there was an opportunity for constructive activity and mass participation in the rebuilding of Russia. The leading Bolsheviks rejected such demands, even in the limited form advocated by the "Workers' Opposition". Lenin and Trotsky clearly saw **any** working class participation as a danger to their power. Against the idea of economic participation under Communist control raised by the "Workers' Opposition", the leading Bolsheviks favoured the New Economic Policy (NEP). This was a return to the same kind of market-based *"state capitalist"* strategy Lenin had advocated against the "Left Communists" **before** the outbreak of the civil war in May 1918 (and, as noted, he had argued for in 1917). This shows a remarkable consistency in Lenin's thoughts, suggesting that claims the policies he advocated and implemented in power were somehow the opposite of what he "really" wanted are weak.

As with the "Left Communists" of 1918, Lenin saw his opposition to the "Workers' Opposition" as reflecting the basic ideas of his politics. *"If we perish,"* he said privately at the time



Secondly, their perspective on the role of the party undermined their commitment to true workers' power and freedom. This can be seen from the comments of Sorin, a leading member of the group, who argued that the "Left Communists" were *"the most passionate proponents of soviet power, but ... only so far as this power does not degenerate ... in a petty-bourgeois direction."* [quoted by Ronald I. Kowalski, **The Bolshevik Party in Conflict**, p. 135] For them, like any Bolshevik, the party played the key role for it was the only true bastion of the interests of the proletariat and, as such, the party *"is in every case and everywhere superior to the soviets ... The soviets represent labouring democracy in general; and its interest, and in particular the interests of the petty bourgeois peasantry, do not always coincide with the interests of the proletariat."* [quoted by Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 182]

Thus soviet power was limited to approval of the party line and — as with Lenin — any deviation from that line could be denounced as *"petty bourgeois"* and, therefore, ignored. *"Ironically,"* Kowalski summarises, *"Sorin's call for a revived soviet democracy was becoming vitiated by the dominant role assigned, in the final analysis, to the party."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 136] Thus their politics were just as authoritarian as the mainstream Bolshevism they attacked on other issues:

> *"Ultimately, the only criterion that they appeared able to offer was to define 'proletarian' in terms of adherence to their own policy prescriptions and 'non-proletarian' by non-adherence to them. In consequence, all who dared to oppose them could be accused either of being non-proletarian, or at the very least suffering from some form of 'false consciousness' — and in the interests of building socialism must recant or be purged from the party. Rather ironically, beneath the surface of their fine rhetoric in defence of the soviets, and of the party*

*as 'a forum for all of proletarian democracy,' there lay a political philosophy that was arguably as authoritarian as that of which they accused Lenin and his faction."* [Kowalski, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 136–7]

*"According to the "Left Communists", therefore,"* notes Richard Sakwa, *"the party was the custodian of an interest higher than that of the soviets. Earlier theoretical considerations on the vanguard role of the party, developed in response to this problem, were confirmed by the circumstances of Bolshevism in power. The political dominance of the party over the soviets encouraged an administrative one as well. Such a development was further encouraged by the emergence of a massive and unwieldy bureaucratic apparatus in 1918 ... The "Left Communists" and the party leadership were therefore in agreement that ... the party should play a tutelary role over the soviets."* Furthermore, *"[w]ith such a formulation it proved difficult to maintain the vitality of the soviet plenum as the soviet was controlled by a party fraction, itself controlled by a party committee outside the soviet."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 182 and p. 182–3]

This position can be traced back to the fundamentals of Bolshevism (see section H.5 on vanguardism). With this ideological preference for party power and the ideological justification for ignoring soviet democracy, it is doubtful that their (correct) commitment to workers' economic self-management would have been successful. An economic democracy combined with what amounts to a party dictatorship would be an impossibility that could never work in practice.

As such, the fact that Bukharin (one time "Left Communist") *"continued to eulogise the party's dictatorship, sometimes quite unabashedly"* during and after the civil war becomes understandable. In this, he was not being extreme but rather expressing the orthodoxy, for *"Bolsheviks no longer bothered to disclaim that the dictatorship of the proletariat was the 'dictatorship of the*



*Soviet Government still had to concentrate on overcoming the masses' cultural backwardness. According to Smilga the extreme demands (of the Workers' Opposition) disrupted the Party's efforts and raised hopes among the workers which could only be disappointed. But, most important, the demands of the Workers' Opposition were revolutionary in a wrong (anarcho-syndicalist) way. This was the ultimate anathema."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

For Lenin, the idea of industrial democracy was a nonsense. In this he was simply repeating the perspective he had held from the spring of 1918. As he put it, it was *"a term that lends itself to misinterpretations. It may be read as a repudiation of dictatorship and individual authority."* Industry, he argued, *"is indispensable, democracy is not"* and *"on no account must we renounce dictatorship either."* Indeed, *"[i]ndustry is indispensable, democracy is a category proper only to the political sphere"*. He did admit *"[t]hat [the opposition] has been penetrating into the broad masses is evident"*, however the *"bidding for or flirtation with the non-Party masses"* was a *"radical departure from Marxism." "Marxism teaches,"* he stressed, *"and this tenet has not only been formally endorsed by the whole Communist International in the decisions of the Second (1920) Congress of the Comintern on the role of the political party of the proletariat, but has also been confirmed in practice by our revolution — that only the political party of the working class, i.e. the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat ... . that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillation of this mass ... Without this the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 82, p. 27, p. 26, p. 197 and p. 246] In other words, *"Marxism"* teaches that workers' democracy and protest (the only means by which *"vacillation"* can be expressed) is a danger to the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* — see section H.5.3 on why this position is the inevitable outcome of vanguardism.

In a way, Lenin was correct for economic democracy combined with political dictatorship would be a contradiction. Trot-

*elements of the opposition who talk themselves into repudiating all 'militarisation of industry', and not only the 'appointments method', which has been the prevailing one up to now, but all 'appointments', that is, in the last analysis, repudiating the Party's leading role in relation to the non-Party masses. We must combat the syndicalist deviation, which will kill the Party unless it is entirely cured of it."* Indeed, *"syndicalist deviation ... leads to the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, Vol. 32, p. 53 and p. 86] Maurice Brinton correctly notes that by this Lenin meant that *"working class power ('the dictatorship of the proletariat') is impossible if there are militants in the Party who think the working class should exert more power in production ('the syndicalist deviation')."* Moreover, *"Lenin here poses quite clearly the question of 'power of the Party' or 'power of the class.' He unambiguously opts for the former — no doubt rationalising his choice by equating the two. But he goes even further. He not only equates 'workers power' with the rule of the Party. He equates it with acceptance of the ideas of the Party leaders!"* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers Control**, p. 76]

The "Workers' Opposition," asserted Lenin was a *"syndicalist and anarchist deviation"* produced partly by *"the influx into the Party of former Mensheviks, and also of workers and peasants who have not yet fully assimilated the communist world outlook."* Their ideas on economic reform were *"radically wrong in theory, and represent a complete break with Marxism and communism, with the practical experience of all semi-proletarian revolutions and of the present proletarian revolution."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 245–6] Significantly, the *"basic arguments of the Opposition were not dealt with in any depth"* at the tenth party congress. *"What argument — as distinct from invective — there was, was often confused,"* Maurice Brinton summarises. *"For instance, apart from being (a) 'genuinely counter-revolutionary' and (b) 'objectively counter-revolutionary', the Workers' Opposition was also 'too revolutionary'. Their demands were 'too advanced' and the*



*party'"* for *"class immaturity was not a peculiarity of the Russian proletariat, but a characteristic of proletarian revolutions in general."* [Stephen F. Cohen, **Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution**, p. 145 and p. 142] So by 1921, all the leading Bolsheviks had argued this position for some time (see section H.1.2, for example). Bukharin even went so far as to argue that *"the watchword"* taken up by some workers (*"even metal workers"*!) of *"For class dictatorship, but against party dictatorship!"* showed that the proletariat *"was declassed."* This also indicated that a *"misunderstanding arose which threatened the whole system of the proletarian dictatorship."* [contained in Al Richardson (ed.), **In Defence of the Russian Revolution**, p. 192] The echoes of the positions argued before the civil war can be seen in Bukharin's glib comment that proletarian management of the revolution meant the end of the "proletarian" dictatorship!

Thirdly, while correctly stressing the need for workers' management and participation the "Left Communists" placed it within a centralised institutional context which nullified it. Incorrectly proclaiming that anarchists aimed at turning all workplaces into the property of their workforce, the "Left Communists" argued for a typically Marxist (centralised) alternative:

> *"It was Bukharin who developed this theme most cogently. In the final analysis, the basic distinction between Communists and Anarchists, he argued, was not their attitude to the state and its power. While they disagreed regarding the role it was to play in the transition period — the Communists ascribed to it a vital role — both sought its ultimate extinction. Rather, what fundamentally divided them was that Communists were convinced that only a centrally-planned economy, in which large-scale production was predominant, would be able to provide the ma-*

> *terial basis of abundance, on which alone socialism could be founded."* [Kowalski, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111]

Ignoring the akward anarchist advocate no such thing — see section I.3.8 — we will simply note that this typically Marxist position would lead to a new class system. So while Osinskii argued that workplaces would be run by boards elected by workers, but **not** composed of a majority of workers employed in a given enterprise, these would elect regional economic councils, which in turn would create a central economic council and it is the higher bodies which would have the power to affirm or veto those bodies below them: *"in the final analysis the authorities at the lower levels would have to be overridden. Osinskii and his fellow-thinkers were compelled to assign the ultimate power of economic decision making to the centre, as their conception of the economics of socialism demanded."* In short, they *"did not comprehend that their conception of central planning was incompatible with the devolution of authority to the shop floor that they aspired to"* and so it is hard not to conclude that the *"ideological preconceptions of the Left Communists would have spawned a centralised, bureaucratic system, not an emancipated society in which power was diffused to the workers."* [Kowalski, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113, p. 186 and p. 188]

This is unsurprising, given the fact that the "Left Communists" were Marxists, with a vision of socialism inherited from Marx based on a centralised plan. Thus we find Osinskii in 1918 defining his vision as *"state socialism, i.e. a centralised system of socialised production, monopolised product distribution and planned utilisation of labour."* [quoted by Silvana Malle, **The Economic Organization of War Communism 1918–1921**, p. 297] Like other Marxists, they seemed unaware of the bureaucracy needed to gather and process the necessary (overwhelming) data to create a plan as well as the means of implementing it. As we discuss in section H.3.13, such a system would be the very state-capitalism the "Left Communists" cor-



> *more freedom of initiative for the workers, it was quite content to leave untouched the state of affairs in which a few hundred thousand imposed their will on many millions. 'And since when have we been enemies of **komitetchina** [manipulation and control by communist party committees], I should like to know?' Shlyapnikov asked at the Tenth Party Congress. He went on to explain that the trade union congress in which, as he and his followers proposed, all control of industry should be vested would 'of course' be composed of delegates nominated and elected 'through the party cells, as we always do.' But he argued that the local trade union cells would ensure the election of men qualified by experience and ability in place of those who are 'imposed on us at present' by the centre. Kollontai and her supporters had no wish to disturb the communist party's monopoly of political power."* [Leonard Schapiro, **The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 294]

Thus they *"sought to preserve the Bolshevik monopoly of power, condoning the use of terror whenever necessary to accomplish this. They limited their demands to internal party reforms, and never advocated sharing political authority with other socialist organisations."* Indeed, Kollontai *"declared that the Workers' Opposition were among the first volunteers to go fight the [Kronstadt] rebels"*, who had raised the demand for soviet democracy (see appendix "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" for more information). [Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, pp. 182–3]

Even this extremely limited demand for more economic democracy was too much for Lenin. In January 1921, he argued that the Bolsheviks *"have now added to our platform the following: We must combat the ideological discord and the unsound*

This would be *"a system of self-activity for the masses"* for *"the building of Communism can and must be the work of the toiling masses themselves."* In short: ***"it is impossible to decree communism."*** [**Op. Cit.**, p. 176, p. 174, p. 182, p. 200 and p. 199]

Economically, then, the "Workers' Opposition" had much to recommend it for it raised ideas long argued by anarchists. Yet, as with the "Left Communists", these positive ideas are undermined by a typically Marxist centralised institutional framework in which industrial unions *"elect the central body directing the whole economic life of the republic."* [Kollontai, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176] As such, the arguments raised in the previous section apply, namely that the centralised regime within which these ideas would be applied would nullify them and end up producing a new class system around the bureaucrats such a system requires.

Likewise with their political ideas. The group did not seek actual workers' democracy for the *"task of the Party at its present crisis"* is to *"lend its ear to the healthy class call of the wide working masses"* but *"correction of the activity of the Party"* meant *"going back to democracy, freedom of opinion, and criticism inside the Party."* The struggle was *"to destroy bureaucracy in the party and replace it by workers' democracy"*: *"for establishing democracy in the party, and for the elimination of all bureaucracy"*. [Kollontai, **Op. Cit.**, p. 172, p. 192 and p. 197] Its demands were solely concerning the internal regime of the party, **not** a call for wider democratic reforms in the state or society as a whole:

> *"The arguments of Kollontai were ... strictly limited in their appeal to the communist party ... Nor did they in any form criticise the domination of the communist minority over the majority of the proletariat. The fundamental weakness of the case of the Workers' Opposition was that, while demanding*



rectly railed against: *"we are by every means — by nationalisation, by centralisation — strangling the forces in our country. The masses are being cut off from living creative power in all branches of our national economy."* [Lomov, quoted by Carmen Sirianni, **Workers Control and Socialist Democracy**, p. 155] Combine this with the privileged role of the party and all the conditions were there to ensure a similar outcome to that created by the Leninist mainstream — even if, ironically, the "Left Communists" were the most vocal in denouncing the inevitable bureaucratic inefficiencies and abuses of the centralised system they both shared.

Finally, how this conflict within the party was resolved is significant, given that the banning of factions (which is generally seen as a key cause in the rise of Stalinism) occurred in 1921 (a ban, incidentally, Trotsky defended throughout the early 1920s). As one historian notes:

> *"The resolution of the party controversy in the spring of 1918 set a pattern that was to be followed throughout the history of the Communist Opposition in Russia. This was the settlement of the issues not by discussion, persuasion, or compromise, but by a high-pressure campaign in the party organisations, backed by a barrage of violent invective in the party press and in the pronouncements of the party leaders. Lenin's polemics set the tone, and his organisational lieutenants brought the membership into line."* [Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87]

Indeed, *"[s]oon after the party congress had approved the peace [of Brest-Litovsk in the spring of 1918], a Petrograd city party conference produced a majority for Lenin. It ordered the suspension of the newspaper* ***Kommunist*** *which had been serving as a Left Communist organ ... The fourth and final issue of the Moscow* ***Kommunist*** *had to be published as a private fac-*

*tional paper rather than as the official organ of a party organisation."* Ultimately, *"[u]nder the conditions of party life established by Lenin, defence of the Opposition position became impossible within the terms of Bolshevik discipline."* [Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88 and p. 89] So much for faction rights — three years **before** they were officially prohibited in the 10th Party Congress!

In addition, the "Left Communists" were not defeated by those with superior ideas winning the debate. Rather, Lenin's arguments *"evinced caricatured distortion of their positions, evasiveness, and bitter invective more than principled confrontation and clarification of opposing positions."*. For example, *"[b]y selectively quoting Osinsky's article so as to make it appear that the Left Communist opposed all labour discipline, he was able to avoid confronting their concrete proposals for work norms and self-discipline by democratically elected workers organisations."* Lenin *"caricatured"* other ideas, so *"[c]ompletely misrepresenting"* them while in other cases *"not a word"* was uttered in reply to their critique. [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers Control and Socialist Democracy**, pp. 149–50] A similar response befell the other oppositions discussed here — whether under Lenin or under Stalin.

In this, though, Lenin was hardly being original. In May 1907 Lenin had defended himself within the party for the rhetoric he had used against a group of Mensheviks, arguing that the *"wording is calculated to evoke in the reader hatred, aversion and contempt ... Such wording is calculated not to convince, but to break up the ranks of the opponent . .. to destroy him ... to evoke the worse thoughts, the worst suspicions about the opponent."* This was part of a struggle to *"struggle to **destroy** the hostile organisation, destroy its influence over the masses of the proletariat."* [**Collected Works**, Vol. 12, pp. 424–5 and p. 427]

Should we be surprised that such techniques should be utilised **within** the party when necessary? Ultimately, as well as exposing how Lenin's economic ideas helped build the



bureaucratic state capitalism Stalinism was born from, the saga of the "Left Communists" shows how the polemical and organisational techniques of Stalinism also did not fall from the sky.

## 2 What were the limitations of the "Workers' Opposition" of 1920?

The next major group of party dissidents were the "Workers' Opposition" of late 1920 and early 1921 (not to be confused with the opposition of **actual** workers to the regime — see section H.6.3). Lead by Alexandra Kollontai and Alexander Shlyapnikov, this grouping is better known than other early oppositions simply because it was the focus for much debate at the tenth party congress in March 1921 and its existence was a precipitating factor in the banning of factions within the Communist Party. Also, the manifesto Kollontai wrote for the group was translated by council communists in Britain and elsewhere.

Unlike the "Left Communists" (see the last section), their support for party dictatorship was more than logically implied, it was taken for granted. Their manifesto fails to mention political democracy at all, instead discussing exclusively economic and party democracy. Thus it was expressing the *"basis on which, in its opinion, the dictatorship of the proletariat must rest in the sphere of industrial reconstruction"*, for the *"whole controversy boils down to one basic question: who shall build the communist economy, and how shall it be build?"* [**Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai**, p. 161 and p. 173]

Kollontai was right to state that the working class *"can alone be the creator of communism"* and to ask the question of *"shall we achieve communism through the workers or over their heads, by the hands of Soviet officials?"* The answer was correct, arguing for the former and *"**see[ing] in the unions the managers and creators of the communist economy**."*

*'compulsory' mobilisation, opting for an 'obligatory' one; that is, each peasant who is able to carry arms, should recognise his obligation to enlist in the ranks of the partisans and to defend the interests of the entire toiling people of Ukraine."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] There were far more volunteers than arms, the opposite of what occurred to both the Reds and Whites during the Civil War. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106]

The third Congress decided to conduct a voluntary mobilisation all those born between 1889 and 1898. This congress told them to assemble at certain points, organise themselves and elect their officers. Another mobilisation decided at the Aleksandrovsk congress never took place. How far the Makhnovists were forced to conscript troops is still a matter of debate. Paul Avrich, for example, states that *"voluntary mobilisation"* in reality *"meant outright conscription, as all able-bodied men were required to serve."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 114] On the other side, surviving leaflets from 1920 *"are in the nature of appeals to join up, not instructions."* [Malet,**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] Trotsky, ironically, noted that *"Makhno does not have general mobilisations, and indeed these would be impossible, as he lacks the necessary apparatus."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106] It is probably right to say that the Congresses desired that every able-bodied man join the Makhnovist army, but they simply did not have the means to enforce that desire and that the Makhnovists tried their best to avoid conscription by appealing to the peasants' revolutionary conscience, with some success.

As well as the military organisation, there was also an explicitly anarchist federation operating in the Ukraine at the same time. The first conference to organise a *"Confederation of Anarchist Organisations of the Ukraine"* was held between November 12th to 16th, 1918. The new federation was named *"Nabat"* (Alarm) and had a six-person Secretariat. Kharkiv was chosen as its headquarters, while it had groups in other major Ukrainian cities (including Kyiv, Odessa and Katerynoslav). The final organisation of the Nabat was accomplished at a



*ent, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. 1, p. 47] This, of course, did not stop him asserting in 1936 that the *"demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**, pp. 89–90]

It should also be remembered that when, in early in 1922, the "Workers' Opposition" had appealed to Communists abroad in the form of a statement to a Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) which included the accusation that the *"party and trade-union bureaucracy ... ignore the decisions of our congresses on putting workers' democracy [inside the party] into practice."* Their *"effort to draw the proletarian masses closer to the state is declared to be 'anarcho-syndicalism,' and its adherents are subjected to persecution and discrediting."* They argued that the *"tutelage and pressure by the bureaucracy goes so far that it is prescribed for members of the party, under threat of exclusion and other repressive measures, to elect not those whom the Communists want themselves, but those whom the ignorant high places want."* [quoted by Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 162] It was Trotsky who defended the party against these claims — unsurprisingly, the Bolshevik dominated Comintern decided against the opposition.

Even more ironically, the dominant faction of the bureaucracy heaped upon Trotsky's opposition faction similar insults to those he (and Lenin) had heaped upon previous oppositions inside and outside the party. In 1924, the Trotskyist opposition was accused of having *"clearly violated the decision of the Tenth Congress ... which prohibited the formation of factions within the party"* and has *"enlivened the hopes of all enemies of the party, including the West-European bourgeoisie, for a split in the ranks of the Russian Communist Party."* It was a *"direct departure of Leninism"* and *"also a clearly expressed **petty-bourgeois***

***deviation"*** reflecting *"the pressure of the petty bourgeois on the position of the proletarian party and its policy."* [contained in Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, pp. 247–8] In 1927, it was the case that the "United Opposition" was *"[o]bjectively … a tool of the bourgeois elements."* [quoted by Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, p. 318] This, of course, did not deter Trotsky making similar claims against his opponents on the left during the 1930s.

Ultimately, the Stalinists had a key weapon in its armoury: *"the GPU security police. Having been used against the Workers Group and Workers Truth, it was now mobilized, covertly, against the new opposition."* [Pirani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 219] Indeed, its use in 1923 (as sanctioned by Trotsky) was used as a precedent when it was the turn of the "Left Opposition".

So what would have happened if the "Left Opposition" had won? The first task would have been a purge of the party in order to cleanse it of bureaucratic and corrupt elements. In this it would have repeated the events of 1921 when Lenin had *"proclaimed a purge of the Party, aimed at those revolutionaries who had come in from other parties — i.e. those who were not saturated with the Bolshevik mentality. This meant the establishment within the Party of a dictatorship of the old Bolsheviks, and the direction of disciplinary measures, not against the unprincipled careerists and conformist late-comers, but against those sections with a critical outlook."* [Serge, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] It is unlikely that another purge would have been any more successful.

Given the identical social relations between Leninism and Stalinism, all that is left to the supporters of Leninism seeking to differentiate it from Stalinism is to focus on the regime within the Communist Party itself. It is stressed that the Bolshevik party under Lenin was far more democratic than under Stalin and, moreover, the repression of the late 1920s onwards simply did not exist. True, although the suppression of opposition currents within Bolshevism did not start under Stalinism for it had existed to some degree from the start. Of course,



these congresses, delegates of the toiling people decided upon the policy to be pursued by the Makhnovist Army. The Revolutionary Military Soviet existed to oversee that decisions were implemented, not to determine the military activities of the troops.

It should also be noted that women not only supported the Makhnovists, they also *"fought alongside the men."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 145] However, *"the participation of women in the movement (by all accounts, quite substantial)"* needs *"further investigation."* [Serge Cipko, *"Nestor Makhno: A Mini-Historiography of the Anarchist Revolution in Ukraine, 1917–1921,"* pp. 57–75, **The Raven**, no. 13, p. 75]

At its height, the army was made up of infantry, cavalry, artillery, machine-gun units, and special branches, including an intelligence service. As the success of partisan warfare depends upon mobility, the army gradually mounted its infantry in light carts (called *"tachanka"*) during 1918–19. As Michael Malet notes, this was a *"novel tactic"* and Makhno *"could be described as the inventor of the motorised division before the car came into general use."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85] The tachanka was used to transport as many troops as possible, giving the Makhnovists mobile infantry which could keep up with the cavalry. In addition, a machine-gun was sometimes mounted in the rear (in autumn 1919, the 1st machine-gun regiment consisted of 120 guns, all mounted on tachanki).

For the most part the Makhnovist army was a volunteer army, unlike all others operating in the Russian Civil War. However, at times of crisis attempts were made to mobilise troops. For example, the Second regional congress agreed that a *"general voluntary and equalitarian mobilisation"* should take place. This meant that this appeal, *"sanctioned by the moral authority of the congress, emphasised the need for fresh troops in the insurrectionary army, no-one was compelled to enlist."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 577] The Congress itself passed a resolution after a long and passionate debate that stated it *"rejected*

> *rule, they were all equal and if several units fought together the top commanders commanded jointly. The army was nominally headed by a Revolutionary Military Council of about ten to twenty members … Like the commanders, the council members were elected, but some were appointed by Makhno …. There also was an elected cultural section in the army. Its aim was to conduct political and ideological propaganda among the partisans and peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 108–9]

The Revolutionary Military Council was elected and directly accountable to the regional workers, peasants and insurgent congresses. It was designed to co-ordinate the local soviets and execute the decisions of the regional congresses.

Hence Voline:

> *"This council embraced the whole free region. It was supposed to carry out all the economic, political, social and military decisions made at the congress. It was thus, in a certain sense, the supreme executive of the whole movement.* ***But it was not at all an authoritarian organ.*** *Only strictly executive functions were assigned to it. It confined itself to carrying out the instructions and decisions of the congress. At any moment, it could be dissolved by the congress and cease to exist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 577]

As such, when Palij notes that this council *"had no decisive voice in the army's actions,"* he misses the point of the council. [Palij, **Ibid.**] It did not determine the military affairs of the army, but rather the interaction of the military and civilians and made sure that the decisions of congresses were executed. Thus the whole army was nominally under the control of the regional congresses of workers, peasants and insurgents. At



the Stalinists did not stop there. Once the "Left Opposition" was broken its members were brutally repressed. Some were simply murdered, many more arrested and placed into prison camps where many died. Which shows, in its own way, a key difference between Lenin's and Stalin's regime. Under Lenin, the opposition **outside** the party was brutally repressed. Stalin simply applied the methods used by Lenin outside the party to oppositions within it. As Emma Goldman summarised:

> *"It does not occur to him that one might detest the savage in the Kremlin and his cruel regime and yet not exonerate Leon Trotsky … In point of truth I see no marked difference between the two protagonists of the benevolent system of the dictatorship except that Leon Trotsky is no longer in power to enforce its blessings, and Josef Stalin is. No, I hold no brief for the present ruler of Russia. I must, however, point out that Stalin did not come down as a gift from heaven to the hapless Russian people. He is merely continuing the Bolshevik traditions, even if in a more relentless manner."* [*"Trotsky protests too much"*, **Writings of Emma Goldman**, p. 251]

Ultimately, Trotsky's "opposition" to the regime he helped shape so much was based on the utopian notion that there could be a benevolent dictatorship. That he was sincere in his illusions is as irrelevant as to pointing to a better internal party regime to differentiate Lenin's regime from Stalin's.

## 4 What do these oppositions tell us about the essence of Leninism?

The history and ideas of these oppositions are important in evaluating the claims of Leninists. If, as modern-day supporters of Bolshevism argue, Leninism is inherently democratic then

we have to come to the conclusion that none of the party oppositions represented the real Leninist tradition. Given that many Trotskyists support the "Left Opposition" as the only alternative to Stalinism, defending the true essence of Bolshevism (see last section for details), we can only wonder what the **real** Bolshevik tradition is. After all, the "Left Opposition" wholeheartedly supported party dictatorship, remained silent on workers' control and urged the speeding up of industrialisation to meet military competition from the west — all things which Leninists say they oppose in Stalinism as being incompatible with genuine socialism.

However, there were groups which did raise more substantial critiques of mainstream Bolshevism and did so while Lenin and Trotsky were heads of the State. How Lenin and Trotsky responded to them is significant. Rather than embrace them as expressing what they (according to Leninists) **really** stood for, they used state repression to break them. This, anarchists argue, shows the essence of Leninism was expressed by the regime Lenin and Trotsky had created — and now defended — rather than selective quoting and wishful thinking about the "Left Opposition".

The only groups associated with the Bolshevik party which advocated democracy for working people were the dissidents of the "Workers' Truth" and "Workers' Group." Both were expelled from the party and their members arrested by the Bolsheviks. The latter group is better known and so, by necessity, we will concentrate on that. It was also the largest and boldest, composed mainly of workers. It attacked the *"purely bureaucratic way"* industry was run and urging *"the direct participation of the working class"* in it. However, unlike the "Workers' Opposition", the "Workers' Group" extended their call for workers' democracy to beyond the workplace and party. They wondered if the proletariat might not be *"compelled once again to start anew the struggle ... for the overthrow of the oligarchy."* They noted that ruling clique in the party *"will tolerate no criti-*



> *"**Voluntary enlistment** meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.*
>
> *"**The electoral principle** meant that the commanders of all units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other positions in the army, were either elected or accepted by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.*
>
> *"**Self-discipline** meant that all the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units; once approved, they were rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96]

Voline paints a similar picture. He also notes that the electoral principle was sometimes violated and commanders appointed *"in urgent situations by the commander himself,"* although such people had to be *"accepted without reservation"* by *"the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 584]

Thus the Makhnovist army, bar some deviation provoked by circumstances, was a fundamentally democratic organisation. The guerrillas elected the officers of their detachments, and, at mass assemblies and congresses, decided policy and discipline for the army. In the words of historian Michael Palij:

> *"As the Makhno army gradually grew, it assumed a more regular army organisation. Each tactical unit was composed of three subordinate units: a division consisted of three brigades; a brigade, of three regiments; a regiment, of three battalions. Theoretically commanders were elected; in practice, however, the top commanders were usually carefully selected by Makhno from among his close friends. As a*

*drought and consequently a bad harvest in Ukraine, especially in the region of the Makhno movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 240–1]

The state terrorism and the summer drought caused Makhno to give up the struggle in mid-August and instead fight his way to the Dniester with the last of his forces and cross into Romania on August 26. Some of his forces which stayed behind were still active for a short time. In November 1921 the Cheka seized 20 machine guns and 2,833 rifles in the new Zaporizhya province alone.

For more details of the history of the movement, Michael Malet's **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Revolution** is an excellent summary. Michael Palij's **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno** is also worth consulting, as are the anarchist histories of Voline and Arshinov.

## 5 How were the Makhnovists organised?

Being influenced by anarchist ideas, the Makhnovists were organised along libertarian lines. This meant that in both civilian and military areas, self-management was practised. This section discusses the military organisation, while the next discusses the social aspect of the movement.

By practising self-management, the Makhnovists offered a completely different model of military organisation to that of both the Red Army and traditional military forces. While the army structure changed depending on its circumstances, the core ideas remained. These were as follows:

> *"The Makhnovist insurrectionary army was organised according to three fundamental principles: voluntary enlistment, the electoral principle, and self-discipline.*



*cism, since it considers itself just as infallible as the Pope of Rome."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Interregnum 1923–1924**, p. 82 and p. 269]

The "Workers' Group" is associated with the old worker Bolshevik G. T. Miasnikov, its founder and leading thinker (see Paul Avrich's *"Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group"* [**The Russian Review**, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 1–29] for more details). As Ante Ciliga recalled about the political debate in the prison camps in the late 1920s and early 1930s (for was more freedom of expression in prison than in Bolshevik society):

> *"In the criticism of the Lenin of the revolutionary period the tone was set by ... the Workers Group ... [It was], in origin, from the Bolshevik old guard. But ... they criticised Lenin's course of action from the beginning, and not on details but as a whole. The Workers Opposition denounced Lenin's economic line. The Workers Group went even farther and attacked the political regime and the single party established by Lenin prior to the NEP [that is before the spring of 1921, when the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced]...*
>
> *"Having put as the basis of its programme Marx's watchword for the 1st International — 'The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves' — the Workers Group declared war from the start on the Leninist concept of the 'dictatorship of the party' and the bureaucratic organisation of production, enunciated by Lenin in the initial period of the revolution's decline. Against the Leninist line, they demanded organisation of production by the masses themselves, beginning with factory collectives. Politically, the Workers Group demanded the control of power and of the*

> *party by the worker masses. These, the true political leaders of the country, must have the right to withdraw power from any political party, even from the Communist Party, if they judged that that party was not defending their interests. Contrary to … the majority of the Workers' Opposition, for whom the demand for 'workers' democracy' was practically limited to the economic domain, and who tried to reconcile it with the 'single party,' the Workers Group extended its struggle for workers' democracy to the demand for the workers to choose among competing political parties of the worker milieu. Socialism could only be the work of free creation by the workers. While that which was being constructed by coercion, and given the name of socialism, was for them nothing but bureaucratic State capitalism from the very beginning."* [**The Russian Enigma**, pp. 277–8]

The group had its origins when Miasnikov had exposed the abuses he had seen first hand in Lenin's regime. In 1921, he stated the obvious that *"[i]t stands to reason that workers' democracy presupposes not only the right to vote but also freedom of speech and press. If workers who govern the country, manage factories, do not have freedom of speech, we get a highly abnormal state."* He urged total freedom of speech for all. He discussed corruption within the party, noting that a *"special type of Communist is evolving. He is forward, sensible, and, what counts most, he knows how to please his superiors, which the latter like only too much."* Furthermore, *"[i]f one of the party rank and file dares to have an opinion of his own, he is looked upon as a heretic and people scoff at him saying, 'Wouldn't Ilyitch (Lenin) have come to this idea if it were timely now? So you are the only clever man around, eh, you want to be wiser than all? Ha, ha, ha! You want to be clever than Ilyitch!' This is the typical*



through numerous mass encirclements and picked up deserters from the Red Army, his forces were being eroded by the far greater numbers employed against them. In addition, *"the Red command worked out new plans to fight Makhno by stationing whole regiments, primarily cavalry, in the occupied villages, to terrorise the peasants and prevent them from supporting Makhno… Also the Cheka punitive units were constantly trailing the partisans, executing Makhno's sympathisers and the partisans' families."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 238] In spite of the difficult conditions, Makhno was still able to attract some Red Army soldiers and even whole units to his side. For example, *"when the partisans were fighting Budenny's Fourth Cavalry Division, their First Brigade, commanded by Maslak, joined Makhno."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 239]

Makhno was forced to leave his home areas of operations and flee east, then west again. By early January his forces had fought 24 battles in 24 days. This pattern continued throughout March and April into May. In June, the Bolsheviks changed their strategy to one of predicting where Makhno was heading and garrisoning troops in that area. In one battle on 15 June, Frunze himself was almost captured. Despite this, the insurgents were very weak and their peasant base was exhausted by years of war and civil war. In the most sympathetic areas, Red Army troops were garrisoned on the peasants. Thus Palij:

> *"[T]hrough combat losses, hardship, and sickness, the number of Makhno partisans was diminishing and they were cut off from their main sources of recruits and supplies. The Ukrainian peasants were tried of the endless terror caused by successive occupation of village after village by the Red troops and the Cheka. The continuous fighting and requisitions were leaving the peasants with little food and horses for the partisans. They could not live in a state of permanent revolution. Moreover, there was extreme*

routed the 42nd division on the 6th, retaking Hulyai Pole and 6,000 prisoners, of whom 2,000 joined his forces. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Simultaneously with the attack on the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks rounded up all known anarchists in the Ukraine (many of whom were in Kharkiv waiting for a legally organised **Nabat** conference to begin).

In the resulting struggle between the two forces, as Palij notes, the *"support of the population was a significant advantage to Makhno, for they supplied the partisans with needed material, including horses and food, while the Red troops operated among a foreign and hostile people."* The Bolsheviks found that the peasants not only refused to supply them with goods, they also refused to answer their questions or, at best, gave answers which were vague and confusing. *"In contrast to the Bolsheviks, Makhno partisans received detailed, accurate information from the population at all times."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 236–7]

Frunze brought in extra forces and ordered both the *"annihilation of the Makhnovists"* and total disarming of the region. Plagued by desertions, it was also ordered that all Makhnovist prisoners were to be shot, to discourage the local population and Red Army soldiers thinking of joining them. There is also evidence of unrest in the Azov fleet, with acts of sabotage being carried out by sailors to prevent their weapons being used against the Makhnovists. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73] While it was common practice for the Bolsheviks to shoot all Makhnovist prisoners, the *"existence of roundup detachments at the end of 1920, whose task was to re-collect prisoners freed by the Makhnovists"* shows that the Makhnovists did not reciprocate in kind. [Malet **Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

At the end of 1920, the Makhnovists had ten to fifteen thousand troops and the *"growing strength of the Makhno army and its successes caused serious concern in the Bolshevik regime, so it was decided to increase the number of troops opposing Makhno."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 237] All the pressure exerted by the Bolsheviks was paying off. Although Makhno repeatedly broke



*'argumentation' of the honourable Communist fraternity." "Any one who ventures a critical opinion of his own,"* he noted, *"will be labelled a Menshevik or Social-Revolutionist, with all the consequences that entails."* [quoted by G. P. Maximoff, **The Guillotine at Work**, p. 269 and p. 268]

Lenin tried to reply to Miasnikov's demand for freedom of speech. Freedom of the press, Lenin argued, would, under existing circumstances, strengthen the forces of counter-revolution. Lenin rejected freedom in the abstract: *"**what sort** of freedom of the press? What **for**? For **which class**?" "We do not believe in 'absolutes.' We laugh at 'pure democracy,'"* he asserted. Freedom of press in Russia, Lenin maintained, *"surrounded by the bourgeois enemies of the whole world, means freedom of **political organisation** for the bourgeoisie and its most loyal servants, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries"* and so *"means facilitating the enemy's task, means helping the class enemy."* In short: *"We have no wish to commit suicide, and therefore, we will not do this."* According to Lenin, freedom of speech was a *"non-party, **anti-proletarian** slogan"* as well as *"an obvious political mistake."* [**Collected Works**, Vol. 32, pp. 504–8]

Miasnikov — rightly — was not convinced by Lenin's arguments. He wrote a strong reply reminding Lenin of his revolutionary credentials:

> *"You say that I want freedom of the press for the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, I want freedom of the press for myself, a proletarian, a member of the party for fifteen years, who has been a party member in Russia and not abroad. I spent seven and a half of the eleven years of my party membership before 1917 in prisons and at hard labour, with a total of seventy-five days in hunger strikes. I was mercilessly beaten and subjected to other tortures … I escaped not abroad [like Lenin], but for party work here in Russia. To me one can grant at least*

*a little freedom of press. Or is it that I must leave or be expelled from the party as soon as I disagree with you in the evaluation of social forces? Such simplified treatment evades but does not tackle our problems …*

*"To break the jaws of international bourgeoisie, is all very well, but the trouble is that, you raise your hand against the bourgeoisie and you strike at the worker. Which class now supplies the greatest numbers of people arrested on charges of counter-revolution? Peasants and workers, to be sure. There is no Communist working class. There is just a working class pure and simple … "*

*"Don't you know that thousands of proletarians are kept in prison because they talked the way I am talking now, and that bourgeois people are not arrested on this score for the simple reason that they are never concerned with these questions? If I am still at large, that is so because of my standing as a Communist. I have suffered for my Communist views; moreover, I am known by the workers; were it not for these facts, were I just an ordinary Communist mechanic from the same factory, where would I be now? In the Che-Ka [prison], or more than this, I would be made to 'escape', just as I made Mikhail Romanov (Tsar's brother) 'escape', as Luxemburg and Liebknecht were made to 'escape'. Once more I say: you raise your hand against the bourgeoisie, but it is I who am spitting blood, and it is we, the workers, whose jaws are being cracked."* [quoted by Maximoff, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 270–1]

After engaging in political activity in his home area, Miasnikov was summoned to Moscow and placed under the control of the Central Committee. In defiance of it, he returned



acknowledge that the *"Makhnovist units fulfilled their military tasks with no less heroism than the Red Army units."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69]

On hearing this success on 16th November, the reaction of the Makhnovista still at Hulyai Pole was cynical but realistic: *"It's the end of the agreement. I'll bet you anything that the Bolsheviks will be on us within the week."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] They were not wrong. Already Frunze, the Red Army commander, had ordered two entire cavalry armies to concentrate near Hulyai Pole at the same time as he ordered the Makhnovist forces to the Caucasus Front! By 24th November Frunze was preparing for the treachery to come, in Order 00149 (which was not sent to the Makhnovist units) saying if they had not departed to the Caucasus front by the 26th *"the Red regiments of the front, who have now finished with Wrangel, will start speaking a different language to these Makhnovist youths."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

Of course this treachery went right to the top, just before the 26th *"deadline"* (which Makhno, not having seen the orders, was unaware of), Lenin urged Rakovski, head of the Ukrainian government to *"[k]eep a close watch on all anarchists and prepare documents of a criminal nature as soon as possible, on the basis of which charges can be preferred against them."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] Indeed, it later appeared the treachery had been prepared from at least 14th or 16th November, as prisoners captured later stated they had received undated anti-Makhnovist proclamations on that date. [Malet, **Ibid.**]

At 3am on the 26th the attacks on the Makhnovists started. Alongside this one of the Makhnovist commanders was lured to a meeting by the Bolsheviks, seized and shot. Some Makhnovist forces managed to break through the encircling Bolsheviks but only after taking heavy losses — of the 2,000–4,000 cavalry at Simferopol, only 250 escaped. By the 1st December, Rakovsi reported the imminent demise of the Makhnovists to the Kharkiv soviet only to have to eat his words when Makhno

So, by October 1920, the success of the Wrangel offensive was again forcing the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists to put aside their differences and take on the common enemy. A deal was reached and on October 2nd, Frunze, the new Red Army commander of the Southern Front, ordered a cessation of hostilities against the Makhnovists. A statement from the Soviet of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) explained the treaty as necessitated by the White offensive but also representing a victory over the *"high-handed communists and commissars"* in forcing them to recognise the *"free insurrection."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

The agreement was signed between October 10th and 15th. It consisted of two parts, a Political and a Military agreement (see section 13 for full details). The Political agreement simply gave the Makhnovists and anarchists the rights they should have had according to the Soviet Constitution. The Military agreement resulted in the Makhnovists becoming part of the Red Army, keeping their established internal structure and, significantly, stopped them from accepting into their ranks any Red Army detachments or deserters therefrom. According to Bolshevik sources, *"there was never the slightest intention on the Bolshevik side of keeping to the agreement once its military value had passed."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 296]

Even before the agreement came into effect, the Makhnovists were fighting alongside the Bolsheviks and between October 4 and 17, Hulyai Pole was retaken by the Aleksandrovsk group, which included 10,000 Makhnovista. On October 22, Aleksandrovsk was taken with 4,000 white prisoners and from then to early November the Makhnovists cut through Wrangel's rear, hoping to cut off his retreat by seizing the Crimean passes. The Whites fought a skilful rearguard which together with the new White fortifications on the peninsula held up the advance. But by the 11th, his hold in the Crimea gone, Wrangel had no choice but to order a general retreat to the ports and an evacuation. Even the Bolsheviks had to



to the Urals and resumed his agitation. At the end of August in 1922 he appeared before a general meeting of Motovilikha party members and succeeded in winning them over to his side. Adopting a resolution against the censure of Miasnikov by the Central Committee's Organisational Bureau (Orgburo), they branded his transfer to Moscow a form of *"banishment"* and demanded that he be allowed *"full freedom of speech and press within the party."* [quoted by Avrich, *"Bolshevik Opposition To Lenin: G. Miasnikov and the Workers Group"*, **The Russian Review**, Vol. 43, No. 1, p. 12]

On 25 November he wrote to a sympathiser in Petrograd urging a campaign of agitation in preparation for the 11th party congress. By now Miasnikov was being watched by the Cheka and his letter was intercepted. For Lenin, this was the last straw. *"We must devote greater attention to Miasnikov's agitation,"* he wrote to Molotov on 5 December, *"and to report on it to the Politburo twice a month."* [quoted by Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 13] To deal with Miasnikov, meanwhile, the Orgburo formed a new commission which recommended his expulsion from the party, which was agreed by the Central Committee's Political Bureau (Politburo) on 20 February 1922. This was the first instance, except for the brief expulsion of S. A. Lozovsky in 1918, where Lenin actually expelled a well-known Bolshevik of long standing.

By the start of 1923, Miasnikov had organised a clandestine opposition and formed (despite his expulsion) the "Workers' Group of the Russian Communist Party." He claimed that it, and not the Bolshevik leadership, represented the authentic voice of the proletariat. P. B. Moiseev, a Bolshevik since 1914, and N. V. Kuznetsov, a former member of the "Workers' Opposition", joined the group. The three men, all workers, constituted themselves as its *"Provisional Central Organisational Bureau"*. Their first act, in February 1923, was to draw up a statement of principles in anticipation of the Twelfth Party Congress called the *"Manifesto of the Workers' Group of the Rus-*

*sian Communist Party,"* amongst other things *"denouncing the New Exploitation of the Proletariat and urging the workers to fight for soviet democracy"*. [I. Deutscher, **The Prophet Unarmed**, p.107]

The manifesto recapitulated the program of Miasnikov's earlier arguments: workers' self-determination and self-management, the removal of bourgeois specialists from positions of authority, freedom of discussion within the party, and the election of new soviets centred in the factories. It protested against administrative high-handedness, the expanding bureaucracy, the predominance of non-workers within the party, and the suppression of local initiative and debate. It argued that in spite of the abolition of private ownership, the worst features of capitalism had been preserved: wage slavery, differences of income and status, hierarchical authority, bureaucratism. In its words, the *"organisation of this industry since the Ninth Congress of the RCP(b) is carried out without the direct participation of the working class by nominations in a purely bureaucratic way."* [quoted by Daniels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 204] It asked:

> *"What are we being told [by the Bolshevik leadership]? 'You sit quiet, go out and demonstrate when you're invited, sing the Internationale — when required — and the rest will be done without you, by first-class people who are almost the same sort of workers as you, only cleverer.' . .. But what we need is a practice based on the self-activity of the working class, not on the party's fear of it."* [quoted by Simon Pirani, **The Russian Revolution in Retreat**, p. 142]

Within the party the manifesto defended the right to form factions and draw up platforms. *"If criticism does not have a distinct point of view,"* Miasnikov wrote to Zinoviev, *"a platform*



*movement, and consequently facilitated the advance of the reorganised anti-Bolshevik force of General Wrangel from the Crimea into South Ukraine, the Makhno region."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

It was widely believed on the White side that Makhno was ready to co-operate with them and, desperate for men, Wrangel decided to appeal to the Makhnovists for an alliance. Their response was simple and direct, they decided to immediately execute his delegate and publish both his letter and a response in the Makhnovist paper *"The Road to Freedom."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 60] Of course, this did not stop the Bolsheviks later claiming such an alliance existed!

Ironically enough, at a general assembly of insurgents, it was decided that *"the destruction of Wrangel"* would *"eliminate a threat to the revolution"* and so free *"all of Russia"* from *"the counter-revolutionary barrage."* The mass of workers and peasants *"urgently needed an end to all those wars"* and so they proposed *"to the Communists that hostilities between them and the Makhnovists be suspended in order that they might wipe out Wrangel. In July and August, 1920, telegrams to this effect were sent to Moscow and Kharkov."* There was no reply and the Bolsheviks *"continued their war against the Makhnovists, and they also continued their previous campaign of lies and calumnies against them."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176]

In July and August the Makhnovists went on the offensive, raiding the Bolsheviks in three provinces and attacking the Red Army infrastructure. Wrangel began another offensive in September, driving the Red Army back again and again and threatening the Makhnovist area. Faced with Wrangel's success, the Bolsheviks started to rethink their position on Makhno, although on the 24th of September the Bolshevik commander-in-chief Kamenev was still declaring the need for *"the final liquidation of the Makhno band."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] A few days later, the Bolsheviks changed their mind and negotiations began.

*the insurrectionary army to the Polish front meant removing from the Ukraine the main nerve centre of the revolutionary insurrection. This was precisely what the Bolsheviks wanted: they would then be absolute masters of the rebellious region, and the Makhnovists were perfectly aware of this."* Moreover, the Makhnovists considered the move *"physically impossible"* as *"half the men, the entire staff and the commander himself were in hospital with typhus."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163]

This was the signal for nine months of bitter fighting between the Red Army and the Makhnovists. Military events in this period are confused, with the Red Army claiming victory again and again, only for the Makhnovists to appear somewhere else. Hulyai Pole changed hands on a couple of occasions. The Bolsheviks did not use local troops in this campaign, due to fear of fraternisation. In addition, they used *"new tactics,"* and *"attacked not only Makhno's partisans, but also the villages and towns in which the population was sympathetic toward Makhno. They shot ordinary soldiers as well as their commanders, destroying their houses, confiscating their properties and persecuting their families. Moreover the Bolsheviks conducted mass arrests of innocent peasants who were suspected of collaborating in some way with the partisans. It is impossible to determine the casualties involved."* They also set up *"Committees of the Poor"* as part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus, which acted as *"informers helping the Bolshevik secret police in its persecution of the partisans, their families and supporters, even to the extent of hunting down and executing wounded partisans."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212–3]

In addition to this suffering, the Bolshevik decision to attack Makhno rather than push into the Crimea was also to prolong the civil war by nine more months. The Whites reorganised themselves under General Wrangel, who began a limited offensive in June. Indeed, the Bolshevik *"policy of terror and exploitation turned almost all segments of Ukrainian society against the Bolsheviks, substantially strengthened the Makhno*



*on which to rally a majority of party members, on which to develop a new policy with regard to this or that question, then it is not really criticism but a mere collection of words, nothing but chatter."* He went even further, calling into question the Bolshevik monopoly of power. Under a single-party dictatorship, he argued, elections remained *"an empty formality."* To speak of *"workers' democracy"* while insisting on one-party government, he told Zinoviev, was to entwine oneself in a contradiction, a *"contradiction in terms."* [quoted by Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 19–20]

Miasnikov was arrested by the GPU (the new name for the Cheka) on 25 May 1923, a month after the Twelfth Party Congress (the rest of the group's leadership was soon to follow). Miasnikov was released from custody and permitted to leave for Germany (this was a device not infrequently used by the authorities to rid themselves of dissenters — for example, many Russian anarchists were deported in 1921). In Berlin he formed ties with the council communists of the German Communist Workers' Party (KAPD) and with the left wing of the German Communist Party. With the aid of these groups, Miasnikov was able to publish the manifesto of the Workers' Group, prefaced by an appeal drafted by his associates in Moscow. The appeal concluded with a set of slogans proclaiming the aims of the Workers' Group: *"The strength of the working class lies in its solidarity. Long live freedom of speech and press for the proletarians! Long live Soviet Power! Long live Proletarian Democracy! Long live Communism!"* [quoted by Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22]

Inside Russia the manifesto was having an effect. Fresh recruits were drawn into the Workers' Group. It established ties with discontented workers in several cities and began negotiations with leaders of the now defunct "Workers' Opposition". The group won support within the Red Army garrison quartered in the Kremlin, a company of which had to be transferred to Smolensk. By summer of 1923 the group had some 300 members in Moscow, as well as a sprinkling of adherents in other

cities. Many were Old Bolsheviks, and nearly all were workers. Soon an unexpected opportunity for the group to extend its influence arrived. In August and September 1923 a wave of strikes (which recalled the strike wave of February 1921 which inspired the Kronstadt sailors to rebel) swept Russia's industrial centres. An economic crisis had been deepening since the beginning of the year, bringing cuts in wages and the dismissal of large numbers of workers. The resulting strikes, which broke out in Moscow and other cities, were spontaneous and no evidence existed to connect them with any oppositionist faction. The Workers' Group, however, sought to take advantage of the unrest to oppose the party leadership. Stepping up its agitation, it considered calling a one-day general strike and organising a mass demonstration of workers on the lines of Bloody Sunday 1905 with a portrait of Lenin (rather than the Tzar) at its head.

The authorities became alarmed. The *"party leaders"* were *"determined to suppress the Workers' Group and the Workers' Truth"* and ordered the GPU into action. [I. Deutscher, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] By the end of September its meeting places had been raided, literature seized, and leaders arrested. Twelve members were expelled from the party and fourteen others received reprimands. Miasnikov was considered such a threat that in the autumn of 1923 he was lured back to Russia on assurances from Zinoviev and Krestinsky, the Soviet ambassador in Berlin, that he would not be arrested. Once in Russia he was immediately placed behind bars, arrested by Dzerzhinsky himself (the infamous creator and head of the Cheka) as a sign of the gravity with which the government viewed the situation.

This response is significant, simply because Trotsky was still an influential member of the Communist Party leadership and, given that for most modern day Leninists he raised the banner of authentic Leninism against the obvious evils of Stalinism, it casts a light on the nature of Bolshevism. More, for as Paul Avrich points out, *"[i]n January 1924, Lenin died. By then the Workers' Group had been silenced. It was the last dissident*



*[Bolshevik] command"* or *"be subjected to ruthless punishment."* [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II., pp. 110–1 and p. 442] Another secret order to the 45th division issued on January 4th instructed them to *"annihilate Makhnovist bands"* and *"disarm the population."* The 41st was sent *"into reserve"* to the Hulyai Pole region. This was *"five days before Makhno was outlawed, and shows that the Bolshevik command had a clear view of Makhno's future, even if the latter did not."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 54]

Unaware of this, the Makhnovista put out propaganda leaflets directed at the Red Army rank and file, appealing to them as comrades. At Aleksandrovsk on December 5th talks occurred between a representative of the Makhnovists and the commander of the 45th division's 1st brigade. These broke down when Makhno was ordered to the Polish front, which the Makhnovists refused. On January 9th, Yegorov, commander of the Red Army southern front, used this pretext to outlaw Makhno. This outlawing was engineered deliberately by the Bolsheviks:

> *"The author of the order realised at that time there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks at that time and he also knew that Makhno would not abandon his region .... Uborevich [the author] explained that 'an appropriate reaction by Makhno to this order would give us the chance to have accurate grounds for our next steps' ... [He] concluded: 'The order is a certain political manoeuvre and, at the very least, we expect positive results from Makhno's realisation of this.'"* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

In addition, war with Poland did not break out until the end of April, over three months later.

Needless to say, the Makhnovists **did** realise the political motivations behind the order. As Arshinov notes, *"[s]ending*

advance continued, cutting the railway route and so stopping all shells reaching Denikin's Moscow front.

Denikin was forced to send some of his best troops from the Moscow front to drive back the Makhnovists and British boats were sent to towns on the coast where Makhno might retreat through. The key city of Katerinoslav was taken with the aid of a workers' uprising on November 9th and held for a month before the advancing Whites and a typhoid epidemic which was to devastate the Makhnovista ranks by the end of the year forced them out of the city. In December, the Red Army advance made possible by Makhno's devastation of Denikin's supply lines continued.

Thus Voline:

> *"It is necessary to emphasise here the historic fact that the honour of having annihilated the Denikinist counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919, belongs entirely to the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army. If the insurgents had not won the decisive victory of Peregonovka, and had not continued to sap the bases in Denikin's rear, destroying his supply service for artillery, food and ammunition, the Whites would probably have entered Moscow in December 1919 at the latest."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 625]

In December the Red Army advance made possible by Makhno's devastation of Denikin's supply lines continued. By early January the Reds had split White forces into three and their troops had reached Katerynoslav. The attitude of the Bolsheviks to the Makhnovists had already been decided. On December 12th, 1919, Trotsky stated that when the two forces met, the Bolsheviks had *"an order ... from which we must not retreat one single step."* While we discuss this secret order in more depth in section 13, we will note here that it gave partisans the option of becoming *"fully subordinate to*



*movement within the party to be liquidated while Lenin was still alive. It was also the last rank-and-file group to be smashed with the blessing of all the top Soviet leaders, who now began their struggle for Lenin's mantle."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

Thus the response of Trotsky is particularly important. As Deutscher notes, Trotsky *"did not protest"* when the dissidents *"were thrown into prison."* Dzerzhinsky, the head of the GPU (the renamed Cheka) was given the task of breaking the opposition groups by the central committee and *"found that even party members of unquestioned loyalty regarded them as comrades and refused to testify against them. He then turned to the Politburo and asked it to declare it was the duty of any party member to denounce to the GPU people inside the party engaged aggressive action against the official leaders."* Trotsky *"did not tell the Politburo plainly that it should reject Dzerzhinsky's demand. He evaded the question."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 108–9]

Neo-Trotskyist Tony Cliff presents a similar picture of Trotsky's lack of concern for opposition groups and his utter failure to support working class self-activity or calls for **real** democracy. He notes that in July and August 1923 Moscow and Petrograd *"were shaken by industrial unrest ... Unofficial strikes broke out in many places .. . In November 1923, rumours of a general strike circulated throughout Moscow, and the movement seems at the point of turning into a political revolt. Not since the Kronstadt rising of 1921 had there been so much tension in the working class and so much alarm in the ruling circles."* The ruling elite, including Trotsky, acted to maintain their position and the secret police turned on any political group which could influence the movement. The *"strike wave gave a new lease of life to the Mensheviks"* and so *"the GPU carried out a massive round up of Mensheviks, and as many as one thousand were arrested in Moscow alone."* When it was the turn of the Workers Group and Workers Truth, Trotsky *"did not condemn their persecution"* and he *"did not support their incitement of workers to industrial unrest."* Moreover, *"[n]or was Trotsky ready to support the de-*

*mand for workers' democracy in the extreme form to which the Workers Group and Workers Truth raised it."* [**Trotsky**, vol. 3, p. 25, p. 26 and pp. 26–7]

By *"extreme,"* Cliff obviously meant *"genuine"* as Trotsky did not call for workers' democracy in any meaningful form (as Cliff acknowledged elsewhere in his book). Indeed, the *"New Course Resolution"* — a key document of the "Left Opposition" — stated *"it is obvious that there can be no toleration of the formation of groupings whose ideological content is directed against the party as a whole and against the dictatorship of the proletariat. as for instance the Workers' Truth and Workers' Group."* Trotsky himself was at pains to distance himself from Miasnikov. [**The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1923–25)**, p. 408 and p. 80] The resolution made it clear that it considered the dictatorship of the proletariat to be incompatible with **real** workers democracy given that both these groups advocated actual soviet and trade union democracy. Indeed, the orthodoxy was reiterated: the dictatorship of the party **was** the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Thus we come to the strange fact that it was Lenin and Trotsky themselves who knowingly destroyed the groups which represent what modern day Leninists assert is the "real" essence of Leninism. Furthermore, modern day Leninists generally ignore or dismiss these opposition groups when they discuss alternatives to Stalinism (precisely because they raised their voices on danger of bureaucratisation **under Lenin** we would suggest). This seems a strange fate to befall tendencies which, if we take Leninists at their word, expressed what their tradition stands for. Equally, in spite of their support for party dictatorship, the "Workers' Opposition" did have some constructive suggestions to make as regards combating the large-scale bureaucratisation which existed under Lenin. Yet almost all modern Leninists (like Lenin and Trotsky before them) dismiss it as utopian. Which is, of course, significant about the **real** essence of Leninism.



repression *"obliged the inhabitants of the villages threatened by the approach of the Denikinists to abandon their hearths and flee. Thus the Makhnovist army was joined and followed in their retreat by thousands of peaant families in flight from their homes with their livestock and belongings. It was a veritable migration. An enormous mass of men, women and children trailed after the army in its slow retreat towards the west, a retreat which gradually extended over hundreds of kilometres."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 607]

Meeting the Nationalists in mid-September, it was agreed on both sides that fighting would only aid the Whites and so the Makhnovists entered a non-aggression pact with Petliura. This enabled them to offload over 1,000 wounded. The Makhnovists continued their propaganda campaign against the Nationalists, however. By the 24th of September, intelligence reports suggested that White forces had appeared to the west of their current position (i.e. where the Nationalists where). The Makhnovists concluded that the only way this could have happened was if the Nationalists had allowed the Whites to cross their territory (the Nationalists disputed this, pointing to the fighting that had started two days before between them and the Whites).

This meant that the Makhnovists were forced to fight the numerically superior Whites. After two days of desperate fighting, the Whites were routed and two regiments were destroyed at the battle of Peregonovka village. Makhno's forces then conducted an incredibly rapid advance in three directions helped by their mobile cart-transported infantry, in three days smashing three reserve regiments and at the greatest point advancing 235 miles east. On the 6th October a drive to the south started which took key White ports and captured a huge quantity of equipment including 600 trucks of British-supplied ammunition and an aeroplane. This was disastrous for Denikin whose forces had reached the northernmost point on their advance on Moscow, for these ports were key for his supply routes. The

*only if it were carried out in the name of the social revolution. An alliance with the worst enemies of the people — with generals — could only be a counter-revolutionary and criminal adventure."* Following him, Makhno *"demanded before the entire congress"* that Hryhoriyiv *"immediately answer for the appalling pogrom of Jews he had organised in Elisavetgrad in May, 1919, as well as other anti-Semitic actions."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136]

Seeing that things were going badly, Hryhoriyiv went for his revolver, but was shot by a Makhnovist. Makhno finished him off. Makhnovist guards disarmed the leading Hryhoriyivists. Then Makhno, Chubenko and others justified the killing before the mass meeting, which approved the act passing a resolution that stated that Hryhoriyiv's death was *"an historical and necessary fact, for his policy, acts and aims were counter-revolutionary and mainly directed to helping Denikin and other counter-revolutionaries, as is proved by his Jewish pogroms."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] The troops under Hryhoriyiv became part of the general Insurrectionary Army.

At the end of July, Makhno recalled the troops he had earlier left in the Red Army and by mid-August the forces met up, becoming an army of some 15,000. At Mykolaiv, the Red Army units were defecting to Makhno in large numbers due in part to the feeling that the Red Army were abandoning the defence of the Ukraine. This was the start of Denikin's massive push north and Petliura's push east. By the end of August, Makhno felt strong enough to go on the offensive against the Whites. Superior White forces pushed the Makhnovists further and further west, away from their home region. *"Denikin,"* in Voline's words, *"not only made war on the army as such, but also on the whole peasant population. In addition to the usual persecutions and beatings, the villages he occupied were burnt and wrecked. The greater part of the peasants' dwellings were looted and wrecked. Hundreds of peasants were shot. The women maltreated, and nearly all the Jewish women … were raped."* This



As noted as regards the "Left Communists" and "Workers' Opposition," their economic reforms were fatally undermined by their Marxist prejudices and they supported the dominant position of the party. While the "Workers Group" was more advanced than either in their opposition to party dictatorship, ultimately the same problem existed — their opposition (like that of the left-Mensheviks during the civil war) was premised on certain Marxist dogmas which would have produced some kind of class society due to its prejudices in favour of centralisation and representative democracy (see section H). The key issue is, then, is not whether their alternative would have produced genuine — that is, libertarian — socialism nor, indeed, what their alternative was as such but rather that they were repressed under Lenin and Trotsky for advocating ideas modern-day Leninists say they support — **precisely because they are Leninists and Trotskyists**. Yet actions speak louder than words.

Ultimately, the only real alternative existed outwith the party and Leninism. Whether this was recognising the real sources for its failures (as shown by numerous anarchist thinkers at the time, not least eye-witnesses like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman) or by creating an actual mass libertarian alternative in the Ukraine (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"). Yet discussing the various Bolshevik oppositions is helpful to understanding why the revolution failed: for the nature of the various oppositions within the party and the fate of such real dissidents as the "Workers' Group" says far more about the real reasons the Russian revolution failed than Trotskyist books on the matter. It proves that the essence of Bolshevism is not a democratic one but rather a deeply authoritarian one hidden (at times) behind libertarian sounding rhetoric. Faced with opposition which were somewhat libertarian, the response of Lenin and Trotsky was to repress them.

In summary, the various opposition groups within Bolshevism were not alternatives and instead show that the problems of the revolution and subsequent civil war did not create but rather revealed Bolshevism's authoritarian core.

## Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?

The key Leninist defence of the actions of the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution is that they had no other choice. Complaints against the Bolshevik attacks on the gains of the revolution and the pro-revolutionary Left in Russia are met with a mantra involving the white terror, the primitive state of Russia and the reactionary peasantry, the invading imperialist armies (although the actual number can, and does, vary depending on who you are talking to) and other such *"forces of nature"* which we are to believe could only be met by a centralised authoritarian regime that would flinch at nothing in order to survive.

However, this is not the case. This is for three reasons.

Firstly, there is the slight problem that many of the attacks on the revolution (disbanding soviets, undermining the factory committees, repressing socialists and anarchists, and so on) started **before** the start of the civil war. As such, its difficult to blame the degeneration of the revolution on an event which had yet to happen (see section 3 of the appendix "What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?" for details).

Secondly, Leninists like to portray their ideology as "realistic," that it recognises the problems facing a revolution and can provide the necessary solutions. Some even claim, flying in the face of the facts, that anarchists think the ruling class will just *"disappear"* (see section H.2.1 ) or that we think *"full-blown"* communism will appear *"overnight"* (see section H.2.5). Only Bolshevism, it is claimed, recognises that civil war is in-



Leaving his troops in the frontline, Makhno left with a small cavalry detachment. While leaving the rest under Red command, Makhno made a secret agreement with his regimental commanders to await a message from him to leave the Red Army and join up against with the partisans. On the 9th and 10th of June, Hulyai Pole was retaken by Bolshevik forces, who took the opportunity to attack and sack the Makhnovist communes. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86f]

After intense fighting, the Whites finally split the Southern Front into three on June 21st. Needless to say, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks blamed this on the partisan forces (even stating that they had *"opened the front"* to the Whites). This was nonsense, as noted above.

After leaving the front, Makhno took refuge in the Chorno-Znamenski forest before continuing the retreat north and skirmishing with Red Army units. This brought him into the territory held by Hryhoriyiv and this, in turn, meant they had to proceed carefully. While the Makhnovists had made a public denunciation of Hryhoriyiv, Makhno was approaching the centre of Hryhoriyov's remaining influence. Surrounded by enemies, Makhno had little choice but to begin discussions with Hryhoriyiv. This was problematic to say the least. Hryhoriyiv's revolt had been tinged with anti-Semitism and had seen at least one major pogrom. Being faced with Hryhoriyov's anti-Semitism and his proposal for an alliance with the Whites against the Reds led the Makhnovists to plot his downfall at a meeting planned for the 27th July.

This meeting had originally been called to discuss the current tasks of the insurgents in the Ukraine and was attended by nearly 20,000 insurgents and local peasants. Hryhoriyiv spoke first, arguing that the most urgent task was to chase out the Bolsheviks and that they should ally themselves with any anti-Red forces available (a clear reference to the Whites under Denikin). The Makhnovist Chubenko spoke next, declaring that the *"struggle against the Bolsheviks could be revolutionary*

Army (which Makhno's troops were part of) to attack on the flank came to nothing. He only mentions Makhno when he recounts that *"General Shkuro's division routed Makhno at Hulyai Pole."* [**The White Armies**, p. 272] With Whites broken through on their flank and with limited ammunition and other supplies (thanks to the Bolsheviks), the Makhnovists had no choice but to retreat.

It was around this time that Trotsky, in a public meeting in Kharkov, *"announced that it were better to permit the Whites to remain in the Ukraine than to suffer Makhno. The presence of the Whites, he said, would influence the Ukrainian peasantry in favour of the Soviet Government, whereas Makhno and his **povstantsi**, would never make peace with the Bolsheviki; they would attempt to possess themselves of some territory and to practise their ideas, which would be a constant menace to the Communist Government."* [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 63]

Due to this Bolshevik betrayal, the Makhnovist sector was in very grave danger. At Hulyai Pole, a peasant regiment was scraped together in 24 hours in an attempt to save the town. It encountered White Cossacks ten miles away from the town and was mown down. The Whites entered Hulyai Pole the next day (June 6th) and gave it a good going over. On the same day, the Bolsheviks issued an order for Makhno's arrest. Makhno was warned and put in his resignation, arguing that it was *"an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call congresses on their own account, to discuss their affairs."* Combined with the *"hostile attitude"* of the Bolshevik authorities towards him, which would lead *"unavoidably to the creation of a special internal front,"* Makhno believed it was his duty to do what he could to avert it, and so he left his post. [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] While Makhno escaped, his staff was not so lucky. Five of them were arrested the same day and shot as a result of Trotsky's order to ban the fourth congress.



evitable during a revolution and only it provides the necessary solution, namely a *"workers state."* Lenin himself argued that *"[n]ot a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 81] As such, its incredulous that modern day followers of Lenin blame the degeneration of the Russian Revolution on the very factors (civil war and exceptional circumstances) that they claim to recognise an inevitable!

Thirdly, and even more embarrassingly for the Leninists, numerous examples exist both from revolutionary Russia at the time and from earlier and later revolutions that suggest far from Bolshevik tactics being the most efficient way of defending the revolution other methods existed which looked to the massive creative energies of the working masses unleashed by the revolution.

During the Russian Revolution the biggest example of this is found in South-Eastern Ukraine. For much of the Civil War this area operated without a centralised state apparatus of the Bolshevik type and was, instead, based on the anarchist idea of Free Soviets. There *"the insurgents raised the black flag of anarchism and set forth on the anti-authoritarian road of the free organisation of the workers."* [Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 50] The space in which this happened was created by a partisan force that instead of using the *"efficiency"* of executions for desertion, tsarist officers appointed over the rank and file soldiers' wishes and saluting so loved by the Bolsheviks instead operated as a volunteer army with elected officers and voluntary discipline. This movement was the Makhnovists, named after its leader, the Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno. The Black Flag which floated over the lead wagon of the Insurgent Army was inscribed with the slogans ***"Liberty or Death"*** and ***"The Land to the Peasants, the Factories to the Workers."*** These slogans summarised what

the Makhnovist were fighting for — a libertarian socialist society. At its height in the autumn of 1919, the Maknovists numbered around 40,000 and its extended area of influence corresponded to nearly one third of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, comprising a population of over seven million.

It is this that explains the importance of the Makhnovists. As historian Christopher Reed notes, the *"Bolsheviks' main claim to legitimacy rested on the argument that they were the only ones capable of preventing a similar disaster [counter-revolution] for the workers and peasants of Russia and that their harsh methods were necessary in the face of a ruthless and unrelenting enemy."* However, Reed argues that *"the Makhno movement in the Ukraine suggests that there was more than one way to fight against the counter-revolution."* [**From Tsar to Soviets**, pp. 258–9] This is why the Makhnovist movement is so important, why it shows that there was, and is, an alternative to the ideas of Bolshevism. Here we have a mass movement operating in the same *"exceptional circumstances"* as the Bolsheviks which did **not** implement the same policies. Indeed, rather than suppress soviet, workplace and military democracy in favour of centralised, top-down party power and modify their political line to justify their implementation of party dictatorship, the Makhnovists did all they could to implement and encourage working-class self-government.

As such, it is difficult to blame the development of Bolshevik policies towards state-capitalist and party-dictatorship directions on the problems caused during the revolution when the Makhnovists, facing similar conditions, did all they could to protect working-class autonomy and freedom. Indeed, it could be argued that the problems facing the Makhnovists were greater in many ways. The Ukraine probably saw more fighting in the Russian Civil War then any other area. Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists lost the centre of their movement and had to re-liberate it. To do so they fought the Austrian and German armies, Ukrainian Nationalists, Bolshe-



*two agents to assassinate Makhno."* [**Civil War in Russia**, p. 271]

Needless to say, Trotsky blamed this White success to the Makhnovists, arguing it was retreating constantly before even the slightest attack by the Whites. However, this was not the case. Analysing these events in July 1919, Antonov (the commander of the Southern Front before Trotsky replaced him) wrote:

> *"Above all, the facts witness that the affirmations about the weakness of the most contaminated region — that from Hulyai Pole to Berdiansk — are without foundation ... It is not because we ourselves have been better organised militarily, but because those troops were directly defending their native place ... Makhno stayed at the front, in spite of the flight of the neighbouring 9th division, following by the whole of the 13th army ... The reasons for the defeat on the southern front do not rest at all in the existence of 'Ukrainian partisans' ... above all it must be attributed to the machinery of the southern front, in not keeping its fighting spirit and reinforcing its revolutionary discipline."* [quoted by Alexander Skirda, **The Rehabilitation of Makhno**, p. 348]

This, incidentally, tallies with Arshinov's account that *"hordes of Cossacks had overrun the region,* ***not through the insurrectionary front but from the left flank where the Red Army was stationed."*** [**Op. Cit.**, p. 126] For what it is worth, General Denikin himself concurs with this account of events, noting that by the 4th of June his forces *"repulsed the routed and demoralised contingents of the Eight and Thirteenth Soviet Armies ... The resistance of the Thirteenth Army being completely broken."* He notes that an attempt by the Fourteenth

couraging toiling people to attack each other, and for inciting pogroms. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 112 and pp. 114–7]

While it took a fortnight for Red forces to contain Hryhoriyiv without trouble, this involved using all available reverses of all three Ukrainian armies. This left none for Makhno's hard-pressed forces at the front. In addition, Dybenko withdrew a front-line regiment from Makhno for use against the revolt and diverted reinforcements from the Crimea which were intended for Makhno. Despite this Makhnos forces (now numbering 20,000) were ordered to resume the attack on the whites. This was due to *"unremitting pressure from Moscow to take Taganrog and Rostov."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] The Makhnovist advance stopped due to the non-fulfilment of an urgent order for ammunition.

On the 19th of May, a White counter-attack not only stopped the advance of the Red Army, it forced the 9th division (and then the Makhnovists) to retreat. On the 29th, the Whites launched a further offensive against the northern Donblas, opening a gap between the 13th and 8th Red Armies. Due to the gravity of the situation, the RSV summoned a fourth congress for June 15th. Trotsky not only banned this congress but took the lead in slandering the Makhnovists and calling for their elimination (see section 13 for details). As well as *"this deliberately false agitational campaign, the [Bolshevik] blockade of the region was carried to the limit ... The provisioning of shells, cartridges and other indispensable equipment which was used by daily at the front, ceased completely."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 118] Palij confirms this, noting that *"the supplies of arms and other war material to Makhno was stopped, thus weakening the Makhno forces vis-a-vis the Denikin troops."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 175] David Footman also notes that the Bolshevik *"hold-back of supplies for the Insurgents developed into a blockade of the area. Makhnovite units at the front ran short of ammunition."* He also mentions that *"[i]n the latter part of May the **Cheka** sent over*



viks and the White Armies of Denikin and then Wrangel. There were smaller skirmishes involving Cossacks returning to the Don and independent *"Green"* bands. The anarchists fought all these various armies over the four years their movement was in existence. This war was not only bloody but saw constant shifts of fronts, advances and retreats and changes from near conventional war to mobile partisan war. The consequences of this was that no area of the territory was a safe *"rear"* area for any period of time and so little constructive activity was possible. Section 4 presents a summary of the military campaigns of these years. A brief idea of the depth of fighting in these years can be seen by considering the town at the centre of the Makhnovists, Hulyai Pole which changed hands no less then 16 times in the period from 1917–1921.

Clearly, in terms of conflict (and the resulting disruption caused by it), the Makhnovists did not have the relative peace the Bolsheviks had (who never once lost their main bases of Petrograd or Moscow, although they came close). As such, the problems used to justify the repressive and dictatorial policies of the Bolsheviks also apply to the Makhnovists. Despite this, the activity of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine demonstrated that an alternative to the supposedly necessary methods of the Bolsheviks did exist. Where the Bolsheviks suppressed freedom of speech, assembly and press, the Makhnovists encouraged it. Where the Bolsheviks turned the soviets into mere cyphers of their government and undermined soviet power, the Makhnovists encouraged working-class participation and free soviets. As we discuss in section 7, the Makhnovists applied their ideas of working class self-management whenever and wherever they could.

Sadly, the Makhnovist movement is a relatively unknown event during the revolution. There are few non-anarchist accounts of it and the few histories which do mention it often simply slander it. However, as the Cohn-Bendit brothers correctly argue, the movement, *"better perhaps than any other movement,*

*shows that the Russian Revolution could have been a great liberating force."* Equally, the reason why it has been almost totally ignored (or slandered, when mentioned) by Stalinist and Trotskyist writers is simple: *"It shows the Bolsheviks stifling workers and peasants with lies and calumnies, and then crushing them in a bloody massacre."* [Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative**, p. 200]

This section of our FAQ will indicate the nature and history of this important social movement. As we will prove, *"the Makhnovshchina ... was a true popular movement of peasants and workers, and ... its essential goal was to establish the freedom of workers by means of revolutionary self-activity on the part of the masses."* [Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 209] They achieved this goal in extremely difficult circumstances and resisted all attempts to limit the freedom of the working class, no matter where it came from. As Makhno himself once noted:

> *"Our practice in the Ukraine showed clearly that the peasant problem had very different solutions from those imposed by Bolshevism. If our experience had spread to the rest of Russia, a pernicious division between country and city would not have been created. Years of famine would have been avoided and useless struggles between peasant and workers. And what is more important, the revolution would have grown and developed along very different lines ... We were all fighters and workers. The popular assembly made the decisions. In military life it was the War Committee composed of delegates of all the guerrilla detachments which acted. To sum up, everyone took part in the collective work, to prevent the birth of a managing class which would monopolise power. And we were successful. Because we had succeeded and gave lie to Bolshevik bureaucratic practices, Trotsky, be-*



> *Red Army men, but are in a far worse condition for supplies."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 33]

In a postscript, Antonov added that the press campaign had certainly helped turn Makhno anti-Soviet (i.e. anti-Bolshevik, as Makhno supported free soviets).

At the beginning of May, another partisan commander, Hryhoriyiv, revolted against the Bolsheviks in the central Ukraine. Hryhoriyiv, like the Makhnovists, had joined with the Bolsheviks when they had re-entered the Ukraine, however his social and political background was totally different. Hryhoriyiv was a former Tsarist officer, who had commanded numerous troops under the Petliurist authority and joined the Bolsheviks once that that regime's armed forces had disintegrated. Arshinov notes that he had *"never been a revolutionary"* and that there had been a *"great deal of adventurism in his joining the ranks of the Petliurists and then the ranks of the Red Army."* His temperament was mixed, consisting of *"a certain amount of sympathy for oppressed peasants, authoritarianism, the extravagance of a Cossack chieftain, nationalist sentiments and anti-Semitism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110]

Hryhoriyov started his revolt by issuing a Universal, or declaration to the Ukrainian people, which contained a virulent attack on the Bolsheviks as well as one explicit anti-Semitic reference, but without mention of Makhno. The height of the revolt was his appearance in the suburbs of Katerynoslav, which he was stopped from taking. He started a pogrom in Yelyzavethrad which claimed three thousand victims.

Once the Makhnovists had been informed of this rebellion, an enlarged staff and RMS meeting was held. A telegram was sent to the soldiers at the front urging them to hold the front and another to the Bolsheviks with a similar message. A few days latter, when more information had been received, a proclamation was issued against Hyyhoriyiv attacking him for seeking to impose a new authority on the working class, for en-

This period saw the most sustained freedom for the region around Hulyai Pole. It had been free of enemy occupation since January, allowing constructive activity to restart. The inhabitants of the free region *"created new forms of social organisation: free workers' communes and Soviets."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 574] The Revolutionary Military Soviet (RMS) called a third regional worker, peasant and insurgent congresses had on April 10th to review progress and to look forward. This was the largest congress to date, with delegates from 72 volosts containing two million people. The Bolshevik military commander Dybenko tried to ban it. The Makhnovists, needless to say, ignored him and the RMS made a famous reply to his arrogance (see section 13 for more details).

It was during this period (late 1918 and early 1919), that the ***Nabat*** anarchist federation was organised. *"Anarchist influence was reported from Aleksandrovsk and other centres,"* notes David Footman, *"Anarchists were holding a conference in Kursk at about the same time and in one of their resolutions it was stated that 'the Ukrainian Revolution will have great chances of rapidly becoming Anarchist in its ideas.' The position called for renewed Bolshevik measures against the Anarchists. **Nabat**, the main Anarchist newspaper in the Ukraine, was suppressed, and its editorial board dispersed under threat of arrest."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 270] Daniel Guerin has reproduced two documents from the Nabat federation in volume II of his **No Gods, No Masters**.

The anarchist influence in and around Hulyai Pole also worried the Bolsheviks. They started a slander campaign against the Makhnovists, to the alarm of Antonov, the overall front commander, who replied in response to an article in Kharkiv Izvestiya:

> *"The article is the most perverted fiction and does not in the least correspond to the existing situation. The insurgents fighting the whites are on a level with the*



> *traying the treaty between the Ukraine and the Bolshevik authorities, sent the Red Army to fight us. Bolshevism triumphed militarily over the Ukraine and at Kronstadt, but revolutionary history will acclaim us one day and condemn the victors as counter-revolutionary grave-diggers of the Russian Revolution."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 88–9]

Two distinct aspects of the anarchist movement existed in the Ukraine at this time, a political and non-military structure called the Nabat (Alarm) federation which operated through the soviets and collectives and a military command structure usually known after is commander Nestor Makhno as the

*Makhnovshchina* (which means the *"Makhno movement"*) although its proper name was the

*Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine*. This section of the FAQ will cover both, although the Makhnovshchina will be the main focus.

For more information on the Makhnovist movement, consult the following books. Anarchist accounts of the movement can be found in Peter Arshinov's excellent **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** and Voline's **The Unknown Revolution** (Voline's work is based on extensive quotes from Arshinov's work, but does contain useful additional material). For non-anarchist accounts, Michael Malet's **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Revolution** is essential reading as it contains useful information on both the history of the movement, its social basis and political ideas. Malet considers his work as a supplement to Michael Palij's **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921** which is primarily a military account of the movement but which does cover some of its social and political aspects. Unfortunately, both books are rare. Paul Avrich's **The Russian Anarchists** contains a short account of the movement and his **Anarchist Portraits** has

a chapter on Nestor Makhno. Makhnovist source material is included in Avrich's **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**. Daniel Guerin includes a section on Makhno and the Makhnovist Movement in volume 2 of **No Gods, No Masters**. As well as extracts from Arshinov's book, it has various manifestos from the movement as well as Makhno's account of his meeting with Lenin. Christopher Read's **From Tsar to Soviets** has an excellent section on the Makhnovists. Serge Cipko presents an excellent overview of works on the Makhnovists in his *"Nestor Makhno: A Mini-Historiography of the Anarchist Revolution in Ukraine, 1917–1921"* (**The Raven**, no. 13). Alexander Skirda presents an overview of perestroika soviet accounts of Makhno in his essay *"The Rehabilitation of Makhno"* (**The Raven**, no. 8). Skirda's biography **Nestor Makhno: Le Cosaque de l'anarchie** is by far the best account of the movement available.

Lastly, a few words on names. There is a large variation on the spelling of names within the source material. For example, Makhno's home town has been translated as Gulyai Pole, Gulyai Polye Huliai-Pole and Hulyai Pole. Similarly, with other place names. The bandit Grigor'ev has been also translated as Hryhor'iv and Hryhoriyiv. We generally take Michael Malet's translations of names as a basis (i.e. we use Hulyai Pole and Hryhoriyiv, for example).

## 1 Who was Nestor Makhno?

The Makhnovist movement was named after Nestor Makhno, a Ukrainian anarchist who played a key role in the movement from the start. Indeed, Makhnoshchina literally means *"Makhno movement"* and his name is forever linked with the revolution in the South-East of the Ukraine. So who was Makhno?

Nestor Ivanovich Makhno was born on the 27th of October, 1889 in Hulyai Pole, which is situated in Katerynoslav province,



> *"Little local Chekas are undertaking a relentless campaign against the Makhnovists, even when they are shedding their blood at the front. They are hunting them down from the rear and persecuting them solely for belonging to the Makhnovist movement … It cannot continue like this: the activity of the local Chekas is deliberately ruining the front, reducing all military successes to nothing, and contributing to the creation of a counter-revolution that neither Denikin nor Krasnov [Hetman of the Don Cossacks] could have achieved…"* [quoted by Alexander Skirda, **The Rehabilitation of Makhno**, p. 346]

Unsurprisingly, the peasants reacted strongly to the Bolshevik regime. Their *"agricultural policy and terrorism"* ensured that *"by the middle of 1919, all peasants, rich and poor, distrusted the Bolsheviks."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] In April alone, there were 93 separate armed rebellions against the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine. The *"more oppressive the Bolshevik policy, the more the peasants supported Makhno. Consequently, the Bolsheviks began to organise more systematically against the Makhno movement, both as an ideology and as a social movement."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

In mid-March the Red Army attacked eastwards. In the course of this Dybenko, commander of the Trandneiper division, recommended one of Makhno's commanders for a medal. Then the Makhnovists attacked the Donbas (east) to relieve the pressure on the Soviet 8th Army caused by a White advance. They took Mariupol following a White incursion at the beginning of April. A White counter-offensive resulted in the Red 9th division panicking, allowing the Whites into Makhno's rear. Red Commander Dybenko refused orders to come to the Makhnovists aid as he was more interested in the Crimea (south). [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 31]

29th drove out all the insurgent forces with heavy losses. In the south, White reinforcements led to the insurgents being pushed North and losing Hulyai Pole.

1919 opened with the Makhnovists organising a congress of front-unit delegates to discuss the progress of the struggle. Over forty delegates attended and a committee of five was elected, along with an operational staff to take charge of the southern front and its rear. It was agreed that local soviets were to be supported in every way, with no military violence directed towards them permitted. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

By the end of January, white reinforcements were landing in the ports of the south. On January 22nd, a worker, peasant and insurgent congress was held at Velyka Mykhailivka. A resolution was passed urging an end to conflict between Makhnovists, Nationalists and Bolsheviks. An alliance was signed between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks in early February. This agreement ensured that the Partisan units entered the Red Army as distinct formations, with their internal organisation (including the election of commanders) intact, and the Red Army in the area formed a brigade to be known as *"the third Transdnieper Batko Makhno brigade"* with Makhno as commander. The Whites were repulsed and Hulyai Pole retaken and the front pushed some distance eastwards.

Thus the military situation had improved by the time of the second worker, peasant and insurgent congress held at Hulyai Pole on February 12th. This congress set up a *"Revolutionary Military Soviet"* to co-ordinate civilian affairs and execute its decisions. The congress resolved that *"the land belongs to nobody"* and should be cultivated without the use of hired labour. It also accepted a resolution opposing anti-Jewish pogroms. Also passed was a resolution which sharply attacked the Bolsheviks, caused by their behaviour since their arrival in the Ukraine. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 154–5] A report by the commander of the 2nd Red Army, Skatchco, indicates the nature of this behaviour:



in the south east of the Ukraine between the Dnieper River and the Sea of Azov. While it seems to be conventional for many historians to call Hulyai Pole a "village," it was in fact a town with a population of about 30,000 and boasted several factories and schools.

Makhno was the son of a poor peasant family. His father died when he was ten months old, leaving him and his four brothers in the care of their mother. Due to the extreme poverty of his family, he had to start work as a shepherd at the age of seven. At eight he started to attend the Second Hulyai Pole primary school in winter and worked for local landlords during the summer. He left school when he was twelve and took up full-time employment as a farmhand on the estates of nobles and on the farms of the German colonist **kulaks.** At the age of seventeen, he started to work in Hulyai Pole itself, first as an apprentice painter, then as an unskilled worker in a local iron foundry and, finally, as a founder in the same establishment.

It was when he was working in the iron foundry that he became involved in revolutionary politics. In the stormy years following the 1905 revolution, Makhno got involved in revolutionary politics. This decision was based on his experiences of injustice at work and seeing the terror of the Russian regime during the 1905 events (in Hulyai Pole there had been no serious disorder, yet the regime sent a detachment of mounted police to suppress gatherings and meetings in the town, terrorising the population by whipping those caught in the streets and beating prisoners with rifle butts). In 1906, Makhno decided to join the anarchist group in Hulyai Pole (which had been formed the previous year and consisted mainly of sons of poorer peasants).

At the end of 1906 and in 1907, Makhno was arrested and accused of political assassinations, but was released due to lack of evidence. In 1908, due to the denunciation of a police spy within the anarchist group, he was arrested and put in jail. In March, 1910, Makhno and thirteen others were tried by a mili-

tary court and sentenced to death by hanging. Due to his youth and the efforts of his mother, the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment with hard labour. He served his time at the Butyrki prison in Moscow, resisting the prison authorities by every means available to him. Due to this resistance, he spent much of his time in chains or in damp and freezing confinement. This experience ensured that Makhno developed an intense hatred of prisons (later, during the revolution, his first act in entering a town or city was to release all prisoners and destroy the prison).

It was during his time in Butykri that Makhno met Peter Arshinov, a fellow anarchist prisoner and later activist and historian of the Makhnovist movement. Arshinov was born in 1887 in the Ukrainian industrial town of Katerinoslav. His father was a factory worker and he was a metal worker. Originally a Bolshevik, he had become an anarchist in 1906, taking a leading part in organising factory workers and actions against the regime. In 1907 he was arrested and sentenced to death, escaping to Western Europe. In 1909, he returned to Russia and was again arrested and again escaped. In 1910, he was arrested and placed in the Butykri prison where he met Makhno. The two anarchists established a close personal and political friendship, with Arshinov helping Makhno develop and deepen his anarchist ideas.

On March 2nd, 1917, after eight years and eight months in prison, Makhno was released along with all other political prisoners as a result of the February Revolution. After spending three weeks in Moscow with the Moscow anarchists, Makhno returned to Hulyai Pole. As the only political prisoner who was returned to his family by the revolution, Makhno became very well-respected in his home town. After years of imprisonment, suffering but learning, Makhno was no longer an inexperienced young activist, but a tested anarchist militant with both a powerful will and strong ideas about social conflict and



In this period, Makhno, with portable printing equipment, was raiding the occupying garrisons and troop trains in the Southern Ukraine. Normal practice was to execute the officers and free the troops. In this period the moral of the occupying troops had crumbled and revolutionary propaganda had made inroads into many units. This was also affecting the nationalist troops and on 20 November the first nationalist unit defected to the Makhnovists. This encouraged them to return to Hulyai Pole on 27 December and there the insurrectionary Staff was formed, this body was to lead the army in the coming years and consisted initially of four old and trusted friends and three political comrades. The Makhnovist presence allowed the setting up of a local soviet and the re-opening of the anarchist clubs. German forces started pulling back to the major cities and on December 14 the Hetman fled Kiyiv. In the resulting vacuum, the Makhnovists rapidly expanded taking in most of the South East Ukraine and setting up fronts against local whites. The Ukrainian nationalists had taken power in the rest of the Ukraine under Petliura and on the 15th December the Makhnovists agreed to make common cause with them against the Whites. In return for arms and ammunition they allowed the nationalists to mobilise in the Makhnovist area (while engaging in propaganda directed at the mobilised troops on their way by train to Katerynoslav).

This was a temporary and pragmatic arrangement directed against the greater enemy of the Whites. However, the nationalists were no friends of working-class autonomy. The nationalists banned elections to the Katerynoslav soviet on 6th of December and the provincial soviet at Kharkiv meet with a similar fate on the 22nd. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22] At the same time as their agreement with the nationalists, the Makhnovista had set up links with Bolshevik partisans to the south and before dawn on the 26th the Bolshevik and Makhnovista forces launched a joint attack on the nationalists at Katerynoslav. The city was taken but held only briefly when a nationalist attack on the

> *"Besides his appeals, Makhno proceeded immediately to direct action. His first concern was to form a revolutionary military unit, sufficiently strong to guarantee freedom of propaganda and action in the villages and towns and at the same time to begin guerrilla operations. This unit was quickly organised ...*
>
> *"His first unit undertook two urgent tasks, namely, pursuing energetically the work of propaganda and organisation among the peasants and carrying out a stubborn armed struggle against all their enemies. The guiding principle of this merciless struggle was as follows. No lord who persecuted the peasants, no policeman of the Hetman, no Russian or German officer who was an implacable enemy of the peasants, deserved any pity; he must be destroyed. All who participated in the oppression of the poor peasants and workers, all who sought to suppress their rights, to exploit their labour, should be executed.*
>
> *"Within two or three weeks, the unit had already become the terror, not only of the local bourgeoisie, but also of the Austro-German authorities."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 558]

The night of 26 September saw Hulyai Pole briefly liberated from Hetman and Austrian troops by the actions of Makhno's troops in association with local people. On the retreat from this Makhno's small band grew when he met the partisan troops headed by Schus. When the Austrians cornered them, they launched a surprise counter attack and routed the opposition. This became known as the battle of Dibrivki and it is from this date, 5 October 1918 that Makhno is given the nickname 'Batko', meaning *"father"* (see section 3 for details). For the next two months already-existing partisan groups sought out and joined the growing army.



revolutionary politics. Ideas which he immediately set about applying.

Once home in Hulyai Pole, Makhno immediately devoted himself to revolutionary work. Unsurprisingly, the remaining members of the anarchist group, as well as many peasants, came to visit him. After discussing ideas with them, Makhno proposed beginning organisational work immediately in order to strengthen links between the peasants in Hulyai Pole and its region with the anarchist group. On March 28–29, a Peasant Union was created with Makhno as its chairman. Subsequently, he organised similar unions in other villages and towns in the area. Makhno also played a large part in a successful strike by wood and metal workers at a factory owned by his old boss (this defeat led to the other bosses capitulating to the workers as well). At the same time, peasants refused to pay their rent to the landlords. [Michael Malet, **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 4] Regional assemblies of peasants were called, both at Hulyai Pole and elsewhere, and on August 5–7, the provincial congress at Katerinoslav decided to reorganise the Peasant Unions into Soviets of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies.

In this way, *"Makhno and his associates brought socio-political issues into the daily life of the people, who in turn supported his efforts, hoping to expedite the expropriation of large estates."* [Michael Palij, **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno**, p. 71] In Hulyai Pole, the revolution was moving faster than elsewhere (for example, while the Aleksandrovsk soviet supported the actions of the Provisional Government during the July days in Petrograd, a meeting in Hulyai Pole saluted the rebellious soldiers and workers). Peasants were drawn to Hulyai Pole for advice and help from the neighbouring **volosts** (administrative districts). The peasantry wanted to seize the land of the large landowners and the kulaks (rich peasants). Makhno presented this demand at the first sessions of the regional Soviet, which were held in Hulyai

Pole. In August, Makhno called all the local landlords and rich peasants (kulaks) together and all documents concerning ownership (of land, livestock and equipment) were taken from them. An inventory of this property was taken and reported to the session of the local soviet and then at a regional meeting. It was agreed that all land, livestock and equipment was to be divided equally, the division to include the former owners. This was the core of the agrarian program of the movement, namely the liquidation of the property of the landowners and kulaks. No-one could own more land than they could work with their own labour. All this was in flat defiance to the Provisional Government which was insisting that all such questions be left to the Constituent Assembly. Free communes were also created on ex-landlord estates.

Unsurprisingly, the implementation of these decisions was delayed because of the opposition of the landlords and kulaks, who organised themselves and appealed to the provisional authorities. When General Kornilov tried to march on Petrograd and take power, the Hulyai Pole soviet took the initiative and formed a local *"Committee for the Salvation of the Revolution"* headed by Makhno. The real aim was to disarm the potential local enemy — the landlords, bourgeoisie, and kulaks — as well as to expropriate their ownership of the people's wealth: the land, factories, plants, printing shops, theatres and so on. On 25 September a volost congress of Soviets and peasant organisations in Hulyai Pole proclaimed the confiscation of the landowners' land and its transformation into social property. Raids on the estates of landlords and rich peasants, including German colonists, began and the expropriation of the expropriators began.

Makhno's activities came to a halt the following spring when Lenin's government signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This treaty gave sizeable parts of the Russian Empire, including the Ukraine, to Germany and Austria in return for peace. The Treaty also saw the invasion of the Ukraine by large



## 4 Can you give a short overview of the Makhnovist movement?

This section of the FAQ gives a short overview of the Makhnovists from July 1918 (when Makhno returned to the Ukraine) and August 1921, when it was finally defeated by Bolshevik armed force. It will be primarily a military history, with the socio-political aspects of the movement discussed in sections 6 (its theory) and 7 (its practice). For details of the rise of influence of Makhno after his release from prison in 1917, see section 1.

The history of the Makhno movement can be broken up into roughly four periods — from July 1918 to February 1919, then the rest of 1919, then January to October 1920 and, finally, from October 1920 to August 1921. This section will give an overview of each period in turn.

By the time Makhno arrived back in the Ukraine in July, 1918, opposition to the German-backed Hetman's regime was mounting and was frequently met with brutal repression, including reprisal executions. Makhno was forced to live underground and on the move, secretly meeting with others, with the Austrians always close behind. Voline recounts Makhno's activities at this time:

> *"Back in Hulyai Pole, Makhno came to the decision to die or obtain victory for the peasants ... He did not delay starting his mission openly among the great masses of peasants, speaking at improvised meetings, writing and distributing letters and tracts. By pen and mouth, he called on the peasants for a decisive struggle against the power of Skoropadsky and the landlords. He declared tirelessly that the workers should now take their fates into their own hands and not let their freedom to act be taken from them ...*

> *detachment fled to the Volchya River, where they were drowned by peasants who had joined the battle. The enemy's defeat was complete.*
>
> *"Local peasants and detachments of revolutionary insurgents came from all directions to triumphantly acclaim the heroes. They unanimously agreed to consider Makhno as* ***Batko*** *of the entire revolutionary insurrection in the Urkaine."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 59–60]

This was how Makhno acquired the nickname *"Batko,"* which stuck to him thereafter.

It should be stressed that *"Batko"* was a nickname and did not signify any form of autocratic or hierarchical position within the movement:

> *"During the civil war, it signified the leadership and control of a specific area and its population in both civil and military fields. The central point of the use of the word, rather than 'leader' or 'dictator' is that the leadership is usually based on respect, as in Makhno's case, and always on intimate knowledge of the home territory."* [Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17]

That this was a nickname can be seen from the fact that *"[a]fter 1920 he was usually called 'Malyi' ('Shorty'), a nickname referring to his short stature, which was introduced by chance by one of the insurgents."* [Peter Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 226] To attach significance to the fact that the peasants called Makhno *"Batko"* (as the Bolsheviks did) simply signifies an ignorance of the Makhnovist movement and its social environment.



numbers of German and Austrian troops, who conquered the entire country in less than three months. Makhno succeeded in forming several military units, consisting of 1700 men, but could not stop Hulyai Pole being taken. After an anarchist congress at the end of April in Taganrog, it was decided to organise small combat units of five to ten peasants and workers, to collect arms from the enemy and to prepare for a general peasant uprising against the Austro-German troops and, finally, to send a small group to Soviet Russia to see at first hand what was happening there to both the revolution and to the anarchists under Bolshevik rule. Makhno was part of that group.

By June, Makhno had arrived in Moscow. He immediately visited a number of Russian anarchists (including his old friend Peter Arshinov). The anarchist movement in Moscow was cowed, due to a Cheka raid in April which broke the backbone of the movement, so ending a political threat to the Bolsheviks from the left. To Makhno, coming from an area where freedom of speech and organisation was taken for granted, the low level of activity came as a shock. He regarded Moscow as the capital of the *"paper revolution,"* whose red tape and meaninglessness had affected even the anarchists. Makhno also visited Peter Kropotkin, asking his advice on revolutionary work and the situation in the Ukraine. To Makhno, *"Moscow appeared as 'the capital of the Paper Revolution,' a vast factory turning out empty resolutions and slogans while one political party, by means of force and fraud, elevated itself into the position of a ruling class."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252]

While in Moscow, Makhno met with Lenin. This meeting came about by chance. Visiting the Kremlin to obtain a permit for free board and lodging, he met the chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, Jakov M. Sverdlov, who arranged for Makhno to meet Lenin. Lenin asked Makhno, *"How did the peasants of your region understand*

*the slogan ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS IN THE VILLAGES?"* Makhno states that Lenin *"was astonished"* at his reply:

> *"The peasants understood this slogan in their own way. According to their interpretation, all power, in all areas of life, must be identified with the consciousness and will of the working people. The peasants understand that the soviets of workers and peasants of village, country and district are neither more nor less than the means of revolutionary organisation and economic self-management of working people in the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its lackeys, the Right socialists and their coalition government."*

To this Lenin replied: *"Well, then, the peasants of your region are infected with anarchism!"* [Nestor Makhno, **My Visit to the Kremlin**, p. 18] Later in the interview, Lenin stated: *"Do the anarchists ever recognise their lack of realism in present-day life? Why, they don't even think of it."* Makhno replied:

> *"But I must tell you, comrade Lenin, that your assertion that the anarchists don't understand 'the present' realistically, that they have no real connection with it and so forth, is fundamentally mistaken. The anarchist-communists in the Ukraine … the anarchist-communists, I say, have already given many proofs that they are firmly planted in 'the present.' The whole struggle of the revolutionary Ukrainian countryside against the Central Rada has been carried out under the ideological guidance of the anarchist-communists and also in part by the Socialist Revolutionaries … Your Bolsheviks have scarcely any presence in our villages. Where they have penetrated, their influence is minimal.*



*groups of cavalry. Peasants informed them that a battalion of Austrians and a special* ***pomeshchik*** *detachment were in the village. Retreat was impossible. Then Makhno, with his usual stubbornness and determination, said to his companions: 'Well, my friends! We should all be ready to die on this spot …' The movement was ominous, the men were firm and full of enthusiasm. All 30 saw only one path before them — the path toward the enemy, who had about a thousand well-armed men, and they all realised that this meant certain death for them. All were moved, but none lost courage.*

*"It was at this movement that one of the partisans, Shchus', turned to Makhno and said:*

*"'From now on you will be* ***Batko*** *to all of us, and we vow to die with you in the ranks of the insurgents.'*

*"Then the whole detachment swore never to abandon the insurgent ranks, and to consider Makhno the general* ***Batko*** *of the entire revolutionary insurrection. Then they prepared to attack. Shchus' with five to seven men was assigned to attack the flank of the enemy. Makhno with the others attacked from the front. With a ferocious 'Hurrah!' the partisans threw themselves headlong against the enemy, smiting the very centre with sabres, rifles and revolvers. The attack had a shattering effect. The enemy, who were expecting nothing of the kind, were bowled over and began to flee in panic, saving themselves in groups and individually, abandoning arms, machine guns and horses. Without leaving them time to come to themselves, to become aware of the number of attacking forces, and to pass to a counter-attack, the insurgents chased them in separate groups, cutting them down in full gallop. A part of the* ***pomeshchik***

*in the following circumstances. Local **pomeshchiks** [landed gentry] in the major centres, the **kulaks** [rich peasants], and the German authorities [the Ukraine being occupied by them at the time], decided to eliminate Makhno and his detachment [of partisans] at any cost. The **pomeshchiks** created a special volunteer detachment consisting of their own sons and those of **kulaks** for the decisive struggle against Makhno. On the 30th of September this detachment, with the help of the Austro-Germans, corned Makhno in the region of Bol'shaya Mihhailovka, setting up strong military posts on all roads. At this time Makhno found himself with only 30 partisans and one machine gun. He was forced to make a fighting retreat, manoeuvring in the midst of numerous enemy forces. Arriving in the forest of Dibrivki, Makhno found himself in an extremely difficult situation. The paths of retreat were occupied by the enemy. It was impossible for the detachment to break through, and escaping individually was beneath their revolutionary dignity. No-one in the detachment would agree to abandon their leader so as to save himself. After some reflection, two days later, Makhno decided to return to the village of Bol'shaya Mikhailovka (Dibrivki). Leaving the forest the partisans met peasants who came to warn them that there were large enemy forces in Dibrivki and that they should make haste to go elsewhere. This information did not stop Makhno and his partisans ... [and] they set out for Bol'shaya Mikhailovka. They approached the village guardedly. Makhno himself and a few of his comrades went on reconnaissance and saw a large enemy camp on the church square, dozens of machine guns, hundreds of saddle horses, and*



*Almost all the communes or peasant associations in the Ukraine were formed at the instigation of the anarchist-communists. The armed struggle of the working people against the counter-revolution in general and the Austro-German invasion in particular has been undertaken with the ideological and organic guidance of the anarchist-communists exclusively.*

*"Certainly it is not in your party's interest to give us credit for all this, but these are the facts and you can't dispute them. You know perfectly well, I assume, the effective force and the fighting capacity of the free, revolutionary forces of the Ukraine. It is not without reason that you have evoked the courage with which they have heroically defended the common revolutionary conquests. Among them, at least one half have fought under the anarchist banner...*

*"All this shows how mistaken you are, comrade Lenin, in alleging that we, the anarchist-communists, don't have our feet on the ground, that our attitude towards 'the present' is deplorable and that we are too fond of dreaming about the future. What I have said to you in the course of this interview cannot be questioned because it is the truth. The account which I have made to you contradicts the conclusions you expressed about us. Everyone can see we are firmly planted in 'the present,' that we are working and searching for the means to bring about the future we desire, and that we are in fact dealing very seriously with this problem."*

Lenin replied: *"Perhaps I am mistaken."* [Makhno, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 24–5]

The Bolsheviks helped Makhno to return to the Ukraine. The trip was accomplished with great difficulty. Once Makhno was almost killed. He was arrested by Austro-German troops and was carrying libertarian pamphlets at the time. A Jewish inhabitant of Hulyai Pole, who had know Makhno for some time, succeeded in saving him by paying a considerable sum of money for his liberation. Once back in Hulyai-Pole, he started to organise resistance to the occupying forces of the Austro-Germans and their puppet regime led by Hetman Skoropadsky. With the resistance, the Makhno movement can be said to have arisen (see section 3 on way it was named after Makhno). From July 1918 to August 1921, Makhno led the struggle for working class freedom against all oppressors, whether Bolshevik, White or Nationalist. During the course of this struggle, he proved himself to be *"a guerrilla leader of quite outstanding ability."* [David Footman, **Civil War in Russia**, p. 245] The military history of this movement is discussed in section 4, while other aspects of the movement are discussed in other sections.

After the defeat of the Makhnovist movement in 1921, Makhno was exiled in Western Europe. In 1925 he ended up in Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life. While there, he remained active in the anarchist movement, with the pen replacing the sabre (to use Alexander Skirda's colourful expression). Makhno contributed articles to various anarchist journals and in particular to **Delo Truda**, an anarchist-communist paper started in Paris by Peter Arshinov (many of these articles have been published in the book **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**). He remained active in the anarchist movement to the end.

In Paris, Makhno met the famous Spanish anarchists Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso in 1927. He argued that in Spain *"conditions for a revolution with a strong anarchist content are better than in Russia"* because not only was there *"a proletariat and a peasantry with a revolutionary tradition whose political maturity is shown in its reactions,"* the Spanish anar-



> *ing Anarchists to Hulyai Pole so as to organise their own Anarchist power there."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**]

As part of this support for anarchist theory, the Makhnovists organised insurgent, peasant and worker conferences to discuss key issues in the revolution and the activities of the Makhno movement itself. Three such conferences had been before Trotsky wrote his diatribe **The Makhno Movement** on June 2nd, 1919. A fourth one was called for June 15th, which Trotsky promptly banned (on pain of death) on June 4th (see section 13 for full details). Unlike the Bolshevik dictatorship, the Makhnovists took every possibility of ensuring the participation of the working people they were fighting for in the revolution. The calling of congresses by the Makhnovists shows clearly that the movement did not, as Trotsky asserted, follow a man, but rather ideas.

As Voline argued, *"the movement would have existed without Makhno, since the living forces, the living masses who created and developed the movement, and who brought Makhno forward merely as their talented military leader, would have existed without Makhno."* Ultimately, the term *"Makhnovshchina"* is used *"to describe a unique, completely original and independent revolutionary movement of the working class which gradually becomes conscious of itself and steps out on the broad arena of historical activity."* [*"preface,"* Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

## 3 Why was Makhno called *"Batko"*?

Nestor Makhno was often called in the movement *"Batko"*, which is Ukrainian for *"father."* Peter Arshinov explains how and in what circumstances Makhno was given this name:

> *"It was ... in September 1918, that Makhno received the nickname **Batko** — general leader of the revolutionary insurrection in the Ukraine. This took place*

was because the *"most important role in this work of unification [of the peasant masses] and in the general development of the revolutionary insurrection in the southern Ukraine was performed by the detachment of partisans guided by a peasant native to the region: Nestor Makhno."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 551] *"From the first days of the movement,"* Arshinov notes, *"up to its culminating point, when the peasants vanquished the landowners, Makhno played a preponderant and central role to such an extent that the whole insurgent region and the most heroic moments of the struggle are linked to his name. Later, when the insurrection had triumphed completely over the Skoropadsky counter-revolution and the region was threatened by Denikin, Makhno became the rallying point for millions of peasants in several regions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

It must be stressed that Nestor Mahkno was not the boss of the Mahknovista. He was not their ruler or general. As such, the fact that the Makhnovists were (unofficially) named after Makhno does not imply that it was his personal fiefdom, nor that those involved followed him as an individual. Rather, the movement was named after him because he was universally respected within it as a leading militant. This fact also explains why Makhno was nicknamed *"Batko"* (see next section).

This can be seen from how the movement was organised and was run. As we discuss in section 5, it was organised in a fundamentally democratic way, by means of mass assemblies of insurgents, elected officers, regular insurgent, peasant and worker congresses and an elected *"Revolutionary Military Soviet."* The driving force in the Makhnovist movement was not, therefore, Makhno but rather the anarchist ideas of self-management. As Trotsky himself was aware, the Makhnovists were influenced by anarchist ideas:

> *"Makhno and his companions-in-arms are not non-party people at all. They are all of the Anarchist persuasion, and send out circulars and letters summon-*



chists had *"a sense of organisation which we lacked in Russia. It is organisation which assures the success in depth of all revolutions."* Makhno recounted the activities of the Hulyai Pole anarchist group and the events in revolutionary Ukraine:

> *"Our agrarian commune was at once the economic and political vital centre of our social system. These communities were not based on individual egoism but rested on principles of communal, local and regional solidarity. In the same way that the members of a community felt solidarity among themselves, the communities were federated with each other … It is said against our system that in the Ukraine, that it was able to last because it was based only on peasant foundations. It isn't true. Our communities were mixed, agricultural-industrial, and, even, some of them were only industrial. We were all fighters and workers. The popular assembly made the decisions. In military life it was the War Committee composed of delegates of all the guerrilla detachments which acted. To sum up, everyone took part in the collective work, to prevent the birth of a managing class which would monopolise power. And we were successful."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 88–9]

As can be seen from the social revolution in Aragon, Durruti took Makhno's advice seriously (see section I.8 for more on the Spanish Revolution). Unsurprisingly, in 1936 a number of veterans of Makhno's Insurgent Army went to fight in the Durruti column. Sadly, Makhno's death in 1934 prevented his own concluding statement to the two Spaniards: *"Makhno has never refused to fight. If I am alive when you start your struggle, I will be with you."* [quoted by Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Makhno's most famous activity in exile was his association with, and defence of, the **Organisational Platform of the**

**Libertarian Communists** (known as the *"Platform"*). As discussed in section J.3.3, the Platform was an attempt to analyse what had gone wrong in the Russian Revolution and suggested a much tighter anarchist organisation in future. This idea provoked intense debate after its publication, with the majority of anarchists rejecting it (for Makhno's discussion with Malatesta on this issue, see **The Anarchist Revolution** published by Freedom Press). This debate often resulted in bitter polemics and left Makhno somewhat isolated as some of his friends, like Voline, opposed the Platform. However, he remained an anarchist to his death in 1934.

Makhno died on the morning of July 25th and was cremated three days later and his ashes placed in an urn within Pere Lachaise, the cemetery of the Paris Commune. Five hundred Russian, French, Spanish and Italian comrades attended the funeral, at which the French anarchist Benar and Voline spoke (Voline used the occasion to refute Bolshevik allegations of anti-Semitism). Makhno's wife, Halyna, was too overcome to speak.

So ended the life of one great fighters for working-class freedom. Little wonder Durruti's words to Makhno:

> *"We have come to salute you, the symbol of all those revolutionaries who struggled for the realisation of Anarchist ideas in Russia. We also come to pay our respects to the rich experience of the Ukraine."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88]

For fuller details of Makhno's life, see the accounts by Peter Arshinov (**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**), Paul Avrich (*"Nestor Makhno: The Man and the Myth,"* in **Anarchist Portraits**), Michael Palij, (**The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno**) and Michael Malet (**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Revolution**).



## 2 Why was the movement named after Makhno?

Officially, the Makhnovist movement was called the **Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine**. In practice, it was usually called the *"Makhno movement"* (***"Makhnovshchina"*** in Russian) or the Makhnovists. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky placed great significance on this:

> *"The anti-popular character of the Makhno movement is most clearly revealed in the fact that the army of Hulyai Pole is actually called 'Makhno's Army'.* ***There, armed men are united not around a programme, not around an ideological banner, but around a man."*** [**The Makhno Movement**]

Ignoring the irony of a self-proclaimed Marxist (and later Leninist and founder of Trotskyism!) making such a comment, we can only indicate why the Makhnovists called themselves by that name:

> *"Because, first, in the terrible days of reaction in the Ukraine, we saw in our ranks an unfailing friend and leader, MAKHNO, whose voice of protest against any kind of coercion of the working people rang out in all the Ukraine, calling for a battle against all oppressors, pillagers and political charlatans who betray us; and who is now marching together with us in our common ranks unwavering toward the final goal: liberation of the working people from any kind of oppression."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 272]

The two of the anarchists who took part in the movement and later wrote its history concur. Voline argues that the reason why the movement was known as the *"Makhnovist movement"*

> *"Wrangel really tried to come into direct contact with Makhno's men and dispatched to Makhno's headquarters two representatives for negotiations ... [However] Makhno's men not only did not enter into negotiations with the representatives of Wrangel, but publicly hanged them as soon as they arrived at the headquarters."* [quoted by Palij, **Ibid.**]

Trotsky, of course, still tried to blacken the Makhnovists. In the same article he argued that *"[u]ndoubtedly Makhno actually co-operated with Wrangel, and also with the Polish **szlachta**, as he fought with them against the Red Army. However, there was no formal alliance between them. All the documents mentioning a formal alliance were fabricated by Wrangel ... All this fabrication was made to deceive the protectors of Makhno, the French, and other imperialists."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225]

It is hard to know where to start in this amazing piece of political story-telling. As we discuss in more detail in section 13, the Makhnovists were fighting the Red Army from January to September 1920 because the Bolsheviks had engineered their outlawing! As historian David Footman points out, the attempt by the Bolsheviks to transfer Makhno to Polish front was done for political reasons:

> *"it is admitted on the Soviet side that this order was primarily 'dictated by the necessity' of liquidating **Makhnovshchina** as an independent movement. Only when he was far removed from his home country would it be possible to counteract his influence"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 291]

Indeed, it could be argued that by attacking Makhno in January helped the Whites to regroup under Wrangel and return later in the year. Equally, it seems like a bad joke for Trotsky to blame the victim of Bolshevik intrigues for defending them-



conference held in April 2–7, 1919. The federation aimed to form a *"united anarchism"* and guaranteed a substantial degree of autonomy for every participating group and individual. A number of newspapers appeared in a Ukrainian towns and cities (mostly entitled **Nabat**), as did leaflets and pamphlets. There was a main weekly paper (called **Nabat**) which was concerned largely with anarchist theory. This completed the Makhnovist papers **Road to Freedom** (which was often daily, sometimes weekly and dealt with libertarian ideas, everyday problems and information on partisan activities) and **The Makhnovist Voice** (which dealt primarily with the interests, problems, and tasks of the Makhnovist movement and its army). The Nabat organisation was also published a pamphlet dealing with the Makhnovist movement's problems, the economic organisation of the region, the free soviets, the social basis of the society that was to be built, and the problem of defence.

Unsurprisingly, the Nabat federation and the Makhnovists worked together closely, with Nabat members worked in the army (particularly its cultural section). Some of its members were also elected to the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet. It should be noted that the Nabat federation gained a number of experienced anarchists from Soviet Russia, who fled to the Ukraine to escape Bolshevik repression. The Nabat shared the fortunes of the Makhno movement. It carried on its work freely as long as the region was controlled by the Makhnovist Army, but when Bolshevik or White forces prevailed, the anarchists were forced underground. The movement was finally crushed in November 1920, when the Bolsheviks betrayed the Makhnovists.

As can be seen, the Makhnovists implemented to a large degree the anarchist idea of self-managed, horizontally federated associations (when possible, of course). Both the two major organisational layers to the Makhnovist structure (the army and the congresses) were federated horizontally and the "top"

structure was essentially a mass peasant, worker and guerrilla decision-making coalition. In other words, the masses took decisions at the "top" level that the Revolutionary Military Soviet and the Makhnovist army were bound to follow. The army was answerable to the local Soviets and to the congresses of soviets and, as we discuss in section 7, the Makhnovists called working-people and insurgent congresses whenever they could.

The Makhnovist movement was, fundamentally, a working class movement. It was *"one of the very few revolutionary movements to be led and controlled throughout by members of 'the toiling masses.'"* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] It applied its principles of working class autonomy and self-organisation as far as it could. Unlike the Red Army, it was predominantly organised from the bottom up, rejecting the use of Tsarist officers, appointed commanders, and other "top-down" ways of the Red Army (see section 14 for further discussion of the differences between the two forces).

The Makhnovist army was not by any means a perfect model of anarchist military organisation. However, compared to the Red Army, its violations of principle are small and hardly detract from their accomplishment of applying anarchist ideas in often extremely difficult circumstances.

## 6 Did the Makhnovists have a constructive social programme?

Yes, they did. The Makhnovists spent a great deal of energy and effort in developing, propagating and explaining their ideas on how a free society should be created and run. As Michael Malet noted, the *"leading Makhnovists had definite ideas about the ideal form of social organisation."* [**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 107] Moreover, as we discuss in the next section, they also successfully applied these ideas when and where they could.



self-liberation of the working classes from every oppression — foreign or domestic, economic or political, cultural or social.

## 12 Did the Makhnovists support the Whites?

No, they did not. However, black propaganda by the Bolsheviks stated they did. Victor Serge wrote about the *"strenuous calumnies put out by the Communist Party"* against him *"which went so far as to accuse him of signing pacts with the Whites at the very moment when he was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against them."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 122]

According to Arshinov, *"Soviet newspapers spread the false news of an alliance between Makhno and Wrangel"* and in the summer of 1920, a representative of the Kharkov government *"declared at the Plenary Session of the Ekaterinoslav Soviet, that Soviet authorities had written proof of the alliance between Makhno and Wrangel. This was obviously an intentional lie."* Wrangel, perhaps believing these lies had some basis, sent a messenger to Makhno in July, 1920. *"Wrangel's messenger was immediately executed"* and the *"entire incident was reported in the Makhnovist press. All this was perfectly clear to the Bolsheviks. They nevertheless continued to trumpet the alliance between Makhno and Wrangel. It was only after a military-political agreement had been concluded between the Makhnovists and the Soviet power that the Soviet Commissariat of War announced that there had never been an alliance between Makhno and Wrangel, that earlier Soviet assertions to this effect were an error."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 173–5]

Needless to say, while the Bolsheviks spread the rumour to discredit Makhno, the Whites spread it to win the confidence of the peasants. Thus when Trotsky stated that Wrangel had *"united with the Ukrainian partisan Makhno,"* he was aiding the efforts of Wrangel to learn from previous White mistakes and build some kind of popular base. [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 220] By October, Trotsky had retracted this statement:

*Denikinists,"* it should be noted that *"[n]owhere .... nationalism openly advocated, and the line of argument put forward can more easily be interpreted as libertarian and, above all, anti-White."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146]

In 1928, Makhno wrote a rebuttal to a Soviet historian's claim that Makhno became a Ukrainian Nationalist during the 1920–21 period. He *"totally dismissed the charges"* and argued that the historian *"distorted anarchism's espousal of local autonomy so as to create trumped-up charges of nationalism."* As Sysyn argues, while Makhno *"never became a nationalist, he did to a degree become a Ukrainian anarchist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 292 and p. 303]

Thus while neither Makhno nor the movement were nationalists, they were not blind to national and cultural oppression. They considered nationalism as too narrow a goal to satisfy the **social** aspirations of the working classes. As Makhno argued in exile, the Ukrainian toilers had *"asserted their rights to use their own language and their entitlement to their own culture, which had been regarded before the revolution as anathema. They also asserted their right to conform in their lives to their own way of life and specific customs."* However, *"[i]n the aim of building an independent Ukrainian State, certain statist gentlemen would dearly love to arrogate to themselves all natural manifestations of Ukrainian reality."* Yet the *"healthy instincts of the Ukrainian toilers and their baleful life under the Bolshevik yoke has not made them oblivious of the State danger in general"* and so they *"shun the chauvinist trend and do not mix it up with their social aspirations, rather seeking their own road to emancipation."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, pp. 24–5]

In summary, the Makhnovists were opposed to nationalism but supported culture diversity and self-determination within a free federation of toilers communes and councils. They did not limit their aims to national liberation, but rather sought the



So what was their social programme? Being anarchists, it comprised two parts, namely political and economic aspects. The Makhnovists aimed for a true social revolution in which the working classes (both urban and rural) could actively manage their own affairs and society. As such, their social programme reflected the fact that oppression has its roots in both political and economic power and so aimed at eliminating both the state and private property. As the core of their social ideas was the simple principle of working-class autonomy, the idea that the liberation of working-class people must be the task of the working-class people themselves. This vision is at the heart of anarchism and was expressed most elegantly by Makhno:

> *"Conquer or die — such is the dilemma that faces the Ukrainian peasants and workers at this historic moment ... But we will not conquer in order to repeat the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters; we will conquer in order to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of the truth."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 58]

As such, the Makhnovists were extremely hostile to the idea of state power, recognising it simply as a means by which the majority are ruled by the few. Equally, they were opposed to wage slavery (to private or state bosses), recognising that as long as the workers do not manage their own work, they can never be free. As they put it, their goals could only be achieved by an *"implacable revolution and consistent struggle against all lies, arbitrariness and coercion, wherever they come from, a struggle to the death, a struggle for free speech, for the righteous cause, a struggle with weapons in hand. Only through the abolition of all rulers, through the destruction of the whole foundation of their*

*lies, in state affairs as well as in political and economic affairs. And only through the social revolution can the genuine Worker-Peasant soviet system be realised and can we arrive at SOCIALISM."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 273] They, like other anarchists and the Kronstadt rebels, termed this programme of working class self-management the ***"third revolution."***

We will discuss the political aspect of the Makhnovist programme first, then its economic one. However, the Maknovists considered (correctly) that both aspects could not be separated. As they put it: *"We will not lay down our arms until we have wiped out once and for all every political and economic oppression and until genuine equality and brotherhood is established in the land."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 281] We split the aspects simply to aid the presentation of their ideas.

At the core of their ideas was what they termed the ***"Free Soviet System"*** (or ***"free soviets"*** for short). It was this system which would allow the working class to create and run a new society. As they put it:

> *"[The] Makhnovists realise that the working people are no longer a flock of sheep to be ordered about by anyone. We consider the working people capable of building, on their own and without parties, commissars or generals, their own FREE SOVIET SYSTEM, in which those who are elected to the Soviet will not, as now [under the Bolsheviks], command and order us, but on the contrary, will be only the executors of the decisions made in our own workers' gatherings and conferences."* [contained in Peter Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 280–1]

Thus the key idea advocated by the leading Makhnovista for social organisation and decision-making was the *"free toilers' soviet of peasant and worker organisations."* This meant they were to be independent of all central authority and composed



> is why the question of the language to be taught in the schools cannot be solved by our army, but can only be decided by the people themselves, by parents, teachers and students
>
> "It goes without saying that all the orders of Denikin's so-called 'Special Bureau' as well as General Mai-Maevsky's order No. 22, which forbids the use of the mother tongue in the schools, are null and void, having been forcibly imposed on the schools.
>
> "In the interest of the greatest intellectual development of the people, the language of instruction should be that toward which the local population naturally tends, and this is why the population, the students, the teachers and the parents, and not authorities or the army, should freely and independently resolve this question." [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 210–1]

They also printed a Ukrainian version of their paper (*"The Road to Freedom"*).

Clearly their opposition to Ukrainian nationalism did not mean that the Makhnovists were indifferent to imperialism and foreign political or cultural domination. This explains why Makhno criticised his enemies for anti-Ukrainian actions and language. Michael Malet summarises, for the Makhnovists *"Ukrainian culture was welcome, but political nationalism was highly suspect."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 143]

Given anarchist support for federal organisation from below upwards, working-class self-determination and autonomy, plus a healthy respect for local culture, it is easy to see why some historians have fostered a nationalist perspective onto the Makhnovists where none existed. This means that when they agitated with the slogan *"All to whom freedom and independence are dear should stay in the Ukraine and fight the*

This does not mean that anarchists are indifferent to cultural and national domination and oppression. Far from it! As we discussed in sections D.6 and D.7, anarchists are against foreign domination and cultural imperialism, believing that every community or national group has the right to be itself and develop as it sees fit. This means that anarchists seek to transform national liberation struggles into **human** liberation struggles, turning any struggle against foreign oppression and domination into a struggle against **all** forms of oppression and domination.

This means that the Makhnovists, like anarchists in general, seek to encourage local culture and language while opposed nationalism. As Frank Sysyn argues, it *"would be a mistake ... to label the Makhnivtsi as 'anti-Ukrainian.' Although they opposed the political goals of most 'svidomi ukraintsi' (nationally conscious Ukrainians), they accepted the existence of a Ukrainian nation and used the terms 'Ukraine' and 'Ukrainian.'"* [**Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution**, p. 288] It should be noted that opponents of Ukrainian independence generally called it the *"south of Russia"* or *"Little Russia."*

Thus an opposition to nationalism did not imply a rejection or blindness to foreign domination and free cultural expression. On the question of the language to be taught in schools, the Cultural-Educational Section of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army wrote the following in October, 1919:

> "The cultural-educational section of the Makhnovist army constantly receives questions from school teachers asking about the language in which instruction should be given in the schools, now that Denikin's troops have been expelled.
>
> "The revolutionary insurgents, holding to the principles of true socialism, cannot in any field or by any measure do violence to the natural desires and needs of the Ukrainian people. This



of those who worked, and not political parties. They were to federate on a local, then regional and then national level, and power within the federation was to be horizontal and not vertical. [Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] Such a system was in opposition to the Bolshevik practice of Soviets defined and dominated by political parties with a vertical decision- making structure that reached its highest point in the Bolshevik Central Committee.

Thus, for the Makhnovists, the soviet system would be a "bottom-up" system, one designed not to empower a few party leaders at the centre but rather a means by which working people could manage their own affairs. As the put it, the *"soviet system is not the power of the social-democratic Communist-Bolsheviks who now call themselves a soviet power; rather it is the supreme form of non-authoritarian anti-state socialism, which expresses itself in the organisation of a free, happy and independent system of social life for the working people."* This would be based on the *"principles of solidarity, friendship and equality."* This meant that in the Makhnovist system of free soviets, the *"working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which will carry out the will and desires of the working people themselvs, that is to say, ADMINISTRATIVE, not ruling soviets."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 272–3]

As David Footman summarises, Makhno's *"ultimate aims were simple. All instruments of government were to be destroyed. All political parties were to be opposed, as all of them were working for some or other form of new government in which the party members would assume the role of a ruling class. All social and economic affairs were to be settled in friendly discussion between freely elected representatives of the toiling masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 247]

Hence the Makhnovist social organisation was a federation of self-managed workers' and peasants' councils (soviets), which would *"be only the executors of the decisions made in our workers' gatherings and conferences."* [contained in Arshinov,

**Op. Cit.**, p. 281] In other words, an anarchist system based on mass assemblies and decision-making from the bottom up.

Economically, as is to be expected, the Makhnovists opposed private property, capitalism and wage-slavery. Their economic ideas were summarised in a Makhnovist declaration as follows:

> *"The lands of the service gentry, of the monasteries, of the princes and other enemies of the toiling masses, with all their livestock and goods, are passed on to the use of those peasants who support themselves solely through their own labour. This transfer will be carried out in an orderly fashion determined in common at peasant assemblies, which must remember in this matter not only each of their own personal interests, but also bear in mind the common interest of all the oppressed, working peasantry.*
>
> *"Factories, workshops, mines and other tools and means of production become the property of the working class as a whole, which will run all enterprises themselves, through their trade unions, getting production under way and striving to tie together all industry in the country in a single, unitary organisation."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 266]

They continually stressed that the *"land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised."* This meant a system of use-rights, as *"the land, the mines, the factories, the workshops, the railroads, and so on, will belong neither to individuals nor to the government, but solely to those who work with them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273 and p. 281]



> *in Berdyansk, Wrangel — were all treated by the Makhnovists as enemies of the workers. Each one of these invasions represented for them essentially a threat to the workers, and the Makhnovists had no interest in the national flag under which they marched."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

He stressed that *"national prejudices had no place in the Makhnovshchina. There was also no place in the movement for religious prejudices ... Among modern social movements, the Makhnovshchina was one of the few in which an individual had absolutely no interest in his own or his neighbour's religion or nationality, in which he respected only the labour and the freedom of the worker."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 211]

The Makhnovists made their position on nationalism clear in the 'Declaration' published by the Revolutionary Military Council of the army in October, 1919:

> *"When speaking of Ukrainian independence, we do not mean national independence in Petliura's sense but the social independence of workers and peasants. We declare that Ukrainian, and all other, working people have the right to self-determination not as an 'independent nation' but as 'independent workers'"* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

In other words, the Makhnovists *"declared, that in their option **Petlurovtchina** [the Petliura movement, Petliura being the leader of the Nationalists] was a bourgeois nationalist movement whose road was entirely different from that of the revolutionary peasants, that the Ukraine should be organised on a basis of free labour and the independence of the peasants and the workers ... and that nothing but struggle was possible between the **Makhnovitchina** , the movement of the workers, and the **Petlurovtchina** , the movement of the bourgeoisie."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 572]

Therefore, any claims that the Makhnovists were nationalists are incorrect. The Makhnovist movement was first and foremost an internationalist movement of working people. This is to be expected as anarchists have long argued that nationalism is a cross-class movement which aims to maintain the existing class system but without foreign domination (see section D.6 for details). As such, the Makhnovists were well aware that nationalism could not solve the social question and would simply replace a Russian ruling class and state with a Ukrainian one.

This meant that the aims of the Makhnovists went further than simply national liberation or self-determination. Anarchists, rather, aim for working-class self-liberation and self-determination, both as individuals and as groups, as well as politically, economically and socially. To quote Makhno's wire to Lenin in December 1918, the Makhnovist *"aims are known and clear to all. They are fighting against the authority of all political governments and for liberty and independence of the working people."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 80]

From this class and anti-hierarchical perspective, it is not unsurprising that the Makhnovists were not nationalists. They did not seek Ukrainian independence but rather working-class autonomy. This, of necessity, meant they opposed all those who aimed to govern and/or exploit the working class. Hence Arshinov:

> *"Composed of the poorest peasants, who were united by the fact that they all worked with their own hands, the Makhnovist movement was founded on the deep feeling of fraternity which characterises only the most oppressed. During its entire history it did not for an instant appeal to national sentiments. The whole struggle of the Makhnovists against the Bolsheviks was conducted solely in the name of the rights and interests of the workers. Denikin's troops, the Austro-Germans, Petliura, the French troops*



In industry, such a system clearly implied a system of worker's self-management within a system of federated factory committees or union branches. On the land, it meant the end of landlordism, with peasants being entitled to as much land and equipment as they could cultivate without the use of hired labour. As a Makhnovist congress in 1919 resolved:

> *"The land question should be decided on a Ukraine-wide scale at an all-Ukrainian congress of peasants on the following basis: in the interests of socialism and the struggle against the bourgeoisie, all land should be transferred to the hands of the toiling peasants. According to the principle that 'the land belongs to nobody' and can be used only by those who care about it, who cultivate it, the land should be transferred to the toiling peasantry of Ukraine for their use without pay according to the norm of equal distribution."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155]

In addition to advocating the abolition of private property in land and the end of wage labour by distributing land to those who worked it, the Makhnovists also supported the forming of *"free"* or *"working"* communes. Like their policy of land distribution, it also aimed to benefit the poorer peasants and rural wage labourers. The *"free commune"* was a voluntary association of rural workers who took over an expropriated estate and managed the land in common. The commune was managed by a general meeting of all its members and based on the liberty, equality and solidarity of its members.

Clearly, in terms of their economic policies, the Makhnovists proposed a clear and viable alternative to both rural and urban capitalism, namely workers' self-management. Industry and land would be socialised, with the actual management of production resting in the hands of the workers themselves and co-ordinated by federated workers' organisations. On

the land, they proposed the creation of voluntary communes which would enable the benefits of co-operative labour to be applied. Like their political ideas, their economic ideas were designed to ensure the freedom of working people and the end of hierarchy in all aspects of society.

In summary, the Makhnovist had a constructive social ideas which aimed to ensure the total economic and political emancipation of the working people. Their vision of a free society was based on a federation of free, self-managed soviets, the socialisation of the means of life and workers' self-management of production by a federation of labour unions or factory committees. As the black flags they carried into battle read, *"liberty or death"* and *"the land to the peasants, the factories to the workers."*

## 7 Did they apply their ideas in practice?

Yes, the Makhnovists consistently applied their political and social ideas when they had the opportunity to do so. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who quickly turned away from their stated aims of soviet democracy and workers' control in favour of dictatorship by the Bolshevik party, the Makhnovists did all in their power to encourage, create and defend working-class freedom and self-management (see section 14 for further discussion). In the words of historian Christopher Reed:

> *"there can be no question that the anarchists did everything they could to free the peasants and workers and give them the opportunity to develop their own forms of collective control over land and factories . .. [T]he Ukrainian anarchists fought under the slogan of land to the peasants, factories to the workers and power to the soviets. Wherever they had influence they supported the setting up of communes and soviets. They introduced safeguards intended to protect direct self-government from*



Opposing workers' democracy because working people could make decisions that the party thought were wrong shows a deep *"hostility"* to the **real** city workers and their liberty and equality. Equally, Bolshevik repression of workers' strikes, freedom of speech, assembly, organisation and self-determination shows far more *"hostility"* to the city worker than a few Makhnovist misunderstandings!

All in all, any claim that the Makhnovists *"hated"* city workers is simply false. While some Makhnovists may not have liked the city nor really understood the complexities of an urban economy, they did recognise the importance of encouraging working-class autonomy and self-organisation within them and building links between the rural and urban toilers. While the lack of a large-scale anarcho-syndicalist movement hindered any positive construction, the Makhnovists at least tried to promote urban self-management. Given Bolshevik authoritarianism and its various rationalisations, it would be fairer to say that it was the Bolsheviks who expressed *"hostility"* to the city workers by imposing their dictatorship upon them rather than supporting working-class self-management as the Makhnovists did!

## 11 Were the Makhnovists nationalists?

Some books on the Makhnovist movement try to present the Makhnovists as being Ukrainian nationalists. A few discuss the matter in order, perhaps, to increase the respectability of the Makhnovist movement by associating it with a more *"serious"* and *"respectable"* political theory than anarchism, namely *"Nationalism."* Those who seriously investigate the issue come to the same conclusion, namely that neither Makhno nor the Makhnovist movement was nationalist (see, for example, Frank Sysyn's essay **Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution** which discusses this issue).

rance of the city and its resulting misunderstandings do not constitute *"hostility"* or *"hatred."*

Moreover, where these misunderstandings developed show that the claims that the Makhnovists hated the city workers are simply false. Simply put, the misunderstanding occurred when the Makhnovists had liberated cities from the Whites. As we discussed in section 7, the first thing the Makhnovists did was to call a conference of workers' delegates to discuss the current situation and to urge them to form soviets, unions and co-operatives in order to manage their own affairs. This hardly shows *"hatred"* of the city worker. In contrast, the first thing the Bolsheviks did in taking a city was to form a *"revolutionary committee"* to govern the town and implement Bolshevik policy.

This, needless to say, shows a distinct *"hostility"* to the city workers on the part of the Bolsheviks. Equally, the Bolshevik advocacy of party dictatorship to overcome the *"wavering"* of the working class. In the words of Trotsky himself (in 1921):

> *"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party. which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]



> *organised interference ... They conducted relentless class war against landlords, officers, factory owners and the commercial classes could expect short shrift from Makhno and his men, especially if they had taken up arms against the people or, like the Whites ..., had been responsible for looting, pogroms and vicious reprisals against unarmed peasants on a colossal scale."* [**From Tsar to Soviets**, p. 263]

As we discussed in the last section, the core ideas which inspired the Makhnovists were working-class self-determination and self-management. They aimed at the creation of a *"free soviet system"* and the end of capitalism by rural and industrial self-management. It is to the credit of the Makhnovists that they applied these ideas in practice rather than talking about high principles and doing the exact opposite.

In practice, of course, the war left little room for much construction work. As Voline pointed out, one of the key disadvantages of the movement was the *"almost continual necessity of fighting and defending itself against all kinds of enemies, without being able to concentrate on peaceful and truly positive works."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 571] However, in the disruption of the Civil War the Makhnovists applied their ideas when and where they could.

Within the army, as we discussed in section 5, the insurgent troops elected their own commanders and had regular mass assemblies to discuss policy and the agreed norms of conduct within it. In civilian matters, the Makhnovists **from the start** encouraged working-class self-organisation and self-government. By late 1917, in the area around Hulyai Pole *"the toiling masses proceeded ... to consolidate their revolution. The little factories functioned ... under the control of the workers. The estates were split up ... among the peasants ... a certain number of agricultural communes were formed."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

The aim of the Makhnovists was to *"transfer all the lands owned by the gentry, monasteries, and the state into the hands of peasants or to organise, if they wished, peasant communes."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] This policy was introduced from the start, and by the autumn of 1917, all land, equipment and livestock around Hulyai Pole had been expropriated from the gentry and kulaks and placed in the hands of working peasants. Land reform had been achieved by the direct action of the peasantry.

However, *"many of the peasants understood that the task was not finished, that it was not enough to appropriate a plot of land and be content with it. From the hardships of their lives they learned that enemies were watching from all sides, and that they must stick together. In several places there were attempts to organise social life communally."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86]

In line with social anarchist theory, the Makhnovists also tried to introduce collective forms of farming. These experiments in collective working and living were called *"free communes."* Despite the difficult military situation communes were established, principally near Hulyai Pole, in the autumn of 1917. This activity was resumed in February to March of 1918. They re-appeared in early 1919, once the threat of counter-revolution had been (temporarily) defeated.

There were four of these communes within five miles of Hulyai Pole itself and many more further afield. According to Makhno, these agricultural communes *"were in most cases organised by peasants, though sometimes their composition was a mixture of peasants and workmen [sic!]. Their organisation was based on equality and solidarity of the members. All members of these communes — both men and women — applied themselves willingly to their tasks, whether in the field or the household."* Unlike many communes, people were given the personal space they desired, so *"any members of the commune who wanted to cook separately for themselves and their children, or to take food from the communal kitchens and eat it in their own quarters, met with no objection from the other members."* The management of



tion 13) and attacked them, *"hostility"* to Communists seems a sensible position to take! Equally, the first Bolshevik attack on the Makhnovists occurred in mid-1919, when the Bolsheviks began justifying their party dictatorship as essential for the success of the revolution. The other two occurred in 1920, when the Bolsheviks were announcing to the whole world at the Communist International (to quote Zinoviev) that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 152] Given this, perhaps the fact that the Makhnovists shot Communists can be explained in terms of defence against Bolshevik betrayal and opposition to the dictatorship of the Communist Party rather than *"hostility to the city."* Needless to say, the Communists shot Makhnovists and anarchists. What does that suggest a *"hostility"* to by the Bolsheviks? Working-class autonomy and freedom?

Clearly, Trotsky was clutching at straws in his smearing of the Makhnovist movement as haters of the city worker. The *"hostility"* Trotsky speaks of can be far more easily explained in terms of the necessities imposed upon the Makhnovists by the civil war and the betrayals of the Bolsheviks. As such, it would be fairer to state that the Makhnovists showed *"hostility"* or *"hatred"* to the city or city workers only if you equate both with the Bolshevik party dictatorship. In other words, the Makhnovists showed *"hostility"* to the new ruling class of the Communist Party hierarchy.

All this does not mean that there were not misunderstandings between the Makhno movement, a predominantly rural movement, and the workers in the cities. Far from it. Equally, it can be said that the Makhnovists did not understand the workings of an urban economy and society as well as they understood their own. However, they made no attempt to **impose** their world-view on the city workers (unlike the Bolsheviks, who did so on both urban and rural workers). However, igno-

> *slightest desire to give their bread voluntarily to the State. This is why they are so hostile in their relations with the contemporary tax collectors — the commissars and the various supply organs of the State.*
>
> *"But the peasants always try to enter into **direct** relations with the urban workers. The question was raised more than once at peasant congresses, and the peasants always resolved it in a revolutionary and positive manner."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258]

Simply put, Trotsky misinterprets hostility to the repressive policies of the Bolshevik dictatorship with hostility to the city.

Moreover, ignoring the **actual** relationships of the Makhnovists with the city workers, we can fault Trotsky's arguments without resource to such minor things as facts. This is because every one of his "examples" of *"hatred for the city and the city worker"* can be explained by more common sense arguments.

As regards the destruction of trains and railway tracks, a far simpler and more plausible explanation can be found than Trotsky's *"hostility to the city."* This is the fact that a civil war was taking place. Both the Reds and Whites used armoured trains to move troops and as bases of operations. To destroy the means by which your enemy attacks you is common sense! Equally, in the chaotic times of the war, resources were often in low supply and in order to survive the Makhnovists had to *"loot"* trains (needless to say, Trotsky does not explain how the Makhnovists knew the trains were *"marked for the factories."*). It should be noted that the Bolsheviks *"looted"* the countryside, can we surmise that the Bolsheviks simply expressed *"hostility to the village"*?

As regards the shooting of Communists, a far simpler and more plausible explanation also exists. Rather than show *"hostility to the city,"* it shows *"hostility"* to the Communist Party, its policies and its authoritarian ideas. Given that the Bolsheviks had betrayed the Makhnovists on ***three*** occasions (see sec-



each commune *"was conducted by a general meeting of all its members."* In addition, the communes decided to introducing anarchist schooling based on the ideas of Franciso Ferrer (see section J.5.13 for details). Makhno himself worked on one for two days a week for a period. [Makhno, quoted by Paul Avrich, **Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 131]

They were set up on the former estates of landlords, and consisted of around 10 families or 100 to 300 people and although each had peasant anarchist members not all the members were anarchists. Makhno worked on Commune No. 1, which was on the estate of former landlord Klassen. When re-founded in 1919 this commune was named after Rosa Luxemburg, the Marxist revolutionary who had recently been murdered in the German revolution. It was a success, for by the spring sowing it had grown from nine families to 285 members working 340 acres of land. The communes represented a way that poor and middle peasants could pool resources to work estates that they could not have worked otherwise and, as Michael Malet points out, *"they were organised from the bottom up, not the top down."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

However, as Makhno himself acknowledged, while the *"majority of the toiling population saw in the organisation of rural communes the healthy germ of a new social life"* which could provide a *"model of a free and communal form of life,"* the *"mass of people did not go over to it."* They cited as their reasons *"the advance of the German and Austrian armies, their own lack of organisation, and their inability to defend this order against the new 'revolutionary' [Bolshevik] and counter-revolutionary authorities. For this reason the toiling population of the district limited their revolutionary activity to supporting in every way those bold springs."* [Makhno, quoted by Avrich, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132] Given that the communes were finally destroyed by White and Red forces in June 1919, their caution was justified. After this, peace did not return long enough for the experiment to be restarted.

As Michael Malet argues:

> *"Very few peasant movements in history have been able to show in practice the sort of society and type of landholding they would like to see. The Makhnovist movement is proof that peasant revolutionaries can put forward positive, practical ideas."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

The Makhnovist experiments, it should be noted, have strong similarities to the rural revolution during the Spanish Revolution of 1936 (see sections I.8.5 and I.8.6 for more details).

As well as implementing their economic ideas on workers' self-management, land reform and free communes, the Makhnovists also organised regional congresses as well as local soviets. Most of the activity happened in and around Hulyai Pole, the focal point of the movement.This was in accord with their vision of a *"free soviet system."* Needless to say, the congresses could only be called during periods of relative calm (i.e. the Makhnovist home area was not occupied by hostile forces) and so congresses of insurgents, peasants and workers were called in early 1919 and another in October of that year. The actual dates of the regional congresses were:

23 January 1919 at Velyka Mykhailivka

12 February 1919 at Hulyai Pole

10 April 1919 at Hulyai Pole

20 October 1919 at Aleksandrovsk

A congress for the fifteenth of June 1919 never met because Trotsky unilaterally banned it, under pain of death to anyone even **discussing** it, never mind calling for it or attending as a delegate. Unlike the third congress, which ignored a similar ban by Dybenko, the fourth congress could not go ahead due to



We can also point to the fact that the Makhnovists arranged direct exchanges of goods between the towns and country. In early 1918, for example, corn was shipped directly to a Moscow factory in return for textiles (without state interference). In 1919, 1500 tons of grain (and a small amount of coal) was sent by train to Petrograd and Moscow where the commander of the train was to exchange it again for textiles. The initiative in both cases came from the Hulyai Pole peasants. Again, hardly the work of city-hating peasants.

Peter Arshinov indicates the underlying theory behind the Makhnovists as regards the relations between city and country:

> *"The Makhnovshchina ... understands that the victory and consolidation of the revolution ... cannot be realised without a close alliance between the working classes of the cities and those of the countryside. The peasants understand that without urban workers and powerful industrial enterprises they will be deprived of most of the benefits which the social revolution makes possible. Furthermore, they consider the urban workers to be their brothers, members of the same family of workers.*
>
> *"There can be no doubt that, at the moment of the victory of the social revolution, the peasants will give their entire support to the workers. This will be voluntary and truly revolutionary support given directly to the urban proletariat. In the present-day situation [under the Bolsheviks], the bread taken by force from the peasants nourishes mainly the enormous governmental machine. The peasants see and understand perfectly that this expensive bureaucratic machine is not in any way needed by them or by the workers, and that in relation to the workers it plays the same role as that of a prison administration toward the inmates. This is why the peasants do not have the*

## 10 Did the Makhnovists hate the city and city workers?

For some reason the Makhnovists have been portrayed as being against the city and even history as such. This assertion is false, although sometimes made. For example, historian Bruce Lincoln states that Makhno *"had studied the anarchist writings of Bakunin, whose condemnation of cities and large-scale industries fit so well with the anti-urban, anti-industrial feelings of the Ukrainian peasants, and his program was precisely the sort that struck responsive chords in peasant hearts."* [**Red Victory**, p. 325] Lincoln fails to present any evidence for this claim. This is unsurprising as it is doubtful that Makhno read such condemnations in Bakunin as they do not, in fact, exist. Similarly, the Makhnovist *"program"* (like anarchism in general) was not *"anti-urban"* or *"anti-industrial."*

However, Lincoln's inventions are mild compared to Trotsky's. According to Trotsky, *"the followers of Makhno"* were marked by *"hatred for the city and the city worker."* He later gives some more concrete examples of this *"hostility to the city"* which, as with the general peasant revolt, also *"nourished the movement of Makhno, who seized and looted trains marked for the factories, the plants, and the Red Army; tore up railway tracks, shot Communists, etc."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80 and p. 89]

Unsurprisingly, Trotsky simply shows his ignorance of the Makhno movement by these statements. To refute Trotsky's claim we can simply point to how the Makhnovists acted once they occupied a city. As we discuss in section 7, the first thing the Makhnovists did was to call a conference of workers and urge them to organise their own affairs directly, using their own class organs of self-management (soviets, unions, etc.). Hardly the activity of a group of people who allegedly *"hated"* city workers!



the treacherous attack by the Red Army that preceded it. Four Makhnovist commanders were executed by the Red Army for advertising this congress. Another congress planned for Aleksandrovsk in November 1920 was also prevented by Bolshevik betrayal, namely the attack after Wrangel had been defeated. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] See section 13 for further details.

The reason for these regional congresses was simple, to coordinate the revolution. *"It was indispensable,"* Arshinov notes, *"to establish institutions which unified first a district composed of various villages, and then the districts and departments which composed the liberated region. It was indispensable to find general solutions for problems common to the entire region. It was indispensable to create organs suitable for these tasks. And the peasants did not fail to create them. These organs were the regional congresses of peasants and workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 87–8] These congresses *"were composed of delegates of peasants, workers and of the insurgent army, and were intended to clarify and record the decisions of the toiling masses and to be regarded as the supreme authority for the liberated area."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 266]

The first congress, which was the smallest, discussed the strengthening of the front, the adoption of a common nomenclature for popular organisations (soviets and the like) and to send a delegation to convince the draftees in the Nationalist forces to return home. It was also decided to organise a second congress. The second congress was larger, having 245 delegates from 350 districts. This congress *"was strongly anti-Bolshevik and favoured a democratic socio-political way of life."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 153] One delegate made the issue clear:

> *"No party has a right to usurp governmental power into its own hands . .. We want life, all problems, to be decided locally, not by order from any authority above; and all peasants and workers should decide their own fate, while those elected should only carry*

*out the toilers' wish."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

A general resolution was passed, which acknowledged the fact that the Bolshevik party was *"demanding a monopoly of the Revolution."* It also stated:

> *"With deep regret the Congress must also declare that apart from external enemies a perhaps even greater danger, arising from its internal shortcomings, threatens the Revolution of the Russian and Ukrainian peasants and workers. The Soviet Governments of Russia and of the Ukraine, by their orders and decrees, are making efforts to deprive local soviets of peasants and workers' deputies of their freedom and autonomy."* [quoted by Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

As noted in section 5, the congress also decided to issue an *"obligatory"* mobilisation to gather troops for the Army. It also accepted a resolution on land reform, stating that the land *"belongs to nobody"* and could be used by anyone as long as they did not use wage labour (see section 6 for the full resolution). The congress accepted a resolution against plunder, violence, and anti-Jewish pogroms, recognising it as an attempt by the Tsarist government to *"turn the attention of all toiling people away from the real reason for their poverty,"* namely the Tsarist regime's oppression. [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155]

The second congress also elected the Revolutionary Military Soviet of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents, which had *"no powers to initiate policy but designed merely to implement the decisions of the periodic congresses."* [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

The third congress was the largest and most representative, with delegates from 72 volosts (in which two million people



Anarchist Serge Cipko summarises the literature by stating that the *"scholarly literature that discusses Makhno's relationships with the Jewish population is of the same opinion [that the Makhnovists were not anti-Semitic] and concur that unlike the Whites, Bolsheviks and other competing groups in Ukraine during the Revolution, the Makhnovists did not engage in pogroms."* [*"Nestor Makhno: A Mini-Historiography of the Anarchist Revolution in Ukraine, 1917–1921,"* pp. 57–75, **The Raven**, no. 13, p. 62]

Historian Christopher Reed concurs, noting that *"Makhno actively opposed anti-Semitism … Not surprisingly, many Jews held prominent positions in the Insurgent movement and Jewish farmers and villagers staunchly supported Makhno in the face of the unrestrained anti-Semitism of Ukrainian nationalists like Grigoriev and of the Great Russian chauvinists like the Whites."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 263–4] Arthur E. Adams states that *"Makhno protected Jews and in fact had many serving on his own staff."* [**Bolsheviks in the Urkaine**, p. 402]

We apologise again for labouring this point, but the lie that Makhno and the Makhnovists were anti-Semitic is relatively commonplace and needs to be refuted. As noted, Trotskyists repeat Trotsky's false assertions without correction. Other repeat the lie from other sources. It was essential, therefore, to spend time making the facts available and to nail the lie of Makhnovist anti-Semitism once and for all!

western Ukraine, where the local otamany (warlords) and the Nationalists were strong. Very few took place where Makhno's influence predominated, the nearest being in Katerinoslav town and Kherson province; none in the provinces of Katerinoslav or Tavria. It should also be noted that the period of January to June of that year was one of stability within the Makhnovist region, so allowing them the space to apply their ideas. Malet summarises:

> *"Even granted the lower level of Jewish involvement in left-bank trade, the almost total lack of anti-Semitic manifestations would show that Makhno's appeals, at a time when anti-Semitism was fast becoming fashionable, did not go unheeded by the population. There were a number of Jewish colonies in the south-east Ukraine."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 169]

Unsurprisingly, Malet notes that apart from certain personal considerations (such as his friendship with a number of Jews, including Voline and Yossif the Emigrant), *"the basis of Makhno's hostility to anti-Semitism was his anarchism. Anarchism has always been an international creed, explicitly condemning all forms of racial hatred as incompatible with the freedom of individuals and the society of equals."* And like other serious historians, he points to *"the continual participation in the movement of both intellectual Jews from outside, and Jews from the local colonies"* as *"further proof … of the low level of anti-Semitism within the Makhnovshchina."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 171 and pp. 171–2]



lived). This congress aimed to *"clarify the situation and to consider the prospects for the future of the region."* It decided to conduct a voluntary mobilisation of men to fight the Whites and *"rejected, with the approval of both rich and poor peasants, the Bolshevik expropriations."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 158] Toward the end of the congress, it received a telegram from the Bolshevik commander Dybenko calling it *"counter-revolutionary,"* its organisers *"outlaws"* and dissolving it by his order. The congress immediately voted an indignant resolution in rely. This corrected Dybenko's factual mistakes on who called it, informed him why it was called, gave him a history lesson on the Makhnovist region and asked him:

> *"Can there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves? …*
>
> *"Is it permissible, is it admissible, that they should come to the country to establish laws of violence, to subjugate a people who have just overthrown all lawmakers and all laws?*
>
> *"Does there exist a law according to which a revolutionary has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass, of which he calls himself the defender, simply because this mass has taken the good things which the revolution promised them, freedom and equality, without his permission?*
>
> *"Should the mass of revolutionary people perhaps be silent when such a revolutionary takes away the freedom which they have just conquered?*
>
> *"Do the laws of the revolution order the shooting of a delegate because he believes he ought to carry out the mandate given him by the revolutionary mass which elected him?*

> *"Whose interests should the revolutionary defend; those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103]

As we discuss in section 13, Trotsky's order to ban the fourth congress indicates that such laws do exist, with the *"entire peasant and labouring population are declared guilty of high treason if they dare participate in their own free congress."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123]

The last congress was held between 20th and 26th of October in Aleksandrovsk. One delegate was to be elected per 3000 people and one delegate per military unit. This gave 270 mostly peasant delegates. Only 18 were workers, of which 6 were Mensheviks, who walked out after Makhno called them *"lapdogs of the bourgeoisie"* during the discussion on *"free socio-economic organisations"*! [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109] The congress passed a number of resolutions, concentrating on the care of the wounded and the poorest part of the population, a voluntary mobilisation, voluntary peasant contributions to feed the army and forced levies on the bourgeoisie.

According to Voline, the chairman, Makhnovist ideas were freely discussed:

> *"The idea of free Soviets, genuinely functioning in the interests of the working population; the question of direct relationships between peasants and city workers, based on mutual exchange of the products of their labour; the launching of a libertarian and egalitarian social organisation in the cities and the country; all these question were seriously and closely studied by the delegates themselves, with the assistance and co-operation of qualified comrades."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 640]



*the work of the Makhnovists, though even here neither Makhno himself nor any of his recognisable subordinates are to be seen, nor is there any indication that Makhno had authorised the raid or, indeed, that the band involved was in fact affiliated with his Insurgent Army."* Avrich then states that *"there is evidence that Makhno did all in his power to counteract anti-Semitic tendencies among his followers"* and that *"a considerable number of Jews took part in the Makhnovist movement."* He also points out that the Jewish anarchists Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Sholem Schwartzbard, Voline, Senya Fleshin, and Mollie Steimer did not criticise Makhno as an anti-Semite, they also *"defended him against the campaign of slander that persisted from all sides."* [**Anarchist Portraits**, pp. 122–3] It should be noted that Schwartzbard assassinated the Nationalist leader Petliura in 1926 because he considered him responsible for pogroms conducted by Nationalist troops during the civil war. He shot Petliura the day after he, Makhno and Berkman had seen him at a Russian restaurant in Paris. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189]

Michael Malet, in his account of the Makhnovists, states that *"there is overwhelming evidence that Makhno himself was not anti-Semitic."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 168] He indicates that in the period January to September 1919, the Central Committee of Zionist Organisations in Russia listed the Nationalists as creating 15,000 victims of pogroms, then the Denikinists with 9,500 followed by Hryhoriyiv, Sokolovsky, Struk, Yatsenko and Soviet troops (500 victims). Makhno is not mentioned. Of the pogroms listed, almost all took place on the

*"2. Do not speak of pogroms alleged to have been organised by Makhno himself. That is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist Army, I have had hints and precise denunciations on this subject. But, up to the present, every time I have tried to check the facts, I have been obliged to declare that on the day in question no Makhnovist unit could have been at the place indicated, the whole army being far away from there. Upon examining the evidence closely, I established this fact, every time, with absolute certainty, at the place and on the date of the pogrom, no* ***Makhnovist*** *unit was operating or even located in the vicinity.* ***Not once*** *have I been able to prove the existence of a Makhnovist unit at the place a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 699]

This conclusion is confirmed by later historians. Paul Avrich notes that *"[c]harges of Jew-baiting and of anti-Jewish pogroms have come from every quarter, left, right, and centre. Without exception, however, they are based on hearsay, rumour, or intentional slander, and remain undocumented and unproved."* He adds that the *"Soviet propaganda machine was at particular pains to malign Makhno as a bandit and pogromist."* Wishing to verify the conclusions of Tcherikover proved by Voline, Avrich examined several hundred photographs in the Tcherikover Collection, housed in the YIVO Library in New York and depicting anti-Jewish atrocities in the Ukraine during the Civil War. He found that *"only one [was] labelled as being*



He notes that the congress *"decided that the workers, without any authority, would organise their economic, political and administrative life for themselves, by means of their own abilities, and through their own direct organs, united on a federative basis."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 641]

It is significant to note that the congress also discussed the activities of the Makhnovists within the city itself. One delegate raised the issue of the activities of the Kontrrazvedka, the Makhnovist *"counter-intelligence"* section. As noted in section 5, the Makhnovists, like all the armies in the Russian Civil War, had its intelligence service. It combined a number of functions, such as military reconnaissance, arrest and holding of prisoners, counter-insurgency (*"Originally it had a punitive function, but because of improper treatment of prisoners of war, it was deprived of its punitive function."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 300]). The delegate stated that this *"counter-espionage service"* was engaged in *"arbitrary acts and uncontrolled actions — of which some are very serious, rather like the Bolshevik Cheka."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 643] Immediately a commission of several delegates was created to investigate the situation. Voline argues that *"[s]uch an initiative on the part of workers' delegates would not have been possible under the Bolshevik regime. It was by activity of this kind that the congress gave a preview of the way in which a society should function from the beginning if it is based on a desire for progress and self-realisation."* [Voline, **Ibid.**] Sadly, the commission could not complete its work due to the city being evacuated soon after the congress.

Another incident shows that under the Makhnovists the civilian population was in control. A delegate noted that Klein, the Makhnovist military commander in the city, had become publicly and riotously drunk after issuing proclamations against drunkenness. Klein was called before the congress, which accepted his apology and his request to be sent to the front, away from the boredom of desk work which had driven him to drink! This, according to Voline, showed that

the workers and their congress were the masters and the army its servant. [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 645–7]

Outside of the congresses the work of local Soviets was to be co-ordinated through the Revolutionary Military Soviet (RMS), the first RMS was set up by the 2nd congress and consisted of one delegate for each of the 32 volsts the Makhnovista had liberated. The RMS was to be answerable to the congresses and limited to implementing their decisions but the difficult military situation meant this seldom happened. When it did (the 3rd Congress) the Congress had no problems with its actions in the previous period. After the Aleksandrovsk congress, the RMS consisted of 22 delegates including three known Bolsheviks and four known Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks considered the remaining delegates *"anarchists or anarchist sympathisers".*

The military chaos of 1920 saw the RMS dissolved and replaced by the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine, which consisted of seven members elected by the insurgent army. Its secretary was a left Socialist Revolutionary. The RMS in addition to making decisions between Congresses carried out propaganda work including the editing of the Makhnovist paper *"The Road to Freedom"* and collected and distributed money.

Lastly, we must discuss what happened when the Makhnovists applied their ideas in any cities they liberated as this gives a clear idea of the way they applied their ideas in practice. Anarchist participant Yossif the Emigrant stated that it was *"Makhno's custom upon taking a city or town to call the people together and announce to them that henceforth they are free to organise their lives as they think best for themselves. He always proclaims complete freedom of speech and press; he does not fill the prisons or begin executions, as the Communists do."* He stressed it was *"the expression of the toilers themselves"* and *"the first great mass movement that by its own efforts seeks to free itself from government and establish economic self-determination. In*



*the activities of the movement. The Jewish agricultural colonies which were scattered throughout the districts of Mariupol, Berdiansk, Alexandrovsk, etc., participated in the regional assemblies of workers, peasants and partisans; they sent their delegates to the regional Revolutionary Military Council.*

*"6. Rich and reactionary Jews certainly had to suffer from the Makhnovist army, not as Jews, but just in the same way as non-Jewish counter-revolutionaries."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, pp. 967–8]

However, it could be claimed that these accounts are from anarchists and so are biased. Ignoring the question of why so many Jewish anarchists should defend Makhno if he was, in fact, a pogromist or anti-Semite, we can turn to non-anarchist sources for confirmation of the fact that Makhno and the Makhnovist movement were not anti-Semites.

First, we turn to Voline, who quotes the eminent Jewish writer and historian M. Tcherikover about the question of the Makhnovists and anti-Semitism. Tcherikover had, for a number of years, had specialised in research on the persecutions of the Jews in Russia. The Jewish historian states

"with certainty that, on the whole, the behaviour of Makhno's army cannot be compared with that of the other armies which were operating in Russian during the events 1917–21. Two facts I can certify absolutely explicitly.

"1. It is undeniable that, of all these armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard the civil population in general and the Jewish population in particular. I have numerous testimonies to this. The proportion of **justified** complaints against the Makhnovist army, in comparison with the others, is negligible.

*I know that he would not have had anything to do with persons, or a movement, which possessed the slightest leaning towards anti-Semitism."* [*"appendix,"* **My Visit to the Kremlin**, pp. 36–7]

However, by far the best source to refute claims of anti-Semitism the work of the Jewish anarchist Voline. He summarises the extensive evidence against such claims:

> *"We could cover dozens of pages with extensive and irrefutable proofs of the falseness of these assertions. We could mention articles and proclamations by Makhno and the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents denouncing anti-Semitism. We could tell of spontaneous acts by Makhno himself and other insurgents against the slightest manifestation of the anti-Semitic spirit on the part of a few isolated and misguided unfortunates in the army and the population... One of the reasons for the execution of Grigoriev by the Makhnovists was his anti-Semitism and the immense pogrom he organised at Elizabethgrad ...*
>
> *"We could cite a whole series of similar facts, but we do not find it necessary ... and will content ourselves with mentioning briefly the following essential facts:*
>
> *"1. A fairly important part in the Makhnovist movement was played by revolutionists of Jewish origin.*
>
> *"2. Several members of the Education and Propaganda Commission were Jewish.*
>
> *"3. Besides many Jewish combatants in various units of the army, there was a battery composed entirely of Jewish artillery men and a Jewish infantry unit.*
>
> *"4. Jewish colonies in the Ukraine furnished many volunteers to the Insurrectionary Army.*
>
> *"5. In general the Jewish population, which was very numerous in the Ukraine, took an active part in all*



*that sense it is thoroughly Anarchistic."* [Alexander Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, pp. 193–5]

Arshinov paints a similar picture:

> *"As soon as they entered a city, they declared that they did not represent any kind of authority, that their armed forces obliged no one to any sort of obligation and had no other aim than to protect the freedom of the working people. The freedom of the peasants and the workers, said the Makhnovists, resides in the peasants and workers themselves and may not be restricted. In all fields of their lives it is up to the workers and peasants themselves to construct whatever they consider necessary. As for the Makhnovists — they can only assist them with advice, by putting at their disposal the intellectual or military forces they need, but under no circumstances can the Makhnovists prescribe for them in any manner."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 148]

In addition, the Makhnovists *"fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power."* Indeed, the *"only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people."* They also took the opportunity to destroy every prison they got their hands on, believing that free people *"have no use for prisons"* which are *"always built only to subjugate the people, the workers and peasants."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153, p. 154 and p. 153]

The Makhnovists encouraged self-management. Looking at Aleksandrovsk:

> *"They immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference of the workers of the city. When the conference met, a detailed report was given on the military situation in the region and it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations, basing themselves on the principles of labour and equality. The workers enthusiastically acclaimed all these suggestions; but they hesitated to carry them out, troubled by their novelty, and troubled mainly by the nearness of the front, which made them fear that the situation of the town was uncertain and unstable. The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed these ideas with the greatest enthusiasm, but who only with difficulty succeeded in giving them concrete forms. Railroad workers took the first step in this direction. They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region ... From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began to turn systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

Unfortunately, the Makhnovists occupied only two cities (Alexandrovsk for four weeks and Katerinoslav for two periods of one and five weeks respectively). As a rule the Makhnovist rank and file had little or no experience of life in the cities and this placed severe limits on their ability to understand the specific problems of the workers there. In addition, the cities did not have a large anarchist movement, meaning that the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had more support then they did.



> *or the aforementioned movement perpetrate such acts? ... Thus far, no such evidence advanced by Jews has come to my attention. The only thing that has appeared thus far in the press generally, certain Jewish anarchist organs included, regarding myself and the insurgent movement I led, has been the product of the most shameless lies and of the vulgarity of certain political mavericks and their hirelings."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 28]

It should be noted that Yanovsky, editor of the Yiddish language anarchist paper **Freie Arbeiter Stimme** later admitted that Makhno was right. Yanovsky originally believed the charges of anti-Semitism made against Makhno, going so far as ignoring Makhno's appeal to him out of hand. However, by the time of Makhno's death in 1934, Yanovsky had learned the truth:

> *"So strongly biased was I against him [Makhno] at that time I did not think it necessary to find out whether my serious accusation was founded on any real facts during the period of his great fight for real freedom in Russia. Now I know that my accusations of anti-Semitism against Makhno were built entirely on the lies of the Bolsheviks and to the rest of their crimes must be added this great crime of killing his greatness and the purity of this fighter for freedom."*

Due to this, he could not forgive himself for *"so misjudg[ing] a man merely on the basis of calumny by his bitter enemies who more than once shamefully betrayed him, and against whom he fought so heroically."* He also notes that it had *"become known to me that a great many Jewish comrades were heart and soul with Makhno and the whole Makhno movement. Amongst them was one whom I knew well personally, Joseph Zutman of Detroit, and*

**Cit.**, pp. 187–9] He also notes that Gallina Makhno, Nestor's wife, would *"slightly raise her voice in indignation when reports of Jew-baiting by **povstantsi** [partisans] were mentioned. These stories were deliberately spread by the Bolsheviki, she averred. No-one could be more severe in punishing such excesses than Nestor. Some of his best comrades are Jews; there are a number of them in the Revolutionary Soviet and in other branches of the army. Few men are so loved and respected by the **povstantsi** as Yossif the Emigrant, who is a Jew, and Makhno's best friend."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 238–9] Both Goldman and Berkman became friends with Makhno during his exile in Paris.

After his exile, Makhno himself spent time refuting allegations of anti-Semitism. Two articles on this subject are contained in **The Struggle Against the State and other Essays**, a collection of Makhno's exile writings. In the article *"The Makhnovshchina and Anti-Semitism"* he recounts various examples of the *"uncompromising line on the anti-Semitism of pogromists"* which the Makhnovists took *"throughout its entire existence."* This was *"because it was a genuinely revolutionary toilers' movement in the Ukraine."* He stressed that *"[a]t no time did the movement make it its business to carry out pogroms against Jews nor did it ever encourage any."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 38 and p. 34] He wrote another article (called *"To the Jews of All Countries"*):

> *"In my first 'Appeal to Jews, published in the French libertarian newspaper, **Le Libertaire**, I asked Jews in general, which is to say the bourgeois and the socialist ones as well as the 'anarchist' ones like Yanovsky, who have all spoken of me as a pogromist against Jews and labelled as anti-Semitic the liberation movement of the Ukrainian peasants and workers of which I was the leader, to detail to me the specific facts instead of blathering vacuously away: just where and just when did I*



Both parties were, at best, neutral to the Makhnovists and anarchists, so making it likely that they would influence the city workers against the movement. As Voline noted, the *"absence of a vigorous organised workers' movement which could support the peasant insurgents"* was a disadvantage. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 571]

There were minor successes in both cities. In Alexandrovsk, some trains were got running and a few factories reopened. In Katerinoslav (where the city was under a state of siege and constant bombardment by the Whites), the tobacco workers won a collective agreement that had long been refused and the bakers set themselves to preparing the socialisation of their industry and drawing up plans to feed both the army and the civilian population. Unsurprisingly, the bakers had long been under anarcho-syndicalist influence. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 124]

Clearly, whenever they could, the Makhnovists practised their stated goals of working-class self-management and supported the organisational structures to ensure the control of and participation in the social revolution by the toiling masses. Equally, when they liberated towns and cities they did not impose their own power upon the working-class population but rather urged it to organise itself by setting up soviets, unions and other forms of working-class power. They urged workers to organise self-management of industry. True to the anarchist vision of a free society, they advocated and practised freedom of assembly, speech and organisation. In the words of historian Christopher Reed:

> *"Makhno's Insurgent Army ... was the quintessence of a self-administered, people's revolutionary army. It arose from the peasants, it was composed of peasants, it handed power to the peasants. It encouraged the growth of communes, co-operatives and soviets but distrusted all permanent elites attempting to take hold within them. It would be foolish to think that Makhno was supported by every peasant or*

*that he and his followers could not, on occasions, direct their cruelty towards dissidents within their own ranks, but, on the whole, the movement perhaps erred on the side of being too self-effacing, of handing too much authority to the population at key moments."* [**From Tsar to Soviets**, p. 260]

As such, Makhnovist practice matched its theory. This can be said of few social movements and it is to their credit that this is the case.

## 8 Weren't the Makhnovists just Kulaks?

According to Trotsky (and, of course, repeated by his followers), *"Makhno created a cavalry of peasants who supplied their own horses. These were not the downtrodden village poor whom the October revolution first awakened, but the strong and well-fed peasants who were afraid of losing what they had. The anarchist ideas of Makhno (ignoring of the state, non-recognition of the central power) corresponded to the spirit of this kulak cavalry as nothing else could."* He argued that the Makhnovist struggle was not the anarchist struggle against the state and capitalism, but rather *"a struggle of the infuriated petty property owner against the proletarian dictatorship."* The Makhno movement, he stressed, was just an example of the *"convulsions of the peasant petty bourgeoisie which desired, of course, to liberate itself from capital but at the same time did not consent to subordinate itself to the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80, p. 89 and pp. 89–90]

Unfortunately for those who use this kind of argument against the Makhnovists, it fails to stand up to any kind of scrutiny. Ignoring the sophistry of equating the Bolshevik party's dictatorship with the "dictatorship of the proletariat," we can easily refute Trotsky's somewhat spurious argument concerning the background of the Makhnovists.



*the working people who refuse to submit to their arbitrary dictatorship. Every insurgent should arrest and send to the army staff all representatives of such expeditionary corps, Extraordinary Commissions and other institutions which oppress and subjugate the people; if they resist, they should be shot on the spot. As for any violence done to peaceful workers of whatever nationality — such acts are unworthy of any revolutionary insurgent, and the perpetrator of such acts will be punished by death."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 218]

It should also be noted that the chairmen of three Makhnovist regional congresses were Jewish. The first and second congresses had a Jewish chairman [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 293], while Voline was the chair for the fourth one held at Aleksandrovsk. Similarly, one of the heads of the army's counter-espionage section was Jewish. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212] Little wonder both Arshinov and Voline stress that an important role was played by Jews within the movement.

The Jewish American anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman were also in Russia and the Ukraine during the revolution. Between 1920 and 1921, they were in contact with anarchists involved with the Makhnovists and were concerned to verify what they had heard about the movement from Bolshevik and other sources. Berkman recounts meeting the Jewish anarchist Yossif the Emigrant (shot by the Bolsheviks in late 1920). Yossif stated that *"Nestor is merciless toward those guilty of Jew-baiting. Most of you have read his numerous proclamations against pogroms, and you know how severely he punishes such things."* He stressed that any stories of atrocities and pogroms committed by the Makhnovists were *"lies wilfully spread by the Bolsheviks"* who *"hate Nestor worse than they do Wrangel."* For Yossif, *"Makhno represents the real spirit of October."* [quoted by Berkman, **Op.**

*shake the very foundation of our class struggle — the solidarity and unity of all workers — you must move against conscious and unconscious counter-revolutionaries who endanger the emancipation of the working people from capital and authority. Your revolutionary duty is to stifle all nationalist persecution by dealing ruthlessly with all instigators of anti-Semitic pogroms.*

*"The path toward the emancipation of the workers can be reached by the union of all the workers of the world."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, 215–7]

Arshinov also quotes an order issued by Makhno to *"all revolutionary insurgents without exception"* which states, in part, that the *"goal of our revolutionary army, and of every insurgent participating in it, is an honourable struggle for the full liberation of the Ukrainian workers from all oppression."* This was *"why every insurgent should constantly keep in mind that there is no place among us for those who, under the cover of the revolutionary insurrection, seek to satisfy their desires for personal profit, violence and plunder at the expense of the peaceful Jewish population."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 217–8]

Unsurprisingly, as an anarchist, Makhno presents a class analysis of the problem of racism, arguing as follows:

*"Every revolutionary insurgent should remember that his personal enemies as well as the enemies of all the people are the rich bourgeoisie, regardless of whether they be Russian, or Jewish, or Ukrainian. The enemies of the working people are also those who protect the unjust bourgeois regime, i.e., the Soviet Commissars, the members of repressive expeditionary corps, the Extraordinary Commissions which go through the cities and villages torturing*



Firstly, however, we should clarify what is meant by the term *"kulak."* According to one set of Trotskyist editors, it was *"popularly used to refer to well-to-do peasants who owned land and hired poor peasants to work it."* [*"glossary,"* Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 146] The term itself derives from the Russian for *"fist,"* with appropriate overtones of grasping and meanness. In other words, a rural small-scale capitalist (employer of wage labour and often the renter of land and loaner of money as well) rather than a well-off peasant as such. Trotsky, however, muddies the water considerably by talking about the *"peasant petty bourgeoisie"* as well. Given that a peasant **is** *"petty"* (i.e. petit) bourgeois (i.e. own and use their own means of production), Trotsky is blurring the lines between rural capitalist (kulak) and the middle peasantry, as occurred so often under Bolshevik rule.

Secondly, we could just point to the eyewitness accounts of the anarchists Arshinov and Voline. Both stress that the Makhno movement was a mass revolutionary movement of the peasant and working poor in the Southern Ukraine. Arshinov states that after Denikin's troops had been broken in 1919, the Makhnovists *"literally swept through villages, towns and cities like an enormous broom"* and the *"returned **pomeshchiks** [landlords], the **kulaks** , the police, the priests"* were destroyed, so refuting the *"the myth spread by the Bolsheviks about the so-called **kulak** character of the Makhnovshchina."* Ironically, he states that *"wherever the Makhnovist movement developed, the **kulaks** sought the protection of the Soviet authorities, and found it there."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 145] Yossif the Emigrant, another anarchist active in the movement, told anarchist Alexander Berkman that while there was a *"kulak"* element within it, *"the great majority are not of that type."* [quoted by Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 187] According to Gallina Makhno (Makhno's wife), when entering a town or village it was *"always Makhno's practice to compel the rich peasants, the **kulaki** , to give up their surplus wealth, which was then divided*

*among the poor, Makhno keeping a share for his army. Then he would call a meeting of the villagers, address them on the purposes of the **povstantsi** [partisan] movement, and distribute his literature."* [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 149]

However, this would be replying to Trotsky's assertions with testimony which was obviously pro-Makhnovist. As such, we need to do more than this, we need to refute Trotsky's assertions in depth, drawing on as many non-anarchist sources and facts as possible.

The key to refuting Trotsky's argument that the Makhnovists were just kulaks is to understand the nature of rural life before and during 1917. Michael Malet estimates that in 1917, the peasantry could be divided into three broad categories. About 40 percent could no longer make a living off their land or had none, another 40 per cent who could make ends meet, except in a bad year, and 20 per cent who were relatively well off, with a fraction at the very top who were very well off. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 117] Assuming that *"kulak"* simply meant *"rich"* or *"well-off"* peasant, then Trotsky is arguing that the Makhnovist movement represented and was based on this top 20 per cent. However, if we take the term *"kulak"* to mean *"small rural capitalist"* (i.e. employer of wage labour) then this figure would be substantially smaller as few within this group would employ hired labour or rent land. In fact, the percentage of peasant households in Russia employing permanent wage-labour was 3.3% in 1917, falling to 1% in 1920. [Teodor Shanin, **The Awkward Class**, p. 171]

In 1917, the peasants all across the Russian Empire took back the land stolen by the landlords. This lead to two developments. Firstly, there was a *"powerful levelling effect"* in rural life. [Shanin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 159] Secondly, the peasants would only support those who supported their aspirations for land reform (which was why the Bolsheviks effectively stole the Socialist-Revolutionary land policy in 1917). The



*the clear and splendid foundation of the revolution appeared indelible dark blots caused by the parched blood of poor Jewish martyrs who now, as before, continue to be innocent victims of the criminal reaction, of the class struggle ... Shameful acts are being carried out. Anti-Semitic pogroms are taking place.*

*"Peasants, workers and insurgents! You know that the workers of all nationalities — Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Armenians, etc. — are equally imprisoned in the abyss of poverty. You know that thousands of Jewish girls, daughters of the people, are sold and dishonoured by capital, the same as women of other nationalities. You know how many honest and valiant revolutionary Jewish fighters have given their lives for freedom in Russia during our whole liberation movement... The revolution and the honour of workers obliges all of us to declare as loudly as possible that we make war on the same enemies: on capital and authority, which oppress all workers equally, whether they be Russian, Polish, Jewish, etc. We must proclaim everywhere that our enemies are exploiters and oppressors of various nationalities: the Russian manufacturer, the German iron magnate, the Jewish banker, the Polish aristocrat .... The bourgeoisie of all countries and all nationalities is united in a bitter struggle against the revolution, against the labouring masses of the whole world and of all nationalities.*

*"Peasants, workers and insurgents! At this moment when the international enemy — the bourgeoisie of all countries — hurries to the Russian revolution to create nationalist hatred among the mass of workers in order to distort the revolution and to*

> *"Anti-Semitism exists in Russia as well as in many other countries. In Russia, and to some extent in the Ukraine, it is not a result of the revolutionary epoch or of the insurrectionary movement, but is on the contrary a vestige of the past. The Makhnovists always fought it resolutely in words as well as deeds. During the entire period of the movement, they issued numerous publications calling on the masses to struggle against this evil. It can firmly be stated that in the struggle against anti-Semitism in the Ukraine and beyond its borders, their accomplishment was enormous."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 211–215]

Arshinov then goes on to quote an appeal published by Makhnovists together with anarchists referring to an anti-Semitic incident which took place in the spring of 1919. It is called **WORKERS, PEASANTS AND INSURGENTS FOR THE OPPRESSED, AGAINST THE OPPRESSORS — ALWAYS!**:

> *"During the painful days of reaction, when the situation of the Ukrainian peasants was especially difficult and seemed hopeless, you were the first to rise as fearless and unconquerable fighters for the great cause of the liberation of the working masses... This was the most beautiful and joyful moment in the history of our revolution. You marched against the enemy with weapons in your hands as conscious revolutionaries, guided by the great idea of freedom and equality... But harmful and criminal elements succeeded in insinuating themselves into your ranks. And the revolutionary songs, songs of brotherhood and of the approaching liberation of the workers, began to be disrupted by the harrowing cries of poor Jews who were being tormented to death... On*



Ukraine was no different. In 1917 the class structure in the countryside changed when the Hulyai Pole peasants were amongst the first to seize the landlords' land. In August 1917 Makhno assembled all the landed gentry (*"**pomeshchiks**"*) of the region *"and made them give him all the documents relating to lands and buildings."* After making an exact inventory of all this property and presenting a report to the local and then district congress of soviets, he *"proceeded to equalise the rights of the **pomeshchiks** and **kulaks** with those of the poor peasant labourers in regard to the use of the land ... the congress decided to let the **pomeshchiks** and **kulaks** have a share of the land, as well as tools and livestock, equal to that of the labourers."* Several other peasant congresses nearby followed this example and adopted the same measure. [Peter Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 53–4]

Most of this land, tools and livestock was distributed to poor peasants, the rest was used to set up voluntary communes where the peasants themselves (and not the state) self-managed the land. Thus the peasants' *"economic conditions in the region of the Makhno movement were greatly improved at the expense of the landlords, the church, monasteries, and the richest peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214] This redistribution was based on the principle that every peasant was entitled to as much land as their family could cultivate without the use of hired labour. The abolition of wage labour in the countryside was also the method the anarchists were to use in Spain to divide up the land some 20 years later.

We should also note that the Makhnovist policy of land reform based on the abolition of wage labour was, as we noted in section 7, the position agreed at the second regional congress called in 1919. The Makhnovists specifically argued with regards to the kulaks:

> *"We are sure that ... the kulak elements of the village will be pushed to one side by the very course of*

*events. The toiling peasantry will itself turn effortlessly on the kulaks, first by adopting the kulak's surplus land for general use, then naturally drawing the kulak elements into the social organisation."*
[cited by Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 118–9]

As such, when Trotsky talks about the *"downtrodden village poor whom the October revolution first awakened,"* he is wrong. In the area around Hulyai Pole it was **not** the October revolution which *"first awakened"* them into action, it was the activities of Makhno and the anarchists during the summer and autumn of 1917 which had done that (or, more correctly, it was their activities which aided this process as the poor peasants and landless workers needed no encouragement to expropriate the landlords).

Needless to say, this land redistribution reinforced Makhno's popularity with the people and was essential for the army's later popularity and its ability to depend on the peasants for support. However, the landlords and richer kulaks did not appreciate it and, unsurprisingly, tried to crush the movement when they could. Once the Austro-Germans invaded, the local rich took the opportunity to roll back the social revolution and the local **pomeshchiks** and **kulaks** formed a *"special volunteer detachment"* to fight Makhno once he had returned from exile in July 1918. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

This system of land reform did not seek to divide the village. Indeed, the Makhnovist approach is sometimes called the *"united village"* theory. Rather than provoke unnecessary and damaging conflict behind the frontlines, land reform would be placed in the hands of the village community, which would ensure that even the kulaks would have a fair stake in the post-revolutionary society as everyone would have as much land as they could till without using hired labour. The Bolshevik policy, as we will see, aimed at artificially imposing "class con-



*resent an enormous danger for the Jewish population and for the entire revolution if one did not oppose them quickly and resolutely.*

*"When the insurrectionary army retreated toward Uman in the summer of 1919, there were several cases when insurgents plundered Jewish homes. When the insurrectionary army examined these cases, it was learned that one group of four or five men was involved in all these incidents — men who had earlier belonged to Hryhoriyiv's detachments and who had been incorporated into the Makhnovist army after Hryhoriyiv was shot. This group was disarmed and discharged immediately. Following this, all the combatants who had served under Hryhoriyiv were discharged from the Makhnovist army as an unreliable element whose re-education was not possible in view of the unfavorable conditions and the lack of time. Thus we see how the Makhnovists viewed anti-Semitism. Outbursts of anti-Semitism in various parts of the Ukraine had no relation to the Makhnovshchina.*

*"Wherever the Jewish population was in contact with the Makhnovists, it found in them its best protectors against anti-Semitic incidents. The Jewish population of Hulyai Pole, Aleksandrovsk, Berdyansk, Mariupol, as well as all the Jewish agricultural colonies scattered throughout the Donets region, can themselves corroborate the fact that they always found the Makhnovists to be true revolutionary friends, and that due to the severe and decisive measures of the Makhno visits, the anti-Semitic leanings of the counter-revolutionary forces in this region were promptly squashed.*

*Uspenovka. These peasants were not part of the insurrectionary army. However, the Makhnovists felt it was impossible to leave this crime unpunished, and they shot the murderers. It was later established that this event and other attempts of this nature had been carried out at the instigation of Denikin's agents, who had managed to infiltrate the region and had sought by these means to prepare an atmosphere favourable for the entry of Denikin's troops into the Ukraine.*

*"On May 4th or 5th, 1919, Makhno and a few commanders hurriedly left the front and went to Hulyai Pole, where they were awaited by the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary of the Republic, L. Kamenev, who had arrived from Khar'kov with other representatives of the Soviet government. At the Verkhnii Tokmak station, Makhno saw a poster with the words: 'Death to Jews, Save the Revolution, Long Live Batko Makhno.'*

*"'Who put up that poster?' Makhno asked.*

*"He learned that the poster had been put up by an insurgent whom Makhno knew personally, a soldier who had taken part in the battle against Denikin's troops, a person who was in general decent. He presented himself immediately and was shot on the spot.*

*"Makhno continued the journey to Hulyai Pole. During the rest of the day and during his negotiations with the Plenipotentiary of the Republic, he could not free himself from the influence of this event. He realised that the insurgent had been cruelly dealt with, but he also knew that in conditions of war and in view of Denikin's advance, such posters could rep-*



flict" upon the villages from without and was a disaster as it was totally alien to the actual socio-economic situation. Unsurprisingly, peasant communities **as a whole** rose up against the Bolsheviks all across Russia.

As such, the claim that the Makhnovists were simply *"kulaks"* is false as it fails to, firstly, acknowledge the actual pre-revolutionary composition of the peasantry and, secondly, to understand the social-revolution that had happened in the region of Hulyai Pole in 1917 and, thirdly, totally ignores the actual Makhnovist position on land reform. As Michael Malet argues, the Bolsheviks *"totally misconstrued the nature of the Makhno movement. It was not a movement of kulaks, but of the broad mass of the peasants, especially the poor and middle peasants."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 122]

This was sometimes acknowledged by Bolsheviks themselves. IAkovlev acknowledged in 1920 that in 1919 Makhno *"was a real peasant idol, an expression of all peasant spontaneity against … Communists in the cities and simultaneously against city capitalists and landowners. In the Makhno movement it is difficult to distinguish where the poor peasant begins [and] the 'kulak' ends. It was a spontaneous peasant movement …. In the village we had no foothold, there was not one element with which we could join that would be our ally in the struggle against the bandits [sic!]."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

According to a Soviet author present at the Makhnovist regional congresses on January 23 and February 12: *"In 1919 when I asked the chairman of the two Congresses (a Jewish farmer) whether the 'kulaks' were allowed to participate in the Congress, he angrily responded: 'When will you finally stop talking about kulaks? Now we have no kulaks among us: everybody is tilling as much land as he wishes and as much as he can.'"* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 293]

According to Christian Rakovskii, the Bolshevik ruler of Ukraine, *"three-fourths of the membership of the [partisan] bands were poor peasants."* He presented a highly original

and inventive explanation of this fact by arguing that *"rich peasants stayed in the village and paid poor ones to fight. Poor peasants were the hired army of the kulaks."* [Vladimir N. Brovkin, **Behind the Front the Lines of the Civil War**, p. 112 and p. 328]

Even Trotsky (himself the son of a rich peasant!) let the cat out of the bag in 1919:

> *"The liquidation of Makhno does not mean the end of the Makhnovschyna, which has its roots in the ignorant popular masses."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 122]

Ultimately, all sources (including Bolshevik ones) accept that in the autumn of 1919 (at the very least) Makhno's support was overwhelming and came from all sections of the population.

Even ignoring the fact there was a social revolution and the eye-witness Bolshevik accounts (including Trotsky's!) which contradict Trotsky's assertions, Trotsky can be faulted for other reasons.

The most important issue is simply that the Makhnovist movement could not have survived four years if (at best) 20 per cent of the population supported it. As Christopher Reed notes, when the Makhnovists were *"in retreat they would abandon their weapons and merge with the local population. The fact that they were able to succeed shows how closely they were linked with the ordinary peasants because such tactics made Makhno's men very vulnerable to informers. There were very few examples of betrayal."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 260] If Makhno's social base was as weak as claimed there would have been no need for the Bolsheviks to enter into alliances with him, particularly in the autumn of 1920 when the Makhnovists held no significant liberated area. Even after the defeat of Wrangel and the subsequent Bolshevik betrayal and repression, Makhno's mass base allowed



*insurgent army, the Jewish colonies sent from their midst a large number of volunteers.*

*"In the army of the Makhnovist insurgents there was an exclusively Jewish artillery battery which was covered by an infantry detachment, also made up of Jews. This battery, commanded by the Jewish insurgent Shneider, heroically defended Hulyai Pole from Denikin's troops in June, 1919, and the entire battery perished there, down to the last man and the last shell.*

*"In the extremely rapid succession of events after the uprising of 1918–19, there were obviously individuals who were hostile to Jews, but these individuals were not the products of the insurrection; they were products of Russian life. These individuals did not have any importance in the movement as a whole. If people of this type took part in acts directed against Jews, they were quickly and severely punished by the revolutionary insurgents.*

*"We described earlier the speed and determination with which the Makhnovists executed Hryhoriyiv and his staff, and we mentioned that one of the main reasons for this execution was their participation in pogroms of Jews.*

*"We can mention other events of this nature with which we are familiar.*

*"On May 12, 1919, several Jewish families — 20 people in all — were killed in the Jewish agricultural colony of Gor'kaya, near Aleksandrovsk. The Makhnovist staff immediately set up a special commission to investigate this event. This commission discovered that the murders had been committed by seven peasants of the neighbouring village of*

*movement. One of the organisers of the 'Nabat' Confederation, and later a member of its secretariat.*

*"**Ya. Alyi (Sukhovol'sky)** — worker, and member of the army's cultural and educational section. In the Tsarist period he was condemned to forced labor for political activity. One of the organisers of the 'Nabat' Confederation and a member of its secretariat.*

*"We could add many more names to the long list of Jewish revolutionaries who took part in different areas of the Makhnovist movement, but we will not do this, because it would endanger their security.*

*"At the heart of the revolutionary insurrection, the Jewish working population was among brothers. The Jewish agricultural colonies scattered throughout the districts of Mariupol, Berdyansk, Aleksandrovsk and elsewhere, actively participated in the regional assemblies of peasants, workers and insurgents; they sent delegates there, and also to the regional Revolutionary Military Council.*

*"Following certain anti-Semitic incidents which occurred in the region in February, 1919, Makhno proposed to all the Jewish colonies that they organise their self-defence and he furnished the necessary guns and ammunition to all these colonies. At the same time Makhno organised a series of meetings in the region where he appealed to the masses to struggle against anti-Semitism.*

*"The Jewish working population, in turn, expressed profound solidarity and revolutionary brotherhood toward the revolutionary insurrection. In answer to the call made by the Revolutionary Military Council to furnish voluntary combatants to the Makhnovist*



him to remain active for months. Indeed, it was only when the peasants themselves had become exhausted in 1921 due to worsening economic conditions and state repression, were the Makhnovists finally forced into exile.

In the attempt to *"eradicate his influence in the countryside"* the Bolsheviks *"by weight of numbers and consistent ruthlessness they achieved a partial success."* This was achieved by state terrorism:

> *"On the occupation of a village by the Red Army the **Cheka** would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovist supporters; an amenable Soviet would be set up; officials would be appointed or imported to organise the poor peasants … and three or four Red militia men left as armed support for the new village bosses."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 292]

Moreover, in these *"military operations the Bolsheviks shot all prisoners. The Makhnovists shot all captured officers unless the Red rank and file strongly interceded for them. The rank and file were usually sent home, though a number volunteered for service with the Insurgents. Red Army reports complain of poor morale … The Reds used a number of Lettish and Chinese troops to decrease the risk of fraternisation."* [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 293] If the Makhnovists were made up of kulaks, why would the Bolsheviks fear fraternisation? Equally, if the Makhnovists were "kulaks" then how could they have such an impact on Red Army troops (who were mostly poor peasants)? After all, Trotsky had been complaining that "Makhnovism" had been infecting nearby Red Army troops and in August 1919 was arguing that it was *"still a poison which has infected backward units in the Ukrainian army."* In December 1919, he noted that *"disintegration takes place in unstable units of our army when they came into contact with Makhno's forces."* It seems unlikely that a movement made up of "kulaks" could have such an impact. Moreover, as Trotsky noted, not all Makhnovists were

anarchists, *"some of them wrongly regard themselves as Communists."* Again, why would people who regarded themselves as Communists join a movement of "kulaks"? [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, p. 367, p. 110 and p. 137]

In addition, it seems highly unlikely (to say the least!) that a movement which is alleged to be either made up of or supported by the kulaks could have had a land policy which emphasised and implemented an equal share for the poorest peasantry, not just of land but also of live and dead stock as well as opposing the hiring of labour. This fact is reinforced when we look at the peasant reaction to the Bolshevik (and, presumably, anti-kulak and pro-"downtrodden village poor") land policy. Simply put, their policies resulted in massive peasant unrest directed against the Bolsheviks.

The Bolshevik land decrees of the 5th and 11th of February, 1919, stated that large landlord holdings would become state farms and all stock was to be taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture, with only between one third and one half of the land being reserved for poor peasants. This was *"largely irrelevant, since the peasantry had expected, and in some cases already controlled, all of it. To them, the government was taking away their land, and not seizing it from the landlords, then keeping some of it and handing the rest over to its rightful owners."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 134] Thus the land was to expropriated by the state, **not** by the peasants. The result of this policy soon became clear:

> *"The Bolsheviks expropriation policy was countervailed by the peasants' resistance based upon their assumption that 'the land belongs to nobody ... it can be used only by those who care about it, who cultivate it.' Thus the peasants maintained that all the property of the former landlords was now by right their own. This attitude was shared not only by the rich and middle peasants but also the poor and landless, for they all wished to be independent*



*shed light on this question, we will cite here certain documented facts which relate to this subject.*

*"An important role was played in the Makhnovist army by revolutionaries of Jewish origin, many of whom had been sentenced to forced labour for participation in the 1905 revolution, or else had been obliged to emigrate to Western Europe or America. Among others, we can mention:*

*"**Kogan** — vice-president of the central organ of the movement, the Regional Revolutionary Military Council of Hulyai Pole. Kogan was a worker who, for reasons of principle, had left his factory well before the revolution of 1917, and had gone to do agricultural work in a poor Jewish agricultural colony. Wounded at the battle of Peregonovka, near Uman, against the Denikinists, he was seized by them at the hospital at Uman where he was being treated, and, according to witnesses, the Denikinists killed him with sabres.*

*"**L. Zin'kovsky (Zadov)** — head of the army's counter espionage section, and later commander of a special cavalry regiment. A worker who before the 1917 revolution was condemned to ten years of forced labour for political activities. One of the most active militants of the revolutionary insurrection.*

*"**Elena Keller** — secretary of the army's cultural and educational section. A worker who took part in the syndicalist movement in America. One of the organisers of the 'Nabat' Confederation.*

*"**Iosif Emigrant (Gotman)** — Member of the army's cultural and educational section. A worker who took an active part in the Ukrainian anarchist*

## 9 Were the Makhnovists anti-Semitic and pogromists?

No, they were not. Anyone who claims that the Mahnovist movement was anti-Semitic or conducted pogroms against Jews simply shows ignorance or a desire to deceive. As we will show, the Makhnovists were both theoretically and practically opposed to anti-Semitism and progroms.

Unsurprisingly, many Leninists slander the Makhnovists on this score. Trotsky, for example, asserted in 1937 that Makhno's followers expressed *"a militant anti-Semitism."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80] Needless to say, the Trotskyist editors of the book in question did not indicate that Trotsky was wrong in the accusation. In this way a slander goes unchecked and becomes "accepted" as being true. As the charge of *"militant anti-Semitism"* is a serious one, so it is essential that we (unlike Trotsky) provide evidence to refute it.

To do so we will present a chronological overview of the evidence against it. This will, to some degree, result in some duplication as well as lengthy quotations, however it is unavoidable. We are sorry to labour this point, but this allegation is sadly commonplace and it is essential to refute it fully.

Unsurprisingly, Arshinov's 1923 account of the movement takes on the allegations that the Makhnovists were anti-Semitic. He presents extensive evidence to show that the Makhnovists opposed anti-Semitism and pogroms. It is worth quoting him at length:

> *"In the Russian press as well as abroad, the Makhnovshchina was often pictured as a very restricted guerrilla movement, foreign to ideas of brotherhood and international solidarity, and even tainted with anti-Semitism. Nothing could be more criminal than such slanders. In order to*



> *farmers. The poorer the areas, the more dissatisfied were the peasants with the Bolshevik decrees.*
>
> *"Thus Communist agricultural policy and terrorism brought about a strong reaction against the new Bolshevik regime. By the middle of 1919, all peasants, rich and poor, distrusted the Bolsheviks."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156]

The Bolshevik inspired Poor Peasant Committees were *"associated with this disastrous policy, were discredited, and their reintroduction would need the aid of troops."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] The Makhnovists, in contrast, did not impose themselves onto the villages, nor did they attempt to tell the peasants what to do and how to divide the land. Rather they advocated the formation of Free Soviets through which these decisions could be made. This, along with their support for land reform, helped win them mass support.

After evacuating the Ukraine in mid-1919 due to the success of Denikin's counter-revolution, the Ukrainian Communists took time to mull over what had happened. The Central Committee's November 1919 resolution on the Ukraine *"gave top priority to the middle peasant — so often and so conveniently lumped in together with the kulak and dealt with accordingly — the transfer of landlord land to the poor peasants with only minimum exceptions for state farms."* These points were the basis of the new Ukrainian land law of 5th of February, 1920. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] This new law reflected long standing Makhnovist theory **and** practice. Therefore, the changing nature of Bolshevik land policy in the Ukraine indicates that Trotsky's claims are false. The very fact that the Bolsheviks had to adjust their policies in line with Makhnovist theory indicates that the later appealed to the middle and poor peasants.

Equally, it seems strange that the *"kulaks"* who apparently dominated the movement should have let themselves be led by poor peasants and workers. Voline presents a list of some

of the participants of the movement and the vast majority are either peasants or workers. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 688–91] As historian Michael Palij notes, *"[a]lmost to a man, they [the Makhnovist leadership] were of poor peasant origin, with little formal education."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 254] Exceptions to the general rule were usually workers. Most were Anarchists or Socialist-Revolutionaries. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 254–62]

Of course, it can be argued that the leadership of a movement need not come from the class which it claims to lead. The leadership of the Bolsheviks, for example, had very few actual proletarians within it. However, it seems unlikely that a class would select as its leaders members of the population it oppressed! Equally, it seems as unlikely that poor peasants and workers would let themselves lead a movement of kulaks, whose aims would be alien to theirs. After all, poor peasants would seek land reform while kulaks would view this as a threat to their social position. As can be seen from the Makhnovist land policy, they argued for (and implemented) radical land reform, placing the land into the hands of peasants who worked the land without hiring labour (see section 7)

As regards Trotsky's argument that the Makhnovists had to be kulaks because they originally formed a cavalry unit, it is easy to refute. Makhno himself was the son of poor peasants, an agricultural labourer and a worker in a factory. He was able to ride a horse, so why could other poor peasants not do so? Ultimately, it simply shows that Trotsky knew very little of Ukrainian peasant life and society.

Given that the Bolshevik government was meant to be a "worker-peasant" power, it seems strange that Trotsky dismisses the concerns of the peasantry so. He should have remembered that peasant uprisings against the Bolshevik government occurred constantly under the Bolsheviks, forcing them (eventually) to, first, recognise the false nature of their peasant policies in 1919 and, second, to introduce the NEP in 1921. As such, it seems somewhat ironic for Trotsky to attack



the Makhnovists for not following flawed Bolshevik ideology as regards the peasantry!

The Bolsheviks, as Marxists, saw the peasants as "petit bourgeoisie" and uninterested in the revolution except as a means to grab their own plot of land. Their idea of land collectivisation was limited to state ownership. The initial Bolshevik land strategy can be summed up as mobilising the poor peasantry against the rest on the one hand and mobilising the city worker against the peasants (through forced grain confiscation on the other). The lack of knowledge of peasant life was the basis of this policy, which was abandoned in 1919 when it was soon proven to be totally wrong. Rather than see wealth extremes rise, the 1917 revolution saw a general levelling.

As regards the peasantry, here as elsewhere the Bolsheviks claimed their strategy was the objectively necessary (only possible) one in the circumstances. And here again the Makhnovists demonstrate this to be false, as the Bolsheviks themselves acknowledged in practice by changing their agricultural policies and bringing them closer to the Makhnovist position.

Clearly, both factually and logically, Trotsky's arguments are false. Ultimately, like most Bolsheviks, Trotsky uses the term *"kulak"* as a meaningless term of abuse, with no relation to the actual class structure of peasant life. It simply means a peasant opposed to the Bolsheviks rather than an actual social strata. Essentially, he is using the standard Leninist technique of specifying a person's class (or ideas) based on whether they subscribe to (or simply follow without question) Leninist ideology (see section H.2.12 for further discussion of this). This explains why the Makhnovists went from being heroic revolutionaries to kulak bandits (and back again!) depending on whether their activity coincided with the needs of Bolshevik power or not. Expediency is not a sound base to build a critique, particularly one based simply on assertions like Trotsky's.

*ing it over to the peasants."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60] In fact, the Bolsheviks did **not** try to implement the *"socialisation"* of land. Rather, they tried to **nationalise** the land and place it under state control — a radically different concept. Indeed, it was the Makhnovists who argued that the *"land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 273] The Bolsheviks, in contrast, initially *"decreed that all lands formerly belonging to the landlords should be expropriated and transformed into state farms."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] The peasants quite rightly thought that this just replaced one set of landlords with another, stealing the land which rightfully belonged to them.

After distorting the source material by selective quoting, Rees does it again when he argues that *"by the spring of 1920 they [the Bolsheviks] had reversed the policy towards the peasants and instituted Committees of Poor Peasants, these 'hurt Makhno ... his heart hardened and he sometimes ordered executions.' This policy helped the Bolshevik ascendancy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60]

Rees quotes Palij as evidence. To refute his argument we need simply quote the same pages:

> *"Although they [the Bolsheviks] modified their agricultural policy by introducing on February 5, 1920, a new land law, distributing the former landlords', state and church lands among the peasants, they did not succeed in placating them because of the requisitions, which the peasants considered outright robbery ... Subsequently the Bolsheviks decided to introduce class warfare into the villages. A decree was issued on May 19, 1920, establishing 'Committees of the Poor' ... Authority in the villages was delegated to the committees,*



selves. And the idea that Makhno had *"protectors"* in any imperialist nation is a joke, which deserves only laughter as a response!

It should be noted that it is *"agreed that the initiative for joint action against Wrangel came from the Makhnovites."* This was ignored by the Bolsheviks until after *"Wrangel started his big offensive"* in September 1920 [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 294 and p. 295]

So while the Bolsheviks claimed that the Makhnovists had made a pact with General Wrangel, the facts are that Makhnovists fought the Whites with all their energy. Indeed, they considered the Whites so great a threat to the revolution they even agreed to pursue a pact with the Bolsheviks, who had betrayed them twice already and had subjected both them and the peasantry to repression. As such, it could be argued that the Bolsheviks were the only counter-revolutionaries the Makhnovists can be accurately accused of collaborating with.

Every historian who has studied the movement has refuted claims that the Makhnovist movement made any alliance with the counter-revolutionary White forces. For example, Michael Palij notes that Denikin *"was the main enemy that Makhno fought, stubbornly and uncompromising, from the end of 1918 to the end of 1919. Its social and anti-Ukrainian policies greatly antagonised all segments of Ukrainian society. The result of this was an increased resistance to the Volunteer Army and its regime and a substantial strengthening of the Makhno movement."* He also notes that after several months of *"hard fighting"* Denikin's troops *"came to regard Makhno's army as their most formidable enemy."* Makhno's conflict with Wrangel was equally as fierce and *"[a]lthough Makhno had fought both the Bolsheviks and Wrangel, his contribution to the final defeat of the latter was essential, as is proved by the efforts of both sides to have him as an ally."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 177, p. 202 and p. 228] According to Footman, Makhno *"remained to the end the implacable enemy of the Whites."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 295] Malet just

states the obvious: *"The Makhnovists were totally opposed to the Whites."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140]

We will leave the last word to the considered judgement of the White General Denikin who, in exile, stated that the Makhno movement was *"the most antagonistic to the idea of the White movement."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140]

In summary, the Makhnovists fought the White counter-revolution with all their might, playing a key role in the struggle and defeat of both Denikin and Wrangel. Anyone who claims that they worked with the Whites is either ignorant or a liar.

## 13 What was the relationship of the Bolsheviks to the movement?

The Makhnovists worked with the Bolsheviks in three periods. The first (and longest) was against Denikin after the Red Army had entered the Ukraine after the withdrawal of the Austro-Germans. The second was an informal agreement for a short period after Denikin had been defeated. The third was a formal political and military agreement between October and November 1920 in the struggle against Wrangel. Each period of co-operation ended with Bolshevik betrayal and conflict between the two forces.

As such, the relationship of the Bolsheviks to the Makhnovists was one of, at best, hostile co-operation against a common enemy. Usually, it was one of conflict. This was due, fundamentally, to two different concepts of social revolution. While the Makhnovists, as anarchists, believed in working-class self-management and autonomy, the Bolsheviks believed that only a centralised state structure (headed by themselves) could ensure the success of the revolution. By equating working-class power with Bolshevik party government (and from 1919 onwards, with the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party), they could not help viewing the Makhnovist movement as a threat to their



Obviously, Rees considers the expropriating of the landlords and kulaks as an act which *"did not disturb the age-old class structure of the countryside"*!

Let us not forget that the official Makhnovist position was that the *"holdings of the landlords, the monasteries, and the state, including all livestock and goods, were to be transferred to the peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 151] At the second congress of workers, peasants and insurgents held in February, 1919, it was resolved that *"all land be transferred to the hands of toiling peasants ... according to the norm of equal distribution."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] This meant that every peasant family had as much land as they could cultivate without the use of hired labour. The Makhnovists argued with regards to the kulaks:

> *"We are sure that ... the kulak elements of the village will be pushed to one side by the very course of events. The toiling peasantry will itself turn effortlessly on the kulaks, first by adopting the kulak's surplus land for general use, then naturally drawing the kulak elements into the social organisation."* [cited by Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 118–9]

Thus, just to stress the point, the Makhnovists **did** *"disturb"* the *"age-old class structure of the countryside."*

Clearly, Rees is simply taking nonsense. When he states that Makhnovist land policies *"did not disturb the age-old class structure of the countryside,"* he is simply showing his utter and total disregard for the truth. As the Bolsheviks themselves found out, no mass movement could possibly exist among the peasants without having a positive and levelling land policy. The Makhnovists were no exception.

Rees then states that *"[i]n 1919 the local Bolshevik authorities made mistakes which played into Makhno's hands."* Unsurprisingly enough, he argues that this was because they *"tried to carry through the socialisation of the land, rather than hand-*

> *"Peasants' economic conditions in the region of the Makhno movement were greatly improved at the expense of the estates of the landlords, the church, monasteries, and the richest peasants, but Makhno had not put an end to the agricultural inequalities. His aim was to avoid conflicts within the villages and to maintain a sort of united front of the entire peasantry."* [M. Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

Clearly, Rees has distorted the source material, conveniently missing out the information that Makhno had most definitely "disturbed" the peasant economy at the expense of the rich! And, we are sure that Rees would have a fit if it were suggested that the real basis of Bolshevik support was not their socialism, but their opposition to the war and the Whites!

Amazingly, Rees also somehow manages to forget to mention the peasant revolution which had started in 1917 in his attack against Makhno:

> *"Makhno and his associates brought socio-political issues into the daily life of the people, who in turn supported the expropriation of large estates ... On the eve of open conflict [in late 1917], Makhno assembled all the landowners and rich peasants (kulaks) of the area and took from them all official documents relating to their land, livestock, and equipment. Subsequently an inventory of this property was taken and reported to the people at the session of the local soviet, and then at the regional meeting, It was decided to allow the landlords to share the land, livestock, and tools equally with the peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]



power (see section 14 for a discussion of the political differences and the evolving nature of the Bolshevik's conception of party rule).

Such a perspective ensured that they could only co-operate during periods when the White threat seemed most dangerous. As soon as the threat was defeated or they felt strong enough, the Bolsheviks turned on their former allies instantly. This section discusses each of the Bolshevik betrayals and the subsequent conflicts. As such, it is naturally broken up into three parts, reflecting each of the betrayals and their aftermath.

Michael Malet sums up the usual Bolshevik-Makhnovist relationship by arguing that it *"will be apparent that the aim of the Soviet government from the spring of 1919 onwards was to destroy the Makhnovists as an independent force, preferably killing Makhno himself in the process .. . Given the disastrous nature of Bolshevik land policy ... this was not only unsurprisingly, it was inevitable."* He also adds that the *"fact that Makhno had a socio-political philosophy to back up his arguments only made the Bolsheviks more determined to break his hold over the south-east Ukraine, as soon as they realised that Nestor would not surrender that hold voluntarily."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 128 and p. 129]

The first betrayal occurred in June 1919. The Makhnovists had been integrated with the Red Army in late January 1919, retaining their internal organisation (including the election of commanders) and their black flags. With the Red Army they fought against Denikin's Volunteer Army. Before the arrival of Red forces in their region and the subsequent pact, the Makhnovists had organised a successful regional insurgent, peasant and worker congress which had agreed to call a second for February 12th. This second congress set up a Revolutionary Military Soviet to implement the decisions of this and following congresses. This congress (see section 7) passed an anti-Bolshevik resolution, which urged *"the peasants and workers to watch vigilantly the actions of the Bolshevik regime that cause a real danger to the worker-peasant*

*revolution.*" Such actions included the monopolisation of the revolution, centralising power and overriding local soviets, repressing anarchists and Left Socialist Revolutionaries and *"stifling any manifestation of revolutionary expression."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

This change from the recent welcome was simply the behaviour of the Bolsheviks since their arrival. The (unelected) Ukrainian Bolshevik government had tried to apply the same tactics as its Russian equivalent, particularly as regards the peasants. In addition, the Bolshevik land policy (as indicated in section 8) was a complete disaster, alien to the ideas and needs of the peasants and, combined with grain requisitioning, alienating them.

The third congress was held on the 10th of April. By this time, Communist agricultural policy and terrorism had alienated all the peasantry, who *"rich and poor alike"* were *"united in their opposition"* to the Bolsheviks. [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Indeed, the *"poorer the areas, the more dissatisfied were the peasants with the Bolshevik decrees."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] As we indicated in section 7, the third congress was informed that it was *"counter-revolutionary"* and banned by the Bolshevik commander Dybenko, provoking a famous reply which stressed the right of a revolutionary people to apply the gains of that revolution when they see fit. It is worth re-quoting the relevant section:

> *"Can there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves? ...*
>
> *"Is it permissible, is it admissible, that they should come to the country to establish laws of violence, to subjugate a people who have just overthrown all lawmakers and all laws?*



more socialist than the militarised Bolshevik state capitalist system.

Secondly, Rees fails to understand the nature of anarchism. Anarchism argues that it is up to working class people to organise their own activities. This meant that, ultimately, it was up to the railway workers **themselves** (in association with other workers) to organise their own work and industry. Rather than being imposed by a few leaders, **real** socialism can only come from below, built by working people, through their own efforts and own class organisations. Anarchists can suggest ideas and solutions, but ultimately its up to workers (and peasants) to organise their own affairs. Thus, rather than being a source of condemnation, Makhno's comments should be considered as praiseworthy as they were made in a spirit of equality and were based on encouraging workers' self-management.

Ultimately, the best reply to Rees is simply the fact that after holding a *"general conference of the workers of the city"* at which it was *"proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations"* based on *"the principles of self-management,"* the *"[r]ailroad workers took the first step in this direction"* by *"form[ing] a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

Even more amazing (if that is possible) is Rees' account of the revolution in the countryside. Rees argues that the *"real basis of Makhno's support was not his anarchism, but his opposition to grain requisitioning and his determination not to disturb the peasant economy"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] and quotes Palij as follows:

> *"Makhno had not put an end to the agricultural inequalities. His aim was to avoid conflicts with the villages and to maintain a sort of united front of the entire peasantry."* [M. Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

However, here is the actual context of the (corrected) quote:

Clearly, the Makhnovists **did** create a *"programme that would appeal to the workers."* However, it is true that the Makhnovists did fail win over more than a minority of workers. This may have been due to the fact that the Makhnovists only freed two cities, both for short periods of time. As Paul Avrich notes, "he found little time to implement his economic programs." [**Anarchist Portraits**, p. 121] Given how Rees bends over backwards to justify Bolshevik policies in terms of *"objective factors,"* it is significant that in his discussion of the Makhnovists such *"objective factors"* as time fail to get a mention!

Thus Rees's attempt to paint the Makhnovists as anti-working class fails. While this is the core of his dismissal of them as a possible *"libertarian alternative to the Bolsheviks,"* the facts do not support his assertions. He gives the example of Makhno's advice to railway workers in Aleksandrovsk *"who had not been paid for many weeks"* that they should *"simply charge passengers a fair price and so generate their own wages."* He states that this *"advice aimed at reproducing the petit-bourgeois patterns of the countryside."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] Two points can be raised to this argument.

Firstly, we should highlight the Bolshevik (and so, presumably, *"proletarian"*) patterns imposed on the railway workers. Trotsky simply *"plac[ed] the railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops under martial law"* and *"summarily ousted"* the leaders of the railwaymen's trade union when they objected." The Central Administrative Body of Railways (Tsektran) he created was run by him *"along strictly military and bureaucratic lines."* In other words, he applied his ideas on the *"militarisation of labour"* in full. [M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 67] Compared to the Bolshevik pattern, only an ideologue could suggest that Makhno's advice (and it was advice, not a decree imposed from above, as was Trotsky's) can be considered worse. Indeed, by being based on workers' self-management it was infinitely



> *"Does there exist a law according to which a revolutionary has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass, of which he calls himself the defender, simply because this mass has taken the good things which the revolution promised them, freedom and equality, without his permission?*
>
> *"Should the mass of revolutionary people perhaps be silent when such a revolutionary takes away the freedom which they have just conquered?*
>
> *"Do the laws of the revolution order the shooting of a delegate because he believes he ought to carry out the mandate given him by the revolutionary mass which elected him?*
>
> *"Whose interests should the revolutionary defend; those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103]

After the 3rd congress, the Bolsheviks started to turn against Makhno:

> *"It was now that favourable mention of Makhno ceased to appear in the Soviet Press; an increasingly critical note became apparent. Supplies failed to get through to Makhnovite units and areas."* [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 271]

Lenin himself advised local Bolshevik leaders on Makhno, stating in early May that *"temporarily, while Rostov is not yet captured, it is necessary to be diplomatic."* [quoted by Arthur E. Adams, **Bolsheviks in the Ukraine**, pp. 352–3] Thus, as long as the Bolsheviks needed cannon fodder, Makhno was to be tolerated. Things changed when Trotsky arrived. On May 17th he promised a *"radical and merciless liquidation of partisanshchina [the partisan movement], independence, hooliganism,*

*and leftism."* [quoted by Adams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 360] According to one historian, Trotsky *"favoured a thorough-going annihilation of the partisan's ideological leaders as well as men like Hryhoriyov who wielded political power."* [Adams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 360] Unsurprisingly, given Trotsky's stated mission, Bolshevik hostility towards the Makhnovists became more than mere words. It took the form of both direct and indirect aggression. *"In the latter part of May,"* states Footman, *"the **Cheka** sent over two agents to assassinate Makhno."* Around the same time, the Red *"hold-back of supplies for the Insurgents developed into a blockade of the area. Makhnovite units at the front ran short of ammunition."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271 and p. 272] This, obviously, had a negative impact the Makhnovists' ability to fight the Whites.

Due to the gravity of the military and political situations both at and behind the front, the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet decided to call an extraordinary congress of peasants, workers, insurgents and Red soldiers. This congress was to determine the immediate tasks and the practical measures to be taken by the workers to remedy the mortal danger represented by the Whites. On May 31st, a call was sent out which stated, in part, *"that only the working masses themselves can find a solution [to the current problem], and not individuals or parties."* The congress would be based as follows: *"elections of delegates of peasants and workers will take place at general assemblies of villages, towns, factories and workshops."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

The Bolshevik reply came quickly, with Trotsky issuing his infamous Order no. 1824 on June 4th:

> *"This Congress is directed squarely against the Soviet Power in the Ukraine and against the organisation of the southern front, where Makhno's brigade is stationed. This congress can have no other result then to excite some new disgraceful revolt like that of Grigor'ev, and to open the front to the Whites, be-*



Little wonder Rees distorts the issues and transforms a policy to defend the **real** revolution into one which banned a *"call for revolution"*! We should be grateful that he distorted the Makhnovist message for it allows us to indicate the dictatorial nature of the regime and politics Rees is defending.

All of which disproves Rees' assertion that *"the movement never had any real support from the working class. Neither was it particularly interested in developing a programme which would appeal to the workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] Now, Rees had obviously read Palij's summary of Makhnovist ideas. Is he claiming that workers' self-management and the socialisation of the means of production do not *"appeal"* to workers? After all, most Leninists pay lip-service to these ideas. Is Rees arguing that the Bolshevik policies of the time (namely one-man management and the militarisation of labour) *"appealed"* to the workers more than workers' self-management of production? Equally, the Makhnovists argued that the workers should form their own free soviets which would *"carry out the will and orders of their constituents."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 151] Is Rees **really** arguing that the Bolshevik policy of party dictatorship *"appealed"* to the workers more than soviet democracy? If so, then heaven help us if the SWP ever get into power!

Luckily, as Jonathan Aves' book **Workers Against Lenin** proves, this was not the case. Working-class resistance to Bolshevik policies was extremely widespread and was expressed by strikes. It should be noted that the wave of strikes all across Russia which preceded the Kronstadt revolt also raised the demand for soviet democracy. The call for *"free soviets"* was raised by the Kronstadt revolt itself and during the "mini-Kronstadt" in Katerinoslav in June 1921 where the demands of the workers *"were very similar in content with the resolutions of the Kronstadt rebels"* and telegraph operators sent *"messages throughout the Soviet Republic calling for 'free soviets.'"* [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 172 and p. 173]

*"holdings of the landlords, the monasteries and the state, including all livestocks and goods, were to be transferred to the peasants"* and *"all factories, plants, mines, and other means of production were to become property of all the workers under control of their professional unions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 151]

In such an environment, a call for *"revolution"* (or, more correctly, *"armed uprisings against the Makhno movement"*) could only mean a Bolshevik coup to install a Bolshevik party dictatorship. As the Makhnovists were clearly defending working-class and peasant self-government, then a Bolshevik call for *"armed uprisings"* against them also meant the end of such free soviets and their replacement with party dictatorship. Little wonder Rees distorts his source! Arshinov makes the situation clear:

> *"The only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people. In Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, right after the occupation of these cities by the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks hastened to organise* ***Revkoms*** *(****Revolutionary Committees*** *) seeking to organise their political power and govern the population … Makhno advised them to go and take up some honest trade instead of seeking to impose their will on the workers … In this context the Makhnovists' attitude was completely justified and consistent. To protect the full freedom of speech, press, and organisation, they had to take measures against formations which sought to stifle this freedom, to suppress other organisations, and to impose their will and dictatorial authority on the workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154]



> *fore whom Makhno's brigade can only retreat incessantly on account of the incompetence, criminal designs and treason of its commanders.*
>
> *"1. By the present order this congress is forbidden, and will in no circumstances be allowed to take place.*
>
> *"2. All the peasant and working class population shall be warned. orally and in writing, that participation in the said congress will be considered an act of high treason against the Soviet Republic and the Soviet front.*
>
> *"3. All delegates to the said Congress shall be arrested immediately and bought before the Revolutionary Military Tribunal of the 14th, formerly 2nd, Army of the Ukraine.*
>
> *"4. The persons spreading the call of Makhno and the Hulyai Pole Executive Committee to the Congress shall likewise be arrested.*
>
> *"5. The present order shall have the force of law as soon as it is telegraphed. It should be widely distributed, displayed in all public places, and sent to the representatives of the executive committees of towns and villages, as well as to all the representatives of Soviet authority, and to commanders and commissars of military units."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 122–3]

Arshinov argues that this *"document is truly classic"* and *"[w]hoever studies the Russian revolution should learn it by heart."* He compares Trotsky's order to the reply the Makhnovists had sent to the Bolsheviks' attempt to ban the third congress. Clearly, Order No. 1824 shows that laws did exist *"made by a a few people who call themselves revolutionaries*

*which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves"*! Equally, the order shows that *"a revolutionary has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass ... simply because this mass has taken the good things which the revolution has promised them, freedom and equality, without his permission"*! Little wonder Arshinov states that this order meant that the *"entire peasant and labouring population are declared guilty of high treason if they dare to participate in their own free congress."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123]

According to Voline, in Alexandrovsk *"all workers meetings planned for the purpose of discussing the call of the Council and the agenda of the Congress were forbidden under pain of death. Those which were organised in ignorance of the order were dispersed by armed force. In other cities and towns, the Bolsheviks acted in the same way. As for the peasants in the villages, they were treated with still less ceremony; in many places militants and even peasants 'suspected of acting in favour of the insurgents and the Congress' were seized and executed after a semblance of a trial. Many peasants carrying the call were arrested, 'tried' and shot, before they could even find out about Order No. 1824."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 599–600]

As Arshinov summarises:

> *"This entire document represents such a crying usurpation of the rights of the workers that it is pointless to comment further on it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 124]

Trotsky continued his usurpation of the rights of the workers in a later order on the congress. In this, Trotsky called this openly announced workers, peasant and insurgent congress a *"conspiracy against Soviet power"* and a *"congress of Anarchist-kulaks delegates for struggle against the Red Army and the Soviet power"* (which explains why the congress organisers had asked



After distorting Makhnovist relations with the Bolsheviks, Rees moves on to distorting the socio-political ideas and practice of the Makhnovists. As would be expected from his hatchet-job on the military history of the movement, his account of its social ideas leaves much to be desired. However, both aspects of his critique have much in common. His account of its theoretical ideas and its attempts to apply them again abuse the source material in disgraceful ways.

For example, Rees states that under the Makhnovists *"[p]apers could be published, but the Bolshevik and Left Socialist Revolutionary press were not allowed to call for revolution"* and references Michael Palij's book. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60] Looking at the page in question, we discover a somewhat different account. According to Palij's work, what the Makhnovists **actually** *"prohibited"* was that these parties should *"propagate armed uprisings against the Makhnovist movement."* A clear rewriting of the source material and an indication of how low Leninists will sink. Significantly, Palij also notes that this *"freedom of speech, press, assembly and association"* was implemented *"[i]n contrast to the Bolshevik regime"* and its policy of crushing such liberties. [**Op. Cit.** pp. 152–3] Ironically, the military-political agreement of late 1920 between the Reds and Makhnovists included a similar clause, banning expression that *"tended to a violent overthrow of the Soviet government."* [quoted by Palij, **OP. Cit.**, p. 224] Which means, to use Rees' distorted terminology, that the Bolsheviks banned calls for revolution!

However, this distortion of the source material **does** give us an insight into the mentality of Leninism. After all, according to Palij, when the Makhnovists entered a city or town they *"immediately announced to the population that the army did not intend to exercise political authority."* The workers and peasants were to set up soviets *"that would carry out the will and orders of their constituents"* as well as *"organis[e] their own self-defence force against counter-revolution and banditry."* These political changes were matched in the economic sphere as well, as the

the Bolsheviks preferred to attack the Makhnovists rather than allow them the freedom they had been fighting for. Resources which could have been used to aid the economic rebuilding of Russia and the Ukraine were used to attack their former allies. The talents and energy of the Makhnovists were either killed or wasted in a pointless conflict. Should we be surprised? After all, the Bolsheviks had preferred to compound their foes during the Civil War (and, indirectly, aid the very Whites they were fighting) by betraying their Makhnovist allies on two previous occasions (once, because the Makhnovists had dared call a conference of working people to discuss the civil war being fought in their name). Clearly, Bolshevik politics and ideology played a key role in all these decisions. They were **not** driven by terrible objective circumstances (indeed, they made them worse).

Rees obviously distorted the truth about the first two agreements between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks. He portrayed the Makhnovists as the guilty party, "breaking" with the Bolsheviks when in fact it was (in both cases) the Bolsheviks who broke with and betrayed the Makhnovists. That explains why he fails to present any information on **why** the first break happened and why he distorts the events of the second. It cannot be said that he was unaware of these facts — they are in the very books he himself references! As such, we have a clear and intended desire to deceive the reader. As regards the third agreement, while he makes no pretence that the Makhnovists were the guilty party however, he implies that the Bolsheviks had to act as they did before the Makhnovists turned on them. Little wonder, then, that he does not provide the details of the agreement made between the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists — to do so would have been to expose the authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks. Simply put, Rees'distortions of the source material he uses comes as no surprise. It undermines his basic argument and so cannot be used in its original form. Hence the cherry-picking of quotations to support his case.



that hotbed of kulakism, the Red Army troops, to send delegates!). Trotsky indicated the fate of those workers and peasants who dared participate in their own revolution: *"There can be only one penalty for these individuals: shooting."* [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, p. 293]

Trotsky also ordered the arrest of Makhno, who escaped but who ordered his troops to remain under Bolshevik command to ensure that the front against Denikin was maintained. However, five members of his staff were shot for having distributed literature concerning the banned fourth congress. This order was the first step in the Bolshevik attempt to *"liquidate the Makhnovist movement."* This campaign saw Bolshevik regiments invade the insurgent area, shooting militants on the spot and destroying the free communes and other Makhnovist organisations. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121] It should be noted that during the Spanish Revolution, the Stalinists acted in the same way, attacking rural collectives while the anarchist troops fought against Franco at the front.

Thus the participating event for the break between the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks was Trotsky's banning of the fourth regional congress. However, this was preceded by an intense press campaign against the Makhnovists as well as holding back of essential supplies from the frontline troops. Clearly the Bolsheviks considered that the soviet system was threatened if soviet conferences were called and that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was undermined if the proletariat took part in the revolutionary process!

With the Makhnovist front weakened, they could not hold against Denikin's attacks, particularly when Red Army troops retreated on their flank. Thus, the front which the Makhnovists themselves had formed and held for more than six months was finally broken. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 124] The Red Army was split into three and the Whites entered the Ukraine, which the Bolsheviks promptly abandoned to its fate. The Makhnovists, drawing stray Red Army and other forces to it, contin-

ued to fight the Whites, ultimately inflicting a decisive defeat on them at Peregonovka, subsequently destroying their supply lines and ensuring Denikin's defeat (see section 4).

The Red Army re-entered the Ukraine at the end of 1919. Bolshevik plans with regard to the Makhnovists had already been decided in a secret order written by Trotsky on December 11th. Red Army troops had to *"be protected against infection by guerrilla-ism and Makhnovism"* by various means, including *"extensive agitation"* which used *"examples from the past to show the treacherous role played by the Makhnovites."* A *"considerable number of agents"* would be sent *"ahead"* of the main forces to *"join the guerrilla detachments"* and would agitate against *"guerrilla-ism."* Once partisan forces meet with Red Army troops, the former *"ceases to be a military unit after it has appeared on our side of the line ... From that moment it becomes merely material for processing, and for that purpose is to be sent to our rear."* To *"secure complete subordination of the detachments,"* the Red forces *"must make use of the agents previously set to these detachments."* The aim, simply put, was to ensure that the partisans became *"fully subordinate to our command."* If the partisans who had been fighting for revolution and against the Whites opposed becoming *"material for processing"* (i.e cannon fodder), *"refuses to submit to orders, displays unruliness and self-will,"* then it *"must be subjected to ruthless punishment."* Recognising the organic links the partisans had with the peasants, Trotsky argues that *"in the Ukraine, guerrilla detachments appear and disappear with ease, dissolving themselves into the mass of the armed peasant population"* and so *"a fundamental condition for the success against guerrilla-ism is* ***unconditional disarmament of the rural population, without exception.****"* [Trotsky, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, pp. 440–2] As events would show, the Bolsheviks implemented Trotsky's order to the letter.

On December 24th, Makhno's troops met with the Bolshevik 14th army and its commander *"admitted Makhno's service*



point was never ratified by the Bolsheviks as it was *"absolutely unacceptable to the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [quoted by Palij, **Ibid.**] This clause was:

> *"One of the basic principles of the Makhno movement being the struggle for the self-administration of the toilers, the Partisan Army brings up a fourth point: in the region of the Makhno movement, the worker and peasant population is to organise and maintain its own free institutions for economic and political self-administration; this region is subsequently federated with Soviet republics by means of agreements freely negotiated with the appropriate Soviet governmental organ."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 224]

Clearly, this idea of worker and peasant self-management, like soviet democracy, could not be reconciled with the Bolshevik support for party dictatorship as the expression of *"the dictatorship of the proletariat"* which had become a Bolshevik ideological truism by that time. Little wonder the Bolsheviks failed to ratify the fourth clause and violated the other agreements. Simply put, a libertarian alternative to Bolshevism would give the Russian and Ukrainian working masses hope of freedom and make them harder to control. It is unsurprising that Rees fails to discuss the treaty — it would, yet again, undermine his case that the Bolsheviks were forced by objective circumstances to be dictatorial.

And, of course, let us not forget the circumstances in which this betrayal took place. The country was, as Rees reminds us, in a state of economic disruption and collapse. Indeed, Rees blames the anti-working class and dictatorial actions and policies of the Bolsheviks on the chaos caused by the civil war. Yet here are the Bolsheviks prolonging this very Civil War by turning (yet again!) on their allies. After the defeat of the Whites,

It would be a good idea to reproduce the agreement which the Bolsheviks ripped up. There were two parts, a military and a political one. The military one is pretty straight forward (although the clause on the Makhnovists refusing to accept Red Army detachments or deserters suggests that the Makhnovists' democratic army was seen by many Red Army soldiers as a better alternative to Trotsky's autocratic structure). The political agreement was as follows:

> *"1. Immediate release, and an end to the persecution of all Makhno men and anarchists in the territories of the Soviet Republics, except those who carry on armed resistance against Soviet authorities.*
>
> *"2. Makhno men and anarchists were to have complete freedom of expression of their ideas and principles, by speech and the press, provided that nothing was expressed that tended to a violent overthrow of Soviet government, and on condition that military censorship be respected…*
>
> *"3. Makhno men and anarchists were to enjoy full rights of participation in elections to the soviets, including the right to be elected, and free participation in the organisation of the forthcoming Fifth All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets …"* [cited by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 224]

Needless to say, the Bolsheviks delayed the publication of the political agreement several until several days after the military one was published — *"thus blurring its real meaning."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225] Clearly, as it stands, the agreement just gave the Makhnovists and anarchists the rights they should have had according to the Soviet Constitution! Little wonder the Bolsheviks ignored it — they also ignored their own constitution. However, it is the fourth point of the political agreement which gives the best insight into the nature of Bolshevism. This last



*in defeating Denikin."* However, while *"the Bolsheviks fraternised with the Makhno troops … they distrusted Makhno, fearing the popularity he had gained as a result of his successful fighting against Denikin."* The Bolsheviks had *"no intention of tolerating Makhno's independent policy, but hoped first to destroy his army by removing it from its own base. With this in mind, on January 8th, 1920, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Fourteenth Army ordered Makhno to move to the Polish Front … The author of the order realised that there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks at the time and he also knew that Makhno would not abandon his region..... Uborevich [the author] explained that 'an appropriate reaction by Makhno to this order would give us the chance to have accurate grounds for our next steps' … [He] concluded: 'The order is a certain political manoeuvre and, at the very least, we expect positive results from Makhno's realisation of this.'"* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 209 and p. 210] As can be seen, these actions fit perfectly with Trotsky's secret order and with Bolshevik desire for a monopoly of power for itself (see next section).

As expected, the Makhnovists refused to leave their territory. They realised the political motivations behind the order. As Arshinov notes, *"[s]ending the insurrectionary army to the Polish front meant removing from the Ukraine the main nerve centre of the revolutionary insurrection. This was precisely what the Bolsheviks wanted: they would then be absolute masters of the rebellious region, and the Makhnovists were perfectly aware of this."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163] As well as political objections, the Makhnovists listed practical reasons for not going. Firstly, *"the Insurrectionary Army was subordinate neither to the 14th Corps nor to any other unit of the Red Army. The Red commander had no authority to give orders to the Insurrectionary Army."* Secondly, *"it was materially impossible to carry it out, since half the men, as well as nearly all the commanders and staff, and Makhno himself, were sick [with typhus]."* Thirdly, *"the fighting qualities and rev-*

*olutionary usefulness of the Insurrectionary Army were certainly much greater on their own ground."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 650–1]

The Bolsheviks refused to discuss the issue and on the 14th of January, they declared the Makhnovists outlawed. They then *"made a great effort to destroy"* Makhno. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210] In summary, the Bolsheviks **started** the conflict in order to eliminate opposition to their power. This led to nine months of bitter fighting between the Red Army and the Makhnovists. To prevent fraternisation, the Bolsheviks did not use local troops and instead imported Latvian, Estonian and Chinese troops. They also used other *"new tactics,"* and *"attacked not only Makhno's partisans, but also the villages and towns in which the population was sympathetic toward Makhno. They shot ordinary soldiers as well as their commanders, destroying their houses, confiscating their properties and persecuting their families. Moreover the Bolsheviks conducted mass arrests of innocent peasants who were suspected of collaborating in some way with the partisans. It is impossible to determine the casualties involved."* They also set up *"Committees of the Poor"* as part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus, which acted as *"informers helping the Bolshevik secret police in its persecution of the partisans, their families and supporters, even to the extent of hunting down and executing wounded partisans."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212–3]

This conflict undoubtedly gave time for the Whites to reorganise themselves and encouraged the Poles to invade the Ukraine, so prolonging the Civil War. The Makhnovists were threatened by both the Bolsheviks **and** Wrangel. By mid-1920, Wrangel appeared to be gaining the upper hand and the Makhnovists *"could not remain indifferent to Wrangel's advance … Everything done to destroy him would in the last analysis benefit the revolution."* This lead the Makhnovists to consider allying with the Bolsheviks as *"the difference between the Communists and Wrangel was that the Communists had the support of the masses with faith in the revolution. It is true*



Rees continues to re-write history by arguing that *"Makhno did not fight with the Reds again until October 1920 when Wrangel advanced on Makhno's base."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] In fact, it was the **Makhnovists** who contacted the Bolsheviks in July and August in 1920 with a view to suspending hostilities and co-operating in the fight against Wrangel. This decision was made at a mass assembly of insurgents. Sadly, the Bolsheviks made no response. Only in September, after Wrangel had occupied many towns, did the Bolsheviks enter into negotiations. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 176–7] This is confirmed by Footman, who states that it is *"agreed that the initiative for joint action against Wrangel came from the Makhnovists"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 294], as well as by Palij, who notes that *"Makhno was compelled to seek an understanding with the Bolsheviks"* but *"no reply was received."* It was *"Wrangel's success [which] caused the Bolshevik leaders to reconsider Makhno's earlier proposal."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 222–3] Obviously indicating that the Makhnovists placed the struggle against the White counter-revolution above their own politics would place the Bolsheviks in a bad light, and so Rees fails to give the details behind the agreement of joint action against Wrangel.

As regards this third and final break, Rees states that it was (*"unsurprisingly"*) a *"treaty of convenience on the part of both sides and as soon as Wrangel was defeated at the end of the year the Red Army fought Makhno until he have up the struggle."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] Which, as far as it goes, is true. Makhno, however, *"assumed [that] the forthcoming conflict with the Bolsheviks could be limited to the realm of ideas"* and that they *"would not attack his movement immediately."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231] He was wrong. Instead the Bolsheviks attacked the Makhnovists without warning and, unlike the other breaks, without pretext (although leaflets handed out to the Red Army stated that **Makhno** had *"violat[ed] the agreement"*! [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 236]).

he decides to blame the initial success of Wrangel on them as well. He quotes Michael Palij as follows: *"As Wrangel advanced … Makhno retreated north .. . leaving behind small partisan units in the villages and towns to carry out covert destruction of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus and supply bases."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] He again sources Palij's work on the *"effective"* nature of these groups, stating that White Colonel Noga reported to headquarters that Makhno was critical to Wrangel's advance.

As regards the claims that Makhno was *"critical"* to Wrangel's advance, Colonal Noga actually states that it was *"peasant uprisings under Makhno and many other partisan detachments"* which gave *"the Reds no rest."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214] However, what Rees fails to mention is that Palij argues that it was the Bolshevik *"policy of terror and exploitation"* which had *"turned almost all segments of Ukrainian society against the Bolsheviks, substantially strengthened the Makhno movement, and consequently facilitated the advance of the reorganised anti-Bolshevik force of General Wrangel from the Crimea into South Ukraine, the Makhno region."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214] Again, Makhno is blamed for the inevitable results of Bolshevik policies and actions!

It should also be reported that Noga's comments are dated 25th March 1920, while Palij's summary of Makhno's activities retreating from Wrangel was about June 1920 — 2 months later! As regards this advance by Wrangel, Palij argues that it was the *"outbreak of the Polish-Bolshevik war at the end of April"* which *"benefited Wrangel"* and *"enabled him to launch an offensive against the Bolsheviks in Tavriia on June 6th."* Indeed, it was after a *"series of battles"* that Wrangel *"penetrated north, forcing a general Bolshevik retreat."* Now, *"[a]s Wrangel advanced deeper into the Left Bank, Makhno retreated north to the Kharkiv region, leaving behind small partisan units in the villages and towns to carry on covert destruction of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus and supply bases."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 219] Again, Rees' account has little bearing to reality or the source material he uses.



*that these masses were cynically misled by the Communists, who exploited the revolutionary enthusiasm of the workers in the interests of Bolshevik power."* With this in mind, the Makhnovists agreed at a mass assembly to make an alliance with the Bolsheviks against Wrangel as this would eliminate the White threat and end the civil war. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176]

The Bolsheviks ignored the Makhnovist offer using mid-September, when *"Wrangel's success caused the Bolsheviks leaders to reconsider."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 223] Sometime between the 10th and 15th of October the final agreement was signed:

> *"Part I — Political Agreement.*
>
> *"1. Immediate release of all Makhnovists and anarchists imprisoned or in exile in the territories of the Soviet Republic; cessation of all persecutions of Makhnovists or anarchists, except those who carry on armed conflict against the Soviet Government.*
>
> *"2. Complete freedom in all forms of public expression and propaganda for all Makhnovists and anarchists, for their principles and ideas, in speech and the press, with the exception of anything that might call for the violent overthrow of the Soviet Government, and on condition that the requirements of military censorship be respected. For all kinds of publications, the Makhnovists and anarchists, as revolutionary organisations recognised by the Soviet Government may make use of the technical apparatus of the Soviet State, while naturally submitting to the technical rules for publication.*
>
> *"3. Free participation in elections to the Soviets; and the right of Makhnovists and anarchists to be elected thereto. Free participation in the organisation of the*

*forthcoming Fifth Pan-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets …*

*"Part II — Military Agreement.*

*"1. The Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army (Makhnovist) will join the armed forces of the Republic as a partisan army, subordinate, in regard to operations, to the supreme command of the Red Army; it will retain its established internal structure, and does not have to adopt the bases and principles of the regular Red Army.*

*"2. When crossing Soviet territory at the front, or going between fronts, the Insurrectionary Army will not accept into its ranks neither any detachments of, nor deserters from, the Red Army …*

*"3. For the purpose of destroying the common enemy — the White Army — the Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army (Makhnovists) will inform the working masses that collaborate with it the agreement that has been concluded; it will call upon the people to cease all military actions hostile to the Soviet power; and for its part, the Soviet power will immediately publish the clauses of the agreement.*

*"4. The families of combatants of the Makhnovist Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army living in the territory of the Soviet Republic shall enjoy the same rights as those of soldiers of the Red Army …"*
[quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178]

This agreement was agreed by both sides, although the Bolsheviks immediately broke it by publishing the military agreement first, followed by the political agreement a week later, so obscuring the real meaning of the pact. As it stands, the political clause simply gave anarchists and Makhnovists the rights



*to return briefly"* would confuse them with facts and so it goes unmentioned.

Lincoln, it must be stressed, concurs with Rees's other main sources (Palij and Footman) on the fact that the Bolsheviks betrayed the Makhnovists! Clearly, Rees has rewritten history and distorted **all** of his main references on the Makhnovist movement. After reading the same fact in three different sources, you would think that the Bolshevik betrayal of the Makhnovists which provoked their resistance against them would warrant **some** mention, but no! In true Stalinist fashion, Rees managed to turn a Bolshevik betrayal of the Makhnovists into a stick with which to beat them with! Truly amazing.

Simply put, if the Bolsheviks had not wanted to impose their rule over the Ukraine, then the conflict with the Makhnovists need not have taken place and Wrangel would not have been in a position to invade the Ukraine. Why did the Bolsheviks act in this way? There was no *"objective factor"* for this action and so we must turn to Bolshevik ideology.

As we proved in section 14, Bolshevik ideology by this time identified Bolshevik party dictatorship as the only expression of "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Does Rees **really** believe that such perspectives had no impact on how the Bolsheviks acted during the Revolution? The betrayal of the Makhnovists can only be understood in terms of the *"subjective factor"* Rees seeks to ignore. If you think, as the Bolsheviks clearly did, that the dictatorship of the proletariat equalled the dictatorship of the party (and vice versa) then anything which threatened the rule of the party had to be destroyed. Whether this was soviet democracy or the Makhnovists did not matter. The Makhnovist idea of worker and peasant self-management, like soviet democracy, could not be reconciled with the Bolshevik ideology. As such, Bolshevik policy explains the betrayals of the Makhnovists.

Not satisfied with distorting his source material to present the Makhnovists as the guilty party in the return of Wrangel,

act of ideological faith to blame the victims of this conflict for it! In his attempts to demonise the Makhnovists, he argues that *"[i]n fact it was Makhno's actions against the Red Army which made 'a brief return of the Whites possible.'"* In defence of his claims, Rees quotes from W. Bruce Lincoln's **Red Victory**. However, looking at Lincoln's work we discover that Lincoln is well aware who is to blame for the return of the Whites. Unsurprisingly, it is **not** the Makhnovists:

> *"Once Trotsky's Red Army had crushed Iudenich and Kolchak and driven Deniken's forces back upon their bases in the Crimea and the Kuban, it turned upon Makhno's partisan forces with a vengeance ... [I]n mid-January 1920, after a typhus epidemic had decimated his forces, a re-established Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party declared Makhno an outlaw. Yet the Bolsheviks could not free themselves from Makhno's grasp so easily, and it became one of the supreme ironies of the Russian Civil War that his attacks against the rear of the Red Army made it possible for the resurrected White armies ... to return briefly to the southern Ukraine in 1920."* [**Red Victory**, p. 327]

Ignoring the fact that Rees does not bother to give the correct quote (a problem that re-occurs frequently in his essay), it can be seen that he does paraphrase the last sentence of Lincoln's work correctly. Strange, then, that he ignores the rest of his account which clearly indicates that the Bolsheviks *"turned upon"* the Makhnovists and *"declared Makhno an outlaw."* Obviously such trivial facts as the initial Bolshevik attacks against the Makhnovists are unimportant to understanding what actually happened in this period. Informing his readers that it was the Bolsheviks' betrayal of the Makhnovists which provoked the resistance that *"made it possible for ... the White armies ...*



they should have already had, according to the constitution of the Soviet state. This shows how far the Bolsheviks had applied that constitution.

The agreement is highly significant as in itself it disproves many of the Bolsheviks slanders about the Makhnovists and it proves the suppression of the anarchist press to have been on political grounds.

However, the Makhnovists desired to add a fourth clause to the Political Agreement:

> *"Since one of the essential principles of the Makhnovist movement is the struggle for the self-management of the workers, the Insurrectionary Army (Makhnovist) believes it should insist on the following fourth point of the political agreement: in the region where the Makhnovist Army is operating, the population of workers and peasants will create its own institutions of economic and political self-management; these institutions will be autonomous and joined in federation, by means of agreement, with the government organs of the Soviet Republic,"* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 179–80]

Unsurprisingly, the Bolsheviks refused to ratify this clause. As one Bolshevik historian pointed out, the *"fourth point was fundamental to both sides, it meant the system of free Soviets, which was in total opposition to the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] As we discuss in the next section, the Bolsheviks had equated the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* with the dictatorship of their party and so working-class self-management could not be allowed. It should be noted that this fourth clause was the cause of Lenin and Trotsky's toying with the idea of allowing the Makhnovists south-eastern Ukraine as an anarchist experiment (as mentioned by both Victor Serge and Trotsky in later years).

Once Wrangel had been defeated by Makhnovist and Red Army units, the Bolsheviks turned on the movement. Makhno had *"assumed that the coming conflict with the Bolsheviks could be limited to the realm of ideas, feeling that the strong revolutionary ideas and feelings of the peasants, together with their distrust of the foreign invaders, were the best guarantees for the movement's territory. Moreover, Makhno believed that the Bolsheviks would not attack his movement immediately. A respite of some three months would have allowed him to consolidate his power [sic!] and to win over much of the Bolshevik rank and file."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231] From the wording of the second clause of the military agreement (namely, to refuse Red Army deserters or units), it is clear that the Bolsheviks were aware of the appeal of Makhnovist politics on the Red Army soldiers. As soon as Wrangel was defeated, the Red Army attacked. Makhnovist commanders were invited to meetings, arrested and then shot. The Red Army surrounded Makhnovist units and attacked them. At the same time, anarchists were arrested all across the Ukraine. Hulyai Pole itself was attacked (Makhno, despite overwhelming odds, broke out). [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 71–2]

In the words of Makhno:

> *"In this difficult and responsible revolutionary position the Makhno movement made one great mistake: alliance with the Bolsheviks against a common enemy, Wrangel and the Entente. In the period of this alliance that was morally right and of practical value for the revolution, the Makhno movement mistook Bolshevik revolutionism and failed to secure itself in advance against betrayal. The Bolsheviks and their experts treacherously circumvented it."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 234]

While the Bolsheviks continuously proclaimed the final defeat of the Makhnovists, they held out for nearly a year before



required the elimination of *"special bodies of armed men"* by an armed population. To this day, his followers parrot his claims (while, simultaneously, justifying the exact opposite in Lenin's Russia). Now, is Rees **really** arguing that the Bolshevik monopoly of power, the creation of a secret police and the clamping down on working people's freedom were **not** dangers to the Russian Revolution and should not be watched *"vigilantly"*? If so, then his conception of revolution includes the strange notion that dictatorship by a party does not threaten a revolution! Then again, neither did the Bolsheviks (indeed, they thought calling worker, peasant and partisan congresses to discuss the development of the revolution as the real danger to it!). If not, then he cannot fault the regional congress resolution for pointing out the obvious. As such, Rees' misquoting of the resolution backfires on him.

Significantly, Rees fails to mention that during this period (the first half of 1920), the Bolsheviks *"shot ordinary soldiers as well as their commanders, destroying their houses, confiscating their properties, and persecuting their families. Moreover the Bolsheviks conducted mass arrests of innocent peasants who were suspected of collaborating in some way with the partisans. It is impossible to determine the casualties involved."* The hypocrisy is clear. While Rees presents information (some of it, we stress, from a fake source) on Makhnovist attacks against the Bolshevik dictatorship, he remains silent on the Bolshevik tactics, violence and state terrorism. Given that the Bolsheviks had attacked the Makhnovists, it seems strange that that Rees ignores the *"merciless methods"* of the Bolsheviks (to use Palij's phrase) and concentrates instead on the acts of self-defence forced onto the Makhnovists. Perhaps this is because it would provide too strong a *"flavour"* of the Bolshevik regime? [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 212–3 and p. 213]

Rees makes great play of the fact that White forces took advantage of the conflict between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, as would be expected. However, it seems like an

The resolution noted that the current situation was *"characterised by the seizure of power by the political party of Communists-Bolsheviks who do not balk at anything in order to preserve and consolidate their political power by armed force acting from the centre. The party is conducting a criminal policy in regard to the social revolution and in regard to the labouring masses."* To top it off, point number three read:

> *"We protest against the reactionary habits of Bolshevik rulers, commissars, and agents of the Cheka, who are shooting workers, peasants, and rebels, inventing all kinds of excuses … The Cheka which were supposed to struggle with counterrevolution … have turned in the Bolsheviks' hands into an instrument for the suppression of the will of the people. They have grown in some cases into detachments of several hundred armed men with a variety of arms. We demand that all these forces be dispatched to the front."* [quoted by Vladimir N. Brovkin, **Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War**, pp. 109–10]

We should also point out that Rees selectively quotes the resolution to distort its meaning. The resolution, in fact, *"urges the peasants and workers to watch vigilantly the actions of the Bolshevik regime that cause a real danger to the worker-peasant revolution."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154] We have listed some of the actions of the Bolsheviks that the congress considered as a *"real danger."* Considering the truth of these complaints, only someone blinded by Bolshevik ideology would consider it strange that worker and peasant delegates should agree to *"watch vigilantly"* those actions of the Bolsheviks which were a *"real danger"* to their revolution!

Lenin (before taking power, of course) had argued that elections and recall to soviets were essential to ensure that the workers control the "workers' state" and that socialism



being forced to leave the Ukraine in August 1921. Indeed, by the end of 1920 his troops number ten to fifteen thousand men and the *"growing strength of the Makhno army and its successes caused serious concern in the Bolshevik regime."* More Red troops were deployed, *"stationing whole regiments, primarily cavalry, in the occupied villages to terrorise the peasants and prevent them from supporting Makhno… Cheka punitive units were constantly trailing the partisans, executing Makhno's sympathisers and the partisans' families."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 237 and p. 238] Combined with this state terrorism, economic conditions in the villages got worse. The countryside was exhausted and 1921 was a famine year. With his rural base itself barely surviving, the Makhnovists could not survive long.

It should be noted that during the periods after the Bolsheviks had turned on the Makhnovists, the latter appealed to rank-and-file Red Army troops not to attack them. As one of their leaflets put it: *"Down with fratricidal war among the working people!"* They urged the Red Army troops (with some success) to rebel against the commissars and appointed officers and join with the Makhnovists, who would *"greet [them] as our own brothers and together we will create a free and just life for workers and peasants and will struggle against all tyrants and oppressors of the working people."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 276 and p. 283]

Even after the defeat of the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks did not stop their campaign of lies. For example, Trotsky reported to the Ninth Congress of Soviets on December 26th, 1921, that the Makhnovists were *"in Romania,"* where Makhno had *"received a friendly welcome"* and was *"liv[ing] comfortably in Bucharest."* The Makhnovists had picked Romania because it was, like Poland, *"a country where they … felt secure"* due to the way they treated *"Russian counter-revolutionary bands."* [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. IV, p. 404] In reality, the *"Romanian authorities put Makhno, his wife, and his followers in an internment camp."* The Bolsheviks were not unaware of

this, as they *"sent a series of sharp diplomatic notes demanding Makhno's extradiction."* They expelled Makhno and his wife to Poland on April 11, 1922. The Poles also interned them and, again, the Bolsheviks demanded Makhno's extradition *"on the ground that he was a criminal and not entitled to political asylum."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 242] Trotsky's lies come as no surprise, given his and his party's track record on slandering anarchists.

As can be seen, the relationship of the Makhnovists to the Bolsheviks was one of constant betrayal of the former by the latter. Moreover, the Bolsheviks took every opportunity to slander the Makhnovists, with Trotsky going so far as to report Makhno was living well while he was rotting in a capitalist prison. This is to be expected, as the aims of the two groups were at such odds. As we discuss in the next section, while the Makhnovists did whatever they could to encourage working-class self-management and freedom, the Bolsheviks had evolved from advocating the government of their party as the expression of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" to stating that only the dictatorship of their party could ensure the success of a social revolution and so **was** "the dictatorship of the proletariat." As the Makhnovist movement shows, if need be, the party would happily exercise its dictatorship **over** the proletariat (and peasantry) if that was needed to retain its power.

## 14 How did the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks differ?

Like chalk and cheese.

Whereas the Bolsheviks talked about soviet democracy while exercising a party dictatorship, the Makhnovists not only talked about *"free soviets,"* they also encouraged them with all their ability. Similarly, while Lenin stated that free speech was *"a bourgeois notion"* and that there could be *"no free speech in a revolutionary period,"* the Makhnovists



Looking at the congress where the resolution was passed, we find that the list of *"real dangers"* was, quite simply, sensible and, in fact, in line with Leninist rhetoric. The resolution acknowledged the fact that the Bolshevik party was *"demanding a monopoly of the Revolution."* As we discussed in section 14, it was during this period that the Bolsheviks explicitly started to argue that the "dictatorship of the party" **was** the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The resolution also stated:

> *"With deep regret the Congress must also declare that apart from external enemies a perhaps even greater danger, arising from its internal shortcomings, threatens the Revolution of the Russian and Ukrainian peasants and workers. The Soviet Governments of Russia and of the Ukraine, by their orders and decrees, are making efforts to deprive local soviets of peasants and workers' deputies of their freedom and autonomy."* [quoted by Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

It also stated:

> *"the political commissars are watching each step of the local soviets and dealing ruthlessly with those friends of peasants and workers who act in defence of peoples' freedom from the agency of the central government ... The Bolshevik regime arrested left Socialist Revolutionaries and anarchists, closing their newspapers, stifling any manifestation of revolutionary expression."*

Delegates also complained that the Bolshevik government had not been elected, that it was *"imposing upon us its party dictatorship"* and *"attempting to introduce its Bolshevik monopoly over the soviets."* [quoted by Palij, [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

from the fake diary *"betray the nature of the movement in this period,"* he tries to link them with Makhnovist theory. *"These actions,"* he argues, *"were consistent with an earlier resolution of the Insurgent Army which declared that it was 'the actions of the Bolshevik regime which cause a real danger to the worker-peasant revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Firstly, given a true account of the second break between the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks, it would be fair to conclude that the resolution was, in fact, correct! However, such facts are not mentioned by Rees, so the reader is left in ignorance.

Secondly, to correct another of Rees' causal mistakes, it should be noted that this resolution was **not** passed by the Insurgent Army. Rather it was passed at the Second Regional Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents held at Hulyai Pole on February 12th, 1919. This congress had 245 delegates, representing 350 districts and was one of four organised by the Makhnovists. Unsurprisingly, these regional congresses are not even mentioned by Rees in his account. This is for obvious reasons — if the Makhnovists could organise congresses of workers, peasants and insurgents to discuss the progress of the revolution, then why could the Bolsheviks not manage it? Equally, to mention them would also mean mentioning that the Bolsheviks tried to ban one and succeeded in banning another.

Thirdly, the tone of the congress was anti-Bolshevik simply because the Ukraine had had a taste of Bolshevik rule. As Rees himself acknowledges in a roundabout way, the Bolsheviks had managed to alienate the peasantry by their agricultural policies.

Fourthly, the Bolsheviks had engineered the outlawing of the Makhnovists. Thus the actions of the Makhnovists were **not** *"consistent"* with the earlier resolution. They were, in fact, *"consistent"* with self-defence against a repressive state which had attacked them first!



proclaimed free speech for working people. [Lenin quoted by Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 33] While the Bolsheviks ended up arguing for the necessity of party dictatorship during a revolution, the Makhnovists introduced free soviets and organised peasant, worker and insurgent congresses to conduct the revolution.

We have discussed the Makhnovist ideas in both theory and practice in sections 5, 6 and 7. In spite of the chaos and difficulties imposed upon the movement by having to fight the counter-revolution, the Makhnovists applied their ideals constantly. The Makhnovists were a mass movement and its constructive efforts showed that there was an alternative route the Russian revolution could have followed other than the authoritarian dictatorship that Leninists, then and now, claimed was inevitable if the revolution was to be saved.

To see why, we must compare Bolshevik ideology and practice to that of the Makhnovists in three key areas. Firstly, on how a revolution should be defended. Secondly, on the role of the soviets and party in the revolution. Thirdly, on the question of working-class freedom.

Early in 1918, after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty the Bolsheviks re-introduced Tsarist officers into the army alongside bourgeois military discipline. As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

> *"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 37]

Officers were appointed rather then elected. They argued this had to be done to win the war. The *"principle of election,"* stated Trotsky, *"is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient and has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* Thus the election of officers and the creation of soldiers' committees was abolished from the top, replaced by appointed officers. Trotsky's rationale for this was simply that *"political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited."* In other words, the Bolshevik Party held power as power was actually held by it, **not** the working class. Trotsky tried to answer the obvious objection:

> *"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the* ***appointment*** *of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [**Work, Discipline, Order**]

He repeated this argument in his 1919 diatribe against the Makhnovists:

> *"The Makhnovites shout raucously: 'Down with appointed commanders!' This they do only so as to delude the ignorant element among their own soldiers. One can speak of 'appointed' persons only under the bourgeois order, when Tsarist officials or bourgeois ministers appointed at their own discretion commanders who kept the soldier masses*



*the insurrectionary army to the Polish front meant removing from the Ukraine the main nerve centre of the revolutionary insurrection. This was precisely what the Bolsheviks wanted: they would then be absolute masters of the rebellious region, and the Makhnovists were perfectly aware of this."* In addition, *"neither the 14th Corps nor any other unit of the Red Army had any ties with the Makhnovist army; least of all were they in a position to give orders to the insurrectionary army."* Nor does Rees mention that the Makhnovists considered the move *"physically impossible"* as *"half the men, the entire staff and the commander himself were in hospital with typhus."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163]

Consider what Rees is (distortedly) accounting. The beginning of 1920 was a time of peace. The Civil War looked like it was over. The White Generals had been defeated. Now the Bolsheviks turn on their allies after issuing an ultimatum which they knew would never be obeyed. Under the circumstances, a stupider decision cannot be easily found! Moreover, the very logic of the order was a joke. Would be it wise to leave the Ukraine undefended? Of course not and if Red Army units were to stay to defend the region, why not the Makhnovists who actually came from the area in question? Why provoke a conflict when it was possible to transfer Red Army units to the Polish front? Simply put, Rees presents a distorted picture of what was happening in the Ukraine at the time simply so he can whitewash the Bolshevik regime and blacken the Makhnovists. As he himself later notes, the Bolshevik-Makhnovist conflict gave the White General Wrangel the space required to restart the Civil War. Thus the Bolshevik decision to attack the Makhnovists helped prolong the Civil War — the very factor Rees blames the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevik ideology and practice on!

It is **now** that Rees presents his evidence of Makhnovist violence against the Bolsheviks (the Red Army reports and entries from the fake diary of Makhno's wife). Arguing that the entries

*at that time and he also knew that Makhno would not abandon his region .... Uborevich [the author] explained that 'an appropriate reaction by Makhno to this order would give us the chance to have accurate grounds for our next steps' ... [He] concluded: 'The order is a certain political manoeuvre and, at the very least, we expect positive results from Makhno's realisation of this.'"* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

This is confirmed by Rees' other references. David Footman, whom Rees also uses for evidence against the Makhnovist movement, notes that while it was *"true there were military reasons for reinforcing"* the Polish frontier (although he also notes the significant fact that the war *"was not to break out for another four months"*), it was *"admitted on the Soviet side that this order was primarily 'dictated by the necessity' of liquidating* ***Makhnovshchina*** *as an independent movement. Only when he was far removed from his home country would it be possible to counteract his influence, and to split up and integrate his partisans into various Red Army formations."* He notes that there were *"other occasions (notably in Siberia) of the Soviet authorities solving the problem of difficult partisan leaders by sending them off to fight on distant fronts"* and, of course, that *"Makhno and his staff ... were perfectly aware of the underlying Soviet motives."* Footman recounts how the Makhnovist staff sent a *"reasoned reply"* to the Bolsheviks, that there *"was no immediate response"* from them and in *"mid-January the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party declared Makhno and his force to be outside the law, and the Red Army attacked."* [**The Russian Civil War**, pp. 290–1]

In other words, according to the sources Rees himself selects, the Bolsheviks **started** the conflict in order to eliminate opposition to their power!

Needless to say, the Makhnovists **did** realise the political motivations behind the order. As Arshinov notes, *"[s]ending*



*subject to the bourgeois classes. Today there is no authority in Russia but that which is elected by the whole working class and working peasantry. It follows that commanders appointed by the central Soviet Government are installed in their positions by the will of the working millions. But the Makhnovite commanders reflect the interests of a minute group of Anarchists who rely on the kulaks and the ignorant."* [**The Makhno Movement**]

Of course, most workers are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky's own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Equally, it was not *"the will of the working millions"* which appointed anyone, it was a handful of leaders of the Bolshevik party (which had manipulated the soviets to remain in power). Needless to say, this was a vast change from Lenin's comments in **State and Revolution** opposing appointment and calling for election of **all** officials!

Moreover, the explanation that *"the ignorant"* were to blame for Makhnovist opposition to appointed officers had a long legacy with Trotsky. In April 1918, when justifying Bolshevik introduction of appointed officers, he had argued that the *"Soviet government is the same as the committee of a trade union. It is elected by the workers and peasants and you can at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, at any moment you like, dismiss that government and appoint another. But once you have appointed it, you must give it the right to choose the technical specialists."* He stressed that this applied *"in military affairs, in particular."* Using the trade union analogy, he argued that the workers had *"entrusted us [the Bolshevik leaders] with the direction of the union"* and this meant that the Bolshevik leaders, not the workers, should decide things as *"we are*

*better able to judge in the matter"* than them! The workers role was stated clearly: *"if our way of conducting the business is bad, then throw us out and elect another committee!"* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 113] In other words, like any bureaucrat, for Trotsky working-class participation in the affairs of the revolution was seen as irrelevant: the masses had voted and their role was now that of obeying those who *"are better able to judge."*

Using an argument the Tsar could have been proud of, Trotsky defended the elimination of soldier democracy:

> *"How could soldiers who have just entered the army choose the chiefs! Have they any vote to go by? They have none. And therefore elections are impossible."* [**Ibid.**]

Equally, how could workers and peasants who have just entered political or economic struggle in 1917 choose the chiefs? Had they any vote to go by? They had none. And therefore political and workplace elections are impossible. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky soon ended up applying this logic to politics as well, defending (like all the leaders of Bolshevism) the dictatorship of the party **over** working class. How could the *"ignorant"* workers be expected to elect the best *"chiefs"* never mind manage their own affairs!

Ironically, in 1936 the Stalinist Communist Party in Spain was to make very similar arguments about the need for a regular army and army discipline to win the war. As Aileen O'Carroll in her essay *"Freedom and Revolution"* argues:

> *"The conventional army structure evolved when feudal kings or capitalist governments required the working class to fight its wars for them. These had to be authoritarian institutions, because although propaganda and jingoism can play a part initially*



of the Whites ensured their defeat. As the correspondent of **Le Temps** observed:

> *"There is no doubt that Denikin's defeat is explained more by the uprising of the peasants who brandished Makhno's black flag, then by the success of Trotsky's regular army. The partisan bands of 'Batko' tipped the scales in favour of the Reds."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 208]

Palij argues that it was the *"rapidly changing military situation [which] soon caused a change in the Bolsheviks' attitude toward Makhno."* The two forces meet up on December 24th, 1919. However, *"[a]lthough the Bolsheviks fraternised with the Makhno troops and the commander even offered co-operation, they distrusted Makhno, fearing the popularity he had gained as a result of his successful fight against Denikin."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 209] It should also be stressed that **no** formal treaty was signed.

Clearly, Rees' summary leaves a lot to be desired!

This is not the end of it. Rees even attempts to blame the Makhnovists for the attack of General Wrangel. He argues that *"by the end of 1919 the immediate White threat was removed. Makhno refused to move his troops to the Polish front to meet the imminent invasion and hostilities with the Red Army began again on an even more widespread scale."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58]

This, needless to say, is a total distortion of the facts. Firstly, it should be noted that the *"imminent"* invasion by Poland Rees mentions did not, in fact, occur until *"the end of April"* (the 26th, to be precise). The break with Makhno occurred as a result of an order issued in early January (the 8th, to be precise). [Michael Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 219 and p. 210] Clearly, the excuse of *"imminent"* invasion was a cover, as recognised by a source Rees himself uses, namely Palij's work:

> *"The author of the order realised at that time there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks*

his troops and region in danger). Rather, he waited until the Bolsheviks showed that they would not defend the Ukraine against the Whites before he acted. As such, Rees misuses his source material and used Palij as evidence for a viewpoint which is the exact opposite of the one he recounts. The dishonesty is obvious. But, then again, it is understandable, as Trotsky banning a worker, peasant and partisan congress would hardly fit into Rees' attempt to portray the Bolsheviks as democratic socialists overcome by objective circumstances! Given that the Makhnovists had successfully held three such congresses to discuss the war against reaction, how could objective circumstances be blamed for the dictatorial actions of Trotsky and other leading Red Army officers in the Ukraine? Better not to mention this and instead rewrite history by making Makhno break with the Bolsheviks and attack them for no reason!

Rees moves onto the period of co-operation between the insurgents and the Bolsheviks. His version of what happened is that *"Denikin's advance against Makhno's territory in autumn 1919 quickly forced a renewal of the treaty with the Bolsheviks. Makhno harassed Denikin's troops from the rear, making their advance more difficult."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58]

A more accurate account of what happened would be that Makhno reorganised his troops after the Bolsheviks had retreated and evacuated the Ukraine. These troops included those that had been left in the Red Army in June, who now left to rejoin him (and brought a few Red Army units along too). After conducting quick and demoralising raids against Denikin's forces, the Makhnovists were forced to retreat to the West (followed by White forces). In late September, near Peregonovka, Makhno inflicted a major defeat against the following Whites and allowed the Makhnovists to attack across Denikin's supply lines (which stopped his attack on Moscow thus, ironically, saving the Bolshevik regime). Makhno's swift attack on the rear



> *in encouraging enlistment, the horrors of war soon expose the futility of nationalism. A large part of military organisation is aimed at ensuring that soldiers remain fighting for causes they do not necessarily believe in. Military discipline attempts to create an unthinking, unquestioning body of soldiers, as fearful of their own side as of the other."* [**Red & Black Revolution**, no. 1]

In short in both Russia and Spain the Bolsheviks wanted an army that would obey them regardless of whether the individual soldiers felt they were doing the correct thing, indeed who would obey through fear of their officers even when they knew what they were doing was wrong. Such a body would be essential for enforcing minority rule over the wishes of the workers. Would a self-managed army be inclined to repress workers' and peasants' strikes and protests? Of course not.

The Makhnovists show that another kind of revolutionary army was possible in the Russian Revolution and that the *"ignorant"* masses could choose their own officers. In other words, the latter-day justifications of the followers of Bolshevism are wrong when they assert that the creation of the top-down, hierarchical Red Army was a result of the *"contradiction between the political consciousness and circumstantial coercion"* and *"a retreat"* because *"officers were appointed and not elected,"* it was a conscript army and *"severe military discipline."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October"*, **International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3–82, p. 46] As can be seen, Trotsky did not consider it as a *"retreat"* or caused by *"circumstances."* Equally, the Makhnovists managed to organise themselves relatively democratically in the circumstances created by the same civil war.

As such, the differences between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks as regards the internal organisation of a revolutionary army are clear. The Bolsheviks applied top-down, bourgeois methods of internal organisation and discipline.

The Makhnovists applied democratic internal organisation and discipline as far as possible.

From our discussion of the Bolshevik justifications for its system of appointed officers in the Red Army, it will come as no surprise that as regards the relationship of the soviets to the revolutionary organisation (party) the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks were (again) miles apart. While we discuss this in greater detail in section 14 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?", we will give a flavour of Bolshevik ideology on this subject here.

From the start, Lenin identified soviet (or working class) power with the power of their own party. In October 1917, Lenin was equating party and class: *"the power of the Bolsheviks — that is, the power of the proletariat."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 102] After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks were clear that the soviets would not have *"all power."* Rather, the first act of soviet sovereignty was to alienate it into the hands of a Bolshevik government. In response to a few leading Bolsheviks who called for a coalition government, the Bolshevik Central Committee stated that it was *"impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets ... handed power over to this government."* [quoted by Robery V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, pp. 127–8] How can the *"power of the Soviets"* exist when said soviets immediately *"handed power"* over to another body? Thus the only *"power"* the soviets had was simply the *"power"* to determine who actually held political power.

The question of who held power, the soviets or the party, came into focus when the soviet elections resulted in non-Bolshevik majorities being elected. After the initial honeymoon period, soviet elections started to go badly for the Bolsheviks. Ever since taking power in 1917, the Bolsheviks had become increasingly alienated from the working class.



bers of Makhno's staff *"were captured and executed the next day."* **Now** Palij recounts how *"[a]s soon as Makhno left the front he and his associates began to organise new partisan detachments in the Bolsheviks' rear, which subsequently attacked strongholds, troops, police, trains and food collectors."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 177]

Palij *"subsequently"* refers to Makhno after Denikin's breakthrough and his occupation of the Ukraine. *"The oppressive policy of the Denikin regime,"* he notes, *"convinced the population that it was as bad as the Bolshevik regime, and brought a strong reaction that led able young men ... to leave their homes and join Makhno and other partisan groups."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 190] As Makhno put it, *"[w]hen the Red Army in south Ukraine began to retreat ... as if to straighten the front line, but in reality to evacuate Ukraine ... only then did my staff and I decide to act."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 190] After trying to fight Denikin's troops, Makhno retreated and called upon his troops to leave the Red Army and rejoin the fight against Denikin. He *"sent agents amongst the Red troops"* to carry out propaganda urging them to stay and fight Denikin with the Makhnovists, which they did in large numbers. This propaganda was *"combined with sabotage."* Between these two events, Makhno had entered the territory of pogromist warlord Hryhoryiv (which did **not** contain Red troops as they were in conflict) and assassinated him. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191 and p. 173]

It should also be noted that Palij states that it was the Whites who *"were the main enemy that Makhno fought, stubbornly and uncompromisingly, from the end of 1918 to the end of 1919."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 177]

Clearly, Rees's summary leaves a lot to be desired! Rather than Makhno attacking the Bolsheviks, it was they who broke with him — as Palij, Rees's source, makes clear. Indeed, Makhno made no attempt to undermine the Red Army's campaign against Denikin (after all, that would have placed

*Army"* and quotes Michael Palij's book **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno** as follows: *"as soon as Makhno left the front he and his associates began to organise new partisan detachments in the Bolsheviks' rear, which subsequently attacked strongholds, troops, police, trains and food collectors."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58] Rees is clearly implying that Makhno attacked the Bolsheviks, apparently for no reason. The truth is totally different. It is easy to show this — all we need to do is look at the book he uses as evidence.

Rees quotes Palij on page 177. This page is from chapter 16, which is called *"The Bolsheviks Break with Makhno."* As this was not enough of a clue, Palij presents some necessary background for this Bolshevik break. He notes that before the break, *"the Bolsheviks renewed their anti-Makhno propaganda. Trotsky, in particular, led a violent campaign against the Makhno movement."* He also mentions that *"[a]t the same time, the supplies of arms and other war materials to Makhno were stopped, thus weakening the Makhno forces vis-a-vis the Denikin troops."* In this context, the Makhnovists Revolutionary Military Council *"decided to call a fourth congress of peasants, workers, and partisans"* for June 15th, 1919, which Trotsky promptly banned, warning the population that *"participation in the Congress shall be considered an act of state treason against the Soviet Republic and the front."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 175 and p. 176]

The Bolsheviks had, of course, tried to ban the third congress in April but had been ignored. This time, they made sure that they were not. Makhno and his staff were not informed of Trotsky's dictatorial order and learned of it three days later. On June 9th, Makhno sent a telegram informing the Bolsheviks that he was leaving his post as leader of the Makhnovists. He *"handed over his command and left the front with a few of his close associates and a cavalry detachment"* while calling upon the partisans to *"remain at the front to hold off Denikin's forces."* Trotsky ordered his arrest, but Makhno was warned in advance and escaped. On June 15–16th, mem-



The spring and summer of 1918 saw *"great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections"* in all provincial city elections that data is available for. The Mensheviks were the main beneficiaries of these election swings (Socialist Revolutionaries also gained) The Bolsheviks forcibly disbanded such soviets. They continually postponed elections and *"pack[ed] local soviets once they could no longer count on an electoral majority"* by giving representation to the organisations they dominated which made workplace elections meaningless. [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 22–4 and p. 33] In Petrograd, such packing swamped the actual number of workplace delegates, transforming the soviets and making elections irrelevant. Of the 700-plus deputies to the "new" soviet, over half were elected by Bolshevik dominated organisations so ensuring a solid Bolshevik majority even before the factory voting began.

Thus, the regime remained "soviet" in name only. Faced with a defeat in the soviets, the Bolsheviks simply abolished them or changed them to ensure their position. This process, it should be noted, started **before** the outbreak of Civil War in late May 1918, implying that Bolshevik authoritarianism cannot be explained as reactions to difficult objective circumstances.

Unsurprisingly, Bolshevik ideology started to adjust to the position the party found itself in. As Samuel Farber argues, in the *"period of March to June 1918, Lenin began to make frequent distinctions **within** the working class, singling out workers who could still be trusted, denouncing workers whom he accused of abandoning the working class and deserting to the side of the bourgeoisie, and complaining about how the working class had become 'infected with the disease of petty-bourgeois disintegration.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Combined with the vision of "working-class" or "soviet" power expressed by the power of his party, this laid the foundations for what came next. In 1919 Lenin fully and explicitly argued that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was, in fact, the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party:

> *"we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party ... we say, 'Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position ... '"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 29, p. 535]

This quickly become Bolshevik orthodoxy. Trotsky argued in his infamous work **Terrorism and Communism** that there was *"no substitution at all"* when *"the power of the party"* replaces *"the power of the working class."* Zinoviev argued this point at the Second Congress of the Communist International. As he put it:

> *"Today, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class ... [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920**, vol. 1, pp. 151–2]

Neither Lenin nor Trotsky disagreed. By the end of the civil war, Lenin was arguing that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ...*



[Read, **Op. Cit.**, p. 268] Makhno, in comparison, had a peak of about 40,000 in late 1919 [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 112] (Read states a peak of around 30,000 [**Op. Cit.**, p. 264]). Even by the end of 1920, a few months into the Tambov rebellion (it started in August of that year), the Makhnovists still had 10 to 15 thousand troops. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 237]

In summary, the movement which lasted longer, covered a larger area and involved more troops is classed by Rees as the smaller of the two! Incredible — but it does give a flavour of the scholarship involved in his essay. Perhaps by *"smaller"* Rees simply meant that Makhno was physically shorter than Antonov?

After getting such minor details as size wrong, Rees turns to the actual history of the movement. He looks at the relations between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, accurately stating that they *"were chequered."* However, he is wrong when he tries to explain what happened by stating they *"reflect[ed] the fast changing military situation in the Ukraine throughout the civil war."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58] In fact, as we will prove, the relationships between the two forces reflected the military situation refracted through the ideology and needs of Bolshevik power. To ignore the ideological factor in the Makhnovist-Bolshevik relationships cannot be justified as the military situation does **not** fully explain what happened.

The Makhnovists co-operated with the Red Army three times. Only two of these periods were formal alliances (the first and last). Discussing the first two pacts, Rees alleges that the Makhnovists broke with the Bolsheviks. The truth is the opposite — the Bolsheviks turned on the Makhnovists and betrayed them in order to consolidate their power. These facts are hardly unknown to Rees as they are contained in the very books he quotes from as evidence for his rewritten history.

The first pact between the Makhnovists and the Red Army ended June 1918. According to Rees, *"[c]o-operation continued until June 1919 when the Insurgent Army broke from the Red*

*Whites"*! And Rees lambastes socialist Samuel Farber for mentioning the *"Red Terror, but not the Green Terror"* in Farber's discussion of the Tambov revolt! All in all, pretty pathetic.

Rees' concern for the truth can be seen from the fact that he asserts that Makhno's *"rebellion"* was *"smaller"* than the Tambov uprising and distinguished from it *"only by the muddled anarchism of its leader."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58] In fact, the Makhnovist movement was the bigger of the two. As Michael Malet notes:

> *"The differences between them explain why the Makhnovshchina lasted over four years, the Antonovshchina less than one year. The initial area of the Makhno movement was larger, and later expanded, whereas the Antonov region was restricted to the southern half of one province throughout its existence. The Makhno movement became established earlier, and was well-known before its break with the soviet regime. A crucial factor was the period of peace between the Bolsheviks and Makhno during the first half of 1919, something Antonov never had. It allowed for political and social development as well as military build-up. It followed from this that Makhno attracted much more support, which was increased and deepened by the positive ideology of Makhno and the anarchists who came to help him. This was not a matter of being anti-State and anti-town — all the Greens, including Antonov, shared this view in a less sophisticated form — but a positive land policy and a realisation of the need to link up with the towns on a federal basis in the post-revolutionary society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155]

Even in terms of troops, the Makhno movement was larger. The Antonov rebellion had *"a peak of around 20,000"* troops.



*the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21]

This places the Bolshevik betrayals of the Makhnovists in 1919 and 1920 into **political** context. It also explains the Bolshevik opposition to the proposed fourth clause of the 1920 political and military agreement (see last section). Simply put, at the time (and long afterwards) the Bolsheviks equated the revolution with their own power. As such, Makhnovist calls for soviet self-management threatened the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (i.e. dictatorship of the party) by encouraging working people to participate in the revolution and giving the radically false idea that working-class power could be exercised by working people and their own class organisations.

Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev held this position until their deaths. Trotsky, for example, was arguing in 1923 that *"[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158] Even after the rise of Stalinism, he was still arguing for the *"objective necessity"* of the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* in 1937. He stressed that the *"revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions."* [Trotsky, **Writings 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]

This suggests that the later Trotskyist argument that the Bolsheviks were forced by *"objective factors"* to replace the dictatorship of the proletariat by that of the party is false. At the time, and afterwards, the Bolsheviks did not argue in these terms. The end of soviet democracy was not considered a problem or a retreat for the revolution. The opposite was

the case, with the elimination of democracy being raised to an ideological truism to be applied everywhere. Equally, the fact that the Makhnovists did all they could to promote soviet self-management and actually called regional congresses of workers, peasants and insurgents suggests that *"objective factors"* simply cannot explain Bolshevik actions. Simply put, like the Bolshevik betrayals of the Makhnovists, the Bolshevik elimination of soviet democracy by party dictatorship can only be fully understood by looking at Bolshevik ideology.

Little wonder the Makhnovists argued as followed:

> *"Since the arrival of the Bolsheviks the dictatorship of their party has been established here. As a party of statists, the Bolshevik Party everywhere has set up state organs for the purpose of governing the revolutionary people. Everything has to be submitted to their authority and take place under their vigilant eye. All opposition, protest, or even independent initiative has been stifled by their Extraordinary Commissions [the secret police, the Cheka]. Furthermore, all these institutions are composed of people who are removed from labour and from revolution. In other words, what has been created is a situation in which the labouring and revolutionary people have fallen under the surveillance and rule of people who are alien to the working classes, people who are inclined to exercise arbitrariness and violence over the workers. Such is the dictatorship of the Bolshevik-Communist Party .. .*
>
> *"We again remind the working people that they will liberate themselves from oppression, misery and violence only through their own efforts. No change in power will help them in this. Only by means of their own free worker-peasant organisations can the workers reach the summit of the social revolution*



> *Soviet authorities is based on a fabrication, and the picture these authorities draw from such a diary is an ordinary lie."* [Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 226f]

Ironically enough, Rees implicitly acknowledges this by lamely admitting (in an end note) that *"Makhno seems to have had two 'wives'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 78] And we should note that the source Rees uses for the fake diary entries (W.H. Chamberlin's **The Russian Revolution**) uses as **his** source the very Bolshevik documentation that Arshinov quite correctly denounced over 70 years before Rees put pen to paper. Little wonder Michael Palij, in his detailed account of the movement (**The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921**), fails to use it. So, in summary, a major part of his account is based on falsehoods, falsehoods exposed as such decades ago. This indicates well the quality of his case against the Makhnovist movement.

As regards the "evidence" he extracts from this fake diary and Red Army reports, it simply shows that Bolsheviks were shot by Makhno's troops and Red Army troops died in combat. This went both ways, of course. In *"military operations the Bolsheviks shot all prisoners. The Makhnovists shot all captured officers unless the Red rank and file strongly interceded for them. The rank and file were usually sent home, though a number volunteered for service with the Insurgents."* Equally, *"[o]n the occupation of a village by the Red Army the Cheka would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovite supporters; an amenable Soviet would be set up; officials would be appointed or imported to organise the poor peasants ... and three or four Red militia men left as armed support for the new village bosses."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 292–3] As such, Rees' account of Makhnovist "terror" against the Bolsheviks seems somewhat hypocritical. We can equally surmise that the methods used by the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists also *"often mirrored those used by the*

said of his account is that at least he does not raise the totally discredited accusation that the Makhnovists were anti-Semitic or *"kulaks."* However, he more than makes up for this by distorting the facts and references he uses (it would be no exaggeration to argue that the only information Rees gets correct about his sources is the page number).

Rees starts by setting the tone, stating that the *"methods used by Makhno and Antonov [a leader of the "Greens" in Tambov] in their fight against the Red Army often mirrored those used by the Whites."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 57] Strangely enough, while he lists some for Antonov, he fails to specify any against Makhno. However, the scene is set. His strongest piece of evidence as regards Makhno's *"methods"* against the Red Army come from mid-1920 after, it should be noted, the Bolsheviks had engineered the outlawing of the Makhnovist movement and needlessly started the very conflict Rees uses as evidence against Makhno. In other words, he is attacking the Makhnovists for defending themselves against Bolshevik aggression!

He quotes reports from the Ukrainian Front to blacken the Makhnovists, using them to confirm the picture he extracts from *"the diary of Makhno's wife."* These entries, from early 1920, he claims *"betray the nature of the movement"* (i.e. after, as we shall see, the Bolsheviks had engineered the outlawing of the Makhnovists). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58] The major problem for Rees' case is the fact that this diary is a fake and has been known to be a fake since Arshinov wrote his classic account of the Makhnovists in 1923:

> *"After 1920, the Bolsheviks wrote a great deal about the personal defects of Makhno, basing their information on the diary of his so-called wife, a certain Fedora Gaenko .... But Makhno's wife is Galina Andreevna Kuz'menko. She has lived with him since 1918. She* ***never*** *kept, and therefore never lost, a diary. Thus the documentation of the*



> *— complete freedom and real equality."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.** pp. 116–7]

Which brings us to the next issue, namely working-class freedom. For anarchists, the key point of a revolution is to increase working-class freedom. It means the end of hierarchy and the direct participation in the revolution by the working classes themselves. As Bakunin put it, *"revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237] For this reason, the Makhnovists (like Bakunin) argued for a revolutionary society based on free federations of worker and peasant organisations (free soviets).

This means that actions which consolidated rule by a few cannot be revolutionary, even if the few are made up of the most revolutionary of the revolutionaries. Thus working class power cannot be equated to the power of a political party, no matter how *"socialist"* or *"revolutionary"* its ideas or rhetoric. This means that Bolshevik restrictions on working class freedom (of speech, assembly, press, organisation) struck at the heart of the revolution. It did not signify the defence of the revolution, but rather its defeat. Ultimately, as Emma Goldman quickly recognised, what the Bolsheviks called *"defence of the Revolution"* was *"really only the defence of [the] party in power."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 57]

Anarchists had long argued that, to quote Goldman again, there is *"no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical."*

[**Op. Cit.**, p. 260] The evolution of Bolshevik practice and theory reinforces this argument. The means used had an impact on the course of events, which in turn shaped the next set of means and the ideology used to justify it.

This explains the Makhnovist and Bolshevik differences in relationship to working-class freedom. For anarchists, only freedom or the struggle for freedom can teach people to be free (and so is genuinely revolutionary). This explains why the Makhnovists not only proclaimed freedom of election, speech, press, assembly and organisation for working people, which was an essential revolutionary position, they also implemented it (see section 7). The Bolsheviks did the reverse, clamping down on the opposition at every occasion (including workers' strikes and protests). For the Makhnovists, working-class freedom was the key gain of the revolution, and so had to be introduced, practised and defended. Hence Makhno:

> *"I consider it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call congresses on their own account, to discuss their affairs. That is why the prohibitions of such congresses, and the declaration proclaiming them illegal ... , represent a direct and insolent violation of the rights of the workers."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

For the Bolsheviks, working-class freedom was something to fear. Back in 1903, Lenin laid the groundwork for this by arguing that the *"**spontaneous** development of the labour movement leads to it being subordinated to bourgeois ideology."* He stressed that *"the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness ... the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist*



[**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] This explains his attack on the Makhnovist movement. Faced with the same *"objective factors"* as the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists did not act in the same way. As such, the *"subjective factor"* amounts to more than Rees' stark choice and so objective conditions cannot explain everything.

Clearly, then, the Makhnovists undermine his basic thesis. As such, we would expect a less than honest account of the movement and Rees does not disappoint. He talks about the *"muddled anarchism"* of Makhno, dismissing the whole movement as offering no alternative to Bolshevism and being without *"an articulated political programme."* Ultimately, for Rees, Makhno's *"anarchism was a thin veneer on peasant rebellion"* and while *"on paper"* the Makhnovists *"appeared to have a more democratic programme"* there were *"frauds."* [p. 57, p. 58, p. 61 and p. 70]

The reality of the situation is totally different. Ignoring the obvious contradiction (i.e. how can the Makhnovists have the appearance of a *"democratic programme"* and, simultaneously, not articulate it?) we shall analyse his account of the Makhnovist movement in order to show exactly how low the supporters of Bolshevism will go to distort the historical record for their own aims (see the appendix "What was the Kronstadt uprising?" for Rees's distortions about the Kronstadt revolt). Once the selective and edited quotations provided by Rees are corrected, the picture that clearly emerges is that rather than the Makhnovists being *"frauds,"* it is Rees' account which is the fraud (along with the political tradition which inspired it).

Rees presents two aspects of his critique of the Makhnovists. The first is a history of the movement and its relationships (or lack of them) with the Bolsheviks. The second is a discussion of the ideas which the Makhnovists tried to put into practice. Both aspects of his critique are extremely flawed. Indeed, the errors in his history of the movement are so fundamental (and, indeed, so at odds with his references) that it suggests that ideology overcame objectivity (to be polite). The best that can be

*Also the anarchist historian Paul Avrich mentions it in his work **The anarchists in the Russian Revolution**."* [**Op. Cit.**, no. 175, p. 15]

In reality, neither work says any such thing. Looking at the first (unnamed) one, assuming it is E.H. Carr's **The Bolshevik Revolution** there is no reference to pogroms carried out by the Makhnovists (looking in the index for "Makhno"). Which, perhaps, explains why the paper refused to provide a book title and page number. As far as the second reference goes, Avrich made no such claim in **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**. He **did** address the issue in his **Anarchist Portraits**, concluding such charges are false.

And the name of the original article? Ironically, it was entitled *"The anarchist school of falsification"*!

However, more sophisticated slanders, lies and distortions have been levelled at the Makhnovists by the supporters of Bolshevism. This is to be expected, as the experience of the Makhnovists effectively refute the claim that the Bolsheviks had no choice but to act as they did. It is hard to maintain a position that "objective conditions" made the Bolsheviks act as they did when another mass revolutionary army, operating in the same environment, did not act in the same way. This means that the Makhnovists are strong evidence that Bolshevik politics played a key role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. Clearly such a conclusion is dangerous to Bolshevism and so the Maknovist movement must be attacked, regardless of the facts.

A recent example of this is John Rees' essay *"In Defence of October"* (**International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3–82). Rees, a member of the UK Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) is at pains to downplay the role of Bolshevik ideology in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. He argues that "objective factors" ensured that the Bolsheviks acted as they did. The *"subjective factor"* was simply a choice between defeat and defence against the Whites: *"Within these limits Bolshevik policy was decisive."*



*intelligentsia."* This meant that *"Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness ... could only be brought to them from without."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82 and pp. 74–5] Clearly, if the workers turned against the party, then the workers were *"being subordinated to bourgeois ideology."* It was in their own interests, therefore, for the party to subordinate the workers and so soviet democracy became not an expression of working-class power but rather something which undermined it!

This perspective can be seen when the Makhnovists liberated cities. In Alexandrovsk and Katerinoslav, the Bolsheviks proposed to the Makhnovists spheres of action — their **Revkom** (Revolutionary Committee) would handle political affairs and the Makhnovists military ones. Makhno advised them *"to go and take up some honest trade instead of seeking to impose their will on the workers."* Instead, the Makhnovists called upon *"the working population to participate in a general conference .... and it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forced and their organisations."* [Arshinov **Op. Cit.**, p. 154 and p. 149] The differences between the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists could not be clearer.

Lastly, we should note that while Lenin and the leading Bolsheviks wholeheartedly opposed working-class economic self-management by factory committees and instead urged "efficient" top-down one-man management, the Makhnovists supported working-class self-management of production. Under the Bolsheviks, as Arshinov argued, the *"nationalisation of industry, [while] removing the workers from the hands of individual capitalists, delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single, ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital, with the sole difference that the Communist boss, the State, not only exploits the workers, but also punishes them himself ... Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obli-*

*gation to the State ... It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 71] The Makhnovist propaganda, in contrast, stressed the need for workers to socialise the means of production and place it under their direct management by their own class organs. In other words, the abolition of wage slavery by workers' self-management of production.

Unsurprisingly, the Makhnovists supported the Kronstadt rebellion (see the appendix "What was the Kronstadt uprising?" for more on Kronstadt). Indeed, there is significant overlap between the Kronstadt demands and the ideas of the Makhnovist movement. For example, the Makhnovist idea of free soviets is almost identical to the first three points of the Kronstadt programme and their land policy the same as point 11 of the Kronstadt demands. The Kronstadt rebels also raised the idea of *"free soviets"* and the *"third revolution,"* common Makhnovist slogans (see section 3 of the appendix "What was the Kronstadt uprising?" for details). As one Bolshevik writer notes, it is *"characteristic that the anarchist-Makhnovists in the Ukraine reprinted the appeal of the Kronstadters, and in general did not hide their sympathy for them."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] Voline also noted that the *"ideas and activities of the Makhnovist peasants were similar in all respects to those of the Kronstadt rebels in 1921."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 575]

In summary, the major difference between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks is that the former stuck by and introduced their stated aims of *"soviet power"* and working-class freedom while the latter rejected them once they clashed with Bolshevik party policies.

## 15 How do the modern followers of Bolshevism slander the Makhnovists?

Many modern-day supporters of Bolshevism, on the rare occasions when they do mention the Makhnovist movement, simply repeat the old Bolshevik (and Stalinist) slanders against them.

For example, this is what Joseph Seymour of the U.S. **Spartacus League** did. Their newspaper **Workers Vanguard** ran a series entitled *"Marxism vs. Anarchism"* and in part 7, during his discussion of the Russian Revolution, Seymour claimed:

> *"The most significant counter-revolutionary force under the banner of anarchism was the Ukrainian peasant-based army of Nestor Makhno, which carried out pogroms against Jewish communities and collaborated with White armies against the Bolsheviks."* [**Workers Vanguard**, 8/30/1996, p. 7]

Seymour, needless to say, made these accusations without providing any documentation, and with good reason, for outside of Stalinist hagiographies, no evidence exists to support his claims. As we indicated in section 9, the Makhnovists opposed anti-Semitism and did **not** conduct pogroms. Equally, section 12 proves that the Makhnovists did **not** collaborate with the Whites in any way (although this did not stop the Bolshevik press deliberately spreading the lie that they had).

More recently, the UK Leninist **Revolutionary Communist Group** asserted in their paper that the Makhnovists *"joined with counter-revolutionary White and imperialist armies against socialist Russia. This band of brigands also carried out pogroms against Jewish communities in the Ukraine."* [**Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!**, issue no. 174, p. 12] No evidence for such a claim was presented in the original review article. When an anarchist pointed out their assertion was *"falling back on a long tradition of Stalinist lies"* and asked for *"any historical references"* to support it, the paper replied by stating that while there were *"several"* references, it would give two: *"E.H. Carr refers to it in his history of the civil war.*

*free and democratic society,"* castes *"related as subordinates and superiors."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 216]

Moving on, Caplan defines the Historical Argument as:

> *"A second popular argument states that historically, the term 'anarchism' has been clearly linked with anarcho-socialists, anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists, and other enemies of the capitalist system. Hence, the term 'anarcho-capitalism' is a strange oxymoron which only demonstrates ignorance of the anarchist tradition."*

He argues that *"even if we were to accept the premise of this argument — to wit, that the meaning of a word is somehow determined by its historical usage — the conclusion would not follow because the minor premise is wrong. It is simply not true that from its earliest history, all anarchists were opponents of private property, free markets, and so on."*

Firstly, anarchism is not just a word, but a political idea and movement and so the word used in a political context is associated with a given body of ideas. You cannot use the word to describe something which has little or nothing in common with that body of ideas. You cannot call Marxism "anarchism" simply because they share the anarchist opposition to capitalist exploitation and aim for a stateless society, for example.

Secondly, it is true that anarchists like Tucker were not against the free market, but they did not consider capitalism to be defined by the free market but by exploitation and wage labour (as do all socialists). In this they share a common ground with Market Socialists who, like Tucker and Proudhon, do not equate socialism with opposition to the market or capitalism with the "free market." The idea that socialists oppose *"private property, free markets, and so on"* is just an assumption by Caplan. Proudhon, for example, was not opposed to competition, "property" (in the sense of possession) and markets but during his lifetime and up to the present date he is acknowledged



> *which assisted the Bolsheviks in seizing the surplus grain ... The establishment of Committees of the Poor was painful to Makhno because they became not only part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus the peasants opposed, but also informers helping the Bolshevik secret police in its persecution of the partisans, their families and supporters, even to the extent of hunting down and executing wounded partisans ... Consequently, Makhno's 'heart hardened and he sometimes ordered executions where some generosity would have bestowed more credit upon him and his movement. That the Bolsheviks preceded him with the bad example was no excuse. For he claimed to be fighting for a better cause.' Although the committees in time gave the Bolsheviks a hold on every village, their abuse of power disorganised and slowed down agricultural life ... This policy of terror and exploitation turned almost all segments of Ukrainian society against the Bolsheviks, substantially strengthened the Makhno movement, and consequently facilitated the advance of the reorganised anti-Bolshevik force of General Wrangel from the Crimea into South Ukraine, the Makhno region."* [M. Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 213–4]

Amazing what a *"..."* can hide, is it not! Rees turns an account which clearly shows the Bolshevik policy was based on informers, secret police and the murder of rebels as well as being a total disaster into a victory. Moreover, he also transforms it so that the victims are portrayed as the villains. Words cannot do this re-writing of history justice. Yes, indeed, an organisation of informers to the secret police in every village can aid the *"ascendancy"* of a one-party dictatorship (aided, of course, by

overwhelming military force), but it cannot aid the ascendancy of freedom, equality and socialism.

Given the actual record of the Bolsheviks' attempts to break up what they considered the *"age-old class structure"* of the villages with the *"Committees of the Poor,"* it is clear why Rees distorts his source.

It does seem ironic that Rees attacks the Makhnovists for not pursuing Bolshevik peasant policies. Considering the absolute **failure** of those policies, the fact that Makhno did not follow them is hardly cause for condemnation! Indeed, given the numerous anti-Bolshevik uprisings and large-scale state repression they provoked, attacking the Makhnovists for not pursuing such insane policies is equally insane. After all, who, in the middle of a Civil War, makes matters worse for themselves by creating more enemies? Only the insane — or the Bolsheviks!

That Makhnovist land policy was correct and the Bolshevik one wrong can be seen from the fact that the latter changed their policies and brought them into line with the Makhnovist ones. As Palij notes, the Bolsheviks *"modified their agricultural policy by introducing on February 5, 1920, a new land law, distributing the formers landlords', state, and church lands among the peasants."* This, of course, was a vindication of Makhnovist policy (which dated from 1917!). Makhno *"initiated the peasants' movement, confiscating and distributing landlords' land and goods"* (and, unlike the Bolsheviks, *"encouraging the workers to take over factories and workshops"*). As regards the Bolsheviks attempts to break up what they considered the *"age-old class structure"* of the villages with the *"Committees of the Poor,"* it was, as noted above, a complete disaster and counter-productive. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 213 and p. 250] All in all, the Makhnovist policies were clearly the most successful as regards the peasantry. They broke up the class system in the countryside by expropriating the ruling class and did not



> *eryone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there is no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. So long as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170]

Of course Rothbard does not draw the obvious conclusion. He wants to maintain that the state is bad and property is good while drawing attention to their obvious similarities! Ultimately Rothbard is exposing the bankruptcy of his own politics and analysis. According to Rothbard, something can look like a state (i.e. have the *"ultimate decision-making power"* over an area) and act like a state (i.e. *"make rules for everyone"* who lives in an area, i.e. govern them) but not be a state. This not a viable position for obvious reasons.

Thus to claim, as Caplan does, that property does not generate "rulership" is obviously nonsense. Not only does it ignore the dictionary definition of rulership (which, let us not forget, is Caplan's **own** methodology) as well as commonsense, it obviously ignores what the two institutions have in common. **If** the state is to be condemned as "rulership" then so must property — for reasons, ironically enough, Rothbard makes clear!

Caplan's critique of the *"Philological Argument"* fails because he tries to deny that the social relationship between worker and capitalist and tenant and landlord is based upon **archy,** when it obviously is. To quote Proudhon, considered by Tucker as *"the Anarchist **par excellence,**"* the employee *"is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience."* Without *"association"* (i.e. co-operative workplaces, workers' self-management) there would be *"two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers which is repugnant to a*

argue that *"economic exploitation and political domination . .. [are] two continually interacting aspects of the same thing — the subjection of man by man."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 147] Rocker made the same point, arguing that the *"exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 18]

Thus Caplan is ignoring the meaning of words to state that *"on its own terms this argument fails to exclude anarcho-capitalists"* because they define rulership to exclude most forms of archy! Hardly convincing.

Strangely enough, "anarcho"-capitalist icon Murray Rothbard actually provides evidence that the anarchist position **is** correct. He argues that the state *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170] This is obviously a form of rulership. However, he also argues that *"[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 173] Which, to state the obvious, means that **both** the state and property is marked by an *"ultimate decision-making power"* over a given territory. The only "difference" is that Rothbard claims the former is "just" (i.e. "justly" acquired) and the latter is "unjust" (i.e. acquired by force). In reality of course, the modern distribution of property is just as much a product of past force as is the modern state. In other words, the current property owners have acquired their property in the same unjust fashion as the state has its. If one is valid, so is the other. Rothbard (and "anarcho"-capitalists in general) are trying to have it both ways.

Rothbard goes on to show why statism and private property are essentially the same thing:

> *"If the State may be said too properly own its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for ev-*



create new conflicts by artificially imposing themselves onto the villages.

Lastly, we must also wonder just how sensible it is to *"disturb"* the economy that produces the food you eat. Given that Rees, in part, blames Bolshevik tyranny on the disruption of the economy, it seems incredible that he faults Makhno for not adding to the chaos by failing to *"disrupt the peasant economy"*! However, why let logic get in the way of a good rant!

As well as ignoring the wealth of information on Makhnovist land policy, Rees turns to their attempts to form free agrarian communes. He argues that Makhno's attempts *"to go beyond the traditional peasant economy were doomed"* and quotes Makhno's memoirs which state *"the mass of the people did not go over"* to his peasant communes, which only involved a few hundred families. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Looking at Makhno's memoirs a somewhat different picture appears. Firstly, Makhno states that there were *"four such agricultural communes within a three- or four-mile radius of Hulyai-Pole,"* but in the whole district *"there were many"* in 1918 (the period being discussed in his memoirs). Makhno recounts how each *"commune consisted of ten families of peasants and workers, totalling a hundred, two hundred or three hundred members"* and the *"management of each commune was conducted by a general meeting of all its members."* He does state that *"the mass of people did not go over to it"* but, significantly, he argues that this was because of *"the advance of the German and Austrian armies, their own lack of organisation, and their inability to defend this order against the new 'revolutionary' and counter-revolutionary authorities. For this reason the toiling population of the district limited their real revolutionary activity to supporting in every way those bold spirits among them who had settled on the old estates [of the landlords] and organised their personal and economic life on free communal lines."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 130–2]

Of course, failing to mention the time period Makhno was recounting does distort the success of the communes. The Bolsheviks were evacuating the Ukraine as part of their treaty with German and Austrian Imperialism when the communes were being set up. This left them in a dangerous position, needless to say. By July, 1918, the area was occupied by Austrian troops and it was early 1919 before the situation was stable enough to allow their reintroduction. One commune was named *"Rosa Luxemburg"* (after the Marxist revolutionary martyr) and was mostly destroyed by the Bolsheviks in June 1919 and completely destroyed by the Whites a few days later. In such circumstances, can it be surprising that only a minority of peasants got involved in them? Rather than praise the Makhnovists for positive social experimentation in difficult circumstances, Rees shows his ignorance of the objective conditions facing the revolution. Perhaps if the peasants did not have to worry about the Bolsheviks as well as the Whites, they would have had more members?

All in all, Rees account of Makhnovist ideas on the peasant economy are, to put it mildly, incorrect. They paint a radically different picture of the reality of both Makhnovist ideas and practice as regards the peasantry. Ironically, the soundness of Makhnovist policy in this area can be seen from the fact that the Bolsheviks changed their land policy to bring it into line with it. Not, of course, that you would know that from Rees' account. Nor would you know what the facts of the Bolsheviks' land policy were either. Indeed, Rees uses Michael Palij's book to create a picture of events which is the exact opposite of that contained in it! Very impressive!

Intent on driving the final nail into the coffin, he tries to apply "class analysis" to the Makhnovists. Rees actually states that *"given this social base [i.e the Makhnovists' peasant base] ... much of Makhno's libertarianism amounted to little more than paper decrees."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60]



does this by attempting to refute two arguments, The Philological Argument and the Historical Argument.

Taking each in turn we find:

Caplan's definition of *"The Philological Argument"* is as follows:

> *"Several critics have noted the origin of the term 'anarchy,' which derives from the Greek 'arkhos,' meaning 'ruler,' and the prefix an-,' meaning 'without.' It is therefore suggested that in my definition the word 'government' should be replaced with the word 'domination' or 'rulership'; thus re-written, it would then read: 'The theory or doctrine that all forms of rulership are unnecessary, oppressive, and undesirable and should be abolished.'"*

Caplan replies by stating that:

> *"This is all good and well, so long as we realise that various groups of anarchists will radically disagree about what is or is not an instance of 'rulership.'"*

However, in order to refute this argument by this method, he has to ignore his own methodology. A dictionary definition of ruler is *"a person who rules by authority."* and *"rule"* is defined as *"to have authoritative control over people"* or *"to keep (a person or feeling etc.) under control, to dominate"* [**The Oxford Study Dictionary**]

Hierarchy by its very nature is a form of rulership (hier-***archy***) and is so opposed by anarchists. Capitalism is based upon wage labour, in which a worker follows the rules of their boss. This is obviously a form of hierarchy, of domination. Almost all people (excluding die-hard supporters of capitalism) would agree that being told what to do, when to do and how to do by a boss is a form of rulership. Anarchists, therefore,

understand their ideas on property and instead Caplan just concentrates on the fact they use the word. Caplan also ignores:

> their many statements on being socialists and part of the wider socialist movement. their opposition to capitalist property-rights in land and other scarce resources. their recognition that capitalism was based on usury and that it was exploitation. their attacks on government **and** capital, rather than just government. their support for strikes and other forms of direct action by workers to secure the full product of their labour.

In fact, the only things considered useful seems to be the individualist anarchist's support for free agreement (something Kropotkin also agreed with) and their use of the word "property." But even a cursory investigation indicates the non-capitalist nature of their ideas on property and the socialistic nature of their theories.

Perhaps Caplan should ponder these words of Kropotkin supporters of the *"individualist anarchism of the American Proudhonians ... soon realise that the individualisation they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts, and ... abandon the ranks of the anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economist."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 297]

Caplan seems to confuse the end of the ending place of ex-anarchists with their starting point. As can be seen from his attempt to co-opt Proudhon, Spooner and Tucker he has to ignore their ideas and rewrite history.

## 6 — Appendix: Defining Anarchism

In his Appendix *"Defining Anarchism"* we find that Caplan attempts to defend his dictionary definition of anarchism. He



Ironically enough, the list of *"paper decrees"* Rees presents (when not false or distorted) are also failings associated with the Bolsheviks (and taken to even more extreme measures by the Bolsheviks)! As such, his lambasting of the Makhnovists seems deeply hypocritical. Moreover, his attempt to ground the few deviations that exist between Makhnovist practice and Makhnovist theory in the peasant base of the army seems an abuse of class analysis. After all, these deviations were also shared by the Bolsheviks. As such, how can Rees justify the Bolshevik deviations from socialist theory in terms of *"objective factors"* yet blame Makhnovist ones on their *"social base"*? Do *"objective factors"* only afflict Leninists?

Take for example his first *"paper"* decree, namely the election of commanders. He states that *"in practice the most senior commanders were appointed by Makhno."* In other words, the Makhnovists applied this principle extensively but not completely. The Bolsheviks abolished it by decree (and did not blame it on *"exceptional circumstances"* nor consider it as a *"retreat"*, as Rees asserts). Now, if Rees' "class analysis" of the limitations of the Makhnovists were true, does this mean that an army of a regime with a proletarian base (as he considers the Bolshevik regime) cannot have elected commanders? This is the logical conclusion of his argument.

Equally, his attempt to *"give a flavour of the movement"* by quoting one of the resolutions adopted by a mass meeting of partisans also backfires (namely, *"to obey the orders of the commanders if the commanders are sober enough to give them"*). Firstly, it should be noted that this was, originally, from a Red Army source. Secondly, drunkenness was a big problem during the civil war (as in any war). It was one of the easiest ways of forgetting reality at a time when life was often unpleasant and sometimes short. As such, the *"objective factor"* of civil war explains this resolution rather than the social base of the movement! Thirdly, Rees himself quotes a Central Committee member's comment to the Eighth Party

Congress that there were so many *"horrifying facts about drunkenness, debauchery, corruption, robbery and irresponsible behaviour of many party members that one's hair stands on end."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 66] The Eighth Congress was in 1919. Does this comment give a *"flavour"* of the Bolshevik regime under Lenin? Obviously not, as Rees defends it and blames this list of horrors on the objective factors facing the Bolsheviks. Why does the drunkenness of the Makhnovists come from their *"social base"* while that of the Bolsheviks from *"objective factors"*? Simply put, Rees is insulting the intelligence of his readers.

The Makhnovist resolution was passed by a mass assembly of partisans, suggesting a fundamentally democratic organisation. Rees argues that the civil war resulted in the Bolshevik vices becoming institutionalised in the power of the bureaucracy. However, as can be seen, the Makhnovists practised democracy during the civil war, suggesting that the objective factors Rees tries to blame for the Bolshevik vices simply cannot explain everything. As such, his own example (yet again) backfires on his argument.

Rees claims that *"Makhno held elections, but no parties were allowed to participate in them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60] This is probably derived from Palij's comment that the free soviets would *"carry out the will and orders of their constituents"* and *"[o]nly working people, not representatives of political parties, might join the soviets."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 151] This, in turn, derives from a Makhnovist proclamation from January 1920 which stated:

> *"Only labourers who are contributing work necessary to the social economy should participate in the soviets. Representatives of political organisations have no place in worker-peasant soviets, since their participation in a workers' soviet will transform the latter into deputies of the party and can lead to the downfall of the soviet system."* [contained



*because some anarcho-capitalists **say** they are 'anarchists' and because they criticise the State."* [Peter Sabatini, **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 100] However, being opposed to the state is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being an anarchist (as can be seen from the history of the anarchist movement). Brian Morris puts it well when he writes:

> *"The term anarchy comes from the Greek, and essentially means 'no ruler.' Anarchists are people who reject all forms of government or coercive authority, all forms of hierarchy and domination. They are therefore opposed to what the Mexican anarchist Flores Magon called the 'sombre trinity' — state, capital and the church. Anarchists are thus opposed to both capitalism and to the state, as well as to all forms of religious authority. But anarchists also seek to establish or bring about by varying means, a condition of anarchy, that is, a decentralised society without coercive institutions, a society organised through a federation of voluntary associations. Contemporary 'right-wing' libertarians ... who are often described as 'anarchocapitalists' and who fervently defend capitalism, are not in any real sense anarchists."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 38]

Rather than call themselves by a name which reflects their origins in liberalism (and **not** anarchism), the "anarcho"-capitalists have instead seen fit to try and appropriate the name of anarchism and, in order to do so, ignore key aspects of anarchist theory in the process. Little wonder, then, they try and prove their anarchist credentials via dictionary definitions rather than from the anarchist movement itself (see next section).

Caplan's attempt in his FAQ is an example to ignore individualist anarchist theory and history. Ignored is any attempt to

an extreme version of liberalism, but liberalism nevertheless — and liberalism is not anarchism. To reduce anarchism so is to destroy what makes anarchism a unique political theory and movement:

> *"anarchism does derive from liberalism and socialism both historically and ideologically ... In a sense, anarchists always remain liberals and socialists, and whenever they reject what is good in either they betray anarchism itself ... We are liberals but more so, and socialists but more so."* [Nicholas Walter, **Reinventing Anarchy**, p. 44]

In other words, "anarcho"-capitalism is a development of ideas which have little in common with anarchism. Jeremy Jennings, in his overview of anarchist theory and history, agrees:

> *"It is hard not to conclude that these ideas ["anarcho"-capitalism] — with roots deep in classical liberalism — are described as anarchist only on the basis of a misunderstanding of what anarchism is."* [**Contemporary Political Ideologies**, Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (eds.), p. 142]

Barbara Goodwin also agrees that the "anarcho"-capitalists' *"true place is in the group of right-wing libertarians"* not in anarchism [**Using Political Ideas**, p. 148]. Indeed, that "anarcho"-capitalism is an off-shoot of classical liberalism is a position Murray Rothbard would agree with, as he states that right-wing Libertarians constitute *"the vanguard of classical liberalism."* [quoted by Ulrike Heider, **Anarchism: Left, Right and Green**, p. 95] Unfortunately for this perspective anarchism is not liberalism and liberalism is not anarchism. And equally as unfortunate (this time for the anarchist movement!) "anarcho"-capitalism *"is judged to be anarchism largely*



> in Peter Arshinov's **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 266]

Rees' comments indicate that he is not familiar with the make-up of the Russian Soviets of 1917. Unlike the soviets from the 1905 revolution, those in 1917 allowed *"various parties and other organisations to acquire voting representation in the soviet executive committees."* Indeed, this was *"often how high party leaders became voting delegates to"* such bodies. It should *"be underlined that these party delegates were selected by the leadership of each political organisation, and not by the soviet assembly itself. In other words, these executive committee members were not directly elected by the representatives of the producers"* (never mind by the producers themselves). [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 31]

In addition, Russian Anarchists had often attacked the use of *"party lists"* in soviet elections, which turned the soviets from working-class organs into talking-shops. [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 190] This use of party lists meant that soviet delegates could be anyone. For example, the leading left-wing Menshevik Martov recounts that in early 1920 a chemical factory *"put up Lenin against me as a candidate [to the Moscow soviet]. I received seventy-six votes he-eight (in an open vote)."* [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 202] How would either of these two intellectuals actually know and reflect the concerns and interests of the workers they would be "delegates" of? If the soviets were meant to be the delegates of working people, then why should non-working class members of political parties be elected to a soviet?

Given that the people elected to the free soviets would be **delegates** and **not** representatives, this would mean that they would reflect the wishes of their workmates rather than the decisions of the party's central committee. As such, if a worker who was a member of a political party could convince their workmates of their ideas, the delegate would reflect the deci-

sions of the mass assembly. As such, the input of political parties would not be undermined in any way (although their domination would be!).

As such, the Makhnovist ideas on soviets did not, in fact, mean that workers and peasants could **not** elect or send delegates who were members of political parties. They had no problems as such with delegates who happened to be working-class party members. They did have problems with delegates representing only political parties, delegates who were not workers and soviets being mere ciphers covering party rule.

That this was the case can be seen from a few facts. Firstly, the February 1919 congress resolution *"was written by the anarchists, left Socialist Revolutionaries, and the chairman."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] Similarly, the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet created at the Aleksandrovsk congress in late 1919 had three Communists elected to it. There were 18 delegates from workers at that congress, six were Mensheviks and the remaining 12 included Communists [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111, p. 124] Clearly, members of political parties were elected to both the congresses and the Revolutionary Military Soviet. As such, the idea that free soviets excluded members of political parties is false — they simply were not dominated by them (for example, having executives made up of members of a single party or delegating their power to a government as per the national soviet in Russia). This could, of course, change. In the words of the Makhnovist reply to Bolshevik attempts to ban one of their congresses:

> *"The Revolutionary Military Council ... holds itself above the pressure and influence of all parties and only recognises the people who elected it. Its duty is to accomplish what the people have instructed it to do, and to create no obstacles to any left socialist party in the propagation of ideas. Consequently, if one day the Bolshevik idea succeeds among the work-*



clear that they considered themselves as socialists, against capitalism (it may be claimed that Spooner never called himself a socialist, but then again he never called himself an anarchist either; it is his strong opposition to wage labour that places him in the socialist camp). Secondly, Caplan lets the cat out the bag by noting that this "adoption" involved a few warnings — more specifically, the attempt to rubbish or ignore the underlying socio-economic ideas of Tucker and Spooner and the obvious anti-capitalist nature of their vision of a free society.

Individualist anarchists are, indeed, more similar to classical liberals than social anarchists. Similarly, social anarchists are more similar to Marxists than Individualist anarchists. But neither statement means that Individualist anarchists are capitalists, or social anarchists are state socialists. It just means some of their ideas overlap — and we must point out that Individualist anarchist ideas overlap with Marxist ones, and social anarchist ones with liberal ones (indeed, one interesting overlap between Marxism and Individualist Anarchism can be seen from Marx's comment that abolishing interest and interest-bearing capital *"means the abolition of capital and of capitalist production itself."* [**Theories of Surplus Value**, vol. 3, p. 472] Given that Individualist Anarchism aimed to abolish interest (along with rent and profit) it would suggest, from a Marxist position, that it is a socialist theory).

So, if we accept Kropotkin's summary that Individualist Anarchism ideas are *"partly those of Proudhon, but party those of Herbert Spencer"* [**Kropotkins' Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 173], what the "anarcho"-capitalist school is trying to is to ignore the Proudhonian (i.e. socialist) aspect of their theories. However, that just leaves Spencer and Spencer was not an anarchist, but a right-wing Libertarian, a supporter of capitalism (a *"champion of the capitalistic class"* as Tucker put it). In other words, to ignore the socialist aspect of Individualist Anarchism (or anarchism in general) is to reduce it to liberalism,

that anarchism and capitalism are two **different** political ideas with specific (and opposed) meanings — to deny these meanings by uniting the two terms creates an oxymoron, one that denies the history and the development of ideas as well as the whole history of the anarchist movement itself.

As Kropotkin knew Proudhon to be an anti-capitalist, a socialist (but not a communist) it is hardly surprising that he mentions him. Again, Caplan's attempt to provide historical evidence for a "right-wing" anarchism fails. Funny that the followers of Kropotkin are now defending individualist anarchism from the attempted "adoption" by supporters of capitalism! That in itself should be enough to indicate Caplan's attempt to use Kropotkin to give credence to "anarcho"-capitalist co-option of Proudhon, Tucker and Spooner fails.

Interestingly, Caplan admits that "anarcho"-capitalism has recent origins. In section 8 (Who are the major anarchist thinkers?) he states:

> *"Anarcho-capitalism has a much more recent origin in the latter half of the 20th century. The two most famous advocates of anarcho-capitalism are probably Murray Rothbard and David Friedman. There were however some interesting earlier precursors, notably the Belgian economist Gustave de Molinari. Two other 19th-century anarchists who have been adopted by modern anarcho-capitalists with a few caveats are Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner. (Some left-anarchists contest the adoption, but overall Tucker and Spooner probably have much more in common with anarcho-capitalists than with left-anarchists.)"*

Firstly, as he states, Tucker and Spooner have been *"adopted"* by the "anarcho"-capitalist school. Being dead they have little chance to protest such an adoption, but it is



> *ers, the Revolutionary Military Council ... will necessarily be replaced by another organisation, 'more revolutionary' and more Bolshevik."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 103–4]

As such, the Makhnovists supported the right of working-class self-determination, as expressed by one delegate to Hulyai Pole conference in February 1919:

> *"No party has a right to usurp governmental power into its hands ... We want life, all problems, to be decided locally, not by order from any authority above; and all peasants and workers should decide their own fate, while those elected should only carry out the toilers' wish."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

Thus, Rees fails to present an accurate account of Makhnovist theory and practice as regards *"free soviets."* Rather than oppose party participation within their soviets and congresses, the Makhnovists opposed the domination of soviets and congresses by political parties, a radically different concept. Like the Kronstadt rebels, they argued for all power to the soviets and not to parties.

Lastly, Rees attacks the Makhnovists for having two security forces, the Cheka-like **razvedka** and the Punitive Commission. How this is an expression of the Makhnovist *"social base"* is hard to explain, as both the Bolsheviks and Whites also had their security forces and counter-intelligence agencies.

While Rees quotes Footman's statement that *"we can safely assume [!] these services were responsible for frequent injustices and atrocities,"* he fails to mention that Footman does not provide any examples (hence his comment that we can *"assume"* they occurred!). Footman himself notes that *"[o]f the Makhnovite security services ... we know very little."*

[David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 288] Rees himself only lists one, namely the summary shooting of a Bolshevik cell discovered in the Army. Given the bloody record of the Bolshevik Cheka (which, again, Rees defends as necessary to defend against the Whites!), this suggests that the crimes of the Makhnovist counter-intelligence pale in comparison.

Rees also quotes the historian Chamberlin that *"Makhno's private Cheka ... quickly disposed of anyone who was suspected of plotting against his life."* [**Op. Cit.**, 60] Strangely enough, Rees fails to mention the Bolshevik attempts to assassinate Makhno, including the one in the latter part of May 1919 when, it should be noted, the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks were meant to be in alliance. Nor does he mention that the Cheka *"would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovites."* [David Footman, **Civil War in Russia**, p. 271 and p. 293]

As regards the last conflict with the Red Army, it should be noted that while *"generalised accusations of Makhnovist atrocities are common"* the facts are it was *"the Makhnovists who stood to gain by liberating prisoners, the Bolsheviks by shooting them."* This was because *"the Red Army soldiers had been conscripted from elsewhere to do work they neither liked nor understood"* and the *"insurgents had their own homes to defend."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] Thus, while Rees quotes Footman's opinion that *"Makhno's later campaigns [were] among the most bloody and vindictive,"* these facts suggest that we **cannot** *"safely assume that these [security] services were responsible for frequent injustices and atrocities."* Clearly, if the Makhnovists were releasing Red Army prisoners (and many of whom were joining Makhno), the picture of an atrocity inflicting army can hardly be a valid picture.

And it should be stressed that Bolshevik terror and violence against the Makhnovists is strangely absent from Rees's account.

Rees presents just **one** concrete example of Makhnovist *"Cheka-like"* violence, namely, the execution of a Bolshevik cell



Kropotkin defined anarchism as *"the no-government system of socialism."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 46] Malatesta argued that *"when [people] sought to overthrow both State and property — then it was anarchy was born"* and, like Tucker, aimed for *"the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 19, pp. 22–28] Indeed **every** leading anarchist theorist defined anarchism as opposition to government **and** exploitation. Thus Brain Morris' excellent summary:

> *"Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined [in dictionaries, for example], and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists... as well as the character of anarchist movements... it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state."* [*"Anthropology and Anarchism,"* **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** no. 45, p. 40]

Therefore anarchism was never purely a political concept, but always combined an opposition to oppression with an opposition to exploitation. Little wonder, then, that both strands of anarchism have declared themselves "socialist" and so it is *"conceptually and historically misleading"* to *"create a dichotomy between socialism and anarchism."* [Brian Morris, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39] Needless to say, anarchists oppose **state** socialism just as much as they oppose capitalism. All of which means

> *including 'Benjamin Tucker, whose journal Liberty was started in 1881 and whose conceptions are a combination of those of Proudhon with those of Herbert Spencer.'"*

There is a nice historical irony in Caplan's attempts to use Kropotkin to prove the historical validity of "anarcho"-capitalism. This is because while Kropotkin was happy to include Tucker into the anarchist movement, Tucker often claimed that an anarchist could not be a communist! In **State Socialism and Anarchism** he stated that anarchism was *"an ideal utterly inconsistent with that of those Communists who falsely call themselves Anarchists while at the same time advocating a regime of Archism fully as despotic as that of the State Socialists themselves."* [*"State Socialism and Anarchism"*, **Instead of a Book**, pp. 15–16]

While modern social anarchists follow Kropotkin in not denying Proudhon or Tucker as anarchists, we do deny the anarchist title to supporters of capitalism. Why? Simply because anarchism as a **political** movement (as opposed to a dictionary definition) has always been anti-capitalist and against capitalist wage slavery, exploitation and oppression. In other words, anarchism (in all its forms) has always been associated with specific political **and** economic ideas. Both Tucker and Kropotkin defined their anarchism as an opposition to both state and capitalism. To quote Tucker on the subject:

> *"Liberty insists... [on] the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no more exploitation of man by man."* [cited in **Native American Anarchism — A Study of Left-Wing American Individualism** by Eunice Schuster, p. 140]



in December, 1919. It should be noted that the Bolsheviks had been explicitly arguing for Party dictatorship for some time by then. The reason why the Bolsheviks had been *"denied an open trial"* was because they had already been shot. Unfortunately, Makhno gave two contradictory reasons why the Bolsheviks had been killed. This led to the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet setting up a commission of three to investigate the issue. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the commission exonerated Makhno although Voline, out of the members, seemed to have been genuinely embarrassed by the affair. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 51–2] Needless to say, Rees fails to comment on the Bolshevik summary killing of Makhnovist staff in June 1919 or, indeed, any other summary executions conducted by the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists (including the shooting of prisoners).

Given the summary justice handed out by the Bolshevik Cheka, it seems strange that Rees dismisses the Makhnovist movement on assumptions and one event, yet he does. Obviously, the large-scale and continuous Bolshevik killings of political enemies (including Makhnovists) is irrelevant compared to this one event.

All in all, Rees' attempts to blame the few deviations the Makhnovists had from anarchist theory on the *"social base"* of the movement are a joke. While justifying the far more extreme deviations of Bolshevik theory and practice in terms of *"objective factors,"* he refuses to consider this possibility for the Makhnovists. The hypocrisy is clear, if not unexpected.

One last point. Taking Rees' "class analysis" of the Makhnovists seriously, the logical conclusion of his argument is clear. For Rees, a movement which compromises slightly with its principles in the face of extreme *"objective factors"* is *"petty bourgeois."* However, a movement which compromises totally (indeed introduces and justifies the exact opposite of its original claims) in face of the same *"objective factors"* is *"proletarian."* As such, his pathetic attempt at "class analysis" of the Makhnovists simply shows up the dictatorial nature of the

Bolsheviks. If trying to live up to libertarian/democratic ideals but not totally succeeding signifies being *"petty-bourgeois"* while dismissing those ideals totally in favour of top-down, autocratic hierarchies is *"proletarian"* then sane people would happily be labelled *"petty-bourgeois"*!

And Rees states that *"[n]either Makhno's social programme nor his political regime could provide an alternative to the Bolsheviks"*! [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60] Little wonder he distorts that social programme and political regime — an honest account of both would see that Rees is wrong. The Makhnovist movement clearly shows that not only did Bolshevik policies have a decisive impact on the development of the Russian Revolution, there was a clear alternative to Bolshevik authoritarianism and party dictatorship.

In summary, Rees' attack on the Makhnovists fails. It can be faulted on both factual and logical grounds. His article is so riddled with errors, selective quoting and downright lies that it is factually unreliable. Similarly, his attempt to attack the Makhnovist political theory and practice is equally factually incorrect. His attempt to explain the deviations of Makhnovist practice from its theory in terms of the *"social base"* is simply an insult to the intelligence of the reader and an abuse of class analysis.

A far more compelling analysis would recognise that the Makhnovists were not a perfect social movement but that the deviations of its practice from its theory can be explained by the objective factors it faced. Equally, the example of the Makhnovists shows the weakness of Rees' main argument, namely that the objective factors that Bolshevism faced can solely explain its authoritarian politics. That the Makhnovists, facing the same objective factors, did not act in the same manner as the Bolsheviks shows that Bolshevik ideology played a key role in the failure of the revolution. This explains Rees' clumsy attempts to rewrite the history and theory of the Makhnovshchina.



So, Caplan's historical argument to support his notion that anarchism is simply anti-government fails. Anarchism, in all its many forms, have distinct economic as well as political ideas and these cannot be parted without loosing what makes anarchism unique. In particular, Caplan's attempt to portray Proudhon as an example of a "pure" anti-government anarchism also fails, and so his attempt to co-opt Tucker and Spooner also fails (as noted, Tucker cannot be classed as a "pure" anti-government anarchist either). If Proudhon was a socialist, then it follows that his self-proclaimed followers will also be socialists — and, unsurprisingly, Tucker called himself a socialist and considered anarchism as part of the wider socialist movement.

> *"Like Proudhon, Tucker was an 'un-marxian socialist'"* [William O. Reichart, **Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism**, p. 157]

## 5 — Anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism

Caplan tries to build upon the non-existent foundation of Tucker's and Proudhon's "capitalism" by stating that:

> *"Nor did an ardent anarcho-communist like Kropotkin deny Proudhon or even Tucker the title of 'anarchist.' In his Modern Science and Anarchism, Kropotkin discusses not only Proudhon but 'the American anarchist individualists who were represented in the fifties by S.P. Andrews and W. Greene, later on by Lysander Spooner, and now are represented by Benjamin Tucker, the well-known editor of the New York Liberty.' Similarly in his article on anarchism for the 1910 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, Kropotkin again freely mentions the American individualist anarchists,*

If the end of *"usury"* **was** considered a *"side-effect"* rather than an objective, then the problems of the trusts and economic inequality/power (*"enormous concentration of wealth"*) would not have been an issue. That the fact of economic power **was** obviously considered a hindrance to anarchy suggests the end of usury was a key aim, an aim which "free competition" in the abstract could not achieve. Rather than take the "anarcho"-capitalist position that massive inequality did not affect "free competition" or individual liberty, Tucker obviously thought it did and, therefore, "free competition" (and so the abolition of the public state) in conditions of massive inequality would not create an anarchist society.

By trying to relegate an aim to a *"side-effect,"* Caplan distorts the ideas of Tucker. Indeed, his comments on trusts, *"concentrated capital"* and the *"enormous concentration of wealth"* indicates how far Individualist Anarchism is from "anarcho"-capitalism (which dismisses the question of economic power Tucker raises out of hand). It also indicates the unity of political and economic ideas, with Tucker being aware that without a suitable economic basis individual freedom was meaningless. That an economy (like capitalism) with massive inequalities in wealth and so power was not such a basis is obvious from Tucker's comments.

Thirdly, what did Tucker consider as a government-imposed monopoly? Private property, particularly in land! As he states *"Anarchism undertakes to protect no titles except such as are based upon actual occupancy and use"* and that anarchism *"means the abolition of landlordism and the annihilation of rent."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 61, p. 300] This, to state the obvious, is a restriction on "private property" (in the capitalist sense), which, if we use Caplan's definition of socialism, means that Tucker was obviously part of the "Leftist camp" (i.e. socialist camp). In other words, Tucker considered capitalism as the product of statism while socialism (libertarian of course) would be the product of anarchy.



## 16 What lessons can be learned from the Makhnovists?

The Makhnovist movement was one of the most important events of the Russian Revolution. It was a mass movement of working people who tried and succeeded to implement libertarian ideas in extremely difficult circumstances.

As such, the most important lesson gained from the experience of the Makhno movement is simply that *"objective factors"* cannot and do not explain the degeneration of the Russian Revolution or Bolshevik authoritarianism. Here was a movement which faced the same terrible circumstances as the Bolsheviks faced (White counter-revolution, economic disruption, and so on) and yet did not act in the same manner as the Bolsheviks. Where the Bolsheviks completely abolished army democracy, the Makhnovists extensively applied it. Where the Bolsheviks implemented party dictatorship **over** the soviets, the Makhnovists encouraged and practised soviet self-management. While the Bolsheviks eliminated freedom of speech, press, assembly, the Makhnovists defended and implemented them. The list is endless (see section 14).

This means that one of the key defences of the Bolshevik Myth, namely that the Bolsheviks had no choice but to act as they did due to *"objective factors"* or *"circumstances"* is totally undermined. As such, it points to the obvious conclusion: Bolshevik ideology influenced the practice of the party, as did their position within the *"workers' state,"* and so influenced the outcome of the Revolution. This means that to play down Bolshevik ideology or practice in favour of *"objective factors"*, one fails to understand that the actions and ideas generated during the revolution were not "objectively" determined but were **themselves** important and sometimes decisive factors in the outcome.

Take, for example, the Bolshevik decision to betray the Makhnovists in 1920. Neither betrayal was "objectively de-

termined" before-hand. However, it did make perfect sense from a perspective which equated the revolution with the *"dictatorship of the party."* That the first betrayal undoubtedly extended the length of the Civil War by allowing the Whites the space to reorganise under Wrangel also had its impact on Bolshevik theory and practice as well as the *"objective factors"* it had to face.

As such, the Makhnovists give a counter-example to the common pro-Bolshevik argument that the horrors of the Civil War were responsible for the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party and the revolution. In the words of one historian:

> *"[The] Insurgent Army ... was organised on a voluntary basis and respected the principle of election of commanders and staff. The regulations governing conduct were drawn up by commissions of soldiers and approved by general meetings of the units concerned. In other words, it embodied the principles of the soldiers' movement of 1917, principles rejected by the Bolsheviks when they set up the Red Army, supposedly because of their harmful effects on fighting efficiency, a characteristic of them discovered by the Bolsheviks only after they had come to power on the basis of promoting them. But the Insurgent Army, given its size and equipment, was very effective. Some have even credited it with greater responsibility than the Red Army for the defeat of Denikin. It took enormous efforts by the Bolsheviks, including the arrest or shooting of thousands of people, in order to pacify the region ... even after the Insurgent Army was militarily broken, it took six months to mop up the remnants... Within its area of operations, which consisted of only two to three per cent of the total population of European Russia, the Insurgent Army was undoubtedly highly effective. While one*



> *to attain its promises. Lack of capital, the means to creation and accumulation of wealth, usually doomed a labourer to a life of exploitation. This the anarchists knew and they abhorred such a system."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 102]

This is part of the reason why they considered themselves socialists and, equally as important, they were considered socialists by **other** socialists such as Kropotkin and Rocker. The Individualist Anarchists, as can be seen, fit very easily into Kropotkin's comments that *"the anarchists, in common with all socialists... maintain that the now prevailing system of private ownership in land, and our capitalist production for the sake of profits, represent a monopoly which runs against both the principles of justice and the dictates of utility."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 285] Given that they considered profits as usury and proposed *"occupancy and use"* in place of the prevailing land ownership rights they are obviously socialists.

That the end of usury was considered a clear aim of his politics explains Tucker's 1911 postscript to his famous essay *"State Socialism and Anarchism"* in which he argues that *"concentrated capital"* **itself** was a barrier towards anarchy. He argued that the *"trust is now a monster which... even the freest competition, could it be instituted, would be unable to destroy."* While, in an earlier period, big business *"needed the money monopoly for its sustenance and its growth"* its size now ensured that it *"sees in the money monopoly a convenience, to be sure, but no longer a necessity. It can do without it."* This meant that the way was now *"not so clear."* Indeed, he argued that the problem of the trusts *"must be grappled with for a time solely by forces political or revolutionary"* as the trust had moved beyond the reach of *"economic forces"* simply due to the concentration of resources in its hands. [*"Postscript"* to **State Socialism and Anarchism**]

rent. Hence we find Tucker arguing that a *"just distribution of the products of labour is to be obtained by destroying all sources of income except labour. These sources may be summed up in one word, — usury; and the three principle forms of usury are interest, rent and profit."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 474] To ignore the fact that Tucker also considered profit as exploitative seems strange, to say the least, when presenting an account of his ideas.

Secondly, rather than it being *"unclear"* whether the end of usury was *"merely a desirable side effect"* of anarchism, the opposite is the case. Anyone reading Tucker (or Proudhon) would quickly see that their politics were formulated with the express aim of ending usury. Just one example from hundreds:

> *"Liberty will abolish interest; it will abolish profit; it will abolish monopolistic rent; it will abolish taxation; it will abolish the exploitation of labour; it will abolish all means whereby any labourer can be deprived of any of his product."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 347]

While it is fair to wonder whether these economic effects would result from the application of Tucker's ideas, it **is** distinctly incorrect to claim that the end of usury was considered in any way as a *"desirable side effect"* of them. Rather, in **their** eyes, the end of usury was one of **the** aims of Individualist Anarchism, as can be clearly seen. As Wm. Gary Kline points out in his excellent account of Individualist Anarchism:

> *"the American anarchists exposed the tension existing in liberal thought between private property and the ideal of equal access. The Individualist Anarchists were, at least, aware that existing conditions were far from ideal, that the system itself worked against the majority of individuals in their efforts*



*can never know how history might have turned out had things been different, the Insurgent Army gives plenty of grounds for thinking that a people's revolutionary war of the kind it represented might have been at least as effective on a national scale with nationwide resources at its disposal as Trotsky and the Red Army's ruthless centralisation. It would not, however, have been compatible with the imposition from above of the Bolshevik leadership's vision of revolution. When the Insurgent Army drove the enemy out of an area they encouraged the local population to solve their own problems. Where the Red Army took over, the Cheka quickly followed. The Bolsheviks themselves were energetically snuffing out the ideals of 1917.*

*"Given such considerations it may be, though it cannot be logically proven one way or the other, that the Bolsheviks' deeply rooted authoritarianism rather than the civil war itself led to the construction of a highly centralised system that aimed at 'complete control' over political and many other aspects of social life. It could even be argued, though it is equally unprovable, that the tendency to authoritarianism, far from ensuring victory, nearly led to catastrophe. For one thing, it helped alienate many workers who felt cheated by the outcome of the revolution, and support for the regime was … far from even in this core group … [It] may, indeed, have been becoming more alienated as a result of Bolshevik measures depriving it of the means of expression of its growing catalogue of grievances… Far from being 'necessary' or even functional, the Bolshevik leadership's obsession with externally imposed discipline and authority might even have*

> *made the task of victory in the war more difficult and more costly. If the counter-example of Makhno is anything to go by then it certainly did."* [Christopher Read, **From Tsar to Soviets**, pp. 264–5]

As such, another key lesson to be learned from the Makhno movement is the importance of practising during a revolution the ideas you preach before it. Means and ends are linked, with the means shaping the ends and the ends inspiring the means. As such, if you argue for working-class power and freedom, you cannot dump these aims during a revolution without ensuring that they are never applied after it. As the Makhnovist movement showed, even the most difficult situations need not hinder the application of revolutionary ideas.

The importance of encouraging working-class autonomy also shines through the Makhnovist experience. The problems facing a social revolution are many, as are the problems involved in constructing a new society. The solutions to these problems cannot be found without the active and full participation of the working class. As the Makhnovist congresses and soviets show, free debate and meaningful meetings are the only means, firstly, to ensure that working-class people are *"the masters of their own lives,"* that *"they themselves are making the revolution,"* that they *"have gained freedom." "Take that faith away,"* stressed Alexander Berkman, *"deprive the people of power by setting up some authority over them, be it a political party or military organisation, and you have dealt a fatal blow to the revolution. You will have robbed it of its main source of strength, the masses."* [**ABC of Anarchism**, p. 82]

Secondly, it allows the participation of all in solving the problems of the revolution and of constructing the new society. Without this input, **real** socialism cannot be created and, at best, some form of oppressive state capitalist regime would be created (as Bolshevism shows). A new society needs the



Perhaps Caplan will now claim Robert Owen and William Thompson as capitalists?

Tucker called himself a socialist on many different occasions and stated that there were *"two schools of Socialistic thought ... State Socialism and Anarchism."* And stated in very clear terms that:

> *"liberty insists on Socialism... — true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalence on earth of Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 363]

And like all socialists, he opposed capitalism (i.e. usury and wage slavery) and wished that *"there should be no more proletaires."* [see the essay *"State Socialism and Anarchism"* in **Instead of a Book**, p. 17]

Caplan, of course, is well aware of Tucker's opinions on the subject of capitalism and private property. In section 13 (What moral justifications have been offered for anarchism?) he writes:

> *"Still other anarchists, such as Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker as well as Proudhon, have argued that anarchism would abolish the exploitation inherent in interest and rent simply by means of free competition. In their view, only labour income is legitimate, and an important piece of the case for anarchism is that without government-imposed monopolies, non-labour income would be driven to zero by market forces. It is unclear, however, if they regard this as merely a desirable side effect, or if they would reject anarchism if they learned that the predicted economic effect thereof would not actually occur."*

Firstly, we must point that Proudhon, Tucker and Spooner considered **profits** to be exploitative as well as interest and

To state the obvious, you can be a hater of "communism" and still be a socialist!

So this, his one attempt to prove that Tucker, Spooner and even Proudhon were really capitalists by quoting the actual people involved is a failure.

He asserts that for any claim that "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist is wrong because *"the factual supporting arguments are often incorrect. For example, despite a popular claim that socialism and anarchism have been inextricably linked since the inception of the anarchist movement, many 19th-century anarchists, not only Americans such as Tucker and Spooner, but even Europeans like Proudhon, were ardently in favour of private property (merely believing that some existing sorts of property were illegitimate, without opposing private property as such)."*

The facts supporting the claim of anarchists being socialists, however, are not "incorrect." It is Caplan's assumption that socialism is against all forms of "property" which is wrong. To state the obvious, socialism does not equal communism (and anarcho-communists support the rights of workers to own their own means of production if they do not wish to join communist communes — see above). Thus Proudhon was renown as the leading French Socialist theorist when he was alive. His ideas were widely known in the socialist movement and in many ways his economic theories were similar to the ideas of such well known early socialists as Robert Owen and William Thompson. As Kropotkin notes:

> *"It is worth noticing that French mutualism had its precursor in England, in William Thompson, who began by mutualism before he became a communist, and in his followers John Gray (A Lecture on Human Happiness, 1825; The Social System, 1831) and J. F. Bray (Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy, 1839)."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 291]



freedom of experimentation, to adapt freely to the problems it faces, to adjust to the needs and hopes of those making it. Without working-class freedom and autonomy, public life becomes impoverished, miserable and rigid as the affairs of all are handed over to a few leaders at the top of a social hierarchy, who cannot possibility understand, let alone solve, the problems affecting society. Freedom allows the working class to take an active part in the revolution. Restricting working-class freedom means the bureaucratisation of the revolution as a few party leaders cannot hope to direct and rule the lives of millions without a strong state apparatus. Simply put, the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Either working class people create socialism (and that needs workers' autonomy and freedom as its basis), or some clique will and the result will not be a socialist society.

As the experience of the Makhnovist movement shows, working-class freedom can be applied during a revolution and when it is faced with the danger of counter-revolution.

Another key lesson from the Makhnovist movement is that of the need for effective anarchist organisation. The Makhnovists did not become anarchist-influenced by chance. The hard effort by the local anarchists in Hulyai Pole before and during 1917 paid off in terms of political influence afterwards. Therefore, anarchists need to take a leading role in the struggles of working people (as we indicated in section I.8.2, this was how the Spanish anarchists gained influence as well). As Voline noted, one of the advantages the Makhnovist movement had was *"the activity of ... libertarian elements in the region ... [and the] rapidity with which the peasant masses and the insurgents, despite unfavourable circumstances, became acquainted with libertarian ideas and sought to apply them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 570]

Arshinov expands on this issue in a chapter of his history (*"The Makhnovshchina and Anarchism"*), arguing that many Russian anarchists *"suffered from the disease of disorganisation,"* which led to *"impoverished ideas and futile practice."* Moreover,

most did not join the Makhnovist movement, *"remained in their circles and **slept through** a mass movement of paramount importance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 244 and p. 242]

Indeed, it was only in May 1919 that the *"Nabat"* Ukrainian anarchist confederation was organised. This federation worked closely with the Makhnovists and gained influence in the villages, towns and cities within and around the Makhnovist region. In such circumstances, the anarchists were at a disadvantage compared to the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had been organised far longer and so had more influence within the urban workers.

While many anarchists did participate effectively and organisationally within many areas of Russia and the Ukraine (gaining influence in Moscow and Petrograd, for example), they were much weaker than the Bolsheviks. This meant that the Bolshevik idea of revolution gained influence (by, it should be noted, appropriating anarchist slogans and tactics). Once in power, the Bolsheviks turned against their rivals, using state repression to effectively destroy the anarchist movement in Russia in April 1918 (see section 24 of the appendix "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" for details). This, incidentally, led to many anarchists coming to the Ukraine to escape repression and many joined the Makhnovists. As Arshinov notes, the Bolsheviks *"knew perfectly well that ... anarchism in Russia, lacking any contact with a mass movement as important as the Makhnovshchina, did not have a base and could not threaten nor endanger them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248] Waiting till **after** a revolution starts to build such a base is a dangerous tactic, as the experience of the Russian anarchists shows. As the experience of the Moscow anarchists active in the bakers' union shows, organised working-class support can be an effective deterrent to state repression (the Moscow bakers' union continued to have anarchists active in it until 1921).



> *power of usury, and not at all the possession by the labourer of his products."*

You will instantly notice that Proudhon does not mean by property *"the possession of the labourer of his products."* However, Proudhon did include in his definition of "property" the possession of the capital to steal profits from the work of the labourers. As is clear from the quote, Tucker and Proudhon was opposed to capitalist property (*"the power of usury"*). From Caplan's own evidence he proves that Tucker was not a capitalist!

But lets quote Tucker on what he meant by *"usury"*:

> *"There are three forms of usury, interest on money, rent on land and houses, and profit in exchange. Whoever is in receipt of any of these is a usurer."* [cited in **Men against the State** by James J. Martin, p. 208]

Which can hardly be claimed as being the words of a person who supports capitalism!

And we should note that Tucker considered both government and capital oppressive. He argued that anarchism meant *"the restriction of power to self and the abolition of power over others. Government makes itself felt alike in country and in city, capital has its usurious grip on the farm as surely as on the workshop and the oppressions and exactions of neither government nor capital can be avoided by migration."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 114]

And, we may add, since when was socialism identical to communism? Perhaps Caplan should actually read Proudhon and the anarchist critique of private property before writing such nonsense? We have indicated Proudhon's ideas above and will not repeat ourselves. However, it is interesting that this passes as "evidence" of "anti-socialism" for Caplan, indicating that he does not know what socialism or anarchism actually is.

movement and **What is Property?** *"embraces the core of nineteenth century anarchism... [bar support for revolution] all the rest of later anarchism is there, spoken or implied: the conception of a free society united by association, of workers controlling the means of production... [this book] remains the foundation on which the whole edifice of nineteenth century anarchist theory was to be constructed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

Little wonder Bakunin stated that his ideas were Proudhonism *"widely developed and pushed to these, its final consequences."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 198]

## 4 — Tucker on Property, Communism and Socialism.

That Tucker called himself a socialist is quickly seen from **Instead of A Book** or any of the books written about Tucker and his ideas. That Caplan seeks to deny this means that either Caplan has not looked at either **Instead of a Book** or the secondary literature (with obvious implications for the accuracy of his FAQ) or he decided to ignore these facts in favour of his own ideologically tainted version of history (again with obvious implications for the accuracy and objectivity of his FAQ).

Caplan, in an attempt to deny the obvious, quotes Tucker from 1887 as follows in section 14 (What are the major debates between anarchists? What are the recurring arguments?):

> *"It will probably surprise many who know nothing of Proudhon save his declaration that 'property is robbery' to learn that he was perhaps the most vigorous hater of Communism that ever lived on this planet. But the apparent inconsistency vanishes when you read his book and find that by property he means simply legally privileged wealth or the*



It should be noted that this lesson was recognised by the main anarchists associated with the Makhnovists. In exile, Voline argued for the need to build a *"synthesis"* anarchist federation (see section J.3.2) while Arshinov and Makhno both associated themselves with the Platform (see section J.3.3).

Another key lesson is the need to combine rural and urban organisation. As Voline argued, the *"absence of a vigorous organised workers' movement which could support that of the peasant insurgents"* was a major disadvantage for the Makhno movement. [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 571] If there had been a workers' movement influenced by anarchist or syndicalist ideas within the Ukrainian towns during the Russian Revolution, the possibilities of constructive work would have been increased immensely. Take the example of when the Makhnovists liberated Aleksandrovsk and organised two workers' conferences. It was only at the insurgents' insistence that the unions agreed to send delegates, but for information only. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that Mensheviks had some influence in the unions and Bolshevik influence was increasing. Both parties may have preferred the Makhnovists to the Whites, but neither accepted anarchist ideas of workers' self-management and so constructive work was limited to the railway workers. In contrast, when Katerinoslav was liberated, the bakers set themselves to preparing the socialisation of their industry and drawing up plans to feed both the army and the civilian population. Unsurprisingly, the bakers had long been under anarcho-syndicalist influence. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123 and p. 124]

As the Makhnovists themselves realised, their movement had to be complemented by urban working-class self-activity and self-organisations. While they did all they could to encourage it, they lacked a base within the workers' movement and so their ideas had to overcome the twin barriers of workers' unfamiliarity with both them and their ideas and Marxist influence. With a strong working-class movement influenced by

anarchist ideas, the possibilities for constructive work between city and village would have been helped immensely (this can be seen from the example of the Spanish Revolution of 1936, where rural and urban collectives and unions made direct links with each other).

Lastly, there is the lesson to be gained from Makhnovist co-operation with the Bolsheviks. Simply put, the experience shows the importance of being wary towards Bolshevism. As Voline put it, another disadvantage of the Makhnovists was a *"certain casualness, a lack of necessary distrust, towards the Communists."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 571] The Makhnovists were betrayed three times by the Bolsheviks, who continually placed maintaining their own power above the needs of the revolution. The anarchists were simply used as cannon fodder against the Whites and once their utility had ended, the Bolsheviks turned their guns on them.

Thus a lesson to be learned is that co-operation between anarchists and Bolsheviks is fraught with danger. As many activists are aware, modern-day supporters of Bolshevism constantly urge everyone to unite *"against the common enemy"* and not to be *"sectarian"* (although, somehow this appeal to non-sectarianism does not stop them printing lying accounts of anarchism!). The Makhnovists took them at their word in early 1919 and soon found out that *"unity"* meant *"follow our orders."* When the Makhnovists continued to apply their ideas of working-class self-management, the Bolsheviks turned on them. Similarly, in early 1920 the Bolsheviks outlawed the Makhnovists in order to break their influence in the Ukraine. The Makhnovist contribution to the defeat of Denikin (the common enemy) was ignored. Lastly, in mid-1920 the Makhnovists placed the need of the revolution first and suggested an alliance to defeat the common enemy of Wrangel. Once Wrangel had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ripped up the agreement they had signed and, yet again, turned on the Makhnovists. Simply put, the Bolsheviks continually placed



to use Proudhon's expression). This would mean recognising that *"the right to products is exclusive — jus in re; the right to means is common — jus ad rem"* [cited by Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 96] which would lead to self-management:

> *"In democratising us, revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 63]

As Woodcock points out, in Proudhon's *"picture of the ideal society of the ideal society it is this predominance of the small proprietor, the peasant or artisan, that immediately impresses one"* with *"the creation of co-operative associations for the running of factories and railways."* [*"On Proudhon's 'What is Property?'"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 209, p. 210]

All of which hardly supports Caplan's attempts to portray Proudhon as "really" a capitalist all along. Indeed, the "later" Proudhon's support for protectionism [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 187], the *"fixing after amicable discussion of a* ***maximum*** *and* ***minimum*** *profit margin," "the organising of regulating societies"* and that mutualism would *"regulate the market"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 70] and his obvious awareness of economic power and that capitalism exploited and oppressed the wage-worker suggests that rather than leading some to exclude Proudhon from the "leftist camp" altogether, it is a case of excluding him utterly from the "rightist camp" (i.e. "anarcho"-capitalism). Therefore Caplan's attempt to claim (co-opt would be better) Proudhon for "anarcho"-capitalism indicates how far Caplan will twist (or ignore) the evidence. As would quickly become obvious when reading his work, Proudhon would (to use Caplan's words) *"normally classify government, property, hierarchical organisations ... as 'rulership.'"*

To summarise, Proudhon was a socialist and Caplan's attempts to rewrite anarchist and socialist history fails. Proudhon was the fountainhead for both wings of the anarchist

required not only to defend people against the state, but also capitalism. He saw society dividing into *"two classes, one of employed workers, the other of property-owners, capitalists, entrepreneurs."* He thus recognised that capitalism was just as oppressive as the state and that it assured *"the victory of the strong over the weak, of those who property over those who own nothing."* [as quoted by Alan Ritter, **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 121] Thus Proudhon's argument that *"property is liberty"* is directed not only against the state, but also against social inequality and concentrations of economic power and wealth.

Indeed, he considered that *"companies of capitalists"* were the *"exploiters of the bodies and souls of their wage earners"* and an outrage on *"human dignity and personality."* Instead of wage labour he thought that the *"industry to be operated, the work to be done, are the common and indivisible property of all the participant workers."* In other words, self-management and workers' control. In this way there would be *"no more government of man by man, by means of accumulation of capital"* and the *"social republic"* established. Hence his support for co-operatives:

> *"The importance of their work lies not in their petty union interests, but in their denial of the rule of capitalists, usurers, and governments, which the first [French] revolution left undisturbed. Afterwards, when they have conquered the political lie... the groups of workers should take over the great departments of industry which are their natural inheritance."* [cited in **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, E. Hymans, pp. 190–1, and **Anarchism**, George Woodcock, p. 110, 112]

In other words, a **socialist** society as workers would no longer be separated from the means of production and they would control their own work (the *"abolition of the proletariat,"*



their own interests before that of the revolution and their allies. This is to be expected from an ideology based on vanguardism (see section H.5 for further discussion).

This does not mean that anarchists and Leninists should not work together. In some circumstances and in some social movements, this may be essential. However, it would be wise to learn from history and not ignore it and, as such, modern activists should be wary when conducting such co-operation. Ultimately, for Leninists, social movements are simply a means to their end (the seizing of state power by them on behalf of the working class) and anarchists should never forget it.

Thus the lessons of the Makhnovist movement are exceedingly rich. Simply put, the Makhnovshchina show that anarchism is a viable form of revolutionary ideas and can be applied successfully in extremely difficult circumstances. They show that social revolutions need not consist of changing one set of bosses for another. The Makhnovist movement clearly shows that libertarian ideas can be successfully applied in a revolutionary situation.

# Appendix : Anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism

This appendix exists for one reason, namely to explain why the idea of "anarcho"-capitalism is a bogus one. While we have covered this topic in section F, we thought that this appendix should be created in order to discuss in more detail why anarchists reject both "anarcho"-capitalism and its claims to being anarchist.

This appendix has three parts. The first two sections are our critique of Bryan Caplan's "anarcho"-capitalist "Anarchist Theory FAQ." Caplan's FAQ is the main on-line attempt to give the oxymoron of "anarcho"-capitalism some form of justification and so it is worthwhile explaining, using his FAQ as the base, why such an attempt fails. The last part of this appendix is the original version of section F,

As we will prove, Caplan's FAQ fails in its attempt to show that "anarcho" capitalism can be considered as part of the anarchist movement and in fact his account involves extensive re-writing of history. This appendix is in two parts, a reply to Caplan's most recent FAQ release (version 5.2) and an older reply to version 4.1.1 (which was originally section F.10 of the FAQ). The introduction to the reply to version 4.1.1 indicates what most anarchists think of Caplan's FAQ and its claims of "objectivity" as so we will not repeat ourselves here.

We decided to replace the original version of section F with an edited version simply because the original section was too long in respect to the rest of the FAQ. While this FAQ may have started out as a rebuttal to "anarcho"-capitalist claims of being



> *others who work like him, but bringing in little to idlers."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145]

Perhaps this makes these three well known anarcho-communists "really" proto-"anarcho"-capitalists as well? Obviously not. Instead of wondering if his ideas on what socialism is are wrong, he tries to rewrite history to fit the anarchist movement into his capitalist ideas of what anarchism, socialism and whatever are actually like.

In addition, we must point out that Proudhon's *"emphasis on the genuine antagonism between state power and property rights"* came from his later writings, in which he argued that property rights were required to control state power. In other words, this *"heterodoxy"* came from a period in which Proudhon did not think that state could be abolished and so *"property is the only power that can act as a counterweight to the State."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 140] Of course, this "later" Proudhon also acknowledged that property was *"an absolutism within an absolutism," "by nature autocratic"* and that its *"politics could be summed up in a single word,"* namely *"exploitation."* [p. 141, p. 140, p. 134]

Moreover, Proudhon argues that *"spread[ing] it more equally and establish[ing] it more firmly in society"* is the means by which "property" *"becomes a guarantee of liberty and keeps the State on an even keel."* [p. 133, p. 140] In other words, rather than "property" **as such** limiting the state, it is "property" divided equally through society which is the key, without concentrations of economic power and inequality which would result in exploitation and oppression. Therefore, *"[s]imple justice... requires that equal division of land shall not only operate at the outset. If there is to be no abuse, it must be maintained from generation to generation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141, p. 133, p. 130].

Interestingly, one of Proudhon's *"other heterodoxies"* Caplan does not mention is his belief that "property" was

within capitalism and so should be supported. As Albert Meltzer puts it:

> *"All present systems of ownership mean that some are deprived of the fruits of their labour. It is true that, in a competitive society, only the possession of independent means enables one to be free of the economy (that is what Proudhon meant when, addressing himself to the self-employed artisan, he said 'property is liberty', which seems at first sight a contradiction with his dictum that it was theft)"*[**Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, pp. 12–13]

Malatesta makes the same point:

> *"Our opponents ... are in the habit of justifying the right to private property by stating that property is the condition and guarantee of liberty.*

*"And we agree with them. Do we not say repeatedly that poverty is slavery?*

*"But then why do we oppose them?*

*"The reason is clear: in reality the property that they defend is capitalist property... which therefore depends on the existence of a class of the disinherited and dispossessed, forced to sell their labour to the property owners for a wage below its real value... This means that workers are subjected to a kind of slavery."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 113]

As does Kropotkin:

> *"the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour... man really produces most when he works in freedom, when he has a certain choice in his occupations, when he has no overseer to impede him, and lastly, when he sees his work bringing profit to him and to*



anarchist, it no longer is. As such, in an ***anarchist*** FAQ section F became redundant as "anarcho"-capitalism is a fringe ideology even within the USA. If it were not for their presence on the web and some academics taking their claims to being anarchists at face value, we would only mention them in passing.

We have decided to include this appendix as it is really an addition to the main body of the FAQ. Parties interested in why "anarcho"-capitalist claims are false can explore this appendix, those who are interested in anarchist politics can read the FAQ without having to also read too many arguments between anarchists and capitalists. We should, perhaps, thank Caplan for allowing us an opportunity of explaining the ideas of such people as Proudhon and Tucker, allowing us to quote them and so bring their ideas to a wider audience and for indicating that anarchism, in all its forms, has always opposed capitalism and always will.

# Replies to Some Errors and Distortions in Bryan Caplan's "Anarchist Theory FAQ" version 5.2

## 1 — Individualist Anarchists and the socialist movement.

Caplan, in his FAQ, attempts to rewrite anarchist history by trying to claim that the individualist anarchists were forerunners of the so-called "anarcho-capitalist" school. However, as is so often the case with Caplan's FAQ, nothing could be further from the truth.

In section 5 (What major subdivisions may be made among anarchists?) of his FAQ, Caplan writes that:

> *"A large segment of left-anarchists is extremely sceptical about the anarchist credentials of anarcho-capitalists, arguing that the anarchist movement*

*has historically been clearly leftist. In my own view, it is necessary to re-write a great deal of history to maintain this claim."*

He quotes Carl Landauer's **European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements** as evidence:

> *"To be sure, there is a difference between individualistic anarchism and collectivistic or communistic anarchism; Bakunin called himself a communist anarchist. But the communist anarchists also do not acknowledge any right to society to force the individual. They differ from the anarchistic individualists in their belief that men, if freed from coercion, will enter into voluntary associations of a communistic type, while the other wing believes that the free person will prefer a high degree of isolation. The communist anarchists repudiate the right of private property which is maintained through the power of the state. The individualist anarchists are inclined to maintain private property as a necessary condition of individual independence, without fully answering the question of how property could be maintained without courts and police."*

Caplan goes on to state that *"the interesting point is that before the emergence of modern anarcho-capitalism Landauer found it necessary to distinguish two strands of anarchism, only one of which he considered to be within the broad socialist tradition."*

However, what Caplan seems to ignore is that both individualist and social anarchists agree that there **is** a difference between the two schools of anarchist thought! Some insight. Of course, Caplan tries to suggest that Landauer's non-discussion of the individualist anarchists is somehow "evidence" that



> *work, for example his dwelling-house, land and tools. Proudhon initially refers to legitimate rights of ownership of these goods as 'possession,' and although in his latter work he calls **this** 'property,' the conceptual distinction remains the same."* [**Classical Anarchism**, pp. 85–86]

Indeed, according to Proudhon himself, the *"accumulation of capital and instrument is what the capitalist owes to the producer, but he never pays him for it. It is this fraudulent deprivation which causes the poverty of the worker, the opulence of the idle and the inequality of their conditions. And it is this, above all, which has so aptly been called the exploitation of man by man."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 43]

He called his ideas on possession a *"third form of society, the synthesis of communism and property"* and calls it *"liberty."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 68]. He even goes so far as to say that property *"by its despotism and encroachment, soon proves itself oppressive and anti-social."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] Opposing private property he thought that *"all accumulated capital is collective property, no one may be its exclusive owner."* Indeed, he considered the aim of his economic reforms *"was to rescue the working masses from capitalist exploitation."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 44, p. 80]

In other words, Proudhon considered capitalist property to be the source of exploitation and oppression and he opposed it. He explicitly contrasts his ideas to that of capitalist property and **rejects** it as a means of ensuring liberty.

Caplan goes on to claim that *"[s]ome of Proudhon's other heterodoxies include his defence of the right of inheritance and his emphasis on the genuine antagonism between state power and property rights."*

However, this is a common anarchist position. Anarchists are well aware that possession is a source of independence

In contrast to some of Bookchin's comments (and Caplan) K. Steven Vincent is correct to argue that, for Proudhon, justice *"applied to the economy was associative socialism"* and so Proudhon is squarely in the socialist camp [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 228].

However, perhaps all these "leftists" are wrong (bar Bookchin, who **is** wrong, at least some of the time). Perhaps they just did not understand what socialism actually is (and as Proudhon stated *"I am socialist"* [**Selected Writing of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 195] and described himself as a socialist many times this also applies to Proudhon himself!). So the question arises, did Proudhon support private property in the capitalist sense of the word? The answer is no. To quote George Woodcock summary of Proudhon's ideas on this subject we find:

> *"He [Proudhon] was denouncing the property of a man who uses it to exploit the labour of others, without an effort on his own part, property distinguished by interest and rent, by the impositions of the non-producer on the producer. Towards property regarded as 'possession,' the right of a man to control his dwelling and the land and tools he needs to live, Proudhon had no hostility; indeed he regarded it as the cornerstone of liberty."* [*"On Proudhon's 'What is Property?'"*, **The Raven** No. 31, pp. 208–9]

George Crowder makes the same point:

> *"The ownership he opposes is basically that which is unearned ... including such things as interest on loans and income from rent. This is contrasted with ownership rights in those goods either produced by the work of the owner or necessary for that*



their ideas are not socialistic. Firstly, Landauer's book is about **European** Socialism. Individualist anarchism was almost exclusively based in America and so hardly falls within the book's subject area. Secondly, from the index Kropotkin is mentioned on **two** pages (one of which a footnote). Does that mean Kropotkin was not a socialist? Of course not. It seems likely, therefore, that Landauer is using the common Marxist terminology of defining Marxism as Socialism, while calling other parts of the wider socialist movement by their self-proclaimed names of anarchism, syndicalism and so on. Hardly surprising that Kropotkin is hardly mentioned in a history of "Socialism" (i.e. Marxism).

As noted above, both schools of anarchism knew there was a difference between their ideas. Kropotkin and Tucker, for example, both distinguished between two types of anarchism as well as two types of socialism. Thus Caplan's *"interesting point"* is just a banality, a common fact which anyone with a basic familiarity of anarchist history would know. Kropotkin in his justly famous essay on Anarchism for **The Encyclopaedia Britannica also** found it necessary to distinguish two strands of anarchism. As regards Caplan's claims that only one of these strands of anarchism is *"within the broad socialist tradition"* all we can say is that both Kropotkin **and** Tucker considered their ideas and movement to be part of the broader socialist tradition. According to an expert on Individualist Anarchism, Tucker *"looked upon anarchism as a branch of the general socialist movement"* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, pp. 226–7]. Other writers on Individualist Anarchism have noted the same fact (for example, Tucker *"definitely thought of himself a socialist"* [William O. Reichart, **Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism**, p. 156]). As evidence of the anti-socialist nature of individualist anarchism, Caplan's interpretation of Landauer's words is fundamentally nonsense. If you look at the writings of people like Tucker you will see that they called themselves socialists and considered

themselves part of the wider socialist movement. No one familiar with Tucker's works could overlook this fact.

Interestingly, Landauer includes Proudhon in his history and states that he was *"the most profound thinker among pre-Marxian socialists."* [p. 67] Given that Caplan elsewhere in his FAQ tries to co-opt Proudhon into the "anarcho"-capitalist school as well as Tucker, his citing of Landauer seems particularly dishonest. Landauer presents Proudhon's ideas in some depth in his work within a chapter headed

**"The three Anticapitalistic Movements."** Indeed, he starts his discussion of Proudhon's ideas with the words *"In France, post-Utopian socialism begins with Peter Joseph Proudhon."* [p. 59] Given that both Kropotkin and Tucker indicated that Individualist Anarchism followed Proudhon's economic and political ideas the fact that Landauer states that Proudhon was a socialist implies that Individualist Anarchism is also socialist (or "Leftist" to use Caplan's term).

Tucker and the other individualist anarchists considered themselves as followers of Proudhon's ideas (as did Bakunin and Kropotkin). For example, Tucker stated that his journal **Liberty** was *"brought into existence as a direct consequence of the teachings of Proudhon"* and *"lives principally to spread them."* [cited by Paul Avrich in his *"Introduction"* to **Proudhon and his "*Bank of the People*"** by Charles A. Dana]

Obviously Landauer considered Proudhon a socialist and if Individualist Anarchism follows Proudhon's ideas then it, too, must be socialist.

Unsurprisingly, then, Tucker also considered himself a socialist. To state the obvious, Tucker and Bakunin both shared Proudhon's opposition to **private** property (in the capitalist sense of the word), although Tucker confused this opposition (and possibly the casual reader) by talking about possession as "property."

So, it appears that Caplan is the one trying to rewrite history. #app2



within production ("anarcho"-capitalists take note!). Proudhon also called for *"democratically organised workers' associations"* to run large-scale industry in his 1848 Election Manifesto. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62] Given that Bookchin considers as *"authentic artisanal socialists"* those who called for **collective** ownership of the means of production, but *"exempted from collectivisation the peasantry"* [p. 4] we have to conclude that Proudhon was such an "authentic" artisanal socialist! Indeed, at one point Bookchin mentions the *"individualistic artisanal socialism of Proudhon"* [p. 258] which suggests a somewhat confused approach to Proudhon's ideas!

In effect, Bookchin makes the same mistake as Caplan; but, unlike Caplan, he should know better. Rather than not being a socialist, Proudhon is obviously an example of what Bookchin himself calls *"artisanal socialism"* (as Marx and Engels recongised). Indeed, he notes that Proudhon was its *"most famous advocate"* and that *"nearly all so-called 'utopian' socialists, even [Robert] Owen — the most labour-orientated — as well as Proudhon — essentially sought the equitable distribution of property."* [p. 273] Given Proudhon's opposition to wage labour and capitalist property and his support for industrial democracy as an alternative, Bookchin's position is untenable — he confuses socialism with communism, rejecting as socialist all views which are not communism (a position he shares with right-libertarians).

He did not always hold this position, though. He writes in **The Spanish Anarchists** that:

> *"Proudhon envisions a free society as one in which small craftsmen, peasants, and collectively owned industrial enterprises negotiate and contract with each other to satisfy their material needs. Exploitation is brought to an end... Although these views involve a break with capitalism, by no means can they be regarded as communist ideas..."* [p. 18]

*the Proudhonist contract from the capitalist contract"* namely *"it abjured profit and exploitation."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 40–41] — which, of course, places him in the socialist tradition (see last section). Unfortunately, Bookchin fails to acknowledge this or that Proudhon was totally opposed to wage labour along with usury, which, again, instantly places him in ranks of socialism (see, for example, the **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 98, pp. 215–6 and pp. 221–2, and his opposition to state control of capital as being *"more wage slavery"* and, instead, urging whatever capital required collective labour to be *"democratically organised workers' associations"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62]).

Bookchin (on page 78) quotes Proudhon as arguing that *"association"* was *"a protest against the wage system"* which suggests that Bookchin's claims that Proudhonian *"analysis minimised the social relations embodied in the capitalist market and industry"* [p. 180] is false. Given that wage labour is **the** unique social relationship within capitalism, it is clear from Proudhon's works that he did not "minimise" the social relations created by capitalism, rather the opposite. Proudhon's opposition to wage labour clearly shows that he focused on the **key** social relation which capitalism creates — namely the one of domination of the worker by the capitalist.

Bookchin **does** mention that Proudhon was *"obliged in 1851, in the wake of the associationist ferment of 1848 and after, to acknowledge that association of some sort was unavoidable for large-scale enterprises."* [p. 78] However, Proudhon's support of industrial democracy pre-dates 1851 by some 11 years. He stated in **What is Property?** that he *"preach[ed] emancipation to the proletaires; association to the labourers"* and that *"leaders"* within industry *"must be chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves."* [p. 137 and p. 414] It is significant that the first work to call itself anarchist opposed property along with the state, exploitation along with oppression and supported self-management against hierarchical relationships



## 2 — Why is Caplan's definition of socialism wrong?

Perhaps the problem lies with Caplan's "definition" of socialism. In section 7 (Is anarchism the same thing as socialism?) he states:

> *"If we accept one traditional definition of socialism — 'advocacy of government ownership of the means of production' — it seems that anarchists are not socialists by definition. But if by socialism we mean something more inclusive, such as 'advocacy of the strong restriction or abolition of private property,' then the question becomes more complex."*

Which are hardly traditional definitions of socialism unless you are ignorant of socialist ideas! By definition one, Bakunin and Kropotkin are not socialists. As far as definition two goes, all anarchists were opposed to (capitalist) private property and argued for its abolition and its replacement with possession. The actual forms of possession differed from between anarchist schools of thought, but the common aim to end private property (capitalism) was still there. To quote Dana, in a pamphlet called *"a really intelligent, forceful, and sympathetic account of mutual banking"* by Tucker, individualist anarchists desire to *"destroy the tyranny of capital, — that is, of property"* by mutual credit. [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his *"Bank of the People"***, p. 46]

Interestingly, this second definition of socialism brings to light a contradiction in Caplan's account. Elsewhere in the FAQ he notes that Proudhon had *"ideas on the desirability of a modified form of private property."* In fact, Proudhon did desire to restrict private property to that of possession, as Caplan himself seems aware. In other words, even taking his own definitions we find that Proudhon would be considered a socialist! Indeed, according to Proudhon, *"all accumulated capital is collective property, no one may be its exclusive owner."* [**Selected**

**Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 44] Thus Jeremy Jennings' summary of the anarchist position on private property:

> *"The point to stress is that all anarchists [including Spooner and Tucker], and not only those wedded to the predominant twentieth-century strain of anarchist communism have been critical of private property to the extent that it was a source of hierarchy and privilege."*

He goes on to state that anarchists like Tucker and Spooner *"agreed with the proposition that property was legitimate only insofar as it embraced no more than the total product of individual labour."* [*"Anarchism"*, **Contemporary Political Ideologies**, Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (eds.), p. 132]

The idea that socialism can be defined as state ownership or even opposition to, or "abolition" of, all forms of property is not one which is historically accurate for all forms of socialism. Obviously communist-anarchists and syndicalists would dismiss out of hand the identification of socialism as state ownership, as would Individualist Anarchists like Tucker and Joseph Labadie. As for opposition or abolition of all forms of "private property" as defining socialism, such a position would have surprised communist-anarchists like Kropotkin (and, obviously, such self-proclaimed socialists as Tucker and Labadie).

For example, in **Act for Yourselves** Kropotkin explicitly states that a peasant *"who is in possession of just the amount of land he can cultivate"* would not be expropriated in an anarchist revolution. Similarly for the family *"inhabiting a house which affords them just enough space ... considered necessary for that number of people"* and the artisan *"working with their own tools or handloom"* would be left alone [pp. 104–5]. He makes the same point in **The Conquest of Bread** [p. 61] Thus, like Proudhon, Kropotkin replaces **private property** with **possession** as the former is *"theft"* (i.e. it allows exploitation, which



If he did perhaps he would who see that the Individualist Anarchists were a school of socialism, given their opposition to exploitation and the desire to see its end via their political, economic and social ideas.

## 3 — Was Proudhon a socialist or a capitalist?

In section 8 (Who are the major anarchist thinkers?), Caplan tries his best to claim that Proudhon was not really a socialist at all. He states that *"Pierre[-Joseph] Proudhon is also often included [as a "left anarchist"] although his ideas on the desirability of a modified form of private property would lead some to exclude him from the leftist camp altogether."*

"Some" of which group? Other anarchists, like Bakunin and Kropotkin? Obviously not — Bakunin claimed that *"Proudhon was the master of us all."* According to George Woodcock Kropotkin was one of Proudhon's *"confessed disciples."* Perhaps that makes Bakunin and Kropotkin proto-capitalists? Obviously not. What about Tucker? He called Proudhon *"the father of the Anarchistic school of Socialism."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 381] And, as we noted above, the socialist historian Carl Launder considered Proudhon a socialist, as did the noted British socialist G.D.H. Cole in his **History of Socialist Thought** (and in fact called him one of the *"major prophets of Socialism."*). What about Marx and Engels, surely they would be able to say if he was a socialist or not? According to Engels, Proudhon was *"the Socialist of the small peasant and master-craftsman."* [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 260]

In fact, the only "left" (i.e. social) anarchist of note who seems to place Proudhon outside of the "leftist" (i.e. anarchist) camp is Murray Bookchin. In the second volume of **The Third Revolution** Bookchin argues that *"Proudhon was no socialist"* simply because he favoured *"private property."* [p. 39] However, he does note the *"one moral provision [that] distinguished*

> *create what you German socialists call **community** and which for the moment I will only go so far as calling **liberty** or **equality.**"* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 151]

In other words, Proudhon shared the common aim of all socialists (namely to abolish capitalism, wage labour and exploitation) but disagreed with the means. As can be seen, Tucker placed himself squarely in this tradition and so could (and did) call himself a socialist. Little wonder Joseph Labadie often said that *"All anarchists are socialists, but not all socialists are anarchists."* That Caplan tries to ignore this aspect of Individualist Anarchism in an attempt to co-opt it into "anarcho"-capitalism indicates well that his FAQ is not an objective or neutral work.

Caplan states that the *"United States has been an even more fertile ground for individualist anarchism: during the 19th-century, such figures as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, and Benjamin Tucker gained prominence for their vision of an anarchism based upon freedom of contract and private property."*

However, as indicated, Tucker and Spooner did **not** support private property in the capitalist sense of the word and Kropotkin and Bakunin, no less than Tucker and Spooner, supported free agreement between individuals and groups. What does that prove? That Caplan seems more interested in the words Tucker and Proudhon used rather than the meanings **they** attached to them. Hardly convincing.

Perhaps Caplan should consider Proudhon's words on the subject of socialism:

> *"Modern Socialism was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 177]



*"indicate[s] the scope of Expropriation"* namely *"to everything that enables any man [or woman]... to appropriate the product of other's toil"* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61])

Even Marx and Engels did not define socialism in terms of the abolition of all forms of "private property." Like anarchists, they distinguished between that property which allows exploitation to occur and that which did not. Looking at the **Communist Manifesto** we find them arguing that the *"distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property"* and that *"Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."* Moreover, they correctly note that "property" has meant different things at different times and that the *"abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of Communism"* as *"[a]ll property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions."* As an example, they argue that the French Revolution *"abolished feudal property in favour of bourgeois property."* [**The Manifesto of the Communist Party**, p.47, p. 49 and p. 47]

Which means that the idea that socialism means abolishing "private property" is **only** true for those kinds of property that are used to exploit the labour of others. Nicholas Walter sums up the anarchist position when he wrote that anarchists *"are in favour of the private property which cannot be used by one person to exploit another."* [**Reinventing Anarchy**, p. 49] In other words, property which is no longer truly **private** as it is used by those who do not own it. In effect, the key point of Proudhon's **What is Property?**, namely the difference between possession and property. Which means that rather than desire the abolition of all forms of "private property," socialists (of all kinds, libertarian and authoritarian) desire the abolition of a specific kind of property, namely that kind which allows

the exploitation and domination of others. To ignore this distinction is to paint a very misleading picture of what socialism stands for.

This leaves the *"the strong restriction ... of private property"* definition of socialism. Here Caplan is on stronger ground. Unfortunately, by using that definition the Individualist Anarchists, like the Social Anarchists, are included in socialist camp, a conclusion he is trying to avoid. As **every** anarchist shares Proudhon's analysis that *"property is theft"* and that **possession** would be the basis of anarchism, it means that every anarchist is a socialist (as Labadie always claimed). This includes Tucker and the other Individualist Anarchists. For example, Joseph Labadie stated that *"the two great sub-divisions of Socialists"* (anarchists and State Socialists) both *"agree that the resources of nature — land, mines, and so forth — should not be held as private property and subject to being held by the individual for speculative purposes, that use of these things shall be the only valid title, and that each person has an equal right to the use of all these things. They all agree that the present social system is one composed of a class of slaves and a class of masters, and that justice is impossible under such conditions."* [**What is Socialism?**] Tucker himself argued that the anarchists' *"occupancy and use"* title to land and other scare material would involve a change (and, in effect, *"restriction"*) of current (i.e. capitalist) property rights:

> *"It will be seen from this definition that Anarchistic property concerns only products. But anything is a product upon which human labour has been expended. It should be stated, however, that in the case of land, or of any other material the supply of which is so limited that all cannot hold it in unlimited quantities, Anarchism undertakes to protect no titles except such as are based on actual occupancy and use."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 61]



as Wm. Gary Kline correctly points out, *"expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 104] In other words, the *"abolition of the proletariat"* as desired by Proudhon.

Therefore, like all socialists, Tucker wanted to end usury, ensure the *"product to the producer"* and this meant workers owning and controlling the means of production they used (*"no more proletaires"*). He aimed to do this by reforming capitalism away by creating mutual banks and other co-operatives (he notes that Individualist Anarchists followed Proudhon, who *"would individualise and associate"* the productive and distributive forces in society [as quoted by James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 228]). Here is Kropotkin on Proudhon's reformist mutualist-socialism:

> *"When he proclaimed in his first memoir on property that 'Property is theft', he meant only property in its present, Roman-law, sense of 'right of use and abuse'; in property-rights, on the other hand, understood in the limited sense of* ***possession****, he saw the best protection against the encroachments of the state. At the same time he did not want violently to dispossess the present owners of land, dwelling-houses, mines, factories and so on. He preferred to* ***attain the same end*** *by rendering capital incapable of earning interest."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlet's**, pp. 290–1 — emphasis added]

In other words, like all anarchists, Proudhon desired to see a society without capitalists and wage slaves (*"the same end"*) but achieved by different means. When Proudhon wrote to Karl Marx in 1846 he made the same point:

> *"through Political Economy we must turn the theory of Property against Property in such a way as to*

demanded *"that the economy be controlled neither by private enterprise nor by the state ... but by the producers"* such as *"the revolutionary syndicalists"* and *"the students of 1968."* [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 165] *"Industrial Democracy must... succeed Industrial Feudalism,"* to again quote Proudhon. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 167]

Thus the common agreement between all socialists was that capitalism was based upon exploitation and wage slavery, that workers did not have access to the means of production and so had to sell themselves to the class that did. Thus we find Individualist Anarchists arguing that the whole produce of labour ought to belong to the labourer and opposing the exploitation of labour by capital. To use Tucker's own words:

> *"the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labour, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labour by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labour... . And to such a state of things I am as much opposed as any one. But the minute you remove privilege ... every man will be a labourer exchanging with fellow-labourers ... What Anarchistic-Socialism aims to abolish is usury ... it wants to deprive capital of its reward."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 404]

By ending wage labour, anarchist socialism would ensure *"The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer"* and so *"everyone [would] be a proprietor"* and so there would be *"no more proletaires"* (in the words of Ernest Lesigne, quoted favourably by Tucker as part of what he called a *"summary exposition of Socialism from the standpoint of Anarchism"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 17, p. 16]). Wage labour, and so capitalism, would be no more and *"the product [would go] to the producer."* The Individualist Anarchists,



and so:

> *"no advocate of occupancy and use believes that it can be put in force until as a theory it has been accepted as generally ... seen and accepted as is the prevailing theory of ordinary private property."* [**Occupancy and Use versus the Single Tax**]

So, as can be seen, Individualist Anarchism rejected important aspects of capitalist property rights. Given that the Individualist Anarchists were writing at a time when agriculture was still the largest source of employment this position on land is much more significant than it first appears. In effect, Tucker and the other American Anarchists were advocating a **massive** and **fundamental** change in property-rights, in the social relationships they generated and in American society. This is, in other words, a very *"strong restriction"* in capitalist property rights (and it is **this** type of property Caplan is referring to, rather than "property" in the abstract).

However, such a "definition" of socialism as "restricting" private property is flawed as it does not really reflect anarchist ideas on the subject. Anarchists, in effect, reject the simplistic analysis that because a society (or thinker) accepts "property" that it (or he/she) is capitalistic. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the term "property" has been used to describe a wide range of situations and institutions. Thus Tucker used the term "property" to describe a society in which capitalist property rights were **not** enforced. Secondly, and far more importantly, concentrating on "property" rights in the abstract ignores the social relationships it generates. Freedom is product of social interaction, not one of isolation. This means that the social relationships generated in a given society are the key to evaluating it — not whether it has "property" or not. To look at "property" in the abstract is to ignore people and the relationships they create between each other. And it is these relationships which

determine whether they are free or not (and so exploited or not). Caplan's use of the anti-property rights "definition" of socialism avoids the central issue of freedom, of whether a given society generates oppression and exploitation or not. By looking at "property" Caplan ignores liberty, a strange but unsurprising position for a self-proclaimed "libertarian" to take.

Thus both of Caplan's "definitions" of socialism are lacking. A *"traditional"* one of government ownership is hardly that and the one based on "property" rights avoids the key issue while, in its own way, includes **all** the anarchists in the socialist camp (something Caplan, we are sure, did not intend).

So what would be a useful definition of socialism? From our discussion on property we can instantly reject Caplan's biased and simplistic starting points. In fact, a definition of socialism which most socialists would agree with would be one that stated that *"the whole produce of labour ought to belong to the labourer"* (to use words Thomas Hodgskin, an early English socialist, from his essay **Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital**). Tucker stated that *"the bottom claim of Socialism"* was *"that labour should be put in possession of its own,"* that *"the natural wage of labour is its product"* (see his essay **State Socialism and Anarchism**). This definition also found favour with Kropotkin who stated that socialism *"in its wide, generic, and true sense"* was an *"effort to **abolish** the exploitation of labour by capital."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 169]

From this position, socialists soon realised that (to again quote Kropotkin) *"the only guarantee not to by robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145] Because of this socialism also could be defined as *"the workers shall own the means of production,"* as this automatically meant that the product would go to the producer, and, in fact, this could also be a definition of socialism most socialists would agree with. The form of this ownership, however, differed from socialist tendency to socialist tendency (some, like Proudhon, proposed



co-operative associations, others like Kropotkin communal ownership, others like the Social Democrats state ownership and so on). Moreover, as the economy changed in the 19th century, so did socialist ideas. Murray Bookchin gives a good summary of this process:

> *"Th[e] growing shift from artisanal to an industrial economy gave rise to a gradual but major shift in socialism itself. For the artisan, socialism meant producers' co-operatives composed of men who worked together in small shared collectivist associations … For the industrial proletarian, by contrast, socialism came to mean the formation of a mass organisation that gave factory workers the collective power to expropriate a plant that no single worker could properly own… They advocated **public** ownership of the means of production, whether by the state or by the working class organised in trade unions."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 262]

So, in this evolution of socialism we can place the various brands of anarchism. Individualist anarchism is clearly a form of artisanal socialism (which reflects its American roots) while communist anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism are forms of industrial (or proletarian) socialism (which reflects its roots in Europe). Proudhon's mutualism bridges these extremes, advocating as it does artisan socialism for small-scale industry and agriculture and co-operative associations for large-scale industry (which reflects the state of the French economy in the 1840s to 1860s). The common feature of all these forms of anarchism is opposition to usury and the notion that *"workers shall own the means of production."* Or, in Proudhon's words, *"abolition of the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 179] As one expert on Proudhon points out, Proudhon's support for *"association"* (or *"associative socialism"*) *"anticipated all those later movements"* which

*together everyone who is in some way or another critical of the state. It is why calling the likes of Nozick 'anarchists' is highly misleading.*" [*"Some notes on 'Anarchism'"*, pp. 141–5, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 143] So anarchists have evaluated "free market" capitalism and rejected it as non-anarchist for over 150 years. Attempts by "anarcho"-capitalism to say that their system is "anarchist" flies in the face of this long history of anarchist analysis. That some academics fall for their attempts to appropriate the anarchist label for their ideology is down to a false premise: it *"is judged to be anarchism largely because some anarcho-capitalists **say** they are 'anarchists' and because they criticise the State."* [Peter Sabatini, **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 100]

More generally, we must stress that most (if not all) anarchists do not want to live in a society **just like this one** but without state coercion and (the initiation of) force. Anarchists do not confuse "freedom" with the "right" to govern and exploit others nor with being able to change masters. It is not enough to say we can start our own (co-operative) business in such a society. We want the abolition of the capitalist system of authoritarian relationships, not just a change of bosses or the possibility of little islands of liberty within a sea of capitalism (islands which are always in danger of being flooded and our activity destroyed). Thus, in this section of the FAQ, we analysis many "anarcho"-capitalist claims on their own terms (for example, the importance of equality in the market or why capitalism cannot be reformed away by exchanges on the capitalist market) but that does not mean we desire a society nearly identical to the current one. Far from it, we want to transform this society into one more suited for developing and enriching individuality and freedom. But before we can achieve that we must critically evaluate the current society and point out its basic limitations.

Finally, we dedicate this section of the FAQ to those who have seen the real face of "free market" capitalism at work: the



as a socialist, indeed one of the greatest in French (if not European) history. Similarly we find Rudolf Rocker writing that the Individualist Anarchists *"all agree on the point that man be given the full reward of his labour and recognised in this right the economic basis of all personal liberty. They regard free competition ... as something inherent in human nature ... They answered the **socialists of other schools** [emphasis added] who saw in **free competition** one of the destructive elements of capitalistic society that the evil lies in the fact that today we have too little rather than too much competition."* [quoted by Herbert Read, **A One-Man Manifesto**, p. 147] Rocker obviously considered support for free markets as compatible with socialism. In other words, Caplan's assumption that all socialists oppose free markets, competition and so on is simply false — as can be seen from the history of the socialist movement. What socialists **do** oppose is capitalist exploitation — socialism *"in its wide, generic, and true sense"* was an *"effort to **abolish** the exploitation of labour by capital."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 169] In this sense the Individualist Anarchists are obviously socialists, as Tucker and Labadie constantly pointed out.

In addition, as we have proved elsewhere, Tucker was opposed to capitalist private property just as much as Kropotkin was. Moreover, it is clear from Tucker's works that he considered himself an enemy of the capitalist system and called himself a socialist. Thus Caplan's attempt to judge the historical argument on its own merits fails because he has to rewrite history to do so.

Caplan is right to state that the meaning of words change over time, but this does not mean we should run to use dictionary definitions. Dictionaries rarely express political ideas well — for example, most dictionaries define the word "anarchy" as "chaos" and "disorder." Does that mean anarchists aim to create chaos? Of course not. Therefore, Caplan's attempt to use dictionary definitions is selective and ultimately useless —

anarchism as a political movement cannot be expressed by dictionary definitions and any attempt to do so means to ignore history.

The problems in using dictionary definitions to describe political ideas can best be seen from the definition of the word "Socialism." According to the **Oxford Study Dictionary** Socialism is *"a political and economic theory advocating that land, resources, and the chief industries should be owned and managed by the State."* The **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary**, conversely, defines socialism as *"any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or government ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods."*

Clearly the latter source has a more accurate definition of socialism than the former, by allowing for "collective" versus solely "State" control of productive means. Which definition would be better? It depends on the person involved. A Marxist, for example, could prefer the first one simply to exclude anarchism from the socialist movement, something they have continually tried to do. A right-libertarian could, again, prefer the first, for obvious reasons. Anarchists would prefer the second, again for obvious reasons. However neither definition does justice to the wide range of ideas that have described themselves as socialist.

Using dictionaries as the basis of defining political movements ensures that one's views depend on **which** dictionary one uses, and **when** it was written, and so on. This is why they are not the best means of resolving disputes — if resolution of disputes is, in fact, your goal.

Both Kropotkin and Tucker stated that they were socialists and that anarchism was socialistic. If we take the common modern meaning of the word as state ownership as the valid one then Tucker and Kropotkin are **not** socialists and no form of anarchism is socialist. This is obviously nonsense and it shows



ber that while they claim "real capitalism" does not exist (because all existing forms of capitalism are statist), they will claim that all the good things we have — advanced medical technology, consumer choice of products, etc. — are nevertheless due to "capitalism." Yet if you point out any problems in modern life, these will be blamed on "statism." Since there has never been and never will be a capitalist system without some sort of state, it's hard to argue against this "logic." Many actually use the example of the Internet as proof of the power of "capitalism," ignoring the fact that the state paid for its development before turning it over to companies to make a profit from it. Similar points can be made about numerous other products of "capitalism" and the world we live in. To artificially separate one aspect of a complex evolution fails to understand the nature and history of the capitalist system.

In addition to this ability to be selective about the history and results of capitalism, their theory has a great "escape clause." If wealthy employers abuse their power or the rights of the working class (as they have always done), then they have (according to "libertarian" ideology) ceased to be capitalists! This is based upon the misperception that an economic system that relies on force **cannot** be capitalistic. This is **very** handy as it can absolve the ideology from blame for any (excessive) oppression which results from its practice. Thus individuals are always to blame, **not** the system that generated the opportunities for abuse they freely used.

Anarchism has always been aware of the existence of "free market" capitalism, particularly its extreme (minimal state) wing, and has always rejected it. As we discuss in section 7, anarchists from Proudhon onwards have rejected the idea of any similar aims and goals (and, significantly, vice versa). As academic Alan Carter notes, anarchist concern for equality as a necessary precondition for genuine freedom means *"that is one very good reason for not confusing anarchists with liberals or economic 'libertarians' — in other words, for not lumping*

is to provide other anarchists with arguments and evidence to use against "anarcho"-capitalism and its claims of being a new form of "anarchism."

So this section of the FAQ does not, as we noted above, represent some kind of "debate" within anarchism. It reflects the attempt by anarchists to reclaim the history and meaning of anarchism from those who are attempting to steal its name (just as right-wingers in America have attempted to appropriate the name "libertarian" for their pro-capitalist views, and by so doing ignore over 100 years of anti-capitalist usage). However, this section also serves two other purposes. Firstly, critiquing right-libertarian and "anarcho"-capitalist theories allows us to explain anarchist ones at the same time and indicate why they are better. Secondly, and more importantly, the "ideas" and "ideals" that underlie "anarcho"-capitalism are usually identical (or, at the very least, similar) to those of neo-liberalism. This was noted by Bob Black in the early 1980s, when a *"wing of the Reaganist Right has obviously appropriated, with suspect selectivity, such libertarian themes as deregulation and voluntarism. Ideologues indignant that Reagan has travestied their principles. Tough shit! I notice that it's their principles, not mine, that he found suitable to travesty."* [**The Libertarian As Conservative**] This was echoed by Noam Chomsky two decades later when while *"nobody takes [right-wing libertarianism] seriously"* as *"everybody knows that a society that worked by ... [its] principles would self-destruct in three seconds"* the *"only reason"* why some people *"pretend to take it seriously is because you can use it as a weapon."* [**Understanding Power**, p. 200] As neo-liberalism is being used as the ideological basis of the current attack on the working class, critiquing "anarcho"-capitalism and right-libertarianism also allows use to build theoretical weapons to use to resist this attack and aid the class struggle.

A few more points before beginning. When debating with "libertarian" or "anarchist" capitalists it's necessary to remem-



the limitations of using dictionary definitions on political theories.

Therefore Caplan's attempt to justify using the dictionary definition fails. Firstly, because the definitions used would depend which dictionary you use. Secondly, dictionary definitions cannot capture the ins and outs of a **political** theory or its ideas on wider subjects.

Ironically enough, Caplan is repeating an attempt made by State Socialists to deny Individualist Anarchism its socialist title (see *"Socialism and the Lexicographers"* in **Instead of a Book**). In reply to this attempt, Tucker noted that:

> *"The makers of dictionaries are dependent upon specialists for their definitions. A specialist's definition may be true or it may be erroneous. But its truth cannot be increased or its error diminished by its acceptance by the lexicographer. Each definition must stand on its own merits."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 369]

And Tucker provided many quotes from **other** dictionaries to refute the attempt by the State Socialists to define Individualist Anarchism outside the Socialist movement. He also notes that any person trying such a method will *"find that the Anarchistic Socialists are not to be stripped of one half of their title by the mere dictum of the last lexicographer."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 365]

Caplan should take note. His technique been tried before and it failed then and it will fail again for the same reasons.

As far as his case against the Historical Argument goes, this is equally as flawed. Caplan states that:

> *"Before the Protestant Reformation, the word 'Christian,' had referred almost entirely to Catholics (as well as adherents of the Orthodox Church) for about one thousand years. Does this reveal any linguistic*

*confusion on the part of Lutherans, Calvinists, and so on, when they called themselves 'Christians'? Of course not. It merely reveals that a word's historical usage does not determine its meaning."*

However, as analogies go this is pretty pathetic. Both the Protestants and Catholics followed the teachings of Christ but had different interpretations of it. As such they could both be considered Christians — followers of the Bible. In the case of anarchism, there are two main groupings — individualist and social. Both Tucker and Bakunin claimed to follow, apply and develop Proudhon's ideas (and share his opposition to both state and capitalism) and so are part of the anarchist tradition.

The anarchist movement was based upon applying the core ideas of Proudhon (his anti-statism and socialism) and developing them in the same spirit, and these ideas find their roots in **socialist** history and theory. For example, William Godwin was claimed as an anarchist after his death by the movement because of his opposition to both state and private property, something all anarchists oppose. Similarly, Max Stirner's opposition to both state and capitalist property places him within the anarchist tradition.

Given that we find fascists and Nazis calling themselves "republicans," "democrats," even "liberals" it is worthwhile remembering that the names of political theories are defined not by who use them, but by the ideas associated with the name. In other words, a fascist cannot call themselves a "liberal" any more than a capitalist can call themselves an "anarchist." To state, as Caplan does, that the historical usage of a word does not determine its meaning results in utter confusion and the end of meaningful political debate. If the historical usage of a name is meaningless will we soon see fascists as well as capitalists calling themselves anarchists? In other words, the label "anarcho-capitalism" is a misnomer, pure and simple, as **all** an-



Therefore, just because someone uses a label it does not mean that they support the ideas associated with that label. And this is the case with "anarcho"-capitalism — its ideas are at odds with the key ideas associated with all forms of traditional anarchism (even individualist anarchism which is often claimed as being a forefather of the ideology).

All we can do is indicate **why** "anarcho"-capitalism is not part of the anarchist tradition and so has falsely appropriated the name. This section of the FAQ aims to do just that — present the case why "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists. We do this, in part, by indicating where they differ from genuine anarchists (on such essential issues as private property, equality, exploitation and opposition to hierarchy) In addition, we take the opportunity to present a general critique of right-libertarian claims from an anarchist perspective. In this way we show up why anarchists reject that theory as being opposed to liberty and anarchist ideals.

We are covering this topic in an anarchist FAQ for three reasons. Firstly, the number of "libertarian" and "anarcho"-capitalists on the net means that those seeking to find out about anarchism may conclude that they are "anarchists" as well. Secondly, unfortunately, some academics and writers have taken their claims of being anarchists at face value and have included their ideology into general accounts of anarchism. These two reasons are obviously related and hence the need to show the facts of the matter. As we have extensively documented in earlier sections, anarchist theory has always been anti-capitalist. There is no relationship between anarchism and capitalism, in any form. Therefore, there is a need for this section in order to indicate exactly why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist. As will be quickly seen from our discussion, almost all anarchists who become aware of "anarcho"-capitalism quickly reject it as a form of anarchism (the better academic accounts do note that anarchists generally reject the claim, though). The last reason

The "anarcho"-capitalist argument hinges on using the dictionary definition of "anarchism" and/or "anarchy" — they try to define anarchism as being "opposition to government," and nothing else. However, dictionaries are hardly politically sophisticated and their definitions rarely reflect the wide range of ideas associated with political theories and their history. Thus the dictionary "definition" is anarchism will tend to ignore its consistent views on authority, exploitation, property and capitalism (ideas easily discovered if actual anarchist texts are read). And, of course, many dictionaries "define" anarchy as "chaos" or "disorder" but we never see "anarcho"-capitalists use that particular definition!

And for this strategy to work, a lot of "inconvenient" history and ideas from all branches of anarchism must be ignored. From individualists like Spooner and Tucker to communists like Kropotkin and Malatesta, anarchists have always been anti-capitalist (see section G for more on the anti-capitalist nature of individualist anarchism). Therefore "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists in the same sense that rain is not dry.

Of course, we cannot stop the "anarcho"-capitalists using the words "anarcho", "anarchism" and "anarchy" to describe their ideas. The democracies of the west could not stop the Chinese Stalinist state calling itself the People's Republic of China. Nor could the social democrats stop the fascists in Germany calling themselves "National Socialists". Nor could the Italian anarcho-syndicalists stop the fascists using the expression "National Syndicalism". This does not mean that any of these movements actual name reflected their content — China is a dictatorship, not a democracy, the Nazi's were not socialists (capitalists made fortunes in Nazi Germany because it crushed the labour movement), and the Italian fascist state had nothing in common with anarcho-syndicalists ideas of decentralised, "from the bottom up" unions and the abolition of the state and capitalism.



archists have opposed capitalism as an authoritarian system based upon exploitation and wage slavery.

To ignore the historical usage of a word means to ignore what the movement that used that word stood for. Thus, if Caplan is correct, an organisation calling itself the "Libertarian National Socialist Party," for example, can rightly call itself libertarian for *"a word's historical usage does not determine its meaning."* Given that right-libertarians in the USA have tried to steal the name "libertarian" from anarchists and anarchist influenced socialists, such a perspective on Caplan's part makes perfect sense. How ironic that a movement that defends private property so strongly continually tries to steal names from other political tendencies.

Perhaps a better analogy for the conflict between anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism would be between Satanists and Christians. Would we consider as Christian a Satanist grouping claiming to be Christian? A grouping that rejects everything that Christians believe but who like the name? Of course not. Neither would we consider as a right-libertarian someone who is against the free market or someone as a Marxist who supports capitalism. However, that is what Caplan and other "anarcho"-capitalists want us to do with anarchism.

Both social and individualist anarchists defined their ideas in terms of both political (abolition of the state) **and** economic (abolition of exploitation) ideas. Kropotkin defined anarchism as *"the no-government form of socialism"* while Tucker insisted that anarchism was *"the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury."* In this they followed Proudhon who stated that *"[w]e do not admit the government of man by man any more than the exploitation of man by man."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 245]

In other words, a political movement's economic ideas are just as much a part of its theories as their political ideas. Any attempt to consider one in isolation from the other kills what

defines the theory and makes it unique. And, ultimately, any such attempt, is a lie:

> *"[classical liberalism] is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore simply a lie, for freedom is impossible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 46]

Therefore Caplan's case against the Historical Argument also fails — "anarcho-capitalism" is a misnomer because anarchism has always, in all its forms, opposed capitalism. Denying and re-writing history is hardly a means of refuting the historical argument.

Caplan ends by stating:

> *"Let us designate anarchism (1) anarchism as you define it. Let us designate anarchism (2) anarchism as I and the American Heritage College Dictionary define it. This is a FAQ about anarchism (2)."*

Note that here we see again how the dictionary is a very poor foundation upon to base an argument. Again using **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary**, we find under "anarchist" — *"one who rebels against any authority, established order, or ruling power."* This definition is very close to that which "traditional" anarchists have — which is the basis for our own opposition to the notion that anarchism is merely rebellion against **State** authority.

Clearly this definition is at odds with Caplan's own view; is Webster's then wrong, and Caplan's view right? Which view is backed by the theory and history of the movement? Surely that should be the basis of who is part of the anarchist tradition and movement and who is not? Rather than do this, Caplan and other "anarcho"-capitalists rush to the dictionary (well, those



# Appendix — Is "anarcho"-capitalism a type of anarchism?

Anyone who has followed political discussion on the net has probably come across people calling themselves libertarians but arguing from a right-wing, pro-capitalist perspective. For most Europeans this is weird, as in Europe the term *"libertarian"* is almost always used in conjunction with *"socialist"* or *"communist."* In the US, though, the Right has partially succeeded in appropriating this term for itself. Even stranger, however, is that a few of these right-wingers have started calling themselves "anarchists" in what must be one of the finest examples of an oxymoron in the English language: 'Anarcho-capitalist'!!

Arguing with fools is seldom rewarded, but to allow their foolishness to go unchallenged risks allowing them to deceive those who are new to anarchism. That's what this section of the anarchist FAQ is for, to show why the claims of these "anarchist" capitalists are false. Anarchism has always been anti-capitalist and any "anarchism" that claims otherwise cannot be part of the anarchist tradition. So this section of the FAQ does not reflect some kind of debate within anarchism, as many of these types like to pretend, but a debate between anarchism and its old enemy, capitalism. In many ways this debate mirrors the one between Peter Kropotkin and Herbert Spencer, an English pro-capitalist, minimal statist, at the turn the 19$^{th}$ century and, as such, it is hardly new.

The reason for increased inequality and poverty as a result of increased deregulation is simple. A "free exchange" between two people will benefit the stronger party. This is obvious as the economy is marked by power, regardless of "anarcho"-capitalist claims, and any "free exchange" will reflect difference in power. Moreover, a series of such exchanges will have an accumulative effect, with the results of previous exchanges bolstering the position of the stronger party in the current exchange.

Moreover, the claim that removing taxation will **increase** donations to charity is someone strange. We doubt that the rich who object to money being taken from them to pay for welfare will **increase** the amount of money they give to others if taxation **was** abolished. As Peter Sabatini points out, "anarcho"-capitalists *"constantly rant and shriek about how the government, or the rabble, hinders their Lockean right to amass capital."* [**Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p.101] Caplan seems to expect them to turn over a new leaf and give **more** to that same rabble!



that do not define anarchy as "disorder"). This is for a reason as anarchism as a political movement as always been explicitly anti-capitalist and so the term "anarcho"-capitalism is an oxymoron.

What Caplan fails to even comprehend is that his choices are false. Anarchism can be designated in two ways:

> (1). Anarchism as you define it
> (2). Anarchism as the anarchist movement defines it and finds expression in the theories developed by that movement.

Caplan chooses anarchism (1) and so denies the whole history of the anarchist movement. Anarchism is not a word, it is a political theory with a long history which dictionaries cannot cover. Therefore any attempt to define anarchism by such means is deeply flawed and ultimately fails.

That Caplan's position is ultimately false can be seen from the "anarcho"-capitalists themselves. In many dictionaries anarchy is defined as *"disorder," "a state of lawlessness"* and so on. Strangely enough, no "anarcho"-capitalist ever uses **these** dictionary definitions of "anarchy"! Thus appeals to dictionaries are just as much a case of defining anarchism as you desire as not using dictionaries. Far better to look at the history and traditions of the anarchist movement itself, seek out its common features and apply **those** as criteria to those seeking to include themselves in the movement. As can be seen, "anarcho"-capitalism fails this test and, therefore, are not part of the anarchist movement. Far better for us all if they pick a new label to call themselves rather than steal our name.

Although most anarchists disagree on many things, the denial of our history is not one of them.

## Replies to Some Errors and Distortions in Bryan Caplan's "Anarchist Theory FAQ" version 4.1.1.

There have been a few "anarchist" FAQ's produced before. Bryan Caplan's anarchism FAQ is one of the more recent. While appearing to be a "neutral" statement of anarchist ideas, it is actually in large part an "anarcho"-capitalist FAQ. This can be seen by the fact that anarchist ideas (which he calls "left-anarchist") are given less than half the available space while "anarcho"-capitalist dogma makes up the majority of it. Considering that anarchism has been around far longer than "anarcho"-capitalism and is the bigger and better established movement, this is surprising. Even his use of the term "left anarchist" is strange as it is never used by anarchists and ignores the fact that Individualist Anarchists like Tucker called themselves "socialists" and considered themselves part of the wider socialist movement. For anarchists, the expression "left anarchist" is meaningless as all anarchists are anti-capitalist. Thus the terms used to describe each "school" in his FAQ are biased (those whom Caplan calls "Left anarchists" do not use that term, usually preferring "social anarchist" to distinguish themselves from individualist anarchists like Tucker).

Caplan also frames the debate only around issues which he is comfortable with. For example, when discussing "left anarchist" ideas he states that *"A key value in this line of anarchist thought is egalitarianism, the view that inequalities, especially of wealth and power, are undesirable, immoral, and socially contingent."* This, however, is **not** why anarchists are egalitarians. Anarchists oppose inequalities because they undermine and restrict individual and social freedom.

Taking another example, under the question, *"How would left-anarchy work?"*, Caplan fails to spell out some of the really obvious forms of anarchist thought. For example, the



> *"Poverty would be handled by work and responsibility for those able to care for themselves, and voluntary charity for those who cannot. (Libertarians hasten to add that a deregulated economy would greatly increase the economic opportunities of the poor, and elimination of taxation would lead to a large increase in charitable giving.)"*

Notice the implication that poverty is now caused by laziness and irresponsibility rather than by the inevitable workings of an economic system that **requires** a large *"reserve army of the unemployed"* as a condition of profitability. The continuous "boom" economy of "anarcho"-capitalist fantasies is simply incompatible with the fundamental principles of capitalism. To re-quote Michael Kalecki (from section B.4.4), *"[l]asting full employment is not at all to [the] liking [of business leaders]. The workers would 'get out of hand' and the 'captains of industry' would be anxious 'to teach them a lesson'"* as *"'discipline in the factories' and 'political stability' are more appreciated by business leaders than profits. Their class interest tells them that lasting full employment is unsound from their point of view and that unemployment is an integral part of the 'normal' capitalist system."*. See section C.7 ("What causes the capitalist business cycle?") for a fuller discussion of this point.

In addition, the claims that a "deregulated economy" would benefit the poor do not have much empirical evidence to back them up. If we look at the last quarter of the twentieth century we discover that a more deregulated economy has lead to massive increases in inequality and poverty. If a movement towards a deregulated economy has had the opposite effect than that predicted by Caplan, why should a totally deregulated economy have the opposite effect. It is a bit like claiming that while adding black paint to grey makes it more black, adding the whole tin will make it white!

a threat than the loss of one worker is to the firm. The reality of economic power leads people to contract into situations that, although they are indeed the "best" arrangements of those available, are nonetheless miserable. In any real economy — and, remember, the right-libertarian economy lacks any social safety net, making workers' positions more insecure than now — the right-libertarian denial of economic power is a delusion.

Unlike anarchist theory, right-libertarian theory provides **no** rationale to protest private power (or even state power if we accept the notion that the state owns its territory). Relations of domination and subjection are valid expressions of liberty in their system and, perversely, attempts to resist authority (by strikes, unions, resistance) are deemed "initiations of force" upon the oppressor! In contrast, anarchist theory provides a strong rationale for resisting private and public domination. Such domination violates freedom and any free association which dominates any within it violates the basis of that association in self-assumed obligation (see section A.2.11). Thus Proudhon:

> *"The social contract should increase the well-being and liberty of every citizen. — If any one-sided conditions should slip in; if one part of the citizens should find themselves, by the contract, subordinated and exploited by others, it would no longer be a contract; it would be a fraud, against which annulment might at any time by invoked justly."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 114]

Caplan's claim that right libertarians oppose regulation of individual behaviour is simply not true. They just oppose state regulation while supporting private regulation wholeheartedly. Anarchists, in contrast, reject both public and private domination.

Caplan:



works of Bookchin, Kropotkin, Bakunin and Proudhon are not discussed in any detail. His vague and confusing prose would seem to reflect the amount of thought that he has put into it. Being an "anarcho"-capitalist, Caplan concentrates on the economic aspect of anarchism and ignores its communal side. The economic aspect of anarchism he discusses is anarcho-syndicalism and tries to contrast the confederated economic system explained by one anarcho-syndicalist with Bakunin's opposition to Marxism. Unfortunately for Caplan, Bakunin is the source of anarcho-syndicalism's ideas on a confederation of self-managed workplaces running the economy. Therefore, to state that *"many"* anarchists *"have been very sceptical of setting up any overall political structure, even a democratic one, and focused instead on direct worker control at the factory level"* is simply **false**. The idea of direct local control within a confederated whole is a common thread through anarchist theory and activity, as any anarchist could tell you.

Lastly, we must note that after Caplan posted his FAQ to the "anarchy-list," many of the anarchists on that list presented numerous critiques of the "anarcho"-capitalist theories and of the ideas (falsely) attributed to social anarchists in the FAQ, which he chose to ignore (that he was aware of these postings is asserted by the fact he e-mailed one of the authors of this FAQ on the issue that anarchists never used or use the term "left-anarchist" to describe social anarchism. He replied by arguing that the term "left-anarchist" had been used by Michel Foucault, who never claimed to be an anarchist, in one of his private letters! Strangely, he never posted his FAQ to the list again).

Therefore, as can be seen from these few examples, Caplan's "FAQ" is blatantly biased towards "anarcho-capitalism" and based on the mis-characterisations and the dis-emphasis on some of the most important issues between "anarcho-capitalists" and anarchists. It is clear that his viewpoint is anything but impartial.

This section will highlight some of the many errors and distortions in that FAQ. Numbers in square brackets refer to the corresponding sections Caplan's FAQ.

## 1 Is anarchism purely negative?

[1]. Caplan, consulting his **American Heritage Dictionary**, claims: *"Anarchism is a negative; it holds that one thing, namely government, is bad and should be abolished. Aside from this defining tenet, it would be difficult to list any belief that all anarchists hold."*

The last sentence is ridiculous. If we look at the works of Tucker, Kropotkin, Proudhon and Bakunin (for example) we discover that we can, indeed list one more *"belief that all anarchists hold."* This is opposition to exploitation, to usury (i.e. profits, interest and rent). For example, Tucker argued that *"Liberty insists... [on] the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no more exploitation of man by man."* [cited in **Native American Anarchism — A Study of Left-Wing American Individualism** by Eunice Schuster, p. 140] Such a position is one that Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin would agree with.

In other words, anarchists hold two beliefs — opposition to government **and** opposition to exploitation. Any person which rejects either of these positions cannot be part of the anarchist movement. In other words, an anarchist must be against capitalism in order to be a true anarchist.

Moreover it is not at all difficult to find a more fundamental *"defining tenet"* of anarchism. We can do so merely by analysing the term *"an-archy,"* which is composed of the Greek words **an**, meaning *"no"* or *"without,"* and **arche**, meaning literally *"a ruler,"* but more generally referring to the **principle** of rulership, i.e. hierarchical authority. Hence an anarchist is someone who advocates abolishing the principle



> *But the neglected question is: Where? Where does a man have this right? He certainly does not have it on property on which he is trespassing. In short, he has this right only either on his own property or on the property of someone who has agreed, as a gift or in a rental contract, to allow him in the premises. In fact, then, there is no such thing as a separate 'right to free speech'; there is only a man's property right: the right to do as he wills with his own or to make voluntary agreements with other property owners."* [Murray Rothbard, **Power and Market**, p. 176]

Of course, Rothbard fails to see that for the property-less such a regime implies **no** rights whatsoever. It also means the effective end of free speech and free association as the property owner can censor those on their property (such as workers or tenants) and ban their organisations (such as unions). Of course, in his example Rothbard looks at the "trespasser," **not** the wage worker or the tenant (two far more common examples in any modern society). Rothbard is proposing the dictatorship of the property owner and the end of civil liberties and equal rights (as property is unequally distributed). He gives this utter denial of liberty an Orwellian twist by proclaiming the end of civil liberties by property rights as "a new liberty." Perhaps for the property-owner, but not the wage worker — *"We who belong to the proletaire class, property excommunicates us!"* [Proudhon, **What is Property?**, p. 137]

In effect, right-Libertarians do not care how many restrictions are placed on you as long as it is not the government doing it. Of course it will be claimed that workers and tenants "consent" to these controls (although they reject the notion that citizens "consent" to government controls by not leaving their state). Here the libertarian case is so disingenuous as to be offensive. There is no symmetry in the situations facing workers and firms. To the worker, the loss of a job is often far more of

guaranteeing that production will be for profit rather than use; that there will consequently be runaway growth and an endless devouring of nature based on the principle of "grow or die;" and that the alienation and deskilling of the workforce will continue. What the "anarcho"-capitalist really means by "doing away with the regulation of economic behaviour" is that ordinary people will have even lessopportunity than now to democratically control the rapacious behaviour of capitalists. Needless to say, the "regulation of personal" behaviour would **not** be done away with in the workplace, where the authority of the bosses would still exist and you would have follow their petty rules and regulations.

Moreover, regardless of "anarcho"-capitalist claims, they do not, in fact, support civil liberties or oppose "regulation" of personal behaviour as such. Rather, they **support** property owners suppressing civil liberties on their property and the regulation of personal behaviour by employers and landlords. This they argue is a valid expression of property rights. Indeed, any attempts to allow workers civil liberties or restrict employers demands on workers by state or union action is denounced as a violation of "liberty" (i.e. the power of the property owner). Those subject to the denial of civil liberties or the regulation of their personal behaviour by landlords or employees can "love it or leave it." Of course, the same can be said to any objector to state oppression — and frequently is. This is an artificial double standard, which labels a restraint by one group or person in a completely different way than the same restraint by others simply because one is called "the government" and the other is not.

This denial of civil liberties can be seen from these words by Murray Rothbard:

> *"[I]n the profoundest sense there are no rights but property rights .. . Freedom of speech is supposed to mean the right of everyone to say whatever he likes.*



of hierarchical authority — not just in government but in all institutions and social relations.

Anarchists oppose the principle of hierarchical authority because it is the basis of domination, which is not only degrading in itself but generally leads to exploitation and all the social evils which follow from exploitation, from poverty, hunger and homelessness to class struggle and armed conflict.

Because anarchists oppose hierarchical authority, domination, and exploitation, they naturally seek to eliminate all hierarchies, as the very purpose of hierarchy is to facilitate the domination and (usually) exploitation of subordinates.

The reason anarchists oppose government, then, is because government is **one manifestation** of the evils of hierarchical authority, domination, and exploitation. But the capitalist workplace is another. In fact, the capitalist workplace is where most people have their most frequent and unpleasant encounters with these evils. Hence workers' control — the elimination of the hierarchical workplace through democratic self-management — has been central to the agenda of classical and contemporary anarchism from the 19$^{th}$ century to the present. Indeed, anarchism was born out of the struggle of workers against capitalist exploitation.

To accept Caplan's definition of anarchism, however, would mean that anarchists' historical struggle for workers' self-management has never been a "genuine" anarchist activity. This is clearly a **reductio ad absurdum** of that definition.

Caplan has confused a necessary condition with a sufficient condition. Opposition to government is a necessary condition of anarchism, but not a sufficient one. To put it differently, all anarchists oppose government, but opposition to government does not automatically make one an anarchist. To be an anarchist one must oppose government for anarchist reasons and be opposed to all other forms of hierarchical structure.

To understand why let use look to capitalist property. Murray Rothbard argues that *"[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 173] Defence firms would be employed to enforce those decisions (i.e. laws and rules). No real disagreement there. What **is** illuminating is Rothbard's comments that the state *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area"* [**Op. Cit.** , p. 170] Which, to state the obvious, means that both the state and property is marked by an *"ultimate decision-making power"* over their territory. The only "difference" is that Rothbard claims the former is "just" (i.e. "justly" acquired) and the latter is "unjust" (i.e. acquired by force). In reality of course, the modern distribution of property is just as much a product of past force as is the modern state. In other words, the current property owners have acquired their property in the same unjust fashion as the state has its. If one is valid, so is the other. Rothbard (and "anarcho"-capitalists in general) are trying to have it both ways.

Rothbard goes on to show why statism and private property are essentially the same thing:

> *"**If** the State may be said too properly **own** its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there **is** no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. **So long** as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170]

Of course Rothbard does not draw the obvious conclusion. He wants to maintain that the state is bad and property is



entitled to their property. However, as John Stuart Mill pointed out over 100 years ago, the *"social arrangements"* existing today *"commenced from a distribution of property which was the result, not of a just partition, or acquisition by industry, but of conquest and violence ... [and] the system still retains many and large traces of its origin."* [**Principles of Political Economy**, p. 15] Given that (as we point out in section F.1) Murray Rothbard argues that the state cannot be claimed to own its territory simply because it did not acquire its property in a "just" manner, this suggests that "anarcho"-capitalism cannot actually argue against the state. After all, property owners today cannot be said to have received their property "justly" and **if** they are entitled to it so is the state to **its** "property"!

But as is so often the case, property owners are exempt from the analysis the state is subjected to by "anarcho"-capitalists. The state and property owners may do the same thing (such as ban freedom of speech and association or regulate individual behaviour) but only the state is condemned by "anarcho"-capitalism.

Caplan:

> *"On other issues, the anarcho-capitalist differs little if at all from the more moderate libertarian. Services should be privatised and opened to free competition; regulation of personal AND economic behaviour should be done away with."*

The "anarcho"-capitalist's professed desire to "do away" with the "regulation" of economic behaviour is entirely disingenuous. For, by giving capitalists the ability to protect their exploitative monopolies of social capital by the use of coercive private states, one is thereby "regulating" the economy in the strongest possible way, i.e. ensuring that it will be channelled in certain directions rather than others. For example, one is

experiment under "anarcho"-capitalist law (if they can afford it, of course) does not address the issue of changes in social awareness (caused, by example, by class struggle) which can make such "laws" redundant. So, when all is said and done, "anarcho"-capitalism just states that as long as you accept their rules, you are free to do what you like.

How generous of them!

Thus, while we would be allowed to be collective capitalists or property owners under "anarcho"-capitalists we would have no choice about living under laws based on the most rigid and extreme interpretation of property rights available. In other words, "anarcho"-capitalists recognise (at least implicitly) that there exists one collective need that needs collective support — a law system to define and protects people's rights. Ultimately, as C.B. Macpherson argues, "Individualism" implies "collectivism" for the *"notion that individualism and 'collectivism' are the opposite ends of a scale along which states and theories of the state can be arranged ... is superficial and misleading... . [I]ndividualism ... does not exclude but on the contrary demands the supremacy of the state [or law] over the individual. It is not a question of the more individualism, the less collectivism; rather, the more through-going the individualism, the more complete the collectivism. Of this the supreme illustration is Hobbes's theory."* [**The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism**, p.256] Under "anarcho"-capitalism the individual is subject to the laws regarding private property, laws decided in advance by a small group of ideological leaders. Then real individuals are expected to live with the consequences as best they can, with the law being placed ahead of these consequences for flesh and blood people. The abstraction of the law dominates and devours real individuals, who are considered below it and incapable of changing it (except for the worse). This, from one angle, shares a lot with theocracy and very little with liberty.

Needless to say, Caplan like most (if not all) "anarcho"-capitalists assume that the current property owners are



good while drawing attention to their obvious similarities! Ultimately Rothbard is exposing the bankruptcy of his own politics and analysis. According to Rothbard, something can look like a state (i.e. have the *"ultimate decision-making power"* over an area) and act like a state (i.e. *"make rules for everyone"* who lives in an area, i.e. govern them) but not be a state. This not a viable position for obvious reasons.

In capitalism, property and possession are opposites — as Proudhon argued in **What is Property?**. Under possession, the "property" owner exercises *"ultimate decision-making power"* over themselves as no-one else uses the resource in question. This is non-hierarchical. Under capitalism, however, use and ownership are divided. Landlords and capitalists give others access to their property while retaining power over it and so the people who use it. This is by nature hierarchical. Little wonder Noam Chomsky argued that a *"consistent anarchist must oppose private ownership of the means of production and the wage slavery which is a component of this system as incompatible with the principle that labour must be freely undertaken and under the control of the producer."* [*"Notes on Anarchism"*, **For Reasons of State**, p. 158]

Thus a true anarchist must oppose both state and capitalism as they generate the same hierarchical social relationships (as recognised by Rothbard but apparently subjected to "doublethink"). As "anarcho"-capitalists do not oppose capitalist property they cannot be anarchists — they support a very specific form of **archy,** that of the capitalist/landlord over working class people.

Self-styled "anarcho"-capitalists do not oppose government for anarchist reasons. That is, they oppose it not because it is a manifestation of hierarchical authority, but because government authority often **conflicts** with capitalists' authority over the enterprises they control. By getting rid of government with its minimum wage laws, health and safety requirements, union rights laws, environmental standards, child labour laws, and

other inconveniences, capitalists would have even more power to exploit workers than they already do. These consequences of "anarcho"-capitalism are diametrically opposed to the historically central objective of the anarchist movement, which is to eliminate capitalist exploitation.

We must conclude, then, that "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists at all. In reality they are capitalists **posing** as anarchists in order to attract support for their laissez-faire economic project from those who are angry at government. This scam is only possible on the basis of the misunderstanding perpetrated by Caplan: that anarchism means nothing more than opposition to government.

Better definitions of anarchism can be found in other reference works. For example, in **Grollier's Online Encyclopedia** we read: *"Anarchism rejects all forms of hierarchical authority, social and economic as well as political."* According to this more historically and etymologically accurate definition, "anarcho"-capitalism is not a form of anarchism, since it does not reject hierarchical authority in the economic sphere (which has been the area of prime concern to anarchists since day one). Hence it is **bogus** anarchism.

## 2 Anarchism and Equality

[5.] On the question "What major subdivisions may be made among anarchists?" Caplan writes:

> *"Unlike the left-anarchists, anarcho-capitalists generally place little or no value on equality, believing that inequalities along all dimensions — including income and wealth — are not only perfectly legitimate so long as they 'come about in the right way,' but are the natural consequence of human freedom."*

This statement is not inaccurate as a characterisation of "anarcho"-capitalist ideas, but its implications need to be made



> *"However, in theory an 'anarcho-capitalist' society might be filled with nothing but communes or worker-owned firms, so long as these associations were formed voluntarily (i.e., individuals joined voluntarily and capital was obtained with the consent of the owners) and individuals retained the right to exit and set up corporations or other profit-making, individualistic firms."*

It's interesting that the "anarcho"-capitalists are willing to allow workers to set up "voluntary" co-operatives so long as the conditions are retained which ensure that such co-operatives will have difficulty surviving (i.e. private property and private states), but they are unwilling to allow workers to set up co-operatives under conditions that would ensure their success (i.e. the absence of private property and private states). This reflects the usual vacuousness of the right-libertarian concepts of "freedom" and "voluntarism."

In other words, these worker-owned firms would exist in and be subject to the same capitalist *"general libertarian law code"* and work in the same capitalist market as the rest of society. So, not only are these co-operatives subject to capitalist market forces, they exist and operate in a society defined by capitalist laws. As discussed in section F.2, such disregard for the social context of human action shows up the "anarcho" capitalist's disregard for meaningful liberty.

All Caplan is arguing here is that as long as people remain within the (capitalist) "law code," they can do whatever they like. However, what determines the amount of coercion required in a society is the extent to which people are willing to accept the rules imposed on them. This is as true of an "anarcho"-capitalist society as it is of any other. In other words, if more and more people reject the basic assumptions of capitalism, the more coercion against anarchistic tendencies will be required. Saying that people would be free to

Moreover, co-operatives within capitalism have a tendency to adapt to the dominant market conditions rather than undermining them. There will be pressure on the co-operatives to compete more effectively by adopting the same cost-cutting and profit-enhancing measures as capitalist firms. Such measures will include the deskilling of workers; squeezing as much "productivity" as is humanly possible from them; and a system of pay differentials in which the majority of workers receive low wages while the bulk of profits are reinvested in technology upgrades and other capital expansion that keeps pace with capitalist firms. But this means that in a capitalist environment, there tend to be few practical advantages for workers in collective ownership of the firms in which they work.

This problem can only be solved by eliminating private property and the coercive statist mechanisms required to protect it (including private states masquerading as "protection companies"), because this is the only way to eliminate competition for profits as the driving force of economic activity. In a libertarian socialist environment, federated associations of workers in co-operative enterprises would co-ordinate production for **use** rather than profit, thus eliminating the competitive basis of the economy and so also the "grow-or-die" principle which now puts co-operatives at a fatal economic disadvantage. (For more on how such an economy would be organised and operated, as well as answers to objections, see section I.)

And let us not forget what is implied by Caplan's statement that the "anarcho"-capitalist does not think that co-operative holding of "property" "would be widespread or prevalent." It means that the vast majority would be subject to the power, authority and laws of the property owner and so would not govern themselves. In other words, it would a system of private statism rather than anarchy.

Caplan:



clear. "Anarcho"-capitalists generally place little or no value on equality — particularly economic equality — because they know that under their system, where capitalists would be completely free to exploit workers to the hilt, wealth and income inequalities would become even greater than they are now. Thus their references to "human freedom" as the way in which such inequalities would allegedly come about means "freedom of capitalists to exploit workers;" it does not mean "freedom of workers **from** capitalist exploitation."

But "freedom to exploit workers" has historically been the objective only of capitalists, not anarchists. Therefore, "anarcho"-capitalism again shows itself to be nothing more than capitalism attempting to pass itself off as part of the anarchist movement — a movement that has been dedicated since its inception to the destruction of capitalism! One would have to look hard to find a more audacious fraud.

As we argue in section 2.1 of the appendix "Is 'anarcho'-capitalism a type of anarchism?" the claim that inequalities are irrelevant if they *"come about the right way"* ignores the reality of freedom and what is required to be free. To see way we have to repeat part of our argument from that section and look at Murray Rothbard's (a leading "anarcho"-capitalist icon) analysis of the situation after the abolition of serfdom in Russia and slavery in America. He writes:

> *"The **bodies** of the oppressed were freed, but the property which they had worked and eminently deserved to own, remained in the hands of their former oppressors. With economic power thus remaining in their hands, the former lords soon found themselves virtual masters once more of what were now free tenants or farm labourers. The serfs and slaves had tasted freedom, but had been cruelly derived of its fruits."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 74]

However, contrast this with Rothbard's (and Caplan's) claims that if market forces ("voluntary exchanges") result in the creation of free tenants or wage-labourers then these labourers and tenants are free (see, for example, **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 221–2 on why "economic power" within capitalism does not, in fact, exist). But the labourers dispossessed by market forces are in **exactly** the same situation as the former serfs and slaves. Rothbard sees the obvious "economic power" in the later case, but denies it in the former. But the **conditions** of the people in question are identical and it is these conditions that horrify us and create social relationships because on subordination, authority and oppression rather than freedom. It is only ideology that stops Rothbard and Caplan drawing the obvious conclusion — identical conditions produce identical social relationships and so if the formally "free" ex-serfs are subject to "economic power" and "masters" then so are the formally "free" labourers within capitalism! Both sets of workers may be formally free, but their circumstances are such that they are "free" to "consent" to sell their freedom to others (i.e. economic power produces relationships of domination and unfreedom between formally free individuals).

Thus inequalities that *"come about in the right way"* restrict freedom just as much as inequalities that do not. If the latter restricts liberty and generate oppressive and exploitative social relationships then so do the former. Thus, if we are serious about individuality liberty (rather than property) we must look at inequalities and what generate them.

One last thing. Caplan states that inequalities in capitalism are *"the natural consequence of human freedom."* They are not, unless you subscribe to the idea that capitalist property rights are the basis of human freedom. However, the assumption that capitalist property rights are the best means to defend individual liberty can be easily seen to be flawed just from the example of the ex-slaves and ex-serfs we have just described. Inequali-



capitalist society for the same reason that they are not widespread or prevalent now: namely, that the socio-economic, legal, and political systems would be structured in such as way as to automatically discourage their growth (in addition, capitalist firms and the rich would also have an advantage in that they would still own and control the wealth they currently have which are a result of previous "initiations of force". This would give them an obvious advantage on the "free-market" — an advantage which would be insurmountable).

As we explain in more detail in section J.5.11, the reason why there are not more producer co-operatives is partly structural, based on the fact that co-operatives have a tendency to grow at a slower rate than capitalist firms. This is a good thing if one's primary concern is, say, protecting the environment, but fatal if one is trying to survive in a competitive capitalist environment.

Under capitalism, successful competition for profits is the fundamental fact of economic survival. This means that banks and private investors seeking the highest returns on their investments will favour those companies that grow the fastest. Moreover, in co-operatives returns to capital are less than in capitalist firms. Under such conditions, capitalist firms will attract more investment capital, allowing them to buy more productivity-enhancing technology and thus to sell their products more cheaply than co-operatives. Even though co-operatives are at least as efficient (usually more so) than their equivalent capitalist firms, the effect of market forces (particularly those associated with capital markets) will select against them. This bias against co-operatives under capitalism is enough to ensure that, despite their often higher efficiency, they cannot prosper under capitalism (i.e. capitalism selects the **least efficient** way of producing). Hence Caplan's comments hide how the effect of inequalities in wealth and power under capitalism determine which alternatives are "widespread" in the "free market"

into the foundation of their system a distinctly **non**-neutral philosophy, namely capitalism. Those who reject such a basis may end up sharing the fate of tribal peoples who rejected that system of property rights, for example, the Native Americans.

In other words, in terms of outcome the whole system would favour **capitalist** values and so not be "philosophically neutral." The law would be favourable to employers rather than workers, manufacturers rather than consumers, and landlords rather than tenants. Indeed, from the "anarcho"-capitalist perspective the rules that benefit employers, landlords and manufacturers (as passed by progressive legislatures or enforced by direct action) simply define liberty and property rights whereas the rules that benefit workers, tenants and consumers are simply an interference with liberty. The rules one likes, in other words, are the foundations of sacred property rights (and so "liberty," as least for the capitalist and landlord), those one does not like are meddlesome regulation. This is a very handy trick and would not be worth mentioning if it was not so commonplace in right-libertarian theory.

We should leave aside the fantasy that the law under "anarcho"-capitalism is a politically neutral set of universal rules deduced from particular cases and free from a particular instrumental or class agenda.

Caplan:

> *"Critics of anarcho-capitalism sometimes assume that communal or worker-owned firms would be penalised or prohibited in an anarcho-capitalist society. It would be more accurate to state that while individuals would be free to voluntarily form communitarian organisations, the anarcho-capitalist simply doubts that they would be widespread or prevalent."*

There is good reason for this doubt. Worker co-operatives would not be widespread or prevalent in an "anarcho"-



ties resulting from "voluntary exchanges" in the capitalist market can and do result in the denial of freedom, thus suggesting that "property" and liberty are not natural consequences of each other.

To state the obvious, private property (rather than possession) means that the non-property owner can gain access to the resource in question only when they agree to submit to the property owner's authority (and pay tribute for the privilege of being bossed about). This aspect of property (rightly called *"despotism"* by Proudhon) is one which right-libertarians continually fail to highlight when they defend it as the paradigm of liberty.

## 3 Is anarchism the same thing as socialism?

[7.] In this section ("Is anarchism the same thing as socialism?") Caplan writes:

> *"Outside of the Anglo-American political culture, there has been a long and close historical relationship between the more orthodox socialists who advocate a socialist government, and the anarchist socialists who desire some sort of decentralised, voluntary socialism. The two groups both want to severely limit or abolish private property..."*

For Caplan to claim that anarchism is not the same thing as socialism, he has to ignore anarchist history. For example, the Individualist anarchists called themselves *"socialists,"* as did social anarchists. Indeed, Individualist Anarchists like Joseph Labadie stated that *"Anarchism is voluntary socialism"* [**Anarchism: What it is and What it is Not**) and wanted to limit private property in many ways (for example, *"the resources of nature — land, mines, and so forth — should not be held as private property and subject to being held by the*

*individual for speculative purposes, that use of these things shall be the only valid title, and that each person has an equal right to the use of all these things.*" [**What is Socialism?**]). Therefore, **within** the *"Anglo-American political culture,"* **all** types of anarchists considered themselves part of the socialist movement. This can be seen not only from Kropotkin's or Bakunin's work, but also in Tucker's (see **Instead of a Book**). So to claim that the *"Anglo-American"* anarchists did not have *"a long and close historical relationship"* with the wider socialist movement is simply **false.**

The statement that anarchists want to severely limit or abolish "private property" is misleading if it is not further explained. For the way it stands, it sounds like anarchism is just another form of coercive "state" (i.e. a political entity that forcibly prevents people from owning private property), whereas this is far from the case.

Firstly, anarchists are **not** against "private property" in the sense personal belongings. *"Anarchists,"* points out Nicholas Walter, *"are in favour of the private property which cannot be used by one person to exploit another — those personal possessions which we accumulate from childhood and which become part of ours."* [*"About Anarchism"*, in **Reinventing Anarchy**, p. 49] Kropotkin makes the anarchist position clear when he wrote that we *"do not want to rob any one of his coat"* but expropriation *"must apply to everything that enables any man [or woman] — by he financier, mill owner, or landlord — to appropriate the product of others' toil."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61]

In effect, Caplan is confusing two very different kinds of "private property", of which one rests on usefulness to an individual, the other on the employment (and so exploitation) of the labour of others. The latter produces social relations of domination between individuals, while the former is a relationship between people and things. As Proudhon argued, possession becomes property only when it also serves as means of



> *he thinks could be developed fairly easily by purification of the Anglo-American common law), whereas Friedman focuses more intently on the possibility of plural legal systems co-existing and responding to the consumer demands of different elements of the population. The difference, however, is probably overstated. Rothbard believes that it is legitimate for consumer demand to determine the philosophically neutral content of the law, such as legal procedure, as well as technical issues of property right definition such as water law, mining law, etc. And Friedman admits that 'focal points' including prevalent norms are likely to circumscribe and somewhat standardise the menu of available legal codes."*

The argument that "consumer demand" would determine a "philosophically neutral" content of the law cannot be sustained. Any law code will reflect the philosophy of those who create it. Under "anarcho"-capitalism, as we have noted (see section F.6), the values of the capitalist rich will be dominant and will shape the law code and justice system, as they do now, only more so. The law code will therefore continue to give priority to the protection of private property over human values; those who have the most money will continue being able to hire the best lawyers; and the best (i.e. most highly paid) judges will be inclined to side with the wealthy and to rule in their interests, out of class loyalty (and personal interests).

Moreover, given that the law code exists to protect capitalist property rights, how can it be "philosophically neutral" with that basis? How would "competing" property frameworks coexist? If a defence agency allowed squatting and another (hired by the property owner) did not, there is no way (bar force) a conflict could be resolved. Then the firm with the most resources would win. "Anarcho"-capitalism, in effect, smuggles

this. As Noam Chomsky notes, the *"rapid industrial development in the southeastern region [of America] a century ago was based on (Black) convict labour, leased to the highest bidder."* Chomsky quotes expert Alex Lichtenstein comments that Southern Industrialists pointed out that convict labour was *"more reliable and productive than free labour"* and that it overcomes the problem of labour turnover and instability. It also *"remove[d] all danger and cost of strikes"* and that it lowers wages for *"free labour"* (i.e. wage labour). The US Bureau of Labor reported that *"mine owners [in Alabama] say they could not work at a profit without the lowering effect in wages of convict-labour competition."* [**The Umbrella of US Power**, p. 32]

Needless to say, Caplan fails to mention this aspect of "anarcho"-capitalism (just as he fails to mention the example of Ford's private police state). Perhaps an "anarcho"-capitalist will say that prison labour will be less productive than wage labour and so workers have little to fear, but this makes little sense. If wage labour is more productive then prison labour will not find a market (and then what for the prisoners? Will profit-maximising companies **really** invest in an industry with such high over-heads as maintaining prisoners for free?). Thus it seems more than likely that any "prison-factory system" will be as productive as the surrounding wage-labour ones, thus forcing down their wages and the conditions of labour. For capitalists this would be ideal, however for the vast majority a different conclusion must be drawn.

Caplan:

> *"Probably the main division between the anarcho-capitalists stems from the apparent differences between Rothbard's natural-law anarchism, and David Friedman's more economistic approach. Rothbard puts more emphasis on the need for a generally recognised libertarian legal code (which*



exploitation and subjection of other people. But failing to distinguish these radically different forms of "private property" Caplan distorts the anarchist position.

Secondly, it is not that anarchists want to pass laws making private property (in the second, exploitative, sense) illegal. Rather they want to restructure society in such a way that the means of production are freely available for workers to use. This does not mean "anarchist police" standing around with guns to prohibit people from owning private property. Rather, it means dismantling the coercive state agencies that make private property possible, i.e., the departments of real police who now stand around with guns protecting private property.

Once that occurs, anarchists maintain that capitalism would be impossible, since capitalism is essentially a monopoly of the means of production, which can only be maintained by organised coercion. For suppose that in an anarchist society someone (call him Bob) somehow acquires certain machinery needed to produce widgets (a doubtful supposition if widget-making machines are very expensive, as there will be little wealth disparity in an anarchist society). And suppose Bob offers to let workers with widget-making skills use his machines if they will pay him "rent," i.e. allow him to appropriate a certain amount of the value embodied in the widgets they produce. The workers will simply refuse, choosing instead to join a widget-making collective where they have free access to widget-making machinery, thus preventing Bob from living parasitically on their labour. Thus Kropotkin:

> *"Everywhere you will find that the wealth of the wealthy springs from the poverty of the poor. That is why an anarchist society need not fear the advent of a Rothschild [or any other millionaire] who would settle in its midst. If every member of the community knows that after a few hours of productive toil he [or*

> *she] will have a right to all the pleasures that civilisation procures, and to those deeper sources of enjoyment which art and science offer to all who seek them, he [or she] will not sell his strength… No one will volunteer to work for the enrichment of your Rothschild."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61]

In this scenario, private property was "abolished," but not through coercion. Indeed, it was precisely the abolition of organised coercion that allowed private property to be abolished.

## 4 Anarchism and dissidents

[9.] On the question "How would left-anarchy work?" Caplan writes:

> *"Some other crucial features of the left-anarchist society are quite unclear. Whether dissidents who despised all forms of communal living would be permitted to set up their own inegalitarian separatist societies is rarely touched upon. Occasionally left-anarchists have insisted that small farmers and the like would not be forcibly collectivised, but the limits of the right to refuse to adopt an egalitarian way of life are rarely specified."*

This is a straw man. "Left" (i.e. real) anarchist theory clearly implies and **explicitly states** the answer to these questions.

Firstly, on the issue of "separatist" societies. Anarchist thinkers have always acknowledged that there would be multitude of different communities after a revolution (and not just Caplan's "inegalitarian" ones). Marx, for example, mocked Bakunin for arguing that only revolutionary communes would federate together and that this would not claim any right to govern others (see Bakunin's *"Letter to Albert Richards"*, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 179] Kropotkin



the alienation, dehumanisation, frustration, rage, and other negative emotions produced by the inhumane and unjust economic system.

Thus it is only in our societies like ours, with their wholesale manufacture of many different kinds of criminals, that punishment appears to be the only possible way to discourage "crime." From the left-libertarian perspective, however, the punitive approach is a band-aid measure that does not get to the real root of the problem — a problem that lies in the structure of the system itself. The real solution is the creation of a non-hierarchical society based on communal ownership of productive assets, which, by eliminating poverty and the other negative effects of capitalism, would greatly reduce the incidence of criminal behaviour and so the need for punitive countermeasures.

Finally, two more points on private prisons. Firstly, as to the desirability of a "prison factory system," we will merely note that, given the capitalist principle of "grow-or-die," if punishing crime becomes a business, one can be sure that those who profit from it will find ways to ensure that the "criminal" population keeps expanding at a rate sufficient to maintain a high rate of profit and growth. After all, the logic of a "prison factory system" is self-defeating. If the aim of prison is to deter crime (as some claim) and if a private prison system will meet that aim, then a successful private prison system will stop crime, which, in turn, will put them out of business! Thus a "prison factory system" cannot aim to be efficient (i.e. stop crime).

Secondly, Caplan does not mention the effect of prison labour on the wages, job conditions and market position of workers. Having a sizeable proportion of the working population labouring in prison would have a serious impact on the bargaining power of workers. How could workers outside of prison compete with such a regime of labour discipline without submitting to prison-like conditions themselves? Unsurprisingly, US history again presents some insight into

because the rich would either own the arbitration company or influence/control it through the power of the purse (see section F.6). In addition, "successful" arbitrators would also be wealthy, therefore making neutrality even more unlikely. Moreover, given that the laws the "neutral arbitrator" would be using are based on capitalist property rights, the powers and privileges of the owner are built into the system from the start.

Second, the left-libertarian critique of punishment does not rest, as "anarcho"-capitalists claim, on the naive view that intimidation and coercion aren't effective in controlling behaviour. Rather, it rests on the premise that capitalist societies produce large numbers of criminals, whereas societies based on equality and community ownership of productive assets do not.

The argument for this is that societies based on private property and hierarchy inevitably lead to a huge gap between the haves and the have-nots, with the latter sunk in poverty, alienation, resentment, anger, and hopelessness, while at the same time such societies promote greed, ambition, ruthlessness, deceit, and other aspects of competitive individualism that destroy communal values like sharing, co-operation, and mutual aid. Thus in capitalist societies, the vast majority of "crime" turns out to be so-called "crimes against property," which can be traced to poverty and the grossly unfair distribution of wealth. Where the top one percent of the population controls more wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined, it is no wonder that a considerable number of those on the bottom should try to recoup illegally some of the mal-distributed wealth they cannot obtain legally. (In this they are encouraged by the bad example of the ruling class, whose parasitic ways of making a living would be classified as criminal if the mechanisms for defining "criminal behaviour" were not controlled by the ruling class itself.) And most of the remaining "crimes against persons" can be traced to



stated that *"the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same"* and *"[s]ide by side with the revolutionised communes ... places would remain in an expectant attitude, and would go on living on the Individualist system."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 81] While he was hopeful that *"everywhere [would be] more or less Socialism"* he recognised that the revolution would not conform to *"any particular rule"* and would differ in different areas — *"in one country State Socialist, in another Federation"* and so on. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 82] Malatesta made the same point, arguing that *"after the revolution"* there would be *"relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way."* This is because anarchism *"cannot be imposed"*. [**Life and Ideas**, p. 173, p. 21]

Needless to say, these "separatist societies" (which may or may not be "inegalitarian") would not be anarchist societies. If a group of people wanted to set up a capitalist, Marxist, Georgist or whatever kind of community then their right would be respected (although, of course, anarchists would seek to convince those who live in such a regime of the benefits of anarchism!). As Malatesta pointed out, *"free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of other"* as *"it is clear that all, and only, those ways of life which respect freedom, and recognise that each individual has an equal right to the means of production and to the full enjoyment of the product of his own labour, have anything in common with anarchism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 103 and p. 33]

Ultimately, *"it is not a question of right and wrong; it is a question of freedom for everybody... None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom coupled with experience, is the only way of dis-*

*covering the truth and what is best; and there can be no freedom if there is the denial of the freedom to err."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 49]

Secondly, regarding *"dissidents"* who wanted to set up their own *"inegalitarian separatist societies,"* if the term "inegalitarian" implies economic inequalities due to private property, the answer is that private property requires some kind of state, if not a public state then private security forces ("private-state capitalism"), as advocated by "anarcho"-capitalists, in order to protect private property. Therefore, "anarcho"-capitalists are asking if an anarchist society will allow the existence of states. Of course, in the territory that used to be claimed by a nation state a whole host of communities and societies will spring up — but that does not make the non-anarchist ones anarchist!

Thus suppose that in a hypothetical libertarian socialist society, Bob tries to set up private security forces to protect certain means of production, e.g. farmland. By the hypothesis, if Bob merely wanted to work the land himself, there would be no reason for him go to the trouble of creating a private state to guard it, because use-rights guarantee that he has free access to the productive assets he needs to make a living. Thus, the only plausible reason Bob could have for claiming and guarding more farmland than he could use himself would be a desire to create a monopoly of land in order to exact tribute from others for the privilege of using it. But this would be an attempt to set up a system of feudal exploitation in the midst of a free community. Thus the community is justified in disarming this would-be parasite and ignoring his claims to "own" more land than he can use himself.

In other words, there is no "right" to adopt an "inegalitarian way of life" within a libertarian community, since such a right would have to be enforced by the creation of a coercive system of enslavement, which would mean the end of the "libertarian" community. To the contrary, the members of such a community have a right, guaranteed by "the people in arms," to resist such attempts to enslave them.



have occurred at Ford and if Ford's private police state would ever have been reformed.

Of course, from an "anarcho"-capitalist perspective the only limitation in the Ford workers' liberty was the fact they had to pay taxes to the US government. The regime at Ford could **not** restrict their liberty as no one forced them to work for the company. Needless to say, an "anarcho"-capitalist would reject out of hand the argument that no-one forced the citizen to entry or remain in the USA and so they consented to taxation, the government's laws and so on.

This is more than a history lesson. Such private police forces are on the rise again (see *"Armed and Dangerous: Private Police on the March"* by Mike Zielinski, **Covert Action Quarterly**, no. 54, Fall, 1995 for example). This system of private police (as demonstrated by Ford) is just one of the hidden aspects of Caplan's comment that the "anarcho"-capitalist *"typically hails modern society's increasing reliance on private security guards... and other demonstrations of the free market's ability to supply the defensive and legal services normally assumed to be of necessity a government monopoly."*

Needless to say, private police states are not a step forward in anarchist eyes.

Caplan:

> *"Unlike some left-anarchists, the anarcho-capitalist has no objection to punishing criminals; and he finds the former's claim that punishment does not deter crime to be the height of naivete. Traditional punishment might be meted out after a conviction by a neutral arbitrator; or a system of monetary restitution (probably in conjunction with a prison factory system) might exist instead."*

Let us note first that in disputes between the capitalist class and the working class, there would be no *"neutral arbitrator,"*

*be freely obtained from ex-Ford workers."* [Huw Beynon, **Working for Ford**, pp. 29–30]

The private police attacked women workers handing out pro-union handbills and gave them *"a serve beating."* At Kansas and Dallas *"similar beatings were handed out to the union men."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34] This use of private police to control the work force was not unique. General Motors *"spent one million dollars on espionage, employing fourteen detective agencies and two hundred spies at one time [between 1933 and 1936]. The Pinkerton Detective Agency found anti-unionism its most lucrative activity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32] We must also note that the Pinkerton's had been selling their private police services for decades before the 1930s. In the 1870s, they had infiltrated and destroyed the Molly Maguires (a secret organisation Irish miners had developed to fight the coal bosses). For over 60 years the Pinkerton Detective Agency had *"specialised in providing spies, agent provocateurs, and private armed forces for employers combating labour organisations."* By 1892 it *"had provided its services for management in seventy major labour disputes, and its 2 000 active agents and 30 000 reserves totalled more than the standing army of the nation."* [Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 9 and p. 55] With this force available, little wonder unions found it so hard to survive in the USA. Given that unions could be considered as "defence" agencies for workers, this suggests a picture of how "anarcho"-capitalism may work in practice.

It could be argued that, in the end, the union was recognised by the Ford company. However, this occurred after the New Deal was in place (which helped the process), after yearsof illegal activity (by definition union activism on Ford property was an illegal act) and extremely militant strikes. Given that the union agreement occurred nearly 40 years after Ford was formed **and** in a legal situation violently at odds with "anarcho"-capitalism (or even minimal statist capitalism), we would be justified in wondering if unionisation would ever



The statement that "left" anarchists have *"occasionally"* insisted that small farmers and the like would not be forcibly collectivised is a distortion of the facts. No responsible left libertarian advocates forced collectivisation, i.e. compelling others to join collectives. Self-employment is always an option. This can be seen from Bakunin's works [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 200], Kropotkin's [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61 and **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 104–5] and Malatesta's [**Life and Ideas**, p. 99, p. 103]. So the anarchist opposition to forced collectivisation has always existed and, for anyone familiar with the ideas of social anarchism, very well know. Thus during the Spanish Revolution, small farmers who did not wish to join collective farms were allowed to keep as much land as they could work themselves. After perceiving the advantages of collectives, however, many joined them voluntarily (see Sam Dolgoff, ed., **The Anarchist Collectives**).

To claim that social anarchists *"occasionally"* oppose forced collectivisation is a smear, pure and simple, with little basis in anarchist activity and even less in anarchist theory. Anyone remotely familiar with the literature could not make such a mistake.

Finally, we should point out that under "anarcho"-capitalism there would be, according to Murray Rothbard, a *"basic libertarian law code."* Which means that under "anarcho"-capitalism, "egalitarian" communities could only come about within a "inegalitarian" legal framework! Thus, given that everything would be privatised, dissenters could only experiment if they could afford it **and** accepted the legal system based on capitalist property rights (and, of course, survive the competition of capitalist companies within the capitalist framework). As we have argued in sections B.4 and F.3 the capitalist market is not a level playing field — which hinders experimentation. In other words, "anarcho"-capitalists has the abstract right to experiment (within the capitalist laws) but hinders the possibility to live under other regimes. And,

we must point out, **why** should we have to **pay** the stealers of the earth for the privilege to life our own lives? Caplan, in effect, ignores the barriers to experimentation in his system while distorting the anarchist position.

## 5 How would anarcho-capitalism work?

[10.] This section (How would anarcho-capitalism work?) contains Caplan's summary of arguments for "anarcho"-capitalism, which he describes as an offshoot of Libertarianism. Thus:

> *"So-called 'minarchist' libertarians such as Nozick have argued that the largest justified government was one which was limited to the protection of individuals and their private property against physical invasion; accordingly, they favour a government limited to supplying police, courts, a legal code, and national defence."*

The first thing to note about this argument is that it is stated in such a way as to prejudice the reader against the left-libertarian critique of private property. The minarchist right-"libertarian," it is said, only wants to protect individuals and their private property against "physical invasion." But, because of the loose way in which the term "property" is generally used, the "private property" of most "individuals" is commonly thought of as **personal possessions,** i.e. cars, houses, clothing, etc. (For the left-libertarian distinction between private property and possessions, see section B.3.1.) Therefore the argument makes it appear that right libertarians are in favour of protecting personal possessions whereas left-libertarians are not, thus conjuring up a world where, for example, there would be no protection against one's house being "physically invaded" by an intruder or a stranger stealing the shirt off one's back!



and the result was the emergence of the corporate America that "anarcho"-capitalists say they oppose.

Caplan argues that "liquor-store owners" do not generally kill each other over turf. This is true (but then again they do not have access to their own private cops currently so perhaps this could change). But the company owners who created their own private police forces and armies in America's past **did** allow their goons to attack and murder union organisers and strikers. Let us look at Henry Ford's Service Department (private police force) in action:

> *"In 1932 a hunger march of the unemployed was planned to march up to the gates of the Ford plant at Dearborn... The machine guns of the Dearborn police and the Ford Motor Company's Service Department killed [four] and wounded over a score of others... Ford was fundamentally and entirely opposed to trade unions. The idea of working men questioning his prerogatives as an owner was outrageous... [T]he River Rouge plant... was dominated by the autocratic regime of Bennett's service men. Bennett .. organise[d] and train[ed] the three and a half thousand private policemen employed by Ford. His task was to maintain discipline amongst the work force, protect Ford's property [and power], and prevent unionisation... Frank Murphy, the mayor of Detroit, claimed that 'Henry Ford employs some of the worst gangsters in our city.' The claim was well based. Ford's Service Department policed the gates of his plants, infiltrated emergent groups of union activists, posed as workers to spy on men on the line... Under this tyranny the Ford worker had no security, no rights. So much so that any information about the state of things within the plant could only*

poor areas are generally more crime afflicted than rich areas, "anarcho"-capitalism may see vast sections of the population not able to afford "protection" (just as they may not be about to afford health care and other essential services). Indeed, "protection services" which try to provide cheap services to "high-risk" areas will be at an competitive disadvantage in relation to those who do not, as the "high-risk" areas will hurt profits and companies without "high-risk" "customers" could undercut those that have.

Caplan:

> *"Anarcho-capitalists generally give little credence to the view that their 'private police agencies' would be equivalent to today's Mafia — the cost advantages of open, legitimate business would make 'criminal police' uncompetitive. (Moreover, they argue, the Mafia can only thrive in the artificial market niche created by the prohibition of alcohol, drugs, prostitution, gambling, and other victimless crimes. Mafia gangs might kill each other over turf, but liquor-store owners generally do not.)"*

As we have pointed out in section F.6, the "Mafia" objection to "anarcho"-capitalist defence companies is a red herring. The biggest problem would not be "criminal police" but the fact that working people and tenants would subject to the rules, power and laws of the property owners, the rich would be able to buy better police protection and "justice" than the poor and that the "general" law code these companies would defend would be slanted towards the interests and power of the capitalist class (defending capitalist property rights and the proprietors power). And as we also noted, such a system has already been tried in 19th-century and early 20th America, with the result that the rich reduced the working class to a serf-like existence, capitalist production undermined independent producers (to the annoyance of individualist anarchists at the time),



By lumping the protection of "individuals" together with the protection of their "private property," the argument implies that right libertarians are concerned with the welfare of the vast majority of the population, whereas in reality, the vast majority of "individuals" **do not own** any private property (i.e. means of production) — only a handful of capitalists do. Moreover, these capitalists use their private property to exploit the working class, leading to impoverishment, alienation, etc., and thus **damaging** most individuals rather than "protecting" them.

Caplan goes on:

> *"This normative theory is closely linked to laissez-faire economic theory, according to which private property and unregulated competition generally lead to both an efficient allocation of resources and (more importantly) a high rate of economic progress."*

Caplan does not mention the obvious problems with this "theory," e.g. that during the heyday of laissez-faire capitalism in the US there was vast wealth disparity, with an enormous mass of impoverished people living in slums in the major cities — hardly an "efficient" allocation of resources or an example of "progress." Of course, if one defines "efficiency" as "the most effective means of exploiting the working class" and "progress" as "a high rate of profit for investors," then the conclusion of the "theory" does indeed follow.

And let us not forget that it is general equilibrium theory which predicts that unregulated competition will produce an efficient allocation of resources. However, as we noted in section C.1, such a model has little to do with any real economy. This means that there is no real reason to assume an efficient outcome of capitalist economies. Concentrations of economic power and wealth can easily skew outcomes to

favour the haves over the have-nots (as history again and again shows).

Moreover, the capitalism can easily lead to resources being allocated to the most profitable uses rather than those which are most needed by individuals. A classic example is in the case of famines. Amartya Sen (who won the 1998 Nobel Prize for economics) developed an

**"entitlement"** approach to the study of famine. This approach starts with the insight that having food available in a country or region does not mean everyone living there is "entitled" to it. In market economies, people are entitled to food according to their ability to produce it for themselves or to pay or swap for it. In capitalist economies, most people are entitled to food only if they can sell their labour/liberty to those who own the means of life (which increases the economic insecurity of wage workers).

If some group loses its entitlement to food, whether there is a decline in the available supply or not, a famine can occur. This may seem obvious, yet before — and after — Sen, famine studies have remained fixated on the drop in food available instead of whether specific social groups are entitled to it. Thus even a relatively success economy can price workers out of the food market (a depressed economy brings the contradiction between need and profit — use value and exchange value — even more to the forefront). This *"pricing out"* can occur especially if food can get higher prices (and so profits) elsewhere — for example the Irish famine of 1848 and sub-Saharan famines of the 1980s saw food being exported from famine areas to areas where it could fetch a higher price. In other words, market forces can skew resource allocation away from where it is most needed to where it can generate a profit. As anarchist George Barret noted decades before Sen:

> *"Today the scramble is to compete for the greatest profits. If there is more profit to be made in satisfy-*



order to exploit the market. Obviously in "anarcho"-capitalism the firms in question only use their powers for good!

Needless to say, the "anarcho"-capitalist will object and argue that competition will ensure that collusion will not occur. However, given that co-operation is required between all firms in order to provide the commodity "peace" this places the "anarcho"-capitalist in a bind. As Caplan notes, "aggressive" firms are *"likely to attract only high-risk clients and thus suffer from extraordinarily high costs."* From the perspective of the colluding firms, a new entry into their market is, by definition, aggressive. If the colluding firms do not co-operate with the new competitor, then it will suffer from *"extraordinarily high costs"* and either go out of business or join the co-operators. If the new entry could survive in the face of the colluding firms hostility then so could "bad" defence firms, ones that ignored the market standards.

So the "anarcho"-capitalist faces two options. Either an "aggressive" firm cannot survive or it can. If it cannot then the very reason why it cannot ensures that collusion is built into the market and while the system is peaceful it is based on an effective monopoly of colluding firms who charge monopoly profits. This, in effect, is a state under the "anarcho"-capitalist's definition as a property owner cannot freely select their own "protection" — they are limited to the firms (and laws) provided by the co-operating firms. Or an "aggressive" firm can survive, violence is commonplace and chaos ensures.

Caplan's passing reference to the *"adverse selection problem"* in medical insurance suggests another problem with "anarcho"-capitalism. The problem is that high-risk people are especially likely to seek protection, which drives up the price for, as "anarcho"-capitalists themselves note, areas with high crime levels "will be bad for profits," as hardware and personnel costs will be correspondingly higher. This means that the price for "protection" in areas which need it most will be far higher than for areas which do not need it. As

"anarcho" capitalist has given no reason why warfare among legalised gangs would not continue under industrial feudalism, except the extremely lame reason that it would not be profitable — a reason that has never prevented war in any known feudal society.

It should be noted that the above is not an argument from "original sin." Feudal societies are characterised by conflict between opposing "protection agencies" not because of the innate depravity of human beings but because of a social structure based on private property and hierarchy, which brings out the latent capacities for violence, domination, greed, etc. that humans have by creating a financial incentive to be so. But this is not to say that a different social structure would not bring out latent capacities for much different qualities like sharing, peaceableness, and co-operation, which human beings also have. In fact, as Kropotkin argued in **Mutual Aid** and as recent anthropologists have confirmed in greater detail, ancient societies based on communal ownership of productive assets and little social hierarchy were basically peaceful, with no signs of warfare for thousands of years.

However, let us assume that such a competitive system does actually work as described. Caplan, in effect, argues that competition will generate co-operation. This is due to the nature of the market in question — defence (and so peace) is dependent on firms workingtogether as the commodity "peace" cannot be supplied by one firm. However, this co-operation does not, for some reason, become **collusion** between the firms in question. According to "anarcho"-capitalists this competitive system not only produces co-operation, it excludes "defence" firms making agreements to fix monopoly profits (i.e. co-operation that benefits the firms in question). Why does the market produce beneficial co-operation to everyone but not collusion for the firms in question? Collusion is when firms have "business relationships" and "negotiate in good faith" to insure their profitability by agreeing not to compete aggressively against each other in



> *ing my lady's passing whim than there is in feeding hungry children, then competition brings us in feverish haste to supply the former, whilst cold charity or the poor law can supply the latter, or leave it unsupplied, just as it feels disposed. That is how it works out.*" [**Objectives to Anarchism**]

In other words, inequality skews resource allocation towards the wealthy. While such a situation may be *"efficient allocation of resources"* from the perspective of the capitalist, it is hardly so from a social perspective (i.e. one that considers **all** individual needs rather than "effective demand").

Furthermore, if we look at the stock market (a key aspect of any capitalist system) we discover a strong tendencies **against** the efficient allocation of resources. The stock market often experiences "bubbles" and becomes significantly over-valued. An inflated stock market badly distorts investment decisions. For example, if Internet companies are wildly over-valued then the sale of shares of new Internet companies or the providing of start-up capital will drain away savings that could be more productively used elsewhere. The real economy will pay a heavy price from such misdirected investment and, more importantly, resources are **not** efficiency allocated as the stock market skews resources into the apparently more profitable areas and away from where they could be used to satisfy other needs.

The stock market is also a source of other inefficiencies. Supporters of "free-market" capitalism always argued that the Stalinist system of central planning created a perverse set of incentives to managers. In effect, the system penalised honest managers and encouraged the flow of **dis**-information. This lead to information being distorted and resources inefficiently allocated and wasted. Unfortunately the stock market also creates its own set of perverse responses and mis-information. Doug Henwood argues that *"something like a prisoners' dilemma pre-*

*vails in relations between managers and the stock market. Even if participants are aware of an upward bias to earnings estimates, and even if they correct for it, managers still have an incentive to try and fool the market. If you tell the truth, your accurate estimates will be marked down by a sceptical market. So its entirely rational for managers to boost profits in the short term, either through accounting gimmickry or by making only investments with quick paybacks.*" He goes on to note that *"[i]f the markets see high costs as bad, and low costs as good, then firms may shun expensive investments because they will be taken as signs of managerial incompetence. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, the stock market rewarded firms announcing write-offs and mass firings — a bulimic strategy of management — since the cost cutting was seen as contributing rather quickly to profits. Firms and economies can't get richer by starving themselves, but stock market investors can get richer when the companies they own go hungry. As for the long term, well, that's someone else's problem."* [**Wall Street**, p. 171]

This means that resources are allocated to short term projects, those that enrich the investors now rather than produce long term growth and benefits later. This results in slower and more unstable investment than less market centred economies, as well as greater instability over the business cycle [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 174–5] Thus the claim that capitalism results in the "efficient" allocation of resources is only true if we assume "efficient" equals highest profits for capitalists. As Henwood summarises, *"the US financial system performs dismally at its advertised task, that of efficiently directing society's savings towards their optimal investment pursuits. The system is stupefyingly expensive, gives terrible signals, and has surprisingly little to do with real investment."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 3]

Moreover, the claim that laissez-faire economies produce a high rate of economic progress can be questioned on the empirical evidence available. For example, from the 1970s onwards there has been a strong tendency towards economic deregula-



*to discern or if regulation requires a uniform price regardless of risk)."*

The theory that *"failure to peacefully arbitrate will yield to jointly destructive warfare, which will be bad for profits"* can be faulted in two ways. Firstly, if warfare would be bad for profits, what is to stop a large "defence association" from ignoring a smaller one's claim? If warfare were "bad for business," it would be even worse for a small company without the capital to survive a conflict, which could give big "defence associations" the leverage to force compliance with their business interests. Price wars are often bad for business, but companies sometimes start them if they think they can win. Needless to say, demand would exist for such a service (unless you assume a transformation in the "human nature" generated by capitalism — an unlikely situation and one "anarcho"-capitalists usually deny is required for their system to work). Secondly — and this is equally, if not more, likely — a "balance of power" method to stop warfare has little to recommend it from history. This can be seen from the First World War and feudal society.

What the "anarcho"-capitalist is describing is essentially a system of "industrial feudalism" wherein people contract for "protection" with armed gangs of their choice. Feudal societies have never been known to be peaceful, even though war is always "unprofitable" for one side or the other or both. The argument fails to consider that "defence companies," whether they be called police forces, paramilitaries or full-blown armies, tend to attract the "martial" type of authoritarian personality, and that this type of "macho" personality thrives on and finds its reason for existence in armed conflict and other forms of interpersonal violence and intimidation. Hence feudal society is continually wracked by battles between the forces of opposing warlords, because such conflicts allow the combatants a chance to "prove their manhood," vent their aggression, obtain honours and titles, advance in the ranks, obtain spoils, etc. The

ference between statism and capitalism, Caplan has indicated their essential commonality. For the proletarian, property is but another form of state. For this reason anarchists would agree with Rousseau when he wrote that:

> *"That a rich and powerful man, having acquired immense possessions in lands, should impose laws on those who want to establish themselves there, and that he should only allow them to do so on condition that they accept his supreme authority and obey all his wishes; that, I can still conceive. But how can I conceive such a treaty, which presupposes anterior rights, could be the first foundation of law? Would not this tyrannical act contain a double usurpation: that on the ownership of the land and that on the liberty of the inhabitants?"* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 316]

Caplan:

> *"The underlying idea is that contrary to popular belief, private police would have strong incentives to be peaceful and respect individual rights. For first of all, failure to peacefully arbitrate will yield to jointly destructive warfare, which will be bad for profits. Second, firms will want to develop long-term business relationships, and hence be willing to negotiate in good faith to insure their long-term profitability. And third, aggressive firms would be likely to attract only high-risk clients and thus suffer from extraordinarily high costs (a problem parallel to the well-known 'adverse selection problem' in e.g. medical insurance — the problem being that high-risk people are especially likely to seek insurance, which drives up the price when riskiness is hard for the insurer*



tion. However, this tendency has been associated with a **slow down** of economic growth. For example, *"[g]rowth rates, investment rates and productivity rates are all lower now than in the [Keynesian post-war] Golden Age, and there is evidence that the trend rate of growth — the underlying growth rate — has also decreased."* Before the Thatcher pro-market reforms, the British economy grew by 2.4% in the 1970s. After Thatcher's election in 1979, growth decreased to 2% in the 1980s and to 1.2% in the 1990s. In the USA, we find a similar pattern. Growth was 4.4% in the 1960s, 3.2% in the 1970s, 2.8% in the 1980s and 1.9% in the first half of the 1990s [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 236]. Moreover, in terms of inflation-adjusted GDP per capita and productivity, the US had the worse performance out of the US, UK, Japan, Italy, France, Canada and Australia between 1970 and 1995 [Marc-Anfre Pigeon and L. Randall Wray, **Demand Constraints and Economic Growth**]. Given that the US is usually considered the most laissez-faire out of these 7 countries, Caplan's claim of high progress for deregulated systems seems at odds with this evidence.

As far as technological innovation goes, it is also not clear that deregulation has aided that process. Much of our modern technology owns its origins to the US Pentagon system, in which public money is provided to companies for military R&D purposes. Once the technology has been proven viable, the companies involved can sell their public subsidised products for private profit. The computer industry (as we point out in section J.4.7) is a classic example of this — indeed it is unlikely whether we would have computers or the internet if we had waited for capitalists to development them. So whether a totally deregulated capitalism would have as high a rate of technological progress is a moot point.

So, it seems likely that it is only the **assumption** that the free capitalist market will generate *"an efficient allocation of resources and (more importantly) a high rate of economic progress."* Empirical evidence points the other way — namely,

that state aided capitalism provides an approximation of these claims. Indeed, if we look at the example of the British Empire (which pursued a strong free trade and laissez-faire policy over the areas it had invaded) we can suggest that the opposite may be true. After 25 prosperous years of fast growth (3.5 per cent), after 1873 Britain had 40 years of slow growth (1.5 per cent), the last 14 years of which were the worse — with productivity declining, GDP stagnant and home investment halved. [Nicholas Kaldor, **Further Essays on Applied Economics**, p. 239] In comparison, those countries which embraced protectionism (such as Germany and the USA) industrialised successfully and become competitors with the UK. Indeed, these new competitors grew in time to be efficient competitors of Britain not only in foreign markets but also in Britain's home market. The result was that *"for fifty years Britain's GDP grew very slowly relative to the more successful of the newer industrialised countries, who overtook her, one after another, in the volume of manufacturing production and in exports and finally in real income per head."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. xxvi] Indeed, *"America's growth and productivity rates were higher when tariffs were steep than when they came down."* [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 277]

It is possible to explain almost everything that has ever happened in the world economy as evidence not of the failure of markets but rather of what happens when markets are not able to operate freely. Indeed, this is the right-libertarian position in a nut shell. However, it does seem strange that movements towards increased freedom for markets produce worse results than the old, more regulated, way. Similarly it seems strange that the country that embraced laissez-faire and free trade (Britain) did **worse** than those which embraced protectionism (USA, Germany, etc.).

It could always be argued that the protectionist countries had embraced free trade their economies would have done even better. This is, of course, a possibility — if somewhat



> *would involve individuals subscribing to one of a large number of competing police services; these police services would then set up contracts or networks for peacefully handling disputes between members of each others' agencies. Alternately, police services might be 'bundled' with housing services, just as landlords often bundle water and power with rental housing, and gardening and security are today provided to residents in gated communities and apartment complexes."*

This is a scenario designed with the upper classes in mind and a few working class people, i.e. those with **some** property (for example, a house) — sometimes labelled the "middle class". But under capitalism, the tendency toward capital concentration leads to increasing wealth polarisation, which means a shrinking "middle class" (i.e. working class with decent jobs and their own homes) and a growing "underclass" (i.e. working class people without a decent job). Ironically enough, America (with one of the most laissez-faire capitalist systems) is also the Western nation with the **smallest** "middle class" and wealth concentration has steadily increased since the 1970s. Thus the number of people who could afford to buy protection and "justice" from the best companies would continually decrease. For this reason there would be a growing number of people at the mercy of the rich and powerful, particularly when it comes to matters concerning employment, which is the main way in which the poor would be victimised by the rich and powerful (as is indeed the case now).

Of course, if landlords **do** "bundle" police services in their contracts this means that they are determining the monopoly of force over the property in question. Tenants would "consent" to the police force and the laws of the landlord in exactly the same way emigrants "consent" to the laws and government of, say, the USA when they move there. Rather than show the dif-

unlikely. After all, the argument for laissez-faire and free trade is that it benefits all parties, even if it is embraced unilaterally. That Britain obviously did not benefit suggests a flaw in the theory (and that no country **has** industrialised without protectionism suggests likewise). Unfortunately, free-market capitalist economics lends itself to a mind frame that ensures that nothing could happen in the real world that would could ever change its supporters minds about anything.

Free trade, it could be argued, benefits only those who have established themselves in the market — that is, have market power. Thus Britain could initially benefit from free trade as it was the only industrialised nation (and even **its** early industrialisation cannot be divorced from its initial mercantilist policies). This position of strength allowed them to dominate and destroy possible competitors (as Kaldor points out, *"[w]here the British succeeded in gaining free entry for its goods... it had disastrous effects on local manufactures and employment."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. xxvi]). This would revert the other country back towards agriculture, an industry with diminishing returns to scale (manufacturing, in contrast, has increasing returns) and ensure Britain's position of power.

The use of protection, however, sheltered the home industries of other countries and gave them the foothold required to compete with Britain. In addition, Britains continual adherence to free trade meant that a lot of **new** industries (such as chemical and electrical ones) could not be properly established. This combination contributed to free trade leading to stunted growth, in stark contrast to the arguments of neo-classical economics.

Of course, we will be accused of supporting protectionism by recounting these facts. That is not the case, as protectionism is used as a means of "proletarianising" a nation (as we discuss in section F.8). Rather we are presenting evidence to refute a claim that deregulated capitalism will lead to higher growth. Thus, we suggest, the history of "actually existing" capitalism



the monopoly of government over society represented by the *"general libertarian law code,"* nor the monopoly of power that owners have over their property and those who use it. The difference between public and private statism is that the boss can select which law enforcement agents will enforce his or her power.

The threat to freedom and justice for the working class is clear. The thug-like nature of many private security guards enforcing private power is well documented. For example, the beating of protesters by "private cops" is a common sight in anti-motorway campaigns or when animal right activists attempt to disrupt fox hunts. The shooting of strikers during strikes occurred during the peak period of American laissez-faire capitalism. However, as most forms of protest involve the violation of "absolute" property rights, the "justice" system under "anarcho"-capitalism would undoubtedly fine the victims of such attacks by private cops.

It is also interesting that the "anarcho"-capitalist "hails" what are actually symptoms of social breakdown under capitalism. With increasing wealth disparity, poverty, and chronic high unemployment, society is becoming polarised into those who can afford to live in secure, gated communities and those who cannot. The latter are increasingly marginalised in ghettos and poor neighbourhoods where drug-dealing, prostitution, and theft become main forms of livelihood, with gangs offering a feudalistic type of "protection" to those who join or pay tribute to them. Under "anarcho"-capitalism, the only change would be that drug-dealing and prostitution would be legalised and gangs could start calling themselves "defence companies."

Caplan:

> *"In his ideal society, these market alternatives to government services would take over **all** legitimate security services. One plausible market structure*

indicates that Caplan's claim that deregulated capitalism will result *"a high rate of economic progress"* may be little more than an assumption. True, it is an assumption of neo-classical economics, but empirical evidence suggests that assumption is as unfounded as the rest of that theory.

Next we get to the meat of the defence of "anarcho"-capitalism:

> *"Now the anarcho-capitalist essentially turns the minarchist's own logic against him, and asks why the remaining functions of the state could not be turned over to the free market. And so, the anarcho-capitalist imagines that police services could be sold by freely competitive firms; that a court system would emerge to peacefully arbitrate disputes between firms; and that a sensible legal code could be developed through custom, precedent, and contract."*

Indeed, the functions in question could certainly be turned over to the "free" market, as was done in certain areas of the US during the 19th century, e.g. the coal towns that were virtually owned by private coal companies. We have already discussed the negative impact of that experiment on the working class in section F.6.2. Our objection is not that such privatisation cannot be done, but that it is an error to call it a form of anarchism. In reality it is an extreme form of laissez-faire capitalism, which is the exact opposite of anarchism. The defence of private power by private police is hardly a move towards the end of authority, nor are collections of private states an example of anarchism.

Indeed, that "anarcho"-capitalism does not desire the end of the state, just a change in its form, can be seen from Caplan's own arguments. He states that *"the remaining functions of the state"* should be *"turned over to the free market."* Thus the



state (and its functions, primarily the defence of capitalist property rights) is **privatised** and not, in fact, abolished. In effect, the "anarcho"-capitalist seeks to abolish the state by calling it something else.

Caplan:

> *"The anarcho-capitalist typically hails modern society's increasing reliance on private security guards, gated communities, arbitration and mediation, and other demonstrations of the free market's ability to supply the defensive and legal services normally assumed to be of necessity a government monopoly."*

It is questionable that *"modern society"* **as such** has increased its reliance on *"private security guards, gated communities"* and so on. Rather, it is the **wealthy** who have increased their reliance on these forms of private defence. Indeed it is strange to hear a right-libertarian even use the term "society" as, according to that ideology, society does not exist! Perhaps the term "society" is used to hide the class nature of these developments? As for "gated communities" it is clear that their inhabitants would object if the rest of society gated themselves from them! But such is the logic of such developments — but the gated communities want it both ways. They seek to exclude the rest of society from their communities while expected to be given access to that society. Needless to say, Caplan fails to see that liberty for the rich can mean oppression for the working class — *"we who belong to the proletaire class, property excommunicates us!"* [Proudhon, **What is Property?**, p. 105]

That the law code of the state is being defended by private companies is hardly a step towards anarchy. This indicates exactly why an "anarcho"- capitalist system will be a collection of private states united around a common, capitalistic, and hierarchical law code. In addition, this system does not abolish

*the collective development of mankind."* He goes on to argue that *"man in isolation can have no awareness of his liberty ... Liberty is therefore a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 146, p. 147] Right Libertarians, by building their definition of freedom from the isolated person, end up by supporting restrictions of liberty due to a neglect of an adequate recognition of the actual interdependence of human beings, of the fact what each person does is effected by and affects others. People become aware of their humanity (liberty) in society, not outside it. It is the **social relationships** we take part in which determine how free we are and any definition of freedom which builds upon an individual without social ties is doomed to create relations of domination, not freedom, between individuals — as Rothbard's theory does (to put it another way, voluntary association is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for freedom. Which is why anarchists have always stressed the importance of equality — see section 3 for details).

So while facts of nature can restrict your options and freedom, it is the circumstances within which they act and the options they limit that are important (a person trapped at the bottom of a pit is unfree as the options available are so few; the lame person is free because their available options are extensive). In the same manner, the facts of society can and do restrict your freedom because they are the products of human action and are defined and protected by human institutions, it is the circumstances within which individuals make their decisions and the social relationships these decisions produce that are important (the worker driven by poverty to accept a slave contract in a sweat shop is unfree because the circumstances he faces have limited his options and the relations he accepts are based upon hierarchy; the person who decides to join an anarchist commune is free because the commune is non-hierarchical and she has the option of joining another commune, working alone and so forth).



working men and women (anarchist or not) murdered in the jails and concentration camps or on the streets by the hired assassins of capitalism.

## 1 Are "anarcho"-capitalists really anarchists?

In a word, no. While "anarcho"-capitalists obviously try to associate themselves with the anarchist tradition by using the word "anarcho" or by calling themselves "anarchists", their ideas are distinctly at odds with those associated with anarchism. As a result, any claims that their ideas are anarchist or that they are part of the anarchist tradition or movement are false.

"Anarcho"-capitalists claim to be anarchists because they say that they oppose government. As such, as noted in the last section, they use a dictionary definition of anarchism. However, this fails to appreciate that anarchism is a **political theory**, not a dictionary definition. As dictionaries are rarely politically sophisticated things, this means that they fail to recognise that anarchism is more than just opposition to government, it is also marked a opposition to capitalism (i.e. exploitation and private property). Thus, opposition to government is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being an anarchist — you also need to be opposed to exploitation and capitalist private property. As "anarcho"-capitalists do not consider interest, rent and profits (i.e. capitalism) to be exploitative nor oppose capitalist property rights, they are not anarchists.

Moreover, "anarcho"-capitalism is inherently self-refuting. This can be seen from leading "anarcho"-capitalist Murray Rothbard. he thundered against the evil of the state, arguing that it *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area."* In and of itself, this definition is unremarkable. That a few people

(an elite of rulers) claim the right to rule others must be part of any sensible definition of the state or government. However, the problems begin for Rothbard when he notes that *"[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170 and p. 173] The logical contradiction in this position should be obvious, but not to Rothbard. It shows the power of ideology, the ability of means words (the expression *"private property"*) to turn the bad (*"ultimate decision-making power over a given area"*) into the good (*"ultimate decision-making power over a given area"*).

Now, this contradiction can be solved in only **one** way — the owners of the *"given area"* are also its users. In other words, a system of possession (or "occupancy and use") as favoured by anarchists. However, Rothbard is a capitalist and supports private property. In other words, wage labour and landlords. This means that he supports a divergence between ownership and use and this means that this *"ultimate decision-making power"* extends to those who **use,** but do not own, such property (i.e. tenants and workers). The statist nature of private property is clearly indicated by Rothbard's words — the property owner in an "anarcho"-capitalist society possesses the *"ultimate decision-making power"* over a given area, which is also what the state has currently. Rothbard has, ironically, proved by his own definition that "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist.

Rothbard does try to solve this obvious contradiction, but utterly fails. He simply ignores the crux of the matter, that capitalism is based on hierarchy and, therefore, cannot be anarchist. He does this by arguing that the hierarchy associated with capitalism is fine as long as the private property that produced it was acquired in a "just" manner. In so doing he yet again draws attention to the identical authority structures and social relationships of the state and property. As he puts it:



the former. But the **conditions** of the people in question are identical and it is these conditions that horrify us. It is only his ideology that stops Rothbard drawing the obvious conclusion — identical conditions produce identical social relationships and so if the formally "free" ex-serfs are subject to *"economic power"* and *"masters"* then so are the formally "free" labourers within capitalism! Both sets of workers may be formally free, but their circumstances are such that they are "free" to "consent" to sell their freedom to others (i.e. economic power produces relationships of domination and unfreedom between formally free individuals).

Thus Rothbard's definition of liberty in terms of rights fails to provide us with a realistic and viable understanding of freedom. Someone can be a virtual slave while still having her rights non-violated (conversely, someone can have their property rights violated and still be free; for example, the child who enters your backyard without your permission to get her ball hardly violates your liberty — indeed, you would never know that she has entered your property unless you happened to see her do it). So the idea that freedom means non-aggression against person and their legitimate material property justifies extensive **non-freedom** for the working class. The non-violation of property rights does **not** imply freedom, as Rothbard's discussion of the former slaves shows. Anyone who, along with Rothbard, defines freedom *"as the **absence of invasion** by another man of any man's person or property"* in a deeply inequality society is supporting, and justifying, capitalist and landlord domination. As anarchists have long realised, in an unequal society, a contractarian starting point implies an absolutist conclusion.

Why is this? Simply because freedom is a result of **social** interaction, not the product of some isolated, abstract individual (Rothbard uses the model of Robinson Crusoe to construct his ideology). But as Bakunin argued, *"the freedom of the individual is a function of men in society, a necessary consequence of*

up. No one would deny that you are unfree. Let us further assume that another person walks by and accidentally falls into the pit with you.

According to right-libertarianism, while you are unfree (i.e. subject to deliberate coercion) your fellow pit-dweller is perfectly free for they have subject to the "facts of nature" and not human action (deliberate or otherwise). Or, perhaps, they "voluntarily choose" to stay in the pit, after all, it is "only" the "facts of nature" limiting their actions. But, obviously, both of you are in **exactly the same position,** have **exactly the same choices** and so are **equally** unfree! Thus a definition of "liberty" that maintains that only deliberate acts of others — for example, coercion — reduces freedom misses the point totally.

Why is this example important? Let us consider Murray Rothbard's analysis of the situation after the abolition of serfdom in Russia and slavery in America. He writes:

> *"The **bodies** of the oppressed were freed, but the property which they had worked and eminently deserved to own, remained in the hands of their former oppressors. With economic power thus remaining in their hands, the former lords soon found themselves virtual masters once more of what were now free tenants or farm labourers. The serfs and slaves had tasted freedom, but had been cruelly derived of its fruits."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 74]

However, contrast this with Rothbard's claims that if market forces ("voluntary exchanges") result in the creation of free tenants or labourers then these labourers and tenants are free (see, for example, **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 221–2 on why "economic power" within capitalism does not exist). But the labourers dispossessed by market forces are in **exactly** the same situation as the former serfs and slaves. Rothbard sees the obvious *"economic power"* in the later case, but denies it in



> *"**If** the State may be said too properly **own** its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there **is** no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. **So long** as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170]

Obviously Rothbard argues that the state does not "justly" own its territory — but given that the current distribution of property is just as much the result of violence and coercion as the state, his argument is seriously flawed. It amounts, as we note in section 4, to little more than an ***"immaculate conception of property"*** unrelated to reality. Even assuming that private property was produced by the means Rothbard assumes, it does not justify the hierarchy associated with it as the current and future generations of humanity have, effectively, been excommunicated from liberty by previous ones. If, as Rothbard argues, property is a natural right and the basis of liberty then why should the many be excluded from their birthright by a minority? In other words, Rothbard denies that liberty should be universal. He chooses property over liberty while anarchists choose liberty over property.

Even worse, the possibility that private property can result in **worse** violations of individual freedom (at least of workers) than the state of its citizens was implicitly acknowledged by Rothbard. He uses as a hypothetical example a country whose King is threatened by a rising "libertarian" movement. The King responses by *"employ[ing] a cunning stratagem,"* namely he *"proclaims his government to be dissolved, but just before doing so he arbitrarily parcels out the entire land area of his kingdom to the 'ownership' of himself and his relatives."* Rather

than taxes, his subjects now pay rent and he can *"regulate to regulate the lives of all the people who presume to live on"* his property as he sees fit. Rothbard then asks:

> *"Now what should be the reply of the libertarian rebels to this pert challenge? If they are consistent utilitarians, they must bow to this subterfuge, and resign themselves to living under a regime no less despotic than the one they had been battling for so long. Perhaps, indeed,* ***more*** *despotic, for now the king and his relatives can claim for themselves the libertarians' very principle of the absolute right of private property, an absoluteness which they might not have dared to claim before."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 54–5]

So not only does the property owner have the same monopoly of power over a given area as the state, it is **more** despotic as it is based on the *"absolute right of private property"*! And remember, Rothbard is arguing **in favour** of "anarcho"-capitalismAnd remember, Rothbard is arguing **in favour** of "anarcho"-capitalism (*"if you have unbridled capitalism, you will have all kinds of authority: you will have* ***extreme*** *authority."* [Chomksy, **Understanding Power**, p. 200]). So in practice, private property is a major source of oppression and authoritarianism within society — there is little or no freedom within capitalist production (as Bakunin noted, *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"*). So, in stark contrast to anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists have no problem with factory fascism (i.e. wage labour), a position which seems highly illogical for a theory calling itself libertarian. If it were truly libertarian, it would oppose all forms of domination, not just statism. This position flows from the "anarcho"-capitalist definition of freedom as the absence of coercion and will be discussed in section 2 in more detail.

Of course, Rothbard has yet another means to escape the obvious, namely that the market will limit the abuses of the



*ative"* freedom means that you *"lack political freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings,"* then capitalism is indeed based on such a lack, since property rights need to be enforced by human beings (*"I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do"*). After all, as Proudhon long ago noted, the market is manmade, hence any constraint it imposes is the coercion of man by man and so economic laws are not as inevitable as natural ones [see Alan Ritter's **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 122]. Or, to put it slightly differently, capitalism requires coercion in order to work, and hence, is **not** similar to a "fact of nature," regardless of Nozick's claims (i.e. property rights have to be defined and enforced by human beings, although the nature of the labour market resulting from capitalist property definitions is such that direct coercion is usually not needed). This implication is actually recognised by right-libertarians, because they argue that the rights-framework of society should be set up in one way rather than another. In other words, they recognise that society is not independent of human interaction, and so can be changed.

Perhaps, as seems the case, the "anarcho"-capitalist or right-Libertarian will claim that it is only **deliberate** acts which violate your (libertarian defined) rights by other humans beings that cause unfreedom (*"we define freedom ... as the* ***absence of invasion*** *by another man of an man's person or property"* [Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 41]) and so if no-one deliberately coerces you then you are free. In this way the workings of the capitalist market can be placed alongside the "facts of nature" and ignored as a source of unfreedom. However, a moments thought shows that this is not the case. Both deliberate and non-deliberate acts can leave individuals lacking freedom.

Let us assume (in an example paraphrased from Alan Haworth's excellent book **Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 49) that someone kidnaps you and places you down a deep (naturally formed) pit, miles from anyway, which is impossible to climb

contracts to be enforced; forbid using another's property without his or her consent ("theft," trespass, copyright infringement, etc.); prohibit "conspiracy," unlawful assembly, rioting, and so on; and create monopolies through regulation, licensing, charters, patents, etc. This means that capitalism has to include the mechanisms for deterring property crimes as well as mechanisms for compensation and punishment should such crimes be committed. In other words, capitalism is in fact far more than "voluntary bilateral exchange," because it **must** include the policing, arbitration, and legislating mechanisms required to ensure its operation. Hence, like the state, the capitalist market is a social institution, and the distributions of goods that result from its operation are therefore the distributions sanctioned by a capitalist society. As Benjamin Franklin pointed out, *"Private property … is a Creature of Society, and is subject to the Calls of that Society."*

Thus, to claim with Sir Isaiah Berlin (the main, modern, source of the concepts of *"negative"* and *"positive"* freedom — although we must add that Berlin was not a right-Libertarian), that *"[i]f my poverty were a kind of disease, which prevented me from buying bread … as lameness prevents me from running, this inability would not naturally be described as a lack of freedom"* totally misses the point [*"Two Concepts of Liberty"*, in **Four Essays on Liberty**, p. 123]. If you are lame, police officers do not come round to stop you running. They do not have to. However, they **are** required to protect property against the dispossessed and those who reject capitalist property rights.

This means that by using such concepts as "negative" liberty and ignoring the social nature of private property, right-libertarians are trying to turn the discussion away from liberty toward "biology" and other facts of nature. And conveniently, by placing property rights alongside gravity and other natural laws, they also succeed in reducing debate even about rights.

Of course, coercion and restriction of liberty **can** be resisted, unlike "natural forces" like gravity. So if, as Berlin argues, *"neg-*



property owners. If workers do not like their ruler then they can seek another. However, this reply completely ignores the reality of economic and social power. Thus the "consent" argument fails because it ignores the social circumstances of capitalism which limit the choice of the many. Anarchists have long argued that, as a class, workers have little choice but to "consent" to capitalist hierarchy. The alternative is either dire poverty or starvation.

"Anarcho"-capitalists dismiss such claims by denying that there is such a thing as economic power. Rather, it is simply freedom of contract. Anarchists consider such claims as a joke. To show why, we need only quote (yet again) Rothbard on the abolition of slavery and serfdom in the 19th century. He argued, correctly, that the *"**bodies** of the oppressed were freed, but the property which they had worked and eminently deserved to own, remained in the hands of their former oppressors. With economic power thus remaining in their hands, the former lords soon found themselves virtual masters once more of what were now free tenants or farm labourers. The serfs and slaves had tasted freedom, but had been cruelly derived of its fruits."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

To say the least, anarchists fail to see the logic in this position. Contrast this with the standard "anarcho"-capitalist claim that if market forces ("voluntary exchanges") result in the creation of *"free tenants or farm labourers"* then they are free. Yet labourers dispossessed by market forces are in exactly the same social and economic situation as the ex-serfs and ex-slaves. If the latter do not have the fruits of freedom, neither do the former. Rothbard sees the obvious *"economic power"* in the latter case, but denies it in the former. It is only Rothbard's ideology that stops him from drawing the obvious conclusion — identical economic conditions produce identical social relationships and so capitalism is marked by *"economic power"* and *"virtual masters."* The only solution is for "anarcho"-capitalists to simply say the ex-serfs and ex-slaves were actually free to choose

and, consequently, Rothbard was wrong. It might be inhuman, but at least it would be consistent!

Rothbard's perspective is alien to anarchism. For example, as individualist anarchist William Bailie noted, under capitalism there is a class system marked by *"a dependent industrial class of wage-workers"* and *"a privileged class of wealth-monopolisers, each becoming more and more distinct from the other as capitalism advances."* This has turned property into *"a social power, an economic force destructive of rights, a fertile source of injustice, a means of enslaving the dispossessed."* He concludes: *"Under this system equal liberty cannot obtain."* Bailie notes that the modern *"industrial world under capitalistic conditions"* have *"arisen under the **regime** of status"* (and so *"law-made privileges"*) however, it seems unlikely that he would have concluded that such a class system would be fine if it had developed naturally or the current state was abolished while leaving the class structure intact (as we note in section G.4, Tucker recognised that even the *"freest competition"* was powerless against the *"enormous concentration of wealth"* associated with modern capitalism). [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 121]

Therefore anarchists recognise that "free exchange" or "consent" in unequal circumstances will reduce freedom as well as increasing inequality between individuals and classes. In other words, as we discuss in section 3, inequality will produce social relationships which are based on hierarchy and domination, **not** freedom. As Noam Chomsky put it:

> *"Anarcho-capitalism, in my opinion, is a doctrinal system which, if ever implemented, would lead to forms of tyranny and oppression that have few counterparts in human history. There isn't the slightest possibility that its (in my view, horrendous) ideas would be implemented, because they would quickly destroy any society that made this colossal error.*



contract are irrelevant because they are created by people exercising their rights and not violating other peoples' ones (see the section on *"Voluntary Exchange"* in **Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, pp. 262–265).

This means that within a society *"[w]hether a person's actions are voluntary depends on what limits his alternatives. If facts of nature do so, the actions are voluntary. (I may voluntarily walk to someplace I would prefer to fly to unaided)."* [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, p. 262] Similarly, the results of voluntary actions and the transference of property can be considered alongside the "facts of nature" (they are, after all, the resultants of "natural rights"). This means that the circumstances created by the existence and use of property can be considered, in essence, as a "natural" fact and so the actions we take in response to these circumstances are therefore "voluntary" and we are "free" (Nozick presents the example [p. 263] of someone who marries the only available person — all the more attractive people having already chosen others — as a case of an action that is voluntary despite removal of all but the least attractive alternative through the legitimate actions of others. Needless to say, the example can be — and is — extended to workers on the labour market — although, of course, you do not starve to death if you decide not to marry).

However, such an argument fails to notice that property is different from gravity or biology. Of course not being able to fly does not restrict freedom. Neither does not being able to jump 10 feet into the air. But unlike gravity (for example), private property has to be protected by laws and the police. No one stops you from flying, but laws and police forces must exist to ensure that capitalist property (and the owners' authority over it) is respected. The claim, therefore, that private property in general, and capitalism in particular, can be considered as "facts of nature," like gravity, ignores an important fact: namely that the people involved in an economy must accept the rules of its operation — rules that, for example, allow

those who earn it, Libertarianism is based on that classic saying *"work makes one free!"* (***Arbeit macht frei!***), which the Nazis placed on the gates of their concentration camps. Of course, since it is capitalism, this motto is somewhat different for those at the top. In this case it is *"other people's work makes one free!"* — a truism in any society based on private property and the authority that stems from it.

Thus it is debatable that a libertarian or "anarcho" capitalist society would have less unfreedom or coercion in it than "actually existing capitalism." In contrast to anarchism, "anarcho"-capitalism, with its narrow definitions, restricts freedom to only a few aspects of social life and ignores domination and authority beyond those aspects. As Peter Marshall points out, the right-libertarian's *"definition of freedom is entirely negative. It calls for the absence of coercion but cannot guarantee the positive freedom of individual autonomy and independence."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 564] By confining freedom to such a narrow range of human action, "anarcho"-capitalism is clearly **not** a form of anarchism. Real anarchists support freedom in every aspect of an individual's life. #secf21

## 2.1 What are the implications of defining liberty in terms of (property) rights?

The change from defending liberty to defending (property) rights has important implications. For one thing, it allows right libertarians to imply that private property is similar to a "fact of nature," and so to conclude that the restrictions on freedom produced by it can be ignored. This can be seen in Robert Nozick's argument that decisions are voluntary if the limitations on one's actions are not caused by human action which infringe the rights of others. Thus, in a "pure" capitalist society the restrictions on freedom caused by wage slavery are not really restrictions because the worker voluntarily consents to the contract. The circumstances that drive a worker to make the



> *The idea of 'free contract' between the potentate and his starving subject is a sick joke, perhaps worth some moments in an academic seminar exploring the consequences of (in my view, absurd) ideas, but nowhere else."* [**Noam Chomsky on Anarchism**, interview with Tom Lane, December 23, 1996]

Clearly, then, by its own arguments "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist. This should come as no surprise to anarchists. Anarchism, as a political theory, was born when Proudhon wrote **What is Property?** specifically to refute the notion that workers are free when capitalist property forces them to seek employment by landlords and capitalists. He was well aware that in such circumstances property *"violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism … [and has] perfect identity with robbery."* He, unsurprisingly, talks of the *"proprietor, to whom [the worker] has sold and surrendered his liberty."* For Proudhon, anarchy was *"the absence of a master, of a sovereign"* while *"proprietor"* was *"synonymous"* with *"sovereign"* for he *"imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control."* This meant that *"property engenders despotism,"* as *"each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property."* [**What is Property**, p. 251, p. 130, p. 264 and pp. 266–7] It must also be stressed that Proudhon's classic work is a lengthy critique of the kind of apologetics for private property Rothbard espouses to salvage his ideology from its obvious contradictions.

Ironically, Rothbard repeats the same analysis as Proudhon but draws the **opposite** conclusions and expects to be considered an anarchist! Moreover, it seems equally ironic that "anarcho"-capitalism calls itself "anarchist" while basing itself on the arguments that anarchism was created in opposition to. As shown, "anarcho"-capitalism makes as much sense as "anarcho-statism" — an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. The idea that "anarcho"-capitalism warrants the name "anar-

chist" is simply false. Only someone ignorant of anarchism could maintain such a thing. While you expect anarchist theory to show this to be the case, the wonderful thing is that "anarcho"-capitalism itself does the same.

Little wonder Bob Black argues that *"[t]o demonise state authoritarianism while ignoring identical albeit contract-consecrated subservient arrangements in the large-scale corporations which control the world economy is fetishism at its worst."* [**Libertarian as Conservative**] The similarities between capitalism and statism are clear — and so why "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be anarchist. To reject the authority (the *"ultimate decision-making power"*) of the state and embrace that of the property owner indicates not only a highly illogical stance but one at odds with the basic principles of anarchism. This whole-hearted support for wage labour and capitalist property rights indicates that "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists because they do not reject all forms of **archy.** They obviously support the hierarchy between boss and worker (wage labour) and landlord and tenant. Anarchism, by definition, is against all forms of archy, including the hierarchy generated by capitalist property. To ignore the obvious archy associated with capitalist property is highly illogical.

In addition, we must note that such inequalities in power and wealth will need "defending" from those subject to them ("anarcho"-capitalists recognise the need for private police and courts to defend property from theft — and, anarchists add, to defend the theft and despotism associated with property!). Due to its support of private property (and thus authority), "anarcho"-capitalism ends up retaining a state in its "anarchy"; namely a **private** state whose existence its proponents attempt to deny simply by refusing to call it a state, like an ostrich hiding its head in the sand (see section 6 for more on this and why "anarcho"-capitalism is better described as "private state" capitalism). As Albert Meltzer put it:



*"creates a relation of subordination"* and not of freedom [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39, p. 59]

Any attempt to build an ethical framework starting from the abstract individual (as Rothbard does with his *"legitimate rights"* method) will result in domination and oppression between people, **not** freedom. Indeed, Rothbard provides an example of the dangers of idealist philosophy that Bakunin warned about when he argued that while *"[m]aterialism denies free will and ends in the establishment of liberty; idealism, in the name of human dignity, proclaims free will, and on the ruins of every liberty founds authority."* [**God and the State**, p. 48] This is the case with "anarcho"-capitalism can be seen from Rothbard's wholehearted support for wage labour and the rules imposed by property owners on those who use, but do not own, their property. Rothbard, basing himself on abstract individualism, cannot help but justify authority over liberty.

Overall, we can see that the logic of the right-libertarian definition of "freedom" ends up negating itself, because it results in the creation and encouragement of **authority,** which is an **opposite** of freedom. For example, as Ayn Rand points out, *"man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave."* [**The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z**, pp. 388–9] But, as was shown in section C, capitalism is based on, as Proudhon put it, workers working *"for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products,"* and so is a form of **theft.** Thus, by "libertarian" capitalism's **own** logic, capitalism is based not on freedom, but on (wage) slavery; for interest, profit and rent are derived from a worker's **unpaid** labour, i.e. *"others dispose of his [sic] product."*

And if a society **is** run on the wage- and profit-based system suggested by the "anarcho" and "libertarian" capitalists, freedom becomes a commodity. The more money you have, the more freedom you get. Then, since money is only available to

major impact on people's liberty. Therefore freedom is better described as "self-government" or "self-management" — to be able to govern ones own actions (if alone) or to participate in the determination of join activity (if part of a group). Freedom, to put it another way, is not an abstract legal concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all their powers, capacities, and talents which nature has endowed them. A key aspect of this is to govern one own actions when within associations (self-management). If we look at freedom this way, we see that coercion is condemned but so is hierarchy (and so is capitalism for during working hours, people are not free to make their own plans and have a say in what affects them. They are order takers, **not** free individuals).

It is because anarchists have recognised the authoritarian nature of capitalist firms that they have opposed wage labour and capitalist property rights along with the state. They have desired to replace institutions structured by subordination with institutions constituted by free relationships (based, in other words, on self-management) in **all** areas of life, including economic organisations. Hence Proudhon's argument that the *"workmen's associations ... are full of hope both as a protest against the wage system, and as an affirmation of* ***reciprocity****"* and that their importance lies *"in their denial of the rule of capitalists, money lenders and governments."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 98–99]

Unlike anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist account of freedom allows an individual's freedom to be rented out to another while maintaining that the person is still free. It may seem strange that an ideology proclaiming its support for liberty sees nothing wrong with the alienation and denial of liberty but, in actual fact, it is unsurprising. After all, contract theory is a *"theoretical strategy that justifies subjection by presenting it as freedom"* and nothing more. Little wonder, then, that contract



> *"Common-sense shows that any capitalist society might dispense with a 'State' ... but it could not dispense with organised government, or a privatised form of it, if there were people amassing money and others working to amass it for them. The philosophy of 'anarcho-capitalism' dreamed up by the 'libertarian' New Right, has nothing to do with Anarchism as known by the Anarchist movement proper. It is a lie ... Patently unbridled capitalism ... needs some force at its disposal to maintain class privileges, either form the State itself or from private armies. What they believe in is in fact a limited State — that us, one in which the State has one function, to protect the ruling class, does not interfere with exploitation, and comes as cheap as possible for the ruling class. The idea also serves another purpose ... a moral justification for bourgeois consciences in avoiding taxes without feeling guilty about it."* [**Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, p. 50]

For anarchists, this need of capitalism for some kind of state is unsurprising. For *"Anarchy without socialism seems equally as impossible to us [as socialism without anarchy], for in such a case it could not be other than the domination of the strongest, and would therefore set in motion right away the organisation and consolidation of this domination; that is to the constitution of government."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 148] Because of this, the "anarcho"-capitalist rejection of anarchist ideas on capitalist property economics and the need for equality, they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition.

Thus anarchism is far more than the common dictionary definition of "no government" — it also entails being against all forms of **archy**, including those generated by capitalist prop-

erty. This is clear from the roots of the word "anarchy." As we noted in section A.1, the word anarchy means "no rulers" or "contrary to authority." As Rothbard himself acknowledges, the property owner is the ruler of their property and, therefore, those who use it. For this reason "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be considered as a form of anarchism — a real anarchist must logically oppose the authority of the property owner along with that of the state. As "anarcho"-capitalism does not explicitly (or implicitly, for that matter) call for economic arrangements that will end wage labour and usury it cannot be considered anarchist or part of the anarchist tradition.

Political theories should be identified by their actual features and history rather than labels. Once we recognise that, we soon find out that "anarcho"-capitalism is an oxymoron. Anarchists and "anarcho"-capitalists are not part of the same movement or tradition. Their ideas and aims are in direct opposition to those of all kinds of anarchists.

While anarchists have always opposed capitalism, "anarcho"-capitalists have embraced it. And due to this embrace their "anarchy" will be marked by extensive differences in wealth and power, differences that will show themselves up in relationships based upon subordination and hierarchy (such as wage labour), **not** freedom (little wonder that Proudhon argued that *"property is despotism"* — it creates authoritarian and hierarchical relationships between people in a similar way to statism).

Their support for "free market" capitalism ignores the impact of wealth and power on the nature and outcome of individual decisions within the market (see sections 2 and 3 for further discussion). For example, as we indicate in sections J.5.10, J.5.11 and J.5.12, wage labour is less efficient than self-management in production but due to the structure and dynamics of the capitalist market, "market forces" will actively discourage self-management due to its empowering nature for workers. In other words, a developed capitalist market



their will (this seems to be his case against slave contracts — see section 2.6). But this ignores the fact that between the signing and breaking of the contract and during work hours (and perhaps outside work hours, if the boss has mandatory drug testing or will fire workers who attend union or anarchist meetings or those who have an "unnatural" sexuality and so on) the worker **does** alienate his will and body. In the words of Rudolf Rocker, *"under the realities of the capitalist economic form ... there can be no talk of a 'right over one's own person,' for that ends when one is compelled to submit to the economic dictation of another if he does not want to starve."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 17]

Ironically, the rights of property (which are said to flow from an individual's self-ownership of themselves) becomes the means, under capitalism, by which self-ownership of non-property owners is denied. The foundational right (self-ownership) becomes denied by the derivative right (ownership of things). Under capitalism, a lack of property can be just as oppressive as a lack of legal rights because of the relationships of domination and subjection this situation creates.

So Rothbard's argument (as well as being contradictory) misses the point (and the reality of capitalism). Yes, **if** we define freedom as *"the absence of coercion"* then the idea that wage labour does not restrict liberty is unavoidable, but such a definition is useless. This is because it hides structures of power and relations of domination and subordination. As Carole Pateman argues, *"the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself... To sell command over the use of oneself for a specified period ... is to be an unfree labourer."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 151]

In other words, contracts about property in the person inevitably create subordination. "Anarcho"-capitalism defines this source of unfreedom away, but it still exists and has a

the obvious, I do not "own" myself, as if were an object somehow separable from my subjectivity — I **am** myself. However, the concept of "self-ownership" is handy for justifying various forms of domination and oppression — for by agreeing (usually under the force of circumstances, we must note) to certain contracts, an individual can "sell" (or rent out) themselves to others (for example, when workers sell their labour power to capitalists on the "free market"). In effect, "self-ownership" becomes the means of justifying treating people as objects — ironically, the very thing the concept was created to stop! As L. Susan Brown notes, *"[a]t the moment an individual 'sells' labour power to another, he/she loses self-determination and instead is treated as a subjectless instrument for the fulfilment of another's will."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 4]

Given that workers are paid to obey, you really have to wonder which planet Murray Rothbard is on when he argues that a person's *"labour service is alienable, but his **will** is not"* and that he [sic!] *"cannot alienate his **will**, more particularly his control over his own mind and body."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 40, p. 135] He contrasts private property and self-ownership by arguing that *"[a]ll physical property owned by a person is alienable ... I can give away or sell to another person my shoes, my house, my car, my money, etc. But there are certain vital things which, in natural fact and in the nature of man, are **in**alienable ... [his] will and control over his own person are inalienable."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 134–5]

But *"labour services"* are unlike the private possessions Rothbard lists as being alienable. As we argued in section B.1 ("Why do anarchists oppose hierarchy") a person's *"labour services"* and *"will"* cannot be divided — if you sell your labour services, you also have to give control of your body and mind to another person! If a worker does not obey the commands of her employer, she is fired. That Rothbard denies this indicates a total lack of common-sense. Perhaps Rothbard will argue that as the worker can quit at any time she does not alienate



will promote hierarchy and unfreedom in production in spite of its effects on individual workers and their wants (see also section 10.2). Thus "free market" capitalism tends to re-enforce inequalities of wealth and power, **not** eliminate them.

Furthermore, any such system of (economic and social) power will require extensive force to maintain it and the "anarcho"-capitalist system of competing "defence firms" will simply be a new state, enforcing capitalist power, property rights and law.

Overall, the lack of concern for meaningful freedom within production and the effects of vast differences in power and wealth within society as a whole makes "anarcho"-capitalism little better than "anarchism for the rich." Emma Goldman recognised this when she argued that *"'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters ... in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom ... is denounced as ... evil in the name of that same individualism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112] And, as such, is no anarchism at all.

So, unlike anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists do not seek the *"abolition of the proletariat"* (to use Proudhon's expression) via changing capitalist property rights and institutions. Thus the "anarcho"-capitalist and the anarchist have different starting positions and opposite ends in mind and so they cannot be considered part of the same (anarchist) tradition. As we discuss further in later sections, the "anarcho"-capitalist claims to being anarchists are bogus simply because they reject so much of the anarchist tradition as to make what they do accept non-anarchist in theory and practice. Little wonder Peter Marshall said that *"few anarchists would accept the 'anarcho-capitalists' into the anarchist camp since they do not share a concern for economic equality and social justice."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 565] #secf11

## 1.1 Why is the failure to renounce hierarchy the Achilles Heel of right-wing libertarianism

Any capitalist system will produce vast differences in economic (and social) wealth and power. As we argue in section 3.1, such differences will reflect themselves in the market and any "free" contracts agreed there will create hierarchical relationships. Thus capitalism is marked by hierarchy (see section B.1.2) and, unsurprisingly, right-libertarians and "anarcho"-capitalists fail to oppose such "free market" generated hierarchy.

Both groups approve of it in the capitalist workplace or rented accommodation and the right-Libertarians also approve of it in a 'minimal' state to protect private property ("anarcho"-capitalists, in contrast, approve of the use of private defence firms to protect property). But the failure of these two movements to renounce hierarchy is their weakest point. For anti-authoritarianism has sunk deep roots into the modern psyche, as a legacy of the sixties.

Many people who do not even know what anarchism is have been profoundly affected by the personal liberation and counterculture movements of the past thirty years, epitomised by the popular bumper sticker, *"Question Authority."* As a result, society now tolerates much more choice than ever before in matters of religion, sexuality, art, music, clothing, and other components of lifestyle. We need only recall the conservatism that reigned in such areas during the fifties to see that the idea of liberty has made tremendous advances in just a few decades.

Although this liberatory impulse has so far been confined almost entirely to the personal and cultural realms, it may yet be capable of spilling over and affecting economic and political institutions, provided it continues to grow. The Right is well aware of this, as seen in its ongoing campaigns for "family values," school prayer, suppression of women's rights, fundamentalist Christianity, sexual abstinence before marriage, and



This definition has some problems, however. In such a society, one cannot (legitimately) do anything with or on another's property if the owner prohibits it. This means that an individual's only **guaranteed** freedom is determined by the amount of property that he or she owns. This has the consequence that someone with no property has no guaranteed freedom at all (beyond, of course, the freedom not to be murdered or otherwise harmed by the deliberate acts of others). In other words, a distribution of property is a distribution of freedom, as the right-libertarians themselves define it. It strikes anarchists as strange that an ideology that claims to be committed to promoting freedom entails the conclusion that some people should be more free than others. However, this is the logical implication of their view, which raises a serious doubt as to whether "anarcho"-capitalists are actually interested in freedom.

Looking at Rothbard's definition of "liberty" quoted above, we can see that freedom is actually no longer considered to be a fundamental, independent concept. Instead, freedom is a derivative of something more fundamental, namely the *"legitimate rights"* of an individual, which are identified as property rights. In other words, given that "anarcho"-capitalists and right libertarians in general consider the right to property as "absolute," it follows that freedom and property become one and the same. This suggests an alternative name for the right Libertarian, namely ***"Propertarian."*** And, needless to say, if we do not accept the right-libertarians' view of what constitutes "legitimate" "rights," then their claim to be defenders of liberty is weak.

Another important implication of this "liberty as property" concept is that it produces a strangely alienated concept of freedom. Liberty, as we noted, is no longer considered absolute, but a derivative of property — which has the important consequence that you can "sell" your liberty and still be considered free by the ideology. This concept of liberty (namely "liberty as property") is usually termed "self-ownership." But, to state

> *"The modern Individualism initiated by Herbert Spencer is, like the critical theory of Proudhon, a powerful indictment against the dangers and wrongs of government, but its practical solution of the social problem is miserable — so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of 'No force' be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 98]

><h1>2 What do

For "anarcho"-capitalists, the concept of freedom is limited to the idea of *"freedom from."* For them, freedom means simply freedom from the *"initiation of force,"* or the *"non-aggression against anyone's person and property."* [Murray Rothbard, **For a New Liberty**, p. 23] The notion that real freedom must combine both freedom *"to"* **and** freedom *"from"* is missing in their ideology, as is the social context of the so-called freedom they defend.

Before starting, it is useful to quote Alan Haworth when he notes that *"[i]n fact, it is surprising how **little** close attention the concept of freedom receives from libertarian writers. Once again **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** is a case in point. The word 'freedom' doesn't even appear in the index. The word 'liberty' appears, but only to refer the reader to the 'Wilt Chamberlain' passage. In a supposedly 'libertarian' work, this is more than surprising. It is truly remarkable."* [**Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 95]

Why this is the case can be seen from how the "anarcho"-capitalist defines freedom.

In a right-libertarian or "anarcho"-capitalist society, freedom is considered to be a product of property. As Murray Rothbard puts it, *"the libertarian defines the concept of 'freedom' or 'liberty'...[as a] condition in which a person's ownership rights in his body and his legitimate material property rights are not invaded, are not aggressed against... . Freedom and unrestricted property rights go hand in hand."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.41]



other attempts to revive the Ozzie-and-Harriet mindset of the Good Old Days. This is where the efforts of "cultural anarchists" — artists, musicians, poets, and others — are important in keeping alive the ideal of personal freedom and resistance to authority as a necessary foundation for economic and political restructuring.

Indeed, the libertarian right (as a whole) support restrictions on freedom **as long as its not the state that is doing it**! Their support for capitalism means that they have no problem with bosses dictating what workers do during working hours (nor outside working hours, if the job requires employees to take drug tests or not be gay in order to keep it). If a private landlord or company decrees a mandatory rule or mode of living, workers/tenets must "love it or leave it!" Of course, that the same argument also applies to state laws is one hotly denied by right-Libertarians — a definite case of not seeing the wood for the trees (see section 2.3).

Of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist will argue, workers and tenants can find a more liberal boss or landlord. This, however, ignores two key facts. Firstly, being able to move to a more liberal state hardly makes state laws less offensive (as they themselves will be the first to point out). Secondly, looking for a new job or home is not that easy. Just a moving to a new state can involve drastic upheavals, so change changing jobs and homes. Moreover, the job market is usually a buyers market (it has to be in capitalism, otherwise profits are squeezed — see sections C.7 and 10.2) and this means that workers are not usually in a position (unless they organise) to demand increased liberties at work.

It seems somewhat ironic, to say the least, that right-libertarians place rights of property over the rights of self-ownership, even though (according to their ideology) self-ownership is the foundational right from which property rights are derived. Thus in right-libertarianism the rights of property owners to discriminate and govern the property-less

are more important than the freedom from discrimination (i.e. to be yourself) or the freedom to govern oneself at all times.

So, when it boils down to it, right-libertarians are not really bothered about restrictions on liberty and, indeed, they will defend private restrictions on liberty with all their might. This may seem a strange position for self-proclaimed "libertarians" to take, but it flows naturally from their definition of freedom (see section 2 for a full discussion of this). but by not attacking hierarchy beyond certain forms of statism, the 'libertarian' right fundamentally undermines its claim to be libertarian. Freedom cannot be compartmentalised, but is holistic. The denial of liberty in, say, the workplace, quickly results in its being denied elsewhere in society (due to the impact of the inequalities it would produce) , just as the degrading effects of wage labour and the hierarchies with which is it bound up are felt by the worker outside work.

Neither the Libertarian Party nor so-called "anarcho"-capitalism is **genuinely** anti-authoritarian, as those who are truly dedicated to liberty must be. #secf12

### 1.2 How libertarian is right-Libertarian theory?

The short answer is, not very. Liberty not only implies but also requires independent, critical thought (indeed, anarchists would argue that critical thought requires free development and evolution and that it is precisely **this** which capitalist hierarchy crushes). For anarchists a libertarian theory, if it is to be worthy of the name, must be based upon critical thought and reflect the key aspect that characterises life — change and the ability to evolve. To hold up dogma and base "theory" upon assumptions (as opposed to facts) is the opposite of a libertarian frame of mind. A libertarian theory must be based upon reality and recognise the need for change and the existence of change. Unfortunately, right-Libertarianism is marked more by ideology than critical analysis.



> ment, we are ready to go with him into a full discussion of the subject)… .
>
> "If he holds that the landlords are justly entitled to their lands, let him make a defence of the landlords or an attack on our unjust proposal." [quoted by Carl Watner, *"The English Individualists As They Appear In Liberty,"* pp. 191–211, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), pp. 199–200]

Significantly, Tucker and other individualist anarchists saw state intervention has a result of capital manipulating legislation to gain an advantage on the so-called free market which allowed them to exploit labour and, as such, it benefited the **whole** capitalist class. Rothbard, at best, acknowledges that **some** sections of big business benefit from the current system and so fails to have the comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of capitalism as a **system** (rather as an ideology). This lack of understanding of capitalism as a historic and dynamic system rooted in class rule and economic power is important in evaluating "anarcho"-capitalist claims to anarchism. Marxists are not considered anarchists as they support the state as a means of transition to an anarchist society. Much the same logic can be applied to right-wing libertarians (even if they do call themselves "anarcho"-capitalists). This is because they do not seek to correct the inequalities produced by previous state action before ending it nor do they seek to change the definitions of "private property" imposed by the state. In effect, they argue that the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" should "wither away" and be limited to defending the property accumulated in a few hands. Needless to say, starting from the current (coercively produced) distribution of property and then eliminating "force" simply means defending the power and privilege of ruling minorities:

*ket and its 'spontaneous' triumph over the past. It is pointless to argue, as Rothbard seems ready to do, that capitalism would have succeeded without the bourgeois state; the fact is that all capitalist nations have relied on the machinery of government to create and preserve the political and legal environments required by their economic system."* That, of course, has not stopped him *"critis[ing] others for being unhistorical."* [Stephen L Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 77–8 and p. 79]

In other words, there is substantial differences between the victims of a thief trying to stop being robbed and be left alone to enjoy their property and the successful thief doing the same! Individualist Anarchist's were aware of this. For example, Victor Yarros stressed this key difference between individualist anarchism and the proto-"libertarian" capitalists of "voluntaryism":

> "[Auberon Herbert] believes in allowing people to retain all their possessions, no matter how unjustly and basely acquired, while getting them, so to speak, to swear off stealing and usurping and to promise to behave well in the future. We, on the other hand, while insisting on the principle of private property, in wealth honestly obtained under the reign of liberty, do not think it either unjust or unwise to dispossess the landlords who have monopolised natural wealth by force and fraud. We hold that the poor and disinherited toilers would be justified in expropriating, not alone the landlords, who notoriously have no equitable titles to their lands, but **all** the financial lords and rulers, all the millionaires and very wealthy individuals… . Almost all possessors of great wealth enjoy neither what they nor their ancestors rightfully acquired (and if Mr. Herbert wishes to challenge the correctness of this state-



Right-Libertarianism is characterised by a strong tendency of creating theories based upon assumptions and deductions from these axioms (for a discussion on the pre-scientific nature of this methodology and of its dangers, see the next section). Robert Nozick, for example, in **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** makes no attempt to provide a justification of the property rights his whole theory is based upon. His main assumption is that *"[i]ndividuals have rights, and there are certain things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)."* [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. ix] While this does have its intuitive appeal, it is not much to base a political ideology upon. After all, what rights people consider as valid can be pretty subjective and have constantly evolved during history. To say that "individuals have rights" is to open up the question "what rights?" Indeed, as we argue in greater length in section 2, such a rights based system as Nozick desires can and does lead to situations developing in which people "consent" to be exploited and oppressed and that, intuitively, many people consider supporting the "violation" of these "certain rights" (by creating other ones) simply because of their evil consequences.

In other words, starting from the assumption "people have [certain] rights" Nozick constructs a theory which, when faced with the reality of unfreedom and domination it would create for the many, justifies this unfreedom as an expression of liberty. In other words, regardless of the outcome, the initial assumptions are what matter. Nozick's intuitive rights system can lead to some very non-intuitive outcomes.

And does Nozick prove the theory of property rights he assumes? He states that *"we shall not formulate [it] here."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 150] Moreover, it is not formulated anywhere else in his book. And if it is not formulated, what is there to defend? Surely this means that his Libertarianism is without foundations? As Jonathan Wolff notes, Nozick's *"Libertarian property rights remain substantially undefended."* [**Robert Nozick: Property, Justice and the Minimal State**, p. 117] Given that

the right to acquire property is critical to his whole theory you would think it important enough to go into in some detail (or at least document). After all, unless he provides us with a firm basis for property rights then his entitlement theory is nonsense as no one has the right to (private) property.

It could be argued that Nozick **does** present enough information to allow us to piece together a possible argument in favour of property rights based on his modification of the *"Lockean Proviso"* (although he does not point us to these arguments). However, assuming this is the case, such a defence actually fails (see section B.3.4 for more on this). If individuals **do** have rights, these rights do not include property rights in the form Nozick assumes (but does not prove). Nozick appears initially convincing because what he assumes with regards to property is a normal feature of the society we are in (we would be forgiven when we note here that feeble arguments pass for convincing when they are on the same side as the prevailing sentiment).

Similarly, both Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand (who is infamous for repeating *"A is A"* ad infinitum) do the same — base their ideologies on assumptions (see section 11 for more on this).

Therefore, we see that most of the leading right-Libertarian ideologues base themselves on assumptions about what "Man" is or the rights they should have (usually in the form that people have (certain) rights because they are people). From these theorems and assumptions they build their respective ideologies, using logic to deduce the conclusions that their assumptions imply. Such a methodology is unscientific and, indeed, a relic of religious (pre-scientific) society (see next section) but, more importantly, can have negative effects on maximising liberty. This is because this "methodology" has distinct problems. Murray Bookchin argues:



> *(which is also anti-statist, being hostile to any social intervention on the part of the State to protect the victims of exploitation — in the matter of working hours, hygienic working conditions and so on), and the greed of unlimited exploitation, had stirred up in England a certain agitation in favour of pseudo-individualism, an unrestrained exploitation. To this end, they enlisted the services of a mercenary pseudo-literature ... which played with doctrinaire and fanatical ideas in order to project a species of 'individualism' that was absolutely sterile, and a species of 'non-interventionism' that would let a man die of hunger rather than offend his dignity."* [Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 39]

This perspective can be seen when Tucker denounced Herbert Spencer as a champion of the capitalistic class for his vocal attacks on social legislation which claimed to benefit working class people but stays strangely silent on the laws passed to benefit (usually indirectly) capital and the rich. "Anarcho"-capitalism is part of that tradition, the tradition associated with a capitalism which no longer needs obvious state intervention as enough wealth as been accumulated to keep workers under control by means of market power.

As with the original nineteenth century British "anti-state" capitalists like Spencer and Herbert, Rothbard *"completely overlooks the role of the state in building and maintaining a capitalist economy in the West. Privileged to live in the twentieth century, long after the battles to establish capitalism have been fought and won, Rothbard sees the state solely as a burden on the market and a vehicle for imposing the still greater burden of socialism. He manifests a kind of historical nearsightedness that allows him to collapse many centuries of human experience into one long night of tyranny that ended only with the invention of the free mar-*

these problems can be solved by consistently applying the principles of individualist anarchism, unlike "anarcho"-capitalism, and that is why it is a real school of anarchism. In other words, a system of **generalised** wage labour would not be anarchist nor would it be non-exploitative. Moreover, the social context these ideas were developed in and would have been applied ensure that these contradictions would have been minimised. If they had been applied, a genuine anarchist society of self-employed workers would, in all likelihood, have been created (at least at first, whether the market would increase inequalities is a moot point — see section G.4).

We must stress that the social situation is important as it shows how apparently superficially similar arguments can have radically different aims and results depending on who suggests them and in what circumstances. As noted, during the rise of capitalism the bourgeoisie were not shy in urging state intervention against the masses. Unsurprisingly, working class people generally took an anti-state position during this period. The individualist anarchists were part of that tradition, opposing what Marx termed *"primitive accumulation"* in favour of the pre-capitalist forms of property and society it was destroying.

However, when capitalism found its feet and could do without such obvious intervention, the possibility of an "anti-state" capitalism could arise. Such a possibility became a definite once the state started to intervene in ways which, while benefiting the system as a whole, came into conflict with the property and power of individual members of the capitalist and landlord class. Thus social legislation which attempted to restrict the negative effects of unbridled exploitation and oppression on workers and the environment were having on the economy were the source of much outrage in certain bourgeois circles:

> *"Quite independently of these tendencies [of individualist anarchism] . .. the anti-state bourgeoisie*



> *"Conventional reason rests on identity, not change; its fundamental principle is that **A equals A,** the famous 'principle of identity,' which means that any given phenomenon can be only itself and cannot be other than what we immediately perceive it to be at a given moment in time. It does not address the problem of change. A human being is an infant at one time, a child at another, an adolescent at still another, and finally a youth and an adult. When we analyse an infant by means of conventional reason, we are not exploring what it is **becoming** in the process of developing into a child."* [*"A Philosophical Naturalism"*, **Society and Nature** No.2, p. 64]

In other words, right-Libertarian theory is based upon ignoring the fundamental aspect of life — namely **change** and **evolution.** Perhaps it will be argued that identity also accounts for change by including potentiality — which means, that we have the strange situation that A can **potentially** be A! If A is not actually A, but only has the potential to be A, then A is not A. Thus to include change is to acknowledge that A does not equal A — that individuals and humanity evolves and so what constitutes A also changes. To maintain identity and then to deny it seems strange.

That change is far from the "A is A" mentality can be seen from Murray Rothbard who goes so far as to state that *"one of the notable attributes of natural law"* is *"its applicability to all men [sic!], regardless of time or place. Thus ethical law takes its place alongside physical or 'scientific' natural laws."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 42] Apparently the "nature of man" is the only living thing in nature that does not evolve or change! Of course, it could be argued that by "natural law" Rothbard is only referring to his method of deducing his (and, we stress, they are just his — not natural) "ethical laws" — but his methodology starts by assuming certain things about "man." Whether these

assumptions seem far or not is besides the point, by using the term "natural law" Rothbard is arguing that any actions that violate **his** ethical laws are somehow "against nature" (but if they were against nature, they could not occur — see section 11 for more on this). Deductions from assumptions is a Procrustean bed for humanity (as Rothbard's ideology shows).

So, as can be seen, many leading right-Libertarians place great store by the axiom "A is A" or that "man" has certain rights simply because "he" is a "man". And as Bookchin points out, such conventional reason *"doubtless plays an indispensable role in mathematical thinking and mathematical sciences ... and in the nuts-and-bolts of dealing with everyday life"* and so is essential to *"understand or design mechanical entities."* [**Ibid.**, p.67] But the question arises, is such reason useful when considering people and other forms of life?

Mechanical entities are but one (small) aspect of human life. Unfortunately for right-Libertarians (and fortunately for the rest of humanity), human beings are **not** mechanical entities but instead are living, breathing, feeling, hoping, dreaming, **changing** living organisms. They are not mechanical entities and any theory that uses reason based on such (non-living) entities will flounder when faced with living ones. In other words, right-Libertarian theory treats people as the capitalist system tries to — namely as commodities, as things. Instead of human beings, whose ideas, ideals and ethics change, develop and grow, capitalism and capitalist ideologues try to reduce human life to the level of corn or iron (by emphasising the unchanging "nature" of man and their starting assumptions/rights).

This can be seen from their support for wage labour, the reduction of human activity to a commodity on the market. While paying lip service to liberty and life, right-libertarianism justifies the commodification of labour and life, which within a system of capitalist property rights can result in the treating of people as means to an end as opposed to an end in themselves (see sections 2 and 3.1).



> *"Committed as they were to equality in the pursuit of property, the objective for the anarchist became the construction of a society providing equal access to those things necessary for creating wealth. The goal of the anarchists who extolled mutualism and the abolition of all monopolies was, then, a society where everyone willing to work would have the tools and raw materials necessary for production in a non-exploitative system ... the dominant vision of the future society ... [was] underpinned by individual, self-employed workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 95]

As such, a limited amount of wage labour within a predominantly self-employed economy does not make a given society capitalist any more than a small amount of governmental communities within an predominantly anarchist world would make it statist. As Marx argued. when *"the separation of the worker from the conditions of labour and from the soil ... does not yet exist, or only sporadically, or on too limited a scale ... Where, amongst such curious characters, is the 'field of abstinence' for the capitalists? ... Today's wage-labourer is tomorrow's independent peasant or artisan, working for himself. He vanishes from the labour-market — but not into the workhouse."* There is a *"constant transformation of wage-labourers into independent producers, who work for themselves instead of for capital"* and so *"the degree of exploitation of the wage-labourer remain[s] indecently low."* In addition, the *"wage-labourer also loses, along with the relation of dependence, the feeling of dependence on the abstemious capitalist."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 935–6]

Saying that, as we discuss in section G.4, individualist anarchist support for wage labour is at odds with the ideas of Proudhon and, far more importantly, in contradiction to many of the stated principles of the individualist anarchists themselves. In particular, wage labour violates "occupancy and use" as well as having more than a passing similarity to the state. However,

*vidual himself; in other words, the expropriation of the worker."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 940] He notes that to achieve this, the state is used:

> *"How then can the anti-capitalistic cancer of the colonies be healed? . .. Let the Government set an artificial price on the virgin soil, a price independent of the law of supply and demand, a price that compels the immigrant to work a long time for wages before he can earn enough money to buy land, and turn himself into an independent farmer."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 938]

Moreover, tariffs are introduced with *"the objective of manufacturing capitalists artificially"* for the *"system of protection was an artificial means of manufacturing manufacturers, or expropriating independent workers, of capitalising the national means of production and subsistence, and of forcibly cutting short the transition ... to the modern mode of production,"* to capitalism [**Op. Cit.**, p. 932 and pp. 921–2]

It is this process which Individualist Anarchism protested against, the use of the state to favour the rising capitalist class. However, unlike social anarchists, many individualist anarchists were not consistently against wage labour. This is the other significant overlap between "anarcho"-capitalism and individualist anarchism. However, they were opposed to exploitation and argued (unlike "anarcho"-capitalism) that in their system workers bargaining powers would be raised to such a level that their wages would equal the full product of their labour. However, as we discuss in section G.1.1 the social context the individualist anarchists lived in must be remembered. America at the times was a predominantly rural society and industry was not as developed as it is now wage labour would have been minimised (Spooner, for example, explicitly envisioned a society made up mostly entirely of self-employed workers). As Kline argues:



And as Bookchin points out, *"in an age of sharply conflicting values and emotionally charges ideals, such a way of reasoning is often repellent. Dogmatism, authoritarianism, and fear seem all-pervasive."* [**Ibid.**, p. 68] Right-Libertarianism provides more than enough evidence for Bookchin's summary with its support for authoritarian social relationships, hierarchy and even slavery (see section 2).

This mechanical viewpoint is also reflected in their lack of appreciation that social institutions and relationships evolve over time and, sometimes, fundamentally change. This can best be seen from property. Right-libertarians fail to see that over time (in the words of Proudhon) property *"changed its nature."* Originally, *"the word **property** was synonymous with ... **individual possession**"* but it became more *"complex"* and turned into **private property** — *"the right to use it by his neighbour's labour."* The changing of use-rights to (capitalist) property rights created relations of domination and exploitation between people absent before. For the right-Libertarian, both the tools of the self-employed artisan and the capital of a transnational corporation are both forms of "property" and (so) basically identical. In practice, of course, the social relations they create and the impact they have on society are totally different. Thus the mechanical mind-set of right-Libertarianism fails to understand how institutions, like property, evolve and come to replace whatever freedom enhancing features they had with oppression (indeed, von Mises argued that *"[t]here may possibly be a difference of opinion about whether a particular institution is socially beneficial or harmful. But once it has been judged [by whom, we ask] beneficial, one can no longer contend that, for some inexplicable reason, it must be condemned as immoral"* [**Liberalism**, p. 34] So much for evolution and change!).

Anarchism, in contrast, is based upon the importance of critical thought informed by an awareness that life is in a constant process of change. This means that our ideas on human

society must be informed by the facts, not by what we wish was true. For Bookchin, an evaluation of conventional wisdom (as expressed in *"the law of identity"*) is essential and its conclusions have *"enormous importance for how we behave as ethical beings, the nature of nature, and our place in the natural world. Moreover... these issues directly affect the kind of society, sensibility, and lifeways we wish to foster."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69–70]

Bookchin is correct. While anarchists oppose hierarchy in the name of liberty, right-libertarians support authority and hierarchy, all of which deny freedom and restrict individual development. This is unsurprising because the right-libertarian ideology rejects change and critical thought based upon the scientific method and so is fundamentally **anti-life** in its assumptions and **anti-human** in its method. Far from being a libertarian set of ideas, right-Libertarianism is a mechanical set of dogmas that deny the fundamental nature of life (namely change) and of individuality (namely critical thought and freedom). Moreover, in practice their system of (capitalist) rights would soon result in extensive restrictions on liberty and authoritarian social relationships (see sections 2 and 3) — a strange result of a theory proclaiming itself "libertarian" but one consistent with its methodology.

From a wider viewpoint, such a rejection of liberty by right-libertarians is unsurprising. They do, after all, support capitalism. Capitalism produces an inverted set of ethics, one in which capital (dead labour) is more important that people (living labour). After all, workers are usually easier to replace than investments in capital and the person who owns capital commands the person who "only" owns his life and productive abilities. And as Oscar Wilde once noted, crimes against property *"are the crimes that the English law, valuing what a man has more than what a man is, punishes with the harshest and most horrible severity."* [**The Soul of Man Under Socialism**]



> "In Western Europe, the homeland of political economy, the process of primitive accumulation is more of less accomplished... .
>
> "It is otherwise in the colonies. There the capitalist regime constantly comes up against the obstacle presented by the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems has its practical manifestation here in the struggle between them." [Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 931]

Individualist anarchism is obviously an aspect of this struggle between the system of peasant and artisan production of early America and the state encouraged system of private property and wage labour. "Anarcho"-capitalists, in contrast, assume that generalised wage labour would remain under their system (while paying lip-service to the possibilities of co-operatives — and if an "anarcho"-capitalist thinks that co-operative will become the dominant form of workplace organisation, then they are some kind of market socialist, **not** a capitalist). It is clear that their end point (a pure capitalism, i.e. generalised wage labour) is directly the opposite of that desired by anarchists. This was the case of the Individualist Anarchists who embraced the ideal of (non-capitalist) laissez faire competition — they did so, as noted, to **end** exploitation, **not** to maintain it. Indeed, their analysis of the change in American society from one of mainly independent producers into one based mainly upon wage labour has many parallels with, of all people, Karl Marx's presented in chapter 33 of **Capital**. Marx, correctly, argues that *"the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of that private property which rests on the labour of the indi-*

the Individualist Anarchists agreed with Rousseau that in order to prevent extreme inequality of fortunes you deprive people of the means to accumulate in the first place and **not** take away wealth from the rich. An important point which "anarcho"-capitalism fails to understand or appreciate.

There are, of course, overlaps between individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism, just as there are overlaps between it and Marxism (and social anarchism, of course). However, just as a similar analysis of capitalism does not make individualist anarchists Marxists, so apparent similarities between individualist anarchism does not make it a forerunner of "anarcho"-capitalism. For example, both schools support the idea of "free markets." Yet the question of markets is fundamentally second to the issue of property rights for what is exchanged on the market is dependent on what is considered legitimate property. In this, as Rothbard notes, individualist anarchists and "anarcho"-capitalists differ and different property rights produce different market structures and dynamics. This means that capitalism is not the only economy with markets and so support for markets cannot be equated with support for capitalism. Equally, opposition to markets is **not** the defining characteristic of socialism (as we note in section G.2.1). As such, it **is** possible to be a market socialist (and many socialist are). This is because "markets" and "property" do not equate to capitalism:

> "Political economy confuses, on principle, two very different kinds of private property, one of which rests on the labour of the producers himself, and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. It forgets that the latter is not only the direct antithesis of the former, but grows on the former's tomb and nowhere else.



This mentality is reflected in right-libertarianism when it claims that stealing food is a crime while starving to death (due to the action of market forces/power and property rights) is no infringement of your rights (see section 4.2 for a similar argument with regards to water). It can also be seen when right-libertarian's claim that the taxation *"of earnings from labour"* (e.g. of one dollar from a millionaire) is ***"on a par with** forced labour"* [Nozick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 169] while working in a sweatshop for 14 hours a day (enriching said millionaire) does not affect your liberty as you "consent" to it due to market forces (although, of course, many rich people have earned their money **without** labouring themselves — their earnings derive from the wage labour of others so would taxing those, non-labour, earnings be "forced labour"?) Interestingly, the Individualist Anarchist Ben Tucker argued that an income tax was *"a recognition of the fact that industrial freedom and equality of opportunity no longer exist here [in the USA in the 1890s] even in the imperfect state in which they once did exist"* [quoted by James Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 263] which suggests a somewhat different viewpoint on this matter than Nozick or Rothbard.

That capitalism produces an inverted set of ethics can be seen when the Ford produced the Pinto. The Pinto had a flaw in it which meant that if it was hit in a certain way in a crash the fuel tank exploded. The Ford company decided it was more "economically viable" to produce that car and pay damages to those who were injured or the relatives of those who died than pay to change the invested capital. The needs for the owners of capital to make a profit came before the needs of the living. Similarly, bosses often hire people to perform unsafe work in dangerous conditions and fire them if they protest. Right-libertarian ideology is the philosophical equivalent. Its dogma is "capital" and it comes before life (i.e. "labour").

As Bakunin once put it, *"you will always find the idealists in the very act of practical materialism, while you will see the*

*materialists pursuing and realising the most grandly ideal aspirations and thoughts."* [**God and the State**, p. 49] Hence we see right "libertarians" supporting sweat shops and opposing taxation — for, in the end, money (and the power that goes with it) counts far more in that ideology than ideals such as liberty, individual dignity, empowering, creative and productive work and so forth for all. The central flaw of right-libertarianism is that it does not recognise that the workings of the capitalist market can easily ensure that the majority end up becoming a resource for others in ways far worse than that associated with taxation. The legal rights of self-ownership supported by right-libertarians does not mean that people have the ability to avoid what is in effect enslavement to another (see sections 2 and 3).

Right-Libertarian theory is not based upon a libertarian methodology or perspective and so it is hardly surprising it results in support for authoritarian social relationships and, indeed, slavery (see section 2.6). #secf13

### 1.3 Is right-Libertarian theory scientific in nature?

Usually, no. The scientific approach is **inductive,** much of the right-libertarian approach is **deductive.** The first draws generalisations from the data, the second applies preconceived generalisations to the data. A completely deductive approach is pre-scientific, however, which is why many right-Libertarians cannot legitimately claim to use a scientific method. Deduction does occur in science, but the generalisations are primarily based on other data, not *a priori* assumptions, and are checked against data to see if they are accurate. Anarchists tend to fall into the inductive camp, as Kropotkin put it:

> *"Precisely this natural-scientific method applied to economic facts, enables us to prove that the so-called 'laws' of middle-class sociology, including also their*



clear that these ideas **are** socialist in nature and in aim (similarly, not all the Individualist Anarchists called themselves anarchists but their ideas are clearly anarchist in nature and in aim).

This combination of the political and economic is essential as they mutually reinforce each other. Without the economic ideas, the political ideas would be meaningless as inequality would make a mockery of them. As Kline notes, the Individualist Anarchists' *"proposals were designed to establish true equality of opportunity ... and they expected this would result in a society without great wealth or poverty. In the absence of monopolistic factors which would distort competition, they expected a society largely of self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them since all would be required to live at their own expense and not at the expense of exploited fellow human beings."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 103–4]

Because of the evil effects of inequality on freedom, both social and individualist anarchists desired to create an environment in which circumstances would not drive people to sell their liberty to others at a disadvantage. In other words, they desired an equalisation of market power by opposing interest, rent and profit and capitalist definitions of private property. Kline summarises this by saying *"the American [individualist] anarchists exposed the tension existing in liberal thought between private property and the ideal of equal access. The Individual Anarchists were, at least, aware that existing conditions were far from ideal, that the system itself working against the majority of individuals in their efforts to attain its promises. Lack of capital, the means to creation and accumulation of wealth, usually doomed a labourer to a life of exploitation. This the anarchists knew and they abhorred such a system."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

And this desire for bargaining equality is reflected in their economic ideas and by removing these underlying economic ideas of the individualist anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalism makes a mockery of any ideas they do appropriate. Essentially,

> *political economy, are not laws at all, but simply guesses, or mere assertions which have never been verified at all."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 153]

The idea that natural-scientific methods can be applied to economic and social life is one that many right-libertarians reject. Instead they favour the deductive (pre-scientific) approach (this we must note is not limited purely to Austrian economists, many more mainstream capitalist economists also embrace deduction over induction).

The tendency for right-Libertarianism to fall into dogmatism (or *a priori* theorems, as they call it) and its implications can best be seen from the work of Ludwig von Mises and other economists from the right-Libertarian "Austrian school." Of course, not all right-libertarians necessarily subscribe to this approach (Murray Rothbard for one did) but its use by so many leading lights of both schools of thought is significant and worthy of comment. And as we are concentrating on **methodology** it is not essential to discuss the starting assumptions. The assumptions (such as, to use Rothbard's words, the Austrian's *"fundamental axiom that individual human beings act"*) may be correct, incorrect or incomplete — but the method of using them advocated by von Mises ensures that such considerations are irrelevant.

Von Mises (a leading member of the Austrian school of economics) begins by noting that social and economic theory *"is not derived from experience; it is prior to experience..."* Which is back to front. It is obvious that experience of capitalism is necessary in order to develop a viable theory about how it works. Without the experience, any theory is just a flight of fantasy. The actual specific theory we develop is therefore derived from experience, informed by it and will have to get checked against reality to see if it is viable. This is the scientific method — any theory must be checked against the facts. However, von Mises



So because "anarcho"-capitalists embrace capitalism and reject socialism, they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition.

Which brings us nicely to the second point, namely a lack of concern for equality. In stark contrast to anarchists of all schools, inequality is not seen to be a problem with "anarcho"-capitalists (see section 3). However, it is a truism that not all "traders" are equally subject to the market (i.e. have the same market power). In many cases, a few have sufficient control of resources to influence or determine price and in such cases, all others must submit to those terms or not buy the commodity. When the commodity is labour power, even this option is lacking — workers have to accept a job in order to live. As we argue in section 10.2, workers are usually at a disadvantage on the labour market when compared to capitalists, and this forces them to sell their liberty in return for making profits for others. These profits increase inequality in society as the property owners receive the surplus value their workers produce. This increases inequality further, consolidating market power and so weakens the bargaining position of workers further, ensuring that even the freest competition possible could not eliminate class power and society (something B. Tucker recognised as occurring with the development of trusts within capitalism — see section G.4).

By removing the underlying commitment to abolish non-labour income, any "anarchist" capitalist society would have vast differences in wealth and so power. Instead of a government imposed monopolies in land, money and so on, the economic power flowing from private property and capital would ensure that the majority remained in (to use Spooner's words) *"the condition of servants"* (see sections 2 and 3.1 for more on this). The Individualist Anarchists were aware of this danger and so supported economic ideas that opposed usury (i.e. rent, profit and interest) and ensured the worker the full value of her labour. While not all of them called these ideas "socialist" it is

goes on to argue at length that *"no kind of experience can ever force us to discard or modify **a priori** theorems; they are logically prior to it and cannot be either proved by corroborative experience or disproved by experience to the contrary ..."*

And if this does not do justice to a full exposition of the phantasmagoria of von Mises' *a priorism*, the reader may take some joy (or horror) from the following statement:

> *"If a contradiction appears between a theory and experience, **we must always assume** that a condition pre-supposed by the theory was not present, or else there is some error in our observation. The disagreement between the theory and the facts of experience frequently forces us to think through the problems of the theory again. **But so long as a rethinking of the theory uncovers no errors in our thinking, we are not entitled to doubt its truth**"* [emphasis added — the quotes presented here are cited in **Ideology and Method in Economics** by Homa Katouzian, pp. 39–40]

In other words, if reality is in conflict with your ideas, do not adjust your views because reality must be at fault! The scientific method would be to revise the theory in light of the facts. It is not scientific to reject the facts in light of the theory! This anti-scientific perspective is at the heart of his economics as experience *"can never . .. prove or disprove any particular theorem"*:

> *"What assigns economics to its peculiar and unique position in the orbit of pure knowledge and of the practical utilisation of knowledge is the fact that its particular theorems are not open to any verification or falsification on the grounds of experience ..... The ultimate yardstick of an economic theorem's correct-*



*is bound to respect. **What** is a thing. **Who** is a person. Things have no claims; they exist only to be claimed. The possession of a right cannot be predicted of dead material, but only a living person."*[quoted by Wm. Gary Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 73]

This, we must note, is the fundamental critique of the capitalist theory that capital is productive. In and of themselves, fixed costs do not create value. Rather value is creation depends on how investments are developed and used once in place. Because of this the Individualist Anarchists, like other anarchists, considered non-labour derived income as usury, unlike "anarcho"-capitalists. Similarly, anarchists reject the notion of capitalist property rights in favour of possession (including the full fruits of one's labour). For example, anarchists reject private ownership of land in favour of a "occupancy and use" regime. In this we follow Proudhon's **What is Property?** and argue that *"property is theft"*. Rothbard, as noted, rejected this perspective.

As these ideas are an **essential** part of anarchist politics, they cannot be removed without seriously damaging the rest of the theory. This can be seen from Tucker's comments that *"**Liberty** insists... [on] the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no more exploitation of man by man."* [cited by Eunice Schuster in **Native American Anarchism**, p. 140]. He indicates that anarchism has specific economic **and** political ideas, that it opposes capitalism along with the state. Therefore anarchism was never purely a "political" concept, but always combined an opposition to oppression with an opposition to exploitation. The social anarchists made exactly the same point. Which means that when Tucker argued that *"**Liberty** insists on Socialism... — true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalence on earth of Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity"* he knew exactly what he was saying and meant it wholeheartedly. [**Instead of a Book**, p. 363]

of the land being its ruler suggests a political aspect to the ideology best left unexplored? Given that the idea of grounding rulership on land ownership receded during the Middle Ages, it may be unwise to note that under "anarcho"-capitalism the landlord and capitalist would, likewise, be sovereign over the land **and** those who used it? As we noted in section 1, this is the conclusion that Rothbard does draw. As such, there **is** a political aspect to this difference.

Moreover. *"the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production."* [Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 934] For there are *"two ways of oppressing men: either directly by brute force, by physical violence; or indirectly by denying them the means of life and this reducing them to a state of surrender."* In the second case, government is *"an organised instrument to ensure that dominion and privilege will be in the hands of those who ... have cornered all the means of life, first and foremost the land, which they make use of to keep the people in bondage and to make them work for their benefit."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 21] Privatising the coercive functions of said government hardly makes much difference.

Of course, Rothbard is simply skimming the surface. There are two main ways "anarcho"-capitalists differ from individualist anarchists. The first one is the fact that the individualist anarchists are socialists. The second is on whether equality is essential or not to anarchism. Each will be discussed in turn.

Unlike both Individualist (and social) anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists support capitalism (a "pure" free market type, which has never existed although it has been approximated occasionally). This means that they reject totally the ideas of anarchists with regards to property and economic analysis. For example, like all supporters of capitalists they consider rent, profit and interest as valid incomes. In contrast, all Anarchists consider these as exploitation and agree with the Individualist Anarchist Benjamin Tucker when he argued that *"[w]hoever contributes to production is alone entitled. **What** has no rights that **who***



> *ness or incorrectness is solely reason unaided by experience."* [**Human Action**, p. 858]

Von Mises rejects the scientific approach as do all Austrian Economists. Murray Rothbard states approvingly that *"Mises indeed held not only that economic theory does not need to be 'tested' by historical fact but also that it **cannot** be so tested."* [*"Praxeology: The Methodology of Austrian Economics"* in **The Foundation of Modern Austrian Economics**, p. 32] Similarly, von Hayek wrote that economic theories can *"never be verified or falsified by reference to facts. All that we can and must verify is the presence of our assumptions in the particular case."* [**Individualism and Economic Order**, p. 73]

This may seen somewhat strange to non-Austrians. How can we ignore reality when deciding whether a theory is a good one or not? If we cannot evaluate our ideas, how can we consider them anything bar dogma? The Austrian's maintain that we cannot use historical evidence because every historical situation is unique. Thus we cannot use *"complex heterogeneous historical facts as if they were repeatable homogeneous facts"* like those in a scientist's experiment [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, p. 33]. While such a position **does** have an element of truth about it, the extreme *a priorism* that is drawn from this element is radically false (just as extreme empiricism is also false, but for different reasons).

Those who hold such a position ensure that their ideas cannot be evaluated beyond logical analysis. As Rothbard makes clear, *"since praxeology begins with a true axiom, A, all that can be deduced from this axiom must also be true. For if A implies be, and A is true, then B must also be true."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 19–20] But such an approach makes the search for truth a game without rules. The Austrian economists (and other right-libertarians) who use this method are free to theorise anything they want, without such irritating constrictions as facts, statistics, data, history or experimental confirmation. Their only guide is logic.

But this is no different from what religions do when they assert the logical existence of God. Theories ungrounded in facts and data are easily spun into any belief a person wants. Starting assumptions and trains of logic may contain inaccuracies so small as to be undetectable, yet will yield entirely false conclusions.

In addition, trains of logic may miss things which are only brought to light by actual experiences (after all, the human mind is not all knowing or all seeing). To ignore actual experience is to loose that input when evaluating a theory. Hence our comments on the irrelevance of the assumptions used — the methodology is such that incomplete or incorrect assumptions or steps cannot be identified in light of experience. This is because one way of discovering if a given chain of logic requires checking is to test its conclusions against available evidence (although von Mises did argue that the *"ultimate yardstick"* was *"solely reason unaided by experience"*). If we **do** take experience into account and rethink a given theory in the light of contradictory evidence, the problem remains that a given logical chain may be correct, but incomplete or concentrate on or stress inappropriate factors. In other words, our logical deductions may be correct but our starting place or steps wrong and as the facts are to be rejected in the light of the deductive method, we cannot revise our ideas.

Indeed, this approach could result in discarding (certain forms of) human behaviour as irrelevant (which the Austrian system claims using empirical evidence does). For there are too many variables that can have an influence upon individual acts to yield conclusive results explaining human behaviour. Indeed, the deductive approach may ignore as irrelevant certain human motivations which have a decisive impact on an outcome. There could be a strong tendency to project "right-libertarian person" onto the rest of society and history, for example, and draw inappropriate insights into the way human society works or has worked. This can be seen,



*circumstances, and the penalty or damage to be inflicted because of its infraction … under Anarchism the law … will be regarded as* ***just*** *in proportion to its flexibility, instead of now in proportion to its rigidity."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 160–1] In others, the law will evolve to take into account changing social circumstances and, as a consequence, public opinion on specific events and rights. Tucker's position is fundamentally **democratic** and evolutionary while Rothbard's is autocratic and fossilised.

On the land question, Rothbard opposed the individualist position of "occupancy and use" as it *"would automatically abolish all rent payments for land."* Which was **precisely** why the individualist anarchists advocated it! In a predominantly rural economy, this would result in a significant levelling of income and social power as well as bolstering the bargaining position of non-land workers by reducing unemployment. He bemoans that landlords cannot charge rent on their *"justly-acquired private property"* without noticing that is begging the question as anarchists deny that this is *"justly-acquired"* land. Unsurprising, Rothbard considers *"the property theory"* of land ownership as John Locke's, ignoring the fact that the first self-proclaimed anarchist book was written to refute that kind of theory. His argument simply shows how far from anarchism his ideology is. For Rothbard, it goes without saying that the landlord's *"freedom of contract"* tops the worker's freedom to control their own work and live and, of course, their right to life. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 8 and p. 9] However, for anarchists, *"the land is indispensable to our existence, consequently a common thing, consequently insusceptible of appropriation."* [Proudhon, **What is Property?**, p. 107]

The reason question is why Rothbard considers this a **political** difference rather than an economic one. Unfortunately, he does not explain. Perhaps because of the underlying **socialist** perspective behind the anarchist position? Or perhaps the fact that feudalism and monarchism was based on the owner

> nature of things have some precedents guiding them in their instructions to a jury. But since no case is exactly the same, a jury would have considerable say about the heinousness of the offence in each case, realising that circumstances alter cases, and prescribing penalty accordingly. This appeared to Spooner and Tucker to be a more flexible and equitable administration of justice possible or feasible, human beings being what they are.…
>
> "But when Mr. Rothbard quibbles about the jurisprudential ideas of Spooner and Tucker, and at the same time upholds **presumably in his courts** the very economic evils which are at bottom the very reason for human contention and conflict, he would seem to be a man who chokes at a gnat while swallowing a camel." [quoted by Mildred J. Loomis and Mark A. Sullivan, *"Laurance Labadie: Keeper Of The Flame"*, pp. 116–30, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 124]

In other words, to exclude the general population from any say in the law and how it changes is hardly a *"minor"* difference! Particularly if you are proposing an economic system which is based on inequalities of wealth, power and influence and the means of accumulating more. It is like a supporter of the state saying that it is a *"minor"* difference if you favour a dictatorship rather than a democratically elected government. As Tucker argued, *"it is precisely in the tempering of the rigidity of enforcement that one of the chief excellences of Anarchism consists … under Anarchism all rules and laws will be little more than suggestions for the guidance of juries, and that all disputes … will be submitted to juries which will judge not only the facts but the law, the justice of the law, its applicability to the given*



for example, in attempts to claim pre-capitalist societies as examples of "anarcho"-capitalism in action.

Moreover, deductive reasoning cannot indicate the relative significance of assumptions or theoretical factors. That requires empirical study. It could be that a factor considered important in the theory actually turns out to have little effect in practice and so the derived axioms are so weak as to be seriously misleading.

In such a purely ideal realm, observation and experience are distrusted (when not ignored) and instead theory is the lodestone. Given the bias of most theorists in this tradition, it is unsurprising that this style of economics can always be trusted to produce results proving free markets to be the finest principle of social organisation. And, as an added bonus, reality can be ignored as it is **never** "pure" enough according to the assumptions required by the theory. It could be argued, because of this, that many right-libertarians insulate their theories from criticism by refusing to test them or acknowledge the results of such testing (indeed, it could also be argued that much of right-libertarianism is more a religion than a political theory as it is set-up in such a way that it is either true or false, with this being determined not by evaluating facts but by whether you accept the assumptions and logical chains presented with them).

Strangely enough, while dismissing the "testability" of theories many right-Libertarians (including Murray Rothbard) **do** investigate historical situations and claim them as examples of how well their ideas work in practice. But why does historical fact suddenly become useful when it can be used to bolster the right-Libertarian argument? Any such example is just as "complex" as any other and the good results indicated may not be accountable to the assumptions and steps of the theory but to other factors totally ignored by it. If economic (or other) theory is untestable then **no** conclusions can be drawn from history, including claims for the superiority of laissez-faire capitalism.

You cannot have it both ways — although we doubt that right-libertarians will stop using history as evidence that their ideas work.

Perhaps the Austrian desire to investigate history is not so strange after all. Clashes with reality make a-priori deductive systems implode as the falsifications run back up the deductive changes to shatter the structure built upon the original axioms. Thus the desire to find **some** example which proves their ideology must be tremendous. However, the deductive a-priori methodology makes them unwilling to admit to being mistaken — hence their attempts to downplay examples which refute their dogmas. Thus we have the desire for historical examples while at the same time they have extensive ideological justifications that ensure reality only enters their world-view when it agrees with them. In practice, the latter wins as real-life refuses to be boxed into their dogmas and deductions.

Of course it is sometimes argued that it is **complex** data that is the problem. Let use assume that this is the case. It is argued that when dealing with complex information it is impossible to use aggregate data without first having more simple assumptions (i.e. that "humans act"). Due to the complexity of the situation, it is argued, it is impossible to aggregate data because this hides the individual activities that creates it. Thus "complex" data cannot be used to invalidate assumptions or theories. Hence, according to Austrians, the axioms derived from the "simple fact" that "humans act" are the only basis for thinking about the economy.

Such a position is false in two ways.

Firstly, the aggregation of data **does** allow us to understand complex systems. If we look at a chair, we cannot find out whether it is comfortable, its colour, whether it is soft or hard by looking at the atoms that make it up. To suggest that you can is to imply the existence of green, soft, comfortable atoms. Similarly with gases. They are composed to countless individual atoms but scientists do not study them by looking at those



not isolated from economics. As David Wieck put it, Rothbard *"writes of society as though some part of it (government) can be extracted and replaced by another arrangement while other things go on before, and he constructs a system of police and judicial power without any consideration of the influence of historical and economic context."* [*"Anarchist Justice,"* in **Nomos XIX**, Pennock and Chapman, eds., p. 227]

Unsurprisingly, the political differences he highlights **are** significant, namely *"the role of law and the jury system"* and *"the land question."* The former difference relates to the fact that the individualist anarchists *"allow[ed] each individual free-market court, and more specifically, each free-market jury, totally free rein over judicial decision."* This horrified Rothbard. The reason is obvious, as it allows real people to judge the law as well as the facts, modifying the former as society changes and evolves. For Rothbard, the idea that ordinary people should have a say in the law is dismissed. Rather, *"it would not be a very difficult task for Libertarian lawyers and jurists to arrive at a rational and objective code of libertarian legal principles and procedures."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 7–8] Of course, the fact that *"lawyers"* and *"jurists"* may have a radically different idea of what is just than those subject to their laws is not raised by Rothbard, never mind answered. While Rothbard notes that juries may defend the people against the state, the notion that they may defend the people against the authority and power of the rich is not even raised. That is why the rich have tended to oppose juries as well as popular assemblies.

Unsurprisingly, the few individualist anarchists that remained pointed this out. Laurance Labadie, the son of Tucker associate Joseph Labadie, argued in response to Rothbard as follows:

> "Mere common sense would suggest that any court would be influenced by experience; and any free-market court or judge would in the very

arguments can easily pass for convincing when they are on the same side as the prevailing sentiment and social system. And, of course, there is the utility of such theories for ruling elites — *"[a]n ideological defence of privileges, exploitation, and private power will be welcomed, regardless of its merits."* [Noam Chomsky, **The Chomsky Reader**, p. 188] #secf14

## 1.4 Is "anarcho"-capitalism a new form of individualist anarchism?

Some "anarcho"-capitalists shy away from the term, preferring such expressions as "market anarchist" or "individualist anarchist." This suggests that there is some link between their ideology and that of Tucker. However, the founder of "anarcho"-capitalism, Murray Rothbard, refused that label for, while *"strongly tempted,"* he could not do so because *"Spooner and Tucker have in a sense pre-empted that name for their doctrine and that from that doctrine I have certain differences."* Somewhat incredibly Rothbard argued that on the whole politically *"these differences are minor,"* economically *"the differences are substantial, and this means that my view of the consequences of putting our more of less common system into practice is very far from theirs."* [*"The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View"*, **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 7]

What an understatement! Individualist anarchists advocated an economic system in which there would have been very little inequality of wealth and so of power (and the accumulation of capital would have been minimal without profit, interest and rent). Removing this social and economic basis would result in **substantially** different political regimes. This can be seen from the fate of Viking Iceland, where a substantially communal and anarchistic system was destroyed from within by increasing inequality and the rise of tenant farming (see section 9 for details). In other words, politics is



atoms and their actions. Within limits, this is also valid for human action. For example, it would be crazy to maintain from historical data that interest rates will be a certain percentage a week but it is valid to maintain that interest rates are known to be related to certain variables in certain ways. Or that certain experiences will tend to result in certain forms of psychological damage. General tendencies and "rules of thumb" can be evolved from such study and these can be used to **guide** current practice and theory. By aggregating data you can produce valid information, rules of thumb, theories and evidence which would be lost if you concentrated on "simple data" (such as "humans act"). Therefore, empirical study produces facts which vary across time and place, and yet underlying and important patterns can be generated (patterns which can be evaluated against **new** data and improved upon).

Secondly, the simple actions themselves influence and are influenced in turn by overall (complex) facts. People act in different ways in different circumstances (something we can agree with Austrians about, although we refuse to take it to their extreme position of rejecting empirical evidence as such). To use simple acts to understand complex systems means to miss the fact that these acts are not independent of their circumstances. For example, to claim that the capitalist market is "just" the resultant of bilateral exchanges ignores the fact that the market activity shapes the nature and form of these bilateral exchanges. The "simple" data is dependent on the "complex" system — and so the complex system **cannot** be understood by looking at the simple actions in isolation. To do so would be to draw incomplete and misleading conclusions (and it is due to these interrelations that we argue that aggregate data should be used critically). This is particularly important when looking at capitalism, where the "simple" acts of exchange in the labour market are dependent upon and shaped by circumstances outside these acts.

So to claim that (complex) data cannot be used to evaluate a theory is false. Data can be useful when seeing whether a theory is confirmed by reality. This is the nature of the scientific method — you compare the results expected by your theory to the facts and if they do not match you check your facts **and** check your theory. This may involve revising the assumptions, methodology and theories you use if the evidence is such as to bring them into question. For example, if you claim that capitalism is based on freedom but that the net result of capitalism is to produce relations of domination between people then it would be valid to revise, for example, your definition of freedom rather than deny that domination restricts freedom (see section 2 on this). But if actual experience is to be distrusted when evaluating theory, we effectively place ideology above people — after all, how the ideology affects people in **practice** is irrelevant as experiences cannot be used to evaluate the (logically sound but actually deeply flawed) theory.

Moreover, there is a slight arrogance in the "Austrian" dismissal of empirical evidence. If, as they argue, the economy is just too complex to allow us to generalise from experience then how can one person comprehend it sufficiently to create an economic ideology as the Austrian's suggest? Surely no one mind (or series of minds) can produce a model which accurately reflects such a complex system? To suggest that one can deduce a theory for an exceedingly complex social system from the theoretical work based on an analysis technique which deliberately ignores that reality as being unreliable seems to require a deliberate suspension of one's reasoning faculties. Of course, it may be argued that such a task is possible, given a small enough subset of economic activity. However, such a process is sure to lead its practitioners astray as the subset is not independent of the whole and, consequently, can be influenced in ways the ideologist does not (indeed, cannot) take into account. Simply put, even the greatest mind cannot comprehend the complexities of real life and so empirical evidence needs to



Hence W. Duncan Reekie's argument (quoting leading Austrian economist Israel Kirzner) that *"empirical work 'has the function of establishing the **applicability** of particular theorems, and thus **illustrating** their operation' ... Confirmation of theory is not possible because there is no constants in human action, nor is it necessary because theorems themselves describe relationships logically developed from hypothesised conditions. Failure of a logically derived axiom to fit the facts does not render it invalid, rather it 'might merely indicate inapplicability' to the circumstances of the case.'"* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 31]

So, if facts confirm your theory, your theory is right. If facts do not confirm your theory, it is still right but just not applicable in this case! Which has the handy side effect of ensuring that facts can **only** be used to support the ideology, **never** to refute it (which is, according to this perspective, impossible anyway). As Karl Popper argued, a *"theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific."* [**Conjectures and Refutations**, p. 36] In other words (as we noted above), if reality contradicts your theory, ignore reality!

Kropotkin hoped *"that those who believe in [current economic doctrines] will themselves become convinced of their error as soon as they come to see the necessity of verifying their quantitative deductions by quantitative investigation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 178] However, the Austrian approach builds so many barriers to this that it is doubtful that this will occur. Indeed, right-libertarianism, with its focus on exchange rather than its consequences, seems to be based upon justifying domination in terms of their deductions than analysing what freedom actually means in terms of human existence (see section 2 for a fuller discussion).

The real question is why are such theories taken seriously and arouse such interest. Why are they not simply dismissed out of hand, given their methodology and the authoritarian conclusions they produce? The answer is, in part, that feeble

subject to the regime maximise their utility by keeping quiet and not protesting. Given this, von Mises' praise for fascism in the 1920s may be less contradictory than it first appears (see section 6.5) as it successfully "deterred democracy" by crushing the labour, socialist and anarchist movements across the world.

So, von Mises, von Hayek and most right-libertarians reject the scientific method in favour of ideological correctness — if the facts contradict your theory then they can be dismissed as too "complex" or "unique". Facts, however, should inform theory and any theory's methodology should take this into account. To dismiss facts out of hand is to promote dogma. This is not to suggest that a theory should be modified very time new data comes along — that would be crazy as unique situations **do** exist, data can be wrong and so forth — but it does suggest that if your theory **continually** comes into conflict with reality, its time to rethink the theory and not assume that facts cannot invalidate it. A true libertarian would approach a contradiction between reality and theory by evaluating the facts available and changing the theory is this is required, not by ignoring reality or dismissing it as "complex".

Thus, much of right-Libertarian theory is neither libertarian nor scientific. Much of right-libertarian thought is highly axiomatic, being logically deduced from such starting axioms as *"self-ownership"* or *"no one should initiate force against another"*. Hence the importance of our discussion of von Mises as this indicates the dangers of this approach, namely the tendency to ignore/dismiss the consequences of these logical chains and, indeed, to justify them in terms of these axioms rather than from the facts. In addition, the methodology used is such as that it would be fair to argue that right-libertarians get to critique reality but reality can never be used to critique right-libertarianism — for any empirical data presented as evidence as be dismissed as "too complex" or "unique" and so irrelevant (unless it can be used to support their claims, of course).



inform any theory seeking to describe and explain it. To reject it is simply to retreat into dogmatism and ideology, which is precisely what right-wing libertarians generally do.

Ultimately, this dismissal of empirical evidence seems little more than self-serving. It's utility to the ideologist is obvious. It allows them to speculate to their hearts content, building models of the economy with no bearing to reality. Their models and the conclusions it generates need never be bothered with reality — nor the effects of their dogma. Which shows its utility to the powerful. It allows them to spout comments like "the free market benefits all" while the rich get richer and allows them to brush aside any one who points out such troublesome facts.

That this position is self-serving can be seen from the fact that most right libertarians are very selective about applying von Mises' argument. As a rule of thumb, it is only applied when the empirical evidence goes against capitalism. In such circumstances the fact that the current system is not a free market will also be mentioned. However, if the evidence seems to bolster the case for propertarianism then empirical evidence becomes all the rage. Needless to say, the fact that we do not have a free market will be conveniently forgotten. Depending on the needs of the moment, fundamental facts are dropped and retrieved to bolster the ideology.

As we indicated above (in section 1.2) and will discuss in more depth later (in section 11) most of the leading right-Libertarian theorists base themselves on such deductive methodologies, starting from assumptions and "logically" drawing conclusions from them. The religious undertones of such methodology can best be seen from the roots of right-Libertarian "Natural law" theory.

Carole Pateman, in her analysis of Liberal contract theory, indicates the religious nature of the "Natural Law" argument so loved by the theorists of the "Radical Right." She notes that for Locke (the main source of the Libertarian Right's Natural Law cult) *"natural law"* was equivalent of *"God's Law"* and that

*"God's law exists externally to and independently of individuals."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 154] No role for critical thought there, only obedience. Most modern day "Natural Law" supporters forget to mention this religious undercurrent and instead talk of about "Nature" (or "the market") as the deity that creates Law, not God, in order to appear "rational." So much for science.

Such a basis in dogma and religion can hardly be a firm foundation for liberty and indeed "Natural Law" is marked by a deep authoritarianism:

> *"Locke's traditional view of natural law provided individual's with an external standard which they could recognise, but which they did not voluntarily choose to order their political life."* [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

In section 11 we discuss the authoritarian nature of "Natural Law" and will not do so here. However, here we must point out the political conclusions Locke draws from his ideas. In Pateman's words, Locke believed that *"obedience lasts only as long as protection. His individuals are able to take action themselves to remedy their political lot... but this does not mean, as is often assumed, that Locke's theory gives direct support to present-day arguments for a right of civil disobedience... His theory allows for two alternatives only: either people go peacefully about their daily affairs under the protection of a liberal, constitutional government, or they are in revolt against a government which has ceased to be 'liberal' and has become arbitrary and tyrannical, so forfeiting its right to obedience."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 77]

Locke's "rebellion" exists purely to reform a **new** 'liberal' government, not to change the existing socio-economic structure which the 'liberal' government exists to protect. His theory, therefore, indicates the results of a priorism, namely a denial of any form of social dissent which may change the "natural law" as defined by Locke. This perspective can be found



in Rothbard who lambasted the individualist anarchists for arguing that juries should judge the law as well as the facts. For Rothbard, the law would be drawn up by jurists and lawyers, not ordinary people (see section 1.4 for details). The idea that those subject to laws should have a say in forming them is rejected in favour of elite rule. As von Mises put it:

> *"The flowering of human society depends on two factors: the intellectual power of outstanding men to conceive sound social and economic theories, and the ability of these or other men to make these ideologies palatable to the majority."* [**Human Action**, p. 864]

Yet such a task would require massive propaganda work and would only, ultimately, succeed by removing the majority from any say in the running of society. Once that is done then we have to believe that the ruling elite will be altruistic in the extreme and not abuse their position to create laws and processes which defended what **they** thought was "legitimate" property, property rights and what constitutes "aggression." Which, ironically, contradicts the key capitalist notion that people are driven by self-gain. The obvious conclusion from such argument is that any right-libertarian regime would have to exclude change. If people can change the regime they are under they may change it in ways that right libertarian's do not support. The provision for ending amendments to the regime or the law would effectively ban most opposition groups or parties as, by definition, they could do nothing once in office (for minimal state "libertarians") or in the market for "defence" agencies (for "anarcho"-capitalists). How this differs from a dictatorship is hard to say — after all, most dictatorships have parliamentary bodies which have no power but which can talk a lot. Perhaps the knowledge that it is **private** police enforcing **private** power will make those

> *taking possession of what they consider unjustly appropriated by the few... . The Spencerian party [proto-right-libertarians] perfectly well understand that; and while they advocate no force for changing the existing conditions, they advocate still more force than is now used for maintaining them. As to Anarchy, it is obviously as incompatible with plutocracy as with any other kind of -cracy."* [**Anarchism and Anarchist Communism**, pp. 52–53]

Because of this need to defend privilege and power, "anarcho"-capitalism is best called "private-state" capitalism. This will be discussed in more detail in section 6.

By advocating private property, right libertarians contradict many of their other claims. For example, they say that they support the right of individuals to travel where they like. They make this claim because they assume that only the state limits free travel. But this is a false assumption. Owners must agree to let you on their land or property (*"people only have the right to move to those properties and lands where the owners desire to rent or sell to them."* [Murray Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 119]. There is no "freedom of travel" onto private property (including private roads). Therefore immigration may be just as hard under "anarcho"-capitalism as it is under statism (after all, the state, like the property owner, only lets people in whom it wants to let in). People will still have to get another property owner to agree to let them in before they can travel — exactly as now (and, of course, they also have to get the owners of the road to let them in as well). Private property, as can be seen from this simple example, is the state writ small.

One last point, this ignoring of ("politically incorrect") economic and other views of dead political thinkers and activists while claiming them as "libertarians" seems to be commonplace in right-Libertarian circles. For example, Aris-



All in all, the right-Libertarian concept of freedom is lacking. For an ideology that takes the name "Libertarianism" it is seems happy to ignore actual liberty and instead concentrate on an abstract form of liberty which ignores so many sources of unfreedom as to narrow the concept until it becomes little more than a justification for authoritarianism. This can be seen from right-Libertarian attitudes about private property and its effects on liberty (as discussed in the next section). #secf22

## 2.2 How does private property affect freedom?

The right-libertarian does not address or even acknowledge that the (absolute) right of private property may lead to extensive control by property owners over those who use, but do not own, property (such as workers and tenants). Thus a free-market capitalist system leads to a very selective and class-based protection of "rights" and "freedoms." For example, under capitalism, the "freedom" of employers inevitably conflicts with the "freedom" of employees. When stockholders or their managers exercise their "freedom of enterprise" to decide how their company will operate, they violate their employee's right to decide how their labouring capacities will be utilised. In other words, under capitalism, the "property rights" of employers will conflict with and restrict the "human right" of employees to manage themselves. Capitalism allows the right of self-management only to the few, not to all. Or, alternatively, capitalism does not recognise certain human rights as **universal** which anarchism does.

This can be seen from Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie's defence of wage labour. While referring to *"intra-firm labour markets"* as *"hierarchies"*, Reekie (in his best *ex cathedra* tone) states that *"[t]here is nothing authoritarian, dictatorial or exploitative in the relationship. Employees order employers to pay them amounts specified in the hiring contract just as much as employers order employees to abide by the terms of*

*the contract.*" [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 136, p. 137]. Given that *"the terms of contract"* involve the worker agreeing to obey the employers orders and that they will be fired if they do not, its pretty clear that the ordering that goes on in the *"intra-firm labour market"* is decidedly **one way**. Bosses have the power, workers are paid to obey. And this begs the question, **if** the employment contract creates a free worker, why must she abandon her liberty during work hours?

Reekie actually recognises this lack of freedom in a "round about" way when he notes that *"employees in a firm at any level in the hierarchy can exercise an entrepreneurial role. The area within which that role can be carried out increases the more authority the employee has."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 142] Which means workers **are** subject to control from above which restricts the activities they are allowed to do and so they are **not** free to act, make decisions, participate in the plans of the organisation, to create the future and so forth within working hours. And it is strange that while recognising the firm as a hierarchy, Reekie tries to deny that it is authoritarian or dictatorial — as if you could have a hierarchy without authoritarian structures or an unelected person in authority who is not a dictator. His confusion is shared by Austrian guru Ludwig von Mises, who asserts that the *"entrepreneur and capitalist are not irresponsible autocrats"* because they are *"unconditionally subject to the sovereignty of the consumer"* while, **on the next page**, admitting there is a *"managerial hierarchy"* which contains *"the average subordinate employee."* [**Human Action**, p. 809 and p. 810] It does not enter his mind that the capitalist may be subject to some consumer control while being an autocrat to their subordinated employees. Again, we find the right-"libertarian" acknowledging that the capitalist managerial structure is a hierarchy and workers are subordinated while denying it is autocratic to the workers! Thus we have "free" workers within a relationship distinctly **lacking** freedom (in the sense of self-



impact on current freedom but by looking at past history. This has the interesting side effect of allowing its supporters to look at capitalist and statist hierarchies, acknowledge their similar negative effects on the liberty of those subjected to them but argue that one is legitimate and the other is not simply because of their history! As if this changed the domination and unfreedom that both inflict on people living today (see section 2.3 for further discussion and sections 2.8 and 4.2 for other examples of "justly acquired" property producing terrible consequences).

The defence of capitalist property does have one interesting side effect, namely the need arises to defend inequality and the authoritarian relationships inequality creates. In order to protect the private property needed by capitalists in order to continue exploiting the working class, "anarcho"-capitalists propose private security forces rather than state security forces (police and military) — a proposal that is equivalent to bringing back the state under another name.

Due to (capitalist) private property, wage labour would still exist under "anarcho"-capitalism (it is capitalism after all). This means that "defensive" force, a state, is required to "defend" exploitation, oppression, hierarchy and authority from those who suffer them. Inequality makes a mockery of free agreement and "consent" (see section 3.1). As Peter Kropotkin pointed out long ago:

> *"When a workman sells his labour to an employer … it is a mockery to call that a free contract. Modern economists may call it free, but the father of political economy — Adam Smith — was never guilty of such a misrepresentation. As long as three-quarters of humanity are compelled to enter into agreements of that description, force is, of course, necessary, both to enforce the supposed agreements and to maintain such a state of things. Force — and a good deal of force — is necessary to prevent the labourers from*

> *this system a set of holdings of different people are judged to be just (or unjust) by looking at past history, and not by checking the consequences of that set of holdings. But what if the consequences are recognisably terrible? .. .[R]efer[ing] to some empirical findings in a work on famines ... evidence [is presented] to indicate that in many large famines in the recent past, in which millions of people have died, there was no over-all decline in food availability at all, and the famines occurred precisely because of shifts in entitlement resulting from exercises of rights that are perfectly legitimate... . [Can] famines ... occur with a system of rights of the kind morally defended in various ethical theories, including Nozick's. I believe the answer is straightforwardly yes, since for many people the only resource that they legitimately possess, viz. their labour-power, may well turn out to be unsaleable in the market, giving the person no command over food ... [i]f results such as starvations and famines were to occur, would the distribution of holdings still be morally acceptable despite their disastrous consequences? There is something deeply implausible in the affirmative answer.*" [**Resources, Values and Development**, pp. 311–2]

Thus "unrestricted" property rights can have seriously bad consequences and so the existence of "justly held" property need not imply a just or free society — far from it. The inequalities property can generate can have a serious on individual freedom (see section 3.1). Indeed, Murray Rothbard argued that the state was evil not because it restricted individual freedom but because the resources it claimed to own were not "justly" acquired. Thus right-libertarian theory judges property **not** on its



government) — a strange paradox. Indeed, if your personal life were as closely monitored and regulated as the work life of millions of people across the world, you would rightly consider it oppression.

Perhaps Reekie (like most right-libertarians) will maintain that workers voluntarily agree ("consent") to be subject to the bosses dictatorship (he writes that *"each will only enter into the contractual agreement known as a firm if each believes he will be better off thereby. The firm is simply another example of mutually beneficial exchange"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 137]). However, this does not stop the relationship being authoritarian or dictatorial (and so exploitative as it is **highly** unlikely that those at the top will not abuse their power). And as we argue further in the next section (and also see sections B.4, 3.1 and 10.2), in a capitalist society workers have the option of finding a job or facing abject poverty and/or starvation.

Little wonder, then, that people "voluntarily" sell their labour and "consent" to authoritarian structures! They have little option to do otherwise. So, **within** the labour market, workers **can** and **do** seek out the best working conditions possible, but that does not mean that the final contract agreed is "freely" accepted and not due to the force of circumstances, that both parties have equal bargaining power when drawing up the contract or that the freedom of both parties is ensured. Which means to argue (as many right-libertarians do) that freedom cannot be restricted by wage labour because people enter into relationships they consider will lead to improvements over their initial situation totally misses the points. As the initial situation is not considered relevant, their argument fails. After all, agreeing to work in a sweatshop 14 hours a day **is** an improvement over starving to death — but it does not mean that those who so agree are free when working there or actually **want** to be there. They are not and it is the circumstances, created and enforced by the law, that have ensured that they "consent" to such a regime (given the

chance, they would desire to **change** that regime but cannot as this would violate their bosses property rights and they would be repressed for trying).

So the right-wing "libertarian" right is interested only in a narrow concept of freedom (rather than in "freedom" or "liberty" as such). This can be seen in the argument of Ayn Rand (a leading ideologue of "libertarian" capitalism) that *"**Freedom**, in a political context, means freedom from government coercion. It does **not** mean freedom from the landlord, or freedom from the employer, or freedom from the laws of nature which do not provide men with automatic prosperity. It means freedom from the coercive power of the state — and nothing else!"* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 192] By arguing in this way, right libertarians ignore the vast number of authoritarian social relationships that exist in capitalist society and, as Rand does here, imply that these social relationships are like "the laws of nature." However, if one looks at the world without prejudice but with an eye to maximising freedom, the major coercive institution is seen to be not the state but capitalist social relationships (as indicated in section B.4).

The right "libertarian," then, far from being a defender of freedom, is in fact a keen defender of certain forms of authority and domination. As Peter Kropotkin noted, the *"modern Individualism initiated by Herbert Spencer is, like the critical theory of Proudhon, a powerful indictment against the dangers and wrongs of government, but its practical solution of the social problem is miserable — so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of 'No force' be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 98]

To defend the "freedom" of property owners is to defend authority and privilege — in other words, statism. So, in considering the concept of liberty as "freedom from," it is clear that by defending private property (as opposed to possession) the "anarcho"-capitalist is defending the power and authority of property owners to govern those who use "their" property.



> such owners… the more 'free people and good patriots' has the State.
>
> "Political liberalism, like everything religious, counts on **respect,** humaneness, the virtues of love… . For in practice people respect nothing, and everyday the small possessions are bought up again by greater proprietors, and the 'free people' change into day labourers." [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 248]

Thus "anarcho"-capitalists reject totally one of the common (and so defining) features of all anarchist traditions — the opposition to capitalist property. From Individualist Anarchists like Tucker to Communist-Anarchists like Bookchin, anarchists have been opposed to what Godwin termed *"accumulated property."* This was because it was in *"direct contradiction"* to property in the form of *"the produce of his [the worker's] own industry"* and so it allows *"one man… [to] dispos[e] of the produce of another man's industry."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 129–131] Thus, for anarchists, capitalist property is a source exploitation and domination, **not** freedom (it undermines the freedom associated with possession by created relations of domination between owner and employee).

Hardly surprising then the fact that, according to Murray Bookchin, Murray Rothbard *"attacked me [Bookchin] as an anarchist with vigour because, as he put it, I am opposed to private property."* [**The Raven**, no. 29, p. 343]

We will discuss Rothbard's "homesteading" justification of property in the next section. However, we will note here one aspect of right-libertarian defence of "unrestricted" property rights, namely that it easily generates evil side effects such as hierarchy and starvation. As famine expert Amartya Sen notes:

> *"Take a theory of entitlements based on a set of rights of 'ownership, transfer and rectification.' In*

## 4 What is the right-libertarian position on private property?

Right libertarians are not interested in eliminating capitalist private property and thus the authority, oppression and exploitation which goes with it. It is true that they call for an end to the state, but this is not because they are concerned about workers being exploited or oppressed but because they don't want the state to impede capitalists' "freedom" to exploit and oppress workers even more than is the case now!

They make an idol of private property and claim to defend absolute, "unrestricted" property rights (i.e. that property owners can do anything they like with their property, as long as it does not damage the property of others. In particular, taxation and theft are among the greatest evils possible as they involve coercion against "justly held" property). They agree with John Adams that *"[t]he moment that idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the Laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. Property must be sacred or liberty cannot exist."*

But in their celebration of property as the source of liberty they ignore the fact that private property is a source of "tyranny" in itself (see sections B.1 and B.4, for example — and please note that anarchists only object to private property, **not** individual possession, see section B.3.1). However, as much anarchists may disagree about other matters, they are united in condemning private property. Thus Proudhon argued that property was *"theft"* and *"despotism"* while Stirner indicated the religious and statist nature of private property and its impact on individual liberty when he wrote :

> "Property in the civic sense means **sacred** property, such that I must **respect** your property… Be it ever so little, if one only has somewhat of his own — to wit, a **respected** property: The more



And also, we must note, defending all the petty tyrannies that make the work lives of so many people frustrating, stressful and unrewarding.

However, anarchism, by definition, is in favour of organisations and social relationships which are non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian. Otherwise, some people are more free than others. Failing to attack hierarchy leads to massive contradiction. For example, since the British Army is a volunteer one, it is an "anarchist" organisation! (see next section for a discussion on why the "anarcho"-capitalism concept of freedom also allows the state to appear "libertarian").

In other words, "full capitalist property rights" do not protect freedom, in fact they actively deny it. But this lack of freedom is only inevitable if we accept capitalist private property rights. If we reject them, we can try and create a world based on freedom in all aspects of life, rather than just in a few. #secf23

### 2.3 Can "anarcho"-capitalist theory justify the state?

Ironically enough, "anarcho"-capitalist ideology actually allows the state to be justified along with capitalist hierarchy. This is because the reason why capitalist authority is acceptable to the "anarcho"-capitalist is because it is "voluntary" — no one forces the worker to join or remain within a specific company (force of circumstances are irrelevant in this viewpoint). Thus capitalist domination is not really domination at all. But the same can be said of all democratic states as well. Few such states bar exit for its citizens — they are free to leave at any time and join any other state that will have them (exactly as employees can with companies). Of course there **are** differences between the two kinds of authority — anarchists do not deny that — but the similarities are all too clear.

The "anarcho"-capitalist could argue that changing jobs is easier than changing states and, sometimes, this is correct —

but not always. Yes, changing states does require the moving of home and possessions over great distances but so can changing job (indeed, if a worker has to move half-way across a country or even the world to get a job "anarcho"-capitalists would celebrate this as an example of the benefits of a "flexible" labour market). Yes, states often conscript citizens and send them into dangerous situations but bosses often force their employees to accept dangerous working environments on pain of firing. Yes, many states do restrict freedom of association and speech, but so do bosses. Yes, states tax their citizens but landlords and companies only let others use their property if they get money in return (i.e. rent or profits). Indeed, if the employee or tenant does not provide the employer or landlord with enough profits, they will quickly be shown the door. Of course employees can start their own companies but citizens can start their own state if they convince an existing state (the owner of a set of resources) to sell/give land to them. Setting up a company also requires existing owners to sell/give resources to those who need them. Of course, in a democratic state citizens can influence the nature of laws and orders they obey. In a capitalist company, this is not the case.

This means that, logically, "anarcho"-capitalism must consider a series of freely exitable states as "anarchist" and not a source of domination. If consent (not leaving) is what is required to make capitalist domination not domination then the same can be said of statist domination. Stephen L. Newman makes the same point:

> *"The emphasis [right-wing] libertarians place on the opposition of liberty and political power tends to obscure the role of authority in their worldview ... the authority exercised in private relationships, however — in the relationship between employer and employee, for instance — meets with no objection... . [This] reveals a curious insensitivity to the*



option. And, of course, in a system designed to secure the life and liberty of each person, how can it be deemed acceptable to leave the life and protection of even one individual to the charitable whims of others? (Perhaps it will be argued that individual's have the right to life, but not a right to be a parasite. This ignores the fact some people **cannot** work — babies and some handicapped people — and that, in a functioning capitalist economy, many people cannot find work all the time. Is it this recognition of that babies cannot work that prompts many right-libertarians to turn them into property? Of course, rich folk who have never done a days work in their lives are never classed as parasites, even if they inherited all their money). All things considered, little wonder that Proudhon argued that:

> "Even charitable institutions serve the ends of those in authority marvellously well.
>
> "Charity is the strongest chain by which privilege and the Government, bound to protect them, holds down the lower classes. With charity, sweeter to the heart of men, more intelligible to the poor man than the abstruse laws of Political Economy, one may dispense with justice." [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 69–70]

As noted, the right-libertarian (passing) acknowledgement of poverty does not mean that they recognise the existence of market power. They never ask themselves how can someone be free if their social situation is such that they are drowning in a see of usury and have to sell their labour (and so liberty) to survive.

words, their propaganda is based on something that has never existed, and never will, namely an egalitarian capitalist society.

### 3.2 But what about "anarcho"-capitalist support for charity?

Yes, while being blind to impact of inequality in terms of economic and social power and influence, most right-libertarians **do** argue that the very poor could depend on charity in their system. But such a recognition of poverty does not reflect an awareness of the need for equality or the impact of inequality on the agreements we make. Quite the reverse in fact, as the existence of extensive inequality is assumed — after all, in a society of relative equals, poverty would not exist, nor would charity be needed.

Ignoring the fact that their ideology hardly promotes a charitable perspective, we will raise four points. Firstly, charity will not be enough to countermand the existence and impact of vast inequalities of wealth (and so power). Secondly, it will be likely that charities will be concerned with "improving" the moral quality of the poor and so will divide them into the "deserving" (i.e. obedient) and "undeserving" (i.e. rebellious) poor. Charity will be forthcoming to the former, those who agree to busybodies sticking their noses into their lives. In this way charity could become another tool of economic and social power (see Oscar Wilde's **The Soul of Man Under Socialism** for more on charity). Thirdly, it is unlikely that charity will be able to replace all the social spending conducted by the state — to do so would require a ten-fold increase in charitable donations (and given that most right-libertarians denounce the government for making them pay taxes to help the poor, it seems unlikely that they will turn round and **increase** the amount they give). And, lastly, charity is an implicate recognition that, under capitalism, no one has the right of life — its a privilege you have to pay for. That in itself is enough to reject the charity



> *use of private authority as a means of social control. Comparing public and private authority, we might well ask of the [right-wing] libertarians: When the price of exercising one's freedom is terribly high, what practical difference is there between the commands of the state and those issued by one's employer? ... Though admittedly the circumstances are not identical, telling disgruntled empowers that they are always free to leave their jobs seems no different in principle from telling political dissidents that they are free to emigrate.*" [**Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 45–46]

Murray Rothbard, in his own way, agrees:

> *"**If** the State may be said too properly **own** its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there **is** no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. **So long** as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property.*" [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170]

Rothbard's argues that this is **not** the case simply because the state did not acquire its property in a *"just"* manner and that it claims rights over virgin land (both of which violates Rothbard's "homesteading" theory of property — see section 4.1 for details and a critique). Rothbard argues that this defence of statism (the state as property owner) is unrealistic and ahistoric, but his account of the origins of property is equally unrealistic and ahistoric and that does not stop him supporting capitalism. People in glass houses should not throw stones!

Thus he claims that the state is evil and its claims to authority/power false simply because it acquired the resources it claims to own *"unjustly"* — for example, by violence and coercion (see **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 170–1, for Rothbard's attempt to explain why the state should not be considered as the owner of land). And even **if** the state **was** the owner of its territory, it cannot appropriate virgin land (although, as he notes elsewhere, the *"vast"* US frontier no longer exists *"and there is no point crying over the fact"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]).

So what makes hierarchy legitimate for Rothbard is whether the property it derives from was acquired justly or unjustly. Which leads us to a few **very** important points.

Firstly, Rothbard is explicitly acknowledging the similarities between statism and capitalism. He is arguing that **if** the state had developed in a *"just"* way, then it is perfectly justifiable in governing (*"set[ting] down rules"*) those who "consent" to live on its territory in **exactly** the same why a property owner does. In other words, private property can be considered as a "justly" created state! These similarities between property and statism have long been recognised by anarchists and that is why we reject private property along with the state (Proudhon did, after all, note that *"property is despotism"* and well as *"theft"*). But, according to Rothbard, something can look like a state (i.e. be a monopoly of decision making over an area) and act like a state (i.e. set down rules for people, govern them, impose a monopoly of force) but not be a state. But if it looks like a duck and sounds like a duck, it is a duck. Claiming that the origins of the thing are what counts is irrelevant — for example, a cloned duck is just as much a duck as a naturally born one. A statist organisation is authoritarian whether it comes from *"just"* or *"unjust"* origins. Does transforming the ownership of the land from states to capitalists **really** make the relations of domination created by the dispossession of the many less authoritarian and unfree? Of course not.



> *"An 'incentive' is always available in conditions of substantial social inequality that ensure that the 'weak' enter into a contract. When social inequality prevails, questions arises about what counts as voluntary entry into a contract ... Men and women ... are now juridically free and equal citizens, but, in unequal social conditions, the possibility cannot be ruled out that some or many contracts create relationships that bear uncomfortable resemblances to a slave contract."* [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, p. 62]

This ideological confusion of right-libertarianism can also be seen from their opposition to taxation. On the one hand, they argue that taxation is wrong because it takes money from those who "earn" it and gives it to the poor. On the other hand, "free market" capitalism is assumed to be a more equal society! If taxation takes from the rich and gives to the poor, how will "anarcho"-capitalism be more egalitarian? That equalisation mechanism would be gone (of course, it could be claimed that all great riches are purely the result of state intervention skewing the "free market" but that places all their "rags to riches" stories in a strange position). Thus we have a problem, either we have relative equality or we do not. Either we have riches, and so market power, or we do not. And its clear from the likes of Rothbard, "anarcho"-capitalism will not be without its millionaires (there is, after all, apparently nothing unlibertarian about *"organisation, hierarchy, wage-work, granting of funds by libertarian millionaires, and a libertarian party"*). And so we are left with market power and so extensive unfreedom.

Thus, for a ideology that denounces egalitarianism as a *"revolt against nature"* it is pretty funny that they paint a picture of "anarcho"-capitalism as a society of (relative) equals. In other

included this aside before any right-libertarians claim that we are misrepresenting Stirner' argument.)

If we consider "equality before the law" it is obvious that this also has limitations in an (materially) unequal society. Brian Morris notes that for Ayn Rand, *"[u]nder capitalism ... politics (state) and economics (capitalism) are separated ... This, of course, is pure ideology, for Rand's justification of the state is that it 'protects' private property, that is, it supports and upholds the economic power of capitalists by coercive means."* [**Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 189] The same can be said of "anarcho"-capitalism and its "protection agencies" and "general libertarian law code." If within a society a few own all the resources and the majority are dispossessed, then any law code which protects private property **automatically** empowers the owning class. Workers will **always** be initiating force if act against the code and so "equality before the law" reinforces inequality of power and wealth.

This means that a system of property rights protects the liberties of some people in a way which gives them an unacceptable degree of power over others. And this cannot be met merely by reaffirming the rights in question, we have to assess the relative importance of various kinds of liberty and other values we how dear.

Therefore right-libertarian disregard for equality is important because it allows "anarcho"-capitalism to ignore many important restrictions of freedom in society. In addition, it allows them to brush over the negative effects of their system by painting an unreal picture of a capitalist society without vast extremes of wealth and power (indeed, they often construe capitalist society in terms of an ideal — namely artisan production — that is really **pre**-capitalist and whose social basis has been eroded by capitalist development). Inequality shapes the decisions we have available and what ones we make:



Secondly, much property in "actually existing" capitalism is the product (directly or indirectly) of state laws and violence (*"the emergence of both agrarian and industrial capitalism in Britain [and elsewhere, we must add] ... could not have got off the ground without resources to state violence — legal or otherwise"* [Brian Morris, **Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 190]). If state claims of ownership are invalid due to their history, then so are many others (particularly those which claim to own land). As the initial creation was illegitimate, so are the transactions which have sprung from it. Thus if state claims of property rights are invalid, so are most (if not all) capitalist claims. If the laws of the state are illegitimate, so are the rules of the capitalist. If taxation is illegitimate, then so are rent, interest and profit. Rothbard's "historical" argument against the state can also be applied to private property and if the one is unjustified, then so is the other.

Thirdly, **if** the state had evolved "justly" then Rothbard would actually have nothing against it! A strange position for an anarchist to take. Logically this means that if a system of corporate states evolved from the workings of the capitalist market then the "anarcho"-capitalist would have nothing against it. This can be seen from "anarcho"-capitalist support for company towns even though they have correctly been described as *"industrial feudalism"* (see section 6 for more on this).

Fourthly, Rothbard's argument implies that similar circumstances producing similar relationships of domination and unfreedom are somehow different if they are created by *"just"* and *"unjust"* means. Rothbard claims that because the property is *"justly"* acquired it means the authority a capitalist over his employees is totally different from that of a state over its subject. But such a claim is false — both the subject/citizen and the employee are in a similar relationship of domination and authoritarianism. As we argued in section 2.2, how a person got into a situation is irrelevant when considering how free

they are. Thus, the person who "consents" to be governed by another because all available resources are privately owned is in exactly the same situation as a person who has to join a state because all available resources are owned by one state or another. Both are unfree and are part of authoritarian relationships based upon domination.

And, lastly, while "anarcho"-capitalism may be a "just" society, it is definitely **not** a free one. It will be marked by extensive hierarchy, unfreedom and government, but these restrictions of freedom will be of a private nature. As Rothbard indicates, the property owner and the state create/share the same authoritarian relationships. If statism is unfree, then so is capitalism. And, we must add, how "just" is a system which undermines liberty. Can "justice" ever be met in a society in which one class has more power and freedom than another. If one party is in an inferior position, then they have little choice but to agree to the disadvantageous terms offered by the superior party (see section 3.1). In such a situation, a "just" outcome will be unlikely as any contract agreed will be skewed to favour one side over the other.

The implications of these points are important. We can easily imagine a situation within "anarcho"-capitalism where a few companies/people start to buy up land and form company regions and towns. After all, this **has** happened continually throughout capitalism. Thus a "natural" process may develop where a few owners start to accumulate larger and larger tracks of land "justly". Such a process does not need to result in **one** company owning the world. It is likely that a few hundred, perhaps a few thousand, could do so. But this is not a cause for rejoicing — after all the current "market" in "unjust" states also has a few hundred competitors in it. And even if there is a large multitude of property owners, the situation for the working class is exactly the same as the citizen under current statism! Does the fact that it is "justly" acquired property that faces the worker really change the fact she must submit to the



> *"Another disquieting aspect of the libertarians' refusal to acknowledge power in the market is their failure to confront the tension between freedom and autonomy... Wage labour under capitalism is, of course, formally free labour. No one is forced to work at gun point. Economic circumstance, however, often has the effect of force; it compels the relatively poor to accept work under conditions dictated by owners and managers. The individual worker retains freedom [i.e. negative liberty] but loses autonomy [positive liberty]."* [**Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 122–123]

(As an aside, we should point out that the full Stirner quote cited above is *"[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors, of those who have at their disposal some bit of the state domains (and everything possessible in State domain belongs to the State and is only a fief of the individual), especially money and land; of the capitalists, therefore. The labourer cannot **realise** on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the customer."*

It could be argued that we misrepresenting Stirner by truncating the quote, but we feel that such a claim this is incorrect. Its clear from his book that Stirner is considering the "minimal" state (*"The State is a — commoners' State ... It protects man ...according to whether the rights entrusted to him by the State are enjoyed and managed in accordance with the will, that is, laws, of the State."* The State *"looks on indifferently as one grows poor and the other rich, unruffled by this alternation. As **individuals** they are really equal before its face."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115, p. 252]). As "anarcho"-capitalists consider their system to be one of rights and laws (particularly property rights), we feel that its fair to generalise Stirner's comments into capitalism **as such** as opposed to "minimum state" capitalism. If we replace "State" by "libertarian law code" you will see what we mean. We have

Inequality in the market ensures that the decisions of the majority of within it are shaped in accordance with that needs of the powerful, not the needs of all. It was for this reason that the Individual Anarchist J.K. Ingalls opposed Henry George's proposal of nationalising the land. Ingalls was well aware that the rich could outbid the poor for leases on land and so the dispossession of the working classes would continue.

The market, therefore, does not end power or unfreedom — they are still there, but in different forms. And for an exchange to be truly voluntary, both parties must have equal power to accept, reject, or influence its terms. Unfortunately, these conditions are rarely meet on the labour market or within the capitalist market in general. Thus Rothbard's argument that economic power does not exist fails to acknowledge that the rich can out-bid the poor for resources and that a corporation generally has greater ability to refuse a contract (with an individual, union or community) than vice versa (and that the impact of such a refusal is such that it will encourage the others involved to "compromise" far sooner). And in such circumstances, formally free individuals will have to "consent" to be unfree in order to survive.

As Max Stirner pointed out in the 1840s, free competition *"is not 'free,' because I lack the **things** for competition."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 262] Due to this basic inequality of wealth (of "things") we find that *"[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors ... of the capitalists, therefore. The labourer cannot **realise** on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the customer."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Its interesting to note that even Stirner recognises that capitalism results in exploitation. And we may add that value the labourer does not *"realise"* goes into the hands of the capitalists, who invest it in more "things" and which consolidates and increases their advantage in "free" competition.

To quote Stephan L. Newman:



government and rules of another to gain access to the means of life?

When faced with anarchist criticisms that **circumstances** force workers to accept wage slavery the "anarcho"-capitalist claims that these are to be considered as objective facts of nature and so wage labour is not domination. However, the same can be said of states — we are born into a world where states claim to own all the available land. If states are replaced by individuals or groups of individuals does this change the essential nature of our dispossession? Of course not.

Rothbard argues that *"[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 173] and, equally obviously, this ultimate-decision making power extends to those who **use,** but do not own, such property. But how "free" is a free society where the majority have to sell their liberty to another in order to live? Rothbard (correctly) argues that the State *"uses its monopoly of force ... to control, regulate, and coerce its hapless subjects. Often it pushes its way into controlling the morality and the very lives of its subjects."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 171] However he fails to note that employers do exactly the same thing to their employees. This, from an anarchist perspective, is unsurprising, for (after all) the employer **is** *"the ultimate decision-making power over his just property"* just as the state is over its "unjust" property. That similar forms of control and regulation develop is not a surprise given the similar hierarchical relations in both structures.

That there is a choice in available states does not make statism any less unjust and unfree. Similarly, just because we have a choice between employers does not make wage labour any less unjust or unfree. But trying to dismiss one form of domination as flowing from "just" property while attacking the other because it flows from "unjust" property is not seeing the wood for the trees. If one reduces liberty, so does the other. Whether the situation we are in resulted from "just" or

"unjust" steps is irrelevant to the restrictions of freedom we face because of them (and as we argue in section 2.5, "unjust" situations can easily flow from "just" steps).

The "anarcho"-capitalist insistence that the voluntary nature of an association determines whether it is anarchistic is deeply flawed — so flawed in fact that states and state-like structures (such as capitalist firms) can be considered anarchistic! In contrast, anarchists think that the hierarchical nature of the associations we join is equally as important as its voluntary nature when determining whether it is anarchistic or statist. However this option is not available to the "anarcho"-capitalist as it logically entails that capitalist companies are to be opposed along with the state as sources of domination, oppression and exploitation. #secf24

## 2.4 But surely transactions on the market are voluntary?

Of course, it is usually maintained by "anarcho"-capitalists that no-one puts a gun to a worker's head to join a specific company. Yes, indeed, this is true — workers can apply for any job they like. But the point is that the vast majority cannot avoid having to sell their liberty to others (self-employment and co-operatives **are** an option, but they account for less than 10% of the working population and are unlikely to spread due to the nature of capitalist market forces — see sections J.5.11 and J.5.12 for details). And as Bob Black pointed out, right libertarians argue that *"'one can at least change jobs.' but you can't avoid having a job — just as under statism one can at least change nationalities but you can't avoid subjection to one nation-state or another. But freedom means more than the right to change masters."* [**The Libertarian as Conservative**]

So why do workers agree to join a company? Because circumstances force them to do so — circumstances created, we must note, by **human** actions and institutions and not some ab-



are not equal (for, if the bargainers had equal power it is doubtful they would agree to sell control of their liberty/time to another). This means that "power" and "market" are not antithetical terms. While, in an abstract sense, all market relations are voluntary in practice this is not the case within a capitalist market. For example, a large company has a comparative advantage over small ones and communities which will definitely shape the outcome of any contract. For example, a large company or rich person will have access to more funds and so stretch out litigations and strikes until their opponents resources are exhausted. Or, if a local company is polluting the environment, the local community may put up with the damage caused out of fear that the industry (which it depends upon) would relocate to another area. If members of the community **did** sue, then the company would be merely exercising its property rights when it threatened to move to another location. In such circumstances, the community would "freely" consent to its conditions or face massive economic and social disruption. And, similarly, *"the landlords' agents who threaten to discharge agricultural workers and tenants who failed to vote the reactionary ticket"* in the 1936 Spanish election were just exercising their legitimate property rights when they threatened working people and their families with economic uncertainty and distress. [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 260]

If we take the labour market, it is clear that the "buyers" and "sellers" of labour power are rarely on an equal footing (if they were, then capitalism would soon go into crisis — see section 10.2). In fact, competition *"in labour markets is typically skewed in favour of employers: it is a buyer's market. And in a buyer's, it is the sellers who compromise."* [Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 129] Thus the ability to refuse an exchange weights most heavily on one class than another and so ensures that "free exchange" works to ensure the domination (and so exploitation) of one party by the other.

for themselves, fighting against the elements and so forth. It does **not** invoke the idea of transnational corporations employing tens of thousands of people or a population without land, resources and selling their labour to others. Indeed, Rothbard argues that economic power does not exist (at least under capitalism; as we saw in section 2.1 he does make — highly illogical — exceptions). Similarly, David Friedman's example of a pro-death penalty and anti-death penalty "defence" firm coming to an agreement (see section 6.3) assumes that the firms have equal bargaining powers and resources — if not, then the bargaining process would be very one-sided and the smaller company would think twice before taking on the larger one in battle (the likely outcome if they cannot come to an agreement on this issue) and so compromise.

However, the right-libertarian denial of market power is unsurprising. The necessity, not the redundancy, of equality is required if the inherent problems of contract are not to become too obvious. If some individuals **are** assumed to have significantly more power than others, and if they are always self-interested, then a contract that creates equal partners is impossible — the pact will establish an association of masters and servants. Needless to say, the strong will present the contract as being to the advantage of both: the strong no longer have to labour (and become rich, i.e. even stronger) and the weak receive an income and so do not starve.

If freedom is considered as a function of ownership then it is very clear that individuals lacking property (outside their own body, of course) loses effective control over their own person and labour (which was, lets not forget, the basis of their equal natural rights). When ones bargaining power is weak (which is typically the case in the labour market) exchanges tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than working towards an equalisation.

In other words, "contract" need not replace power if the bargaining position and wealth of the would-be contractors



stract "fact of nature." And if the world that humans create by their activity is detrimental to what we should value most (individual liberty and individuality) then we should consider how to **change that world for the better.** Thus "circumstances" (current "objective reality") is a valid source of unfreedom and for human investigation and creative activity — regardless of the claims of right-Libertarians.

Let us look at the circumstances created by capitalism. Capitalism is marked by a class of dispossessed labourers who have nothing to sell by their labour. They are legally barred from access to the means of life and so have little option but to take part in the labour market. As Alexander Berkman put it:

> "The law says your employer does not sell anything from you, because it is done with your consent. You have agreed to work for your boss for certain pay, he to have all that you produce …
>
> "But did you really consent?
>
> "When the highway man holds his gun to your head, you turn your valuables over to him. You 'consent' all right, but you do so because you cannot help yourself, because you are **compelled** by his gun.
>
> "Are you not **compelled** to work for an employer? Your need compels you just as the highwayman's gun. You must live… You can't work for yourself …The factories, machinery, and tools belong to the employing class, so you **must** hire yourself out to that class in order to work and live. Whatever you work at, whoever your employer may be, it is always comes to the same: you must work **for him**. You can't help yourself. You are **compelled**." [**What is Communist Anarchism?**, p. 9]

Due to this class monopoly over the means of life, workers (usually) are at a disadvantage in terms of bargaining power — there are more workers than jobs (see sections B.4.3 and 10.2 for a discussion why this is the normal situation on the labour market).

As was indicated in section B.4 (How does capitalism affect liberty?), within capitalism there is no equality between owners and the dispossessed, and so property is a source of **power.** To claim that this power should be "left alone" or is "fair" is *"to the anarchists... preposterous. Once a State has been established, and most of the country's capital privatised, the threat of physical force is no longer necessary to coerce workers into accepting jobs, even with low pay and poor conditions. To use Ayn Rand's term, 'initial force' has* ***already taken place,*** *by those who now have capital against those who do not... . In other words, if a thief died and willed his 'ill-gotten gain' to his children, would the children have a right to the stolen property? Not legally. So if 'property is theft,' to borrow Proudhon's quip, and the fruit of exploited labour is simply legal theft, then the only factor giving the children of a deceased capitalist a right to inherit the 'booty' is the law, the State. As Bakunin wrote, 'Ghosts should not rule and oppress this world, which belongs only to the living'"* [Jeff Draughn, **Between Anarchism and Libertarianism**].

Or, in other words, right-Libertarianism fails to *"meet the charge that normal operations of the market systematically places an entire class of persons (wage earners) in circumstances that compel them to accept the terms and conditions of labour dictated by those who offer work. While it is true that individuals are formally free to seek better jobs or withhold their labour in the hope of receiving higher wages, in the end their position in the market works against them; they cannot live if they do not find employment. When circumstances regularly bestow a relative disadvantage on one class of persons in their dealings with another class, members of the advantaged class have little*



> shelter but also education, medicine, sanitation, justice, police, all forms of security and insurance, even permission to use the streets (for these also would be privately owned), as one reads about all this a curious feature emerges: everybody always has enough money to buy all these things.
>
> "There are no public casual wards or hospitals or hospices, but neither is there anybody dying in the streets. There is no public educational system but no uneducated children, no public police service but nobody unable to buy the services of an efficient security firm, no public law but nobody unable to buy the use of a private legal system. Neither is there anybody able to buy much more than anybody else; no person or group possesses economic power over others.
>
> "No explanation is offered. The anarcho-capitalists simply take it for granted that in their favoured society, although it possesses no machinery for restraining competition (for this would need to exercise authority over the competitors and it is an **anarcho**-capitalist society) competition would not be carried to the point where anybody actually suffered from it. While proclaiming their system to be a competitive one, in which private interest rules unchecked, they show it operating as a co-operative one, in which no person or group profits at the cost of another." [**On the Capitalist Anarchists**]

This assumption of (relative) equality comes to the fore in Murray Rothbard's "Homesteading" concept of property (discussed in section 4.1). "Homesteading" paints a picture of individuals and families doing into the wilderness to make a home

### 3.1 Why is this disregard for equality important?

Simply because a disregard for equality soon ends with liberty for the majority being negated in many important ways. Most "anarcho"-capitalists and right-Libertarians deny (or at best ignore) market power. Rothbard, for example, claims that economic power does not exist; what people call *"economic power"* is *"simply the right under freedom to refuse to make an exchange"* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 222] and so the concept is meaningless.

However, the fact is that there are substantial power centres in society (and so are the source of hierarchical power and authoritarian social relations) which are **not the state.** The central fallacy of "anarcho"-capitalism is the (unstated) assumption that the various actors within an economy have relatively equal power. This assumption has been noted by many readers of their works. For example, Peter Marshall notes that *"'anarcho-capitalists' like Murray Rothbard assume individuals would have equal bargaining power in a [capitalist] market-based society"* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 46] George Walford also makes this clear in his comments on David Friedman's **The Machinery of Freedom**:

> "The private ownership envisages by the anarcho-capitalists would be very different from that which we know. It is hardly going too far to say that while the one is nasty, the other would be nice. In anarcho-capitalism there would be no National Insurance, no Social Security, no National Health Service and not even anything corresponding to the Poor Laws; there would be no public safety-nets at all. It would be a rigorously competitive society: work, beg or die. But as one reads on, learning that each individual would have to buy, personally, all goods and services needed, not only food, clothing and



*need of coercive measures to get what they want."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 130]

To ignore the circumstances which drive people to seek out the most "beneficial exchange" is to blind yourself to the power relationships inherent within capitalism — power relationships created by the unequal bargaining power of the parties involved (also see section 3.1). And to argue that "consent" ensures freedom is false; if you are "consenting" to be join a dictatorial organisation, you "consent" **not** to be free (and to paraphrase Rousseau, a person who renounces freedom renounces being human).

Which is why circumstances are important — if someone truly wants to join an authoritarian organisation, then so be it. It is their life. But if circumstances ensure their "consent" then they are not free. The danger is, of course, that people become **accustomed** to authoritarian relationships and end up viewing them as forms of freedom. This can be seen from the state, which the vast majority support and "consent" to. And this also applies to wage labour, which many workers today accept as a "necessary evil" (like the state) but, as we indicate in section 8.6, the first wave of workers viewed with horror as a form of (wage) slavery and did all that they could to avoid. In such situations all we can do is argue with them and convince them that certain forms of organisations (such as the state and capitalist firms) are an evil and urge them to change society to ensure their extinction.

So due to this lack of appreciation of circumstances (and the fact that people become accustomed to certain ways of life) "anarcho"-capitalism actively supports structures that restrict freedom for the many. And how is "anarcho"-capitalism **anarchist** if it generates extensive amounts of archy? It is for this reason that all anarchists support self-management within free association — that way we maximise freedom both inside **and** outside organisations. But only stressing freedom outside organisations, "anarcho"-capitalism ends up denying freedom as

such (after all, we spend most of our waking hours at work). If "anarcho"-capitalists **really** desired freedom, they would reject capitalism and become anarchists — only in a libertarian socialist society would agreements to become a wage worker be truly voluntary as they would not be driven by circumstances to sell their liberty.

This means that while right-Libertarianism appears to make "choice" an ideal (which sounds good, liberating and positive) in practice it has become a "dismal politics," a politics of choice where most of the choices are bad. And, to state the obvious, the choices we are "free" to make are shaped by the differences in wealth and power in society (see section 3.1) as well as such things as "isolation paradoxes" (see section B.6) and the laws and other human institutions that exist. If we ignore the context within which people make their choices then we glorify abstract processes at the expense of real people. And, as importantly, we must add that many of the choices we make under capitalism (shaped as they are by the circumstances within which they are made), such as employment contracts, result in our "choice" being narrowed to "love it or leave it" in the organisations we create/join as a result of these "free" choices.

This ideological blind spot flows from the "anarcho"-capitalist definition of "freedom" as "absence of coercion" — as workers "freely consent" to joining a specific workplace, their freedom is unrestricted. But to defend **only** "freedom from" in a capitalist society means to defend the power and authority of the few against the attempts of the many to claim their freedom and rights. To requote Emma Goldman, *"'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters … , in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues' while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom … is denounced as … evil in the name of that same individualism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112]



*which people enjoy 'equal freedom' and 'equal rights,' is actually a specific form of egalitarianism. As such, Libertarianism itself is a revolt against nature. If people, by their very biological nature, are unequal in all the attributes necessary to achieving, and preserving 'freedom' and 'rights'… then there is no way that people can enjoy 'equal freedom' or 'equal rights'. If a free society is conceived as a society of 'equal freedom,' then there ain't no such thing as 'a free society'."* [**The Myth of Natural Law**, p. 36]

Under capitalism, freedom is a commodity like everything else. The more money you have, the greater your freedom. "Equal" freedom, in the Newspeak-Rothbardian sense, **cannot** exist! As for "equality before the law", its clear that such a hope is always dashed against the rocks of wealth and market power (see next section for more on this). As far as rights go, of course, both the rich and the poor have an "equal right" to sleep under a bridge (assuming the bridge's owner agrees of course!); but the owner of the bridge and the homeless have **different** rights, and so they cannot be said to have "equal rights" in the Newspeak-Rothbardian sense either. Needless to say, poor and rich will not "equally" use the "right" to sleep under a bridge, either.

Bob Black observes in **The Libertarian as Conservative** that *"[t]he time of your life is the one commodity you can sell but never buy back. Murray Rothbard thinks egalitarianism is a revolt against nature, but his day is 24 hours long, just like everybody else's."*

By twisting the language of political debate, the vast differences in power in capitalist society can be "blamed" not on an unjust and authoritarian system but on "biology" (we are all unique individuals, after all). Unlike genes (although biotechnology corporations are working on this, too!), human society **can** be changed, by the individuals who comprise it, to reflect the basic features we all share in common — our humanity, our ability to think and feel, and our need for freedom.

archists support equality precisely **because** we recognise that everyone is unique. If we are serious about "equality of rights" or "equal freedom" then conditions must be such that people can enjoy these rights and liberties. If we assume the right to develop one's capacities to the fullest, for example, then inequality of resources and so power within society destroys that right simply because people do not have the means to freely exercise their capacities (they are subject to the authority of the boss, for example, during work hours).

So, in direct contrast to anarchism, right-Libertarianism is unconcerned about any form of equality except "equality of rights". This blinds them to the realities of life; in particular, the impact of economic and social power on individuals within society and the social relationships of domination they create. Individuals may be "equal" before the law and in rights, but they may not be free due to the influence of social inequality, the relationships it creates and how it affects the law and the ability of the oppressed to use it. Because of this, all anarchists insist that equality is essential for freedom, including those in the Individualist Anarchist tradition the "anarcho"-capitalist tries to co-opt — *"Spooner and Godwin insist that inequality corrupts freedom. Their anarchism is directed as much against inequality as against tyranny"* and *"[w]hile sympathetic to Spooner's individualist anarchism, they [Rothbard and David Friedman] fail to notice or conveniently overlook its egalitarian implications."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 74, p. 76]

Why equality is important is discussed more fully in the next section. Here we just stress that without social equality, individual freedom is so restricted that it becomes a mockery (essentially limiting freedom of the majority to choosing **which** employer will govern them rather than being free within and outside work).

Of course, by defining "equality" in such a restrictive manner, Rothbard's own ideology is proved to be nonsense. As L.A. Rollins notes, *"Libertarianism, the advocacy of 'free society' in*



In other words, its all fine and well saying (as right-libertarians do) that you aim to abolish force from human relationships but if you support an economic system which creates hierarchy (and so domination and oppression) by its very workings, "defensive" force will always be required to maintain and enforce that domination. Moreover, if one class has extensive power over another due to the systematic (and normal) workings of the market, any force used to defend that power is **automatically** "defensive". Thus to argue against the use of force and ignore the power relationships that exist within and shape a society (and so also shape the individuals within it) is to defend and justify capitalist and landlord domination and denounce any attempts to resist that domination as "initiation of force."

Anarchists, in contrast, oppose **hierarchy** (and so domination within relationships — bar S&M personal relationships, which are a totally different thing altogether; they are truly voluntary and they also do not attempt to hide the power relationships involved by using economic jargon). This opposition, while also including opposition to the use of force against equals (for example, anarchists are opposed to forcing workers and peasants to join a self-managed commune or syndicate), also includes support for the attempts of those subject to domination to end it (for example, workers striking for union recognition are not "initiating force", they are fighting for their freedom).

In other words, apparently "voluntary" agreements can and do limit freedom and so the circumstances that drive people into them **must** be considered when deciding whether any such limitation is valid. By ignoring circumstances, "anarcho"-capitalism ends up by failing to deliver what it promises — a society of free individuals — and instead presents us with a society of masters and servants. The question is, what do we feel moved to insist that people enjoy? Formal, abstract

(bourgeois) self-ownership ("freedom") or a more substantive control over one's life (i.e. autonomy)? #secf25

## 2.5 But surely circumstances are the result of liberty and so cannot be objected to?

It is often argued by right-libertarians that the circumstances we face within capitalism are the result of individual decisions (i.e. individual liberty) and so we must accept them as the expressions of these acts (the most famous example of this argument is in Nozick's **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** pp. 161–163 where he maintains that *"liberty upsets patterns"*). This is because whatever situation evolves from a just situation by just (i.e. non-coercive steps) is also (by definition) just.

However, it is not apparent that adding just steps to a just situation will result in a just society. We will illustrate with a couple of banal examples. If you add chemicals which are non-combustible together you can create a new, combustible, chemical (i.e. X becomes not-X by adding new X to it). Similarly, if you have an odd number and add another odd number to it, it becomes even (again, X becomes not-X by adding a new X to it). So it **is** very possible to go from an just state to an unjust state by just step (and it is possible to remain in an unjust state by just acts; for example if we tried to implement "anarcho"-capitalism on the existing — unjustly created — situation of "actually existing" capitalism it would be like having an odd number and adding even numbers to it). In other words, the outcome of "just" steps can increase inequality within society and so ensure that some acquire an unacceptable amount of power over others, via their control over resources. Such an inequality of power would create an "unjust" situation where the major are free to sell their liberty to others due to inequality in power and resources on the "free" market.

Ignoring this objection, we could argue (as many "anarcho"-capitalists and right-libertarians do) that the unforeseen results



ties by eliminating the major source of such inequalities (wage labour) by self-management (see section I.5.12 for a discussion of "capitalistic acts" within an anarchist society). We have no desire to restrict free exchanges (after all, most anarchists desire to see the "gift economy" become a reality sooner or later) but we argue that free exchanges need not involve the unrestricted property rights Nozick assumes. As we argue in sections 2 and 3.1, inequality can easily led to the situation where self-ownership is used to justify its own negation and so unrestricted property rights may undermine the meaningful self-determination (what anarchists would usually call "freedom" rather than self-ownership) which many people intuitively understand by the term "self-ownership".

Thus, for anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist opposition to equality misses the point and is extremely question begging. Anarchists do not desire to make humanity "identical" (which would be impossible and a total denial of liberty **and** equality) but to make the social relationships between individuals equal in **power.** In other words, they desire a situation where people interact together without institutionalised power or hierarchy and are influenced by each other "naturally," in proportion to how the (individual) **differences** between (social) **equals** are applicable in a given context. To quote Michael Bakunin, *"[t]he greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results... the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give — such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination."* [**God and the State**, p. 33]

Such an environment can only exist within self-managed associations, for capitalism (i.e. wage labour) creates very specific relations and institutions of authority. It is for this reason anarchists are socialists (i.e. opposed to wage labour, the existence of a proletariat or working class). In other words, an-

Another reason for "anarcho"-capitalist lack of concern for equality is that they think that *"liberty upsets patterns"* (see section 2.5, for example). It is argued that equality can only be maintained by restricting individual freedom to make exchanges or by taxation of income. However, what this argument fails to acknowledge is that inequality also restricts individual freedom (see next section, for example) and that the capitalist property rights framework is not the only one possible. After all, money is power and inequalities in terms of power easily result in restrictions of liberty and the transformation of the majority into order takers rather than free producers. In other words, once a certain level of inequality is reached, property does not promote, but actually conflicts with, the ends which render private property legitimate. Moreover, Nozick (in his "liberty upsets patterns" argument) *"has produced ... an argument for unrestricted private property using unrestricted private property, and thus he begs the question he tries to answer."* [Andrew Kerhohan, *"Capitalism and Self-Ownership"*, from **Capitalism**, p. 71] For example, a worker employed by a capitalist cannot freely exchange the machines or raw materials they have been provided with to use but Nozick does not class this distribution of "restricted" property rights as infringing liberty (nor does he argue that wage slavery itself restricts freedom, of course).

So in response to the claim that equality could only be maintained by continuously interfering with people's lives, anarchists would say that the inequalities produced by capitalist property rights also involve extensive and continuous interference with people's lives. After all, as Bob Black notes *"[y]our foreman or supervisor gives you more or-else orders in a week than the police do in a decade"* nevermind the other effects of inequality such as stress, ill health and so on [**Libertarian as Conservative**]. Thus claims that equality involves infringing liberty ignores the fact that inequality also infringes liberty. A reorganisation of society could effectively minimise inequali-



of human action are fine unless we assume that these human actions are in themselves bad (i.e. that individual choice is evil).

Such an argument is false for three reasons.

First, when we make our choices the aggregate impact of these choices are unknown to us — and not on offer when we make our choices. Thus we cannot be said to "choose" these outcomes, outcomes which we may consider deeply undesirable, and so the fact that these outcomes are the result of individual choices is besides the point (if we knew the outcome we could refrain from doing them). The choices themselves, therefore, do not validate the outcome as the outcome was not part of the choices when they where made (i.e. the means do not justify the ends). In other words, private acts often have important public consequences (and "bilateral exchanges" often involve externalities for third parties). Secondly, if the outcome of individual choices is to deny or restrict individual choice on a wider scale at a later stage, then we are hardly arguing that individual choice is a bad thing. We want to arrange it so that the decisions we make now do not result in them restricting our ability to make choices in important areas of life at a latter stage. Which means we are in favour of individual choices and so liberty, not against them. Thirdly, the unforeseen or unplanned results of individual actions are not necessarily a good thing. If the aggregate outcome of individual choices harms individuals then we have a right to modify the circumstances within which choices are made and/or the aggregate results of these choices.

An example will show what we mean (again drawn from Haworth's excellent **Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 35). Millions of people across the world bought deodorants which caused a hole to occur in the ozone layer surrounding the Earth. The resultant of these acts created a situation in which individuals and the eco-system they inhabited were in great danger. The actual acts themselves were by no means wrong, but the aggregate impact was. A similar argument can apply to any form of

pollution. Now, unless the right-Libertarian argues that skin cancer or other forms of pollution related illness are fine, its clear that the resultant of individual acts can be harmful to individuals.

The right-Libertarian could argue that pollution is an "initiation of force" against an individual's property-rights in their person and so individuals can sue the polluters. But hierarchy also harms the individual (see section B.1) — and so can be considered as an infringement of their "property-rights" (i.e. liberty, to get away from the insane property fetish of right-Libertarianism). The loss of autonomy can be just as harmful to an individual as lung cancer although very different in form. And the differences in wealth resulting from hierarchy is well known to have serious impacts on life-span and health.

As noted in section 2.1, the market is just as man-made as pollution. This means that the "circumstances" we face are due to aggregate of millions of individual acts and these acts occur within a specific framework of rights, institutions and ethics. Anarchists think that a transformation of our society and its rights and ideals is required so that the resultant of individual choices does not have the ironic effect of limiting individual choice (freedom) in many important ways (such as in work, for example).

In other words, the **circumstances** created by capitalist rights and institutions requires a **transformation** of these rights and institutions in such a way as to maximise individual choice for all — namely, to abolish these rights and replace them with new ones (for example, replace property rights with use rights). Thus Nozick's claims that *"Z does choose voluntarily if the other individuals A through Y each acted voluntarily and within their rights"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 263] misses the point — it is these rights that are in question (given that Nozick **assumes** these rights then his whole thesis is begging the question).



**social** inequalities, especially inequalities of property (which will tend to increase, rather than decrease, inequality). And as we argue in section 8 these inequalities of property were initially the result of force, **not** differences in ability. Thus to claim that social inequality flows from natural differences is false as most social inequality has flown from violence and force. This initial inequality has been magnified by the framework of capitalist property rights and so the inequality within capitalism is far more dependent upon, say, the existence of wage labour, rather than "natural" differences between individuals.

If we look at capitalism, we see that in workplaces and across industries many, if not most, unique individuals receive identical wages for identical work (although this often is not the case for women and blacks, who receive less wages than male, white workers). Similarly, capitalists have deliberately introduced wage inequalities and hierarchies for no other reason that to divide (and so rule) the workforce (see section D.10). Thus, if we assume egalitarianism **is** a revolt against nature, then much of capitalist economic life is in such a revolt (and when it is not, the "natural" inequalities have been imposed artificially by those in power).

Thus "natural" differences do not necessarily result in inequality as such. Given a different social system, "natural" differences would be encouraged and celebrated far wider than they are under capitalism (where, as we argued in section B.1, hierarchy ensures the crushing of individuality rather than its encouragement) without any change in social equality. The claim that "natural" differences generates social inequalities is question begging in the extreme — it takes the rights framework of society as a given and ignores the initial source of inequality in property and power. Indeed, inequality of outcome or reward is more likely to be influenced by social conditions rather than individual differences (as would be the case in a society based on wage labour or other forms of exploitation).

ian societies. If social inequality did, indeed, flow from natural inequalities then **all** societies would be marked by it. This is not the case. Indeed, taking a relatively recent example, many visitors to the early United States noted its egalitarian nature, something that soon changed with the rise of wage labour and industrial capitalism (a rise dependent upon state action, we must add, — see section 8). This implies that the society we live in (its rights framework, the social relationships it generates and so forth) has a far more of a decisive impact on inequality than individual differences. Thus certain rights frameworks will tend to magnify "natural" inequalities (assuming that is the source of the initial inequality, rather than, say, violence and force). As Noam Chomsky argues:

> *"Presumably it is the case that in our 'real world' some combination of attributes is conducive to success in responding to 'the demands of the economic system' ... One might suppose that some mixture of avarice, selfishness, lack of concern for others, aggressiveness, and similar characteristics play a part in getting ahead [in capitalism]... Whatever the correct collection of attributes may be, we may ask what follows from the fact, if it is a fact, that some partially inherited combination of attributes tends to material success? All that follows . .. is a comment on our particular social and economic arrangements .. . The egalitarian might responds, in all such cases, that the social order should be changes so that the collection of attributes that tends to bring success no longer do so ... "* [**The Chomsky Reader**, p. 190]

So, perhaps, if we change society then the social inequalities we see today would disappear. It is more than probable that natural difference has been long ago been replaced with



And we must add (before anyone points it out) that, yes, we are aware that many decisions will unavoidably limit current and future choices. For example, the decision to build a factory on a green-belt area will make it impossible for people to walk through the woods that are no longer there. But such "limitations" (if they can be called that) of choice are different from the limitations we are highlighting here, namely the lose of freedom that accompanies the circumstances created via exchange in the market. The human actions which build the factory modify reality but do not generate social relationships of domination between people in so doing. The human actions of market exchange, in contrast, modify the relative strengths of everyone in society and so has a distinct impact on the social relationships we "voluntarily" agree to create. Or, to put it another way, the decision to build on the green-belt site does "limit" choice in the abstract but it does **not** limit choice in the kind of relationships we form with other people nor create authoritarian relationships between people due to inequality influencing the content of the associations we form. However, the profits produced from using the factory increases inequality (and so market/economic power) and so weakens the position of the working class in respect to the capitalist class within society. This increased inequality will be reflected in the "free" contracts and working regimes that are created, with the weaker "trader" having to compromise far more than before.

So, to try and defend wage slavery and other forms of hierarchy by arguing that "circumstances" are created by individual liberty runs aground on its own logic. If the circumstances created by individual liberty results in pollution then the right-Libertarian will be the first to seek to change those circumstances. They recognise that the right to pollute while producing is secondary to our right to be healthy. Similarly, if the circumstances created by individual liberty results in hierarchy (pollution of the mind and our relationships with others as opposed to the body, although it affects that to) then we are

entitled to change these circumstances too and the means by which we get there (namely the institutional and rights framework of society). Our right to liberty is more important than the rights of property — sadly, the right-Libertarian refuses to recognise this. #secf26

### 2.6 Do Libertarian-capitalists support slavery?

Yes. It may come as a surprise to many people, but right-Libertarianism is one of the few political theories that justifies slavery. For example, Robert Nozick asks whether *"a free system would allow [the individual] to sell himself into slavery"* and he answers *"I believe that it would."* [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. 371] While some right-Libertarians do not agree with Nozick, there is no logical basis in their ideology for such disagreement.

The logic is simple, you cannot really own something unless you can sell it. Self-ownership is one of the cornerstones of laissez-faire capitalist ideology. Therefore, since you own yourself you can sell yourself.

(For Murray Rothbard's claims of the *"unenforceability, in libertarian theory, of voluntary slave contracts"* see **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 134–135 — of course, **other** libertarian theorists claim the exact opposite so *"libertarian theory"* makes no such claims, but nevermind! Essentially, his point revolves around the assertion that a person *"cannot, in nature, sell himself into slavery and have this sale enforced — for this would mean that his future will over his own body was being surrendered in advance"* and that if a *"labourer remains totally subservient to his master's will voluntarily, he is not yet a slave since his submission is voluntary."* [p. 40] However, as we noted in section 2, Rothbard emphasis on quitting fails to recognise that actual denial of will and control over ones own body that is explicit in wage labour. It is this failure that pro-slave contract "libertarians" stress — as we will see, they consider the slave contract



*archist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse, in fact. Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is **equal** opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse, and only the repression of this free diversity results in levelling, in uniformity and sameness. Free opportunity and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations… . Life in freedom, in anarchy will do more than liberate man merely from his present political and economic bondage. That will be only the first step, the preliminary to a truly human existence."* [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. 25]

Thus anarchists reject the Rothbardian-Newspeak definition of equality as meaningless within political discussion. No two people are identical and so imposing "identical" equality between them would mean treating them as **unequals**, i.e. not having equal worth or giving them equal respect as befits them as human beings and fellow unique individuals.

So what should we make of Rothbard's claim? It is tempting just to quote Rousseau when he argued *"it is … useless to inquire whether there is any essential connection between the two inequalities [social and natural]; for this would be only asking, in other words, whether those who command are necessarily better than those who obey, and if strength of body or of mind, wisdom, or virtue are always found in particular individuals, in proportion to their power or wealth: a question fit perhaps to be discussed by slaves in the hearing of their masters, but highly unbecoming to reasonable and free men in search of the truth."* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 49] But a few more points should be raised.

The uniqueness of individuals has always existed but for the vast majority of human history we have lived in very egalitar-

[**Egalitarianism as a Revolt against Nature and Other Essays**, p. 4, p.5]

In others words, every individual is unique. Something no egalitarian has ever denied. On the basis of this amazing insight, he concludes that equality is impossible (except "equality of rights") and that the attempt to achieve "equality" is a "revolt against nature" — as if any anarchist had ever advocated such a notion of equality as being identical!

And so, because we are all unique, the outcome of our actions will not be identical and so social inequality flows from natural differences and not due to the economic system we live under. Inequality of endowment implies inequality of outcome and so social inequality. As individual differences are a fact of nature, attempts to create a society based on "equality" (i.e. making everyone identical in terms of possessions and so forth) is impossible and "unnatural."

Before continuing, we must note that Rothbard is destroying language to make his point and that he is not the first to abuse language in this particular way. In George Orwell's **1984**, the expression *"all men are created equal"* could be translated into Newspeak, but it would make as much sense as saying *"all men have red hair,"* an obvious falsehood (see *"The Principles of Newspeak"* Appendix). It's nice to know that "Mr. Libertarian" is stealing ideas from Big Brother, and for the same reason: to make critical thought impossible by restricting the meaning of words.

"Equality," in the context of political discussion, does not mean "identical," it usually means equality of rights, respect, worth, power and so forth. It does not imply treating everyone identically (for example, expecting an eighty year old man to do identical work to an eighteen violates treating both with respect as unique individuals). For anarchists, as Alexander Berkman writes, *"equality does not mean an equal amount but equal* ***opportunity****... Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True an-*



as an extended wage contract. Moreover, a modern slave contract would likely take the form of a *"performance bond"* [p. 136] in which the slave agrees to perform X years labour or pay their master substantial damages. The threat of damages that enforces the contract and such a "contract" Rothbard does agree is enforceable — along with *"conditional exchange"* [p. 141] which could be another way of creating slave contracts.)

Nozick's defence of slavery should not come as a surprise to any one familiar with classical liberalism. An elitist ideology, its main rationale is to defend the liberty and power of property owners and justify unfree social relationships (such as government and wage labour) in terms of "consent." Nozick just takes it to its logical conclusion, a conclusion which Rothbard, while balking at the label used, does not actually disagree with.

This is because Nozick's argument is not new but, as with so many others, can be found in John Locke's work. The key difference is that Locke refused the term *"slavery"* and favoured *"drudgery"* as, for him, slavery mean a relationship *"between a lawful conqueror and a captive"* where the former has the power of life and death over the latter. Once a *"compact"* is agreed between them, *"an agreement for a limited power on the one side, and obedience on the other ... slavery ceases."* As long as the master could not kill the slave, then it was *"drudgery."* Like Nozick, he acknowledges that *"men did sell themselves; but, it is plain, this was only to drudgery, not to slavery: for, it is evident, the person sold was not under an absolute, arbitrary, despotical power: for the master could not have power to kill him, at any time, whom, at a certain time, he was obliged to let go free out of his service."* [Locke, **Second Treatise of Government**, Section 24] In other words, like Rothbard, voluntary slavery was fine but just call it something else.

Not that Locke was bothered by involuntary slavery. He was heavily involved in the slave trade. He owned shares in the "Royal Africa Company" which carried on the slave trade for England, making a profit when he sold them. He also held a sig-

nificant share in another slave company, the "Bahama Adventurers." In the *"Second Treatise"*, Locke justified slavery in terms of *"Captives taken in a just war."* [Section 85] In other words, a war waged against aggressors. That, of course, had nothing to do with the **actual** slavery Locke profited from (slave raids were common, for example). Nor did his "liberal" principles stop him suggesting a constitution that would ensure that *"every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his Negro slaves."* The constitution itself was typically autocratic and hierarchical, designed explicitly to *"avoid erecting a numerous democracy."* [**The Works of John Locke**, vol. X, p. 196]

So the notion of contractual slavery has a long history within right-wing liberalism, although most refuse to call it by that name. It is of course simply embarrassment that stops Rothbard calling a spade a spade. He incorrectly assumes that slavery has to be involuntary. In fact, historically, voluntary slave contracts have been common (David Ellerman's **Property and Contract in Economics** has an excellent overview). Any new form of voluntary slavery would be a "civilised" form of slavery and could occur when an individual would "agree" to sell themselves to themselves to another (as when a starving worker would "agree" to become a slave in return for food). In addition, the contract would be able to be broken under certain conditions (perhaps in return for breaking the contract, the former slave would have pay damages to his or her master for the labour their master would lose — a sizeable amount no doubt and such a payment could result in debt slavery, which is the most common form of "civilised" slavery. Such damages may be agreed in the contract as a "performance bond" or "conditional exchange").

In summary, right-Libertarians are talking about "civilised" slavery (or, in other words, civil slavery) and not forced slavery. While some may have reservations about calling it slavery, they agree with the basic concept that since people own themselves



Other people give us the possibilities to develop our full human potentiality and thereby our freedom, so when we destroy the freedom of others we limit our own. *"To treat others and oneself as property,"* argues anarchist L. Susan Brown, *"objectifies the human individual, denies the unity of subject and object and is a negation of individual will … even the freedom gained by the other is compromised by this relationship, for to negate the will of another to achieve one's own freedom destroys the very freedom one sought in the first place."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 3]

Fundamentally, it is for this reason that anarchists reject the right-Libertarian theories of freedom and justice — it just does not ensure individual freedom or individuality.

## 3 Why do anarcho"-capitalists place little or no value on "equality"?

Murray Rothbard argues that *"the 'rightist' libertarian is not opposed to inequality."* [**For a New Liberty**, p. 47] In contrast, "leftist" libertarians oppose inequality because it has harmful effects on individual liberty.

Part of the reason "anarcho"-capitalism places little or no value on "equality" derives from their definition of that term. Murray Rothbard defines equality as:

> *"A and B are 'equal' if they are identical to each other with respect to a given attribute… There is one and only one way, then, in which any two people can really be 'equal' in the fullest sense: they must be identical in* ***all*** *their attributes."*

He then points out the obvious fact that *"men are not uniform,… . the species, mankind, is uniquely characterised by a high degree of variety, diversity, differentiation: in short, inequality."*

individual is seen as revolving around an act, the contract, and **not** in our relations with others. All the social facts and mechanisms that precede, surround and result from the transaction are omitted. In particular, the social relations that result from the transaction are ignored (those, and the circumstances that make people contract, are the two unmentionables of right-libertarianism).

For anarchists it seems strange to concentrate on the moment that a contract is signed and ignore the far longer time the contract is active for (as we noted in section A.2.14, if the worker is free when they sign a contract, slavery soon overtakes them). Yes, the voluntary nature of a decision is important, but so are the social relationships we experience due to those decisions.

For the anarchist, freedom is based upon the insight that other people, apart from (indeed, **because** of) having their own intrinsic value, also are "means to my end", that it is through their freedom that I gain my own — so enriching my life. As Bakunin put it:

> *"I who want to be free cannot be because all the men around me do not yet want to be free, and consequently they become tools of oppression against me."*
> [quoted by Errico Malatesta in **Anarchy**, p. 27]

Therefore anarchists argue that we must reject the right-Libertarian theories of freedom and justice because they end up supporting the denial of liberty as the expression of liberty. What this fails to recognise is that freedom is a product of social life and that (in Bakunin's words) *"[n]o man can achieve his own emancipation without at the same time working for the emancipation of all men around him. My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men who are my equals."* [**Ibid.**]



they can sell themselves as well as selling their labour for a lifetime.

We must stress that this is no academic debate. "Voluntary" slavery has been a problem in many societies and still exists in many countries today (particularly third world ones where bonded labour — i.e. where debt is used to enslave people — is the most common form). With the rise of sweat shops and child labour in many "developed" countries such as the USA, "voluntary" slavery (perhaps via debt and bonded labour) may become common in all parts of the world — an ironic (if not surprising) result of "freeing" the market and being indifferent to the actual freedom of those within it.

And it is interesting to note that even Murray Rothbard is not against the selling of humans. He argued that children are the property of their parents. They can (bar actually murdering them by violence) do whatever they please with them, even sell them on a *"flourishing free child market."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 102] Combined with a whole hearted support for child labour (after all, the child can leave its parents if it objects to working for them) such a "free child market" could easily become a "child slave market" — with entrepreneurs making a healthy profit selling infants to other entrepreneurs who could make profits from the toil of "their" children (and such a process did occur in 19th century Britain). Unsurprisingly, Rothbard ignores the possible nasty aspects of such a market in human flesh (such as children being sold to work in factories, homes and brothels). And, of course, such a market could see women "specialising" in producing children for it (the use of child labour during the Industrial Revolution actually made it economically sensible for families to have more children) and, perhaps, gluts and scarcities of babies due to changing market conditions. But this is besides the point.

Of course, this theoretical justification for slavery at the heart of an ideology calling itself "libertarianism" is hard for many right-Libertarians to accept. Some of the "anarcho"-

capitalist type argue that such contracts would be very hard to enforce in their system of capitalism. This attempt to get out of the contradiction fails simply because it ignores the nature of the capitalist market. If there is a demand for slave contracts to be enforced, then companies will develop to provide that "service" (and it would be interesting to see how two "protection" firms, one defending slave contracts and another not, could compromise and reach a peaceful agreement over whether slave contracts were valid). Thus we could see a so-called "anarchist" or "free" society producing companies whose specific purpose was to hunt down escaped slaves (i.e. individuals in slave contracts who have not paid damages to their owners for freedom). Of course, perhaps Rothbard would claim that such slave contracts would be "outlawed" under his "general libertarian law code" but this is a denial of market "freedom". If slave contracts **are** "banned" then surely this is paternalism, stopping individuals from contracting out their "labour services" to whom and however long they "desire". You cannot have it both ways.

So, ironically, an ideology proclaiming itself to support "liberty" ends up justifying and defending slavery. Indeed, for the right-libertarian the slave contract is an exemplification, not the denial, of the individual's liberty! How is this possible? How can slavery be supported as an expression of liberty? Simple, right-Libertarian support for slavery is a symptom of a **deeper** authoritarianism, namely their uncritical acceptance of contract theory. The central claim of contract theory is that contract is the means to secure and enhance individual freedom. Slavery is the antithesis to freedom and so, in theory, contract and slavery must be mutually exclusive. However, as indicated above, some contract theorists (past and present) have included slave contracts among legitimate contracts. This suggests that contract theory cannot provide the theoretical support needed to secure and enhance individual freedom. Why is this?



*of negative liberty, which all too easily translates in experience as the negation of liberty."* [Stephan L. Newman, **Liberalism as Wit's End**, p. 161]

Thus right-Libertarian's fundamental fallacy is that "contract" does not result in the end of power or domination (particularly when the bargaining power or wealth of the would-be contractors is not equal). As Carole Pateman notes, *"[i]ronically, the contractarian ideal cannot encompass capitalist employment. Employment is not a continual series of discrete contracts between employer and worker, but ... one contract in which a worker binds himself to enter an enterprise and follow the directions of the employer for the duration of the contract. As Huw Benyon has bluntly stated, 'workers are paid to obey.'"* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 148] This means that *"the employment contract (like the marriage contract) is not an exchange; both contracts create social relations that endure over time — social relations of subordination."* [**Ibid.**]

Authority impoverishes us all and must, therefore, be combated wherever it appears. That is why anarchists oppose capitalism, so that there shall be *"no more government of man by man, by means of accumulation of capital."* [P-J Proudhon, cited by Woodcock in **Anarchism**, p. 110] If, as Murray Bookchin point it, *"the object of anarchism is to increase choice"* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 70] then this applies both to when we are creating associations/relationships with others and when we are **within** these associations/relationships — i.e. that they are consistent with the liberty of all, and that implies participation and self-management **not** hierarchy. "Anarcho"-capitalism fails to understand this essential point and by concentrating purely on the first condition for liberty ensures a society based upon domination, oppression and hierarchy and not freedom.

It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that the basic unit of analysis of the "anarcho"-capitalist/right-libertarian is the transaction (the "trade," the "contract"). The freedom of the

of what freedom is and what their interests actually are. This means that, in order not to be farcical, any relationships we create must reflect in their internal workings the critical evaluation and self-government that created them in the first place. Sadly capitalist individualism masks structures of power and relations of domination and subordination within seemingly "voluntary" associations — it fails to note the relations of domination resulting from private property and so *"what has been called 'individualism' up to now has been only a foolish egoism which belittles the individual. Foolish because it was not individualism at all. It did not lead to what was established as a goal; that is the complete, broad, and most perfectly attainable development of individuality."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Selected Writings**, p. 297]

This right-Libertarian lack of concern for concrete individual freedom and individuality is a reflection of their support for "free markets" (or "economic liberty" as they sometimes phrase it). However, as Max Stirner noted, this fails to understand that *"[p]olitical liberty means that the **polis,** the State, is free; ... not, therefore, that I am free of the State... It does not mean **my** liberty, but the liberty of a power that rules and subjugates me; it means that one of my **despots** ... is free."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 107] Thus the desire for "free markets" results in a blindness that while the market may be "free" the individuals within it may not be (as Stirner was well aware, *"[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors ... of the capitalists, therefore."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115])

In other words, right-libertarians give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail to take into account the fact that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of self-managed activity, solidarity and voluntary co-operation. For liberty to be real it must exist in all aspects of our daily life and cannot be contracted away without seriously effecting our minds, bodies and lives. Thus, the right-Libertarian's *"defence of freedom is undermined by their insistence on the concept*



As Carole Pateman argues, *"contract theory is primarily about a way of creating social relations constituted by subordination, not about exchange."* Rather than undermining subordination, contract theorists justify modern subjection — *"contract doctrine has proclaimed that subjection to a master — a boss, a husband — is freedom."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 40 and p. 146] The question central to contract theory (and so right-Libertarianism) is not "are people free" (as one would expect) but "are people free to subordinate themselves in any manner they please." A radically different question and one only fitting to someone who does not know what liberty means.

Anarchists argue that not all contracts are legitimate and no free individual can make a contract that denies his or her own freedom. If an individual is able to express themselves by making free agreements then those free agreements must also be based upon freedom internally as well. Any agreement that creates domination or hierarchy negates the assumptions underlying the agreement and makes itself null and void. In other words, voluntary government is still government and the defining chararacteristic of an anarchy must be, surely, "no government" and "no rulers."

This is most easily seen in the extreme case of the slave contract. John Stuart Mill stated that such a contract would be "null and void." He argued that an individual may voluntarily choose to enter such a contract but in so doing *"he abdicates his liberty; he foregoes any future use of it beyond that single act. He therefore defeats, in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself...The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free. It is not freedom, to be allowed to alienate his freedom."* He adds that *"these reasons, the force of which is so conspicuous in this particular case, are evidently of far wider application."* [quoted by Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171–2]

And it is such an application that defenders of capitalism fear (Mill did in fact apply these reasons wider and unsurprisingly became a supporter of a market syndicalist form of socialism). If we reject slave contracts as illegitimate then, logically, we must also reject **all** contracts that express qualities similar to slavery (i.e. deny freedom) including wage slavery. Given that, as David Ellerman points out, *"the voluntary slave ... and the employee cannot in fact take their will out of their intentional actions so that they could be 'employed' by the master or employer"* we are left with *"the rather implausible assertion that a person can vacate his or her will for eight or so hours a day for weeks, months, or years on end but cannot do so for a working lifetime."* [**Property and Contract in Economics**, p. 58]

The implications of supporting voluntary slavery is quite devastating for all forms of right-wing "libertarianism." This was proven by Ellerman when he wrote an extremely robust defence of it under the pseudonym "J. Philmore" called **The Libertarian Case for Slavery** (first published in **The Philosophical Forum**, xiv, 1982). This classic rebuttal takes the form of "proof by contradiction" (or **reductio ad absurdum**) whereby he takes the arguments of right-libertarianism to their logical end and shows how they reach the memorably conclusion that the *"time has come for liberal economic and political thinkers to stop dodging this issue and to critically re-examine their shared prejudices about certain voluntary social institutions ... this critical process will inexorably drive liberalism to its only logical conclusion: libertarianism that finally lays the true moral foundation for economic and political slavery."*

Ellerman shows how, from a right-"libertarian" perspective there is a *"fundamental contradiction"* in a modern liberal society for the state to prohibit slave contracts. He notes that there *"seems to be a basic shared prejudice of liberalism that slavery is inherently involuntary, so the issue of genuinely voluntary slavery has received little scrutiny. The perfectly valid liberal argument that involuntary slavery is inherently unjust is thus taken*



> titlement theory of justice. After reviewing empirical and conceptual shortcomings, he observes that such work 'plays an important function in the process of . .. 'blaming the victim,' and of protecting property against egalitarian onslaughts by various non-propertied groups.' An ideological defence of privileges, exploitation, and private power will be welcomed, regardless of its merits.
>
> "These matters are of no small importance to poor and oppressed people here and elsewhere." [**The Chomsky Reader**, pp. 187–188]

It may be argued that the reductions in liberty associated with capitalism is not really an iniquitous outcome, but such an argument is hardly fitting for a theory proclaiming itself "libertarian." And the results of these authoritarian social relationships? To quote Adam Smith, under the capitalist division of labour the worker *"has no occasion to exert his understanding, or exercise his invention"* and *"he naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exercise and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become."* The worker's mind falls *"into that drowsy stupidity, which, in a civilised society, seems to benumb the understanding of almost all of the inferior [sic!] ranks of people."* [cited by Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 186]

Of course, it may be argued that these evil effects of capitalist authority relations on individuals are also not iniquitous (or that the very real domination of workers by bosses is not really domination) but that suggests a desire to sacrifice real individuals, their hopes and dreams and lives to an abstract concept of liberty, the accumulative effect of which would be to impoverish all our lives. The kind of relationships we create **within** the organisations we join are of as great an importance as their voluntary nature. Social relations **shape** the individual in many ways, restricting their freedom, their perceptions

need — one person might gain control of the necessities of life. Others are then free to sell themselves to this person as slaves, if he is willing to accept them. Otherwise, they are free to perish. Without extra question-begging conditions, the society is just.

"The argument has all the merits of a proof that 2 + 2 = 5… Suppose that some concept of a 'just society' is advanced that fails to characterise the situation just described as unjust… Then one of two conclusions is in order. We may conclude that the concept is simply unimportant and of no interest as a guide to thought or action, since it fails to apply properly even in such an elementary case as this. Or we may conclude that the concept advanced is to be dismissed in that it fails to correspond to the pretheorectical notion that it intends to capture in clear cases. If our intuitive concept of justice is clear enough to rule social arrangements of the sort described as grossly unjust, then the sole interest of a demonstration that this outcome might be 'just' under a given 'theory of justice' lies in the inference by **reductio ad absurdum** to the conclusion that the theory is hopelessly inadequate. While it may capture some partial intuition regarding justice, it evidently neglects others.

"The real question to be raised about theories that fail so completely to capture the concept of justice in its significant and intuitive sense is why they arouse such interest. Why are they not simply dismissed out of hand on the grounds of this failure, which is striking in clear cases? Perhaps the answer is, in part, the one given by Edward Greenberg in a discussion of some recent work on the en-



*to include voluntary slavery (in which case, the argument, by definition, does not apply). This has resulted in an abridgment of the freedom of contract in modern liberal society."* Thus it is possible to argue for a *"civilised form of contractual slavery."* ["J. Philmore,", **Op. Cit.**]

So accurate and logical was Ellerman's article that many of its readers were convinced it **was** written by a right-libertarian (including, we have to say, us!). One such writer was Carole Pateman, who correctly noted that *"[t]here is a nice historical irony here. In the American South, slaves were emancipated and turned into wage labourers, and now American contractarians argue that all workers should have the opportunity to turn themselves into civil slaves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]).

The aim of Ellerman's article was to show the problems that employment (wage labour) presents for the concept of self-government and how contract need not result in social relationships based on freedom. As "Philmore" put it, *"[a]ny thorough and decisive critique of voluntary slavery or constitutional nondemocratic government would carry over to the employment contract — which is the voluntary contractual basis for the free-market free-enterprise system. Such a critique would thus be a* ***reductio ad absurdum****."* As *"contractual slavery"* is an *"extension of the employer-employee contract,"* he shows that the difference between wage labour and slavery is the time scale rather than the principle or social relationships involved. [**Op. Cit.**] This explains, firstly, the early workers' movement called capitalism ***"wage slavery"*** (anarchists still do) and, secondly, why capitalists like Rothbard support the concept but balk at the name. It exposes the unfree nature of the system they support! While it is possible to present wage labour as "freedom" due to its "consensual" nature, it becomes much harder to do so when talking about slavery or dictatorship. Then the contradictions are exposed for all to see and be horrified by.

All this does not mean that we must reject free agreement. Far from it! Free agreement is **essential** for a society based

upon individual dignity and liberty. There are a variety of forms of free agreement and anarchists support those based upon co-operation and self-management (i.e. individuals working together as equals). Anarchists desire to create relationships which reflect (and so express) the liberty that is the basis of free agreement. Capitalism creates relationships that deny liberty. The opposition between autonomy and subjection can only be maintained by modifying or rejecting contract theory, something that capitalism cannot do and so the right-wing Libertarian rejects autonomy in favour of subjection (and so rejects socialism in favour of capitalism).

The real contrast between anarchism and right-Libertarianism is best expressed in their respective opinions on slavery. Anarchism is based upon the individual whose individuality depends upon the maintenance of free relationships with other individuals. If individuals deny their capacities for self-government from themselves through a contract the individuals bring about a qualitative change in their relationship to others — freedom is turned into mastery and subordination. For the anarchist, slavery is thus the paradigm of what freedom is **not**, instead of an exemplification of what it is (as right-Libertarians state). As Proudhon argued:

> *"If I were asked to answer the following question: What is slavery? and I should answer in one word, It is murder, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him."* [**What is Property?**, p. 37]

In contrast, the right-Libertarian effectively argues that "I support slavery because I believe in liberty." It is a sad reflection of the ethical and intellectual bankruptcy of our society



enough capital to give them an advantage within a free society. Moreover, it is somewhat ironic to hear capitalists talking about anarchism denying choice when we oppose wage labour considering the fact workers were not given any choice when the capitalists used the state to develop wage labour in the first place!

## 2.8 Why should we reject the "anarcho"-capitalist definitions of freedom and justice?

Simply because they lead to the creation of authoritarian social relationships and so to restrictions on liberty. A political theory which, when consistently followed, has evil or iniquitous consequences, is a bad theory.

For example, any theory that can justify slavery is obviously a bad theory — slavery does not cease to stink the moment it is seen to follow your theory. As right-Libertarians can justify slave contracts as a type of wage labour (see section 2.6) as well as numerous other authoritarian social relationships, it is obviously a bad theory.

It is worth quoting Noam Chomsky at length on this subject:

> "Consider, for example, the 'entitlement theory of justice'... [a]ccording to this theory, a person has a right to whatever he has acquired by means that are just. If, by luck or labour or ingenuity, a person acquires such and such, then he is entitled to keep it and dispose of it as he wills, and a just society will not infringe on this right.
>
> "One can easily determine where such a principle might lead. It is entirely possible that by legitimate means — say, luck supplemented by contractual arrangements 'freely undertaken' under pressure of

that such an "argument" is actually taken seriously by (some) people. The concept of "slavery as freedom" is far too Orwellian to warrant a critique — we will leave it up to right Libertarians to corrupt our language and ethical standards with an attempt to prove it.

From the basic insight that slavery is the opposite of freedom, the anarchist rejection of authoritarian social relations quickly follows (the right-wing Libertarians fear):

> *"Liberty is inviolable. I can neither sell nor alienate my liberty; every contract, every condition of a contract, which has in view the alienation or suspension of liberty, is null: the slave, when he plants his foot upon the soil of liberty, at that moment becomes a free man.. . Liberty is the original condition of man; to renounce liberty is to renounce the nature of man: after that, how could we perform the acts of man?"* [P.J. Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 67]

The employment contract (i.e. wage slavery) abrogates liberty. It is based upon inequality of power and *"exploitation is a consequence of the fact that the sale of labour power entails the worker's subordination."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, P. 149] Hence Proudhon's (and Mill's) support of self-management and opposition to capitalism — any relationship that resembles slavery is illegitimate and no contract that creates a relationship of subordination is valid. Thus in a truly anarchistic society, slave contracts would be unenforceable — people in a truly free (i.e. non-capitalist) society would **never** tolerate such a horrible institution or consider it a valid agreement. If someone was silly enough to sign such a contract, they would simply have to say they now rejected it in order to be free — such contracts are made to be broken and without the force of a law system (and private defence firms) to back it up, such contracts will stay broken.



choose" between those that remain (see also section B.4). Anarchists, in contrast, desire to expand the available options by abolishing capitalist private property rights and removing inequalities in wealth and power that help restrict our options and liberties artificially.

So does an anarchist society have much to fear from the spread of wage labour within it? Probably not. If we look at societies such as the early United States or the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, for example, we find that, given the choice, most people preferred to work for themselves. Capitalists found it hard to find enough workers to employ and the amount of wages that had to be offered to hire workers were so high as to destroy any profit margins. Moreover, the mobility of workers and their "laziness" was frequently commented upon, with employers despairing at the fact workers would just work enough to make end meet and then disappear. Thus, left to the actions of the "free market," it is doubtful that wage labour would have spread. But it was not left to the "free market".

In response to these "problems", the capitalists turned to the state and enforced various restrictions on society (the most important being the land, tariff and money monopolies — see sections B.3 and 8). In free competition between artisan and wage labour, wage labour only succeeded due to the use of state action to create the required circumstances to discipline the labour force and to accumulate enough capital to give capitalists an edge over artisan production (see section 8 for more details).

Thus an anarchist society would not have to fear the spreading of wage labour within it. This is simply because would-be capitalists (like those in the early United States) would have to offer such excellent conditions, workers' control and high wages as to make the possibility of extensive profits from workers' labour nearly impossible. Without the state to support them, they will not be able to accumulate

The right-Libertarian support for slave contracts (and wage slavery) indicates that their ideology has little to do with liberty and far more to do with justifying property and the oppression and exploitation it produces. Their support and theoretical support for slavery indicates a deeper authoritarianism which negates their claims to be libertarians.

## 2.7 But surely abolishing capitalism would restrict liberty?

Many "anarcho"-capitalists and other supporters of capitalism argue that it would be "authoritarian" to restrict the number of alternatives that people can choose between by abolishing capitalism. If workers become wage labourers, so it is argued, it is because they "value" other things more — otherwise they would not agree to the exchange. But such an argument ignores that reality of capitalism.

By **maintaining** capitalist private property, the options available to people **are** restricted. In a fully developed capitalist economy the vast majority have the "option" of selling their labour or starving/living in poverty — self-employed workers account for less than 10% of the working population. Usually, workers are at a disadvantage on the labour market due to the existence of unemployment and so accept wage labour because otherwise they would starve (see section 10.2 for a discussion on why this is the case). And as we argue in sections J.5.11 and J.5.12, even **if** the majority of the working population desired co-operative workplaces, a capitalist market will not provide them with that outcome due to the nature of the capitalist workplace (also see Juliet C. Schor's excellent book **The Overworked American** for a discussion of why workers desire for more free time is not reflected in the labour market). In other words, it is a myth to claim that wage labour exists or that workplaces are hierarchical because workers value other things — they are hierarchical because bosses have more clout on the market than workers and, to use Schor's expression, workers end up wanting what they get rather than getting what they want.

Looking at the reality of capitalism we find that because of inequality in resources (protected by the full might of the legal system, we should note) those with property get to govern those without it during working hours (and beyond in many cases). If the supporters of capitalism were actually concerned about liberty (as opposed to property) that situation would be abhorrent to them — after all, individuals can no longer exercise their ability to make decisions, choices, and are reduced to being order takers. If choice and liberty are the things we value, then the ability to make choices in all aspects of life automatically follows (including during work hours). However, the authoritarian relationships and the continual violation of autonomy wage labour implies are irrelevant to "anarcho"-capitalists (indeed, attempts to change this situation are denounced as violations of the autonomy of the property owner!). By purely concentrating on the moment that a contract is signed they blind themselves to the restricts of liberty that wage contracts create.

Of course, anarchists have no desire to **ban** wage labour — we aim to create a society within which people are not forced by circumstances to sell their liberty to others. In order to do this, anarchists propose a modification of property and property rights to ensure true freedom of choice (a freedom of choice denied to us by capitalism). As we have noted many times, "bilateral exchanges" can and do adversely effect the position of third parties if they result in the build-up of power/money in the hands of a few. And one of these adverse effects can be the restriction of workers options due to economic power. Therefore it is the supporter of capitalist who restricts options by supporting an economic system and rights framework that by their very workings reduce the options available to the majority, who then are "free to

*of the company itself or handled special organisations set up for this purpose."* Within such a regime *"those with the most property had proportionally the greater say in matters which affected the community."* If the poor objected then they could simply leave. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 421–2 and p. 422]

Given this, the idea that Molinari was an anarchist in any form can be dismissed. His system was based on privatising government, not abolishing it (as he himself admitted). This would be different from the current system, of course, as landlords and capitalists would be hiring force directly to enforce their decisions rather than relying on a state which they control indirectly. This system, as we proved in section 6, would not be anarchist as can be seen from American history. There capitalists and landlords created their own private police forces and armies, which regularly attacked and murdered union organisers and strikers. As an example, there is Henry Ford's Service Department (private police force):

> *"In 1932 a hunger march of the unemployed was planned to march up to the gates of the Ford plant at Dearborn... The machine guns of the Dearborn police and the Ford Motor Company's Service Department killed [four] and wounded over a score of others... Ford was fundamentally and entirely opposed to trade unions. The idea of working men questioning his prerogatives as an owner was outrageous ... [T]he River Rouge plant... was dominated by the autocratic regime of Bennett's service men. Bennett .. organise[d] and train[ed] the three and a half thousand private policemen employed by Ford. His task was to maintain discipline amongst the work force, protect Ford's property [and power], and prevent unionisation... Frank Murphy, the mayor of Detroit, claimed that 'Henry Ford employs some of the worst gangsters in our city.' The claim was well*



totle (beloved by Ayn Rand) *"thought that only living things could bear fruit. Money, not a living thing, was by its nature barren, and any attempt to make it bear fruit (**tokos**, in Greek, the same word used for interest) was a crime against nature."* [Marcello de Cecco, quoted by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 41] Such opposition to interest hardly fits well into capitalism, and so either goes unmentioned or gets classed as an "error" (although we could ask why Aristotle is in error while Rand is not). Similarly, individualist anarchist opposition to capitalist property and rent, interest and profits is ignored or dismissed as "bad economics" without realising that these ideas played a key role in their politics and in ensuring that an anarchy would not see freedom corrupted by inequality. To ignore such an important concept in a person's ideas is to distort the remainder into something it is not.

## 4.1 What is wrong with a "homesteading" theory of property?

So how do "anarcho"-capitalists justify property? Looking at Murray Rothbard, we find that he proposes a *"homesteading theory of property"*. In this theory it is argued that property comes from occupancy and mixing labour with natural resources (which are assumed to be unowned). Thus the world is transformed into private property, for *"title to an unowned resource (such as land) comes properly only from the expenditure of labour to transform that resource into use."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 63]

Rothbard paints a conceptual history of individuals and families forging a home in the wilderness by the sweat of their labour (its tempting to rename his theory the *"immaculate conception of property"* as his conceptual theory is somewhat at odds with actual historical fact).

Sadly for Murray Rothbard, his "homesteading" theory was refuted by Proudhon in **What is Property?** in 1840 (along

with many other justifications of property). Proudhon rightly argues that *"if the liberty of man is sacred, it is equally sacred in all individuals; that, if it needs property for its objective action, that is, for its life, the appropriation of material is equally necessary for all ... Does it not follow that if one individual cannot prevent another ... from appropriating an amount of material equal to his own, no more can he prevent individuals to come."* And if all the available resources are appropriated, and the owner *"draws boundaries, fences himself in ... Here, then, is a piece of land upon which, henceforth, no one has a right to step, save the proprietor and his friends ... Let [this]... multiply, and soon the people ... will have nowhere to rest, no place to shelter, no ground to till. They will die at the proprietor's door, on the edge of that property which was their birthright."* [**What is Property?**, pp. 84–85, p. 118]

As Rothbard himself noted in respect to the aftermath of slavery (see section 2.1), not having access to the means of life places one the position of unjust dependency on those who do. Rothbard's theory fails because for *"[w]e who belong to the proletaire class, property excommunicates us!"* [P-J Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105] and so the vast majority of the population experience property as theft and despotism rather than as a source of liberty and empowerment (which possession gives). Thus, Rothbard's account fails to take into account the Lockean Proviso (see section B.3.4) and so, for all its intuitive appeal, ends up justifying capitalist and landlord domination (see next section on why the Lockean Proviso is important).

It also seems strange that while (correctly) attacking social contract theories of the state as invalid (because *"no past generation can bind later generations"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 145]) he fails to see he is doing **exactly that** with his support of private property (similarly, Ayn Rand argued that *"[a]ny alleged 'right' of one man, which necessitates the violation of the right of another, is not and cannot be a right"* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 325] but obviously appropriating land does



ical" issues and so he discussed *"economic anarchism"* as well in his critique of private property (as Proudhon also did later). As such, to artificially split anarchism into political and economic spheres is both historically and logically flawed. While some dictionaries limit "anarchism" to opposition to the state, anarchists did and do not.

The key problem for Hart is that Molinari refused to call himself an anarchist. He did not even oppose government, as Hart himself notes Molinari proposed a system of insurance companies to provide defence of property and *"called these insurance companies 'governments' even though they did not have a monopoly within a given geographical area."* As Hart notes, Molinari was the sole defender of such free-market justice at the time in France. [David M. Hart, *"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part II"*, pp. 399–434,Journal of Libertarian Studies, vol. V, no. 4, p. 415 and p. 411] Molinari was clear that he wanted *"a regime of free government,"* counterpoising *"monopolist or communist governments"* to *"free governments."* This would lead to *"freedom of government"* rather than its abolition (not freedom **from** government). For Molinarie the future would not bring *"the suppression of the state which is the dream of the anarchists .. . It will bring the diffusion of the state within society. That is ... 'a free state in a free society.'"* [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 429, p. 411 and p. 422] As such, Molinari can hardly be considered an anarchist, even if "anarchist" is limited to purely being against government.

Moreover, in another sense Molinari was in favour of the state. As we discuss in section 6, these companies would have a monopoly within a given geographical area — they have to in order to enforce the property owner's power over those who use, but do not own, the property in question. The key contradiction can be seen in Molinari's advocating of company towns, privately owned communities (his term was a *"proprietary company"*). Instead of taxes, people would pay rent and the *"administration of the community would be either left in the hands*

Little wonder he, like so many others, argued that Godwin was *"the first theoriser of Socialism without government — that is to say, of Anarchism."* [**Environment and Evolution**, p. 62 and p. 26] For Kropotkin, anarchism was by definition not restricted to purely political issues but also attacked economic hierarchy, inequality and injustice. As Peter Marshall confirms, *"Godwin's economics, like his politics, are an extension of his ethics."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 210]

Godwin's theory of property is significant because it reflected what was to become standard nineteenth century socialist thought on the matter. In Britain, his ideas influenced Robert Owen and, as a result, the early socialist movement in that country. His analysis of property, as noted, predated Proudhon's classic anarchist analysis. As such, to state, as Hart did, that Godwin simply *"concluded that the state was an evil which had to be reduced in power if not eliminated completely"* while not noting his analysis of property gives a radically false presentation of his ideas. [Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 265] However, it does fit into his flawed assertion that anarchism is purely concerned with the state. Any evidence to the contrary is simply ignored.

## 7.1 Are competing governments anarchism?

No, of course not. Yet according to "anarcho"-capitalism, it is. This can be seen from the ideas of Gustave de Molinari.

Hart is on firmer ground when he argues that the 19th century French economist Gustave de Molinari is the true founder of "anarcho"-capitalism. With Molinari, he argues, *"the two different currents of anarchist thought converged: he combined the political anarchism of Burke and Godwin with the nascent economic anarchism of Adam Smith and Say to create a new forms of anarchism"* that has been called *"anarcho-capitalism, or free market anarchism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Of course, Godwin (like other anarchists) did not limit his anarchism purely to "polit-



violate the rights of others to walk, use or appropriate that land). Due to his support for appropriation and inheritance, he is clearly ensuring that future generations are **not** born as free as the first settlers were (after all, they cannot appropriate any land, it is all taken!). If future generations cannot be bound by past ones, this applies equally to resources and property rights. Something anarchists have long realised — there is no defensible reason why those who first acquired property should control its use by future generations.

However, if we take Rothbard's theory at face value we find numerous problems with it. If title to unowned resources comes via the *"expenditure of labour"* on it, how can rivers, lakes and the oceans be appropriated? The banks of the rivers can be transformed, but can the river itself? How can you mix your labour with water? "Anarcho"-capitalists usually blame pollution on the fact that rivers, oceans, and so forth are unowned, but how can an individual "transform" water by their labour? Also, does fencing in land mean you have "mixed labour" with it? If so then transnational corporations can pay workers to fence in vast tracks of virgin land (such as rainforest) and so come to "own" it. Rothbard argues that this is not the case (he expresses opposition to *"arbitrary claims"*). He notes that it is **not** the case that *"the first discoverer ... could properly lay claim to [a piece of land] ... [by] laying out a boundary for the area."* He thinks that *"their claim would still be no more than the boundary **itself**, and not to any of the land within, for only the boundary will have been transformed and used by men"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50f]

However, if the boundary **is** private property and the owner refuses others permission to cross it, then the enclosed land is inaccessible to others! If an "enterprising" right-libertarian builds a fence around the only oasis in a desert and refuses permission to cross it to travellers unless they pay his price (which is everything they own) then the person **has** appropriated the oasis without "transforming" it by his labour. The travellers

have the choice of paying the price or dying (and the oasis owner is well within his rights letting them die). Given Rothbard's comments, it is probable that he will claim that such a boundary is null and void as it allows "arbitrary" claims — although this position is not at all clear. After all, the fence builder **has** transformed the boundary and "unrestricted" property rights is what right-libertarianism is all about.

And, of course, Rothbard ignores the fact of economic power — a transnational corporation can "transform" far more virgin resources in a day than a family could in a year. Transnational's "mixing their labour" with the land does not spring into mind reading Rothbard's account of property growth, but in the real world that is what will happen.

If we take the question of wilderness (a topic close to many eco-anarchists' and deep ecologists' hearts) we run into similar problems. Rothbard states clearly that *"libertarian theory must invalidate [any] claim to ownership"* of land that has *"never been transformed from its natural state"* (he presents an example of an owner who has left a piece of his *"legally owned"* land untouched). If another person appears who **does** transform the land, it becomes *"justly owned by another"* and the original owner cannot stop her (and should the original owner *"use violence to prevent another settler from entering this never-used land and transforming it into use"* they also become a *"criminal aggressor"*). Rothbard also stresses that he is **not** saying that land must continually be in use to be valid property [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 63–64] (after all, that would justify landless workers seizing the land from landowners during a depression and working it themselves).

Now, where does that leave wilderness? In response to ecologists who oppose the destruction of the rainforest, "anarcho"-capitalists suggest that they put their money where their mouth is and **buy** rainforest land. In this way, it is claimed, rainforest will be protected (see section B.5 for why such arguments are nonsense). As ecologists desire the rainfor-



anarchist analysis. For Godwin, there were *"three degrees"* of property. The first is possession of things you need to live. The second is *"the empire to which every man is entitled over the produce of his own industry."* The third is *"that which occupies the most vigilant attention in the civilised states of Europe. It is a system, in whatever manner established, by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry."* He notes that it is *"clear therefore that the third species of property is in direct contradiction to the second."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 701 and p. 710–2]

Godwin, unlike classical liberals, saw the need to *"point out the evils of accumulated property,"* arguing that the the *"spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud … are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement."* Like the socialists he inspired, Godwin argued that *"it is to be considered that this injustice, the unequal distribution of property, the grasping and selfish spirit of individuals, is to be regarded as one of the original sources of government, and, as it rises in its excesses, is continually demanding and necessitating new injustice, new penalties and new slavery."* He stressed, *"let it never be forgotten that accumulated property is usurpation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 732, pp. 717–8, and p. 718]

Godwin argued against the current system of property and in favour of *"the justice of an equal distribution of the good things of life."* This would be based on *"[e]quality of conditions, or, in other words, an equal admission to the means of improvement and pleasure"* as this *"is a law rigorously enjoined upon mankind by the voice of justice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 725 and p. 736] Thus his anarchist ideas were applied to private property, noting like subsequent anarchists that economic inequality resulted in the loss of liberty for the many and, consequently, an anarchist society would see a radical change in property and property rights. As Kropotkin noted, Godwin *"stated in 1793 in a quite definite form the political and economic principle of Anarchism."*

**tarian Studies**, vol. V, no. 3, p. 284] Yet anarchism has **never** been solely concerned with abolishing the state. Rather, anarchists have always raised economic and social demands and goals along with their opposition to the state. As such, anti-statism may be a necessary condition to be an anarchist, but not a sufficient one to count a specific individual or theory as anarchist.

Specifically, anarchists have turned their analysis onto private property noting that the hierarchical social relationships created by inequality of wealth (for example, wage labour) restricts individual freedom. This means that if we do seek *"the maximum of individual liberty"* then our analysis cannot be limited to just the state or government. Consequently, to limit anarchism as Hart does requires substantial rewriting of history, as can be seen from his account of William Godwin.

Hart tries to co-opt of William Godwin into the ranks of "anti-state" liberalism, arguing that he *"defended individualism and the right to property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 265] He, of course, quotes from Godwin to support his claim yet strangely truncates Godwin's argument to exclude his conclusion that *"[w]hen the laws of morality shall be clearly understood, their excellence universally apprehended, and themselves seen to be coincident with each man's private advantage, the idea of property in this sense will remain, but no man will have the least desire, for purposes of ostentation or luxury, to possess more than his neighbours."* [**An Enquiry into Political Justice**, p. 199] In other words, personal property (possession) would still exist but not private property in the sense of capital or inequality of wealth.

This analysis is confirmed in book 8 of Godwin's classic work entitled ***"On Property."*** Needless to say, Hart fails to mention this analysis, unsurprising as it was later reprinted as a socialist pamphlet. Godwin thought that the *"subject of property is the key-stone that completes the fabric of political justice."* Like Proudhon, Godwin subjects property as well as the state to an



est **because it is wilderness** they are unlikely to "transform" it by human labour (its precisely that they want to stop). From Rothbard's arguments it is fair to ask whether logging companies have a right to "transform" the virgin wilderness owned by ecologists, after all it meets Rothbard's criteria (it is still wilderness). Perhaps it will be claimed that fencing off land "transforms" it (hardly what you imagine "mixing labour" with to mean, but nevermind) — but that allows large companies and rich individuals to hire workers to fence in vast tracks of land (and recreate the land monopoly by a "libertarian" route). But as we noted above, fencing off land does not seem to imply that it becomes property in Rothbard's theory. And, of course, fencing in areas of rainforest disrupts the local eco-system — animals cannot freely travel, for example — which, again, is what ecologists desire to stop. Would Rothbard accept a piece of paper as "transforming" land? We doubt it (after all, in his example the wilderness owner **did** legally own it) — and so most ecologists will have a hard time in "anarcho"-capitalism (wilderness is just not an option).

As an aside, we must note that Rothbard fails to realise — and this comes from his worship of the market and his "Austrian economics" — is that people value many things which do not appear on the market. He claims that wilderness is *"valueless unused natural objects"* (for it people valued them, they would use — i.e. appropriate — them). But unused things may be of **considerable** value to people, wilderness being a classic example. And if something **cannot** be transformed into private property, does that mean people do not value it? For example, people value community, stress free working environments, meaningful work — if the market cannot provide these, does that mean they do not value them? Of course not (see Juliet Schor's **The Overworked American** on how working people's desire for shorter working hours was not transformed into options on the market).

Moreover, Rothbard's "homesteading" theory actually violates his support for unrestricted property rights. What if a property owner **wants** part of her land to remain wilderness? Their desires are violated by the "homesteading" theory (unless, of course, fencing things off equals "transforming" them, which it apparently does not). How can companies provide wilderness holidays to people if they have no right to stop settlers (including large companies) "homesteading" that wilderness? And, of course, where does Rothbard's theory leave hunter-gather or nomad societies. They **use** the resources of the wilderness, but they do not "transform" them (in this case you cannot easily tell if virgin land is empty or being used as a resource). If a troop of nomads find its traditionally used, but natural, oasis appropriated by a homesteader what are they to do? If they ignore the homesteaders claims he can call upon his "defence" firm to stop them — and then, in true Rothbardian fashion, the homesteader can refuse to supply water to them unless they hand over all their possessions (see section 4.2 on this). And if the history of the United States (which is obviously the model for Rothbard's theory) is anything to go by, such people will become "criminal aggressors" and removed from the picture.

Which is another problem with Rothbard's account. It is completely ahistoric (and so, as we noted above, is more like an *"immaculate conception of property"*). He has transported "capitalist man" into the dawn of time and constructed a history of property based upon what he is trying to justify (not surprising, as he does this with his "Natural Law" theory too — see section 7). What **is** interesting to note, though, is that the **actual** experience of life on the US frontier (the historic example Rothbard seems to want to claim) was far from the individualistic framework he builds upon it and (ironically enough) it was destroyed by the development of capitalism.

As Murray Bookchin notes, *"the independence that the New England yeomanry enjoyed was itself a function of the co-operative social base from which it emerged. To barter*



the various defence companies becomes apparent. In the end, that is what "anarcho"-capitalism recognises with its "general libertarian law code" (based either on market forces or "natural law"). Thus it appears that one government/hierarchy over a given territory is inevitable under any form of capitalism. That being the case, it is obvious that a democratic form of statism, with its checks and balances, is preferable to a dictatorship that imposes "absolute" property rights and so "absolute" power.

Of course, we do have another option than either private or public statism. This is anarchism, the end of hierarchical authority and its replacement by the "natural" authority of communal and workplace self-management.

## 7 How does the history of "anarcho"-capitalism show that it is not anarchist?

Of course, "anarcho"-capitalism does have historic precedents and "anarcho"-capitalists spend considerable time trying to co-opt various individuals into their self-proclaimed tradition of "anti-statist" liberalism. That, in itself, should be enough to show that anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism have little in common as anarchism developed in opposition to liberalism and its defence of capitalism. Unsurprisingly, these "anti-state" liberals tended to, at best, refuse to call themselves anarchists or, at worse, explicitly deny they were anarchists.

One "anarcho"-capitalist overview of their tradition is presented by David M. Hart. His perspective on anarchism is typical of the school, noting that in his essay anarchism or anarchist *"are used in the sense of a political theory which advocates the maximum amount of individual liberty, a necessary condition of which is the elimination of governmental or other organised force."* [David M. Hart, *"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part I"*, pp. 263–290, **Journal of Liber-**

impose it. This can be seen from the experiences of the Italian factory occupations in 1920 (see section A.5.5), in which workers refused to accept capitalist property or authority as valid and ignored it. In response to this change of thought within a large part of society, the capitalists backed fascism in order to stop the evolutionary process within society.

The socialist economic historian Maurice Dobbs, after reviewing the private armies in 1920s and 1930s America made much the same point:

> *"When business policy takes the step of financing and arming a mass political movement to capture the machinery of government, to outlaw opposing forms of organisation and suppress hostile opinions we have merely a further and more logical stage beyond [private armies]"* [**Op, Cit.**, p. 357]

(Noted Austrian Economist Ludwig von Mises whose extreme free market liberal political and economic ideas inspired right-libertarianism in many ways had this to say about fascism: *"It cannot be denied that Fascism and similar movements aiming at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has, for the moment, saved European civilisation. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live eternally in history."* [**Liberalism**, p. 51])

This example illustrates the fact that capitalism **per se** is essentially authoritarian, because it is necessarily based on coercion and hierarchy, which explains why capitalists have resorted to the most extreme forms of authoritarianism — including totalitarian dictatorship — during crises that threatened the fundamental rules of the system itself. There is no reason to think that "anarcho"-capitalism would be any different.

Since "anarcho"-capitalism, with its private states, does not actually want to get rid of hierarchical forms of authority, the need for one government to unify the enforcement activities of



*home-grown goods and objects, to share tools and implements, to engage in common labour during harvesting time in a system of mutual aid, indeed, to help new-comers in barn-raising, corn-husking, log-rolling, and the like, was the indispensable cement that bound scattered farmsteads into a united community."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 233] Bookchin quotes David P. Szatmary (author of a book on Shay' Rebellion) stating that it was a society based upon *"co-operative, community orientated interchanges"* and not a *"basically competitive society."* [**Ibid.**]

Into this non-capitalist society came capitalist elements. Market forces and economic power soon resulted in the transformation of this society. Merchants asked for payment in specie which (and along with taxes) soon resulted in indebtedness and the dispossession of the homesteaders from their land and goods. In response Shay's rebellion started, a rebellion which was an important factor in the centralisation of state power in America to ensure that popular input and control over government were marginalised and that the wealthy elite and their property rights were protected against the many (see Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, for details). Thus the homestead system was undermined, essentially, by the need to pay for services in specie (as demanded by merchants).

So while Rothbard's theory as a certain appeal (reinforced by watching too many Westerns, we imagine) it fails to justify the "unrestricted" property rights theory (and the theory of freedom Rothbard derives from it). All it does is to end up justifying capitalist and landlord domination (which is probably what it was intended to do).

## 4.2 Why is the "Lockean Proviso" important?

Robert Nozick, in his work **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** presented a case for private property rights that was based on what he termed the *"Lockean Proviso"* — namely that common (or unowned) land and resources could be appropriated by in-

dividuals as long as the position of others is not worsen by so doing. However, if we **do** take this Proviso seriously private property rights cannot be defined (see section B.3.4 for details). Thus Nozick's arguments in favour of property rights fail.

Some right-libertarians, particularly those associated with the Austrian school of economics argue that we must reject the Lockean Proviso (probably due to the fact it can be used to undermine the case for absolute property rights). Their argument goes as follows: if an individual appropriates and uses a previously unused resource, it is because it has value to him/her, as an individual, to engage in such action. The individual has stolen nothing because it was previously unowned and we cannot know if other people are better or worse off, all we know is that, for whatever reason, they did not appropriate the resource (*"If latecomers are worse off, well then that is their proper assumption of risk in this free and uncertain world. There is no longer a vast frontier in the United States, and there is no point crying over the fact."* [Murray Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 240]).

Hence the appropriation of resources is an essentially individualistic, asocial act — the requirements of others are either irrelevant or unknown. However, such an argument fails to take into account **why** the Lockean Proviso has such an appeal. When we do this we see that rejecting it leads to massive injustice, even slavery.

However, let us start with a defence of rejecting the Proviso from a leading Austrian economist:

> *"Consider ... the case ... of the unheld sole water hole in the desert (which **everyone** in a group of travellers knows about), which one of the travellers, by racing ahead of the others, succeeds in appropriating ... [This] clearly and unjustly violates the Lockean proviso... For use, however, this view is by no means the only one possible. We notice that the energetic*



is such as to protect capitalist property rights). Moreover, we doubt that most "anarcho"-capitalists would embrace the ideology if it was more than likely that non-capitalist utopias would overcome the capitalist ones (after all, they **are** self-proclaimed capitalists).

So, given that "anarcho"-capitalists who follow Murray Rothbard's ideas and minimal-statist right-libertarians agree that **all** must follow the basic *"general libertarian law code"* which defends capitalist property rights, we can safely say that the economically *"most fit"* would be capitalist ones. Hardly surprising if the law code reflects capitalist ideas of right and wrong. In addition, as George Reitzer has argued (see **The McDonaldization of Society**), capitalism is driven towards standardisation and conformity by its own logic. This suggests that plurality of communities would soon be replaced by a series of "communities" which share the same features of hierarchy and ruling elites. ("Anarcho"-capitalists who follow David Friedman's ideas consider it possible, perhaps likely, that a free market in laws will result in one standard law code and so this also applies to that school as well)

So, in the end, the "anarcho" capitalists argue that in their system you are free to follow the (capitalist) law and work in the (capitalist) economy, and if you are lucky, take part in a "commune" as a collective capitalist. How **very** generous of them! Of course, any attempt to change said rules or economy are illegal and would be stopped by private states.

As well as indicating the falsity of "anarcho"-capitalist claims to support "experimentation," this discussion has also indicated that coercion would not be absent from "anarcho"-capitalism. This would be the case only if everyone voluntarily respected private property rights and abided by the law (i.e. acted in a capitalist-approved way). As long as you follow the law, you will be fine — which is exactly the same as under public statism. Moreover, if the citizens of a society do not want a capitalist order, it may require a lot of coercion to

words, like any authoritarian system, the "rules" within "anarcho"-capitalism do not evolve with society and its changing concepts (this can be seen from the popularity of "natural law" with right-libertarians, the authoritarian nature of which is discussed in section 11).

Therefore, in "anarcho"-capitalism you are free to follow the (capitalist) laws and to act within the limits of these laws. It is only within this context that you can experiment (if you can afford to). If you act outside these laws, then you will be subject to coercion. The amount of coercion required to prevent such actions depends on how willing people are to respect the laws. Hence it is not the case that an "anarcho"-capitalist society is particularly conducive to social experimentation and free evolution, as its advocates like to claim. Indeed, the opposite may be the case, as any capitalist system will have vast differences of wealth and power within it, thus ensuring that the ability to experiment is limited to those who can afford it. As Jonathan Wolff points out, the *"image of people freely moving from one utopia to another until they find their heaven, ignores the thought that certain choices may be irreversible... This thought may lead to speculation about whether a law of evolution would apply to the plural utopias. Perhaps, in the long run, we may find the framework regulated by the law of survival of the economically most fit, and so we would expect to see a development not of diversity but of homogeneity. Those communities with great market power would eventually soak up all but the most resistant of those communities around them."* [**Robert Nozick: Property, Justice and the Minimal State**, p. 135]

And if the initial distribution of resources is similar to that already existing then the *"economically most fit"* will be capitalistic (as argued in section J.5.12, the capitalist market actively selects against co-operatives even though they are more productive). Given the head start provided by statism, it seems likely that explicitly capitalist utopia's would remain the dominant type (particularly as the rights framework



> *traveller who appropriated all the water was not doing anything which (always ignoring, of course, prohibitions resting on the Lockean proviso itself) the other travellers were not equally free to do. The other travellers, too, could have raced ahead ... [they] did* ***not*** *bother to race for the water ... It does not seem obvious that these other travellers can claim that they were* ***hurt*** *by an action which they could themselves have easily taken"* [Israel M. Kirzner, *"Entrepreneurship, Entitlement, and Economic Justice"*, pp. 385–413, in **Reading Nozick**, p. 406]

Murray Rothbard, we should note, takes a similar position in a similar example, arguing that *"the owner [of the sole oasis] is scarcely being 'coercive'; in fact he is supplying a vital service, and should have the right to refuse a sale or charge whatever the customers will pay. The situation may be unfortunate for the customers, as are many situations in life."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 221] (Rothbard, we should note, is relying to the right-libertarian von Hayek who — to his credit — does maintain that this is a coercive situation; but as others, including other right-libertarians, point out, he has to change his definition of coercion/freedom to do so — see Stephan L. Newman's **Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 130–134 for an excellent summary of this debate).

Now, we could be tempted just to rant about the evils of the right libertarian mind-frame but we will try to present a clam analysis of this position. Now, what Kirzner (and Rothbard et al) fails to note is that without the water the other travellers will die in a matter of days. The monopolist has the power of life and death over his fellow travellers. Perhaps he hates one of them and so raced ahead to ensure their death. Perhaps he just recognised the vast power that his appropriation would give him and so, correctly, sees that the other travellers would

give up all their possessions and property to him in return for enough water to survive.

Either way, its clear that perhaps the other travellers did not *"race ahead"* because they were ethical people — they would not desire to inflict such tyranny on others because they would not like it inflicted upon them.

Thus we can answer Kirzner's question — *"What ... is so obviously acceptable about the Lockean proviso... ?"* [**Ibid.**]

It is the means by which human actions are held accountable to social standards and ethics. It is the means by which the greediest, most evil and debased humans are stopped from dragging the rest of humanity down to their level (via a "race to the bottom") and inflicting untold tyranny and domination on their fellow humans. An ideology that could consider the oppression which could result from such an appropriation as "supplying a vital service" and any act to remove this tyranny as "coercion" is obviously a very sick ideology. And we may note that the right-libertarian position on this example is a good illustration of the dangers of deductive logic from assumptions (see section 1.3 for more on this right-libertarian methodology) — after all W. Duncan Reekie, in his introduction to Austrian Economics, states that *"[t]o be intellectually consistent one must concede his absolute right to the oasis."* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 181] To place ideology before people is to ensure humanity is placed on a Procrustean bed.

Which brings us to another point. Often right-libertarians say that anarchists and other socialists are "lazy" or "do not want to work". You could interpret Kirzner's example as saying that the other travellers are "lazy" for not rushing ahead and appropriating the oasis. But this is false. For under capitalism you can only get rich by exploiting the labour of others via wage slavery or, within a company, get better pay by taking "positions of responsibility" (i.e. management positions). If you have an ethical objection to treating others as objects ("means



their bastions by their own armed forces, with a bunch of poor crowded around them for protection. This would be very similar to feudal Europe.

The competing police forces would also be attempting to execute the laws of their sponsors in areas that may not be theirs to begin with, which would lead to conflicts unless everyone agreed to follow a "general libertarian law code" (as Rothbard, for one, wants). If there were competing law codes, the problem of whose "laws" to select and enforce would arise, with each of the wealthy security sponsors desiring that their law control all of the land. And, as noted earlier, if there were **one** "libertarian law code," this would be a *"monopoly of government"* over a given area, and therefore statist.

In addition, it should be noted that the right-libertarian claim that under their system anarchistic associations would be allowed as long as they are formed voluntarily just reflects their usual vacuous concept of freedom. This is because such associations would exist within and be subject to the "general libertarian law code" of "anarcho"-capitalist society. These laws would reflect and protect the interests and power of those with capitalist property, meaning that unless these owners agree, trying to live an anarchist life would be nearly impossible (its all fine and well to say that those with property can do what they like, if you do not have property then experimentation could prove difficult — not to mention, of course, few areas are completely self-sufficient meaning that anarchistic associations will be subject to market forces, market forces which stress and reward the opposite of the values these communes were set up to create). Thus we must **buy** the right to be free!

If, as anarchists desire, most people refuse to recognise or defend the rights of private property and freely associate accordingly to organise their own lives and ignore their bosses, this would still be classed as "initiation of force" under "anarcho"-capitalism, and thus repressed. In other

most normal people will be somewhat at a disadvantage if a cartel of defence firms decides to act coercively. The division of labour society will discourage the spread of skills required for sustained warfare throughout society and so, perhaps, ensure that customers remain "vulnerable." The price of liberty may be eternal vigilance, but are most people willing to include eternal preparation of war as well? For modern society, the answer seems to be no, they prefer to let others do that (namely the state and its armed forces). And, we should note, an armed society may be a polite one, but its politeness comes from fear, **not** mutual respect and so totally phoney and soul destroying.

If we look at inequality within society, this may produce a ghettoisation effect within "anarcho"-capitalism. As David Friedman notes, conflict between defence firms is bad for business. Conflict costs money both in terms of weaponry used and increased ("danger money") wages. For this reason he thinks that peaceful co-operation will exist between firms. However, if we look at poor areas with high crime rates then its clear that such an area will be a dangerous place. In other words, it is very likely to be high in conflict. But conflict increases costs, and so prices. Does this mean that those areas which need police most will also have the highest prices for law enforcement? That is the case with insurance now, so perhaps we will see whole areas turning into Hobbesian anarchy simply because the high costs associated with dangerous areas will make the effective demand for their services approach zero.

In a system based on "private statism," police and justice would be determined by "free market" forces. As indicated in section B.4.1, right-libertarians maintain that one would have few rights on other peoples' property, and so the owner's will would be the law (possibly restricted somewhat by a "general libertarian law code", perhaps not — see last section). In this situation, those who could not afford police protection would become victims of roving bandits and rampant crime, resulting in a society where the wealthy are securely protected in



to an end") then these options are unavailable to you. Thus anarchists and other socialists are not "lazy" because they are not rich — they just have no desire to get rich off the labour and liberty of others (as expressed in their opposition to private property and the relations of domination it creates). In other words, Anarchism is not the "politics of envy"; it is the politics of liberty and the desire to treat others as "ends in themselves".

Rothbard is aware of what is involved in accepting the Lockean Proviso — namely the existence of private property (*"Locke's proviso may lead to the outlawry of **all** private property of land, since one can always say that the reduction of available land leaves everyone else .. . worse off"*, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 240 — see section B.3.4 for a discussion on why the Proviso **does** imply the end of capitalist property rights). Which is why he, and other right-libertarians, reject it. Its simple. Either you reject the Proviso and embrace capitalist property rights (and so allow one class of people to be dispossessed and another empowered at their expense) or you reject private property in favour of possession and liberty. Anarchists, obviously, favour the latter option.

As an aside, we should point out that (following Stirner) the would-be monopolist is doing nothing wrong (as such) in attempting to monopolise the oasis. He is, after all, following his self-interest. However, what is objectionable is the right-libertarian attempt to turn thus act into a "right" which must be respected by the other travellers. Simply put, if the other travellers gang up and dispose of this would be tyrant then they are right to do so — to argue that this is a violation of the monopolists "rights" is insane and an indication of a slave mentality (or, following Rousseau, that the others are *"simple"*). Of course, if the would-be monopolist has the necessary **force** to withstand the other travellers then his property then the matter is closed — might makes right. But to worship rights, even when they obviously result in despotism, is definitely a

case of *"spooks in the head"* and "man is created for the Sabbath" not "the Sabbath is created for man."

### 4.3 How does private property effect individualism?

Private property is usually associated by "anarcho"-capitalism with individualism. Usually private property is seen as the key way of ensuring individualism and individual freedom (and that private property is the expression of individualism). Therefore it is useful to indicate how private property can have a serious impact on individualism.

Usually right-libertarians contrast the joys of "individualism" with the evils of "collectivism" in which the individual is sub-merged into the group or collective and is made to work for the benefit of the group (see any Ayn Rand book or essay on the evils of collectivism).

But what is ironic is that right-libertarian ideology creates a view of industry which would (perhaps) shame even the most die-hard fan of Stalin. What do we mean? Simply that right-libertarians stress the abilities of the people at the top of the company, the owner, the entrepreneur, and tend to ignore the very real subordination of those lower down the hierarchy (see, again, any Ayn Rand book on the worship of business leaders). In the Austrian school of economics, for example, the entrepreneur is considered the driving force of the market process and tend to abstract away from the organisations they govern. This approach is usually followed by right-libertarians. Often you get the impression that the accomplishments of a firm are the personal triumphs of the capitalists, as though their subordinates are merely tools not unlike the machines on which they labour.

We should not, of course, interpret this to mean that right-libertarians believe that entrepreneurs run their companies single-handedly (although you do get that impression



better name for "anarcho"-capitalism would be "private-state" capitalism. At least that way we get a fairer idea of what they are trying to sell us. As Bob Black writes in **The Libertarian as Conservative**, *"To my mind a right-wing anarchist is just a minarchist who'd abolish the state to his own satisfaction by calling it something else... . They don't denounce what the state does, they just object to who's doing it."*

### 6.5 What other effects would "free market" justice have?

Such a system would be dangerous simply because of the power it places in the hands of companies. As Michael Taylor notes, *"whether the [protection] market is competitive or not, it must be remembered that the product is a peculiar one: when we buy cars or shoes or telephone services we do not give the firm power based on force, but armed protection agencies, like the state, make customers (their own and others') vulnerable, and having given them power we cannot be sure that they will use it only for our protection."* [**Community, Anarchy and Liberty**, p. 65]

As we argued above, there are many reasons to believe that a "protection" market will place most of society (bar the wealthy elite) in a "vulnerable" position. One such reason is the assumptions of the "anarcho"-capitalists themselves. As they note, capitalism is marked by an extreme division of labour. Instead of everyone having all the skills they need, these skills are distributed throughout society and all (so it is claimed) benefit.

This applies equally to the "defence" market. People subscribe to a "defence firm" because they either cannot or do not want the labour of having to protect their own property and person. The skills of defence, therefore, are concentrated in these companies and so these firms will have an advantage in terms of experience and mental state (they are trained to fight) as well as, as seems likely, weaponry. This means that

*purchasing these services from capitalist vendors… Rothbard sees nothing at all wrong with the amassing of wealth, therefore those with more capital will inevitably have greater coercive force at their disposal, just as they do now."*

Far from wanting to abolish the state, then, "anarcho"-capitalists only desire to privatise it — to make it solely accountable to capitalist wealth. Their "companies" perform the same services as the state, for the same people, in the same manner. However, there is one slight difference. Property owners would be able to select between competing companies for their "services." Because such "companies" are employed by the boss, they would be used to reinforce the totalitarian nature of capitalist firms by ensuring that the police and the law they enforce are not even slightly accountable to ordinary people.

Looking beyond the "defence association" to the defence market itself (as we argued in the last section), this will become a cartel and so become some kind of public state. The very nature of the private state, its need to co-operate with others in the same industry, push it towards a monopoly network of firms and so a monopoly of force over a given area. Given the assumptions used to defend "anarcho"-capitalism, its system of private statism will develop into public statism — a state run by managers accountable only to the share-holding elite.

To quote Peter Marshall again, the "anarcho"-capitalists *"claim that all would benefit from a free exchange on the market, it is by no means certain; any unfettered market system would most likely sponsor a reversion to an unequal society with defence associations perpetuating exploitation and privilege."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 565] History, and current practice, prove this point.

In short, "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists at all, they are just capitalists who desire to see private states develop — states which are strictly accountable to their paymasters without even the sham of democracy we have today. Hence a far



sometimes!). But these abstractions help hide the fact that the economy is overwhelmingly interdependent and organised hierarchically within industry. Even in their primary role as organisers, entrepreneurs depend on the group. A company president can only issue general guidelines to his managers, who must inevitably organise and direct much of their departments on their own. The larger a company gets, the less personal and direct control an entrepreneur has over it. They must delegate out an increasing share of authority and responsibility, and is more dependent than ever on others to help him run things, investigate conditions, inform policy, and make recommendations. Moreover, the authority structures are from the "top-down" — indeed the firm is essentially a command economy, with all members part of a collective working on a common plan to achieve a common goal (i.e. it is essentially collectivist in nature — which means it is not too unsurprising that Lenin argued that state socialism could be considered as one big firm or office and why the system he built on that model was so horrific).

So the firm (the key component of the capitalist economy) is marked by a distinct **lack** of individualism, a lack usually ignored by right libertarians (or, at best, considered as "unavoidable"). As these firms are hierarchical structures and workers are paid to obey, it does make **some** sense — in a capitalist environment — to assume that the entrepreneur is the main actor, but as an individualistic model of activity it fails totally. Perhaps it would not be unfair to say that capitalist individualism celebrates the entrepreneur because this reflects a hierarchical system in which for the one to flourish, the many must obey? (Also see section 1.1).

Capitalist individualism does not recognise the power structures that exist within capitalism and how they affect individuals. In Brian Morris' words, what they fail *"to recognise is that most productive relations under capitalism allow little scope for creativity and self-expression on the part of workers; that such*

*relationships are not equitable; nor are they freely engaged in for the mutual benefit of both parties, for workers have no control over the production process or over the product of their labour. Rand [like other right-libertarians] misleadingly equates trade, artistic production and wage-slavery... [but] wage-slavery ... is quite different from the trade principle"* as it is a form of *"exploitation."* [**Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 190]

He further notes that *"[s]o called trade relations involving human labour are contrary to the egoist values Rand [and other capitalist individualists] espouses — they involve little in the way of independence, freedom, integrity or justice."* [**Ibid.**, p. 191]

Moreover, capitalist individualism actually **supports** authority and hierarchy. As Joshua Chen and Joel Rogers point out, the *"achievement of short-run material satisfaction often makes it irrational [from an individualist perspective] to engage in more radical struggle, since that struggle is by definition against those institutions which provide one's current gain."* In other words, to rise up the company structure, to "better oneself," (or even get a good reference) you cannot be a pain in the side of management — obedient workers do well, rebel workers do not.

Thus the hierarchical structures help develop an "individualistic" perspective which actually reinforces those authority structures. This, as Cohn and Rogers notes, means that *"the structure in which [workers] find themselves yields less than optimal social results from their isolated but economically rational decisions."* [quoted by Alfie Kohn, **No Contest**, p. 67, p. 260f]

Steve Biko, a black activist murdered by the South African police in the 1970s, argued that *"the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."* And this is something capitalists have long recognised. Their investment in "Public Relations" and "education" programmes for their employees shows this clearly, as does the hierarchical nature of the firm. By having a ladder to climb, the firm rewards obedience and pe-



have to compromise to get a job — see section 10.2 on why this is the case). After all, in the company towns, only company money was legal tender and company police the only law enforcers.

Therefore, it is obvious that the "anarcho"-capitalist system meets the Weberian criteria of a monopoly to enforce certain rules in a given area of land. The *"general libertarian law code"* is a monopoly and property owners determine the rules that apply to their property. Moreover, if the rules that property owners enforce are subject to rules contained in the monopolistic *"general libertarian law code"* (for example, that they cannot ban the sale and purchase of certain products — such as defence — on their own territory) then "anarcho"-capitalism **definitely** meets the Weberian definition of the state (as described by Ayn Rand as an institution *"that holds the exclusive power to **enforce** certain rules of conduct in a given geographical area"* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 239]) as its "law code" overrides the desires of property owners to do what they like on their own property.

Therefore, no matter how you look at it, "anarcho"-capitalism and its "defence" market promotes a *"monopoly of ultimate decision making power"* over a *"given territorial area"*. It is obvious that for anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist system is a state system. As, as we note, a reasonable case can be made for it also being a state in "anarcho"-capitalist theory as well.

So, in effect, "anarcho"-capitalism has a **different** sort of state, one in which bosses hire and fire the policeman. As Peter Sabatini notes [in **Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**], *"[w]ithin Libertarianism, Rothbard represents a minority perspective that actually argues for the total elimination of the state. However Rothbard's claim as an anarchist is quickly voided when it is shown that he only wants an end to the public state. In its place he allows countless private states, with each person supplying their own police force, army, and law, or else*

not "coerced." However, the "consent" argument is so weak in conditions of inequality as to be useless (see sections 2.4 and 3.1, for example) and, moreover, it can and has been used to justify the state. In other words, "consent" in and of itself does not ensure that a given regime is not statist (see section 2.3 for more on this). So an argument along these lines is deeply flawed and can be used to justify regimes which are little better than "industrial feudalism" (such as, as indicated in section B.4, company towns, for example — an institution which right-libertarianism has no problem with). Even the *"general libertarian law code,"* could be considered a "monopoly of government over a particular area," particularly if ordinary people have no real means of affecting the law code, either because it is market-driven and so is money-determined, or because it will be "natural" law and so unchangeable by mere mortals.

In other words, **if** the state *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area"* [Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170] then its pretty clear that the property owner shares this power. The owner is, after all, the *"ultimate decision-making power"* in their workplace or on their land. If the boss takes a dislike to you (for example, you do not follow their orders) then you get fired. If you cannot get a job or rent the land without agreeing to certain conditions (such as not joining a union or subscribing to the "defence firm" approved by your employer) then you either sign the contract or look for something else. Of course Rothbard fails to note that bosses have this monopoly of power and is instead referring to *"prohibiting the voluntary purchase and sale of defence and judicial services."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 171] But just as surely as the law of contract allows the banning of unions from a property, it can just as surely ban the sale and purchase of defence and judicial services (it could be argued that market forces will stop this happening, but this is unlikely as bosses usually have the advantage on the labour market and workers



nalises rebellion. This aims at creating a mind-set which views hierarchy as good and so helps produce servile people.

This is why anarchists would agree with Alfie Kohn when he argues that *"the individualist worldview is a profoundly conservative doctrine: it inherently stifles change."* [**Ibid.**, p. 67] So, what is the best way for a boss to maintain his or her power? Create a hierarchical workplace and encourage capitalist individualism (as capitalist individualism actually works **against** attempts to increase freedom from hierarchy). Needless to say, such a technique cannot work forever — hierarchy also encourages revolt — but such divide and conquer can be **very** effective.

And as anarchist author Michael Moorcock put it, *"Rugged individualism also goes hand in hand with a strong faith in paternalism — albeit a tolerant and somewhat distant paternalism — and many otherwise sharp-witted libertarians seem to see nothing in the morality of a John Wayne Western to conflict with their views. Heinlein's paternalism is at heart the same as Wayne's... To be an anarchist, surely, is to reject authority but to accept self-discipline and community responsibility. To be a rugged individualist a la Heinlein and others is to be forever a child who must obey, charm and cajole to be tolerated by some benign, omniscient father: Rooster Coburn shuffling his feet in front of a judge he respects for his office (but not necessarily himself) in True Grit."* [**Starship Stormtroopers**]

One last thing, don't be fooled into thinking that individualism or concern about individuality — not **quite** the same thing — is restricted to the right, they are not. For example, the *"individualist theory of society ... might be advanced in a capitalist or in an anti-capitalist form ... the theory as developed by critics of capitalism such as Hodgskin and the anarchist Tucker saw ownership of capital by a few as an obstacle to genuine individualism, and the individualist ideal was realisable only through the free association of labourers (Hodgskin) or independent proprietorship (Tucker)."* [David Miller, **Social Justice**, pp. 290–1]

And the reason why social anarchists oppose capitalism is that it creates a **false** individualism, an abstract one which crushes the individuality of the many and justifies (and supports) hierarchical and authoritarian social relations. In Kropotkin's words, *"what has been called 'individualism' up to now has been only a foolish egoism which belittles the individual. It did not led to what it was established as a goal: that is the complete, broad, and most perfectly attainable development of individuality."* The new individualism desired by Kropotkin *"will not consist ... in the oppression of one's neighbour ... [as this] reduced the [individualist] ...to the level of an animal in a herd."* [**Selected Writings**, p, 295, p. 296]

## 4.4 How does private property affect relationships?

Obviously, capitalist private property affects relationships between people by creating structures of power. Property, as we have argued all through this FAQ, creates relationships based upon domination — and this cannot help but produce servile tendencies within those subject to them (it also produces rebellious tendencies as well, the actual ratio between the two tendencies dependent on the individual in question and the community they are in). As anarchists have long recognised, power corrupts — both those subjected to it and those who exercise it.

While few, if any, anarchists would fail to recognise the importance of possession — which creates the necessary space all individuals need to be themselves — they all agree that private property corrupts this liberatory aspect of "property" by allowing relationships of domination and oppression to be built up on top of it. Because of this recognition, all anarchists have tried to equalise property and turn it back into possession.

Also, capitalist individualism actively builds barriers between people. Under capitalism, money rules and individuality is expressed via consumption choices (i.e. money). But



who have a monopoly of force and coercion within a given area. Relative to the rest of the society, these defence associations would have a monopoly of force and coercion of a given piece of property; thus, by the "anarcho"-capitalists' **own definition** of statehood, these associations would qualify!

If we look at Rothbard's definition of statehood, which requires (a) the power to tax and/or (b) a *"coerced monopoly of the provision of defence over a given area"*, "anarcho"-capitalism runs into trouble.

In the first place, the costs of hiring defence associations will be deducted from the wealth created by those who use, but do not own, the property of capitalists and landlords. Let not forget that a capitalist will only employ a worker or rent out land and housing if they make a profit from so doing. Without the labour of the worker, there would be nothing to sell and no wages to pay for rent. Thus a company's or landlord's "defence" firm will be paid from the revenue gathered from the capitalists power to extract a tribute from those who use, but do not own, a property. In other words, workers would pay for the agencies that enforce their employers' authority over them via the wage system and rent — taxation in a more insidious form.

In the second, under capitalism most people spend a large part of their day on other people's property — that is, they work for capitalists and/or live in rented accommodation. Hence if property owners select a "defence association" to protect their factories, farms, rental housing, etc., their employees and tenants will view it as a *"coerced monopoly of the provision of defence over a given area."* For certainly the employees and tenants will not be able to hire their own defence companies to expropriate the capitalists and landlords. So, from the standpoint of the employees and tenants, the owners do have a monopoly of "defence" over the areas in question. Of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist will argue that the tenants and workers "consent" to **all** the rules and conditions of a contract when they sign it and so the property owner's monopoly is

"anarcho"-capitalism is not stable and will not remain orderly as agencies develop which favour the interests of their own customers and enforce their own law codes at the expense of others. If collusion cannot occur (or is too costly) then neither can the punishment of non-conforming firms and "anarcho"-capitalism will prove to be unstable.

So, to sum up, the "defence" market of private states has powerful forces within it to turn it into a monopoly of force over a given area. From a privately chosen monopoly of force over a specific (privately owned) area, the market of private states will turn into a monopoly of force over a general area. This is due to the need for peaceful relations between companies, relations which are required for a firm to secure market share. The unique market forces that exist within this market ensure collusion and monopoly.

In other words, the system of private states will become a cartel and so a public state — unaccountable to all but its shareholders, a state of the wealthy, by the wealthy, for the wealthy. In other words, fascism.

## 6.4 Why are these "defence associations" states?

It is clear that "anarcho"-capitalist defence associations meet the criteria of statehood outlined in section B.2 ("Why are anarchists against the state"). They defend property and preserve authority relationships, they practice coercion, and are hierarchical institutions which govern those under them on behalf of a "ruling elite," i.e. those who employ both the governing forces and those they govern. Thus, from an anarchist perspective, these "defence associations" as most definitely states.

What is interesting, however, is that by their own definitions a very good case can be made that these "defence associations" as states in the "anarcho"-capitalist sense too. Capitalist apologists usually define a "government" (or state) as those



money does not encourage an empathy with others. As Frank Stronach (chair of Magna International, a Canadian auto-parts maker that shifted its production to Mexico) put it, *"[t]o be in business your first mandate is to make money, and money has no heart, no soul, conscience, homeland."* [cited by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 113] And for those who study economics, it seems that this dehumanising effect also strikes them as well:

> "Studying economics also seems to make you a nastier person. Psychological studies have shown that economics graduate students are more likely to 'free ride' — shirk contributions to an experimental 'public goods' account in the pursuit of higher private returns — than the general public. Economists also are less generous that other academics in charitable giving. Undergraduate economics majors are more likely to defect in the classic prisoner's dilemma game that are other majors. And on other tests, students grow less honest — expressing less of a tendency, for example, to return found money — after studying economics, but not studying a control subject like astronomy.
>
> "This is no surprise, really. Mainstream economics is built entirely on a notion of self-interested individuals, rational self-maximisers who can order their wants and spend accordingly. There's little room for sentiment, uncertainty, selflessness, and social institutions. Whether this is an accurate picture of the average human is open to question, but there's no question that capitalism as a system and economics as a discipline both reward people who conform to the model." [Doug Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p, 143]

Which, of course, highlights the problems within the "trader" model advocated by Ayn Rand. According to her, the trader is **the** example of moral behaviour — you have something I want, I have something you want, we trade and we both benefit and so our activity is self-interested and no-one sacrifices themselves for another. While this has **some** intuitive appeal it fails to note that in the real world it is a pure fantasy. The trader wants to get the best deal possible for themselves and if the bargaining positions are unequal then one person will gain at the expense of the other (if the "commodity" being traded is labour, the seller may not even have the option of not trading at all). The trader is only involved in economic exchange, and has no concern for the welfare of the person they are trading with. They are a bearer of things, **not** an individual with a wide range of interests, concerns, hopes and dreams. These are irrelevant, unless you can make money out of them of course! Thus the trader is often a manipulator and outside novels it most definitely is a case of "buyer beware!"

If the trader model is taken as the basis of interpersonal relationships, economic gain replaces respect and empathy for others. It replaces human relationships with relationships based on things — and such a mentality does not encompass how interpersonal relationships affect both you and the society you life in. In the end, it impoverishes society and individuality. Yes, any relationship must be based upon self-interest (mutual aid is, after all, something we do because we benefit from it in some way) but the trader model presents such a **narrow** self-interest that it is useless and actively impoverishes the very things it should be protecting — individuality and interpersonal relationships (see section I.7.4 on how capitalism does not protect individuality).



law enforcement would be localised in given areas as most crime occurs where the criminal lives. Few criminals would live in New York and commit crimes in Portland. However, as defence companies have to co-operate to provide their services, so would the cartels. Few people live all their lives in one area and so firms from different cartels would come into contact, so forming a cartel of cartels.

A cartel of cartels may (perhaps) be less powerful than a local cartel, but it would still be required and for exactly the same reasons a local one is. Therefore "anarcho"-capitalism would, like "actually existing capitalism," be marked by a series of public states covering given areas, co-ordinated by larger states at higher levels. Such a set up would parallel the United States in many ways except it would be run directly by wealthy shareholders without the sham of "democratic" elections. Moreover, as in the USA and other states there will still be a monopoly of rules and laws (the "general libertarian law code").

Some "anarcho"-capitalists claim that this will not occur, but that the co-operation needed to provide the service of law enforcement will somehow **not** turn into collusion between companies. However, they are quick to argue that renegade "agencies" (for example, the so-called "Mafia problem" or those who reject judgements) will go out of business because of the higher costs associated with conflict and not arbitration. However, these higher costs are ensured because the firms in question do not co-operate with others. If other agencies boycott a firm but co-operate with all the others, then the boycotted firm will be at the same disadvantage — regardless of whether it is a cartel buster or a renegade.

The "anarcho"-capitalist is trying to have it both ways. If the punishment of non-conforming firms cannot occur, then "anarcho"-capitalism will turn into a war of all against all or, at the very least, the service of social peace and law enforcement cannot be provided. If firms cannot deter others from disrupting the social peace (one service the firm provides) then

themselves against the cartel and its taxation (i.e. monopoly profits), enough will remain members of the cartel (perhaps they will be fired if they change, perhaps they dislike change and think the extra money is worth peace, perhaps they fear that by joining the new company their peace will be disrupted or the outcomes of their problems with others too unsure to be worth it, perhaps they are shareholders and want to maintain their income) so that co-operation will still be needed and conflict unprofitable and dangerous (and as the cartel will have more resources than the new firm, it could usually hold out longer than the new firm could). In effect, breaking the cartel may take the form of an armed revolution — as it would with any state.

The forces that break up cartels and monopolies in other industries (such as free entry — although, of course the "defence" market will be subject to oligopolistic tendencies as any other and this will create barriers to entry, see section C.4) do not work here and so new firms have to co-operate or loose market share and/or profits. This means that "defence companies" will reap monopoly profits and, more importantly, have a monopoly of force over a given area.

Hence a monopoly of private states will develop in addition to the existing monopoly of law and this is a de facto monopoly of force over a given area (i.e. some kind of public state run by share holders). New companies attempting to enter the "defence" industry will have to work with the existing cartel in order to provide the services it offers to its customers. The cartel is in a dominant position and new entries into the market either become part of it or fail. This is exactly the position with the state, with "private agencies" free to operate as long as they work to the state's guidelines. As with the monopolist "general libertarian law code", if you do not toe the line, you go out of business fast.

It is also likely that a multitude of cartels would develop, with a given cartel operating in a given locality. This is because



## 4.5 Does private property co-ordinate without hierarchy?

It is usually to find right-libertarians maintain that private property (i.e. capitalism) allows economic activity to be co-ordinated by non-hierarchical means. In other words, they maintain that capitalism is a system of large scale co-ordination without hierarchy. These claims follow the argument of noted right-wing, "free market" economist Milton Friedman who contrasts *"central planning involving the use of coercion — the technique of the army or the modern totalitarian state"* with *"voluntary co-operation between individuals — the technique of the marketplace"* as two distinct ways of co-ordinating the economic activity of large groups (*"millions"*) of people. [**Capitalism and Freedom**, p. 13].

However, this is just playing with words. As they themselves point out the internal structure of a corporation or capitalist company is **not** a "market" (i.e. non-hierarchical) structure, it is a "non-market" (hierarchical) structure of a market participant (see section 2.2). However "market participants" are part of the market. In other words, capitalism is **not** a system of co-ordination without hierarchy because it does contain hierarchical organisations which **are an essential part of the system**!

Indeed, the capitalist company **is** a form of central planning and shares the same "technique" as the army. As the pro-capitalist writer Peter Drucker noted in his history of General Motors, *"[t]here is a remarkably close parallel between General Motors' scheme of organisation and those of the two institutions most renowned for administrative efficiency: that of the Catholic Church and that of the modern army .. ."* [quoted by David Enger, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 66]. And so capitalism is marked by a series of totalitarian organisations — and since when was totalitarianism liberty enhancing? Indeed, many "anarcho"-capitalists actually celebrate the command

economy of the capitalist firm as being more "efficient" than self-managed firms (usually because democracy stops action with debate). The same argument is applied by the Fascists to the political sphere. It does not change much — nor does it become less fascistic — when applied to economic structures. To state the obvious, such glorification of workplace dictatorship seems somewhat at odds with an ideology calling itself "libertarian" or "anarchist". Is dictatorship more liberty enhancing to those subject to it than democracy? Anarchists doubt it (see section A.2.11 for details).

In order to claim that capitalism co-ordinates individual activity without hierarchy right-libertarians have to abstract from individuals and how they interact **within** companies and concentrate purely on relationships **between** companies. This is pure sophistry. Like markets, companies require at least two or more people to work — both are forms of social co-operation. If co-ordination within companies is hierarchical, then the system they work within is based upon hierarchy. To claim that capitalism co-ordinates without hierarchy is simply false — its based on hierarchy and authoritarianism. Capitalist companies are based upon denying workers self-government (i.e. freedom) during work hours. The boss tells workers what to do, when to do, how to do and for how long. This denial of freedom is discussed in greater depth in sections B.1 and B.4.

Because of the relations of power it creates, opposition to capitalist private property (and so wage labour) and the desire to see it ended is an essential aspect of anarchist theory. Due to its ideological blind spot with regards to apparently "voluntary" relations of domination and oppression created by the force of circumstances (see section 2 for details), "anarcho"-capitalism considers wage labour as a form of freedom and ignore its fascistic aspects (when not celebrating those aspects). Thus "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist. By concentrating on the moment the contract is signed, they ignore that freedom is restricted during the contract itself. While denouncing



**co-operate** with the others (or go out of business fast) and this means collusion can take place. In other words, a system of private states will have to agree to work together in order to provide the service of "law enforcement" to their customers and the result of such co-operation is to create a cartel. However, unlike cartels in other industries, the "defence" cartel will be a stable body simply because its members **have** to work with their competitors in order to survive.

Let us look at what would happen after such a cartel is formed in a specific area and a new "defence company" desired to enter the market. This new company will have to work with the members of the cartel in order to provide its services to its customers (note that "anarcho"-capitalists already assume that they *"will have to"* subscribe to the same law code). If the new defence firm tries to under-cut the cartel's monopoly prices, the other companies would refuse to work with it. Having to face constant conflict or the possibility of conflict, seeing its decisions being ignored by other agencies and being uncertain what the results of a dispute would be, few would patronise the new "defence company." The new company's prices would go up and so face either folding or joining the cartel. Unlike every other market, if a "defence company" does not have friendly, co-operative relations with other firms in the same industry then it will go out of business.

This means that the firms that are co-operating have but to agree not to deal with new firms which are attempting to undermine the cartel in order for them to fail. A "cartel busting" firm goes out of business in the same way an outlaw one does — the higher costs associated with having to solve all its conflicts by force, not arbitration, increases its production costs much higher than the competitors and the firm faces insurmountable difficulties selling its products at a profit (ignoring any drop of demand due to fears of conflict by actual and potential customers). Even if we assume that many people will happily join the new firm in spite of the dangers to protect

operate with its fellows in order to provide its services for its customers. They need to be able to agree to courts and judges, agree to abide by decisions and law codes and so forth. In economics there are other, more accurate, terms to describe co-operative activity between companies: collusion and cartels. Collusion and cartels is where companies in a specific market agree to work together to restrict competition and reap the benefits of monopoly power by working to achieve the same ends in partnership with each other. In other words this means that collusion is built into the system, with the necessary contractual relations between agencies in the "protection" market requiring that firms co-operate and, by so doing, to behave (effectively) as one large firm (and so, effectively, resemble the state even more than they already do). Quoting Adam Smith seems appropriate here: *"People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, p. 117]

For example, when buying food it does not matter whether the supermarkets I visit have good relations with each other. The goods I buy are independent of the relationships that exist between competing companies. However, in the case of private states, this is **not** the case. If a specific "defence" company has bad relationships with other companies in the market then it is against my self-interest to subscribe to it. Why join a private state if its judgements are ignored by the others and it has to resort to violence to be heard? This, as well as being potentially dangerous, will also push up the prices I have to pay. Arbitration is one of the most important services a defence firm can offer its customers and its market share is based upon being able to settle interagency disputes without risk of war or uncertainty that the final outcome will not be accepted by all parties.

Therefore, the market set-up within the "anarcho"-capitalist "defence" market is such that private states **have to**



(correctly) the totalitarianism of the army, they ignore it in the workplace. But factory fascism is just as freedom destroying as the army or political fascism.

Due to this basic lack of concern for freedom, "anarcho"-capitalists cannot be considered as anarchists. Their total lack of concern about factory fascism (i.e. wage labour) places them totally outside the anarchist tradition. Real anarchists have always been aware of that private property and wage labour restriction freedom and desired to create a society in which people would be able to avoid it. In other words, where **all** relations are non-hierarchical and truly co-operative.

To conclude, to claim that private property eliminates hierarchy is false. Nor does capitalism co-ordinate economic activities without hierarchical structures. For this reason anarchists support co-operative forms of production rather than capitalistic forms.

## 5 Will privatising "the commons" increase liberty?

"Anarcho"-capitalists aim for a situation in which *"no land areas, no square footage in the world shall remain 'public,'"* in other words **everything** will be *"privatised."* [Murray Rothbard, **Nations by Consent**, p. 84] They claim that privatising "the commons" (e.g. roads, parks, etc.) which are now freely available to all will increase liberty. Is this true? We have shown before why the claim that privatisation can protect the environment is highly implausible (see section E.2). Here we will concern ourselves with private ownership of commonly used "property" which we all take for granted and pay for with taxes.

Its clear from even a brief consideration of a hypothetical society based on "privatised" roads (as suggested by Murray Rothbard in **For a New Liberty**, pp. 202–203 and David Fried-

man in **The Machinery of Freedom**, pp. 98–101) that the only increase of liberty will be for the ruling elite. As "anarcho"-capitalism is based on paying for what one uses, privatisation of roads would require some method of tracking individuals to ensure that they pay for the roads they use. In the UK, for example, during the 1980s the British Tory government looked into the idea of toll-based motorways. Obviously having toll-booths on motorways would hinder their use and restrict "freedom," and so they came up with the idea of tracking cars by satellite. Every vehicle would have a tracking device installed in it and a satellite would record where people went and which roads they used. They would then be sent a bill or have their bank balances debited based on this information (in the fascist city-state/company town of Singapore such a scheme **has** been introduced).

If we extrapolate from this example to a system of **fully** privatised "commons," it would clearly require all individuals to have tracking devices on them so they could be properly billed for use of roads, pavements, etc. Obviously being tracked by private firms would be a serious threat to individual liberty. Another, less costly, option would be for private guards to randomly stop and question car-owners and individuals to make sure they had paid for the use of the road or pavement in question. "Parasites" would be arrested and fined or locked up. Again, however, being stopped and questioned by uniformed individuals has more in common with police states than liberty. Toll-boothing **every** street would be highly unfeasible due to the costs involved and difficulties for use that it implies. Thus the idea of privatising roads and charging drivers to gain access seems impractical at best and distinctly freedom endangering if implemented at worse.

Of course, the option of owners letting users have free access to the roads and pavements they construct and run would be difficult for a profit-based company. No one could make a profit in that case. If companies paid to construct roads for



*equalities of power in the economic and social domains, one has to imagine society as strangely compartmentalised in order to believe that those inequalities will fail to reflect themselves in the judicial and legal domain, and that the economically powerful will be unable to manipulate the legal and judicial system to their advantage. To abstract from such influences of context, and then consider the merits of an abstract judicial system. .. is to follow a method that is not likely to take us far. This, by the way, is a criticism that applies…to any theory that relies on a rule of law to override the tendencies inherent in a given social and economic system"* [Weick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225] (For a discussion of this problem as it would surface in attempts to protect the environment under "anarcho"-capitalism, see sections E.2 and E.3).

There is another reason why "market forces" will not stop abuse by the rich, or indeed stop the system from turning from private to public statism. This is due to the nature of the "defence" market (for a similar analysis of the "defence" market see Tyler Cowen's *"Law as a Public Good: The Economics of Anarchy"* in **Economics and Philosophy**, no. 8 (1992), pp. 249–267 and *"Rejoinder to David Friedman on the Economics of Anarchy"* in **Economics and Philosophy**, no. 10 (1994), pp. 329–332). In "anarcho"-capitalist theory it is assumed that the competing "defence companies" have a vested interest in peacefully settling differences between themselves by means of arbitration. In order to be competitive on the market, companies will have to co-operate via contractual relations otherwise the higher price associated with conflict will make the company uncompetitive and it will go under. Those companies that ignore decisions made in arbitration would be outlawed by others, ostracised and their rulings ignored. By this process, it is argued, a system of competing "defence" companies will be stable and not turn into a civil war between agencies with each enforcing the interests of their clients against others by force.

However, there is a catch. Unlike every other market, the businesses in competition in the "defence" industry **must** co-

to back it up). Friedman's assumption that lower costs will automatically win over people's passions is unfounded. As is the assumption that both firms have equal resources and bargaining power. If the pro-capital punishment firm demands more than the anti can provide and has larger weaponry and troops, then the anti defence firm may have to agree to let the pro one have its way.

So, all in all, it is **not** clear that *"everyone gains"* — there may be a sizeable percentage of those involved who do not "gain" as their desire for capital punishment is traded away by those who claimed they would enforce it.

In other words, a system of competing law codes and privatised rights does not ensure that **all** consumers interests are meet. Given unequal resources within society, it is also clear that the "effective demand" of the parties involved to see their law codes enforced is drastically different. The wealthy head of a transnational corporation will have far more resources available to him to pay for **his** laws to be enforced than one of his employees on the assembly line. Moreover, as we argue in sections 3.1 and 10.2, the labour market is usually skewed in favour of capitalists. This means that workers have to compromise to get work and such compromises may involve agreeing to join a specific "defence" firm or not join one at all (just as workers are often forced to sign non-union contracts today in order to get work). In other words, a privatised law system is very likely to skew the enforcement of laws in line with the skewing of income and wealth in society. At the very least, unlike every other market, the customer is **not** guaranteed to get exactly what they demand simply because the product they "consume" is dependent on other within the same market to ensure its supply. The unique workings of the law/defence market are such as to deny customer choice (we will discuss other aspects of this unique market shortly).

Weick sums up by saying *"any judicial system is going to exist in the context of economic institutions. If there are gross in-*



their customers/employees to use, they would be financially hindered in competition with other companies that did not, and thus would be unlikely to do so. If they restricted use purely to their own customers, the tracking problem appears again.

Some may object that this picture of extensive surveillance of individuals would not occur or be impossible. However, Murray Rothbard (in a slightly different context) argued that technology would be available to collate information about individuals. He argued that *"[i]t should be pointed out that modern technology makes even more feasible the collection and dissemination of information about people's credit ratings and records of keeping or violating their contracts or arbitration agreements. Presumably, an anarchist [sic!] society would see the expansion of this sort of dissemination of data."* [*"Society Without A State"*, in **Nomos XIX**, Pennock and Chapman (eds.), p. 199] So, perhaps, with the total privatisation of society we would also see the rise of private Big Brothers, collecting information about individuals for use by property owners. The example of the **Economic League** (a British company who provided the "service" of tracking the political affiliations and activities of workers for employers) springs to mind.

And, of course, these privatisation suggestions ignore differences in income and market power. If, for example, variable pricing is used to discourage road use at times of peak demand (to eliminate traffic jams at rush-hour) as is suggested both by Murray Rothbard and David Friedman, then the rich will have far more "freedom" to travel than the rest of the population. And we may even see people having to go into debt just to get to work or move to look for work.

Which raises another problem with notion of total privatisation, the problem that it implies the end of freedom of travel. Unless you get permission or (and this seems more likely) pay for access, you will not be able to travel **anywhere.** As Rothbard **himself** makes clear, "anarcho"-capitalism means the end of the right to roam or even travel. He states that *"it became*

*clear to me that a totally privatised country would not have open borders at all. If every piece of land in a country were owned … no immigrant could enter there unless invited to enter and allowed to rent, or purchase, property."* [**Nations by Consent**, p. 84] What happens to those who cannot **afford** to pay for access is not addressed (perhaps, being unable to exit a given capitalist's land they will become bonded labourers? Or be imprisoned and used to undercut workers' wages via prison labour? Perhaps they will just be shot as trespassers? Who can tell?). Nor is it addressed how this situation actually **increases** freedom. For Rothbard, a *"totally privatised country would be as closed as the particular inhabitants and property owners [**not** the same thing, we must point out] desire. It seems clear, then, that the regime of open borders that exists **de facto** in the US really amounts to a compulsory opening by the central state… and does not genuinely reflect the wishes of the proprietors."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85] Of course, the wishes of **non**-proprietors (the vast majority) do not matter in the slightest. Thus, it is clear, that with the privatisation of "the commons" the right to roam, to travel, would become a privilege, subject to the laws and rules of the property owners. This can hardly be said to **increase** freedom for anyone bar the capitalist class.

Rothbard acknowledges that *"in a fully privatised world, access rights would obviously be a crucial part of land ownership."* [**Nations by Consent**, p. 86] Given that there is no free lunch, we can imagine we would have to pay for such "rights." The implications of this are obviously unappealing and an obvious danger to individual freedom. The problem of access associated with the idea of privatising the roads can only be avoided by having a "right of passage" encoded into the "general libertarian law code." This would mean that road owners would be required, by law, to let anyone use them. But where are "absolute" property rights in this case? Are the owners of roads not to have the same rights as other owners? And if "right of passage" is enforced, what would this mean for road owners when



a monopoly which explicitly exists to defend the power and capital of the wealthy. The major difference is that the agencies used to protect that wealth will be in a weaker position to act independently of their pay-masters. Unlike the state, the "defence" firm is not remotely accountable to the general population and cannot be used to equalise even slightly the power relationships between worker and capitalist.

And, needless to say, it is very likely that the private police forces **will** give preferential treatment to their wealthier customers (what business does not?) and that the law code will reflect the interests of the wealthier sectors of society (particularly if *"prosperous"* judges administer that code) in reality, even if not in theory. Since, in capitalist practice, "the customer is always right," the best-paying customers will get their way in "anarcho"-capitalist society.

For example, in chapter 29 of **The Machinery of Freedom**, David Friedman presents an example of how a clash of different law codes could be resolved by a bargaining process (the law in question is the death penalty). This process would involve one defence firm giving a sum of money to the other for them accepting the appropriate (anti/pro capital punishment) court. Friedman claims that *"[a]s in any good trade, everyone gains"* but this is obviously not true. Assuming the anti-capital punishment defence firm pays the pro one to accept an anti-capital punishment court, then, yes, both defence firms have made money and so are happy, so are the anti-capital punishment consumers but the pro-death penalty customers have only (perhaps) received a cut in their bills. Their desire to see criminals hanged (for whatever reason) has been ignored (if they were not in favour of the death penalty, they would not have subscribed to that company). Friedman claims that the deal, by allowing the anti-death penalty firm to cut its costs, will ensure that it *"keep its customers and even get more"* but this is just an assumption. It is just as likely to loose customers to a defence firm that refuses to compromise (and has the resources

not just reflect economic power and wealth? David Friedman, who is for a market in law codes, argues that *"[i]f almost everyone believes strongly that heroin addiction is so horrible that it should not be permitted anywhere under any circumstances anarcho-capitalist institutions will produce laws against heroin. Laws are being produced on the market, and that is what the market wants."* And he adds that *"market demands are in dollars, not votes. The legality of heroin will be determined, not by how many are for or against but how high a cost each side is willing to bear in order to get its way."* [**The Machinery of Freedom**, p. 127] And, as the market is less than equal in terms of income and wealth, such a position will mean that the capitalist class will have a higher effective demand than the working class, and more resources to pay for any conflicts that arise. Thus any law codes that develop will tend to reflect the interests of the wealthy.)

Which brings us nicely on to the next problem regarding market forces.

As well as the obvious influence of economic interests and differences in wealth, another problem faces the "free market" justice of "anarcho"-capitalism. This is the *"general libertarian law code"* itself. Even if we assume that the system actually works like it should in theory, the simple fact remains that these "defence companies" are enforcing laws which explicitly defend capitalist property (and so social relations). Capitalists own the means of production upon which they hire wage-labourers to work and this is an inequality established **prior** to any specific transaction in the labour market. This inequality reflects itself in terms of differences in power within (and outside) the company and in the "law code" of "anarcho"-capitalism which protects that power against the dispossessed.

In other words, the law code within which the defence companies work assumes that capitalist property is legitimate and that force can legitimately be used to defend it. This means that, in effect, "anarcho"-capitalism is based on a monopoly of law,



people sue them for car-pollution related illnesses? (The right of those injured by pollution to sue polluters is the main way "anarcho"-capitalists propose to protect the environment. See sections E.2 and E.3). It is unlikely that those wishing to bring suit could find, never mind sue, the millions of individual car owners who could have potentially caused their illness. Hence the road-owners would be sued for letting polluting (or unsafe) cars onto "their" roads. The road-owners would therefore desire to restrict pollution levels by restricting the right to use their property, and so would resist the "right of passage" as an "attack" on their "absolute" property rights. If the road-owners got their way (which would be highly likely given the need for "absolute" property rights and is suggested by the variable pricing way to avoid traffic jams mentioned above) and were able to control who used their property, freedom to travel would be **very** restricted and limited to those whom the owner considered "desirable." Indeed, Murray Rothbard supports such a regime (*"In the free [sic!] society, they [travellers] would, in the first instance, have the right to travel only on those streets whose owners agree to have them there"* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 119]). The threat to liberty in such a system is obvious — to all but Rothbard and other right-libertarians, of course.

To take another example, let us consider the privatisation of parks, streets and other public areas. Currently, individuals can use these areas to hold political demonstrations, hand out leaflets, picket and so on. However, under "anarcho"-capitalism the owners of such property can restrict such liberties if they desire, calling such activities "initiation of force" (although they cannot explain how speaking your mind is an example of "force"). Therefore, freedom of speech, assembly and a host of other liberties we take for granted would be reduced (if not eliminated) under a right-"libertarian" regime. Or, taking the case of pickets and other forms of social struggle, its clear that privatising "the commons" would only benefit the bosses. Strikers or other activists picketing or

handing out leaflets in shopping centre's are quickly ejected by private security even today. Think about how much worse it would become under "anarcho"-capitalism when the whole world becomes a series of malls — it would be impossible to hold a picket when the owner of the pavement objects, for example (as Rothbard himself argues, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132) and if the owner of the pavement also happens to be the boss being picketed, then workers' rights would be zero. Perhaps we could also see capitalists suing working class organisations for littering their property if they do hand out leaflets (so placing even greater stress on limited resources).

The I.W.W. went down in history for its rigorous defence of freedom of speech because of its rightly famous "free speech" fights in numerous American cities and towns. Repression was inflicted upon wobblies who joined the struggle by "private citizens," but in the end the I.W.W. won. Consider the case under "anarcho"-capitalism. The wobblies would have been "criminal aggressors" as the owners of the streets have refused to allow "undesirables" to use them to argue their case. If they refused to acknowledge the decree of the property owners, private cops would have taken them away. Given that those who controlled city government in the historical example were the wealthiest citizens in town, its likely that the same people would have been involved in the fictional ("anarcho"-capitalist) account. Is it a good thing that in the real account the wobblies are hailed as heroes of freedom but in the fictional one they are "criminal aggressors"? Does converting public spaces into private property **really** stop restrictions on free speech being a bad thing?

Of course, Rothbard (and other right-libertarians) are aware that privatisation will not remove restrictions on freedom of speech, association and so on (while, at the same time, trying to portray themselves as supporters of such liberties!). However, for right-libertarians such restrictions are of no consequence. As Rothbard argues, any *"prohibitions would not be state imposed, but would simply be requirements for residence or*



Of course it will be argued that the Supreme Court is a monopoly and so our analysis is flawed. In "anarcho"-capitalism there is no monopoly. But the corporate laws came about because there was a demand for them. That demand would still have existed in "anarcho"-capitalism. Now, while there may be no Supreme Court, Rothbard does maintain that *"the basic Law Code ...would have to be agreed upon by all the judicial agencies"* but he maintains that this *"would imply no unified legal system"*! Even though *"[a]ny agencies that transgressed the basic libertarian law code would be open outlaws"* and soon crushed this is **not**, apparently, a monopoly. [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 234] So, you either agree to the law code or you go out of business. And that is **not** a monopoly! Therefore, we think, our comments on the Supreme Court decision are valid.

If all the available defence firms enforce the same laws, then it can hardly be called "competitive"! And if this is the case (and it is) *"when private wealth is uncontrolled, then a police-judicial complex enjoying a clientele of wealthy corporations whose motto is self-interest is hardly an innocuous social force controllable by the possibility of forming or affiliating with competing 'companies.'"* [Weick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225]

This is particularly true if these companies are themselves Big Business and so have a large impact on the laws they are enforcing. If the law code recognises and protects capitalist power, property and wealth as fundamental **any** attempt to change this is "initiation of force" and so the power of the rich is written into the system from the start!

(And, we must add, if there is a general libertarian law code to which all must subscribe, where does that put customer demand? If people demand a non-libertarian law code, will defence firms refuse to supply it? If so, will not new firms, looking for profit, spring up that will supply what is being demanded? And will that not put them in direct conflict with the existing, pro-general law code ones? And will a market in law codes

of protesters being badly beaten by private security guards. As far as market theory goes, the companies are only supplying what the buyer is demanding. The rights of others are **not a factor** (yet more "externalities," obviously). Even if the victims successfully sue the company, the message is clear — social activism can seriously damage your health. With a reversion to "a general libertarian law code" enforced by private companies, this form of "defence" of "absolute" property rights can only increase, perhaps to the levels previously attained in the heyday of US capitalism, as described above by Weick.

### 6.3 But surely market forces will stop abuses by the rich?

Unlikely. The rise of corporations within America indicates exactly how a "general libertarian law code" would reflect the interests of the rich and powerful. The laws recognising corporations as "legal persons" were **not** primarily a product of "the state" but of private lawyers hired by the rich — a result with which Rothbard would have no problem. As Howard Zinn notes:

> *"the American Bar Association, organised by lawyers accustomed to serving the wealthy, began a national campaign of education to reverse the [Supreme] Court decision [that companies could not be considered as a person]... . By 1886... the Supreme Court had accepted the argument that corporations were 'persons' and their money was property protected by the process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment... . The justices of the Supreme Court were not simply interpreters of the Constitution. They were men of certain backgrounds, of certain [class] interests."* [**A People's History of the United States**, p. 255]



*for use of some person's or community's land area."* [**Nations by Consent**, p. 85] Thus we yet again see the blindness of right-libertarians to the commonality between private property and the state. The state also maintains that submitting to its authority is the requirement for taking up residence in its territory (see also section 2.3 for more on this). As Benjamin Tucker noted, the state can be defined as (in part) *"the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 24] If the property owners can determine "prohibitions" (i.e. laws and rules) for those who use the property then they are the *"sole authority over a given area and all within it,"* i.e. a state. Thus privatising "the commons" means subjecting the non-property owners to the rules and laws of the property owners — in effect, privatising the state and turning the world into a series of Monarchies and oligarchies without the pretence of democracy and democratic rights.

These examples can hardly be said to be increasing liberty for society as a whole, although "anarcho" capitalists seem to think they would. So far from **increasing** liberty for all, then, privatising the commons would only increase it for the ruling elite, by giving them yet another monopoly from which to collect income and exercise their power over. It would **reduce** freedom for everyone else. As Peter Marshall notes, *"[i]n the name of freedom, the anarcho-capitalists would like to turn public spaces into private property, but freedom does not flourish behind high fences protected by private companies but expands in the open air when it is enjoyed by all"* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 564].

Little wonder Proudhon argued that *"if the public highway is nothing but an accessory of private property; if the communal lands are converted into private property; if the public domain, in short, is guarded, exploited, leased, and sold like private property — what remains for the proletaire? Of what advantage is it to him that society has left the state of war to enter the regime of police?"* [**System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 371]

## 6 Is "anarcho"-capitalism against the state?

No. Due to its basis in private property, "anarcho"-capitalism implies a class division of society into bosses and workers. Any such division will require a state to maintain it. However, it need not be the same state as exists now. Regarding this point, "anarcho"-capitalism plainly advocates "defence associations" to protect property. For the "anarcho"-capitalist, however, these private companies are not states. For anarchists, they most definitely are.

According to Murray Rothbard [*"Society Without A State"*, in **Nomos XIX**, Pennock and Chapman, eds., p. 192.], a state must have one or both of the following characteristics:

He makes the same point in **The Ethics of Liberty** [p. 171].

Instead of this, the "anarcho"-capitalist thinks that people should be able to select their own "defence companies" (which would provide the needed police) and courts from the free market in "defence" which would spring up after the state monopoly has been eliminated. These companies *"all... would have to abide by the basic law code"* [*"Society Without A State"*, p. 206]. Thus a *"general libertarian law code"* would govern the actions of these companies. This "law code" would prohibit coercive aggression at the very least, although to do so it would have to specify what counted as legitimate property, how said can be owned and what actually constitutes aggression. Thus the law code would be quite extensive.

How is this law code to be actually specified? Would these laws be democratically decided? Would they reflect common usage (i.e. custom)? "supply and demand"? "Natural law"? Given the strong dislike of democracy shown by "anarcho"-capitalists, we think we can safely say that some combination of the last two options would be used. Murray Rothbard, as noted in section 1.4, opposed the individualist anarchist



beaten and killed. The workers own defence organisations were the only ones willing to help them, and if the workers seemed to be winning then troops were called in to "restore the peace" (as happened in the Ludlow strike, when strikers originally cheered the troops as they thought they would defend their civil rights; needless to say, they were wrong).

Here we have a society which is claimed by many "anarcho"-capitalists as one of the closest examples to their "ideal," with limited state intervention, free reign for property owners, etc. What happened? The rich reduced the working class to a serf-like existence, capitalist production undermined independent producers (much to the annoyance of individualist anarchists at the time), and the result was the emergence of the corporate America that "anarcho"-capitalists say they oppose.

Are we to expect that "anarcho"-capitalism will be different? That, unlike before, "defence" firms will intervene on behalf of strikers? Given that the "general libertarian law code" will be enforcing capitalist property rights, workers will be in exactly the same situation as they were then. Support of strikers violating property rights would be a violation of the "general libertarian law code" and be costly for profit making firms to do (if not dangerous as they could be "outlawed" by the rest). Thus "anarcho"-capitalism will extend extensive rights and powers to bosses, but few if any rights to rebellious workers. And this difference in power is enshrined within the fundamental institutions of the system.

In evaluating "anarcho"-capitalism's claim to be a form of anarchism, Peter Marshall notes that *"private protection agencies would merely serve the interests of their paymasters."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 653] With the increase of private "defence associations" under "really existing capitalism" today (associations that many "anarcho"-capitalists point to as examples of their ideas), we see a vindication of Marshall's claim. There have been many documented experiences

> *were sometimes described as such. The territories owned by coal companies, which frequently included entire towns and their environs, the stores the miners were obliged by economic coercion to patronise, the houses they lived in, were commonly policed by the private police of the United States Steel Corporation or whatever company owned the properties. The chief practical function of these police was, of course, to prevent labour organisation and preserve a certain balance of 'bargaining.'*
>
> *"These complexes were a law unto themselves, powerful enough to ignore, when they did not purchase, the governments of various jurisdictions of the American federal system. This industrial system was, at the time, often characterised as feudalism... ."* [*"Anarchist Justice"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 223–224]

For a description of the weaponry and activities of these private armies, the economic historian Maurice Dobbs presents an excellent summary in **Studies in Capitalist Development** [pp. 353–357]. According to a report on *"Private Police Systems"* cited by Dobbs, in a town dominated by Republican Steel, the *"civil liberties and the rights of labour were suppressed by company police. Union organisers were driven out of town."* Company towns had their own (company-run) money, stores, houses and jails and many corporations had machine-guns and tear-gas along with the usual shot-guns, rifles and revolvers. The *"usurpation of police powers by privately paid 'guards and 'deputies', often hired from detective agencies, many with criminal records"* was *"a general practice in many parts of the country."*

The local (state-run) law enforcement agencies turned a blind-eye to what was going on (after all, the workers **had** broken their contracts and so were "criminal aggressors" against the companies) even when union members and strikers were



principle that juries would judge both the facts and the law, suggesting instead that *"Libertarian lawyers and jurists"* would determine a *"rational and objective code of libertarian legal principles and procedures."* The judges in his system would *"not [be] making the law but finding it on the basis of agreed-upon principles derived either from custom or reason."* [*"Society without a State"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206] David Friedman, on the other hand, argues that different defence firms would sell their own laws. [**The Machinery of Freedom**, p. 116] It is sometimes acknowledged that non-libertarian laws may be demanded (and supplied) in such a market.

Around this system of "defence companies" is a free market in "arbitrators" and "appeal judges" to administer justice and the "basic law code." Rothbard believes that such a system would see *"arbitrators with the best reputation for efficiency and probity...[being] chosen by the various parties in the market...[and] will come to be given an increasing amount of business."* [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, p.199] Judges *"will prosper on the market in proportion to their reputation for efficiency and impartiality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 204]

Therefore, like any other company, arbitrators would strive for profits and wealth, with the most successful ones becoming *"prosperous."* Of course, such wealth would have no impact on the decisions of the judges, and if it did, the population (in theory) are free to select any other judge (although, of course, they would also *"strive for profits and wealth"* — which means the choice of character may be somewhat limited! — and the laws which they were using to guide their judgements would be enforcing capitalist rights).

Whether or not this system would work as desired is discussed in the following sections. We think that it will not. Moreover, we will argue that "anarcho"-capitalist "defence companies" meet not only the criteria of statehood we outlined in section B.2, but also Rothbard's own criteria for the state, quoted above.

As regards the anarchist criterion, it is clear that "defence companies" exist to defend private property; that they are hierarchical (in that they are capitalist companies which defend the power of those who employ them); that they are professional coercive bodies; and that they exercise a monopoly of force over a given area (the area, initially, being the property of the person or company who is employing the "association"). If, as Ayn Rand noted (using a Weberian definition of the state) a government is an institution *"that holds the exclusive power to **enforce** certain rules of conduct in a given geographical area"* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 239] then these "defence companies" are the means by which the property owner (who exercises a monopoly to determine the rules governing their property) enforce their rules.

For this (and other reasons), we should call the "anarcho"-capitalist defence firms "private states" — that is what they are — and "anarcho"-capitalism "private state" capitalism.

Before discussing these points further, it is necessary to point out a relatively common fallacy of "anarcho"-capitalists. This is the idea that "defence" under the system they advocate means defending people, not territorial areas. This, for some, means that defence companies are not "states." However, as people and their property and possessions do not exist merely in thought but on the Earth, it is obvious that these companies will be administering "justice" over a given area of the planet. It is also obvious, therefore, that these "defence associations" will operate over a (property-owner defined) area of land and enforce the property-owner's laws, rules and regulations. The deeply anti-libertarian, indeed fascistic, aspects of this "arrangement" will be examined in the following sections.

## 6.1 What's wrong with this "free market" justice?

It does not take much imagination to figure out whose interests *"prosperous"* arbitrators, judges and defence companies



and not be subject to popular control beyond choosing between companies to enforce the capitalist laws.

## 6.2 What are the social consequences of such a system?

The "anarcho" capitalist imagines that there will be police agencies, "defence associations," courts, and appeals courts all organised on a free-market basis and available for hire. As David Weick points out, however, the major problem with such a system would not be the corruption of "private" courts and police forces (although, as suggested above, this could indeed be a problem):

> *"There is something more serious than the 'Mafia danger', and this other problem concerns the role of such 'defence' institutions in a given social and economic context.*
>
> *"[The] context... is one of a free-market economy with no restraints upon accumulation of property. Now, we had an American experience, roughly from the end of the Civil War to the 1930's, in what were in effect private courts, private police, indeed private governments. We had the experience of the (private) Pinkerton police which, by its spies, by its **agents provocateurs,** and by methods that included violence and kidnapping, was one of the most powerful tools of large corporations and an instrument of oppression of working people. We had the experience as well of the police forces established to the same end, within corporations, by numerous companies... . (The automobile companies drew upon additional covert instruments of a private nature, usually termed vigilante, such as the Black Legion). These were, in effect, private armies, and*

As an example of how competing "protection agencies" will work in an "anarcho"-capitalist society, it is far more insightful than originally intended!

Now let us consider the *"basic law code"* itself. How the laws in the *"general libertarian law code"* would actually be selected is anyone's guess, although many "anarcho"-capitalists support the myth of "natural law," and this would suggest an unchangeable law code selected by those considered as "the voice of nature" (see section 11. for a discussion of its authoritarian implications). David Friedman argues that as well as a market in defence companies, there will also be a market in laws and rights. However, there will be extensive market pressure to unify these differing law codes into one standard one (imagine what would happen if ever CD manufacturer created a unique CD player, or every computer manufacturer different sized floppy-disk drivers — little wonder, then, that over time companies standardise their products). Friedman himself acknowledges that this process is likely (and uses the example of standard paper sizes to indicate such a process).

In any event, the laws would not be decided on the basis of "one person, one vote"; hence, as market forces worked their magic, the "general" law code would reflect vested interests and so be very hard to change. As rights and laws would be a commodity like everything else in capitalism, they would soon reflect the interests of the rich — particularly if those interpreting the law are wealthy professionals and companies with vested interests of their own. Little wonder that the individualist anarchists proposed "trial by jury" as the only basis for real justice in a free society. For, unlike professional "arbitrators," juries are ad hoc, made up of ordinary people and do not reflect power, authority, or the influence of wealth. And by being able to judge the law as well as a conflict, they can ensure a populist revision of laws as society progresses.

Thus a system of "defence" on the market will continue to reflect the influence and power of property owners and wealth



would defend: their own, as well as those who pay their wages — which is to say, other members of the rich elite. As the law exists to defend property, then it (by definition) exists to defend the power of capitalists against their workers.

Rothbard argues that the *"judges"* would *"not [be] making the law but finding it on the basis of agreed-upon principles derived either from custom or reason"* [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206]. However, this begs the question: **whose** reason? **whose** customs? Do individuals in different classes share the same customs? The same ideas of right and wrong? Would rich and poor desire the same from a *"basic law code"*? Obviously not. The rich would only support a code which defended their power over the poor.

Although only *"finding"* the law, the arbitrators and judges still exert an influence in the "justice" process, an influence not impartial or neutral. As the arbitrators themselves would be part of a profession, with specific companies developing within the market, it does not take a genius to realise that when "interpreting" the "basic law code," such companies would hardly act against their own interests as companies. In addition, if the "justice" system was based on "one dollar, one vote," the "law" would best defend those with the most "votes" (the question of market forces will be discussed in section 6.3). Moreover, even if "market forces" would ensure that "impartial" judges were dominant, all judges would be enforcing a **very** partial law code (namely one that defended **capitalist** property rights). Impartiality when enforcing partial laws hardly makes judgements less unfair.

Thus, due to these three pressures — the interests of arbitrators/judges, the influence of money and the nature of the law — the terms of "free agreements" under such a law system would be tilted in favour of lenders over debtors, landlords over tenants, employers over employees, and in general, the rich over the poor, just as we have today. This is what one would expect in a system based on "unrestricted" property rights and

a (capitalist) free market. A similar tendency towards the standardisation of output in an industry in response to influences of wealth can be seen from the current media system (see section D.3 — How does wealth influence the mass media?)

Some "anarcho"-capitalists, however, claim that just as cheaper cars were developed to meet demand, so cheaper defence associations and "people's arbitrators" would develop on the market for the working class. In this way impartiality will be ensured. This argument overlooks a few key points:

Firstly, the general "libertarian" law code would be applicable to **all** associations, so they would have to operate within a system determined by the power of money and of capital. The law code would reflect, therefore, property **not** labour and so "socialistic" law codes would be classed as "outlaw" ones. The options then facing working people is to select a firm which best enforced the **capitalist** law in their favour. And as noted above, the impartial enforcement of a biased law code will hardly ensure freedom or justice for all.

Secondly, in a race between a Jaguar and a Volkswagen Beetle, who is more likely to win? The rich would have "the best justice money can buy," as they do now. Members of the capitalist class would be able to select the firms with the best lawyers, best private cops and most resources. Those without the financial clout to purchase quality "justice" would simply be out of luck — such is the "magic" of the marketplace.

Thirdly, because of the tendency toward concentration, centralisation, and oligopoly under capitalism (due to increasing capital costs for new firms entering the market, as discussed in section C.4), a few companies would soon dominate the market — with obvious implications for "justice."

Different firms will have different resources. In other words, in a conflict between a small firm and a larger one, the smaller one is at a disadvantage in terms of resources. They may not be in a position to fight the larger company if it rejects arbitration and so may give in simply because, as the "anarcho"-capitalists



so rightly point out, conflict and violence will push up a company's costs and so they would have to be avoided by smaller companies. It is ironic that the "anarcho"-capitalist implicitly assumes that every "defence company" is approximately of the same size, with the same resources behind it. In real life, this would clearly **not** the case.

Fourthly, it is **very** likely that many companies would make subscription to a specific "defence" firm or court a requirement of employment. Just as today many (most?) workers have to sign no-union contracts (and face being fired if they change their minds), it does not take much imagination to see that the same could apply to "defence" firms and courts. This was/is the case in company towns (indeed, you can consider unions as a form of "defence" firm and these companies refused to recognise them). As the labour market is almost always a buyer's market, it is not enough to argue that workers can find a new job without this condition. They may not and so have to put up with this situation. And if (as seems likely) the laws and rules of the property-owner will take precedence in any conflict, then workers and tenants will be at a disadvantage no matter how "impartial" the judges.

Ironically, some "anarcho"-capitalists point to current day company/union negotiations as an example of how different defence firms would work out their differences peacefully. Sadly for this argument, union rights under "actually existing capitalism" were created and enforced by the state in direct opposition to capitalist "freedom of contract." Before the law was changed, unions were often crushed by force — the companies were better armed, had more resources and had the law on their side. Today, with the "downsizing" of companies we can see what happens to "peaceful negotiation" and "co-operation" between unions and companies when it is no longer required (i.e. when the resources of both sides are unequal). The market power of companies far exceeds those of the unions and the law, by definition, favours the companies.

be subject to "market forces," as dissatisfied individuals could affiliate themselves to other godi. This system, however, had an obvious (and fatal) flaw. As the **Encyclopaedia Britannica** points out:

> *"The position of the godi could be bought and sold, as well as inherited; consequently, with the passing of time, the godord for large areas of the country became concentrated in the hands of one man or a few men. This was the principal weakness of the old form of government: it led to a struggle of power and was the chief reason for the ending of the commonwealth and for the country's submission to the King of Norway."*

It was the existence of these hierarchical elements in Icelandic society that explain its fall from anarchistic to statist society. As Kropotkin argued *"from chieftainship sprang on the one hand the State and on the other* ***private*** *property."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 85] Kropotkin's insight that chieftainship is a transitional system has been confirmed by anthropologists studying "primitive" societies. They have come to the conclusion that societies made up of chieftainships or chiefdoms are not states: *"Chiefdoms are neither stateless nor state societies in the fullest sense of either term: they are on the borderline between the two. Having emerged out of stateless systems, they give the impression of being on their way to centralised states and exhibit characteristics of both."* [Y. Cohen quoted by Birgit T. Runolfsson Solvason, **Op. Cit.**] Since the Commonwealth was made up of chiefdoms, this explains the contradictory nature of the society — it was in the process of transition, from anarchy to statism, from a communal economy to one based on private property.

The **political** transition within Icelandic society went hand in hand with an **economic** transition (both tendencies being



> *based. Ford's Service Department policed the gates of his plants, infiltrated emergent groups of union activists, posed as workers to spy on men on the line... Under this tyranny the Ford worker had no security, no rights. So much so that any information about the state of things within the plant could only be freely obtained from ex-Ford workers."* [Huw Beynon, **Working for Ford**, pp. 29–30]

The private police attacked women workers handing out pro-union handbills and gave them *"a severe beating."* At Kansas and Dallas *"similar beatings were handed out to the union men."* This use of private police to control the work force was not unique. General Motors *"spent one million dollars on espionage, employing fourteen detective agencies and two hundred spies at one time [between 1933 and 1936]. The Pinkerton Detective Agency found anti-unionism its most lucrative activity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34 and p. 32] We must also note that the Pinkerton's had been selling their private police services for decades before the 1930s. For over 60 years the Pinkerton Detective Agency had *"specialised in providing spies, agent provocateurs, and private armed forces for employers combating labour organisations."* By 1892 it *"had provided its services for management in seventy major labour disputes, and its 2 000 active agents and 30 000 reserves totalled more than the standing army of the nation."* [Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 55] With this force available, little wonder unions found it so hard to survive in the USA.

Only an "anarcho"-capitalist would deny that this is a private government, employing private police to enforce private power. Given that unions could be considered as "defence" agencies for workers, this suggests a picture of how "anarcho"-capitalism may work in practice radically different from the pictures painted by its advocates. The reason is simple, it does not ignore inequality and subjects economics to an

anarchist analysis. Little wonder, then, that Proudhon stressed that it *"becomes necessary for the workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism."* Anarchism, in other words, would see *"[c]apitalistic and proprietary exploitation stopped everywhere, the wage system abolished"* and so *"the economic organisation [would] replac[e] the governmental and military system."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 227 and p. 281] Clearly, the idea that Proudhon shared the same political goal as Molinari is a joke. He would have dismissed such a system as little more than an updated form of feudalism in which the property owner is sovereign and the workers subjects (see section B.4 for more details).

Unsurprisingly, Molinari (unlike the individualist anarchists) attacked the jury system, arguing that its obliged people to *"perform the duties of judges. This is pure communism."* People would *"judge according to the colour of their opinions, than according to justice."* [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 409] As the jury system used amateurs (i.e. ordinary people) rather than full-time professionals it could not be relied upon to defend the power and property rights of the rich. As we noted in section 1.4, Rothbard criticised the individualist anarchists for supporting juries for essentially the same reasons.

But, as is clear from Hart's account, Molinari had little concern that working class people should have a say in their own lives beyond consuming goods. His perspective can be seen from his lament about those *"colonies where slavery has been abolished without the compulsory labour being replaced with an equivalent quantity of free [sic!] labour [i.e., wage labour], there has occurred the opposite of what happens everyday before our eyes. Simple workers have been seen to exploit in their turn the industrial* ***entrepreneurs,*** *demanding from them wages which bear absolutely no relation to the legitimate share in the product which they ought to receive. The planters were unable to obtain for their sugar a sufficient price to cover the increase in wages,*



> *and Germanic social order... They [the Icelanders] excluded overlords with coercive power and expended the mandate of the assembly to fill the full spectrum of the interests of the landed free farmers. The changes transformed a Scandinavian decision-making body that mediated between freemen and overlords into an Icelandic self-contained governmental system without overlords. At the core of Icelandic government was the Althing, a national assembly of freemen."* [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 75]

Therefore we see communal self-management in a basic form, **plus** co-operation between communities as well. These communistic, mutual-aid features exist in many non-capitalist cultures and are often essential for ensuring the people's continued freedom within those cultures ( section B.2.5 on why the wealthy undermine these popular *"folk-motes"* in favour of centralisation). Usually, the existence of private property (and so inequality) soon led to the destruction of communal forms of self-management (with participation by all male members of the community as in Iceland), which are replaced by the rule of the rich.

While such developments are a commonplace in most "primitive" cultures, the Icelandic case has an unusual feature which explains the interest it provokes in "anarcho"-capitalist circles. This feature was that individuals could seek protection from any godi. As the **Encyclopaedia Britannica** puts it, *"the extent of the godord [chieftancy] was not fixed by territorial boundaries. Those who were dissatisfied with their chief could attach themselves to another godi... As a result rivalry arose between the godar [chiefs]; as may be seen from the Icelandic Sagas."* This was because, while there were *"a central legislature and uniform, country-wide judicial and legal systems,"* people would seek the protection of any godi, providing payment in return. [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 2] These godi, in effect, would

In other words, Kropotkin's analysis of communal society is far closer to the reality of Medieval Iceland than "anarcho"-capitalist attempts to turn it into a some kind of capitalist utopia.

However, the communal nature of Icelandic society also co-existed (as in most such cultures) with hierarchical institutions, including some with capitalistic elements, namely private property and "private states" around the local **godar.** The godar were local chiefs who also took the role of religious leaders. As the **Encyclopaedia Britannica** explains, *"a kind of local government was evolved [in Iceland] by which the people of a district who had most dealings together formed groups under the leadership of the most important or influential man in the district"* (the godi). The godi *"acted as judge and mediator"* and *"took a lead in communal activities"* such as building places of worship. These *"local assemblies... are heard of before the establishment of the althing"* (the national thing). This althing led to co-operation between the local assemblies.

Thus Icelandic society had different elements, one based on the local chiefs and communal organisations. Society was marked by inequalities as *"[a]mong the landed there were differences in wealth and prominence. Distinct cleavages existed between landowners and landless people and between free men and slaves."* This meant it was *"marked by aspects of statelessness and egalitarianism as well as elements of social hierarchy ... Although Iceland was not a democratic system, proto-democratic tendencies existed."* [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 64 and p. 65] The Icelandic social system was designed to reduce the power of the wealthy by enhancing communal institutions:

> *"The society ... was based on a system of decentralised self-government ... The Viking Age settlers began by establishing local things, or assemblies, which had been the major forum for meetings of freemen and aristocrats in the old Scandinavian*



*and were obliged to furnish the extra amount, at first out of their profits, and then out of their very capital. A considerable number of planters have been ruined as a result ... It is doubtless better that these accumulations of capital should be destroyed than that generations of men should perish [Marx: 'how generous of M. Molinari'] but would it not be better if both survived?"* [quoted by Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 937f]

So workers exploiting capital is the *"opposite of what happens everyday before our eyes"*? In other words, it is normal that entrepreneurs *"exploit"* workers under capitalism? Similarly, what is a *"legitimate share"* which workers *"ought to receive"*? Surely that is determined by the eternal laws of supply and demand and not what the capitalists (or Molinari) thinks is right? And those poor former slave drivers, they really do deserve our sympathy. What horrors they face from the impositions subjected upon them by their ex-chattels — they had to reduce their profits! How dare their ex-slaves refuse to obey them in return for what their ex-owners think was their *"legitimate share in the produce"*! How *"simple"* these workers are, not understanding the sacrifices their former masters suffer nor appreciating how much more difficult it is for their ex-masters to create *"the product"* without the whip and the branding iron to aid them! As Marx so rightly comments: *"And what, if you please, is this 'legitimate share', which, according to [Molinari's] own admission, the capitalist in Europe daily neglects to pay? Over yonder, in the colonies, where the workers are so 'simple' as to 'exploit' the capitalist, M. Molinari feels a powerful itch to use police methods to set on the right road that law of supply and demand which works automatically everywhere else."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 937f]

An added difficulty in arguing that Molinari was an anarchist is that he was a contemporary of Proudhon, the first self-declared anarchist, and lived in a country with a vigorous anarchist movement. Surely if he was really an anarchist, he would have proclaimed his kinship with Proudhon and joined in the

wider movement. He did not, as Hart notes as regards Proudhon:

> *"their differences in economic theory were considerable, and it is probably for this reason that Molinari refused to call himself an anarchist in spite of their many similarities in political theory. Molinari refused to accept the socialist economic ideas of Proudhon .. . in Molinari's mind, the term 'anarchist' was intimately linked with socialist and statist economic views."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 415]

Yet Proudhon's economic views, like Godwin's, flowed from his anarchist analysis and principles. They cannot be arbitrarily separated as Hart suggests. So while arguing that *"Molinari was just as much an anarchist as Proudhon,"* Hart forgets the key issue. Proudhon was aware that private property ensured that the proletarian did not exercise *"self-government"* during working hours, i.e. was not a self-governing individual. As for Hart claiming that Proudhon had *"statist economic views"* it simply shows how far an "anarcho"-capitalist perspective is from genuine anarchism. Proudhon's economic analysis, his critique of private property and capitalism, flowed from his anarchism and was an integral aspect of it.

To restrict anarchism purely to opposition to the state, Hart is impoverishing anarchist theory and denying its history. Given that anarchism was born from a critique of private property as well as government, this shows the false nature of Hart's claim that *"Molinari was the first to develop a theory of free-market, proprietary anarchism that extended the laws of the market and a rigorous defence of property to its logical extreme."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 415 and p. 416] Hart shows how far from anarchism Molinari was as Proudhon had turned his anarchist analysis to property, showing that *"defence of property"* lead to the oppression of the many by the few in social relationships



In practice this meant that *"each commune was a mutual insurance company, or a miniature welfare state. And membership in the commune was not voluntary. Each farmer had to belong to the commune in which his farm was located and to contribute to its needs."* [Gissurarson quoted by Birgit T. Runolfsson Solvason, **Ordered Anarchy, State and Rent-Seeking: The Icelandic Commonwealth, 930–1262**] The Icelandic Commonwealth did not allow farmers **not** to join its communes and *"[o]nce attached to the local **hreppr**, a farm's affliation could not be changed."* However, they did play a key role in keeping the society free as the **hreppr** *"was essentially non-political and addressed subsistence and economic security needs. Its presence freed farmers from depending on an overclass to provide comparable services or corresponding security measures."* [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 138]

Therefore, the Icelandic Commonwealth can hardly be claimed in any significant way as an example of "anarcho"-capitalism in practice. This can also be seen from the early economy, where prices were subject to popular judgement at the **skuldaping** (*"payment-thing"*) **not** supply and demand. [Kirsten Hastrup, **Culture and History in Medieval Iceland**, p. 125] Indeed, with its communal price setting system in local assemblies, the early Icelandic commonwealth was more similar to Guild Socialism (which was based upon guild's negotiating "just prices" for goods and services) than capitalism. Therefore Miller correctly argues that it would be wrong to impose capitalist ideas and assumptions onto Icelandic society:

> *"Inevitably the attempt was made to add early Iceland to the number of regions that socialised people in nuclear families within simple households… what the sources tell us about the shape of Icelandic householding must compel a different conclusion."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112]

In addition, as in most pre-capitalist societies, there were "commons", common land available for use by all. During the summer, *"common lands and pastures in the highlands, often called **almenning**, were used by the region's farmers for grazing."* This increased the independence of the population from the wealthy as these *"public lands offered opportunities for enterprising individuals to increase their store of provisions and to find saleable merchandise."* [Jesse Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 47 and p. 48]

Thus Icelandic society had a network of solidarity, based upon communal life:

> "The status of farmers as free agents was reinforced by the presence of communal units called **hreppar** (sing. **hreppr**) ... these [were] geographically defined associations of landowners... the **hreppr** were self-governing ... .[and] guided by a five-member steering committee ... As early as the 900s, the whole country seems to have been divided into **hreppar** ... **Hreppar** provided a blanket of local security, allowing the landowning farmers a measure of independence to participate in the choices of political life ...
>
> "Through copoperation among their members, **hreppar** organised and controlled summer grazing lands, organised communal labour, and provided an immediate local forum for settling disputes. Crucially, they provided fire and livestock insurance for local farmers... [They also] saw to the feeding and housing of local orphans, and administered poor relief to people who were recognised as inhabitants of their area. People who could not provide for themselves were assigned to member farms, which took turns in providing for them." [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 137–8]



identical to those which mark the state. Moreover, Proudhon, argued the state would always be required to defend such social relations. Privatising it would hardly be a step forward.

Unsurprisingly, Proudhon dismissed the idea that the laissez faire capitalists shared his goals. *"The school of Say,"* Proudhon argued, was *"the chief focus of counter-revolution next to the Jesuits"* and *"has for ten years past seemed to exist only to protect and applaud the execrable work of the monopolists of money and necessities, deepening more and more the obscurity of a science naturally difficult and full of complications."* Much the same can be said of "anarcho"-capitalists, incidentally. For Proudhon, *"the disciples of Malthus and of Say, who oppose with all their might any intervention of the State in matters commercial or industrial, do not fail to avail themselves of this seemingly liberal attitude, and to show themselves more revolutionary than the Revolution. More than one honest searcher has been deceived thereby."* However, this apparent "anti-statist" attitude of supporters of capitalism is false as pure free market capitalism cannot solve the social question, which arises because of capitalism itself. As such, it was impossible to abolish the state under capitalism. Thus *"this inaction of Power in economic matters was the foundation of government. What need should we have of a political organisation, if Power once permitted us to enjoy economic order?"* Instead of capitalism, Proudhon advocated the *"constitution of Value,"* the *"organisation of credit,"* the elimination of interest, the *"establishment of workingmen's associations"* and *"the use of a just price."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 225, p. 226 and p. 233]

Clearly, then, the claims that Molinari was an anarchist fail as he, unlike his followers, were aware of what anarchism actually stood for. Hart, in his own way, acknowledges this:

> *"In spite of his protestations to the contrary, Molinari should be considered an anarchist thinker. His attack on the state's monopoly of defence must*

> *surely warrant the description of anarchism. His reluctance to accept this label stemmed from the fact that the socialists had used it first to describe a form of non-statist society which Molinari definitely opposed. Like many original thinkers, Molinari had to use the concepts developed by others to describe his theories. In his case, he had come to the same political conclusions as the communist anarchists although he had been working within the liberal tradition, and it is therefore not surprising that the terms used by the two schools were not compatible. It would not be until the latter half of the twentieth century that radical, free-trade liberals would use the word 'anarchist' to describe their beliefs."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 416]

It should be noted that Proudhon was **not** a communist-anarchist, but the point remains. The aims of anarchism were recognised by Molinari as being inconsistent with his ideology. Consequently, he (rightly) refused the label. If only his self-proclaimed followers in the *"latter half of the twentieth century"* did the same anarchists would not have to bother with them!

As such, it seems ironic that the founder of "anarcho"-capitalism should have come to the same conclusion as modern day anarchists on the subject of whether his ideas are a form of anarchism or not!

## 7.2 Is government compatible with anarchism?

Of course not, but ironically this is the conclusion arrived at by Hart's analyst of the British "voluntaryists," particularly Auberon Herbert. Voluntaryism was a fringe part of the right-wing individualist movement inspired by Herbert Spencer, a spokesman for free market capitalism in the later half of the nineteenth century. As with Molinari, there is a problem with



> *household, kin, Thing, even enmity, more than the nexus of cash, bound people to each other. The lack of extensive economic differentiation supported a weakly differentiated class system … [and material] deprivations were more evenly distributed than they would be once state institutions also had to be maintained."* [**Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland**, p. 306]

At this time Iceland *"remained entirely rural. There were no towns, not even villages, and early Iceland participated only marginally in the active trade of Viking Age Scandinavia."* There was a *"diminished level of stratification, which emerged from the first phase of social and economic development, lent an appearance of egalitarianism — social stratification was restrained and political hierarchy limited."* [Jesse Byock, **Viking Age Iceland**, p. 2] That such a society could be classed as "capitalist" or even considered a model for an advanced industrial society is staggering.

Kropotkin in **Mutual Aid** indicates that Norse society, from which the settlers in Iceland came, had various "mutual aid" institutions, including communal land ownership (based around what he called the *"village community"*) and the **thing** (see also Kropotkin's **The State: Its Historic Role** for a discussion of the "village community"). It is reasonable to think that the first settlers in Iceland would have brought such institutions with them and Iceland did indeed have its equivalent of the commune or "village community," the **Hreppar**, which developed early in the country's history. Like the early local assemblies, it is not much discussed in the Sagas but is mentioned in the law book, the Grágás, and was composed of a minimum of twenty farms and had a five member commission. The Hreppar was self-governing and, among other things, was responsible for seeing that orphans and the poor within the area were fed and housed. The Hreppar also served as a property insurance agency and assisted in case of fire and losses due to diseased livestock.

other. As the victims of these past abuses are long gone and attempts to find their descendants meaningless (because of the generalised effects the thefts in question), anarchists feel we are justified in demanding the ***"expropriation of the expropriators"***.

Due to Rothbard's failure to understand the dynamic and generalising effects that result from the theft of productive resources (i.e. externalities that occur from coercion of one person against a specific set of others) and the creation of a labour market, his attempt to refute anarchist analysis of the history of "actually existing capitalism" also fails. Society is the product of collective activity and should belong to us all (although whether and how we divide it up is another question).

## 9 Is Medieval Iceland an example of "anarcho"-capitalism working in practice?

Ironically, medieval Iceland is a good example of why "anarcho"-capitalism will **not** work, degenerating into de facto rule by the rich. It should be pointed out first that Iceland, nearly 1,000 years ago, was not a capitalistic system. In fact, like most cultures claimed by "anarcho"-capitalists as examples of their "utopia," it was a communal, not individualistic, society, based on artisan production, with extensive communal institutions as well as individual "ownership" (i.e. use) and a form of social self-administration, the **thing** — both local and Iceland-wide — which can be considered a "primitive" form of the anarchist communal assembly.

As William Ian Miller points out *"[p]eople of a communitarian nature.. . have reason to be attracted [to Medieval Iceland]... the limited role of lordship, the active participation of large numbers of free people ... in decision making within and without the homestead. The economy barely knew the existence of markets. Social relations preceded economic relations. The nexus of*



presenting this ideology as anarchist, namely that its leading light, Herbert, explicitly rejected the label "anarchist."

Herbert was clearly aware of individualist anarchism and distanced himself from it. He argued that such a system would be *"pandemonium."* He thought that people should *"not direct our attacks — as the anarchists do —* ***against all government*** *, against government in itself"* but *"only against the overgrown, the exaggerated, the insolent, unreasonable and indefensible forms of government, which are found everywhere today."* Government should be *"strictly limited to its legitimate duties in defence of self-ownership and individual rights."* He stressed that *"we are governmentalists ... formally constituted by the nation, employing in this matter of force the majority method."* Moreover, Herbert knew of, and rejected, individualist anarchism, considering it to be *"founded on a fatal mistake."* [**Essay X: The Principles Of Voluntaryism And Free Life**] As such, claims that he was an anarchist or "anarcho"-capitalist cannot be justified.

Hart is aware of this slight problem, quoting Herbert's claim that he aimed for *"regularly constituted government, generally accepted by all citizens for the protection of the individual."* [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] Like Molinari, Herbert was aware that anarchism was a form of socialism and that the political aims could not be artificially separated from its economic and social aims. As such, he was right **not** to call his ideas anarchism as it would result in confusion (particularly as anarchism was a much larger movement than his). As Hart acknowledges, *"Herbert faced the same problems that Molinari had with labelling his philosophy. Like Molinari, he rejected the term 'anarchism,' which he associated with the socialism of Proudhon and .. . terrorism."* While *"quite tolerant"* of individualist anarchism, he thought they *"were mistaken in their rejections of 'government.'"* However, Hart knows better than Herbert about his own ideas, arguing that his ideology *"is in fact a new form of anarchism, since the most important aspect*

*of the modern state, the monopoly of the use of force in a given area, is rejected in no uncertain terms by both men.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86] He does mention that Benjamin Tucker called Herbert a *"true anarchist in everything but name,"* but Tucker denied that Kropotkin was an anarchist suggesting that he was hardly a reliable guide. [quoted by Hart, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87] As it stands, it seems that Tucker was mistaken in his evaluation of Herbert's politics.

Economically, Herbert was not an anarchist, arguing that the state should protect Lockean property rights. Of course, Hart may argue that these economic differences are not relevant to the issue of Herbert's anarchism but that is simply to repeat the claim that anarchism is simply concerned with government, a claim which is hard to support. This position cannot be maintained, given that both Herbert and Molinari defended the right of capitalists and landlords to force their employees and tenants to follow their orders. Their "governments" existed to defend the capitalist from rebellious workers, to break unions, strikes and occupations. In other words, they were a monopoly of the use of force in a given area to enforce the monopoly of power in a given area (namely, the wishes of the property owner). While they may have argued that this was "defence of liberty," in reality it is defence of power and authority.

What about if we just look at the political aspects of his ideas? Did Herbert actually advocate anarchism? No, far from it. He clearly demanded a minimal state based on voluntary taxation. The state would not use force of any kind, *"except for purposes of restraining force."* He argued that in his system, while *"the state should compel no services and exact no payments by force,"* it *"should be free to conduct many useful undertakings … in competition with all voluntary agencies … in dependence on voluntary payments."* [Herbert, **Op. Cit.**] As such, *"the state"* would remain and unless he is using the term "state" in some highly unusual way, it is clear that he means a system where



The accumulative effect of these acts of violation of a "free" market was to create a class society wherein most people "consent" to be wage slaves and enrich the few. While those who suffered the impositions are long gone and the results of the specific acts have multiplied and magnified well beyond their initial form. And we are still living with them. In other words, the initial acts of coercion have been transmitted and transformed by collective activity (wage labour) into society-wide affects.

Rothbard argues in the situation where the descendants (or others) of those who initially tilled the soil and their aggressors (*"or those who purchased their claims"*) still extract *"tribute from the modern tillers"* that this is a case of *"**continuing** aggression against the true owners"*. This means that *"the land titles should be transferred to the peasants, without compensation to the monopoly landlords."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 65] But what he fails to note is that the extracted "tribute" could have been used to invest in industry and transform society. Why ignore what the "tribute" has been used for? Does stolen property not remain stolen property after it has been transferred to another? And if the stolen property is used to create a society in which one class has to sell their liberty to another, then surely any surplus coming from those exchanges are also stolen (as it was generated directly and indirectly by the theft).

Yes, anarchist agree with Rothbard — peasants should take the land they use but which is owned by another. But this logic can equally be applied to capitalism. Workers are still living with the effects of past initiations of force and capitalists still extract "tribute" from workers due to the unequal bargaining powers within the labour market that this has created. The labour market, after all, was created by state action (directly or indirectly) and is maintained by state action (to protect property rights and new initiations of force by working people). The accumulative effects of stealing productive resources as been to increase the economic power of one class compared to an-

Would dividing it equally between all be fair? Not everyone worked equally hard to produce it. So we have a problem — the result of the initial theft is far greater than the theft considered in isolation due to the productive nature of what was stolen.

In other words, what Rothbard ignores in his attempt to undermine anarchist use of history is that when the property stolen is of a productive nature, the accumulative effect of its use is such as to affect all of society. Productive assets produce **new** property, **new** values, create a **new** balance of class forces, **new** income and wealth inequalities and so on. This is because of the **dynamic** nature of production and human life. When the theft is such that it creates accumulative effects after the initial act, it is hardly enough to say that it does not really matter any more. If a nobleman invests in a capitalist firm with the tribute he extracted from his peasants, then (once the firm starts doing well) sells the land to the peasants and uses that money to expand his capitalist holdings, does that **really** make everything all right? Does not the crime transmit with the cash? After all, the factory would not exist without the prior exploitation of the peasants.

In the case of actually existing capitalism, born as it was of extensive coercive acts, the resultant of these acts have come to shape the **whole** society. For example, the theft of common land (plus the enforcement of property rights — the land monopoly — to vast estates owned by the aristocracy) ensured that working people had no option to sell their labour to the capitalists (rural or urban). The terms of these contracts reflected the weak position of the workers and so capitalists extracted surplus value from workers and used it to consolidate their market position and economic power. Similarly, the effect of mercantilist policies (and protectionism) was to enrich the capitalists at the expense of workers and allow them to build industrial empires.



individuals live under a single elected government as their common law maker, judge and defender within a given territory.

This becomes clearer once we look at how the state would be organised. In his essay *"A Politician in Sight of Haven,"* Herbert does discuss the franchise, stating it would be limited to those who paid a voluntary *"income tax,"* anyone *"paying it would have the right to vote; those who did not pay it would be — as is just — without the franchise. There would be no other tax."* The law would be strictly limited, of course, and the *"government ... must confine itself simply to the defense of life and property, whether as regards internal or external defense."* In other words, Herbert was a minimal statist, with his government elected by a majority of those who choose to pay their income tax and funded by that (and by any other voluntary taxes they decided to pay). Whether individuals and companies could hire their own private police in such a regime is irrelevant in determining whether it is an anarchy.

This can be best seen by comparing Herbert with Ayn Rand. No one would ever claim Rand was an anarchist, yet her ideas were extremely similar to Herbert's. Like Herbert, Rand supported laissez-faire capitalism and was against the "initiation of force." Like Herbert, she extended this principle to favour a government funded by voluntary means [*"Government Financing in a Free Society,"* **The Virtue of Selfishness**, pp. 116–20] Moreover, like Herbert, she explicitly denied being an anarchist and, again like Herbert, thought the idea of competing defence agencies ("governments") would result in chaos. The similarities with Herbert are clear, yet no "anarcho"-capitalist would claim that Rand was an anarchist, yet they do claim that Herbert was.

This position is, of course, deeply illogical and flows from the non-anarchist nature of "anarcho"-capitalism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Rothbard discusses the ideas of the "voluntaryists" he fails to address the key issue of who determines the laws being enforced in society. For Rothbard, the key issue is

**who** is enforcing the law, not where that law comes from (as long, of course, as it is a law code he approves of). The implications of this is significant, as it implies that "anarchism" need not be opposed to either the state nor government! This can be clearly seen from Rothbard's analysis of voluntary taxation.

Rothbard, correctly, notes that Herbert advocated voluntary taxation as the means of funding a state whose basic role was to enforce Lockean property rights. For Rothbard, the key issue was **not** who determines the law but who enforces it. For Rothbard, it should be privatised police and courts and he suggests that the *"voluntary taxationists have never attempted to answer this problem; they have rather stubbornly assumed that no one would set up a competing defence agency within a State's territorial limits."* If the state **did** bar such firms, then that system is not a genuine free market. However, *"if the government **did** permit free competition in defence service, there would soon no longer be a central government over the territory. Defence agencies, police and judicial, would compete with one another in the same uncoerced manner as the producers of any other service on the market."* [**Power and Market**, p. 122 and p. 123]

However, this misses the point totally. The key issue that Rothbard ignores is who determines the laws which these private "defence" agencies would enforce. If the laws are determined by a central government, then the fact that citizen's can hire private police and attend private courts does not stop the regime being statist. We can safely assume Rand, for example, would have had no problem with companies providing private security guards or the hiring of private detectives within the context of her minimal state. Ironically, Rothbard stresses the need for such a monopoly legal system:

> *"While 'the government' would cease to exist, the same cannot be said for a constitution or a rule of law, which, in fact, would take on in the free society a far more important function than at present. For*



However, the man with the knife has the advantage and soon carves himself a house and fields from the wilderness. Seeing that they need the knife and the tools created by the knife to go beyond mere existing, some of the other survivors hire themselves to the knife owner. Soon he is running a surplus of goods, including houses and equipment which he decides to hire out to others. This surplus is then used to tempt more and more of the other islanders to work for him, exchanging their land in return for the goods he provides. Soon he owns the whole island and never has to work again. His hut is well stocked and extremely luxurious. His workers face the option of following his orders or being fired (i.e. expelled from the island and so back into the water and certain death). Later, he dies and leaves his knife to his son. The woman whose knife it originally was had died long before, childless.

Note that the theft did not involve taking any land. All had equal access to it. It was the initial theft of the knife which provided the man with market power, an edge which allowed him to offer the others a choice between working by themselves or working for him. By working for him they did "benefit" in terms of increased material wealth (and also made the thief better off) but the accumulate impact of unequal exchanges turned them into the effective slaves of the thief.

Now, would it **really** be enough to turn the knife over to the whoever happened to be using it once the theft was discovered (perhaps the thief made a death-bed confession). Even if the woman who had originally taken it from the ship been alive, would the return of the knife **really** make up for the years of work the survivors had put in enriching the the thief or the "voluntary exchanges" which had resulted in the thief owning all the island? The equipment people use, the houses they life in and the food they eat are all the product of many hours of collective work. Does this mean that the transformation of nature which the knife allowed remain in the hands of the descendants of the thief or become the collective property of all?

waged, workers from across the world, its likely to stay that way).

So Rothbard's "solution" to the problem of past force seems to be (essentially) a justification of existing property titles and not a serious attempt to understand or correct past initiations of force that have shaped society into a capitalist one and still shape it today. The end result of his theory is to leave things pretty much as they are, for the past criminals are dead and so are their victims.

However, what Rothbard fails to note is that the **results** of this state action and coercion are still with us. He totally fails to consider that the theft of productive wealth has a greater impact on society than the theft itself. The theft of **productive** wealth shapes society in so many ways that **all** suffer from it (including current generations). This (the externalities generated by theft) cannot be easily undone by individualistic "solutions".

Let us take an example somewhat more useful that the one Rothbard uses (namely, a stolen watch). A watch cannot really be used to generate wealth (although if I steal a watch, sell it and buy a winning lottery ticket, does that mean I can keep the prize after returning the money value of your watch to you? Without the initial theft, I would not have won the prize but obviously the prize money far exceeds the amount stolen. Is the prize money mine?). Let us take a tool of production rather than a watch.

Let assume a ship sinks and 50 people get washed ashore on an island. One woman has foresight to take a knife from the ship and falls unconscious on the beach. A man comes along and steals her knife. When the woman awakes she cannot remember if she had managed to bring the knife ashore with her or not. The man maintains that he brought it with him and no one else saw anything. The survivors decide to split the island equally between them and work it separately, exchanging goods via barter.



> *the freely competing judicial agencies would have to be guided by a body of absolute law to enable them to distinguish objectively between defence and invasion. This law, embodying elaborations upon the basic injunction to defend person and property from acts of invasion, would be codified in the basic legal code. Failure to establish such a code of law would tend to break down the free market, for then defence against invasion could not be adequately achieved."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123–4]

So if you violate the *"absolute law"* defending (absolute) property rights then you would be in trouble. The problem now lies in determining who sets that law. Rothbard is silent on how his system of monopoly laws are determined or specified. The "voluntaryists" did propose a solution, namely a central government elected by the majority of those who voluntarily decided to pay an income tax. In the words of Herbert:

> *"We agree that there must be a central agency to deal with crime — an agency that defends the liberty of all men, and employs force against the uses of force; but my central agency rests upon voluntary support, whilst Mr. Levy's central agency rests on compulsory support."* [quoted by Carl Watner, *"The English Individualists As They Appear In Liberty,"* pp. 191–211, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, p. 194]

And all Rothbard is concerned over private cops would exist or not! This lack of concern over the existence of the state and government flows from the strange fact that "anarcho"-capitalists commonly use the term "anarchism" to refer to any philosophy that opposes all forms of initiatory coercion. Notice that government does not play a part in this definition, thus

Rothbard can analyse Herbert's politics without commenting on who determines the law his private "defence" agencies enforce. For Rothbard, *"an anarchist society"* is defined *"as one where there is no legal possibility for coercive aggression against the person and property of any individual."* He then moved onto the state, defining that as an *"institution which possesses one or both (almost always both) of the following properties: (1) it acquires its income by the physical coercion known as 'taxation'; and (2) it acquires and usually obtains a coerced monopoly of the provision of defence service (police and courts) over a given territorial area."* [*"Society without a State"*, in **Nomos XIX**, Pennock and Chapman (eds.)., p. 192]

This is highly unusual definition of "anarchism," given that it utterly fails to mention or define government. This, perhaps, is understandable as any attempt to define it in terms of *"monopoly of decision-making power"* results in showing that capitalism is statist (see section 1 for a summary). The key issue here is the term *"legal possibility."* That suggestions a system of laws which determine what is *"coercive aggression"* and what constitutes what is and what is not legitimate "property." Herbert is considered by "anarcho"-capitalists as one of them. Which brings us to a strange conclusion, that for "anarcho"-capitalists you can have a system of "anarchism" in which there is a government and state — as long as the state does not impose taxation nor stop private police forces from operating!

As Rothbard argues *"if a government based on voluntary taxation permits free competition, the result will be the purely free-market system ... The previous government would now simply be one competing defence agency among many on the market."* [**Power and Market**, p. 124] That the government is specifying what is and is not legal does not seem to bother him or even cross his mind. Why should it, when the existence of government is irrelevant to his definition of anarchism and the state? That private police are enforcing a monopoly law determined



and will belong to the first person to appropriate and utilise it. If the current owners are not the actual criminals then there is no reason at all to dispossess them of their property; if the just owners cannot be found then they may keep the property as the first people to use it (of course, those who own capital and those who use it are usually different people, but we will ignore this obvious point).

Thus, since all original owners and the originally dispossessed are long dead nearly all current title owners are in just possession of their property except for recently stolen property. The principle is simple, dispossess the criminals, restore property to the dispossessed if they can be found otherwise leave titles where they are (as Native American tribes owned the land **collectively** this could have an interesting effect on such a policy in the USA. Obviously tribes that were wiped out need not apply, but would such right-libertarian policy recognise such collective, non-capitalist ownership claims? We doubt it, but we could be wrong — the Libertarian Party Manifesto states that their "just" property rights will be restored. And who defines "just"? And given that unclaimed federal land will be given to Native Americans, its seems pretty likely that the **original** land will be left alone).

Of course, that this instantly gives an advantage to the wealthy on the new "pure" market is not mentioned. The large corporations that, via state protection and support, built their empires and industrial base will still be in an excellent position to continue to dominate the market. Wealthy land owners, benefiting from the effects of state taxation and rents caused by the "land monopoly" on farmstead failures, will keep their property. The rich will have a great initial advantage and this may be more than enough to maintain them in there place. After all, exchanges between worker and owner tend to reinforce existing inequalities, **not** reduce them (and as the owners can move their capital elsewhere or import new, lower

insight into the nature of capitalism and produced a deeply radical response to it and its authoritarian structures.

Far from being a "natural" development, then, capitalism was imposed on a society of free and independent people by state action. Those workers alive at the time viewed it as *"unnatural relations"* and organised to overcome it. These feelings and hopes still exist, and will continue to exist until such time as we organise and *"abolish the wage system"* (to quote the IWW preamble) and the state that supports it.

## 8.7 Why is the history of capitalism important?

Simply because it provides us with an understanding of whether that system is "natural" and whether it can be considered as just and free. If the system was created by violence, state action and other unjust means then the apparent "freedom" which we currently face within it is a fraud, a fraud masking unnecessary and harmful relations of domination, oppression and exploitation. Moreover, by seeing how capitalist relationships were viewed by the first generation of wage slaves reminds us that just because many people have adjusted to this regime and consider it as normal (or even natural) it is nothing of the kind.

Murray Rothbard is well aware of the importance of history. He considered the *"moral indignation"* of socialism arises from the argument *"that the capitalists have stolen the rightful property of the workers, and therefore that existing titles to accumulated capital are unjust."* He argues that given *"this hypothesis, the remainder of the impetus for both Marxism and anarchosyndicalism follow quote logically."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 52]

So some right-libertarians are aware that the current property owners have benefited extensively from violence and state action in the past. Murray Rothbard argues (in **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 57) that if the just owners cannot be found for a property, then the property simply becomes again unowned



by the government seems hardly a step in the right direction nor can it be considered as anarchism. Perhaps this is unsurprising, for under his system there would be *"a basic, common Law Code"* which *"all would have to abide by"* as well as *"some way of resolving disputes that will gain a majority consensus in society ... whose decision will be accepted by the great majority of the public."* [*"Society without a State,"* **Op. Cit.**, p. 205]

At least Herbert is clear that this would be a government system, unlike Rothbard who assumes a monopoly law but seems to think that this is not a government or a state. As David Wieck argued, this is illogical for according to Rothbard *"all 'would have to' conform to the same legal code"* and this can only be achieved by means of *"the forceful action of adherents to the code against those who flout it"* and so *"in his system* ***there would stand over against every individual the legal authority of all the others.*** *An individual who did not recognise private property as legitimate would surely perceive this as a tyranny of law, a tyranny of the majority or of the most powerful — in short, a hydra-headed state. If the law code is itself unitary, then this multiple state might be said to have properly a single head — the law . .. But it looks as though one might still call this 'a state,' under Rothbard's definition, by satisfying* ***de facto*** *one of his pair of sufficient conditions: 'It asserts and usually obtains a coerced monopoly of provision of defence service (police and courts) over a given territorial area' ... Hobbes's individual sovereign would seem to have become many sovereigns — with but one law, however, and in truth, therefore, a single sovereign in Hobbes's more important sense of the latter term. One might better, and less confusingly, call this a libertarian state than an anarchy."* [*"Anarchist Justice"*, in **Nomos XIX**, Pennock and Chapman (eds.)., pp. 216–7]

The obvious recipients of the coercion of the new state would be those who rejected the authority of their bosses and landlords, those who reject the Lockean property rights Rothbard and Herbert hold dear. In such cases, the rebels and

any "defence agency" (like, say, a union) which defended them would be driven out of business as it violated the law of the land. How this is different from a state banning competing agencies is hard to determine. This is a *"difficulty"* argues Wieck, which *"results from the attachment of a principle of private property, and of unrestricted accumulation of wealth, to the principle of individual liberty. This increases sharply the possibility that many reasonable people who respect their fellow men and women will find themselves outside the law because of dissent from a property interpretation of liberty."* Similarly, there is the economic results of capitalism. *"One can imagine,"* Wieck continues, *"that those who lose out badly in the free competition of Rothbard's economic system, perhaps a considerable number, might regard the legal authority as an alien power, state for them, based on violence, and might be quite unmoved by the fact that, just as under nineteenth century capitalism, a principle of liberty was the justification for it all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 217 and pp. 217–8]

### 7.3 Can there be a "right-wing" anarchism?

Hart, of course, mentions the individualist anarchists, calling Tucker's ideas *"**laissez faire** liberalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 87] However, Tucker called his ideas *"socialism"* and presented a left-wing critique of most aspects of liberalism, particularly its Lockean based private property rights. Tucker based much of his ideas on property on Proudhon, so if Hart dismisses the latter as a socialist then this must apply to the former. Given that he notes that there are *"two main kinds of anarchist thought,"* namely *"communist anarchism which denies the right of an individual to seek profit, charge rent or interest and to own property"* and a *"'right-wing' proprietary anarchism, which vigorously defends these rights"* then Tucker, like Godwin, would have to be placed in the *"left-wing"* camp. [*"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part II"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 427] Tucker,



indicates well its inherently authoritarian nature. Only once other options were closed off and capitalists given an edge in the "free" market by state action did people accept and become accustomed to wage labour.

Opposition to wage labour and factory fascism was/is widespread and seems to occur wherever it is encountered. *"Research has shown"*, summarises William Lazonick, *"that the 'free-born Englishman' of the eighteenth century — even those who, by force of circumstance, had to submit to agricultural wage labour — tenaciously resisted entry into the capitalist workshop."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 37] British workers shared the dislike of wage labour of their American cousins. A *"Member of the Builders' Union"* in the 1830s argued that the trade unions *"will not only strike for less work, and more wages, but will ultimately **abolish wages**, become their own masters and work for each other; labour and capital will no longer be separate but will be indissolubly joined together in the hands of workmen and work-women."* [quoted by Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 133] This is unsurprising, for as Ostergaard notes, *"the workers then, who had not been swallowed up whole by the industrial revolution, could make critical comparisons between the factory system and what preceded it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134] While wage slavery may seem "natural" today, the first generation of wage labourers saw the transformation of the social relationships they experienced in work, from a situation in which they controlled their own work (and so themselves) to one in which **others** controlled them, and they did not like it. However, while many modern workers instinctively hate wage labour and having bosses, without the awareness of some other method of working, many put up with it as "inevitable." The first generation of wage labourers had the awareness of something else (although, of course, a flawed something else) and this gave then a deep

all their might. In response to being subjected to the "law of value," workers rebelled and tried to organise themselves to fight the powers that be and to replace the system with a co-operative one. As the printer's union argued, *"[we] regard such an organisation [a union] not only as an agent of immediate relief, but also as an essential to the ultimate destruction of those unnatural relations at present subsisting between the interests of the employing and the employed classes... .[W]hen labour determines to sell itself no longer to speculators, but to become its own employer, to own and enjoy itself and the fruit thereof, the necessity for scales of prices will have passed away and labour will be forever rescued from the control of the capitalist."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 27–28]

Little wonder, then, why wage labourers considered capitalism as a form of *"slavery"* and why the term *"wage slavery"* became so popular in the anarchist movement. It was just reflecting the feelings of those who experienced the wages system at first hand and joined the socialist and anarchist movements. As labour historian Norman Ware notes, the *"term 'wage slave' had a much better standing in the forties [of the 19th century] than it has today. It was not then regarded as an empty shibboleth of the soap-box orator. This would suggest that it has suffered only the normal degradation of language, has become a **cliche**, not that it is a grossly misleading characterisation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. xvf]

These responses of workers to the experience of wage labour is important to show that capitalism is by no means "natural." The fact is the first generation of workers tried to avoid wage labour is at all possible as they hated the restrictions of freedom it imposed upon them. They were perfectly aware that wage labour was wage slavery — that they were decidedly **unfree** during working hours and subjected to the will of another. While many working people now are accustomed to wage labour (while often hating their job) the actual process of resistance to the development of capitalism



after all, argued that he aimed for the end of profit, interest and rent and attacked private property in land and housing beyond "occupancy and use."

As can be seen, Hart's account of the history of "anti-state" liberalism is flawed. Godwin is included only by ignoring his views on property, views which in many ways reflects the later "socialist" (i.e. anarchist) analysis of Proudhon. He then discusses a few individuals who were alone in their opinions even within extreme free market right and all of whom knew of anarchism and explicitly rejected the name for their respective ideologies. In fact, they preferred the term *"government"* to describe their systems which, on the face of it, would be hard to reconcile with the usual "anarcho"-capitalist definition of anarchism as being "no government." Hart's discussion of individualist anarchism is equally flawed, failing to discuss their economic views (just as well, as its links to "left-wing" anarchism would be obvious).

However, the similarities of Molinari's views with what later became known as "anarcho"-capitalism are clear. Hart notes that with Molinari's death in 1912, *"liberal anti-statism virtually disappeared until it was rediscovered by the economist Murray Rothbard in the late 1950's"* [*"Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-statist Liberal Tradition: Part III"*, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88] While this fringe is somewhat bigger than previously, the fact remains that the ideas expounded by Rothbard are just as alien to the anarchist tradition as Molinari's. It is a shame that Rothbard, like his predecessors, did not call his ideology something other than anarchism. Not only would it have been more accurate, it would also have lead to much less confusion and no need to write this section of the FAQ! As it stands, the only reason why "anarcho"-capitalism is considered a form of "anarchism" by some is because one person (Rothbard) decided to steal the name of a well established and widespread political and social theory and movement and apply it to an ideology with little, if anything, in common with it.

As Hart inadvertently shows, it is not a firm base to build a claim. That anyone can consider "anarcho"-capitalism as anarchist simply flows from a lack of knowledge about anarchism. As numerous anarchists have argued. For example, *"Rothbard's conjunction of anarchism with capitalism,"* according to David Wieck, *"results in a conception that is entirely outside the mainstream of anarchist theoretical writings or social movements … this conjunction is a self-contradiction."* He stressed that *"the main traditions of anarchism are entirely different. These traditions, and theoretical writings associated with them, express the perspectives and the aspirations, and also, sometimes, the rage, of the oppressed people in human society: not only those economically oppressed, although the major anarchist movements have been mainly movements of workers and peasants, but also those oppressed by power in all those social dimensions … including of course that of political power expressed in the state."* In other words, *"anarchism represents . .. a moral commitment (Rothbard's anarchism I take to be diametrically opposite)."* [*"Anarchist Justice"*, in **Nomos XIX**, Pennock and Chapman (eds.), p. 215, p. 229 and p. 234]

It is a shame that some academics consider only the word Rothbard uses as relevant rather than the content and its relation to anarchist theory and history. If they did, they would soon realise that the expressed opposition of so many anarchists to "anarcho"-capitalism is something which cannot be ignored or dismissed. In other words, a "right-wing" anarchist cannot and does not exist, no matter how often they use that word to describe their ideology. As Bob Black put it, *"a right-wing anarchist is just a minarchist who'd abolish the state to his own satisfaction by calling it something else … They don't denounce what the state does, they just object to who's doing it."* [**Libertarian as Conservative**]

The reason is simple. Anarchist economics and politics cannot be artificially separated, they are linked. Godwin and Proudhon did not stop their analysis at the state. They



marked American life and sunk deeply into mass consciousness during the days of the early economy. In 1854, for example, a group of skilled piano makers wrote that *"the day is far distant when they [wage earners] will so far forget what is due to manhood as to glory in a system forced upon them by their necessity and in opposition to their feelings of independence and self-respect. May the piano trade be spared such exhibitions of the degrading power of the day [wage] system."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, p. 26]

Clearly the working class did not consider working for a daily wage, in contrast to working for themselves and selling their own product, to be a step forward for liberty or individual dignity. The difference between selling the product of one's labour and selling one's labour (i.e. oneself) was seen and condemned (*"[w]hen the producer … sold his product, he retained himself. But when he came to sell his labour, he sold himself … the extension [of wage labour] to the skilled worker was regarded by him as a symbol of a deeper change"* [Norman Ware, **The Industrial Worker, 1840–1860**, p. xiv]). Indeed, one group of workers argued that they were *"slaves in the strictest sense of the word"* as they had *"to toil from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same for our masters — aye, masters, and for our daily bread"* [Quoted by Ware, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] and another argued that *"the factory system contains in itself the elements of slavery, we think no sound reasoning can deny, and everyday continues to add power to its incorporate sovereignty, while the sovereignty of the working people decreases in the same degree."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29]

Almost as soon as there were wage workers, there were strikes, machine breaking, riots, unions and many other forms of resistance. John Zerzan's argument that there was a *"relentless assault on the worker's historical rights to free time, self-education, craftsmanship, and play was at the heart of the rise of the factory system"* is extremely accurate [**Elements of Refusal**, p. 105]. And it was an assault that workers resisted with

## 8.6 How did working people view the rise of capitalism?

The best example of how hated capitalism was can be seen by the rise and spread of the socialist movement, in all its many forms, across the world. It is no coincidence that the development of capitalism also saw the rise of socialist theories. However, in order to fully understand how different capitalism was from previous economic systems, we will consider early capitalism in the US, which for many "Libertarians" is **the** example of the "capitalism-equals-freedom" argument.

Early America was pervaded by artisan production — individual ownership of the means of production. Unlike capitalism, this system is **not** marked by the separation of the worker from the means of life. Most people did not have to work for another, and so did not. As Jeremy Brecher notes, in 1831 the *"great majority of Americans were farmers working their own land, primarily for their own needs. Most of the rest were self-employed artisans, merchants, traders, and professionals. Other classes — employees and industrialists in the North, slaves and planters in the South — were relatively small. The great majority of Americans were independent and free from anybody's command."* [**Strike!**, p. xxi] These conditions created the high cost of combined (wage) labour which ensured the practice of slavery existed.

However, toward the middle of the 19th century the economy began to change. Capitalism began to be imported into American society as the infrastructure was improved, which allowed markets for manufactured goods to grow. Soon, due to (state-supported) capitalist competition, artisan production was replaced by wage labour. Thus "evolved" modern capitalism. Many workers understood, resented, and opposed their increasing subjugation to their employers (*"the masters"*, to use Adam Smith's expression), which could not be reconciled with the principles of freedom and economic independence that had



extended it the social relationships produced by inequality of wealth, i.e. economic power as well as political power. To see why, we need only consult Rothbard's work. As noted in the last section, for Rothbard the key issue with the "voluntary taxationists" was not who determined the *"body of absolute law"* but rather who enforced it. In his discussion, he argued that a democratic "defence agency" is at a disadvantage in his "free market" system. As he put it:

> *"It would, in fact, be competing at a severe disadvantage, having been established on the principle of 'democratic voting.' Looked at as a market phenomenon, 'democratic voting' (one vote per person) is simply the method of the consumer 'co-operative.' Empirically, it has been demonstrated time and again that co-operatives cannot compete successfully against stock-owned companies, especially when both are equal before the law. There is no reason to believe that co-operatives for defence would be any more efficient. Hence, we may expect the old co-operative government to 'wither away' through loss of customers on the market, while joint-stock (i.e., corporate) defence agencies would become the prevailing market form."*

Notice how he assumes that both a co-operative and corporation would be *"equal before the law."* But who determines that law? Obviously **not** a democratically elected government, as the idea of "one person, one vote" in determining the common law all are subject to is *"inefficient."* Nor does he think, like the individualist anarchists, that the law would be judged by juries along with the facts. As we note in section 1.4, he rejects that in favour of it being determined by *"Libertarian lawyers and jurists."* Thus the law is unchangeable by ordinary people and enforced by private defence agencies hired to protect the

liberty and property of the owning class. In the case of a capitalist economy, this means defending the power of landlords and capitalists against rebel tenants and workers.

This means that Rothbard's *"common Law Code"* will be determined, interpreted, enforced and amended by corporations based on the will of the majority of shareholders, i.e. the rich. That hardly seems likely to produce equality before the law. As he argues in a footnote:

> *"There is a strong **a priori** reason for believing that corporations will be superior to co-operatives in any given situation. For if each owner receives only one vote regardless of how much money he has invested in a project (and earnings are divided in the same way), there is no incentive to invest more than the next man; in fact, every incentive is the other way. This hampering of investment militates strongly against the co-operative form."*

So **if** the law is determined by the defence agencies and courts then it will be determined by those who have invested most in these companies. As it is unlikely that the rich will invest in defence firms which do not support their property rights, power, profits and definition of property rights, it is clear that agencies which favour the wealthy will survive on the market. The idea that market demand will counter this class rule seems unlikely, given Rothbard's own argument. After all, in order to compete successfully you need more than demand, you need source of investment. If co-operative defence agencies do form, they will be at a market disadvantage due to lack of investment. As argued in section J.5.12, even though co-operatives are more efficient than capitalist firms lack of investment (caused by the lack of control by capitalists Rothbard notes) stops them replacing wage slavery. Thus capitalist wealth and power inhibits the spread of freedom in production.



*Individualist Anarchists, we must add] ... [talked about] putting more money in circulation."* [Howard Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 278]

Overall, therefore, state action ensured the transformation of America from a society of independent workers to a capitalist one. By creating and enforcing the "land monopoly" (of which state ownership of unoccupied land and its enforcement of landlord rights were the most important) the state ensured that the balance of class forces tipped in favour of the capitalist class. By removing the option of farming your own land, the US government created its own form of enclosure and the creation of a landless workforce with little option but to sell its liberty on the "free market". This, combined with protectionism, ensured the transformation of American society from a pre-capitalist one into a capitalist one. They was nothing "natural" about it.

Little wonder the Individualist Anarchist J.K. Ingalls attacked the "land monopoly" in the following words:

> *"The earth, with its vast resources of mineral wealth, its spontaneous productions and its fertile soil, the free gift of God and the common patrimony of mankind, has for long centuries been held in the grasp of one set of oppressors by right of conquest or right of discovery; and it is now held by another, through the right of purchase from them. All of man's natural possessions ... have been claimed as property; nor has man himself escaped the insatiate jaws of greed. The invasion of his rights and possessions has resulted ... in clothing property with a power to accumulate an income."* [quoted by James Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 142]

*land into a commodity and stimulating land speculation, made the midwestern farmers dependent upon markets for the continual possession of their farms."* [Charlie Post, **Op. Cit.**, p. 223] Once on the market, farmers had to invest in new machinery and this also got them into debt. In the face of a bad harvest or market glut, they could not repay their loans and their farms had to be sold to so do so. By 1880, 25% of all farms were rented by tenants, and the numbers kept rising.

This means that Murray Rothbard's comment that *"once the land was purchased by the settler, the injustice disappeared"* is nonsense — the injustice was transmitted to other parts of society and this, along with the legacy of the original injustice, lived on and helped transform society towards capitalism [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 73]. In addition, his comments about *"the establishment in North America of a truly libertarian land system"* would be one the Individualist Anarchists would have seriously disagreed with! [**Ibid.**]

Thus state action, in restricting free access to the land, ensured that workers were dependent on wage labour. In addition, the *"transformation of social property relations in northern agriculture set the stage for the 'agricultural revolution' of the 1840s and 1850s ... [R]ising debts and taxes forced midwestern family farmers to compete as commodity producers in order to maintain their land-holding ... The transformation ... was the central precondition for the development of industrial capitalism in the United States."* [Charlie Post, **Ibid.**, p. 226]

In addition to seizing the land and distributing it in such a way as to benefit capitalist industry, the *"government played its part in helping the bankers and hurting the farmers; it kept the amount of money — based in the gold supply — steady while the population rose, so there was less and less money in circulation. The farmer had to pay off his debts in dollars that were harder to get. The bankers, getting loans back, were getting dollars worth more than when they loaned them out — a kind of interest on top of interest. That was why ... farmers' movements [like the*



If we apply his own argument to Rothbard's system, we suggest that the market in "defence" will also stop the spread of more libertarian associations thanks to capitalist power and wealth. In other words, like any market, Rothbard's "defence" market will simply reflect the interests of the elite, not the masses.

Moreover, we can expect any democratic defence agency (like a union) to support, say, striking workers or squatting tenants, to be crushed. This is because, as Rothbard stresses, **all** "defence" firms would be expected to apply the *"common"* law, as written by *"Libertarian lawyers and jurists."* If they did not they would quickly be labelled "outlaw" agencies and crushed by the others. Ironically, Tucker would join Bakunin and Kropotkin in an "anarchist" court accused to violating "anarchist" law by practising and advocating "occupancy and use" rather than the approved Rothbardian property rights. Even if these democratic "defence" agencies could survive and not be driven out of the market by a combination of lack of investment and violence due to their "outlaw" status, there is another problem. As we discussed in section 1, landlords and capitalists have a monopoly of decision making power over their property. As such, they can simply refuse to recognise any democratic agency as a legitimate defence association and use the same tactics perfected against unions to ensure that it does not gain a foothold in their domain (see section 6 for more details).

Clearly, then, a "right-wing" anarchism is impossible as any system based on capitalist property rights will simply be an oligarchy run by and for the wealthy. As Rothbard notes, any defence agency based on democratic principles will not survive in the "market" for defence simply because it does not allow the wealthy to control it and its decisions. Little wonder Proudhon argued that laissez-faire capitalism meant *"the victory of the strong over the weak, of those who own property over those who own nothing."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 259]

## 8 What role did the state take in the creation of capitalism?

If the "anarcho"-capitalist is to claim with any plausibility that "real" capitalism is non-statist or that it can exist without a state, it must be shown that capitalism evolved naturally, in opposition to state intervention. However, in reality, the opposite is the case. Capitalism was born from state intervention and, in the words of Kropotkin, *"the State ... and capitalism ... developed side by side, mutually supporting and re-enforcing each other."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 181]

Numerous writers have made this point. For example, in Karl Polanyi's flawed masterpiece **The Great Transformation** we read that *"the road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organised and controlled interventionism"* by the state [p. 140]. This intervention took many forms — for example, state support during "mercantilism," which allowed the "manufactures" (i.e. industry) to survive and develop, enclosures of common land, and so forth. In addition, the slave trade, the invasion and brutal conquest of the Americas and other "primitive" nations, and the looting of gold, slaves, and raw materials from abroad also enriched the European economy, giving the development of capitalism an added boost. Thus Kropotkin:

> *"The history of the genesis of capital has already been told by socialists many times. They have described how it was born of war and pillage, of slavery and serfdom, of modern fraud and exploitation. They have shown how it is nourished by the blood of the worker, and how little by little it has conquered the whole world."* [**Op. Cit.**,p. 207]

Or, if Kropotkin seems too committed to be fair, we have John Stuart Mill's statement that:



claims supported by the law [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 125] Thus land which should have been free was sold to land-hungry farmers and the few enriched themselves at the expense of the many. Not only did this increase inequality within society, it also encouraged the development of wage labour — having to pay for land would have ensured that many immigrants remained on the East Coast until they had enough money. Thus a pool of people with little option but to sell their labour was increased due to state protection of unoccupied land. That the land usually ended up in the hands of farmers did not (could not) countermand the shift in class forces that this policy created.

This was also the essential role of the various "Homesteading Acts" and, in general, the *"Federal land law in the 19th century provided for the sale of most of the public domain at public auction to the higher bidder ... Actual settlers were forced to buy land from speculators, at prices considerably above the federal minimal price"* (which few people could afford anyway) [Charlie Post, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222]. Little wonder the Individualist Anarchists supported an *"occupancy and use"* system of land ownership as a key way of stopping capitalist and landlord usury as well as the development of capitalism itself.

This change in the appropriation of land had significant effects on agriculture and the desirability of taking up farming for immigrants. As Post notes, *"[w]hen the social conditions for obtaining and maintaining possession of land change, as they did in the midwest between 1830 and 1840, pursuing the goal of preserving [family ownership and control] .. . produced very different results. In order to pay growing mortgages, debts and taxes, family farmers were compelled to specialise production toward cash crops and to market more and more of their output."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 221–2]

So, in order to pay for land which was formerly free, farmers got themselves into debt and increasingly turned to the market to pay it off. Thus, the *"Federal land system, by transforming*

This was because, in the words of Maurice Dobbs, it *"became clear to those who wished to reproduce capitalist relations of production in the new country that the foundation-stone of their endeavour must be the restriction of land-ownership to a minority and the exclusion of the majority from any share in [productive] property."* [**Studies in Capitalist Development**, pp. 221–2] As one radical historian puts it, *"[w]hen land is 'free' or 'cheap'. as it was in different regions of the United States before the 1830s, there was no compulsion for farmers to introduce labour-saving technology. As a result, 'independent household production' ... hindered the development of capitalism ... [by] allowing large portions of the population to escape wage labour."* [Charlie Post, *"The 'Agricultural Revolution' in the United States"*, pp. 216–228, **Science and Society**, vol. 61, no. 2, p. 221]

It was precisely this option (i.e. of independent production) that had to be destroyed in order for capitalist industry to develop. The state had to violate the holy laws of "supply and demand" by controlling the access to land in order to ensure the normal workings of "supply and demand" in the labour market (i.e. that the bargaining position on the labour market favoured employer over employee). Once this situation became the typical one (i.e. when the option of self-employment was effectively eliminated) a (protectionist based) "laissez-faire" approach could be adopted and state action used only to protect private property from the actions of the dispossessed.

So how was this transformation of land ownership achieved?

Instead of allowing settlers to appropriate their own farms as was the case before the 1830s, the state stepped in once the army had cleared out the original users. Its first major role was to enforce legal rights of property on unused land. Land stolen from the Native Americans was sold at auction to the highest bidders, namely speculators, who then sold it on to farmers. This process started right *"after the revolution, [when] huge sections of land were bought up by rich speculators"* and their



> *"The social arrangements of modern Europe commenced from a distribution of property which was the result, not of just partition, or acquisition by industry, but of conquest and violence... "* [**Principles of Political Economy**, p. 15]

Therefore, when supporters of "libertarian" capitalism say they are against the "initiation of force," they mean only **new** initiations of force; for the system they support was born from numerous initiations of force in the past. And, as can be seen from the history of the last 100 years, it also requires state intervention to keep it going (section D.1, "Why does state intervention occur?," addresses this point in some detail). Indeed, many thinkers have argued that it was precisely this state support and coercion (particularly the separation of people from the land) that played the **key** role in allowing capitalism to develop rather than the theory that *"previous savings"* did so. As the noted German thinker Franz Oppenheimer argued, *"the concept of a 'primitive accumulation,' or an original store of wealth, in land and in movable property, brought about by means of purely economic forces"* while *"seem[ing] quite plausible"* is in fact *"utterly mistaken; it is a 'fairly tale,' or it is a class theory used to justify the privileges of the upper classes."* [**The State**, pp. 5–6]

This thesis will be discussed in the following sections. It is, of course, ironic to hear right-wing libertarians sing the praises of a capitalism that never existed and urge its adoption by all nations, in spite of the historical evidence suggesting that only state intervention made capitalist economies viable — even in that Mecca of "free enterprise," the United States. As Noam Chomsky argues, *"who but a lunatic could have opposed the development of a textile industry in New England in the early nineteenth century, when British textile production was so much more efficient that half the New England industrial sector would have gone bankrupt without very high protective tariffs, thus terminating industrial development in the United States? Or the high*

*tariffs that radically undermined economic efficiency to allow the United States to develop steel and other manufacturing capacities? Or the gross distortions of the market that created modern electronics?"* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 168]. To claim, therefore, that "mercantilism" is not capitalism makes little sense. Without mercantilism, "proper" capitalism would never have developed, and any attempt to divorce a social system from its roots is ahistoric and makes a mockery of critical thought.

Similarly, it is somewhat ironic when "anarcho"-capitalists and right libertarians claim that they support the freedom of individuals to choose how to live. After all, the working class was not given **that** particular choice when capitalism was developing. Indeed, their right to choose their own way of life was constantly violated and denied. So to claim that **now** (after capitalism has been created) we get the chance to try and live as we like is insulting in the extreme. The available options we have are not independent of the society we live in and are decisively shaped by the past. To claim we are "free" to live as we like (within the laws of capitalism) is basically to argue that we are able to "buy" the freedom that every individual is due from those who have stolen it from us in the first place!

Needless to say, some right-libertarians recognise that the state played a massive role in encouraging industrialisation (more correct to say "proletarianisation" as it created a working class which did not own the tools they used, although we stress that this process started on the land and not in industry). So they contrast "bad" business people (who took state aid) and "good" ones. Thus Rothbard's comment that Marxists have *"made no particular distinction between 'bourgeoisie' who made use of the state, and bourgeoisie who acted on the free market."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 72]

But such an argument is nonsense as it ignores the fact that the "free market" is a network (and defined by the state by the property rights it enforces). For example, the owners of



sociated with the rise of capitalism [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 273].

In other words, there is good reason to think that the enclosures, far from being some kind of socialist myth, in fact played a key role in the development of capitalism. As Lazonick himself notes, *"Chambers misunderstood" "the argument concerning the 'institutional creation' of a proletarianised (i.e. landless) workforce. Indeed, Chamber's own evidence and logic tend to support the Marxian [and anarchist!] argument, when it is properly understood."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273]

## 8.5 What about the lack of enclosures in the Americas?

The enclosure movement was but one way of creating the *"land monopoly"* which ensured the creation of a working class. The circumstances facing the ruling class in the Americas were distinctly different than in the Old World and so the "land monopoly" took a different form there. In the Americas, enclosures were unimportant as customary land rights did not really exist. Here the problem was that (after the original users of the land were eliminated, of course) there were vast tracts of land available for people to use.

Unsurprisingly, there was a movement towards independent farming and this pushed up the price of labour, by reducing the supply. Capitalists found it difficult to find workers willing to work for them at wages low enough to provide them with sufficient profits. It was due the difficulty in finding cheap enough labour that capitalists in America turned to slavery. All things being equal, wage labour **is** more productive than slavery. But in early America all things were **not** equal. Having access to cheap (indeed, free) land meant that working people had a choice, and few desired to become wage slaves. Because of this, capitalists turned to slavery in the South and the "land monopoly" in the North and West.

but to work for another. This would drive down wages and increase demand. Moreover, freed from the land, these workers could later move to the towns in search for better work.

Secondly, it is argued that the number of small farm owners increased, or at least did not greatly decline, and so the enclosure movement was unimportant. Again, this misses the point. Small farm owners can still employ wage workers (i.e. become capitalist farmers as opposed to "yeomen" — independent peasant proprietor). As Lazonick notes, *"[i]t is true that after 1750 some petty proprietors continued to occupy and work their own land. But in a world of capitalist agriculture, the yeomanry no longer played an important role in determining the course of capitalist agriculture. As a social class that could influence the evolution of British economy society, the yeomanry had disappeared."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

Thirdly, it is often claimed that it was population growth, rather than enclosures, that caused the supply of wage workers. So was population growth more important that enclosures? Maurice Dobbs argues that *"the centuries in which a proletariat was most rapidly recruited were apt to be those of slow rather than of rapid natural increase of population, and the paucity or plenitude of a labour reserve in different countries was not correlated with comparable difference in their rates of population-growth."* [**Studies in Capitalist Development**, p. 223] Moreover, the population argument ignores the question of whether the changes in society caused by enclosures and the rise of capitalism have an impact on the observed trends towards earlier marriage and larger families after 1750. Lazonick argues that *"[t]here is reason to believe that they did."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] Also, of course, the use of child labour in the factories created an economic incentive to have more children, an incentive created by the developing capitalist system. Overall, Lazonick notes that *"[t]o argue that population growth created the industrial labour supply is to ignore these momentous social transformations"* as-



the American steel and other companies who grew rich and their companies big behind protectionist walls are obviously "bad" bourgeoisie. But are the bourgeoisie who supplied the steel companies with coal, machinery, food, "defence" and so on not also benefiting from state action? And the suppliers of the luxury goods to the wealthy steel company owners, did they not benefit from state action? Or the suppliers of commodities to the workers that laboured in the steel factories that the tariffs made possible, did they not benefit? And the suppliers to these suppliers? And the suppliers to these suppliers? Did not the users of technology first introduced into industry by companies protected by state orders also not benefit? Did not the capitalists who had a large and landless working class to select from benefit from the "land monopoly" even though they may not have, unlike other capitalists, directly advocated it? It increased the pool of wage labour for **all** capitalists and increased their bargaining position/power in the labour market at the expense of the working class. In other words, such a policy helped maintain capitalist market power, irrespective of whether individual capitalists encouraged politicians to vote to create/maintain it. And, similarly, **all** capitalists benefited from the changes in common law to recognise and protect capitalist private property and rights that the state enforced during the 19$^{th}$ century (see section B.2.5).

It appears that, for Rothbard, the collusion between state and business is the fault, not of capitalism, but of particular capitalists. The system is pure; only individuals are corrupt. But, for anarchists, the origins of the modern state-capitalist system lies not in the individual qualities of capitalists as such but in the dynamic and evolution of capitalism itself — a complex interaction of class interest, class struggle, social defence against the destructive actions of the market, individual qualities and so forth. In other words, Rothbard's claims are flawed — they fail to understand capitalism as a **system** and its dynamic nature.

Indeed, if we look at the role of the state in creating capitalism we could be tempted to rename "anarcho"-capitalism "marxian-capitalism". This is because, given the historical evidence, a political theory can be developed by which the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" is created and that this capitalist state "withers away" into anarchy. That this means rejecting the economic and social ideas of Marxism and their replacement by their direct opposite should not mean that we should reject the idea (after all, that is what "anarcho"-capitalism has done to Individualist Anarchism!). But we doubt that many "anarcho"-capitalists will accept such a name change (even though this would reflect their politics far better; after all they do not object to past initiations of force, just current ones and many do seem to think that the modern state **will** wither away due to market forces).

But this is beside the point. The fact remains that state action was required to create and maintain capitalism. Without state support it is doubtful that capitalism would have developed at all.

So, when the right suggests that "we" be "left alone," what they mean by "we" comes into clear focus when we consider how capitalism developed. Artisans and peasants were only "left alone" to starve, and the working classes of industrial capitalism were only "left alone" outside work and for only as long as they respected the rules of their "betters." As for the other side of the class divide, they desire to be "left alone" to exercise their power over others, as we will see. That modern "capitalism" is, in effect, a kind of "corporate mercantilism," with states providing the conditions that allow corporations to flourish (e.g. tax breaks, subsidies, bailouts, anti-labour laws, etc.) says more about the statist roots of capitalism than the ideologically correct definition of capitalism used by its supporters.



ideal society of freedom. To find out that an idol has feet of clay and that we are still living with the impact of its origins is something pro-capitalists must deny. So **is** the enclosures a socialist myth? Most claims that it is flow from the work of the historian J.D. Chambers' famous essay *"Enclosures and the Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution."* [**Economic History Review**, 2nd series, no. 5, August 1953] In this essay, Chambers attempts to refute Karl Marx's account of the enclosures and the role it played in what Marx called *"primitive accumulation."*

We cannot be expected to provide an extensive account of the debate that has raged over this issue. All we can do is provide a summary of the work of William Lazonick who presented an excellent reply to those who claim that the enclosures were an unimportant historical event. We are drawing upon his summary of his excellent essay *"Karl Marx and Enclosures in England"* [**Review of Radical Political Economy**, no. 6, Summer, 1974] which can be found in his books **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor** and **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**. There are three main claims against the socialist account of the enclosures. We will cover each in turn.

Firstly, it is often claimed that the enclosures drove the uprooted cottager and small peasant into industry. However, this was never claimed. It is correct that the agricultural revolution associated with the enclosures **increased** the demand for farm labour as claimed by Chambers and others. And this is the whole point — enclosures created a pool of dispossessed labourers who had to sell their time/liberty to survive. The *"critical transformation was not the level of agricultural employment before and after enclosure but the changes in employment relations caused by the reorganisation of landholdings and the reallocation of access to land."* [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 30] Thus the key feature of the enclosures was that it created a supply for farm labour, a supply that had no choice

tarians" ask: How "free" is the "free market"? And why, when it is introduced, do the rich get richer and the poor poorer? This was the case in Chile (see Section C.11). For the poverty associated with the rise of capitalism in England 200 years ago, E.P. Thompson's **The Making of the English Working Class** provides a detailed discussion. Howard Zinn's **A People's History of the United States** describes the poverty associated with 19th-century US capitalism.

## 8.4 Aren't the enclosures a socialist myth?

The short answer is no, they are not. While a lot of historical analysis has been spent in trying to deny the extent and impact of the enclosures, the simple fact is (in the words of noted historian E.P. Thompson) enclosure *"was a plain enough case of class robbery, played according to the fair rules of property and law laid down by a parliament of property-owners and lawyers."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 237–8]

The enclosures were one of the ways that the *"land monopoly"* was created. The land monopoly was used to refer to capitalist property rights and ownership of land by (among others) the Individualist Anarchists. Instead of an *"occupancy and use"* regime advocated by anarchists, the land monopoly allowed a few to bar the many from the land — so creating a class of people with nothing to sell but their labour. While this monopoly is less important these days in developed nations (few people know how to farm) it was essential as a means of consolidating capitalism. Given the choice, most people preferred to become independent farmers rather than wage workers (see next section).

However, the importance of the enclosure movement is downplayed by supporters of capitalism. Little wonder, for it is something of an embarrassment for them to acknowledge that the creation of capitalism was somewhat less than "immaculate" — after all, capitalism is portrayed as an almost



## 8.1 What social forces lay behind the rise of capitalism?

Capitalist society is a relatively recent development. As Murray Bookchin points out, for a *"long era, perhaps spanning more than five centuries,"* capitalism *"coexisted with feudal and simple commodity relationships"* in Europe. He argues that this period *"simply cannot be treated as 'transitional' without reading back the present into the past."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 179] In other words, capitalism was not a inevitable outcome of "history" or social evolution.

He goes on to note that capitalism existed *"with growing significance in the mixed economy of the West from the fourteenth century up to the seventeenth"* but that it *"literally exploded into being in Europe, particularly England, during the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181] The question arises, what lay behind this *"growing significance"*? Did capitalism *"explode"* due to its inherently more efficient nature or where there other, non-economic, forces at work? As we will show, it was most definitely the later one — capitalism was born not from economic forces but from the political actions of the social elites which its usury enriched. Unlike artisan (simple commodity) production, wage labour generates inequalities and wealth for the few and so will be selected, protected and encouraged by those who control the state in their own economic and social interests.

The development of capitalism in Europe was favoured by two social elites, the rising capitalist class within the degenerating medieval cities and the absolutist state. The medieval city was *"thoroughly changed by the gradual increase in the power of commercial capital, due primarily to foreign trade... By this the inner unity of the commune was loosened, giving place to a growing caste system and leading necessarily to a progressive inequality of social interests. The privileged minorities pressed ever more definitely towards a centralisation of the political forces of*

*the community... Mercantilism in the perishing city republics led logically to a demand for larger economic units [i.e. to nationalise the market]; and by this the desire for stronger political forms was greatly strengthened... . Thus the city gradually became a small state, paving the way for the coming national state."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Nationalism and Culture**, p. 94]

The rising economic power of the proto-capitalists conflicted with that of the feudal lords, which meant that the former required help to consolidate their position. That aid came in the form of the monarchical state. With the force of absolutism behind it, capital could start the process of increasing its power and influence by expanding the "market" through state action.

As far as the absolutist state was concerned, it *"was dependent upon the help of these new economic forces, and vice versa... ." "The absolutist state,"* Rocker argues, *"whose coffers the expansion of commerce filled ..., at first furthered the plans of commercial capital. Its armies and fleets ... contributed to the expansion of industrial production because they demanded a number of things for whose large-scale production the shops of small tradesmen were no longer adapted. Thus gradually arose the so-called manufactures, the forerunners of the later large industries."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 117–8]

Some of the most important state actions from the standpoint of early industry were the so-called Enclosure Acts, by which the "commons" — the free farmland shared communally by the peasants in most rural villages — was "enclosed" or incorporated into the estates of various landlords as private property (see section 8.3). This ensured a pool of landless workers who had no option but to sell their labour to capitalists. Indeed, the widespread independence caused by the possession of the majority of households of land caused the rising class of merchants to complain *"that men who should work as wage-labourers cling to the soil, and in the naughtiness of their hearts prefer independence as squatters to employment by a master."*



sell themselves to capitalists in order to survive. There is no doubt that if the state had "left alone" the European peasantry, allowing them to continue their collective farming practices ("collective farming" because, as Kropotkin shows in **Mutual Aid**, the peasants not only shared the land but much of the farm labour as well), capitalism could not have taken hold (see **Mutual Aid**, pp. 184–189, for more on the European enclosures). As Kropotkin notes, *"[i]nstances of commoners themselves dividing their lands were rare, everywhere the State coerced them to enforce the division, or simply favoured the private appropriation of their lands"* by the nobles and wealthy. [**Mutual Aid**, p. 188]

Thus Kropotkin's statement that *"to speak of the natural death of the village community [or the commons] in virtue of economical law is as grim a joke as to speak of the natural death of soldiers slaughtered on a battlefield."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 189]

Like the more recent case of fascist Chile, "free market" capitalism was imposed on the majority of society by an elite using the authoritarian state. This was recognised by Adam Smith when he opposed state intervention in **The Wealth of Nations**. In Smith's day, the government was openly and unashamedly an instrument of wealth owners. Less than 10 per cent of British men (and no women) had the right to vote. When Smith opposed state interference, he was opposing the imposition of wealth owners' interests on everybody else (and, of course, how "liberal", nevermind "libertarian", is a political system in which the many follow the rules and laws set-down in the so-called interests of all by the few? As history shows, any minority given, or who take, such power **will** abuse it in their own interests). Today, the situation is reversed, with neo-liberals and right libertarians opposing state interference in the economy (e.g. regulation of Big Business) so as to prevent the public from having even a minor impact on the power or interests of the elite.

The fact that "free market" capitalism always requires introduction by an authoritarian state should make all honest "Liber-

with their usual rhetoric about civilisation and progress. Thus John Bellers, a 17th-century supporter of enclosures, claimed that commons were *"a hindrance to Industry, and ... Nurseries of Idleness and Insolence."* The *"forests and great Commons make the Poor that are upon them too much like the **indians.**"* [quoted by Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 163] Elsewhere Thompson argues that the commons *"were now seen as a dangerous centre of indiscipline ... Ideology was added to self-interest. It became a matter of public-spirited policy for gentlemen to remove cottagers from the commons, reduce his labourers to dependence ..."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 242–3]

The commons gave working-class people a degree of independence which allowed them to be "insolent" to their betters. This had to be stopped, as it undermined to the very roots of authority relationships within society. The commons **increased** freedom for ordinary people and made them less willing to follow orders and accept wage labour. The reference to "Indians" is important, as the independence and freedom of Native Americans is well documented. The common feature of both cultures was communal ownership of the means of production and free access to it (usufruct). This is discussed further in section I.7 (Won't Libertarian Socialism destroy individuality?)

As the early American economist Edward Wakefield noted in 1833, *"where land is cheap and all are free, where every one who so pleases can easily obtain a piece of land for himself, not only is labour dear, as respects the labourer's share of the product, but the difficulty is to obtain combined labour at any price."* [**England and America**, quoted by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, **Commonsense for Hard Times**, p. 24]

The enclosure of the commons (in whatever form it took — see section 8.5 for the US equivalent) solved both problems — the high cost of labour, and the freedom and dignity of the worker. The enclosures perfectly illustrate the principle that capitalism requires a state to ensure that the majority of people do not have free access to any means of livelihood and so must



[R.H Tawney, cited by Allan Elgar in **The Apostles of Greed**, p. 12]

In addition, other forms of state aid ensured that capitalist firms got a head start, so ensuring their dominance over other forms of work (such as co-operatives). A major way of creating a pool of resources that could be used for investment was the use of mercantilist policies which used protectionist measures to enrich capitalists and landlords at the expense of consumers and their workers. For example, one of most common complaints of early capitalists was that workers could not turn up to work regularly. Once they had worked a few days, they disappeared as they had earned enough money to live on. With higher prices for food, caused by protectionist measures, workers had to work longer and harder and so became accustomed to factory labour. In addition, mercantilism allowed native industry to develop by barring foreign competition and so allowed industrialists to reap excess profits which they could then use to increase their investments. In the words of Marian-socialist economic historian Maurice Dobbs:

> *"In short, the Mercantile System was a system of State-regulated exploitation through trade which played a highly important rule in the adolescence of capitalist industry: it was essentially the economic policy of an age of primitive accumulation."* [**Studies in Capitalism Development**, p. 209]

As Rocker summarises, *"when abolutism had victoriously overcome all opposition to national unification, but its furthering of mercantilism and economic monopoly it gave the whole social evolution a direction which could only lead to capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 116–7]

This process of state aid in capitalist development was also seen in the United States of America. As Edward Herman points out, the *"level of government involvement in business*

*in the United States from the late eighteenth century to the present has followed a U-shaped pattern: There was extensive government intervention in the pre-Civil War period (major subsidies, joint ventures with active government participation and direct government production), then a quasi-laissez faire period between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century [a period marked by "the aggressive use of tariff protection" and state supported railway construction, a key factor in capitalist expansion in the USA], followed by a gradual upswing of government intervention in the twentieth century, which accelerated after 1930."* [**Corporate Control, Corporate Power**, p. 162]

Such intervention ensured that income was transferred from workers to capitalists. Under state protection, America industrialised by forcing the consumer to enrich the capitalists and increase their capital stock. *"According to one study, of the tariff had been removed in the 1830s 'about half the industrial sector of New England would have been bankrupted' ... the tariff became a near-permanent political institution representing government assistance to manufacturing. It kept price levels from being driven down by foreign competition and thereby shifted the distribution of income in favour of owners of industrial property to the disadvantage of workers and customers."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 56]

This protection was essential, for as Du Boff notes, the *"end of the European wars in 1814 ... reopened the United States to a flood of British imports that drove many American competitors out of business. Large portions of the newly expanded manufacturing base were wiped out, bringing a decade of near-stagnation."* Unsurprisingly, the *"era of protectionism began in 1816, with northern agitation for higher tariffs. .. "* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14, p. 55]

Combined with ready repression of the labour movement and government "homesteading" acts (see section 8.5), tariffs were the American equivalent of mercantilism (which, after all, was above all else a policy of protectionism, i.e. the use of gov-



A college economist planned
To live without access to land
He would have succeeded
But found that he needed
Food, shelter and somewhere to stand.

Thus the Individualist (and other) anarchists' concern over the *"land monopoly"* of which the Enclosure Acts were but one part. The land monopoly, to use Tucker's words, *"consists in the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150] It is important to remember that wage labour first developed on the land and it was the protection of land titles of landlords and nobility, combined with enclosure, that meant people could not just work their own land.

In other words, the circumstances so created by enclosing the land and enforcing property rights to large estates ensured that capitalists did not have to point a gun at workers head to get them to work long hours in authoritarian, dehumanising conditions. In such circumstances, when the majority are dispossessed and face the threat of starvation, poverty, homelessness and so on, "initiation of force" is **not required.** But guns **were** required to enforce the system of private property that created the labour market in the first place, to enforce the enclosure of common land and protect the estates of the nobility and wealthy.

In addition to increasing the availability of land on the market, the enclosures also had the effect of destroying working-class independence. Through these Acts, innumerable peasants were excluded from access to their former means of livelihood, forcing them to migrate to the cities to seek work in the newly emerging factories of the budding capitalist class, who were thus provided with a ready source of cheap labour. The capitalists, of course, did not describe the results this way, but attempted to obfuscate the issue

*law imposed capitalist definitions to exclusive property in land"* [**Customs in Common**, p. 163]. Property rights, which exclusively favoured the rich, replaced the use rights and free agreement that had governed peasant's use of the commons. Unlike use rights, which rest in the individual, property rights require state intervention to create and maintain.

This stealing of the land should not be under estimated. Without land, you cannot live and have to sell your liberty to others. This places those with capital at an advantage, which will tend to increase, rather than decrease, the inequalities in society (and so place the landless workers at an increasing disadvantage over time). This process can be seen from early stages of capitalism. With the enclosure of the land, an agricultural workforce was created which had to travel where the work was. This influx of landless ex-peasants into the towns ensured that the traditional guild system crumbled and was transformed into capitalistic industry with bosses and wage slaves rather than master craftsmen and their journeymen. Hence the enclosure of land played a key role, for *"it is clear that economic inequalities are unlikely to create a division of society into an employing master class and a subject wage-earning class, unless access to the mans of production, including land, is by some means or another barred to a substantial section of the community."* [Maurice Dobbs, **Studies in Capitalist Development**, p. 253]

The importance of access to land is summarised by this limerick by the followers of Henry George (a 19th century writer who argued for a *"single tax"* and the nationalisation of land). The Georgites got their basic argument on the importance of land down these few, excellent lines:



ernment to stimulate the growth of native industry). Only once America was at the top of the economic pile did it renounce state intervention (just as Britain did, we must note).

This is **not** to suggest that government aid was limited to tariffs. The state played a key role in the development of industry and manufacturing. As John Zerzan notes, the *"role of the State is tellingly reflected by the fact that the 'armoury system' now rivals the older 'American system of manufactures' term as the more accurate to describe the new system of production methods"* developed in the early 1800s. [**Elements of Refusal**, p. 100] Moreover, the *"lead in technological innovation [during the US Industrial Revolution] came in armaments where assured government orders justified high fixed-cost investments in special-pursue machinery and managerial personnel. Indeed, some of the pioneering effects occurred in government-owned armouries."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 218] The government also *"actively furthered this process [of "commercial revolution"] with public works in transportation and communication."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]

In addition to this "physical" aid, *"state government provided critical help, with devices like the chartered corporation"* [**Ibid.**] and, as we noted in section B.2.5, changes in the legal system which favoured capitalist interests over the rest of society.

Interestingly, there was increasing inequality between 1840 and 1860 in the USA This coincided with the victory of wage labour and industrial capitalism — the 1820s *"constituted a watershed in U.S. life. By the end of that decade ...industrialism assured its decisive American victory, by the end of the 1830s all of its cardinal features were definitely present."* [John Zerzan, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] This is unsurprising, for as we have argued many times, the capitalist market tends to increase, not reduce, inequalities between individuals and classes. Little wonder the Individualist Anarchists at the time denounced the way that

property had been transformed into *"a power [with which] to accumulate an income"* (to use the words of J.K. Ingalls).

Over all, as Paul Ormerod puts it, the *"advice to follow pure free-market polices seems ... to be contrary to the lessons of virtually the whole of economic history since the Industrial Revolution ... every country which has moved into ... strong sustained growth . .. has done so in outright violation of pure, free-market principles." "The model of entrepreneurial activity in the product market, with judicious state support plus repression in the labour market, seems to be a good model of economic development."* [**The Death of Economics**, p. 63]

Thus the social forces at work creating capitalism was a combination of capitalist activity and state action. But without the support of the state, it is doubtful that capitalist activity would have been enough to generate the initial accumulation required to start the economic ball rolling. Hence the necessity of Mercantilism in Europe and its modified cousin of state aid, tariffs and "homestead acts" in America.

## 8.2 What was the social context of the statement "laissez-faire?"

The honeymoon of interests between the early capitalists and autocratic kings did not last long. *"This selfsame monarchy, which for weighty reasons sought to further the aims of commercial capital and was... itself aided in its development by capital, grew at last into a crippling obstacle to any further development of European industry."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Nationalism and Culture**, p. 117]

This is the social context of the expression *"laissez-faire"* — a system which has outgrown the supports that protected it in its early stages of growth. Just as children eventually rebel against the protection and rules of their parents, so the capitalists rebelled against the over-bearing support of the absolutist state. Mercantilist policies favoured some industries and



*opportunity 'to do as they pleased'."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 182]

The one essential form of support the "Libertarian" right wants the state (or "defence" firms) to provide capitalism is the enforcement of property rights — the right of property owners to "do as they like" on their own property, which can have obvious and extensive social impacts. What "libertarian" capitalists object to is attempts by others — workers, society as a whole, the state, etc. — to interfere with the authority of bosses. That this is just the defence of privilege and power (and **not** freedom) has been discussed in section B and elsewhere in this appendix, so we will not repeat ourselves here.

Samuel Johnson once observed that *"we hear the loudest **yelps** for liberty among the drivers of Negroes."* Our modern "libertarian" capitalist drivers of wage-slaves are yelping for exactly the same kind of "liberty." [Johnson quoted in Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 141]

## 8.3 What other forms did state intervention in creating capitalism take?

Beyond being a paymaster for new forms of production and social relations and defending the owners' power, the state intervened economically in other ways as well. As we noted in section B.2.5, the state played a key role in transforming the law codes of society in a capitalistic fashion, ignoring custom and common law to do so. Similarly, the use of tariffs and the granting of monopolies to companies played an important role in accumulating capital at the expense of working people, as did the breaking of unions and strikes by force.

However, one of the most blatant of these acts was the enclosure of common land. In Britain, by means of the Enclosure Acts, land that had been freely used by poor peasants for farming their small family plots was claimed by large landlords as private property. As E.P. Thompson notes, *"Parliament and*

exploit workers, exploit consumers, build their industrial empires and so forth.

So, the expression "laissez-faire" dates from the period when capitalists were objecting to the restrictions that helped create them in the first place. It has little to do with freedom as such and far more to do with the needs of capitalist power and profits (as Murray Bookchin argues, it is an error to depict this *"revolutionary era and its democratic aspirations as 'bourgeois,' an imagery that makes capitalism a system more committed to freedom, or even ordinary civil liberties, than it was historically"* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 180f]). Takis Fotopoules, in his essay *"The Nation-state and the Market"*, indicates that the social forces at work in "freeing" the market did not represent a "natural" evolution towards freedom:

> *"Contrary to what liberals and Marxists assert, marketisation of the economy was not just an evolutionary process, following the expansion of trade under mercantilism ... modern [i.e. capitalist] markets did not evolve out of local markets and/or markets for foreign goods ... the nation-state, which was just emerging at the end of the Middle Ages, played a crucial role creating the conditions for the 'nationalisation' of the market ... and ... by freeing the market [i.e. the rich and proto-capitalists] from effective social control."* [**Society and Nature**, Vol. 3, pp. 44–45]

The "freeing" of the market thus means freeing those who "own" most of the market (i.e. the wealthy elite) from *"effective social control,"* but the rest of society was not as lucky. Peter Kropotkin makes a similar point in **Modern Science and Anarchism**, *"[w]hile giving the capitalist any degree of free scope to amass his wealth at the expense of the helpless labourers, the government has **nowhere** and **never**. ..afforded the labourers the*



harmed the growth of industrial capitalism in others. The rules and regulations imposed upon those it did favour reduced the flexibility of capitalists to changing environments. As Rocker argues, *"no matter how the abolutist state strove, in its own interest, to meety the demands of commerce, it still put on industry countless fetters which became gradually more and more oppressive ... [it] became an unbearable burden ... which paralysed all economic and social life."* [*Op. Cit.*, p. 119] All in all, mercantilism became more of a hindrance than a help and so had to be replaced. With the growth of economic and social power by the capitalist class, this replacement was made easier.

Errico Malatesta notes, *"[t]he development of production, the vast expansion of commerce, the immeasurable power assumed by money ... have guaranteed this supremacy [of economic power over the political power] to the capitalist class which, no longer content with enjoying the support of the government, demanded that government arise from its own ranks. A government which owed its origin to the right of conquest . .. though subject by existing circumstances to the capitalist class, went on maintaining a proud and contemptuous attitude towards its now wealthy former slaves, and had pretensions to independence of domination. That government was indeed the defender, the property owners' gendarme, but the kind of gendarmes who think they are somebody, and behave in an arrogant manner towards the people they have to escort and defend, when they don't rob or kill them at the next street corner; and the capitalist class got rid of it ... [and replaced it] by a government [and state] ... at all times under its control and specifically organised to defend that class against any possible demands by the disinherited."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 19–20]

Malatesta here indicates the true meaning of *"leave us alone,"* or *"laissez-faire."* The **absolutist** state (not "the state" per se) began to interfere with capitalists' profit-making activities and authority, so they determined that it had to go — as happened, for example, in the English, French and American revolutions. However, in other ways, state intervention in

society was encouraged and applauded by capitalists. *"It is ironic that the main protagonists of the State, in its political and administrative authority, were the middle-class Utilitarians, on the other side of whose Statist banner were inscribed the doctrines of economic Laissez Faire"* [E.P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 90]. Capitalists simply wanted **capitalist** states to replace monarchical states, so that heads of government would follow state economic policies regarded by capitalists as beneficial to their class as a whole. And as development economist Lance Taylor argues:

> *"In the long run, there are no laissez-faire transitions to modern economic growth. The state has always intervened to create a capitalist class, and then it has to regulate the capitalist class, and then the state has to worry about being taken over by the capitalist class, but the state has always been there."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 104]

In order to attack mercantilism, the early capitalists had to ignore the successful impact of its policies in developing industry and a "store of wealth" for future economic activity. As William Lazonick points out, *"the political purpose of [Adam Smith's] the* ***Wealth of Nations*** *was to attack the mercantilist institutions that the British economy had built up over the previous two hundred years... In his attack on these institutions, Smith might have asked why the extent of the world market available to Britain in the late eighteenth century was* ***so uniquely under British control.*** *If Smith had asked this 'big question,' he might have been forced to grant credit for [it] ... to the very mercantilist institutions he was attacking ..."* Moreover, he *"might have recognised the integral relation between economic and political power in the rise of Britain to international dominance."* Overall, *"[w]hat the British advocates of laissez-faire neglected to talk about was the role that a system of national power had played*



*in creating conditions for Britain to embark on its dynamic development path ... They did not bother to ask how Britain had attained th[e] position [of 'workshop of the world'], while they conveniently ignored the on going system of national power — the British Empire — that ... continued to support Britain's position."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 2, p. 3, p.5]

Similar comments are applicable to American supporters of laissez faire who fail to notice that the "traditional" American support for world-wide free trade is quite a recent phenomenon. It started only at the end of the Second World War (although, of course, **within** America military Keynesian policies were utilised). While American industry was developing, the country had no time for laissez-faire. After it had grown strong, the United States began preaching laissez-faire to the rest of the world — and began to kid itself about its own history, believing its slogans about laissez-faire as the secret of its success. In addition to the tariff, nineteenth-century America went in heavily for industrial planning–occasionally under that name but more often in the name of national defence. The military was the excuse for what is today termed rebuilding infrastructure, picking winners, promoting research, and coordinating industrial growth (as it still is, we should add).

As Richard B. Du Boff points out, the "anti-state" backlash of the 1840s onwards in America was highly selective, as the general opinion was that *"[h]enceforth, if governments wished to subsidise private business operations, there would be no objection. But if public power were to be used to control business actions or if the public sector were to undertake economic initiatives on its own, it would run up against the determined opposition of private capital."* [**Accumulation and Power**, p. 26] In other words, the state could aid capitalists indirectly (via tariffs, land policy, repression of the labour movement, infrastructure subsidy and so on) and it would "leave them alone" to oppress and

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mutually reinforcing). Initially, when Iceland was settled, large-scale farming based on extended households with kinsmen was the dominant economic mode. This semi-communal mode of production changed as the land was divided up (mostly through inheritance claims) between the 10th and 11th centuries. This new economic system based upon individual **possession** and artisan production was then slowly displaced by tenant farming, in which the farmer worked for a landlord, starting in the late 11th century. This economic system (based on tenant farming, i.e. capitalistic production) ensured that *"great variants of property and power emerged."* [Kirsten Hastrup, **Culture and History in Medieval Iceland**, pp. 172–173]

So significant changes in society started to occur in the eleventh century, as *"slavery all but ceased. Tenant farming ... took [its] place."* Iceland was moving from an economy based on **possession** to one based on **private property** and so *"the renting of land was a widely established practice by the late eleventh century ... the status of the **godar** must have been connected with landownership and rents."* This lead to increasing oligarchy and so the mid- to late-twelfth century was *"characterised by the appearance of a new elite, the big chieftains who are called storgodar ... [who] struggled from the 1220s to the 1260s to win what had earlier been unobtainable for Icelandic leaders, the prize of overlordship or centralised executive authority."* [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 269 and pp. 3–4]

During this evolution in ownership patterns and the concentration of wealth and power into the hands of a few, we should note that the godi's and wealthy landowners' attitude to profit making also changed, with market values starting to replace those associated with honour, kin, and so on. Social relations became replaced by economic relations and the nexus of household, kin and Thing was replaced by the nexus of cash and profit. The rise of capitalistic social relationships in production and values within society was also reflected in exchange,

with the local marketplace, with its pricing *"subject to popular judgement"* being *"subsumed under central markets."* [Hastrup, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225]

With a form of wage labour (tenant farming) being dominant within society, it is not surprising that great differences in wealth started to appear. Also, as protection did not come free, it is not surprising that a godi tended to become rich also (in Kropotkin's words, *"the individual accumulation of wealth and power"*). Powerful godi would be useful for wealthy landowners when disputes over land and rent appeared, and wealthy landowners would be useful for a godi looking for income. Concentrations of wealth, in other words, produce concentrations of social and political power (and vice versa) — *"power always follows wealth."* [Kropotkin, **Mutual Aid**, p. 131]

The transformation of **possession** into **property** and the resulting rise of hired labour was a **key** element in the accumulation of wealth and power, and the corresponding decline in liberty among the farmers. Moreover, with hired labour springs dependency — the worker is now dependent on good relations with their landlord in order to have access to the land they need. With such reductions in the independence of part of Icelandic society, the undermining of self-management in the various Things was also likely as labourers could not vote freely as they could be subject to sanctions from their landlord for voting the "wrong" way (*"The courts were less likely to base judgements on the evidence than to adjust decisions to satisfy the honour and resources of powerful individuals."* [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 185]).. Thus hierarchy within the economy would spread into the rest of society, and in particular its social institutions, reinforcing the effects of the accumulation of wealth and power.

The resulting classification of Icelandic society played a key role in its move from relative equality and anarchy to a class society and statism. As Millar points out:

> *"as long as the social organisation of the economy did not allow for people to maintain retinues, the basic egalitarian assumptions of the honour system... were reflected reasonably well in reality... the mentality of hierarchy never fully extricated itself from the egalitarian ethos of a frontier society created and recreated by juridically equal farmers. Much of the egalitarian ethic maintained itself even though it accorded less and less with economic realities.. . by the end of the commonwealth period certain assumptions about class privilege and expectations of deference were already well enough established to have become part of the lexicon of self-congratulation and self-justification."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 33–4]

This process in turn accelerated the destruction of communal life and the emergence of statism, focused around the godord. In effect, the godi and wealthy farmers became rulers of the country. Political changes simply reflected economic changes from a communalistic, anarchistic society to a statist, propertarian one. Ironically, this process was a natural aspect of the system of competing chiefs recommended by "anarcho"-capitalists:

> *"In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Icelandic society experienced changes in the balance of power. As part of the evolution to a more stratified social order, the number of chieftains diminished and the power of the remaining leaders grew. By the thirteenth century six large families had come to monopolise the control and ownership of many of the original chieftaincies."* [Byock, **Op. Cit.**, p. 341]

These families were called **storgodar** and they *"gained control over whole regions."* This process was not imposed, as *"the*

*rise in social complexity was evolutionary rather than revolutionary ... they simply moved up the ladder."* This political change reflected economic processes, for *"[a]t the same time other social transformations were at work. In conjunction with the development of the **storgadar** elite, the most successful among the **baendr** [farmers] also moved up a rung on the social ladder, being 'big farmers' or **Storbaendr**"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 342] Unsurprisingly, it was the rich farmers who initiated the final step towards normal statism and by the 1250s the **storbaendr** and their followers had grown weary of the **storgodar** and their quarrels. In the end they accepted the King of Norway's offer to become part if his kingdom.

The obvious conclusion is that as long as Iceland was not capitalistic, it was anarchic and as it became more capitalistic, it became more statist.

This process, wherein the concentration of wealth leads to the destruction of communal life and so the anarchistic aspects of a given society, can be seen elsewhere, for example, in the history of the United States after the Revolution or in the degeneration of the free cities of Medieval Europe. Peter Kropotkin, in his classic work **Mutual Aid**, documents this process in some detail, in many cultures and time periods. However, that this process occurred in a society which is used by "anarcho"-capitalists as an example of their system in action reinforces the anarchist analysis of the statist nature of "anarcho"-capitalism and the deep flaws in its theory, as discussed in section 6.

As Miller argues, *"[i]t is not the have-nots, after all, who invented the state. The first steps toward state formation in Iceland were made by churchmen... and by the big men content with imitating Norwegian royal style. Early state formation, I would guess, tended to involve redistributions, not from rich to poor, but from poor to rich, from weak to strong."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 306]

The "anarcho"-capitalist argument that Iceland was an example of their ideology working in practice is derived from the

work of David Friedman. Friedman is less gun-ho than many of his followers, arguing in **The Machinery of Freedom**, that Iceland only had some features of an "anarcho"-capitalist society and these provide some evidence in support of his ideology. How a pre-capitalist society can provide any evidence to support an ideology aimed at an advanced industrial and urban economy is hard to say as the institutions of that society cannot be artificially separated from its social base. Ironically, though, it does present some evidence against "anarcho"-capitalism precisely because of the rise of capitalistic elements within it.

Friedman is aware of how the Icelandic Republic degenerated and its causes. He states in a footnote in his 1979 essay *"Private Creation and Enforcement of Law: A Historical Case"* that the *"question of why the system eventually broke down is both interesting and difficult. I believe that two of the proximate causes were increased concentration of wealth, and hence power, and the introduction into Iceland of a foreign ideology — kingship. The former meant that in many areas all or most of the godord were held by one family and the latter that by the end of the Sturlung period the chieftains were no longer fighting over the traditional quarrels of who owed what to whom, but over who should eventually rule Iceland. The ultimate reasons for those changes are beyond the scope of this paper."*

However, from an anarchist point of view, the "foreign" ideology of kingship would be the **product** of changing socio-economic conditions that were expressed in the increasing concentration of wealth and not its cause. After all, the settlers of Iceland were well aware of the "ideology" of kingship for the 300 years during which the Republic existed. As Byock notes, Iceland *"inherited the tradition and the vocabulary of statehood from its European origins … On the mainland, kings were enlarging their authority at the expense of the traditional rights of free farmers. The emigrants to Iceland were well aware of this process … available evidence does suggest that the early Icelanders knew*

*quite well what they did not want. In particular they were collectively opposed to the centralising aspects of a state.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 64–6] Unless some kind of collective and cultural amnesia occurred, the notion of a "foreign ideology" causing the degeneration is hard to accept. Moreover, only the concentration of wealth allowed would-be Kings the opportunity to develop and act and the creation of boss-worker social relationships on the land made the poor subject to, and familiar with, the concept of authority. Such familiarity would spread into all aspects of life and, combined with the existence of "prosperous" (and so powerful) godi to enforce the appropriate servile responses, ensured the end of the relative equality that fostered Iceland's anarchistic tendencies in the first place.

In addition, as private property is a monopoly of rulership over a given area, the conflict between chieftains for power was, at its most basic, a conflict of who would **own** Iceland, and so rule it. The attempt to ignore the facts that private property creates rulership (i.e. a monopoly of government over a given area) and that monarchies are privately owned states does Friedman's case no good. In other words, the system of private property has a built in tendency to produce both the ideology and fact of Kingship — the power structures implied by Kingship are reflected in the social relations which are produced by private property.

Friedman is also aware that an *"objection [to his system] is that the rich (or powerful) could commit crimes with impunity, since nobody would be able to enforce judgement against them. Where power is sufficiently concentrated this might be true; this was one of the problems which led to the eventual breakdown of the Icelandic legal system in the thirteenth century. But so long as power was reasonably dispersed, as it seem to have been for the first two centuries after the system was established, this was a less serious problem.*" [**Op. Cit.**]

Which is quite ironic. Firstly, because the first two centuries of Icelandic society was marked by **non-capitalist** economic

relations (communal pricing and family/individual possession of land). Only when capitalistic social relationships developed (hired labour and property replacing possession and market values replacing social ones) in the 12th century did power become concentrated, leading to the breakdown of the system in the 13th century. Secondly, because Friedman is claiming that "anarcho"-capitalism will only work if there is an approximate equality within society! But this state of affairs is one most "anarcho"-capitalists claim is impossible and undesirable!

They claim there will **always** be rich and poor. But inequality in wealth will also become inequality of power. When "actually existing" capitalism has become more free market the rich have got richer and the poor poorer. Apparently, according to the "anarcho"-capitalists, in an even "purer" capitalism this process will be reversed! It is ironic that an ideology that denounces egalitarianism as a revolt against nature implicitly requires an egalitarian society in order to work.

In reality, wealth concentration is a fact of life in **any** system based upon hierarchy and private property. Friedman is aware of the reasons why "anarcho"-capitalism will become rule by the rich but prefers to believe that "pure" capitalism will produce an egalitarian society! In the case of the commonwealth of Iceland this did not happen — the rise in private property was accompanied by a rise in inequality and this lead to the breakdown of the Republic into statism.

In short, Medieval Iceland nicely illustrates David Weick's comments (as quoted in section 6.3) that *"when private wealth is uncontrolled, then a police-judicial complex enjoying a clientele of wealthy corporations whose motto is self-interest is hardly an innocuous social force controllable by the possibility of forming or affiliating with competing 'companies.'"* This is to say that "free market" justice soon results in rule by the rich, and being able to affiliate with "competing" "defence companies" is insufficient to stop or change that process.

This is simply because any defence-judicial system does not exist in a social vacuum. The concentration of wealth — a natural process under the "free market" (particularly one marked by private property and wage labour) — has an impact on the surrounding society. Private property, i.e. monopolisation of the means of production, allows the monopolists to become a ruling elite by exploiting, and so accumulating vastly more wealth than, the workers. This elite then uses its wealth to control the coercive mechanisms of society (military, police, "private security forces," etc.), which it employs to protect its monopoly and thus its ability to accumulate ever more wealth and power. Thus, private property, far from increasing the freedom of the individual, has always been the necessary precondition for the rise of the state and rule by the rich. Medieval Iceland is a classic example of this process at work.

## 10 Would laissez-faire capitalism be stable?

Unsurprisingly, right-libertarians combine their support for "absolute property rights" with a whole-hearted support for laissez-faire capitalism. In such a system (which they maintain, to quote Ayn Rand, is an *"unknown ideal"*) everything would be private property and there would be few (if any) restrictions on "voluntary exchanges." "Anarcho"-capitalists are the most extreme of defenders of pure capitalism, urging that the state itself be privatised and no voluntary exchange made illegal (for example, children would be considered the property of their parents and it would be morally right to turn them into child prostitutes — the child has the option of leaving home if they object).

As there have been no example of "pure" capitalism it is difficult to say whether their claims about are true (for a discussion of a close approximation see the section 10.3). This section



of the scientific method and, as we noted above, comes to us straight from the Roman Catholic church.

It is the subjective revolt by individuals against what is considered "objective" fact or "common sense" which creates progress and develops ethics (what is considered "good" and "right") and society. This, in turn, becomes "accepted fact" until the next free thinker comes along and changes how we view the world by presenting **new** evidence, re-evaluating old ideas and facts or exposing the evil effects associated with certain ideas (and the social relationships they reflect) by argument, fact and passion. Attempts to impose *"an evaluation of the facts of reality by man's consciousness"* would be a death blow to this process of critical thought, development and evaluation of the facts of reality by individual's consciousness. Human thought would be subsumed by dogma.

*consciousness"*). But "Man" does not have a consciousness, only individuals do. Man is an abstraction, it is individuals who live and think, not "Man." Such "Man worship" — like Natural Law — has all the markings of a religion.

As Max Stirner argues *"liberalism is a religion because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts 'Man' to the same extent as any other religion does to God... it sets me beneath Man."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 176] Indeed, he *"who is infatuated with **Man** leaves persons out of account so far as that infatuation extends, and floats in an ideal, sacred interest. **Man**, you see, is not a person, but an ideal, a spook."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.79]

Rand argues that we must evaluate *"the facts of reality by man's consciousness according to a rational standard of value"* but who determines that value? She states that *"[v]alues are not determined by fiat nor by majority vote"* [p. 24] but, however, neither can they be determined by "man" or "man's consciousness" because "man" does not exist. Individuals exist and have consciousness and because they are unique have different values (but as we argued in section A.2.19, being social creatures these values are generalised across individuals into social, i.e. objective, values). So, the abstraction "man" does not exist and because of this we see the healthy sight of different individuals convincing others of their ideas and theories by discussion, presenting facts and rational debate. This can be best seen in scientific debate.

The aim of the scientific method is to invent theories that explain facts, the theories are not part of the facts but created by the individual's mind in order to explain those facts. Such scientific "laws" can and do change in light of new information and new thought. In other words, the scientific method is the creation of subjective theories that explain the objective facts. Rand's method is the opposite — she assumes "man's nature," "discovers" what is "good" from those assumptions and draws her theories by deduction from that. This is the **exact** opposite



of the FAQ is an attempt to discover whether such a system would be stable or whether it would be subject to the usual booms and slumps. Before starting we should note that there is some disagreement within the right-libertarian camp itself on this subject (although instead of stability they usually refer to "equilibrium" — which is an economics term meaning that all of a societies resources are fully utilised).

In general terms, most right-Libertarians' reject the concept of equilibrium as such and instead stress that the economy is inherently a dynamic (this is a key aspect of the Austrian school of economics). Such a position is correct, of course, as such noted socialists as Karl Marx and Michal Kalecki and capitalist economists as Keynes recognised long ago. There seems to be two main schools of thought on the nature of disequilibrium. One, inspired by von Mises, maintains that the actions of the entrepreneur/capitalist results in the market co-ordinating supply and demand and another, inspired by Joseph Schumpeter, who question whether markets co-ordinate because entrepreneurs are constantly innovating and creating new markets, products and techniques.

Of course both actions happen and we suspect that the differences in the two approaches are not important. The important thing to remember is that "anarcho"-capitalists and right-libertarians in general reject the notion of equilibrium — but when discussing their utopia they do not actually indicate this! For example, most "anarcho"-capitalists will maintain that the existence of government (and/or unions) causes unemployment by either stopping capitalists investing in new lines of industry or forcing up the price of labour above its market clearing level (by, perhaps, restricting immigration, minimum wages, taxing profits). Thus, we are assured, the worker will be better off in "pure" capitalism because of the unprecedented demand for labour it will create. However, full employment of labour is an equilibrium in economic terms and that, remember, is impossible due to the dynamic nature

of the system. When pressed, they will usually admit there will be periods of unemployment as the market adjusts or that full unemployment actually means under a certain percentage of unemployment. Thus, if you (rightly) reject the notion of equilibrium you also reject the idea of full employment and so the labour market becomes a buyers market and labour is at a massive disadvantage.

The right-libertarian case is based upon logical deduction, and the premises required to show that laissez-faire will be stable are somewhat incredible. If banks do not set the wrong interest rate, if companies do not extend too much trade credit, if workers are willing to accept (real wage related) pay cuts, if workers altruistically do not abuse their market power in a fully employed society, if interest rates provide the correct information, if capitalists predict the future relatively well, if banks and companies do not suffer from isolation paradoxes, then, perhaps, laissez-faire will be stable.

So, will laissez-faire capitalism be stable? Let us see by analysing the assumptions of right-libertarianism — namely that there will be full employment and that a system of private banks will stop the business cycle. We will start on the banking system first (in section 10.1) followed by the effects of the labour market on economic stability (in section10.2). Then we will indicate, using the example of 19th century America, that actually existing ("impure") laissez-faire was very unstable.

Explaining booms and busts by state action plays an ideological convenience as it exonerates market processes as the source of instability within capitalism. We hope to indicate in the next two sections why the business cycle is inherent in the system (see also sections C.7, C.8 and C.9).



manity). This can be seen when Rand talks about her system of "objective" values and rights.

When discussing the difference between *"subjective," "intrinsic"* and *"objective"* values Rand noted that *"intrinsic"* and *"subjective"* theories *"make it possible for a man to believe what is good is independent of man's mind and can be achieved by physical force."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] In other words, intrinsic and subjective values justify tyranny. However, her *"objective"* values are placed squarely in *"Man's Nature"* — she states that *"[i]ndividual rights are the means of subordinating society to moral law"* and that *"the source of man's rights is man's nature."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 320, p. 322]

She argues that the *"**intrinsic** theory holds that the good is inherent in certain things or actions, as such, regardless of their context and consequences, regardless of any benefit or injury they may cause to the actors and subjects involved."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] According to the **Concise Oxford Dictionary**, *"intrinsic"* is defined as *"inherent," "essential," "belonging naturally"* and defines *"nature"* as *"a thing's, or person's, innate or essential qualities or character."* In other words, if, as Rand maintains, man's rights **are** the product of *"man's nature"* then such rights are **intrinsic**! And if, as Rand maintains, such rights are the *"extension of morality into the social system"* then morality itself is also intrinsic.

Again, her ideology fails to meet its own tests — and opens the way for tyranny. This can be seen by her whole hearted support for wage slavery and her total lack of concern how it, and concentrations of wealth and power, affect the individuals subjected to them. For, after all, what is "good" is "inherent" in capitalism, regardless of the context, consequences, benefits or injuries it may cause to the actors and subjects involved.

The key to understanding her contradictory and illogical ideology lies in her contradictory use of the word "man." Sometimes she uses it to describe individuals but usually it is used to describe the human race collectively (*"man's nature," "man's*

*uration. When freedom is nothing more than the recognition of necessity…we discover the gene's tyranny over the greater totality of life…when knowledge becomes dogma (and few movements are more dogmatic than socio-biology) freedom is ultimately denied."* [*"Socio-biology or Social Ecology"*, in **Which way for the Ecology Movement?** pp. 49 — 75, p. 60]

In conclusion the doctrine of Natural Law, far from supporting individual freedom, is one of its greatest enemies. By locating individual rights within "Man's Nature," it becomes an unchanging set of dogmas. Do we really know enough about humanity to say what are "Natural" and universal Laws, applicable forever? Is it not a rejection of critical thinking and thus individual freedom to do so?

## 11.6 Why is the notion of "discovery" contradictory?

Ayn Rand indicates the illogical and contradictory nature of the concepts of "discovering" "natural law" and the "natural rights" this "discovery" argument creates when she stated that her theory was *"objective."* Her "Objectivist" political theory *"holds that good is neither an attribute of 'things in themselves' nor man's emotional state, but* ***an evaluation*** *of the facts of reality by man's consciousness according to a rational standard of value… The objective theory holds that* ***the good is an aspect of reality in relation to man*** *— and that it must be discovered, not invented, by man."* [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 22]

However, this is playing with words. If something is "discovered" then it has always been there and so is an intrinsic part of it. If "good" **is** "discovered" by "man" then "good" exists independently of people — it is waiting to be "discovered." In other words, "good" is an attribute of *"man as man,"* of *"things in themselves"* (in addition, such a theory also implies that there is just **one** possible interpretation of what is "good" for all hu-



## 10.1 Would privatising banking make capitalism stable?

It is claimed that the existence of the state (or, for minimal statists, government policy) is the cause of the business cycle (recurring economic booms and slumps). This is because the government either sets interest rates too low or expands the money supply (usually by easing credit restrictions and lending rates, sometimes by just printing fiat money). This artificially increases investment as capitalists take advantage of the artificially low interest rates. The real balance between savings and investment is broken, leading to over-investment, a drop in the rate of profit and so a slump (which is quite socialist in a way, as many socialists also see over-investment as the key to understanding the business cycle, although they obviously attribute the slump to different causes — namely the nature of capitalist production, not that the credit system does not play its part — see section C.7).

In the words of Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie, *"[t]he business cycle is generated by monetary expansion and contraction … When new money is printed it appears as if the supply of savings has increased. Interest rates fall and businessmen are misled into borrowing additional founds to finance extra investment activity … This would be of no consequence if it had been the outcome of [genuine saving] … -but the change was government induced. The new money reaches factor owners in the form of wages, rent and interest … the factor owners will then spend the higher money incomes in their existing consumption:investment proportions … Capital goods industries will find their expansion has been in error and malinvestments have been inoccured."* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, pp. 68–9]

In other words, there has been *"wasteful mis-investment due to government interference with the market."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 69] In response to this (negative) influence in the workings of the mar-

ket, it is suggested by right-libertarians that a system of private banks should be used and that interest rates are set by them, via market forces. In this way an interest rate that matches the demand and supply for savings will be reached and the business cycle will be no more. By truly privatising the credit market, it is hoped by the business cycle will finally stop.

Unsurprisingly, this particular argument has its weak points and in this section of the FAQ we will try to show exactly why this theory is wrong.

Let us start with Reckie's starting point. He states that the *"main problem"* of the slump is *"why is there suddenly a '**cluster**' of business errors? Businessmen and entrepreneurs are market experts (otherwise they would not survive) and why should they all make mistakes simultaneously?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68] It is this *"cluster"* of mistakes that the Austrians' take as evidence that the business cycle comes from outside the workings of the market (i.e. is exogenous in nature). Reekie argues that an *"error cluster only occurs when all entrepreneurs have received the wrong signals on potential profitability, and all have received the signals simultaneously through government interference with the money supply."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74] But is this **really** the case?

The simple fact is that groups of (rational) individuals can act in the same way based on the same information and this can lead to a collective problem. For example, we do not consider it irrational that everyone in a building leaves it when the fire alarm goes off and that the flow of people can cause holdups at exits. Neither do we think that its unusual that traffic jams occur, after all those involved are all trying to get to work (i.e. they are reacting to the same desire). Now, is it so strange to think that capitalists who all see the same opportunity for profit in a specific market decide to invest in it? Or that the aggregate outcome of these individually rational decisions may be irrational (i.e. cause a glut in the market)?

In other words, a "cluster" of business failures may come about because a group of capitalists, acting in isolation, over-



of "natural law" but it reflects real life and freedom far better. All in all, we must always remember that what is "good" for man need not be good for people. "Natural law" fails to do this and stands condemned.

## 11.5 But Natural Law was discovered, not invented!

This statement truly shows the religious nature of the Natural Law cult. To see why its notion of "discovery" is confused, let us consider the Law of Gravity. Newton did not "discover" the law of gravity, he invented a theory which explained certain observed phenomena in the physical world. Later Einstein updated Newton's theories in ways that allowed for a better explanation of physical reality. Thus, unlike "Natural Law," scientific laws can be updated and changed as our knowledge changes and grows. As we have already noted, however, "Natural Laws" cannot be updated because they are derived from fixed definitions (Rothbard is pretty clear on this, he states that it is *"[v]ery true"* that natural law is *"universal, fixed and immutable"* and so are *"'absolute' principles of justice"* and that they are *"independent of time and place"* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 19]). However, what he fails to understand is that what the "Natural Law" cultists are "discovering" are simply the implications of their own definitions, which in turn simply reflect their own prejudices and preferences.

Since "Natural Laws" are thus "unchanging" and are said to have been "discovered" centuries ago, it's no wonder that many of its followers look for support in socio-biology, claiming that their "laws" are part of the genetic structure of humanity. But socio-biology has dubious scientific credentials for many of its claims. Also, it has authoritarian implications **exactly** like Natural Law. Murray Bookchin rightly characterises socio-biology as *"suffocatingly rigid; it not only impedes action with the autocracy of a genetic tyrant but it closes the door to any action that is not biochemically defined by its own config-*

And we stress that anarchists have no desire to harm individuals, only to change institutions. If a workplace is taken over by its workers, the owners are not harmed physically. If the oasis is taken from the monopoliser, the ex-monopoliser becomes like other users of the oasis (although probably **disliked** by others). Thus anarchists desire to treat people as fairly as possible and not replace one form of coercion and domination with another — individuals must **never** be treated as abstractions (if they have power over you, destroy what creates the relation of domination, **not** the individual, in other words! And if this power can be removed without resorting to force, so much the better — a point which social and individualist anarchists disagree on, namely whether capitalism can be reformed away or not comes directly from this. As the Individualists think it can, they oppose the use of force. Most social anarchists think it cannot, and so support revolution).

This argument may be considered as "utilitarian" (the greatest good for the greatest number) and so treats people not as "ends in themselves" but as "means to an end". Thus, it could be argued, "natural law" is required to ensure that **all** (as opposed to some, or many, or the majority of) individuals are free and have their rights protected.

However, it is clear that "natural law" can easily result in a minority having their freedom and rights respected, while the majority are forced by circumstances (created by the rights/laws produced by applying "natural law" we must note) to sell their liberty and rights in order to survive. If it is wrong to treat anyone as a "means to an end", then it is equally wrong to support a theory or economic system that results in people having to negate themselves in order to live. A respect for persons — to treat them as ends and never as means — is not compatible with private property.

The simple fact is that **there are no easy answers** — we need to weight up our options and act on what we think is best. Yes, such subjectivism lacks the "elegance" and simplicity



invest in a given market. They react to the same information (namely super profits in market X), arrange loans, invest and produce commodities to meet demand in that market. However, the aggregate result of these individually rational actions is that the aggregate supply far exceeds demand, causing a slump in that market and, perhaps, business failures. The slump in this market (and the potential failure of some firms) has an impact on the companies that supplied them, the companies that are dependent on their employees wages/demand, the banks that supplied the credit and so forth. The accumulative impact of this slump (or failures) on the chain of financial commitments of which they are but one link can be large and, perhaps, push an economy into general depression. Thus the claim that it is something external to the system that causes depression is flawed.

It could be claimed the interest rate is the problem, that it does not accurately reflect the demand for investment or relate it to the supply of savings. But, as we argued in section C.8, it is not at all clear that the interest rate provides the necessary information to capitalists. They need investment information for their specific industry, but the interest rate is cross-industry. Thus capitalists in market X do not know if the investment in market X is increasing and so this lack of information can easily cause "mal-investment" as over-investment (and so overproduction) occurs. As they have no way of knowing what the investment decisions of their competitors are or now these decisions will affect an already unknown future, capitalists may over-invest in certain markets and the net effects of this aggregate mistake can expand throughout the whole economy and cause a general slump. In other words, a cluster of business failures can be accounted for by the workings of the market itself and **not** the (existence of) government.

This is **one** possible reason for an internally generated business cycle but that is not the only one. Another is the role of class struggle which we discuss in the next section and yet

another is the endogenous nature of the money supply itself. This account of money (proposed strongly by, among others, the post-Keynesian school) argues that the money supply is a function of the demand for credit, which itself is a function of the level of economic activity. In other words, the banking system creates as much money as people need and any attempt to control that creation will cause economic problems and, perhaps, crisis (interestingly, this analysis has strong parallels with mutualist and individualist anarchist theories on the causes of capitalist exploitation and the business cycle). Money, in other words, emerges from **within** the system and so the right-libertarian attempt to "blame the state" is simply wrong.

Thus what is termed "credit money" (created by banks) is an essential part of capitalism and would exist without a system of central banks. This is because money is created from within the system, in response to the needs of capitalists. In a word, money is endogenous and credit money an essential part of capitalism.

Right-libertarians do not agree. Reekie argues that *"[o]nce fractional reserve banking is introduced, however, the supply of money substitutes will include fiduciary media. The ingenuity of bankers, other financial intermediaries and the endorsement and* ***guaranteeing of their activities by governments and central banks*** *has ensured that the quantity of fiat money is immense."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73]

Therefore, what "anarcho"-capitalists and other right-libertarians seem to be actually complaining about when they argue that "state action" creates the business cycle by creating excess money is that the state **allows** bankers to meet the demand for credit by creating it. This makes sense, for the first fallacy of this sort of claim is how could the state **force** bankers to expand credit by loaning more money than they have savings. And this seems to be the normal case within capitalism — the central banks accommodate bankers activity,



to free ourselves from domination is a necessary evil in order to stop far greater evils occurring (as, for example, in the clear-cut case of the oasis monopoliser).

Perhaps it will be argued that domination is only bad when it is involuntary, which means that it is only the involuntary nature of coercion that makes it bad, not the domination it involves. By this argument wage slavery is not domination as workers voluntarily agree to work for a capitalist (after all, no one puts a gun to their heads) and any attempt to overthrow capitalist domination is coercion and so wrong. However, this argument ignores that fact that **circumstances** force workers to sell their liberty and so violence on behalf of property owners is not (usually) required — market forces ensure that physical force is purely "defensive" in nature. And as we argued in section 2.2, even Rothbard recognised that the economic power associated with one class of people being dispossessed and another empowered by this fact results in relations of domination which cannot be considered "voluntary" by any stretch of the imagination (although, of course, Rothbard refuses to see the economic power associated with capitalism — when its capitalism, he cannot see the wood for the trees — and we are ignoring the fact that capitalism was created by extensive use of coercion and violence — see section 8).

Thus, "Natural law" and attempts to protect individuals rights/liberty and see a world in which people are free to shape their own lives are fatally flawed if they do not recognise that private property is incompatible with these goals. This is because the existence of capitalist property smuggles in power and so domination (the restriction of liberty, the conversion of some into order-givers and the many into order-takers) and so Natural Law does not fulfil its promise that each person is free to pursue their own goals. The unqualified right of property will lead to the domination and degradation of large numbers of people (as the oasis monopoliser so graphically illustrates).

while attempts to **remove** power (such as revolution and the democratisation of property rights) is "bad". Somewhat strange logic, we feel.

However such a position fails to understand **why** we consider coercion to be wrong/unethical. Coercion is wrong because it subjects an individual to the will of another. It is clear that the victim of coercion is lacking the freedom that the philosopher Isaiah Berlin describes in the following terms:

> *"I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be an instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer — deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other mean as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realising them."* [**Four Essays on Liberty**, p. 131]

Or, as Alan Haworth points out, *"we have to view coercion as a violation of what Berlin calls **positive** freedom."* [**Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 48]

Thus, if a system results in the violation of (positive) liberty by its very nature — namely, subject a class of people to the will of another class (the worker is subject to the will of their boss and is turned into an order-taker) — then it is justified to end that system. Yes, it is "coercion" is dispossess the property owner — but "coercion" exists only for as long as they desire to exercise power over others. In other words, it is not domination to remove domination! And remember it is the domination that exists in coercion which fuels our hatred of it, thus "coercion"



they do not force them to do it. Alan Holmes, a senior vice president at the New York Federal Reserve, stated that:

> *"In the real world, banks extend credit, creating deposits in the process, and look for the reserves later. The question then becomes one of whether and how the Federal Reserve will accommodate the demand for reserves. In the very short run, the Federal Reserve has little or no choice about accommodating that demand, over time, its influence can obviously be felt."* [quoted by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 220]

(Although we must stress that central banks are **not** passive and do have many tools for affecting the supply of money. For example, central banks can operate "tight" money policies which can have significant impact on an economy and, via creating high enough interest rates, the demand for money.)

It could be argued that because central banks exist, the state creates an "environment" which bankers take advantage off. By not being subject to "free market" pressures, bankers could be tempted to make more loans than they would otherwise in a "pure" capitalist system (i.e. create credit money). The question arises, would "pure" capitalism generate sufficient market controls to stop banks loaning in excess of available savings (i.e. eliminate the creation of credit money/fiduciary media).

It is to this question we now turn.

As noted above, the demand for credit is generated from **within** the system and the comments by Holmes reinforce this. Capitalists seek credit in order to make money and banks create it precisely because they are also seeking profit. What right-libertarians actually object to is the government (via the central bank) **accommodating** this creation of credit. If only the banks could be forced to maintain a savings to loans ration of one, then the business cycle would stop. But is this

likely? Could market forces ensure that bankers pursue such a policy? We think not — simply because the banks are profit making institutions. As post-Keynesianist Hyman Minsky argues, *"[b]ecause bankers live in the same expectational climate as businessmen, profit-seeking bankers will find ways of accommodating their customers... Banks and bankers are not passive managers of money to lend or to invest; they are in business to maximise profits..."* [quoted by L. Randall Wray, **Money and Credit in Capitalist Economies**, p. 85]

This is recognised by Reekie, in passing at least (he notes that *"fiduciary media could still exist if bankers offered them and clients accepted them"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73]). Bankers will tend to try and accommodate their customers and earn as much money as possible. Thus Charles P. Kindleberger comments that monetary expansion *"is systematic and endogenous rather than random and exogenous"* seem to fit far better the reality of capitalism that the Austrian and right-libertarian viewpoint [**Manias, Panics, and Crashes**, p. 59] and post-Keynesian L. Randall Wray argues that *"the money supply ... is more obviously endogenous in the monetary systems which predate the development of a central bank."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 150]

In other words, the money supply cannot be directly controlled by the central bank since it is determined by private decisions to enter into debt commitments to finance spending. Given that money is generated from **within** the system, can market forces ensure the non-expansion of credit (i.e. that the demand for loans equals the supply of savings)? To begin to answer this question we must note that investment is *"essentially determined by expected profitability."* [Philip Arestis, **The Post-Keynesian Approach to Economics**, p. 103] This means that the actions of the banks cannot be taken in isolation from the rest of the economy. Money, credit and banks are an essential part of the capitalist system and they cannot be artificially isolated from the expectations, pressures and influences of that system.



vented a few hundred years ago, in one part of the planet, does not seem to bother its advocates. Nor does the fact that for the vast majority of human existence, people have lived in societies which violated almost **all** of their so-called "Natural Laws" To take one example, before the late Neolithic, most societies were based on usufruct, or free access to communally held land and other resources [see Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**]. Thus for millennia, all human beings lived in violation of the supposed "Natural Law" of private property — perhaps the chief "law" in the "Libertarian" universe.

If "Natural Law" did exist, then all people would have discovered these "true" laws years ago. To the contrary, however, the debate is still going on, with (for example) fascists and "Libertarians" each claiming "the laws of nature" (and sociobiology) as their own.

## 11.4 Does "Natural Law" actually provides protection for individual liberty?

But, it seems fair to ask, does "natural law" actually respect individuals and their rights (i.e. liberty)? We think not. Why?

According to Rothbard, *"the natural law ethic states that for man, goodness or badness can be determined by what fulfils or thwarts what is best for man's nature."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 10] But, of course, what may be "good" for "man" may be decidedly **bad** for men (and women). If we take the example of the sole oasis in a desert (see section 4.2) then, according to Rothbard, the property owner having the power of life and death over others is "good" while, if the dispossessed revolt and refuse to recognise his "property", this is "bad"! In other words, Rothbard's "natural law" is good for **some** people (namely property owners) while it can be bad for others (namely the working class). In more general terms, this means that a system which results in extensive hierarchy (i.e. **archy**, power) is "good" (even though it restricts liberty for the many)

*him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 227]

Thus anarchism, in contrast to the "natural law" cult, recognises that "natural laws" (like society) are the product of individual evaluation of reality and social life and are, therefore, subject to change in the light of new information and ideas (Society *"progresses slowly through the moving power of individual initiative"* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 166] and so, obviously, do social rights and customs). Ethical or moral "laws" (which is what the "Natural Law" cult is actually about) is not a product of "human nature" or abstract individuals. Rather, it is a **social** fact, a creation of society and human interaction. In Bakunin's words, *"moral law is not an individual but a social fact, a creation of society"* and any *"natural laws"* are *"inherent in the social body"* (and so, we must add, not floating abstractions existing in "man's nature"). [**Ibid.**, p. 125, p. 166]

The case for liberty and a free society is based on the argument that, since every individual is unique, everyone can contribute something that no one else has noticed or thought about. It is the free interaction of individuals which allows them, along with society and its customs and rights, to evolve, change and develop. "Natural Law," like the state, tries to arrest this evolution. It replaces creative inquiry with dogma, making people subject to yet another god, destroying critical thought with a new rule book.

In addition, if these "Natural Laws" are really what they are claimed to be, they are necessarily applicable to **all** of humanity (Rothbard explicitly acknowledges this when he wrote that *"one of the notable attributes of natural law"* is *"its applicability to all men, regardless of time or place"* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 42]). In other words, every other law code **must** (by definition) be "against nature" and there exists **one** way of life (the "natural" one). The authoritarian implications of such arrogance is clear. That the Dogma of Natural Law was only in-



Let us assume that the banks desire to maintain a loans to savings ratio of one and try to adjust their interest rates accordingly. Firstly, changes in the rate of interest *"produce only a very small, if any, movement in business investment"* according to empirical evidence [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 82–83] and that *"the demand for credit is extremely inelastic with respect to interest rates."* [L. Randall Wray, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] Thus, to keep the supply of savings in line with the demand for loans, interest rates would have to increase greatly (indeed, trying to control the money supply by controlling the monetary bases in this way will only lead to very big fluctuations in interest rates). And increasing interest rates has a couple of paradoxical effects.

According to economists Joseph Stiglitz and Andrew Weiss (in *"Credit Rationing in Markets with Imperfect Knowledge"*, **American Economic Review**, no. 71, pp. 393–410) interest rates are subject to what is called the *"lemons problem"* (asymmetrical information between buyer and seller). Stiglitz and Weiss applied the "lemons problem" to the credit market and argued (and unknowingly repeated Adam Smith) that at a given interest rate, lenders will earn lower return by lending to bad borrowers (because of defaults) than to good ones. If lenders try to increase interest rates to compensate for this risk, they may chase away good borrowers, who are unwilling to pay a higher rate, while perversely not chasing away incompetent, criminal, or malignantly optimistic borrowers. This means that an increase in interest rates may actually increase the possibilities of crisis, as more loans may end up in the hands of defaulters.

This gives banks a strong incentive to keep interest rates lower than they otherwise could be. Moreover, *"increases in interest rates make it more difficult for economic agents to meet their debt repayments"* [Philip Arestis, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 237–8] which means when interest rates **are** raised, defaults will increase and place pressures on the banking system. At high enough short-term interest rates, firms find it hard to pay

their interest bills, which cause/increase cash flow problems and so *"[s]harp increases in short term interest rates .. .leads to a fall in the present value of gross profits after taxes (quasi-rents) that capital assets are expected to earn."* [Hyman Minsky, **Post-Keynesian Economic Theory**, p. 45]

In addition, *"production of most investment goods is undertaken on order and requires time for completion. A rise in interest rates is not likely to cause firms to abandon projects in the process of production . .. This does not mean ... that investment is completely unresponsive to interest rates. A large increase in interest rates causes a 'present value reversal', forcing the marginal efficiency of capital to fall below the interest rate. If the long term interest rate is also pushed above the marginal efficiency of capital, the project may be abandoned."* [Wray, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 172–3] In other words, investment takes **time** and there is a lag between investment decisions and actual fixed capital investment. So if interest rates vary during this lag period, initially profitable investments may become white elephants.

As Michal Kalecki argued, the rate of interest must be lower than the rate of profit otherwise investment becomes pointless. The incentive for a firm to own and operate capital is dependent on the prospective rate of profit on that capital relative to the rate of interest at which the firm can borrow at. The higher the interest rate, the less promising investment becomes.

If investment is unresponsive to all but very high interest rates (as we indicated above), then a privatised banking system will be under intense pressure to keep rates low enough to maintain a boom (by, perhaps, creating credit above the amount available as savings). And if it does this, over-investment and crisis is the eventual outcome. If it does not do this and increases interest rates then consumption and investment will dry up as interest rates rise and the defaulters (honest and dishonest) increase and a crisis will eventually occur.



commonly regarded as human rights. One can object to state power without believing in "Natural Law."

## 11.3 Why is "Natural Law" authoritarian?

Rights, far from being fixed, are the product of social evolution and human action, thought and emotions. What is acceptable now may become unacceptable in the future. Slavery, for example, was long considered "natural." In fact, John Locke, the "father" of "Natural Rights," was heavily involved in the slave trade. He made a fortune in violating what is today regarded as a basic human right: not to be enslaved. Many in Locke's day claimed that slavery was a "Natural Law." Few would say so now.

Thomas Jefferson indicates exactly why "Natural Law" is authoritarian when he wrote *"[s]ome men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the ark of the Covenant, too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment...laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.. . as that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, institutions must advance also, to keep pace with the times.. . We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilised society to remain forever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."*

The "Natural Law" cult desires to stop the evolutionary process by which new rights are recognised. Instead they wish to fix social life into what **they** think is good and right, using a form of argument that tries to raise their ideology above critique or thought. Such a wish is opposed to the fundamental feature of liberty: the ability to think for oneself. Michael Bakunin writes *"the liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has **himself** recognised them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon*

## 11.2 But "Natural Law" provides protection for individual rights from violation by the State. Those who are against Natural Law desire total rule by the state.

The second statement represents a common "Libertarian" tactic. Instead of addressing the issues, they accuse an opponent of being a "totalitarian" (or the less sinister "statist"). In this way, they hope to distract attention from, and so avoid discussing, the issue at hand (while at the same time smearing their opponent). We can therefore ignore the second statement.

Regarding the first, "Natural Law" has **never** stopped the rights of individuals from being violated by the state. Such "laws" are as much use as a chocolate fire-guard. If "Natural Rights" could protect one from the power of the state, the Nazis would not have been able to murder six million Jews. The only thing that stops the state from attacking people's rights is individual (and social) power — the ability and desire to protect oneself and what one considers to be right and fair. As the anarchist Rudolf Rocker pointed out:

> *"Political [or individual] rights do not exist because they have been legally set down on a piece of paper, but only when they have become the ingrown habit of a people, and when any attempt to impair them will be meet with the violent resistance of the populace… .One compels respect from others when he knows how to defend his dignity as a human being… .The people owe all the political rights and privileges which we enjoy today, in greater or lesser measure, not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 64]

Of course, if is there are no "Natural Rights," then the state has no "right" to murder you or otherwise take away what are



This is because increasing interest rates may increase savings **but** it also reduce consumption (*"high interest rates also deter both consumers and companies from spending, so that the domestic economy is weakened and unemployment rises"* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 70]). This means that firms can face a drop off in demand, causing them problems and (perhaps) leading to a lack of profits, debt repayment problems and failure. An increase in interest rates also reduces demand for investment goods, which also can cause firms problems, increase unemployment and so on. So an increase in interest rates (particularly a sharp rise) could reduce consumption and investment (i.e. reduce aggregate demand) and have a ripple effect throughout the economy which could cause a slump to occur.

In other words, interest rates and the supply and demand of savings/loans they are meant to reflect may not necessarily move an economy towards equilibrium (if such a concept is useful). Indeed, the workings of a "pure" banking system without credit money may increase unemployment as demand falls in both investment and consumption in response to high interest rates and a general shortage of money due to lack of (credit) money resulting from the "tight" money regime implied by such a regime (i.e. the business cycle would still exist). This was the case of the failed Monetarist experiments on the early 1980s when central banks in America and Britain tried to pursue a "tight" money policy. The "tight" money policy did not, in fact, control the money supply. All it did do was increase interest rates and lead to a serious financial crisis and a deep recession (as Wray notes, *"the central bank uses tight money polices to raise interest rates"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 262]). This recession, we must note, also broke the backbone of working class resistance and the unions in both countries due to the high levels of unemployment it generated. As intended, we are sure.

Such an outcome would not surprise anarchists, as this was a key feature of the Individualist and Mutualist Anar-

chists' arguments against the "money monopoly" associated with specie money. They argued that the "money monopoly" created a "tight" money regime which reduced the demand for labour by restricting money and credit and so allowed the exploitation of labour (i.e. encouraged wage labour) and stopped the development of non-capitalist forms of production. Thus Lysander Spooner's comments that workers need *"**money capital** to enable them to buy the raw materials upon which to bestow their labour, the implements and machinery with which to labour ... Unless they get this capital, they must all either work at a disadvantage, or not work at all. A very large portion of them, to save themselves from starvation, have no alternative but to sell their labour to others ..."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 39] It is interesting to note that workers **did** do well during the 1950s and 1960s under a "liberal" money regime than they did under the "tighter" regimes of the 1980s and 1990s.

We should also note that an extended period of boom will encourage banks to make loans more freely. According to Minsky's *"financial instability model"* crisis (see *"The Financial Instability Hypothesis"* in **Post-Keynesian Economic Theory** for example) is essentially caused by risky financial practices during periods of financial tranquillity. In other words, *"stability is destabilising."* In a period of boom, banks are happy and the increased profits from companies are flowing into their vaults. Over time, bankers note that they can use a reserve system to increase their income and, due to the general upward swing of the economy, consider it safe to do so (and given that they are in competition with other banks, they may provide loans simply because they are afraid of losing customers to more flexible competitors). This increases the instability within the system (as firms increase their debts due to the flexibility of the banks) and produces the possibility of crisis if interest rates are increased (because the ability of business to fulfil their financial commitments embedded in debts deteriorates).



society off the political agenda by giving them a divine, everlasting quality.

Moreover, such an "individualist" account of the origins of rights will always turn on a muddled distinction between individual rationality and some vague notion of rationality associated with membership of the human species. How are we to determine what is rational for an individual **as and individual** and what is rational for that same individual **as a human being**? It is hard to see that we can make such a distinction for *"[i]f I violently interfere with Murray Rothbard's freedom, this may violate the 'natural law' of Murray Rothbard's needs, but it doesn't violate the 'natural law' of **my** needs."* [L.A. Rollins, **The Myth of Natural Rights**, p. 28] Both parties, after all, are human and if such interference is, as Rothbard claims, *"antihuman"* then why? *"If it helps me, a human, to advance my life, then how can it be unequivocally 'antihuman'?"* [L. A. Rollins, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27] Thus "natural law" is contradictory as it is well within the bounds of human nature to violate it.

This means that in order to support the dogma of "Natural Law," the cultists **must** ignore reality. Ayn Rand claims that *"the source of man's rights is...the law of identity. A is A — and Man is Man."* But Rand (like Rothbard) **defines** *"Man"* as an *"entity of a specific kind — a rational being"* [**The Virtue of Selfishness**, pp. 94–95]. Therefore she cannot account for **irrational** human behaviours (such as those that violate "Natural Laws"), which are also products of our "nature." To assert that such behaviours are not human is to assert that A can be not-A, thus contradicting the law of identity. Her ideology cannot even meet its own test.

Libertarian ideologist power over the people that he or she wants to rule.

How can one be against a "Natural Law" or a "Natural Right"? It is impossible. How can one argue against gravity? If private property, for example, is elevated to such a level, who would dare argue against it? Ayn Rand listed having landlords and employers along with *"the laws of nature."* They are **not** similar: the first two are social relationships which have to be imposed by the state; the *"laws of nature"* (like gravity, needing food, etc.) are **facts** which do not need to be imposed. Rothbard claims that *"the natural fact is that labour service **is** indeed a commodity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 40] However, this is complete nonsense — labour service as a commodity is a **social** fact, dependent on the distribution of property within society, its social customs and so forth. It is only "natural" in the sense that it exists within a given society (the state is also "natural" as it also exists within nature at a given time). But neither wage slavery or the state is "natural" in the sense that gravity is natural or a human having two arms is. Indeed, workers at the dawn of capitalism, faced with selling their labour services to another, considered it as decidedly "unnatural" and used the term "wage slavery" to describe it!

Thus, where and when a "fact" appears is essential. For example, Rothbard claims that *"[a]n apple, let fall, will drop to the ground; this we all observe and acknowledge to be **in the nature** of the apple."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 9] Actually, we do not "acknowledge" anything of the kind. We acknowledge that the apple was subject to the force of gravity and that is why it fell. The same apple, "let fall" in a space ship would **not** drop to the floor. Has the "nature" of the apple changed? No, but the situation it is in has. Thus any attempt to generate abstract "natures" requires you to ignore reality in favour of ideals.

Because of the confusion its usage creates, we are tempted to think that the use of "Natural Law" dogma is an attempt to **stop** thinking, to restrict analysis, to force certain aspects of



Even if we assume that interest rates **do** work as predicted in theory, it is false to maintain that there is one interest rate. This is not the case. *"Concentration of capital leads to unequal access to investment funds, which obstructs further the possibility of smooth transitions in industrial activity. Because of their past record of profitability, large enterprises have higher credit ratings and easier access to credit facilities, and they are able to put up larger collateral for a loan."* [Michael A. Bernstein, **The Great Depression**, p. 106] As we noted in section C.5.1, the larger the firm, the lower the interest rate they have to pay. Thus banks routinely lower their interest rates to their best clients even though the future is uncertain and past performance cannot and does not indicate future returns. Therefore it seems a bit strange to maintain that the interest rate will bring savings and loans into line if there are different rates being offered.

And, of course, private banks cannot affect the underlying fundamentals that drive the economy — like productivity, working class power and political stability — any more than central banks (although central banks can influence the speed and gentleness of adjustment to a crisis).

Indeed, given a period of full employment a system of private banks may actually speed up the coming of a slump. As we argue in the next section, full employment results in a profits squeeze as firms face a tight labour market (which drives up costs) and, therefore, increased workers' power at the point of production and in their power of exit. In a central bank system, capitalists can pass on these increasing costs to consumers and so maintain their profit margins for longer. This option is restricted in a private banking system as banks would be less inclined to devalue their money. This means that firms will face a profits squeeze sooner rather than later, which will cause a slump as firms cannot make ends meet. As Reekie notes, inflation *"can temporarily reduce employment by postponing the time when misdirected labour will be laid off"* but as Austrian's (like Monetarists) think *"inflation is a monetary phenomenon"*

he does not understand the real causes of inflation and what they imply for a "pure" capitalist system [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67, p. 74]. As Paul Ormerod points out *"the claim that inflation is always and everywhere purely caused by increases in the money supply, and that there the rate of inflation bears a stable, predictable relationship to increases in the money supply is ridiculous."* And he notes that *"[i]ncreases in the rate of inflation tend to be linked to falls in unemployment, and vice versa"* which indicates its **real** causes — namely in the balance of class power and in the class struggle. [**The Death of Economics**, p. 96, p. 131]

Moreover, if we do take the Austrian theory of the business cycle at face value we are drawn to conclusion that in order to finance investment savings must be increased. But to maintain or increase the stock of loanable savings, inequality must be increased. This is because, unsurprisingly, rich people save a larger proportion of their income than poor people and the proportion of profits saved are higher than the proportion of wages. But increasing inequality (as we argued in section 3.1) makes a mockery of right-libertarian claims that their system is based on freedom or justice.

This means that the preferred banking system of "anarcho"-capitalism implies increasing, not decreasing, inequality within society. Moreover, most firms (as we indicated in section C.5.1) fund their investments with their own savings which would make it hard for banks to loan these savings out as they could be withdrawn at any time. This could have serious implications for the economy, as banks refuse to fund new investment simply because of the uncertainty they face when accessing if their available savings can be loaned to others (after all, they can hardly loan out the savings of a customer who is likely to demand them at any time). And by refusing to fund new investment, a boom could falter and turn to slump as firms do not find the necessary orders to keep going.



Rothbard claims that *"if A, B, C, etc., have differing attributes, it follows that they have different **natures.**"* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 9] Does this means that as every individual is unique (have different attributes), they have different natures? Skin and hair colour are different attributes, does this mean that red haired people have different natures than blondes? That black people have different natures than white (and such a "theory" of "natural law" was used to justify slavery — yes, slaves **are** human but they have "different natures" than their masters and so slavery is okay). Of course Rothbard aggregates "attributes" to species level, but why not higher? Humans are primates, does that mean we have the same natures are monkeys or gorillas? We are also mammals as well, we share many of the same attributes as whales and dogs. Do we have similar natures?

But this is by the way. To continue we find that after defining certain "natures," Rothbard attempts to derive *"Natural Rights and Laws"* from them. However, these *"Natural Laws"* are quite strange, as they can be violated in nature! Real natural laws (like the law of gravity) **cannot** be violated and therefore do not need to be enforced. The "Natural Laws" the "Libertarian" desires to foist upon us are not like this. They need to be enforced by humans and the institutions they create. Hence, Libertarian "Natural Laws" are more akin to moral prescriptions or juridical laws. However, this does not stop Rothbard explicitly *"plac[ing]"* his *"Natural Laws" "alongside physical or 'scientific' natural laws."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 42]

So why do so many Libertarians use the term "Natural Law?" Simply, it gives them the means by which to elevate their opinions, dogmas, and prejudices to a metaphysical level where nobody will dare to criticise or even think about them. The term smacks of religion, where "Natural Law" has replaced "God's Law." The latter fiction gave the priest power over believers. "Natural Law" is designed to give the

violate these rights, they are facts of natural and you are violating nature" (compare to "Do not violate these laws, or you will go to hell"). So to point out that "Natural Law" is **not** the same as the law of gravity (because it has to be enforced by humans) is not attacking some kind of "straw man" — it is exposing the fact that these "Natural Laws" are just the personal prejudices of those who hold them. If they do not want then to be exposed as such then they should call their laws what they are — personal ethical laws — rather than compare them to the facts of nature.

## 11.1 Why the term "Natural Law" in the first place?

Murray Rothbard claims that *"Natural Law theory rests on the insight.. . that each entity has distinct and specific properties, a distinct 'nature,' which can be investigated by man's reason"* [**For a New Liberty**, p. 25] and that *"man has rights because they are **natural** rights. They are grounded in the nature of man."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 155]

To put it bluntly, this form of "analysis" was originated by Aristotle and has not been used by science for centuries. Science investigates by proposing theories and hypotheses to explain empirical observations, testing and refining them by experiment. In stark contrast, Rothbard **invents** definitions (*"distinct" "natures"*) and then draws conclusions from them. Such a method was last used by the medieval Church and is devoid of any scientific method. It is, of course, a fiction. It attempts to deduce the nature of a "natural" society from *a priori* considerations of the "innate" nature of human beings, which just means that the assumptions necessary to reach the desired conclusions have been built into the definition of "human nature." In other words, Rothbard defines humans as having the "distinct and specific properties" that, given his assumptions, will allow his dogma (private state capitalism) to be inferred as the "natural" society for humans.



So, would market forces create "sound banking"? The answer is probably not. The pressures on banks to make profits come into conflict with the need to maintain their savings to loans ration (and so the confidence of their customers). As Wray argues, *"as banks are profit seeking firms, they find ways to increase their liabilities which don't entail increases in reserve requirements"* and *"[i]f banks share the profit expectations of prospective borrowers, they can create credit to allow [projects/investments] to proceed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 295, p. 283] This can be seen from the historical record. As Kindleberger notes, *"the market will create new forms of money in periods of boom to get around the limit"* imposed on the money supply [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]. Trade credit is one way, for example. Under the Monetarist experiments of 1980s, there was *"deregulation and central bank constraints raised interest rates and created a moral hazard — banks made increasingly risky loans to cover rising costs of issuing liabilities. Rising competition from nonbanks and tight money policy forced banks to lower standards and increase rates of growth in an attempt to 'grow their way to profitability'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 293]

Thus credit money ("fiduciary media") is an attempt to overcome the scarcity of money within capitalism, particularly the scarcity of specie money. The pressures that banks face within "actually existing" capitalism would still be faced under "pure" capitalism. It is likely (as Reekie acknowledges) that credit money would still be created in response to the demands of business people (although not at the same level as is currently the case, we imagine). The banks, seeking profits themselves and in competition for customers, would be caught between maintaining the value of their business (i.e. their money) and the needs to maximise profits. As a boom develops, banks would be tempted to introduce credit money to maintain it as increasing the interest rate would be difficult and potentially dangerous (for reasons we noted above). Thus, if credit money is not forth coming (i.e. the banks stick to the Austrian claims

that loans must equal savings) then the rise in interest rates required will generate a slump. If it is forthcoming, then the danger of over-investment becomes increasingly likely. All in all, the business cycle is part of capitalism and **not** caused by "external" factors like the existence of government.

As Reekie notes, to Austrians *"ignorance of the future is endemic"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 117] but you would be forgiven for thinking that this is not the case when it comes to investment. An individual firm cannot know whether its investment project will generate the stream of returns necessary to meet the stream of payment commitments undertaken to finance the project. And neither can the banks who fund those projects. Even **if** a bank does not get tempted into providing credit money in excess of savings, it cannot predict whether other banks will do the same or whether the projects it funds will be successful. Firms, looking for credit, may turn to more flexible competitors (who practice reserve banking to some degree) and the inflexible bank may see its market share and profits decrease. After all, commercial banks *"typically establish relations with customers to reduce the uncertainty involved in making loans. Once a bank has entered into a relationship with a customer, it has strong incentives to meet the demands of that customer."* [Wray, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

There are example of fully privatised banks. For example, in the United States (*"which was without a central bank after 1837"*) *"the major banks in New York were in a bind between their roles as profit seekers, which made them contributors to the instability of credit, and as possessors of country deposits against whose instability they had to guard."* [Kindleberger, **Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

In Scotland, the banks were unregulated between 1772 and 1845 but *"the leading commercial banks accumulated the notes of lessor ones, as the Second Bank of the United States did contemporaneously in [the USA], ready to convert them to specie if they thought they were getting out of line. They served, that is,*



rights and laws that its supporters argue for are to be considered just like the law of gravity (although they acknowledge, of course, that unlike gravity, **their** *"natural laws"* **can be violated in nature**). Far from saying that the rights they support are just that (i.e. rights **they** think are good) they try to associate them with universal facts. For example, Lysander Spooner (who, we must stress, used the concept of "Natural law" to **oppose** the transformation of America into a capitalist society, unlike Rand, Nozick and Rothbard who use it to defend capitalism) stated that:

> *"the true definition of law is, that it is a fixed, immutable, natural principle; and not anything that man ever made, or can make, unmake, or alter. Thus we speak of the laws of matter, and the laws of mind; of the laws of gravitation, the laws of light, heat, and electricity…etc., etc… . The law of justice is just as supreme and universal in the moral world, as these others are in the mental or physical world; and is as unalterable as are these by any human power. And it is just as false and absurd to talk of anybody's having the power to abolish the law of justice, and set up their own in its stead, as it would be to talk of their having the power to abolish the law of gravitation, or any other natural laws of the universe, and set up their own will in the place of them."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 88]

Rothbard and other capitalist supporters of "Natural Law" make the same sort of claims (as we will see). Now, why, if they are aware of the fact that unlike gravity their "Natural Laws" can be violated, do they use the term at all? Benjamin Tucker said that "Natural Law" was a *"religious"* concept — and this provides a clue. To say "Do not violate these rights, otherwise I will get cross" does not have **quite** the same power as "Do not

ous other demagogues, religious fanatics, and political philosophers. However, each likes to claim that only **their** "natural law" is the "real" one, all the others being subjective impositions. We will ignore these assertions (they are not arguments) and concentrate on explaining why natural law, in all its forms, is a myth. In addition, we will indicate its authoritarian implications.

Instead of such myths anarchists urge people to "work it out for themselves" and realise that any ethical code is subjective and not a law of nature. If its a good "code", then others will become convinced of it by your arguments and their intellect. There is no need to claim its a function of "man's nature"!

The following books discuss the subject of "Natural Law" in greater depth and are recommended for a fuller discussion of the issues raised in this section:

Robert Anton Wilson, **Natural Law** and L.A. Rollins, **The Myth of Natural Law**.

We should note that these books are written by people associated, to some degree, with right-libertarianism and, of course, we should point out that not all right-libertarians subscribe to "natural law" theories (David Friedman, for example, does not). However, such a position seems to be the minority in right-Libertarianism (Ayn Rand, Robert Nozick and Murray Rothbard, among others, did subscribe to it). We should also point out that the Individualist Anarchist Lysander Spooner also subscribed to "natural laws" (which shows that, as we noted above, the concept is not limited to one particular theory or ideology). We present a short critique of Spooner's ideas on this subject in section G.7.

Lastly, it could be maintained that it is a common "straw man" to maintain that supporters of Natural Law argue that their Laws are like the laws of physics (and so are capable of stopping people's actions just as the law of gravity automatically stops people flying from the Earth). But that is the whole point — using the term "Natural Law" implies that the moral



*as an informal controller of the money supply. For the rest, as so often, historical evidence runs against strong theory, as demonstrated by the country banks in England from 1745 to 1835, wildcat banking in Michigan in the 1830s, and the latest experience with bank deregulation in Latin America."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 82] And we should note there were a few banking "wars" during the period of deregulation in Scotland which forced a few of the smaller banks to fail as the bigger ones refused their money and that there was a major bank failure in the Ayr Bank.

Kendleberger argues that central banking *"arose to impose control on the instability of credit"* and did not cause the instability which right-libertarians maintain it does. And as we note in section 10.3, the USA suffered massive economic instability during its period without central banking. Thus, **if** credit money **is** the cause of the business cycle, it is likely that a "pure" capitalism will still suffer from it just as much as "actually existing" capitalism (either due to high interest rates or over-investment).

In general, as the failed Monetarist experiments of the 1980s prove, trying to control the money supply is impossible. The demand for money is dependent on the needs of the economy and any attempt to control it will fail (and cause a deep depression, usually via high interest rates). The business cycle, therefore, is an endogenous phenomenon caused by the normal functioning of the capitalist economic system. Austrian and right-libertarian claims that *"slump flows boom, but for a totally unnecessary reason: government inspired mal-investment"* [Reekie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 74] are simply wrong. Over-investment **does** occur, but it is **not** *"inspired"* by the government. It is *"inspired"* by the banks need to make profits from loans and from businesses need for investment funds which the banks accommodate. In other words, by the nature of the capitalist system.

### 10.2 How does the labour market effect capitalism?

In many ways, the labour market is the one that affects capitalism the most. The right-libertarian assumption (like that of mainstream economics) is that markets clear and, therefore, the labour market will also clear. As this assumption has rarely been proven to be true in actuality (i.e. periods of full employment within capitalism are few and far between), this leaves its supporters with a problem — reality contradicts the theory.

The theory predicts full employment but reality shows that this is not the case. Since we are dealing with logical deductions from assumptions, obviously the theory cannot be wrong and so we must identify external factors which cause the business cycle (and so unemployment). In this way attention is diverted away from the market and its workings — after all, it is assumed that the capitalist market works — and onto something else. This "something else" has been quite a few different things (most ridiculously, sun spots in the case of one of the founders of marginalist economics, William Stanley Jevons). However, these days most pro-free market capitalist economists and right-libertarians have now decided it is the state.

In this section of the FAQ we will present a case that maintains that the assumption that markets clear is false at least for one, unique, market — namely, the market for labour. As the fundamental assumption underlying "free market" capitalism is false, the logically consistent superstructure built upon comes crashing down. Part of the reason why capitalism is unstable is due to the commodification of labour (i.e. people) and the problems this creates. The state itself can have positive and negative impacts on the economy, but removing it or its influence will not solve the business cycle.

Why is this? Simply due to the nature of the labour market.

Anarchists have long realised that the capitalist market is based upon inequalities and changes in power. Proudhon



*capable of being furnished ... [would assure that all would] be under no necessity to act as a servant, or sell his or her labour to others."* [Lysander Spooner, **A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 47, p. 39, p. 50, p. 41] In other words, a specie based system (as desired by many "anarcho"-capitalists) was considered a key way of maintaining wage labour and exploitation.

Interestingly, since the end of the era of the Gold Standard (and so commodity money) popular debate, protest and concern about money has disappeared. The debate and protest was in response to the **effects** of commodity money on the economy — with many people correctly viewing the seriously restrictive monetary regime of the time responsible for economic problems and crisis as well as increasing inequalities. Instead radicals across the political spectrum urged a more flexible regime, one that did not cause wage slavery and crisis by reducing the amount of money in circulation when it could be used to expand production and reduce the impact of slumps. Needless to say, the Federal Reserve system in the USA was far from the institution these populists wanted (after all, it is run by and for the elite interests who desired its creation).

That the laissez-faire system was so volatile and panic-ridden suggests that "anarcho"-capitalist dreams of privatising everything, including banking, and everything will be fine are very optimistic at best (and, ironically, it was members of the capitalist class who lead the movement towards state-managed capitalism in the name of "sound money").

## 11 What is the myth of "Natural Law"?

Natural Law, and the related concept of Natural Rights, play an important part in Libertarian and "anarcho"-capitalist ideology. Right-libertarians are not alone in claiming that their particular ideology is based on the "law of nature". Hitler, for one, claimed the same thing for Nazi ideology. So do numer-

*and business cycle swings more severe"* [**Accumulation and Power**, p. 177] It was in response to this instability that the Federal Reserve system was created; and as Doug Henwood notes *"the campaign for a more rational system of money and credit was not a movement of Wall Street vs. industry or regional finance, but a broad movement of elite bankers and the managers of the new corporations as well as academics and business journalists. The emergence of the Fed was the culmination of attempts to define a standard of value that began in the 1890s with the emergence of the modern professionally managed corporation owned not by its managers but dispersed public shareholders."* [**Wall Street**, p. 93] Indeed, the Bank of England was often forced to act as lender of last resort to the US, which had no central bank.

In the decentralised banking system of the 19th century, during panics thousands of banks would hoard resources, so starving the system for liquidity precisely at the moment it was most badly needed. The creation of trusts was one way in which capitalists tried to manage the system's instabilities (at the expense of consumers) and the corporation was a response to the outlawing of trusts. *"By internalising lots of the competitive system's gaps — by bring more transactions within the same institutional walls — corporations greatly stabilised the economy."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94]

All during the hey-day of laissez faire we also find popular protests against the money system used, namely specie (in particular gold), which was considered as a hindrance to economic activity and expansion (as well as being a tool for the rich). The Individualist Anarchists, for example, considered the money monopoly (which included the use of specie as money) as the means by which capitalists ensured that *"the labourers … [are] kept in the condition of wage labourers,"* and reduced *"to the conditions of servants; and subject to all such extortions as their employers … may choose to practice upon them"*, indeed they became the *"mere tools and machines in the hands of their employers"*. With the end of this monopoly, *"[t]he amount of money,*



argued that *"[t]he manufacturer says to the labourer, 'You are as free to go elsewhere with your services as I am to receive them. I offer you so much.' The merchant says to the customer, 'Take it or leave it; you are master of your money, as I am of my goods. I want so much.' Who will yield? The weaker."* He, like all anarchists, saw that domination, oppression and exploitation flow from inequalities of market/economic power and that the *"power of invasion lies in superior strength."* [**What is Property?**, p. 216, p. 215]

This applies with greatest force to the labour market. While mainstream economics and right-libertarian variations of it refuse to acknowledge that the capitalist market is a based upon hierarchy and power, anarchists (and other socialists) do not share this opinion. And because they do not share this understanding with anarchists, right-libertarians will never be able to understand capitalism or its dynamics and development. Thus, when it comes to the labour market, it is essential to remember that the balance of power within it is the key to understanding the business cycle. Thus the economy must be understood as a system of power.

So how does the labour market effect capitalism? Let us consider a growing economy, on that is coming out of a recession. Such a growing economy stimulates demand for employment and as unemployment falls, the costs of finding workers increase and wage and condition demands of existing workers intensify. As the economy is growing and labour is scare, the threat associated with the hardship of unemployment is weakened. The share of profits is squeezed and in reaction to this companies begin to cut costs (by reducing inventories, postponing investment plans and laying off workers). As a result, the economy moves into a downturn. Unemployment rises and wage demands are moderated. Eventually, this enables the share of profits first of all to stabilise, and then rise. Such an *"interplay between profits and unemployment as the key determinant of business cycles"* is

*"observed in the empirical data."* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 188]

Thus, as an economy approaches full employment the balance of power on the labour market changes. The sack is no longer that great a threat as people see that they can get a job elsewhere easily. Thus wages and working conditions increase as companies try to get new (and keep) existing employees and output is harder to maintain. In the words of economist William Lazonick, labour *"that is able to command a higher price than previously because of the appearance of tighter labour markets is, by definition, labour that is highly mobile via the market. And labour that is highly mobile via the market is labour whose supply of effort is difficult for managers to control in the production process. Hence, the advent of tight labour markets generally results in more rapidly rising average costs ...as well as upward shifts in the average cost curve..."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 106]

In other words, under conditions of full-employment *"employers are in danger of losing the upper hand."* [Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 75] Schor argues that *"employers have a structural advantage in the labour market, because there are typically more candidates ready and willing to endure this work marathon [of long hours] than jobs for them to fill."* [p. 71] Thus the labour market is usually a buyers market, and so the sellers have to compromise. In the end, workers adapt to this inequality of power and instead of getting what they want, they want what they get.

But under full employment this changes. As we argued in section B.4.4 and section C.7, in such a situation it is the bosses who have to start compromising. And they do not like it. As Schor notes, America *"has never experienced a sustained period of full employment. The closest we have gotten is the late 1960s, when the overall unemployment rate was under 4 percent for four years. But that experience does more to prove the point than any other example. The trauma caused to business by those years of a*



ism, but this they do not. The logic is simple — if X is good, then it is permissible to use it. If X is bad, the system is not pure enough.

However, as right-libertarians **do** use historical examples so shall we. According to Murray Rothbard, there was *"quasi-laissez-faire industrialisation [in] the nineteenth century"* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 264] and so we will use the example of nineteenth century America — as this is usually taken as being the closest to pure laissez-faire — in order to see if laissez-faire is stable or not.

Yes, we are well aware that 19th century USA was far from laissez-faire — there was a state, protectionism, government economic activity and so on — but as this example has been often used by right-Libertarians' themselves (for example, Ayn Rand) we think that we can gain a lot from looking at this imperfect approximation of "pure" capitalism (and as we argued in section 8, it is the "quasi" aspects of the system that counted in industrialisation, **not** the laissez-faire ones).

So, was 19th century America stable? No, it most definitely was not.

Firstly, throughout that century there were a continual economic booms and slumps. The last third of the 19th century (often considered as a heyday of private enterprise) was a period of profound instability and anxiety. Between 1867 and 1900 there were 8 complete business cycles. Over these 396 months, the economy expanded during 199 months and contracted during 197. Hardly a sign of great stability (since the end of world war II, only about a fifth of the time has spent in periods of recession or depression, by way of comparison). Overall, the economy went into a slump, panic or crisis in 1807, 1817, 1828, 1834, 1837, 1854, 1857, 1873, 1882, and 1893 (in addition, 1903 and 1907 were also crisis years).

Part of this instability came from the eras banking system. *"Lack of a central banking system,"* writes Richard Du Boff, *"until the Federal Reserve act of 1913 made financial panics worse*

ers have little option about what they "choose" to give and fear that they will **not** be chosen, then they are at a disadvantage when compared to their bosses and so "consent" to being treated as a resource from the capitalist can make a profit from. And so this will result in any "free" contract on the labour market favouring one party at the expense of the other — as can be seen from "actually existing capitalism".

Thus any "free exchange" on the labour market will usually **not** reflect the true desires of working people (and who will make all the "adjusting" and end up wanting what they get). Only when the economy is approaching full employment will the labour market start to reflect the true desires of working people and their wage start to approach its full product. And when this happens, profits are squeezed and capitalism goes into slump and the resulting unemployment disciplines the working class and restores profit margins. Thus full employment will be the exception rather than the rule within capitalism (and that is a conclusion which the historical record indicates).

In other words, in a normally working capitalist economy any labour contracts will not create relationships based upon freedom due to the inequalities in power between workers and capitalists. Instead, any contracts will be based upon domination, **not** freedom. Which prompts the question, how is libertarian capitalism **libertarian** if it erodes the liberty of a large class of people?

## 10.3 Was laissez-faire capitalism stable?

Firstly, we must state that a pure laissez-faire capitalist system has not existed. This means that any evidence we present in this section can be dismissed by right-libertarians for precisely this fact — it was not "pure" enough. Of course, if they were consistent, you would expect them to shun all historical and current examples of capitalism or activity within capital-



*tight labour market was considerable. Since then, there has been a powerful consensus that the nation cannot withstand such a low rate of unemployment."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 75–76]

So, in other words, full employment is not good for the capitalist system due to the power full employment provides workers. Thus unemployment is a necessary requirement for a successful capitalist economy and not some kind of aberration in an otherwise healthy system. Thus "anarcho"-capitalist claims that "pure" capitalism will soon result in permanent full employment are false. Any moves towards full employment will result in a slump as capitalists see their profits squeezed from below by either collective class struggle or by individual mobility in the labour market.

This was recognised by Individualist Anarchists like Benjamin Tucker, who argued that mutual banking would *"give an unheard of impetus to business, and consequently create an unprecedented demand for labour, — a demand which would always be in excess of the supply, directly contrary of the present condition of the labour market."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 149–150] In other words, full employment would end capitalist exploitation, drive non-labour income to zero and ensure the worker the full value of her labour — in other words, end capitalism. Thus, for most (if not all) anarchists the exploitation of labour is only possible when unemployment exists and the supply of labour exceeds the demand for it. Any move towards unemployment will result in a profits squeeze and either the end of capitalism or an economic slump.

Indeed, as we argued in the last section, the extended periods of (approximately) full employment until the 1960s had the advantage that any profit squeeze could (in the short run anyway) be passed onto working class people in the shape of inflation. As prices rise, labour is made cheaper and profits margins supported. This option is restricted under a "pure" capitalism (for reasons we discussed in the last section) and so "pure" capi-

talism will be affected by full employment faster than "impure" capitalism.

As an economy approaches full employment, *"hiring new workers suddenly becomes much more difficult. They are harder to find, cost more, and are less experiences. Such shortages are extremely costly for a firm."* [Schor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 75] This encourages a firm to pass on these rises to society in the form of price rises, so creating inflation. Workers, in turn, try to maintain their standard of living. *"Every general increase in labour costs in recent years,"* note J. Brecher and J. Costello in the late 1970s, *"has followed, rather than preceded, an increase in consumer prices. Wage increases have been the result of workers' efforts to catch up after their incomes have already been eroded by inflation. Nor could it easily be otherwise. All a businessman has to do to raise a price ... [is to] make an announcement... Wage rates ... are primarily determined by contracts"* and so cannot be easily adjusted in the short term. [**Common Sense for Bad Times**, p, 120]

These full employment pressures will still exist with "pure" capitalism (and due to the nature of the banking system will not have the safety value of inflation). This means that periodic profit squeezes will occur, due to the nature of a tight labour market and the increased power of workers this generates. This in turn means that a "pure" capitalism will be subject to periods of unemployment (as we argued in section C.9) and so still have a business cycle. This is usually acknowledged by right-libertarians in passing, although they seem to think that this is purely a "short-term" problem (it seems a strange "short-term" problem that continually occurs).

But such an analysis is denied by right-libertarians. For them government action, combined with the habit of many labour unions to obtain higher than market wage rates for their members, creates and exacerbates mass unemployment. This flows from the deductive logic of much capitalist economics. The basic assumption of capitalism is that markets clear. So



capitalists to stop/reduce investment and credit and so create the economic environment (i.e. increasing unemployment) necessary to undercut working class power.

In other words, a period of full unemployment is not sufficient to reform capitalism away. Full employment (nevermind any struggle over workers' control) will reduce profits and if profits are reduced then firms find it hard to repay debts, fund investment and provide profits for shareholders. This profits squeeze would be enough to force capitalism into a slump and any attempts at gaining workers' self-management in periods of high employment will help push it over the edge (after all, workers' control without control over the allocation of any surplus is distinctly phoney). Moreover, even if we ignore the effects of full employment may not last due to problems associated with over-investment (see section C.7.2), credit and interest rate problems (see section 10.1) and realisation/aggregate demand disjoints. Full employment adds to the problems associated with the capitalist business cycle and so, if class struggle and workers power did not exist or cost problem, capitalism would still not be stable.

If equilibrium is a myth, then so is full employment. It seems somewhat ironic that "anarcho"-capitalists and other right-libertarians maintain that there will be equilibrium (full employment) in the one market within capitalism it can never actually exist in! This is usually quietly acknowledged by most right-libertarians, who mention in passing that some "temporary" unemployment **will** exist in their system — but "temporary" unemployment is not full employment. Of course, you could maintain that all unemployment is "voluntary" and get round the problem by denying it, but that will not get us very far.

So it is all fine and well saying that "libertarian" capitalism would be based upon the maxim *"From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen."* [Robert Nozick, **Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, p. 160] But if the labour market is such that work-

if unemployment exists then it can only be because the price of labour (wages) is too high (Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie argues that unemployment will *"disappear provided real wages are not artificially high"* [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 72]).

Thus the assumption provokes the conclusion — unemployment is caused by an unclearing market as markets always clear. And the cause for this is either the state or unions. But what if the labour market **cannot** clear without seriously damaging the power and profits of capitalists? What if unemployment is required to maximise profits by weakening labours' bargaining position on the market and so maximising the capitalists power? In that case unemployment is caused by capitalism, not by forces external to it.

However, let us assume that the right-libertarian theory is correct. Let us assume that unemployment is all the fault of the selfish unions and that a job-seeker *"who does not want to wait will always get a job in the unhampered market economy."* [von Mises, **Human Action**, p. 595]

Would crushing the unions reduce unemployment? Let us assume that the unions have been crushed and government has been abolished (or, at the very least, become a minimum state). The aim of the capitalist class is to maximise their profits and to do this they invest in labour saving machinery and otherwise attempt to increase productivity. But increasing productivity means that the prices of goods fall and falling prices mean increasing real wages. It is high real wages that, according to right-libertarians, that cause unemployment. So as a reward for increasing productivity, workers will have to have their money wages cut in order to stop unemployment occurring! For this reason some employers might refrain from cutting wages in order to avoid damage to morale — potentially an important concern.

Moreover, wage contracts involve **time** — a contract will usually agree a certain wage for a certain period. This builds in



Thus, in the face of reducing wages, the labour market may see an accumulative move away from (rather than towards) full employment, The right-libertarian argument is that unemployment is caused by real wages being too high which in turn flows from the assumption that markets clear. If there is unemployment, then the price of the commodity labour is too high — otherwise supply and demand would meet and the market clear. But if, as we argued above, unemployment is essential to discipline workers then the labour market **cannot** clear except for short periods. If the labour market clears, profits are squeezed. Thus the claim that unemployment is caused by "too high" real wages is false (and as we argue in section C.9, cutting these wages will result in deepening any slump and making recovery longer to come about).

In other words, the assumption that the labour market must clear is false, as is any assumption that reducing wages will tend to push the economy quickly back to full employment. The nature of wage labour and the "commodity" being sold (i.e. human labour/time/liberty) ensure that it can never be the same as others. This has important implications for economic theory and the claims of right-libertarians, implications that they fail to see due to their vision of labour as a commodity like any other.

The question arises, of course, of whether, during periods of full employment, workers could not take advantage of their market power and gain increased workers' control, create co-operatives and so reform away capitalism. This was the argument of the Mutualist and Individualist anarchists and it does have its merits. However, it is clear (see section J.5.12) that bosses hate to have their authority reduced and so combat workers' control whenever they can. The logic is simple, if workers increase their control within the workplace the manager and bosses may soon be out of a job and (more importantly) they may start to control the allocation of profits. Any increase in working class militancy may provoke

rigidity into the market, wages cannot be adjusted as quickly as other commodity prices. Of course, it could be argued that reducing the period of the contract and/or allowing the wage to be adjusted could overcome this problem. However, if we reduce the period of the contract then workers are at a suffer disadvantage as they will not know if they have a job tomorrow and so they will not be able to easily plan their future (an evil situation for anyone to be in). Moreover, even without formal contracts, wage renegotiation can be expensive. After all, it takes time to bargain (and time is money under capitalism) and wage cutting can involve the risk of the loss of mutual good will between employer and employee. And would **you** give your boss the power to "adjust" your wages as he/she thought was necessary? To do so would imply an altruistic trust in others not to abuse their power.

Thus a "pure" capitalism would be constantly seeing employment increase and decrease as productivity levels change. There exist important reasons why the labour market need not clear which revolve around the avoidance/delaying of wage cuts by the actions of capitalists themselves. Thus, given a choice between cutting wages for all workers and laying off some workers without cutting the wages of the remaining employees, it is unsurprising that capitalists usually go for the later. After all, the sack is an important disciplining device and firing workers can make the remaining employees more inclined to work harder and be more obedient.

And, of course, many employers are not inclined to hire over-qualified workers. This is because, once the economy picks up again, their worker has a tendency to move elsewhere and so it can cost them time and money finding a replacement and training them. This means that involuntary unemployment can easily occur, so reducing tendencies towards full employment even more. In addition, one of the assumptions of the standard marginalist economic model is one of decreasing returns to scale. This means that as employment increases,



costs rise and so prices also rise (and so real wages fall). But in reality many industries have **increasing** returns to scale, which means that as production increases unit costs fall, prices fall and so real wages rise. Thus in such an economy unemployment would increase simply because of the nature of the production process!

Moreover, as we argued in-depth in section C.9, a cut in money wages is not a neutral act. A cut in money wages means a reduction in demand for certain industries, which may have to reduce the wages of its employees (or fire them) to make ends meet. This could produce a accumulative effect and actually **increase** unemployment rather than reduce it.

In addition, there are no "self-correcting" forces at work in the labour market which will quickly bring employment back to full levels. This is for a few reasons. Firstly, the supply of labour cannot be reduced by cutting back production as in other markets. All we can do is move to other areas and hope to find work there. Secondly, the supply of labour can sometimes adjust to wage decreases in the wrong direction. Low wages might drive workers to offer a greater amount of labour (i.e. longer hours) to make up for any short fall (or to keep their job). This is usually termed the *"efficiency wage"* effect. Similarly, another family member may seek employment in order to maintain a given standard of living. Falling wages may cause the number of workers seeking employment to **increase**, causing a full further fall in wages and so on (and this is ignoring the effects of lowering wages on demand discussed in section C.9).

The paradox of piece work is an important example of this effect. As Schor argues, *"piece-rate workers were caught in a viscous downward spiral of poverty and overwork... When rates were low, they found themselves compelled to make up in extra output what they were losing on each piece. But the extra output produced glutted the market and drove rates down further."* [Juliet C. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p, 58]